

Chesham Rewilding Project | Lowndes Park

A model community-led rewilding project

SUMMARY:

Rewilding is a fairly new concept. It is a process that aims to give an area a boost in returning to a low-maintenance, natural state. We propose to rally the community to help plant (in a natural layout) more than one thousand trees and shrubs that will grow into natural woodland on low traffic areas (2.5 acres) at the rear of Lowndes Park. These trees and shrubs, along with some specially added features, will provide habitats for bats, songbirds, raptors, small mammals, pollinators such as bees, butterflies, some amphibians, and owls.

At the back of Lowndes Park, along from the community Orchard, are six areas that sit between the established paths. They currently consist of a few scattered small-to-medium trees with a few larger ones dotted on the edges, along with rough grass. A long time ago this entire area was wooded, before human activity resulted in their destruction.

WHAT IS REWILDING?

As the *Rewilding Britain* site explains:

“Rewilding is a form of ecological restoration where the emphasis is on humans stepping back and leaving an area to nature, as opposed to more active forms of natural resource management. Rewilding efforts aim to create ecosystems requiring passive management.”

PROPOSED AREA:

Four areas with a combined surface of approximately 9,115m² sit at the back stretch of Lowndes Park, between the community orchard and Sovereign Coppice. (Two additional optional areas—combined surface of 2,500m²—could also be planted with shrub / wildflower.) Our proposed project area has several key advantages:

- The site is sloped and south facing, providing an ideal area for planting a mix of naturally occurring Buckinghamshire species.
- The new woodland will help to offset some of the effects of the adjacent and newly completed sports facilities at Chiltern Hills Academy.
- The site has very low current foot traffic outside of the established paths, which will either be maintained or replaced.
- The new woodland will improve soil quality, water retention, and will boost flood prevention down the hill and along the Chess.
- The site is a short walk from the town centre & station, so the project can be promoted as a point of interest for visitors.
- The existing (private) woodland along the edge of the park can act as a species “bank”. The additional area of woodland will improve the overall landscape connectivity, improving biodiversity.

PROJECT EXPERT/PLANNER & PROJECT CONSULTANT:

Jim Ashton is one of the country's leading and most passionate experts on rewilding, natural habitats, and ecosystems. Jim travels nationally designing and creating wildlife habitats including woodlands, wildlife ponds, and meadows. He designs and undertakes rewilding projects for private landowners, community groups, and NGOs. The projects range in size from private gardens to sites several hectares in size. Jim lives locally in Buckinghamshire.

Nick Christensen has undertaken conservation projects in Kenya, Slovakia, India, & France. Nick has worked for Bucks, Berks & Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT); is a project manager for a private trust in Pembrokeshire; and is currently studying for a Master's in Wildlife and Conservation Management. Nick is a long time Chesham resident and grew up in Lowndes Park (not exclusively of course!)

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT:

2020 has shown us how important local community, volunteering, and 'pitching in together' can be. The 1,200 trees & shrubs (more if we include the optional sites), wildlife habitats, deadwood, bat and bird boxes etc. will require a community effort to prepare and get in place. There is great potential for school and youth groups to get involved too. Whether as individuals or through existing local groups, this project will seek to engage as many members of the community as possible.

Along with the proven benefits of being "in nature", this project can provide a chance for people to work on a **long-term legacy project** for the benefit of the community — and especially the young and future generations of residents and visitors to Chesham. We hope the result will become a model project to inspire other communities across Bucks.

A NOTE ON VIEWS:

In 15-25 years (and beyond) when our new trees grow and mature, there will be some reductions in the distant view (particularly during the summer), from the back top of the park. However, the project's combination of natural planting layouts (not all areas are tall trees), and the incorporation of habitat areas will both ensure that viewing points will remain present. Also of course, families and dog walkers will have the benefit of viewing this rewilded area close up.

SPECIES LIST:

Woodland Canopy Species:	Shrub and Understory Species:	Specific Insect & Animal Habitats:
Alder	Apple (Crab)	Bat & Tit Boxes
Ash (currently unavailable)	Blackthorn	Kestrel & Owl Boxes
Aspen	Box	Pollinator areas (wild mini-meadows below and above site)
Beech	Buckthorn (Purging)	Spider habitats
Birch (Silver)	Privet (Wild)	Log Piles & Deadwood for beetles, bees, fungi & more
Cherry (Wild)	Dogwood	
Hornbeam	Elder	
Oak (Pedunculate)	Elm (English)	
Dogwood	Elm (Wych)	
Elder	Field Maple	
Elm (Wych)	Guelder Rose	
Field Maple	Hawthorn	
	Hazel	
	Holly	
	Juniper	
	Rose (Dog)	
	Rowan	
	Spindle	
	Wayfaring Tree	
	Whitebeam	
	Willow (Goat)	
	Yew	