

CONSERVATION ADVISOR SITE VISIT REPORT – Fen Park, Kirkley, Lowestoft

Conservation Adviser: Cathy Smith

Date of visit: 06/11/2024

Name of Project leader: Jonny Hawes, Parks and Grounds Maintenance Manager, Lowestoft Town Council

Lauren Elliott – Project and Committee Clerk, Lowestoft Town Council

Owner: Lowestoft Town Parish Council

District Council: East Coast

Location: Southwell Road/ Martins Avenue NR33 0RZ

Grid reference: TM539920

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[Enquiry](#)

Lowestoft Town Council would like advice on managing the wooded area of Fen meadow park.

Summary of Site

Soils are locally variable, predominantly Soilscape 10: Freely draining slightly acid sandy soils, but also Soilscape 27: Fen peat soils

Approximate area: 3.3ha

Current management arrangements: Lowestoft Town council is responsible for management. Concern has been raised about instability of

Habitat connectivity

North of the lake, still within the park, there is broadleaved deciduous woodland, a habitat of principal importance under Section 41 of the NERC Act, also referred to as priority habitat. The land immediately north of Kirkely fen park is recognised as good quality semi-improved grassland. Kirkely stream is adjacent to the park. The park is set within a residential area where gardens and other green spaces such as the allotments make a contribution to available habitat.

Species

A full ecological survey was not carried out, but a quick search of the records reveals the following within 1Km.

Protected species

Badger, Norfolk hawker, European eel,

Priority Species

Common toad, hedgehog, skylark, starling, house sparrow, herring gull, dunnock, kittiwake, song thrush, linnet, willow warbler, curlew, lapwing, bullfinch, cuckoo.

Red listed Birds of Conservation Concern (in addition to priority species)

Swift, greenfinch, house martin, fieldfare, mistle thrush

Species noted at the time of the visit

Note this is a sub-optimal time of year to assess herbaceous vegetation.

Alder	<i>Alnus glutinosa</i>
Silver birch	<i>Betula pendula</i>
Willow spp.	<i>Salix spp.</i>
Bramble	<i>Rubus fruticosus</i>
Water mint	<i>Mentha aquatica</i>
Fool's watercress	<i>Apium nodiflorum</i>
Pendulous sedge	<i>Carex pendula</i>
Stinging nettle	<i>Urtica dioica</i>
Bamboo	
Rhododendron	

Management recommendations

The wooded area south of the path to Tom Crisp way includes some substantial alder trees and appears to be more mature woodland than that north of the path.

Wet woodlands can be associated with bryophyte (moss and liverworts) interest and there are a large number of invertebrates associated with alder. Cuckoo recorded locally is a bird associated with wet woodland. Bats such as common and soprano pipistrelle, brown long eared and natterers bats also use this habitat. Dead wood within wet woodland provides specialised habitats for invertebrates and fungi. Dead wood whether fallen and standing of all sizes, should be conserved and retained wherever tree safety concerns are not over-riding. Mature alder is a habitat where in general non-intervention delivers the best outcomes for wildlife.

Mature alder carr is a priority habitat for conservation. There have been many losses of this habitat in the last century it is now a scarce habitat. The strongholds for wet woodlands in Suffolk are Suffolk Broads, the Waveney and Little Ouse Valleys and the Suffolk River Valleys Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA).

Within this area is a surface drain connected to a small stream has not been managed for some while. There are plans to dig it out. It is understood that the local drainage board have confirmed that the area doesn't come under their remit, and that checks are being made with Suffolk County Council.

Maintaining the surface drain will allow surface water to drain away improving oxygen levels in the soil whilst retaining moist soil conditions typical of a fen. Work should be carried out between September-March which is the dormant time for most wildlife. However, the bird breeding season is considered to commence from 1st March so work carried out in early spring should comply with the legislation. Other protected species associated with water courses includes Norfolk Hawker dragonfly, otter and water vole.

Good practice when de-silting back involves leaving at least one third of the ditch untouched, working at only one bank at a time and leaving marginal vegetation untouched where possible. Maintain a shallow edge on the fen meadow side of the drain. Dispose of spoil carefully, avoiding filling in hollows or placing on areas diverse in wildflowers.

North of the path the alder appears younger and gives the impression that it has naturally colonised from the older stand. Within this area there are also some large ornamental trees and garden plants.

The rhododendron wasn't identified to variety but is worth closer investigation as *Rhododendron ponticum*, can invade woodland, forming a thick leaf litter and shading out ground flora.

Certain bamboo species can become problematic rapidly forming dense stands, the single clump seen doesn't currently appear to be spreading so could be retained but monitored.



Concern was raised by the Town Council about the spindly self-seeded alder and its propensity to topple over. This a natural process which ultimately will leave the strongest trees standing. However, selective thinning of the most suppressed trees can promote better establishment of the remaining trees and lead to greater heterogeneity at shrub and ground layers. Initially reduce by up to 20%, retaining those with the best canopy potential then review in 4-6 years' time. Thinning trees around specimen mature trees would have the added benefit of making them more visible and promote tree health, however it would be prudent to reduce gradually, removing no more than half of the nearby young trees, avoid sudden changes which could negatively impact the condition of the specimen tree as well as wildlife. An alternative approach to thinning is to ring bark trees, this has the benefit of creating standing deadwood. Be aware of trees with bat roost potential, ie those with peeling bark, knot or rot holes and retain standing and fallen deadwood where possible. Dependant on the extent of thinning, a tree felling license may be required. It is understood that a tree safety check has recently been carried out and this should be referred in the first instance.

Friends of Kirkey may be able to utilise some of the timber for creating habitat piles for species such as hedgehogs, grass snakes and invertebrates.

[Wildlife recording and monitoring](#)

Wildlife recording is a tool for monitoring management and can be hugely rewarding. Biological records are most beneficial if lodged with Suffolk Biological Records Information Service SBiS, 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. Apps include ObsIdentify which has an element of gamification and is reputedly particularly useful for invertebrates, ensure a high degree of certainty or are checked in a reputable field guide before submitting the record to SBiS.

Fixed point photography could also be useful to gain a better understanding of management decisions on the woodland.

Trail or nest box cameras suitably secured could also be informative and a good way of engaging the community.

We would love to hear how you get on, do let us know if we can be of further assistance.

Yours sincerely

Cathy Smith
Conservation Adviser

Resources

MAGIC (DEFRA maps)

[Magic Map Application \(defra.gov.uk\)](https://defra.gov.uk/magic)

Soilscapes:

[Soilscapes soil types viewer - National Soil Resources Institute. Cranfield University \(landis.org.uk\)](https://landis.org.uk)

National Biodiversity Network Atlas

<https://records.nbnatlas.org/>

Priority Habitats UK Biodiversity Action Plans Wet Woodland

[Wet woodland \(UK BAP Priority Habitat description\) \(jncc.gov.uk\)](https://jncc.gov.uk)

Wet Woodland Suffolk Biodiversity Factsheet

[Wet Woodland \(suffolkbis.org.uk\)](https://suffolkbis.org.uk)

Invertebrates associated with wet woodland (Nationally)

[Notable invertebrates associated with wet woodland \(buglife.org.uk\)](https://buglife.org.uk)

Bats and trees

[Bats-Trees.pdf](#)

Tree safety

[Common sense risk management of trees - Forest Research](#)

Tree felling license

[Tree felling licence: when you need to apply - GOV.UK](#)

Norfolk Hawker management profile

[norfolk hawker.indd](#)

Eels

[The Eels \(England and Wales\) Regulations 2009](#)

Rhododendron – Non Native Species Secretariat

[Rhododendron » NNSS](#)

Wildlife recording

[Suffolk Biological Recording Online | Suffolk Biodiversity Information Service \(suffolkbis.org.uk\)](#)

[iRecord | Manage and share your wildlife records \(brc.ac.uk\)](#)

[Setting up an iRecord activities for local groups - YouTube](#)

iNaturalist

[A Community for Naturalists · iNaturalist United Kingdom](#)

Suffolk Wildlife Trust Courses

[Courses & Webinars | Suffolk Wildlife Trust](#)