

Wintringham Waters

The vision for the Wintringham Brook Corridor is encapsulated as 'Wintringham Waters', a series of wetland habitats designed to support the development's water strategy, provide access to nature, enhance the natural environment while fostering an engaging space for community interaction and wildlife observation.

At the heart of Wintringham Waters is the historic Wintringham Brook, a shallow watercourse that flows East to West through the site. Through close consultation with BMD's ecological consultants and Wildlife Trust BCN, Wintringham Brook has had a series of interventions to enhance the brook corridor for wildlife and to bring people closer to nature. Much of the brooks was initially compromised by rubbish, scrub overgrowth and dark and narrow sections. The refurbishment work not only cleared the brook, but enabled the bed and sides of the brook to be improved for nature, with spaces created for water mammals, opening up sections for both nature, and for human interaction with the watercourse, and planting to support the water quality passing through the brook.

Alongside this an existing smaller watercourse, has been realigned to make it more significant and to feed into the brook, providing more water through the course of the year. The work has re-established the historic lost Monks Brook, into a feature within the first phase of development, with planting along it, and a route through a green corridor, connecting play areas.

Alongside these historic natural features, new wetland basins have been created as part of ensuring a climate resilient place, and to support the wider challenges for the neighbouring town of St Neots, which has been subject to flooding over recent years. Wintringham Waters provides around 61,000 cubic metres of surface water storage volume capacity and has been specially designed to hold water back, to avoid quick run off deluging the wider river network in the town. It can withstand storm durations from 15 minutes through to 180 hours of rainfall.

The new basins each have unique characteristics, to promote diverse habitats including wet woodland, grassland, and water's edge and open water wetland areas. This variety supports a wide range of species and enhances the ecological dynamics:

Western Basin: Designed as a shallow wild wetland, perfect for attracting amphibians and providing breeding grounds for insects.

Central Basin: Features a bird hide and two gravelled islands. This setup is tailored to encourage wetland birds to land and use the lake with confidence, offering safe nesting spots and feeding opportunities.

Eastern Basin: Contains a grassed island which serves as an ideal grassland nesting habitat. The basin is deeper and island designed to keep mammals away, providing a secure environment for ground-nesting birds to breed and feed safely.

Key Wildlife supported by this area include :

1.Birds: The different basins and bird hides make the corridor a haven for birdwatchers and avian species alike. In the years to come, residents and visitors can expect to see species like the Reed Warbler, Lapwing, Little Egret, Kingfisher and other wetland birds thriving in these carefully crafted habitats.

2.Amphibians and Aquatic Species: The varied depth and vegetation of the wetland basins provide perfect breeding and living conditions for frogs, smooth newts, and various aquatic insects.

3.Reptiles: Areas with sunny, sheltered spots near the water attract reptiles such as the Common Lizard and Grass Snake.

4.Mammals: Larger mammals such as otters may be attracted to the expansive aquatic environments, while smaller species like Hedgehogs, mice and voles benefit from the grassland and marginal plantings.

5.Invertebrates: From grasshoppers and dragonflies to bees and butterflies, the grassland, wetland and woodland habitats promote a whole host of different invertebrates that support pollination and the food web.

These enhancements not only contribute to the ecological health of the area but also create a multifunctional space that allows people to engage with nature in meaningful ways. The wayfinding around this area and interpretation on the hides are being developed with the local Wildlife Trust as part of a series of regular nature events for the local community, to bring residents closer to nature and more aware of the vital role of the habitats and species created and maintained around them. As the spaces mature, the communities team will be looking to develop nature volunteers from the community to help look after the spaces and be part of wider citizen science surveys working alongside our more formal monitoring of Biodiversity Net Gain and Species Action Plans.

James Patmore, BMD

"The team worked really hard under U&C's steer to bring together the engineering and climate requirements for water, with the opportunities to create something really special for nature: especially where wetland habitats and species are a real priority for this part of Cambridgeshire. Working with partners like the Wildlife Trust has been key to ensure we bring in both practical learnings in managing and maintaining these spaces and ensuring the design and delivery picks up the wider priorities for both this river corridor and the Nature Recovery work for the region. It has been fantastic to see this area of the site evolve from the early digging out of the basins, to what has now come forward as a rich series of habitats for nature. I am really looking forward to this area being opened up next year for residents to enjoy and engage with."

Martin Baker, Conservation Manager (Cams),

The Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire (BCN)

"Right from the first planning discussions about the Wintringham development, the historic brooks running east to west across the development, and the ecology in the fields by the railway line have been a key priority for us. The work that's been undertaken on the Brook is a good example of how development can provide wildlife-rich spaces for nature and people as part of the wider work we and local partners are doing to bring about nature recovery along the river Great Ouse corridor, one of the 6 priority areas for landscape-scale nature recovery identified by Natural Cambridgeshire. We look forward to working with the team on Hen Brook and the Railway Field to continue the good work for nature, and continuing our engagement with the new community to increase their understanding of the green spaces around them, the wildlife present, and how they can play their part in caring for them now and for future generations."

