

Restoring and expanding open habitats from woods and forests in England: a consultation

The Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust would like to place on record its support for the representation submitted by Tony Whitbread of Sussex Wildlife Trust on behalf of The Wildlife Trusts.

In general the Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust is in favour of the maximum extent of removal of conifers to restore open habitats. The Trust has removed conifers and successfully restored open habitats at a number of nature reserves contributing to UK and Lincolnshire Biodiversity Action Plan targets. For example, areas of heathland have been restored through the Coversands Project at Scotton Common and Messingham Sand Quarry Nature Reserves, and limestone grassland has been restored at Robert's Field Nature Reserve.

Robert's Field was once the finest butterfly site in Lincolnshire, with at least four species now extinct in the county. The Trust has had a one acre meadow reserve at Robert's Field, under a management agreement with the Forestry Commission, since 1985. The remainder of the site, which was formerly limestone grassland, was planted with conifers in the 1960s despite its SSSI status. The Trust embarked on a plan to restore Roberts's Field to limestone grassland in 1994. The conifer trees were felled and the site was re-seeded with hay seeds from local limestone grassland. The reserve is now managed by a combination of hay cropping and autumn grazing with sheep. The restoration has been very successful and many of the limestone plants found in the old meadow can now be found in the restored grassland areas.

We would like to highlight an aspect which the document does not appear to consider, namely the damage done to heathland nature reserves and Sites of Special Scientific Interest by the planting and growth of plantations on adjoining land. This has caused the lowering of the water table at LWT reserves at Linwood Warren, Scotton Common and possibly also at Kirkby Moor with consequent loss of wet heath and species such as butterwort, sundew, bog asphodel, marsh gentian, curlew and greyling butterfly. In addition, seed dispersal from the plantations onto open heath in the reserves has caused constant problems. Consequently we believe that priority should be given to the removal of plantations immediately adjoining SSSI reserves.