



THE HODDESDON SOCIETY

Charity No 234800

Mr Lewis Cocking MP
House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA

18 December 2024

By email

Dear Mr Cocking

RSBP Rye Meads

We are writing to you on behalf of The Hoddesdon Society. Our members are concerned about the fate of RSPB Rye Meads and, as our local MP, we wanted to draw the latest developments to your attention and ask you to do what you can to assist us in assuring the future of this valuable local Nature Reserve.

As you may know, the RSPB recently published a statement¹ expressing the intention to review the management of several reserves in England. This includes Rye Meads, which the organisation “*will be exploring options for the future of...during 2023, including potential change of management*”. It is completely ending its valuable educational programme on site at Rye Meads which has benefited so many local schools and students over the years.

We know that you will be familiar with Rye Meads and will appreciate the importance of this invaluable local asset. Not only is this 145-acre habitat vitally important to local people and wildlife, it is also internationally significant to nature conservation. Rye Meads is one of the best sites for viewing kingfishers in the country and many people travel from London, and much further afield, for the rich birdwatching experience on offer here. The site boasts not just Red Listed Kingfishers but Common Terns, endangered Water Voles, and many species of rare waterfowl. The value of Rye Meads in supporting a rich array of birdlife is reflected in its designations: it is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Special Protection Area (SPA) and, most significantly, a RAMSAR site; a wetland of international importance.

We have been contacted by a number of local people who love the reserve and are concerned by this sudden and unexpected announcement. In March 2020, the RSPB opened its beautiful new Kingfisher Visitor Hub,

¹ See link here: [Important update on Rye Meads Nature Reserve - Rye Meads - Rye Meads - The RSPB Community](#)

a purpose-built and accessible building that everyone could enjoy. The construction was financed by local groups, wills and trusts whom we are certain invested assuming a long lifespan for the facility, certainly longer than just four years.

While the management of Rye Meads could, in theory, be transferred to another organisation such as the Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust (“**HMWT**”), the Lee Valley Regional Park Authority or the freehold owner Thames Water, all these options would be inferior to ownership and management by a charity that specialises in bird conservation.

Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust, as a local organisation, does not have anything like the breadth of capacity that the RSPB, a national charity with over 1.2 million members, commands. Amwell Nature Reserve (adjacent to RSPB Rye Meads) is managed by HMWT and there is no visitor centre on site, and it is not staffed by volunteers. RSPB Rye Meads is currently staffed 363 days a year. Visitor centres are important for assuring equitable and inclusive access to the natural world. On site toilets are vital to enable for groups of children, the elderly and disabled people to be able to visit any reserve.

Thames Water is in dire financial straits and faces an uncertain future, reporting last week that it only has enough funds to survive until March and is at risk of collapse. It seems unlikely that Thames Water will be in a position to commit its resources to wildlife conservation.

The Lee Valley Regional Park Authority (the LVRPA) has a turnover that is dwarfed by the RSPB's. We think it unlikely that the LVRPA, which has been disposing of parkland ‘no longer required for Park purposes’ across the Regional Park as part of its Corporate Land & Property Strategy over the last few years, will have any appetite for this role.

The concern is, therefore, it is unlikely any organisation can maintain the reserve and visitor centre to the high standard which is currently being delivered and which the site, its wildlife and the public deserves.

The RSBP has said that it will be actively considering its options for the long-term future of Rye Meads over the next few months, so it appears that there is still time to influence the outcome. There is considerable local feeling across the Borough and we will be supporting the campaign to keep Rye Meads open and managed by the RSBP, and seek the reversal of the cancellation of the school educational programme.

We would be delighted if, as our local Member of Parliament, you could add your voice to the local campaign and write to the current Chief Executive of the RSPB requesting a reconsideration of its approach to Rye Meads, in order to safeguard this precious place for future generations.

Yours faithfully

Nicola Cowan
Secretary
On behalf of The Hoddesdon Society