

Protecting wildlife during Salisbury River Park construction

Work began in January to prepare the site ahead of the main construction work which will start in June.

Some trees and vegetation needed to be cleared and this work was completed early in the project to ensure trees were removed before nesting season. When construction work is complete the project team will plant 6 times as many trees as they have removed and many of the felled trees will be reused on site.

The Salisbury River Park project is a partnership between the Environment Agency, Wiltshire Council, Salisbury City Council and the Swindon and Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership. Once finished it will reduce flood risk to over 350 homes and businesses in Salisbury.

In addition to reducing flood risk, the Salisbury River Park project will provide major ecological, amenity, walking and cycling benefits. Improving biodiversity is a key part of this project.

Recently water voles within the site boundary have been trapped and relocated to some specially prepared habitat on the River Avon downstream near Ringwood. The voles are being closely monitored in their new home to ensure they thrive and establish a new community.

After relocating water voles from the area the team destroyed burrows to prevent other voles moving in before construction work starts. This work has all been completed under the supervision of specialist ecologists.

The riverbank has now been temporarily covered in a membrane to prevent other animals from burrowing. When work starts on this channel in July the membrane will be removed and the bank fully excavated. This is the earliest that the team can start in the channel to minimise the risk to any juvenile fish. Overall, the scheme works will greatly improve the habitat for water voles, and they are expected to naturally recolonise this area from nearby populations.

Throughout the work ecologists are on site surveying and monitoring for other animals, including otters and nesting birds, to ensure there is no detriment to them as a result of any of the works.

Ron Curtis, Area Flood and Coastal Risk Manager at The Environment Agency said:

We have reached the important stage of preparing the Salisbury River Park site ready for construction to begin later this year. This is the first step in providing better flood protection for the city. We know the devastating impact that flooding can have, which

is why protecting people and communities is our top priority.

The scheme will bring multiple benefits for residents and businesses in Salisbury, including:

- creating wildlife corridors and improving biodiversity
- improving the recreational and amenity value of the area, creating green spaces that are more pleasant to move through and spend time in
- promoting sustainable travel by expanding and improving the network of footpaths and cycle paths in the area, as well as improving the coach park
- enabling growth and the regeneration of key development sites in the city centre
- improving climate change resilience
- enhancing the tourism offer in Salisbury

Cllr Dr Mark McClelland, Cabinet Member for Transport, Waste, Street Scene and Flooding at Wiltshire Council, said:

It is a key priority for us that Wiltshire's natural beauty, its historic sites, houses and unique habitats and wildlife are protected and nurtured. The Salisbury River Park project is an exciting project which fully embraces these goals, and we look forward to works starting in earnest in the coming months.

Paddy Bradley CEO Swindon and Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership said of the announcement:

We welcome the completion of this first stage of the work for the Salisbury River Park. The work undertaken will help create an attractive environment, increasing habitat and biodiversity for future generations to come whilst reducing the risk of flooding to the city. All measures have been taken to minimise the impact of this temporary loss of habitat and we look forward to seeing the improved wetland and woodland habitats and the rewilding of this internationally important chalk stream environment.

Full site mobilisation will start in mid-late June with site compounds being established on the long stay Central Car Park and Ashley Road Open Space.

Further information on the project can be found at:

www.salisburyriverparkphase1.com.