

A National Trust strategy to create a
53 square kilometre nature reserve for
wildlife and people in Cambridgeshire

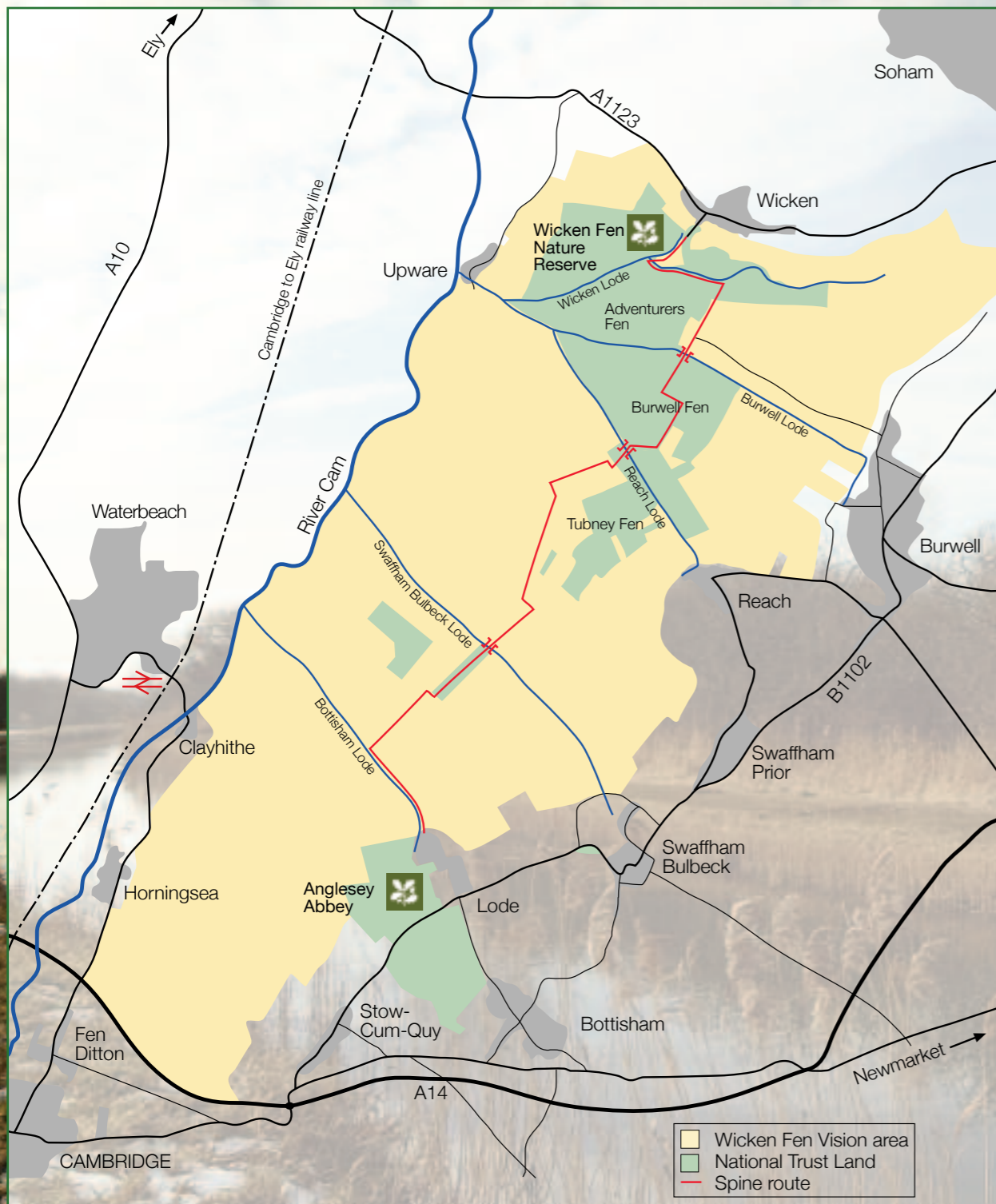


Wicken Fen Vision

Space to breathe
for people and wildlife

Space to think
about our environment and our future

Space to explore
on foot, bike, horse and boat



Working together for this very special place

Wicken Fen was the very first nature reserve to be owned by the National Trust and has been in our care since 1899. It remains one of the most important wetlands in Europe – an iconic habitat, supporting thousands of plants, insects, birds and mammals, but at the heart of an area facing major pressure for new development.

We have worked hard for more than a hundred years to protect the rare species here through the intensive management of the fen habitats. However, this became increasingly difficult and by the late twentieth century it had become clear that we could not protect this unique place because the wetland nature reserve was just too small and too isolated. The concept of extending the reserve was conceived.

In 1999, we launched the Wicken Fen Vision. The 100 year Vision aims to extend the reserve to a maximum of 5,300

hectares by purchasing land to the south and east of Wicken, restoring its fen and wetland habitats and creating a landscape-scale space for wildlife and people.

Already we have acquired sufficient land to more than double the size of the reserve to its current 758 hectares. We are now working with individuals and organisations at community, regional and national levels to create a unique series of habitats and a huge public open space for people to explore and enjoy.

This document lays out our ideas and aspirations and we welcome comments and inputs from everyone: please read it and tell us what you think, and how you can help.



Dame Fiona Reynolds
Director General
National Trust
May 2009

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The Vision explained

Wicken Fen is one of the few remaining fragments of fenland wilderness in East Anglia. Its biodiversity is exceptional but it is too small and isolated to support sustainable populations of its special and rare species.

This unique place is at the heart of an area experiencing considerable pressure for new housing and other developments and in a county containing very limited open spaces with public access.

We want to create a massive new area open to the public covering 53 square kilometres between Wicken Fen and Cambridge, an inspirational place for people and a sustainable home for wildlife.

Where we are now

Wicken Fen has developed a superb range of wetland habitats – fen, reedbed, wet woodland and open water, on a deep, peat soil which is kept wet by rainfall and clean, chalky river water. The reserve's rich habitats and species are protected by national, European and international law, but legislation alone will not conserve wildlife. Active management, such as cutting, has been required to maintain the fen and reed bed habitats. Even at 255 hectares in area, the designated National Nature Reserve is too small to guarantee the long-term survival of all of its numerous rare and special species. Wicken Fen is vulnerable to damaging influences from the surrounding more intensive land uses and is isolated and quite some distance from other wetland reserves.

The best strategy to protect and enhance the wildlife of Wicken Fen is to make the nature reserve much bigger and to bring much more adjacent land into conservation management.

Pioneering fenland restoration

In 1999, the National Trust launched the Wicken Fen Vision with the long-term aim of a massive increase in the reserve's size to a maximum of 5,300 hectares, expanding southwards towards the edge of Cambridge. The National Trust plans to use ecological restoration techniques to create and restore wildlife habitats on a landscape scale and to provide visitors with new access to nature and green space. The aim is to create a mosaic of wetland habitats: wet grasslands, reed beds, marsh, fen and shallow ponds and ditches, as well as establishing chalk grassland and woodlands where soil and topography dictate.

The Wicken Fen Vision, along with the related Great Fen Project near Peterborough, are exciting, pioneering projects to put wildlife back into heavily managed fenland countryside. They will have international significance for the ecological transformation of landscapes and will form part of a

new network of wetland habitats across the East of England. This in turn is helping conserve species at risk from the loss of freshwater coastal habitats and from climate change. These projects recognise that to deliver this kind of conservation vision requires integrating the requirements of wildlife with the needs of local people, the economy and tourism. New opportunities to gain access to the countryside on foot, bike, horse and boat are an essential part of these projects. It is this holistic approach that is promoting such widespread support.

Conventional approaches to land restoration are highly prescriptive and intensive in their approach. They are costly both in their creation and subsequent management. The Wicken Fen Vision approach is planned on a sufficiently large scale that it provides an opportunity to create self-regenerating habitats which can be managed less intensively. Species assemblages will change over time, creating a dynamic habitat mosaic. The exact composition of this mosaic is less predictable but will be more responsive and adaptable to long term environmental change. The added benefit of this extensive approach is that we believe it is less costly and more sustainable both in the short and longer term.

Hydrology – water levels in ditches and soil – across the Vision area will be controlled appropriately,

UNDER PRESSURE

In Cambridgeshire there are 9,239 hectares of habitat notified as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). This represents less than 2.7 per cent of the county's land area. By comparison Cumbria has 159,902 hectares of SSSIs, 23 per cent of the county. The average in England overall is 6.8 per cent.

Wicken Fen lies only 15 kilometres from the City of Cambridge, which is forecast to grow to a population of over 250,000 by the year 2025.

and there will be free-roaming, self-reliant herds of large herbivores such as cattle, horses and deer. Grazing animals are critical for adding a vital element of dynamism to that created by the variations in water levels. Large herbivores influence rather than manage vegetation, but the National Trust is deliberately aiming for a 'lighter touch' for the Vision land, which will be more maintainable in the long term. Animal welfare will be paramount. We will consider meat production as a secondary product from land grazed with domestic stock.

It is important to acknowledge that, although the National Trust has identified 53 square kilometres of land that could form part of the Wicken Fen Vision, there is no necessity to acquire all the land in order for the Vision to meet its objectives. In some areas, management agreements with landowners might form a sensible approach, and this is being actively investigated.

The 100 year timescale has been deliberately chosen to allow as much flexibility of approach as possible. Conservation priorities, farming practices and demand for access to public open space will all change over time: this very long-term approach will ensure that the Vision can evolve to meet these changes while holding true to the underlying principles of the project.

The next 100 years – looking after special places, for ever for everyone

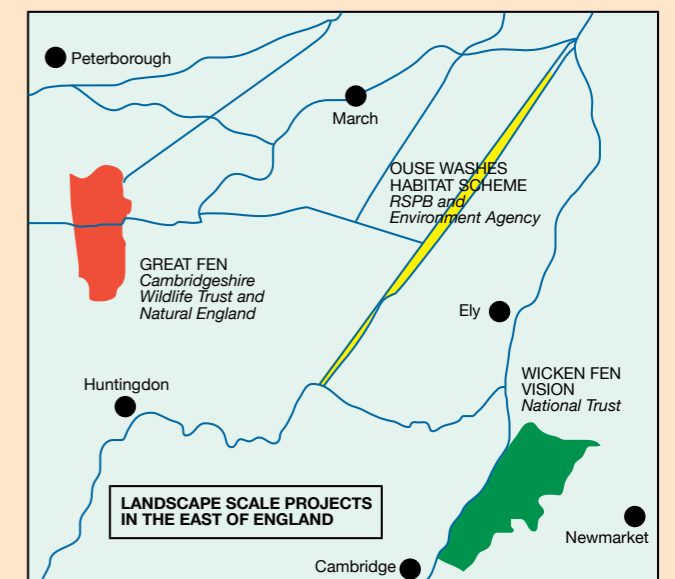
The National Trust has the experience, expertise and capacity to make this long-term vision a reality. Founded in 1895, we are the largest environmental charity in Europe and have landholdings totalling over 250,000 hectares in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. We have 3.6 million members, an annual turnover in excess of £160 million per annum and endowed assets exceeding £70 million. Every year we attract over 12 million paying visitors and a further 50

A VERY SPECIAL PLACE

Wicken Fen has the following designations:

- National Nature Reserve under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act, 1949.
- Site of Special Scientific Interest under the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981.
- Special Area of Conservation under the EU Habitats Directive.
- Wetland protected under the International Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, 1971 (Ramsar Convention).

million enjoy access to our free countryside properties. We pride ourselves on our holistic approach to the work of helping to look after the nation's cultural and natural heritage and helping people to access and benefit from it.



Past and present: the Wicken Fen Vision in context

Wicken Fen is a product of thousands of years of man's interaction with the landscape. From the earliest drainage, possibly in Roman times, to today's pressure for new homes, the landscape has been continuously evolving, along with the wildlife which it supports.

However, this small corner of Cambridgeshire is unique because some areas of Wicken Fen have never been drained, making this whole landscape internationally important for biodiversity and for conservation.

Our 100 year vision is to protect and safeguard this valuable resource not just to help rare species survive and thrive, but so that people can enjoy the space and solitude so rare in today's world.

From Roman transport to post-war restoration

The origin of the Lodes

The straight, raised waterways, known as Lodes, which cross the area to the south of Wicken have been considered by some to be of Roman origin. They were probably constructed as a transport system, taking products and goods from villages on the southern extremity of the Fen across to the River Cam and from there up to the coast at King's Lynn. Through the early medieval period the landscape, crossed by slow moving rivers, was an impenetrable 'wild undrained fen'.

Drainage begins

The later medieval period saw some localised drainage which produced grazing land but this was restricted to the fen edge. It was not until the 17th century that more extensive drainage plans were initiated. The Adventurers – venture capitalists who provided the funding to drain the land – transformed the landscape from the 17th century, producing the intensively farmed countryside that is now characteristic of the Fens running from Cambridge up to the Wash.

The area known as Wicken Fen remained undrained. It was used for peat digging and sedge



harvesting by local villagers. It became well known from 1850 onwards to Victorian naturalists who came to the Fen to collect moths and butterflies. In the 1890s the peat and sedge economies collapsed being replaced by coal and roof tiles. As a result there were major concerns that Wicken Fen would be drained as had happened elsewhere. A number of the early entomologists (particularly G.H. Verrall and The Hon N.C. Rothschild) played a vital role in ensuring Wicken's survival by acquiring parts of the Fen and donating them to the National Trust.

Safeguarding a unique landscape

Wicken Fen was the first nature reserve to be owned by The National Trust and has been in the Trust's care since 1899 when the first parcel of land on the Ancient Fen was purchased. In the hundred years since this first purchase, there have been a further 53 land conveyances and the reserve had grown to 255 hectares. However there have been some diversions from this steady expansion of wildlife habitats in the intervening years.

During the Second World War the land known as Adventurers Fen was requisitioned by the War Office, drained again by Alan Bloom and converted to arable cultivation. The Ancient Fen at Wicken however remained undrained and protected by the National Trust, 'an island in a sea of intensive agriculture'.

In 1946 the adjacent and most recently drained land was handed back to the National Trust and the extensive areas of mere, reed beds and wet meadows took shape. It is from this experience and the capacity to restore fen habitats from previously drained and farmed land in more recent years that we can draw confidence in the ongoing expansion of the Wicken Fen Vision.

Today's picture – a shared Vision

The Wicken Fen Vision is a very long-term project, but in the first few years significant progress has been made in bringing the Vision to life.

Land acquisition

Since 1999 the National Trust has acquired several new areas of land, and we now own more than 800 hectares in the area, including land around Anglesey Abbey in . We have received support from a wide range of partners in helping us purchase land, as well as using our own funds.

Conservation

We have created 422 hectares of new habitat over the past few years. We begin the process by stopping infield drainage and allowing permanent vegetation to develop. In some places we allow the land to become much wetter which encourages birds, wildflowers and insects. We have introduced Highland cattle and Konik ponies to help manage some of the new areas, creating a mosaic of different habitats which are providing a home to a wide range of species. These new areas all help to protect the existing Wicken Fen National Nature Reserve, which is one of the most important in Europe.

Public access

Helping people enjoy the Wicken Fen Vision area is one of our biggest priorities, and we have made major progress towards creating a spine route that crosses the area from north to south. The spine route also links into the network of quiet lanes and footpaths which crosses the Vision area.

Bridging the gap

In early 2008 a new bridge was installed over Swaffham Bulbeck Lode opening up new routes for



walkers, cyclists and horse-riders and linking with new paths on land recently purchased by the National Trust. We are planning another bridge over Reach Lode, and we hope to improve public access over Burwell Lode which will complete the north-south link across the Vision area.

Working with local people

We have held hundreds of meetings with local people and organisations, and in spring 2008 we undertook a major public consultation exercise to seek local people's views on the Vision and how it should grow in the future. A series of drop-in sessions took place in early autumn 2008 to get views from specific groups about what they would like to see in the future. An on-going programme of working with local communities is at the heart of the Wicken Fen Vision.

Our guiding principles

- Enhancing nature conservation, protecting the depleting peat soils, managing water resources and preserving cultural heritage.
- Ensuring a sustainable financial future and supporting the local economy.
- Working with local people, landowners, businesses, government agencies and voluntary and conservation organisations.
- Encouraging public access and recreation, scientific research, volunteering, community engagement and learning.

Guiding Principle 1

We will manage the land to enhance its nature conservation value, protect the depleting peat soils, secure sufficient water resources and preserve and interpret the cultural heritage.

We are guided here by the management principles set out in 'Nature and the National Trust', our nature conservation policy (2005). These principles are:

- We will strive for an abundance and diversity of species appropriate to local climate, geology and soils.
- We will allow nature to take its course wherever possible and desirable, and will manage positively for this.
- Where a habitat is of intrinsic significant cultural and/or ecological importance, the Trust will promote active management to maintain it as far as this is sustainable.
- We will respect and promote the intimate relationship between natural and cultural heritage.
- We will plan and manage on a landscape scale to create a network of large, high-quality habitats, working in partnership with others as required.
- We acknowledge that the effective conservation of

water resources, soils and a host of wetland habitats can only be achieved by working at a catchment or river basin level.

- We will manage for wildlife in the context of sustainable land use seeking optimum outcomes for nature as an integral part of all land uses.
- We will manage for the long term, in the context of predicted climate change and other environmental influences. We accept that some habitats and species will be lost, changed or replaced over time.
- We will adopt land management techniques that work with natural processes rather than attempt to impose habitat creation plans or manage land based on narrow species-driven goals. We will use low-input management such as extensive grazing to achieve our conservation and habitat creation goals.



Guiding Principle 2

We will ensure that the Vision has a sustainable financial future and supports the local economy

We are guided by the principles of sustainable development enshrined in the accounting technique of the Triple Bottom Line, where the *financial* costs and *social* benefits will be evaluated alongside our primary aim of securing *environmental* benefits.

In addition, we will:

- Encourage new business ventures that are appropriate to the aims of our overall vision.
- Build strategic funding partnerships in the public, private and voluntary sectors.
- Explore opportunities for financial support for peat soil protection and carbon fixing as well as realising wider social benefits of providing for flood storage, aquifer recharge, and water quality enhancement.
- Investigate and adopt innovative income streams to sustain the financial future of the project.
- Ensure that there are sufficient appropriately skilled, valued and respected staff and volunteers to achieve the Vision's purpose.



Guiding Principle 3

We will work in partnership with local people, landowners, businesses, government agencies and voluntary and conservation organisations.

We are guided here again by our nature conservation policy (2005) which states:

- The Trust will use its experience to influence policy, working with partner organisations and public campaigns.
- The Trust will seek to contribute to nature conservation by learning from what it does, and by sharing this knowledge and experience with others.
- We will seek to integrate our work with other policies and strategies at local, regional and national levels, with councils, regional government, statutory agencies and other Non-Governmental Organisations.

Guiding Principle 4

We will provide expanding opportunities for public access and recreation, scientific research, volunteering, engagement and learning.

- We will encourage access to the expanding Nature Reserve to act as a source of inspiration, enjoyment and learning for members, visitors, volunteers, enthusiasts and scholars.
- We will extend educational and community outreach activities across the expanding Vision area.
- We will provide a uniquely valuable large open space within the Cambridge Growth Area, with public access corridors linking to other areas beyond the boundaries of the Wicken Fen Vision.
- We will encourage community involvement across all our activities.
- We will engage with the Health and Wellbeing agenda.
- We will facilitate scientific research which will inform our ongoing management.

Our aims and objectives

- To greatly expand the space for wildlife and people.
- To encourage habitats that benefit wildlife.
- To provide access to the Vision area and encourage local people to become involved in our work.
- To learn continually from our experience and influence policy development at a national and international level.
- To ensure a secure financial future

WILDLIFE

To greatly expand the space for wildlife and people.

We will increase the area of accessible nature reserve around Wicken Fen to a sustainable and adaptable landscape, extending towards Cambridge over an area of 53 square kilometres.

Objectives

- 1.1 Prioritise which areas of land we would wish to purchase on the basis of their potential for habitat creation, public access and ongoing sustainable management.
- 1.2 Sensitively negotiate purchase of land from local landowners.
- 1.3 Develop and maintain our relationships with individual landowners and farmers across the Vision area, where they are not at this juncture selling their land.

HABITATS

To create a mosaic of habitats, securing the essential resource of water and protecting peat soils.

Farmland to the south of Wicken Fen is being gradually converted into a nature reserve, with a fascinating mosaic of habitats, and a wealth of cultural and historical features and where the careful management of water levels and subsequent adoption of extensive grazing regimes will provide for sustainable future land management.

Objectives

- 2.1 Increase control of water availability and retention, whilst maintaining the integrity of the drainage function of the Internal Drainage Board (IDB) system.
- 2.2 Increase control over water quality by working with statutory authorities and local landowners.
- 2.3 Develop land management processes for restoration after farmland is acquired according

to soils, hydrology, size of land parcel and proximity to other Wicken Fen Vision land.

- 2.4 Develop extensive grazing management systems with self-reliant herds of herbivores to create a mobile mosaic of self-regenerating wildlife habitats.
- 2.5 Work closely with the Environment Agency, who are responsible for the Lodes, to find the best way to secure the long-term future of these historic waterways.
- 2.6 Monitor hydrological and ecological processes across restored areas.
- 2.7 Promote land management agreements with farmers that encourage sympathetic management for wildlife.
- 2.8 Investigate use of suitable areas for flood alleviation.

PEOPLE

To provide opportunities for visitors, tourists and local residents to benefit from access to the Vision area and engage supporters in our work.

The extensive nature reserve will provide access routes from Cambridge and surrounding towns and villages by foot, cycle, on horseback and by boat and will create recreational opportunities across a unique and developing area of countryside. The Vision area will also provide extensive opportunities for volunteering, education and interpretation.

We want to ensure that the National Trust engages with local communities and that local people can develop a sense of ownership of the Vision.

Objectives

- 3.1 Engage with all local stakeholders, especially people living within the Vision area and in

In all our activities we will take full account of the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act.

neighbouring villages.

- 3.2 Promote sustainable transport, growing in scope with the Vision, and encourage public transport to, from and within the Vision area.
- 3.3 Promote and encourage a wide range of community activities and engagement.
- 3.4 Work with partners to maximise opportunities to address the Health and Wellbeing agenda.
- 3.5 Develop an access forum to involve local stakeholders in access management decisions.
- 3.6 Provide recreational and tourism facilities appropriate to the landscape and the integrity of the National Nature Reserve.
- 3.7 Provide appropriate educational opportunities to help engage the public with nature conservation, climate change issues and the developing landscape.
- 3.8 Provide a wealth of opportunities for volunteering.
- 3.9 Continuously improve interpretation of the area's landscape, wildlife and cultural heritage.

LEARNING

To learn continually from our experience and influence wider policy development on landscape-scale conservation at a national and international level.

The Wicken Fen Vision and the Great Fen Project are pioneering landscape-scale projects in the UK. Experiences from both these projects will be shared in the future to influence policy development and practice in sustainable land management, habitat restoration and community engagement. Over the past 50 years, more than 250 academic papers have been published on various aspects of Wicken Fen.

Objectives

- 4.1 Encourage research into and monitoring of ecological restoration, and the wider socio-economic aspects of the project.

- 4.2 Encourage research looking at responses to climate change afforded by the project, particularly in respect of 'ecosystem services' (e.g. carbon sequestration, flood control and ground-water replenishment).
- 4.3 Contribute to policy development on landscape-scale conservation at national and international levels.
- 4.4 Record, interpret and conserve important archaeological, historical, cultural and landscape features.

RESOURCES

To ensure a sustainable financial future for the management of the expanding nature reserve.

Better management of a wider range of income streams – from Higher Level Stewardship payments to 'green' businesses like cycle hire – is a central part of our financial future, in the context of a potential reduction of visitors paying to access the nature reserve.

- 5.1 Develop our capacity for fund raising for land purchase by building strong partnerships with a wide variety of partners across the public, private, community and voluntary sectors.
- 5.2 Develop new initiatives to ensure funding is sustained for ongoing management of land being restored and opened up for public access.
- 5.3 Investigate land uses and business activities that can provide additional income sympathetic to the biodiversity aims and the visual landscape.
- 5.4 Produce a Financial Plan for the next five years that identifies expected costs and revenues to address all agreed aims and objectives.
- 5.5 Reduce overall energy usage by the National Trust and promote energy efficiency measures.

Meeting the challenges

Managing landscape, water resources and soils

Creating a mosaic of wetland habitats without major engineering solutions and maintaining the internal drainage function

Making use of existing water resources and re-wetting peat soils

Working as part of the community

Interacting with existing land use and with our partners' plans and policies
Helping people benefit from the Wicken Fen Vision and shape its future

Funding the Vision

Securing finance for a sustainable future, maximising income and managing our land efficiently

Managing landscape, water resources and soils

There are four major challenges:

- creating a mosaic of wetland and other wildlife habitats, using control of water levels and extensive grazing
- re-wetting peat soils to avoid their loss without recourse to major engineering solutions
- maintaining the internal drainage function for land that will continue to be farmed
- re-wetting peat soils to avoid their loss and to create a wider range of habitats.

In eastern England, climate change is likely to cause milder winters and warmer summers, with an overall increase in rainfall. This may result in greater quantities of water being present in winter but warmer summers will increase evaporation and water take-up by plants, causing a more rapid drawdown of the water table. Securing winter water supply should enable suitable areas of the new Vision land to be maintained as wetland with year-round higher water tables even with future climate change.

The Wicken Fen Vision area offers valuable potential for storing flood water and to allow water to percolate into the soils and replenish groundwater resources. A full hydrological resources plan, taking account of climate change scenarios, and covering the whole Vision area has been commissioned: details are available on our website.

Historically, peat soils have been some of the richest for food production. However, decades of intensive cultivation and hundreds of years of drainage have significantly reduced the extent of peat soils, as they have oxidised and eroded away, in places at a rate of more than two centimetres a year.

The 2,000 hectares of remaining peat soils to the south of Wicken Fen are in an important location. Re-wetting these soils will have the significant benefits of

reversing centuries of soil loss and greatly expanding the nature reserve. The area required to support sustainable wildlife varies from species to species but, in general, the larger the area of suitable habitat, the more sustainable the wildlife populations can become.

Research into the soils, hydrology and habitats will guide the project and help to inform the management of this, and other, landscape-scale projects.

Working as part of the community

How does the Vision interact with existing land use and with the area's heritage? How do plans for the Vision fit with our partner's policies? How can local people and visitors benefit from the Wicken Fen Vision and shape its future?

Landownership, landscape and settlements: there are over 120 land owners in the Vision area ranging from large farm businesses to small equestrian holdings and hobby farms. We need to maintain close relationships with landowners and land managers to understand the pressures faced by all types of farming. We also need to:

- establish a clear policy for vermin control
- deal with invasive and noxious weeds
- avoid disturbance to the drainage of adjacent land

There are existing dwellings, roads and rights of way across the Vision area. Our plans for creating new habitats will take account of all existing rights of way and in relation to private property, drainage infrastructure and all land not in our ownership, we will not undertake work that will have any potentially deleterious effect in their vicinity.

Fitting in with other plans: the Wicken Fen Vision fits very closely with the plans and policies of a broad spectrum of agencies, central government departments and local and regional government. We will continue to work with our partners to ensure that

our plans reflect both the needs of local people through working with local authorities, and the national development pressures which are affecting Cambridgeshire (see page 25 for more information).

Getting to the Vision area: we need to plan for a significant number of additional visitors to the Vision area, but we will not encourage car travel within the Vision area. We will need to assess suitability of existing car parking on the periphery of the Vision area and the impact on local communities. Public transport to the Vision area is currently limited and we will encourage the expansion of public transport routes: a transport and access strategy has been commissioned.

New access: increased access for local people and visitors is a key aim of the Wicken Fen Vision. We will achieve this by enhancing the existing public rights of way, providing bridges across water courses and completing missing links in the existing network. More information on the new spine route and other access improvements is on page 24. Grazing by cattle and ponies is an important way of managing land in the Vision area: it will be important to manage grazing to avoid conflict with users of new and established rights of way running across the grazed areas.

History and cultural heritage: there is a rich cultural heritage across the Wicken Fen Vision area with more than 400 archaeological sites including three Scheduled Ancient Monuments and 44 listed buildings (see page 23 for more information). To protect and interpret these sites we need to:

- make sure that habitat creation and water management is preceded by field-walking and metal-detecting surveys
- undertake palaeo-environmental sampling or other investigation whenever appropriate
- carry out research and oral history recording of the cultural history of the area.

Funding the Vision

What will the Vision cost to achieve? Where will the money come from to fund land purchases and for ongoing management?

The National Trust has sound financial disciplines and clear rules for acquiring land: as well as raising the purchase price of any land that we buy, we must also create an endowment to pay for managing the land, for ever. We use a formula to work out the size of the endowment we need, taking into account any income that the land will generate.

We need to build relationships with partners and funders to ensure long term sustainable support both for land purchases and for other projects. We need to maximise income from our enterprises (shops, cafés, education service and visitor centres) as well as establishing new environmentally appropriate businesses such as cycle and canoe hire and camping. We need to make our land management as efficient and low-cost as possible and we need to encourage volunteers to help achieve this.

The scale of the overall funding challenge is set out below, based on the prevailing assumptions in autumn 2008. To date we have secured £4 million in grant between 2003 and 2009 and established an endowment reserve of £900,000.

THE OVERALL FUNDING CHALLENGE

- To buy a further 4,600 hectares at today's prices (autumn 2008) will cost £55 million.
- Investment in new infrastructure is expected to cost £10 million.
- Creating the endowment we need for ongoing management will cost £18 million.
- Total investment would be £83 million.

Working with our partners

The Wicken Fen Vision has an impact on a very wide community of interests so we must work with all of our partners and stakeholders, listen to their concerns and interpret their needs, and garner ongoing support and involvement as the Vision area expands.

There has been enormous support for the Wicken Fen Vision since its launch in 1999. The National Trust is committed to working with all stakeholders, listening to their concerns, interpreting their needs and, most importantly, securing on-going support and involvement as the Vision area expands.

Developing strong working partnerships will widen our knowledge base and support amongst key partners, including potential users of the expanding Vision area. We believe this approach will produce more sustainable results.

Who are the key stakeholders in the project and how will we involve them?

Local stakeholders: landowners, local businesses, local communities, Cambridge residents, recreational visitors, Swaffham Internal Drainage Board, donors

National Trust internal stakeholders: Local Committee, National Trust Regional Committee, Wicken Fen staff and volunteers, National Trust regional staff, National Trust head office staff

Local authorities: Parish Councils, East Cambridgeshire District Council, South Cambridgeshire District Council, Cambridge City Council, Cambridgeshire County Council

Government agencies: East of England Development Agency, Environment Agency, Natural England, DEFRA, GO-East, English Heritage, Swaffham Internal Drainage Board

Universities and other research bodies: University of Cambridge, Anglia Ruskin University, Cranfield University, Centre for Ecology and Hydrology

Non-governmental organisations and conservation bodies: Wildlife Trust, Great Fen Project, RSPB, Wet Fens Partnership, National Farmers Union

Utility Companies: Anglia Water, EDF Energy,

National Grid.

Fundamental to our success to date has been the active support of the **Wicken Fen Local Committee**. This Local Committee has been in existence for 90 years and has throughout this time provided the National Trust with a wealth of scientific knowledge and experience of nature conservation management and provided links with the local community.

The Local Committee helped launch the Vision in 1999 and will continue to provide invaluable advice on all aspects of nature conservation management of the existing National Nature Reserve as well as advising on the interpretation of monitoring, recording and interpreting the ecological development of land being restored to wetlands in the Vision area.

The National Trust, with the Local Committee's support, recognises the value of key partnership working in furthering the aims of the Vision and that we will need to extend the range of consultation, advice and particularly investigations into long term funding. At a strategic level, a **Vision Partnership Panel** has been established.

Membership of the Panel includes the following external organisations: Environment Agency, Natural England, DEFRA, Cambridgeshire Horizons, EEDA, Cambridgeshire County Council, South Cambs, East Cambs and Cambridge City Council, Greater Cambridge Partnership, Swaffham IDB, Cambridge University, Anglia Ruskin University, Sustrans and local business representatives. The Partnership Panel:

- Provides guidance and advice to further the Vision's aims and objectives and immediate input into the development of this Strategy
- Provides a forward look at sources of financial support for acquisition and management of new land

- Considers and advises upon the wider context of the Vision when considered against their own organisation's forward strategies and the opportunities for cross working
- Considers and advises upon the longer term issues and their impact on our project e.g. green infrastructure developments in the sub-region, biodiversity and climate change, flood defence management, CAP reform, carbon sequestration and public engagement
- Considers and advises upon risk management as the land area of the Vision expands.

We also wish to engage more directly with users of the Fen and Vision area. In order to help this engagement we have set up a **Wicken Fen Parish Liaison Group** and a **Wicken Fen User Forum**. This informal forum brings together interested parties from the local area to consider specific topics, providing a sounding board for the concerns and aspirations of all local users. The Forum discusses and considers topics such as:

- Public access, footpaths, bridleways and cycle routes
- Boating and navigation issues
- Community engagement, interpretation, wider site management, recording, volunteer opportunities and events
- Education and wider environmental studies
- Healthy living initiatives.

Forum members represent the interests of their communities or specific interest groups with the topic to be considered, e.g. Parish Councils, ramblers, disabled access representatives, horse riders and cycling organisations, local National Trust members, boating organisations, Fenland By-Ways Users, Volunteer Bureau, teachers, etc.

We have also set up a **Grazing Forum** to consider and advise upon all aspects of our free-ranging grazing regimes and in particular:

- Management of large free-ranging herbivores (cattle, horses, deer) for the long term sustainable management of a dynamic landscape
- Shorter term, seasonal traditional grazing management, using domestic cattle and sheep, during conversion from arable cropping
- Operating within the parameters of animal welfare and cross compliance with subsidy regimes
- The management challenge of the interaction between free-ranging grazing herbivores and visitors
- The effect of grazing on biodiversity and habitat development.

The Local Committee, the Partnership Panel, the Parish Liaison group, the User Forum and the Grazing Forum are all advisory in function. Decisions on the management of Wicken Fen are taken by the National Trust through its own governance structure at property, regional and national level in the light of the advice provided by these advisory panels.

If you would like to participate in one of these advisory groups, please contact National Trust staff at Wicken Fen. See page 26 for contact details.

Consultation: views on the Vision

During the first half of 2008, we held a series of public events across the area to explain the Wicken Fen Vision, to listen to local people's views and reactions to the plans and to discuss how the plans should be implemented.

The 2008 consultation process for the Wicken Fen Vision centred on a series of public meetings in Swaffham Bulbeck, Wicken, Waterbeach, Fen Ditton, Lode and Burwell, with special events and drop-in sessions in Soham, Ely, Newmarket and Cambridge.

The exercise elicited over 550 responses covering overall views on the Vision as well as comments on how and why people enjoy the countryside, what sort of facilities and developments they would and would not like to see, and what is important to them when visiting new places.

Most of the responses were from the local area, but some were received from further afield, reflecting the fact that people from all over the world are interested in Wicken Fen.

What aspects of the countryside are important?

Nine out of ten said that peace and quiet and the chance to get away from it all were important. Other high scoring areas were the chance to see wildlife, getting some health and exercise and discovering and enjoying your local area. When asked which aspect was most important, peace and quiet came out strongly on top, scoring twice as strongly as its next nearest response.

Are there any problems with the countryside from the visitor's perspective?

Too much traffic was the biggest complaint, closely followed by too much litter. Two of the biggest problems involved access to the countryside with 30 per cent saying that there were too few footpaths and public open space and 25 per cent saying that they weren't sure where they could and couldn't go in the countryside.

How could a visitor's experience of the countryside be improved?

Responses reflected the huge variety of visitors that places like Wicken Fen attracts. Some wanted the area to be left as it is, while others said that board

walks, lavatories and visitor centres were important. Some wanted to plan their own visits and some wanted guided trails and children's facilities.

What specific facilities in the countryside are most important?

The most frequent response was a desire for well signposted paths and trails. Getting to the countryside is an important issue too, with car parking and road signage both scoring highly. Further down the list but still important were good interpretation and visitor information, easy-to-use paths like boardwalks. Lowest scores went to countryside being close to home and good public transport links.

The final question sought views on the Wicken Fen Vision.

Around 70 per cent think that the Wicken Fen Vision is an excellent idea, 13 per cent think it's a good idea on the whole, 11 per cent have some reservations about the project and six per cent are opposed to it.

Continuing consultation activities

During September and October 2008 a series of drop-in sessions were conducted at Wicken Fen aimed at specific groups of users including walkers, horse-riders, cyclists, anglers, bird-watchers, naturalists, dog-walkers and boaters. The intention was to identify specific needs amongst these groups of users and to create an ongoing series of forums for public consultation.

A newsletter is being published on a regular basis and around 20,000 copies are distributed extensively across the area.

The Wicken Fen website includes a wide range of information on the Vision as well as contact details to enable interested members of the public to participate in the development of future plans.

Despite having large areas of open farmland around Burwell access is very limited so greater access to a larger area for walking would be wonderful! •

I think it's an excellent idea, and hope that the vision can be achieved as soon as possible so that the residents of Cambridge can enjoy it. •

Go for it – but try not to forget the original Vision for wildlife and wild landscape – leave some bits without way-marked trails, facilities and amenities. •

Vital for wildlife and us, to keep biodiversity and varied habitats, to balance all the new housing increases. •

There must be a balance between accessibility for people and too much disruption to the wildlife. •

I already enjoy walking and cycling in the area. I am looking forward to the new paths opening up and being under NT management. This is a great Vision! •

I live in Cambridge and welcome the idea of being able to access new areas on foot or by bike. There is a real need to balance the urban environment with green spaces. •

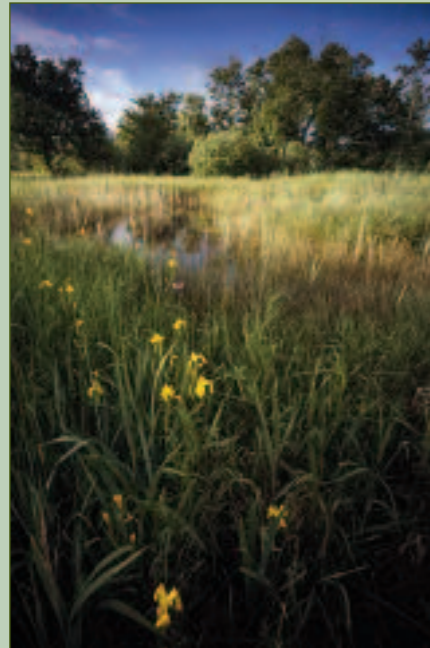
Fenland area needs to be better managed for wildlife – currently farming is too intensive. More interesting areas for walking are also needed, even if there aren't any hills! •



Further information

Landscape plan
Topography
Soils
Archaeology
Access Strategy
Strategic fit

Landscape plan

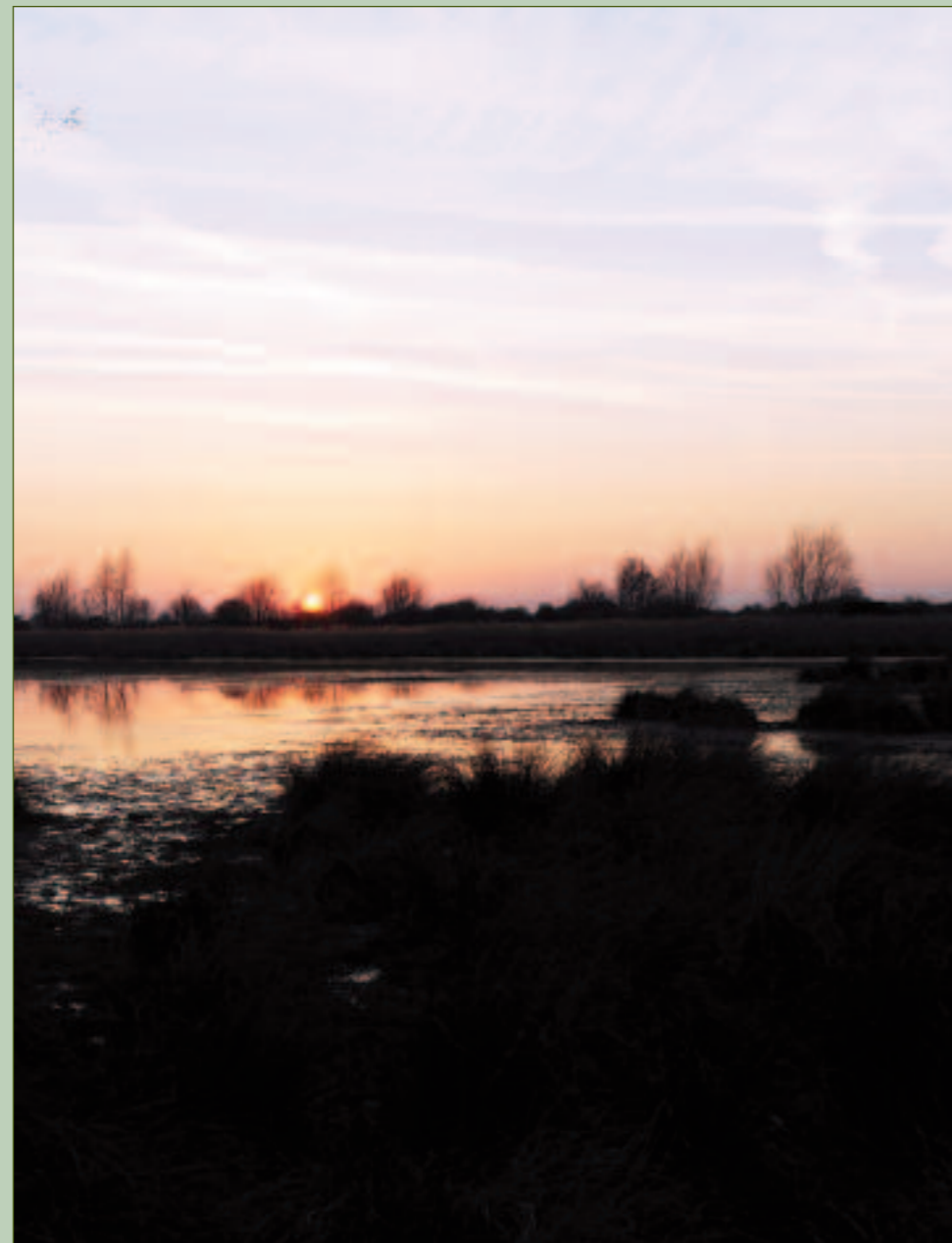


A mosaic of landscapes and habitats

The landscape plan for the Wicken Fen Vision aims to create a diverse range of habitats providing suitable environments for a huge number of species, including many which are rare and threatened, as well as providing different landscapes for visitors to explore.

The mosaic of different habitats and landscapes will be shaped by the soils and topography of the Vision lands. For example, in the lowest-lying areas around Burwell Fen, there will be more wet grassland, shallow open water and reedbeds. In the drier areas towards the southern end of the Vision area, there will be more rough grassland, new woodland and coppice belts.

Although there is a broad idea of what landscapes and habitats will be suited to different areas, there is not a prescriptive landscape plan covering the Vision area: instead, we will create more detailed plans as new land is acquired.



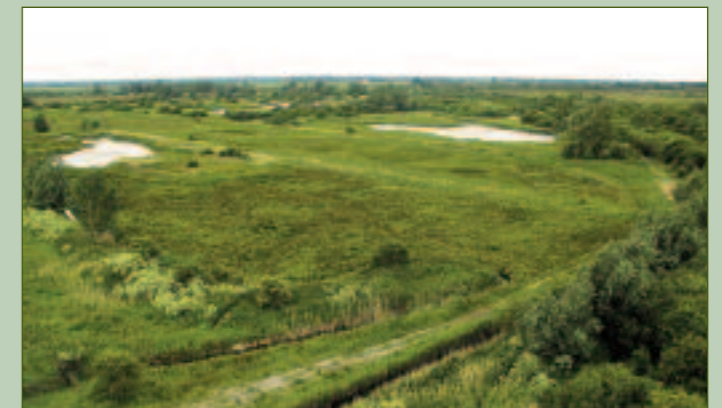
There will be some **new areas of shallow open water** like the existing mere on Adventurers Fen. There are no plans to create very large areas of permanent open water. Many of the areas of open water will be fringed by reedbeds which provide excellent habitats for a huge range of birds as well as many insects.

Areas of open water will be linked to existing drainage, providing a slow-moving water system with fresh water entering from the higher areas of the Vision area and draining slowly towards the lower areas.

Grassland will form the largest landscape in the Vision area, although there will be many different sorts of grassland ranging from dry upland areas, for example in the south of the Vision, to grassland that is kept permanently wet, and in between there will be grassland that is wet in winter and allowed to dry out in the summer.

The reason for creating a range of different grassland habitats is that there are many different species that thrive in grassland but their requirements vary. Barn owls need rough grassland to hunt over, finding voles and other small mammals. Some rare species of plant only grow in wet and boggy conditions whereas others need land where the surface is broken up in order to germinate successfully.

Managing grassland will need a range of different techniques. Much of the Vision area will be managed using grazing animals such as Konik ponies and Highland cattle which thrive in the wet and exposed conditions, creating a range of different grassland habitats.



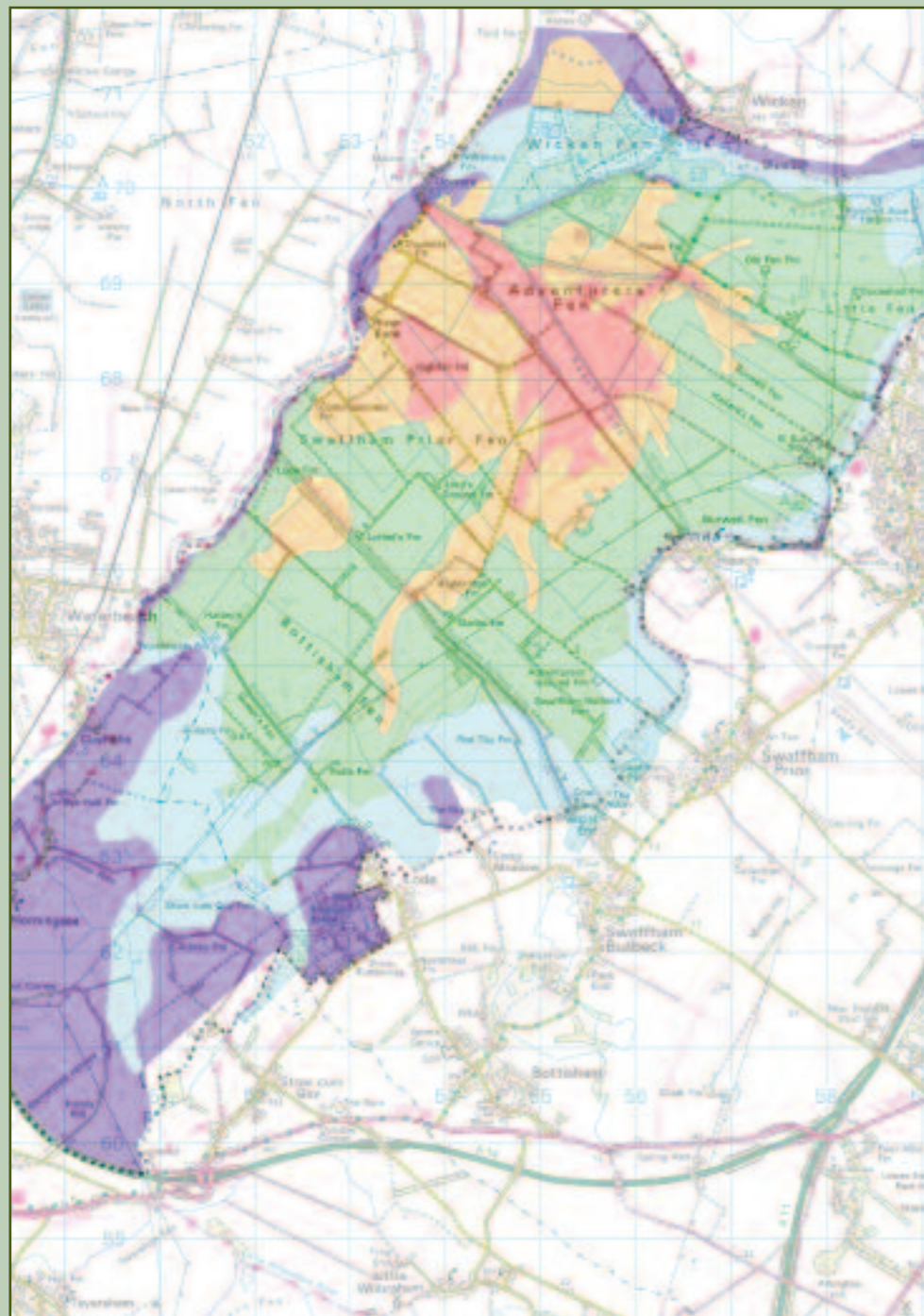
As well as forming navigation routes and providing a place for anglers to fish, the **Lodes** are an important part of the landscape of the Vision area, and also represent a unique set of habitats. The Lodes are slow-moving but flow constantly and they act as wildlife corridors, giving animals, birds and insects a route to move between different landscape areas and habitats. The Lodes are a central part of the landscape plan and the National Trust is working closely with the Environment Agency to make sure that the Lodes are protected and enhanced.

Topography and hydrology

The area of the Wicken Fen Vision overlaps to a great extent with that of the Swaffham Internal Drainage Board (IDB). The land is mostly very low-lying, with the lowest point being around two metres below sea level in the Burwell Fen area. The area is bounded in the west by the River Cam and is bisected by the Lodes, man-made waterways that drain the higher ground to the east and provide navigable waterways to the villages on the eastern fringe of the Vision area. Higher land exists both in the east and the south of the area, and the undrained area of the ancient fen at Wicken Fen is significantly higher than surrounding areas, evidence of the massive shrinkage of the peat soils over the past three hundred years.

The topography will have a significant impact on how the Wicken Fen Vision develops over coming years, with different habitats being created to suit the underlying topography and landscape: wetter areas on the low-lying land and drier areas on the higher land. Research shows that there is sufficient water in the Vision area to keep the remaining peat soils damp throughout the year.

Flood protection is an important element of the Wicken Fen Vision since the low-lying areas of the Vision can play a valuable role in holding and controlling excess water, helping to avoid flooding downstream. The National Trust is working closely with the Environment Agency to maximise the flood alleviation benefits of the Wicken Fen Vision.



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Soils

Soil types are a key determinant of landscape and topography in lowland England, and the Wicken Fen Vision contains some of the last remaining areas of undrained peat soil. Once covering hundreds of square kilometres of eastern England, there is now less than one per cent of these peat soils left in their original state.

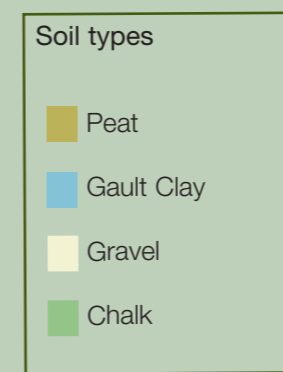
Peat soil that has been drained oxidises rapidly and shrinks and if cultivated, especially with efficient modern techniques, quickly breaks down. Current estimates are that the remaining 2,000 hectares of peat soils in the Vision area will disappear within the next 30 to 50 years and since drainage in the 17th century soil levels have fallen by several metres.

However, by rewetting the drained land, peat soils can be re-established creating valuable new habitats, as has already happened on several hundred hectares of Baker's Fen in the north of the Vision area. Peat soils also play an important role in managing carbon in the atmosphere: carbon can be sequestered or "locked up" in peat soils, and is released when the soils are drained and cultivated.

Elsewhere in the Vision area, gravels occur which were laid down when the area was criss-crossed by waterways which have now disappeared. Free-draining chalk soils dominate the south and east of the Vision area forming the edge of the chalk escarpment which characterises the areas of Cambridgeshire between Newmarket and Royston.



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Archaeology

The material culture and social history of the Wicken Fen Vision area represents a centrally important part of the project, and the National Trust is strongly committed to researching, recording, conserving and interpreting these aspects of the area, alongside the wildlife and nature conservation aspects of the Vision.

The man-made Lode navigations form an important set of historical artefacts, with some elements possibly dating back to Roman times (the River Cam was used as a trading route during the Roman occupation) and Roman sites have been identified in the south-western corner of the Vision area as well as on the Chalk uplands to the east.

There is significant evidence of Stone Age occupation, with a series of Mesolithic sites identified on the gravel soils of Swaffham Prior Fen and both Mesolithic and Neolithic axes being widely distributed across the Vision area. Bronze Age metal artefacts have also been discovered in a sparse distribution, and there is evidence of a round barrow in Stow-cum-Quy as well as a long barrow on Swaffham Prior Fen.

The National Trust's Anglesey Abbey in the southern area of the Wicken Fen Vision is archaeologically important: although the majority of the house itself is relatively modern, some parts of it are medieval in origin, and the grounds contain striking evidence of the monastic water management system.

The social history of Wicken Fen itself, the way it was managed and its impact on local people, is an important element in the story of the area. The National Trust is strongly committed to telling this story to visitors and local people alike. The Fen Cottage, adjacent to the visitor centre at Wicken Fen, is one of the National Trust's smallest properties and is open to the public at weekends, portraying life as it would have been in the early part of the 20th century.

Key

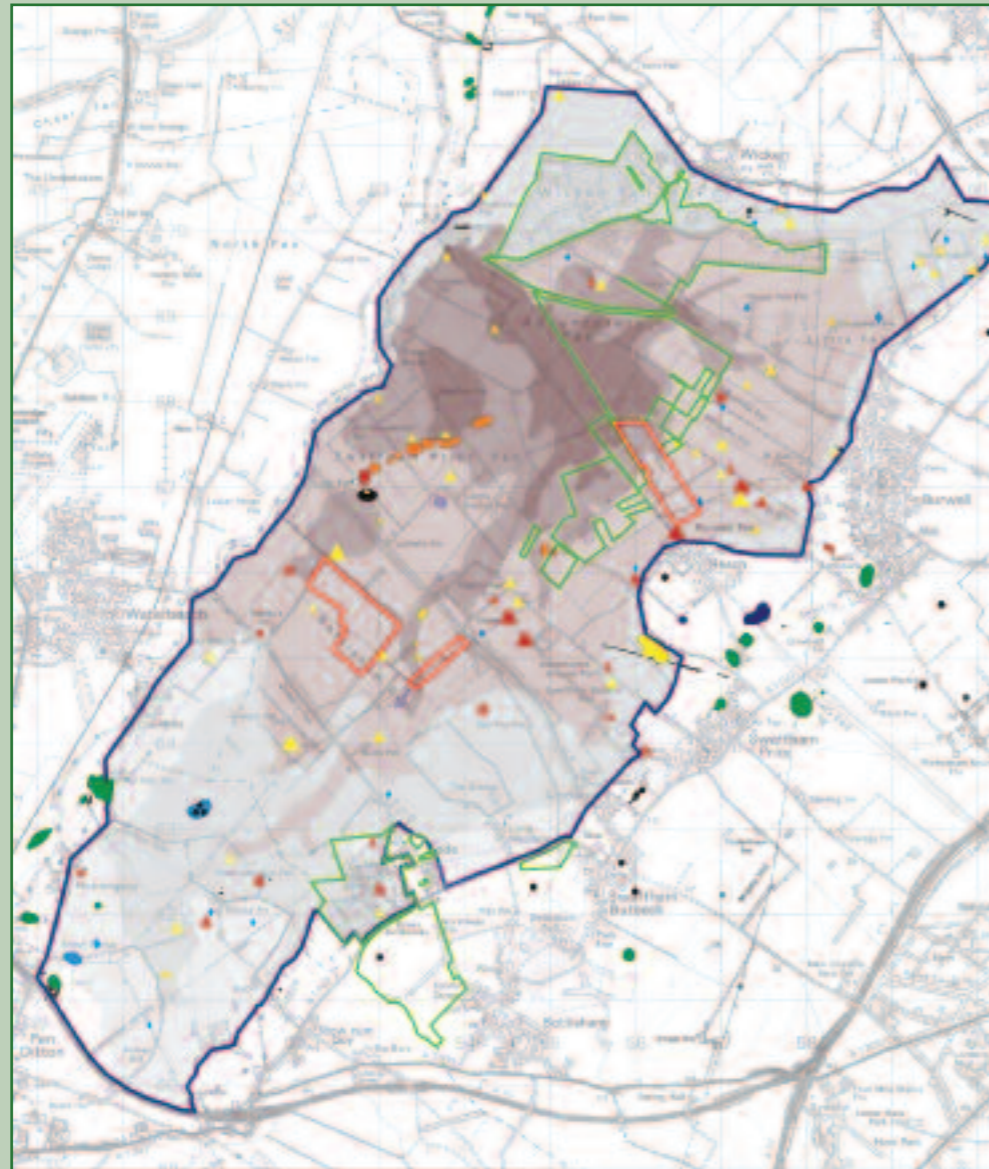
- Long barrow
- Round barrows
- Crop marks

1 2-4 5+

- Mesolithic axe
- Neolithic axe
- Bronze age metalwork

Sites from Fenland Project

- Mesolithic
- Mesolithic/neolithic
- Neolithic
- Flint scatterer
- Bronze age
- Iron age
- Roman



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Access and the spine route

Public access is at the very heart of the Wicken Fen Vision and a key aim is to open up thousands of hectares of green space for people to enjoy, escaping the pressures of modern life and seeing wildlife and nature on their doorsteps.

The Vision area already has a network of minor roads and rights of way, but these do not always allow access to the most interesting areas nor to some of the new areas of land being managed by the National Trust. The central element of the access plan is a spine route running from Wicken Fen in the north of the Vision area to Waterbeach and Anglesey Abbey in the south, giving access to the heart of the Vision lands which, over time, will become a mosaic of different wildlife habitats and landscapes.

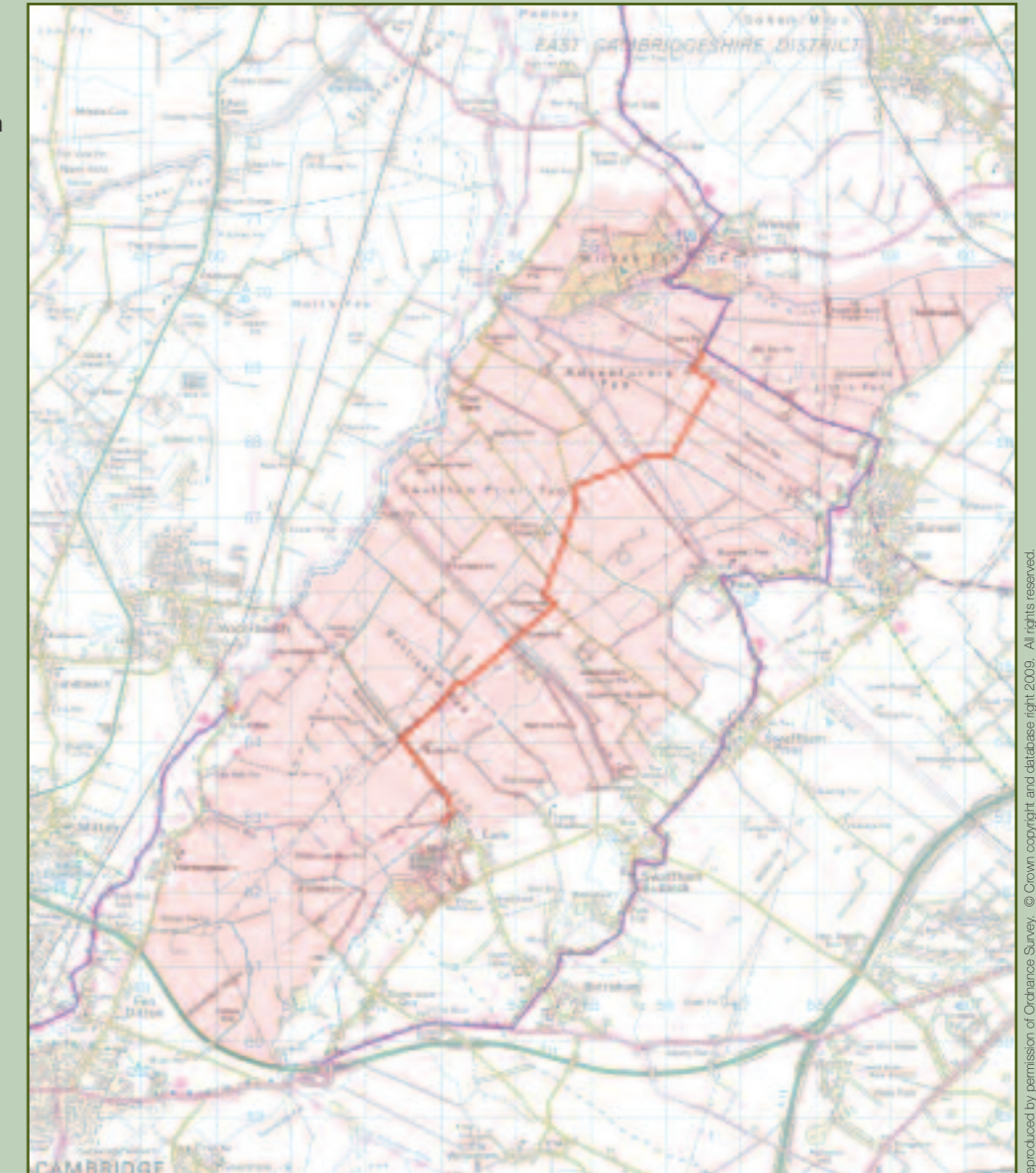
The major obstacles to creating the spine route are the Lodes, waterways which cut across the Vision area from east to west. New bridges are required and the first, across Swaffham Bulbeck Lode, was opened in the summer of 2008. As of May 2009, plans are being drawn up for work to begin on a bridge across Reach Lode and work is in hand to enhance access across Burwell Lode. The intention is to have a hard surfaced path suitable for walkers and cyclists, from Wicken Fen to Anglesey Abbey, available for use in 2010.

As well as the spine route, the National Trust is keen to improve access routes from and to the villages that lie to the east of the Vision lands, improving access for local people to use the area for recreation.

New paths are also being created in areas recently acquired by the National Trust: for example a new seven mile walk around Burwell Fen and Hurdle Hall, supported by Viridor Credits, was opened in 2008.

Access routes

- Wicken Fen Vision Spine Route
- Sustrans National Cycle Route
- Other local routes



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Strategic fit with key partner strategies

The Wicken Fen Vision Strategy is closely linked to other local, regional and national strategies and policies.

Cambridgeshire Structure Plan Cambridgeshire County Council

Policies for creating new green infrastructure and enhancing the existing landscape are reflected in local planning policies. Countryside Enhancement Areas identify areas where emphasis will be given to the promotion of schemes for quiet recreation and the enhancement of access, landscape and biodiversity.

Growth Areas, Community Plan Department for Communities and Local Government

The Wicken Fen Vision will help to ensure that the growth proposed for the London-Stansted-Cambridge-Peterborough Growth Area and more specifically within the Cambridge sub-region can be delivered in a sustainable way. It will ensure that new and existing communities have access to enhanced informal recreation opportunities close to where they live and replacing biodiversity lost to development and also to sea level rise/coastal erosion elsewhere in the region.

The Wicken Fen Vision has already received grant support from DCLG for land acquisition and public access improvements.

Green Infrastructure Strategy Cambridgeshire Horizons

Cambridgeshire Horizons has worked with a wide range of partners to develop a Green Infrastructure Strategy for the Cambridge sub-region and to secure public and private sector funding for its implementation. The Wicken Fen Vision is listed as one of the major existing Green Infrastructure projects.

Biodiversity Action Plans Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Biodiversity Partnership

There are 45 Habitat and Species Action Plans. The Wicken Fen Vision features strongly in these plans and will make a significant contribution towards achieving the targets to protect and enhance biodiversity.

Rights of Way Improvement Plan Cambridgeshire County Council

The plan promotes a Public Rights of Way network as an integral part of a wider transport system creating safe sustainable local transport, which improves public health, enhances biodiversity, increases recreational opportunities and contributes to the rural economy. This

plan mentions the Wicken Fen Vision as a project that will contribute towards this objective.

The East of England Plan Government Office for the East of England

The Wicken Fen Vision will help to fulfill policies on green infrastructure, biodiversity conservation and enhancement and large-scale habitat enhancement for the benefit of people and wildlife (Chapter 8).

Regional Economic Strategy East of England Development Agency

The Wicken Fen Vision will help to contribute to goals addressing *high quality places to live, work and visit* and *an exemplar for the efficient use of resources*.

Regional Environmental Strategy East of England Regional Assembly

This strategy reflects many of the same values and objectives of the Wicken Fen Vision, including enhancing landscape character and biodiversity.

Flood Risk Management Strategy Environment Agency

Small-scale catchment management approaches can deliver significant flood risk management benefits: the Wicken Fen Vision is an ideal opportunity to investigate how these benefits can be maximised.

Strategic Outcomes Natural England

The Wicken Fen Vision fits closely with Natural England's four strategic outcomes, which together deliver on the agency's purpose to conserve, enhance and manage the natural environment for the benefit of current and future generations:

- A healthy natural environment
- Enjoyment of the natural environment
- Sustainable use of the natural environment
- A secure environmental future

Local Development Frameworks East Cambs and South Cambs District Councils

This strategy will help to deliver environmental policies emerging through the Local Development Frameworks, by enhancing biodiversity, landscape and recreational values.

For links to the these strategies, please visit the Wicken Fen Vision website:
www.wicken.org.uk/vision.htm

Views, comments, ideas, inputs... please get in touch.

The Wicken Fen Vision is not a plan set in stone, but a series of ideas about how the National Trust can work with a wide range of partners to create a unique landscape which will benefit people and wildlife in an area of the country that is under huge pressure from new development.

The National Trust has already carried out a major public consultation during 2008 and is undertaking a range of ongoing consultation and information exercises. A user forum has been set up, representing user groups including horse-riders, cyclists, anglers, bird-watchers and naturalists, walkers and dog walkers: the forum will meet regularly to share their views on

access plans for the Vision area.

A newsletter is distributed to around 20,000 houses in villages and towns around the Vision area covering wildlife and conservation, new projects in the Vision area such as footbridges and new paths and special events at Wicken Fen.

The National Trust works closely with a wide range of partners including East Cambridgeshire and South Cambridgeshire District Councils, and participates in consultation exercises such as neighbourhood panels.

We welcome your views, wherever you live. Please contact us.

Contact the Wicken Fen Vision

☎ **01353 720274**
✉ **wickenfen@nationaltrust.org.uk**
💻 **www.wicken.org.uk/vision.htm**

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