

## **Shapwick Heath NNR 2018-2023 Management Plan – Executive Summary**

Shapwick Heath NNR is a nature reserve with a great richness and diversity of wetland habitats. Its place within the suite of nature reserves of the Avalon Marshes, itself part of the nationally important landscape of the Somerset Levels & Moors, makes Shapwick Heath part of an area that we aspire to manage at a landscape scale. 'Bigger, better, more joined-up' is the philosophy we aim to reflect, and it is our place in the wider landscape, community and economy that we consider in all that we do.

### Habitats

Shapwick Heath boasts a stunning variety of wetland habitats from the open water and reedbeds that support internationally important bird assemblages, to a range of wet grassland, fen and mire communities managed through traditional farming methods, along with stands of wet woodland. Within the management plan there are detailed descriptions of each of our protected habitats and species, our rationale for why we are managing them as we do and full descriptions of the projects we employ to achieve our objectives. High quality conservation management of our site, to reach and maintain favourable conservation status for our Sites of Scientific Interest (SSSI's), is always at the core of what we do.

### Heritage

In our 2018-2023 management plan we aspire to further develop some of our cultural features, the most well-known of which is the Neolithic Sweet Track. Other such trackways still lie uninvestigated within the NNR and we seek to work closely with the South-West Heritage Trust on new investigations into these trackways and finding ways to improve interpretation of them. We also seek to explore and better interpret the industrial heritage of our site, which is such an important element in the landscape evolution of Shapwick Heath. With projects to restore and share the stories of the peat-working heritage of the moors, such as re-building the Peat-workers Canteen at Meare Heath, restoration of sections of lock and canal, creating access to the lakes where the iron-age dug-out canoe was discovered by peat-farmers in 1908, we hope to better make the connection with the human history of the reserves, as well as their natural history.

### Avalon Marshes Partnership

The partnership of organisations that work across the Avalon Marshes is central to our planning and decision-making and we have a deep commitment to continuing to work closely together. An important part of this will be the further development of joint communications and public engagement into a joint Visitor Management Strategy, to aid the management of the reserves as a cohesive whole, so that the public can understand and access them with ease. To enable this to happen Natural England are committed to the process of bringing the reserves of the area together as one 'Avalon Marshes NNR'. We believe this will be of great benefit to the area, whose many visitors come to enjoy the wildlife and landscape, bringing benefits in the public's understanding of the importance of the Somerset Levels & Moors as a whole and to the local economy.

### Avalon Marshes Centre

We see the Avalon Marshes Centre as a key location to enable the Avalon Marshes NNR to feel like a cohesive whole. The centre provides orientation and information to visitors to the area, and plans are in place to continue with its development – re-landscaping of the car park and wildlife garden, an improved café area, replacement of the classroom and meeting facilities, re-development of the old Peat Moors Centre site and support for the South-West

Trust's developing Avalon Marshes Archaeological Park within it. From here we wish to grow our educational provision and become a 'hub' for natural history and citizen science, a destination for local arts & crafts, good food and a warm welcome to the area.

We also continue with our annual programme of events that welcomes our local community, as well as providing opportunities to learn and connect with nature for people of all ages. We aim to provide many volunteering opportunities from surveying, to estate work, to student placements and improve the provision of benefits for human health and wellbeing through access to the reserves. The reserves of the Avalon Marshes are an important part of the Somerset Levels & Moors that people can access and enjoy, and the Avalon Marshes Centre is key to this.

### Green Economy

Shapwick Heath NNR and the Avalon Marshes is fast becoming an attractive 'wildlife destination' for visitors, and making the most of opportunities to contribute positively to the local economy is an important theme. Good reserve and visitor management will provide a high quality experience for visitors, who will in turn use local businesses and services during their stay. We seek to work with our Avalon Marshes partners, tourist information centres and businesses in the local area to achieve the best outcomes for the local economy that we can, whilst retaining the tranquil atmosphere and conservation of wildlife that people have been attracted to come and see.

### Income Generation and Alternative Funding Sources

Changes in the resourcing for nature conservation has been a background theme for a number of years now. In this management plan therefore we must also focus some of our energies on ways of developing new income streams and alternative ways of resourcing our operations. Our principles in this are always to focus on projects that compliment, and are ethically aligned, to our conservation work, whether it be turning a waste material into a resource, the utilisation of sustainable energy-generating technology or finding commercial applications for some of the services we provide.

### Summary

We believe we have outlined an ambitious programme for the next five years, inspired by our 50-year vision for the future of the Avalon Marshes. Many of our proposed projects will be developed in co-operation with our partners and will require external funding to be sourced. We cannot guarantee that we will achieve completion of every project we propose in this management plan cycle, but we hope the plan gives a clear picture of our direction of travel, and shows our commitment to the core principles of our 21<sup>st</sup> Century Conservation Strategy: to create resilient landscapes, to work in partnership and put people at the heart of everything we do and to value our natural capital.