

Sheepwash Local Nature Reserve – Integrated Issues, Risks and Outstanding Matters (Final Updated Version)

(Consolidated analysis incorporating environmental, infrastructure, governance and partnership concerns raised by the Friends of Sheepwash)

1. Development pressure, contamination risk and land creep – Rattlechain Lagoon and Sheepwash

There is **comparable and ongoing pressure at Rattlechain Lagoon**, where there have been sustained efforts to push for development on land that is **known to be heavily contaminated**.

This is a critical concern. If development proceeds at Rattlechain:

- There is a **real and foreseeable risk of “creeping development”** towards Sheepwash
- There are **environmental risks of contamination migration**, including:
 - Seepage through historic made ground
 - Washaway during heavy rainfall and flood events
 - Runoff entering connected watercourses

Given the hydrological relationship between Rattlechain, Sheepwash pools and the wider catchment, **any disturbance of contaminated land presents risks to Sheepwash and ultimately the River Tame**.

Despite this:

- There is no publicly stated **buffer or protection strategy** linking Rattlechain and Sheepwash
- No evidence has been shared of a **cross-site contamination risk assessment**
- No reassurance has been provided that Sheepwash’s LNR status would be treated as a decisive constraint against nearby development

This reinforces the need for Sheepwash to be treated as a **strategic environmental asset**, not residual or “available” land.

2. Viewing point infrastructure – safety, longevity and accessibility

The viewing point at Sheepwash continues to be raised as an unresolved issue.

It is now clear that:

- A standard bench alone is **not sufficient** for this exposed location
- The site requires a robust seating solution

Or, preferably, a concrete block that can be sat upon, providing a durable, low-maintenance and vandal-resistant option suitable for long-term public use.

Without this:

- Seating remains vulnerable to movement, vandalism and subsidence

- Visitor safety and accessibility are compromised
- The lifespan and value of any installation is significantly reduced

This should be treated as a **small but essential infrastructure intervention**, not an optional enhancement.

3. Fred Perry Walk / Haines Branch – agreed footprint and emerging risks

It is important to restate clearly that:

Fred Perry Walk / Haines Branch forms part of the Friends of Sheepwash agreed footprint, as explicitly agreed with M Huggins.

This area is not peripheral. It is:

- A historic corridor
- An ecological gateway
- A functional link between the High Street, canal infrastructure and Sheepwash itself

There are now **significant concerns regarding contractor activity** on and around the **old Wilko building**, including:

- Lack of clarity over the scope and nature of works
- Potential impacts on:
 - Haines Branch
 - Canal-side structures
 - Ground conditions and historic features

Given the agreed footprint, **Friends of Sheepwash should be informed and engaged** on any such activity. At present, this has not occurred, which undermines partnership working and site stewardship.

4. Canal tunnels – unresolved flooding, leakage and pollution risk

The canal tunnels running through the Sheepwash site remain a **major unresolved environmental risk**.

One tunnel in particular has been:

- The subject of repeated discussion
- Highlighted consistently as a source of concern

However:

- There has been **no clear resolution**
- No published assessment
- No agreed action plan

Outstanding risks include:

- **Flooding and structural leakage**
- **Pollution and contaminated runoff**
- Seepage or discharge into:
 - Sheepwash pools
 - Surrounding wetlands
 - Ultimately the **River Tame**

Responsibility remains unclear:

- It is not evident whether accountability lies with the Council, Canal & River Trust, or another body
- There is no transparency on inspection regimes or monitoring

This represents a significant governance and environmental gap that cannot remain unresolved.

5. Land ownership, parking and public confidence

John's Lane entrance

There remains no clear, published position on:

- Parking capacity and management
- Ownership of adjacent land parcels
- Any proposals linked to recently purchased properties

Uncertainty persists despite previous assurances that Land Registry checks were underway. No outcome has been shared.

This fuels concern about:

- Incremental development pressure
- Loss of buffer land
- Increased ASB and visitor pressure

Claims regarding pool ownership

A social media claim suggests that **one of the Sheepwash pools has been purchased by a third party**.

This is a serious assertion that requires:

- Immediate clarification by the Council
- Written confirmation of ownership of **all pools and waterbodies** within Sheepwash LNR
- Assurance that no disposal or transfer has occurred

Failure to address this undermines public confidence and invites speculation.

6. Gates, locks and accessibility

Despite repeated commitments:

- No completed **audit of gates, locks and accessibility** has been published
- Known issues remain unresolved:
 - Locks cut through at the Sheepwash Lane front gates
 - Gates left unsecured
 - Radar-key access problems
 - Poor or incorrect installations

While some works have been undertaken, the Council position now acknowledges that further improvements are **not programmed into the current year**, raising concerns around safety, access and deterrence.

7. Bins, benches and basic maintenance

- Bin replacement has been slow and inconsistent
- Existing bins are not emptied frequently enough
- Other sites appear to receive quicker attention

Bench provision has progressed only after prolonged delay, and without resolving foundational issues such as the viewing point base.

These are basic operational matters that should not remain unresolved at an LNR.

8. Habitat management and stalled improvements

- Wildflower meadow development has stalled with no clear explanation
- Tree works lack a published forward programme
- Opportunities for biodiversity gain, education and positive engagement are being missed

This contrasts with the stated ambition for nature recovery and green infrastructure.

9. Overall conclusion

Taken together, these issues show that:

- Sheepwash faces **external environmental threats**, internal infrastructure failures and governance gaps
- Problems are being addressed **piecemeal**, not strategically
- Friends of Sheepwash continue to act responsibly, constructively and in good faith
- The Council's response remains fragmented, slow and often deflectionary

The cumulative effect is a **growing strategic risk** to the reserve's ecological integrity, public confidence and long-term protection.

10. What this now clearly supports

This strengthened analysis supports the case for:

- A **site-wide, published management and risk plan**
- Explicit clarification of **ownership, buffers and protection boundaries**
- Integrated treatment of Sheepwash, Rattlechain Lagoon, canal assets and Fred Perry Walk as a **connected environmental system**
- A reset of the relationship with the Friends of Sheepwash as a **delivery and stewardship partner**