

# Site Improvement Plan

## Ouse Washes

Site Improvement Plans (SIPs) have been developed for each Natura 2000 site in England as part of the Improvement Programme for England's Natura 2000 sites (IPENS). Natura 2000 sites is the combined term for sites designated as Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protected Areas (SPA). This work has been financially supported by LIFE, a financial instrument of the European Community.

The plan provides a high level overview of the issues (both current and predicted) affecting the condition of the Natura 2000 features on the site(s) and outlines the priority measures required to improve the condition of the features. It does not cover issues where remedial actions are already in place or ongoing management activities which are required for maintenance.

The SIP consists of three parts: a Summary table, which sets out the priority Issues and Measures; a detailed Actions table, which sets out who needs to do what, when and how much it is estimated to cost; and a set of tables containing contextual information and links.

Once this current programme ends, it is anticipated that Natural England and others, working with landowners and managers, will all play a role in delivering the priority measures to improve the condition of the features on these sites.

The SIPs are based on Natural England's current evidence and knowledge. The SIPs are not legal documents, they are live documents that will be updated to reflect changes in our evidence/knowledge and as actions get underway. The information in the SIPs will be used to update England's contribution to the UK's Prioritised Action Framework (PAF).

The SIPs are not formal consultation documents, but if you have any comments about the SIP or would like more information please email us at [IPENSLIFEProject@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:IPENSLIFEProject@naturalengland.org.uk), or contact Natural England's Responsible Officer for the site via our enquiry service 0300 060 3900, or [enquiries@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@naturalengland.org.uk)

### **This Site Improvement Plan covers the following Natura 2000 site(s)**

**UK0013011 Ouse Washes SAC**

**UK9008041 Ouse Washes SPA**

## Site description

The Ouse Washes SPA is one of the regions few remaining washland habitats. The site was created in the seventeenth century to provide a flood water storage area for the River Great Ouse. The traditional winter flood storage and summer grazing by cattle, as well as hay production, have given rise to a mosaic of rough grassland and wet pasture, with a diverse and rich ditch fauna and flora. The site regularly supports internationally and nationally important numbers of over-wintering and breeding bird species. Of particular note are the large number of Teal, Pintail, Wigeon, Shoveler, Pochard and Bewick's Swans. Many bird species that regularly use the site either during breeding or wintering periods are qualifying SPA features and qualifies as a wetland of international importance holding over the threshold of 20,000 individual waterfowl.

The Ouse Washes SAC supports populations of Annex II species spined loach *Cobitis taenia*. The species occurs in the Counter Drain, Old Bedford/River Delph areas of the Ouse Washes, which contains clear water and abundant macrophytes which are of particular importance to maintain healthy populations of this species.

## Plan Summary

*This table shows the prioritised issues for the site(s), the features they affect, the proposed measures to address the issues and the delivery bodies whose involvement is required to deliver the measures. The list of delivery bodies will include those who have agreed to the actions as well as those where discussions over their role in delivering the actions is on-going.*

Priority & Issue	Pressure or Threat	Feature(s) affected	Measure	Delivery Bodies
1 Inappropriate water levels	Pressure	A050(NB) Wigeon, A056(B) Shoveler, A119(B) Spotted Crake, A151(B) Ruff, A156a(B) Black-tailed Godwit	Habitat creation to offset historical decline of wintering and breeding birds and other strategies to alleviate flooding	Defra, Environment Agency, Natural England
2 Water Pollution	Threat	A037(NB) Bewick's Swan, A038(NB) Whooper Swan, A050(NB) Wigeon, A051(B) Gadwall, A051(NB) Gadwall, A052(NB) Eurasian teal, A053(B) Mallard, A054(NB) Pintail, A055(B) Garganey, A056(B) Shoveler, A056(NB) Shoveler, A059(NB) Common pochard, A082(NB) Hen Harrier, A119(B) Spotted Crake, A151(B) Ruff, A151(NB) Ruff, A156a(B) Black-tailed Godwit, A156a(NB) Black-tailed Godwit, Breeding bird assemblage, S1149 Spined loach, Waterbird assemblage	Implementation of Diffuse Water Pollution plan to tackle inappropriate levels of nutrients from flooding	Environment Agency, Natural England

## Issues and Actions

*This table outlines the prioritised issues that are currently impacting or threatening the condition of the features, and the outstanding actions required to address them. It also shows, where possible, the estimated cost of the action and the delivery bodies whose involvement will be required to implement the action. Lead delivery bodies will be responsible for coordinating the implementation of the action, but not necessarily funding it. Delivery partners will need to support the lead delivery body in implementing the action. In the process of developing the SIPs Natural England has approached the delivery bodies to seek agreement on the actions and their roles in delivering them, although in some cases these discussions have not yet been concluded. Other interested parties, including landowners and managers, will be involved as the detailed actions are agreed and delivered. Funding options are indicated as potential (but not necessarily agreed or secured) sources to fund the actions.*

### 1 Inappropriate water levels

Notified interests (including breeding birds, overwintering birds and supporting grassland communities) are being adversely affected by increased flooding on the Ouse Washes. Flooding during spring / early summer severely damages the breeding bird interest by flooding nests, drowning young and affecting habitat. Deep flooding during winter also impacts overwintering birds such as wigeon and impacts on the wetland fauna, especially invertebrate populations. Wetland flora is also affected through prolonged submersion, favouring swamp communities over the designated grassland species. Prolonged summer flooding disrupts essential management of the washland, affecting the condition of the grassland for breeding birds in subsequent spring/summer season(s).

Action	Action description	Cost estimate	Timescale	Mechanism	Funding option	Delivery lead body	Delivery partner(s)
<b>1A</b>	Creation of a 500ha of wetland grassland habitat creation at the Ouse Washes Habitat Creation Project adjacent to the Ouse Washes to offset a historical decline of breeding and wintering bird species on the Ouse Washes. Currently 92ha of habitat creation at Coveney is underway.	Not yet determined	2017-18	Habitat creation / restoration strategy: Creation of new habitat	Defra	Environment Agency	Defra, Natural England
<b>1B</b>	Creation of a further area of 500ha of wetland grassland habitat creation, as part of the originally allocated 1008ha, at Coveney and Sutton sites on the Ouse Washes to offset a historical decline of breeding and wintering bird species on the Ouse Washes.	Not yet determined	2020	Habitat creation / restoration strategy: Creation of new habitat	Not yet determined	Not yet determined	Defra, Natural England

<i>Action</i>	<i>Action description</i>	<i>Cost estimate</i>	<i>Timescale</i>	<i>Mechanism</i>	<i>Funding option</i>	<i>Delivery lead body</i>	<i>Delivery partner(s)</i>
<b>1C</b>	Further measures to address the effect of inappropriate water levels on populations of breeding and wintering birds on the Ouse Washes. The increased flooding harms habitat suitable for many of the birds which visit the site. Implementation of the Great Ouse Tidal River Strategy which looks at flood risk management over the next 100 years for the New Bedford and Great Ouse Tidal Rivers, will focus on flood risk to the areas protected by the South Level Barrier Bank and Tidal River East and West Embankments.	£2.27million per year	2009 onwards	Flood Risk Maintenance Programme: Flood Risk Management - Operational Work	Government partnership Funding Policy	Environment Agency	n/a

<i>Action</i>	<i>Action description</i>	<i>Cost estimate</i>	<i>Timescale</i>	<i>Mechanism</i>	<i>Funding option</i>	<i>Delivery lead body</i>	<i>Delivery partner(s)</i>
<b>1D</b>	Deliver a new Water Level Management Plan for 2015 and beyond.	Not yet determined	2015-16	Water Level Management Plan	Defra	Natural England	n/a

## 2 Water Pollution

Inappropriate levels of nutrients from diffuse pollution in combination with inappropriate water levels from flooding have adversely affected the extent/composition of vegetation communities on the washes. Resulting changes to the grassland mosaic has potential to affect the notified bird interests by destroying habitat suitable for many of the birds that visit or breed at the site. Occasional incidences of low oxygen levels on River Delph and Counter Drain have potential to impact spined loach populations.

<i>Action</i>	<i>Action description</i>	<i>Cost estimate</i>	<i>Timescale</i>	<i>Mechanism</i>	<i>Funding option</i>	<i>Delivery lead body</i>	<i>Delivery partner(s)</i>
<b>2A</b>	Implement the current Diffuse Water Pollution Plan (DWP) to tackle inappropriate levels of nutrients from flooding on the Ouse Washes.	£4,732,000	2015 onwards	Diffuse Water Pollution Plan	Water Framework Directive (WFD), Catchment Sensitive Farming (CSF), Agri-environment scheme	Natural England	Environment Agency
<i>Action</i>	<i>Action description</i>	<i>Cost estimate</i>	<i>Timescale</i>	<i>Mechanism</i>	<i>Funding option</i>	<i>Delivery lead body</i>	<i>Delivery partner(s)</i>
<b>2B</b>	Implement the Ouse Washes Incident Management Plan to improve the management of water retained on the Washes and to manage dissolved oxygen levels.	From incident response budget	Reviewed annually	Non-Natural England funded site management plan: Incident management plan	Incident response budget	Environment Agency	n/a

## Site details

The tables in this section contain site-relevant contextual information and links

### Qualifying features

#UK Special responsibility

#### Ouse Washes SAC

S1149 *Cobitis taenia*: Spined loach

#### Ouse Washes SPA

Breeding bird assemblage

A052(NB) *Anas crecca*: Eurasian teal

A053(B) *Anas platyrhynchos*: Mallard

Waterbird assemblage

A082(NB) *Circus cyaneus*: Hen harrier

A156a(B) *Limosa limosa islandica*: Black-tailed godwit

A054(NB) *Anas acuta*: Northern pintail

A055(B) *Anas querquedula*: Garganey

A056(B) *Anas clypeata*: Northern shoveler

A050(NB) *Anas penelope*: Eurasian wigeon

A056(NB) *Anas clypeata*: Northern shoveler

A051(B) *Anas strepera*: Gadwall

A151(B) *Philomachus pugnax*: Ruff

A037(NB) *Cygnus columbianus bewickii*: Bewick swan

A038(NB) *Cygnus cygnus*: Whooper swan

### Site location and links

#### Ouse Washes SAC

Area (ha) **311.35**

Grid reference **TL498895**

[Map link](#)

Local Authorities

Cambridgeshire; Norfolk

Site Conservation Objectives

[European Site Conservation Objectives for Ouse Washes SAC](#)

<i>European Marine Site conservation advice</i>	<a href="#">n/a</a>
<i>Regulation 33/35 Package</i>	<a href="#">n/a</a>
<i>Marine Management Organisation site plan</i>	<a href="#">n/a</a>
<b>Ouse Washes SPA</b>	
Area (ha) <b>2447.26</b> Grid reference <b>TL498888</b>	<a href="#">Map link</a>
<i>Local Authorities</i>	Cambridgeshire; Norfolk
<i>Site Conservation Objectives</i>	<a href="#">European Site Conservation Objectives for Ouse Washes SPA</a>
<i>European Marine Site conservation advice</i>	<a href="#">n/a</a>
<i>Regulation 33/35 Package</i>	<a href="#">n/a</a>
<i>Marine Management Organisation site plan</i>	<a href="#">n/a</a>

## Water Framework Directive (WFD)

The Water Framework Directive (WFD) provides the main framework for managing the water environment throughout Europe. Under the WFD a management plan must be developed for each river basin district. The River Basin Management Plans (RBMP) include a summary of the measures needed for water dependent Natura 2000 sites to meet their conservation objectives. For the second round of RBMPs, SIPs are being used to capture the priorities and new measures required for water dependent habitats on Natura 2000 sites. SIP actions for non-water dependent sites/habitats do not form part of the RBMPs and associated consultation.

### Ouse Washes SAC

River basin	Anglian	<a href="#">Anglian RBMP</a>
WFD Management catchment	Old Bedford including the Middle Level	
WFD Waterbody ID (Cycle 2 draft)	GB205033000010, GB205033000020, GB205033000030, GB205033000060	

### Ouse Washes SPA

River basin	Anglian	<a href="#">Anglian RBMP</a>
WFD Management catchment	Old Bedford including the Middle Level	
WFD Waterbody ID (Cycle 2 draft)	GB205033000010, GB205033000020, GB205033000030, GB205033000060	



## Overlapping or adjacent protected sites

Site(s) of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)	
Ouse Washes SAC	Ouse Washes SSSI
Ouse Washes SPA	Ouse Washes SSSI

  

National Nature Reserve (NNR)	
Ouse Washes SAC	n/a
Ouse Washes SPA	n/a

  

Ramsar	
Ouse Washes SAC	Ouse Washes
Ouse Washes SPA	Ouse Washes

  

Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Areas (SPA)	
Ouse Washes SAC	Ouse Washes SPA
Ouse Washes SPA	Ouse Washes SAC

<i>Version</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Comment</i>
1.0	09/10/2014	

[www.naturalengland.org.uk/ipens2000](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ipens2000)

