

CPO THE OLD STABLES BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE

Save Grove Park's Willow Tree Wetlands

from Feb 2024 developer assault



- **Despite the environmental protections and the absence of permission to clear the area, the retail park developer that owns the Willow Tree Wetlands has used heavy machinery to destroy trees, plants and habitats.**
- The site is Northbrook Park, just off Baring Road, & can be accessed via Ronver Road. It is a priority habitat for rare species and a natural flood defence system.
- The developers appear intent on degrading the land's biodiversity to pave the way for future planning applications following a previous unsuccessful application.
- The developers are destroying the nature and wildlife before an upcoming inspection to decide on the environmental protections that should be applied to the site.
- All trees on the site that were there in 2012 are protected by law through a site-wide TPO. The destruction taking place right now clearly violates these legal protections.

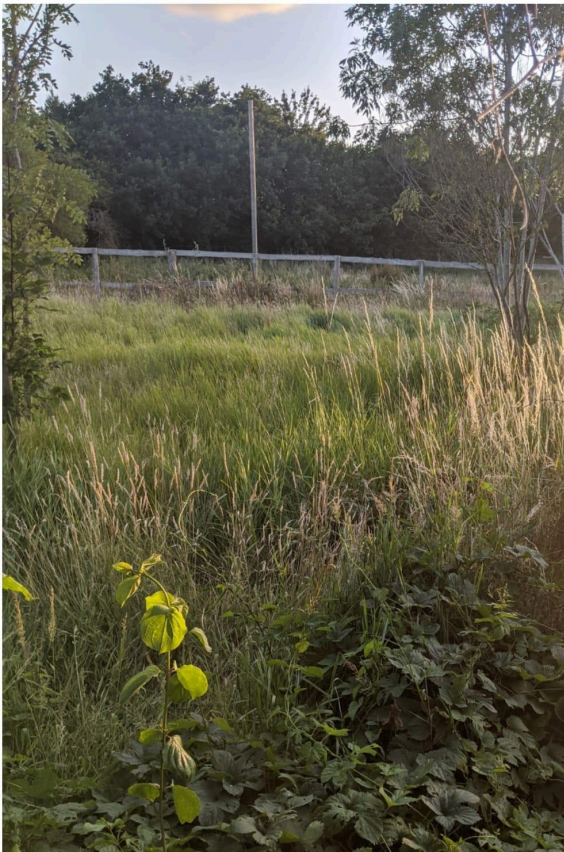
TAKE ACTION NOW!

Calling all local residents:

Demand that Lewisham Council halts this assault on nature:

- **Write to the acting Mayor Brenda Dacres (brenda.dacres@lewisham.gov.uk)**
 - cc jennifer.daothong@lewisham.gov.uk, the CEO of Lewisham Council: Jennifer Daothong
 - cc media.relations@lewisham.gov.uk Lewisham Council media relations
 - cc info@grovepark.org.uk, the amazing Grove Park Community Group working to protect the ward's beautiful green spaces
 - Follow [@ringwaygardens](https://twitter.com/ringwaygardens) (Grove Park Community Group) on twitter
- **Ask her to immediately:**
 - Serve an injunction to halt works and protect the remaining trees (enforcing the site-wide TPO)
 - Investigate the TPO breach and prosecute crimes that have committed
 - Demand that Lewisham Council CPO the land and bring it into public ownership to take it away from these manifestly irresponsible developers
 - Protect the biodiversity - one of the most biodiverse areas in central London (see below for more)
 - Urge the Council to uphold its commitment, which was a manifesto commitment for the former Mayor, and implement the Railway Children National Park to provide public access to this crucial green space

August 2020



Today



What is at stake?

- **The owners actions have repeatedly breached environmental protections** (there is an area-wide Tree Preservation Order on the site covering all trees over 12 years old - many of the trees destroyed in February 2024 are thought to be significantly older than this). A range of mature trees and shrubs are also at risk from these developers, including various willows (*Salix* spp.), pedunculate oak (*Quercus robur*), sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*), hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), elder (*Sambucus nigra*), blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*), English elm (*Ulmus procera*) and cherry (*P. avium*). In particular, the proposal shows that the mature trees at the back of Northbrook Park would be removed in order to site the track. This would not only render our park unrecognisable but is also in direct contradiction of Kewisham's Climate Emergency Action Plan which recognises the vital importance of trees as carbon storers and improvers of air quality. The surrounding area, which includes a primary school, is notorious for its high levels of air pollution, which was [recently found](#) to have contributed to the tragic death of a young girl called Ella Kissi-Debrah.
- **The intentional habitat loss is damaging protected species and degrading the unique wetlands habitat.** Not only is it a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (LeBII15I/LeB29) as well as a Metropolitan Open Land - but it includes a very rare inner London Wet Woodland, and Wetland Priority Habitat. According to the WWT and RSPB 90% of wetlands have disappeared in England. The wet grassland, woodland ponds, willow car and reed beds (which the development would largely destroy), provides a home for the common newt, frog and toad as well as migrant birds, with wheatear, whinchat, cuckoo and garden warbler all seen regularly in spring and autumn. Wetland plantlife present includes fool's watercress (*Apium nodiflorum*), pendulous sedge (*Carex pendula*), reed sweet-grass (*Glyceria maxima*), and yellow iris (*Iris pseudacorus*). Great horsetail (*Equisetum telmateia*), which is scarce in London, also occurs here. Common lizard protected under Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 are present throughout the green corridor.
- **The green corridor must be preserved.** The developer's plans would interrupt the continuous green corridor for flora and fauna leading to the nearby Grade 1 site: Statutory Nature Reserve, Grove Park Nature Reserve (LNR), and beyond to Elmstead Woods. This rare grass chalkland provides feeding and breeding sites, shelter and means of dispersal for very many species of plants, bird, mammals and insects. This includes the small Blue butterfly, Burnet moths and a rare chalcid wasp species, *Brachymeria Tibialis*, a well known parasite of Burnet moth pupae. Other rare species include Hedgehogs, the Small Blue (butterfly), Hairstreak butterflies, two types of bat (*Vesper* and *Daubenton*) and the House Sparrow.
- **Undermining the community's Neighbourhood Plan:** the site lies within the designated area of the proposed Grove Park Neighbourhood Plan. The [Neighbourhood Plan](#) is to create an urban national park. The plan preserves the locations which inspired Edith Nesbit's famous book 'The Railway Children' and has been recognised and backed as [one of CPRE London's vision of ten new parks](#). The site has cultural heritage status and should be recognised. Despite being a manifesto commitment of former Mayor Egan, the Council's support for the realisation of the urban national park has been lamentable. During 2023 despite numerous requests, Council officers et al refused to apply for multiple grants missing deadlines for millions of pounds of funding which could have made the urban national park a reality and secured the heritage landscape. This could have included a new Ringway Centre.

Background:

Ownership: Like much of the Grove Park railway embankment and surrounding areas, the land has been bought by developers intent on putting profit before community needs and nature. In 2008 a company registered offshore in the British Virgin Islands acquired the land for just £475,000 and have been trying to overturn environmental protections and develop it ever since, selling the site to another of its companies, Austringer Estates Ltd¹, for nearly £8 million. Austringer Estates Ltd's parent company, Austringer Capital Ltd², builds [retail parks and apartment blocks](#) and [shopping centre car parks](#).

2019 application for a stables...or a retail park?! They submitted a planning application in 2019, on the face of it to build a new stables, replacing the old Ronver Road Stables which closed in 2016. A closer look at the application revealed that the planned stables was a front to clear the land and pave the way (literally) for further applications. The proposal sought to clear the entire perimeter of the site to build a wide track (building materials not specified, so this could have been a tarmac road) upwards of 1km long around the perimeter of the land, apparently for the purposes of leading horses to feeding stations. For nearly 60 years the horses had previously simply grazed on a field without issue - no track was required. Once the land has been cleared and the nature is gone there will be nothing left to protect making circumstances more favourable to subsequent planning applications possible. The application was [rejected](#).

2022 appeal: The rejected planning application was appealed. Community leaders hired a barrister and worked tirelessly to prepare a case and present it to an independent inspector, highlighting the need to preserve and protect the rich biodiversity. Ultimately the appeal was [dismissed in July 2022](#). The appellants were ordered to pay costs to Lewisham Council, which we believe would have run to tens of thousands of pounds. As far as we are aware, this money has not yet been paid to the Council - another indication that the landowners are not acting responsibly.

Upcoming examination: Lewisham Council is putting together a new Local Plan which includes an imminent reexamination of all environmental protections on green spaces like the Willow Tree Stables site. We know from comments submitted by Austringer / their agent that they see this as an opportunity to change the status of the land and develop it:

Austringer / Tetlow King: "...Through the Local Plan process, there is the opportunity to allocate the site for development..."

In 2019 Tetlow King [celebrated](#) building on MOL protected green belt in Bromley: "Tetlow King Planning (TKP) are delighted to have helped secure permission for 151 homes in Bromley, South East London" The scheme proposed 151 homes on land within Bromley which constitutes Metropolitan Open Land (MOL – London's internal Green Belt) and is meant to be afforded the same protection and Green Belt (GB).

¹ In 2018 Austringer Estates Ltd changed its name to "AIM LAND LIMITED", Company number 11182462. The two company directors listed are: Nilufar Yousuf Bux and Yousuf Ayyub Bux.

² The beneficial owners of the land register companies offshore in the Isle of Man and the British Virgin Island and frequently hand the land from company to company. Lewisham Council's [examination document](#) for the Grove Park Neighbourhood Plan lists the following companies as the owners of the land: Oceanwave Estates Ltd / Austringer Estates Ltd / Austringer Capital Ltd. It appears Oceanwave sold it to Austringer Estates (now Aim Land), which is some sort of subsidiary of Austringer Capital (with a history e.g. of company directors in common, and other overlaps). This all makes it a lot harder to scrutinise their record.

What the site used to look like

