

SALISBURY CITY COUNCIL

Report

Subject: Proposed Restoration of Units 26 and 27, River Avon SSSI
Committee: Environment Committee
Date: 8 December 2025
Author: Marc Read, Head of Environmental Services

1. Report Summary:

- 1.1 This report seeks Committee approval for Wiltshire Wildlife Trust (WWT) to deliver habitat restoration works on Salisbury City Council owned land at Units 26 and 27 of the River Avon SSSI.
- 1.2 WWT has secured Ministry of Defence (MOD) funding specifically for environmental improvement. They wish to use that funding on our land, at no cost to Salisbury City Council, to restore declining wetlands and meadow habitats.
- 1.3 City Council officers are strongly in favour of the proposal. A letter of support from the Council will allow WWT to proceed with planning permission and Environment Agency permit applications.

2. Background:

- 2.1 Units 26 and 27 form part of the River Avon Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Natural England (2009) recorded the units as unfavourable and in some areas declining.
- 2.2 WWT's 2025 assessment found:
 - Unit 26: Poor condition (lowland meadow; declining due to lack of grazing)
 - Unit 27: Moderate condition (reedbeds and wet woodland drying out; climate change a major threat)
- 2.3 Declining water levels in Unit 27 threaten key habitats and species, including the historically present Desmoulin's whorl snail. Unit 26 has deteriorated further because long-term grazing ceased.

3. Proposed Works:

- 3.1 WWT proposes a two-stage restoration programme, funded entirely through their MOD allocation.
- 3.2 **Stage 1 – Unit 27 (2025–2026)**

Objective: Improve water retention and restore wetland conditions.

Measures:

- Extend an existing non-flowing drain network.
- Drains approx. 2.5m wide and up to 1.5m deep, set at 46.6m above sea level
- Designed to hold water for longer periods and naturally fill during river overbank events.

Benefits:

- Protects reedbeds and wet woodland from drying.
- Supports wetland species, including water voles.
- No significant change in flood risk expected.

3.3 Stage 2 – Unit 26 (2026 onwards)

Objective: Begin restoration of lowland meadow features.

Measures:

- Create shallow scrapes to increase soil moisture and encourage species recovery.
- Review potential for reintroducing grazing, which is essential for long-term meadow management.

4. Environmental Benefits:

- Restores failing SSSI habitats of national importance.
- Improves biodiversity and climate resilience.
- Enhances ecological value of SCC-owned land at no cost to the authority.
- Supports recovery of reedbeds, wet woodland, meadow species, and protected fauna.

5. Recommendation:

4.1 The Committee is recommended to:

4.1.1 Approve the restoration proposal.

4.1.2 Authorise the Head of Environmental Services to issue a formal letter of support to Wiltshire Wildlife Trust.

4.1.3 Note that the work is fully funded by MOD resources via WWT, with zero cost to Salisbury City Council.

4.1.4 Agree that WWT may proceed with planning and permitting applications for the work

5. Wards Affected:

4.1 The Avon Valley Nature Reserve is located in the Fisherton & Bemerton Village Ward but will benefit biodiversity across Salisbury.

5. Background Papers:

5.1 Proposed restoration of Units 26 and 27, River Avon SSSI, Salisbury

5.2 Unit 27 Proposed Plan and Construction Levels

6. Implications

- 6.1 **Financial:** No direct cost to the Council; project funded external sources and managed by WWT.
- 6.2 **Legal:** Planning permission and EA permits required; Council approval supports compliance.
- 6.3 **Personnel:** Minimal staff time for liaison and monitoring.
- 6.4 **Environmental Impact:** Significant positive impact on biodiversity and climate resilience.
- 6.5 **Equalities Impact:** Public benefit through improved natural environment and ecosystem services.

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DIO Project Tethys

A multi-year habitat and aquifer recharge project

4 Strands:

1. 9 Mile River – Wiltshire Wildlife Trust (WWT)
2. Desmoulin's Whorl Snail [DWS (WWT)]
3. Wessex River Trust, Exploration of River Ebble
4. Units 26 and 27 SSSI, Salisbury (WWT)

Strand 4 is broken into 2 years:

1. Year 1 – Unit 27
2. Year 2 – Unit 26



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Natural England last surveyed these units in 2009.

1. Unit 26 = unfavourable and declining
2. Unit 27 = unfavourable no change

Wiltshire Wildlife Trust ecologists assessed both units during 2025

Table 1: Baseline Condition Assessment and Metric Calculation

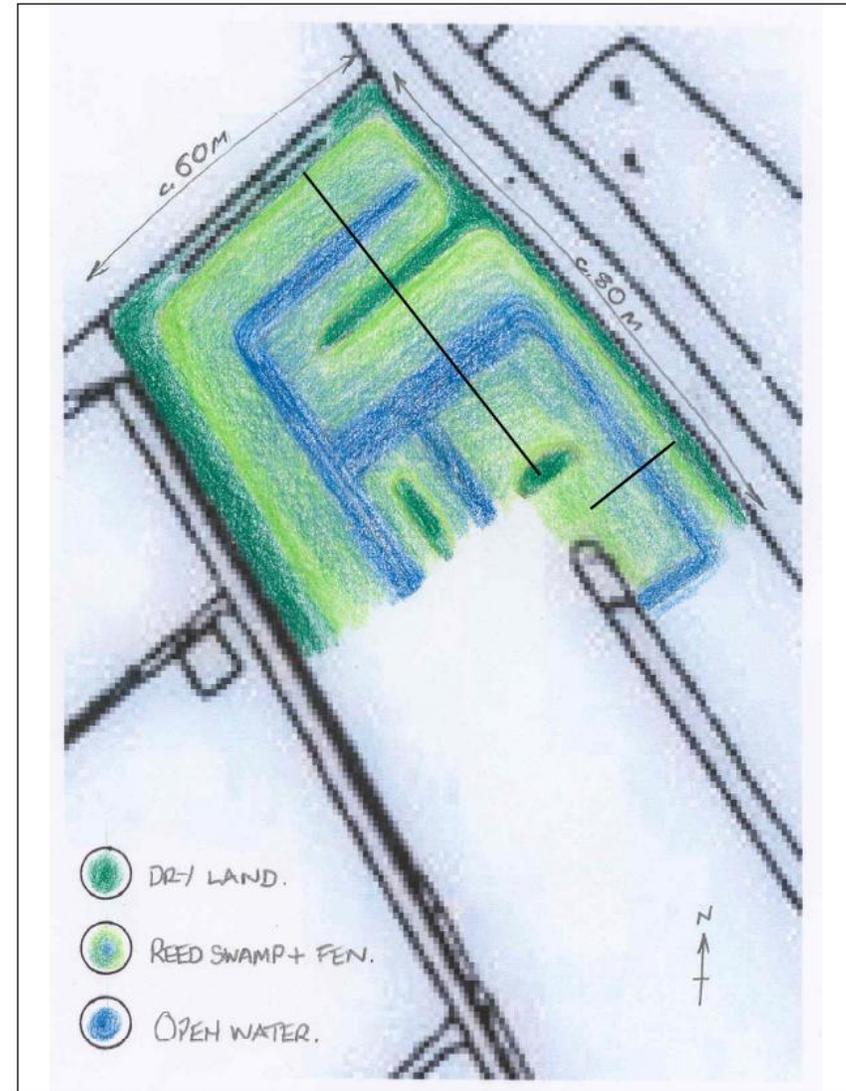
| Site Name | Compartment | Baseline Habitat Type (incl. distinctiveness) | Baseline Habitat Condition | Baseline Habitat Value |
|-----------|-------------|--|-------------------------------|---------------------------|
| SSSI 26 | Parcel A | Lowland Meadow (very high) | Poor | 17.66 |
| SSSI 27 | Parcel B | Wet Woodland (high) | Moderate | 10.35 |
| | Parcel C | Reedbeds (high) | Moderate | 32.29 |

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Threats to Unit 27:

1. Drying
2. Scrub encroachment
3. Vegetation change
4. Loss of Important species especially DWS

Plan of the restored habitat.



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Project Proposal:

1. Extend 2014 restoration
2. Rewets and holds water for longer
3. Improves habitat for Desmoulins Whorl Snail

Considerations:

1. Soil disposal
2. Timing of works
3. Permissions including:
 - I. Landowner Salisbury Council
 - II. NE SSSI permission
 - III. Potential EA waste disposal licence
 - IV. Wiltshire Council Planning Permission
 - V. Archaeology
 - VI. Services



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Restoration work aims to:

1. Maintain level floor in drains
2. Ensuring no flow
3. Holding water for longer
4. Creating wetter soils
5. Reducing vegetation encroachment
6. Maintaining and improving habitat for DWS

