

NEWSLETTER SPRING 2012

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RIVER NENE REGIONAL PARK
INSPIRED SPACES

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Special Protection Area, launch and Northampton Washlands Recreational Management Plan

The SPA launch by Natural England was held at Stanwick Lakes on 12th January and attended by approximately 40 delegates from the public and private sectors along with the Mayor of Raunds Town Council. There were some excellent presentations, particularly those by Steve Holiday from RSPB and Brian Eversham of the Wildlife Trust, which could potentially form the basis for an advocacy presentation.

A number of guided walks took place over the weekend after the launch at Summer Leys, Titchmarsh Meadow LNR, Stanwick Lakes and Northampton Washlands.

RNRP and RSPB engaged with members of the public at the Northampton Washlands site to inform them of the importance of the SPA designation and, in particular, the problem of the disturbance of over-wintering birds.

This was the culmination of a series of awareness-raising sessions held at the Northampton Washlands through December and January by RNRP. Approximately 80 visitors came along to the Washlands for the Saturday event, many of whom were first time visitors to the site, and the response was generally extremely positive.

The tenant farmers were kept fully informed throughout the process, and were pleased that the public were now being made more aware with the issues at the site, which include the worrying and loss of livestock from attacks by dogs. The ongoing effects of public access will need to be monitored for the foreseeable future, with the work to date helping to inform the development of the Northampton Washlands Recreational Management Plan.

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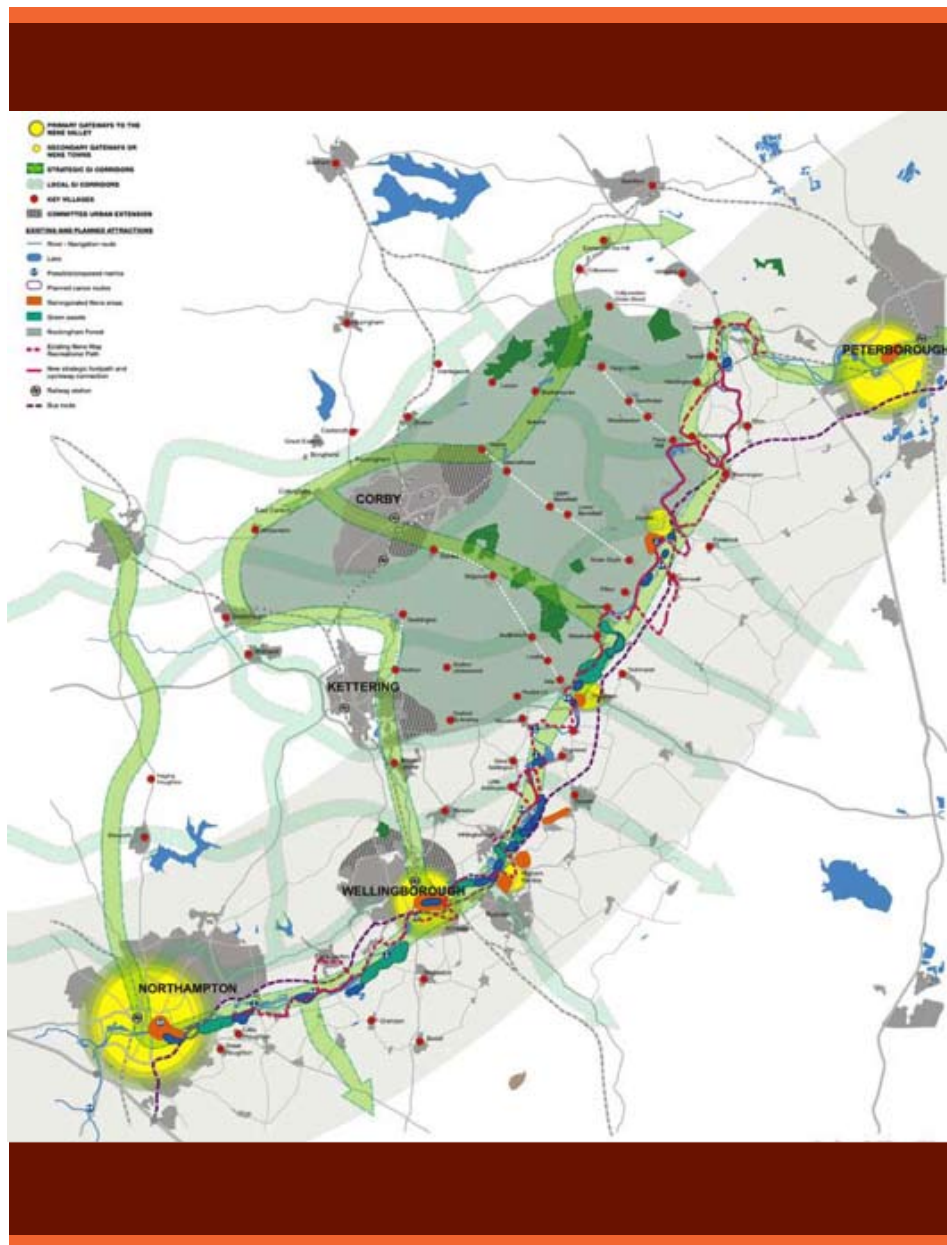
The Nene Valley Strategic Plan

The Nene Valley Strategic Plan provides an overview of the Nene Valley from Northampton to Peterborough and was developed through a period of extensive consultation with partners from the public, private and voluntary sectors. The following plan highlights some of the areas that will need to be addressed, in particular, the development of the primary and secondary towns as gateways to the Nene Valley, the importance of addressing the needs of local communities and visitors to the valley in respect of the provision of amenities, the potential for a winter economy and the potential of the catchment area in terms of visitor attractions and job creation.

The NVSP document is set out in five themes that include: a more enjoyed River Nene, improved Nene towns, a living countryside, a connected Nene Valley and enhanced natural and cultural attractions. These themes were developed to ensure that the plan addressed issues that centred on, but were wider than, the natural environment to ensure that there would be tangible social and economic benefits from its partnership delivery.

The NVSP plan is complementary to NCC's 'Towards a Naturally Resilient and Low Carbon Northamptonshire', which is at the heart of the authority's environmental programme and that of the Local Nature Partnership, which is in development. This has the potential to be constituted at a similar level to Local Enterprise Partnerships, such as the Northamptonshire Enterprise Partnership (NEP) and the South East Midlands LEP (SEMLEP). The delivery of the NVSP will also be supported by the Northamptonshire Nene Nature Improvement Area, which is described in more detail overleaf.

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Nature Improvement Area (NIA)

The funding for this has now been approved and will support partners in developing a resilient ecological network based on the themes of; growth and development, public awareness and access, river environment, farming and land management and markets for ecosystem services. These support the nature conservation aspects of the NVSP and will take these elements of the strategic plan forward.

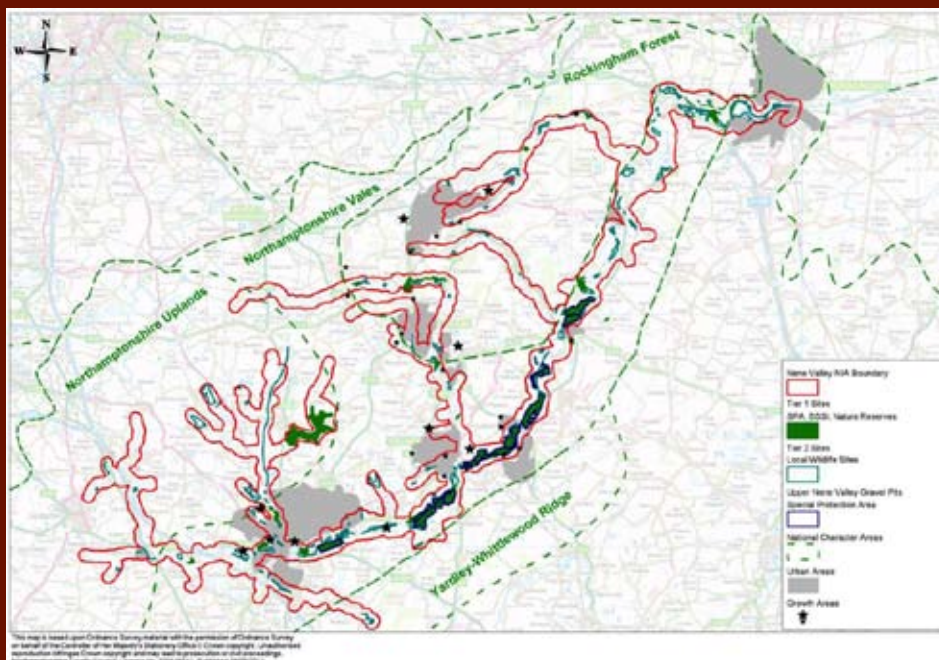
The NIA has five key objectives which will be delivered in partnership. The first of these objectives is to address 'growth and development' and a Natural Development Officer post is being hosted by the Wildlife Trust and based at NCC. This will ensure that the NIA's objectives are embedded in planning policies and that, in conjunction with the two Joint Planning Units, strengthen the relationship between landscape scale change and planning policy and its ability to secure a positive contribution to a coherent ecological network.

The second objective addressing 'access and awareness' will be taken forward by RSPB who will engaging consultants to undertake a visitor access study, produce a visitor engagement plan, integrate the NIA into recreation and tourism strategies and the delivery of implementation plans through public and private investment, including developer contributions.

The third objective is to 'improve the ecological status of the river and enhance its ecosystem service provision'. This will be undertaken by a River Restoration Advisor from the River Restoration Trust hosted by Cranfield University and RNRP. The officer will therefore be working closely with the Revital-ISE Project Officer, as well as the Northamptonshire Integrated Catchment Management Plan Officer, and colleagues at the Wildlife Trust and Northamptonshire County Council.

The fourth objective, to 'Strengthen the ecological network through effective engagement with farmers and landowners' will be undertaken by a Land Advisor hosted by the Wildlife Trust. This will provide an action plan for priority areas for agri-environmental advice, Whole Farm Environment Plans and High Level Stewardship agreements as well as revised BAP habitat creation and restoration targets, a landowner engagement strategy, on the ground habitat improvements, research into possible long term funding and scoping for a landscape partnership.

The fifth objective is to 'Investigate the potential to market the ecosystem services provide by the Nene Valley', which will be delivered by the University of Northampton. They will employ a post-doctoral research associate who, with access to the wider expertise within the university, will work closely with other academic and professional centres within the Nene Valley NIA partnership. In addition, a university funded PhD student will be appointed in 2012 to focus on how different habitat types in the Nene Valley support populations of pollinators.



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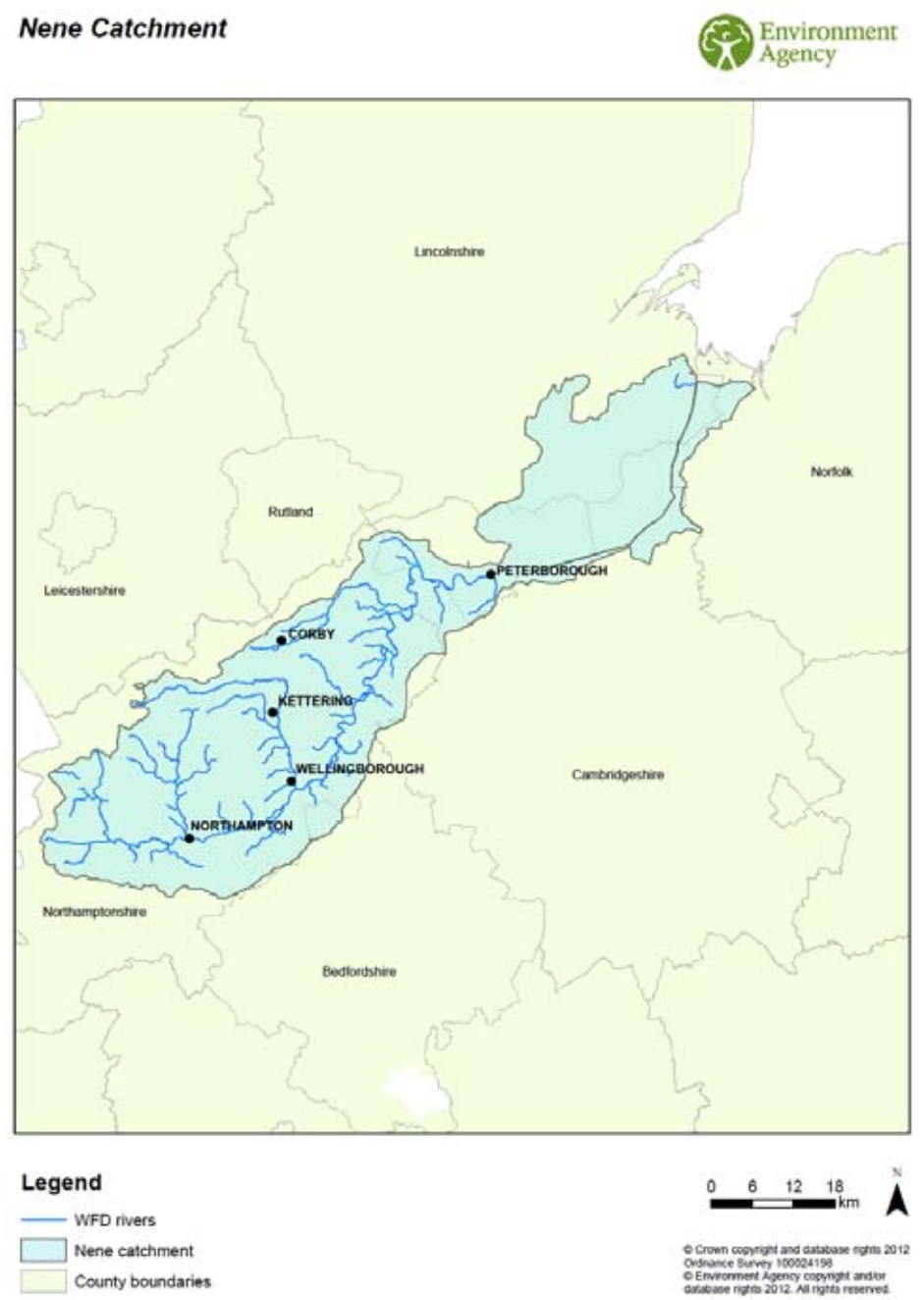
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Nene Integrated Catchment Pilot

The key aim of the Nene Catchment Pilot, which is hosted by the River Nene Regional Park Community Interest Company, is to inform the second phase of the Anglian region's River Basin Management Plan (due in 2015) which sets out to meet the objectives of the EU Water Framework Directive.

The current evaluation phase of the pilot will continue until March 2013. This will engage partners, communities and other stakeholders in developing an integrated approach to the protection and enhancement of the river catchment. It is envisaged that the initial scoping and key stakeholder engagement will involve the RNRP Stakeholder Steering Group and RNRP Board members in drawing down relevant information.

The first quarterly monitoring and evaluation returns have been completed; and the Project Officer has attended a number of Defra organised learning and information share events. In addition, RNRP is currently organising a key stakeholder workshop to work through the out of the Catchment Plan, which is the ultimate aim of the pilot phase. This will involve organisations that have a direct impact on WFD objectives and issues in the catchment area, and will be facilitated by a Defra appointed consultant. Also, RNRP is in the process of scoping a WFD feasibility study for the Northampton and Peterborough urban areas of the catchment. This includes the Northampton Enterprise Zone, and will identify key issues and opportunities to enhance the river environment in these areas.



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Revital-ISE Project

Funding for the Revitalise project has been secured for the current and next financial year, and is generally regarded as an exemplar for the work on the Nene undertaken as part of the NIA. The longstanding Revital-ISE Project Officer has resigned from that post, although he will continue to provide advice and support for Catchment Sensitive Farming with a focus on the Ise, which will also assist the incoming Project Officer.

Water has been released on to the Water meadow at the Wicksteed Park Nature Reserve for the first time in at least 100 years. Over 550m of the main water channels have been dug out by volunteers since December 2010 while a further 900m of the smaller channels were ploughed out by tractor in 2011. Since then with the county being in drought the river level has never been high enough to feed water on to the Water meadow. After the rain of the last three weeks the river level was finally high enough for the sluice to be opened on Thursday lunchtime. The ditches were all filled and the water control systems were working well before the river level fell back to below the required height. But by Monday morning the level was up again and the water channels across the water meadow were full and water was spreading over the meadow for the first time in living memory.

Now that the ditch systems are full of water the specialist wetland plants should now have sufficient moisture to thrive. Several large stands of Marsh marigold are in flower at the moment, with Cuckoo flower also coming into flower. Now the coarser tall vegetation is not dominant specialist wetland plants such as Meadowsweet and Great burnet are also in evidence. The project led by Dr Robin Field, the Revital-ISE Project Manager and Jane Pearman, Reserves Manager for the Wildlife Trust has also cleared scrub from the site, cut the meadow several times, created a riverside path and fenced part of the site. The only jobs left to complete are to finish the fencing and put up the interpretation panel then grazing can resume.

The Wildlife Trust is managing the site as one of their Northamptonshire nature reserves. Jane Pearman, Reserves Manager said 'The Water Meadow is such a rare habitat so this is a fabulous opportunity to be able to restore and improve it for wildlife.' This type of habitat is rare in the midlands and this is the only working water meadow in Northamptonshire.

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Catchment Sensitive Farming

This is a partnership project between Natural England, Environment Agency and RNRP. This Nene Catchment Partnership operates on the upper Nene and Ise catchments and gives farm advice to landowners within these areas. The main issues of concern are sedimentation, phosphates and metaldehyde (slug pellets). To help counteract these issues the partnership gives free one to one advice, runs workshops and on farm events, and provides guidance for a Capital Grant Scheme.

The Capital Grant Scheme application window has now closed for this year and 18 farmers have applied for funding. These applications will be determined by Natural England by mid- July with approved work to be completed by February next year.

Pat Kelly (EA) is the new project manager for CSF having taken over from Greg Oakes at the end of 2011. A limited amount of funding was also provided for visits along the lower Nene between January and March of this year.

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Northampton Marina Official Opening, Becket's Park

The Northampton marina, Becket's Park was formally opened by the Chairman of the Environment Agency, Lord Chris Smith on Friday 30th March. This was preceded by a boat trip along the Nene to the junction with the Grand Union Canal and was attended by representatives of partner organisations, including RNRP. The Northampton Marina was recognised by Lord Smith as one of the few public realm projects that have been delivered during the recent economic downturn, and had acted as a flagship scheme sending out the message that Northamptonshire, and its county town, Northampton, are open for business.

The boat trip provided an opportunity for partners to reflect on the value of the marina to raise Northampton's profile, and that of the waterfront, as an area for future development, and this was demonstrated by its recent designation as an Enterprise Zone. It also provided those attending, which included Brian Binley MP, along with representatives of business such as Carlsberg, Avon as well as the University of Northampton, with an excellent view of the potential that Northampton has to offer in its plan for growth and redevelopment in the riverside, St John and Town centre areas.

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The Rockingham Forest for Life pilot

The pilot study for the Rockingham Forest for Life has now been completed with the submission of a Summary report for the Forestry Commission and Defra. The report, which has now been signed off by the RFfL Steering group, sets out the key findings of the study and provides a framework for a methodology that secures private sector funding to support woodland creation and reduce dependency on the public purse.

However, in addition to fulfilling the requirements of the original brief, the project has now moved from inception to delivery both with the planting of a 2ha site in Geddington on land that is part of the Boughton estate, and a Section 106 agreement in respect of a new development, which has been recognised as having the potential to be a significant energy user.



As part of the pre-application discussions with consultants for the developer, the potential to make a significant contribution to the Rockingham Forest for Life project was proposed. The conditions of the planning approval are currently being prepared by East Northamptonshire Council's legal team and are to include provision for a contribution to the project of £250K. This will be brought forward over a three or four year period, following commencement of the development.

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RIVER NENE REGIONAL PARK
INSPIRED SPACES

Working in partnership to

Protect **natural and cultural assets**
Improve **health and well being**

Tackle **climate change**

Increase **leisure and recreation opportunities**

Promote **Northamptonshire**

Improve **connectivity and support biodiversity**
Support the **local economy**

For further information please contact the River Nene Regional Park CIC

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