



**TEWKESBURY NATURE
RESERVE**

**STRATEGIC PLAN
2023 – 2028**

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Introduction from Professor Lindsey McEwen, Chair of Tewkesbury Nature Reserve Trustees

Welcome to Tewkesbury Nature Reserve, an independent nature reserve embedded within the rapidly growing town of Tewkesbury. Since 2012, TNR has established and developed an urban floodplain nature reserve and in the last three years, started provision of nature-connected activities that benefit both people and nature.

This document sets out our plans for the next five years, 2023 – 2028. During this period, we plan to build on these significant past achievements by:

- Managing habitats to attract a wider range of wildlife.
- Improving access to the reserve so more people can visit the reserve for an inclusive range of activities.
- Building on the success of the learning and outreach provision to support different groups in coming to the reserve for educational and health and wellbeing benefits.
- Working with community partners to secure funds that help build the reserve's sustainability and community-embedding with those populations on its boundaries.

However, our overriding aim for the period of this strategic plan is to ensure the sustainability of the reserve well beyond the five years covered by this plan, and to secure it as a resource for the people of Tewkesbury for the long-term future.

To achieve this aim will mean not only building our success-rate when bidding for new funds, but also significantly increasing awareness, appreciation and engagement among the local community. Our strategic objectives, which are set out in this plan, are designed to help us achieve this. We have already secured funding to support the delivery of some learning and outreach activities over the next 24 months. However, to achieve all our objectives will require significant additional resources and funding and the support of committed volunteers.

To find out more about Tewkesbury Nature Reserve, and how you can get involved in this rewarding work, please visit our new website www.tewkesburynaturereserve.org.uk or email info@tewkesburynaturereserve.org.uk for more information.

Lindsey McEwen, September 2023

Context

Location

Tewkesbury Nature Reserve is a 40-hectare site of flood meadow and pasture on the edge of Tewkesbury in Gloucestershire, UK. The River Swilgate flows into the reserve from the south, and the Tirlle Brook from the northeast. These two water courses then converge within the site, and flow out at the northwest towards Tewkesbury Abbey, and the River Avon. The reserve is situated on a floodplain and is subject to regular inundation. To the east and south, the reserve is bordered by the busy A38 Tewkesbury Bypass, and to the east, west and north it is surrounded by residential and commercial development.

This unique location, only a few hundred yards from the historic centre of Tewkesbury, and only a mile from the M5 motorway, provides the opportunity to offer a valuable recreational area to the town and to bring wildlife to the doorstep of some 20,000 people, while also potentially attracting visitors from much further afield.

History

The reserve was established in 2012 by an enthusiastic group of local residents who saw the potential to establish a nature reserve, with benefits for both wildlife and the community. Prior to the establishment of the reserve, the land (owned by Tewkesbury Borough Council and two house-building companies) was used for informal recreation and farming, with little formal management of the land for wildlife or public access. The aim of the new venture was to create a valuable green space that would enhance biodiversity, increase flood protection, and improve urban drainage, while providing recreational and educational facilities for the community.

A successful application was made to the Heritage Lottery Fund to finance the setting up of an organisation to administer the project: a company limited by guarantee was set up, and Tewkesbury Nature Reserve Ltd was formed. Since then, TNR has flourished with the help of valuable support from several external organisations, including the Environment Agency (EA), Natural England (NE), the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust (WWT), Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust (GWT), and Tewkesbury Borough Council (TBC). WWT, in association with the EA, undertook a survey of the site which then formed the basis of a detailed plan for its environmental enhancement, including diversifying the habitats and alleviating flood risks. Meanwhile TNR was accepted by Natural England to undertake a Higher-Level Stewardship (HLS) scheme. In 2014, we were successful in securing a major grant from the Gloucestershire Environmental Trust (GET) which, at the time, administered the income from the Landfill Levy. This enabled us to undertake a significant part of

the plans prepared by WWT, including meander (re)instatement, excavating reedbeds, ponds, and scrapes, pollarding trees and installing cattle fencing. A follow-up report to the earlier WWT report was commissioned in 2022 and has helped shape this new Strategic Plan.

In 2015, we secured an initial 30-year lease on the portion of land owned by Tewkesbury Borough Council (which included the land from one of the housebuilding companies). The land to the north of the car park, owned by the second housebuilding company, was transferred into TNR's direct ownership. In 2018, a grant from the LEADER Rural Development programme enabled the installation of much-needed signage and other infrastructure improvements, including further fencing, two bird hides and a car park for visitors.

During the 2020 - 21 COVID-19 pandemic, use of the reserve by the local community increased significantly, as people came to value the opportunities for exercise and peaceful reflection offered by this green space easily accessible from the town. In 2021, we were successful in securing a grant from the Government's Green Recovery Challenge Fund, "*Developing TNR as a 'green lung' for community recovery*". This focused on connecting people with nature by delivering a programme of learning and outreach focused on outdoor activities that linked learning and health on, and through, Tewkesbury Nature Reserve. The trustees are currently focused on building on the success of this project by securing further funds to continue and develop these learning and outreach programmes.

Current status

Tewkesbury Nature Reserve is a company limited by guarantee, and also a registered charity. It is led by a small Board of Trustees composed of local residents, advised by a Management Team which includes representatives of the Environment Agency, Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust, Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group and a regional university, alongside local enthusiasts.

A Reserve Manager and a Volunteer Coordinator (both employed on a part-time basis) have responsibility for the day-to-day management of the reserve. Recent successful funding bids have allowed us to recruit additional part-time employees to support learning and outreach, access, and social prescribing activities, and we are currently seeking funding to support these areas of activity on a more long-term basis. Our employees can call on an active pool of volunteers for help with suitable tasks, including practical maintenance, citizen science, and learning, outreach and communications. We continue to work to recruit new volunteers and increase the social and health and wellbeing benefits of volunteering.

Vision & Mission

Our Vision is for:

“A healthy, thriving community nature reserve, a safe haven for wildlife combined with an outdoor learning environment in which people can connect with nature.”

Our Mission is to:

- Establish, develop and maintain a healthy and thriving community nature reserve, by protecting, improving, and conserving the natural environment, and enhancing the biodiversity of the site.
- Make the reserve accessible to the public as a place for recreation, education, and the promotion of health and wellbeing, while balancing the needs of visitors with those of the natural environment.
- Develop the reserve as an outdoor learning environment, and promote an understanding and appreciation of freshwater wetlands, nature, wildlife and the role of floodplains across all age groups through active community participation.
- Reinstate and support natural hydrological processes, re-naturalise watercourses and make new wetland areas, creating spaces for nature and improving the site's ability to retain water, and playing a part in reducing flooding.

Strategic Objectives

Our Strategic Objectives for the period 2023 – 2028 are to:

1. Develop and manage the reserve to further enhance and increase the biodiversity of fauna and flora.
2. Make the reserve accessible to all as a place where people can connect with wildlife, to benefit learning for sustainability, and physical and mental health and wellbeing.
3. Engage schools and the local community in enjoying and caring for the reserve, encouraging a respect for nature combined with ownership and pride in a valued local amenity.
4. Develop the reserve as a learning environment, offering a range of learning opportunities tailored to different ages, interests and needs, especially children, youth and older people.
5. Further improve the site's ability to retain water through the creation of new wetland areas and supporting natural vegetation to act as a sponge.
6. Ensure the reserve plays its part within the "Nature Recovery Networks" of the river corridor and the wider local natural environment; and forge region-specific partnerships with complementary conservation areas, projects, individuals and organisations.

These are underpinned by our key Operational Objectives to:

7. Generate a sustainable level of funding and the other resources necessary to ensure the reserve can flourish and achieve its strategic objectives.
8. Promote awareness of the reserve amongst diverse communities through targeted, specific, engaging and informative content, using a range of channels and platforms both online and offline.
9. Ensure the organisation is effective and fit for purpose through sound governance and management.

Further information on each of these objectives, and how we plan to achieve them, is provided on the following pages.

Objective 1: Developing the reserve for wildlife

Develop and manage the reserve to further enhance and increase the biodiversity of fauna and flora.

From 2015 to 2022, with the support of partners and stakeholders, considerable progress has been made in taking forward the recommendations of the original WWT report. Reedbeds and scrapes have been created and parts of the River Swilgate have been reprofiled. We have developed a wildflower meadow which in 2022 was surveyed by the Floodplain Partnership and deemed suitable to be included in Defra's National Priority Habitat inventory. Monitoring has shown an exciting range of flora and fauna present on the reserve, including otter, kingfisher, amphibians and reptiles, diverse invertebrates, and good populations of wildflowers and grasses. The habitats present have increased the site's ability to meet the needs of the species present and potentially new species arriving.

Over the next five years, we will:

- Update the management plan to cover the period from 2023 – 2028, and to ensure all habitats are covered with an appropriate management statement.
- Continue development of the wetland habitat through maintaining existing features and adding new ones such as ponds, reedbeds and linking swales. Ensure new wetland features are designed to benefit wildlife.
- Explore further enhancement and expansion of the lowland floodplain hay meadow habitat to maintain the grassland species present and increase their abundance and frequency.
- Continue development of regular monitoring and recording of species and habitats, and submit records to appropriate organisations. Use information gathered to evaluate the habitats and ensure they provide the key requirements of wildlife; food source, safe shelter, nesting habitat, overwintering habitat and connectivity.
- Monitor for non-native invasive species including Himalayan balsam, floating pennywort and signal crayfish, and ensure regular, appropriate and timely management is actioned.
- Consider how we can integrate rewilding principles into our future management of the reserve.

Objective 2: Developing the reserve for people

Make the reserve accessible to all as a place where people can connect with wildlife, to benefit physical and mental health and wellbeing.

The geographical location of the site is adjacent to residential areas and the historic centre of Tewkesbury and offers a unique opportunity for development as an urban reserve to bring wildlife to the doorsteps of local residents. This easy-to-reach green space provides opportunities to view, experience and engage with nature. We recognise that this proximity to the town can also be a threat to the reserve, as unmanaged access could potentially destroy the fragile natural environment we are trying to protect. Therefore, we aim to strike a balance between meeting the needs of people and wildlife, making the reserve as accessible as possible while protecting vulnerable ecosystems.

Despite several access improvements over the last decade, we know that more could be done to make the reserve fully accessible to visitors.

Over the next five years, we will:

- Undertake an Access Audit for the reserve, gather user experiences, and work to act on recommendations to make the reserve and TNR's engagements more accessible.
- Further develop physical access to the site (e.g. gates that provide better wheelchair access, and pathway improvements) whilst maintaining its primary purpose as a nature reserve and minimising the impact on wildlife.
- Set up a Community Forum (CF), with local representation, to report to the Trustees on any perceived barriers to usage, especially among disadvantaged or under-represented groups, and opportunities for better engagement.
- Develop partnerships with appropriate organisations (social care and community workers, medical centres, etc.) to maximise the use of the natural environment for people's health and wellbeing, including social prescribing activities. Social prescribing helps people to improve their health, wellbeing and social welfare by connecting them to support services in the community.

Objective 3: Engaging people

Engage the local community in enjoying and caring for the reserve, encouraging eco-stewardship.

In the medium to long term, the success of the reserve will depend on the extent to which it is valued and enjoyed by the local community. This requires a respect for nature, combined with ownership and pride in a valued local amenity and an enjoyment of a green outdoor space at the heart of the town. The reserve offers a focus for community recreation, learning, and physical and mental health and well-being. We want not only to raise awareness of the reserve in the local community, but also to promote active engagement and involvement, leading to care of the space, and increased sense of ownership and pride.

Over the next five years, we will:

- Engage local diverse communities in learning and outreach opportunities (see Objective 4) to instil a sense of care over the reserve.
- Develop the reserve as a resource that connects nature and people in recovery for health and wellbeing. (see also Objective 2 re social prescribing).
- Continue to develop our volunteer base in practical maintenance, learning and outreach, and citizen science, and increase leadership in these.
- Re-evaluate how a Supporters group or 'Friends of TNR' group could support eco-stewardship on the reserve and help advance our objectives.

Objective 4: Learning

Develop the reserve as a learning environment, offering a range of learning opportunities tailored to different ages, interests and needs.

A desire to see TNR as a learning resource has been at the heart of the reserve's development since its formation. This encompasses both "formal" learning through links with educational establishments seeking an outdoor classroom or laboratory, and "informal" learning by community groups and the public who wish to develop a better understanding of nature through immersion in an attractive green-blue outdoor setting. Contacts have been established with a diverse set of stakeholders including local schools, community groups, and universities. The evaluation of our DEFRA-funded Green Lung project provides steers to the way forward.

Over the next five years, we will:

- Continue to develop successful and diverse learning activities that promote connectivity with nature (e.g. Nature Guardians, arts-based workshops, school visits, citizen science) tailored to different ages, interests and needs.
- Develop new learning activities that increase the diversity of people interacting with the reserve (e.g. children, youth and older people).
- Make creative use of art, science and technology to reach new target groups within Tewkesbury and beyond, working with specialists (e.g. local artists).
- Increase co-working with communities in delivery of learning and outreach activities (e.g. establish a Community Forum; see Objective 2).
- Continue to build and develop partnerships with appropriate organisations (schools, colleges, universities, community groups, those delivering community and health and wellbeing support etc.) to promote interest in outdoor learning and its benefits.

Objective 5: Flood management

Further improve the site's ability to retain water through the creation of new wetland areas and supporting natural vegetation to act as a sponge.

The reserve is located on the lower reaches of the River Swilgate and has an important floodplain storage function for Tewkesbury during floods. Permission from the Environment Agency is required for any alterations to the river or its floodplain. The creation of new wetland areas can both increase floodplain storage and provide valuable habitats for species with particular needs (e.g. wading birds).

The sustainable management of the soil is also important to flood reduction. The management of grazing levels plays an important role. Overgrazing can cause soils to become compacted, increasing water sitting on the surface and running off the fields, contributing to flooding. Overgrazing also reduces plants roots as well as their leaves, reducing pathways for water to enter the soil, again causing more surface water and runoff. Appropriate low-level grazing can, however, be beneficial to soil health and therefore flood management.

Over the next five years, we will:

- Re-naturalise watercourses, create new wetland areas, and enhance the site for wetland species.
- Strengthen partnerships with relevant conservation organisations and landowners.
- Improve our understanding of whole-site hydrology, including soils and grazing.
- Engage with citizen scientists and professionals to understand local water quality issues and what we can do about them.
- Explore opportunities to educate the public about natural flood management and the role the reserve plays in storing flood water.

Objective 6: Nature Recovery Networks

Ensure the reserve plays its part within the “Nature Recovery Networks” (NRN) of the river corridor and the wider local natural environment.

Tewkesbury Nature Reserve is a valuable resource in a network of wetland sites along the Rivers Severn and Avon that are characteristic to this part of the country. It is locally important as a “green lung” for both wildlife and people, being almost entirely enclosed by roads and residential developments. However, the Tirlle brook and River Swilgate flow through the site, acting as wildlife corridors out into the wider countryside, and the Trustees are committed to ensuring the site plays its part through participation in relevant collaborative projects such as Eelscapes (see below).

Over the next five years, we will:

- Continue to forge partnerships with complementary conservation areas, projects, individuals and organisations.
- Develop links with local groups with similar objectives (e.g. the Severn Ham, Avon Meadows at Pershore, Kemerton Conservation Trust, etc.) to share learning and initiatives, and to have a stronger voice.
- Actively participate in the production of a Local Nature Recovery Network (LNRN) for Gloucestershire, making sure that the reserve is integrated into the network, both by being physically included and by making sure that the aspirations in this strategic plan are adhered to.
- Actively participate in the Eelscapes project led by Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust, which aims to develop connected wetland sites along the Severn Vale corridor through partnership working. The project aims to demonstrate how landscape-scale conservation can be delivered across areas of complex and multiple landownerships, to support the recovery of threatened species like the European eel and true fox-sedge; and also develop a model for large-scale floodplain restoration.

Objective 7: Income and resources

Generate a sustainable level of funding, and the other resources necessary to ensure the reserve can flourish and achieve its strategic objectives.

The ambition of this strategic plan has highlighted the need to increase the resources available to the organisation if we are to achieve our aspirations over the next five years, and to generate a more sustainable level of income. In its early days, TNR was very successful in obtaining the required funding to establish the reserve and to carry out necessary physical development work. However, we recognise that we are now in a period of financial uncertainty, with very strong competition for any available funds at both a national and local level. In the lifetime of this plan, it is expected that TNR will undergo a transition from Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) funding to the Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS), although HLS funding remains in place as the plan is being written. In addition, TNR will continue to seek funds to put its learning and outreach activities on a stable financial footing.

Over the next five years, we will:

- Maximise funding opportunities from ELMS and other suitable sources.
- Systematically bring together funding sources and partnership opportunities to meet strategic needs, and creatively match TNR's own funds with external opportunities.
- Increase TNR's capacity for securing funding by recruiting specialist trustees, management team and/or volunteers.
- Diversify accrument/requests for resources including non-cash support and sponsorship/partnership with corporate businesses.
- Make better use of charitable status through individual giving, (e.g. Give As You Earn, donations, gift aid, gifts in wills) and fundraising events.

Objective 8: Communication

Promote awareness of the reserve amongst diverse communities through targeted, specific, engaging and informative content, using a range of platforms both online and offline.

Raising awareness of the reserve itself and of the opportunities it offers, among all sectors of the local community, is critical to achieving our vision. We wish to develop the interest and enthusiasm of individuals and organisations in our work. This includes engagement with the opportunities we will offer to develop greater understanding, appreciation and involvement with wildlife, the natural environment and its benefits for health and wellbeing. This will integrate strong attention to communication for increased inclusion, and to deliver improved access.

Over the next five years, we will:

- Develop a communication strategy which identifies the different audiences we want to reach and matches these with the appropriate communication media and channels to convey our messages most effectively.
- Update existing printed material about the reserve to include examples of learning and exercise activities and opportunities for volunteering.
- Develop a set of materials to promote self-led health and wellbeing activities.
- Continue to maintain and develop the content on TNR's digital channels, the website and social media accounts for increased community engagement.

Objective 9: Governance and management

Ensure the organisation is effective and fit for purpose through sound governance and management.

An effective organisational structure, ethos and culture is essential if we are to achieve our objectives over the next five years. TNR has changed its paid staffing model since 2021, with increased staffing in both Reserve Management and Learning and Outreach. This will be systematically evaluated.

Over the next five years, we will:

- Continue to develop our policies and procedures to reflect changes to organisational and funding body requirements, and regulation and legislation. Policies will be reviewed annually to ensure their robustness and effectiveness.
- Capitalise on reflective opportunities for governance review and identification of good practice.
- Introduce a process of risk management to cover both organisational and operational risks.
- Ensure an appropriate level of resourcing for trustees, employees and volunteers through a programme of succession planning and personal development.
- Monitor, review and report progress against the delivery of this Strategic Plan.

Contact

To contact Tewkesbury Nature Reserve with any enquiries relating to this document, please e-mail info@tewkesburynaturereserve.org.uk