




Wildlife Trust for
**Beds, Cambs
& Northants**

Our Wilder Future

A Plan for Nature Recovery
in Beds, Cambs and Northants

2030



A Short-eared Owl is shown in flight, its wings spread wide, revealing a pattern of brown and white feathers. The owl's head is turned towards the camera, showing its large, yellow eyes and a small, dark beak. It is holding a small, brown mouse in its beak. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green, suggesting a natural habitat.

This five year plan lays out the steps we will take, and the priorities we will focus on, to ensure we are working effectively to protect nature and inspire people in our three counties.

The UK Government, and others, have set a goal of halving carbon emissions and conserving 30% of land for biodiversity by the end of the decade. This report shows how we will play our part to help achieve these goals in Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire.

Local Action. Collective Impact. Global Change.

Society, the economy and the political map have changed a huge amount since we launched our last five year plan in 2020 – our charity, our partners and our reserves have been affected in many far-reaching ways. The pandemic changed working patterns and increased reserve visitor numbers; domestic politics has led to a sustained period of inflationary pressures and tighter household budgets, and the impact of climate change has made looking after habitats more challenging than ever.

Despite these challenges, since 2020 we have achieved outstanding successes, including expanding our Great Fen vision with the £8.6million Lottery-funded Peatland Progress project, saving the unique rewilding site Strawberry Hill through our largest-ever fundraising appeal, reintroducing beavers to Northamptonshire, reaching over 25,000 people through events and education, launching our new Team Wilder programme, and increasing our membership by more than 2,200.

The pressures we know we are likely to face in the coming years include an uncertain

economic outlook, a renewed drive for growth in our three counties – with planned new homes and transport links sitting uneasily up against the imperative to deliver nature's recovery – and the continued impact of unpredictable weather patterns on our reserves and the wider countryside.

We've learnt a lot and it's clearer than ever that our future plans must make us more resilient, more flexible and better prepared. We need to change the way we fundraise, engage the public, collaborate, use technology, and demonstrate natural solutions, whilst building on the strengths we have developed over recent decades.

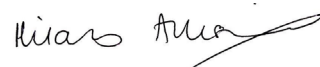
To achieve this we have focused our plans up to the end of the decade on three strategic aims: *Nature in Recovery*, which covers our ambitions for halting and reversing biodiversity declines on the ground, *People taking meaningful action*, our vision for a deeper engagement with local

communities and diverse groups of many kinds who share our passion for wildlife, and *Natural Solutions*, a mission to influence decision-making to bring home nature's relevance in addressing some of today's societal challenges such as health, wellbeing, flood alleviation and new agricultural futures.

To achieve these goals we have identified five *Strategic Transformations* we must make as an organisation and eight *Enabling Priorities* – the foundations of our work we need to build on and develop further.

Achieving these goals is urgent as 2030 is the deadline set by our Government and others to halt biodiversity declines and climate chaos. The Wildlife Trusts movement is now more aligned than ever in our response and our plan reflects this.

As we head towards the end of the decade we know we must make a step change in our ambition, keep a clear focus on the measurable impact of our work, listen to and foster the next generation of nature enthusiasts, and collaborate more closely with others to work at scale.



Dr Hilary Allison, Chair
Wildlife Trust for Beds, Cambs and Northants



Brian Eversham, Chief Executive
Wildlife Trust for Beds, Cambs and Northants



Event at Trumpington Meadows by Holly Wilkinson

About us

The Wildlife Trust BCN is part of a movement of 46 Wildlife Trusts across the UK. We manage more than 100 nature reserves in Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire covering 4,400 hectares across nine Living Landscape areas. 95% of our local population live within five miles of one of our reserves.

We have over 38,000 members, 1,900 volunteers, 12 trustees and 122 members of staff working together to protect local wildlife. We run more than 500 public engagement events a year on reserves as well as at two education centres and two visitor centres. We advise farmers and landowners, comment on planning applications and partner with local authorities to deliver long term nature recovery strategies in our three counties.

Our vision

People close to nature, in a land rich in wildlife

Our mission

- Conserve local wildlife, by caring for land ourselves and with others
- Inspire others to take action for wildlife
- Inform people, by offering advice and sharing knowledge

Our values

We believe that:

- we must focus on all wildlife and whole ecosystems to safeguard the natural environment
- everyone has a role to play in restoring nature
- we should value, respect and listen to our staff, volunteers, members and supporters so they can contribute fully to achieving our vision
- working in partnership brings more benefits than working alone
- conservation depends on local knowledge and good science
- we achieve more for wildlife by operating in an efficient and business-like manner
- we should operate in an environmentally sustainable way
- working to restore nature should be rewarding for everyone involved



Our Strategic Goals

G1

Nature in recovery

G2

People taking action

G3

Natural solutions

Our Strategic Transformations

1

Delivering a nature recovery network

2

Empowering our communities

3

Step change in fundraising

4

Digital transformation

5

Breaking down barriers

Our Enabling Priorities

1

Good governance and operational excellence

2

Retaining and building a wide supporter base

3

Ensuring our reserves are the foundations for nature's recovery

4

Sustainability

5

Marketing and brand

6

Invest in highly skilled, diverse staff and movement-wide learning

7

Volunteering

8

Speak with a bold and confident voice

Nature in Recovery

Nature continues to decline, and we face one of the biggest challenges in our region when it comes to reversing this. The pressure of agriculture and development in our region has had a major impact on wildlife – there are fewer places for species to feed, shelter and thrive.

Our nature reserves are at the heart of the huge effort in recent decades to protect what we have and to save rare orchids, threatened bats and wintering wetland bird roosts from disappearing entirely. Each one provides a safe haven for the plants and animals there, and together they form part of a network across the landscape which allows wildlife to move and spread.

We will maintain the ecological richness of precious longstanding sites like Brampton Wood, Old Sulehay and Flitwick Moor through direct habitat management, conservation grazing and regular monitoring. We will also develop and deliver management plans for newly acquired sites like Strawberry Hill, Fleam Dyke and Speechly's Farm in the Great Fen. We will consider strategic acquisitions of land to make the network stronger and more resilient.

Nature reserves can never be the whole solution. We will work beyond reserve boundaries, with landowners, decision-makers and communities, to create a resilient landscape where protected wild spaces, sustainable development and nature-friendly farming go hand in hand.

Our monitoring and research will provide us with essential, targeted information about our different nature reserves. We will survey species trends, monitor the condition of our grassland and woodland reserves and test new habitat management techniques.

We can't do this work alone. We need local experts who can help us monitor our changing wildlife, and the facilities to handle the data they generate. We will build on our current relationships with other key nature non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and county wildlife groups to help deliver monitoring and conservation projects on our land, as well as continuing to support and develop the hundreds of regular volunteers our staff rely on. We will provide training for local naturalists, and support biological record centres in our three counties.

England is now one of the most nature depleted countries in the world. Just 1.8% of the country is designated as a SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest).¹

OUR IMPACTS



Our nature reserves will be in the best possible condition for wildlife



A better-connected network of wildlife sites across the countryside



Our conservation actions will be based on sound scientific evidence

Strawberry Hill in Bedfordshire is a rewilding haven for nature and one of our most ambitious projects – protecting sites like these is key to our conservation ambitions



People taking meaningful action

Ours is a fast-growing region where levels of social equality, access to green space and nature engagement range across a wide spectrum. This means we need to increase the number of people we reach and widen our appeal to inspire new groups and communities.

An important shift in our approach will come through Team Wilder, a growing and powerful grassroots movement of people tackling biodiversity loss. Through the Team Wilder approach, we will facilitate and support community groups to create wild spaces, monitor species and campaign for nature. We aim to give them hope, as well as the practical skills and support they need to make a difference in their neighbourhoods.

Team Wilder is one of the key inspirational journeys we will focus on to help everyone find the role they can play - alongside volunteering, donating money, joining as a member, supporting our campaigns and becoming corporate partners.

These journeys start through greater public recognition of our brand. To achieve this we will raise our profile further, positioning ourselves clearly as the most active wildlife conservation charity in our three counties. As well as placing a new focus on targeted digital marketing and a

strong regional media presence, we will carry out a renewal of interpretation signage on our reserves to ensure we are delivering a vibrant and appealing brand and message to the tens of thousands of people who visit our reserves each year.

Our members will remain the foundation of our support, and we will aim to increase our membership base whilst also offering new ways to support the Trust that appeal to changing tastes and a new generation of nature lovers.

When decisions are made, locally or nationally, that have an impact on nature we will empower our supporters, with the tools and resources they need to make their voices heard in support of wildlife.

We will take our message out to people wherever they are, online and in local communities, to ensure we reach and inspire more individuals, offering them new ways to take meaningful action for the wildlife and habitats they care about.

OUR IMPACTS



The Team Wilder approach will be central to our work



An increase in our membership, funding and business partnerships



An enhanced public profile with a clear brand presence online, in the media, on reserves, and in communities

The UK was ranked last out of 18 European countries measured for the population's connectedness to nature in a recent academic study.²

Natural solutions

The natural environment underpins our own lives, and our economy. Locally, nationally, and globally, we face multiple challenges from the collapse of natural systems and a warming climate.

We are seeing a marked decline in the physical and mental wellbeing of some people, particularly in more vulnerable parts of society. Nature is a key part of the solution to these issues.

This message isn't always well communicated, and too often nature is seen as a secondary societal benefit that falls below other, more urgent, priorities. It has not been embraced as a way of tackling many of the challenges we face.

Our own nature reserves are a unique resource for us to demonstrate this as they are truly local and give us a platform to show the significant benefits that nature can provide.

We will work to ensure the vital role the natural environment plays in securing health, wellbeing and prosperity in our three counties is recognised and understood by those who set policies and make decisions.

We will proactively showcase the best examples of natural solutions to the people who need to see them. From our wet farming trials in the Great Fen to sustainable development success stories like Trumpington Meadows, conservation innovations like the butterfly banks on our Bedfordshire chalk reserves, and more.

Through local nature partnerships, engagement in the planning system and face to face meetings we will strive to ensure policy decisions have protection for nature built in from the outset.

As well as playing our part locally we will be actively involved in the national Wildlife Trusts movement, and with others where that is most effective, to engage with those making decisions that affect the UK's most important wildlife habitats and species.

We will play our part to restore ecosystems so that natural habitats can store and sequester carbon, help prevent flooding, reduce soil erosion, improve soil fertility, provide pollination services, and support improvements to people's physical and mental wellbeing.

70% of the UK's degraded lowland peatlands are found in the Cambridgeshire Fens. Research suggests that this releases more carbon emissions than all other human activity in the county.³

OUR IMPACTS



Decision makers, especially at a local level, are well informed about the potential of natural solutions



Key decisions on planning, transport and infrastructure are increasingly informed by practical advice from us on how to defend nature



Learnings from key projects to conserve nature on our land are shared widely

Strategic Transformations

Our three goals, and the current shifts in society, technology and the political landscape, require us to make some far reaching changes as an organisation. These strategic transformations will ensure we are in fighting shape to deliver our objectives efficiently and effectively.

Delivering a nature recovery network

A key goal for the Government's 2030 biodiversity pledge is a national Nature Recovery Network. There are four Local Nature Recovery Strategies which feed into this in our region. We will bring our strategic and tactical expertise on nature conservation to the table to ensure these are thorough, robust and properly deliver for local wildlife. As part of this we will form mutually beneficial partnerships with farmers, landowners, local agencies and communities, through channels including Local Nature Partnerships, farm clusters and our nature reserves management work.



Little Bugs event by Holly Wilkinson

Empowering our communities

Through the Team Wilder approach we will be giving communities the resources and support they need to make a difference for nature. We will be facilitators, connecting a diverse range of people from all backgrounds and ages and upskilling them. These groups will be led by communities and supported by staff across the Trust who will be trained in community organising. They will be empowered to deliver projects from river restoration, habitat management and wildlife monitoring to green space accessibility, fundraising and advocacy.



Plug planting by Holly Wilkinson

Step change in fundraising

Building on the fundraising successes of the past five years, we will be aiming higher, reaching more people, funders and businesses to unlock the resources needed to deliver this plan. We aspire to build a £1.5m Wilder Future Fund which will drive our fundraising activities over the next three years. This Fund will focus on sustainably underpinning our core activities, rather than relying on project based appeals. We will also widen our grant funding pipeline and inspire new Wildlife Guardians, major donors and legacy pledgers to support us.

Digital transformation

Achieving more whilst managing human and financial resources sustainably requires a transformation in the way we utilise new technology. Further developing the way we use drones to access land for monitoring and habitat interventions, and basing our management on reliable and data-rich mapping are two key examples for our conservation work. We will also unlock new efficiencies by facilitating better communication between teams through cloud based networking, project management and data storage.

Breaking down barriers

The integration of new technology into a post pandemic hybrid working structure has opened new opportunities enabling different teams and organisations to work together internally and across the Wildlife Trusts movement. We will work within groups to address previous barriers and limitations on our work. And we will collaborate with other Trusts on some of the toughest challenges common across regional borders – not just sharing knowledge but also launching joint projects.



Great Fen stakeholders event by Nik Shelton

Enabling Priorities

Behind the Strategic Transformations we will build on and strengthen the key functions that have helped get us to where we are. Our Enabling Priorities are the areas where we need to grow and work smarter to deliver more.

Good governance and operational excellence

Charities and NGOs are under continued scrutiny – our reputation is our key asset, and governance must remain a priority for the Trust. We will continue to strengthen and make more effective the functions which underpin our conservation goals: Human Resources, financial compliance and stability, safeguarding, health and safety, and facilities management, with an increased understanding of equality, diversity and inclusion to ensure all our staff and supporters feel valued and welcome.

Recruitment by Matthew Power Photography



Retaining and building a wide supporter base

As our region's population continues to grow and a younger generation engages with nature and our work, we must keep a clear focus on retention of members whilst exploring ways to appeal to new demographics. This means continuing to invest in high quality membership support and benefits such as *Local Wildlife* magazine whilst offering new supporter packages and tailored journeys towards them. We must appeal to more people, from diverse communities, with a message that is meaningful to them.

Cambourne HQ by Rebecca Neal



Ensuring our reserves are the foundations for nature's recovery

Our monitoring and research will provide us with essential, targeted information about our different nature reserves. We will survey species trends, monitor the condition of our grassland and woodland reserves and test new habitat management techniques.

The Wildlife Trust BCN Strategy 2030: Our Wilder Future



Small blue at Trumpington Meadows



Wild work day by Holly Wilkinson

Sustainability

Given the climate and biodiversity crises it is vital we step up our commitment to reduce our own environmental impacts and provide a credible voice to inspire others to act. The next five years will be crucial in setting our Trust on a pathway to drive change and bring about meaningful impacts for sustainability. Building on the solid foundation put in place over the last five years we will continue to make progress in key areas including CO₂ emissions reduction; energy efficiency of buildings; fleet transport; and empowering staff to make more sustainable choices at work and for their commute.

Enabling Priorities

Marketing and brand

As we compete for attention and support, having a clear and recognisable brand is more important than ever. The perception our brand creates of our ambition and ability to deliver is a vital tool in our success.

Ensuring we have the basics right with strong design principles, a clear appealing message, and stories that show the impact of our work, we will use established and emerging digital channels, media, advertising and physical signage. We will build a better understanding of our audiences which will inform targeted supporter journeys allowing us to reach the people who care the most about our work.



Volunteers at Fleam Dyke by Nik Shelton

Invest in highly skilled, diverse staff and movement-wide learning

Only with skilled, motivated colleagues can we deliver our objectives. We will work alongside other Trusts to invest in skills, and in people, making teams more connected and show all staff the opportunities available to them to progress. We will work towards new ways of funding posts, and continue to create and promote pathways into conservation careers.



Apple Day by Holly Wilkinson

Volunteering

Volunteers are the backbone of our conservation work. As well as bolstering our staff resources, managing habitats, caring for livestock and supporting our communities and education work, volunteering delivers mental and physical health benefits and brings people together in common cause. Supporting individuals, ensuring they are safe, and giving them the equipment and training they need is vital for the Trust. We will ensure volunteering opportunities are open to everyone in society.



The Wildlife Trust BCN Strategy 2030: Our Wilder Future

Working with the press by Holly Wilkinson



Work experience by Rebecca Neal

Speak with a bold and confident voice

As the most active and effective nature conservation NGO in our region, with a solid track record and a wealth of expertise and knowledge, we should be confident in speaking up for nature and calling for support from individuals, funders, partners and businesses.

We have the power to lead genuine change for nature and climate in our region, as long as we have faith in our mission, clarity in our message and a shared understanding of our priorities and approach.

Our place in the wider movement

We are one of 46 independent regional charities that, along with the national Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts (RSWT), make up the Wildlife Trusts movement.

Collectively we have more than 900,000 members, over 35,000 volunteers, 3,600 staff and 600 trustees. There are 37 Wildlife Trusts in England and five Wildlife Trusts in Wales, as well as the Scottish Wildlife Trust in Scotland, Ulster Wildlife in Northern Ireland, Alderney Wildlife Trust in the Channel Islands and Manx Wildlife Trust in the Isle of Man. The role of RSWT – the central charity – is to ensure a strong collective voice for wildlife, to help coordinate work between individual Wildlife Trusts, and to lead the development of the movement and federation as a whole.

The movement is harnessing new digital technologies to build partnerships between Trusts and work together on common challenges, saving money, resources and spreading best practice.

The Wildlife Trusts Strategy 2030 lays out the movement's collective mission to protect UK nature, empower communities and tackle climate change. It states:

We agree to work together, with mutual respect, determination, and in good faith, to find solutions in accordance with our values as a movement, and to overcome strategic, political, and technical barriers to achieve our common vision of a thriving natural world, with our wildlife and natural habitats playing a valued role in driving global change, and everyone inspired and empowered to take action for nature.

Wildlife has intrinsic value, bringing colour, beauty and wonder to all our lives.

¹ HM Government Land Use Consultation January 2025

² Richardson, M., Hamlin, I., Elliott, L.R. et al. 'Country-level factors in a failing relationship with nature: Nature connectedness as a key metric for a sustainable future.' *Ambio* 51, 2201–2213 (2022). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13280-022-01744-w>

³ Cambridge University Science and Policy Exchange (CUSPE) report 'Net Zero Cambridgeshire' published in October 2019. https://consultations.greatercambridgeplanning.org/sites/gcp/files/2021-08/NetZeroCarbonReductionTargets_GCLP_210831.pdf

Image: Spiderwebs on knapweed heads at Strawberry Hill by Holly Wilkinson

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