**Scheme to boost wildlife at Belhus Woods Country Park to launch**

A government-backed scheme to boost wildlife at Belhus Woods Country Park is to launch this autumn.

The Countryside Stewardship Scheme supports long-term nature recovery to increase the variety of rare plant and animal life in the park.

Belhus Woods, near Thurrock, has over 300 acres of meadows, lakes and ancient woodlands. It is a rich blend of landscapes that have evolved from prehistoric settlements to the Normans – when it was a working woodland.

The Countryside Stewardship Scheme project to restore woodland pasture will include scrub management and the installation of livestock fencing.

Providing a valuable environment for wildlife, the woodland pasture consists of old and veteran trees and open grassland, heather and plants.

Together these habitats support many rare and threatened species, along with more common plants and species. The project will see an increase in fungi and diversity of beetles and wildlife such as bats, birds, insects and butterflies, including the silver washed fritillary.

Work to the several ancient woodlands and wood pasture will also see coppice rotation take place to increase flora and fauna. The coppicing works, which allows trees to flourish by thinning the new growth and dead wood, will create a habitat for the re-introduction of the endangered Dormouse.

As part of the scheme, Red Poll cattle will be introduced as a natural land management method to graze areas of woodland and grassland pasture.

The grassland pasture restoration encourages the growth of flowers and fungi, which will attract beetles and specifically the rare Shrill Carder bee – currently only found in a few UK locations.

The cattle eat just enough grass for wildflowers to flourish, which helps increase the variety of insects and pollinators.

The parks meadows, some of which are over 400-years-old, will also be managed naturally by hay cutting and green hay spreading to encourage a variety of wildflower species, such as vetches and bird's foot trefoil and more.

All the Countryside Stewardship Scheme works will be overseen by leading ecologists from Essex County Council's Place Services and agreed by Natural England, the government’s statutory body responsible for natural green infrastructure.

To ensure the projects’ success, a series of habitat audits and surveys will take place. These include working with local animal monitoring groups, like the Essex Field Club, to ensure that the restoration works are successful.

Councillor Mark Durham, Cabinet Member for the Arts, Heritage and Culture, said: "This ambitious landscape restoration scheme at Belhus Woods will bring the past to life and help enhance and protect the environment for the future.

“Using natural land management techniques, the projects will benefit rare and declining flora and fauna and see new species of wildflowers and animals introduced to this wonderful ancient parkland.”

To find out more about the Countryside Stewardship Works taking place at Belhus Woods Country Park visit: [www.explore-essex.com/landscape-restoration-belhus](http://www.explore-essex.com/landscape-restoration-belhus)

**ENDS**

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