



# Crayford Marshes

A vision 2023









# Wildlife and Heritage

## A future for Crayford Marshes

Crayford Marshes is a much-loved wildlife and heritage-rich site, located in the Green Belt on the Thames Gateway at the outer edge of south-east London. It forms part of an ecological network connecting Rainham Marshes and Dartford Marshes creating sanctuary for wildlife and people. This fabulous green space with big open skies offers tranquility within an ever growing and congested area.

Crayford Marshes is divided into two by the Thames Road which creates an inner and outer location. The inner marshes include Thames Road Wetland, the River Wansunt (paralleling the Cray) and the Stanham River and are home to many rare species including Marsh Sow-thistle, Harvest Mouse and Water Vole. Peregrine, Marsh Harrier and Red Kite can be observed above. Across the Thames Road a walk following the London Loop pathway to the outer marshes will take you past the historic Howbury Moat, which was owned by the half brother of William the Conqueror in the 11th Century AD and the Tithe Barn which dates from the 1600's. Here Kingfishers perch by the moat and Skylark own the skies singing their song of sunshine. Corn Bunting can be heard making their calls that sound like jangling keys. Even the ancient Willow trees viewed over the north of the fence, believed to be around 300 years old, offer protection to a variety of wildlife including Little Owl and Buzzard. Unsurprisingly this marshland north to the River Thames is a Site of Metropolitan Importance for Nature Conservation (SMINC) which means that it is one of the very best wildlife sites in the whole of the capital; it supports one of a few areas of flood-plain grazing marsh – a Priority Habitat – remaining in Greater London.

Crayford Marshes is a key part of the Thames Estuary South Important Invertebrate Area, with important populations of our most threatened bumblebee, the Shrill Carder Bee (*Bombus sylvarum*) as well as Brown-banded Carder Bee (*Bombus humilis*) and Phoenix Fly (*Dorycera graminum*) both priority species. Crayford Marshes places an important role in supporting populations of invertebrates in Greater London.

World War Two anti-aircraft gun sites and pillboxes, which can be seen by the public footpath, are a reminder of Crayford Marshes' history. Onwards towards the River Thames and the England Coastal Pathway reveals salt marsh, which is one of the most effective weapons in our fight against climate change. They act as giant carbon sinks which lock away carbon while also protecting us from flooding. Waders such as Avocet, Redshank and Oystercatcher are attracted to the salt marsh to feed and at low tide you may also observe a Common or Grey Seal.

We want to see a future for Crayford Marshes that secures and protects all of its precious wildlife, habitat, history and green space for the local community. The Friends of Crayford Marshes community group has been gathering local opinions



Water Vole © Donna Zimmer



White-letter Hairstreak © Canva



Little Owl © Wayne Howes

Tithe Barn and Howbury Moat © Donna Zimmer



Harvest Mouse © Donna Zimmer

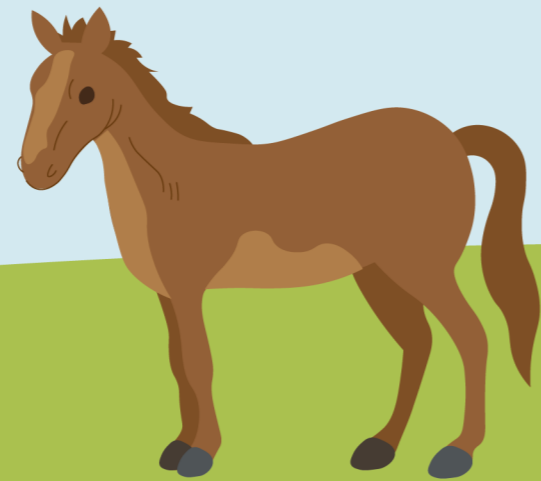


Redshank © Donna Zimmer

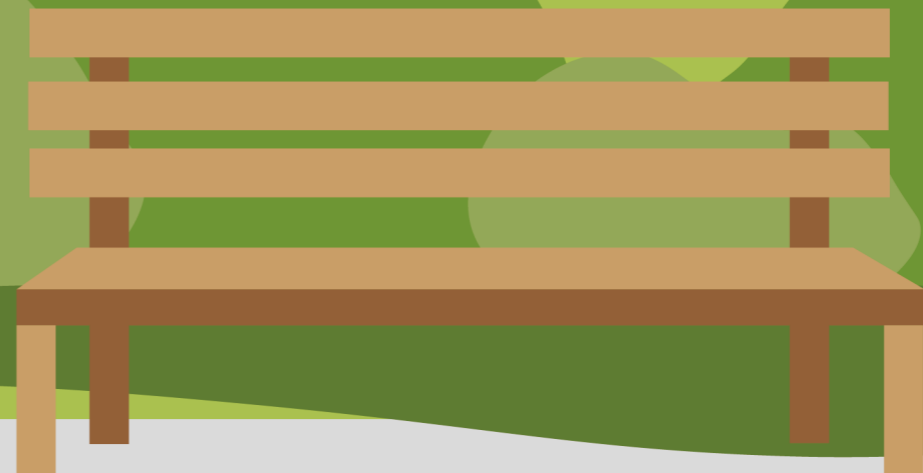


Shrill Carder Bee © Karen Sutton





Information Board  
Grade 1 SINC  
Key Breeding Ground for  
Corn Bunting and Skylark  
Can you spot them?



- Thames Rd Wetland
- Dartford Marshes via Bridge
- England Coastal Path





94%

of people said Crayford Marshes was either 'very important' or 'somewhat important', for their physical or mental well-being.

96%

of people would like to see dedicated areas focusing on the conservation of breeding grounds for rare and red-listed species.



Photography © Dominica Piatek

A survey of the local community demonstrated that Crayford Marshes is clearly popular with over 94% of people saying they had visited before, 39% visit to observe wildlife, 29% enjoy walking while 15% go there to take photographs, 7% walk their dogs, 5% cycle and 2% enjoy sailing. This clearly shows the marshes' valuable role as somewhere to enjoy open space, connect with nature and to exercise outdoors. No wonder over 93% of people felt Crayford Marshes was either very important or somewhat important for their physical or mental well-being! Research shows that time in nature-rich landscapes helps people to be happier and healthier.

People care about Crayford Marshes. 75% of respondents were aware of past and current threats to the Green Belt and they want to see the whole site protected from development, 96% of people would like to see dedicated areas focusing on the conservation of rare and declining species such as Corn Bunting and Skylark, which breed on the Site of Borough Importance (Grade I) for Nature Conservation which is at most risk from development. Respondents wanted to see improvements to the site that would benefit wildlife and suggested green bridges to re-connect the outer and inner Crayford Marshes plus the Dartford Marshes for both people and wildlife. People also want to find a solution to fly-tipping along Wallhouse Road, and discourage motor bikes by finding another location suitable for this recreation.

What are people saying?



## Protection & Improvements



# Supporting Nature & People

Visitors to Crayford Marshes stated that they belong to over 20 different groups, from local history and wildlife conservation organisations to Walking For Health and other recreational and well-being groups. Although 95% of respondents said they live within Bexley Borough, the other 5% travelled to Crayford Marshes from all over London as well as Sevenoaks & Hastings. It is clear that Crayford Marshes is already a place of destination and so should remain a publicly accessible green space managed for wildlife, with visitor and local community enjoyment and well-being at its heart.

Over 13% of respondents thought no facilities were needed at Crayford Marshes, over 16% would like to see a hide for birdwatching, 16% would welcome toilet facilities. Over 15% would like to see an information and educational centre with 12% requesting a cafe. Interestingly, over 91% of respondents thought it was either very important or somewhat important to involve local youth organisations in developing ideas for the future of Crayford Marshes, however only just over 9% of respondents who completed this survey were 18-30 years old. An educational visitor space would be an excellent way to engage with and encourage young people and local schools to visit and learn about Crayford Marshes' history and rare wildlife on their doorstep.



Members of Erith Yacht Club © Jeremy Michell



Cyclists and families enjoying the London Loop

Common Seal © Donna Zimmer

RSPB Bexley Wetland Centre © Donna Zimmer

Thames 21 Volunteers at Thames Road Wetlands

Sea Scouts © David Leal



# Improved Access

Considering how many people visit Crayford Marshes to walk and enjoy its open space, it is unsurprising that respondents were also keen to see information and signage across the site to help them navigate and understand the marshes. There is a clear desire for educational literature from a wildlife and historical point of view with over 27% of respondents saying they would like to see educational display boards, 24% would like to see directional signs at intermittent points and 11% requesting a mobile location app, 35% would like to see all the above.

Although 88% of respondents indicated that they had no problem with accessing and moving around Crayford Marshes, over 10% commented that some of the uneven footpaths made it difficult to walk on and this also made it unsuitable for wheelchair users. It would be beneficial to all to make the footpaths accessible while of course being careful not to disturb or damage the hedgerows and wildlife habitat. If we are successful in progressing this vision towards implementation, then a critical part of the scheme would be initiating an inclusive and collaborative design process at the outset to ensure local communities' needs and concerns are best accommodated in how the Marshes will be accessed and managed in the future





# How can I help?

Our vision is just that - a vision. To keep the Crayford Marshes safe for people and nature we need to work with local partners and decision-makers. Local people can show their support for the campaign by raising awareness through their friends and networks, and contacting their councillors and MP, asking them to discuss how we can save our fabulous Green Belt site.

Please share this vision with others in your community and together let's work to save Crayford Marshes for people and nature for future generations.



**Friends of Crayford Marshes**



**@MarshesCrayford**



Oystercatchers



Bearded Reedling



Heron with Grass Snake



Water Vole



Marsh Sow Thistle



This vision has been created by a partnership of London Wildlife Trust, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), Campaign for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE London and Kent branches), Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust, Buglife, Thames 21 and Friends of Crayford Marshes.



### Designation Abbreviations

The whole of the open land of both the inner and outer Crayford Marshes is designated as being a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation. The northern part of the outer marshes is a Site of Metropolitan Importance for Nature Conservation (SMINC, site M107) whilst the inner marshes, including Thames Road Wetland, fall within the 'River Cray' SMINC (site M106). SMINCs are the very best wildlife sites in London. The former landfill area on the southern part of the outer marshes has been upgraded to a Site of Borough (Grade I) Importance for Nature Conservation, demonstrating its value within Bexley.

### KEY

	Footpaths		Harvest Mouse		Redshank
	Green Belt		Kingfisher		Marsh land
	Grade 1 SINC		Marsh Sow-thistle		Skylark
	SINC		Corn Bunting		Woodland
	Viewpoints		Water Vole		Marsh Frog
	Reedbed		White-letter Hairstreak		Grey Heron
	Open Water		Common Seal		Shrubbery



- LANDMARKS ON SITE**
- ① Erith Yacht Club
  - ② Submerged Forest
  - ③ Radar Tower
  - ④ Dartford Creek Barrier
  - ⑤ WW2 Battery
  - ⑥ Tithe Barn & Moat
  - ⑦ Ancient Trees
  - ⑧ Hedgerow
  - ⑨ Radar Tower
  - ⑩ Old Flour Mill
  - ⑪ Pill Boxes
  - ⑫ Dartford Creek Barrier
  - ⑬ Model Aeroplane Club
  - ⑭ Long Reach Tavern (former site)
  - ⑮ Joyce Green Tramway