

Project: 5026 - Princes Parade - Implementation Stage (FHDC)
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26th February 2021

Royal Military Canal Habitat Improvements: Technical Note.

This note has been provided to provide an outline of the habitat improvement works along the Royal Military Canal, providing a summary for interested parties of the timings, works involved, why the works are being conducted and the expected outcomes and benefits of these activities.

Why the works are being conducted?

Three areas along the Royal Military Canal have been selected to receive reptiles that will be translocated from the development on land along Princes Parade. These areas of the Royal Military Canal already support a low population of grass snake, however, further work is required to improve the habitat to ensure that it is suitable to receive an increased number of reptiles.

In order to achieve this, existing areas of tall ruderal habitats and scrub are being cleared to create a more open complex of habitats. This will break up the solid areas of dense vegetation allowing grassland to be established between areas of existing scrub, along with habitat piles. Although the primary aim will be to create suitable reptile habitat, these works will also benefit species such as foraging bats and birds that utilise the canal corridor by creating a more diverse vegetative structure that will likely improve invertebrate diversity and provide additional foraging opportunities. The current cover of dense, dark scrub and tall ruderal habitats provide more limited resources for these species groups.

The Royal Military Canal has been selected as the reptile receptor site based on its proximity to the development site, to ensure that reptiles stay within the local area. In addition, the new habitats created along the Royal Military Canal will be managed for wildlife in the long term.

These enhancements will also benefit reptiles already present through the provision of new foraging and refuge opportunities.

When are the works being carried out and for how long?

Primary vegetation clearance and ground preparation improvement works have already started. These works are expected to continue across the growing season of 2021, with the initial scrub and ruderal vegetation removals being conducted between Late February and March 2021. Works have been timed for this period to minimise the effects on nesting birds later in the season, and clearance works from March onwards will be preceded by a check for nesting birds.

The works areas for Princes Parade have been split into three areas. These are A, B and C. All three areas will involve minor ground works using arisings from the works to create log piles, hibernacula and compost heaps for reptiles that will also benefit other faunal groups.

- Area A will involve management actions to create areas of grassland where stands of Alexanders and other tall ruderal vegetation dominate, with some scrub control.
- Area B will involve the greatest extent of change removing a combination of scrub and dead wood to open this area up to allow for grassland to be established. These works are the most involved and are expected to extend beyond the completion of preparation works for areas A and B.

- Area C will involve a similar process to A, with a combination of limited tree canopy management, scrub control and ground preparation of existing tall ruderal and grassland areas to improve habitat conditions. Works to area C are expected to commence on w/c 8th March 2021.

Figure 1, below, shows the locations of work areas A, B and C along the northern edge of the canal.



Once the new areas of habitat have been created in all three areas (A, B and C), future habitat management will continue as an addition to Folkestone and Hythe District Council's existing management programme for the Royal Military Canal.

What will these works entail?

Works in all three areas will comprise teams of people to first clear area of existing vegetation. Once areas have been suitably cleared and prepared a turf laying will be used to create new grassland areas between the existing and retained scrub.

This will be most noticeable along section B which has the largest areas of dense scrub. In order to prepare the grounds over a short period of time, access to these areas will be restricted for the duration of the works to minimise trampling of the recently turfed grassland in order to help establish the new habitats created and for health and safety purposes due to the use of machinery needed.

This will include some traffic from transporting equipment, which will be limited with works conducted during sociable hours only. Disruption is expected to be minimal.

How will this change the site?

Initial works to these areas will appear harsh and destructive, as the necessary ground preparation and scrub control will appear ugly. However, works have been designed and planned to quickly establish the new grassland habitat matrix in these locations. The overall impression between the initial works will appear deleterious, but these works will quickly provide new ecologically important habitats that will be of significant benefit to wildlife, in addition, allowing more sunlight to reach the northern banks and providing a more open complex of grassland and scrub. The grassland will initially be allowed to grow tall to provide the necessary cover for reptiles, with management over later periods creating a mixture of taller and shorter areas through staggered mowing regimen.

The habitat piles created for reptiles will also initially stand out but will quickly settle in and blend with the surrounding grassland, scrub and trees.

Yours sincerely,

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