

Purchase of Land at Keyhaven



Land behind Saltgrass Lane

We are the Environment Agency. We protect and improve the environment.

We help people and wildlife adapt to climate change and reduce its impacts, including flooding, drought, sea level rise and coastal erosion.

We improve the quality of our water, land and air by tackling pollution. We work with businesses to help them comply with environmental regulations. A healthy and diverse environment enhances people's lives and contributes to economic growth.

We can't do this alone. We work as part of the Defra group (Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs), with the rest of government, local councils, businesses, civil society groups and local communities to create a better place for people and wildlife.

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What land has the Environment Agency bought?

The Environment Agency has bought approximately 160 hectares (397 acres) of land in the Keyhaven area, which includes land around Aubrey and Vidle Van Farms and parts of the Avon Water. We have included a map at the end of this leaflet to show the boundary of the land that has been purchased.

When did the EA become the landowner?

The land was officially transferred to the Environment Agency from Kingwell (Aubrey) Limited on the 06/12/2024.



View of land looking south from Keyhaven Road

Why did the Environment Agency buy the land?

The Environment Agency bought the land because it is a key location for the creation of new coastal habitats and grazing marshes. Being able to create new habitats is an important part of the Environment Agency being able to gain permission to build and maintain flood defences that are needed to better protect people's homes and businesses.

Under the Habitats Regulations* the Environment Agency has a responsibility to provide new coastal habitat to compensate for places where building and maintaining flood defences prevents habitats from forming naturally.

Owning a site that is suitable for creating habitat enables us to demonstrate that we can meet the requirements of the Habitats Regulations.

Due to the built-up nature and highly designated environment of the Solent, there are very limited opportunities for creating new coastal habitats. The land at Keyhaven represents one of the few places where there is non-designated land adjacent to the coast that is suitable for habitat creation.

The site is also very close to where existing habitats are being damaged by the presence of flood defences. Creating new habitat as close as possible to where the damage will occur, is key principle when planning compensation, and because of how the Habitat Regulations work it keeps the amount of habitat we need to create to a minimum.

*Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017



View looking towards Avon Water and Keyhaven from near Vidle Van Farm.

How much coastal habitat does the Environment Agency have to create?

The amount of habitat the Environment Agency needs to create is linked to the North Solent Shoreline Management Plan which sets out high level policies for where defences should be needed. To give an idea of the scale of the challenge, at the moment across Hampshire and Sussex we need to identify over 200 hectares of new saltmarsh habitat.

The work of the Hurst Spit to Lymington Strategy will help to further define how much coastal habitat we need to create locally.

You can find out more about the Hurst Spit to Lymington Strategy at:
www.hurstspit2lymington.co.uk

You can find out more about the North Solent Shoreline Management Plan at:
www.northsolentsmp.co.uk

Why buy the land now when the Hurst Spit to Lymington Strategy is not yet finished? Has the Environment Agency acted too soon?

The opportunity to buy the land existed because the previous landowner, Kingwell, was willing to sell it prior to starting their planned Nitrate Management¹ and Biodiversity Net Gain Schemes² on the site. These Natural Capital schemes are part of the legal requirements on developers to ensure there is no net impact on the environment from their development. There was no guarantee that the opportunity to buy the site would be available in the future.

The sale of Biodiversity Net Gain units would make the land unsuitable for the Environment Agency's requirements because it would prevent the land being used for habitat compensation.

It was therefore important that we acted now to retain the potential to create compensatory habitat in the future.

We do recognise that this comes ahead of the final conclusions of the Hurst Spit to Lymington Strategy but this purchase in no way pre-judges the outcomes of that strategy which will continue to be developed and go through the formal processes of public consultation and adoption by New Forest District Council in 2026/27.

1 - Natural England, Nutrient Neutrality and Mitigation
<https://shorturl.at/iXZIE>

2 - GOV.UK Biodiversity Net Gain
<https://www.gov.uk/government/collect/biodiversity-net-gain>

Separate to the requirements of the strategy, the Environment Agency has a requirement to seek out suitable sites to be used to create coastal habitat and has a successful track record of doing so, such as at Medmerry, West Sussex.

<https://shorturl.at/fS74f>

Therefore, it is likely that we would have tried to secure this opportunity even if we had not been working on the strategy. Any significant changes to the site in the future will be subject to all the necessary permissions and consultations through the local planning authorities before going ahead. Our intention, whilst addressing flood risk challenges, is to help create a special environment that will be of great benefit to local people and wildlife. What exactly this will look like is not yet known, but we will engage with local people and stakeholders at every step of the process.

Why buy the Avon Water SSSI area?

Ownership of the Avon Water presents opportunities to expand the existing habitats or over time restore them to a more natural transitional habitat in keeping with the Draft Pathway for this location proposed by Hurst Spit to Lymington Strategy. Both options present positive outcomes for people and wildlife.

In addition to this. The land that was purchased was secured as one, separating out the Avon Water may have risked the purchase of the overall site and would have posed issues for future site management. Managing small, fragmented sites is challenging for conservation management and can limit wildlife potential. Habitat that is bigger, more diverse and more joined-up is key for nature restoration.

So what will change now the EA owns the site?

The Environment Agency has bought the land in order to secure the opportunity for creating habitat in the future. There are no plans to make changes to the existing use of the site for at least 5yrs. The majority of the site is under agricultural use, and for the next 5yrs or so that will continue. Kingwell are still able to sell Nitrate credits on the site, and when they do there will be restrictions on what activities can be undertaken. The result will be that the agricultural use may gradually become less intensive as more credits are sold.

View of land looking towards Vidle Van Farm and Keyhaven from near the Avon Water.

You may see some activities on site as we assess the site and seek to make aspects of it safe and secure, and make sure we comply with the various covenants that stipulate that certain conditions are met. You may also witness other activities as we survey and monitor the site in order to better plan for the future. These activities may include bird surveys, drone surveys, water sampling and borehole monitoring.

The parts of the site that are designated as SSSI will be managed accordingly, and we are likely to go into partnership with a third party to help with this.



How quickly will things change?

Ultimately, the Hurst Spit to Lymington Strategy will define what the future of the site should be and when that should happen.

Determining exactly what habitat will be where, and how it will be created will be the role of a specific project that will focus solely on this location. Once that project is started, there will be extensive engagement and consultation with local people and other stakeholders. Going through this process will take time, so we anticipate a minimum of 5 more years before any significant changes take place.

Will public access to the land change?

The only permitted access onto the land is via the existing Public Rights of Way, and these access routes will remain.

You may see new or replacement fences in some areas as we make the site secure and most importantly, make it safe.

In the future there may be opportunities to enhance public access, which would be planned in consultation with the local community and carefully consider the needs of wildlife.

View of land behind Saltgrass Lane from Hurst Spit



Should we not be supporting farmers to keep land in agricultural production?

The Environment Agency, as part of DEFRA, does recognise the vital role that farmers play in all our lives. In relation to the land at Keyhaven, prior to the Environment Agency buying the land an agreement had been reached between Kingwell and the Local Planning Authorities to use the site for a Nitrate Management scheme.

The purpose of the scheme, which will continue even with the changed ownership, is to reduce nitrate inputs into the Solent. This is achieved by restricting what activities can be undertaken on the site e.g. applying nitrates to crops. Therefore, gradually over time, the Nitrate Management scheme will result in a

transition from the type of agricultural activities seen today, to something less intensive such as low-density extensive pastoral grazing.

It is worth noting that excess nitrates in the environment are partly responsible for the degradation of important habitats such as the salt marshes in this area.

When agricultural land is in close proximity to coastal habitats it is very difficult to avoid impacting them. It is hoped therefore, that Kingwell's Nitrate Management scheme will complement the Environment Agency's habitat creation work to benefit the people and wildlife in Keyhaven.



Blanket weed on Keyhaven Saltmarshes

Are you going to sort out the flooding issues in Keyhaven?

The flooding issues affecting Keyhaven Village are the result of several different factors. To resolve them will require different organisations and landowners to work together.

We will do an assessment of the flood risk in and around the land and ensure drainage ditches are kept clear in order to allow water to drain away freely. We will ensure that we remain compliant with the law, and that properties will not be at risk of flooding due to action or inaction taken.

Recently we identified that the structures at the opening of the Avon Water were failing. We replaced them ahead of the winter in order to prevent tidal waters from going upstream.

This work means the level of flood protection offered by the sluices has been maintained.

Who do I go to if I have any questions about the land?

If you would like to ask us about any specific issues, please use the contact details below.

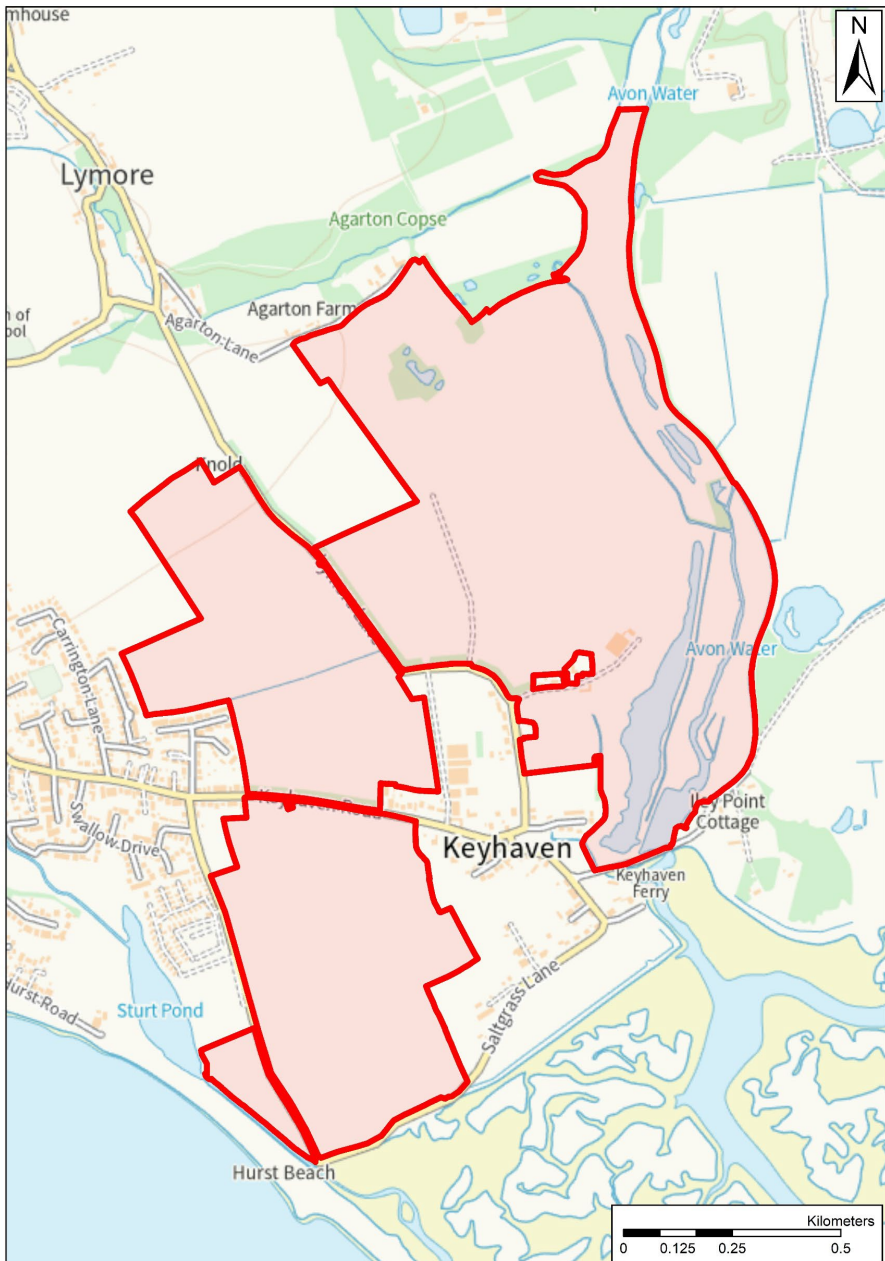
For any questions about the future use of the site and how it relates to the Hurst Spit to Lymington Strategy please email:

hurstspit2lymington@environment-agency.gov.uk

For any questions relating to the operation of the land, boundary issues or maintenance please contact our Estates Team:

estatessouth@environment-agency.gov.uk

Red line boundary of the land at Keyhaven that has been bought by the Environment Agency.



Would you like to find out more about the Environment Agency or about your environment?

Then call us on

03708 506 506 (Monday to Friday 8am to 6pm)

Email

enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk

Or visit our website

www.gov.uk/environment-agency

Incident hotline 0800 807060 (24 hours)

Floodline 0345 988 1188 (24 hours)

Find out about call charges

www.gov.uk/call-charges