



## » Case Study

# BRANTON CONSERVATION AREA

Gravel extraction and comprehensive restoration has transformed the flood-prone agricultural landscape of Branton into a diverse wetland habitat that alleviates flooding for the local community.

### Rare species found at Branton Nature Conservation Area:

- » Kingfisher
- » Lapwing
- » Comma butterfly

### BACKGROUND

CEMEX relies on raw materials such as gravel and sand to make its cement and concrete products. These are essential for building the roads, schools and homes that society needs, but quarrying the materials has the potential to degrade habitats and damage species unless the land is carefully managed. We are determined to have a positive impact on nature by promoting a diverse range of habitats and species while quarries are active, and by rehabilitating disused sites. By restoring former quarry sites we also provide communities with new nature reserves and education and leisure facilities.

Branton is in the Breamish Valley in Northumberland, where sand and gravel have been extracted since 1920 for road surfacing and construction. The conservation area is located south of the river Breamish and west of Northumberland National Park.

Before quarrying, the land was intensively farmed and

had little biological diversity. CEMEX UK was granted permission to extract material from the site in 1993 on the condition that we would transform the site into a nature conservation area once work was complete. We extracted 1.66 million tonnes of sand and gravel from the quarry.

### ACTIONS

CEMEX UK worked with Northumberland County Council, Northumberland Wildlife Trust and the River Tweed Commissioner to restore the site. Our main aim was to create an area that complements the rural landscape and improves biological diversity.

We restored the site progressively, creating lakes and planting trees, shrubs and grass over 10 years. We provided shallow 'scrapes' in the ground for birds to nest in, planted woodland at the lake shores and created reed beds. Native broadleaved British trees, a rich mix of wild grass and wildflowers add to the diversity of habitats and attract different species.

Northumberland Park Authority donated a bird hide to shelter visitors as they observe wildlife and we created a nature trail footpath through the reserve. A specially designed pond allows children to safely approach the water's edge, where they can sweep the water with nets and collect pond species to examine. Children can

## » Case Study

# BRANTON CONSERVATION AREA (CONT)

enter the reserve directly from the grounds of the nearby primary school.

### **OUTCOMES**

The former quarry is now a 22-hectare aquatic landscape and visitor attraction supporting rare species such as kingfisher, lapwing, spotted flycatcher and brown hare. In total, 55 bird species, 21 butterfly and moth species and seven species of dragonfly and damselfly have been spotted.

Northumberland County Council designated Branton Nature Conservation Area and the surrounding countryside as an Area of Great Landscape Value. It is an important resource for the local community, who use the area for walking and educational purposes. The reserve also diverts flooding away from the nearby village of Powburn, as the lakes provide extra capacity for excess surface water run-off. It is estimated that this has halved the frequency of flooding.

### **FUTURE PLANS**

CEMEX UK has agreed a five-year aftercare management scheme to continue conservation work at Branton, which will be extended for a further 20 years. Northumberland County Council oversees this arrangement to make sure conservation work continues to be successful.

CEMEX UK encourages local community members to suggest ways to maintain and improve the site. We plan to set up a Conservation Advisory Group of local community members to help manage the site on a voluntary basis.

### **BIODIVERSITY STRATEGY**

With help from experts at the royal society for the protection of birds (RSPB), we have developed an ambitious ten-year biodiversity strategy. This sets challenging targets, including our goal to create and maintain, by 2020, 1,000 hectares of habitats identified by the UK Government as conservation priorities.

### **CONTACT**

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