

Funding the future of Huntingdonshire's Park's and Open Spaces

Our commercial sustainability plan.

Presented By: **Robbie Bratchell**

APSE Conference, 12 November 2026









Hinchingbrooke Country Park New Visitor Centre

Alongside the commercial sustainability plan, we are also investing into improved and modernised visitor attractions, including a new visitor centre and café, additional car parking and path improvements.

Whilst this work is being undertaken it is important to keep the park open.

This involved provision of a temporary café (The Nest Box) and ancillary facilities.

A new visitor centre and café shaped by visitors.

Visitors highlighted good value, quality food and comfortable seating. Their feedback is helping shape the new café. This was informed by an online survey with direct feedback from residents.

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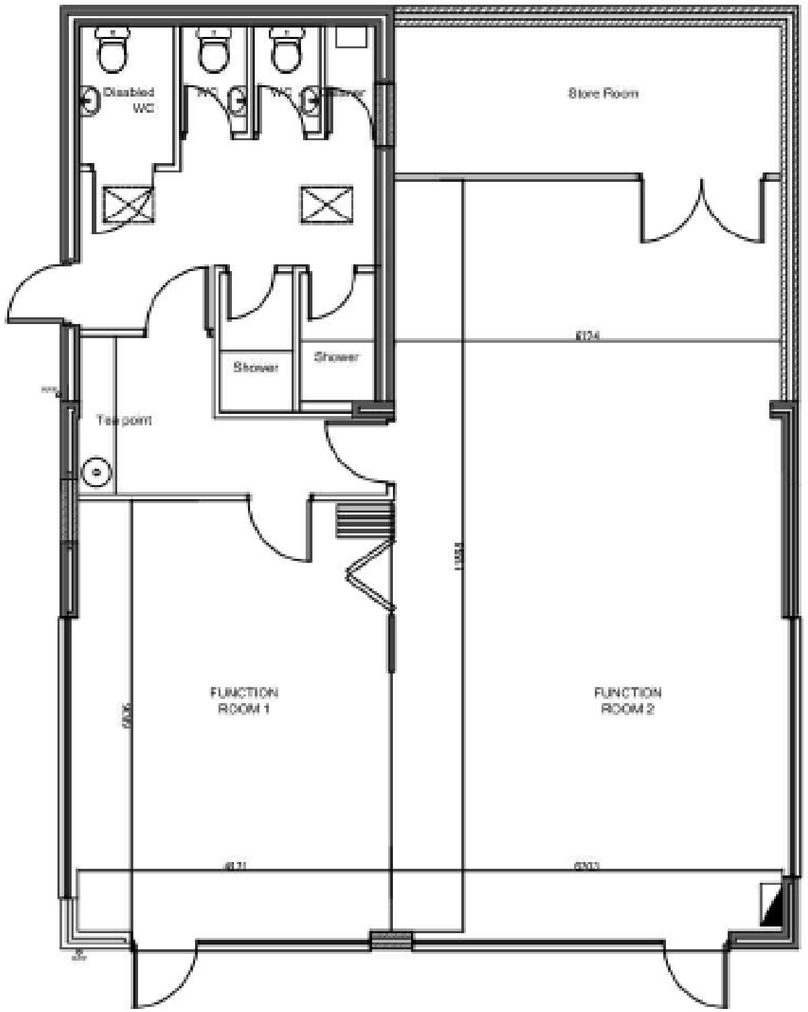
Hinchingbrooke Country Park Existing Café Upgrade



- £300,000 investment to convert the existing café into a flexible commercial and community venue
- Creation of two adjoining function rooms, which can operate separately or combine into one larger space
- Shared tea and coffee point, toilet facilities and accessible WC
- Dedicated storage, cleaning and building-services areas
- Flexible layout suitable for:
  - Meetings and training
  - Indoor events and functions
  - Educational and youth activities
  - Community and partner organisation use
- Will create additional space to generate income alongside the new visitor centre

Why Do We Need a Plan?

£1.1m

Service deficit when we commissioned the review.

£700,000

Additional annual income we aim to generate by the end of 2028/29.

We wanted to move towards break-even while keeping our parks accessible and protecting wildlife.





T3 Approach

- T3 were selected to help define a new commercial vision for HDC parks.

- The approach looked at:

1. Review & propose initial ideas
2. Focus on traditional commercial gain products
3. Focus on Quick Wins
4. Environmental Considerations
5. Desirability in terms of local demographic
6. Intellectual Property branded ideas
7. Ideas into 4 Categories









To create a fully costed investment plan with a creative overview of ‘commercial opportunities’ - for a total of 5 sites:

Hinchingbrooke Country Park, Huntingdon
Paxton Pits Nature Reserve, Little Paxton
Riverside Park, St Neots
Riverside Park, Huntingdon
Priory Park, St Neots

What T3’s review gave us

T3’s 2025 report looked at five parks and the people likely to visit each one. Ideas ranged from seasonal food stalls to an inflatable aqua park.

The cost and income estimates gave us a shortlist to test with our own teams.



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How we chose our first projects

Cabinet approved the plan in March 2026. We considered what each site could accommodate, what it would cost to run and where wildlife needed protection.

First-phase proposals:

St Neots Riverside Park
Seasonal watersports and refreshments.

Hinchingbrooke Country Park
Play area beside the new visitor centre.

Hinchingbrooke Country Park
Seasonal watersports, Aqua Park and refreshments.

All Parks
Activating our Parks with a variety of events.

Paxton Pits
Potential Bike Hire.

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Hinchingbrooke Aqua Challenge

Residents submitted 132 entries in the competition to name it.

- The Aqua Challenge is a flagship investment that generates new income, enhances visitor experiences, and supports the long-term sustainability of Parks and Open Spaces.
- Leveraging One Leisure's proven track record in delivering high-quality leisure experiences, the Aqua Challenge brought an exciting new attraction to Hinchingbrooke Country Park, returning Summer 2027.
- The Aqua park opened on 18th July 2026 and ran throughout the Summer until 6th September 2026 and will reopen next summer season.

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The First Summer

3,564

visits from 18 July to 6 September 2026.

The Royal Life Saving Society awarded the park silver accreditation after its audit.

“We had a great time, and the staff were super helpful”

Summer Bat Evenings

204 people joined us over eight evenings.

Friends of Hinchingbrooke Country Park funded the bat detectors. Visitors rated the evenings 4.77 out of 5.

The Bat Evenings are part of our new and developing educations programme.

£2,710 Total income.

£1,864 Reported surplus.



Where we go from here

Our first summer gives us a starting point. We still need to see what these activities contribute year after year.

Nick Massey on how habitat banking can fund Revenue Generation and Conservation.





Habitat Banking

At Huntingdonshire District Council

Presented By: **Nick Massey**

https://www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk/





Project Introduction and Overview

What is Habitat Banking?

What does HDC’s Habitat Banking Project Involve?

Habitat Banking Project

- Establish habitat banks across seven suitable Council-owned or leased sites
- Generate Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) units
- Deliver the programme through a two-phase approach
- Create, enhance and manage habitats to achieve measurable ecological improvements
- Develop a scalable delivery model for future expansion
- Support external landowners and developers with their BNG requirements
- Deliver long-term environmental, social and financial benefits across Huntingdonshire

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Project Foundations

The Bio4All Project

The Biodiversity for All (Bio4All) project provided the foundation for Habitat Banking at HDC, by assessing feasibility across Council owned land, identifying and prioritising suitable sites for a two-phased approach, and developing the initial financial model. The project also assisted the Phase 1 pilot, by utilising £49,416 of underspend, to fund ecological surveys, Habitat Management and Monitoring Plans (HMMPs), and initial habitat creation works. This enabled testing and refinement of the habitat banking approach before wider implementation.

The Two-Phases

The Habitat Banking Project will be delivered in two phases. Phase 1 focuses on piloting the habitat banking model across Barford Road Pocket Park, Huntingdon Riverside and St Neots Riverside. The initial plans expected Phase 1 site registration to take place in Autumn 2026, with the first habitat unit sales anticipated from March 2027. Phase 2 will expand the programme to Spring Common, Stukeley Meadows, Berman Park and Priory Park, building on the lessons learnt during Phase 1. Phase 2 will increase BNG unit generation, creating a larger and more established habitat banking portfolio.

The Financial Projection

Initial officer modelling indicated that the Habitat Banking Project could generate up to **£2.77 million** in net income over the 30-year management period, comprising of approximately **£1.9 million** from Phase 1 and **£817,000** from Phase 2. After accounting for management, staffing and maintenance costs, the programme is forecast to deliver a positive financial contribution of around **£355,000**. NOTE: Actual returns will depend on market demand for BNG units and the biodiversity performance of the habitat bank sites.

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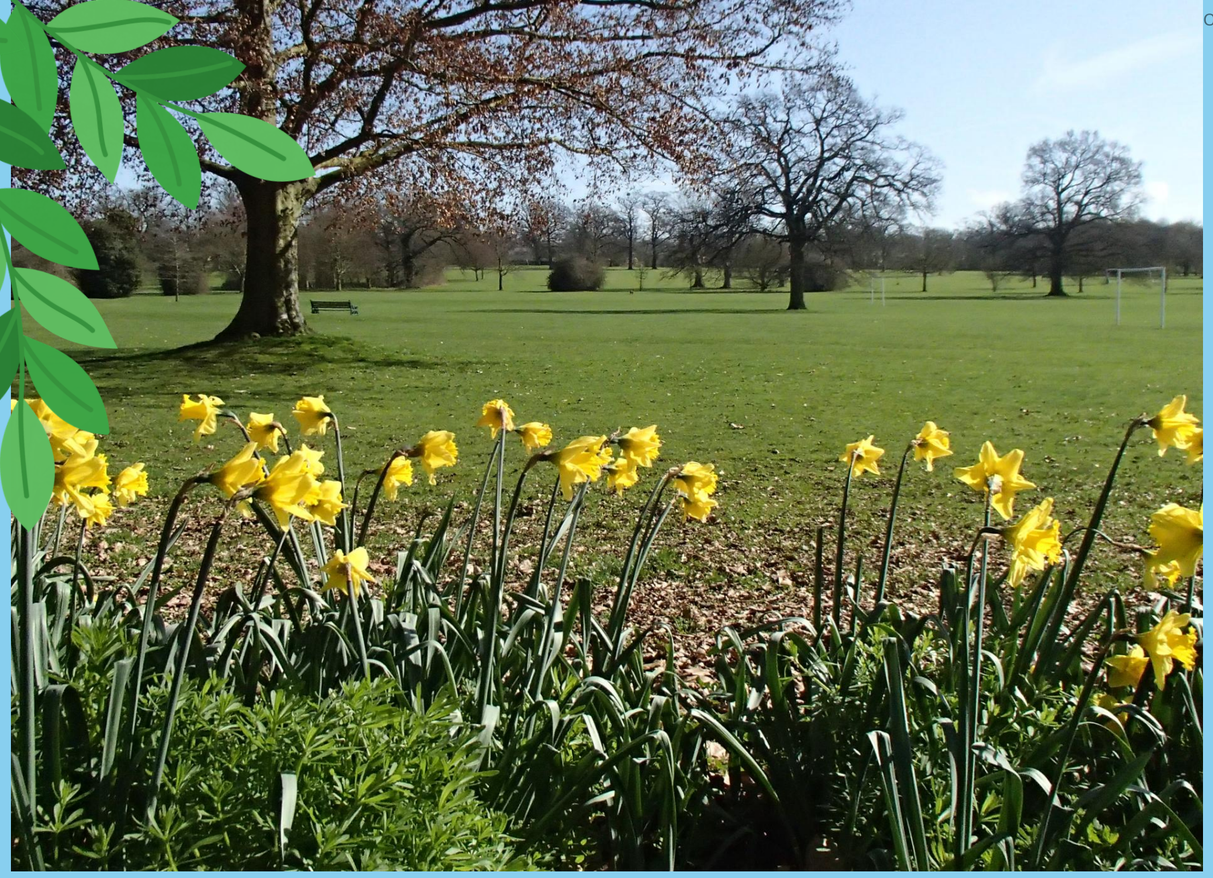


Key Objectives

Conservation and Biodiversity

- Enhance biodiversity across Council land.
- Create and manage high-quality habitats for long-term nature recovery.
- Support biodiversity, nature recovery, climate resilience and environmental enhancement while embedding strong biosecurity standards.

Financial Sustainability

- Generate revenue through the sale of BNG units.
- Create sustainable funding for parks and open spaces.
- Reinvest surplus into parks and wider Council priorities.

Community Engagement

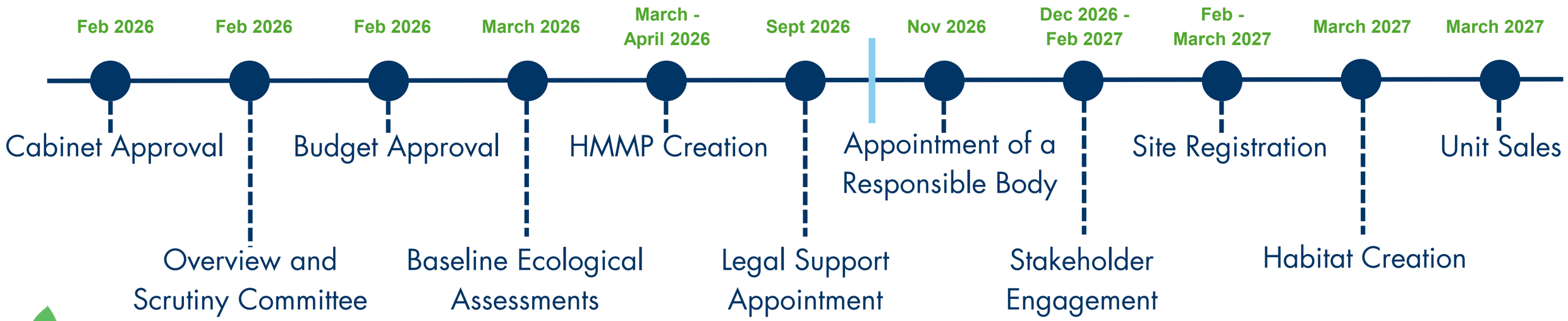
- Improve the quality and accessibility of natural spaces.
- Support internal and external apprenticeships, training and volunteering opportunities and build in-house ecological and land-management capability.
- Support community wellbeing through access to nature.

Statutory Requirements

- Help developers meet statutory BNG requirements (Environment Act 2021), while keeping nature-based investments within the district.
- Support the Council's Corporate Plan, Climate Strategy and Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

Phase 1 Project Update

And End of (Financial) Year Goals



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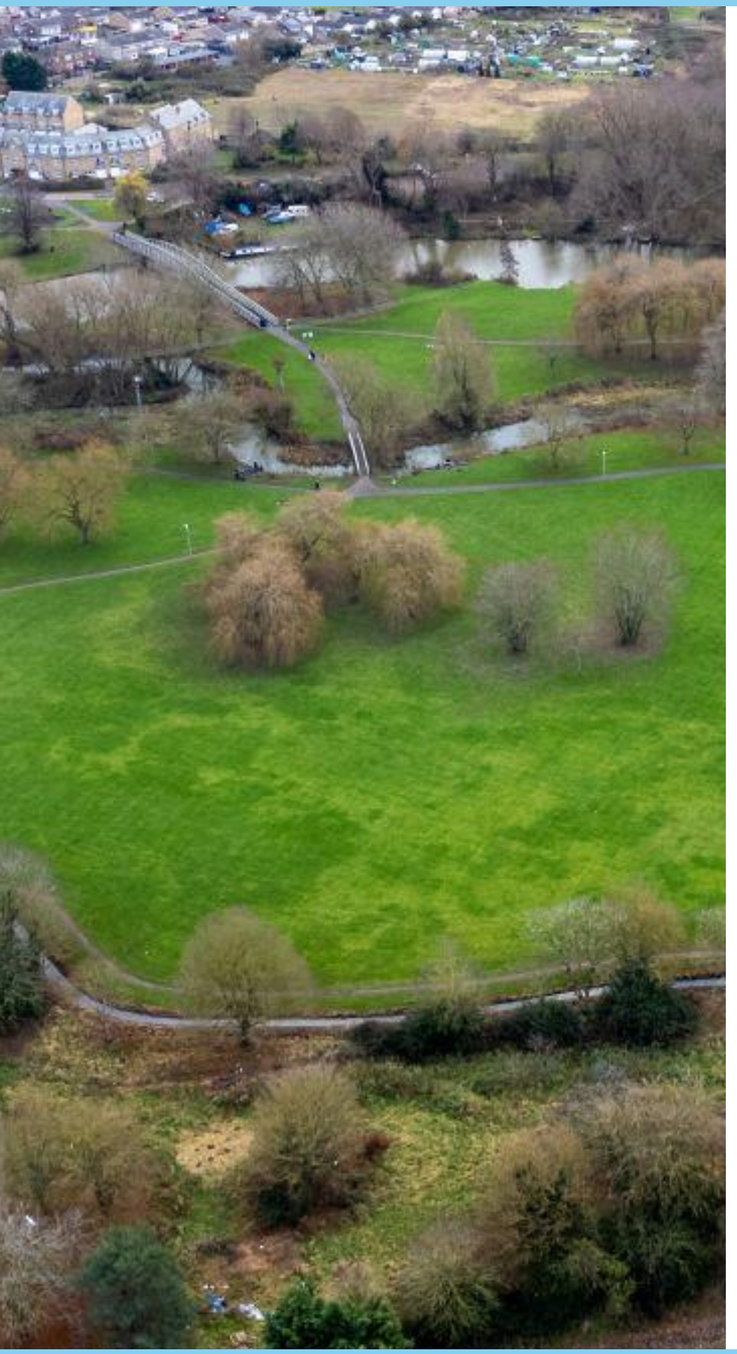

Key Challenges and Learning

Determining the appropriate **procurement** route for the appointment of a Responsible Body proved challenging, due to quotation value and novelty. Various processes were actioned at differing stages, causing additional work and delays. We have now established a clear understanding of procurement surrounding Habitat Banking, which can be utilised in other phases/projects.

Habitat banking is a relatively new and evolving area, requiring specialist **legal support** that fell outside of the Council's in-house expertise. Significant legal counsel has been required to establish the appropriate governance and delivery models. We now have established approaches and are working on legal templates to support future phases/related projects.

With projected income/expenditure depending upon 30 years of market demand and biodiversity performance, developing robust **financial forecasts** has been challenging. We have therefore worked to strengthen HDC's understanding of BNG markets, pricing considerations and long-term forecasting. The financial modelling tools and methodologies developed can now be applied to future opportunities.

The **public nature** of the proposed habitat bank sites has required careful consideration of existing access rights, land use requirements and stakeholder interests. Learning to create detailed boundary reviews and red-line plans have been necessary to ensure habitats can be secured.

Learning to develop a more integrated delivery model, that aligns the project with climate resilience, flood mitigation and green infrastructure objectives, has helped to **secure additional external funding** and maximise the project's benefits.

Stakeholders holding differing priorities and perspectives regarding the use of individual sites has created challenges involving balancing local interests with strategic objectives. We have learnt that even attempting to involve key stakeholders within the project helps reduce future backlash.

Early Successes

Developing Innovative Partnerships

A collaborative project with Anglian Water, to develop a Sustainable Urban Drainage System (SuDS) project that delivers both flood mitigation and biodiversity benefits. We have been able to work this into our HMMP, and generate additional BNG units, while a portion of the project has been funded by Anglian Water.

Building Market Demand

Multiple commercial opportunities are currently being explored, with potential sales expected shortly after site registration. Should the opportunities progress as anticipated, the programme could achieve its financial income targets for the first year, within the initial few months of operation.

Strategic Impact

Positioned HDC as an early adopter of Habitat Banking within local government. Establishing a platform for delivering long-term biodiversity gains while generating sustainable income for the Council. Has resulted in staff developing valuable knowledge that will help support future habitat banking and biodiversity initiatives.





Thank you for listening!

Any Questions?

HDC Homepage Huntingdonshire District Council Huntingdonshire District Council