

Broads Authority

28 November 2025

Agenda item number 12

Land Purchase at Barton Turf

Report by Ecology & Design Manager

Purpose

To provide the Committee with an update regarding the purchase of land at Barton Turf known as 'Mallow Marsh'.

Broads Plan context

B3 - Seek biodiversity net gain and enhance areas of fen, reed bed, grazing marsh and wet woodland, to protect peatlands as carbon sinks

B4 - Define, implement and monitor management regimes for priority species and invasive non-native species

Recommendation

Note the purchase of the site and proposed programme of work.

Contents

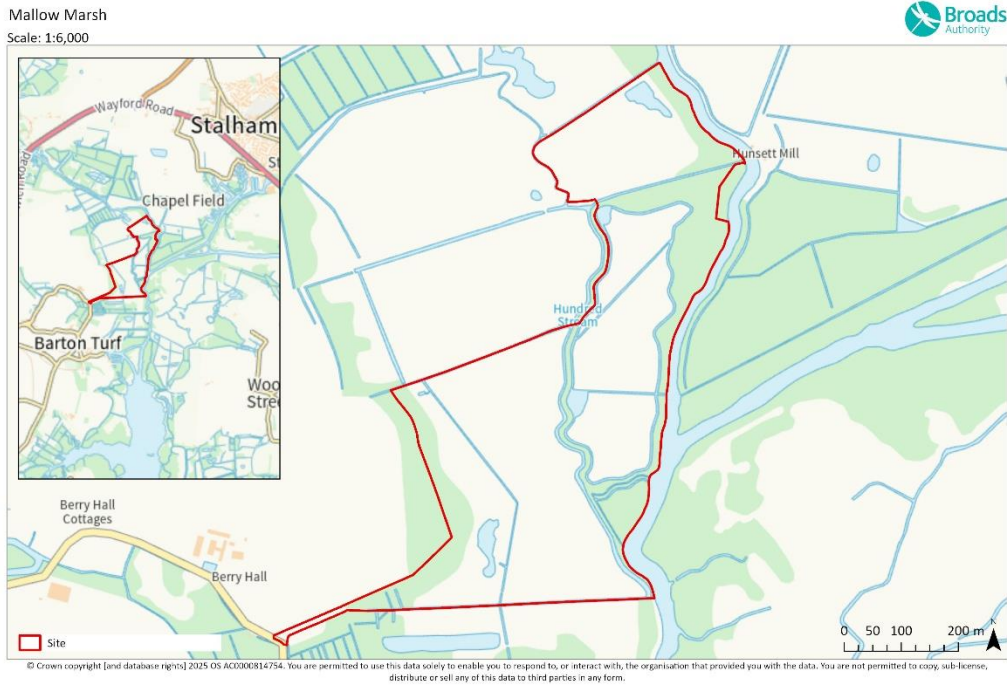
1.	Introduction	1
2.	Habitats and species	3
3.	Land management	3
4.	Financial implications	4
5.	Risk implications	4
	Appendix 1 – Site photographs	6

1. Introduction

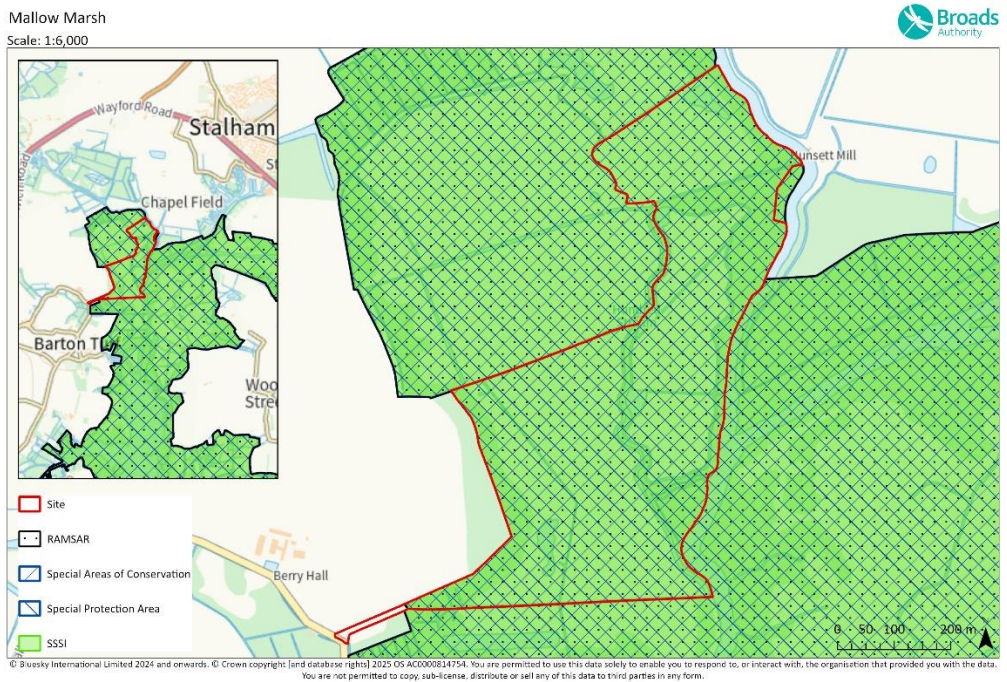
- 1.1. On 18th September 2025, the Broads Authority completed on the purchase of 28.36ha of wetland known as Mallow Marsh. The site is located within the parishes of Barton Turf and Stalham, within the River Ant valley and just north of Barton Broad. Map 1 shows the location of the site.

1.2. The site lies within the Ant Broads and Marshes Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and is part of the Broads Special Area of Conservation (SAC), Broadland Special Protection Area (SPA) and Broadland Ramsar. These designations offer the highest level of protection for qualifying habitats and species and are shown on Map 2.

Map 1 – Location of Mallow Marsh



Map 2 – Site Designations



2. Habitats and species

- 2.1. The Ant valley supports one of the most extensive areas of primary fen habitat remaining in Britain. Lowland fen and reedbed are both habitats of principle importance in England, known as Section 41 (as mandated under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act, 2006).
- 2.2. Mallow Marsh is a prime example of Broads wetland habitats, consisting of a mosaic of reedbed, fen, scrub, mature wet woodland and open water in the form of ditches and ponds. The western boundary of the site also contains a belt of mature mixed-species woodland, offering an important transition zone between the dry 'upland' and floodplain.
- 2.3. This site is underlain by peat, a distinctive and valuable substrate, known for its multiple benefits: carbon storage and sequestration, water (flood) capacity, and for the habitats and species it supports, including many fen plants, mammals and insects.
- 2.4. The mix of fen, reedbed, scrub and open water communities present on site are home to many iconic Broads species such as the Swallowtail butterfly and its caterpillar foodplant, milk parsley, the Norfolk hawker dragonfly, bittern, marsh harrier, otter and water vole. Many of these species have high levels of legal protection.
- 2.5. Despite the presence of these valuable habitats and species, the site is currently classified in 'unfavourable condition' by Natural England, largely owing to a lack of management. This includes the persistent presence of invasive species *Crassula helmsii* (New Zealand Pigmyweed).

3. Land management

- 3.1. Fen and reedbed habitat require ongoing management to maintain their interest. Without management to maintain open herbaceous conditions, these mid-succession habitats will be invaded by woody species and eventually become closed-canopy woodland.
- 3.2. Open water habitats, provided by ditches also require management to ensure water flow and quality is maintained for the myriad of species that rely on water both as a home and to transport oxygen and nutrients around the site.
- 3.3. Early assessment of Mallow Marsh by the Ecology Team has identified initial management requirements including phased removal of closed-canopy scrub that has invaded the fen, improving access around the site for staff and machinery and commencement of a rotational programme of fen/reedbed cutting.
- 3.4. Much of this will be undertaken by in-house staff (Operations Technicians) alongside the potential reinstatement of commercial reed and sedge cutting.

- 3.5. Longer term management aims will include pond creation to reinstate open water features, management of the mixed-species woodland on the upland edge through grazing and/or cutting and putting in place measures to manage the *Crassula helmsii*.

4. Financial implications

- 4.1. The land purchase (£455,000) was made possible through the additional National Park capital grant and was prioritised given the significant contribution this acquisition will make towards Defra's 30 x 30 biodiversity targets.
- 4.2. As landowners of a designated site, ongoing financial commitments for the Broads Authority are centred around its habitat management.
- 4.3. Government funded land management schemes such as Countryside Stewardship provide mechanisms for landowners to undertake essential management on sites of conservation importance. This scheme is administered by the Rural Payments Agency (an executive agency of Defra), working closely with Natural England for designated sites.
- 4.4. The Authority already holds a Countryside Stewardship agreement for its land holding at How Hill, receiving payment for delivering wetland management options.
- 4.5. Initial discussions have commenced with Natural England, starting the process of Countryside Stewardship application for Mallow Marsh. The application is likely to be successful as it will secure management commitments on a site that had fallen out of scheme and requires management to improve its condition status.
- 4.6. Exact funding details will depend upon options chosen. These are split into 'revenue' streams, for options that are undertaken routinely and 'capital' items for those that require one-off funding.
- 4.7. Based on initial discussions and existing knowledge of the scheme, it is likely that fen maintenance payments of £920/ha/year will be included, alongside a wetland cutting supplement of £1,346/ha, paid for the area cut in any given year. Capital items such as scrub control on difficult sites and fencing will also be added.
- 4.8. Countryside Stewardship agreements usually run for 5 years (some options up to 10 years).

5. Risk implications

- 5.1. As landowners of a protected site, there are obligations to manage the habitats and species for which the site is designated. This management requires appropriate resources in terms of staff, revenue budgets and specialist equipment.
- 5.2. Entrance into schemes such as Countryside Stewardship also represent a commitment to deliver the identified land management, for which in turn, funding is provided.

- 5.3. The Broads Authority has long and established experience in wetland management, both on existing landholdings at How Hill and through the delivery of management agreements with third-party landowners.
- 5.4. Specialised equipment has been purchased such as the Fen Harvester and Truxor (amphibious excavator/plant harvester) and the operational workforce is highly skilled in the operation of these and other machines such as excavators, working in sensitive and often difficult working conditions.
- 5.5. Staff numbers are crucial to the delivery of this work, with in-house teams currently delivering management over c.400ha of fen habitat. For this effort to be maintained, the complement of operational staff needs to be retained and where possible increased, to allow for further expansion of fen management, as a part-funded and high priority work area.

Author: Sue Stephenson

Date of report: 13 November 2025

Background papers:

[Broads Plan](#) strategic objectives: B3, B4

Appendix 1 – Site photographs

Appendix 1 – Site photographs



Cladium mariscus (Saw sedge) and mixed fen. Looking south over Mallow Marsh towards mixed-species woodland on upland edge.



Mixed fen & invading scrub within transition zone between upland edge and tall herb fen.