

Great Fen Masterplan: Statement of Consultation

Huntingdonshire LDF | Great Fen Masterplan: Statement of Consultation

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Summary

Background

This statement of consultation is based on the Great Fen partnership's report on consultation undertaken in the preparation of their Great Fen Masterplan. It has been produced to accompany the Great Fen Planning Guidance adopted by Huntingdonshire District Council to assist within determining planning applications within the Great Fen area. It provides a record of the extensive public engagement in the preparation of the Masterplan as evidence of its status as a material consideration in the determination of planning applications.

The Great Fen Project Partners consist of the Environment Agency; Huntingdonshire District Council; Middle Level Commissioners; Natural England; and the Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire and Peterborough. They are committed to ensuring that the Great Fen Project delivers significant environmental, health, recreation and economic benefits.

In order to achieve these outcomes and make effective planning decisions, the partners established the need for a masterplan document, illustrating the partners' vision for a range of features for the Great Fen Project area, including: habitats and land management; access zoning; flood risk management area(s); visitor facilities; activity and recreation hubs; signage and interpretation; access links to surrounding communities; and links to local attractions and amenities.

Phase 1 of Consultation

The Great Fen Project team, alongside LDA Design, conducted consultation sessions between 3 April and 11 May 2009 to help form the first draft of the masterplan. The following groups were consulted at this first stage:

- Conservation and wildlife specialists (3 April 09)
- Access and activity specialists (6 April 09)
- Huntingdonshire District Councillors and Cambridgeshire County Councillors (14 April 09)
- Tourism, heritage and business specialists (15 April 09)
- Local Parish Councillors (23 April 09)
- Chapel Road local residents (5 May 09)
- Local householders in the project area (11 May 09)
- Farmers in the Great Fen Project area, and other key individuals (April to May 09)

Key findings from the first phase of public consultation can be summarised as follows:

- There was general support for the habitats proposed for the Project area, though a concern that all habitats were not represented in Zone 1 (the wilderness area).
- Access zoning was viewed as a good way of managing people and wildlife, although it was suggested that the wilderness area could be extended south, and it was noted that access from the north was not direct (i.e. needed to go around Zone 1). Zone 1 was adapted in shape to incorporate more habitats and to provide better access.
- There was general support for the location of a flood risk management area, with suggestions for some additional locations and questions about multi-use (e.g. for water storage, access, a wilderness area)
-
- The proposed location on new visitor facilities at New Decoy was supported, though with some concerns from the boating community about access via waterway, and questions about the nature of visitor facilities and visitor projections. There was some concern that habitats/ interest would not develop sufficiently quickly to enable visitor pressure/ access to be moved from the National Nature Reserves in the short to medium term.

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- A list of existing access, amenities and services were suggested for inclusion on the map. These were included wherever possible. A range of access improvements were suggested for the project area, centring on a multi-use network of circular paths and routes from surrounding communities and the visitor centre, with the potential for additional single use/ different surfaced/ ephemeral paths extending from these. There was a suggestion for a linear PRow route through the project area and suggestions for diverting existing PRow to enable an area for wading birds to be develop west of Woodwalton Fen. Locations for moorings and turning points were suggested.
- It was proposed that parking within the project area be kept to the main visitor facilities for security and income generation reasons.
- There was also a strong feeling that raised viewing should be provided over the project area, for example, through tower hides or through more innovative means, such as treetop walks.
- There was a strong feeling across groups that visitor hubs with possible parking and multi-modal forms of access into the project area could be created, which would also provide economic opportunities in terms of increased tourism and entrepreneurial opportunities.
- A range of activities were proposed, including: boat, canoe and punt hire; cycling; angling; walking and dog walking; wildlife watching in both the traditional and in innovative senses; pony trekking; corporate team building and education; camping and caravanning, including wilderness camping or barn accommodation; ballooning; wild swimming; and game shooting.
- The need for phasing visitor facilities, access and activities was highlighted.
- It was highlighted that activities and provision should encourage overnight visits.
- It was pointed out that both summer and winter activities need to be provided.
- Opportunities for joint marketing and promotion was provided, particular with surrounding heritage facilities, and promotion that could be viewed from the railway line.
- Suggestions for future consultation included high involvement and interactive methodology.

More detail can be found in 2 'Phase 1 Consultation Summary'.

Phase 2 of Consultation

The first draft was then taken to consultation with the general public and stakeholder organisations between September and October 2009, to get further comments and feedback. The key findings of the Phase 2 consultation are also included in this report.

The second phase of public consultation was undertaken between 5 September and 16 October 2009, considering the first draft of the masterplan. Groups consulted during this second stage include:

- Emergency services
- Young people
- Schools
- Families
- Older people
- Disability organisations and users
- Existing volunteers
- Cross-section of the general public
- Further feedback from stakeholders consulted in Apr-May 09

Nineteen events and structured interviews were held at public venues and schools in the local area. Event locations included central venues such as Serpentine Green shopping centre, Ramsey Community Information Centre, Huntingdon Farmers Market and libraries. Structured interviews were carried out with local horse-riders, people with disabilities from the Papworth Trust, Disability Cambridgeshire, pupils and parents at local schools, and young people at Abbey College and Ramsey Youth Centre. The partners spoke to over 500 people during these events.

Sixteen information points were established at libraries and information centres in the area between and including Peterborough and Huntingdon. Visitors were able to find out more about the Great Fen Project and feedback was recorded, either through informal comments, or through completing a questionnaire. Questionnaires were also available online.

Over 260 responses were obtained and analysed, with 85% of the responses coming from the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough area. It should be noted that there was some under-representation in the questionnaire responses of both the under 16s and 16-35 year olds (which will include families) and Black and Minority Ethnic groups. The views of children and young people, particularly in terms of what they would like to see and do in the Great Fen in the future, were gained through events in schools and in a local youth centre. Parents and carers were also encouraged to provide comments in after school sessions.

Responses were also received from nine stakeholder organisations via email: Peterborough City Council (Natural Networks); Sustrans; English Heritage; Inland Waterways Association; Great Ouse Boating Association; Cambridgeshire Local Access Forum; National Farmers Union; Cambridgeshire County Council (Environment Policy and Projects team and Countryside Access team) and Disability Cambridgeshire.

Key findings from the second phase of public consultation can be summarised as follows:

- There was a good level of support from the general public for the provision of land for wildlife and for Fenland restoration. Over 40% of questionnaire respondents identified this as a good aspect of the masterplan.
- There was a common concern that people could have a negative impact on wildlife.
- The visitor centre was a very popular aspect of the masterplan and 58% of questionnaire respondents wanted to visit a visitor centre. There were many suggestions for potential activities and facilities to attract a range of users, including walking trails, boat rides, sailing, fishing, natural adventure areas and bike trails.
- Many people highlighted the provision of leisure and recreation facilities as a good aspect of the masterplan.
- A range of activities were proposed which were not incorporated specifically in the questionnaire. These included adding information on heritage and archaeology, shooting (clay pigeon and wildfowl), adventure play area, archery, enjoying the peace and quiet, wilderness camping, swimming and access via all terrain wheelchair.
- There was general support for visitor gateways and village based facilities, and suggestions were made for some potential locations.
- There was some concern that the impact of traffic on local roads needs to be assessed prior to building a visitor centre or providing other facilities.
- A number of people were concerned that there was not enough parking in the masterplan.
- There was some concern that some parking/ potential parking areas would not be secure (e.g. Holme Fen, St Andrew's Church).
- A number of people suggested Park and Ride facilities including those, such as boat trips, which might provide a better experience than a bus.
- Many people brought up the issue of public transport as being a key factor in enabling many people to visit and get around the local area, including local people, older people, people with disabilities, and tourists (e.g. from Cambridge, Peterborough). Links to rail services were highlighted as being important.
- Many people thought that better accessibility to the area was a good part of the masterplan.
- Off-road bike and walking links from communities were considered to be particularly important for many people. Almost 29% of questionnaire respondents wanted to travel to the area by bike, and 22% wanted to walk there. Suggestions were made for some additional links not included on the masterplan. It was suggested that there should be clearer and stronger links to the Peterborough Green Wheel.
- Some people suggested separate provision for dog walkers, and others suggested dog activity areas.
- A number of people felt that the bridleway access could be increased, particularly with a north to south link and circular route provision.
- A number of people raised questions as to how the Great Fen Project would be phased, and also how it would be funded in the future.
- The need for better local promotion was highlighted. Suggestions included more links with the local media, as well as information to local venues and schools.

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- A number of people highlighted the improvements for the local economy and tourism as good aspects of the project. Some people wanted to see a unique attraction to draw in tourists. Others emphasised the needs for developing links with local tourism and businesses at this stage.
- A number of people raised concerns about land being taken out of agricultural production, with particular reference to the needs of an increasing population.
- Stakeholders suggested a range of amendments and additions to the text in the masterplan report, including emphasising the importance of farming, and adding information on heritage and archaeology.
- Some updates to the map were highlighted (e.g. missing Bed and Breakfasts, pub no longer at Ramsey Mereside).

More detail can be found in 3 'Phase 2 Consultation Summary'.

1 Background

The Great Fen Project

- 1.1 The vision statement for the Great Fen Project is as follows:
"A restored fenland landscape providing a rich variety of habitats for people and wildlife, now and in the future".
- 1.2 The Great Fen Project, born out of concern for the future of two National Nature Reserves, Holme Fen and Woodwalton Fen, is an ambitious 50 year vision to bring into nature conservation management approximately 9,000 acres of land. The project will create fenland habitats on a landscape scale, for the benefit of both wildlife and people.
- 1.3 The Great Fen Project will safeguard the integrity of nationally and internationally important nature conservation sites, and be a major boost to the achievement of key local and national Biodiversity Action Plan targets for both habitats and species.
- 1.4 The Great Fen partners have established the following aims:
- **Nature Conservation:** to create a resilient and sustainable wetland habitat;
 - **Countryside Access:** to provide access to a vast and inspirational wetland wilderness for a wide range of users in an area largely devoid of public footpaths and to transform the area into a significant tourist destination, and thus enhance people's enjoyment of the natural environment, and particularly of the Great Fen;
 - **Environmental Awareness:** to actively raise public awareness and knowledge of the environment and environmental challenges and provide opportunities for learning about fenland heritage, helping people develop the awareness, knowledge, attitudes, skills and participation that will support conservation of local heritage; and
 - **Community Benefit and Financial Viability:** to contribute to diversification in the local economy, creating opportunities for new jobs and income streams through profitable land management and visitor enterprises and to develop community involvement in the project through volunteering.

The Masterplan Process

- 1.5 The masterplan process seeks to develop the vision of the Great Fen Project into a physical reality.
- 1.6 The masterplan process has involved the research and analysis of a wealth of information setting out issues as follows:
- The site and its context;
 - Opportunities and constraints;
 - Physical features (e.g. drainage, ecology, access, landscape features, environmental and cultural designations);
 - Socio-economic studies;
 - Stakeholder consultation outcomes.
- 1.7 Once all of these issues had been considered, a set of aims and objectives were defined which are measurable aspirations which the masterplan must deliver.
- 1.8 The masterplan is a comprehensive plan which provides an inter-linked solution to what can be achieved on the ground. It is a spatial plan used to guide the long term delivery of the Great Fen Vision and Aims and Objectives.

1 Background

Previous Consultation

- 1.9** Consultation with stakeholders started at the beginning of the project in 2001. A consultation project was undertaken in Autumn 2007 to find out more about the kinds of access, activities and facilities people would like to see at the Great Fen, as part of development work for the Heritage Lottery Fund project.
- 1.10** This consultation included a public survey, stakeholder questionnaire and meetings with key organisations, including representatives of disability groups, Black and Minority Ethnic groups, low income groups, youth groups and schools. The public survey was promoted and distributed in a range of places, including on partner websites and at local community events and information centres.
- 1.11** Approximately 220 people took part in the public survey, including existing users and non-users of the Great Fen. The following findings are relevant to the masterplan:

Transport

- 2 in every 3 (66%) individual respondents would like to visit the Great Fen Project by car.
- 1 in 3 (33%) wanted to travel by bike.
- over 1 in 5 (over 20%) wanted to travel by public transport.
- just under 1 in 5 (nearly 20%) wanted to travel by foot.
- just under 1 in 10 (nearly 10%) wanted to travel by waterway.

Activities

- The most popular were going for a walk (93%), enjoying the peace and quiet (76%) and watching wildlife (77%)
- Approximately half of all respondents would like to learn about wildlife, learn about local history, and take a boat ride.

Access improvements

- The most popular improvements that were seen as very important were signposts (74%) and toilets (71%).
 - Just under half of all respondents also wanted information panels, refreshments available, a picnic area and benches.
 - Approximately a third of all respondents wanted zones without dogs, and areas where dogs can be off leads
 - Approximately 1 in 3 respondents wanted information leaflets
 - Approximately 1 in 4 respondents wanted lighting in car parks
- 1.12** The initial stakeholder questionnaire and meetings with key organisations highlighted a range of issues, including how best to remove a range of barriers, including physical, intellectual, social and cultural, and financial barriers.
- 1.13** For a number of groups, including disability, BME and low income groups, the provision of non-car access, particularly public transport, was seen as vital. Toilets, a picnic area (to reduce costs of a day out), somewhere to shelter, and multi-sensory interpretation were also highlighted as important. A more detailed discussion of the Phase 1 consultation can be found in the Great Fen Education and Community Involvement Strategy (2008-2013), submitted as part of the Heritage Lottery Fund bid in March 2008.

2 Phase 1 Consultation Summary

2.1 The Great Fen Project team, alongside LDA Design, conducted consultation sessions between 3 April and 11 May 2009 to help form the first draft of the masterplan. The following groups were consulted at this first stage:

- Conservation and wildlife specialists (3 April 09)
- Access and activity specialists (6 April 09)
- Huntingdonshire District Councillors and Cambridgeshire County Councillors (14 April 09)
- Tourism, heritage and business specialists (15 April 09)
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- Farmers in the Great Fen Project area, and other key individuals (April to May 09)

2.2 During the consultation sessions, individuals were invited to comment on plans and proposed locations for the following items:

Items with least flexibility to change:

- Habitat areas
- Access zones
- Flood risk management
- Existing access
- Existing activity areas
- Existing amenities and services
- Visitor facilities (Ramsey Heights, the National Nature Reserves, and new proposed facilities at New Decoy)

Items with the most flexibility to change:

New access, facilities and 'features', for visitors:

- Roads and car parking
- Footpaths, cycleways and bridleways
- Waterways and moorings
- Public transport links
- Panoramic views
- Information points/ interpretation

New activity/ recreation hubs for:

- Boating
- Walking
- Cycling
- Angling
- Dog walking
- Wildlife watching
- Other

2.3 The Great Fen Project partners described these items, and explained the thinking behind them, and the flexibility of the partners to change plans for these items.

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Habitats and Land Management

Climate Resilience

- 2.4** A representative of the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust highlighted that it was important to think about how the project would be climate proofed; in fifty years climate change could have a considerable effect, for example, on water availability. It was argued that this needed to be considered and built into planning at an early stage. This applies both to planning for habitats, and having provision to adapt access with climate change.
- 2.5** It was also expressed by members of the conservation and wildlife group that the range of different climate change models needs to be considered and that rising sea levels may have an impact in the future. It was suggested that plans should be flexible, with an ability to adapt to circumstances.
- 2.6** The Project partners state that the project will assist adaptation through connecting the nature reserves and creating a range of habitats. The project partners will also aspire to store water in the project area. Work undertaken with Atkins will help the partners to decide on potential locations for flood storage.

Depth of Peat

- 2.7** A question was raised as to whether there was information about how the depth of peat varied across the project area as this could affect habitat development. A study was undertaken in part of the southern section of the project area, but not in the northern half. There is also a Soil Survey peat map for the northern area which dates to 1973 which could be used to estimate current peat depths from.

Woodland and Dry Grassland

- 2.8** It was commented that there was no woodland/ dry grassland in the wilderness area or Zone 1 (see also discussion under 'Access Zones').
- 2.9** Consultation with Bridgwater College indicated that woodland within Zone 5 (Visitor Facilities) could be beneficial for corporate teambuilding and educational purposes and resources (See Teambuilding and Educational Activities in 'Activity Provision' for a discussion of suggested species and size of potential woodland areas for these activities). Natural England suggested introducing the concept of scattered scrub rather than woodland.
- 2.10** LDA Design suggested using woodland to help define the boundary of the Great Fen and creating a feeling of separation from the outside world, with some 'windows' into the Great Fen. The Project Partners, in contrast to this, felt strongly that it was important that the Great Fen Project area blends with and is part of the landscape, rather than feeling like a separate entity. It was felt that this would link into Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) opportunities in the areas surrounding the project, and would also give more coherency with the idea of being part of a living landscape. Middle Level Commissioners pointed out that arterial watercourses will need to be kept clear of trees, with a good buffer of 20 metres from the bottom of the bank. LDA Design proposed that woodland could form part of a gateway into the Great Fen, to help visitors see and feel like they've arrived.
- 2.11** The concept of buffering and opportunities for HLS for surrounding landowners should be noted in the text of the masterplan document. There was agreement that there could be a gradual transition of trees round the edge of Holme Fen, which could also provide a marker from the train line. While the masterplan should aim to link ancient woodlands, and increase woodland cover on the southern section of the project area, the Project Partners felt that this should be consistent with the historical field pattern, and shouldn't be extensive enough to block views. They also highlighted the need to ensure that open area is maintained where people live, both for aesthetics, and the need to minimise mosquitoes close to where people live. The Project Partners agreed with the idea of arrival gateways, but felt that there were other ways to provide this, for example, through a bogoak sculpture.

General Management Issues

2.12 The following management questions were also raised:

- Consideration of the depletion of nutrients from fertile soils and the impact on quality of reedbeds needed for thatching.
 - The Project Partners are aware that depletion of nutrients is a problem. Grazing and haycutting will help to reduce nutrients in the soil. An alternative is to strip the soil off the surface, but this would not be possible in large areas (larger than a few hectares).
- How restoration will take place, namely, whether it will be left to regenerate naturally or whether species will be introduced
 - A mixture of restoration techniques were considered to be necessary. There will be some pure natural regeneration and some seeding. It is planned that diversity will develop over time with management. Monitoring will also be undertaken as the Great Fen develops to compare the effectiveness of restoration and management techniques.
- How the peat is going to be re-wetted effectively as this has been problematic in other projects
 - The project partners will consider how these issues affect Middle Farm and Darlow's Farm and will review management practice accordingly.
- Request for a management plan highlighting the zones and what the management is for those areas and species
 - There are already some management plans for the Great Fen Project. The project partners will be providing a full Great Fen management plan for the Great Fen in the future.
- The Environment Agency felt that the Great Fen could be an important area for eels, and could contribute to the implementation of eel management plans in the future.
- Natural England and the Wildlife Trust would also like cattle grids installed to limit the movement of stock, especially near the B660.

Flood Risk Management

Banks as Access Routes

2.13 It was suggested that the banks of the proposed flood risk management area could be used as access routes which give a good view over the project area. The Project Partners thought that this might be possible, although Middle Level Commissioners identified the need for alternative horse access that was not on the banks due to potential impact.

Alternative or Additional Locations

2.14 It was suggested that there could be a deeper water storage area with regulating water storage as a reservoir in Zone 3 (Holme Fen National Nature Reserve). The Project Partners will continue to consider a network of flood storage areas, which could include areas in the northern end of the project like Zone 3. Decisions will be influenced by the hydrology study undertaken by Atkins.

Interpretation of "Flood Risk Management Area"

2.15 A number of consultees initially interpreted the flood risk management area as a permanent area of open water, whereas it might be similar to Woodwalton Fen, i.e. dry for the majority of the time, but with capacity for water storage to manage occasional flood events. It was also explained that the area could be farmed,

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with farmers compensated for flood events and loss of crops. The Project Partners are also considering whether water storage could be incorporated into any new flood risk management engineering, which could provide water for drier conditions. This will be informed by ongoing hydrology studies by Atkins.

Necessity Question

- 2.16** A local councillor questioned whether flood storage was needed. Middle Level Commissioners and the Environment Agency have stated that they see it as necessary to prepare for changes to flood risk predicted as a result of changes in climate.

Access Zones

The Impact of People on Wildlife

- 2.17** The concept of using zones to support the management of people and wildlife was supported across groups, although further suggestions were made as to how this could be optimised e.g. through adjusting boundaries or providing screening. A number of individuals across consultation groups expressed a concern about the potential impact of people on the wildlife of the Great Fen. They felt that this needed to be managed carefully.

Zone 1 – Quiet Area/ Very Limited Access (previously referred to as the “Wilderness” Area)

- 2.18** Members of the Conservation and Wildlife group expressed disappointment with the size of Zone 1 and were concerned that the full range of habitats were not incorporated within Zone 1. Open water and limited dry grassland and woodland were not indicated on the map in this area. The group suggested that Zone 1 could be extended to incorporate part of the open water north of the visitor facilities and more of the peat soil and that a further wilderness zone in the southern end of the project area could be added.
- 2.19** It was identified by the Access group that the shape and boundaries of Zone 1 impeded direct access from the north. The Project Partners agreed that Zone 1 could be orientated north-south instead of east-west to incorporate more habitats and enable direct access from the north. This would also provide opportunities for occasional access into Zone 1 by a limited number of electric boat trips from the visitor centre.
- 2.20** It was suggested that the flood risk management area could be a quiet area with minimal access like Zone 1. The Project Partners thought that should be considered, although there are a number of constraints. For example, it may not be possible to develop scrub in the flood risk management area, and there are existing public rights of way within this area.
- 2.21** It was suggested that a quiet buffer zone up to Zones 1 and 2 would be of benefit particularly for those wanting to watch birds. Access into Zone 2 is allowed on foot/ by all terrain wheelchair. For Zone 1, there could be limited access by electric boat, and there would be access up to Zone 1, particularly with the proximity of the visitor centre to its edge (for example, areas of open water).

Zone 2 - Woodwalton Fen National Nature Reserve

- 2.22** It was suggested that the buffer zone around Zone 2 could be extended to incorporate an area for wading birds. The partners have incorporated this suggestion as it was felt that this would be extremely beneficial, both as a view for people using the Public Right of Way to the west of the area, and for wildlife. This route would require a diversion of a PRoW, discussed in 'Footpaths, Cycleways and Bridleways'.
- 2.23** There was a general agreement with the idea of maintaining the existing designation of access (walking, all terrain wheelchairs, no bicycles, horses or dogs except assistance dogs) in Woodwalton Fen, alongside improvements for widening access to enable a wider range of people to visit the reserve e.g. a reserved parking space, more rest places, free hire of all terrain wheelchairs.

- 2.24** Sustrans asked whether there could be a designated cycle trail through Woodwalton Fen. However it was considered important to maintain the zoning decision that was made due to the sensitivity of the area and guard against compaction.

Zone 3 - Holme Fen National Nature Reserve

- 2.25** A member of the conservation and wildlife group suggested that there should be less pressure on Holme Fen NNR, and that it should be given the same access designation as Woodwalton Fen NNR (i.e. no bicycles, no dogs except assistance dogs). However it would not be possible to remove access for cyclists and drivers using the roads running through Holme Fen. The Project Partners also said that they would not want to remove access for those who already regularly use Holme Fen, including local dog-walkers. However, through providing areas in alternative locations which could be much more attractive for dog-walkers it was hoped people would transfer to using less wildlife sensitive areas. Discussion about improving access for walkers in Holme Fen is provided in 'Access and Management Issues'.

Zone 4 - Enhanced Access Area and the Great Fen Project Boundary

- 2.26** Local householders questioned why the Great Fen Project boundary did not incorporate Wildlife Trust nature reserves and a further area of land (translocation land owned by Network Rail) in the south west. The Project Partners said that it would be difficult to change the defined project boundary at this stage, but where land was already under management for wildlife there would be few benefits to incorporating it.
- 2.27** It was asked whether the Project Partners had considered extending the project area to the north. The Project Partners felt that while they would work closely with any green infrastructure projects to the north or in other areas, they would not seek to extend the Great Fen Project boundary.
- 2.28** One of the Councillors questioned why the area needed to be as large as it was. The Project Partners response is that the project area is underpinned by hydrology, and by connecting the two National Nature Reserves to create a climate resilient place for people and wildlife, which is multi-functional. The partners also emphasised that the area is less than 1% of the fenland basin.
- 2.29** A number of people asked how realistic plans were for land in Zone 4 to be acquired and what impact this would have on access and activities proposed in the area. The Project Partners will continue to liaise with landowners to establish where there may be opportunities, not just for land purchase, but also for partnership working through Higher Level Stewardship schemes, and for developing better access routes.

Zone 5 - Visitor Facilities and “Honey-pot” Area

- 2.30** There was support across groups for the location and access principles in Zone 5. A location off the B660 was seen as a vital component.
- 2.31** Consultees from the boating community felt that Zone 5 was in the wrong place, because of the lack of access by waterway. It was thought that a new waterway to New Decoy would involve significant expense to alter Exhibition Bridge. It was suggested that Zone 5 should be located at Charterhouse Farm because of access to the waterway. It was thought that this would add extra appeal to the visitor centre, because visitors would be able to enjoy viewing the boats. Potential access problems for boat users with disabilities were also identified.
- 2.32** The area in the vicinity of Charterhouse Farm was one of the sites considered for a potential visitor centre. Although it had some advantages, particularly, the presence of an existing waterway, New Decoy Farm, where Zone 5 is represented, had many more advantages. In addition to factors such as the presence of 360 degree views, and a large enough area within which to develop walks, cycle routes and access facilities, a key factor was that the Project Partners owned the land in this area.

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- 2.33** However, to enable closer access by waterway, the Project Partners have proposed that a clay lined waterway would be possible up to the B660 and then connecting via the central footpath/ cycleway to the visitor facilities. A bus stop adjacent to these moorings would enable access for boat users for whom that distance (approximately 1km) would be too far.
- 2.34** Also of importance for boaters was access to a place to turn around and get to the pub in Holme. It was thought that the maximum number of boats to accommodate would be 12. The draft masterplan provides for moorings along the New Dyke and for a footpath to be provided to Holme village. Moorings should be on the northern bank of the dyke as this will maintain privacy for landowners nearby. The southern bank is not owned by the Project Partners.
- 2.35** Further discussion on the nature of visitor facilities is discussed in 'Visitor Facilities'.

Existing Access

Existing Problems

- 2.36** Problems with existing access were highlighted as being the existing section of the National Cycle Network which falls on a dangerous road, the lack of safe, circular access from surrounding villages and gaps in access from villages. In developing the first draft of the masterplan, the Project Partners have looked to develop routes which wherever possible are circular and do not use busy roads. This is discussed further in 'Footpaths, Cycleways and Bridleways'.

Additions or Revisions to the Map

- 2.37** Consultees identified that the waterway running to Ramsey (this was on the map but not highlighted in blue), the wider highway network and bus stops were items that were missing from the map. These features have been added to the map.
- 2.38** Consultees also highlighted the need for the following revisions or checks:
- Concerns were expressed that the Ordnance Survey depiction of what routes have public rights (and which do not) was not completely accurate. The Project Partners found that they were correct within the project area, but that there were a small number of diversions that have not been corrected on the OS mapping for the wider area.
 - It was recommended to check for the presence of any unrecorded Public Rights of Way or those which the County Council delivers. This has been checked by the Project Partners.
 - It was recommended that the Rights of Way (RoW) Improvement Plan was consulted, which considers wider access networks than just RoW. This has been checked by the Project Partners.

Public Rights of Way (PRoW) within the Project Area

- 2.39** The conservation and wildlife group highlighted that two PRoWs within the project area are little used, they run parallel from the south to the centre of the project area. They recommended that it would be highly beneficial for wading birds if the eastern PRoW, or a section of it, could be permanently removed, with the parallel western PRoW providing the main access. They suggested that this would enable a larger area for waders adjacent to Woodwalton Fen, which would also provide an attractive view from the western PRoW.
- 2.40** The access and activities group were asked what they thought of this proposal. Overall they had no issues with this idea and consultees considered this PRoW to be used very little at present. Cambridgeshire County Council pointed out that removing a PRoW is not a simple process, but suggested it may be possible if the Project Partners provide an alternative route or diversion. The partners elected to seek a diversion of the eastern PRoW, providing a diversion using the western PRoW.

Existing Activity Areas

Angling

- 2.41** It was noted that there may be additional angling facilities outside the Great Fen Project area that are not marked. Environment Agency has provided up to date details of locations of angling facilities.
- 2.42** Chapel Road residents expressed concern over the current impact of angling along the Great Raveley Drain, in terms of the impact of vehicles on Chapel Road (e.g. grass verges used for passing), and litter left in the fishing areas. Proposals to minimise the impact of vehicle use of Chapel Road are considered under 'Visitor Facilities'.
- 2.43** In addition, the partners have also spoken to the local Angling Society, who have said that they would be happy to include a guidance with their instructions and directions (e.g. for competitions) to encourage angling visitors to drive carefully down Chapel Road and to not use grass verges for passing. The Angling Society state in all their literature that anglers should take litter with them. The Society also carry out random checks on sites to ensure that anglers have the necessary handbooks and will collect litter if they see any.
- 2.44** Natural England and the Wildlife Trust are developing wardening schemes, which will include developing relationships with users of Woodwalton Fen and anglers along the Great Raveley Drain. Limited difficulties with approaching people who have dropped litter, or that don't have their handbook, due to occasional verbal abuse were identified.
- 2.45** The Environment Agency highlighted that Great Raveley Drain is an excellent winter fishery area where fish tend to shoal, attracting people from across the country, and it is likely that this will continue to be popular with anglers into the future.
- 2.46** The Environment Agency also emphasised that a particular benefit of the existing angling activity is that anglers use local pubs, providing business during the quieter winter months. There are usually about 10 competitions each winter season.

Existing Amenities and Services

Additions or Revisions to the Map

- 2.47** Consultees suggested that all Bed & Breakfast accommodation, the caravanning and camping site at Kings Ripton, the location of heritage attractions (e.g. Flag Fen, Ramsey Rural Museum), other points of interpretation interest, such as features marked on OS maps (e.g. Castle Moat) and Wildlife Trust nature reserves in and around the Project area should be added to the map. These additional features have been subsequently researched and added where appropriate.

Moorings and Facilities

- 2.48** The Inland Waterways Association said that Bill Fen Marina is a good place from which to explore the Great Fen, and that it would take just over an hour to travel from Bill Fen Marina.

Visitor Facilities

Ramsey Heights Countryside Classroom and Nature Reserve

- 2.49** Support was expressed for using Ramsey Heights Countryside Classroom and Nature Reserve (located on Chapel Road) as the main visitor facilities for the Great Fen Project over the next five years, until new visitor facilities are available at the proposed site of New Decoy, off the B660.

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- 2.50** Local residents asked how the Countryside Classroom would be used in the future, once the new visitor facilities were present. The Project Partners said that many of its current functions (e.g. school and community groups visits, events etc) would be located at the new visitor centre. However, it would still be used, for example, for training events.

Woodwalton Fen National Nature Reserve

- 2.51** In light of increasing visitor numbers, the question was raised as to whether improved facilities would be provided at Woodwalton Fen, such as public toilets, which people may expect. The Project Partners said that they were looking to redirect pressure away from Woodwalton Fen and that they were aware that they needed to provide better information about the availability of toilets (e.g. at the Countryside Classroom during office hours, nearby pubs).

Holme Fen National Nature Reserve

- 2.52** The problem of security at Holme Fen, in particular car break-ins, was highlighted. The Project Partners responded that vandalism and anti-social behaviour (arson in bird hides, removal of waymarkers, break-ins to parked cars) makes improvements to visitor facilities at Holme Fen difficult. However, they have planned other improvements, such as better information and signage, including location of toilets.

New Visitor Facilities at New Decoy

- 2.53** Consultees across groups wanted to know the timetable for delivery of new visitor facilities at New Decoy. These are scheduled to be provided in 2013, subject to funding, but that while that is the aim, there is still a great deal of feasibility study and work to be done. The possibility of incremental improvements, such as information points and basic visitor facilities located elsewhere in the project area, in the meantime was highlighted.
- 2.54** Consultees discussed the nature of the new visitor centre and facilities proposed at New Decoy, including the nature of the building and what it will provide, the interpretation provision, attractions, activities, and the nature of the surrounding area. At that time this was yet to be agreed, but it was likely to include office facilities, meeting space, storage, a café, interpretation and access in to the surrounding area of mixed habitats.

Concerns

- 2.55** A number of consultees had concerns that there would be nothing to see around the new visitor facilities in five years time. However, the Great Fen Project partners explained that Fen habitats develop relatively quickly, and that there will be other interesting features e.g. activities and interpretation.

Visitor Experiences

- 2.56** There was a strong feeling from many consultees across groups that the new visitor facilities should provide unique and inspiring experiences. Suggestions provided include the following:

General Matters

- Viewing the project area from a raised height – examples identified included using “treetop walks” or being able to use zip wires.
- Ancient crafts, for example, enabling people to cut reed with ancient tools and demonstration of old industries.
- Local food.
- Organic food.
- Snack bar.
- Cloakrooms.
- Arts and crafts, and heritage all year round.

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- Interactive features, audio-visual displays, a way of showing the vision, permanent installations.
- Hands-on experiences.
- Consideration of examples in Holland and the States.
- Security provided through CCTV/ alarm systems and possibly a moat.
- Bike racks (Sheffield stands).
- Three or four small woodland areas (approximately 6 acres each) for corporate team-building and educational use, possibly incorporating round houses in meadow glades for overnight stays see 'Activity Provision' for more of a discussion of nature of activities, woodland species and design considerations). Educational areas are also likely to incorporate ponds and meadows. These areas may require restricted access when in use.
- A mix of habitats within a short range of the visitor centre for interpretation and visitor use (including reedbeds, wet and dry grassland, scrub and woodland).

Dog Related

- Picnic areas for dogs and no dogs.
- Dog play areas alongside children's play areas (divided by low fence), to enable parents to watch both.
- Red (no dog), amber (dogs on lead) and green (dogs off lead) system, with attractive alternative for dog walkers. Low fences or hedgerows to divide without segregating users.
- Dog walking trails incorporating place(s) to swim and dig (sand or wood chippings would be suitable), and potentially use equipment (e.g. tunnels and equipment used in Crufts).
- A general green space (rectangular, ideally half a mile up to a few miles) designated for dogs off leads to enable shorter or longer walks through looping back, which could be particularly important, for example, for older people. This could also incorporate a "dog training area", which would be a smaller fenced area. This would also provide an opportunity for dog walkers to meet staff.
- Dog toys/ food/ bowls on sale in the shop has provided a good income in other locations.
- Mini kennel area where a dog can be tied and kept sectioned off, but the design enables it to be visible and open fronted, as it was suggested many people have a paranoia that their dogs will be stolen.
- Taps and bowls available on routes and marked on a map.

Horse Related

- Bar to hitch horses, but ideally a corral (5m x 5m for two horses) for security to ensure if a horse come loose, it cannot run away (the primary concern of horse riders), and possibly with a picnic bench overlooking the corral.

Angling

- Angling facilities, including, for example, five platforms for people with disabilities and young people, and ideally 30 pegs to fish, with as many of those as possible being platforms, potentially phased in with demand.
- Angling facilities less than 50m from parking for people with disabilities.
- Angling facilities where tackle can be dropped off.

2.57 As part of the masterplan implementation the Project Partners will consult further on the nature of visitor facilities. This feedback will be incorporated into that work.

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Visitor Projections

- 2.58** A common question that arose across consultation groups related to visitor projections because of the potential impact, need for parking, and nature of visitor facilities. It was suggested that a study or modelling could be undertaken to help with looking at creating features for visitors or predicting disturbance of wildlife. It was highlighted that visitor projections are important for surrounding communities and local businesses (e.g. Bed & Breakfasts, pubs).
- 2.59** The Project Partners said that they were aiming for 50,000 to 100,000 visitors to the visitor facilities in the next five to ten years. However, they highlighted the difficulties in predicting visitor numbers, and said that more work was needed. The Project Partners also suggested that it was likely that a phased approach to accommodate rising numbers of visitors would be needed.

Visitor Gateways and Local Village Based Facilities

- 2.60** There was a strong feeling across groups, but particularly in the heritage, tourism and business group, that locating visitor hubs and/or parking in local communities surrounding the project area would help local communities to benefit economically from the tourism generated by the Great Fen. It was suggested that another mode of transport could be used to gain access to the Great Fen.
- 2.61** The following access opportunities and ideas have been identified by consultees and the Project Partners:
- Parking in or close to Holme, because of its location close to the A1, with an electric bus, road/water vehicle or 'Fen Duck'.
 - Parking in Ramsey with a water taxi, cycle hire and/or canoe hire.
 - There was the suggestion of seeing if the new Tesco's in Ramsey would provide parking facilities and even a shuttle bus, although this would need to be considered alongside concerns from local residents that Tesco's is diverting business from Ramsey town shops, and that shops and businesses in the High Street in Ramsey should benefit from the tourism.
 - Parking and cycle hire in Yaxley.
 - Links to the proposed Park and Ride facilities for Peterborough.
 - Links to a possible visitor centre in the Hamptons.
 - Parking, including possibly horse box parking, at Woodwalton.
 - Links to the water taxi proposed for Peterborough (Environment Agency).
 - Links via public bus services.
 - Links via train (cycling one way between Peterborough and Huntingdon, then getting the train back).
 - Links via model railway.
 - High quality, safe, (off-road) and reasonably direct footpaths, cycle routes and bridleways from surrounding centres of population, including Peterborough, Yaxley, Huntingdon, Ramsey, Sawtry, Holme and Woodwalton.
- 2.62** It was also suggested that this might require subsidised parking.
- 2.63** To encourage local economic benefits, the Project Partners have proposed that they would look to provide gateways to the Great Fen and village based facilities as part of the masterplan. The individual nature of the gateway or village based facility would be dependent on its location, visitor profile and opportunities to work with local businesses. As an example, it might be possible to provide extra parking facilities and information. Depending on location, feasibility and local business opportunities, a gateway or village based facility may provide visitors with the option to hire a bike, or take an electric bus or water taxi to the Great Fen. The Project Partners felt that the impact on residents would need to be minimised, and how best to do this should be discussed with local people at the public consultation.

Multi-modal Access

- 2.64** A number of consultees suggested multi-modal access e.g. canoe one way and get a water taxi back, cycle one way and get an electric bus back, cycle one way and get the train back. It was suggested that the Great Fen partners could discuss with the Wicken Vision team how they are looking to achieve this. The Project Partners will continue to look at methods used at Wicken Fen.

Management

- 2.65** There was also the suggestion that these hubs would not need to be necessarily managed by the partners, and could provide opportunities for entrepreneurs. Consultees and Project Partners suggested that they could incorporate refreshment huts or tearoom, toilets and light industrial units e.g. shops rented for local crafts, bicycle shop and hire (as at Rutland Water). The Project Partners will look into this as part of further consultation and work with local businesses and communities.

Access To and Within the Great Fen Project Area

Access and Management Issues

Managing People and Wildlife

- 2.66** There were some general concerns about ensuring that there is a careful balance between wildlife and access provision, and the conservation and wildlife group highlighted the need to manage access to minimise the potentially negative impact on sensitive species. A member of the conservation and wildlife group also felt that work should establish where the wildlife is or where we want it, and then plan access around it. Holme Parish Councillors were worried that the Project area might be like a country park or theme park.

Flexibility of Access

- 2.67** The need for flexibility to change access, from a wildlife or climate change perspective, was highlighted by the conservation and wildlife group. In particular, it was suggested that there may need to be exclusions on key sensitive areas during critical periods.

Screening and Landscaping

- 2.68** It was suggested that natural topography, barriers, screens or walls with holes could help to minimise the impact of visitors and/or restrict access onto sensitive areas, while still allowing users to view the wildlife. For example, it was suggested that a screen could be built on the western bank of Woodwalton Fen. The Project Partners agree that consideration needs to be made of where screening might be appropriate. See also the discussion around of the development of woodland in 'Habitats and Land Management'.

People with Disabilities

- 2.69** It was highlighted that disability access points are very important, and also that consideration needs to be made about where to provide toilets. It was recommended that the full range of disability groups be consulted. See also section 'Visitor Facilities'.

Visitor Pressure

- 2.70** Many of the consultees asked about the impact of visitor use on the NNRs, and there was a concern that if the Great Fen Project led to greater numbers of visitors at the NNRs, the conservation aims of conserving the rare species of the NNRs, would be compromised. It has been estimated that Woodwalton Fen currently receives about 5,000 visitors a year, and it is thought that the maximum capacity is about 8,000 visitors.

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- 2.71** Chapel Road residents expressed concern that vehicle use on Chapel Road had already increased a great deal. They highlighted the negative impacts of this, particularly in terms of the condition of the road (road surface deterioration and use of grass verges for passing) and speed of the road (National Speed Limit), which they felt was too high considering its use by pedestrians, children etc. Feedback on a speed survey and discussions with Highways regarding imposing a speed limit on the road suggested that signs should be provided to signify that it was a single track road with lay-bys and that pedestrians, children, and horses maybe on the road so drivers should show caution. This requires further investigation from the Project Partners on behalf of local residents in the near future. Chapel Road residents welcomed the idea of new visitor facilities off the B660 which they felt could much better sustain visitor pressure.
- 2.72** There was overall agreement across consultation groups that visitor pressure should be directed away from the National Nature Reserves on to the new visitor facilities. A staff member of Cambridgeshire County Council felt that we could afford to be less cautious with restricting access to the National Nature Reserves. It was suggested that the drains in Woodwalton Fen provided a natural 'moating effect' which might help to direct access.
- 2.73** It was also suggested that there could be some means of getting close and experiencing Woodwalton Fen through looking in e.g. from a bank or from a bird/ tower hide. Provision for wheelchair and pushchair users would need to be considered.
- 2.74** It was also suggested that there could be better access provision in Holme Fen NNR, including boardwalk provision, for example, because people would want to see and experience the silver birches, and an equivalent experience would not be available at the visitor centre either in the short or medium term. It was suggested that an effective path network in Holme Fen, connected to wider access networks, could spread use and hence reduce the likelihood of damage to sensitive species.
- 2.75** The Ramblers Association said that while more visitor pressure in Holme Fen may be undesirable, a footpath might be needed, or thought given to how many people there will be and where they should be directed. The Project Partners will look further into access to Holme Fen based on this feedback.
- 2.76** Local landowners highlighted locations where public access could pose safety and/or security issues. It was also raised that the masterplan should not be confused with what is available now. The partners will need to make clear that the masterplan is aspirational and should ensure that people are aware that current access is mainly constrained to the public footpath network.
- 2.77** It has also been indicated that there may be an old public access route across the railway east of Sawtry, although the definitive map information on the County Council's website suggested that this was not the case.

Panoramic Views and Raised Viewpoints

- 2.78** A number of consultees highlighted the idea of raised viewpoints, both at visitor facilities (discussed in 'Visitor Facilities') and within the project area as follows:
- Raised bird hides on the western PRoW to the west of Woodwalton Fen with views of a possible wader area.
 - Raised area/ bird hide looking into Woodwalton Fen, for example, from the north-east.
 - The tower of St Andrew's Church as a possible viewpoint.
 - The possibility of utilising views from higher ground to the south.
- 2.79** The partners have marked potential viewpoints on the draft masterplan map, and will consider whether any of these could be raised viewing points in the future.

Information, Signage and Interpretation

- 2.80** It was suggested that there should be better information about access and activities, particularly where they are located, where to go, how to get there etc. It was suggested that this needs to be addressed now. Further discussion of interpretation is included under 'Visitor Facilities'.
- 2.81** It was highlighted that interpretation needs to be in places other than the visitor centre and needs to tell the story of the Fens. Other methods of interpretation suggested included, recreating the ancient landscape and use of tools e.g. reed cutting, live web cams, and broadband/ wifi interpretation, podcasts and digital access (although it was highlighted that digital access is an issue in this area especially Holme).
- 2.82** It was suggested that interpretative links could be made with the following attractions/ points of heritage interest, with the potential for information points:
- Peterborough Cathedral (also visible from raised platform) – with the associated story of transport of stone over the Whittlesey Mere.
 - Peterborough Museum.
 - Flag Fen.
 - Ramsey Abbey (also visible from raised platform).
 - Sawtry Abbey (also visible from raised platform).
 - St Andrew's Church.
 - Old brick pits close to Woodwalton Fen.
- 2.83** It was proposed that the human heritage story, the Bronze Age landscape etc was incorporated. The Project Partners are currently forming links with local heritage attractions to look at joint promotion.

Roads, Car Parking and Public Transport

Impact on Local Roads and Villages

- 2.84** It was suggested that the Great Fen partners would need to consider (and minimise) the impact on villages and local roads, particularly from the A1(M) to the villages (Holme village and Conington). There was a suggestion that there could be access via the old A1.

Road Crossing at the New Visitor Facilities

- 2.85** It was highlighted that a safe means of crossing the B660 would be required to reach the visitor facilities, whether that was a crossing, pedestrian bridge or underpass. The Project Partners will investigate this further and liaise with the Highways Authority.

Level Crossing at Holme

- 2.86** Consultees across groups highlighted the problem of the level crossing at Holme as presenting a potential access problem for the visitor facilities. A transport study, undertaken by Atkins, with projections of visitor numbers of 50,000 per year, suggested that this would increase traffic by an average of 40 cars per day. However, it was also pointed out that visitor numbers are more likely to be concentrated on peak times, such as summer periods/ weekends and Bank Holidays. A number of solutions were proposed by consultees and the Project Partners, which will be considered further by Project Partners:
- Having a manned signal at Holme Fen was proposed by a resident who works for Network Rail. If it were manually controlled, staff could decide to open the gates more often to let traffic through. This suggests a meeting between the partners and Network Rail would be worth pursuing, especially if particularly busy periods can be planned for.
 - Park and Ride schemes by water taxi, electric bus or bike. Parking could be located in or close to Holme to promote local tourism and business.

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- Providing a bridge or footbridge.
- Having a radio station where people can tune into receive information about the Great Fen Project.
- Timing bus services with the level crossing.

Parking within the Great Fen Project Area

2.87 It was expressed that to help with the issues of security, it would be sensible to concentrate parking at the main visitor facilities in Zone 5. It was also suggested that this would draw people to the main visitor facilities, and would make sense from an income generation point of view. It was suggested by the Project Partners that there could be limited parking in the Project area by viewpoints/ interpretation points.

Public Transport Links

2.88 The importance of talking to bus companies, and exploring public transport links and options, was highlighted by consultees across the groups. It was felt that for many individuals this would be the only viable non-car option. It was asked whether the guided busway from Cambridge to St Ives could at least get people part of the way to the Great Fen. Although there will always be limitations in influencing the routes of private transport providers, the Project Partners will liaise further with local public transport providers, including community transport providers to ensure that they are aware of the Great Fen and potential demand for transport from the surrounding towns and villages.

Footpaths, Cycleways and Bridleways

Circular Routes within and to the Project Area

2.89 A view shared across groups was the desire for circular routes from surrounding communities into the Great Fen, existing and National Networks, as well as radiating from the visitor centre, with shorter and longer options available, and opportunities to extend. For example, the Ramblers felt that a 12 mile walk was easily achievable in a day.

2.90 The British Horse Society (BHS) said that community circuits would be the most important thing for local communities, as they do not involve transport of horses in boxes, and therefore are both easier for users and more sustainable. Circuits of 10 to 15 miles were suggested, with circuits whose boundaries touch or overlap, to enable variation. Avoidance of fast moving motorised traffic and routes avoiding black spots was seen as highly preferable. BHS suggested that for novices, routes of 7 to 10 miles may be more achievable, for example, if pony hire was set up. The possibility of using banks along waterways was suggested, particularly where this may give views over the Project area.

2.91 The importance of providing “family-safe” routes was highlighted i.e. being on quiet roads, or off-road paths or farm roads. It was suggested that, where possible, these routes should follow existing hard surfaces and PRowS to minimise the cost of improvements. The need for reasonably level and direct, and attractive routes was also highlighted.

2.92 The following routes were suggested:

- Links to the Peterborough Green Wheel east of Stanground, via Farcet and either Straight Lode or the quieter Conquest Lode, with a short length of farm track (negotiation required) to link to the Great Fen via existing bridges. The Conquest Lode route reaches Great Fen at Zone 1.
- Links to the Ortons and the Hamptons (including the Hampton Country Park and a potential visitor centre at Hamptons which could be a gateway to the Great Fen)
- Links from Peterborough via Yaxley (including the proposed Country Park) and Sawtry.
- Link from Yaxley via farm roads and a river bank (this will require negotiation with the landowner).
- Alternative route from Yaxley following Yaxley Lode.
- Link from Sawtry where there are existing bridleway rights at Five Arch Bridge, though nearby farm road may provide a better surface (rights would need to be obtained).

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- Access from Ramsey along the old railway line.
- From Ramsey the public footpath on Biggin Lane and Bury Lane is used by some cyclists, but rights would need to be obtained.
- Access from Ramsey via Chapel Road and Woodwalton Fen.
- Links from Woodwalton village utilising existing PRow in the south of the Project area.
- Direct links from Holme village to Holme Fen.
- Route running from Holme village to the visitor centre, avoiding the road.
- Links from Upwood and Great Raveley (one of the PRow currently stops in a field).
- Links with RAF Upwood.
- Links with Alconbury Airbase.
- Links from Huntingdon as part of the Ermine Street allocated development. This should become the preferred National Cycle Network route between Huntingdon and Alconbury, and might be preferable to the route starting on the Abbots Ripton Road, though this better serves the existing residential areas of Oxmoor etc.

2.93 Also suggested was upgrading the footpath through Yaxley to a cycleway/ bridleway. Another suggestion was a route alongside the waterway from Ramsey which would have the benefit of ownership by Middle Level Commissioners. It was noted that the part of the access would be alongside the road, which may not be desirable from an aesthetics and noise point of view.

2.94 Sustrans also recommended that bike stands (Sheffield stands preferred) be located where people are allowed on foot but not by bike.

2.95 BHS is also aiming to develop a bridleway linear link from Huntingdon to Peterborough Green Wheel, tying in with a national initiative of the British Horse Society to have a route from London to Boston, linking into existing routes there (the H1 Great Northern Bridle Route). These can be signed by white writing on a red patch (e.g. H1), which looks like the cycle network signs, but also indicates to cyclists that it is not necessarily a smooth road.

2.96 The project partners have considered potential circular, safe routes from the surrounding communities. Some proposed routes were consulted on during the Phase 2 consultation.

Link from Holme Fen to Woodwalton Fen

2.97 A member of the Countryside Access team at Cambridgeshire County Council suggested that in light of the problems with security and parking at Holme Fen, safe and legal off-road walking links from Holme Fen to Woodwalton Fen should be provided, incorporating the paths along Yaxley Lode and also to Holme village. It was suggested that these should be a priority and that with landowner agreement, the County Council could help to deliver these within a year. The Great Fen partners have incorporated safe links as suggested, although with reference to delivery within five years, the partners highlight the issue that much of the land is tenanted to long term tenants.

Public Rights of Way

2.98 The advantages of providing PRow were highlighted, including upkeep by Cambridgeshire County Council, and automatic inclusion on OS maps. The Project Partners expressed the concern that if PRow were introduced, and then species arrived, such as cranes, which were very sensitive, it would then be impossible to cordon off an area and so it was recognised that their constraints would make them inappropriate in some locations (including use at all times, legal procedures to divert, and very difficult to extinguish altogether). See [Flood Risk Management, LINK] for discussion of changing the existing PRow access to the west of Woodwalton Fen.

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- 2.99** However it was identified that permissive paths have their own issues, not least the associated long term uncertainty when public money is involved. The suggested approach was to establish a 'backbone' bridleway network with PRow status, shown on OS maps, offering safe off-road routes, linking to a network of permissive paths, which might have seasonal availability and which might change as the fen restoration process proceeds.
- 2.100** Sustrans recommended that it would be valuable to have a high quality route extended through the Great Fen, particularly routes linking Peterborough and Huntingdon with the proposed visitor centre. This would enable easy day trips to be made whereby people might get the train from Peterborough to Huntingdon, and then cycle back to Peterborough via the Great Fen. Such a link could potentially become the main National Cycle Network (NCN) route in the area, putting the Great Fen directly on the NCN and making it an obvious attraction for touring cyclists.
- 2.101** The Project Partners have decided on two key, off road, spinal routes, north to south through the project area, and east to west. These link into existing footpath and cycle routes, although their designations/status are yet to be determined.
- 2.102** Sustrans added that provision of service for cyclists at the visitor centre, and any other facilities near cycle routes and road entrances to the Great Fen would be useful, as would secure cycle parking (Sheffield stands) in any places beyond which only walkers would be permitted.
- 2.103** BHS said that they will publicise PRowS, but don't tend to publicise permissive paths, as they can spend money advertising and then the paths are closed. If a path was going to be a PRow, the British Horse Society could help to raise money for it as a charity, but this wouldn't be possible for permissive paths, because they are not permanent.

Multi-user versus Single User

- 2.104** There were mixed views on multi-user paths. It was thought that the occasional bike would not pose issues, however in areas where there would be cycle hire and heavy use by bikes, it was thought that this could be much more of a problem, so walkers and cyclists should be kept separate. It was also suggested that more should be done to consult people with disabilities to see how they felt about sharing paths with cyclists. It was also suggested that some walkers prefer not to walk on bridleways, so suggested not to combine the two. It was suggested that there are many possible approaches for multi-user paths which can satisfy all users, which will require further research and consideration.
- 2.105** The BHS said that multi-user paths have worked with no conflict where the paths are sufficiently wide. They suggest that the ideal would be 5 metres, with 3m of grass path designated for horses. However, it was appreciated that this would not always be possible. Where it is just a bridleway, BHS said that it would normally be 4 metres wide, coming down to 3 metres if there is not the land, some obstacle, or where there is a pinch point (1.6m for stopping entry by car). There is discretion to not take out good trees or species, and also allowance of rotation for cuts (e.g. for a 5m path, mowing one side one year, and one side another). However riders don't like riding in long grass next to roads because of potential litter which could include sharp objects. BHS said that horse riders main objections arise when an existing bridleway is tarmaced over, but that they are generally happy where there is new provision. BHS have said that when we get to the implementation stage, they will provide advice on the nature of gates, based on experience across the country.

Path Surfaces

- 2.106** It was suggested that on multi-user routes there could be a section of hard surfaced track for walkers/cyclists, and an adjacent section of softer surface for horse riders, who may use the tarmac or hard surface when the other section is particularly dry or wet. Sustrans felt that tarmac was required if cycle paths were to be shared with horse-riders, due to the increased impact of horses. The use of alternative surfaces was also suggested.

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- 2.107** BHS said that grass is generally preferred, although horse riders will use harder surfaces in wet weather, therefore this would also be a benefit of multi-surfaced/ multi-user paths. It was also felt that shared use would save on maintenance of the grass areas, as people will tend to walk on the harder surface. Crushed stone was suggested as a good hard surface.
- 2.108** A network of paths with different surfaces was recommended by Countryside Access. This is in line with previous consultation with Royal National Institute for Blind People (RNIB) and other disability groups who commented that people will enjoy walking or using a wheelchair on non-tarmac surfaces e.g. using grass paths.

Concern with Cycling Impact on Wildlife

- 2.109** Consultees from the conservation and wildlife group expressed concern about the impact of cycling on wildlife in terms of potential disturbance and effects on the movement of deer. A local wildlife specialist said that the cycle route at Grafham has impacted very severely on disturbance to wildlife. The partners will look to manage this and provide screening where appropriate.

Cycleway around Zone 2

- 2.110** It was proposed that there could be a cycleway around Zone 2 without access in, providing a circular route with different land structures to tell the story of the Fen, habitats and farming. This suggestion was incorporated into the first draft of the masterplan.

Waterways and Moorings

Waterway Access

- 2.111** Environment Agency said that access from Peterborough to the Great Fen via boat takes approximately a day. They suggested that the Fen Waterways feasibility studies are also worth revisiting, to look at wider masterplanning that is happening in the area and potential links to the Great Fen. The boating community thought that the Middle Level is currently underutilised by boat users. The most obvious waterway access for powered boats was highlighted as being along the New Dyke, which runs along the centre of the Project area, just south of the B660. Exhibition Bridge was highlighted as a major problem for limiting access via the eastern edge of the project, and would be expensive to remedy.

Moorings and Turning Points

- 2.112** The boating community suggested that:
- It is better to have basic moorings provided than have boaters create their own.
 - At boating facilities and a mooring terminus, a local services would be an advantage.
 - All Environment Agency moorings are metallised.
 - There should be 20m turning points on the western and eastern ends of this waterway.
 - 30m of moorings should be provided for narrow boats (accommodating 12 boats).
- 2.113** It was highlighted that it would make sense to tie in links with footpaths from the moorings to the visitor centre. Access for people with disabilities to the visitor centre was highlighted as a potential issue.
- 2.114** Three locations of moorings were proposed along the central waterway by the boating community, which would be suitable for long boats. Two further locations of moorings were proposed by the Environment Agency on the waterway between Ramey St Mary's and Pondersbridge.
- 2.115** A member of the Countryside Services team at Huntingdonshire District Council recommended against long term moorings because of associated problems with cars on tracks, and hours of use. The Inland Waterways Association (IWA) recommended 48 hour maximum moorings. IWA felt that the facilities would definitely attract people from the Nene and Grand Union Canal to the Ouse, but felt that the visitor centre

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should be positioned next to a canal or drain. The Great Ouse Boating Association said that they could manage moorings in or around the Great Fen Project area. Local landowners have expressed concern about how moorings may impact on security and privacy.

Canoeing and Kayaking

- 2.116** It was suggested that people could canoe from Ramsey. Cambridgeshire Canoeing Association recommended that a water entrance to the Great Fen would enable canoeists and kayakers to come to the Fen from adjacent rivers and then to paddle within the Great Fen itself. It was felt that there was not easy, near access from rivers and other bodies to the Great Fen, so the demand from people paddling their way in would probably be limited, but it would be important for them to feel welcomed.
- 2.117** Like walkers, the Association said that canoeists prefer to do circular routes. It was suggested that to be a success, the approved routes would need some adjustment to the fen drove banks to make it easier to get out of the water and into another piece of water, for example, the Environment Agency can provide stepped banks, and it was noted that the British Canoe Union HQ is willing to give advice about design and construction of portage points.
- 2.118** The Cambridgeshire Canoeing Association also suggested that a car park adjacent to the water which could be easily accessed with a good landing stage would enable visitors to drive to the Great Fen and then to launch their own craft once there. It was highlighted that this would enable them to spend more time within the Great Fen itself. The Association thought that if this area was close to a restaurant and toilet facilities then it could be a very popular option with visitors.
- 2.119** The Project Partners will indicate canoeing circuits on the masterplan, and look at how portage points and stepped access will need to be integrated. How canoeing might be linked into Zone 5 (visitor facilities) will be considered during further visitor facilities consultation.

Activity Provision

Boat, Canoe or Punt Hire

- 2.120** Based on other models (e.g. Slimbridge, Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust) it was suggested that boat hire and canoe hire be located at the visitor centre to help with staffing and impact management. This was recommended as both a good opportunity for income generation, and a good way to see wildlife with minimal disturbance.
- 2.121** Cambridgeshire Canoeing Association recommended a canoe hire facility within the boundary or just outside, if for administrative reasons this is the practical solution. It was suggested that to enable visitors who have difficulty walking to see the wildlife, the most suitable option would be stable touring open boats (paddled with a one bladed paddle for two to three people). The potential for punting was also suggested, either as either a guided or self-guided experience. A Cambridgeshire County Councillor said that it would not be possible to encourage sailing because of the depth of the water.

Cycle Hire

- 2.122** It was suggested that cycle hire could either be provided internally, or it could be provided by a local entrepreneur and business. The idea was presented that there could be more than one point to hire a bike, which then could be dropped off elsewhere, and another mode of transport taken for the return journey. The partners will investigate opportunities for this in the future.

Horse Riding

- 2.123** It was suggested that a good way to view wildlife without disturbing it is on horseback, and that people could hire horses or ponies, with a circular route around an area where people could go wildlife watching. There was concern about people bringing horses into the Project area if they were unused to riding in the

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Fens. It was also pointed out that the clay in the south was often too wet or too dry for riding. The British Horse Society suggested looking on the Ride UK website for information and rationale support for funding bids.

- 2.124** Due to the high density of cars, people and possibly livestock in Zone 5, the Project partners detailed consideration is required of how to provide provision for horse riders in the Project area which doesn't conflict with Zone 5. Local horse riders were consulted further on this during Phase 2 of the consultation, (see 'Access to and within the Great Fen Project area').

Angling

- 2.125** A representative from Yaxley, Holme and District Angling Association felt that it would be good to have angling facilities close to the visitor facilities, where safe parking would be available, as security can be an issue. Having fishing platforms would be particularly useful for people with disabilities and young children.
- 2.126** Hunts Association for Tourism said that the southern end of the Great Raveley drain is fishable and that there is a hard road beside it. However, the Project Partners have said that they have a concern about the potential disturbance caused by this, and are not sure that there is adequate road access. It was also suggested that the Great Fen could be good for hosting fishing competitions to attract many visitors. It was thought that this would also help to encourage overnight tourists.
- 2.127** The local Neighbourhood Manager for Ramsey said that the fishing culture was huge locally and for new migrant worker communities. It was proposed by a local resident that there could be a fishing lake stocked with edible fish, such as trout. It was also suggested during the consultation that there may be some conflict between angling and boating.
- 2.128** The partners will look further into provision of angling facilities in the Project area. The partners will liaise further with local anglers to provide appropriate facilities and to minimise conflicts with other users.

Wildlife Watching

- 2.129** It was also considered important to develop opportunities for winter attractions i.e. wildlife, swans (as at Welney), birdlife. Provision to go and view the wildlife was seen as important. Moving forward from the idea of raised viewing platforms, treetop accommodation was proposed to watch wildlife, and it was proposed that wilderness tours could be undertaken, as in Africa. These tours could be conducted during the day or at night (e.g. badger watching possibly using infra-red viewing).
- 2.130** The Project Partners will take these considerations into view when looking in more detail at visitor facilities and business opportunities in the future.

Walking and Dog Walking

- 2.131** Concerns were expressed about the problems with dogs defecating and not being kept on leads. It was proposed by the Project Partners that there could be routes designated for people to walk dogs off the lead, and there could be other 'no dog' routes. It was discussed that these may need to be somewhat self-policing.
- 2.132** The Access and Recreation representative from Natural England highlighted the importance of dog walkers (for example, 40% of RSPB members are dog walkers) for revenue and support on site in reducing vandalism and influencing other dog owners, particularly out of hours when staff aren't present.
- 2.133** Access could be organised using a red (no dog), amber (dogs on leads) and green (dogs off leads) system. Routes would ideally include circular dogs off lead routes, and rectangular areas with opportunities to loop back.

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- 2.134** Natural England suggested that there should not be a blanket “dogs on lead” approach, where the demands of grazing or land use do not require it; there should be good provision across the project area and that dogs on leads everywhere can become unenforceable.
- 2.135** Natural England also highlighted that where health walks are provided (often 1hr to 1.5hr in duration), dogs are often not allowed so alternatives which do allow dogs should be provided. Suggested activities included training days, or encouraging dog walkers to organise events. The Project Partners agreed that utilising the red/ amber/ green approach would be a sensible one which could be outlined in the text of the masterplan.

Dog Mess Issues

- 2.136** Natural England said that research has shown that dog mess can be deposited in standard litter bins, so there is no need for separate provision, unless the partners wished to reduce the amount of litter being deposited in bins throughout the area. They recommended a bin after 100m of the start of a walk, when dogs are most likely to defecate. It was recommended that they should also be marked on a map. Natural England also suggested consideration of the Forestry Commissions successful “Stick and flick” approach, which involved flicking dog mess off paths and useable areas, where it will biodegrade, rather than going into landfill. This advice will be considered by the partners when looking at future management of dog walking access, particularly within Zone 5 where the greatest provision for dog walking will be made.

Camping and Caravanning

- 2.137** There was a general feeling that camping and caravanning should be located outside the Project area, although the question was also raised as to whether a caravanning site could be located in the south end, linking to a new cycleway. Ferry Meadows was provided as an example of a site where a caravanning site situated on the outskirts is very popular, where people can walk and bus easily to facilities and a pub. The Project Partners concluded that they would signpost people to local caravanning businesses operating outside the Project area and not provide any extra caravanning provision within the area.

Wilderness Camping

- 2.138** The heritage, business and tourism group thought opportunities for eco-friendly, wilderness camping, which would be low impact and involve single night stays, should be considered. This could also be linked with bushcraft activities. It was thought that the New Forest could provide advice on campsites. This is an area which the Project Partners will continue to consider, particularly in Zone 5 of the Project, where this provision could link in with educational and community group opportunities.

Backpacking Experience

- 2.139** Providing a youth hostel in a converted building, or similar backpacking experiences was suggested, like Bunkhouse Barns (Deepdale, Norfolk), which could provide affordable accommodation in the form of a bunkhouse/ camping etc. The Project Partners considered that this could be a possibility in the future.

Teambuilding and Educational Activities

- 2.140** Discussion was undertaken with Bridgwater College to consider the possibility of corporate teambuilding and educational activities linked to use of natural resources e.g. natural shelter building, rope bridges, lighting fires. It was suggested that the ideal scenario would be to create small woodlands close to the visitor facilities, each approximately 2.5ha and divided into three to enable rotation for management purposes. A range of woodland types would also be useful; high impact woodland, with species such as Ash and Scots Pine for coppicing and shelter-building, and multi-root trees for rope bridges, low impact woodland, incorporating habitat piles, more wildlife akin to a traditional wood, and resources that require special management care and educational use woodland, incorporating more sparsely planted areas so children can remain in sight and enable freer play, and a range of species providing textual activities (e.g. horse chestnut, pine, holly).

2.141 It was suggested that these three or four woodlands were in separate locations within Zone 5, not grouped together, to enable users to have a greater feeling of exploration on site, and to make a clear distinction between woodlands and their uses (e.g. clear change when a youth group progresses from high impact to low impact activities). Further discussions will be required to determine how access will be managed. The Project Partners will consider these issues further when consulting on visitor facilities and surrounding area of Zone 5.

Additional Suggestions for Activities and Attractions

2.142 There was a suggestion for wild swimming provision, with a query over water quality near the visitor centre for this. It was suggested that there could be a designated area with associated services. There were concerns about health and safety of this activity and the Project Partners decided that this was not something which they would undertake.

2.143 It was suggested that there could be balloon flights from, to or over the Great Fen, and just a field might be needed. A contact was provided who might be able to run balloon flights. However it was highlighted that this would unfortunately have significant negative impacts on both cattle and wildlife, particularly sensitive species such as cranes.

2.144 Huntingdonshire Association for Tourism thought that it would be an opportunity to work in partnership with the Game Conservancy, who conserve land for game, especially partridges. It was thought that the upland area in Zone 4 may be a good area.

2.145 It was noted that a miniature steam railway group in Mereside were looking for a place to set up a track. It was suggested that a train could take people from the visitor centre to the NNRs.

Social, Economic and Tourism Considerations

Education, Training and Volunteering Opportunities

2.146 The following suggestions were made for education, training and volunteering opportunities by consultees and Project Partners:

- Apprenticeships for young people e.g. in traditional crafts like thatching, or through Wildlife Trust Volunteer Officer schemes.
- Vocational volunteering opportunities.
- PhD and higher education studies e.g. in carbon sequestration.
- Volunteer wardening.
- Link with Canon Cameras at Wennington to develop joint courses in wildlife photography.

2.147 The Project Partners are working on a providing more volunteering and training opportunities on these themes and will explore these opportunities over the next five years.

Agriculture

2.148 Concerns were expressed by a Councillor that agriculture shouldn't be replaced in the Holme Fen area before it is known what is going to replace it and how many jobs are going to be created. The Project Partners agree that it is vital to be clear what the business and local economy benefits of the Great Fen Project will be. There is now a Business and Economy working group for the Great Fen. In addition to looking at jobs created through land management, grazing, and jobs at the proposed visitor centre and facilities, they will be developing wider plans to ensure that local communities and the wider region benefit through new business opportunities, for example, providing accommodation, cafes, or new activities such as cycle, canoe or boat hire. See also 'Visitor Facilities'.

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Growth Areas

2.149 It was identified that it would be useful to have future urban development plans to the south of Peterborough marked on the maps. There was a question raised as to how the Project links to wider geography and large green infrastructure projects, like Wicken Fen and Lakenheath. The Project Partners will be providing a map showing how the Great Fen links into the wider green infrastructure and future housing development.

Peterborough Airfield

2.150 It was asked whether the growth of this airfield has been factored into plans, for example, whether it might detract from visitor experiences, but also how it might be used for opportunities, such as balloon flights. The owners of the airfield are supporters of the Project. There is a zone that extends for approximately 2000 metres around the airfield within which tall structures could pose an unacceptable risk to aircraft. The Project Partners do not propose such structures within the Great Fen, so this should not be a constraint.

High Value 'Staying Visitors' and Visitor Profiling

2.151 The importance of attracting high value 'staying visitors' was raised, and the need to make links with existing accommodation providers. It was felt that better access, for example from Ramsey, would help to attract these visitors, and provide economic return to local businesses and communities.

2.152 It was felt that visitor profiling would be important in ensuring economic return to the local business community. It was also argued that the Great Fen partners need to consider how visitor profiles will change in future, how it could be of benefit and how to make that happen.

Business Opportunities

2.153 It was recommended that there could be opportunities for creating a retail outlet for local crafts, foods and products. Another suggestion was that it might be possible to grow biomass and crops which have benefits to wildlife. Implementation of the Masterplan will include investigating any opportunities for developing business in and around the Project area that are consistent with the social and environmental goals of the Project. These could be for the benefit of the Project Partners' needs to generate income to sustain the Project, or to support independent local enterprises. This will include land management activities, such as grazing and the production of biomass for various purposes, including energy generation.

Partnerships, Marketing and Promotion

Museums, Heritage and Archaeology Attractions

2.154 A number of consultees suggested that the Great Fen should link up with local museums, heritage and archaeology attractions in terms of physical access e.g. via the Peterborough Green Wheel cycle routes and the Fen Waterways link, as well as for promotion and joint events. Promotional links will be run with local attractions over the next five years, for example, through better information, running events which transport people between the attractions, and through joint interpretation projects (e.g. film and animation). On the masterplan maps, the Project Partners have planned new links between the Great Fen Project and the Peterborough Green Wheel in addition to circular routes running to and from local communities, such as Ramsey and Sawtry, where there are local attractions.

Promotion Opportunities with the Train

2.155 Promotion visible from the trains was suggested as an excellent means of gaining publicity. The partners will look into options of how this can best be achieved, and will also liaise with the train companies.

Promoting Active Travel

2.156 It was suggested that the Great Fen partners could promote active travel, bringing health benefits. A number of consultees also suggested that access by car and other motorised modes, including powered boats, should be limited where possible. The Project Partners are aiming to enable and promote sustainable transport to the Great Fen, which includes safe pedestrian, cycle routes and bridleways from surrounding communities. Powered boats will be able to moor along New Dyke (running through the centre of the project). The partners have proposed that access through other parts of the project area is likely to be only by small craft (such as canoes or punts) or electric boat.

Unique Selling Point

2.157 It was proposed that the Great Fen needed to establish unique selling points and attractions that would really excite and inspire people to visit. The partners agree with this and will be investigating further as the Great Fen develops specifically looking at the visitor facilities in Zone 5.

Phasing and Delivery

2.158 It was suggested that a key element of delivery would be phasing development of attractions and access over time, alongside restoration work. The partners agree that this will be vital.

Public Perception, Involvement and Future Consultations

Public Perception

2.159 Parish Councillors expressed that there was some feeling in local communities of elitism regarding the project and that it was not for communities, for example, due to the publicity surrounding Prince Charles and Stephen Fry. They also said that local people were worried that the Project was snowballing and moving too fast. More communication and going out to local communities was suggested, but not through coming to the village hall, as they thought people would not turn up.

Suggestions for Future Consultees

2.160 Stakeholders thought that the following consultees should be included in further consultation:

- Volunteers.
- Local airport.
- Public transport companies.
- Green Blue (advice on boating issues).
- Potential providers for electric boats (can be provided by David Biggs, Inland Waterways Association).
- Disability groups.
- Age Concern and U3As.
- Parkinson Society.
- Motor Neurone.
- Teachers and schools .
- Local horse riders (can be invited by British Horse Society).
- Steve Jenkins an access consultant (also an ecologist, previous manager of Highways team, and expert in animal behaviour) used by Natural England.
- Kennel Club.

2.161 The partners agreed to invite these individuals and groups to participate in the Phase 2 consultation.

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Suggestions for Future Consultation

2.162 Local residents suggested having an event at Ramsey Heights Countryside Classroom. It was also suggested that involvement should be interactive, conversational and should avoid jargon. There were other suggestions including consider participatory budgeting for one part, attending local events to consult, using joint consultation to help share resources and to avoid consultation fatigue, using methods in line with government policy on the empowerment agenda, not imposing decisions, taking people through the thought processes, and going out to towns/ communities then bringing people back into the Great Fen.

3 Phase 2 Consultation Summary

- 3.1** The second phase of public consultation was undertaken between 5 September and 16 October 2009, considering the first draft of the master plan. Groups consulted during this second stage included:
- Emergency services
 - Young people
 - Schools
 - Families
 - Older people
 - Disability organisations and users
 - Existing volunteers
 - Cross-section of the general public
 - Further feedback from stakeholders consulted in Apr-May 09
- 3.2** Nineteen events and structured interviews were held at public venues and schools in the area. Event locations included central venues such as Serpentine Green shopping centre in Peterborough, Ramsey Community Information Centre, Huntingdon Farmers Market and libraries. Structured interviews were carried out with local horse-riders, people with disabilities from the Papworth Trust, Disability Cambridgeshire, pupils and parents at local schools, and young people at Abbey College and Ramsey Youth Centre. The Project Partners spoke to over 500 people during these events.
- 3.3** Sixteen information points were established at libraries and information centres in the area between and including Peterborough and Huntingdon. Visitors were able to find out more about the Great Fen Project and feedback was recorded, either through informal comments, or through completing a questionnaire. Questionnaires were also available online.
- 3.4** Over 260 responses were received and analysed, with 85% of the responses coming from the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough area. There was some under-representation in the questionnaire responses of both the under 16s and 16-35 year olds (which will include families) and Black and Minority Ethnic groups. The views of children and young people, particularly in terms of what they would like to see and do in the Great Fen in the future, were gained through events in schools and in a local youth centre. Parents and carers were also encourage to provide comments in after school sessions.
- 3.5** Responses were also received from nine stakeholder organisations via email: Peterborough City Council (Natural Networks); Sustrans; English Heritage; Inland Waterways Association; Great Ouse Boating Association; Cambridgeshire Local Access Forum; National Farmers Union; Cambridgeshire County Council (Environment Policy and Projects team and Countryside Access team) and Disability Cambridgeshire.
- 3.6** People either spoke to staff, looked at an In-Brief document (two pages and a map), a Public Information Booklet, and/ or the full Masterplan Report, depending on their level of interest. The documents were available on the Great Fen website as well as at events and at information points in local communities, such as local libraries.

Habitats and Land Management

Range of Habitats

- 3.7** People were positive that a range of habitats would be provided to create interest, including woodland, grassland and fenland.

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Agricultural Production

- 3.8** During the public consultation and events, a number of people were concerned about the Great Fen Project on the grounds that the value of agricultural land and food production from this intensively farmed area could reduce, especially in view of the growing population, food security, and because much of the area is high quality agricultural land. It was also suggested that a better explanation of the benefits and objectives would be useful to anyone with these fears.
- 3.9** A number of people also felt that the farming story could be more incorporated into education and communications about the Great Fen, and also linked with the history and heritage stories e.g. the winning of the land in the monastic and 18th century, the draining of Whittlesey Mere, the continuing drainage story. This would set the Great Fen area in the context of the wider fenland area and its modern importance.
- 3.10** The Project Partners acknowledge the importance of farming in the Fens. Research by DEFRA has shown that projects like the Great Fen will not have undesirable impacts on UK food security. The partners will work to ensure that education and community work includes more information about farming and its importance, providing a fuller picture of the history and wildlife of the Fens.
- 3.11** Some people felt that the Project did not justify taking farmland out of production. The points put forward by Project Partners were that:
- the Great Fen Project would provide vital extra flood storage to help protect thousands of hectares of surrounding farmland and communities during extreme rainfall events, predicted as a result of climate change
 - the rate of peat shrinkage will lead to the valuable topsoil being lost in the future, reducing its fertility and versatility and that this would be tackled through the project
 - farming practises such as grazing will continue in the Project area. The creation of new grasslands will halt the loss of peat and could be managed in partnership with local farmers.
 - in responding to future increased food demand, there is other agricultural land not in active production in the UK with less potential value for people and wildlife, and it is also estimated that a third of all food is currently wasted in the UK. Reducing current wastage will be a key part of meeting the food needs of a rising population.
 - the area being converted from intensive root and arable crop agriculture to other forms of agriculture and land management is a very small fraction of the agricultural land available nationally (0.019%), and presents a rare opportunity to provide many other benefits for wildlife, and also for human recreation and health, for tourism and the local economy (training, jobs and businesses) and to prevent the equivalent of 325,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide being released each year.
- 3.12** The National Farmers Union emphasised the importance of farming in the Fens and its contribution to national food production, particularly with the challenges of climate change and the need for local food. They also suggested that although the Project Partners had consulted with farmers further consultation will be needed. The Project Partners fully recognise the need to work closely with the farming community both within and outside the Project area. The Project Partners will also continue to seek ways to work with tenants and landowners to develop opportunities for working together.

Mosquitoes and Malaria

- 3.13** A few people raised concerns about increases in mosquitoes and a resurgence of malaria as a result of increasing water levels in the Project. The Project Partners are undertaking studies into mosquitoes in the Great Fen to inform land management and ensure that habitats and land are managed in a way that minimises opportunities for mosquitoes to breed close to where people live and limit any possibility impacts on people. The partners have also taken advice from Public Health authorities on the factors required for Malaria and are satisfied that risks are insignificant.

Open Water

- 3.14** A number of people expressed support for the provision of more freshwater areas as these were seen as beneficial to anglers and fish stock.

Flood Risk Management

Concerns about Flooding

- 3.15** A few people expressed similar misconceptions as in Phase 1 (see 'Flood Risk Management' for information) that the whole Great Fen area was going to be flooded. These concerns were alleviated when it was explained that the Great Fen was not to be flooded but would provide water storage to help protect surrounding communities and farmland. The Project Partners also explained that water tables are being raised mostly below ground, and therefore there would only be limited amounts of extra open water across the whole project area. On the whole, there was a positive response to providing extra flood risk management capacity.

Access Zones

Finding a Balance between People and Wildlife

- 3.16** The concept of using zones to support the management of people and wildlife continued to be supported. A number of people were worried about the potential impact of people on the wildlife of the Great Fen and felt that this needed to be managed carefully. Some people were worried that there would not be areas of peace and quiet. Possible solutions included the concept of zoning with limited access to some areas, and providing plenty of viewing areas where people can see the environment without harming it.
- 3.17** The Project Partners emphasise that a key benefit of a large area like the Great Fen, would be the possibility to create areas of peace and quiet for people and for wildlife, as well as areas of higher activity, where larger numbers of people can come to appreciate and support the wildlife and heritage of the Fens. Zone 1 will provide an area of very limited access for people, with only occasional viewing, for example, by electric boat trip. Zone 5, including the visitor centre and surrounding area, will provide an area with a wide range of activities for visitors.
- 3.18** It was also suggested that good signposting and circular walking routes could help keep people on designated routes and minimise disturbance. The partners will be providing clearly marked trails for visitors.

Zone 1 – Quiet Area/ Very Limited Access

- 3.19** A perimeter access route around the north and east sides of Zone 1, such as is currently the case at Minsmere where there are sensitive species was suggested. The Project Partners will be providing perimeter access along the west of Zone 1 and access into Zone 1 will be possible from the visitor centre by a limited number of boat trips. The Project Partners did not feel that a perimeter route would add significantly to people's experiences to justify the expense. There are also privacy and land ownership constraints in the area. The Project Partners will not be restricting public access on the public highway in Zone 1, as it leads to private dwellings.

Zone 2 – Woodwalton Fen

- 3.20** Concerns were expressed that Woodwalton Fen might be damaged, and that the access that was enjoyed now would be restricted. There are no plans to change the access at Woodwalton Fen from what it is now, namely, access for pedestrians only, and no dogs except assistance dogs. A significant aim of the Project as a whole is to protect the wildlife and habitats of Woodwalton Fen, and the Project Partners are very much committed to this now and in the future.

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Existing Access

Public Rights of Way (PRoW) within the Project Area

- 3.21** During Phase 1, the conservation and wildlife group recommended that it would be highly beneficial for wading birds if the eastern PRoW in Zone 2 of the project area, or a section of it, could be permanently removed to provide a waders area, with the parallel western PRoW providing the main access. The access and activities group, including Huntingdonshire Ramblers Association, had no issues with this idea and consultees considered this PRoW to be used very little at present. Countryside Services (Cambridgeshire County Council) suggested that it may be possible to close the PRoW if the Great Fen partners provide an alternative route or diversion. During Phase 2, however, Countryside Services expressed concerns about removing the PRoW from a legal point of view. The Project Partners will continue to seek a diversion of the eastern PRoW, providing a diversion using the western PRoW, but recognise the statutory constraints within which the diversion would have to be carried out.

Existing Amenities and Services

- 3.22** Consultees recommended the following changes to the map: Bed & Breakfast accommodation to be inserted at Upwood; the pub at Ramsey Mereside has closed, delete; add other points of interpretation interest, such as archaeological features marked on OS maps (e.g. Castle Moat); add Wildlife Trust nature reserves in and around the Project area (Woodwalton Marsh and Five Arches, Riddy Wood, also Upwood Meadows NNR and Lady's Wood). The Project Partners recognised that there were other features of interest in the area but also wished for the masterplan maps to be as simple as possible and so would not add lots of other features. They could feature in future maps or other interpretation provided by the partners, as necessary.

Visitor Facilities

Visitor Facilities at Ramsey Heights Countryside Classroom and Nature Reserve

- 3.23** A number of people asked what was available to visit now. Ramsey Heights Countryside Classroom will be the main base for the Great Fen team of staff and volunteers, and the main location for school and community group visits and events, and it will also serve as an information point for casual visitors to the Great Fen, with a trail and interpretation about the Great Fen Project.
- 3.24** The availability of a grass parking area, surfaced blue badge holder parking, an indoor space, toilets, including an accessible toilet, and good access for a range of abilities, are seen as particular advantages of this location. However, its capacity is limited to local community use and events, due to road access and size. A future visitor centre will provide facilities for wider tourism and larger numbers.

Visitor Facilities at Woodwalton Fen National Nature Reserve

- 3.25** The lack of toilets at Woodwalton Fen was identified and is seen as a real drawback for visiting groups. Currently, activities for schoolchildren are therefore limited. The Project Partners have said that they are looking to redirect pressure away from Woodwalton Fen and that they were aware that they needed to provide better information about the availability of toilets (e.g. at the Countryside Classroom during office hours).

Visitor Facilities at Holme Fen National Nature Reserve

- 3.26** Car park security was identified as something that deters people from visiting Holme Fen. The lack of toilets is also an issue. The Project Partners are working on increasing wardening at Holme Fen National Nature Reserve to improve security. The Project Partners also hope that increasing visitor numbers to the Great Fen Project area will increase presence at Holme Fen and therefore reduce the incidence of car break-ins and vandalism.

New Visitor Centre and Surrounding Facilities

- 3.27** Respondents were very much in favour of the of the proposed new visitor centre. 58% of questionnaire respondents said that one of the things they would do was 'go to the Visitor Centre' when they visited the Great Fen Project area.
- 3.28** Several people also asked about timescales of new visitor facilities. The Project Partners are aiming to begin developing visitor facilities in 2013, but this is dependent on technical investigations and feasibility studies, as well as securing funding.
- 3.29** Many people who commented on the location felt that the visitor centre was in a good location. Cambridgeshire County Council welcomed its location on the North-South footpath and cycleway spine.
- 3.30** Representatives from the Great Ouse Boating Association felt that the visitor centre would be better located by a waterway, and said that consideration should be given to how boaters will access the visitor centre.
- 3.31** The Project Partners will continue to consider how boaters will have access to the visitor centre, for example, by ensuring that moorings are linked into footpaths and cycleways wherever possible, and potentially by having an extra bus stop close to the moorings on New Dyke (as indicated on the masterplan map).

Visitor Experiences

- 3.32** Respondents wished to take part in a wide variety of activities when they visited the Great Fen, many of which would involve the visitor centre. Suggestions for the visitor centre included:
- A demonstration area near the visitor centre to show people how to grow their own vegetables and possibly pigs or chickens, and live more sustainably was suggested by several people. This could feed into a farm shop at the Centre. A working farm was suggested, and young people suggested an area to pet animals.
 - Shop selling local items
 - Live webcams showing perhaps water birds on the meres or nestbox activity in the spring, especially for those unable to go far into the Project area. Recorded film could also be shown at other times.
 - Facilities for small children and babies, including paths for pushchairs and baby-changing
 - Facilities for angling, including provision and platforms for groups (e.g. youth groups, disability groups) where there is parking, toilets and other facilities close by.
 - An outdoor centre for a variety of activities, including canoeing, climbing, off road biking and archery.
 - A unique attraction (or Unique Selling Point) to attract visitors and tourists from further afield e.g. unique adventure facilities.
- 3.33** Activities for the Great Fen as a whole are discussed under Phase 2 in 'Activity Provision'.
- 3.34** Facilities to improve access for disabled visitors at the visitor centre included:
- Accessible parking – sheltered area for transferring people, if possible to cover all round a vehicle.
 - Braille and tactile books and leaflets.
 - Easily understood signposting, colour coding for visually impaired.
 - Hearing loop in the visitor centre and a portable loop.
 - Good photos with big legends, especially helpful for those with learning disabilities.
 - Possibly a sensory garden.
 - Big buttons for wheelchair access to visitor centre and disabled toilets
- 3.35** In the short term, the Project Partners are making improvements at the Ramsey Heights Countryside Classroom, the community centre for the Great Fen. These include:

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- blue badge holder parking closer to the building (and a space available during office hours at Woodwalton Fen NNR)
- tactile books and maps, and large print available
- clear waymarking
- portable hearing loops
- free all terrain mobility scooters for hire
- improvements to surfaces/ removal of steps to create an accessible circular route
- a new accessible outdoor shelter/ bird hide

Alternative Visitor Centre Facilities

3.36 Sustrans were concerned that a central visitor centre would lead to people driving to it rather than taking sustainable means of transport. They suggested more visitor centres on the periphery of the project area, for example, on the northern end close to the Hamptons and at the southern end close to Woodwalton. The Project Partners will encourage information points and facilities in local communities surrounding the project area, with cycling and walking links. It is also possible that other transport (e.g. water taxi, electric bus, cycle hire) could be provided in the future from these points, depending on opportunities arising with local businesses and entrepreneurs.

Visitor Projections

3.37 The problem of underestimating visitor numbers was identified, and the subsequent negative impact that this might have e.g. on roads and traffic, on staff. Suggestions to mitigate this issue included:

- Making the visitor centre large enough to accommodate larger numbers of visitors from the beginning
 - Capacity will be considered as part of consultation on the visitor centre and surrounding facilities
- Modelling predictions of visitor numbers and visits during peak and off peak periods
 - A range of investigations will need to be undertaken before the Project Partners bring forward detailed proposals for the visitor centre. Visitor modelling will need to be considered as part of the investigatory phase.
- Manned signal at Holme crossing
 - The Project Partners have been given informal advice that it may be possible to make changes to the way the barriers are closed at Holme Crossing. This will be investigated further.
- Sufficient parking
 - The Project Partners are looking to have an overflow car park at the visitor centre for peak periods
- Park and ride
 - The Project Partners are very interested in park and ride, but highlight that these opportunities will depend on business feasibility and local business providers
- Enough toilets (and accessible toilets) at the right locations
 - The Project Partners will have toilets and accessible toilets at the visitor centre. The Project Partners will also signpost local facilities (e.g local pubs), gateways and local village based facilities, and will describe the accessibility of these facilities. The Project Partners hope to encourage use of local facilities and businesses in this way.

Visitor Gateways and Local Village Based Facilities

- 3.38** There was a positive response to the idea of providing Great Fen information points and facilities in local communities, as a means of encouraging use of local shops and businesses. It was suggested that Stilton and Upwood could be included as Local Village Based facilities. It was agreed that Stilton was a suitable location. Upwood village was considered by the partners to be quite small as a base for local village based facilities, although the Project Partners did not discount it as a possibility in the future.
- 3.39** The Head Teacher at Ashbeach School in Ramsey St Mary's suggested that the new community centre next to the school could serve as a gateway, as there is space for information and parking available. The Project Partners thank Ashbeach School and would very much like to follow up on this.
- 3.40** A number of people suggested access from these facilities by non-car modes of transport. For example, people especially liked the idea of travelling into the Great Fen by water taxi, for example from Ramsey, and cycle hire. The Project Partners will be looking into the feasibility of these ideas over the coming years, and would welcome contact from any local businesses who would like to provide services.
- 3.41** Circular routes from gateways were preferred by cyclists, walkers and horse-riders. The Project Partners have tried to provide circular routes wherever possible, and will continue to seek to provide these wherever feasible.
- 3.42** Cambridgeshire County Council said that they welcomed consideration of visitor gateways. They suggested a further gateway where walkers from Yaxley would approach the Great Fen. The Project Partners will consider the appropriate level of information at all points where visitor enter the Project area, and will develop this entry point as appropriate.

Access to and within the Great Fen Project area

Managing People and Wildlife

- 3.43** There were concerns about the impact of too many people on the wildlife they had come to see. Suggestions included: restricting people to particular areas; leaving large areas where people are not allowed; limiting intrusion, signs, instructions, renaming of features. The Project Partners have provided a zoning system as part of the masterplan, with areas of higher levels of access – particularly Zone 5 (visitor centre and surrounding facilities) and Zone 4 (a large amount of the Project area). There are, however, some areas that will have restricted access to enable sensitive wildlife to succeed – particularly Zone 1 (very limited access) and Zone 2 (Woodwalton Fen, will retain existing access status of walkers and adapted all terrain wheelchairs (available for free hire), and no dogs (except assistance dogs). The partners are also sensitive to the needs of residents to preserve their privacy and security. Zoning is also discussed under 'Access Zones'.

Access for People with Disabilities

- 3.44** A number of people were pleased to see that access for people with disabilities had been considered. Much feedback was provided by people with disabilities and groups, including Disability Cambridgeshire. The following issues were raised:
- People with disabilities (and other users without disabilities) may need a toilet break, for example, once an hour
 - The Project Partners will provide toilets and accessible toilets at the visitor centre, with shorter and longer walks and activities available from there. There is also an accessible toilet at Ramsey Heights Countryside Classroom, from where community activities and events are currently run for the Great Fen. The Project Partners will also keep this in mind when organising events and activities.

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- Accessible toilets are needed outside of staffed hours
 - The partners will look into options (e.g. radar key operated toilets) at the Great Fen. The partners will also publicise from 2010 the location of the closest accessible toilets (e.g. in local pubs).
- Access for vehicles (e.g. through gates) may be required if a mobility scooter breaks down
 - Staff and emergency vehicles (potentially including mobility scooter breakdown services if they register with us) will be able to gain access through locked gates. Staff will only be able to assist with breakdowns of Great Fen mobility scooters.
- Paths should have wide firm surfaces, if multi-user there must be safe passing space. Mixing cycling and wheelchairs can be problematic. Use of bells was also suggested for cyclists as one of the solutions to this problem.
 - Wherever possible, the Project Partners will aim to provide wider paths on mixed use routes, and will also seek to provide pedestrian/ wheelchair user only routes wherever feasible.
 - The Project Partners will also raise the issue of bells with cycle hire providers in the future
- Anglers with disabilities would like safe angling platforms, preferably at the new visitor facilities
 - Fishing is unlikely to be available at the new visitor centre. The open water provided by the visitor facility is intended to be for the benefit of wildlife and wildlife watching. These water bodies will not be suitable for fish species that anglers will be fishing for. Angling is available in other parts of the project area and could be expanded to other locations.
- All terrain scooters/wheelchairs should be available for hire
 - The Project Partners would like to provide these at the new visitor facilities. These will also be available to hire from 2010 at Ramsey Heights Countryside Classroom and Nature Reserve, once new access improvements have been completed to create an accessible circular route, and at Woodwalton Fen National Nature Reserve.
- There should be information and facilities for people with visual impairments, hearing impairments and visitors with learning difficulties
 - The Project Partners will work with local people, including people with disabilities, over the next five years, and when developing the new visitor facilities, to provide the best possible provision across the Project area.

Access to and Visitor Pressure on the NNRs and the Countryside Classroom

- 3.45** Some people asked about the impact of visitor use of the NNRs, and there was a concern that if the Great Fen Project led to greater numbers of visitors at the NNRs, this would have a negative impact on the wildlife that the Project aims to protect.
- 3.46** The Project Partners are zoning access at Woodwalton Fen and Holme Fen NNRs, to help balance access and wildlife. In the Woodwalton Fen area, due to the sensitivity of species on site access will remain at its current level i.e. for pedestrians only, with seasonal restrictions in place where required, with no dogs, except assistance dogs. In the Holme Fen area, access will also remain at its current level (pedestrians, cyclists and horse-riders on designated routes only). Visitor pressure on these sites will also be monitored.

- 3.47** Countryside Access (CCC) felt that better access to Woodwalton Fen and Holme Fen NNR should be provided. During Phase 1, the Ramblers Association said that while you might not want more visitor pressure in Holme Fen, a footpath might be needed, or thought given to how many people there will be and where they should be directed.

Potential Conflict Between Access and Grazing

- 3.48** Countryside Access (CCC) said that while they would support grazing as a practical land management strategy, they noted that perceptions of potential conflict between grazing and users of existing public rights of way have been highlighted in discussion around land management at Wicken Fen. The Project Partners are clear that grazing will be a major means by which land in the Great Fen is managed. Potential conflicts with people accessing the Great Fen will have to be managed.

Impact on Local Roads and Villages

- 3.49** A number of people expressed concern about the impact of increased traffic on local roads and road surfacing, the proposed crossing of the B660 near the visitor centre, and the use of local 'quiet' roads by cyclists, pedestrians and horse-riders. Safety on these roads was seen as paramount, and off-road paths were preferred by all groups. It was also suggested that the potential impact on local roads be assessed prior to developing visitor facilities, to assess their capacity and the impact of large numbers of visitors during peak periods.
- 3.50** Traffic management will be an important aspect of providing Great Fen visitor facilities. Whilst the Project Partners wish to encourage visitors to come by means other than the car, they also recognise the practicality of using cars in rural areas. A lot of consideration will be given to this during the planning phase. The new visitor centre will also be signposted, to help prevent people getting lost on local roads.

Condition of Roads

- 3.51** One person expressed concern about the current condition of roads in Holme. Cambridgeshire County Council's Highways division, have advised that improvements need to be applied for as part of the minor improvement scheme in conjunction with the parish council. The Project Partners will also be liaising further with Highways during visitor consultation in summer 2010.

Park and Ride

- 3.52** Many people suggested the possibility of park and ride facilities for the Great Fen Project, for example, by electric bus, water taxi, bike, both as a way of reducing impact on local roads and other users, and as an experience in itself. The Project Partners are supportive of ideas such as park and ride. The most significant challenge will be to ensure that a service is financially viable for the project. The Project Partners would welcome appropriate business ventures (e.g. potential providers of a water taxi from Ramsey, cycle hire providers at gateways and local village based facilities) to help provide this sort of service for the Great Fen.

Level Crossing at Holme

- 3.53** Respondents also mentioned the problems with the level crossing and the time that can be taken to get across it. Some people felt that holdups here would colour the whole visitor experience. This will require further consideration from the Project Partners. The Project Partners will look into the possibility of working with Network Rail to reduce delays at the crossing.

Dangers to Wildlife from Increased Traffic

- 3.54** A couple of people were concerned about the increased likelihood of wildlife being killed by cars in the Great Fen. One suggestion was for animal crossing signs.

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Suggestion of Closing the B660

3.55 A couple of people suggested that the B660 could be re-routed or closed. The B660 is a key route for local people, connecting Ramsey and surrounding communities to the A1 and Peterborough. Closing it would have unacceptable impacts on local people and the economy. It will also be a key route to the visitor centre. Off road alternatives will be provided for walkers and cyclists (along the east-west spine).

Parking Provision in the Project Area

3.56 During Phase 2, out of questionnaire respondents, 3 out of 4 people said that they would like to be able to travel to the Great Fen by car. A number of people were concerned that other than for the visitor centre, there was not enough parking provision in the Project area. By locating any extra parking in local communities (potentially at some gateways and local village based facilities), rather than inside the Project area, the Project Partners aim to encourage use of local shops and businesses, encouraging benefits to the local economy. This will reduce the risks of security problems for visitors travelling by car, which has proved problematic at Holme Fen NNR, and in many other nature reserves across the UK. A map showing parking areas is available on the Great Fen Project website (www.greatfen.org.uk) or from the Great Fen team (info@greatfen.org.uk, 01487 815524).

Security of Parking

3.57 Security of parking was a concern for a number of people, with particular reference to break-ins at Holme Fen NNR. Security was a key reason for the Project Partners not choosing to have any extra parking areas outside of the visitor centre and visitor gateways/ local village based facilities. The Project Partners are aiming to increase volunteer wardening at Holme Fen NNR and across the Project area as it develops, to create more of a staff presence and therefore a greater deterrent. The Project Partners encourage anyone interested in helping as a volunteer warden to contact the Great Fen team (info@greatfen.org.uk, 01487 815521).

3.58 Local horse-riders were particularly concerned about security of horse boxes and trailers. The British Horse Society recommended the "Give a farmer a fiver" scheme, whereby horse boxes can be parked in farms, and this provides extra security. The Project Partners will look into this and discuss this as a possibility with local farmers.

Dog Friendly Parking

3.59 The idea of dog-friendly parking, as at RSPB Minsmere was suggested. The Project Partners would like to consider this and consult people further on their needs e.g. shaded areas for dogs in cars, as part of the visitor facilities consultation.

Footpaths, Cycleways and Bridleways

3.60 New footpaths, cycleways and bridleways for the area were highlighted by many people as being good aspects of the masterplan. Some specific issues raised were as follows:

- A safe off-road route from Ramsey was seen as key, and many people expressed support for the off-road walking and cycling route from Ramsey to the Great Fen, marked on the masterplan.
- CCC noted that while there was a gateway at Frog Hall (G1 – northern gateway), there are currently no public highway rights to get to Bradford bridge from Farcet Fen. The partners are aware of this and will liaise with landowners as appropriate as with all aspiration shown on land now owned by the Project partners.

Extent of Paths Shown

- 3.61** There was some concerns that the coarse granularity of access away from the visitor centre currently presented would potentially concentrate users on a small number of paths, reducing user choice, increasing environmental impact and adversely impacting the visitor experience. There will be opportunities for providing other access beyond the routes indicated on the masterplan map. These will be considered when more detailed work is undertaken on access in the project area.
- 3.62** It was also suggested that finer granularity paths (i.e. not just the major routes) should also be indicated on the masterplan, and argued that unless such paths are provided, this will not take pressure away from the National Nature Reserves. The Ramblers Association thought that it would make most sense to develop finer path networks as the project develops, in response to demand.
- 3.63** The Project Partners are supportive of adding more public access in the future in the Great Fen Project area, in the light of how the landscape develops and how features of interest develop. Additional access provided will need to be mindful of disturbance to wildlife and the privacy of local residents. Finer grained paths will not necessarily be included at the strategic level of the masterplan, but will be referred to in delivery plans.
- 3.64** a perimeter route was suggested (e.g. along Yaxley Lode/ Old Nene Course and along the line of ECML railway). The Project Partners felt that a route along the railway would not be desirable from a noise, aesthetics, trespassing and safety perspective. The masterplan highlights the major routes for the Project area, which will be a priority for the partners.

Links with the Peterborough Green Wheel

- 3.65** Stronger links with the Green Wheel network via Yaxley and Hampton were requested by walkers, cyclists and horse-riders, including Natural Networks (Peterborough City Council - PCC).
- 3.66** Natural Networks pointed out that with some good signing, this could be an extremely popular route into the Great Fen, with several thousand new houses planned in the Hampton area in the near future. They are currently working closely with PCC's planning department to ensure that a quality cycle route is constructed that heads south through the proposed Hampton Leys development to Yaxley. They said that this could easily be signed towards the Great Fen from the Green Wheel, then link in with a well-signed route through Yaxley and south to the Great Fen.
- 3.67** The Project Partners support the new route from Hampton, and would be happy to link with Natural Networks to provide better signage from the Green Wheel onto the route proposed in the masterplan from Yaxley and Farcet.

Spine Routes (North-South, East-West)

- 3.68** CCC and Sustrans welcomed the north-south Spine Route, crossed by east-west "arms" and Sustrans thought that it could become the most direct cycle and walking route between Peterborough and Huntingdon, and would be an attraction in itself.
- 3.69** Sustrans emphasised that to maximise numbers using the North-South Spine Route, the route should be continued to the main centres of population by the most attractive and direct routes achievable, in partnership with local authorities, other interested organisations and landowners. CCC also asked how the route would be linked to Huntingdon. The partners state that a key aim of the North-South route is to provide a link between Huntingdon and Peterborough. The precise route and means of delivering a route from Great Fen to Huntingdon still needs to be explored and will be done so in partnership with local authorities, landowners and organisations.

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Bridleway Access

3.70 A number of local horse-riders and the British Horse Society were pleased that there were new bridleway routes proposed. However, a number of local horse-riders and key stakeholders (Countryside Access – Cambridgeshire County Council, and British Horse Society) felt that more bridleways could be provided. A number of opportunities for potential further improvement were identified:

- A north-south bridleway linking to the Peterborough Green Wheel, providing access from the north and a long-distance link
 - The Project Partners had originally not included this route to help concentrate use in the south and to avoid conflict between horses and large numbers of users and cars at the visitor centre. However, in light of the comments, the partners will make changes to the north-south spine route to include access for horse-riders.
- Extra bridleways to provide circular routes
 - Two suggested routes would not be possible as they impacted on the Zone 2 buffer around Woodwalton Fen.
 - The Project Partners have agreed two other additional routes in the south of Zone 4, which will be incorporated into the masterplan.
 - An old bridleway running between Stilton and Holme Fen could be reinstated. The Project Partners will investigate this further.
 - Other suggestions to create circular routes, for example, around the periphery of Woodwalton Fen, and a circular route from the north have not been discounted, but the Project Partners felt that they could not be agreed at this stage without further research and considerations (e.g. where they included provision along currently unsurfaced banks). Options for these routes will be investigated.
- Involving local bridleway groups in planning was suggested.
 - The Project Partners have been liaising with British Horse Society, but would also very much welcome the involvement of local bridleway groups and local horse-riders.

Walking

3.71 Residents of Ramsey Heights village identified a lack of pavements next to roads linking to the Project area. The Project Partners raised this issue with Cambridgeshire County Council's (CCC) Highways division, who advised that this improvement has been put forward as part of the minor improvement scheme, but has so far not been taken forward as other improvements in the local area have been selected as being of higher priority. This does not mean that this particularly improvement to pavements will not happen in the future. CCC was concerned that text in the masterplan indicating the creation of circular walks serving the surrounding communities was not adequately reflected in the plans presented, and that they would like to see this include some rides.

3.72 The Project Partners highlight that circular walking routes are proposed from the north (Yaxley and Farcet, linking to the Green Wheel), from Ramsey, from Upwood, from Sawtry and Holme villages. There are also further circular options proposed within the Great Fen. More options will also be available surrounding the visitor centre, enabling people to choose an appropriate length of walk. Walks on rides are available in Woodwalton Fen and Holme Fen NNRs.

Good Signposting

- 3.73** It was suggested that good signposting would be needed for the Great Fen Project, which would help both access and help to reduce the likelihood of people impacting on sensitive wildlife species. The Project Partners will ensure that there is clear waymarking on major trails. Improvements are already taking place at Ramsey Heights Countryside Classroom and Nature Reserve and Woodwalton Fen NNR.

Public Rights of Way

- 3.74** CCC highways division were pleased to see the objectives of the Cambridgeshire Rights of Way Improvement Plan incorporated into the masterplan, but were concerned about some aspects of the proposals for re-directing an existing public right of way. The Project Partners will liaise closely with CCC to ensure that this is undertaken in the correct manner.

Cyclepaths

- 3.75** A number of people said that they were pleased with the new cycleway access routes provided. Sustrans said that in principle the networks were excellent, but asked how the network would be phased. The partners will be producing an action plan showing phasing as a next step to follow the masterplan publication. Sustrans recommended the following for cyclepaths within and outside the reserve area:

- routes should be chosen for their directness and connection to identifiable points of special interest
- inherited angular access grid should be softened wherever possible to match the contours and special features of the reserve area
- long straight paths should be given minor changes of direction where possible, to enhance interest and reduce feelings of fatigue
- major changes of direction should be retained only where they coincide with a location of special interest, as they otherwise add distance without reaching a destination and can be discouraging
- routes should be chosen to include natural viewpoints
- cycle routes should have a hard, sealed surface, such as tarmac, which is the least costly for maintenance and the kindest to the user.
- where visitors are expected to proceed on foot to a particular area of interest, the surface should change and cycle stands should be provided

- 3.76** The Project Partners will bear these points in mind and will liaise with local organisations, including Sustrans, when putting new cycleways in place. There will be some areas where farm tracks which can be used for cycleways are already present, where there will be fewer options for changes, without significant extra cost. The Project Partners will decide on surfaces at a later stage, in consultation with local people. From 2010, the partners will be providing cycle stands at Woodwalton Fen National Nature Reserve and Ramsey Heights Countryside Classroom, where people cycling to these reserves can proceed on foot on grass paths.

- 3.77** The Head at Ashbeach requested an off-road cycling route from Ramsey St Marys (one of the gateways to the Project area) to the Great Fen. This would enable them to cycle school groups out to the Great Fen Project. The Project Partners will contact the Highways Agency (Cambridgeshire County Council) and investigate this as an option for the future.

Specific Suggestions on Cycle Routes

- 3.78** The following was suggested by Sustrans:
- With the prospect of further population growth in Hampton and Great Haddon the access route via Yaxley Lode could become the most important route into the reserve for cyclists and walkers from these areas and from the west of Peterborough, if suitably attractive routes north of Yaxley can also be provided. The Yaxley approach, suitably located (eg through the Recreation Ground), could give excellent views over the project area. We suggest a bridge over the Lode to Black Ham Drove could

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serve both this route and the Farcet route via Conquest Drive. Alternatively, old maps show a straight farm road southwards from Broad Drive (south-east of Yaxley). If this could be recreated it would be more direct.

- The Project Partners will be adding a text box to indicate an additional route to be provided by Natural Networks, from Hampton to Yaxley. Beyond Yaxley, the route currently described in the masterplan has the advantage of being located to a greater extent within the Great Fen Project boundary, and therefore may be more achievable and may offer more of an experience of the Great Fen landscape. Detailed planning for specific routes may yield more suitable or cost-effective access which is different from that proposed in the masterplan.
- The cycleways map shows the Spine Route as being very angular and indirect south of Black Ham Drive. It would be better if this could follow a more direct route with gentler changes of direction, following around and between the natural zones planned for this part of the reserve.
 - At the moment the partners are following drove roads as much as possible to keep costs of new pathway development down, however, the Project Partners agree that smoothing out tight corners is desirable. This level of detail will be considered at the implementation phase.
- The Spine Route south from Middle Farm should preferably follow the slight ridge to Manor Farm and Church End, to allow it a more direct line and the best possible views. The Ordnance Survey 1:25000 map indicates intermittent farm tracks along this ridge, which could no doubt be linked appropriately.
 - The existing route provides a better network of tracks and still affords good views over Woodwalton Fen, so it was felt to be more appropriate. However, this alternative route will be considered at the implementation phase.
- The Spine Route might best be connected southwards from Woodwalton Bridge Street via a bridleway to the B1090 and thence via Clay Lane and the reinstatement of a former right of way directly to Owl End, Great Stukeley. As usage grows it might be worth considering the possible closure of the B1090 to motor traffic at the top of Walton Hill.
 - While it is too early to draw specific routes through to Huntingdon, the Project Partners will bear this option in mind as opportunities and plans for links from Huntingdon in the future.
- The eastern spine shown on the Cycleways map is excellent, and needs the most direct possible links into Ramsey, especially the link shown from the north of the town towards Speed the Plough Farm and around the north of Woodwalton Fen. This route might need much negotiation with landowners and new surfacing, but it would be very beneficial, giving a direct and safe cycle route between Ramsey and Peterborough via Yaxley or Farcet. There is no safe cycle route out of Ramsey at present.
 - The precise route between Ramsey and the Great Fen will be decided in consultation with landowners, tenants, users and others. The route to Speed the Plough Farm is direct, though the partners are also aware of constraints that limit the potential of this route.

3.79 A member of the public also suggested that cycleways should link into the Ramsey Town Transport Plan. The partners will continue to liaise with the relevant departments in both Huntingdonshire District Council (also a partner in the Great Fen Project), Cambridgeshire County Council and Peterborough City Council to ensure that cycleways proposed for the Great Fen link up with wider networks and plans.

Access from Moorings

- 3.80** CCC put forward that boaters often wish to be able to cycle from moorings, so cycleways should be provided where possible mooring is likely. The Project Partners have this very much in mind, and new moorings on New Dyke will be located adjacent to the major E-W cycling and walking route wherever possible.

Suggestions for Phasing Access Routes

- 3.81** Sustrans recommended prioritising cycling and walking access from Peterborough (via Yaxley and Farcet) and from Huntingdon, so as to promote local visits from the early stages. They then recommended access from Ramsey following this. The Project Partners will consider this as part of the action plan phase.

Multi-user Versus Singular Use

- 3.82** There were mixed views about multi-user paths. Some people highlighted that bikes can pose difficulties and come up quickly behind walkers, wheelchair and mobility scooter users. One horse-rider felt that dogs and bikes should be kept separate from horses. Solutions suggested included having wider paths with different surfaces for different users, that dogs should be kept on leads where there is horse-riding, and that there should be some separate provision for different types of users.
- 3.83** Due to cost and maintenance considerations, it will not always be possible to provide separate provision for all different types of users in the Great Fen. However, as part of the network, the Project Partners will aim to provide some sections specialised to different users where possible and in liaison with local users, authorities and landowners.
- 3.84** Some respondents differentiated between family or pleasure cyclists (admiring scenery or out for gentle exercise) and speed cyclists (those timing themselves around a circular route). It was suggested that these two groups could be kept apart. The Project Partners do not have the ability to provide alternative routes for cyclists who will be going at significant speed. Visitor management strategies will need to be considered to deal with this issue if it arises.

Bridges to Holme Fen NNR

- 3.85** Concern was expressed about narrow pathways over bridges at Holme Fen and the difficulty of access for people with disabilities and parents with buggies. It was suggested that if wider access bridges were provided, these could be marked on the maps. The Project Partners are currently looking into making improvements to widen the bridge to the Holme Post at Holme Fen.

Waterways

- 3.86** Cambridgeshire Local Access Forum (CLAF) identified that there is currently poor access provision to fenland waterways. They agreed that access for canoes should be provided, and asked whether canoes would have access via Exhibition Bridge. They said that they did not think it would make financial sense to change Exhibition Bridge to allow motorised access into Zone 1. The partners agree that this is not currently cost-effective and will not be seeking changes to Exhibition Bridge.
- 3.87** Great Ouse Boating Association (GOBA) were concerned about that the Great Fen would limit powered boat access into the Great Fen Project area, for example, along New Dyke and Great Raveley drain. The Project Partners state that there is no intention to restrict certain types of boats to the already-navigable parts of the Middle Level System in and around the Great Fen Project area. It is only the current restrictions, such as bridges, which will constrain access. Specifically there is no intention to allow only electric boats into the Middle Level waterways in the Great Fen.

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- 3.88** The Project Partners may be in a position to create smaller waterways within the project area which will not be directly connected to the Middle Level system. These waterways will be narrow and winding and close to wildlife. For these reasons the Project Partners will likely restrict these waterways to specific areas with additional limits on the number and nature of craft.
- 3.89** Boaters who wish to access into the Great Fen can do so via the Middle Level navigation which is linked to the rivers Great Ouse and Nene. These in turn form part of the national navigation network thus affording those who are on both short and extended trips the opportunity to access the project area using owned or hired pleasure craft. In addition a suitably sited base for tripper boats can offer an interesting alternative to the more widely adopted park and ride concept.

Moorings and Turning Points

- 3.90** GOBA were concerned that there were no moorings shown apart from at Bill Fen Marina. The Project Partners have been considering where best to locate moorings in the Project area. Moorings will be provided along the New Dyke, providing access to the heart of the Great Fen. The exact location of these moorings is to be determined. These moorings will be located as close as possible to proposed new walking and cyclepaths, and a new bus stop is proposed so that boating visitors would not necessarily need to walk or cycle the distance (approximately 1 km) if they are unable.

Canoeing and Kayaking

- 3.91** CLAF agreed with the Cambridgeshire Canoeing Association in their views that it would be desirable to provide access to the project area for canoeists from adjacent rivers, and to paddle within the Great Fen Project area, and also agreed that a small car park adjacent to the water with a good landing stages would enable people to launch their own crafts from the Great Fen. The Project Partners will be looking at developing canoeing circuits in the future and will liaise with local canoeists. The Project Partners will look at how portage points and stepped access will need to be integrated through further consultation with canoeists and kayakers. How canoeing might be linked into Zone 5 (visitor facilities) will be considered later.

Public Transport Links

- 3.92** A reliable, regular bus service (particularly on summer weekends) was seen as essential for a number of people in the local communities who do not drive, including older people and people with disabilities.
- 3.93** It was also commented that it would be essential for many tourists e.g. attracting people to visit who are already in Cambridge and could use the guided bus/ bus links as far as Huntingdon, and enabling people to visit who could come by train to Peterborough or Huntingdon from London. It was suggested that there could be a 'Fen Hopper' bus service, similar to the "Coastal Hopper" currently running in rural North Norfolk. One perceived advantage of the Coastal Hopper was that it served both tourist and local communities seeking to travel in the area.
- 3.94** Although there will always be limitations in influencing the routes of private transport providers, the partners will liaise further with local public transport providers, and community transport providers, to encourage new services in and around the Great Fen Project.
- 3.95** Natural Networks (PCC) suggested discussing proposals of a shuttlebus service connecting Peterborough's residents/ visitors to the Great Fen with the PCC Passenger Transport Contracts and Planning Team Manager.

Panoramic Views and Raised Viewpoints

- 3.96** A number of people suggested that locations for raised viewing would be useful as a little height would provide a good view over the flat landscape. Creative means of doing this, for example, by treehouse, zipwire or climbing wall were suggested. It was also highlighted that access for wheelchair users, people with mobility impairments and pushchairs would also need to be considered. Views from the visitor centre will be considered as part of its design process.

Information, Signage and Interpretation

- 3.97** It was suggested that the story of the Fens should not concentrate on the recent (post 1800) story but instead take a much wider and longer view. It could include eras such as Hereward the Wake, the monasteries and their influence and landholdings, the story of the use and demise of Whittlesea Mere, Napoleonic War prisoners of war camp, the coming of the railways and the Holme to Ramsey branch line, and nearby WWII airbases. The Project Partners are already working on interpreting some of this history through new education and community programmes. It will also be incorporated at the new visitor centre and at key features in and around the project area wherever appropriate.

Activity Provision

Boat, Canoe or Punt Hire

- 3.98** Large numbers of respondents in the public consultation said that they would like to take a boat ride when they visited the Great Fen, and many also said they would like to go canoeing, particularly children and young people. People with disabilities said that travelling by boat would be a good way to see the Fens. Sailing, pedal boats and rowing boats were also suggested as environmentally friendly possibilities. Cambridgeshire Local Access Forum wanted to see motorised petrol/ diesel boating kept to a minimum in the Great Fen Project area. Motorised and petrol/diesel boat access will continue to be allowed on the Middle Level System throughout the Great Fen Project. On drains outside the Middle Level system, controlled by the partners, there will be access by electric boat or non-powered vehicles only.

Cycle Hire and Biking Activities

- 3.99** Cycle hire, cycle lessons, cycle paths or trails and facilities for visitors bringing their own cycles were all popular with the public questionnaire respondents. The need for secure cycle stands was also mentioned by many, especially those who would travel into the Great Fen on their own bicycles. Young people suggested bike trails which included bumps, slopes and more of a challenge. To avoid motorcycle access onto these trails, one option identified was keeping access to these trails via a moat. Cycle parking will be provided in a number of locations. It is being provided in 2010 at Woodwalton Fen NNR and Ramsey Heights Countryside Classroom.

Horse Riding

- 3.100** A number of people were interested in horse riding in the Great Fen, including over 10% of questionnaire respondents. People were interested in riding their horses from where they live, bringing their horses using horse boxes, or riding with a school. The British Horse Society said that they would encourage people to ride from where they live whenever this is possible. It was felt that better access provision and facilities for horse-riders from surrounding communities would enable this. Circular routes were also preferable.

Fishing

- 3.101** Many people were interested in fishing, including 13% of questionnaire respondents, young people and people with disabilities. The importance of fishing as a local activity was highlighted. People with disabilities highlighted the need for accessible fishing platforms, toilets and parking close by. A number of people with disabilities, young people and parents wanted to see fishing provision close to the visitor centre. It

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was suggested that the new freshwater areas might also provide a commercial opportunity in the raising of freshwater fish whereby frozen or smoked fish could be sold at the Visitor Centre or in the suggested farm shop.

- 3.102** Fishing is unlikely to be available at the new visitor centre. The open water provided by the visitor facility is for the benefit of wildlife and wildlife watching. These water bodies will not be suitable for fish species that anglers will be fishing for. Angling is available on the Middle Level Drains which provide the best habitat for coarse fish. It is these areas where there may be opportunities for enhancing facilities and catering for all users.

Local Wildlife

- 3.103** A large number of respondents would like to discover local wildlife at the Great Fen. Many of the groups spoken to, including children and young people, were also very interested in wildlife. There will be many opportunities for wildlife watching which will develop as the Great Fen develops. The Project Partners expect a rich and varied menu of wildlife activities to be available for all visitors.

Walking and Dog Walking

- 3.104** Walking was the most popular choice of activities (over 85% wanted to walk in around the Great Fen Project area). At least 1 in 4 questionnaire respondents wanted to walk dogs in and around the Great Fen. A number of people who wanted dog-walkers' access to be regulated, and a number who wanted more access for dog-walkers. Concerns were also expressed about the problems with dogs defecating and owners not keeping them on leads. It was proposed by the Project Partners that there could be routes designated for people to walk dogs off the lead, and there could be other no dog routes. It was discussed that these may need to be somewhat self-policing. This suggestion received positive feedback.
- 3.105** The Project Partners agreed that utilising the red/ amber/ green approach would be a sensible approach to dealing with the sensitive issue of dogs and dog walking. Dog bins were also suggested. The Project Partners will consider how best to deal with this issue as dog-walking routes develop, in liaison with local dog walkers.

Discovering Local History

- 3.106** Almost half of all questionnaire respondents want to find out about local history. Specific suggestions included peat-digging at Woodwalton Fen, exploring the wider history of the Fens prior to Victorian times, Hereward the Wake, drainage and the Whittlesey Mere, WWII and the surrounding airbases, and archaeological finds. The Project Partners have already begun to run some events exploring local history and will be providing new schools programmes, events and interpretation (including boards, trails and leaflets) exploring the local history of the Fen, from Neolithic times to modern farming. This includes an oral history project to gather memories of the Fens. This work will be developed over the coming years and will very much be part of the new visitor centre and the facilities surrounding it. The partners are also working with the Fenland Museums partnership to explore the history of the Fens.

Camping and Caravanning

- 3.107** In the Phase 2 consultation 13% of respondents said that they would like to stay overnight in the area. Opportunities for camping in the Great Fen were of particular interest to young people. Cambridgeshire Local Access Forum and a few other people felt that camping and caravanning would be more appropriate based outside the Project area. Several local campsites, including at Kings Ripton and Pidley, have made contact during the consultation events. Young people also suggested an outdoor centre where they could stay overnight.

Wilderness Camping

- 3.108** Young people were very interested in wilderness camping, either close to the visitor centre, or at their own spot reached, for example, by canoeing. The Project Partners agree that they would like commercial camping and caravanning sites to be located outside the project area, which will benefit local businesses. However, wilderness camping, for youth groups or community groups, may well be made available inside the Project area.

Picnic Areas

- 3.109** Many people would like to have a picnic in the Great Fen (44% of respondents). This was also a popular option with children and young people. The Project Partners will provide picnic facilities at the visitor centre. Picnic benches are also provided currently at Ramsey Heights Countryside Classroom and Nature Reserve (the nature reserve is free and open all year round).

Play Facilities and Adventure Activities

- 3.110** The provision of both play facilities and adventure activities were very popular, particularly among children, young people and families. There were many ideas and concepts proposed for adventure play areas, including natural play areas (similar to those provided at Stanwick Lakes), den building activities and/or areas, a climbing wall with either natural or artificial holds, a natural assault course, zipwires, a treetop village linked with bridges and zip wires, high ropes, low ropes, a “Go Ape” type experience (bridges/ zip wires), a slide or slope created that could include something like tobogganing. Bushcraft was also suggested as an adventure activity, along with other outdoor activities suggested above (such as canoeing, kayaking and biking).
- 3.111** These facilities will be considered further as part of the visitor centre feasibility work. Some activities, like den building, are already available as part of the Great Fen programme of events and activities as discussed below.

Events and Activities

- 3.112** Many people wanted to attend events at the Great Fen (36% of questionnaire respondents). Suggestions for events included wildlife watching, gift-making events and stargazing events. The Project Partners currently provide some small scale family and community events, walks and training workshops, mainly from Ramsey Heights Countryside Classroom, but also out in the local community. Details of these events are on the Great Fen website, in the free Great Fen newsletter (available by email and by post) and are from the Great Fen team.
- 3.113** With the visitor centre, the Project Partners will be able to provide more events, some on a larger scale, for local communities, businesses and the general public. The Project Partners will welcome ideas and discuss further options as part of the visitor centre feasibility work.

Arts

- 3.114** Art activities were popular, and suggestions included photography, painting and music event. One suggestion was provided for showing photography areas on a map. The Project Partners would like to provide a wide range of art events and activities over the next few years, including photography, painting, wood carving, sculpture, willow weaving, animation, film, storytelling and smaller scale music events. The partners have also marked potential viewpoints on the masterplan map, and will develop these further as features develop.

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Visiting Local Shops/ Pubs/ Cafes

3.115 Many people (29% of respondents) wished to visit local shops, pubs and cafés in and around the Great Fen Project area. The Project Partners hope to encourage this through provision of circular walks, visitor gateways and local village based facilities in surrounding communities. The partners will also highlight this demand to local public transport providers.

Visiting Churches and Museums

3.116 1 in 5 people wished to visit churches and museums in and around the Great Fen Project area. The Project Partners are working alongside local museums, for example, through the Fenland Museums partnership to ensure joint promotion and the partners will signpost other local attractions. The Project Partners will also highlight demand for visiting local attractions with local public transport providers. The Project Partners may be able to work in partnership on special events, for such as Heritage Weekend, to provide some transport, for example, between Ramsey Rural Museum and the Great Fen.

Bring Friends and Family

3.117 A large number of people (over 45% of respondents) wished to bring friends and family to visit the Great Fen Project. It was suggested that there could be group discounts.

Additional Suggestions for Activities and Attractions

- **Archery** - It is possible that this activity could take place. However, as there is currently already archery available in the local area.
- **Paintballing** - There is already provision close by, near to Monk's Wood. The Great Fen partners would direct people to local providers.
- **Wild swimming** - The Project Partners think that the demand for and issues surrounding wild swimming would need to be investigated further if any provision was to be made available in the future.
- **Shooting (wildfowl and clay)** - Shooting activities in the project area would need to take place in a way that is not detrimental to the wider aims and objectives of the project.
- **Astronomy/ Meteorology** - Options for astronomy, meteorology or cloud watching and taking advantage of the dark skies in the area were suggested. The Project Partners will look to speak to any local astronomy societies in the coming years to see what might be possible, for example, having stargazing walks or events.

Education, Training and Volunteering

Education and Learning

3.118 A number of people felt that the Great Fen had a great potential for educational activities for schools, children, young people, families and the public as a whole, including involving local people, schools and groups in its development. The Great Fen team offer some services at the moment from Ramsey Heights Countryside Classroom, including school and community group visits, as well as some family and community events. Educational activity provision will be able to widen and increase when the team moves to the visitor centre.

Training and/ or Workshops

3.119 Over 15% of questionnaire respondents were interested in training and/or workshops. Suggestions included photography and local crafts. The partners will be providing training, informally through volunteering, as well as through workshops. Training workshops currently available include a variety of wildlife workshops, photography and land management skills (as part of the Wildlife Trust's Wildlife Training Workshops programme). The partners hope to widen provision in the future, for example, providing training in local traditional crafts such as willow weaving, or in areas such as bushcraft.

Volunteering and Work Experience

3.120 A large number of people wanted to volunteer at the Great Fen Project (almost 1 in 5 of respondents). A number of young people expressed an interest in helping with practical work and doing work experience at the Great Fen. The Project Partners expect to see volunteering opportunities increase as the Great Fen develops. There are currently a wide range of volunteering opportunities with opportunities to learn new skills, including practical work, helping with researching local history, helping with community and family events, including walks, making props, and office support. There are also work experience opportunities available.

Academic Studies

3.121 A couple of people suggested conducting academic research on the Great Fen. CLAF suggested that consideration might be given to studies into carbon sequestration and methane release.

3.122 The Project Partners have already begun undertaking studies. For example, the partners linked up with the Open University to study carbon sequestration – it was predicted that the Great Fen Project would prevent the release of the equivalent of over 320,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide each year. Woodwalton Fen has long been used as a site to study ecology and has a rich history of biological recording. Partnerships with academic institutions will continue to provide the partners with research and advice the whole range of issues the project is aiming to address.

Emergency Services – Access and Egress

3.123 Ramsey Fire Brigade members attended a public information event held in Ramsey, to look at the plans for the Great Fen and start to identify what they would need if called upon to rescue anyone from an accident. The firemen at Ramsey are 'retained' staff – that is they are not a full-time fire brigade and have to be called in from their normal occupations. They do however have a good response time, but to reach most of the southern part of the Great Fen area would take time. It may be worth investigating response times further with them.

3.124 Points raised included:

- Clear ways to locate incidents - A map, divided into quarters using the north-south access spine and B660 e.g. ABCD or 1234 to identify location of the accident or they could use OS grid refs.
- Grid refs on waymarker posts would be very useful.
- Wider tracks rather than footpaths would enable access to an accident, although fire engines are heavy vehicles and may not be able to travel far within the Project area in wet conditions.
- Map and keys for gates need to be kept by all emergency services.
- if campfires are permitted then the Fire brigade should be informed
- Coverage of the Great Fen area should be investigated further as the northern part of the area is likely to be served by the Yaxley Brigade.

Funding

3.125 A number of people were concerned about how the Great Fen would be funded, for example, the cost of ongoing maintenance. Suggestions including commercial sponsors, charges for access/ car parking/ sales, government endorsement and education links. The Project Partners will seek a variety of sources of funding, from traditional sources such as charitable trusts, as well as from the visitor centre and other land management enterprises.

3.126 One person also felt that there should be free services at the Great Fen. The Project Partners will provide some free services as part of overall provision in the Great Fen, to ensure that those with lower budgets are also able to enjoy the Great Fen.

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Social, Economic and Tourism Considerations

3.127 A number of people highlighted benefits to local businesses and tourism as being good aspects of the masterplan.

Unique Attraction

3.128 Some people felt that more vision was required to bring in tourists. A number of people felt that a unique attraction was needed, for example, adventure facilities or unique facilities found nowhere else.

Emphasis on Tourism

3.129 It was raised that there should be more consideration of tourism. Natural Networks (PCC) felt that greater emphasis could be made on Peterborough as a very nearby tourist destination with an excellent range of facilities, attractions and accommodation just a few miles from the Great Fen and the visitor centre. They suggested that this could be explored further with staff at the tourist information centre. The Project Partners will follow up on this link and will be gaining further advice on effectively developing new tourism and business opportunities.

Local Food and Crafts

3.130 It was suggested that local craft workers might also give demonstrations and sell handicrafts. The Project Partners are keen to support local artists and craft workers, both at the visitor centre and at visitor gateways and local village based facilities.

Partnerships, Marketing and Promotion

Better Information and Promotion

3.131 The need for better information and promotion was highlighted by many people during the masterplan consultation. Suggestions included:

- More frequent articles and updates in the local press
- continue community/ education work
- marketing/ PR/ commercial sponsorship
- more roadshows
- clearer explanation of benefits
- focus on different uses of land for farmers/ food security
- school projects
- local schools e.g. Folksworth
- promote the role of carbon capture
- help tackle government apathy and get government support
- better promotion east of Whittlesey e.g. Wisbech, March – advertise and hold events in wider areas
- Get young people involved
- Better information for anglers
- Better information for dog walkers
- Advertise on bus timetables
- Highlight the economic benefits
- Reach people and visitors further afield
- Add to the list of Peterborough tourist attractions
- Provide a central point of information

3.132 These are all valuable suggestions. The team is aiming to do more publicity, events and roadshows, including a central information point at Ramsey Heights Countryside Classroom, where many of the Great Fen team are based. The team welcome any suggestions for places to promote events, activities and the projects in general (e.g. through community talks, newsletters and information boards).

Museums, Heritage and Archaeology Attractions

3.133 The importance of making promotional links with other attractions and tourist networks was mentioned by several people and stakeholders. The Great Fen Project team will be developing promotional links with local attractions over the next five years, for example, through better information, running events which transport people between the attractions, and through joint interpretation projects (e.g. film and animation). The Project Partners will also follow up on suggested tourism contacts given during the consultation.

Phasing and Delivery

3.134 It was suggested that a key element of delivery would be phasing development of attractions and access over time, alongside restoration work. The Project Partners agree that this will be vital. Many people during Phase 2 asked about long-term timelines and when the various facilities would be available. Following completion of the masterplan the Project Partners will be producing an action plan to describe their anticipated objectives for the next three years. All aspects of the masterplan will be dependent on funding and partnership work with local authorities, landowners and other organisations. Some aspects of the masterplan are planned to happen relatively quickly - the visitor centre is planned for the next five or six years. Other aspects, such as the full network of access paths, will take a lot longer.

3.135 The action plan that will be developed following the masterplan will show how access will be developed alongside land management. This is an essential part of providing for visitors to the Great Fen Project. The Project Partners are already undertaking access improvements at Ramsey Heights Countryside Classroom and at the National Nature Reserves.

Public Perception, Involvement and Future Consultations

Public Perception

3.136 The general public provided very helpful views throughout the consultation. A wide range of positive aspects of the project were highlighted by participants. These included:

- Provision for wildlife
- Fen restoration
- Footpaths and car free walking
- Bridleways and including horse riding facilities
- Cycling and the potential to experience nature and cycle safely
- Bus links and new bus stops
- Walking/ cycling links from local communities
- Opening up waterways
- Boat rides
- More open space with accessibility
- Ambitious size
- Learning and education
- Disabled access and inclusion
- Variety of purposes and functions of the Great Fen
- Range of interests and activities and access
- Fishing
- Tourism, increase in local trade, local economy, and bringing visitors to the area
- Infrastructure for the area

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- Support for shops and employment at the visitor centre
- Opportunities for local people and families to learn about the local environment
- Bring communities together
- Helping people to learn about value of wildlife
- Exercise
- Visitor centre
- Experience past fen life
- Flood safety valve
- Carbon capture
- Balance of wildlife and people

3.137 A wide range of potential problems, solutions and questions were raised, including potential issues with access, better provision of information, and balancing provision for wildlife and people. The range of potential problems and solutions have been discussed throughout this report and will also be incorporated into the Frequently Asked Questions on the [Great Fen website](#).

Involvement and Future Consultations

3.138 A number of people asked that the public or a particular group (e.g. local horse-riders) be involved in future consultations and decision making. The partners will actively seek and welcome further involvement. Individuals and groups, for example, who would like to comment on ongoing access and interpretation (boards, leaflets, trails, art) improvements are welcome to contact the Great Fen team to get involved (info@greatfen.org.uk; 01487 815524).

3.139 The partners would like to thank everyone for their comments and suggestions during the consultation on the masterplan. Balancing the needs and interests of a diverse range of users and interest groups is challenging but the partners hope the Great Fen will offer something for everyone and become a fantastic resource for local communities.

Abbreviations

BHS - British Horse Society

CCC - Cambridgeshire County Council

CLAF - Cambridgeshire Local Access Forum

EEDA - East of England Development Agency

GOBA - Great Ouse Boating Association

HDC - Huntingdonshire District Council

IWA - Inland Waterways Association

NNR - National Nature Reserve

PCC - Peterborough City Council

PRoW/RoW - Public Rights of Way/ Rights of Way