

Section 6.

Engaging Local Stakeholders

The Great Fen Vision can only be realised by working with a wide variety of local people and stakeholders. The Project Partners have engaged with local people since the start of the project and a process of stakeholder engagement has informed the development of the illustrative masterplan. This section summarises the stakeholder workshops and other events that have taken place to date.

General Stakeholder Consultation since 2001

- Since the beginning of the project in 2001 there has been ongoing consultation with stakeholders. Early consultation involved establishing relationships with landowners and other key stakeholders such as National Farmers Union.
- In 2005 an independently-facilitated consultation event was held at Holmewood Hall, attended by approximately 36 people representing local communities, landowners and other interests. The consultees agreed there were broad support for the project and recognised a range of benefits that could be gained from the project, including local access, tourism and water management. A number of issues were also raised, such as managing the tension between nature conservation and public access and the locality of a visitor centre. The results of the consultation were disseminated (and are still available) and were used by the partners to guide their work.
- A consultation project was undertaken in autumn 2007 to find out more about the kinds of access, activities and facilities people would like to see at the Great Fen, as part of development work for the Heritage Lottery Fund project. Approximately 220 people took part in the public survey, including existing users and non-users. The partners learned that two thirds of

visitors wanted to come to the project area by car and one third by bike. Access by public transport, foot and waterway were less popular. The survey respondents indicated the sorts of access improvements they would like to see, including the provision of sign posts, refreshments, information panels and toilets. Local community groups and organisations were consulted through stakeholder questionnaires and interviews. This included discussions of access and activities with representatives of local schools, youth groups, disability organisations, Black and Minority Ethnic groups, and low income groups.

- On 6th June 2008 representatives of the project partners held a public meeting with parish, district and county councillors, chaired by Shailesh Vara MP. The meeting enabled concerns to be raised and factual inaccuracies to be addressed. A set of recommendations was made to the Great Fen Project steering group, which included issues such as communication and land assembly. These were acknowledged and responded to by the project partners.



■ The Great Fen Project team, together with LDA Design, conducted consultation sessions between 3 April and 11 May 2009 to produce the first draft of this masterplan. The following groups were consulted at this first stage:

- Conservation and wildlife specialists
- Access and activity specialists
- Huntingdonshire District Councillors and Cambridgeshire County Councillors
- Tourism, heritage and business specialists
- Local Parish Councillors
- Local residents close to Woodwalton Fen National Nature Reserve
- Some local householders in the project area
- Farmers in the project area, and other key individuals

Extra text to be added once the Public consultation is completed in September/October 2009.

There was broad support for the location and type of wildlife habitats proposed, the use of the land for flood protection, the zonation of the project area and the location of the visitor centre. Concerns were raised about the lack of access to the visitor centre from the waterway, conflicts between public access and nature conservation and conflicts between different types of access. Many people agreed that the project should link to local settlements and link with existing businesses and initiatives catering for tourists.