

Nene Valley Nature Improvement Area – 2nd Year Delivery

Objective 1: planning and development

Much of the planning work in the Nene Valley NIA has to date focused on green infrastructure and accessible natural greenspace. A complete register has been compiled of accessible natural areas in and around the NIA, and from this an analysis of residents' access to nature under Natural England's Accessible Natural Greenspace Standard (ANGSt). The Biodiversity SPD for North Northamptonshire (i.e. Wellingborough, Kettering, Corby and East Northamptonshire) has been amended to include the NIA. Engagement with Neighbourhood planning settlements in the NIA has also commenced.

A key priority for the near future is to complete the Green Infrastructure Delivery Plan for the upcoming North Northamptonshire Core Strategy inspection. The report and accompanying list of projects for Community Infrastructure Levy and s.106 receipts will form part of the evidence base for the inspection. This will lead to a long-term source of income for projects in the NIA. Over the next year work will continue on engaging with the Northampton Waterside Enterprise Zone and major sustainable urban extensions to ensure positive outcomes for the NIA. An important element of this work will be outreach to planning officers in all nine local authorities regarding the NIA, its objectives and how planning can contribute.

Objective 2: access and engagement

Natural England's Condition Assessment of the Upper Nene Valley Gravel Pits SPA and shows that many units are in unfavourable condition due to the impacts of inappropriate access. WeBS counts and Breeding Bird surveys also show a decline in bird numbers attributable to these impacts. The development strategies show that the pressure on suitable Green Infrastructure is going to increase considerably making these issues even more acute. A visitor access study has been produced to quantify where people go in the NIA and assess their impact on the natural environment.

The Nene Valley is one of 3 NIAs to be awarded support through the Sciencewise public dialogue project, and will be working with specialists to engage the local communities in the work of the NIA. A community panel has been established at Northampton Washland and is proving an effective vehicle for engaging all site user groups in planning the future management of access on the site.

Objective 3: river restoration

Many waterbodies in the Nene catchment are failing to meet the ecological standards required by the Water Framework Directive. One of the main purposes of this objective is to find out why each waterbody is failing, initially by "desk study" and now by walking the rivers. Once a waterbody assessment is complete and problems identified, projects are being developed to address the issues. Typical problems are siltation of the riverbed, disconnection of the river from its floodplain (by the raising of floodbanks), channelisation (straightening of the river) which cuts off meanders that would otherwise diversify habitats, and habitat discontinuity caused by barriers such as weirs. Around 80% of the river Nene has now been walked and assessed, and projects have been submitted for consideration along much of this length.

One enhancement project is already complete at Duston, Northampton, where a 1.1km-long stretch of the River Nene is badly impacted by a weir, which causes sedimentation of the river, inhibits natural processes such as erosion and deposition, prevents fish movement and increases the risk of flooding.

Objective 4: land management

The NIA Land Advisor has been visiting landowners in the Nene Valley, assessing their land and preparing applications for Higher Level Schemes (HLS). The EU Common Agricultural Policy is undergoing reform, and we anticipate a period where no funding for HLS will be available. Consequently there has been a big push to get as many farms in the Nene Valley as possible into a scheme. Since the start of the NIA 12 HLS agreements have been produced, and 3 more are underway. Over 1,500ha of land has come into HLS, some highlights include:

- 10ha of species rich grassland restoration at Burton Latimer
- 10ha of species rich grassland restoration at Newton
- 2.5ha of fen restoration at Litchborough
- 20ha arable reversion to grassland at Litchborough for resource protection
- Options for farmland birds at Brigstock over 40ha of arable land
- 20ha of floodplain grazing marsh restoration for waders and waterfowl at Irthlingborough
- 8ha of floodplain meadow restoration at Denford
- 3ha of floodplain meadow and 7ha parkland restoration at Wicksteed

Objective 5: ecosystem services

The aim of the current phase of the project is to map and model biodiversity and ecosystem services across the Nene Valley. This work is progressing well. We have collected a vast amount of biodiversity data from numerous different sources. Meanwhile we have collected multiple data sets and base maps to enable us to model ecosystem service provision. We are currently testing an ecosystem service mapping tool called EcoServ, developed by the Durham Wildlife Trust, but we are also investigating other off-the-shelf tools as well as developing our own bespoke methodology. We are now at the stage of just starting to produce our first maps, and investigating the overlap between ecosystem services and biodiversity. A small Payments for Ecosystem Services pilot is being implemented around Pitsford Reservoir to try and reduce levels of pesticides in the drinking water reservoir.

<http://www.wildlifebcn.org/thenenevalley/nia>

