

Press release: Restoring fifty hectares of rare and threatened habitats in Doncaster to benefit all

Almost 50 hectares of nationally-important habitat is being restored in Doncaster as part of an Environment Agency-led project benefiting communities and wildlife.

The work across seven woodland areas, including two Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), will help improve water quality, reduce flood risk, and enhance natural habitats for protected species.

Beginning in September last year, the Inspiring Water Action in the Torne project is creating, restoring and improving up to 46.5 hectares of wet-woodland priority habitats – and involving local communities in doing so.

The 46.5 hectares represents 11 per cent of the Environment Agency's national target for habitat creation.

Measures include selectively thinning the woodland, re-wetting areas that have dried out, improving access for visitors, and sowing native plants that will help filter pollutants from the environment.

As well as providing for one of the nation's most threatened bird species – the Willow Tit – the restored wet-woodland will act as a natural aid to reducing flood risk by creating more room for water.

The estimated 4,000 cubic metres of extra storage space will help naturally interrupt and soak up the flow of rising waters, reducing the risk to around 1,000 nearby properties, as well as to agricultural land.

This will lessen the reliance on the Keadby Pumping Station, bringing down the carbon and financial costs of using it to artificially drain excess water from the River Torne into the River Trent.

David Newborough, Environment Agency catchment co-ordinator, said:

Our role is to create better places for people and wildlife. This project is a perfect example of how we can achieve that through simple measures that deliver many benefits.

By restoring wet woodland to a state that's closer to how nature intended, we're protecting vital habitat, providing for threatened species, creating spaces that everyone can enjoy, and reducing the risk of flooding, all in one go.

Communities across the area are involved in making the project a success,

with volunteers and school children taking active roles.

Around 600 children and young people across seven schools, each linked with one of the woodland sites, are using the project to learn first-hand about flood risk, water quality and management, and ecology.

David continued:

Working with school children is one of the most exciting and rewarding aspects of this project.

They are directly involved in understanding and protecting our natural environment, which is essential for its future. And their enthusiasm for the difference they can make is great to see.

Some of the work is being carried out by volunteers, who are learning new skills in the management of woodland habitats. These skills will help them maintain the improvements into the future.

The £100,000 project, which includes work at Potteric Carr Nature Reserve SSSI, Holmes Carr Wood, Tickhill Low Common, Bog Wood, Bessacarr Bank, Sandall Beat Wood SSSI and Rossington Brick Pond, is expected to bring benefits valued at around £1m.

Inspiring Water Action in the Torne is a Torne Catchment Partnership project led by the Environment Agency and involving [Yorkshire Wildlife Trust](#), [Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council](#), [Natural England](#) and local communities.

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[News story: QROPS Online Service closing in April 2017](#)

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The online service for managing qualifying recognised overseas pension schemes (QROPS) will close on 5 April 2017.

Managers and administrators of pension schemes must report information to HM Revenue and Customs about overseas pension schemes, including transfers to and payments from QROPS.

From 6 April 2017, you'll need to use the existing [forms and reference material](#) as the QROPS Online Service will be no longer available.

[Press release: Leicester and Loughborough Enterprise Zone will rev up the Midlands Engine](#)

The Midlands Engine is going interstellar thanks to plans for a new Enterprise Zone to support the UK's space science industry, Local Government Minister Marcus Jones has confirmed.

The new Science and Innovation Enterprise Zone will cover 3 sites across Leicester and Loughborough, and aims to deliver 6,500 new jobs by building on the local area's expertise in the sector.

Leicester is already home to the [National Space Centre](#) and the new Zone is now hoping to attract space-age businesses to the area with the offer of specialist research and development facilities to bring innovative ideas and products to market.

New and expanded businesses located there are set to benefit from business rate reliefs worth tens of thousands of pounds each year, an incentive set to pull in more investment into the region and boost the local economy.

The new Enterprise Zone will cover 160 hectares at Loughborough Science and Energy Park, Charnwood Campus and Leicester Waterside. It forms a key part of the government's efforts to fire up the Midlands Engine, and create an economy that works for everyone in all parts of the country.

Visiting Loughborough University Science and Enterprise Park, Local Government Minister Marcus Jones said:

Leicester and Loughborough have a strong track record in the science and innovation industries, so we're determined to support the area by attracting new businesses.

This new Enterprise Zone will help secure as many as 6,500 jobs for people right at the heart of the Midlands Engine and the site has real potential to rocket to the top of the space science field.

I've seen first hand the new zone's ambitious plans to boost local growth, which forms an essential part of the government's commitment to create an economy that works for everyone.

Nick Pulley, Chair of the Leicester and Loughborough Enterprise Partnership, said:

Confirmation of this second Enterprise Zone will make Leicester and Leicestershire extremely attractive to science, innovation and hi-tech manufacturing companies looking for research facilities and industrial and office space to base and expand their businesses.

We have already seen this model working brilliantly at MIRA Technology Park in the automotive sector and we will look to replicate this in the science, innovation and hi-tech manufacturing sectors.

Together, the Enterprise Zones give us 4 specialist commercial sites that really enable us to cement our distinctive place as the research and development capital of the Midlands. I hope that the government now backs our Growth Deal bid and provides the funding

needed to invest in the infrastructure to accelerate development on these sites.

Sir Peter Soulsby, Leicester City Mayor said:

This is fantastic news and will provide great incentives for businesses to invest in our city and county.

It will of course help to deliver our ambitious plans for the Waterside area in the city and strengthen the University of Leicester's proposed National Space Park at Pioneer Park, which will give Leicester an even greater prominence on a global scale.

It is critical now that Growth Deal funding is forthcoming to support the delivery of these sites.

Support for growing business in the Midlands Engine

Enterprise Zones are central to the government's Industrial Strategy, to help businesses up and down the country seize the opportunities presented by leaving the European Union.

Each Enterprise Zone is unique, looking to build on the strengths of each area, and support some of the country's most vital industries including manufacturing, technology and renewable energy.

For example, the East Midlands are already home to an Enterprise Zone at the [MIRA technology plant](#), which is developing future technology for the transport sector. Since its creation in 2012, MIRA has secured £9.5 million for the creation of an engineering skills training centre and attracted a number of high-profile international businesses, such as Bosch Engineering and Aston Martin.

When the Leicester and Loughborough zone launches in April, it will be one of 48 zones across the country and will build on the success of the Midlands' existing zones. Since their launch in 2012, the 6 zones in the Midlands have attracted 9,000 jobs, 120 companies and secured £1.1 billion private sector investment.

Further information

First established in 2012, [Enterprise Zones](#) have attracted more than £2.6 billion of private investment and more than 700 new businesses – attracting more than 29,000 jobs across a range of key industries.

In addition to business rates discounts worth up to £275,000, 100% of business rates growth on the new zone will be retained by local authorities and the local enterprise partnership for 25 years to reinvest in local economic growth.

The Loughborough and Leicester Science and Innovation Zone will be established from the start of April 2017.

[Press release: Registration open for online apprenticeship service](#)

The Department for Education and the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) are from today (13 February 2017) encouraging large employers to sign up and register for the apprenticeship service, in readiness for the launch of the [apprenticeship levy](#) on 6 April 2017.

The [apprenticeship service](#) is an online digital system (similar to online banking) that has been set up to support the apprenticeship levy.

The levy will require employers, with a wage bill of over £3 million a year, to pay 0.5% of their wage bill into the apprenticeship service, to encourage them to invest into apprentices.

The online service then allows those employers to financially manage their apprenticeship programme and help them to estimate their financial spend and recruit apprentices through their training providers. It will help employers:

- focus on their business priorities
- address skills shortages head on
- invest in the skills and training to help their organisations succeed

Apprenticeships and Skills Minister Robert Halfon said:

Our funding reforms are essential to ensuring that this country works to build a highly skilled workforce for the future.

Nobody understands the skills employers need better than the employers themselves and that is why we are placing them in the driving seat, to ensure they get the talent they need to grow.

I have tried the new service myself and am impressed with how easy to use it is. All you need to do is set up an account, so I encourage employers to do it now so they can be ready for the levy coming later in this year.

Sue Husband, director of the National Apprenticeship Service said:

The apprenticeship levy will come into effect in April 2017 to put apprenticeship funding on a sustainable footing and fund growth in

the apprenticeship programme.

Employers have told us that they want to be in control of their apprenticeship programme and funding. They want to manage it quickly and easily, so we have designed the apprenticeship service to do just that.

It's really quick to set up an account, and employers that have already registered during our testing phase have told us how easy they found it.

To register, levy-paying employers should have:

- their [Government Gateway](#) login details for PAYE schemes they want to include
- the details for each organisation that will be making an agreement with a training provider for apprenticeship training, including Companies House or charity number

The [register to manage your apprenticeship funds](#) page provides more guidance.

The apprenticeship levy

Over the last few years the government has embarked on a large-scale programme to reform the way apprenticeships are delivered and funded in England. The reformed apprenticeships are:

- more rigorous
- better structured
- independently assessed
- more clearly aligned to the needs of employers

In spring 2017, the way the government funds apprenticeships in England is changing. Some employers will be required to contribute to a new apprenticeship levy, and there will be changes to the funding for apprenticeship training for all employers. The apprenticeship levy begins on 6 April 2017.

The levy requires all employers operating in the UK, with a pay bill of over £3 million each year, to invest in apprenticeships.

Employers won't be able to pay for apprenticeships until they have started paying the levy (from May onwards).

Read more at [Apprenticeship funding: how it will work](#).

The apprenticeship service

Through the apprenticeship service, all levy-paying employers can:

All levy-paying and non-levy paying employers can:

- find – '[find apprenticeship training](#)' gives employers easy-to-digest information on the choices available to them – employers can search for and find an appropriate standard or framework, a quality-assured training provider, and compare one provider with another
- recruit – through the [recruit an apprentice](#) service, training providers can post vacancies for apprenticeships and traineeships on behalf of employers – this will be opened up to employers at a later date

Skills Funding Agency (SFA)

The SFA funds skills training for further education (FE) in England. We support over 1,000 colleges, private training organisations, and employers with £3.2 billion of funding each year.

The SFA is an executive agency, sponsored by the Department for Education.