

MAKING A LANDSCAPE – February 2016



There can be no doubt of the pressure that the countryside around is under. Whether it is the demand for more homes or the requirements for minerals extraction our area is the focus of a lot of development at the moment – with the prospect of much more to come.

The Langdyke Countryside Trust was set up in 1999 with the aim of enhancing our local countryside and helping local people understand the natural world around them. As such we have always taken a proactive approach, rather than waiting for things to happen. Over the last 17 years, the Trust has established a network of five local nature reserves and has – through the hard work of its members – transformed the landfill site at Swaddywell Pit into a major habitat for wild orchids and rare insects; turned Torpel Manor Field from a pony paddock into a nationally acclaimed heritage site and created a completely new nature reserve on the gravel workings at Etton-Maxey Pits.

For 2016 we have launched an initiative designed to have a lasting impact on the wider countryside around us and also to link local people yet more closely to the landscape. We have initiated an oak planting scheme, with each tree dedicated to a person or event, as commissioned by local people.

Among the most significant and beautiful heritage sights around us are the large, mature oaks that stand in the fields and hedgerows, many dating back at least 500 years. These great giant trees are part of our history and hopefully of our future. Of our native trees, they are claimed to host the greatest number of other natural species. But there aren't many young trees growing up to take their place in the centuries to come. So we are working with local landowners to encourage them to consider planting oak trees on their land as part of a project to ensure that the oak remains a local landscape feature.

Our aim is to see at least 50 oaks planted across the area over the next 5 years and we are starting by planting some ourselves. In January we planted 3 new oak trees on our Swaddywell Pit reserve. And in a great example of how we can link landscape and people, these trees are all dedicated to individuals as part of a commission from the John Clare Society. One commemorates the retirement of Dr Ronald Blythe, who has been the society's President since inception in 1981. The other two trees are in recognition of Edmund Blunden's pioneering work on John Clare (his plaque is on the John Clare Cottage) and finally a tree for John Clare himself.

We have another six trees that we want to plant on our reserves over the next twelve months and would happily dedicate these to local people or families as well. If you are interested in 'sponsoring an oak' and leaving a lasting and fitting mark on the local landscape or if you are a landowner and would like to be involved in the planting scheme – please get in touch – richard@athene-communications.co.uk