Immediate release

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East West Rail commits to 10% net biodiversity gain target across whole Project

- **20 Ecological Compensation Sites established across first connection stage**
- **New enhanced wildlife sites showing signs of positive results**
- **Havens benefiting rare and protected species**

Wildlife habitats created across the first connection stage of East West Rail (EWR) are flourishing following successful ecological compensation measures. East West Railway Alliance (EWRA) has created 20 Ecological Compensation Sites (ECS) along the length of the Project route from Bicester, in Oxfordshire to Bletchley, in Buckinghamshire, to protect and reduce the impact to important and protected species and habitats along the line of the railway.

East West Railway Company (EWR Co), which is responsible for planning the rest of the Project between Bletchley and Cambridge, now wish to continue the success of work carried out by EWRA. In its latest proposals, published in May, the Company committed to an ambitious target of 10% biodiversity net gain across the whole Project.

EWR Co has today published a new video on the ECS located across the first connection stage of the Project.

The ECS created by EWRA aim to enhance habitat connectivity along the route and improve existing habitat features where possible. Many of the sites have been transformed from low diversity, arable land into purpose-built wildlife havens designed to benefit invertebrates, butterflies, birds, bats, reptiles and amphibians, otters and badgers.

The sites – which incorporate 45 ponds, badger setts, a bat house, more than 70 bat boxes and the planting of more than 150,000 plants and trees - benefit some especially important species and habitats associated with the Project. These include black poplar trees – the most endangered native timber tree in Britain - the rare black hairstreak and other hairstreak butterflies, and barbastelle bats – one of the rarest species of mammals in the UK listed as Near Threatened on the global IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.

ECS and new habitats created by EWRA are now established with surveys showing positive results:

- Two species of bat are now roosting in a specially-constructed bat house, built to replace the Swanbourne Station building. Three further species have been recorded visiting the structure: Brown-long eared, Natterer and Daubenton
- Bat numbers across the Project have remained stable since the first surveys in 2021, suggesting bats have coped well with the construction phase of the Project. Static detector and transect surveys have identified 12 species of bat passing through or using ECS
- All of the new ponds created have confirmed great crested newt populations
- 10 out 11 barn owl boxes have shown evidence of breeding during surveys
- 27 artificial badger setts built have all been occupied by badgers, with a fifth of them used for breeding
- An artificial otter holt is being used regularly by otters.

Mark Cuzner, EWRA Director, said: "Reducing the Project's environmental impact has been a crucial factor in designing and building East West Rail, which is why we have been working closely with ecologists, engineering designers and construction teams to preserve or improve habitats at every opportunity.

"We are delighted that our Ecological Compensation Sites are proving to be a huge success and there are management plans in place for all of them to ensure they continue to flourish for many years to come."

Vanessa Hilton, Head of Environment, EWR Co, said: "The UK has suffered a significant loss of flora and fauna over recent decades, so it is fundamental that we not only preserve and conserve these along the rail route but do our bit to increase the chances for nature and wildlife.

"It's great to know that these Ecological Compensation Sites are doing well, along with our wider landscape replanting work and that is why we have committed to a 10% biodiversity net gain across the length of the whole Project. Learning from the work that has already been done, and with local interest and nature groups, we're confident we can repeat this success story for the wildlife between Bletchley and Cambridge."

Other environmental successes by EWRA include:

- 95% of all works under Protective Provision consents from the Environment Agency, Lead Local Flood Authorities and Internal Drainage Board have been successfully completed. The remaining 5% of works will be completed in 2023
- All compensatory flood storage areas have been built
- No net loss of watercourse extents has been achieved, with all river realignments and channel works completed.

-Ends-

Notes to Editors

- ECS will be returned to their third-party landowners or to Network Rail who will ultimately become the maintainers of these sites for years to come. Any habitats created and accounted for in the biodiversity net gain metric must be maintained for a period of 30 years in accordance with a management plan - the way they conduct that maintenance could change if they so wanted after that date.
- Each habitat type has a management plan based on each of their ecological requirements and sensitivities. For example, if a site contains an area of meadow, the management plan describes methods to maintain and enhance it as a meadow and the cutting regimes to protect species known to be present. Recommendations in the management plans have been given by suitably qualified ecologists and landscape managers who are experienced in habitat creation and have expert botanical knowledge.

- EWR Co was shortlisted for an industry award in recognition of a digital tool that utilises survey information and remote-sensed data to enable the mapping of ecological habitats, allowing for better environmental design from the outset.

About the East West Rail project
East West Rail intends to create a new direct connection between Oxford and Cambridge. Serving communities across the area, it intends to bring faster journey times and lower transport costs as well as ease pressure on local roads.
East West Rail is planned to be delivered in three Connection Stages:

- Connection Stage One: Oxford to Bletchley and Milton Keynes
- Connection Stage Two: Oxford to Bedford
- Connection Stage Three: Oxford to Cambridge

Network Rail was responsible for developing the first part of the East West Rail, connecting Oxford with Bicester, and is a partner in the EWR Alliance to deliver Phase 2 of Connection Stage 1, where East West Railway Company (EWR Co) and Network Rail are acting as the Department for Transport's joint sponsors.

EWR Co is now developing the route to enable services to run to Cambridge via Bedford and plans to seek statutory powers under the Planning Act 2008, following a period of extensive consultation.

About East West Rail Alliance
The East West Rail Alliance was procured by Network Rail to construct the section of East West Rail between Bicester and Bletchley, and comprises Network Rail, Atkins, Laing O'Rourke and VolkerRail.

About East West Railway Company
East West Railway Company (EWR Co) was set up by the Secretary of State for Transport in 2018 to develop East West Rail, a railway with customers and communities at its core. We are responsible for planning the section of East West Rail between Bletchley and Cambridge,

while overseeing delivery of the section between Bicester and Bletchley – which is being delivered by the East West Rail Alliance.

We have a mission to innovate and challenge the status-quo in the rail and construction industries, leading to a more efficient and cost-effective project delivery, and a great experience for passengers and the communities we serve. Our vision is delivery of a safe and secure railway that is better for the customer; cheaper for the taxpayer; delivered quicker than before and is greener for the environment.

Our distinctive outlook and commitment to doing the right thing for our customers and local communities runs through everything we do and every decision we make.