



Delivery of nutrient mitigation schemes

The Government's proposed nutrient pollution amendments to the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill will provide a means of weakening environmental protections for our most important wildlife sites. Nutrient pollution places at risk some of our most precious habitats - such as internationally rare chalk streams, and species - with the salmon populations of many English rivers now [threatened](#) with extinction.

The rules protect sites already in poor condition from pollution, such as the Somerset level SSSI whose conservation status was [downgraded](#) to 'unfavourable declining' in 2021 due to nutrient pollution.

The proposed removal of river protections has come after much industry lobbying. But claims that this is necessary because the rules created a 'housing moratorium' are highly exaggerated. Nutrient neutrality schemes established by Local Authorities and by Natural England, working with local providers, have offset the pollution that new homes would cause, and [enabled](#) housebuilding to go ahead. Removing pollution rules places the wildlife of these special places at risk, and flies in the face of the evidence from schemes across the country that show that development doesn't have to come at the expense of our rivers.

Here we showcase how Wildlife Trust schemes are delivering measures to offset water pollution, helping nature's recovery and enabling housebuilding. The current system is working.

Wildlife and Countryside Link's latest briefing on Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill amendments can be found [here](#).



Several Wildlife Trusts have worked on projects to reduce pollution across river catchments for nutrient neutrality schemes that unlock new housebuilding.

Durham Wildlife Trust

In the past two years, Durham Wildlife Trust has secured 636 acres of land in one of Natural England's (NE) priority nutrient mitigation catchments, the Tees Valley. This land is being used for nitrogen mitigation and long-term nature recovery. The land acquisition has been funded by Natural England under its three-year nutrient neutrality scheme, whereby NE secures mitigation thanks to funds from the scheme, and then sells the related nutrient credits to developers so that housing development can go ahead. (NB Durham Wildlife Trust is- to our knowledge- the only provider of mitigation solutions for the NE scheme in the Tees Valley).

NE's [press release](#) of 31 March 2023 noted that the land they had invested in within the Tees Valley catchment would provide credits to developers to unlock 1,600 houses.

The land acquired will help realise the Trust's vision for a [Great North Fen](#) while contributing towards the [30x30](#) and [Nature Recovery Network](#) objectives the Wildlife Trusts share with Government.

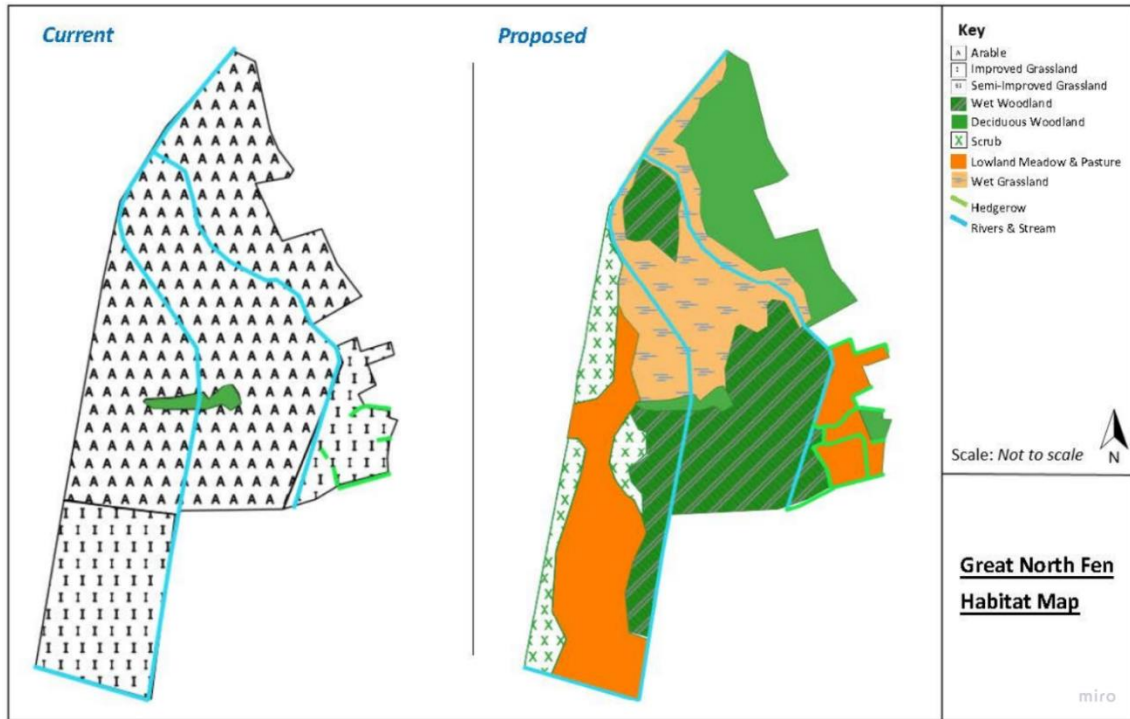
Mordon North

Size: 292 acres

Location: Tees Valley. Located in the catchment of the River Skerne, a tributary of the Tees

Mitigation: estimated 1230kg nitrogen mitigated

Nature recovery plans: Creation of woodland, scrub, grassland, scrapes.





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Current / before (above) – intensive grassland and arable fields (*illustrative purposes only*)



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After (below) – wet woodland, wet grassland, water voles and lapwings (*illustrative purposes only*)





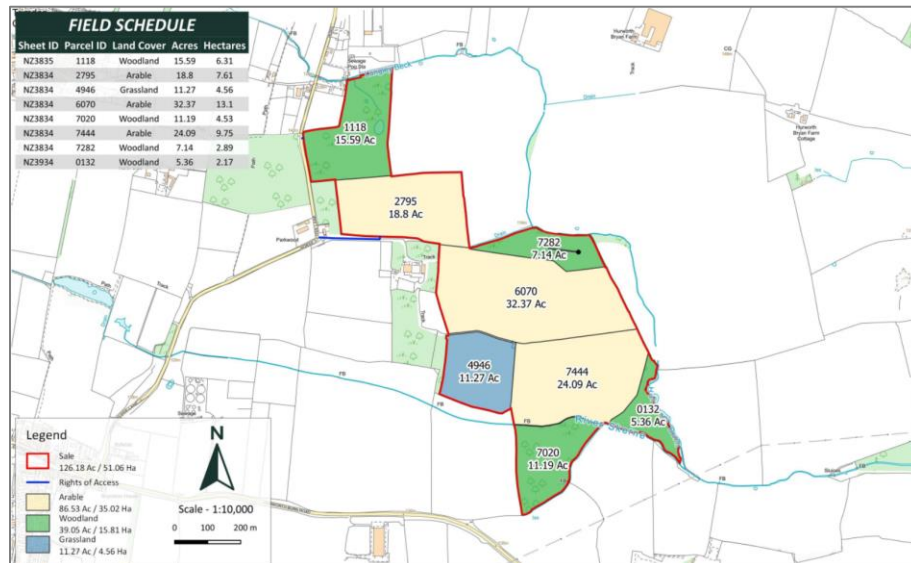
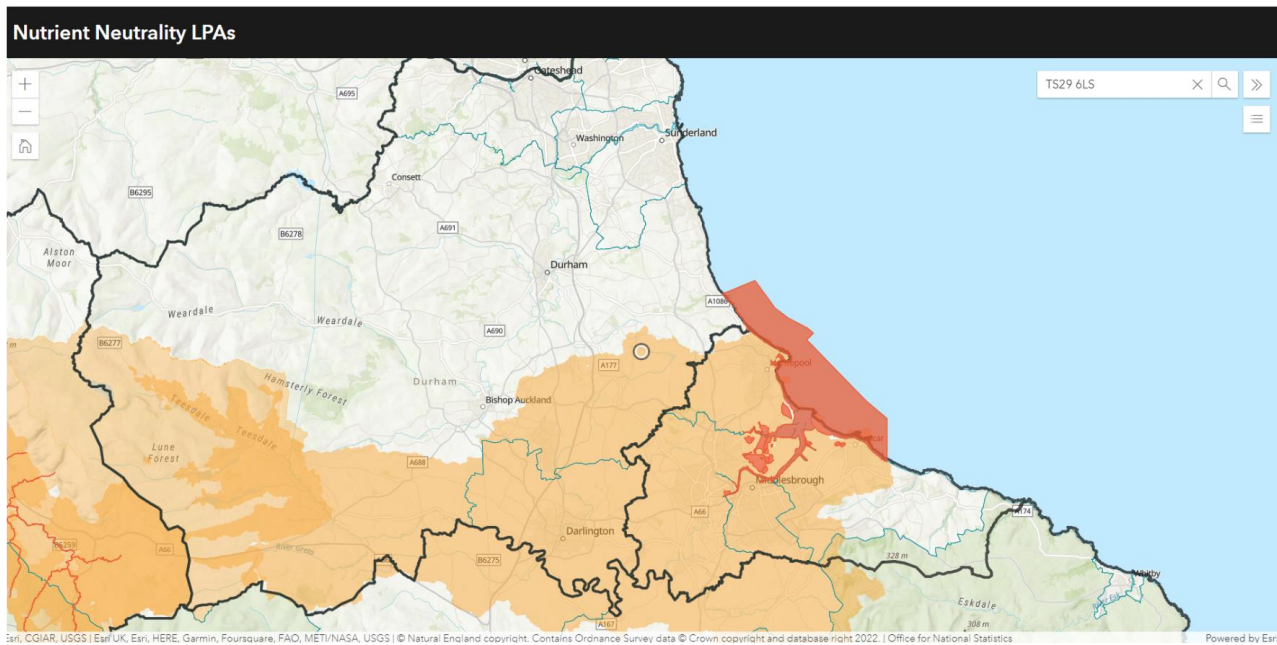
Horse Close Lane

Size: 125 acres

Location: Tees Valley, River Skerne.

Mitigation: Site used to mitigate nitrogen pollution.

Nature recovery plans: Natural regeneration of woodland, supplemented with planting and pond creation, to help nature recover on this site.





Horse Close Lane

Eldon Moor

Size: 219 acres

Location: Tees Valley

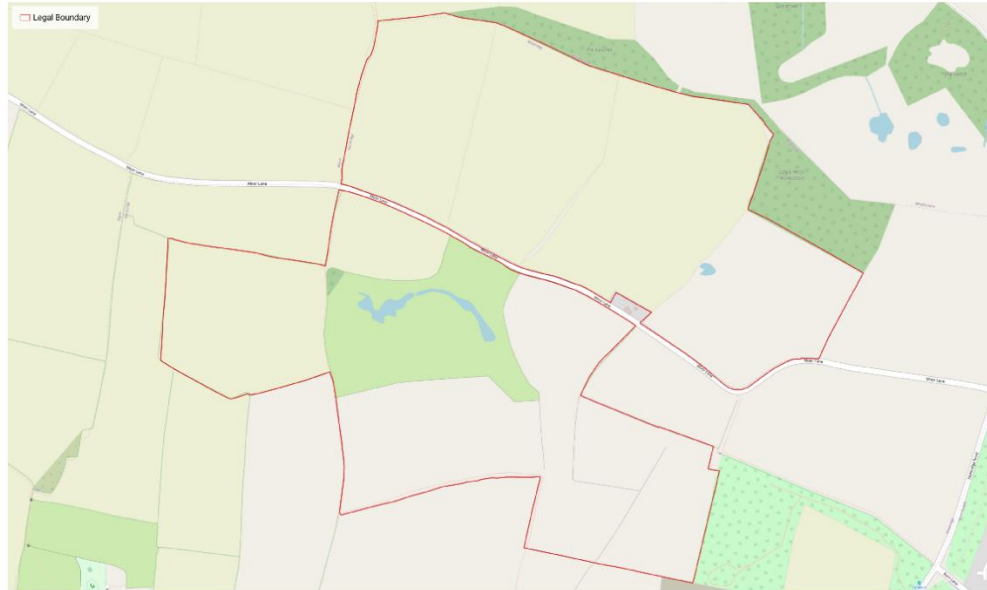
Mitigation: Site used to mitigate nitrogen

Nature recovery plans: Buffering and expanding adjoining woodlands by tree planting and natural regeneration on former arable land. Restoring existing ponds and wetland features and increasing the number of ponds and overall area of wetland habitat in appropriate locations. Some areas of arable land will be reverted to grassland and wood pasture and existing hedgerows and hedgerow trees conserved to retain the existing ecological features.




MERIT ESTATES

Land at Eldon Moor Farm



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100m
Scale: 1:5000 (at A4)

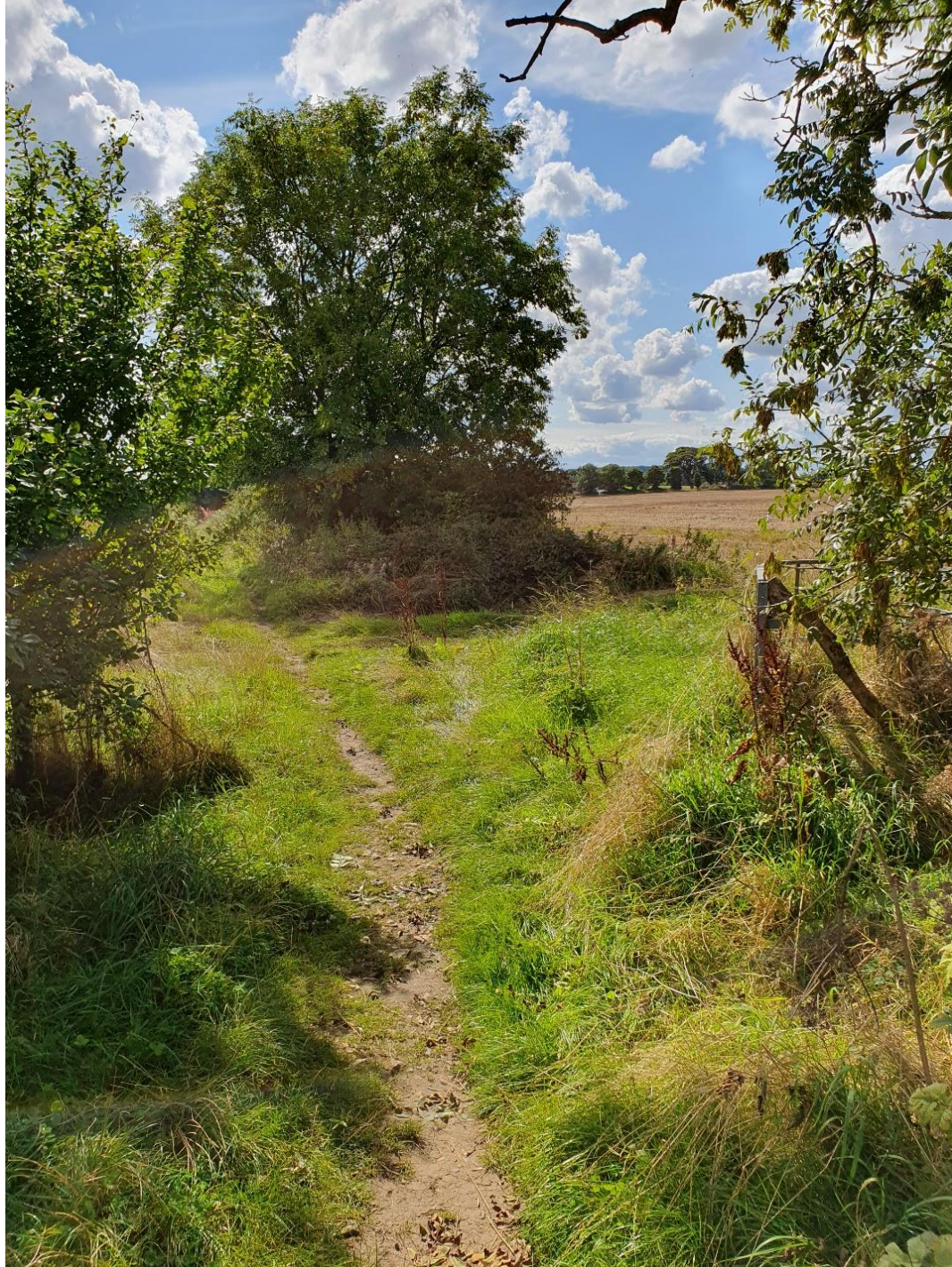


Eldon Moor



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Eldon Moor



Dorset Wildlife Trust

Dorset Wildlife Trust purchased 420-acre [Wild Woodbury site](#) near Bere Regis, supported by a grant from both Bournemouth Christchurch & Poole Council and Dorset Council, to mitigate the impacts of increases in nitrates due to new housing development in the Poole Harbour catchment.

This has enabled the avoidance of 4.47 tonnes of nitrogen entering the catchment each year – mitigation which allows 2111 homes to be built - and the delivery of significant benefits for wildlife and the local community.

[Dorset Wildlife Trust highlights the crucial role of nutrient neutrality schemes in protecting the region's waterways from yet more pollution. | Dorset Wildlife Trust](#)



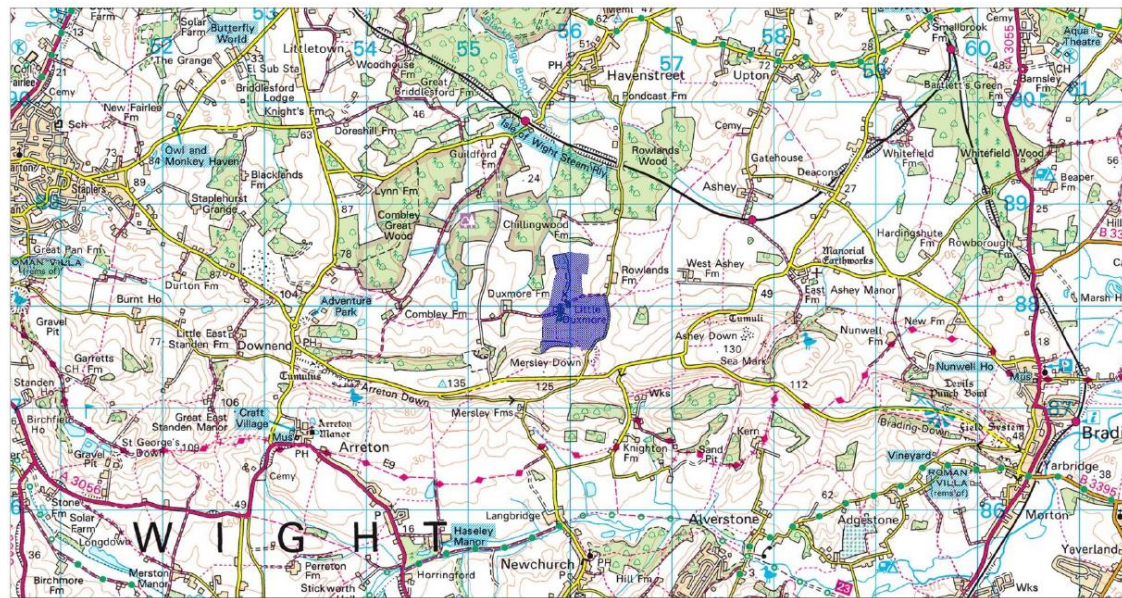
In the two years since Dorset Wildlife Trust took ownership of the site, they have already seen huge increases in wildlife through allowing the land to recover from previous nutrient inputs.

Since the land was acquired in 2021, it has been allowed to naturally regenerate with remarkable results. Staff and volunteers have recorded over 1,300 species in this summer's surveys and eight Red List birds of conservation concern have been confirmed to be breeding at Wild Woodbury.





Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust



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Little Duxmore, Isle of Wight



The Nutrient Neutrality rules have been working very well in the Solent area.

Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust has secured two sites for nutrient mitigation. These enable the avoidance of over 3.75 tonnes of nitrogen entering the Solent catchment each year and mitigate for the impacts of 4000 homes.

On the Isle of Wight the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust **purchased Little Duxmore** in 2020, a 42 acre site, now called “[Wilder Duxmore Farm](#)”, which was previously an arable farm subject to high levels of fertiliser inputs, growing mainly maize for anaerobic digestion.

As part of the Trust's Nature-Based Solutions programme, the land has been taken out of intensive agriculture and is being rewilded, allowing nature to take the lead.

Through the provision of nitrate credits, the project is offsetting development in the Solent catchment, restoring habitat for wildlife and helping to address the issue of high nitrate pollution in the Solent.

The site sits on a tributary of the Wootton Creek, which means it can offset the impact of new developments in the Portsmouth, Havant, Fareham, and Gosport areas, which once occupied, will drain into water treatment works at Budds Farm and Peel Common, that ultimately discharge into the Solent.

The mitigation scheme on the island was calculated to remove 848kg/N per year from the Solent ecosystem. The Wildlife Trust held back a portion of those credits in order to ensure a reduction, not just an equivalence, in pollution. Despite this, the credits available to sell on could be expected to unlock the building of around 1000 homes, at a cost-per-credit tested up-front with developers who confirmed that the scheme would be eminently affordable.

Wilder Nunwell, Isle of Wight





Nunwell Estate is the Trust's newest nutrient reduction scheme site, recently acquired on the Isle of Wight.

It is an arable farm, near Brading of approximately 356 acres, mainly consisting of cereal crops. Like Little Duxmore, Nunwell was also receiving high amounts of nutrient inputs for cereal cropping, which were eventually entering the Solent.

The Nunwell Estate drains into the Monktonmead and Eastern Yar (lower) catchments, which feed into the Solent via Ryde and Bembridge respectively. This means Nunwell can offset the impact of new developments on the mainland- Fareham/Gosport/Portsmouth and Havant areas, which once occupied, will drain into water treatment works at Peel Common and Budds Farm as well as developments on the Island itself (within the Eastern Yar (lower) catchment)

Restoration for nature has begun and the Trust has started to sell nutrient credits from the site.

Collectively, these examples demonstrate the effectiveness of nutrient mitigation schemes in enabling housing development to progress without contributing additional nutrient pollution loads to our already-harmed rivers, wetlands and coasts. They show that development which is sustainable can be secured through these and other initiatives, and that such schemes have the ability not only to enable sustainable development, but to make a significant contribution to nature's recovery in line with Government objectives and international obligations. These opportunities are lost if the Government's proposed amendment succeeds.

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For more information contact amorse@wildlifetrusts.org