

Hazeley Heath Jeff Gilbert

It was announced today that the RSPB has received a grant of £859,900 from HLF for the acquisition of 110ha of Hazeley Heath in Hook, Hampshire. The conservation charity plans to develop this project for the benefit of the existing wildlife and the local community.

The project will carry out essential conservation work to improve the habitat and enhance the site for wildlife. Footpaths will be maintained and low key information points about the site's heritage will be installed. This work will be carried out through a comprehensive and local volunteering programme.

Hazeley Heath is a small fragment of the once extensive heather, gorse and shrub habitat which covered much of South East England.

If managed sensitively, the site can once again be home to many specialist species of plants and animals.

It is already a Site of Special Scientific Interest and makes up part of the wider Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area for several species of bird that are of conservation concern, including woodlarks, nightjars and Dartford warblers.

For centuries, this area was used as an active common where local people would graze animals, gather wood and cut turf for fuel. Such activities created a unique habitat rich in biodiversity. The 20th century saw the heath used for military training, clay and sand extraction and for landfill.

A neighbouring 52ha of Hazeley Heath is owned by Hart District Council and the project will be managed in partnership alongside them. The RSPB will also continue to work with Hampshire County Council to implement the bridleways plan already agreed with the previous heath owners.

Chris Corrigan, Regional Director for RSPB South East England, said: “This is an exciting development for us, Hazeley Heath is tremendous piece of heathland. We are grateful to the Timpany family for providing the opportunity to purchase the site, and for allowing us time to secure grant funding for the acquisition, as without that patience the project would not have been able to proceed.”

Cllr Sara Kinnell, Hart Council Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Environmental Promotion, said: "We are delighted with the news that the RSPB have been successful in gaining an HLF grant and would like to offer our congratulations to those involved in this important step forward for heathland preservation.

“We would also like to welcome them to the Hazeley Heath Partnership and I know we are all looking forward to working together in delivering a positive future for our local heathland and for those who enjoy visiting this wonderful wildlife haven.”

Stuart McLeod, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund South East, said: “The Heritage Lottery Fund is delighted to support this project which will help stimulate people’s interest in their local natural heritage and enable them to play an active role in helping to protect it for the future. This is a great example of how Lottery money will bring benefits to people of all ages, whether through volunteering, or simply enjoying their wonderful surroundings, whilst conserving a delicate ecological environment.”

Notes to editors

The RSPB speaks out for birds and wildlife, tackling the problems that threaten our environment. They are the largest wildlife conservation organisation in Europe with over one million members. Wildlife and the environment face many threats. Their work is focused on the species and habitats that are in the greatest danger and driven by the passionate belief that birds and wildlife enrich people's lives. The health of bird populations is indicative of the health of the planet, on which the future of the human race depends; we all have a responsibility to protect wildlife. The RSPB has more than one million members, over 17,000 volunteers, 1,772 FTE staff, more than 200 nature reserves, nine regional offices, a UK headquarters, three national offices... and one vision - to work for a better environment rich in birds and wildlife.

Further information

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