

Kemerton Conservation Trust

Kemerton Court
Kemerton
Tewkesbury
Gloucestershire
GL20 7HY

Tel: 01386 725 254

www.kemerton.org

Registered Charity No. 702488

**GOVERNORS**

ADRIAN DARBY, OBE
MATTHEW DARBY (Chairman)
PETER DOBLE
PETER MARREN
ROGER UMPELBY
ROSEMARY WINNALL, MBE

Kemerton Lake Nature Reserve Woodland Grazing and Visitor Improvement Project Report 14th March 2025

Project Background

Kemerton Lake Nature Reserve (KLNR) is Kemerton Conservation Trust's flagship reserve. It is a 46.5-acre (18.8 ha) wetland complex created out of a former gravel working, situated between the villages of Bredon, Westmancote, Kemerton and Kinsham. The reserve is a designated Local Wildlife Site and has a diverse range of habitats including a 16-acre (6.5 ha) lake, pools, seasonal wet scrapes, reed beds, grassland, and land specially cultivated for arable plants. The reserve is surrounded by 111 acres (45 ha) of native woodland and arboretum, including the Lake Walk, which are not part of the reserve, but which make an important contribution to the habitat mosaic.

KLNR attracts many visitors annually, including residents from the four villages that surround the reserve, and wildlife enthusiasts from further afield who come to use the hides walk in the woodland. The reserve is traversed by a public footpath and several permissive paths for trust members. The reserve and surrounding woodland is owned by the Kemerton Estate and managed in partnership with Kemerton Conservation Trust (KCT), a registered charity, who lease the reserve.

The woodland that surrounds the reserve is relatively young and is developing ecologically. It was felt that woodland grazing could benefit it because occasional grazing of woodland by cattle, carried out in accordance with the methodologies promoted by the Woodland Trust and Soil Association, can confer multiple nature conservation benefits. These include creating a mosaic of habitats, promoting natural regeneration, preventing domination by shade tolerant species, maintaining glades and space for individual trees to develop, disturbing ground to assist in seed dispersal, suppressing vigorous species such as nettle and bramble, and increasing the diversity of ground flora, lichens, bryophytes, insects, reptiles and small mammals.

The Kemerton cattle herd is certified organic and is mob-grazed outdoors year-round. The herd does not use Ivermectin or other medication that might cause harm to woodland flora. There is evidence that tree browsing by cattle significantly reduces their methane and ammonia output. Recent carbon auditing by Trinity Agtech demonstrates that the mob-grazing techniques employed by the Kemerton herd result in rapid soil accumulation and net carbon capture.

For woodland grazing to take place, stock proof fencing was required. Fencing the entire 111 acres of woodland was not feasible due to prohibitive costs. However, the Lake Walk, a woodland strip that runs along the east and south sides of the reserve, already had stock-

proof fencing on one side and was adjacent to a recently established wood pasture restoration and creation project providing direct links between the historic wood pasture in Kemerton Park and the Bredon Hill SAC/SSSI. It was decided that this area would be feasible to fence within budget. Conservation would be additionally enhanced by providing new access gates at the intersection of the public footpath and a permissive path, which would help to prevent dogs straying into the reserve and disturbing fauna, such as ground-nesting Cetti's warblers.

The Lake Walk consists of relatively young woodland planted on former arable land. The ground flora lacks diversity and is dominated by nettle and bramble in many areas. Some native bluebells and daffodils have been introduced from local sources, but there was a need for more to provide an abundant early nectar source for emerging pollinators such as queen bumblebees. These flowers are also extremely attractive and are a wonderful addition for visitors at a time of year when the woodland is still bare. The bulbs would be planted by the trust's volunteers, providing a good opportunity for them to get involved, spend time outdoors, learn new skills and make social connections.

The number of visitors to the reserve has grown significantly over recent years as it has become better known locally. New signage and leaflets were wanted to ensure that people have up to date information about the site, both for their enjoyment and to prevent harm to sensitive wildlife.

New benches had been requested by visitors with reduced mobility, as existing benches had become unsafe and broken over time. Before the project began, the only seating on the routes was in the bird hides, two of which are member-only.

The reserve is often visited by families with young children, but there was nothing specific to engage them. The trust wanted to engage young people with the site and help to educate them about nature conservation in an enjoyable way.

This project was a joint partnership between the Kemerton Estate and KCT, as it involves cattle fencing and grazing (managed by the Estate) as well as conservation work, access improvements and better signage and leaflets that are for the direct benefit of the trust and our visitors.

Kemerton Estate and KCT therefore applied for grant funding from the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) Fund to pay for fencing, access improvements, signage and habitat creation at KLNr and the Lake Walk. The work would be carried out by contractors supported by KCT's warden and volunteers. We successfully bid for £18,826.48, which represented 72% of the total project cost. The project began in June 2024 and was completed in February 2025. KCT also successfully applied to Highfields Trust CIO for an additional £2500 towards the project. The balance of funds came from KCT's own financial reserves, including £2500 from The Benefact Group's Movement for Good Award which we received in 2023.

Project Aims

The aims of this project are as follows:

1. Improve carbon storage and lower flood risk through conservation grazing. The natural processes replicated by mob-grazing of organic cattle are known to build soils and sequester carbon. Extending these processes into the Lake Walk woodland will have positive impacts on soils. There is further evidence that browsing of trees by cattle balances their rumens and reduces their methane and

ammonia production. Improved woodland soils achieved through conservation grazing will enhance water storage capacity.

2. Improve the area of wildlife-rich habitat through planting wildflowers and removing redundant fencing and tree guards. Planting early spring flowering native bulbs will increase the availability of nectar for early emerging pollinators such as queen bumblebees, hoverflies and butterflies. Old, redundant fencing & tree guards pose a threat to wildlife, removing them from the site will remove a wildlife hazard.
3. Manage the site better for biodiversity by installing new perimeter fencing and carrying out conservation grazing. Installing a new perimeter fence and gates will reduce disturbance to wildlife from dogs, which poses a significant threat to many species. Grazing woodland with cattle, carried out in accordance with Woodland Trust methodologies, can increase biodiversity by creating a mosaic of habitats, promoting natural regeneration, preventing domination by shade tolerant species, maintaining glades and space for individual trees to develop, disturbing ground to assist in seed dispersal and suppressing vigorous species such as nettle and bramble.
4. Improve the visitor experience at Kemerton Lake Nature Reserve through the provision of new signage, map and information leaflets, an interpretation board. The new signage and interpretation board will include information on the nature reserve and adjoining woodland, including information about its management, which will improve understanding of the trust's work at the site. The provision of activity sheets for children will help them to understand and enjoy the nature reserve in new ways. New benches will make the site more accessible and enjoyable, particularly for older or less mobile visitors, by providing places for people to rest and peacefully enjoy their surroundings. Using locally produced oak benches will ensure they are in keeping with the woodland setting.
5. Improve volunteer participation through involvement in the project. As part of the project the trust's volunteers will be planting wildflower bulbs, engaging with and learning about the nature reserve, and getting actively involved with the management of the site.
6. Enhance the quality of the landscape by removing defunct fencing and tree guards and planting wildflowers along the edge of permissive paths.

To deliver those aims, the project focussed on the following:

1. Removal of old, redundant rabbit fencing along the public footpath that runs through the reserve and scrub clearance to facilitate new fencing works.
3. Installation of 345m of new stock fencing with 2 strands of plain wire along the public footpath to replace the old fence.
4. Installation of 1240m of stock fencing with 2 strands barbed wire along outer woodland perimeter (focussing on the Lake Walk).
5. Installation of 2 new metal gates where the permissive path crosses the public footpath, and reuse of one existing metal gate in new location on roadside.
6. Replacement of a broken wooden stile with a metal stile on permissive path.
7. Removal of old, broken fencing and old, redundant tree guards in the Lake Walk.
9. Planting of 500 native daffodil and 500 bluebell bulbs along the permissive path in the Lake Walk.
10. Installation of 3 new oak benches along the permissive path and public footpath in the woodland.
11. Designing, printing and installing a new interpretation board for visitors to the nature reserve.
12. Designing, printing and installing new 'welcome' signs for the nature reserve.

13. Designing new pdf activity sheets and posters linked to QR codes for children visiting the reserve.
15. Designing and printing new map leaflets for the nature reserve showing up-to-date access arrangements.
16. Designing and printing new and up-to-date information leaflets about the trust.

Overview of Works

Project works commenced in June 2024 and the final works were completed in January 2025 (see Appendix A – Photo Montage).

In June, Project Manager Kate Aubury took photos from fixed points in the Lake Walk, which will be used as a baseline for monitoring the effects of cattle grazing on the woodland. She also started to design the leaflet and the welcome signs.

In July, Kate Aubury publicised the project on KCT's Facebook page and in the trust's newsletter. She also ordered the bulbs and benches and began liaising with the contractors over upcoming works. The graphic designer finalised the design of the new welcome signs.

In August, Kate Aubury finalised the design of the updated map and information leaflets, and a batch of both were printed. KCT's website was also updated with a pdf of the new map. The new aluminium welcome signs were delivered.

In early September, contractors began scrub clearance for the new fencing. They removed the old public footpath fence and installed the new fence over several days. Visitors were kept updated via KCT's Facebook page and with temporary signage on the affected paths, although the path remained open throughout the installation. KCT Warden John Threadingham installed the new welcome signs at both entrances to the nature reserve.

In October, the fencing contractor completed all the fencing works, including installing the new gates. It is hoped that cattle grazing will begin in Autumn 2026. On 24th October, Kate Aubury took part in a FiPL Guided Walk to showcase our project. Attendees visited Kemerton Lake Nature Reserve and heard about the project aims.

In November, 1000 wildflower bulbs were planted along the Lake Walk. John Threadingham supervised a corporate volunteer day on 6th November, with employees from Babcock DSG planting half the bulbs and learning more about the nature reserve in the process. Kate Aubury and KCT's work party volunteers planted the remaining bulbs a week later. Contractors spent several days removing old, redundant fencing and defunct tree guards from the Lake Walk. Work began on designing children's activity sheets and the interpretation board.

In December, the completed children's activity sheets were uploaded to KCT's website and the accompanying posters were put up in all 3 bird hides. Kate Aubury publicised the new activity sheets on KCT's Facebook page. The graphic designer finished the interpretation board design and it was sent to print.

In January, contractors installed the new interpretation board and three new benches at the reserve. The project was publicised in the trust's newsletter.

In February, the newly planted daffodils in the Lake Walk began to bloom.

Project Results

The project was completed on time and under budget. The final claim of £18,474.18 was slightly lower than originally quoted due to savings made on fencing and printing costs.

The new fencing was installed successfully despite challenging weather conditions in autumn 2024 and the area has been made secure for cattle grazing.

A significant number of old, redundant fencing and broken tree guards were removed from the Lake Walk, which will be beneficial to wildlife as well as looking more attractive for visitors. The wire is being recycled.

1000 bluebell and daffodil bulbs were successfully planted by volunteers. The daffodils are already flowering, looking vibrant for visitors and offering early nectar for emerging pollinators. The bluebells have appeared and are beginning to come into flower. Our volunteers enjoyed being involved with the project and learned new skills. They are taking pride in seeing the plants flowering for the first time. The corporate volunteers from Babcock DSG learned about conservation in action on their visit and gave us very positive feedback. They hope to return in 2025 for more hands-on involvement with the trust.

New signage and benches were installed successfully, giving rise to positive feedback, particularly regarding the new benches.

The new activity sheets were completed and are available for younger visitors to the reserve to download or view on their phones using QR codes. We hope that it encourages them to learn more about the flora and fauna of the site and become more engaged with nature.

The new KCT leaflets were updated in-house with volunteer help and have already been used at events and in membership packs. They are invaluable for helping to spread the word about KCT's work and for use by visitors to KLNR.

The Future

As part of the project, we took fixed point photos of the woodland in the Lake Walk before work began to monitor the effects of grazing over the next 3-5 years. If the effects are broadly positive, the trust will look to introduce more woodland areas into the grazing regime in the future where funds become available.

Improved carbon capture and water retention in the soils should occur over time because of conservation grazing. This long-term benefit will help the site cope with changing rainfall patterns over the coming decades.

The new fencing and wildflower bulbs should provide benefits for years to come. The wildflowers will gradually increase in number, filling the Lake Walk with colour and nectar in the early spring, for both pollinators and visitors to enjoy.

The new benches were carefully chosen to ensure they will last for many years in an outdoor environment. The trust will maintain them and repair them as necessary. Along with the new signage, the benches will benefit visitors to KLNR into the future.

Acknowledgements

Kemerton Estate Partnership and Kemerton Conservation Trust would like to thank Farming in the Protected Landscapes (FiPL) Fund delivered by Cotswolds National Landscape and Highfields Trust CIO for generously supporting this project and making it possible. We would

also like to thank Movement for Good from The Benefact Group for their generous award to the trust in 2023, half of which was put towards this project.

We would also like to thank all those who assisted in the delivery of the project, including KCT Warden John Threadingham, our hardworking work party volunteers, and volunteers from Babcock DSG. We would also like to thank our contractors for their excellent work; Shaw Countryside Management who installed the new fencing and CRC Ecology who carried out habitat management works and installed the new benches and interpretation board.



Cotswolds
National
Landscape

Appendix A Photo Montage



Stock fencing with 2 strands of Barbed Wire: fencing along Kinsham Lane, fencing along southern boundary of reserve, fencing along edge of South Ride up to public footpath

All photos copyright Kate Aubury



Stock fencing with 2 strands of plain wire: old fencing along public footpath before removal, new public footpath fencing

All photos copyright Kate Aubury



2 New gates: Gate 1 on South Ride, Gate 2 on South Ride

All photos copyright Kate Aubury



Metal Shetland Stile: stile in position on public footpath

Photo copyright Kate Aubury



Move & Reinstall Metal Gate: gate on Kinsham Lane after reinstallation

Photo copyright Kate Aubury



3 x Oak Benches: Bench 1 on Lake Walk, Bench 2 on South Ride (see below for Bench 3)

All photos copyright CRC Ecology



Interpretation Board Print & Frame: Installed Interpretation Board with Bench 3 on Public Footpath, closeup of Interpretation Board

All photos copyright CRC Ecology





Aluminium Welcome Signs: Welcome sign on Kissing gate at southern entrance to reserve

Photo copyright Kate Aubury



Contractor time for fence & guard removal: pile of old fencing after removal from Lake Walk

Photo copyright Kate Aubury



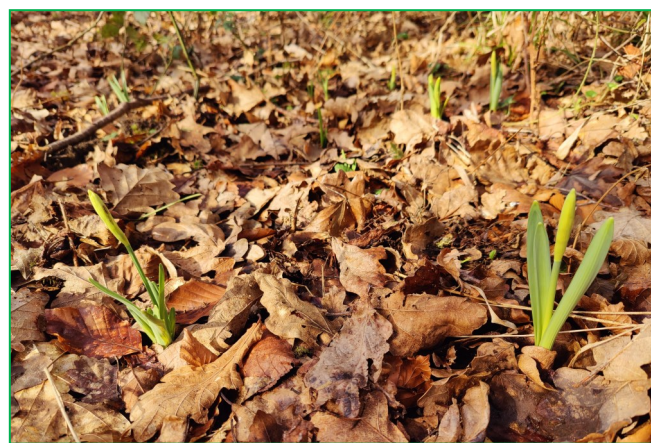
Bulb Planting: Volunteers from Babcock DSG planting bulbs, Daffodil bulb in ground, KCT volunteer planting bulbs

Photo one copyright John Threadingham, photos two & three copyright Kate Aubury



FiPL Project Event: Attendees on a guided walk at KLNLR

Photo copyright Kate Aubury



Daffodils beginning to emerge in February in Lake Walk

Photo copyright Kate Aubury