DESCRIPTION OF INTERVENTION

New public paths have opened up the marshes to a wide range of users, including cyclists, walkers and those with limited mobility. Some of the new paths have a conventional asphalt finish while some more informal paths are made from crushed stone which is allowed to grow over with vegetation. New signage aids with orientation. Some of the new interventions echo historical patterns and forms within the landscape; in places the alignments of former military tracks have been re-used. Elsewhere new alignments and figures have been imposed on the existing landscape. These new elements include earth-banks, reedbeds, bridges and boardwalks. The new Trackway bridge re-establishes the historic link between the marshes and Rainham village. Better strategic water management has been made possible through the creation of new watercourses and wetland areas. The conservation status of the site disallows the use of any imported plant material; new habitat areas are created by a combination of ground re-profiling and control of water levels. Local vegetation is then allowed to re-colonise these areas naturally. New farm management infrastructure has been created to support the return of grazing cattle to the site. Reclaimed concrete and locally sourced timber have been used extensively in the construction of new infrastructural elements.

EVALUATION

In the years since the project began Rainham Marshes has found a new place in the public imagination, becoming a destination for Londoners seeking an experience of wild nature within reach of the city. Public use of the site has risen dramatically. The marshes have featured widely in local and national press and television. This new popularity has developed alongside the re-vitalisation of the site’s natural habitats. The balance between high levels of public access and impacts on the site’s wildlife is one which will require careful and ongoing monitoring. Another potential criticism is that the project erodes the sense of a truly wild, open landscape by the imposition of new design elements. It is hoped that the design approach taken, the use of materials and scale of the new interventions has allowed the site to achieve a new public status whilst retaining and enhancing its innate qualities.