

# Nene Valley Year 1 summary

---

## Overall

The Nene Valley NIA suffers from a complex set of issues. A strong partnership has been developed and is delivering effectively against 5 key objectives. Highlights from 2012-13 include:

- Accessible Natural Green Space register compiled and analysis of provision across the NIA completed.
- Biodiversity SPD for North Northamptonshire updated to include reference to NIA.
- Neighbourhood planning settlements in the NIA engaged.
- NIA projects developed for inclusion in North Northamptonshire Green Infrastructure Delivery Plan for future CIL and s.106 funding.
- 78 hours of visitor survey work in the Nene Valley completed, 90 more hours planned.
- Online survey about community awareness and access to the NIA developed and received 200 responses.
- Volunteers recruited and trained to carry out breeding bird surveys in the SPA.
- Desk study of watercourses in the NIA concludes that siltation of the riverbed, disconnection of the river from its floodplain, channelisation and habitat discontinuity caused by barriers are main issues to address.
- Restoration project underway at Duston Mill Channel in Northampton to improve habitat along 1.1km of the river Nene.
- 1,500ha of farmland to come into HLS in 2012-13. At least 73ha of priority habitat will be created and restored through these schemes.
- Ecological data for the NIA has been collated to inform assessment of ecosystem service provision.
- New mapping tool being trialled to map provision and demand of ecosystem services, with ultimate ambition of developing markets for payments of ecosystem services.

## 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 is being produced to quantify where people go in the NIA and assess their impact on the natural environment. 78 hours of visitor survey work have been carried out at 19 survey locations. Another 90 hours of visitor interviews have been scheduled. A variety of visitors have been interviewed, from dog walkers, walkers and cyclists, to those specifically visiting the sites for a particular wildlife interest or just to enjoy the scenery.

An online survey has been established to supplement on-site surveys and has so far received 200 responses. 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.

### **Objective 3 – river restoration**

This objective to improve the ecological status of the river and enhance ecosystem service provision is led by the River Restoration Adviser (RRA). 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 will be 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. Another key role of the RRA is to work with the NIA Land Adviser (Objective 4) to tackle diffuse pollution from agriculture.

One enhancement project is already progressing 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**

Through effective engagement with farmers and landowners we will maintain, restore and create priority habitats and implement sustainable land management practices to strengthen the ecological network.

The NIA Land Adviser 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 before the final deadline later this year. Since the start of the NIA 3 farms have signed agreements, 2 have been submitted, 2 are in progress, 5 more are due to be started soon, and 1 is awaiting the go ahead from Natural England. Over 1,500ha of land are 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**

Ecosystem services are the benefits that people derive from the natural environment and are at the heart of the Nene Valley NIA project. We are attempting to gain a clear understanding of the ecosystem services provided by the Nene Valley NIA, their health, the biodiversity thresholds for their provision and how people and the economy depend on them. Our overall goal is to investigate the potential to market the ecosystem services provided by the Nene Valley, and to ensure that ecosystem services have strong local value, which is integrated into planning, design and decision making.

The aim of the first 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.