



**CAMBRIDGESHIRE
& PETERBOROUGH**
COMBINED AUTHORITY

CAMBRIDGESHIRE AND PETERBOROUGH COMBINED AUTHORITY BOARD	AGENDA ITEM No: 3.6
31st July 2019	PUBLIC REPORT

VISION FOR NATURE

1.0 PURPOSE

- 1.1. The CPCA's ambition is to deliver a leading place in the world to live, learn and work. The natural environment has a fundamental role to play in that ambition. Natural Cambridgeshire, working with the CPCA, has developed a Vision for Nature, and this paper recommends endorsing it.

<u>DECISION REQUIRED</u>	
Lead Member:	Councillor Chris Boden, Portfolio Holder for Spatial Planning
Lead Officer:	Paul Raynes, Director of Delivery and Strategy
Forward Plan Ref: n/a	Key Decision: No
The Combined Authority Board is recommended to: (a) Endorse the Vision for Nature.	Voting arrangements Simple majority of all Members

2.0 BACKGROUND

The Local Nature Partnership

- 2.1. An independent voice for the natural environment in Cambridgeshire & Peterborough is provided by Natural Cambridgeshire (the Local Nature

Partnership)¹. This partnership has senior representatives of landowners, nature conservation and environmental organisations, access interests, community, social and health partners, economic and business interests, local authorities and research organisations. It undertakes a range of activity, including producing a 'Developing with Nature' toolkit to help developers and infrastructure providers in achieving biodiversity gains.

- 2.2. Natural Cambridgeshire has proposed a Vision for Nature (attached as Appendix 1). This emphasises the need to consider nature as a fundamental part of decision-making, and to recognise its different aspects. The Vision aims to "put nature at the heart of the growth agenda" and sets out the need for environmental net gain.
- 2.3. Cambridgeshire and Peterborough has one of the lowest proportions of rich wildlife or natural areas. Only 3% of the area is defined as natural, compared to 35% of the UK. The big difference is the use of land for farming; with 57% of the UK land surface given over to agriculture, compared to 88% for the CPCA area.

Links to CPCA strategy and natural capital

- 2.4. The ambition of the CPCA is to make the area a leading place in the world, which includes nature in all its aspects. Endorsing a clear vision on nature will complement existing aims to double the economy, meet housing needs and enable a sustainable transport system. The Vision can inform the emerging Non-statutory Strategic Spatial Framework.
- 2.5. The Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Independent Economic Review said there was a need to be clear about the social and economic value nature brings, for example the importance of insects to farmers as pollinators, wetlands providing flood defences or water filtration, or green spaces contributing to healthy living. The government is promoting this 'natural capital' approach and from 2020 the Office of National Statistics will be reporting on the UK's natural asset balance sheet alongside traditional measures of economic activity. The CPCA's emerging Local Industrial Strategy acknowledges the importance of the environment to business prosperity, and the role businesses can play both in enhancing it and as a source of new economic activity.

Targets

- 2.6. Nationally, the government has set out in its Environment Plan (2018) proposals for improving the environment within a generation. It wants to increase rich wildlife areas by 50% over the next 25 years. Government also wants national woodland cover to increase to 12% by 2060, and at least three-quarters of protected sites to be in a favourable condition. Government has said it will also mandate via the planning system that all new developments must deliver a net gain in biodiversity (rather than just mitigate impact).

¹ <https://naturalcambridgeshire.org.uk/terms/>

- 2.7. The recent national review of wildlife sites by Professor Sir John Lawton called for "more, bigger, better and joined" natural environments. However, it acknowledged that recreating large expanses of continuous natural habitat is not a feasible option in many places, though it recommended that attempts to establish significantly 'bigger and better' areas should be made.
- 2.8. The overarching target proposed by Natural Cambridgeshire is to "double the area of rich wildlife habitats and natural green-space", which is more ambitious than the government's target. As a vision for nature, rather than the environment, it does not seek to address every environmental issue (for example waste management or hazards).
- 2.9. The target of doubling rich wildlife habitats would require about 16,200ha to be restored/created (including freshwater areas). This compares to the overall area of the CPCA of 339,000ha. Improvements are proposed for both urban and rural areas.
- 2.10. The Local Nature Partnership regard this as an achievable but stretching target, compared to the government's ambition for a 50% increase as an average across the UK and the low proportion at present. Given the low baseline, they regard this as a minimum that should not prevent the area from striving for more.

Implications

- 2.11. Given the importance of the agricultural sector, the CPCA has a clear interest in the extent to which vision might affect the use of agricultural land. EU funding currently supports the conversion or management of agricultural land for nature (under the Environmental Stewardship scheme). The government has committed that post-Brexit it will maintain support for the agricultural sector, with a shift from CAP payments based on area farmed to funding for 'public goods' like access or boosting wildlife.
- 2.12. If the gains were to come solely from the conversion of farmland then the 16,200ha would amount to a 5% reduction in the 296,800ha of land currently farmed – or changes in the way they are farmed. However, there are many ways in which rich wildlife areas can be restored or created, and that does not have to involve land currently being farmed. For example, old mineral workings or through management of existing green space. Restoration projects can also offer opportunities for farmers and agricultural businesses to develop new sources of income.

Great Fen project example

The Great Fen project is located between Peterborough and Huntingdon. By providing natural plant cover and re-wetting the peat the Great Fen project will stop peat loss in its area, delivering substantial wildlife benefits. Draining causes the peat to emit CO₂ and erode away - at a rate of about 2cm each year in the Fens. Farming will still be taking place on the Great Fen but in a different way. The Great Fen will become a low-intensity food producer - with grazing cattle and sheep. It will also be providing other products, such as high-quality hay for

livestock feed from the grassland. In the future, the Great Fen could grow a local source of willow, and reed for thatching houses and for biofuels. To date, about 1900ha has been acquired by the project.

- 2.13. The stated targets for the expansion of RSPB's Ouse Fen, the National Trust's Wicken Fen Vision, and the Wildlife Trust partnership's Great Fen could by themselves deliver about a quarter (4100ha) of the doubling target by 2050.
- 2.14. Public bodies have a statutory duty to conserve biodiversity. The Environment Agency and the Internal Drainage Boards for example are furthering conservation of the linear landscape of the waterways, particularly in the Fens, by influencing how they are managed and the adoption of local Biodiversity Action Plan targets.
- 2.15. The Lawton Review also proposed that ecological connections such as buffer zones, wildlife corridors and smaller but still wildlife-rich 'stepping stones' were established. The review noted that these connections did not have to be continuous, physical connections - a mosaic of mixed land use, for example, may be sufficient.
- 2.16. Delivering the 100,000 homes, jobs and infrastructure in Local Plans comes with a requirement to incorporate high quality green and blue infrastructure. These infrastructure elements of major housing, economic and transport developments can have a significant role to play in providing those natural stepping stones and corridors, particularly so for any new garden villages and strategic sites as these are likely to be under the new higher requirements for net gain. As the new requirements for net biodiversity gain become clear, the NSSF can have a role to play in discussions on any strategic scale green or blue infrastructure opportunities.
- 2.17. In its role as a funder of infrastructure or as a developer of schemes, the CPCA can ensure that its own activity is supportive of the target. Constituent organisations of the Board also have role to play in management of their assets, such as public green spaces (e.g. parks and playing fields) or managed road verges and hedges - as well as encouraging residents and businesses to incorporate measures into the built environment (e.g. green roofs, swift bricks, bat boxes etc).
- 2.18. The CPCA and partners are enabling sustainable growth (achieving social, economic and environmental outcomes). In some cases there will be impacts on nature. Considering those impacts and potential mitigation is for the existing consenting regimes, which contain substantial protection for nature and rich wildlife areas. For example, Local Plans set out policies on nature that need to be considered in the granting of planning permission for most built development. The role of the Vision is not therefore to duplicate or introduce additional thresholds, but rather set supportive objectives for growth.
- 2.19. CPCA is engaging with the pilot work on mapping Natural Capital with the potential for the emergence of natural capital investment products.

3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1. As an enabler/provider of transport infrastructure and housing the CPCA will be expected to demonstrate that it is contributing to the target where appropriate. Costs might be incurred on CPCA funded schemes to meet the doubling nature aims (for example a larger amount of land-take for compensatory improvements). However, this cost risk should be factored into business cases as the planning system already requires mitigation of environmental impacts.

4.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1. The Combined Authority, as a public authority for the purposes of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, has a statutory duty under section 40 of that Act to have regard, in the exercising of its functions so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity. For the purposes of the Act conserving biodiversity includes, in relation to a living organism or type of habitat, restoring or enhancing a population or habitat.

5.0 SIGNIFICANT IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1. The Vision for Nature is not just concerned with increasing rich wildlife areas, but also with promoting better access to natural areas. This is a positive benefit to those localities and residents that currently have limited access.

6.0 APPENDICES

- 6.1. Appendix 1 – A Vision for Nature

<u>Source Documents</u>	<u>Location</u>
Making space for nature, 2010	https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130402170324/http://archive.defra.gov.uk/environment/biodiversity/documents/201009space-for-nature.pdf