

Rivermead Ditch Enhancement Plan

River Academy, Richfield Avenue, Reading

Presented to Bowmer and Kirkland

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Delta-Simons Project Number: 21-1172 / 89826.550580

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1	Final	7 th February 2023		<i>J. Britt</i>	<i>Charlotte J.</i>	<i>Charlotte J.</i>
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1.0 Context and Purpose

Delta-Simons Ltd. has been appointed by Bowmer and Kirkland (the 'Client') to prepare an Enhancement Plan for Rivermead Ditch at the proposed River Academy on Richfield Avenue, Reading in Berkshire RG1 8EQ (hereafter referred to as the 'Site'). The Site has been granted planning consent (Planning Permission Reference 212061 granted by Reading Borough Council 20 July 2022) for the construction of a new three-storey 8 form entry school for years 11 - 16, including a SEND unit and 300 place 6th form (total school capacity of 1500 pupils) including the creation of a new access from Richfield Avenue, new parking area, cycle parking landscaped areas, external play areas, Multi Use Games Area (MUGA) and sporting pitches.

Planning condition 36 states:

"No development shall commence above foundation level until a Rivermead Ditch enhancement plan which includes full details (and timetables) for enhancing the ditch, including the eradication of invasive species, the desilting and re-profiling of the ditch and the enhancement of the marginal vegetation has been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The plan shall thereafter be implemented in accordance with the approved details and timetable."

2.0 Baseline Information

A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) was undertaken at the Site by Delta-Simons in February 2022, and the results reported in an Ecological Impact Assessment (EclA) (report reference 21-1172.05, April 2022). This assessment reported the section of Rivermead Ditch within the Site boundary to support standing water at the time of the survey. The water quality was poor, with considerable litter present. The banks were covered in dense scrub, including bramble *Rubus fruticosus* agg., broadleaved dock *Rumex obtusifolius*, common nettle *Urtica dioica*, and willowherb *Epilobium* sp. Japanese knotweed *Fallopia japonica* (see Section 3.0, below), was also recorded along the northern bank, on the western end of the ditch. The ditch was not considered suitable to support otter *Lutra lutra* or water vole *Arvicola amphibius*. The bankside scrub did, however, provide suitable habitat for nesting birds.

3.0 Invasive Non-Native Species

At the time of writing, management of the Japanese knotweed has been implemented through excavation and appropriate removal off-Site, with reference to the Japanese Knotweed Remediation Report prepared for the Site by Japanese Knotweed Ltd in July 2020. The success of this eradication programme will continue



to be monitored during construction works on Site and as part of the ditch enhancement works. Contractors will be made aware of the previous presence of this species as part of pre-works tool-box talks/inductions. This will include information on how to identify the species, and legal implications. In the unlikely event Japanese knotweed is identified to persist at the Site, works will stop immediately and appropriate mitigation implemented, including application of an exclusion zone and de-contamination of any equipment used in proximity of the identified plants. A specialist at Japanese Knotweed Ltd. will be contacted for advice and a further treatment plan implemented.

4.0 Enhancement of Bankside Vegetation

In accordance with the landscape plans prepared by Ares Landscape Architects, sections of existing scrub vegetation along the ditch embankments are to be retained, although managed to reduce scrub cover and encroachment into the water channel, to improve the biodiversity value of the watercourse. In order to provide greater species diversity within the bankside vegetation, areas either side of the proposed footbridge are to be cleared of existing vegetation and replanted with a native scrub mix. The following measures are to be taken to enhance the bankside vegetation:

- With the exception of those identified for removal to facilitate the new footbridge, trees along the ditch corridor are to be retained.
- Where indicated for retention, the existing bankside scrub is to be flailed/strimmed to reduce its cover and encourage a more open channel. Scrub overhanging the foot of the bank is to be cut back, and the overall height of the vegetation reduced to a minimum 500 mm in height.
- Where removal and replanting of scrub is identified, the scrub will first be reduced through flailing/cutting where necessary, and then the full plants removed with an excavator. The profile of the banks will be reinstated through the addition of approved topsoil, where necessary and prepared for planting. The profile will be returned to the existing, or to tie into the batters required for the footbridge installation. The consented species mix will be planted in the next available season.
- Cuttings from any management/clearance work will be removed from the channel to prevent it causing blockages downstream.
- Where practicable, vegetation clearance/management will be undertaken outside of the main nesting bird season (i.e. clearance carried out between September and February inclusive). If these works cannot be restricted to within this period, an Ecological Watching Brief will be maintained during the main bird breeding season to ensure that no nesting birds are adversely affected. This will entail checking all suitable habitat for nesting birds, and a buffer of at least 5 m beyond that area, by a suitably experienced ecologist prior to the commencement of works. If, during the Ecological Watching Brief, birds are found to be within the area due to be cleared or the buffer zone, measures to prevent any disturbance to breeding birds, including the cessation of works in areas close to breeding sites until the birds have completed breeding, will be put in place until the chicks have fledged.
- Restoring and managing a more open water channel is anticipated to encourage colonisation of aquatic in-channel vegetation, enhancing the biodiversity of the watercourse.

5.0 Desilting/General Clearance

Once vegetation has been cleared/reduced as detailed above, the requirement and scope for desilting works will be determined. Where necessary de-silting within the channel will be undertaken, as well as general clearance of debris and obstructions. This will be performed to minimise disturbance to the retained vegetation and to maintain the existing profile and will be undertaken with reference to any relevant legislation and policy regarding drainage channels. The following works will be undertaken:

- Any physical obstructions such as large rocks, rubble, fallen trees and branches and other waste materials (litter, grass cuttings etc) will be removed. All non-organic waste will be removed to an off-Site location and disposed of in an appropriate manner. Any organic waste will, where appropriate, be left a

safe distance from the bank for a few days to allow any organisms to move back into the watercourse, after which the waste will be removed from the Site so it doesn't wash back into the watercourse.

- Any pipes into or out of the ditch will be cleared of debris and silt removed to the same level or below the base of the pipe(s).
- In order to maintain the function of the ditch, an even depth of silt will be removed along the length of the ditch. However, where possible any existing shallow shelves within the channel are to be maintained/reinstated to provide habitat for freshwater invertebrates.
- No reprofiling works are proposed, and de-silting will be undertaken to minimise impacts on areas of retained vegetation (i.e. removed from the channel without scraping the banks).
- Given the existing condition of the ditch and nature of the surrounding development, extracted silt is to be removed from Site and appropriately disposed of.

6.0 Timetable of Works

The ditch enhancement works are proposed to be completed in 2023, following discharge of the appropriate planning conditions. In order to avoid the nesting bird season vegetation management/clearance will be undertaken from the beginning of September, with works anticipated to be completed within a 10-day period. Where indicated, planting of native scrub to the banks of the ditch will be undertaken during winter 2023/24.