CONSERVATION ADVISOR SITE VISIT REPORT The Hythe Worlington

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Date of visit: 23/06/2021

Name of Project leader: Nick Foster, Chair of PC
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Owner: Worlington Parish Council

Location of site: Accessed from a footpath at the end of Church Lane, Worlington.
Grid Reference: TL689743

Approximate area: 1ha

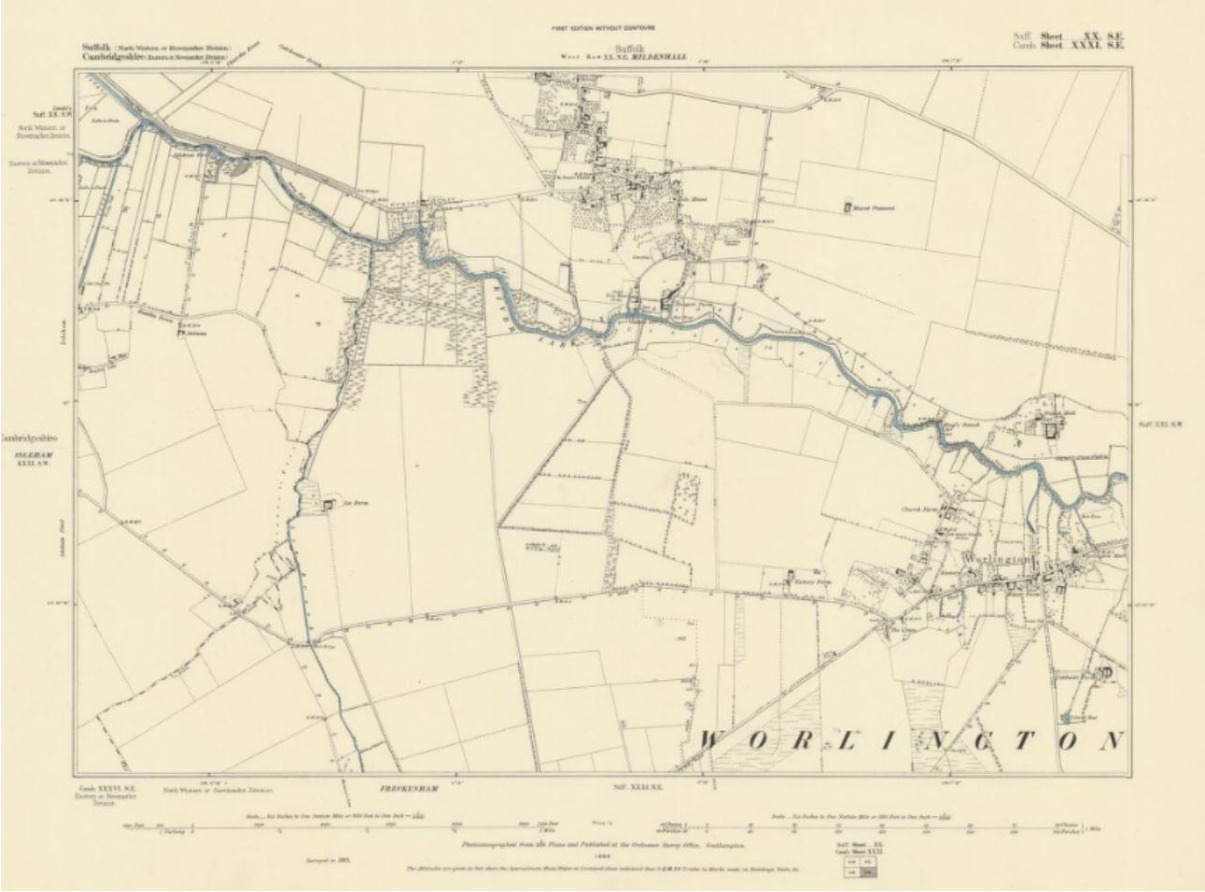
Contents

Enquiry

Restoration of a riverside site for public access and wildlife considerations.

Summary of the site

The Hythe is a picturesque site beside the River Lark, a chalk stream river. Historic maps mark a ford near the bend in the river (National Library of Scotland OS 6" 1842-1952), there is now a footbridge which can be assessed via the footpath to the east.



Chalk stream rivers are a rare unique habitat, capable of supporting rare aquatic species such as kingfisher and water vole.
For a detailed assessment see The River Lark Catchment Partnership.

The soils immediately surrounding the river are Fen Peat soils supporting wet fen and carr woodlands. The scrub and deciduous woodland area to the south of the plot are supported by freely draining, slightly acid, base rich soils. (source: Soilscapes).

The Hythe supports correspondingly diverse habitats, from a small area of reed, ditch and woodland.

Recent restoration work has so far involved removal of scrub, ivy, ditch clearance and mowing. Picnic benches have been installed and widely welcomed by the community.

Consideration is being given to installing a fishing platform and wildflower seeding.

Trees and scrub

1. The small block of deciduous woodland and scrub has an important role in connectivity between other bankside trees and the hedgerows along the track from Church Lane, as well as providing a buffer from arable fields to the south.

2. Scrub habitat is often undervalued but provides good bird nesting, roosting, and feeding resources as well as pollen and nectar sources for pollinator species.

3. Rotational management will help to retain habitat in different stages of succession. Mixed scrub stands begin to develop into woodland after about 15 years. The scrub has been cleared as one block, but a long-term vision could be to see the two areas either side of the main path at different points in this cycle.

4. Management of scrub involves, coppicing, cutting the scrub back to near the ground which encourages regeneration from the stump and rootstock, and when used in small areas, enhances scrub stand.
   Coppicing produces large volumes of arisings. Some could be stacked on site to provide dead wood habitat and shelter, others chipped prior to removal.

5. Any scrub renewal work should be done between 1st September- end of February, outside of the bird breeding season.

6. Where possible ivy should be left on the healthy mature trees. Ivy is not parasitic on trees; it generates its own energy from sunlight and merely uses the structure of the tree to support it. When a tree is already diseased and rotting, we sometimes see ivy clad boughs broken off, the underlying cause here is the senescence of the tree rather than the ivy. Ivy is a natural part of the ecosystem, providing late summer pollinator resources, winter berries for birds and roosting and nesting places.

7. If any tree maintenance work is carried out to the mature trees, Bat Conservation guidance regarding bat roosts should be referred to see note below.

Reed habitat

1. Some reed bed habitat should be retained. It is an integral part of the riverside habitat for birdlife, mammals and invertebrates. Tall vegetation serves as an important buffer between disturbance from public access and animals such as otters and kingfishers known to be present in the water channel.

2. A block of reeds has recently been cut this is a traditional way of managing reed beds. Cutting reduces the rate of succession to scrub, reduces the rate of litter accumulation and stimulates the growth of new reeds. Winter cutting maintains its' dominance, summer cutting reduces its competitive ability, allows more diverse vegetation. Frequent cutting will ultimately eliminate the reed. When undertaking a summer cut, be sure to check for nesting birds to avoid disturbance, see 'Important considerations'.

3. For conservation management of the reed stand, aim for a cutting frequency of between 3-7 years. (A longer rotation of up to 15 years in larger reed beds is not unusual.)

4. Set any mown pathway as far back from the river edge as possible to reduce disturbance to wildlife in the river and that living in the reed bed.

5. Limit clearance of bankside vegetation to strategic viewpoints, such as near the picnic benches and bend in the river to reduce the impact of visitors to the site on the riverine wildlife.

Ditch habitat

1. Ditches can support a great deal of aquatic wildlife, with open sunny ones attracting the most aquatic invertebrates, such as the clouds of banded demoiselles seen at the time of the visit. The National Biodiversity Atlas records show 10 species of dragonfly and damselflies have been sited within 0.5Km of The Hythe.

2. Bank side vegetation can be controlled using a rotation of 2-5 years, with no more than half the length cut at one time.

3. Ideally maintenance should be done between August- end of February, outside the bird breeding season. Be mindful of disturbance to other protected species.

Wildflower seeding

1. We would advise initially monitoring to find out wildflowers naturally appear following the restoration work before sowing wildflower seeds. Often seeds within the soil bank will germinate once conditions such as sufficient light levels are restored.

2. If seeding is still desirable, look to the local flora for inspiration, maybe consider seed gathering from non-sensitive sites.

3. If purchasing wildflower seed, stick to those of local providence and those compatible with local conditions. If the area in mind is near the trees, you will be looking at woodland edge or hedgerow species such as the mix from Emorsgate seeds. Due to the free draining nature of your soil not all woodland wildflowers will thrive, so check each species in turn.

4. Wildflower seeds are best sown in the autumn. First prepare the bed by creating a short sward and 50% bare ground. Broadcast seed in the surface. The seed must be bedded in to ensure good contact with the soil, light rolling is a way of achieving this.
   In the period immediately after sowing and the first spring, the sward should be kept short to aid germination and establishment.

Fishing platform

1. Mange the location and installation of the platform such that protected species are not disturbed, see 'Important considerations'.

2. You may need to seek permission from relevant authority which I believe in this case is the Environment Agency who have responsibility for main rivers. The Internal drainage board oversee smaller water courses.

3. Check fishing bye-laws, including both National and those for the Anglia region, also any relating to the proximity of the weir.

4. In advance of any fishing platform, develop ways of managing fishing practices through byelaws. If not already doing so, consider working with Lark Angling and Preservation Society.

Wildlife Recording

1. Wildlife recording would be valuable on this site and could become a Parish wide endeavour. There are many forms it could take but can be more widely beneficial if lodged with Suffolk Biological Records either directly or through i-Record.
   The i-record platform allows for groups to set up their own space for collective records and has a process for verification. We do also receive records placed on the People's Trust for Endangered species website.
2. iNaturalist is an app based Identification platform.

Important Considerations

1. Check any responsibilities you may have for the watercourse, permitted or licensable activities on the government website: Construction near protected areas and wildlife - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

2. Some of the more mature hedge trees may be providing bat roosts. Bats are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (amended) and Conservation of species

regulations 2017 (amended). The protection makes it an offence to intentionally or recklessly disturb a bat or group of bats in their roost or to damage or destroy a place used by bats for breeding or resting (roosts) (even if bats are not occupying the roost at the time). Any tree surgery carried out to the mature trees should follow the guidelines from the Bat Conservation Trust.

3. The drier areas could be used by hedgehogs, the accompany guidelines advice of ways to reduce the likelihood to injury during management work.

4. Otters are fully protected as a European protected species (EPS) and is also protected under sections 9 and 11 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.
   You're breaking the law if you:
   Capture, kill, disturb or injure otters (on purpose or by not taking enough care)
   Damage or destroy a breeding or resting place (deliberately or by not taking enough care)
   Obstruct access to their resting or sheltering places (deliberately or by not taking enough care)

5. It is illegal to damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird while it is in use or being built. Activities which can disturb wild birds, particularly during the breeding season include trimming or cutting trees, bushes, hedges and rough vegetation.
   As a rough guide the bird breeding season is considered as March – end of August.

It was a pleasure to meet you and discuss the opportunities for managing the land to enhancing the wildlife value.

We would love to hear how you get on, do share any results of your project.

Yours sincerely

Cathy Smith
Community Wildlife Advisor

Resources

Bat Conservation Trust: Roosts in trees - Bat roosts - Bat Conservation Trust (bats.org.uk)

Hedgehog ecology and land management: https://ptes.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/HEMP.pdf

The scrub management handbook:
The Scrub Management Handbook: Guidance on the management of scrub on nature conservation sites - IN124 (naturalengland.org.uk)

Bringing reedbeds back to Life
bringing_reedbeds_to_life_tcm9-385799.pdf (rspb.org.uk)

Example woodland edge/ hedgerow seed mix:
EH1F - 100% Wild Flowers for Hedgerow Mixture | Hedgerow mixtures | Hedge and Woodland | Emorsgate Seeds – (01553) 829 028 (wildseed.co.uk)

The River Lark Partnership
The River Lark Catchment Partnership – Website for organisations in The River Lark Catchment Partnership

Catchment based Approach – The state of England's chalk streams
The State of England's Chalk Streams – Chalk-Streams

Water course owner responsibilities:
Owning a watercourse - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Environment Agency, river courses
Main River Map (arcgis.com)

Internal Drainage Board
Homepage | Association of Drainage Authorities (ada.org.uk)

Wildlife recording
Suffolk Biological Recording Online | Suffolk Biodiversity Information Service (suffolkbis.org.uk)

iRecord | Manage and share your wildlife records (brc.ac.uk)

This is a useful video: Setting up an iRecord activities for local groups - YouTube

iNaturalist
A Community for Naturalists · iNaturalist United Kingdom

Accompanying factsheets:
Land management guidance for hedgehogs, wildflower seed suppliers