



Ecology Consultancy



# **Rother Valley Railway (Track Reinstatement between Austen's Bridge and Junction Road)**

## Landscape and Ecology Management Plan (LEMP)

### Report for Rother Valley Railway Ltd

Version	Author	Checked by	Approved by	Date	Type
1.0	Rosanna Marston ACIEEM BSc MSc	Sasha Dodsworth BSc MSc MCIEEM	Wendy McFarlane MA MSc MCIEEM	25.05.2018	FINAL
2.0	Rosanna Marston ACIEEM BSc MSc	Charlie Dwight BSc CEcol, MCIEEM	Giles Coe	20/12/2015	FINAL
3.0	Rosanna Marston ACIEEM BSc MSc		Rosanna Marston ACIEEM BSc MSc	19/02/2019	FINAL

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# 1 Introduction

## BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Ecology Consultancy was commissioned by Rother Valley Railway Ltd to prepare a Landscape and Ecology Management Plan (LEMP) for the Rother Valley Railway (Track Reinstatement between Austen's Bridge and Junction Road), Robertsbridge, East Sussex.
- 1.2 It should be noted that planning permission and conditions apply to the whole scheme -  
reinstatement of the Rother Valley Railway from Northbridge Street, Robertsbridge, to Junction Road, Bodiam. The environmental statement for this scheme that supported the planning application was drafted in respect of the entire route and in the absence of survey data, was based on assumptions of presence and the likelihood of different habitats and species being present.
- 1.3 This document covers only the section of the site from Austen's Bridge to Junction Road only and will be updated for the other sections as the scheme progresses. This and other supporting documents have been created after site specific surveys for this section of the track only.
- 1.4 The LEMP is required to discharge planning condition number 5 (Application Number RR/2014/1608/P) issued by Rother District Council as below:

*No development shall take place until a landscape and ecology management plan and monitoring strategy, including long-term design objectives, management responsibilities and maintenance schedules and a timetable for implementation has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The plan must deliver the recommendations of the approved site-specific ecological surveys carried out in accordance with condition 3 and contain details of:*

- *the extent and type of any new planting (for example native species of local provenance)*
- *maintenance regimes*
- *any new habitat created on site*

- *management responsibilities.*

*The management plan and monitoring strategy shall be implemented as approved.*

## **SCOPE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.5 This document provides details on the new habitat created on site, the extent and type of new planting, maintenance regimes and management responsibilities. It also addresses comments made by Dr Kate Cole (County Ecologist for East Sussex County Council) in her letter dated 22 August 2018 (ref: RR/2018/2095/DC).
- 1.6 This strategy has been written by Rosanna Marston BSc MSc ACIEEM, an Ecologist who has over five years' consultancy experience.
- 1.7 This document has been prepared with reference to best practice guidance as detailed in British Standard 42020:2013 Biodiversity - Code of Practice for Biodiversity and Development (BSI, 2013).

## **SITE CONTEXT AND STATUS**

- 1.8 The site is the stretch of track between Austen's Bridge and Junction Road B2244, east of Robertsbridge, East Sussex. The site covers approximately 1.659 hectares (ha) in total and is centred on Ordnance Survey National Grid Reference TQ 7688 2414.
- 1.9 The site comprises a wooded embankment (former railway line) with smaller areas of dense scrub, tall ruderal vegetation, bare ground and poor semi-improved grassland. To the north and east of the site are grassland fields. To the west is the River Rother (running under Austen's bridge) and to the east is Junction Road B2244.

## **DESCRIPTION OF THE DEVELOPMENT**

- 1.10 Current proposals for the site involve the reinstatement of the railway line between Austen's Bridge and Junction Road B2244. This will result in the loss of approximately 0.427ha of semi-natural habitats including 0.410ha of woodland and scrub.
- 1.11 The heritage railway only runs for 6 months of the year, during the summer. During this period, there would only be 10 trains a day (five in each direction), except for

seven days of the year when there would be 14 trains (seven in each direction). All trains would be outside the hours of peak traffic flow (rush hours) and run from approximately 10:40 – 18:00. The trains are restricted to a maximum of 25 mph (40 kph).

## 2 Landscape and Ecology Management Plan

### LONG TERM DESIGN OBJECTIVES

- 2.1 The long term design objectives for the site are to ensure that adequate mitigation, compensation, enhancement and restoration of habitats are implemented at the site.

### EXISTING HABITAT ENHANCEMENT

- 2.2 Retained woodland measuring 1.118ha located along the northern and southern boundaries of the site will be enhanced for hazel dormouse with new scrub planting in the gaps (10% of the area) equating to new habitat creation of 0.112ha. The following mitigation measures are proposed as part of the habitat creation and enhancements and include:

- A new woodland understorey to be created by planting a mosaic of scrub species of local provenance.
- New scrub planting to total habitat creation of 0.112ha. Species composition will comprise 17% bramble, 17% blackthorn, 17% Guelder Rose, 17% hazel, 17% honeysuckle and 17% hawthorn.
- Scrub understorey to provide a rich food resource for dormice (and other species) year round.
- New planting and woodland to be managed for five years.

- 2.3 All of the scrub and tree planting will be carried out during winter/spring 2019 which is the peak planting time for these species and will result in a better likelihood of establishment.

### NEW HABITAT CREATION

#### Planting

- 2.4 To compensate for habitat loss on site and enhance this area for wildlife, an area of approximately 0.41ha of mixed native scrub and trees will be planted along the railway corridor approximately 450m north-east of the site. This area will be an extension to existing woodland and scrub in the area and along with the new woodland understorey totals 0.52ha of planting, 0.11ha in excess of what is to be lost (a net gain). This area is currently grassland, and where the grassland has a long

sward, the bank should be strimmed prior to planting (with due regard to the potential presence of other protected species e.g. reptiles).



- 2.5 Planting will comprise a mix of species with recognised value to dormice (Bright et al, 2006) including oak (10%), birch/rowan/hornbeam (15%), hazel (10%), hawthorn (30%), blackthorn (30%) and honeysuckle (5%). The new planted areas will comprise a higher diversity of species than is currently present on the site within the scrub and secondary woodland and will also increase the proportion of species providing food for dormice such as hazel and honeysuckle.
- 2.6 All of the scrub and tree planting will be carried out during winter/spring 2019.
- 2.7 The whips will be 45-60cm, bare root stock and planted at 50cm centres for all species at the percentage mixture above. This will equate to five whips/m<sup>2</sup>. Protective spiral guards will be provided.
- 2.8 Post-planting maintenance should be carried out to ensure that the whips establish in the first season following planting. For example, to ensure the whips are not out-competed by grassland and tall ruderals. Any whip failures will be replaced.
- 2.9 Two years after planting, the scrub will be topped to encourage dense growth (October to February). After five years, cut scalloped edges 1-2m deep to create a graded edge by coppicing to ground level (October to February). This should be repeated every five years.

### **Dormouse Boxes**

- 2.10 To mitigate for the temporary loss of nesting sites, enhance the site for biodiversity and enable long term monitoring of the site, 40 dormouse boxes will be installed at 15-20m intervals within woodland along the northern and southern site boundaries (see Table 2.1 below). Boxes will be installed in winter 2018/2019 so that they are in place before habitat clearance takes place.
- 2.11 The boxes are to be monitored as part of the national Dormouse Monitoring Program (NDMP) for five years. All results will be submitted to People Trust for Endangered Species (PTES) to provide data on dormouse distribution for the local area. The boxes will be monitored and maintained.



**Table 2.1: Dormouse and Bird Box Details**

Example	Number	Type	Target species	Location
 <p>© Kent Mammal Group</p>	40	Kent Mammal Group Dormouse Box	Hazel dormouse and birds including blue tit	On tree at chest height
 <p>© Schwegler</p>	5	Nest box 1B (entrance hole 32mm)	Great tit, blue tit, marsh tit, coal tit, crested tit, redstarts, nuthatches, collard flycatcher, pied flycatcher, wrynecks, tree sparrow, house sparrow, bats	On tree 2-4m high, facing east

### Bird Boxes

2.12 To mitigate for the temporary loss of nesting sites and enhance the site for biodiversity, five bird boxes will be installed at within woodland along the northern and southern site boundaries (see Table 2.1 above). Boxes will be installed in winter 2018/2019 so that they are in place before breeding commences in Spring 2019.

2.13 Barn owl boxes will not be provisioned on site to reduce the likelihood drawing these birds to the railway line and incurring train strikes.

### Log piles

2.14 To mitigate for the loss of reptile hibernation habitat and enhance the site for biodiversity, approximately five new log piles will be created on-site using the cut material from the woodland on the embankment. These log piles will also be used as reptile receptor locations should any reptiles be found during clearance works.

## **MANAGEMENT RESPONSIBILITIES**

- 2.15 The habitats referred to in this management plan are the property of Rother Valley Railway Ltd. All works described in this management plan are the responsibility of, and to be wholly funded by, Rother Valley Railway Ltd.

# References

Bright et al (2006) *The dormouse conservation handbook: second edition*. English Nature, Peterborough

British Standards Institution (2013). *Biodiversity – Code of practice for planning and development*. BS 42020:2013. BSI, London.

## Appendix 1: Habitat Creation/Enhancement Map



## Appendix 2: Timetable of Ecological Works

# Management Schedule

OPTIMAL PERIOD FOR TASK ■ ALTERNATIVE PERIOD FOR TASK ✓

Management Prescriptions	Jan-Mar	Apr-Jun	Jul-Sep	Oct-Dec	Year					
					2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Initial Capital Works										
Planting of 0.112 ha of understorey scrub within the existing woodland. Species composition of planting stock to be as follows: 17% Bramble 17% Blackthorn 17% Guelder rose 17% Hazel 17 % Honeysuckle 17% Hawthorn	■					✓				
Planting of 0.41 ha of woodland/scrub. Species composition of planting stock to be as follows: 10% Oak 30% Blackthorn 15% Birch/Rowan/Hornbeam 10% Hazel 5% Honeysuckle 30% Hawthorn	■					✓				
Installation of 40 new dormouse boxes within existing woodland.	■					✓				
Installation of 5 new bird boxes within existing woodland.	■					✓				

# Management Schedule

OPTIMAL PERIOD FOR TASK ■ ALTERNATIVE PERIOD FOR TASK ✓

Management Prescriptions	Jan-Mar	Apr-Jun	Jul-Sep	Oct-Dec	Year					
					2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Installation of 5 new log piles within existing woodland		■				✓				
<b>Management and Maintenance</b>										
Inspection of new scrub planting to assess establishment success.				■	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Re-plant any stock that has failed to establish.	■					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Topping of scrub to encourage dense growth (October to February).	■			■			✓			
Creation of scalloped edges 1-2m deep by coppicing to ground level (October to February).	■			■						✓
2 x monitoring visits of dormouse boxes, results to be submitted to NDMP.		■	■			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Dormouse boxes to be repaired/replaced (if required) and cleaned out.				■		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓





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**London** - Tempus Wharf, 33a Bermondsey Wall West, London, SE16 4TQ  
T. 020 7378 1914 W. [www.ecologyconsultancy.co.uk](http://www.ecologyconsultancy.co.uk) E. [enquiries@ecologyconsultancy.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@ecologyconsultancy.co.uk)

- **Sussex** - 3 Upper Stalls, Iford, Lewes, East Sussex BN7 3EJ T. 01273 813739
- **East Anglia** - 60 Thorpe Road, Norwich, Norfolk NR1 1RY T. 01603 628408
- **Midlands** - 1-2 Trent Park, Eastern Avenue, Lichfield, Staffordshire WS13 6RN T. 01543 229049
- **North** - Trinity Walk, Unit G37b, Market Walk, Wakefield, West Yorkshire WF1 1QR T. 01924 683558