

## Project Profile

### Former Aggregates Site: Restoration Project

#### Background

The former sand quarry site is located within the Fenland of Cambridgeshire. Aggregate extraction ceased across the site several decades ago and it is still owned by a leading aggregate manufacturing company. In recent years the site has been leased by a motorcross operator who is seeking to continue using the site as it represents one of the best motorcross surfaces in the UK.

Since the closure of the site to aggregate extraction, a basic level of restoration has taken place (e.g. tree planting), and the site has now matured with an extensive lagoon present, reedbed, broadleaved plantation, areas of bare sand and slowly recolonizing sand exposures. The site is subject to a Section 106 agreement which secures its long-term future as a site for nature conservation. This will be realised through the production of a detailed phased restoration and aftercare strategy.

#### BSG's role in the project

To help meet the requirements of the Section 106 agreement BSG Ecology was commissioned in 2014 by the motorcross operator to prepare an Ecological Restoration and Habitat Management Plan for the site. In June 2014, BSG Ecology conducted a desk study and Phase 1 habitat survey to obtain an understanding of the current interest of the site for nature conservation, which could subsequently inform appropriate restoration proposals and objectives and future site management.

The desk study and Phase 1 habitat survey revealed that the northern half of the site largely comprises extensive areas of exposed sand across which motorcross takes place. This northern part was deemed to be in an unfavourable condition, due to the extent of exposed sand and lack of vegetation, although, with appropriate management in place, it has the potential to support species rich invertebrate assemblages associated with open mosaic habitats; a habitat typically associated with previously developed land in which thermophilous (heat-loving) and burrowing invertebrates typical of sandy soils thrive. Open Mosaic Habitats on Previously Developed Land is identified nationally as a Habitat of Principal Importance<sup>1</sup>, and many invertebrates associated with it are nationally scarce species or are themselves Species of Principal Importance<sup>2</sup>. The southern half of the site, which includes a large, deep lagoon with reedbeds at its perimeter, has the potential to become an important wetland habitat, with more extensive reedbeds and shallower open water supporting a range of ornithological, botanical and invertebrate interest.

BSG Ecology worked with the client to deliver the vision for the restoration proposals. This needed to meet the requirements of the Section 106 Agreement, yet had to also be sympathetic to the client's business objective of continuing to operate across

the site. It was therefore decided that the site would lend itself mostly towards habitat restoration, creation and management principles that favour open mosaic habitat to the north and wetland habitat to the south. Background reading of local planning documents and previous correspondence with consultees such as Natural England, The Wildlife Trusts and RSPB found that the proposals for the future restoration and management of the site would be widely supported by others.

Having identified the objectives of the plan, the identification of key targets was required to meet these objectives. A timeline was drafted showing the outline of the separate restoration and management projects. Each management and restoration project was also tabulated to show clearly how each one would be implemented, including the following detail:

- Purpose of the project;
- Who is responsible;
- Methodology (including the protection of any rare, notable or protected species already on site);
- Timing (e.g. during which calendar year / month to conduct the project); and
- Frequency (e.g. whether the project is a one-off or requires repeated actions).

Key targets were set that would enable the site to be restored and managed for the two key habitats (wetland and open mosaic habitats on previously developed land) and their associated plant, invertebrate and bird assemblages. However, it is also considered that through implementation of the plan, wider benefits would occur, for a range of species capable of using the site, such as: water vole, reptiles, amphibians and foraging bats.

#### Next Steps

Following submission of the Ecological Restoration and Habitat Management Plan to relevant consultees, positive feedback has been received and minor adjustments to the plan have been made to reflect comments raised by the RSPB and The Wildlife Trusts. BSG Ecology hopes to work with our client to successfully implement the plan over the next 5 to 10 years and looks forward to maintaining good relations with the consultees throughout this process. This will be achieved through a carefully designed monitoring strategy and site meetings to report the effectiveness of the management and to identify any changes required to ensure success.

<sup>1</sup> as referred to in Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (2006)

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*