

3.1.4.h. Consideration of Edgeley (council ward) as an area of conservation concern

*In this document, *True Natural Space* refers to non-fragmented wild, wilded/rewilded (even if enhanced for nature) areas of land within urban environments as opposed to managed and planted parks used as open public amenities.

True Natural Spaces are where (for the greater part) nature has taken course over decades to provide ample security and refuge for wildlife.

Meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs requires consideration of access to true natural spaces. This requires the identification of true natural spaces and the preservation, protection, designation and sometimes enhancement of true natural spaces, especially in urban environments. The presence of and access to natural space is an essential factor contributing to a healthy society.

Strong, vibrant and healthy communities require access to true natural spaces. Sometimes true natural spaces are available in the right places at the right time and can be rare in urban areas such as Edgeley. Once local access to true natural spaces are taken by urban development they may never reappear and opportunities which can benefit local communities are lost forever.

Sustainable solutions would include protecting and enhancing natural environment and true natural spaces according to legally binding commitments and not mitigating or compensating for their destruction. Local circumstances in Edgeley dictate a need for access to true natural green space (as opposed to managed open parks for human recreation) and such spaces should be protected and their value understood.

The promotion of a sustainable pattern of development would make allowances for areas of true natural space where areas of natural space are rare and where there is a need for access to it. Ecosystem service in Edgeley is at bare-bones level and the local community would benefit by the protection, designation and enhancement of existing habitat(s) as well as improving and creating more natural environment (in terms of wildlife habitat) to enable a boost in terms of wellbeing, health, education and social cohesion.

The strategic policies for Stockport should consider the presence of natural spring fed rivulets and their ecological importance to neighbouring reservoirs and the wider river systems. Conservation should be considered in terms of water infrastructure as well as in ecological terms. Conservation, especially in designated conservation areas where cellars of streets running parallel with reservoirs and other local streets are subject to serious flooding should consider local water tables and identify the effect of the removal of woodland and vegetation (roots) on water tables.

Local plans and spatial development strategies should assess that Edgeley is deprived of access to true natural space and wildlife habitat. The outline part of the planning application (Ref: # DC/092211 - development of a car park to the south) involves permanently removing the last reasonably sized vestige of natural habitat in Edgeley and along with it; the chances of establishing ecoservices which access to true natural habitat can offer in contribution to health, wellbeing and social cohesion of many people over many generations.

Local plans and spatial development strategies should identify that reasonable alternatives to the car park in question would involve convincing, encouraging or incentives for use of public transport for an average perceived figure of only 150-200 out of a perceived 19,750 people.

It is necessary to protect Edgeley's last vestige of accessible true natural habitat of reasonable size for reasons relating to legally binding commitments to biodiversity and for the health, wellbeing, educational opportunities and social cohesion of the Edgeley community and surrounding areas, the latter reasons also encompassed by legally binding commitments to biodiversity.

Many individuals in Edgeley, including children, marginalized groups, and people with disabilities or health problems, have interests other than football. *They* also need gateways leading to social interaction and local more accessible opportunities to enjoy and benefit from the activities within natural habitat that urban wildlife areas and nature reserves can provide. Such activities would include being involved in the protection, creation, restoration, enhancement and management of urban nature reserves as well as other activities such reserves can provide. Access to such areas should be one of the priorities considered in town planning.

Gated wildlife and nature reserves offer schools options to expand education beyond school grounds, especially where (like Alexandra Park Primary School in Edgeley) they have no green areas or space to create natural habitat of their own. This should be a consideration of town planners in plans and strategies across Stockport when making decisions on sites that have potential to be reserved for nature and wildlife.

See Part 4: (*Community, Health & Education*)

Edgeley Habitat Survey

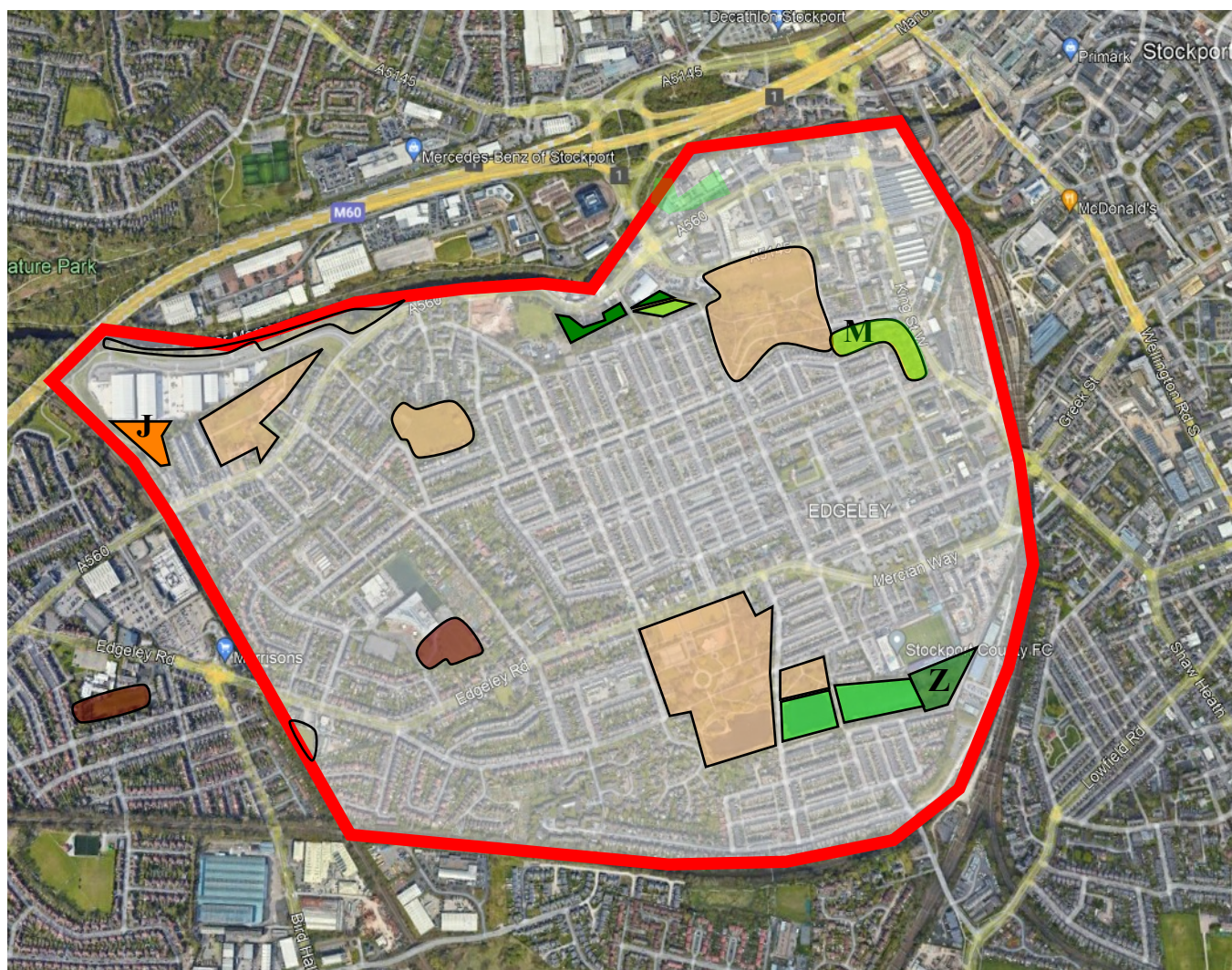
On the following page is a basic survey of wildlife habitat in the council ward for Edgeley, Stockport. Edgeley is built up urban land. For the purpose of this representation, those significant parts which are not have been divided into categories.









These are:

- Managed parks (primarily serving as amenities for human recreation) with heavy footfall and regular management. They are marked in salmon pink on the map.
- Private parks with heavy footfall and regular management. They are marked in lighter green on the map.
- Unmanaged, enclosed (or private) natural or rewilding or rewilded areas with restricted access. These are our areas which have the best suitability for wildlife. They are marked dark green on the map.

There are also some very small wooded areas with open access to the public which suffer regular human intrusion, litter and damage and can be prone to anti-social behaviour, *etc.* These areas are not deemed as suitable for wildlife. They are marked yellow green on the map.

Suitability for wildlife refers to relatively safe and secure hunting, foraging and nesting space - with emphasis on space, security and a natural provision for native species.



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|  Edgeley ward border |  Unmanaged industrial landscape / scrub - medium suitability for wildlife ** |
|  Sports field or school playing field - very unsuitable for wildlife |  Wooded area with open access to public. Limited security. Low to Medium for birds. Low for mammals. |
|  Managed industrial landscape - low suitability for wildlife |  Private parks with heavy footfall - medium suitability for wildlife *** |
|  Managed parks with heavy footfall - low suitability for wildlife * |  Enclosed (private) natural or re-wilding sites & unmanaged sites existing within industrial com- |

Edgeley and Natural Space

The presence of birds alone is not an indicator of suitable wildlife habitat. You may have noticed that the birds you see in your gardens or in the trees in your streets, even in the parks, more often than not do not actually live in your gardens or in the trees in your streets. And, though some small areas of parks may offer limited support for bird nesting, you'll struggle to find their nests and their night shelters in the parks.

Parks by their nature are human recreation spaces and although there has been increasing forethought for providing small wild zones in them over recent years, generally speaking, parks are heavily managed areas of land under continuous disturbance, development and constant human activity. They are regularly subject to noise, light, roaming dogs and antisocial behaviour. Something made evident recently when an attempt was made to set fire to perhaps one of the most suitable areas for nesting wildlife in Edgeley park .

Alexandra Park is a beautiful and fantastic place. A credit to those who maintain it. It, along with other community based programs such as Grow Edgeley and Friends of Alexandra Park, are a massive benefit to wildlife in many ways. But human recreation areas cannot be categorized as adequate sanctuaries for wildlife.

The two private angling clubs, on Reservoirs 1 & 2, Gosjacs and EPAC (now merged) offer fantastic habitat for aquatic life. They are fenced off and require membership to enter. They care a great deal for the wildlife and have already stated their support for the proposal of a wildlife reserve upon EWR. The work that these two clubs have done over the years to create and maintain an ecosystem for aquatic life is immense.

In regard to secure and natural space for wildlife, the problem with these two enclosed areas (Reservoirs 1 & 2) is that they are surrounded by only a thin strip of dry land which accommodates the human access points to the reservoirs. Thus, once again, support by way of secure habitat for non aquatic birds and mammals is very limited.

In Edgeley, that leaves us with only three areas of meaningful space which can, as things stand, be deemed as having the capability to support and protect wildlife. Two of them are small sections of inaccessible steep bank woodland behind Larkhill Road overlooking Stockport Audi. The third is the only one of them of any meaningful degree in respect to size and the only one offering accessibility. That area, situated at the end of Moscow Road East next to reservoir #1, is the subject of this document and is referred to as *EWR*.

Situated outside of Edgeley to the west (within the old Edgeley ward boundary) is a similar area. That exists in the immediate vicinity, most of it on the actual premises of, the sewage works. What a testimony of our devotion to our natural heritage that is. That the descendents of the creatures we shared this land with for three and a half thousand years are forced to resort to living among the stench of our sewage.

Edgeley ward now consists of approximately 571 acres. Of those 571 acres, as things are, only 3.57 acres are capable of providing secure and safe space to wildlife in terms of habitat areas.

In percentage, that means that 99.3% of the surface area of Edgeley is incapable of supporting wildlife habitat to any consistent, self sustainable or meaningful degree. Without the land we are making a case for today, it would be less ... and all that remains would be situated outside of Edgeley ward among the sewage works.

Testimony

Yew trees are native British trees. A long time before football our warriors used to make bows from them. My father was born and bred in Fallowfield, just a longbow relay from here. My mother, her two sisters and her brother were born and bred on Edgeley. They used to race tortoises on Bulkeley street. They lived in a time, not long ago, when taking a walk to pick blackberries and gooseberries on some nearby place I can't find anymore was normal. The only Yew tree I know of outside of a garden is in EWR.

When was the last time you ate hazelnuts? I can't find any. Do you even know that hazelnuts are native British plants? What on earth happened up the A6 in Hazel Grove?

I consider myself very lucky. Before I moved back to this area twenty-seven years or so ago I grew up in another town right next to a wood. I grew up in the woods. Without such land for which we are making a case for today, no kids this side of Edgeley will be able to witness or experience, or learn about their natural history, without getting in a car or onto a bus or a train. They won't even be able to see a glimpse of it. All that would remain would be situated among the sewage works at the other side of Edgeley. They will have to wear pegs on their noses just to get close to it.

What are you going to tell your children happened? Natural history is cultural history, it's in their blood and a WHOLE lot of people HAVE and STILL ARE overlooking the effect of too much urbanisation on the mental health of our young generations . The opportunity to sit in a quiet wood close to home, listening to the wind rustling in long grasses should be a right. There shouldn't be a battle to protect it.

Edgeley Resident / Member of EWRG

Testimony

It seems that the final battle of the British people is not taking place within the woods and meadows but rather, is FOR the woods and meadows. For the sake of the upbringing of British children and the wildlife they adore WHEN and WHERE does this stop?

Edgeley Resident / Member of EWRG

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3.1.4.i. Consideration of EWR as a Nature Reserve

The area subject to the outline part of the planning application (Ref: # DC/092211) is the most valuable in Edgeley in terms of environmental value and in terms of potential for establishing a basis for ecoservices related to health and wellbeing and education.

The lone representation of EWR as viable habitat in the context of the local area considered in context of legally binding commitments to recover nature and improve biodiversity at local and community levels needs to be considered.

In the context of Edgeley, EWR (as an area of habitat) is irreplaceable. With the absence of a Local Plan, a Local Nature Recovery Strategy and a Biodiversity Action Plan, and according to the policies in the National Planning Policy Framework 2023, The Environment Act, and legally binding commitments toward biodiversity in regard to ecology, habitat and local communities, EWR should be considered as an asset warranting protection. See Section **3.1**.

Species recovery and habitat restoration projects make a difference. Improving habitat is good for nature and for people but it also helps mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change.

Katherine Hawkins, Nature Policy Manager, The Wildlife Trusts

As it stands today, EWR can deliver ‘benefits for **nature and support efforts to address climate change**’. EWR cannot possibly be classed as surplus to requirements considering its potential to be enhanced to offer ecosystem opportunities to the local community. Opportunities for new provision in the form of a gated nature reserve in an area deprived of access to natural habitat should be informing assessments of the area.

EWR is not an extensive tract of land. It is easily accessible to the community of Edgeley. It is special because it is the last vestige of accessible natural habitat in Edgeley and of particular significance because of the ongoing biodiversity emergency and because it is the only area in Edgeley of reasonable size capable of being enhanced to provide accessible community-wide ecosystem services for health, wellbeing and education. Its ecological significance and potential is furthered by its proximity to the neighbouring reservoirs, particularly Reservoir # 1.

The non-strategic policies for Stockport’s specific areas should consider the presence of a natural spring fed rivulet in EWR and its ecological importance to the neighbouring reservoirs and the wider river systems. It should be considered in terms of water infrastructure as well as in ecological terms.

The idea presented in this document is for a gated nature reserve offering ecoservices to local community (including food production growing beds); social participation activities; flood risk prevention and mitigation; enhancement of biodiversity; protection, restoration and encouragement of native species of flora and wildlife; and protection of the site’s existing qualities contributing to cooling/shading and carbon storage.

EWR is comprised of woodland, grassland habitat, and scrub. As a whole area it is of a scope and size which cannot be replaced locally. Compensation strategies published by the planning application (Ref: # DC/092211) and in relation to the outline part are too fragmented and piecemeal and exist of areas too small or narrow to be considered viable solutions in terms of habitat compensation. There is too high a risk of deterioration and loss of habitat value to any 'retained' section due to issues arising from the immediate proximity to a car park with very high footfall.

The outline part of the planning application (Ref: # DC/092211) would bring any 'retained' areas of existing natural environment within EWR and the natural spring fed rivulet ecologically connected to the reservoirs and the wider river system into immediate proximity of a car park and subject to risk of pollution (noise and light), litter and anti-social behaviour. Any 'retained' areas of existing natural environment would drastically lose value in terms of security and provisions for wildlife.

In regard to the outline part of the planning application (Ref: # DC/092211); environmental (in the case of loss of wildlife habitat, flooding and risk to water bodies) and social impacts (in the case of losing Edgeley's only reasonable space giving access to true natural habitat and resulting ecoservices) can be avoided and alternative options are available to consider which will reduce and eliminate those impacts.

More detail about the habitat of EWR is presented in **Chapter 3.2**.

EWR and Green Corridors

In today's urbanised world, green corridors are an essential aspect of nature's survival. Green corridors provide a network of communication for many species, often linking habitat areas to each other. Sadly, it is increasingly becoming the case (especially in highly concentrated urban areas) that the corridors themselves are the only habitat and home that wildlife has to rely upon. Many of them exist as railway embankments. Thankfully, Network Rail take their duty to wildlife and the biodiversity crisis very seriously and contribute toward maintaining these corridors for wildlife.

There are national strategies in place aimed at designating, creating and maintaining green corridors. It is an ongoing process and not all corridors are identified or designated. Not only birds and mammals rely upon green corridors. Amphibians and insects (the basic building blocks of the food chain) and important pollinators also rely upon them.

All bodies and authorities concerned with the state of nature in the UK are fully aware of the importance of green corridors.

Much of England's wildlife is now restricted to wildlife sites, which consist largely of semi-natural habitats. However, surviving in small, isolated sites is difficult for many species, especially in the longer term and given climate change. We want a large number of high quality sites which contain the range and area of habitats that species require. We also want ecological connections that allow species, or their genes, to move between these sites. For many species, habitat does not have to be a continuous, physical connection for them to disperse. An ecological network is this network of high quality sites, protected by buffer zones, and connected by wildlife corridors and smaller, but still wildlife-rich, "stepping-stone" sites.

Biodiversity 2020, p19

EWR is situated upon a green corridor and is an important link between outlying habitats to the south and the reservoirs. The image below illustrates the position of EWR in relation to a green corridor.

The location of EWR as a nature reserve and a knuckle in a green corridor serving the reservoir area means it is essential to the wildlife we experience in Edgeley. EWR's position adjoining the railway premises means it is in fact the most valuable link to the ecology of the reservoir area and Alexandra Park.



A Greater Picture

Pursuant of legally binding targets aimed at improving biodiversity, stemming habitat loss and addressing the demise of species abundance, Defra and Natural England put huge emphasis on Coherent Ecological Networks.

To the south of Edgeley, beyond Adswold, is the potential to create a core habitat country wildlife park which would offer Stockport great future employment and economic opportunities.

That is the subject of another document.