Cambridge City Council Biodiversity Strategy 2026 – 2031

Sheep's Green Local Nature Reserve, Newnham

Contents

1. Foreword

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Cabinet Member for Nature, Open Spaces & City Services

When we adopted our 2022 Biodiversity Strategy, we pledged to undertake a midterm review on progress and direction. This draft revised strategy for consultation seeks to update changes in national legislation and recognise new regional strategies, partnerships and local projects. It provides an opportunity to reflect on and celebrate the many successful projects and partnerships working to protect and restore nature across the city and beyond.

The 2021 Environment Act places a new statutory duty on all Local Authorities to publish a Biodiversity Duty Report to demonstrate our collective efforts in support of biodiversity. The accompanying report showcases our shared regional and local visions, strategies and initiatives and provides case studies on what has been achieved between 2022 and 2025.

This summer I felt great pride in joining the Friends of Logan's Meadow Local Nature Reserve at their opening event of the newly created wetlands in East Chesterton. This ambitious project is a great example of the collaborative approach needed to restore urban habitats and wildlife. The original concept from the Friends, supported the vision of the Cambridge Nature Network, whose partners helped secure initial Lottery funding for design and consultation. Natural England provided additional Green Recovery Funding for a new woodland buffer, planted by the local community. The resulting momentum secured a Combined Authority grant and developer (S106) contributions to dig the new wetlands, which, following the planting of reeds by volunteers have already been visited by water voles, otters and kingfishers.

Such projects give us hope that the decline in nature can be reversed when communities and partners work together on shared challenges and goals. As I write we await adoption of the new statutory Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. We worked with the Combined Authority to produce this overarching vision for our region with shared priorities and goals that complement the existing objectives and projects of the Cambridge Nature Network, and we look forward to collaborating on delivery.

The repeating message of collaboration fundamentally supports our proposal for Cambridge to seek Nature City Accreditation for our collective work and ambition to put nature at the heart of our communities. We propose to take a lead on this and I hope you will feel inspired to respond to the consultation and join us in whatever way you are able.

Swift Tower and new wetland at Logan's Meadow Local Nature Reserve, East Chesterton

2. Vision

Our corporate plan sets out a clear '**One Cambridge, Fair for All'** vision which we are working towards cooperatively with our residents and partner organisations. Collectively we are seeking **'Cambridge to be a net zero carbon city, where people and nature enjoy a clean river, clean air, and biodiverse green spaces'** and where **'strong nature networks are coordinated between relevant bodies to combat the impacts of social and climate injustice'**

We will deliver this vision through our Corporate Plan (2022 – 2027) priorities. The first of which is **'Leading Cambridge's response to the climate change and biodiversity emergencies'**

'Our Biodiversity Strategy vision is that over the next 5 years Cambridge will see a "measurable net gain" in biodiversity, both within the city and the surrounding countryside, including the extent and quality of priority habitats and populations of priority species. Wildlife habitats will be protected, enhanced and where possible expanded and linked. The very best wildlife habitats will form the Cambridge Nature Network that will permeate the whole of the city and link to the wider Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Local Nature Recovery Strategy. Everyone who lives or works within Cambridge will have access to high quality natural greenspaces within walking distance of their home or place of work, and there will be a greater awareness and understanding of biodiversity with opportunities to be involved and collaborate in local wildlife enhancement projects and monitoring'.

3. Executive Summary

The Cambridge City Council Biodiversity Strategy (2026–2031) sets out a renewed commitment to address the biodiversity emergency declared in 2019. Building on the 2022 strategy, this update aligns with the Environment Act 2021, regional Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS), and the Natural Cambridgeshire (Local Nature Partnership) 'Doubling Nature' ambition.

Vision:

By 2031, Cambridge will achieve a measurable net gain in biodiversity, ensuring priority habitats and species are protected, enhanced, and connected. Every resident will have access to high-quality natural greenspaces, fostering engagement and wellbeing.

Strategic Objectives:

- Deliver measurable biodiversity net gain across the city.
- Improve condition and connectivity of designated sites and priority habitats.
- Embed biodiversity considerations across all council services and developments.
- Empower communities, businesses, and institutions to act.
- Maximise biodiversity potential of council assets and urban spaces.
- Establish long-term monitoring and research partnerships.

Key Themes:

- **Biodiversity Mainstreaming:** Integrate biodiversity into planning, housing, and operations; adopt LNRS; achieve 20% biodiversity net gain for council-led developments.

- The Core: Enhance Local Nature Reserves and Commons; support Cambridge Nature Network; restore chalk streams; review grazing practices.

- **Nature in Your Neighbourhood:** Promote community-led projects, Nature City Accreditation, pollinator-friendly initiatives, and biodiversity education.

Action Plan (2026–2031):

The strategy outlines targeted actions under these themes, including policy adoption, habitat restoration, species recovery, and collaborative projects with partners. Progress will be monitored through biodiversity audits, site condition assessments, and community engagement metrics.

Outcome:

This strategy aims to reverse biodiversity decline, strengthen ecological resilience, and embed nature at the heart of Cambridge's communities—delivering environmental, social, and health benefits for future generations.

4. Introduction

The term ‘biodiversity’ describes all forms of life, their interactions and the ecosystems that support them and us. It includes all species, both common and rare, which combine to provide us with the air we breathe, water we drink and the food we eat.

4.1 Why we need a strategy

In 2019, we declared a biodiversity emergency in recognition of the pressures facing our natural world, both locally and internationally. We adopted the current Biodiversity Strategy in 2022 to guide our work to meet this challenge and pledged to undertake a mid-term review to ensure we are meeting our objectives.

As with the Council’s climate change emergency, the biodiversity emergency requires all our services to consider their net impact on biodiversity within their operations. This revised strategy embeds biodiversity principles and considerations across all Council service areas and the communities we serve.

For many years, we have worked with our Friends Groups, Local Nature Reserve volunteers and partners such as the Wildlife Trust, Cambridge Past Present and Future, community gardens and orchards to maintain and improve the rich diversity of habitats in and around Cambridge. We greatly value this shared expertise and passion, recognising that we cannot hope to reverse the decline and help our species adapt to a changing climate alone. For this reason, the strategy review seeks to further engage with other city property owners, businesses, community groups and visitors to respect, protect and enhance our city’s wildlife and the multiple benefits it provides our communities.

We are partners in the Cambridge Nature Network (CNN), which incorporates our iconic riverside commons and Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) and we look forward to continue to work closely with other network stakeholders including the East Cambridge Farmland Cluster, Cambridge University colleges and the wider local

community to conserve and enhance the network as a vital strategic piece of green infrastructure for the city.

Due to the economic success of Cambridge and the local region, major growth sites which were identified within the Cambridge City Council's former Nature Conservation Strategy (2006) have now been built, along with associated new country parks and habitats to complement the existing network of LNRs, woodlands and water courses. Trumpington Meadows Country Park and Hobson's Park are now vibrant new strategic green spaces, providing welcome respite for communities during the Covid pandemic and new homes for farmland and wetland species. These schemes demonstrate that with good design and planning policy, biodiversity net gain is achievable on multifunctional spaces, with Hobsons Park being designated a County Wildlife Site in 2025.

The Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service between the City and South Cambridgeshire District Council allows us to help plan on a strategic Greater Cambridge geography for existing and new green infrastructure and measurable biodiversity net gain within our emerging shared local plan. Identifying land not just for new homes but for new habitats and green connections to meet our duty under the Environment Act 2021.

In addition, developments have included planning conditions securing Section 106 contributions, which have helped fund biodiversity projects on existing green spaces, such as 'The Rush' fish pass at Sheep's Green LNR and new wetlands at Logan's Meadow LNR.

4.2 Cambridge biodiversity in context

The biodiversity emergency we are experiencing is not just local but also global. Current global species extinction rates are 100 to 1000 times higher than the expected baseline rate, and they are increasing. Some of the key driving forces which are causing the emergency are increasing demands for housing, food and energy production. These can result in habitat loss, habitat degradation, habitat fragmentation and environmental pollution. They also contribute to, and exacerbate, the effects of climate change. The result is a decrease in species diversity, but also impacts on other elements of biodiversity, such as genetic diversity within species, or the functional characteristics of ecosystems. Ultimately these declines and changes undermine nature's productivity, resilience and adaptability placing it at risk of further damage or collapse.

All these pressures are damaging to the intrinsic value of biodiversity, and the ecosystem services that we rely on for our social, economic and environmental health and wellbeing - including clean air, urban cooling, flood alleviation and food to name but a few. A thriving biodiverse environment is critical for life with a growing evidence base to suggest that we lead healthier lives, both mentally and physically, if we have more opportunities to interact with nature.

The UK is one of the most nature depleted countries in the world (ranked 189 out of 218). Almost 15% of all species in the UK are at risk from extinction. With 72% of the UK land area managed for agriculture it is no surprise that changes in this industrial sector, responding to Government policy and societal changes, have one of the greatest impacts on our nation's biodiversity. Other drivers for change include urbanisation, invasive species, hydrological change and climate change.

In comparison to other parts of the UK, Cambridgeshire has some of the lowest proportions of Priority Habitats and land designated for nature conservation, and it has the second lowest proportion of woodland coverage. Within the region agricultural change has also been instrumental in land use changes and biodiversity

losses. Grassland cover has decreased from around 30% in the 1930s to less than 10% in 2018, being replaced in large part by arable farmland. Cambridgeshire also contains relatively little accessible green infrastructure for people, growing populations are placing greater recreational pressures on these existing greenspaces.

The same suite of threats impact on the biodiversity of Cambridge as they do throughout the rest of the world. Our city and its associated sub region are experiencing rapid urban growth, including housing, commercial and institutional development. Whilst this helps support a thriving local economy it places significant pressure on our green infrastructure[1] and the biodiversity it supports.

It is challenging in an urban environment to balance the needs of both wildlife and people. If we are to reverse the declines in biodiversity, we must value and make space for nature in the urban communities where we live and in the surrounding countryside. This will mean protecting and enhancing the precious biodiversity resources that we have left but also ensuring there is sufficient outdoor recreational space for residents to be able to access and enjoy.

The very fact that these pressures are occurring at a local level does mean that it is within our power to do something about them. Biodiversity is resilient, particularly in our towns and cities; and has the capacity to bounce back. There are many examples of positive interventions making a difference for biodiversity across the UK. The suite of actions set out within this strategy is the response of Cambridge City Council to the biodiversity emergency we face locally, nationally, and internationally. We recognise the importance of a healthy and biodiverse environment that is sustainably planned and managed to ensure the current and future prosperity and health and wellbeing of all sections of our communities. Our aim is to go beyond simply halting the decline in biodiversity but to actively restore the quality of our natural environment and leave our city's wildlife in a better state than that in which

[1] The term green infrastructure also includes the blue infrastructure of our city such as rivers and streams

we found it. We hope the following strategy will inspire you to join us and help to deliver the proposed actions and associated changes needed to achieve this.

4.3 Legislation and policy

This Biodiversity Strategy considers and is aligned with a range of national, regional and local policies and plans, as outlined below, Legislative documents, policy reports and reviews or policy drivers are described in further detail in Appendix 1.

National Legislation

- Environment Act 2021
- The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended)
- The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended)
- Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006
- The Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000

Policy documents (national, regional and local)

- National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2012 (updated 2024)
- South Cambridgeshire Local Plan (2018) and Cambridge Local Plan (2018)
- Draft Greater Cambridge Local Plan (publication timeline December 2026)
- South Cambridgeshire District Council Doubling Nature Strategy (2021)
- Greater Cambridge Biodiversity Supplementary Planning Document (2022)
- UK National Biodiversity Strategy & Action Plan (NBSAP) 2025
- Draft Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Local Nature Recovery Strategy (publication timeline December 2025)

Reviews, plans and policy drivers (national, regional, and local)

- Greater Cambridge Green Infrastructure Opportunity Mapping (2020/2021)

- Greater Cambridge chalk streams project report (2024)
- CCC/MKA Ecology Ltd Biodiversity Audit (2021)
- Natural England Nature Networks
- 25 Year Environment Plan (2018)
- Making Space for Nature: A review of England's Wildlife Sites and Ecological Network (The Lawton Report, 2010)
- Cambridge Nature Network Report

Our strategy recognises and adopts the principle of the following national initiatives that support our vision and objectives.

The Big Chalk Partnership

An ambitious, national-scale alliance of over 150 organisations—primarily National Landscapes, National Parks, conservation groups, farms, community groups, and government agencies—working across southern England's chalk and limestone geologies. Covering around 20% of England's land, including iconic areas like the Cotswolds, Chilterns, North Wessex Downs, and the South Downs National Park, the partnership is uniting efforts to restore, reconnect, and enhance nature-rich habitats at landscape scale. By embedding ecological recovery within national commitments to protect at least 30% of land for biodiversity by 2030, Big Chalk promotes collaborative conservation, data-driven project planning, and dynamic partnerships to ensure these vulnerable landscapes thrive in a changing climate.

Butterfly Conservation **-** ***Butterfly-Friendly Cities***

Butterfly conservation focuses on protecting butterfly species and their habitats, which are vital indicators of a healthy ecosystem. Urban areas can play a key role through the concept of a "butterfly-friendly city," where green spaces, parks, gardens, and roadside verges are managed to provide nectar-rich plants, native wildflowers, and shelter for butterflies. These cities reduce pesticide use, create pollinator corridors, and encourage community involvement in planting and monitoring. By integrating biodiversity into urban planning, butterfly-friendly cities

help reverse declines in pollinator populations, support climate resilience, and bring nature closer to people.

Nature Town & Cities

Nature Towns and Cities is a coalition—led by Natural England, the National Trust, the National Lottery Heritage Fund, and partners—aiming to transform urban living through nature. It seeks to give more people access to green and blue spaces within a 15-minute walk and enable more children to play in nature on their doorstep. It champions green infrastructure planning, to improve mental and physical health, provide climate resilience, improve air quality, community cohesion, and encourage economic investment. Ultimately, it positions nature not as optional, but as fundamental infrastructure—ensuring urban areas are greener, healthier, and more equitable for people and wildlife alike

4.4 Local initiatives

The continued decline in biodiversity has prompted several local and regional initiatives that seek to protect, restore and enhance biodiversity through both development and land management practices. Many of these seek landscape scale restoration of habitats to ensure that ecosystems are resilient. The City Council seeks to support these through both policies and projects to ensure that opportunities are realised on our land holdings, and we deliver measurable biodiversity net gain through our statutory functions, operational services and community influence.

Natural Cambridgeshire (Local Nature Partnership) Doubling Nature Vision

Natural Cambridgeshire is a partnership of leaders from businesses, local authorities, the health sector, farming, wildlife and environmental organisations that exists to champion, influence and enable the fulfilment of the Doubling nature vision

Cambridge Nature Network

The Cambridge Nature Network is a landscape scale biodiversity initiative led by the Local Wildlife Trust and Cambridge Past Present and Future with support from local Councils and other key landowning partners. The initiative is founded on an evidence based spatial plan for protecting and enhancing nature, focussed on the best of the remaining habitats within 10km of the city and key opportunities and locations for creating new habitats and associated linkages. Through collaboration with landowners and communities it represents an ambitious but achievable vision for local nature recovery. The Cambridge Nature Network will form a critical part of the emerging statutory Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Cambridgeshire, which will be overseen by the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority.

Draft South Cambridgeshire Climate & Nature Strategy 2026–2030

Led by South Cambridgeshire District Council, establishes a clear vision: empower the district to lead in climate action, enhance environmental stewardship, protect and restore nature, and build resilience for communities in the face of escalating climate impacts. Its key principles focus on embedding climate and nature objectives throughout the council's work, leveraging partnerships, and prioritising actions that deliver co-benefits—benefiting both nature and people—while enabling sustainable economic growth and improving wellbeing

Cambridge University Biodiversity Action Plan

Representing considerable land holdings across the city, this plan seeks to deliver a significant and measurable improvement in the biodiversity of the University of Cambridge estate, and the Greater Cambridge Area more generally, in a manner that educates and inspires an appreciation of the natural environment, and that

encourages interventions, research and innovation to enhance and protect biodiversity for future generations. It seeks to further collaborative working with the City Council on biodiversity initiatives.

Wicken Fen Vision

The National Trust's Wicken Fen Vision is an ambitious, 100-year plan to create a diverse landscape for wildlife and people stretching from Wicken Fen to the edge of Cambridge. By restoring natural processes, careful management of water and grazing will allow the land to evolve a mosaic of habitats for a wide variety of abundant wildlife. People will be able to enjoy access and recreation opportunities across a beautiful, tranquil natural fenland landscape, with opportunities for volunteering, education, and interpretation.

Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS)

The LNRS a legally mandated framework under the Environment Act 2021, aimed at reversing nature decline in one of England's most depleted regions. Spearheaded by the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority (responsible authority) in partnership with Cambridgeshire County Council, Natural Cambridgeshire and local (supporting) authorities, the strategy sets biodiversity priorities, maps existing and potential habitats, and identifies key areas and species for ecological restoration.

Acting as a spatial roadmap, it targets the expansion and reconnection of wildlife-rich areas—aligning with the region's "Doubling Nature" ambition—and emphasises nature-based solutions for cleaner water, flood mitigation, carbon storage, community access, and resilience to climate change. Following extensive stakeholder engagement and public consultation (July–September 2025), the strategy is set to guide land-use planning, public investment, and local conservation efforts—building a nature-rich, productive, and sustainable landscape for both people and wildlife.

Meadow and urban forest planting at Cherry Hinton Hall

4.5 Cambridge City Council role

We manage more than 80 parks and open spaces, such as play areas, allotments, community gardens and orchards, totalling over 742 hectares. Some of these sites are designated and managed predominantly as nature reserves, for their wildlife value and form part of the key Cambridge Nature Network, whilst others provide valuable predominantly recreational open space for residents and visitors to enjoy. Whatever the primary purpose and size of these spaces, combined they provide a huge potential for increasing the extent, quality and connectivity of habitats within the city and their contribution to the wider Local Nature Recovery Strategy. Therefore, we have an obligation and opportunity to ensure that all sites maximise their potential for biodiversity, provide good examples of habitat management and creation and hopefully influence other landowners to do the same.

We manage approximately 23 kilometres of awarded watercourses, including some of our precious chalk streams, by ensuring management is sensitive to biodiversity, whilst providing our statutory drainage functions, we can protect such iconic species as otter, water vole, kingfishers and brown trout in the city. We are also riparian

owners of a significant stretch of the main riverbank through the city. Wherever possible we are seeking to ‘naturalise’ previously engineered banks such as at Stourbridge Common, creating new backwaters and wetland such as on Logan's Meadow LNR and providing passage for fish around artificial obstructions, such as at the weir at Byron’s Pool LNR and ‘The Rush’ fish pass at Sheep’s Green LNR.

We are custodians of our precious common land and oversee the historic grazing management practice that retains flood meadow landscapes and iconic cattle grazing in the heart of the city. These grasslands form a key part of the network of Cambridge spaces and offer potential for enhanced management to benefit biodiversity, urban drainage and capture carbon emissions.

Through implementation of our Tree Strategy (2016 – 2026), we manage over 30,000 trees, contributing to the urban forest that provides both wildlife and communities with a range of ecosystem services, making our neighbourhoods cooler, cleaner and more attractive places to live. Streets trees provide vital shade for communities as well as habitat and ‘stepping stones’ for species living in or moving through the built environment.

Our property estate includes rental units, iconic buildings such as the Guildhall and council housing properties with gardens and communal open spaces. How we manage, renovate, and invest in these assets will impact upon existing species present and provide huge opportunities for restoring nature where people live and work.

Through our Community Service, Community Engagement Team we offer support to local Friends Groups, providing opportunities for volunteering in our parks and open spaces, and work closely with local community groups including On the Verge promoting new wildflower meadows and Action for Swifts, with swift box provision such as on Queen Ann Terrace car park and at Edgecombe Flats.

We provide local schools with natural green spaces for valuable environmental education opportunities enabling pupils to explore, experience and value nature close to home.

As a local authority we are often a key partner in many local initiatives and projects with links to community groups. By promoting biodiversity through raising awareness in communities we can ensure that opportunities for people to connect with, protect, enhance, and appreciate nature are realised.

Figure 1. Our role in local nature recovery

4.6 Biodiversity in Cambridge

The geological and landscape setting

There are three National Character Areas (NCA) around Cambridge, each with distinctive geological features which dictate the landscape character and biodiversity contained within them.

To the north and west is (NCA 88) Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire Clay lands. A broad gently undulating lowland plateau with shallow rivers, and notably the Great Ouse and Nene, which broaden as they reach the Fens. The area is dominated by intensive arable farming. There is an underlying clay geology which is overlain by glacial deposits of chalky boulder clays which add great character to the ancient woodlands in the area.

To the south and east is (NCA 87) East Anglian Chalk. Characterised by smooth rolling chalkland hills with large irregular field enclosed by low-lying hedgerows. Much of the area is under cereal production but important semi-natural habitats include lowland calcareous grassland and the chalk streams which are under significant threat from modification, pollution and abstraction.

Further north and east of the city, and with a narrow corridor alongside the River Cam, is (NCA 46) The Fens. Characterised as an expansive low-lying wetland landscape. Woodland cover is sparse, and the open fields are bounded by drains and river systems which provide an important ecological network. An important area for biodiversity with several internationally recognised areas of nature conservation value.

Within the City of Cambridge, it is possible to see the influence of each of these regions on the habitats and species that are present. Directly to the south-east of the city are chalky grasslands with exposed chalk (such as East Pit in Cherry Hinton). To the north and east are areas which have characteristics of fenland with reedbeds and drains (such as Wilbraham Fen). To the west, and running right through the

heart of the city, are riverside meadows and pastures which are characteristic of the semi-natural habitats of the clay lands (such as Grantchester Meadows and Midsummer Common).

The ecological setting

Statutory and non-statutory designated areas

Within Cambridge there are a range of areas designated for their nature conservation value. These include statutorily designated Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) which are of national significance for the biodiversity and geological features they support. The statutory sites also include LNRs which are of statutory local significance for both people and wildlife.

Non-statutory sites include County Wildlife Sites (CWS), which represent some of the most important habitats in Cambridgeshire. Within the city itself are a suite of City Wildlife Sites (CiWS) and Protected Road Verges (PRVs). These areas do not meet national or County criteria for statutory designation, but they do meet important criteria at a local level and contain many locally significant habitats and species.

The habitats and species at these locations are varied but typically reflect the wider landscape with woodlands, chalk grasslands and rivers and streams. Some are designated for the species they support, such as water vole. Some habitats and species within Cambridge are listed as Habitats of Principal Importance and Species of Principal Importance, or Priority Habitats and Species. These are listed on the NERC Act (2006) and represent some of the most valued habitats and species in the UK.

Other greenspaces

Cambridge is fortunate to have a host of other greenspaces which all make a significant contribution to our biodiversity. These include country parks, such as those at Milton (just outside the city boundary in South Cambridgeshire) and

Trumpington Meadows (which straddles the border with South Cambridgeshire). There are also other accessible natural greenspaces including Grantchester Meadows, Hobson's Park, and new areas of open space at Eddington and Darwin Green in north-west Cambridge.

Cambridge is a 'green' city. Beyond the formal greenspaces such as designated areas and parks, there are also numerous informal greenspaces, including community gardens and orchards, private gardens as well as college grounds, street trees and increasingly, green roofs. Tree canopy covers approximately 17.6% of the city making a significant contribution to the biodiversity resource in Cambridge.

The Cambridge Nature Network

Two priority areas of the Cambridge Nature Network directly interact with the city and surrounding countryside. The Cambridge Nature Network Priority Areas have been identified by grouping core sites based on landscape features, topography, and hydrology. Within these areas, potential extension habitats (or 'steppingstones') are proposed with a view to creating coherent joined up nature networks, which are resilient to the modern-day pressures on our biodiversity. The Cambridge Nature Network target is to achieve a 30% coverage of wildlife rich habitats within each Priority Area.

The River Cam Corridor Priority Area passes right through the heart of Cambridge following the course of the Cam. This Priority Area also includes the tributaries of the Cam which flow from the south, such as Cherry Hinton Brook and Hobson's Brook. This is a critical Priority Area within the network as it provides the connection linking other Priority Areas to the north, south, east and west. Many of these sites and watercourses are managed by Cambridge City Council so we are uniquely placed to help deliver the network through the city.

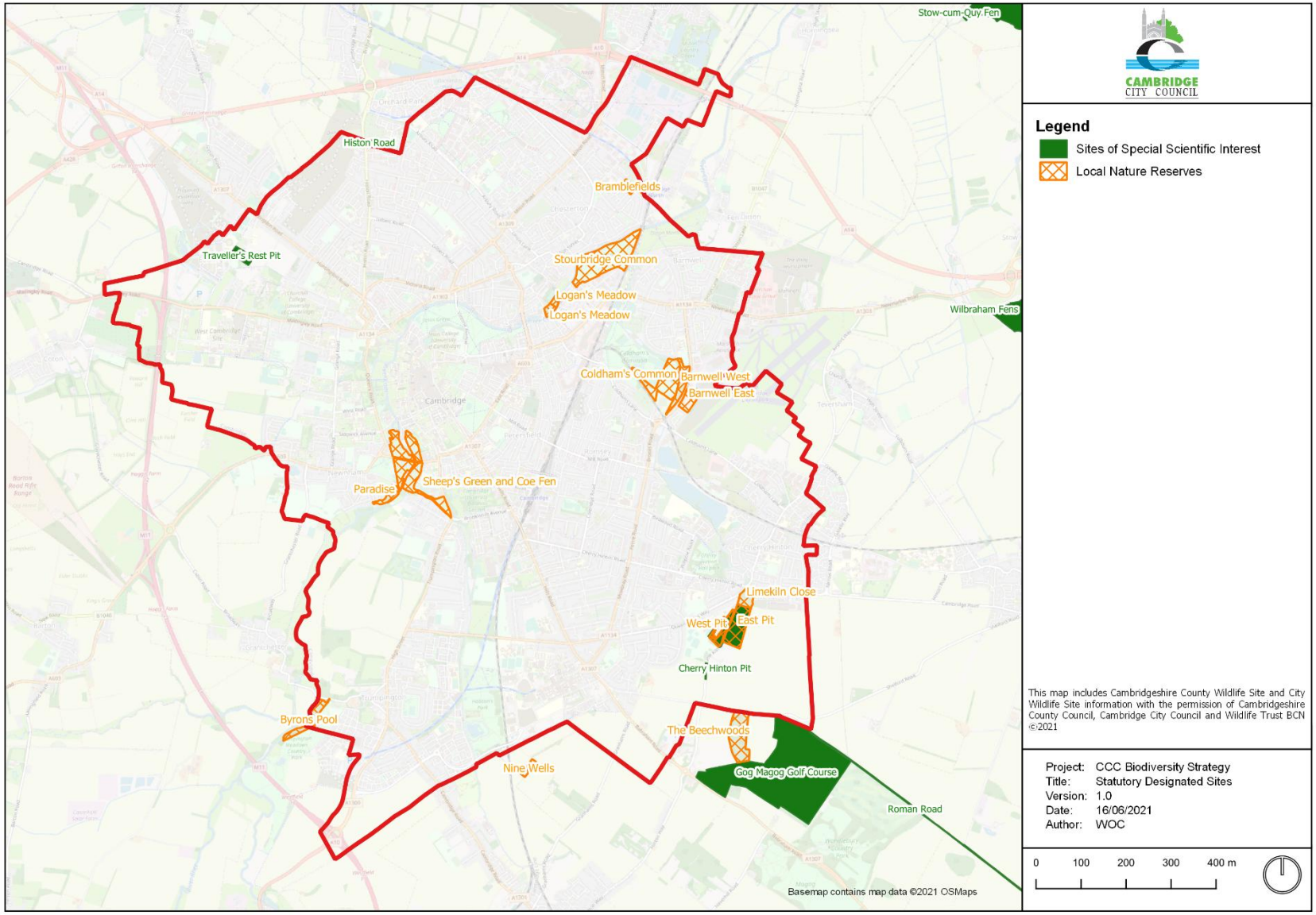
Just south of Cambridge, the Gog Magog Hills Priority Area reaches to the fringe of the city. This Priority Area is characterised by the underlying chalk with the key sites of nature conservation importance located at the Cherry Hinton chalk pit complex at

this point on the edge of Cambridge. It stretches further south and east of the city with other important chalk habitats, such as the Roman Road SSSI.

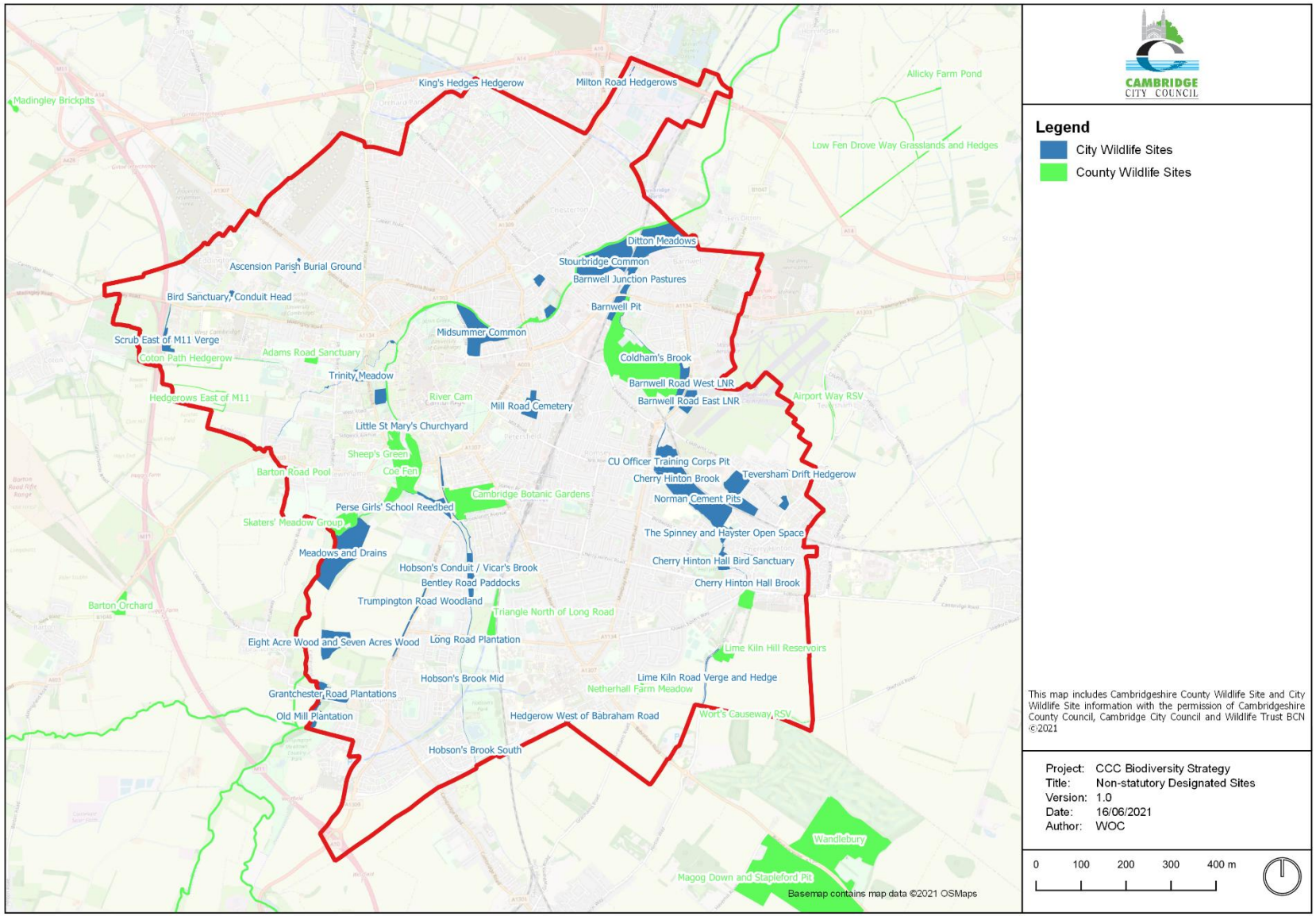
There are four other Cambridge Nature Network Priority/Opportunity Areas. Directly to the north and east are the Cambridge Fens Priority Areas and Wicken Fen Vision South Priority Area. To the west lies the Boulder Clay Woodlands Priority Area and further north is the Fen Edge Orchards and Droves Opportunity Area.

The Cambridge Nature Network has been integrated into the draft Cambridgeshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

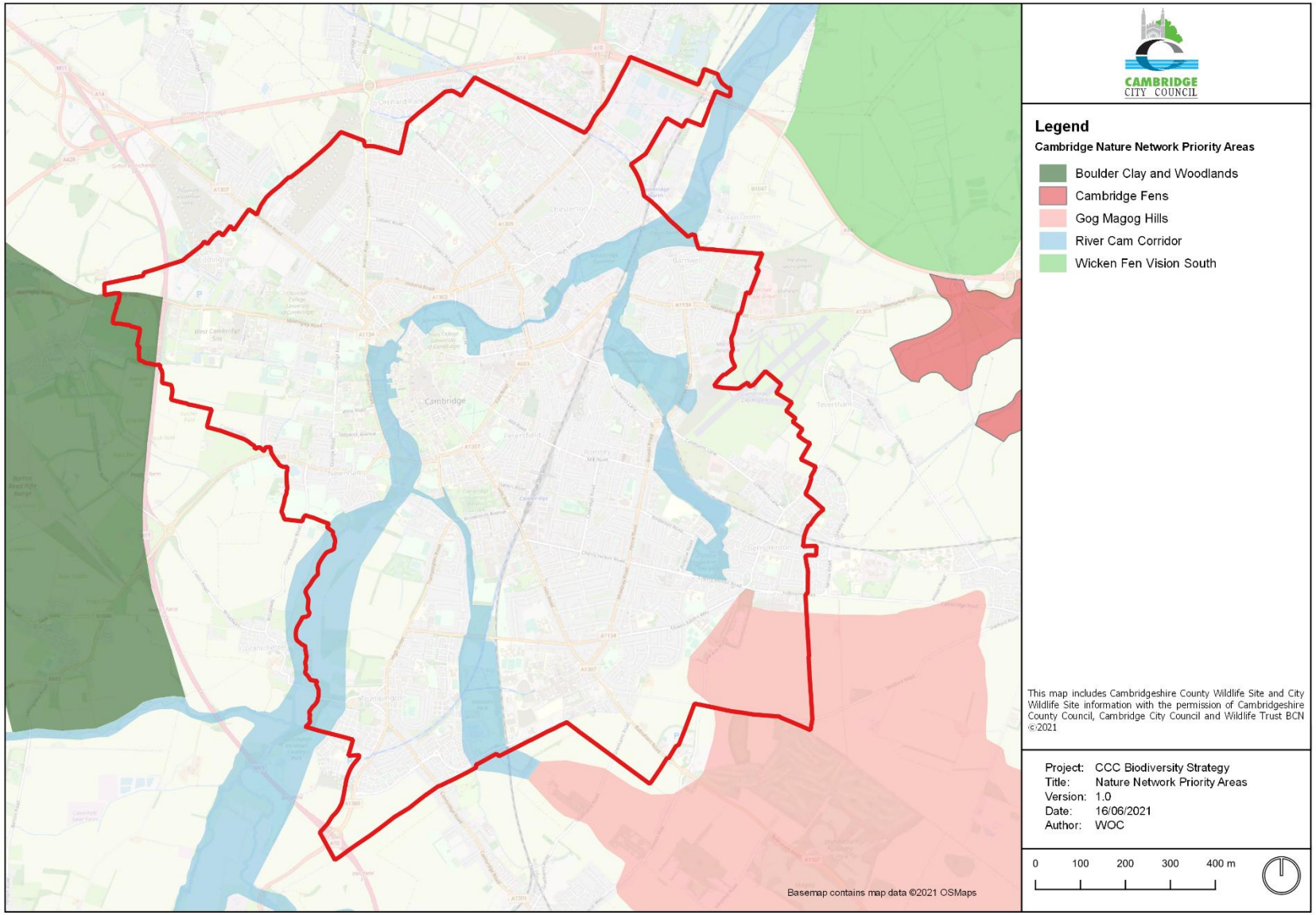
Map 1 showing statutory designated areas in Cambridge



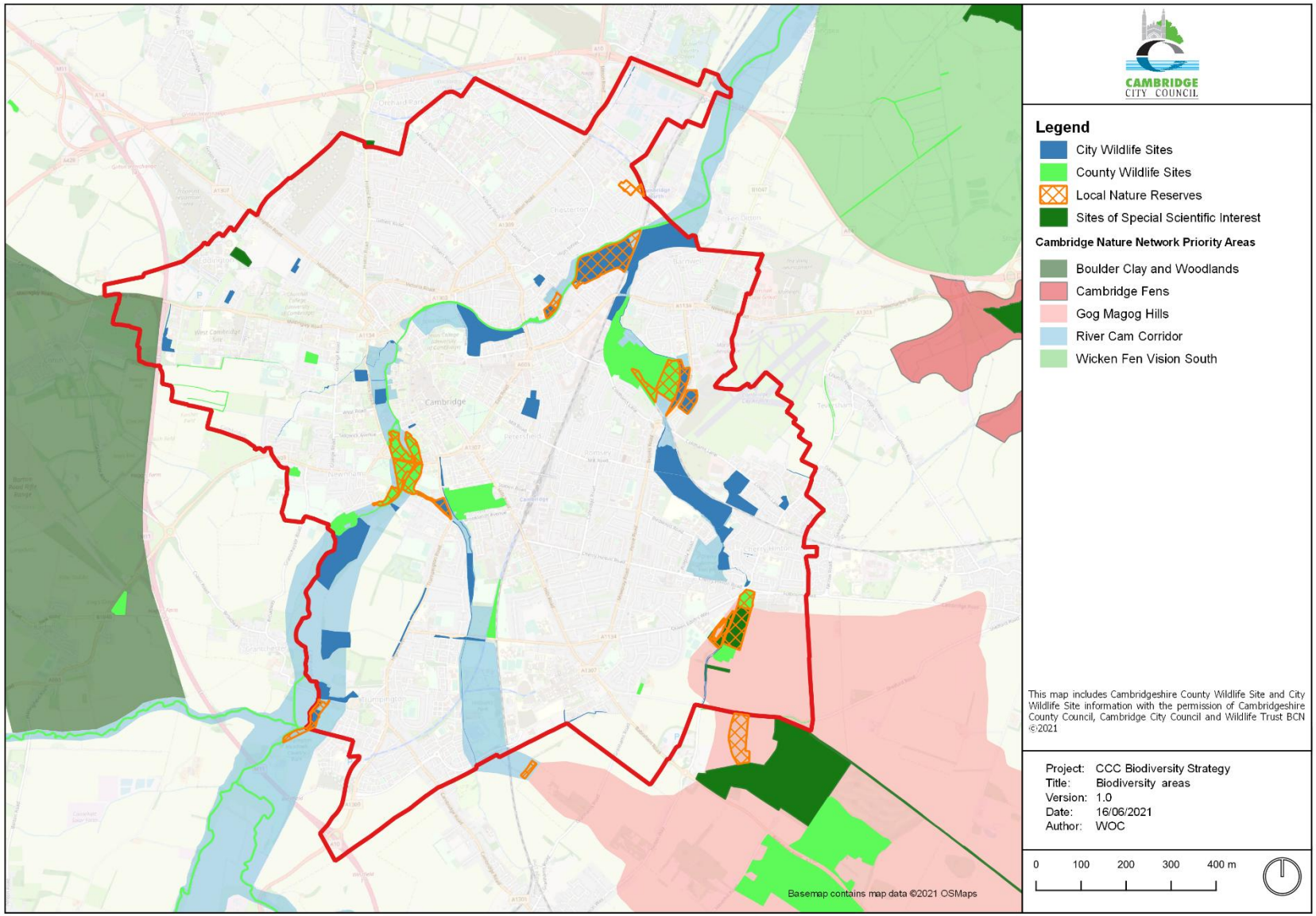
Map 2 showing non-statutory designated areas in Cambridge



Map 3 showing Cambridge Nature Network Priority Areas in Cambridge



Map 4 showing biodiversity sites and areas in Cambridge



City key habitats

The various sites in the Cambridge Nature Network support several core habitats with distinct species, pressures and management requirements.

Grasslands

Cambridge grasslands range from small areas of rare species-rich lowland calcareous grassland to wide expanses of species poor amenity grasslands, which are widespread throughout the city. Significant grassland habitats are present along the Cam corridor and these run through the centre of Cambridge including Sheep's Green, Midsummer Common and Stourbridge Common. These areas, with their grazing cattle, give Cambridge its unique rural character. Coldham's Common provides further large areas of grassland with a mix of amenity grassland through to more species diverse neutral and calcareous grasslands. There have been significant additions to the species-rich grassland resource in recent years with the creation of Trumpington Meadows Country Park and Hobson's Park to support local developments.

Priority grassland types within Cambridge include:

- Lowland calcareous grassland
- Lowland meadows

Woodland

Woodlands are uncommon in Cambridgeshire with very few areas of ancient woodland remaining. Areas of naturally regenerated woodland are present throughout the city however and include Byron's Pool in Trumpington and the Bird Sanctuary, The Spinney and Limekiln Road LNR, all situated in Cherry Hinton. Several areas of wet woodland occur, primarily at Paradise and Logan's Meadow LNR.

Priority woodland types within Cambridge include:

- Lowland beech and yew woodland
- Wet woodland
- Lowland mixed deciduous woodland

Sheep's Green contains wood pasture habitat which comprises mature trees set within semi-natural grassland habitats. This combination of habitats, and particularly the veteran and ancient pollard willows, is important for numerous invertebrates including the scarce musk beetle *Aromia moschata*. These woodlands and mature trees also provide roosting and foraging habitats for a range of bat species, such as common pipistrelle *Pipistrellus pipistrellus* and brown long-eared bat *Plecotus auritus*.

Hedgerows and scrub

Old and mature hedgerows are uncommon in the city with a few remaining examples at King's Hedges and Cherry Hinton. There are significant areas of scrub habitats, particularly around Coldham's Common and Barnwell within the designated sites at these locations.

Priority hedgerow and scrub habitats within Cambridge include:

- Hedgerows

These old hedgerows and scrub habitats provide important habitats through the city and particularly for bird species which use them for breeding during the spring and summer months and for foraging and cover in the autumn and winter months.

Wetlands

The River Cam corridor contains a variety of wetland habitats, including wet grasslands, reedbeds, and the chalk streams which form tributaries to the Cam. The chalk streams around and within the city are very scarce habitats of international importance. Other wetland habitats occur away from the River Cam and these include ponds, lakes, and ditches.

Priority wetland habitats within Cambridge include:

- Reedbeds
- Ponds
- Rivers (including Chalk Streams)

The River Cam presents one of our most important wetland habitats, and, combined with its tributaries, forms a network of habitats through the city. To the north Teversham and Wilbraham Fen are biodiversity ‘hotspots’, which are home to a wealth of specialist birds, invertebrates and other species which reside in the reedbed and wetland habitats there.

Our wetland habitats are home to eels, kingfisher, grey wagtail, otter and water vole. Water voles have suffered significant national declines as a species but Cambridgeshire, and Cambridge in particular, remains a stronghold. They thrive in the slow-flowing, well-vegetated ditches found through the city.

Urban

Urban habitats dominate the city and often offer surprising opportunities for wildlife. There are pockets of habitats for species to thrive, including gardens, allotments, and street trees. Increasingly the built environment is purposefully designed to accommodate biodiversity with integrated bird and bat boxes or green roofs.

Priority urban habitats within Cambridge include:

- Open mosaic habitat on previously developed land

The David Attenborough Building on the New Museums Site is an example of how biodiversity can work with the built environment. Here green roofs provide habitats high above street level, and swifts nest in boxes that are built into the towers. Swifts are charismatic birds that form part of the backdrop to a Cambridge summer with squadrons of screaming birds swooping through the streets and nesting within the cracks and crevices of the buildings in Cambridge. Similarly, house martins use our buildings as nesting sites, for example at Addenbrookes Biomedical campus and in the gatehouse at King's College. The buildings of Cambridge also host breeding peregrine falcon, which can regularly be seen surveying the city from the spires of King's College Chapel.

Many species of bat roost in the buildings in the city, and some are specialists that will typically only roost in buildings. This includes serotine bat *Eptesicus serotinus*, which can be seen hawking and swooping for prey over Nightingale Recreation Ground. As you move towards the edge of the city where the gardens tend to be bigger you are more likely to encounter other important species such as song thrush, or even part of the thriving urban badger population.

- Gardens

Collectively private gardens form the biggest land use within the city and are therefore vital in providing green space and tree canopy cover. Multiple ownership means that the individual biodiversity value of these spaces varies greatly but there is potential to greatly increase biodiversity value through relatively simple changes to management or initiative such as creating hedgehog highways to link gardens. Studies have shown that sensitively managed gardens can support a wide range of species that are often declining in the wider farmland landscape. The installation of garden ponds can benefit many species include amphibians, particularly when

associated with other habitats such as long grass and wood piles that provide areas to forage and shelter.

The cultural setting

Cambridge is a place of naturalists and conservationists and has been for many years. We have perhaps one of the most studied natural histories of any city. It is possible to trace this history through just one plant in the city. The Butterbur patch which grows alongside the River Cam at Paradise LNR was first recorded in that location in the 1600s by the notable botanist John Ray. It has been recorded in that location ever since, its flowers appearing in early spring before the leaves.

Cambridge is home to many individuals, trusts, societies, groups, and institutes with nature conservation at the heart of what they do. Some groups have been well-established in the city for considerable periods of time, such as the Cambridge Natural History Society which has been studying the biodiversity of the area for over 164 years. Other more recently established organisations such as the Cambridge Conservation Initiative, a collaboration of the University and conservation organisations, have a world-wide reach far beyond the perimeter of the city. Whilst these groups are varied and diverse, they each have a shared goal to conserve and promote biodiversity. Collectively they present an enormous opportunity for successful collaboration to help Cambridge lead the way in the world as an example of how biodiversity and communities can co-exist and thrive together in a city geography.

4.7 Local threats and pressures

As with many other urban areas there are pressures and threats in Cambridge which degrade and deplete our biodiversity resource. To understand the opportunities and threats to biodiversity in Cambridge we commissioned the Biodiversity Audit and the Greater Cambridge Chalk Stream Project Report. These reports also identified several threats and pressures which are specific to our local area. The key pressures on biodiversity within Cambridge include:

- Habitat loss: Direct loss of biodiverse habitats and the species they support
- Habitat fragmentation: Removal of the links between areas resulting in smaller, less resilient habitats
- Habitat degradation: A deterioration in the condition of the habitat, such as reduction in species diversity

The key local causes of these are:

- Urbanisation: This can result in direct habitat loss and fragmentation. It could also lead to a degradation of habitats, for example from the effects of artificial light. Other indirect effects include poor air quality from increasing traffic. Nitrogen from exhaust fumes can over time increase nutrients in greenspaces and alter the composition of these habitats.
- Recreational pressure: As the population grows there is increasing demand on our greenspaces. Many habitats and species in the city are sensitive to disturbance. Impacts include trampling, or disturbance and nutrient deposition from the increasing popularity of dog walking in the city. Dog fouling deposits nutrients in sensitive habitats and this can change the vegetative composition of the area. Dogs off leads can have significant effects on ground nesting birds or disturbance of other animals such as mammals.
- Hydrological change: The Greater Cambridge Chalk Stream Project identified hydrological change as a major driver for negative impacts on our chalk streams and rivers. This includes channel modification or depleted aquifers

leading to low flow and poor water quality. These result in habitat loss and degradation.

There are also wider causes, such as climate change which has the potential to alter habitats and species populations, thereby making them more scarce or unviable. These threats and pressures do not recognise the boundaries that we impose as humans. They pass through natural pathways, such as river catchments, and consequently their solutions will lie outside the city too. This will require us to work with stakeholders across a greater area.

5. Biodiversity Audit

As part of the development of the 2022 Biodiversity Strategy, we established a baseline of habitat types and their condition for the key natural green spaces in our ownership so that we could plan and monitor management and enhancements to deliver a measurable gain in biodiversity. To quantity this we the Biodiversity Metric tool developed by Natural England in partnership with DEFRA, The Environment Agency and other organisations to provide developers, planners and land managers with the means of measuring the value of the biodiversity under their jurisdiction. It uses the size, type, and condition of habitats as a proxy for their importance and value for nature (Crosher *et al.,* 2019b).

Using a variation on the DEFRA Biodiversity Metric 2.0, the following attributes of the habitats within our natural green spaces where recorded:

- *Distinctiveness:* The type and importance of a habitat. Habitats that are rare and/or support a wide range of species are more distinctive.
- *Condition:* A measure of the quality of a given habitat type. It should be stressed that condition in biodiversity terms is not to be confused with traditional perceptions of condition or maintenance. A grassland that might be perceived to be well maintained (e.g., regularly mown) is very likely to be in poor condition. Distinctiveness and condition are also not wholly independent. Some of the factors that lead to a habitat being in poor condition may also lead to its definition as being a lower distinctiveness.
- *Strategic significance:* Any site that possesses a designation, or falls within the Cambridge Nature Network Priority Area, is considered High, those deemed ecologically valuable but without designation are considered Medium, and those with limited ecological value and no designation are classed as Low.

Each of these factors or scores is given a weighting and the scores multiplied together along with the area of habitats or lengths of linear features (e.g., hedgerows) to create a ‘Biodiversity Unit’. Areas with large areas of rare habitats in

good condition have the highest number of units. Whilst the biodiversity unit can appear to overly simplify the complexity of the natural world, it does provide a method of measuring it to guide management decisions.

The baseline habitat audits for these important areas of green space within the city of Cambridge was conducted in the summer of 2020. It encompassed 32 sites ranging from SSSI to recreation grounds and parks in all areas of the city and included key City Council owned or managed locations.

A total of 1350 habitat units and 122 hedgerow/tree-line units were recorded across the 32 sites. Sites that scored highly were generally large or supported highly distinctive habitats in good condition. The top six sites listed in Table 1 account for 60% of the total biodiversity units within the audit. They comprise a mix of sites which highlight the methodological principles behind BNG.

Larger sites or areas will naturally hold more biodiversity; Hobson's Park (25ha) and Coldham's Common (41ha) are the two largest sites within the audit and are at the top of the list.

Even in smaller sites, more distinctive (i.e., rarer or more valuable) habitats in good condition also score highly; East Pit, a unit within the Cherry Hinton Pits SSSI is a third of the size of Hobson's Park and a fifth of Coldham's Common but holds over 40% of the biodiversity units of each. East Pit is dominated by the highly distinctive chalk grassland in good condition.

Table 1: The top six most valuable sites within the 2020 Biodiversity Audit, as measured using the DEFRA Metric 2.0

Site	Area Units	% Total area units	% Total survey area
Hobson's Park	263.1	19.5	12.4
Coldham's Common	251.2	18.6	19.9

East Pit (Cherry Hinton Pits SSSI)	109.7	8.1	3.9
Byron's Pool	80.3	5.9	2.1
Stourbridge Common	60.6	4.5	9.3
Limekiln Close LNR	53.8	4.0	1.4

Woodland provides the most biodiversity units among the habitats found within the surveyed sites, accounting for 32% of the total. Some of these units are associated with the highly distinctive 'wood pasture and parkland', a habitat found in large areas within the River Cam floodplain, particularly in Sheep's Green. Neutral grassland is the second most productive accounting for 21%. It is noteworthy that nearly half of the units from neutral grassland come from a single site - Hobson's Park.

The largest areas of habitat within the surveyed sites are modified and amenity grasslands. Many of the sites surveyed are large recreational areas (Pieces and recreation grounds) or Commons, which are dominated by these highly managed and therefore low value and poor condition habitats. By contrast, a much smaller area of habitat that nevertheless provides a relatively high proportion of the total is found in lowland calcareous grassland, a high distinctiveness habitat.

As well as measuring the distinctiveness of a given habitat, an assessment of its condition using published assessment guidelines (Crosher *et al.,* 2019a) was made. Overall, 123 ha (63%) of the total area of the audit is in poor condition, accounting for 28% of all the biodiversity units. A number of common observations emerged from the Audit. Several of these relate directly to constraints on the condition of some habitats:

- *Larger sites hold more biodiversity.* This presents both an opportunity for habitat creation; the large commons, pieces and recreation grounds offer enormous potential for habitat creation or restoration. It also highlights a risk;

at present, a lot of the biodiversity under City Council control is contained within a small number of sites.

- *Recreation pressure.* Many of the woodland and grassland sites suffer from high recreation pressure, particularly from dog-walking. The associated damage can be the main reason for a site's poor condition.
- *Less is more.* The large areas of grassland habitats within the city are intensively managed. Cutting less often will both promote higher value grasslands and improve their condition. Similarly, many of the Commons are over grazed and a relaxation of grazing pressure will benefit these areas; the right amount of grazing can bring the best results for grasslands.
- *Deadwood.* Woodlands across Britain are usually stripped of their deadwood and those in Cambridge are no different. Introduction of deadwood, either from selective felling within sites or from outside, plus techniques to 'veteranise' existing trees will lead to improvements in the condition of the City's woodland.[2]
- *Habitat succession and species.* The more objective approach taken in this audit is naturally habitat focussed. However, conservation objectives for species, particularly those of Local or National Importance is still an important consideration when determining future management strategies.

As well as providing a tool for calculating the value of current habitats, BNG and the DEFRA Metric that guides it, provides a framework to calculate whether changes to those habitats will lead to an increase or decrease in the biodiversity value of a given place. Typically, these comparisons are made in the context of development, but they also provide a method for planners and land managers to more easily identify how biodiversity under their jurisdiction can be improved. This is one of the key outcomes of the audit and it helps us identify areas of green space where there are opportunities.

[2] We leave deadwood where it is safe to do so, specify conservation deadwood where appropriate to, shorten existing deadwood so that it is safe, leave both fallen and standing deadwood where appropriate, and deploy veteranisation techniques by employing a managed-decline approach to many trees.

To demonstrate on a more practical level how an increase in measurable biodiversity can be achieved, we include four case studies within the Audit Report. The case studies have been selected to highlight different approaches to increasing measurable biodiversity in Cambridge:

- *Habitat enhancement:* In many cases improving the *condition* of what is already there will bring about significant gains.
- *Habitat restoration:* There are opportunities, at both small and large scales, to create new or restore historical habitats and in so doing, improve the *distinctiveness* of habitats.

By estimating the *predicted* habitat types and their conditions, a comparison between the current and future value of land can be made and, if the changes are positive, a *net gain* will arise.

In addition to these specific case studies, below are three scenarios which also demonstrate how gains in biodiversity can be met by enhancing habitats within the city.

Table 2: Scenarios of city-wide habitat enhancement

Scenario	Current Units	Potential Units	% Increase	Notes
All (8.3ha) calcareous grassland in poor condition to moderate	57	68.3	20	80% of this scenario could be met at one site: Coldham's Common
50% (5.5ha) of all neutral grassland from poor to moderate condition	50.5	68.3	35	63% of all neutral grassland is also at Coldham's Common

Scenario	Current Units	Potential Units	% Increase	Notes
25% (10.5ha) of all amenity grassland to wildflower (assuming poor condition)	91.3	112	23	The potential value of adding wildflower areas to Recreation grounds and Pieces

The Audit provided several specific recommendations for each site which have been incorporated into our action plan. However, a number are common. These include, but are not limited to:

- Relaxation of grazing pressure or reduced mowing frequency on grasslands - to improve both value and condition of grassland, whilst potentially saving costs and allowing other work elsewhere.
- Restricting or limiting the impacts of recreation (especially dog walking) on grasslands, woodlands and watercourses.
- ‘Meadow creation’. Many of the city’s parks already have ‘wildflower corners’. These could be made bigger and more permanent.
- Increase the volume of deadwood in woodlands.
- Wetland restoration on the River Cam floodplain.
- Improving the structural (e.g., widening by less frequent cutting) and floristic component of hedgerows and their ground flora.
- Improving the connectivity of sites and habitats, particularly south of the city centre.

To inform the 2025 midterm review we commissioned repeat habitat surveys, along with management and monitoring plan recommendations for 14 of our core nature sites. These demonstrate the changes and direction of travel (between 2020 and 2025) for site habitat condition and provides key futures actions to meet our objectives.

The table below provides an overall condition for each site, and the direction of travel, taking a view across all the habitats and conditions at each location. These overall conditions are based on professional judgement and do not necessarily consider just extent of conditions across the site. Instead, additional weight has been placed on what are perceived to be the most important features of each site. For example, at Nine Wells the site is assessed overall as moderate – stable even though the most extensive habitat (woodland has moved from moderate to good). This is because the key habitat at this location, the chalk springs have remained stable in moderate condition. Another example is West Pit where the most extensive habitat, woodland, has declined in condition. However, this site has overall been assessed as good – stable because this is the condition of the calcareous grassland at this location, its most important feature.

Table 3: Summary of core site habitat condition and direction of travel

Site	Overall condition assessment (RAG rating)
Coldham's Common LNR	**Moderate - stable**
Stourbridge Common LNR	**Poor - stable**
Sheep's Green, Coe Fen, Lower Vicar's Brook, New Bit and Coe Fen Straits LNR	**Moderate - stable**
Barnwell East LNR	**Moderate - stable**
Barnwell West LNR	**Moderate - declining**
Paradise LNR	**Good - stable**
Byron's Pool LNR	**Moderate - declining**
Nine Wells LNR	**Moderate - stable**
Midsummer Common (County Wildlife Site)	**Poor - stable**
Bramblefield's LNR	**Moderate - declining**
West Pit LNR	**Good - stable**
Logan's Meadow LNR	**Moderate - improving**
Mill Road Cemetery (County Wildlife Site)	**Moderate - stable**
Hobson's Park (County Wildlife Site)	**Moderate - improving**

Of 14 sites that were reassessed in 2025 two are in good condition, ten are in moderate condition and two are in poor condition. The two sites in good condition are West Pit and Paradise, both with critical and rare habitats in the city (calcareous grassland and wet woodland). It is notable that the two sites in poor condition are significant and extensive locations: Midsummer Common and Stourbridge Common. Whilst these sites are in poor condition their scale and prominence in the city does indicate great potential for improvement if grazing can be appropriately managed, together with recreational impacts.

Of the sites two are thought to be improving, whilst nine are stable and three are declining. The two improving sites are those which have undergone the most significant change in recent years (Logan's Meadow and Hobson's Park). The declining sites - Byron's Pool, Bramblefield's and West Barnwell – have seen negative change for a variety of reasons including maturing habitats with a lack of management, or recreational pressures in the case of Byron's Pool.

6. Biodiversity strategy

Cambridge City Council recognises the global biodiversity emergency and the local impact this will have, and is having, on the city and communities we serve. Therefore, in 2019 we pledged to provide leadership and to ensure that we work with all sections of the community, including schools, community groups, university colleges, businesses and residents to reverse the decline in biodiversity and deliver measurable net gain within Cambridge and the wider sub-region. Within this section we have defined our vision and objectives and set out our proposed actions to enable us to achieve this.

'Our vision is that over the next 5 years Cambridge will see a "measurable net gain" in biodiversity, both within the city and the surrounding countryside, including the extent and quality of priority habitats and populations of priority species. Wildlife habitats will be protected, enhanced and where possible

expanded and linked. The very best wildlife habitats will form the Cambridge Nature Network that will permeate the whole of the city and link to the wider Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Local Nature Recovery Strategy. Everyone who lives or works within Cambridge will have access to high quality natural greenspaces within walking distance of their home or place or work, and there will be a greater awareness and understanding of biodiversity with opportunities to be involved and collaborate in local wildlife enhancement projects and monitoring'.

Our aim is to put biodiversity at the forefront of everything that we do. By maximising opportunities for collaboration, we are working in partnership with residents, businesses, and institutions, and building upon existing strategies for climate and trees, to achieve this goal.

We will promote the principles set out in the Lawton Report: bigger, better, more joined up. This will require improvements and enhancements to our core sites in the city to create a biodiverse blue and green thread through the heart of Cambridge. We will see a healthy river and tributaries flowing through their natural floodplain habitats. Areas of existing grasslands will be improved, former wetland features will be restored, and new ones created. This network will help to restore healthy populations of iconic species such as otter, eel, and water vole.

Beyond this core area we will strive to create a city that is more permeable for nature. We have made a commitment to enhance our own estate to maximise the opportunities for biodiversity. And we have also made a commitment to engage and enable others in the city to do the same. Building upon our core network this will help to join the dots and connect people to nature, creating a city where birdsong and buzzing invertebrates can be heard and experienced by everyone everywhere who lives, works, visits and studies in Cambridge.

The biodiversity emergency is intricately linked with the climate emergency. Many of the proposed actions set out below will also serve to alleviate the climate emergency. The actions set out within our climate strategy will contribute to resolving

the biodiversity emergency. Therefore, our updated climate, Urban Forest and biodiversity strategies will work together to ensure we do maximise our effort to tackle these threats.

Our strategic objectives are:

1. **To secure a measurable net gain in biodiversity across the city by 2031 in support of the Natural Cambridgeshire Doubling Nature Vision by 2030**

2. **To ensure designated sites and priority habitats are in good / favourable condition and connected, where possible, to increase resilience to a changing climate and contribute to the Cambridge Nature Network and Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Local Nature Recovery Strategy**

3. **To engage and promote awareness of biodiversity and wellbeing, supporting and empowering coordinated action in our communities, businesses, and institutions**

4. **To ensure that biodiversity protection and enhancement is considered by all council service functions and projects in line with our statutory Biodiversity Duty**

5. **To maximise the potential of our buildings, parks, open spaces, allotments and community gardens, watercourses and tree stock to support biodiversity, whilst balancing their multifunctional needs**

6. **To harness the wealth of local professional and amateur knowledge and experience in identifying and solving local issues.**

7. **To work with partners to establish long term, species and habitat surveys and monitoring to measure the impact of activities and identify new threats and opportunities across the city**

To meet the objectives, the proposed actions have been grouped within three themes:

Biodiversity mainstreaming: This theme is about embedding biodiversity into everything that we do, whether that is constructing new houses, buying materials, or undertaking our role as a planning authority. We will ensure that our actions minimise impacts on biodiversity as well as seek opportunities to enhance it. We will aim to develop cross-cutting strategies and solutions between all services that promote biodiversity and focus on nature-based solutions.

Our ambition is to consider the intrinsic value of conserving and enhancing biodiversity, as part of everything that we do. We will take steps to ensure that we review the effects of our activities and decisions on biodiversity and that, wherever feasible, we can be working to promote and enhance the biodiversity of the city. We will take our objectives concerning biodiversity policy and consider them within all other areas of our work, for example our housing, transport, and economy.

We recognise that biodiversity not only has intrinsic value and beauty but also provides our life support system, whilst further contributing to all our lives in Cambridge by generating economic, community, health and well-being benefits. The mainstreaming approach will also help us to explore sustainable nature-based solutions across the city. This means we can use nature to help us solve some of the biggest issues that face us today including climate change, water and flood management or atmospheric pollutants from vehicles. This process will recognise and value nature as an asset that delivers multiple benefits to us.

The core: This theme is about developing our core of biodiversity sites in the City. This includes reviewing and updating management plans for our most important

nature conservation areas and working with partners to ensure a coherent and resilient nature network through Cambridge and beyond.

The Lawton Report encourages ‘bigger, better and more joined up’ habitats. The aim of this theme is to focus on our core sites, many of which are situated within the Cambridge Nature Recovery Network. Here we aim to focus on ‘bigger and better’ by improving biodiversity management of our core greenspaces, and wherever possible making more space for nature at these locations.

Many of these sites fall within the Cambridge Nature Network and Local Nature Recovery Strategy, our work here will help us make a meaningful contribution to these initiatives to deliver a joined up and resilient biodiversity network. The City Council will work to achieve a measurable biodiversity net gain in these core locations to contribute to our commitment to double nature.

Nature in your neighbourhood: This theme is about encouraging nature to flourish across the city through empowerment and collaboration with communities, businesses and institutions. The aim is to ensure nature is not restricted to a few precious locations and that it can be enjoyed, understood, and experienced by all.

The biodiversity emergency is too big a problem to solve alone. In this theme we have developed actions which require a collaborative approach to the problem and to help encourage nature on your doorstep. Many of the actions relate to how people interact with nature in Cambridge, and we will provide the means and inspiration to help facilitate and encourage positive steps to be taken at a local level. We have developed actions to promote collaborative working in the city, drawing on the wealth of biodiversity expertise that we are fortunate to have in Cambridge. Other actions provide communities with the information or resources they need to help biodiversity in their neighbourhood. We will continue our commitment to existing initiatives, such as our hedgehog highways and neighbourhood canopy projects.

Our aim is to encourage engagement with nature to ensure that it is pervasive throughout the entire city. It is vitally important that we work hard to ensure that our key sites of nature conservation are protected and managed effectively. However, we need to go beyond these islands of biodiversity and work to create greater connectivity for nature. Within this theme we are focussing on the Lawton's Report 'more joined up'.

7 Action plan (2026 – 2031)

Since adoption of the strategy in 2022 we have been collaborating on actions to achieve our objectives. Appendix 2 Biodiversity Duty Report summarises our key activities under our 3 themes and celebrates successes to date.

Moving forward to achieve our vision and objectives we will continue to collaborate with partners to deliver the following proposed action plan (2026 – 2031) and monitor our collective outcomes.

Biodiversity Mainstreaming *'Consider and embed nature in everything we do'*

Actions	Partners	Outcomes	Timeline
Adopt, support delivery and monitoring of the LNRS	City Services, Natural Cambridgeshire, CPCA, Cambridgeshire County Council	Strategic delivery of habitat and species actions	Adoption: December 2025 – Delivery ongoing
Adoption and implementation of Shared Local Plan	GCSPS, SCDC	Robust biodiversity policies, aligned with LNRS and BNG delivery to guide sustainable development	Proposed adoption by December 2026
Adoption and implementation of Urban Forest Strategy (2026 - 2036)	City Services, Community Services	Management, protection, planting of and engagement with the urban forest	Adoption March 2026 – Delivery 2026 – 2036
Ensure CIP and other City Council developments achieve a minimum 20% BNG target across all projects	CIP, GCSPS	New development secure high-quality habitats and species enhancement with long term management and monitoring in place.	Ongoing
Implement Environmental Management System	City Services	Improved environmental	March 2026 - ongoing

to secure ISO14001 accreditation for City operation hub and activities		performance across City Service	
Explore rainwater harvesting on Council owned properties	City Service, Property Services, Water Resources East (WRE)	Reduced abstraction for aquifer for tree watering and other operation functions	Feasibility 2026, deliver 2027

The Core '*working with partners to ensure a coherent resilient nature network*'

Actions	Partners	Outcomes	Timeline
Continued support of CNN	City Services, CPPF, BCN WT, Cambridge Ahead, National Trust, RSPB, East Cambridge Farming Cluster	Collaborate on funding bids and sharing resource to create 'Bigger, better, more joined up' habitats across the CNN	Ongoing
Local Nature Reserve and Commons management	City Service, Community Services, Volunteers and Corporate Groups	Complete ongoing habitat management of our 12 LNRs, including control of invasive species	Ongoing
Continue our work with the Wildlife Trust to provide advice to private landowners and managers to bring sites into positive management	City Services, BCN WT, private landowners	Increase number of designated Local Wildlife Sites in positive management	Ongoing
Identification and designation of additional City Wildlife Sites and LNRs	City Services	Secure protection and enhanced management of qualifying sites	2026 -Cowley Road drain CiWS, Church End LNR and Fulbourn Rd LNR
Adopt and deliver new Management Plan Reviews for LNRs and Commons	City Services	New management plans embedded to ensure favourable habitat condition	13 sites reviewed in 2025 to be adopted and

			delivered in 2026 to 2030
Conservation Cattle Grazing Review	City Service, CNN, Licensed graziers	Review grazing timescales and number of animals to ensure we meet site management plan conditions	Review in 2025 / 2026
Trial the use of hardy sheep breeds within temporary fenced compartments on smaller sites.	City Services, CNN, East Cambridge Farmers Cluster	Enhanced management of key sites	Trial in 2026, if successful deliver from 2027 onwards
Greater Cambridge Chalk Stream Project (GCCSP)	City Services, South Staffs Water, Cam Catchment Partnership, Anglian Water, Environment Agency, Hobson's Conduit Trust	Deliver and monitor 6 case study sites. Work with partners to deliver WINEP and other investment in Cambridge chalk streams	2026 - 2028
Cambridge and Peterborough Environmental Records Centre (CPERC)	City Service, GCSPS, CPERC	Continue support through Service Level Agreement and representation on the Steering Group	Ongoing

Nature in your neighbourhood *'ensure nature is not restricted to a few precious locations and can be enjoyed, understood and experienced by all'*

Actions	Partners	Outcomes	Timeline
Seek support and agree actions to achieve Nature City Accreditation	City Services, Community Services, CNN, CCF Community Groups, Business	Strengthened partnership, shared leadership, community engagement, external recognition, increase funding opportunities	2026 Self-assessment. Build Partnership, seek Foundation Accreditation

Parks Biodiversity Toolkit (publish 2021) promotion	City Services, Community services	Inspire communities to codesign and secure funding for local park biodiversity enhancement	Ongoing
Nature Recovery 'From the Ground Up' LNRS delivery ward-based community action	City Services, Community Services, Cambridgeshire County Council, Community Groups	4-year Cambridge County Council Project targeting Parish scale delivery of the LNRS. Selected wards: Cherry Hinton, Abbey, East Chesterton, Market & Trumpington	2026 – 2030 programme to enable communities to develop and deliver LNRS actions.
Butterfly Friendly Council (BFC)	City Services, Butterfly Conservation	Meet the 5 steps to become an official BFC	2026
Cambridge Elm diversity Project – *celebrating the unique diversity of Cambridgeshire Elm*	City Services, Community Service, BCN WT	Establish a 'community nursery' of local Elm species for planting in partnership across the CNN	2026 - 2031
Native Black Poplar Project	City Services, Community Services,	Establish a 'community nursery' of local cultivars for planting in partnership across the CNN	2026 - 2031
River Cam CAN, DiversiTree legacy	City Services, Community Services	Seek further funding to secure management and replacement planting for willow pollards	2026 - 2031

Cambridge Nature Festival	City Services, Community Services, CNN	Month long programme of free and low-cost events to connect people with nature	Support events and promotion in 2026, seek funding 2026 onwards
Environmental Education Spaces Continue to support existing spaces and explore additional site resource	City Service, primary school / nursery license holders	Continued use of 3 spaces, explore at least 1 additional site	2026 - 2031
Environment Improvement Programme (EIP) project selection criteria / prioritisation	City Services	Seek to allocate future budget to projects that meet strategic biodiversity and urban forest objectives.	2026 - 2027
'Wild about Art' projects – continue to support funding bids and provide locations for nature-based art across Cambridge	City Services, Community Services, artist and communities	Innovative education and / or habitat creation temporary and permanent installations exploring the wonders of nature	2026 - 2031
Urban Nature Conservation Evidence	City Services, Cambridge Conservation Initiative, Cambridge Conservation Forum	Facilitate research trials on our urban conservation actions to build a shared evidence base	2026 – Closed Churchyard grass cutting trials and monitoring invertebrate use of climate resilient non-native trees - Ongoing

8 References

Draft Cambridge City Council Urban Forest Strategy

Draft Cambridge City Council Climate Change Strategy

Draft Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Local Nature Recovery Strategy

Draft Greater Cambridge Local Plan

Draft South Cambridgeshire District Council Climate & Nature Strategy

Cambridgeshire County Council Biodiversity Strategy

Cambridge Nature Network

Greater Cambridge Chalk Stream Project Report

9 Appendix

Appendix 1

National Legislation

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2012 (last updated July 2021)

The revised NPPF was updated on 20 July 2021 setting out the Government's planning policies for England and the process by which these should be applied. The policies within the NPPF are a material consideration in the planning process. The key principle of the NPPF is a presumption in favour of sustainable development, with sustainable development defined as a balance between economic, social and environmental needs.

Policies 174 to 188 of the NPPF address conserving and enhancing the natural environment, stating that the planning system should:

- Contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by protecting and enhancing valued landscapes.
- Recognise the wider benefits of ecosystem services; and
- Minimise impacts on biodiversity and provide net gains in biodiversity where possible, contributing to the Government's commitment to halt the overall decline in biodiversity.

Furthermore, there is a focus on re-use of existing brownfield sites or sites of low environmental value as a priority, and discouraging development in National Parks, Sites of Specific Scientific Interest, the Broads or Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty other than in exceptional circumstances.

Where possible, planning policies should also "promote the conservation, restoration and enhancement of priority habitats, ecological networks and the protection and

recovery of priority species; and identify and pursue opportunities for securing measurable net gains for biodiversity".

Environment Act 2021

The Environment Act 2021 sets out key legislation after the UK's exit from the European Union. With the largest changes to green regulations in decades, the Act includes the establishment of an Office for Environmental Protection, targets on air pollution, water quality and biodiversity, and the enshrinement of the 25 Year Environment Plan in law. The Act also makes provisions for a mandatory 10% net gain in biodiversity for all developments covered by the Town and Country Planning Act, and it also introduces a statutory requirement for Local Nature Recovery Strategies.

Public authorities who operate in England must consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity in England. This is the strengthened 'biodiversity duty' that the Environment Act 2021 introduced requiring local authorities to:

- Consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity.
- Agree policies and specific objectives based on your consideration.
- Act to deliver your policies and achieve your objectives

The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended)

The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) provides legal protection to natives UK species and enhances the protection of SSSIs. In addition to affording protection to some species, The Act also names species which are considered invasive and require control. Section 14 of the Act prohibits the introduction into the wild of any animal of a kind which is not ordinarily resident in, and is not a regular visitor to, Great Britain in a wild state, or any species of animal or plant listed in Schedule 9 to the Act. In the main, Schedule 9 lists non-native species that are already established in the wild, but which continue to pose a conservation threat to native biodiversity and habitats, such that further releases should be regulated.

The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended)

The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) is secondary legislation which puts into domestic law the EU Habitats Directive (Council Directive 92/43/EEC) and certain elements of the EU Wild Birds Directive (Directive 2009/147/EC). These Directives contain rules for the protection of habitats and species, the proper management of habitats and preventing exploitation of species. The Regulations ensure that the UK will continue to meet international commitments under the Bern Convention and the Bonn convention.

Schedule 2 offers protection to a number of notable species such as great crested newts, hazel dormouse, otter, and all bat species. Schedule 2 protects these species from deliberate capture, death, or injury as well as disturbance both to themselves and their breeding sites or resting places.

Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006

Many of the species covered by The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, along with a host of others not afforded additional protection, are listed on Section 41 of the NERC Act 2006.

Section 41 (S41) of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC Act 2006) requires the Secretary of State to publish a list of habitats and species that are of principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity in England. The list (including 56 habitats and 943 species) has been drawn up in consultation with Natural England and draws upon the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) List of Priority Species and Habitats.

The S41 list should be used to guide decision-makers such as local and regional authorities to have regard to the conservation of biodiversity in the exercise of their normal functions – as required under Section 40 of the NERC Act 2006. The duty applies to all local authorities and extends beyond just conserving what is already

there, to carrying out, supporting and requiring actions that may also restore or enhance biodiversity.

The Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000

The CRoW Act (2000), as well as implementing the “right to roam”, also contains changes for nature conservation updating aspects of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 such as strengthening punishment for killing, injuring or disturbing protected species, and extending the regulations to cover reckless behaviour as well as intentional acts against protected species.

Section 74 of the act contains a list of habitats and species of Principal Importance for the conservation of biodiversity in England, which falls in accordance with the 1992 UN Convention on Biological Diversity.

Policy documents (national, regional and local)

South Cambridgeshire Local Plan (2018) and Cambridge Local Plan (2018) - currently being updated to the Greater Cambridge Shared Local Plan

South Cambridgeshire District Council adopted their Local Plan in 2018, with the overall environmental objectives of: “contributing to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment; and, as part of this, helping to improve biodiversity, prudent use of natural resources, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change including moving to a low carbon economy”.

Key policies include:

Policy NH/4, which prevents developments from occurring that result in the loss, deterioration or fragmentation of irreplaceable habitats, and outlines that new developments must aim to maintain, enhance, restore or add to biodiversity.

Policy NH/5, which sets out protection for sites of biodiversity or geological importance; and
Policy NH/6, which encourages proposals that reinforce, link or create new green infrastructure in line with the Cambridgeshire Green Infrastructure Strategy (2011).

Cambridge City Council also adopted their Local Plan in 2018, with a small selection of key policies including:

Policy 4: Green belt - new development in the Green Belt will not be approved except in very special circumstances, in line with Green Belt policy in the National Planning Policy Framework.

Policy 7: River Cam - development proposals that are situated along the River Cam should where possible enhance the natural resources of the river and provide opportunities for re-naturalisation of the river; and Policy 31 f: Any flat roofs should be a green or brown roof, as part of a key measure in Cambridge's climate change adaptation policy.

Cambridge City Council and South Cambridgeshire District Council are preparing a Greater Cambridge Local Plan, which will set out plans for infrastructure, new homes and economic growth in the region over the next 20 years.

Greater Cambridge Biodiversity Supplementary Planning Document (2022)

Published in January 2022 this document provides guidance on how biodiversity should be addressed through the planning process. The document provides technical guidance to ensure that the biodiversity policies set out in the Local Plans are effectively implemented. The document provides accessible, accurate and up-to-date guidance on the planning regulations surrounding biodiversity, including relevant national legislation. It sets out the information that should be submitted with planning applications to demonstrate how development proposals meet the councils' requirements. The Supplementary Planning Document is a material planning consideration in determining planning applications in both Council areas.

Biodiversity 2020: A strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services

DEFRA produced the Biodiversity 2020: A strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services with the strategy mission defined to: "halt overall biodiversity loss, support healthy well-functioning ecosystems and establish coherent ecological networks, with more and better places for nature for the benefit of wildlife and people". The first two action areas include developing an integrated landscape-scale approach to conservation on land and at sea, and to "put people at the heart of biodiversity policy". The actions themselves are supported by numerous grants, campaigns and competitions.

Reviews, plans and policy drivers (national, regional and local)

CCC/MKA Biodiversity Audit (2020)

The Biodiversity Audit, released in conjunction with this Biodiversity Strategy, is a report calculating a baseline estimate of biodiversity across several statutorily and non-statutorily designated sites owned by Cambridge City Council. Habitat and condition maps provide the data on the existing value of sites, with opportunities for enhancement and alterations to management regimes also provided. Sites were assessed using the Defra Biodiversity Metric 2.0 (Crosher et al., 2019b) with the intention of providing measurable biodiversity gain in the future.

Making Space for Nature: A review of England's Wildlife Sites and Ecological Network (The Lawton Report, 2010)

The Lawton Report (2010) is an independent review of wildlife sites across England, with the key aim of assessing whether these sites are capable of responding and adapting to climate change. Professor Lawton reached this conclusion: "England's

collection of wildlife sites are generally too small and too isolated, leading to declines in many of England's characteristic species. With climate change, the situation is likely to get worse... We need more space for nature". The report outlines 24 recommendations to improve the situation, with key themes of "more, bigger, better and joined".

25 Year Environment Plan 2018

The 25 Year Environment Plan published by DEFRA outlines long term government actions that prioritise environmental health in agriculture, fishing, land use and other areas. One of the six key areas identified for further action include "Recovering nature and enhancing the beauty of landscapes", under which the development of a Nature Recovery Network (NRN) and the opportunity to reintroduce native species are outlined. Through the NRN, the goal is to provide half a million hectares of additional wildlife habitat to provide linkages and promote connectivity between existing protected areas. Ensuring environmental net gain in housing and infrastructure developments is also discussed as a key method of achieving economic growth whilst providing measurable improvements for the environment.

The Economics of Biodiversity: The Dasgupta Review 2021

The Dasgupta Review was prepared by Professor Sir Partha Dasgupta and released in February 2021. The review's critical message is that nature can no longer be ignored within economic decisions, and that human demands vastly outpace the capacity of the natural environment to provide the "goods and services" required. In direct relation to ecology, the review discusses the importance of biodiversity in increasing the stability of ecosystem functioning, and that the loss of biodiversity reduces the productivity of communities and their ability to produce biomass. The review also outlines a fundamental flaw in Gross Domestic Product (GDP), highlighting its lack of consideration of the depreciation of natural capital, and the economic costs of these losses.