



West of England Nature Partnership

Joining up the dots for nature

Sevenside Wetlands Nature Improvement Area



Nature Improvement Areas

Defra have empowered Local Nature Partnerships to establish new Nature Improvement Areas (NIA), wherever the opportunities or benefits are greatest to do so. NIAs are large (in the region of 10,000-50,000 hectares), discrete areas that, by taking a landscape-scale approach, will deliver a step change in nature conservation.

Sevenside Wetlands Nature Improvement Area

The WENP has identified its first Nature Improvement Area by applying the criteria set by Defra. The area identified includes part of the Severn Estuary and the land running adjacent to it. Whilst predominantly rural, it contains the densely industrial landscape around Avonmouth, and the towns of Portishead, Weston-super-Mare and Clevedon, shown below.



NIA Vision:

"To recognise the Sevenside Wetlands NIA as a vibrant, nature-rich landscape, where people, business and wildlife thrive"

Why Sevenside?

The Severn Estuary has the second highest tidal range in the world; this extreme tidal flux and underlying geology creates ideal conditions for large communities of invertebrates, attracting vast numbers of birds and fish which migrate thousands of miles to feed there. The area is a particularly important overwintering ground for migratory wildfowl and waders, supporting over 74,000 birds annually including Bewick's swan, shelduck, dunlin and redshank.

The land adjacent to the Severn contains a mosaic of important habitats, including coastal and floodplain grazing marsh, saltmarsh, woodland and traditional orchards. This unique landscape has been formed by land management techniques employed by people over generations, alongside the shaping force of the Severn. The habitats are rich in wildlife, and there exists an opportunity to restore and reconnect them on a significant scale, as advocated by Sir John Lawton in 'Making Space for Nature' (2012), which called for habitats to be bigger, better and more joined up.

Why was this area chosen?

- Whilst the Severn Estuary has multiple designations (SSSI, SAC, SPA, SNCI, Ramsar) for the most part the designations do not include the adjacent land which provide complementary habitats for the estuary wildlife.
- Although the area's ecological value has been recognised for some time, it hasn't been prioritised for resources and has subsequently suffered through a lack of investment.
- There exists a good opportunity to work with landowners, businesses and communities to help them connect with nature and initiate long-term restoration of the natural environment.

Why is the area special?

The area is a predominantly low-lying agricultural landscape, characterised by the presence of water through its vast river, rhyne and ditch network. This watery environment is rich in wildlife, attracting invertebrates, amphibians, otters, water voles, and wading birds. Across the area, there is an opportunity to deliver **large scale ecological networks** through rhyne restoration, which will benefit wildlife and people alike.

A number of wildlife sites of **significant ecological importance** can be found across the area within the Gordano Valley, North Somerset Levels and Moors and Lower Severn Vale. The aim is to **improve connectivity** by reconnecting these sites to create **coherent and resilient ecological corridors** that will enable wildlife to move easily across the landscape.

Nature and people will be **better connected** and **inspired** through an enhanced experience of the outside world, affirming the sense of place and associated history of the area. Investing in the natural environment will bring benefits to **nearby urban areas**, such as increased biodiversity, climate change mitigation, and improved access to recreational activities through the planned coastal path. This will in turn help boost the local economy.



Water vole (Avonmouth)

We aim to work with businesses to help them realise the value of the local environment for their business

and their employees **health and wellbeing**. Restoring the natural environment will help build in resilience to **climate change** through reduced flood risk, increased vegetation cover (carbon storage) and heat absorption during hot spells.



There exists opportunities to **derive multiple benefits** through long term investment in the area. Restoring the ditch network will reduce flood risk for farmers and local communities, whilst delivering water quality (Water Framework Directive) and nature conservation objectives (EU Habitats Directive). Working with landowners to improve the quality of the land will help ensure they have a viable and competitive business model, whilst creating a haven for wildlife.

NIAs, economic development, and planning

NIAs should make a positive economic, social and environmental contribution to local communities, and as such should not be seen as a block to development. It is not the intention to stifle planning or sustainable development within the area; economic development will remain vital, and many developments will have minimal impact or indeed have a potential positive impact on the overall integrity or objectives of the NIA. The aim is to integrate wildlife habitats with human activity, and take a more strategic and integrated approach to how land is used and shared.

Contact info@wenp.org.uk for more information