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Project Profile

Sefton Park Restoration, Liverpool: Ecological Survey & Assessment

Background

Sefton Park is an example of an early municipal park, and covers approximately 95 hectares. It is designated by Historic England as Grade I Parkland in the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens. Created in the 19th century on agricultural land, it includes large tracts of grassland with trees and woodland compartments surrounding a series of lakes. Parts of the park are also designated as a County Wildlife Site in recognition of the importance of the range and quality of habitats present and their potential to support wildlife. Sefton Park is situated to the south of Liverpool city centre and within 1 km of Mersey Estuary Special Protection Area (SPA), Ramsar and Site of Scientific Interest (SSSI).

The Park was acquired by Liverpool City Council in 1872. Messrs. Hornblower and Edward Andre developed the design for the Park in 1866 and it was opened in 1872. Still owned by Liverpool City Council, it is an important location for recreational, sporting and entertainment events in the city.

The key to the design of the park lies in the placement of the tree groups and their relationship with the network of circular and elliptical paths and drives. The principal feature of the Park is the central spine of lakes, streams and cascades. In addition to the landscape quality of the Park, there has been growing recognition of its role in providing habitats for wildlife within an otherwise dense urban area.

Liverpool City Council was awarded almost £5 million of Heritage Lottery Funding (HLF) under the Urban Parks Programme to restore and improve the park. The project included a park ranger base and educational centre, refurbishment of the Eros Fountain (and all other statues and fountains), installation of a new play area, and restoration of footpaths.

BSG Ecology's Role in the Project

As part of the restoration proposals, BSG Ecology was commissioned through LDA Design to assess the ecological value of the parkland and identify opportunities for ecological enhancement.

BSG Ecology liaised with a wide range of organisations, including Lancashire Wildlife Trust and Natural England, as well as local bat, badger, amphibian, reptile and bird groups, local naturalists and the Friends of Sefton Park.

The primary aim of our work was to collate all existing ecological information relating to the Park, identify gaps in knowledge and establish the need for any additional ecological surveys.

On completion of the consultation process we produced a report, which collated existing ecological data for the Park and provided recommendations for further ecological survey work, to be carried out at an appropriate time of year. This work informed the successful Stage 1 HLF application.

The following surveys were recommended at Stage 1 to provide additional ecological information to ensure that the nature conservation value of the Park was fully understood and inform the detailed restoration proposals for the parkland. They were subsequently completed as part of the Stage 2 HLF application.

- A winter tree survey to identify trees that have the potential to support roosting bats.
- A bat survey during the spring and summer months to identify roost sites, evidence of feeding areas and important flight routes within the Park.
- A breeding bird survey focusing on the woodland/tree species and future habitat management.
- A general invertebrate assessment of the Park, including the deadwood and freshwater habitats.
- Water vole survey of the waterbodies.
- A survey for amphibians of the waterbodies within the Park.
- A vegetation survey of the Park to determine any areas where a change in the cutting regime would be beneficial and where creation of wildflower areas would be appropriate.

Outcome

The gathering of historical information and the completion of a variety of ecological surveys at the Park provided us with a high quality baseline dataset. This enabled us to work closely with the historic landscape specialists to shape the proposals for the Park's restoration. This enabled the protection of existing areas and features of biodiversity interest and allowed the project team to maximise the future value of the parkland to wildlife through the creation of new habitats and changes in site management practices.