

A New Home At Bittesby Country Park

Welcome to our enchanting corner of the countryside, where the captivating tale of the resilient water voles unfolds. Amidst the development of Magna Park South, a delicate harmony between progress and preservation was meticulously crafted to safeguard these beloved creatures, protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. A diligent ecological survey captured the presence of these delightful water voles, prompting a heartfelt endeavour to ensure their continued well-being and prosperity.

Now, why did these charming creatures need to be relocated, you might ask? Regulations stipulated a necessary distance between their newfound habitat and other existing water vole populations, they could not be returned to Magna Park South, underscoring the meticulous efforts to maintain their safety and safeguard their delicate ecosystems. Thus, a careful and considerate trapping process was initiated, prioritizing the comfort and security of each precious vole during their gentle transition to a new haven.

A meticulously crafted plan, designed to mirror the natural sanctuaries cherished by these spirited creatures was developed. Envision the blueprint of their new abode, carefully envisaged to reflect their intrinsic needs and preferences. This bespoke habitat boasted an array of carefully selected features, each intricately woven to ensure the water voles felt right at home.

Steep banks, meticulously sculpted to mimic their favoured burrowing terrain, allowing them to play and explore to their heart's content. A relatively stable water level is required so as not to flood their burrows, meticulously recreated to mimic the nurturing environment crucial for their growth and well-being.

Take note of the carefully curated plant types, including the beloved bottle sedge, which not only served as a vital component of their diet but also provided shelter and a sense of familiarity in their newfound sanctuary.



Plan of Water Vole habitat



A heartwarming revelation surfaces as we delve deeper into their captivating narrative. These resilient water voles were not limited to the confines of Magna Park South alone; they were discovered both upstream and downstream of the site, and to the peripheries of Bittesby Country Park affirming their innate ability to adapt and thrive within their dynamic surroundings.

With each passing season, we eagerly anticipate the gradual expansion and colonization of the surrounding areas, as these spirited creatures continue to leave their endearing mark on the landscape, weaving a tapestry of life and vitality in their wake across the very heart of our park.



Water Vole *Arvicola terrestris*

The native UK Water Vole, scientifically known as *Arvicola terrestris*, is a charming semi-aquatic rodent species that thrives in a variety of wetland habitats, such as marshes, rivers, and ponds. With a stout body, short limbs, and a distinctive blunt nose, these creatures are well-adapted for their aquatic lifestyle. Their dense, water-resistant fur provides excellent insulation, keeping them warm during their frequent forays into the water.

Water voles are known for their remarkable burrowing abilities, creating complex networks of burrows with multiple entrances and chambers. These burrows serve as safe havens from predators, which include birds of prey, foxes, and even non-native species like the American mink, which pose a significant threat to their population.

Primarily herbivorous, water voles feed on a diverse diet of grasses, sedges, roots, and other aquatic plants, displaying a crucial role in shaping their wetland habitats. Despite their critical ecological significance, the UK water vole population has experienced a sharp decline in recent years due to habitat loss, pollution, and predation. Conservation efforts have been underway to protect these endearing creatures, including habitat restoration projects and the implementation of measures to control non-native predators, aiming to ensure the survival and thriving of this vital species in the UK's natural landscape.