


Transforming the
Trent Valley



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Project Spotlight: Repurposing Pillboxes of Stop Line 5

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During the Second World War, a complex of small fortifications, concrete mini-bunkers known as pillboxes (due to their shape) were built at strategic points across the country to defend Britain from invasion.

A network of pillboxes was constructed along the Trent, Tame, and Dove Valleys. It took advantage of the natural obstacles created by the rivers and reinforced weak points, such as bridges and shallows, where an enemy would have been likely to cross. This network was called Western Command Stop Line Number 5.

Stop Line No.5 pillboxes are constructed from reinforced concrete to a design called FW Type 24, although some local variants to this design also exist. A metal cage of reinforcing steel would have been built and surrounded with a wooden mould, or formwork. Concrete was mixed and poured over several days as the pillbox grew, creating a bulletproof bunker from which soldiers could defend the crossing points of the three rivers.

Despite having no statutory protection, many pillboxes remain in good condition. Their strong construction has left them able to withstand time and weather. Because they are often found in fairly remote places they have been left neglected, often overgrown with brambles. In other places



they have been the subject of anti-social behaviour.

These pillboxes are part of our shared cultural heritage and by repurposing them for wildlife use, they will also be protected for future generations to understand the dark days of the 1940s, and conversely to enjoy as secure places for wildlife habitat and protection.

Working with our partners, we have created a pillbox conversion programme in the scheme area, some for bat hibernacula or roosts, others for swallows and other wild bird nests. The bat hibernacula conversions include blocking up the loopholes, fitting a lockable steel-plated door and attaching boards and fabric inside for bats to hibernate in over winter or use as summer roost sites. One loophole has a small slit left for the bats to crawl through. Closing the loopholes creates a constant temperature within the pillbox, necessary for the bats to survive.

Similarly, the swallow and wild bird nest site conversions have a lockable steel-plated door but the loopholes are left open for the birds to fly in and out of, and shelves fitted inside for nesting platforms.



The windows, or loopholes, are flared, allowing a machine gunner inside to have a wide field of fire, while having the greatest possible protection.