



# Bedfordshire and Luton Habitat Action Plan: Floodplain Grazing Marsh

Updated September 2015





## Foreword

We are fortunate in Bedfordshire to have a fantastic range of habitats and species within a relatively small geographical area. It is a county of marked contrasts, with the chalk habitats of the North Chilterns, the heathland and acid grassland of the Greensand Ridge and the woodlands and rolling countryside of the Ouse Valley. The fact that species such as adders, dormice and otters are all now expanding their ranges to varying degrees is something we should be proud of and testament to the work of the organisations and individuals involved, but we should not be complacent. There is much to be done, and these Biodiversity Action Plans set out the scale of that challenge very clearly. Only by continuing to work in partnership, putting the case for nature ever more strongly and clearly, can we hope to build on recent progress, bring the natural environment to the fore of the thinking of key decision-makers and reverse long-term declines.

*Jon Balaam, Chair of Bedfordshire Local Nature Partnership*



## Biodiversity Action Plans Overview

The **UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP)** was created in response to a commitment at the 1992 Convention on Biological Diversity. It summarises the status of the most threatened habitats and species in the UK and then sets out a series of actions to halt their decline and then reverse it. There are National Action Plans for 1150 species and 65 habitats. The last meeting of the Convention on Biological Diversity took place in Nagoya, Japan during October 2010. During the convention the BAP was replaced by the **Aichi Targets**, which were signed by 192 governments. These 20 Targets aim to halt the loss in biodiversity worldwide by 2020. Within the targets there are a range of challenges, from protecting our best habitats and rarest species, to restoring the services our natural environment provides and tackling climate change. The *UK Post-2010 Biodiversity Framework* (July 2012) describes how the Aichi Targets will be implemented across the UK and is underpinned by a Biodiversity Strategy for each Country. In England this is *Biodiversity 2020: A strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services* (August 2011).

Although the Aichi Targets are the focus from the most recent Convention on Biological Diversity, the BAP is still a very valuable reference nationally and locally. It has been used to draw up statutory lists in some of the more recent Acts of Parliament which aim to protect and enhance biodiversity. In 2006 the **Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (NERC)** came into effect. In Section 41 of the Act there is a list of habitats and species which are “*of principal importance for the purpose of conserving biodiversity*”. This lists all the BAP habitats and species which are still regarded as priorities for conservation under the *UK Post-2010 Biodiversity Framework*. The list includes 56 habitats and 943 species. It was included to assist public bodies with the statutory duty placed on them by Section 40 of the Act. This is often referred to as the ‘Biodiversity Duty’ and states that public bodies have to:

*“In exercising their functions, have regard, so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity.”*

The aim of the Act is to embed nature conservation within all the relevant policies and decisions that public bodies make. Public bodies include a range of organisations from the Borough and Ward Councils to bodies carrying out functions of a public character under a statutory power. There is a Guidance Document that accompanies this Act to assist local authorities to implement the Biodiversity Duty.

Priority species and habitats are also recognised in the **National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)**, which came into effect in early 2012. The NPPF replaced most of the planning guidance which was previously available. It promotes the preservation, restoration and re-creation of priority habitats and ecological networks as well as the protection and recovery of priority species (paragraph 117).

Although the BAP is no longer promoted nationally it is written into legislation and policies which are being currently used. To support this locally, the BAP is still in use to inform and guide many projects and is kept relevant.



## Floodplain Grazing Marsh

**National lead organisation(s):**  
Natural England

**County lead organisation(s):**  
Environment Agency

Grazing marsh is defined as periodically inundated pasture or meadow with ditches. Sites may contain ponds and seasonally water-filled hollows with swamp communities but not extensive areas of tall fen communities. The majority of sites are grazed although some are cut for hay or silage.

### Current status

#### **National status**

The exact extent of this habitat type in the UK is not known but significant losses are thought to have occurred in the last 60 years. It is estimated that there is around 300,000 ha left in the UK. Only a small percentage of this is semi-natural supporting a high diversity of native plant species. Marshes are very important for breeding waders such as snipe, lapwing and curlew. Remaining sites are very sensitive to nutrient levels.

#### **Local status**

The largest areas of floodplain grazing marsh are located in the Ouse, Ivel, Ouzel and Flit valleys, with more fragmented areas alongside some of the smaller watercourses such as the River Lea. Whilst some areas, particularly in the Ivel and Flit valleys are of County Wildlife Site status most are now improved grasslands. Fenlake Meadow Local Nature Reserve in Bedford is a good example of floodplain grazing grassland which also contains some areas of marshy grassland.

### Current factors affecting floodplain grazing marsh

- Embanked sections of river in the Ivel valley and deposits of dredging reducing flooding opportunities.
- Drainage of and creation of ponds in marshy areas.
- Inappropriate management and/or lack of management of marshy sites, in part due to difficulty finding appropriate grazing stock.
- Development pressures in general and in particular on the floodplain.
- Lack of maintenance of structures (e.g. mills, weirs and bridges) on rivers and streams.



## Current action

### **Management, research and guidance**

Bedfordshire's local countryside projects and the Wildlife Trust are actively creating and restoring areas of floodplain grazing marsh; these include Sandy Smith Nature Reserve, Marston Vale Forest Centre and Flitwick Moor.

The Wildlife Trust, Greensand Trust and Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity offer advice on a wide range of wetland and grassland management issues and are working to facilitate greater understanding and dialogue among a wide range of wetland users. Natural England's website "Coastal Habitat Restoration: towards good practice" provides extensive information on managing coastal and floodplain grazing marsh.

### **Achievements since publication of first Action Plan**

Since the publication of the 2008 Floodplain Grazing Marsh BAP, significant progress has been made on managing and restoring areas of floodplain grazing marsh at various sites in the county. Many existing areas of this habitat have received positive management by being entered into Higher Level Stewardship Schemes including the Ouzel Meadows & Corbets Hill Farm in the Ouzel Valley on the northern edge of Leighton-Linslade, Sandy Smith Nature Reserve in the Flit Valley, The Riddy on the Ivel in Sandy, Arlesey Old Moat & Glebe Meadows also on the Ivel and sites along the River Lea in Luton. Overall, 232 ha of floodplain grazing marsh have been brought into management under environmental stewardship, of which, 40 ha have been restored.

On Flitwick Moor and upstream along the River Flit and Eversholt Brook the Wildlife Trust, and a partnership of others, have been successfully tackling the non-native invasive species Himalayan balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*) which was threatening the areas wetlands, including grazing marshes. There has also been significant improvement to the grazing infrastructure at Flitwick Moor which has brought an additional 16 ha into The Wildlife Trust's management. In Bedford adjacent to the Ouse £88,000 of drainage infrastructure has been added to Fenlake Meadows using a SITA grant to Bedford Borough Council which allows the water regime on the site to be managed and it has also been entered into Higher Level Stewardship.

Seven County Wildlife Sites (CWS) containing floodplain grazing marsh along the River Ouse have been surveyed and monitored and management advice given and/or assistance provided with entry into Environmental Stewardship by the Wildlife Trust. These are Austin Cannons Meadow CWS, Begwary Brook Pits CWS, Bromham Park CWS, Fenlake Meadows CWS, Mill Rise, Turvey CWS, Stevington Meadow CWS and Willington Moat CWS. In the Ouzel Valley, three owners have received laminated factsheets to assist them with the management of their sites.

A GIS map for floodplain grazing marsh has been produced by the Bedfordshire and Luton Biodiversity Recording and Monitoring Centre to more accurately show the extent and distribution of this habitat within the county. It is shown in Figure 1.



## Action plan objectives and targets

### Objectives

Maintain and where possible expand the range of floodplain grazing marsh in Bedfordshire and Luton

Maintain and where possible improve the condition of floodplain grazing marsh in Bedfordshire and Luton

### Targets

- A. Maintain the 2007 extent (76.6 ha) of floodplain grazing marsh in Bedfordshire and Luton.
- B. By 2020 achieve favourable condition of 66 ha of floodplain grazing marsh in Bedfordshire by implementing positive management regimes.
- C. Restore by 2020 70 ha of floodplain grazing marsh in Bedfordshire and Luton.
- D. Create by 2020 20 ha of floodplain grazing marsh in Bedfordshire and Luton.

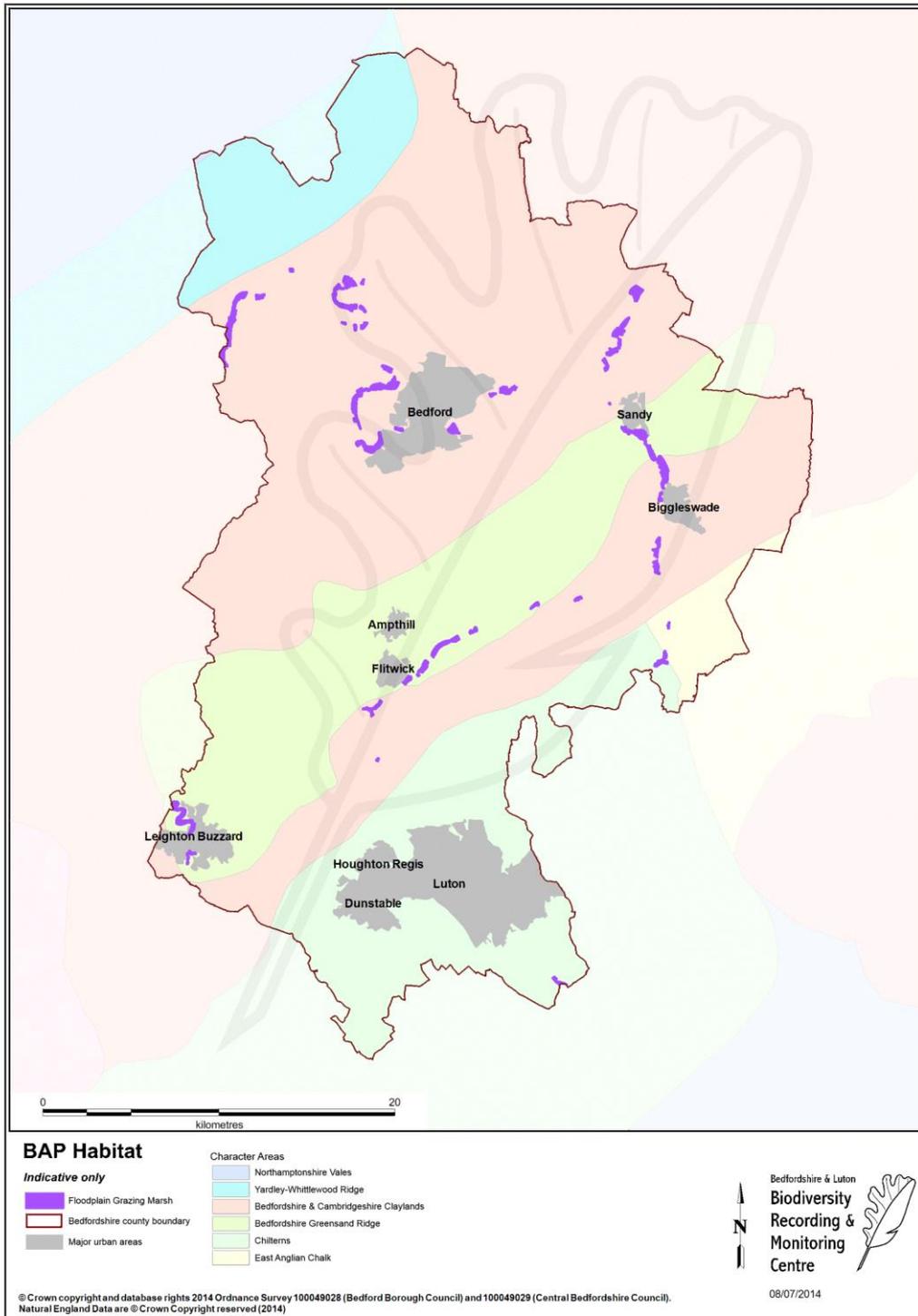


Figure 1: Distribution of floodplain grazing marsh in Bedfordshire

## Proposed action

### Partners

Anglian Water Services  
Bedford Borough Council  
Bedford Group of Internal Drainage Boards  
Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity  
Bedfordshire & Luton Biodiversity Recording and Monitoring Centre  
Central Bedfordshire Council

Environment Agency  
Forest of Marston Vale  
Natural England  
The Greensand Trust  
Wildlife Trust

### Action

### Policy and legislation

No local action identified

### Site safeguard and management

1. Create by 2030 12 ha of floodplain grazing marsh at Biddenham Loop.
2. Ensure that the Bromham Water Meadow management plan is implemented when development begins (11.5 ha).
3. Liaise and seek to work closely with landowners and site managers to continue improving floodplain grazing marsh at Biggleswade Common. Attempt to include floodbank breaching to facilitate more frequent flooding of the site (54 ha).
4. Complete the revision of the management plan for Henlow Common and Langford Meadows LNR (10 ha). Include existing management actions: grazing, hard rush cutting and raking and bramble control.
5. Agree and implement a restoration and management plan for Hollington Basin
6. Produce where necessary and implement management plans for Bromham Park Marshy Grassland (2.1 ha) and Lepards/South Mills Pits (0.5 ha).
7. Investigate and recommend by 2020 measures to restore East Hyde Riverside (2.6 ha), Priestley Farm (6 ha), Westoning Moor (2 ha) and Shefford Hardwick Farm (1.3 ha).
8. By 2020 implement restoration recommendations for East Hyde Riverside, Priestley Farm, Westoning Moor and Shefford Hardwick Farm.

### **Advisory**

No local action identified

### **Future research and monitoring**

9. Establish and implement a rolling monitoring programme to assess the condition of five County Wildlife Sites under 10 ha each year, using the lowland grassland assessment method, such that all sites are monitored every 5 years.
10. Establish and implement a rolling monitoring programme to assess the condition of five non-County Wildlife Sites under 10 ha each year, using the lowland grassland assessment method, such that all sites are monitored every 5 years.
11. Monitor the condition of the 5 sites over 10 ha (Biggleswade Common, Bromham Water Meadows, Fenlake Meadows, Hollington Basin, Church Meadows Leighton Buzzard) every 5 years.

### **Communication and publicity**

12. Continue to produce individual factsheets/letters for landowners of floodplain grazing marsh to highlight the presence and importance of grazing marsh where appropriate.



## Monitoring the Action Plan

The Floodplain Grazing Marsh action plan will be reviewed every 5 years.

## Complementary plans

A national action plan exists for coastal and floodplain grazing marsh.

Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire have also written action plans for floodplain grazing marsh.

This action plan links to other Bedfordshire and Luton habitat action plans, in particular those for reedbed, rivers and lowland meadow.

## Acknowledgements

This BAP has been updated by The Greensand Trust and Wildlife Trust. The Bedfordshire Waterways and Wetlands Working Group has compiled the original action plan. For more information please contact the Local Nature Partnership Coordinator. Members of the working group include Environment Agency, Central Bedfordshire Council, Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity, The Greensand Trust, Bedford Group of Internal Drainage Boards, Natural England and the Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire.

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