



## NEWSLETTER WINTER/SPRING 2014

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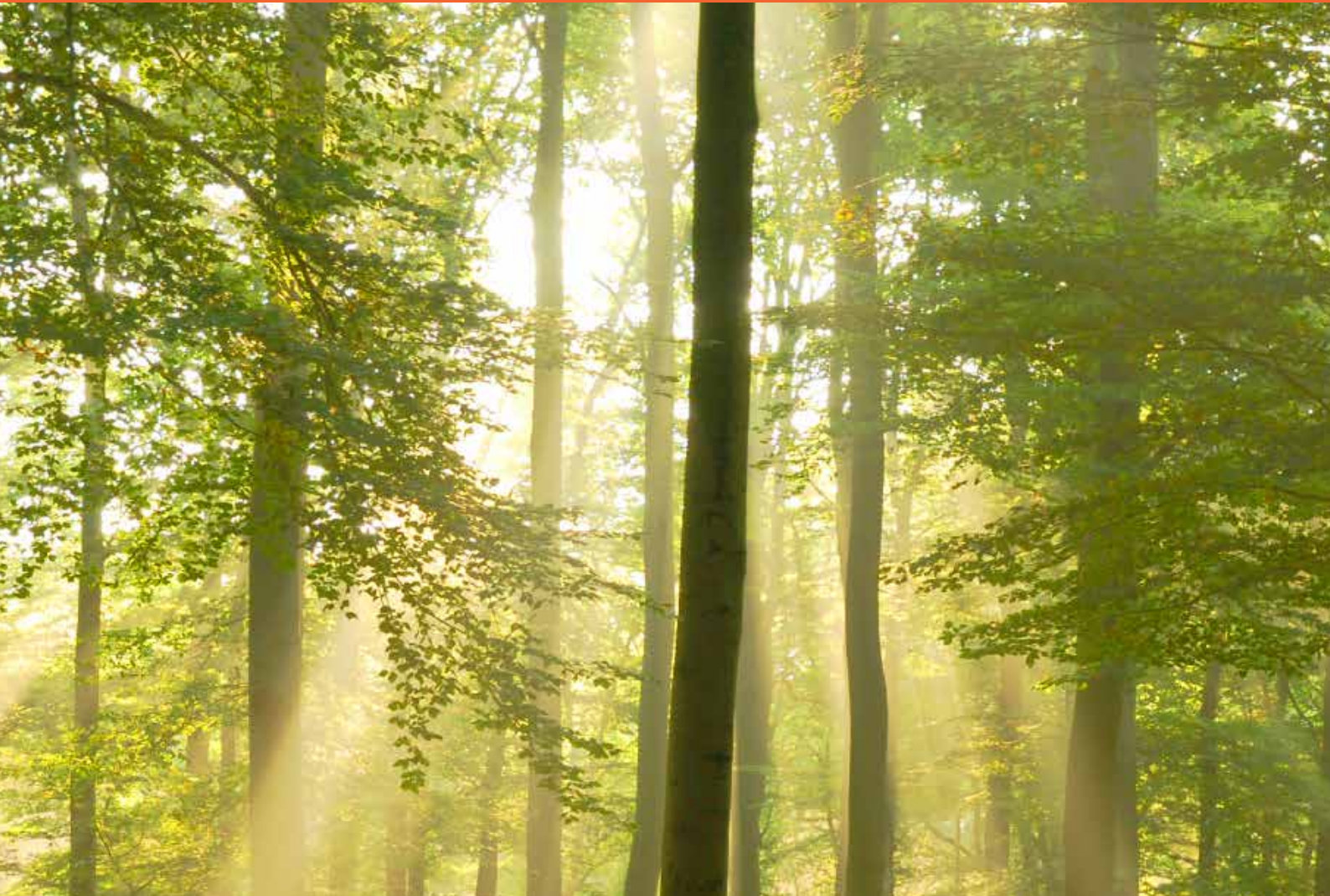
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RIVER NENE REGIONAL PARK  
**INSPIRED SPACES**



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## **RNRP Achievements**

- ✓ **Northampton Marina**
- ✓ **Nene Valley Strategic Plan**
- ✓ **Environmental Character & Green Infrastructure Suite**
- ✓ **Tree Top canopy walk, Salcey Forest**
- ✓ **Stanwick Lakes**
- ✓ **Top Lodge, Fineshade Wood Nr Corby**
- ✓ **Connecting People & Places – Breathing Spaces**
- ✓ **Northampton Parks**

**More information available at: [www.riverneneregionalpark.org](http://www.riverneneregionalpark.org)**





## Introduction

I would like to begin by offering a warm welcome to the new Directors joining our Board in the last few weeks. John Brown from the Woodland Trust, Oliver Burke from the Wildlife Trust and Simon Mutsaers from Groundwork Northamptonshire (delivery partners). Karen Britton from East Northamptonshire Council (representing our Stakeholder Steering Group). Councillor Michael Clarke from Northamptonshire County Council, Councillor Glenvil Greenwood-Smith from ENC and Amanda Pearce who is representing the single voice of DEFRA as an observer. We are very much looking forward to working with all of you.

While the late Autumn and Winter months may be considered by many to be a quiet time of the year that hasn't been the case at RNRP. As you can see from the updates within this newsletter the team has been busy on several fronts from river improvement, to land stewardship, woodland creation and an innovative fundraiser.

Looking forward through 2014 and beyond we are firmly focused on maintaining our commitment to the Local Nature Partnership, delivering outcomes for the Nature Improvement Area with our partners there and to the establishment of the Nene Catchment Partnership to drive implementation of our soon to be completed Integrated Catchment Management Plan.

It is our hope, that through the existing Local Nature Partnership and the Catchment Partnership we can arrive at a collaborative plan for the natural environment in our area with priorities agreed between all partners and that this plan will enable us to source funding for coordinated implementation from the many pots available.

Looking to the future of the Nene Valley NIA, May will see the submission of a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund for a Landscape Partnership Project. The development of this bid is being accomplished through a series of workshops with project partners, leading to some excellent opportunities for collaboration and partnership working moving forward. We look forward to providing an update on this in the next newsletter.

Until then I would like to wish you all the very best for this New Year and look forward to connecting and working with all of you over the coming months.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kathryn Hardcastle', written in a cursive style.

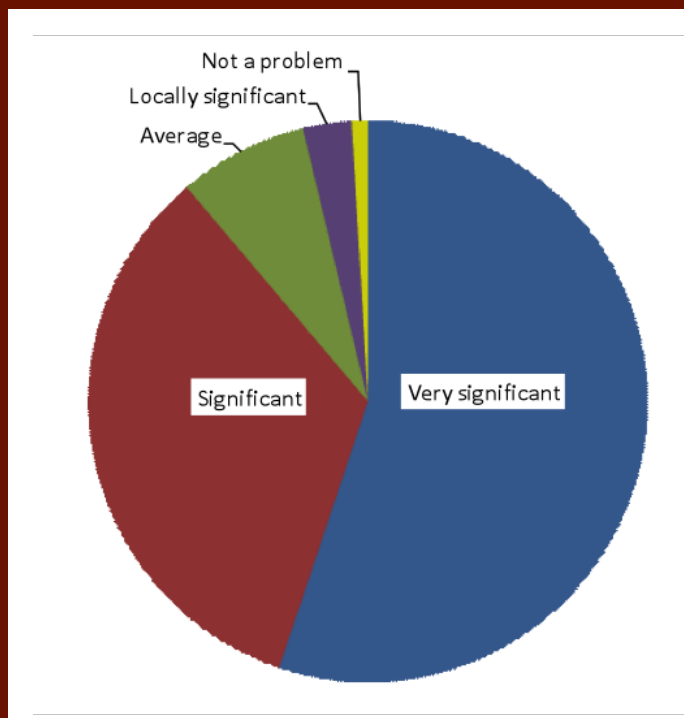
**Kathryn Hardcastle**  
**Tel: 01604 366331**  
**Email: [khardcastle@northamptonshire.gov.uk](mailto:khardcastle@northamptonshire.gov.uk)**

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## Nene Integrated Catchment Management Plan

An extensive public consultation regarding the draft Catchment Management Plan was completed in December. This included a web-based survey, direct contact with a wide range of organisations and 3 public open days organised across the valley. Some 200 responses have been received providing a picture of how issues within the catchment are viewed as well as a wealth of issues and projects which can be included in the new plan.

### Pollution from Urban Areas



The responses from the general public, local communities and many private and public bodies show clearly that there is a high level of awareness and concern regarding the issues. The chart shows the response to the question on pollution from urban areas, clearly the majority of responses consider it a significant issue for the Nene. There was a very similar response to questions across the range of issues including abstraction, alien species and access.

The consultation provided an opportunity to improve links with many groups who have a keen interest in the catchment particularly parish councils and amenity groups. This has led to the development of a number of local projects which can be linked with the various Water Framework Directive Urban Studies, the walkovers undertaken by Simon Whitton (River Restoration Officer) and local authority area strategies to deliver large-scale coordinated projects which can address a number of objectives of the catchment plan.

Following from the consultation we have arranged a number of workshops and meetings to explore the issues which have been raised in more detail and to provide greater opportunities for an input into the next edition of the catchment plan. The next version will be completed in the next few months.

For further information please contact Dr Simon Newell: Tel: 01604 367325 Email: [snewell@northamptonshire.gov.uk](mailto:snewell@northamptonshire.gov.uk)



From left to right: Simon Newell - RNRP, Georgina Forbes - Wildlife Trust, Viktor Tzikas - RNRP



## Forests for Life – Rockingham



Can you see the wood **from the trees?**  
 £6000-£8000 per hectare funding for landowners to create woodland.



## Forests for Life **Rockingham**

You will all recall our promotions drive for the Forests for Life project that we undertook in the Autumn in the hope of securing some suitable land for the purposes of woodland creation in the area of the ancient Rockingham Forest.

While we received quite high levels of interest it has been difficult to secure land for planting this season. Some of the interested landholders this year are not yet in ownership of the land nominated for planting but are hopeful to participate next winter. Several others did not have sites that met with the criteria we had established for this round of activity although we will work with them to explore other opportunities in the future.

One site looks set to progress to planting in early March. The site is close to Kettering. The Woodland Trust are supporting the delivery of that planting and it will include a community planting day hosted and arranged by our partners the Groundwork Trust. Keep an eye on the local media for updates as we are hoping to attract some media attention around this planting in the hope of raising our profile and that of this project.

**For further information please contact Kathryn Hardcastle:**  
**Tel: 01604 366331 Email: [khardcastle@northamptonshire.gov.uk](mailto:khardcastle@northamptonshire.gov.uk)**

**What is the Forests for Life, Rockingham Forest Area?**

The Rockingham Forest was originally established as a Royal Hunting Forest by William the Conqueror in the 11th century and initially covered much of Northamptonshire. However, pressure from agriculture and development resulted in much of the ancient forest being felled, leading to widespread habitat destruction and fragmentation. This had a disastrous impact upon a variety of species including butterflies, such as the now extinct Dusky Tiger butterfly, as well as birds and mammals.

To address the issue of woodland fragmentation across Northamptonshire, the North Northamptonshire Regional Park (NORP) in partnership with the Woodland Trust and Groundwork Northamptonshire has funded for landowners to create woodland where it meets the following priorities:

- Protects and enhances existing ancient woodland through management and buffering.
- Buffers or increases the size of existing ancient woodland.
- Releases woodland on previously wooded sites, particularly former ancient woodland sites.
- Addresses fragmentation by creating connections between existing woodland.



**How can you get involved?**

If you have land in the Forests for Life, Rockingham Forest Area and are interested in planting trees on it then we would like to speak to you!

We can support you from start to finish providing you with:

- Expert advice on planning and designing your woodland.
- Financial support with grants of between **£3000-£8000 per hectare** to help with purchasing, planting and initial maintenance of trees. (These grant amounts will be based on the extent to which a site meets the criteria listed above).
- We can organise and oversee community planting projects for your site.

**What criteria do you need to meet?**

- Your site must fall within the Forests for Life, Rockingham Forest Area.
- Your site must be suitable for planting trees. You should not plant on wetlands, chalk grassland, grassland that has never been ploughed or broadcast. We can help you check this if you're unsure.
- Ideally we want to select sites that either increase the connectivity of the remaining blocks of ancient woodland in the Rockingham Forest, or buffer them from existing agricultural or development activity. As a result sites will be prioritised for planting once applications have been received.
- An intended minimum planting density of 1,000 trees per hectare.
- We can only support the planting of native tree species.

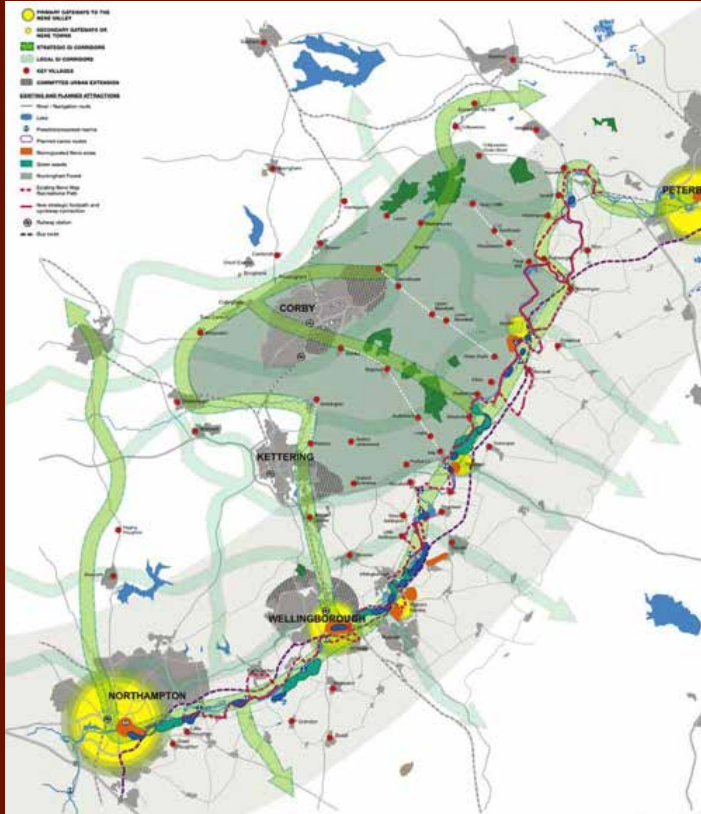
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## Revital-ISE Project

It is with sadness that I announce here the departure of our Revital-Ise Project Officer. While Laura thoroughly enjoyed her responsibilities with RNRP her first love is working within the agricultural community and when she was offered the opportunity to move back into that arena the temptation was simply too great. We are sorry to lose Laura and wish her all the best with her future endeavours.

With regard to the Revital-ISE Project, with Laura departing this offered us, along with our funders, the opportunity to undertake a review of the project. This is being carried out by a third party independent consultant who will be considering the achievements and progress of the project over its life and helping us map a way forward for this initiative. The landscape around river management is changing at the moment with central government initiatives such as the Catchment Based Approach and the soon to be completed Integrated Catchment Management Plan for the Nene so we cannot predict what may happen but will of course keep you all updated as decisions are made.

**For further information please contact Kathryn Hardcastle**  
**Tel: 01604 366331**  
**Email: [khardcastle@northamptonshire.gov.uk](mailto:khardcastle@northamptonshire.gov.uk)**



## Update on Northampton Washlands

There has been a lot of activity at the Northampton Washlands over the last few weeks with the installation of some new signage. These have been designed to improve the experience of visiting the site for users by encouraging good behaviour and providing interpretation of the site. In the near future a short section of railings will also be installed to remind people to remain on the embankment rather than wandering down into the basin itself where they may disturb wildlife and livestock. This work was achieved with a small grant from Natural England.

As well sign installation there were also some surveys and interviews conducted at the site during a recruitment process for the new Washlands Community Panel. This is an initiative under the Nature Improvement Area who, with funding from Science Wise, are aiming to involve community members in making decisions about site management at three sites within the Nature Improvement Area.

The panel, composed of local residents and site users as well as the landholder and professional experts, have met twice with two more meetings planned for February. They have been discussing issues at the site associated with its current management and the impacts (both positive and negative) of the various activities that take place there. They have written a vision statement for the site and it is hoped that, over the next two meetings, they will develop a simple management plan for the site.





## Nene Valley Nature Improvement Area River Restoration Adviser

Simon Whitton, the River Restoration Adviser, is walking the rivers within the boundaries of the Nene Valley Nature Improvement Area (NIA), which runs from Daventry to Peterborough, in order to assess their habitats and biodiversity and to help them achieve the requirements of the Water Framework Directive, important European legislation. Approximately 82% of the River Nene itself has been completed (i.e. from Kislingbury to Thorpe Waterville and several sections from there to Peterborough) and detailed proposals for improving the habitats assessed are being compiled. It was hoped that we would have finished walking the main river by the end of 2013, but that hasn't happened for a variety of reasons, not least due to developing and managing habitat enhancement projects (see below). It is anticipated that the walkovers will be completed by the end of March, whereupon assessment of the tributaries will commence.

Observations and ideas for improvement are also being passed to Heather Webb, the NIA's Natural Development Officer, who is using them to inform her responses to planning applications: when she receives a proposal for a new development, she checks to see what suggestions have been made in the nearby area. For example, one development is close to a weir where it has been identified that a fishpass ought to be fitted. Heather has passed this suggestion to the local planning department, who are now considering adding a condition to the permission so that the developer must also build the fishpass, as part of an environmental enhancement to their scheme.

The habitat improvement project on the River Nene at Duston Mill, Northampton, was completed in October 2013. The work was to involve re-sculpting the banks of approximately 450 m of the river (thereby increasing water-conveyance and reducing flood risk to nearby properties), and using the excavated material to create underwater ledges, generally 3 m wide, in several locations in order to form wetland areas, diversifying the in-river habitats. Unfortunately, however, the Environment Agency, who managed the project on behalf of the NIA, explained that the depth of the water meant that access for the contractor was difficult, so they could only narrow the river by 1 m on average. Furthermore, the water level kept fluctuating and they were unable to accurately gauge the "normal" level, so the narrowing has taken place above water, with no underwater ledges created. Whilst the end result isn't what we had planned, there will still be environmental benefits and the landscaping was successful, so flood risk is slightly decreased in the area.



*A section of the River Nene that has been re-landscaped and narrowed at Duston Mill. Vegetation will soon appear on the bare bank.*

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*A panoramic view of the new backwater at Rushton, showing its connection to the River Ise.*

In November 2013 we completed the excavation of a new 45 m-long backwater on the River Ise at Rushton near Kettering (part of the Revital-ISE project), which will provide a spawning and refuge area for fish. (The benefits of backwaters are explained further in a section below.) To create the backwater, we removed 170 m<sup>3</sup> of soil from the route of a former meander, the natural course of the river before it was straightened in the 1860s when the nearby railway was built. The bed of the backwater is generally at the same level as the bed of the river, but it gently slopes up at the far end, providing a wetland area that will support a wide range of plants and invertebrates.

One of the conditions applied to our Planning Permission for this £23k Defra-funded project was that we had to have an archaeologist on site during the excavation works due to the Roman and Saxon heritage of the area. This was just as well, as we unearthed four early Anglo-Saxon graves, complete with skeletons, which laid only 30 cm below ground level. Although this brought about a slight delay in the completion of the works, it has generated some interest in the local media.



*Photograph © Northamptonshire Archaeology*

*Remains of pottery (left) finger bone (right)  
skull fragments (below)*



*Anglo Saxon brooch*

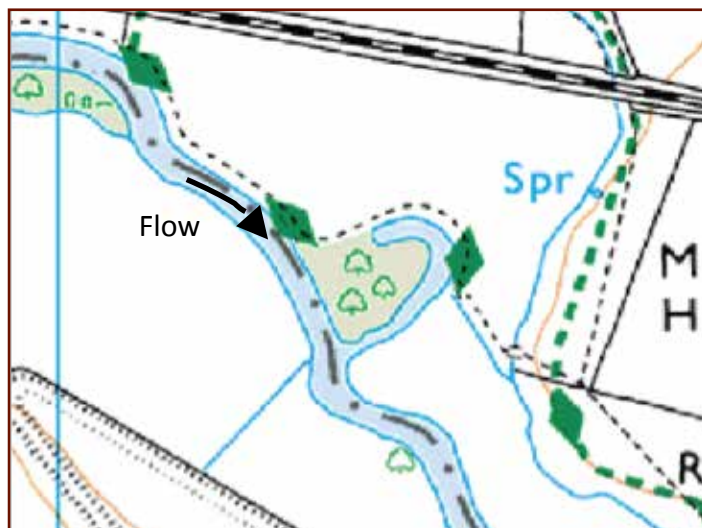
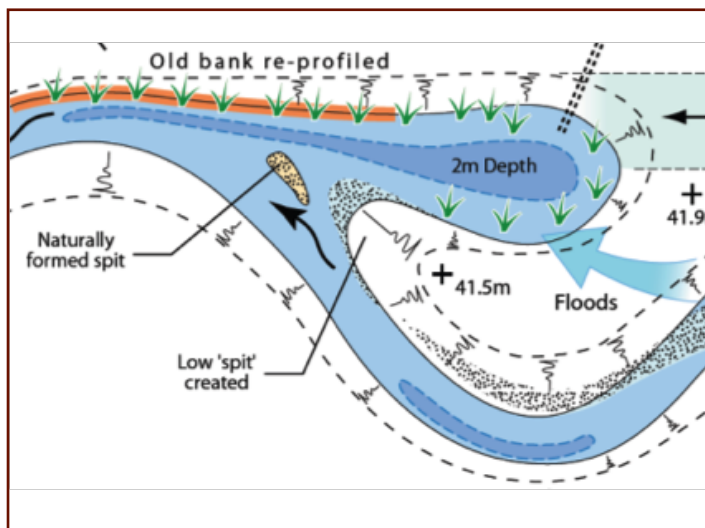
Additional project ideas are also being discussed with two major landowners at the eastern end of the NIA. It is early days, however, and we hope to provide more details in the next newsletter.

In each newsletter, we aim to highlight a different key issue for rivers and their habitats. On the back of our completed project at Rushton, it seems appropriate to explain the benefits that backwaters provide to a river and its biodiversity. A backwater is a dead-ended area of water attached to a river (a "backchannel" is a secondary channel attached at both its ends to the main river). They are usually parts of old meanders, the former course of the river. Many rivers were straightened in the 20th century, mainly to make them more efficient as drainage channels, but this usually left the old meanders dry and no longer attached to the river. Furthermore, most backwaters have been filled in, either by farmers to increase the size of their fields (and make them more efficient for food production) or by developers to make their plots larger. They are now quite rare habitats.



A backwater will usually have shallow margins, providing a variety of habitats to support a range of plants and invertebrates that you may not find in a deep, flowing river. Furthermore, backwaters provide important areas for fish, especially as spawning sites and as refuges from fast-flowing water in times of flood. Larger fish usually have the power and strength to swim against the high flows, but juveniles don't, so they are washed downstream and often killed. Fish surveys often find that there are many large, old adult fish in a river, but few juveniles. The problem is that as these adults die, the numbers of juveniles are not high enough to replace them – so overall populations are decreasing. This is of course a simplification, but the absence of backwaters doesn't help.

Like all natural features, backwaters come in a variety of shapes and sizes. The size they can be recreated of course depends on the space (and money!) available, but, generally, the bigger the better, with varying depths, which will provide varying habitats. Ideally, any new backwater will point back upstream (see the examples below), otherwise it is likely to silt up quickly, rendering it useless for fish in the river, though it may then become a wetland. Much of a backwater is dry at "normal" river levels, but it will fill up as flows in the river increase. They therefore provide slightly more capacity for floodwater, reducing the risk of flooding downstream, albeit by a small amount, so a suite of new backwaters could help to protect urban areas from flooding.



*Examples of backwaters. The example on the left is manmade, following the re-meandering of a previously straightened river. The example on the right is a remnant part of the watercourse, though is likely to have become a backwater when the river was straightened for navigation. (Images: Left, copyright of the River Restoration Centre. Right, Ordnance Survey. Crown copyright. Licence No. 100019331.)*

We have identified many old backwaters close to or attached to the River Nene, and it is one of our priorities to improve as many of them as possible. To excavate silt from the mouth of a backwater, to enable access for fish, is relatively inexpensive. However, a key issue with the excavation of backwaters is the disposal of spoil. This will have to be taken outside the floodplain (to satisfy the Environment Agency), but to take it off site can be prohibitively expensive.

**For further information, please contact Simon Whitton: Tel: 01604 367445 Email: [whitton@northamptonshire.gov.uk](mailto:whitton@northamptonshire.gov.uk)**



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## Nene Valley Nature Improvement Area Land Advisor and Catchment Sensitive Farming

Nene Valley Nature Improvement Area Land Advice

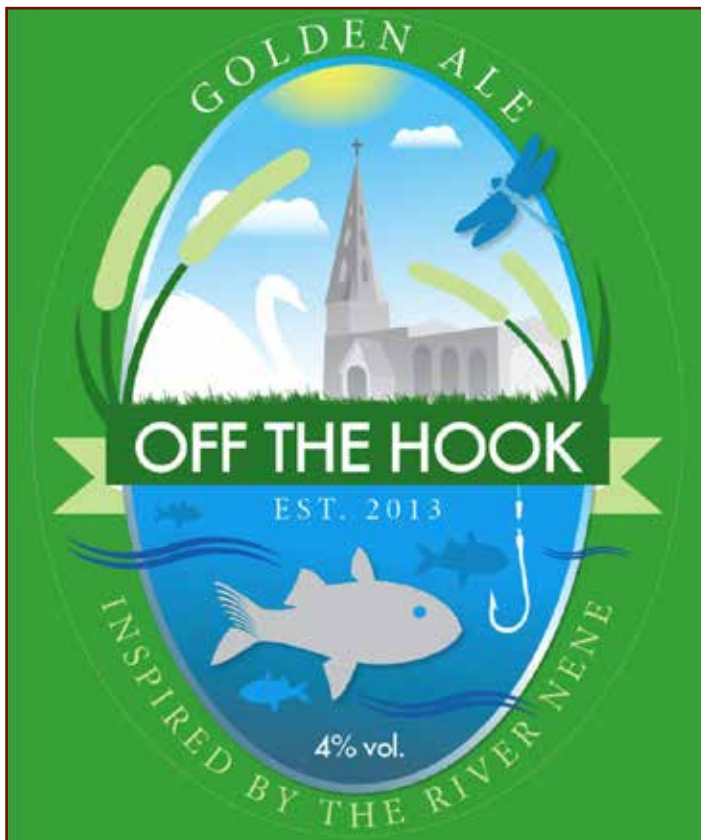
With the completion of the High Level Stewardship Program we are now working on transitional High Level Stewardship applications. Three of these are in progress, two at sites of special scientific interest (SSSIs); Achurch Meadows and Twywell Gullet and one at a Scheduled Ancient Monument: Papley.

We are pleased to announce here that the Catchment Sensitive Project has been confirmed as running nationally for another year (until end March 2015) and we are in negotiations with both Natural England and the Environment Agency to determine what our local commitment will be over the next fourteen months and in parallel to this the Land Advisor grant fund and the catchment sensitive farming Lower Nene grant fund have funded additional projects in our area.

The National Catchment Sensitive Farming (CSF) Capital Grant Scheme will open on February 1st and we are hosting a workshop for potential applicants on February 11th at Moulton College, Northampton. Please contact us for additional information. Additional CSF events are also planned on the topics of farm health checks and soils. Further details on these will be available via our website once finalised.

For further information, please contact Dr Robin Field: Tel: 01604 367243 Email: [rfield@northamptonshire.gov.uk](mailto:rfield@northamptonshire.gov.uk)

## Winner of the River Nene Regional Park CiC Beer competition Chris Wykes



The River Nene Regional Park CIC, in partnership with Nobbys Brewery, is very pleased to announce that their competition to name a locally produced beer has been won by Desborough resident Chris Wykes. The beer will be called "Off The Hook" and the label (see below) depicts an idyllic summers day on the River Nene.



Kathryn Hardcastle, Chief Executive for RNRP said "The competition proved to be very popular and we received a large number of high calibre and extremely imaginative entries. However, the design from Chris stood out as we felt it really captured the spirit of the River Nene; he is a very worthy winner and we offer him our congratulations".

The name "Off The Hook" came from Chris watching an angler this year catch a fish on the river, however, just as he was about to net it, it got away and he thought to himself "Well that ones off the hook!". Chris was also inspired to create the label design as he passes the Nene every day and says that seeing narrow boats, canoeists and swans slowly travelling down the river, as well as our stunning riverside architecture, meant he wanted to create something that showcased a natural feature that lies at the heart of Northamptonshire.

He also wanted to win the competition for his dad, who died at the end of 2011. Chris says "my dad loved locally produced ale and every summer we would go to 'olde worlde' pubs in Northants and he would try something new, so winning this competition is a fitting tribute to him. It has made my year infact".

Off The Hook can now be bought directly from Nobbys Brewery, please contact Jane Leadbitter on 01604 740785. Nobbys brewery have been handcrafting beer in Northamptonshire for nearly 10 years and take great pride in producing high quality artisan products, sourcing nearly everything they use from Northamptonshire stock.

Jane Leadbitter from Nobbys Brewery said "We are really excited to be involved In such a valuable community project and hope that off the hook will prove to be a successful fundraising venture." All proceeds raised will go towards funding the creation of wildflower meadows along the Nene and its tributaries and to help fund community group projects along the river.

The following outlets have confirmed that they will be stocking the beer 'Off The Hook':

<b>Nobbys Brewery (Please contact Jane Leadbitter)</b>	
c/o The Ward Arms, Guilsborough	01604 740785
<b>Beckworth Emporium</b>	
Glebe Road, Mears Ashby, Northants NN6 0DL	01604 812371
<b>St Giles cheese</b>	
77 St Giles' St, Town Centre, Northampton NN1 1JF	01604 622271
<b>Manor Farm Shop (Should be available mid February)</b>	
Main St, Catthorpe, Leicestershire LE17 6DB	01788 869002
<b>Creaton Post Office</b>	
High Street, Creaton, Northants NN6 8NA - <a href="http://www.creatonpo.co.uk">www.creatonpo.co.uk</a>	01604 505801
<b>The Wine Barn</b>	
Heart of the Shires, Unit 7, A5 Watling Street, NN7 4LB	
<b>Stanwick Lakes</b>	
Visitor Centre shop, NN9 6GY - <a href="http://www.stanwicklakes.org.uk">www.stanwicklakes.org.uk</a>	01933 625522
<b>Stamford Cheese and Wine</b>	
17 St. Mary's Street, Stamford, Lincolnshire, PE9 2DG - <a href="http://www.stamfordcheese.com">www.stamfordcheese.com</a>	01780 489269



RIVER NENE REGIONAL PARK  
INSPIRED SPACES

Protect **natural and cultural assets**  
Improve **health and well being**  
Tackle **climate change**  
Promote **Northamptonshire**  
Increase **leisure and recreation opportunities**  
Improve **connectivity and support biodiversity**  
Support the **local economy**

# Working in partnership to

For further information please contact the River Nene Regional Park CIC

Telephone: 01604 367648

Website: [www.riverneneregionalpark.org](http://www.riverneneregionalpark.org)