



Three Rivers District Council

Rickmansworth Aquadrome

Second Steering Group Workshop: Record Report

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RSK General Notes

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1 Introduction

This short report sets out the findings from the second workshop with the Rickmansworth Aquadrome Landscape and Environmental Design Project Steering Group, held at Rickmansworth Golf Club on 11th March 2026. The workshop formed part of a wider project update meeting hosted by Charlotte Gomes, Jo Copley and Jess Hodges of Three Rivers District Council. The workshop was facilitated by Andrew Tempany and Jane Fortescue of RSK and Beth Green of Haley Sharpe.

The workshop took the form of an update presentation about the project by RSK. This was followed by an exercise focused on review of the current draft masterplan and emerging designs plus one on interpretive design, benchmarking and narratives for on site interpretation.

The key messages from the above two exercises are summarised overleaf. The materials presented in the workshop are shown at Appendix 1 and Appendix 2.

2 Exercise 1: Emerging designs review

2.1 Key messages

These are summarised below in relation to the four boards which were exhibited around the room of the venue, and which addressed: 1) scene setting/baseline; 2) the masterplan; 3) detail areas for the formal visitor spaces; and 4) detail areas for the wild spaces on site.

1. Scene setting/baseline:

- **Access to nature/nature connectedness:** The need to design habitats to bring wildlife to viewpoints experienced and enjoyed by visitors was noted, to enable people to experience nature and to learn more about it through appropriate and well-designed interpretation. The need to make nature trails accessible to visitors of all mobilities and to explain key nature features for young people, in ways which engage them, was also noted.
- **Space for nature:** The need to identify and protect sensitive habitats, both for their own sake and from disturbance/damage, was noted, along with the need for appropriate and sensitively designed physical barriers where necessary.
- **Visitor experience, behaviour and interpretation:** It was felt the point about the site being a Local Nature Reserve (LNR) rather than a park was very important and should be strongly made at the site entrance.
- **Visitor tension/user group conflict:** It was questioned whether nature, people and place were equal priorities. The potential tension between management for biodiversity and the presence of activities such as water skiing was noted.
- **Implementation:** A query was noted around how nature would be protected during the build of the project during the Delivery phase.
- **Operations:** The point was raised about the need to manage vehicular access for the maintenance teams and to the sailing club.

2. Masterplan

- **Design inputs, complementary initiatives and data:** The Walk Wheel Cycle Trust (Sustrans) noted that they have a concept design for the aquadrome to towpath link as part of the wider NCN6 improvements. Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust (HMWT) referred to their Wetland Assessment of the Colne Valley in the context of landscape scale habitat recommendations.
- **Visitor welcome and information; visitor behaviour:** The need for consistency of approach to all gateways and entrance points to the site was noted, as was the need to stress that the site is far more than a greenspace, also being a nature reserve and habitat of significance. General comment was made about education opportunities although nothing specific was added in terms of detail.
- **Accessibility:** The desire for improvements to pedestrian access along the Grand Union Canal towpath was noted, as was a desire for walking access along the Riverside Drive side of the river, although these are both outside the remit of the

project. An aspiration was noted to open up the glade in the south-eastern part of the site.

- **Maintenance liabilities:** Significant maintenance liabilities and eventual replacement costs were noted in relation to boardwalks, and suggestions were made as to accessible surfaces with much lower maintenance costs, such as hoggin.
- **Nature-based design interventions:** Positive responses were received in relation to the proposed restoration of sections of the River Colne and to the proposed new natural play area on the southern side of the site between the café lawn and the avenue. The Pinetum and its rationale were queried.
- **User conflicts:** Issues were noted regarding dogs off leads and how triggering this can potentially be for neurodivergent children including those with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Tensions were also noted regarding spaces for events on site, as this is also a somewhat divisive issue.

3. Detail areas for the formal visitor spaces

- **The Meadow:** Shared use rather than segregation was advocated by one participant for cycle and pedestrian paths. A question was raised as to whether the design approach for the Meadow was over engineered, without specific reference as to how.
- **Bury Point – contemplative seating:** This drew mixed responses. Some participants felt that the basket weave coracle inspired seat was perfect and that the ideas were attractive, others disliked it and likened it to a mini bomb shelter. A general comment was also raised in favour of naturalistic surfacing as far as possible, rather than the current tarmac.
- **Natural play and discovery zone:** Very positive responses were received to the proposed interventions here.
- **Accessibility and resilience of paths including raised paths:** Concerns were raised about longevity and maintenance, and some disliked the use of composite and plastic products.
- **People:** The need to identify key interpretation themes for the site and to design these into access proposals from the outset, was noted. The principle of interpretation being designed for the audience and for those with short attention spans was also noted, with brief and concise messaging of key points.
- **Dog enrichment area:** There was support for controlling access for dogs and for providing alternative exercise provision for them. One participant made the point that many nature reserves are entirely dog free and that having dogs on leads would be a reasonable request.

4. Detail areas for the wild spaces

- **Pinetum:** It was felt desirable to explain more about the natural qualities of this space, its flora, fauna and biodiversity, via interpretation, or to encourage people to look up. Some preferred to keep it closed to visitors to enable nature to thrive. The need to consider long term viability of visitor infrastructure such as boardwalks was also noted, as were whether they are appropriate to place, and how and whether they would help people experience nature, as well as their safety (concerns about potential trips and falls). Stepping stones to nature and creating a careful balance between key

viewpoints and creating refuges for nature, as well as avoiding aspects which could clutter the Pinetum and detract from the special qualities it has.

- **Woodland Walk:** Positive responses were received to the plans to enhance accessibility, as long as walkways are low key.
- **Signage and wayfinding:** Simple, subtle way marking of a few satisfying routes was highlighted as a principle, as was the benefit picking interpretive themes unique to the Aquadrome and its story to reinforce its genuine USP. Wayfinding could also be used to refer to mindful areas of quiet reflection and contemplation.

3 Exercise 2: Interpretive themes, designs and benchmarking

3.1 Key messages

General feedback from stakeholders regarding interpretation

- Site is seen as a nature reserve first and this function should take priority.
- Accessibility measures should be implemented but should not destroy habitats or compromise our responsibility to nature.

Feedback in response to designs/benchmarking

- A preference for shallower/flatter tactiles.
- Concerns were raised about safety of signage - risks of climbing children/falls, etc.
- Mixed feedback about some more complex benchmarking examples, there is a desire for creative interpretation, but an overwhelming concern about durability, safety and maintenance of any interpretation on the site.
- Preference was expressed to keep colour of signage to a minimum.
- Not too much text – participants felt that interpretation should be kept to 50 words maximum.
- Wariness around the idea of having 'too much clutter' on the site.
- Pudding stone (effect) was popular.
- Simple signage was preferred over anything too 'sculptural/architectural'.
- Participants feel that the landscape/site can do the talking for itself.



