



Kennet Valley  
Wetland Reserve  
Hungerford



# Wetland News

Restoring ancient water meadows for the benefit of all

Summer 2025 | 02



# Fantastic News!

The Town and Manor is delighted to announce that the Kennet Valley Wetland Reserve project can begin! As applied for back in April 2024, full planning permission for the wetland and its access has been granted alongside outline planning permission for the Education and Information Centre.



Town and Manor of Hungerford





Photo credit: © Helen Lawley

A flock of Golden plover and Lapwing take to the skies over a wetland where they stay during the winter months.

## Our Patron

We are delighted to announce that The Right Honourable Richard Benyon has agreed to be our Patron of our appeal and has said the following:



Wetlands make a vital contribution to the natural environment. They support 40% of the world's plants and animals. They also provide migratory birds with a place to rest and refuel; act as natural sponges to reduce flooding and drought; store almost

33% of the world's carbon resources and act as a natural solution to minimise the impact of climate change.

However, we have now lost almost 90% of our original wetlands in the UK.

In addition our environment is increasingly under threat. Through changing weather patterns we are now beginning to experience some of the more extreme results of climate change. To quote Tony Juniper, the Chair of Natural England: 'First drought, then floods, Britain experiences harsh weather extremes nowadays, and it will only get worse with climate change. We must build our resilience. Fortunately, there's a good way of doing that; restoring wetlands.'

In this regard I particularly welcome the initiative of the Town and Manor of Hungerford to restore some 40 acres of former water meadows in the Kennet Valley, and develop them as a wetland reserve.

This development, of a previously neglected site, will increase biodiversity and nature recovery through the provision of new habitats for birds, mammals and reptiles, including rare and endangered species. Flood control down-river will also be improved.

Members of the public will have free public access to the site for recreational purposes, now recognised as an essential for both physical and mental health. I particularly welcome the provision that will be made for people with disabilities through the 'Access for all' objective.

In addition, I am delighted to know that ARK (Action For The River Kennet) who have been providing highly regarded education programmes on wetland and river ecology for schools in the Kennet Valley for many years, intend to move to the Education and Information Centre on completion of the building.

All of this does of course come at a cost, some £1.5 million, which the Town and Manor hope to raise through an Appeal. I am delighted to support this as its Patron and would ask you to join me in supporting this most welcome initiative.

Thank you.

**Richard Benyon**  
Rt Hon The Lord Benyon, of Englefield, GCVO



# What has been going on behind the scenes whilst awaiting planning permission?

- We have taken numerous tours of the site, including the West Berkshire Planning Officer in charge of our application, our new MP Lee Dillon, new Hungerford Town Councillors, representatives of the Kennet Valley Catchment Partnership, Members of ARK, Hungerford Allotment Holders Association and lots more local residents.
- Worked with our planning consultant to answer queries from bodies including Natural England, West Berks Highways department, Exolum and the Environment Agency.
- Produced a fundraising prospectus.
- Continued to explore possible funding opportunities.
- Established a team with the right ecological knowledge and local knowledge to manage the project.
- Listened to more input and comments from Hungerford residents.
- Proceeded with developing the plans for the wetland itself, the exact location of paths, marking out screening for the edge of the site, cross referencing with ecologists and the topographical map.
- Kept our fingers crossed!



## The Newbury Show

Despite the awful weather forecast for the weekend a team of Trustees, our River Keeper Rob Knight Starr and Fundraiser Claire Jones prepared and manned our stand. Our aim was to raise awareness of the wetland project. The response from everyone we spoke to was very positive.

For children there was a wetland colouring page with pencils and a guess -the-name-of-the-frog competition. The froggy's name was 'Ribbit' and was guessed correctly by Colby from Hungerford.

Next year we hope to return to the show with the aim of fundraising now that we have planning permission.



# What happens now?

Working with the project management team, the infrastructure of the wetland site itself will begin to emerge.

Paths will be marked out, ponds, scrapes and channels will be earmarked for excavation.

Trees will be pruned and even moved to create screening along the northern edge of the reserve.

Contractors will be sought to deliver the access road, bridge over Undy's Stream on to the wetland site and the carpark.

Detailed plans for the Education and Information Centre will be drawn up ready to submit a full planning application. The building the Education and Information Centre will be put out to tender in the hope that permission for this sustainably built, stilted structure will be granted in the future.

Aerial photo of the site at present with the location of the paths shown by mowing. Thank you to Rupert Kelton, Action for the River Kennet (ARK)

## ...and fundraising will begin!

Our first target is to raise the £800,000 required to build the access and deliver the wetland with the ponds, planting and boardwalks which will enable you to visit and appreciate the new bird and wildlife we know the reserve will attract.

If you would like to find out more or help fund the Kennet Valley Wetland Reserve or have ideas for fundraising for this wonderful project, please contact Claire Jones: [claire.jones@townandmanor.co.uk](mailto:claire.jones@townandmanor.co.uk) or call on 07379 058 208.

**We are delighted to announce that our fundraising has begun with a wonderful CIL grant from West Berkshire Council. Coming from the 'Community Infrastructure Levy' fund, the £100,000 will go towards putting in place the infrastructure needed for the public to access the Reserve; an access road, bridge and car park. What a great start to our fundraising campaign; thank you West Berkshire Council!**



Cetti's Warbler (*Cettia cetti*) is a shy bird that likes to stay hidden away in the undergrowth. Its loud bursts of song mean you'll usually hear it before you see it.