

Water Attenuation helps nature – Runway Park story

Runway Park has always been an important set piece for the development, capturing a footprint of the historic runway, while not making the new development always feel like “an old airfield”; and delivering strategic green space at scale, within the heart of the development but with flexibility to work around housing numbers and the dynamism of the central hub.

Technically, when design work started an additional challenge was raised of meeting increased water capacity to make the development climate resilient and enable the development to hold back water for the wider area to make them more resilient during times of increased flooding risk. The Park as designed has transformed an approach which would have seen 7 ponds required with 23,000m³ of storage required, into a water storage volume of 31,400m³ split across 2 ponds.

The team turned the design into options around a sunken park, where water levels could vary over the year to provide the capacity, and in so doing, provide an ever changing green and blue space for people to draw them in. Further consultation and work with the Wildlife Trust provided an opportunity to explore how local shortages of wetland habitats could be addressed through developing this design further, and varying the use of recycled runway content into soils could support a mosaic variety of grassland habitats. These habitats are crucial for the development, as these enhance the legacy of the grasslands running along the old runway, but are part of the biodiversity process of turning those manicured grass areas into wildlife rich habitats.

The designs had further input from residents at community consultation events and young people both through the Alconbury Weald youth club and Make Your Mark event with girls from local schools to test the spaces for places young people would want to safely hang out, and have also been worked through with access groups, to fit into the wider designs of paths, cycle ways and bridleways across the other parks coming forward, and to reach local amenities in the future central hub of the development.

The designs have been met with positivity and excitement by partners and residents, and are due to be submitted to planning in November 2024, with work starting on their extensive implementation from Spring 2025. Establishing the runway fully will take a number of years, and work will be delivered in phases over the course of the development

Wildlife Trust Bedfordshire Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire: “The design of the runway park combining high quality access for the new community while providing new wetland and grassland habitats for wildlife and respecting the heritage of the area demonstrates good practice in place design. The Wildlife Trust looks forward to working with Urban & Civic to help design the site interpretation to bring to life the careful thought that has gone into the design of the park and make it a great place to engage local residents and visitors on the nature all around them.”

