Natural Cambridgeshire

putting nature at the heart

The State of Nature in Cambridgeshire

A Report of the Partnership

NOVEMBER 2023

1. Introduction

In the summer of 2019 **Natural Cambridgeshire** proposed a vision to double nature which has been adopted by the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority and all the other local authorities in the county. Six priority areas were identified to give a focus to the strategy and Section 2 (below) of this report describes recent activities in these areas.

The 2021 Environment Act imposes on local authorities the obligation to consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity, to create local nature recovery strategies (LNRS) and to require a biodiversity net gain (BNG) of at least 10% on every development over a certain size. These have been a strong focus on meetings over the past year of the quarterly Natural Environment Policy and Planning Forum, run by Natural Cambridgeshire together with the Combined Authority and the County Council, and composed of officers from the local authorities and experts from our partner organisations. Section 3 (page 7) describes work our local authorities have been doing.

Our many partner organisations join together in our quarterly Partnership Forum. Section 4 (page 17) contains reports from some of the larger ones.

The many activities of Natural Cambridgeshire include administering a Fund for Nature[1] provided by the Combined Authority and are described in a separate report.

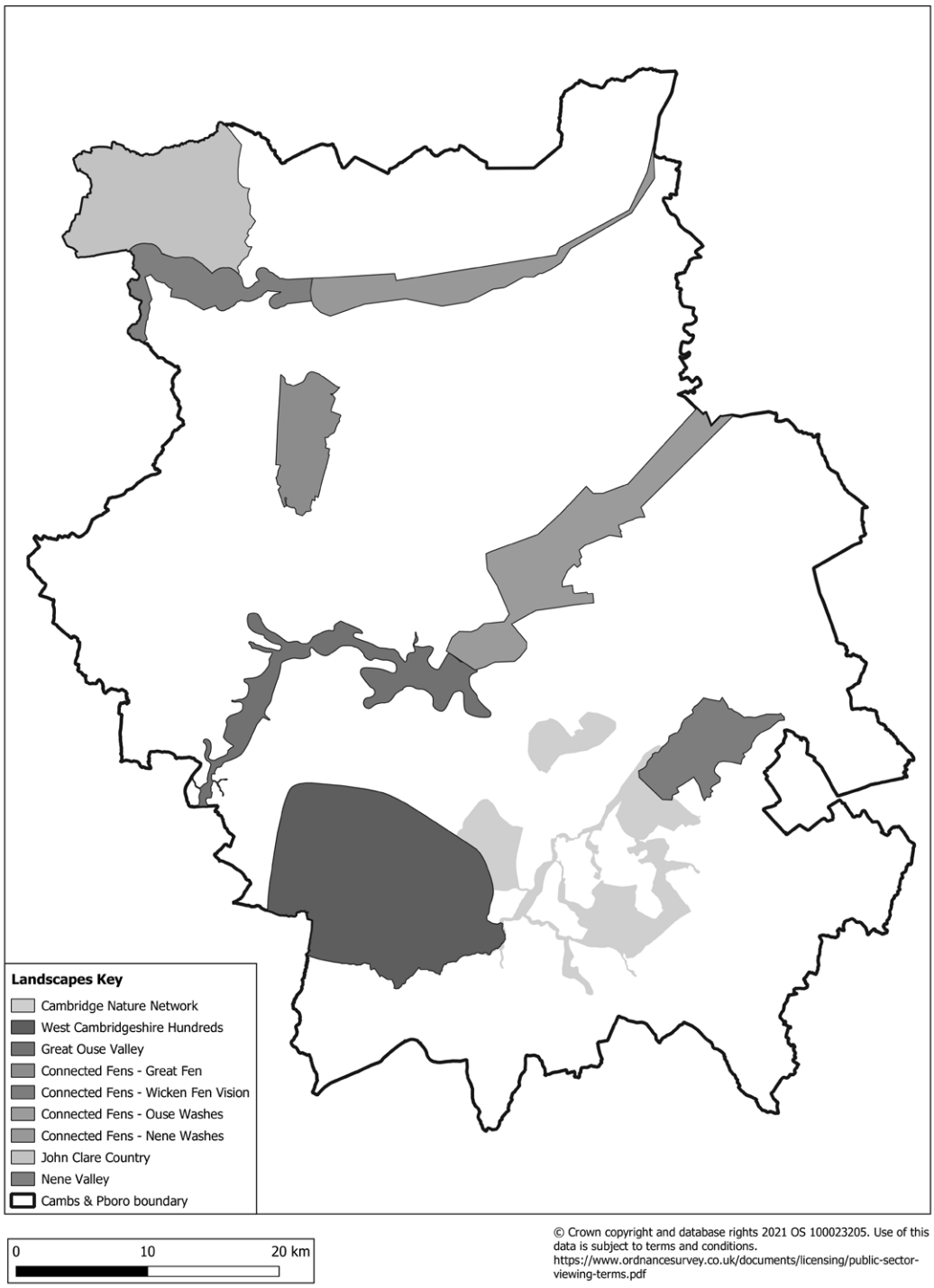
Cover photo: RSPB Fen Drayton Lakes
Credit: RSPB

1. https://cambridgeshirepeterborough-ca.gov.uk/news/cpca-board-approve-business-cases-and-funds-for-doubling-nature-in-cambridgeshire-and-peterborough/

2. The Priority Landscapes

To deliver the Doubling Nature Vision, six priority areas have been identified around which to focus nature recovery efforts. These landscapes were chosen because of their unique ecological and geographic features, and their intrinsic value to the identity and natural heritage of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough landscape.

Natural Cambridgeshire Landscape Priority Areas



The **Cambridge Nature Network** partnership continues to meet to co-ordinate actions, projects and share information and knowledge.

Significant grants from the government's Green Recovery Programme, Natural England's Nature Recovery Programme and the National Lottery Communities Fund are enabling the delivery of over 25 projects between 2021 and 2025, to create new or better habitats and to inspire people to get involved. They range from converting 150 acres of farmland in the Gog Magog Hills, to expanding country parks and nature reserves, to small projects on school grounds in the city. Funding has enabled the partnership to employ an officer to help with project management, co-ordination and promotion and a Land Advisor was also employed by the Wildlife Trust BCN. The majority of projects funded by Green Recovery and Natural England were completed and a new project, River Cam CAN[2], has just started. The partnership organised a successful Cambridge Nature Festival[3] in June.

An East Cambridge Farmer Cluster has been formed and held their first events. The cluster has allowed landowners to reconnect or to meet new farmers and to share knowledge. They have also secured funding to purchase some shared equipment which will support the better management of small areas of species rich grassland across the farms or at small conservation sites. The cluster group is currently looking to join up with the Granta farmer cluster which will create a larger and more effective cluster, increasing the numbers of landowners to 20-30. Some initial funding from Natural England will support a winter and spring programme of events to kick start this larger cluster. Further funding will be sought to put together a more extensive programme of events and knowledge sharing activities, and for specialist equipment to better support regenerative farming across multiple farms.

For the **Connected Fens**, a Landscape Recovery funding bid has been put together by a group of farmers and landowners adjacent to the Ouse Washes, including the conservation partners that own the majority of the Ouse Washes (RSPB, WWT and Wildlife Trust BCN). The RSPB co-ordinated and prepared the bid, with the main focus on what the participating farmers might do to restore nature and farm more sustainably on their land. If successful, there will be two years to put together a plan of action that supports the farmers businesses and identifies the potential private and public funding sources that could support landscape scale changes.

2. https://www.cambridgeppf.org/news/river-cam-can-project-launched
3. https://cambridgenaturenetwork.org/naturefestival/

The **John Clare Countryside (JCC)** initiative has had a productive and collaborative year. Its vision of restoring and enhancing the natural beauty and biodiversity of the area has been embraced by various stakeholders, including communities, landowners, and businesses. Some of the highlights include the continuation of parishes working to deliver their parish nature recovery plans. This has included planting, access enhancements and awareness raising through regular meetings and promotion. The project has planted 1.6 km of new hedgerow, more than 400 native trees and established 280m2 of wildflower meadow.

The partnership team also engaged over 800 people at more than 70 walks, work parties and talks and worked with local businesses who have volunteered to build water harvesters across the area.

The partnership has also been working with major landowners to develop a shared vision and identify opportunities for nature across the landscape. This has also involved exploring long-term funding and support options for the JCC initiative to ensure its viability and impact.

Three major Estates (Milton, Burghley and Walcot) have come together with Langdyke Countryside Trust, Nene Park Trust and the Wildlife Trust BCN to explore putting together a Landscape Recovery project. This will include both the John Clare Countryside and the Nene Valley upstream of Peterborough, due to the overlap in landowners and conservation partners across both priority landscapes. Details of what to include in a Landscape Recovery project are now being actively worked upon with the aim to complete a project proposal in the first half of 2024. The Wildlife Trust has completed the initial nature network opportunity mapping for the Estates. The Wildlife Trust has also drafted some nature recovery objectives.

The wider John Clare Countryside partnership continues to meet regularly to co-ordinate action, whether on landscape nature recovery, parish nature recovery or access enhancements. The Parish Clusters are active and are undertaking small scale nature projects in and around the villages, involving active groups of local volunteers, in line with their Parish Nature Recovery Plans.

A natural capital assessment has been prepared for the **Nene Valley**. A biodiversity assessment was conducted based on the Defra Biodiversity Metric, which showed that the highest biodiversity habitat units were delivered by the largest sites, though smaller sites offer more per hectare. The ecosystem service maps demonstrate the spatial pattern of provision for eleven different ecosystem services and the demand for four. These modelled carbon storage, carbon sequestration, air quality regulation, noise regulation, local climate regulation, pollination, water flow regulation,

water quality regulation, food production, timber production, and accessible nature. The maps show that woodland is the best habitat for air quality regulation, noise regulation and local climate regulation. Pollination capacity is highest in areas of semi-natural habitat within Nene Park, with areas of woodland and grassland providing the highest provision in spring and summer. Carbon sequestration is highest in areas of broadleaved woodland. On the other hand, agricultural land on mineral soil is a slight net emitter of carbon due to emissions associated with agricultural practices.

The Wildlife Trust BCN has prepared a habitat opportunity map for the **Great Ouse Valley** from St Neots to Earith. This identifies the locations of the key habitats, species-rich floodplain meadows, reedbeds, wet woodland and open waters. The conservation priority is the continued management of these sites. The map also identifies priority sites for restoration or creation of habitats, particularly floodplain meadows. The Wildlife Trust is working with landowners at Houghton and Holywell to plan and implement species-rich floodplain meadow restoration projects. At Houghton a suitable wildflower seed mix has been added to parts of a large meadow, following ground preparation. It is hoped the wildflower seed will successfully germinate and become established over the next year or two with appropriate management. The site will be monitored to record progress.

The **West Cambridgeshire Hundreds** involves a cluster of 30 farmers. High-level opportunity mapping has been undertaken with Stewardship options mapped for some farms, to identify where best places are for best habitats, and to use existing mapping to go to farmers to discuss and review opportunities, in an iterative co-designed process. Twelve farms are involved in the H3 Sheffield University Study: Healthy Soils, Healthy Food, Healthy People, and regenerative agriculture (which is difficult on clay but is beginning to work).

The Wildlife Trust continues to undertake restoration management in the ancient woodland nature reserves. At Waresely and Gransden Woods the restoration of the main ride has continued creating a less shaded and better drained surface which will hopefully re-vegetate as well as provide a better surface for visitors. Large areas of ash with ash dieback have been cleared close to paths. A mixture of natural regeneration and planting a wider variety of locally appropriate trees and shrubs is being used to restock the wood.

3. Local Authorities

Cambridge City Council have appointed a Biodiversity Project Officer to help deliver their Biodiversity Strategy actions, across all services. A new project is getting underway in Cambridge, thanks to a £495k grant from the National Lottery Community Climate Action Fund. The River Cam Climate Action through Nature project will involve communities near the river working on initiatives that will benefit them and the environment. The two-year project aims to raise awareness of the challenges faced by the river Cam and inspire and support people to help make a positive impact.

As part of this larger project, the Council will be delivering a project called DiversiTree that will celebrate the riverside veteran trees of Cambridge. The vision for the DiversiTree project is to identify and work with local stakeholders to sustainably manage Cambridge's veteran willows located on riverbanks and engage with residents, workers, and visitors to develop a deeper awareness of the importance of veteran trees and the rich biodiversity they support.

A Chalk Stream Project Lead has been appointed to oversee the delivery of the Combined Authority funded Greater Cambridge Chalk Steam Project, which has identified a suite of evidence-based projects on several chalk streams in the City and South Cambridgeshire District. Fantastic support has been received from stakeholders including community groups, academic institutes, and landowners to help identify projects that will case study and showcase restoration potential and hope to secure additional funding and a partnership legacy beyond the initial 3-year programme.

As partners of the Cambridge Nature Network, the Council has worked with the Wildlife Trust to complete the Green Recovery Fund grassland restoration trials on the City Commons. Using a range of techniques across many sites, including additional wetland scrapes on Stourbridge Common Local Nature Reserve.

The Council have also successfully translocated previously sown species-rich turf from Hobson's Park, due to be temporarily lost to the Cambridge South Station site compound, to Midsummer Common, Barnwell Junction Meadows and Ascham Road – a Happy Bee Streets, where herbicides are no longer used and where volunteer residents have been helping maintain and record plants on their verges.

Plans for a new wetland creation at Logan's Meadow Local Nature Reserve have secured planning approval, funding from the Combined Authority and a specialist river restoration contractor. Confirmation on maintenance requirements of an Anglian Water pipe a that runs below the site is currently awaited; once resolved it is hoped to begin works in late winter/early spring 2024.

Public access enhancements at Byron's Pool LNR using S106 developer contributions have been completed and woodland management plans of this site, and Nine Wells LNR, have been commissioned to guide a programme of woodland enhancement over the next 5 years.

Working with the Wildlife Trust and Cambridge University two biodiversity grounds maintenance courses have been delivered for Council supervisors and operatives, and specialist cut-and-collect equipment purchased to help maintain the many new long grass areas and meadows across our parks and County Council road verges that the Council maintain. Many of these areas have been created through the Council's Environmental Improvement Projects scheme, where communities can suggest enhancements in their neighbourhood. This year's consultation round had a biodiversity theme, promoting the Council's Parks Biodiversity Toolkit, which has generated many projects for delivery across the City's open spaces.

The Cambridge Canopy Project came to an end in 2023 planting 2,384 standards, 250 half-standards, and 600 whips in our streets and open spaces. For the 2023 analysis of tree canopy trends between 2008 and 2018.

Cambridge Tree Canopy Trends 2008-2018

Overall canopy cover increased from 17.1% in 2008 to 17.6% in 2018. This increase was mostly due to the growth of medium and large trees, since young trees have smaller crowns.

The only wards to experience a decrease in canopy cover were Castle, due to the large construction projects, and Newnham, because of a substantial decrease in canopy cover in gardens. Nevertheless, Newnham remained the ward with highest canopy cover in 2018.

Gardens account for a high proportion of canopy cover, given their relatively small area. The area of land dedicated to gardens decreased in all wards between 2008 and 2018 due to densification. However, in some wards, the canopy cover in these gardens increased. This suggests that gardens are a potential target for tree planting or preservation.

Tree preservation orders are currently located mostly in the wards with high canopy cover, so targeting wards with lower canopy cover would be valuable.

Protected open spaces contain a high proportion of tree canopy cover, particularly for large and massive trees in those wards with lower total canopy cover. Therefore, protected open spaces are key for protecting and increasing tree canopy cover in the areas of Cambridge which need it most.

Between 2008 and 2018, canopy cover increased substantially in most parts of Cambridge with a high index of multiple deprivation. These areas now have canopy cover comparable to the rest of the city. To increase this further, efforts should focus on adding new tree preservation orders.

Cambridgeshire County Council continues to work towards improving nature across Cambridgeshire directly though our own actions and working with partners. Formal partnerships this year have extended to include an agreement with Natural Cambridgeshire for joint working and a Service Level Agreement with Fenland District Council to provide biodiversity and ecology services to their planners, covering ecology advice on applications and the application of Biodiversity Net Gain.

Our Climate Change and Environment Strategy continues to evolve and drive actions as we continue to make best use of our available assets and resources. Two of our key commitments are to improve biodiversity across the council's estate by 2030 and to understand and grow our Natural Capital account to benefit people and nature by 2025 and integrate this into the delivery of council functions by 2030.

The council has committed to being net zero by 2030 for its fleet and utilities, and to halve emissions from everything else by 2030 (compared to 2018/19). This year we committed resources into improving our understanding of our carbon baseline and to identity where we can make changes and improvements to reach these targets. This includes nature-based solutions and the use of natural assets, whether that is to improve the amount of carbon our assets sequester or to generally grow our natural capital.

A workstream for 'Natural Capital & Ecosystem Services' has been established to develop our actions in this area and to ensure that we get multiple outcomes where possible. This brings our work on Natural Flood Risk Management, Parks and Greenspaces, Community Nature, Woodland Creation and local heritage listing into a single programme. Activities under this work stream will form the basis of understanding the council's natural capital account, drawing on work already done for the Future Parks Accelerator, with wider net-zero work, including the biodiversity and trees audit and that planned for the local nature recovery strategy. We aim to have a baseline for this by 2025.

We have completed our audit of the council's non-agricultural lands and estates, assessing their current state of nature conservation against the Defra metric. We will then develop a strategy of opportunities to strategically target key areas for improving biodiversity across the council's estate by 2030. Part of this work includes an assessment of the potential for tree planting, hedgerow expansion and carbon sequestration. We have acquired mapping of trees and hedgerows on our estates and are currently assessing these to understand their current and possible future contributions to our net zero ambitions.

Our ongoing development of the Trees and Woodland Strategy is underway; the woodland audit work mentioned above is a key part of this as it will identify opportunity areas for both improved management and new planting. It will also

enable an evidence based target related to tree and hedgerow planting to be established. We are in the process of getting the Woodland Creation Accelerator Fund underway, with a view to getting started next year.

Council members and officers have been working with district colleagues and National Highways on making good the tree planting along the new A14 corridor where previous schemes have failed. A further three "Tiny Forests" were planted at three primary schools across the County. Funded by the Forestry Commission's Local Authority Treescape Fund and in collaboration with Earthwatch Europe, these saw a mix of 600 native woodland species planted at each site. The project created valuable spaces for eco-education, biodiversity and carbon sequestration while providing the school pupils the opportunity to each plant a tree which many of them had never done before.

The Environment Act 2021 gave all local authorities a strengthened biodiversity duty to identify and report back on what measures they were planning to take in their area to conserve and biodiversity. We are currently working on the development of a biodiversity strategy and tree & woodland strategy that will inform an action plan of how we can achieve biodiversity improvements by 2030.

Cambridgeshire County Council has committed to explore opportunities for Nature Based Solutions for Natural Flood Risk Management across Cambridgeshire. Further to the Environment Agency's Natural Flood Management Pilot Study, work is ongoing to identify locations across the county where NFM could be incorporated into the landscape to manage flood risk, enhance biodiversity and contribute to research on a national scale as to the effectiveness of different measures. In addition to our own work, the County Council is supporting local community groups to design and deliver their own NFM solutions. One example is Alconbury where the local flood group is building on the work already undertaken by the Environment Agency to further expand the network of NFM features upstream of the Alconbury Brook. In addition to rural NFM, we are also working with partners (including Anglian Water) to deliver small scale urban NFM in market towns. In addition to reducing the risk of flooding, these features can provide localised recharge of aquifers, an amenity space for local residents and a contribution towards a reduction in urban heating effects.

The Restructure of Highways Maintenance placed a clear focus on supporting nature through the creation of a dedicated Green Infrastructure Team. This Team will lead change in the way we manage and maintain our highway grass verges, hedges, shrubs and trees. The new Team reflects the importance of our highways green infrastructure in achieving nature recovery as part of our Climate Crisis response.

Every year we take part in No Mow May supporting biodiversity through not cutting gras verges at this key time for pollinating plants and insects. When cutting the grass

during the rest of the year we have specific management plans for all sites where there are specific rare and protected species. Further supporting these at risk plants in their recovery.

The council continues to work with other planning authorities to develop a process for dealing with Biodiversity Net Gain assessments when it becomes mandatory in January 2024.

Local Nature Recovery Strategies are an England-wide system of spatial strategies and are a major new policy contained in the Environment Act 2021, aimed at increasing the biodiversity of our area through a network of nature recovery. The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority have been appointed by DEFRA as the Responsible Authority for the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough area. They have contracted this responsibility to Cambridgeshire County Council to develop the LNRS, in collaboration with Natural Cambridgeshire as a key partner.

The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough LNRS will be developed as an evidence based, locally led and collaborative approach. The area has already adopted a 'Doubling Nature' ambition that responds to the existing deficit of rich wildlife areas across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, and the national biodiversity decline.

The LNRS process officially started in June 2023 and since then we have been working very closely with Natural Cambridgeshire, CPCA and District Councils, who are formally recognised as Supporting Authorities, to set up management and governance principles; engagement with key stakeholders, understanding baseline data to assist with delivery of LNRS; collecting data to develop baseline mapping; and preparing a communication and engagement plan.

The **Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority** has nature and the natural environment as a core priority. In 2023 it has continued its core funding for a number of partner organisations as part of its Doubling Nature ambition, including Natural Cambridgeshire, Fenland SOIL and Huntingdonshire's Biodiversity for All programme. A range of projects funded from its climate programme continued to be developed and delivering outcomes for nature, including chalk streams and the Fund for Nature. These are described in more detail in other partners' updates. The Authority organised its Climate Summit in November, with large parts of the agenda covering issues relating to the natural environment, including soils and flood resilience.

In 2023 the Combined Authority also received official confirmation that it would be the responsible authority for the production of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy. Operationally, Cambridgeshire County Council have been commissioned to lead the

work with the support of Natural Cambridgeshire. Consultants are undertaking work on mapping habitats as part of the evidence base, leading to a major programme of stakeholder engagement on the work early in 2024.

The Combined Authority continues to take a leading role in the Oxford to Cambridgeshire Pan-Regional Partnership, and their environment workstream is chaired by the Leader of South Cambridgeshire District Council. They are currently considering the work programme, including taking forward environmental principles.

The Combined Authority has engaged with the National Infrastructure Commission and was pleased to see the NIC's Second Assessment published in October picks up many of the Authority's asks, including addressing the challenges around water supply and flood resilience. The Authority has commissioned an Infrastructure Delivery Framework looking at barriers to sustainable growth, including natural infrastructure and water. This is due to report in March 2024.

East Cambridgeshire District Council has reaffirmed its corporate commitment to creating a 'cleaner, greener East Cambridgeshire', with nature recovery a key element of that approach in 2023/24. In particular, the Council's focus for the year has been on engagement, starting with a £100k Pride of Place community nature based grant scheme (June), followed by its first ever Green Fair (August) and a public vote on which local species residents thought most needed help to recover (September).

The Pride of Place scheme has already awarded funds to nearly a dozen projects, including a new community pond[4] at Peacock's Meadow, Littleport and a new wildlife area[5] in Soham, together with tree planting, wildflower meadows and pond restoration projects throughout the district. The public vote[6] on species recovery was won by hedgehogs, meaning the Council will kick off a long term programme of trying to create habitats for hedgehogs and help raise awareness with residents what they can do to help. Through these engagement programmes, the Council believes it can bring the biodiversity crisis we face to the attention of a wide audience, helping to stimulate grass-roots nature-based action.

There are more engagement-based initiatives set to launch soon, starting with a free oak tree giveaway starting in November 2023. This will be closely followed by an ambition to get East Cambridgeshire residents to put up one bird or bat box for every home in the district – that's 40,000 of them! This 'One+One' initiative is set to launch in early 2024.

Finally, with Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) about to be fully commenced, the Council is delighted to have secured their first in-house senior ecologist. They are also pleased

4. https://www.eastcambs.gov.uk/press/peacock%E2%80%99s-meadow-receives-funding-wildlife-pond
5. https://www.eastcambs.gov.uk/press/funding-wildlife-area-will-help-create-new-green-loop-soham
6. https://www.eastcambs.gov.uk/press/hedgehogs-win-hearts-people-east-cambs

to see their farmer engagement work starting to pay dividend, with the launch of Oxwillow[7], a private initiative in the East Cambridgeshire fens seeking to delivery nature recovery including through the selling of BNG credits.

Fenland District Council (FDC) continues to work on a number of green infrastructure projects that will help to encourage greater biodiversity, develop more climate resilient communities, and boost resident's health and wellbeing.

Over the past year FDC carried out tree planting across several parks including in Wisbech and March and operational cemeteries in March and Whittlesey. This comprised a mix of around 200 'native' and ornamental standard and semi standard trees.

The Council also continued to work with partners to encourage members of the community to get involved with nature recovery. It actively supports 17 Street Pride groups and a number of In Bloom and Friends groups in the district, who work hard to improve the local street scene, open spaces and heritage sites, and promote environmental education.

Earlier this year it also held a 'Nature Recovery' event with Natural Cambridgeshire, PECT (Peterborough Environment City Trust) and Cambridgeshire ACRE in March to provide residents, community organisations and landowners with information and advice on developing nature restoration projects in Fenland.

With funding and support from Natural England and the BCN Wildlife Trust an Interim Nature Recovery Network study[8] has been produced for Fenland. This should inform the production of the CPCA's own LNRS as well as providing interim advice on the preferred locations for improvements for off-site BNG including for community-based projects. The Interim NRN also provides evidence for developing a Green Infrastructure Network for the district through
the emerging new Local Plan.

Work through the planning policy stream is looking to ensure that the Council continues to deliver on its responsibility to both enhance as well as conserve biodiversity as required by the Environment Act. Policies on green infrastructure, designated nature sites, BNG, LNRS and carbon sinks and sequestration are included in the draft Local Plan.

Additional support for nature through planning can be found in the recently adopted Neighbourhood Plan for Whittlesey (May 2023). The Plan identifies areas to be protected in the planning process and includes specific policies to safeguard open space from development pressure, and to help the town adapt and mitigate climate

7. https://www.oxwillow.co.uk/

8. www.fenland.gov.uk/media/20450/Fenland-Interim-Nature-Recovery-Network-Final-July-2023/pdf/Fenland_Interim_Nature_Recovery_Network_Final_-_July_2023.pdf?m=638352059851100000

change. A site of some 22ha to the east of the town has been formally allocated in the plan for a new Country Park.

Since the location of the proposed Fens Reservoir just north of Chatteris was announced by Anglian Water and Cambridge Water at the end of last year, FDC has continued to work with the proponents and other stakeholders on the master planning for the project. The Fens Reservoir is identified as a Priority Area within the Interim National Nature Reserve (along with the Nene Washes and Ouse Washes), and the proposal should provide an exciting opportunity with many potential benefits including for biodiversity enhancements.

Huntingdonshire District Council formally recognised a Climate Crisis and Ecological Emergency in February 2023. Through a partnership with the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority, the Council has launched the Biodiversity for All project, which will champion an evidence-based approach to enhancing biodiversity across the District. The Biodiversity for All project has allowed the Council to commission a series of ecological audits across its strategic parks and open spaces. This has led to a program of works based on priority habitats and environmental opportunities.

HDC has also launched a Biodiversity Community Grant Scheme. Successful grant applicants will receive an ecological audit by our recently appointed Graduate Ecologists. Following the audit, the team will support an evidenced-based bid for funds to deliver works that increase biodiversity on their sites. The Council aims to fund and support 20 community groups across the District before the end of the project.

The Council has also partnered with Groundwork UK to provide employability opportunities for individuals not in work. Jobseekers that participate gain experience and qualifications whilst working on ecological enhancements at Council-owned sites.

In order to embed the learning and habitat mapping that the project is enabling, the Council is also developing a District-wide citizen science programme. HDC will partner with INaturalist to provide a free platform for residents to identify and monitor species in our District and in turn be part of our solution to support nature.

During 2023, the Council trialled other environmental approaches to support nature, such as Alternative Land Management. This scheme involved the Council working with town and parish Councils to make significant positive biodiversity impact on areas of land we own and maintain. This is done by allowing grass to grow to meadow grass and cutting once a year. This will be supported by increasing the number of floral meadows (currently 1.4ha) and the tree canopy by adopting and implementing a four-year tree planting programme (approximately 10,000 trees).

All of HDC's work is driven by the Council's newly adopted Corporate Plan. This includes the key priority of "Creating a better Huntingdonshire for future generations." To help reach this ambition, the Council has committed to enable community action on biodiversity and support green skills development; and deliver a Huntingdonshire Plan for Nature and contribute to the regional Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

Peterborough City Council (PCC) has been protecting existing populations of rare and valuable species, from invertebrates to birds, while also experimenting with new ways of establishing rich biodiverse habitats within existing areas of managed grassland.

The Barn Owl Recovery programme was delayed due to COVID, however it is now again in full swing, placing and monitoring Barn Owl boxes all around the Peterborough City Council area. Barn owls are present in 32 boxes, kestrels in 5 boxes, jackdaws in 13 boxes and stock doves in 7 boxes. This represents a significant increase in the barn owl population within Peterborough, and the locations of all these boxes are on a GIS map. This provides valuable information regarding the exact location of barn owl territories across the city, directing planning considerations and helping justify further compensation and mitigation. Similar to the Barn Owl Recovery Programme, the Council has been supporting a survey of the Marholm Crossing and Brook Drain County Wildlife Site for the presence of four-spotted moth, after heavy disturbance from a National Rail infrastructure project had occurred. The species has survived in this area and the site is being managed for their survival.

County Wildlife Sites continue to generally remain in good condition, or working towards it, with 77.5% in positive conservation management. While this is a slight reduction on previous years there are plans in place to ensure that where PCC has control of the site its management will be improved. Even with this reduction PCC remain one of the top performing local authorities in England, as published by Defra on the National Indicator Target for Biodiversity (SDL 160). We hope that with the new Local Nature Recovery Strategy we can work with local landowners to ensure that we have 100% positive management.

There is a constant fight between the need for biodiversity and the perception that wild areas should be kept 'tidy' through constant cutting. Peterborough City Council have been performing an experiment to see if a bespoke seed mix can be created of flowering species which can survive the heavy cutting expected in managed green areas. This is ongoing but will hopefully result in a mix which can increase the number of species within these heavily managed areas and benefit biodiversity.

Peterborough City Council have updated their website in preparation of the enaction of Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) legislation and provided a form for interested parties

to submit land which they wish to put forward for the creation of off-site Biodiversity Net Gain credits. This, along with efforts to collaborate with local nature trusts, will hopefully result in off-site BNG remaining within the Unitary Area.

South Cambridgeshire District Council continues to take action for nature in line with its commitment to the Doubling Nature ambition, and its own 'Green to our Core' key business plan priority.

The Awarded Watercourses team has been working closely with the Wild Trout Trust and local nature groups on several schemes to support and improve biodiversity on waterways in the district. The team have been trained in water vole habitat identification on the River Shep and have provided equipment and expertise to support the creation of new trout habitat and flow diversification on the River Mel. The team are now exploring more partnership projects with the Wild Trout Trust and specialist nature groups.

The Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service has advanced its preparations for the implementation of mandatory 10% Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG), as required by the Environment Act 2021. Building on the Biodiversity Supplementary Planning Document and Interim BNG Protocol adopted last year, a programme of training for planning officers, members and parish councils has been set up, and guidance for applicants and the public is being updated. The service is also pleased to have recruited an additional Ecologist, which will improve its capacity to meet this new obligation.

Four pilot sites for wildflowers on SCDC Housing land at West Wickham, Coton, Fen Ditton and Guilden Morden have been successfully planted and have been well received by residents. Additional wildflower areas, tree planting, bird and bat boxes are now being planned to improve biodiversity on six more sites within the council's own estate, aiming to involve tenants and residents in their creation and upkeep.

The Council's Community Chest Biodiversity Grant remains open, offering up to £2000 funding for local nature projects. Funded projects so far this year include restoration of a neglected wooded area and pond in Meldreth, and planting of a commemorative oak tree in Duxford.

The Council's annual Six Free Trees scheme continues to offer free trees to parish councils. Following the success of last year's scheme, which saw 144 trees planted, preparations are underway to run the scheme for another year. This will add to the total of 533 trees already planted since the scheme began in 2020.

The Climate and Environment team will be running a local climate conference in November to coincide with COP28. This will have a doubling nature focus, including

guest speakers from Natural Cambridgeshire, an arboriculturist and Girton Nature Recovery group. It is envisaged that the conference will allow parishes and community groups to share experiences and ideas and will showcase local nature recovery projects.

Alongside this, a series of case studies of local nature projects are being published on the Council's website and via our quarterly Zero Carbon Communities newsletter, which is issued to parish councils and local climate action groups. It is hoped that these will inspire local action on nature recovery while providing useful practical guidance on setting up community nature projects.

4. The work of our partner organisations

Anglian Water's Biodiversity team has been focused in Cambridgeshire on its land at its intake on the River Great Ouse at Offord. Formally the site of a tree nursery for the landscaping of Grafham Water when it was created over 50 years ago, the site is being enhanced for biodiversity through targeted tree planting, pollarding, coppicing and wild life, and encouraging the creation of dead and dying features in trees to help wild life, as well as pond creation. It is intended that this work will benefit many species including nightingales which are found at Grafham Water and along the valley.

In the river itself, Anglian Water continues its programme of floating pennywort eradication, to protect Grafham Water and the Ouse Washes. This collaboration includes the Environment Agency and Keep Britain Tidy who are focusing on other stretches of the river.

On the subject of biosecurity, additional measures have been installed at Grafham Water to prevent the loss down the Diddington Brook of killer shrimp and other invasive species.

Elsewhere Anglian Water has installed additional phosphate removal at Linton, Wittering, Oldhurst and Waresley. This will improve water quality, benefiting biodiversity in downstream watercourses.

The **Cam Valley Forum** members have contributed ideas and thinking to the Local Nature Partnership, helping to embed the value of the natural environment into local decision making, promote sustainable land use and management, promote the greening of all growth, advise on strategic planning matters and enhance the quality of life, health and well-being of citizens.

We are grateful to Natural Cambridgeshire's leadership in supporting our concern in the present water crisis. The greatest problem which we feel the County still faces, with

respect to the health of its streams and rivers, is our own enduringly unsustainable impact on that environment. At present genuine environmental well-being of the waterways is still some way off. We all need to save water, reduce per capita usage, and see water as a much more precious resource. We still need faster planning for alternative water supply from other reservoirs – rather than just continuing to take that water away from our failing Chalk streams.

We say 'well done' to the City and County authorities for investing in chalk stream recovery and for now employing its own staff dedicated to that objective. This is really welcomed. Small changes in water course management are also happening at several sites. Modifying streambeds with gravel and flow deflectors helps improve them for fish and other wildlife. There is always need for better flow and better water quality. The negative impacts of climate change, notably huge soil moisture deficits in summer, seem to act also on top of all these other difficulties.

Five years ago, Cam Valley Forum took the lead in physically tackling the invasive floating pennywort. High phosphate – emanating largely from our own sewage – was one reason why that invasive floating pennywort grew so aggressively across our rivers and why perhaps many of the water crowfoot species in the County have seemingly disappeared.

The Cam Valley Forum volunteers have engaged recently in Citizen Science and have established that the poor quality of the River Cam's bathing water, or indeed for any water recreation, is largely attributable to our small upstream overloaded rural sewage treatment works. We hope that our pressing for safer swimming water and more action on faecal pollution will yield needed improvements in effluent treatment.

The **Cambridge Centre for Landscape Regeneration (CLR)** has completed its first full year of research and co-ordination of a whole-system analysis of the challenges faced by the Fens in the context of climate change, including biodiversity loss, land-use carbon emissions, increasing water management issues, sustainability of arable productivity and socio-economic factors. The team represent 14 departments of the University, from Archaeology to Zoology via Computer Science, Geography, Public Health etc.

This summer, CLR researchers conducted intensive fieldwork on key fen land-use types: for example arable fields (regenerative & BAU), wet grassland, nature reserves, ditches and solar arrays, involving 14 farms and 10 nature reserves. Gratitude is extended to all of the CLR's land management partners, including farmers in the Fenland SOIL group and beyond, who have allowed the team access to their land. Two flux-towers have been installed, to provide greenhouse gas emission data; completed

proof-of-concept field trials of a low-cost CO2 sensor network; measured methane and soil microbial activity, using a range of lab techniques and eDNA sampling; censused the biodiversity of pollinator, natural predator, bird, plant and ditch communities; and held four conservation evidence-gathering workshops in the field with land managers.

A Farm and Land Management Survey started in October 2023, with the aim of identifying opportunities and incentives for diversification and other actions to manage peat loss or water storage. An analysis of ONS data to identify current and future business opportunities in the fenland region is also underway. Researchers continue to develop relationships with stakeholder groups including NGOs, farmers, community groups, local government and industry.

Policy events and conferences have included a discussion day with Defra, the Environment Agency and NGOs, hosted by CLR and the Centre for Science & Policy, and two conferences co-hosted with NIAB and Fenland SOIL on Paludiculture and the Future of Lowland Agricultural Peat Farming.

A social outreach and education programme has commenced including engagement with schools and communities with Cambridge Science Centre and Natural Cambridgeshire (with whom CLR aims to be an active partner in creating a Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Cambridgeshire). Further projects just getting underway include understanding the relationship between health outcomes and access to nature; hydrological analyses and modelling; collaborative research on the interplay between art and peatland ecology; and an association with the Future Fenscapes archaeological program in the University of Cambridge, from which it is hoped to understand what the past can reveal about the present and tell us about the future of the Fens.

Cambridge Past, Present & Future (CPPF) is the local charity that cares about the beauty of Cambridge and its environment. The charity owns and cares for several green spaces in and around Cambridge including Wandlebury Country Park, Coton Countryside Reserve and Barnwell Meadows and it is working hard to improve their ecological value, increase the amount of habitat and better connect them to other habitats in the area. CPPF also provides opportunities for local communities to visit and enjoy these places and to benefit from free access to nature, including a schools outdoor education programme.

The population of the Cambridge area is planned to grow by 30% in a 20-year period, at the same time as nature is in significant decline. To respond, we will need to increase the amount of green space available for nature and people. CPPF is doing this through projects on its land, as well as working in partnership with other like-minded organisations and also by advocating for changes in policy.

During the year CPPF carried out a range of nature conservation tasks including laying hedges, woodland restoration, scrub control, pond management, meadow management and litter picking. Volunteers kindly gave 3,257 hours of work.

Following the purchase of 25 acres of farmland next to Wandlebury Country Park in 2021, CPPF has continued to transform it to benefit nature and people. 21 acres were sown with chalk meadow seed mix and staff and volunteers worked hard to nurture newly planted trees. A new 1km walk has been opened along with a new picnic area and dog exercise area. With the help of volunteers a new pollinator garden was created.

Cambridge Water Company continues to deliver biodiversity improvements as part of its environmental commitments and has developed two funding schemes for environmental change in the wider catchment and communities that they supply.

A catchment management fund, SPRING, is for farmers and landowners to help make land use improvements to enhance biodiversity, improve soil structure, reduce runoff, and protect water quality, and the PEBBLE fund[9] is for projects that support biodiversity and improvements to our precious local chalk streams. The SPRING scheme is favoured by the farming community over other similar catchment sensitive farming schemes as it offers a wider number of options for biodiversity improvements, innovative working and provides a more straightforward application process, and this is reflected in its success to date.

Examples of the land use changes Cambridge Water have supported include winter, and year-round, cover crops, buffer strips, habitats, and innovative trials of new approaches. Winter cover crops allow a wide variety of species to grow on otherwise bare soil; these species flower at various times, providing late summer feeding and habitat for many insects, bees, and butterflies and over winter habitats increasing the diversity of wildlife. These crops will also improve the structure and health of the soil, adding organic matter over time. Year-round cover crops act a break to arable farming, also improving soil health and help to remove excess nutrients in the soil as well as providing habitat for many species. Buffer strips of 6m at field boundaries provide protection from field run-off and habitat for insect species that are beneficial to crops by reducing the need for pesticide use. This year we have trialled an approach to promote drought resilience in newly established hedgerows where a wildflower mix is applied and once established will be planted with hedgerow, so that both will protect each other, the wildflowers holding moisture so that the hedgerow can fully establish and will be protected in dry conditions.

9. https://www.cambridge-water.co.uk/environment/biodiversity/pebble-fund

Further support for biodiversity projects within the community and in collaboration with environmental stakeholders is facilitated through the PEBBLE fund, which is open to applications every year. Projects that have been funded include wildflower gardens, community orchards and woodland regeneration and planting, biodiversity rich nature gardens and ponds, tackling Invasive species and river restoration on our precious chalk streams.

Highlights include supporting a pollinator garden at Wandlebury Country Park which will plant native, all round flowering species to provide resources to specific pollinators such as butterflies and bees, moths and hoverflies all year round and for many generations to come; and supporting the creation of a wetland area in the Mill River nature reserve by planting fen community species such as sedges, rushes, flag irises, marsh marigold and woundwort on the 75 acre site. There has been a strong focus on chalk stream restoration recently with Cambridge Water funding work on the Rivers Granta, Mel, Shep and headwaters at Bassingbourn. This work has included wetland creation, bankside planting, habitat creation for water vole, channel narrowing, sediment removal and the addition of more gravel and chalk for spawning fish. These measures provide the diverse habitat that support chalk stream aquatic and terrestrial wildlife, and sinuous fast flowing channels and banks for priority species such as water voles and brown trout.

During 2022-23 Cambridge Water have provided £80k of support to catchment schemes and improved over 550ha of land, whilst the PEBBLE fund has awarded over £120k of support in the last five years improving 31 hectares of habitat. Cambridge Water is at the forefront of the water scarcity issues in the wider Cambridge area and the pressure this has on chalk streams, and has proposals from 2025 to undertake multi-million pound catchment scale river restoration on chalk streams, some of which has already commenced on the River Granta, the Company's chalk stream restoration flagship project.

Cambridgeshire ACRE is delivering the New Life on the Old West project, funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, to create a more resilient fenland landscape. The project enhances biodiversity connectivity across the landscape, while connecting local people with their natural heritage and green spaces. The project, which started in October 2020, had been due to run until March 2024, but an extension has recently been agreed to September 2025. This will allow the project team to deliver additional outputs and outcomes that will ensure the long-term management of the new habitat sites and community green spaces and ensure that volunteering opportunities created by the project are sustained.

The project has tested an approach of using multiple natural heritage sites for delivery, coupled with a targeted programme of community activities and reliance on people's voluntary efforts, with citizen science being used to create a wealth of new biodiversity data about the project area. The project has delivered the majority of its target outputs already, including a diverse mix of 95 habitat enhancements taking place on community green spaces in nine parishes and on seven farms. These new habitats include wetlands, ponds, and improvements for wildlife in the network of farmland drains, wildflower meadows, new rare black poplar trees and mixed native species hedges.

Over 3,000 people have been involved with the project so far, attending wildlife training days, enjoying guided nature walks and boat trips, learning about habitat management and getting involved in work parties. Open for Nature days have brought together local wildlife and conservation organisations, with lots of fun, family-friendly activities for the local community. Volunteers have been enormously helpful to the project, assisting with a wide range of habitat work, helping at public events and recording wildlife seen at newly created sites and in the wider landscape. Citizen science and further training for volunteers will be a key focus of the next phase of the project, in addition to supporting local groups, landowners and parish councils with their own ideas for nature recovery.

Alongside the New Life on the Old West project, Cambridgeshire ACRE has delivered another project directly connected to creating a more resilient fenland landscape and enhancing biodiversity. The Water Care Partnership works collaboratively with communities and organisations in the north Cambridgeshire Fens to identify the issues facing the water bodies and develop work streams or projects to address them. Cambridgeshire ACRE hosts the partnership, which is funded by the Environment Agency. In 2023 the partnership has been updating its Catchment Management Plan – a shared document which identifies the key challenges in the catchment and sets out methods of addressing them. This management plan also contains the "live" Action Plan (updated twice a year), which is a comprehensive overview of water-based activities across the catchment and lists the partners projects/programmes.

The majority of projects in the Water Care Partnership Action Plan are delivered by its partners but the host (Cambridgeshire ACRE) often undertakes smaller-scale projects and has been managing the Ramsey and March RiverCare litter picks for over 5 years. Groups of volunteers meet regularly to remove litter in and around the Old River Nene (March) and Bury Brook/High Lode (Ramsey). Last year the groups took part in 8 picks, undertook water quality monitoring, and collected 129 bags of litter – making a real difference to the water environment in the Fens. The partnership also works at a more strategic level, to ensure the catchment is properly understood and appropriate decisions are made about its future at a national and local level.

The **Country Land and Business Association (CLA)** represents roughly 600 members in Cambridgeshire, a membership spanning a huge range of diverse rural businesses operating over 240,000 acres of rural land across the county. Farming and land management remain the cornerstone of Cambridgeshire's CLA membership, and through ongoing consultation with scheme designers within the Rural Payments Agency the CLA has worked tirelessly to ensure that the 'public money for public goods' agenda, and the various elements of the Environmental Land Management scheme deliver both for the county's farmers and for nature. If successful, the transition to a new era in agriculture and land use policy will place biodiversity, water and air quality, and environmental sustainability squarely amid the county's food production systems at a scale that could help reverse the decline in nature whilst offering viable revenue streams for Cambridgeshire's farmers.

The CLA has conducted a series of in-person and online events throughout the year to offer advice to farmers and land managers as they navigate this transition and can make the most informed decisions for their businesses and the land and natural resources under their stewardship. The CLA has also continued its work in the Water for Food Group and responded to the latest consultation on both the regional water resource management plan, and the forthcoming Anglian Water reservoir project that will see a new reservoir in the Cambridgeshire Fens. The CLA is keen to ensure future water supplies are secured for the rural sector, and that the reservoir provides a huge range of ecosystem services and helps to enhance biodiversity.

Having ready access to high quality green space should be non-negotiable, and to help realise this ambition the CLA Charitable Trust provided financial support to Wandlebury Country Park to purchase an off-road mobility scooter so that more people can benefit from spending time outdoors and amongst nature.

With work underway across the country to prepare Local Nature Recovery Strategies, and with mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain approaching, the CLA has connected with responsible and supporting authorities to ensure farmers and landowners are involved in the production of strategies and understand how best to engage with BNG if appropriate for their business aims and objectives. The CLA look forward to ongoing consultation with Natural Cambridgeshire and partner organisations as both directives take shape and a strategy is produced that can truly inform nature recovery and be a valuable tool for farmers and land managers as they pursue alternative income streams.

The **Environment Agency's (EA)** priorities include: increasing the resilience of people, property and businesses to the risks of flooding and coastal erosion; protecting and improving water, land and biodiversity, and; improving the way they work as a

regulator to protect people and the environment from the ongoing impacts of climate change and to support sustainable growth.

Together with Natural England and Forestry Commission colleagues, the EA work in partnership with local public, private and voluntary organisations to help progress the Combined Authority's Climate Action Plan and to inform the work of the Combined Authority's Independent Commission on Climate.

The EA promote the 25 Year Environment Plan's natural capital and ecosystem services approach in order to create local opportunities for green finance and investment. Taking account of the findings and recommendations of the Lowland Agricultural Peat Task Force they ensure The Fens perform a vital role in tackling climate change. The EA also provide guidance, data and evidence and support for the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) to enable nature conservation and nature-based solutions; such action will also support the introduction of Biodiversity Net Gain which becomes mandatory in January 2024. They also help to deliver Natural Flood Management in the Nene Valley and the Hen Brook east of St Neots.

The **Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group East (FWAG East)** has had a busy and successful year, working with farmers to bring environmental benefits to the farm. Several projects are taking place across Cambridgeshire, in addition to the core work of applying for agri-environment schemes on behalf of farmers. Defra's Sustainable Farming Incentive has re-opened in a simpler form, containing the most basic and popular options from the more advanced Countryside Stewardship scheme, as well as options which encourage farmers to look at their farming methods, such as Soil Management Plans, Nutrient Management Plans (looking at efficient fertiliser use) and Integrated Crop Management Plans (looking at pesticide use and its natural alternatives). The Sustainable Farming Incentive is non-competitive and can work alongside existing schemes, and it is already getting a lot of attention from farmers with the first applications being made.

FWAG East secured Countryside Stewardship funding for wetland creation projects in the fens, including two of the three Higher-tier agreements in Cambridgeshire. One of the most strategically located was on arable land close to the Ouse Washes and is the first phase of a new 'Lifeboat' wet grassland site. In liaison with partners, works to create a wader and wildfowl-friendly mosaic of wet grassland, open water, and shallow drawdown areas are expected in 2024. Elsewhere in Cambridgeshire, several Mid-tier applications were made, including options on riverside land, traditional orchards and parkland, and the introduction of flower-rich areas, margins and winter bird food plots on arable land. On behalf of Natural England, FWAG East once again ran one-to-one clinics for those wishing to apply for Countryside Stewardship, as well

as visiting farms to approve the application of options on priority habitats such as species-rich grassland and parkland. We took part in the regional Farm Business Updates speaking about the changes to Countryside Stewardship, and gave a workshop on the subject to county farm tenants.

Projects which are continuing in the county include the West Cambs 100s farmer cluster and its contribution to the national Health Soil, Healthy Food and Healthy People research project carried out by the universities of Cambridge and Sheffield, amongst other partners. A third of the farmers in this group are continuing their excursions into regenerative agriculture and sharing their findings and the research results with the rest of the group.

Further work was undertaken with suppliers of vegetables (mainly from the Fens) to a major supermarket, increasing the environmental and biodiversity benefits provided by their farms. This year the focus was on water quality and water use, with advice on the protection of watercourses and rainwater harvesting. They also started working with a major retailer looking at the carbon footprints of the retailer's suppliers and carrying out UK Habitat surveys on their land, giving suggestions for new and enhanced habitat.

FWAG East continues to deliver Natural England's District Level Licensing scheme to create or restore ponds suitable for great crested newt across the county. Since the beginning of the Cambridgeshire District Level Licensing project in early 2020, FWAG East have delivered 169 ponds in Cambridgeshire, 49 of which have begun their programme of survey and monitoring (which will continue for a period of 25 years). Of these 49 ponds, 29% tested positive for great crested newt earlier this year, 59% absent, and 12% inconclusive. The Cambridgeshire results are slightly below the national occupancy rate of 35% in 2023. Next spring, FWAG East will be surveying a total of 150 Cambridgeshire ponds, which feeds into the national great crested newt monitoring programme run by Natural England.

A further 2626m of hedgerow was planted in the county under the national Queen's Canopy Award funded by the Tree Council. This is separate from the several thousand metres of new and restored hedgerow applied for in Countryside Stewardship grants.

Cambridgeshire farmers have performed well in the national and regional farm conservation awards, giving us the runner-up in the 2023 FWAG East Conservation Award (over 5 counties), and the runner-up in the 2023 national FWAG Silver Lapwing Award.

On the horizon in 2024 are several new projects, including applying for funding for new farmer clusters, more work on the Cam Washes SSSI and the Alconbury Brook Natural Flood Management Project, and joining partners in a Grey Partridge Recovery project.

Fenland SOIL brings together farmers, NGOs, academia, retailers and government to establish a pathway to reduce emissions and forge a greener future. Farming on lowland agricultural peat faces a triple challenge, to increase food security, enhance biodiversity and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. In East Anglia, emissions from lowland peat are estimated to make up 40% of the region's total emissions.

Fenland SOIL aims to address issues arising from farming lowland peat holistically from the bottom up to ensure that mitigations are reasonable and achievable for land managers. It is enabling farmers with the skills to reduce emissions, ensure best agricultural practice, enhance biodiversity, support changes to water management, and help advance in agritech and regenerative principles on peaty soils.

The Fens landscape has evolved significantly since drainage efforts commenced about 300 years ago. Physical shrinkage of peat soils from water loss, wind and water erosion, and oxidation, have led to several metres of soil loss. Not only does this mean the loss of a valuable growing medium but also significant carbon emissions. Estimates suggest that agricultural use of peat on the Cambridgeshire Fens is producing about 2.6 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent per year.

Fenland SOIL's work includes supporting the establishment of emission factors for a range of cropping and mitigation techniques; funding flux towers across Fenland farms to research actual emissions; working with key strategic partners academic partners to analyse research data; pioneering the development of Peatland Mosaic Landscape Opportunity Mapping; evaluating the economic impacts of changing from current to modified farming systems; working closely with water management authorities overcome practical barriers to introducing wetter soil conditions; working with key stakeholders to improve biodiversity in the farmed landscape

In April 2022 Fenland SOIL and NIAB were awarded a Natural England Peatland Restoration Discovery Grant, bringing together farmers and other experts to develop co-designed land management opportunity maps at catchment scale. With a pilot area of 11,000ha, farmers provided information on productivity metrics, hydrology and soils at field scale, and data was subsequently ground-truthed and sense checked by the experts. The result was a co-designed opportunity map for each district which was developed as a tool for land managers to guide further work enhance land management practices, identify areas suitable for wetter management, areas that require alternative mitigation measures and areas of mineral soil that can potentially increase carbon storage through regenerative agriculture. The learnings from the Discovery Grant Project are being transferred to Fenland SOIL's second phase of opportunity mapping funded through Natural England's Paludiculture Exploration Fund. The project will develop and apply the methodology identified in the Discovery Grant Project applying it to a further 27,000 ha.

In addition to the mapping work, Fenland SOIL is practically exploring the feasibility of paludiculture in an intensive vegetable production system with plans to carry out a commercial scale trial.

Fens 2100+ The Fens and coastal lowlands landscape is at the forefront of climate change and one of the main drivers for the recently launched Fens 2100+. A programme of work is being developed that will seek to drive investment to manage flood risk assets in the Fens over the next 100 years. The work is closely linked to that of the Future Fens Integrated Adaptation taskforce, and the Environment Agency is one of the sponsor organisations. A piece of independent, academic research on the impacts of climate change in the Fens to 2100 and beyond is currently being sponsored. Looking at flooding, water, agriculture and the economy, and this research stems from the UK Climate Change Risk Assessments (1-3). It is being undertaken by the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research at a Fens landscape level. It is expected that the results are published by summer 2024.

The **Fens East Peat Partnership (FEPP),** consisting of Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust, Norfolk Wildlife Trust, Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Northampton and Cambridgeshire, RSPB, National Trust and Natural England, is part of the long-standing Fens for the Future Partnership. FEPP was formed in 2021 to start addressing the barriers to lowland peat restoration in the Fens and successfully bid for Nature for Climate Change Peatland Grant Scheme 'Discovery' (NCPGS) funding.

NCPGS funding, delivered by Natural England is supporting peat restoration that will reduce greenhouse gas emissions from sites with degraded peat. The discovery funding was to work on finding out what the barriers are to peat restoration in the lowland Fens and to try and find solutions. 20 sites from across the Fens, which included seven in Cambridgeshire were in this initial phase. Following on from this project, in May 2023 FEPP bid for NCPGS Restoration funding and were successful in being awarded this new project funding in September.

The restoration project runs through to March 2025 and includes 17 peatland sites across the Fens, all seven sites within Cambridgeshire are included. Each site is at a different stage of their restoration journey to become a healthy, functioning peat ecosystem. Some sites are new and it is anticipated there will be an increase in the area of peat restored; others are existing sites which need restoration to improve infrastructure as they are becoming dry for too long due to climate change.

The restoration work planned will mean these areas of lowland peat will be more resilient in the face of climate change and help us to adapt and deal with the changes.

Primarily the main benefit will be reducing the greenhouse gases emitting from the degraded peat and then on some sites in the near future starting to become carbon stores once again. Other key benefits from the sites will be to manage water in extreme weather events to store water.

The Cambridgeshire sites include areas of the Great Fen and Wicken Fen vision together with other private sites. All the restoration work follows the Lawton principles to make space for nature, 'more, bigger, better and joined up', creating a strong ecological network as part of the Cambridgeshire Nature Recovery Strategy.

The **Food, Farming and Countryside Commission (FFCC)** is reaching the conclusion of its pilot phase (based in Devon and Cambridgeshire & Peterborough) to trial and promote the case for Land Use Frameworks for England and at a larger-than-local level. The aim throughout the Cambridgeshire pilot[10] has been to enable better, more joined-up decision making about land use in a county experiencing intense development pressures, while also achieving nature recovery, sustainable farming and food production, the sustainable supply and use of water and energy, and meeting the needs of local communities.

Working with partners has helped us collectively identify the issues, opportunities, and challenges, exploring them further in a listening exercise with communities, which widened the breadth and depth of perspectives. A breakthrough this year was the production of a prototype tool, created by a Cambridge-based data visualisation company, Vizzuality. The prototype layers existing data sets for the key issues identified by the leadership group, enabling immediate insights into the tensions – and opportunities for synergy – between different land uses in this pressurised county. Such a resource is not the land use framework itself, but is viewed as one of the keys to establishing a land use framework. The prototype has been presented to organisations as diverse as Defra, the Combined Authority, and the University of Cambridge, with a universally positive response.

Work at the England level continues while Defra's consultation on the subject, promised by the end of 2023, is awaited. Meanwhile, the project's government partner (and funder), The GeoSpatial Commission, has included our work in its reports[11], and we continue to collaborate with them to share insights and learning. The case for a Land Use Framework has been boosted by support this year from organisations as diverse as the House of Lords, Royal Society, CPRE, NFU and Shared Assets, and interest

10. https://www.figma.com/proto/jzu11Q8XV0WX1QMTgtH70Z/%5BSHARED%5D-Land-Use-Framework-Prototype?page-id=16%3A11117&node-id=16-30284&viewport=1462%2C502%2C0.13&scaling=scale-down&starting-point-node-id=16%3A30284

11. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/finding-common-ground-integrating-data-science-and-innovation-for-better-use-of-land

is growing about how this can work. As a result, FFCC will host a conference in the New Year across all five jurisdictions (including the Republic of Ireland where we've been advising on land use) to explore developments. It is hoped members of the Cambridgeshire group will be able to join and contribute.

A meeting of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough leadership group early in 2024 will decide next steps, and FFCC are proud to be leading debates on a much-needed policy, as well as trialling a tool which illustrates how to bring a land use framework into being.

The **Forestry Commission** is dedicating significant resource to supporting the development and implementation of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough's LNRS, and is keen to ensure this activity actively supports a transition to a landscape that is more wooded, richer in wildlife and delivering a wide range of other environmental and social benefits for people. Moreover, given the imperative to tackle the twin challenges of biodiversity and climate change, this is seen as a critical role for all types of woodland.

The Commission works with Cambridgeshire landowners and tenants to help design and create new woodlands, with the aim of increasing the biodiversity, contribute to carbon sequestration and improve the wellbeing of urban and rural communities across the county. Like all priority habitats, our ancient woodlands are irreplaceable, and so are a priority for the Forestry Commission to help support via management plans and grants, and wherever possible expand or reconnect those remain ancient woodlands by natural regeneration or appropriate new planting.

The Commission share their data, and have recruited staff to support the LNRS and helping it to connect with landowners, woodland and forestry organisations locally.

Well managed woodland or forestry provides structure and composition in which species can thrive, complementing our semi-natural habitats, and hence the Commission see a key role for appropriately managed productive woodland in supporting nature recovery. Woodland and forestry can also provide wider environmental benefits such as flood amelioration, water quality improvements and climate change mitigation. The provision of home-grown timber also helps to offset our footprint overseas.

Kingfisher Bridge is situated just south of Ely, and less than 15 miles from Cambridge. It is a wildlife conservancy, founded as an initially private venture in 1995, and has employed pioneering conservation techniques on what was once a fen edge farm, turning it into a wetland wildlife site that displays a remarkable capacity for recovery in both fenland flora and fauna. The pristine calcareous ground water emanating

from the local Jurassic limestone is now used to supply some of the extensive wetland meadows, reedbeds and a large lake, adjacent to the older Cam Washes. Once the reedbeds had established the site quickly attracted bitterns to breed there successfully in 2007, the first successful Cambridgeshire bittern breeding since the late 1930s.

One reason for successful reedbed management has been their bunded construction allowing for each individual reedbed careful water level control. For the variety of wetland grazing different livestock are used. Nepalese-origin water buffalo, which are hardy to the cold, and Longhorn cattle and Konik ponies, as at Wicken Fen, are all involved. The water buffalo are the wetland specialists, they graze the reedbeds in succession on a five year cycle. The cattle are the classic grazers of the rank long grass washes, whilst the ponies short graze the meadows, where in summer waders such as lapwings breed. Because of the Reserve's compact 300 acres, fenced compartments assist management. A degree of electric fencing, which successfully deters most ground predators from entry, means that wader breeding success is more likely. Much of the whole area is closed to human access in the breeding season, minimising disturbance. The reserve hosts a rich bird community, with over 215 bird species listed, 92 of which have bred. Naturalist visitors are encouraged and records are kept of a many different wildlife taxa (flora and fauna), currently topped by over 744 species of moths! The 'bounce back' in biodiversity gain that has been demonstrated is amazingly encouraging.

The **Langdyke Countryside Trust** is a nature conservation charity dedicated to helping nature recover and people understand, appreciate and take action for nature. It is based in the John Clare Countryside between Stamford and Peterborough and currently owns or manages ten nature reserves. The Trust has five key objectives, to double membership; enhance its existing reserves for nature; expand its reserves; promote the John Clare Countryside; and engage and inspire its members.

The Trust continued to work towards the achievement of its objectives in 2022/3. In particular, they were able to extend the amount of land under our management, and to continue to improve the habitats on its reserves for nature.

The Trust's reserves continue to prosper. Whether it's the return of nightingale to Bainton Pits, the increasing number of man orchids at Swaddywell and the continued success of Operation Turtle Dove at Etton Maxey Pits, Langdyke's reserves are in great shape for nature. There was a new project at Swaddywell working with Butterfly Conservation to increase habitat for key butterfly species and two new scrapes were dug at Etton Maxey Pits, creating new habitats for wetland birds and insects.

Most notably the Trust were also able to increase the number and extent of our reserves, meaning more land is being managed for nature locally. An agreement to manage an additional meadow immediately west of Vergette Wood Meadow was entered into as was a long-term management agreement with Nene Park Trust to look after M'Ladys' Pond near Ailsworth. Efforts to buy two more pits south of the Maxey Cut, Christ's College Pits, were a big focus of work for the year too. A successful fundraising campaign was launched for the purchase and initial management of the reserve, the purchase of which is hoped to conclude in the next financial year.

Work to help nature recover across the wider countryside was continued, working with partners at Nene Park Trust, Natural England, the Wildlife Trusts and PECT as part of the John Clare Countryside project to help deliver nature projects across 25 parishes. The project has planted 1.6 km of new hedgerow, more than 400 native trees and established 280m^2 of wildflower meadow. The partnership team, led by one of Langdyke's members, also engaged over 800 people at more than 70 walks, work parties and talks. All of the parishes in the JCC area are actively engaged in the project and all have up to date parish nature recovery plans.

Efforts to engage Langdyke members focused on a regular series of events, including guided walks, online talks and two training sessions on how to identify local bird species. Regular work parties on Monday and Thursdays were held every week, and also a number of corporate work parties both on the Trust's reserves and in the wider countryside. The work of the Trust's artists in residence was of particular significance attracting a wider audience beyond the traditional membership base, including the appointment of the Trust's first poet in residence, who attended a number of events, reading from his own work, inspired by local nature. Membership continues to increase now with 215 household memberships.

The **Middle Level Commissioners** and **Internal Drainage Boards** manage the man-made drainage ditches and channels across the Middle Level fens; they provide a vital refuge and arterial network for nature in an intensively cultivated and increasingly developed fenland landscape. They prioritise the support of nature through their adapted management regimes to maximise biodiversity where flood risk allows. The Middle Level is some of the lowest land in the country, with some land lying 4m below sea level. Without the channels it could not drain naturally.

Most channel maintenance activities take place outside the main bird nesting season, and where channel capacity allows, a fringe of marginal vegetation is retained on at least one side of channels, or both sides of wider channels, to maximise the habitat available to a range of aquatic species. Pre-planted coir rolls are also now used in the place of, or in addition to, hard-engineered bank toe stabilisation to improve marginal

habitat and diversity. Species such as the threatened water vole, many birds, otters, fish and eels thrive in and around channels. IDBs also provide and maintain hundreds of barn owl boxes, bat boxes and artificial kingfisher holes.

A trial is underway on the Sixteen Foot channel to identify the best approach to establishing and maintaining a more diverse sward of flowers and grasses on channel banks following bank repairs, in order to improve support of pollinators across the region. The trial will compare the establishment success of a hydroseeded wild flower sward, to a hand-sown wild flower sward and hand-sown standard multi-species grass mix. With the commencement of the Middle Level bank raising scheme in late 2024 to early 2025, there will be opportunity to re-seed many hundreds of hectares of reprofiled bank, delivering significant benefits for a range of wildlife across the area.

Alongside this, plans are underway to re-survey and map areas that can be enhanced for nature with the aim of creating packages that can be made available for biodiversity net gain funding. This will also include some reed bed filtration ponds and SUDS features, which could be enhanced to provide more for biodiversity and recreation opportunities for local communities.

IDBs rarely own land but their infrastructure is key to achieving and maintaining favourable water levels for peat restoration and paludiculture initiatives. Several internal drainage boards have partnered a number of applications for funding to improve water level control in order to re-wet some peatland areas in the Middle Level with the aim of reducing carbon emissions from peat wastage. The Middle Level Commissioners have also applied for Defra funding to replace pinch-point structures in the main channel system that would be obstructive to conveying sufficient water to similar initiatives, particularly around the Great Fen area, in the future.

Approval has been given for the refurbishment of the eel pass at St Germans pumping station. The redevelopment will see improvements to the eel monitoring facilities that are essential in contributing towards a better understanding of the population status of the internationally threatened and protected species. Refurbishment will also provide the opportunity to monitor the population status and trends of the invasive, non-native Chinese mitten crab within the Middle Level catchment, which are becoming an increasing concern due to their burrowing activities and their competition with, and predation of native species including glass eels. The refurbishment aims to be complete in 2024.

The **National Farmers Union** represents the majority of farmers and growers in Cambridgeshire. The county is a powerhouse of British agricultural production while also being host to much biodiversity and natural beauty. It produces over £0.5bn

worth of agricultural production which is over 3.0% of England's total production and includes over 10% of the country's vegetable, horticultural and sugar beet production. The NFU has promoted sustainable intensification of agricultural production whereby farmers can deliver the dual goals of a safe and reliable food supply for the nation while also protecting and enhancing wildlife, biodiversity and landscapes.

Cambridgeshire's 2,000 or so farm holdings have been at the heart of nature conservation both through voluntary initiatives and through participation in government schemes. The NFU has led Industry-wide initiatives like Championing the Farmed Environment, Tried & Tested, the Greenhouse Gas Action Plan, the Voluntary Initiative and Open Farm Sunday which have played, and will continue to play, a role in promoting good environmental practice on farm and sharing that with the wider public.

The NFU has embraced the government's vision of providing 'public money for public goods' and has led the co-design process of the new ELM scheme with Defra adopting much of our proposed 'Sustainable Food and Farming Scheme' in their 'Sustainable Farming Incentive' scheme. The 2023 version is proving to be of interest to many farmers and we are continuing to press Defra to include options for lowland peat and ditch management in 2024 that will increase both the appeal and applicability to Cambridgeshire's farmers.

The decision to maintain but simplify Countryside Stewardship alongside Sustainable Food and Farming will create the bridge for higher environmental ambition and delivery alongside the further roll-out of the Landscape Recovery scheme. These later developments will make it possible for the burgeoning number of farm cluster groups in the county to deliver in a bigger and better joined up way.

The NFU is an active partner in the Combined Authority's work on peatland issues through the Climate Programme Board and the Fenland SOIL committee, spearheading farmer engagement to tackle the combined goals of peatland preservation and enhancement and reducing carbon emissions. Fenland SOIL has delivered farmer mapping and commissioned research into the economics of raising water tables and will use the outputs of both to encourage Defra to go further with the development of grant options that will enable farmers to pursue a mosaic approach to delivering environmental outcomes.

The NFU sees farmers as part of the solution to climate change and nature recovery and Cambridgeshire farmers are playing their part in locking up carbon through effective soil management, hedgerow and tree planting and ditch management, amongst other things. We have a stated and achievable ambition to reach net zero by 2040 and are engaged in the development of Cambridgeshire's Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

The **National Trust** is working on projects in Cambridgeshire to reverse nature's decline such as restoring peatland at Wicken Fen NNR and creating habitats on the wider Wicken Fen nature reserve which will support the recovery of species including turtle doves. The Wicken Vision is also a vital mechanism through the Trust will deliver for nature and climate. The Vision is a 100-year ambition, 25 years old next year, through which National Trust works in partnership to restore habitats on a landscape-scale, creating connectivity for wildlife and local communities from Wicken Fen to the edge of Cambridge.

Natural England is the government's adviser on the natural environment. The government's Environmental Improvement Plan was launched in 2023 and this set out rightly ambitious and important targets for the natural environment, set around an apex goal of halting the decline in biodiversity. Towards those goals, Natural England has been working closely with the Combined Authority and Cambridgeshire County Council to establish a Local Nature Recovery Strategy. In addition they have been supporting local authorities in particular as they prepare for the implementation of statutory Biodiversity Net Gain from January 2024.

In the Fens, support for the protection and restoration of peat has been provided through the Peat Grant Scheme, including substantial grant funding being awarded to the Fens East Peat Partnership. The Paludiculture Exploration Fund is supporting a number of projects to understand how agriculture can diversify in the Fens and elsewhere in ways that better protect peat soils. Support for measures to recover nature on a landscape scale continue to be provided, especially around the three National Nature Reserves that Natural England manage in the Fens, and along the internationally important Ouse Washes. On a more strategic level, work is ongoing with other partners to explore long-term solutions to climate change and integrated water needs through the Future Fens Integrated Adaptation Project.

Around Cambridge, funding is provided to support to the implementation of the Cambridge Nature Network. There is also a close working relationship with the Environment Agency, local authorities and water companies particularly to understand and address issues around water scarcity and how the needs for growth are reconciled with the need for nature recovery.

National Nature Reserves within John Clare Country to the West of Peterborough are managed by Natural England, where they are working closely with local partners and land managers to bring forward plans for nature recovery across this valuable local landscape.

Peterborough Environment City Trust (PECT) has been working for the past 12 months to enhance and protect green spaces in and around Peterborough city. Some of the initiatives include the Forest for Peterborough project, which has a goal of planting more than 230,000 trees by 2030, and the Pollinating Peterborough campaign, which promotes the planting of flowers and the creation of habitats for bees and other pollinators.

PECT has been delivering education and outreach programmes to children and adults, such as the Junior Forester Award, which educates students about the value of trees and forests. At community events PECT has been working with children to highlight the importance of pollinators by making pollinator stations and informs the public about the benefits of nature, in addition to providing advice to residents, local councillors and landowners about local nature restoration.

As one of the Peterborough Major Charities of the year, PECT has been supporting various walks around some of the iconic landscape and locations around Peterborough. PECT has also been providing expertise and support to communities across the area, including some of the nature recover groups in John Clare Countryside.

This year marks the 30th anniversary of PECT, and to celebrate this milestone the organisation has been offering thirty communities the chance to receive a grant to support their environmental and sustainable activities.

The **Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)** is a significant nature conservation landowner in Cambridgeshire and manages 4,200ha of land for nature in the county, including substantial reserves at the Ouse Washes and Nene Washes, Fen Drayton Lakes, an expanding area at Ouse Fen (the Hanson/RSPB Wetland Project) and mixed wetland and woodland at Fowlmere. The former four reserves sit at the core of the Natural Cambridgeshire Connected Fens priority landscape, covering much of the Cambridgeshire Fens, and form the backbone of RSPB Fens Priority Landscape work up to 2030.

This year the RSPB report continued progress in their work with land managers. They've maintained their facilitation support to the Ely Nature Friendly Farming Zone cluster, with a focus being on renewing memberships to align with the Farm Wildlife six key elements. The group meets to visit member farms and discuss emerging issues / opportunities, and has had a presence at regional events and Open Farm Sunday, helping to show the great work that the farmers are doing. Currently the cluster group is involved in an externally funded participatory mapping project to create a future vision for the group, highlighting where habitat creation/management opportunities might arise and where additional farms could be encouraged to join.

Work within 'Operation Turtle Dove' continues to support land managers in Cambridgeshire who want to provide supplementary feed and / or habitat enhancement for these critically endangered farmland birds. The RSPB team in Cambridgeshire now engage with 38 stakeholders and have a team of volunteers providing co-ordination support, carrying out surveys, and providing habitat creation support through the Small Plots Project (creating small-scale foraging plots for turtle doves).

The Volunteer Monitoring of Farm Wildlife pilot project, now in its third year in Cambridgeshire, has to date supported upwards of 50 volunteers to carry out a multitude of wildlife surveys (birds, bumblebees, pollinators and butterflies) across 40 farms, and is supported by Volunteer Coordinators. The data gathered show farmers the nature they have on their farms and encourages them to put in place additional measures to enhance it. For 2024 the focus will be to provide bird surveys to finalise the methodology and data capture and offer these to new farms in target areas of the county. There are plans to expand on the success of this model in future years.

The RSPB helped co-ordinate a bid to Defra for a Landscape Recovery Scheme (the highest level new agricultural support scheme) with a number of landowners and conservation partners around the Ouse Washes and the River Wissey. If successful, this would proceed into a two year development phase and could provide a game-changing long term positive change for nature in this area.

On the RSPB reserves at Fowlmere, the first of 3-4 winters of excavator works have begun, including improving ditches and meres and installing a new sluice; the aim is to make Fowlmere more resilient to climate change, and improve habitats for fish and water voles. At the Nene Washes cranes continue to do well with 3 pairs fledging 5 chicks and two corncrake territories. However, breeding wader numbers continue to decline, with a worrying year for black-tailed godwit, for which the site holds the majority of UK breeding pairs.

Numbers of breeding waders at the Ouse Washes 'life raft' sites continue to do well, partially offsetting continued decline on the main site – hampered this year by a very late season due to high winter and early spring floods. At Ouse Fen we had 13 booming bittern males this year along with the first ever confirmed UK breeding attempt by glossy ibis. Cattle egrets continue to breed, along with possible little crake. Avian influenza severely impacted some birds however, particularly the black-headed gull and common tern colonies. Fen Drayton Lakes continue to provide a hot spot for breeding turtle doves with three territories.

The **University of Cambridge** and its 31 **Colleges** have been working collaboratively to deliver for nature across the city and have a vision to deliver a significant and measurable improvement in the biodiversity of the University of Cambridge estate, and the Greater Cambridge Area more generally, in a manner that educates and inspires an appreciation of the natural environment, and that encourages interventions, research and innovation to enhance and protect biodiversity for future generations.

Following a biodiversity baseline assessment[12] of the University estate, the University's Ecological Advisory Panel[13], chaired by the Executive Director of the Cambridge Conservation Initiative[14], worked to publish the University's first Biodiversity Action Plan[15], a 10-year vision for nature. The Cambridge Colleges' Biodiversity Baseline[16] then reviewed what wildlife was present across the city collegiate estate and how these land holdings are managed with wildlife in mind. The Cambridge Colleges have developed a set of guiding principles to support Colleges in further enhancing their grounds for wildlife and over two thirds of the Colleges have, or are developing their own action plans.

This information has informed how the University and Colleges deliver for wildlife across Cambridge, working with citywide partners to deliver on a landscape scale. In addition to practical changes in management, a partnership with experts from The Wildlife Trust BCN and Cambridge City Council is enabling the upskilling of grounds teams through bespoke training courses for University and College staff.

Over 2,000m^2 of wildflowers have been planted across the University estate; in addition, high profile demonstration projects such as the Kings College meadow, have engaged local communities alongside delivering for biodiversity. Over 60 trees were planted to commemorate the Queen's Jubilees and networks of ponds have been restored. To better deliver for wildlife we recognise the importance of working with our students, staff and wider community to change the perception of Cambridge as the city of manicured lawns to a biodiverse city landscape for its residents.

Wildlife Trust BCN continues to take a landscape approach to nature conservation work and is actively involved in all six priority landscapes. The Trust's approach includes managing and acquiring nature reserves, providing land advice to farmers, landowners and businesses, engaging with communities through family events,

12. https://www.environment.admin.cam.ac.uk/files/biodiversity_summary_baseline14112019_report_0.pdf
13. https://www.environment.admin.cam.ac.uk/ESSC/ecological-advisory-panel-terms-reference
14. https://www.cambridgeconservation.org/
15. https://www.environment.admin.cam.ac.uk/files/uoc_biodiversityactionplan.pdf
16. https://www.environment.admin.cam.ac.uk/sites/www.environment.admin.cam.ac.uk/files/copy_of_college_biodiversity_baseline_summary_report_-_october_2022-compressed.pdf

education activities and supporting local communities and individuals to take action for wildlife on their own patch. A nature recovery network requires that the best core nature sites that support many of our iconic and rarest or declining species continue to be well-managed. The Wildlife Trust therefore continues to invest in the management of our nature reserves including restoration of habitats where required.

The acquisition of Speechley's Farm at the Great Fen will allow the Wildlife Trust and Natural England to raise water levels in the sub-catchment to the west of Woodwalton Fen, with the Wildlife Trust creating a variety of new wetland habitats. The visitor hub at New Decoy Farm has been designed and is awaiting planning permission with construction planned to start in 2024.

In the Cambridge Nature Network, the Wildlife Trust has purchased Fleam Dyke and a strip of the adjacent arable land, with the generous support of members, donors, local people, Cambridge Past Present & Future and the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Fund for Nature. The plan is to create species-rich grassland on the arable land to create a more sustainable grazing unit with Fleam Dyke managed as part of the wider landscape. Significant restoration work will be required on Fleam Dyke over the coming decade. Elsewhere, the Wildlife Trust has worked with Cheveley Farms (Babraham) to restore a section of the River Granta upstream of Babraham.

The Wildlife Trust has prepared an interim Nature Network report for Fenland District Council, following on from the similar report for East Cambridgeshire District Council reported last year. The Wildlife Trust is now working with Huntingdonshire District Council to prepare an interim Nature Network report for Huntingdonshire. All these reports will inform the statutory Local Nature Recovery Strategy as well as support local action by the council, landowners, businesses and communities.

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Natural Cambridgeshire
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