

Reversing the fortunes of 'poor' land given away by King Henry VIII

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Greensand Country can now look towards bright future Lisa King

The 'poor' history of Greensand Country in Bedfordshire has resulted in rich natural heritage and £1.7million National Lottery boost.

Stretching from Leighton Buzzard to Gamlingay, the sandy soils of the Bedfordshire landscape were unsuitable for agriculture and by medieval times it was mainly used for grazing, woodland, deer hunting, keeping rabbits and as part of monastic estates. When the monasteries were dissolved by King Henry VIII, the land was given away to those in his favour, who built their manor houses and parks up on this higher land.

[quote= Robyn Llewellyn, Head of HLF East of England] "From healthy heathlands and working woodlands to storytelling and geotrails, we're delighted to support this project which will achieve a sustainable future for the Greensand landscape." [/quote]

As a result of this history, Greensand Country contains all of Bedfordshire's remaining heather heathland, more than half of its woodland, and more surviving historic parkland than any other landscape in the country.

However, this incredible natural heritage, and the story behind them, is at risk of being lost.

Decades of modern development and changes in land use are weakening its character and fragmenting valuable habitats. Meanwhile, heritage skills are dying out and the importance of the landscape is being forgotten.

Reversing the decline

Thanks to National Lottery players, this five-year scheme led by Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity (BRCC) will see project partners and landowners:

- Create healthy heather heathland
- Restore working woodland
- Create habitat corridors to allow wildlife to move freely across the landscape
- Recruit apprentices and volunteers to ensure traditional skills are handed down to a new generation
- Improve footpaths, cycle paths and bridleways to enhance the ways people can explore the landscape
- Hold events, workshops and festivals so people of all ages can get involved in the future of Greensand Country

Robyn Llewellyn, Head of HLF East of England, said: “From healthy heathlands and working woodlands to storytelling and geotrails, we’re delighted to support this project which will achieve a sustainable future for the Greensand landscape and reconnect people with the natural heritage on their doorstep.

“Alongside a diverse partnership of organisations, volunteers and communities will play an integral role in this exciting vision for Greensand Country, gaining the skills and experience needed to not only reverse its decline but ensure it continues to thrive beyond the lifespan of the project.”

For more information and to discover how you can get involved visit the [BRCC website](#) and follow [@HLFEoE](#) on Twitter.