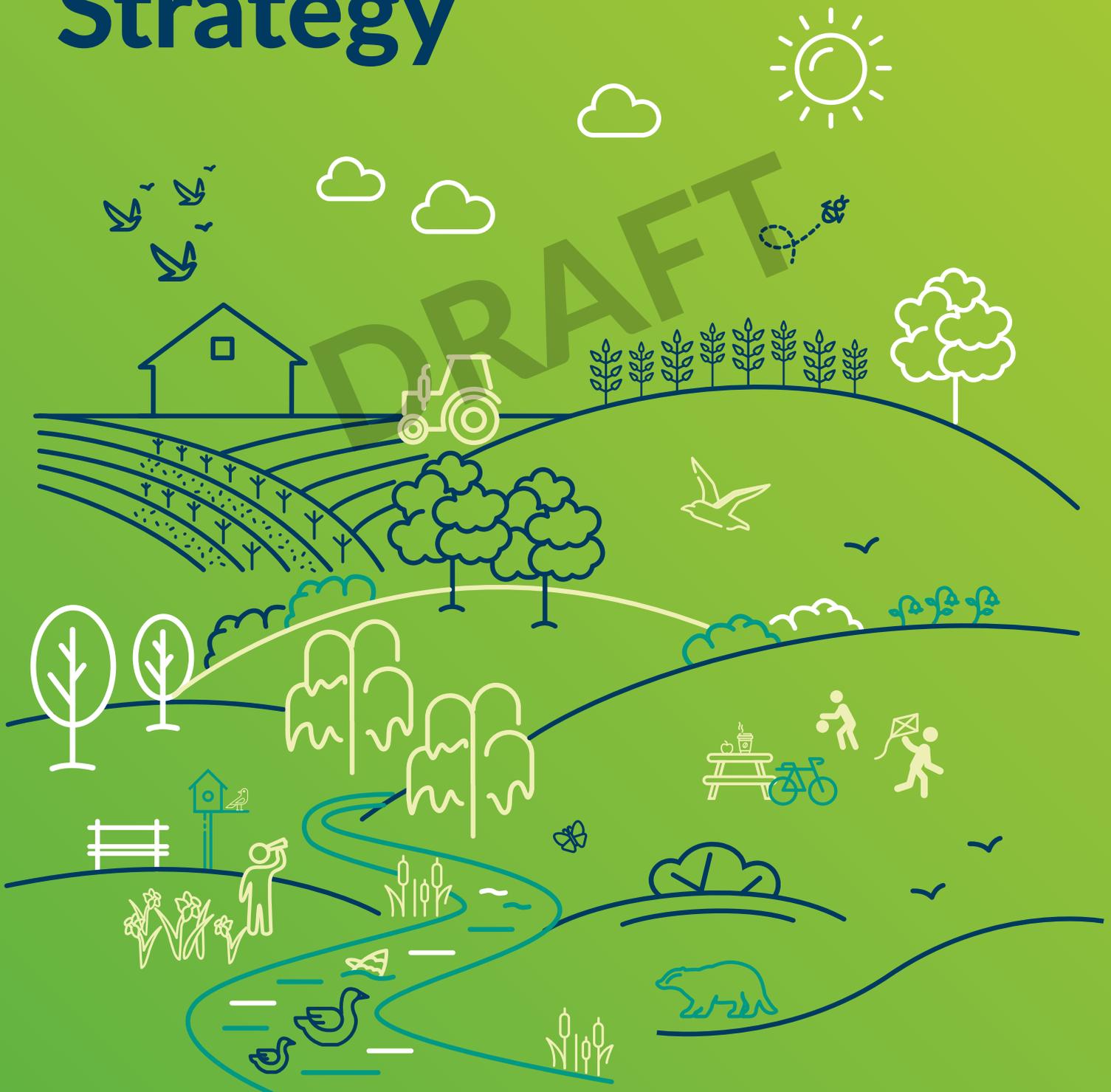




South  
Cambridgeshire  
District Council

# Doubling Nature Strategy

2021



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## Foreword

### Foreword from Cllr Bridget Smith, Leader

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### Foreword from Cllr Pippa Heylings, Chair of our Climate and Environment Advisory Committee

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# Introduction

The world is facing an ecological crisis with species declining globally, due to human actions, at the fastest rate ever recorded. This is clear from numerous studies.

The Global Assessment on Biodiversity carried out for the United Nations in 2019 reported that 1 million species are threatened with extinction and warned that we are undermining the natural infrastructure on which our modern world depends.

In the UK, the 2019 State of Nature report found populations of the UK's most important wildlife had fallen by 60 per cent in 50 years. On the eve of new global biodiversity targets being set by the international community, the Government's own assessment of progress towards existing UK targets shows that it is failing on 15 out of 20 measures, with particular challenges around the targets on pollution, vulnerable ecosystems outside protected areas, and on restoring degraded ecosystems

**The State of Nature 2019 report lists five main threats to biodiversity in the UK: pollution, climate change, changes in agricultural practices, urbanisation and the introduction of non-native species.**

Sadly, Cambridgeshire is very much part of this picture. A recent report for the Cambridgeshire Biodiversity Partnership showed massive declines since the 1930s in key habitats such as semi-natural grassland in Cambridgeshire. Once common species such as hares, hedgehogs and turtle doves are at risk of disappearing.

The ecological and climate emergencies are interlinked. This document sets out what we are doing to tackle the ecological crisis and is a sister document to South Cambridgeshire's Zero Carbon Strategy, which we adopted in May 2020. We have already signed up, with our partners in Natural Cambridgeshire, to the vision of doubling nature in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough by 2050. Here we set out our approach to delivering that vision in South Cambridgeshire.

## What do we mean by nature?

There are several terms closely connected to nature including biodiversity, natural capital and green infrastructure.

This strategy outlines what we are doing for biodiversity – our wild plants and animals. It also touches on what we are doing to enhance other natural assets in the district, including our soils, air and water. The sum of our natural assets is our natural capital and is essential for our prosperity and wellbeing. It is from our natural capital that vital ecosystem service benefits such as food, water, flooding mitigation and climate regulation derive. The related term 'green infrastructure' is more typically used in a planning context to refer to elements of the natural environment in relation to development plans.



## The Council's role

The Council owns only a tiny proportion of the land in South Cambridgeshire. We directly control even less, since almost all the land we own is associated with our Council housing.

Clearly, we cannot double nature on our own and so, as with our Zero Carbon Strategy, this strategy is about how we make best use of the powers and influence we have to encourage, support and, in some cases, compel others to play their part.

Our most significant work in support of the vision to double nature is the work we are doing as the local planning authority through our shared planning service with Cambridge City Council, Greater Cambridge Shared Planning. As Section 7 explains, Greater Cambridge Shared Planning is currently in an intensive period of policy development as preparations are made for a new joint Greater Cambridge Local Plan for Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire, which will set out planning policy for the next 20 years. This document provides a

snapshot of our current work through planning relating to nature, and an overview of how we are developing new planning policies to enhance this work further. For a detailed picture and emerging up-to-date information, readers are directed to the Greater Cambridge Shared Planning website.

An action plan based on this strategy will be developed in consultation with stakeholders in the coming months. This will be incorporated into our business and service delivery plans for 2021-22 and beyond with progress monitored and reported through our usual processes.

# The natural capital of South Cambridgeshire

Natural capital is the sum of our natural assets and ecosystems including soil, trees, air, water and other biodiversity.

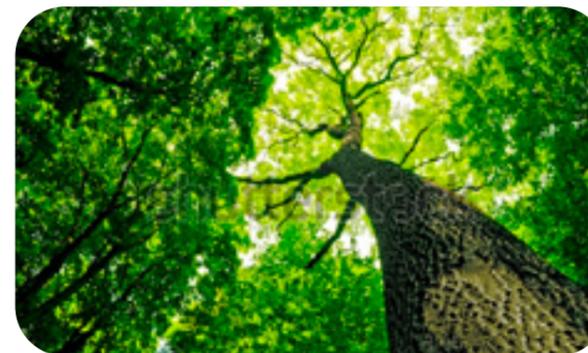
Quality of life, wellbeing, resilience to extreme weather conditions and the quality of the homes and neighbourhoods we are building depend on these fully functioning ecosystems and assets.



## Soil

Fertile soils are perhaps South Cambridgeshire's greatest natural resource. The soils in the district include boulder clay, chalk and peat, with most land designated as grade 2 or 3 (i.e. good) agricultural land. As such it is put to good use by mainly medium and large-scale farms, producing food, especially arable crops.

Over recent decades technological advances have enabled much improved yields. However, many intensive farming practices, including deep ploughing, rapid crop-rotation, enlarging fields and removing trees and hedges, are resulting in soil erosion and degradation which, if unstopped, will cause productivity to decline. Hedgerows are critically important to connect remaining fragments of biodiversity and they are also threatened by changes in land use and new development pressure.



## Trees

South Cambridgeshire has fewer trees than most other areas of the UK, although it does contain some important ancient woodlands. Mainly in the west of the district with some in the southeast, these probably survived historically due to the difficulty of ploughing the heavy boulder clay. Major transport infrastructure routes are a potential threat to some of this long-standing woodland.



## Air

Air quality is generally good as might be expected in a largely rural district, but traffic on busy major roads can give rise to problems, especially where busy junctions are close to residential areas. We monitor air quality closely and, where necessary, declare Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs) requiring action to improve air quality. The stretch of the A14 between Bar Hill and Milton is currently an AQMA. Existing monitoring systems show declines in pollution levels in this AQMA in recent years. We are extending coverage of our monitoring, especially to understand where there may be potential pollution hot spots.



## Water

Cambridgeshire is one of the driest parts of the UK and the rainfall we have is highly variable, which means that water needs to be carefully managed. South Cambridgeshire's three main rivers, the Granta, Cam and Rhee, all originate from chalk springs, which also supply the aquifer that provides much of our drinking water. Chalk streams in the UK are internationally important in the conservation of biodiversity. The UK has about three quarters of the world's chalk streams. However, the amount of water being taken for public water supply are endangering the chalk streams' ability to flow healthily, impacting on the wildlife that lives there.

## Biodiversity

Important wildlife habitats in South Cambridgeshire include rivers and streams, especially chalk ones, woodland, scrub, old orchards, hedgerows, arable farmland, ponds, churchyards and cemeteries, lowland chalk grasslands, meadows, pastures and both man-made and natural wetlands.

South Cambridgeshire is one of the areas of highest growth in the country and this has led to higher levels of housing and office construction, including the continued emergence of strategic new towns and supporting transport infrastructure. This urbanisation has led to changes in land-use and has an impact on habitat and biodiversity. Changes in planning policy and standards are particularly important to ensure that key remaining biodiversity is protected where possible and that there is overall environmental net gain.

With much of the land intensively farmed, biodiversity in South Cambridgeshire has been under pressure for many decades. Semi-natural habitats such as permanent pasture have been converted to

arable. Field margins have been narrowed, orchards and hedges grubbed up, and seed-rich winter stubbles lost due to spring sowing being replaced by autumn sowing. Wetlands have been 'improved' through drainage. This means that where farms can adopt wildlife-friendly management practices, this is particularly valuable. Examples of these include retaining patches of native vegetation, leaving wider margins in arable fields and creating beetle banks.

With biodiversity under such pressure, areas which are dedicated to nature are of great importance. There are 180 sites designated for conservation in South Cambridgeshire, covering 3,484 hectares; just under 4 per cent of total land area. 59 of these are legally protected, as detailed in the table below. These include a variety of habitats including wetlands, wood park, pasture and ancient woodland. The sole site of international importance is the Eversden and Wimpole Woods Special Area of Conservation, an ancient woodland supporting the rare barbastelle bat.

Designation for nature conservation	Legally protected under UK legislation?	Number of sites in South Cambridgeshire	Area in hectares
Sites of Special Scientific Interest	✓	52	1,667
Special Area of Conservation	✓	1	66
Local Nature Reserve	✓	6	37
County Wildlife Sites	✗	121	1,714*
<b>Total</b>		<b>180</b>	<b>3,484</b>

Detailed information about the natural capital of South Cambridgeshire is available in a major study of green infrastructure in Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire published in November 2020. Commissioned by Greater Cambridge Shared Planning to inform policy development for the new Greater Cambridge Local Plan, this 206 page report, including 35 maps, outlines the extent and distribution of green infrastructure assets and networks in Greater Cambridge and the opportunities available to enhance and expand these. The report addresses the following seven themes, providing a detailed overview of green infrastructure assets and opportunities for each:

- 1 Landscape, cultural heritage, and sense of place
- 2 Biodiversity and geodiversity
- 3 The water environment
- 4 Access and connectivity
- 5 Recreation and play
- 6 Carbon sequestration
- 7 Agriculture and community food growing

➤ **The Greater Cambridge Green Infrastructure Opportunity Mapping Baseline Report can be viewed for further details.**

# The Natural Capital Framework

**Natural Capital (NC) is the stock of the world's living and non-living natural resources including soils, water, the atmosphere, ecological communities and the natural processes that underpin their functioning. The extent, condition and location of the stock of NC determine the flow of goods and services (known as ecosystem services) that provide benefits to people today and into the future.**



**These goods and services can be categorised as:**

- Provisioning services such as food, fresh water, fuel wood and fibre
- Regulating services such as climate regulation, floodwater attenuation, water purification and reduction of pests and diseases
- Cultural services such as benefits to health and wellbeing, recreation and ecotourism, aesthetic, inspirational and educational benefits and a sense of place and cultural heritage
- Supporting services necessary to produce other ecosystem services such as soil formation, nutrient recycling and pollination.



The content on this page is adapted from the Natural Capital Protocol



# The vision

**Our vision is to double nature in South Cambridgeshire by 2050 and, in so doing, enable wildlife and people to thrive and businesses to prosper.**

This means:

- More wildlife-rich habitats
- An increase in tree canopy cover
- Better accessibility to green space.

# Our approach

**Although we directly control only a tiny area of land in the district, there are many ways we can influence what happens on land we do not control.**

Our approach is to use our widening circles of influence to protect and enhance nature in the district.

- We will be an exemplar to others on our own estate through tree planting and nature enhancing measures. This includes our main office at South Cambridgeshire Hall and the communal land associated with our Council housing.
- We will make the most of our direct influence on the natural environment as the local planning authority through our commitment to doubling nature.
- We will use our wider influence through formal and informal partnerships with businesses and community.



The two maps below are taken from the Greater Cambridge Green Infrastructure Opportunity Mapping Baseline Report. Fig 5.1 Extent of the GI Network and fig 7.1 Combined Opportunities map, showing the broad opportunity zones for green infrastructure grouped under seven themes,

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1 Landscape, cultural heritage, and sense of place | 5 Recreation and play                    |
| 2 Biodiversity and geodiversity                    | 6 Carbon sequestration                   |
| 3 The water environment                            | 7 Agriculture and community food growing |
| 4 Access and connectivity                          |  |

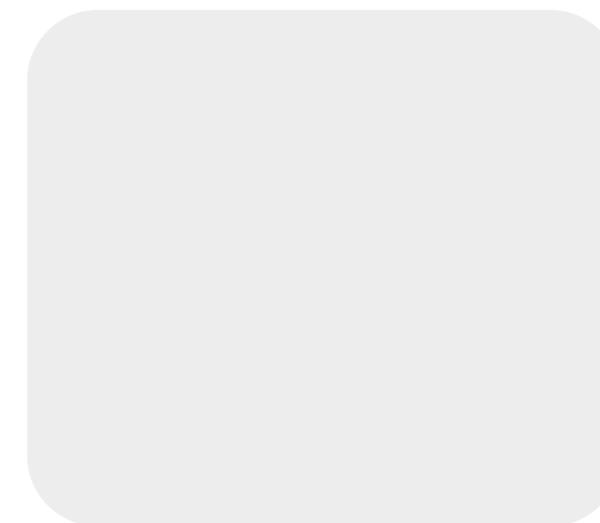


Fig 5.1 Extent of the GI Network

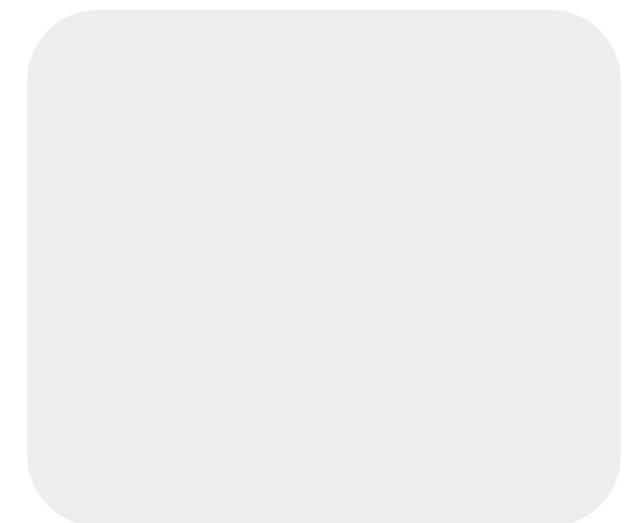


Fig 7.1 Combined Opportunities map, showing the broad opportunity zones for green infrastructure



# Our own estate

Nearly all the land we own is closely associated with our own housing stock. As such, it is referred to by the name of our ring-fenced landlord account, the Housing Revenue Account (HRA).

As well as tenants' homes, gardens, and carparks, HRA land includes:

- 36 hectares of communal land down to grass
- 1.9 hectares of additional land down to grass
- 10,000 metres of hedging
- Several hundred trees of various species, sizes and age
- Streams and watercourses running through HRA land

Our grounds maintenance contractors cut grass regularly throughout the growing season, cut hedges and shrub beds at least once per year, and carry out reactive tree surgery work as needed.

This work is monitored by means of regular formal estate inspections with tenant representatives, parish councils and other interested parties, informal estate inspections throughout the year and checks with tenants and customers to ensure they are satisfied with grounds maintenance and tree surgery work. We work closely with our Tenant Participation Group to identify areas for service improvement.

We are working on various projects to enhance our HRA land for nature.



## Tree audit

With the support of our grounds maintenance contractor we are undertaking a tree audit. Over the coming year every tree on communal land will be mapped to show its location, size, species and condition. This will allow us to bring forward a proactive programme of tree surgery to prevent problems and improve tree health. This will also identify where we can implement our ambitious tree planting programme and ensure that we are planting the right trees in the right places.



## Tree planting

With support and funding from our Repairs and Maintenance contractor under the social value element of our contract with them, we are planting additional trees. We are also supporting residents who wish to plant trees and shrubs on communal land close to their homes.



## Wildflowers

We are developing our estate inspection process to identify further opportunities to improve our green spaces including identifying suitable areas to be reseeded with wildflowers.

We will also encourage tenants to make their gardens wildlife-friendly and encourage changes to cutting regimes to allow for wildflower habitat where appropriate to benefit nature.



## Commercial sites

Other than HRA land, we own the site of our main office in Cambourne, South Cambridgeshire Hall, and we have a small portfolio of properties purchased as commercial investments.

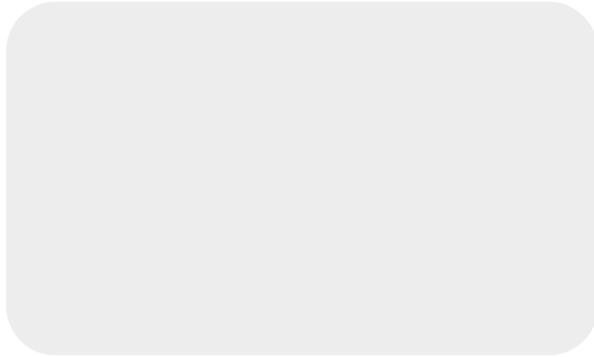
We will explore options for enhancing nature as part of any future planned maintenance of development work to these sites.



## Milton Country Park

We also own Milton Country Park, a 38 hectare former sand and gravel pit which we developed into a country park in the early 1990s. Management of Milton Country Park is carried out by Cambridge Sport Lakes Trust under a long term lease. The park includes woodland, water, and grassy meadow habitats which the Trust manages to support and enhance biodiversity and the natural environment. Visitors to the park can enjoy an abundance of wildlife throughout the year.

There are two categories where we have responsibility for the management of land we do not own, and where we aim to manage this land effectively for nature.



### Drainage

We have responsibility (mainly under 19th century legislation) for the upkeep and maintenance of approximately 275km of streams and ditches known as 'awarded watercourses'.

These can support a great deal of wildlife including water beetles, dragonflies, and water voles.

We manage these in ways which encourage nature conservation and maintain biodiversity, as well as preventing flooding.

For example, work is carried out in an upstream direction so that disturbed animals can more easily recolonise cleared areas and vegetation is temporarily deposited close to the bank, where possible, so that displaced invertebrates can return to the water.

### Churchyards

We currently manage three closed churchyards, St Mary the Virgin Great Shelford, All Saints' Horseheath and St May and All Saints' Willingham.

Situated at the heart of the villages, these sites are a great refuge for many species, especially bats, birds and insects. We vary grass cutting regimes and leave space for areas of wildflowers, leave ivy where appropriate and undertake any maintenance work in a sympathetic way.



### Nature in new communities

Our role bringing forwards local centres, community facilities and business parks at Northstowe and other major development sites provides opportunities for enhancing nature. As we did with great success in Cambourne, we will use our role to create accessible green space, increase tree canopy cover and establish wildlife habitats.



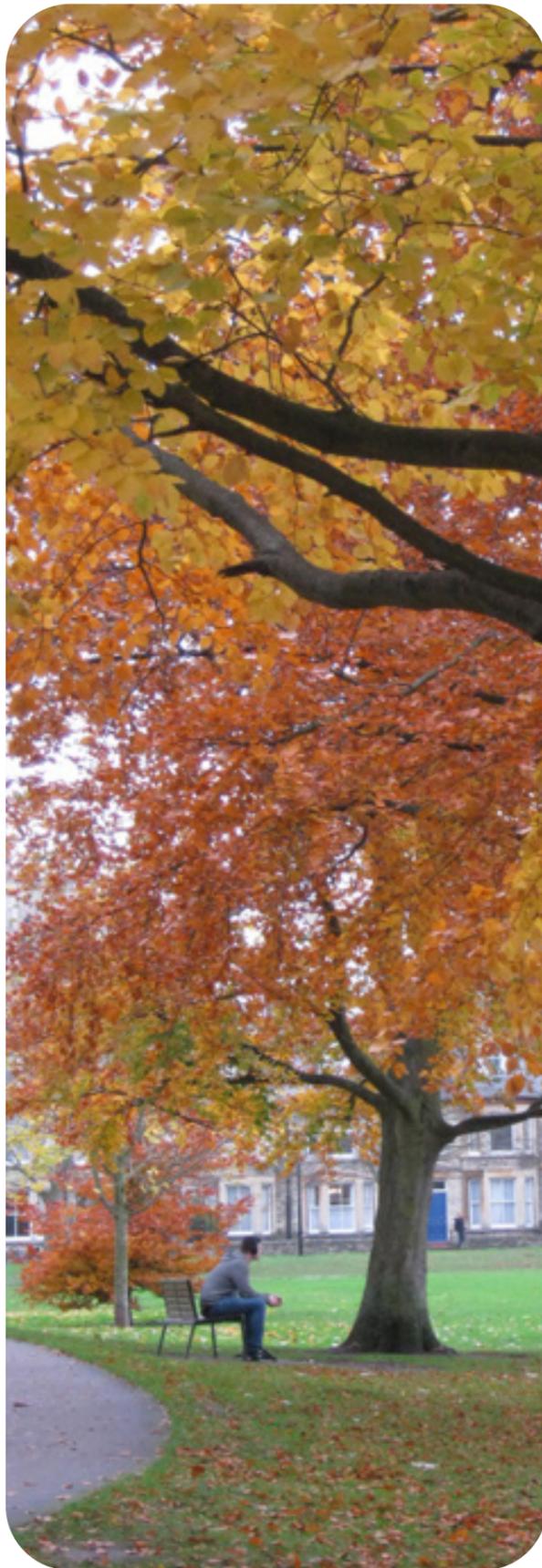
# Influence through policies

**As the local planning authority we have major influence in support of the vision to double nature in South Cambridgeshire.**

Urbanisation and development are one of the key drivers to change in biodiversity and natural capital. We also have an important statutory role in managing local air quality.

As previously mentioned, our planning function is carried out in partnership with Cambridge City Council through Greater Cambridge Shared Planning. We set local policy and manage development in line with Government policies laid out in the National Planning Policy Framework.

The current South Cambridgeshire Local Plan was adopted in 2018. It includes a suite of policies to help ensure that new development in the area reduces its environmental impact by minimising carbon emissions, flood risk, pollution and pressure on resources such as water and helping to protect and enhance biodiversity. We also have a Biodiversity Supplementary Planning Document that expands on policies to ensure that biodiversity is adequately protected and enhanced throughout the development process. Our planners have been able to work with developers and communities using these policies to secure good outcomes for nature, as shown in the case studies on pages 18 and 19.



## Changes at national level have created new opportunities

Since the 2018 Local Plan was adopted, revisions to the National Planning Policy Framework have created new opportunities to achieve net gains for nature.

The current Framework states that planning policy should identify and pursue opportunities for securing measurable gains for biodiversity.

Using the Government's pilot biodiversity accounting tool, we are doing this, and have succeeded in securing biodiversity net gain on several major development sites. The Government has indicated that biodiversity net gain will become mandatory in the new Environment Bill meaning that developers will be **required** to ensure habitats for wildlife are enhanced and left in a measurably better state than they were pre-development in the new Environment Bill.

## Greater Cambridge Local Plan

Through the Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service we are preparing a new joint Local Plan which will set out planning policy in Greater Cambridge (Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire) for the next 20 years.

Both Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire District Councils recognise the pressure on the natural environment and are committed to exploring how the new Local Plan can do more to improve natural and semi-natural spaces, known in planning terms as 'green infrastructure', across the area of Greater Cambridge. This will include how we can make use of new powers to mandate biodiversity net gain.

We have made biodiversity and green spaces one of the four big themes that will influence how homes, jobs and infrastructure will be planned in the new Local Plan.

In a novel move which underlines the priority we are giving to our biodiversity and green spaces theme we included a Call for Green Sites in our Call for Sites process. A Call for Sites is a normal part of plan making, providing a way for landowners, developers, individuals and other interested parties to suggest sites for development.

The Call for Green Sites specifically allowed anyone to submit suggestions of land to grow and enhance the green space network, and provided an important signal to landowners of the importance of working with them to identify suitable land, such as for community forests.

## Green Infrastructure Opportunity Mapping

To inform the development of policies to deliver our doubling nature aspirations we have commissioned a Green Infrastructure Opportunity Mapping study. The baseline report provides robust evidence on the quantity and quality of existing green infrastructure assets and networks within Greater Cambridge and identifies broad opportunity areas to enhance and expand the network. Later stages of the study will identify a range of deliverable projects to enhance the green infrastructure network. The baseline report can be viewed on the Greater Cambridge Shared Planning website. [Accessible link pls](#)

Plan making takes a long time due to the need to do it rigorously and in dialogue with our communities. As the new Greater Cambridge Local Plan nears adoption it will carry ever greater weight in planning decisions. However, it is not expected to be finally adopted until 2023.

## New Supplementary Planning Documents

Meanwhile, we have developed a new Greater Cambridge Sustainable Design and Construction Supplementary Planning Document to ensure that current policies in the adopted Local Plan are implemented as effectively as possible.

We are also developing a new Biodiversity Supplementary Planning Document to support current policies to protect and enhance biodiversity, and to provide a framework by which mandatory biodiversity net gain, if and when it becomes law, will be achieved across all development within the district. We are working closely with our partners across Cambridgeshire to design a robust system that can be adopted by neighbouring local authorities.

## Making policies stick

An important aspect of our influence through policies is in how we ensure that they are implemented effectively. Through the Development Management process our planning team ensures that planning applications address matters relating to the protection and enhancement of nature, and provision of green space.

They impose planning conditions to make otherwise unacceptable developments acceptable, and negotiate planning obligations, also known as section 106 agreements, to secure particular measures that are needed. Examples of successful outcomes for nature are described in case studies on the following pages.

## Tackling water scarcity

We know water an important issue to our local communities, and we have commissioned an Integrated Water Management Study to inform the new Greater Cambridge Local Plan. We reported early findings in November 2020, which highlight that there is no environmental capacity for additional growth levels being tested for the new plan to be served by increasing abstraction from the chalk aquifer which supplies much of the water to the Cambridge area. We will need to explore robust policies regarding water efficiency, and work with bodies like Water Resources East who are planning regional solutions to address the issue.

The Council's adopted Local Plan includes a water efficiency policy, with further information included within our Greater Cambridge Sustainable Design and Construction Supplementary Planning Document (SPD).

## Action on air quality

We have a statutory responsibility for air quality management. Our new Air Quality Strategy outlines a new approach to monitoring and improving air quality across the district to ensure that air quality issues are considered in all communities.

Key actions on air quality include:

- reviewing and upgrading our air quality monitoring network in line with the new strategy and to reflect the growth in the district
- a new hotspot monitoring initiative to pilot alternative technologies for air quality monitoring
- new equipment installed at Orchard Park School where we are monitoring the levels of exposure to air pollutants in younger children.

# Gains for nature through planning

## Cambourne

Cambourne is a settlement of three linked villages situated nine miles to the west of Cambridge and has become an exemplar of a large-scale development built with nature and greenspace as a key deliverable. Its Masterplan design was approved in 1996 with work starting on the entirely rural site of former agricultural land in June 1998. The settlement, now of around 10,500 (2019 estimate), originally had total area of 417 hectares of which only 133 hectares (approximately 32% by area) were allocated for housing producing a final density of 32 dwellings per hectare, achieved through the provision of a high proportion of publicly accessible open space. Existing woodland and scrub, lakes, connecting greenways, green open-space, ecology, cycle paths and good access links throughout the development were major drivers of the proposed layout of Cambourne.

The outcome of thoughtful planning guidance by the South Cambridgeshire District Council has been a community that has a well-designed and well-used network of public open space, with associated benefits for biodiversity, resident's health and wellbeing. Cambourne has demonstrated how publicly accessible open space and other Green Infrastructure features can be delivered through a considered and visionary planning process that puts nature at its heart, and not as an after-thought. The design of Cambourne's Green Infrastructure won a Landscape Institute Award in 2010.



## Northstowe

Northstowe is a new development that will eventually have up to 10,200 homes and a population of over 26,000, making it a town of a similar size to Huntingdon.

Expanding phases of the development were deemed to significantly impact biodiversity, especially farmland birds, in a way that could not be mitigated within the existing development boundary. So an offsite mitigation strategy providing significant habitat for biodiversity, some distance from the site, was agreed.

A biodiversity impact assessment was undertaken and working with a specialist environmental consultant, the Environment Bank, the extent of compensation and estimated offset requirements for farmland birds were agreed using biodiversity net gain calculations in line with best practice and emerging national policies.

As a result, the purchase of around 72 hectares of farmland, some 6km north east from the development, for conversion to bird-friendly habitats was brokered and agreed with Environment Bank along with a monitoring for perpetuity clause.

As part of the negotiation between the developer (Homes England) and the Local Planning Authority (South Cambridgeshire District Council), not only was a 30 year monitoring effort at the mitigation site agreed, but also an enforcement clause, meaning that the land management practices undertaken on the land by the farmer needed to produce the intended biodiversity net gain, or payments to the farmer would cease and enforcement action be taken. This model of offsite mitigation is likely something that will increase as biodiversity net gain becomes the norm for developments across England and developers and local planning authorities embrace a greener way of delivering their work and protecting the natural environment.



## Waterbeach

The village of Waterbeach, five miles north of Cambridge, is the location for a residential development of around 6,500 homes on a 290 hectare former barracks and airfield site, heralded as an outstanding example of how large volume housing development can deliver new landscapes rich in nature. An important aspect of the Waterbeach development has been the vision for delivering a legacy of natural habitats exceeding those destroyed or altered through the development of a site, known as Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG).

Supported by the planning team at Greater Cambridge Shared Planning, the developer Urban and Civic has created four Biodiversity Priority Areas (BPAs). In these, the site's natural assets have been mapped, safeguarded and expanded, creating distinctive habitats linked through smaller scale features to provide an interconnected mosaic of habitat and space for wildlife and people. These BPAs cover nearly 45% of the site and deliver BNG of up to 10%. The nature-led vision for Waterbeach embraces the location's fen-edge landscape and helps shape the development of new wetland habitats and natural areas.

In November 2020 the team behind the Waterbeach development won the Landscape Institute's prestigious Excellence in Masterplanning and Urban Design award in recognition of its strong landscape-led approach, consistent across all scales from sub-regional context to detailed design.





# Using our wider influence

**Protecting and increasing natural capital is the responsibility and work of numerous organisations in all sectors: private, public and voluntary. We work closely with these organisations through formal and informal partnerships to make the most of our influence.**

We are corporate members of the Wildlife Trust for Beds, Cambs and Northants, and contribute funding to the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Environmental Records Centre, (CPERC).

## The OxCam Arc

The Oxford Cambridge Arc, better known as the OxCam Arc, is a corridor of land connecting Oxford, Milton Keynes, Bedford and Cambridge which has been designated by the government as a key economic priority. As one of 31 local authorities contained within the Arc, we are leading the call for the Arc to deliver improvements to the natural environment alongside ambitions for growth. Successful lobbying to this effect led to the inclusion of a fourth OxCam Arc workstream - Environment - which is currently led by Cllr Bridget Smith.

## At county level

**Natural Cambridgeshire is our Government-recognised Local Nature Partnership. It brings together a broad range of local organisations, businesses and people who aim to help bring about improvements in their local natural environment.**

We are represented on the Natural Cambridgeshire Board, and Partnership Forum, by Councillors and staff members, and are collaborating with them on several projects that support the Natural Cambridgeshire vision to double nature. These include:

### Landscape Scale Projects

By working closely with communities, landowners and farmers there is potential to create large areas of new habitat. Natural Cambridgeshire has identified five separate landscape-scale projects, two of which sit within, or partly within South Cambridgeshire.

The Gog Magog Hills project aims to create green space for recreation and also link and enhance precious habitats in an area which was once extensive chalk grassland grazed by sheep but is now largely arable.

The Connected Fens project aims to safeguard the future of the wildlife and habitats in the Cambridgeshire Fens by ensuring the success of current, pioneering conservation projects and joining them together. These include:

### The Fens Biosphere

This multi-sector partnership project is coordinated by Cambridgeshire ACRE and is working towards achieving UNESCO Biosphere status for the Fens. Biosphere reserves involve local communities and interested stakeholders in planning and management of an area in ways which integrate conservation of biodiversity and cultural diversity, and environmentally sustainable economic development.

Parts of South Cambridgeshire lie within the proposed Biosphere buffer zone where activities will be focused on linking people, science and conservation to support the core zone of sites of specific conservation value. Such activities could include trialling new agricultural crops and techniques, encouraging communities to develop new spaces for nature and looking at how water resources can be managed on a landscape scale.

### The Future Parks Accelerator

This ambitious collaboration is hosted by Cambridgeshire County Council and aims to find new ways to deliver, manage and fund parks and open space to ensure they are available for everyone for generations to come. The project is one of eight in the UK selected for funding from the National Lottery Fund, the National Trust and the Government's Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government.

### The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Doubling Nature Investment Fund

This project is led by the Combined Authority and Natural Cambridgeshire and aims to establish a fund to provide resources for doubling nature.

### Developing with Nature Toolkit

This toolkit has been developed by Natural Cambridgeshire to help developers and infrastructure providers demonstrate their commitment to achieving a net biodiversity gain. It comprises a list of 10 things to do for nature, a scoring matrix and guidance notes with links to background information including a summary map of strategic green infrastructure and ecological network priorities in Cambridgeshire. We are signposting developers to the toolkit and will adopt it in our new Biodiversity Supplementary Planning Document in due course as standard guidance with respect to whether a development has achieved a net gain for biodiversity.

# Supporting and encouraging residents and communities to do more for nature

We work closely with the communities in the one hundred plus villages and settlements in South Cambridgeshire.

This puts us in a unique position to promote, support and encourage action for nature. Here are some of the ways in which we do this:

## Zero Carbon Communities grant scheme

Our Zero Carbon Communities grant was set up in May 2019 to support communities to get involved in the transition to net zero carbon in South Cambridgeshire. Funded by Business Rates which we retain under the Government's Renewable Energy Project Business Rates Retention Scheme, the grant enables voluntary organisations and parish councils to run projects which engage communities in climate and environment-related issues. In its first year it funded 19 projects, five of which involved planting trees or hedges.

## Climate and environment workshops

Alongside our Zero Carbon Communities grant, we run workshops and forums for parish councils and community groups to develop skills and knowledge, network, and share good practice and ideas relating to climate and the environment. A programme of online events is being planned for February 2021 which will include sessions on sustainable agriculture, neighbourhood planning for green spaces, and how to make a parish nature recovery plan.

## Tree Wardens Network

We are the registered local coordinator for the Tree Warden Network, a national initiative set up by The Tree Council to promote and support tree wardens. These are volunteers appointed by parish councils or other community organisations who gather information about their local trees, get involved in local tree matters and encourage local practical projects related to the trees and woods.

## Three Free Trees

In 2020 we launched a Three Free Trees scheme to encourage more planting of native trees in our villages and towns. We invited parish councils in South Cambridgeshire to apply for a voucher which could be exchanged at a local garden centre for three small trees, or one larger one. Guidance was provided on how to choose appropriate wildlife-friendly species.

## Support for community allotments and orchard in new communities

Our Sustainable Communities team supports community development in new settlements such as Northstowe. Part of the team's work has been to encourage and facilitate a community allotment and orchard in Northstowe.

## Neighbourhood planning for nature

Neighbourhood planning allows communities to take a proactive approach to deciding the future of the places where they live and work, helping shape the future development and use of land in their neighbourhood.

This includes identifying areas of open space that are of value to the community and putting them forwards to be designated as local green space.

Our **Neighbourhood Planning Toolkit** explains in detail how communities can go about preparing a neighbourhood plan. We keep this updated and will add guidance on how nature can be protected and enhanced through a neighbourhood plan once the Biodiversity Supplementary Planning document has been adopted.

## Community woods and parkland

Community woods and parkland allow local organisations and individuals to come together to maintain land and enhance biodiversity. This can be through planting, woodland management such as coppicing, recording species and maintaining features such as paths and culverts. They also provide the wider community with access to spaces for informal recreation and enjoying nature.

We will continue to support communities to develop and deliver plans for community forests and woodlands.

# What you can do

There are lots of ways you can support nature in South Cambridgeshire. Here are a few suggestions.

- Make your garden more wildlife-friendly, see **Wildlife Gardening | Wildlife Trust for Beds, Cambs & Northants (wildlifebcn.org)** for ideas.
- Get together with others in your neighbourhood to create and deliver a nature recovery plan for your local area, using the **Natural Cambridgeshire Local Nature Recovery Toolkit**.
- Work with a local community organisation or your parish council to apply for funding through the Zero Carbon Communities grant scheme.
- Support a nature conservation organisation.
- Sign the **Natural Cambridgeshire Pledge for Nature**.





## Further information

You can find further information via the below links.

- [Greater Cambridge Local Plan](#)
- [Zero Carbon Communities grant scheme](#)
- [Trees and Hedgerows on the Council's website](#)
- [Natural England Natural Capital Atlas 4 provides detailed maps showing the distribution and condition of natural assets in Cambridgeshire](#)
- [Mapping Natural Capital and Opportunities for Habitat Creation in Cambridgeshire report for Cambridgeshire Biodiversity Partnership](#)
- [OxCam Local Natural Capital Plan](#)
- [Natural Cambridgeshire](#)
- [Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northants](#)
- [Cam Valley Forum](#)