

# Ouse Washes

Habitat Creation Project Update

November 2011

The Ouse Washes is a vital part of the defences that protect the Fens from flooding. It is also of great importance for wildlife. However, in recent decades the numbers of certain bird species using the Washes has reduced. This habitat creation project has been set up to reverse the decline, while allowing us to continue operating the Washes for flood defence.



## Purpose of this update

During 2011 the Ouse Washes Habitat Creation team has met with many individuals and organisations locally to explain the background to the project and discuss the proposed wet grassland creation. This update is to let you know how we are progressing with the project.

## Progress with the proposed Coveney and Sutton sites

At both Coveney and Sutton we are still seeking to secure the necessary land for the project and are currently working with local landowners to achieve this. So far this year we have added approximately 60 hectares (150 acres) for possible habitat creation.

At Coveney, we have been developing our habitat creation proposals in preparation for future public consultation. This includes the likely layout of the site, together with thinking about the possible sources of water to fill the reservoir and the arrangements for subsequently distributing this water to the different parts of the site. We have also looked at the possible design of the reservoir to try and avoid the need to import or remove excavated or construction materials and so minimise likely traffic movements during construction. This summer we have undertaken surveys for protected species such as water voles and more recently undertaken an initial archaeological investigation on part of the prospective habitat creation site.

## Local engagement

The two public drop-in events held at Coveney and Sutton in March were well attended by approximately 130 people. We are considering the points raised at these during the on-going design and environmental assessment of the scheme proposals for both sites. For example, at Coveney in response to concerns raised by horse riders we have considered how their current use of the area can be maintained and possibly improved.



Following the drop-in events, we have made a number of presentations to local elected representatives through meetings hosted by East Cambridgeshire District Council (ECDC) and Cambridgeshire County Council. This included a recent presentation to the West Area Neighbourhood Panel meeting.

In June, we also arranged a visit by a number of local parish council representatives to the RSPB's recently created wet grassland site close to Manea. This gave a good opportunity for people to see what the proposed new habitat will look like and discuss how the site was created and is managed. We also subsequently met with Coveney parish council to respond to points raised by them.

During the year we have met with Stephen Barclay MP on a number of occasions. We have sought to answer a range of questions concerning the background and implementation of the project raised by him and constituents, and we will continue to work with Stephen Barclay MP as the scheme progresses.

One of key concerns raised by Stephen Barclay MP and others is in relation to any possible increase in rainfall run-off or flood risk caused by the new habitat. This is an issue we take very seriously. Our schemes will be designed to address flood risk concerns and a flood risk assessment will be submitted with the planning applications along with applications for consent to the local drainage authorities. There may even be possible mutual benefits, for example we could make use of water that might otherwise have to be pumped away by the drainage authorities.

## Looking forward

We are planning public consultation on our habitat creation proposals for the Coveney site starting in February through to April 2012. This is a change to our previously publicised timetable and is subject to making the required progress in obtaining land.

Following the public consultation and in light of comments received, we will finalise the Coveney site proposals and environmental assessment ready for submission of a planning application to ECDC during the summer of 2012.

At Sutton the main focus will continue to be on securing land for the project.

## Further information or comments?

Please contact the project team using the email address: [OWHCP@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:OWHCP@environment-agency.gov.uk)  
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