New access at Gilbert’s Pit, Charlton unveiled on 18th May 2016

Gilbert’s Pit SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest) at Charlton in Southeast London is one of a number of former quarries worked in this area for their sand, gravel and chalk. This pit was primarily worked for the Thanet Sand used for moulding at the Woolwich Arsenal foundries and glass manufacture. Notified as an SSSI in 1953 it represents the only permanent exposure in the Woolwich area of the Woolwich Formation.

Steps have been built up the east side of the quarry face. They represent the result of extensive partnership working between the London Geodiversity Partnership, Natural England and the Royal Borough of Greenwich. The steps were jointly funded with a £10,000 grant from Natural England and £1,300 from Royal Borough of Greenwich who has overseen the project, providing a new gate, done tree felling and scrub clearance.

The LGP has organised volunteer workdays and given technical expertise, advising on which section to improve and helped scope the geotechnical survey undertaken by Capita Symonds.

The steps were opened on Wednesday 18 May 2016 attended by representatives of Natural England, the London Geodiversity Partnership and Royal Borough of Greenwich Parks, Estates and Open Spaces Officers. The steps were “unveiled” in a ribbon-cutting event by Cllr John Fahy.

The photographs show the robust steps that will be able to be used by schools, geologists and be essential training for construction engineers. It provides a rare opportunity to encounter and understand the complex sediments that underlie much of London that can present significant challenges in strategic developments such as Crossrail. The platforms offer views of the disused workings where information boards are to be placed telling of the geology that can be seen.
The steps, installed by Complete Ecology, provide unprecedented managed access to the east section. The steps have three viewing platforms, are well constructed and safe, with non-slip surfaces and handrails on both sides.

Additionally, a new gate has been installed in the fence in front of the south face. This will allow access to enable the scrub to be kept down. There is now an excellent view from the floor of the pit that enables a vista of the Woolwich Formation shell beds and Reading Formation mottled clay at the top (which can be seen close up from the top platform of the new steps on the east face) down to the underlying sands of the Upnor Formation and the Thanet Sand Formation, both covered by scree elsewhere in the pit. In due course a sign will be placed at the base with a photograph detailing the junctions of beds. The Blackheath pebble bed at the top of the section is best seen at the top of the east face. Access to see the pebble bed close up is via a third gate at the top of the steps at the north end of Gilbert’s Pit.

Access to Gilbert’s Pit steps, the south face gate and the top is by arrangement with the Royal Borough of Greenwich. Groups or individuals wishing access should contact Larry Blake (Senior Parks Ranger) either by email at larry.blake@royalgreenwich.gov.uk or by telephone on 020 8921 4124.

The Royal Borough of Greenwich press release can be found at:
http://www.royalgreenwich.gov.uk/press/article/776/gilberts_pit_grand_opening

LGP, 23 May 2016

Photographs of the evolving stages of the steps are on the next two pages.
Building of steps at Gilbert’s Pit, 2016

Before work started in February

First stage: scaffolding poles on 11 March

First steps at the bottom on 17 March

First landing on 23 March

Almost there by 15 April
Building of steps at Gilbert’s Pit, 2016

Completed steps on 26 April