

Press release



Nationally important habitat restoration work to begin at the Wicksteed water meadows, Kettering

Photo opportunity: Saturday 15th January at 10am, first turf of the restoration to be cut by Oliver Wicksteed at the water meadows (opposite side of the road to Wicksteed Park). Meet at the Ise Pavilion car park.

The Big Lottery 'Awards for All' grant scheme is providing funds to the Wicksteed Trust to run a series of community events to help to restore the meadow. Site interpretation and a leaflet will also be provided from this grant scheme. The restored site will hopefully be managed in the future by the Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire and Peterborough as a nature reserve. Oliver Wicksteed, Chairman of the Wicksteed Trust, the landowners, said 'It is great to see this site being restored to its former glory and be available for visitors to the park for both educational and recreational purposes'. He will be cutting the first turf of the restoration project on Saturday 15th January at about 10.30am.

Major work to help restore the water meadows at Wicksteed is planned to start that day with the local community group 'Natural-ISE' and volunteers from 'Groundwork North Northants' helping to clear scrub and the ditches. Further work is planned for the next couple of weeks but full restoration may take much of the rest of the year. The work forms part of the Revital-ISE project, which is part funded by the Environment Agency, and aims to revive the River Ise and its surrounding environment. Revital-ISE Project Manager Dr Robin Field confirmed that the restoration project will be carried out by a range of community groups, Moulton College students, volunteer groups from industry, the River Nene Regional Park (RNRP), Wicksteed Trust, Groundwork North Northamptonshire and the Wildlife

Trust. The initial work included cutting the water meadow, which has been completed by a local farmer, and the reconnection to the river which has been done by the Environment Agency. Dr Robin Field said 'it is important to restore this rare and valuable habitat as very little working water meadow remains in England'.

Water meadows have played an important role in agriculture for 300 years but by the start of the 20th-century they were in decline. They were common in southern England, stretched into the Midlands and provided early grass for cattle and sheep in April. The sites were drowned with river water early in the year to provide this, and then again later in the year to provide a crop of hay. They were the most productive areas of grassland within many farms. They were also botanically very species rich and a wide range of now rare species of birds and mammals also used them. As methods of producing more grass or draining the land improved most water meadows were lost. In 1790 in south Wiltshire alone there were approximately 7,000ha of water meadow; by 1978 there were only four working water meadow systems in Dorset, Hampshire and Wiltshire. This one at Wicksteed may well be the only one left in Northamptonshire, of any size, which can be restored to working order.

The future work includes the re-engineering of the ditches and replacing the sluices. Much of this work needs to be completed by hand due to the very fragile nature of the habitat. The site is a Local Wildlife Site and work to re-wet the site should benefit the species present. Dates for the community events will be announced later but if you would like to be involved in this nationally important project please contact the Revital-ISE Project at either: nrp@northamptonshire.gov.uk or by telephoning 01604-236764.

ENDS

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Notes to editors

Revital-ISE Project

The Revital-ISE project provides an outstanding opportunity for partnership working between landowners, land managers, local authorities, Government Agencies, environmental groups, and local communities to re-establish a high quality environment throughout the Ise Valley that meets the needs of a 21st century community. The Revital-ISE Project Manager post is part funded for three years by the Environment Agency and hosted by the River Nene Regional Park.

The River Nene Regional Park (RNRP)

RNRP is a Community Investment Company that is hosted by Northamptonshire County Council and can hold assets and land on behalf of the community. It is an independent organisation that was constituted under the framework of the Treasury's Green Book and is recognised as a Treasury model for the environment in relation to sustainable growth area funding delivery.

RNRP Vision

"By 2016 the RNRP partnership will be an independent, inclusive, reciprocal and beneficial partnership of public, private and third sector members. It will be nationally and internationally recognised as the centre of excellence for the piloting, co-ordination and delivery of regional sustainable development, addressing strategic issues such as Climate Change, the enhancement of local biodiversity and the innovative development of the environment as an asset for social development, education, leisure & recreation, heritage and cultural activity, and as a primary vehicle of economic regeneration."

The Wicksteed Trust

The Wicksteed Trust was established by Charles Wicksteed in 1916 to carry out his work after his death and to keep his dream alive. The Wicksteed Trust's charitable objectives are for the benefit of people resident, but not exclusively, in Kettering and its neighbourhood, in particular the provision of facilities for recreation and other leisure time occupation in the interests of social welfare to improve the conditions of life of the users of such facilities. The Trust continues to achieve its objectives by providing free access to open spaces conducive to health. These open spaces comprise gardens, an arboretum and parkland at Wicksteed Park. The operation of a leisure park through its wholly owned subsidiary company Wicksteed Park Limited. The leisure park is situated within Wicksteed Park.

Wicksteed Park

Wicksteed Park is one of the oldest leisure parks in the UK having opened in 1921 and is owned by The Wicksteed Trust. Based in 147 acres of parkland and lakes, there are 35 rides and attractions, regular daytime and evening entertainment, plus a caravan and camping site during the summer months.

