

## North West Surrey (UK) A vision for mineral sites restoration

### Introduction

The north-western corner of Surrey in the UK is an area with a long history of mineral (sand and gravel) extraction, concentrated on the river terrace gravels of the lower river Thames. The restoration of mineral workings has left a legacy of both filled and unfilled sites across the area. Many of the flooded gravel pits and open-water bodies have been successfully turned into sites of nature conservation interest, some of international importance for waterfowl. However, there are also areas which were originally restored to agriculture that have become neglected over recent years.

### Our aims and objectives

A landscape-scale and multi-site restoration strategy is being developed for mineral workings in North West Surrey, to ensure restorations complement the wider surrounding landscape and deliver positive outcomes for wildlife and people.

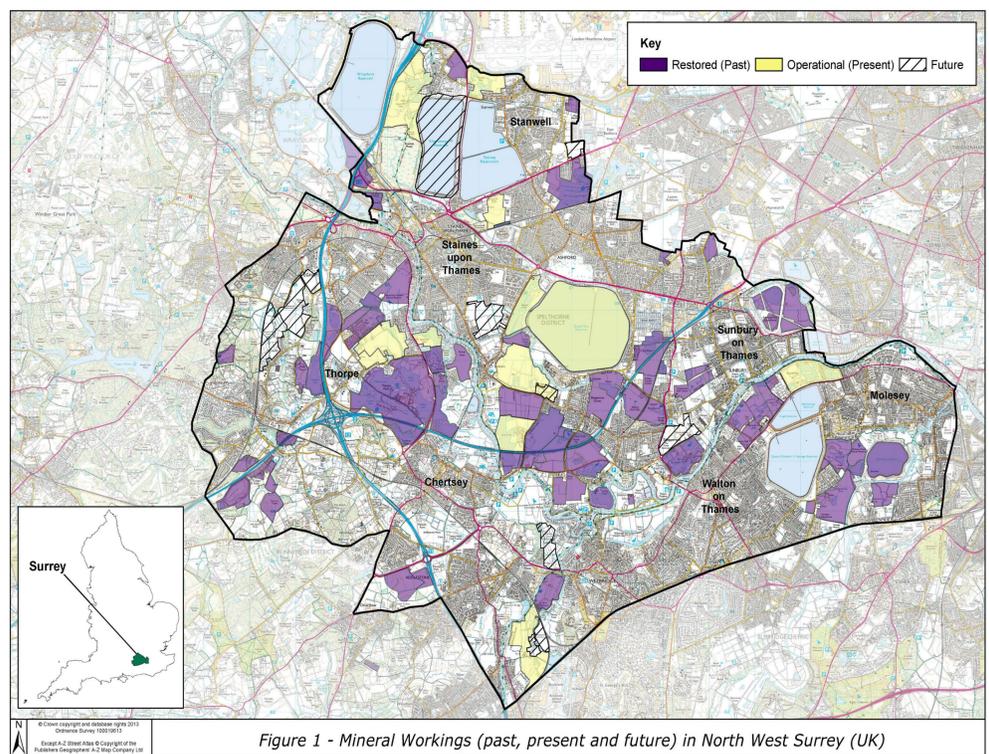
The main objectives of the restoration strategy are to:

- Help protect and enhance the ecological richness of the area
- Improve access links and recreational facilities
- Improve resilience to the effects of climate change
- Enhance the landscape character

Looking at all mineral workings (past, present and future) in the area, the restoration strategy sets out a long-term 'vision' for the area. This 'vision' integrates agriculture, nature conservation, landscape, birdstrike, flood alleviation, agricultural and recreational interests.



Figure 2 - An aerial view of some of the mineral workings in North West Surrey (UK)



### Opportunities

The restoration of mineral sites can provide many benefits, to the environment and local communities. The North West Surrey restoration strategy explores opportunities for mineral workings to:

- Support the South West London Waterbodies SPA/RAMSAR complex.
- Enhance and create habitats of priority importance such as floodplain grassland and reedbeds.
- Improve access networks and recreational provisions for the benefit of local communities.
- Deliver landscape improvements in the area.
- Contribute to plans to reduce flood risk.



Figure 3 - Example of a restoration designed for nature conservation with public access

### Constraining issues

There are a number of factors that influence restoration schemes in the study area and need to be taken into account in developing the restoration strategy and vision document. These include:

- The decline and viability of agriculture in the area. The amount of farming in the area is now limited and horse grazing and stabling has replaced traditional farming uses in many cases. This has implications as most sites in the current Surrey Minerals Plan have a preferred infill restoration to agriculture.
- The decline in waste materials available for infill restorations. This might lead to a change in approach to the restoration of mineral sites and to schemes involving little or no fill becoming more common. There is a strong desire within the local community however not to see further no fill, or wet, restorations in the area.
- The proximity of the study area to Heathrow Airport and the need to reduce potential bird strike hazard and risk.
- The risk of fluvial flooding in the area, which is very high.

### Preparing the restoration strategy

The restoration strategy is being developed in partnership with local stakeholders including local planning authorities, mineral operators, residents' associations, local interest groups, Heathrow Airport and environmental organisations. This has built on the engagement activities that took place as part of the development of the current Surrey Minerals Plan.

As part of the stakeholder engagement process, the Council held four community engagement events across the study area. The aim of the events was to explore how mineral restorations could provide benefits to wildlife and people in the North West Surrey study area. Aimed at residents' associations, local councillors and local interest groups the events provided an opportunity to hear local views on the benefits that the restoration of mineral sites could provide and are being used to help shape the vision for the area.