

CONSERVATION ADVISOR SITE VISIT REPORT – Hall Farm Road Play Area, Melton

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Date of visit: 16/09/2021

Name of Project leader: Pip Alder, Assistant Clerk & Management Officer Melton Parish Council

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Owner: Melton Parish Council

Location of site: Accessed off Hall Farm Close, Hall Farm Road and Manthorpe Close, Melton.

Grid Reference: TM280506

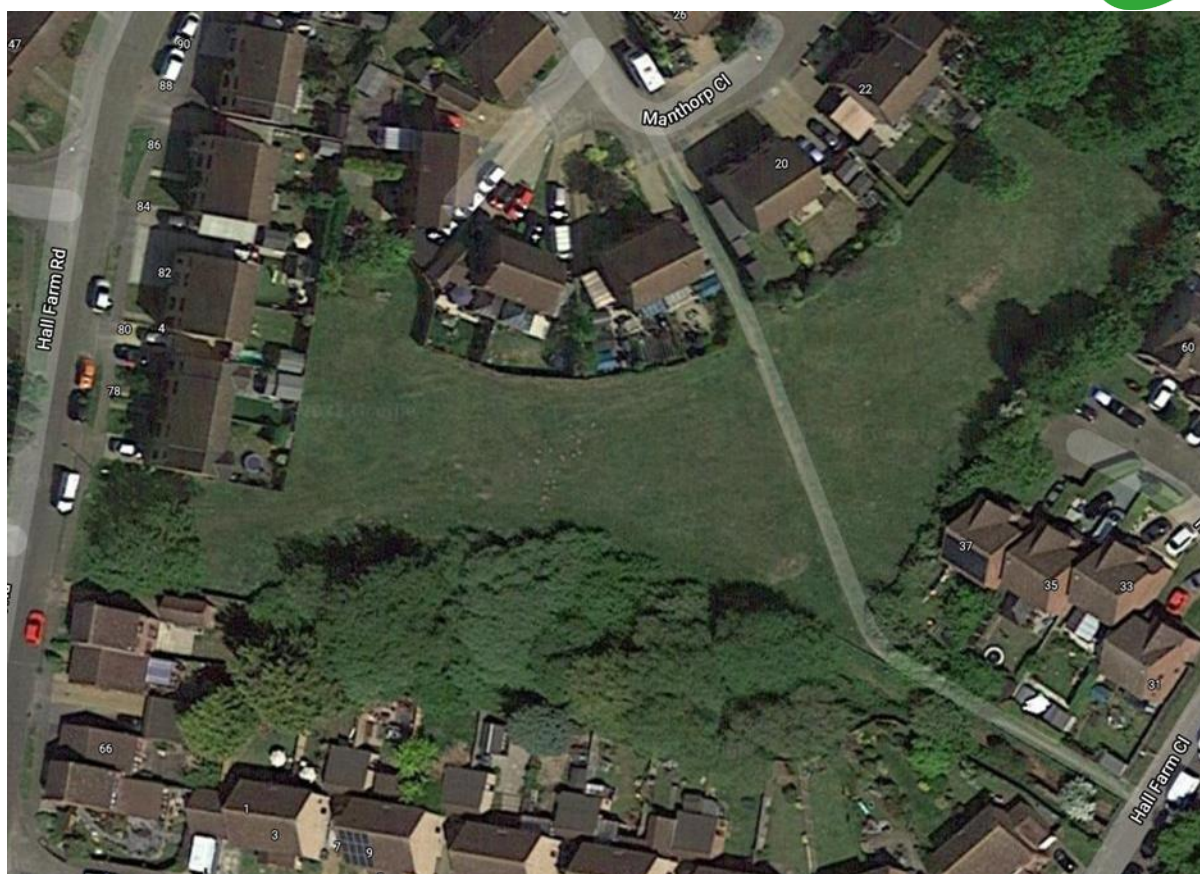
Contents

Enquiry	1
Summary of the site	2
Species	3
Management Proposals	4
Scrub renewal	4
Ditch restoration	5
Public engagement and wildlife recording	6
Important considerations	6
Resources	7

Enquiry

A parcel of land was divested to Melton Parish Council from East Suffolk Council that has a small section of waterway. On the image below is the area of trees at the bottom of the picture. It's a boggy area with a waterway/stream that runs out beside the path that leads onto Hall Farm Close.

Melton Parish Council are looking at enhancing the area and some residents have asked that the wet area is improved as it's currently subject to fly tipping.



Summary of the site

Soilscape 10: Freely draining slightly acid sandy soils

The ditch line is shown on MAGIC (DEFRA maps) as a less 'water issue' SKs 'sinks'

5918m², 0.5918ha designated as Green Space in the Neighbourhood Plan.

Most of the play area is short mown grass with some hedging and shrubs around the periphery.

The area which the Parish Council would like advice on lies on the southern boundary and is a wet boggy area with land drainage discharging to the southeast. Although dry at the time of the visit it is understood to be typically wet. Water was discharging from a concrete pipe by the walkway to Hall Farm Close, the water quality was not tested.

The boggy area, or ditch is largely hidden by willow shrub and some alder trees.

Himalayan balsam is growing in the wetter areas. Also noted was common reed *Phragmites australis* and water mint.



Species



NBN Atlas records within 0.5 KM, recorded within last 10 years
Note this is not a complete list, see website for further records.

Lucanus cervus – Stag beetle (Priority species UK)

Erinaceus europaeus -Hedgehog (Priority species UK)

Apus apus – Swift (Conservation: Amber due to recent declines)

Photo left: water mint

Management Proposals

Scrub habitat, although often undervalued, supports a wide range of species, including birds, mammals and invertebrates. Scrub provides good nesting, roosting and feeding habitat for birds such as wrens, dunnocks and members of the tit family. Alder and willow catkins are an important early source of pollen and nectar supply for bees and the small seeds found in alder cones are food for birds such as goldfinches. There are many invertebrates associated with alder and willows, which in turn provide food for birdlife, especially during the breeding season.

The edge habitat has retained a graded structure although would benefit from a long grassy edge. Within, the scrub has become tall and lost the lower scrub layers so, within financial constraints, would benefit from renewal work.

Scrub renewal

1. The scrub species appears to be predominantly willow, *Salix spp.* and alder, *Alnus glutinosa*. These tree species are typical of wet woodland as expected along this seepage area. Un-manged scrub ultimately grows into woodland and the ground becomes drier. Good management for conservation aims to promote a diversity of species, sizes and age classes of trees.
2. Mixed scrub stands begin to develop into woodland after about 15 years, so a rotation of around that duration, or in this case, managing a fifth every third year, will help create scrub in different stages of scrub to benefit invertebrate species.
3. Coppicing is the usual method used to manage scrub. Trees are cut back to near to the ground to encourage regeneration from the stump and rootstock. It would be best to retain some mature alder trees but if alder is coppiced, leave stools of about 25cm high to ensure there is enough living wood for the tree to re-grow.
4. Coppicing produces large volumes of brash. Some could be stacked on site to provide dead wood habitat and shelter, others chipped and used for habitat piles, mulching ornamental planting or removed from site. It would also be possible to use the brash to create a dead hedge to discourage access if littering remains a problem.
5. Clearance work ideally needs to be carried out during the winter months (1st September to the end of February) outside of the bird breeding season. Whilst the seasonally wet nature of the scrub may not be ideal for hedgehog breeding and hibernation, it is still a possibility. To minimise harm to hedgehogs, the ideal timing for the clearance of low scrub is September-October. Also be aware of the possibility of bat roosts if working on mature trees.
6. Many species thrive in areas where two different habitats meet such as woodland and grassland these transitional habitats are most valuable for wildlife when there is a gradual change from short vegetation to scrub and taller trees. Consideration could be given to creating a broad band of long grass between the scrub and close mown lawn. The grassy edge could be cut on an annual basis or biennial basis in late summer, early autumn. Do be aware of the potential for reptiles such as grass snakes

or lizards, mowing on a warm day allows them to escape, see our fact sheet. Removing arisings will help prevent the build up of nutrients and prevent a thatch forming. The arisings can be composted or used to create a habitat pile.

7. Stag beetles are a priority species and adult beetles have been recorded locally. Retaining some undisturbed deadwood on site, especially partially buried tree stumps will be beneficial both to stag beetles but also for amphibians such as frogs and toads during their terrestrial stage. A log pyramid can also be an attractive feature, The People's Trust for Endangered Species design is a good one to follow, see below. Logs are also a favourable habitat feature for amphibians to shelter and feed by during their terrestrial phase.
8. The space is constrained but if space permits, additional tree species could be planted to add diversity. Possibilities for wet areas include alder buckthorn, hazel or elder.

Ditch restoration

An alternative proposal from residents is to clear the scrub to create a pond. Although there is the prospect of it becoming a pond with fluctuating water levels, the area to the southeast may be best considered as a ditch. (An artificially created feature less than 5 metres wide which retains water for more than 4 months in a year).

Ditches can support a variety of aquatic life such as damselfly and dragonflies. Wet and boggy areas are also valuable resources for invertebrates such as some hoverfly larvae (pollinator species) and other invertebrates such as rove beetles and crane flies. Downstream of the discharge pipe, scrub could be reduced to improve light levels to the ditch as part of the general scheme of scrub renewal as described above.



The presence of Himalayan balsam (pictured above) is of note as an alien invasive, schedule 9 species. There is no legal obligation to control it on your own land only to prevent its spread. Control requires a great deal of sustained effort, pulling or cutting for at least 5 years as seeds can remain in the seed bank. Cutting needs to be done as low to the ground as possible and may need to be done multiple times in the season and it tends to regrow. The removed stems are best left in low-lying piles on site to rot down as a licence may be

needed to remove the material offsite. Cease control measures when it begins to set seed, usually at the end of August. See Government guidelines.

Public engagement and wildlife recording

Rotational management of the scrub should help demonstrate to residents that the area is being cared for. Gradual canopy reduction will also help with complaints of leaf fall into gardens.

However, helping residents to understand the value of having trees and bushes in the park may form part of the consultation process. There is growing evidence of the benefits of trees in urban areas: reducing heat stress through shading, improving air quality through capturing air born particulates and buffering noise and light pollution.

Recent research into well-being demonstrates the value of species rich areas beyond those more impoverished green spaces. The paper goes on to discuss the conflicting desires for more nature rich areas and neatness, suggesting that 'rather than de-vegetating to make places safer through the elimination of hiding places, it would be better to "re-people" spaces through the creation of social events in those spaces.' The Parish Council's current consultation process and proposals to make this green space more inviting sit well with this premise. See resources.

Another way of engaging with the local community is to encourage gardening for wildlife and wildlife recording. There are many forms wildlife recording can 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. There is also an app-based platform for i-record.

Important considerations

- Some of the more mature 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.
- Himalayan Balsam is a schedule 9, alien invasive species, see discussion above and Government guidelines.

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

MAGIC (DEFRA maps)

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

Soilscapes:

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

Himalayan Balsam:

[Stop invasive non-native plants from spreading - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

Wet woodland

[Wet Woodland | Buglife](#)

Bat Conservation Trust:

[Roosts in trees - Bat roosts - Bat Conservation Trust \(bats.org.uk\)](https://bats.org.uk)

Wildlife Ponds in places with public access:

[1 \(freshwaterhabitats.org.uk\)](https://freshwaterhabitats.org.uk)

Stag Beetle Pyramids

[Build-a-log-pile-for-stag-beetles.pdf \(ptes.org\)](#)

The scrub management handbook:

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

Wildlife recording

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

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

Video tutorial

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

iNaturalist

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

Restorative benefits of biological diversity in green spaces

[Frontiers | Not All Green Space Is Created Equal: Biodiversity Predicts Psychological Restorative Benefits from Urban Green Space | Psychology \(frontiersin.org\)](#)

Accompanying factsheets:

Land management and hedgehogs, Reptile habitat piles