



Proposal for creating:
‘Simoco’ Woodland Park

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**** First draft for discussion purposes ****

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Simoco site is ~1 ha of floodplain situated between the Vie Estate and the River Cam. The site is contiguous with Logan's Meadow playing fields, which in turn are adjacent to the Logan's Meadow Nature Reserve. Cambridge City Council acquired the Simoco site around 2001 and it has since been largely managed by neglect.

This appears to us to be a wasted opportunity. From a biodiversity perspective, it could be part of an enlarged local nature reserve (LNR) supporting more diverse wildlife. From a climate perspective, it could be growing trees to sequester carbon. And from an amenity perspective it could be enhanced to provide peace and respite to local residents and visitors.

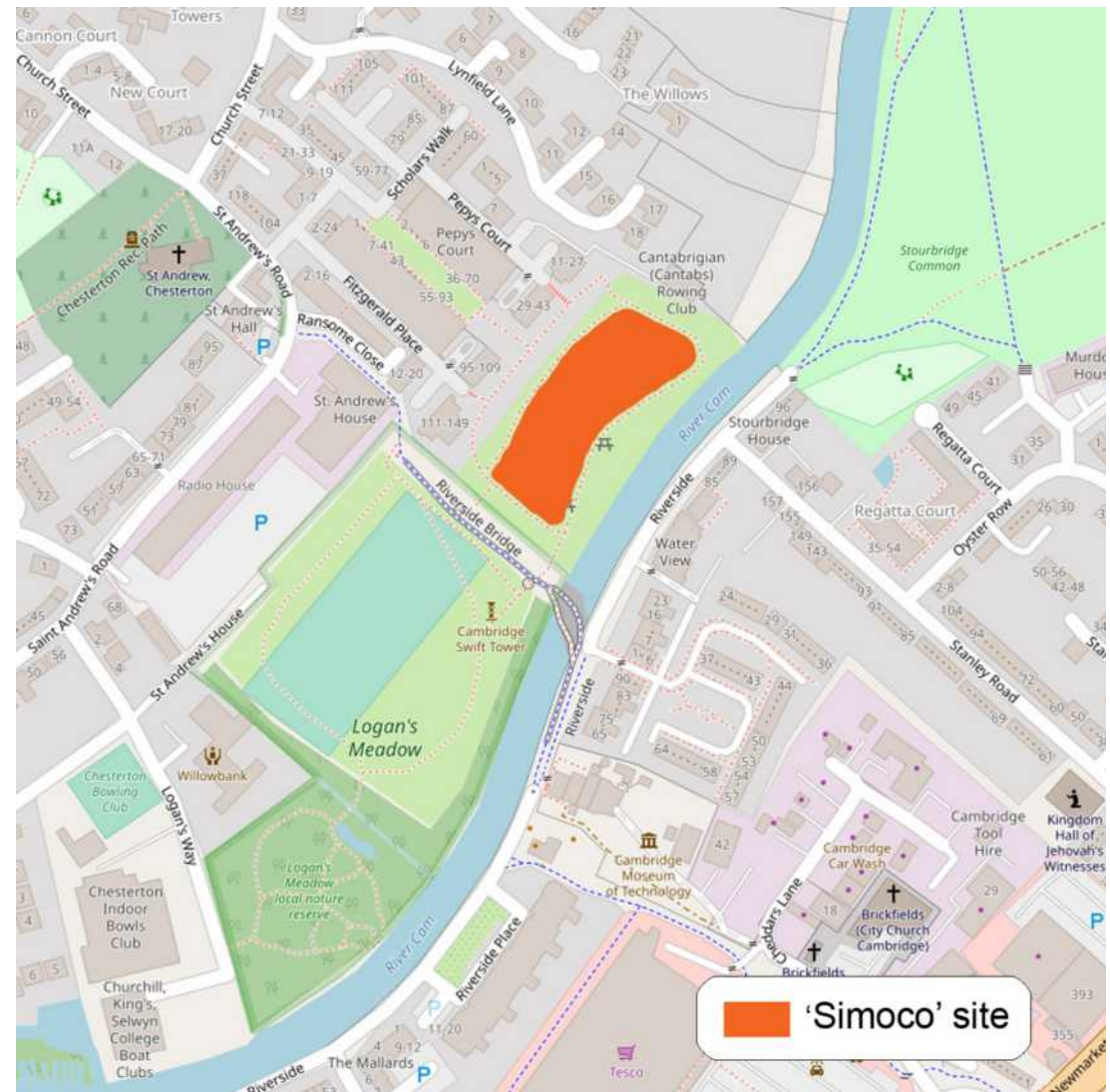
Any change to the site needs to be sympathetic to the nearby housing, hence we do not propose that this become a mirror image of the existing Logan's Meadow LNR. Instead we have developed plans which incorporate more formal design elements on the northwest side adjacent to the housing which transitions to a less formal style towards the river.

Land use changes such as we are proposing require demonstrable community support. We are also aware of the severe financial pressures under which local government is operating. To investigate how best this project might be revised, enacted and maintained, we are proposing the creation of a "Friends of Logan Meadow LNR".

1. LOCATION OF THE 'SIMOCO' SITE

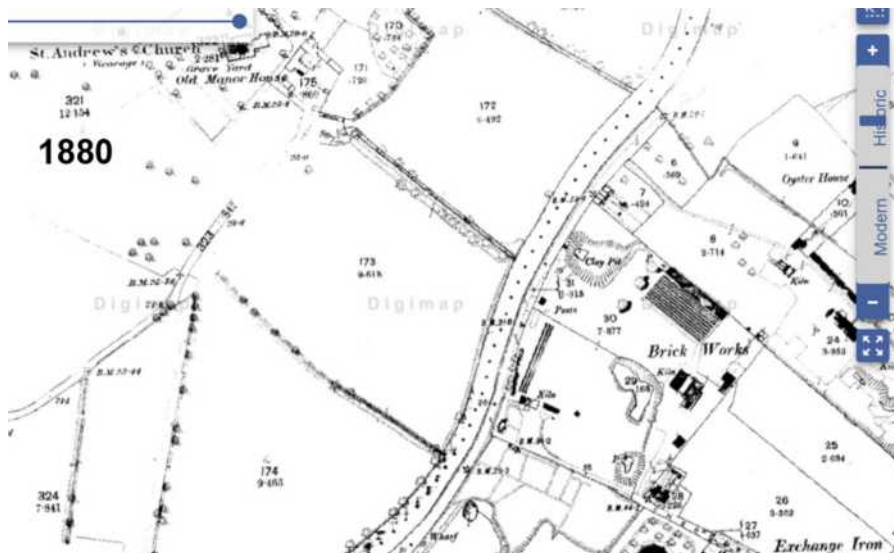
The 'Simoco' site is located between Logan's Meadow to the southwest, Vie Apartments to the northwest, Stourbridge Common to the northeast and the River Cam to the southeast.

We expect that in 2020 the current geographic limits of the Logan's Meadow Local Nature Reserve (LMNR) will be extended to as to include the Simoco site. The City Council currently has no plans for replanting the Simoco site if/when the LMNR is extended.



2. HISTORY OF THE 'SIMOCO' SITE

2.1 1880



A map of the area from 1880 shows that at that time the site was undeveloped floodplain.

2.2 1920



By 1920 the situation is little changed with the future Simoco site remaining undeveloped.

2.3 December 2000



This view looking the northeast, shows how the site was originally developed by Simoco.

Simoco offices are visible to the left, with the floodplain given over to a sports area including a football pitch and three tennis courts.

2.4 December 2002



This view shows how the floodplain was subdivided for development.

The dark black line is a fence erected to separate off the future building site of the Vie development to the northwest (left of image).

2.5 January 2007



By January 2007, construction of the Vie apartments was well underway.

2.6 May 2017



This image provides a good impression of the site at present.

3. CURRENT USE OF THE SIMOCO SITE



Location	Item	Supplier
1	New Grasscrete maintenance access way	Grass Concrete Company
2	New maintenance access crossing	Miles Waterways
3	New barrier	Mowells & Co
4	Desire line – Carr stone path	Gaskin Brothers
5	Boulders and planting	Bannolds & Coles Nurseries
6	New top dressing to path - Fibredec	Colas Fibredec
7	New picnic Area - Picnic tables & BBQ stone	Glasdon - Enviropol range
8	Recycling bins	Big Belly Compactors
9	Outdoor Fitness Equipment	Wicksteed Leisure
10	New seating and bin	Kompan & Mowells
11	New reinforced grass path and footbridge link to Logan's Meadow LNR extension	Matta & Miles Waterways
12	Desire line – Fibredec path	Colas
13	New link path - Fibredec	Colas
14	Dog waste bin	Wybone
15	New trees – Willows & natives	Barchams

The diagram above shows the City Council's vision for the site. This has been largely enacted, but with the outdoor fitness equipment being relocated to Logan's Meadow.

The site has been mown approximately every three years. It is largely "managed by neglect", due to limited City Council funds, poor access and little community involvement.

The peripheral path is used by only a small number of dog walkers, and joggers. The area inside the peripheral path is unused since it includes nettles and brambles. Barbeque facilities remain unused owing to their design and location.

This lack of activity helps facilitate anti-social behaviour and drug taking on the southeast side of the site. Used needles in this area are not uncommon.

4. RECENT PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE SIMOCO SITE

4.1 View looking north



This view is looking north on a sunny day and shows an expansive view across the length of the site.

Scrub and mixed grassland is established, with Alders forming a hedge against the metal fence. there are mature Willows towards the river on the right.

The current seating area consists of two large fixed wooden picnic tables. There is a stone barbeque bowl that is starting to crack and will need replacing. It is mainly used for open fires.

4.2 View looking northwest



Here we are looking northwest towards the Simoco flats. To the right is an established Willow screening with some Willows already reaching 20 ft. in height.

This view shows the scrub/grassland in the foreground which is well above waist height. The land here is flat apart from some woodchip mounds.

4.3 View looking west



This view looking west shows extensive scrub on the site, which prevents it from being used for recreational activities.

Note existing trees on the site.

4.4 View looking south



Here we are looking across the site towards the river, Waterview apartments and the Museum of Technology.

The four semi-mature Willows in the distance were planted by the City Council in 2015/16. Much older Weeping willows form a very attractive feature along the Cam, but several have been lost in recent years due to their canopy having been allowed to become too large. In October 2018 the City Council undertook a much needed pollarding of the remaining Weeping Willows which should help ensure their immediate survival.

5. ACCESS TO THE SIMOCO SITE

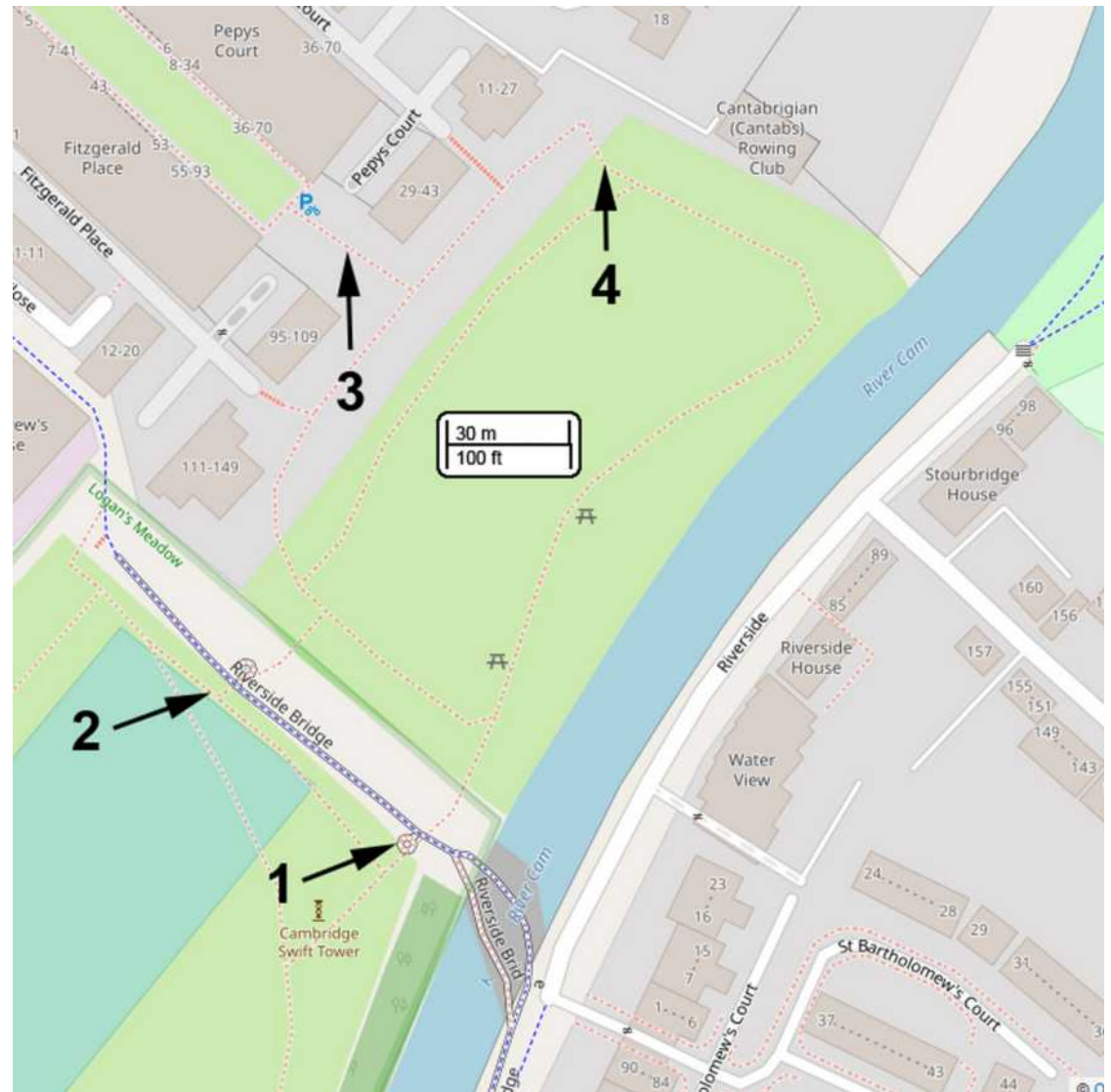
There are currently four entrance points to the Simoco site, which are in varying state of repair.

Entrance 1: This is via Logan's Meadow and involves crossing a small wooden bridge. The bridge itself is passable, but in summer can be restricted by overgrowing brambles / blackberries.

Entrance 2: This is also via Logan's Meadow. Where the path passes beneath the Riverside Bridge is very muddy following wet weather.

Entrance 3: This entrance is currently closed. There is a sign from the Vie Estate stating that the wooden bridge is currently considered to be unsafe. This bridge is owned by and is the responsibility of, Cambridge City Council.

Entrance 4: This entrance connects with paved paths leading to the Cantabrigian Rowing Club and to Pepys Court. It is the only access point for vehicular access (Camcitco rubbish removal; tree pollarding, etc). Ownership/maintenance for Entrance 4 lies (probably) with Vie owners and leaseholders, whose interest is managed by Encore Estates



6. LAND USE CHANGE: GUIDING PRINCIPLES & OBJECTIVES

We suggest that any change of use to the Simoco site should be examined with respect to the following criteria:

6.1 A Response to the Climate Emergency

Cambridge City Council declared a climate emergency on 21st February 2019. The Committee on Climate Change has outlined how land use change can contribute towards combating climate change¹. They estimate that upwards of 1.5 million ha of new woodland will need to be planted in the UK by 2050 to meet national carbon reduction targets.

6.2 Increasing biodiversity

In May 2019 Cambridge City Council declared a biodiversity emergency². Amongst other things this seeks to “make the Council estate more hospitable to a wide range of plants and animals”. It also promises to work in partnership with community groups to “encourage wider biodiversity action across the city”.

¹ <https://www.theccc.org.uk/publication/land-use-reducing-emissions-and-preparing-for-climate-change/#key-findings-and-recommendations>
Accessed 16 Oct 2019

² <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/biodiversity-emergency> Accessed 16 Oct 2019

6.3 Retaining flood protection capability

The Simoco site is part of a natural floodplain of the River Cam. A significant portion was paved over to create the Vie Apartments and associated roads and parking. Given that climate change will bring sea level rise and more intense rainfall events, it is important that the remaining unbuilt portion continues to be able to act as a natural flood area.

6.4 An enhanced community asset

The Simoco site provides very limited community benefit at present (see Section 3). We argue that land use change of this site should also aim to provide an amenity of which the community can be proud and will want to make use of and will help promote their wellbeing.

6.5 Summary of land use change objectives

- Sequester carbon
- Increase biodiversity
- Maintain flood protection
- Provide a multi-use community asset
- Connect people with the River Cam
- Respect site setting, especially Vie Apartments location

7. POSSIBLE CHANGES OF LAND USE

7.1 Woodland

The Committee on Climate Change has recommended that the UK should be planting 30,000 ha of new woodland annually. This is more than double the current rate of planting.

New woodland is needed in order to sequester carbon dioxide (CO₂), which forms a key part of most plans to meet net zero carbon emissions targets. Trees also offer the potential to improve air quality, provide a cooler microclimate, increase biodiversity and promote feelings of wellbeing.

The amount of carbon sequestered will depend on variables such as tree species, planting density and whether or not there are plans to fell or thin trees. Using a calculator³ based on UK Forestry Commission guidance, we estimate that a 0.7ha site could be expected to sequester ~500 tCO₂e over 50 years. The majority of carbon is stored only once the trees have become well established.

7.2 Community solar farm

The 'Simoco' site is of similar size to that used to create the Reach Solar Farm⁴. In principle solar PV panels could be installed to generate electricity and to provide educational opportunities.

³ <https://ccsbestpractice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Calculating-the-carbon-sequestration-value-of-trees.pdf>

⁴ <https://reachsolarfarm.co.uk>

The downsides to this option include: flood risk, requirement for fencing/security ground maintenance issues, grid connection requirement, lack of expertise, significant upfront costs and visual impact.

7.3 Allotments

Cambridge has a shortage of allotments. Although the social and wellbeing benefits of allotments are well known, the biodiversity and carbon implications of converting the Simoco site to allotments are poor. Security fencing would also need to be erected.

7.4 Community growing and recreation space

Community growing spaces are becoming increasingly popular in the UK and offer excellent educational opportunities for schools. Again, the biodiversity and carbon implications of converting (part of) the Simoco site is not positive and security fencing might need to be erected.

7.5 Summary Table

	Climate	Biodiversity	Flood Protection	Community Asset	Community access
Woodland	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓
Solar farm	✓✓✓	xx	x	✓✓	xx
Allotments	xx	x	✓✓	✓✓	✓
Com.grow.	x	?	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓

8. ADDITIONAL CONSTRAINTS

8.1 Proximity to Vie Apartments

The northwestern boundary of the Simoco site backs onto the Vie Apartments (see photographs in Section 4.2 and 4.3). For this reason it would probably be inappropriate for this section of the site to be transformed into unstructured woodland.

Similarly the proximity of housing provides an opportunity to incorporate family-friendly features such as a lawn on this part of the site.

8.2 Community Opinion

To date we have made only a small number of enquiries of visitors on site regarding potential land use changes. While these have been entirely positive, we are aware that there needs to be a much wider and more thorough consultation among the community.

8.3 City Council Funding

The proposed change of land use will involve a capital expense as well as recurring costs of maintenance. Given present local government constraints, a plan will need to be developed to show how this site can be properly maintained in the foreseeable future.

9. RECOMMENDED LAND USE CHANGE

Based on the analysis in Section 7 and on the additional constraints described in Section 8, we believe that the most appropriate land use change would be to that of a woodland park. This would incorporate more formal, family-friendly elements on the northwestern side of the site, so as to provide a strong social amenity and community asset. Moving towards the river the site would take on a less structured style with increased tree planting so as to meet the objectives of carbon sequestration and enhanced biodiversity.

10. POSSIBLE DESIGN ELEMENTS (1 OF 4)

Lawn

Pavilion on Lawn



Meeting and
chilling space



Lawn lined with Cornus



Space for exercise

10. POSSIBLE DESIGN ELEMENTS (2 OF 4)



Tree-lined
Lawn



Woodland
paths



Riverside
planting

10. POSSIBLE DESIGN ELEMENTS (3 OF 4)



Riverside
walk

Bridges
connecting
islands



Benches
around
the lawn



10. POSSIBLE DESIGN ELEMENTS (4 OF 4)



Riverside
open space



Riverside
Seating



Immersive
walkways



Access to
Camb

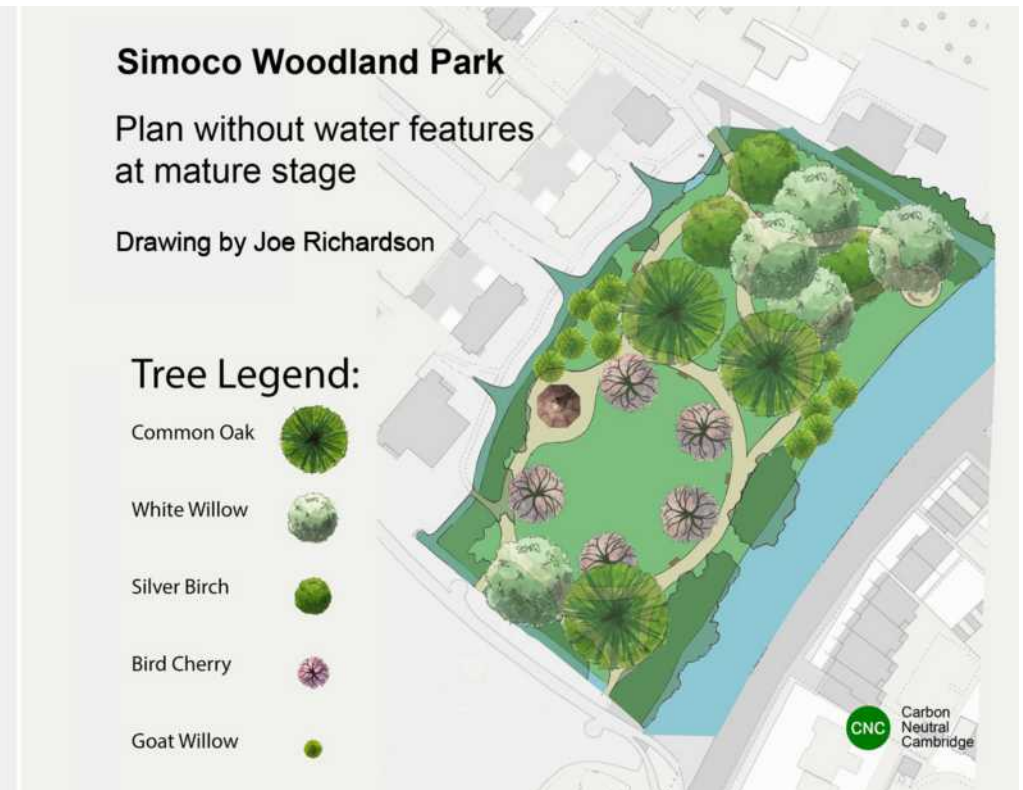
11. SCHEMATIC PLANS

11.1 Without water features



In this section we show schematic diagrams to help raise discussion about which design elements could and should be incorporated into the site reconfiguration.

The choice of whether or not water features are included, may



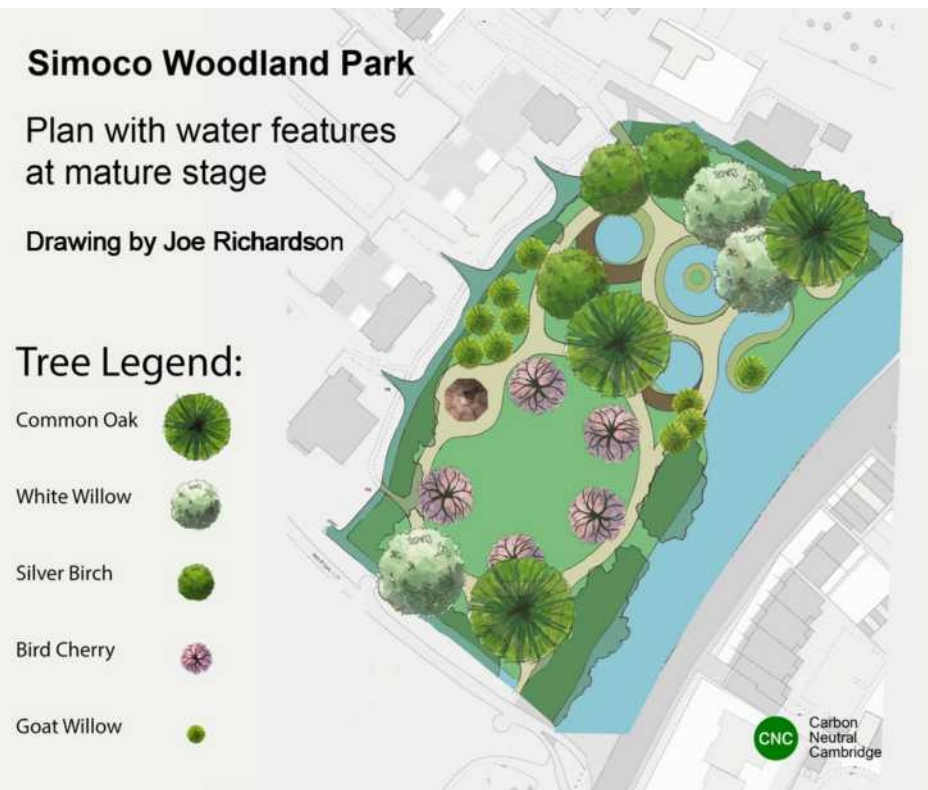
be dictated by the feasibility of bringing machinery on site and safety issues. In this schematic, without water features, we've included a large recreational area bordered by Cherry trees. Is this appropriate? Would it be possible to ensure it is properly maintained? We need your views.

11. SCHEMATIC PLANS

11.2 With water features



In this second schematic we have assumed that water features can be created and will be safe. We think that these ponds could enhance biodiversity, help promote well-being and offer downstream flood protection. Is this too simplistic? Would they become stagnant, or attract anti-social behaviour? By main-



taining a large recreational space and giving space for water, is there too little space left for trees?

There are multiple ways in which the Simoco site could be configured. Before having a public consultation, we would welcome your views in order to revise these schematic plans.

12. SCHEMATIC PROJECT TIMETABLE

Simoco' Woodland Park: Schematic Work Programme

		2019					2020											
		Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Admin	Establish "Friends of Logan's Meadow"						▲											
	Linkup with interested parties / stakeholders																	
	Informal consultations w/ neighbours																	
	Informal discussions with City Council																	
	Research site history & ecology																	
	Revise site plan																	
	Proposal to City Council																	
	Formal City Council Consultation																	
	Consultation results published																	
	Approval by City Council																	
On site studies	Produce detailed site map																	
	Existing plant survey																	
	Survey nearby Logan's Meadow																	
Funding	Revise planting plan																	
	Costing of planting plan																	
	Research source(s) of funding																	
	Raise funds for Year 1 planting																	
	Funding in place																	
Tree planting	Order trees for Year 1 planting																	
	Year 1 planting																	

13. ISSUES & NEXT STEPS

These include:

1. A community group needs to “own” this project. Could / should this be done under the auspices of an existing organisation (e.g. Friends of Stourbridge Common) or should a new organisation (e.g. Friends of Logan’s Meadow) be established?
2. For this project to be a success, there needs to be buy-in from the local community. How will the local community be notified of early plans and how will their issues and concerns be collected?
3. There will need to be a formal City Council consultation process. How best to collate the key issues and concerns of the local community into an adequate consultation.
4. Issues of access and safety.
5. Funding

14. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are grateful to a number of people who have kindly offered their thoughts and ideas about replanting the Simoco site. These include: Guy Belcher, Tony Booth, Ben Bradnack, Mike Davey, Cab Davidson, Matt Magrath and James Murray White.