



The State of Nature in Cambridgeshire

A Report of the Partnership

NOVEMBER 2021



1. Introduction

The following are extracts from the [Cambridgeshire Green Infrastructure Strategy \(2011\)](#):

“Cambridgeshire is a predominantly farmed landscape, with some threequarters of the county devoted to the production of food, fuel and fibre. There is a wide range of landscapes and habitats, including some of national and international importance (for example, the Ouse and Nene Washes). There are flat fens in the north and east, undulating clay lands in the west and chalk hills in the south. Manmade waterways and three distinct river valleys – the Nene, Cam and Great Ouse – flow across a largely open agricultural landscape with Holme Fen in Huntingdonshire as the UK’s lowest lying point.

Cambridgeshire contains a rich biodiversity resource and potential. However, the county has suffered declines in a number of its species and habitats for many different reasons, most notably increased development pressure and agricultural intensification. Overall, Cambridgeshire has a smaller proportion of natural habitats than most counties in Britain. Many species have already been lost, and some of those that remain are isolated and declining.

The four objectives are:

- 1. Reverse the decline in biodiversity** – Conserving and enhancing biodiversity and geo-diversity, through the protection and enhancement of habitats and wildlife sites and linkage of key habitats.
- 2. Mitigate and adapt to climate change** – Manage the impacts of climate change through developing initiatives that reduce greenhouse gas emissions and that actively take carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere; promote access to green routes that reduce the need for travel by car; and create Green Infrastructure that supports our adaptation to a changing weather pattern through, for example, flood control.
- 3. Promote sustainable growth and economic development** – Green Infrastructure plays a key role in place-making, ensuring Cambridgeshire remains a place that people want to live and invest in. It can help attract and keep high quality workers and attract visitors, as well as contributing to the character of our settlements and countryside to create attractive and distinctive new places.
- 4. Support healthy living and well-being** – Green Infrastructure can support healthy and active lifestyles, support good mental health, inspire learning, and create a sense of community.”

2. What has changed since 2011?

- 1. Reverse the decline in biodiversity** – Central and local government, and the general public, have become much more aware of the importance of biodiversity. In future subsidies to farmers will be paid to reward them for public good, and developers will be required to enhance biodiversity by at least 10%. Natural Cambridgeshire's vision to double nature has been widely supported by local authorities across the county and endorsed by the Combined Authority and the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Independent Climate Commission, and even taken up by those working on the development of the Oxford-Cambridge arc.
- 2. Mitigate and adapt to climate change** – There is now wide awareness of the urgent need to address the challenge of climate change. The various local authorities in the County have their own strategies, and the Combined Authority has set up an independent commission to advise it. There is growing recognition that helping nature has an important role. The County faces the significant challenges of being in the driest part of the country with limited water resources. Soil degradation, habitat fragmentation, low tree and grassland cover, climate change, increasing flood risk all put our natural and historic environment at risk. There is a particular need to secure a sustainable future for our Fens environment with its peat soils.
- 3. Promote sustainable growth and economic development** – There is increasing recognition from business and employers that access to high quality green space is important for the well-being and productivity of workers and their ability to attract and retain them. A survey by the business organisation Cambridge Ahead found that access to nature was one of the top priorities for young professionals.
- 4. Support healthy living and well-being** – The pandemic has highlighted the importance for physical and mental health of being able to get out into nature, and that Cambridgeshire does not have a large amount of accessible greenspace compared to other counties. The increase in the number of visitors to green space that was caused by the pandemic has led to increased wear and in some cases the carrying capacity of nature sites being exceeded.

3. What Natural Cambridgeshire is doing

Natural Cambridgeshire is an umbrella organisation working with the County's local authorities and its other partners to double the area of our rich wildlife habitats and green-space from 8.5% to 17%, while paying particular attention to:

- access to green-space for communities
- quality of life and public health
- air quality
- integrated water management considering water resources, water quality and resilience to flooding and climate change
- climate change.

Achieving this requires focusing efforts to enhance existing, and create new, large areas of rich wildlife habitat and more accessible green space, and ensure these are better connected, by:

- Securing access to high quality natural green spaces within 300m of everyone's home
- Enlarging two areas of existing natural fen (Great Fen and Wicken Fen Vision)
- Increasing tree cover and the network of woodlands, hedgerows, within and around our towns and cities, and on the clay lands of South Cambridgeshire, Huntingdonshire and west of Peterborough
- Expanding the flower-rich grasslands on the limestone plateau west of Peterborough, and on the chalk downs at the southern fringes of Cambridge
- Enhancing and extending the meadows of the Nene, Great Ouse and Cam river valleys
- Extending wetlands either side of the Ouse and Nene Washes
- Creating natural habitats by restoring mineral workings, including the gravel workings in the Fens
- Ensuring that at least 90% of our richest wildlife areas are in good ecological condition

- Ensuring new housing and work place developments incorporate high quality green and blue infrastructure providing multiple benefits for people and the environment
- Encouraging existing property owners to incorporate wildlife friendly features in their gardens, buildings and land.

All this needs greater community engagement and working with environmental organisations, farmers and local authorities to ensure that plans and actions are informed by the best available knowledge. Natural Cambridgeshire recognises that there is a requirement to audit where investment in biodiversity is needed and to measure and record the benefits. Successful projects will need to be publicised locally to demonstrate success and build trust. The Biodiversity Net Gain requirement is a good opportunity, but it must be strategic.

In January 2021, Natural Cambridgeshire became a charitable incorporated organisation in its own right, and continues to facilitate dialogue and discussion, and information sharing and knowledge exchange, between and across organisations and geographical administrations within the county, in order to further the 'Doubling Nature' vision.

Taking a landscape scale approach to nature recovery, six priority landscapes have been identified, around which partnerships are actively being built and strengthened in order to maximise opportunities to attract resource and accelerate nature recovery. The six priority landscapes are John Clare Countryside; the Nene Valley; the Connected Fens; the Great Ouse Valley; the West Cambridgeshire Hundreds and the Cambridge Nature Network. For each landscape there is a pipeline of projects, and the partnership is seeking resource to build capacity to develop that pipeline and to scope, scale up, and cost projects further.

Recognising the huge role that communities have to play in nature recovery, in September 2021 a Local Nature Recovery Toolkit was launched, with a view to encouraging communities to take greater ownership of their parks and green spaces, including developing their own local nature recovery plans, and promoting the value and benefits of volunteering.

The Partnership has continued to convene quarterly Partnership Forum events, attracting up to 80 people to each. They generally include six to eight speakers, cover matters of both policy and local practice, and include updates on Natural Cambridgeshire and partner news.

Good practice in relation to development and building healthy communities remains a principal priority, which is addressed through the Developing with Nature working group which meets three times a year, and is convened by partners, Urban and Civic.

A Measurement and Evaluation Working Group meets regularly to actively progress data mapping, monitoring and reporting requirements.

With an increasingly complex policy landscape, including farming reform and the introduction of biodiversity net gain, and with Royal Assent of the Environment Bill, Natural Cambridgeshire continues to convene with local authorities, and other key stakeholders, in order that we can navigate these uncharted waters together and formulate the best solutions for our county.

4. What some of our partners are doing

The following section includes reports directly from our partners, including local authorities, governmental and non-governmental agencies.

4.1 Reports from Local Authorities

Cambridge City Council have designated 12, and manage 10, Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) in and around the City. We have been delivering habitat enhancement and creation schemes on these and other open spaces through implementation of our 2006 Nature Conservation Strategy. Following a Full Council Biodiversity Emergency pledge in 2019 a revised draft Biodiversity Strategy has been consulted on in 2021 and is scheduled for adoption in January 2022. The strategy endorses the recently launched Cambridge Nature Network of core City habitats and pledges to further enhance these sites. It also seeks to mainstream and embed biodiversity considerations across all services and projects and work with our communities to provide space for nature in all neighbourhoods.

To inform our revised Biodiversity Strategy we have commissioned baseline audits of all our LNRs, commons and larger natural green spaces. This will allow us to plan for, deliver and monitor measurable biodiversity net gain across our estate.

The council is committed to enhancing our riverside LNRs as part of the wider nature network. In 2020 we consulted on plans to extend the existing Logan's Meadow LNR designation to incorporate former sports pitches. Working in partnership with Cambridge Past Present & Future and the BCN Wildlife Trust we have been successful in securing Green Recovery Funding to implement a first phase of these works and a small wetland creation scheme on the nearby Stourbridge Common. We have also worked in partnership with the Environment Agency to create two natural bypass channels around weirs on the River Cam.

In 2020 we instigated the Greater Cambridge Chalk Stream project, working with Cambridge Water, The Wildlife Trust and the Wild Trout Trust we commissioned a baseline survey of our key chalk streams and to date have implemented three identified projects, on Coldham's Brook, Cherry Hinton Brook and Vicars Brook.

Through the Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service with South Cambridgeshire District Council, we have consulted on a new shared Biodiversity Supplementary Planning Document to steer all new developments to achieving measurable biodiversity net gain.

We are implementing the Cambridge Canopy Project to raise canopy cover from 17% to 19%, which will require 800,000 m² of new tree cover on public and private land.

We work with On the Verge Cambridge volunteers to deliver new meadows and long grass areas on parks and road verges and the Action for Swift group to provide successful swift box schemes on our housing stock.



Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority with a directly elected Mayor, was established in 2017 with powers and funding established through the Devolution Deal with government (focused on growth, transport and skills). The Authority endorsed the Doubling Nature ambition at the launch event by Natural Cambridgeshire in 2019, and the Authority has taken an active role within the operation of Natural Cambridgeshire. It also enhanced its capacity and linkages to the DEFRA group by co-sponsoring a secondment (to end of March 2021) of an officer from the Environment Agency. This included providing internal training on the forthcoming requirements around net biodiversity gain in the Environment Bill.

The Mayor Nik Johnson has established a champion role on Climate and the Environment. Cllr. Bridget Smith has that role. In October 2021 the Authority endorsed a set of environmental principles to inform the Government's spatial framework for the OxCam Arc. Those principles reinforce the Doubling Nature ambition and contain a proposal to achieve 20% Biodiversity Net Gain from new development. In November, the Board will consider a new 'sustainable growth' ambition statement.

As the Local Transport Authority it launched a consultation on the key vision for a refreshed Local Transport and Connectivity Plan in November 2021. It identifies a key issue as: "Protecting and making better our green spaces and improving nature can both be supported with a well-planned and good quality transport network" and asks for views on a vision that includes: "it must put improved public health at its core, it must help create a fairer society, it must respond to climate change targets, it must protect our environment and clean up our air, and it must be the backbone of sustainable economic growth in which everyone can prosper". A range of transport infrastructure projects are underway or have been delivered that support active travel and public transport, that will reduce air pollution (benefiting the environment overall and indirectly nature).

The Authority commissioned the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Independent Commission on Climate to undertake an evidence-based review of issues facing the area and to make recommendations on mitigating and adapting to a changing climate. The Commission issued its initial full report in October 2021, which makes specific recommendations on nature-based solutions and green investment that aligns with Natural Cambridgeshire's vision. The Authority has established a Climate Working Group to develop a multi-partner action plan by February 2022, and is considering resourcing specific measures through its annual budget refresh.

Cambridgeshire County Council have designated 8 and directly manage 7 Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) around the County, which enhance local biodiversity and provide access to green space for local communities. Lockdown has seen a dramatic increase in the numbers of people using these places, as they serve as places, for local people to 'escape' too. This has led to a lot more 'wear and tear' and anti-social behaviour, and we will be carrying out repairs and habitat enhancements over the coming winter.

Our Climate Change and Environment Strategy includes a number of biodiversity targets. To help us achieve these targets we are developing the following projects:

- Writing a tree and woodland strategy covering all County Council assets.
- Preparing a biodiversity audit as a baseline for measuring progress towards our doubling nature ambition. This will also help with the development of a nature recovery network and identify where contributions toward biodiversity net gain are possible.
- We continue to be the host organisation for the Future Parks Project, which is now moving into the transition phase aiming to deliver a sustainable future for our parks and green spaces.

- We have successfully launched our new and improved cutting regime for wildflower road verges across the highways network. This involves a 'cut and collect' trial for our more botanically important Sites of Special Scientific Interest and County Wildlife sites.
- We are the lead organisation for the Roman Road Conservation Enhancement Scheme, ensuring this site is appropriately managed as a Site of Special Scientific Interest, Scheduled Monument and public right of way. We receive a grant from Natural England and work very closely with the Friends of Roman Road. The scheme comes to an end of 2021 and so we are now working with Natural England to seek funding for a landscape scheme that will also include Fleam Dyke SSSI and Devils Dyke SSSI.
- In the Alconbury Natural Flood Management project we aim for delivery of biodiversity net gain as an additional benefit in wider flood risk management projects, as in the Abbotsley Water Meadow Project.
- We continue to work with a range of partners to increase the future resilience of an important chalk stream south of Cambridge and deliver solutions which can provide benefit across a range of areas including water resources, water quality, flooding and habitat potential.

Through an internal restructuring we have created a Historic and Natural Environment Service that has allowed us to increase resource and capacity in the Biodiversity and Greenspaces Team. This will help with delivery of the Climate Change and Environment biodiversity targets.

East Cambridgeshire District Council has very limited land ownership, and therefore has limited ability to directly boost the natural environment. However, where it does manage land, it has recently adjusted (and continues to adjust) its management regime to encourage greater biodiversity, wildflowers and 'room for bees'.

Over the past two years, following a climate emergency declaration, the Council has put in place two new policy documents which should boost the local natural environment:

- First, it has adopted a new Natural Environment Supplementary Planning Document, a wide-ranging policy document to enable new development to respond positively to biodiversity opportunities.
- Second, in June 2020 (and updated in June 2021), a new 'Environment Plan', which tackles both climate change and natural environment

issues. This Plan establishes a series of targets, and the June 2021 refresh includes several tree-planting related initiatives and a commitment to prepare an East Cambridgeshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy (for feeding into a county-based Nature Recovery Strategy).

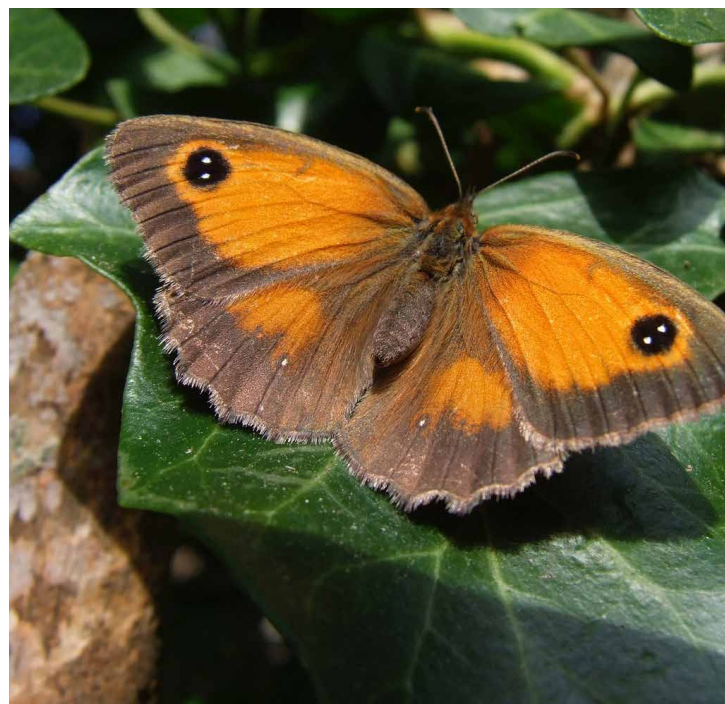
Huntingdonshire District Council plays a very active role in managing woodland and open spaces in the district. Priory Park in St Neots, Hinchingsbrooke Country Park in Huntingdon and Paxton Pits Nature Reserve at Little Paxton, all retained their Green Flag Awards in 2021 acknowledging well managed parks and open green spaces. During winter 2020/21 HDC planted around 1500 new trees at Hinchingsbrooke Country Park and Priory Park, St Neots to both enhance the tree canopy and support nature.

Pictorial meadow planting has proven popular with residents and bees alike with Priory Park and Hinchingsbrooke Country Park being recognised as havens for bees and other pollinators by the 2020 Bees Needs Awards.

2020 saw the adoption of both the Healthy Open Spaces Strategy and an updated Tree Strategy. These work in tandem to promote the environmental benefits arising from well managed trees and woodland areas, provide diverse habitats for plants and wildlife and help maximise the health benefits for residents and visitors of the district's parks and open spaces.

Berman Park in St Ives opened in April 2021. Situated just north of the River Great Ouse, this provides a home for nature and connects to existing HDC managed woodland providing a green corridor for local wildlife and, of course, opportunities for residents to relax and explore the natural environment.

Former sand and gravel workings have given Huntingdonshire a legacy of a large network of lakes many of which now provide local nature reserves. The 75ha Paxton Pits local nature reserve was established in 1985; expansion to 285 hectares is now underway with extra lakes, islands and wildflower rich grassland. The Dragonfly Society named Paxton Pits a Dragonfly Hotspot after 26 species of Dragonfly and Damselfly, nearly half of all species known in the UK, were recorded in Dragonfly Week 2020.



To capitalise on current public interest in engaging with green space an app called GoJauntly has been launched aiming to get people actively involved in nature. This includes a 'Nature Notes' feature which encourages users to engage with and appreciate their surroundings.

The Great Fen Masterplan 2010 established a landscape scale project to transform over 3,000 hectares of land into a highly biodiverse fenland landscape. A partnership between Huntingdonshire District Council, the Environment Agency, Natural England, Middle Level Commissioners and the Wildlife Trust, this is one of the largest wetland restoration projects in Europe. Connecting Holme Fen and Woodwalton Fen National Nature Reserves, the project combines wetland habitat restoration with promotion of public access to the natural environment. Its many benefits include supporting fen plants found almost nowhere else in the UK, reducing carbon emissions by rewetting the peat soils and providing a mosaic of wetland habitats supporting dragonflies, butterflies and amphibians.

Peterborough City Council's (PCC) future plans are defined within its Trees and Woodland Strategy and Biodiversity Strategy, both of which have been recently updated and adopted at Full Council.

50,000 Specimen Trees and 200+ hectares of woodland are now strategically managed across the city, with over 9,000 trees planted in the last five years. At its Cabinet meeting in November 2021, a target of planting around 10,000 trees pa, for 14 years, was agreed.

A 10-year licence agreement has been signed with Froglife to take an active lead role in managing and promoting the use of the Boardwalks LNR, which has included securing Heritage Lottery Funds to deliver their 'Dragonfinder' project.

Funding has been secured from various sources including the Biodiversity Partnership and POIS to carry out pond/ habitat restoration works in a number of locations.

The SSSI Shelterbelt woodland owned by PCC has been enhanced for newts and new ponds created following successful partnership working during the Fletton Parkway widening scheme with Natural England, PCC Highways and Natural Environment Teams and Froglife working together.

A selection of green spaces are now being managed in a way that promotes biodiversity, which involves reduced mowing frequencies, allowing plants to flower and set seed, and providing habitats for invertebrates, birds and other animals.

Continued support has been given for the long-standing Peterborough Barn Owl Recovery Programme, which is recognised as one of the most successful of these

programmes in the UK, and to monitoring and habitat management for the rare four-spotted moth in Peterborough. This has resulted in additional habitat being created to ensure the moth's long-term protection and enhancement as part of a Network Rail project.



The Council has worked with the Environment Agency and River Nene Regional Park to help inform key strategic planning documents including the city centre plan.

Approximately 83% of local wildlife sites across Peterborough are in positive management, which places the city in the top 10 performing local authorities in England as published by DEFRA on the National Indicator Target for Biodiversity (SDL 160).

Peterborough's protected verge network continues to be managed in a positive manner for wildlife, including extensions to four sections of road verges recommended in the Biodiversity Strategy.

South Cambridgeshire District Council set out its approach to 'doubling nature' in a strategy adopted in February 2021. On its own estate, almost all of its 36 hectares of land are associated with its own housing stock, on which trees are being mapped and a proactive programme is in place to maintain their good health. Suitable locations for planting new trees and establishing wildflower strips have been identified, after having introduced a new step for this purpose into its regular estate inspections, which are attended by tenant representatives, parish councils and other interested parties. The Council also maintains approximately 275 km of streams and ditches and manages these in ways which maintain and enhance biodiversity.

Through its shared planning service with Cambridge City Council, the Council is about to adopt a new Biodiversity Spatial Planning Document (SPD) which will signpost users to existing biodiversity-relevant policies and legislation and amplify important approaches (such as Biodiversity Net Gain) for development schemes. The SPD will also highlight a swathe of non-binding biodiversity improvements that schemes can adopt and encourage developers to incorporate biodiversity from the early planning stages of their schemes, not as after thoughts or hastily cobbled together add-ons.

This SPD will help set the tone for the direction of new biodiversity policies emerging from the development of the new Greater Cambridge Local Plan, still a couple of years away. Biodiversity and Green Spaces was one of four main themes in the initial consultation, and the Call for Sites included a call for green sites, appealing for suggestions of land to grow and enhance our green space network. A comprehensive Green Infrastructure Opportunity Mapping Baseline Report was published in November as part of the evidence base for the preferred strategic spatial options.

Beyond policy documents, Greater Cambridge Shared Planning maintains an experienced team of specialist officers who are responsible for ensuring that biodiversity and green infrastructure is at the heart of the planning process, a need, and not a nice-to-have. These officers bring key knowledge from the disciplines of ecology, arboriculture and landscape architecture, to ensure that development schemes, large or small are appraised not just for their economic or logistical practicalities, but for their impacts on landscapes, habitats and the component species that make their homes in the natural environments of our area.

The Council is also using its wider influence through partnerships to good effect. It is leading the call for the Oxford Cambridge Arc to protect, restore, enhance and create new space for nature, and stand as an exemplar for environmentally sustainable development. At local level it supports parish councils and community groups to develop new areas for nature with grants from an annual Zero Carbon Communities scheme.

4.2 Reports from DEFRA's three bodies:

The **Environment Agency** is working to help people and wildlife adapt to climate change and reduce its impacts, including flooding, drought, sea level rise and coastal erosion. Climate risks cut across all of our activities. We work closely with a wide range of local partners and organisations including: the Mayoral Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority, its Independent Commission on Climate and its membership of the Mayoral Climate Working Group; local planning authorities; Natural Cambridgeshire; and academic institutions.

We provide evidence and advice to business, industry, developers and others on how to use our information and resources to adapt to climate change. We are also working to uphold the natural capital and ecosystem services approach embodied in the government's 25 Year Environment Plan to help secure more private sector investment for nature.

Natural England's statutory purpose is to ensure that the natural environment is conserved, enhanced, and managed for the benefit of present and future generations, thereby contributing to sustainable development. Its priorities for 2020 to 2025 are to support our mission and the ambitions of the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan, including a well-managed Nature Recovery Network which creates and protects resilient ecosystems rich in wildlife and natural beauty, enjoyed by people and widely benefiting society; people connected to the natural environment for their own and society's wellbeing, enjoyment and prosperity; nature-based solutions contributing fully to tackling the climate change challenge and wider environmental hazards and threats; and improvements in the natural capital that drives sustainable economic growth, healthy food systems and prospering communities.

The **Forestry Commission**, as the Government's advisors on Forestry matters, welcome any proactive plans to increase tree cover, helping to deliver the Government's strategy for reducing carbon and the 25 Year Environment Plan. Cambridgeshire has some significant ancient woodlands, such as the West Cambridgeshire Hundreds, and others around Huntingdonshire such as Monks Wood. Not just carbon stores, these habitats are seed banks for biodiversity and a natural capital resource. There are opportunities to link up woodlands and establish new woodland buffers to enlarge the existing woodland, protecting and enabling resilience to climate change.

In the right place trees reduce flooding, soil erosion and agricultural run-off. With Cambridgeshire starting from a very low tree base (3.3% landcover, the lowest in the East and East Midlands), a target to double woodland cover would be beneficial for people and wildlife as well as carbon sequestration. There are various case studies, such as of a [farm in Cambridgeshire](#). There are significant grants and support available for creating woodland through the [England Woodland Creation Offer](#), and Forestry England, the division that manages publicly owned forests, also has a [creation offer](#). Staff are available to help.

4.3 Reports from Non-Governmental Organisations:

Cambridge Past, Present & Future (CPPF) is the local charity that cares about the heritage of greater Cambridge and its green landscapes. 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 natural 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.

In the past year CPPF has created a new pond at Wandlebury and purchased 27 acres of land to expand the park for the benefit of nature and people. At Coton Countryside Reserve the charity has devised a project that would convert farmland into 13 acres of new wetland habitat at the same time as reducing pollution in the Bin Brook. It is also creating 3.5 acres of new woodland, restoring a meadow and creating new public greenspace at the Reserve. CPPF is also in the process of restoring the ecological value of Barnwell Meadows, a City Wildlife Site.

CPPF recognises that the challenge of restoring nature can only be sustained through a collective effort and has been working with other like-minded organisations and landowners on a long-term initiative to create a Cambridge Nature Network. The Nature Network has been granted Green Recovery Funding from government to deliver a series of projects that will increase nature and public benefit. This work is underway and is being co-ordinated by CPPF.

CoFarm Foundation is a new Cambridge-based charity working to develop a new model of community based agroecological farming - or 'co-farming'. The charity has, since 2019, been piloting the CoFarm model to optimise outcomes for biodiversity; health and wellbeing; community cohesion and local economic inclusion by placing sustainable food and farming at the centre of communities. The 7 acre pilot farm is in Abbey ward, Cambridge, where over 350 volunteers have co-designed and co-created their own farm under the supervision of experienced horticulturists and ecologists. Since June 2020 the farm's market garden has produced over



11.6 tonnes of organically grown food worth over £52,000 and donated all of it to 9 community food hubs across the city in support of people experiencing food insecurity. CoFarm and Natural Cambridgeshire are committed to working together to identify at least one site in each of the six priority landscapes across Cambridgeshire and work with each community to co-create their own community farms.

The **Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group** (FWAG) East has been working with Cambridgeshire farmers for over 50 years, advising them on biodiversity and helping to access grants to improve habitat on the farm. This is still the principal focus of FWAG's work, and our expertise lies in putting forward applications for agri-environment schemes which maximise benefits for biodiversity while remaining within the farmer's ability to deliver and which suit the farm business. We also undertake work with partners who wish to reach farmers in certain areas or with particular features on their farm, acting as the trusted adviser to deliver projects for the Environment Agency, Natural England, the Wildlife Trust, county councils, supermarkets, water companies and a range of other organisations.

As well as working with individual farmers, we have been co-ordinating or facilitating farmer groups, and currently run them in two of the Natural Cambridgeshire priority landscapes: the Great Ouse Valley (34 farmers, including 20 with riverside land), and the West Cambridgeshire Hundreds (29 farmers). The Ouse Valley group is helping to deliver the Wet Meadows and Wet Woodlands project, and the West Cambridgeshire Hundreds was built around the ancient woodlands in the west of the county. This latter group is now also involved with Cambridge University in a project on sustainable agriculture, encouraging farmers to undertake regenerative farming techniques which sequester carbon and cut down on chemical inputs. At least two other Cambridgeshire farmer clusters are currently being considered for water catchment projects.

FWAG East has been responsible for delivering Woodland Trust and Tree Council projects, enabling farmers to access grant funding for planting trees and hedgerows. They are also helping to deliver Natural England's District Level licensing scheme and have been responsible for creating or restoring nearly 80 ponds across the county in the last 2 years, and advising on the management of 80 more. We also run training events for farmers, ranging from how to establish and manage agri-environment scheme measures to the re-introduction of beavers to looking on-farm at new crops and farming techniques which help to combat climate change.

The **Food, Farming and Countryside Commission** is developing a Land Use Framework for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough with Natural Cambridgeshire, along with many other local bodies. One of two pilots in England, this action research collaboration aims to help landowners, farmers and organisations make better decisions about land use. A Cambridgeshire Land Use Framework would help all partners take a more strategic, joined up and multifunctional approach to optimise the production of food, nature restoration and meeting net zero targets, whilst also addressing housing needs, jobs, water and infrastructure provision.



The **Langdyke Countryside Trust** is a charity dedicated to the preservation and enhancement of the natural and built heritage in the countryside between Peterborough and Stamford. It manages seven nature reserves and has over 210 household members and a core team of nearly 70 active volunteers.

In early 2021 the Trust adopted a new strategy for its future growth, committing to helping with Natural Cambridgeshire's overall Doubling Nature agenda, by significantly increasing its own land-holdings, doubling its membership and working with its partners to take forward the vision for nature recovery across John Clare Countryside.

These plans took a significant step forward with the award of a major grant through the Green Recovery Challenge Fund, which funded the appointment of a dedicated project team. This will allow the Trust and its partners to accelerate the development of parish nature recovery plans across each of the 16 parishes in the area, with a series of community planting days taking place across spring and autumn 2021. The funding will also help take forward discussions with major local landowners to put in place nature recovery plans across the area. As part of the wider partnership, the Trust has helped developed five individual plans for habitat restoration, including focusing on recreating some of John Clare's lost landscapes.

Major successes for nature this year, include the continued success of the supplementary feeding programme for turtle doves, with this species continuing to prosper locally; the discovery of a small yellow underwing moth at our Vergette Wood Meadow reserve, and the immediate colonisation of a new sand martin nest box bank.

The Trust has recently renewed its lease on land at Bainton Heath, working closely with National Grid and maintains its partnerships with both Highways England and Tarmac, to manage land for nature with them. It is also hoping to expand its land holdings in the near future, with two potential sites under discussion. Just as importantly, the Trust continues to broaden its membership base, reflecting the increasing awareness of the importance of nature for local people.

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 so much biodiversity and natural beauty. The county 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. At the height of DEFRA's agri-environment schemes over 70% of the farmed land area was in the Entry and Higher Level schemes, and much more land was managed for nature on a voluntary basis.

Industry-led initiatives like the Campaign for the Farmed Environment, Tried & Tested, the Greenhouse Gas Action Plan, the Voluntary Initiative and Open Farm Sunday 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 the Sustainable Farming Incentive. We expect to see further suggestions taken up in the local nature recovery and landscape recovery components as well. Our proposals will deliver for nature by targeting soil quality, biodiversity, water flow and efficient use, water and air quality, greenhouse gas reductions and increasing access to the countryside.

The NFU is an active partner in the Combined Authority's work on peatland issues through the Fenland SOIL committee, spearheading farmer engagement to tackle the combined goals of peatland preservation and enhancement and reducing carbon emissions. The NFU sees farmers as part of the solution to climate change 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 an achievable ambition to reach net zero by 2040.

The NFU will continue to work with local partnerships such as Fens for the Future and the partners of Natural Cambridgeshire to share knowledge and best practice of wildlife and nature friendly farming and promote collaboration between farmers and also between farmers and wider environmental stakeholders to deliver Natural Cambridgeshire's doubling nature goals.

The **National Trust** in Cambridgeshire looks after Wicken Fen, Anglesey Abbey and Wimpole Estate. These special places are contributing to the Trust's national strategy to create 25,000 hectares of priority habitat and improve the condition of our wildlife-rich sites by 2025.

Wicken Fen is the most biodiverse site in the country with over 9,300 species recorded. Investment in scrub management and cutting of the SSSI has hugely improved the site condition over the last 10 years. In 1999 the Wicken Fen Vision was launched; a 100-year plan to expand the nature reserve and create a landscape for people and wildlife covering 53 square kilometres. In the last 20 years the size of the nature reserve has more than doubled, with over 400 hectares of priority habitat created. We have seen the return of iconic species including water vole, otter and crane, and soil carbon emissions have been reduced by 80%. We have improved or created 48km of access, linked a national cycleway route with Cambridge and welcomed over 1 million visitors.

Anglesey Abbey is restoring 12 hectares of priority habitat and developing a wild play offer that balances access to the woodland while allowing nature to thrive. This site plays a key role in connecting its many visitors with nature and provides a gateway for Cambridgeshire communities into the wider landscape.



The Wimpole Estate is at the forefront of the green recovery with support from the National Lottery Heritage Fund to create new wetland features and convert over 100 hectares of arable land to mixed woodland, woodland pasture, and agroforestry. This will enhance the biodiversity at Wimpole, create new wildlife habitats, and provide carbon offset opportunities in the future. Wimpole Home Farm is a great example of sustainable mixed farming system which is looking after the land and providing for wildlife. It is a sustainable livestock and organic arable farm with rotations to improve soil health, extensive wildlife features and looks after water resources.

Nene Park Trust manages the Nene Park estate which covers 690 hectares of the Nene valley, west of Peterborough and one of its core purposes is to conserve and safeguard wildlife. In fact, 43% of the Trust's land is in stewardship schemes in which land is managed to DEFRA specifications to benefit wildlife.

Since the Park's creation, tree cover over its land holdings has been increased by 60% and the Trust continues to look at the possibility of planting new areas of native woodland across its land. Amenity grassland mowing across the Park has been significantly reduced in recent years by establishing more long grass and wildflower areas.

Working with other organisations such as Buglife and Froglife, The Trust has established beelines, new amphibian ponds and is working to control invasive non-native species across the Park. The Trust has also undertaken other biodiversity projects such as establishing a new tern raft on Overton Lake and creating and maintaining the sandmartin nesting boxes on Lynch Lake, in which there was 100% occupancy in 2020 with 500/600 fledged young from 81 nest chambers.

2019 saw the increased connectivity between the river and its floodplain using the RSPB rotary ditcher to establish a 5km network of shallow foot drains and scrapes, which has in turn meant that the meadows remain 'wetter for longer' encouraging more wetland birds to overwinter and feed on the land. In 2020, there were 13 different species of wading birds spotted on the meadows. The Trust is currently looking to work with other partners including the Wildlife Trust and the Environment Agency to undertake another large-scale wetland restoration project on the Rural Estate.

A new share farming scheme set up in 2020, as a partnership between Nene Park Trust and first-generation farmers, the Baxter Brothers, aims to achieve shared objectives around nature conservation, sustainability, education and community engagement (using native breed livestock in an extensive grazing system with minimal inputs). This sees 68 hectares of previously arable land on the Nene Park rural estate reverted to grazed grassland, which also protects nationally important heritage sites.

The Trust continues to promote environmental education through our Education Department and so far in 2021, 2,306 school children have been to Nene Park on educational visits.

New Life on the Old West, delivered by Cambridgeshire Acre and funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, aims to help create a more resilient fenland landscape, by enhancing biodiversity connectivity across the largely arable landscape, whilst connecting local people with their natural heritage and green space assets.

Delivering the project will make new spaces for wildlife, while creating opportunities for volunteering and learning, connecting communities with their natural heritage. It will increase resilience for the area's priority habitats and species, by undertaking habitat improvements in order to create enhanced corridors and stepping-stones across the landscape, linking up two expanding core, internationally significant wetland conservation areas: Wicken Fen Nature Reserve to the east and RSPB Ouse Fen Nature Reserve, part of the Great Ouse Wetland, to the west.

New Life on the Old West has three key aims:

1. To strengthen ecological networks to enhance biodiversity and reverse the decline in wildlife and habitats.
2. Demonstrate and showcase sustainable biodiversity improvements along the fenland ditch network and community green spaces.
3. Create opportunities for local people to be inspired, learn about and connect with their diverse and accessible fenland natural heritage.

The term 'New Life' in the project title refers to the new biodiversity benefits the project will bring, along with benefits for people, with new natural heritage sites to visit and new opportunities for people to volunteer, learn about and connect with nature. New Life tests 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, through citizen science being used to create a volume of new biodiversity data about the project area.

Peterborough Environment City Trust (PECT) manages 'Forest for Peterborough' (FFP) and has planted over 117,000 trees. The FFP will increase tree canopy coverage across Peterborough until the project closes in 2030 with the successful planting of 230,000 trees with our partnering organisations including Peterborough City Council, Nene Park Trust and many individual private landowners. PECT is also delivering the national 'B-Lines' pollinator project in Peterborough, which includes creating and establishing wildflower areas within the city that connect areas with pollinator friendly native wildflower species; this already consists of over 1.3km of such corridors. This work also involves working with partnering groups to protect and expand rare and important wildflower verges.

PECT's Natural Environment strategy embeds both the importance of protecting and improving biodiversity and the connection of habitats and uses the following principles; to prioritise using native tree species and from local suppliers; ensure the broadest diversity of native species are used; eliminate the use of plastic tree guards and replace with non-plastic biodegradable versions. These principles contribute to the main aims of maintaining, restoring or creating structural diversity where it has been lost, in decline or absent which are all elements that reduce biodiversity loss.

PECT's tree planting program uses a systematic method which assesses both vertically and laterally on all the potential planting sites. Attention is paid to developing multiple layers of vegetation which increases tree canopy cover but does not result in lost public green space or reduce access to these vital and limited urban areas. Trees are a critical visual and habitat feature of urban areas; they also intercept pollution and aid air quality but their importance in contributing to reducing and stabilising peak urban summer temperatures will become more apparent as climatic variations increase mean summer temperatures.

The comprehensive and long running natural environment projects engage, enthuse and encourage many thousands of adult volunteers and school children to participate in a legacy of improvements across the city of Peterborough and the surrounding parishes. Public engagement, awareness generation, education and training are core elements of PECT's current nature projects and will continue to be fundamental to future projects too.

Redlist Revival provides The Life Map to connect knowledge and activity throughout society to sustain life for today's generations – and tomorrow's. Macro data is provided in a consistent, accessible, understandable and usable format with the primary material focussed on the 30 datasets for reporting and disclosure of the Environmental sector covering Climate, Marine Life, Life on Land and Clean Water. The Life Map uses the 10km grid squares and allocates every city, town and parish

to these grid squares to create 1,407 Communities across England, including 36 in Cambridgeshire.

In Cambridgeshire we have been encouraging landholders, from all sectors, to engage with The Life Map and register their interest in sustaining life. Land has been registered in 32 communities (89%) covering 37,494 hectares (over 10% of the area of the county with 15 of communities exceeding 10% of the area registered in their own right. Landholders, from all sectors have been registering land and have received details of the relative ecological value of their community together with the quantification of the habitats and the list of bird species for which they are individually and collectively responsible.

A number of those landholders have taken advantage of accessing the national standards, that we have created with the formal endorsement of Natural England and the British Trust for Ornithology, to benchmark their performance for range and abundance of priority species. These sites have subsequently received the first non-discretionary Certificates with a number of sites achieving Top 1% performance for abundance and one site receiving national Life on Land Awards where abundance of two priority species has exceeded the national threshold.

We are developing further national standards for the other taxonomic groups and about to start the engagement programme for the elected members of national and local government that will lead to the provision of material for the education sector to give relevance and context to the national curriculum. Every initiative is seeking the same issue of where are we starting from, how do we measure change and how do we recognise and acknowledge success. The Life Map has the potential to support and connect each unique initiative seeking to sustain life.

Royal Society for the Protection of Birds is a significant nature conservation landowner in Cambridgeshire, with over 4,200 hectares of land managed for nature. This includes the majority of the Ouse Washes (in partnership with the Wildlife Trust and WWT) and Nene Washes, our reserve at Fen Drayton Lakes, an expanding area at Ouse Fen (the Hanson/RSPB Wetland Project) and RSPB Fowlmere. Most of these reserves sit at the core of our Fens Priority Landscape, covering much of Cambridgeshire Fens, and the focus for our work up to 2030. Our objectives for our work within this landscape covers the themes of priority habitats, priority species, people and policy.

Our priority habitats include lowland wet grassland, reedbeds and the provision of nature friendly farmland. We aim to improve the condition of existing habitats (so for example bringing the Ouse Washes back into favourable condition), and expand the



extent and connectivity of wetland habitats, through restoration of minerals sites at Ouse Fen and Block Fen, expansion of our reserves and private landowner-led initiatives with RSPB support. Working with the Environment Agency, we are the delivery partner for the Ouse Washes Habitat Creation Project, which is creating wet grassland habitat on peat soils adjacent to the Ouse Washes.

Our priority species include the internationally important breeding wader populations (such as red-listed black-tailed godwit) on the Washes, which have suffered severe declines from spring/summer flooding in recent decades, and wetland species such as Bittern and Crane in our reedbed/mixed wetland habitats. We aim to restore wader

populations back to historical levels through management on reserves and through additional habitat creation.

We are currently working with the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust on 'Project Godwit' – a programme of work to safeguard and expand the breeding population through measures including 'headstarting'. In the farmed environment a key species is the turtle dove, which has suffered cataclysmic declines in recent decades. We are working with partners to provide advice to farmers and landowners to support breeding turtle doves on their land by providing suitable habitat and supplementary feeding.

Our work with people includes engagement with communities in the Fens to raise awareness of their importance for nature and to garner support for its protection and enhancement. We will be developing a network of volunteers to help us achieve our objectives across our workstreams.

On the policy front we will work with partners to ensure that developing policy initiatives such as the Environmental Land Management System, Biodiversity Net Gain and the Lowland Peatland Taskforce deliver for nature.

Wildlife Trust BCN has been taking a landscape approach to nature conservation for over 20 years and is involved in all of the six priority landscape areas identified for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. Our approach spans all aspects of our work, including managing and acquiring nature reserves, providing land advice to farmers, landowners and businesses, engaging with communities through family events, education activities and supporting local communities and individuals to take action for wildlife on their own patch.

At the Great Fen, the Trust is working with partners and is acquiring land to restore a wild fen landscape over 37 square kilometres linking Woodwalton Fen and Holme Fen National Nature Reserves. As well as now owning or managing over half of the area, we have an active programme of engagement with and involvement of local communities, and we are working on a project to trial new wet farming crops that might help preserve the fenland peat while allowing farming to continue sustainably.

In the West Cambridgeshire Hundreds, the Trust is one of over 20 landowners that co-operate and co-ordinate conservation actions across property boundaries. Most are private family farmers and Estates, but the National Trust at Wimpole are also a key partner. While the Wildlife Trust has acquired land to buffer and extend two of our ancient woodland nature reserves, the main focus in this landscape is supporting landowners to move towards more nature friendly forms of farming.

In the John Clare Country, we are working with local partners including the Langdyke Countryside Trust to support community-led conservation initiatives including Parish Nature Recovery Plans. We also support landowners with habitat creation and nature friendly farming initiatives.

The Wildlife Trust working with Cambridge Past Present & Future, has been developing a Cambridge Nature Network. A strategy document has been produced covering Cambridge and its immediate hinterland, highlighting the priority landscape areas to develop a nature recovery network in and around the City. We have worked with landowners to identify the best opportunities on their land and provided many with individual reports setting out those opportunities for action. The Cambridge Nature Network was launched in May 2021, and the next steps are to work with partners to identify areas for collaborative projects, to promote the Network through the Local Plan process, and to work with individual landowners to take forward habitat creation and restoration projects.

Natural Cambridgeshire is a registered charity in England and Wales no.1193040.

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