

Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust

Horbling Line



Location & Access

OS: 130 • **GR:** TF 115 350 • 1.20ha (3.00 acres) • Management agreement 1985

Habitat type: Grassland

Access is from the site of the old railway bridge on the lane running westwards from the village of Horbling. There is a path through the northern section. Access to both cuttings is by the steps from the roadside.

Description & Management

Scrub and grassland habitats on a stretch of disused railway line. The reserve section of this old railway track consists of a cutting and embankment. Blackthorn and hawthorn scrub provide nest sites for whitethroat and lesser whitethroat, spotted flycatcher and tree sparrow. In winter, seed supplies attract flocks of finches and there is a large thrush roost. The commoner butterflies are also abundant. Control of scrub and maintenance of open grassy areas are the main management aims.

History

The 16 mile single track Great Northern Railway line between Bourne and Sleaford opened for goods traffic in October 1871. A passenger service started on 2 January 1872 with five passenger trains a day. With just four stations between Bourne and Sleaford (Morton Road, Rippingale, Billingborough and Horbling, Aswarby and Screddington) the journey time was 50 minutes, making the average speed around 20mph.

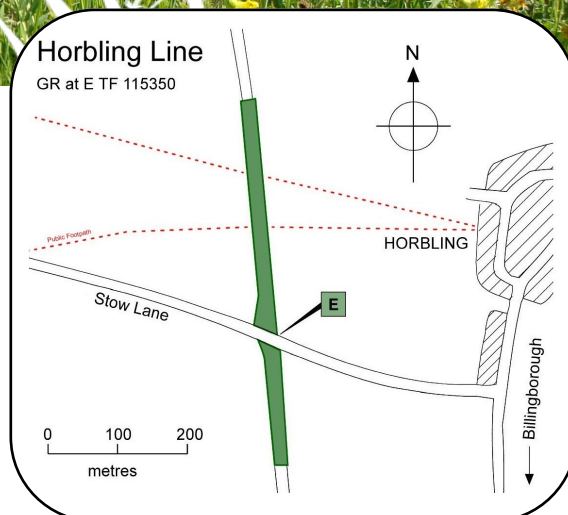
With poor connecting services, the line was never well used by passengers, and closed for passenger traffic in September 1930, although special Sunday excursions between Bourne and

Skegness continued occasionally until 1939. The line was more successful for freight traffic, particularly for potatoes and grain. The Sleaford to Billingborough section of track finally closed on 28 July 1956. However, the track was retained and used for some years to store redundant railway wagons north of the A52 at Threackingham. (Information from *Lost Railways of Lincolnshire*).

After the closure of the railway the green linear 'wildlife corridor' inevitably started to change. Some land was sold and converted back to agriculture. Some sections presented more of a challenge to convert, including the cuttings and embankments within the current reserve area. Scrub and woodland started to colonise these areas, creating an attractive area for wildlife. Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust archives reports that during a site survey in 1982 there were some fine grassland areas where the track had been removed, with more than one pair of nightingales being seen and heard in the scrub areas.

At that time there was some threat that the land would also be levelled and converted to agriculture. A local campaign to save the area was mounted, instigated by Jason Wright, a schoolboy at Brown's School in Horbling. The campaign featured in the local press and a 140 signature petition was sent to the site owners, the Crown Estate Commissioners.

Eventually, the present reserve area was leased from Crown Estates to the Trust as a nature reserve in 1985. Initially Trust volunteers worked at establishing a path through the



northern part of the reserve, and cleared scrub. This enthusiasm soon faltered and the area became neglected. By 1994 most of the grassy areas had succumbed to scrub encroachment, and the path long gone.

Since 1994, under new management within the Trust, the scrub has been pushed back and the grassy areas have re-established. In 2003 volunteers from the Prince's Trust spent a week working on the reserve, installing steps, hedge planting and coppicing scrub. Prior to actually working on the reserve they had carried out a number of fund-raising activities, which paid for the step material, hedge planting, and seating.

The reserve is now a small haven for wildlife. The steps allow easier access to the northern part of the reserve and created a circular walk from the village, which has become very popular. Local farmers have used the presence of the nature reserve to enhance their land under the Higher Level Stewardship scheme (HLS). This government funded scheme aims to deliver significant environmental benefits to land in the scheme. Together with the Trust reserve and the historically important ridge and furrow field adjacent to the reserve, this provides a much larger 'corridor' to other wildlife areas.