

# A Public Dialogue Project

Learning from the experience of  
the Nene Valley NIA



## Contents

<b>Foreword .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter 1. Introduction.....</b>	<b>2</b>
1.1. About the Nene Valley NIA .....	2
1.2. The Public Dialogue Project in the Nene Valley .....	2
1.3. Governance.....	3
<b>Chapter 2. What is public dialogue? .....</b>	<b>4</b>
2.1. Engaging with the public .....	4
2.2. Public dialogue defined .....	4
2.3. What public dialogue is not .....	5
2.4. Changing the focus of engagement.....	6
<b>Chapter 3. Checklist for running a public dialogue process.....</b>	<b>8</b>
3.1. Context .....	8
3.2. Scope .....	9
3.3. Delivery.....	9
3.4. Impact.....	12
3.5. Evaluation.....	13
<b>Chapter 4. Nene Valley NIA Community Panels .....</b>	<b>14</b>
4.1. Overall methodology .....	14
4.2. Site selection .....	14
4.3. Participant recruitment .....	15
4.4. Overall process design.....	15
4.5. Planning individual sessions .....	17
4.6. Example activities.....	18
4.7. Example outputs.....	22
<b>Appendix A: Community Panel background material.....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Appendix B: Pre completed example action card .....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Appendix C: Sorting and prioritising actions matrix .....</b>	<b>28</b>

## Foreword

In 2013 three Nature Improvement Areas (NIAs) were awarded funding for a Public Dialogue Project from a programme supported by Defra, Natural England and Sciencewise-ERC<sup>1</sup> (the government's programme to support public dialogue in policy involving science and technology issues). Meres and Mosses, Morecambe Bay and Nene Valley NIAs were each committed to working towards the overarching aim of the Public Dialogue Project:

*To embed public dialogue into local decision-making for the development of integrated biodiversity, landscape and ecosystems policy and practice, within the context of Localism and the Big Society.*

In writing this paper we wanted to take the opportunity to build on what has been learnt about implementing the Public Dialogue Project in the Nene Valley NIA. Using the definition applied by Sciencewise-ERC, it explains what is meant by public dialogue and how this differs from and overlaps with other forms of public engagement; it describes the conditions that are needed for the successful delivery of a public dialogue process. It also describes how we approached the public dialogue exercise in the Nene Valley NIA and provides some detail about the individual activities undertaken.

We hope that this paper will be of interest and use to NIA partners from both within the Nene Valley NIA and further afield, as well as other natural environment and landscape scale partnerships.



---

<sup>1</sup> Sciencewise-ERC is the government's programme to support public dialogue in policy involving science and technology issues [www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk](http://www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk)



# Chapter 1. Introduction

## 1.1. About the Nene Valley NIA

The Nene Valley NIA is re-creating and re-connecting natural areas along the River Nene and its tributaries, from Daventry to Peterborough.

The Nene Valley provides a wide range of natural habitats, including wildflower meadows, wetlands, marshes, woodlands and wet grasslands. This diversity of habitats makes the valley one of the most important inland localities in England for a wide range of wildlife including kingfishers, herons, otters and grass snakes. It is also internationally important for its populations of over-wintering water birds such as golden plovers, bitterns, wigeon and gadwall. For this reason, the core of the NIA, the Nene Valley floodplain between Northampton and Aldwincle, has been classified as a Special Protection Area (SPA) under the European Commission Birds Directive.

## 1.2. The Public Dialogue Project in the Nene Valley

The funding made available to Nene Valley NIA was for a public dialogue process that aimed to:

*Engage local people in meaningful dialogue about the NIA and relevant policies.*

The intention was that the Public Dialogue Project would give local people the opportunity to contribute to finding solutions for issues around public access within the NIA. In turn it was hoped that this would build a sense of ownership in the delivery of those solutions, both during and beyond the end of the current NIA period, and would particularly contribute to policy in the following ways.

- Foster positive landowner / public relations.
- Encourage sustainable access to the countryside to improve health and wellbeing.
- Mitigate the impacts of recreational disturbance in the Special Protection Area.

The NIA set a number of ambitions for the public dialogue work.

- Ensuring the public was informed of the evidence base being generated by the NIA and had a chance to contribute to it themselves.
- Engaging the public in genuine and informed debate about the solutions for the issues on specific sites across the NIA.
- Reaching out to 'hard to reach' groups to enable their voices to be heard in the debates about possible solutions.
- Using methods that were appropriate to different audiences.

The Nene Valley NIA Public Dialogue Project plan was agreed in early 2013 and consisted of two key work streams.

### Community Panels

- Two Community Panels – each one concerned with the issues on a specific site.
- Each Panel involved members of the public attending a series of evening meetings, alongside technical experts.
- Iterative process of deliberation, sharing views and promoting understanding about the issues on the site in question.
- Working towards the creation of an outline action plan for the site.
- Presentation of the action plan to the NIA Board for consideration and action

### Interactive website

- A new Nene Valley NIA website incorporating a significant degree of scope for interaction with the public.
- Allowed a diverse mix of public participants to input their perspectives on key public dialogue questions, plus mapping and assessment of sites and their usage.

## 1.3. Governance

The Nene Valley NIA has planning groups for each of its five objectives and the public dialogue work was developed and managed by the group responsible for objective two – *enhance public awareness, access and benefits of the NIA sustainable and sympathetic way, while ensuring that the designated sites at the core remain in favourable condition.*

The planning group was made up of a number of organisations from the NIA partnership and included the RSPB's representative on the NIA Board, who was the primary link between the planning group and the Board. The other members were from Natural England, University of Northampton, the Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire, and River Nene Regional Park.

The planning group secured the Natural England / Sciencewise funding for the Public Dialogue Project, and member organisations committed to matched funding through the provision of meeting space and staff resources. The group also took a very active role in shaping the dialogue process from the outset, and provided support to the facilitator in designing the detail of the process, as well as with project delivery.

## Chapter 2. What is public dialogue?

### 2.1. Engaging with the public

Over recent decades there have been many initiatives and programmes that sought to engage with the general public or specific communities. Reflecting both different ideologies and political contexts, ideas have come and gone, and new names applied to familiar concepts: terms such as community development, community empowerment, capacity building, social capital, community organising, community cohesion, community participation, asset based community development, and co-production have all been widely used. On close examination each one has some distinct features, as well as areas of overlap with other ideas. What is important is that everyone who commits to any approach shares the same understanding of both what that approach means and what it hopes to achieve. Without this common understanding there is significant potential for ‘mission drift’ and for the public to receive confusing and even conflicting messages about the purpose of the engagement. **It is therefore essential that everyone embarking on a public dialogue process is clear about what this means**, the conditions needed for its successful delivery, and what it can achieve.

### 2.2. Public dialogue defined<sup>2</sup>

Sciencewise-ERC has defined public dialogue as follows:

*Public dialogue is a process during which members of the public interact with scientists, stakeholders (for example, research funders, business and pressure groups) and policy makers to deliberate on issues relevant to future policy decisions.*

In essence this means that public dialogue brings together a diverse mix of public participants with a range of views and values.

- To learn from written information and experts.
- Listen to each other, and share and develop their views.
- Reach carefully considered conclusions.
- Communicate those conclusions directly to inform policy or decision-making.

---

<sup>2</sup> This sections and that which follows draw heavily on the key Sciencewise-ERC document that outlines what is meant by and required of its public dialogue programme: *The Government’s Approach to Public Dialogue on Science and Technology*, BIS, 2013.

As a result, it helps policy and decision-makers.

- Make better and more robust decisions that reflect public values and views.
- Increase the legitimacy of tough decisions.
- Demonstrate accountability for public investments.
- Overcome entrenched positions and enable policy to move forward.

Public dialogue should therefore include activities that bring members of the public face-to-face with each other and technical experts (those with specific expertise in the subject or issue under consideration). There must be an opportunity for everyone to have the chance to speak and be questioned, and listen to and question others; this works best when people are in a room together.

### The Nene Valley NIA Community Panels experience

- An open invitation to members of the public to attend Community Panels.
- Panels also attended by technical experts (RSPB, Natural England, River Nene Regional Park, Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire).
- Other expert advice sought and fed into Panel discussions as necessary.
- Iterative process of deliberation to consider the issues and reach conclusions.
- Action plan drafted for the site/s being examined and presented to the NIA Board.
- Decision-makers on the NIA Board have a good understanding of the public's views about the issues, and possible solutions, for individual sites.
- Interactive website used to support the face to face deliberations by opening up the opportunity for more people to respond to key questions.

## 2.3. What public dialogue is not

There are some significant ways in which public dialogue differs from other approaches to engaging the public when applying the definition applied by Sciencewise-ERC. While some characteristics may be shared, it is important to be clear about what public dialogue is not.

- One way communication 'to' the public...rather it's a two way process of deliberation.
- Fully 'representative'..... it is members of the public coming together who, after adequate information, discussion and access to specialists, can form considered advice that gives a strong indication of how the public at large feels about certain issues.
- A 'talking shop' alone....all public dialogue processes should have a clear link to the development of policies or decision-making.

- About the public actually making decisions....this remains the role for those with ultimate responsibility for doing so.
- Focused on gaining public support for existing or preconceived policies....there should be a genuine commitment to using the intelligence generated by the dialogue process to inform thinking around policies and decisions.

## 2.4. Changing the focus of engagement

Public dialogue processes therefore represent a shift from traditional methods of drafting policies and making decisions – a shift that has been coined as moving from ‘Decide, Announce, Defend’ (DAD) to ‘Engage, Deliberate, Decide’ (EDD)<sup>3</sup>.

In traditional approaches the initiating organisation or partnership takes the decision or defines the policy and then communicates that to stakeholders and the public who may not like what has been agreed. If this is the case then resources are needed to ‘defend’ what has been decided. Should this remain unacceptable, they may have to return to the drawing board and repeat the exercise.

In public dialogue, and other collaborative processes, significantly more time is spent earlier in the process with focused deliberation around the issues under consideration. By the time decisions or policies are announced they already have a degree of support, a set of enthusiastic advocates, and are grounded in the knowledge and experience of those who have taken part in the process. Success is more likely, both in terms of securing broader agreement and implementation.



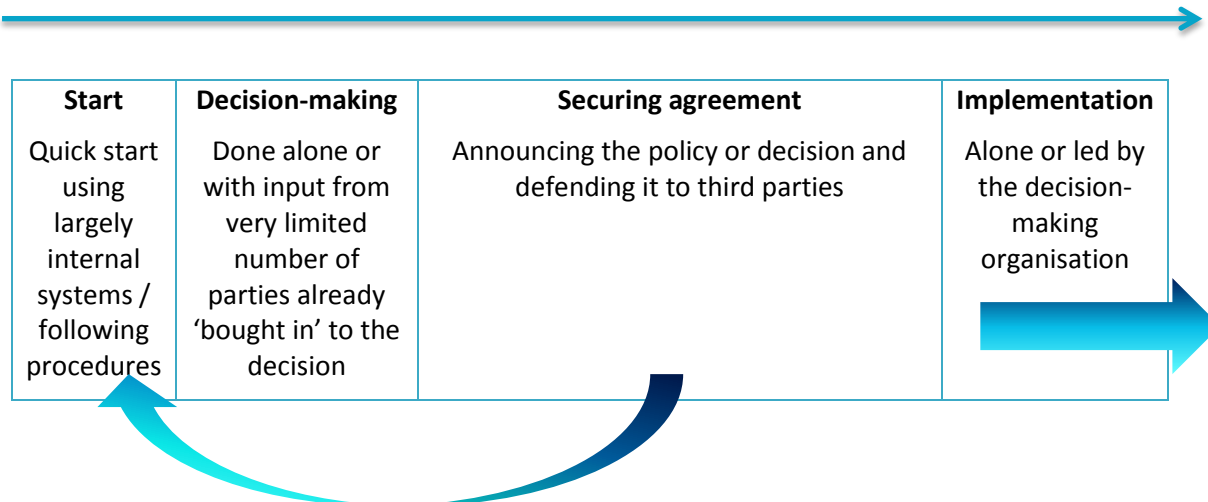
---

<sup>3</sup> This draws on the **Working with Others** approach to stakeholder engagement, developed within the Environment Agency. Copyright for the material is held by the Environment Agency and InterAct Networks.



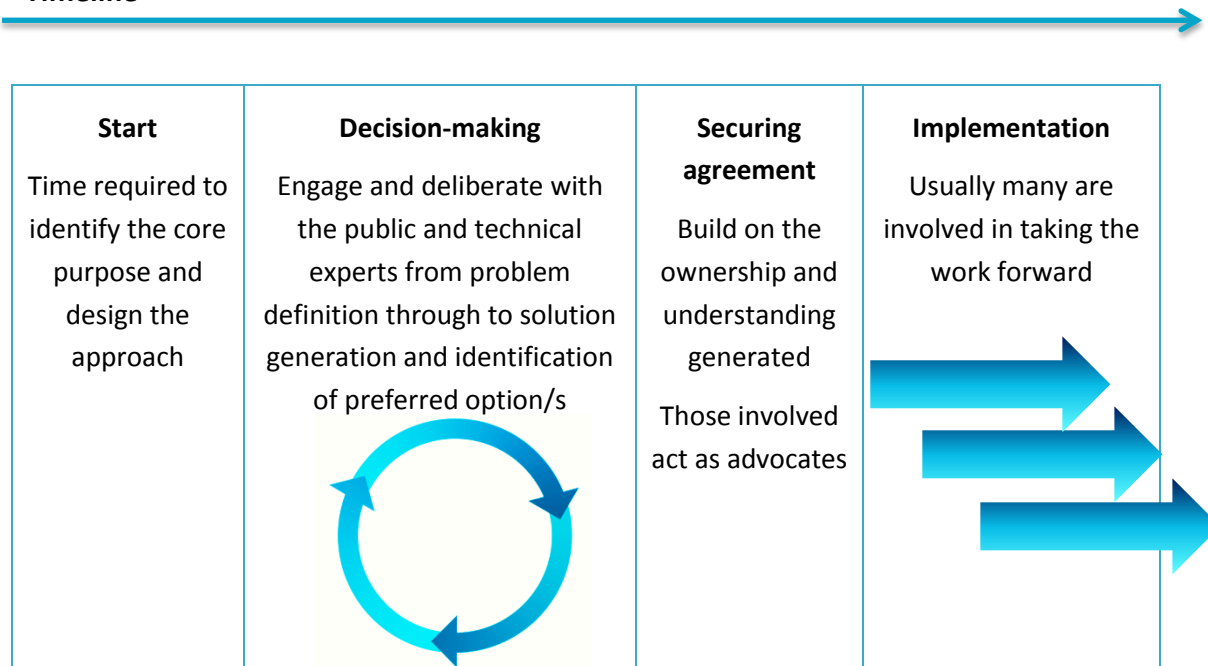
## Traditional approaches – DAD ‘Decide, Announce, Defend’

### Timeline



## Collaborative approaches – EDD ‘Engage, Deliberate, Decide’

### Timeline



## Chapter 3. Checklist for running a public dialogue process

There are five areas to consider when designing and running a public dialogue process: Context, Scope, Delivery, Impact and Evaluation.

### 3.1. Context

**The environment and context will result in good outcomes from the process.**

(It is not advisable to embark on a public dialogue process if the following conditions have not been met.)

- Have a clear purpose and objectives from the outset that relate to the policy or decision-making process that the public dialogue will feed into.
- Align with the relevant policy or decision-making timetable and start as early as possible in the policy or decision-making timetable so there is sufficient time to address the issues adequately.
- Ensure there is scope to influence the policies or decisions that are the focus of the public dialogue.
- Secure 'buy in' from the policy actors to take account of the findings of the dialogue.
- Have sufficient resources in place to run the process effectively (time, skills and funding).
- Start with a culture of openness and transparency that will underpin the whole process.
- Acknowledge any previous history of engagement, successful or otherwise.



© Copyright Wildlife Trust

### The Nene Valley NIA Community Panels experience

- Building on the research on recreation and access undertaken in the NIA, it was agreed that the Community Panels would focus on individual sites and sites experiencing visitor pressure were selected for Community Panels (Community Panel 1 examined Northampton Washlands; Community Panel 2 examined Summer Leys and Mary's Lake).
- Clear purpose established – to discuss issues related to each specific site, consider solutions and present an action plan to the NIA Board.
- NIA Board committed to supporting the process.
- Board members provided the technical expertise required at Panel meetings.
- External resources secured from the NIA Public Dialogue Project with additional inputs from partners through the provision of venues and staff time to support the process.

## 3.2. Scope

**The range of issues and questions of policy covered in the dialogue are defined and it is clear what the public can influence and what they cannot.**

- Be clear and specific about the issues and policies the dialogue will address.
- Ensure the scope and parameters of the dialogue have been agreed with relevant parties.
- Assert the extent to which policies or decisions can be influenced – the dialogue should be about informing the policy or decision-making process rather than determining the actual decisions / policy.

### The Nene Valley NIA Community Panels experience

- Openness about the scope of the process and the fact that the NIA did not have money in place to implement the actions plans – rather that this would be sourced on a project by project basis by the Board.

## 3.3. Delivery

**The dialogue process reflects good practice in its design and execution.**

### *Organising the process*

- Should be run by an organisation / individuals with the credibility, competence and experience to deliver a successful process.
- Have clear and specific objectives that are communicated to the participants.

### **The Nene Valley NIA Community Panels experience**

- Organised by an experienced, independent facilitator using funding from the Public Dialogue Project.
- Good support from the planning group; for example, helping with recruitment, providing technical expertise, acting as a 'sounding board' for the design of individual sessions, providing venues and staff to attend Panel meetings, and a thorough commitment to the concept of a public dialogue process.
- Clear objectives consistently communicated to potential participants through all publicity.

### ***The participants***

- Involve the general public, policy makers and technical experts together.
- Include technical experts who are competent in their subject and can communicate this effectively in a group situation with members of the public present.
- Recruit widely and ensure that no members of the public area excluded from taking part.
- Consider how 'representative' the participants need to be and whether the process needs to reflect a range of interests and/or socio-demographic characteristics, or whether participants can be self-selecting (if this is the case then the process should take account of any potential bias this may create).

### **The Nene Valley NIA Community Panels experience**

- Recruitment methods included press coverage and posters on site. Most effective was having someone on site approaching users and discussing the Panel with them.
- Self-selection process used to recruit Panel members without providing monetary incentives.
- Evening meetings held so the Panels were accessible to both working and non-working members of the public.
- Once established the Panel members considered whether there were 'gaps' in their representation and employed other methods to reach a broader audience (on site and online surveys; guided walk).

### ***The design***

- Use techniques that are appropriate to the objectives and provide sufficient credibility to the evidence generated (the necessary depth and scope to influence the policy and decisions in question).

- Multiple methods may be employed where necessary, including face to face and online conversations.
- Ensure that participants are provided with sufficient background knowledge and technical understanding to engage effectively in the deliberations.
- Be deliberative by allowing time for participants to become informed, be able to reflect on their own and others' views, and explore issues in depth with other participants.
- Manage and run in a way that has no in-built bias and does not allow any faction to dominate.
- Be respectful of the time and energy that members of the public are committing to participating in the process (this may require the use of incentive payments to encourage people to be involved).





### The Nene Valley NIA Community Panels experience

- A series of three meetings was planned for each Community Panel – in both cases a couple more meetings were added at the request of Panel members reflecting their desire to have more time for deliberation.
- Meetings in quick succession (approximately every two weeks) to keep a momentum to the process.
- Findings from each session written up and circulated to Panel members quickly, also to help keep up momentum.
- Objectives for each session outlined at the commencement of each Panel. This helped ensure that the process could achieve what it set out to do, and so participants had a clear understanding of how each meeting related to the planned outcome.
- Deliberation at each meeting built on the previous session in an iterative way, starting with what all participants (both members of the public and technical experts) knew about the site already.
- Individual activities during the Panel meetings were designed to maximise participation, encourage clear thinking and questioning, provide a record of each stage of the deliberation, and work towards the goal of drafting a site action plan.
- Website used to reach a wider audience by posing questions and generating debate about issues, uses, conflicts and benefits.

More information is provided about session design in Section 4.

### Reporting

- Provide outputs from the dialogue process (e.g. reports or presentations) in a format that is relevant and can be easily understood by both those you are trying to influence and those who have taken part in the dialogue process.
- Involve participants in the reporting of their findings.
- Ensure participants are kept informed about how their findings are being communicated and used.

## 3.4. Impact

### The public dialogue can deliver the desired outcomes.

- Make sure that the relevant policy and decision-makers are sent the outputs of the dialogue process

- Ensure that mechanisms exist for participants' views to be taken into account in policy and decision-making.
- Share learning about how the process has been run to help build the capacity and enthusiasm of others to deliver public dialogue processes where relevant.
- Encourage the policy and decision-makers to feed back to participants how their views have been taken into account, and how they have impacted on the policy / decision and, if they haven't, why.

#### **The Nene Valley NIA Community Panels experience**

- Site action plans presented to the NIA Board.
- Board encouraged to feed back to Panel members when actions have been implemented.
- Training session for Board members on running public dialogue processes, reflecting on the experience in the Nene Valley with the Public Dialogue Project.
- Production of this guidance to help inform future practice in the Nene Valley and beyond.

### **3.5. Evaluation**

#### **The process is shown to be robust and contributes to learning.**

- Both the impact and the outcomes of the dialogue process should be evaluated.
- Plan and start the evaluation early in the public dialogue process.
- Ensure the evaluation addresses the objectives and expectations of everyone involved.
- Be evaluated by an independent party where possible.

#### **The Nene Valley NIA Community Panels experience**

- Independent evaluation by a third party contracted by Natural England as part of the Public Dialogue Project.
- Review meeting held with Board sub group following the first round of Panel meetings to reflect on the process and outcomes, and to inform the second round of Panels.

## Chapter 4. Nene Valley NIA Community Panels

This section is designed to give more detail about the Public Dialogue Project in the Nene Valley NIA. It includes an explanation of some of the overarching features we had to consider as well as some sample activities from the Community Panels that we ran.

### 4.1. Overall methodology

The planning group decided at an early stage that the public dialogue work should dovetail with other activities and planning processes in the NIA. Notably, it provided an opportunity to examine in some detail the issues on sites which were identified as being under recreational pressure in a major piece of research commissioned by the NIA<sup>4</sup>. With specific sites as a focus, it was envisaged that it would be possible to recruit dialogue participants from users, surrounding residents and businesses, as well as the general population.

Community Panels were selected as the primary mechanism for the public dialogue process. In addition the interactive website could be used to broaden reach to a wider audience and seek responses to key questions. The result would be a combination of face to face and online deliberations.

### 4.2. Site selection

Site 1 – Northampton Washlands – due to project timelines this site was selected prior to the publication of the research. It is a heavily used, centrally located site and there was an existing evidence base about the extent of recreational disturbance (notably from dogs off leads) on the bird populations.

Site 2 – Summer Leys and Mary's Lake – these sites selected following publication of the research. Analysis of the results by the dialogue planning group established that there were two further sites that merited attention and the formation of a Community Panel. Given these sites were immediately adjacent, and that any changes to visitor access and facilities on one would have a knock-on impact on the other, it was decided to create one Community Panel to cover them together. The key issue on these sites was the potential impact of different user groups on each other, rather than on wildlife.

---

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.nenevalleynia.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Footprint-Ecology-Upper-Nene-Valley-Gravel-Pits-SPA-Visitor-Survey-screenres.pdf>

## 4.3. Participant recruitment

Before undertaking the recruitment we drafted some background information about a) the purpose of the Community Panel and how it would run, and b) what would be expected of a Panel member (see Appendix A).

Interested parties were directed to contact the Panel facilitator who could talk through the role with them and send them the background material. This single point of contact was important because it ensured that everyone received the same information about the purpose of the Panel.

The recruitment took several forms.

- Articles in the local press.
- Posters on site and in local venues.
- Information sent to local organisations.
- On site recruitment – someone on site approaching users and explaining the Panel to them.

It was the final method that proved most successful for both sites. However, in both cases the start date for the run of Panels had to be put back due to poor recruitment levels. We realised that it is not easy to attract people willing to give up several evenings to attend meetings. While a series of meetings was necessary to ensure we could produce credible, reliable and informed recommendations for the NIA Board, it was clearly a big (unpaid) commitment for Panel members.

12 members of the public attended meetings of the Northampton Washlands Community Panel. 14 members of the public attended meetings of the Summer Leys / Mary's Lake Community Panel.

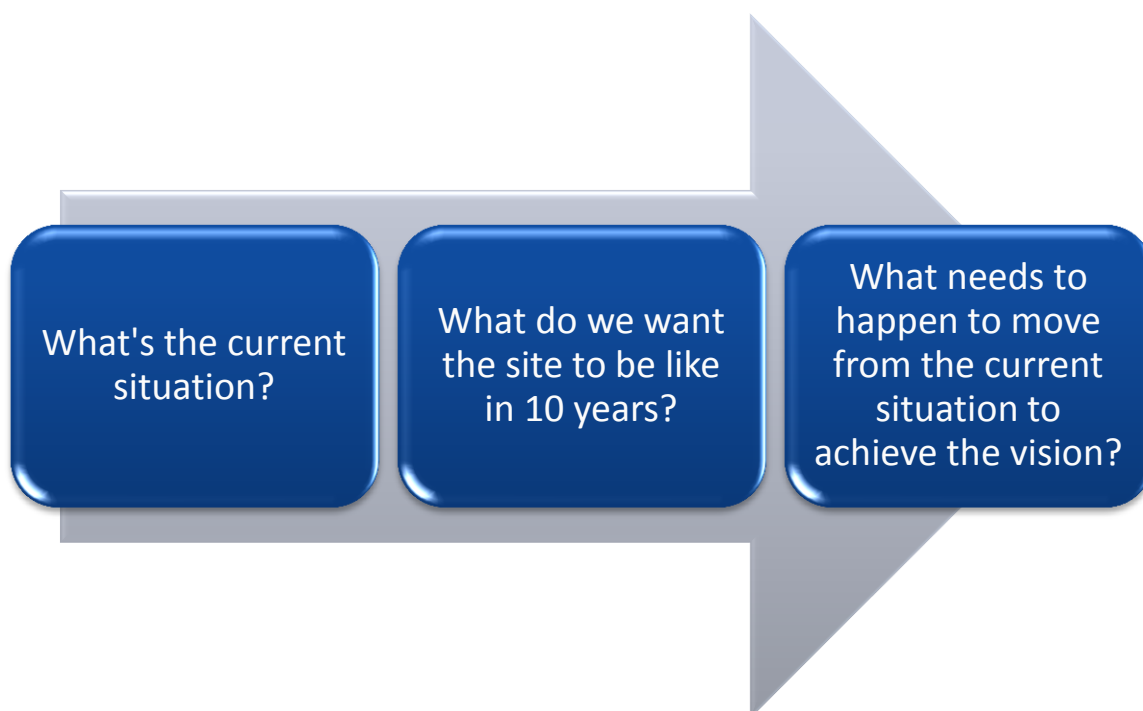
At the Summer Leys / Mary's Lake Community Panel, following some initial activities to record the issues and benefits of the site/s, there was an awareness among members that some interests were not represented on the group. Additional activities were therefore scheduled to gather views from a broader audience.

- A simple survey was designed.
- Panel members interviewed other users on site using the survey questions, attempting to talk to people whose interests were not represented on the Panel (for example, people with disabilities, parents with young children / pushchairs, runners).
- Flyers were placed on car windscreens in the car park, with a link to the survey online.
- Panel members volunteered to accompany a guided walk at the site so they could speak to the walk participants about their perspectives as it progressed around the lake.

## 4.4. Overall process design

At the outset the facilitator mapped out the objectives for each of the Panel sessions to ensure that the process would allow sufficient time for deliberation and could produce the agreed output – a site action plan to be presented to the NIA Board.

The general principle was to take participants through an iterative process.



Session 1 7.00pm – 9.00pm	Session 2 7.00pm – 9.00pm	Session 3 7.00pm – 9.00pm	Session 4 7.00pm – 9.00pm
<b>Objective:</b> To explain the role of the Panel, to share participants' knowledge about the site.	<b>Objective:</b> To explore the future vision/s for the site, where consensus can be reached, and how and what needs to happen to enable this vision to be realised.	<b>Objective:</b> To discuss ideas for future changes to the site/s and their management to help attain the vision.	<b>Objective:</b> To come to agreement about the proposals for the site to be made to the NIA Partnership Board.

There was some flexibility within this and, with the agreement of Panel members, the number of sessions for Summer Leys and Mary's Lake was increased to six. The two additional sessions were used to add further detail to the proposals for action.



## 4.5. Planning individual sessions

Once the objectives were established for each session it was possible for the facilitator to design the content of each session. In doing so there were a number of factors that had to be taken into consideration.

Approach	Examples
<b>Using techniques that allowed everyone to participate fully, methods that did not exclude some individuals nor allowed dominant characters to take over.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Working in pairs or small groups initially before bringing the full group together.</li> <li>Including technical experts in each small group to help manage discussions.</li> <li>Careful management by the facilitator, taking action when discussions went off track or were being dominated by an individual.</li> <li>Starting from a base where everyone could contribute equally – posing questions that all Panel members could respond to.</li> </ul>
<b>Methods that allowed participants to be able to consider the issues objectively and critically.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Providing technical inputs from the experts present to build participants' knowledge.</li> <li>Providing similar opportunities for members of the public to share their (often extensive) knowledge of the site.</li> <li>Technical experts taking a full and active role participating in every Panel meeting alongside members of the public, not 'sitting on the sidelines'.</li> <li>Giving sufficient time to share knowledge, question others and be questioned.</li> <li>An iterative series of activities that had a logical flow from one to the other, and built on everyone's knowledge and understanding.</li> </ul>
<b>Methods that ensured that a 'real time' record of the discussions was made.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Using prompts and key questions to keep discussions focused.</li> <li>Panel members recording their key points as they progressed through each session, e.g. on pro forma sheets, question sheets, post it notes etc.</li> <li>Facilitator writing up the notes of each session quickly and circulating to Panel members to check accuracy.</li> </ul>

## 4.6. Example activities

The following examples are all activities that were used at Community Panel meetings. They are included here to illustrate the kinds of tasks that Panel members undertook, reflecting the approaches described above.

CREATING A VISION			
<b>Purpose:</b>	To establish participants' hopes and vision for the site.	<b>Time needed:</b>	45-60 minutes
<b>Resources:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Up to about 6-8 cards per person (approximate size = ¼ of A4)</li> <li>Pen per person</li> </ul>	<b>When:</b>	Early in the process, to provide clarity about what the group is working towards.
<p><b>How:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Each group members casts forward to 2024 and thinks about what they want the site to be like. Use prompts such as:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What do you see?</li> <li>What do you do?</li> <li>What do you enjoy?</li> </ul> </li> <li>Ask participants to think laterally and to think clearly.</li> <li>Each person writes their key words or ideas onto cards; a separate card for each word or idea.</li> <li>In two groups, they look at the cards, move them around and try to group them into related themes.</li> <li>To what extent are the ideas complementary, to what extent do they conflict and which don't they know about (e.g. if they don't know if competing interests conflict with the future of the site)?</li> <li>Each group feeds back on what they have in front of them.</li> <li>Full group discussion about the extent of the overlap and where there may be conflicts that need addressing or working on (these may need to be recorded and considered separately in another session).</li> <li>If possible, quickly pull together a draft 'vision statement' that can be agreed and everyone would want to work towards. It maybe necessary for the facilitator to take the cards and groupings away and work on the vision statement between meetings.</li> </ul> <p>The agreed vision statement will then be a key reference point for all the discussions that follow about what should happen on the site – it is likely that it will undergo further revisions as it comes into use.</p>			

## ASSESSING THE CURRENT SITUATION

<b>Purpose:</b>	To share participant's knowledge about the site; to help build everyone's capacity to participate fully; to acknowledge the problems and opportunities on the site.	<b>Time needed:</b>	45-60 minutes
<b>Resources:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flipchart sheet for each theme; header naming the subject on colour coded paper; line down the centre with one side allocated to benefits and the other to issues</li> <li>• Post it notes for each person in 2 colours (one for benefits and one for issues)</li> <li>• Colour coded A3 paper</li> <li>• Pens per person</li> </ul>	<b>When:</b>	Early in the process

### How:

- Flipcharts are placed around the room, one for each of the subjects relevant to the site – for example, ecology, access/recreation, agriculture. The header cards should be in different colours.
- Everyone has post it notes.
- In a fete type exercise everyone considers the benefits and issues under each heading, writes each one on the correct colour post it note (one colour for benefits and one for issues) and sticks it into the relevant section (benefit or issue) on the relevant sheet (ecology, recreation or agriculture). Participants move between the sheets as they choose, with time prompts provided by the facilitator to ensure they add comments to each of the themes.
- Remind to write clearly, in full sentences, with clarity around the point – they need to be read and understood by others in the room.
- Split into 3 groups (self selected group composition).
- Each group takes one sheet and looks at what has been generated. They move the post its around in a grouping and theming exercise; groups may include both issues and benefits where they are a related point.
- Where possible the groups write a summary statement for each of their theme (on colour coded paper to match the colour of the header card).
- Feedback and discuss in whole group.
- These statements become the basis for starting to consider actions required on the site – the use of colour coded paper helps track back to the original subject area at a later date if required. Each statement should be coded to make it easier to reference in the future.

**GENERATING ACTIONS**

<b>Purpose:</b>	To consider what needs to happen on the site to achieve the vision.	<b>Time needed:</b>	60 – 90 minutes
<b>Resources:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Copies of the agreed vision</li> <li>• Copies of the current issues / benefits generated by the group and theme statements</li> <li>• Pre completed example action card to illustrate what is required (see Appendix B)</li> <li>• Blank action cards (colour coded to the subject areas [see above])</li> <li>• Pens per person</li> </ul>	<b>When:</b>	Mid process
<b>How:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Go through the resources / information generated thus far in the process – vision, benefits and issues summary and themes.</li> <li>• Work in 3 groups and start with the statements for one subject (ecology, access/recreation or agriculture).</li> <li>• Look at the statements – what now needs to happen to optimise the benefits / reduce the problems and work towards the vision?</li> <li>• Groups write out a series of actions that they think need to happen.</li> <li>• Need to have a very open mind at this stage. Actions will be refined, further developed and prioritised at a later stage – ‘blue sky thinking’ not limited by concerns about resources etc.</li> <li>• Important to be really clear what is needed and why. It should not be very general like <i>“something needs to happen to protect ecological status”</i>; rather it’s more specific <i>“propose education campaign to promote responsible use of the site”</i>.</li> <li>• The groups have ‘action cards’ to complete – at this stage interested in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Code/s for the statement the action refers to</li> <li>– WHAT needs to happen (i.e. the action)</li> <li>– WHY is it needed</li> </ul> </li> <li>• There are other headings that will be used later so don’t need to be completed at this stage. Show example action card.</li> <li>• Don’t worry if actions devised overlap with another area – at this stage it is crucial to get as much down as possible to be refined later.</li> <li>• Groups carousel around the subjects – they move to the next subject when the facilitator asks and they can add more detail to the action or add further actions under that topic.</li> <li>• Feedback as whole group. Individual groups select a couple of actions to share from their original subject.</li> <li>• The action cards are later refined and checked for duplication or overlap, before prioritising.</li> </ul>			

## SORTING AND PRIORITISING ACTIONS

<b>Purpose:</b>	Sorting the agreed actions.	<b>Time needed:</b>	60 minutes
<b>Resources:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Copies of the agreed action cards (once duplicates/overlaps removed and refined further)</li> <li>• Flipchart sheet per subject area split into a matrix (see Appendix C)</li> <li>• Pens per person</li> </ul>	<b>When:</b>	End process

### How:

- One group per subject area.
- Group looks at the action cards for their subject and has to decide between two sets of options for that action:
  - Is the action a ‘must have’ or a ‘nice to have’, and at the same time ...
  - Is it ‘easy’ or ‘hard’ to implement?
- Each card could be placed in one of four sections on the matrix (must have/easy to implement; must have/hard to implement; nice to have/easy to implement; nice to have/hard to implement).
- When each group has completed the task for their subject the facilitator moves them to the sheet for the next subject where the cards will already have been allocated.
- The group can question the placement of up to two cards on the sheet they are looking at – they add a question mark to that card.
- The exercise is repeated until each group has looked at every subject.
- As a whole group, look at the cards where question marks have been added. The group that placed the question mark can ask why the card was placed where it was and why they disagree with that placement. The facilitator works to get agreement about where the card should be placed and it is moved if necessary.
- The result is a set of actions for which there is a sense of the group’s priority for each one and their assessment of how hard it will be to implement them. This is the basis for drafting the action plan.



## 4.7. Example outputs

Vision statements were developed for each of the sites. This is not always straightforward to do, as it is not easy for people to cast forward to a point in the distant future. It's therefore important to use an activity that develops their thinking in an incremental fashion, as described in the activity example above, and creates a credible and robust vision as a result.

Both Community Panels successfully drafted vision statements. In each case the Panel members treated their vision as a 'live' document, continually returning to the statement to check its validity and applicability as their thinking evolved throughout the process. As a result there were several drafts of the vision before a final version was agreed.

### The Nene Valley NIA Community Panels experience

#### Summer Leys / Mary's Lake Vision

In 2024 Summer Leys will be managed primarily for its nature conservation value. It will retain its high ecological value and maintain the protected status.

Use by the public will be managed and will:

- Ensure good access for people with disabilities;
- Provide access for the public along the Public Rights of Way and the permissive paths;
- Provide information to users about the value of the site and recommended behaviours; and
- Engage its users.

The Wildlife Trust management plan will be in place that includes detail about how these purposes are managed. This management plan will sit within a strategic level zoning plan for this section of the valley, so each site can be managed for its primary

The action plans for each site included a number of actions being recommended by the Panel to the NIA Board. Each action has an outline description and a level or priority as being proposed by the Panel. Examples from the Summer Leys and Mary's Lake action plan follow.

**STRATEGY ACTION: Develop a strategic level zoning plan for the valley (S2)**

<b>Must have</b>	✓	<b>Easy to implement</b>	-
<b>Nice to have</b>	-	<b>Hard to implement</b>	✓

Through their discussions the Panel became increasingly aware that, should they propose minimising recreational use at Summer Leys, there was the potential to put other sites under undue pressure. They had noted the increase in use when the country parks started charging for parking and do not want to just push problems elsewhere in the valley. The action is therefore to create a strategic level zoning plan for the valley which would identify the primary purpose of each site and consider how to manage pressures, including recreational use, across the area rather than on a site by site basis. This should take account of development pressures over the lifetime of the vision statement and should ensure that there is no implicit conflict between the intentions contained in individual site management plans.

**FACILITIES ACTION: Review site supervision 'package' (F1)**

<b>Must have</b>	✓	<b>Easy to implement</b>	-
<b>Nice to have</b>	-	<b>Hard to implement</b>	✓

There is considerable concern among Panel members about site security, particularly around anti social evening / night time activity. They appreciate the difficulties associated with locking the gate at night, but they feel that this should be a priority action. If it really is not possible then it would be necessary to consider alternatives such as a 'Farm Watch' type scheme, further liaison with the police and/or a hotline system, for example.

**COMMUNICATIONS ACTION: User code of conduct developed (C2)**

<b>Must have</b>	✓	<b>Easy to implement</b>	✓
<b>Nice to have</b>	-	<b>Hard to implement</b>	-

The Panel would like to see a simple code of conduct developed for the site that outline what are acceptable behaviours from all users. The code of conduct should be displayed at the site (see C1).

## Appendix A: Community Panel background material

### Summer Leys & Mary's Lake Community Panel

#### Why a Panel?

- We believe that local people have a unique insight into their area, and the green spaces and sites that they use. We want to harness this insight and knowledge by creating a Panel that will play a key role in discussions about the future management of Summer Leys and Mary's Lake.
- We think this is particularly powerful when local people work alongside those who work in the countryside professions. When their knowledge is combined there is a lot of scope for creative thinking about the issues that the site presents.
- This is an approach that we want to use at sites across the Nature Improvement Area. We have already tested this idea and the Northampton Washlands Panel worked effectively to produce a draft action plan and set of recommendations for the site.

#### Key task of the Panel

- To consider the uses and pressures at Summer Leys and the best ways forward for access at Mary's Lake, taking into account all of the uses, plus conservation and recreation issues and pressures.
- To make recommendations that reflect an agreed set of parameters, as set out at the start of the process.

#### Panel membership

- There will be about 18-20 people in total on the Panel.
- Members of the public who have an interest in or use Summer Leys and Mary's Lake will be in the majority, chosen on a first come, first served basis, providing that the full range of users are represented. Representatives from Natural England, the Wildlife Trust and RSPB will also be members.

#### Panel meetings

- Helen Bovey who is an independent facilitator will facilitate the meetings (telephone 07775 633205; email [helen@icarus.uk.net](mailto:helen@icarus.uk.net)).
- Each meeting will have a clear task to complete.
- The meetings will be designed in a way that gives everyone an opportunity to take part and give their views on what is being discussed. They will not be in the style of very formal, sitting around a table meetings with a Chair person.
- It will be a time bound group – the Panel will complete the tasks outlined above and then disband.

## Summer Leys & Mary's Lake Community Panel

### WHAT WE'RE LOOKING FOR FROM PANEL MEMBERS

#### 1. Commitment

- Attend the four planned Panel meetings. Each meeting will be held at a local venue and in the evening.
- Contribute to other Panel activities, as decided by the Panel.

#### 2. Knowledge

- Good knowledge of the site as a user and / or local resident.
- Good awareness of the needs of their own interest group (if applicable) and / or willingness to engage other users to seek their views.
- To understand a key area/s of interest to contribute to discussing / tackling complex issues.
- The RSPB and Natural England representatives are primarily attending as technical experts on ecological matters, and will provide input to help inform discussions.

#### 3. Personal qualities

- Willingness to be a part of team working to achieve an agreed goal.
- Ability to listen and recognise the views and the needs of others.
- Commitment to working towards consensus.
- Ability to represent both their area/s of interest and to fairly consider those of others.
- To be open, transparent and receptive to a range of differing and potentially conflicting needs.

## Summer Leys & Mary's Lake Community Panel

### Get involved in the future of Summer Leys & Mary's Lake

*Summer Leys and Mary's Lake are among the most popular places for people to enjoy the outdoors in the Nene Valley and they are protected sites for wild birds.*

*If you're part of the local community or use the site regularly, and are interested in sharing views and ideas with others about this important place, **then why not join our new Community Panel?***

During 4 evening meetings in October and November the Panel will be:

- Considering the uses and pressures on Summer Leys
- Discussing the best ways forward for access at Mary's Lake

*You don't need to be an expert, just someone willing to come along and take part in the discussions.*

*If you'd like to join the Panel, or need information, please contact:*

*Helen Bovey on 07775 633205, [helen@icarus.uk.net](mailto:helen@icarus.uk.net)*

*(please leave a message if unattended and we will return your call as soon as possible)*





## Appendix B: Pre completed example action card

<b>ACTION HEADING</b> <i>Disabled Access</i>			<b>Ref:</b> <i>A7</i>
<b>WHAT needs to happen – what is the action proposed?</b> <i>The disabled parking bays need re-marking so they are only used by those needing them. Signage may be needed to emphasise that these bays should not be used by anyone who is not eligible to do so.</i>			<b>Themes to action relates to:</b> <i>R2, R3</i>
<b>WHY is this action needed?</b> <i>The paint is very faint / almost non-existent and it is hard for car park users to see where the disabled bays are. We've had feedback from disabled users that they often can't park because other users have used their parking bays.</i>			
<b>Complementary</b> <i>A2, A4</i>	<b>Conflicting</b> <i>None</i>	<b>Overlaps</b> <i>A2</i>	

Once the action has been defined there is a second stage of deciding the degree to which it complements other actions, or if it conflicts or overlaps with them. This then leads into discussion about whether the action needs refining or combining with another. Where there is conflict then the discussion is about where the priority lies and which action should take prevalence.

These 'codes' refer to themes that were designated from the previous exercise to 'access the current situation'.

## Appendix C: Sorting and prioritising actions matrix

	<b>MUST HAVE</b>	<b>NICE TO HAVE</b>
<b>EASY TO IMPLEMENT</b>		
<b>HARD TO IMPLEMENT</b>		