

Holmrook is a small village on the A595 in West Cumbria, near the rivers Irt and Esk as they open out into the sea near Ravenglass.

Holmrook Reading Room was built, on the bank of the river Irt, in 1925 to provide a community space for villagers, and still does.

Background

The land behind the Reading Room has always been open to the public and is a lovely, quiet spot in the centre of the village, but the value to wildlife had declined in recent years. The Reading Room Committee wanted to address this.

Work began in 2008 when grant funding was first sought. At a CVS Funding Fair, we heard about ACT's Biodiversity and Community Building's project and made contact with Helen Knowles the Biodiversity Officer.

Helen visited the site and advised us on how to take the project forward to create the meadow. Helen recommended CWMET (Cumbria Waste Management Environment Trust) as a potential source of funding.

With support from Helen Squires, CWMET Grants Manager, in 2009 we were successful in our application to the Cumbria Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund (CALSF). This is a Defra funded scheme, administered by CWMET on behalf of Cumbria County Council.

We simply could not believe it when we were awarded £7210, the whole amount that we needed for the project. This covered 80% of the project costs, the remaining 20% we met with in kind contribution.

Everyone on the Holmrook Reading Room committee had been anxious to use the land for the benefit of local wildlife and suddenly we were in business!



Holmrook Reading Room

What has been achieved?

When the grant was awarded, the race was on to make all the improvements to the space. This included the creation of a diverse selection of habitats, planting native wild flowers and bushes to provide food and nesting / resting space for everything from solitary bees to hedgehogs.

We developed our project plan through consultation with villagers and local authorities, and chose plants to suit the soil and existing environment. Without many big trees, we had to find another way of putting up all our nest boxes.

We now have an acre of wonderfully planted meadow, with around 40 nesting boxes and countless spaces for ground nesting/ burrowing animals. The Cumbrian Dyke, which replaced the fence, is a sight to behold as well as offering nesting space for small animals. In the Autumn we will put in the young bushes, which will supply fruit for our residents next year.



The Starting Point - 'Ground Zero'



The finished Cumbrian Dyke, August 2010

The Learning

Whilst developing the project it was useful to visit our local SSSI's (Sites of Special Scientific Interest) for inspiration, and we called upon several experts for advice.

It was important to involve specialist agencies such as South Cumbria Rivers Trust in order to consider all elements of the project, from the risk of flooding to avoiding damage to trees when placing nest boxes.

An entire food chain is being created in the precious meadow space and it may take years to establish itself, but the first faltering steps have been taken.

Eventually there will be bird boxes tailored for almost every space with food and a safe environment for all. As Helen Knowles, ACT's Biodiversity Officer, had said, it is no good just providing nesting space - there has to be space for a whole ecosystem including plant life and insects.

We want to ensure that this haven will be sustainable, and made sure we involved local young people in planting and fixing the nest boxes. It is hoped that continued

involvement will provide the 'helpers for tomorrow', and our Reading Room Garden Club annual £9 membership fees, will help with ongoing costs.

Contact Details

We are keen to share our ecosystem; it's a wonderful spot that we want people to visit and enjoy, but it's important to remember that here the animals and plants come first - it's their world! If you would like more information about the project, or would like to make a donation, please contact Val Graham, Holmrook Reading Room Secretary, on Tel: 019467 24105 or Email: valg@esend-it.com

CWMET is a project hosted by ACT, for more information about grants contact: Tel: 01768 242140 or Email: enquiries@cwmet.org.uk

ACT's Biodiversity at Community Buildings project has now ended.

If you would like general village hall information and advice, please contact ACT on Tel: 01768 840 827 or Email: info@cumbriaaction.org.uk

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ACTion with Communities in Cumbria, The Old Stables, Redhills, Penrith, Cumbria CA11 0DT
T: 01768 840827 | F: 01768 242134 | www.cumbriaaction.org.uk | info@cumbriaaction.org.uk
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