

Press release: Flood risk reduced and wildlife brimming over on the Ribble

A new scheme that will improve flood protection, boost wildlife habitats and create 160 hectares of new saltmarsh, was opened today (Thursday 21st September).

The new reserve not only creates new saltmarsh habitat but strengthens sea defences. The £6 million scheme at Hesketh, in Lancashire, is a partnership project between the RSPB, Natural England and the Environment Agency.

The RSPB's Hesketh Out Marsh Reserve and Natural England's Ribble Estuary National Nature Reserve (NNR) are a real world demonstration of the newly-launched joint strategy for NNRs. The Environment Agency has breached the banks at Hesketh Out Marsh East. This important work has been made possible by:

- almost £2 million funding from Landfill Communities Fund monies from FCC Environment through [WREN](#)
- £3.7 million government funding to reduce flood risk

Environment Minister Thérèse Coffey said:

Hesketh is an inspiring project, creating fantastic new habitats for wildlife and providing increased flood protection for hundreds of people living around the Ribble Estuary.

This £6 million scheme shows how embracing new ideas and working with partners can create tremendous benefits for the environment.

Natural England's Chairman, Andrew Sells, said:

England's National Nature Reserves are the most special places for nature, which also help improve the wellbeing of people making more than 17 million visits every year. Uniting these two reserves on the Ribble will create wonderful new habitat, reduce the risk of flooding and enhance the area's appeal to wildlife.

It is also an extremely symbolic moment, demonstrating how conservation will work in the future. Bringing together a number of important organisations and the local community, with the aim of providing a far greater home for nature, is at the heart of the new Joint NNR strategy. It will enable us all to deliver more public benefits, such as improved health and wellbeing, and allow wildlife to spill over and enrich the surrounding countryside.

On completion, the full RSPB Hesketh Out Marsh Reserve will include 340 hectares of saltmarsh, making it the largest site of its kind in the north of England. Natural England will designate the reserve as part of the existing Ribble Estuary NNR later in 2017. The RSPB and Natural England will then jointly manage both sites as effectively one large reserve. Ribble Estuary NNR is already England's third largest National Nature Reserve.

Robin Horner, RSPB Area Manager said:

We're delighted to be celebrating this partnership work and all that has been achieved through this project. These improved coastal defences, fronted by saltmarsh, deliver much needed local climate change adaptation and provide invaluable new wildlife habitat close to Britain's most important single river estuary for birds.

Work at Hesketh Outmarsh East has involved strengthening and raising the height of 2km of flood banks. This has reduced the flood risk to more than 140 properties and 300 hectares of prime farmland nearby. This is known as 'managed realignment', and is one of the largest schemes of its kind in the UK.

Emma Howard Boyd, Chair of the Environment Agency, said:

Hesketh is a win, win scenario – a fantastic scheme which not only works with nature to reduce flood risk but also brings benefits to the wider environment and local communities. Through partnership working we can achieve more and Hesketh proves that.