

## **MEDIA RELEASE – for immediate release**

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### **Wiltshire Wildlife Trust opens a new nature reserve next to Marlborough for the benefit of wildlife and people**

Bay Meadows, a new water meadow and chalk stream nature reserve owned by Wiltshire Wildlife Trust, is now open to the public.

The nature reserve sits within the North Wessex Downs AONB, located on the outskirts of Marlborough in Wiltshire. Wiltshire Wildlife Trust purchased the site in 2022 to protect it from the threat of development, preserve it for the local community to enjoy and increase its biodiversity.

Bay Meadows is now both a nature park for everyone to visit and a nature reserve for wildlife, comprising 30 acres of restored water meadows. The River Og, a typical Wiltshire chalk stream, runs through the reserve and joins the River Kennet in the town, making Bay Meadows an important wildlife corridor between Ogbourne Maisey and Marlborough. Surveys undertaken as part of the project have revealed more than 300 species call Bay Meadows home, including otter and wild brown trout; it is also one of the last refuges of water voles, which have decreased by over 94% nationally and are now absent from most nearby counties.

Chairman Alan Pardoe and Chief Executive Mike Hill of The Hills Group opened Bay Meadows on 1 November at an official opening event attended by Ninna Gibson, Deputy Lord Lieutenant of Wiltshire, Nick Fogg, Mayor of Marlborough, and Nick Holliday, Committee Member of National Lottery Heritage Fund, as well as a small group of the Trust's major stakeholders.

Thanks to the generous support of the National Lottery Heritage Fund, The Hills Group, Dyson, Fish in Need, Marlborough Area Board, the Town Council, and other generous donors, the Trust completed a two-year programme of habitat restoration and community engagement work prior to the reserve opening. Attendees of the official opening event had the chance to learn about how Bay Meadows has been transformed for the benefit of wildlife and local people since the land was purchased.

As part of the restoration project, the floodplain meadow was restored to not only improve wetland habitat to attract more mammals, birds, fish and pollinators, but to also provide a nature-based solution to mitigating climate change. A series of shallow scrapes were created to hold water back in the floodplain, allowing it to be released slowly during

extended dry periods to help sustain wildlife and provide ideal habitat for water birds. Trees and snakeshead fritillary bulbs were also planted with the help of community volunteers to increase biodiversity across the site. Grazing by a small herd of cattle has been introduced into the Wildlife Refuge area to create ideal conditions for more wildflowers to flourish.

As part of the community engagement work, schools, clubs and other organisations visited Bay Meadows to participate in fun, nature-based activities, such as building dens and bird boxes. A dedicated area was also set up to deliver wellbeing activities for the Trust's Marlborough Wellbeing Programme, such as conservation work, wildlife walks and nature-based crafts, to increase nature connectedness in adults from the local community.

The opening of the nature reserve has given Marlborough communities access to a new nature-rich green space, with the creation of easy walking trails. For families, there is a picnic area, a den building area, logs to climb on and an enchanted tunnel. There is also a bug hunting trail, reptile mats and bug hotels for children to explore. WWT's experts will continue to use the wellbeing area created as part of the project for guided activities.

**Joanna Lewis, CEO of Wiltshire Wildlife Trust, said:**

“The nature park will be a fantastic asset for this community – a place for local people to come to relax and unwind and connect with nature.

“The people of Marlborough have really embraced the project. We've involved over 700 local people of all ages and backgrounds through family days, green prescription programmes, school visits and Forest School outreach.

“Crucially for the long-term flourishing of wildlife on the reserve, we have inspired an amazing band of volunteers, who've been involved in citizen science surveying and all kinds of habitat improvements. When we stepped in, Bay Meadows was poor grazing land with limited biodiversity – our volunteers have already helped create new wetland scrapes, install special woody debris features to vary the water-flow of the Og to benefit water voles and dragonflies, planted thousands of beautiful snakeshead fritillaries and thousands of trees and bushes.

“We need nature in our lives, for our health and happiness and for the resilience of our farming systems and the stability of our climate. In saving Bay Meadows, and working together to create a new nature reserve and a new community nature park, we have stood up for nature and for people.”

**Mike Hill, Chief Executive of The Hills Group, said:**

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“It is a real honour to be able to open Bay Meadows and one that has been made even more special by our long-time links with Wiltshire Wildlife Trust and the town of Marlborough.

“The Hills Group is delighted with the work Wiltshire Wildlife Trust has done in developing Bay Meadows for everyone to enjoy. It is another example of the excellent partnership between our two organisations.

“I’d also like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who was involved in this project, especially Gary Mantle, Wiltshire Wildlife Trust’s former CEO, whose passion, energy, and vision have been an inspiration to many of us for over 30 years.”

The creation of [Bay Meadows nature reserve](#) is part of Wiltshire Wildlife Trust’s wider strategy to restore nature at a landscape scale by improving connectivity through wildlife corridors and better habitat management. The Trust is not only carrying out extensive works to improve, restore and create wetland habitat on its own nature reserves, but is also working with farmer clusters and landowners to restore a wide range of habitats across the wider landscape of Wiltshire.

Bay Meadows is now one of more than 40 Wiltshire Wildlife Trust nature reserves spread throughout the county covering over 3,000 acres, with all of Wiltshire’s habitats represented, from chalk downlands to woodlands. Find out more about Wiltshire Wildlife Trust’s nature reserves at: [www.wiltshirewildlife.org/reserves](http://www.wiltshirewildlife.org/reserves).

**[ENDS]**

**Images:** Please find a dropbox with images [here](#) for use in connection with this story and Wiltshire Wildlife Trust only. Photographers must be credited.

Image below: Bay Meadows Opening Event - Mike Hill from The Hills Group cutting the ribbon with (left to right): Joanna Lewis (WWT), Alan Pardoe (The Hills Group), Ninna Gibson (Deputy Lord Lieutenant of Wiltshire), Nick Holliday (National Lottery Heritage Fund) and Dr Gary Mantle (former CEO of WWT)

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## **Notes to editors**

**Wiltshire Wildlife Trust's** vision is to create a sustainable future for wildlife and people. We are unique in the county in combining the management of over 40 nature reserves and working with local communities to provide educational and wellbeing activities, and to promote sustainable living. The Trust is supported by over 23,000 members and more than 1,000 volunteers. For more information about the Trust, please visit [www.wiltshirewildlife.org](http://www.wiltshirewildlife.org).

