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The Wandle Valley Green Ribbon Initiative

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For a little known London river the Wandle generates remarkable enthusiasm amongst those that are aware of this wildlife-rich, green chain that links Croydon, Sutton and Merton to the Thames Path at Wandsworth. Yet the potential in terms of recreational amenity, ecology and heritage of what is virtually a linear park, is only realised in a few popular places along its course.

The river corridor is also home to long-established industry, modern businesses, residential communities and some pockets of deprivation. Sadly, in many parts these adjacent communities and businesses have ‘turned their back on the river’ – allowing it to be neglected and abused.

The South London Partnership believes it is time the whole of this unique river and its environs were enhanced and presented to the community – not only as a rare and valuable asset for recreation and wildlife but also as a unique location offering homes and businesses a healthy and desirable environment in which to flourish.

The Environment Agency in its River Restoration 2002 report on South London’s rivers (supported by The Mayor of London’s Office and English Nature), states in its Executive Summary:

“River restoration can play a positive role in urban regeneration and the creation of sustainable urban communities through delivering a wide range of social and environmental benefits for all”

Aims of the Wandle Green Ribbon Initiative

This discussion document sets out the opportunities and challenges facing the area, and seeks to establish a framework from which an action plan for the Wandle can be drawn up. The action plan will build on several initiatives already undertaken by public, private and voluntary organisations and individuals, to enhance the river and its environs and enable the realisation of the area's full potential as an asset for local communities and London as whole.

Recent improvements along the River Wandle have clearly demonstrated the river's huge potential as a major recreational amenity and wildlife habitat for south London. That potential also makes it an attractive location for homes and businesses. However much work still needs to be done to realise the economic and environmental regeneration that is key to accessing the special benefits the Wandle Valley has to offer.

The river valley's potential for regeneration and development presents the opportunity to enhance its relationship with local communities and improve its interface with the many industrial estates along its course. With its paths, open spaces and wildlife, the Wandle provides exactly the vital leisure, health and educational amenity that Londoners need.

This document is just a beginning. In setting out some of the opportunities and areas of need along the river corridor, it seeks to bring together the many and various interests to work towards a long term vision and action plan for the Wandle which can then be used to galvanise further support and funding for river-led regeneration along the Wandle.

Regeneration through Synergy

South London Partnership believes that a forum bringing together the many organisations, and individuals, interested in developing a shared action plan for the Wandle's regeneration will:

- promote the Wandle's rich environment, history and industrial heritage
- provide a framework to encourage investment
- create a synergy between the various activities whereby the whole will be greater than the sum of the individual actions
- support the economic and environmental regeneration of this river, not only as an asset for south London, but as a valuable amenity for the capital as a whole
- build upon what has already been achieved – including the 1997 WSAP (Wandle Strategy Action Plan)

- Is there the will and capability to support such a Forum?

The need for River led regeneration

Parts of the Wandle corridor already attract significant numbers of visitors and it is a well loved local amenity for local children paddling and fishing, visitors to Morden Hall Park, Carshalton Ponds, wildlife enthusiasts, Merton Abbey Mills weekend market, golfers at Mitcham, Wandle trail walkers and shopping in Sutton, Croydon, Wimbledon, Wandsworth and Purley Way.

The Wandle is also home to significant numbers of businesses and residents.

However, on the basis that a chain is as strong as its weakest link, the Wandle and its environs also include many areas suffering neglect and urban decay and these undermine the river's environmental integrity, its recreational potential and value as a generator of employment and sustainable local communities.

Despite some excellent completed projects and regular clean-ups the river's considerable length means it is difficult for individual councils and local voluntary groups to address all the challenges facing the Wandle from its sources in the Surrey Hills to its mouth on the Thames at Wandsworth. This discussion document highlights the potential rewards of a co-ordinated approach to regeneration.

Cities need more local facilities

With the increasing cost and environmental impact of transport (and motoring in particular), continued growth in personal mobility is unsustainable. It is therefore important to reduce the need for travel by offering more local choice and facilities and open space.

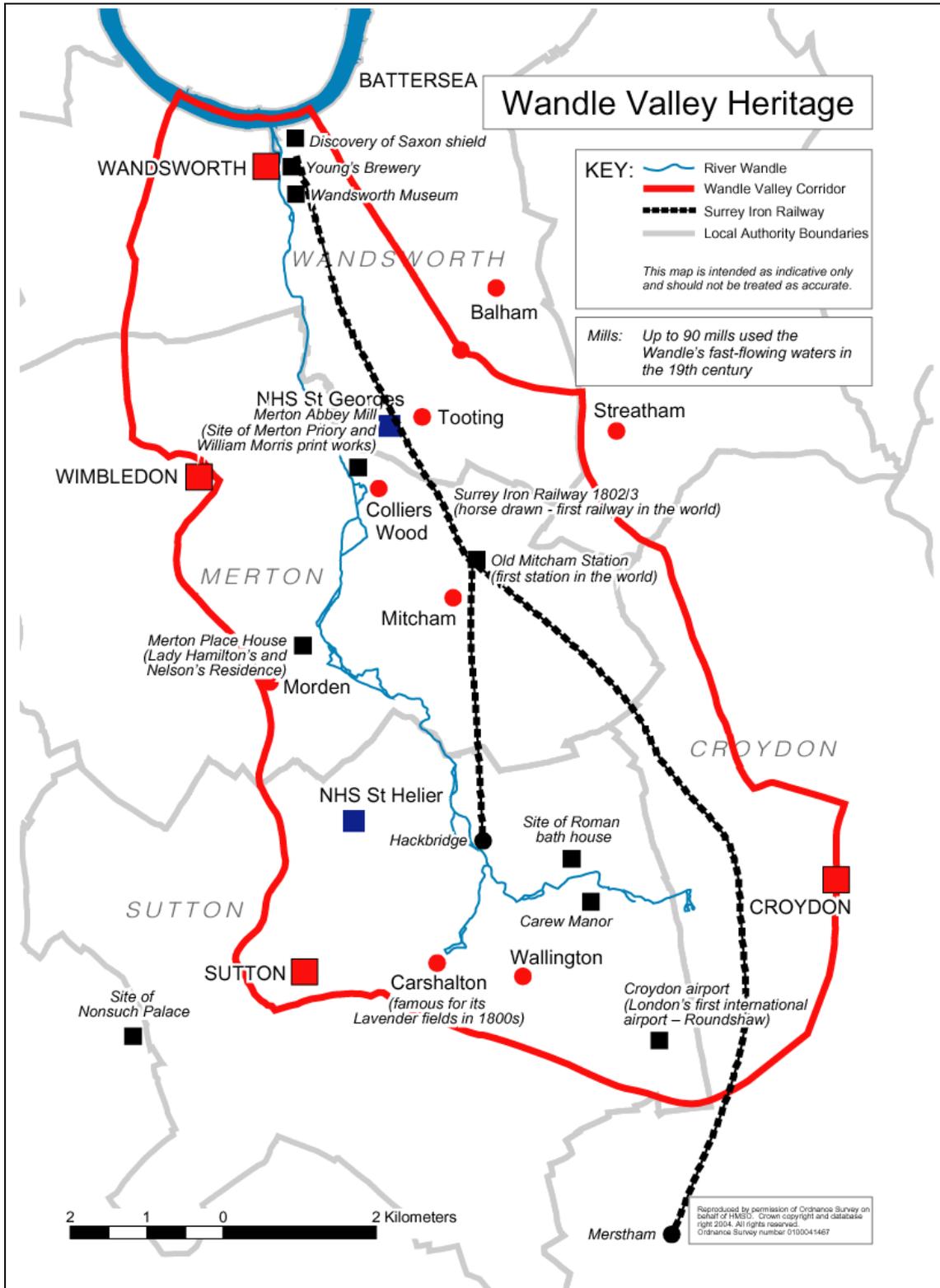
The broad Wandle Valley and the river's immediate environs continues to attract business, employment and housing but has the potential to attract more. Achieving the right mix of employment, leisure facilities, retailing and homes in potentially attractive areas like the Wandle and its environs will contribute to 'lifestyle sustainability'.

The Wandle's importance today:

- one of the capital's most extensive green chains and wildlife habitats
- important visitor attractions
- one of London's most concentrated industrial corridors accounting for nearly 20% of the capital's manufacturing base
- an area with potentially attractive settings for new businesses and sustainable homes
- a future 500 hectare country park
- further potential for inward investment in leisure and tourism
- part of the national cycle trail

Much excellent work has already been done by a number of organisations – including local councils, Groundwork and transport groups such as Sustrans and SWELTRAC - and most importantly by an army of dedicated volunteers.

This review sets out just some of the still largely untapped potential of south London's own river. There are many other dreams and ideas that are not yet included in this document - the Wandle is not south London's only river but it is the most significant in terms of the scale of regeneration potential.



A rare landscape with a rich heritage

It is the special character of the Wandle's landscape, its ecology and historic significance that generates such passion amongst those who know what this remarkable river has to offer as it runs through parks and wilderness areas providing a unique habitat for herons, cormorants, kingfishers, eels and a variety of fish .

But the character of the Wandle also stems from the interface between its green chain of open spaces, its ribbon of industrial estates and adjacent communities. Unattractive 'hard industrial edges' to the rivers environs probably inhibited urban sprawl in the 30s and 50s. Today they confer a sense of remoteness and tranquillity that adds a special mood to its ambience interspersed with unattractive black spots of urban decay.

Heritage

Historically the Wandle is most famed for the fast flowing waters that powered some 90 mills and attracted so many industries. Its reputation as 'the hardest worked river in the world' placed it at the heart of 18th century industrialisation, where transport requirements resulted in the innovation of the world's first iron railway – the Surrey Iron Railway, which ran horse-drawn freight from Wandsworth towards Mitcham. It is not therefore surprising that today it remains the location for nearly a fifth of London's manufacturing industry.

But the river's history goes back even further. The famous Saxon shields were found close to the Wandle mouth in the Thames - replicas can be seen in the Wandsworth Museum. In 1117, Merton Priory was founded where Stane Street crosses the Wandle. It predates Canterbury Cathedral as a leading seat of Christianity in England and it was here that Thomas a Becket was educated and the first statute of English law promulgated. When Henry VIII dissolved the monasteries, he used the Priory's stones to build his magnificent Nonesuch Palace near Sutton, its foundations lie there today beneath the grass in Nonesuch Park.

In the 19th century the Wandle at Merton Abbey was home to William Morris's famous 'arts & crafts' paper and fabric printworks, where he developed new dyeing techniques and produced many of his most famous designs including '*the Strawberry thief*' and '*Wandle*'. William de Morgan and Arthur Liberty built factories which today form part of the popular Merton Abbey Mills craft market. The work of ceramist William and pre-Raphaelite painter Evelyn, De Morgan can be seen in the De Morgan Centre on West Hill, Wandsworth.

Further upstream, Nelson's 'Merton Paradise' the estate of Lady Hamilton (his long term mistress), lends a genteel character to the National Trust's Morden Hall Park , which now attracts half a million visitors a year. Nelson is buried in the church of St Mary the Virgin in Merton Park, one of London's first garden suburbs, along with John Innes who developed his famous potting compost in Merton. In 1870 he built the Merton Park estate designed by architect John Sydney Brocklesby in the Arts & Crafts Style. One of its houses includes a garden designed by Gertrude Jekyll. Wandsworth is home to two arts and crafts houses by Voysey, one facing Wandsworth Common.

By 1900 Carshalton was known as the 'lavender capital of the world' and the fields at Wallington, Carshalton, Waddon and Sutton provided lavender to companies such as Yardley. Today lavender growing has been revived by collaboration between the Bio-regional Development Group and HMP Downview, using a special 'heritage harvester' built from scrap and recycled materials.

Before the first World War, films were being made at Merton Park Studios. The 'Scotland Yard' series was at the Studios from 1953-1961, Edgar Lustgarten's 'Scales of Justice' ran until the studio closed in 1967. Today 'The Bill' is filmed at a nearby studio on the Morden Road Estate.

From Merton Priory to today, the Wandle corridor is home to some significant religious buildings. The beautiful Buddhist temple is at Wimbledon whilst on the Valley's periphery at Morden the recently built mosque is the largest in Western Europe.

Transport innovations have continued from the era of Roman 'Stane Street' which crossed the Wandle at what is now the Savacentre to the first iron railway and the world's first commercial airport at Croydon. To this day Airport House still stands, flagged by the appropriately named, De Haviland Heron passenger plane on its concourse whilst Wandsworth's heliport on the Thames less than a mile from the Wandle mouth brings the wealthy to London and takes them to major sporting events. The highly successful Tramlink has given many more people easy access to Wimbledon and Croydon as well as commuter rail connections to central London.

One example of a historic river based industry that is very much in the news is Young's Brewery in Wandsworth High St. It is one of the oldest family owned breweries in the world having been established 170 years ago on the site of an older brewery dating back 400 years. However this brewing tradition is about to change. Young's are currently looking for new premises to improve safety and productivity. Their initial plans for the site recognise the importance of improved access to the Wandle's banks.

*Other historic highlights of the Wandle Valley
Carew Manor, 1500 Grade 1 listed building Sutton
Huguenots' Burial Ground, East Hill, Wandsworth
Archbishop Whitgift, Almshouses, Croydon*

The Wandle's heritage - an asset worth sustaining.

- How do we ensure that this rich heritage and character is sustained?
- Are there opportunities to further develop Wandle Valley's heritage offer?
- How can the associated economic and social opportunities be realised?

Green Ribbon

Inner South West London is well served by green open space with the inner conurbations benefiting from the commons, including Wandsworth, Tooting, Streatham and Wimbledon. There are also substantial parks such as Morden Hall and Beddington Park; smaller parks and open spaces such as King George's, Ravensbury, Poulter, Wandle, Carshalton Ponds and the Grove, Merton, Waddon Ponds and Wandle Park Croydon. Finally there is Mitcham Common, one of the most under-utilised major open spaces in London.

The Wandle Valley Country Park

Both Mitcham Common (to the north) and Beddington Park adjoin a further large parcel of open land which includes Beddington Farmlands and sewage works and other adjacent (designated) Metropolitan Open Land. These are SINC areas (Sites of Interest for Nature Conservation) recognised for their wildlife diversity and habitat potential and regarded as important aspects of essential regeneration for adjoining communities in Sutton and Merton. This 500 hectare area has been designated as the Wandle Valley Country Park and will be one of the largest areas of restored green space in London.

Mitcham Common is close to the Wandle (approx 400 metres at one point) and is one of South London's major open spaces. Apart from its golf course Mitcham Common is greatly under-utilized by those seeking outdoor recreation and its facilities are minimal. The recently refurbished Ravensbury pub/restaurant (Mitcham end of A263) is one of the few by the Common, beyond Mitcham town centre, and perhaps the only one that attracts passing clientele. Other local pubs have closed or serve only their immediate neighbourhood. The golf course, unlike the course on Wimbledon Common, is interspersed with many impenetrable thickets and the A263 Croydon road divides the common in two. Parking and catering facilities are minimal but transport links via train and tram connect nearby at Mitcham Junction.

The linking of the Common in Merton and Beddington Park in Sutton via the restoration and eventual release of Beddington Sewage works and restoration of adjacent Metropolitan Open Land, would create a 500 hectare Country Park..

Restoration of Metropolitan Open Land

Beddington sewage treatment works is equivalent in area to approx 40% of Mitcham Common and is owned by Thames Water and Viridor Waste Management who are licensed to treat sludge and infill land over the next decade. Their license stipulates that they must restore the land as Metropolitan Open Land by 2016. The area also includes large plots owned by others including the council. Some of these areas of land are inadequately fenced to keep walkers and 'young explorers' from the dangers of hidden concrete culverts yet it is attractive and tempting to explore. The land is a wildlife haven and has several paths through it between the landmark BEDZED sustainable housing estate and the sewage treatment works.

The whole area from Mitcham Common and the Beddington Farm Lands to Beddington Park in the south is bounded by a variety of housing estates and industrial areas with important potential 'gateway' locations at Mitcham town centre, Hackbridge and Beddington Lane.

The concept of enhancing the common and adjacent Metropolitan Open Land's environment to Country Park status is a grand ambition that may take some time to achieve, but it will greatly benefit the wider community in south London when it is established

Showcase for sustainable innovation

With the innovative **BEDZED** housing development serving as an inspiration to sustainability on its doorstep, and proposals to establish a state-of-the-art anaerobic digestion plant (to reduce odour and generate usable gas) on the Beddington sewage works site, the proposed Wandle Valley Country Park provides the opportunity for the sustainable regeneration of a major tract of 'lost land' in south London.

The London Boroughs of Sutton and Merton joined together to make a bid to the Millennium Commission to establish the Country Park. Whilst this was unsuccessful, a bid to the EU Sustainable and Accessible Urban Landscape fund (SAUL) has meant that Groundwork and the LDA have been able to work with the local boroughs to continue the vision of developing the Country Park and its environs.

The proposed Wandle Country Park is a long term project but the Wandle Green Ribbon and the Country Park projects are complementary and the benefits of including them both in a coordinated environmental enhancement programme are clear.

River Thames to Surrey Hills

Taken together these riverside and common land open spaces represent a green ribbon of land sustained by the Wandle and linking the Thames Path at Wandsworth to the Surrey Hills. Along its course the most successful leisure attractions are undoubtedly Merton Abbey Mills - with its thriving craft and farmers market and variety of pubs, restaurants, and food stalls - and Morden Hall Park with its river walks, garden centre and café restaurant which attracts over half a million visitors each year. Apart from open space, other leisure facilities along the river are few and far between.

Quality of Open Space and Riverside

Research confirms that quality open space helps reduce anti-social behaviour and fear of crime. There are also demonstrable benefits for health and well-being. However, many parts of this green ribbon are little known, some are not very accessible and some footpaths and cycle ways are not hospitable despite improvement work. The major part of the area designated as a Country Park is virtually inaccessible at present.

Degradation of open space

Old waterworks, industrial site perimeters and areas north of Collier's Wood are unattractive and inadequately signed, paths are in poor condition and graffiti remains on all available surfaces. The riverbank on the Mitcham side opposite Poulter Park is inaccessible and the Trail path in poor condition.

- Are there similar areas along the Wandle which need action?

Sustaining regeneration

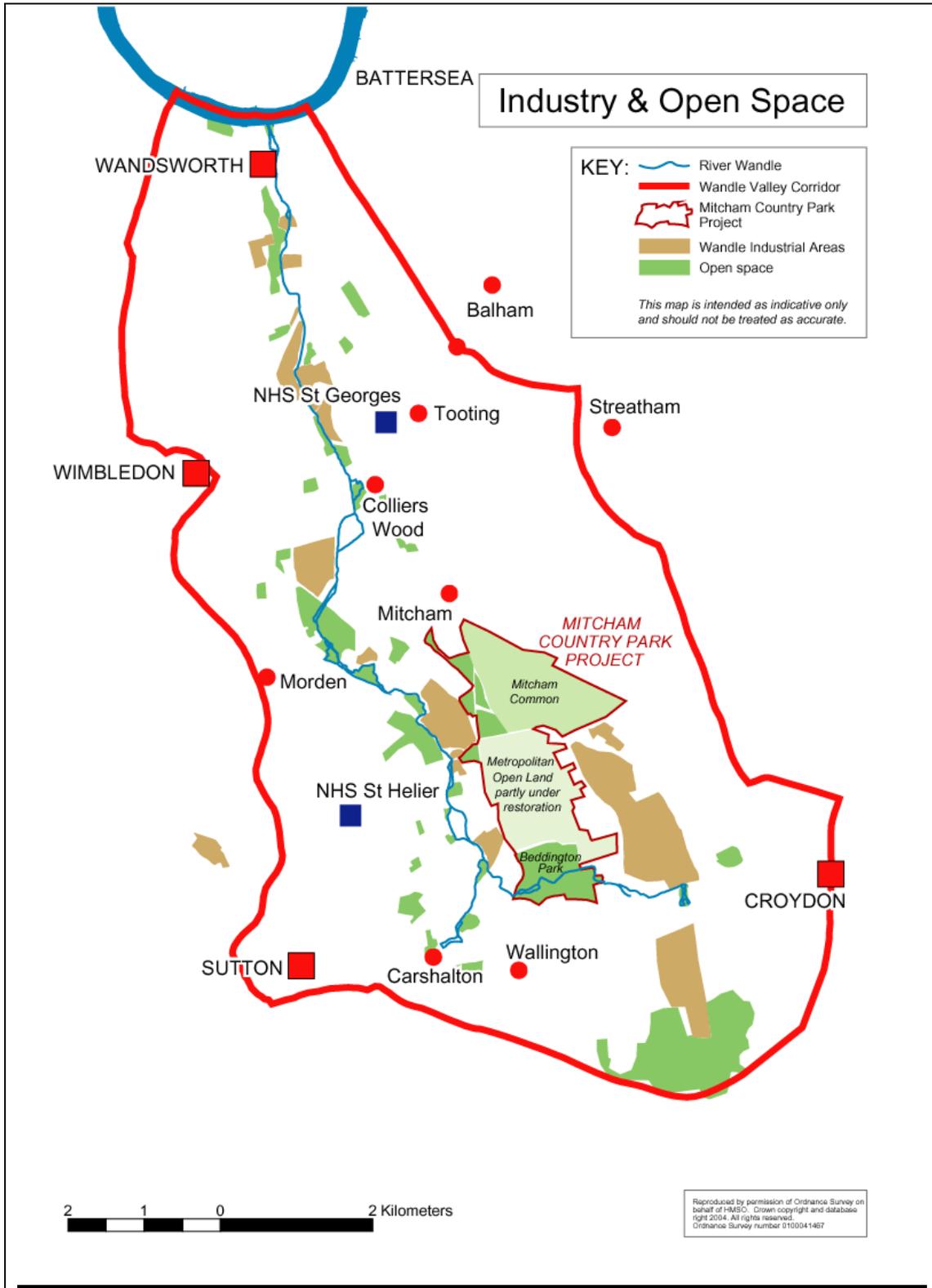
Neglect, vandalism and fly tipping are problems that must be treated realistically and holistically over a long period. The substantial improvement work that has already been undertaken along the Wandle needs to be maintained and any concerted effort to upgrade the public realm and access, should be accompanied by heightened awareness and a positive attitude amongst communities, school pupils, businesses and visitors towards looking after the local environment.

- What measures could support this?

Sustainable landscaping

'Sustainable landscaping' is designed to be less vulnerable to vandalism and fly-tipping. It is a challenge for planners and landscape architects but it is possible. The improved condition of the long term problem at Trewint Street bridge at Earlsfield is an example.

- Are there other good examples locally or elsewhere?
- How can good practice be encouraged?



Industry and the Wandle

Industry is a key source of local employment for many in the Wandle Valley and today comprises a mix of traditional manufacturing, vital but 'dirty' industries such as cement works waste disposal, and newer high-tech manufacturing and creative industries.

Industry is mainly based on a ribbon of small and medium sized estates throughout the Wandle corridor, the majority lying close by the river itself and culminating in the south Wandle industrial area where there is significant opportunity for larger businesses. The extent to which so many of these estates are established close to the river reflects the Wandle's early history when it almost certainly provided much more than the current 17% of London's manufacturing base. Today, industry remains important and the Wandle corridor is designated in the Mayor's London Plan, as one of the capital's four important areas for economic growth and regeneration.

Industrial Estate Environmental Decay

However industry, putting aside its benefits, has taken a toll on the environment and whilst toxic pollution is far from the levels of a few decades ago it nevertheless remains a concern. The weight of traffic accessing the superstores and IKEA off Purley Way also adds to the congestion and pollution stress on the surrounding area.

A particular problem for the industrial estates is their poor condition, with decaying perimeters, badly maintained roads, poor signage and absence of landscaping and local amenities. This state of dilapidation encourages vandalism, theft, graffiti and fly tipping. Improving the environment of industrial estates requires estate management forums and maintenance committees which many estates do not have and consequently little is done. In addition a poor environment discourages positive environmental action by businesses and their employees.

Business-led strategy

The four riparian councils are actively involved in business retention actions in their parts of the Valley and are committed to retaining employment. The various environmental strategies for the area (such as Sutton Council's 1998 Environmental Strategy) and specific actions to engage with businesses in their locality such as the South London Partnership/LDA 'Manufacturing Excellence Programme' and the Groundwork/LDA Morden Road Business Improvement District, have achieved some improvements to the external environment, encouraged better practice through use of footpaths, cycling and trams.

Some significant steps towards industrial estate regeneration have been undertaken. SWELTRAC and TfL commissioned a comprehensive review by WS Atkins of four of the principle industrial estates in the Wandle corridor. The results of these studies formed part of collaborative work undertaken on these estates under the South London Partnership LDA funded 'Manufacturing Excellence' programme. Grants from this programme, matched with cash from the businesses supplemented by further grants from the local authorities and TfL, funded a number of estate improvements. Examples include both the Garratt Business Park (off Garratt Lane) and Willow Lane where a range of improvements were undertaken including signage, lighting, estate security and the establishment of business-led estate management groups. On the Garratt Business Park, four untidy adjacent estates with river frontage are in process of being rationalised into one more clearly defined zone. Businesses on this estate and Wandsworth Council have also initiated an industrial estate land ownership mapping project as a prelude to implementing further improvement schemes.

This business-led strategy is recommended as a prerequisite for planning further regeneration and making funding submissions. The RRML (Riverside Road Management Ltd) business association has in effect acted as a pilot scheme demonstrating how well such associations can work with local authorities in the regeneration of industrial estates.

Most businesses along the river have 'turned their back' on the river itself, barricading their property against unauthorised entry via the river paths. Thus in many places the river boundaries present an ugly, graffiti scarred and neglected vista. But it is recognised that young and especially creative businesses are attracted by the quality of the environment in which they locate as well as transport access considerations. In Wandsworth, which has seen substantial growth in small and creative businesses, it is clear that the quality of environment (and cityscape) is of at least equal importance as quality of premises and transport links in attracting inward investment both from a client and employee attracting perspective.

Decaying industrial estates:

Poor access and maintenance encourage vandalism and fly-tipping which impacts on people working and visiting the area. This especially applies to poorly maintained perimeter fencing which encourages burglary. Ground contamination may also be a problem in poorly maintained areas.

Industrial Estate Management Forums

However, the scale of the Wandle corridor means much more needs to be done. The case for proper industrial estate management needs to be made and the benefits to property owners and tenants explained and positive support actions put in place. Getting it right can help reduce anti-social behaviour and encourage good environmental practice and improve the riverside environment.

- Are there existing channels of communication with industry to facilitate this?

Employment & Commuting

The patterns of employment and commuting in the Wandle corridor have few surprises. We know that there's a marked bias towards skilled crafts people to the south consistent with the concentration of industrial estates. In Wandsworth there is a higher density of professional / managerial people who are either self-employed or work in the West End or City. This is consistent with comments already made about the availability of office space in Wandsworth which is attractive to small and start-up businesses and partly due to proximity to the Thames from Putney to Battersea Power Station. This results in the highest concentration of small businesses of any borough - approx 17,000. The short connections to the West End and City from Clapham Junction along with a range of high band housing stock and new Thameside residential developments make it an attractive location for commuting executives.

Croydon has a high enough concentration of office space to generate its own rush hour in both directions. Along with Sutton, the good transport connections to central London collect both managerial and clerical staff from both near and far and funnel London bound commuters to both West End and City. Both town centres benefits from a range of housing close to the town centre thus preserving their dormitory role whilst providing a resource of middle and upper management for future commercial inward investment.

Wimbledon has seen growth in inward investment with the tram connection to the Waterloo mainline and District Line facilitating a range of commuting patterns but which remain predominantly London bound commuting.

The Merton/Morden/Colliers Wood areas and the south Wandle industrial heartlands have a high proportion of 'skilled trade employees' and people living within two kilometres from their work place (*source CERl Kingston University* – reflecting the string of substantial industrial estates and the relatively high percentage of affordable housing nearby).

Leisure and Healthcare

There are a number of important large hospital sites in the corridor including St George's, one of London's key teaching hospitals in Tooting. In addition there is Springfield Mental Hospital and St Helier, and Croydon's principle hospital, Mayday - along with smaller estates such as the Wilson and Nelson. These represent a significant share of the Southwest London Strategic Health Authorities estate and are almost all in need of additional investment, renewal and improvements. The Springfield estate also includes a large area of Metropolitan Open Land part of which is currently a golf course.

Healthcare accessibility

Taking forward the healthcare investment needs and related transport improvements presents a unique opportunity to improve accessibility to the major facilities thus embedding health provision within the wider community.

- How can we ensure that healthcare and healthcare accessibility improvements will increase opportunities for physical exercise – leading to better public health?

Improving Access – Improving Health

Improved access and increasing the level of usage of the paths and open spaces would open up these areas to more people and increase opportunities for walking and cycling.

- Will this result in enhanced security? Are there other measures which are needed?
- Encouraging people to walk and cycle more will also add to their quality of life and improve health how can this be encouraged?
- How can we preserve the distinct character of unique wildlife habitat areas and more formal parkland whilst improving access for walking and cycling?

Housing & Sustainable Communities

The Wandle corridor has long been considered an ideal location for housing developments. From the 'garden' estate at Merton Park built by John Innes in 1870, to the interwar LCC overspill estate which runs from Morden to Sutton (built to provide workers for the nearby Wandle industry) - to Bill Dunster's fully sustainable and innovative Bedzed development at Hackbridge which has led the way in sustainable residential development setting an example for Europe.

Not all these developments have been an overwhelming success and the Wandle corridor includes more than its share of deprived and excluded communities.

The proposed new housing and mixed use development at **Plough Lane** on the old Wimbledon Football ground site is an example of a development which will incorporate features which not only make a positive contribution to a more sustainable and environmentally friendly way of life, but will also contribute to the enhancement of the river-side and local environs.

Colliers Wood is part of the designated 'area of intensification' in the London Plan. The brown field site adjacent to Merton Abbey Mill has attracted a major housing development to this riverside area. Planning gain has brought a new footbridge facilitating access to the riverside walk, Morden Hall wetland area and Deans City Farm. However, the residential blocks run very close to the river bank and there is a case to be made for significantly wider margins in addition to riverbank access paths for future riverside development. Mitcham Village and Colliers Wood are starting to see rises in property values and both Tramlink and the newly appreciated attractiveness of the area around Merton Abbey Mills have stimulated this trend as well as the above average rises in the cost of housing in parts of Wandsworth, Balham and Battersea pushing first time buyers further out.

The **Roundshaw Estate**, one of Suttons most deprived areas won major regeneration funding in association with a CHP (Combined Heat and Power) initiative, along with the refurbishment of 800 homes schools and facilities. The CHP system itself provides superior energy efficiency and is a significant step towards sustainability.

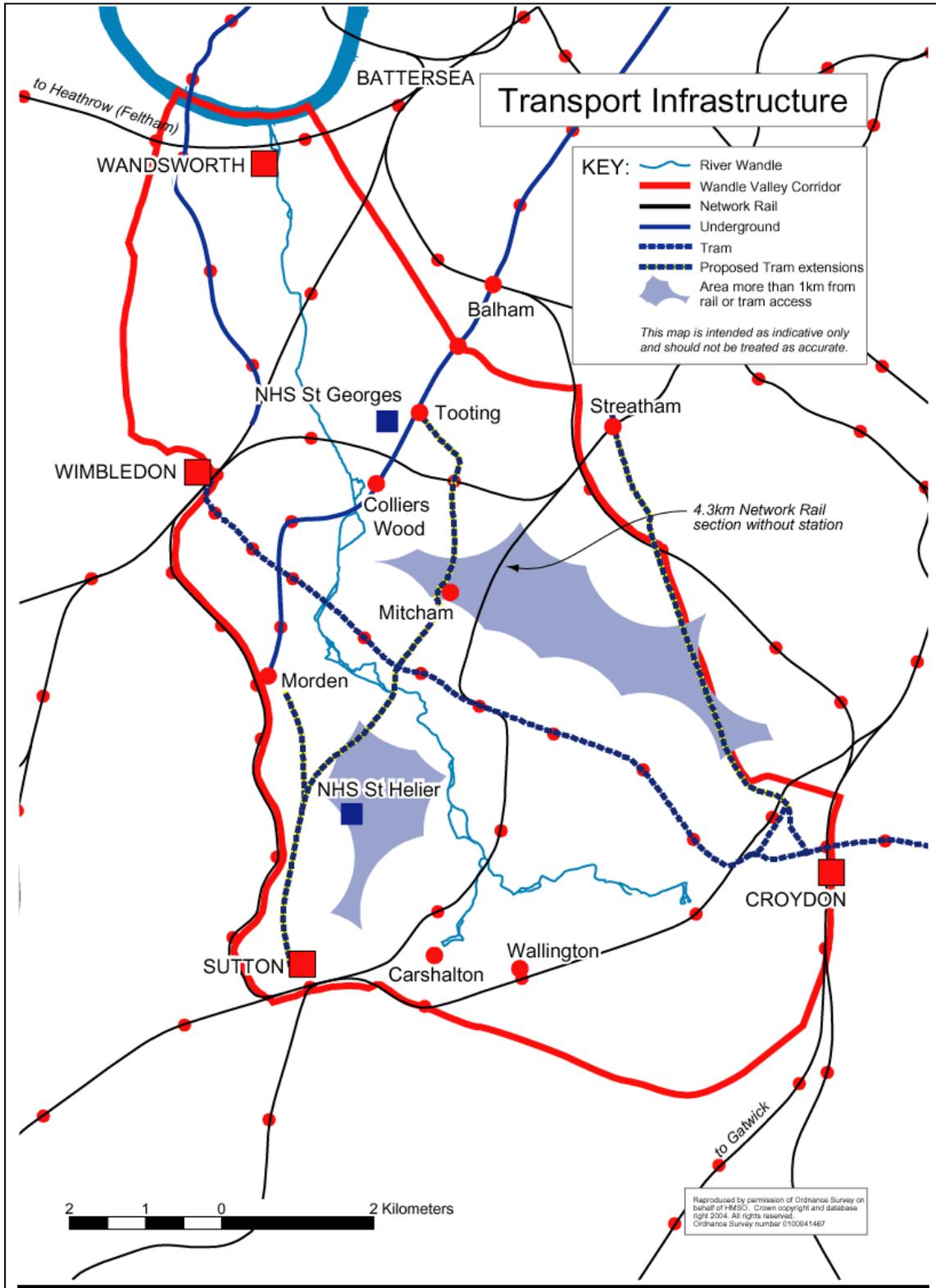
Southside, Wandsworth town's shopping centre lies below the Arndale Estate's residential towers. Its 500 homes have been refurbished through the Wandsworth Challenge Partnership SRB funding bids and the whole estate and river environs greatly improved. The Wandle still runs beneath the shopping centre but it is now marked and reflected in the design – surfacing nearby in St George's Park.

Environmentally sensitive quality development

- How can new developments avoid infringing the river's immediate environs, ensuring that they make a positive contribution to the locality?
- Parts of the Wandle corridor already suffer from drainage problems, how can flood and run-off risk from future developments be minimised?
- How can development and preservation/enhancement of the environment and heritage be successfully be achieved?
- Can planning briefs encourage future housing schemes that build on, and refine, the considerable learning generated by the Bedzed scheme.
- Such a cluster of sustainable buildings could in themselves bring visitors and publicity of the best kind. How can green minded developers be encouraged?

Education and social issues

- The river corridor includes a concentration of deprived communities. How can community development, youth work and educational initiatives improve lives in these local communities and awareness and respect for the local environment?
- Would specific events and activities around the river serve to increase use, and thus contribute to a greater sense of safety and ownership?



Transport Infrastructure

The Wandle Valley corridor forms an arc around the SW quadrant of London. As such it is traversed by several major radial road and rail arteries. In addition it is close to the District Line from Wimbledon to Putney/Paddington and the Northern Line from Morden and Collier's Wood to the West End and City.

More recently the Tramlink network - which links New Addington, (near the Surrey Hills), Croydon, Beckenham Junction and Wimbledon - has provided much improved access to many places including Morden Hall Country Park, IKEA and the Purley Way superstores - and local theatres (Croydon and Wimbledon) and from many previously isolated estates. The network has proved remarkably successful, carrying 20 million passengers a year many of whom used to travel by car.

Tramlink Extensions

The majority of homes across the Wandle Valley are well within a kilometre of rail or tram access. However there are two significant areas where the distance is much further:

- The St. Helier area between Morden and Carshalton
- From Thornton Heath Pond west of the A23 towards Mitcham

Two of the proposed extensions to Tramlink are particularly relevant to these two areas i.e.:

- Sutton to Tooting (with Morden branch) via St. Helier, Rosehill, St George's Hospital
- West Croydon to Streatham via Thornton Heath Pond

Tramlink extensions help fill the gaps

■ Implementing both these proposed route extensions has several clear and important benefits. They will place about two thirds of those currently living more than a kilometre from the rail/tram network, within walking distance of a tram stop. They are therefore important in giving viable access to the rail/tram network for many thousands of people for whom it is currently too remote.

Network Rail – Gaps

'ON' (Overground Network) is an improved daytime service for non-commuting rail journeys which is welcome and useful in the Wandle Valley area. Its promotion along with promotion of tram services and the Wandle Trail should form part of any promotion of the Wandle and its attractions.

One opportunity of the rail network of particular relevance in the Valley is the unusually long gap between Streatham and Mitcham Junction (approx 4 km) – on the Thameslink operated line between Sutton, London Bridge and Bedford. The future of Thameslink 2000 and its relationship to ON and tram extensions is of critical importance to the Wandle Corridor.

Transport Infrastructure

There are two areas where thousands of homes and two major hospitals have poor access to rail and tram connections. With the exception of Tramlink, public transport accessibility is generally poor throughout the corridor and the road network is severely congested. The majority of industrial estates suffer from poor accessibility for deliveries, customers and staff and this has a detrimental effect on their competitiveness and ability to recruit staff.

Wandle Trail – Cycle Network

The river's 14 miles of linking trail is a recognised route for those many walkers and cyclists who have discovered it. However, it includes less welcoming areas and substantial gaps that need improvement before the Trail can be completed and become fully part of the National Cycle Network. The Wandle Trail Partnership has undertaken projects linked to the National Cycle Network including the Wandle Trail section for north – south travel linking the Thames path with South London and Surrey.

At a local level the trail is already significant to walkers and cyclists as an access route to local town centres (ie Wandsworth) and leisure facilities – however it could be more so. Sustrans is working on a key gap in the Trail at Earlsfield near Wandsworth Town Centre where the river goes under the Waterloo mainline.

Linking Gaps in the Wandle Trail

Linking this gap is a major priority and is supported by the local councils, Sustrans Groundwork. Some funding for an environment enhancing, suspended footway has been secured and the Environment Agency consulted. Way markers are being installed as part of the Wandle Trail Arts Programme / Cycle network.

- What other actions are needed to complete the Wandle Trail?

South Wandle to Surrey Hills to Gatwick

The Wandle Valley initiative is relevant to long-term planning at the northern end of the Gatwick Corridor in terms of linking the Thames to the Surrey Hills via the Wandle Valley, particularly in the context of the transport and business links with the 'Gatwick Diamond'.

With increased pressure for economic growth, commercial property and new homes the 'green stepping stones' between the capital's Wandle Valley green lung and the Surrey Downs in the Metropolitan Green Belt need to be preserved and links for cycling routes and chains of open spaces should be safeguarded. This should include the open space surrounding the newly regenerated Roundshaw estate at South Beddington which could provide one such stepping stone.

The old Roman Road, Stane Street, (now the A24) ran from Chichester to London via Pulborough and on through Ewell, Cheam, Colliers Wood, Tooting, Balham and Clapham. The Wandle's historical importance was industrial – providing the power to drive the emerging industrial revolution. With the railways in the 19th and early 20th century, the focus was still very much within London and radial. The latter half of the 20th century saw the opening of Gatwick Airport and then the M25. With these, the focus of transport and industry shifted southwards and that process continues today.

For businesses today in the Wandle corridor, transport links to the motorway network and Gatwick via the mainline rail network and the A23/A24, along with supply-chain links to businesses in the Gatwick Diamond are as important as the river itself once was.

Regional infrastructure

The Gatwick Diamond initiative seeks to consolidate the industrial base, developing and strengthening links along the southern Wandle and through to Brighton via Gatwick, Crawley and Reigate/Redhill.

- How can a more effective liaison with planning, transport and economic development be created with the Gatwick Diamond plan?

Art, Culture and the River

The Wandle has inspired an artistic tradition as William Morris's design factory and studio demonstrated but it has also been the source of inspiration for many other artists over the years. Today, new designer/maker businesses are based close to the river continuing these links, emphasising that the river-side environment is particularly important to creative businesses which in turn attract other inward investment in the long term..

Set in the urban and more formal landscaped areas, public art can add an interesting dimension to public open space (see Canizarro Park and Wimbledon School of Art; South Bank). Sculpture and artefacts such as beam engines from the industrial history of the river, may both be appropriate in carefully selected locations, avoiding ecologically sensitive wilderness areas.

Sustrans supported by Groundwork Merton and Wandsworth, Merton and Sutton Councils, have embarked on the **Wandle Trail Arts Programme** (also supported by the Arts Council). It includes viewing platforms and two new bridges in Ravensbury Park. Further art works are being considered for a variety of locations – including the Plough Lane housing development with financial support from the developer David Wilson Homes. The scheme could be extended to link with the sculpture already located on the Spit at the river mouth and the recent sculpture in front of the Old Burial Ground, Garratt Lane Wandsworth.

In Wandsworth town centre the role of public art in regeneration has been recognised, if not yet funded.

Wandle Valley Festival & Events

2004 saw the first event to draw attention to the Wandle and its potential as a major green chain for south London. A series of 'fairs' were organised along the river with linking events such as cycle rides from source to mouth and a variety of displays, activities and participants. Although supported by most of the local councils, Youngs Brewery, South London Partnership and other local stakeholders, it was largely driven by the voluntary sector (WEF and other groups) on a very small budget. Visitor numbers were modest but sufficiently encouraging to be regarded as a successful first event and it is planned to repeat the event in summer 2005 incorporating learning to date.

Support for Wandle Events

As a means of bringing the river and its recreational benefits to the attention of local communities – and spreading the benefits from visitors to London, support for events along the Wandle is in line with the objectives of the Green Ribbon programme and the Mayor's tourism strategy. Such activities could also be an important addition to highlighting the river's value to the community and building more active local involvement.

- How can events and festivals be supported and promoted?

Nelson and the Wandle 2005 will see the 200th anniversary of Nelson's death (21st Oct). This will be marked by a major event in Merton in October.

Morden Hall Park as well as providing a year-round attraction with craft demonstrations such as wood-turning, is home to several events including the Mediaeval Fayre - a popular event with much pig roasting, jousting and local craftware for sale.

Merton Abbey Mill's craft market and pottery is now one of the main tourist attractions of SW London, rivalling Portobello Road in its appeal to international tourists in high season. Its collection of historic industrial buildings and association with William Morris and Liberty prints is well known. Its Colour House Theatre is small but ideal for small plays; Sunday blues gigs and other shows.

Theatres & entertainment

The broader Wandle Valley is home to several theatres including Wimbledon and Polka Theatres in Merton, Fairfield Hall/Ashcroft and Warehouse Theatres in Croydon and the small Colour House Theatre at Merton Abbey Mill. Clapham Junction has its Grand, now resurrected as a music venue and discotheque. Wandsworth town centre has 5 Garratt Lane a Victorian 'long room' theatre that is reputed to have served as London's first regular cinema and other club style venues. Regeneration funding has supported several of these venues in the past and plans are currently being considered for the return of the 'Long room' to public access after a recent, refurbishment in collaboration with its owners, Young's Brewery. The resurgence of cinemas has meant new multiplexes in Wandsworth, Putney, Wimbledon, Croydon and Clapham, all contribute to supporting each town centre's shopper footfall and commercial viability whilst offering shorter distances to travel for evening entertainment. Traditional pubs continue to play a growing role in the music and fringe theatre sectors, the Latchmere in Battersea and although not a pub, the Warehouse in East Croydon.

Wimbledon School of Art provides internationally recognised graduate training in theatre, costume and performance design whilst ALRA (Academy of Live and Recorded Arts) Wandsworth Common is one of the country's largest drama schools.

The potential of the now derelict and squatted, old Granada listed cinema in St. Johns Hill Battersea has been identified as ideal artists live/work accommodation but is currently empty except for squatters. The live/work concept is crucial for young creative people and has been shown to stimulate wider commercial activity when it has become established as in Shoreditch and other places.

Artists Open House weeks and Arts Festivals are becoming a regular fixtures in some boroughs and Battersea Arts Centre has established a reputation as a seed bed for original theatre productions with West End potential and major exhibitions and art fairs.

Art and cultural role in regeneration

Art and culture are acknowledged as drivers of regeneration:

- How can the many cultural assets and events be promoted and supported?
- Could they be the basis for an annual Wandle Arts programme and strategy?

Development & Flood plain risk

Developers have long ago invested in the Wandle Delta area along the Thames bank but increasingly they are opening their eyes to the opportunities for residential development along the river, especially around Mitcham. The fascinating profile of the BEDZED sustainable development has contributed to the interest in the area by architects and developers along with its surrounding green Metropolitan Open land. Being a river valley however there is always the potential risk of flooding and that is a priority for the Environment Agency.

Storm drainage overflow risk

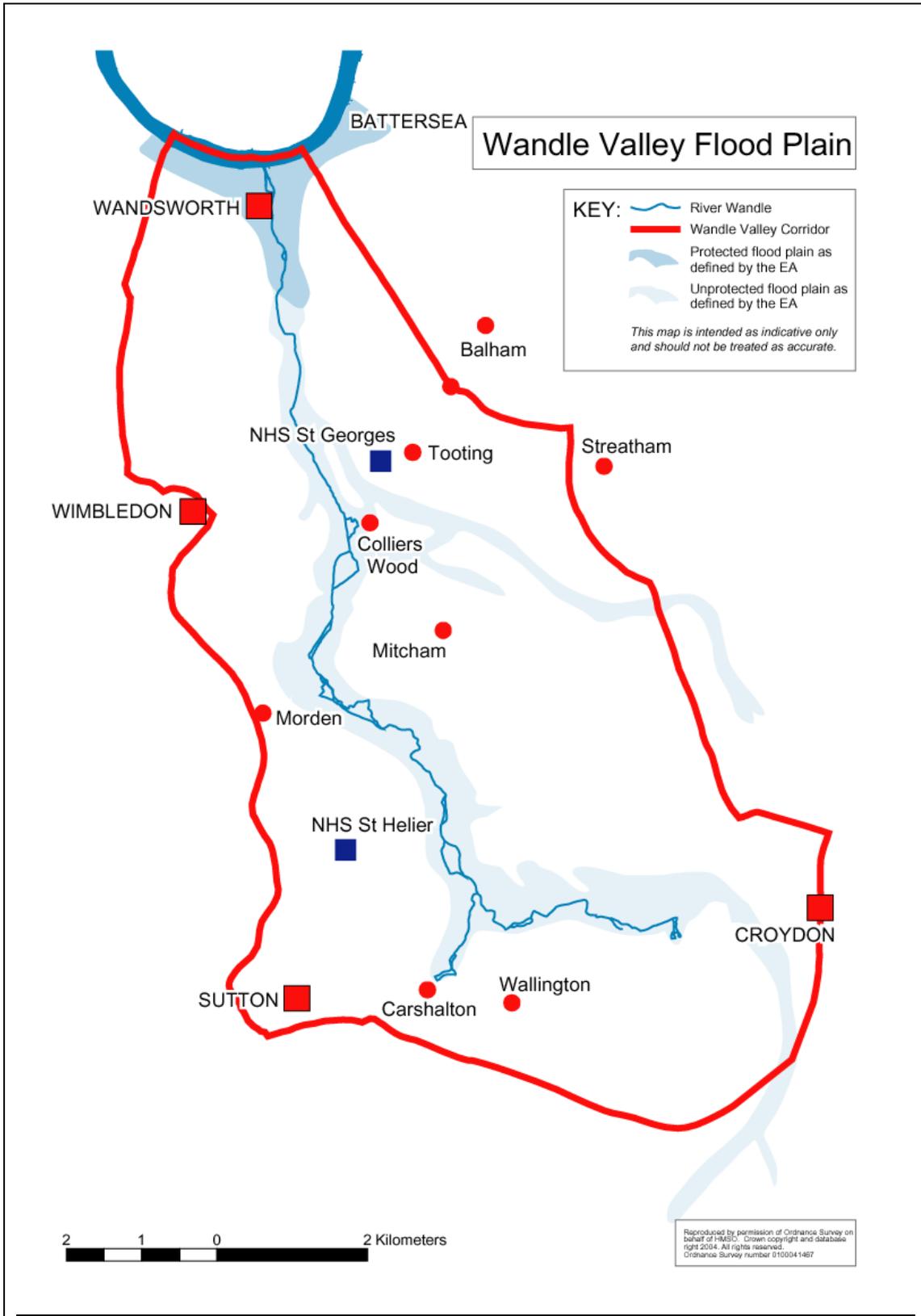
The issue of Storm drain overflow and chemical and/or sewage pollution contaminating the river is one that has plagued the Wandle over the years. This has had on occasion a big impact on wildlife with fish kills. Although the problem is relatively rare, partly as a result of rainfall patterns – what preventative measures need to be undertaken to eliminate the occurrences?

The Environment Agency has commenced a strategic study of the Wandle catchment. This study aims to develop a five-year programme highlighting flood risk management priorities. In the interests of sustainable development they see it as important that this work is continued alongside the South London Sub-Regional Development Framework and this South London Partnership Wandle initiative.

The Environment Agency is concerned that environmental sustainability, in its widest sense, should be incorporated into the Wandle initiative. They have specific concerns relating to the pressures of development within the valley which include:

Flood management draft priorities

- Flood risk assessment. Prevention of inappropriate development in the flood plain, flood defences and wider riverside margins.
- No encroachment into, the river to avoid river flow obstruction
- Large developments to ensure adequate provision for water conservation, waste recycling and disposal with construction based on either BREEAM or Ecohomes standards.
- Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS), source control and water harvesting, recycling and reuse should be adopted where practicable.
- Developments should be in harmony with their natural and physical environment
- Developers should be encouraged to enhance the natural environment and link fragmented habitats within the river corridor.
- Developments should re-naturalise the riverbanks with the aim of increasing natural habitat, path margins and increasing flood storage.
- **Environmental remedial needs**
Ensuring the Wandle gets its share of any storm drain overflow remedial funding. A soil survey is needed.



Examples of Recent Initiatives

The following is a summary of projects initiated by the riparian councils and key environmental organisations including Groundwork, Sustrans and the Environment Agency

The Thames

Wandle Delta

Wandsworth Town Centre

Merton Collier's Wood

Mitcham

Morden Hall Park

Sutton Beddington

Carshalton

Croydon

Purley Way

At the Wandle mouth Wandsworth's regeneration partnership developed an Urban Design Framework to enhance the Thames and Wandle riverside with promenades, footbridge and new landscaping at **The Spit** in the river mouth and at the southern end of the town centre including improved access and wildlife tranquility zones. Enhancing the Wandle and its Trail to the Merton border is under consideration. Together with Sustrans, Wandsworth Council have made improvements to eliminate fly-tipping at **Trewint St bridge** and are working on imaginative ways of connecting the gap in the Wandle Trail between there and **King George's Park**. WBC are also active with regeneration and employment issues in the riverside industrial estates. **Young's Brewery** are planning to move from their Wandle site in Wandsworth town centre and are working with the council on some imaginative plans which include a promenade along their stretch of the Wandle bank.

Following the huge success of **Merton Abbey Mill** market and riverside facilities, Merton Council with Groundwork has completed the regeneration of the Wandle Park at **Collier's Wood** and currently has the large **Willow Lane Industrial Estate** and **Mitcham Urban Village** on its agenda. The development of the rest of the Merton Abbey site is well advanced and planning gain has seen a new footbridge which will do much to encourage market visitors to explore nearby **Dean's City Farm** and the wetland areas of **Morden Hall Park**. **Ravensbury Park** has some of the country's finest trees that may well compete with Carshalton's historic plane tree mentioned below.

In Sutton, **Beddington Park** is a popular family recreational destination with good facilities for children and several stretches of wildlife tranquillity zones. Giving more public access without disturbing wildlife is a challenge that may warrant further investigation. **Carshalton Ponds** has benefited from recent large scale investment to ensure they remain full and water is kept flowing. Along with the Grove Park it has a market town ambience and picture post card landscape incorporating some of the country's most precious trees including the 200 year old 123 foot plane tree (when measured in 1964).

Recognising the ecological habitat and leisure amenity potential of the Wandle, **Croydon** is seeking to use the Blue Ribbon Network (London's waterways) as facilitating the opening up their limited and partly culverted stretch of the Wandle. The degree of their success will also be dependent current planning negotiations for a Wandle side development site near Purley Way. At issue is bringing the river to the surface with a bank side path or burying it under industrial buildings and eliminating public access to a significant stretch of Croydon's potential riverside – it is hoped this GRI initiative will support the Council's environmentally positive case.

Raising awareness

Relative to its length and accessible environs, relatively few people currently enjoy the Wandle's leisure amenity, (with the exception of Merton Abbey Mill and Morden Hall Park).

There have been recent articles on the Wandle in the Sunday papers. A map of the Wandle trail has been produced and the mainly individual attractions publish their own literature.

It will take a long time for a rolling programme of enhancement along the river to become known amongst the broader community and resources are limited - yet a programme of awareness raising and promotion will need to go hand in hand with concerted actions to enhance the Wandle.

Raising Awareness

What mechanisms could be used (cost effectively) to promote the Wandle and raise awareness, interest and support?

How can the enthusiasm and support of the many voluntary and community activists be harnessed to promote the Wandle?

South London Partnership

The South London Partnership is one of five Sub-regional Strategic Partnerships contributing to the development of the London Plan's, South London Sub-regional Development Framework.

It works with Bromley, Croydon, Kingston, Sutton, Merton, Richmond and Wandsworth Councils; London South Learning & Skills Council, Business Link for London, Kingston University, South London Business, the Council for South London Chambers, Connexions South London, the SW London Strategic Health Authority, SWELTRAC and SELTRANS transport partnerships; the GLA (Greater London Authority), the LDA (London Development Agency), transport for London, Government Office for London and independent environmental and voluntary organisations in supporting the needs of the south London community.

Consultation

Institutions consulted during the preparation of this discussion document:

Croydon Council	SWELTRAC
Day Aggregates	Thames Water
English Heritage	Transport for London
Environment Agency	Tramlink
GLA	Viridor Waste Management Co Ltd
Groundwork Merton	Wandle Festival Organisers
Merton Abbey Market	Wandsworth Borough Council
Merton Council	Wandsworth Cyclists
Network Rail	Wandsworth Environment Forum
Riverside Road Management Ltd	Wandsworth Society
Sustrans	Wandsworth Town Centre Partnership
Sutton Council	Young's Brewery

BSJB and SLP April 2005

Supplementary Papers

NOT PART OF REVIEW DOCUMENT – for future ref

Issues for action

Decaying industrial estates:

Poor access and maintenance encourage vandalism and fly-tipping which impacts on people working and visiting the area. This especially applies to poorly maintained perimeter fencing which encourages burglary. Ground contamination may also be a problem in poorly maintained areas.

Degradation of open space

Old waterworks, industrial site perimeters and areas north of Collier's Wood are unattractive and inadequately signed, paths are in poor condition and graffiti remains on all available surfaces. The riverbank on the Mitcham side opposite Poulter Park is inaccessible and the Trail path in poor condition.

Need for environmentally sensitive quality development

New developments need tighter planning guidelines to avoid infringing the river's immediate environs – and to ensure that they make a positive contribution to the locality. Flood risk assessment and defence strategy need to be included in planning briefs if not already.

Transport Infrastructure

There are two areas where thousands of homes and two major hospitals have poor access to rail and tram connections. With the exception of Tramlink, public transport accessibility is generally poor throughout the corridor and the road network is severely congested. The majority of industrial estates suffer from poor accessibility for deliveries, customers and staff and this has a detrimental effect on their competitiveness and ability to recruit staff. The proposed Wandle trail represents a significant opportunity for walking and cycling for work and leisure as it will link several employment and leisure areas along the Wandle – but there are gaps which present particular design challenges and these need addressing. There are also issues of personal and business security both along the river and on the public transport network which must be addressed if more people are to be encouraged to use more sustainable modes of transport.

Education and social issues

The river corridor includes a concentration of deprived communities. A range of community development, youth work and educational initiatives in these areas would build trust between local communities. Specific events and activities around the river would serve to increase use, and thus contribute to a greater sense of safety and ownership.

Environmental remedial needs

Ensuring the Wandle gets its share of any storm drain overflow remedial funding. A soil survey is needed.

Sustaining regeneration

With substantial work having already been undertaken it is important that it is maintained against neglect, vandalism and dumping. It is depressing to see wildlife interpretation boards sprayed over with gang tags or removed completely and in spite of the valiant work of several environmental groups litter and fly-tipping are an on-going problem. However it is a problem that must be treated realistically and holistically over a long period. Any concerted effort to upgrade the public realm and access, needs to be accompanied by heightened awareness and attitude forming projects in schools, supported by local communities and some security measures. 'Sustainable landscaping' designed to be less vulnerable to vandalism and fly-tipping is a challenge for planners and landscape architects - it is possible as demonstrated by the improved condition of the long term problem at Trewint St. bridge.

Guiding Principles

It is recognised that an initiative such as this one should not sap officer time and resources however some minimal framework and structure is essential to bring a worthwhile programme to fruition. The guidelines suggested below will help to achieve the initiative's aims for the benefit of all stakeholders and the communities they represent or work with.

Draft Management Guidelines

1. It is proposed that a framework of cooperation be established amongst stakeholders supporting / and or developing the general principles and management guidelines of the Green Ribbon Initiative (GRI). The following are offered as a proposal:

2. The aims of the Green Ribbon Initiative should be agreed along the following lines: *To enhance the environmental amenity and economic potential of the Wandle Valley area through a coordinated programme of river led regeneration.*

3. A database of relevant area statistics be collated so that benchmarks could be set against long term inward investment, housing and other criteria to monitor long term improvement.

4. Each stakeholder body including the riparian councils would be recommended to bring together a list of their own priority projects, relating to concerns and opportunities in their reaches of the river and surrounding areas. These would form the basis of the GRI Action Programme.

5. Projects requiring outside funding would be identified and submissions prepared and coordinated by the stakeholder concerned or the SLP if it is cross-boundary project.

6. Planning briefs for all significant developments in the Wandle Valley especially those in close proximity to the river should include a recognition of the value and special character of the local environment and seek to enhance it rather than constrain it.

7. A coordinating officer be appointed at each stakeholder to facilitate communication.

8. A coordinating working group should meet at most twice a year or as necessary, to liaise and update on the GRI Programme status and funding submissions and Tramlink extension news.

8. A progress report should be published (collated and emailed) following each of the six monthly meetings.

9. A revised and agreed programme should be published to update and replace this document within twelve months. It would outline an *agreed* Action Programme.

10. A time frame should be established with a target date at which an agreed level of progress had been made to warrant – a 'launch' and awareness campaign.

Green Ribbon Initiative - Ideas Pool

1. Ecologically sensitive landscape design. Designated differentials between areas of parkland, wilderness, recreational open space, etc
2. High quality sustainable / maintainable enhancement: to minimise vandalism / graffiti and dumping
3. Improved access and appropriate trail surfacing. Different surfaces for different sections but all safe for cyclists and walkers i.e. avoiding hard surfaces in wilderness areas.
4. Special planning zone status and requirements to safeguard against flooding and for habitat and recreational space preservation
5. Development Planning Briefs that acknowledge environmental sensitivity and encourage improved access through planning gain.
6. Regeneration of adjacent industrial estates. Especially perimeter fence renewal and industrial estate access, landscaping and signage
7. Industrial estate management associations / forums to facilitate estate enhancement.
8. River based schools and community projects to stress the value of the wildlife resource and recreational potential of a cared for river
9. Public awareness programme for local and wider south London once the programme has reached a 'launch' point. Ensure that new visitors will be attracted and catered for.
10. Tramlink extensions and other infrastructure access improvements. Lobbying for both Tramlink extensions will substantially reduce remaining poor rail access zones and play a major role in regeneration.
11. Regular meetings with landowners of utility sites (especially adjacent to Mitcham Common) to monitor land restoration schedules and look for opportunities to reopen land to public domain and educational visits to the utilities.
12. Database of all relevant organisations and forum contact details for circulation to all stakeholders.
13. Encourage the development of the Wandle Valley Festival which started in 2004. Its modest beginnings were seen as a basis for future events designed to draw attention and visitors to the Wandle, its many recreational benefits and heritage.
14. Rail Network. Undertake a feasibility study of potential locations and demand levels for a station to fill 4km gap between Streatham and Mitcham Junction.

Country park & open space - ideas pool

1. Review access points to make it more user-friendly and linked to bus stops, but sensitive to habitat preservation.
2. Provision of some secure parking
3. Establish clear links between the Common and the Wandle Trail
4. Evaluate a cut and cover tunnel for a key 400-500m section of the A236. to unify the two halves of the common. The proposed Hindhead tunnel on the A3 may provide a precedent.
5. Establish catering facilities once other work has been completed especially to the east and southern ends of the common
6. Lift awareness of the Common/Country Park and its new facilities including coordinated signage and 'gateway' treatments
7. Establish shortest timetable for reinstating public access to land restored by the utilities.
8. Where public access exists, ensure it is safe and perimeter fencing to unsafe areas is adequate (Carshalton Road).
9. Develop schools projects related to both the river and the Country Park
10. Promote awareness of the archaeological site of the Roman villa
11. More inviting controlled visitor access to some parts of the utility sites
12. Seek to include the Roundshaw open space at South Beddington as a green stepping stone linking the Wandle Valley to the Surrey Hills