



26<sup>th</sup> November 2007

## Funding Boost for Middle Level Commissioners Otter Recovery Project

The Middle Level Commissioners, (MLC), have received a £52,000 funding boost from SITA Trust for a project that aims to get otters back to the waterways of the Fens as a regular breeding species.

SITA Trust provides funding through the Landfill Communities Fund. Funding is available for community and environmental groups to carry out a range of improvement projects.

The funding allocated to MLC for this three year project will enable the construction of a network of breeding and resting holts, (underground dens), and the creation of small pockets of otter-friendly habitat alongside the 120 miles of Middle Level waterways.

Before the 1950s, otters occurred regularly on Fenland rivers but numbers crashed nationally mainly due to chemical pollution. While they are returning to other parts of the country, a Cambridgeshire Otter Survey completed in February 2007 showed that they are still largely absent from the middle of the Fens. The provision of breeding and resting habitat throughout the Middle Level system via this project aims to allow the natural expansion of otters to continue.

Other elements of the project involve assisting the Environment Agency in combating the use of illegal nets and traps that can drown otters and also working with bridge owners to improve access for otters by providing ledges where necessary.

Additional support and funding for the project has been offered by Natural England, The Environment Agency and the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Biodiversity Partnership bringing the total project funds up to £61,000. Surveys of otter signs will be required to monitor changes to their distribution throughout the project and volunteers from wildlife groups including The Wildlife Trust, March Wildlife Group and the Cambridgeshire Mammal Group will be assisting with the surveys.

Cliff Carson, Environmental Officer at the Middle Level Commissioners who will be managing the project said 'This is a brilliant boost for an important Biodiversity Action Plan species. With their experience of working on and managing the Fenland waterways, the Middle Level Commissioners workforce is well placed to carry out this work. Although otters are nocturnal, when they return to breed on local rivers and drains, the chances of a lucky person catching a glimpse of this exciting animal are increased'.

Iain Smith, Clerk and Chief Executive, Middle Level Commissioners said 'Public bodies are required to have regard to conserving biodiversity but the granting of these funds will allow MLC to do much more than that for a well-liked species that we are in a good position to help. This is an

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exciting and important project, one of the largest of its kind to be undertaken by a Drainage Authority in the UK'.

**Ends.**

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## **Notes to the editor**

### **Middle Level Commissioners**

The Middle Level is the central and largest section of the Great Level of the Fens, reclaimed by drainage during the mid-17th Century.

Its river system consists of over 120 miles (190 kilometres) of watercourses most of which are also navigations and has a catchment of just over 170,000 acres (70,000 hectares).

The Commissioners, together with local drainage boards, therefore operate a complex flood protection and water level management system to balance the various water uses and requirements and to alleviate the risk of flooding of land and properties.

The efficient operation of the system is vital to the safety and prosperity of over 100,000 people who live and work in the area. But for the operations of the Commissioners and boards, much of the fen land would be under water for much of the year, accesses from higher ground would be cut-off and many of the present land uses, which are taken for granted, would be impossible.

### **SITA Trust**

1. SITA Trust was set up in 1997 and runs three funding programmes:
  - Enhancing Communities – for community improvement projects around landfill sites owned by SITA UK
  - Enriching Nature – for biodiversity projects within the vicinity of landfill sites in England

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- GreenPrints – launched in June 2007 to encourage 16-25 year olds to volunteer their time and energy to improving green spaces in their local communities
2. Each year, SITA Trust commits over £7 million nationwide through the Landfill Communities Fund

### **The Landfill Communities Fund (formerly the Landfill Tax Credit Scheme)**

1. Landfill tax was introduced in 1996 to encourage more sustainable ways of managing waste
2. The landfill tax legislation also brought about the Landfill Communities Fund. This scheme allows landfill operators to voluntarily donate 6.6% of their landfill tax liability to environmental improvement projects
3. The Landfill Communities Fund is independently regulated on behalf of HM Government's Revenue & Customs by ENTRUST

For information on how to apply for funding from SITA Trust call (01454) 262910 or click on [www.sitatrust.org.uk](http://www.sitatrust.org.uk)

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