

New Life on the Old West

Creating natural stepping-stones between key Cambridgeshire wetland reserves

New Life on the Old West is a National Lottery Heritage Fund supported project, delivered by Cambridgeshire Acre. We are recruiting a big team of volunteers to help create new wildlife habitat and record our Fenland wildlife in 9 parishes along the Old West River – from Wicken in the east to Willingham in the west. We hope to create natural stepping-stones to help wildlife move between two important wetland nature reserves, National Trust's Wicken Fen and RSPB's Ouse Fen, and spread more widely over the New West landscape. Over the next few years there will be opportunities to join work parties, learn to survey for otters, wetland birds, water voles and invertebrates, join expert led guided walks and boat trips, and learn much more about the history and heritage of the Fens.

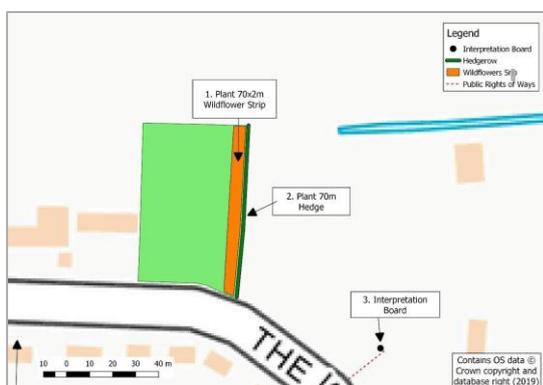


Water vole c. Kate Milne, RSPB

By creating new ponds, scrapes and wildflower meadows, and by making the network of drainage ditches more wildlife friendly, we can create new homes and food sources for threatened species, such as the water vole, lapwing and turtle dove, for whom the Fens is such an important area.

With Little Thetford Parish Council and local volunteers, we will work on three sites in Little Thetford village.

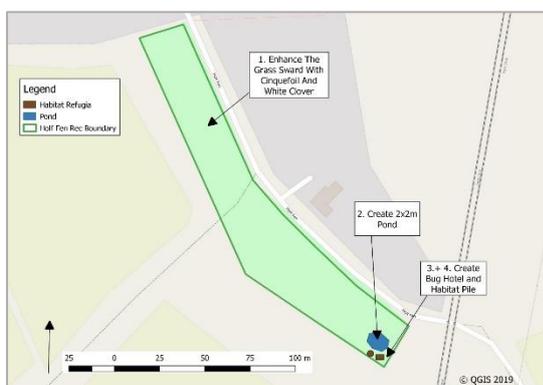
Little Thetford Cemetery:



At the Cemetery, we will sow a 70m x 2m wildflower strip with cinquefoil and clover plugs. These flowers are suitable, as the area is mowed, and they are adapted to intensive cutting and grazing. They are important food plants for a range of pollinators such as bees and flies.

We will also plant a 70m hedge in front of the fence on the eastern boundary, using a wide range of native species – such as hawthorn and blackthorn, hazel and dogwood. This will become a home for nesting birds and a source of nectar and fruit, and of course a home for hedgehogs!

Holt Fen Recreation Ground:

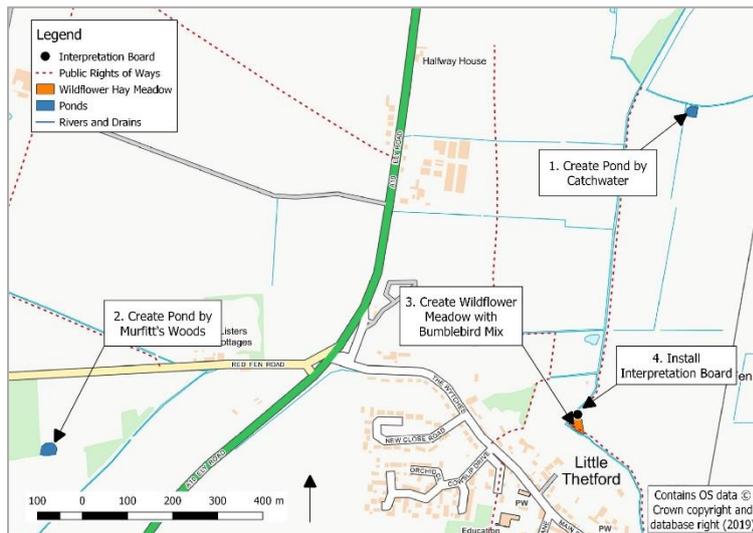


Here we will plant more than 100 wildflower plugs. Again, these will be cinquefoil and white clover, adapted to regular mowing. A new 2x2m pond in the open area will be dug near the hedgerow. Grass will be left to grow tall around the pond, shelter for frogs, toads, other amphibians and small mammals, while damselflies and dragonflies will quickly be attracted.

The pond will be shallow (less than 50cm deep) which is best for pond beetles and plants. We will line the pond, so it stays wet year-round, and add watermint, yellow flag iris, and water forget-me-not plants. Finally, we'll build a bug hotel and habitat piles around the pond for minibeasts – a lovely job for the kids!

At Wytches Road Rec, the Parish Council will change the mowing regime to leave a wide strip of long grass along the ditch on the western most side – another home for amphibians and small mammals, and perfect hunting ground for barn owls.

Elsewhere in the parish, there will be habitat work taking place at Bedwell Hey Farm. A new pond is planned near the Catchwater. This is already an important stronghold for amphibians and the pond will further enhance their habitat. It will be dug to create multiple water levels for as wide a range of plants and water beetles as possible.



Habitat work planned at Bedwell Hey Farm

Another shallow pond will be dug in a damp field corner near Murfitts Woods. Shallow water is known to be the most important freshwater habitat, so this will also help a lot of different species of wildlife.

Turtle doves and other thirsty wildlife will be able to access both ponds to drink, while the bank of the pond near the Catchwater will be carefully designed to allow water voles to dig their burrows.

A 0.25ha scallop shaped wildflower meadow will be sown with a “bumble-bird” seed mix, alongside the well-used footpath to the north of the village. Bumble-bird mix is a combination of bee-attracting flowers and farmland-bird attracting grain crops. It is also much easier to establish on an arable field, which has historically been fertilised, than other wildflower meadow seed mixes.

An information board will be installed alongside the footpath full of fascinating facts about the landscape and the wildlife it supports for walkers and visitors to enjoy. There will also be an information board provided in the village near the Old Cemetery.



We'd love to hear from anyone who would like to learn more or get involved!
 Contact Project Manager Howard Jones at Howard.Jones@camsacre.org.uk You can also follow us on twitter [@OldLifeNewWest](https://twitter.com/OldLifeNewWest) and join us on Facebook, or visit our (soon to be upgraded) website www.newlifeontheoldwest.wordpress.com