

**GREAT FEN MASTERPLAN
(Report of Director of Environmental & Community Services)**

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 This report introduces the draft illustrative Masterplan for the Great Fen Project which has been approved by the Project's Steering Group on the basis for consultation. It is now intended that the Great Fen Project Partners will consult widely on this document before finalising it early in 2010.

1.2 The illustrative Masterplan is a spatial plan – it sets out where new physical features could be created and illustrates where existing features are retained. It shows, amongst other things, open water, wetlands, woodlands, footpaths and cycleways, buildings and car parks. It is intended to convey something of the new character which could be created. Subject to final approval it will form the basis of a new action plan which the partners will develop next year to guide the on-going development of the project.

1.3 The Great Fen Project is one of the most significant habitat restoration projects ever undertaken in Britain by the acquisition and restoration of land adjacent to two existing National Nature Reserves, Holme Fen and Woodwalton Fen. Connecting these two reserves will create a haven for wildlife. The Project, however, is by no means exclusively about wildlife as it will create a massive green space for people, opening up new opportunities for recreation, education and business. Agriculture will also remain an important aspect; although over the life of the project the intensive arable activity will decrease, replaced in part by grazing and other economic activity. The Project partners are:

- Environment Agency
- Huntingdonshire District Council
- Middle Level Commissioner
- Natural England
- The Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire and Peterborough

1.4 The Great Fen Vision as recast in the Masterplan is:

A vast swath of restored, accessible fenland landscape providing a rich variety of habitats for people and wildlife, offering an unforgettable encounter with nature now and in the future.

- 1.5 The aims of the project have been revised during the Masterplan process as follows:

Natural Environment:

- ✚ To create a new resilient fenland landscape which delivers major wild life benefits and achieves high standards of sustainability in all respects.

Social:

- ✚ To create an accessible, inspiring and tranquil environment for recreation, education, health and wellbeing.

Economic:

- ✚ To contribute to diversification and development of the local economy, consistent with environmental and social objectives.

Climate Change Adaptation and mitigation:

- ✚ To plan, design and manage the Great Fen to benefit climate change adaptation and mitigation.

These aims are expanded in more detail in the accompanying text.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 A report was presented to Overview & Scrutiny (Service Support) in November 2008, this dealt with progress with the project; the governance arrangements; the linkage of the project to the Council's own aims and objectives; the statutory status of the project in relation to the Regional Spatial Strategy and the, then, emerging Council's Core Strategy; funding achieved and future direction. In considering the last point, reference was made to a meeting of County, District and Parish Councillors and the response of the Project partners. That response covered:

- ✚ New and more robust governance arrangements (Cabinet received a report on this at their last meeting);
- ✚ A communication and information strategy;
- ✚ Land assembly and land management
- ✚ Further research and Masterplanning.

In respect of this latter matter the report referred to Partners developing a Masterplan which sets out what the project area will be like in the future and informs discussions on issues such as visitor facilities and access. It had been hoped to complete the Masterplan earlier in 2009, however, the robust nature of the studies and stakeholder involvement required led to a revised programme as mentioned above.

- 2.2 The masterplanning process has also involved the bringing together of a wealth of information in a baseline study, fieldwork analysis and consultation with a wide variety of interest groups and stakeholders

2.3 As part of the stakeholder involvement contributing to the development of the draft Masterplan a seminar for County and District Members was held in June 2009 led by Professor Robert Tregay of Landscape Design Associates who had been engaged to produce the Masterplan.

2.4 The Masterplan document, the text for which is appended, is set out as follows:

1. Introduction
2. The Masterplanning process
3. Strategic Drivers
4. Physical Geography and Ecology
5. People communities and heritage
6. Engaging local stakeholders
7. Aims
8. The illustrative Masterplan
 - Habitats
 - Landscape character and structure
 - Land management
 - Visitor gateways
 - Access and circulation
9. The heart of the Great Fen: The visitor centre and surrounding Landscape
10. Next steps

Members will also have received the various map layers making up the Masterplan. The published version laying out the text and including photographs, will be available to Members and sent under separate cover in due course. (Note: the reference on page 23 of the text refers to the Masterplan itself not being available – however, this is simply a composite of the map layers).

3. **RECOMMENDATION:**

Overview & Scrutiny (Environmental Well Being):

- To comment on the draft Illustrative Masterplan as a basis for public consultation.

Cabinet:

- To endorse the publication of the Masterplan for public consultation in the light of any comments from Overview & Scrutiny (Environmental Well Being).

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Great Fen Baseline Study – LDA 2009

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