

PROTECTING AND ENHANCING OUR ENVIRONMENT

Fundamentally, extraordinarily and wonderfully different.

To develop or conserve. That is the question. Or, more accurately, that WAS the question.

The opening of the new Abberton Scheme near Colchester proves that you can do both – a point made by Sir David Attenborough as he performed the official opening ceremony on June 3 this year.

The naturalist and broadcaster was visiting the enlarged Abberton Reservoir, which was recently filled to its new storage capacity of 41 billion litres of water, in his role as a President Emeritus of the Wildlife Trusts and was able to visit the new Abberton Reservoir Visitor Centre run by the Essex Wildlife Trust.

The £150 million project, which has been one of the UK's largest engineering projects, has secured drinking water supplies to 1.5 million people in Essex for generations to come.

Sir David said: "I can remember a time when nature conservation and development were seen to be in opposition - you either developed or conserved - and that led to confrontation. Here at Abberton Reservoir this is fundamentally, extraordinarily and wonderfully different."

"This development has been constructed hand-in-hand to create a wonderment for people and wildlife who live and visit here and a godsend for people who depend on it for water"

"It is a blessing, a wonder and a great admiration to see what has been achieved by this partnership being celebrated."

Abberton Reservoir is important to wildlife and wildfowl and has some of the highest environmental protection designations including, Ramsar site and Site of Special Scientific Interest status as well as being a Special Protection Area.

The site is internationally important for dabbling ducks, such as Shoveler and Teal. The enhancement project has increased the amount of shallow water habitat crucial for these birds and also the waders that frequent the reservoir.



Abberton Reservoir has been enlarged by 58 per cent and the additional water will bolster supplies to the Chelmsford, Basildon, Brentwood, Southend and Thurrock areas and also to the London boroughs of Barking, Dagenham, Havering and Redbridge.

The project began construction in 2010 and the major works were completed this year. The result is a showcase of what can be achieved when engineers and environmentalists share a common goal - working together to enable man and nature to co-exist in a changing climate.

From the original site has emerged a new functioning wetland of spectacular value. Leading conservationists have predicted that Abberton Reservoir will become the best inland waterfowl site in the UK.

The local community also benefits from improved public access to Abberton Reservoir and its surroundings whilst conserving and enhancing the natural features and the wildlife it supports. The completed scheme sees the network of footpaths, cycle routes and bridleways near the reservoir increase from around 4 kilometres to 16 kilometres.

Stephanie Hilborne OBE, Chief Executive, the Wildlife Trusts, said: “The new Abberton Reservoir is an amazing place. Essex & Suffolk Water should be congratulated for achieving a massively increased water storage facility whilst creating a vastly improved habitat for wildlife.

“The company has embraced the European value of the site for birds and worked closely with Essex Wildlife Trust. The result is wonderful – well supported by local people, no legal costs at public inquiry and 11 miles of new waterside habitat that had previously been concrete. And, critically, a greatly increased volume of water stored ready for use by people in Essex and parts of London. We must all learn from this.”

Natural England Chairman, Andrew Sells, said: “This huge engineering project is a tribute to sustainable development. Not only does it provide an enormous increase in water capacity, it has created more than 200 hectares of habitat for important wildlife.



“The reservoir enhancement represents probably the single largest development on a Special Protection Area in history. At the heart of it has been a great working relationship involving Essex and Suffolk Water’s team, conservation organisations including Natural England, and the local community.

“The benefits for the environment and the community mean that this project actually goes beyond sustainability – we now have a bigger reservoir and a better Special Protection Area.” John Devall, Water Director for Essex & Suffolk Water, said: “The reservoir is living proof that we can plan and complete a major water supply project and actually protect and enhance the natural environment at the same time.”

John Hall, Chief Executive Officer of Essex Wildlife Trust, said: “Essex & Suffolk Water has been working closely in partnership with Essex Wildlife Trust and many others. The company has made sure that the habitats that supported wildlife were clearly understood before work commenced and have looked after the interests of that superb wildlife during construction, making sure the final habitats have increased in both size and quality.

“Here, major construction has improved both water security for people and habitats for wildlife of international importance.”

Come and see for yourself and take a visit to the reservoir and the Essex Wildlife Trust visitor centre:

www.essexwt.org.uk/reserves/abberton-reservoir