

The Great Fen Socio-Economic Study

Executive Summary



Bedfordshire
Cambridgeshire
Northamptonshire



middle level
commissioners

Headline Figures

The Great Fen has already:

Created **7.15** direct additional **new jobs**

Awarded **65%** of its total contract expenditure **locally**

Provided **significant** new local volunteering **opportunities**

By 2032 The Great Fen could:

Generate between **£1.4 - 3.25 million** turnover p.a.

Create between **24-59 new jobs**

Realise the value of **eco-system** services to the benefit of **local communities**

Background

The Great Fen is one of Europe's most important landscape scale wetland restoration projects with an ambitious vision to create over 3,700 ha of regenerated fenland landscape between Huntingdonshire and Peterborough. It will provide a haven for wildlife, help to mitigate the impact of climate change and deliver a range of opportunities to develop ecosystem services. Ultimately the project will create a transformational green space with significant related new opportunities for local business development and appropriate agriculture initiatives, enhanced recreational and education opportunities, targeted new sustainable tourism initiatives and a range of other opportunities for all of the local communities.

The Study

To help realise these aspirations a Great Fen Socio-Economic Study was undertaken in 2012, and a report produced by Cumulus Consultants This study involved an evaluation of the current socio-economic impacts of the Great Fen, an assessment of ecosystem services and their potential value, identification of achievable socio-economic opportunities and the development of a route map suggesting priorities for further targeted work.

Integral to the study was the desire to be inclusive and ensure partnership engagement. To that end, some 20 key stakeholders were directly involved in the study, contributing via one to one interviews and/or through attendance at an interactive consultative meeting with interested partners.





Key Findings

The Great Fen is delivering many of its project aims, it is however still at an early stage on its journey to maturity. The scale of socio-economic benefits achieved to date inevitably reflects this; that said the report clearly highlights a number of noticeable positive impacts already achieved.

To date the Great Fen has:

Created over 7 direct jobs plus 2.5 contract jobs

Awarded 65% of its contract expenditure locally (£255,000 p.a.)

Provided 870 volunteer days p.a. (equivalent to 4 full time, unpaid jobs)

Enabled Volunteers to gain new skills

Assisted volunteers gain paid employment

With the on-going changes from intensive arable production to extensively managed livestock and hay production as part of the conservation management of 866ha of fenland habitat, local agricultural employment patterns have inevitably changed. However despite being in its early days, the Great Fen has already seen an overall small, but positive, net increase in local employment.

Complimenting this - and epitomising the Great Fen ethos – associated volunteering opportunities have significantly increased thereby providing new skills and confidence to help local people enhance their lives and achieve paid employment.

Business Opportunities

Going forward, the report illustrates the potential of the Great Fen to deliver significant new socio-economic opportunities to the local economy over the next 20 years and beyond. A range of potential new and enhanced business opportunities arising from the Great Fen have been identified; it is considered that they will have the potential by 2032 to:

Generate between £1.4 - 3.25 million turnover annually

Create between 24-59 direct new jobs

Provide significant skills development and volunteering opportunities





Highlighted significant business opportunities include native breed beef and lamb production, and nature conservation contracting. Tourism and recreation business opportunities include equestrian activities, farm tourism, a café / shop outlet and cycle and boat hire. Increased sustainable visitor numbers will positively impact upon demand for accommodation and eating establishments

As visitor numbers grow, expenditure and related employment is expected to increase significantly in the years ahead. By way of example, the RSPB's Frampton Reserve experienced a five-fold increase in visitor numbers and employment in only eight years, following investment in land acquisition, wetland habitat restoration and visitor facilities.



This increased activity, whether private businesses operating in the area or habitat restoration and construction projects, will produce significant opportunities for training, apprenticeships and volunteering. This will be of particular importance and advantage to the local communities and educational establishments.

Payment for Ecosystem Service

Central to the Great Fen vision is the delivery of eco-system services. These can confer benefit to individuals, communities, and businesses on a local, regional and national scale. These eco system services include food and fibre production; water supply and quality; flood control; tourism and recreation; regulation of greenhouse gas emissions; biodiversity, wildlife and genetic diversity; and human health.

The Great Fen will also play an important and positive role in local water management and flood mitigation. Equally its contribution to amenity value, quality of life, and human health, provides demonstrable economic value to landscape scale developments within the region. By way of example, developers for anticipated large scale projects at Alconbury Weald and Great Haddon see the enhanced quality of life offered by proximity to the Great Fen as a key developmental and marketing asset.

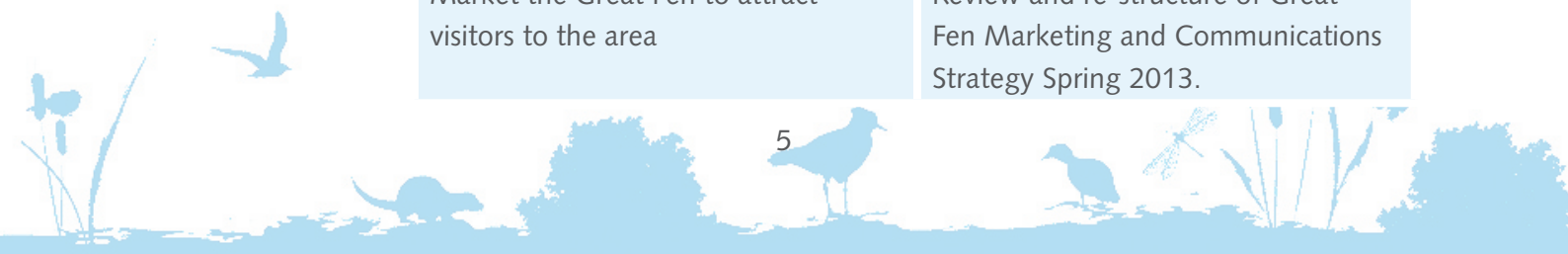
Whilst acknowledging the complexities in quantifying the value of eco-system services provided by the Great Fen, the report highlights that significant potential exists and this will be a key area for further work as the project develops.



Recommendations

The report highlights a number of clear recommendations focused on developing strategic clarity, a partnership with the local business community to identify and develop viable business opportunities, overcome potential barriers to economic development, prioritise infrastructure and other building blocks, and ensure efficient allocation of resources.

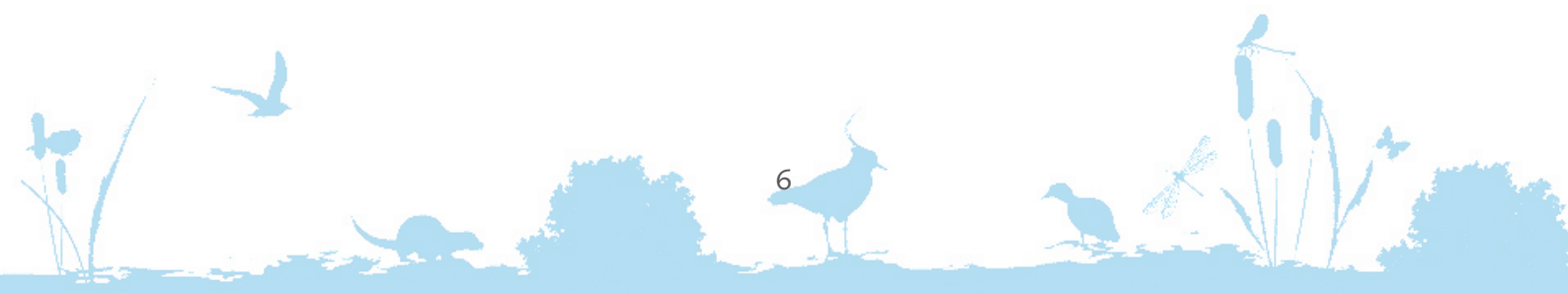
Recommendations and Actions arising from the report	First steps already taken
Strategy	
Develop a socio-economic development and funding strategy for the Great Fen with Project Partners	On agenda for Great Fen Steering Committee meetings in March and July 2013.
Agree a strategic direction for developing Great Fen Payment for Eco System Services schemes with Project Partners	On agenda for Great Fen Steering Committee meetings in March and July 2013.
Agree a socio-economic development route map with Project Partners	On agenda for Great Fen Steering Committee meetings in March and July 2013.
Partnership, and communication	
Develop an economic partnership with key stakeholders	Solid groundwork laid in Great Fen Socio-Economic workshop (September 2012). Partnerships to be expanded, developed and focused in 2013/2014 and beyond. Business Forum included in Great Fen Action Plan.
Communicate regularly with the business community and other stakeholders.	Review and re-structure of Great Fen Marketing and Communications Strategy Spring 2013.
Marketing	
Review the Great Fen Marketing and Communications Strategy to ensure socio-economic elements are fully integrated	Review and re-structure of Great Fen Marketing and Communications Strategy Spring 2013.
Market Great Fen business opportunities to existing and potential stakeholders	Review and re-structure of Great Fen Marketing and Communications Strategy Spring 2013.
Market the Great Fen to attract visitors to the area	Review and re-structure of Great Fen Marketing and Communications Strategy Spring 2013.





Recommendations and Actions arising from the report	First steps already taken
Infrastructure	
Progress the development of the Great Fen Visitor Centre and other visitor facilities and services.	RIBA Open Ideas Competition to be completed by end of April 2013 and Fundraising strategy in preparation.
Progress the development of visitor infrastructure, including, as a priority, access/transport infrastructure	First Great Fen Information Point open. New visitor facilities at Rymes Reedbed open Spring 2013. Access routes into and around Great Fen under development.
Install signage to attract and direct visitors.	Great Fen branding and new signage rolls out from 2013. Brown signs in place.
Business support and development	
Develop a package of business support	Huntingdonshire Business Start Up Support Programme established in January 2013
Identify and provide guidance on potential sources of business funding	Provision included in Business Start Up Programme and through partner network
Discuss business development opportunities with farmers and other businesses on a one to one basis.	Provision included in Business Start Up Programme and through partner network
Skills development and training	
Continue/develop exceptional volunteering, education and training activities and partnerships	Volunteer, education and training activities continue, partnerships are active and being expanded. All are key elements of Great Fen extension bid to Heritage Lottery Fund (decision March 2013).
Develop Great Fen apprenticeship opportunities	Apprenticeship opportunities under consideration as part of Visitor Centre aspirations.

Continued





Monitoring	
Establish and monitor key indicators for socio-economic development	On agenda for Great Fen Steering Committee meetings in March and July 2013.
Project Partners	
Clarify the nature of future business partnerships on own land and property	On agenda for Great Fen Steering Committee meetings in March and July 2013.
Review with tenants conditions for sustainable business opportunities.	On agenda for Great Fen Steering Committee meetings in March and July 2013.
Socio-economic proof' all work and activities on the Great Fen.	On agenda for Great Fen Steering Committee meetings in March and July 2013.

Next steps

The Great Fen is undeniably at the infancy stage of its developmental journey towards maturity, however, as the report demonstrates, a solid basis for future socio-economic development is already in place. Now is the time to build upon that basis to create the conditions and opportunities that will confer real and lasting benefit to local businesses and local people over the next 20 years of the Great Fen's development.

The next step is for the Great Fen Project partners to consider the report, review the recommendations, and determine their priorities for socio-economic growth. A fundamental early requirement will be the need to identify and prioritise both funding and resource opportunities. Equally, identifying and engaging with the appropriate partners to progress the Project's vision will be paramount, which in turn will ensure that the central theme of local participation and engagement is maintained.

Going forward, the Great Fen Project must be viewed within the wider Huntingdonshire context and against a changing backdrop both political and economic. As a consequence flexibility will be a key factor of the project's on-going development.

