



North
Northamptonshire
Together with Nature



North Northamptonshire **Local Nature Recovery Strategy**

Public Consultation Version October 2024

Foreword

In May 2023, North Northamptonshire Council (NNC) embarked on a pivotal journey by initiating the development of our Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS). This strategy is part of a broader national effort driven by the UK Government's 25 Year Environment Plan and the Environment Act 2021, which mandates the creation of LNRSs across the country. Our goal is clear: to restore and enhance nature and wildlife across North Northamptonshire, ensuring that future generations inherit a rich, diverse, and resilient natural environment.

The Council has long recognised that the success of our natural environment is intrinsically linked to the wellbeing of our communities. Protecting and enhancing biodiversity is not just an environmental imperative but a social and economic one as well. In alignment with this vision, we have committed significant resources and effort to ensuring that our Local Nature Recovery Strategy is robust, evidence-based, and responds to local needs.

The development of this strategy has been guided by the principles set out in the Environment Act 2021, with a focus on delivering tangible improvements for nature. This includes restoring habitats, increasing connectivity between green spaces, and supporting species recovery. Moreover, it aligns with our key policies and initiatives, including our comprehensive climate action programme, and collectively contributes to the wider objectives of nature conservation and enhancement in our region.

The Local Nature Recovery Strategy has been shaped through extensive consultation with local communities, environmental bodies, and other stakeholders. Their insights and expertise have been invaluable in identifying priority areas for nature recovery and in designing practical actions that will have the most meaningful impact. The strategy is a living document, evolving as we learn more and adapt to the changing needs of our environment.

North Northamptonshire Council is committed to leading by example in this vital endeavour. As we move forward, it will be crucial to continue working closely with our communities, local businesses, and conservation organisations. Together, we can achieve a thriving natural environment that supports wildlife, improves our quality of life, and contributes to the global fight against biodiversity loss. The steps we have taken so far are just the beginning, and we look forward to building on this foundation in the years to come.

Councillor Harriet Pentland
Executive Member for Climate and the Green Environment

Executive Summary

The North Northamptonshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) is designed to restore and enhance biodiversity across the region. Developed in line with the UK Government's 25-Year Environment Plan and the Environment Act 2021, this strategy focuses on protecting key habitats such as urban sites, woodlands, wetlands, grasslands, and watercourses.

The LNRS prioritises the restoration of habitats and the protection and enhancement of native species. It emphasises the need to link green spaces to improve wildlife movement and strengthen ecosystem resilience. Additionally, the strategy outlines species-specific practical actions, such as creating habitats for priority species like the Chequered Skipper butterfly, while also controlling invasive species that threaten local biodiversity.

Mapping is central to the LNRS, with detailed maps identifying areas for habitat restoration and expansion, as well as green space connectivity. These maps guide targeted actions across the region, ensuring that efforts are focused on areas where they will have the most impact. The strategy's priorities include expanding woodland, enhancing wetland environments and improving grassland habitats, all of which support a wide range of species and contribute to overall ecological health.

The strategy focuses on the key areas within North Northamptonshire, the Rockingham Forest, Nene Valley, and Ise Valley. In Rockingham Forest, the focus is on restoring ancient woodlands and supporting species like the Red-shanked Carder Bee and Hazel Dormouse. In the Nene Valley, the strategy prioritises protecting internationally important wetlands and managing recreational pressures on bird populations. The Ise Valley sees efforts to conserve wetlands and implement species-specific practical actions for Water Vole and birds such as the Curlew.

Overall, the LNRS relies on collaboration between local authorities, environmental organisations, landowners, and the community. Through clear priorities, detailed mapping, and species-specific actions, the strategy provides a framework for guiding conservation efforts. Its goal is to create a thriving, sustainable landscape where nature flourishes, ecosystems are resilient and local communities benefit from a healthier environment.

Henry Aged 7



Special thanks to....



Councillors, Town and Parish Councils that attended events, as well as Farmers and Landowners that took time out at a busy time of year to take part in discussions. Thanks also go to all organisations that supported the production of the Strategy:

- Anglian Water
- British Association for Shooting and Conservation
- British Horse Society (Northants Local Access Forum)
- Environment Agency
- Forestry Commission
- Freshwater Habitats Trust
- Made in Northampton
- Natural Capital solutions
- Natural England
- Nene Rivers Trust
- John Lockhart - Nicholson's
- Northamptonshire Biodiversity Records Centre
- Northamptonshire Local Nature Partnership
- Northamptonshire Sport - Active Partnership
- Northants Area Ramblers
- Northants Young Farmers Club
- Ryan Mills - Planscape Consultants
- Rockingham Forest Vision
- The National Farmers Union
- The Ramblers, Northampton
- Titchmarsh Primary School
- Wellingborough Nene and District Angling Club (WNDAC)
- Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire

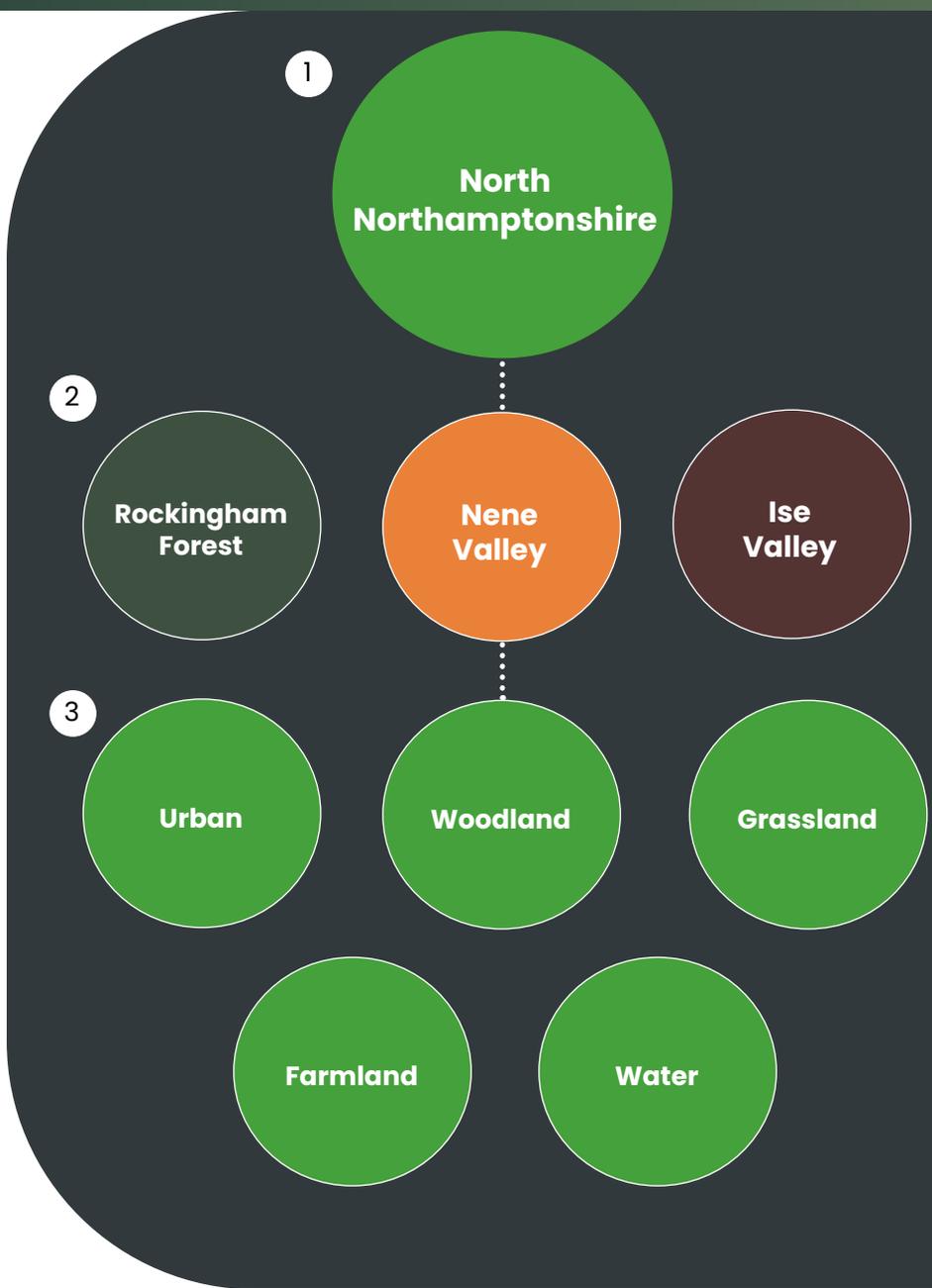




Content



Foreword	2
Executive Summary	3
How to use this document	6
Introduction	7
North Northamptonshire Natural Environment	8
Current Pressures: North Northamptonshire Wide	10
Wider Environmental Benefits	11
Our Process	12
Our Vision	13
Document Users	14
Priorities and Practical Actions	16
North Northamptonshire Priorities	17
Character Areas	21
Rockingham Forest Priorities	22
Nene Valley Priorities	38
Ise Valley Priorities	51
Risks and Enablers	64
Achieving our Vision	65
References	67



How to use this document



This Local Nature Recovery Strategy is designed to be user-friendly and informative. It features clearly organised sections and clickable tabs, enabling quick access to the information you need. Alternatively, you can choose to scroll through the document at your own pace.

1. About the LNRS and North Northamptonshire: The first section outlines the purpose and vision of the strategy, provides an overview of North Northamptonshire's natural environment, and introduces overarching priorities and practical actions to achieve nature recovery relevant to the whole region and its stakeholders.
2. Navigate by Location: The rest of the document is then organised by specific character areas within North Northamptonshire: the Rockingham Forest, Nene Valley, and Ise Valley. Each location section is tailored to the unique characteristics and needs of that area.
3. Explore Habitat Types: Within each character area section, the information is organised by habitat types. This includes details on the area's characteristics, current pressures, key species, as well as specific priorities and practical actions. Some practical actions are repeated across different priorities, therefore they have all been coded for easy identification and ongoing monitoring. This structure enables you to quickly find relevant information for your project, site, or area.
4. Mapping: A supporting mapping portal accompanies the written document, offering detailed information on existing assets and potential locations for practical actions related to habitats and species. To access the mapping portal, click the button located at the bottom right of each page.

By following these steps, you can efficiently find the specific information and guidance needed to support nature recovery in North Northamptonshire.





Introduction

Purpose and context

The Environment Act introduces a new statutory requirement to produce locally led Nature Recovery Strategies every 3-10 years. The aim is to coordinate local action to support the delivery of the national 25 Year Environment Plan, which aims to create a Nature Recovery Network of 500,000 hectares of additional habitat in England.

North Northamptonshire Council was appointed a Responsible Authority by the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to lead on preparing a Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) for the area. It is a document that has been prepared through collaboration. Working alongside the Nene Rivers Trust CIO, the Northamptonshire Wildlife Trust, Northamptonshire Biodiversity Records Centre and other key stakeholders we have drawn together knowledge, expertise and the best available information and data to create priorities to help recover and enhance nature, as well as potential practical actions to deliver these priorities.

We have worked with our neighbouring Responsible Authorities to ensure that those cross-boundary considerations have been met. Throughout the process we worked directly with West Northamptonshire Council, who we share the same landscape character areas and many stakeholders.

The North Northamptonshire LNRS is a detailed plan focused on protecting and improving the region's natural environment. It aims to boost biodiversity, restore important habitats, and retain the area's unique healthy ecosystems. By combining local conservation efforts with wider environmental goals, the LNRS hopes to create a connected network of habitats that supports wildlife diversity. Through collaboration, it is intended that this strategy will help guide all in North Northamptonshire on ways to support nature recovery. This includes:

- Directing public bodies on their new duty for nature recovery
- Guiding farmers and land managers in habitat management & creation decisions
- Directing developers and planning authorities on plan making and decision taking for the benefit of nature
- Guiding communities and businesses to take action for nature.

RAMSAR

A Ramsar site is a Wetland of International Importance which has been designated under the Wetland Convention, also known as the Ramsar Convention.

SPECIAL PROTECTION AREA

Special Protection Areas (SPAs) are designated for their bird populations, under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017

North Northamptonshire Natural Environment

Brannon age 9



North Northamptonshire is home to a diverse array of wildlife, with a variety of important habitats that support species and sites of international significance. The region's rich natural heritage includes several key habitats and species:

- **Ancient woodlands of the Rockingham Forest:** These woodlands provide essential habitats for a range of species, including Adders, Barbastelle Bats, and Wood White butterflies. The Rockingham Forest, with its ancient trees and diverse understory, plays a vital role in maintaining local biodiversity.
- **Gravel pits and wet grasslands in the Nene Valley:** Recognised as an internationally important Ramsar site and Special Protection Area, these areas are vital for conservation. The gravel pits and wet grasslands support a variety of bird species, including Lapwings and Golden Plovers. These habitats are crucial for migratory birds and waterfowl, providing essential breeding and feeding grounds.
- **Calcareous grasslands:** This habitat type is notable for its rich plant diversity, including various orchid species and the presence of the Grizzled Skipper Butterfly. Limestone grasslands are known for their unique flora, which thrive on the thin, nutrient-poor soils, and their management is essential for conserving many rare and specialised species.
- **Rivers, streams and brooks:** The water network flowing through North Northamptonshire forms a crucial system that supports a wide range of aquatic life and provides essential resources for the surrounding habitats. These watercourses, including the River Nene, help sustain a diverse ecosystem, offering habitats for fish such as Barbel, invertebrates, and riparian plants, as well as serving as important corridors for species movement.
- **Meadows:** Meadows in the area are important for supporting species such as the Brown Hare and a wide variety of wildflowers. These ecosystems are among the most biodiverse in the region, offering food and shelter to numerous pollinators, birds, and mammals. The presence of brown hares is a positive indicator of the health of these habitats.

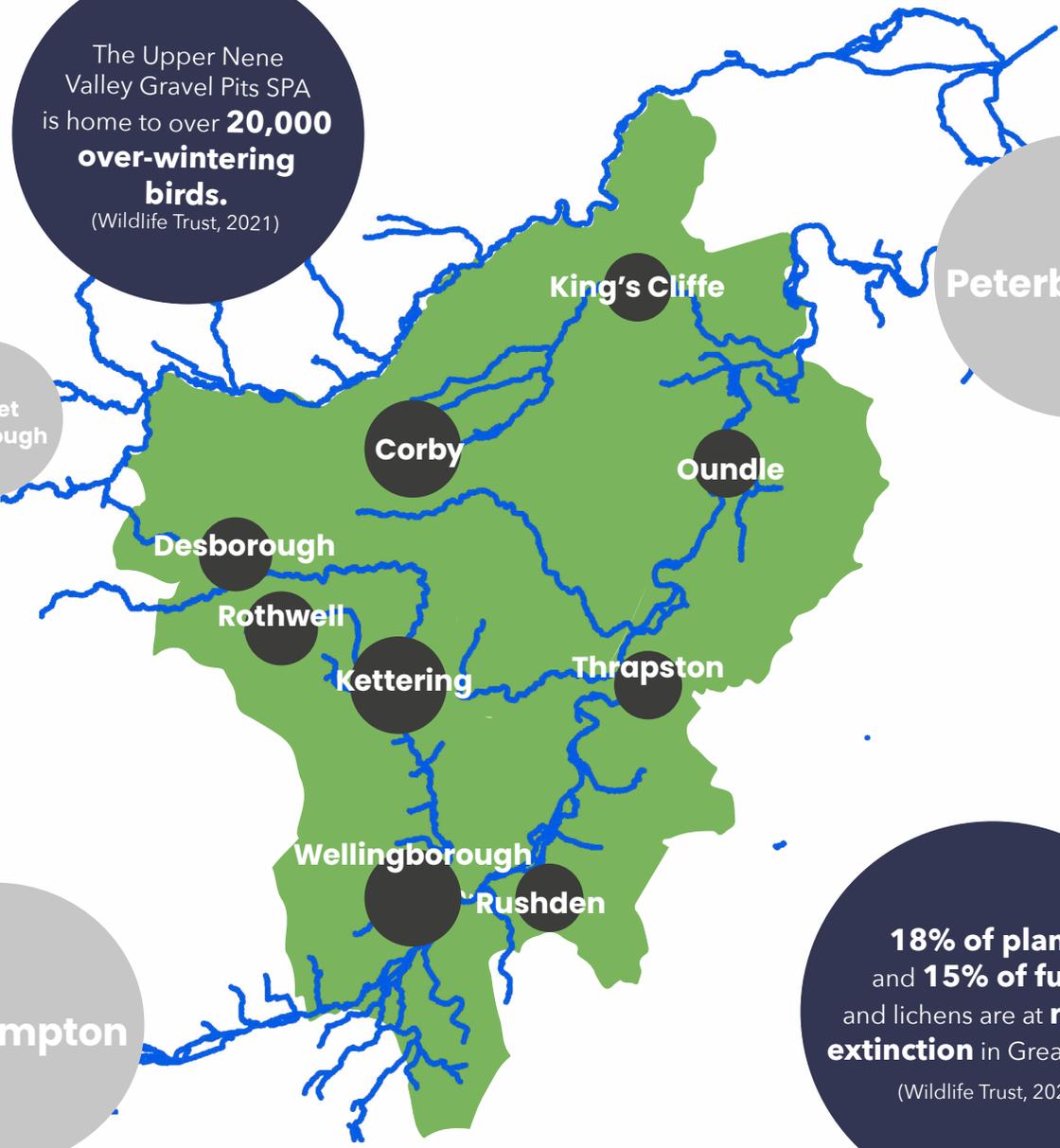
North Northamptonshire remains a valuable area for both wildlife and local communities. Ongoing efforts to enhance and protect these natural assets have led to notable achievements in nature recovery, such as the creation of wildlife corridors that connect fragmented habitats and allow species to move more freely. Restoration projects have focused on improving important habitats like woodlands and grasslands, as well as enhancing river ecosystems to support diverse aquatic and riparian life. These actions have contributed to preserving and improving biodiversity in the region, supporting a healthy environment for both people and wildlife.

"Nature is the reason that we are all alive"
Hugo Aged 9

The Upper Nene Valley Gravel Pits SPA is home to over **20,000 over-wintering birds.**
(Wildlife Trust, 2021)

Peterborough

Market Harborough



"How we value nature has changed" Jane Aged 80

Northamptonshire has the third highest rate of **plant species loss at 0.82 species per year.**
(Wildlife Trust, 2021)

Northampton

18% of plants and 15% of fungi and lichens are at risk of extinction in Great Britain.
(Wildlife Trust, 2021)



Current Pressures North Northamptonshire Wide

North Northamptonshire’s wildlife is under pressure. Much of the countryside is made up of arable fields, which are often of little biodiversity value. North Northamptonshire is a significant growth area, this, coupled with the fact that North Northamptonshire has one of the UK’s lowest proportions of protected areas for biodiversity, means that it is vital that steps are taken to ensure our remaining biodiversity is not further damaged or destroyed.

The main pressures include:

- **Climate Change:** Changing weather patterns, disrupted seasons, and more extreme weather make it harder for wildlife to adapt and survive.
- **Invasive Species:** Species such as mink and high numbers of deer are damaging local wildlife by taking over and disrupting ecosystems, which requires constant management.
- **Pollution:** Runoff from farms, industries, and urban areas harms water, soil, and air quality, affecting native species and ecosystems.
- **Urban Developments:** The expansion of urban areas places pressure on key habitats, such as urban edge and open mosaic areas, leading to the disruption of local ecosystems.

Because of these pressures, the habitats across North Northants have experienced substantial changes:

- **Changes to woodland:** conversion of ancient woodlands to plantations, impacts of pest and disease and reduction of management have all impacted woodland ecological condition alongside significant impacts from deer.
- **Farming Changes:** More intense farming has led to the loss of grasslands and hedgerows, and many farmland birds are declining.
- **Habitat Loss:** Semi-natural habitats have been lost due to gravel extraction, farming, and development—Nationally, 97% of lowland meadows have been lost since 1935, and is likely to be higher in the Nene Valley.
- **River Changes:** Rivers have been straightened and deepened, and there’s been an increase in nutrient pollution.
- **Urban Habitat Loss:** Quality habitats on the edge and within urban areas have disappeared, leading to fewer hedgehogs.
- **Wildlife Declines:** For example, Water Voles and breeding waders have drastically declined.

33%
of North
Northamptonshire
woodlands are
currently unmanaged

(Forestry Commission, 2024)

97%

of lowland meadows
have been lost
since 1935

(Wildlife Trust, 2021)

**“Children are
missing out on
the wildlife and
nature”**
Margaret Aged 89



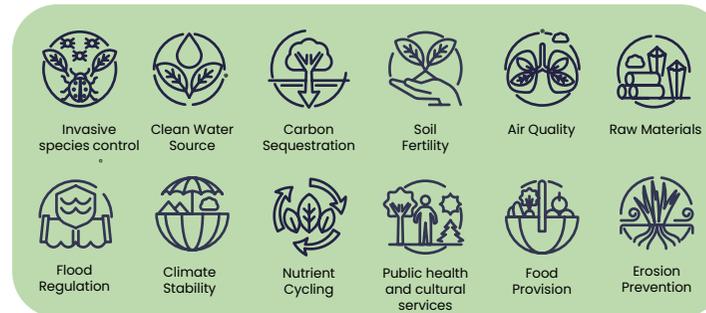
“In the next ten years I want the Government to make more of an effort against climate change.”
Noah Aged 9

How does the LNRS link to wider environmental and natural capital requirements?



The UK government’s 25 Year Environment Plan and Environmental Improvement Plan 2023 set out national goals and targets to improve the natural environment, focusing on cleaner air and water, habitat protection, reducing waste, and promoting sustainable resource use. The North Northamptonshire LNRS directly contributes to these national objectives by prioritising the restoration of local habitats, increasing accessible green spaces, and encouraging sustainable land use practices. This approach not only supports priority species but also ensures that natural resources are safeguarded and enhanced for future generations, aligning with the wider national vision for a greener, healthier environment.

A key aspect of this strategy is the protection and enhancement of Natural Capital, which refers to the parts of nature that provide value or benefits to people, such as ecosystems, species, freshwater, land, minerals, air, oceans, and natural processes (Natural Capital Committee, 2014). The benefits of Natural Capital, also known as ecosystem services, include essential functions such as food production, flood and climate regulation, crop pollination, and cultural services like beautiful landscapes and recreational opportunities.



These **ecosystem services** have helped shape our **priorities** and guide the development of the **practical actions**.

The LNRS highlights the direct connections between nature recovery and broader environmental benefits. By restoring and linking habitats, enhancing biodiversity, and promoting sustainable land use, the strategy ensures the continued delivery of ecosystem services. For example, restoring wetland habitats not only improves biodiversity but also enhances flood control, carbon storage, and water purification. By doing so, the strategy takes a holistic approach to nature recovery, delivering long-term environmental and societal benefits across North Northamptonshire.



North Northamptonshire Nature Recovery



This section highlights North Northamptonshire’s Vision for Nature Recovery, as well as the main priorities and practical actions needed to improve and protect the natural areas across North Northamptonshire. Our priorities are to boost habitat quality, expand and link natural spaces, and increase biodiversity in woodlands, grasslands, farmlands, wetlands and urban areas. To reach these goals, we’ll take specific actions that are tailored to local needs to support a more sustainable and thriving environment.



Our Process

The vision, priorities and practical actions outlined in this LNRS were developed through collaboration with a wide range of stakeholders, including local organisations and community representatives. The strategy’s development involved support, advice, discussions, workshops, and meetings to ensure a detailed and inclusive approach that reflects the diverse needs and priorities of the region.

A key part of the LNRS development process was a series of stakeholder workshops organised and led by the Nene Rivers Trust. These workshops brought together a variety of participants, including environmental organisations, public bodies, landowners, farmers, and foresters. Additionally, separate workshops were held with council officers and parish councils to gather insights and ensure the strategy is balanced and representative of all interests.

Alongside these workshops, research and analysis on species was conducted, further shaping the strategy. This research helped to identify important species in North Northamptonshire that need more/bigger/better connected habitat (Category A Species) and those that need targeted habitat management/bespoke conservation (Category B Species).

These sessions, combined with the research on priority species, were invaluable in shaping the strategy’s priorities and practical actions. Using the National Environmental Objectives and drawing on the collective expertise of participants, along with quantitative data such as tallies or keyword mentions, the most important priorities were shortlisted. This evidence-based approach ensures the strategy addresses the most pressing issues and opportunities for nature recovery in North Northamptonshire, reflecting the shared vision and commitment of all stakeholders involved.

Professional support and advice also played a crucial role in the strategy’s development. Experts from the Northamptonshire Wildlife Trust, Northamptonshire Biodiversity Records Centre, Natural England, Forestry Commission, Environment Agency, National Farmers Union, Country Land and Business Association and other professional bodies were consulted to provide detailed knowledge about the unique ecological characteristics of North Northamptonshire. This professional input helped to ensure that the strategy was scientifically robust, grounded in the latest research, and reflective of the specific needs of different habitats and species within the region. Local knowledge was also vital, as it provided an understanding of the historical and cultural significance of the landscape, ensuring that conservation efforts align with community values and long-term sustainability.

Through this collaborative approach we have developed North Northamptonshire’s Vision for Nature Recovery.



Vision

To create a thriving natural environment in North Northamptonshire that supports biodiversity, enhances ecosystem services, and contributes to the well-being of local communities. With a focus on three distinct character areas to provide and enhance their unique habitat opportunities.



As North Northamptonshire Council and its partners look ahead to 2035, we imagine a region where nature is thriving, and biodiversity is flourishing. Our goals include creating wildlife corridors filled with woodlands, shrubs, and diverse grasslands, as well as healthier aquatic environments, with cleaner rivers and better wetland management. Restoring rivers closer to their natural state, reducing invasive species, and boosting biodiversity are all top priorities.

A key part of our vision is to continue to balance farming with nature, where local farms produce sustainable food while continuing to be custodians of the land and being mindful of their environmental impact. We also hope to see more community involvement, with people taking an active role in caring for the local environment and understanding the importance of environmental stewardship.

Overall, we aim to:

- Create outcomes that deliver for nature
- Ensure collaboration and shared responsibility
- Deliver nature that is Bigger, Better and more joined up (Lawton Principles)
- Ensure access to nature (intellectual and physical) is enhanced
- Improve public health and wellbeing through an enhanced urban green infrastructure network
- Create balanced and sustainable habitats
- Ensure wide engagement and more understanding.

There are already areas identified within North Northamptonshire that have unique characteristics that can support our vision and aims for nature recovery in a way that is appropriate to their current habitats, such as the Rockingham Forest, Nene Valley and Ise Valley.

“Every animal is different - embrace the diversity”
Stuart Aged 85

Document Users

Planners and Developers

In North Northamptonshire, planners and developers have a key role in shaping the local environment and supporting nature recovery. This strategy provides important guidelines on where and how new developments should occur to benefit the environment.

- **Planning New Developments:** The emerging North Northamptonshire Local Plan will determine the best locations for new buildings and infrastructure, focusing on avoiding areas with valuable natural habitats. Planners should use this strategy to ensure that new projects enhance and protect local wildlife and green spaces.
- **Assessing New Projects:** When reviewing development proposals, this strategy should be used to ensure projects protect and improve local nature. Developers need to demonstrate how their plans will contribute to a network of well-connected and thriving natural areas.

The new North Northamptonshire Local Plan will incorporate these priorities, ensuring future developments support larger, connected natural spaces and enhance local biodiversity.



Communities

Everyone in North Northamptonshire can contribute to nature recovery. Whether you're an individual or part of a local group, there are many ways to get involved.

- **Community Involvement:** Explore the interactive map to find nature recovery opportunities in your area. Discuss your ideas with your local Councillor to gain support and take advantage of available funding to help with nature projects.
- **Personal Actions:** You can support nature recovery by creating habitats in gardens that support a variety of species. You could also take part in planting days, and habitat improvement activities in the local area.



Public and Environmental Bodies

Public and Environmental bodies in North Northamptonshire, including councils and environmental organisations, play a critical role in nature recovery and environmental protection. They must use this strategy to help conserve and enhance our local biodiversity.

- **Roles and Responsibilities:** Public bodies will be involved in creating policies, managing land, enforcing environmental regulations, and investing in projects that benefit nature. They also lead by example, showing the community how to support and protect the environment.
- **Using the Strategy:** Public bodies should use this strategy to inform their policies and decisions, prioritise funding, and direct environmental investments. The strategy's maps and nature recovery priorities will highlight the key areas where public investment can make the biggest difference, ensuring that projects provide maximum benefits to nature and local communities.



Farmers, Foresters, and Land Managers

Farmers, foresters, and land managers in North Northamptonshire can access this strategy to guide their work and improve local habitats. It will help shape how government environmental schemes are applied in our area.

- **Local Knowledge and Planning:** While the strategy provides a broad overview, local knowledge is crucial for detailed planning. The maps, priorities and practical actions are based on available data but should be refined with local insights for the best results.
- **Nature Recovery Practical actions:** These practical actions offer guidance on how and where to implement habitat improvements. Land owners/Managers can access this guidance and make choices for their land to support nature recovery, such as creating new wetlands or enhancing existing grasslands.

Priorities and Practical Actions

Priorities are the key goals that the strategy seeks to achieve, such as increasing wildlife populations or improving the health of local habitats. Practical actions (otherwise known as potential measures) are specific steps that support these priorities, like planting trees, creating wildflower meadows, or restoring rivers.

The strategy identifies priorities that apply across the entire North Northamptonshire area, as well as those tailored to specific character areas; Rockingham Forest, Nene Valley and Ise Valley. By connecting priorities with practical actions, the LNRS provides a clear plan for local communities and organisations to work together in support of nature recovery.

The defined practical actions include a number of mapped and species-specific actions, identified in the document using symbols:

◇ = Species practical actions

△ = Mapped practical actions.

The species practical actions focus on delivering measures for 'Important Species' in North Northamptonshire. The list takes into account factors such as species that need bigger and better connected habitat and those that need targeted habitat management or bespoke conservation, ensuring the actions provide the greatest benefit for the species.

Mapped practical actions can be accessed via the 'Explore the map' icon in the bottom right-hand corner of the page. Mapping evidence has been informed by Habitat Opportunity Mapping, which was based on a technical assessment of habitat locations, baseline condition and potential connectivity.

Though mapping outputs have used specific data where available to inform locations, greater flexibility has been provided where necessary. These maps highlight areas where actions can be explored. This allows for specific projects within them to be investigated to meet the requirements of priorities and practical actions. For further details on the development of these maps please see the LNRS Mapping Methodology.

The supporting wider natural capital benefits for each of the priorities are also identified and illustrated on each of the priority pages.

“Plant flowers and make bug hotels and make habitats for bugs and animals to live in.”
Erin Aged 11

NORTH NORTHAMPTONSHIRE PRIORITY



Improve the condition, connectivity and management of habitats and corridors across North Northamptonshire.

Practical Actions:

- 001. All developments need to improve species abundance through multifunctional benefits
- 002. Prevent severance and reduce fragmentation of existing habitats and corridors
- 003. Ensure all new habitats created are in positive management
- 004. Enhance the network through increased connectivity between habitats by using corridors in the rural and urban area (e.g. greenways, canals, waterways, railway edge banks, field margins and highway verges) Δ
- 005. Create an individual identity for each character area through co-ordinated habitat creation and landscape enhancements
- 006. Double the amount of priority habitats and bring them into good condition
- 007. Connect different habitat areas to support diverse species populations, facilitate movement and build resilience to pressures
- 008. Identify, conserve and bring into positive management the network of Local Wildlife Sites

◇ = Species practical actions Δ = Mapped practical actions

What is a Priority Habitat?

Those habitats which have been deemed to be of principal importance for the purpose of conserving biodiversity



This priority accords with the National Environmental Objectives and is crucial for protecting and enhancing biodiversity in North Northamptonshire. With the region's habitats becoming more fragmented due to development and changes in land use, it's important to connect and manage these areas to help wildlife thrive. Feedback from local communities, landowners, and environmental groups emphasised the need for a clear strategy to link existing habitats. Experts have offered advice on the best ways to restore and connect these areas, making sure that wildlife corridors are both effective and sustainable.



NORTH NORTHAMPTONSHIRE PRIORITY

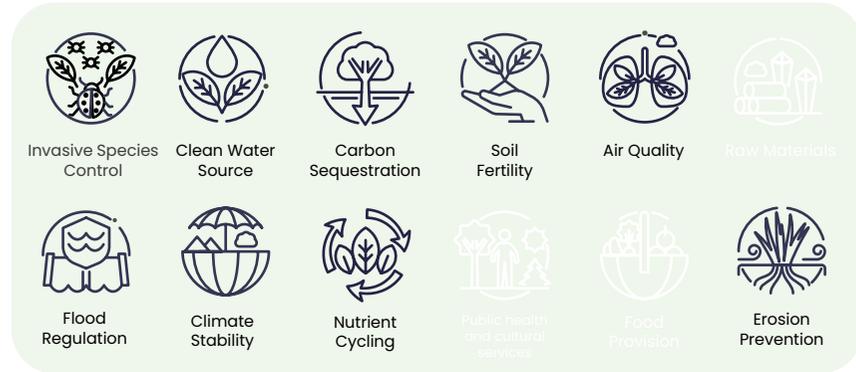


Increase environmental resilience of nature across North Northamptonshire

Practical Actions:

- 009. Increase area of land managed for priority birds, including Lapwing and Golden Plover across functionally linked land in proximity to the Upper Nene Gravel Pits Δ
- 010. Increase management of all woodlands to diversify the structure and increase species to support ecological and future climate resilience
- 011. Create and restore wetland mosaics to increase climate resilience
- 012. Increase land area of regenerative agriculture practices and management that maintains or improves soil quality health, biodiversity and water quality, and reduces flood risk.
- 013. Restore and re-profile sections of watercourses that have been subject to past hard engineering
- 014. Increase the tree canopy to 17%* by both planting and encouraging natural regeneration. Add new trees to urban settings of streets, parks and public spaces; extend and connect existing woodlands and plant along watercourses to provide habitat, reduce urban heat islands, improve air and water quality and draw down carbon contributing towards climate change mitigation
- 015. Enhance the network of habitats through corridor and stepping stone improvements

◊ = Species practical actions Δ = Mapped practical actions



Building environmental resilience is vital in tackling climate change and other environmental challenges. In North Northamptonshire, this involves developing ecosystems that can cope with changing conditions, like extreme weather (floods and droughts) and shifts in species locations. Feedback from stakeholders highlighted the need for long-term planning and flexible management. Experts in ecology and climate offered guidance on improving habitat quality and supporting species at risk from climate impacts, helping to ensure the region's natural environments can endure and bounce back from future challenges.

*Please see the North Northamptonshire Council Tree Strategy for further information about our trees and how to help increase canopy cover.

What is Functionally Linked Land?

A term used to describe these areas of land as they are critical to the ecological or behavioural functions of SPA species and support the functionality and integrity of the designated sites for these species



NORTH NORTHAMPTONSHIRE PRIORITY

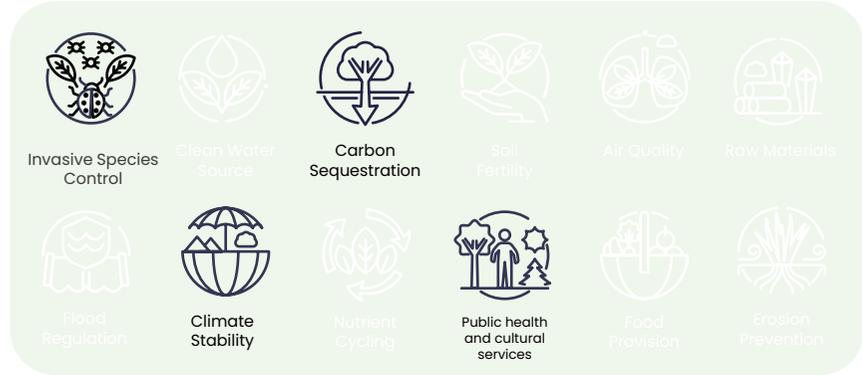
Increase species diversity and abundance

Farmland species such as the turtle dove, have declined **more than 90% since 1970**

Practical Actions:

- 016. Increase land managed for priority species
- 017. Extend existing sites to allow better management for habitats and species.
- 018. Control and removal of invasive non-native species*
- 019. Support priority species across all habitats in North Northamptonshire
- 020. Create large grasslands managed by late haycut for Skylarks and other ground nesting birds ◊
- 021. Create wet grasslands with tussocky swards that hold water through the spring for breeding waders like Redshank and Snipe ◊
- 022. Identify and conserve existing Black-Poplars and plant cuttings at suitable new sites ◊
- 023. Create Osprey platforms and tern rafts to provide breeding sites ◊
- 024. Provide Barn Owl nest boxes and creation of corridors of tussocky grasslands ◊
- 025. Promote stewardship options that benefit farmland birds priority species such as Tree Sparrow and Turtle Dove ◊
- 026. Promote stewardship options that benefit arable plant priority species
- 027. Increase hedgerow planting to improve connectivity for Bats throughout the farmed landscape to link new and existing woodlands
- 028. Promote Swift-friendly building designs and installation of swift boxes ◊
- 029. Improve habitat connectivity through urban areas and promote Hedgehog friendly gardening ◊
- 030. Promote Bat friendly building design and installation of bat boxes

◊ = Species practical actions Δ = Mapped practical actions
 * Further details how invasive species are determined can be found at:
www.gov.uk/guidance/invasive-non-native-alien-animal-species-rules-in-england-and-wales#non-native



Biodiversity is vital for healthy ecosystems, and increasing species diversity and density is key to maintaining ecological balance across North Northamptonshire. This priority aims to protect existing species while encouraging the return of those that have declined. Local surveys, expert advice, and community input have shaped habitat management practices, ensuring actions are culturally appropriate and ecologically effective. Improving habitat connectivity, particularly through urban areas, has also been a focus, with practical actions like promoting hedgehog-friendly gardening to support species movement and resilience in more developed landscapes.

Wet grasslands are especially important for breeding waders such as Redshank and Snipe, making their creation and management a key priority. Stakeholders and experts have identified suitable sites and advised on best land management practices to support these species. Black-poplars, one of Britain’s rarest native trees, are to be protected based on local and historical knowledge, with efforts to conserve existing trees and establish new populations. Additionally, initiatives to support Ospreys and terns through the installation of artificial platforms and rafts have been informed by input from the Wildlife Trust and local stakeholders to ensure these efforts are effectively integrated into wider conservation activities.



NORTH NORTHAMPTONSHIRE PRIORITY

Reduce the impact of recreational disturbance on bird populations in the Special Protection Area

Practical Actions:

- 031. Support wardens, public engagement and other practices to encourage people to walk dogs on leads and limit recreational disturbance in particularly sensitive areas of the SPA Δ
- 032. Create alternative publicly accessible green spaces that provide a nature rich mosaic of habitats and reduce recreational pressures on the Upper Nene Valley Gravel Pits Δ
- 033. Provide surfaced paths, interpretation boards and fencing to encourage and improve access to nature and direct recreational pressure to less sensitive areas
- 034. Increase non-accessible greenspace suitable habitat for SPA qualifying species

◊ = Species practical actions Δ = Mapped practical actions

Recreational disturbance

refers to someone taking part in a recreational activity that causes:

- Change in behaviour of wildlife
- Damage to habitat
- In serious cases, physical harm or death of wildlife



Recreational activities can inadvertently disturb sensitive bird species, especially in designated Special Protection Areas (SPAs). This priority focuses on finding a balance between public access and conservation objectives. Input from the local planning authority, Wildlife Trust and Natural England was crucial in developing practical actions to minimise disturbance. Practical actions include creating alternative green spaces that are open to the public, as well as improving existing ones with surfaced paths, interpretation boards, and fencing. These practical actions are designed to guide visitors towards areas where their presence has less impact, while also making nature more accessible and enjoyable for everyone.





Character Areas

North Northants is divided into three landscape areas, these are loosely based on the Natural England's defined 'National Character Areas' but have then been informed by local understanding and geography.

1. Rockingham Forest

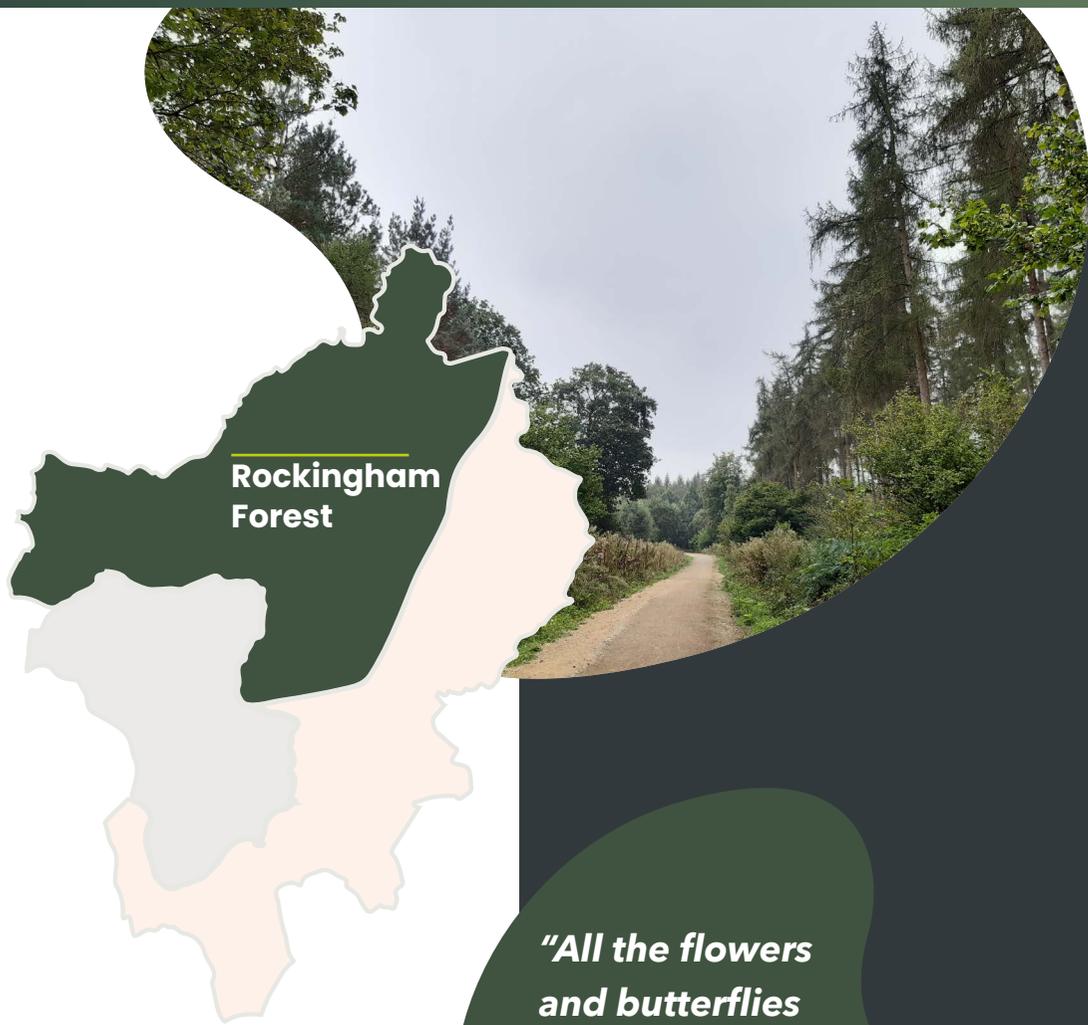
A historic area of ancient woodland, rolling farmland, and villages. Once a royal hunting ground, it's rich in wildlife and biodiversity.

2. Nene Valley:

Following the River Nene, this area has wide floodplains, wetlands, and historic towns. It's known for its scenic views and diverse birdlife.

3. Ise Valley:

A rural valley shaped by the River Ise, with gently hills, farmland and a network of villages. It's a key wildlife corridor with scenic walking routes.



Rockingham Forest

The Rockingham Forest area gets its name from the royal hunting forest that existed here between the 11th and 19th centuries. Today, the forest boundaries are defined by a mix of those former legal limits and the area’s natural features.

The landscape is known for its large woodlands, including both broadleaved trees and commercial plantations. These woodlands stretch across the elevated plateau and ridges, highlighting the area’s unique topography. Ancient woodlands like Wakerley, Geddington Chase, and Fermyn stand out on the skyline as key landmarks.

These woodlands are generally separated by large fields, most of which are used for farming, with crops like cereals and oilseed rape being the most common. The fields are bordered by low, well-kept hedgerows with occasional trees, and in some areas, you’ll also find drystone walls.

A network of small streams runs through the area, and although features like wet meadows, pollarded trees, and ponds are becoming rarer, they remain important in the local river valleys.

The Welland Valley that is the border for North Northamptonshire, has woodland crossing in places and linkages into Leicestershire and Rutland are important to support the wider nature recovery of the Rockingham Forest.

These woodlands, once heavily coppiced, are home to a rich variety of species that are of great conservation interest, including the Black Hairstreak butterfly, Hazel Dormouse, and Red Kite. Several sites in the area are designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and National Nature Reserves to protect these valuable habitats.

“All the flowers and butterflies are so pretty and fascinating”
Emelia Aged 9



2024 year has
been a very poor
year for **Wood White
Butterflies**

(Northamptonshire Butterfly
Recorder July 2024)



Rockingham Forest

Anticipated Future Pressures in the Rockingham Forest:

- **Deer:** Growing deer populations will continue to damage coppiced and newly planted woodlands, disrupt woodland structure, and prevent natural tree regeneration. They are also causing more crop damage and vehicle collisions.
- **Population Growth:** More people mean more pressure on existing green spaces.
- **Urban Developments:** The expansion of urban areas, especially around Corby, will lead to the loss of urban edge habitats and key open mosaic habitats on previously developed land.
- **Tree Pests and Diseases:** Ash dieback and other emerging diseases will significantly impact the woodlands, especially those dominated by Ash trees.
- **Quarry Infilling/Lack of Management:** This can lead to the loss of open mosaic habitats and missed opportunities to create new habitats or connect existing ones.
- **Loss of Woodland Management:** Woodlands have become darker and with more simple structures which provide lower quality habitat and support fewer species that depend on these managed environments.
- **Habitat Fragmentation:** Managing small, isolated sites may lead to the local extinction of species due to lack of connectivity between habitats.



KEY HABITATS

Rockingham Forest



***"I loved
Listening to the
nightingales"***
Jane Aged 80



Important habitats



- Open Mosaic Habitat on Previously Developed Land
- Parks & Gardens



Important species



- Swift
- Basil Thyme
- Picture-winged Fly
- Hedgehog
- Pipistrelle Bat assemblage

URBAN

Disused ironstone quarries and abandoned Second World War airfields are significant historical features in the landscape. Around Corby, previous developments have left behind important brownfield sites. These are valuable mosaics of scrub, bare ground and calcareous grassland with rare plants such as Basil Thyme and butterflies such as Grizzled and Dingy Skippers, scarce insects such as cuckoo bumblebees and birds such as Nightingale. Ring Haw is one of the richest wildlife sites in the forest. In towns and villages, gardens, allotments, and churchyards also provide essential habitats for wildlife.

Pressures and Constraints

Large-scale residential developments to the east of Kettering (known as Hanwood Park) and at the edge of Corby have extended the urban areas into nearby landscapes and habitats, causing visual intrusion and habitat fragmentation. Quarrying in Rockingham Forest has also had a major impact, leading to both habitat loss and the creation of important open mosaic and calcareous grassland habitats. However, these areas are now declining due to lack of management and being filled in for agriculture or development.

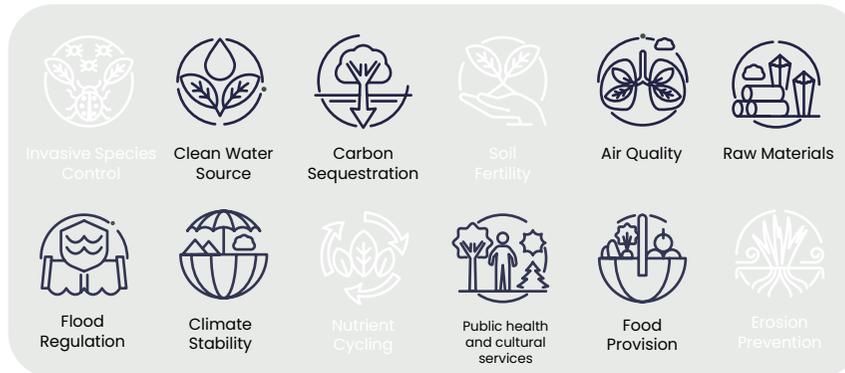
Specialist butterflies, like the Dingy Skipper (down 15%) and Grizzled Skipper (down 49%), have seen national declines. Local populations have likely followed this trend, though important colonies still exist where conservation efforts are in place.



ROCKINGHAM FOREST PRIORITY

Urban

Protect, restore and increase connectivity of urban habitats that provide multifunctional benefits



Practical Actions:

- 035. Identify, protect and sensitively manage key brownfield sites to enhance open mosaic habitats. This would support species such as the Picture-winged Fly.
- 036. Ensure suitable quarry restoration plans that lead to creation of priority habitats
- 037. Work with local communities to produce parish nature recovery strategies and restore areas of urban green space
- 038. Promote management of wildlife areas in churchyards through Conservation Churchyard scheme
- 039. Expand network of Protected Wildflower Verges
- 040. Promote management and creation of traditional orchards
- 041. Change landscape management regimes across publicly owned land to encourage sustainable practices such as grass 'cut and collect'
- 042. Promote and encourage integrated Sustainable Drainage Systems networks in new developments that include habitat creation
- 043. Retain, restore and enhance existing greenspaces and urban Local Wildlife Sites to promote favourable ecological conditions Δ
- 044. Restore early successional habitats on suitable brownfield sites for Basil Thyme ◊
- 045. Increase the size and quality of the Country Park network by working with landowners to use adjacent land to link into country parks

Urban habitats in the Rockingham Forest offer essential green spaces that support both biodiversity and human well-being. Protecting and enhancing these areas is crucial for maintaining ecological balance and green infrastructure connectivity in urban environments. Stakeholder engagement, particularly with the community and local authority officers, underscored the importance of these habitats. Technical support was also provided by specialists to inform practical actions for enhancing urban green spaces and ensuring they offer multifunctional benefits such as carbon sequestration, flood management, and recreational opportunities.

What is the Conservation Churchyard Scheme?
 The Conservation Churchyard Award Scheme run by the Wildlife Trust. It aims to help villages increase the wildlife of their churchyards.



◊ = Species practical actions Δ = Mapped practical actions





Dormouse numbers have **declined by 51%** since 2000
(Wildlife Trust, 2024)



Important habitats



- Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland
- Wood-Pasture and Parkland
- Traditional Orchards

Important species



- Woodcock
- Woodland wildflower assemblage
- Nightingale
- Stag Beetle
- Black Hairstreak
- Wood White
- Adder
- Hazel Dormouse
- Woodland bat assemblage
- Pine Martin
- Chequered Skipper

WOODLAND

The area is well wooded with large commercial forests of conifers and broadleaved trees, as well as ancient, semi-natural woodlands. Large woodlands like Wakerley Great Wood, Geddington Chase, and Fermyn Woods are standout features on the landscape. These ancient woodlands are nationally important for nature conservation and are home to a wide variety of species. Many of them, like Collyweston Great Wood and Easton Hornstocks, are protected as National Nature Reserves (NNR) and Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Some of these woods are known for rare species like the Black Hairstreak butterfly and the now-thriving Red Kites that nest there. Additionally, the area is dotted with large country houses and historic estates, such as Deene Park, Kirby Hall, and Rockingham Castle, which add to the landscape's charm.

There are also great examples of urban woodlands in the Rockingham Forest. This includes Thoroughsale and Hazel Woods, a 75ha complex of ancient woodland, woodland, scrub, and grassland located in the centre of Corby and entirely surrounded by built development including Corby town centre and the Corby Parkland Gateway civic quarter. It is estimated to date back to around 800AD. The woodland sits on relatively level topography, although there are shallow valley features associated with the Willow Brook and its tributaries. Soils are slowly permeable, seasonally wet, slightly acid but base-rich loamy and clayey soils of moderate fertility.





"I really like going on relaxing walks through woodland areas"

Iris Aged 11

90% of adder populations surveyed are declining.

(Wildlife Trust, 2024)

WOODLAND

Pressures and Constraints

Woodlands are experiencing multiple pressures through the changing climate; impacts of deer, existing pests and disease such as Ash dieback and Oak decline and the threat of new pests such as Oak Processionary Moth. A decline of woodland management including traditional practices such as coppicing has reduced the quality of habitat and threatens the long term survival of all woodlands, but in particular the historic ancient woodlands of the Rockingham Forest. Recent efforts to restore woodlands converted to plantations in the last century, and to control deer numbers have made some impact but more action is needed.

Parkland in the area has decreased by about 25% due to farming changes, and many of the remaining areas need better conservation management, which is beginning to happen through recent Environmental Stewardship schemes.

Specialist butterflies have declined significantly, with the Wood White down 82% and the White Admiral down 60%. However, the Black Hairstreak has remained stable, and the Chequered Skipper has been successfully reintroduced into Fineshade Woods.

Nightingales and Adders have also seen sharp declines, but Rockingham Forest still supports important populations of both. The reintroduction of the Red Kite in the forest has been a major success, with breeding numbers increasing by 196% in the East Midlands over the past decade.

ROCKINGHAM FOREST PRIORITY

Woodland

Extend the area, connectivity and management of woodland to provide a mosaic of woodland and associated habitat (1)

Practical Actions:

- 046. Target woodland creation in optimum locations that connect ancient and priority woodlands. This would support species such as the Woodcock and an assemblage of Woodland Bat species Δ ◊
- 047. Enhance resilience of new and existing woodland by creating diverse, mixed species stands using tree species best suited to individual site characteristics, and future climate projection
- 048. Reintroduce woodland management techniques through skills training and funding incentives
- 049. Manage deer numbers to reduce impact, year on year, to allow woodland management to be effective. This would support woodland wildflower assemblages*
- 050. Install fences and other physical barriers to prevent deer damaging ecologically-sensitive areas, where appropriate
- 051. Restore woodlands impacted by Ash dieback, target management actions to diversity species to aid ecological and climate resilience
- 052. Manage ancient and veteran trees, including identification of successors to ensure habitat continuity
- 053. Restore and manage neglected woodland rides and glades for butterflies. This would support the Wood White butterfly ◊
- 054. Restore Plantation on Ancient Woodland sites to semi-natural composition by gradually removing non-native trees in programmes of thinning and harvesting Δ
- 055. Restore management of historic parklands and wood-pasture on estates and connections between them. This would support species such as the Stag Beetle. ◊

◊ = Species practical actions Δ = Mapped practical actions



Expanding and connecting the woodlands in Rockingham Forest is essential for creating a mosaic of habitats that support a wider range of species and increase ecological resilience. This priority has been guided by the National Environment Objectives as well as input from the Forestry Commission and Wildlife Trust, who provided expert advice on woodland management and species-specific needs. In particular, the management of ancient and veteran trees, alongside the restoration and management of neglected woodland rides and glades, is crucial for supporting butterfly species.

Local knowledge has also been vital in identifying key areas for woodland expansion and connectivity, ensuring that these efforts are targeted and effective. Together, these initiatives will enhance biodiversity, improve habitat quality, and strengthen the forest's overall ecological health.

*Managing Deer is vital to ensure that ground flora and the understorey are present to provide nesting and foraging opportunities for a wide range of species.



ROCKINGHAM FOREST PRIORITY

Woodland

Extend the area, connectivity and management of woodland to provide a mosaic of woodland and associated habitat (2)

Practical Actions:

- 056. Create more mixed environments, such as scrub, around and between woodlands to support diverse wildlife, vibrant ecosystems and species
- 057. Maintain connectivity of existing habitats inside and peripheral to existing populations of Adder ◊
- 058. Sympathetic management to Blackthorn in targeted woodlands to benefit the Black Hairstreak ◊
- 059. Monitor existing Hazel Dormouse populations, use nest boxes where needed and connect to surrounding suitable habitats and consider reintroductions where necessary ◊
- 060. Retain mature, dead, and dying standing trees in existing woodlands to provide bat roosting habitat
- 061. Continue reintroduction of Chequered Skipper to sites with suitable ride management ◊
- 062. Introduce coppicing and deer control within targetted woodlands to create woodland-scrub mosaics to benefit Nightingale ◊
- 063. Research potential for future reintroductions of Pine Marten ◊
- 064. Buffer and connect ancient and priority habitat woodlands to reduce fragmentation and create wildlife corridors. This would support species such as the Woodcock and an assemblage of woodland bats Δ ◊

◊ = Species practical actions Δ = Mapped practical actions

Nightingale
has
declined by around 45% nationally in last 25 years
(Wildlife Trust, 2024)



Broadleaved woodlands in Rockingham Forest are essential for biodiversity, and expanding and connecting these woodlands is crucial for creating a mosaic of habitats that support a range of species. Buffers and connectivity of ancient and priority habitat woodlands play a key role in supporting species like the Woodcock and various woodland bats, which rely on these continuous, well-managed environments for survival. Extending these woodlands and ensuring they are linked will enhance species movement and improve overall ecosystem resilience.

The Adder, for example, depends on well-connected habitats to thrive. Fragmented habitats can isolate populations, leading to reduced genetic diversity and a higher risk of local extinctions. Sympathetic blackthorn management in targeted woodlands will also benefit species like the Black Hairstreak, a butterfly that relies on this specific habitat for its lifecycle.

The recent reintroduction of the Chequered Skipper highlights the success of thoughtful management practices. Expanding and carefully managing the mosaic of habitats across Rockingham Forest will give these diverse species, from reptiles to butterflies, the best chance to thrive and contribute to the overall health of the forest ecosystem.





GRASSLAND

Areas of unimproved grassland are scattered throughout Rockingham Forest. Areas of former grazing land exist within the woodlands, with low-lying grassland on the broader floodplains. In the past, species-rich meadows were common across the woodlands, but now they're mostly limited to places like Sudborough Green Lodge SSSI.

In the northern part of the forest, the limestone geology means calcareous grasslands are more prominent, these are known for their variety of wildflowers, including orchids. Some of the best examples of these grasslands are found in old quarries, like Collyweston Quarry SSSI and Twywell Hills and Dales, or in roadside verges. Many of these verges are classified as Local Wildlife Sites and are often more valuable for wildlife than the surrounding fields, providing habitats for creatures like Glow Worms, lizards, and Slow Worms.

Important habitats



- Lowland calcareous grassland
- Lowland meadow

Important species



- Curlew
- Skylark
- Red-shanked Carder Bee
- Dyer's Greenweed
- Green-winged Orchid
- Dingy & Grizzled Skipper
- Liquorice Piercer
- Small & Chalk Hill Blue



" I like all the beautiful animals and flowers there are in nature."

George Aged 7

GRASSLAND

Pressures and Constraints

Intensive farming led to the loss of meadows and wetlands, especially along river valleys, as permanent pasture was converted into grassland improved for silage. The few that remain are now even more valuable. Over the past 20 years, agri-environment schemes aimed at regenerating grasslands and lowland hay meadows have helped protect these important habitats.

Since 1970, 64% of flowering plant species in England have declined. For instance, the nationally scarce Man Orchid has seen its population cut in half, and Northamptonshire has one of the highest rates of Man Orchid species loss. Basil Thyme, an indicator of high-quality grassland, is now classified as 'Vulnerable,' though recent efforts in Rockingham Forest have shown promising recovery results.

ROCKINGHAM FOREST PRIORITY

Grassland

Protect, manage and expand the network of grassland areas

Practical Actions:

- 065. Implement sensitive long-term management of existing calcareous grasslands and meadows
- 066. Survey and bring statutory and non-statutory grassland sites into positive management
- 067. Prioritise calcareous grassland creation where it buffers or links existing sites and where suitable geology exists, to support species such as Dyers Greenweed, Green-winged Orchid and the Liquorice Piercer Moth Δ \diamond
- 068. Improve management of disused railways
- 069. Control invasive plant species and encroaching scrub in grasslands by a mixture of suitable methods
- 070. Connect areas of priority grassland with other habitats to support diverse species populations, facilitate movement and build resilience to pressures, to support species such as the Red-shanked Carder Bee \diamond
- 071. Create wet grassland habitats outside of the SPA to buffer and link existing habitats as well as provide less disturbed habitat to support species such as the Curlew \diamond
- 072. Restore and create calcareous grassland – scrub mosaics on undulating sites to benefit Dingy and Grizzled Skipper \diamond
- 073. Reintroductions of Small and Chalkhill Blue butterflies at sites where suitable habitat and foodplant has been restored or created \diamond

\diamond = Species practical actions Δ = Mapped practical actions

The planting of more **Wild Liquorice** may help to boost the **Liquorice Piercer's** local population.



Grasslands in Rockingham Forest, home to species like the Red-shanked Carder Bee, are vital for biodiversity and require expansion and connectivity to support species movement and resilience. Sensitive long-term management of existing calcareous grasslands and meadows is essential to maintaining these habitats. Stakeholder input, including from ecologists and the Wildlife Trust, helped shape strategies to enhance grassland areas, with a focus on creating continuous habitats to improve species diversity. Discussions also highlighted the potential for planting Wild Liquorice, which supports the Liquorice Piercer moth, further enriching the biodiversity of the area. By connecting priority grasslands with other habitats through effective habitat corridors, ensures that the fragmented landscape of Rockingham Forest supports healthy, mobile populations and maintains its rich biodiversity.





Important habitats



- Hedgerows
- Arable field margins

Important species



- Barn Owl
- Turtle Dove
- Arable Weed Assemblage
- Hedgerow Bat Assemblage
- Harvest Mouse
- Polecat
- Brown & White-letter Hairstreak

FARMLAND

Large- to medium-sized fields, of mixed arable and some pastoral land use, displays the regular pattern of 18th and 19th century enclosures set within a more sinuous pattern of older enclosures, winding lanes and watercourses. Fields are commonly bordered by established hedgerows with mature trees or drystone walls.

Pressures and Constraints

In the 20th century, intensive farming led to the loss of many hedgerows, which affected the landscape and wildlife habitats. However, in the last 20 years, efforts to restore hedgerows through Environmental Stewardship schemes, along with creating field margins, have helped boost biodiversity on farmland.

Breeding bird populations in England have generally declined in recent decades, especially among woodland and farmland birds. However, there's some evidence that these declines have started to level off in the last ten years.



ROCKINGHAM FOREST PRIORITY

Farmland

Manage farmed landscapes to support the protection and enhancement of biodiversity

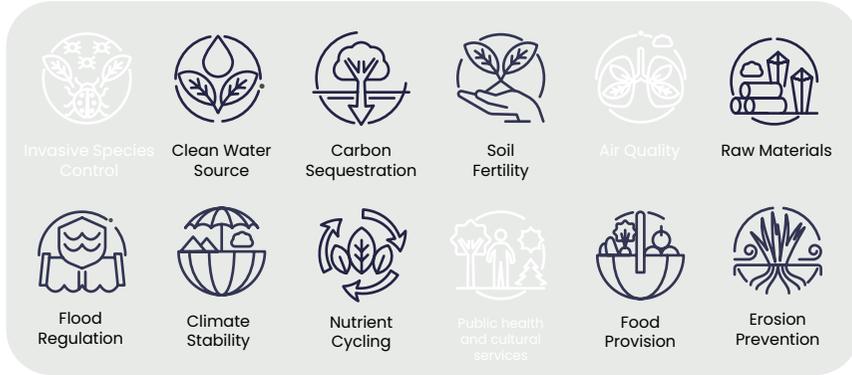
Practical Actions:

- 074. Enhance farmed landscapes through creation of semi-natural habitats such as grassland, scrub, field margins and hedgerows. This would support species such as the Harvest Mouse ◊
- 075. Promote catchment sensitive farming to improve management of riparian vegetation and reduce nutrient and sediment runoff to watercourses, for example through reducing cattle poaching
- 076. Implement Polecat monitoring and research project ◊
- 077. Plant and restore low intensity managed tall mixed hedgerows for butterflies such as Brown and White-letter Hairstreak ◊
- 078. Allow natural processes to gradually return selected low-grade agricultural land to semi-natural habitats

◊ = Species practical actions Δ = Mapped practical actions

What are Riparian Habitats?

Riparian habitats are the areas where land meets water, like streambanks, riverbanks, and floodplains. The water is supported by the soil and plants in these areas by carrying sediment and storing water.



Farming plays a key role in the Rockingham Forest, making it essential to manage these landscapes in a way that enhances biodiversity while maintaining agricultural productivity. This priority emphasises sustainable farming practices that support wildlife. Collaboration with local farmers and agricultural advisors has led to practical practical actions that balance farming with conservation goals. Research, such as polecat monitoring, has guided these efforts to ensure farmed landscapes contribute positively to regional biodiversity. Additionally, restoring and planting low-intensity managed tall mixed hedgerows is crucial for supporting species like the Brown and White-letter Hairstreak butterflies.





WATER

A network of shallow streams has created many small valleys and flows into the Nene and Welland rivers, which both eventually flow east into The Wash. The Welland valley runs along the northern edge of the Forest with its wide floodplain offering important wet grassland areas. The valley spans into Rutland and Leicestershire and so collaborative efforts have been explored with the LNRS Responsible Authority to ensure coordinated actions that promote habitat connectivity, enhance natural capital, and support biodiversity. Ponds around Corby are also a key habitat for Great Crested Newts as they provide essential breeding grounds and a safe environment for larval development.



Important habitats



- Ponds
- Rivers
- Grazing marsh, fen and reedbed



Important species



- Lapwing & Golden Plover
- Redshank & Snipe
- Black-poplar
- Osprey
- Common Tern
- Pondweeds & Stoneworts
- European Water Vole

Pressures and Constraints

In the 1970s, sections of the Welland River were straightened and deepened in an effort to control flooding and improve drainage, but these alterations caused habitat degradation and disrupted the natural movement of fish species. Many villages along the rivers and streams in the Rockingham Forest area of North Northampton are still affected by flooding today.

Today, the three water bodies within the Willow Brook sub-catchment of the River Nene exhibit a moderate to good ecological status, although ongoing flood risks in the surrounding villages pose challenges for long-term environmental stability.

ROCKINGHAM FOREST PRIORITY

Water

Enhance the functionality, biodiversity and historic features of rivers, streams and ponds

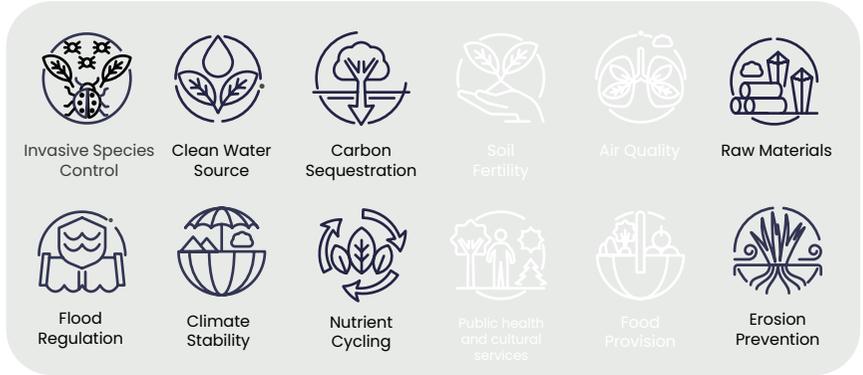
Practical Actions:

- 079. Implement Natural Flood Management opportunities to help regulate water quality and water flow, with a particular focus on the Harpers Brook, Southwick Brook and River Jordan catchments Δ
- 080. Create and extend semi-natural habitats (such as lowland flood meadows, floodplain grazing marsh and reedbeds) that would support a wide variety of species including Bittern Δ ◊
- 081. Promote riparian tree planting to shade and cool the water and reduce sediment or pollutant run off into the water Δ
- 082. Encourage the creation of new ponds through Great-Crested Newt mitigation schemes. This would also support Pondweeds and Stoneworts ◊
- 083. Find new sites to reintroduce Water Voles ◊

◊ = Species practical actions Δ = Mapped practical actions

What is Natural Flood Management (NFM)?

These processes help protect, restore, and imitate the natural functions of areas like catchments and floodplains to slow down and store water. NFM practical actions can involve managing soil, land, rivers, and floodplains.



Rivers, streams, and ponds in Rockingham Forest are vital for supporting diverse ecosystems and maintaining the region's natural heritage. Enhancing these water bodies involves restoring natural features and improving water quality to support species like Bittern. Stakeholder engagement, including input from the Environment Agency and the Wildlife Trust, guided the development of practical actions to restore and manage these aquatic habitats effectively, ensuring they continue to provide ecological and cultural benefits.



Nene Valley

It's the 10th longest river in the country, with important tributaries like the River Ise, which runs through Kettering and Wellingborough, and Willow Brook, which flows through Corby. Starting west of Northampton, the Nene Valley consists of low-lying clay valleys, which are rich in both history and wildlife. This, along with many local sites, contributes to its unique landscape.

A common feature of the valley is the flooded gravel pits, which have turned into important wetlands due to reclamation projects. These wetlands are some of the most vital freshwater habitats in the Midlands, home to many wetland birds and waterfowl. In 2011, the Upper Nene Valley Gravel Pits were designated as a Special Protection Area because of the wide variety of wetland birds they support, including species like the Bittern, Gadwall, and Golden Plover. It was also designated as a Wetland of International Importance under the Convention on Wetlands, also known as the Ramsar Convention.

In 2012, the Nene Valley was also named one of twelve Nature Improvement Areas. The goal was to restore and reconnect natural spaces along the Nene and its tributaries, from Daventry to Peterborough, with local organisations and individuals working together to improve the area for nature.

The river and its surrounding habitats also play an important role in the region by managing water flow, quality, and availability. They also provide valuable recreational spaces and support biodiversity in the nearby urban areas.

"Nature means happiness because nature is just like us, it's amazing."
Phoebe Aged 8





Nene Valley

Anticipated Future Pressures in the Nene Valley:

- **Recreational Pressure:** Increased activities like walking, cycling, sailing, and off-lead dog walking are disturbing wildlife, especially overwintering birds, which led to the sites being designated.
- **Agricultural Intensification:** The push for higher food production, loss of government payments and farm mergers are leading to the cultivation of pastures and semi-natural habitats.
- **Lack of Habitat Management:** The decline of mixed farming has resulted in less hay cutting and grazing, causing the remaining grasslands and wetlands to become overgrown and less diverse.
- **Urban Expansion:** Increased population and the growth of towns and new developments is leading to the loss of natural habitats, increased visitors, and the reduction of land that connects key wildlife areas.
- **Water Flow Changes:** Increased water abstraction and modifications to structures on the River Nene could disrupt the natural flow and water levels, affecting wetlands and wet grasslands.
- **Pollution:** Agricultural run-off and wastewater are raising phosphate levels, lowering water quality, and harming aquatic invertebrates.
- **Invasive Species:** Non-native species like mink, signal crayfish, and Himalayan balsam are outcompeting native wildlife, causing further ecological imbalance.



KEY HABITATS

Nene Valley



"I want hedgehogs to have little homes and holes in the fence so that they can come in and out" Freya Aged 9



Important habitats



- Parks and gardens
- Brownfield sites



Important species



- Swift
- Picture-winged Fly
- Hedgehog
- Pipistrelle Bat assemblage

URBAN

Towns like Rushden and Thrapston, along with a network of charming villages, shape the open character of the landscape, alongside associated infrastructure, including major roads, which are often visually dominant. Mineral extraction changed the Valley in the 20th century, with extensive areas of the Nene Valley gravel terraces quarried to produce large areas into lakes and wetlands. These areas are now managed to help wildlife, particularly wildfowl, and also for recreation. The River Nene, and its tributaries, is a major feature of many urban areas. Gardens, road verges, churchyards and allotments all provide important wildlife habitats in towns and villages.

Pressures and Constraints

Large-scale development along the A45 has led to the loss of farmland and natural habitats. However, mineral extraction has created a network of gravel pit lakes and wetlands that are now valuable wildlife sites, particularly for overwintering birds. Sites like Stanwick Lakes and Summer Leys have become some of North Northamptonshire's most important wildlife areas.

Hedgehogs in Britain have been in long-term decline, but urban populations seem to be stabilising or even recovering, highlighting the importance of gardens and green spaces in their conservation.



NENE VALLEY PRIORITY

Urban

Protect, restore and increase connectivity of urban habitats that provide multifunctional benefits

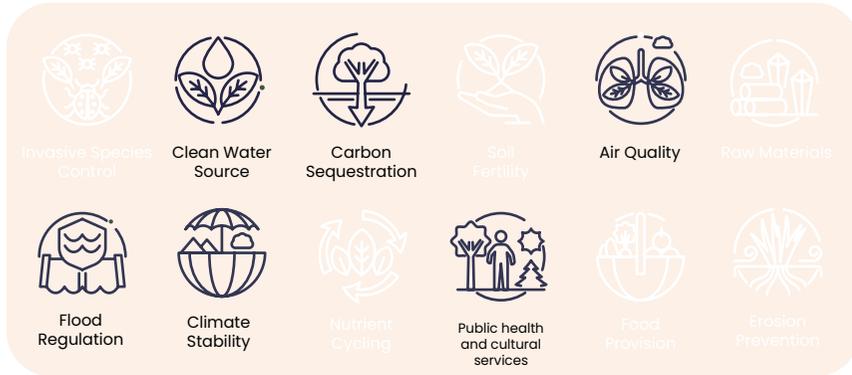
Practical Actions:

- 039. Expand network of Protected Wildflowers Verges
- 041. Change landscape management regimes across publically owned land to encourage sustainable practices such as grass 'cut and collect'
- 042. Promote and encourage integrated Sustainable Drainage Systems networks in new developments
- 043. Retain, restore and enhance existing greenspaces and urban Local Wildlife Sites to promote favourable ecological conditions Δ
- 045. Increase the size and quality of the Country Park network by working with landowners to use adjacent land to link into country parks
- 084. Conserve and enhance urban rivers and their riparian boundary recognising their key role in supporting nature in towns and villages

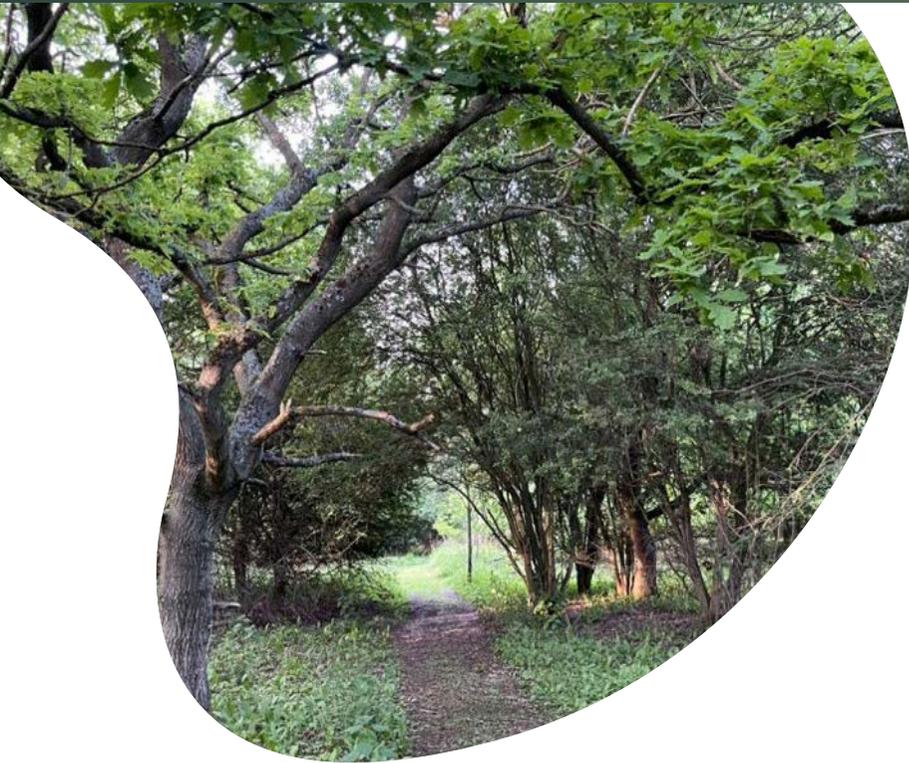
◊ = Species practical actions Δ = Mapped practical actions



Ruben Aged 7



In the Nene Valley, the network of the towns and villages means that urban habitats are crucial for supporting biodiversity while also providing recreational spaces for residents. Protecting and enhancing these areas ensures they continue to offer multifunctional benefits, such as improving air quality, reducing urban heat island effects and supporting wildlife. Stakeholder engagement with the local authority and community groups highlighted the importance of accessible green spaces. They also contributed to practical actions for enhancing these urban habitats, ensuring they are resilient and support a wide range of species.



Important habitats



- Wet Woodland
- Traditional Orchards

Important species



- Woodcock

WOODLAND

The Valley has limited woodland, although spinneys and copses are located on the ridges and hills, as well as trees along the water's edge. Wet woodlands, like Earl's Barton Carr, are especially important. These areas usually have trees like Willow, Alder, or Birch, though they can look different from place to place. The trees along the rivers are also important, often growing as mature trees that line the riverbanks. These trees are key parts of the landscape and provide homes for many invertebrates and other species.

Pressures and Constraints

Woodland areas have become more fragmented and sparse, with gaps forming that impact the plants and wildlife within these habitats. Despite this, some positive changes have occurred. For example, wet woodlands and scrub areas have started to grow around old gravel extraction sites, which can provide new habitats for wildlife.

Unfortunately, the numbers of Willow Tits and Marsh Tits have fallen, following a national trend of decline for these species. This decline is a concern as it reflects broader challenges faced by woodland birds due to habitat loss and changes in their environment.

To help these birds and other woodland species, it's important to protect and restore woodland areas, especially in regions affected by agricultural activities. Supporting the growth of new habitats can also play a crucial role in reversing these negative trends.

NENE VALLEY PRIORITY

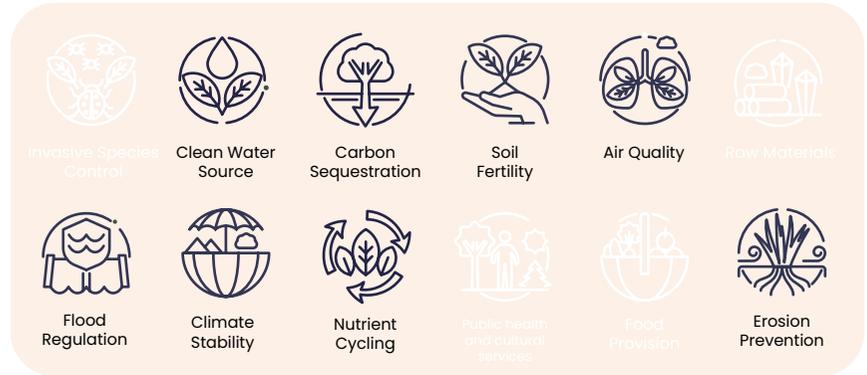
Woodland

Increase wood-pasture and wet woodland opportunities

Practical Actions:

- 046. Target woodland creation in optimum locations that connect ancient and priority woodlands. This would support species such as the Woodcock and an assemblage of woodland bat species. Δ ◊
- 047. Enhance resilience of new and existing woodland through the creation of diverse, mixed species stands using tree species best suited to individual site characteristics, and future climate projections
- 049. Manage deer numbers to reduce impact, year on year, to allow woodland management to be effective. This would support Woodland Wildflower assemblages ◊
- 051. Restore woodlands impacted by Ash dieback, target management actions to diversify species compositions to aid ecological and climate resilience.
- 052. Manage ancient and veteran trees, and identify successors to ensure habitat continuity
- 064. Buffer and connect ancient and priority habitat woodlands to reduce fragmentation and create wildlife corridors. This would support species such as the Woodcock and an assemblage of Woodland Bats. Δ ◊
- 085. Promote opportunities for open wood pasture as an ecotone around historic woodland
- 086. Target wet woodland creation to increase available habitat and provide suitable habitat for priority species Δ
- 087. Create more transitional environments around and between woodlands to support diverse wildlife and vibrant ecosystems

◊ = Species practical actions Δ = Mapped practical actions



Wood-pasture and wet woodlands are important habitats in the Nene Valley, supporting priority species such as the Woodcock and woodland bats. Increasing these habitats involves restoring degraded areas and creating new ones to enhance biodiversity and ecological connectivity. This priority was informed by the National Environmental Objectives and technical advice from the Forestry Commission and Wildlife Trust, who identified key areas for habitat restoration. Engagement with local landowners ensured that these initiatives are feasible and integrated into broader land management practices.

What is an Ecotone?
A transitional area of vegetation between two different habitats





Important habitats



- Lowland meadow
- Grazing marsh, fen and reedbed

Important species



- Curlew
- Skylark
- Green-winged Orchid

GRASSLAND

Although now fragmented, there are still some great examples of waterside meadows in the Nene Valley. This area is really important for floodplain meadows, which include types like the Achurch Meadows SSSI and Ditchford Meadows. Overwintering birds utilise the floodplain grazing marsh surrounding the open water habitats and wider afield as an important feeding habitat. Some of the best sites are also home to breeding birds like Redshank and Lapwing. The ditches in these meadows are crucial for a variety of plants and insects.

Pressures and Constraints

Since World War II, 97% of lowland meadows have been lost nationally, with the Nene Valley likely seeing an even higher loss. However, recent restoration efforts, especially on old gravel extraction sites, have helped reverse this trend, creating habitats for internationally important overwintering birds. Projects like the Nene Valley Nature Improvement Area are restoring meadows, but increased recreational use is disturbing wildlife and complicating site management

The Nene Valley has become nationally important for wildflower-rich floodplain meadows, thanks to significant conservation efforts over the past decade. Currently, 15 of 25 water bodies in the mid-Nene have moderate to good ecological status.

NENE VALLEY PRIORITY

Grassland

Protect, manage and expand the network of grassland areas

Practical Actions:

- 066. Survey and bring statutory and non-statutory grassland sites into positive management
- 068. Improve management of disused railways
- 071. Create wet grassland habitats outside of the Special Protection Area to buffer and link existing habitats as well as provide less disturbed habitat to support species such as the Curlew Δ \diamond
- 070. Connect areas of priority grassland with other habitats to support diverse species populations, facilitate movement and build resilience to pressures, to support species such as the Red-shanked Carder Bee Δ \diamond
- 088. Promote floodplain meadow restoration and creation Δ

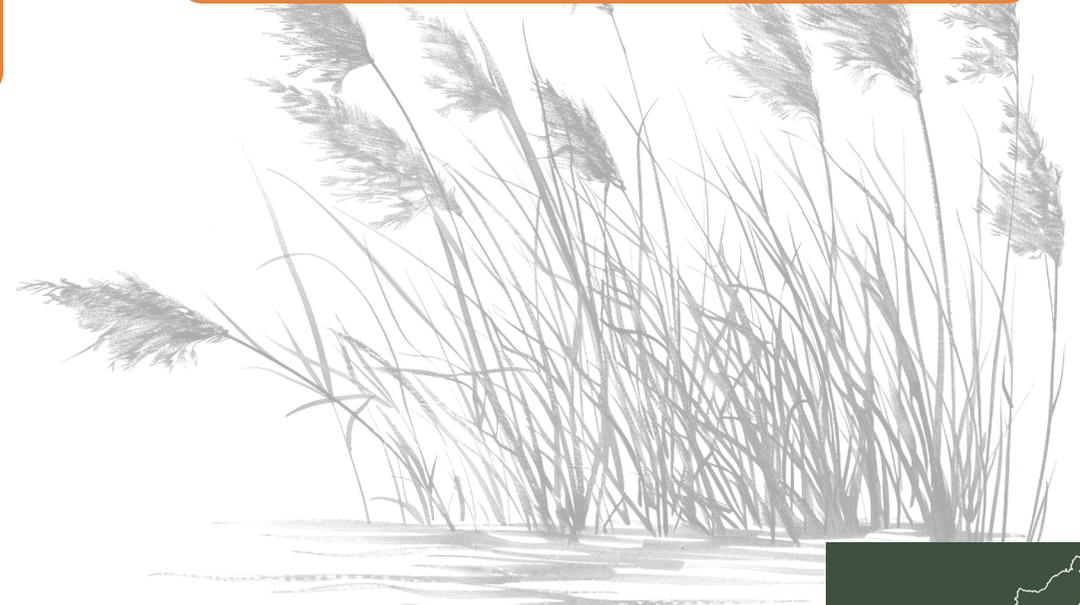
\diamond = Species practical actions Δ = Mapped practical actions



Elliot Aged 8

- Invasive Species Control
- Clean Water Source
- Carbon Sequestration
- Soil Fertility
- Air Quality
- Raw Materials
- Flood Regulation
- Climate Stability
- Nutrient Cycling
- Public health and cultural services
- Food Provision
- Erosion Prevention

Grasslands in the Nene Valley are vital for supporting diverse plant and animal species, including the Red-shanked Carder Bee. Expanding and connecting these grasslands is essential for maintaining ecological networks and building resilience to environmental pressures. Local farmers provided insights into the management of these grasslands, while the Wildlife Trust advised on the best practices for enhancing connectivity and species diversity.





FARMLAND

The Valley has a mixed agricultural regime of arable and pasture, with arable land tending to be on the broader, flat river terraces and smaller pastures on the slopes of many minor valleys and on more undulating ground. Arable and pasture fields provide important foraging habitat for wetland birds such as Lapwing and Golden Plover. 'Functionally linked land' is a term used to describe these areas of land as they are critical to the ecological or behavioural functions of Special Protection Area species and support the functionality and integrity of the designated sites for these species.



Important habitats



- Hedgerows
- Arable field margins



Important species



- Barn Owl
- Tree Sparrow
- Turtle Dove
- Arable plant assemblage
- Hedgerow bat assemblage
- Harvest Mouse

Pressures and Constraints

Dairy farming has decreased in the Nene Valley, while cereal farming has increased. Environmental initiatives have led to more buffer strips, bird seed crops, and better management of remaining natural habitats, including hedgerow restoration.

Farmland birds have suffered major declines, with species like Lapwing and Turtle Dove particularly affected. Harvest Mouse numbers have likely declined over the past 40 years and the species is now classified as rare.

NENE VALLEY PRIORITY

Farmland

Maintain, restore and create priority habitats through effective engagement with farmers and landowners

Practical Actions:

- 074. Enhance farmed landscapes through creating semi-natural habitats like grassland, scrub, field margins and hedgerows. This would support species such as the Harvest Mouse ◊
- 089. Identify, protect and manage key areas of functionally linked land Δ
- 090. Promote stewardship options such as improved riparian habitat management along watercourses and the integration of fallow in crop rotation
- 091. Promote soil conservation practices that enhance fertility, reduce soil erosion, and increase carbon sequestration

◊ = Species practical actions Δ = Mapped practical actions

*"I remember
flocks of
Sparrows in
hedges"*
Sheila Aged 85



Engaging with farmers and landowners is crucial for the success of habitat restoration and creation efforts in the Nene Valley. This priority focuses on building strong partnerships to implement conservation practices that benefit both biodiversity and agricultural productivity. Stakeholder engagement highlighted the importance of collaborative approaches, and technical specialists provided guidance on specific habitat management techniques. These efforts aim to align biodiversity goals with the needs and interests of land managers, ensuring long-term sustainability.



Important habitats



- Rivers
- Grazing marsh, fen and reedbed
- Pond

Important species



- Bittern
- Lapwing & Golden Plover
- Redshank & Snipe
- Bogbean
- Black-poplar
- Osprey
- Common Tern
- Barbel
- Pondweeds & stoneworts
- European Water Vole
- Beaver
- White-clawed fish

WATER

The River Nene, along with the flooded gravel pits and wetlands created from land reclamation, forms some of the most important freshwater wetlands in the Midlands. These areas are crucial for a wide range of wetland birds and wildfowl, especially in winter. The Upper Nene Valley Gravel Pits, stretching from Northampton to north of Thrapston, are designated as a Special Protection Area (SPA), Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Wetland of International Importance, for the assemblage of wintering and breeding birds, and their habitats. The wetlands also include fen, swamp, and marsh areas, which are vital for wildlife, including reedbeds that attract Bitterns and Starling murmurations in winter. The backwaters and channels are important for fish spawning and other wildlife. Otters can now be found throughout the valley, though Water Voles are only found in a few small, isolated spots.

Pressures and Constraints

Otters have made a comeback in the valley, but Water Voles are now limited to a few small, isolated colonies. The Nene River has been heavily modified over centuries for navigation, flood management, and water extraction, leading to issues like siltation, altered water flow, and habitat loss. However, many backwaters have been restored in the last decade.

Wintering waterbird numbers peaked in the 20th century but have since declined, though some species like the Little Egret have successfully colonized the area. The Upper Nene Valley Gravel Pits SPA hosts around 20,000 overwintering birds each year, though species like the Golden Plover have seen declines. Breeding birds like Lapwing, Redshank, and Curlew have also declined, though Little Egret and Cetti's Warbler populations have increased.



NENE VALLEY PRIORITY

Water

Enhance the functionality, biodiversity and historic features of rivers, streams and ponds

Practical Actions:

- 082. Encourage the creation of new ponds through great-crested newt mitigation schemes, this would also support Pondweeds and stoneworts ◊
- 093. Restore backwaters and backchannels to provide fish spawning and riparian habitats along the river. This would support species such as Barbel ◊
- 094. Restore new quarry sites to a mosaic of wetland habitats
- 095. Restore natural river channels and drainage patterns and create areas of permanently or seasonally wet meadow, reedbed and other typical riverside land uses. This would support species such as the Bittern ◊
- 096. Promote catchment sensitive farming to improve management of riparian vegetation, such as reducing cattle poaching and pollarding willows
- 097. Coordinate Mink control efforts leading to Water Vole reintroductions ◊
- 098. Implement Natural Flood Management to help regulate water quality and water flow, with a particular focus on projects around suitable Nene structures*
- 099. Create and improve habitat along watercourses to help reduce the inflow of surface water carrying nutrient and sediment pollutants whilst also acting as wildlife corridors
- 100. Reintroduce Beaver to the Nene Wetlands Δ
- 101. Consider reintroductions of White-Clawed Crayfish at suitable sites where Signal Crayfish have been controlled ◊
- 102. Enable fish movement by removing barriers and installing fish passes

◊ = Species practical actions Δ = Mapped practical actions



Restoring natural river channels and drainage patterns in the Nene Valley is essential for maintaining healthy aquatic ecosystems and supporting species such as the Bittern. This priority involves creating wet meadows, reedbeds, and other typical riverside habitats that provide crucial resources for wildlife. Stakeholder engagement with the Nene Rivers Trust, Environment Agency and other stakeholders informed the development of these practical actions and provided guidance on how to balance flood management with habitat restoration, ensuring that the valley's rivers continue to support a rich diversity of species.

* Structures are anything that is man made along the river including locks and weirs

Water vole have seen a **47% national** decline since 1998. (Wildlife Trust, 2024)



Ise Valley

The Ise Valley, which includes the River Ise, its tributaries, and floodplains, is an important wildlife corridor running through mostly farmland and urban areas, including the towns of Desborough, Kettering, Barton Seagrave, and Wellingborough. There are also large public parks connected to the river, like the Ise Valley Parklands in Kettering and the area around Swanspool Brook in Wellingborough.

The largest tributary of the River Nene, the River Ise starts near Harrington and flows into the Nene at Wellingborough. Out of the eight water bodies in the Ise, five have a moderate to good ecological status, meaning there are significant natural habitats, especially along the upper parts of the river. Some areas still have natural features like winding curves, shallow riffles, and deep pools, as well as formal water features in historic sites like Boughton House.

Scattered small woods, spinneys, and copses can be found on the ridges and hillsides around the valley. Most of the land in the Ise Valley is used for farming, either for crops or pasture, with some areas preserving traditional ridge and furrow patterns in the upper catchment.

The Ise Valley is also subject to the Ise Valley Strategic Plan (April, 2022). This Plan was developed by the River Ise Partnership and is a large-scale programme to enhance the quality of the Valley's natural environment and help improve its resilience to climate change.

"I like the smell and sounds of nature"
Max Aged 9





Ise Valley

Anticipated Future Pressures in the Ise Valley

- **Urban Expansion:** New residential and commercial developments are being built, which means more natural habitats are being lost.
- **Population Growth:** More people means more pressure on existing green spaces.
- **Lack of Habitat Management:** With fewer mixed farms, there's less hay cutting and grazing, which harms semi-natural grasslands and wetlands.
- **Changes to Waterways:** Physical modifications to rivers and streams are blocking the return of species that used to live there.
- **Pollution:** Wastewater and runoff from farms are increasing phosphate levels in the water, which harms aquatic insects and other wildlife.
- **Invasive Species:** Non-native animals like Mink, Signal Crayfish, and Himalayan Balsam are taking over and harming native wildlife.



KEY HABITATS

Ise Valley



“There used to be hedgehogs everywhere”
 Margaret Aged 89



Important habitats



- Parks and gardens
- Brownfield sites



Important species



- Swift
- Picture-winged Fly
- Hedgehog
- Pipistrelle bat Assemblage

URBAN

The Ise Valley has significant urban areas such as Wellingborough, Kettering and Desborough which each have important green spaces including Swanspool Brook, Wicksteed Park and Desborough Green Space alongside parks, gardens, allotments and churchyards. The area is also experiencing a rise in development, with significant residential and mixed-use projects like Glenvale Park and Stanton Cross emerging on the edge of Wellingborough. These new developments will create several green spaces and corridors that will contribute to supporting local wildlife. Former quarry works now hold a variety of woodland, scrub and calcareous grassland habitats, such as at Finedon Pocket Park, West Lodge Farm and Rothwell Gullet.

Pressures and Constraints

Kettering and Wellingborough have seen a lot of new development recently, especially with large-scale residential schemes such as Glenvale Park and Stanton Cross. This has led to the loss of farmland and natural habitats.

Turning these areas into urban developments means there is less green space, which affects local wildlife and plant life. Wildlife may struggle to find suitable homes and food, and the increased human activity can further disturb these areas.

To address these issues, planning policy and guidance has tried to balance the need for housing with protecting natural spaces. This can and is being done by maintaining and enhancing green corridors, safeguarding priority habitats, and using wildlife-friendly practices in new building projects.



ISE VALLEY PRIORITY

Urban

Protect, restore and increase connectivity of urban habitats that provide multifunctional benefits



Practical Actions:

- 039. Expand network of Protected Wildflowers Verges
- 041. Change landscape management regimes to encourage sustainable practices such as grass 'cut and collect'
- 042. Promote and encourage integrated Sustainable Drainage System networks in new developments
- 043. Expand, restore and enhance existing green spaces and urban Local Wildlife Sites to promote favourable ecological conditions Δ
- 045. Increase the size and quality of the Country Park network by working with landowners to use adjacent land to link into country parks
- 084. Conserve and enhance urban rivers and their riparian boundary recognising their key role in supporting nature in towns and villages

◊ = Species practical actions Δ = Mapped practical actions

Urban habitats in the Ise Valley play a crucial role in supporting biodiversity, mitigating pressures on the Special Protection Area and offering green spaces for the local community as the region becomes more fragmented due to large-scale developments and changes in land use. Protecting and enhancing these habitats ensures they provide multifunctional benefits, such as recreational spaces, wildlife corridors, and climate regulation through increased tree canopy cover. Engagement with the local planning authority and community groups emphasised the importance of these areas. Technical input from the Wildlife Trust and Council officers helped shape practical actions for improving the connectivity and resilience of urban habitats in the Ise Valley.

"I like the bats that fly around in circles at my home."
Jessica Aged 9





Important habitats



- Lowland mixed deciduous woodland
- Wood-pasture and parkland
- Wet Woodland

Important species



- Woodcock

WOODLAND

Small fragments of wet woodland remain along the Valley, which are important for wildlife and help manage floodwaters. Riverside trees are also important, often as mature individuals that line the riverbanks. The Ise valley features some notable wood-pasture and parkland areas, like Boughton House and Wicksteed Park. Overall, the valley has more woodland than the Nene, with large areas of woodland around the upper reaches such as Weekley Hall Woods and Badsaddle, as well as Withmale Park and Bush Walk Woods in the lower areas.

Pressures and Constraints

Woodlands have become sparse and fragmented, with nearby farming degrading plant life. Mature trees have suffered from urban development, safety concerns, and poor management practices. By 1995, nearly half of the original parkland had been lost. While bat populations have generally declined, Brown Long-eared Bats and Noctules have remained stable over the last 20 years.

ISE VALLEY PRIORITY

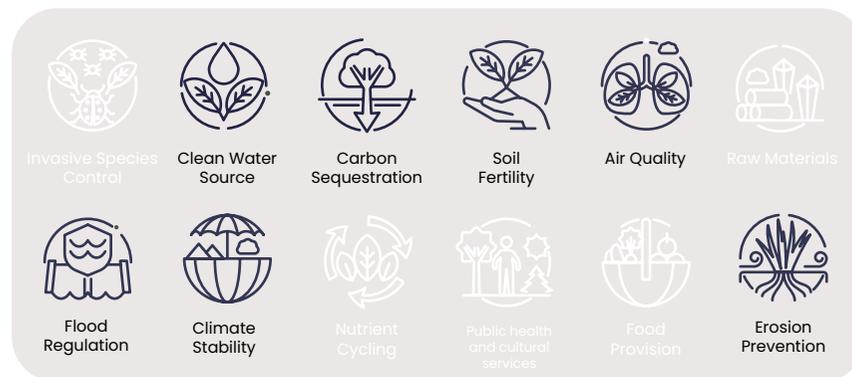
Woodland

Increase wood-pasture and wet woodland opportunities

Practical Actions:

- 047. Enhance resilience of new and existing woodland through the creation of diverse, mixed species stands using tree species best suited to individual site characteristics, and future climate projections
- 051. Restore woodlands impacted by Ash dieback, target management actions to diversify species compositions to aid ecological and climate resilience
- 052. Manage ancient and veteran trees and identify successors to ensure habitat continuity
- 087. Create more transitional environments around and between woodlands to support diverse wildlife and vibrant ecosystems
- 103. Create riparian buffers along watercourses to minimise flooding in the catchment Δ
- 104. Create new woodland in tributaries and headwaters and plant trees at the top of river catchments to hold water and slow the flow across the catchment Δ

◊ = Species practical actions Δ = Mapped practical actions



Wood-pasture and wet woodlands are significant habitats in the Ise Valley, providing important resources for priority species such as the Woodcock. Increasing these habitats through restoration and creation efforts helps to maintain biodiversity and ecological connectivity. Stakeholder engagement, particularly with landowners and the Forestry Commission, guided the identification of suitable areas for these habitats and advised on the specific management practices needed to support the target species and enhance overall ecosystem health.



Theo Aged 9



Important habitats



- Lowland Meadow
- Lowland Calcareous grassland

Important species



- Curlew
- Skylark
- Green-winged Orchid

GRASSLAND

There are several important lowland meadows designated as Local Wildlife Sites around Desborough and other scattered locations throughout the Ise Valley. These meadows are rich in biodiversity, supporting a variety of wildflowers, grasses, and pollinators, and play a crucial role in maintaining the ecological balance of the area. In addition to these Local Wildlife Sites, there are notable Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) such as Barford Meadows and Hardwick Lodge Meadow. Together, these diverse habitats in the Ise Valley form a network of grassland habitats that are vital for local wildlife and contribute significantly to the wider network of priority habitats.

Pressures and Constraints

Many semi-natural habitats have been lost to farming and development, with lowland fen now limited to small, isolated patches. Recently, projects like Revital-ISE and the Nene Valley Nature Improvement Area have started to restore these habitats. The Revital-ISE project (2008-2014) improved biodiversity by enhancing river and wetland environments, removing barriers to fish movement, and restoring floodplains.

ISE VALLEY PRIORITY

Grassland

Protect, manage and expand the network of grassland areas

Practical Actions:

- 066. Survey and bring statutory and non-statutory grassland sites into positive management
- 068. Improve management of disused railways
- 071. Create wet grassland habitats outside of the SPA to buffer and link existing habitats as well as provide less disturbed habitat to support species such as the Curlew Δ \diamond

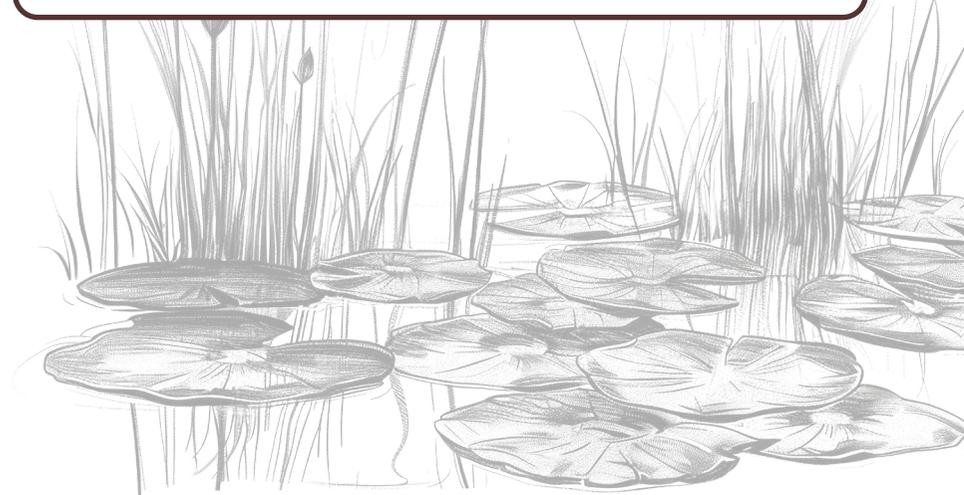
\diamond = Species practical actions Δ = Mapped practical actions

What is Wet Grassland Habitat?

Wet grassland is a type of floodplain habitat that includes species-rich meadows and grazed pastures in lowlands, as well as less diverse grazing marshes in floodplains.



Grasslands in the Ise Valley are important for supporting a wide variety of species, including pollinators and ground-nesting birds. Expanding and managing these grasslands is essential for maintaining the ecological integrity of the valley. Local stakeholders, including farmers and the Wildlife Trust, provided valuable insights into the best practices for grassland management and contributed to the development of practical actions that enhance connectivity between grasslands and other habitats, supporting species diversity and resilience.





Important habitats



- Hedgerows
- Arable Field Margins

Important species



- Barn Owl
- Turtle Dove
- Arable plant assemblage
- Hedgerow bat assemblage
- Harvest Mouse

FARMLAND

This is an area of mixed farming with arable dominating the larger flatter areas of land, whilst pasture is more dominant on the slopes of the many minor valleys and close to settlements. Arable field margins can support rare plants, crop-nesting bird species and birds which feed in arable fields and a variety of bumblebee species. Ancient hedgerows are often found along parish boundaries, streams and ancient roads and tracks forming wildlife corridors as well as important habitats in their own right. As with the Nene Valley character area, many of the arable fields in the Ise Valley act as functionally linked land; given their proximity to the Nene Valley Special Protection Area and providing critical support to the ecological or behavioural functions of priority species.

Pressures and Constraints

Changes in land use are putting the area’s historic ridge and furrow fields at risk. These ancient farming patterns, which create distinctive ridges and furrows in the soil, are being affected by new developments and modern farming practices.

Over the past decade, the number of Barn Owls in the East Midlands has decreased. Barn Owls rely on old, undisturbed farmland for hunting and nesting, so changes in land use can be particularly harmful to them. On a more positive note, Yellowhammer populations have remained stable, meaning their numbers haven’t changed much. Additionally, Skylark numbers have seen a slight increase, which suggests that some aspects of their habitat are still supportive.

Protecting these historic fields and maintaining suitable habitats for wildlife is important to ensure the survival of species like Barn Owls while supporting the overall health of the ecosystem.

ISE VALLEY PRIORITY

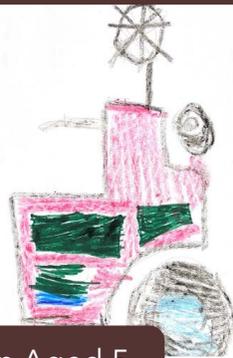
Farmland

Maintain, restore and create priority habitats through effective engagement with farmers and landowners

Practical Actions:

- 089. Identify, protect and manage key areas of functionally linked land Δ
- 090. Promote stewardship options such as improved riparian habitat management along watercourses and the integration of fallow in crop rotation
- 091. Promote soil conservation practices that enhance fertility, reduce soil erosion, and increase carbon sequestration
- 105. Review existing pattern of coverts and linear planting along watercourses and encourage new tree planting around these areas
- 106. Encourage best farming practices such as introducing winter cereal crops into planned rotation to improve soil structure and provide opportunities for Golden Plover to forage (within a 10km buffer of the Special Protection Area) \diamond

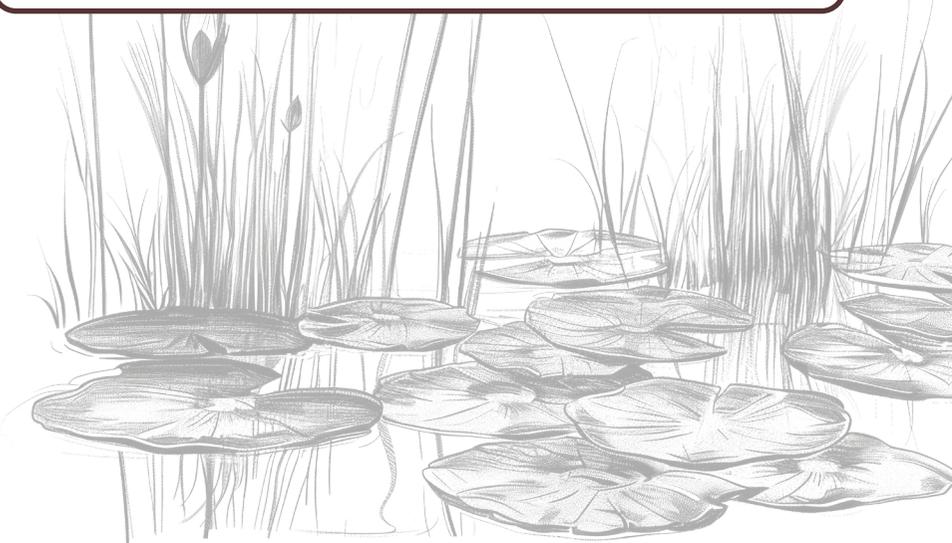
\diamond = Species practical actions Δ = Mapped practical actions



Arran Aged 5

Invasive Species Control	Clean Water Source	Carbon Sequestration	Soil Fertility	Air Quality	Raw Materials
Flood Regulation	Climate Stability	Nutrient Cycling	Public health and cultural services	Food Provision	Erosion Prevention

Effective engagement with farmers and landowners is essential for maintaining, restoring, and creating priority habitats in the Ise Valley. This priority focuses on fostering strong partnerships to implement conservation practices that benefit biodiversity and agricultural productivity. Stakeholder feedback emphasised the need for collaborative approaches and provided guidance on habitat management and restoration techniques. These efforts aim to align conservation goals with land management practices, ensuring the sustainability of the Valley's natural resources.





Important habitats



- Rivers
- Grazing marsh, fen and reedbed
- Pond

Important species



- Lapwing & Golden Plover
- Redshank & Snipe
- Black-poplar
- Osprey
- Common Tern
- Barbel
- Pondweeds & stoneworts
- European Water Vole
- White-clawed Crayfish
- Grayling

WATER

The river is a crucial wildlife corridor and habitat. There are historical records of Water Vole, particularly along some of the tributaries and otter have recolonised the valley. The river is home to twelve fish species, including Bullhead and Stone Loach. A roughly 4km stretch of the Ise is designated as SSSI as the best example in the county of a lowland river on clay, displaying a variety of semi-natural features, a rich invertebrate fauna and historical populations of White Clawed Crayfish and Grayling. Lowland fen was once widespread in the valley but now it's only found in small areas like Southfield Farm Marsh SSSI. Open water areas are mostly in formal settings like Boughton House, Wicksteed Park, and Cransley Reservoir.

Pressures and Constraints

The River Ise has been heavily modified, especially around Boughton House and Wicksteed Park, where it was straightened and deepened to reduce flooding. This has disconnected the river from its floodplain. Water Vole numbers have dropped 47% nationally since 1998, with only a few recent sightings in the Ise. Otters have returned to most watercourses, but Grayling, once found only in the Ise in Northamptonshire, haven't been seen since around 2000. The native, White-Clawed Crayfish population is uncertain, while the invasive American Signal Crayfish is spreading.

Great Crested Newts have declined sharply over the last 40 years, despite legal protections. Habitat loss remains their biggest threat.



ISE VALLEY PRIORITY

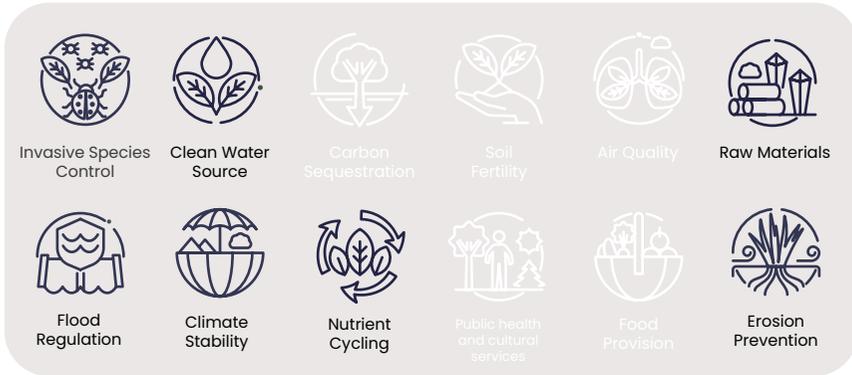
Water

Improve the ecological status of the watercourses through an integrated sensitive approach

Practical Actions:

- 094. Restore new quarry sites to a mosaic of wetland habitats.
- 096. Promote catchment sensitive farming to improve management of riparian vegetation, such as reducing cattle poaching and pollarding willows
- 097. Coordinate Mink control efforts leading to Water Vole reintroductions ◊
- 099. Create and improve habitat along water courses to help reduce the inflow of surface water carrying nutrient and sediment pollutants whilst also acting as wildlife corridors
- 101. Consider reintroductions of White-clawed Crayfish at suitable sites where Signal Crayfish have been controlled ◊
- 102. Enable fish movement by removing barriers and installing fish passes
- 107. Introduce large woody materials into the river channel to restore habitat diversity and help vegetation to mature along the river
- 108. Implement Natural Flood Management to help regulate water quality and water flow, with a particular focus on projects in the Slade Brook and Upper Ise catchments and around suitable Ise structures* in the wider area.
- 109. Research the potential for future reintroduction of Grayling in historical locations on the Ise ◊

◊ = Species practical actions Δ = Mapped practical actions



Improving the ecological status of the River Ise is a key priority, focusing on restoring natural processes and enhancing habitat quality. This includes exploring the potential reintroduction of Grayling, a species historically found in the Ise Valley, and White-clawed Crayfish, a native species that has declined due to competition and disease from the invasive Signal Crayfish. Stakeholder engagement, including input from the Environment Agency and Wildlife Trust, informed the development of an integrated approach to river management that balances ecological goals with the needs of local communities and landowners, ensuring that the river ecosystem remains healthy and resilient.

* Structures are anything that is man made along the river including locks and weirs

White-clawed Crayfish can be found in shallow water with a rocky substrate and soft banks for burrows



Risks and Enablers



There are several uncertainties and risks that could affect the implementation of this strategy in North Northamptonshire. Key issues include the significant impact of climate change, recreational pressures on the Special Protection Area and uncertainties about future policies, such as planning, regulation, environmental land management, farm incentives, and funding in the post-pandemic recovery. The following enablers are essential for local success:

- **Community Engagement and Equity:** Get the local community involved in nature recovery efforts, including those from marginalised or less represented groups. Make sure everyone benefits from conservation work and has a say in the decisions being made.
- **Partnerships and Collaboration:** Team up with local governments, businesses, non-profits, and residents. By working together, you can combine resources and expertise to make conservation projects more effective.
- **Education and Capacity Building:** Focus on teaching people about the environment and raising public awareness. Help individuals and communities learn how to get involved in conservation efforts and care for nature.
- **Long-term Planning and Adaptation:** Make plans that look far into the future, taking climate change into account. Make use of strategies such as the North Northamptonshire Big 50 that can support the delivery of environmental and climate actions.
- **Recreational Pressures on Protected Areas:** Consider the impact of recreational activities on the Special Protection Area (SPA). Ensure that these activities do not harm wildlife or disrupt habitats and find ways to balance public enjoyment with conservation needs.
- **Anticipate Future Pressures:** Think ahead about factors that might impact wildlife and habitats, such as climate change and new developments like housing and infrastructure. Be prepared for these challenges to protect and manage natural areas effectively.



Achieving our Vision



By achieving the vision outlined in the North Northamptonshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy, we align with the National Environmental Objectives set out in the government's 25-year Environment Plan, creating a future where nature thrives, benefiting both wildlife and the communities that rely on it. As part of the national effort to restore or create over 500,000 hectares of wildlife-rich habitat outside protected sites by 2042, we will restore and connect vital habitats through wildlife corridors. This will allow biodiversity to flourish and enable species to better adapt to environmental changes. Cleaner rivers and healthier wetlands, as emphasized in the Plan's focus on improving water quality and availability, will support richer ecosystems, help manage flooding, and play a crucial role in tackling climate change.

Sustainable farming will ensure a balance between producing food and protecting the environment, contributing to improved soil health, reduced emissions, and enhanced biodiversity. Local farmers will continue to care for the land using practices that not only support this recovery but also align with national priorities such as the river and farm network. This approach demonstrates that farming and nature can work together, creating a resilient and self-sustaining environment.

Getting the community involved will be essential in driving this transformation. Encouraging local people to engage with nature and take part in its protection will build a sense of shared responsibility. This will also help people better understand the importance of biodiversity to the planet and our own well-being. By improving access to nature, both physically and in terms of knowledge, we aim to inspire more people to care for the environment and strengthen their connection with the natural world.

By delivering on our priorities and taking practical action, we will contribute to the national goal of enhancing nature across the UK, ensuring that North Northamptonshire is not only preserved but expanded, improved, and better connected. Following the Lawton Principles, we will make nature "bigger, better, and more joined up", ensuring that future generations can enjoy a rich, diverse, and resilient landscape. With support from all stakeholders, we can lead the way in nature recovery, in line with the 25-year Environment Plan, and ensure a sustainable future for everyone.



25%
increase in areas for
Nature*

*based on all mapped practical actions being provided.



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**"Nature will love
you back if you
look after it"**

Stuart Aged 85



North
Northamptonshire
Together with Nature

**"Its fun and
sometimes a bit messy
but that's what makes
it so amazing, if we
didn't have nature the
world would just be
boring."**

Isla Aged 10



Lennox age 7