

# Sustainable economic future of mineral sites

## The Swale and Ure Washlands project

### Introduction

The Swale and Ure Washlands Project (SUWP) is a working partnership, set up following consultation on North Yorkshire County Council's Minerals Local Plan. Consultees identified the need to provide a broader, more strategic approach to mineral site after-use, since often the great potential for nature conservation and public amenity was not fully realised. The SUWP is managed by the Lower Ure Conservation Trust (a registered charity) but is steered by a group consisting of the County Council, Environment Agency, English Nature and the minerals industry (Hanson, Tarmac, Lafarge, Brown and Potter and Tancred Gravels).

### Background

Washlands are areas of low lying ground in the middle to lower reaches of rivers which are seasonally flooded when winter water levels flow, or wash, over the river banks. Seasonal flooding of this nature can also be artificially created, using sluices and flap valves to deliberately flood land adjacent to a river. Such methods were used in central and southern England to create water meadows – lush, rich pasture for livestock. Winter flooding of this type brings two benefits to landowners. The floodwater carries silt and nutrients which settle out onto the land, fertilising and enriching the soils. In addition, the covering of water keeps the soils slightly warmer than it would be if exposed. This results in an early start to the growing season.

Examples of washlands still managed in traditional ways can be found in the Lower Derwent National Nature Reserve, on the Yorkshire River Derwent. Here, seasonal flooding maintains wildflower-rich hay meadows in early summer and wintering wetlands for hundreds of thousands of wildfowl and waders.

### Objectives

The overall aim of the project is to develop a unique and fascinating area for nature conservation as well as a place where people, the historic landscape and industry can co-exist. The project produced a Minerals Restoration Strategy which provides a strategic view of the sympathetic restoration and sustainable after-use of existing and planned mineral extraction sites in the project area. The strategy defined clear goals for the creation of new wetland habitats and community assets with biodiversity and landscape targets. It aims to help local authorities, parish councils, local people and mineral companies in their discussions when planning the restoration of mineral workings in the area. An important part of the project was the involvement of the

local community, through opportunities for recreation, and the preservation and interpretation of the cultural heritage to create a sense of pride in the environment.

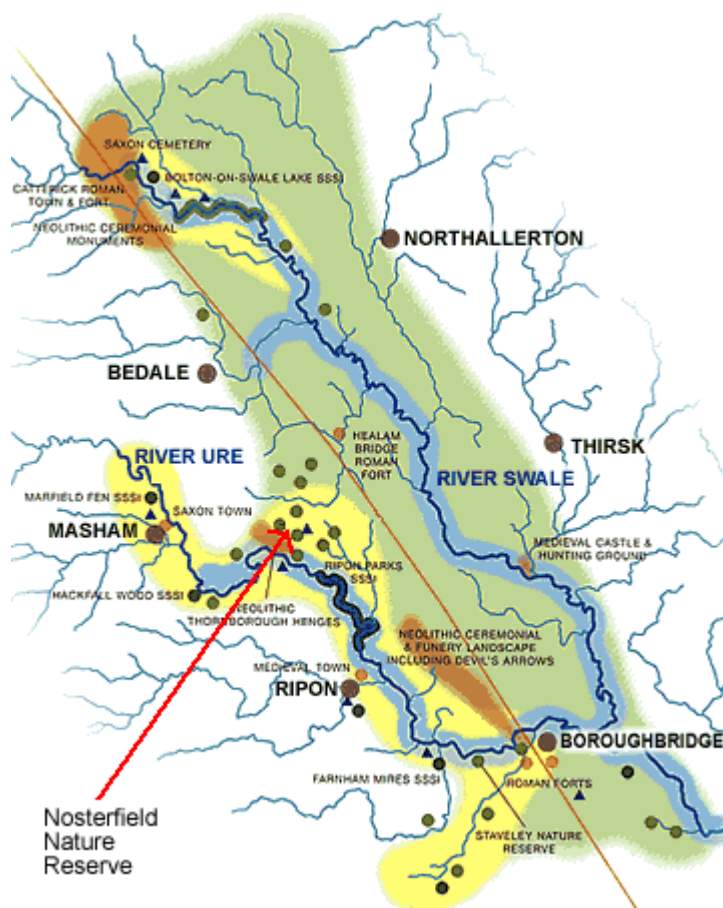
## Funding

Funding is provided by North Yorkshire County Council, Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund, English Heritage and Askham Bryan College.

## Materials and Methods

### Study area

As indicated in the figure, the geographical boundary of the project reflects the areas with the greatest concentration of current and future mineral workings, but is also based upon the historical watershed (or washlands), highlighting the linkages between the two river systems that are important to biodiversity and landscape planning in this region.



### Methods

The Landscape Agency Ltd was commissioned by the Lower Ure Conservation Trust (LUCT) to develop a document to serve as non-statutory guidance to support the Minerals Local Plan.

The strategy aims to assist the mineral planning authority, mineral operators, developers and other interested groups to consider proposed after-use schemes within a wider landscape context and to develop schemes which contribute positively to the landscape, helping to deliver the vision of the Swale and Ure Washlands project.

The strategy is a 10-year document with a suggested review after five years.

Specifically, the document aims to:

- Provide the minerals industry with focused, practical, strategic guidance on how the after-use of former mineral sites can be used to protect and enhance amenity and the environment.
- Identify priorities for increasing biodiversity to maximise the nature conservation potential of former mineral sites.
- Provide new community amenities available to all.
- Involve local communities in projects which enhance their cultural environment, promoting pride in the area.
- Provide an educational resource for mineral operators and the public.
- Contribute positively to the local economy through increased numbers of visitors.
- Preserve cultural heritage.
- Protect water resources.

The project area comprises not only the washlands habitats but also several market towns, home to the majority of people who work and spend their leisure time in the area. Within the project area, 'Core areas' have been identified which contain the main localities affected by mineral extraction, and where most scope exists for the minerals industry to contribute to an enhanced landscape for people and wildlife.

## Results

- Swale and Ure Washlands Mineral Site After-use Strategy: a 10 year strategic document prepared by The Landscape Agency Ltd with funding from North Yorkshire County Council, Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund, English Heritage and Askham Bryan College.
- Scientists led by Dr Anthony Long of Durham University investigated fluvial, vegetational and landscape evolution of the area and the impact of human activity during the later postglacial (Holocene) period. The report, *Landscape history and human impacts*, was funded by English Heritage through the Aggregates Sustainability Fund.  
<http://www.geography.dur.ac.uk/projects/swale-ure/Home/tabid/1761/Default.aspx>

- Two examples of the project's success are Nicholson Quarry in Littlethorpe, Ripon and their flagship site at Nosterfield Nature Reserve also near Ripon. A former Tarmac sand and gravel quarry, the reserve is the culmination of five years' work with local people. It has recently been acknowledged as the most important site in the north for wintering and inland migrating waders. It is also home to 150 different bird species, with redshanks, lapwings and shovelers all breeding there.
- A new 3 ha (6.5 acre) reed bed has been created together with the development of new propagation techniques to raise reeds of local provenance for restoration projects in the area. Askham Bryan College has developed new ways of propagating the reeds and a regional nursery can provide plants to landowners restoring or creating new wetland habitat.

## Conclusion

The objectives of the Swale and Ure Washlands project have been well covered in the industrial press and the project aims are adopted by the minerals industry in the project area. Current planning applications address the objectives project in their strategic planning.

## Future plans

These include:

- Protecting and creating a diverse natural environment.
- Conserving rare or scarce species and habitats.
- Contributing positively to the local economy.
- Attracting tourists.
- Generating a sense of place and local pride.
- Engendering and empowering local communities who live and work in the area.
- Preserving cultural heritage and interpreting the past.
- Providing and enhancing opportunities for recreation.
- Protecting our water resources.

## Reference

A Future for the Washlands. Proposals for sustainable environmental, economic and cultural development of the Swale and Ure Washlands. Available online from: <http://www.luct.org.uk/swale.asp?l=3>