Farming in Protected Landscapes programme
Funding case study

Major Wetlands projects

Campden House Estate (CHE) and Cornwell Estate (CE)

Grant awarded: £185,890 (CHE) and £146,381 (CE)
Total project value: £225,305 (CHE) £271,807 (CE)
Location: Chipping Campden and Chipping Norton

Cotswolds National Landscape

Funding themes met: Climate Nature People Place

Introduction

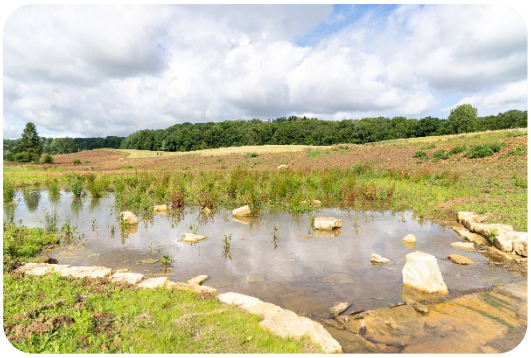
Wetlands hold water in the landscape, presenting opportunities for water storage, flood alleviation and nature recovery. Wetlands make up only 3 per cent of the UK but are home to around 10 per cent of all our species. Historically, we've lost 90 per cent of our wetlands in the last 100 years, so vitally important for the species that remain*. And rivers and lakes are not considered to be close to their natural state in any part of the UK**. All wetlands, lakes and rivers need space to move in the landscape.

Campden House Estate – Creation of wetlands

Campden House Estate is situated near the town of Chipping Campden. The Estate farm began its transition to regenerative agriculture practices in 2023, adopting measures to boost biodiversity, mitigate flood risk and sequester carbon. As part of their transition, they created 65 hectares of wood pasture, species-rich grassland and re-created orchards along the valley between Campden Wood and the head of the valley. Estate owner, Tom Smith's goal was to combine woodland, pasture and arable farming with wetland creation for a landscape-level boost to biodiversity.

The River Cam flows through the middle of the farm, and 1.25 km of the watercourse is encompassed by the wetland project. The water course drops rapidly through part of the Estate that eventually runs towards the town of Chipping Campden. Before the project, it scoured a narrow channel, carrying silt and nutrients from agricultural run-off and soil from the surrounding areas.

*According to the Environment Agency, 2019.
**UK Parliament Post – POSTnote 709, 17 January 2024.



The works at Campden House Estate, that hold water in the landscape.

The focus of the wetland project was on the former bathing lake, which had been out of use since the 1930s. Through removal of sediment/silt and creation of attenuation ponds, the project aimed to alleviate flooding and aid nature recovery in the valley and across the landscape.

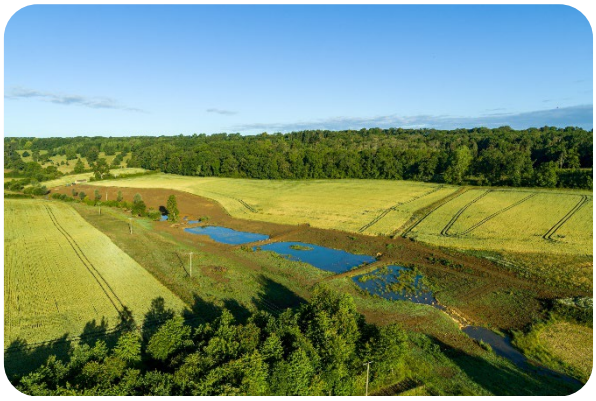
Reeds, shrubs, scrapes and trees along the length act as bio-siltation filters. A system of leaky dams, sluices and weirs reduce the flow velocity and soil erosion, as well as providing protection for the rare White Clawed Crayfish that have been found further upstream.

Major Wetlands (continued)

Grassland margins have been created to act as a buffer to the arable fields in the lower section of the valley, reducing the risk of pollution and mopping up overflow in periods of heavy rainfall.

Drone footage in October 2024 demonstrated that after high rainfall events, the wetland can hold a significant amount of water back from the town while providing extremely important habitats for biodiversity.

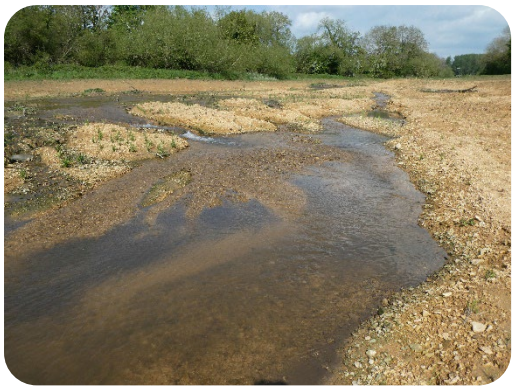
Tom Smith said: "We have already seen new species move into the wetland area. Ten years from now I would love to see a hive of insects, bird activity and wildlife teeming together in the middle of this valley and throughout the farm".



The project in July 2024 that attracted kingfisher, dragonflies, ducks, greenshanks and other wading birds.

Cornwell Estate – River restoration and wetland creation

The Cornwell Estate Wetland Restoration project exemplifies the power of targeted environmental intervention in a farming landscape. Supported by a FiPL grant of £146,381, this project revitalised 12 hectares of land along the Chipping Norton Brook, transforming it into a dynamic wetland system that addresses urgent ecological and climate challenges.



The re-wriggled brook in the landscape

Drone-view of the brook, with water diverted across land, away from the deep-cut channel.

This project reversed the effects of decades of habitat degradation by rewiggling the brook, reconnecting it with its floodplain and establishing aquatic plants and wetland habitats. Before the interventions, the brook had very poor water quality with high levels of nutrients coming from Chipping Norton sewage treatment works and nutrients from soil run-off.

During storm overflows, the brook has received raw sewerage effluent from the water treatment works, upstream. The Evenlode Catchment Partnership will continue to monitor the water quality.

The restored wetland now holds the capacity of ten Olympic-sized swimming pools, mitigating flood risks downstream while replenishing water supplies during droughts. These efforts slow the brook's flow, allowing sediment and excess nutrients to settle; improving water quality as it flows back into the brook. Partners in the project included Wild Oxfordshire, the Environment Agency, Thames Water together with private funding from the land owner.

Final word

While the project faced adverse weather in October 2023, contractors persevered through challenging conditions to complete the work on time.

Ann Berkeley (Project Lead and FiPL applicant) from Wild Oxfordshire describes the results:

"It's incredible to see the brook transformed. What was once a constricted channel now flows freely across the landscape. You can hear the noise of it, bubbling and gurgling and moving like a proper river should."

Please note: *Figures are based on final approved claims and estimated total spend on the projects.*