



Celebrating
25 YEARS
COTSWOLD LAKES TRUST & THE HILLS GROUP





Introduction



The Hills Group has been pivotal in creating the Cotswold Water Park as we know it today, since their first gravel pit was dug over 100 years ago. To date Hills has created many of the Cotswold Water Park's 180+ lakes and their commitment to collaborative work and careful restoration over many years has played a fundamental role in creating this exceptional leisure amenity and a haven for wildlife.

Cotswold Lakes Trust has been fortunate to work in partnership with The Hills Group who have provided continued support throughout the years. Their generosity in providing a combined total of over £1.3 million through the Landfill Communities Fund has enabled the Trust to help preserve the amazing biodiversity of habitats and species in the Cotswold Water Park and to carry out projects ranging from the creation of nature reserves to improving public access and managing country parks.

Hills' continued support and friendship has been invaluable, helping Cotswold Lakes Trust to work towards achieving its vision of ensuring that through conservation, recreation and education, the Cotswold Water Park will remain a leading and sustainable example of how people and wildlife can successfully co-exist.

We would like to thank The Hills Group for their commitment and dedication to the environment and their continued support to both Cotswold Lakes Trust and the Cotswold Water Park. Together we can protect this nationally important landscape for generations to come.

Paul Hazel
Executive Chairman,
Cotswold Lakes Trust



"Hills has been operating in the Cotswold Water Park area for over 100 years and has created many of the lakes and wonderful habitats you see in this area today. We are proud to support Cotswold Lakes Trust in the projects they undertake to enhance biodiversity and community engagement."

Peter Andrew
Group Director,
Hills Quarry Products



Working together...

The Cotswold Water Park is a stunning wetland landscape with over 180 lakes covering an area of 42 square miles, which hundreds of thousands of local people and visitors enjoy every year. It has received national recognition for its importance for wetland wildlife with thousands of water birds breeding in the spring or visiting for the winter.

The Hills Group has been actively involved in the Cotswold Water Park since the first lake was dug in 1919 and today the Cotswold Water Park is one of the most important sources of gravel in the area. The post-extraction restoration process has been the vehicle for the creation of an exceptional leisure amenity and a haven for wildlife amongst the lakes, ponds, reed beds, marsh, wet woodland and wader scrapes. Some of the lakes are now used for water sports and leisure activities whilst others are kept solely for nature to thrive with wading, migrating, feeding and nesting birds.

The careful restoration of land that has been quarried is a particular skill and one that has won The Hills Group top industry awards.



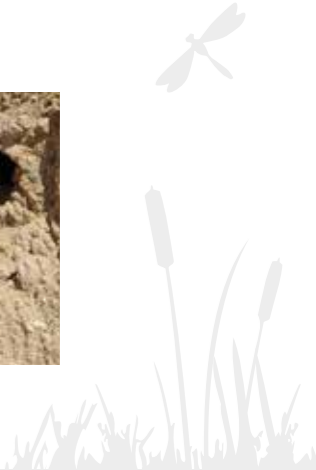
...for over 25 years

Cotswold Lakes Trust is a charity dedicated to the conservation and enhancement of the Cotswold Water Park for the benefit of wildlife and people. Its sole focus is to improve the Cotswold Water Park by enhancing its biodiversity, providing recreational opportunities for its local communities and visitors, and as an educational resource.

The Hills Group and Cotswold Lakes Trust have a history of working together over 25 years to create stunning biodiverse habitats for nature to thrive.

Starting in 1999 at Keynes Country Park with the construction of the Millennium Building, The Hills Group and Cotswold Lakes Trust have carried out a series of projects ranging from the creation of nature reserves to improving public access and managing country parks. As a great advocate for community and education, the partnership has facilitated access for school groups, quarry tours, fossil hunts and wildlife surveys.

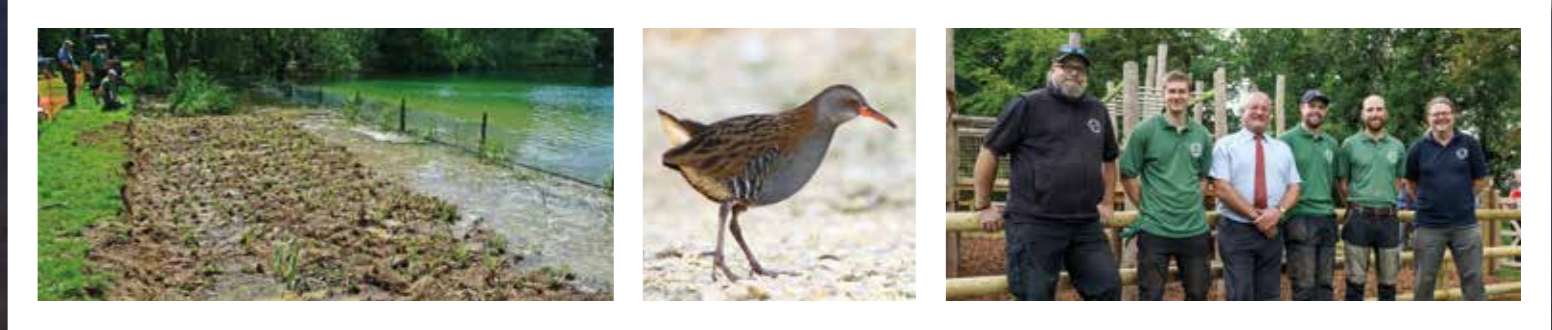
The close relationship has enabled The Hills Group and Cotswold Lakes Trust to come together to find solutions to ensure that wildlife is protected during quarrying. The Sand Martin and Little Ringed Plover, for example, are flagship species for the Cotswold Water Park and are found here almost entirely due to the sand and gravel extraction producing the habitats that these species need. The Sand Martin's nesting activities can be problematic for sand and gravel quarries, but by working together, habitat has been put aside by Hills for Sand Martins to allow them to nest in areas that are not disturbed during the spring and summer, with operational areas modified to prevent the species from colonising them.



Supporting Cotswold Lakes Trust's activities in the Cotswold Water Park



Over 25 years, The Hills Group has supported Cotswold Lakes Trust in its vital charitable work providing over £1.3 million through the Landfill Communities Fund for projects which have made a long lasting difference to the Cotswold Water Park for both people and wildlife.



A focus on...

Shornote Reedbeds

Shornote Reedbeds was the first mineral site in the Cotswold Water Park to be purposely restored as a nature reserve. A joint project between The Hills Group, Thames Water and the Cotswold Lakes Trust; the partnership provided the opportunity to create a site with large areas of reed fringe and islands for ground nesting birds as well as other associated wetland features. Since its inception, it has arguably become the most important site for birds in the Gloucestershire half of the Cotswold Water Park with species such as Water Rail, Siberian Chiffchaff, Reed Bunting and the elusive Bittern all recorded.

River works between Cleveland Lakes and Shornote Reedbeds

The Cerney Wick Brook connects two of the Cotswold Water Park's richest, most biodiverse sites; Shornote Reedbeds in Gloucestershire and Cleveland Lakes in Wiltshire. Support from The Hills Group through the Landfill Communities Fund and a third party contribution from the Environment Agency enabled Cotswold Lakes Trust to carry out a two year project. This included a series of environmental enhancements at the two key sites and created better ecological connections between them, encouraging resident species such as Kingfisher, Water Vole and Otter to fully colonise the brook.



Cleveland Lakes

Cleveland Lakes is Cotswold Lakes Trust's largest nature reserve, with almost five times as many biological records as the next most abundant nature reserve in the Cotswold Water Park. An extensive variety of wetland habitats have been created and managed, including open water, reedbeds, lagoons, mud scrapes and wet woodland, as well as the river corridor itself where the Cerney Wick Brook finally meets the River Thames. Cleveland Lakes is host to Wiltshire's largest heronry, where in excess of 40 pairs of Grey Heron and 20 pairs of Little Egret breed every year. The reedbeds provide habitat for Reed Warbler, Reed Bunting and Otter, as well as refuge for Water Voles, when their burrows on the River Thames are flooded.

For over 15 years, The Hills Group has supported Cotswold Lakes Trust on projects at Cleveland Lakes including the creation of a new permissive path, habitat management and more recently, much needed shelter and storage facilities for the hardworking volunteers at the nature reserve.



A focus on...

Neigh Bridge Country Park

Neigh Bridge Country Park is one of a number of sites managed and maintained by Cotswold Lakes Trust. It contains a lake, areas of grassland, hedgerows and a stretch of the River Thames. As a designated Green Space, it provides a place for local residents to walk and a base to explore the surrounding area using the network of public rights of way. It is also a key access point onto the Thames Path National Trail.

Since 2007, The Hills Group has supported Cotswold Lakes Trust on various projects at Neigh Bridge Country Park. These include habitat management and creation, refurbishment of the car park and the following three key schemes:

- **A new marsh creation project on the lake**

This was undertaken on an area of the lake which had started to become used as an informal beach and dog-swimming area, despite being unsafe and destroying almost all of the marginal lake vegetation. With funding from The Hills Group, the Trust implemented a large-scale planting scheme using a variety of native wetland plants which established very quickly.

- **Natural play trail**

A natural play trail was created in 2015/16 alongside the River Thames and Thames Path National Trail, using existing on-site materials from tree works carried out beside the river.

The trail included balance beams and stepping logs, encouraging children to engage in healthy activity in a natural setting.



- **Children's playground**

Further funding from The Hills Group and Gloucestershire County Council's Build Back Better Fund, enabled the Trust to replace the children's playground in 2021/22. Natural materials and recycled salvageable parts from the previous playground were used to provide this much needed facility for visitors and the local children of Somerford Keynes.

Water Vole Recovery Project

The Trust is very grateful to The Hills Group who have continued to support the Cotswold Water Park Water Vole Recovery Project for 13 years, through the Landfill Communities Fund. The funding enables Trust staff and volunteers to survey and monitor the stability of Water Vole populations across the Cotswold Water Park, provide advice to landowners, and carry out works to create and manage Water Vole habitat.

Water Voles are still the country's fastest declining mammal, largely due to predation by invasive American Mink, which escaped, or were released from fur farms many decades ago. In the Cotswold Water Park, a few populations of the voles survived despite this and the Cotswold Water Park Water Vole Recovery Project was initiated to protect them and encourage their colonisation.

The Hills Group's continued support has also allowed for the sustained control of American Mink which has seen a gradual reversal of the decline of the Water Vole numbers, as well as benefiting other native wildlife species.

The Cotswold Water Park for future generations

The Cotswold Water Park has received national recognition for its importance for wetland wildlife, particularly its thousands of breeding and wintering waterbirds. It is a place that acts as a carbon sink; its reedbeds, woodlands and wetlands absorbing and storing carbon from human activities.

The partnership between The Hills Group and Cotswold Lakes Trust is set to continue into the future, building on the achievements over the last 25 years to restore and create this exceptional leisure amenity and haven for wildlife.

Cotswold Lakes Trust is committed to providing an educational resource, engaging with visitors, the local community, schools and universities to promote a greater understanding and appreciation of the heritage, wildlife and landscape of the Cotswold Water Park. Together we will work to protect this unique natural setting for future generations to enjoy.

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for their use of images:
David Hall, Dave Kilbey, Dave Soons, Dan Stubbins, Robert Iles, Kim Milsom, Jill Bewley, Kay Ransom, Anita Syvret, Nigel Gardiner, CWP Hire, Cotswold Forest School, Bowmoor Sailing Club and Cotswold Country Park & Beach.



Cotswold Lakes Trust manages large areas of the Cotswold Water Park including:

- 275 acres of woodland
- 23 acres of reedbed
- 265 acres of lakes
- 3,450 metres of hedgerow
- 2,350 metres of river
- 66 acres of wetland
- 24 acres of grassland

For more information about Cotswold Lakes Trust and for ways to support its work, please visit www.cotswoldlakestrust.org





Cotswold Lakes Trust is a charity dedicated to the conservation and enhancement of the Cotswold Water Park for the benefit of wildlife and people



Cotswold Lakes Trust

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