

Liverpool City Region Ecological Network

Nature Improvement Area focus area

NIA Focus Area 11: Dibbinsdale, Raby Mere and Eastham Country Park

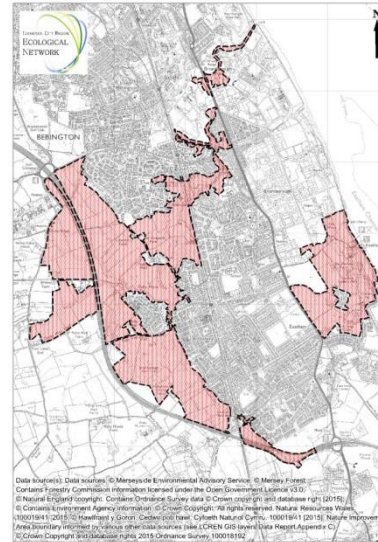
District(s): Wirral

Area 603 hectares

Ecological priorities are:

Habitat creation

- Opportunity to create new woodland to buffer ancient woodland, to the west of the main Dibbinsdale woodland complex.



Habitat management

- Woodland management to improve structure and quality of ancient woodland, wet woodland and river;
- Both Japanese knotweed and Himalayan balsam pose significant threats to woodland and wetland habitats; management to eradicate these species is required.

Existing ecological features:

1. There are 325 ha of existing habitat.
2. Core Biodiversity Area: 1 SSSI; 1 LNR; 11 Local Sites; Deciduous Woodland including wet woodland and 10 ancient woodland sites; together with reedbed and ponds Priority Habitats;
3. Linear features: river; railway line, motorway and primary route; hedgerow and streams.
4. Species: European eel; white-letter hairstreak; black poplar; holm oak; English bluebell; brown hare; bullfinch; dingy skipper; great crested newt; harvest mouse; noctule; Daubenton's bat; spotted flycatcher; water vole; pipistrelle; skylark and possibly otter.



Focus area description:

The Focus Area is drawn tightly on its eastern boundary as the designated sites are bounded by residential or employment areas. The western boundary is less tight, where opportunities exist to buffer the existing ancient woodland areas. The Focus Area is based on the river Dibbin and its catchment area and the extent of ancient woodland, the largest contiguous extent on the Wirral.

The Focus Area includes Eastham Country Park where significant opportunities exist to improve woodland quality and attractiveness as a visitor resource for the City Region.

Ecological opportunities

Habitat creation:

- Much of the Focus Area is covered by site designations that include nature conservation objectives, e.g. SSSI. Management should be in line with established management plans.
- **Woodland:** Planting woodland around the existing ancient woodland would buffer these important sites and allow species populations to be more resilient and expand into the new woodland. The existing woodlands are separated by roads and development. Woodland or hedgerow planting that links and strengthens links between the ancient woodlands could also enable species to move more easily across the area. The planting could fill in gaps in tree cover, or could create woodland belts to connect woodlands across longer distances.
- **Hedgerows:** Creating new hedgerows and tree lines that connect the existing woodlands will create a landscape that could facilitate the easier movement of woodland species.
- **Ponds:** A network of ponds is present in the rural portion of the Focus Area. Creating more ponds would support the existing network and improve habitat for important species such as dragonflies and amphibians. Ponds also provide the opportunity to create wetland habitats within the urban landscape where space is limited, especially where the Focus Area is narrow.

Habitat management priorities:

- **Woodland:** Areas of the woodland resource are mainly within public and third sector ownership. Management ranges from amenity to some habitat works. Within the ancient woodland, management should be targeted to ensure key features such as deadwood, mature trees, glades and rides, together with a diverse ground flora are present. Management can enhance the structure of the woodland by ensuring that there are suitable shrub and ground layers, to allow species to move across the area and populations to expand from the ancient woodland sites. A priority is the eradication of Japanese knotweed and Himalayan balsam.
- **Ponds:** The ponds within the Focus Area are important for invertebrate and amphibian populations. Management to prevent complete shading by trees and drying out is required in some cases. However, a mix of ponds in different conditions, such as completely open - some shading – complete shading, provides a range of habitat diversity. Protection of ponds from pollution inputs, such as nutrient enrichment, is important to ensure the habitat can support important species.
- **Wetland:** Along the river Dibbin are small areas of reedbed and swamp wetlands.

Scattered patches of swamp habitats also exist along the brooks. Management of the existing swamp should maintain the extent and prevent too much scrub growth, but maintain some scrub as wet woodland. Some areas may require cutting to prevent drying out. Any cutting should be undertaken on a rotational basis.

- **Hedgerows:** Traditional management of the hedgerows, such as laying, would strengthen the structure. Measures such as filling gaps in existing hedges and cutting every 3 years would improve the function of the hedgerow. Planting and allowing large tree species to grow tall would provide a diversity of height and expand the tree cover of the area. Hedgerow management allows the existing agricultural uses of fields to be maintained while providing significant improvements to important habitats.

Ecosystem Services Benefits

The Focus Area's watercourses, wetlands and floodplain areas act to store water. Improvement in the function of the habitats would help to store more water, while further habitat creation could add to the storage capacity. This helps to make properties and land more secure inside and outside the Focus Area and could benefit property value. The river Dibbin and its tributaries are in poor condition under the Water Framework Directive.

Management of the woodlands, in particular, could provide economic opportunities in relation to renewable energy and microgeneration such as through biomass or coppicing. Existing woodlands act as a carbon store and any new woodland would also help store carbon.

The wider area, including Brotherton Park, Dibbinsdale Local Nature Reserve and Eastham Country Park, provides a significant recreational resource for local residents and visitors. The parks also generate a significant number of volunteer days input to site management.

Focus Area support to wider priorities and strategies

Local Plans – The local authorities in the City Region have worked together to prepare the Ecological Network as a joint evidence base and to help plan for biodiversity at a landscape-scale in line with the National Planning Policy Framework. Discussions with neighbouring areas through Nature Connected, the Government-recognised Local Nature Partnership, have enabled wider connections beyond the city region to be made. In line with paragraph 117 of the National Planning Policy Framework, the LCR Ecological Network includes a Core Biodiversity Area of designated nature and geological sites and priority habitats, linking networks and strategic priorities for habitat creation or enhancement. This is one of seventeen Nature Improvement Area Focus Areas which together make up the LCR Nature Improvement Area. Although not a Proposals Map designation, further refinement of NIA boundaries and land uses may occur as part of each district's Local Plan processes.

Flood Catchment Management Plans - the ecological opportunities can be used to help manage water flows, store flood waters and release them slowly. This is in line with the Policy the Environment Agency is taking to deal with flood risk along the river Dibbin.

River Basin Management Plans (Water Framework Directive) - the ecological opportunities identified could help deliver improvements to water quality and morphology. This could help improve the ecological condition of the watercourses which is key objective of the North West River Basin Management Plan.

National Character Areas - the ecological opportunities are in line with two of the four

'Statements of Environmental Opportunity' identified in the Merseyside Conurbation NCA 58. Delivery of the Focus Area ecological opportunities could strengthen landscape resilience and adaptation to climate change. This will help the Character Area achieve sustainable growth and a more secure environmental future.

Countryside Stewardship scheme – The scheme could support land managers in the delivery of multiple public benefits. Overall, biodiversity should be the priority for the scheme but synergies also exist to maximise opportunities to deliver biodiversity, wetland and forestry proposals. The scheme could also contribute towards the delivery of water quality and forestry objectives.

Nature Connected and Cheshire LNP- implementation of the Focus Area's ecological opportunities could work towards the LCR LNP's Key Action D and would also support the delivery of its other Key Actions. They would also contribute to the 'living landscape' proposals of Cheshire LNP.

LCR LEP – The Focus Area could support the LEP's priority for the Knowledge Economy and Skills by enhancing and inspiring learning for school and higher education students, including work placements/training in the natural environment.

Atlantic Gateway – the NIA ecological opportunities fit with the investment opportunities of the Sustainability priority (landscape park, grey to green).