



## John Clare Countryside

Our joint vision for a heritage  
landscape with nature at its heart



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*Nightingale and cover image of grasshopper by Sarah Lambert*



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# John Clare Countryside

Our joint vision for a heritage landscape with nature at its heart

## Objectives

To create, launch and deliver an ambitious and accessible nature recovery area across the landscape areas west of Peterborough, designed, led and supported by residents, landowners, farmers, businesses and parish councils of the area.

This nature recovery area would be recognised by Natural England and other statutory agencies and recognised in local policy documents including Local Plans.

It would be distinguished from other nature recovery areas because it is community led and because of how it combines the natural and built heritage and its links, through John Clare, to literature and the arts.

## Introduction

As residents, businesses, parish councils, landowners, farmers and visitors we want the countryside around us to be an area where nature is at the heart of our lives. Where swifts and swallows are a central feature of our summer evenings, where otters continue to enthrall people as they play in the Maxey Cut, where bees and other insects thrive, not decline, and where there are far more, not less, ponds, meadows, wild flowers, hedgerows and trees. And where people can walk or cycle out in safety and tranquility across this thriving countryside, enjoying the sights and sounds and even the silence of the natural world; enjoying dark skies and cherishing the heritage – both natural and man-made – around them.

That sounds like a countryside worth living in. But it is a countryside under threat and increasing pressure from housing growth and traffic and sadly even from lack of appreciation. In recent years, despite many successes on and off the network of nature reserves, there have been significant declines in many key species, particularly farmland and woodland birds, such as lapwing, yellowhammer, nightingale, spotted flycatcher and woodcock; and decreases in the number of mammals such as hedgehog and hare and the variety of butterflies and moths.

Working in partnership, the Langdyke Countryside Trust now wants to ensure that we conserve the beauty of our landscape and conserve its rich local heritage and establish an area characterised by

- Outstanding natural biodiversity through major habitat restoration connected through a mosaic of smaller wildlife havens and corridors
- An unspoilt landscape that is used by local people and the people of an expanding Peterborough, providing them with a large area of unspoilt countryside on their doorstep
- Well-kept heritage sites, accessible to all and working together to involve and attract visitors
- Cycle paths, footways and ‘quiet roads’ – a green transport infrastructure - where priority is given to walkers and riders
- Prosperous and successful farming, profiting from a combination of environmentally friendly farming practice, sustainable tourism and recreational activities

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# Project Aims



*European Turtle Dove by Brian Lawrence*

**Building on the substantial work of the partners to date and on the heritage and legacy of the work of the poet John Clare this project aims to**

- 1.** Deliver significant increases in key wildlife habitats, particularly those of limestone grassland, wetland and arable farmland
- 2.** Raise levels of local pride, aspiration and community cohesion by helping local communities to understand, appreciate and enjoy their local natural and built heritage
- 3.** Pilot and champion best practice sustainable development in all aspects of future development within the area including sustainable techniques of land management both on and off the existing nature reserves
- 4.** Promote public health and wellbeing, providing large areas of accessible green open space for the people of Peterborough
- 5.** Create new jobs and economic opportunities within the area, allied to the delivery of these objectives, particularly in tourism, visitor attractions and farming and nature conservation.

The achievement of these objectives will create a better quality of life for residents and visitors through the creation of a more-sustainable local environment with easy access to rich and inspiring nature and greater appreciation of its heritage and history.

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# Background

**John Clare Countryside lies between the Nene and Welland valleys to the west of Peterborough and to the east of the A1. The area sits across two National Character Areas – 92 Rockingham Forest and 75 Kesteven Uplands.**

The birthplace of John Clare, one of the country's most significant poets of the natural world, it already boasts a network of existing nature reserves across a varied range of habitats, including two Natural England national nature reserves (Barnack Hills and Holes and Castor Hanglands), a number of SSSIs and several local nature reserves run by the Wildlife Trusts and the Langdyke Countryside Trust.

To the south of the area, the Nene Park Trust manages large areas of land in the interests of the community and for nature. The William Scott Abbot Trust operates the Sacrewell Farm visitor centre on the western edge of John Clare Countryside.

This distinctive landscape is rich in heritage – from the Roman roads of King Street and Ermine Street, the remains of Durobrivae, the Norman

manor house at Torpel, the beauty of the Medieval parish churches and the history and landscape settings of Burghley House and Milton Hall and their respective parks.

Another important visitor attraction, the John Clare Cottage, a museum in the birthplace of the poet in Helpston, lies at the centre of the area. Clare himself, lived and worked here and wrote poignantly about the environmental pressures the landscape was under in the 19th century. His voice can provide an important focus for the development of this nature recovery area.

The John Clare Countryside project is a partnership of local organisations, initially co-ordinated by the Langdyke Countryside Trust, a voluntary, membership-based organisation but in time likely to develop its own organisational structures. The project will be created and delivered by local residents, businesses and landowners.

Since its foundation in 1999 the Langdyke Countryside Trust has established a network of seven nature reserves across the area – Swaddywell Pit, Torpel Manor Field,

Bainton Heath, Etton Maxey Pits, Vergette Wood Meadow, Etton High Meadow and Marholm Field Bank. The Trust has an active membership of over 120 households and runs a variety of events throughout the year.

In that time the Trust has also created a new visitor centre at Torpel Manor Field and a range of educational materials to help people understand its heritage. It has put up nearly 200 nest boxes across the area and helped plant new hedgerows and new trees. As a result, orchids thrive at Swaddywell, avocets have bred at Etton Maxey and rare moths and butterflies prosper at Bainton. We have planted a community orchard at Etton High Meadow.

Working in close partnership with Natural England, the Wildlife Trusts, Nene Park Trust, PECT, William Scott Abbot Trust, John Clare Society, the John Clare Trust, parish councils and landowners the Trust now wants to take its work to a new level and create a nationally recognised, but still locally led, nature recovery area across the John Clare Countryside.



*Thick-legged Flower Beetle by Paul Braham*



# JOHN CLARE COUNTRY







### Map Key

- + Local Church
- o Place of Interest
- course of roman road
- SSSI
- JCC Boundary
- Nature Reserve
- National Nature Reserve
- Trust Reserve
- County Wildlife Site

### LANGDYKE RESERVES:

- 1 – Etton Maxey Pits
- 2 – Etton High Meadow
- 3 – Vergette Wood and Meadow
- 4 – Bainton Heath
- 5 – Torpel Manor
- 6 – Swaddywell Pit
- 7 – Marholm Field Bank

### NATURAL ENGLAND NATIONAL NATURE RESERVES:

- 8 – Barnack Hills and Holes
- 9 – Castor Hanglands

### WILDLIFE TRUST NATURE RESERVES:

- 10 – Southorpe Meadow
- 11 – Southorpe Paddock



Scale: 1:29,000



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# Key deliverables of the project

## 1. Increases in key indicator species

This will be achieved through a significant increase in the area of land actively managed in the interests of nature and heritage including both

- a. Land under the direct management of the partners – through the expansion of existing nature reserves, particularly around Hills and Holes, Castor Hanglands, Swaddywell Pit and along the Maxey Cut, linking the reserves at Bainton Heath and Etton Maxey Pits
- b. Land managed by other landowners as part of new agri-environment schemes designed to help the recovery of key species and as part of nature rich wildlife corridors which join up the network of nature reserves

As part of this work and working with partners and other landowners we would aim

- To create additional hectares of limestone grassland
- To create additional hectares of wetland, wet woodland and wet meadows
- To create new ponds including in gardens and on farmland
- To plant trees as part of new hedgerows and as standards
- To create actively managed wildlife corridors
- To create habitat and nesting space for key target species such as orchids, hedgehog, bats, barn owl and swift

## 2. Increase levels of public engagement, understanding and participation in the natural and built heritage of the area

This will be achieved through the active and co-ordinated promotion of visitor facilities at existing centres such as the John Clare Cottage, Sacrewell Farm and potentially at new facilities within the estate of the Nene Park Trust. A jointly managed natural and built heritage engagement and education programme would be run across all the partners, providing multiple opportunities to learn about the natural and built heritage of the area and to participate in all aspects of the project, including volunteering opportunities.

The project aims to link the existing visitor attractions through the creation of a network of well-maintained footpaths, bridleways and cycle paths, making John Clare Countryside a visitor destination with multiple easily accessible points of interest, without increasing levels of car traffic in the area.

Within this context we would aim to work with local landowners to consider

- a. Creating and maintaining new waymarked cycle ways
- b. Creating and maintaining new waymarked permissive footpaths
- c. Designating more local roads as quiet lanes and establish a clearer priority for pedestrians, cyclists and horse-riders on key roads

The project would actively involve local people in the achievement of its nature objectives by choosing to target key species that people are familiar with, but which need help, such as hedgehog and swift and

encouraging them to provide nesting and feeding habitat in their gardens and houses.

We would look to use on-line platforms to teach people how to recognise and support these species and to encourage them to record their sightings and to take pride in their role in the recovery of these populations.

The partners would work together to reach out to residents of Peterborough, particularly those with limited existing access to green open space and help them to visit, enjoy and appreciate John Clare Countryside. This would include educational programmes run at locations within the city, with the aim of taking the countryside into the city, rather than waiting for people to visit the countryside.

The project would also build on existing work designed to engage local people and residents of Peterborough (and indeed visitors generally) in the history and heritage of the area, making use of heritage assets at Durobrivae, Castor, village churches, John Clare Cottage and Torpel Manor Field.

We would seek to replicate the successful Torpel Heritage Lottery Funded project and expand Langdyke's existing history and archaeology group to engage more local people.

Finally, there would also be a creative theme throughout the project, linking the natural world with art and literature. Again, this would build on existing work through the John Clare Society and John Clare Trust and previous and current arts-based projects supported by local artists and members of the Society of Wildlife Artists.



### 3. Pilot and champion best practice sustainable development in all aspects of future development within the area including sustainable techniques of land management both on and off the existing nature reserves

Small scale housing and commercial development within the village envelopes and to support local farming are encouraged within the existing policy framework, including the neighbourhood plans (either in place or emerging) of Castor, Ailsworth, Glinton, Peakirk, Northborough, Helpston and Barnack.

The project would develop guidelines, based on the local nature partnership's Developing with Nature toolkit, to help developers support the objectives and aims of the project in terms of best practice design concepts and for achieving net biodiversity gain.

The project would work with local landowners to identify and promote new techniques of sustainable land management and techniques of nature conservation.



*Froglet by Mike Horne*



*Pond at Swaddywell Pit*

### 4. Promote public health and wellbeing, providing large areas of accessible green open space for the people of Peterborough

A primary function of the John Clare Nature Recovery Area will be to provide the combination of accessible green open space and protected areas for nature necessary to complement the economic growth agenda of the local and wider region.

JCC would be planned and managed to offer opportunities for local people to enjoy the countryside, and its thriving natural world and well conserved built heritage.

The project would consider carefully how to manage increased access to the landscape area to ensure

that we do not create additional traffic or put undue pressure through disturbance on important sites for nature.

Initial thinking is that we would encourage people to use existing (and improved) access points rather than create new ones and look at ways in which they can be linked by well-maintained footpaths and cycle ways. It might also be worth considering developing improved access point(s) (car park with footpaths etc) in the northern part of the area, perhaps as part of the evolving Etton-Maxey Pits complex, which already attracts dog-walkers and birdwatchers.

Another idea is to create access points into the JCC within the urban area of Peterborough from which people could walk or cycle out into the area.

# Key deliverables of the project (cont)

## 5. Create new jobs and economic opportunities within the area, allied to the delivery of these objectives, particularly in tourism, visitor attractions and farming and nature conservation.

The creation and long-term delivery of the John Clare Countryside vision would create a small number of jobs both directly and indirectly.

Directly we would expect to see between 2-5 permanent jobs created to manage the delivery of the vision and of key projects within it. These would include a partnership and project manager role, plus conservation jobs in managing the expanded network of nature reserves and public education and engagement roles. Commercial opportunities would also be created through

contracts with local suppliers to deliver projects such as creating new ponds, mowing areas of grassland, planting hedgerows etc, where these cannot be delivered by volunteers.

The increased visitor numbers would also support the creation of new jobs at existing visitor destinations.

We also expect that the increased visitor numbers would lead to new jobs in other leisure facilities through increased demand at local shops, cafes and pubs and potentially to the creation of new facilities in the area, such as tea-rooms, cycle hubs etc.

The partnership would like to explore whether it could link into the University of Peterborough to support the local skills agenda with an emphasis on courses linked to sustainable development; natural sciences and land use.



## Conclusion

**The John Clare Countryside concept will deliver significant benefits to both people and wildlife.**

The strength of the concept lies in the fact that it already exists. JCC is an established landscape feature that contains a mosaic of nationally important natural habitats, nature reserves, heritage sites and is supported by ambitious and like-minded local partners.

It is already happening - much has already been done and will continue be done through the efforts of the existing partners.

But our ambition is to make this so much more.

JCC has the potential to combine improvements to the health and wellbeing and social cohesion of local people with landscape-scale nature recovery. It can support the wider environment capital ambitions of Peterborough and the natural capital plans of our statutory partners.

It is an ambitious, but relatively easily achieved long-term project that can be sustained because it has been created and will be delivered by local people and landowners who have a personal interest in making it succeed.

It is about creating a thriving and cherished landscape – good for people, good for nature, good for the future.



# Appendix A - Current supporters (September 2019)

**The following organisations have been involved in developing this document and support its aims and will be involved in its delivery**

- Langdyke Countryside Trust
- Nene Park Trust
- Wildlife Trusts for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire
- PECT
- William Scott Abbott Trust
- Protect Rural Peterborough
- John Clare Society
- John Clare Trust
- Natural England
- Natural Cambridgeshire
- Peterborough City Council
- Milton Estate
- Ailsworth Parish Council
- Castor Parish Council
- Barnack Parish Council
- Ufford Parish Council
- Helpston Parish Council
- Sutton Parish Council



*Emperor Dragonfly by Steve Zealand*

## Appendix B - Proposed target species for public engagement

Flower rich grassland	Woodland	Wetland	Farmland	Villages and gardens
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Orchids – Man, Pyramidal, Fragrant</li> <li>● Glow-worm</li> <li>● Grizzled and dingy skipper</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Marsh tit</li> <li>● LS Woodpecker</li> <li>● Longhorn beetle</li> <li>● Purple emperor</li> <li>● Bluebell</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Cuckoo</li> <li>● Lapwing</li> <li>● Otter</li> <li>● Toad</li> <li>● Frog</li> <li>● Freshwater mussels</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Skylark</li> <li>● Turtle dove</li> <li>● Brown hare</li> <li>● Key arable plant species</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Swift</li> <li>● Hedgehog</li> <li>● Toad</li> <li>● Frog</li> <li>● Wall ferns</li> <li>● Bats</li> </ul>



*Langdyke  
Trust*

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