

Greater Cambridge Local Plan – evidence gathering on green infrastructure

Information from Friends of Cherry Hinton Brook

17th June 2020

Friends of Cherry Hinton Brook (FCHB) are primarily concerned with ensuring the health of Cherry Hinton Brook as a vital habitat for wildlife with, in many places, its adjacent footpath providing an important public amenity allowing the brook also to be enjoyed by local residents. Given that the brook is the key element in the green corridor that links the Wandlebury/Gog Magogs area with the centre of the city, we also take an interest in this larger area. It is unique in that it is essentially a blue-green corridor due to the presence of the three large lakes, Cherry Hinton Brook, fields, hedges, road verges and some small areas of woodland. The lakes and brook, in particular, are tightly linked with some wildlife dependent on both habitats, such as kingfishers which feed in one and nest in the other.

The corridor is recognised by a number of organisations as being a vital network of green spaces that will need to be addressed in the future Greater Cambridge Local Plan. It is, however, an area that is often over-looked in discussions about Cambridge's biodiversity and green spaces. Indeed many residents have only recently discovered the area, as a result of the COVID-19 lockdown drawing attention to lesser known green spaces accessible for exercise.

The following information is taken from the FCHB report "*Wildlife and conservation of the Cambridge lakes and Cherry Hinton Brook: A summary overview of existing information*", updated with information in the 2018 Local Plan. Additional information on the wildlife and conservation work undertaken along Cherry Hinton Brook is available on our website: <https://friendsofcherryhintonbrook.org.uk/>

Cherry Hinton Brook is a chalk stream, arising from springs at Giant's Grave in Cherry Hinton and flowing through Cherry Hinton, the eastern suburbs of the City and north-west through Coldham's Common to the River Cam. Chalk streams (a priority habitat under the European Habitats Directive and in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan) are a globally threatened and rare habitat. There are only a few hundred chalk streams in the world, confined to north-west Europe. The vast majority (just over 200) are in England, with many of them now, like Cherry Hinton Brook, under threat from a range of pressures. The stretch of chalk stream running from Daws Lane, near Cherry Hinton Hall, north-west for approximately 1.7km before being swallowed by a culvert just past Coldham's Lane, is **City Wildlife Site 11 (Cherry Hinton Brook)**, which recognises its rare status as a chalk stream and the important wildlife such as the Water Vole that is found within it.

The lakes and open spaces adjoining the Brook are equally important, as testimony to the little known but important industrial past of Cambridge, and also for the wildlife habitat and healthy green spaces that has now taken its place. A century ago this area was dominated by the Norman and Saxon cement works and the marl pits from which the raw materials were extracted. Since the closure of the last factories in the early 1980s, the area has become an important haven for wildlife of many kinds.

Under Policy 16 of the 2018 Cambridge Local Plan, the lakes are part of an area that has been approved for primarily passive outdoor recreation opportunities in the form of a new urban country park (see map on p.3). The Local Plan states that development of this area will only be supported where, among other things, a detailed feasibility report is submitted, the form and nature of public access to the urban country park are established, and existing sites of local nature conservation importance are recognised. The Local Plan states that: “Future uses will need to be sensitive to the nature conservation value of some of these sites. The former landfill sites at Coldham’s Lane include areas of potential ecological importance.”

Over 90% of the area south of the railway line comprises a designated City Wildlife Site and/or protected open space. The lakes were included in the *2006 Cambridge City Council Nature Conservation Strategy* as one of a number of potential new Local Nature Reserves to be designated by 2016, indicating the importance of these bodies and the adjacent brook and open spaces for wildlife. The following spaces are designated as City Wildlife Sites:

City Wildlife Site 48: The Spinney and Hayster Open Space – the Brook runs adjacent to this site, and through the grounds of Cherry Hinton Hall.

City Wildlife Site 17: Coldham’s Lane Old Landfill Site (areas marked A in 2018 Local Plan): this is also protected open space. The vegetation on this site was controversially cleared in 2013 and again more recently, which has led to significant loss of wildlife habitat. The Local Plan states “Any redevelopment of the eastern portion of the landfill sites marked as areas A on Figure 3.4 will require ecological enhancement as part of any redevelopment on site and provision of enhanced wildlife habitat and publicly accessible open space on the western portion of the landfill sites marked as area B on Figure 3.4.”

City Wildlife Site 40: Norman Cement Pits – covers the two main lakes that are accessible only to members of Cherry Hinton and District Angling Club and other permitted users such as emergency services. It is also designated as protected open space. This area in particular has been subject to a long-running debate about its future development as part of the proposed “urban country park”. The Council has established a Lakes Working Group to facilitate stakeholder discussions. There are multiple interests in the area which for many years has also been subject to trespassing and anti-social activities in warm weather. There is very limited land around the water bodies and a number of safety and access issues, which will present challenges to opening the site to the public and which are likely to limit the range of activities that could be undertaken there. There is a broad consensus that this should be limited to the quiet enjoyment of the natural history of the area, primarily through walking.

City Wildlife Site 18: CU Officer Training Corps Pit - grassland around the Territorial Army Pit (one of the three “lakes”)

Figure 3.4: South of Coldham's Lane Area of Major Change

