Lower Hoopern Valley, University of Exeter Update

Friends of Lower Hoopern Valley AGM

Nicola Corrigan (Head of Sustainability Programmes)
& David Evans (Head of Grounds)
20/11/24

Today

- University of Exeter Nature Positive Strategy (Nicola)

- Lower Hoopern Valley (David)
  - Our aims for the Valley
  - Consultation results from last year
  - Where we've got to
  - Future Plans

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Nature Positive Strategy

- Why? Protect the planet for future generations

- We have pledged to become a Nature Positive University– we must have a baseline, smart targets, and report annually.

Nature Positive means halting and reversing nature loss so that species and ecosystems start to recover.

- Urban areas can be, and are, good for biodiversity

- University campuses can be particularly good

GOALS: enhance and protect nature

Objectives

1) **Improve the biodiversity value of University Campuses**
2) **Increase the natural capital* value of University campuses** and areas we can influence.
3) Increase how we **engage/connect people with nature** (via teaching, volunteering, research).
4) **Provide positive benefits** to staff, students and local communities as a result of nature-based interventions.
5) **Reduce the impact of our operations**, **supply chain and global activities** on biodiversity and the environment.

**Natural capital is the stock of renewable and non-renewable natural resources (geology, soil, air, water and living organisms) that combine to yield a flow of benefits to people*

Action Plan

Grounds and their Maintenance	Built and Grounds	Operations	Teaching and Research	Engagement	Monitoring

[University of Exeter Nature Positive Strategy]

Lower Hoopern Valley - Our aims for the Valley

- Enhancing biodiversity and 'environmental services', such as helping reduce water run-off and improve water quality.
- Improve access, education opportunities and engagement with our local community.
- Provide a place for research.
- Carbon sequestration (planting some habitats which store carbon such as trees and hedges)

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Public consultation

- Two events –
  - May 16th 2023 – over 100 responses
  - November 28th 2023 – 56 responses

56% agreed or strongly agreed with our primary objectives

All primary objectives were supported by at least 35% of responses

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Public consultation November 2023

In November 2023 we held our second community engagement event to present the developing plans for the Lower Hoopern Valley

96% were satisfied or very satisfied with the developing design proposal*

Which features were most popular?

Community access improvements were most popular (64%)

Biodiversity improvements were very popular (50%), with ponds and wetlands most often mentioned (18%)

98% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the designs met our primary objectives

- To enhance biodiversity,
- To improve community engagement, access and education,
- To provide a resource for natural and social science research, and,
- To provide a level of carbon sequestration (the uptake and long-term storage of carbon).

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*56 responses as of 4/1/12

Please note that we read and considered all responses – this is just a summary of some of the most frequently mentioned themes

You Said..

We Did..

Concerns

Most concerns were around the potential for increased access to lead to increased anti-social behaviour such as littering.

We will–

- Provide information for site users on respectful use of the site.
- look into having a greater presence of grounds team staff during day-time hours on site
- The University security patrol will be available to be contacted with specific concerns.

Better path surfacing

During our first infrastructure phase, we will prioritise -

- Developing an accessible path on the northern side of the site.
- Improving surfacing in areas of the mown paths which become muddy.

Differing views on dog walking

We will encourage people to be respectful of all users (including wildlife!) and remind people to clear up after their dogs.

Keeping a 'wild' feel

There were concerns about losing the natural or wild feeling of the site – we are keen to keep the site as a natural, wildlife haven, but with better access. We will consider this in management and materials.

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Please note that we read and considered all responses – this is just a summary of some of the most frequently mentioned items

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Biodiversity Enhancement Proposals

Meadow management

- Making sure brambles don't overtake
- Reducing some dominant native species such as nettle and ragwort.
- Carrying out a cut and collect, if we can – this is key for improving plant diversity

New hedgerows

Enhancing dead wood habitats – removing dead standing trees when dangerous, but leaving them for wildlife where we can

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LOWER HOOPERN VALLEY
New Infrastructure Proposals

Some changes in response to consultation:

Fewer signs, fences and gates – to keep the ‘wild’ feel

No benches near Velwell Road entrance.

We have contacted Exeter City Council re: bins

Activities in response to the consultation – improving access

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Other access improvements

New foot bridge over existing culvert of unknown safety

New fully accessible 200m path, accessed from Prince of Wales Road

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Lockable noticeboards, so we can keep people updated

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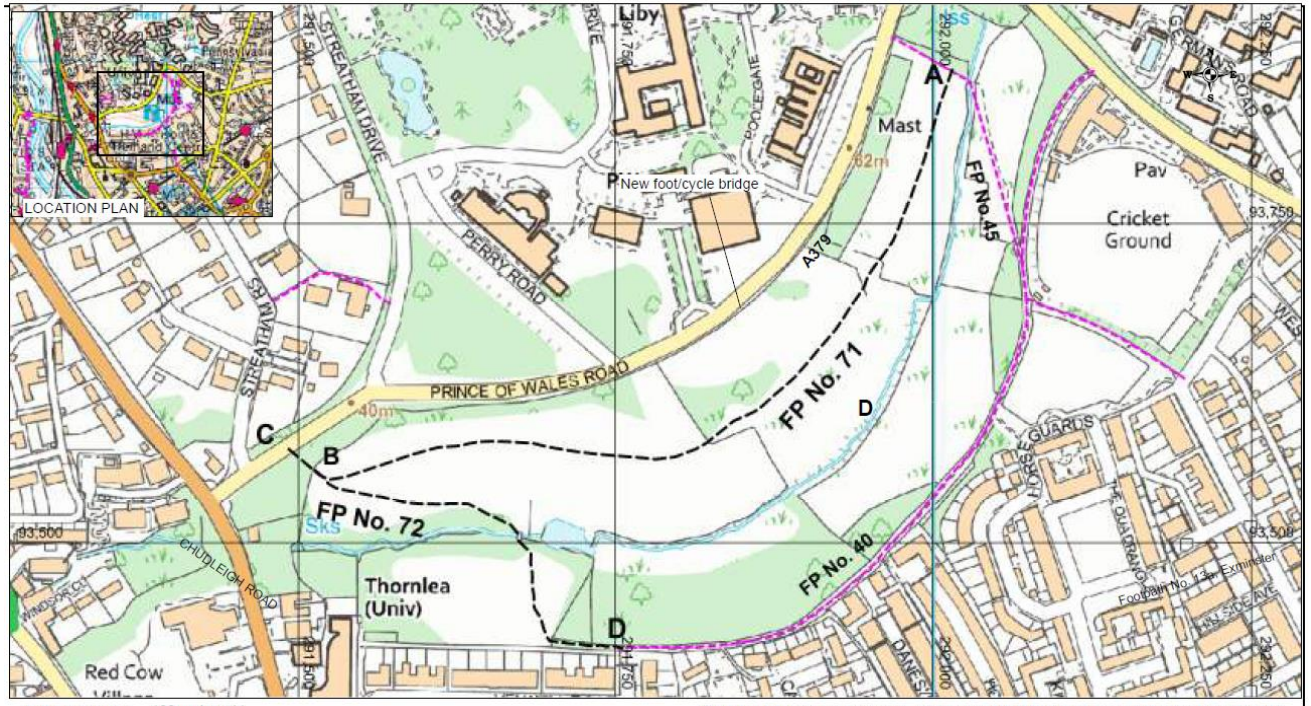
Public right of way – foot path

- Creation agreement signed by Devon County Council and the University
- Pause while we finished the footbridge over the culvert
- New gates and signs at C and D will be installed by Devon County Council



Grid ref SX 9288 100 metre grid

HIGHWAYS ACT 1980 SECTION 25
PUBLIC PATH CREATION AGREEMENT
FOOTPATH Nos. 71 AND 72, EXETER

drawing number	CCET/PROW/24/19
date	May 2024
scale	1:3570 at A4
drawn by	AS/ST

Notation

Footpaht added by Creation Agreement A-B-C FP No. 71 approx. 660 metres - - - - - -
C-B-D FP No. 72 approx 340 metres - - - - - -

Existing public footpaths

Meg Booth
Director of Climate Change Environment and Transport

Devon County Council

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First event on the accessible path!

- Foraging event, open to staff, students and local community

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Infrastructure plans coming up

- Majority of works complete
- Interpretation board on new accessible path
- Additional benches In the Valley (after the nature-based flood management solutions)

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Plans coming up – Nature-based flood management solutions

- Working with the Environment Agency and University of Exeter researchers from Department of Geography and Centre for Resilience in Environment, Water and Waste

What are they and why are we doing it?

- Ways of working with nature to help -
  - 'slow the flow' – reduce the amount of water running off from the site
  - Help water quality – by trapping sediment and any pollution.
  - Help nature – making sure that water courses are connected – removing obstacles that wildlife can't get through, like solid weirs
  - Providing lots of different wildlife habitats – ponds, wet grassland areas

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Challenges with the Taddiforde Brook

- While some shade is good for water courses, it is too shaded – so few plants can grow on the edges and in the brook.
- In many places the brook is much deeper with steeper banks than we would expect from how wide it is – probably from erosion during high rainfall

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Freshwater sampling – not much in here apart from a lot of freshwater shrimp

Some solutions

Woody spreaders

Have gap underneath, allowing clear flow at low water and letting freshwater wildlife move up stream.

In high water reduce how quickly the water leaves the sites and create pools behind them.

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Creating pools and channels to hold water when it has been raining a lot

- They will be associated with the brook, rather than separate from it.

Photo courtesy of Mehdi Bagheri Gavkosh, University of Exeter

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How are we planning on doing this?

- There will be some disruption/ machinery on site – we will try and keep this to a minimum.
- Using trees next to or nearby the brook to create the large woody spreaders – focusing on -
  - Trees with ash die back
  - Younger sycamores with lower biodiversity value (older, bigger trees have greater biodiversity value)
  - Using trees that we might need to remove to help access anyway.
  - And allowing us to let light into the brook in some places
- Protecting biodiversity
  - Outside bird nesting season
  - Using straw bales to keep sediment in during works
  - Woodlands can benefit from tree management – lets in light for new trees

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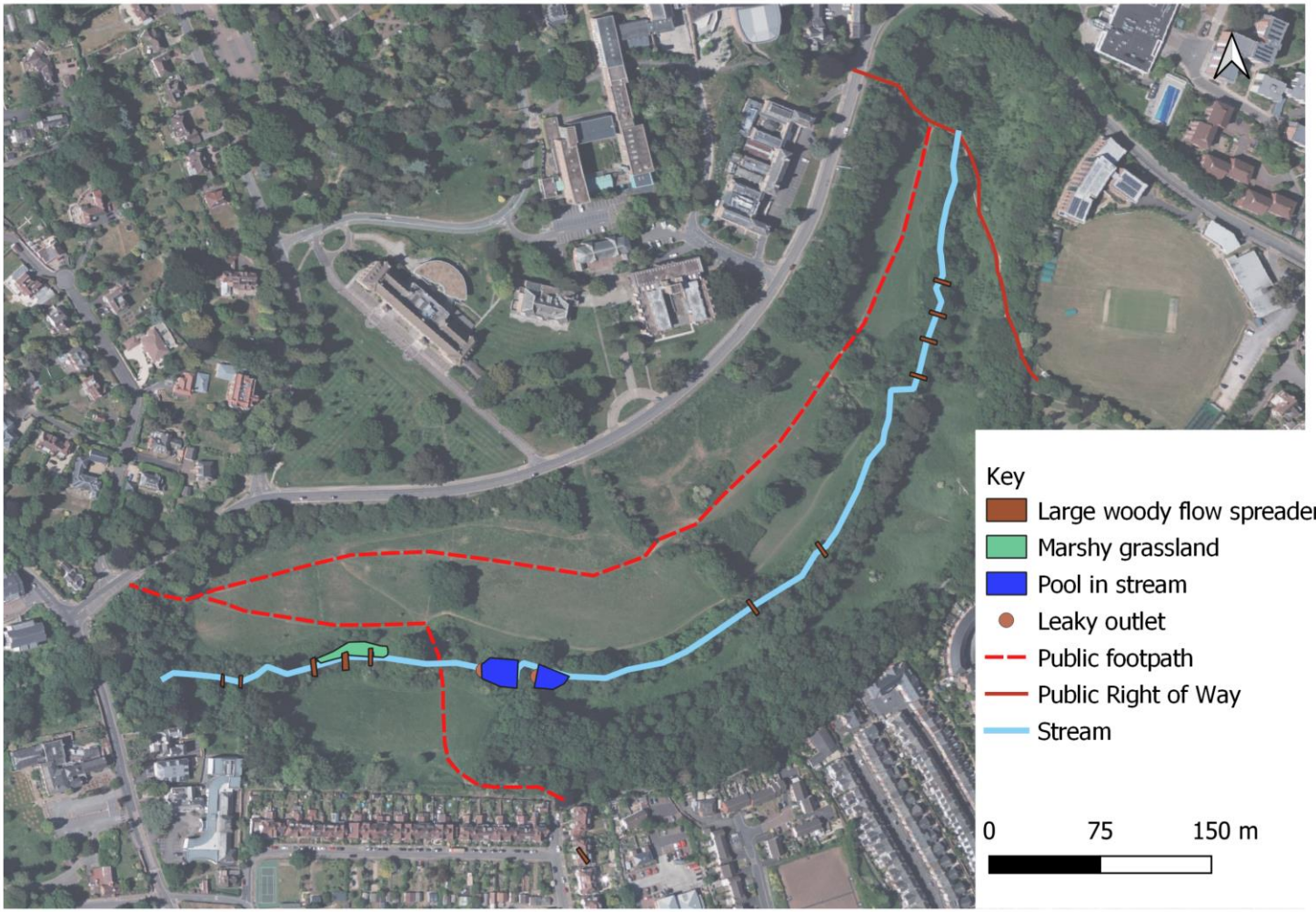
Where? Throughout the brook
Should not close footpath
Might get a bit muddy where machinery come in



Other planting plans

- Hedgerow near the new accessible path
- Potentially some ‘parkland’ /wood pasture style tree planting (trees which are well spread out, providing different habitats for wildlife).

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Lower Hoopern Valley Opening/ Celebration event – Save the (new) date

- Tuesday 6th May 2pm -6pm

- Opening the Valley - a short speech from the Vice Chancellor Prof Lisa Roberts
- Invites/save the dates will go out in January, and it will be advertised on Eventbrite.
- Food, tea and coffee
- Acoustic music
- Nature-focused family friendly activities (details TBC)
- Tour of the site as specific times.
- We would love to you to be involved – if anyone would like to have a stand, please get in touch with Ros - r.shaw@exeter.ac.uk

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Thank you for listening!

- All updates are available on our website, including our consultation response summary

https://www.exeter.ac.uk/about/sustainability/whatwearedoing/biodiversity/lowerhoopernvalley/

- Follow us on Instagram
  - Sustainability Team @uoesustainability
  - Grounds Team @universityofexetergrounds

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