

# RICKMANSWORTH AQUADROME

RIBA Stage 2 Report

February 2026



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### Document History

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# 1

## INTRODUCTION

# 1.1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Rickmansworth Aquadrome is already a cherished landscape of lakes and diverse woodland and wetland habitats on the edge of Rickmansworth. This Stage 2 report sets out a clear, shared direction for how it can continue to be a welcoming, accessible and nature-rich Local Nature Reserve, protecting its special character and habitats while improving everyday experiences for visitors and strengthening its role within the Colne Valley Regional Park. It builds on the Aquadrome's existing strengths while responding to recurring challenges of flooding, dated infrastructure, uneven legibility and pressure on habitats from high footfall.

The emerging masterplan is structured around three interlocking themes – Nature, People and Place – which together shape how the Aquadrome has evolved and how it should change. Our initial Site visits and analysis confirms that the opportunity is not a single “big move” but a coordinated suite of targeted interventions that make the park work better year-round, clarify gateways and movement, balance busy hubs with quiet refuges, and restore blue-green systems. The concept masterplan therefore conserves what is distinctive while repairing, enhancing and revealing qualities that have been eroded over time.

Across the Site, a family of character areas turns this strategy into tangible places. To the north, the Woodland Walk and Pinetum become sensory, less-formal landscapes that celebrate wet woodland, filtered views to the river Colne and the sculptural quality of the existing pines, supported by new boardwalks, seating glades and careful habitat management. Around the lakes' eastern and southern edges, The Meadow, the re-graded causeway and improved western lake edge provide inclusive, all-weather circuits, balancing floodplain function with informal recreation, long views and moments of quiet reflection. At the heart of the Aquadrome, an expanded Visitor Hub and Natural Play and Discovery Zone create a welcoming sequence of social, playable and educational spaces, including a potential Changing Places facility, clearer movement from the car park and canal, and dog-management areas that reduce conflict between users and wildlife. Together, these interventions respond directly to engagement feedback about the need to maintain a “wild” feel while improving comfort, safety and clarity for a wide range of users.

A Site-wide Character, Materiality and Accessibility Strategy underpins the masterplan and sets out how the Aquadrome should look and feel as it is renewed. It distinguishes between formal and informal areas, proposes a restrained, durable palette of surfacing and furniture, and embeds inclusive design, circularity and ease of maintenance from the outset. Alongside this, an interpretive framework – “Rickmansworth through time”, “Wild Rickmansworth” and “Rickmansworth today” – shapes an integrated approach to storytelling, play and wayfinding. Poetry, sculpture and tactile interventions are conceived as part of the landscape fabric rather than add-on signage, encouraging visitors to explore beyond the main paths, understand the Site's industrial and ecological heritage, and feel part of its ongoing care.

Taken together, the Stage 2 work provides a robust framework and concept design for the next stage of design development. It confirms a clear vision, a high-quality green space, welcoming for all, with biodiverse and sustainable environments, and translates this into spatial proposals, character guidance and interpretive principles that can be tested and refined with stakeholders. Subsequent stages will develop the masterplan in more detail, coordinate with ecology and hydrology, prepare outline costs and phasing, and continue engagement with local communities and user groups to ensure that Rickmansworth Aquadrome and its rich and varied habitats are conserved, enhanced, nurtured and protected for future generations.



Figure 1 Photo of Bury Lake

## 1.2 PROJECT BACKGROUND

Rickmansworth Aquadrome is a much-loved mosaic landscape of lakes, wetlands, woodland, paths and areas for wildlife, for quiet recreation and nature connectedness, as well as active recreation and watersports. This project sets a clear, shared direction for how the Aquadrome can continue to be welcoming, accessible and nature-rich, protecting its heritage and habitats while improving everyday experiences for visitors. Our aim is to balance quiet, restorative spaces with carefully located activity, strengthen connections to the wider network, and create a robust plan for long-term stewardship and investment. The project is being delivered with funding and support from the National Lottery Heritage Fund and it's development is informed by the National Lottery's Four Pillars for sustainable investment and grant aid, described in Appendix 1.

### Scope

This Stage 2 (Concept Design) work:

- Develops a Site-wide vision and guiding principles structured around Place, People and Nature.
- Tests options and defines a preferred concept masterplan with key interventions and character.
- Sets movement and accessibility principles (paths, gradients, seating cadence, wayfinding).
- Outlines blue-green and biodiversity strategies for lakes, edges and woodland.
- Establishes a character and materiality approach for formal and informal areas.
- Summarises engagement insights and how they shape the concept.
- Provides order-of-cost, phasing, and an outline delivery/funding pathway.
- Identifies risks, dependencies and next steps for Stage 3.

The material is prepared at concept level. Detailed design, technical specifications, statutory consents and tender documentation will be developed in later stages, informed by further surveys and approvals.



# 1.3 ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY

Engagement is central to developing a masterplan that is grounded in the Aquadrome’s place, history and everyday users. On 15th October 2025, as part of a wider project update hosted by Three Rivers District Council, the design team convened the first engagement session with the Rickmansworth Aquadrome Landscape and Environmental Design Project Steering Group at Rickmansworth Golf Club.

## Initial Steering Group Workshop

The purpose of the initial engagement workshop was twofold: to mark the commencement of the masterplan and to gather the Steering Group’s ideas, insights and lived experience to inform the emerging concept.

The workshop was facilitated by RSK, LinkyThinks and Haley Sharpe Design. It comprised:

- An introductory presentation by RSK outlining project scope and intent;
- A warm-up exercise from LinkyThinks exploring linguistic framing and the evocation of place; and
- Two parallel breakout rounds: (1) interpretive benchmarking with Haley Sharpe Design, supported by illustrative precedents; and (2) Site assets, potential and issues mapping with RSK, using tagged, location-based annotations on a large-format aerial photograph.

The key messages emerging from these activities are summarised on the following pages and have directly shaped the Stage 2 concept, structured around Place, People and Nature.

## Exercise 1: Linguistic Framing

Key messages:

- Presentation of the concept of linguistic framing, whereby words are used to both describe and shape an experience.
- Discussing the limitations of fact-based, information-driven education and a move toward a more experiential approach to learning.
- Groups were encouraged to think of creative collective nouns for animals, with examples such as ‘a lamentation of swans’, ‘a murmuration of starlings’ given as poetic examples. Groups came up with playful and abstract ideas such as ‘a gingeration of foxes’ and ‘a bothering of badgers’.
- The groups were given some leaves with new vocabulary written on them, prompting discussion about what they might mean.

Words like apricity, eolian, petrichor, flânerie, viridescent, anemoia, crepuscular, sussurus and sonorous were presented as examples that reflect poetic observation of nature.

- This was followed by discussion of the kinds of experiences people associate with the Aquadrome and what kinds of messaging/ emotional responses we want to elicit from future engagement with it.
- Conversations took place about how standard information boards, poetry and art can be potentially unapproachable. Solutions could involve a more deconstructed approach that takes visitors on journeys through the landscape via words, textures and guided activities to provide context and accessibility.



Figure 2 Photo of Steering Group workshop

## Exercise 2: Interpretive Benchmarking

Key messages:

- Storytelling interventions can draw from natural, historical, industrial and social heritage sources with the overall aim being to increase appreciation of the Site.
- Interactive ideas were popular, e.g. tactile, brass rubbing, sensory and full body play initiatives. Participants in the workshop responded well to ‘look down and up’ initiatives and other ideas that would draw audiences to explore areas of the Site that are not on the main pathways. Sculptures should have added interpretation.
- There was an eagerness for visitors to have opportunities to interact with the natural assets of the Site, including wildlife, through initiatives that encourage and facilitate engagement.
- Littering and environmental consciousness should be addressed in the interpretation, creating a greater appreciation of the natural habitats.
- It was universally identified that it is particularly important to keep the “wild” feel of the Site.

- Concern was expressed about the potential for interpretation initiatives dating.
- There was also concern around the impact of the flooding onsite with regards to any interpretive material.
- Positive feedback was expressed for natural play ideas, if these are not disruptive to the natural aspects of the Site.
- Concern was articulated around the security of the Site and impact on interpretation materials. It was remarked that these would need to be made of inexpensive/easily replicable materials (e.g. plastics rather than metal) and robust.
- Durability and low maintenance solutions should be considered for all interpretive solutions.
- The entrances to the Site should clearly communicate that this is the start of a local nature reserve and reveal more of the special character and quality of the Site/to foretell what awaits visitors.
- Signage and wayfinding should also consider demarcations from the wider landscape and townscape (i.e. the walk from the train station and associated orientation).

## Exercise 3: Site assets, potential and issues

Key messages:

- The key findings from this exercise were summarised on an annotated aerial photograph (Fig. 2). This captured the observations made by the participants on key assets, potential and issues/areas for improvement, as seen by them.
- The spatial tagging and numbering reflected the locational notes made by the participants, enabling the observations to feed into the emerging spatial masterplan.

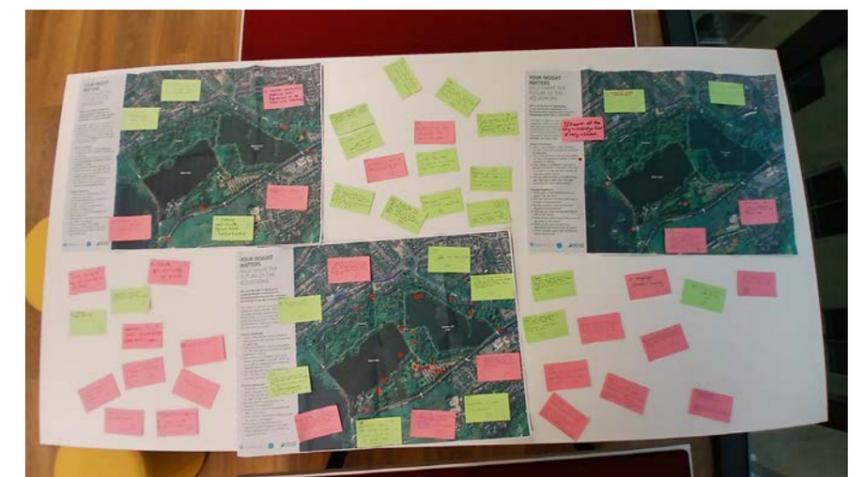


Figure 3 Photo of annotated aerial maps from exercise 3



# 2

## CONTEXT & BASELINE

## 2.1 COLNE VALLEY

Rickmansworth Aquadrome is a classic edgeland landscape at the northern end of the Colne Valley Regional Park, to the north-west of London. The first glimpse of real countryside and landscape scale expanses of nature for many Londoners heading west, it is part of an expansive chain of lakes and wetlands in the floor of the Colne Valley, braided with the meandering course of the river Colne chalk stream.

It is a rich and beautiful wetland mosaic, the legacy of a centuries old timeline of land management and industry, from flood meadows for grazing and osier beds for basket weaving, to the Grand Union Canal and mineral extraction for the materials to build the 1920s Wembley Stadium. It is a Local Nature Reserve, the gateway to the wider Colne Valley via the distinctive network of three chalks streams which meet in Three Rivers District – Colne, Chess and Gade.

A much-loved community greenspace asset which serves a wide catchment across the shires and North London, the Aquadrome has to deal with many competing priorities and differing perceptions as to what it is and should be. These perceptions are overlaid upon a complex canvas of a dynamic, evolving landscape which is adapting to large-scale change such as climate change and environmental resilience.

Our emerging Masterplan creates a spatial framework to deal with those challenges. It also serves as a roadmap for the detailed design interventions which form part of the National Lottery funded Landscape and Environmental Design restoration project for the Aquadrome.

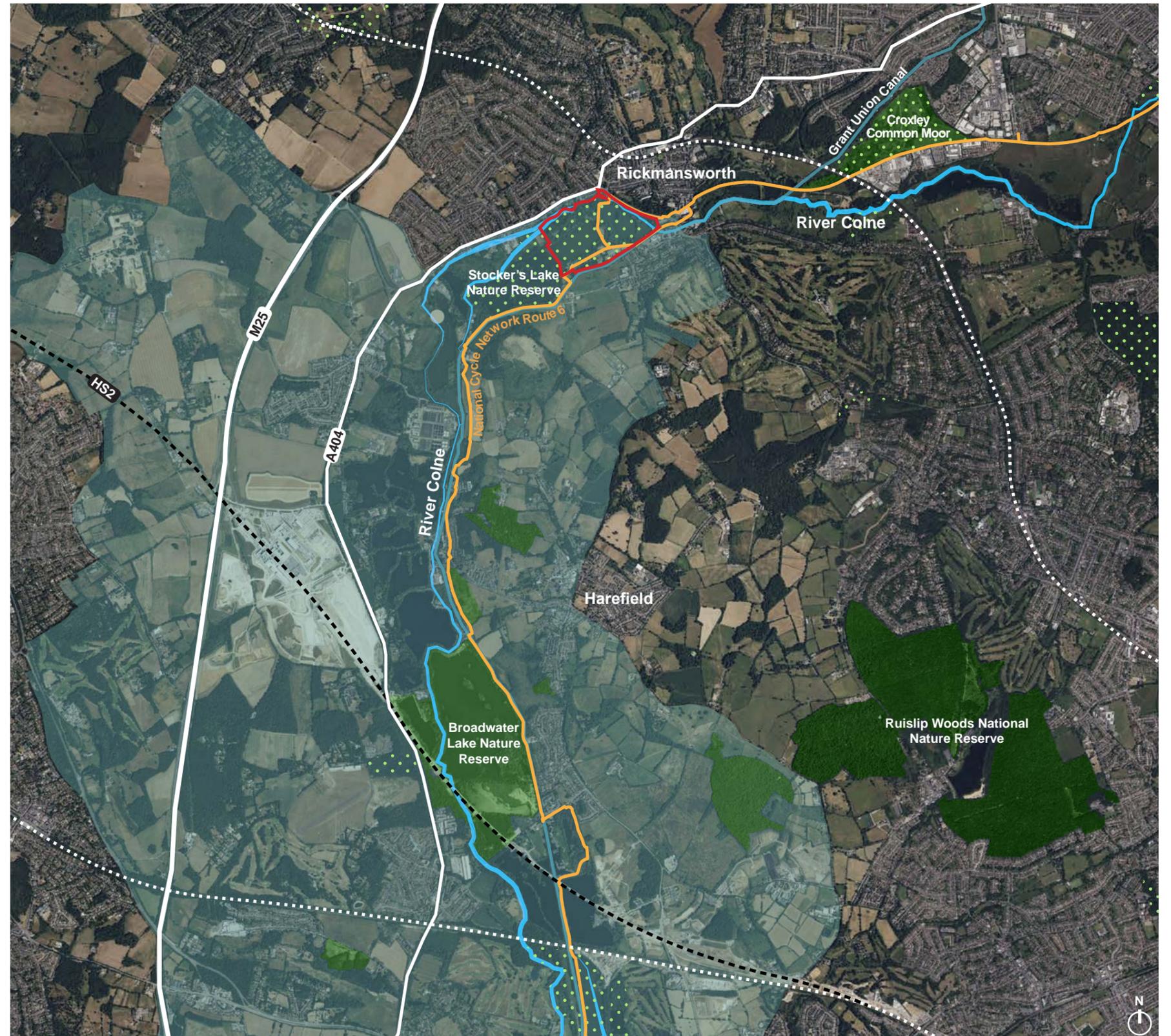
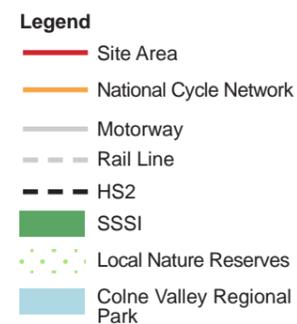


Figure 4 Colne Valley Regional Park (Google Earth © Google © 2026 Airbus)

## 2.2 RICKMANSWORTH AQUADROME

Rickmansworth Aquadrome's present-day identity is shaped by three interlocking forces: Nature, People and Place. A rich mosaic landscape, the Site is an often delicate balance between systems, whether natural/ecological or social. It is these sensitivities and balances which shape the masterplan for the Site – a rich, place-based design approach based on collaborative, connected, nature-based and regenerative design inspired principles. Its waterside setting establishes a distinctive character; everyday use by local communities gives it purpose; and living habitats set the rhythms and limits of what can happen where. The baseline that follows introduces these themes at a high level, setting the scene for detailed descriptions of how they shape the Site's character, use and priorities for sensitive, lasting improvement.



### Nature

The Aquadrome comprises a mosaic of open water, wet woodland, grassland and riparian habitats. Much of the woodland is classed as wet woodland, a Section 41 habitat of principal importance, supporting deadwood ecology and a rich invertebrate assemblage. Other habitats of Principal Importance present on Site include lowland mixed deciduous woodland, native hedgerows and the river Colne. The river Colne runs along the northern and eastern boundaries, with historic drainage ditches and lake margins creating valuable ecosystems and movement corridors for wildlife.

Designated as a Local Nature Reserve in 2007, the Aquadrome sits within a wider network of nature Sites, most notably Stocker's Lake immediately to the west, enhancing its role as a stepping-stone for birds and other species along the Colne Valley. This connected setting elevates the importance of habitat quality, edge management and visitor circulation in balancing access with biodiversity gains.



### People

The Aquadrome is stitched into a wider active-travel network: the Ebury Way and the Grand Union Canal towpath give direct, largely traffic-free links to Watford, Uxbridge and beyond, forming parts of National Cycle Network Routes 6 and 61. This makes the Site a natural gateway for everyday walking, wheeling and leisure cycling as well as longer recreational routes.

Proximity and strong connections to Rickmansworth make the Aquadrome a valued everyday asset, bringing lakes and wet woodland unusually close to local neighbourhoods. Equally, its links into the Colne Valley give it a strategic role within a wider green network, connecting long-distance routes for walking, wheeling and cycling. It therefore serves both daily local needs and regional recreation.

On Site, an extensive surfaced path network encircles the lakes and connects key destinations, supported by free public parking, toilets and The Café in the Park. Family play and seating provide inclusive places to pause, while established clubs and community activities, including sailing at Bury Lake Young Mariners, fishing on Batchworth and regular events programming, contribute to a lively but balanced visitor offer.



### Place

Rickmansworth Aquadrome is a 41-hectare Local Nature Reserve on the northern edge of the Colne Valley Regional Park, set between the river Colne and the Grand Union Canal and immediately connected to Rickmansworth town.

The landscape is defined by two principal lakes, Batchworth Lake and Bury Lake, framed by woodland and open grassland, giving the Site a distinctive waterside character with clear edges and long views to the wider green-blue network of the Colne Valley.

The Aquadrome's form is a legacy of early 20th-century gravel extraction: pits left in the valley floor naturally filled with water (some gravel was used for the aggregate to build the towers of the original Wembley Stadium of 1924). Today, Batchworth Lake is topped up by the river Colne while Bury Lake is largely spring-fed, with both draining back to the Colne, an origin story that underpins the Site's strong sense of place and hydrological connectivity. The Aquadrome holds Green Flag status, reflecting a well-managed, high-quality landscape.



## 2.3 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Many of the Site's heritage associations relate to natural heritage and the legacy of the early 20th century gravel extraction for the concrete to build the original 1924 Wembley Stadium.

Prior to the gravel extraction, historic Ordnance Survey mapping shows waterways associated with the river Colne and Grand Union Canal, watercress beds and scattered areas of wet woodland in a network of agricultural fields west of the town. Gravel extraction continued until 1928, after which the Site was operated as Rickmansworth Aquadrome by the Aquadrome Company from 1928 to 1941, before being used by the War Department for Army drilling. The Site was transferred to Three Rivers District Council in 1974.

The desk-based archaeological assessment undertaken for this masterplan has revealed some earlier heritage assets of predominantly local interest, some of which are listed on the Hertfordshire Historic Environment Record (HER). Key points are:

- Beyond the Site are four Grade II Listed Buildings, two Conservation Areas, and one Locally Listed Building with views to and from Rickmansworth Aquadrome, such that the Aquadrome contributes to their setting.
- Several HER records and findspots in relation to the pre-historic era, including a Palaeolithic hand-axe found within the south-eastern part of the Site's boundary and a Bronze Age axe head found near the northern boundary.
- Archaeological potential associated with the historic course of the river Colne. The river's banks have the potential to contain pre-19th century palaeo-environmental or waterlogged remains.
- Medieval and later development associated with Bury Manor, 120m east of the Site. Medieval archaeological potential on Site is generally low, as the part of the valley in which the Aquadrome is sited essentially formed part of the hinterland of medieval Rickmansworth.
- Post-medieval heritage includes the Site of Bury Farm (surrounded with orchards on the 1868 Ordnance Survey map). Bury Farm was located on the Site of the present depot to the west of the Aquadrome's car park, and may have formed part of a much earlier manorial possession. Beyond is the course of the Grand Union Canal, at close proximity to the Site. The canal is connected to the 19th century industrial heritage of the valley which included mills and wharves. A Grade II listed (replica) canal mile post is also extant near the Site.
- Much of the heritage of the Site relates to the legacy of 20th century aggregate quarrying, which began in the western part of the Site before c. 1914, to form what is now Batchworth Lake, as part of a network of gravel pits in the Colne Valley between Rickmansworth and Staines.



Figure 5 Historic Ordnance Survey Map (1888-1915), CC-BY (NLS)

## 2.4 ACCESS & MOVEMENT

Rickmansworth Aquadrome is an outstanding resource for nature and nature connectedness on the town's doorstep. The value of nature to us is widely known, as noted by Dr William Bird of Intelligent Health – 'We're designed to be connected to nature'. Yet, as highlighted in a recent report from Natural England, people with accessibility requirements can often experience significant barriers in accessing the natural world<sup>2</sup>.

An accessibility audit of the Aquadrome by Access & Inclusion UK to inform this Landscape and Environmental Design project focused on accessibility to the aquadrome from pan-disability, neurodiversity and linguistic perspectives. It considered visitor arrival and journey through the Site, and wayfinding and digital offering in the context of current best practice for inclusion and accessibility. Key findings relevant to this Masterplan are summarised below.

**Many aspects of the Aquadrome's existing offering are very good from an accessibility perspective, including:**

- Expansive car park with accessible parking spaces;
- Large café with good degree of circulation space;
- Accessible toilet provision;
- Level access to the principal points of scenic, visual and nature interest via the wide, solid surfaced paths around the lakes.

**Areas which offer improvement potential are:**

- To increase the number of blue badge spaces in the car park in line with the recommended minimum for recreational and leisure venues (6% of the total complement);
- To provide a Changing Places facility on Site;
- To provide multi-format visitor information/interpretive material at the Welcome Hub and throughout the Site, and enhanced signage and wayfinding more generally. This could take the form of tactile mapping, careful use of colour and positioning of interpretive/informative material and consideration of written, audio and tactile formats, as well as digital materials such as Navilens accessible QR Codes;
- Accessible cycle/tandem/tramper hire to enable more user groups to make use of the wide, level paths;
- Accessible play provision in the new play area and for incidental play;
- Provision of shelter for disabled or mobility impaired users; and
- Provision of a greater number of accessible fishing pegs.

Specific accessible and inclusive design matters are also covered in the design principles later in this Masterplan report.

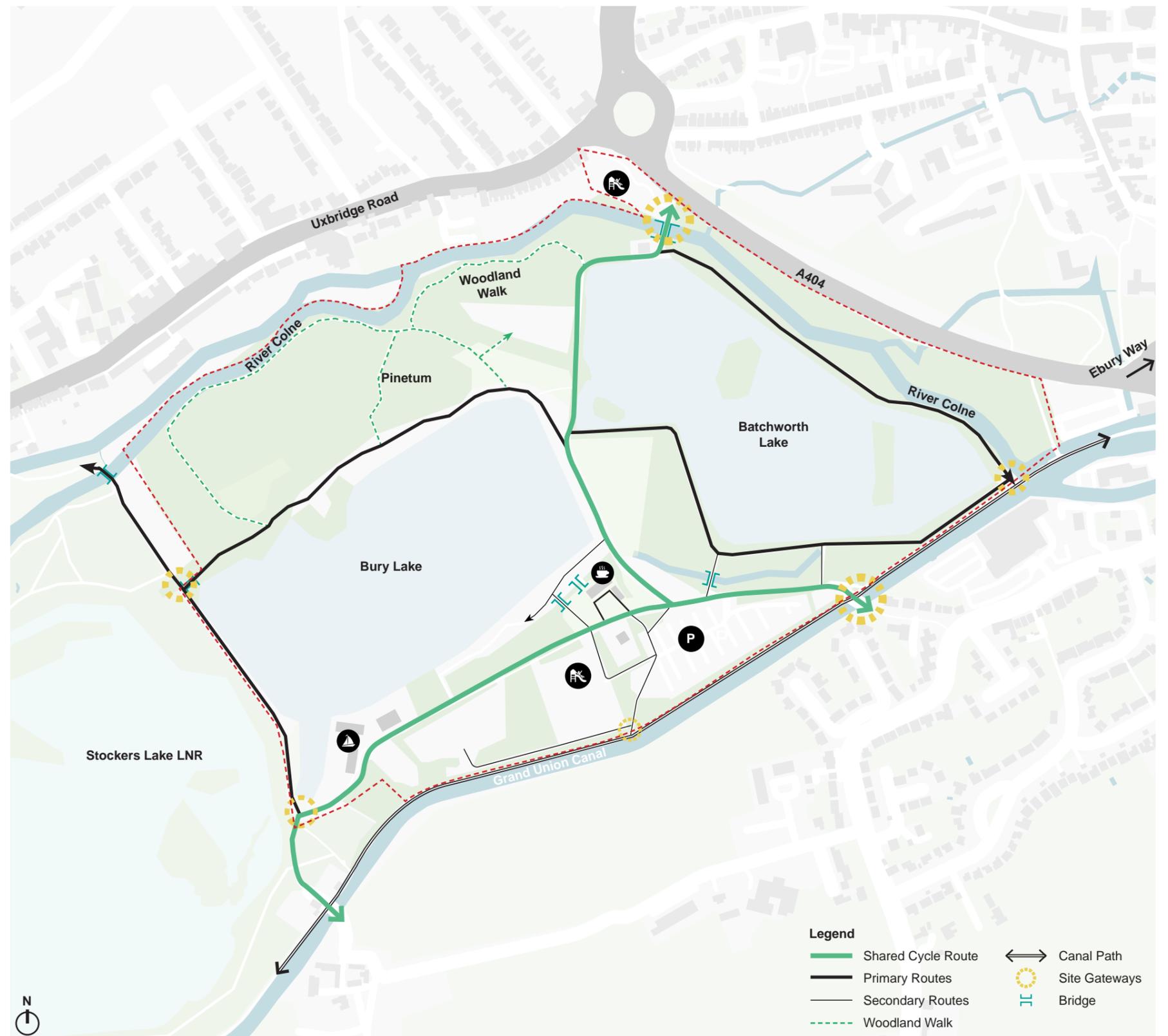


Figure 6 Existing movement routes (Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right 2026)

## 2.5 ECOLOGY

RSK Biocensus was appointed to complete a preliminary ecological appraisal of Rickmansworth Aquadrome, undertaken in November 2025. A series of ecology surveys were also undertaken at the Site throughout 2024. The below summary provides an overview of the works undertaken and findings. Refer to 'Rickmansworth Aquadrome Preliminary Ecological Appraisal Report' produced by RSK Biocensus and Aquadrome Biodiversity Data Hub for full details.

### Preliminary Ecological Appraisal:

- A survey was undertaken using UK Habitat survey classification, habitat condition assessments were undertaken and the suitability of the Site to support protected or otherwise notable plant and animal species was assessed, but no species-specific surveys were undertaken.
- A Habitat Suitability Assessment for fish was undertaken by RSK Biocensus along the river Colne. This is reported separately (RSK Biocensus, 2025).
- The Site comprised Lakes, Modified and Other neutral grassland, Wet woodland, Lowland mixed deciduous woodland, Other woodland; broadleaved, Mixed and Bramble scrub along with urban habitats, hedgerows and lines of trees.
- The Site had some suitability to support notable invertebrates, breeding and wintering birds, roosting and foraging bats, amphibians, reptiles, badger, otter, water vole and other mammals including hedgehog.
- The proposed development would likely result in an enhancement in the condition of Wet woodland, Other neutral grassland and River habitats, but a Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) Assessment has not yet been completed. A BNG stage report will be required for a planning application.

### Habitat Assessment 2024:

Predominant habitats are the former gravel pits of Bury and Batchworth Lakes and the associated woodland habitats which surround them. The river Colne (chalk stream) follows the northern Site boundary, interspersed with areas of modified grassland, scrub, wetland, and urban habitats.



Figure 7 Extract of UKHab Baseline Survey (RSK Biocensus, data: Microsoft, Vantor OS date © Crown Copyright and database right 2022 © Crown Copyright 2025)

Four habitats of principal importance were identified at the Aquadrome in the 2024 assessment, and they should be a focus of conservation and enhancement, they are as follows:

- Rivers (priority habitat)
- Wet woodland
- Lowland mixed deciduous woodland
- Native hedgerows

With regard to the DEFRA Biodiversity Metric, the 2024 assessment measured over 350 habitat biodiversity units at the Aquadrome, with the lakes and the woodlands making the single largest contribution to habitat biodiversity. The assessment identified several opportunities to add or enhance biodiversity on Site, either through increasing condition of existing habitats (such as the wet woodlands which are generally in moderate to poor condition), or through creating new habitats of greater distinctiveness. Potential interventions identified include increasing the condition of the lakes and wet woodland (such as by leaving deadwood in-situ and reducing disturbance), enhancing the condition of the river through removal of certain engineered interventions, enhancing modified grasslands to other neutral grasslands and providing features for target species, such as otter holts or bird/bat boxes.

Supporting surveys to the 2024 Habitat Assessment included invertebrate, vertebrate/mammal and bat surveys. The invertebrate survey identified

some 269 invertebrate species in areas of wet woodland, deadwood and scrub fringes on Site, with up to 13 of these species having national status for rarity/scarcity. Vertebrate, mammal and bat surveys identified the following key points:

- Bat walkover surveys and static detector data identified the potential for the following bat species on Site: soprano pipistrelle, common pipistrelle, Nathusius' pipistrelle, Daubenton's bat, Natterer's bat, brown long-eared bat, noctule, and serotine.
- The mix of habitats on Site provides high quality foraging opportunities for bats with the woodland edges to areas of water in particular providing for Daubenton's and soprano pipistrelle, with a number of tree roosts likely on Site, as well as the confirmed bat roost in the toilet block. Securely sited bat boxes may provide an opportunity.
- Water vole are regularly recorded on the sunnier stretches of the river Colne west of the Site and there may be potential for them at the Aquadrome, although the continuous vegetation alongside the river may present a sub-optimal habitat for them. Very localised tree reduction, having regard to the need to avoid adverse impacts on bat populations, may be helpful, particular on the north-east bank near Riverside Drive.
- Although otter are unconfirmed there is a degree of presence in the Colne and at the Aquadrome. This could potentially be enhanced by a discreetly placed otter holt.

- The survey indicates that there are apparently relatively low current populations of reptiles and amphibians (although this is qualified by the limitations of the eDNA survey methods used by the surveyors).
- Grass cuttings and arisings in heaps in sunny areas and dedicated hibernacula outside of floodable areas were recommended by the survey as ways to increase potential species count, along with a reptile breeding pond in a sunny, non-floodable area.
- Thinning vegetation around wet woodland pools and watercourses was also recommended in the 2024 surveys to create richer communities of vegetation and invertebrate wildlife.

**Opportunities to enhance the biodiversity value of the Site could include:**

- The installation of bat and bird boxes on retained trees throughout the Site.
- The removal of non-native species including INNS and non schedule 9 non-natives including cherry laurel and snowberry from the woodland habitats on Site.
- Enhancement of grassland habitats on Site through overseeding with suitable seed mix and managing through an annual 'hay cut'.
- Leaving any timber generated from the tree works on Site to create hibernacula and place at the woodland/grassland boundaries to benefit reptiles.



Figure 8 Lake and river restoration and re-naturalisation concepts which are being explored in the masterplan



3

ANALYSIS

## 3.1 INTRODUCTION

Our analysis of the Aquadrome is presented in the form of a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Challenges analysis assessing Rickmansworth Aquadrome through the three inter-connected themes; **Nature, People and Place**. Together they describe how the Site has been formed, used and cared for over time, and how it should evolve.

Organising the assessment in this way reflects the layered heritage of the Aquadrome where landscape design, community use. It ensures natural processes have always been intertwined and ensures that recommendations balance environmental outcomes with visitor experience and practical delivery, protecting the Site's character while enabling positive change.



### Nature

Nature addresses the ecological systems that define the Aquadrome's identity: lakes, river corridors, woodlands and the processes that sustain them.



### People

People focuses on visitors, community and operations: accessibility, inclusivity, safety, wayfinding, recreation and amenities and governance that determine how the Site is experienced and managed day to day.



### Place

Place considers the physical fabric and movement network: paths, bridges, entrances, facilities and the overall landscape character that shapes how the Aquadrome looks and functions, and how people feel about it.

## 3.2 NATURE

### Strengths

- High ecological value: mosaic of lakes, wet woodland and the chalk stream - river Colne; LNR and Local Wildlife Site with strong bird interest; adjacency to Stockers Lake LNR supports landscape-scale ecology.
- Presence of some listed or rare wildlife: Water vole, Cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus*) (Red List), *Teredus cylindricus* (Red List), Alder leaf beetle.
- Variety of plant species in proximity to urban population: Siberian oak, American elm species, Giant redwood.

### Weaknesses

- River condition: over-wide/deep, sluggish and over-shaded in places, with limited marginal and in-channel vegetation.
- Lakes have steep shelves that constrain marginal habitat development.
- Invasive and pest species present or nearby (e.g. Japanese knotweed, high signal crayfish densities, Canada geese; Himalayan balsam).
- Bank erosion from dogs, birds and crayfish.
- External water-quality pressures (canal grey water; storm-overflow discharges).

### Opportunities

- River restoration: targeted light-gapping, large woody material and berm creation to diversify flows and expand margins; create stepping-stone habitat for water vole.
- River channel, embankment works and bank re-profiling along the river Colne to improve hydrology and ecology.
- Lake-edge works: marginal benches/reed fringes and floating habitat.
- Seasonal structure & pollinators: meadows and bulb planting.
- Drainage network: ditch clearance and a hydrology study to ease flood pinch-points and improve wetland function.
- Biosecurity and monitoring: early detection and citizen-science recording.
- Create greater understanding and appreciation for the habitats through sharing nature stories via engaging, interactive interventions, clear gateways into the Site and community events and activities.
- Make the behind-the-scenes caretaking and monitoring visible to the public via physical or digital interpretation.

### Challenges

- Floodplain dynamics: recurring inundation shapes habitats and access, requires adaptive management rather than elimination;
- Further degradation of banks impacting upon ability to establish marginal vegetation.

- Climate-change impacts on hydrology, pests/pathogens and habitat resilience.
- Continued external pollution inputs to the Colne may limit ecological gains.



Figure 9 Opportunities diagram - Nature (Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right 2026)

## 3.3 PEOPLE

### Strengths

- Very popular with consistently high satisfaction; positive feedback for design, maintenance and cleanliness.
- Good visitor offer: café, toilets, large play area and dog-free picnic space.
- Generally accessible: extensive level, surfaced paths with regular seating.
- Recently improved water-edge access around Batchworth Lake (new fishing platforms and platforms).
- Active community and governance: Users Forum, club licences/ leases, programmed community use.

### 3.2 Weaknesses

- High usage drives congestion on paths and in the car park; occasional conflicts between user groups and wildlife disturbance.
- Litter issues at water edges, including inputs from the canal.
- Dog management concerns (dog-dog conflict, wildlife chasing, uncontrolled water/bank access).
- Underwhelming southern arrival; cycle routes are unclear and poorly communicated.
- Inconsistent wayfinding within the Aquadrome and to/from the wider network reduces legibility for infrequent visitors.
- Limited amenity around the café (few comfortable dwell spaces; lawn usability; weak visual/physical relationship to Bury Lake).
- Limited all-ages/ all-weather offer (few sheltered outdoor areas).
- Picnic area between lakes is fragmented and poorly arranged, discouraging use.
- North side of Batchworth Lake under performs as a hub (despite the platform); toilet block quality is low.

### 3.3 Opportunities

- Inclusivity upgrade: explore a Changing Places facility.
- Improve accessible routes to the Pinetum and Woodland Walk with considerate surfacing and gradients.
- Establish a clear, consistent identity through branding and wayfinding; rationalise furniture to durable, accessible standards.
- Family engagement: create an interactive nature-play space and strengthen meet-up/arrival spaces and outdoor learning areas.
- Evidence-led management: refresh visitor surveys and add automated counts.
- Reimagine the green between the lakes as a destination for picnicking, informal play and relaxation, with shade and seating.

### 3.4 Challenges

- Sustained high footfall increases maintenance requirements.
- Ongoing behaviour management (dogs, litter) and communications effort required.
- Public-health pests/diseases (e.g., Oak Processionary Moth) demand monitoring and response.

- Recurrent and inadequately managed flooding, sometimes severe, restricts access and can undermine perceptions of safety.
- Changing the perspective of the function of the floodplain and not an inconvenience.
- Conflicts relating from shared usage of paths in high traffic areas (and pinch points).
- Balance of a LNR with the many recreation activities .
- Changing the perspective of the visitor from a recreational park to a LNR.



Figure 10 Opportunities diagram - People (Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right 2026)

## 3.4 PLACE

### Strengths

- Strategic connectivity across the wider network (NCN Route 6, Colne Valley Trail, Ebury Way, Grand Union Canal) with a generous on-site car park.
- Extensive surfaced path network supporting shared use.
- Recognised quality: the love the public have for the Site and existing management plan in place - its in active management.
- Strong scenic character: tranquil feel and separation from the urban context, with distinctive areas such as the Lakes, Rivers, Woodland Walk and Pinetum.
- Compelling views: Seasonal variety, expansive water and broad natural skyline.
- Historic and cultural value: former gravel pit, whose aggregate was used to build the original Wembley Stadium, subsequent lakes used for public recreation and water sports.
- Function as a floodplain to protect the Site and surrounding areas.

### Weaknesses

- Low-lying sections (e.g. causeway and woodland paths) have limited resilience to seasonal flooding; surfacing and edges are damaged and access can be restricted.
- Access pinch points: Bridges below current standards; narrow bridges; constrained causeway and woodland paths; the geography of the Site restricts access and movement at pinch points
- Inconsistent and degraded furniture and open-topped bins (vermin risk); dated and inconsistent interpretive signage/branding.
- Weak legibility and safety between car park and café/visitor hub.
- Entrances lack identity and presence in the wider context.
- The sense of arrival to the car park and overall legibility.
- Visual connections across the Site are frequently obstructed by tree cover.

### Opportunities

- Replace dilapidated bridges; widen/resurface primary shared routes where feasible, and address causeway vulnerability.
- Re-plan arrival and car park for clearer movement, safe crossings, cycle facilities and sightlines; connect spaces around the café into a coherent visitor hub at the heart of the Aquadrome.
- Car park: rationalise layout, consider appropriate sizing, introduce robust sustainable drainage and provide safe pedestrian routes to the hub.
- Improve sightlines and inter-visibility between key areas to aid legibility.
- Improving views through vegetation management.

- Adopt a coherent, accessible furniture and wayfinding standard; upgrade interpretation and storytelling (e.g. desire-line-led signage and an arts trail).
- Design with water: embrace periodic inundation using resilient materials, elevated routes and flood-compatible experiences.
- Strengthen the distinct identities of Batchworth Lake and Bury Lake through edge treatments, planting and activity zoning.

### Challenges

- Site-wide Flood Zone 3 constraints: flooding must be facilitated as durability and lifecycle of new works are impacted.
- River impoundments limit natural processes and fish passage (upstream weir required for canal levels).
- Historic asbestos-containing material constrains interventions and requires ongoing management.



Figure 11 Opportunities diagram - Place (Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right 2026)

## 3.5 SUMMARY

The Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Challenges analysis confirms a well-loved, high-quality landscape with exceptional connectivity and character, but with recurring flood pinch-points, dated infrastructure and variable legibility. The opportunity is to make the Aquadrome work better year-round: clarify gateways and movement, balance busy hubs with quiet refuges, and restore blue-green systems—so Place, People and Nature all benefit together.



- Restore river processes (de-shading, bank repair, in-channel features) and reconnect floodplain where feasible.
- Enrich lake margins (benches, reed fringes, islands) and manage wet woodland structure for priority species.
- Tackle biosecurity and invasive pressures; monitor change and involve citizen science.
- Improve water management.
- Share the ecology story through low-clutter interpretation and trails to build stewardship.



- Deliver an inclusive, step-free network with frequent places to rest and a Changing Places facility.
- Make navigation intuitive: a clear wayfinding hierarchy and visible orientation nodes.
- Create balanced activity zones (Natural Play and Discovery Zone, Dog Enrichment Area) and more sheltered, all-weather locations.
- Reimagine the greens between lakes for social use, outdoor learning and everyday dwell time.
- Use evidence (counts, surveys) to guide operations and sustain high satisfaction.



- Re-plan arrivals (town and vehicle entrance) into clear gateways and a coherent Visitor Hub.
- Upgrade bridges, causeway and primary paths for resilient, all-weather access.
- Adopt a unified palette for materials, furniture, signage and interpretation; refresh identity.
- Strengthen distinct lake characters and key viewpoints/landmarks.
- Design with maintainable details and sustainability-led solutions.



4

EMERGING  
MASTERPLAN

# 4.1 VISION & OBJECTIVES

For the Aquadrome to be enhanced, nurtured and protected. To achieve a careful balance so nature can flourish and visitors can connect with and discover beautiful and unique habitats, whilst understanding the importance of the environmental heritage of the Site.

## Nature

**Creating Biodiverse and Sustainable Environments - The Aquadrome will conserve and enhance wildlife, landscape and heritage features and all aspects of management will be undertaken with sustainability as a guiding principle.**

- Restore blue-green systems and improve resilience.
- Protect and enhance priority habitats.
- Educate and inform visitors about vital wildlife and their habitats.
- To conserve and share the landscape and heritage of the Aquadrome.

## People

**To Be Welcoming for All - The Aquadrome will be an inviting, clean and well-maintained green space for all to enjoy.**

- Inclusive, legible and intuitive arrivals.
- Enable access for everyone.
- Provide balanced and diversified activity offer.
- Clean and well-kept by design.

## Place

**A High Quality Green Space - The Aquadrome will be a flagship destination, providing high quality facilities and diverse recreational opportunities alongside its rich wildlife habitats.**

- Create memorable gateways.
- Celebrate and strengthen Site informed character areas.
- Enable year-round access.

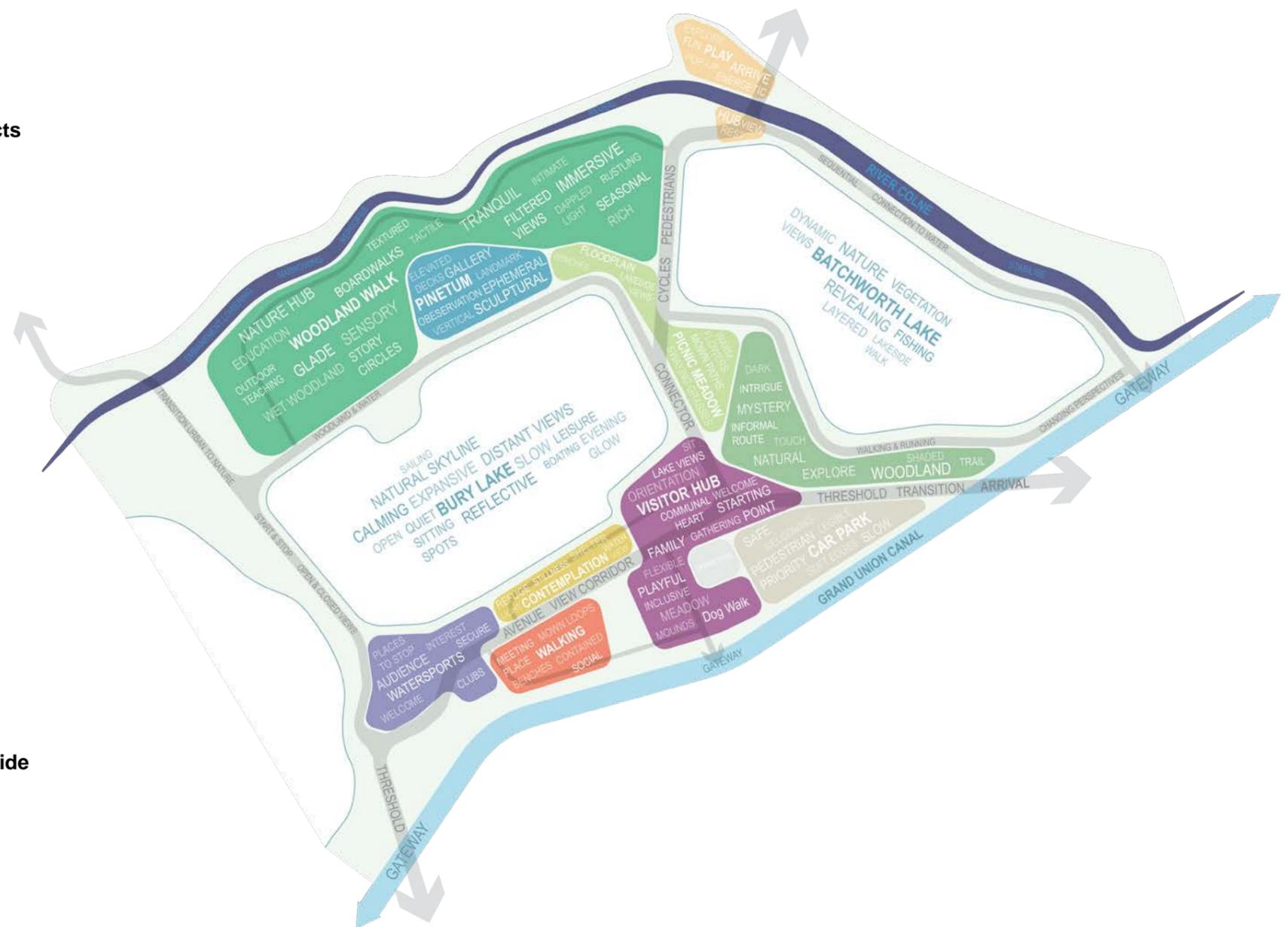


Figure 12 Zonal masterplan

## 4.2 CONCEPT MASTERPLAN

The emerging concept masterplan sets a clear spatial framework for holistic, carefully considered improvements to Rickmansworth Aquadrome. Building on a robust existing structure, diverse habitats and well-used amenities, the approach avoids a single “big move” in favour of conserving what is distinctive while repairing, enhancing and revealing qualities that have been lost or eroded. Priorities include more inclusive access and clearer gateways; targeted habitat management to bring forward distinctive natural features; and layering complementary uses that sit comfortably within the setting. The plan identifies key areas for enhancement alongside localised upgrades (viewpoints, thresholds and focal points) organised under Nature, People, Place to guide coordinated delivery into the next stage.

### Rickmansworth Gateway

An inviting northern entrance and lively hub that clearly signals arrival. Nature-led materials, generous planting and playful touches create a welcoming threshold with step-free routes, safe crossings and cycle parking. Clear wayfinding, seating and destination play set the tone for the Aquadrome’s quality, encouraging exploration into the wider Site.

### Woodland Walk

A sensory, less-managed route through the wet woodland that celebrates water and the seasonal qualities, intimate character and diverse habitats of the woodland and river Colne. The design is informed by the textural qualities of the woodland and canopy, emphasising filtered views to water and wildlife and embracing the immersive, sensory experience of the woodland and subtle opportunities for nature connectedness.



### The Hollow

An intimate woodland clearing for informal gathering and outdoor learning. Grouped informal timber seating provide flexible space for talks, school sessions and small community events. Informal mown paths and subtle interpretation invite hands-on engagement with nature within a natural setting.

### Pinetum

A distinctive, more hidden grove with a sculptural character. This intentionally managed and tranquil, wild space contrasts with the Woodland Walk, offering opportunities for understanding and interpreting the distinctive natural heritage through storytelling and quiet dwelling. The design emphasises the visual qualities of the trees and the expressive character of new interventions.

### Visitor Hub

The emotional and social heart of the Aquadrome. A lively, communal destination combining play, seating, meeting and movement. This is an active waterfront with clear spatial organisation and durable finishes, and it serves as a central hub from which to explore the Aquadrome. Long views across the Site and clear wayfinding are important to aid legibility and orientation.



### Bury Point

A calm, reflective lakeside place where designed elements sit lightly in nature. A restrained palette of natural materials, stone and planting frames wide water views and quiet seating nooks. A semi-open shelter offers prospect and refuge. Dedicated edge space supports remote-control boating, while generous benches invite dwelling, contemplation and moments of remembrance, facilitated by the expansive views where sky, water and woodland meet.

### Natural Play and Discovery Zone

A nature-themed, immersive landscape for families to relax, play and learn. Sculpted ground, stepping logs and Site-derived natural features echo the Aquadrome’s topography and habitats. Playable interpretation weaves stories of gravel lakes, woodland and wildlife, fostering curiosity, confidence and stewardship through inclusive challenges, varied seating, seasonal planting and hands-on discovery.

### Dog Enrichment Area

A clearly identified off-lead area with discreet boundaries and clear etiquette signage support safety. Grass routes, shade and discrete seating encourage short stays. Native or naturalised planting buffers protect sensitive habitats, reducing conflicts while retaining a natural, low-key character.

### Car Park

A reconfigured arrival with pedestrian-priority routes to the Visitor Hub. Dedicated walkways, crossing points and wayfinding improve safety and legibility. Permeable surfacing and open swales manage runoff and reduce pooling, while native planting and trees soften edges, making the car park more welcoming and in keeping with the qualities of the wider Site.

### The Meadow

A gently undulating floodplain landscape that balances water storage with ecology, new habitat creation and everyday access and amenity. Broad grass swathes and wildflower meadow offer informal recreation, picnicking and quiet dwelling with long views across the lakes. A heritage-informed sculptural marker anchors the centre of the Site, acting as a landmark and meeting point.

### The Causeway

A clear, level north–south spine that stays open in wet weather, providing year-round, step-free access across the Site. Widened sections create bays for pause and passing; improved seating celebrates viewpoints across Bury Lake. Robust surfacing, subtle wayfinding and occasional shelter improve legibility while respecting the Aquadrome’s calm character.

### The Arts Trail

An arts trail celebrating the water, natural, and industrial elements of the Aquadrome will be sympathetically integrated within the nature reserve. The trail will be threaded from the Visitor Hub through to the Woodland Walk, gently observing the site’s textures, light, and canopy through site-specific sculptures, carvings, and subtle sound pieces that tell Aquadrome narratives. Etched waymarkers, discreet listening posts, and QR prompts will encourage pause, reflection, and playful interaction at curated locations.

The aim of the trail is to encourage visitors to look up and down into the surrounding landscape, taking in all of its rich layers, from the ground flora to the treetops.



Figure 13 Emerging conceptual masterplan

## 4.2 CONCEPT MASTERPLAN

### 1 Woodland Walk

The proposals seek to celebrate this tranquil route, safe access: upgrades to surfacing, repair riverbanks, and deliver in-channel enhancements. New resting points (benches, perches and quiet bays) invite short pauses to absorb birdsong, moving water and the dappled textures and light and shade of wet woodland.

### 2 Woodland Walk Node & Boardwalk Start

A clear wayfinding marker will denote a key junction and the beginning of a new raised boardwalk. From here, the route continues through lower-lying wet woodland and branches toward the Pinetum, offering inclusive, dry-foot passage and a gentle cue to slow down and explore.

### 3 River Restoration

Restore a more natural flow regime, improve water quality and fish passage, and reduce maintenance requirements. Bank repairs and in-channel features will stabilise edges and enhance habitat complexity.

### 4 Viewpoints & River Edge Improvements

Refurbish existing viewpoints with durable seating, handrails where necessary, and habitat-sensitive bank works. Define small areas at suitable spots to create safe, framed views, complemented by light-touch interpretation that shares river ecology and Site stories.

### 5 Pinetum

Provide inclusive access via a raised boardwalk that weaves between the existing pines and conifers, remaining open during flood events. Keep ground vegetation low and largely grassland to reveal the trees' sculptural forms as well as to create views to new sculptural interventions celebrating the natural heritage and cultural associations of the trees in the Pinetum. The boardwalk will widen at intervals for seating and integrated interpretation, creating a coherent, uncluttered visitor experience.

### 6 Pinetum Threshold & Lake Connection

Mark the gateway from the Bury Lake footpath and the Pinetum with subtle embankment improvements and a modest viewing platform at the water's edge. The intervention will improve sightlines, orientation and the sense of arrival at the threshold to the Pinetum.

### 7 Floodplain Lowering

Lower select areas of the floodplain to slowly move and store water to reduce over-topping elsewhere and build climate resilience. Works will be shaped to blend with existing landform and maintain informal recreation space when dry. Opportunities for seasonal wetlands/ponds are welcomed.

### 8 Formalising Desire Lines

Upgrade well-used informal paths to resilient routes, using surfacing that matches context: bound or unbound materials where appropriate, or mown grass or compacted surfacing in lower-impact areas. This increases route choice while protecting sensitive habitats and reducing erosion.

### 9 Prominent Bury Lake Viewpoint

At this landmark edge point, the proposals aim to manage vegetation to open panoramic views and the experience of these at sunrise and sunset, while reinforcing legibility around the lake. A stopping point or small shelter or art piece with sculptural qualities could act as a visible anchor from multiple shores, aiding wayfinding and offering weather-protected pause and contemplation.

### 10 The Hollow

Formalise the existing clearing for small groups, outdoor learning and nature-based activities. Set slightly away from main paths, The Hollow will provide a calm spot to observe seasonal change and woodland ecology without intrusive infrastructure.

### 11 Uxbridge Road Gateway (Orientation Point)

Acknowledge the true arrival sequence beginning at Uxbridge Road (outside the current Site boundary). Improve on-site threshold cues (clear sightlines, maps and directional signage) so visitors can orient quickly and choose routes with confidence. Coordinate future off-site enhancements with relevant stakeholders.

### 12 The Causeway & Western Lake Edge

Raise the path between Bury Lake and Stocker's Lake to maintain year-round, step-free access. Replace eroded viewpoints with robust rest platforms and new seating, taking cues from recent fishing platforms but focused on respite rather than angling, alongside sympathetic bank restoration around all of both lakes.



Figure 14 Emerging conceptual masterplan

## 4.2 CONCEPT MASTERPLAN

### WOODLAND WALK

I slip, I slide, I gloom, I glance,  
Among my skimming swallows;  
I make the netted sunbeam dance  
Against my sandy shallows.



Figure 15 Indicative illustration of the Woodland Walk

## PINETUM

**I murmur under moon and stars; In brambly wilderness-  
es; I linger by my shingly bars; I loiter round my cresses.**

*(From The Brook, by Alfred, Lord Tennyson)*

Nature and landscapes, our natural world and natural systems have inspired numerous artists and writers past and present, and also provide design cues for a combined arts trail for the Site.



Figure 16 Indicative illustration of the Pinetum

## 4.2 CONCEPT MASTERPLAN

### 1 Visitor Hub - Lakeside Picnic Area & Bird Viewing

The proposals will create a welcoming lakeside picnic terrace with new bridge crossing from the café and footpath access along Bury Lake. A modest bird-viewing platform, akin to the new platform overlooking Batchworth Lake, will frame safe, elevated views while protecting marginal habitats.

### 2 Visitor Hub - Vegetation Management Behind the Café

Selectively clear ground and mid-storey vegetation to open views to Bury Lake, retaining key trees and improving safety and passive surveillance.

### 3 Visitor Hub - Café Forecourt & Lawn

Reconfigure the existing lawn as a lively, inclusive social space with outdoor seating, incidental play and lawn games. The space will provide varied seating for all ages and abilities, a Changing Places facility, clear desire-line routes and intuitive connections to adjacent paths.

### 4 Navigational Node

Establish a new, highly visible and clear orientation point for arrivals from the car park, Frogmoor Lane and the canal. The node will include Site mapping, simple wayfinding and cues that invite exploration of the wider Aquadrome.

### 5 Bury Point

Rationalise seating and introduce a restrained surfacing palette for inclusive access. A new, semi-enclosed shelter offering prospect and refuge will form a focal point sharing intervisibility with vantage points around Bury Lake. A robust edge platform will provide space for model boating and quiet dwelling, alongside sensitive bank improvements.

### 6 Bridge & Boardwalk Link

Introduce a small bridge and boardwalk to complete a circular route to Bury Point from both directions, ensuring dry-foot access and an easy loop with clear sightlines.

### 7 Natural Play and Discovery Zone

Create a dog-free, nature-led playful area with picnic tables and shaded seating. The space will include provision of a new access path from the canal as the main route to the Visitor Hub (bypassing the car park). The space will incorporate natural play features (low mounds, stepping and balancing logs) preferably sourced on Site.

### 8 Dog Enrichment Area

Provide a secure off-lead zone with simple timber agility elements, seating and bins to support longer stays and positive social interaction. Future iterations of the design will explore suitable positioning of the Dog Enrichment Area to minimise the requirement for new fencing and associated visual clutter.

### 9 Car Park Reconfiguration

The design will seek to improve parking efficiency and introduce dedicated pedestrian routes and crossings. Improvements will include enhanced legibility to a single, clearly defined Visitor Hub access and integrate simple swales to address localised pooling and improve the setting.

### 10 Entrance Relocation (Frogmoor Lane)

Explore opportunities to bring vehicles into the car park earlier along Frogmoor Lane to improve pedestrian arrival and reduce conflicts. This could allow for a stronger gateway presence to be established at the threshold to the Aquadrome, comparable to the town centre entrance on Riverside Drive.

### 11 Gate Line De-cluttering

Rationalise fences, bollards and signage to open sightlines to the Visitor Hub. Provide continuous, readable surfacing for a clearer arrival.

### 12 The Meadow

Lower ground levels in select areas to increase floodplain storage and keep adjacent paths open during flood events. Arisings could be re-used to form a gentle landmark with potential for a sculptural marker at the centre of the Site and visible from points across the Aquadrome. This also has potential to be a locally specific landform microcosm of the gentle valley sides which can be seen from here to the west of the Site. Floodplain meadows with mown desire-line paths, picnic spots and small rest platforms will balance biodiversity enhancements with recreational uses.

### 13 Sightline Management

Pollarding and manage understorey and ivy on selected trees to reveal long views towards the Site's centre from the Rickmansworth approach, improving orientation while retaining habitat value.

### 14 South-western Gateway (Orientation Point)

Acknowledge the arrival to the Aquadrome Site. Improve on-site threshold cues (clear sightlines, maps and directional signage) so visitors can orient quickly and choose routes with confidence. Coordinate future off-site enhancements with relevant stakeholders.

### 15 The Causeway & Western Lake Edge

Raise the path between Bury Lake and Stocker's Lake to maintain year-round, step-free access. Replace eroded viewpoints with robust rest platforms and new seating, taking cues from recent fishing platforms but focused on respite rather than angling, alongside sympathetic bank restoration.

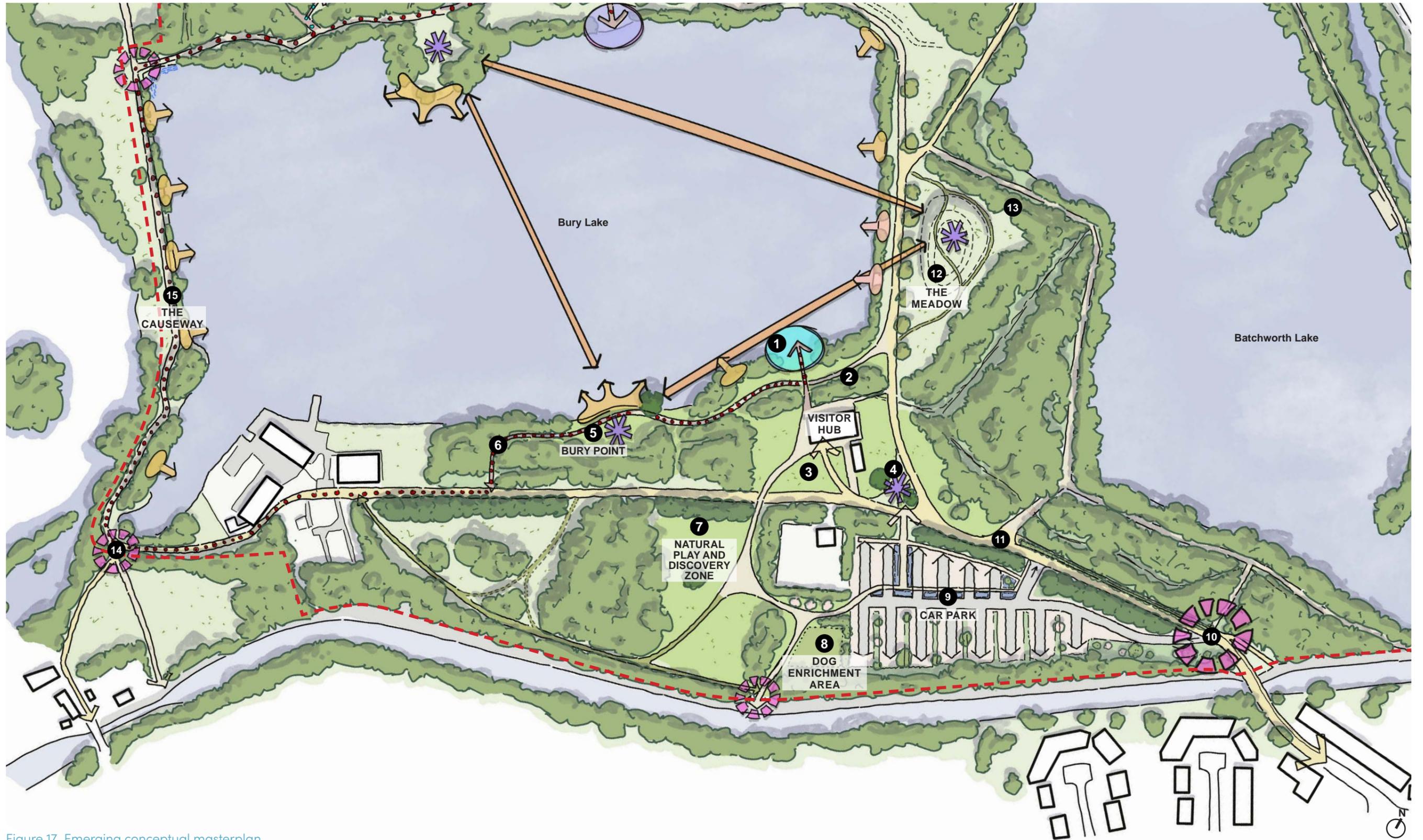


Figure 17 Emerging conceptual masterplan

## 4.2 CONCEPT MASTERPLAN

### VISITOR HUB



Figure 18 Indicative illustration of the Visitor Hub

## THE MEADOW



Figure 19 Indicative illustration of The Meadow



5

CHARACTER &  
MATERIALITY

# 5.1 A SITEWIDE STRATEGY FOR THE AQUADROME

Rickmansworth Aquadrome is an outstanding piece of our natural and post-industrial landscape heritage, a rich, layered landscape of numerous elements. Its tranquility, elemental qualities and special landscape character have all played their part in making it become a highly valued and well-loved destination across many decades, for the local and wider community. Yet at the same time it is that very popularity which is causing the fabric of the Aquadrome to fray at the edges now and causing visible wear and ecological damage. Now is a timely point for the Lottery funded restoration design for the Aquadrome, to enhance its resilience and ensure it remains there for future generations to cherish and enjoy.

Storytelling, Site character, materiality and user experience will be central points of that restoration design. The Aquadrome's story is one to be experienced over time. Every material, pathway and planting choice provides the framework for crafting this narrative spatially, experientially and emotionally. It turns the visitor journey into a series of chapters, from arrival and orientation to immersion and reflection, all connected by a shared identity rooted in the Site's cultural and natural heritage.

This Landscape Character, Materiality and Accessibility Strategy provides a clear tiered framework to guide the emerging Site-wide Masterplan and detailed design decisions for the Aquadrome. It aspires to create a coherent identity while allowing appropriate variation across the Site and reflecting the different use patterns and functionality of the Aquadrome Site.

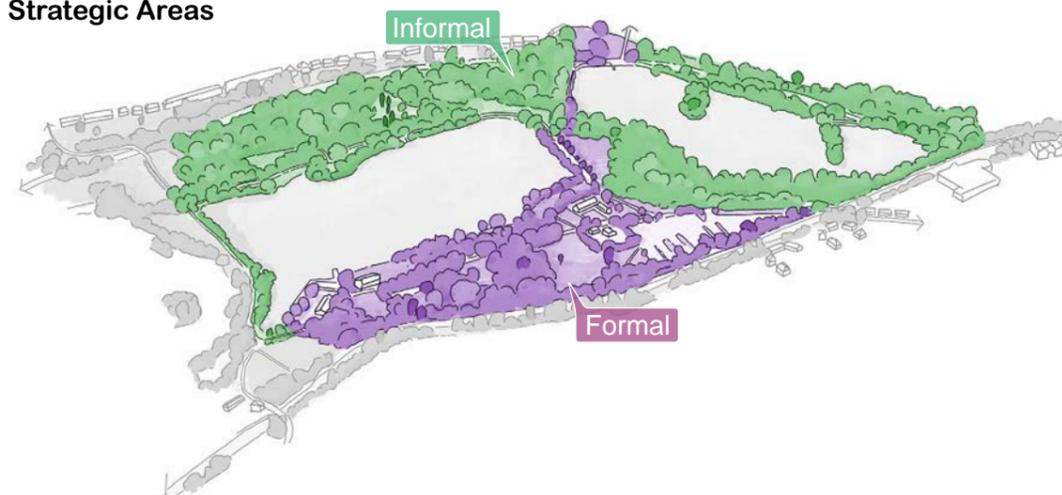
- 1. Sitewide Principles:** establish a robust, maintainable and inclusive approach to movement, surfacing, planting, dark sky Site, wayfinding, art, furniture, thresholds, accessibility, maintenance, play, sustainability and blue-green infrastructure.
- 2. Strategic Areas:** distinguish between formal and informal settings. The formal areas will use refined, durable, often industrially finished materials. Whereas the informal areas will make use of natural, raw and Site-derived materials that can adapt over time.
- 3. Key Places:** provide place-specific guidance for the Woodland Walk, Pinetum, Visitor Hub (café setting and lakeside), Bury Point and Natural Play and Discovery Zone, while remaining aligned with their respective Strategic Area guidance.

The Strategy is both aspirational and practical. It supports delivery of the Aquadrome's vision and objectives, informs spatial coordination and technical design, and ensures legibility, accessibility and long-term maintenance. It recognises the priorities and actions within the Aquadrome Management Plan 2022–2027 so that proposals are realistic and build on known conditions and management needs.

## 1 Sitewide Principles



## 2 Strategic Areas



## 3 Key Places



## 5.2 SITEWIDE PRINCIPLES

These Sitewide Principles guide masterplan and detailed materiality decisions so that proposals are functional, robust easy to maintain, and read as part of a coherent Aquadrome family. They apply to Sitewide infrastructure and inform the Strategic Area and Key Place Guidance.



### Movement Hierarchy & Inclusive Circulation

Structure movement as a clear, legible hierarchy with generous, step-free primary routes for shared use. Complement these with secondary and tertiary paths that enable exploration and diversification of user experience without compromising accessibility.

### Surfacing and hard materials

Adopt a restrained, replicable palette comprising robust sealed surfaces on primary routes. Use subtle visual contrast to mark gateways, and provide consistent, durable edge treatments and repairs at high-wear lake and riverside fronts. Simplicity and coherence of material choices, colour palettes and textures/tactile qualities will be used to reference the rich industrial and natural heritage of the Site, as well as to create integrated accessible and inclusive design interventions for various user needs.

### Planting Structure

In line with the Vegetation Strategy for the Site, reinforce the Local Nature Reserve character through native, habitat-led planting and sensitive, light-touch management (including wet woodland, marginal and meadow mosaics) while protecting the ecological value of the river Colne and the lakes. Use planting palettes and associations to contribute to the narrative driven landscape design and to enrich sensory environments and soundscapes.

### Dark Sky Site

Safeguard dark corridors for species and for the dark night time character of the Site. Proposed lighting will only be targeted and coordinated in areas where it is identified as strictly necessary to meet essential safety needs on key routes, gateways and nodes.

### Wayfinding, Branding & Interpretation

Deliver a coherent hierarchy of welcome, orientation, directional and interpretive information aligned with Aquadrome branding. Rationalise signs to minimise clutter, ensure links to the town, station and canal, and consider complementary digital layers.

### Views

Use targeted, light touch 'design through management' approaches to enhance visual assets, legibility and valued views on Site, e.g. celebration of the Site's dramatic sunrise and sunset views and big skies.

### Art

Use land art, sculpture and other artistic interventions including linguistic cues as a common thread to aid storytelling and celebrate the Aquadrome's cultural and natural heritage. Consider standalone pieces and integrated artworks within furniture, wayfinding or landscape interventions.

### Site Furniture

Specify a unified, durable furniture family to enable phased replacement and ease of maintenance. Provide inclusive seating, closed-top litter bins and carefully considered locations to achieve good coverage without clutter.

### Edges & Thresholds

Design entrances, gates, bridges and waterfronts as legible, identity-reinforcing thresholds that safely manage flows and occasional closures. Maintain clear sightlines and ensure treatments are consistent with brand identity.

### Hydrology

Integrate water management visibly and safely, using Natural Flood Management (NFM) to reduce impacts of flooding and align blue-green systems with access, ecology and amenity so that hydrology is legible and valued.

### Inclusive Access & Comfort

Meet or exceed inclusive standards with continuous step-free loops, comfortable gradients and frequent rest points, including wheelchair spaces. Ensure level surfaces and clear shared-use etiquette.

### Maintenance, Longevity & Circularity

Favour robust, repairable and modular components, using recycled content where appropriate, as part of fabric first, regenerative/circular economy design approaches. Standardise details and specify vandal-resistant finishes to support straightforward replacement and end-of-life recovery.

### Play & Education

Embed play and learning across the Aquadrome (in addition to dedicated play spaces) through routes and small-scale interventions and incidental pieces which can be discovered as part of the Aquadrome experience and which encourage interaction with nature and communicate the Site's natural and cultural heritage for all ages, in engaging and accessible ways.

### Sustainability

Embed sustainability and nature-sensitive design throughout the masterplan and detailed design. Prioritise repairability, longevity in wet environments, re-use and upcycling of local materials, and native, climate-resilient planting. As part of the design approach, consideration will be given to climate impacts of specification choices, to smart detailing and construction techniques which minimise design waste and which make as much use of existing Site material as practicable (e.g. paving sub-bases etc).

## 5.3 INFORMAL AREAS

Informal Areas celebrate the uncurated beauty of the Aquadrome and should be designed and maintained to promote biodiversity and the Site's sense of wildness and elemental quality. Proposals should enhance conditions for wildlife to thrive and protect the character of these places. Access for recreation and amenity should be designed and managed in a nature-sensitive manner so visitors can enjoy the unique natural setting and co-exist sensitively with habitats and species.

### Characteristics & qualities

- Natural, 'raw' and adaptable, with a character that changes over time. Consideration of the properties of materials and ones which age well over time, contributing to aesthetic qualities.
- Site-informed and Site-derived materials such as timber, stone, gravel and materials reflecting underlying geology.
- Multifunctional and incidental, with a nature-led character.

### Elements

- Surfacing: Compacted stone, natural or mown paths and boardwalks in wet areas, with edge protection and handrails where necessary.
- Habitat management: Native, habitat-led assemblages including wet woodland, marginal and meadow mosaics.
- Dark Sky Site: No lighting will be proposed within Informal Areas.
- Furniture: A mix of informal, natural seating (such as felled timber or boulders) and formal seating with a natural character.
- Signage: Low-impact wayfinding totems, small-format interpretation at habitat points and nature trail interpretive signage/facilities.
- Drainage: Working with existing drainage to provide open, natural drainage features integrated with planting, along with natural flood management interventions where appropriate.

### Consider

- Use of natural, local and Site-informed materials with simple details.
- Allowing vegetation to soften edges and celebrate seasonality and change.
- Providing refuge and sensory richness, including the sound of water and movement of leaves.

### Avoid

- Over-formalised kerbs, rigid alignments and bright industrial finishes.
- High illuminance and uncontrolled light spill into habitats.
- Excessive signage or furniture clutter.



Figure 20 Informal Areas (Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right 2026)

## 5.4 FORMAL AREAS

Formal Areas place greater emphasis on visitor access for recreation and include moments of pause, gathering, and social interaction. They enable people to enjoy the wider natural environment through a range of activities. These areas involve a higher degree of design intervention to promote outdoor activity and should be of robust design for intensive use and longevity, while connecting contemporary visitor use to the Site's industrial and cultural heritage.

### Characteristics & qualities

- Industrial, refined, robust and hard-wearing, with a timeless or permanent quality. Clean and simple use of materials with typically no more than 2-3 key materials/finishes/colours, and which use colour theory effectively to complement Aquadrome branding.
- Processed natural materials such as stone, concrete and metal/oxidised metals.
- Detailing informed by Site history and heritage, (e.g. textures that reference Rickmansworth straw/basket-weaving heritage).
- Embedded objects and combined materials that speak to geology, history and our longstanding connection with the Earth. This as a material language that connects education, storytelling and functionality.

### Elements

- Surfacing: Robust, largely sealed, walkways and footpaths with inlaid patterns, locally specific textures or art to aid legibility whilst ensuring durability (in respect to frequent use and flooding).
- Dark Sky Site: Lighting: Little to no lighting; if identified as necessary to meet essential safety needs, use low-impact, low-level and shielded fittings on timers that respect dark corridors.
- Wayfinding: Integrated directional signage, with clear nodes and gateways.
- Furniture: Durable, coordinated families; defined seating walls and edges; formal furniture including picnic tables, communal seating and amenity grassland; and informal seating edge treatments.
- Surface art/interpretation: Embedded motifs recalling local industry, stories and ecology.
- Planting: Sensory character inspired by local habitats and of a lowland wetland associative quality. With some ornamental characteristics (e.g. flowering, plant structure, fruiting).

### Consider

- Use of durable, easy-to-maintain finishes for year-round enjoyment.
- Providing clear sightlines and intuitive circulation, especially at hubs.

### Avoid

- Avoid gentrification of the Site.
- Overly ornate features that date quickly.
- Mixed, uncoordinated signage and furniture styles.



Figure 21 Formal Areas (Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right 2026)

## 5.5 KEY PLACES

Key Places provide place-specific guidance for the Woodland Walk, Pinetum, Visitor Hub (café setting and lakeside), Bury Point, Natural Play and Discovery Zone and the Arts Trail, while remaining aligned with their respective Strategic Area guidance.



**Woodland Walk**



**Pinetum**



**Visitor Hub - Café setting**



**Visitor Hub - Lakeside**



**Bury Point**



**Natural Play and Discovery Zone**



Figure 22 Key Places (Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right 2026)

## 5.6 WOODLAND WALK

### IMMERSION AND DISCOVERY

A sensory, nature sensitive route through wet woodland that celebrates water and the seasonal qualities and diverse habitats of the woodland and river Colne. The design is informed by the textural qualities and diverse habitats of the woodland and canopy, emphasising filtered views to water and wildlife, the rare species of the woodland, and embracing the immersive, sensory experience of the woodland.

#### Elements

- Surfacing: Raised boardwalks above wetter ground with short sections of retained/improved sealed surfaces in drier areas.
- Planting: Habitat-led planting with native understorey; protection of wet woodland and retention of mossy logs and other standing and fallen deadwood wherever possible.
- Furniture: A mix of informal, natural seating (felled timber) and formal seating to meet high popularity and the diverse needs of visitors. Small lookouts or dwelling platforms along boardwalks.
- Wayfinding & interpretation: Bespoke, nature-sensitive wayfinding with modest markers, habitat interpretation and opportunities for natural art or sculpture.



## LOOK & FEEL



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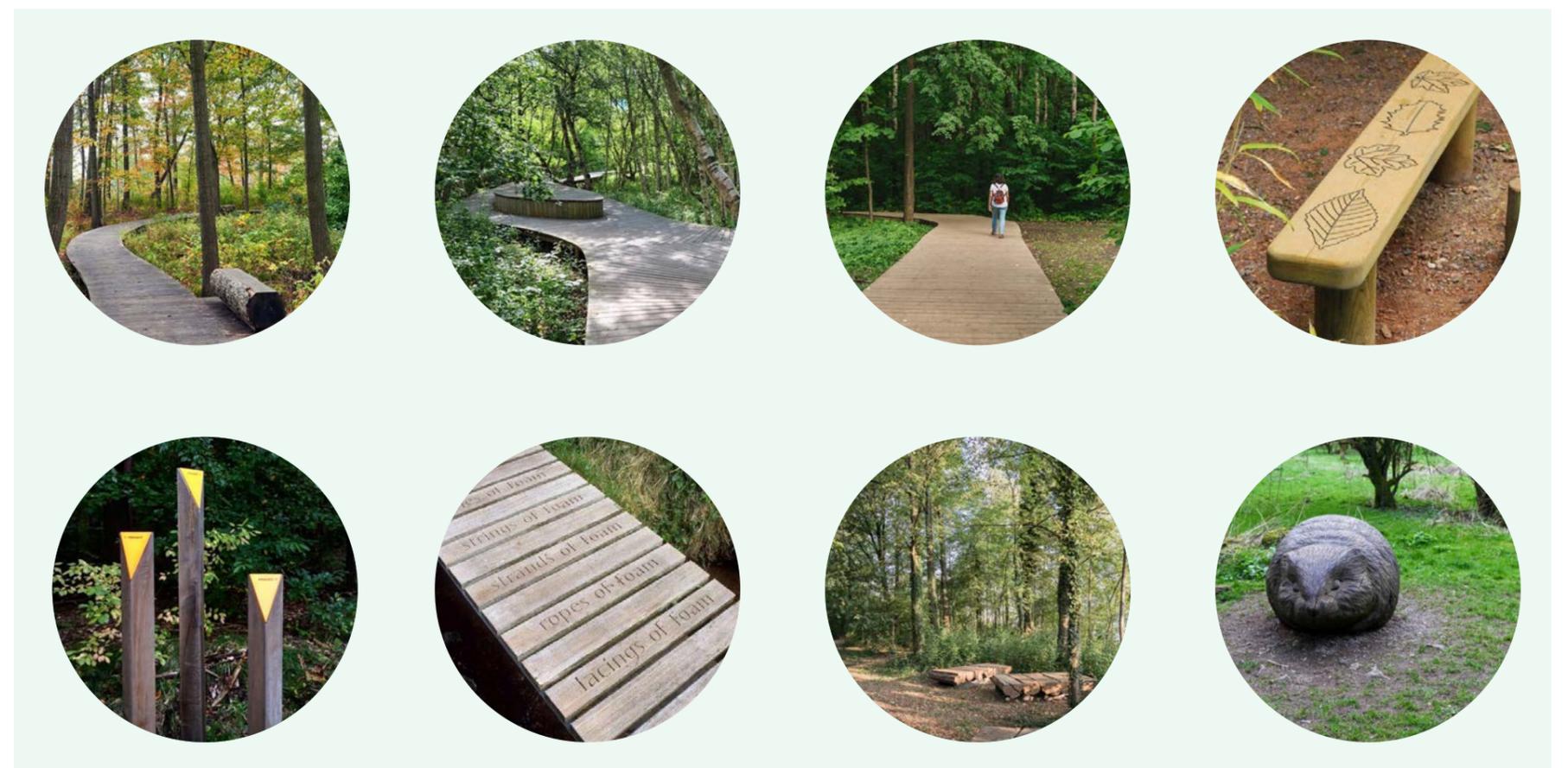


Figure 23 Look and feel precedent examples

## 5.7 PINETUM

### MYSTERY AND MEMORY

A distinctive, hidden grove with a sculptural character. This intentionally managed and tranquil space contrasts with the Woodland Walk, offering opportunities for storytelling and quiet dwelling and to celebrate the natural heritage through sensitively placed, elemental and Site specific sculpture. The design emphasises the visual qualities of the pines and conifers in addition to the expressive character of new interventions.

#### Elements

- Surfacing: Sculptural or meandering boardwalks above root zones to protect trees.
- Planting: Managed understorey to reveal structure, with a focus on specimen trees in their space to celebrate their unique visual and cultural appeal.
- Furniture: Discreet dwelling points and integrated perches within the boardwalk design.
- Wayfinding & interpretation: Minimal posts, sculptural cues and interpretive storytelling. Pieces at ground and canopy level can be used as a way of presenting sculpture within the landscape, multiple pieces can weave narratives together, encourage different vantage points (looking up).
- Hydrology: Maintain permeable ground and avoid compaction, and by subtly directing walking routes/encouraging the views 'from afar'.



(Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right 2026)



## LOOK & FEEL

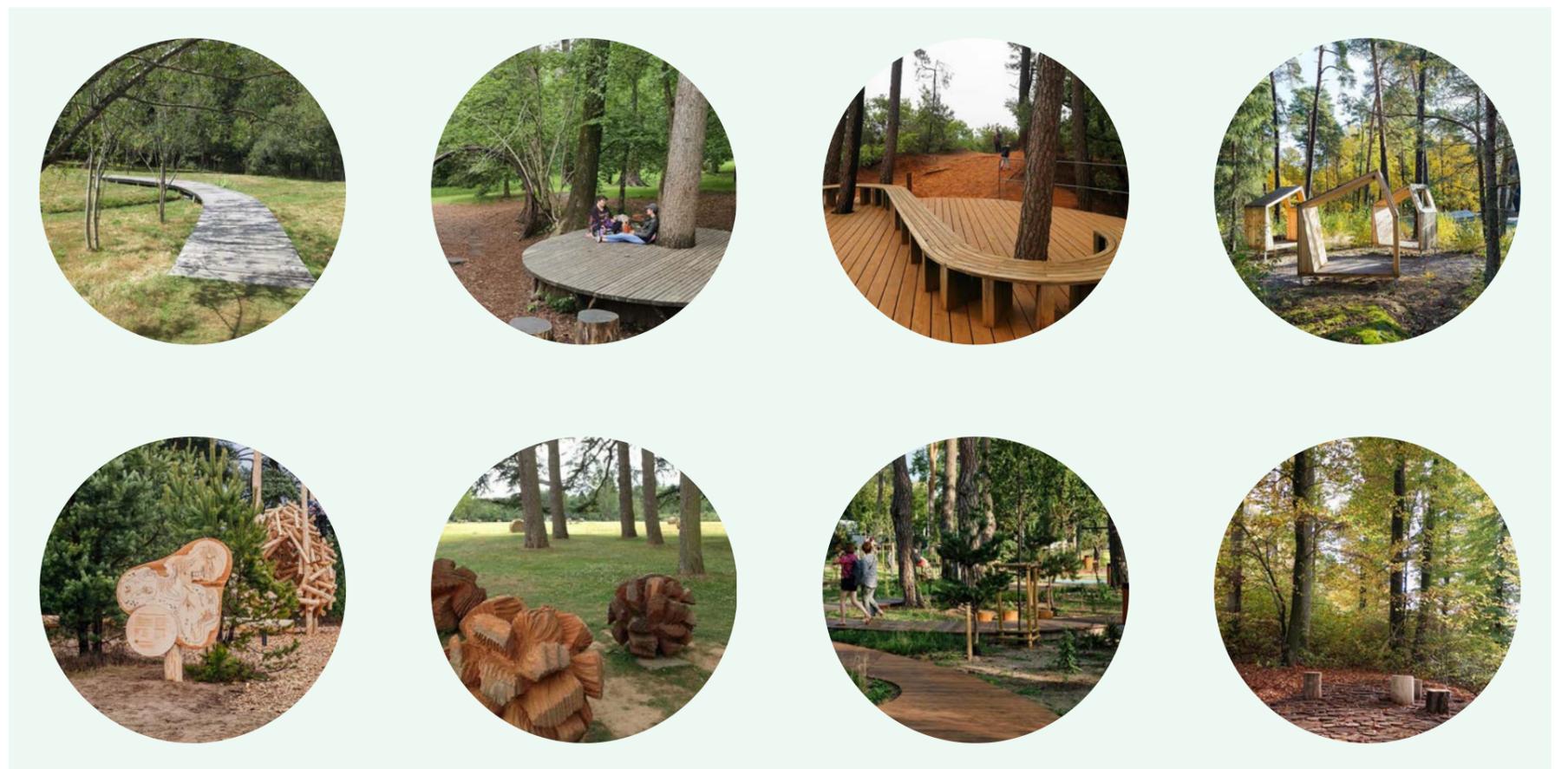


Figure 24 Look and feel precedent examples

# 5.8 VISITOR HUB

## ENCOUNTER AND ORIENTATION

The community core and social heart of the Aquadrome. A lively, communal destination combining play, seating, meeting and movement. This is an active waterfront with clear spatial organisation and durable finishes, and it serves as a central hub from which to explore the Aquadrome. Long views across the Site and clear wayfinding are important to aid legibility and orientation.

### Elements

- Surfacing: Smooth and level, well-considered routes; multifunctional spaces for movement and dwelling; inlaid motifs to aid legibility.
- Planting: Native /naturalised planting that echoes local habitats and lowland wetland character in a low maintenance and contained manner.
- Furniture: A variety of furniture and seating to support both individual and social use, including communal tables and seating edges, and multifunctional gabion elements that evoke nature & industry.
- Edges & accessibility: Defined waterfront edges that provide safe prospect and refuge, with fully accessible and inclusive design.
- A Changing Places changing room
- Wayfinding & interpretation: Overview of the Site's history and nature themes. A clear gateway and welcome space, legible connection with the car park, orientation map, and fingerposts to the town, station, canal and also other Aquadrome and Colne Valley Regional Park destinations.



## LOOK & FEEL



(Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right 2026)

Figure 25 Look and feel precedent examples

# 5.9 BURY POINT

## PAUSE AND REFLECTION

A calm, tranquil and reflective place that balances designed elements with nature. The space frames lake views, uses a limited material palette and offers opportunities for personal pause. It should foster a sense of prospect and refuge, with open views across the water and a semi-open shelter, prioritising places to dwell, contemplate and remember.

### Elements

- Surfacing: Simple, accessible surfaces with minimal extent and width to reinforce intimacy and human scale. A new bridge to reconnect with the main path.
- Planting: A calm palette with strong seasonal structure and limited colour, celebrating seasonal qualities such as spring and autumn colour, winter form and frost-enhanced silhouettes, as well as species with contemplative and memory triggering associations.
- Dark Sky Site: No artificial lighting, allowing designs to play with natural light through the day and seasons, including reflections from the water.
- Furniture: Individual seats (or small benches) with armrests, and small sculptural pieces; careful orientation to views is essential. Create shelter using simple materials as cladding and incorporating the use by the Radio Controlled Model Yachting Club.
- Views & interpretation: Framed views, with art or sculpture used sparingly to guide views.
- Wayfinding: Minimal wayfinding, using subtle plaques only.
- Clutter: Avoid unnecessary fixtures to maintain a sense of calm.



(Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right 2026)



## LOOK & FEEL

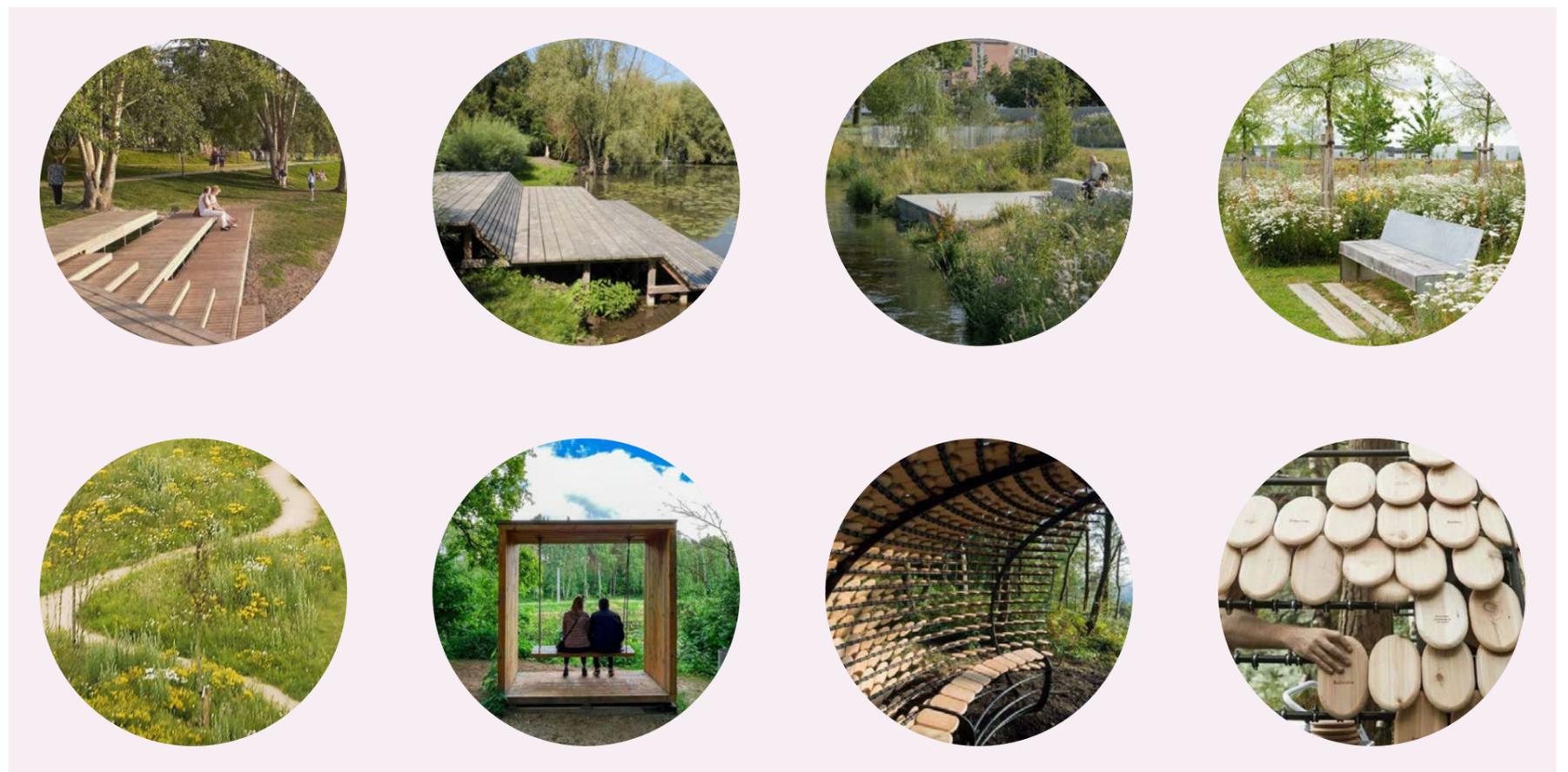


Figure 26 Look and feel precedent examples

# 5.10 NATURAL PLAY AND DISCOVERY ZONE

## IMAGINATION AND FUTURE STORIES

A nature-themed, immersive play landscape with educational value that celebrates topography and planting. Storytelling of the Aquadrome's natural and cultural heritage is expressed through a playable landscape, encouraging curiosity and stewardship.

### Elements

- Play: Natural and incidental play elements that promote movement and interaction with nature (e.g. small landforms, timber trails, stepping features).
- Surfacing: Natural surfaces including meadow and amenity grass, with small compacted-gravel informal paths.
- Planting: Playful but managed soft landscape with willow tunnels and layered, low maintenance planting.
- Dark Sky Site: Early-evening safety lighting at entries only, if identified as necessary to meet essential safety needs.
- Furniture: Picnic tables, mixed-ability seating and informal or multifunctional seating options.
- Wayfinding: Playful way-markers aligned with the Aquadrome brand.



## LOOK & FEEL



(Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right 2026)

Figure 27 Look and feel precedent examples

# 5.11 WELCOMING FOR ALL

This initial strategy translates the Rickmansworth Aquadrome Management Plan’s ambition to be “welcoming for all” into material and design prescriptions that improve accessibility, legibility and comfort across the Aquadrome. It focuses on step-free movement, inclusive furniture and facilities, clear information, perceived safety and equitable access to the water’s edge.

### Paths & surfacing

- Provide a connected, largely level, step-free network using robust, low-maintenance solid finishes accessibility. New surfacing should be min. 3.0 m wide; National Cycle Network spines could target 4.0 m where space allows. Address pinch points by targeted widening and edge repairs.
- Prioritise upgrades at key nodes (e.g. Entrances), path edges along Bury Lake and sections affected by flooding/erosion; consider a raised boardwalk of at least 2.2m width through the Pinetum and parts of the Woodland Walk.
- Use continuous detectable edges and firm, slip-resistant tactile surfacing at junctions, bridge thresholds and water-edge platforms.
- Consider use of permeable and appropriate footpath colours.

### Entrances & bridges

- Make all pedestrian entrances consistent, step-free and legible; remove staggered barriers and replace with gates that enable access control only when required. Use a clear colour palette for all thresholds and gates.
- Bridge replacements to be designed to modern, wider standards (where appropriate) to enable safe shared use and adequate headroom; widen approach footways and landscape for a genuinely welcoming, accessible gateway.

### Inclusive furniture

- Standardise designs across the Site: attractive, accessible benches and picnic tables (arm/back rests as standard), with materials considering composite plastic (if quality can be achieved) and sustainable timber. Draw from the best practice design guidelines in the Accessibility Audit produced for the Site by Access & Inclusion UK.
- Install benches on hard pads with adjacent wheelchair space on main paths; some benches should allow for transfer from wheelchair to bench; reassess locations to ensure even provision and DDA-compliant intervals. Provide seating for parents/carers in proximity to new accessible play equipment.
- Replace open-topped bins with closed-top models. Removing all small bins and replacing large ones at key locations, using a clear, unified and coherent visual identity throughout.
- Provide additional accessible fishing pegs at Batchworth Lake.

### Include inclusive & accessible play elements.

- Rest points & viewing, with seating also provided at 50m intervals, where practicable, including benches without arms and ‘social seating’.
- Maintain frequent resting opportunities (benches/picnic tables), especially on long lakeside loops, and introduce accessible viewing/picnic platforms where appropriate to distribute dwell space and reduce path congestion.

### Wayfinding & interpretation (see also best practice guidance on detailed signage design in the Accessibility Audit produced for the Site)

- Implement a rationalised approach: accessible welcome/orientation panels at entries, directional fingerposts to key destinations, and shared-use path signage; remove temporary/redundant signs and update legacy panels. Use naming and colour coding to brand trails and key routes. Follow Aquadrome brand guidelines.
- Provide raised-relief/tactile and/or braille Site maps and tactile handrail markers at decision points, plus layered interpretation (touchable textures, Navilens accessible QR codes, optional audio via QR/NFC) positioned by rest points with natural lighting.
- Provide sensory story mapping for the Site, detailing in concise phrases and image rich visuals the sensory elements visitors may encounter and look out for.

- Main interpretive signage at accessible reading heights and on accessible pathways. Integrate other accessible signage at welcome/arrival points with this rationalised palette/placement, e.g. including directions to blue badge parking and accessible facilities; route mapping with details as to key landmarks, route accessibility and walk times to enable visit planning.

### Car park & “first-100 m” experience

- Ensure dedicated Blue Badge bays, clear pedestrian desire-line paths to the hub/lakes and improved cycle parking; set out a coherent, welcoming meet-up area with seating, orientation and sightlines to the lake.

### Safety & perception of safety

- Respond to lower after-dark feelings of safety by designing for natural surveillance: maintain clear sightlines along paths and across the car park (vegetation clearance, high-canopy trees; no dense thickets beside main routes).



Figure 28 Access, Gateways and Nodes Plan (Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right 2026)



6

INTERPRETIVE  
LAYERS

# 6.1 VISITOR PROFILE

Identifying the target audience for the Rickmansworth Aquadrome is essential to develop our understanding of how the Site is currently being used and how it can be developed to meet the needs of visitors.

As a popular green space offering lakes and water pursuits, wildlife habitats, recreational facilities and walking routes, the Aquadrome attracts a diverse range of users. The information presented here is taken from data collected during visitor observation in the Summer of 2024. A demographic profile of the area within a 2km radius of the Aquadrome has also been presented in next section. By analysing demographic characteristics, visitor behaviors, and the motivations that draw people to the Site, this section aims to establish a clear profile of the Aquadrome's audience. This understanding will support informed decision-making for future planning, interpretation, management, and community engagement.

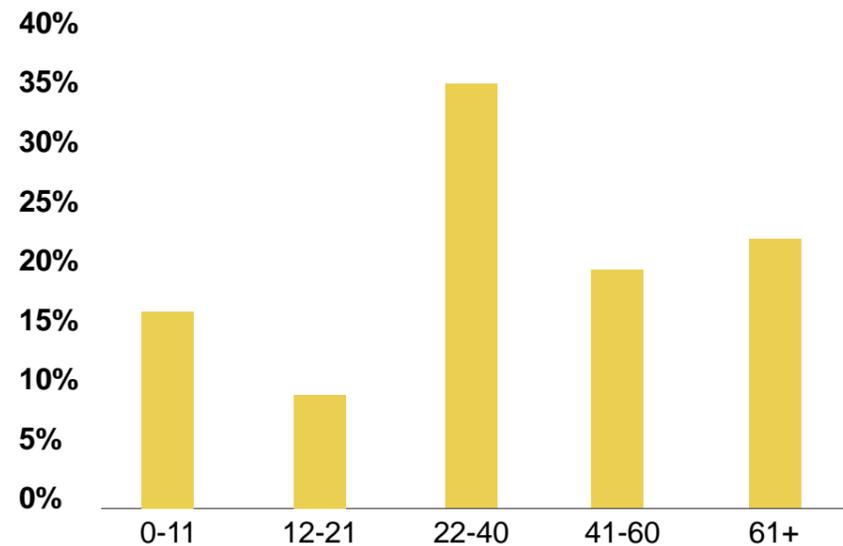
### Audience Profile

- Range of ages – mostly 22-40 and 61+. Significantly underused by teenagers/young adults.
- Range of activities – most popular with walkers / dog walkers.
- Higher levels of visitor numbers on weekends.

Sources above are from Rickmansworth Aquadrome Social Data captured by Three Rivers District Council.

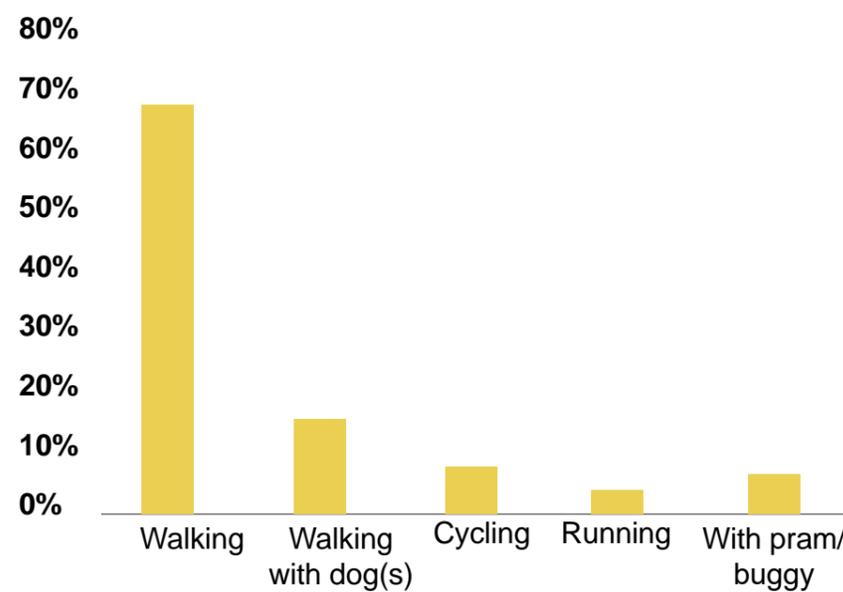
**Age group of visitors**

(nearest whole %)



**Activity undertaken by visitors**

(nearest whole %)



# 6.1 VISITOR PROFILE

## LOCAL DEMOGRAPHICS

Whilst Rickmansworth Aquadrome is a popular Site for visitors from further afar, Haley Sharpe have undertaken a demographic review of the local community living within 2km of the Site. This area has a population of approximately 17,300 (NOS Census data).

The findings of the demographic review lead to the implications below for the Aquadrome's visitor offer.

### Appeal to an engaged local community

- Interpretation should be appropriate for an interested local audience and new users.
- Opportunities to delve into the heritage of the Site and educational content will be provided.

### Cultural Inclusivity

- Options could be available for translation of interpretation into different languages – reflecting the diversity of the population.

### Health and Wellbeing

- Emphasis can be placed on active outdoor experiences to align with wider health and well-being initiatives (Health walks programmes, green social prescribing, Nordic walking group which uses the Aquadrome, Park Run).

### Environmental and Heritage Messaging

- Interpretation should consider an emphasis on conservation, biodiversity and sustainability, reflecting the potential interests of environmentally aware residents.

### Accessibility

- While there are lower than average disability rates, emphasis must be placed on inclusive design for all ages and abilities as part of good, inclusive design practice more widely and to reflect the priorities and provisions of the relevant parts of the Equality Act 2010.



Figure 29 Rickmansworth 2km offset (Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right 2026)

## 6.2 INTERPRETIVE LAYERS

### INTERPRETIVE AIMS

The interpretive layers will be developed to support the project's overall vision and to enhance visitors understanding of the Site. We have listed the aims of interpretive interventions proposed in tandem with the wider masterplan below.

#### The interpretation aims to:

- Create greater understanding and appreciation of the nature reserve through sharing stories about its natural and social history (via engaging, interactive interventions, clear gateways into the Site).
- Inspire visitors to care for the natural environment (via sharing stories about delicate plant and animal life, showcasing behind-the-scenes care-taking).
- Invite visitor to have fun and play (via interactive, nature-play trails and immersive, accessible Site storytelling).
- Create moments of rest and contemplation allowing visitors to be mindful in a natural setting (via seating, directing views, poetic words, meaningfully placed and thoughtful, Site specific interventions on the proposed Combined Arts Trail).

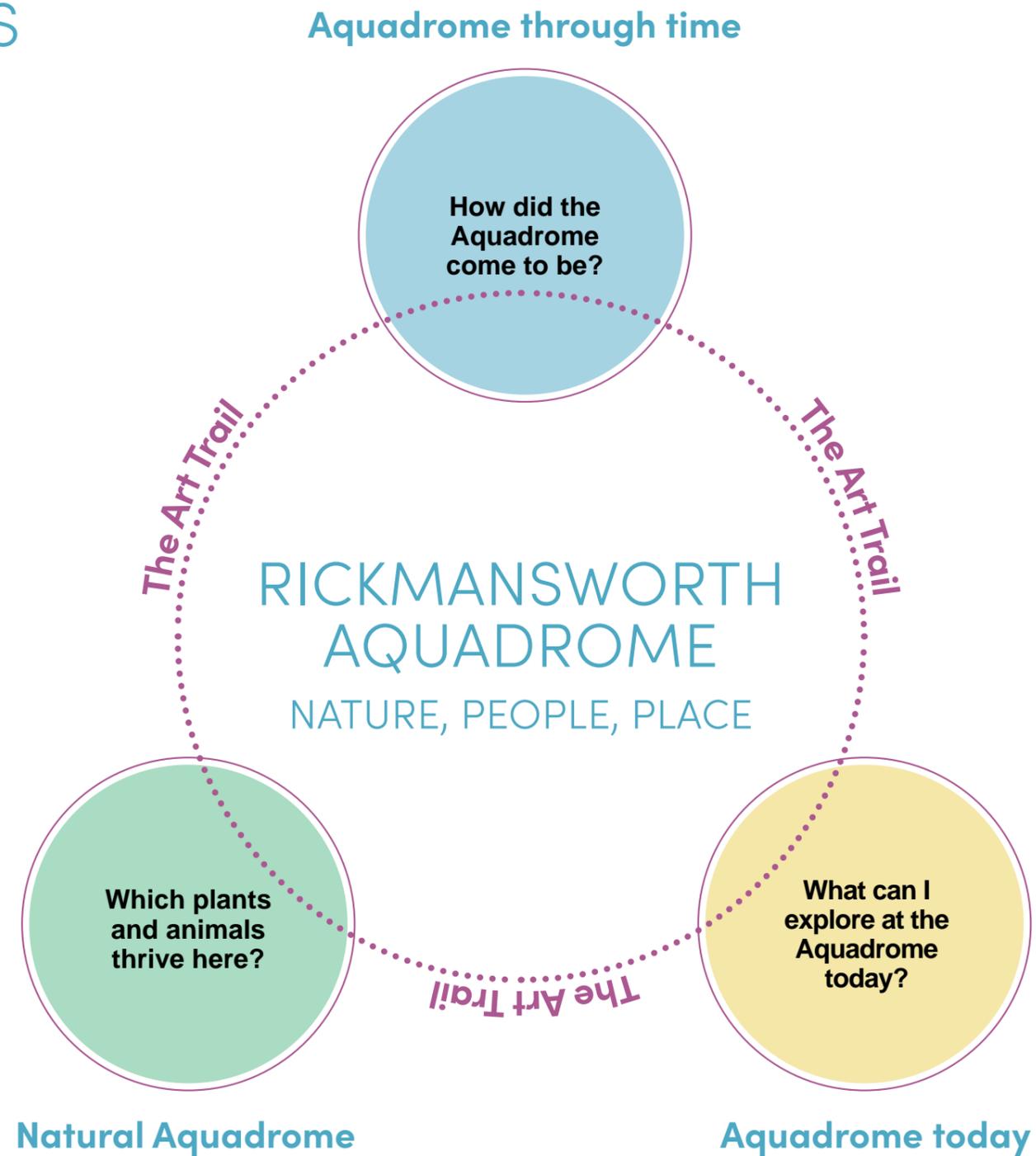


## 6.2 INTERPRETIVE LAYERS

### THEMATIC FRAMEWORK

The interpretation can be structured around three core themes that weave together the multiple stories of Rickmansworth Aquadrome. Poetry can touch all themes and explore ideas which are not tied to the Site alone. The Site specific sculptural interventions can be used to spotlight and accentuate peoples' associations with the area alongside it; to enhance the understanding of this rich mosaic landscape and wetland ecosystem in the context of the wider environment.

All themes and stories require research and stakeholder engagement to refine the messages and to identify corresponding imagery and visual archival material.



## 6.2 INTERPRETIVE LAYERS

### WILD RICKMANSWORTH

This theme explores the question: Which animals and plants thrive here?

Main message: Rickmansworth Aquadrome is a nature reserve with two lakes, a chalk river, grassland, wet woodland. Together these elements form a wild haven for diverse plants and animals, including some rare species.

#### Example foci for stories and narrative associations

- Habitats: Woodland, Wet Woodland, Shrub, Wetland, Rivers and Lakes, Grassland.
- Wet Woodland: Rare habitat, willow species, alder, associated rare species (invertebrates, fungi).
- River Colne: Internationally rare. Associated flora and fauna including water vole, otter, fish species, invertebrates.
- Pinetum: Western red cedar, Sitka spruce, Giant redwood, fungi
- Wildflower Meadow: Ragged-robin, Common valerian, butterflies, bees.
- Floodplain: Hydrology, designed to allow the floodplain to function.
- Trees: Important species including American Elm, Siberian Oak and Atlas Cedar, as well as crack willows, osiers and alders associated with the lakeside fringes.
- Birds: Wildfowl, Kingfisher, Cetti's warbler, Hobby, Red kite, Cuckoo – red list, Lapwing, Song thrush, House sparrow.
- Animals: listed, threatened, mammals, insects, Water vole, Otter, European mole, Pygmy shrew, Bat, Smooth newt, Grass snake, Common frog, *Teredus cylindricus* (Red List), leaf miner weevil - notable, Alder leaf beetle - rare, *Ceutorhynchus rapae* – notable, *Chrysopilus laetus* - scarce.
- Caretakers/ Behind-the-scenes: eDNA testing, habitat management.

#### Interpretative media options

- Habitat overview at arrival with map
- Incidental trail with tactile elements
- Woodland and Pinetum
- Habitat gateway markers
- Birdwatch/ wildlife spots
- QR code leading to online content, link to nature Sites



Batchworth Lake - Alamy



Sampling for the eDNA testing - Place Services



Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*) - Adobe



Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea*) - Andreas Trepte, CC BY-SA 2.5



*Teredus cylindricus* Red List - People's Trust for Endangered Species



Water Vole - Alamy

## 6.2 INTERPRETIVE LAYERS

### RICKMANSWORTH THROUGH TIME

This theme explores the question: How did the Aquadrome come to be?

Main message: Rickmansworth was once a gravel pit and some of its aggregate was used to build Wembley Stadium in the 1920s. The pits filled with water and people turned them into a hub for swimming, ice-skating and water skiing.

#### Example Stories

- The historic presence of Bury Farm on the Site and its relationship to the manorial property of Bury Manor.
- Gravel pits: Wembley Stadium, Colne Valley Gravel Pits, young to mature landscape created through extensive mineral extraction in the early 20th century.
- Industrial workings and asbestos, whether as part of the ramped access for the quarry pits, or as infill when quarrying ceased, and the associated constraints this has created for the Site today.
- Grand Union Canal: local industries and industrial heritage.
- The Rickmansworth narrow-boat builders W H Walker and Brothers, who were based nearby at Frogmoor Wharf on the Grand Union Canal, and whose legacy helped shape the Site and local context.
- 1920s-30s Aquadrome: Swimming lake, ice skating, camping, 1928 Aquadrome Company (a group of businessmen in London until 1941), 1941 War Department for army exercises.
- Water skiing: Jeanette Steward Wood - member of the British Water Ski Team for three World Championships from 1963 to 1967.

#### Interpretative media options

- History overview at arrival.
- Incidental trail with historic views.
- QR code leading to online content, link to nature Sites.



Gravel extraction - Three Rivers Museum



Aquadrome 1938 - Alamy



Aquadrome 1938 - Alamy



Rickmansworth aerial 1921 - Rickmansworth Water ski Club



Skating Championships 1933 - Alamy



Jeanette Steward Wood, British Water Ski Team 1965 - Alamy

## 6.3 INTERPRETIVE THEMES

### RICKMANSWORTH TODAY

This theme explores the question: What can I explore at the Aquadrome today?

Main message: Today Rickmansworth Aquadrome strikes a balance between conserving wild spaces for plants and animals, and offering the local community places to relax and enjoy themselves, as well as to seek opportunities for nature connectedness

#### Example Stories

- Orchard and old Hertfordshire varieties such as the Caroon Cherry, or apples such as the Bushey Grove, Brownlees Russet or Langley Pippin
- Activities: National Cycle Route 6
- Watersports: Water skiing, Sailing, Powerboat, Paddleboarding, Fishing, Radio Yachting, Kayak
- Rickmansworth Waterways Trust
- Health & Wellbeing
- How can I help look after the Aquadrome?

#### Interpretative media options

- Overview at arrival
- Signage highlighting club activities
- Seating and framed views
- QR code leading to online content, link to nature Sites



Walkers at Rickmansworth - Alamy



Fishing at Rickmansworth - Alamy



Rickmansworth Water Ski



Batchworth Lake



Habitat and wildlife



Batchworth Lake in the mist

# 6.4 STORY MAPPING

## TYPOLOGIES

Visitors will encounter different interpretive layers throughout their journey allowing them to engage with the Site in a variety of ways: clear gateway signage introducing the nature reserve, Site overviews at the main entrances, interpretive graphics along the main pathways and playful incidental pieces on nature trails. Story mapping is indicative to the current Site Plan and will be developed alongside the Site Masterplan design and stakeholder engagement.

- Main Site interpretation**
- Grouping main stories**
  - Rickmansworth through time
  - Natural Rickmansworth
  - Rickmansworth today
- Gateway signage – 6no, 2no major, 4no minor**
- Interpretive panel options**
  - A Batchworth Lake – birds + recreation history
  - B Bury Lake – birds + recreation history
  - C Hydrology – canal, lakes, river, ditches, floodplain
  - D Natural Habitat
  - E River Colne
  - F Wet woodland
  - G Heritage – local history, include timeline, gravel extraction
- Playful incidental trails (can be connected to the Combined Arts Trail as appropriate)**
  - Woodland Walk
  - Pinetum
  - Floodplain
  - Tree Avenue
- Functional facility and club information board - to provide location and context**



Figure 30 Site interpretation strategy plan (Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right 2026)

## 6.4 STORY MAPPING GATEWAYS

Visitors can arrive at Rickmansworth Aquadrome via six entrances. These threshold are important arrival points and set the tone for how the Aquadrome communicates with visitors. They should clearly indicate that visitors are stepping out of the urban landscape and into a nature reserve that is under protection and cared for.

**Two gateways are more likely to be used by visitors arriving for the first time:**

- Vehicle Entrance – Visitors arriving via car
- Ebury Entrance – Visitors arriving via town/ train station by foot

**Four minor gateways are mainly used by local residents but should still clearly signal the Site as a nature reserve.**

### Interpretive Elements

- 2 major gateway signs with Site map and short introduction
- 4 minor gateway signs with Site map and short introduction



Figure 31 Rossographer, CC BY-SA 2.0

## 6.4 STORY MAPPING

### VISITOR & WELCOME AREA

The main arrival area and field in front of the Visitor Hub is the social hub of the Aquadrome. It is where most people will start their visit. A clear Site Map with marked trails will allow visitors to orient themselves and plan their visit. Interpretation about the Site should be centered here allowing people to get an overview of what the Site has to offer, its history and nature. This will minimise the interpretive signage along the paths to only a few Site-specific views and stories.

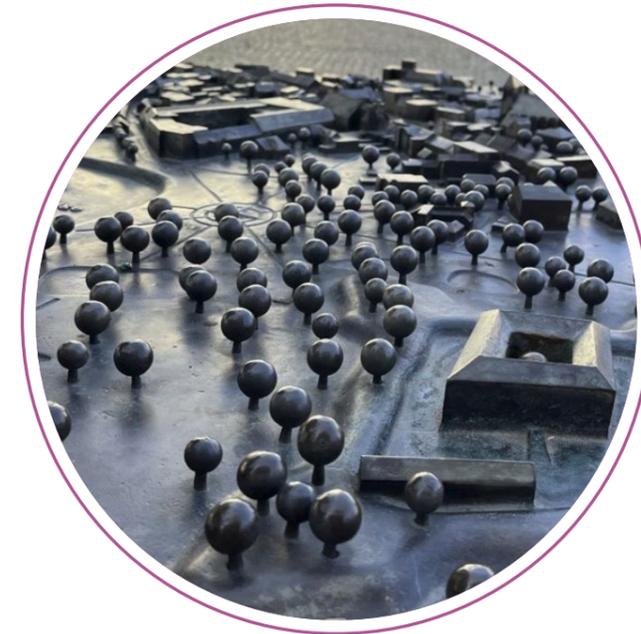
**The arrival point should introduce the three main themes:**

- Rickmansworth through time
- Natural Rickmansworth
- Rickmansworth today

**A smaller version of this hub could be repeated at the Ebury Entrance.**

**Interpretive Elements**

- Sheltered group gathering spot with seating
- Tactile/ 3D map of Site
- Wayfinding map indicating trails
- Interpretive signage covering the three main themes
- Arts Trail introduction



## 6.4 STORY MAPPING

### INTERPRETIVE SIGNAGE

A series of interpretive signage points can be dotted around the main pathways, at spots that are accessible to all visitors. These interpret specific views or interest points such as the entrances to the woodland walk and Pinetum or the history of the canal. Content that relates to the whole Site should not appear along the path, but at the main hub to keep signage to a minimum.

**These signs can also include tactile elements such as a raised outline of the River, animal or plant species.**

#### Interpretive Elements

- Interpretive text – 150 word max
- Imagery
- Tactiles



## 6.4 STORY MAPPING

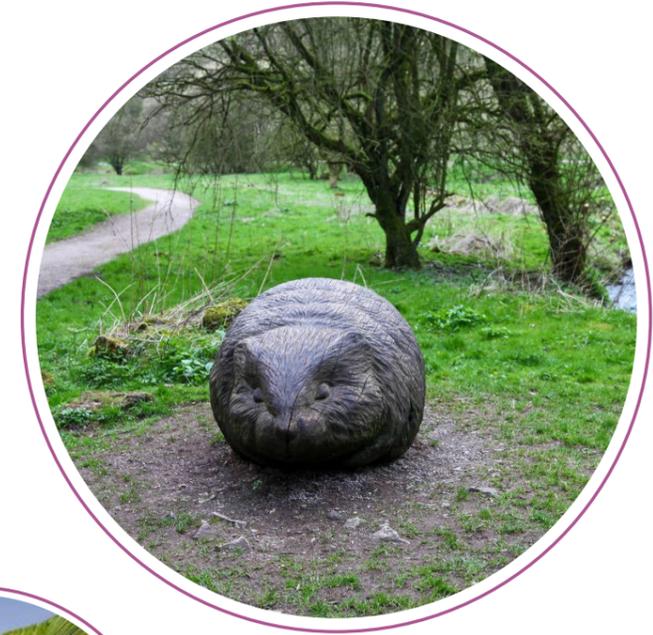
### THE ARTS TRAIL

Within the more informal, wild areas of the Aquadrome, interpretive signage should take the form of playful engagement without interpretive texts. These will relate to the Natural Rickmansworth theme and highlight all species, plant details, or mythical nature stories. They will invite visitors, young and old, to use their senses and be more present in the natural settings, including encouraging visitors to look up high into the Pinetum trees, look down to woodland soil to spot insects, touch moss or bark, smell wildflowers, or listen to bird songs.

**There is an opportunity to interweave the Arts Trail components to link and thread words, nature, setting and routes.**

#### Interpretive Elements

- Supersised version of plant details, or tiny insects
- Tactiles
- Wood carving of animal species
- Etched words into wooden/ stone structures
- Words that only can be seen after the rain
- Stepping stones
- Natural dens and resting points
- Framed views
- Simple natural seating for classroom activities
- All features will be accessible as per access audit



Lie down and listen to amplified sounds of nature

Sheltered areas to gather

Sound cones for people to play music, sit and socialise

Figure 32 Sketch example of optional features in Natural Play and Discovery Zone

## 6.4 STORY MAPPING

### THE ARTS TRAIL

The Arts Trail will connect with events and activities, and create immersive cultural experiences.

The Arts Trails should be developed by local community groups in collaboration with local writers and be integrated into the activity plan. They could include physical manifestation highlighting certain words or phrases in sculptural form.

#### Thematic Integration

- Seasonal events can align with the themes of local festivals, heritage days or significant historical events/anniversaries for the Site.

#### Interactive Activities

- Guided walks: Poetry readings along the trail during community events can be organised
- Workshops: Creative and mindful writing or spoken word workshops can be hosted along key points of the trail / in the hub.
- Family Activities: Activities such as scavenger hunts can be organised, wherein participants find lines of poems or use them as interpretive clues, etc.

#### Partnerships

- Local artists and schools could be invited to contribute poems or artwork for the trail.
- Cultural institutions such as local museums or heritage Sites could be partnered with for joint programming.

#### Digital Engagement

- QR codes could be added to each stop, linking to audio recordings, videos or event calendars.
- Social media engagement could be stimulated by encouraging visitors to share photos or their own poetry inspired by the Site using event hashtags.



## 6.5 ART & SCULPTURE

### INITIAL IDEAS

A series of Site-specific outdoor art installations will celebrate Rickmansworth Aquadrome's history and natural environment through their form. These art works will be key features of the Arts Trail to ensure that they are interwoven into the creative fabric of the Site and do not appear as isolated or unrelated installations.

They will be thoughtfully placed along natural pathways and linked by a separate art trail that encourages visitors to experience the Aquadrome from new perspectives.

Ideally, the displays will rotate based on a regular basis inspired by seasonality, themes and events.



Hannah Peschar Sculpture Gardens in Surrey



Forest of Dean, Sculpture Trail

Grizedale Forest sculpture - CC BY-SA 2.0



Cotswold Sculpture Park

Figure 33 Precedent examples of external art and sculpture

## 6.5 ART AND SCULPTURE



### 1. Cultivate Local Identity and Sense of Place

Celebrate the distinctive cultural, historical, and ecological character of the Rickmansworth Aquadrome. Encourage public artworks that interpret the Site's rich waterways heritage, its legacy of gravel extraction, and its contemporary role as a cherished recreational landscape.

### 2. Foster Community Co-Creation

Engage local residents, schools, user groups, and community organisations through participatory design workshops, creative walks, hands-on making sessions, and temporary activations. Encourage a platform for dialogue and shared discovery.

### 3. Embed Art in Everyday Experience

Ensure public art is not limited to standalone installations but woven seamlessly through trails, lakeside edges, play areas, and gathering spaces, enriching daily experiences and creating moments of surprise, curiosity, and connection across the Site.

### 4. Integrate Art with Ecology and Sustainability

Encourage Site-specific artworks that respond to the Aquadrome's natural systems, its lakes, wetlands, woodland habitats, wildlife corridors, and microclimates. Promote sustainable materials, low-impact fabrication methods, and long-term stewardship and maintenance practices.

## 6.6 TAGLINE IDEAS

### REINFORCING THE BRAND

As we advance the placemaking process, a targeted sub-brand line can act as a bridge between the park's current identity and its future potential. By expressing the Aquadrome's emerging narrative, this secondary brand will help reshape how people view the Aquadrome and begin to influence behaviors and patterns of use ahead of full implementation and over time.



A rare wet woodland

Nature. People. Place

Nature. People. Together

For connection, culture, and the outdoors

Shared space, shared stories

Your wild nature reserve

## 6.7 DESIGN PRINCIPLES

### EMBED NOT ADD

To build on the ethos of the Aquadrome being a sustainable community hub, the design principles for storytelling should be to engrave and emboss into the material palette, instead of adding additional graphic panels the production will be integrated. This also builds on durability, lifespan and longevity of the storytelling interventions.





7

NEXT STEPS

## 7.1 NEXT STEPS

### Next steps include:

- Refine the concept masterplan in coordination with ecology and hydrology, aligning proposals with technical requirements and Site flood dynamics.
- Prepare initial sketch designs for each key area/place to test character, access and use (plans, quick visuals and outline sections).
- Engage on the emerging ideas with the Steering Group and public user groups to gather insight and kick-start co-design for the next iteration.
- Define the interpretive trails (Combined Art Trail) covering route, touchpoints, content brief and delivery approach.





8

APPENDIX

# 8.1 APPENDIX 1

The Rickmansworth Aquadrome Landscape and Environmental Design project is being delivered with funding and support from the National Lottery Heritage Fund. National Lottery have four key pillars or investment principles which they seek to deliver as part of their grant funding, and which have shaped the approach to all aspects of this project<sup>1</sup>. The four pillars are:

**Saving heritage:**

- Conserving and valuing heritage now and for the future: A key purpose of the grant funding is to ensure that heritage remains accessible, relevant, sustainable and valued.

**Protecting the environment:**

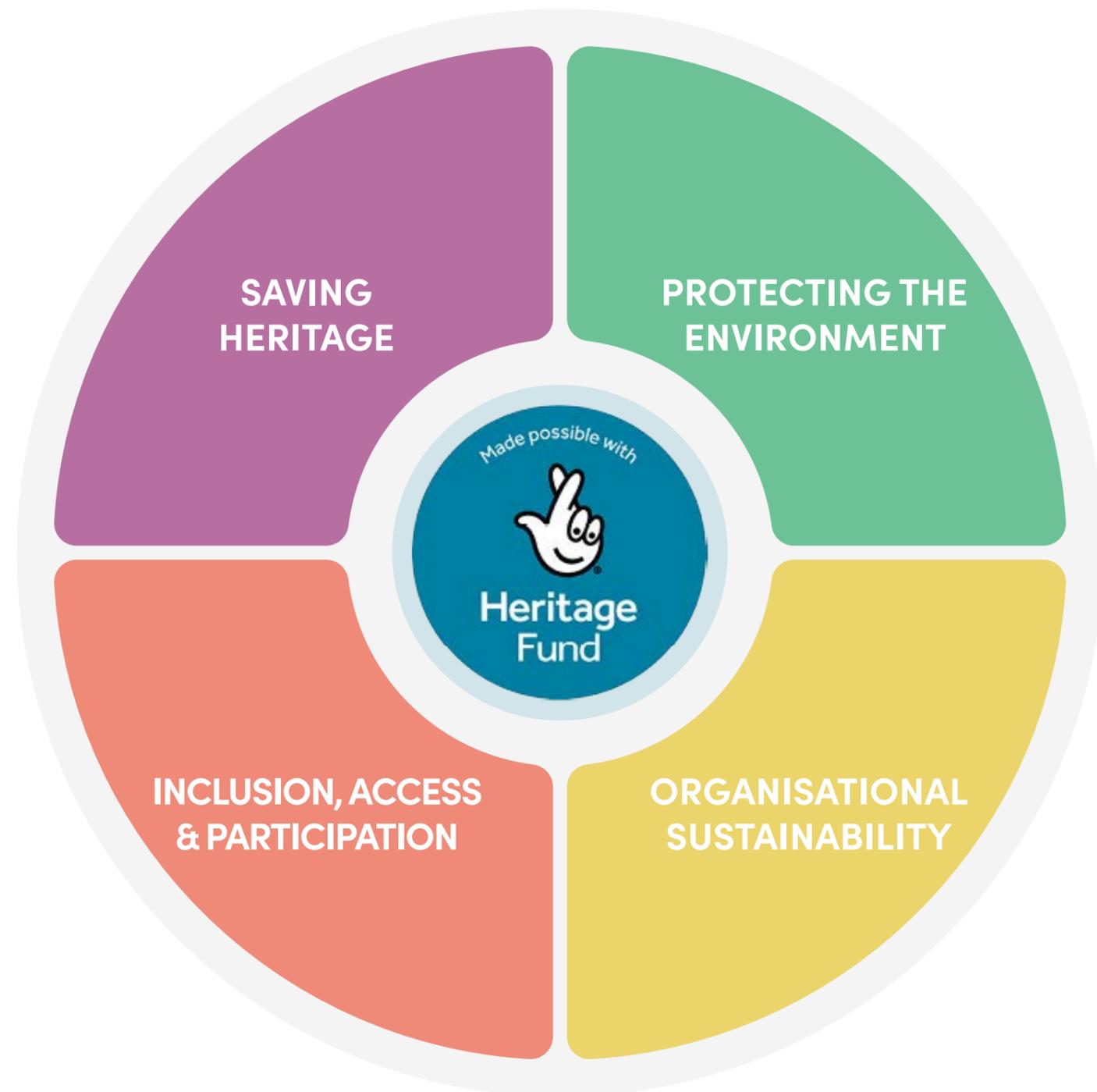
- Supporting nature recovery and environmental sustainability: The National Lottery seeks to support natural heritage and environmentally sustainable projects which help the UK meet its nature recovery targets and mitigate the impact of climate change on heritage.

**Inclusion, access and participation:**

- Supporting greater inclusion, access, diversity and participation in heritage: National Lottery supports organisations in ensuring that, irrespective of background or personal circumstance, everyone has opportunities to learn, develop new skills and explore heritage.

**Organisational sustainability:**

- Strengthening heritage to be adaptive and financially resilient, contributing to communities and economies: National Lottery supports organisations with capacity building and skills development to ensure sound long-term futures and encourage new heritage investment to the benefit of communities and economies.





**Haley  
Sharpe**

