

MERTON PARK GREEN WALKS MANAGEMENT PLAN

February 1998

**Written by P Guest BSc AIEEM, on behalf of the
London Borough of Merton**

Education, Leisure and Libraries Department

Based on a draft document of May 1997 prepared by Ruth Hutton

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Part 1: Policy Statement

The Borough Council recognises the importance of wildlife and green spaces to people living in Merton and pursues policies to defend sites of interest from development, and manages its open spaces with Nature Conservation in mind.

The Unitary Development Plan (UDP) defines policies relating to ecology and nature Conservation and is available for inspection at Merton Civic Centre and most local libraries. To further demonstrate its commitment to nature conservation the Council has already designated four Local Nature Reserves and intends to declare more in future. It is proposed that the Merton Park Green Walks will be given LNR status, and the production of this management plan is an important part of this process. The handbook "Nature Conservation in Merton" will be published by the London Ecology Unit in 1998 and identifies this site as a Borough Grade 1 Site of Importance for nature conservation. This designation ensures that the common is protected by Policy EN.4 and the production of this management plan is in line with Policy EN.16 – Management of Green Spaces – Conservation Plans.

Part 2: Description and History

Name	<i>Merton Park Green Walks</i>
Area	<i>1.5 Ha approx.</i>
Grid Reference	<i>TQ 253 697</i>
Maps	<i>BGS 1: 50,000 Sheet 270 South London OS 1: 25,000 sheet TQ 26/36 OS 1:1250 sheets TQ2569NE & NW</i>
Local Planning Authority	<i>Merton Borough Council</i>
District	<i>London Borough of Merton</i>
UDP Designation	<i>Site of Borough Importance for Nature Conservation (Grade I)</i>
Contact	<i>London Borough of Merton, The Education, Leisure and Libraries Department, The Civic Centre London Road, Morden Surrey Tel: 0181 545 3658</i>
Status	<i>Public Open Space</i>
Public Access	<i>Open</i>
Public Right of Way	<i>None</i>
Services	<i>A large sewer runs across parcel A from the Abbey Rec. grounds and into the industrial estate together with a surface water drain.</i>

2.1: Description

The site is owned by the London Borough of Merton and is recognised as a Site of Borough Importance for Nature Conservation (Grade I). It is situated on the strip of land that used to form part of the railway line between Merton Park and Tooting and includes a part of old station platforms. Morden Road forms the eastern boundary and the site then follows a linear course between Abbey Recreation Ground and Nursery Road Playing Fields and an adjacent industrial area, until at the western end it reaches Merton Park Station and the Croydon Tramlink line, which is currently under construction.

2.2: Access

The site has open access throughout except for the small triangular woodland area adjacent to the Tramlink line. There are access points via Morden Road through a metal kissing gate and from Abbey Recreation Ground in the eastern corner. A footpath constructed in 1994 connects this area to another entrance via a footpath between the western end of Melbourne Road and the footbridge over the Wimbledon/West Croydon Line. There is another access point from Rutlish Road via the footpath starting adjacent to the station building.

2.3: History

The railway line from Wimbledon through Mitcham to West Croydon opened in 1855. In 1868 came the Wimbledon, Tooting and Streatham line, and on the same day a branch from Tooting via Merton Abbey to the Mitcham to Wimbledon line at Lower Merton was opened. A station called Lower Merton was opened on the Merton Abbey branch at the same time but this had no platform for passengers. This was rectified in 1870 and in 1887 the name of the station was changed from Lower Merton to Merton Park.

Due to low usage the last passenger train to run through Merton Park on the Tooting branch in 1929, and after that only freight trains ran on the line. The line is believed to have been the location of Arthur Askey's "Ghost Train" film that was made at Merton Park Studios, presumably because of its low level of use. All traffic finally ceased in May 1975, the tracks between Merton Park and Tooting being taken up soon after. Half of the old line has now vanished, but two substantial lengths remain: between Myrna Close and the end of Victoria Road and to the west of Morden Road where the old track bed forms much of the site described here.

Since the line closed nature has taken over and the area has been colonised by a range of plants and animals. Up until 1994 the site was relatively unused due to poor access, and had been threatened with destruction in a proposal to extend Merantun Way through to Kingston Road. This proposal was scrapped and in early 1994 a granite dust footpath along the old scalping base of the railway line and two new entrances leading into Abbey Recreation Ground and Morden Road were installed. This provided formal access through the site for walkers and prevented further damage to fences and vegetation bordering Abbey Recreation Ground. All paths and gates are accessible to wheelchairs.

All of the land to the east of the footpath from Dorset Road to Melbourne Road is currently controlled by the Leisure Services Committee of Merton Council and forms parcels A and B of the proposed Local Nature Reserve. The land shown as parcel C is currently held by Environmental Services but is to be transferred to Leisure Services Committee control with the remainder of this area being used as a depot during the construction work on the Tramlink and afterwards for a proposed housing development.

2.4: Geology & Soil

The site has a loam type soil lying on a gravel subsoil with the underlying geology being an interglacial terrace and seems to be fairly well drained. There is some soil mounding in the eastern area, possibly a result of dumping of material when or after the old railway line was removed.

2.5: Local Significance

There is no other area of public open greenspace of nature conservation interest within a fairly large area north of Morden Hall Park so the site addresses a local deficiency. This factor was significant in the site being scheduled as Borough Grade 1. The woodland areas of the eastern section of the site, together with the woodland triangle adjacent to the Tramlink line are the only significant areas of woodland in the vicinity.

2.6: Recreation

The site provides an opportunity for quiet enjoyment of wildlife and greenspace and a means of walking from Kingston Road to Morden Road away from traffic noise and fumes.

2.7: Educational Opportunities

The site is close to three schools whose pupils could use the site for parts of their environmental studies.

2.10: Problems

There is general rubbish dumping by local residents in Melbourne Avenue particularly of garden rubbish but more general rubbish is often dumped near the site entrances.

Japanese knotweed has been a persistent problem despite attempts in the last two years to eradicate it. The majority of Japanese knotweed is found in the open areas in Parcel C on the habitat map with some also present in parcel B.

There has been some vandalism of trees on site and attempts to make tree houses, and small fires have been lit using vegetation and rubbish thrown over the fences from properties in Melbury Gardens. The fires have damaged a number of trees, particularly the willows in parcel B.

2.11: The Woodland (Parcel D)

Originally it was intended that the small triangular area of woodland between Parcel B and the railway was to be included within the LNR, but it has not proved possible to trace the ownership. Although not formally part of the LNR as a result of this, the area adds to the conservation value of the site and should ideally be managed as a sanctuary for wildlife.

Part 3: The Habitats, Flora and Fauna

3.1: Nature Conservation and Recreation

This mainly linear nature reserve comprises a range of urban habitats from open grassland to young secondary woodland that represent a fairly typical example of ecological succession on an abandoned railway line. Appendix 1, the London Ecology Unit survey data gives an indication of the flora present, but there is little information on the small mammal and invertebrate interest of the site and this should be further investigated. The railside habitats provide a valuable addition to the site, and extend as a green corridor nearly to Morden Hall Park.

Recent access and footpath improvements have done much to enhance the site's aesthetic and passive recreational value. It now provides a pleasant green walkway frequently used by local people, but concerns have been raised regarding perceived threats of attack from behind high vegetation.

3.2.1: Parcel A

This parcel comprises of a strip of land 200m by 15m running parallel to the Abbey Recreation Ground along the old railway line. The vegetation consists of typical wasteland species, with sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus*, dominating the upper storey vegetation and forming a fairly dense canopy. Many of these are multi-stemmed which indicated that they were cut back in the past possibly when the line was still in use. Beneath this is a developing understory with ash *Fraxinus excelsior*, birch, *Betula pendula*, hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, cherry plum *Prunus cerasifera*, grey willow, *Salix cinerea*, and goat willow *Salix caprea*. Also present is a mixture of large amounts of snowberry *Symphoricarpo albus var laevigatus*, bramble *Rubus fruticosus*, and ivy *Hedera helix*, to be seen everywhere on the ground and clambering up some of the trees. Particularly near to the Morden Road exit there are a number of examples of the butterfly bush *Buddleja davidii*, which again typifies such urban wasteland habitats. A chain link fence separates this parcel from the playing field along which grows a patchy garden privet hedge.

The ground layer includes many common species with false oat-grass *Arrhenatherum elatus*, ground ivy *Glechoma hederacea*, creeping thistle *Cirsium arvensis*, great mullein *Verbascum thapsus*, nettle *Urtica dioica*, black horehound *Ballota nigra*, garlic mustard *Alliaria petiolata*, common figwort *Scrophularia nodosa*, ribwort plantain *Plantago lanceolata*, bindweed *Calystegia silvatica* and Mugwort *Artemisia vulgaris* all being noted in 1997.

200 whips were planted along the newly created footpath and entrance by Abbey Recreation Ground during 1994. A number of these have survived to the end of 1997 including ash, hawthorn and wild rose *Rosa canina*.

3.2.2: Parcel B

This area comprises of a strip of land approximately 200 metres long and 30 metres wide ending at the path running from Dorset Road to Melbourne Road. The vegetation in the eastern section of the parcel has a large patch of multi-stemmed crack willow *Salix fragilis*, lying in a slight hollow with small quantities of holly, birch, ash including one fine multi-

stemmed example, and sycamore. The understorey layer is slightly less dense than parcel A and includes elder *Sambucus nigra*, and some small hawthorns that were probably planted recently. Many of the crack willows are maturing and are beginning to break up and fall over so may need some attention. The ground is well trodden as this area seems to be used as a play area by local children and this has prevented vegetation from growing in parts.

The presence of willows in a slight hollow suggests that this area may be damper than the rest of the site, at least when there has been sufficient recent rainfall. There is a small hole of about 1m by 0.5m dug in the centre of the area which in early January 1998 had some 15cm of water but this was after several days of major rainfall. It may be worthwhile monitoring this hole to see if there is any potential for the creation of a small pond.

The western section of this parcel is a mosaic of grassland, tall vegetation and bramble scrub with occasional small oaks *Quercus robur*, and ash trees. The grassland areas are quite diverse, probably because of the low fertility typical of such the old railway land, and include rats-tail fescue *Vulpia myuros*, red fescue *Festuca rubra*, false oatgrass and yorkshire fog *Holcus lanatus*. Common vetch *Vicia sativa*, ribbed melilot *Melilotus officinalis*, common knapweed *Centaurea nigra*, creeping thistle *Cirsium arvense*, wild onion *Allium vineale*, yarrow *Achillea millefolium*, mugwort *Artemisia vulgaris*, Canadian goldenrod *Solidago canadensis*, Michaelmas daisies *Aster Sp.*, and a bridewort *Spiraea sp.* create an attractive floristic display providing late summer nectar sources for invertebrates. The open grassland habitats are threatened by invasive species particularly the bramble patches which need regular cutting back and need at least bi-annual cutting and clearing. A few clumps of Japanese knotweed are also present in this parcel and need to be eradicated.

3.2.3: Parcel C: Station area

This section consists of a roughly square parcel of land of some 65m, with an informal path that ambles from the Dorset Road to Melbourne Road footpath along the line of the old railway to reach the station and exiting in Rutlish Road. It is a mosaic of open grassland, tall herbaceous vegetation and scrub with some ash, hazel and small areas of regenerating but diseased elm. The grassland areas are of similar composition to parcel B and are also being gradually lost to bramble and other invasives. There is more Canadian goldenrod *Solidago canadensis*, than in parcel B which makes a fine splash of yellow during the late summer but will need controlling. Growing on and around the old platforms are many trees and shrubs with ash and birch in particular threatening to break up the brickwork. Other trees here include several old trees of heaven *Ailanthus altissima*, yew *Taxus baccata*, garden privet *Ligustrum ovalifolium*, hawthorn and mock orange *Philadelphus coronarius*, many of which probably originate from ornamental planting when the platforms were in use. Between the platforms is a shady area with bramble patches and tall herbs including some male fern *Dryopteris felix-mas*.

This is an attractive and peaceful spot and the former platforms add some historical interest to the site.

3.2.4: Parcel D: Woodland (not in LNR)

This parcel consists of a small triangular area of woodland that is controlled by Merton Council Leisure Services department under a long term lease from the owners, the Rutlish

Foundation. The OS map from the 1951 survey shows trees in the northern section, presumably the elms now killed by disease and the roots of which now produce the profuse elm suckers, with the southern half being allotments. The scrub is quite dense but many of the small elm trees present are inevitably dying of Dutch Elm Disease. A few sycamores, hawthorns, hollies *Ilex aquifolium*, snowberries and elders grow mainly along the edges with a very dense stand of bramble in the centre of the triangle. Only a few plants thrive on the ground under this dense vegetation, being mainly cow parsley *Anthriscus sylvestris*, ivy, nettle *Urtica dioica*, Canadian golden rod and a few presumably garden daffodils *Narcissus Sp.*

The fence to the footpath is broken and the wood is clearly being used as a play area by local children, and is much littered with rubbish. The principle value of the woodland for wildlife would appear to be for nesting birds in the thorn and bramble scrub, which is threatened by this current level of disturbance.

3.3.1: Fauna

The seeding plants often attract “charms” of goldfinches in summer, and these delightful birds may breed on the site as they are also present in the breeding season. Other birds likely to be using the site for breeding are the migratory lesser whitethroat and blackcap and residents like the dunnock, greenfinch, blue tit, long tailed tit, song thrush and blackbird. Swifts and house martins feed over site benefiting from the sites invertebrate population and meadow brown butterflies are common on the grassland areas. The small triangle of woodland has long tailed tits, blackcaps and also whitethroats probably breeding. Ron Kettle and Pamela Goldsmith (local residents) report that butterflies seen on the site include holly blue, speckled wood, small tortoiseshell, orange tip, small white, peacock, meadow brown and small or Essex skippers. It is likely that most of these butterflies are breeding on the site.

Little is known of the small mammals present but it is likely that bank voles and wood mice are present. At least one fox earth can be seen on parcel B and occasionally pipistrelle bats have been observed feeding over the area at dusk.

3.3.2: Invasives

There are a number of non-native plant species present which have the potential to become dominant and thus reduce the diversity of the site. Of these it is only really necessary to eliminate Japanese knotweed because of its highly invasive nature and the ease with which it can be spread to other areas. Sycamore will need to be controlled if the woodland areas are not to become dominated by it, and it may be necessary to remove a few of the larger sycamores to allow other species to replace them. The Canadian goldenrod need not be eradicated but should not be allowed to become too dominant in the grassland areas where it can be controlled by being pulled in late summer or autumn. Snowberry spreads mainly by suckering growth from its rhizomes and its spread should be monitored and controlled if necessary.

Part 4: Evaluation and Prescriptions

4.1: Overall Management Objectives

1. To provide local people with an accessible place to enjoy nature.
2. To maintain and enhance the existing ecological value of the site through the sympathetic management of the woodland, grassland and scrub habitats.
3. To prevent fly tipping and rubbish dumping by ensuring that fencing remains in good condition.
4. To work with local Residents Associations and schools to maintain and enhance the site.
5. To maintain the footpaths.
6. To monitor the effectiveness of the management in maintaining and enhancing the wildlife interest of the site
7. To provide opportunities for educational use by local schools.
8. To provide interpretative panels and information leaflets to improve local awareness of conservation and wildlife on the site.
9. To eradicate Japanese knotweed from the site and monitor the spread of sycamore.
10. To maintain the triangular woodland as a refuge for breeding birds and animals.

4.2: General Management Policies

Dead Wood – dead and dying wood is of critical importance to invertebrate conservation and must not be “tidied up”.

All dead wood should be left to rot in situ except where it is causing, or has the potential to cause, a public safety problem. Where this occurs, the following will apply:

Dead wood should be cut up into the largest practical pieces and left to rot away from public footpaths. The richest fauna tends to be supported by material in partial shade and in contact with moist soil.

4.3: Parcel A

A long term objective for this area is to reduce the dominance of sycamore in favour of a more diverse woodland with ash, oak, field maple *Acer campestre*, and birch becoming more frequent. Sycamore tends to create a lot of shade that suppresses other species and also is a very productive seed producer so can invade open areas quickly. Some selective felling of larger trees and control of sycamore seedlings may be necessary to create suitable conditions for the other species to grow into. No more than 5% annually should be cut to allow a gradual transition to the more diverse species composition. Future occasional planting of more tree whips will be necessary to enhance this process. It is not necessary to consider elimination of sycamore as although the diversity of invertebrates it supports is small these tend to be present in large numbers. The aphid populations on even a single sycamore can for example, provide a significant resource to breeding birds such as blue tits collecting food for their young.

The buddleia bushes may need to be cut back occasionally to produce fresh and vigorous growth. This should be done in rotation during winter as necessary with each bush being cut back to a central core of branches.

An important aspect of the management of this parcel (and parts of parcel B) is to ensure that public perceptions of the threat of attack are minimised. To achieve this it is necessary to cut

back vegetation on either side of the footpath and to ensure that there seems to be few opportunities for unseen attackers to lie in wait. Fortunately much of the existing scrub vegetation (bramble and rose) tend to produce fairly low lying and dense thickets that produce a reasonable compromise between conservation value and the perception of increased threat. Vegetation should be managed to keep contours gently rounded, and not cut at a sharp angle away from the path, such that apparent opportunities to hide from view are minimised. This should help to reduce the public perception of threat and encourage more people to use the path, further increasing the sense of safety.

4.4: Parcel B

The crack willows in the area backing onto houses in Melbourne Road are maturing and would benefit from being either coppiced or preferably in these circumstances, pollarded in rotation especially where this reduces the risk of them coming down on the path. Many of these willows are multi-stemmed and one reasonably vertical stem should be cut at approximately 3m high and the rest cut at ground level. It is suggested that one or two be cut each year to assess the effect of this management. Ultimately these will require re-cutting on perhaps a ten to fifteen year cycle in the long term and will develop into much larger trunks which will hollow out providing a supply of rotting timber. A supply of standing and fallen rotting logs may encourage stag beetles, if not already present, to spread on to the site as there are two known colonies nearby. Stag beetles appear to have a stronghold in south London and are included in the UK biodiversity action plan. To prevent them being moved or burnt any logs left lying around should be as large as possible, and preferably scattered where they will also become covered in a protective layer of bramble. If it felt that such cut material should be minimised then the excess, especially smaller material, could be moved to parcel D, which will have less access.

The grassland areas should be cut and cleared biannually with preferably half cut each year in late summer or autumn and with the bramble scrub cut back at the same time. A matrix of bramble and grassy areas with an approximate 50% split, will produce an attractive and beneficial result for both floristic and invertebrate diversity. Cutting on a biannual basis will help to protect the invertebrate interest, particularly the butterflies such as the small or Essex skippers, which are reliant on grasses being present after August, as they hibernate on grass stems. The cut grass should be stacked in a designated area, possibly shared with parcel C.

4.5: Parcel C: Old Station area

This area should be managed as a scrub grassland matrix with the aim being to maintain approximately 50% as grassland in the long term. The grassland areas should be cut on a bi-annual basis with half cut and cleared each year in late summer or early autumn. Any encroaching bramble or other invasives should be cut back at the same time. One or two areas should be designated for piling the grass cuttings, which will need to be carefully located to not attract attention from vandalism.

The small patches of elm scrub within the grassland areas should be eradicated by being cut and treated but the ash and hazel should be left. Additional planting of scattered hawthorn and blackthorn will add to the variety and interest of the site, and could be more intensively planted alongside the railway line as a visual backdrop to the site. It is anticipated that these measures could be phased over a three to five year period.

The old platforms make an interesting feature and should be retained as reminders of the history of the site. A number of small trees, mainly ash, sycamore and tree of heaven are growing close to the brickwork and may need to be controlled to prevent damage. There are quite a few suckers present from the original tree of heaven trees, which should be cut back regularly. The few larger birches should be retained together with the larger trees planted on the platforms, native and exotic, as they add interest and are among the largest trees on the parcel. The areas between the platforms should be maintained as a partly shaded area with bramble scrub and areas of tall herbs cut on a biannual rotation at the same time as the rest of the grassland areas.

A footpath currently runs alongside this parcel from the end of Rutlish Road to Melbourne Road joining up with the footpath across the site to Dorset Road, with an informal path across this parcel. It is not yet completely clear how the housing development in the station area will affect these routes but as parcel C is to remain as open access, an access point should be installed to the footpath from Rutlish Road. This should lead to a new path running roughly along the existing informal route to another access point leading directly to parcel B. Another informal path runs up onto the western platform and around the parcel in a roughly circular manner. This path should not need improvement and provides informal access around the parcel.

4.6: Parcel D: Woodland (not in LNR)

The wood is small with no likely through route for an access path but it can be easily viewed and enjoyed from the public path. Consequently it is proposed that the wood be securely fenced and managed as a refuge to protect its value as a breeding area for birds, with the emphasis on achieving improved diversity in the tree and shrub layers. A short length of new fencing is required to achieve this, the position of which will depend on whether access is still required to the playing field.

The woodland triangle consists of mainly dead and dying elm scrub, with some sycamore and holly. Cutting and treating of no more than 10% per annum of the elm scrub, and planting of other species such as oak, ash, hazel and field maple will assist in diversifying the structure and species composition. Only about 50% of the elm scrub should be so managed with the rest allowed to develop into elm scrub with a varied age structure. The young sycamore and elm suckers will continue to need occasional control until the new species have become well established. Any cut elm should be left in situ in the largest sections possible and some may be stacked in wood piles. A number of cut crack willow trunks could be moved here from parcel B as they will be less disturbed, and may then be of value to the local stag beetle population and others.

Part 5: Finance & Work Programme

5.1: Management Schedule

5.1.1: Implementation of LNR and initial years.

- Investigate possible grant funding (through the proposed tramline project) to erect a six foot metal boundary fence between the site and properties in Melbury Gardens to replace the existing damaged fencing. This would improve security for the residents and help to reduce fly tipping with its consequential damage to the habitats on the site.
- Write to local residents asking them to notify Leisure Services if anyone has been seen dumping rubbish over boundary fences.
- Carry out further small scale whip planting in parcel A where gaps can be created or where gaps naturally appear in the canopy.
- Pollard the larger crack willows in parcel B leaving cut timber in large sections either here or in parcel D.
- Cut and treat the elm sucker growth in parcel C.
- Carry out small scale planting of hawthorn, blackthorn and wild rose in parcel C.
- Cut down small areas of elm scrub in parcel D and plant up with oak, hazel and field maple.
- Investigate possibility of creating a small pond in Parcel B.
- Install interpretative signboards at the major entrances, and produce a simple leaflet about the site.

5.1.2: Regular Annual / Biannual Work

- Cut and rake off half of the grassland areas each year in late summer early autumn and cut back bramble scrub.
- Employ an approved contractor to spray Japanese knotweed annually in spring until eradicated.
- Remove build up of fly tipping in front of resident's boundary fence by Melbury Gardens twice yearly or as directed by the Supervising Officer.
- Litter pick footpath on a two weekly basis.
- Cut back biannually encroaching vegetation 1m either side of central granite dust footpath ensuring good sightlines are maintained.
- Undertake regular safety checks on all large trees and check for any dead elm that may cause a hazard.
- Monitor growth of sycamore and tree of heaven saplings.
- Monitor and cut back as necessary the buddleia in Parcel A.

5.1.3: Long Term Management

- Top up and roll granite dust footpath every five years.
- Selectively remove sycamore in Parcel A and plant up the gaps with whips of more suitable species.
- Pollard the larger crack willows in parcel B on a fifteen year rotation.

5.2: PROJECT COSTS

The Leisure Services Committee allocates an annual budget for the maintenance of this site. This covers the work carried out by Merton D.S.O who are the Grounds Maintenance Contractors for the Morden area. Variation orders are given for removal of fly tipping as this can not be included within the scope of the general Grounds Maintenance Work as it varies in quantity.

There has been some involvement by the Merton Conservation Volunteers in recent years, which could be restarted now that the future of the site is assured. Except for the tree cutting work, many of the occasional tasks are relatively simple and can be safely implemented by local volunteer or community service groups.

5.3: MONITORING

No regular biological monitoring takes place at present and is unlikely unless a volunteer can be found to carry out regular butterfly or bird counts. Official inspection visits should be arranged annually to assess the effects of the management on the site, paying particular attention to the grassland diversity, the status of invasives as well as for hazards. Occasional visits should also be arranged at suitable times to look for particular species or groups such as birds, butterflies and stag beetles.

Bibliography

- Yarham, I. Dawson, D. Boyle, M. Holliday, R. 1997. **Nature Conservation in Merton, Ecology Handbook 29 Final Draft**. London Ecology Unit.
- Stace, C. 1997. **New Flora of the British Isles**, 2nd Ed. Cambridge University Press.

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Merton Park Green Walks

Restoration Proposals after damage caused during TWU repair work.

Fencing

The new fencing should include an access gate to the triangular woodland area for maintenance work. The management plan for the site specified that this area was too small to encourage open access. The new line of the fence should be wide enough to accommodate all future uses of the pathway route, including the proposed cycleway.

Timing: This work can be done at any time.

Hedgerow planting

The three areas specified for hedgerow planting should have a mixture of hedgerow shrubs planted at approximately 200-300mm gaps over at least 1m width. The species mix should be:

60% Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*)
20% Field maple (*Acer campestre*)
5% Guelder rose (*Viburnum opulus*)
5% Dog rose (*Rosa canina*)
5% Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*)
5% Wild privet (*Ligustrum vulgare*)

No blackthorn should be used on this site due to its suckering habit, which would create a later management problem.

The stock chosen should be raised from UK sourced seed, not from cuttings. The London Wildlife Trust Garden Centre provides suitable stock raised from London seed sources.

Timing: Autumn 1999.

Trees

A small group of trees are to be planted at the corner of the site to replace those lost. Suitable species for these are oak *Quercus robur*, hornbeam *Carpinus betulinus*, and wild gean *Prunus avium*.

They should be augmented by a few understory shrubs planted as whips using mainly the hedgerow species with possibly a few hazel *Corylus avellana*, added to the mix.

Timing: Autumn 1999.

Wild flower meadow

This area is ideal for sowing a summer flowering meadow as the exposed soil is fortunately a low fertility subsoil. This should be cleared in late summer 1999, by using a contact herbicide prior to spreading a seed mix in September 1999. The seed mix chosen should be one selected as suitable for a dry meadow and include a good range of meadow grasses such as sweet vernal *Anthoxanthum odoratum* and crested dogtail *Cynosurus cristatus*, as well as flowers such as hardheads *Centaureum erythraea* and oxeye daisies *Leucanthemum vulgare*.

The first year of establishment will require that the sward is cut at least two or three times to 50mm high with the cuttings being removed in order to establish the plants. A good flowering should not be expected until the second year (2001). Thereafter an annual late summer or early autumn cut and clear should be sufficient.

Timing: Re-clearing and seeding – September 1999. Cutting several times in Summer 2000.

There is no need for the arisings from the meadow cuttings to be removed from the site if a suitably secret area can be found for a “compost heap”. The arisings could also be used to add to the mulch on the trees and hedgerow planted areas.

Pond Creation

One relatively low-lying area looks suitable for the creation of a small pond. This should be created using the following reasonably vandal-proof system:

1. Layer of sand
2. Heavy duty Butyl pond liner
3. Layer of sand
4. Layer of old paving stones broken into halves / quarters and reassembled as a jigsaw
5. Fill gaps with coarse gravel
6. Cover with layer of low fertility sub-soil
7. fill pond

A small number of submerged and emergent plants can be introduced to the pond in spring 2000.

Timing: Autumn 1999.

Interpretation

This site needs an interpretation panel and a suitable position for this might be just inside the gate from the central pathway adjacent to the damaged area. TWU might be disposed towards sponsoring this, especially as their logo can then be put on it!

Timing: any time

The London Wildlife Trust contracting company, London Conservation Services have considerable experience in work such as proposed above. Contact Alan Scott (managing agent) on 0171 928 9142.

Pete Guest.

Appendix 1: Species list for old railway land by Merton Park Station

	English name	Latin name	% of London
e	Apple	<i>Malus domestica</i>	0.00 c
1	Ash	<i>Fraxinus excelsior</i>	100.00
1	Barren brome	<i>Bromus sterilis</i>	96.25
1	Bindweed	<i>Convolvulus arvensis</i>	100.00
1	Bittersweet	<i>Solanum dulcamara</i>	98.75
1	Black horehound	<i>Ballota nigra</i>	98.50
d	Box	<i>Buxus sempervirens</i>	0.00 c
1	Bramble	<i>Rubus fruticosus</i>	99.75
1	Broad-leaved dock	<i>Rumex obtusifolius</i>	99.50
e	Canadian golden rod	<i>Solidago canadensis</i>	77.25
1	Cat's ear	<i>Hypochaeris radicata</i>	98.00
e	Cherry plum	<i>Prunus cerasifera</i>	10.25
e	Cherry-laurel	<i>Prunus laurocerasus</i>	4.25 c
1	Cock's-foot	<i>Dactylis glomerata</i>	97.25
1	Common horsetail	<i>Equisetum arvense</i>	83.50
1	Common mallow	<i>Malva sylvestris</i>	96.75
1	Common sallow	<i>Salix cinerea</i>	60.25
1	Common vetch	<i>Vicia sativa</i>	79.25
	Cotoneasters	<i>Cotoneaster spp.</i>	g
1	Cow parsley	<i>Anthriscus sylvestris</i>	98.50
1	Creeping cinquefoil	<i>Potentilla reptans</i>	99.50
1	Creeping thistle	<i>Cirsium arvense</i>	100.00
1	Curled dock	<i>Rumex crispus</i>	97.50
1	Elder	<i>Sambucus nigra</i>	100.00
d	English elm	<i>Ulmus minor</i>	92.25
e	Evening primrose	<i>Oenothera erythrosepala</i>	42.50
e	False acacia	<i>Robinia pseudoacacia</i>	47.75
e	Garden privet	<i>Ligustrum ovalifolium</i>	0.00 c
1	Goat willow	<i>Salix caprea</i>	67.75
1	Goat's-beard	<i>Tragopogon pratensis</i>	82.25
u	Ground elder	<i>Aegopodium podagraria</i>	89.25
1	Groundsel	<i>Senecio vulgaris</i>	99.50
1	Hawthorn	<i>Crataegus monogyna</i>	92.75
1	Hazel	<i>Corylus avellana</i>	53.75
1	Hedge mustard	<i>Sisymbrium officinale</i>	98.75
1	Honeysuckle	<i>Lonicera periclymenum</i>	35.25
e	Horse-radish	<i>Armoracia rusticana</i>	92.25
1	Ivy	<i>Hedera helix</i>	95.00
e	Japanese knotweed	<i>Reynoutria japonica</i>	91.50
e	Jasmine	<i>Jasminum officinale</i>	0.00 c
e	Large bindweed	<i>Calystegia sepium silvatica</i>	91.50
1	Lesser burdock	<i>Arctium minus</i>	92.00
1	Lesser yellow trefoil	<i>Trifolium dubium</i>	82.50
e	Lilac	<i>Syringa vulgaris</i>	8.00 c
1	Male fern	<i>Dryopteris filix-mas</i>	83.50
1	Meadow vetchling	<i>Lathyrus pratensis</i>	72.75
e	Michaelmas daisy	<i>Aster spp.</i>	86.75
e	Mock orange	<i>Philadelphus coronarius</i>	0.50 c
d	Mountain cranesbill	<i>Geranium pyrenaicum</i>	25.75
1	Mugwort	<i>Artemisia vulgaris</i>	99.75
1	Nettle-leaved bellflower	<i>Campanula trachelium</i>	5.00
1	Nipplewort	<i>Lapsana communis</i>	95.75
1	Oat grass	<i>Arrhenatherum elatius</i>	99.50

e	Oxford ragwort	<i>Senecio squalidus</i>	99.00
1	Perennial rye-grass	<i>Lolium perenne</i>	100.00
1	Rat's tail fescue	<i>Vulpia myuros</i>	19.75
1	Red clover	<i>Trifolium pratense</i>	98.25
1	Red dead-nettle	<i>Lamium purpureum</i>	97.75
1	Red fescue	<i>Festuca rubra</i>	75.00
1	Red-veined dock	<i>Rumex sanguineus</i>	60.25
e	Ribbed melilot	<i>Melilotus officinalis</i>	62.25
1	Ribwort	<i>Plantago lanceolata</i>	100.00
	Rose	<i>Rosa sp.</i>	g
1	Rose-bay willow-herb	<i>Chamaenerion angustifolium</i>	100.00
1	Rough-stalked meadow-grass	<i>Poa trivialis</i>	86.25
e	Russian comfrey	<i>Symphytum x uplandicum</i>	22.00
1	Silver birch	<i>Betula pendula</i>	86.25
1	Smooth hawksbeard	<i>Crepis capillaris</i>	88.00
1	Smooth-stalked meadow-grass	<i>Poa pratensis</i>	95.75
e	Snowberry	<i>Symphoricarpos albus</i>	53.50 c
1	Spear thistle	<i>Cirsium vulgare</i>	99.75
e	Steeplebush	<i>Spiraea douglasii</i>	0.75 c
1	Stinging nettle	<i>Urtica dioica</i>	100.00
e	Sycamore	<i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i>	100.00
e	Tree of heaven	<i>Ailanthus altissima</i>	16.00 c
1	Tufted vetch	<i>Vicia cracca</i>	65.75
e	Virginia creeper	<i>Parthenocissus quinquefolia</i>	5.25
1	Wall barley	<i>Hordeum murinum</i>	98.75
1	White bryony	<i>Bryonia cretica</i>	67.25
1	White clover	<i>Trifolium repens</i>	100.00
1	Yarrow	<i>Achillea millefolium</i>	100.00
e	Yellow fumitory	<i>Corydalis lutea</i>	24.75
1	Yew	<i>Taxus baccata</i>	31.25
1	Yorkshire fog	<i>Holcus lanatus</i>	98.50

The status of each species is indicated as: 1= native to London, d = doubtfully native to London, b = native to Britain but not London, u = doubtfully native to Britain... e = not native. The figures given in the column headed % of London are an indication of how widespread the species is in Greater London: the percentage of the 400 Greater London 'tetrad' recording units with records of the species in Burton's (1983) Flora of the London Area. The figures give an inflated indication of the distribution of all species, as a single record in one of the recording units suffices for the species to be counted effectively as if present throughout the entire four square kilometres. Some species are difficult to record through being inconspicuous, seasonal, or occupying a difficult habitat, like open water. Nevertheless the gross differences in the percentages represent real differences in distribution. No figure is furnished for plants not mapped in the Flora (such as species that were not fully identified 'g', and lower plants 'l'). Other species reproduce poorly, or not at all, in London but occur widely in cultivation or as remnants of previous cultivation 'c'; the percentage of these is low, as Burton's atlas is confined to natural records.