

Developing business cases and attracting funding to maintain waterside wildlife sites in Greater Manchester

Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA)



Bank protection disconnecting Stanney Brook from its floodplain

Date carried out

April 2019 – September 2021

Location

Greater Manchester

Background

For some time, wildlife sites around Greater Manchester have not been able to attract sufficient resources and hence have become poorly maintained. As a result, their important habitats have started to deteriorate.

To help address this GMCA (through the Natural Course Greater Manchester Ecology Unit work), created ecological management plans for four waterside Sites of Biological Importance (SBI) within Greater Manchester.

SBIs are identified because they are strategically important wildlife sites. Their importance has been confirmed in the pilot Greater Manchester Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) which was published in 2021.

The objective is for the management options outlined in the four plans to be taken forward during Phase 4 of Natural Course.

Partners

Tameside (Greater Manchester Ecology Unit), Rochdale, Salford and Oldham (Northern Roots) Councils

Themes



Water quality



Water quantity



Natural rivers



Green infrastructure

In order to progress, resources need to be identified to take forward work on the SBI sites. The necessary information will be collated in the form of funding plans and business cases for investment.

Project

The four sites where management plans have been written are:

- Bankfield Clough SBI, in Oldham
- Kersal Dale SBI, in Salford
- Stanney Brook SBI, in Rochdale
- Wince Brook, within Alkington Woods and Rhodes Lodges SBI in Rochdale.

Project (continued)

All four sites have problems with invasive non-native plants. Three of the four sites share the theme of woodland and grassland management, the exception being Wince Brook where much of the recommended actions are in or over the river. Stanney Brook SBI was the only site that did not have pond work suggested. Meanwhile, Bankfield Clough SBI and Kersal Dale SBI require footpath improvements and have potential issues with informal mountain bike usage.

Bankfield Clough SBI possesses rare heath habitat that needs restoration, young woodlands that require bird and bat boxes to provide roosting and nesting opportunities, and a local community that is keen to be involved.

Kersal Dale SBI offers many opportunities but suffers from antisocial behaviour so further public engagement activities are required to discourage camping, BBQs, picnics, and campfires.

A proposal to renaturalise parts of Stanney Brook will involve removing bank protection and reconnecting the watercourse to its floodplain and removing redundant pipes from the riverbed.

The suggested river work for Wince Brook involves repair or removal of a failing bridge, taking away bank protection to reconnect a section of floodplain to the river, repairing bank protection to protect a slope beneath gardens, and removal of the remains of two weirs.

Outcomes

Great Crested Newt District Level Licence (DLL) assistance has been secured to restore ponds at Bankfield Clough SBI.

Oldham Council successfully bid for Green Recovery Challenge Fund (GRCF) resources, enabling the implementation of many of the recommendations in the management plan for Bankfield Clough, such as tackling invasive non-native plant species, preventing blackthorn from encroaching onto grassland and improving footpaths.

A draft Water Environment Improvement Fund funding proposal has been submitted to the Environment Agency for reconnecting Stanney Brook to its floodplain. GMCA and other Natural Course affiliates in Greater Manchester will continue to work within the emerging statutory framework to understand how this and other wildlife sites, identified in the emerging Local Nature Recovery Strategy, can be financed and where Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) offers an opportunity

The Wince Brook management plan has been included in the Bringing the Irk to Life Action Plan (part of Natural Course).

Learning

- A mandatory BNG process has taken longer than expected to be implemented, meaning that it was not an active route to investment during Phase 3 of Natural Course.
- The Greater Manchester LNRS is due to be formalised in 2022 and will be key to rolling out BNG as it provides local authorities with strategically prioritised and evidenced locations for biodiversity offsetting and habitat banking.
- The management proposals contained in the site plans may not be of sufficient scale to attract investment or biodiversity credits and may need to be bundled together or with other projects, that deliver multiple benefits, in order to attract resources to improve the condition of the wildlife sites.

Next Steps

During Phase 4 GMCA will continue to seek funding and investment and implement the management plan recommendations.

Mike Beard, Natural Course Project Officer and Greater Manchester Environment Team said...
"In recent years it has become increasingly difficult for local authorities to resource the upkeep of wildlife sites, leading to the deterioration of these important habitats. This project has been investigating how existing and new sources of financial support can be applied on the ground to support and improve the condition of valuable wildlife sites."

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