

CLIMATE CHANGE, GROWTH AND ENVIRONMENT EXECUTIVE ADVISORY PANEL

Wednesday 18th May 2022

Report Title	Ise Valley Strategic Plan
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Executive Member	Councillor Harriet Pentland – Executive Member for Climate & Green Environment

List of Appendices

Appendix A – Ise Valley Strategic Plan

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. This Report was presented to the Planning Policy Executive Advisory Panel on Monday 16th May. Members were recommended to:
- a) Note the contents of the Ise Valley Strategic Plan and acknowledge it has been prepared by the River Nene Regional Park (RNRP) on behalf of, and with input from, the River Ise Partnership, of which the Council is an actively participating member;
 - b) Endorse the content of the Ise Valley Strategic Plan and ask that it be presented to the Executive for approval
- 1.2. Given the mission and aims set out in the Ise Valley Strategic Plan (the Plan / IVSP) and the positive impact it will have with respect to managing and mitigating against climate change, it is appropriate that Members of the Climate Change, Environment and Growth Executive Advisory Panel are also informed about the content of the IVSP and made aware of the benefits of working in partnership to deliver the Plan.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 The Ise Valley Strategic Plan can be used as a tool to attract funding that will support the development and delivery of projects within the Ise Valley that will enhance the natural environment. This Report will provide a brief insight into the preparation, content and structure of the Plan and set out examples of success to date.
- 2.2 There is an overview of how the IVSP links to other plans, programmes and strategies, including the Corporate Plan (2021). This will show how implementation of the IVSP will not only bring tangible benefits to people and wildlife but also support the delivery of Council priorities and duties conferred through the Environment Act 2021 and other national policy and regulatory requirements.

3 Recommendations

- 3.1 It is recommended that the Climate Change, Environment and Growth Executive Advisory Panel:
 - a) Note the contents of the Ise Valley Strategic Plan and acknowledge it has been prepared by the River Nene Regional Park (RNRP) on behalf of, and with input from, the River Ise Partnership, of which the Council is an actively participating member;
 - b) Endorse the content of the Ise Valley Strategic Plan

Reason for Recommendations

- 3.2 Endorsement of the Plan from both the Planning Policy and Climate Change, Environment and Growth Executive Advisory Panels (with a view to approval from the Executive) will enable Officers of the Council to use the Plan as a tool to attract funding streams and develop and deliver collaborative projects that will protect and enhance the Ise Valley and deliver priorities set out in the Council's Corporate Plan (2021).

Alternative Options Considered

- 3.3 The Climate Change, Environment and Growth Executive Advisory Panel could resolve not to endorse the content of the Ise Valley Strategic Plan. However, not endorsing the Plan would send a message to the River Ise Partnership that the Council does not see the River Ise Strategic Plan as a credible tool with which to attract funding for the development and delivery of projects that will protect and enhance the Ise Valley.
- 3.4 This approach could diminish the Council's credibility as an active participant within the Partnership which could reduce the Council's ability to make recommendations for project development and delivery. Rejecting the Ise Valley Strategic Plan and the opportunity to actively participate on the River Ise Partnership will not stop the Council delivering against priorities set out in the Corporate Plan (2021) but it will reduce the number of opportunities available to deliver multiple priorities effectively and efficiently.

4 Report Background

River Ise Partnership

- 4.1 The River Ise Partnership first came together in October 2019 through a collective interest in the Ise Valley. The Partnership seeks to provide a coordinated approach to project development and delivery aimed at improving access to and the quality of the Valley. It is a strong and inclusive network with membership drawn from both North and West Northamptonshire Councils, land holders, tourism operators, government agencies and non-governmental organisations (pp 61-63 Appendix A). The Partnership aims to facilitate partner and community participation in the planning, development and united enjoyment of the Ise Valley.
- 4.2 The vision of the Partnership is to ensure that the Ise Valley plays a central role in North Northamptonshire's sustainable and economic prosperity; that its landscape character and sense of place is highly regarded and valued as much as our planned growth.
- 4.3 The Partnership have sought, through the writing of the IVSP, to develop a large-scale and ambitious programme that will enhance the quality of the Valley's natural environment for people and wildlife, create socioeconomic benefits through tourism opportunities for local communities, provide for natural flood management and mitigate against climate change. Further information on the mission and aims, membership and leadership of the Partnership can be found on PP 61 – 63 of the IVSP – Appendix A.

Initial Progress

- 4.4 Since its inception in 2019, and despite the impact of COVID-19 on working practices, the Partnership have made positive progress in the production of the IVSP. As part of this work they have identified and secured funding towards the creation of an Ise Valley Way (see below) and initiated the South Meadows project in Wicksteed Park which will provide river and flood plain restoration for ecological and geomorphological enhancements and reduce flood risk to industrial buildings upstream along the Slade Brook (see below).

IVSP Project - Ise Valley Way

- 4.5 The Ise Valley Way is a 'flag-ship' project for the River Ise Partnership and is included as a project within the IVSP (pp75-93 Appendix A). Initially proposed to connect the towns of Wellingborough, Kettering and Corby, through the Ise Valley, as a continuous walking and cycling route for both leisure and commuting purposes, the Partnership have begun to proactively link this project with the existing Greenway Project.
- 4.6 There is an appetite to look beyond separate approaches to advance the Greenway and Ise Valley Way. This is an opportunity for the Council and the Partnership to collaborate and share assets, skills and knowledge to bring forward a North Northamptonshire Greenway; an opportunity to improve active travel through safer routes by uniting the existing Greenway and the Ise Valley Way and then beyond by creating spurs to enhance accessibility to key network routes and develop links between settlements.

- 4.7 It is intended that the Ise Valley Way will be incorporated into the Forward Plan for the Greenway to enable a coordinated and collaborative, North Northamptonshire approach for delivery.
- 4.8 Work on the Ise Valley Way has already been started by the Partnership; the route is identified, has been refined through ground truthing and consultants are being commissioned to develop a Feasibility Study with Interim Designs to take it to the next level. Funding of £40k was secured from the Community Renewal Fund to provide for the Feasibility Study. Funding of £100k has been secured from the Garden Communities Fund for the surfacing of land north of Wicksteed Park to Deeble Road to enhance pedestrian access, a further submission has been made to extend the River Ise footpath/cycleway to link with Hanwood Park. We are hopeful of being successful with that bid too.
- 4.9 In tandem, the Greenway Project Officer has secured £80k from the Community Renewal Fund to provide a Detailed Design Study for a new Greenway route through the recently regenerated Chester House Estate. The new Greenway route is the first step in linking the Greenway and the Ise Valley Way as it will connect to the proposed Ise Valley route in the south.

IVSP Project - South Meadows, Wicksteed Park

- 4.10 This project is also identified in the Ise Valley Strategic Plan (Table 6 p56, Appendix A) and will be delivered in two phases. Phase one provides a hydrological element, the detailed design of which is complete; it will involve the re-engineering of the River Ise and Slade Brook confluence to restore natural meandering and to reconnect the river with its natural floodplain. Phase two will bring forward a number of interventions to enhance the study area through habitat creation to increase species diversity and improve access and connectivity for people and wildlife from the wider Wicksteed parkland into and throughout the study area.
- 4.11 Educational opportunities will be capitalised through Wicksteed Park's education programme. The project will become a showcase of innovation for school children, university students and members of the local community. Interpretation boards and tailored programmes will set out to explore a variety of issues addressed through the delivery of the project including flooding and water management, ecology and landscape restoration and climate change mitigation.
- 4.12 The Project is likely to cost between £100k to £150k to deliver in its entirety. The Environment Agency have invested £50k in association with the River Nene Regional Park's investment of £40k. The focal point for this initial funding will be on delivering phase one of the project. Discussions are currently underway with developers with respect to securing S106 monies to deliver phase two.

Ise Valley Strategic Plan – An Effective Strategy

- 4.13 These examples of project development through the Ise Valley Strategic Plan demonstrate that the River Ise Partnership is already using the Plan as a practical tool to initiate partnership collaboration and attract funding streams to deliver project opportunities to enhance the Ise Valley.
- 4.14 The Plan itself provides an effective strategy to focus on bringing people, projects and funding together in an opportunistic but coordinated manner. Part 1 identifies the study area (Figure 1 p7, Appendix A) and provides a narrative around the plans, policies and programmes informing the Plan.
- 4.15 Part 2 sub-divides the study area into three zones to determine, on a local scale, how they function individually and as a whole within the study area. The zones are profiled to establish an existing baseline with respect to biodiversity, connectivity and access, community health and well-being, landscape, heritage, flooding and water management and ecosystem services. Opportunities to enhance the existing baseline are identified and the narrative continues by setting out wider issues affecting the Ise Valley.
- 4.16 Part 3 sets out that the successful implementation of the Plan is based on three strands:
- 1) Development of working practices within the Partnership and through partnership collaboration (Table 4 p51, Appendix A);
 - 2) Integration of general project principles (Table 5 p53, Appendix A) into project development; and
 - 3) Delivery of individual projects (Table 6 p56, Appendix A) that will realise the Mission and Aims of the Partnership.

The Plan in Combination with other Plans, Strategies and Programmes

- 4.17 The IVSP provides a focus on the Ise Valley. It is seeking to exemplify a natural best for North Northamptonshire by identifying opportunities to enhance the quality of the Valley for people and wildlife. The Plan aims to protect and enhance the natural and historic assets within the Ise Valley, improve access and connectivity throughout the Valley, contribute to flood and climate change management and mitigation and to create opportunities that provides for recreation, attracts tourism and supports inward investment, etc.
- 4.18 There are a lot of cross cutting threads from the ISVP into other plans, strategies and programmes that the Council is involved with. The Habitat Opportunity Mapping (HOM) for Northamptonshire is particularly relevant with respect to supporting project identification and development for the ISVP. HOM is a geographical information system; it's a tool that can be used to identify areas suited for the expansion of key habitats. It aims to highlight locations where new habitat can be created that will deliver specific benefits, whilst taking identified constraints into account.

- 4.19 These benefits are often referred to as ecosystem services. They benefit people, wildlife and the environment as a whole, for example, through the provision of food, regulation of flooding and air quality and cultural benefits such as recreational opportunities. Habitat Opportunity Mapping is an effective tool and will ensure that priority projects for the IVSP can be selected to deliver multiple benefits. It will also provide a basis to carry such projects forward into the emerging Natural Capital Investment Plan.
- 4.20 The Natural Capital Investment Plan will set out the priority and pipeline projects for North Northamptonshire to enhance and benefit our natural capital. It will inform the development of the emerging Strategic Plan for North Northamptonshire and it has a wide range of other uses, for example it will inform the Local Nature Recovery Strategy that the Council has a duty to produce. It can help meet the Council's climate change objectives and the Grounds Maintenance Team can use it to enhance existing assets.
- 4.21 Ultimately, projects in the IVSP that are informed by HOM and carried forward into the Natural Capital Plan will be in a better position to be awarded funding from multiple sources including streams made available through Government initiatives, capital funding from existing budgets and planning obligations.
- 4.22 The relevance of the IVSP with respect to duties arising from the Environment Act 2021 and policies emerging from the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan will be drawn out in Section 5 (Issues and Choices). Links between the IVSP and other corporate policies and plans will be made in Section 7 (Relevant Policies and Plans).
- 4.23 The narrative in 4.6 identifies an aspiration to link the Ise Valley Way with the existing Greenway and the future ambition of delivering a North Northamptonshire Greenway. The Council is also invested in delivering green infrastructure, open spaces and opportunities for outdoor recreation so our residents and visitors can lead active, fulfilled lives. Section 8 sets out a list of background papers. It is a list of plans and programmes which will benefit from the IVSP and the IVSP will contribute to their deliverance.

5 Issues and Choices

Issues arising

- 5.1 At the March Planning Policy Executive Advisory Panel (PPEAP) (24/03/22) and subsequently the April Climate Change, Environment and Growth Executive Advisory Panel a Report¹ was presented with respect to the consultation by the Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) on proposals for how biodiversity net gain will work in practice. The Report explained the issues associated with biodiversity net gain.²

¹ [Item 5: Consultation on Biodiversity Net Gain Regulations and Implementation \(Bateman and Stopforth\)](#)

² an approach to development that means habitats for wildlife must be left in a measurably better state than they were before the development.

- 5.2 The Report noted that the Environment Act 2021 provides the legislation to protect and enhance the environment for future generations. This includes measures to clean up the country's air, restore natural habitats, increase biodiversity and make better use of our resources. These changes will be driven by new legally binding environmental targets enforced by a new independent Office for Environmental Protection (OEP) which will hold government and public bodies to account on their environmental obligations.
- 5.3 In addition to the above, the report highlighted other policy areas that are being developed to meet the ambitions set out in the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan. The Council will need to identify opportunities to deliver these policies and be seen to do so. It is likely that a number of strategies and approaches will need to be put in place to achieve this. When approved by the Executive, the IVSP can be used by Officers as a legitimate tool to help deliver some of these policy requirements, for example:

- The IVSP seeks to expand, improve and connect the network of green and blue spaces along the Ise Valley. Enhancing existing and creating new habitats will provide places for nature to become rich in wildlife and more resilient to climate change. The Ise Valley could therefore be proposed to form part of the Government's objective to create a national **Nature Recovery Network** which will in turn open up funding opportunities.
- The **species abundance target** will be a legally binding target to halt the decline of nature by 2030. Further legal detail is needed but it is anticipated this policy could stimulate investment. The IVSP is an ambitious programme to enhance the quality of the Valley's natural environment. It provides project opportunities and can direct action to secure investment opportunities. It will not only deliver an increase in species abundance but also boost species diversity.
- **Planning reforms** - The Planning for the Future White Paper published in August 2020 proposed wider reforms to the planning system. Improving biodiversity will be a core objective; the IVSP seeks to strengthen partnership working and collaboration to develop, secure funding towards and deliver projects that will enhance the natural environment.

The IVSP requires that project development integrates a set of project principles specifically to increase biodiversity, strengthen the network of habitats and ensure they become more resilient to current and future pressures.

- 5.4 Paragraphs 5.2 to 5.3 above look at some of the legislative and policy changes coming forward that relate to the natural environment. It is important to note the IVSP is also about the health and wellbeing of people who live, work and visit areas within the Ise Valley; it seeks to promote leisure opportunities to encourage active lifestyles. It aligns with national strategies including the [Cycling and Walking Plan for England](#) (2020) and [Putting Health into Place](#) (2019) which lead to local approaches like the development of the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIP) and [Supporting](#)

[Northamptonshire to Flourish: Northamptonshire's Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2016-2020.](#)

- 5.5 The Council could choose to develop its own plans and strategies to address emerging legislative and policy requirements without the input of other partners and stakeholders. This would mean that the Council would be in overall control for the development of initiatives to meet their legislative and policy duties and the delivery process. However, this would be turning a back on effective and on-going joint working with partners. It would probably lead to missed project and funding opportunities. It would not provide the most effective and efficient use of resources and would not reflect best practice.
- 5.6 Ultimately, endorsing the Ise Valley Strategic Plan is an endorsement to a collaborative and project led enhancement of the Ise Valley for people and wildlife. The ISVP will form part of the toolbox the Council will need to deliver new legislative and policy requirements.

6 Next Steps

- 6.1 Approval of the content of the Plan from both PPEAP and CCEAP and a recommendation from PPEAP to take the IVSP to Executive for approval will see it progress through the decision-making process to Executive. The preferred outcome will be:
- a) An approval for the IVSP to be used both internally and, in partnership, externally, as a mechanism to enhance the Ise Valley for the benefit of people, wildlife and the natural environment; and
 - b) Recognition that the IVSP can help the Council deliver their priorities set out in the Corporate Plan and other relevant plans, programmes and strategies
- 6.2 The IVSP will be presented to Executive for approval.

7 Implications (including financial implications)

7.1 Resources, Financial and Transformation

- 7.1.1 The IVSP was prepared with, and for the River Ise Partnership by the River Nene Regional Park (RNRP). The commission was jointly funded by the former Borough Councils of Kettering and Wellingborough and the Environment Agency. The former Borough Councils of Kettering and Wellingborough made their contribution using their existing planning policy budgets which have now been carried forward into planning policy budgets within NNC.

- 7.1.2 A part-time (0.5 fte) Senior Project Officer (SPO) was funded by the North Northamptonshire Joint Planning and Delivery Unit (JPDU) from a grant funding stream which has been carried forward into the JPDU budget within NNC. The funding was for a three-year period ending in 2023. The SPO is appointed by the River Nene Regional Park CIC and is based in their offices. The Officer is responsible for the administration of the River Ise Partnership, for project development and delivery relating to the IVSP and for exploring funding opportunities that contribute to the delivery of projects within the IVSP.
- 7.1.3 The SPO is currently exploring a funding opportunity through the National Lottery Heritage Fund to secure funding for an additional Project Officer who can continue to support project development within the Ise Valley and secure funding to deliver them. This is a demonstration of the commitment to the continuation of the Ise Valley Partnership and the delivery of the IVSP.
- 7.1.4 The Ise Valley project forms part of the Council's Planning Policy Teams' work programme, staff resources are identified to support it. There are no direct financial implications as a result of endorsing the content of the ISVP. There may be financial implications with respect to supporting project delivery where additional funding is sought to contribute to and / or match other funding secured. However, it is expected that these resource and financial implications will be met through existing budgets and team structures.
- 7.1.5 The work being undertaken by the Ise Valley Partnership is transformational, having created strong working relationships across the North Northamptonshire area, which have delivered the IVSP and is now securing funds to deliver improvements in the environment.

7.2 Legal and Governance

- 7.2.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from the endorsement of the IVSP. The Ise Partnership was created prior to the formation of NNC. Current Membership consists of:

7.2.2

Members	Friends of
Environment Agency	Anglian Water
Natural England	Boughton Estates
Forestry Commission	West Northamptonshire Council*
North Northamptonshire Council	
River Nene Regional Park CIC	
Bedfordshire, CN Wildlife Trust	
Wicksteed Charitable Trust	

*West Northamptonshire Council are seeking Membership to the Partnership subject to approval by their Planning Policy Committee

- 7.2.3 Political oversight is provided by Cllr Mike Tebbutt (Assistant Executive Member for Growth and Regeneration) for North Northamptonshire Council.

7.3 Relevant Policies and Plans

North Northamptonshire Corporate Plan 2021

- 7.3.1 Key commitment one of the Corporate Plan targets *active, fulfilled lives*. It aims to help people live healthier, more active, independent and fulfilled lives. Delivering projects through the IVSP will improve accessibility within the Valley and beyond which will enable people to engage with outdoor leisure opportunities that will enhance their mental health and well-being.
- 7.3.2 Key commitment three seeks to create *safe and thriving places* that will enable a thriving and successful economy that shapes great places to live, learn, work and visit. The Ise Partnership aims to contribute to the development of regenerative tourism. The IVSP will become a vehicle for project development and delivery to provide socio-economic benefits for communities through employment and income earning opportunities. The drive to promote the heritage and cultural legacy of the Ise Valley will strengthen cultural identity throughout the towns and villages within the Ise Valley and attract tourism and visitors to the area.
- 7.3.3 Key commitment four is focused on a *green, sustainable environment* for North Northamptonshire. The Ise Partnership is committed to providing a coordinated, partnership approach that improves access to, and the quality of the Ise Valley. It seeks to increase the level and diversity of community participation in this resolve. The projects to be delivered will help to tackle climate change, protect the countryside and enhance the natural environment and ecology. Enabling cycle and pedestrian access from Wellingborough to Corby through the Ise Valley Way will promote opportunities for sustainable, active travel. The Council, through its active involvement, will be taking a lead on improving the green environment and demonstrate its clear leadership in tackling environmental sustainability.

Planning Policy

- 7.3.4 The Ise Valley Strategic Plan directs actions and activities that will enhance the quality of the Ise Valley's natural capital and promote access to it. It will help to mitigate climate change and ensure the Ise Valley plays a central role in North Northamptonshire's sustainable and economic growth while enhancing the landscape character and sense of place.
- 7.3.5 Where planning proposals arise within the Plan's study area it can be used to support decision-making and to secure developer contributions (where appropriate). This will help to deliver the strategy set out within the North Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy 2011-2031 (JCS) and the relevant Part Two Local Plans for Wellingborough, Kettering and Corby.

7.3.6 In particular, the IVSP seeks to protect and enhance the historic environment (JCS Policy 2), landscape character (JCS Policy 3), biodiversity (JCS Policy 4) and the water environment (JCS Policy 6). Contributions could also be sought to support and enhance community services (JCS Policy 7), facilitate connectivity (JCS Policy 8; Policy 15) and enhance green infrastructure (JCS Policy 19; Policy 20)

7.4 Risk

7.4.1 There are no significant risks relating to the endorsement of the IVSP. However, it should be noted that the delivery of the Ise Valley Way and other projects within the IVSP will, in some cases, require the willingness of landowners to enable project delivery.

7.4.2 The Partnership, and in particular the River Nene Regional Park and NNC have a strong track record of positive working relationships with landowners to deliver a variety of projects, for example, habitat enhancements, natural flood management and improvements to access and connectivity.

7.4.3 The Partnership will work proactively with landowners by explaining and demonstrating the benefits of enabling projects to be delivered on their land; they will seek to secure funding streams for project delivery to encourage engagement, these may include S106 contributions and capital project funding alongside other funding bids.

7.5 Consultation

7.5.1 The IVSP does not form part of the Development Plan for North Northamptonshire so it is not subject to any statutory consultation process.

7.5.2 It has been subject to consultation within the Ise Partnership on the following dates:

- February 2021
- July/August 2021
- November 2021
- February 2022

7.5.3 These opportunities to comment allowed members of the Partnership to ‘fact-check’ the Plan and provide comments so that the Plan went through an iterative process of development and refinement. In the future, as the stakeholder network develops, the level of engagement will increase to identify new projects, enlist volunteers, secure funding, etc.

7.6 Consideration by Scrutiny

- 7.6.1 None at this time, though should members of the Scrutiny Commission request this as an addition to the work programme, officers will be happy to provide information.

7.7 Equality Implications

- 7.7.1 An Equalities Screening Assessment is being prepared in consultation with the Council's Equalities team. It will be complete and ready for submission with the Report to Executive as an appendix.

7.8 Climate Impact

- 7.8.1 Endorsing the use of the IVSP will provide key positive impacts in respect of climate change. The IVSP sets out actions, activities and an approach that, if delivered, will help the Ise Valley become a connected landscape of places and spaces to enable freedom of movement for people and wildlife; our existing and important habitats can be restored and developed so they become more resilient to climate change, bring about environmental gain, enable ecological networks to grow and secure natural heritage through better management.
- 7.8.2 Activities will include habitat restoration and creation which for example, can assist with carbon sequestration through tree planting; enhancing the water environment to facilitate natural flow so flooding is reduced and natural flood risk management introduced and improved connectivity to enable active travel by foot or cycle to reduce reliance on private vehicles.

7.9 Community Impact

- 7.9.1 The IVSP seeks to increase the level and diversity of partner and community participation in the planning for and development and delivery of projects throughout the Ise valley. The Valley will become more accessible, and people will benefit from the enhanced natural environment, greater natural capital and multiple ecosystem services.
- 7.9.2 Community participation and engagement will ensure projects are focussed on meeting local needs and foster community cohesion. A beautiful Ise Valley will promote recreation and sustainable tourism from Wellingborough to Corby and beyond. People will benefit in terms of health, fitness and well-being.

7.10 Crime and Disorder Impact

7.10.1 There are no identified negative impacts in relation to crime and disorder related to this report; indeed, research³ has shown that well managed and maintained open spaces and natural environments can help to reduce the prevalence of crime and vandalism and improve the aesthetic quality of an area.

8.0 Background Papers

- 8.1 [The Environment Act 2021](#)
- 8.2 [The 25 Year Environment Plan 2018](#)
- 8.3 [North Northamptonshire JCS 2011 - 2031](#)
- 8.4 [The Plan for the Brough of Wellingborough 2019](#)
- 8.5 [Kettering Site Specific Part 2 Local Plan 2021](#)
- 8.6 [Part Two Local Plan for Corby 2021](#)
- 8.7 [Corporate Plan North Northamptonshire Council 2021](#)

³ Forest Research: <https://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/?s=crime&type=&date-from=&date-to=>