

A VISION FOR BROCKHOLES WETLAND NATURE RESERVE

Brockholes is a 106-hectare site made up of former gravel workings. It is located to the NE of Junction 31 of the M6 at a strategic position in Central Lancashire within the City of Preston. It offers a major opportunity to sustain and further develop a high value biodiversity asset accessible to large numbers of people.

It will be the hub of a network of wetland sites in this part of the NW of England, offering an introduction to wildlife in the region and a link to other sites.

It links a mosaic of wildlife havens in the Ribble Valley. These include adjacent ancient semi-natural woodlands and unimproved grasslands, in both of which the Trust plays a key management role – 190 hectares in total.

Fig 1 The Brockholes Site and the M6 Looking North



Project Aims

- The development of Brockholes as a nature conservation site of regional and national importance
- The development of Brockholes as a conservation destination and as a 'gateway' to other biodiversity destinations within the NW of England

Project Objectives

1. Secure ownership of the site to ensure its continued value for nature conservation.
2. Design and construct an accessible nature reserve.
3. Put in place the management infrastructure to protect and enhance its wildlife value.
4. Establish baselines for future monitoring.
5. Develop the nature reserve and associated visitor facilities as a regional conservation destination in its own right.
6. Put in place facilities to maximise the educational and volunteer potential of the site.
7. Establish an income base to generate the funds necessary to sustain the wildlife value.
8. Develop partnerships to implement the aims.
9. Develop Brockholes as a 'gateway' into other biodiversity sites in the Region.
10. Contribute to national, regional and local strategies on biodiversity, economy and social inclusion.

PHASING

Phase 1 & 2 Project Activities and Outcomes

| ACTIVITY | OUTPUT |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| Land Acquisition | 1] 112 hectares of land secured |
| Staff Recruitment | 1] Reserve Manager appointed - 1ft job 2] Project Manager appointed – 1ft job (short-term contract) |
| Site Office / Workshop Refurbishment | 1] 100sq.m. 1 st phase visitor centre and site base 2] 165sq.m. workshop |
| Phase 1 Nature Reserve Works | 1] 500m access paths [to DDA level] 2] Internal road network improvements 3] Management plan prepared 4] Baseline habitat and species surveys completed 5] 112 hectares of habitat in active management, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> 31ha of lowland meadow <input type="checkbox"/> 10.5ha of floodplain grazing marsh <input type="checkbox"/> 7ha of SSSI wet woodland into favourable management <input type="checkbox"/> 37ha of mesotrophic lagoons into management <input type="checkbox"/> A minimum of 12 ponds created <input type="checkbox"/> 2km of connected, species-rich hedgerow planted and 250m derelict hedges restored |
| Phase 1 Recreation Works | 1] 750m access paths [to DDA level] 2] Partnership with the Lancs Outdoor Activities Initiative set up 3] 1 st LOAI courses running |
| Establish New Deal Operation | 1] New Deal supervisor recruited - 1 ft job 2] ND base operational 3] 1st Trainees recruited [7 fte jobs – min 50% from local communities] |
| Detailed Business Plan Produced | 1] Forward business plan in place detailing revenue generation actions, management structures |

Phase 3 Project Activities and Outcomes

The third phase will involve the further development of the site to achieve the following results by the end of the project:

Enhanced Nature Reserve

- Major works contract complete
- Formal reserve opening
- Apprentice scheme for biodiversity managers in place [3 no.]
- Continued monitoring of the Nature Reserve works and additional enhancement

Site Management and Partnership Development

- Implementation of management plan
- Community Partnership established
- Volunteer group fully established
- Volunteer training package in place

SIGNIFICANCE OF PROJECT

STRATEGIC BIODIVERSITY RELATIONSHIPS

Brockholes is part of an extensive complex of regionally and nationally important nature conservation sites in this locality which include:

- ❑ The Brockholes Wetlands
- ❑ The Red Scar, Tunbrook and Boilton Ancient Woodlands (SSSI)
- ❑ Pope Lane Fields Grasslands (LNR)
- ❑ The River Ribble Corridor

This is **one of the best habitat assemblages in the region** combining

- ❑ Wetlands – open water, flood plain, grazing marsh
- ❑ Nationally important complex of ancient woodlands
- ❑ One of the UK's major Salmon rivers

Fig 2 Biodiversity Context



This diversity and quality of habitat is unrivalled in the region. Consequently, this complex of sites will offer a unique nature conservation experience to the visitor, certainly not replicated in the region and arguably not found elsewhere in the UK in such close proximity to major urban areas. The Wildlife Trust is already actively involved in the management of the adjacent woodlands and grasslands so can effectively bring all these elements into a coherent management package to benefit wildlife and visitors.

CONTRIBUTION TO BAP TARGETS

Brockholes is situated at an important location in the River Ribble corridor just upstream of the tidal estuary and on the fringe of the Bowland Uplands. To date observations on its biodiversity have been largely confined to birdlife, much of which has been drawn to the site by the existence of extensive areas of open water. Because the site has been actively quarried until recently, it has not been classified in terms of its biodiversity value. However it is designated as a **County Biological Heritage Site** and meets **SSSI** criteria.

In addition to Brockholes, the adjacent Boilton Wood is wet woodland and, together with Red Scar and Tunbrook Woods, forms part of the largest complex of semi natural ancient woodland in the Lancashire Plains and Valleys Natural Area. Not only does this area include **some of the best wildlife features in Lancashire** but it also has a major role to play in greening the Central Lancashire City region.

The overarching aims of conservation management will be to bring all habitats into favourable condition with special emphasis on UK Priority Habitats and those supporting UK Priority Species, and to create/expand habitats with a similar emphasis. Overall objectives are to help to achieve relevant targets in the UKBAP and Lancashire LBAP.

ORNITHOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE

To date, the main driver for securing the future of Brockholes has been its known importance for birds.

- Diversity of breeding species: A total of 53 species bred on the site between 2000 and 2005, 47 of them in most years.
- Diversity of passage and wintering species: An additional 110 species were recorded during the same period, bringing the total to 163, thus meeting the guideline for selection as SSSI (150 species) on the grounds of avian species diversity.
- The open waters and their margins, together with the grassland, are particularly important for breeding birds, in particular for waders (**Redshank, Lapwing, Common Sandpiper, Oystercatcher, Ringed Plover** and **Little Ringed Plover**), and wetland passerines (**Sand Martin, Grey Wagtail, Reed Warbler, Sedge Warbler and Reed Bunting**), as well as **Little and Great Crested Grebes** and **Kingfisher**. Relict hedgerows and scrub support, among more common species, breeding **Song Thrush** and **Tree Sparrow**.
- The spring assemblage of passage **Whimbrel** in Lancashire is the largest in the country. Brockholes is one of just four roost sites in Lancashire and is currently the second largest.
- Despite severe limitations on access due its being a working quarry, Brockholes has become one of Lancashire's major birdwatching sites, attracting regular visitors from throughout east and central Lancashire. Local ornithologists are confident it could become one of NW England's major wetland sites, on a par with Leighton Moss, Marshside and Martin Mere.

Birdwatching at the Reinstated Lagoon to the South of the Access Road



LONG TERM SUSTAINABILITY AND ENHANCEMENT

Recent reports from Defra, English Nature, the Environment Agency and NWDA all clearly demonstrate that a significant demand for accessible nature conservation sites in the North West exists and is growing. The key attraction of wetland sites as a nature conservation experience is that people can readily observe biodiversity in action.

The M6 from Brockholes



The Wildlife Trust will develop:

- ❑ a **network of routes** around the site to maximise opportunities for seeing wildlife,
- ❑ support **recreational use** on certain of the water bodies, in particular angling for younger people help them use the site in a positive way,
- ❑ a joint venture to ensure small scale recreation use of the area, particularly to engage with young people from local communities,
- ❑ develop the site's **educational** potential and provide **training facilities**. The Trust has an excellent record of delivering successful training outcomes with its delivery of New Deal being particularly valued in the sub-region.

We are determined that any visitor facilities will not compromise our primary aim of securing Brockholes as a site for nature conservation. Access to the site will be carefully managed by the routing of footpaths and activities away from sensitive areas. This 'zoning' will also help us to ensure visitors enjoy the site safely. We have used this approach at our other wetland nature reserves, Mere Sands Wood and Wigan Flashes.

Boilton Wood from Brockholes



STRATEGIC RELATIONSHIPS

Wetlands form an extremely important component of biodiversity in NW England. There are sites of regional, national and international importance, which are managed by a range of conservation organisations to create a network of sites unequalled on the western fringe of Europe. Brockholes compliments and adds to that network.

Brockholes and the Lancashire Wetlands Network

