

Planning, Design, and Access Statement

Wildlife Pond at Silvercombe (Retrospective)

Reference: PP-12349232

Introduction

This retrospective planning application is for a small shallow wildlife pond at Silvercombe, a residential dwelling located at Bagshot Road and Pennypot Lane, Chobham. The site lies within the Green Belt.

The pond is located on the South field of the property. The Silvercombe field is roughly rectangular in shape, approximately 85m x 60m (~1.2 acres). The field is surrounded by hedgerows, and is predominantly grassland (apart from some garden beds along the North side).

The pond is located toward the Southeast corner of the field. It is approximately 9 meters by 9 meters (with irregular shape), with a maximum depth of 1 meter.

The pond was built according to guidelines suggested by the Freshwater Habitats Trust (<https://freshwaterhabitats.org.uk/>), and adheres to all known development restrictions for the Green Belt.

The primary intent is to provide a pristine freshwater habitat for native wildlife, addressing the critical shortage of unpolluted ponds in the UK, while also enhancing the natural beauty of the Green Belt for local residents. The pond also provides some pragmatic improvements for the surrounding area, as a secondary benefit.

Planning and Design

During the winter wet season of 2022-23, several inches of standing rain water accumulated over the Southeast quadrant of the Silvercombe field. Aerial photographs from previous years showed that this has happened previously (please refer to photographs from 2020 and 2021, courtesy of Alex Vero).

A shallow (1m) pond was dug at the lowest point of the rain water accumulation, thereby reducing the surrounding wet area, while also providing a useful freshwater resource for wildlife. Under the surface, the pond contains shallower shelves (e.g. 0.5m), and gently tapered gradients, providing a variety of ecological niches preferred by different species of flora and fauna.

The spoil dug from the pond was used to build up the surrounding area, especially along the South fenceline, where a new diverse mixed hedge has been planted. A low berm was added along the South edge of the pond, to further prevent the spread of standing water during the wet season.

There is a public right-of-way footpath on the South side of the fence, on the land owned by the Old Vicarage. Thus, the pond and hedge construction has the added benefit of protecting the public footpath from excess standing water.

Initially, a slightly raised path made of porous material was built around the North and West edge of the pond. However, the path has since been removed, and that area will return to natural grassland.

A variety of natural habitats in and around the pond can foster a wide range of birds, insects, and other native species. The pond complements the mixed (double-row) hedge, which will provide food and shelter for many small birds, bees, and other local species. Nature itself will be the primary driver as the wildlife pond develops, as recommended by the Freshwater Habitat Trust guidance in their Million Ponds UK initiative. No further curation from the land owners is required, except to ensure that the pond remains unpolluted and healthy.

Direct benefits of the Silvercombe pond for birds and other fauna have already been observed during the drought conditions that followed (more than two months without rain during May through July of 2023). The pond has had frequent visits from (at least) three Canada geese, two Egyptian geese, three mallard ducks, a nearby nesting pair of ravens, and numerous smaller birds (too many to list). The pond has quickly been colonized by various species of water beetles, pond skaters, dragonflies, and other aquatic insects.

Several people passing by on the public footpath have expressed very positive comments about the pond, and it will naturally become more diverse and more beautiful over time.

Vehicle Access and Parking

The pond has no impact on traffic or parking, as there are no nearby roads (Pennypot Lane is approximately 80 meters to the West). The Silvercombe field can be accessed from a private drive off of Pennypot Lane, which has a gate that is kept locked.

The pond is on private land, with no public access. The pond can be seen by people on the footpath, but not interacted with (unless they trespass). The small gate on the South fence is permanently locked, and has not been used for more than ten years. As it grows in, the newly planted mixed hedge inside the fence will make entry onto the field more difficult. Thus, the pond provides a "look, but don't touch" opportunity to view nature.

Landscaping and Trees

There are no trees on the Silvercombe field near the pond. There are two trees on the adjacent plot, about 20 meters from the pond, but they are unaffected, and no roots were disturbed during construction.

The removed spoil appears to be rich in blue clay, which is perfect for a natural pond basin. The only source of water is rain water. The water level of the pond gradually decreased during three summer months with very little rain, reaching about 0.3 meters deep, but did not dry out completely.

Flood Risk

The development is located outside of the flood zone, so no flood risk assessment should be necessary. In fact, the pond can only function to buffer such risks.

Biodiversity and Conservation -- Background on Freshwater Habitats

The recent Sir David Attenborough documentary series "**Wild Isles**" (especially Episode 4, "Freshwater") helped raise public awareness of the dire condition of freshwater habitats in the UK. About 95 percent of freshwater streams, lakes, and ponds are now

polluted, adversely affecting the flora and fauna that depend on those habitats to survive.

Moreover, once they are polluted, it is extremely difficult to restore a freshwater habitat back to its original healthy state. With the Million Ponds initiative, the Freshwater Habitat Trust estimates that half a million new ponds are needed in the UK to provide a refuge for the wildlife that is now at risk.

Wildlife pond creation is a key component in the preservation and recovery of natural environments, and is therefore aligned with government policies at both the local and national level.

Adding ponds is consistent with the aims of the **Surrey Nature Partnership** (<https://surreynaturepartnership.org/>), and the **Local Nature Recovery Strategy** (<https://www.surreycc.gov.uk/land-planning-and-development/local-nature-recovery-strategy-lnrs>).

The UK national guidelines for natural environment and biodiversity (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/natural-environment#biodiversity>) states:

The National Planning Policy Framework encourages net gains for biodiversity to be sought through planning policies and decisions. Biodiversity net gain delivers measurable improvements for biodiversity by creating or enhancing habitats in association with development. Biodiversity net gain can be achieved on-site, off-site or through a combination of on-site and off-site measures. It may help local authorities to meet their duty under section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006.

[Reference ID 8-022-20190721, Revision date 2019-07-21, Paragraph 022]

The section of the **National Planning Policy Framework** for the Green Belt (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-planning-policy-framework/13-protecting-green-belt-land>) further adds:

13. Protecting Green Belt land

145. Once Green Belts have been defined, local planning authorities should plan positively to enhance their beneficial use, such as looking for opportunities to provide access; to provide opportunities for outdoor sport and recreation; to retain and enhance landscapes, visual amenity and biodiversity; or to improve damaged and derelict land.

[Chapter 13, Paragraph 145]

While there is no guarantee that a small wildlife pond will increase biodiversity in the surrounding area, there can be no doubt that it is an important step in the right direction.

Conclusion

We fully support the restrictions on development in the Green Belt, which preserve and enhance the natural setting of the Surrey countryside.

The shallow pond at Silvercombe will provide a significant boon to native species, and to local residents strolling on the nearby public footpath. The pond will likely become a highlight for the observation of nature in the coming years.

The creation of new wildlife ponds is an essential goal for nature preservation groups in the UK, while being entirely consistent with policies and initiatives at the national and local levels of government.

I would be happy to provide further information or clarifications if needed. Thank you for your consideration.

Dr. Darse Billings.