

Greenspace 2- Elemore Park, Easington Lane

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Elemore Park Greenspace was a former golf course, which closed in 2019. Prior to that, the area was the location of Elemore Colliery and associated spoil heap. The working colliery closed in the mid-1970s. Plans are progressing to transform the 60ha golf course into a country park, SCC's vision is that Elemore Park will be

- Wildlife rich, attractive and inspiring
- Safe
- Accessible

Work is beginning to enhance the natural habitats to create a haven for wildlife and resource for local communities to enjoy nature and undertake informal recreation. The former clubhouse has been refurbished

and repurposed. It now has a café, garden centre and training room for community activities. The space immediately around the building will be a cycle hub and growing space with poly tunnels. Elemore Park connects to the wider countryside via rights of way and permissive walking and cycling routes.



1.2 Elemore Park has large areas of grasslands, hedgerows, scrub, woodland plantations, a stream, and a pond will be managed for wildlife. There are two large lakes in the northern area of the site, which are home to wildfowl and swans. Elemore Golf Course Local Wildlife Site sits within the greenspace. The LWS contains acid grassland, wetland areas and dense gorse scrub which attracts various species of birds. Elemore Park has fantastic potential for habitat restoration and creation and will create significant opportunities for the surrounding communities to enjoy and connect with nature.

2.0 Location and Accessibility

2.1 Elemore Park is west of Easington Lane village and south of Hetton-le-Hole. To the west and south lies agricultural land, extending into County Durham. The Café, Garden Centre and visitor facilities, with parking, opened in Spring 2023. Elemore Park is being promoted as a hub for walking and cycling. The Stephenson Trail, (an 11-mile promoted route which follows the route taken by coal wagons on their way from the Elemore and Hetton Collieries to the River Wear) starts by the Café in Elemore Park. The site also connects to the local cycleway network.

3.0 General description and observations

3.1 The Golf Course at Elemore was built in the 1990s from reclaimed industrial land. At the time, the 60ha site was landscaped to create a suitable playing course with new woodland and areas of open grassland. Two interconnected ornamental ponds were built and fed from field drains and the greens watering systems. The pond helped to reduce any potential flood risk to adjacent housing. The Local Wildlife Site, within the golf course, provided a more natural feature with acid grassland, dense scrub, water course and ponds. This habitat quality has deteriorated through lack of management. The new golf course created habitat with associated wildlife benefits.

3.2 With the golf course's closure and the council's commitment to create a new park, which celebrates the Elemore's biodiversity and ecological interest, there is now a fantastic opportunity to maximise this resource by enhancing and restoring these valuable habitats and create better conditions for wildlife. Elemore is recognised as a site that is important for birds and has the potential to increase the number and diversity of invertebrates.

There three priority areas for enhancement include:

Grasslands

3.3 Elemore Park has large tracts low interest modified grassland, once the greens ceased to be cut or managed after the golf course closed in 2019. They are not particularly diverse or ecologically significant. However, there is huge potential to increase biodiversity and create an opportunity for Biodiversity Net Gain by proactive management. The preferred management option is to set up a conservation-grazing programme. Therefore, Links with Nature will build the necessary infrastructure to make that happen by creating grazing compartments so that cattle or ponies can be moved around the site to graze different areas across the seasons. Grazing infrastructure will include new fencing and a livestock water management system. This will be a significant programme of work to transform Elemore's layout which could influence how people use the site. The western part of the site will be grazed utilising existing fencing and new plantations, and the remainder of the park will be more open and used by visitors all year.

Local Wildlife Site

3.4 The important acid grassland and fenlands within the LWS will be a priority for management with the delivery of further scrub control, management of ruderal vegetation and proactive cutting of grassland areas. The balance of grassland and scrub will be retained to ensure that there is suitable cover for birds. Work can be delivered through a mix of contractors and volunteers.

Wetland Management and Ponds

3.5 The large ornamental ponds to the north of Elemore Park are important community assets and highly valued by the local community. Residents enjoying seeing the swans and other waterfowl that using the ponds throughout the year and breeding during Spring and Summer. There were concerns from residents about water levels during the dry summer of 2022, which affected the swans and other wildlife.

3.6 Since the golf course closure, the changes to how the land is managed has affected how water moved across Elemore Park. There is no longer regular watering of the greens, which has affected the amount of water draining across the site. Therefore, the grasslands, water course and ornamental ponds are dependent on rain and how surface water is managed as it flows across Elemore Park. Natural depressions across the site will enable water to be collected and stored, forming temporary ponds. Using the natural topography, existing watercourse and field drains, interventions to create a series of scrapes, ponds and wet areas, will create additional wetland habitat and areas for water storage. These areas will benefit the ponds by reducing the amount of silt entering the ponds and enabling slower and lengthier water release. By creating more water storage and slowing flows, this will reduce the risk of flash floods and reduce the risk of the large ponds drying up.

3.7 Work is proposed to create a series of leaky dams, through placing woody debris across the stream that flows through Local Wildlife Site, which sits within Elemore Park. By slowing flows temporary ponds will be created providing additional habitats for invertebrate's amphibians and birds.

Woodland Management

3.8 As the DWT report identified there are several woodland plantations across Elemore Park. These offer cover for wildlife and are important landscape features, breaking up the large areas of grassland. The plantations are all a similar age with poor understory and include non-native species. There are stands of ash with signs of dieback. Some will need to be removed for safety reasons which will create

open areas allowing other species to regenerate. There are signs of patches of new regenerating woodland alongside the existing plantations.

3.9 On the eastern side of Elemore, along the route of the Stephenson Trail and connecting to Easington Lane, there are more mature woodland blocks which need management to improve sightlines and ensure that official site entrances feel open and welcoming. Some of the woodland has fallen trees and storm damage.

3.10 Therefore, a programme of management will be delivered to remove fallen trees, to take out non-native species and diseased trees, create open areas and woodland edge habitat, improve the understory diversity and support natural regeneration. Fallen trees due to storm damage can be utilised to create habitat piles which will support invertebrates and other wildlife. Suitable large logs can be left as informal seating for visitors.

3.11 Woodland management can be followed-up by understory planting, which would increase the diversity of the woodland ground cover.

Access and Interpretation

3.12 Over the four years since the golf course closed, the site has been unmanaged and used informally by the public. Many local residents use Elemore Park for walking the dog and enjoying the wildlife. However, there are incidences of anti-social behaviour, particularly by motorbikes and quadbikes, which causes damage to the site and deters other users from accessing Elemore Park. Therefore, a key priority is to stop this by identifying access points onto Elemore with barriers and planting. This will also be supported with greater informal community use and events and activities.

3.13 In conjunction with local residents and partners, Sunderland City Council is developing new entrance signs to ensure that Elemore Park feels more welcoming and that new users feel more comfortable and reassured that they are invited to use Elemore. Work is planned to install these signs in 2023/24 - Links with Nature plans will support and continue this development and dovetail with ongoing plans.

4.0 Existing Management and Maintenance

4.1 Elemore Park has the potential to be a flagship park in the Coalfield and for all residents of Sunderland by offering local people the opportunity to enjoy its wildlife and wonderful landscapes. Elemore Park is connected, via footpaths, bridleways and cycleways, to the surrounding greenspace, countryside and local communities.

SCC has appointed a dedicated Park Manager with the responsibility to develop and manage the park. The park is in the development phase with new infrastructure such as a small play area, trim trail, footpaths and signage being installed. In addition, SCC is following the recommendations set out in DWS ecological appraisal to bring habitats within the park back into active management to enhance its biodiversity. Links with Nature is supporting that work by creating compartments for livestock as part of a Conservation Programme to enhance the grassland, building new footpaths and managing water across the sites in order to create wetlands.

The Local Wildlife Site (LWS) is in poor condition and sensitive management work will take place to improve habitat quality, particularly on the acid grassland. The Countryside team will add Elemore Park to the CMSi system in order to monitor the site and co-ordinate works with the Park Manager.

There is huge public interest in Elemore, the Park Manager is building on that by setting up a Friends' Group. SCC has secured additional funding from Natural England to create a Green Community Hub in

Elemore Park which can enable conservation activity, walks and education use to develop prior to Link Together.

Elemore Park is an excellent location for regular green social prescribing activity due to on-site facilities and range of possible conservation tasks, which can engage regular volunteers, helping to support with skill development and improve health and well-being. Therefore, by the end of the project, it is expected that there will be a cohort of skilled, engaged and enthused individuals to play a part in a Friends Group and continue with practical management on site.

5.0 Proposed Works

5.1 Habitat Management Aims

- To put in place a conservation grazing programme to secure long term management of Elemore Park through Biodiversity Net Gain
- To manage and enhance the local wildlife site by carrying out a programme of grassland management
- To improve the diversity and age structure of woodland plantations

5.2 Access and Interpretation Aims

The proposals for access and interpretation will be finalised once plans for this year's work have been agreed. However, the main focus will include:

- To formalise footpath routes from the building and carpark into Elemore Park at the southern part of the site.
- To continue development of information sign boards around Elemore Park.

6.0 Budget

Source of Funding	Amount (£)
Section 106	119,000
Area Committee	12,355
NECF	0
NLHF	118,645
Total	250,000

Habitat	Project	Months	Budget (£)
Modified Grasslands	Create infrastructure for Conservation Grazing: erect fencing with access points for livestock and visitors across western half of Elemore Park, to create grazing compartment including gates	Anytime	45,000
	Install watering systems for livestock	Anytime	28,975
Acid Grassland	Management of ruderal vegetation strimming and removal	Spring - Summer	
	Programme of scrub control	September to March	4,500

Water management	Creation of wetlands area and scrapes.	April – June	23,288
	Draining scheme to control water around entrance to Stephenson Trail	Anytime	
	WRT Management Fees		3,217
Non-native Invasive Species	Identify and treat Japanese Knotweed	April – September	1,800
Woodland Management	Thinning and creation of woodland glades and edge over two years. Removal of non-native species and dead, diseased and dying trees particularly ash. Programme to be delivered over two years.	October to February	45,000
	Planting ground cover with woodland species bulbs and wildflowers	Various	8,808
Footpaths	To build footpath 800m	Anytime	55,415
Signage and Interpretation boards.	Details to be agreed. Series of information boards and fingerposts planned across site	Anytime	9,000
Contingency – DWT			11,865
Contingency – SCC			13,135
Total			250,000

The specification for each area of work are outlined in the Specifications Links with Nature document and details of future maintenance and management are outlined in the Maintenance and Management Plan document.

