Rare Lincolnshire Fenland to triple in size

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Funds have been raised to purchase Willow Tree Farm in South Holland and restore the fenland landscape creating a new nature reserve. This will increase Lincolnshire’s remaining fenland by 200%.

In Lincolnshire, only a fraction of the extensive wetland that once covered the whole region now remains. Over 99.9% of Lincolnshire’s wet fenland has been lost to drainage. The plants and animals associated with this habitat are now rare or threatened with local extinction.

The restored wetland nature reserve at Willow Tree Farm will create ecological conditions that will help these species to spread. These include rare aquatic plants, insects, fish and birds, such as lapwing, redshank, snipe and marsh harrier.

Critically, Willow Tree Farm is linked to the last remnants of the wild fenlands in Lincolnshire by the River Glen and Counter Drain. Covering just 55 hectares, the Baston Fen and Thurlby Fen nature reserves shelter the last of Lincolnshire's natural, inland fenland landscapes and some of its special wildlife. They are too small to support some of the larger fenland birds and animals, and to cope with the changing climate, but from here the fenland species will be able to colonise Willow Tree Farm.

The project has been made possible with financial support from Natural England, the Heritage Lottery Fund, Lincolnshire Waterways Partnership, Environment Agency and the Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust’s members.

Once the landscape has been restored, the nature reserve will be open to the public. Facilities such as viewing screens, bird hides and interpretation panels will be installed alongside regular bulletin boards at information centres which will inform people about the species that are currently on the site. The Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust will lead outreach programmes in local schools and communities to raise awareness of the ecological heritage of the area.

Don Wright, Chairman of Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust, said: “This is a long held aspiration for the Wildlife Trust and its partners. Our project will enable people to witness, understand and participate in the transformation of these arable fields into an exciting new nature reserve with a diverse and wildlife-rich landscape of meres, reedbeds and grazing marshes.

“It will reconnect people to this vanishing heritage and provide access and activities that will encourage learning, exploration and discovery of the natural, cultural and historical features of this traditional landscape.”

Emma Sayer, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund East Midlands, said: “The purchase of Willow Tree Farm will enable the restoration of 114 hectares of fenland, making a significant contribution to the UK’s Wetland Vision. This project presents an excellent opportunity to help preserve the special natural heritage of Lincolnshire's fenlands. Alongside the huge benefits for wildlife, local people will have the chance to get involved in the nature reserve through volunteering programmes and other public activities.”

Speaking about the purchase, John Hayes MP, said: “It is fantastic news that Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust has raised over £1million to buy Willow Tree Farm in South Holland to create a brand new reserve.

“This new wetland reserve will bring numerous benefits to South Holland, not least in terms of tourism and the enjoyment it will provide for many people living in our area. My congratulations to the Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust on their success in securing this grant and bringing this project forward in South Holland."

Geoff Sansome, Natural England’s Regional Director in the East Midlands, said: “We are really pleased to be supporting this local conservation project through our national Wetland Vision programme. Converting arable land into a rich, diverse landscape, which supports rare species, is a key achievement for the area and a vision of the conservation we would like to see in the Fens in the future. The restoration work also has wider benefits than purely conservation; it will create a key tourism asset, increasing public access to a high quality site and raising awareness of this important historic landscape.”

Nick Bromidge, Environment Agency’s Environment Manager, said: “The successful purchase of Willow Tree Farm will not only help to secure the future of fenland habitats and species, but will also provide an opportunity to involve the local community in a major conservation project. Many congratulations to the Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust. We shall look forward to continuing our partnership with them on this fantastic project”.

Further information

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