

THORNEY ISLAND HABITAT CREATION PROJECT NEWSLETTER

JUNE/JULY 2024 - ISSUE #2

Our Vision

Creation of 30 hectares of compensatory intertidal habitat on the western side of Thorney Island by 2030 to contribute to the Habitat Creation Restoration Programme

What's been happening?

Welcome to the second edition of the Thorney Island Habitat Creation Scheme newsletter. An opportunity to update you on progress and topics of interest. This month the Project Team's focus has been creating and reviewing the project options shortlist.

Recent Flooding

We have experienced several storms this year and on 9th April 2024, a combined spring tide and storm surge caused the highest sea level ever recorded around Thorney Island. High tide levels of around 3.1mAoD overtopped the defences on the western side of Thorney Island and caused significant changes to the shingle beach in the South. Fortunately, no properties on Thorney Island were flooded, but the proposed habitat creation area was submerged with seawater up to 50cm deep!



Source: Environment Agency, South West Thorney Island

Following the flooding our partner ecologist from Chichester Harbour Conservancy, Pete Hughes, visited the site and observed many species of birds enjoying the temporary wetland area.

The recent storm highlights the need for this project, which aims to create many hectares of much needed ecology improvements including space for wetland bird species within Chichester Harbour, whilst providing a more robust and sustainable flood defence to protect the south-western part of the Island.



**Source: Pete Hughes
Chichester Harbour Conservancy**

Project Update

Over the last few months, the project has really gained momentum. The project is currently in the outline stage and assessing options and the viability of the project. Team members recently met Chichester District Council to discuss the project and seek advice on the planning application process.

We also reviewed the preferred project option shortlist. We worked as a team to understand the feasibility of each option, by assessing many aspects, including the logistics, cost, carbon and materials used to produce the preferred option, and are soon to engage with our partners on this. Once agreed, an in-depth study on this chosen option will happen in the next stage of the project.

Importance of bird islands

Like saltmarsh, bird islands within Chichester Harbour are under threat from sea level rise. Natural England identified a decline in bird numbers across Chichester Harbour, in part due to a loss of roosting and nesting sites (*Condition review of Chichester Harbour sites: intertidal, subtidal and bird features, Natural England 2021 (NERRO90)*). Bird islands are one of the most important habitats because they enable breeding pairs to raise their young in a location that is inaccessible to predators. As part of the Thorney Island Habitat Creation Project, we are investigating how we can adapt the existing defences into a potential 1.5km long bird island that will be resistant to the impacts of climate change. This will be an enormous boost to this type of habitat within Chichester Harbour.

Spotlight on Species

As the Thorney Island project will support and benefit numerous habitats and wildlife in the area, we are highlighting a different species each month. This month's species is a **Dunlin**: A small sized wader, approximately the size of a sparrow with pale brown markings and a cream/whitish underbelly. It is very common in the harbour and can be found in big flocks. The Dunlin tends to breed in either North Britain, Iceland or Scandinavia.



A Dunlin - Source: Chichester Harbour Conservancy



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[Thorney Island Habitat Creation Scheme Information Page - Environment Agency - Citizen Space \(environment-agency.gov.uk\)](#)

Footpath Closure

Please be aware that a section of the footpath around Thorney Island remains closed to the public. Walkers beginning the route from the West will not be able to exit from the Eastern side of the island and must retrace their steps. The Environment Agency led on works to repair the sluice at the end of 2023. During these works it was identified that the structure over the sluice was unsafe. This was reported to West Sussex County Council who made the decision to close the public right of way until further notice. Please contact West Sussex Council PROW Team, telephone number 01243 777620 for further information.



Existing public footpath – red line indicates where the path is currently closed

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