

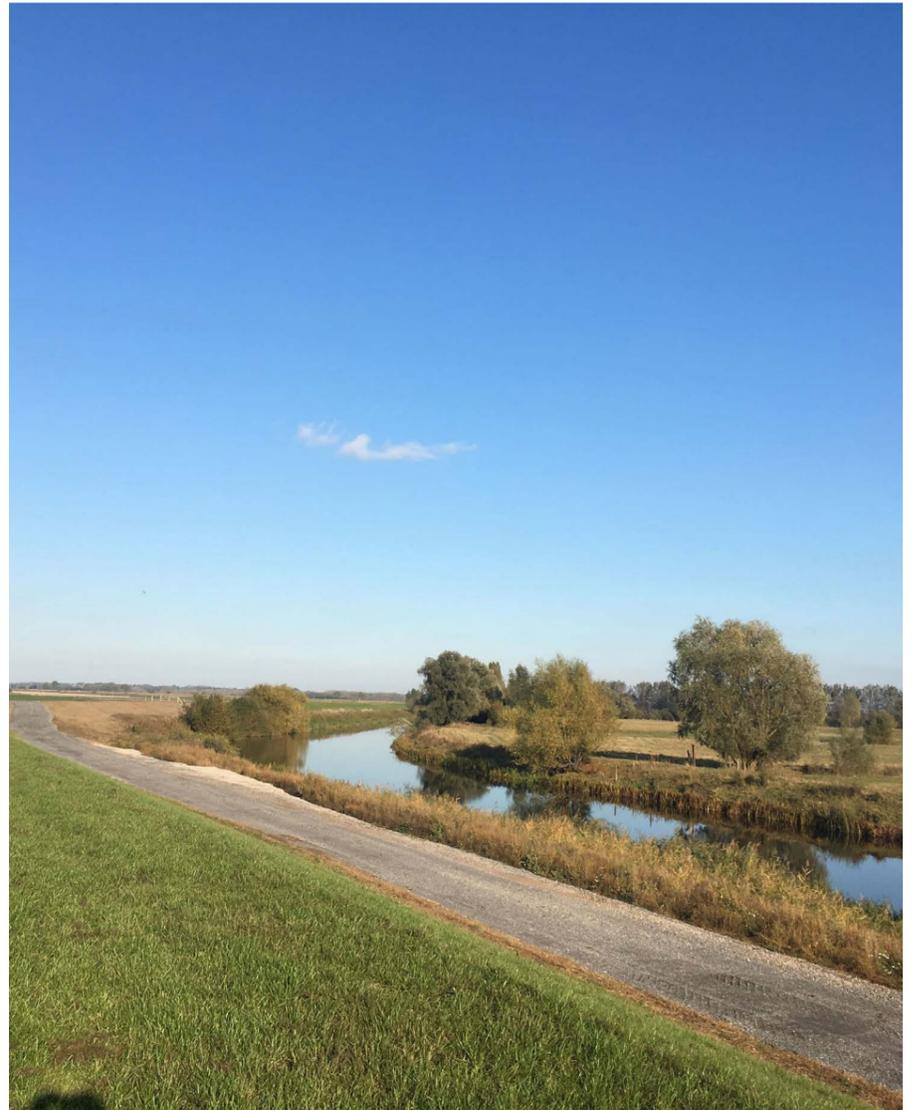
# Ouse Washes

The Ouse Washes Flood Storage Reservoir (FSR) is located on the River Great Ouse north east of Huntingdon.

The Dutch Engineer, Sir Cornelius Vermuyden, originally created the Ouse Washes over 350 years ago for the purpose of storing flood water and played a major role in turning the Fens into agricultural land.

The Washes spans more than ten parishes and two counties. As well as being one of the country's largest flood defence systems, it is an internationally important nature reserve attracting visitors for wildlife and recreation.

The Ouse Washes is maintained by the Environment Agency (river, embankments and other structures), private landowners and the Hundred Foot Washes Internal Drainage Board (riparian habitat).



**The Environment Agency is responsible for its operation and maintenance. It is approximately:**

- 30km (19 miles) long
- up to 0.8km (0.5 miles) wide
- providing 1,900 hectares (approximately 4,700 acres) of land between the banks
- Middle Level Barrier Bank and Cradge Bank form the two dams of the reservoir

# Ouse Washes

As with similar areas in the Netherlands, much of the Fens originally consisted of fresh or salt-water wetlands which were first drained in the 1600s to create valuable land for farming. Today the Great Ouse Fens has become a major agricultural region in Britain for grains and vegetables. It contains large areas of lowland wetland with unique and internationally significant wildlife, and has one of the richest legacies of flood risk and drainage management in the country.

With climate change projections, and many of the flood and water management structures in the Fens coming to the end of their design life, a strategic and longterm approach is needed. This will require changes to current flood risk and drainage activities coupled with significant investment.

This programme is looking at the adaptive approach needed to manage this catchment to balance the needs of people, the environment and agriculture, to ensure we create the right legacy for the next 100 years. This approach will identify the decisions which need to be taken now and those that will need to be taken in the future. Utilising innovative, coordinated and sustainable solutions from landowners, businesses, planning authorities, communities and risk management authorities, to manage this landscape for the long-term.

The Environment Agency is responsible for its operation and maintenance. It is approximately 30km (19 miles) long and up to 0.8km (0.5 miles) wide providing

1,900 hectares (approximately 4,700 acres) of land between the banks. The Middle Level Barrier Bank and the Cradge Bank form the two dams of the reservoir.

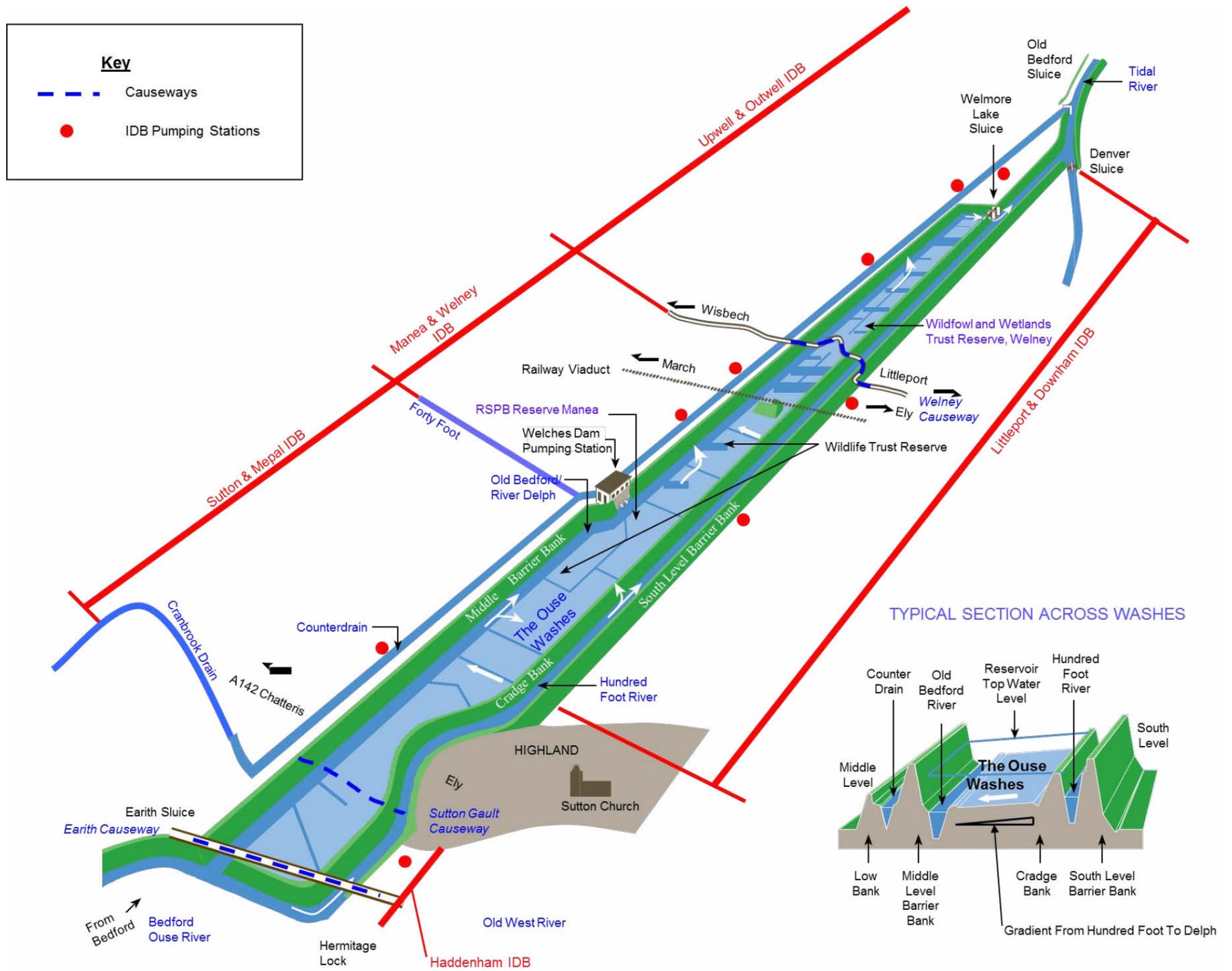
Earith Sluice regulates flow entering the Old Bedford River and the Ouse Washes. Welmore Lake Sluice and Welches Dam pumping station maintain a defined water level in the Washes. The Ouse Washes is confined by the Middle Level Barrier Bank (Old Bedford) and the Cradge Bank (Hundred Foot River). Together these structures form the flood storage reservoir and are registered under the Reservoirs Act 1975 (the Act).

There are 3 roads that cross the Ouse Washes. These roads are called wash roads and are located at Earith, Sutton Gault and Welney. When the Ouse Washes is flooded these roads are under water.

When the water level in the reservoir reaches the crest of the Cradge Bank it is storing approximately 90,000,000m<sup>3</sup> of water above the surrounding ground. This is enough water to fill Wembley Stadium 22 times.



# Ouse Washes



To access the Baseline Report [click here](#).

Click here to view information about the Ouse Washes Section 10 Works project [here](#).

# Environment

The Ouse Washes is one of the largest remaining areas of lowland wet grassland in the UK and holds notable environmental value as a Site of Specific Scientific Interest (SSSI), Special Protection Area (SPA), Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and a Ramsar site.

It is also important from an agricultural aspect and is heavily grazed during the summer. This grazing serves a dual purpose as it facilitates the management of the Washes by controlling vegetation and maintaining the effective transfer of floodwater; it also acts as an effective technique to manage the grassland habitats providing best conditions for the vast array of bird species visiting the area.

Because of the importance of the overwintering and breeding bird populations on the Washes, we can only work on the bank during a short period in the summer to autumn months. This is from mid-July to the end of October each year.

We have been working closely with Natural England, RSPB, the Wildlife Trust and the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust. This has helped us to identify areas of temporary impact that our works may have and enabled us to put measures in place to avoid unnecessary disturbance to wildlife.



An example of this is the wigeon. The wigeon is a medium-sized duck with a round head and small bill.

This protected species breeds in central & northern Scotland and in northern England but spends the winter on sites like the Ouse Washes. The birds feed on the short grass of the embankment and our works will temporarily remove this habitat.

We have allocated an area of land local to the Ouse Washes and prepared it to provide the temporary grazing habitat whilst the new grass establishes on the banks.

