



FENS  
BIOSPHERE

# FENS BIOSPHERE: BIG SKIES, BIG VISION

for a brighter, more sustainable future



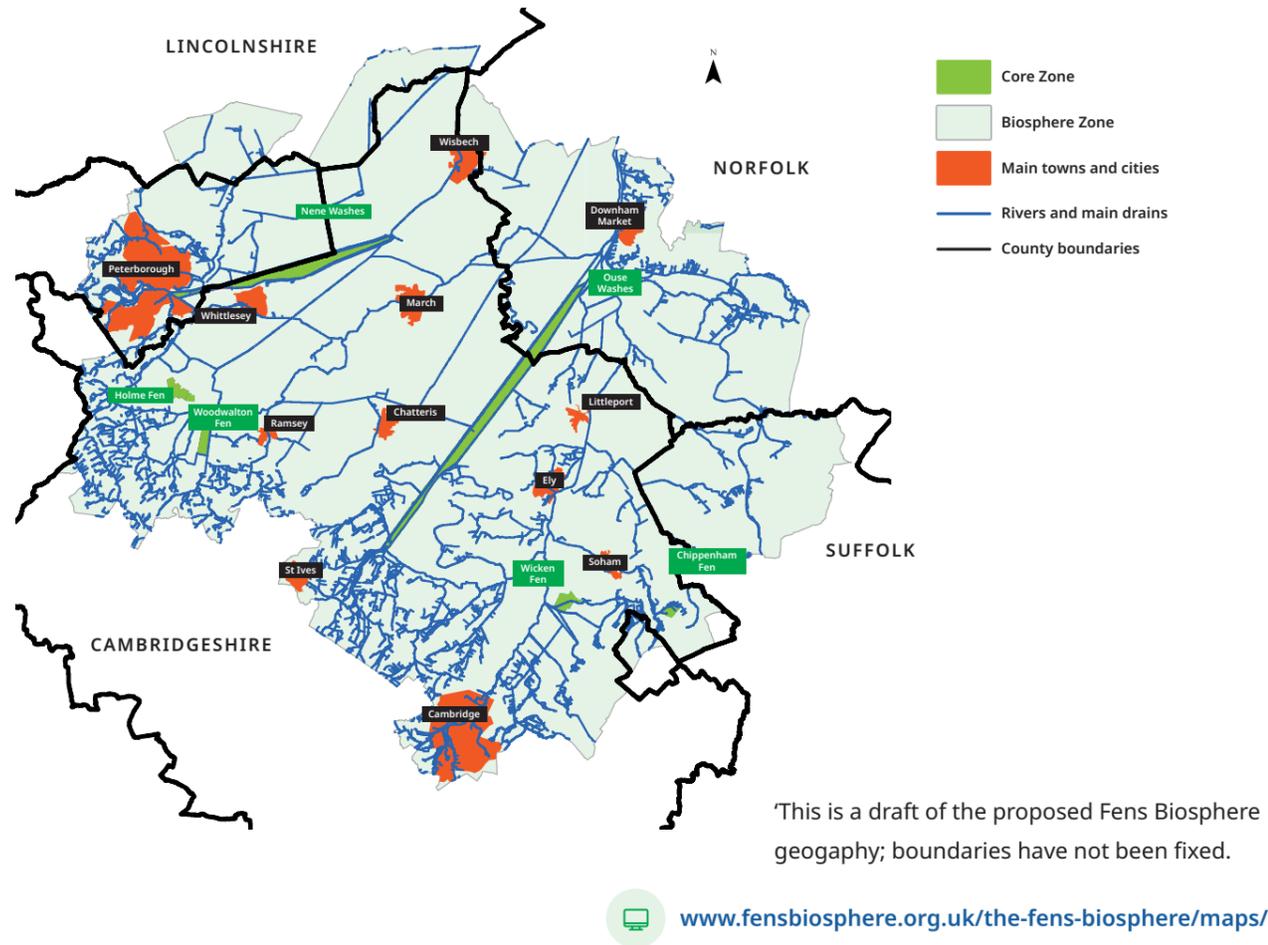
Photo courtesy of Bill Blake Heritage Documentation

A Brief for Local Authorities  
[fensbiosphere.org.uk](https://fensbiosphere.org.uk)

# A BIOSPHERE FOR A BRIGHTER, MORE SUSTAINABLE FUTURE



Photo courtesy of Bill Blake Heritage Documentation



## WHY A UNESCO BIOSPHERE?

**UNESCO Biosphere designation** provides a unique opportunity for the Fens to become a leader in sustainable growth and development and achieve global recognition.

A Biosphere will help Local Authorities address socio-economic issues and facilitate sustainable and inclusive growth. Rather than restricting or hindering ambitions for a better economy and society, a Fens Biosphere can be a catalyst, opening up new opportunities and accelerating positive economic, social and environmental change.

Biosphere status will ensure a bigger vision for the Fens can be achieved through wider cross-sector collaboration, supporting existing plans and initiatives, driving prosperity, and sharing learning from across the world.

### Where are we with the UNESCO nominations?

The Fens is an ideal candidate to become a Biosphere, given its strong identity, exceptional environment and biodiversity, significant cultural heritage and the commitment of a wide range of stakeholders working together towards a sustainable future. UNESCO and the UK Man and Biosphere Committee strongly believe this area would benefit from the global Biosphere accolade.

A group of multi-sectoral partners have been working closely together over the last two years to bring forward proposals for submission of the Fens Biosphere nomination to UNESCO. This has included involvement and consultation at an early stage with both Members and Officers from Local Authorities that form part of the Fens Biosphere area.

Biosphere proposals will only be presented to UNESCO once all decision-makers and other key stakeholders in the area have endorsed the plans and recognise the added value this would bring to their work and the area as a whole.



Bringing people together to create a shared vision for the future

“The Fens are one of our most significant landscapes, full of history and meaning yet sadly diminished in their value for nature. We need to put that right, by pursuing a vision for sustainable land use that works for people, nature and the economy in the long term. The Fens Biosphere project provides an exciting opportunity to find solutions for this incredible landscape that respect the past and honour the future. I’m delighted to be involved.”

Dame Fiona Reynolds, Master of Emmanuel College Cambridge, Fens Biosphere Ambassador



## WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR THE ECONOMY?



### A Biosphere for a balanced and resilient economy

The economy of the Fens is a tale of two halves: the Fens' rural economy contrasts starkly with high economies and growth areas such as Cambridge and Peterborough. There is a need to address the widening income and equality gap between these areas and rebalance the economy of the Fens. There are also concerns about limitations to growth, as a direct result of serious water stress and flood risk in the Fens, which may worsen with climate change, jeopardising the Fens economic future.

Biosphere status can bring people and organisations together to develop a shared vision for the future of the Fens which addresses these challenges. It will support better management of the natural capital of the Fens, create a sense of connectedness to the Fens, and contribute to a sense of place and better quality of life. This will encourage people to re-locate, work from home or set up business in rural areas, helping the Fens' rural economy to diversify and become more balanced.

A Fens Biosphere will also grow and diversify the economy, by:

- Attracting new funding and investment
- Adding value to the agri-food economy and enhancing its sustainability and resilience
- Growing the green economy by investing in collaborative R&D in land, water, climate and nature management
- Strengthening the Fens brand, driving growth in tourism and leisure, and adding value to local produce.

## WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR COMMUNITIES AND PLACE MAKING?

A Biosphere will help reduce social inequalities, encourage sustainable living and improve quality of life and well-being for all.

There is great diversity across the Fens Biosphere area in terms of quality of life and well-being, with challenging socio-economic issues relating to education, skills, jobs, access to green space, health and well-being and connectivity (transport and digital). Local Authorities already have a range of initiatives to address these issues and recognise the importance of local environments and sustainable, inclusive growth.

A Biosphere will add value, helping Local Authorities support local communities and places by:

- Raising awareness and understanding of the local environment

- Creating a shared sense of connectedness, ownership and pride of place
- 'Nudging' people to adopt 'green' behaviours and healthier lifestyles
- Encouraging environmental improvements which provide multiple benefits, including recreation and health and well-being
- Supporting education, training, skills and job opportunities in the green economy
- Contributing to better infrastructure through environmental design and planning
- Increasing the return on investment and levering in additional funding.



# WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR OUR NATURAL RESOURCES AND CLIMATE RESILIENCE?

A Biosphere will protect and invest in the Fens' natural and cultural capital, for the benefit of people, the economy and the environment, and build its resilience.

Natural capital provides the foundation for people's lives and businesses, including the soils to grow our food, the water resources to supply our drinking water, the biodiversity of our ecosystems, and the landscape we live in. Biodiversity loss and climate change are the greatest threats to our society, and engaging communities in the conversations necessary to address these challenges is not easy and can be overwhelming for many.



Protecting and investing in the area's natural and cultural capital

A Biosphere will improve natural resource management and climate resilience in the Fens by:

- Developing a shared understanding of the Fens' natural capital and climate change, and how key issues such as loss of peat and carbon release can be addressed.
- Supporting the development of a community-based climate change programme to help communities consume resources wisely, reduce emissions, and develop a closer relationship with nature.
- Promoting knowledge exchange in agriculture by showcasing best practice in sustainable farming and encouraging new research and innovation.
- Collaborating with local authorities, land managers and other stakeholders to plan ecological networks and nature's recovery.



Photo courtesy of Pete Johnson

## WHO IS INVOLVED AND HOW WILL IT WORK?

A Biosphere will bring people and organisations together, and complement and strengthen local initiatives.

The Fens Biosphere proposal is still in development. If created, this might be its longer term outcomes and impacts:

- In the short term, a new and more joined up vision and strategy for the area will lead to new partnerships and joint funding bids to stimulate the economy and enhance the environment.
- In the medium term, by 2030, the Biosphere will have attracted funding and inward investment, to develop the green economy, showcase good land management practices, tackle climate challenges,

enhance nature and address community challenges, with residents expressing a greater sense of optimism and recognising the area as a good place to live and work.

- In the longer term, before 2050, the Biosphere will have contributed to a stronger and sustainable economy in the Fens and enhanced Gross Value Added. This will lead to an improved natural environment, Net Zero carbon, sustainable soil and water management and stronger, more inclusive communities.

These medium and longer term targets align with the 2030 targets of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and the 2050 target date for the UK to bring all greenhouse gas emissions to Net Zero.

# WHAT NEXT

Working together, the Fens Biosphere partners plan to submit the UNESCO nomination form by late Spring 2021.

Before this date we wish to: -

- Engage with key Members and Officers to discuss how the plans for the Fens Biosphere can support and accelerate existing strategies for sustainable development.
- Consult with key Members and Officers to finalise the Fens Biosphere area boundary.
- Engage further with Councils and Committees through provision of presentations and online seminars on the specifics of the Fens Biosphere for each Local Authority area and discuss how we can best align the Fens Biosphere with policies, strategies and forward action plans of:
  - Cambridgeshire County Council; Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk; West Suffolk Council; South Holland District Council; Fenland District Council; Huntingdonshire District Council; East Cambridgeshire District Council; South Cambridgeshire District Council; Cambridge City Council; Peterborough City Council and Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority.
- Hold an online event on 13 January 2021 'The Fens Biosphere: Big Skies, Big Vision', to support understanding and discussion about the impact of the Fens Biosphere.
- Feed Members' and Officers' comments and ideas into the UNESCO nomination form so that the Fens Biosphere is a collaboration between all local authorities, NGOs, educational institutions, agricultural representatives, and private sector partners.
- Secure Local Authorities' support for the Fens Biosphere as signatories to the nomination form.
- Provide ongoing opportunities for engagement and development of Fens Biosphere plans and ideas during its next stages.

## MOVING FORWARD

This work has been funded by the People's Postcode Lottery Postcode Dream Trust and the development of the Fens Biosphere is currently facilitated by Cambridgeshire ACRE to enable the initial stages to be carried forward. In the medium term, the aim is for [partners](#) to come together and form a not-for-profit Community Interest Organisation. This will allow the Fens Biosphere a suitable identity and governance model to ensure its successful future.

**Read the full report:** The Social and Economic Value of a Biosphere for the Fens; Cumulus Consultants Ltd at <https://www.fensbiosphere.org.uk/resources-advice/reports-and-downloads/>

For further information

Visit our website:

[www.fensbiosphere.org.uk](http://www.fensbiosphere.org.uk)

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