8 Biodiversity

Policy Context

International

- 8.1 International Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar Convention) (1976): International agreement with the aim of conserving and managing the use of wetlands and their resources.
- 8.2 European Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (Bern Convention) (1979): Aims to ensure conservation and protection of wild plant and animal species and their natural habitats, to increase cooperation between contracting parties, and to regulate the exploitation of those species (including migratory species).
- 8.3 **International Convention on Biological Diversity** (1992): International commitment to biodiversity conservation through national strategies and action plans.
- 8.4 **European Habitats Directive** (1992): Together with the Birds Directive, the Habitats Directive sets the standard for nature conservation across the EU and enables all 27 Member States to work together within the same strong legislative framework in order to protect the most vulnerable species and habitat types across their entire natural range within the EU. It also established the Natura 2000 network.
- 8.5 **European Birds Directive** (2009): Requires the maintenance of all species of naturally occurring birds in the wild state in the European territory at a level which corresponds in particular to ecological, scientific and cultural requirements, while taking account of economic and recreational requirements.
- 8.6 United Nations Declaration on Forests (New York Declaration) (2014): international commitment to cut natural forest loss by 2020 and end loss by 2030.

National

8.7 **National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)**²³³: Encourages plans to "identify, map and safeguard components of local wildlife-rich habitats and wider ecological networks, including the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites of importance for biodiversity; wildlife corridors and stepping stones that connect them; and areas identified by national and local partnerships for habitat management, enhancement, restoration or creation". Plans should also promote conservation, restoration and enhancement of priority habitats and species, ecological networks and measurable net gains for biodiversity.

²³³ Department for Communities and Local Government (2019) National Planning Policy Framework [online] Available at:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment data/file/779764/NPPF Feb 2019 web.pdf

- 8.8 The NPPF states that a strategic approach to maintaining and enhancing networks of habitats and green infrastructure is also to be supported through planning policies and that there should also be support for the enhancement of natural capital at a catchment or landscape scale across local authority boundaries.
- 8.9 **National Planning Practice Guidance (PPG)**²³⁴: Supports the NPPF by requiring Local Plans to include strategic policies that conserve and enhance the natural environment through sustainable development.
- 8.10 **Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006**²³⁵: Places a duty on public bodies to conserve biodiversity.
- 8.11 **Biodiversity 2020:** A strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services²³⁶: Guides conservation efforts in England up to 2020 by requiring a national halt to biodiversity loss, supporting healthy ecosystems and establishing ecological networks. The Strategy includes 22 priorities which include actions for the following sectors: Agriculture, Forestry, Planning & Development, Water Management, Marine Management, Fisheries, Air Pollution and Invasive Non-Native Species.
- 8.12 **Biodiversity offsetting in England Green Paper**²³⁷: Biodiversity offsets are conservation activities designed to compensate for residual losses. The Green Paper sets out a framework for offsetting.
- 8.13 A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment (2018)²³⁸: Sets out goals for improving the environment within the next 25 years. It details how the Government will work with communities and businesses to leave the environment in a better state than it is presently. Identifies six key areas around which action will be focused. Those of relevance to this chapter are: recovering nature and enhancing the beauty of landscapes; securing clean, productive and biologically diverse seas and oceans; and protecting and improving our global environment. Actions that will be taken as part of these three key areas are as follows:
 - Recovering nature and enhancing the beauty of landscapes:

²³⁴ Department for Communities and Local Government (2016) National Planning Practice Guidance [online] Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/planning-practice-guidance

²³⁵ HM Government (2006) Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 [online] Available at: http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/16/pdfs/ukpga/20060016 en.pdf
236 Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (2011) Biodiversity 2020: A strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services [Online] Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/69446/pb13 583-biodiversity-strategy-2020-111111.pdf

²³⁷ Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (2013) Biodiversity offsetting in England Green Paper [Online] Available at:

https://consult.defra.gov.uk/biodiversity/biodiversity offsetting/supporting documents/2013 0903Biodiversity%20offsetting%20green%20paper.pdf

²³⁸ HM Government (2018) A Green Future: Our 23 Year Plan to Improve the Environment [Online] Available at:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/673203/25-year-environment-plan.pdf

- Develop a Nature Recovery Network to protect and restore wildlife, and provide opportunities to re-introduce species that have been lost from the countryside.
- Securing clean, healthy, productive and biologically diverse seas and oceans:
 - Achieve a good environmental status of the UK's seas while allowing marine industries to thrive, and complete our economically coherent network of wellmanaged marine protected areas.
- Protecting and improving our global environment:
 - Provide international leadership and lead by example in tackling climate change and protecting and improving international biodiversity.
 - Support and protect international forests and sustainable agriculture.

Sub-national

- 8.14 **Cambridgeshire Green Infrastructure Strategy (2011)**²³⁹: One of the four overarching objectives of the county-level GI strategy is to reverse the decline in biodiversity. The strategy outlines a series of issues, opportunities and constraints for biodiversity in Cambridgeshire.
- 8.15 **Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Habitat Action Plans**²⁴⁰: The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Biodiversity Group have produced a series of Habitat Action Plans for various habitat types, detailing their current status, the factors affecting them, objectives and long term targets, and proposed actions.
- 8.16 **Anglian River Basin Management Plan (2015)**²⁴¹: Provides a framework for protecting and enhancing the benefits provided by the water environment. To achieve this, and because water and land resources are closely linked, it also informs decisions on land-use planning.
- 8.17 **South Cambridgeshire Biodiversity SPD (2009)**²⁴²: Expands on district-wide policies to ensure that biodiversity is adequately protected and enhanced through the development process. It notes that biodiversity will not be peripheral to the planning process but fully integrated, and is designed to assist applicants in understanding biodiversity requirements.

https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/media/2557/green-infrastructure-strategy.pdf

²³⁹ Cambridge City Council, South Cambridgeshire District Council, Cambridgeshire County Council and other neighbouring authorities (2011) Cambridgeshire Green Infrastructure Strategy [Online] Available at:

²⁴⁰ Cambridge and Peterborough Biodiversity Group (n.d) Habitat Action Plans [Online] Available at: http://www.cpbiodiversity.org.uk/downloads

²⁴¹ Environment Agency, DEFRA (2015) Anglian River Basin Management Plan [online] Available at:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment data/file/718327/Anglian RBD Part 1 river basin management plan.pdf

²⁴² South Cambridgeshire District Council (2009) Biodiversity SPD [Online] Available at: https://www.scambs.gov.uk/media/6675/adopted-biodiversity-spd.pdf

- 8.18 **South Cambridgeshire District Design Guide SPD**²⁴³: Expands on district wide policies in other documents to ensure that design is an integral part of the development process. Chapter 9 covers issues of how biodiversity conservation should be considered as a key element of good design, as well as adding value to developments.
- 8.19 Cambridge City Conservation Strategy 'Enhancing Biodiversity' (2006)²⁴⁴: Prepared for Cambridge City Council by the local Wildlife Trust and designed to guide nature conservation activities across the city. It sets out a vision of achieving biodiversity 'net gain' over a 20-year period. As a technical document, it was produced to support the Cambridge Local Plan.
- 8.20 **Mapping natural capital and opportunities for habitat creation in Cambridgeshire (2019)**²⁴⁵: Report on a project to produce a detailed habitat base map for the whole of Cambridgeshire (including Peterborough) in order to identify opportunities to enhance biodiversity.
- 8.21 **Doubling Nature A Vision for the Natural Future of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough in 2050 (2019)**²⁴⁶: Sets out the vision of Natural Cambridgeshire, the local nature partnership, of doubling nature across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. The vision is to double the area of rich wildlife habitats and greenspace from 8.5% to 17%.
- 8.22 **Citywide Tree Strategy 2016-2026**²⁴⁷: Aims to sustainable manage the Council's own trees and those it manages by agreement, to foster a resilient tree population that responds to the impacts of climate change and urban expansion, to raise awareness of trees being a vital community asset, through promoting continued research, through education via the provision of advice and through partnership working and to make efficient and strategic use of the Council's regulatory powers for the protection of trees of current and future value.

Current Baseline

8.23 Cambridge City Council and South Cambridgeshire District Council have declared biodiversity emergencies and support the Local Nature Partnership's vision to double the area of rich wildlife habitats and natural greenspace within Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. The Councils are also part of the Natural

²⁴³ South Cambridgeshire District Council (2010) District Design Guide SPD [Online] Available at: https://www.scambs.gov.uk/media/6684/adopted-design-guide-spd-final-chapters-7-8-9.pdf

²⁴⁴ Cambridge City Council and the Wildlife Trusts (2006) Nature Conservation Strategy "Enhancing Biodiversity" [Online] Available at:

https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/media/3925/nature-conservation-strategy.pdf

²⁴⁵ Natural Capital Solutions (2019) Mapping natural capital and opportunities for habitat creation in Cambridgeshire [Online] Available at: http://www.cpbiodiversity.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Cambridgeshire-habitat-mapping-final-report-FINAL.pdf

²⁴⁶ Natural Cambridgeshire (2019) Launch of the Doubling Nature Ambition Report [online] Available at: https://naturalcambridgeshire.org.uk/news/natural-cambridgeshire-ambition-to-double-nature-across-peterborough-and-cambridgeshire/

²⁴⁷ Cambridge City Council (2016) Citywide Tree Strategy 2016-2026 [online] Available at: https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/media/3260/tree-strategy-2016-part-1.pdf

- <u>Cambridgeshire Local Nature Partnership</u>, which is a group of Councils and organisations seeking a future rich in wildlife and connecting people with nature.
- 8.24 The plan area hosts a range of habitats important for biodiversity, many of which consist of aquatic and wetland habitats and draw on the region's water resources. These sites include statutorily protected Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), as well as non-statutorily protected Local Nature Reserves (LNR) and County Wildlife Sites. In the past the largely rural nature of the plan area meant that wildlife could easily find refuge and support a variety of species. However, changing farming practices and pressure for development has put pressure on a wide range of species.
- Mapping on behalf of the Cambridgeshire Biodiversity Partnership shows that since the 1930s in Cambridgeshire, semi-natural grassland cover has fallen from around 27% to 4.5% in 2018, while built up area and gardens increased from 5.8% to 10.7% of land cover. This was part of a biodiversity opportunity mapping project which identified existing high quality habitats and opportunities for habitat creation. as shown in Figure 8.1. This shows two layers of habitat opportunity that were created during the project. The first of these is buffer opportunities, which are habitat opportunity areas that are immediately adjacent to existing habitat patches and fall within the previously identified ecological network, therefore providing an opportunity to expand the current area of habitat. The second type of opportunity is stepping-stone opportunities, which are potential sites that fall outside of the ecological network, but are immediately adjacent to it. These areas, including woodland areas and water bodies, could potentially be used to create steppingstone habitats that could link up more distant habitat patches, 248 and can be taken account of in proposed developments. Natural England's national nature recovery network mapping project provides further evidence on how this habitat connectivity extends beyond the boundaries of Cambridgeshire. The impacts of climate change are likely to have a significant effect on habitat connectivity and biodiversity in Greater Cambridge, as elsewhere, and there is a need to plan for climate change adaptation.
- 8.26 There is only one internationally important wildlife site within Greater Cambridge the Everseden and Wimpole Woods SAC, which is noted as of particular importance for its breeding colonies of the rare Barbastelle bat. However there are over 30 nationally designated SSSIs within South Cambridgeshire, including the linear features of the Roman Road south of Cambridge and Fleam Dyke and the Cam Washes SSSI, which consists of seasonally flooded pastures along the Cam in the north of the plan area used by wildfowl and waders. Three of the sites are designated for the geological interest (Barrington Pit SSSI, Barrington Chalk Pit SSSI and Histon Road SSSI), while the remainder are designated for their biological interest. The Nine Wells local nature reserve on the southern edge of Cambridge was previously designated as a SSSI for its population of rare freshwater invertebrates, however these were lost in the drought of 1976 there are plans to create the conditions to reintroduce these species.
- 8.27 Within Cambridge City there are a number of further nationally recognised nature conservation sites, including two SSSIs the Cherry Hinton Chalk Pits and

²⁴⁸ Natural Capital Solutions (2019) Mapping natural capital and opportunities for habitat creation in Cambridgeshire [Online] Available at: http://www.cpbiodiversity.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Cambridgeshire-habitat-mapping-final-report-FINAL.pdf

Traveller's Rest Pit. A third site, Histon Road SSSI, borders the city. A number of additional SSSIs lie immediately on the borders of Greater Cambridge, including Therfield Heath SSSI (Royston), Potton Wood SSSI (Potton), Wicken Fen SSSI (near Soham), and Weaveley and Sand Woods SSSI (Gamlingay). In addition, in South Cambridgeshire there are currently 28 designated Local Nature Reserves (LNRs), of which 8 are owned by the Council, and are distributed relatively evenly across the District. In Cambridge City, there are 12 designated LNRs, 15 County Wildlife Sites, and 51 City Wildlife Sites.²⁴⁹ Finally, there are two adjacent RSPB Reserves at Fen Drayton Lakes and Ouse Fen on the northern border with Huntingdonshire, and a further (smaller) RSPB Reserve at Fowlmere in the south.

- 8.28 In addition, Cambridgeshire County Council have designated a list of Protected Road Verges (PRVs), recognising their status as the largest area of unimproved grassland in the county and their role as important habitat.²⁵⁰
- 8.29 Figure 8.2 shows the various biodiversity designations within the plan area.
- 8.30 The national government has identified habitats and species of principal importance for conservation based on Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) priorities. UK Priority habitats identified by the South Cambridgeshire Biodiversity Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) are:
 - Rivers and streams, including chalk rivers.
 - Woodland.
 - Scrub (threatened by changes in farming practices but important for birds).
 - Old orchards (particularly in the Fen edge villages).
 - Hedgerows (threatened by changes in farming practices but species rich).
 - Arable farmland.
 - Ponds (farm and village ponds are being lost, with negative impact on biodiversity).
 - Churchyards and cemeteries.
 - Lowland calcareous grassland (once extensive within South Cambridgeshire).
 - Meadows and pastures (once common within villages).
- 8.31 Similar Priority Habitats were identified within Cambridge City. 251

²⁴⁹ Cambridge City Council and the Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire & Peterborough (2005) Cambridge City Wildlife Sites Register [Online] Available at:

https://files.cambridge.gov.uk/public/ldf/coredocs/Cambridge%20City%20Wildlife%20Sites%20Register%202005.pdf

²⁵⁰ Cambridgeshire County Council (2011) Protected Road Verges (PRVs) found in Cambridgeshire – listed by Parish [Online] Available at: https://ccc-

<u>live.storage.googleapis.com/upload/www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/libraries-leisure-</u>%26-culture/PRV_list.pdf?inline=true

²⁵¹ Cambridge City Council and the Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire & Peterborough (2005) Cambridge City Wildlife Sites Register [Online] Available at:

- 8.32 Within South Cambridgeshire, Priority Species identified by the Biodiversity SPD are:
 - Otters (widespread along the Upper Cam and its tributaries).
 - Water voles (widespread in some parishes).
 - Skylarks.
 - Great crested newts (found at smaller development sites within villages).
 - House sparrows (rapidly in decline since the 1970s).
 - Barn owls (numbers now increasing but threatened by intensive farming practices).
 - White-clawed crayfish (formerly widespread in the River Rhee but in decline due to disease).
 - Native black poplar trees (formerly of floodplains).
- 8.33 Additional Priority Species identified in Cambridge City are the song thrush and the brown hare.²⁵²
- 8.34 On the eastern borders of the plan area, the National Trust 'Wicken Fen' project plans to extend the wetland landscape to 53 square kilometres by 2099 and restore natural processes to allow the mosaic of habitats to recover. The territory this plan extends into South Cambridgeshire District and includes land lying east of the River Cam and between the settlements of Waterbeach and Lode.²⁵³ The Cambridgeshire Fens (lying between Peterborough and Cambridge) also provides a valuable fenland habitat context to the wider area.
- 8.35 South Cambridgeshire is relatively sparsely wooded,²⁵⁴ with small pockets of ancient woodland concentrated mainly in the west of the plan area (on the border with Huntingdonshire) and in the south east (on the border with the relatively well wooded Uttlesford and St Edmundsbury). The 'West Cambridgeshire Hundreds' project is an effort to reverse the damage and fragmentation of woodlands in the broader area, helping to support habitat connectivity. Three sites that form part of this initiative lie in the west of the plan area (Hardwick Wood, Cambourne Nature Reserve and Hayley Wood) and the remaining two lie across the border in Huntingdonshire. The Councils are also commissioning green infrastructure work to inform the emerging Local Plan.
- 8.36 The condition of the plan area's designated sites is mixed the Cherry Hinton Pit SSSI has been assessed as in 'mostly unfavourable' condition, while the Traveller's

 $\frac{https://files.cambridge.gov.uk/public/ldf/coredocs/Cambridge\%20City\%20Wildlife\%20Sites}{\%20Register\%202005.pdf}$

 $\frac{https://files.cambridge.gov.uk/public/ldf/coredocs/Cambridge\%20City\%20Wildlife\%20Sites}{\%20Register\%202005.pdf}$

²⁵² Cambridge City Council and the Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire & Peterborough (2005) Cambridge City Wildlife Sites Register [Online] Available at:

²⁵³ National Trust (2018) Wicken Fen Vision [Online] Available at:

https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/wicken-fen-nature-reserve/features/wicken-fen-vision 254 South Cambridgeshire District Council (2009) Biodiversity SPD [Online] Available at: https://www.scambs.gov.uk/media/6675/adopted-biodiversity-spd.pdf

Rest Pit SSSI is in 'favourable' condition. The Therfield Heath SSSI on the southern border of Greater Cambridge (within North Hertfordshire) was classified as mostly 'unfavourable recovering' and is under stress from recreational pressure, particularly due to level of public use, including from new and proposed development nearby, recreational facilities and access rights as Common Ground. North Hertfordshire District Council are preparing a mitigation plan for the site and the Councils will need to consider any cross-border implication of development on this site. In addition, the Eversden and Wimpole Woods SSSI was assessed as being in mostly 'unfavourable – recovering' condition, with some areas in 'favourable' condition.

- 8.37 The Cambridgeshire SSSI Recreational Pressure Impact Risk Zones (IRZs) produced by Natural England can be used to gauge the extent of recreational pressure on designated sites due to recreational pressure. Natural England's Monitoring Engagement in the Natural Environment (MENE) data, in addition to other visitor surveys by the National Trust at Wicken Fen and elsewhere, provide more in-depth understanding of these zones of influence and the effects of recreational pressure. Given the importance of aquatic habitats within the plan area, threats to the water environment from over-abstraction and unsustainable water use (see Chapter 6) also present a threat to designated sites.
- 8.38 The 2011 Cambridgeshire Green Infrastructure Strategy notes that habitat loss and fragmentation is a key concern in the broader region, which is influenced by threats from climate change and development. In particular, patches of woodland in Cambridgeshire remain ecologically isolated and there are no large patches of continuous habitat opportunities for field-scale habitat creation exist to connect these isolated woodland fragments.²⁵⁵ The water environment too has an important role to play in habitat connectivity in Greater Cambridge. The Green Infrastructure Strategy notes that biodiversity is not always recognised as having the same value as economic activity and other areas. A new biodiversity/green infrastructure study is currently being commissioned by the Councils to serve as an updated evidence base. Biodiversity and wider environmental net gain will be an important consideration.

Table 8.1 Key sustainability issues for Greater Cambridge and likely evolution without the new Local Plan

| Key sustainability issues for Greater Cambridge | Likely evolution without the new Local Plan | Relevant SA objective |
|---|--|--------------------------|
| Greater Cambridge contains and is in close proximity to a number of both designated and non-designated natural habitats and biodiversity. This includes those designated for their national and international importance. | While the designation of the biodiversity sites described above provide a level of protection (particularly those that are nationally and internationally designated), pressures are likely to continue due to ongoing pressure for further development and growth | SA objective 5 |

²⁵⁵ Natural Capital Solutions (2019) Mapping natural capital and opportunities for habitat creation in Cambridgeshire [Online] Available at: http://www.cpbiodiversity.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Cambridgeshire-habitat-mapping-final-report-FINAL.pdf

| Key sustainability issues for Greater Cambridge | Likely evolution without the new Local Plan | Relevant SA objective |
|--|--|--------------------------------|
| Not all SSSIs are in favourable condition. | projections. Policy NH/5 of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan prevents development having adverse effects on designated sites unless in exceptional circumstances. Policy 69 of the Cambridge Local Plan contains similar requirements. The new Local Plan presents the opportunity for new development to come forward at the most appropriate locations in order to avoid detrimental impacts on biodiversity assets, as well as to update planning policy in relation to future policy direction such as biodiversity net gain. The findings of the HRA will be incorporated into the SA and will provide further insight into biodiversity impacts specifically at designated sites, presenting the opportunity to limit adverse impacts at these locations. | |
| Although designated sites represent the most valued habitats in the plan area, the overall ecological network is also important for biodiversity as a whole and helps to support the health of designated sites, allowing species to migrate in response to climate change. The fragmentation and erosion of habitats and the wider ecological network in Greater Cambridge, including the identified sparse woodland cover and condition of water bodies, is an ongoing threat to biodiversity. | Erosion and fragmentation of habitats and ecological networks could take place through poorly located and designed development. The NPPF requires Local Plans to include policies to safeguard, restore and create ecological networks at a landscape scale. In addition, Policy NH/4 of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan prevents development that results in the deterioration or fragmentation of habitats, and requires new development to maintain, enhance and restore biodiversity. Similarly, Policy 70 of the Cambridge City Local Plan requires development to protect and enhance habitats and species. The new Local Plan provides the opportunity to | SA objective 5 SA objective 11 |

| Key sustainability issues for Greater Cambridge | Likely evolution without the new Local Plan | Relevant SA objective |
|---|---|-----------------------|
| | further promote biodiversity gain and to improve the overall ecological network. Improvements to GI can have a wider range of benefits beyond biodiversity, such as adapting to climate change, acting as a carbon sink and improving mental and physical health and wellbeing. | |



