Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough

National and Local Context

Contents

1. Cambridge Nature Network

This supporting document sets out the national and local context behind the reasoning of why a Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) has been developed. The purpose of this supporting document is to provide background context of the LNRS and vital role in delivering targeted nature recovery actions. District specific opportunities are also identified highlighting opportunities at district level in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.

2. National context

Government response to the Climate and Biodiversity Crises

The international response to the climate and biodiversity crises has been to set nature recovery targets in the Global Biodiversity Framework. These targets aim to halt and reverse the loss of nature by 2030 and achieve nature recovery by 2050. They have been written to ensure an integrated response to address the impacts of climate change and reduce future emissions, alongside providing food, fuel and health benefits.

In 2021 the UK Government passed The Environment Act. This aims to improve air and water quality, protect wildlife, increase recycling and reduce plastic waste. In association, and in response to the Global Biodiversity Framework, in 2023 the Government set legally binding targets in the Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP) to drive forward action to tackle climate change, clean our air and rivers, and boost nature. LNRSs are highlighted in the EIP as crucial to ambitions for a national nature recovery network and the delivery of the government's goal of improving nature. Details of how this LNRS should address each of the national targets set out in the Environment Act 2021 can be found in the **Relevant legislation, policies and strategies** supporting document.

3. Local context

Over the last century, changes in land use across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough has led to significant habitat loss, with remaining habitats becoming smaller and more fragmented. The area is one of the driest in the country with the lowest rainfall, whilst also being at greatest risk of flooding. Both issues are likely to worsen with the impacts of climate change.

In addition, the following are key challenges specific to Cambridgeshire and Peterborough which require vital consideration in the process of identifying priorities for nature recovery:

- The importance of the remaining lowland peat soils and limiting CO2 and methane emissions from agriculture.
- Providing space for nature within our farming and food production system.

- How water is managed and the current impacts of over-abstraction of wetlands and chalk streams.
- Water quality and excess nutrients, adversely impacting aquatic ecosystems and floodplain habitats.
- The impact of major infrastructure such as new housing, employment sites and major transport schemes.
- The rising population and lack of large areas of downland, forest, or commons to provide natural green space for local communities.
- The fragmentation and low % land cover of natural habitats.

Each of these challenges is discussed in Part 1. Local government has put in place various policies and programmes to help address these challenges. A list of local policies and strategies can be found in the **Relevant legislation, policies and strategies** document.

District-specific opportunities

Peterborough

The Peterborough City Council area is comprised primarily of 4 parts, The Fenland in the west, centrally the city itself, to the east the Limestone grasslands of John Clare County and the River Nene and its associated wetlands runs along southern border. Each area presents its own unique opportunities for nature recovery directed by the abiotic factors of soil type, pH, water availability and relative flatness. The River Nene corridor likely has the lowest hanging fruit for nature recovery and the highest potential ecosystem service, however much of this improvement is already being created through the Ferry Meadows project. John Clare County has large existing populations of priority species and land which could be used for habitat creation specific for these species. Importantly the scale of John Clare Country means that large metapopulations could establish. While the Fens is a large area of generally a single habitat, which high value for specific priority species such as Water voles and Wintering birds, we believe there is significant value to be found in recreating “seed” habitats. Introducing the idea of a more varied landscape to the Fens for the long term. Peterborough City itself has surprisingly good green infrastructure, however pockets of low green space availability do exist. Enabling access to the wider Peterborough area through bus routes, visitor centers and more may be a suitable approach. Overall Peterborough has many small pockets of biodiversity, the expansion of which will greatly aid England’s wider Biodiversity Goals.

Fenland

For the Fenland area (northern Cambridgeshire), opportunities exist to create natural habitats around the Ouse and Nene Washes. Examples include the restoration of the Block Fen mineral workings, the RSPB’s proposed expansion of wetlands near Manea, and the major minerals extraction allocations west of Whittlesey. The construction of the Fens Reservoir north of Chatteris provides another significant opportunity for nature provision. The main drain and river network which transects the area and as major arteries for movement provides further opportunities to link major nature sites

with a series of 'stepping stones' on adjacent farmland where appropriate, for example, use of the Forty Foot Drain to link the Ouse Washes in the east with the Great Fen Project in the west.
Providing suitable sites within and/or adjacent to all towns and villages will create a more permeable landscape, allowing local people to engage with nature and combat the significant lack of natural open space within the area.

East Cambridgeshire

To the east of the Ouse Washes is a similar fen landscape to northern Cambridgeshire, with similar nature recovery opportunities based on fen or fen supporting habitats, likely taking advantage of the river networks through the area. Such opportunities exist up to the eastern Cambridgeshire border and beyond into Norfolk towards, for example, Lakenheath. Particularly important will be strengthening and connecting the existing natural fen found at internationally recognised places such as Wicken Fen and Chippenham Fen. Further south, towards Newmarket and on the eastern periphery of Cambridgeshire, internationally rare chalk grasslands and streams provide opportunities for biodiversity strengthening, whilst further south and east again, on the borders with Suffolk, the more rolling clay-based landscape provides alternative significant nature opportunities, this time for woodland or hedgerow planting, albeit such opportunities need to be mindful of and work with the internationally important horseracing industry that dominates that landscape.

Huntingdonshire

The Great Fen provides substantial and diverse opportunities to re-establish fenland and wet woodland habitats in Huntingdonshire with ongoing projects, such as the Huntingdonshire Priority Natural Landscapes report, already contributing to landscape scale restoration and long-term plans for further enhancements. The Great Ouse Valley forms a major river corridor through the district connecting large scale areas of open water from former sand and gravel extraction sites along with extensive floodplain meadows offering significant expansion opportunities. Paxton Pits offers large scale potential to continue to develop the nature reserve's variety of habitats, in particular wetland, open water in former sand and gravel pits, and scrub and woody vegetation. Smaller scale opportunities exist to enhance connectivity between the mosaic of floodplain meadows and seasonally flooded woodland that lie within and between towns and villages along the Great Ouse Valley. Carefully located new woodland creation would benefit established woodlands in central and southern Huntingdonshire by facilitating habitat connections.

Cambridge

Cambridge is a famously green city with its cattle grazed riverside commons, 12 local nature reserves, over 80 public parks and extensive University gardens. Through continued development of the active Cambridge Nature Network there are opportunities to create and enhance significant areas of chalk downland, fens, meadows and woodlands where nature can recover and thrive, providing everyone

who visits, lives or works in Cambridge easy access to high-quality natural green spaces. Improving the flow, water quality and habitats along the unique chalk streams is a priority, as is raising public awareness of the pressures they face. Following the successful Cambridge Canopy Project opportunities exist to further increase and diversify the urban forest on both public and private land.

South Cambridgeshire

South Cambridgeshire offers many opportunities for enhancing biodiversity and natural habitats, both within statutory and non-statutory protected areas. The Gog Magog Hills and Fleam Dyke, which both hosts rare chalk flora, and are both Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) are also part of a growing network of chalk grassland which could be expanded to increase connectivity. There is also a Special Area of Conservation (SAC), Wimpole Wood and Eversden Woods, which is key for the rare barbastelle bat. Thes bats can range up to 20km in a single night meaning the area around this SAC is an important foraging zone. The area of fens to the northeast of the City of Cambridge should also be a focus of enhancement to meet the “Fen Vision” objectives of Natural England and the National Trust.
Strategic enhancements should focus on improving habitat connectivity and increasing green infrastructure in new developments to boost species migration and resilience across the district. These efforts contribute to preserving South Cambridgeshire's ecological richness and responding to biodiversity challenges.