The Great Ouse Heritage Landscape

Business Case for Landscape Self-Designation

September 2025

Stage 2, V0

Great Ouse Valley Trust
Our landscape for life

Huntingdonshire
DISTRICT COUNCIL

Arkwood

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Executive Summary

This report presents Stage 2 of the Business Case for the self-designation of the Great Ouse Valley and Washes landscape.

Building on the work completed in Stage 1, which established the strategic case for self-designation, this stage sets out the economic case, assessing the costs, benefits, and overall value associated with different designation options.

Background and Vision

Stage 1 confirmed a strong and growing case for recognising the Great Ouse Valley and Washes as a coherent and valued landscape. It demonstrated that protecting and enhancing the area's environmental, cultural, and economic value aligns closely with local, regional, and national policy including priorities around nature recovery, flood resilience, heritage protection, and wellbeing.

Through research and stakeholder engagement, Stage 1 also developed a shared vision statement that captures the character and ambition of the landscape:

"An inspiring landscape of vast horizons and dynamic wetlands, where big ideas meet bold stewardship. A place where land, water and people are deeply connected and thriving."

This vision underpins the mission, values, and objectives that guide the self-designation proposal.

Purpose and Approach

The purpose of self-designation is to recognise and manage the Great Ouse Valley and Washes as one cohesive landscape, ensuring its assets are protected and enhanced for future generations. Cambridgeshire currently has one of the lowest proportions of land designated for nature in the UK, with no National Landscapes within its boundaries. Self-designation provides a proactive, locally led approach to address this gap and unlock environmental, social, and economic benefits for the region.

Stage 2 begins by restating the purpose of the business case and summarising the strategic alignment of the proposal. It highlights the ecological, environmental, cultural, and social value of the landscape and the growing need to protect this value from increasing pressures such as climate change, development, and habitat fragmentation.

Options Development

The report outlines the methodology and criteria used to define boundary options for the self-designated landscape. These criteria draw on national designation guidance, adapted to reflect the unique context of the Great Ouse Valley and Washes.

Three options are presented, each encompassing different scales and features of the landscape. The advantages and disadvantages of each are assessed in relation to landscape coherence, deliverability, and potential value.

Economic Analysis

An economic analysis follows, estimating the potential benefits and delivery costs of self-designation. Drawing on studies of existing designated landscapes across the UK, the analysis establishes a method for valuing landscape protection and enhancement. The results show that all three options deliver excellent value, with clear potential for economic, environmental, and wellbeing gains across the region.

While this study does not constitute a full HM Treasury Green Book business case, its structure aligns with government guidance for early-stage programme development. It provides a clear, evidence-based rationale for change, setting out a foundation for coordinated action and investment.

The evidence presented demonstrates a strong strategic, environmental, social, and economic case for recognising, protecting, and managing the Great Ouse Valley and Washes as one coherent and connected landscape.

By pursuing self-designation, stakeholders have the opportunity to safeguard a landscape of, strengthen its resilience to future pressures, and deliver lasting benefits for communities, nature, and the local economy.

1.0 Introduction

This section introduces the context, background and purpose of the business case. It defines what we meanby self-designation, and what this can help us to achieve.

The business case for landscape self-designation was jointly commissioned by Huntingdonshire District Council and the Great Ouse Valley Trust, which is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (Number 117977).

Arkwood Ltd was appointed as the project consultant to develop the business case in collaboration with Counterculture.

The work builds on previous research and engagement by the Great Ouse Valley Trust, as well as previous efforts to designate the landscape as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), with a submission made to Natural England in 2014.

In 2022, the Great Ouse Valley and Washes was identified as a proposed new AONB in a Natural England Future Landscape Designation Prioritisation Process Map. However, the Trust was later told that Natural England are not currently considering new AONBs. In 2023, Natural England re-branded AONBs as National Landscapes (NLs).

Since this point, the Trust has continued to drive efforts to conserve and celebrate the landscape, pursuing self-designation as an important step to protect the value of the Great Ouse Valley.

	Statutory Designation	Self-Designation
Protection	**Legal protections** from inappropriate development • National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 • Countryside and Rights of Way act 2000 • Town and Country Planning Act 1947	**Commitment** between stakeholders to protect landscape value **Integration** with Local Plan and council strategies
Recognition	Political as well as public awareness, especially locally (e.g. through **signage and maps**), plus evidence of local businesses awareness in research*	Self-designation rarely seen in public or policy now but could drive **local** recognition • Areas of Great Landscape Value – Surrey Hills • Special Landscape Areas • Areas of Special Landscape Importance
Management	Legally required up-to-date **management plans** and **legal duty** to conserve and enhance landscape	Management plan could be commissioned depending on priorities and resources, potential for **stakeholder collaboration**
Governance	Designated landscapes can either be run internally within **local authorities** or externally as a **charity or partnership**	Freedom to choose governance model, will **influence funding availability** and flexibility
Funding	Core funding provided by **Defra**, able to bid for special funding pots through other sources e.g. Lottery	Not funded by Defra, potential to access funding through other sources e.g. Lottery, but **dependent on form of governance** and partnership working
Place Identity	Awareness and identity is **not the goal** of statutory designation but may be a secondary effect that builds over time	**Branding, identity and signage** could be developed as part of the self-designation to build momentum around landscape protection

*See section 5.1

2.0 Strategic Vision

2.1 Introduction

This section provides a concise recap of the vision and mission for self-designation, which was developed in collaboration with key stakeholders. It summarises the strategic case that underpins the economic arguments in this report. The previous Stage 1 report sets out the strategic case in detail.

2.2 Vision and mission for self-designation

The vision for self-designation (right) reflects the shared aspiration to:

- Protect and celebrate the Valley's distinctive landscape and heritage
- Strengthen stewardship and connection with nature
- Enhance accessibility, health and well-being for all
- Build on pride in local identity, heritage and a legacy of independent thought

2.2.1 Values

The core values guiding the self-designation are:

- **Stewardship:** Care for the land through thoughtful, long-term management, supporting ecological processes and sustainable land use.
- **Inclusion:** Ensure equal access and meaningful engagement for all communities, so everyone can benefit from the landscape
- **Independence:** Uphold the Valley's tradition of self-determination, shaped by its unique geography and history

Vision:

An inspiring landscape of vast horizons and dynamic wetlands, where big ideas meet bold stewardship. A place where land, water and people are deeply connected and thriving.

Values:

Stewardship | **Inclusion** | **Independence**

Mission:

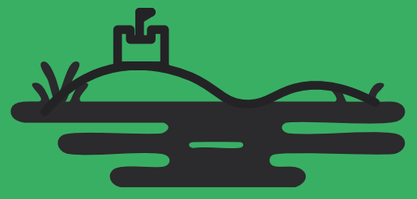
Vast Skies and Wide Horizons

- Encourage bold thinking and new ideas
- Create opportunities for all
- Promote long-term, landscape-led collaboration across boundaries

Braids of Waterways and Wetlands

- Restore and connect habitats
- Support nature-based solutions
- Encourage active travel and improve accessibility throughout the area

Islands of Refuge and Non-Conformity



- Celebrate history and independent thought
- Create an outstanding quality of life for residents
- Attract sustainable tourism through forging a distinct identity for the area

2.2.2 Mission pillars

The mission is expressed through three pillars which each reflect a unique aspect of the landscape.

Vast skies and Wide Horizons

Big skies and big ideas, inspiring awe, spaciousness, possibility and openness to all.

We will:

- Encourage bold thinking and new ideas
- Create opportunities for all
- Promote long-term, landscape-lead collaboration across boundaries

Braids of Waterways and Wetlands

A complex, dynamic, living landscape connects people with nature through blue-green networks.

We will:

- Restore and connect habitats
- Support nature-based solutions
- Encourage active travel throughout the area

Islands of Refuge and Non-Conformity

The relative isolation of the marshy landscape fostered independent identities and distinct ways of life throughout history.

We will:

- Celebrate history and heritage of independent thought
- Create an outstanding quality of life for residents
- Attract sustainable tourism through forging a distinct identity for the area

2.2.3 Objectives for self-designation

The objectives provide a practical framework for action:

Vast Skies and Wide Horizons

Secure **stakeholder commitment** across authorities, organisations and communities	Develop a roadmap for a **long-term management plan**	**Unlock funding streams** to support landscape-scale projects	Pave the way for new **environmental jobs** linked to green growth	Promote **sustainable tourism** that reflects the Valley's identity and heritage

Braids of Waterways and Wetlands

Safeguard and enhance habitats, landscapes, and biodiversity	Restore and **connect habitat networks** across the Valley	Apply **nature-based solutions** to flooding, climate pressures, and soil regeneration	Expand and promote **active travel routes** linked to **blue–green corridors**	Increase **volunteering and community engagement** in conservation

Islands of Refuge and Non-Conformity

Strengthen awareness of **local history** and its link to the landscape	Celebrate heritage and **traditional land practices** while supporting innovation	Enhance **accessibility** to nature, heritage and cultural sites for all	Promote **health, leisure,** and **well-being** through engagement with the landscape	Build recognition of the Great Ouse Valley as a **unique, sustainable destination**

2.3 Review of the strategic case

2.3.1 Strengths and value

The Great Ouse Valley is a highly intact landscape due to much of the area functioning as a floodplain. This has allowed for the development of highly distinctive and connected habitats supported by traditional land management techniques.

The influence of incongruous features is subtle in most areas, often hidden behind belts of vegetation. This creates tranquil and open green landscapes that can support well-being.

Economic and land-use value

Productive **agriculture** supported by high grade soils

Growing **visitor economy** linked to aesthetic quality and leisure opportunities as well as heritage

Traditional land use management practices in washes and wet grasslands

Figure 4. Cows Grazing along the Ouse Washes[2]

Ecological Value

Continuous **habitat corridor** with nature reserves following the river and washes

Designated ecological sites including **Ramsar, SSSIs, SACs, SPAs, LNRs**

Wet meadow and wet woodland with **potential to restore over 640 hectares of priority habitat**

Over **1,300 hectares of lakes and reed beds** including restored Ouse Fen

Figure 1. Lake at Paxton Pits

Sites with valuable and rare flora e.g. **Portholme Meadow**: largest traditionally managed meadow in UK

Figure 2. Portholme Meadow

Ouse Washes: UK's Largest Washlands and internationally significant habitat for rare birds

Figure 3. Ouse Washes[1]

Environmental Value

Water Management

- Engineered channels of the Ouse Washes control water levels and flooding throughout the Fens by storing excess water
- Lakes, wetlands and floodplain meadows regulate water flow and improve drainage

Figure 5. Sluice Gates at Denver

Carbon Sequestration

- Land cover such as floodplain meadows have high soil carbon content
- Concentration of peaty soils

Figure 6. Paxton Pits nature reserve

[1]Photo by Richard Humphrey CC BY-SA-2.0
[2]Photo by Hugh Venables CC BY-SA 2.0

Heritage and cultural Value

Medieval market towns developed along river corridor

Historic use of wetlands and relative isolation for **fortification and defence**

Interconnected **culture, economy and water**

Engineered **drainage systems** throughout history allowed for **settlement and agriculture**

Braided waterways shaped by **historic water mills**

Aesthetic qualities of vastness, tranquillity and isolation celebrated in **stories, poetry and landscape paintings**

Recreational, health and connective value

Restorative **tranquil environments** with birdsong, low noise and light pollution contribute to well-being

Figure 7. Portholme Meadow

Recreation value of open water: boating, swimming, angling as well as surrounding trails and routes

Figure 8. Rowing near Ely

Active and sustainable travel routes such as the Ouse Valley Way stretching from source to sea

Figure 9. Ouse Valley Way Sign

2.3.2 Pressures on the landscape and threats to its value

Climate change – More flooding, drought, storms, and heat extremes threatening people, farming, and habitats

Loss of peatland – Ongoing shrinkage and erosion cause subsidence, flood risk, carbon emissions, and soil loss, degrading the value of the landscape

Increased flood frequency, volume and extent – Prolonged floods harm farming, settlements, and breeding success of waders

Pollution – Sewage and runoff reduce water quality, endanger health, recreation, and biodiversity

Invasive species, pests and diseases - Weaken ecosystems and displace native wildlife

Development pressure – Housing growth fragments habitats, increases runoff, and strains infrastructure

Visitor pressure – Rising numbers risk degradation of landscape value without adequate facilities, investment or management

Access issues – Poorly maintained and limited paths, crossings, and parking reduce accessibility

Agriculture pressures – Intensive practices risk peat loss, carbon release, and biodiversity decline

Fragmented management – Multiple authorities limit joined-up action and ownership

2.4 Strategic Alignment

The self-designation of the Great Ouse Valley and Washes landscape is strategically aligned with policy and strategy from national to local levels.

It supports the duty of public authorities to conserve biodiversity, as set out in the Environment Act 2021, by facilitating habitat restoration and encouraging local collaboration to advance nature recovery priorities.

The self-designation also aligns with the UK's commitment to protect 30% of land and sea for nature by 2030, introducing recognition and protection in East Anglia, an area under-represented in designated landscapes.

The Great Ouse Valley and Washes can contribute to achieving net zero goals by enhancing carbon sequestration, water regulation, and climate adaptation. The landscape encompasses floodplains, wetlands, and habitats that support nature-based solutions, sustainable travel and leisure.

At a regional level, the landscape designation supports the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority's (CPCA) ambition of "doubling nature" and aligns with the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS).

The self-designation also complements the Huntingdonshire District Council (HDC) Local Plan by supporting several key policies, with the area already recognised as a "priority landscape".

A summary of the strategies and policies supported by the self-designation is shown to the right. These policies and their alignment with the self-designation proposals are explained in the Stage 1 Report.

National Policy and Strategy

- European Landscape Convention (ELC)
- 30 by 30 Nature Recovery Commitment
- Environmental Improvement Plan 2023
- Environment Act 2021
- National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)
- Glover Report 2019
- Natural England Designation Guidance
- Net Zero Strategy 2021

Regional and District Policy and Strategy

- CPCA Ambition: Doubling Nature
- Local Nature Recovery Strategy
- HDC Huntingdonshire Futures
- Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036
- HDC Economic Growth Strategy
- HDC Biodiversity For All

Local Partnerships

- Ouse Washes Landscape Partnership
- Fens for the Future Partnership
- New Life on the Old West

2.4.1 Huntingdonshire Futures Strategic Alignment

Huntingdonshire Futures is Huntingdonshire District Council's place strategy for the next 30 years. It is split into five "journeys":

- Pride in Place
- Inclusive Economy
- Health Embedded
- Environmental Innovation
- Travel Transformed

The self-designation of the Great Ouse Valley landscape will contribute to achieving the goals of all five journeys, in particular the ambition to achieve “Pride in Place” by 2050:

"*Distinct, unified and well-loved - by 2050, Huntingdonshire’s citizens will feel proud to live and work in a place with stand-out character*"

The Great Ouse Valley runs through Huntingdonshire, connecting its major historic towns as well as many key nature and heritage sites. However, it is not widely known and appreciated as a continuous landscape. By conserving its value and character and promoting a unified identity and management approach, the Great Ouse Valley can become a cherished asset for residents.

By enhancing place quality, well-being, active travel, and the environmental economy the Great Ouse Valley is an essential driver to achieving the ambitions of Huntingdonshire Futures. By helping to foster a shared identity, self-designation will ensure residents feel proud to live and work in the area.

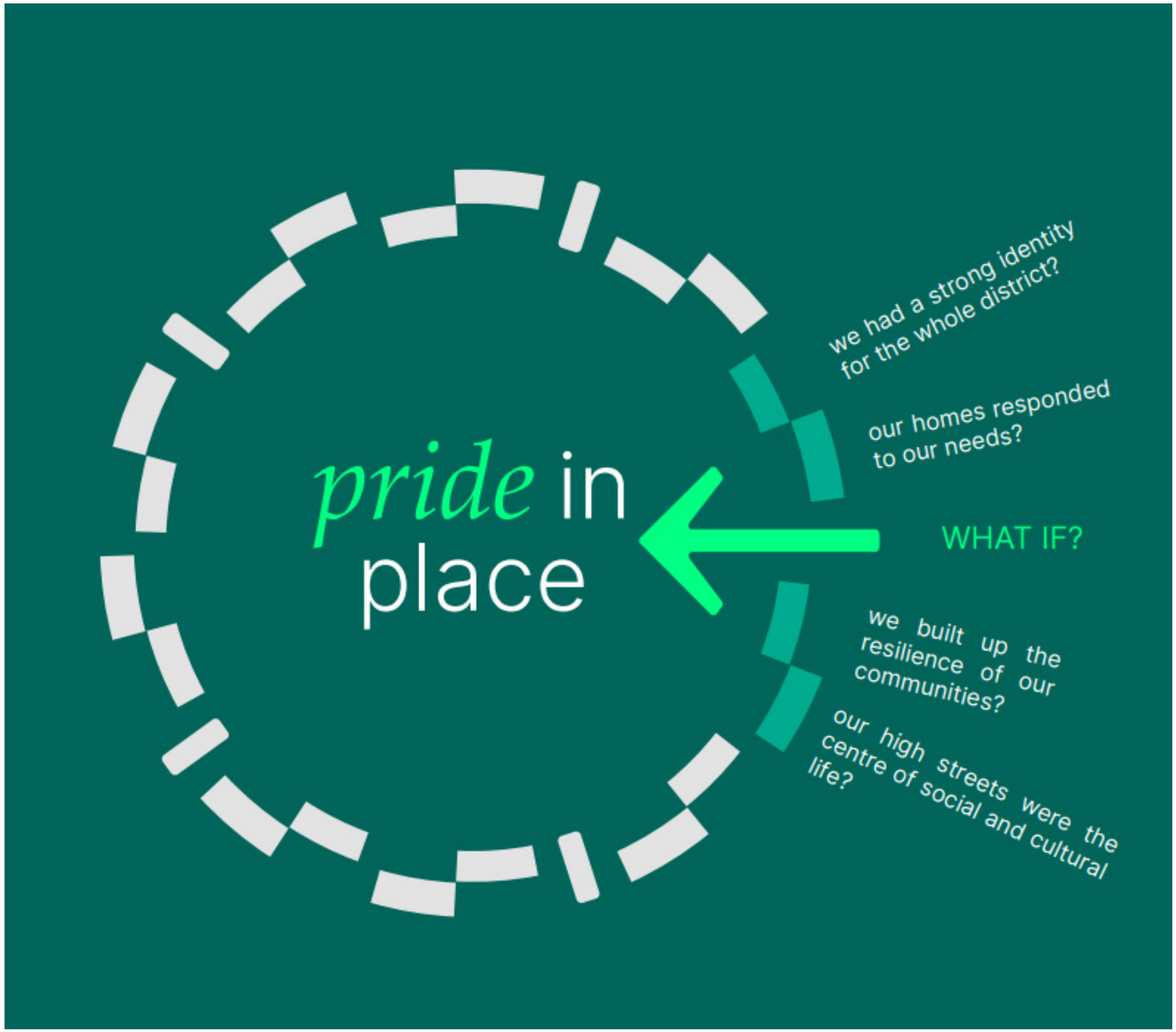


Figure 10. Huntingdonshire Futures "Pride In Place" Journey

3.0 Self-Designation Boundary

3.1 Study area background

At the outset of the project, a broad study area was defined (see Figure 11), encompassing both the 2014 designation area and the wider Ouse River landscape. This area was divided into 3 focus zones, each reflecting the distinct character of the waterways and surrounding environments.

The next section outlines the process for reviewing and defining boundary options for the current phase. It details the evidence base, applied criteria, and how these informed the assessment of potential boundaries.

These provisional boundaries, developed primarily through desk-based analysis using diverse data sources and imagery, form the basis for the economic analysis in Section 5. They offer a range of options and a framework for further engagement, including field surveys and refinement of the preferred boundary.

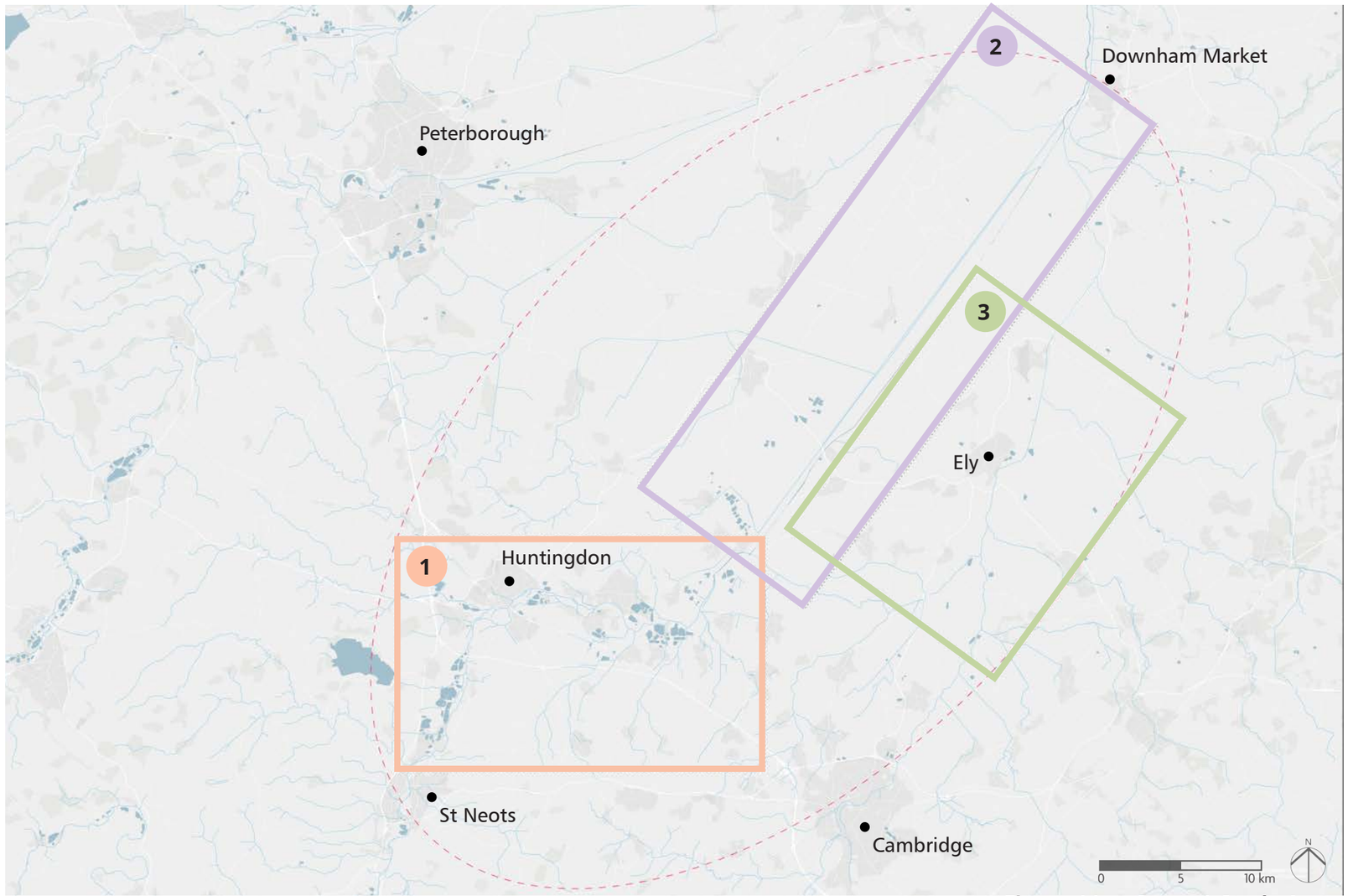


Figure 11. Stage 1 Study Areas

1 - The Huntingdonshire/ South Cambridgeshire Great Ouse Valley: A gently meandering river and floodplain system extending north from St Neots, through Huntingdon, Godmanchester and St Ives, to Earith including braided backwaters, wet meadows and lakes.

2 - The Ouse Washes: A 33 km engineered water channel stretching northeast to Denver Sluice in West Norfolk. This vast, linear, and seasonally wet landscape is surrounded by drained fenlands and benefits from four statutory ecological designations.

3 - The Ely Ouse and Fen Isles: The Ely Ouse diverts from the Washes at Earith and passes through Ely before rejoining near Denver Sluice. The Fen Isles, rising from the flat lands between these watercourses, contribute to the area's unique topography and historic land-use.

3.2 Boundary definition methodology

This section will detail the method used reviewing, defining and refining the boundary options for the self-designated area.

3.2.1 Guidance and evidence base

The process for reviewing, defining, and refining boundary options for the proposed self-designated Great Ouse Valley and Washes Landscape has been designed to be methodical, transparent, and rooted in nationally recognised landscape assessment practice.

Although this is not a statutory designation, the approach draws on National Landscape (Formerly Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty or AONB) criteria so that, if future statutory designation were pursued, the work would already be strategically aligned.

At the same time, a non-statutory designation allows a degree of flexibility to reflect the unique qualities of the Great Ouse Valley and Washes, and the ways in which local communities and visitors value the landscape.

To shape the methodology, a number of key documents and case studies were reviewed:

- **European Landscape Convention (ELC)** – establishes that all landscapes, whether ordinary, degraded, or outstanding, are of value.
- **Natural England** – Approach to Landscape Character Assessment (2014), including Annex 1 definition of landscape value: '*The relative value or importance attached to a landscape (often as a basis for designation or recognition), which expresses national or local consensus, because of its quality, special qualities including perceptual aspects such as scenic beauty, tranquillity or wildness, cultural associations or other conservation issues.*'
- **Natural England** – Guidance for Assessing Landscapes for Designation as a National Park or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (2021) provides nationally consistent boundary-setting principles
- **Landscape Institute** Technical Guidance Note 02/21 on assessing landscape value outside national designations.
- **National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)** – hierarchy of designated sites, maintenance and enhancement of habitat networks and green infrastructure, and the requirement for landscapes to be “special” or “out of the ordinary” to be valued in planning terms.
- **South Oxfordshire & Vale of White Horse Local Landscape Designations (2021)** – provides a methodological example for assessing valued landscapes at local level.

Natural England Guidance for Assessing Landscapes for designation (2021) Natual Beauty Factors:

Landscape Quality	Current physical state or condition of the landscape and its features
Scenic Quality	Appealing to the senses (primarily, but not only, the visual senses).
Relative Wildness	Relatively wild character can be perceived in the landscape and makes a particular contribution to sense of place.
Relative Tranquility	Relative tranquillity (peace, calm) can be perceived in the landscape.
Natural Heritage Features	Influence of flora, fauna, geological and physiographical features on the perception of natural beauty of the area.
Cultural Heritage	Degree to which associations with particular traditions, people, artists, writers or events contribute to perception of natural beauty.

3.2.2 Boundary definition criteria

The criteria used to guide boundary definition are grouped into Core Elements, Shaping Elements, Exclusion Elements, and Rules.

1. Core Elements (highest weighting, essential for inclusion)

These represent the defining qualities of the Great Ouse Valley and Washes as a valued landscape:

- **Hydrological network and floodplain system:** The river, washes, and drainage network that underpin the character and ecology of the valley
- **Highest quality habitats and landscapes**: including Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), Special Protection Areas (SPA), Ramsar sites, and Local/ National Nature Reserves
- **Distinctive local character:** Landscape features and qualities that are unique or rare in a local or national context

2. Shaping Elements (medium weighting, refine and define)

These criteria shape the boundary between core areas to reflect wider landscape quality and coherence:

- **Condition and intactness:** minimal detractors or fragmentation
- **Scenic and perceptual qualities:** Unobstructed views, tranquillity, dark skies and remoteness
- **Cultural and historic value:** heritage assets, archaeological landscapes, associations with local history or traditions
- **Recreation, access and connectivity:** rights of way, cycle routes, access to enjoy the landscape
- **Hydrological shaping:** Following and connecting through hydrological corridors including rivers, washes, and drains

3. Exclusion Elements (Areas not included)

Features that detract from the character of the landscape are excluded where possible:

- **Large settlements** and built-up areas
- Major **infrastructure and industrial development** that disrupts habitat continuity or aesthetic qualities

4. Rules for Boundary Placement

To ensure the boundary is clear, consistent, and defensible:

- **Settlements close to the boundary are excluded**: In line with Natural England guidance. However, boundaries may come close to settlement to reflect the cultural and historic connection of settlement to the wider landscape
- **Landscape-led and legible:** Physical, identifiable features are used wherever possible, such as rivers, drainage ditches, woodland edges, field margins, tracks, railways, or roads (rather than political or ownership boundaries)
- **'Wash-over' principle:** as per Natural England guidance, the boundary can include ("wash over") tracts of land that may not fully meet the criteria themselves, but are contiguous and contribute to landscape coherence. Such areas may also offer potential for future enhancement (for example, through Local Nature Recovery Strategy actions)

3.3 Core inclusion elements

The proposed self-designation focuses on the distinctive natural systems, habitats and features that define the Great Ouse Valley and Washes. These form the backbone of the landscape's ecological, cultural and community value.

3.3.1 The Great Ouse Hydrological Network

The waterways are the connecting thread of the designation. They include the River Great Ouse and its backwaters, running through floodplain meadows, farmland and historic towns such as Huntingdon, Godmanchester, St Ives and Ely. In some areas, the river retains its natural meanders and in others it has been re-directed (Figure 13)

The Ouse Washes, with their parallel drainage channels (Old Bedford River/River Delph and New Bedford River) and seasonally flooded washlands, create one of Europe's most important wetland landscapes (Figure 14).

The waterways and associated habitats such as wetlands, flood meadows, wet woodland and lakes support diverse wildlife and create a continuous connection for wildlife.

The hydrological system not only provides habitat and aesthetic value, but also a vital environmental role in flood protection and securing water supply.

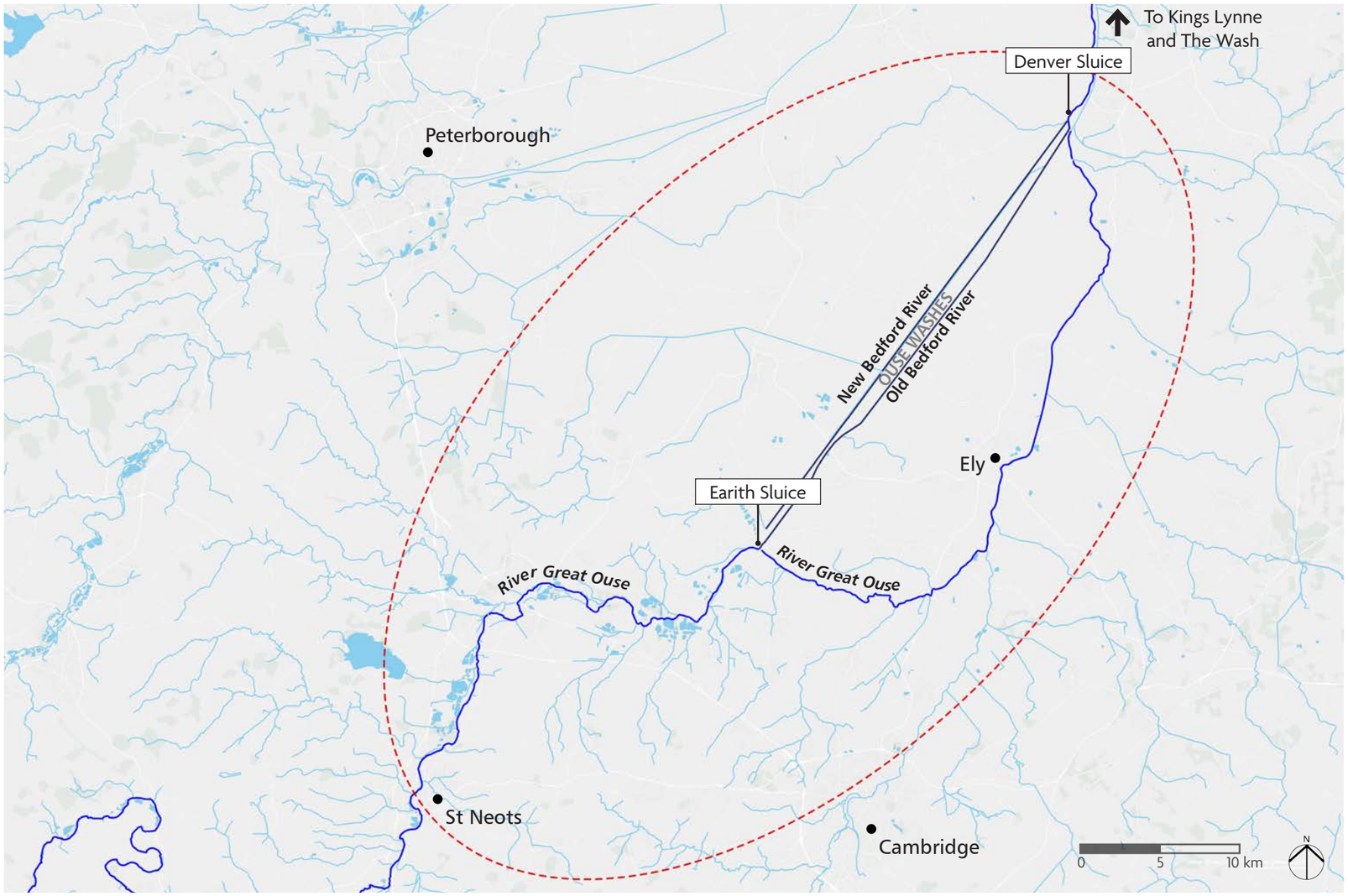


Figure 13. Map of core inclusion element: Main hydrological network of the River Great Ouse

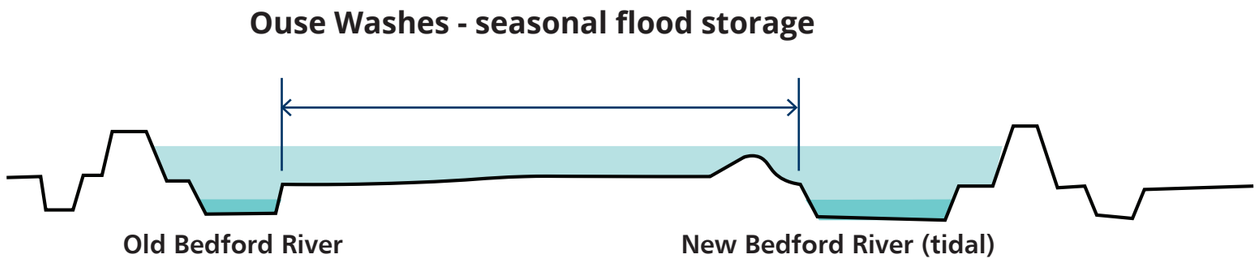


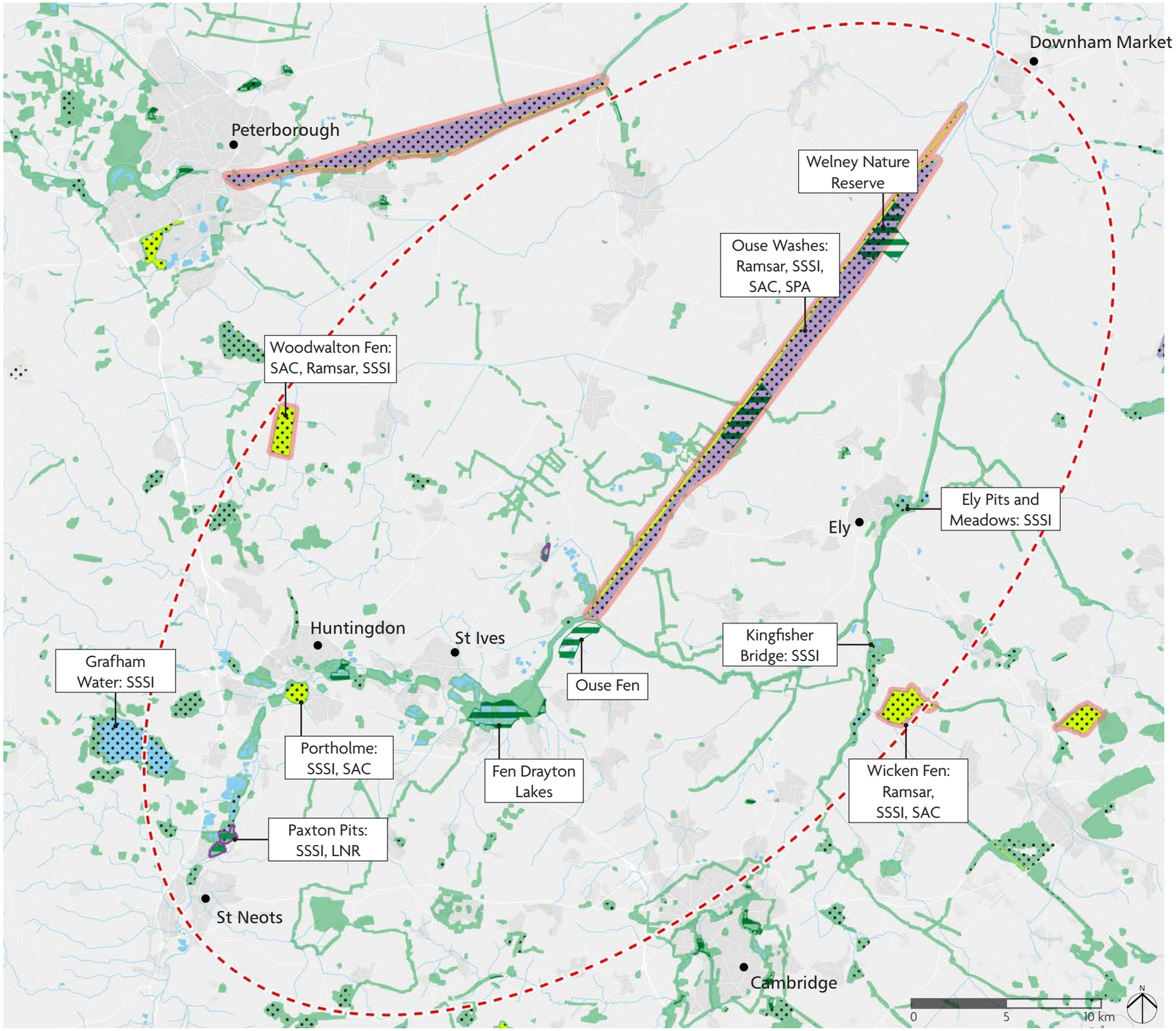
Figure 14. Ouse Washes cross section, based on drawing in OWLP LCA

3.3.2 Protected nature sites and sites of particular importance for biodiversity

Figure 15 shows the nationally and internationally recognised sites of exceptional ecological importance with existing statutory protections in the area of study. Cambridgeshire alone contains 99 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), six Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), and five Ramsar sites.

The Ouse washes is included within all of these categories and is the largest designated site, partially crossing into Norfolk.

Together, these sites create a network of irreplaceable habitats but are currently managed by a wide range of landowners, highlighting the opportunity for a more joined-up approach.



Key

- Area of Particular Importance to Biodiversity (APB) according to developing LNRS
- Ramsar Site
- Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)
- Special Area of Conservation (SAC)
- Special Protection Area (SPA)
- Local Nature Reserve (LNR)
- Nature Reserve

Figure 15. Map of core inclusion elements: Protected nature sites and Areas of Particular Importance to Biodiversity

Ramsar Sites

Ramsar sites are wetlands that are designated for their international importance under the Ramsar Convention. Both Wicken Fen and Ouse Washes are Ramsar sites.

Special Areas of Conservation (SAC)

Internationally significant sites that are conserved to protect habitats and species listed in the European Union (EU) Habitats Directive. Sites include Portholme Meadow and Wicken Fen.

Special Protection Areas (SPA)

Sites protected under the EU Birds Directive to protect rare, vulnerable and migratory birds and their habitats. The Ouse Washes is a SPA.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)

These are nationally significant areas conserved due to their particular interest to science for biological or geological reasons. Sites include Grafham Water, Kingfisher Bridge and Ely Pits and Meadows as well as all the aforementioned sites.

Local Nature Reserves

Local Nature Reserves including Somersham Local Nature Reserve and Paxton Pits Local Nature Reserve are sites designated by local authorities and in some cases town and parish councils. These sites are of special interest locally and are designated for people and wildlife.

Areas of Particular Importance for Biodiversity (APB)

These sites have been identified in the process of creating Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS). They include designated sites mentioned above as well as other important local wildlife sites such as Fen Drayton Lakes and connective green spaces. These are recommended to be preserved for habitat protection and enhancement due to their important role for supporting protected species and biodiversity.

Nature Reserves (non-statutory)

Nature reserves are sites that are managed for nature conservation or restoration and may or may not be publicly accessible. Most of these sites have been identified in Local Nature Recovery Strategies as Areas of Particular Importance for Biodiversity, though some areas fall outside of these boundaries. They are largely managed by charities such as RSPB (Ouse Fen, Fen Drayton Lakes, Paxton Pits) or WWT (Welney Nature Reserve).

Wicken Fen: Ramsar, SAC, SSSI

Wicken Fen was established in 1899 when the National Trust purchased its first two acres of land, establishing the Trust's oldest nature reserve.

The site consists of a mosaic of meadows, sedge and reedbeds and hosts more than 9000 species.

The Wicken Fen Vision is a 100 year plan which aims to expand and restore a wider area of fenland stretching toward Cambridge.

Ouse Washes: Ramsar, SAC, SPA and SSSI

The Ouse Washes is an engineered flood storage area approximately 33 km long and 0.8km wide created by two parallel cuts with embankments. The waterways, banks and seasonally flooded meadow in between are managed with traditional grazing and have become an internationally important wildlife habitat.

Bird species include wigeon, dabbling ducks, whooper swans, garganey, avocet, black-tailed godwit, redshank, snipe, yellow wagtail, lekking ruff, little egret, spotted crake and more.

Two nature reserves, managed by BCN Wildlife Trust and the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, give visitors the opportunity to learn about and spot wildlife from multiple hides.

[1]Photo by Stephen McKay (CC BY-SA 2.0)

[2]Photo by Richard Humphrey (CC BY-SA-2.0)

3.4 Boundary shaping elements

Shaping elements define the boundary between the core elements to limit fragmentation and create coherence.

3.4.1 Areas that could become of particular importance to biodiversity (ACB)

These are areas identified in the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) for habitat creation, enhancement or protection (Figure 16) and include:

- Potential habitat corridors
- Opportunities to expand existing areas and create buffer zones
- Opportunities to enhance low-quality and degraded habitats

3.4.2 Mineral extraction and allocation sites

Many sites allocated and used for mineral extraction will be restored as nature sites. This process began in 1950s and is currently supported by the "Nature after Minerals" partnership lead by RSPB:

- Ouse Fen (Needingworth Quarry) will expand to become the biggest reedbed in the UK (460 ha)
- Block Fen (Mepal Quarry) is a rare case where inert waste will be recycled to create wet grassland, creating new habitat and water capacity to relieve pressure on Ouse Washes habitat

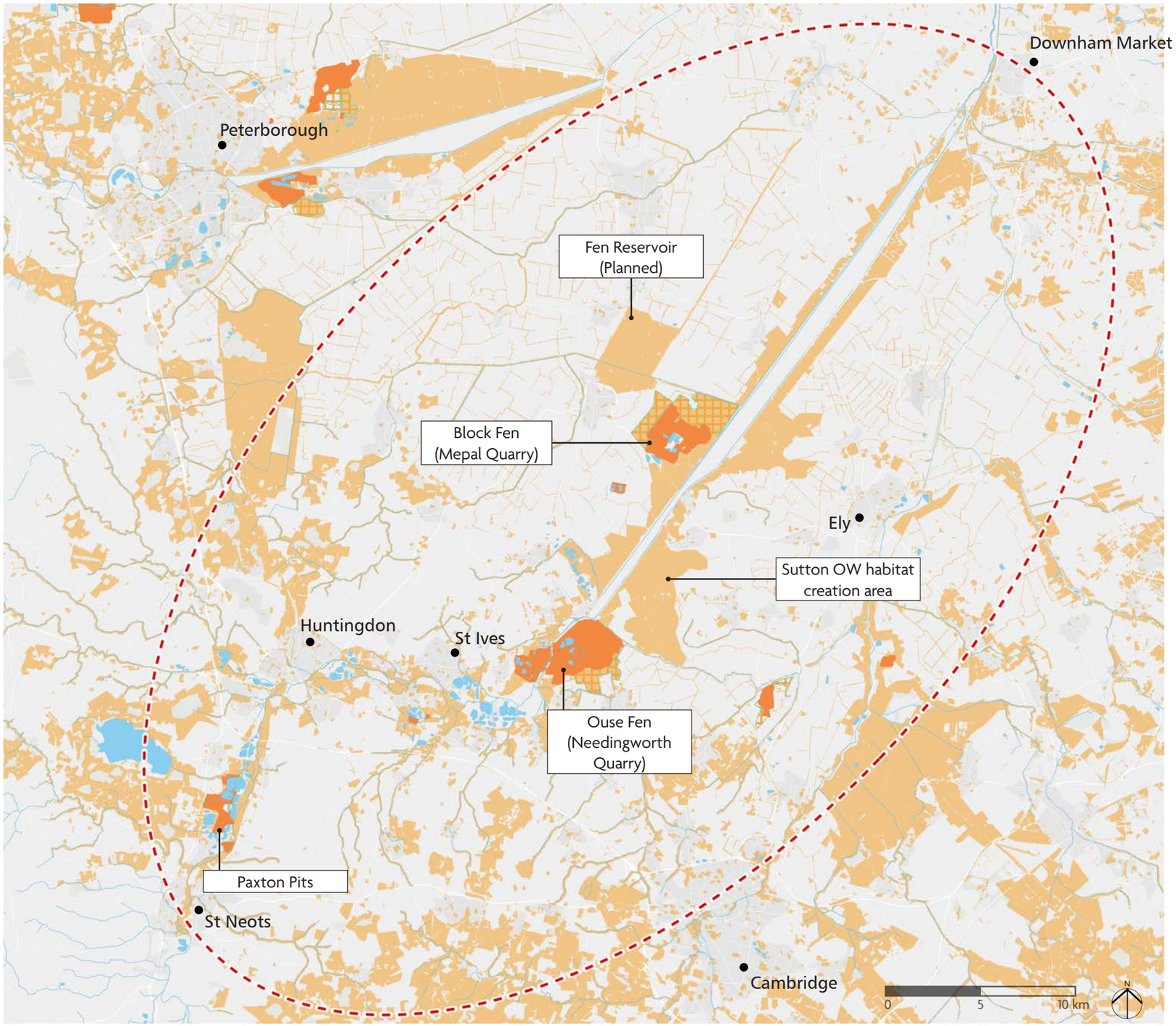


Figure 16. Map of boundary shaping elements: Areas that could become of particular importance to biodiversity and mineral extraction and allocation sites

3.4.3 Heritage and Cultural

Human influence has imprinted on the character and identity of the landscape. Watermills shaped the braiding channels of the Great Ouse. Monastics seeking isolation in the marshes created distinctive settlements and medieval market towns. These stories reflect a tradition of independence and self-determination rooted in the Valley's geography and history (Figure 17).

Landmarks such as St Ives Bridge Chapel, Houghton Mill and Ely Cathedral connect the present-day landscape with its medieval and early modern past, while the Ouse Washes stand as a nationally significant 17th-century engineering achievement in water management.

The area is known for its multiple links to Oliver Cromwell, who resided at different times in Huntingdon, St Ives and Ely. The relative isolation of the landscape was used strategically by the Parliamentarians during the Civil War. See the stage 1 report for more detail on the area's history and heritage value.

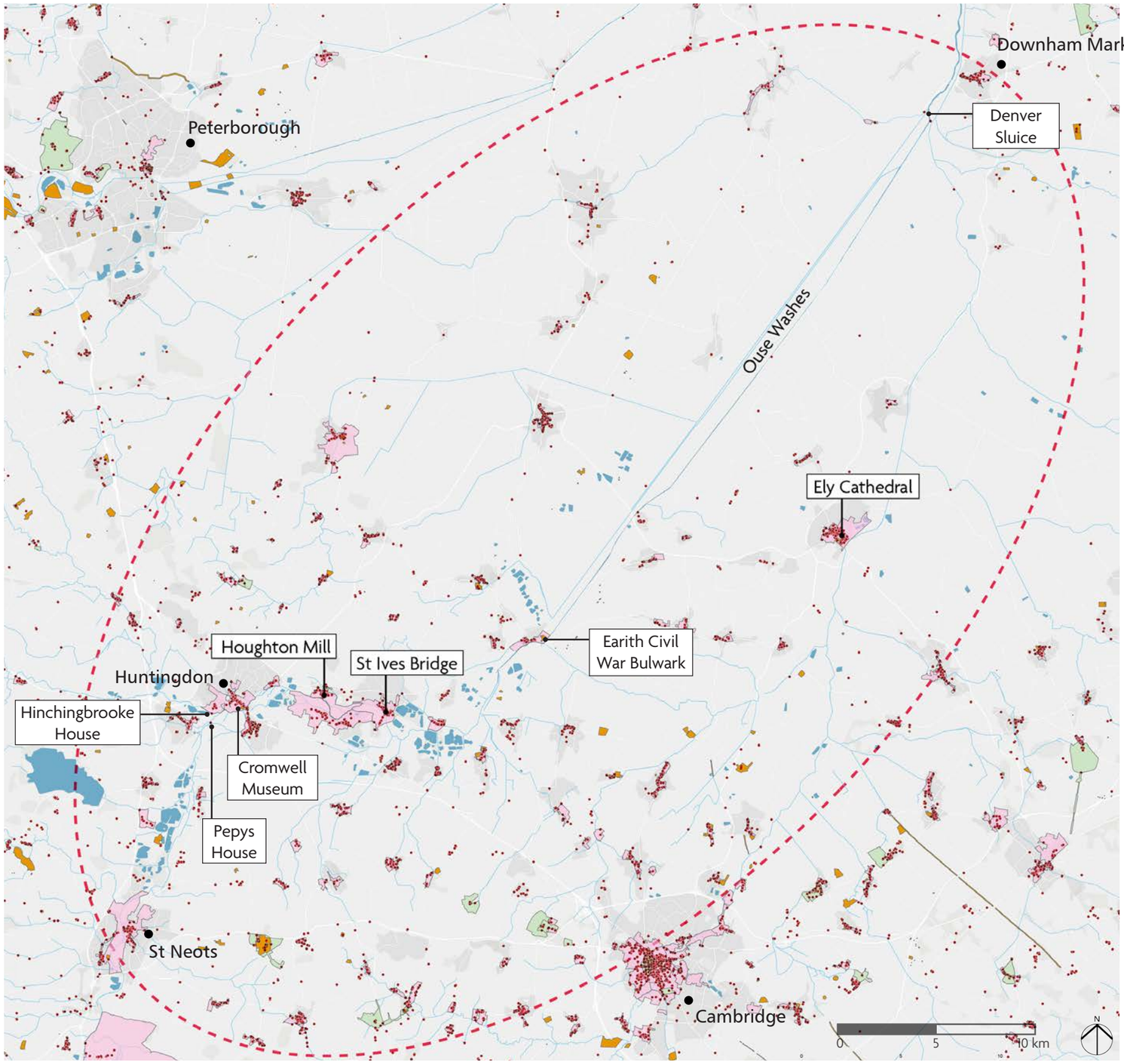


Figure 17. Map of boundary shaping elements: Heritage and cultural sites

3.4.4 Public Rights of Way and Cycle network

The presence of existing active travel networks strengthens the case for self-designation, creating direct benefits for local people by:

- Linking communities with wildlife sites and natural spaces
- Promoting healthy, active lifestyles
- Supporting sustainable everyday travel and tourism

A central feature is the Ouse Valley Way: a long-distance walking route that follows the River Great Ouse from source to sea. By connecting villages, reserves and riverside destinations, it integrates the countryside into daily life while showcasing the Valley's distinctive landscapes (Figure 18).

In 2025, the Great Ouse Valley Trust launched the "Walk the Ouse Valley Way (WOW) Day", a free annual event encouraging people to explore the trail. This initiative not only promotes health and recreation but also builds recognition of the Valley as a connected, living landscape.

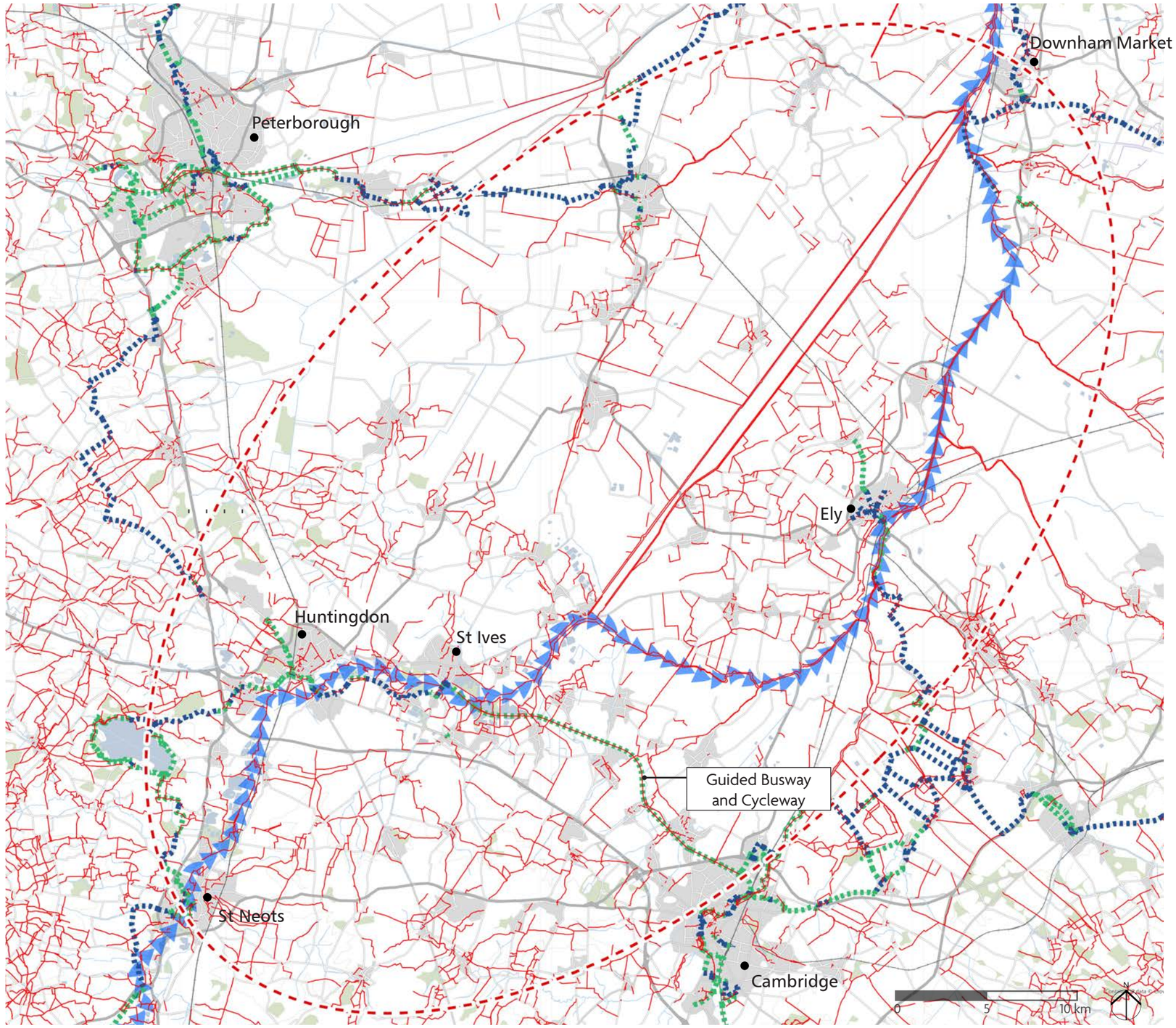


Figure 18. Map of boundary shaping elements: Public Rights of Way and Cycle network

3.4.5 Ground considerations and usage

Two additional factors shape the boundary options for self-designation: agricultural land classification (Figure 19) and flood risk (Figure 20). Both influence how land is valued, used and managed.

The Great Ouse Valley is a highly productive agricultural landscape, with extensive areas of Grade 1 land. The drained fenlands, with their rich peaty soils, are nationally important for food security and underpin intensive farming, particularly in the north of the study area.

Alongside this, areas at high risk of flooding present different opportunities. While less suitable for conventional development, they are valuable for flood attenuation, water management and habitat restoration. In contrast, land of lower agricultural grade offers greater flexibility to balance farming with landscape, heritage and biodiversity objectives.

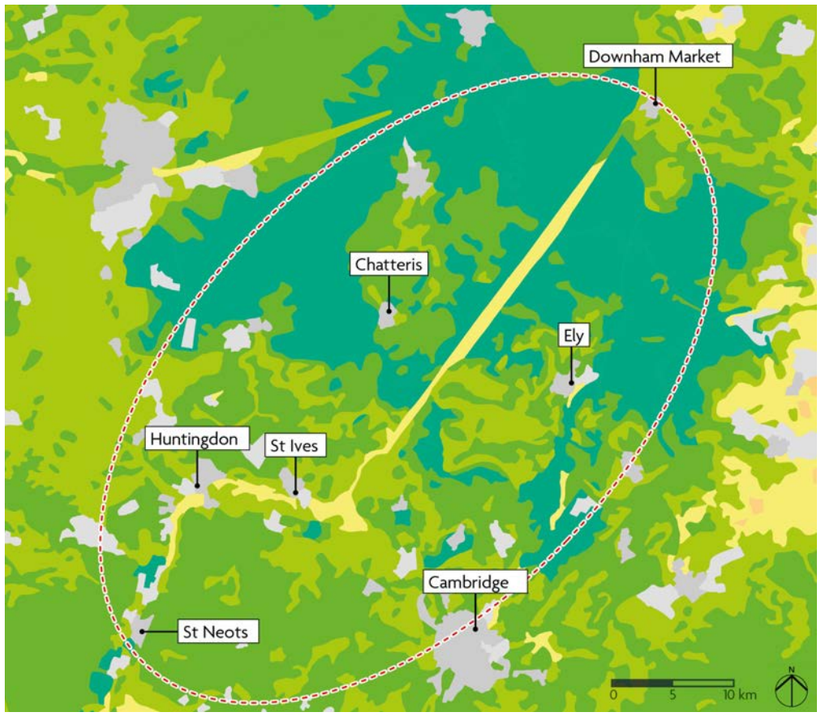


Figure 19. Agricultural land classification

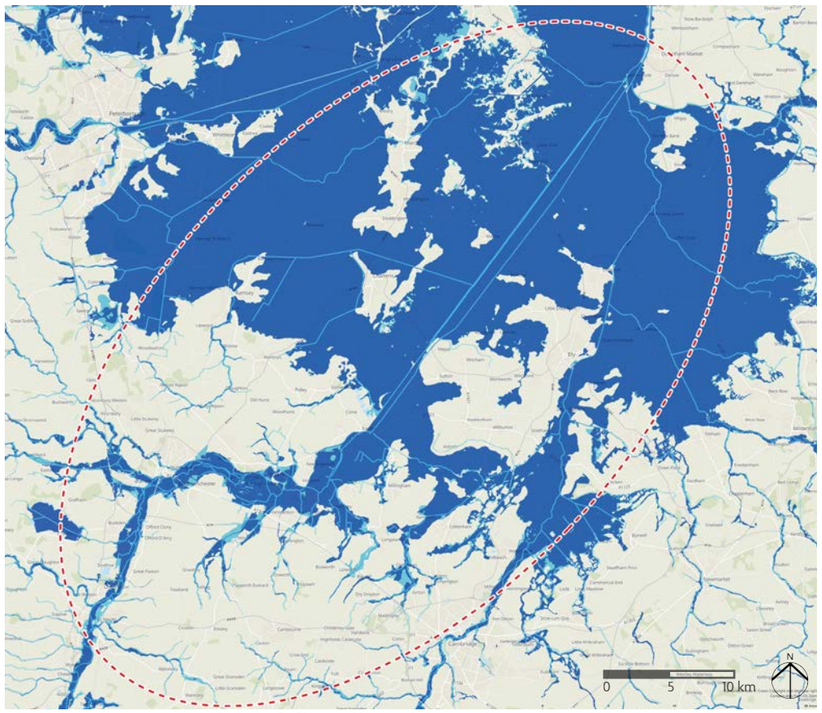
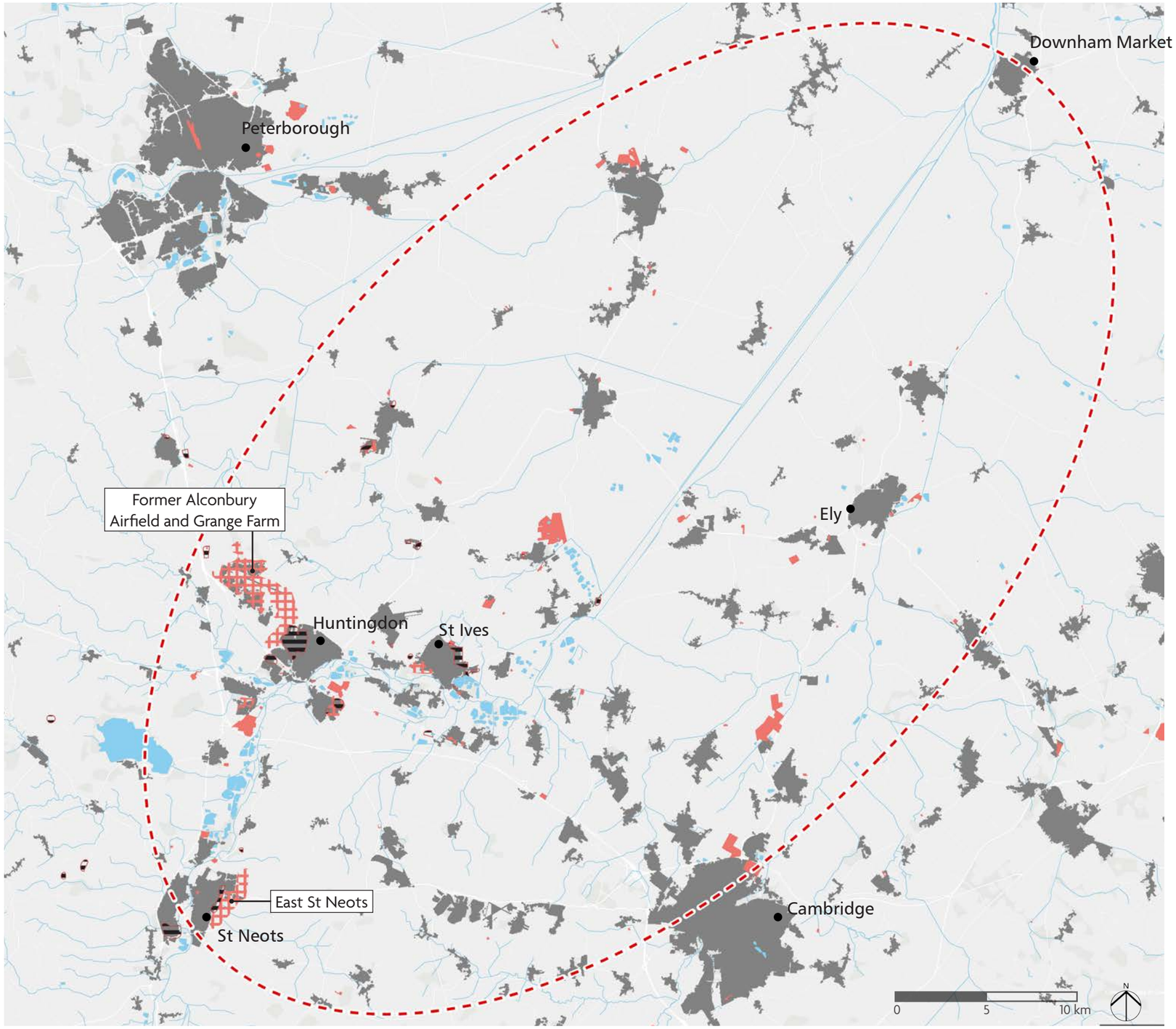


Figure 20. Risk of flooding from rivers and sea Zone 1 and 2

3.5 Exclusion elements

Exclusion elements are elements and sites which detract from landscape value and should not be included in the designation where possible. This includes built up areas (BUA) and areas for industrial use (Figure 21).

Other sites that have been excluded from the boundary include waste management areas that are not being regenerated for biodiversity, and areas that have been allocated for development as mixed use or employment areas.



Key

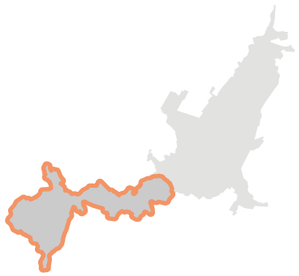
- BUA
- Waste Management Area
- HDC Allocated mixed use
- HDC Employment areas

Figure 21. Map of exclusion elements

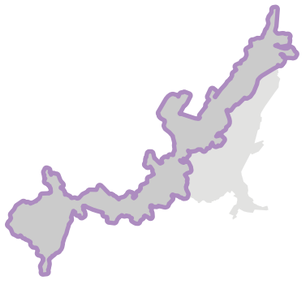
3.6 Final boundary options

The criteria were applied in the study areas to define three options for self-designation, from the minimum area to an extended area. The options are nested such that the area of the "core" option 1 is included in all options, and option 2 is also included in option 3 (Figure 22).

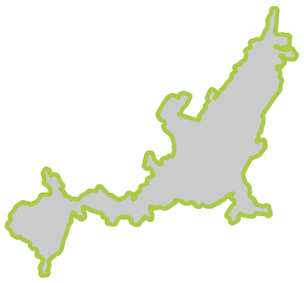
Note that these boundaries will be subject to further review and refinement, and can be adapted in the context of Local Government Reorganisation (see Section 6 - Next Steps).



Option 1: Core Great Ouse Valley



Option 2: Core Great Ouse Valley plus Ouse Washes



Option 3: Extended Great Ouse Valley, including the Ely Ouse, Fen Isles and Ouse Washes

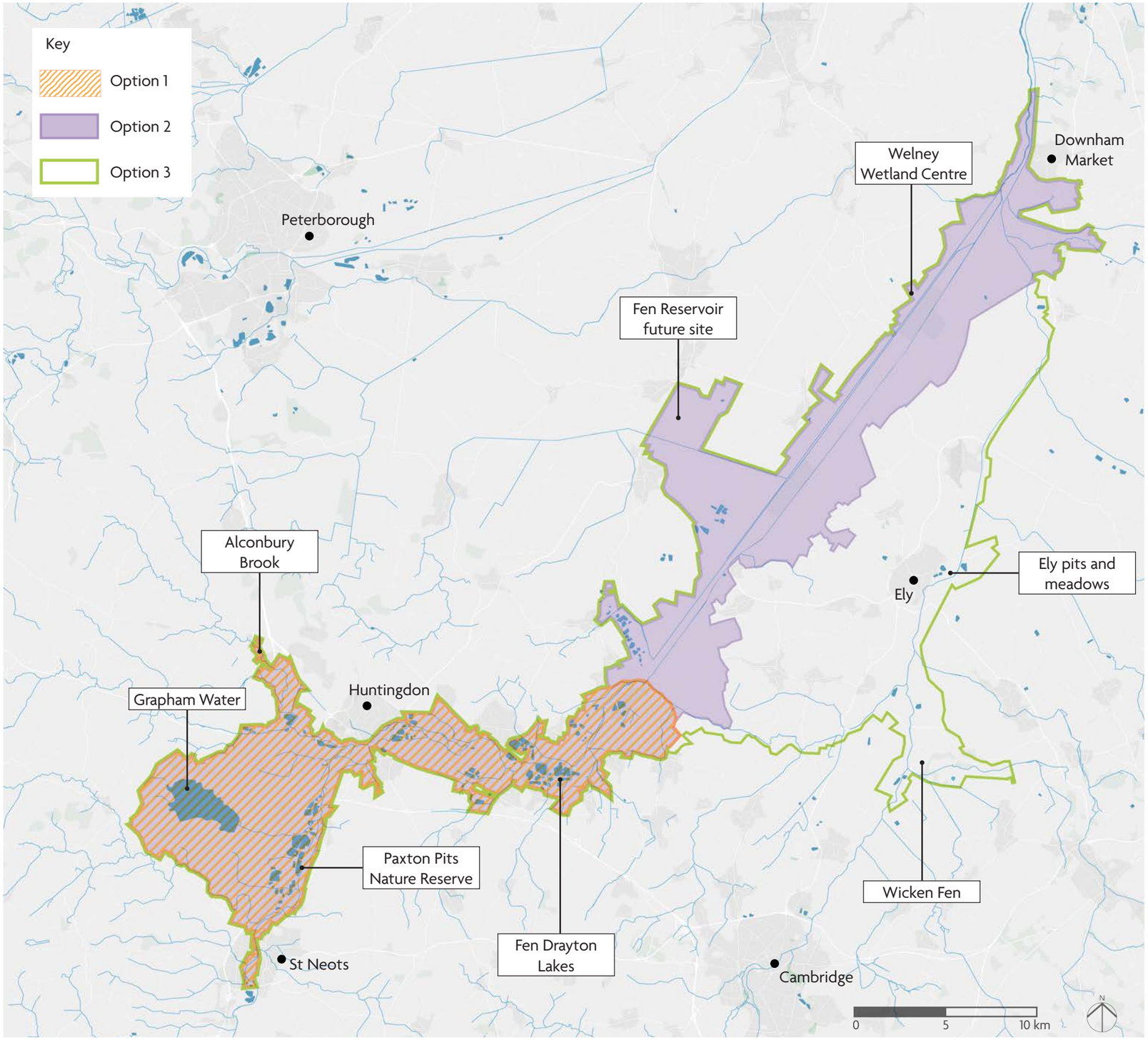


Figure 22. Map of the three nested boundary options

3.6.1 Option 1: Great Ouse Valley Core

This area, focused in the Huntingdonshire and South Cambridgeshire districts, was the original focus for the Great Ouse Valley Trust in the drive for landscape designation. In this way it is the core landscape under consideration for designation and is included within all options (Figure 23).

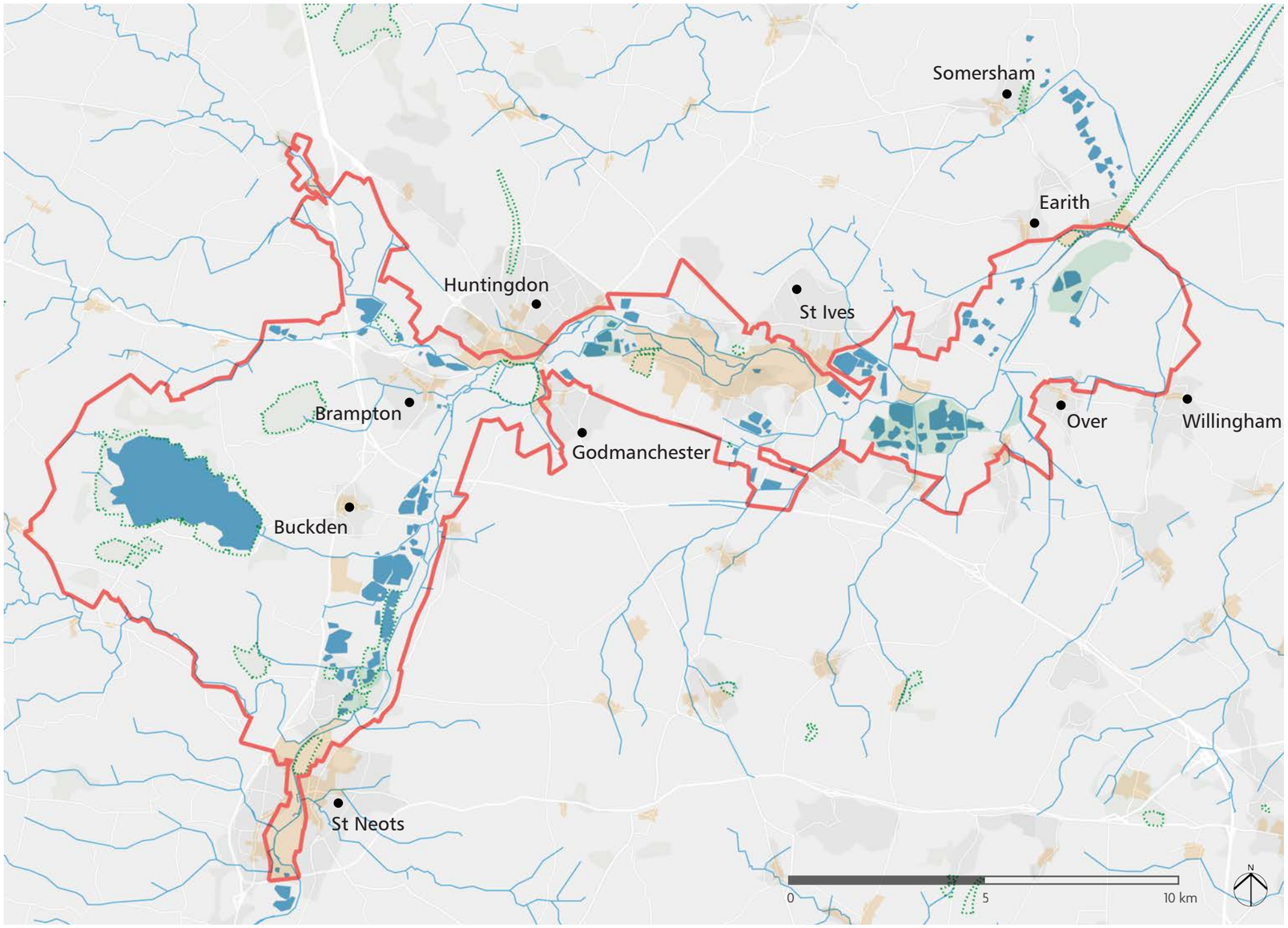
This landscape is defined by its open, low-lying terrain and strong visual and ecological relationship with the river.

The shallow valley stretches from St Neots to Earith via the historic market towns of Huntingdon and Godmanchester. Settlements are connected along the river corridor, separated by meadows and farmland.

The Great Ouse meanders southwest to northeast, through an expansive floodplain characterised by fertile alluvial soils, seasonally flooded meadows, grazing land, wetlands and lakes.

The original boundaries drawn by the trust have been assessed and refined according to the methodology outlined.

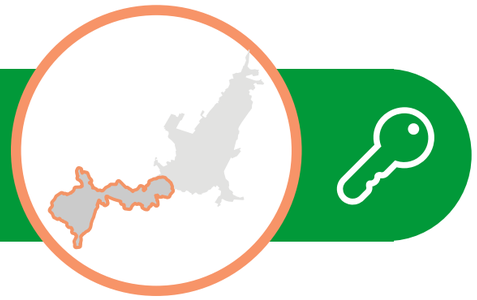
Total Area: 14,972 hectares



Key

Nature Reserve | Statutory Protected Site | Conservation Area | Waterbody

Figure 23. Option 1 overview and context



Hydrology

- Great Ouse and its braided backwaters and floodplains connect towns and villages
- Alconbury Brook and other tributaries
- Grafham Water reservoir and nature reserve
- Nature sites created through mineral extraction, restored for nature and leisure use - Paxton pits, Fen Drayton Lakes, Ouse Fen
- Seasonally flooding landscapes - wet meadow and woodland such as Houghton Meadows

Protected and important nature sites

- 13 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)
- Portholme Meadow Special Area of Conservation (SPA)
- Densely covered by nature reserves and local nature sites
- Brampton Wood - Cambridgeshire's second largest ancient woodland

Portholme Meadow

Houghton Meadow

Ouse Fen

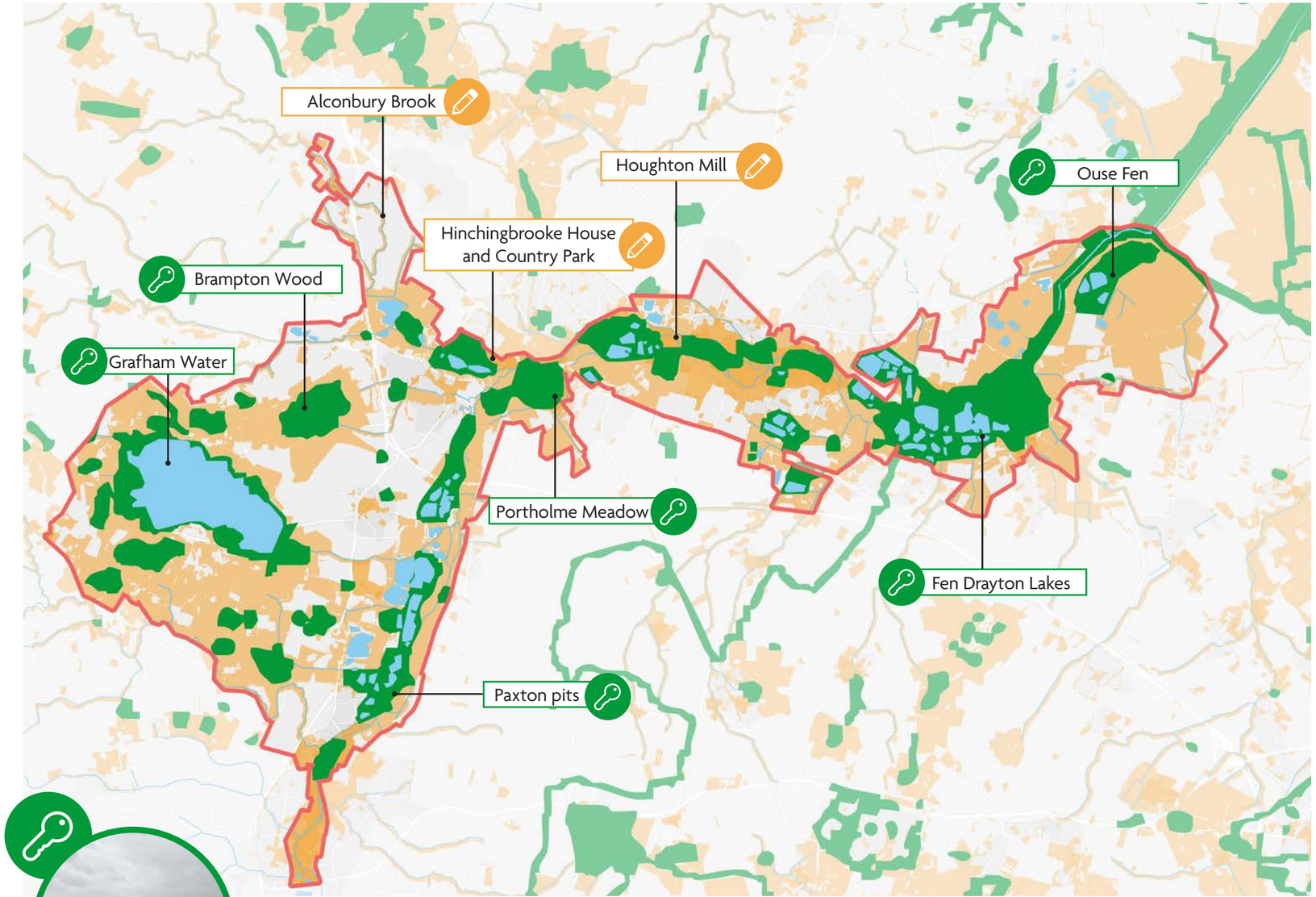


Figure 24. Option 1 inclusion and shaping elements

Heritage and culture

- National Trust Houghton Mill
- The Old Ferry Boat Inn pub, grade II listed building built in 17th Century, associated with a historic crossing
- Medieval bridges at the market towns of St Ives, Huntingdon and Godmanchester. St Ives bridge is one of few remaining bridges to have a chapel built into the bridge
- Multiple sites connected with Oliver Cromwell (Hinchingbrooke House, Cromwell museum)

Landscape and habitat restoration

- Mineral extraction from 1950s onwards has created lakes that are being restored as habitat
- Nature After Minerals partnership established to restore these sites, working with land owners throughout the process of planning, extraction and handover to charities
- Further mineral allocation areas will be restored as reedbeds, creating UK's largest reedbed habitat and creating valuable flood attenuation

Transport and rights of way

- The Ouse Valley Way runs continuously through the area
- The St Ives to Cambridge guided busway and parallel cycle route creates a sustainable travel link into the heart of the proposed area, linking through Fen Drayton lakes

18th-century working Watermill, on a site that has been milling for over 1000 years

Houghton Mill

Claims to be the oldest pub in England, and (reportedly) haunted by a ghost called Juliet

Old Ferry Boat Inn

The Huntingdonshire section of the trail hosts the annual "Walk the Ouse Valley Way" day

Ouse Valley Way

The world's longest guided busway. Parallel pedestrian and cycle route connecting Cambridge to St Ives

Busway and Cycle route

Option strengths and benefits

- High density of protected and high potential sites
- Connection of development to water
- Potential to create a sense of coherence throughout the area, highly coherent and legible as a character area
- Significant potential and plans for reed-bed expansion - 460 hectares planned at Ouse Fen will eventually make it the largest in the UK
- The Ouse Valley (with similar boundaries to this option) is already identified as a Landscape Character Area in the Local Plan (Huntingdonshire District Council)
- This option has minimal need for "wash over" land, with most fields at a smaller scale compared to the other options

Option weaknesses

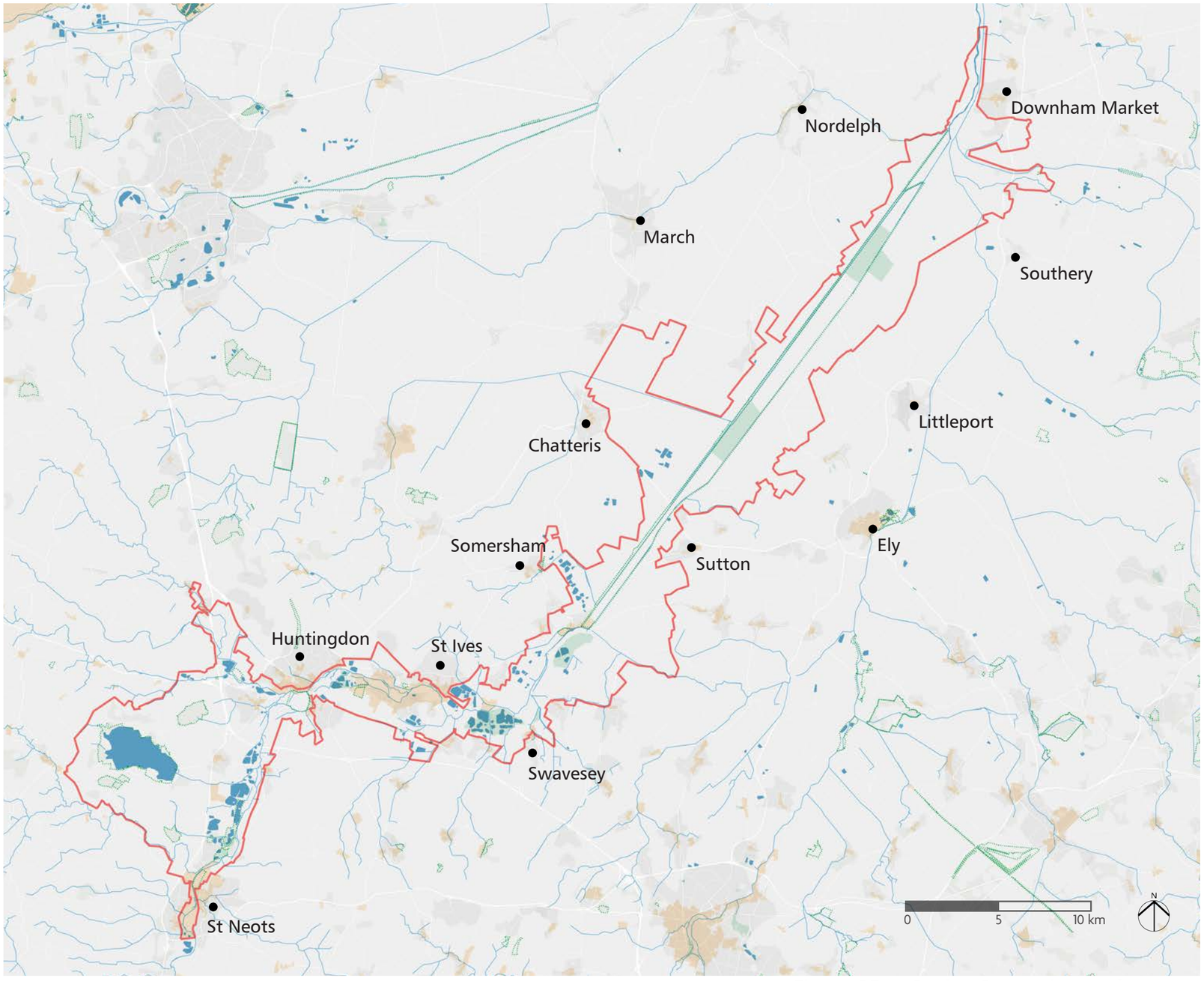
- The option area is small when compared with most mainland National Landscapes. This may hinder any future efforts to re-attempt full statutory designation if desired
- This option excludes the continuation of the valley beyond Earith towards Ely, despite strong landscape coherence along the river corridor

3.6.2 Option 2: Core Great Ouse Valley plus Ouse Washes

This option is a variation on the boundary that was submitted and considered for AONB designation in 2014. It extends beyond the core Great Ouse Valley area to include the Ouse Washes and some of its surrounds, which was the basis for the Ouse Washes Landscape Partnership.

The area has been refined according to the designation criteria and considers the future Fen Reservoir and other habitat development and restoration areas (Figure 25).

Total Area: 33,130 hectares



Key

- Nature Reserve
- Statutory Protected Site
- Conservation Area
- Waterbody

Figure 25. Option 2 overview and context

Hydrology

All features listed in option 1, plus:

- The Ouse Washes, including tidal and non tidal channel, and seadonally flooded meadows
- Fen Reservoir (planned)
- Networks of drains at field margins

Protected and important nature sites

- Ouse Washes is an internationally significant habitat with multiple statutory protections
- WWT Welney Wetland Centre is an important site for species research, conservation, protection and education
- Lowland fen remnant habitat found in places along drainage channels and tributaries

Ouse Washes[1]

WWT Welney

[1]Photo by Richard Humphrey (CC BY-SA-2.0)

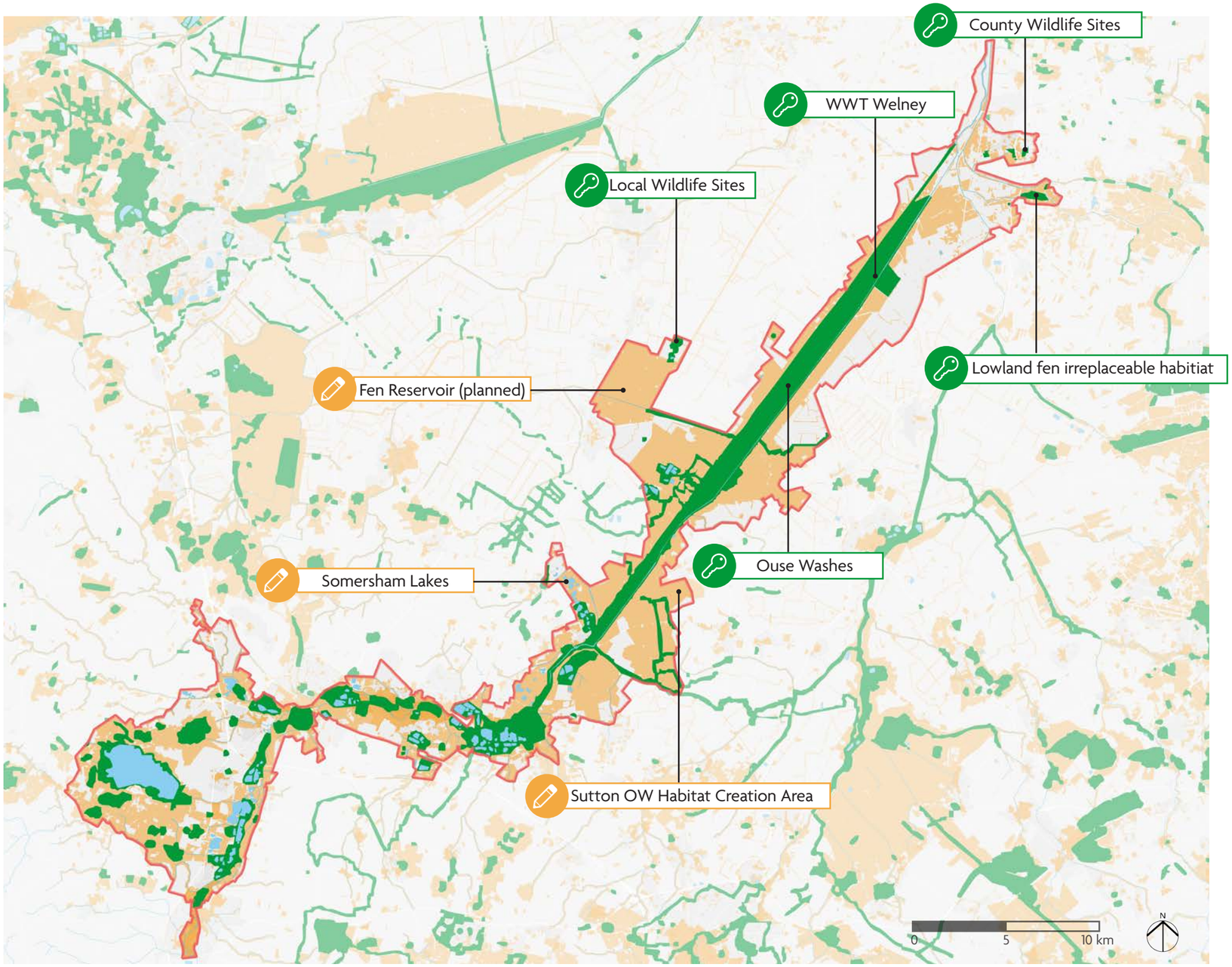


Figure 26. Option 2 inclusion and shaping elements

Heritage and culture

- Ouse Washes and drainage system is a significant feat
- Ouse Washes was also the site of the experimental Hover Train track
- Earith Civil War Bulwark at the southern end of the Ouse Washes - connecting to importance of the isolated geography in political history

Landscape and habitat restoration

- Planned Fen Reservoir creates opportunities for new habitat
- Sutton Ouse Washes Habitat Creation Area
- Habitat restoration at Block Fen mineral extraction site will create wet grassland using inert waste

Transport and rights of way

- The Ouse Valley Way is broken off shortly after Earith in this option
- Public Rights of Way extend along whole of Ouse Washes
- Potential to create new connections between villages using existing network

Some remnants of the track remain from the experimental Hover Train, tested from Earith in 1973

Hover Train

The marshlands of the fens provided a defensive barrier for parliamentarians during the civil war.

Civil War Bulwark[1]

A new reservoir with 5 km^2 water surface is planned for completion in 2036

Fen Reservoir Future Site[2]

Mineral extraction followed by restoration using inert waste will deliver 480 ha wet grassland and flood relief

Block Fen site[3]

Option strengths and benefits:

- This option has the potential to become a highly connected wetland habitat on a large scale through existing restoration efforts
- The inclusion of the Ouse Washes means that this option brings habitat with international protections: Ramsar, SAC, SPA. This habitat continues from the option 1 habitat corridor and may open international funding opportunities
- A similar area was set out as the basis of the 2014 AONB bid. This was shortlisted by Natural England, showing that this may be a future viable option for statutory designation

Option weaknesses:

- Like option 1, this option excludes the Ely Ouse / Old West River despite strong coherence with the river corridor in Huntingdonshire
- Many areas subject to future or in progress restoration of value, rather than current landscape value, with many areas currently in industrial use. Statutory designation requires that sites meet criteria in their current state, and do not allow for inclusion based on future or planned restoration

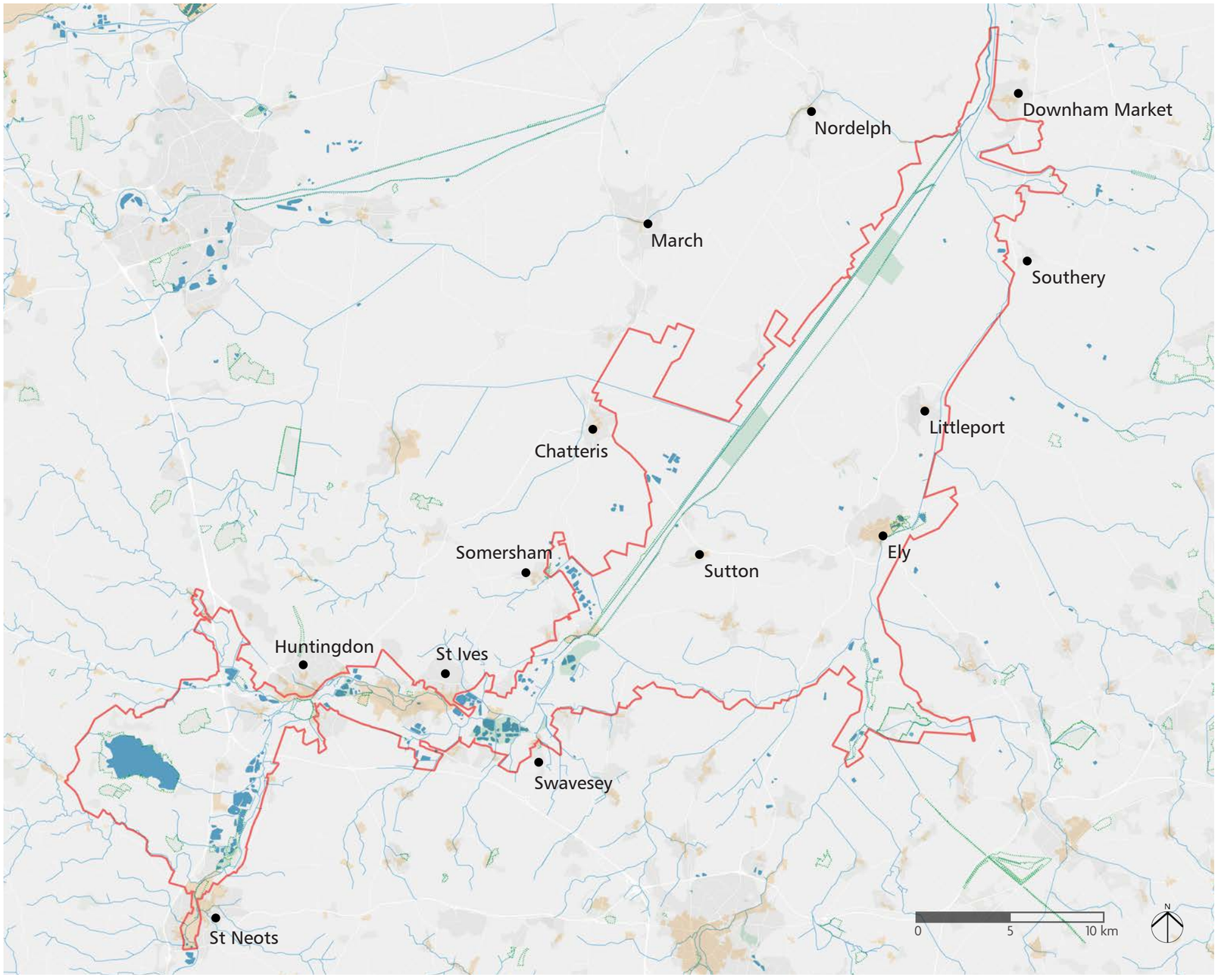
[1]Royal Commission of Historical Monuments
[2]Photo by Richard Humphreys CC BY-SA 2.0
[3]Photo by Chris CC BY-SA 2.0

3.6.3 Option 3: Extended Great Ouse Valley, including the Ely Ouse, Fen Isles and Ouse Washes

This option includes the area of the former two options, while also extending to include the River Great Ouse as it diverges from the Ouse Washes past Earith and re-converges at the Denver Sluice (Figure 27).

This section of the river is known as the "Ely Ouse" or the "Old West River" and was the focus for the "New Life on the Old West" habitat restoration project.

Total Area: 54,304 hectares



Key

- Nature Reserve
- Statutory Protected Site
- Conservation Area
- Waterbody

Figure 27. Option 3 overview and context

Hydrology

- The entire Cambridgeshire section of the River Great Ouse plus the section running through Norfolk to the Denver sluice where it reconverges with the Ouse Washes
- The Ouse Washes
- Networks of drainage channels

Protected and important nature sites

- Wicken Fen - the National Trusts oldest nature reserve, designated Ramsar site, SAC and SSSI
- Kingfisher Bridge Nature reserve and the adjoining Cam Washes - both SSSI
- Ely Pits and Meadows SSSI
- Chettisham Meadow - traditionally managed hay meadow and habitat for protected plant species

Ely Meadows

Wicken Fen[1]

[1] Photo by Stephen McKay (CC BY-SA 2.0)

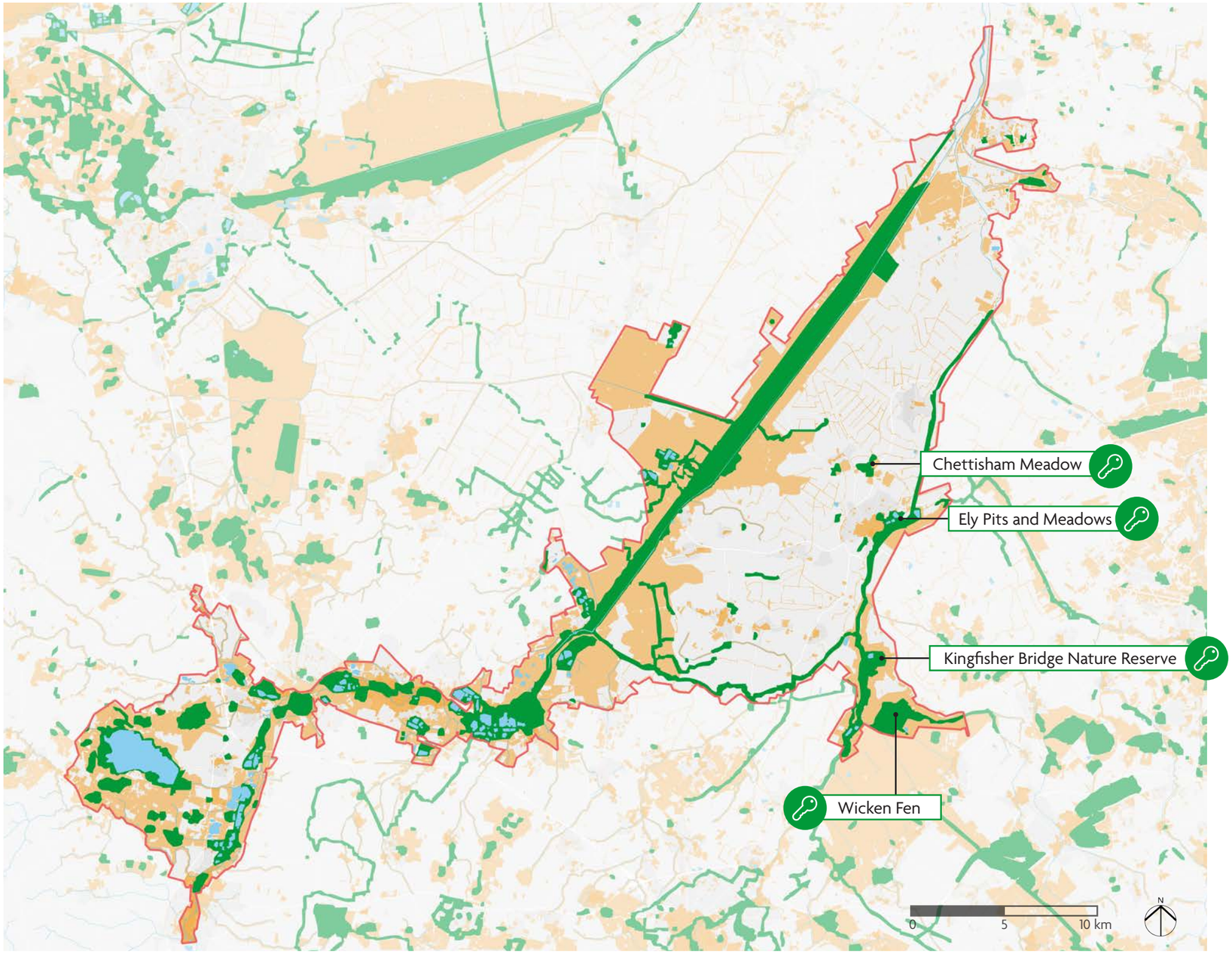


Figure 28. Option 3 inclusion and shaping elements

Heritage and culture

- The Fen Isles, once surrounded by flooding marshlands, created isolation and fostered unique ways of life
- Ely and its world famous Cathedral, visible from much of the surrounding site, relied on the river for transporting building materials to site and an economy based on eels from the river

Landscape and habitat restoration

- New Life on the Old West programme kick-started engagement with habitat restoration projects in the extended area, for example willow copse establishment at Aldreth Washlands
- LNRS identified potential to extend existing habitat sites
- Potential to restore drainage systems and hedgerow to create a robust habitat network between the main waterways

Transport and rights of way

- The Ouse Valley Way connects throughout this area, with multiple public rights of way routes connecting this to the washes public rights of way

A holy site since AD 673 when St Etheldreda established an isolated monestary, the current building (built 1083) is visible from miles around.

Ely Cathedral

The Aldreth Washlands sites was planted with willow copse as part of the New Life on the Old West programme

Aldreth Washlands[1]

The Ouse Valley Way continues past Earith, passing through Ely meadows (pictured)

Ouse Valley Way

Option strengths and benefits:

- As well as the Ouse Washes included in Option 2, this option includes a second internationally protected habitat site also connected to the Great Ouse system. Wicken Fen is a Ramsar site, SSSI and SAC
- This option includes the semi-natural continuation of the Great Ouse Valley as a continuous thread connecting the landscape
- The area contains a large portion of the Ouse Valley Way trail
- There is a strong heritage landscape connection to the Isle of Ely and the ancient site of Ely cathedral
- Multiple sites relevant to the story of Cromwell throughout the option, from his birthplace in Huntingdon, to his later living places in St Ives and Ely
- Farmland, drainage ditches and fragmented remnant fens provide an opportunity to restore important habitats while opening possible funding routes through agricultural restoration funds
- As well as the Great Ouse Valley Trust, and the Ouse Washes Landscape Partnership, this option builds on the work of the New Life on the Old West programme which stoked local engagement

Option weaknesses:

- Includes large areas of intensive agriculture, which creates the challenge of balancing needs with aesthetic and habitat value (however, agricultural land can also attract investment for sustainable agriculture and landscape restoration)

[1]Photo by Hugh Venables (CC BY-SA-2.0)

4.0 Economic Case Methodology

4.1 The economic case for self-designation

The purpose of this study is:

- To set out a high-level case for self-designation that can be presented to decision makers and stakeholders such as Local Authority leaders, MPs, ministers and business leaders.
- To create the foundations for a potential future Green Book business case, should HDC wish to proceed with the preferred option based on the benefits identified.

Nearly 25% of land within England is designated either as National Parks or National Landscapes (formerly Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs)).

The process of designation of National Landscapes by Natural England is determined by Section 82(1) of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CRoW Act). This defines a National Landscape in England (formerly AONBs) as an area with distinctive character and beauty.

They are separate from landscapes designated as National Parks (NP) and have been identified by Natural England as desirable to conserve and enhance the beauty of the area (through Part IV of CRoW Act).

It is recognised that these landscapes go beyond their aesthetic appeal and are living places that support communities through aspects such as supporting nature, food production, and supporting a healthy environment.

The process of statutory designation is thus not informed or driven by economic factors as a primary consideration.

The following section will set out methodologies from other studies which attempt to understand the economic impacts of statutory designated landscapes.

The strengths and limitations of these methodologies and their applicability for making a case for non-statutory designation are explored before they are applied to the current case in Section 5.

4.2 Review of studies of the economic value designated landscapes

The literature and research review focused on previous studies of the economic value of designated landscapes, as well as reviewing the governance and funding of existing protected landscapes.

The following studies, reports and guidance were reviewed:

- The Economic Contribution of Protected Landscapes (Cumulus Consulting, 2014)
- An assessment of the economic value of the Cotswolds AONB (Cumulus Consulting, 2013)
- Dorset's Environmental Economy: Placing and economic value on the Dorset AONB (Ash Futures Ltd, 2015)
- Contribution of the Peak District National Park to the Economy of the East Midlands (SQW Consulting, 2008)
- The Value of AONB Partnerships (LUC, 2013)
- Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty: A guide for AONB partnership members (The Countryside Agency 2001)

Making an economic case is not required as part of the statutory designation process. Therefore, no examples have been found of this being undertaken.

Economic impact studies

- Assessment of the Economic Value of the **Cotswolds AONB** (2013)
- Placing and Economic Value of the **Dorset AONB** (2015)
- Contribution of **Peak District NP** to the economy of the East Midlands (2008)
- The Value of **AONB Partnerships** (2013)

The absence of an economic dimension from the designation process means there has also been limited studies on the economic impact of existing designations. The current research uncovered only three protected landscapes which have been subject to studies on their economic value:

- Peak District NP
- Cotswolds NL
- Dorset NL

These are well-known landscapes, which have strong 'brand recognition'.

The methodologies used to measure economic impact in the three studies are similar. Each estimates the total economic value of the designated landscape (annual Gross Value Added - GVA), then, using business surveys (and a visitor survey for Dorset), calculates what portion of that value would be adversely affected by a decline in the natural landscape.

This study used the following data sets to model the existing GVA for the different areas of proposed self-designation defined in Section 3 to the following:

- **Size** (in Hectares) of the different self-designation option areas
- The **Medium Super Output Areas** (MSOA's) covered in each self-designation option area (establishing a % of coverage where MSOA's are partially covered by proposed designation)
- **Apportioned estimate of employment** for each self-designation option area by industry sector (Office for National Statistics (ONS) 2023 Business Register and Employment Survey)
- **Apportioned average GVA per job** by industry sector (East of England) for each self-designation option area ((ONS 2023 Business Register and Employment Survey)

The studies referenced above then made use of business surveys with a sample size of 155-300 businesses to establish the degree to which a deterioration in the quality of landscape would seriously impact on business performance.

Responses to the business surveys were used to allocate a percentage of an area's existing GVA to designation, on the basis that without the protection afforded by designation, the landscape would deteriorate and this portion of economic value created by business would be lost.

Approaches in common from reviewed studies:

Recognising challenges	• Data limitations • Mismatch between study areas and official ONS data sets
Capturing **direct spend and fundraising** of NL (AONB)	• Expenditure of organisation including salaries, operations etc. • Fundraising record of the AONB / NL
Capturing the **wider economy**	• Capturing GVA using available public data (ONS, Business Register and Employment Survey etc.)
Attributing % of GVA to designation	• Business Survey to ask the degree to which businesses would be impacted if the landscape were not protected.
Applying **% of businesses impacted** to the overall GVA	• To arrive at a proportion of GVA attributed to the designation
Understanding **non-monetised impacts**	• Acknowledging that there are things that we can't place a monetary value on, and articulating these

A business survey was outside the scope and budget of the current study. As a consequence, this study considered the range of impacts found in the studies that had undertaken business surveys to suggest a potential range of percentages of GVA that might be attributed to a protection of the Great Ouse landscape designation (Section 5).

4.3 Methodology for quantifying and articulating economic value

The literature revealed three principal levels on which designation can impact the local economy. This can be applied to understand the potential impact of self-designation:

1) Direct impact:

The money that a Partnership directly leverages and spends, or leverages for other organisations or businesses.

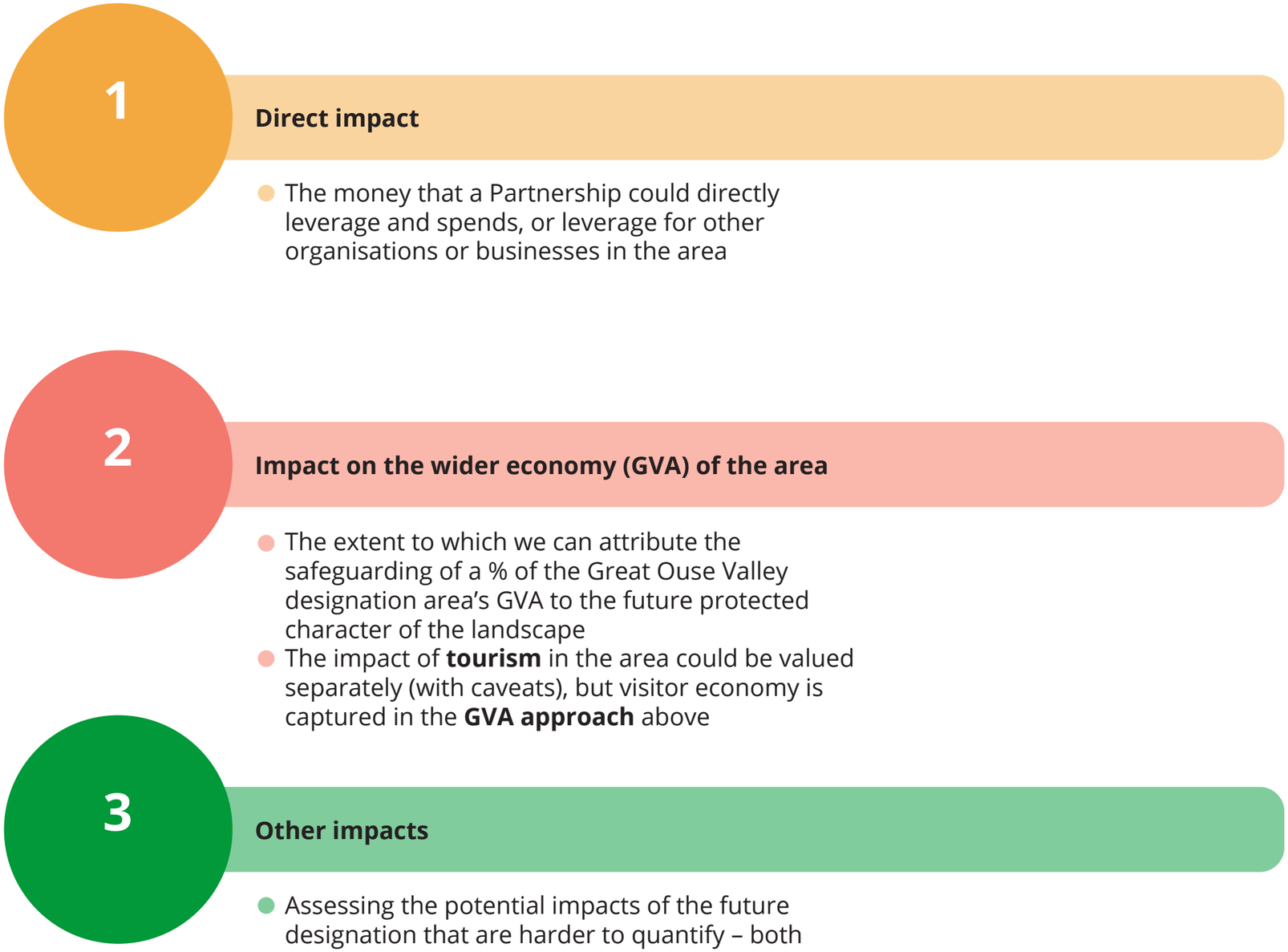
2) The impact on the wider economy (GVA) of the area:

The extent to which a proportion of the GVA of the Great Ouse Valley designation area would be safeguarded through protection and thus could be attributed to the future protected character of the landscape.

The impact of tourism in the area could be valued separately (with caveats), but the visitor economy is captured in the GVA approach above, which includes the whole of the economy

3) Other impacts:

An assessment of the potential impacts of the future designation that are harder to quantify – both positive and negative.



5.0 Economic data analysis

5.1 Direct impact

Direct impacts are dependent on the income and funding leverage capacity of the governing body of the National Landscape.

Most National Landscapes sit with lead Local Authorities, so funding details and budgets are not published. However, Cotswolds NL and Dorset NL are governed by Partnership Boards and therefore publish their financial accounts.

Data on direct spend for three National Landscapes with published accounts are presented in the charts below.

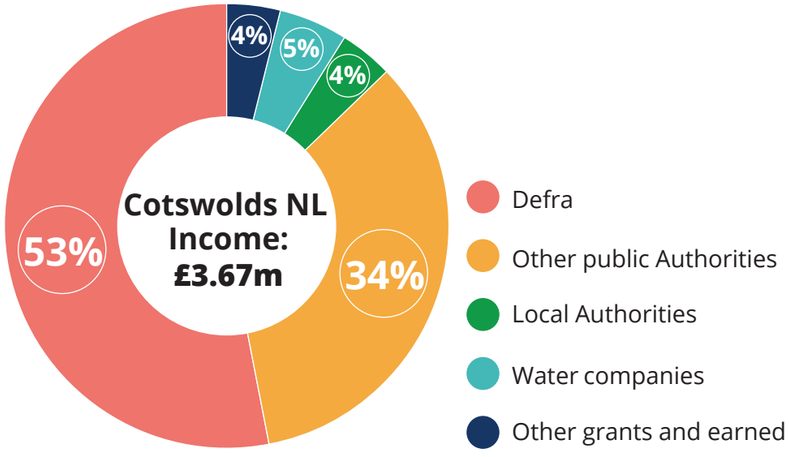
As the self-designation of the Great Ouse will not attract funding from Defra, which accounts for between 53% and 90% of income for the National Landscapes referenced, funding for a self-designated landscape will be derived primarily from partner Local Authorities and any external project funding that can be raised (e.g. from National Lottery Heritage Fund, or other lottery and charitable funds).

Dorset "added value"

"Total 'added value' makes the effective total £4,725,009; the additional £1,869,445 is derived from £128,107 in volunteer time and £1,741,338 in partner spend on joint partnership and granted projects.

Over £1.3 million of this value comes from two programmes the Partnership supported: the Peat Partnership (via a Wytch Farm grant) and the Dorset Rivers programme in which we are an active partner alongside others."

Source: Dorset National Landscape Board minutes, May 2025, p29

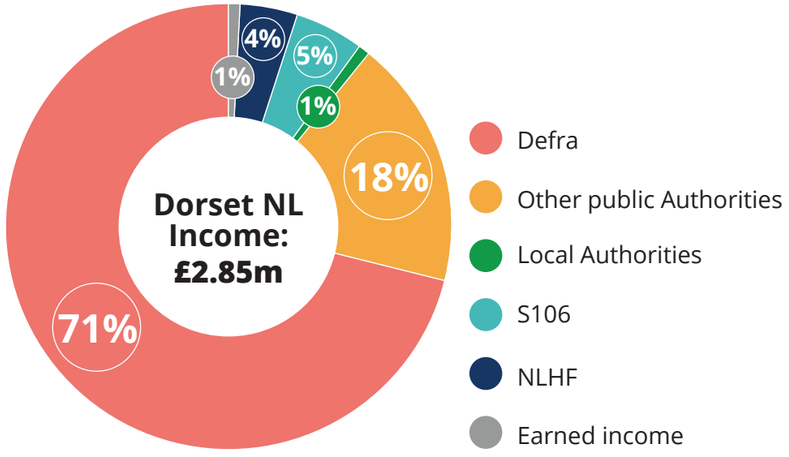


Other public agencies include:

- Natural England
- Highways England
- National Highways
- National Grid

DEFRA income includes:

- Core Grant
- FIPL
- Removing Barriers

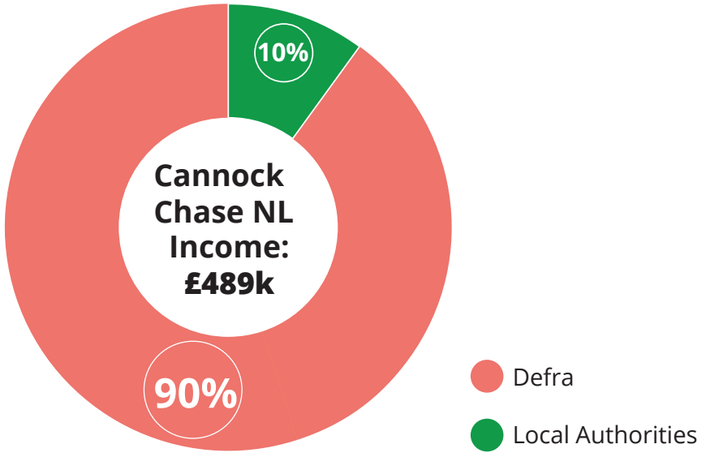


Other public agencies include:

- Environment Agency
- Forestry Commission
- National Landscapes Association
- National Grid

DEFRA income includes:

- Core Grant
- RDEL uplift
- CDEL uplift
- FIPL
- Access for All



- Mainland England's smallest National Landscape: 6,900 ha
- Total income: £489K
- £222K Revenue
- £267K Capital

Figure 29. Direct spend sources for Cotswolds, Dorset and Cannock Chase National Landscapes

5.1.1 Landscape scale and funding sources

The Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) is the primary funder of all NLs in the form of a core grant. Additional direct grants and funding NLs can leverage is also available from Defra (e.g. Farming In Protected Landscapes (FIPL)). Defra funding is only available to landscapes that are formally designated.

An analysis of income data for the Cotswolds, Dorset, and Cannock Chase NLs indicates a correlation between landscape scale and reliance on Defra funding.

The Cotswolds, being the largest of the three, benefits from its size and organisational capacity to secure a higher proportion of non-Defra funding. In contrast, Cannock Chase, with its smaller area and more limited organisational resources, generates significantly less non-Defra income.

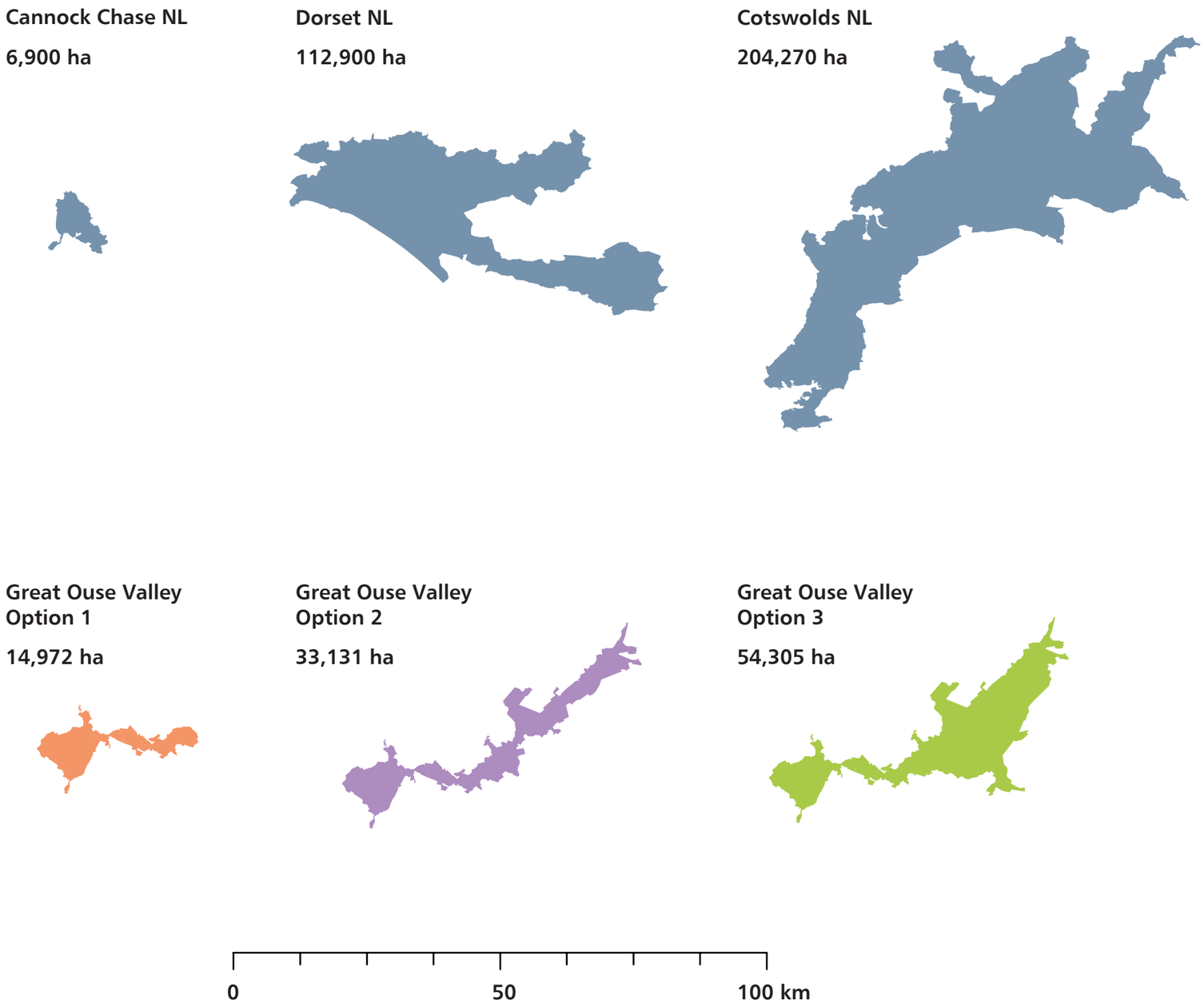


Figure 30. National Landscapes and designation options scale comparison

5.2 Impacts on the wider economy

The methodology and data of previous studies (listed in section 4.1) have been used to estimate the range of possible value of landscape designation to the local economy of the self-designation options.

The following process was followed:

1. Defining the extent (%) of each of the Medium Super Output Areas (MSOAs) covered by each option

2. Estimating the total current GVA of each of the options, by apportioning the total GVA of each MSOA by the % covered by the option

3. Assigning a proportion of GVA of each option to the quality of the landscape (that would be protected by designation)

1. Defining the areas

The options (see Section 3) were mapped using GIS and overlaid with a map of MSOAs. The area of overlap with each MSOA was calculated for each option. Appendix 2 sets out the full list of MSOAs covered by each option.

2. Estimating the current GVA

A GVA estimate for each of the options has been calculated by apportioning GVA per job to the MSOAs, and calculating the pro rata GVA for each MSOA, accounting for the % of each MSOA covered in each option area.

To estimate GVA per job in each MSOA, we have used the most recently published ONS Business Register and Employment Survey counts to calculate jobs by industrial group in each MSOA, and apportioned a GVA

Defining the area(s) by MSOAs → **Estimating current GVA** → **Assigning proportion of GVA to designation**

KPI	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3
Size (Hectares)	14,972	33,131	54,305
MSOAs covered (in part or full)	21	30	37
Employment (apportioned estimate)	20,083	25,267	37,614
Annual employment pay (estimate)	£650,148,793	£808,053,092	£1,205,868,928
Annual direct GVA (estimate) - see below	£1,573,217,148	£1,979,040,349	£2,882,717,531

Table 1. Estimated current GVA for each option

Annual Direct GVA by Local Authority (£m est.)	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3
Bedford	0	0	0
East Cambridgeshire	0	136	985
Fenland	-	120	120
Huntingdonshire	1,457	1,526	1,526
King's Lynn and West Norfolk	-	77	91
South Cambridgeshire	117	119	161
Total	**1,573**	**1,979**	**2,883**

Table 2. Estimated GVA for each option by local authority coverage

* GVA estimate derived from apportioning GVA per job (East of England ONS data) to Business Register and Employment Survey counts in MSOAs, and prorating each MSOA result according to coverage in Option areas

per job using ONS GVA and job counts per industrial group for the East of England.

Table 1 shows data for an apportioned estimates of enterprises, employment and annual employment pay for each option area. Table 2 shows the annual direct GVA of each local authority apportioned by the extent covered by each option area.

3. Assigning a proportion of GVA to landscape protection

The studies reviewed undertook business surveys to attribute the impact of conserving a designated landscape on the wider economy (measured as GVA).

The surveys asked businesses the degree to which a deterioration in the quality of the landscape would seriously affect their business performance.

The studies then allocated a % of the area's estimated total GVA to the designation based on responses from businesses (refined by sector in some cases).

In other studies surveys are carried out by telephone with sample sizes of between 155 (Dorset) and 300 (Peak District) businesses. The National Park report includes the survey questions used.

A business survey is outside the scope of the current study but will be valuable in future to capture the potential impact of self-designation.

In the absence of a bespoke survey, the range of percentages from the reviewed studies are used to suggest a range of potential impact of each of the options.

Cotswolds AONB study (2013) - % businesses seriously affected by a deterioration in landscape quality:

- Accomodation and Food services - 32.5%
- Rest of the economy - 12%
- Overall average - 13%

Peak District National Park study (2008) - % businesses seriously affected by a deterioration in landscape quality:

- Proportion of businesses who feel their performance would be 'seriously affected' by a deterioration in landscape quality - 40%

A limitation of applying this approach is that these surveys applied to existing long-established designated National Landscapes with high levels of awareness. Additionally these surveys were taken over ten years ago.

It should also be considered that at this stage, there may be limited awareness of the quality and benefits of the Great Ouse Valley as one coherent landscape among local people and businesses. This is owing to how the landscape is currently accessed and understood as seperate, disconnected sites. Therefore, the value of the wider connected landscape may not be fully and accurately captured through surveying business owners.

However, from the previous studies we can suggest that a range between 5 to 30% of annual GVA gives a sense of the range of economic value that could be allocated as a result of landscape protection.

Given the recognition factor noted above, it is perhaps more likely that the economic value of the protection of the Great Ouse landscape would be in the lower range (see Table 3) which accounts for upwards of £78.66m of annual GVA.

	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3
5%	78.66	98.95	144.14
10%	157.32	197.90	288.27
15%	235.98	296.86	432.41
20%	314.64	395.81	576.54
25%	393.30	494.76	720.68
30%	471.97	593.71	864.82

Table 3. Potential range of annual GVA % allocated to landscape protection (£m)

5.3 Effects on tourism and the visitor economy

The value of the Visitor Economy is contained within the GVA set out above, as GVA figures account for the value of the whole economy, including tourism.

However, the Scarborough Tourism Economic Activity Monitor (STEAM) methodology (Global Tourism Solutions Licenced Model - see Figure 31) provides an alternative standalone approach to capturing the value of the visitor economy, should there be a need to isolate this element.

Figure 32 sets out the 2024 metrics for STEAM data (commissioned by HDC) across Huntingdonshire. This suggests that the visitor economy across the district resulted in £278 million in direct visitor expenditure and supported 2,639 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) employment.

The Dorset study referenced above models the extent to which National Landscape designation is a factor affecting levels of visitation, based on a visitor survey. That survey found that 47% of visitors to Dorset considered the designation to be partly, greatly or wholly the reason for their visit. The Dorset model suggested that National Landscape designation influenced approximately £67 million in value added from visitor expenditure per annum.

This study does not include or have access to any visitor survey data and the STEAM data referenced above relates solely to Huntingdonshire and not to the other local authority MSOA's that fall within self-designation option areas 2 and 3.

The use of STEAM data could also double-count visitor economy values that are already captured in the GVA calculation. STEAM data is thus referenced as a potential alternative approach to modelling visitor economy benefits separately.

STEAM Methodology:

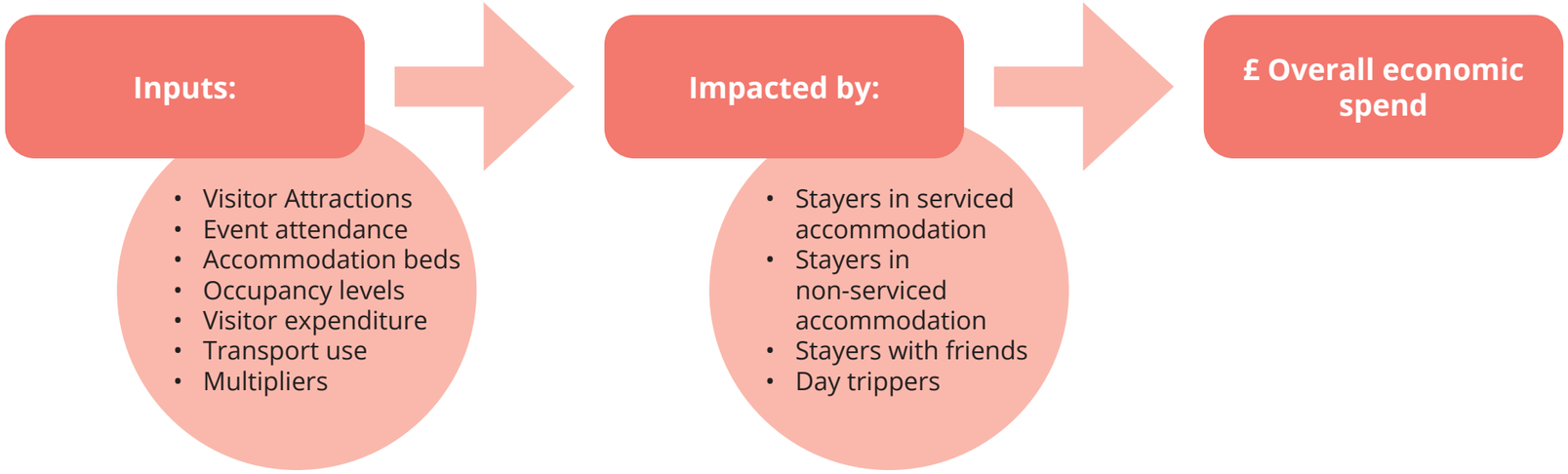


Figure 31. STEAM methodology

Huntingdonshire STEAM data key metrics:

Figure 32. STEAM key metrics for Huntingdonshire

Attributing to Designation/ Landscape Protection?

- Visitor Survey as per Dorset AONB study
- Or tracking STEAM change over time (but landscape protection would not be the only growth factor)

5.5 Non-monetised impacts and benefits

Designation Policy / Action	Potential impacts and benefits	
Planning policy, Development Control and associated policies such as transport & housing	Some restrictions to land use and development / additional planning conditions, potential limits to some business types	Encourages compatible business growth, attractive to potential employees / residents, promotes sustainable travel and affordable housing
Land management policy and activities	Scheme payments, grants and support, more sustainable systems, training, new enterprises and economic and environmental performance	
Conservation, landscape and environmental enhancement, increased understanding and enjoyment	Encourages wealthier residents to move to an area, could increase property prices (which may reduce ability of existing communities to stay in an area)	Attracts / retains staff, quality of life improvements, health and well-being benefits for residents, learning outcomes, volunteering, active citizenship
Sustainable tourism strategy and activities	Impact of increased visitor numbers	Promotes sustainable business practices, sustainable transport, potential to increase visitor numbers

Figure 33. Non-monetised benefits of designation examples

5.6 Costs of managing a self-designated landscape

The costs of administering a designated landscape will vary according to the scale and type of the designated area. Table 4 sets out the costs per hectare of the Cotswolds, Dorset and Cannock Chase National Landscapes.

A self-designated Great Ouse Valley landscape will depend wholly on income from local authorities and from external funding sources, which will affect revenue sources. The form of governance and levels of partnership working can also influence the funding sources that might be available. For example, funding can be sought through partnerships with town/parish councils, local authorities, individuals, businesses, water companies and charitable organisations.

The three self-designation option areas developed in Section 3 are more analogous in scale with Cannock Chase and Dorset than with the Cotswolds. As a consequence, we have considered what the operational costs might be using these two benchmarks – £25.29 per hectare and £32.17 per hectare – giving total annual operating costs of between £481,599 and £1,373,504.

In 2024/25 the 'core budget' for Cannock Chase NL (i.e. the cost of salaries and other running costs) was £252K. This suggests that a figure in this region is likely to be the minimum 'core' budget a protected landscape can operate on. This would provide a basis for trying to lever in further external funding or investment.

Table 5 uses the percentages and total attributable direct GVA values to show the estimated values across each of the self-designation option areas.

5.6.1 Core spending and indicative minimum budget

As the smallest National Landscape in mainland England, Cannock Chase provides an indication of the minimum budget needed to manage a designated landscape.

In 2025-26 Cannock Chase NL budgeted £221K on core budget and baseline revenue projects, with the majority of this spent on staffing and administration costs (£197K). Capital project spending in the same year is budgeted to be £266K.

The core spend can be taken as a minimum cost because, a certain amount of staff time is needed both for the day-to-day running of the designated landscape, as well as for identifying and leveraging external funding sources and managing volunteers.

Given that Option 2 spans around 33,000 hectares—roughly five times the size of Cannock Chase (7,000 hectares)— a larger core budget is likely to be necessary to ensure sufficient organisational capacity to secure the additional funding required annually.

- The costs of delivering a National Landscape vary depending on scale and type
- Looking at the three case studies, we can suggest a cost range for the three Great Ouse option areas

Designated National Landscape	Area (Ha)	Revenue (£)	Cost per Ha
Cotswolds	204,000	3,673,043	£18.01
Dorset	112,900	2,855,564	£25.29
Cannock Chase, Revenue and Capital	6,900	488,920	£70.86
Cannock Chase, Revenue Only	6,900	221,950	£32.17

Table 4. Existing studied NLs costs comparison

	Area (Ha)	Revenue (£)	Cost per Ha
Option 1	14,972	£32.17	£481,599
Option 2	33,130	£32.17	£1,065,682
Option 3	54,304	£32.17	£1,746,779

	Area (Ha)	Revenue (£)	Cost per Ha
Option 1	14,972	£25.29	£378,685
Option 2	33,130	£25.29	£837,952
Option 3	54,304	£25.29	£1,373,504

Table 5. Options estimated costs comparison

5.7 Options cost and value comparison

In order to assess the overall business case in respect of GVA for each of the three option areas, the suggested cost range for each option area has been compared with the range of economic benefits detailed in Table 3. A maximum cost to minimum value ratio has then been calculated (Figure 34, overleaf).

5.7.1 Option recommendations

All three options for the Great Ouse protected landscape deliver substantial value, each demonstrating a strong cost-to-value ratio.

Option 1 achieves the highest ratio due to its coverage of an area with a higher concentration of economic activity compared to the others.

However, as economic value is not the primary criterion for designation, we recommend Option 2 as the preferred choice for the following reasons, offering:

- Area of continuous habitat with existing internationally designated sites, existing restoration projects and areas with high potential for restoration
- Established visitor attractions throughout with good potential to attract further sustainable tourism
- A scale that is comparable with other National Landscapes, making future statutory designation more feasible

Using a cost-per-hectare approach, Option 2 would require a higher annual budget than Option 1 (estimated between £830,000 and £1.07 million).

For comparison, the 2025/26 Cannock Chase NL budget indicates that approximately £250,000 per year (out of a total annual budget of c.£500,000) is needed

Option 1

Suggested cost range:
£378K - £481K p.a.

Comprising:
c. £200K + of salaries and core costs
c. £200K + of project costs

Economic value of landscape protection range:
£78m - £471m p.a.

Max cost to min value ratio: **1:156**

Option 2

Suggested cost range:
£837K - £1.06m p.a.

Economic value of landscape protection range:
£98m - £593m p.a.

Max cost to min value ratio: **1:92**

Option 3

Suggested cost range:
£1.3m - £1.75m p.a.

Economic value of landscape protection range:
£144m - £864m p.a.

Max cost to min value ratio: **1:82**

Figure 34. Options costs and value comparison

to cover costs for core staff and administration (which is a smaller protected landscape than the option areas presented in this study).

Given that Option 2 spans around 33,000 hectares—roughly five times the size of Cannock Chase (7,000 hectares)— a larger core budget would be necessary to ensure sufficient organisational capacity to secure the additional funding required annually.

5.7.2 Phased approach

A further option is to adopt a phased approach to self-designation, starting with the Option 1 area and expanding over time to Options 2 and 3 following additional assessment and stakeholder engagement. This would allow Option 3 to remain a bold long-term ambition, while providing a practical and affordable pathway to early delivery.

Under this model, Option 1 becomes Phase 1: a manageable, locally led starting point capable of demonstrating visible progress. Phases 2 and 3 (reflecting Options 2 and 3) could then come forward as partnerships mature and as greater clarity emerges from local government reorganisation.

A phased approach enables piloting, testing and learning, allowing the designation to evolve as evidence and relationships grow. However, it may limit the clarity of identity and reduce the benefits that come from adopting a single, cohesive landscape-wide designation from the outset.

5.8 Governance and Delivery Options

5.8.1 Governance framework for National Landscapes in England

Designated National Landscapes (NLs) typically have small staff teams and their work is governed by a Joint Advisory Committee or Executive Board representing local authorities, parish councils, landowners and partner organisations.

Each NL must have a management plan which must be in place within 3 years of a designation. A review must take place within 5 years of the start of the plan.

Organisations represented on NL committees or boards don't necessarily own land within the designation themselves, however they work with their stakeholders and partners (including for example farmers, landowners, district and parish councils, organisations such as the RSPB and National Trust) to coordinate work across the whole area. Their functions include managing partnerships and projects, securing funding, and delivering the Management Plan.

The governance structures vary based on the size, complexity, and administrative boundaries of each National Landscape, but all operate through partnerships involving local authorities, communities, and stakeholders to deliver their statutory purposes of conserving and enhancing natural beauty.

5.8.2 Governance models for National Landscapes

There are three main governance models for National Landscapes in England:

- **Joint Advisory Committees (JACs)** e.g. Cannock Chase National Landscape
- **Conservation Boards** e.g. Cotswolds National Landscape
- **Partnership/Executive Boards** e.g. Dorset National Landscape

Joint Advisory Committees (JACs)

Most National Landscapes operate under this model, where NLs in general remain the responsibility of their local authorities by means of special committees. Committee membership is appointed by the constituent local authorities. In this model staff responsible for the delivery of the NL are generally employed via a host authority.

Cannock Chase NL is governed through a Joint Committee, a decision-making body made up of representatives from the five local authorities covering the area (Staffordshire County Council, Cannock Chase District Council, Stafford Borough Council, Lichfield District Council and South Staffordshire District Council), which formally approves and oversees the National Landscape Management Plan.

Conservation Boards

Only two National Landscapes have this special status in which they are governed by their own statutory bodies: The Cotswolds NL and the Chilterns NL.

Both Conservation Boards were created in 2004 following the introduction of The Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000, which enabled local authorities to request that Parliament establish a Conservation Board in cases where NLs cross several administrative boundaries.

The Cotswolds National Landscape is governed by a Conservation Board established by Parliamentary Order. Its Board comprises members from local authorities, parish councils, and government appointees, with statutory duties under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act.

This Board has responsibility for preparing and adopting the statutory Management Plan and overall governance of the landscape.

Partnership/Executive Boards

The team's work is governed by the National Landscape Partnership Board, a non-statutory body. The NL's team work with partners to coordinate conservation and enhancement of the area on behalf of local authorities, with whom legal responsibility sits.

Dorset NL is governed by a Partnership Board that brings together local authorities, statutory agencies, conservation organisations, landowner representatives and others. This Partnership Board oversees delivery of the National Landscape Management Plan and guides the work of the Dorset National Landscape team.

5.8.3 Possible governance options for self-designation

There are three main options for delivering and governing the self-designated landscape:

- Governance by a single local authority
- Governance by a dedicated external organisation
- Governance through creation of a formal Statutory Joint Committee

Governance by a single local authority

This option would mirror the structure of a Joint Advisory Committee for National Landscapes in which the management of the landscape remains the responsibility of one local authority (e.g. Huntingdonshire District Council, or a successor body in the future).

The local authority would employ a core team and manage the budget. An advisory committee would be established to coordinate partnerships and provide oversight.

This is the simplest model to establish and benefits from the host authority's existing infrastructure. However, the partnership is also constrained by the authority's funding rules and cannot easily access charitable grants or seek private donations. In terms of costs, staff would also fall within set local authority pay bands with higher pension and employment costs than typically found in the charitable / third sector.

If the self-designation crosses multiple local authority boundaries, decisions must be ratified by each separate Council, making cross-boundary coordination difficult and slow. Furthermore, uncertainty regarding the structure and boundaries of local authorities due to Local Government Reorganisation could destabilise this structure.

Governance by a dedicated external organisation

In this independent model, the self-designation is governed by a dedicated external organisation. This mirrors the structure of a partnership or executive board for a National Landscape.

An independent legal entity – potentially with charitable status – with a partnership board would be established and populated by stakeholders including representatives from relevant local authorities.

In the case of the Great Ouse Valley, the existing Great Ouse Valley Trust could (subject to the approval of its board and the Charity Commission) transition from being a campaigning body to being an operational delivery organisation.

A small core team of staff hired by the organisation would identify funding opportunities, manage projects and be accountable for delivering the management plan.

This model offers financial flexibility by opening up avenues to seek funding that local authorities cannot access. It may open the door to larger and diverse funding streams such as Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG), private sector funding and grants from bodies like the National Lottery Heritage Fund. Additionally its staff costs and overheads could be smaller than those implied by a local authority model.

This approach also provides independence from the local electoral cycle and bureaucratic restrictions, potentially enabling more agile working. This would allow the organisation to focus purely on landscape conservation and management. However, as an independent organisation, it would have no direct statutory powers and would have to rely entirely on Memoranda of Understanding and partnership agreements with the local authorities.

Governance through the creation of a formal Statutory Joint Committee

Under Section 101 of the Local Government Act 1972, local authorities are able to formally delegate their relevant permissive functions to a Joint Committee.

Multiple participating local authorities can therefore establish a dedicated statutory mechanism for formal, cross-boundary decision making, despite the fact that the designation itself is non-statutory.

The advantage of this model is that it would provide a single decision-making body that is legally binding on all delegating authorities. This model brings clarity and authority, ensuring clear accountability for the management plan delivery across the area.

However, this governance structure requires all participating local authorities to formally agree to delegate powers, which can be politically challenging and time-consuming to negotiate.

In addition, as with governance by a single local authority, this model remains a local authority structure and is constrained by funding rules in its access to potential streams and other constraints outlined above.

5.8.4 Governance options comparison

The governance options range from highly integrated within local government (single authority or joint committee) to fully independent (external organisation). The governance approach taken should take into consideration the boundary option being taken forward.

The single local authority model is the simplest but most constrained, especially for multi-authority landscapes. This approach is therefore most suited to the Option 1 boundary which is contained wholly within Huntingdonshire District Council.

For a larger area (Options 2 and 3) a Statutory Joint Committee would be preferable to a single local authority, providing formal cross-boundary authority and clear, collective accountability. However, it is similarly constrained by council rules and requires significant political consensus to establish.

The external organisation model provides the greatest flexibility, funding potential, and independence but lacks statutory powers and relies on strong partnerships with councils. This model could be considered for any of the three boundary options and is the most suited for a phased approach.

A pilot phase requires flexibility, low set up costs, access to diverse funding, and the ability to adapt quickly. Among the three governance options, an independent external organisation offers the most practical platform for learning and iterative development without the need for complex statutory processes.

During exploratory phases, the pilot organisation can experiment with partnership models, funding mechanisms, and delivery approaches. Staff can be recruited on more flexible terms and generally overheads may be kept lower.

Governance model	Key Strengths	Key Weaknesses
Single Local Authority One local authority hosts and manages the landscape, employing staff and coordinating through an advisory committee	• Simple to establish • Uses existing infrastructure • Clear line of accountability	• Limited funding flexibility constrained by council rules • Higher staffing costs • Slow cross-boundary decision-making • Vulnerable to LGR changes
Dedicated External Organisation Independent entity with a partnership board and its own staff delivering the management plan.	• Access to wider funding • More agile • Lower overheads • Independence from electoral cycles • Strong focus on landscape outcomes.	• No statutory powers - relies on MoUs with councils • Requires sustainable long-term funding model
Statutory Joint Committee Formal Joint Committee under Local Government Act 1972 where multiple councils delegate relevant functions.	• Legally binding cross-boundary decisions • Clear collective accountability; • Strong governance clarity	• Politically harder to establish • Time-consuming to negotiate • Still constrained by local authority funding rules • Formal structure reduces agility

Governance structures can be adjusted as the pilot matures without legislative constraints. It also enables immediate access to wider funding which is vital for demonstrating early wins. An existing body such as the Great Ouse Valley Trust may be used, or a lightweight new vehicle may be established.

The next steps within a phased approach would be to form a formal partnership agreement with participating local authorities to provide political alignment and oversight.

A Pilot Partnership Board would then be established including key stakeholders and local authority representatives. A small delivery team would be recruited to develop a pilot management plan and quick win projects.

6.0 Conclusion and next steps

6.1 The case for Self-designation

The case for support and investment by stakeholders in the self-designation proposals for the Great Ouse Heritage Landscape rests on the substantial environmental, economic, social, and strategic benefits that a designation would bring to the region, with a particular focus on addressing current issues of fragmentation and environmental pressure.

The proposals are championed by the Great Ouse Valley Trust (GOVT) and Huntingdonshire District Council (HDC) as a mechanism to conserve and enhance the area for future generations. Self-designation is seen as valuable in its own right, as well as providing a practical stepping stone toward achieving full statutory National Landscape status if a potential route to this re-opened.

© Arkwood

A recent report 'Assessing the multiple benefits of natural flood management' by The Wildlife Trusts showed that every £1 invested in natural flood management is expected to deliver £10 of benefits over 30 years and that nature is one of the best defences against flooding in a changing climate.

6.1.1 Environment and Conservation

Investment is critical to protecting the Great Ouse Valley's irreplaceable natural assets and enhancing ecological resilience:

Protecting Outstanding and Unique Natural Beauty

The area is considered a landscape of exceptional natural beauty. It boasts unique assets, including classic riverside scenery linking towns and villages, and stunning floodplain meadows. The landscape possesses distinct aesthetic qualities such as vastness, tranquillity, and isolation which have been celebrated in art and writing

International and National Ecological Significance

The area contains numerous internationally and nationally recognised designated sites and extensive water and wetland habitats, with a projected increase in water and reedbeds to over 2,000 hectares (compared to 915 hectares in the Norfolk Broads).

Addressing Threats and Enhancing Biodiversity

Cambridgeshire is one of England's most nature-depleted counties. The already depleted landscape is facing continued threats from development pressure, inappropriate land management, pollution, and climate change impacts. The River Great Ouse already carries "dangerous" levels of E.coli.

Designation would actively drive nature recovery. There is a demonstrable opportunity to restore and create approximately 412 hectares of degraded floodplain meadow habitats. Projects like "The Great Ouse Canopy" are proposed to increase tree cover along the banks to provide shade, improve river health, and create wet woodland habitats.

Climate Change Resilience and Flood Management

Self-designation facilitates investments in nature-based solutions to manage flooding and climate change impacts. The restoration of floodplains to meadow and wetland helps to store water, contributing to flood risk management, carbon sequestration, and soil health.

6.1.2 Economic and Financial Justification

Investment is highly justified by the potential financial returns and funding access provided by formal recognition:

High Return on Investment

Economic analysis of the proposed designated area projects substantial monetary value. Based on precedent studies, the estimated annual Gross Value Added (GVA) allocated to protecting the landscape quality ranges from £78.66 million to £471.97 million for the core area (Option 1). All proposed designation options demonstrate a strong cost-to-value ratio.

Boosting Tourism and Local Economy

Designation would increase awareness and visitor numbers, benefiting local shops and pubs. It enhances the area's brand, supports sustainable tourism, and contributes to job creation, benefiting the local visitor economy.

Unlocking Funding Mechanisms

While immediate self-designation is non-statutory, it is critical for pursuing future statutory National Landscape status, which guarantees core funding from the government (historically around 75% of core costs for existing NLs). The status also strengthens the ability to access significant charitable and external grant funding sources (e.g., the National Lottery Heritage Fund or private green finance initiatives).

Efficient and Coordinated Management

By establishing a formal management framework, coordination among diverse organizations (local authorities, farmers, charities) can pool resources and expertise, ensuring greater impact with less cost.

6.1.3 Socio-Cultural and Strategic Alignment

Stakeholder support ensures the area's management aligns with local community needs and overarching policy goals:

Fostering Community Pride of Place and Wellbeing

The proposal aligns with HDC's "Huntingdon Futures" strategy, specifically promoting "Pride in Place" by 2050. The tranquil environment, coupled with enhanced access, improves the quality of life for residents and promotes social and community interaction, delivering health and mental wellbeing benefits.

Improving Access and Recreation

The designation process focuses on improving recreational assets like the Ouse Valley Way. Proposals include implementing a masterplan for tourism and access to improve facilities for all users, including those with mobility challenges, and creating continuous walking routes.

Fulfilling Policy Commitments

The proposals are strongly aligned with national strategies, including the UK's commitment to protect 30% of land and sea for nature by 2030 ("30 by 30" commitment), the Government's Environmental Improvement Plan, and regional plans such as the Cambridgeshire ambition to "doubling nature".

Addressing Fragmented Management

Currently, management is fragmented across local authorities, statutory bodies, and landowners. The process provides a pathway to forge a shared vision, formalize partnerships, and coordinate strategies across boundaries, creating a cohesive, landscape-scale management approach.

6.2 Possible avenues for further research

This study has been developed using the local official data that is currently available. The scope of the study has not extended to measuring the significance of landscape protection to businesses or to visitors.

The studies referenced in this report have used metrics from business and visitor surveys to assess the impact of landscape designation on economic GVA across those areas, including on the visitor economy. The study has extrapolated findings from these comparable studies, all of which pre-date the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on visitor and wider economic behaviour.

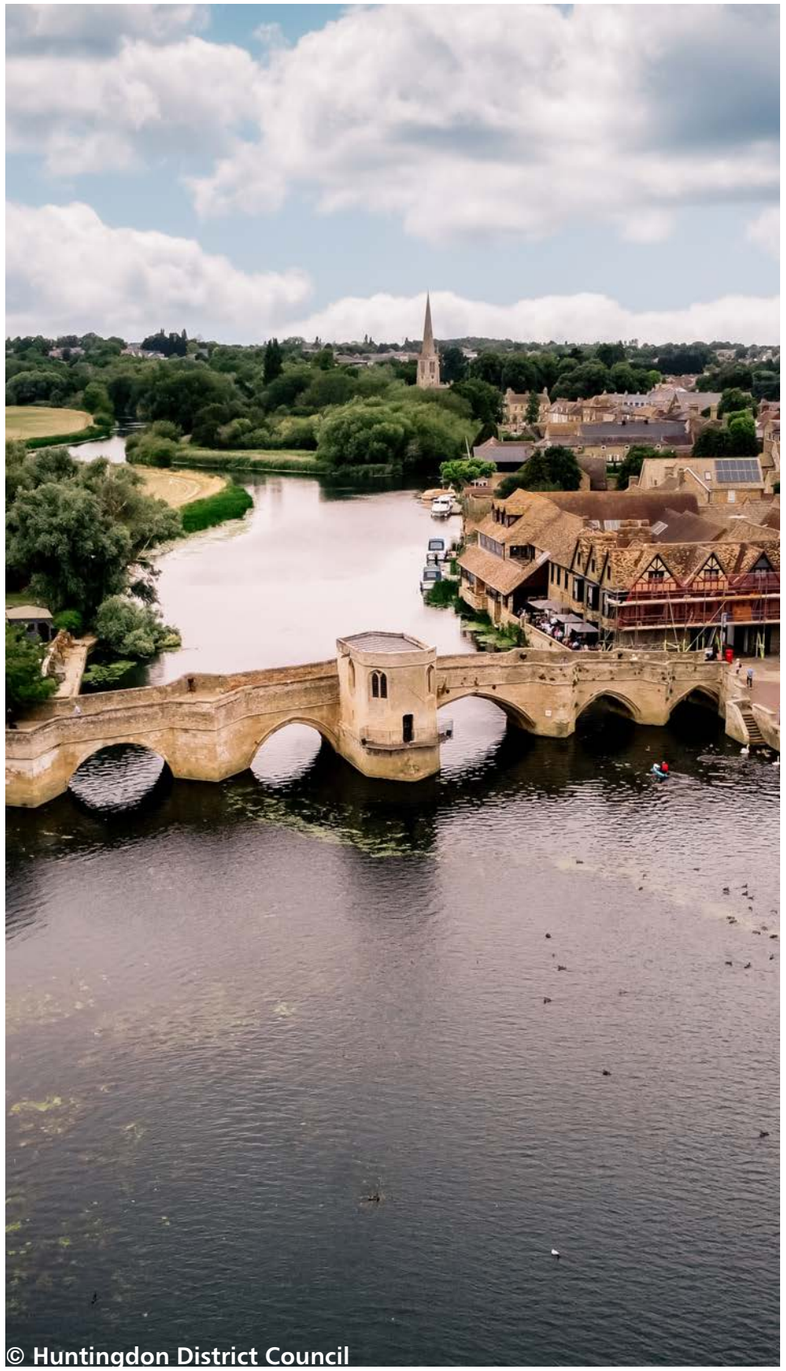
If further data are required, a logical next step would be to commission the following additional studies to provide specific local data for the Great Ouse Valley upon which to develop a more robust GVA calculation. Indicative costs for these surveys are provided. Actual costs would be informed by detailed briefs when developed.

- Online business survey of 150-300 local businesses (using Alchemer platform or equivalent): £10k
- Online visitor opinion survey (using the Maptionnaire platform or equivalent) : £15k
- Natural capital account: provides economic metrics for ecosystem service flows for health and wellbeing (avoided health costs), leisure, carbon sequestration and air quality moderation: £5-10k
- Landscape character assessment: detailed assessment of landscape character across all three options: £20k

6.3 Future stakeholder engagement and consultation

Further engagement with stakeholders and residents is recommended in order to understand the impact and feasibility of the three options:

- Brief internal stakeholders on the outcomes of the current study and the benefits of self-designation to secure political buy-in
- Engage with wider stakeholders, especially other local authorities covered by the preferred self-designation option area, to create a joined-up vision for designation and implementation
- Explore funding through town and parish councils, local donations and develop potential partnerships with other organisations such as the Wildlife Trust, RSPB and National Trust
- Explore creation of an advocacy plan and messaging for communicating the designation



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APPENDIX 1 - Summary of options

KPI	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3
Size (Hectares)	14,972	33,131	54,305
MSOAs covered (in part or full)	21	30	37
Employment (apportioned estimate)	20,083	25,267	37,614
Annual employment pay (estimate)	£ 650,148,793	£ 808,053,092	£ 1,205,868,928
Annual direct GVA (estimate) - see below	£ 1,573,217,148	£ 1,979,040,349	£ 2,882,717,531

Annual Direct GVA by Local Authority (£m est.)	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3
Bedford	0	0	0
East Cambridgeshire	0	136	985
Fenland	-	120	120
Huntingdonshire	1,457	1,526	1,526
King's Lynn and West Norfolk	-	77	91
South Cambridgeshire	117	119	161
Total	**1,573**	**1,979**	**2,883**

Potential range of GVA % allocated to AONB landscape protection

	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3
5%	78.66	98.95	144.14
10%	157.32	197.90	288.27
15%	235.98	296.86	432.41
20%	314.64	395.81	576.54
30%	471.97	593.71	864.82

	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3
GVA	**£1,573,296**	**£1,979,136**	**£2,882,851**
Size (Hectares)	14,972	33,131	54,305
GV per Ha	**£105**	**£60**	**£53**
Employment (apportioned estimate)	20,083	25,267	37,614
Employment per Ha	**1.3**	**0.8**	**0.7**

APPENDIX 2 - Options Medium Super Output Area (MSOA) coverage

Option 1				
MSOA 21 Code	MSOA 21 Name	Total MSOA Area (ha)	Overlap area (ha)	Percent overlap
E02003619	Bedford 004	11447.83071	0.007474	0.00%
E02003736	East Cambridgeshire 005	8983.872038	1.88429	0.02%
E02003758	Huntingdonshire 006	13197.97109	0.092032	0.00%
E02003759	Huntingdonshire 007	2566.44618	885.082384	34.49%
E02003760	Huntingdonshire 008	345.176812	0.00016	0.00%
E02003761	Huntingdonshire 009	180.162315	30.828446	17.11%
E02003762	Huntingdonshire 010	5271.232789	2143.135072	40.66%
E02003764	Huntingdonshire 012	464.999181	92.468829	19.89%
E02003765	Huntingdonshire 013	420.927498	199.195548	47.32%
E02003766	Huntingdonshire 014	1982.675328	751.773852	37.92%
E02003767	Huntingdonshire 015	16548.69877	1860.358221	11.24%
E02003768	Huntingdonshire 016	3944.301283	1761.297716	44.65%
E02003769	Huntingdonshire 017	5390.706652	4235.589914	78.57%
E02003770	Huntingdonshire 018	7743.802409	502.701977	6.49%
E02003771	Huntingdonshire 019	328.148046	99.287145	30.26%
E02003772	Huntingdonshire 020	255.169632	89.35784	35.02%
E02003773	Huntingdonshire 021	297.62248	62.417683	20.97%
E02003774	Huntingdonshire 022	207.559393	33.821645	16.29%
E02003775	South Cambridgeshire 001	3388.484114	1436.495647	42.39%
E02003777	South Cambridgeshire 003	3622.587444	477.283651	13.18%
E02006874	South Cambridgeshire 021	8402.325207	309.043078	3.68%
		Total option area (ha)	**14,972**	

Option 2				
MSOA 21 CODE	MSOA 21 NAME	Total MSOA Area (ha)	Overlap area (ha)	Percent overlap
E02003619	Bedford 004	11447.83071	0.007474	0.00
E02003732	East Cambridgeshire 001	7395.520158	750.552127	10.15
E02003733	East Cambridgeshire 002	10368.64208	5536.685118	53.40
E02003736	East Cambridgeshire 005	8983.872038	1450.923429	16.15
E02003751	Fenland 010	8696.532285	1223.052964	14.06
E02003752	Fenland 011	6115.664046	2792.421158	45.66
E02003758	Huntingdonshire 006	13197.97109	307.795872	2.33
E02003759	Huntingdonshire 007	2566.44618	1306.263926	50.90
E02003760	Huntingdonshire 008	345.176812	0.00016	0.00
E02003761	Huntingdonshire 009	180.162315	30.828446	17.11
E02003762	Huntingdonshire 010	5271.232789	2143.135072	40.66
E02003764	Huntingdonshire 012	464.999181	92.468829	19.89
E02003765	Huntingdonshire 013	420.927498	199.195548	47.32
E02003766	Huntingdonshire 014	1982.675328	751.773852	37.92
E02003767	Huntingdonshire 015	16548.69877	1860.358221	11.24
E02003768	Huntingdonshire 016	3944.301283	1761.297716	44.65
E02003769	Huntingdonshire 017	5390.706652	4235.589914	78.57
E02003770	Huntingdonshire 018	7743.802409	502.701977	6.49
E02003771	Huntingdonshire 019	328.148046	99.287145	30.26
E02003772	Huntingdonshire 020	255.169632	89.35784	35.02
E02003773	Huntingdonshire 021	297.62248	62.417683	20.97
E02003774	Huntingdonshire 022	207.559393	33.821645	16.29
E02003775	South Cambridgeshire 001	3388.484114	1483.948132	43.79
E02003776	South Cambridgeshire 002	3478.483537	0.937222	0.03
E02003777	South Cambridgeshire 003	3622.587444	477.283651	13.18
E02005566	King's Lynn and West Norfolk 016	11591.05947	2132.727955	18.40
E02005567	King's Lynn and West Norfolk 017	520.332465	45.062443	8.66
E02005568	King's Lynn and West Norfolk 018	15554.28793	3451.766972	22.19
E02005569	King's Lynn and West Norfolk 019	17018.8579	0.000034	0.00
E02006874	South Cambridgeshire 021	8402.325207	309.043078	3.68
		Total option area (ha)	**33,131**	

Option 3				
MSOA 21 CD	**MSOA 21 NM**	**Total MSOA Area (ha)**	**Overlap area (ha)**	**Percent overlap**
E02003619	Bedford 004	11447.83071	0.007474	0.00
E02003732	East Cambridgeshire 001	7395.520158	4241.549588	57.35
E02003733	East Cambridgeshire 002	10368.64208	9475.27198	91.38
E02003734	East Cambridgeshire 003	1047.61833	1047.61833	100.00
E02003735	East Cambridgeshire 004	4878.59287	1796.073955	36.82
E02003736	East Cambridgeshire 005	8983.872038	8614.767008	95.89
E02003737	East Cambridgeshire 006	6863.988373	1356.205056	19.76
E02003738	East Cambridgeshire 007	6914.759255	25.967514	0.38
E02003739	East Cambridgeshire 008	2564.73095	266.829603	10.40
E02003740	East Cambridgeshire 009	8435.462642	81.123299	0.96
E02003751	Fenland 010	8696.532285	1223.052964	14.06
E02003752	Fenland 011	6115.664046	2792.421158	45.66
E02003758	Huntingdonshire 006	13197.97109	307.795872	2.33
E02003759	Huntingdonshire 007	2566.44618	1306.263926	50.90
E02003760	Huntingdonshire 008	345.176812	0.00016	0.00
E02003761	Huntingdonshire 009	180.162315	30.828446	17.11
E02003762	Huntingdonshire 010	5271.232789	2143.135072	40.66
E02003764	Huntingdonshire 012	464.999181	92.468829	19.89
E02003765	Huntingdonshire 013	420.927498	199.195548	47.32
E02003766	Huntingdonshire 014	1982.675328	751.773852	37.92
E02003767	Huntingdonshire 015	16548.69877	1860.358221	11.24
E02003768	Huntingdonshire 016	3944.301283	1761.297716	44.65
E02003769	Huntingdonshire 017	5390.706652	4235.589914	78.57
E02003770	Huntingdonshire 018	7743.802409	502.701977	6.49
E02003771	Huntingdonshire 019	328.148046	99.287145	30.26
E02003772	Huntingdonshire 020	255.169632	89.35784	35.02
E02003773	Huntingdonshire 021	297.62248	62.417683	20.97
E02003774	Huntingdonshire 022	207.559393	33.821645	16.29
E02003775	South Cambridgeshire 001	3388.484114	1693.608527	49.98
E02003776	South Cambridgeshire 002	3478.483537	242.915746	6.98
E02003777	South Cambridgeshire 003	3622.587444	477.283651	13.18
E02003778	South Cambridgeshire 004	3264.778522	161.500423	4.95
E02005566	King's Lynn and West Norfolk 016	11591.05947	2132.78659	18.40
E02005567	King's Lynn and West Norfolk 017	520.332465	45.062443	8.66
E02005568	King's Lynn and West Norfolk 018	15554.28793	4660.325647	29.96
E02005569	King's Lynn and West Norfolk 019	17018.8579	184.889341	1.09
E02006874	South Cambridgeshire 021	8402.325207	309.043078	3.68
		Total option area (ha)	**54,305**	

APPENDIX 3 - Summary by industry

Employment Mix (counts)

Option	1: Agriculture, forestry & fishing (A)	2: Mining, quarrying & utilities (B,D and E)	3: Manufacturing (C)	4: Construction (F)	5: Motor trades (Part G)	6: Wholesale (Part G)	7: Retail (Part G)	8: Transport & storage (inc postal) (H)	9: Accommodation & food services (I)
Option 1	30	785	2,270	1,082	457	1,118	1,326	810	1,621
Option 2	63	938	2,998	1,558	598	1,309	1,696	1,127	1,912
Option 3	120	1,277	4,306	2,472	852	1,837	2,690	1,770	2,790

Employment Mix (%)

Option	1: Agriculture, forestry & fishing (A)	2: Mining, quarrying & utilities (B,D and E)	3: Manufacturing (C)	4: Construction (F)	5: Motor trades (Part G)	6: Wholesale (Part G)	7: Retail (Part G)	8: Transport & storage (inc postal) (H)	9: Accommodation & food services (I)
Option 1	0.1%	3.9%	11.3%	5.4%	2.3%	5.6%	6.6%	4.0%	8.1%
Option 2	0.2%	3.7%	11.9%	6.2%	2.4%	5.2%	6.7%	4.5%	7.6%
Option 3	0.3%	3.4%	11.4%	6.6%	2.3%	4.9%	7.2%	4.7%	7.4%

GVA

Option	1: Agriculture, forestry & fishing (A)	2: Mining, quarrying & utilities (B,D and E)	3: Manufacturing (C)	4: Construction (F)	5: Motor trades (Part G)	6: Wholesale (Part G)	7: Retail (Part G)	8: Transport & storage (inc postal) (H)	9: Accommodation & food services (I)
Average GVA/Job	£ 49,310	£ 180,400	£ 103,357	£ 105,596	£ 53,018	£ 53,018	£ 53,018	£ 46,483	£ 24,670
Option 1	£ 1,484,996	£ 141,603,905	£ 234,664,268	£ 114,241,339	£ 24,251,952	£ 59,261,182	£ 70,300,750	£ 37,655,219	£ 40,001,880
Option 2	£ 3,100,733	£ 169,245,606	£ 309,860,777	£ 164,541,883	£ 31,699,931	£ 69,401,301	£ 89,944,657	£ 52,365,239	£ 47,178,017
Option 3	£ 5,901,666	£ 230,425,026	£ 445,033,509	£ 261,003,240	£ 45,158,802	£ 97,417,150	£ 142,611,862	£ 82,259,104	£ 68,825,541

Employment Mix

Option	10 : Information & communication (J)	11 : Financial & insurance (K)	12 : Property (L)	13 : Professional, scientific & technical (M)	14 : Business administration & support services (N)	15 : Public administration & defence (O)	16 : Education (P)	17 : Health (Q)	18 : Arts, entertainment, recreation & other services (R,S,T and U)	TOTAL
Option 1	689	272	496	1,746	1,569	1,509	1,328	2,063	910	**20,083**
Option 2	877	292	638	2,165	2,047	1,591	1,891	2,507	1,058	**25,267**
Option 3	1,231	352	877	3,058	2,800	1,940	3,854	3,730	1,659	**37,614**

Employment Mix

Option	10 : Information & communication (J)	11 : Financial & insurance (K)	12 : Property (L)	13 : Professional, scientific & technical (M)	14 : Business administration & support services (N)	15 : Public administration & defence (O)	16 : Education (P)	17 : Health (Q)	18 : Arts, entertainment, recreation & other services (R,S,T and U)	TOTAL
Option 1	3.4%	1.4%	2.5%	8.7%	7.8%	7.5%	6.6%	10.3%	4.5%	**100%**
Option 2	3.5%	1.2%	2.5%	8.6%	8.1%	6.3%	7.5%	9.9%	4.2%	**100%**
Option 3	3.3%	0.9%	2.3%	8.1%	7.4%	5.2%	10.2%	9.9%	4.4%	**100%**

GVA

Option	10 : Information & communication (J)	11 : Financial & insurance (K)	12 : Property (L)	13 : Professional, scientific & technical (M)	14 : Business administration & support services (N)	15 : Public administration & defence (O)	16 : Education (P)	17 : Health (Q)	18 : Arts, entertainment, recreation & other services (R,S,T and U)	TOTAL
Average GVA/Job	£ 81,778	£ 173,241	£ 436,783	£ 59,722	£ 37,720	£ 83,743	£ 50,844	£ 43,640	£ 90,263	
Option 1	£ 56,373,421	£ 47,182,126	£ 216,672,581	£ 104,280,264	£ 59,196,856	£ 126,335,780	£ 67,520,466	£ 90,017,538	£ 82,172,626	**£ 1,573,217,148**
Option 2	£ 71,697,453	£ 50,592,087	£ 278,510,475	£ 129,300,188	£ 77,230,300	£ 133,263,479	£ 96,164,184	£ 109,419,029	£ 95,525,012	**£ 1,979,040,349**
Option 3	£ 100,699,233	£ 60,931,550	£ 383,270,375	£ 182,599,792	£ 105,602,120	£ 162,493,622	£ 195,937,763	£ 162,778,042	£ 149,769,135	**£ 2,882,717,531**

Great Ouse Valley Trust
Our landscape for life

Huntingdonshire
DISTRICT COUNCIL

Arkwood