

Heart of the Arc

Circulating – Propagating – Sustaining

A vision for inter-regional landscape change in the OxCam Arc



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1 Background

1.1 Legislation

We need to act against man-made climate change and to work towards repairing the damage done to our environment. Recent legislative changes by the UK Government have set out new targets to achieve these aims:

- The 25 Year Environment Plan (2018) outlined the government's main goals for improving the environment within this generation, such as taking a 'natural capital' approach to environmental management, reducing the risks posed by flooding and other natural hazards, and increasing woodland cover.
- The Agriculture Act (2020) sets out changes to farming in the UK following our exit from the European Union. Key to the Act is the proposal that farmers and land managers will receive public money for providing 'public goods' such as improving water quality, supporting public access to land, enhancing cultural heritage, improving the health of plants and animals, or taking action to reduce the impact of environmental hazards.
- The Environment Act (2021) sets long-term targets to improve air quality, biodiversity, water and reduce waste. It incorporates the five recognised Environmental Principles – integration, prevention, precautionary, rectification at source, and polluter pays - and aims to reverse the species decline by 2030.

This legislation promotes greater understanding of the value of our natural capital and, together with the Biodiversity Net Gain policy, offers an opportunity for ecosystem services to be monetised.

1.2 The OxCam Arc

A 'growth corridor' of development curving between Oxford and Cambridge, taking in the counties of Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire (and Milton Keynes), Northamptonshire, Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire. Development in the Arc will be guided by five environmental principles, promoting a sustainable approach that aims to:

1. Work towards a target of net zero carbon by 2040
2. Protect, restore, enhance and create new nature areas and natural capital assets
3. Be an exemplar for environmentally sustainable development, in line with the 25 Year Environment Plan (2018)
4. Ensure that existing and new communities see real benefits from living in the Arc
5. Use natural resources wisely

2 Proposal

This document outlines a proposal for the development of a landscape-scale, multi-faceted, natural capital project at the heart of the OxCam Arc, between Bedford, Milton Keynes, Northampton, Wellingborough and Rushdon. Extending over 30,000 hectares this primarily rural area is being slowly encircled by developments (Figure 4.2) but has the potential to become a significant ecological asset.

Bringing together multiple stakeholders, this project will focus not on large infrastructure developments and grand gestures, but small, incremental changes, that together will transform this area and the lives of those living in and around it. Whilst this proposal is for a specific area, the concepts and methodologies could be applied to several areas within the OxCam Arc.

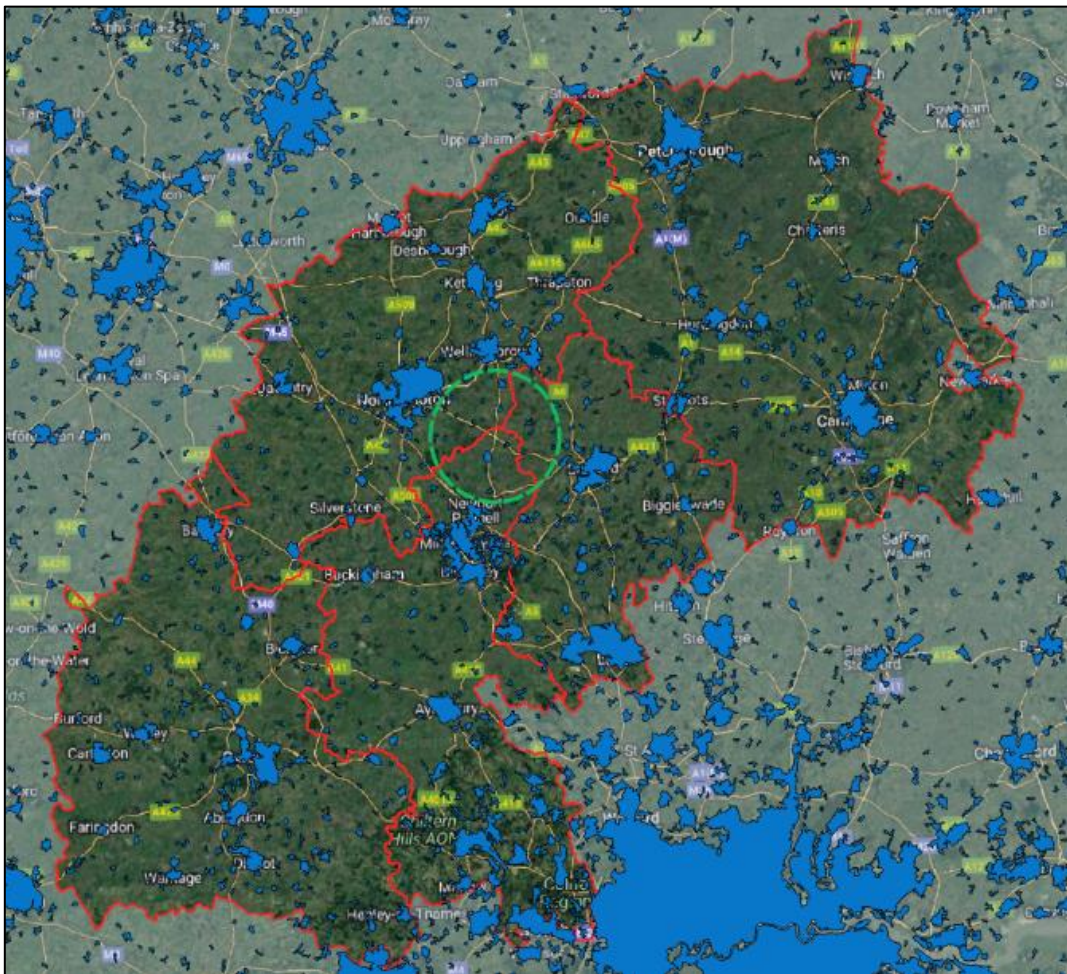


Figure 2.1: OxCam Arc and natural capital project area

2.1 Aims

One could consider the Arc to be a living organism - it has brains (Oxford, Cambridge, Cranfield), a circulatory system (the roads, railways and rivers), lungs (woodlands, hedgerows), but it needs a heart. The heart (and the ark) are associated with giving life and providing shelter, whilst the heart-wood of a tree gives it both structural strength and helps it to resist decay. This project would aim to create a space which provides sanctuary to those living around it, as well as a safe space in which nature can flourish, protected and encouraged by appropriate investment. By supporting and promoting good environmental practices, this park would give strength to the environment, helping in the fight against the decay of species/habitat loss and climate change.

The aims can be categorised into three broad themes – circulation, propagation and sustenance.

2.1.1 Circulation

- To promote the *circulation* of ideas through collaboration across and within sectors, using best practice through knowledge exchange and mutual understanding.
- To *diffuse* and *broadcast* information through public engagement, encouraging connections with and use of our surroundings, and empowering local communities to take control in their area.
- To create a *fluid* process by which methods evolve to be appropriate to the challenge at hand – identifying blockages in processes, and seeking to overcome them.
- To identify existing standalone projects, particularly citizen science and volunteer projects, that could benefit from wider engagement and support.

2.1.2 Propagation

- To create a space for ecological *growth* in an area increasingly surrounded by man-made developments.
- To work with local communities to create something *fruitful* that benefits all those who live in the area, reconnecting people with the landscape by promoting enjoyment of cultural and natural heritage.
- To *enrich* the landscape through appropriate investment.
- To *grow* the local economy, *increasing* prosperity by encouraging local, sustainable development.

2.1.3 Sustaining

- To *nourish* local ecosystems whilst supporting *growth*, *bolstering* the existing ecology whilst promoting expansion into new areas
- To regrow the landscape, *shoring up* the health of both the environment and local people.
- To *defend* the heritage of the area, *preserving* what remains, and promoting enjoyment of and engagement with it.

Together these aims would increase synergy and create a new understanding through shared knowledge and engagement.

2.2 Objectives

These aims will be realised through the following objectives, which focus on changing the ways the project area is managed and funding is invested, so that benefits are felt by all four ecosystem services:

2.2.1 Provisioning services¹

- To expand the green economy of the area through supporting and promoting green industries
- To encourage regenerative agricultural practices
- To support a local market for good quality, fresh food

2.2.2 Regulating services²

- To expand broadleaved/conifer woodlands and hedgerows to aid carbon storage and sequestration, air purification, water flow regulation and water quality
- To promote the creation of waterbodies to improve local climate regulation, and provide connected landscapes for aquatic creatures
- To improve grasslands and wildflower meadows to support pollinators

2.2.3 Supporting services³

- To provide a focus for biodiversity offsetting, improving the quality and extent of grassland, hedgerows and wooded landscapes, and increasing the percentage of tree cover
- To engage with landowners to support sustainable and diverse land management

2.2.4 Cultural services⁴

- To provide education in local crafts, forestry, farming, climate change, and biodiversity
- To celebrate the local environment and history
- To promote local artists and sculptors
- To provide equal access to green spaces to local populations
- To improve mental health by promoting green activities
- To provide an area of peace and refuge
- To increase use of green transport methods within the park, by improving access to the area through the creation of new public rights of way, long-distance routes, cycleways etc.

¹ ecosystems as a source of food, water, medicine, wood, biofuels etc

² seeking balance within ecosystems – regulating air quality, preventing soil erosion, controlling carbon capture and greenhouse gases, natural control of pests and disease

³ ecosystems providing habitats for diverse species

⁴ ecosystems as a source of tourism and recreation, a place for cultural and artistic expression

3 Project development

- Phase 1: Agreement of a shared vision for the project's specific objectives and its role in the larger environmental picture for the region
- Phase 2: Focus of existing schemes within park area – biodiversity offsetting, agri-environment schemes etc
- Phase 3: Develop smaller projects within the larger project umbrella, which satisfy the key aims of the project – nature restoration, community connectivity, green industries
 - Technical feasibility studies
 - Land management plans
 - Identification of revenue streams
- Phase 4: long term implementation and maintenance of projects

4 Project specific statistics: Landscape

4.1 Location

- straddles the boundaries between three counties (Northamptonshire, Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire) and three regions (East Midlands, East and South East)
- land is managed by four different authorities – West Northamptonshire, North Northamptonshire, Bedford Borough and Milton Keynes Borough, with Central Bedfordshire to the south

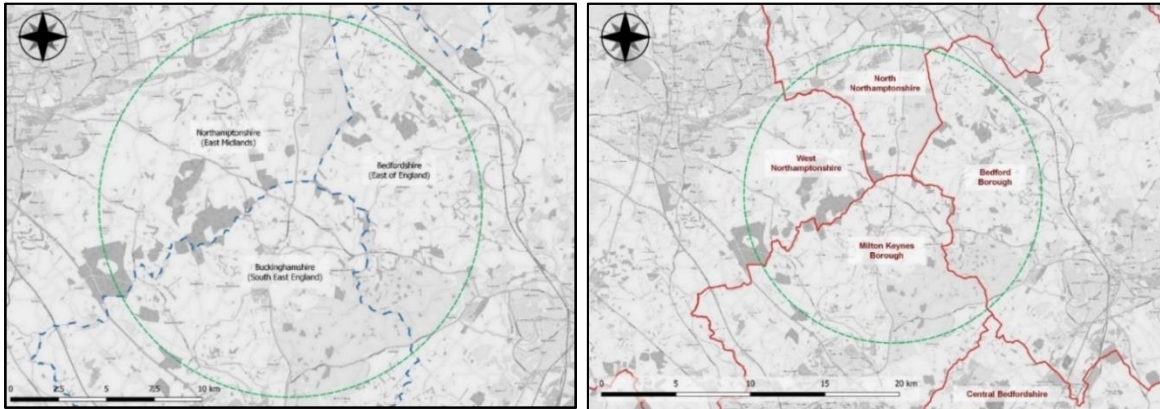


Figure 4.1: (left) Park location on the borders of three regions and three counties (right) authorities within and around the park

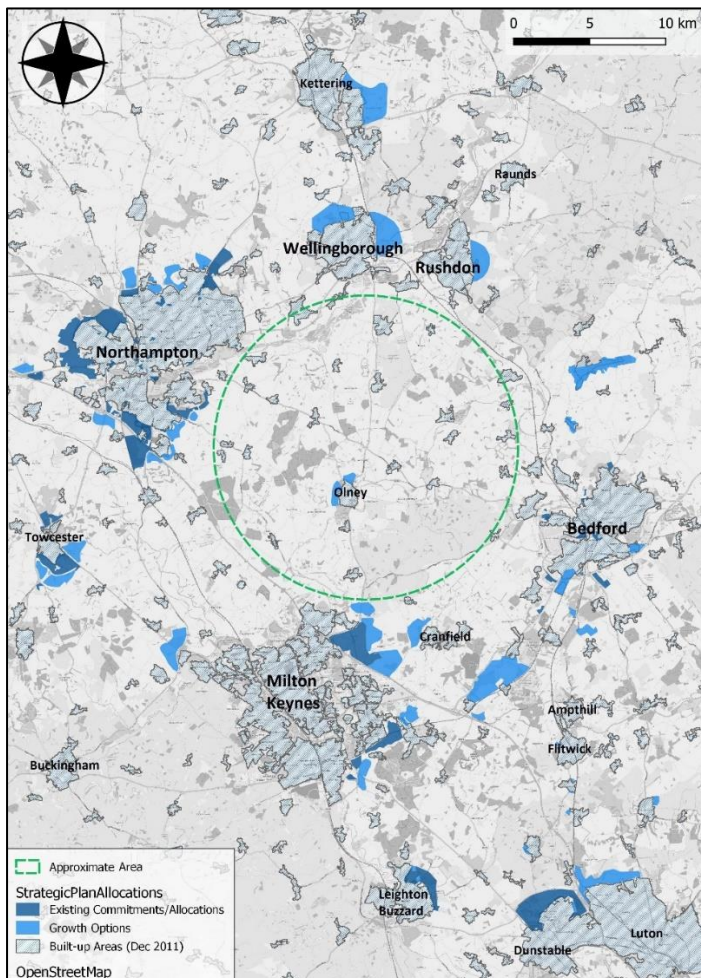


Figure 4.2: Location of current allocations/growth options from the strategic and local plans the local authorities

4.2 Landuse

- The area spans three National Character Areas (NCAs)– the Northamptonshire Vales, the Yardley-Whittlewood Ridge, and the Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire Claylands.
- It contains over 3040 hectares of woodland (~10% of area)
- Contains large number of ancient and veteran trees
- Drained by two primary waterways, their catchments separated by the Yardley – Whittlewood ridge. The River Nene flows through Northampton then north east, whilst the River Great Ouse flows from MK, skirts to the south of Olney, heads north then meanders back south to Bedford. Both rise in Northants and drain into the North Sea at the Wash.



Figure 4.3: (left) National Character Areas (right) existing woodland/parkland

4.3 Protections

- Nine Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs - six in Northamptonshire - Salcey Forest and Yardley Chase are primarily woodland habitats, the Upper Nene Gravel Pits are an extensive area of open water and its margins, whilst Bozeat, Wollaston and Dungee Corner Meadows are grasslands with diverse habitats. The remaining 3 sites are in Bedfordshire – the Felmersham Gravel Pits is a mixed site of open water, grassland, scrub and woodland, Stevington Marsh is a river, reed and marsh site on the River Great Ouse, and Odell Great Wood is a wet ash and maple woodland. Combined, these SSSIs cover **1016 hectares** of the park area.
- There are 21 areas under Environmental Stewardship Schemes (ESS) within the park, of which ten are still active. The area under ESS within/around this region is over **41,000 hectares**, of which nearly **16,000 hectares** are still under active stewardship schemes.

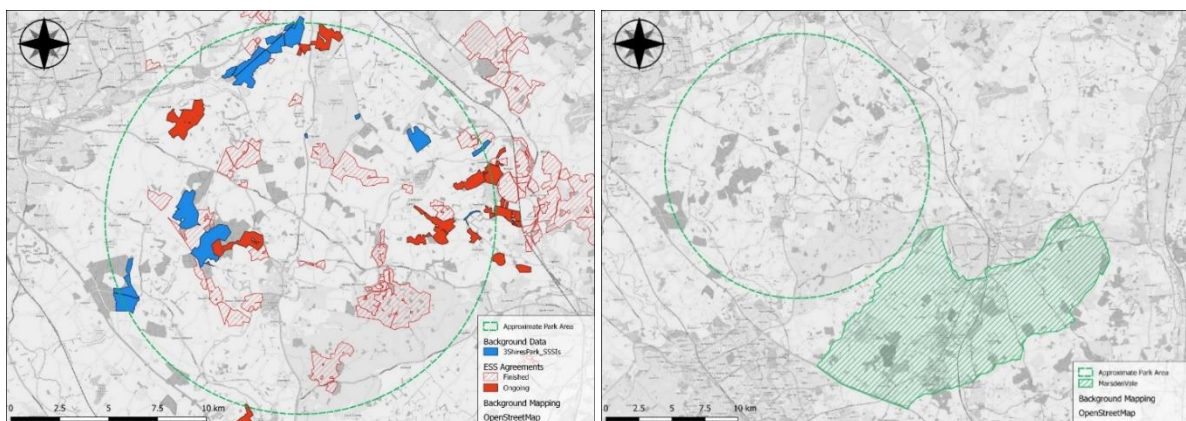


Figure 4.4: (left) SSSIs and Environmental Stewardship schemes within the proposed park (right) Forest of Marston Vale

4.4 Other relevant projects

The community Forest of Marston Vale lies to the south of the park, within the Bedfordshire Claylands NCA. Designated in 1991, this is one of 12 community forests in England which aimed to regenerate degraded landscapes near to towns and cities over a period of 40-50 years. The forest covers an area of 61 sq miles (16,000 hectares) between Bedford and Milton Keynes, along the line of the OxCam development arc, and most the land is under private ownership.

In 1995 the area had 3.6% tree cover, which had grown to 15.4% by 2015 - the overall aim is to reach 30% tree cover. This increase in woodland seen in the first 20 years of the park has already provided the local area with a range of benefits: improved health (valued at £4.95m per year); increased recreational opportunities fostered by the new visitor economy (worth £6.91m per year); improved air quality across the area with the removal of 0.65 tonnes of SO₂ & 65 tonnes of PM₁₀ per annum; reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 1,747 tonnes CO₂e per annum; reduction in peak flood water flows by 5%; and an increase in timber production by 9,127m³ per annum which, together with a focus on using local goods, services and contractors, means the forest has had a total economic impact of £22.05m to date. In 2019 it was accredited to The Queen's Commonwealth Canopy, one of only four forests in England to achieve this.

Together the regional park and the community forest could become a substantial protected area at the heart of the Ox-Cam growth arc.

5 Potential: Landscape

With increasing urbanisation on all sides this area, nestled in between Milton Keynes, Bedford, Rushdon, Wellingborough and Northampton, has the potential to become a key part of local nature recovery strategies – a place of sustainable growth without any degradation of the surrounding landscape.

5.1 Tree Cover

The government's 25 Year Environment Plan (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/25-year-environment-plan>) has a target of 12% woodland cover across England by 2060. According to data released by the Woodland Trust (2019) and presented in Figure 5.1, only Milton Keynes North and Mid Bedfordshire are currently exceeding this target – and in Milton Keynes it should be noted that there is a large difference between tree cover in urban (23%) and rural (11%) areas.

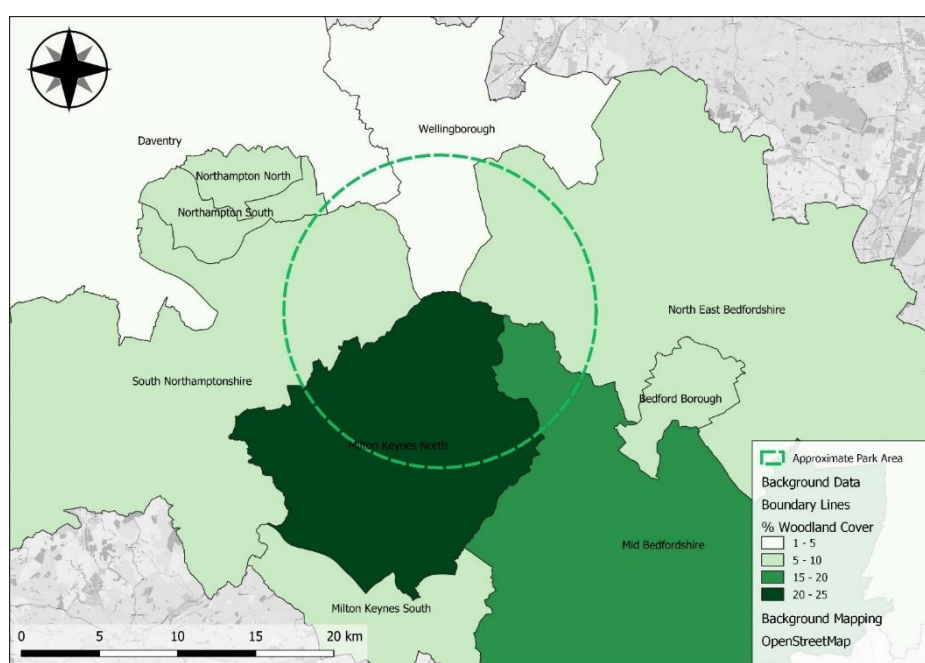


Figure 5.1: Percentage woodland cover by electoral constituency

Street trees, hedgerow trees, small copses and larger woodlands all contribute to tree cover calculations, and it is proposed that efforts to increase woodland cover in this area focus on the former three as part of an agroforestry approach. This would differ to the approach adopted for the Forest of Marston Vale, which is focussed on plantations, but there are still many similarities between the two projects and the benefits they offer:

- (1) Reconnecting the ancient woodlands that once formed the medieval hunting forest of Whittlewood would create longer woodland corridors and give local species the space they need to thrive.
- (2) Increased tree cover would slow water runoff and help reduce flooding downstream - with two large rivers traversing this landscape, and increased flooding events in future years likely due to climate change, an improvement in water sequestration is essential.
- (3) Slowing water runoff would reduce levels of soil erosion, which in turn would improve water quality by decreasing sediment loads.

- (4) An increase in the urban population means an increased need to offset our carbon, and trees, mosses and other plant life can increase capacity for carbon storage and carbon sequestration.
- (5) Trees, particularly coniferous species, are important for air purification, which in turn impacts on health, crop yields, habitats and biodiversity. Planting along roads would be highly beneficial to improving air quality.
- (6) Swathes of trees, scrub and vegetation increase the ability of the land to absorb noise pollution which would have a positive impact on health, wellbeing, productivity and the natural environment.
- (7) Woodland can help regulate local climate variations, reducing the urban heat island effect.
- (8) Planting coniferous woodlands would increase local timber capacity, used for timber-based products and as wood fuel.

Tree planting could be undertaken as part of biodiversity offsetting, through Environmental Stewardship Schemes, or through specific grants for woodland creation.

5.2 Field Boundaries

Hedgerows have been a part of the English landscape for hundreds of years. They tell a story of the countryside, are a defining feature of the landscape and, along with other field boundaries, have a major role to play in local nature recovery:

- (1) Hedgerows are home to many species:
 - Birds - some birds like tall hedgerows with lots of trees, others prefer shorter hedgerows with fewer trees, whilst some species stay at ground level and need grass cover to hide.
 - Pest controllers - in winter, hedgerows provide refuge for organisms that are essential for crop pest control.
 - Pollinators such as bees and butterflies.
- (2) They provide shelter for larger mammals from inclement weather, and shade from the sun.
- (3) The banks and ditches associated with many field boundaries are important for frogs, toads, newts and reptiles.
- (4) Creating connected hedgerows facilitates movement through the landscape for birds, small mammals, and insects.
- (5) Hedgerows slow water runoff, both by storing water and by interrupting its flow, limiting sediment loss and reducing risks of flooding further downstream.
- (6) Hedgerows reduce wind speed near the ground surface, reducing both water loss from soils and the wind erosion of soils.
- (7) Hedgerows play a part in reducing noise and air pollution, particularly along roadways. They are effective at screening unsightly developments and providing privacy.
- (8) Hedgerows, like any plant life, are vital for carbon storage and sequestration.
- (9) Hedgerows are a source of food for both wildlife and humans, and a source of wood for fuel if sustainably managed.

Almost all the ESSs in operation within the park include some form of hedge and ditch management, and this should be encouraged and extended.

5.3 Grasslands/Meadows

Increasing the extent of species-rich grasslands and meadows would result in an increase in wildflowers, supporting pollinating insects, invertebrates, small mammals, bats and birds:

- (1) Grasslands and meadows provide shelter to a large range of insects and animals.
- (2) The creation of grass and meadow corridors, as in projects such as the B-Lines mapping undertaken in Norfolk and Suffolk, would reconnect wildflower-rich habitats within our landscapes, helping pollinators move across the landscape.
- (3) Grasslands slow down water flow and bind soils together, reducing sediment run off and risks of flooding downstream.
- (4) Like all plant life, grasslands and wildflowers play a part in carbon storage and carbon sequestration.

5.4 Native species

A future aim could be to re-introduce native species, as encouraged by the government's 25 year Environment plan. Reintroductions projects have been successfully undertaken across many areas of the UK, of birds and mammals, invertebrates and plants. Local successful projects include Red Kites, the Chequered butterfly, Corn Crakes and the Hazel Dormouse.

6 Project specific statistics: People

6.1 History and Demography

- Shared history across the region, preserved in part by the Scheduled Ancient Monuments (SAMs), listed buildings, and registered parks and gardens spread across the region, as well as in local museums.

Ring ditches and enclosures at Tyringham attest to the long history of humanity in this area, whilst the remains of Roman villas at Newton Lodge Farm and Doddington Mill are part of a strong Roman presence in and around the park – there were larger settlements at Irchester, Lactodorum (Towcester), Magiovinium (Fenny Stratford) and Durocbrivae (Dunstable) which, along with the villas and smaller sites like that north of Olney, were linked by a comprehensive road network that is at times still followed today. The Roman road of Watling Street (now the A5) runs north from London and through Milton Keynes – it was the route of Boudicca’s final march to battle, and some believe this fateful event occurred to the south of Towcester. Watling Street was later the divide between the Danelaw to the east and Mercia and Wessex to the west and south.

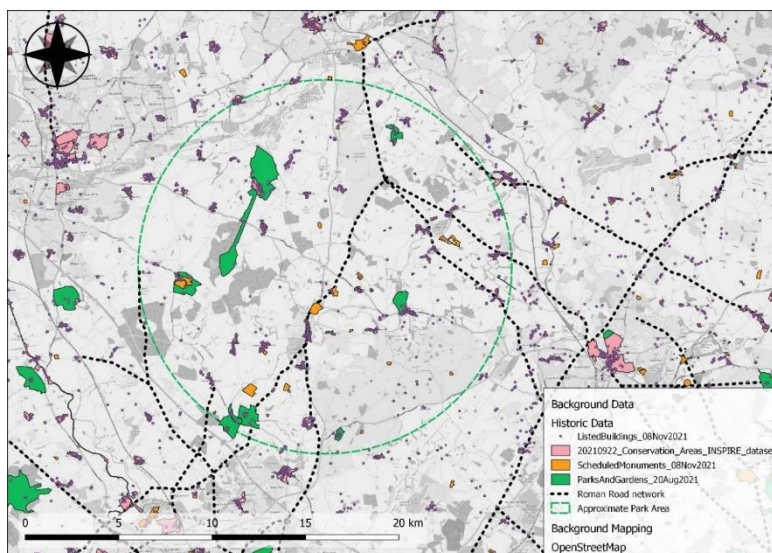


Figure 6.1: Historic protections and roman roads (data from Historic England 2009)

The remains of deserted Medieval settlements at Horton, Filgrave, Chellington and Little Odell attest to the difficult times of the Black Death and famines in the Middle Ages, whilst Ravenstone Priory and Lavendon Abbey are reminders of the dissolution of the monasteries by Henry VIII in the early 16th century. The grand houses and parks of the 17th and 18th centuries – Turvey House, Tyringham Manor, Horton Hall, Castle Ashby and Hinwick House – along with the many listed buildings throughout the area, contribute to the character of this region. Conservation areas protect the many of the villages in the park area, preserving the character of these areas for generations to come.

More recent history has left its mark on this land as well - the Northampton-Bedford railway was built in the 19th century but, like many other unprofitable lines, was a victim of the Beeching plan and closed in the mid 20th century.

- Over 720,000 people live in the fifty settlements that are located either in or within 5km of the park
- There are 3 large towns of over 75,000 ppl (Northampton, Milton Keynes, Bedford), 2 medium towns with 20,000 – 75,000 ppl (Rushden, Wellingborough), 4 small towns of 5000 – 20,000 ppl (Cranfield, Earls Barton, Irthlingborough, Olney) and 41 villages/hamlets of less than 5000 ppl.
- Ethnic diversity is similar to the national pattern, with more diverse populations in larger settlements, and principally ‘white’ populations in the villages.
- There is a tendency towards older populations in villages and younger populations within towns within the park area.
- Over 80% of people in the area consider their health to be ‘very good’ or ‘good’, with large towns, small towns and villages all scoring higher than the national average for England

6.2 Travel and Public Access

- The area is bisected by the A428 and A509, which cross at the Warrington roundabout. The M1 passes to the southwest (linking MK and Northampton), the A45 to the northwest (between Northampton and Wellingborough/Rushdon), the A6 to the northeast (joining Rushdon and Bedford) and the A422 to the southeast (connecting Bedford and MK) (Figure 6.2)
- With connections to the National Rail network in both Northampton and Bedford, as well as Milton Keynes, the area is within reach of a much wider population
- The Sustrams National Cycle Network (routes 6 and 51) connect Northampton, Milton Keynes and Bedford. These are principally off-road within the urban centres but on-road in between.
- There are many footpaths and bridleways criss-crossing the proposed park. Some have been incorporated into long-distance routes of which there are several linking Milton Keynes with Northampton
- There are many bus routes through the area, connecting the main towns of Bedford, Northampton and Milton Keynes, with Olney and the smaller settlements spread throughout the area

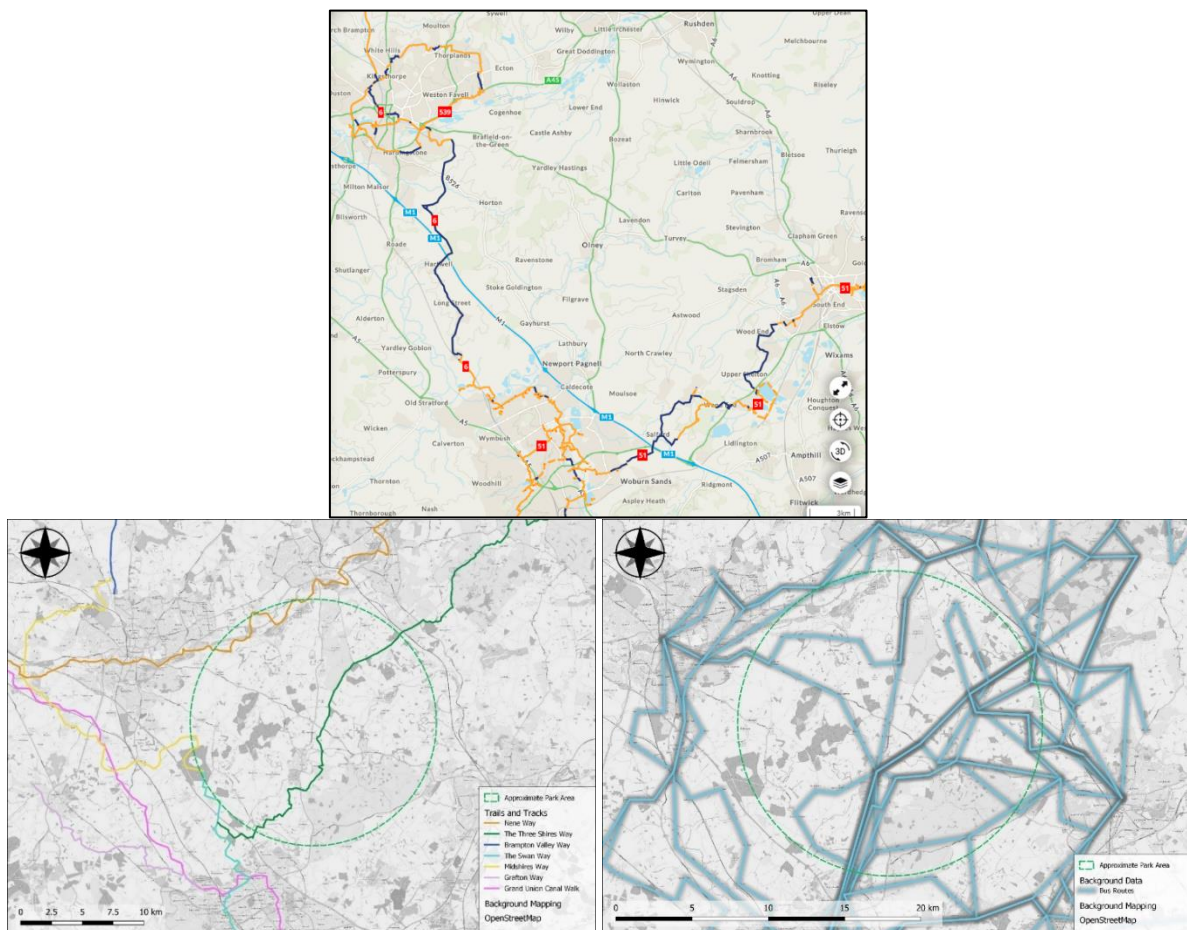


Figure 6.2: (top) Road network and National Cycle Network (left) long distance footpaths (right) Bus routes (by connections, not exact routes). The darker the line, the more routes connecting those settlements

- 18.5% of those living within Milton Keynes (both North and South) are within 500m of woodland (roughly the British average), whilst in South Northamptonshire it is only 3.2%
- There are 3 primary areas of ‘accessible’ woodland – Salcey Forest and Emberton Country Park in MK North, and Harrold Odell Country Park in Mid Bedfordshire.



Figure 6.3 (left) Access to woodlands: percentage of population in each electoral constituency with access to woodland within 500m of their home (right) country parks

- Salcey Forest lies over the southwestern edge of the proposed park area and is the largest ancient wood in the country⁵. It is a remnant of a medieval hunting forest that once spread across the Yardley-Whittlewood ridge and is now managed by the Forestry Commission/Forestry England. The eastern side is a ‘Site of Special Scientific Interest’, containing a large number of mature oak trees, some of which are thought to be over 500 years old. A tree top trail opened in Salcey Forest in 2005 that rises to 18m at the final platform, giving views over these trees and across the fields towards Northampton (currently closed for structural repairs). There is a café in the forest and a children’s play area. The forest hosts a weekly Parkrun – a free weekly timed 5km walk/run held on Saturday mornings. Parkrun encourages social interactions within outdoor environments, and has been shown to reduce isolation, depression and stress, amongst other benefits. No other parkruns are held within the park bounds, but there are several in the surrounding area – two in Northampton (the racecourse and Sixfields), one in Irchester Country Park, two in Bedford (Great Denham and Bedford Park), one in the Forest of Marston Vale, one on Bury Field in Newport Pagnell, and two in Milton Keynes (Willen Lake and Linford Wood).
- Emberton Country Park occupies over 200 acres of land that was once a gravel works to the south of Olney. These have been transformed into five lakes which support a wide variety of wildlife. Visitors can enjoy over 5km of paths and trails, a choice of play areas, camping and picnicking.
- Harrold Odell Country park is a 144 acre multi-Green Flag winning country park in north Bedfordshire. Also once a gravel extraction site, the park now consists of a wooded nature reserve, breckland type rabbit warren, lakes, river meadows, and mixed woodland. A wild variety of birds and mammals have made the park their home, including otters, shrews and bats. There is a visitor centre and café, two play areas, a skate park, picnic areas and miles of walking trails.

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salcey_Forest

7 Potential: People

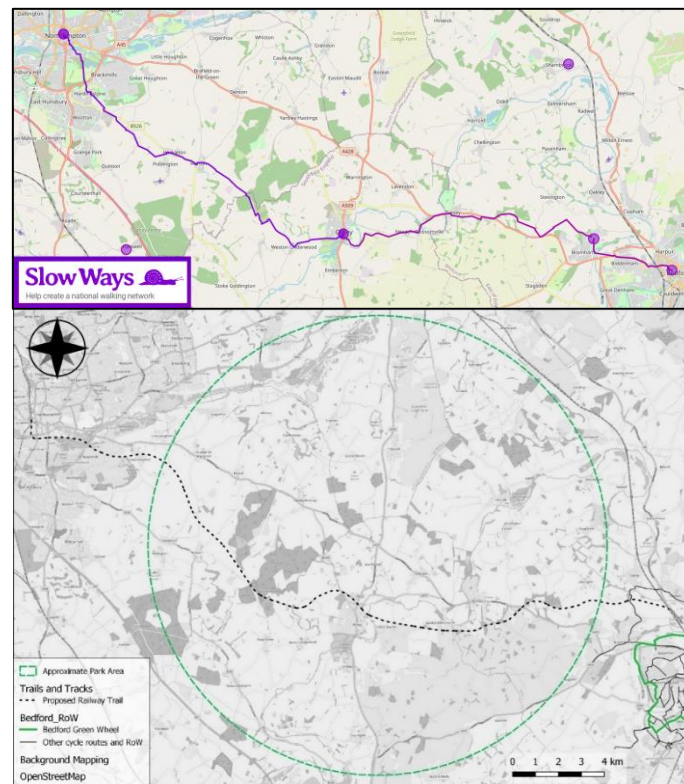
The park has a potential to become a place that all people can come for recreation, for space, to centre themselves in the landscape, to take refuge or find peace. It needs to be a living, working landscape, but one that engages local communities and provides access and leisure potential. It is also important that any future developments within this area are equally accessible for all, with a choice of travel means and routes, and regular connections to local towns and villages.

7.1 Rights of Way and trails

There are many miles of public rights of way running throughout the park already. Promotion of the park could include the collation and/or development of walking/running trails across the region using these rights of way. Targeting a range of ages and abilities, and incorporating information on the history and development of the area, such trails would encourage residents to explore the area, building a connection to the landscape.

Longer routes through the landscape using the existing public rights of way could be publicised to encourage carbon neutral ways to move through the landscape. Some initiatives already exist that could be worked with, such as Slow Ways, which aims to create a national network of walking routes connecting Great Britain's towns, cities and villages, using existing paths and roads.

Creating new rights of way through the landscape would improve accessibility to the countryside for those living in the surrounding urban areas. One proposal under development is to convert the disused Northampton-Bedford railway line into a multi-use trail (Figure 7.1). The northern end would terminate near to the new University of Northampton campus, whilst the southern end would connect to the Bedford Green Wheel and other rights of way. Passing to the north of Olney, this 36km route would bisect the park area, crossing the route of the Three Shires Way (Error! Reference source not found.).



8 Project specific statistics:: Industry, Education, Health and Social

8.1 Industry

- Working landscape
 - Salcey Forest - part working forest producing timber and timber products
 - Christmas tree forestry – on lowland heathlands (The Wildlife Trust)
 - Fisheries at Castle Ashby and Wold Farm
- Recreation
 - White Mills Marina, Grendon Lakes, Summer Leyes Nature Reserve, Billing Aquadrome
 - Castle Ashby house and gardens, Northamptonshire
 - Kathy Brown's Garden, near Bedford
 - Glebe Farm Equestrian Centre
 - Various Golf clubs
 - The Leslie Sell Activity Centre
 - Wold Farm Country Pursuits offer various shooting activities
 - Northampton Shaleway/Brafield International raceway – hot rods and banger racing
 - Santa Pod Raceway – drag racing and monster trucks
 - Bedford Autodrome (just outside area)
 - UKPaintball Northampton – one of several paint balling sites
- Arts
 - Yardley Arts CIC, a social enterprise based in Yardley Hastings, focused on community engagement
 - The Beeby Gallery, Olney – showcasing both local and non-local artists
 - Milton Keynes Arts Centre –Great Linford in MK, offering art and craft courses for all
- Retail/Eateries
 - The Rural Shopping Yard at Castle Ashby
 - Emmaus Village, Carlton
 - Dr Martens Factory Shop, Wollaston
 - Rushden Lakes, River Hub – shopping centres just outside the park area
 - Garden centres – Yardley Hastings, Westwood Farm and Nursery, Milton Ernest, Wollaston, Podington by Cherry Lane, Alban Hill Nureries, Sherington Nurseries, the Beckworth Emporium (north or area) to name but a few
- Business/Conference centres
 - Colworth Park, Sharnbrook
 - Bridge House, Olney
 - Chicheley Hall, near Sherington

8.2 Education

- It is through education and engagement that people come to respect and care for their surroundings – listed below are a selection of ways in which people can already engage with and learn about the landscape of this area.
- Forest Schools
 - Educational activities are run at Salcey Forest by Acorn (www.acornearlyyears.org.uk) – there are a wide range of guided sessions for early years through to adult groups, and can include forest schools, bushcraft, team building and creative art workshops

- Marston Vale Forest School (outskirts of Bedford) runs a variety of weekly sessions and holiday clubs, reconnecting children and families to the excitement of being outdoors.
- Nature Tots, Young Rangers and Teen Rangers – classes for children run by the Wildlife Trust
- Colleges
 - Shuttleworth college – part of the Bedford College group – is a specialist land-based college, offering courses in agriculture, environment, animal sciences, equine studies and outdoor adventure.
 - The National Land Based College, Northampton, offers a variety of technical qualifications for land-based disciplines including agriculture, animal care and management, equine care and management, floristry, forestry and arboriculture, horticulture, land and wildlife management, and land-based engineering.
- Book sharing - a global initiative to share books and track their movement. There are numerous 'bookcrossingzones' across the park area, including at Billing Aquadrome, Salcey Forest, the Rural Shopping Yard at Castle Ashby, Harrold Odell Country Park, and 'the garden outside the library' in Olney. Books can be left somewhere safe like a shelf, a repurposed phonebox or mini library, and any already there may be taken for free.
- Festivals/National Weeks
 - Woodworks! Festival! – held for several years running in the Forest of Marston Vale. A celebration of trees and woodlands that brought together artists, crafts people, growers, woodland managers, tree surgeons, musicians, story tellers and other enthusiasts.
 - National Tree Week – marks the start of the winter tree planting season – aims to encourage people to celebrate and plant trees across the country. In Marston Vale community forest this week will be marked by guided tree walks at different sites, woodland activity sessions (den building, muddy play, tree decorating etc), interactive storytelling sessions
 - Outside the area there are examples of small craft festivals that encourage community engagement and education. One such is the Treehouse Festival, Norfolk, a week-long event with numerous workshops on blacksmithing, wool carding, knife working, book binding, calligraphy, flint knapping, spoon carving, glassblowing, loom weaving, bee keeping, kiln construction and many more.
- Art within the landscape – sculpture trails can encourage movement through the landscape, as well as opportunities to stop and enjoy spaces. The new sculptural play trail being installed by the Parks Trust at Great Linford Manor Park in MK shows how sculptures can educate, engage and encourage play
- Art and crafts workshops – nature inspires art, and there are many workshops, classes and competitions available for those interested. For example:
 - Sensory Art - Zoom drawing classes looking at the life of a tree (The Tree Council)
 - Amateur photography competitions (e.g. The Parks Trust)
 - Christmas Wreath making – several locations have in recent years offered wreath making classes. Run by local florists, such courses encourage engagement with natural materials, creativity and social interactions
- Social media allows land management companies to engage with local communities, for example the Parks Trust MK runs a weekly 'Wildlife Wednesday' where it displays photographs submitted by members of the public on its Instagram page
- Peace and mental well-being
 - Mental Health Awareness week – encouraging connections to nature – the recent lockdowns have only brought home even more how important spending time within nature is for our mental health. It can help us in countless ways, for example the act

of going for a walk can reduce blood pressure, lower the stress hormone cortisol, and regulate melatonin levels which helps us to sleep.

- Natural/green burial sites - where only natural materials can be deposited. These are places of peace and memory, where people can come to connect to their loved ones within a tranquil/natural environment. Can take various forms – either places to scatter ashes such as the Tree Cathedral in Milton Keynes, or spaces to plant commemorative trees like the Olney Green Burial Ground.



Figure 8.1: Chainsaw sheep grazing beyond the ha ha, where sheep and cattle once roamed (photo from www.theparkstrust.com)

9 Potential: Industry, education, health and social

When people feel connected to an area, they are more inclined to want to keep it safe, to want to spend time there, to be willing to give up their time to care for it. Following are some initial ideas for ways to create such connections, to engage with people and encourage access to the park:

- Festivals celebrating local culture, history, artists, skills
- Central point(s) where people could meet for food and conversation
- Sculptures from local artists that provide points of interest in the landscape and help create a sense of community
- Trails that engage children and families, encouraging connections with, and appreciation of, the landscape
- Opportunities for volunteering and collaboration across the whole area – working together as a region to preserve and enhance our land

10 Funding

Funding sources will need to be, by the very nature of this project, varied, concentrating on different aspects of the park, and different time scales. Applications for funding would need to be collaborative.

10.1 Continuation of existing funding

There are schemes already underway which seek to aid landowners and managers in protecting the environmental biodiversity of their land. A focus on extending environmental stewardship schemes within the park area would be beneficial.

The park could become a focus of spending of biodiversity offsetting funds which are received through the Section 106 provision – these funds could be used to improve grasslands and plant new woodlands within the park area.

10.2 New funding

Funding for larger projects within the park would depend on the nature of the project.

If the initial focus is on tree creation, the follow funds could be targeted:

- Trees Call to Action Fund:
 - o A fund created in support of the England Trees Action Plan, which aims for England to have at least 12% woodland cover by 2050. Grants are from £250000 to £500000, and are for projects looking to expand, protect and improve trees and woodland at regional and national scales. There is a focus on partnerships, and projects seeking to connect people with their local landscapes
- Forestry Commission Funds
 - o Woodland Management Plan
- Local Authority Treescape Fund – strategic planting and natural regeneration of trees outside of woodlands
- England Woodland Creation Offer
- Forestry England Leasehold Scheme
- Trees for Climate (just for community forests?)
- Queen’s Green Canopy Project – run by Cool Earth
- The Green Recovery Challenge Fund
- Nature for Climate Fund

Alternatively, initial funding could focus on the creation of a central space for the park:

- SEMLEP - The South East Midlands Local Enterprise Partnership provides Local Growth Funds and Community Grants to deliver local projects that make a difference within local communities in the South East Midlands

10.3 Donations and gifts

The Community Forest uses a variety of funding streams to support their tree planting, for example trees can be bought as dedications or gifts, sponsored by local businesses, or you can become members of the trust for an annual fee.

CONTACT DETAILS

