

# Highways England funds study to help £2.5m rivers scheme become a reality

The £150,000 donation has funded an environmental feasibility study which is now under way to develop, plan and cost a five-year plan for the Stafford Brooks Project.

The project – a partnership of Highways England, Staffordshire Wildlife Trust, Stafford Borough Council and the Environment Agency – wants to make major improvements to habitats close to the Rivers Sow and Penk.

It would restore and create new habitats on a range of sites across the area including Doxey Marshes, Kingsmead Marsh and Radford Meadows.

The work aims to enable wildlife to thrive in the area, mitigate flooding issues and allow people to be better connected to nature by improving public access to sites and creating more green space for families to enjoy.

These restored sites could become home to a variety of wildlife including otter, wading birds such as lapwing and snipe and a range of amphibians.

More snipe will be attracted to the restored river habitats under the Stafford Brooks Project.

Highways England spokesperson Peter Smith said:

We are delighted to be part of this project which will enrich the town environmentally, bringing more wildlife and biodiversity around the rivers for families to enjoy as well as addressing issues with flooding.

Highways England is very grateful to the people of Stafford for their understanding while we are carrying out the upgrade of the M6 between junctions 13 and 15. In addition to the benefits of the motorway upgrade, we are giving something back to the community with projects like Stafford Brooks, the benefits of which would be enjoyed for generations.

It is a very worthwhile scheme and we look forward to helping deliver the results of the study.

The study will identify around 25 sites which can be improved for biodiversity, flood mitigation and water quality. Action will be taken to help join up some sites so habitats are more resilient and wildlife less isolated.

Senior Conservation Manager for Staffordshire Wildlife Trust, David Cadman, said:

We are incredibly excited to have an opportunity to link and restore a range of sites across Stafford to improve biodiversity, water quality, flood mitigation and access as part of forming a nature recovery network for the town.

Borough Council cabinet member for Economic Development and Planning, Frances Beatty, said:

This is fantastic news and a great example of how we are working alongside key partners to bring a very beneficial environmental scheme to fruition. It will see the enhancement and restoration of Kingsmead Marsh, supporting a variety of flora and fauna, including local rare plants such as purple loosestrife and brown sedge.

Our green spaces have great potential and by working on them collectively we can create a green recovery for the town that benefits people and wildlife for now and the future. One of the council's top priorities is Climate Change and we have recently approved a Climate Change and Green Recovery Strategy – and this work will support our aims within the plan.

Ragged robin will thrive as part of the works planned. Picture courtesy of Victoria Bunter .

Madeleine Gardner, Catchment Coordinator at the Environment Agency said:

It's great to be a part of this exciting project. Urban rivers and streams are a vital habitat for wildlife and the restoration of them can significantly improve river ecology and water quality.

This project will not only help to improve the River Sow and its tributaries but also support the health and wellbeing of local residents by providing better access to their rivers and green spaces. It will take us another step further towards delivering the 25 Year Environment Plan's vision of ensuring that our rivers become places where wildlife can thrive.

The grant for the study has come from the Highways England Designated Environment Fund which aims to ensure the road network works more harmoniously with its surroundings to deliver an improved environment. This includes creating new or enhancing existing habitats.

## **General enquiries**

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

## **Media enquiries**

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.