CAMBRIDGESHIRE & PETERBOROUGH COMBINED AUTHORITY

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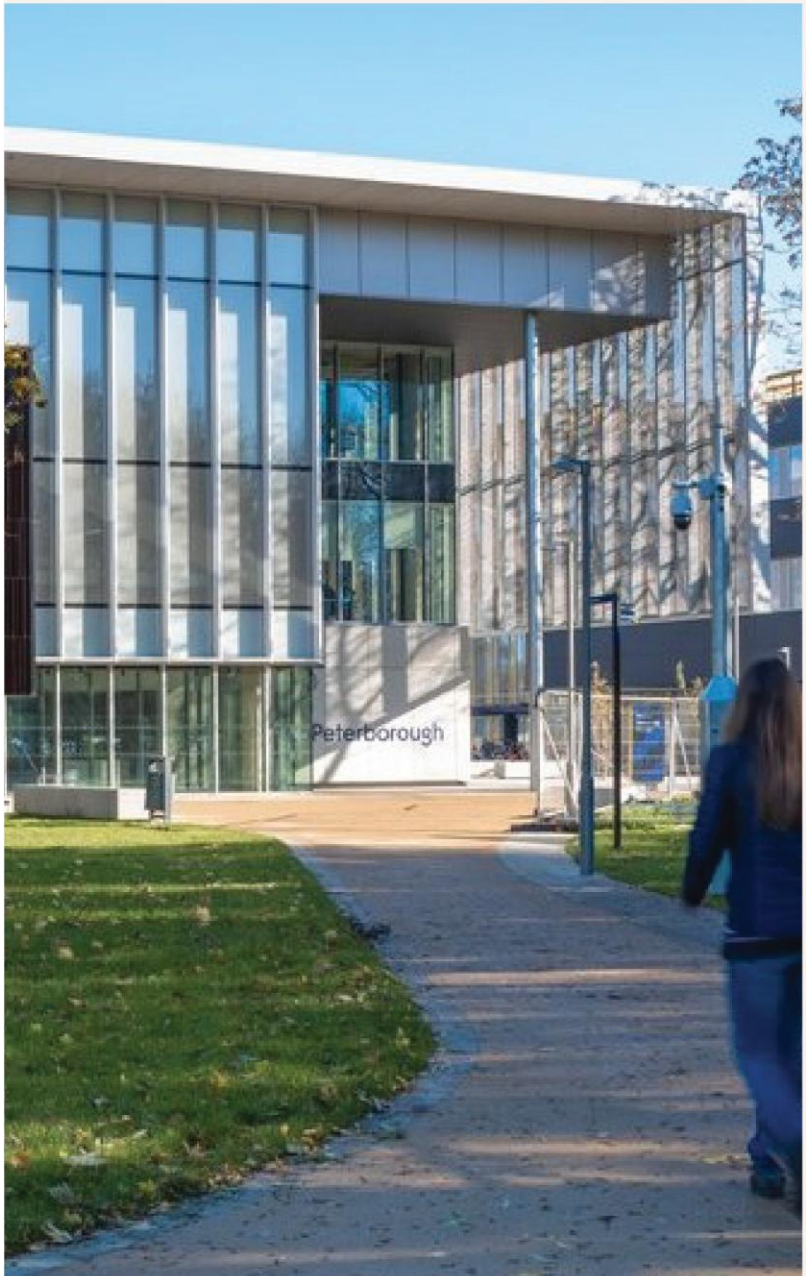
Wildlife & Nature

State of the Region 2025



State of the Region Overview

The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough State of the Region 2025 provides a comprehensive, evidence-based assessment of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough's current economic, social, and environmental landscape. By analysing the most up-to-date data and insights from across the region, this report serves as a resource and evidence base for stakeholders, policymakers, and community leaders to understand the area's opportunities, priorities, and pathways for growth and prosperity.

The comprehensive analysis was structured with more than 140 distinct indicators across eight key themes. The resulting holistic approach reflects stakeholders' commitment to capturing a detailed and nuanced picture of the C&P region's current status and future prospects. The themes and data were selected and refined, through a process of continuous engagement with core stakeholders, ensuring they resonate with local priorities that leveraged relevant data sources.

An interactive publicly accessible data portal containing all the raw data, with interactive charts and maps can be opened from this website link State of The Region Data Portal.

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Wildlife & Nature

This chapter explores wildlife and nature through the sub-themes of green and blue spaces access and biodiversity. It provides insights on the region's performance at preserving and enhancing natural assets.

Despite the C&P region's open spaces, some households in particular areas do not have access to green spaces. Access to green space data[1] provides evidence that the proportion of households with access to green space differed depending upon location and whether the household was situated in an urban or rural area. Cambridge and Peterborough were above the England rate of 87% of households with access to green space despite C&P overall having a slightly lower rate to England, at 83.1%. Furthermore, C&P's rural areas scored lower for households with access to green space (71.6%) than urban areas (89.1%). Similarly, the region lags behind in publicly accessible green and blue infrastructure, offering 22 hectares per 1,000 population compared to England's average of 32 hectares[2].

Nature-rich land comprised 8.6% of C&P's total area, primarily consisting of semi-natural grassland and broadleaf woodland[3]. Tree coverage across the region averaged 10% per ward, with an interesting pattern of lower canopy cover in rural areas compared to urban areas[4]. This suggests that low-density buildings and agricultural land uses do not necessarily correlate with increased tree cover without intervention.

The region has seen a positive trend in the number of sites with significant geological or biodiversity conservation value, increasing from 517 in 2008-09 to 560 in 2023-24[5]. While the percentage of these sites under positive conservation management has declined from a peak of 64% in 2013/14 to 48% in 2022/23, it still outperforms the English average of 43%[6]. However, The Local Nature Recovery Strategy suggests that the UK is the most nature depleted countries with C&P being one of the lowest proportions of land designated for nature. Biodiversity in C&P is rich, with 19,500 unique species recorded, including 1,000 invasive species[7]. The distribution of invasive species varied significantly across the region, with Cambridge hosting the highest proportion at 8%, while Fenland had the lowest at 0.2%.

[1] DEFRA, 2025. Access to green space in England. [Link to source]
[2] The Rivers Trust, 2024. Area of accessible green and blue space per 1000 population (England). [Link to source]
[3] Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Parks Partnership, 2022. A Natural Capital Assessment of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. [Link to source]
[4] Forestry Commission, 2024. UK Ward Canopy Cover. [Link to source]
[5] DEFRA, 2025. Single Data List - local sites in positive conservation management. [Link to source]
[6] DEFRA, 2025. Single Data List - local sites in positive conservation management. [Link to source]
[7] National Biodiversity Network, 2024. NBN Atlas. [Link to source]

Summary of key findings

Metric	Section	Findings
Access to Green Space	1.1	• Cambridge and Peterborough were above the England rate of 87% of households with access to green space, with 93.5% of households in both areas having access to green space. • The overall average for C&P was slightly lower than for England, with a percentage rate of 83.1%. • Rural areas scored lower for households with access to green space (71.6%) than urban areas (89.1%) in C&P.
Access to Blue and Green Infrastructure	1.2	• East Cambridgeshire has the highest area of publicly available green (e.g. parks, gardens) and blue (e.g. rivers, lakes, ponds) infrastructure, at 37.8 hectares per 1,000 population. • Cambridge has the lowest average area at only 3.7 hectares per 1,000 population. This can be expected due to the urban nature of Cambridge, however, due to its density, it is often easier for the population to access.
Nature Rich Land	2.1	• Across the C&P region, nature-rich land spans 29,593 hectares, accounting for 8.6% of the region's total land area
Tree Cover	2.2	• The average canopy cover per ward in the C&P region is 10%. • Rural areas have a lower canopy cover compared to urban areas. Low density buildings with high levels of agricultural land use are not associated with higher levels of canopy cover without intervention.
Local Sites	2.3	• The total number of local sites across the C&P region have increased over time, from 517 in 2008-09 to 560 in 2023-24.
Positively Managed Local Sites	2.4	• In the C&P region overall, the percentage of sites in positive conservation management increased to 64% in 2013-14 but subsequently declined to 48% by 2022-23, although the latest figures show a small increase to 49%. This remains higher than the England average, which has fallen to 39% of local sites. • Cambridgeshire had 80% of the total local sites, with the proportion in positive conservation management in Cambridgeshire reaching a peak of just under 60% in 2013-14 and subsequently falling below 42% from 2021-22. • The percentage of sites in positive conservation management has generally been higher in Peterborough over the period, with the latest result for 2023-24 at 79% of all local sites.
Number of Species	2.5	• There were 19,500 unique species across the C&P region of which 1,000 were invasive. • East Cambridgeshire had the highest count of species, suggesting that it is the most ecologically diverse local authority area in C&P. • Cambridge had the highest proportion of species that were invasive at 8%. This could be due to the urban nature of the city, as urbanisation can result in habitat fragmentation.

1 Green & Blue Spaces Access

1.1 Access to Green Space

Access to green space plays a significant role in enhancing quality of life and promoting physical and mental well-being. The Access to Green Space indicator[8] from the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) provides data pertaining to the percentage of households that were within different walking distances, along a network of walkable streets and paths, of different types of green space for small neighbourhoods in England. The data reported herein portrays only the category of *all green space*, which considered all accessible green spaces, two hectares or larger, within a threshold of 1km distance; the broadest definition of green space.

Figure 1-1 displays the access to green spaces for each MSOA in the C&P region. At the Middle Super Output Area (MSOA) level, 49 of all C&P's 98 MSOAs had a percentage of households within 1km distance of all green space below the 87% overall percentage rate for England. Moreover, six of all C&P's MSOAs had a percentage rate below 50%, three of which are located in Huntingdonshire, two in Fenland and one in East Cambridgeshire. Across all of C&P's MSOAs, the range of percentage values were between 25.5% of households to 100% of households with access to green space. DEFRA notes that the results were sensitive to the size and type of green space and/or the distance between household and green space considered to be accessible under each of the seven scenarios modelled. *All green space*, reported here, as scenario 1, had the broadest definition of green space but does not count access to public rights of way in non-urban areas as a green space experience. It should be noted that the data is classed as an official statistic in development[9].

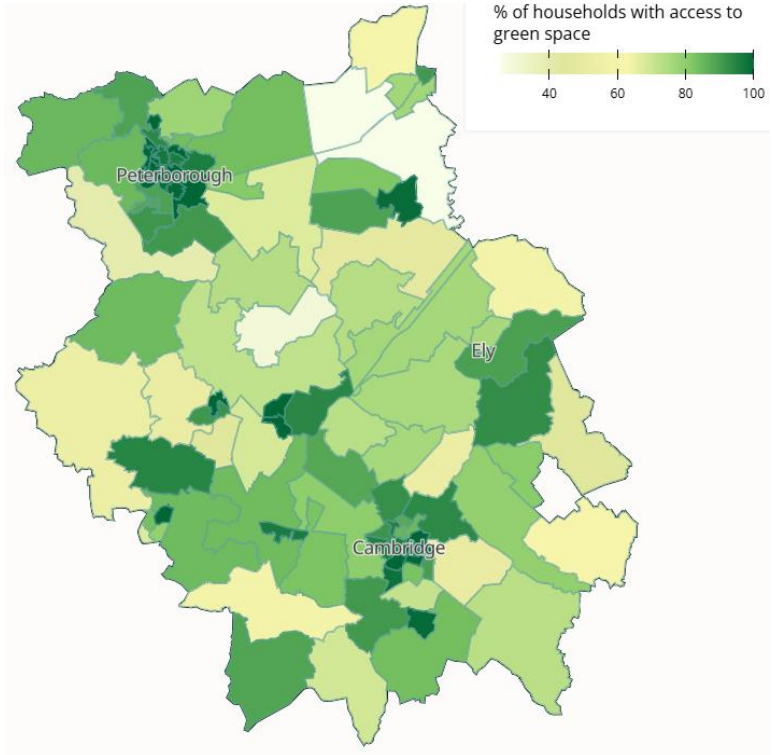


Figure 1-1: Households with Access to Green Space (%) by MSOA in 2025

[8] DEFRA, 2025. Access to green space in England. [Link to source]

[9] The data is currently being tested and refined to meet the standards of trustworthiness, quality, and value (Code of Practice for Statistics).

Figure 1-2 charts the percentage of all households with access to green space for each C&P local authority area and for comparison, England overall. The chart illustrates that both Cambridge and Peterborough had above the England rate of 87%, both scoring 93.5% of households. However, C&P was slightly lower than the rate for England, with a percentage of 83.1%. Fenland had the lowest percentage of all households with 72.6%, with East Cambridgeshire the area with the second lowest rate at 74.7%.

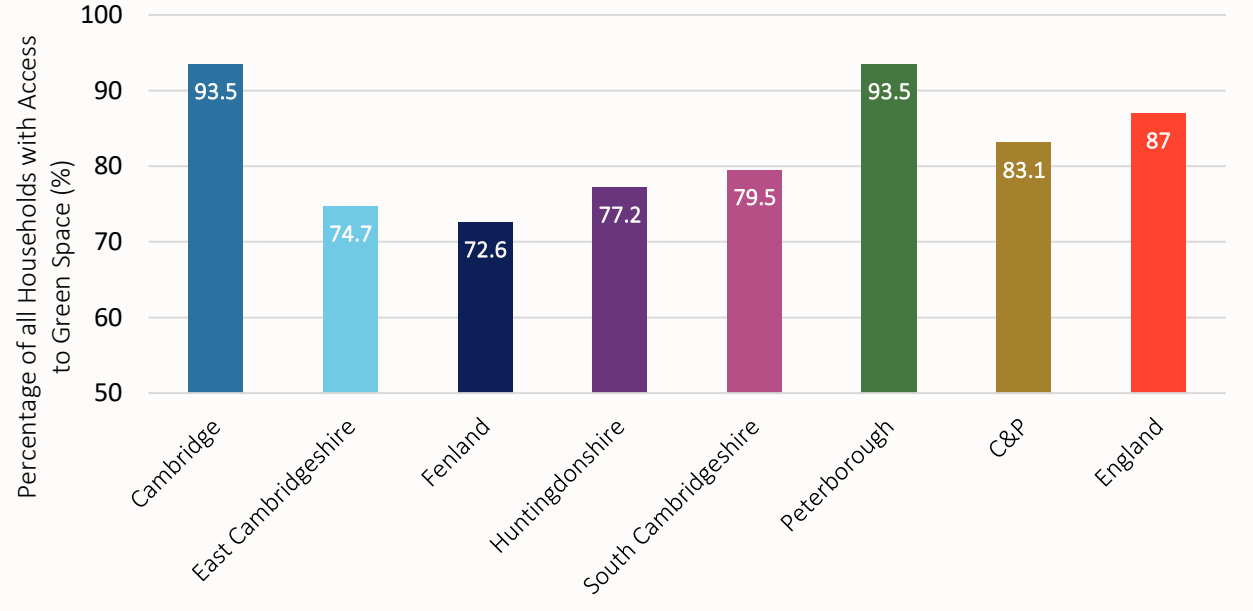


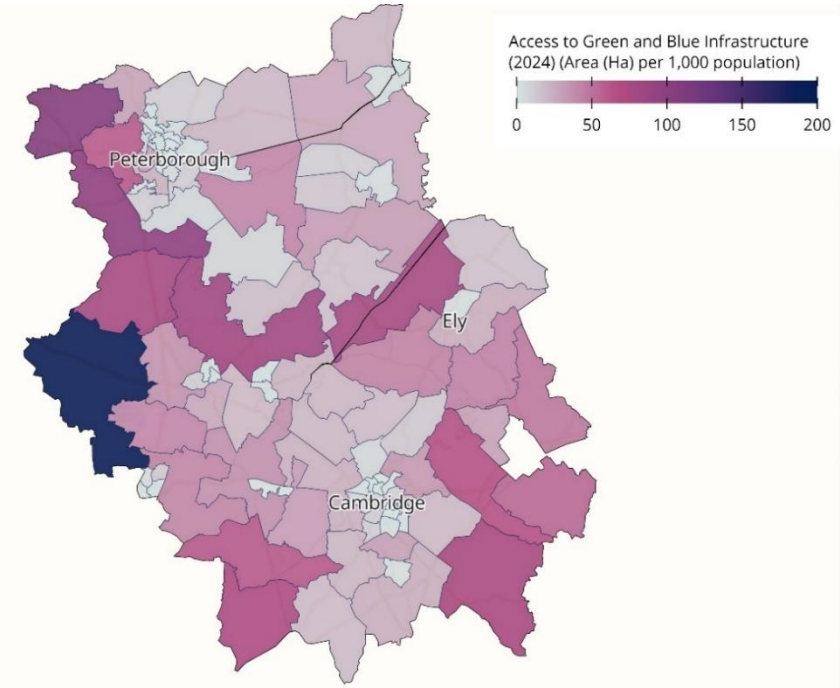
Figure 1-2: Percentage of Households with Access to Green Space by Local Authority Area & England in 2025

The data also categorised each area with an urban-rural flag. On inspection of the difference between urban and rural areas, rural areas scored lower for households with access to green space (71.6%) than urban areas (89.1%) in C&P. The urban-rural rates for C&P were congruent with England, overall, since DEFRA reported the percentage of all households in England with no access to green space was 28% for rural areas and 10% for urban areas[10].

1.2 Access to Blue & Green Infrastructure

Analysing the dataset for access to green and blue infrastructure is valuable for understanding the quality of environmental amenities and their availability to residents within the C&P region. The dataset provides the area (in hectares) of publicly available green and blue infrastructure by 1,000 population by Middle Layer Super Output Area (MSOA)[11]. Here, green infrastructure encompasses parks and gardens etc. while blue infrastructure includes water bodies such as rivers, lakes and ponds.

[10] https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/access-to-green-space-in-england/access-to-green-space-in-england.
[11] The Rivers Trust, 2024. Area of accessible green and blue space per 1000 population (England). [Link to source]



The average area of publicly available green and blue infrastructure per 1,000 people by MSOA, is mapped in Figure 1-3. The MSOA with the largest area of green and blue infrastructure per 1,000 population was located in Huntingdonshire. This MSOA, containing the villages of Catworth, Brington and Spaldwick, had an area of green and blue infrastructure equating to 186 hectares per 1,000 people. This was particularly high in comparison to the average across the C&P region which stood at 22 hectares per 1,000 population though the MSOA contains part of Grafham Water.

Figure 1-3: Area of Publicly Accessible Blue and Green Infrastructure by MSOA

Figure 1-4 presents of the area of green and blue infrastructure by local authority area. The data shows that East Cambridgeshire had the highest area of publicly available green and blue infrastructure, at 37.8 hectares per 1,000 population. Cambridge had the lowest average area at only 3.7 hectares per 1,000 population. This can be expected due to the urban nature of Cambridge. While Cambridge may have less green and blue infrastructure by area, due to its density, it is often easier for the population to access.

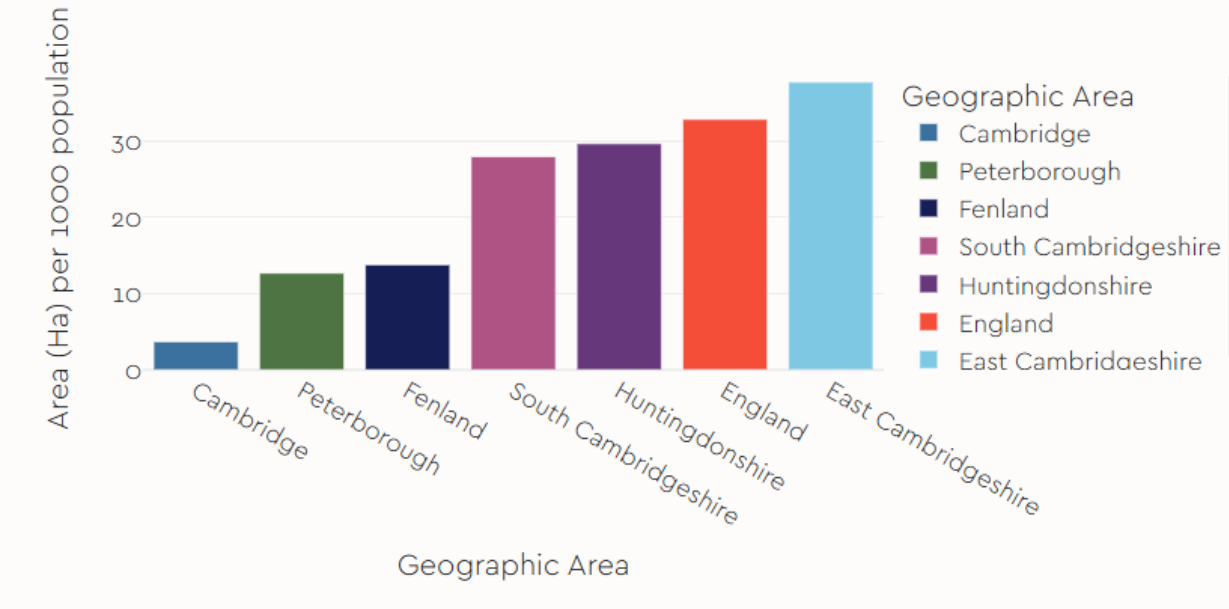


Figure 1-4: Average Area Publicly Accessible Blue and Green Infrastructure

2 Biodiversity

Looking at biodiversity is important for several reasons as biodiversity plays a fundamental role in supporting ecosystem function, climate resilience and human well-being. Biodiversity underpins the provision of ecosystem services such as clean air and water, pollination and climate regulation. The Local Nature Recovery Strategy identifies that habitats generally are missing in favour of nature rich land within the region and moreover that Cambridgeshire is one of the most nature depleted counties across England. This section explores the existing biodiversity with the C&P region.

2.1 Nature Rich Land

Nature rich land is characterised by high biodiversity and contributes to the maintenance of the essential ecosystem services, which are vital for human health, food security and economic prosperity. The Natural Capital Assessment of the C&P region provides data on the area and percentage cover of broad habitat types[12]. Since this particular dataset was provided for the C&P region, we are unable to accurately compare to the rest of England. Out of the 19 broad habitat types, eight can be classified as nature rich, these included:

- Semi-natural grassland (grasslands that have not been intensively managed or modified).
- Marshy grassland (wetland habitats that provide important ecosystem services and contribute to wetland biodiversity).
- Fen, marsh and swamp (wetland ecosystems that support a variety of plant species adapted to waterlogged conditions).
- Scrub (dense vegetation providing important habitat and cover for wildlife).
- Broadleaved woodland (mix of tree species providing habitat for woodland species).
- Coniferous woodland (provide habitat for woodland species).
- Mixed woodland (provide habitat for woodland species).

Across the C&P region, nature-rich land spans 29,593 hectares, accounting for 8.6% of the region's total land area. Figure 2-1 shows the proportion of land covered by each type of nature rich broad habitat type.

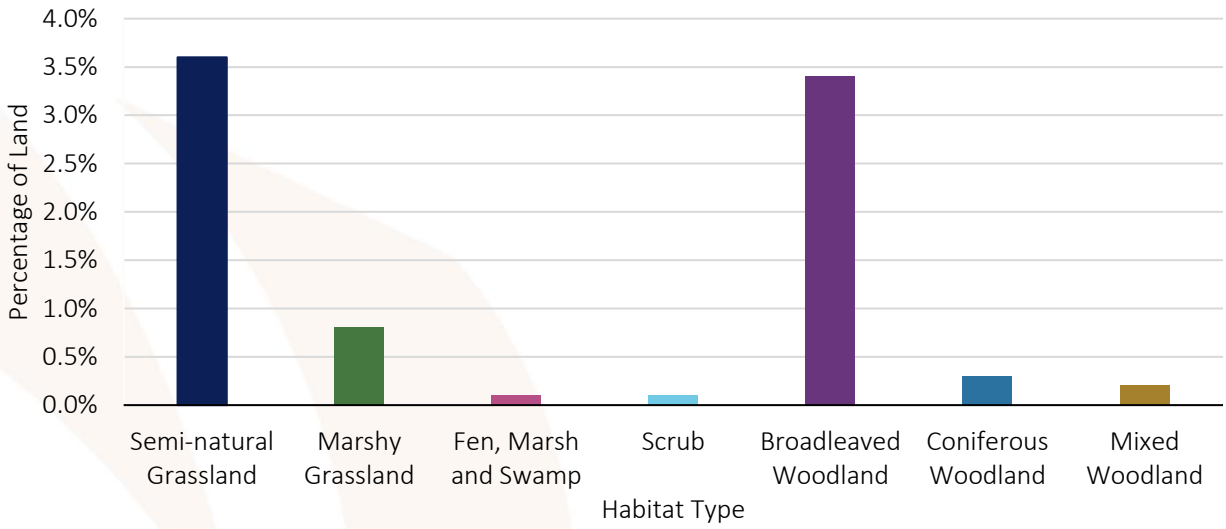


Figure 2-1: Nature Rich Land by Broad Habitat Type (%) in C&P

[12] Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Parks Partnership, 2022. A Natural Capital Assessment of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. [Link to source]

Woodland, when combined, covered the greatest extent of total land in C&P at 13,354 hectares, 3.9% of total land[13]. Most of this was broadleaved woodland at 3.4% of total land which, as well as being nature rich, has high values for both carbon storage and carbon sequestration, water regulation and air purification which highlights their importance in the region.

Semi-natural grassland accounted for the greatest proportion of land as an individual habitat at 3.6% of total land in C&P (12,371 hectares). On the other hand, Scrub and fen, marsh and swamp only accounted for 0.1% of total land area each. It is notable that despite being a rare habitat type, fern marsh and swamp have a particularly high biodiversity value.

2.2 Tree Cover

Tree cover encompasses forests and woodlands. Trees can play a significant role in mitigating climate change by sequestering carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. Trees act as carbon sinks by storing carbon, helping to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and mitigate climate change impacts.

The UK Ward Canopy Cover dataset has been analysed[14]. This dataset is the output from the UK canopy cover webmap project, which aimed to assess the percentage tree canopy cover in every ward in the UK. Wards were classified as rural or urban based on size, with wards larger than 1,000 hectares classed as rural. The average canopy cover by local authority was calculated by taking the average of the percentage canopy cover of all wards within each local authority area. The results are plotted in Figure 2-2.

Across C&P, the average percentage canopy cover for a ward is 10%. Notably, for urban wards the average canopy cover is 13%, while for rural wards this is 7%. Cambridge has the highest average percentage canopy cover at 16% and Peterborough has the second highest at 9%. Fenland has the lowest average canopy cover at 4%, whilst the remaining C&P local authority areas all average 7%. The difference in canopy cover between urban and rural wards is interesting and suggests that low density building with high levels of agricultural land use may not be associated with higher levels of canopy cover without intervention.

[13] Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Parks Partnership, 2022. A Natural Capital Assessment of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. [Link to source]

[14] Forestry Commission, 2024. UK Ward Canopy Cover. [Link to source]

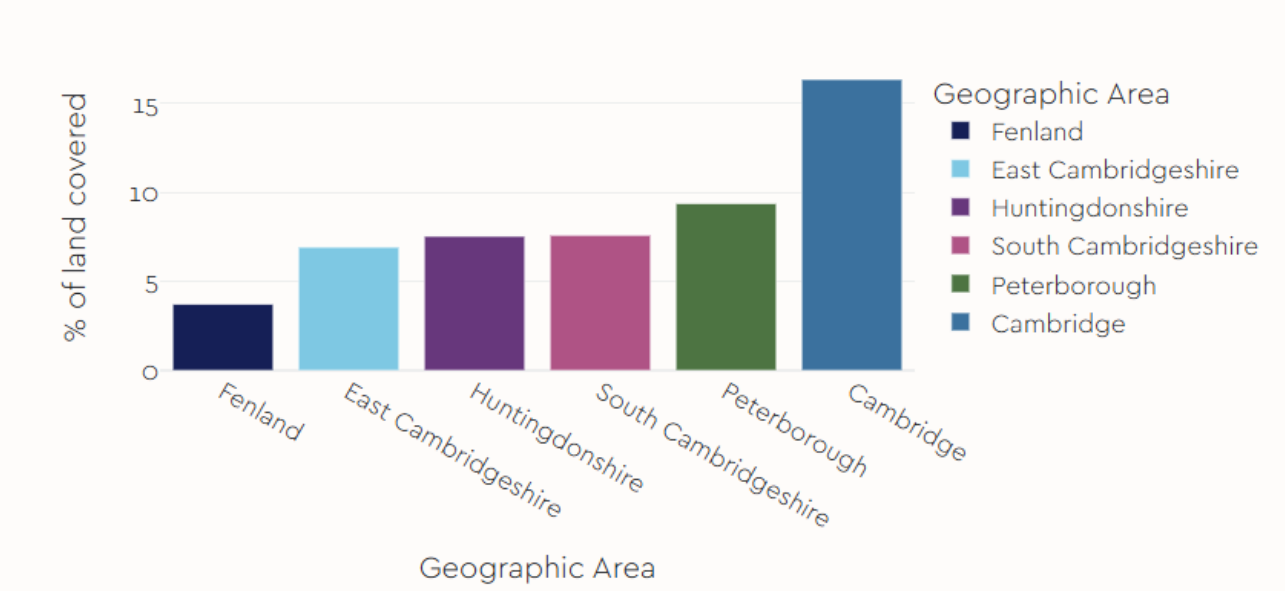


Figure 2-2: Canopy Land Cover (%) by Local Authority Area in 2024

2.3 Local Sites

Local Sites[15] are non-statutory areas identified at local level for their significant nature conservation value. DEFRA collects Local Site counts using data compiled by local authorities, Wildlife Trusts and local environment recording centres. They included both local wildlife sites (identified for significant biodiversity value) and local geological sites (identified for their significant geological value). Although they do not have any statutory status, many are equal in quality to statutory SSSIs. Local site counts were only available for each of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough as individual authorities. Figure 2-3 plots the local site counts for the period 2008-09 to 2023-24. It is important to note that data in both 2019-20 and 2020-21 was not available, resulting in a gap in the time series.

[15] DEFRA, 2025. Single Data List - local sites in positive conservation management. [Link to source]

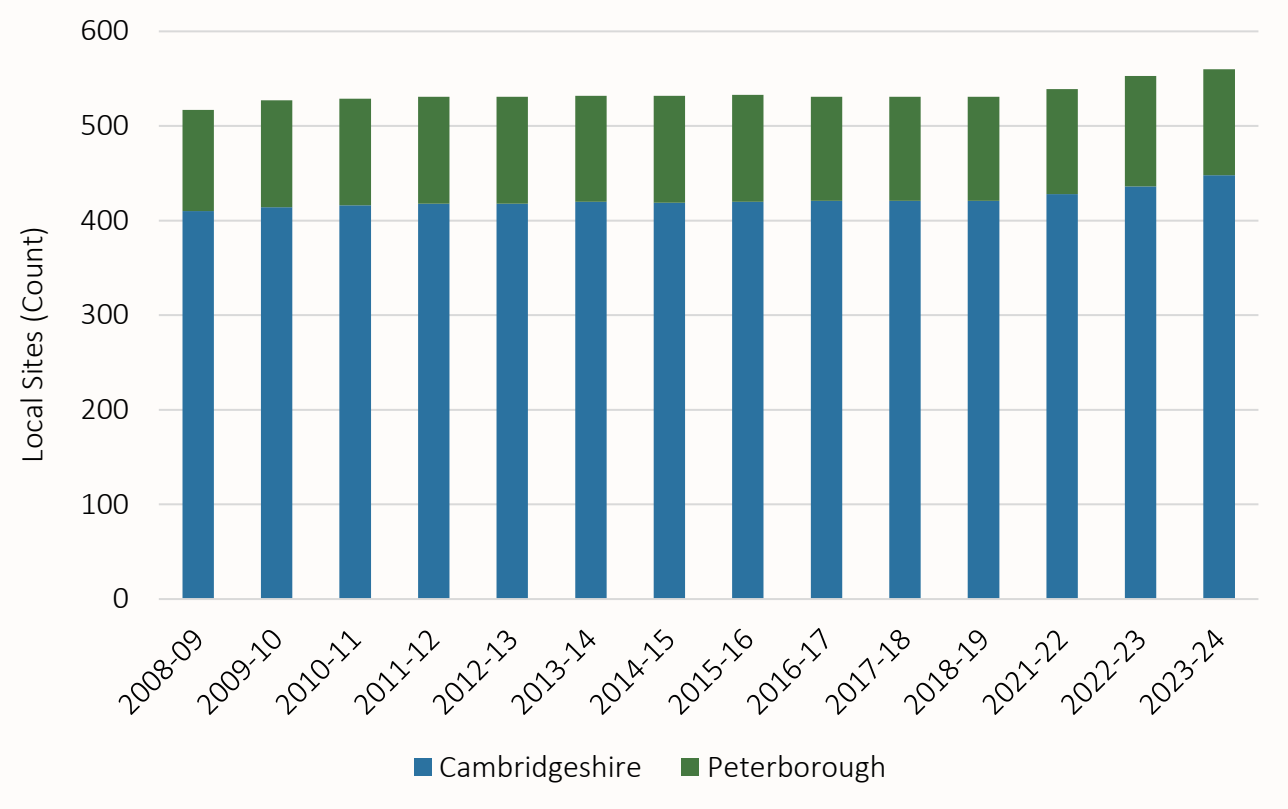


Figure 2-3: Local Sites (Count) by Geographical Area and by Year

The total number local sites across the C&P region increased over time, from 517 in 2008-09 to 560 in 2023-24. The upward trend over the past fourteen years of data suggests an ongoing commitment to conserving biodiversity in the C&P region. It is notable that the increase in sites was most prevalent in the periods 2008-09 to 2009-10 and 2021-22 to 2023-24, with the highest absolute growth between 2021-22 and 2022-23 with 14 additional sites added. However, during the nine-year period, between 2010-11 and 2018-19, there was a lower number of local site additions in Cambridgeshire, within which had seven additional sites, whilst Peterborough's local site count diminished by three during this time period.

As of 2022-24, the majority of local sites are located in Cambridgeshire at 448 while Peterborough has 112. This can be expected as Cambridgeshire covers a larger area, containing five of the six local authority areas in C&P. The most significant growth occurred in Cambridgeshire with an additional 38 sites identified over the 15-year period. In Peterborough 5 additional sites were added.

2.4 Positively Managed Local Sites

Some local sites are in positive conservation management, i.e. they are being managed in order to conserve their nature conservation interest. This indicator reports data collected by DEFRA[16], that presents the percentage of Local Sites which were in positive conservation management. Figure 2-4 charts the percentage of local sites in positive conservation management during the period 2008-09 to 2023-24. It is important to note that data in both 2019-20 and 2020-21 was not available, resulting in a gap in the time series.

[16] DEFRA, 2025. Single Data List - local sites in positive conservation management. [Link to source]

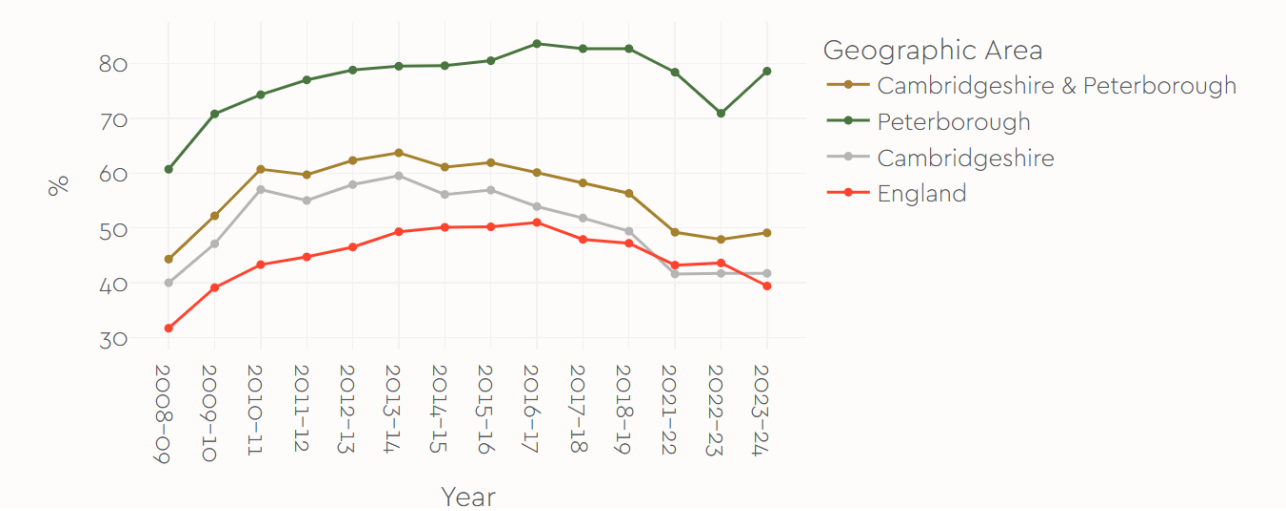


Figure 2-4: Percentage of Local Sites in Positive Conservation Management by Geographical Area and Year

In the C&P region overall, this shows that the percentage of sites in positive conservation management increased to 64% in 2013-14 but subsequently declined to 48% by 2022-23, although the latest figures showed a small increase to 49%. This remains higher than the average across England, which has reduced to 39% of local sites. Cambridgeshire, as the area with the largest number of local sites (80% of the total), is an important driver of the aggregate percentage. The percentage of sites in positive conservation management in Cambridgeshire reached a peak of just under 60% in 2013-14 and has subsequently fallen below 42% from 2021-22.

The percentage of sites in positive conservation management has generally been higher in Peterborough over the period. In Peterborough, the percentage peaked at nearly 84% in 2016-17, falling below 71% in 2022-23 but recovering to nearly 79% in 2023-24. The number of local site in positive conservation management relies on sufficient funding.

2.5 Number of Species

The National Biodiversity Network[17] collects records of species counts and provides them as a live database with segmentation for invasive species. Figure 2-5 and Figure 2-6 chart the number of species within the local authority areas of the C&P region, as reported in 2025 and split between invasive and non-invasive species. It is beneficial to have a lower proportion of invasive species as these can disrupt local ecosystems, alter habitats and outcompete native species for natural resources.

[17] National Biodiversity Network, 2024. NBN Atlas. [Link to source]

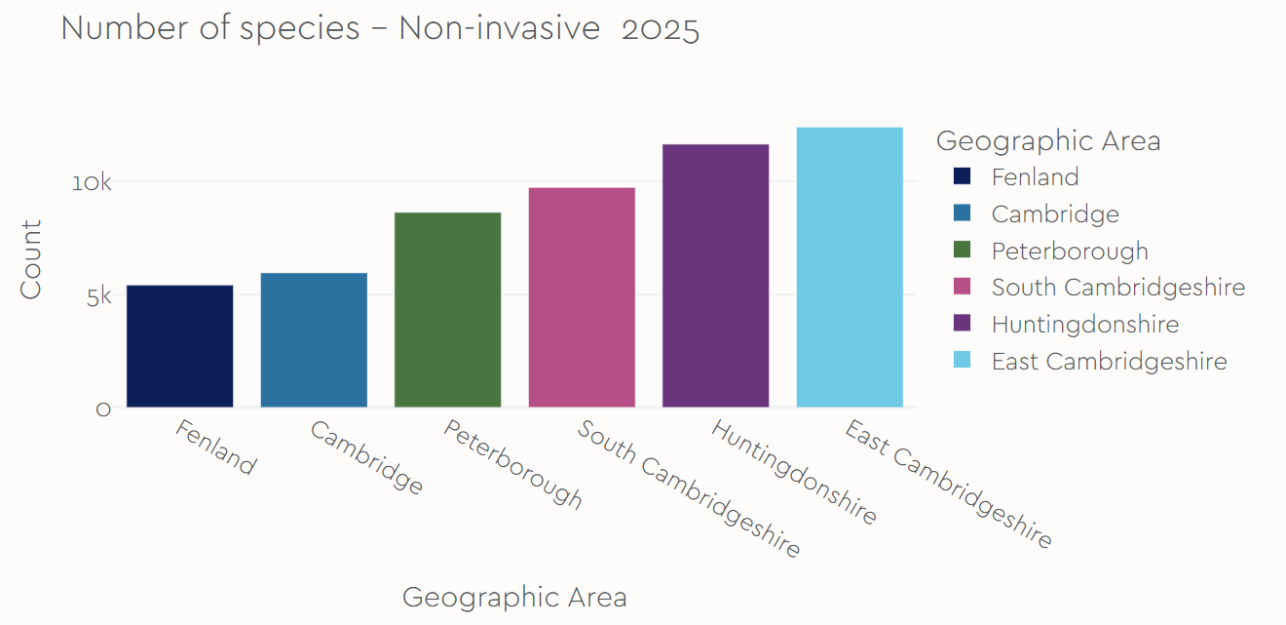


Figure 2-5: Number of Non-Invasive Species (Count) by Local Authority Area in 2025

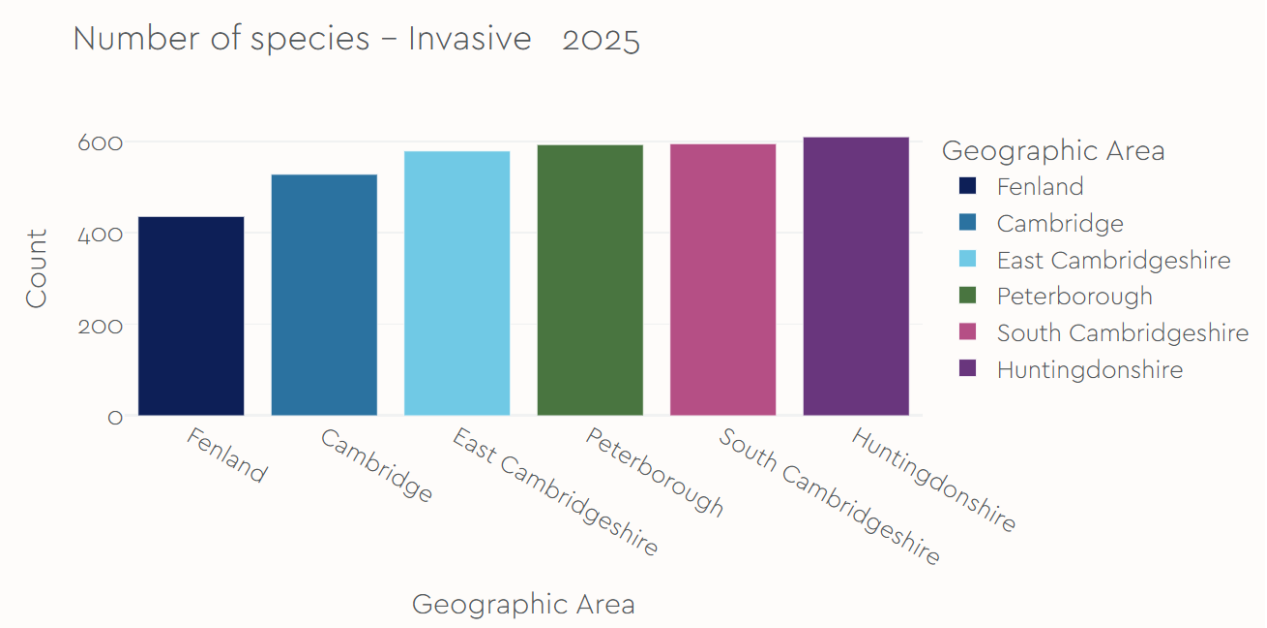


Figure 2-6: Number of Invasive Species (Count) by Local Authority Area in 2025

There were nearly 19,500 unique species across the C&P region of which just over 1,000 were invasive. Note that species may be common across local authorities, therefore these values are not equal to the aggregate of individual local authority area values. East Cambridgeshire had the highest count of species at almost 13,000, suggesting that the authority is the most ecologically diverse out of the local authority areas in the C&P region. Fenland had the lowest count of species at under 5,900. This may be attributed to its predominantly agricultural landscape, potentially offering fewer opportunities for the establishment and spread of both invasive and non-invasive species compared to the more urbanised or ecologically diverse areas.

Despite having the second lowest count of species at 6,500, Cambridge had the highest proportion of species that were invasive, at 8%. This could be due to the urban nature of the city, as urbanisation can result in habitat fragmentation. On the other hand, East

Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire had particularly low proportions of invasive species, at under 5%.