Environmental Assets in Wetheringsett-cum-Brockford

The Significance of the Landscape for the Wethingsett-cum-Brockford Neighbourhood Plan

Landscape character is recognised by Natural England as South Norfolk and Suffolk Claylands. The river Dove, a tributary of the river Waveney, flows as a small stream through the village.

Suffolk County Council, Suffolk Landscape Character Assessment gives a more detailed assessment in their map of North Central Suffolk. The character of the land centred around the course of River Dove is typified by wooded valley and meadowlands and fens. Extending outwards the landscape is described as rolling valley claylands. The remainder of the Parish is identified as plateau claylands.



Statutory designations

No SSSI's lie within the Parish.

Mickfield Meadow, Grid referenceTM143633

Mickfield Meadow is a 2ha site, a rare example of hay rich meadow with associated boundary hedges, owned and managed by Suffolk Wildlife Trust.

It lies just outside the Parish, on the southern boundary and as such could be affected by land use changes within the Wetheringsett-cum-Brockford. The NPPF states that development on land which is likely to have an adverse effect on a SSSI should not normally be permitted. (BMDC Local Policies 2, 15:11).

Natural England use this SSSI Impact Risk Zone mapping to assess the likely impact of development and have produced accompanying guidance notes, see references.

The report from SBIS also show records of protected species which fall within the Parish of Wetheringsett-cum-Brockford less than a mile from the meadow.

Mickfield Meadow is also assessed by footpaths from Wetherup Street and Station Road.



Photo: Cathy Smith



MAGIC Id Meadow SSSI Impact Risk Zone

Babergh Mid Suffolk District Council Joint Local Plan Sustainability Appraisal October 2020

'Although designated sites represent the most valued habitats in the plan area, the overall ecological network is also important for biodiversity as a whole and helps to support the health of designated sites, allowing species to migrate in response to climate change. The fragmentation and erosion of habitats and the wider ecological network in BMSDC is an ongoing threat to biodiversity.'

Non-statutory designated areas: County Wildlife Sites in Wetheringsett-cum-Brockford

 MDSC 186, Road side verge, RNR 116, designated for its' flora. Grid reference: West: TM 12806833 to TM 12806826 East: TM128683 to TM128682 Road U5306.

Suffolk County Council monitor and manage this RNR with assistance of a network of volunteer wardens.



Photo: Cathy Smith

• County Wildlife Site: MSDC 163, a ditch alongside Old Brook Lane. Designated for the rare Tassel stonewort.

Priority Habitats and Species

'Priority Species and Habitats are identified by the UK post 2010 Biodiversity Framework...Known as the section 41 list, this should be used to guide decision makers in implementing their duty under section 40 of the NERC act to have due regard to the conservation of biodiversity' (BMDC Joint Local Plan Policies 2, 15:12).

Potential priority habitats in the village include; river and streams, ponds, hedgerows and mixed deciduous woodland and lowland meadow, parkland and traditional orchards.

Full definitions of the priority habitats can be viewed on the JNNC website, see references.

Hedgerows

Hedgerows are given protection under The Hedgerow Regulations 1997. Here important hedgerows are defined as those with seven woody species, or six woody species in a 30m length, plus other defined features.

The Suffolk Hedgerow Survey carried out between 1998-2012 did not include records for Wetheringsett-cum-Brockford.

Walk over survey

- Hedges are a particular feature in Broad Green where they de-mark ancient field boundaries. The fields adjacent to the lane through Broad Green are all less than 2ha in area.
 – aerial and historical map (National Library of Scotland OS 25" 1904)
- The hedge and bank system to be found beside the footpath beyond Griffin Lane (TM12056731) appears to have features characteristic of an ancient hedgerow. A follow-up survey with land owner permission would be required to confirm this, see DEFRA handbook.
- The hedge and bank system along the Green Lane has features such as multi-stemmed coppice stools indicative of ancient hedgerows. Woody species include; hornbeam, elder, holly, hazel, hawthorn, ash and oak. There are also several notable oak trees along the length. See photos below:

A follow-up survey with land owner permission would be required to confirm this.

- Residents report recent losses of hedgerows due to agricultural maintenance.
- Suffolk Priority species recorded in the Parish such as bullfinch, yellow hammer, hare, hedgehog and pipistrelle bat are associated with hedgerows habitats. (Source: Hedgelink)



Broad Green: aerial Map showing field boundaries. Inset: National Library of Scotland 1842-1854 25" OS map showing field boundaries



Mixed deciduous woodland

The JNNC definition of mixed deciduous woodland priority habitat includes all broadleaved stands and also patches of scrub of above 0.25 hectares forming a continuous canopy, areas of recently felled woodland and other successional types, along with the other integral features of woodland. See JNNC for the full definition.

Deciduous woodland in Wetheringsett-cum-Brockford

Small blocks of deciduous woodland are found scattered throughout the Parish. There are no recorded ancient woodlands shown on the Natural England maps. However, the inventories can never be fully comprehensive; new evidence may come to light that confirms a wood or parkland as ancient that has not previously been recorded on the Ancient Woodland or Parkland Inventory.

Additional woodland is identified by the Forestry Commission Inventory 2014.

The NPPF defines ancient woodland as: "Ancient woodland: An area that has been wooded continuously since at least 1600 AD. It includes Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland and Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS).

Species which are associated with deciduous woodlands for which we have records from the village include; pipistrelle bat, soprano pipistrelle bat, brown long-eared bat, natterers bat. Some farmland bird species also benefit from scrub and edge habitat often associated with woodland.

MAG[°]C Priority Habitat Deciduous woodland



Wood pasture and parkland

'Typically, this structure is one of large open-grown or high forest trees (often pollarded) at various densities, in a matrix of grazed grassland, heathland and/or woodland floras'

Ancient wood pasture and historic parkland should receive the same consideration as other forms of ancient woodland, it is an irreplaceable habitat. The protection of the whole habitat is necessary even though tree cover may be comparatively sparse.

'When applying Biodiversity Net Gain principles, irreplaceable habitats such as ancient woodland, including wood pasture and parkland must never be included in net gain calculations and mitigation and compensation measures must not form part of the considerations in making planning decisions.' (Planners Manual Woodland Trust 2019)

Natural England Suffolk BRC Wood pasture inventory identifies 4 provisional parklands:

- TM 11934 66067 3ha. Near Seamans A140, IP14 5NS
- TM 12274 66769 1.2 ha Westwood house Cedars Hill, IP14 5PQ
- TM 12931 66887 Wetheringsett Manor. IP14 5PH. Area: 2.75ha A preliminary ecological appraisal in 2019 confirms evidence of parkland to the west of the manor. Within the village Natural England Habitat Improvement zone 1.
- TM 12829 66960. Wetheringsett Manor. Area: 0.8ha. A preliminary ecological appraisal in 2019 confirms evidence of parkland to the west of the manor. Within the village Natural England Habitat Improvement zone 1.



MAG[°]C Woodpasture & Parkland BAP Priority Habitat

Traditional Orchards

Definition:

Natural England, have confirmed one traditional orchard in the centre of the village near Wetheringsett Manor and All Saints Church. A further 3 provisional traditional orchards have been identified within the Parish – see below

Confirmed:	TM128668 Area: 1231.8m ^{2,} Church Street IP14 5PH (South of Wetheringsett Manor, east of The Old Rectory.). Condition Excellent 2010. Natural England SUFF0685
	Within the Habitat Improvement Zone 1 as identified by Natural England
Provisional:	TM115667 Brockford Road, IP14 5NU
	TM127660 Hockey Hill, IP14 5PN. Opposite the war memorial and field. Appears overgrown – walk past 2021
	Within the Habitat Improvement Zone 1 as identified by Natural England
	TM146653 Area: 1336.07m ^{2.} Pages Green, IP14 5QA.
	Overgrown, unmanaged (2009)- confirmed by walk past 2021



Ancient and historic trees

In addition to the stands of woodland, standard trees within hedge lines contribute to the overall biological resource and are an important feature in the local landscape.

The NPPF defines ancient and veteran trees as: "A tree which, because of its age, size and condition, is of exceptional biodiversity, cultural or heritage value. All ancient trees are veteran trees. Not all veteran trees are old enough to be ancient, but are old relative to other trees of the same species. Very few trees of any species reach the ancient life-stage."

A veteran tree may not be very old, but it has decay features, such as branch death and hollowing. These features contribute to its biodiversity, cultural and heritage value.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2019 (paragraph 175c1) states: When determining planning applications, local planning authorities should apply the following principles: c) development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats (such as ancient woodland and ancient or veteran trees) should be refused, unless there are wholly exceptional reasons* and a suitable compensation strategy exists.



Photo Cathy Smith

SBIS holds records for 36 ancient and historic trees for Wetheringsett-cum-Brockford, the majority are for pedunculate oak. The location of trees held in the Ancient Tree Inventory can be viewed on the Woodland Trust website which encourages members of the public to report ancient trees according to certain criteria.

33 pedunculate oak2 for Cedrus1 ash1 Horse chestnut

MSDC mapping tool shows two land holdings where there are tree preservation orders both located in Wetherup-Street.

Within the churchyard there are specimen trees of red beech, lime and oak together with more recent plantings of pine, poplar and Cupressus.

* For example, infrastructure projects (including nationally significant infrastructure projects, orders under the Transport and Works Act and hybrid bills), where the public benefit would clearly outweigh the loss or deterioration of habitat.

Lowland Meadows

The term refers to old meadows which haven't been altered from ploughing or agrichemicals and can include unimproved pastures which are grazed by livestock.

Lowland meadow within Mickfield, bordering the Wetheringsett-cum-Brockford Parish Boundary: Mickfield Meadow SSSI borders the Parish, TM143633, see Sites with statutory protection.

Standing water including Ponds and moats

The Freshwater Habitats summaries the JNNC conditions for a pond being classified as a priority habitat:

'Priority ponds are defined as permanent and seasonal standing water bodies up to 2ha in area which are important for the freshwater wildlife they support. Usually priority ponds are those which are near natural in the composition of their plant and animal communities, support endangered or protected species or have unusually diverse communities.'

Pond habitats within Wetheringsett-cum-Brockford

There are numerous large garden ponds and a network of drains.

Several historical houses also have moats.

The National Library of Scotland OS 25" maps 1841-1852 evidence the historical nature of many of our village ponds.

Ordinance survey maps and google aerial maps have been used in combination to get an impression of the standing water resource in the village. In some cases ordinance survey maps indicate the presence of a pond, as the aerial maps were taken when the trees are in full leaf it isn't possible in all cases to confirm the pond still exists. From this inspection, there is in the region of 40-45 ponds still in existence. They vary in area from approximately $100m^2$ to $3500m^2$ with the median area being $200-300m^2$. Ponds are found throughout the Parish with the highest density found in the southern hamlets of Pages Green, Blacksmith's Green and Wetherup Street.

Many ponds are not visible from footpaths or the roadside and would require owner permissions to ascertain their ecological status.

SBIS records from pond habitats; toad and grass snake, also grey heron and kingfisher.





Pond Green Lane Photo: Cathy Smith 2021



Pond Pitman's Corner

Photo: Cathy Smith 2021





Rivers

The River Dove, a tributary of the River Waveney flows as not much more than a stream, through the village. At this stage in its' course, it is not assigned priority habitat status as set out in the water framework directive. However species records of kingfisher and otter illustrate the potential the river has as a biodiversity corridor.

Much of the river course falls also falls within the Environment Agency nitrogen sensitive zone (Source: MAGIC)

A public right of way through an improved grassland meadow in Church Street provides access to a bridge across the river.



Protected Species

Suffolk Biological Records Information Service have provided species records. The information below only refers to those records reported to us which lie within the Parish boundaries. Species records from neighbouring parishes will be referred to in the discussion about ecological networks.

Within the Parish 65 priority species have been recorded, of these 18 are Suffolk BAP species.

Swift boxes have been mounted on a house in Hockey Hill with the support of the SOS Swifts project.

Mammals: Otter, brown hare, pipistrelle bat, soprano pipistrelle bat, brown long-eared bat, natterers bat, hedgehog.

Amphibians and reptiles: grass snake, toad

Birds: Eurasian skylark, kingfisher, mallard, pink footed goose, swift, grey heron, little owl, Western barn owl, red breasted goose, sparrowhawk, buzzard, hobby, kestrel, black-headed gull, European herring gull, Common gull, Lesser black-backed gull, stock dove, common house martin, yellow hammer, turtle dove, linnet, lapwing, common reed bunting, willow warbler, brambling, moorhen, wigeon, gadwall, golden plover, woodcock, grey wagtail, spotted flycatcher, marsh tit, dunnock, house sparrow, song thrush, mistle thrush, Eurasian bullfinch, starling, redwing, field fare.

Plants: sneezewort, pyramidal orchid, southern marsh orchid, crosswort, sour-bread, treacle mustard, dwarf spurge, wild strawberry, corn mint, hoary plantain, wild clary, shepherds needle, golden rod, sulphur clover.

This list is of confirmed records, omission of a species from the list does not imply its' absence.

Farmland Birds

Several rare and declining species of farmland birds are recorded in the NBN data covering the Parish; corn bunting, grey partridge, lapwing, tree sparrow and turtle dove.

An area in the south of the Parish is included in Countryside stewardship targets for corn bunting. Corn bunting have declined by 89% between 1970-2003. The reduction is attributed to fewer insect and seed resources as well as the late nesting of this species resulting in loss of nests at harvest time.



MAG°C :cies - Corn Bunting Countryside Stewardship Target Area

Built Environment and Associated Habitats

In addition to properties identified as having priority landscapes, the gardens of residents provide a significant proportion of land in the settlements and hamlets. These stand to offer additional habitat and connectivity within the landscape and an opportunities for households to see wildlife in close quarters. A growing movement for wildlife friendly gardening supports actions such as those to create hedgehog highways, creating wildflower meadows, deadwood areas and reducing the use of chemicals. Recording schemes such as the, Peoples Trust for Endangered Species Hedgerow survey, BTO garden bird survey and i-record platform provide opportunities to add to the existing species knowledge base in the Parish.

In addition to their community value, green spaces identified during the Neighbourhood plan process have the potential to offer additional wildlife habitat.

The Parkland at Wetheringsett Manor is discussed above.

All Saints Churchyard

Location: IP14 5PH. TM 12732 66845 Area: 4069.51m² Access via Church Street and footpath opposite Manor Bungalow

Within the Natural England Habitat Improvement Zone.

Within the Village Conservation Area.

Bat surveys are being carried out through the Bats in Churches (2019-2021). All Saints was selected for the project to support the PCC in finding solutions to the impact created by bats using the church as an all year round roost.

There are some fine specimen mature trees of red beech, lime and oak, in the churchyard. Along with the wildflower habitat in the churchyard, the trees provide immediate feeding grounds for the bat population. This could be of particular value to brown long eared bats which are known to feed close to their roosts.

The records provided by SBIS have not shown and records of protected plant species for the churchyard. However churchyards are often home to flower-rich grassland which have escaped from fertilisation or re-seeding.

Information about churchyard management to enhance the habitat for wildlife can be found through the charity, God's Acre or Suffolk Wildlife Trust website, see references.

The churchyard provides a valuable community asset in aesthetic and wildlife terms.

Photo: Cathy Smith



Cemetery Location TM 12631 66762 Area: 6453.78m² Access from Church Street

It is in current use as a burial ground. The cemetery hedges and grassland are actively managed through the Parish Council.

Within the Natural England Habitat Improvement Zone.

Within the Village Conservation Area.



Village Hall Field

Location: TM 12589 66654

When inspected in April, the field was closely mown throughout. A row of standard trees have been planted just set back and parallel to the road. To the south and west, the field is sheltered by mature woodland which stands outside the boundary fence. A small overgrown and overshadowed pond stands in the south-west corner which was once used by the primary school.



War memorial Field Location: TM126659

Area: 0.424694

Within the Natural England Habitat Improvement Zone.

Within the Village Conservation Area.

A small triangle of field which sits at the junction of Station Road and Knaves Green behind the war memorial.

At first glance it appears to be improved grassland with hedgerows on 3 of the 4 sides.



Hockey Hill Field Location: TM127662

Area: 0.81 hectare

Within the Natural England Habitat Improvement Zone.

A preliminary ecological report was prepared in March 2019 describes a site bordered with hedgerows and trees to the north and south and more scattered trees to the west. Trees bordering the site are sited as having high bat roost potential. The majority of the site is improved grassland which has been fallow for some years with occassional mowing. There is a small pond and ditches.

Residents report the field as in current use for dog walking and recreation.



Knaves Green - west Location: TM124657

Area: 0.133446 ha

Rented out by The Town and allotments charity.

Currently in use as allotments – it is common practice to treat allotments as a community asset.

A few trees of interest and boundary hedging along the southern boundary.



Ecological networks:

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2019 states that Plans should take a strategic approach to biodiversity. It includes a range of requirements to conserve and enhance the natural environment, among them requiring Local Plans (and by association Neighbourhood Plans) to: '...promote the conservation, restoration and enhancement of priority habitats, ecological networks and the protection and recovery of priority species.'

The land in the centre of the village has been identified as a Habitat Network Enhancement Zone One by Natural England. Within this zone is located Priority deciduous woodland habitat, priority parkland and traditional orchards. The habitat network maps have been produced to provide a useful baseline for the development of a Nature Recovery Network as required within the 25 Year Environment Plan and Local Nature Recovery Strategies as proposed within the Environment Bill.

The habitat network maps are intended to be used to help identify areas for future habitat creation and restoration at a landscape scale. These maps are intended to help to stimulate local engagement with partners and to agree local priorities and identify where action might help build more ecologically resilient ecosystems across landscapes. They are guide rather than specific advice.

The aim of the habitat network maps is to help identify possible locations for actions to improve ecological resilience of the current habitat network; decreasing habitat fragmentation, increasing the extent of the habitat, restoring degraded habitat, expanding, linking and joining habitats.

<u>Natural England: Network Enhancement Zone 1</u>: Land connecting existing patches of primary and associated habitats which is likely to be suitable for creation of the primary habitat. Factors affecting suitability include: proximity to primary habitat, land use (urban/rural), soil type, slope and proximity to coast. Action in this zone to expand and join up existing habitat patches and improve the connections between them can be targeted here. This has particular relevance to Environmental Land Management (ELMS) applications.



The significance of wildlife and ecological assets for the Neighbourhood Plan

Recommendations – protection of natural assets through planning.

- Adopt Biodiversity Net Gain as described by BMSDC and the NPPF.
- Refer to the mitigation hierarchy when assessing all developments but especially those outside of the DEFRA metric parameters.
- Consider the Mickfield Meadow SSSI impact zone in planning applications south of Wetherup Street. The two road side nature reserves, by virtue of their County Wildlife Status should also receive due consideration in planning decision making.
- Be mindful of irreplaceable habitat such veteran trees and parkland and avoid indirect impacts such as soil compaction under the canopy of veteran trees.
- Consider the indirect impacts development close to valuable wildlife habitats can have. Specify smart lighting to minimise the effect of light pollution on bat colonies known in the centre of the village and more widely to be associated with veteran trees and older properties. Dark skies are also valued by village residents.
- Peace and quiet has been identified by residents as a precious asset by residents. Noise pollution can also have an impact on breeding bird populations and the impact of development should be considered.
- Be aware that the mapping of priority habitats does not necessarily represent what is
 present on the ground. For example, scrub is not recognised, yet is a valuable wildlife habitat
 and left to "re-wild" will transition to woodland. The hamlets of Pages Green and
 Blacksmith's Green are notable for the shelter provided by mature trees and hedges, both in
 farmland and gardens.
- Neither the River Dove nor numerous ponds are acknowledged as Priority Habitats within the village but this should not detract from their merit. Ponds should be retained and when opportunity arises restored or created for both their historical place in the landscape and biodiversity value.
- The River Dove and low lying land causes occasional flooding in the village. Natural flood amelioration schemes could be explored and the location of buildings be considered alongside the options.
- Hedgerows are a valued feature in the arable landscape. Retaining the network with particular regard to the historic boundaries and species rich hedgerows should be a priority in planning decision making.

- Ensure wildlife habitat doesn't become fragmented through development. There a many records of hedgehogs across the Parish, permeable boundary treatments help support a viable population.
- Where appropriate incorporate swift boxes (to support the village swift roost), bat bricks or similar nature friendly structures into new build properties.
- Specify permeable boundaries at ground level which are critical for habitat connectivity for species such as hedgehogs and toads.
- Favour sustainable building design which ameliorates the effects of climate change on nature.

Prepared by Cathy Smith, Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group in a voluntary capacity.

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