

Doubling Nature

A Vision for the Natural Future of Cambridgeshire & Peterborough in 2050

Our Vision is that by doubling the area of rich wildlife habitats and natural green-space, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough will become a world-class environment where nature and people thrive, and businesses prosper.

Cambridgeshire and Peterborough has some very attractive landscapes and many special areas designated for their rich wildlife. However, these need enhancing and augmenting in order to support public health and the economic success arising from of the area's growth.

We need to do this because this area faces the significant challenges of being in the driest part of the country with limited water resources, and of securing a sustainable future for our Fens environment with its peat soils. Soil degradation, habitat fragmentation, low tree and grassland cover*, climate change, increasing flood risk, low proportions of land under management for nature and significant increases in visitor footfall all put our natural and historic environment at risk. As part of the Government's plans for the Oxford-Milton Keynes-Cambridge (OxCam) Growth Arc, accelerated development will deliver one million homes by 2050 and, within Cambridgeshire, double GVA. This planned growth is in addition to high levels of economic growth, inward migration and infrastructure and housing development that are already underway in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.

Therefore, putting Nature at the heart of Cambridgeshire & Peterborough's ambitious growth agenda at the outset is essential and fundamental to both the success of the local economy and to the quality of life and well-being. An ambitious vision for a high-quality natural environment is essential for contributing to the standard of life that will attract and retain the skilled workers required for growth over the next 30 years. The Natural Capital Committee¹ has made clear recommendations on the need to protect, enhance and invest in the natural environment while Defra's 25-year Environment Plan² sets out bold ambitions for nature recovery and net biodiversity and environmental gain through development.

By building environmental net gain into growth we can maintain and enhance biodiversity and secure better:-

- Access to green-space for communities
- Quality of life and public health
- Air quality
- Integrated water management considering water resources, water quality and resilience to flooding and climate change
- Carbon sequestration
- Long term financial gains
- Ownership of the vision and growth agenda by local communities through an enhanced 'sense of place'

One of the fastest growing economies in the UK will need to be matched by one of the fastest nature recovery programmes. To achieve this step-change we will **double the area of rich wildlife habitats and green-space from 8.5% to 17%**

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/natural-capital-committee>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/25-year-environment-plan>

* A 2019 mapping exercise reveals just 4.8% woodland and 4% grassland cover for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough – 77k ha of grasslands have been lost since the 1930s, an 80% decline.

Achieving this vision will require focusing efforts to enhance existing, and create new, large areas of rich wildlife habitat and more accessible green space through development, and ensure these are better connected, by:-

- Ensuring new housing and work place developments incorporate high quality green and blue infrastructure providing multiple benefits for people and the environment.
- Encouraging at least 25% of existing property owners to incorporate wildlife friendly features in their gardens, buildings and land.
- Securing access to high quality natural green spaces within 300m of everyone's home.
- Enlarging two areas of existing natural fen (Great Fen & Wicken Fen Vision), as the core of a UNESCO Biosphere together with the Nene and Ouse Washes.
- Increasing tree cover and the network of woodlands, hedgerows, within and around our towns and cities, and on the clay lands of South Cambridgeshire, Huntingdonshire and west of Peterborough.
- Expanding the flower-rich grasslands on the limestone plateau west of Peterborough, and on the chalk downs at the southern fringes of Cambridge.
- Enhancing and extending the meadows of the Nene, Ouse and Cam river valleys.
- Extending wetlands either side of the Ouse and Nene Washes.
- Creating natural habitats by restoring mineral workings, including the gravel workings in the Fens.
- Ensuring that at least 90% of our richest wildlife areas are in good ecological condition.

Delivering the objectives to extend and enhance natural areas requires:-

- Establishment of landscape-scale nature recovery through better connected habitats by improving natural corridors, including increasing ecological potential along our major waterways and extensive fenland drainage channels.
- Holistic management of water courses and wetlands, reducing flood risk by reconnecting rivers with their floodplains, creating new wetlands, water storage and filtration options, and increasing groundwater protection to recover our natural, chalk springs.
- An increased proportion of productive farmland benefiting the environment through agri-environmental schemes and innovative ways of sustainable land management.
- Strategic scale development contributing to strategic scale nature gains, both on-site and off-site, and that all new developments achieve net gains for nature.
- Local businesses to sign up to the Natural Capital Coalition's Protocol³ and use the Natural Capital Accounting Framework⁴ to measure, value and understand their dependencies on the natural environment.
- Greater community engagement and continued partnership working to ensuring that plans and actions are informed by the best available knowledge.
- A Cambridgeshire-wide Local Nature Capital Investment Plan (LNCIP) prepared to inform strategic and economic decision making, in order to maximise opportunities for enhancing the area's natural environment.

³ <https://naturalcapitalcoalition.org/protocol/protocol-application-program/>

⁴ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/516968/ncc-research-cnca-final-report.pdf