



A meeting of **HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL** will be held in the **CIVIC SUITE (LANCASTER / STIRLING ROOMS), PATHFINDER HOUSE, ST MARY'S STREET, HUNTINGDON PE29 3TN** on **WEDNESDAY, 16 OCTOBER 2024** at **7:00 PM** and you are requested to attend for the transaction of the following business:-

AGENDA

APOLOGIES

1. PRAYER

The Council meeting to be opened with prayer.

2. MINUTES (Pages 7 - 22)

To approve as a correct record the Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 17th July 2024.

Time Allocation: 2 Minutes.

3. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

To receive from Members declarations as to disclosable pecuniary, other registerable and non-registerable interests in relation to any Agenda item. See Notes below.

Time Allocation: 2 Minutes.

4. RETURNING OFFICER'S REPORT: ST NEOTS EATONS BY-ELECTION

To note that Barry Chapman has been elected to the Office of Councillor for the St Neots Eatons Ward on 19th September 2024.

Time Allocation: 2 Minutes.

5. CHAIR'S ENGAGEMENTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS (Pages 23 - 24)

To note the Chair's engagements since the last Council meeting.

Time Allocation: 5 Minutes.

6. QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

To answer any questions submitted by the public in accordance with the Constitution.

The deadline for the receipt of public questions is five days prior to the meeting and must be submitted to the Monitoring Officer.

7. NOTICE OF MOTION

Councillor R Martin to move –

This Council Notes:

The Labour Government's recent decision to restrict the Winter Fuel Payment to only pensioners in receipt of means-tested benefits like Pension Credit, as announced by Chancellor Rachel Reeves.

The estimated impact of this decision, which Age UK says will mean 2 million pensioners who badly need the money to stay warm this winter will not receive it.

The significant role that Winter Fuel Payments play in helping older residents of Huntingdonshire and across the UK afford heating during the coldest months, thereby preventing 'heat or eat' dilemmas and safeguarding health.

The criticism from Age UK, the Countryside Alliance and other charities, highlighting the social injustice and potential health risks posed by this sudden policy change.

The additional strain this decision will place on vulnerable pensioners, many of whom do not claim Pension Credit despite being eligible, further exacerbating their financial hardship.

This Council believes:

That the Winter Fuel Payment has been a lifeline for many older people across the UK and that restricting its availability solely to those on Pension Credit risks leaving many pensioners in financial hardship.

While some pensioners currently in receipt of the Winter Fuel Payment may not require it, many thousands across Huntingdonshire sit just above the cut-off for Pension Credit and will now lose their allowance.

The decision to means-test Winter Fuel Payments, especially with such short notice and without adequate compensatory measures, is deeply unfair and will

disproportionately affect the health and well-being of our poorest older residents.

The government's approach fails to consider the administrative barriers and stigma that prevent eligible pensioners from claiming Pension Credit, leaving many without the support they desperately need.

This Council resolves to:

Request that the Council Leader write to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, urging a review of the decision to means-test the Winter Fuel Payment and asking the government to ensure that vulnerable pensioners, particularly those who do not claim Pension Credit, are protected from fuel poverty.

Commit the Council to signing the 'Save the Winter Fuel Payment for Struggling Pensioners' petition being run by Age UK and write to all members offering them the opportunity to sign the petition themselves.

Encourage local efforts to promote Pension Credit uptake through council services and partnerships with local charities and community organisations to ensure that all eligible pensioners in Huntingdonshire are supported in claiming their entitlement.

Time Allocation: 20 Minutes.

8. QUESTIONS TO MEMBERS OF THE CABINET

In accordance with the Council Procedure Rules, all questions –

- ❖ Must be relevant to an item which the Council has powers or duties;
- ❖ Must not relate to an item which is included elsewhere on the Agenda
- ❖ Should be limited to obtaining information or pressing for action; and
- ❖ Should not exceed two minutes in duration.

Questions should not divulge or require to be divulged, confidential or exempt information.

Time Allocation: 15 Minutes.

9. HUNTINGDONSHIRE PRIORITY NATURAL LANDSCAPES (Pages 25 - 118)

Councillors T D Sanderson and S L Taylor, Executive Councillors for Planning and Parks and Countryside, Waste and Street Scene to present a report regarding the priority landscapes identified in the Nature Recovery Network for Huntingdonshire.

(The report was considered by the Cabinet at their meeting on 15th October 2024).

Time Allocation: 20 Minutes.

10. LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE
(Pages 119 - 132)

Councillor S Conboy, Executive Leader of the Council to present on progress that has been made to date in response to the Corporate Peer Challenge and the preparation of an Action Plan.

(The report was considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Performance and Growth) at their meeting on 2nd October 2024).

Time Allocation: 20 Minutes

11. CAMBRIDGESHIRE AND PETERBOROUGH COMBINED AUTHORITY - QUESTIONS (Pages 133 - 166)

This item provides an opportunity for District Council Members to ask questions on Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority issues.

If Members wish to raise questions or issues requiring a detailed response, it would be helpful if they can provide prior notice so that the necessary information can be obtained in advance of the meeting.

Time Allocation: 10 Minutes.

12. OUTCOMES FROM COMMITTEES AND PANELS (Pages 167 - 168)

An opportunity for Members to raise any issues or ask questions arising from recent meetings of the Council's Committees and Panels.

A list of meetings held since the last Council meeting is attached for information and Members are requested to address their questions to Committee and Panel Chairs.

Time Allocation: 10 Minutes.

13. REPRESENTATION OF POLITICAL GROUPS ON DISTRICT COUNCIL COMMITTEES AND PANELS

Following the recent by-election in the St Neots Eatons Ward, to consider a report by the Elections and Democratic Services Manager on the representation of political groups on Committees and Panels in accordance with Section 15 of the Local Government and Housing Act and the District Council's Constitution. **(TO FOLLOW).**

Time Allocation: 5 Minutes.

14. VARIATIONS TO THE MEMBERSHIP OF COMMITTEES AND PANELS

Group Leaders to report on variations to the Membership of Committees and Panels if necessary.

Time Allocation: 5 Minutes.

8th day of October 2024

Michelle Sacks

Chief Executive and Head of Paid Service

Disclosable Pecuniary Interests and other Registerable and Non-Registerable Interests.

Further information on [Disclosable Pecuniary Interests and other Registerable and Non-Registerable Interests is available in the Council's Constitution](#)

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The District Council also permits filming, recording and the taking of photographs at its meetings that are open to the public. Arrangements for these activities should operate in accordance with [guidelines](#) agreed by the Council

Please contact Mrs Lisa Jablonska, Elections and Democratic Services Manager, Tel No. 01480 388004 / e-mail Lisa.Jablonska@huntingdonshire.gov.uk if you have a general query on any Agenda Item, wish to tender your apologies for absence from the meeting, or would like information on any decision taken by the Council.

Specific enquiries with regard to items on the Agenda should be directed towards the Contact Officer.

Members of the public are welcome to attend this meeting as observers except during consideration of confidential or exempt items of business.

Agenda and enclosures can be viewed on the [District Council's website](#).

Emergency Procedure

In the event of the fire alarm being sounded and on the instruction of the Meeting Administrator, all attendees are requested to vacate the building via the closest emergency exit.

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HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the COUNCIL held in the CIVIC SUITE (LANCASTER / STIRLING ROOMS), PATHFINDER HOUSE, ST MARY'S STREET, HUNTINGDON PE29 3TN on Wednesday, 17 July 2024

PRESENT: Councillor S R McAdam – Chair.

Councillors B S Banks, M L Beuttell, A Blackwell, M J Burke, E R Butler, S Bywater, J Catmur, S Cawley, J Clarke, S J Conboy, A E Costello, S J Criswell, L Davenport-Ray, D B Dew, S W Ferguson, I D Gardener, J A Gray, J E Harvey, P J Hodgson-Jones, S A Howell, N J Hunt, M Kadewere, P Kadewere, D N Keane, J E Kerr, C Lowe, R Martin, B A Mickelburgh, D L Mickelburgh, J Neish, Dr M Pickering, B M Pitt, T D Sanderson, D J Shaw, S L Taylor, I P Taylor, D Terry, C H Tevlin, S Wakeford and N Wells.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors T Alban, R J Brereton, S J Corney, C M Gleadow, M A Hassall, A R Jennings, P A Jordan and R A Slade.

15 PRAYER

The Reverend James Bamber, Minister for Huntingdon Methodist Church opened the meeting with a prayer.

16 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on the 22nd May 2024 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

17 MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

18 CHAIR'S ENGAGEMENTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

(At 7.10pm Councillor P J Hodgson-Jones took his seat at the meeting).

The Chair referred to the recent death of District Councillor Graham Welton who sadly passed away in June 2024. Councillor Welton was first elected in May 2022 and represented the St Neots Eatons Ward. During his time as Councillor, he was a Member of both Overview & Scrutiny Panels; Environment, Communities and Partnerships and the Performance and Growth Panel. Originally a London Bus Driver, the Chair reported that Graham latterly made his home in Eaton Ford, where he also represented St Neots Town Council. Following tributes from Councillors R Martin, S J Conboy and T D Sanderson, Members then observed a moments silence in memory of the former Councillor.

The Chair also took the opportunity to remind Members about the seminar on Integrated Water Management Studies which was scheduled to be held on Thursday 18 July 2024 at 6pm on Microsoft Teams. All Members were invited to attend.

The Council then noted those engagements attended by the Chair and Vice-Chair since the last meeting (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book). In doing so, the Chair took the opportunity to announce that he would be supporting two charities this year – Magpas and the Papworth Trust.

19 QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

The Chair reported that there had been no public questions received by the deadline for consideration by the Council.

20 STATE OF THE DISTRICT

The Chair invited the Executive Leader, Councillor S J Conboy to address the Council on the State of the District and to open the debate which was scheduled to follow.

Councillor Conboy opened her address by reminding Members that 2024 represented a significant milestone as the Council celebrated its 50th Anniversary and by placing on record her sincere appreciation to Officers and Members who had supported everything that had been achieved in the past year.

The Executive Leader then went on to report upon the achievements of the Council over the past year. In this regard, Members were advised that through the adoption of the Council Tax Support Scheme which offered support of up to 100% off the Council Tax Bill for households on the lowest incomes, the Council had provided more support for the people who needed it most within the District.

The Council had also made significant achievements towards the aim of helping residents to live in a safe, high-quality home regardless of health, stage of life, family structure, income and tenure type. During 2023/24, 703 affordable homes had been completed, 494 of which were specifically for affordable and social rent which had offered much needed options for the community and had helped with housing waiting lists and prevented excessive use of temporary accommodation. Through the Houses for Ukraine Programme, the Council's Communities and Housing Teams had ensured that no families presented as homeless and the use of Disabled Facilities Grants had enabled 185 people to continue to live at home safely.

The Executive Leader was also pleased to report that the Council One Leisure's Active Lifestyles and Sports Development programmes were continuing to see high levels of attendance and that the Community Health Prevention Project had enabled the roll out of free physical activity courses to prevent cardiovascular disease. Funding from the Integrated Care System had also supported the ESCAPE Pain Pilot System, a group rehabilitation programme for those suffering with chronic joint pain. The Council also noted that One Leisure Facilities had recorded over 1 million admissions.

The Executive Leader then drew attention to the role of good employment in improving people's quality of life and the administration's aspiration that local people should be able to develop their skills to take advantage of opportunities with businesses and education providers working more closely to deliver an inclusive economy. She was pleased to report on the opening of the East Anglia Energy Academy in St Ives in May 2024, which would bring new jobs, skills and investment to the District, together with the Academy a joint venture between Reed Environment and Oxford Energy Academies which aims to attract more people to the trade skills career path and upskill. The support of the District Council's Economic Development Team had enabled Reed to accelerate their timeline significantly.

In terms of the local economy and the administration's aspirations for it to be a place where businesses choose to start up, grow and invest, the Executive Leader reported that the Shop Front Grant Scheme had now been extended to include all market towns within the District. To date, a total of 31 grants had been awarded at a total value of £136,894. The Council were informed that in recognition of the unique challenges faced by rural enterprises, £350,000 had been secured from the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority to support the growth of rural business, which would enable them to diversify income streams and help create positive change, innovation and growth for the District. It was also reported that the Market Towns Programme continued at pace. Work had started at the beginning of the year in St Neots town centre to ensure that it was fit for the future, more accessible and could respond to the growing population and the number of people who live and work in close proximity. Investment in the Priory Centre would also make it a more attractive and exciting venue for amateur dramatics, touring shows and community events. Similarly in Ramsey, work was ongoing to improve the Great Whyte area by redesigning and enhancing public spaces and developing new, low-cost opportunities for independent traders to sell goods and services in the town centre.

Members were informed that the Council had also continued to take positive action to reduce carbon emissions and become net zero by 2040. A trial utilising hydrotreated vegetable oil (HVO) in refuse vehicles had been completed in collaboration with Cambridgeshire Police and Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue. Such that the HVO used by HDC, police and fire service vehicles had already reduced the combined services carbon footprint by 72 tonnes of CO₂. In addition, the Council's Biodiversity for All Programme was continuing to enable and encourage local people and businesses to reduce carbon emissions and increase biodiversity across Huntingdonshire. The Council had also held its first-ever Climate Conversation in November 2023 which had enabled residents, community groups, business owners, farmers, town and parish councils and environmentalists to learn and share ideas for tackling climate change. The Executive Leader was pleased to report that the Council's ongoing efforts to tackle the causes and effects of climate change had seen the Council climb the ranking tables in the Climate Emergency UK scorecard results, to a position around the national average.

The Executive Leader went on remind Members that essential services formed the basis of the Council's everyday work and around 80% of Council resources were aligned to business as usual and the Council must continue to set an excellent example of the standards it expected for its residents. The Council

were informed that some of the day-to-day work over the last year had seen the Council collect 97% of Council Tax, the Council had administered over £250K of Energy Bill Rebate support payments and had been awarded Green Flag status at Paxton Pits and Hinchingsbrooke County Park for the sixth year in a row. It was also reported that at the beginning of July 2024, nearly 43,000 households had successfully subscribed to the Garden Waste subscription service.

The Executive Leader reiterated that as more councils across the country faced financial difficulties, she was proud that Huntingdonshire continued to deliver on its promise of long-term financial sustainability. The Council had set a balanced budget, which did not spend reserves and protected front line services, all in a time of decreasing government funding, rising costs and greater pressure on services. By building strong financial foundations, it was hoped that the Council could plan and enhance services in accordance with the things that matter most to residents.

Looking forward, the Executive Leader remarked that whilst much had been achieved there was always more that could be done. The Council were reminded that it had recently participated within a Local Government Association Corporate Peer Challenge because it was committed to continuous improvement. Later this year it would be taking part in a Planning Peer Challenge. Whilst the introduction of a new Contextual Outcome Measures Dashboard to benchmark Council Performance and a new Continuous Improvement Delivery Plan would underpin and focus attention on the work which is undertaken over the next two years to ensure the Council is as efficient and effective as possible.

Members were advised that there was much to look forward to over the coming year. The Council would progress with the delivery of Civil Parking Enforcement across the District and would also be working on preparing to deliver a weekly food waste collection service for those that could not compost. Work would continue to update the Local Plan which sets out how the District would grow over the next two decades and Huntingdonshire Futures grants will continue to provide local organisations with funding to put on event or activities that support the Huntingdonshire Futures vision. Work would also be ongoing to deliver a Community Health and Wealth Strategy to link the broader social determinants of health with a Community Wealth-Building approach and the Council would continue to provide a wide range of existing statutory and important services seeking to improve their efficiency and effectiveness through the Customer Change programme.

The Executive Leader then took the opportunity to pay tribute to the Council staff and expressed her appreciation to them for the efforts they made to ensure that Huntingdonshire was the best place possible. She explained that following extensive engagement with staff a new Workforce Strategy focussed on attraction and retention, engagement and wellbeing would be rolled out over the forthcoming year.

The Council were also advised that 'Do, Enable Influence' would also continue to be a crucial phrase for the Council over the course of the year as it looks to take on a more enabling role, utilising partnership working and empowerment to reduce demand for traditional public services. Members were informed that the Council would continue to work constructively with the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority, Cambridgeshire County Council and health

colleagues which would allow the Council to proactively influence and contribute to further devolution deals for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. Work would also continue to invest in building positive and productive relationships with local town and parish councils, other public bodies and the third sector and a new Communications and Engagement Strategy would underpin this approach.

In concluding her remarks, the Executive Leader outlined her appreciation to all Members of the Council. She reiterated that the collective will of councillors within the Council Chamber had enabled the Council to put Huntingdonshire at the front and centre of delivery. It had been repeatedly demonstrated that work could be undertaken across party boundaries, valuing different opinions and treating others respectfully. The Council has achieved an awful lot over the last 50 years and as it looked ahead to the next 50 years, the Council continued to lay the foundations for a prosperous future that will deliver a greener, fairer Huntingdonshire for all.

In response and on behalf of the Opposition Group, Councillor R Martin thanked the Executive Leader for the work she had undertaken to champion the District at a local and national level and for the courteous and respectful manner in which she led the Council. He also took the opportunity to reaffirm the commitment made by his predecessor, that the Conservative group would seek to be a collaborative opposition and support those policies which were sensible. However, they would continue to oppose those things that they thought were wrong or ideologically driven.

Having commented on the positive initiatives which had been referred to by the Executive Leader during the previous year and the use of innovation, Councillor Martin also referred to the significant changes which had taken place within the Authority. These included the appointment of a new Chief Executive, new Director for Place and the formation of a new Independent Group within the Joint Administration. He also commented on external changes and the impact that these might have locally, including the change in the national government and the appointment of three new Members of Parliament, for the Huntingdonshire area.

Councillor Martin welcomed the progress that had been made within the One Leisure service following its challenges during Covid and with rising energy prices and was encouraged with the ongoing work which was being undertaken to develop a long-term operating model. He suggested that the Council needed to undertake more long-term horizon scanning as it moved forward over the course of the next few years, to examine all areas of the District. He also took the opportunity to place his thanks and those of his group to all Members of staff within the District Council for their efforts and hard work over the past year.

Councillor Martin then went on to make reference to the poor visual state of the District, arising specifically from the growth of weeds in roads and footpaths. Having acknowledged that it had been the decision of Cambridgeshire County Council to cease their weed treatment programme, Councillor Martin enquired given there were members of the Administration who were also County Councillors and the references within the Executive Leaders speech to 'do, enable, influence', to what extent the Administration had sought to influence the County Council to reverse that decision. He went on to explain that not only were the growth of weeds unsightly, they had also blocked drains in many areas

causing issues with flooding. Whilst the decision had now been reversed, he urged the Administration to reflect further on any influence they could have had going forward.

Councillor Martin then outlined concerns with regards to the Council's continued use of the No Amendments Policy within the Planning Service. Whilst he argued that the Council were benefiting financially from applicants being required to reapply, there were many applicants who were unable to afford to re-apply. Having referred to a specific case in which the applicant chose to apply to another area of the county, rather than reapply, he urged the Administration to focus on the next year at looking at the policy and to make adjustments such that it worked better for what the Council was seeking to achieve in Huntingdonshire.

Turning to Overview and Scrutiny and the Council's decision-making processes, Councillor Martin emphasised the need to utilise the expertise and experience of all Members of the Council and suggested that the role of scrutiny should be embraced, rather than feared to deliver the collective aim of a better Huntingdonshire and a thriving District Council.

Going forward, Councillor Martin advised the Administration that they could expect the Conservative Group to challenge and push back more on certain decisions. However, this would continue to be undertaken fairly and with respect.

In concluding his remarks, Councillor Martin made reference to his attendance at the Hunts Forum Awards Evening held the previous evening which had provided an opportunity for volunteers across the District to be recognised for their contributions. He reiterated that the District Council should be doing more to thank these individuals and recognise the work they were undertaking. Without these residents who give up their time, their energy and their efforts to ensure that the District is a better place to live, the District would not be where it is today.

Councillor N Hunt took the opportunity to reflect on some of the initiatives which had been delivered by the Administration for younger residents within the District. In doing so, he made reference to the delivery of over 700 new affordable homes, the provision of sports and leisure facilities, the arrival of new skills and training providers to the region and the support which the District Council's Economic Development Team had provided to them. He also made reference to the Council's activities in tackling the Council's Carbon footprint, supporting the local energy plan and providing award winning parks and open spaces. He went on to reiterate to all Members, that the impact of local government could be felt by everyone and urged all Members within the Chamber to keep this in mind. He also outlined his excitement at the challenges ahead for the forthcoming year which he was hopeful would be productive for Huntingdonshire residents and young people.

In seeking to respond to some of the comments which had been made by the Leader of the Opposition, Councillor T D Sanderson and S Taylor provided an update on the situation with regards to the reintroduction of the County Council's weed treatment programme, which had not been helped by the recent period of wet weather. As part of which, Members were informed that chemical spraying was now taking place and the District Council had been working in collaboration with the County Council to manually remove weeds in response to complaints logged on the County Council's 'Report a Fault' service. Although the process

would be ramped up shortly. Further details were available on the County Council website.

With regards to planning, Councillor Sanderson reported that the Planning Inspector was in the District Council's favour when discussing the Council's No Amendment's Policy. He also reported on a number of positive developments within the planning service which included the clearing of the backlog and the success of the pre-application service. He was pleased to report that targets for determination of major applications and householder applications in June 2023 had been 100% and 95% respectively.

Finally, and having endorsed the comments of the Executive Leader, Councillor S Wakeford reiterated his thanks to the District Council staff and volunteers who had worked exceptionally hard to make the achievements of the past year possible. However, he reminded the Council that there was still much to do within the District over the remaining two years of the current administration and beyond. Once the new National Government begins its programme of work, he looked forward to working with colleagues across the Chamber to take best advantage of the opportunities the new Government may enable for District Council. Having commended the tone and the spirit of the comments made by the Opposition Leader, Councillor Wakeford also took the opportunity, with reference to the No Amendments Policy, to outline the benefits which this had had upon the enormous backlog in cases which whilst not unique, had been inherited from the previous Administration which had had an impact on costs in terms of delayed decision making.

21 QUESTIONS TO MEMBERS OF THE CABINET

With reference to the Chair's list of engagements, Councillor J Neish expressed his disappointment that as the District's Armed Forces Champion he had not been made aware of the District Council's Flag raising on Armed Forces Day. He requested that this be publicised in advance on future occasions as he was aware of several veterans and residents who may have wished to attend. In thanking Councillor Neish for his comments, the Chair indicated that he had already discussed the issue of the future promotion of civic ceremonies with Officers.

Councillor I Taylor commented on the problems he had experienced over the course of the previous two years in seeking to get defibrillators installed on two buildings owned by the District Council in Eynesbury, St Neots. He questioned whether a streamlined policy or process could be introduced. In response to which, Councillor B Mickelburgh explained that the complexity of some of the tenancy agreements meant that it was not possible to provide a generic answer however he agreed it was a positive idea and he would take it away for further consideration as to how it might fit into future contracts.

In response to a request from Councillor M J Burke for specific data regarding the use and financial performance of One Leisure across the District, the Executive Councillor for Communities, Health and Leisure, Councillor B Pitt, provided an update for the Council. In doing so, the Council noted that Direct Debit membership was now at all time high of 8,400 members and the One Leisure swim school has seen an increase of 14% in the last two years. Active

health sessions had also increased by over 50% in one year and the Active Health Team were now working closely with 15 care homes across the District. In terms of income, the Executive Councillor reported that total income for One Leisure was up 10% in 12 months and costs have gone up by 3.7% which meant that the deficit position had almost halved. With regards to future developments, the Council were informed that £700,000 had been secured from Sport England in March 2023 to install a solar canopy at the car park in St Ives and also triple glazing for the swimming pool. Consideration was also being given to investment in other opportunities for solar PV in an attempt to further drive down operating costs.

With reference to the organisation of the recent election of the Member of Parliament for the Huntingdon Constituency, Councillor J A Gray questioned the Executive Leader as to whether she agreed that the organisation of the election had been exceptionally well run, both by Officers and the candidates, their various counting agents and supporters at the Count. In indicating her wholehearted agreement to this comment, the Executive Leader took the opportunity to thank the staff and volunteers that had contributed to the success of the day and the evening, together with the weeks of preparation. She also took the opportunity to inform the Council that the newly elected Members of Parliament had been invited to come and meet with District Councillors and attend a future meeting.

In response to a question from Councillor C H Tevlin regarding planning performance and progress with the development of the new Local Plan, the Executive Councillor for Planning provided an update for the Council. In doing so, Members noted that major applications for June 2024 had been 100% on target, with household applications processed within 16 weeks at 95%. He was also pleased to report that the backlog had reduced to 80 cases (from 180 in April 2023). With regards to the Local Plan, it was reported that a report on further issues and options would be presented to Overview and Scrutiny in September 2024 and Members were encouraged to attend and participate.

With reference to an ongoing issue with a planning enforcement case within her ward, Councillor C Lowe questioned performance levels within the Planning Enforcement Team. In response to which, the Executive Councillor for Planning, Councillor T D Sanderson, reported that planning enforcement were making good progress and meeting targets. He undertook to speak directly with Councillor Lowe regarding the specific issue to which she was referring.

Having congratulated the Electoral Services Team for their efforts given the numbers of elections in recent months, Councillor R Martin then questioned the Executive Leader on the use of the Special Urgency Powers to bring forward an item for discussion and determination at Cabinet the previous evening and queried whether there was a better future mechanism or future to enable other Members to have an informal input. In response to which, the Executive Leader explained that the Special Urgency Provisions had been used as an exception on this occasion. She reiterated that there would be further opportunities to shape the project as it progressed, it would be a long-term project which affected the entire District area. As the Executive Councillor with responsibility for the report, Councillor Wakeford went on to explain that the Cabinet had not agreed the content of a consultation response but merely to take the authority to produce and submit one and agreed that cross party engagement would form part of this

work. He reiterated that the opportunity needed to be taken to allow the Council the legal ability to give a voice to the concerns of all Members.

In response to a request for an update from Councillor N Wells on the current situation with the District Council's Internal Audit Team and recruitment to the post of Internal Audit Manager, the Executive Councillor for Governance and Democratic Services, Councillor J Harvey, reported that a new Internal Audit Manager, Yasir Khan, had recently started in post.

In response to questions from Councillor J Neish regarding firstly the potential to ease the restrictions on amendments to applications and secondly seeking clarification that the increased fees were being ring fenced for the service, the Executive Councillor for Planning, Councillor T D Sanderson undertook to respond in seeking further clarification on both points and respond in writing.

22 HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL WORKFORCE STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN

With the assistance of a report by the Strategic HR Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book), the Council were invited to consider the approval of a new Workforce Strategy for the District Council.

By way of introduction, the Executive Councillor for Climate, Transformation and Workforce, Councillor L Davenport-Ray, outlined the importance of the Council's workforce in contributing to the aims and objectives of the Council and explained that the draft Strategy had been developed to support their hopes and aspirations.

In terms of the development of the Strategy, Councillor Davenport-Ray explained that it had been the culmination of a significant level of staff engagement. It was reported that over 73% of staff, which equated to 472 employees had participated in engagement sessions to form the recommendations and attention was drawn to their feedback which was set out in detail with the draft document

Council was informed that the Strategy had been broken down into three key areas or 'pillars' that covered the core areas that needed to be focused on. These were attraction and retention, engagement and well-being. Should Council choose to adopt the Strategy, Members attention was drawn to the proposed next steps which were set out in detail at the end of the document and would include continued communication, investment in the Action Plan, the use of relevant governance procedures to report on progress and the monitoring of its impact.

Councillor Davenport-Ray went on to explain that the development of the Strategy had been closely monitored by the Council's Employment Committee, who at their last meeting had suggested that the Strategy should be adopted separately from its Action Plan. This would enable further time for refinement of the Action Plan and input from Members. In this regard she urged Members who had any comments to provide these to their Employment Committee representatives. It was also reported that positive feedback had been received from Union, employee representatives and Council staff. Councillor Davenport-Ray concluded her remarks by reiterating that the aim of the Strategy was to

build a workforce where there were opportunities for development and growth and where every staff member felt valued, included and appropriately rewarded.

Councillor S Cawley outlined his support for the Strategy and the decision to adopt the Strategy separately from the Action Plan. However, he urged the Joint Administration to ensure that they responded to and implemented recommendations at pace given that staff expectations had been raised. Comment was also made regarding the concerns raised by the Peer Review at the likely financial impact of the pay and remuneration review, and he urged the Joint Administration to consider this as part of the budgeting process.

In response to a comment from Councillor J A Gray regarding where responsibility for Council employees lies democratically, the Executive Councillor for Climate Transformation and Workforce explained that in her view there was a distinction between policy and operation. Operational responsibility sat with the Head of Paid Services but setting the strategic direction was the responsibility of Cabinet members and in that regard, it would have been remiss of her to have developed a Workforce Strategy without seeking the views of Council employees. However, it was her view that all Members had a responsibility to some extent for Council staff. In response to other comments regarding the potential for an annual staff survey, the Executive Councillor explained that this was certainly one of the issues being considered, including whether surveys should be undertaken more frequently so it could be gauged whether there were issues to be addressed.

In taking his opportunity to address the Council, Councillor R Martin welcomed the development of the Strategy. He went on to refer to the new Employment Rights Bill that had been referenced within the King's Speech earlier in the week. Whilst it was not yet known what this would contain, Councillor Martin suggested that it would be beneficial for the Strategy to return to full Council for further discussion. He reiterated the comments that had been made regarding the importance of Council staff to the District of Huntingdonshire and the need to consider the management of expectations. Councillor Martin also commented on the remarks made by the Peer Review team regarding the need for the recommendations to be implemented at pace and his hope that extra resources could be obtained to prioritise this. In terms of the Action Plan itself, comment was made regarding the length of time a number of the actions might take and a suggestion was made regarding the need to prioritise a number of these. The Employee Value Proposition being given as an example.

The Executive Leader Councillor S J Conboy outlined her appreciation to the number of staff that had taken the time to engage with the development of the Strategy and the positive feedback that had been received. Whilst welcoming the comments by Members which had been made regarding the desire and will to move at pace and the need for investment in the Council's staff, she reiterated that one of the challenges would be to recognise and manage this within the Council's current financial position.

Finally, Councillor P Hodgson-Jones commented on the need to involve and empower staff to bring forward their own ideas on how things could be done differently and where improvements could be made for the better of the organisation. In response to which the Executive Councillor agreed with this sentiment and explained that she had already been impressed with the ideas and

ingenuity of many of the officers she interacted with. In this regard she explained that the motto – ‘Do, Enable, Influence’ had been suggested by a member of the Open Spaces Team. She agreed to take these comments on board further.

Whereupon and having been proposed and duly seconded, it was

RESOLVED

that the Workforce Strategy as set out in Appendix 1 to the report now submitted be approved.

23 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION - CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE

With the assistance of a report by the Chief Executive (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Council considered the findings of the Local Government Association Corporate Peer Challenge and the recommendations of the Peer Challenge Team.

By way of introduction, the Chief Executive explained that an Action Plan would be presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Performance and Growth) in October 2024 and thereafter on a quarterly basis. However, work had already started on the delivery of many of the recommendations.

With reference to the Workforce Strategy, the Chief Executive reiterated that given the level of engagement from employees and the overall positivity received, she did not wish to lose momentum with this project. With this in mind, discussions had taken place regarding the acceleration of resources to demonstrate to the workforce the intention to deliver against the recommendations. She also outlined her thanks to Council Members for their appreciative comments regarding the Councils’ employees delivering the Council’s aspirations and she would be conveying this to all staff within her weekly newsletter.

Turning to the Peer Review, the Council were advised that the recommendations would be presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Performance and Growth) and accountability would be provided by allocating a Cabinet Member and Member of the Senior Leadership Team to oversee each recommendation. Those members with an interest in benchmarking were encouraged to look at the reports for other Councils on the Local Government Association Website. Members were also advised that a new framework for review had been introduced which was considered to be more challenging than the previous regime.

In terms of the recommendations within the report, Members were also advised that in addition to the key recommendations there were a number of additional actions that would also be implemented. The Chief Executive also reported that the Peer Team had commented on how welcoming and transparent those that they had met as part of the process had been and she had been keen to ensure that all parts of the organisation had felt part of the review. Feedback from staff had been good and tours had included Eastfield House and One Leisure, including the workshop.

In responding to the report, the Executive Leader, Councillor S J Conboy expressed her appreciation to the Peer Review team and indicated that she was looking forward to working with Members across the Council to reflect on the suggestions and recommendations within the report.

Having expressed his appreciation to the Peer Team and commented on the thorough and honest process he had experienced, the Leader of the Opposition Group Councillor R Martin commented on a number of aspects of the report. Firstly, the need to address issues arising from a number of departments feeling as though they were working in silos and the need to monitor trends in the delivery of affordable housing to ensure that any reduction in numbers was not a continuing trend year on year. Councillor Martin also commented on the need to develop a scrutiny work programme and he had already discussed with the Chief Executive the need for more member led engagement at these meetings. He took the opportunity to encourage all backbenchers to engage in the process and bring forward ideas and policies. Finally, Councillor Martin indicated that he looked forward to the Action Plan being brought forward to the next round of Overview and Scrutiny for further discussion and again on a regular basis.

Councillor J Neish commented that the Peer Team had found the District Council to be a well-resourced Council with the ability to make choices about how they delivered services. He commented that the review was a positive thing which would help the Council understand where some of the areas of challenge might be and those that needed further consideration.

Councillor S Wakeford expressed his appreciation to the Peer Review team for the review and the resulting report. He indicated that the resulting report was helpful, and that work had already begun to address some of the recommendations. In response to the comments made by Councillor Martin concerning affordable housing, Councillor Wakeford commented that success in this area was the result of a number of factors. However, the reason the review team had commented so positively was because in many authorities' delivery had gone down, whereas in Huntingdonshire it had increased in the current year.

RESOLVED

that the Corporate Peer Challenge Feedback report as set out at Appendix 1 be received and the recommendations of the Peer team noted

24 ADJOURNMENT

At 8.57 pm it was

RESOLVED

that the meeting stand adjourned

Upon the decision to adjourn the meeting Councillors E R Butler and A E Costello left the meeting and did not return.

Upon resumption at 9.02 pm

25 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE CORPORATE GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE 2023/24

Councillor M J Burke, Chair of the Corporate Governance Committee presented the Annual Report of the Committee for 2023/24 (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) which summarised the Committees activities and the issues that arose within the financial year.

In presenting the report, the Chair was pleased to report that all 17 recommendations from the Local Government Association Audit Peer Challenge had now been implemented, including those that related to the Committee's activities. A further five actions had been identified for the forthcoming year and the Chair indicated his appreciation to Council Officers and the new Internal Audit Manager for their support in this regard.

The Chair also took the opportunity to express his appreciation to the former Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee, Councillors N Wells and J E Harvey for their assistance in his transition to his new role. Although it was acknowledged that Councillor Harvey would continue to assist the Committee in her role as Executive Councillor with responsibility for Governance and Democratic Services.

Whereupon it was

RESOLVED

that the Annual Report 2023/24 of the Corporate Governance Committee be received and noted.

At 9.08pm Councillor S J Criswell left the meeting and did not return.

26 TREASURY MANAGEMENT OUTTURN REPORT 2023/24

Consideration was given to a report by the Council's Chief Finance Officer (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) presented by Councillor B A Mickelburgh, Executive Councillor for Finance and Resources. The report provided an update on treasury management activity for the period 1 April to 31 March 2024, including investment and borrowing activity and treasury performance.

By way of introduction, the Executive Councillor for Finance and Resources proceeded to talk in detail through the following areas: economic review, the performance of Council funds, treasury risk management, non-treasury investments, compliance and treasury management indicators.

Having received a detailed explanation of the economic circumstances in which the UK Economy found itself during the 2023/24 financial year, Council's attention was drawn to the performance of Council funds. Attention was drawn to the Council's Capital Funding Requirement, which measures the Council's underlying need to borrow for capital purposes together with the Council's borrowing levels which were set out in tables 3 -6 of Appendix A. As at 31 March 2024, the Council held £34.27M of loans, however the Executive Councillor for

Finance and Resources assured Members that this was behind the Council's Commercial Property Investment estimated value of around £40M. There had been no additional borrowing undertaken within the reporting period. It was also reported that a large proportion of Council investments were made in the Government's Debt Management Office (DMO). Funds that were placed into the DMO are used to reduce the need for the government to borrow, therefore investing here helps to reduce costs for the public sector overall and stops external money market funds from making gains at the taxpayer's expense.

Members were also reminded that a review of the Council's Commercial Investment Strategy had previously been planned for June 2024. However, this had been delayed pending the arrival of the Council's new Section 151 Officer in the Autumn and it was envisaged that there may be new opportunities in place following the election of a new national Government.

In terms of Non-Treasury Investments, the Council were advised that the Council currently holds £70.8M of such investments in directly owned property (£70.7M) and shareholding in subsidiaries £0.1M). These investments generated £3.92m (2022/23 £5.36m) of investment income for the Authority for 2023/24, a decrease of 37% on 2022/23, as a result of reduced rents at Fareham, Stonehill and Rowley Arts Centre. Having received a brief update on the reasons for this, Members were advised that a further update would be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Performance and Growth) in September 2024 in private session.

With regards to compliance, the Executive Councillor was pleased to report that the Council's Chief Finance Officer had reported that all treasury management activity undertaken during the financial year had complied fully with the CIPFA Code of Practice and the Council's approved Treasury Management Strategy. He also took the opportunity to draw attention to the Government's decision to extend the mandatory statutory override for local authorities to reverse out all unrealised fair value movements resulting from pooled investment funds to 31 March 2025. In the Council's case this would include funds invested within the CCLA property fund.

Finally in terms of treasury management indicators, the Executive Councillor reminded Members that the Council continues to measure and manage its exposure to treasury management risk using the indicators of security, liquidity, exposure to interest rate risk, structure of borrowing, maturing timing and long-term investments. In response to a comment which had been raised at Overview and Scrutiny regarding the Loan to Value ratio shown in Table 17 regarding Commercial Investment properties, the Executive Councillor indicated that they did not currently offer any cause for concern given there were no currently no plans to sell the properties.

In response to a question from Councillor P Hodgson-Jones, the Executive Councillor confirmed that revised data from the Office of National Statistics had confirmed that the United Kingdom had entered a technical recession in the final 6 months of the last year. He also suggested that the forthcoming work on the development of a new Commercial Investment Strategy would enable the Authority to give consideration to different levels of risk and risk profiles and encourage those that were interested to get involved within the development of that Strategy in the Autumn.

Whereupon it was

RESOLVED

that the Treasury Management Performance for 2023/24 be noted.

27 USE OF SPECIAL URGENCY PROVISIONS 2023/24

The Chair explained that Council's Constitution requires the Executive Leader to report annually on Executive Decisions taken under Special Urgency provisions during the Year. The Council noted that there had been no items to report in 2023/24.

28 CAMBRIDGESHIRE AND PETERBOROUGH COMBINED AUTHORITY - QUESTIONS

The Council received and noted copies of the decisions summaries from recent meetings of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority and Members were advised that any issues or questions could be raised in relation to these meetings.

There were no questions raised.

29 OUTCOMES FROM COMMITTEES AND PANELS

A copy of the list of meetings held since the last meeting of the Council held on 22nd May 2024 is appended in the Minute Book and Members were advised that any issues or questions could be raised in relation to these meetings.

There were no questions raised.

30 VARIATIONS TO THE MEMBERSHIP OF COMMITTEES AND PANELS

On the recommendation of Councillor S J Conboy and R Martin, it was

RESOLVED

- (a) that Councillor J E Harvey be appointed to the membership of the Constitution Review Working Group;
- (b) that Councillor C A Lowe be appointed to the vacant position on the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environment, Communities and Partnerships); and
- (c) that Councillor J Clarke be appointed to the membership of the Licensing and Protection / Licensing Committee in place of Councillor S Bywater.

The meeting ended at 9.30pm.

Chair

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CHAIR AND VICE CHAIR'S ENGAGEMENTS 18 July – 16 October 2024

Date:	Event:	Venue:
<u>August</u>		
Monday 5-Aug-24	501st Command Support Wing Change of Command	Alconbury
Tuesday 13-Aug-24	Huntingdonshire Aphasia Support Annual Tea Party	Huntingdon
<u>September</u>		
Thursday 5-Sep-24	RAF Wyton Annual Reception	RAF Wyton
Sunday 22-Sep-24	Mayor of Ely's Tea & Talk	Ely
Thursday 26-Sep-24	Traditional Opening of Peterborough Bridge Fair	Peterborough
<u>October</u>		
Sunday 6-Oct-24	Huntingdon's Police Memorial Day Service	Huntingdon
Sunday 6-Oct-24	Godmanchester Annual Civic Service	Godmanchester
Sunday 13-Oct-24	High Sheriff of Cambridgeshire Justice Service	Cambridge
Sunday 13-Oct-24	Ramsey Council Civic Service *	Ramsey

Notes:

1. The above events have occurred since the last Full Council held on 17 July 2024.
2. *Events attended by an alternate Member (Vice-Chair, Councillor Doug Dew) on behalf of the Chair.

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Public
Key Decision – Yes

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Title/Subject Matter: Huntingdonshire Priority Natural Landscapes

Meeting/Date: Cabinet – 15th October 2024
Council – 16th October 2024

Executive Portfolio: Councillor Simone Taylor
Councillor Tom Sanderson

Report by: Nicholas Massey – Parks and Countryside Project Manager

Ward(s) affected: All

Executive Summary:

This report seeks formal recognition of the priority landscapes identified in the Nature Recovery Network for Huntingdonshire, which is the evidence base for these recommendations. These landscapes will guide the council in enhancing the natural environment as the district continues to grow, without hindering future development.

The recognition of these landscapes supports the Huntingdonshire Futures strategy, particularly in fostering community pride and environmental innovation. It aligns with the Council's Corporate Plan and Climate Strategy, applying a "green lens" to decision-making to improve biodiversity and help communities care for the environment.

While not a statutory planning document, these landscapes will inform planning policy and contribute to the Local Nature Recovery Strategy, led by Cambridgeshire County Council and owned by the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority. This work aims to increase and restore nature, linking to the Council's environmental goals and ensuring a better quality of life for future generations by preserving and enhancing Huntingdonshire's natural assets.

Recommendations:

The Cabinet is advised to formally recognise the landscapes identified in this report as priority landscapes.

RECOMMENDED

that the Cabinet;

- 1) formally recognise and adopt the Priority Landscapes of Huntingdonshire as set out in this report,
- 2) endorse the use of the Nature Recovery Network for Huntingdonshire Document as an evidence base for the identification of Priority Natural Landscapes,
- 3) endorse the use of the Nature Recovery Network for Huntingdonshire Document to inform the response to and engagement with the development of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy and subsequently future Planning Policy,
- 4) delegate to the Assistant Director (Strategic Insight and Delivery) in consultation with the Executive Portfolio Holder to make any minor amendments to the Priority Landscapes of Huntingdonshire policy; (subject to a review of the policy to be undertaken within three years) and
- 5) delegate to the Corporate Director – Place to implement any necessary procedural changes as a result of this endorsement.

that the Council is;

RECOMMENDED

to receive and note the report.

1.0 PURPOSE

1.1 This report aims to gain formal recognition of the priority landscapes set out in the Nature Recovery Network for Huntingdonshire (NRNH) (Background Papers). The Landscapes are:

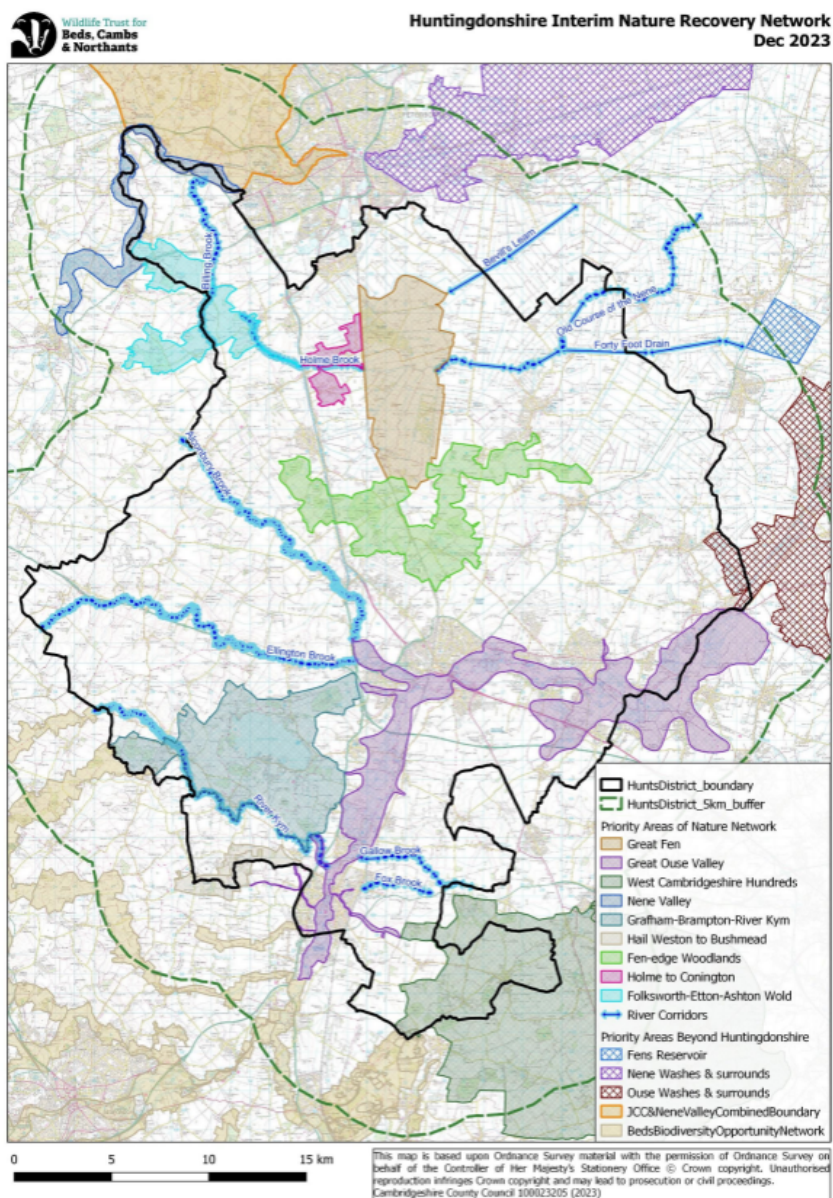
- The Great Fen
- The Great Ouse Valley
- West Cambridgeshire Hundreds
- The Nene Valley
- Grafham-Brampton-River Kym
- Hail Weston to Bushmead
- Fen-edge Woodlands
- Holme to Conington
- Folksworth-Elton-Ashton Wold
- River Corridors

1.2 Huntingdonshire is traversed by several significant river corridors. These include:

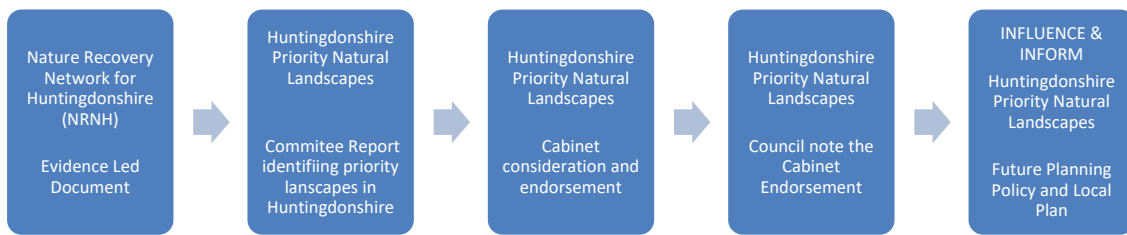
- 1.2.1 **River Great Ouse:** One of the major rivers in the area, it flows through key towns such as St Ives, Huntingdon, and Godmanchester. The River Great Ouse is vital for local biodiversity, recreation, and historical significance.
- 1.2.2 **River Nene:** While it primarily flows through Northamptonshire, parts of the River Nene catchment area extend into the northern parts of Huntingdonshire, influencing local watercourses and habitats.
- 1.2.3 **Alconbury Brook:** A tributary of the River Great Ouse, it runs through the village of Alconbury and is important for local wildlife and flood management.
- 1.2.4 **Ellington Brook:** Another tributary of the River Great Ouse, it flows through Ellington and contributes to the local river system's ecological diversity.
- 1.2.5 **Buckden Brook:** This brook is part of the intricate network feeding into the River Great Ouse, impacting the surrounding habitats and landscapes.

1.3 These river corridors are crucial for maintaining the region's ecological balance, supporting biodiversity, and providing natural flood management, recreational opportunities, and scenic beauty.

Map 1: Huntingdonshire Interim Nature Recovery Network Priority Areas



- 1.4 The landscapes identified in this document will guide the Council in its endeavours to enhance the nature network in Huntingdonshire, highlighting priorities that may be taken in the future as Huntingdonshire continues to grow.
- 1.5 These priority landscapes will inform planning policy as it developed through the development of the update to the Huntingdonshire Local Plan 2036 and support the Huntingdonshire District Council's contribution to the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS), which Cambridgeshire County Council is developing on behalf of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority.



1.7 This basic process shows the evidence base for these recommendations being the work of the BCN Wildlife Trust, which has informed this report setting out the recommendations for Cabinet to approve the recognition of the Landscapes, which can then be used to inform Planning Policy and the Local plans.

2.0 BACKGROUND

What is the NRNH?

- 2.1 With the introduction of the Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) and Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) requirements into the Environment Act 2021, Huntingdonshire District Council's Biodiversity for All project commissioned a report by the Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire (BCN) Wildlife Trust, in September 2023, to aid the Council with its approach to these new areas of work. This report is called the Nature Recovery Network for Huntingdonshire (NRNH) and can be found in the Background Papers.
- 2.2 The NRNH is the evidence base for the identification of the Priority Natural Landscapes. The NRNH sets out the reasons and evidence for the each area identified.
- 2.3 The BCN Wildlife Trust is a key stakeholder in the LNRS development, which aims to identify the priority landscapes for nature throughout Cambridgeshire. The BCN Wildlife Trust is completing similar work across the county to provide evidence for the LNRS.
- 2.4 The NRNH identifies evidence-led priority landscape areas for large-scale, strategic biodiversity and landscape enhancement in Huntingdonshire. This information informs the statutory Local Nature Recovery Strategy and wider place-shaping strategies and funding streams.
- 2.5 A secondary purpose is to set out a framework for local action to enhance biodiversity and people's connection to nature, thus supporting the Council's Corporate Priority, 'Improving quality of life for local people' and 'creating a better Huntingdonshire for future generations.
- 2.6 The NRNH is also a fundamental building block supporting the delivery of Huntingdonshire Futures, the place strategy to influence better outcomes

for our residents and communities to ensure Huntingdonshire continues to be one of the best places to live in the country. Particularly the two key goals of Pride in place – a distinct, unified, and well-loved place where we feel proud to live and Environmental Innovation – home to beautiful, local landscapes.

National Context

- 2.7 The UK Government amended the Environment Act 2021 in March 2023 to introduce Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG), a new condition for planning permissions designed to improve the natural environment. It is, however, recognised that some forms of development are exempt.

BNG

- 2.8 The BNG requirement of the Environment Act became statutory in February 2024. As part of the long-term protection of nature, the Act sets out the need to identify priority locations for biodiversity offsetting for developments where it is not possible to achieve a net gain on-site. Where off-site biodiversity net gain and enhancement measures are required, these would benefit most when they are targeted to priority locations set out in the NRNH.

LNRS

- 2.9 Each LNRS will be specific and tailored to its area. The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority is responsible for the LNRS's delivery and has commissioned Cambridgeshire County Council to deliver the work for the Cambridgeshire area, although Huntingdonshire District Council remains a key stakeholder in its development.
- 2.10 The LNRS will provide other potential environmental benefits, such as identifying areas associated with carbon sequestration, flood regulation and access to nature-rich spaces where this is most needed for health and wellbeing.
- 2.11 Each LNRS will agree on priorities for nature recovery and propose actions in the locations where it would make a particular contribution to achieving those priorities.
- 2.12 Local nature recovery strategies may propose actions such as the
- creation of wetlands
 - restoration of peatlands
 - planting of trees and hedgerows
 - more sustainable management of existing woodlands and other habitats like grasslands
- 2.13 These actions are intended to help nature and improve the wider natural environment.
- 2.14 Responsible authorities must work with other partners when preparing their strategy. They should also involve a wide range of groups to ensure that local nature recovery strategies reflect local priorities and benefit from local knowledge.

- 2.15 This collaborative and strategic approach will help ensure that proposals are appropriate and reflect ambition and an understanding of what can be achieved.
- 2.16 Both BNG and LNRS are legal requirements under the Environment Act 2021, which will help achieve the Council's strengthened legal obligation to enhance and conserve biodiversity. However, LNRSs are not required for mandatory BNG to commence within the planning application process.
- 2.17 LNRS can support a strategic approach to off-site BNG delivery, agreeing on evidence-based locations to expand and connect existing habitats and provide wider environmental benefits. LNRS plays a role in BNG by determining the 'strategic significance' multiplier within the biodiversity metric. The NRNH will operate the same way as the LNRS in the interim before LNRS adoption. Understanding the link between the policies is essential for practitioners involved in BNG delivery.

Corporate Context

- 2.18 Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) and the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) are strongly linked to the Council's Climate Strategy under the nature theme, as these two elements are designed to help increase and restore nature.
- 2.19 At the [full council meeting](#) on Wednesday, 22 February 2023, Councillors formally recognised a climate crisis and ecological emergency in Huntingdonshire and adopted a [climate strategy](#) that sets out the priorities for achieving the net zero carbon council's commitment by 2040. Within this climate strategy there are 6 key priorities:
- Buildings
 - Energy and Renewables
 - Nature
 - Travel and Transport
 - Waste, Recycling and Resource Management
 - Community
- 2.20 The Council's climate strategy highlighted that 83% of respondents to the consultation said that the Council should restore nature and plant trees.
- 2.21 The decision to formally acknowledge the priority landscapes within Huntingdonshire falls within the Nature priority of the council's climate strategy.
- 2.22 The NRNH work also aligns with the Huntingdonshire Place Strategies, which is designed to understand what is most important to residents, communities and stakeholders within our towns and rural areas and looks to build pride in place. The NRNH specifically links in with Journey 4—Environmental Innovation, which states that we should protect what we have. The NRNH sets out the priority landscapes within the District that need to be recognised and celebrated the most. It should be noted that several of the priority landscape areas relate closely to our established towns and villages. They are not intended to be a tool to prevent

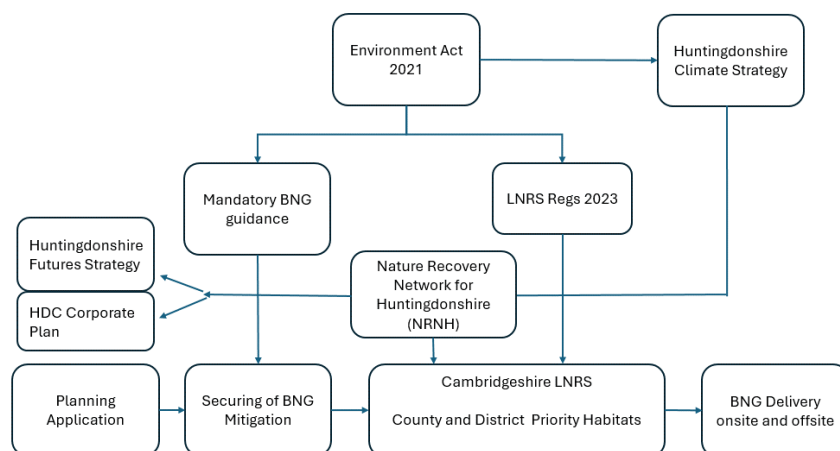
development, instead carefully designed, specified development within they may provide opportunities to enhance the areas and provide additional linkages to support nature connectivity.

- 2.23 The detailed links between the priority landscapes work, and the corporate plan can be found on pages 11-14 of this report.

Local Context

- 2.24 LNRS looks at high-level geography, so the NRNH focus on the district level and our priorities and issues to ensure they are recognised in the broader work.
- 2.25 The NRNH identifies the priority landscapes within the District that are best placed to deliver biodiversity net gain and inform the implementation of biodiversity net gain planning policies.
- 2.26 One key use of the NRNH will be to inform nature recovery plans for managing council-owned open spaces. However, it will also inform and influence broader place-shaping agendas such as:
- other green infrastructure and natural capital investments;
 - Town and Parish Neighbourhood Plans;
 - Parish nature recovery plans and
 - Farming environmental land management schemes.
- 2.27 The Biodiversity for All Team will be presenting the findings from the NRNH at the Town and Parish Forum on the 23rd October 2024.
- 2.28 Once approved, the NRNH will set out the District's priority landscapes, inform the development of the County-wide LNRS and the development of future planning policies
- 2.29 This recognition would mean that when creating or enhancing the habitat in an identified priority landscape, 1.15x more BNG units can be created in these areas than you would otherwise have made, known as the 'strategic significance multiplier'.
- 2.30 This multiplier incentivises developers to align with the LNRS in their area when choosing the location of off-site BNG units. It will support BNG in creating locally driven, joined-up outcomes for nature.
- 2.31 By formally acknowledging the priority natural landscapes set out in this document, the value will be added to the council's statutory planning function, assisting consideration of natural priorities with proposals for growth whilst supporting the implementation and delivery of statutory BNG requirements. The work is also the direct contribution of Huntingdonshire to the LNRS to influence it and ensure that our priorities are identified and set out on the broader geography of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.
- 2.32 Recognising the priority natural landscapes supports the councils Climate Strategy, response to the ecological crisis that the council declared and ensures that the council is focused to deliver maximum benefit to priority landscapes with the potential for more investment and funding in the future.

An example of this is when the Biodiversity for All project used the NRNH to inform the decision-making process for its Community Biodiversity Grant Scheme.



2.32 The above diagram demonstrates the links between the national policies and organisation work.

3.0 COMMENTS OF OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

3.1 The Panel discussed the Huntingdonshire Priority Natural Landscapes Report at its meeting on 3rd October 2024.

3.2 The Panel heard that, following questions from Councillor Alban, the project was an evidence based piece of work and whilst discussions had been held with local landowners during the evidence gathering process, this had not been opened to public consultation at this stage. The Panel were also advised that the study was not focussed on access to the identified spaces, many of the spaces had public rights of way or assumed access and it was noted that during adverse weather some rights of way may be closed in order to protect the habitats and environment of the location.

3.3 It was clarified to the Panel, in response to an enquiry from Councillor Shaw that there were nine identified locations within the document and that the tenth location were the river corridors.

3.4 Following a question from Councillor Hassall, the Panel heard that the report had not been presented to the Local Plan Advisory Group (LPAG). The Panel were advised that the report would be further presented to Cabinet and to Council during the October cycle of meetings. The Panel were reassured that the priority landscapes identified were where the Council wanted to enhance and not inhibit development and would be part of an evidence base being pushed into the Local Nature Recovery Strategy which is a County wide piece of work that will be a planning document with formal consultation built in. This piece of work would be developed by

Cambridgeshire County Council who will be undertaking the work on behalf of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority. This Strategy will help to identify the right locations for new developments. It was noted that the work so far is a technical study, which will form an evidence base which, once developed and adopted, could be used by Planning to make informed decisions. This work is part of a framework of evidence and will be used as supporting evidence once adopted. Councillor Hassall argued that this study would be of great benefit to LPAG in developing the Local Plan as an evidence based piece of work. It would be helpful for the Group to know where the biodiversity priority areas are and would be fantastic to get this overlay to sit alongside the Local Plan whilst that is in development to ensure there are no conflicts in identified areas.

- 3.5 Councillor Hassall proposed to add an additional recommendation to the Cabinet report, this recommendation was seconded by Councillor Mokbul and the Panel voted unanimously in favour of forwarding the proposed recommendation to the Cabinet;

6) to agree that the report and presentation be also presented to the Local Plan Advisory Group.

- 3.6 In response to a question from Councillor McAdam, it was clarified to the Panel that whilst the team did not have the knowledge of how many farmers were currently adopting a nature friendly farming approach, it was known that interest in and adoption of this approach was increasing. This was due to a generational shift in farmers and a resulting change of approach and attitude. It was anticipated that there would be a significant shift in support of this approach over the next decade.
- 3.7 Following a query from Councillor Hunt, the Panel heard that whilst it was not anticipated for the identified locations to change in the future, the detailed measures and actions which sit alongside the geology would be updated as appropriate.
- 3.8 The Panel heard, following questions from Councillor Alban and Councillor Shaw, that this evidence base would assist in assessing the Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) and would not be prohibiting development but identifying where BNG credits could be used. It was noted that developers may not be able to apply BNG credits to their own sites and whilst there was not a requirement to use those credits within the district of development, developers were penalised if that was invested away from the original site with the penalty increasing the further away the investment was made. It was noted that there was a process to be followed in spending these credits and that the priority was to be invested locally in the first instance. It was noted that the BNG credits were administered by the Council and that this was an emerging system. It was noted that a criteria to claim credits was a commitment to maintain the proposed project for 30 years. It was also advised that BNG credits were one element in achieving nature recovery and that many other actions would assist with the wider vision of developing this.

- 3.9 It was clarified, following a further question from Councillor Alban, that the definition of a minor amendment as used in Recommendation 4, was a common term used within reports to allow for adjustments or corrections to the detail of the documents. It was assured that this would not undermine the progress of the documents and would be keep the same intention and direction of the current report.
- 3.10 In response to a question from Councillor Hassall who enquired whether there were enough East West corridors, the Panel heard that this would be monitored as it would take time to assess how this would progress. It was noted that where focus could be made on increasing the population and resilience of species within specific areas, it was often found that, with time, this would then encourage the spread and development of that species in the surrounding areas.
- 3.11 Following the discussion, the Panel were informed that their comments would be added to the Cabinet report in order for Cabinet to make a decision upon the recommendations within the report, and additionally, the Panel request that the Cabinet consider adding the following recommendation to their report;
- 6) to agree that the report and presentation be also presented to the Local Plan Advisory Group.

4.0 KEY IMPACTS / RISKS

- 4.1 Huntingdonshire District Council's Planning department will utilise the Hunts Nature Network document to inform their planning policies around potential priority areas for designated through the statutory local plan to support improvement and influence strategic locations where off-site BNG should be provided.
- 4.2 The document will also provide evidence for a more comprehensive Green Infrastructure Strategy for Huntingdonshire, which will also be used to inform policies in the emerging Local Plan subject to coinciding timelines.
- 4.3 Local Plans prepared by Local Planning Authorities must be consistent with national policy, as set out in the [National Planning Policy Framework](#). Plan-makers should use local nature recovery strategies to inform their responses to the National Planning Policy Framework requirement for plans to protect and enhance biodiversity.
- 4.4 The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act is changing the planning system, leading to the Government issuing a revised draft National Planning Policy Framework for consultation closing on 24th September. These proposed updates will include how the plan-making process should weigh local nature recovery strategies. The Government will also guide local authorities on how they will be expected to comply with their duty regarding local nature recovery strategies through their planning functions.

- 4.5 Without an approved NRNH the Council's Planning Department lacks defined and detailed strategic guidance for its decision-making, along with being limited is its contribution to the developing LNRS.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The NRNH will influence and enable the councils work on legal protections to land or a legal duty to enhance the identified landscapes. The Local Planning Authority can use these priority natural landscapes as a consideration within the planning process.

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 This report does not result in any direct resource requirements. However, it will encourage developers to consider the priorities within our natural landscape.
- 6.2 Huntingdonshire's priority landscapes will inform the local nature recovery strategy for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. The formal adoption of the local nature recovery strategy, in early 2025, may require additional evidence to be commissioned as part of the update to the Local Plan 2036 to determine the suitability of development within or adjacent to the identified corridors. This may give rise to an additional cost through the engagement of specialists and/or planning officer time.

7.0 HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

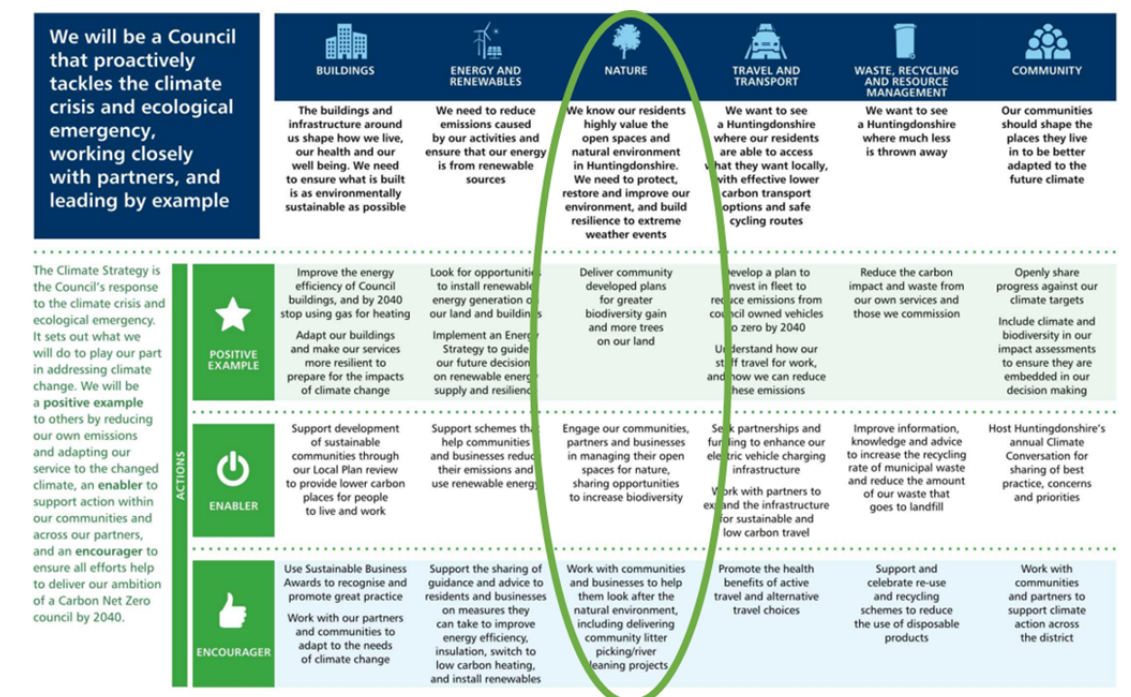
- 7.1 Supporting nature recovery to benefit biodiversity, our environment, and well-being is critical to delivering our Corporate Plan, as it is a vital component of the broader determinants of health that impact our District's long-term sustainability, health, and economy. The NRNH will also benefit Journey 3 (Health Embedded) in the Huntingdonshire Futures Strategy, as this is part of a more holistic approach to health through access to nature.
- 7.2 The Council adopted a Healthy Open Spaces Strategy in 2020, which set out our key priorities and actions for 2030 to ensure that open spaces are protected, that biodiversity and nature are enhanced, and that they support healthy and active communities. 90% of our residents confirmed that greenspaces improved mental health and wellbeing, with nature and wildlife being the most essential aspects of greenspaces.

8.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 Increasing biodiversity and natural capital is a key district-wide priority of the council's climate strategy, which was adopted in February 2023. Securing BNG in priority landscapes in the district will influence the delivery of the following identified actions in the climate strategy.
- 8.2 The council adopted its climate strategy in February 2023, including an action plan for short, medium and long-term actions. Following engagement

and an evidence review, the strategy identified increasing biodiversity and natural capital as one of the three district-wide climate priorities.

8.3 Nature is one of the three priority actions in the climate strategy. This project will deliver on the positive example aspect of the nature theme in the council's climate strategy.



9.0 LINK TO THE CORPORATE PLAN, STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AND/OR CORPORATE OBJECTIVES

9.1 Formally recognising Huntingdonshire's Priority Natural Landscapes set out in this document will directly work towards the three key priorities set out in our Corporate Plan: improving residents' quality of life, ensuring a better environment for future generations, and delivering core services efficiently.

9.1.1 Priority 1: Improving Quality of Life – This work focuses on increasing access to nature for residents by enhancing green spaces and promoting physical and mental well-being. By recognising the Priority Natural Landscapes the council will have developed its approach to Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) and managing public spaces. The Council aims to address the declared ecological crisis and provide a higher level of biodiversity across the district, ensuring residents benefit from a richer natural environment.

9.1.2 Priority 2: Creating a Better Huntingdonshire for Future Generations – This work emphasises long-term conservation efforts, lowering carbon emissions, and restoring critical habitats.

By recognising these Priority Natural Landscapes the council will be incorporating BNG principles into development planning to balance environmental responsibility with growth, ensuring that natural landscapes are recognised.

9.1.3 Priority 3: Doing Core Work Well – This work ensures that the Council meets its statutory obligations and provides high-value services while enabling private investment in biodiversity projects. This is achieved through efficient processes for BNG implementation, supporting community conservation initiatives, and advocating for regional and national policies that promote nature recovery. Partnerships with local stakeholders further strengthen these efforts, positioning Huntingdonshire as a leader in biodiversity conservation.

9.2 The full table detailing the links to the Corporate Strategy can be seen in Appendix A.

10.0 Summary

10.1 The recognition of Huntingdonshire's Priority Natural Landscapes is not designed to inhibit the development and growth of the district, but support it by compliment the vision of the Huntingdonshire Futures strategy, particularly in fostering community pride and environmental innovation. It aligns with the Council's Corporate Plan and Climate Strategy, applying a "green lens" to decision-making to improve biodiversity and help communities care for the environment.

10.2 While not a statutory planning document, Huntingdonshire's Priority Natural Landscapes will inform planning policy and contribute to the Local Nature Recovery Strategy which is being led by Cambridgeshire County Council on behalf of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority. This work aims to increase and restore nature, linking to the Council's environmental goals and ensuring a better quality of life for future generations by preserving and enhancing Huntingdonshire's natural assets.

11.0 LIST OF APPENDICES INCLUDED

- **Appendix A** Huntingdonshire Priorities linked to the Corporate Strategy
- **Appendix B** Huntingdonshire Interim Nature Recovery Network Draft Report
- **Appendix C** Acronym List

12.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- Draft Nature Recovery Network for Huntingdonshire

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Appendix

Appendix A

	Priority 1: Improving quality of life for local people	Priority 2: Creating a better Huntingdonshire for future generations.	Priority 3: Doing our core work well.
	Improving the quality of life for local people	Creating a better Huntingdonshire for future generations - Lowering carbon emissions.	Deliver good quality, high value-for-money services with good control and compliance with statutory obligations.

DO	<p>We will increase the levels of biodiversity in the identified priority areas in the district, through increased private investment, as a result of BNG. This will result in residents having access to a greater level of nature.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) Implementation: Actively implement BNG principles in all council-led development projects, ensuring that any habitat loss is compensated by creating or enhancing natural habitats, thus improving the local environment. • Green Spaces Enhancement: Directly manage and enhance public green spaces, parks, and natural reserves to provide residents with access to nature and promote physical and mental well-being. 	<p>By identifying priority landscapes and contributing to the Local Nature Recovery Strategy we will ensure that the nature in given the best chance to thrive. This increase will be achieved by enhancing areas such as wood and shrubland and creating new habitats. These will have added carbon sequestration benefits. There are well-documented social and economic benefits of accessing nature.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long-term Conservation Projects: Initiate and manage long-term conservation projects to restore and preserve critical habitats, ensuring their protection for future generations. • Sustainable Planning: Incorporate BNG and LNRS principles into the council's long-term planning strategies, ensuring that future development is sustainable and environmentally responsible. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Efficient BNG Processes: Streamline the processes for assessing and implementing BNG in council projects to ensure efficiency and effectiveness in meeting biodiversity goals. • Compliance and Monitoring: Establish robust systems for monitoring and reporting on BNG and LNRS outcomes, ensuring transparency and accountability.
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ENABLE	<p>We are enabling investment to through BNG and the LNRS to achieve significant contributions towards enhancing nature and contributing to nature climate change mitigations and adaptations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for Community Initiatives: Provide grants and resources for local groups and organisations engaged in conservation projects that align with BNG and the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS). • Educational Programs: Facilitate educational programs and workshops to raise residents' awareness of the importance of biodiversity and nature recovery. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Innovation in Conservation: Support research and pilot projects that explore innovative methods for biodiversity conservation and habitat restoration. • Youth Engagement: Develop programs to engage young people in conservation efforts, fostering a sense of responsibility and connection to their natural environment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capacity Building: Provide training and resources for council staff and local stakeholders to enhance their ability to implement and support BNG and LNRS initiatives. • Community Involvement: Foster a participatory approach by involving local communities in planning and decision-making processes related to biodiversity and nature recovery projects.
INFLUENCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy Advocacy: Advocate for policies at the regional and national levels that support BNG and LNRS, ensuring that these frameworks are 	<p>Regional Leadership: Position Huntingdonshire as a leader in biodiversity conservation by sharing best practices and successes in BNG and</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standard Setting: Set high standards for BNG and LNRS practices within the council's operations and projects,

	<p>integrated into broader planning and development regulations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Partnerships: Collaborate with local businesses, developers, and non-profits to promote and implement BNG and LNRS in their projects, ensuring a collective effort to enhance biodiversity.	<p>LNRS implementation with neighbouring districts and councils.</p>	<p>serving as a model for other local authorities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Knowledge Sharing: Promote the exchange of knowledge and experiences in BNG and LNRS through workshops, conferences, and publications, contributing to the broader understanding and implementation of these strategies.
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An Interim Nature Recovery Network for Huntingdonshire

Draft Report

Prepared by

The Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire & Northamptonshire

January 2024



**Wildlife Trust for
Beds, Cambs
& Northants**

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Map 10: Nene Valley Habitat Network

Map 11: River Corridors Habitat Network

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Urgent action is required to reverse biodiversity loss and climate change, which is increasingly being reflected in national, regional and local policies.

In terms of natural habitats, Cambridgeshire has one of the lowest proportions of priority habitats in England (less than 10%), with one of the lowest percentages of land designated for nature and the second lowest woodland cover at 4.8%. Natural assets in Cambridgeshire are coming under increasing pressure with conflicts and / or damage from recreational pressures being recorded at sites including Brampton Wood and Houghton Meadows SSSIs.

The UK Government has set ambitious targets related to climate change and through the Defra sponsored 25 Year Environment Plan has committed to reversing the loss of biodiversity. The Environment Act 2021 introduced a requirement to prepare Local Nature Recovery Strategies and a requirement for mandatory biodiversity net gain through the land use planning system.

Better management, restoration and creation of natural habitats will not just play a part in reversing the loss of biodiversity but will also contribute towards achieving zero-carbon. It can also help provide better access to the countryside for a growing population with the health and social benefits that this brings to the local economy, particularly in a county such as Cambridgeshire that doesn't have large-scale open access downland, commons or coast.

Local Authorities in Cambridgeshire have recognised the climate emergency and biodiversity crisis and are looking to take greater action to address these twin challenges. Many have formally supported the Natural Cambridgeshire vision to double nature:

“Our Vision is that by doubling the area of rich wildlife habitats and natural greenspace, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough will become a world-class environment where nature and people thrive, and businesses prosper.”

The Environment Act 2021 introduces mandatory biodiversity net gain of at least 10% for most developments. It also creates a legal duty for Local Authorities to prepare Local Nature Recovery Strategies, which are anticipated to be produced through cross boundary co-operation at a County or equivalent level.

In Cambridgeshire & Peterborough the Combined Authority is the competent authority and they have agreed that the County Council will lead on the production of this strategy. The first iteration of a Local Nature Recovery Strategy at a county level may of necessity be high level. There will need to be additional work to provide more local detail at a district and parish level. The outputs from this project will be available to inform, influence and feed into the statutory county-level Local Nature Recovery Strategy, but also provide some of the finer grain detail to support action at a district and parish level.

Once biodiversity net gain becomes mandatory in January 2024, there will be a need to identify priority locations for provision of biodiversity offsetting for those developments where it is not possible achieve a net gain on site. Where off-site biodiversity net gain and enhancement measures are required, these would have most benefit where they are targeted to strategic locations, which contribute to the creation of a functioning nature recovery network. Such locations are also rewarded in terms of biodiversity units when using the Defra Biodiversity Metric to measure biodiversity net gain. There is therefore a need to identify strategic locations to deliver biodiversity offsetting in Huntingdonshire.

The proposed Huntingdonshire Nature Network seeks to meet this need by identifying the strategic locations within the district best placed to deliver biodiversity net gain and to inform implementation of biodiversity net gain planning policies.

However, the work will have wider relevance, as it will also help inform and influence wider place shaping agendas such as other green infrastructure and natural capital investments; Parish Neighbourhood Plans and parish nature recovery plans; and farming environmental land management schemes. It can also help to inform organisational nature recovery plans whether that be Huntingdonshire District Council open spaces and estate management or those of private businesses. Huntingdonshire is starting a “Nature for All” programme and there will be strong synergies between the Nature Network and “Nature for All”.

1.2 Strategic Land-use Planning

The ¹Huntingdonshire Local Plan has previously recognised countryside enhancement areas including the Great Fen, Great Ouse Valley and the area around Grafham Water. The Great Fen Masterplan is a separate Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). The current Local Plan includes a policy for new development to deliver no net loss in biodiversity and a net gain where possible. From January 2024, though this will be superseded by the Environment Act mandatory minimum 10% biodiversity net gain requirement.

Where off-site biodiversity net gain and enhancement measures are required, these would have most benefit where they are targeted to strategic locations, which contribute to the creation of a functioning nature recovery network. Such locations are also rewarded in terms of biodiversity units when using the Defra Biodiversity Metric, the official measure of biodiversity net gain.

The Environment Act places a legal duty on Local Authorities to prepare Local Nature Recovery Strategies. These will be produced through cross boundary co-operation at a County or equivalent level, however, they are not likely to be completed before the end of 2024 at the earliest. This document and associated mapping layers will therefore support the existing Huntingdonshire Local Plan (2019) and future revisions of this.

1.3 Study Aims & Objectives

This report has been commissioned by Huntingdonshire District Council. The project aim is to identify a high-level Interim Nature Recovery Network for Huntingdonshire district (to act as a preliminary, but non-statutory Local Nature Recovery Strategy for the area), to inform implementation of biodiversity net gain planning policies. The work will also inform other green infrastructure and natural capital investments, as well as Parish Neighbourhood Plans and organisational nature recovery plans.

The project aims to:

1. Identify Priority Areas for landscape-scale action to support nature’s recovery, from both desktop analysis and targeted fieldwork.
2. Undertake stakeholder engagement with key stakeholders and a sample of major landowners to agree the boundaries of the priority landscape areas.
3. Identify the critical components of a Nature Recovery Network in each of the Priority Areas, based on the ²Lawton principles of More, Bigger, Better, and More Joined Up.

The final products are this report and a series of GIS mapping layers.

The outputs from this project will be available to inform, influence and feed into the statutory county-level Local Nature Recovery Strategy (which commences preparation in October 2023), but also provide a local context for securing biodiversity net gain across Huntingdonshire.

In addition to the above outputs, a separate framework document will be prepared to guide local action for nature to support Huntingdonshire’s “Nature for All” programme.

2. STUDY STAGES

2.1 Identification of Priority Areas

The study was undertaken between September 2023 and January 2024.

The first stage involved putting together the evidence base to identify **Priority Areas** for large-scale, strategic biodiversity and landscape enhancement across Huntingdonshire. There were two separate but related strands to the initial evidence gathering.

The first strand involved collation and analysis of high-level habitat and nature conservation sites data, to identify priority landscape areas as the core components of a potential Nature Recovery Network across Huntingdonshire. Information including data from Natural England's Open Data Portal, Natural Capital Solution's Opportunity Map of Cambridgeshire and data held by the Wildlife Trust on County Wildlife Sites and nature reserves was collated using QGIS to produce a series of mapping layers that can be interrogated and analysed. We assessed this information against maps of underlying and surface geology, soils, topography and drainage to understand the wider landscape context of the habitat information.

The second strand involved site visits to each of the Priority Areas to understand better the local landscape and land-use, and to allow us to refine the area boundaries, which were further tested through engagement with key stakeholders.

2.2 Identifying the Components of a Nature Recovery Network

The second stage involved the identification of the detailed components of a nature recovery network within each of the **Priority Areas**.

The identification of robust ecological networks can be undertaken using a variety of methods, see ³Natural England Research Report NERR081 *Nature Networks Evidence Handbook* (2020).

Many of these methods are modelling approaches that rely on large amounts of habitat and other spatial data and require significant inputs of time and money to produce robust outputs. For the short timescale and level of detail required for this study we therefore decided to use a simpler approach based on use of up-to-date high-quality information on habitats, soils, and discussion with landowners regarding better and poorer quality agricultural land. **This in effect is a more local and refined version of the approach Natural England have taken to their National Habitat Network Framework and Maps and their Habitat Potential data layers.**

By incorporating a component of site visits and habitat mapping within the **Priority Areas**, this simplified approach is likely to produce at least as good results as any ecological modelling result for a similar level of effort. That is not to say that ecological modelling methods would not be useful, but they are likely to refine the identified network, rather than completely re-invent it. They may in future, however, be useful if there are difficult choices to be made between different options for creating stepping-stone habitats. However, they will not change the locations of the core sites or the immediate priorities for creating a Nature Recovery Network for Huntingdonshire.

During fieldwork, detailed analysis of the priority landscape areas was undertaken, including targeted site surveys to update habitat information where this was out of date (most of the phase 1 habitat data dates from the 1990s). These site visits helped us gain a better understanding of local opportunities and constraints that may not be evident from desk-based studies. Analysis of the updated habitat information was used to refine the boundaries of the Priority Areas and to identify core habitat and buffer areas, and key linkages and stepping-stones within the study area, in line with the Lawton principles. As part of the study, connections to the wider Nature Recovery Network across Cambridgeshire and beyond were also considered.

The habitat information gathered during this project, was used to produce a series of GIS mapping layers showing the local Nature Recovery Network including the detailed boundaries of the Priority Areas and the components of a nature recovery network, with core areas, stepping stones and extensions to each of these. Chapter 4 of this report describes these areas in more detail, including the opportunities within each and their potential benefits.

The overall network maps identify the best and most important opportunities for a Nature Recovery Network across Huntingdonshire. However, they do not identify every opportunity and landowners and local communities will be able to bring forward other projects to complement and add to the core network set out in this report.

The information in this report will help inform land use planning decisions, including priority locations for delivery of biodiversity net gain, as well as other priorities for funding including agri-environment schemes.

2.3 Stakeholder Engagement

The draft Priority Areas boundaries were presented to key stakeholders, including Natural England, large conservation organisations such as the National Trust and RSPB, and a sample of landowners with significant land within one or more of the areas. The boundaries of the Priority Areas were further refined based on these discussions.

Once the boundaries of the Priority Areas were established, further discussions took place with key stakeholders to identify the critical components of a Nature Recovery Network and the best opportunities to create or enhance habitats within each. At this stage, not all opportunities have been identified. More detailed engagement with landowners and stakeholders outside of this project will be required to identify the full range of opportunities for expanding the nature recovery network core areas and stepping stones.

Further discussions with landowners will also enable identification of the potential delivery mechanisms for each component of the nature recovery network, whether that be through agricultural policy (Environmental Land Management Schemes), Biodiversity Net Gain linked to development, provision of green infrastructure, or other natural environment policy drivers. They will also identify those opportunities deliverable in the short-term compared to those that will be longer-term ventures.

The Priority Area boundaries and the critical Nature Recovery Network components set out in this report are therefore a product of combined desktop and field assessment, coupled with testing through engagement with key stakeholders.

The outputs from the project are this report and a series of GIS mapping layers showing an interim Nature Recovery Network for Huntingdonshire.

3. IDENTIFICATION OF PRIORITY AREAS

3.1 Sites of Highest Biodiversity Value

In order to establish areas on which to focus landscape-scale biodiversity opportunities, an evidence-based understanding of the current nature conservation sites and habitats across Huntingdonshire is required.

The broad nature of this study could not look at the details of the individual sites and so sites of high biodiversity were defined as those with some kind of designation (e.g. SSSIs, Local Nature Reserves, County Wildlife Sites, ancient woodlands, traditional orchards), or other protection, for instance a private nature reserve. Designated sites are already defined and well mapped and the GIS data for these was taken from the Natural England Open Data Geoportal. We supplemented this with local data available to the Wildlife Trust and through CPERC (the Local Records Centre) including County Wildlife Sites, Wildlife Trust nature reserves, and wildlife-rich countryside sites owned by other conservation stakeholders.

3.2 Identification of Priority Areas

Clusters of designated nature conservation sites were used as the initial basis for identifying potential **Priority Areas**. Although these designated sites cover the vast majority of priority habitats they do not represent all the wildlife habitats present in the area. We therefore supplemented this information with other data sources, to better define clusters of sites and habitats that were well connected.

⁴The Mapping Natural Capital and Opportunities for Habitat Creation in Cambridgeshire Report (Rouquette, 2019), provided a good basis for analysis of the full range of habitats, although not all of the data sets used in this were recent, for example the phase 1 habitat survey for the county dates from the 1990s. We therefore supplemented this high-level habitat opportunity mapping with local knowledge and additional field surveys to update the historical land use information where it is out-of-date.

The Natural England National Habitat Network data layers available on the MAGIC website were also downloaded and interrogated. These provided a coarse layer of information based on simple buffers around different types of priority habitat, which was helpful in identifying the initial areas of focus.

Using the above data, nine potential Priority Areas were outlined and then further defined by studying landscape features such as the topography, underlying geology (both solid and drift), current habitat and land use, and past habitat and land use. Published green infrastructure strategies and visions, such as the Great Fen Masterplan, and land owned and managed by organisations with a predominantly conservation remit was also taken into account. The boundaries of the Priority Areas were refined using the updated habitat information, gathered from site visits.

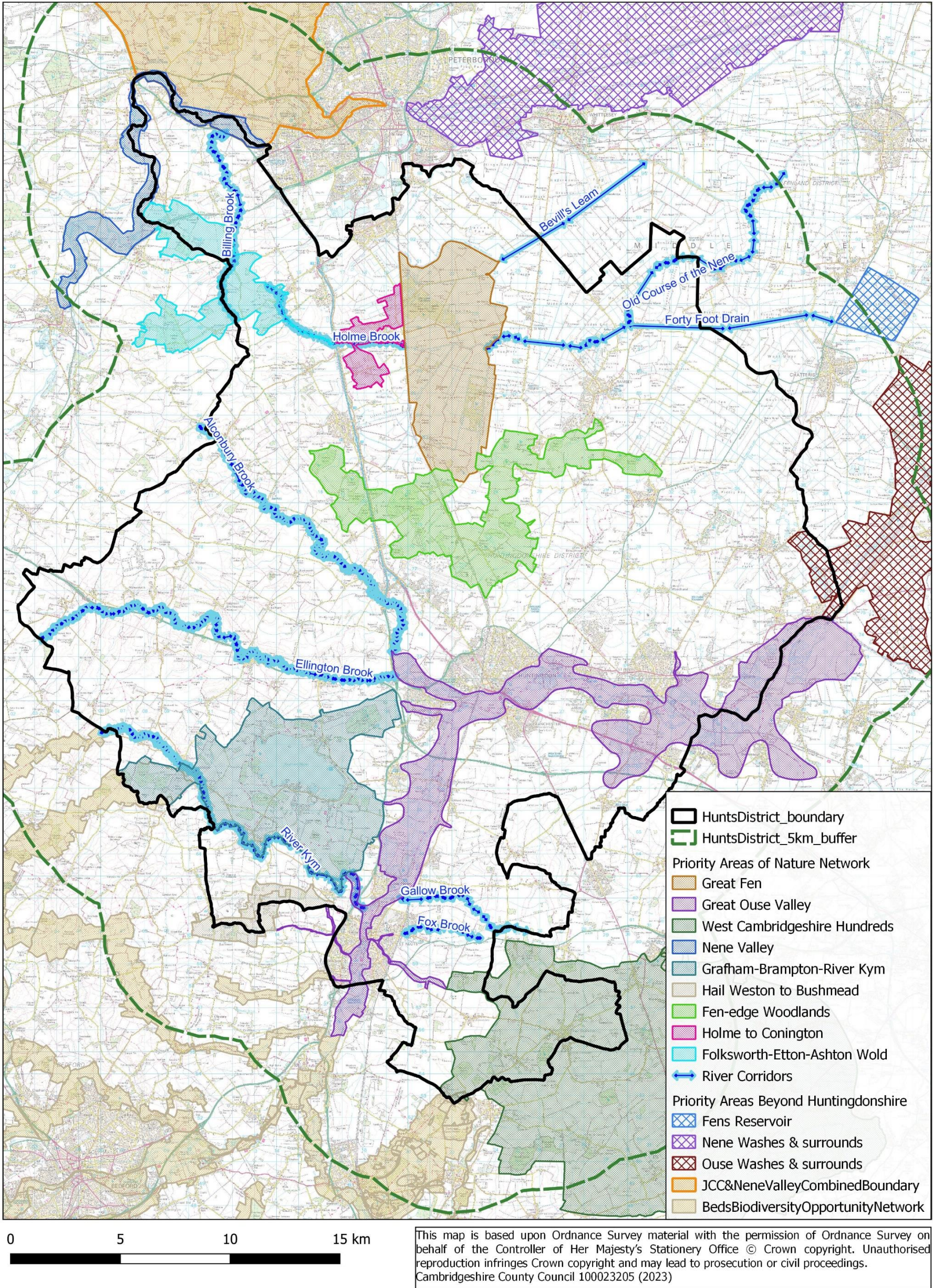
In defining the detailed boundaries of each Priority Area, the placement of the boundary has, where possible, followed land use and geographic features rather than the individual ownership of land, but inevitably these are sometimes one and the same. Where possible, Priority Areas have been connected to neighbouring areas to create a coherent network.

The above information formed the initial evidence base through which we defined areas of focus for a potential Nature Recovery Network within Huntingdonshire. Each area is different in character and may ultimately produce very different opportunities in terms of habitats and land uses.

Map 1: Huntingdonshire Interim Nature Recovery Network Priority Areas



Huntingdonshire Interim Nature Recovery Network
Dec 2023



The nine **Priority Areas** are described below, and also shown on Map 1 above:

It is important to note, when reading the descriptions below, that the Priority Areas as identified in Map 1 are not intended to be converted in their entirety to semi-natural habitats, but will be a mixture of enhanced habitat areas, new habitats, and nature friendly farming. The Priority Areas, as mapped, also do not have any new or amended statutory planning policy status arising from this Report (though future planning policy may take into account the contents of this Report). The purpose of the maps, and the opportunities described below for each mapped area, is to inform nature recovery and land use activities planned within each area. This Report will hopefully help steer those activities to achieve the best available nature recovery solutions.

Further details on each Priority Area, including an individual vision and objectives for each, can be found in section 4 of this Report.

3.3 Great Fen

The Wildlife Trust working with other partners including Natural England have identified a long-term vision to create a landscape for wildlife and people across 37 Km² between Huntingdon and Peterborough, covering the remaining deep peat soils around and connecting Woodwalton Fen and Holme Fen. Woodwalton Fen and Holme Fen represent two of the four remaining historic ancient fen sites in Cambridgeshire. Holme Fen is the lowest lying part of Britain, being 3-4 metres below sea level. Some of the deepest peat soils remain in the northern part of the Great Fen and these provide the best potential to restore lowland fen and other high nature value wetland habitats. The vision is to create a large mosaic of wetland habitats linking, extending and buffering the two historic fen sites. The conservation priorities in the north of the area are the creation of lowland fen priority habitat and other wetland mosaics.

Towards the south of the Great Fen area, the land rises towards Church End, Gamsey Wood and Riddy Wood. In the southern portion of the Vision area the priorities are the creation of lowland meadow priority habitat, and other complementary habitats such as hedgerow networks, ponds and small-scale woodland planting, to complement areas where farming might continue.

Within parts of the Great Fen area, it is recognised that farming will continue to be a long term and important feature of the area. However, there is growing recognition and support in the farming community to adapt farming practices so that thriving and viable farming can continue to take place, while integrating land management methods that support nature recovery. Alternative approaches to farming also have the potential to make a major contribution to reducing greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture in this area. Further details on farming related opportunities are covered in section 4 of this report.

3.4 Great Ouse Valley

The Great Ouse Valley priority area encompasses the River Great Ouse and its floodplain. The confluences with and lower reaches of many of the tributaries are also included. The Great Ouse Valley includes a number of remnant lowland floodplain meadows, with Port Holme being the largest in England. Other high-quality examples include St Neots Common SSSI, Houghton Meadows SSSI and the Hemingford Meadows CWS's. Much of the floodplain remains as grassland though many fields have in the past been agriculturally improved with herbicides and fertilisers to a greater or lesser extent.

Throughout the twentieth century large parts of the valley were dug for sand and gravel. Some of these gravel pits have been restored for conservation uses such as Paxton Pits nature reserve, Godmanchester nature reserve and Fen Drayton nature reserve. Others have deeper sides and are used for fishing or water sports. However, collectively they form a network of sites important for breeding and wintering waterbirds, as well as supporting a wide range of other wetland wildlife whether in the lakes, or associated reedbeds, wet grasslands and wet woodlands. Some of the deeper water lakes are also important for supporting wetland birds that winter on the Ouse Washes or near continent in times of hard winter weather, though these occasions are now becoming increasingly infrequent with climate change.

The River Great Ouse itself is managed as a navigation, however, the backwaters, often following the former course of the river, retain more natural river features and support a range of aquatic and wetland species. Many of the backwaters are high quality wetland habitats, so there is at present little scope to enhance the river itself.

The conservation priorities include the management and restoration of species-rich lowland floodplain meadows from St Neots to Holywell, and the management of the network of lakes and associated wetlands for breeding and wintering birds and other specialist aquatic plants and invertebrates.

The other priority is to improve the water quality of the river due to the adverse impacts of phosphates from agriculture and waste water on Port Holme, the Ouse Washes and other nature sites, as well as reduce excess flooding on the Ouse Washes downstream. However, this requires significant land use change across the catchment which extends well beyond Huntingdonshire.

3.5 West Cambridgeshire Hundreds

The higher ground in the south-east of the district includes a small part of the West Cambridgeshire Hundreds priority area, though most is in South Cambridgeshire. This area comprises glacial boulder clay deposits, which overlay the Cretaceous chalk bedrock. It forms part of the Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire Claylands National Character Area, which includes most of the western and southern parts of Huntingdonshire.

Key sites within Huntingdonshire include Waresley & Gransden Woods SSSI and Sand and Weaveley Woods SSSI. The area also has the headwaters of the Abbotsley Brook and Hen Brook which flow towards St Neots and the Great Ouse.

In the early 2000s, the Forestry Commission commissioned the East Anglian Wildlife Trusts to identify priority areas for the management and restoration of ancient woodlands and creation of new woodlands to inform their woodland grants programme. Six areas were identified in Cambridgeshire, three of which were within Huntingdonshire including the West Cambridgeshire Hundreds, the Grafham-Brampton Woods and the Fen-edge Woodlands.

The conservation priorities in the West Cambridgeshire Hundreds are the restoration and better management of the ancient woodlands, along with buffering and better connecting them through woodland creation, enhancement of hedgerow networks and creation of complementary meadow and pond habitats.

3.6 Grafham-Brampton-River Kym

This priority area also forms part of the Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire Claylands National Character Area. It encompasses Grafham Water and the surrounding land from Brampton Wood in the north-east to the River Kym to the south. The A1 forms the eastern boundary. The area directly connects to the Yardley-Whittlewood Ridge in Bedfordshire which is another area with increased woodland cover. The soils are glacial boulder clay deposits, overlying the Oxford Clay bedrock.

Key sites in Huntingdonshire include Brampton Wood SSSI, Little Paxton Woods SSSI, Perry Woods SSSI, as well as Grafham Water SSSI. There are a number of other ancient woodlands which form a network around Grafham Water and extend south and west to Bedfordshire. Around Southoe there are a number of species-rich lowland meadows, including ancient ridge and furrow meadows.

The conservation priorities in this priority area are the restoration and better management of the ancient woodlands, along with buffering and better connecting them through woodland creation, enhancement of hedgerow networks and creation of complementary meadow and pond habitats. The area around Southoe provides a particular focus for species-rich grassland creation. Grafham Water is designated for its waterbird populations and functionally linked to the Great Ouse Valley gravel pits. Wetland bird conservation is the priority at this site.

3.7 Fen-edge Woodlands

This priority area is located north of Huntingdon and Alconbury Weald and extends west to Sawtry and east to Warboys, with the fens forming the northern boundary. It is situated at the north-eastern edge of the Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire Claylands National Character Area. The surface geology is again glacial boulder clay deposits, which overlay the Oxford Clay bedrock, though in places the Oxford Clay is present at the surface.

Key sites include Monks Wood and the Old Quarter NNR, Aversley Wood SSSI, Warboys Wood SSSI and another 15 ancient woodlands. There are few areas of species-rich grassland but those present are of a high quality including Upwood Meadows NNR, Woodwalton Marsh SSSI and Great Stukeley Railway Cutting SSSI.

The conservation priorities in this area are the restoration and better management of the ancient woodlands, along with buffering and better connecting them through woodland creation, creating woodland stepping stones and enhancing hedgerow networks. The creation of complementary meadow and pond habitats would be highly beneficial close to the ancient woodlands and particularly around Upwood Meadows NNR.

3.8 Hail Weston-Bushmead

This small priority area comprises a number of ancient woodlands and grasslands across the Huntingdonshire / Bedfordshire border. It is situated in the middle of the Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire Claylands National Character Area and the surface geology is glacial boulder clay deposits, which overlay the Oxford Clay bedrock, though in places the Oxford Clay is present at the surface.

Key sites include Huntingdon Wood CWS, High Wood CWS, The Elms Hail Weston CWS, Moor Road Marshy Fields CWS and in Bedfordshire, Bushmead Big Wood CWS, Bushmead Meadows CWS and Hook & Home Woods CWS.

The conservation priorities are the restoration and better management of the ancient woodlands, along with buffering and better connecting them through woodland creation, creating woodland stepping stones and enhancing hedgerow networks. The creation of complementary meadow and pond habitats would be highly beneficial close to the ancient woodlands.

3.9 Folksworth-Elton-Ashton Wold

The area from Elton Park to Folksworth and onto Ashton Wold forms another wooded farmland priority area. Glacial boulder clay deposits form the surface geology, overlying the Oxford Clay bedrock, though in places the Oxford Clay again comes to the surface.

Key sites include Ashton Wold SSSI and Local Wildlife Site (in Northamptonshire), Caldecote Wood CWS, North Wood CWS, Fir Dale Lake and Fishponds CWS and Elton Park. There are also scattered patches of species-rich and other grassland along some of the road verges or watercourses. These include Morborne Hill roadside verge CWS, Greenhill road verges CWS and Lutton Pastures Local Wildlife Site (in Northamptonshire).

Conservation priorities in this area are the restoration and better management of the ancient woodlands, as well as buffering them through more nature friendly farming or habitat creation. Enhanced landscape connectivity for wildlife would be best served by enlarging smaller woodlands or creating new woodland stepping stones. Fields are generally large but there is also scope to enhance landscape connectivity for wildlife through nature friendly farming involving an enhanced hedgerow network and use of uncropped field margins and headlands. The creation of new habitats along the upper reaches of the Holme and Billing Brooks would further contribute to a more connected nature network.

3.10 Holme-Conington

This small priority area lies west of Holme Fen on the other side of the East Coast mainline railway and covers the land around Holme and Conington Villages. Holmewood Hall and Conington Hall have extensive areas of parkland with broadleaved woodland and there is historic ridge and furrow grassland at Conington. North of Holme village there is an area of peat soils opposite Holme Fen and a couple of wildlife sites, The Roughs, Caldecote Fen and Denton Common Pit. Holme Brook passes through the area feeding the Great Fen. The underlying geology is Oxford Clay but with peat deposits north of Holme.

Conservation priorities include a range of more nature friendly farming to create better connectivity between the remnant woods and grasslands of Holmewood and Conington Halls and there is potential to create a continuous habitat corridor along the Holme Brook. Restoration of species-rich grassland is possible at both Holmewood Park and on and around the ridge and furrow grasslands at Conington Park. On the peat soils north of Holme, the priority is to conserve the peat and reduce the loss of carbon, which could be achieved in a number of ways including alternative forms of farming, grassland creation or even small areas of wetland creation.

3.11 Nene Valley

The River Nene forms the north-western boundary of Huntingdonshire with Northamptonshire and Peterborough. The River Nene is a priority area for its floodplain meadows in Peterborough and for wetland bird populations in Northamptonshire. The area of floodplain within Huntingdonshire is limited, with most recognised nature conservation sites within neighbouring districts. However, there are remnant flood meadows and other wetland mosaics at Water Newton, Sibson and Stibbington. The conservation priorities in these locations are the management and restoration of lowland species-rich flood meadow.

3.12 River Corridors (Kym, Alconbury Brook, Ellington Brook & Fen Rivers)

The tributaries of the Great Ouse including River Kym, Ellington Brook, Alconbury Brook and smaller watercourses such as Diddington Brook, Stirtloe Brook, Hen Brook, Wintringham Brook and Abbotsley Brook form a set of linear habitat corridors through the district. None of them have major floodplains, and many have been deepened and straightened as part of past agricultural drainage or engineered solutions to flood management.

There are few significant wetlands associated with these watercourses, however many of them have the potential to benefit from river restoration works aimed at achieving a more sinuous channel with more varied in-stream habitats.

The adoption of natural flood management measures across the wider farmed catchments could support improved flood risk management and water quality. As some of the watercourses are known to be subject to flash flooding, e.g. the Alconbury Brook, the adoption of natural flood management across the catchment is arguably a higher conservation priority than river restoration and wetland creation.

In addition, the Fen Rivers provide connectivity from the Great Fen eastwards to the other internationally important wetlands in the fens including Ouse Washes and Nene Washes through the Forty Foot Drain, Bevill's Leam and Old Course of the Nene. Their major function is water management and there are few habitat sites associated with them, though they could form the focus for better habitat connectivity through the fens.

These rivers are therefore shown as corridors on the Nature Network Maps as opposed to discrete areas of floodplain with potential for large-scale habitat creation, as with the Great Ouse and Nene.

4. PRIORITY AREA NATURE NETWORK COMPONENTS

4.1 Nature Network Rules of Thumb

There are different approaches that can be adopted to develop a nature network, based on local conditions. However, there are some broad principles that influence the design of functional and robust ecological networks (³Natural England Research Report NERR081). The following represents a hierarchical approach based on the Lawton principles (²Lawton et al, 2010), listing the most important elements in order. The key elements are then each considered in turn.

Better site quality > Bigger sites > More sites > Stepping stones & permeable matrix (nature friendly farming) > Corridors

Better site quality: Maintaining the quality of core sites within a network is the starting point, as these will represent the best quality areas of habitat supporting the largest range and number of key species. To achieve the best site quality, there needs to be sufficiently large habitat patches to allow for a complex mosaic of different habitats and micro-habitats, along with dynamic processes to allow the fullest range of species to flourish.

Core sites with long-term continuity of habitats, whether ancient woodland, or long-standing grassland and wetland habitats need to have strong protection as they will support more species and have more complete and carbon-rich soil structures than more recent examples of these habitats.

These core habitat patches should be buffered from adverse adjacent land uses by at least 50m, and ideally 100m of less intensive land uses. In some cases, e.g. where predation from urban cats would affect important species, a larger distance of up to 500m may be required.

The final critical element to achieving better quality core habitat patches is to ensure suitable management that allows key ecological processes such as grazing or natural regeneration to occur. Where this is not possible, for example on small sites, management interventions can attempt to replicate these processes, but this tends to be more costly with less natural results.

Bigger sites: Bigger sites with significant buffer zones have reduced edge effects, and provide larger core habitat patches that can support wider ranging species. They are also likely to have more habitat variation and better support those species with specialist habitat requirements. In the context of climate change, bigger sites are likely to provide more micro-climates and therefore be more resilient than smaller sites.

The aim should be to have core habitat patches of at least 100 Ha with a minimum habitat patch size of 40 Ha. If there are choices to be made, when expanding the size of sites, it will usually be better to choose the smallest core site to increase first (for example increase a site of 30 Ha to 40 Ha before increasing a site of 70 Ha to 100 Ha).

In the context of recreational pressure, bigger sites are usually able to cope with larger numbers of people because of the greater scope to provide areas with no / low disturbance to act as refuges for sensitive species.

More sites: When selecting locations for creating new sites, it will often be better to choose areas with greater variation of topography and aspect. Larger sites are better than smaller sites, but if the former is not possible, larger numbers of smaller sites can work so long as they are well connected to the core sites and each other.

Stepping stones & permeable matrix: Across a defined habitat network the aim should be for there to be at least 30% semi-natural habitat. For specialist species, habitat patches should be less than 200m apart, but for more generalist species less than 1 Km apart is acceptable.

Landscape-scale habitat mosaics help improve the stability of populations and may be important for wide-ranging species. In agricultural landscapes a more heterogeneous landscape can help counter the impacts of intensive farming practices. A landscape with a good variety of different types of habitats can often support a greater variety of species than would be predicted by just considering the number and type of habitats present (i.e. a Nature Network as a whole is potentially more valuable than each individual priority area).

Nature-friendly farming, with a variety of farm habitat features and some high-quality habitat stepping stones will support a habitat network by providing a more permeable matrix through which some species can move. Work at RSPB Hope Farm and the work of the Nature Friendly Farming Network (Georgina Bray & Martin Lines, *pers. comm.*) has shown that giving 10% of farms over to wildlife features is the level required to allow nature to recover. This is also achievable through using the least productive / unproductive parts of fields along with retaining existing farm wildlife features. This approach increases the area of breeding, foraging or sheltering habitats for some species. It is also likely that different landowners will take different approaches based on their own interests, so will increase the variety of the landscape in between habitat patches and help support a wider diversity of species.

Habitat corridors: For most habitat specialist species, corridors are of little value unless they are a minimum 100m wide, due to edge effects reducing the habitat quality along a linear corridor. Natural corridors, such as rivers function better than man-made corridors. Most species will “see” corridors differently to humans. For example, hedgerow corridors are a landscape feature that are of little value to wildlife unless they are dense and tall (i.e. they act as good scrub edge habitat) and they form part of a permeable landscape or part of a woodland habitat network.

Extent of nature-rich habitats: As well as the individual site size, the other critical aspect for the development of a coherent and functioning ecological network is the extent of nature-rich habitats. A minimum land cover of 30% is ideally required to allow species to thrive and respond to naturally fluctuating conditions across a landscape. While in some instances a lower % cover might suffice, this will inevitably require a significantly larger proportion of wildlife-friendly farmland habitats or extensive nature-friendly farming practices.

The following sections consider each of the **Priority Areas** in terms of these principles and identify the components of the habitat network and opportunities for enhancing it. The opportunities identified have been discussed with a few key stakeholders, but detailed discussions have not taken place with most landowners. This would be a valuable subsequent task once the Interim Nature Recovery Network has been published. Land use and land management opportunities will evolve over time, so the Nature Recovery Network should be seen as identifying the best opportunities and indicative of what could be achieved. It provides a framework for action and should evolve as opportunities rise.

4.2 Great Fen Priority Area

4.2.1 Key Facts

Total area: 3,756 Ha

Area of core habitats: 478.46 Ha

Area of core habitats and stepping stones: 542.82 Ha (14.45%)

Area in restoration (core extensions): 1,124.86 Ha

Total area habitats & land in restoration: 1,667.68 Ha (44.4%)

Core sites: Woodwalton Fen SSSI / NNR / SAC, Holme Fen SSSI / NNR.

Important habitats: Lowland fen, wet woodland, wetland mosaics, ditches, lowland meadows and ancient woodland.

Important species:

Fauna: Fen invertebrates for example, *Chrysolia graminis* (Tansy beetle), *Gagitodes sagittata* (Marsh Carpet Moth), and a range of aquatic beetles, flies, moths and spiders.

Birds including common crane, marsh harrier, wintering raptors such as hen harrier & short-eared owl.

Flora: Fen flora for example, fen violet, great water dock, fen wood-rush, bladderwort, water violet & saw sedge.

Overall, more than 1,000 species of beetle have been recorded (20% of them rare in the UK) and over 900 species of moth and butterfly from Woodwalton Fen. Woodwalton Fen supports 82 specialist fen species and 25% of UK priority species.

4.2.2 Network Approach:

Better Management

Woodwalton Fen, Holme Fen and the recent extensions being restored to wetlands are actively managed by Natural England and the Wildlife Trust BCN for their range of priority wetland habitats and species. Management of the core historic fen sites will continue, but in the longer-term, the priority is to further expand the area of high-quality habitats managed for nature, with a view to moving towards less intensive and costly approaches to site management, that work with natural processes. In the short-medium term targeted conservation management is still required on the historic fens to support the critical species and habitats. However, as the area of land buffering and linking these sites is restored to wetland, less intensive approaches to management can be introduced, as the land is progressively re-wetted and new wetlands created across the northern half of the Great Fen.

In the southern part of the Great Fen the land rises up onto the clay and there are a number of smaller nature sites including ancient woodlands, grasslands and scrub set within arable farmland. These small sites require ongoing management to maintain their species complement, particularly while active farming continues around them.

Buffering & Extending Core Areas

The expansion of the Woodwalton Fen & Holme Fen core area has been achieved through the purchase of the Holmewood Estate. Over the past 15 years, habitat creation has taken place at Darlowes Farm, Summer Standing, Corney's Farm, New Decoy Farm, Kesters Docking, Trundle Mere and Engine Farm. While some of this has been high value habitats, other areas have been put down to grass to protect the underlying peat soils until such time as re-wetting could occur. The recent addition of Spechley's Farm completes a hydrological unit west of Woodwalton Fen which will allow the re-wetting of Speechleys and Middle Farm along with Darlowes Farm, as the next stage of the project. However, there remain a small number of farms with peat soils in the north of the Great Fen area where further expansion of priority lowland fen and other habitats could occur but where longer term tenancies mean that arable farming continues. Full re-wetting of the northern half of the Great Fen will have to wait until such time as the

tenancies end or are bought out. The Wildlife Trust BCN hopes to achieve this in stages over the coming decades.

To the south and south-west of Woodwalton Fen there is potential to create a water storage area to replace the use of Woodwalton Fen which is used when the Raveley drain catchment is at risk of flooding. The water from the Raveley drain is rich in nutrients and is damaging some of the important low nutrient fen habitats within Woodwalton Fen.

Stepping Stones

The northern half of the Great Fen is now a near continuous block of habitat or land in habitat restoration. It is in the southern half of the Great Fen where additional areas of stepping stone habitat would be most valuable to better connect the remnant woodlands, hedges and grasslands, as part of a wider approach to nature friendly farming. New habitats could include small meadows, woods and a network of ponds.

Nature Friendly Farming

Across the south of the Great Fen area, on the clay soils arable farming is likely to continue. However, in these locations the adoption of regenerative and nature-friendly approaches to farming could be introduced to support the core habitat areas. The full range of measures including reduced or no tillage, use of cover crops, sowing of pollinator and wild bird seed mixes, and use of fallows or break crops would be beneficial to the creation of a more nature-rich landscape.

In the arable landscape to the south of the Great Fen area, the farming is currently highly intensive with few nature-friendly farming practices in place. Land is typically cropped close to the field boundaries and hedges have many gaps or have become lines of trees. Improved management of hedgerows, including planting up gaps or new connecting hedgerows, and the addition of wider uncropped margins and headlands would act to both buffer the stepping stone habitats and to provide space across the landscape for species to disperse.

Uncropped field margins and headlands could be sown with a variety of seed mixtures to benefit different aspects of the local wildlife. Around the remnant habitats appropriate wild seed mixtures could be sown along uncropped margins to provide food and forage for a range of farmland birds, including turtle doves and corn buntings, as well as pollinating insects. Game cover crops would benefit grey partridge while fallow areas may help lapwing. Ponds could also be created amongst new grassland habitats or within field corners to support populations of Great Crested Newt.

This approach could provide a valuable landscape corridor connecting the Fen-edge Woodlands to the core habitat areas of the Great Fen, improving the value of the land for wildlife and attracting and supporting a wider variety of species as part of the wider Great Fen landscape vision.

4.2.3 Objectives:

Short-term

- Continue management and enhancement of the historic Woodwalton Fen, Holme Fen and the recently created wetland habitats.
- Develop further areas of wetland habitats to buffer, extend and connect Woodwalton Fen and Holme Fen.
- Buffer all the stepping stone habitats in the south of the Great Fen area with species-rich headlands and field margins.
- Identify opportunities for additional habitat stepping stones across the south of Great Fen area.

Long-term

- Create a mosaic of priority habitats and nature-friendly farmland across the whole 37 Km² of the Great Fen Priority Area, to achieve the Great Fen Masterplan Vision to provide a well-managed landscape for nature between Huntingdon and Peterborough.
- Expand the area of priority fen and wetland habitats across all areas of remaining peat soils in the north of the Great Fen area.

- In the south of the Great Fen area, create at least three stepping stone habitats of priority grassland, woodland and pond habitats, each no more than 200 m from the other stepping stones.
- Establish nature-friendly farming approaches with provision of forage and supplementary feeding for farmland birds, addition of wider uncropped field margins and headlands, and well-managed hedgerows to attract a wider variety of wildlife in the south of the Great Fen area.

4.2.4 Priority Area Vision:

Launched early in the 21st century, the Wildlife Trust BCN with partners including Natural England, Huntingdonshire District Council, Middle Level Commissioners and the Environment Agency set out a long-term plan to create a diverse landscape for wildlife and people in the fen area between Huntingdon and Peterborough; connecting and expanding the historic fen sites of Woodwalton Fen and Holme Fen.

The Great Fen vision is to transform farmland between Huntingdon and Peterborough into a dynamic, diverse and beautiful fenland landscape through one of Europe's largest and most ambitious habitat restoration projects, creating benefits for wildlife as well as leisure and business opportunities for people. Once completed the 37 Km² area – the size of a small city – will be a mosaic of threatened wildlife habitats, including both wetland and drier areas of woodland and grassland, and will store water to reduce the risk of flooding and protect surrounding farmland and communities. It will create an accessible, inspiring and tranquil environment for recreation, education, health and well-being. A network of access routes and destination sites will be brought forward to promote recreation and tourism to support the diversification and development of the local economy and provide for the needs of a rapidly growing local population.

The Great Fen landscape will evolve into a mosaic of species-rich habitats including a large area of wetland in the north of the project area, focussed on the creation of fen and other wetland habitats and protection of peat soils to support a wide variety of abundant wildlife. Restoring natural processes, careful management of water and working with landowners will ensure future land management is sustainable, while protection of the peat soils will support climate change adaptation and mitigation. The south of the Great Fen area has the potential to deliver a mosaic of woodland, grassland and scrub alongside nature-friendly farming that may include ponds, hedgerows and species-rich field margins.

4.2.5 Delivery Mechanisms:

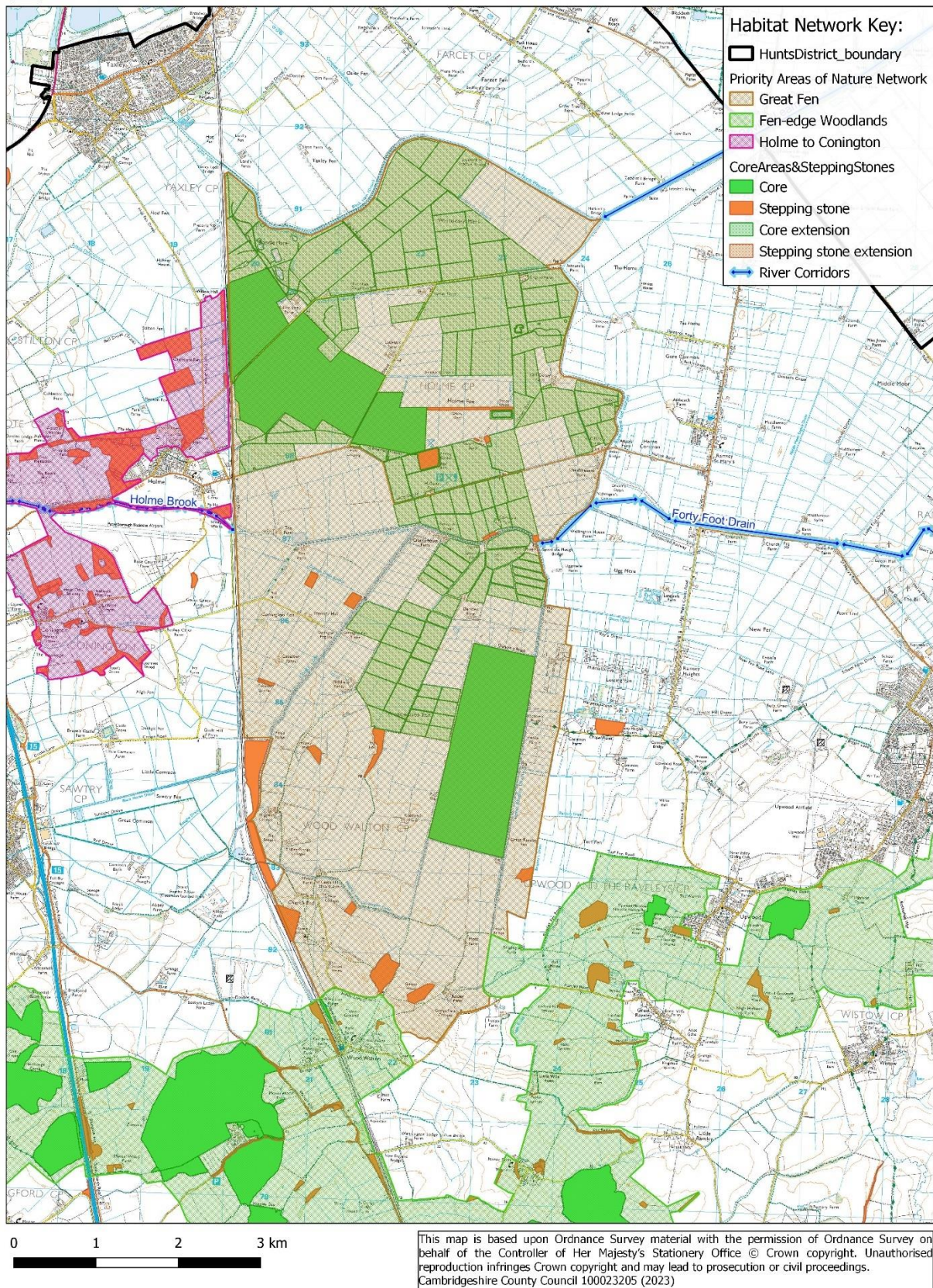
The aim of the Great Fen vision is to increase the land managed for wildlife and people. This will take place through a variety of delivery mechanisms, including land acquisition using the funding sources available to charities, or working in partnership with adjacent landowners. In some cases, landowners may deliver long-term habitat creation through the establishment of one or more habitats banks funded through biodiversity offsetting.

Regenerative and nature-friendly farming approaches will be supported through Environmental Land Management Schemes. However, peatland restoration or protection may be funded through the private market for carbon credits for example linked to the lowland peat carbon code.

Map 2: Great Fen Habitat Network



Great Fen Habitat Network
Dec 2023



4.3 Great Ouse Valley Priority Area

4.3.1 Key Facts

Total area: 7,323 Ha in Cambridgeshire (5,114 Ha in Huntingdonshire)

Area of core & stepping stone habitats: 3,023 Ha (41.3% of total area)

Core sites Portholme SSSI / SAC; St Neots Common SSSI, Godmanchester Eastside Common SSSI, Houghton Meadows SSSI, Berry Fen SSSI, Paxton Pits SSSI / CWS, Buckden Gravel Pits CWS, Brampton Flood Meadows CWS, Hinchingsbrooke Country Park CWS, West Meadow CWS, Westside Common Pollard Willows CWS, Godmanchester Nature Reserve CWS, Hemingford Abbots Meadow CWS, Hemingford Grey Meadow CWS, Meadow Lane Gravel Pits CWS, Holywell Front Pollard Willows CWS, Earith Gravel Pits CWS, Fen Drayton Gravel Pits CWS (South Cambs), Ouse Fen (South Cambs) and Wyboston Lakes (Bedford Borough).

Important habitats: Lowland floodplain meadows, floodplain wetland mosaics, reed swamp, wet woodland, open water lakes and river backwaters.

Important species:

Fauna: Nationally important numbers of overwintering waterfowl with key species including gadwall and tufted duck, along with a wide range of other species. Other wetland bird species include grey heron, cormorant, common tern, black-headed gull, lesser black-backed gull and bittern. Species of scrub and wetland margins include nightingale, cetti's warbler and grasshopper warbler. A wide range of wetland invertebrates with dragonflies including scarce chaser and Norfolk hawk.

Flora: Flora of lowland meadows including fritillary, great burnet, narrow-leaved water-dropwort & pepper saxifrage. A range of aquatic flora can be found particularly in the more natural back channels of the river.

4.3.2 Network Approach:

Better Management

40% of the Ouse Valley is already nature-rich land but much of it would benefit from better management or habitat restoration to reach its full nature potential.

This particularly applies to the floodplain meadows, many of which are a pale reflection of their former glory due to agricultural improvement in the 20th century or less than ideal management more recently. The traditional species-rich flood meadows require an annual hay cut (later in the growing season) and autumn / winter grazing, ideally with a mixture of cattle and sheep. However, livestock businesses are challenging to run in a profitable way, and a more ecologically and economically sustainable livestock farming model may be required if the better management and restoration of floodplain meadow habitats is to be realised. There are a couple of landowners who are exploring this and looking to better manage and restore their floodplain meadows, with one project started in 2023 and another due to start in 2024. One site, Hemingford Meadow (by the Dolphin, St Ives) has been in various Stewardship schemes for 30 years. Better management through extensive and traditional low-input hay cutting and grazing management over a long-time without any specific conservation restoration has eventually helped the recovery of a degraded flood meadow. However, it took twenty years before the change of management took effect and it is only in the past 10 years that a noticeable increase in wildflowers has been seen.

Many of the gravel pits are now several decades old having been worked in the middle and later stages of the last century. Without management trees eventually grow up around the margins of the lakes and reduce their value for waterbirds of open water and open lake margins. Work by Huntingdonshire District Council at Paxton Pits nature reserve, the Wildlife Trust BCN at Godmanchester nature reserve, and RSPB at Fen Drayton Gravel Pits shows what is required to maintain the variety of nature-rich habitats on areas of former sand and gravel quarries.

However, many of the former gravel pits along the Ouse Valley are surrounded by lines of trees and are now less valuable for wetland waterbirds and plants and invertebrates of open margins. Some sites, such

as those where sailing and water sports take place, do remain more open benefitting plants and invertebrates of open margins, but the level of recreational use limits use by some waterbird species.

With a growing population and demand for water-based recreation, alongside the need to make space for nature, a strategic approach to use of open water lakes along the valley is required. Even where the predominant use is water-based recreation, spatial or temporal zoning can be used to provide space for nature alongside recreational uses. For example, if a lake is important for wintering birds and a recreational activity is mainly summer based, the same lake can sustainably support both uses at different times of year. Likewise at other larger sites, it may be possible to set aside part of a lake for example one end, where recreational activities do not take place allowing wildlife a relatively undisturbed refuge.

Buffering & Extending Core Areas

Within the Ouse Valley buffering and extending the core habitat areas is about restoration of species-rich lowland floodplain meadows and floodplain wetland mosaics, where more water can be held on the land for longer to support wetland fauna and plant communities. There is also some scope to increase the extent of wet woodland habitats and reedbeds.

The Ouse Valley Habitat Inventory & Strategy Report (Wildlife Trust BCN, 2022) identified 58 sites / fields where the restoration of lowland floodplain meadow was desirable and possible, 27 where lowland flood meadows could be created, 10 sites where the creation of floodplain wetland mosaics was possible and a further 27 sites where wet woodland could be created. Implementation of these opportunities would create an additional 1,000 Ha (approximately) of nature-rich floodplain and restore the floodplain landscape to a functioning nature network. In addition, the largest lowland reedbed creation scheme in England is taking place post gravel extraction at Ouse Fen (though this is across the river in South Cambs).

Stepping Stones

The creation of additional stepping stone habitats is not needed in the Great Ouse Valley due to the extent of well-connected high quality meadow and open water habitats. The restoration of lower quality example of floodplain grassland and better management of some of the lake complexes are the conservation priorities in the valley.

Nature Friendly Farming

Nature-friendly farming within the Ouse Valley revolves around supporting more ecologically sustainable and profitable grazing enterprises to support the whole-sale restoration of lowland floodplain meadows or floodplain wetland mosaic habitats from St Neots to Earith. However, changes within the wider catchment are also required to significantly reduce diffuse pollution from farmland, which is detrimental to species-rich floodplain meadows.

4.3.3 Objectives:

Short-term

- To secure the continued traditional management of the remaining species-rich floodplain meadows.
- To implement a couple of demonstration floodplain meadow restoration projects at Houghton and Holywell, using locally sourced wildflower seed or green hay where possible.
- To organise a series of farmer / landowner events to promote management and restoration of floodplain meadows and other habitats.
- To work with local communities to plant areas of willow and wet woodland in locations along the valley.

Long-term

- To develop sustainable livestock enterprises to manage the full extent of high quality and restored floodplain meadows and other wetland habitats along the valley.
- To prepare a strategy for the sustainable use and zonation of open water lakes for nature and water-based recreation uses along the valley.
- To create the largest reedbed in lowland England (700 Ha) at Ouse Fen.

4.3.4 Priority Area Vision:

The Great Ouse Valley will comprise a continuous network of nature-rich sites from St Neots to Earith, with well managed and restored species-rich floodplain meadows, open water lakes, and expanded areas of reedbeds and wet woodland. There will be a number of profitable livestock enterprises operating along the valley supporting the continued sustainable management of the floodplain grasslands. The large core open water sites of Paxton Pits nature reserve, Godmanchester nature reserve and Fen Drayton nature reserve will support large nationally important population of waterbirds. They will be supported by the network of other open water lakes which will support wetland wildlife alongside water-based recreational uses through spatial and temporal zoning of uses.

4.3.5 Delivery Mechanisms:

The management and restoration of floodplain meadows and other wetland mosaics will be mainly supported by Environmental Land Management Schemes. However, the creation of sustainable livestock enterprises may also need other funding to support business development and re-structuring.

The large open water wetland complexes are managed by Hunts DC, Wildlife Trust BCN and RSPB. The reedbed creation at Ouse Fen is being delivered by Hanson's / RSPB through the minerals planning process following sand and gravel extraction.

Better management of other open water lakes, particularly those used for water-based recreation, should come through business development and the planning system where activities require planning permission. However, this should be guided by an over-arching strategy so that owners and water sports operators know what they should be doing to support nature recovery.

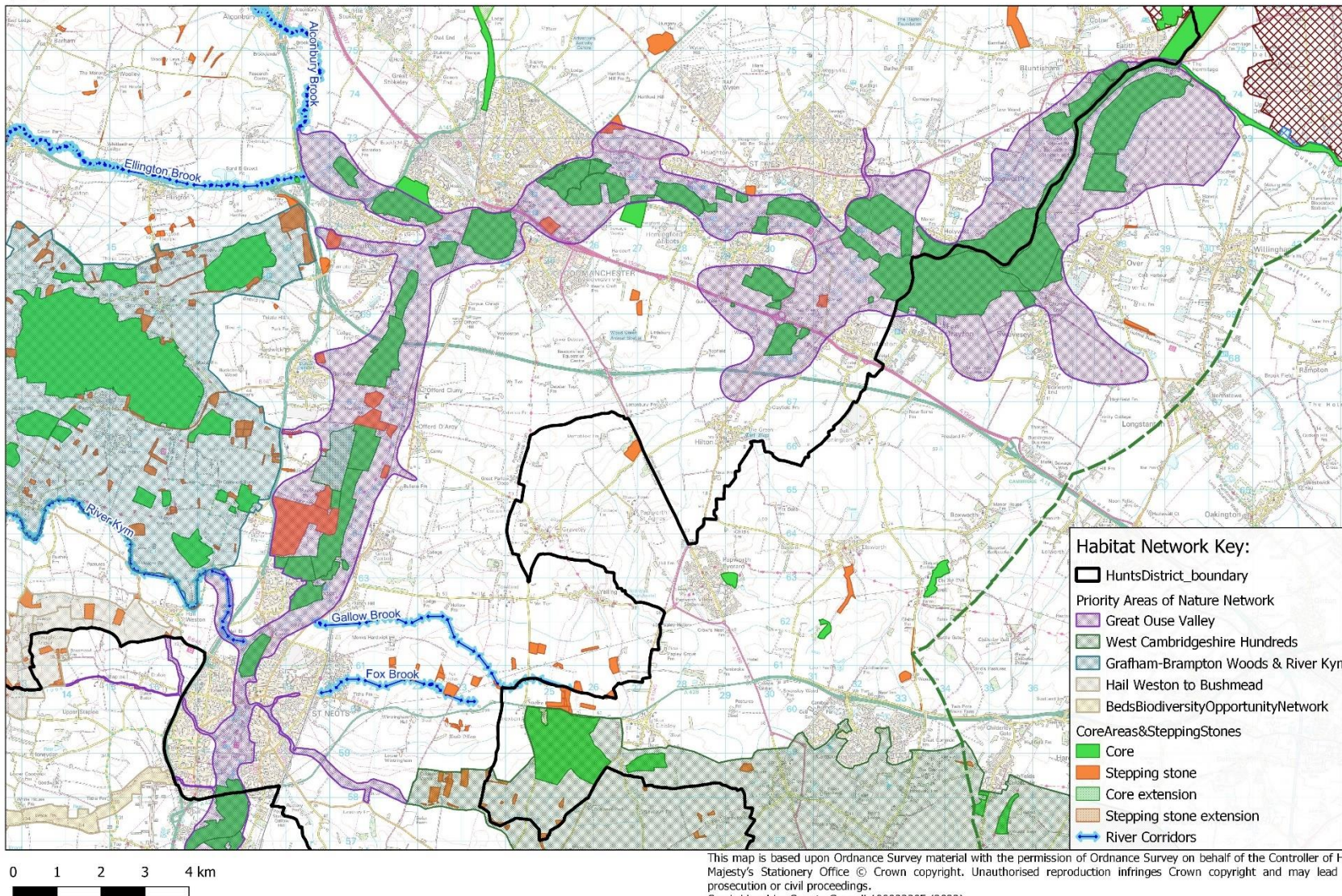
Small woodland planting or habitat creation schemes can be delivered through action by the many local communities living along valley and landowners.

The Environment Agency may play a role in the enhancement of the river backwaters or natural flood management solutions on the tributaries. In the future there may be additional scope for private finance where floodplain habitats are managed or restored to reduce flood risk management, or to help reduce diffuse pollution in the wider catchment, however, these are not "market ready".

Map 3: Great Ouse Valley Habitat Network



Great Ouse Valley Habitat Network
Dec 2023



4.4 West Cambridgeshire Hundreds Priority Area

4.4.1 Key Facts

Total area: 2,622 Ha in Hunts (18,176 Ha South Cambs & Hunts)

Area of core & stepping stone habitats within Hunts or immediately adjacent to Hunts boundary: 564.69 Ha (19.28% of area)

Core sites: Waresley & Gransden Woods SSSI, Weaveley and Sand Woods SSSI, Crimpledean Paddock CWS (all Hunts), and Gamlingay Wood SSSI, Croxton Park CWS, Eltisley Wood CWS (all South Cambs).

Important habitats: Ancient woodland, lowland meadow, wood pasture & parkland.

Important species:

Fauna: Woodland & farmland bird assemblage, Barbastelle bat, purple hairstreak, white-letter hairstreak, small heath & small copper butterflies, woodland invertebrate fauna including longhorn beetles and flies.

Flora: Ancient woodland flora, e.g. oxlip, herb paris, greater butterfly orchid, early purple orchid, bird's-nest orchid, yellow archangel, bluebell, primrose, cowslip, crested cow-wheat and slender tare.

4.4.2 Network Approach:

The Huntingdonshire part of the West Cambridgeshire Hundreds is characterised by intensive arable farmland with a network of larger ancient woodlands often on the heaviest clay soils or areas with poorer sandy soils near the edge of the Greensand Ridge, and a large number of smaller farm woodlands and shelterbelts. There are few grasslands, these are restricted mainly to the edge of villages where they are often used as pony paddocks or road verges. A series of brooks drain the higher ground towards the Great Ouse, but these have mostly been modified by straightening and over-deepening to drain the arable land. The number of core sites within the Huntingdonshire portion of the West Cambridgeshire Hundreds are limited to Waresley & Gransden Woods and Weaveley and Sand Woods SSSIs, but a number of other sites including Gamlingay Wood SSSI, Croxton Park and Eltisley Wood immediately border Huntingdonshire. The relationship and connection to these sites have therefore been considered in this analysis.

Within the area assessed, there are two significant core areas within the woodland habitat network. These are the SSSIs of Waresley & Gransden Woods, Weaveley & Sand Woods and Gamlingay Wood, together with the large number of smaller woodland areas around Waresley and Tetworth. The second is centred on Croxton Park and Eltisley Wood, along with the smaller woodlands round Caldecote and along the Abbotsley Brook. The nature network priorities are to enhance the quality of the habitat network within these two areas and to better connect them to each other.

Better Management

The SSSI ancient woodlands are all managed either as nature reserves or as part of larger Estates. The Wildlife Trust and larger Estates such as Tetworth actively manage their woods for conservation, or for other reasons helping to achieve a varied woodland habitat structure. Croxton Park is managed to conserve its large parkland trees with a programme of planting to provide replacement trees for the future. Croxton Park is in a stewardship scheme and the Estate is managed as an organic farm.

Most of the smaller farm woodlands across the landscape are more recent dating back to Victorian times or the twentieth century. However, across the landscape as a whole the woodlands are in a variety of states of management, some well-managed, others neglected. Many lack structural variety, as woodland management has become uneconomic and ceased and many are too small by themselves to support the full range of woodland habitat structure. However, across the landscape it would be possible to achieve a network of sites supporting the full range of woodland habitat structure from open space to thicket stage to high forest and retention of over-mature and veteran trees and deadwood. This could be achieved through planned management of the larger Estates with multiple woodlands, or through different landowners adopting different approaches to woodland management. Deer management across the landscape will

need to be undertaken to support woodland regeneration with the roaming herds of Fallow deer as well as increasing populations of Roe and Muntjac.

One of the key conservation priorities is therefore to ensure that woodland management provides for a full range of structural variety across the landscape, while being viable for landowners. The expectation is not that every wood would be managed, but that across the landscape a variety of high forest, coppice or thicket stage, woodland open space and veteran trees / deadwood would always be present and ideally in relatively close proximity (within 1 Km of each other).

Buffering & Extending Core Areas

The SSSI woods and their new woodland extensions at Waresley & Gransden Woods and Gamlingay Wood, together with Weavely & Sand Woods cover nearly 200 Ha. The connecting small woods across the Tetworth Estate and other farms increase the habitat area to approximately 280 Ha. There is potential to further increase the size of the core habitat block to between 400-500 Ha though the creation of further woodland extensions to Waresley & Gransden Woods and Gamlingay Wood and the creation of a range of flower-rich grasslands, and scrubby woodland buffers to the smaller farm woods across the landscape. Creating a “softer” more graded and ecologically diverse edge to the woods will support larger numbers of woodland bird species, including many warblers. These type of buffers also have the advantage of increasing shelter within the main ancient woodland for specialist woodland species, whether flora or invertebrates, that prefer sheltered, damper micro-climates.

The Croxton Park core area comprises 258 Ha of core habitats. The smaller woods within Huntingdonshire around Calcedote and the Abbotsley Brook add a further 35 Ha. The best option for buffering and extending these into a single large core habitat area of 400-500 Ha would be to focus provision of new habitats along the connecting brooks. These could be a mixture of flower-rich grassland or scrubby and woodland habitats.

Where farming still occurs adjacent to woods, the use of wide (minimum 12 metres) flower-rich and tussocky field margins and headlands will buffer the woods and provide complementary habitats, as would use of fallow fields in an arable rotation or bird seed and pollinator mixes.

Stepping Stones

The quality of the woodland habitat network around the two core habitat areas could be further enhanced through enhancing the habitat connectivity within and between them. They both already have a good number of smaller woodland stepping stones between the larger core habitat sites. There are two approaches that could be taken to enhancing wider landscape connectivity, one is based around an increased density and quality of hedgerows, while the other is based around the provision of additional stepping stone habitats, to reduce gaps between woodland patches to 200m.

Within each of the core habitat blocks the provision of an enhanced hedgerow network would be beneficial to support the existing woodland network. Hedgerows should be tall and thick (minimum 3 metres wide and 3-5 metres high), or where they are less than 2 metres high, they still need to be thick, but with a series of hedgerow trees along their length. Double hedges are better but are only likely to be provided along green lanes. Single hedges will be the predominant feature. The value of hedges as a nesting, feeding or sheltering habitat for birds, mammals and invertebrates is also greatly enhanced by having buffers of wide, grassy, flower-rich, field margins, which also allow space for the hedges to become bushy and reach their full fruiting potential.

Research has shown that a hedgerow density of 8 Km / Km² is needed for maximum bird species richness (⁵Fuller *et al.*, 2001). This would require significant reduction in field sizes which is not realistic in this area with modern farming techniques and equipment. However, just working with the current hedgerow network (including the scattered remnants of hedges in some locations) it would be possible to enhance the hedges by allowing them to grow wider and by providing wide uncropped flower-rich field margins. Some hedges could be allowed to grow tall where this would have minimal impacts on adjacent crops, while other hedges would have individual trees earmarked for protection and allowed to grow into hedgerow trees. Hedgerows with gaps should be enhanced by filling on the gaps with a diverse mixture of native shrub species.

Beyond the two core habitat blocks, a different approach should be taken to connect these with each other and into the wider landscape. The West Cambridgeshire Hundreds landscape has a significant number of small watercourses originating on the higher parts of the clay plateau. Many of these flow into the Abbotsley Brook / Hen Brook, a tributary of the Great Ouse. They include Banham Dean & Little Brook, College Dean Brook, Vicar's Dean Brook, Bleach Dean and Crimble Dean Brook, Gransden Brook, Small Brook and Waresley Dean Brook.

Most of these watercourses were straightened and deepened to help drain the land for arable agriculture during the twentieth century. However, they form a natural focus for better landscape connectivity. The creation of continuous habitat corridors or the provision of habitat stepping stones every 200 metres along each brook would provide the required connectivity. New habitats could include flower-rich grasslands, areas of shrubby woodland or new small farm woods. Other options include wide farm headlands or margins with tussocky grassland, bird seed mixes or pollen and nectar mixes. These new habitats could be supplemented by natural flood management measures and small wetland features to slow the flow and retain more water on the land for longer in defined places, helping to reduce flooding downstream.

Nature Friendly Farming

As the majority of this priority area will remain in arable farming, the wider adoption of nature-friendly farming options whether through Environmental Land Management schemes or as part of crop rotations will be essential to achieve nature network objectives. The retention and targeted enhancement of hedgerows, the use of fallows, bird seed mixes, pollinator seed mixes and various types of uncropped field margins will all help to enhance the permeability of the landscape for wildlife, as well as provide direct habitats for birds and insects associated with farming. Where these non-cropped habitats approach or exceed 10% of the farmed area, they will support increased populations of farmland birds.

4.4.3 Objectives:

Short-term

- Work with woodland owners to identify and implement opportunities for enhanced management of the woodlands, including deer management, to achieve the full range of woodland habitat structures across the landscape.
- Identify opportunities to buffer and enlarge the ancient woodlands and work with landowners to take forward favoured options.
- Expand the West Cambridgeshire Hundreds nature-friendly farmer cluster to: more widely promote best practice, work together to improve habitat extent and connectivity across the landscape, and promote actions for an agreed set of key species.

Long-term

- Increase the land cover of wildlife-rich habitats from 19% to 30%, including increasing the area of woodland cover from approximately 500 Ha to 800 Ha.
- Create two core habitat blocks covering 400-500 Ha each and where habitat parcels are within 200 metres of the next, through the best mix of enhanced hedgerow networks, creation of woodland and other habitat stepping stones, and nature-friendly farming options.
- Connect the two large core blocks of habitat to each other, using the numerous brooks through the landscape as a natural focus for habitat corridors and stepping stone habitats, and natural flood management.

4.4.4 Priority Area Vision:

The Vision for the West Cambridgeshire Hundreds is to create two much larger core habitat blocks through the expansion and buffering of ancient woodlands and networks of smaller farm woods. These habitats in turn will be better connected through an enhanced hedgerow network with flower-rich field margins and headlands. Across the wider landscape the larger core habitat blocks will be better connected to each other through a range of habitat corridors and stepping stone habitats, often following the water courses and incorporating approaches to natural flood management. These will be supplemented by the widespread

adoption of nature-friendly farming. Woodland and farmland bird populations will increase, and populations of ancient woodland specialist flora and invertebrates will begin to spread.

4.4.5 Delivery Mechanisms:

Achieving the desired nature network within this priority area will involve a variety of approaches. The dominant approach across most of the area will be the adoption of nature-friendly farming and Environmental Land Management Schemes, implemented through the work of individual landowners and an active farmer cluster.

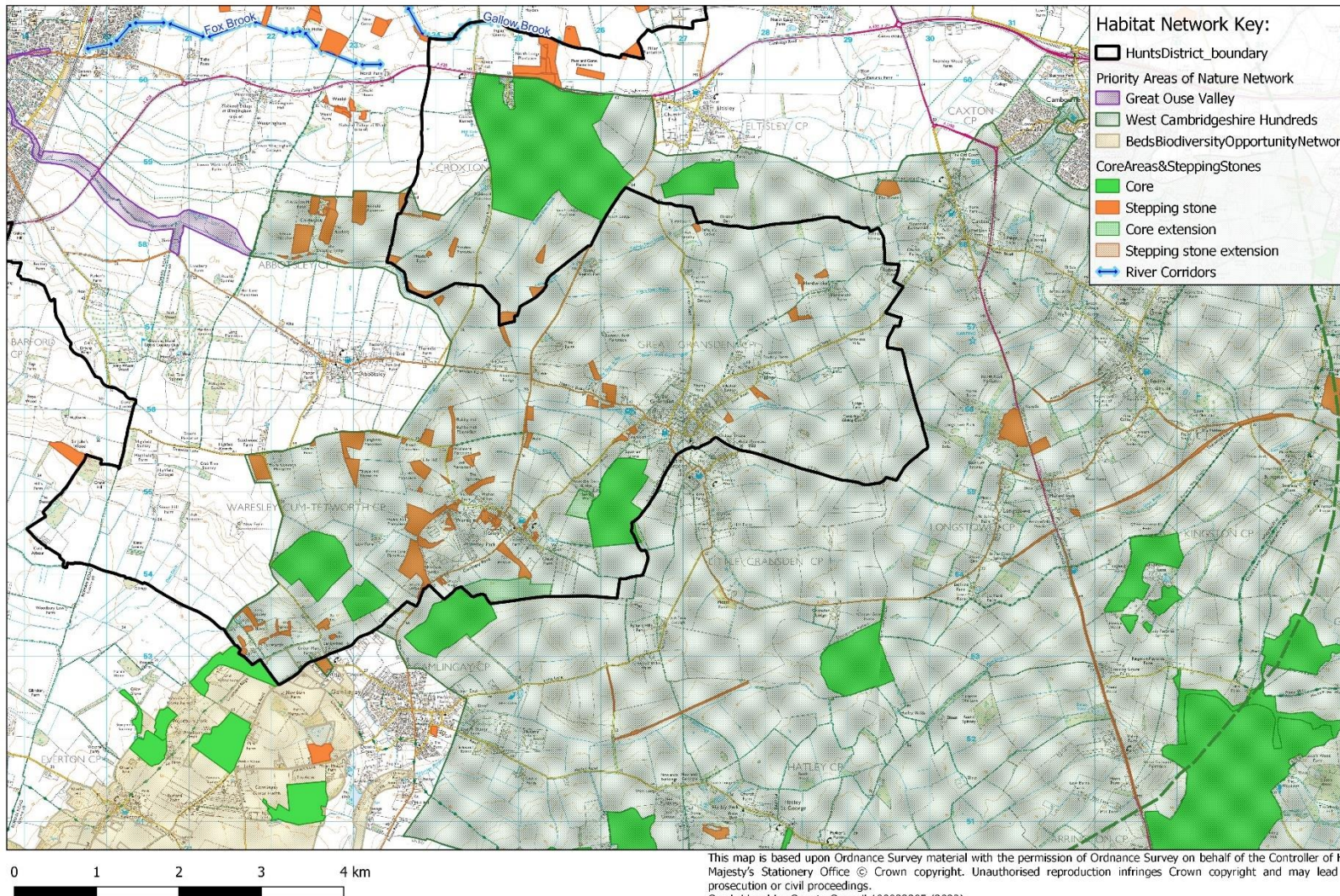
The adoption of natural flood management measures may form part of Environment Land Management Schemes or otherwise be supported by flood risk management authorities.

Elsewhere, in specific locations, there may be opportunities to create new priority habitats funded by a more diverse range of sources that may include woodland carbon payments or Biodiversity Net Gain related to development in Huntingdonshire and / or South Cambridgeshire.

Map 4: West Cambridgeshire Hundreds Habitat Network



West Cambridgeshire Hundreds Habitat Network
Dec 2023



4.5 Grafham-Brampton-River Kym Priority Area

4.5.1 Key Facts

Total area: 5,294 Ha

Area of core habitats: 1,308.63 Ha (24.72% of area)

Area of core and stepping stone habitats: 1,548.47 Ha (29.25% of area)

Core sites: Grafham Water SSSI, Brampton Wood SSSI, Perry Woods SSSI, Little Paxton Wood SSSI, Ellington Pastures & Underlands Wood CWS, West Wood CWS, Calpher Wood & Hartham Street CWS, Dudney Wood & Lady Grove CWS, Diddington Wood CWS, Midloe Wood CWS, Meagre Wood CWS, Agdengreen Woods CWS, Honeyhill CWS, Tilbrook Bushes & Sandy Lane CWS, Horse Close, Midloe Grange CWS, Grassland South of Church Farm CWS, Southoe Hill Pasture CWS, Church Farm / Old Rectory Grasslands CWS and Grassland at the Vicarage CWS.

Important habitats: Ancient Woodland, open water, lowland meadow.

Important species:

Fauna: Hazel dormouse, black hairstreak, white-letter hairstreak and other elm dependent invertebrates, woodland and hedgerow bird assemblage, breeding and wintering waterbirds, farmland bird assemblage, great crested newt.

Flora: Sulphur clover, green-winged orchid, pepper saxifrage, marsh dock, ancient woodland flora and various elm sub-species.

4.5.2 Network Approach:

Better Management

This Priority Area has Grafham Water SSSI at its heart, important for its wetland bird assemblage, and managed by Anglian Water and the Wildlife Trust BCN. In the landscape surrounding the reservoir there is a high concentration of ancient woodlands, in places supported by a network of hedgerows or smaller more recent woodlands and plantations acting as stepping stone habitats.

The woodlands are in a variety of states of management, some well-managed, others neglected. Many lack structural variety, as woodland management has become uneconomic and ceased and many are too small by themselves to support the full range of woodland habitat structure from open space to thicket stage to over-mature and veteran tree woodland features. However, across the landscape it would be possible to achieve a network of woodlands supporting the full range of woodland habitat structure. This could be achieved through planned management of the larger Estates with multiple woodlands, or through different landowners adopting different approaches to woodland management.

Some landowners, particularly the Wildlife Trust, Anglian Water and the larger private Estates with multiple woodlands, do still undertake an active programme of woodland management whether for conservation or to support timber production or shooting. Active woodland management programmes offer the opportunity to provide for woodland structural variety across the landscape, including areas of high forest, thicket stage growth, open space and the retention of over-mature and veteran trees and deadwood. This in turn has the potential to support a more complete range of typical woodland species.

One of the key conservation priorities is therefore to ensure that woodland management provides for a full range of structural variety across the landscape, while being economically viable for landowners. The expectation is not that every wood would be managed, but that across the landscape a variety of high forest, coppice or thicket stage, woodland open space and veteran trees / deadwood would always be present and ideally in relatively close proximity (within 1 Km of each other).

The area around Southoe has one of the few significant groupings of ancient species-rich meadows in the district. There are five County Wildlife Sites with Lowland Meadow priority habitat across all or part of each

site. The three closest collectively cover an area of approximately 27 Ha. The other two are more isolated being between 800 and 1100 m from the main grouping. All of the meadows are managed by a mixture of hay cutting and / or grazing and continuation of this management is essential for their conservation.

Buffering & Extending Core Areas

Many of the ancient woodlands in this area are relatively large, and Brampton Wood is the second largest woodland in Cambridgeshire. Buffering and extension of core habitat areas aims to create larger habitat blocks, helping to support more species and larger populations of woodland fauna and flora, with the ideal aim to create habitat blocks of at least 100 Ha in size and with a minimum size of 40 Ha. There are already six groups of woodland meeting the minimum size threshold and three of these are already over or approaching 100 Ha.

Brampton Wood is 132 Ha by itself. Perry Woods together with Agdengreen Wood (290 metres away) are 94 Ha in size and across the Hunts / Beds border west of Kimbolton, Honeyhill Wood, Tilbrook Bushes and Swineshead Wood (in Beds) are collectively 126 Ha.

Other woodland groupings include Little Paxton Wood, Midloe Wood and Meagre Wood south-east of Grafham Water with a combined area of 67 Ha. The woods at the western end of Grafham Water (Savage's Spinney and Littless Wood), together with Dudney Wood & Lady Grove are approximately 60 Ha in size. While north of Grafham Water, West Wood and Calpher Wood are just over 40 Ha in size combined and are now linked by a newly planted woodland belt.

Within this priority area, significant habitat extensions are therefore less of a priority than better management of the woods to create the full range of habitat structure across the landscape. However, some habitat extensions would still be valuable and support better management, for example creating woodland extensions in the form of a mosaic of shrubs and flower-rich grassland would create more varied woodland edges favoured by a wide range of species. Creating a "softer" more graded and ecologically diverse edge to the woods will support larger numbers of woodland bird species, including many warblers. These type of buffers also have the advantage of increasing shelter within the main ancient woodland for specialist woodland species, whether flora or invertebrates.

At the western end of Grafham Water, Anglian Water have commenced a programme of woodland creation on formerly farmed land to better connect, buffer and extend Savage's Sipnney, Littless Wood and Dudney Wood & Lady Grove.

Where farming still occurs adjacent to woods, the use of wide (minimum 12 metres) flower-rich and tussocky field margins and headlands will buffer the woods and provide complementary habitats, as would use of fallow fields in an arable rotation or bird seed and pollinator mixes.

Not all ancient woodlands will need to be buffered in these ways. Some might already be well connected to other woodlands through being in close proximity (less than 200 metres) or through mature hedgerow networks. However, there will be a number of locations where the buffering approach would be highly beneficial, such as where one or more of the following situations might apply:

- Where woodland edges are highly exposed to prevailing winds or cool easterly / northerly winds; or
- Where the gaps between woodlands are over 200 m.

For example, Little Paxton Wood, Midloe Wood and Meagre Wood are each within 500-750 metres of the other. Buffering them with a mixture of the approaches described above would help to reduce the gap between each wood and provide complementary habitats in close proximity to each wood. However, where there are gaps significantly larger than 200m, an alternative approach is also required involving creation of stepping stone habitats or the use of linear hedgerow and field margin habitats to create a more wildlife friendly landscape between the woods.

Buffering and extension of the Southoe Meadows would be highly beneficial to support their long-term survival and conservation. A larger area of species-rich and other grassland would provide economies of

scale for a more sustainable livestock enterprise and provide greater flexibility in management operations. There are a number of smaller fields around the village that could be enhanced and restored to species-rich grassland. Creating new flower-rich meadow habitats nearby from less productive parts of some arable fields could also be an option, if combined with regenerative approaches to farming. In the absence of this, connecting the sites through a network of wide flower-rich field margin and headlands would be next best option. These field hedge habitats would not be suitable for grazing but would need to receive an annual hay cut if the wildflower species are to persist and spread.

Stepping Stones

For over 15 years a group of partners have been working to better connect the ancient woodlands around Grafham Water. A series of woodland belts and network of hedgerows have been created connecting Brampton Wood, West Wood, Calpher Wood and the woodlands at the western end of Grafham Water. The three core woodland blocks north and west of Grafham Water are now connected, though there is still potential to further enhance this habitat network with provision of other habitat features such as areas of wildflower-rich grassland, ponds, or nature-friendly farming options.

The three core woodland blocks south of Grafham Water are however much more isolated from each other. While it has not been possible to replicate the above approach, there are other options for creating a more connected landscape. The landscape south of Grafham Water is characterised by a number of small, planted farm woods and / or a network of low growing, thin hedgerows. Where the network of hedgerows is still in place these lend themselves to taking a linear approach to better woodland connectivity. Where hedgerows are less frequent, but small farm woods are present, an approach based around increasing the number and size of stepping stone habitat patches would be more appropriate.

To achieve better landscape connectivity for woodland species, the hedgerow network needs to function as good quality woodland edge habitat. To do this, hedgerows need to be tall and thick (minimum 3 metres wide and 3-5 metres high), or where they are less than 2 metres high, they need to be thick, and have a series of hedgerow trees along their length. Double hedges along green lanes are also better than single hedges. The value of hedges as a nesting, feeding or sheltering habitat for birds, mammals and invertebrates is also greatly enhanced by having buffers of wide, grassy field margins, which also allow space for the hedges to become bushy and reach their full fruiting potential. The hedgerow density of 8 Km / Km² for maximum bird species richness is unlikely to be achievable, as the significant reduction in field sizes is not realistic in this area with modern farming techniques and equipment.

However, just working with the current hedgerow network (including the scattered remnants of hedges in some locations) it would be possible to enhance the hedges by allowing them to grow wider and by providing wide uncropped flower-rich field margins. Some hedges could be allowed to grow tall where this would have minimal impacts on adjacent crops, while other hedges would have individual trees earmarked for protection and allowed to grow into hedgerow trees. Hedgerows with gaps should be enhanced with gaps filled in with a diverse mixture of native shrub species.

The area linking Dudney Wood & Lady Grove to the Perry Woods complex and towards Stoney lends itself to this hedgerow connectivity approach, as does the area immediately east of Perry Woods.

However, much of the landscape between Perry Woods and the Little Paxton Wood complex has a lower density of hedgerows. In this area there are a number of small farm woods that provide stepping stone habitats. An approach based around increasing the size of these stepping stones through woodland planting or uncropped flower-rich headlands would be a first step towards enhanced connectivity for woodland species. Creating new stepping stone habitats would be beneficial where gaps between existing ones are over 200m.

Diddington Wood is 36 Ha but is isolated from the other woods, though is close to the eastern end of Grafham Water. Between Diddington Wood and Midloe Wood there is a network of green lanes and bridleways. Creating tall, thick hedgerows alongside one or both sides of the path network with wide flower-rich margins would connect Diddington Wood into the wider woodland habitat network.

West of Grafham Water from Dudney Wood onto Warren Hill and then on to Kimbolton Park increased woodland connectivity could be achieved through a mixed approach of new stepping stone farm woodlands and tall thick single or double hedgerows with flower-rich margins along the rights of way network.

There are also some habitats that are lacking or absent across the landscape, notably ponds, small wetlands and flower-rich native grasslands. These habitats provide essential complementary habitats for woodland species, providing water and feeding opportunities for birds, or pollen and nectar sources for ancient woodland insects. While the provision of bird seed and pollinator or legume mixes as farm or nature-friendly farming options does make up this deficit to some extent, there is still a need for more ponds and flower-rich habitats across the landscape to provide habitat extensions or stepping stones to connect the core ancient woodland habitats.

Nature Friendly Farming

As the majority of this priority area will remain in arable farming, the wider adoption of nature-friendly farming options whether through Environmental Land Management schemes or as part of crop rotations will be essential to achieve nature network objectives. The retention and targeted enhancement of hedgerows, the use of fallows, bird seed mixes, pollinator seed mixes and various types of uncropped field margins will all help to enhance the permeability of the landscape for wildlife, as well as provide direct habitats for birds and insects associated with farming. Where these non-cropped habitats approach or exceed 10% of the farmed area, they will support increased populations of farmland birds.

4.5.3 Objectives:

Short-term

- Work with woodland owners to identify and implement opportunities for enhanced management of the ancient woodlands to achieve the full range of woodland habitat structures within each of the six core woodland habitat blocks.
- Identify opportunities to buffer and enlarge the ancient woodlands and present these to landowners for discussion and adoption (if appropriate).
- Continue to manage the Southoe Meadows complex to conserve the threatened lowland meadow priority habitats and work with landowners to identify opportunities to buffer, extend and better connect the meadows.
- Create a network of ponds across the landscape to support a stable or growing population of great crested newts.

Long-term

- Increase the land cover of wildlife-rich habitats from 29% to 40%, including increasing the area of woodland cover from approximately 750 Ha to 1,150 Ha.
- Connect each of the six core blocks of woodland habitat to each other through the best mix of enhanced hedgerow networks, woodland and other habitat stepping stones, and nature-friendly farming options.
- Explore interest in establishment of a nature-friendly farmer cluster to work together to improve habitat extent and connectivity at the landscape scale.
- Promote actions for an agreed set of the key species, through the farmer cluster.

4.5.4 Priority Area Vision:

The Vision for this priority area is to achieve a connected network of well-managed ancient woodlands around Grafham Water. The woodlands will be better connected through an enhanced network of hedgerows, farm woodlands, species-rich grasslands and ponds. The complex of meadows around Southoe will be enhanced and expanded and form part of a sustainable livestock enterprise. Grafham Water will continue to be a nationally important site for waterbirds. The high value nature sites will be set within a landscape of nature-friendly arable farms, each incorporating additional areas of native woodland, wildflower meadows, ponds, and field edge and in-field habitats including hedgerows, pollen and nectar-rich and wild bird seed mixes, and fallows, appropriate to their circumstances.

The core ancient woodland areas together with the farm woodland stepping stones will provide a range of woodland habitats, including dense shrubby areas for woodland birds and flower-rich glades or margins for insects and deadwood for fungi and invertebrates.

Within the six core blocks of woodland, the woods will be buffered by new woodland or other complementary habitats and be better connected to each other through habitat creation, or enhanced hedgerow networks and farm habitats such as margins of bird seed / pollen and nectar mixes. Each of the six core woodland habitat areas will cover an area of at least 100 Ha.

Arable farming will continue to be the predominant land use, but with greater use of regenerative farming practices and provision of farm and field edge habitats, there will be larger and more extensive populations of farmland birds and rare plants present across the area, and more carbon will be stored in the soils. In places, the hedgerow network will be expanded. The fields will support strong populations of grey partridge, corn bunting and skylark, while in the hedgerows linnet, yellowhammer and whitethroat will breed amongst many other birds. A network of ponds will allow the population of great crested newt to expand.

4.5.5 Delivery Mechanisms:

Achieving the desired nature network will involve a variety of approaches. The dominant approach across most of the area will be the adoption of nature-friendly farming and Environmental Land Management Schemes, implemented through the work of individual landowners and possibly an active farmer cluster.

However, in specific locations, there may be opportunities to create new priority habitats funded by a more diverse range of sources that may include woodland carbon payments or Biodiversity Net Gain related to development in Huntingdonshire.

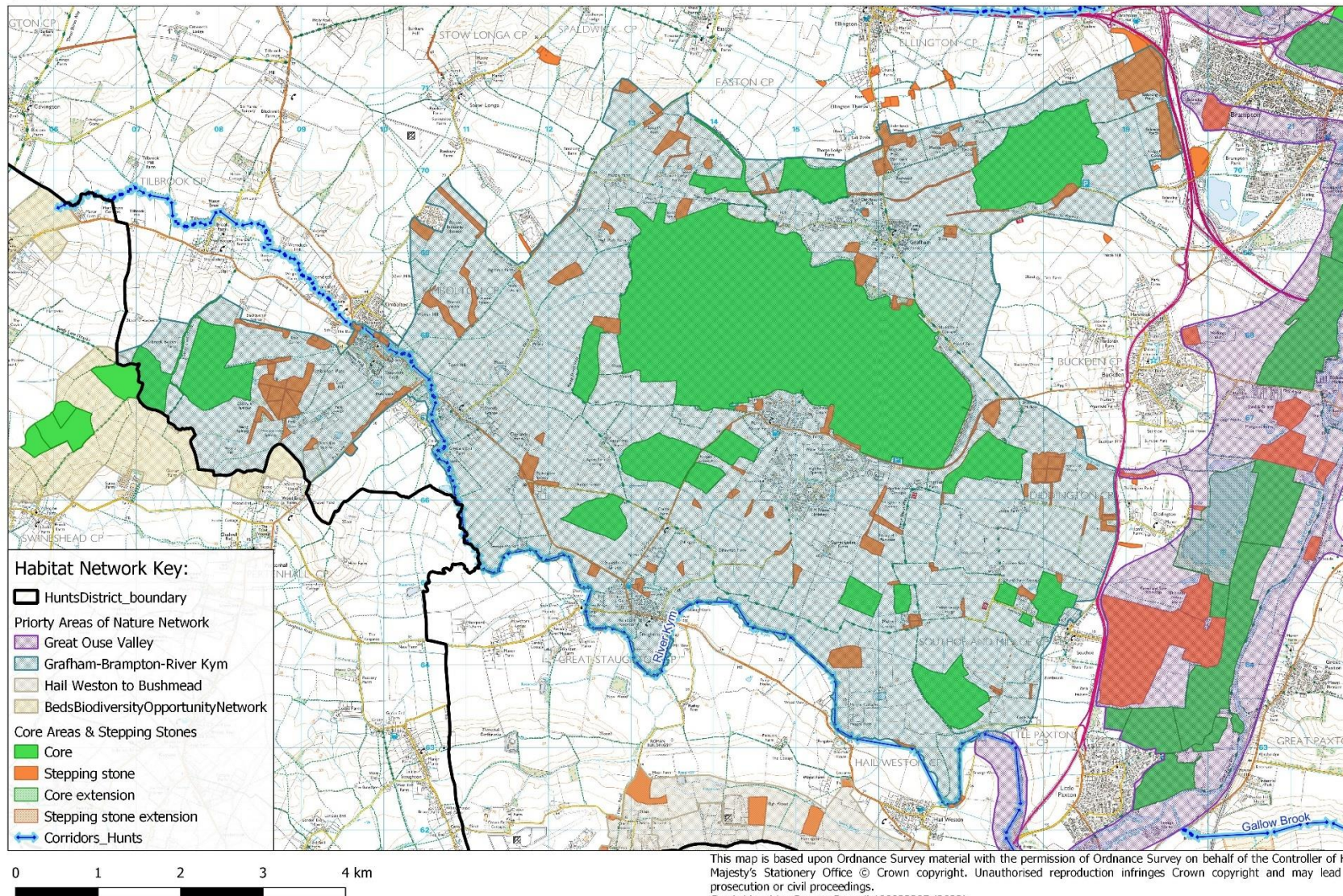
Expansion of the woodland at the western end of Grafham Water will be delivered as part of Anglian Water's commitment to biodiversity enhancement.

Map 5: Grafham-Brampton-River Kym Habitat Network



Grafham-Brampton-River Kym Habitat Network

Dec 2023



4.6 Fen-edge Woodlands Priority Area

4.6.1 Key Facts

Total area: 3,821 Ha

Area of core habitats: 639.24 Ha (16.73% of total area)

Area of core & stepping stone habitats: 789.99 Ha (20.67% of total area)

Core sites: Monks Wood & The Old Quarter NNR / SSSI, Upwood Meadows NNR / SSSI, Aversley Wood SSSI, Great Stukeley Railway Cutting SSSI, Woodwalton Marsh SSSI, Warboys Wood SSSI, Warboys Claypit SSSI, Archer's Wood CWS, Coppingford Lane CWS, Coppingford Wood CWS, Upton Wood CWS, Bevill's Wood CWS, Wennington & Raveley Woods CWS, Holland Wood CWS, Little Less Wood CWS, Boulton's Hunch Wood CWS, Round Wood CWS, Hilly Wood CWS, Raveley Wood CWS, Lady's Wood CWS, Rolt's Wood CWS and Pingle Wood & Cutting CWS.

Important habitats: Ancient woodland and lowland mixed deciduous woodland, lowland meadows, ponds.

Important species:

Fauna: Woodland bird assemblage, black hairstreak, elm & other woodland invertebrates (particularly beetles, flies & moths).

Flora: Ancient woodland flora (e.g. bluebell, primrose, yellow archangel, wood anemone, early purple orchid). Elm species. Lowland meadow flora (e.g. saw-wort, betony, devil's-bit scabious, sulphur clover, green winged orchid, marsh orchids, adder's-tongue & pepper saxifrage).

4.6.2 Network Approach:

The Fen-edge Woodlands priority area is characterised by a network of larger and medium sized ancient woodlands, with Monks Wood National Nature Reserve (NNR) at its centre, set within an intensive arable farmland landscape. Beyond these large woods there are many smaller farm woodlands and shelterbelts, though hedgerows are generally sparse with arable fields being large. There are few species-rich grasslands, but those present are of a high quality including Upwood Meadows SSSI, Woodwalton Marsh SSSI and Great Stukeley Railway Cutting SSSI. Many of the large ancient woodlands also have species-rich grassland along their rides.

There are five distinct blocks of core habitats. Monks Wood NNR and the neighbouring woods forms the largest at the centre of the area, with other significant blocks around Abbots Ripton and between Sawtry, Coppingford and Upton in the west of the area. Two small habitat complexes are found around the village of Upwood with Upwood Meadows NNR at the core of this area, and the woods and other sites around Warboys Wood at the eastern edge of this priority area. The nature network priorities are to enhance the quality of the habitat sites and networks within each of these five areas while also seeking to better connect them to each other.

Better Management

The ancient woodlands are mostly managed as nature reserves by conservation organisations or as part of larger Estates. Natural England manage Monk's Wood, The Woodland Trust manage Aversley & Archer's Woods and the Wildlife Trust manage Upwood Meadows, Woodwalton Marsh, Warboys Wood (part), Lady's Wood and Raveley Wood. The Abbots Ripton Estate manages many of the woods around the village and north of Alconbury Weald, while Upton and Coppingford Woods in the west are owned by Milton Estate.

A majority of the woods have been subject to some form of management, whether for nature conservation, timber production or shooting, thereby achieving a varied woodland structure across the landscape. However, the woods are probably still somewhat undermanaged in terms of providing open space and from the impacts of deer browsing pressure on natural regeneration. Past management in the first half of the

twentieth century removed many timber trees, so the numbers of veteran and over-mature trees and amount of deadwood are still below optimal levels in many of the woods.

Continuation or re-instatement of active programmes of woodland management, whether for timber and other wood products, shooting or as part of nature reserve management, while leaving other areas as limited intervention to allow old trees to grow and levels of deadwood to build up, would help achieve the full range of woodland habitat across the landscape. The provision of areas of high forest, thicket stage growth, open space and the retention of over-mature and veteran trees and deadwood will support a more complete range of typical woodland species.

Some of the ancient woodlands, such as Bevill's Wood, were replanted in the past, but still retain an ancient woodland flora in parts. Restoration of these replanted woodlands to lowland mixed deciduous woodland is the priority for these sites.

One of the key conservation priorities is to ensure that woodland management provides for a full range of structural variety within each of the five woodland habitat blocks, while being viable for landowners. The expectation is not that every wood would be managed, but that across the landscape a variety of high forest, coppice or thicket stage, woodland open space and veteran trees / deadwood would always be present and ideally in relatively close proximity (within 200-300m of each other).

Buffering & Extending Core Areas

The Monk's Wood habitat complex comprises a number of large sites many of which are in close proximity to each other. It is 275 Ha in size and has a high degree of connectivity between sites (each site immediately adjacent or within 200-300m), so extending this area is not a priority.

However, many of the woods still have intensive arable farming coming up to or close to their boundaries. Buffering of the ancient woodland sites with broad headlands and margins, which are allowed to become mosaics of wildflower-rich grassland and shrubs would enhance the landscape habitat quality. A "softer" more graded and ecologically diverse edge to the woodlands would support larger numbers of woodland bird species, including many warblers. These type of buffers also have the advantage of increasing shelter within the main ancient woodland for specialist woodland species, whether flora or invertebrates. In other areas, arable farm habitats such as fallows or bird seed or pollinator mixes, or tussocky grassland might be used to buffer the ancient woodlands.

The Abbots Ripton habitat complex (140 Ha) and Warboys Wood (73 Ha) habitat complex also have a number of sites in close proximity (within 200m). A similar approach to buffering the ancient woodlands is also the priority in these two areas.

In the western part of this priority area, the Sawtry-Copingford-Upton habitat complex meets the minimum size threshold with approximately 140 Ha of core habitats. Upton Wood, Coppingford Wood and Archer's Wood are very well connected, lending themselves to the buffering approach. The valley between Upton Wood and Coppingford Wood provides the best opportunity for woodland creation, potentially through natural regeneration. A mix of flower-rich grassland and shrubs in this area would dramatically enhance both sites. Aversely Wood is isolated from the other woods but would benefit from wider buffers of uncropped field margin and headland habitats, particularly adjacent to the connecting hedgerows.

The Upwood habitat complex is the most fragmented. The creation of new species-rich grasslands adjacent to Upwood Meadows is required to achieve a larger and more sustainable management unit, as well as create priority grassland and pond habitats. There is potential to buffer and extend Rolt's Wood to double its size and create a 40 Ha site between Upwood and Wistow. For the other sites, buffering with uncropped field margin and headland habitats would be the first step to enhancing the habitat network.

Stepping Stones

To achieve a better functioning habitat network across the whole Fen-edge Woodlands priority area, stepping stone habitats are needed in between the five core habitat blocks to better connect them to each other. The aim should be to reduce the gaps between each core habitat block and new stepping stone sites

to less than 1 Km, to better facilitate movement by woodland and farm wildlife. The locations where such stepping stones are most needed are west of Abbots Ripton either side of the East coast mainline railway, around Woodwalton village (to connect to the Great Fen), between Wennington and Raveley villages (two stepping stone sites ideally required), and north of Wistow.

Within the Monks Wood, Abbots Ripton and Warboys core habitat blocks new habitat stepping stones are generally not required (though some existing ones could be enlarged). The large number of small woods and other habitats help make the landscape more permeable for farm wildlife and some woodland species.

However, a new habitat stepping stone created between Aversley and Archer's Woods would help to better connect them, supplemented by the establishment of thicker hedgerows with adjacent wildflower-rich field margins and headlands.

The Upwood habitat complex is the one where the creation of additional and larger habitat stepping stones is most needed to achieve a higher quality habitat network.

Nature Friendly Farming

There are also some habitats that are lacking or absent across the landscape, notably ponds, small wetlands and flower-rich native grasslands. These habitats provide essential complementary habitats for woodland species, providing water and feeding opportunities for birds, or pollen and nectar sources for ancient woodland insects.

While the provision of bird seed and pollinator or legume mixes as farm or nature-friendly farming options does make up this deficit to some extent, there is still a need for more farm woods, ponds and flower-rich habitats at the landscape-scale to provide habitat connectivity within and between the core habitat blocks. Wildflower grasslands also provide pollen and nectar sources over a longer season than agricultural mixes. The lack of livestock and mixed farming is currently a constraint to the creation of flower-rich grasslands, but there may be opportunities closer to the villages, where there is a demand for paddocks for pony grazing. More ponds would support the recovery of populations of great crested newts.

The hedgerow network across the landscape is generally sparse and many are low growing, thin and often gappy, so do not provide a good "woodland edge" habitat structure for nesting birds. The large fields and high-quality arable land do not favour the creation of a high density of hedgerows. However, well-placed hedgerows that are allowed to grow thick and either tall, or else have good numbers of hedgerow trees, can make a contribution to enhancing the landscape for wildlife. A first step would be to enhance / reinstate degraded hedges along current field boundaries and increase their diversity by planting a mixture of native species. The value of a hedgerow as a nesting, feeding or sheltering habitat for birds, mammals and invertebrates is greatly enhanced by being tall, wide and having buffers of wide, grassy field margins, which also allow space for the hedges to become bushy and reach their full fruiting potential. Targeted use of Environmental Land Management schemes to enhance the network of hedgerows and field margins through the landscape, would further increase the diversity and number of animal and plant species.

The areas between Aversley Wood and Archer's Wood, the areas immediately west and east of Monks Wood, the area between Bevills Wood and Abbots Ripton and the area south of Wennington Wood and Abbots Ripton village are the priorities for this approach.

The adoption of nature-friendly farming options whether through agri-environment schemes or as part of wider crop rotations would significantly enhance the landscape for wildlife. The retention of hedgerows, and the use of fallows, bird seed mixes, pollinator seed mixes and various types of uncropped field margins help enhance the permeability of the landscape for species, as well as provide direct habitats for birds and insects associated with farming. Where these non-cropped habitats approach or exceed 10% of the farmed area, they will support increased populations of farmland birds.

4.6.3 **Objectives:**

Short-term

- Promote the adoption of nature-friendly farming to improve farm habitat extent and connectivity on a landscape scale and promote action for an agreed set of the key species.
- Improve the quality of remnant hedgerows and increase the extent of flower and seed rich field margins and headlands to encourage a wider range of birds, mammals and invertebrates.
- Create a network of ponds across the landscape to support a stable or growing population of great crested newts and other pond species.

Long-term

- Increase the % cover of semi-natural habitat, including woodland, flower-rich grasslands and wide, grassy field margins to achieve a habitat land cover of 30%.
- Increase the area of woodland cover from approximately 650 Ha to 800 Ha, and improve woodland connectivity, through buffering the core sites and creating new stepping stone habitats.
- Seek to buffer and extend Upwood Meadow National Nature Reserve to create a larger, more sustainable management unit.
- Create a series of habitat stepping stones to connect the five core habitat blocks to each other and reduce the gaps between them to less than 1 Km.

4.6.4 **Priority Area Vision:**

The Vision for this priority area is a network of large, well-connected ancient woodlands set within nature-friendly arable farms, incorporating additional areas of native woodland, wildflower meadows, ponds, and field edge and in-field habitats including hedgerows, pollen / nectar-rich / wild bird seed mixes, and fallows.

Within the five core habitat blocks, the core ancient woodland and lowland meadow habitat sites will be buffered by new priority habitats or through nature-friendly farming options. Opportunities to extend sites such as around Upwood Meadows and between Upton and Copingford Woods will be taken. The woodlands will be well managed to create a diverse age structure and provide for the full range of woodland habitats, including dense shrubby areas for woodland birds and flower-rich glades or margins for insects and deadwood for fungi and invertebrates. Woodland cover will be increased, particularly through the creation of new habitat stepping stones between the core habitat blocks.

Arable farming will continue to be the predominant land use, but with greater use of regenerative farming practices and provision of farm and field edge habitats, there will be larger and more extensive populations of farmland birds and insects across the area, and more carbon will be stored in the soils. The fields will support strong populations of grey partridge, corn bunting and skylark, while in the hedgerows linnet, yellowhammer and whitethroat will breed amongst many other birds. A network of ponds will allow the population of great crested newt to expand. Larger and more extensive areas of wildflower-rich grassland will support thriving insect and pollinator populations.

4.6.5 **Delivery Mechanisms:**

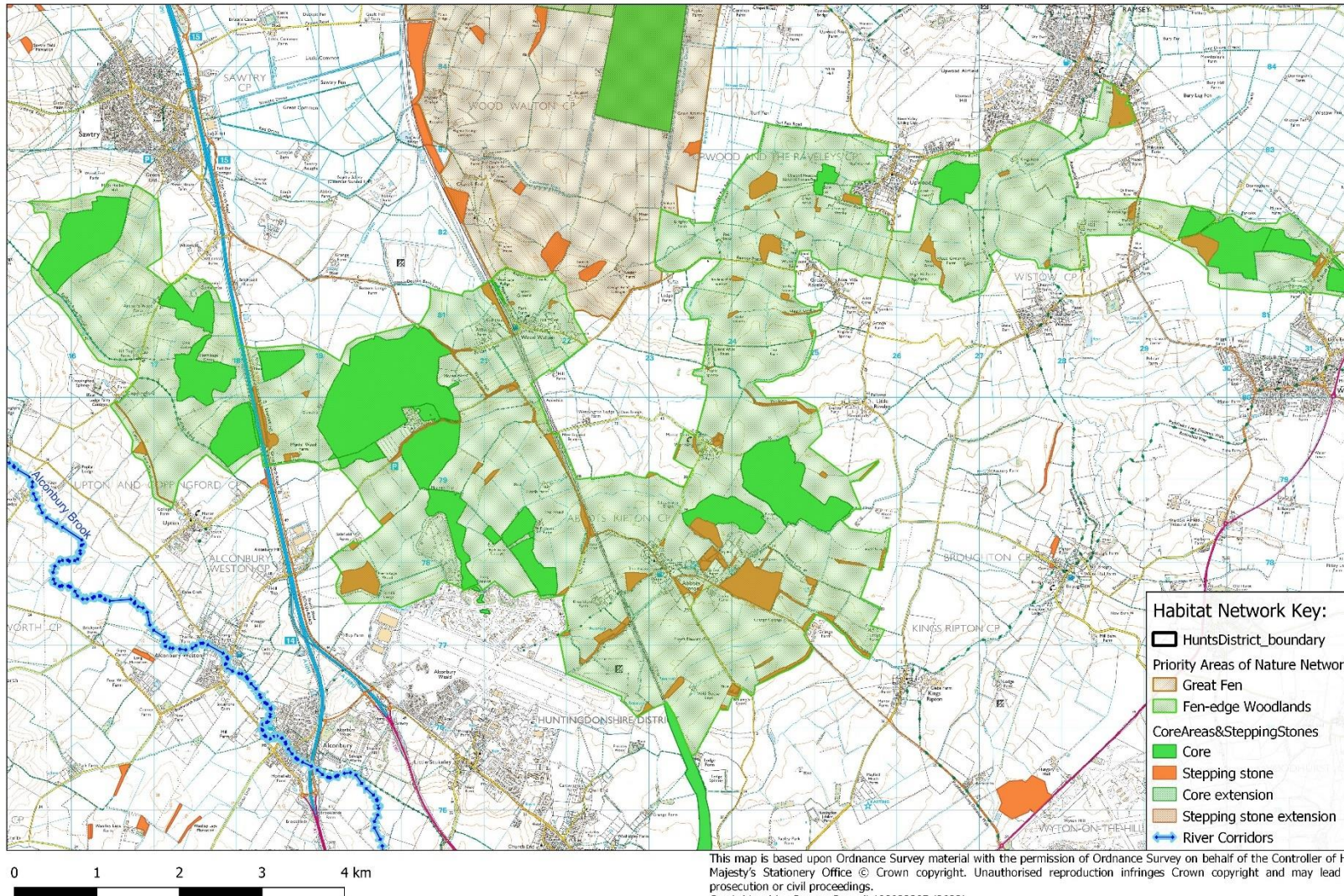
Achieving the desired nature network will involve a variety of approaches. The dominant approach across most of the area will be the adoption of nature-friendly farming and Environmental Land Management Schemes, implemented through the work of individual landowners and possibly an active farmer cluster.

However, in specific locations, there may be opportunities to create new priority habitats funded by a more diverse range of sources that may include woodland carbon payments or Biodiversity Net Gain related to development elsewhere in Huntingdonshire.

Map 6: Fen-edge Woodlands Habitat Network



Fen-edge Woodlands Habitat Network
Dec 2023



4.7 Hail Weston-Bushmead Priority Area

4.7.1 Key Facts

Total area: 725 Ha in Hunts & Beds (401 Ha in Hunts)

Area of core and stepping stone habitats: 105.1 Ha (14.5% of total area)

Core sites: High Wood CWS, Huntingdon Wood CWS and Moor Road Marshy Fields CWS (all Hunts) and Bushmead Big Wood CWS and Bushmead CWS (both Beds).

Important habitats: Ancient Woodland, hedgerows, ponds & small wetlands.

Important species:

Fauna: Great crested newts, woodland and farmland bird assemblages.

Flora: Ancient woodland and wetland flora.

4.7.2 Network Approach:

Better Management

The management of the ancient woodland and open grassland / wetland wildlife sites to support their full range of potential species are the top priority. Within the ancient woodlands, beneficial management includes enhancing the woodland structure to support assemblages of woodland birds and invertebrates while maintaining the ancient woodland flora. This requires protection of old trees and deadwood, areas of dense shrubby growth for warblers and other woodland bird species, and provision of flower-rich rides and glades or patches of species-rich grassland adjacent to the woods.

The wildlife-rich grasslands and wetlands also require some form of management whether through grazing or a cutting regime to provide a varied habitat structure and promote a diversity of wildflower and wetland plant species and invertebrate species.

Buffering & Extending Core Areas

The remaining wildlife sites within Huntingdonshire are relatively small. However, there is the potential to better connect them together to form a single core habitat area of over 40 Ha. This could be achieved through buffering and extending each site with the creation of areas of new woodland or shrubby margins to the ancient woodlands, new wildflower grasslands, thicker hedgerows and small wetlands and ponds. The South Brook watercourse / drain connects Moor Road Marshy Fields, High Wood and Huntingdon Wood. This provides a natural focus for habitat creation.

A solar park has been built west of High Wood. There are plans to expand this to the south of and in between High Wood and Huntingdon Wood. If these are to be brought forward, they could incorporate the above measures into the design of the scheme. Unfortunately, the existing solar park has species-poor grassland around and beneath the solar panels. If the extension was to have areas of flower-rich grassland at least around the margins of the solar park, this would complement the existing ancient woodland habitats. It should also be possible to create a new area of woodland adjacent to the watercourse and linking the northern parts of High Wood and Huntingdon Wood.

The South Brook is buffered from the adjacent arable farmland by wide grassland margins and headlands. This corridor could be enhanced through the incorporation of areas of species-rich grassland, a number of ponds and small wetlands (e.g. by re-profiling the water course banks in two or three places) and the inclusion of one or two small areas of species-rich mixed scrub.

Stepping Stones

New stepping stone habitats could be created across this area, with priority locations in the areas between Moor Road Marshy Fields and High Wood and between these two sites and Bushmead CWS in Bedfordshire. Stepping stones comprising a mosaic of woodland, scrub, open flower-rich grassland and

small ponds or wetlands would add most value to the landscape. A network of new ponds would support the expansion and conservation of Great Crested Newt population and other aquatic fauna and flora.

Hedgerows could be allowed to grow wider and either taller or have hedgerow trees along their length. Thick, wide hedges provide higher quality nesting, sheltering and foraging habitats and at sufficient density can also support the woodland bird assemblages of the ancient woodlands, as well as provide connectivity between the existing habitats and new habitat stepping stones.

Nature Friendly Farming

The majority of this priority area will remain in arable farming, therefore the wider adoption of nature-friendly farming options whether through Environmental Land Management schemes or as part of crop rotations will be essential to achieve nature network objectives. The retention and targeted enhancement of hedgerows, the use of fallows, bird seed mixes, pollinator seed mixes and various types of uncropped field margins will all help to enhance the permeability of the landscape for wildlife, as well as provide direct habitats for birds and insects associated with farming. Where these non-cropped habitats approach or exceed 10% of the farmed area, they will support increased populations of farmland birds.

4.7.3 Objectives:

Short-term

- To enhance the ancient woodland sites through management to achieve a varied habitat structure with old trees and deadwood, dense shrubby growth and areas of flower-rich open space.
- To create an enhanced habitat corridor along the South Brook connecting Huntingdon Wood, High Wood and Moor Road Marshy Fields CWS.
- To incorporate a new woodland to connect High Wood and Huntingdon Wood as well as species-rich grassland buffers to both woods (through the solar park expansion proposal if approved).

Long-term

- To create a mosaic of stepping stone habitats including woodland / scrub, flower-rich grasslands and small wetlands / ponds between Moor Road Marshy Fields and High Wood in Hunts and Bushmead in Beds.
- To increase the high-quality habitats from 14.5% to 25-30% land cover within the Priority Area.
- To adopt nature-friendly farming across the majority of the area.

4.7.4 Priority Area Vision:

To create an expanded network of woodland, scrub, hedgerow, flower-rich grassland, wetland and pond habitats across the farmed landscape. These will support increased populations of breeding songbirds and Great Crested Newts. Nature-friendly farming will provide the backdrop to the expanded area of priority habitats, providing greater breeding, sheltering and foraging opportunities for larger populations of birds, amphibians, reptiles and invertebrates. The solar parks within the area will contribute new hedgerows and areas of flower-rich grassland, with any new solar parks also contributing new woodland and other habitats to connect Huntingdon Wood, High Wood and Moor Road Marshy Fields.

4.7.5 Delivery Mechanisms:

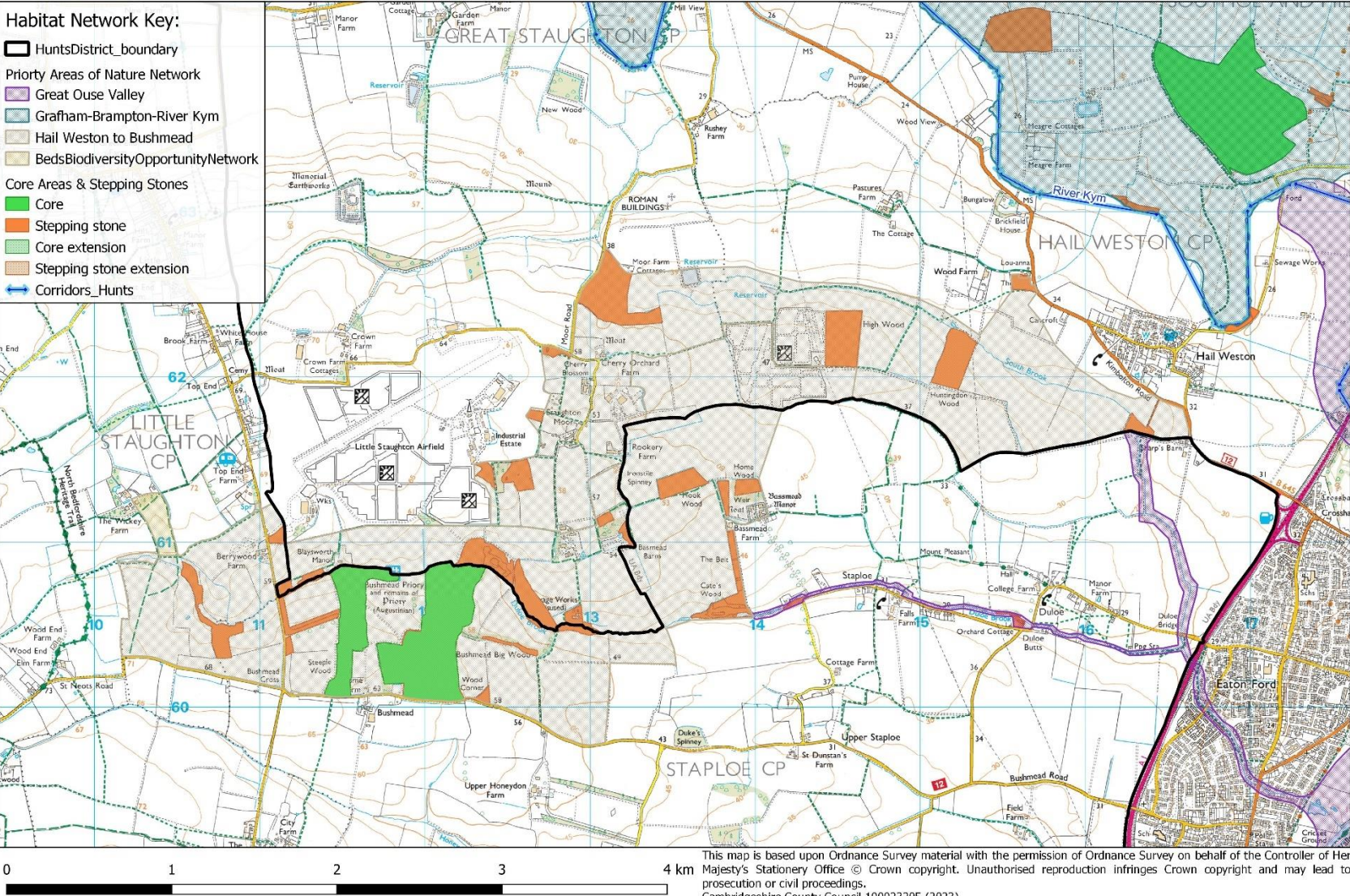
The main delivery mechanism across most of this area will be the use of Environmental Land Management schemes, to support nature-friendly farming and the better management of woodlands, hedgerows and grasslands and the creation of new habitat buffers and stepping stones.

The Natural England great crested newt District Licencing Scheme could support pond creation.

Any new solar parks should also make a major contribution of new habitats to buffer, extend and connect the existing high value nature sites, as well as support better management of the ancient woodlands.

Map 7: Hail Weston-Bushmead Habitat Network

Hail Weston to Bushmead Habitat Network
Dec 2023



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4.8 Folksworth-Elton-Ashton Wold Priority Area

4.8.1 Key Facts

Total area: 1,183 Ha in Hunts (1,980 Ha Hunts & Northants)

Area of core and stepping stone habitats: 502.39 Ha (25.05% of total area)

Core sites: Ashton Wold SSSI, Caldecote Wood CWS, North Wood CWS, Fir Dale Lake & Fish Ponds CWS, Elton Park and Lady Margaret Wood CWS (Northants).

Important habitats: Ancient woodland, lowland mixed deciduous woodland.

Important species:

Fauna: Woodland and farmland bird assemblage.

Flora: Ancient woodland flora.

4.8.2 Network Approach:

This area comprises three main habitat blocks that should form the focus of conservation action. Ashton Wold SSSI and associated habitats is the most important of the three. The second area is the group of sites including two ancient woodlands and Fir Dale Lake around Folksworth, while Elton Park and Estate with its large secondary and plantation woodland blocks is the third. Much of the farmland between these three habitat blocks is highly intensive arable farmland with few habitat features. The Billing Brook, a tributary of the Nene divides the area, while the Holme Brook flows from Folksworth towards the Great Fen.

Better Management

The focus around Ashton Wold is better management of the various woodlands to achieve a more varied woodland structure and a range of complementary habitats including flower-rich grasslands and ponds. This area is already 200 Ha in size and provides sufficient space to incorporate a high-quality network of wooded and other habitats.

The Folksworth ancient woodlands, North Wood and Caldecote Wood, are both too small to achieve the full range of woodland habitat structure, but management could be targeted at enhancing key parts of each to provide more varied woodland habitats.

Elton Park and the other woodlands around the Estate form the third main block of habitats in this area. Across the Northants border, Lady Margaret Wood is a partially replanted ancient woodland, however many of the woods are secondary or planted. Elton Park has some old planted trees but these have not yet reached the veteran stage. The grassland under the park is also species-poor, so the site is undesignated. However, the extent of habitats at over 220 Ha provides a large area within which it would be possible to achieve better outcomes for wildlife through targeted habitat restoration and creation. Priorities include allowing the parkland trees to age, while providing replacements for the future, creating areas of species-rich grassland around the park, and management of the woodlands to achieve a more varied habitat structure.

Buffering & Extending Core Areas

The small ancient woodlands and other stepping stones west of Folksworth currently cover approximately 40 Ha though they are each separated from each other by intensive arable farmland. With buffering and some limited extension of these sites it would be possible to ensure they are each within 200 metres of each other and thus create a larger core habitat area approaching 100 Ha. New habitats could include flower-rich grasslands, shrubby margins to the woods to create a “softer”, more ecologically varied edge or the creation of new woodland stepping stones. These could be supplemented by much wider flower-rich, pollen and nectar mixes, bird seed mixes or tussocky field margins and headlands. Other complementary habitats could include ponds or small wetland features along the upper reaches of the Holme Brook and farm drains.

Stepping Stones

Much of the land between the three main habitat blocks is intensive arable farmland with few habitat features. Remnant hedges, where present are gappy and generally low and sparse, providing poor quality habitat for birds.

The area east of Elton up to the Bullock Road forms part of the Elton Estate and has a number of small farm copses and shelterbelts, but these are generally very small. There is also a stronger network of hedgerows with some thicker hedgerows, often with hedgerow trees. The expansion of the small woods to create larger stepping stone habitats would ensure that the habitats between the Elton habitat block and the Folksworth habitat block are within 1 Km of each other and thereby able to better support movement of species across the landscape. The enhancement of the hedgerow network to allow all of the hedges to grow thicker, to add hedgerow trees (where absent) and to create flower-rich and bird-seed rich margins and headlands would create much improved landscape connectivity.

Landscape connectivity along the Billing Brook and between Folksworth and Ashton Wold is generally much poorer. The creation of two-three new woodland habitat stepping stones, perhaps located adjacent to remnant hedgerows, would be the best approach to enhancing landscape connectivity. The remaining hedgerows should be allowed to grow thicker, with hedgerow trees protected and buffers of wide flower-rich field margins added.

Nature Friendly Farming

The majority of this priority area will remain in arable farming, therefore the wider adoption of nature-friendly farming options whether through Environmental Land Management schemes or as part of crop rotations will be essential to achieve nature network objectives. The retention and targeted enhancement of hedgerows, the use of fallows, bird seed mixes, pollinator seed mixes and various types of uncropped field margins will all help to enhance the permeability of the landscape for wildlife, as well as provide direct habitats for birds and insects associated with farming. In addition, there is the potential to use natural flood management approaches to create a habitat corridor along the Billing and Holme Brooks with small wetland and other habitat features at regular intervals. Where these non-cropped habitats approach or exceed 10% of the farmed area, they will support increased populations of farmland birds.

4.8.3 Objectives:

Short-term

- Enhance the variety of habitats and create more varied woodland habitat structure within the Ashton Wold and Elton Park habitat cluster areas.
- Adopt a range of nature-friendly farming approaches including enhancement and restoration of hedgerows and hedgerow trees, provision of flower and seed-rich margins and headlands, use of fallows and creation of natural flood management features along the watercourses.

Long-term

- Buffer, extend and better connect the habitats within the Folksworth habitat cluster to create an area approaching 100 Ha in size.
- Increase the % cover of semi-natural habitat, including woodland, flower-rich grasslands and wide, grassy field margins to achieve a habitat land cover of 30%.

4.8.4 Priority Area Vision:

The Vision for this priority area is a network of nature-friendly arable farms, incorporating additional areas of native woodland, wildflower meadows, small wetlands and field edge and in-field habitats including hedgerows, pollen and nectar-rich and wild bird seed mixes, and fallows. The use of natural flood management measures will enhance the brooks and farm drains and reduce flooding downstream.

Arable farming will continue to be the predominant land use, but with greater use of regenerative farming practices and provision of farm and field edge habitats, there will be larger and more extensive populations of farmland birds across the area, and more carbon will be stored in the soils.

4.8.5 Delivery Mechanisms:

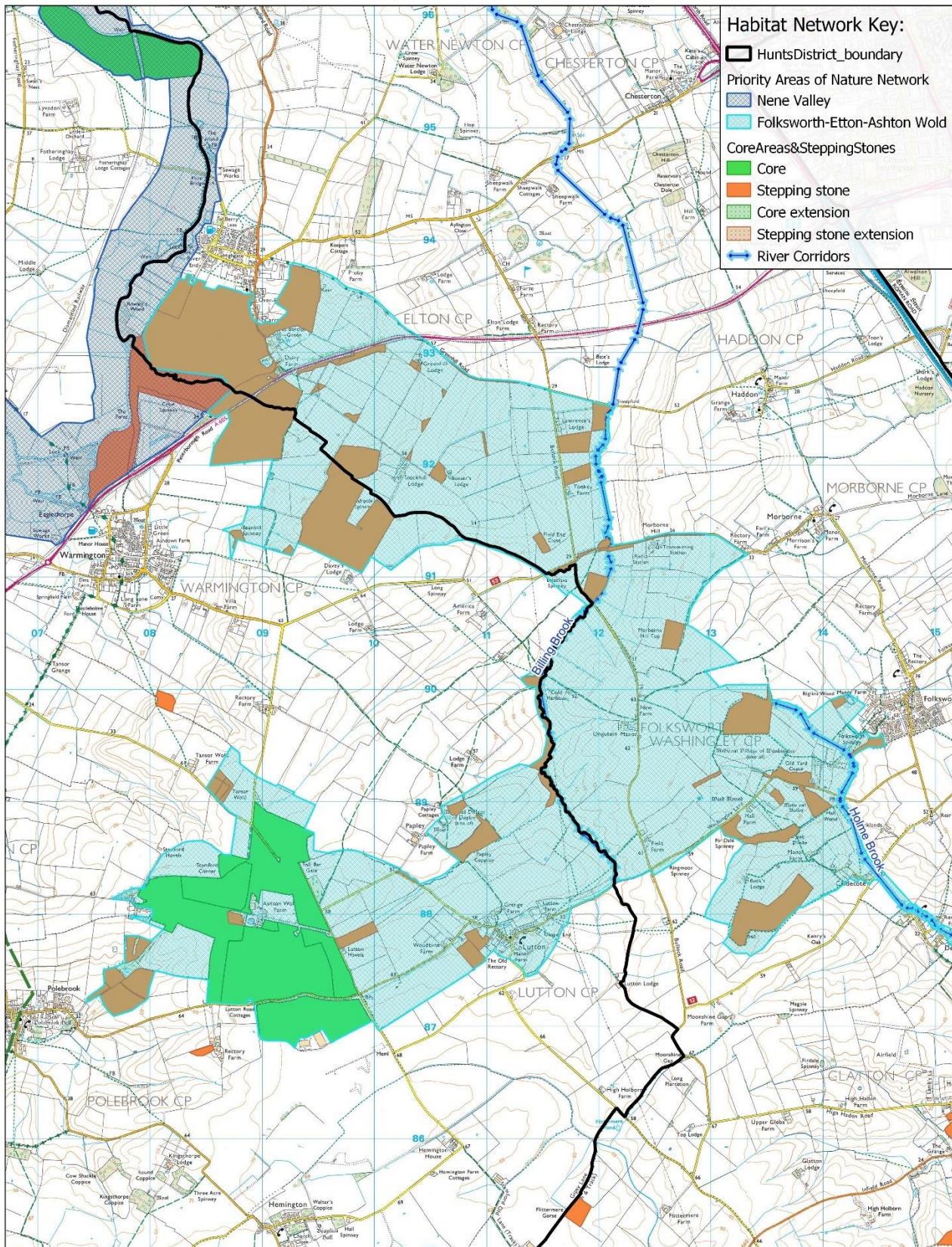
Achieving the desired nature network within this priority area will involve a variety of approaches. The dominant approach across most of the area will be the adoption of nature-friendly farming and Environmental Land Management Schemes, implemented through the work of individual landowners and possibly an active farmer cluster.

The adoption of natural flood management measures may form part of Environment Land Management Schemes or otherwise be supported by flood risk management authorities.

Map 8: Folksworth-Elton-Ashton Wold Habitat Network



Folksworth-Elton-Ashton Wold Habitat Network



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4.9 Holme-Conington Priority Area

4.9.1 Key Facts

Total area: 516 Ha

Area of stepping stone habitats: 113.18 Ha (21.9% of total area)

Core sites: The Roughs Caldecote Fen CWS, Denton Common Pit CWS, Holmewood Park & Conington Park.

Important habitats: Swamp, open water, parkland.

Important species:

Fauna: Farmland and wetland birds.

4.9.2 Network Approach:

This small priority area lies west of Holme Fen on the other side of the East Coast mainline railway and covers the land around Holme and Conington Villages. Holmewood Hall and Conington Hall have extensive areas of parkland with broadleaved woodland and there is historic ridge and furrow grassland at Conington. North of Holme village the area includes an area of peat soils opposite Holme Fen and a couple of County Wildlife Sites, The Roughs, Caldecote Fen and Denton Common Pit. Holme Brook passes through the area feeding the Great Fen.

Conservation priorities include a range of more nature-friendly farming to create better connectivity between the remnant woods and grasslands of Holmewood and Conington Halls and the creation of a continuous habitat corridor along the Holme Brook. Restoration of species-rich grassland is possible at both Holmewood Park and on and around the ridge and furrow grasslands at Conington Park. On the peat soils north of Holme, the priority is to conserve the peat and reduce the loss of carbon, which could be achieved through alternative forms of farming, grassland creation or even small areas of wetland creation.

Better Management

There is potential to enhance the biodiversity value of the parkland at Holmewood Hall and Conington Hall by creating a range of complementary habitats to the extensive areas of planted broadleaved woodlands and parkland trees. These include the creation of areas of flower-rich grassland within the parklands and on areas of historic ridge and furrow grassland. There may also be potential to create networks of new ponds to enhance the habitat variety. Long-term management of the numerous woodlands would in time enhance their biodiversity value for example by enhancing the woodland structure to provide for deadwood and areas of dense shrubby growth for songbirds.

Buffering & Extending Core Areas

This priority area has 22% land cover of habitats, but these are present as numerous smaller habitat parcels of mainly planted broadleaved woodland. There are not the large areas of priority core habitats present in most of the other Priority Areas. The conservation priorities are therefore more focussed on better management of these small habitat patches, as well as better connecting them through the creation of additional habitats in select locations and adoption of nature-friendly farming options.

Stepping Stones

Many of the small habitat patches are already within 200-300 metres of their next nearest. Where these gaps are larger than 500 metres the creation of new, small habitat patches to reduce gaps to around 200 metres would be beneficial. There are 7-8 locations around Conington and a further 4 or 5 around Holme where the creation of new stepping stone habitats would enhance overall connectivity for wildlife. The Holme Brook also provides a focus for habitat creation, including the creation of a more varied channel profile and in-stream habitats. Habitat types to create could include small woods, networks of ponds

associated with woods or grassland and the use of wide headlands and field margins in arable cropped areas.

Nature Friendly Farming

Arable farming would be expected to continue across the majority of this priority area. Adoption of nature-friendly farming approaches, together with regenerative farming could support the wetland and woodland habitats, helping to buffer them from adjacent land uses. Buffering of the Holme Brook along with well-sited broad headlands and field margins including bird seed mixes or pollen and nectar mixes would also provide a range of feeding and breeding opportunities for farmland birds and invertebrates and allow more mobile species to move between habitat patches.

On the peat soils north of Holme there is potential to explore alternative forms of wet farming, should trials at the Great Fen and elsewhere demonstrate the economic viability of this approach. Even without wet farming, more could be done to protect and reduce the carbon emissions from the soils through careful choice of crops and cropping patterns and rotations and creation of areas of grassland.

4.9.3 Objectives:

Short-term

- To enhance Holmewood Park and Conington Park through the creation of a mosaic of habitats including addition of missing elements such as areas of flower-rich grassland, e.g. on the historic ridge and furrow grassland in Conington, or networks of ponds.
- To manage the numerous small park and farm woodlands to create a more diverse habitat structure with areas of dense shrubby growth for songbirds and some trees allowed to age and provide deadwood.
- To buffer the whole length of Holme Brook with wide field margins and / or small woods.
- To promote nature friendly farming options such as bird seed mixes and pollen and nectar mixes in headlands and wide field margins to enhance connectivity across the landscape.

Long-term

- To protect the peat soils north of Holme through alternative approaches to farming and cropping.
- To create a more natural profile and in-stream habitats within Holme Brook.

4.9.4 Priority Area Vision:

The vision is to enhance the biodiversity value of the parklands and woodlands that form the landscapes of Holmewood Hall and Conington Park and to create a better-connected landscape between the two. This will involve the creation of flower-rich habitats in select locations along with some additional small woods and networks of ponds. The Holme Brook will be enhanced as a wildlife corridor, while north of Holme the peat soils will be protected to better store carbon.

4.9.5 Delivery Mechanisms:

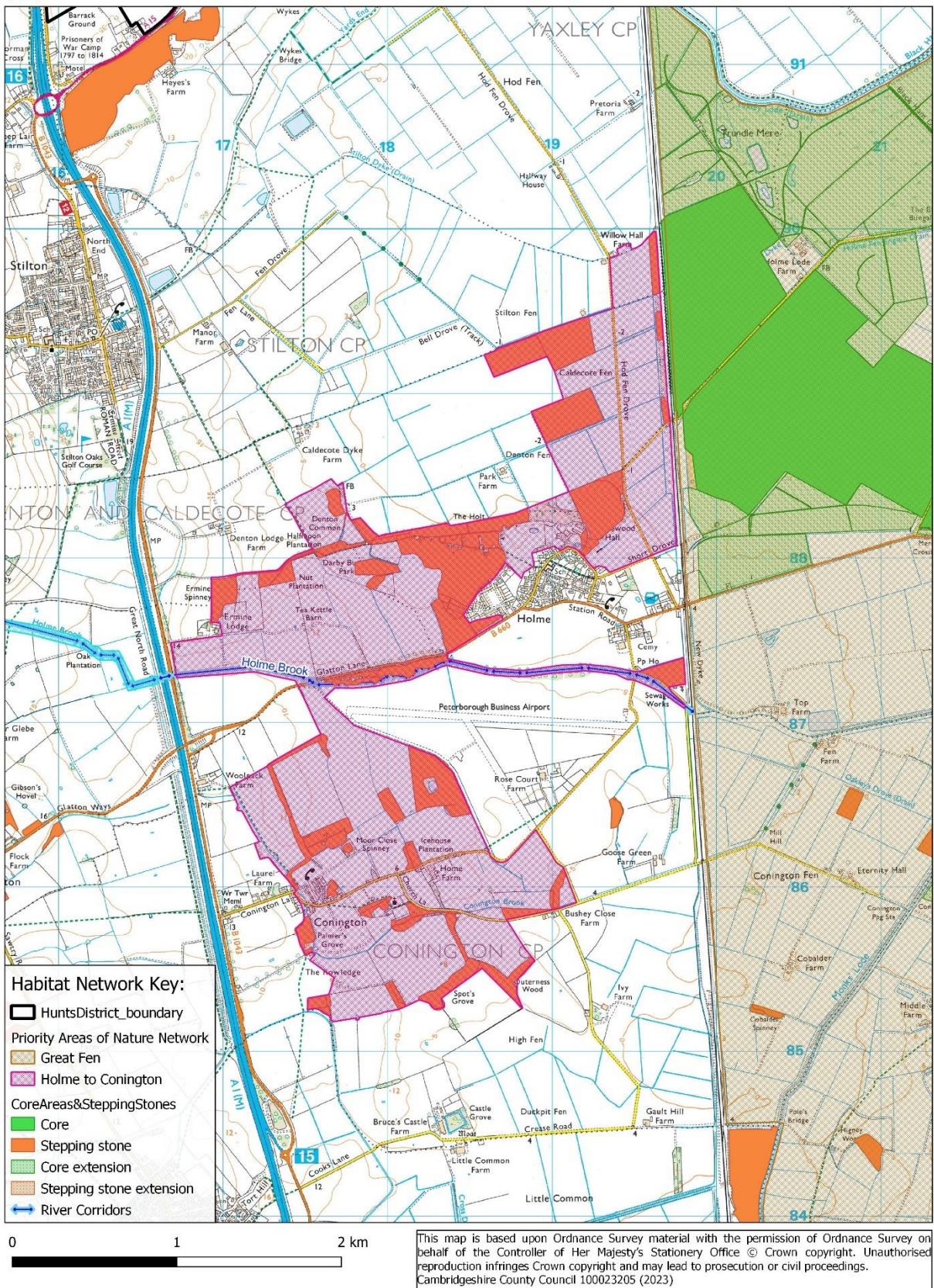
The main delivery mechanism will be the use of Environment Land Management Schemes, whether to create small habitat patches or to support nature-friendly farming. Alternative farm cropping rotations may also play a role.

Carbon payments could support alternative farming or wetland creation on the areas of peat soils.

Map 9: Holme-Conington Habitat Network



Holme-Conington Habitat Network
Dec 2023



4.10 Nene Valley Priority Area

4.10.1 Key Facts

Total area: 1,374 Ha Hunts, Peterborough & Northants within 5 Km of Huntingdonshire (363 Ha within Hunts).

Area of core & stepping stone habitats (in Hunts): 109.53 Ha (30.2%)

Core sites: Castor Flood Meadows SSSI (part Peterborough), Stibbington nature reserve CWS, Sibson Flood Meadows CWS, Water Newton Meadows & Water Newton Pollard Willows CWS (all Hunts). East Holmes CWS, Normangate River Meadows CWS, Sutton Meadows South CWS, Sutton-Sibson Flood Meadows CWS & Sutton Meadows North CWS (all Peterborough).

Important habitats: Floodplain wetland mosaics, lowland floodplain meadows & river backwaters.

Important species:

Fauna: Otter, water vole, aquatic invertebrates including dragonflies and water beetles.

Flora: Great burnet, tubular water-dropwort, narrow-leaved water dropwort, common meadow-rue, pepper saxifrage early marsh orchid, slender tufted sedge and marsh arrow-grass.

4.10.2 Network Approach:

Better Management

The River Nene forms the north-western and northern boundary of the district. From the A1 eastwards there is a continuous network of habitats to the edge of Peterborough. These are either floodplain wetland mosaics or lowland flood meadows. Although a continuous network many of these sites would benefit from enhanced management and / or restoration of species-rich grassland and floodplain wetland features.

Within the Huntingdonshire section of the Nene Valley, 30% of the floodplain is nature-rich land but all of it would benefit from better management or habitat restoration to reach its full nature potential.

Agricultural improvement in the 20th century or less than ideal management more recently has reduced the species-richness of most floodplain sites. The traditional species-rich flood meadows require an annual hay cut (later in the growing season) and autumn / winter grazing, ideally with a mixture of cattle and sheep. The other floodplain wet grassland sites would benefit from retaining more water for longer within a range of ditch and scrape features to encourage the return of wintering and breeding waders. These habitats also benefit from seasonal grazing. However, livestock businesses are challenging to run in a profitable way, and a more ecologically and economically sustainable livestock farming model may be required if the better management and restoration of floodplain meadow and wetland habitats is to be realised. Nene Park Trust own many of the floodplain sites and they are exploring how best to work with their tenant farmers to better manage and restore these sites. They have also implemented a floodplain wetland restoration project at Sutton / Sibson Flood Meadows and are planning a floodplain meadow creation project at West Holmes, to demonstrate approaches to other landowners.

Many of the sites along the Nene Valley are important for their collections of ancient, mainly willow trees, many of which have been pollarded. Continuation of pollarding regimes helps prolong the life of these ancient trees. Planting replacement trees for the future is also required and a couple of landowners are actively doing this, but more could be done. With planting of replacement trees for the future, not all of the ancient willows need be pollarded and some can be allowed to grow old and collapse to provide a wider range of micro-habitats for invertebrates. Some of these fallen trees will re-establish from fallen branches as willows will often re-root when in contact with the soil.

Buffering & Extending Core Areas

Within the Nene Valley east of the A1 buffering and extension of the core habitat areas is about restoration of species-rich lowland floodplain meadows and floodplain wetland mosaics, where more water can be held on the land for longer to support wetland fauna and plant communities.

Stepping Stones

The creation of additional stepping stone habitats is not needed east of the A1 in the Nene Valley due to the extent of well-connected high quality meadow and river backwater habitats. However, upstream from Wansford to Elton, there is potential to create a couple of additional small wetland stepping stone habitats within the floodplain, though due to the limited extent of floodplain on the Hunts side of the river, these may be better located on the Northants side. The floodplain east of Yarwell and south-west of Elton provides potential locations for the creation of floodplain wetland mosaics.

Nature Friendly Farming

Nature-friendly farming within the Nene Valley revolves around supporting more ecologically sustainable and profitable grazing enterprises to support the whole-sale restoration of lowland floodplain meadows or floodplain wetland mosaic habitats upstream of Peterborough. However, changes within the wider catchment are also required to significantly reduce diffuse pollution from farmland, which is detrimental to species-rich floodplain meadows.

4.10.3 Objectives:

Short-term

- Ensure the existing important conservation sites, the SSSI at Castor Flood Meadows and the floodplain meadows and grassland CWS are well managed.
- Implement demonstration projects showcasing restoration and creation of floodplain meadow and floodplain wetland mosaic habitats, with a particular focus on Nene Park Trust sites.
- Work with farmers and farm tenants to support nature-friendly farming, including establishment of a farmer cluster if desired.

Long-term

- Restore the floodplain to a mixture of lowland flood meadow priority habitats and floodplain wetland mosaic habitats to support populations of wintering waders and water birds and facilitate the return of breeding waders.

4.10.4 Priority Area Vision:

The vision for the Nene Valley is to enhance the quality of the floodplain habitats through the better management and restoration of species-rich floodplain meadows and floodplain wetland mosaics, to create a more species-rich and wetter floodplain. There will be a continuous network of nature-rich sites upstream from Peterborough to Stibbington, and beyond a network of stepping stone floodplain wetland habitats between Wansford and Elton.

4.10.5 Delivery Mechanisms:

The main delivery mechanism is likely to be Environmental Land Management Schemes to support the management or restoration of floodplain meadow and wetland habitats.

In the future there may be additional scope for private finance where floodplain habitats are managed or restored to reduce flood risk management, or to help reduce diffuse pollution in the wider catchment, but these are not “market ready”.

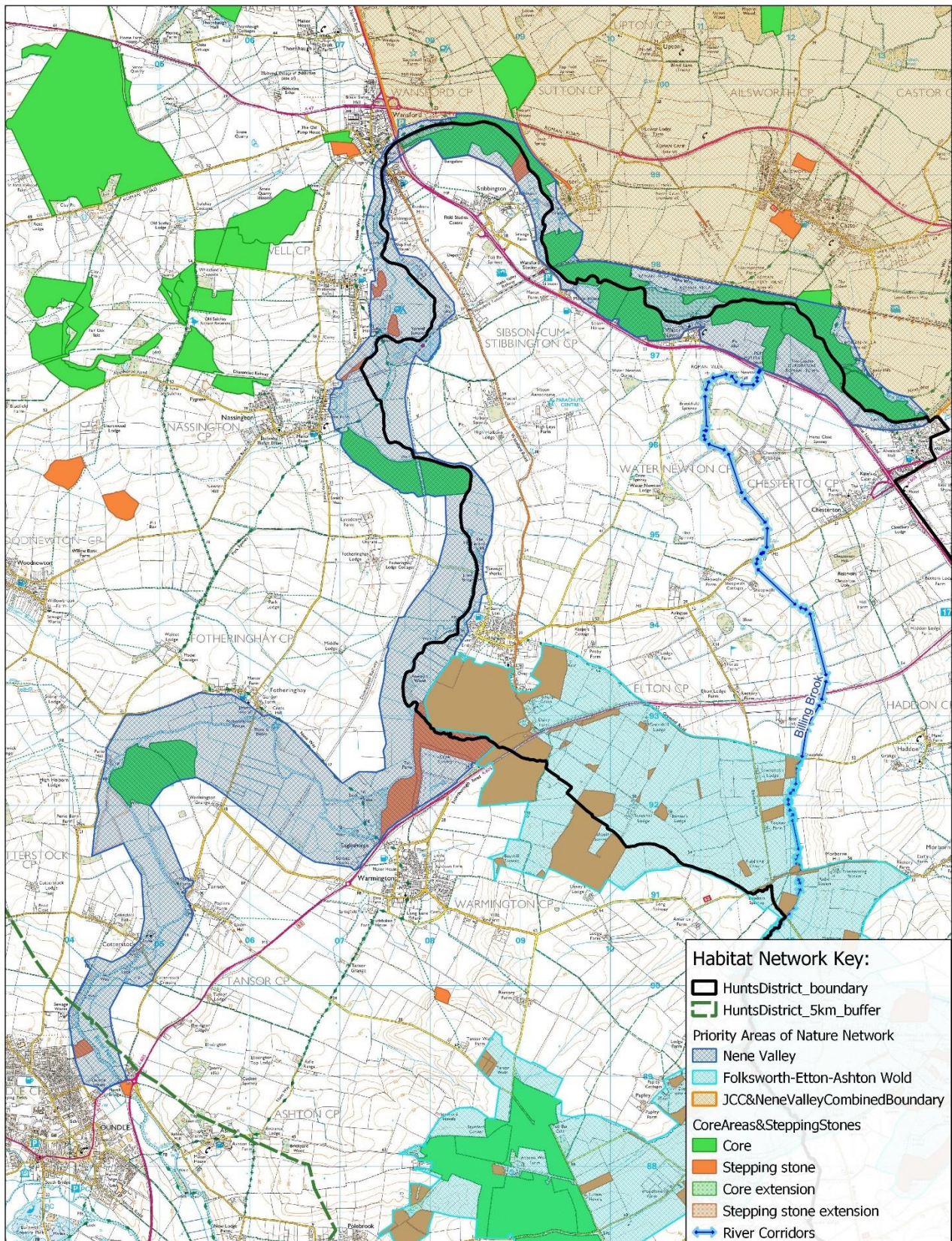
The Environment Agency may play a role in the enhancement of the river Nene backwaters and supporting natural flood management measures, particularly on the tributaries.

Map 10: Nene Valley Habitat Network



Nene Valley Habitat Network

Dec 2023



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4.11 River Corridors (Kym, Ellington Brook, Alconbury Brook and Fen Rivers)

4.11.1 Network Approach:

Outside the identified Priority Areas, including the main rivers of the Great Ouse and Nene there are a number of other smaller rivers and water courses that are tributaries of these larger rivers. These include the River Kym, Ellington Brook, Alconbury Brook, Holme Brook and Billing Brook amongst others. These do not support sufficient quantity and quality of habitats to be identified as their own Priority Areas. However, some do flow through other Priority Areas, the river Kym forms the southern boundary of the Grafham-Brampton Priority Area, while Holme Brook connects the Holme-Conington and Folksworth-Elton-Ashton Wold Priority Areas, and Billing Brook partly flows through the Folksworth-Elton-Ashton Wold Priority Area.

These water courses provide continuous, but relatively narrow habitat corridors through the west of the district and provide a focus for small-scale habitat creation and restoration across the wider landscape of west Huntingdonshire. However, many have been engineered in the past and with undersoil drainage of the surrounding farmland they can cause flooding and diffuse pollution problems downstream.

The priority conservation actions for each of these watercourses and their catchments are working with farmers to introduce natural flood management solutions to retain more water within carefully selected areas of farmland and the river channels to reduce peak flood flows and the risk of flooding downstream. Small scale wetlands and other in-channel interventions such as leaky dams will in turn enhance the river corridors as wildlife corridors. The creation of in-river features such as pools and riffles will further enhance the quality of these small rivers. Natural flood management features can also be designed to help reduce diffuse pollution and improve water quality. Collectively these measures will contribute to addressing issues such as diffuse pollution affecting nationally and internationally conservation sites downstream such as Portholme, the Ouse Washes and the Great Fen.

The north-east of the district forms the western edge of the Fens basin. Here there are large man-made water courses running through the Fens and connecting the Great Fen to the other major fen wetland sites. These include the Forty Foot Drain, Old Course of the Nene and Bevills Leam. These are in turn connected to the Internal Drainage Board (IDB) drainage ditch network and collectively through pump drainage they keep the farmland within the fens dry to support arable agriculture.

With their primary drainage function the scope to create wildlife habitats within the rivers is limited, though banks could be more flower-rich as pollinator highways and in specific locations it may be possible to create two stage channels to support a wider range of wetland flora and fauna. The Middle Level Commissioners have their own biodiversity action plan that brings forward these opportunities.

The IDB drainage network is known as a regional if not national stronghold for water voles, due to the length and connectivity of the drainage network. It is the size and profile of the IDB drains that best support water voles, though it is also possible in select locations to provide higher quality habitats, e.g. through the creation of two-stage channels. Where the water is clean and comes from underlying gravels or peats, drainage ditches can also support outstanding assemblages of invertebrates, including some fen specialist species.

The farmland adjacent to, but outside of these fen river corridors can help support some of the wildlife associated with rivers and wetlands and farmland bird populations. A range of nature-friendly farming measures are possible including the creation of small farm wetlands, enhancement and use of field margins to buffer ditch networks, provision of bird seed mixes and pollen and nectar mixes, and regenerative cropping.

There is also scope to provide small farm-scale wetlands to complement the river corridors. This is likely to include irrigation reservoirs increasingly required to secure water supplies. These can include some shallow margins, or the creation of small reedbeds for their biodiversity value or as part of natural water cleaning solutions.

4.11.2 Objectives:

Short-term

- Promote an expansion of natural flood management measures within the Alconbury Brook catchment, also looking at measures to reduce diffuse pollution and provide in-stream and riverside habitat enhancements.
- Continue the Middle Level Commissioners programme of conservation enhancements to the Fen Rivers and IDB drainage ditch network.

Long-term

- Extend programmes of natural flood management and diffuse pollution reduction measures to the other rivers of west Huntingdonshire including River Kym, Ellington Brook, Holme Brook and Billing Brook.
- Seek to establish a Nature Friendly Farmer Group to cover the Huntingdonshire fens outside of the Great Fen and promote nature-friendly approaches to farming, water course management and farm reservoir design.

4.11.3 Delivery Mechanisms:

The main delivery mechanism is likely to be Environmental Land Management Schemes, whether that be for the management of the farmland adjacent to the river corridors or provision of natural flood management features.

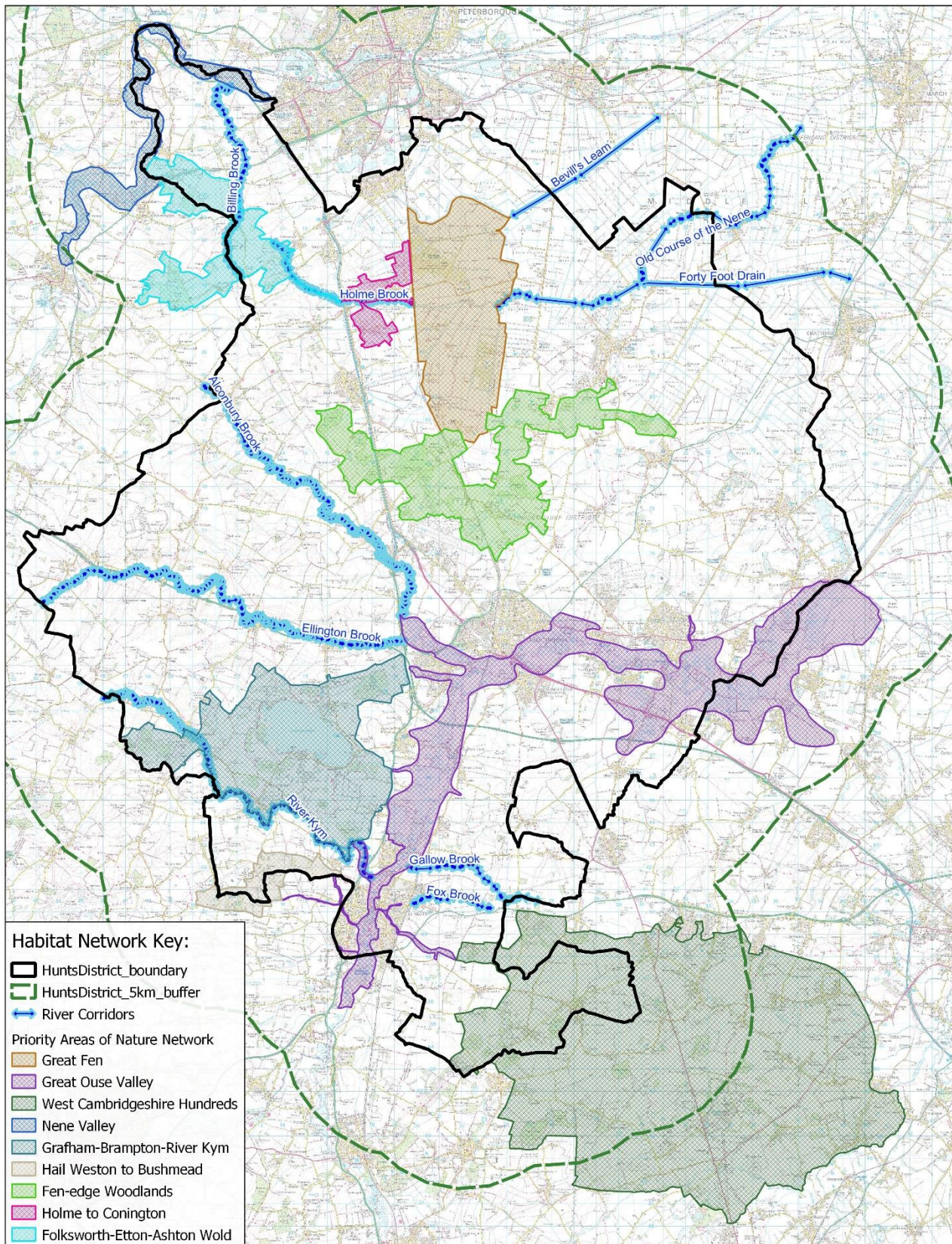
The Environment Agency may also play a role in financially supporting natural flood management measures.

Private finance solutions may emerge to support natural flood management and diffuse pollution reduction, but these are not yet “market ready”.

Map 11: River Corridors



River Corridors & Habitat Network Dec 2023



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5. HUNTINGDONSHIRE INTERIM NATURE RECOVERY STRATEGY SUMMARY

5.1 A Coherent Nature Recovery Network

This report describes the building blocks for a coherent Nature Recovery Network across Huntingdonshire, by identifying **Priority Areas** for nature conservation across the district and their links to neighbouring areas. The nine Priority Areas in total cover approximately 25% of the land area of Huntingdonshire district.

Some of the best opportunities for the creation of priority habitats have been identified within each Priority Area, together with short and long-term objectives. Collectively these will contribute to the delivery of the Cambridgeshire Doubling Nature aspirations within the study area, as well as contribute towards the minimum 30% of land dedicated to nature required for a coherent and functioning ecological network within each Priority Area.

Table 1 below shows the area and percentage land cover of the core areas and stepping stone habitats for the nine Priority Areas identified. There are opportunities to significantly increase the area of priority habitats within the nine Priority Areas, from just under 30% to over 40% land cover. At this level of land cover, ecological networks become more robust and better able to support a more complete range of expected species across the landscape.

Table 1: Priority Areas - Habitat Areas & Percentages

Priority Area	Area (Ha) within Hunts	Core & Stepping stone habitat area 2023 (Ha / %)	Minimum potential long-term habitat area (Ha / %)
Great Fen	3,756	1,667 (44.4%)	2,254 (60%)
Great Ouse Valley	5,114	1,854 (32.2%)	2,554 (50%)
West Cambridgeshire Hundreds	2,622	565 (19.3%)	878 (30%)
Grafham-Brampton-River Kym	5,294	1,548 (29.3%)	2,118 (40%)
Fen-edge Woodlands	3,821	790 (20.7%)	1,146 (30%)
Hail Weston-Bushmead	401	43 (10.8%)	83 (20%)
Folksworth-Elton-Ashton Wold	1,183	190 (16.1%)	290 (25%)
Holme-Conington	516	113 (21.9%)	155 (30%)
Nene Valley	363	109 (30.2%)	145 (40%)
TOTAL	23,070	6,879 (29.8%)	9,623 (42%)

The majority of land within the Priority Areas will continue to be farmed. However, opportunities from the new environmentally-focussed agricultural support regime will result in areas of new habitat on farmland to buffer, connect and provide stepping-stones between the core habitat areas. The best opportunities identified within each Priority Area are not the only areas where landowners and individuals can take action. Over time other opportunities may arise whether from change of ownership, changes to agricultural policies and farming, private finance, or through land use planning.

New nature areas and green spaces will be created in specific locations within the Priority Areas through philanthropy, fund-raising, and payments for ecosystem services such as carbon offsetting or for flood risk management. The planning system through the Local Plan will play an important role in supporting this network, for example through biodiversity net gain and offsetting, provision of strategic natural greenspace through developer contributions, and by ensuring that any green spaces being created as part of new developments link to and support the Nature Recovery Network.

The Nature Recovery Network described is the minimum required to provide space for nature's recovery within Huntingdonshire. The Priority Areas also connect to the surrounding landscape, and form part of a bigger connected network across the rest of Cambridgeshire and neighbouring counties.

5.2 Nature Beyond the Priority Areas

While this study has deliberately focussed on the Priority Areas for a Nature Recovery Network, this does not preclude landowners, individuals, or community groups from taking action in areas outside of the Priority Areas.

Outside of the Priority Areas there are important nature conservation sites and areas of semi-natural habitat, but these are fewer and more isolated from others. In these areas, at the present time, it will be very difficult to achieve the agglomeration benefits of landscape-scale conservation. However, nature-friendly farming can occur anywhere. Wildlife friendly management of open spaces, gardens and buildings can occur throughout our towns and villages. A coherent Nature Recovery Network and nature's recovery will also depend on action being taken across the countryside and within urban areas if we are to restore a truly connected landscape for nature and people.

While the creation of priority habitats might be focussed with the Priority Areas, there is scope for all farmers to adopt nature-friendly farming or regenerative farming methods, wherever they farm. Farmers can provide more space around field margins and headlands, optimise and limit use of agricultural chemicals and manage hedgerows better.

Within the towns and villages there is a network of public open spaces. Some of these in St Neots, Huntingdon or St Ives are within a Priority Area. However, others lie beyond the Priority Area boundaries, but these still provide space for people to interact with nature. In some towns and villages they provide the only access to nature within walking distance for residents.

Huntingdonshire has recognised the environmental importance of their open spaces with some specifically managed for their environmental value, often with community groups. Parish Councils will also often manage small open spaces. There are significant opportunities to work with local residents and community groups to achieve even more for nature across these public parks and open spaces.

There is a wealth of private gardens across the market towns which can provide a potential haven for urban wildlife from foxes and hedgehogs to garden birds, frogs and insect pollinators such as bees. Everyone can garden for wildlife, whether it is a detached house with large garden, a typical modern housing estate small garden or window boxes in flats.

The public open spaces and gardens provide the basis for the "urban forest" but are supplemented by street trees and road verges. As temperatures continue to rise there is a need for much greater "urban greening" with increased tree and vegetation cover to help provide urban cooling in towns, as well as the other benefits of cleaner air and recreation. Buildings can also be made greener through green roofs and green walls.

In a similar vein to the public open spaces and gardens within towns, the parish and village open spaces and rural gardens can also support wildlife, whether through introduction of wildflowers, pond restoration and creation, or more wildlife-friendly mowing and hedge cutting regimes. Each parish or group of parishes could prepare their own Parish Nature Recovery Plan, to guide actions on parish land, within gardens and by the farming and landowning community of their parish.

Across town and country communities working together can help create a Nature Recovery Network within and beyond the Priority Areas. The Biodiversity for All Toolkit prepared alongside this report will provide ideas and options for enhancing these urban open spaces.

6. NEXT STEPS

6.1 Informing the Statutory Local Nature Recovery Strategy

Over the next 12 to 15 months, local partners and stakeholders will be preparing a Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. This interim Nature Recovery Network will provide an evidence base to help inform the county-wide strategy.

6.2 Informing local land-use policy

This Interim Nature Recovery Network supports the Huntingdonshire Local Plan by identifying priorities for landscape-scale action for nature and informing locations for delivery of biodiversity net gain, including biodiversity offsetting.

Biodiversity Net Gain through the planning system is measured using the ⁶Defra Biodiversity Metric (latest version 4.1 as at December 2023). In calculating the biodiversity units allocated to each habitat, a strategic significance score is applied, which if high or medium will increase the number of biodiversity units. There are three strategic significance scores:

- High Strategic Significance - Within area formally identified in local strategy.
- Medium Strategic Significance - Location ecologically desirable but not in local strategy.
- Low Strategic Significance - Area / compensation not in local strategy.

This report formally identifies the nine **Priority Areas** as being the locations within Huntingdonshire where the High Strategic Significance score can be applied to calculating biodiversity units.

The Priority Areas can also be used to inform future locations for development or provision of strategic green infrastructure and provide a framework within which sustainable development across Huntingdonshire can occur. They can be used to inform and target action by landowners through the prioritisation of agri-environment schemes, and they provide a basis for individual landowners and managers to take action to address the biodiversity crisis locally.

6.3 Landowner / stakeholder engagement

Creating a Nature Recovery Network has to involve local stakeholders and particularly landowners, especially where there is a desire to initiate changes to their land and provide space for public access.

During this work we have had high level discussions with a number of key landowners to identify potential issues and opinions relating to delivery of the Nature Recovery Network, whether that be creation of high-quality habitats, nature-friendly farming approaches, or the provision of new public access in the form of permissive routes across farmland or through the creation of accessible natural greenspaces. This has allowed us to better understand landowner aspirations and their views of the opportunities available and potential constraints. From these discussions we have been able to identify a number of opportunities that can be taken forward in the Priority Areas, some in the short-term and others as longer-term endeavours.

Continuing landowner and stakeholder engagement will be critical to successful delivery of a Huntingdonshire Nature Recovery Network. Some discussions are already taking place with a small number of major landowners, exploring the potential for delivering the opportunities and for establishing one or more habitat banks.

6.4 Other Natural Capital & Ecosystem Services

This study only looked at the habitat components of a Nature Recovery Network and has not considered natural capital. However, the Priority Areas identified will also provide a strong focus for delivering wider natural capital benefits.

Taking action within the major river corridors to retain more water within the floodplains for longer will help to manage flood risk. Management of the smaller river corridors and their catchments and amending farming practices in strategic locations to retain more water on land for longer will help contribute to natural flood management, slowing the flow and therefore ameliorate flood risk downstream. This is particularly important on the clay soils that cover much of the district.

The provision of Prestley Country Park at Alconbury Weald and other significant greenspaces as part of new developments will help to provide natural greenspace for the growing populations of the market towns.

Elsewhere, the creation of habitats on the peat soils within the Great Fen Priority Area and elsewhere in the Fens will help to reduce carbon emissions from farming and could in time also help to build soil carbon. Creation of habitats in all Priority Areas whether woodland, hedgerow and even species-rich grassland creation will increase soil carbon levels.

The forthcoming county-wide Local Nature Recovery Strategy is likely to explore these natural capital benefits in greater detail.

6.5 Monitoring & Evaluation

Monitoring of outcomes is essential in order to demonstrate success to stakeholders, funders and the public alike. Ultimately success of a Nature Recovery Network will be judged by a number of measures, including:

- The land cover and quantity of high value and priority habitats;
- The quality of priority habitats and designated nature conservation sites;
- Landscape connectivity; and
- Increasing or stable populations of key species.

Natural Cambridgeshire is developing a series of indicators of success to measure the “Doubling Nature” initiative, as well as methods and projects to address each of the above measures, in priority landscape areas as well as across the county as a whole. There are a number of sources of help including Local Records Centre and volunteer species groups.

It is hoped that as part of this initiative a citizen science monitoring framework and programme could be developed. This would enable the conservation NGOs and others to involve their volunteers and supporters in citizen science programmes as well as providing opportunities to involve the wider public in measuring change and success of the Nature Recovery Network. However, further work is needed to bring together relevant experts and develop these measures into a coherent programme.

7. References

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Acronym List

Here are the acronyms from the Priority Landscapes Cabinet Report along with their full names:

NRNH - Nature Recovery Network for Huntingdonshire

LNRS - Local Nature Recovery Strategy

BNG - Biodiversity Net Gain

SPD - Supplementary Planning Document

SSSI - Site of Special Scientific Interest

CWS - County Wildlife Site

NNR - National Nature Reserve

SAC - Special Area of Conservation

HDC - Huntingdonshire District Council

BCN - Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, and Northamptonshire (Wildlife Trust)

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Wildlife Trust for
**Beds, Cambs
& Northants**



The Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire,
Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire
People close to nature, in a land rich in wildlife

Huntingdonshire Priority Natural Landscapes



Contents:

- Huntingdonshire's biodiversity
- Why nature recovery?
- Why Priority Natural Landscapes?
 - Lawton Principles: MORE, BIGGER, BETTER, JOINED UP
- Identifying Priority Landscapes in Huntingdonshire
- The Huntingdonshire Priority Natural Landscapes
- Next steps
 - Influencing the statutory Local Nature Recovery Strategy
 - Priority locations for Habitat Banks & off-site BNG
 - Nature friendly farming
 - Parish, town and individual actions





Ancient woodlands



Floodplain Meadows



Priority species



Wetlands

State of Nature Report

- 44% of species have decreased over the last 10 years
- 1 in 7 species are threatened with extinction from Great Britain
- Climate change is having an increasing impact on nature in the UK

**We are in a
biodiversity crisis!**

**Why we need to
double nature locally!**



**Wildlife Trust for
Beds, Cambs
& Northants**

Why Priority Natural Landscapes



- Habitat and species conservation approaches have had some successes, but State of Nature Reports show these are limited.
- Lawton Report: Space for Nature
 - English nature protection system “not fit for purpose.”
 - Species more , habitats change in response to natural factors and Climate Change.
 - Species and habitats present affect natural processes and nature provides essential services to us e.g. flood protection, pollination, soils.
 - We need to think bigger & at a landscape scale...
- **MORE, BIGGER, BETTER & JOINED UP**

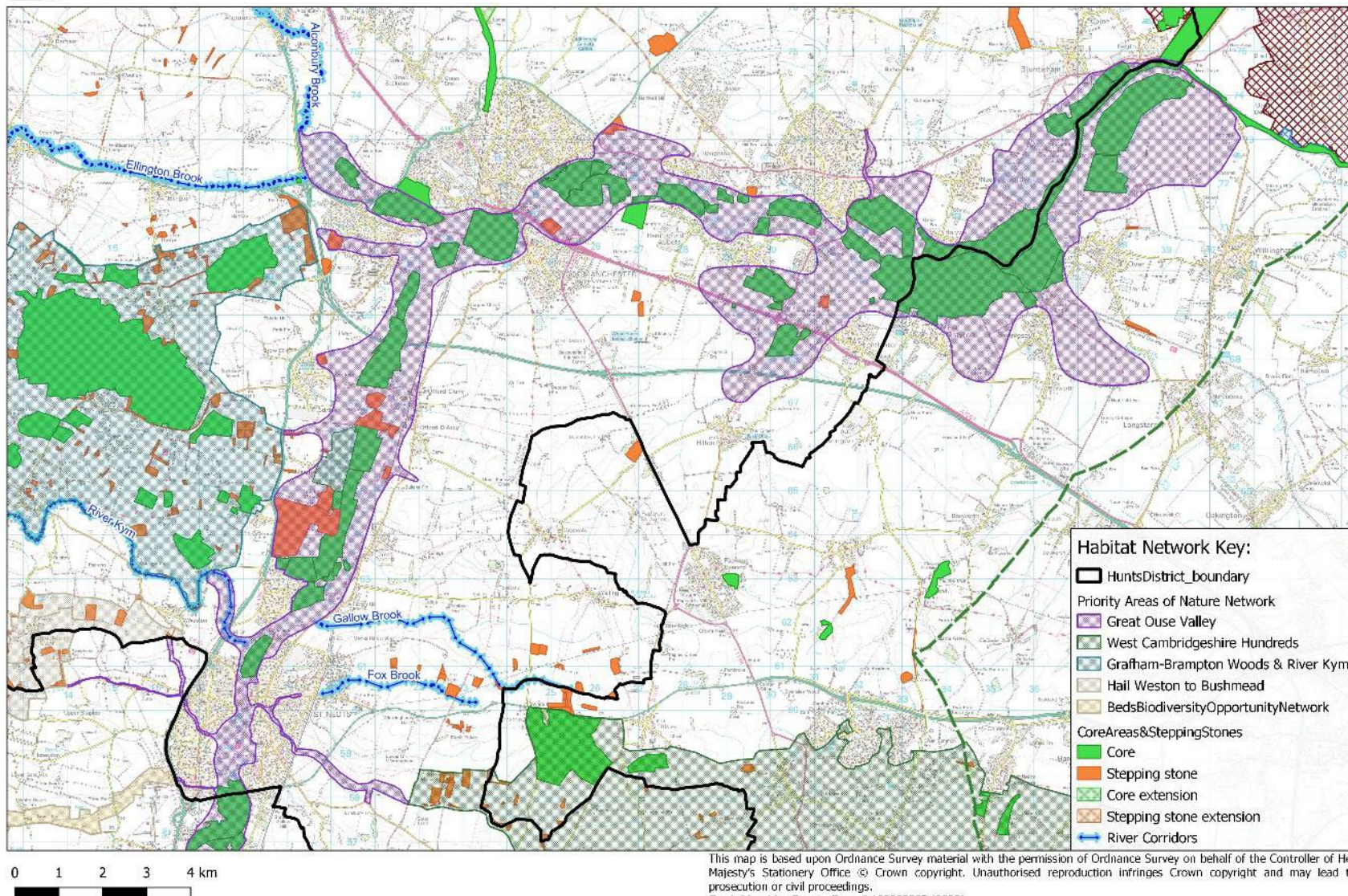


Identifying Priority Landscapes in Huntingdonshire



- Identify location of nature sites and other priority habitats.
- Understanding underlying soils, geology and hydrology.
- Application of published Nature Recovery Principles
 - Identify core habitats
 - Identify stepping-stone habitats and corridors
 - Aim for core habitats of at least 40 Ha and ideally 100 Ha
 - Reduce gaps between habitat patches to 200m or less for habitat specialist species, or 1 Km for generalist species
 - Identify connectivity measures such as nature friendly farming





Great Fen:

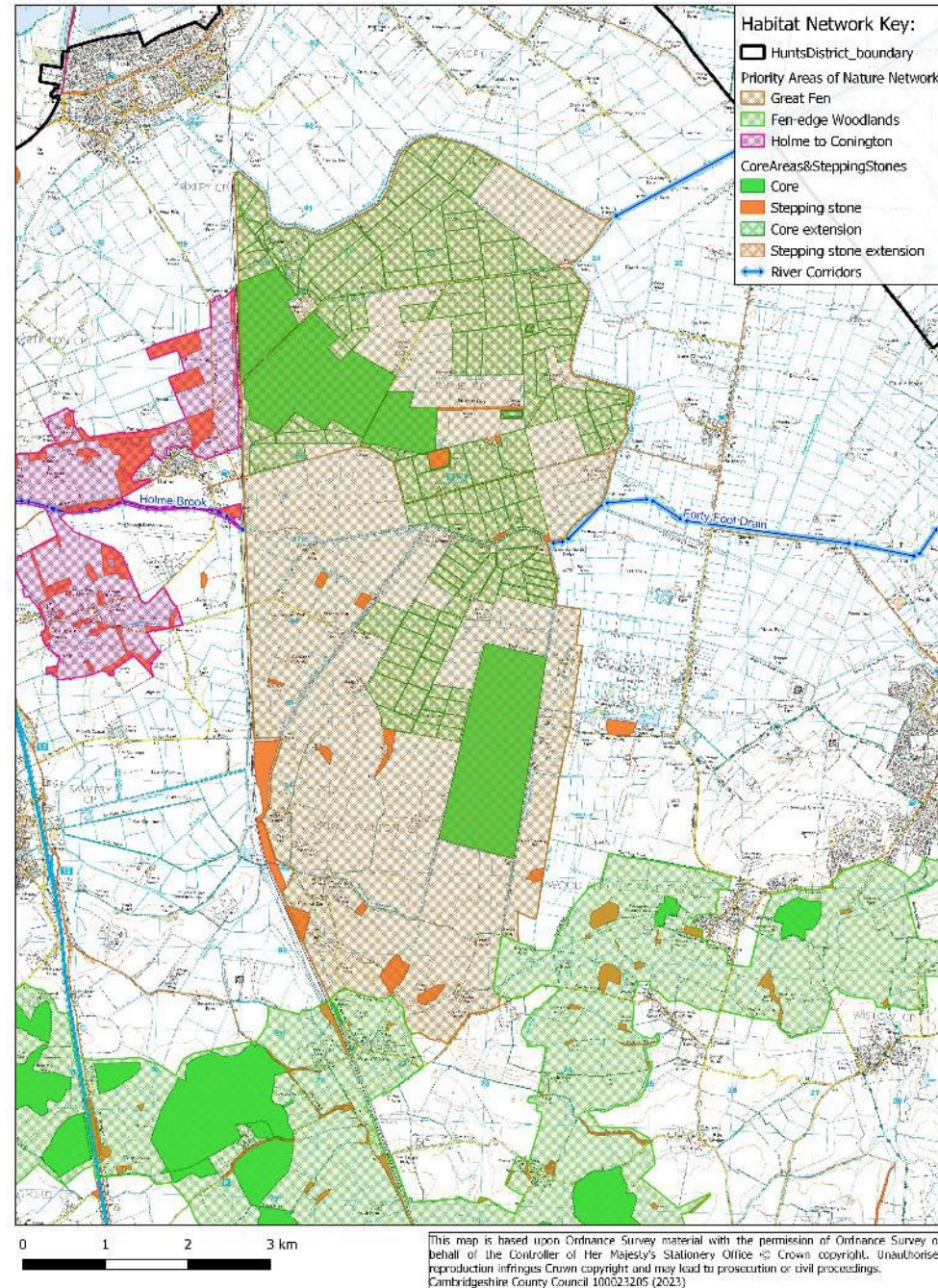
Lawton principles in action.

- More.
- Bigger.
- Better
- Joined Up

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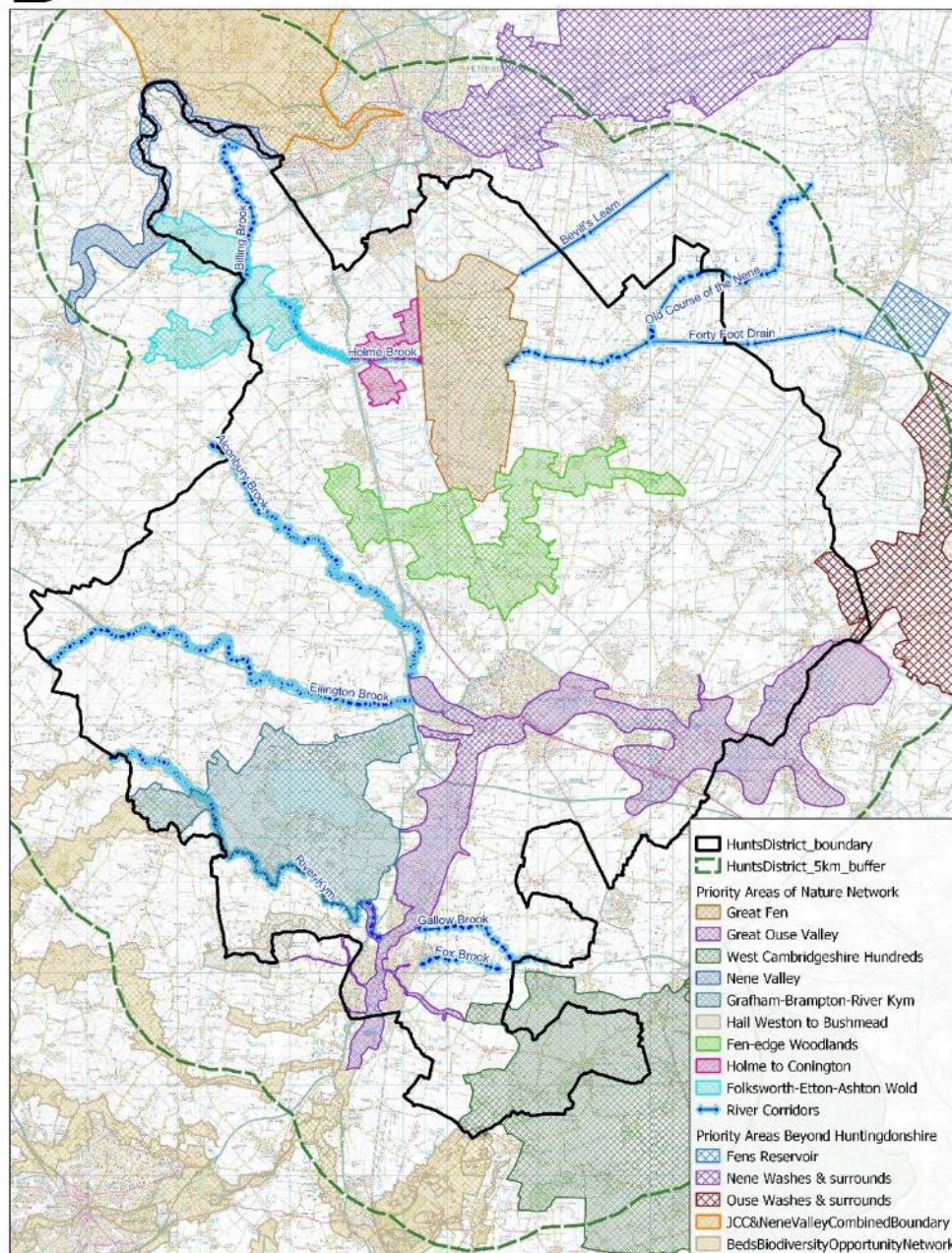
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& Northants**



Huntingdonshire Priority Natural Landscapes



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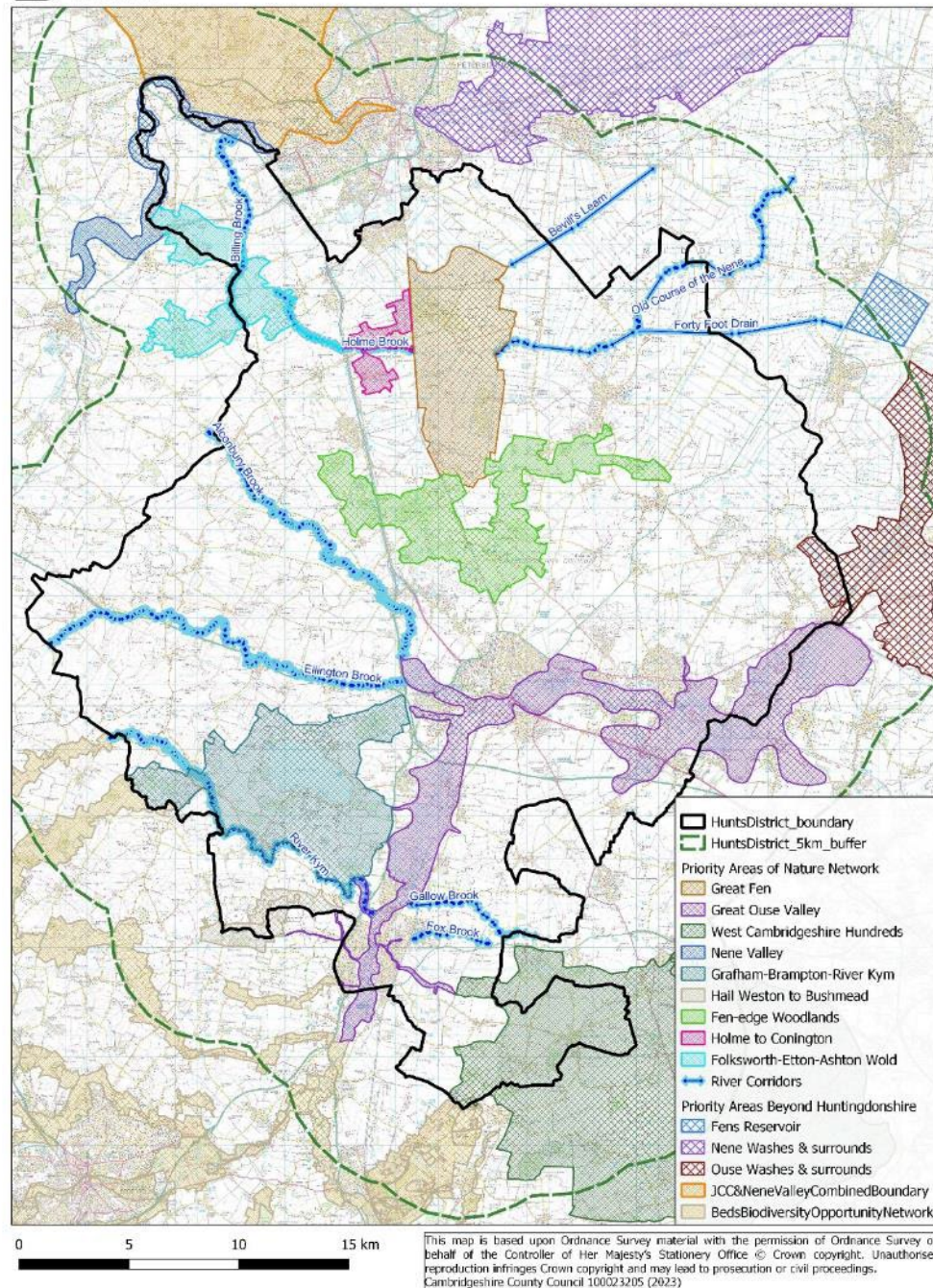
Huntingdonshire Priority Natural Landscapes

Next Steps:

- Influence statutory Local Nature Recovery Strategy.
- Direct locations of Habitat Banks & off-site BNG.
- Nature Friendly Farming.
- Influence parish, town & individual actions through Biodiversity for All.



**Wildlife Trust for
Beds, Cambs
& Northants**



Public
Key Decision – No

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Local Government Association Corporate Peer Challenge

Council / O&S -	Council 16th October 2024
Executive Portfolio:	Executive Leader of the Council, Councillor S Conboy
Report by:	Chief Executive
Ward(s) affected:	All

Executive Summary:

The Council invited the Local Government Association (LGA) to undertake a Corporate Peer Challenge, which took place in May 2024.

The Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) is a highly valued improvement and assurance tool that is delivered by the sector, for the sector. It involves a team of senior local government councillors and officers undertaking a comprehensive review of key finance, performance and governance information and then spending three days at a council to provide robust, strategic, and credible challenge and support.

CPC forms a key part of the improvement and assurance framework for local government. It is underpinned by the principles of Sector-led Improvement (SLI) put in place by councils and the Local Government Association (LGA) to support continuous improvement and assurance across the sector. These state that local authorities are: responsible for their own performance, accountable locally, not nationally and have a collective responsibility for the performance of the sector.

CPC assists councils in meeting part of their Best Value duty, with the UK Government expecting all local authorities to have a CPC at least every five years.

The Council has formally accepted the report and is now required to publish an Action Plan in response by 17th October 2024. The Peers will then return to the Council by the end of January 2025 to follow up on progress. This report outlines the Action Plan and provides an update on progress to date.

Recommendation(s):

That Members note the Action Plan that has been prepared in response to the Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) and note the progress that has been made to date.

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 Following receipt of the CPC report in July 2024, this report is required to set out the Council's response in the form of an Action Plan. Members are also asked to note the work that has been undertaken over the weeks and months since the receipt of the report, as well as the forthcoming programme of activity. Following the initial presentation of the Action Plan it will be reported on quarterly thereafter. Following the six month revisit by the Peers, further changes and updates may be required and will be provided as necessary.
- 1.2 It should also be noted that the findings of the CPC report have been clearly communicated to all staff through a series of briefings (both in person and online; and covering key locations such as Eastfield House and One Leisure) as well as emails, and wider staff communications.
- 1.3 Where necessary and appropriate, service managers and other staff have been involved in shaping the action plan and the associated activities.

2. WHY IS THIS REPORT NECESSARY

- 2.1 There is a requirement to formulate and publish an Action Plan following the receipt of the CPC report. It is important to do this to promote transparency and good practice. The original report accepting the CPC report can be found [here](#) and the CPC report can be viewed in full [here](#).

3. THE CPC FEEDBACK REPORT

Recommendations

- 3.1 **Recommendation 1 - Align finance and workforce to deliver the agreed political priorities including a review of organisational structure.**

A single narrative needs developing and communicating so that everyone is clear what the priorities are, how they are being delivered and what the timescales are for this. The council needs to ensure its officer structure enables delivery of the political priorities, that officer capacity is directed to the priority areas and the finances are aligned.

- 3.2 **Recommendation 2 – Strengthen the internal approach to engagement which ensures the voice of residents/service users are at the heart of decision making.**

Building on the good practice shown in consulting on Huntingdonshire Futures, develop different engagement mechanisms to gain the views of residents/service users on their experience of the council and how these can be responded to.

3.3 Recommendation 3 - Develop a resourced Communications and Engagement Strategy which defines the HDC brand and strategic narrative.

Promote the services the council delivers. Don't undersell the impact being made in the community by leisure, parks and open spaces and operational services. Ensure everyone knows these are delivered by HDC. Be clear about who leads external communications to prevent confusion of messages and brands.

3.4 Recommendation 4 - Review the planning service to ensure that within the planning policy framework the council's priorities are being delivered, for example climate, environment and inclusive growth.

Create understanding across all council services that there needs to be a holistic approach to deliver the councils growth and development ambitions. The planning service is a major contributor to fulfilling the longer-term outcomes of the council, but the results will benefit and impact on the whole council and it is important the service is appropriately positioned and supported to deliver these ambitions.

3.5 Recommendation 5 - Deliver the imminent Workforce Strategy at pace – including addressing staff concerns.

The extensive consultation on the new strategy has raised awareness and staff have high expectations of what it will deliver. Ensure the strategy addresses the inconsistency in policy and practice and brings services together to support a one council approach, where best practice is shared across services and fairness and equity is at its core.

3.6 Recommendation 6 – Continue to strengthen the council's approach to governance, compliance and risk.

To support the council's improved governance approach:

- Review the council's constitution.
- Provide additional capacity for MO and DMO roles.
- Ensure sufficient investment and resource for member development.

3.7 Recommendation 7 - Support and develop a member led scrutiny work programme and prioritise areas where they can add value and help mitigate risk – SLT support.

Ensure there is adequate time between Overview and Scrutiny Committees and Cabinet for members to add value to the process. Support them to shape agendas and work plans and contribute to policy development.

3.8 Recommendation 8 - Define and communicate your approach to transformation/continuous improvement.

Put in place the cross-cutting foundations (technology, workforce, structures, culture, communications) to prepare the organisation for holistic service transformation rather than reinforcing some silos and risk services continuing their own custom and practice.

3.9 In addition to these formal recommendations, there are several other recommendations and suggestions through the body of the Feedback report that will be captured to be considered as part of the formal action plan that will be developed to implement CPC, and by way of several examples, these include but are not limited to:

- To meet the council's ambitions for enhanced partnership working, peers recommend the council reviews the skills and capacity needed to support this work with senior stakeholders and partners.
- Creating and communicating key points of entry into the council for partners and stakeholders would significantly help the council to develop its partnerships and generate opportunities to enable and influence.
- Peers advise some facilitated top team development would assist the new team in building relationships, understanding leadership styles and create space for strategic visioning.
- Further work is needed with service managers to improve horizon scanning and feed this into the budget setting process.
- Consideration should also be given to undertaking a full staff survey.
- The Ideas Board should be taking a more strategic approach to reviewing requests for funding, making sure any bids are aligned to the councils' priorities and clearly drive innovation. There also needs to be consideration given to how any projects funded on a trial basis could be sustained in the longer term if deemed successful.

Governance

3.10 The Feedback Report makes references to the Council's progress against the LGA Governance recommendations, and does note once again the need for more capacity within the Monitoring Officer role and responsibilities – a few examples include, but are not limited to:

- The council is self-aware and identified a range of improvement areas in its 2022/23 Annual Governance Statement (AGS).

There were also 17 recommendations from the LGA peer challenge of internal audit arrangements in 2023, the CGC's self-assessment

against CIPFA's audit committee good practice principles, and the CFO's self-assessment against CIPFA's Financial Management Code, all of which peers were pleased to see were making significant progress and actions monitored closely by the CGC.

- Following recommendations from the Governance Peer Challenge in February, peers were pleased to see the Risk Officer is now working alongside the Internal Audit function drawing on skills and experience from other parts of the council.
- It was encouraging to hear that the council is building capacity with the risk management, procurement and contract management to ensure compliance with new legislation.

Positive Feedback

3.11 The Peer team have been complimentary about the way in which the council prepared and welcomed the team into our ways of working, including the honesty and transparency those whom they met. Alongside the learning to be implemented, it is also important to acknowledge some of the positive comments that have been made:

- Huntingdonshire District Council (HDC) is an ambitious council with long-term aspirations for its place and communities.
- HDC is fortunate to have loyal and committed staff to both the council and place. Many live locally and have a vested interest in the success of the organisation.
- Peers were very impressed by the delivery of affordable housing in the district. In 2023/4 the council facilitated with Registered Providers (RPs) and developers the delivery of 703 homes – 450 specifically for social rent.
- The Economic Development team was praised for the proactive approach it takes with businesses, providing support and signposting.
- Leisure services are keen to work in partnership to develop the collaboration potential.
- The Performance and Efficiency Board, chaired by the Chief Operating Officer, was set up to monitor, address and benchmark performance and escalate issues to the senior leadership team (SLT). Peers considered this Board to be a real asset to the organisation and could see the value the officers involved were bringing to driving improvements in performance.
- Some positive work has been led on external communications, reducing the number of social media channels and increasing capacity to deliver messages via the councils' main channels.

4. THE ACTION PLAN

- 4.1 The recommendations contained within the CPC report, both the formal eight recommendations and the informal ones set out in the body of the report, have been considered by the senior leadership team. An action plan has been developed which is attached at Appendix 1.
- 4.2 Officers have applied our established project management framework to the consideration of the report and the development of the action plan. This is to ensure that it is treated consistently with other projects, whilst also ensuring appropriate prioritisation, project management, resourcing, and monitoring of activity. Appropriate Officers have also been identified to ensure appropriate responsibility for delivery and governance. All of which is considered important to ensure that the Action Plan is deliverable and trackable.
- 4.3 Senior Officers have also met with Cabinet and discussed the findings of the CPC report. These discussions have helped to shape the action plan and the shaping of the underlying activities that will flow from it. This is important to ensure that the Action Plan maintains alignment with other corporate activities and with the Corporate Plan. Additionally, a lead Member has been identified for each of the activities to aid with political accountability and ownership, whilst the overall response to the CPC remains within the remit of the Leader and Chief Executive.
- 4.4 It should be noted that the action plan contains:
- 27 Actions linked to the 8 formal recommendations.
 - 22 of those are currently considered Green
 - 5 are considered Amber
 - 0 are considered Red

 - 7 additional recommendations were identified
 - 7 Actions linked to those additional recommendations
 - 1 is presently Green
 - 1 is presently Amber
 - 5 are marked as To Be Commenced/Considered (yellow)
- 4.5 As can be seen, many activities are presently underway. Some of the recommendations also recognised the need for pieces of work which Officers had already identified as being required. As such, some activities and actions were able to be identified and moved forward at pace. For example, the work to create a single narrative for the Council to utilise in its communications approach – that work has been completed with input from the LGA and the narrative is presently being rolled out to staff and being used in communications.
- 4.6 Although many actions have no formal timescales for completion at this stage, the narratives provide an understanding of where activities have commenced and are underway. As can be seen, in some cases there are inter-dependencies with other feedback (such as from Members following meetings of the Constitution Working Group; or following training). Equally,

some activities are beholden to other parties (such as the Planning Peer Review which has been scoped and is programmed to be undertaken by the LGA/Planning Advisory Service).

- 4.7 The Action Plan is therefore a living document at this time, it will evolve and will be subject to change as the various activities are scoped, shaped, and delivered. Equally it is likely that there will be activities which flow from the action plan which will in turn result in changes to business as usual (BAU); or will result in procedural changes (such as to service planning). That said, some actions will be standalone and taken forward on a task and finish basis.
- 4.8 Thus it is natural that the Action Plan will evolve, and it must be recognised therefore that this is the first iteration, with further updates to be provided at quarterly intervals.

5. COMMENTS OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

- 5.1 The Panel discussed the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Report at its meeting on 2nd October 2024.
- 5.2 In response to a question from Councillor Pickering, the Panel heard that the group would be returning to the Council in Spring 2025 to review progress and to agree the Council's action plan. This visit would mark the end of the formal process but the Council could repeat the review again in the future.
- 5.3 It was clarified to the Panel, following a query from Councillor Wells, that Recommendation 7 was marked as amber status and paused whilst the Overview and Scrutiny Panels undertook a period of self scrutiny and development following recent training.
- 5.4 Councillor Catmur observed that the word ensure had been used in abundance throughout the document and felt that as the definition of this word is to guarantee this was potentially misleading in it's intentions. The Panel were advised that this was a stylistic choice by the LGA and would feed this back. It was assumed that this wording had been used to underline the seriousness of the recommendations, which was taken on board by the Council.
- 5.5 It was observed by Councillor Blackwell, that several action timescales were to be confirmed as well as actions assigned to vacant posts. The Panel were assured that the details on this would be clarified and developed once the recruitment process had been completed and that actions would be redistributed across the project team as appropriate.
- 5.6 Following questions from Councillor Gleadow and Councillor Jennings the Panel were assured that there was a long term vision for the Council and that this would continue regardless of the political landscape. The current administration were aware that they were custodians of the vision and that the evolving structure would be fit for an incoming administration to continue. It was noted that there was continual evolution within local

government and by developing a dynamic structure the organisation would be reactive to change, regardless of the administration, whilst still striving to achieve the long term aims for the best interests of residents.

- 5.7 The Panel were further assured, following an additional question from Councillor Gleadow that a robust Communications Plan was in place and that this would focus equally on internal and external communications. It was noted that there would be changes in how the Council engages with the public and that there would be opportunities to ask residents what they want and to develop how this aligns with the Council's plans. Councillors were also encouraged to bring concerns of the public forward and that there would be opportunities to develop this within the Scrutiny process.
- 5.8 It was observed by Councillor Gardener, that it would be helpful to see regular updates on the progress and development of the action plan at Scrutiny. It was agreed that this would be a productive way forward. The Panel also heard that climate resilience would be built into the Local Plan in order to future proof it. It was reminded that the Local Plan will be fully reviewed based on the evidence provided, therefore residents were encouraged to feed into the consultation process.
- 5.9 Councillor Pickering expressed surprise that only one action had been aligned with Recommendation 1, following which, the Panel heard that the detail underneath the action would be vast and gave officers a clear steer on what to prioritise to achieve the desired outcomes. It was also noted that some reorganisation was likely in order to realign with the corporate strategy and key objectives and in order to make better use of the resource available. There would be a challenge to not be too prescriptive in approach but to work smarter and harder in addition to utilising and maximising funding opportunities as they become available. It was observed that a potential restructure would allow for the introduction of roles identified as critical within the review.
- 5.10 It was clarified to the Panel, following a query from Councillor Pickering relating to the action for Recommendation 2, that the Communications team were investigating how best to fulfil the action and whether the Communications team or the related service would drive each set of communications, this action will be developed following the findings from this.
- 5.11 Following the discussion, the Panel were informed that their comments would be added to the Council report to allow for visibility during their consideration of the report.

6. LINK TO THE CORPORATE PLAN, STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AND/OR CORPORATE OBJECTIVES

- 6.1 The recommendations, general insight and opportunities for learning that the CPC process has provided will assist the Council in delivering against all the actions in the Corporate Plan and Service Plans.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 Resource implications associated with the action plan have and will continue to be kept under review as part of the Councils project management processes.

9. LIST OF APPENDICES INCLUDED

Appendix 1 – CPC Action Plan

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

[Full Council Papers](#) – 17th July 2024 – Corporate Peer Challenge

CONTACT OFFICER

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Unique ref	Recommendation number	Recommendation	Definition	Action	Owner	Responsibility	Delivery resource	Timeframes	Status
CPC001	Recommendation 1	Align finance and workforce to deliver the agreed political priorities including a review of organisational structure.	A single narrative needs developing and communicating so that everyone is clear what the priorities are, how they are being delivered and what the timescales are for this. The council needs to ensure its officer structure enables delivery of the political priorities, that officer capacity is directed to the priority areas and the finances are aligned	A restructure of Senior Leadership Team to be launched for consultation in October 2024	Michelle Sacks	Cllr Conboy	HR resources	Underway - Preparation work commenced. Aim to complete before end of 2024 if possible.	Green
CPC002	Recommendation 2	Strengthen the internal approach to engagement which ensures the voice of residents/service users are at the heart of decision making.	Building on the good practice shown in consulting on Huntingdonshire Futures, develop different engagement mechanisms to gain the views of residents/service users on their experience of the council and how these can be responded to.	Policy decision about whether Comms is accountable for engagement across the organisation to be agreed	Michael Hann	Cllr Ferguson	Michael Hann	Underway - scoping and options appraisal live	Green
CPC003	Recommendation 2			Community health and wealth building - resident workshops to co-deliver a strategy. This is the start of the live engagement opportunities available to our residents	Michael Hann/ Oliver Morley	Cllr Ferguson	Michael Hann	Underway - some workshops already held as part of development of strategy (adopted September).	Green
CPC004	Recommendation 2			Options paper created for different engagement events and approval from Informal Cabinet once completed. Depending on the option chosen there will be a likely budget identified but there will be a need for BAU coordinator resource to facilities and advice on service specific engagement activities	Michael Hann	Cllr Ferguson	TBC - Resourcing to be considered as part of options appraisal	Underway - scoping and options appraisal live	Green
CPC005	Recommendation 2			Network of Communications Champions established within HDC to share learning and key campaigns, in order to provide coordinated comms and key messaging	Michael Hann	Cllr Ferguson	Communications Team	Underway - Quarterly meetings	Green
CPC006	Recommendation 2			Creation of a corporate consultation schedule to a managed approach to consultation. This will include corporate consultations eg: on budget setting as well as service specific consultations eg: Local Plan	Michael Hann	Cllr Ferguson	TBC - Resourcing to be considered as part of options appraisal	Underway - continually reviewed, will be picked up alongside service planning	Green
CPC007	Recommendation 3	Develop a resourced Communications and Engagement Strategy which defines the HDC brand and strategic narrative.	Promote the services the council delivers. Don't undersell the impact being made in the community by leisure, parks and open spaces and operational services. Ensure everyone knows these are delivered by HDC. Be clear about who leads external communications to prevent confusion of messages and brands.	Communications strategy for the year ahead being refreshed and being approved by Informal Cabinet	Michael Hann	Cllr Ferguson	Commissioned out to a third party (LGA)	Underway - partially complete - LGA engagement undertaken. Early draft completed.	Green
CPC008	Recommendation 3			LGA commissioned to create the HDC narrative and develop a comms and engagement strategy to deliver individual campaigns. Within the campaign plans will be a resource and budget profile	Michael Hann	Cllr Ferguson	Michael Hann	Underway - Partially complete. Narrative complete. Roll out and use commencing during September 2024	Green
CPC009	Recommendation 4	Review the planning service to ensure that within the planning policy framework the council's priorities are being delivered, for example climate, environment and inclusive growth.	Create understanding across all council services that there needs to be a holistic approach to deliver the councils growth and development ambitions. The planning service is a major contributor to fulfilling the longer-term outcomes of the council, but the results will benefit and impact on the whole council and it is important the service is appropriately positioned and supported to deliver these ambitions	Undertake a Peer review challenge on the Planning department through engagement with the LGA to agree timeframes. The review will then provide recommendations and an action plan to take into 25/26	Mike Gildersteeves	Cllr Sanderson	Peer Review resource identified to support LGA/PAS work. Budget bid for implementation resource for associated action plan delivery, and ongoing planning enhancements/improvements	Underway - Peer Review planned for November 2024. Pushed back due to availability of LGA support and clashes with conference season.	Green
CPC010	Recommendation 4			Local Plan consultation on issues and options. Activities and findings to be presented SLT, Management team, Strategic Board, Members	Mike Gildersteeves	Cllr Sanderson	Clara Kerr	Underway - Issues and Options consultation live from 18th September.	Green
CPC011	Recommendation 4			Cultural issue to take an holistic view - want to have monthly briefings on topics for Informal Cabinet and Management team about what's going on and why it's important.	Mike Gildersteeves	Cllr Sanderson	Clara Kerr	TBC - Some activity undertaken, but will be reviewed following Peer Review. Also linked to Monthly Member briefings to be rolled out from November.	Amber
CPC012	Recommendation 4			Delivery board, Strategic Board and lessons learnt at both the tactical project level and the sponsor level to inform future HDC delivery of significant change programmes requiring planning	Mike Gildersteeves	Cllr Sanderson	Mike Gildersteeves	Underway - part of continual improvement	Green
CPC013	Recommendation 4			Facilitation of the continuous improvement journey - that as an organisation we need the peer reviews over a number of different services and not just planning	Mike Gildersteeves	Cllr Sanderson	TBC - Linked to main peer review, additional resources available subject to identification of need and business case.	TBC - Some activity undertaken, but will be reviewed following Peer Review.	Amber
CPC014	Recommendation 5	Deliver the imminent Workforce Strategy at pace – including addressing staff concerns.	The extensive consultation on the new strategy has raised awareness and staff have high expectations of what it will deliver. Ensure the strategy addresses the inconsistency in policy and practice and brings services together to support a one council approach, where best practice is shared across services and fairness and equity is at its core.	Action plan to be prioritised and then presented at SLT, Informal Cabinet and then Employment Committee for approval. Will include a scheduled plan to show prioritised actions, timeframes and resources. Employment committee - will be monitoring the WFS action plan alongside established KPIs eg: sickness, staff turnover.	Nicki Bane/ Strategic HR Manager	Cllr Davenport-Ray	Kiran Hans (project manager) and Chloe George (co-ordinator)	Underway - To be completed by end of October	Green

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**CAMBRIDGESHIRE
& PETERBOROUGH**
COMBINED AUTHORITY

Reports from Constituent Council Representatives on the Combined Authority

The following meetings have taken place in July, August and September 2024

Business Board, 8 July 2024

Decision Summary Link: [Business Board \(July\)](#)

Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 11 July 2024

Councillors N J Hunt and J Neish

Decision Summary Link: [Overview and Scrutiny Committee \(July\)](#)

Audit and Governance Committee, 18 July 2024

Councillor P J Hodgson Jones

Decision Summary Link: [Audit and Governance Committee \(July\)](#)

Transport and Infrastructure Committee, 22 July 2024

Councillor S Wakeford

Decision Summary Link: [Transport and Infrastructure Committee \(July\)](#)

Combined Authority Board, 24 July 2024

Councillor S J Conboy

Decision Summary Link: [Combined Authority Board \(July\)](#)

Skills and Employment Committee, 29 July 2024

Councillor S Wakeford

Decision Summary Link: [Skills and Employment Committee \(July\)](#)

Environment and Sustainable Communities Committee, 31 July 2024

Councillor L Davenport-Ray

Decision Summary Link: [Environment and Sustainable Communities Committee \(July\)](#)

Investment Committee, 29 August 2024

Councillor S Wakeford

Decision Summary Link: [Investment Committee \(August\)](#)

Combined Authority Board, 4 September 2024

Councillor S J Conboy

Decision Summary Link: [Combined Authority Board \(September\)](#)

Transport and Infrastructure Committee, 18 September 2024

Councillor S Wakeford

Decision Summary Link: [Transport and Infrastructure Committee \(September\)](#)

Audit and Governance Committee, 26 September 2024

Councillor P J Hodgson-Jones

Decision Summary Link: [Audit and Governance Committee \(September\)](#)

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Any key decision/s set below will come into force and may be implemented after 5.00pm on the fifth clear working day after publication of the decision, unless they are called-in [see note on call in below], with the exception of any key decision on a matter dealt with under the special urgency provisions set out in the Constitution which may be implemented immediately.

1 Apologies for Absence

No apologies were received.

2 Declaration of Interests

There were no declaration of interests made.

3 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 May 2024 were approved as an accurate record.
The Action Log was noted.

4 Business Board Role Profile

It was resolved to:

- A Approve the Business Board member role profile.

5 Combined Authority Forward Planning

The Chair asked members of the Business Board to flag any topics with officers that they feel it would be beneficial for the board to discuss or hold a specialised session around.

6 Business Board Chair's Update

The Chair updated the Board on meetings and discussions held since the last Board meeting and upcoming opportunities.

7 Business Board Feedback from Thematic Committees

Verbal updates were received from the Business Board representatives on the Combined Authority's Thematic Committees, looking at items covered at the previous meetings as well as discussing upcoming topics.

8 CPCA Director's Update

The Executive Director for Economy and Growth spoke to the Board about the impact of the General Election as well as providing an update on staffing changes.

9 Constituent Authority Update

The Economic Development Officer for Peterborough City Council (CEO at Opportunity Peterborough) updated the Business Board on the constituent authority's key priorities, talking through the Economic Growth Strategy.

10 Budget and Performance Report

It was resolved to:

- A Note the budget of the Business Division for the financial year 2024/25.

11 Post UKREiiF Update

The Interim Assistant Director Delivery gave a presentation to the Business Board on the outcomes and feedback received following the Combined Authority's representation at the UK's Real Estate Investment and Infrastructure Forum.

12 Strategic Funds Management Review

It was resolved to:

- A Note the updates contained within the report.

13 Exclusion of the Press and Public

It was resolved that the press and public be excluded from the meeting on the grounds that the next report contained exempt information under Part 1 of Schedule 12A the Local Government Act 1972, as amended, and that it would not be in the public interest for this information to be disclosed. The public interest in maintaining the exemption must be deemed to outweigh the public interest in its publication.

14 Bus Reform

The Executive Director, Place and Connectivity, gave a presentation to the Business Board on the Outline Business Case and draft Audit Letter regarding Bus Reform. Members discussed the proposed recommendations for the Combined Authority Board meeting on 24 July 2024.

15 Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Business Board will take place on Monday 30 September 2024 at 2.30pm. The meeting will be held virtually.

Notes:

- a) Statements in **bold type** indicate additional resolutions made at the meeting.
- b) Five Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee may call-in a key decision of the Mayor, the Combined Authority Board or an Officer for scrutiny by notifying the Monitoring Officer, except for any key decision on a matter dealt with under the special urgency provisions set out in the Constitution which may be implemented immediately.



Any key decision/s set below will come into force and may be implemented after 5.00pm on the fifth clear working day after publication of the decision, unless they are called-in [see note on call in below], with the exception of any key decision on a matter dealt with under the special urgency provisions set out in the Constitution which may be implemented immediately.

1	Apologies for Absence
	Apologies received from Cllr Gilderdale, Cllr Van de Weyer substituted by Cllr Fane, Cllr Cane substituted by Cllr Shepherd, Cllr Farooq substituted by temporary substitute by Cllr Atunes.
2	Election of Chair
	Cllr Van de Weyer was elected Chair for the municipal year 24/25.
3	Election of Vice Chair
	Cllr Goldsack was elected the Vice Chair for the municipal year 24/25.
4	Declaration of Interests
	There were no declaration of interests made.
5	Public Questions
	<p>One question was received in advance of the meeting in accordance with the procedure rules in the Constitution. A copy of the question and response will be appended to the minutes of the meeting.</p> <p>The Committee RESOLVED unanimously to set a working group to consider the Governance of the CPCA's Housing Programme in response to the public question received.</p> <p>The terms of reference for the working group would be circulated to Committee members. The membership would comprise of the following: Cllr Neish, Cllr Shepherd and Van de Weyer.</p>
6	Minutes of the previous meeting
	<p>The minutes of the meeting on 18th March 2024 were approved as an accurate record.</p> <p>The Action Log was noted by the Committee.</p>
7	Appointment of Rapporteurs
	<p>Cllr Bradnam and Cllr Neish were agreed as the rapporteurs for the Transport & Infrastructure Committee.</p> <p>Cllr Goldsack and Cllr Divkovic were agreed as the rapporteurs for the Skills & Employment Committee</p>

	Cllr Cahn was agreed as the rapporteur for the Environment & Sustainable Communities Committee.
8	Forward Plan
	It was resolved to note the Forward Plan.
9	Bus Reform Working Group Terms of Reference
	The Terms of Reference for the Bus Reform Working Group were ratified, and the below membership approved. Cllr Bradnam, Cllr Hay, Cllr Divkovic and Cllr Vellacott.
10	Corporate Strategy and the Budget Process for the Medium -Term Financial Plan (2025/26 TO 2028/29) and Scrutiny Arrangements
	<p>The Committee RESOLVED to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Note the proposed timeline for the setting of the refreshed Corporate Strategy and budget and that this may be subject to change in line with Government announcements or other factors. b) Note and comment on the scrutiny proposals outlined in this report as set out in section 2 in order to agree and approve the budget scrutiny arrangements for the setting of the MTFP from 2025/26; c) Amend the wording for recommendation C to include 'approve'. d) Approve the terms of reference for the budget working group and agreed the below membership: Cllr Shepherd and Cllr Atunes.
11	State of the Region
	The Committee RESOLVED unanimously to note the report and request this was added to the work programme to be considered twice a year.
12	Shared Ambition
	The Committee RESOLVED unanimously to note the report.
13	'Q4 Corporate Performance Report
	<p>The Committee RESOLVED to:</p> <p>Note the report.</p>
14	Improvement Plan Highlight Report
	The Committee RESOLVED to note: the progress in March against the identified areas of ongoing concern set out in the

	Best Value Notice received in January 2024. the update from the Chair, Independent Improvement Board following the meeting held on 7 May 2024
15	Mayor in Attendance
	Mayor Nik Johnson attended and responded to questions from the Committee members.
16	Scrutiny Resources Review
	The Committee RESOLVED to note the report.
17	Work Programme
	It was resolved to note the work programme.
18	Exclusion of the Press and Public
	It was resolved that the press and public be excluded from the meeting on the grounds that the next report contains exempt information under Part 1 of Schedule 12A the Local Government Act 1972, as amended, and that it would not be in the public interest for this information to be disclosed. The public interest in maintaining the exemption must be deemed to outweigh the public interest in its publication.
19	Bus Reform Update
	The Committee RESOLVED to note the report.
20	Date of Next Meeting
	The date of the next meeting is the 12 th September and will be the Mayor's Question Time Informal O&S Committee – 8 th October O&S Committee – 7 th November.

Notes:

- a) Statements in **bold type** indicate additional resolutions made at the meeting.
- b) Five Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee may call-in a key decision of the Mayor, the Combined Authority Board or an Officer for scrutiny by notifying the Monitoring Officer, except for any key decision on a matter dealt with under the special urgency provisions set out in the Constitution which may be implemented immediately.



Any key decision/s set below will come into force and may be implemented after 5.00pm on the fifth clear working day after publication of the decision, unless they are called-in [see note on call in below], with the exception of any key decision on a matter dealt with under the special urgency provisions set out in the Constitution which may be implemented immediately.

1	Apologies for Absence
	Apologies were received from Cllr David Brown, Cllr Keith Horgan Substituted.
2	Declaration of Interests
	There were no declaration of interests made.
3	Chair's Announcements
	<p>The Chair made the following announcements:</p> <p>The Chair advised that he met with the Head of External Audit, who was present at the meeting, where they discussed the next value for money statement and when the committee would receive it for the 2024/2024 accounts.</p> <p>The Chair and the CEO had met where they discussed governance arrangements for Bus Franchising, which officers would bring to the committee at a future meeting</p>
4	Minutes of the previous meeting
	<p>The minutes of the meeting held on the 8th March were approved as a correct record.</p> <p>The action log was noted.</p>
5	Improvement Plan Highlight Report
	<p>The Committee RESOLVED to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Note the progress in May against the identified areas of ongoing concern set out in the Best Vale Notice received in January 2024. b) Note the update from the Chair, Independent Improvement Board following the meeting held on 1 July 2024.
6	Corporate Risk Register
	<p>he Committee RESOLVED to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) To note the report and supporting documentation to enable to Committee to undertake a Deep Dive into the Culture risk b) To note the report and supporting documentation to enable to Committee to undertake a Deep Dive into the Governance VfM risk c) To note the Corporate Risk Register, Dashboard and Heatmap

7	Internal Audit Actions Tracker
	The Committee RESOLVED to: a) To note progress on the implementation of internal audit actions
8	Draft Statement of Accounts & Annual Governance Statement 23/24
	The Committee RESOLVED to note the report.
9	External Audit - 23/24 Draft Audit Plan
	The Committee RESOLVED to note the report.
10	Internal Audit - Progress Report
	The Committee RESOLVED to note the report.
11	Treasury Management Outturn Report 23/24
	The Committee RESOLVED to: a) Review and note the actual performance for the year to 31st March 2024 against the adopted prudential and treasury indicators.
12	Code of Conduct & Complaints Update
	The Committee RESOLVED to: a) The annual report on code of conduct complaints be reviewed and an update of complaints about officers be brought back to the committee at the end of this year.
13	Work Programme
	The Committee RESOLVED to: a) To note the draft work programme for the Audit and Governance Committee for the 2023/24 municipal year attached at Appendix 1.
14	Date of Next Meeting
	26th September 2024 at CPCA Meeting Room Huntingdonshire District Council at 10am. 10th September – Development Session on Teams.

Notes:

- a) Statements in **bold type** indicate additional resolutions made at the meeting.
- b) Five Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee may call-in a key decision of the Mayor, the Combined Authority Board or an Officer for scrutiny by notifying the Monitoring

Officer, except for any key decision on a matter dealt with under the special urgency provisions set out in the Constitution which may be implemented immediately.



Transport and Infrastructure Committee: Decision Summary

Meeting: Monday, 22 July 2024

Any key decision/s set below will come into force and may be implemented after 5.00pm on the fifth clear working day after publication of the decision, unless they are called-in [see note on call in below], with the exception of any key decision on a matter dealt with under the special urgency provisions set out in the Constitution which may be implemented immediately.

NB. The Chair proposed a change to the running order of the items on the agenda so that items that may have required a move into private session were heard last and also to accommodate guest speakers. This was unanimously agreed by the Committee. The decision summary is laid out in the revised order with the numbers in brackets referring to the original agenda item number as published on the website.

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from the Mayor Dr Nik Johnson, Rebecca Stephens, Business Board Representative and also from Cllr Sam Wakeford who was substituted by Cllr Tom Sanderson.

2 Declarations of Interest

Cllr Seaton declared an interest as he was a trustee of FACT Community Transport. This was deemed a non-pecuniary interest and therefore did not affect his participation in items on the agenda.

3 Minutes of the previous meeting and Action Log

The minutes of the meeting on 26 June 2024 were approved as an accurate record. The Action Log was noted by the Committee.

4 Public Questions

Four public questions had been received. The questions are published on the CPCA website and can be found [here](#) under item 4.

5 Forward Plan

It was resolved:

- A To note the Combined Authority Forward Plan.

6 Director's Highlight Report

It was resolved:

- A To note the Director's highlight report.

7 Bus Service Improvement Plan

On being proposed by the Chair and seconded by Cllr Jamil, the Committee resolved (unanimously) to:

- A To recommend to the Combined Authority Board that it approves the revised Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP), as prepared by the Combined Authority at the instruction of the Department for Transport.
- B To recommend to the Combined Authority Board, that subject to approval of the Bus Service Improvement Plan, this be published on the Combined Authority website and a final version to be submitted to the Department for Transport.

- 8 (11) England's Economic Heartland's (EEH) Connecting Economies investment brochures**
- It was resolved to:
- A To note the updated England's Economic Heartland's Connecting Economies investment brochures and seek comment from Committee members.
- 9 A141 & St.Ives Improvement Study - update on progress and engagement**
- It was resolved:
- A To note the update on A141 & St. Ives Improvement Study project progress and delivery including the need for future public engagement
- 10 Active Travel Plan 2024/25**
- On being proposed by the Chair and seconded by Cllr McDonald the Committee resolved unanimously to:
- A Note the five active travel strategic aims for 2024/25.
 - B Recommend to the Combined Authority Board to approve the request for redistribution of Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) Transport revenue funding and the moving of £143,907 from subject to approval to approved. Details of proposed spending can be found in Appendix E.
 - C Subject to the Combined Authority Board approving recommendation B, approve the use of funds for a community Active Travel Grant.
 - D Note the contents of the Active Travel Fund 4 (ATF4) Extension bid.
 - E Recommend to the Combined Authority Board to approve the drawdown of £1.1m from Active Travel Fund 4 Extension funding.
 - F Recommend to the Combined Authority Board approve the delegation of authority to the Assistant Director, Transport to enter into a Grant Funding Agreement with Cambridgeshire County Council following consultation with the Chief Financial Officer and Monitoring Officer.
- 11 (12) March Area Transport Study**
- On being proposed by the Chair and seconded by Cllr Shailer, the Committee resolved unanimously to:
- A Take note of the progress on March Area Transport Study (MATS).
 - B Recommend to the Combined Authority Board to approve the MATS Full Business Case 2 (FBC 2)
 - C Recommend to the Combined Authority Board, approve the drawdown of £7,000,000 of the MediumTerm Financial Plan (MTFP) from subject to approval to approved for the MATS project to be spent in Financial Years 2024/2025 and 2025/2026.
 - D Recommend to the Combined Authority to delegate authority to the Assistant Director of Transport in consultation with the Chief Finance Officer and Monitoring Officer to enter into Grant Funding Agreements with Cambridgeshire County Council
- 12 (13) Work Programme**
- It was resolved to:
- A Note the Committee Agenda Plan.

13 ⁽¹⁴⁾ **Date of Next Meeting**

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as Wednesday 11 September 2024.

14 ⁽⁸⁾ **Bus Reform Outline Business Case**

On being proposed by the Chair and seconded by Cllr Sanderson, the Committee voted 4 in favour, with one abstention.

- A To recommend to the CPCA Board to approve the Bus Reform Assessment (also known as the Business Case) dated 1st July 2024, as provided to the independent auditor, in line with approvals received at the September 13th 2023 CPCA board and agree that the Assessment dated 1st July 2024 supersedes Assessment Dated September 2023 Recommend to the Combined Authority Board to approve the MATS Full Business Case 2 (FBC 2)
- B To recommend to the CPCA Board to proceed with the proposed bus franchising scheme, by taking the following next steps in the statutory process by: • giving notice of the proposed bus franchising scheme, and to make copies of the proposed bus franchising scheme, consultation document, Bus Reform Assessment and Audit Report available for inspection. • consulting with all statutory consultees as listed under section 123E(4) of the Transport Act 2000, as well as the general public of the region.
- C To recommend to the CPCA Board to note the final draft audit letter, as provided to CPCA by the independent auditor.
- D To recommend to the CPCA Board to delegate to the Executive Director Place and Connectivity to agree and publish the final Bus reform Assessment and to publish final Audit letter as received from the Auditor.

Notes:

- a) Statements in **bold type** indicate additional resolutions made at the meeting.
- b) Five Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee may call-in a key decision of the Mayor, the Combined Authority Board or an Officer for scrutiny by notifying the Monitoring Officer, except for any key decision on a matter dealt with under the special urgency provisions set out in the Constitution which may be implemented immediately.



Any key decision/s set below will come into force and may be implemented after 5.00pm on the fifth clear working day after publication of the decision, unless they are called-in [see note on call in below], with the exception of any key decision on a matter dealt with under the special urgency provisions set out in the Constitution which may be implemented immediately.

1 Apologies for Absence

No apologies for absence were received.

2 Announcements

The Mayor congratulated newly elected Members of Parliament and expressed keenness for future collaboration to advance shared goals. He reiterated how Mayoral Combined Authorities play a crucial role in regional regeneration and economic growth.

3 Declaration of Interests

No declarations of interest were made.

4 Combined Authority Membership Update

It was resolved to:

- A Note the temporary change in substitute member from Cambridge City Council on the Combined Authority's Audit and Governance Committee on 20 June 2024.
- B Note the change in substitute Member from South Cambridgeshire District Council on the Combined Authority's Audit and Governance Committee.
- C Note the appointment by Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Fire Authority of Councillor Edna Murphy as their representative on the Combined Authority Board, with Councillor Mohammed Jamil as the substitute.
- D Note the temporary change in substitute member from East Cambridgeshire District Council on the Combined Authority's Audit and Governance Committee on 18 July 2024.
- E Note the change in membership from Peterborough City Council on the Combined Authority's Skills and Employment Committee.
- F Note the temporary change in substitute member from Peterborough City Council on the Combined Authority's Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 11 July 2024.
- G Note the change in Membership from East Cambridgeshire District Council on the Combined Authority's Overview and Scrutiny Committee.**
- H Note the change in Membership from Cambridge City Council on the Combined Authority's Skills and Employment, and Overview and Scrutiny Committees.**

5 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meetings held on 5 June 2024 were approved as an accurate record and signed by the Mayor. The action log was noted.

6 Petitions

No petitions were received.

7 Public Questions

No public questions were received.

8 Forward Plan

It was resolved to:

- A Approve the Forward Plan for July 2024.

9 Audit and Governance Annual Report 2023-24

It was resolved to:

- A Note the Annual Report of the Chair of the Audit and Governance Committee for 2023-24

10 Combined Authority Chief Executive Highlight Report

It was resolved to:

- A Note the contents of the report.

11 UKREiiF Update

It was resolved to:

- A Note the contents of the report.

12 Bus Reform Outline Business Case [KD2024/032]

It was resolved to:

- A Approve the Bus Reform Assessment (also known as the Outline Business Case or OBC Assessment) dated 1st July 2024, as provided to the independent auditor, in line with approvals received at the September 13th 2023 CPCA board and agree that the Bus Reform Assessment dated 1st July 2024 supersedes the Bus Reform Assessment dated September 2023.
- B Note the final Draft Audit Report, as provided to CPCA by the independent Auditor
- C Proceed with the proposed Bus Franchising Scheme following receipt by CPCA of the issued Audit Report from the Auditor in a form which is substantially the same as that of the final Draft Audit Report, by taking the following next steps in the statutory process by:
 - giving notice of the proposed Bus Franchising Scheme, and to make copies of the proposed Bus Franchising Scheme, Consultation Document, final Bus Reform Assessment and Audit Report available for inspection.
 - consulting with all statutory consultees as listed under section 123E(4) of the Transport Act 2000 (the Act), as well as the general public of the region.
- D Delegate authority to the Executive Director Place and Connectivity to agree and publish the final Bus Reform Assessment and to publish the issued Audit Report as received from the Auditor.

13 Corporate Performance Report Q4 2023/24

It was resolved to:

- A Scrutinise performance information relating to the Combined Authority's Corporate Key Performance Indicators.
- B Scrutinise performance information relating to the Combined Authority's Most Complex Programmes and Projects.
- C Scrutinise performance information relating to the Combined Authority's Headline Priority Activities.
- D Note progress to evaluate the impact of the Devolution Deal Investment Fund in a Gateway Review.

14 Risk Report Q4 2023/24

It was resolved to:

- A note the risk register, dashboard and heat map in Appendix A-C.
- B note the update on progress of the Risk Software implementation
- C note the plan for risk deep dives

15 Budget Monitor Update

It was resolved to:

- A Note the restated 2024/25 revenue budget and capital programme updated for approved carry-forwards.
- B Approve the minor changes to the improvement plan budget as set out in section 3.4
- C Note variances forecast overachievement of Treasury Management Income

16 Improvement Plan Update

It was resolved to:

- A Note the progress in May against the identified areas of ongoing concern set out in the Best Value Notice received in January 2024.
- B Note the update from the Chair, Independent Improvement Board following the meeting held on 1 July 2024
- C Note the proposed ongoing arrangements for embedding continuous improvement

17 Overview and Scrutiny Committee Annual Report 2023/24

It was resolved to:

- A **Defer this item until the next meeting of the Combined Authority Board.**

18a Delegations to Officers

It was resolved to:

- A Approve delegations to the Chief Executive (to be added to the constitution) to:
 - Engage with all mayoral candidates leading up to the election of a Mayor for the CPCA
 - Attend meetings with all mayoral candidates leading up to the election of a Mayor for the CPCA
 - Provide guidance and support to all mayoral candidates where required.
- B Approve delegations to the Assistant Director Human Resources (to be added to the constitution) to:
 - Update relevant parts of the constitution and policies relating to Human resources and employment issues due to changes in statute and case law
 - Amend errors relating to Human resources and employment issues in relevant parts of the constitution.
 - Make nonmaterial amendments to processes and policies relating to Human resources and employment issues

18b Appointment to Outside Bodies Protocol

It was resolved to:

- A Approve the Appointment to Outside Bodies Protocol for adoption by the Combined Authority and inclusion in the constitution **with additions as agreed at the meeting.**

19 Appointments to Outside Bodies

It was resolved:

- A To approve the appointment of **the Mayor** as the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority representative on the Cambridge Growth Company Advisory Council.
- B That members appointed to external bodies provide updates to the CPCA Board at intervals agreed by the CPCA Board.

20 Allowance of Independent Persons

It was resolved to:

- A Approve changes to the allowances to ensure that both Independent Persons receive the same.

21 Business Growth and Social Impact Investment Fund Update

It was resolved to:

- A Note the progress updates contained within the report.

22 Appointment of a Director to CPCA Subsidiary Company

It was resolved to:

- A Appoint David Moore, Assistant Director Business Trade and Investment, CPCA as a director of Peterborough Higher Education Property Company Ltd (PROPCo1)

23 Recommendations from the Skills and Employment Committee

It was resolved to approve the recommendations as set out below:

AEB and FCFJ Commissioning and Funding Flexibilities (2024-25 Academic Year) [KD2024/035]

- A Approve CPCA's funding flexibilities for 2024-25 (permitted under the CPCA's devolved AEB powers)

24 Recommendations from the Environment and Sustainable Communities Committee

It was resolved to approve the recommendations as set out below:

Local Nature Recovery Strategy [KD2024/028]

- A Delegate authority to the Environment and Sustainable Communities Committee to approve a draft Local Nature Recovery Strategy for public consultation

25 Recommendations from the Transport and Infrastructure Committee

It was resolved to approve the recommendations as set out below:

Bus Service Improvement Plan [KD2024/033]

- A approve the revised Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP), as prepared by the Combined Authority at the instruction of the Department for Transport
- B (subject to approval of the Bus Service Improvement Plan) approve publication on the Combined Authority website and submission to the Department for Transport

Active Travel Plan [KD2024/023]

- A Note the five active travel strategic aims for 2024/25.
- B approve the request for redistribution of Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) Transport revenue funding and the moving of £143,907 from subject to approval to approved. Details of proposed spending can be found in Appendix E.

- C Subject to approving recommendation B, approve the use of funds for a community Active Travel Grant.
- D Note the contents of the Active Travel Fund 4 (ATF4) Extension bid.
- E approve the drawdown of £1.1m from Active Travel Fund 4 Extension funding.
- F approve the delegation of authority to the Assistant Director, Transport to enter into a Grant Funding Agreement with Cambridgeshire County Council following consultation with the Chief Financial Officer and Monitoring Officer.

March Area Transport Study [KD2024/007]

- A approve the MATS Full Business Case 2 (FBC 2)
- B approve the drawdown of £7,000,000 of the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) from subject to approval to approved for the MATS project to be spent in Financial Years 2024/2025 and 2025/2026.
- C delegate authority to the Assistant Director of Transport in consultation with the Chief Finance Officer and Monitoring Officer to enter into Grant Funding Agreements with Cambridgeshire County Council.

Notes:

- a) Statements in **bold type** indicate additional resolutions made at the meeting.
- b) Five Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee may call-in a key decision of the Mayor, the Combined Authority Board or an Officer for scrutiny by notifying the Monitoring Officer, except for any key decision on a matter dealt with under the special urgency provisions set out in the Constitution which may be implemented immediately.



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1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Charlotte Horobin, Business Board Representative and from Cllr Wakeford, who was substituted by Cllr Pitt.

2 Declaration of Interests

No declarations of interests were made.

3 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting on the 17 June 2024 were approved as an accurate record.

The Action Log was noted by the Committee.

4 Public Questions

One public question had been received and this was circulated to Members and published on the website. A response was given by the Chair.

5 Combine Authority Forward Plan

RESOLVED:

That the Combined Authority Forward Plan be noted.

6 Further Education (FE) Cold Spots - Feasibility Report

RESOLVED: (Unanimous)

The Skills and Employment Committee resolved to:

- A. Note Grant Thornton's independent Feasibility Report and accompanying papers, into FE Cold-Spots in East Cambridgeshire and St Neots
- B. Recommend that the Combined Authority Board accepts the proposal to create an Investment and Implementation Plan including a call for skills capital projects, with investment into skills capital in existing FE providers around Cambridgeshire and Peterborough funded from the remaining FE coldspots budget (set out in paragraph 5.1).
- C. Recommend that the Combined Authority delegate authority to the Assistant Director of Skills and Employment to develop the criteria within the proposed Investment and Implementation Plan.
- D. To note that a progress report will be brought to a future Skills and Employment Committee.

7 Good Work Charter: Progress Report

RESOLVED:

The Skills and Employment Committee resolved to:

- A. Receive a progress update/ presentation on plans to launch a Good Work Charter in 2025.
- B. Note the collaborative work with partners to gather insights which are helping to inform co-creation.
- C. Note the strategic engagement to date and future intentions, with the opportunity to input and shape the Good Work Charter

8 Universal Support Programme

The verbal update was noted by the Committee.

9 Work Programme

RESOLVED:

To note the Committee Agenda Plan.

10 Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as Monday 9 September 2024.

Notes:

- a) Statements in **bold type** indicate additional resolutions made at the meeting.
- b) Five Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee may call-in a key decision of the Mayor, the Combined Authority Board or an Officer for scrutiny by notifying the Monitoring Officer, except for any key decision on a matter dealt with under the special urgency provisions set out in the Constitution which may be implemented immediately.



Any key decision/s set below will come into force and may be implemented after 5.00pm on the fifth clear working day after publication of the decision, unless they are called-in [see note on call in below], with the exception of any key decision on a matter dealt with under the special urgency provisions set out in the Constitution which may be implemented immediately.

1	Apologies for Absence
	Apologies were received from Tim Jones and Emma Garfield, Business Board representatives.
2	Declaration of Interests
	No declarations of interests were made.
3	Minutes of the previous meeting
	The minutes of the meeting on 19 June 2024 were approved as an accurate record. The Action Log was noted by the Committee.
4	Public Questions
	Three public questions were received. The questions and their responses have been published on the website.
5	Forward Plan
	RESOLVED: To note the Combined Authority Forward Plan.
6	Director's Highlight Report
	RESOLVED: To note the Director's Highlight Report.
7	Affordable Housing Programme - Update on Implementation
	RESOLVED: To note the update in the report.
8	Acquiring additional units for the Affordable Housing Programme
	RESOLVED: (Unanimous) The Environment and Sustainable Communities Committee resolved to: A. Note the change to the units proposed by Heylo, this being units swapped from the

	<p>Vistry portfolio to the Allison Homes portfolio of 12 units</p> <p>B. Approve the use of clawback funding of approximately £280,000 for the acquisition of further 8 additional units in Peterborough as part of the Affordable Housing Programme</p>
9	£100k Homes, Fordham
	<p>RESOLVED:</p> <p>The Environment and Sustainable Communities Committee resolved to:</p> <p>A. Submit a recommendation to the Combined Authority's Board in accordance with point 2 of the Options Appraisal, to release resale price restrictions affecting eight £100k Homes in Fordham. Each restriction is to be released at the next point of sale of each dwelling and purchasers shall immediately enter into replacement resale price agreements with the Local Housing Authority: East Cambridgeshire District Council (ECDC).</p>
10	Infrastructure Delivery Framework
	<p>RESOLVED:</p> <p>To note progress on the Infrastructure Delivery Framework and next steps.</p>
11	Climate Programme
	<p>RESOLVED: (Unanimous)</p> <p>The Environment and Sustainable Communities Committee resolved to:</p> <p>A. Approve strategic direction of the climate programme and progress towards delivery noting the business case approval will go through Investment Panel and Committee.</p> <p>B. Within the wider climate programme, support the launch of a bidding round this autumn</p> <p>C. Recommend to Board the allocation of funding for the Net Zero Villages programme to our constituent councils to enable local delivery according to Table 4.</p> <p>D. Recommend to Board that the remaining capital funding from the Care Homes Retrofit Programme is redeployed as part of the Climate Programme.</p> <p>E. To note the progress on the Climate Action Plan review for 2025-30, using funds from the climate programme</p>
12	Greater South East Net Zero Hub Update
	<p>RESOLVED:</p> <p>A. To note the decisions made by the Executive Director of Resources & Performance (to 05/03/24) and Executive Director of Place & Connectivity (from 20/03/24) based on the recommendations of the Greater South East Net Zero Hub Board.</p> <p>B. To note the update on the Community Energy Fund.</p>
13	Work Programme
	RESOLVED:

	To note the Committee Agenda Plan.
14	Date of Next Meeting
	The scheduled September meeting date would now be used for an informal Member briefing session. The next public meeting would be in October when the draft Local Nature Recovery Strategy Plan would be ready to be considered. The date of this meeting was to be confirmed.

Notes:

- a) Statements in **bold type** indicate additional resolutions made at the meeting.
- b) Five Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee may call-in a key decision of the Mayor, the Combined Authority Board or an Officer for scrutiny by notifying the Monitoring Officer, except for any key decision on a matter dealt with under the special urgency provisions set out in the Constitution which may be implemented immediately.



Any key decision/s set below will come into force and may be implemented after 5.00pm on the fifth clear working day after publication of the decision, unless they are called-in [see note on call in below], with the exception of any key decision on a matter dealt with under the special urgency provisions set out in the Constitution which may be implemented immediately.

1	Apologies for Absence
	There were no apologies from members of the Committee.
2	Declaration of Interests
	No declaration of interests were made.
3	Chair's Announcements
	The Chair welcomed Members to their first meeting and expressed his pride in chairing this new committee which would build on the existing governance structure to drive more timely, strategic and effective decisions on investments.
4	Election of Vice-Chair
	<p><u>RESOLVED:</u></p> <p>On being proposed by the Chair and seconded by Cllr Smith, Cllr Sam Wakeford was unanimously elected as Vice-Chair of the Committee.</p>
5	Investment Committee Terms of Reference
	<p><u>RESOLVED:</u></p> <p>The Committee noted the Terms of Reference.</p>
6	Single Assurance Framework Business Case Approvals: Chief Executive Officer Decisions
	<p><u>RESOLVED:</u></p> <p>The Investment Committee resolved to:</p> <p>A. Note the Chief Executive business case decisions for projects less than £1m under the Single Assurance Framework.</p>
7	Investment Concept Papers
	<p><u>RESOLVED:</u></p> <p>The Investment Committee resolved to:</p> <p>A. Note and comment upon the concept papers prior to their presentation CPCA Board at its meeting on 4 September 2024:</p>

8	Single Assurance Framework: Reporting of Major Project Performance and Wider CPCA Projects Dashboard
	<p><u>RESOLVED:</u></p> <p>The Investment Committee resolved to:</p> <p>A. Note the performance against major projects supported by Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA)</p> <p>B. Note the summary of the wider CPCA project landscape</p>
9	Work Programme
	<p><u>RESOLVED:</u></p> <p>The Investment Committee resolved to:</p> <p>A. Note the Work Programme</p>
10	Date of Next Meeting
	The date of the next meeting was confirmed as Monday 30 September 2024.

Notes:

- a) Statements in **bold type** indicate additional resolutions made at the meeting.
- b) Five Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee may call-in a key decision of the Mayor, the Combined Authority Board or an Officer for scrutiny by notifying the Monitoring Officer, except for any key decision on a matter dealt with under the special urgency provisions set out in the Constitution which may be implemented immediately.



Any key decision/s set below will come into force and may be implemented after 5.00pm on the fifth clear working day after publication of the decision, unless they are called-in [see note on call in below], with the exception of any key decision on a matter dealt with under the special urgency provisions set out in the Constitution which may be implemented immediately.

1 Announcements

The Mayor welcomed everyone to the first meeting back after the summer break.

2 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Councillor Bridget Smith (Councillor John Williams substituting) and Councillor Sarah Conboy (Councillor Sam Wakeford substituting).

3 Declaration of Interests

There were no declaration of interests made.

4 Combined Authority Membership Update

It was resolved to:

A Note the changes in membership from Peterborough City Council on the following:

- Combined Authority Board
- Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- Audit and Governance Committee.
- Skills and Employment Committee.
- Transport and Infrastructure Committee.
- Investment Committee

5 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting on 24 July 2024 were approved as an accurate record and signed by the Mayor. The minutes action log was noted.

6 Petitions

No petitions were received.

7 Public Questions

No public questions were received.

8 Forward Plan

It was resolved to:

A Approve the Forward Plan for September 2024.

9 Combined Authority Chief Executive Highlights Report

It was resolved to:

A Note the content of the report

10 Improvement Plan Update

It was resolved to:

- A Note the Best Value Notice issued in January 2024 for six months has lapsed
- B Note the progress made across the Improvement Plan throughout June and July 2024
- C Note the outcome of the Internal Audit review on the 'Embedding Continuous Change'

11 Overview and Scrutiny Committee Annual Report 2023-24

It was resolved to:

- A Note the Annual Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

12 Budget Monitoring Update

It was resolved to:

- A Note the financial performance of the Combined Authority with actuals as at the 30th June 2024.
- B Note the decisions taken by the Chief Executive under powers delegated by the Board in section 7.

13 25/26 Medium Term Financial Plan and Corporate Plan Process - KD2024/015

It was resolved to:

- A Approve the proposed arrangements and timeline for the setting of the refreshed Corporate Strategy and the budget and noting that this may be subject to change in accordance with Government announcements or other factors.
- B Note the revised scrutiny arrangements including the feedback from Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the proposed process for the 2025/26 budget and Medium Term Financial Plan as set out in this report.

14 Appointment of a Combined Authority Returning Officer - KD2024/047

It was resolved to:

- A re-appoint John Hill, East Cambridgeshire District Council Chief Executive, as the Combined Area Returning Officer for the purposes of Article 6 of the Combined Authorities (Mayoral Elections) Order 2017 for the Mayoral election to be held on 1 May 2025.

15 Review of Investment Concept Papers

It was resolved to:

- A approve the concept paper for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Impact to be developed as a formal business case.
- B approve the concept paper for Delivery of Digital Connectivity Strategy 2025-2029 to be developed as a formal business case.

16 Recommendations from the Skills and Employment Committee

It was resolved to approve the recommendations as set out below:

Further Education Cold Spots: Feasibility Report [KD2024/039]

- Accept the proposal to create an Investment and Implementation Plan including a call for skills capital projects, with investment into skills capital in existing FE providers

around Cambridgeshire and Peterborough funded from the remaining FE cold-spots budget

- Delegate authority to the Assistant Director of Skills and Employment to develop the criteria within the proposed Investment and Implementation Plan

17 Recommendations from the Environment and Sustainable Communities Committee

It was resolved to approve the recommendations as set out below:

£100k Homes, Fordham [KD2024/053]

- In accordance with point 2 of the Options Appraisal, to release resale price restrictions affecting eight £100k Homes in Fordham. Each restriction is to be released at the next point of sale of each dwelling and purchasers shall immediately enter into replacement resale price agreements with the Local Housing Authority: East Cambridgeshire District Council (ECDC).

Climate Programme [KD2024/026]

- To approve the allocation of funding for the Net Zero Villages programme to our constituent councils to enable local delivery
- To approve the remaining capital funding from the Care Homes Retrofit Programme to be redeployed as part of the Climate Programme.

Notes:

- a) Statements in **bold type** indicate additional resolutions made at the meeting.
- b) Five Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee may call-in a key decision of the Mayor, the Combined Authority Board or an Officer for scrutiny by notifying the Monitoring Officer, except for any key decision on a matter dealt with under the special urgency provisions set out in the Constitution which may be implemented immediately.



Any key decision/s set below will come into force and may be implemented after 5.00pm on the fifth clear working day after publication of the decision, unless they are called-in [see note on call in below], with the exception of any key decision on a matter dealt with under the special urgency provisions set out in the Constitution which may be implemented immediately.

3	Minutes of the previous meeting
	<u>RESOLVED:</u> The minutes of the meeting on 22 July 2024 were approved as an accurate record. The Action Log was noted by the Committee.
6	Director's Highlight Report
	<u>RESOLVED:</u> To note the Director's Highlight Report.
7	Connecting Cambridgeshire Digital Connectivity Strategy 2021-25 Progress Update and Overview of the proposed 2025-29 Digital Connectivity Strategy
	<u>RESOLVED:</u> (UNANIMOUS) A. To note the contents of the report and Appendix A. B. To recommend to the Combined Authority Board to approve the new Digital Connectivity Strategy 2025-2029.
8	Electric Vehicles Strategy and Funding
	<u>RESOLVED:</u> (UNANIMOUS) A. To recommend to the CPCA Board to approve the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Strategy B. Take notice of the progress on Electric Vehicles (EVs) and Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) business case
9	English National Concessionary Travel Scheme -Local Concession Proposal for pre 09.30 Bus Travel
	<u>RESOLVED:</u> A. To recommend that the Combined Authority Board uses its powers as a local Travel Concession Authority to introduce a local concession allowing pre 9:30 travel for all passholders within the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Travel Concession Area from May 2025 B. To recommend that the Combined Authority Board delegate authority to the Assistant Director for Transport (Public Transport Services) to engage with local operators from the date of decision through to May 2025 to ensure the new local concession is implemented for that date, providing updates to this committee.
10	East West Rail Update
	<u>RESOLVED:</u> (UNANIMOUS) A. Note the contents of the report.

	B. Delegate authority to the Assistant Director for Transport to coordinate a timely response to the East West Rail consultation, in collaboration with the Chair of the Transport and Infrastructure Committee, should the consultation timeline preclude further discussion at the November meeting.
11	Local Transport & Connectivity Plan and Associated Strategies
	<p><u>RESOLVED:</u> (UNANIMOUS)</p> <p>A. Note the update on the Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (LTCP) associated strategies and welcome comment on scopes and work stream</p> <p>B. Recommend to the Combined Authority Board to delegate authority to the Assistant Director for Transport in consultation with the Chief Finance Officer and Monitoring Officer to enter into one or more contracts with the relevant delivery body, as needed to continue the development of the LTCP sub strategies</p>
12	Vision Zero – Road Harm Reduction Programme Update
	<p><u>RESOLVED:</u></p> <p>The Committee resolved to:</p> <p>A. Take note of the progress on the Vision Zero (VZ) programme and raise any feedback or queries to the transport team.</p>
13	Bus Network Update
	<p><u>RESOLVED:</u></p> <p>The Committee resolved to:</p> <p>A. Note the progress on the improvements funded via the precept to the bus network, via increased and new bus services.</p> <p>B. Note the progress of the Tiger pass, £1 fares for Under 25s in the region.</p>
14	Budget and Performance Report
	<p><u>RESOLVED:</u></p> <p>The Committee resolved to:</p> <p>A. Note the financial position of the Transport Division for the financial year 24/25 to July 2024.</p> <p>B. Review and comment on the current Transport budgets within the Combined Authority's Medium-Term Financial Plan and Capital Programme.</p>

Notes:

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Any key decision/s set below will come into force and may be implemented after 5.00pm on the fifth clear working day after publication of the decision, unless they are called-in [see note on call in below], with the exception of any key decision on a matter dealt with under the special urgency provisions set out in the Constitution which may be implemented immediately.

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies received from Cllr Wilson, substituted by Cllr Whelan, Cllr Hodgson-Jones, Cllr Christy substituted by temporary substitute Cllr Nawaz

2 Declaration of Interests

There were no declaration of interests made.

3 Chair's Announcements

The Chair made the following announcements:

- 1) Welcome to new member Cllr Wiggin the representative from Peterborough City Council.
- 2) The Chair encouraged all members to attend the A&G development sessions.
- 3) External Audit - In response to the challenges facing local government auditors nationally, the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution presented a statement to Parliament on the 30th July 2024 setting out the Government's intent to implementing a backstop date for audits of Local Government accounts for the 2022/23 financial year of the 13th December 2024. As a result we will need to consider that year's accounts before the end of November and, under the work programme item, the committee will be asked to consider moving our December meeting to the 28th November.
- 4) 4) Code of Corporate Governance moved to November's meeting

4 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting on 18th July 2024 were approved as an accurate record.
The Action Log was noted by the Committee.

5 Improvement Plan Report

The Committee RESOLVED to:

- a) Note the contents of the letter from Max Soule, Deputy Director, Local Government Intervention and Stewardship, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
- b) Recognise the progress that has been made and the work undertaken by staff, Elected Members, partners and agencies to address the areas of identified improvement
- c) Note the close down arrangements for the current improvement programme (phase 3)
- d) Note the proposed revised future role for the Independent Improvement Board

6 Internal Audit Action Tracker

The Committee RESOLVED to:
To note and endorse progress on the implementation of internal audit action.

7 Constitution Update - Procurement

The Committee RESOLVED to recommend to the Combined Authority Board to approve the changes to the Contract procedure Rules (CPR's) within the constitution which is to be discussed and approved at Board on 16th of October 2024 and will become effective when the new legislation is implemented.

8 Internal Audit - Progress report

The Committee RESOLVED to note the report.

9 Independent Member Recruitment

The Committee RESOLVED to:

- a) Recommend to the CPCA Board that a new independent person is appointed to sit on Audit Committee for a period of four years which may be renewed up to a maximum of one further term (i.e. total maximum 8 years).
- b) Recommend that the CPCA Board agrees to delegate to the Executive Director of Resources and the Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Chair of the Audit and Governance Committee, authority to finalise the draft role description, skills, competencies and person specification attached as Appendix 1 and to approve the advert.
- c) Recommend to the CPCA Board that the recruitment of the new Independent Member be led by a panel consisting of the Chairman of the Audit and Governance Committee and three members of the three main political parties of the committee supported by the Executive Director of Resources and the Monitoring Officer. Nominations for members of the committee be provided.
- d) Following the recruitment process, a report to formally appoint the Independent Person will be presented to a future CPCA Board meeting

10 Work Programme

The Committee RESOLVED to:

- a) Approve the work programme
- b) Amend the work programme so that the December meeting be rescheduled to 28th November.

11 Exclusion of the Press and Public

It was resolved that the press and public be excluded from the meeting on the grounds that the next report contains exempt information under Part 1 of Schedule 12A the Local Government Act 1972, as amended, and that it would not be in the public interest for this information to be disclosed. The public interest in maintaining the exemption must be deemed to outweigh the public interest in its publication.

12 Corporate Risk Register

The Committee RESOLVED to:

- a) *To endorse the Corporate Risk Register and Heatmap*
- b) *To undertake a deep dive into Cyber Security risk*
- c) *To note that the annual risk appetite statement exercise has taken place*

13 Date of Next Meeting

15th October 10am – Development Session (virtual)

8th November at 10am at CPCA Meeting Room HDC.

Notes:

- a) Statements in **bold type** indicate additional resolutions made at the meeting.
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MEETINGS OF THE COUNCIL'S COMMITTEES AND PANELS SINCE THE LAST ORDINARY MEETING

SEPTEMBER 2024

4. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (PERFORMANCE AND GROWTH)

- ❖ Work Programme
- ❖ East Park Solar Farm
- ❖ Further Issues and Options 2024 Engagement Paper for the Local Plan Update
- ❖ Local Plan Land Availability Assessments
- ❖ Sustainability Appraisal for the Local Plan Update: Further Issues and Options and Land Availability Assessment
- ❖ Fens and Lins Reservoirs
- ❖ 3C ICT Shared Service Review (Part Exempt)
- ❖ Finance Performance Report, Q1
- ❖ Corporate Performance Report 2024/25, Quarter 1

5. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (ENVIRONMENT, COMMUNITIES AND PARTNERSHIPS)

- ❖ Work Programme
- ❖ Community Health and Wealth Building Strategy and Delivery Fund
- ❖ Priority 1: Improving Quality of Life for Local People

10. CABINET

- ❖ East Park Solar Farm
- ❖ Further Issues and Options 2024 Engagement Paper for the Local Plan Update
- ❖ Land Availability Assessments
- ❖ Sustainability Appraisal for the Local Plan Update: Further Issues and Options and Land Availability Assessment
- ❖ Community Health and Wealth Building Strategy and Delivery Fund
- ❖ 3C ICT Shared Service Review (Part Exempt)
- ❖ 2024/25 Finance Performance Report, Q1 Forecast
- ❖ Corporate Performance Report 2024/25, Quarter 1 2024/25
- ❖ Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Joint Group Minutes

16. DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

- ❖ 4 Applications requiring reference to Development Management Committee
- ❖ Appeal Decisions

18. EMPLOYMENT COMMITTEE

- ❖ Workforce Information Report – Quarter 1
- ❖ Workforce Profile and Action Plan
- ❖ Workforce Strategy Update
- ❖ Representatives of Employees

25. CORPORATE GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

- ❖ Community Governance Review – Glatton and Conington Parishes
- ❖ Code of Conduct Complaints – Update
- ❖ Use of Surveillance under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA) – Inspection Report Update
- ❖ Corporate Risk Register
- ❖ Internal Audit Service: Progress Report
- ❖ Implementation of Internal Audit Actions
- ❖ Whistleblowing (Policy, Guidance and Concerns Received)
- ❖ Corporate Governance Committee Progress Report

OCTOBER 2024

2. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (PERFORMANCE AND GROWTH)

- ❖ Work Programme
- ❖ Local Government Association Corporate Peer Challenge

3. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (ENVIRONMENT, COMMUNITIES AND PARTNERSHIPS)

- ❖ Work Programme
- ❖ Huntingdonshire Priority Natural Landscapes

15. CABINET

- ❖ Huntingdonshire Priority Natural Landscapes

16. LICENSING AND PROTECTION COMMITTEE

- ❖ Public Space Protection Order (Ramsey)
- ❖ Review of the Public Spaces Protection Order Eynesbury
- ❖ Delegation of Public Space Protection Orders (PSPOs) to Officers
- ❖ Monitoring Report on the Delivery of the Food Law Enforcement and Health and Safety Service Plans
- ❖ Suspension and Revocation of Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licences
- ❖ Licensing and Protection Sub Committees

16. LICENSING COMMITTEE

- ❖ Gambling Act 2005 - Statement of Principles 2024
- ❖ Licensing Sub Committees