

Kennet Valley
Wetland Reserve
Hungerford



A Centre of Excellence
for Wetland Ecology,
Environmental Education
and Public Recreation



Town and Manor of Hungerford



Introduction

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.

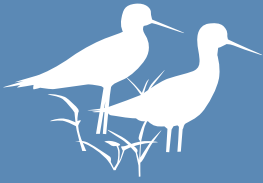
Members of the public will have free access to the site for recreational purposes, now recognised as an essential for both physical and mental health. I particularly welcome the provision that will be made for people with disabilities through the 'Access For All' objective.

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



Project Overview

In 2018 the Town and Manor of Hungerford, a charity with origins in the 14th century, acquired 40 acres of historic water meadows on the north-west edge of Hungerford, immediately adjacent to the River Kennet.

Following detailed surveys of its potential, the charity proposes to create a wetland reserve on the site. The Reserve, which will be of regional importance, will include a planned wetland landscape, a new road access and an Education and Information Centre.

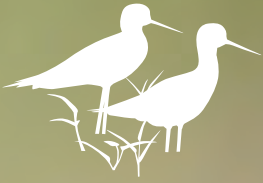
The Reserve will bring significant benefits. In addition to local nature recovery, improved wetland habitats, and greatly enhanced biodiversity, the site will be a free-entry public amenity space offering opportunities for increased physical and mental well-being for all its visitors. The Education and Information Centre will provide both education and information on wetland ecology, conservation and climate change. The landscape will be engineered to make a significant contribution to local flood control in the Kennet Valley.

As a visitor attraction and destination, the Reserve is expected to see up to 20,000 additional visitors each year bringing considerable benefits to the local economy.



The proposals for the Reserve are supported by Natural England, The Environment Agency, North Wessex Downs Natural Landscape (formerly the AONB), ARK (Action for the River Kennet – an education charity established in 2007), BBOWT (Berkshire Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust), West Berkshire Council and Hungerford Town Council. They have also received overwhelming support from local residents through a detailed and extensive public consultation.

Planning permission has now been granted by West Berkshire Council. The development is expected to take two years to complete at a cost of £1.5 million. We are hoping to raise this sum from a combination of sources which will include charitable trusts and foundations, local businesses and individual donations.



The Wetland Landscape

The landscape design, by RM Wetlands and Environment, is based on what remains of the medieval field system with its flood drainage channels connected to the River Kennet.

Planned improvements will stimulate local nature recovery, increase biodiversity, habitat provision and flood mitigation, and secure Biodiversity Net Gain credits.

The public will have a managed physical access to approximately 23 of the 40 acres, with visual access to a further 17 acres. This latter area, the western extent of the Reserve, will be lightly managed and largely left wild.

A new access to the site for both vehicles and pedestrians from Charnham Park Road, has been designed by Abley Letchford Partnership. This will lead to a car park which will accommodate up to 14 cars, including two with disabled access and two with electric vehicle charging points. Space will also be provided for two minibuses and cycle storage. Coach parking is already available on Charnham Park Road immediately adjacent to the new entrance.

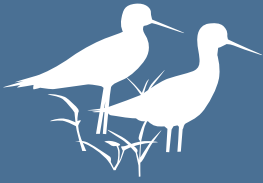
A fundamental objective of the design is to allow access for all. There will be two types of footpath; a circular footpath around the whole of the site

available for public access, and an 'access for all' footpath with a board-walk provided over a shorter route. Low-intensity cattle grazing will maintain the grassland; this will encourage micro-habitats and enhance bio-diversity. Provision will be made to keep separate cattle and members of the public.

**Estimated cost
£800,000**



Helen Llewellyn Photography



The Education and Information Centre

The Education and Information Centre will be an integral part of the Reserve.

The design has been developed in partnership with ARK which provides out-reach education on river and wetland ecology, conservation and climate change. Following our invitation, ARK have informed us that when the building is completed, they would relocate their base to the Centre. From there they would provide additional educational activities, with access to wetland and river habitats, for the many schools within the Kennet Valley and beyond. The Centre will enable classroom based work linked to the National Curriculum including the use of microscopes, a hydrological model of the Kennet Valley, and the use of multi-media presentations and wall-mounted displays.

The Centre will also provide fieldwork opportunities for GCSE and A Level students, for university student courses and for research. In addition it will be available for less formal education and information for local groups such as Brownies, Cubs, Scouts and U3A, as well as for CPD courses. ARK estimates that up to 1,000 students will visit the Reserve in Year 1, with 1,500 in Year 2 and growing from there.

The building has been designed as a timber frame eco building for educational use. It will be elevated on stilts and measure approximately 10 m x 20 m.

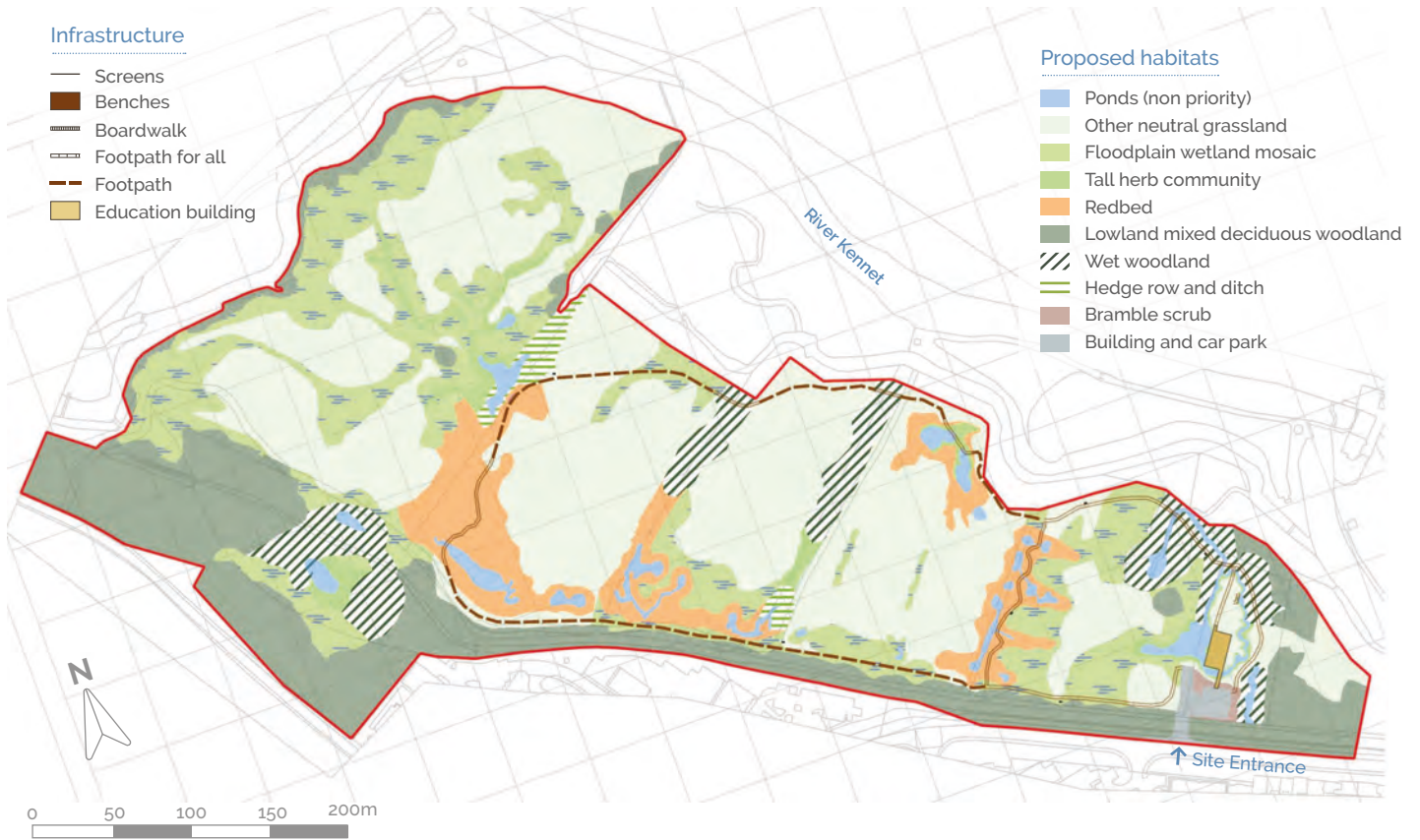


External platforms will allow views across the Reserve and will also provide space for information displays. Access via a ramp will be suitable for wheelchair users. Immediately adjacent outdoor space will include a pond-dipping platform. The Centre will include a publicly accessible WC which will be available at all times.

Construction will be from eco-friendly, sustainably sourced, carbon minimal materials compatible with requirements for health and safety, security, protection from vandalism, extended life and minimal maintenance.

Estimated cost
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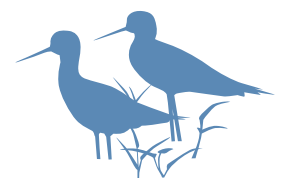
The Wetland Landscape Design



Helen Llewelyn Photography

Management

The Trustees of the Town and Manor already manage over 420 acres of common land and marsh (of which 18% is designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest), and five miles of fishery on the River Kennet. They will be responsible for the management of the Reserve. Day to day management and maintenance will be undertaken by the existing estate staff with an additional member of staff being appointed if necessary. Over 300 residents have already applied to be volunteers.





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