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Farmers urged to be alert to threat of raves

CLA East is urging Norfolk farmers and landowners to remain vigilant to the possibility of unlicensed musical events being organised on their land ahead of New Year's Eve.

It is advising its members to reduce the risk of any illegal activity occurring in empty and remote buildings by ensuring they are secure and regularly monitored; that access to land is restricted by the use of locked gates; that any unusual activity around buildings or land is reported to the police; and to ensure any employees are made aware of the need to report unusual activity.

Suspicious activity around open land or disused buildings should be reported to the police.

This includes any information that an illegal rave is taking place; any sightings of vans, lorries or large numbers of vehicles gathering near woods, rural car parks or near to disused buildings/warehouse; sightings of fliers advertising raves; and broken padlocks on access gates.

CLA Eastern regional director Nicola Currie said: "Illegal raves cause a great deal of disruption and considerable harm to the environment.

"These gatherings can also create problems for landowners, who could fall victim to considerable clean-up costs and expensive repairs. We are supporting Norfolk police with their tough approach to illegal raves, which has seen incidents fall from 70 in 2006 to 11 in 2014."



■ Richard Mason, warden of the Catfield and Sutton Fen RSPB nature reserves.
Picture: JAMES BASS

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Last-ditch appeal over Catfield Fen

Conservation bodies have come together to issue a final appeal to the Environment Agency (EA) to safeguard the future of a Broads wildlife haven.

A letter signed by the RSPB, Norfolk Wildlife Trust, Butterfly Conservation and five other conservation organisations commends the EA's 'minded to' decision to refuse continued water abstraction from the two boreholes closest to Catfield Fen nature reserve.

However, following the close of public consultation and ahead of its final decision, expected in February, the letter calls on the EA to fully consider important new evidence - not part of its previous deliberations - that further underlines the damage water abstraction is causing.

It says: "This is particu-

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larly important given Natural England now considers part of Catfield Fen is already deteriorating.

"Catfield and Sutton Fens (a neighbouring Ant Valley site) are two of the richest wetlands in Europe. Together, they are home to large populations of swallowtail butterflies, water voles and Norfolk hawk dragonflies. Their reedbeds and ditches are also home to cranes, bitterns, marsh harriers and otters.

"Catfield Fen is one of Butterfly Conservation's premier reserves and of the four remaining UK fen orchid colonies, it is the most important."

The letter points out that a perfect balance of alkaline ground water and acidic rain-water was needed to main-

tain the intricate web of life that exists within the fen and there was growing evidence that Catfield was becoming drier and more acidic.

Taking an opposing view, the NFU insists the EA's 'minded to' decision was reached despite a lack of definitive evidence.

And it says farmers who rely on abstracted water to grow irrigated crops near Catfield Fen are being placed in an almost impossible situation by the licence renewal process.

The NFU claims new issues have been raised at a late stage, which the farmer applicant Andrew Alston has not had the time or resources to analyse and potentially rebut; and that insufficient weight is being given to the public benefits farming delivers within the Norfolk Broads.

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