

Case Study

Clausentum Fen — restoring biodiversity

Background

Clausentum Fen, meaning 'enclosed,' is named after a Roman settlement that used to sit in a bend of the river Itchen. Known as a 'green finger', the Fen extends into the urban communities of Winchester.

The Fen is a haven for local wildlife including snipe, linnets, reed bunting, bullfinches and spotted flycatchers; the fen is also a wonderful green space for local residents and visitors to exercise and enjoy being with nature.

In 2003 a local resident successfully applied to have the site recognised as a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation. However, without a conservation management plan in place the site began to decline, which attracted fly-tipping, litter, and other anti-social behaviour.

In 2016, after a conversation at the street carol-singing party, the residents of Clausentum Road (which overlooks the Fen) decided to take action. They formed the Clausentum Fen Conservation Group which is dedicated to looking after the site.



The recovering landscape at Clausentum Fen

The project

The Conservation Group, uniting a community aged from 9 to 99 years, wrote a constitution and consulted with relevant experts and stakeholders including; Hampshire County Council; Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust; South Downs National Park Authority; and the Environment Agency. A conservation management plan was developed with the aim of restoring lost biodiversity.

The Conservation Group started the regeneration process by:

- clearing bamboo growth the size of a tennis court,
- removing litter and clearing nettles and
- experimenting with baffles and waterflow.

Contractors were required to remove several large sycamores that were threatening to break the stream bank and to undertake landscaping to create a still pond. The cost of this work was met by a £2,000 grant from the Sustainable Communities Fund and matched by grants from two Hampshire County Councillors.

The project has attracted the support of over 30 specialists who have contributed their technical expertise in the fields of hydrology, habitat management, arboriculture, wildlife recording and monitoring.

“It’s going to be a perfect habitat for water voles.”

Marcus Swalwell, volunteer and local resident

The outcome

Habitat management

- The clearance work has allowed the conservation group to create ideal fen conditions and start replanting native plants.
- Over the winter the reworked site has looked bare but the area has now been reseeded. Flag iris and snowdrops have started to show and as the weather warms up goat willow, hawthorn, blackthorn, guelder-rose, native dog wood and bramble will grow quickly restoring the shrub habitat across the site.
- The experimentation with baffles and water flow has already lead to an increase in river fly – a good indicator of water health and an important food source for fish and birds.

Public engagement

- The momentum created by the work has lead to an increase in membership of the conservation group to over 130 people.
- Students from Winchester College helped with clearing the main incoming water channel.
- Managing public access is a key challenge. The northern part of the site, with beautiful beech trees and other interesting species, will be accessible to the public but access to the southern part is likely to be restricted to protect the wildlife.

The future

The local community will be involved in decisions about the on-going management of the site and volunteer working groups undertaking key maintenance tasks will take place during the year.

Further recording and monitoring is planned to better understand the water flow through the fen and the plants and animals living in the habitat.

The conservation group is planning further work in the central fen area to smooth out some of the excavated areas and remodel the pools of standing water. This will create a landscape that will help to restore the fen vegetation and wildlife.

For more information on the Clausentum Fen conservation group please visit:

<http://www.clausentumfen.co.uk/>

For information on the Sustainable Communities Fund please visit:

www.southdowns.gov.uk/scf



The South Downs National Park Partnership Management Plan (PMP) 2014–19 sets out a shared vision for how we all would like the National Park to be in the future. It includes 11 long-term outcomes, and provides a framework for communities, landowners, charities, businesses and public bodies to work together to make this vision and these outcomes a reality.

This project contributes to the following PMP outcome:

Outcome

southdowns.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/SDNP-Partnership-Management-Plan-2014-19.pdf

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