CONSERVATION ADVISER SITE VISIT REPORT **St Peter's church, Carlton Colville**

Adviser: Cathy Smith, Community Wildlife Adviser

Date of visit: 22nd October 2025

Project leader: Mark Ellis, church maintenance co-ordinator, treasurer and lay minister

Benefice: Carlton Colville and Mutford

Archdeaconry: Norwich

Deanery: Lothingland

Location of site: Church Lane, Carlton Colville, Lowestoft NR33 8AT

Grid Reference: TM 51006 90136

Contents

Enquiry

St Peter's church is starting to manage the churchyard for wildlife but would appreciate an advisory visit, and advice on creating a land management plan.

Summary of the site

Soilscape 18: Slowly permeable seasonally wet slightly acid but base-rich loamy and clayey soils.

Soils are locally variable and adjacent soils are, Soilscape 10: Freely draining slightly acid sandy soils.

Approximate area: 0.72ha

Habitat connectivity: Immediately north of St Peter's church MAGIC DEFRA maps indicate wood pasture or Parkland, a habitat of principal importance under the NERC Act 2006, also known as priority habitat. Further wood pasture or parkland is shown approximately 250m east of the churchyard. Aerial maps show that development has occurred at both these sites although tree preservation orders remain. Residential gardens and green spaces also make and contribution to available habitat.

Species

A full ecological survey was not undertaken, below are a few records of note within 1Km from the National Biodiversity Network Atlas. Although many records are quite old, Carlton Colville church has a relatively large number of species records, 161, on the NBN Beautiful burial ground platform. This platform was set up to inform the faculty process.

Species of Principal Importance NERC Act Section 41, Priority Species
Hedgehog*, common toad, grass snake*, dunnock, starling, house sparrow, skylark, tree sparrow, bullfinch, cuckoo, linnet, herring gull, yellow hammer, marsh tit, lapwing, song thrush, wall butterfly, small heath butterfly.

*Conferred some degree of protection.

Additional red listed birds of conservation concern
Swift, greenfinch, fieldfare, mistle thrush, house martin.

Species noted on the day

Lady's bedstraw	*Galium verum*
Yarrow	*Achillea millefolium*
Mouse-ear hawkweed	*Pilosella officinarum*
Ribwort plantain	*Plantago lanceolata*
Barren strawberry	*Potentilla sterilis*
Bulbous buttercup	*Ranunculus bulbosus*
Creeping cinquefoil	*Potentilla reptans*
Ground ivy	*Glechoma hederacea*
Germander speedwell	*Veronica chamaedrys*
Dandelion	*Taraxacum officinale*
Cats ear	*Hypochaeris radicata*

Dove's foot cranesbill	*Lotus corniculatus*
Red clover	*Trifolium pratense*
Daisy	*Bellis perennis*
Herb Robert	*Geranium robertianum*
Selfheal	*Prunella vulgaris*
Spear thistle	*Cirsium vulgare*
Violet	*Viola spp.*
Nettle	*Urtica dioica*
Chickweed	*Stellaria media*
Groundsel	*Senecio vulgaris*
Ivy	*Hedera helix*
Yew	*Taxus baccata*
Sycamore	*Acer pseudoplatanus*
Holly	*Ilex aquifolium*
Bramble	*Rubus fruticosus*
Common Lime	*Tilia* x *europaea*
Elm	*Ulnus spp.*
Hawthorn	*Crataegus monogyna*
Alexanders	*Smyrnium olusatrum*
Pink wood sorrel	*Oxalis articulata*

Management recommendations

Churchyards can often be rare remnants of a species rich grassland habitat that was once common in Suffolk. It is estimated that 90% of our herb-rich meadows have vanished in the last half century so churchyards are often a reservoir of local provenance grassland wildflowers. These flower rich habitats provide a rich pollinator nectar resource which also support many other invertebrate species as well as seed eating and insect eating birds, small mammals and reptiles. Flower rich meadows enhance soil microbial diversity; carbon sequestration and storage so make a vital contribution to ameliorating climate change.

Churchyards can also be significant components within green corridors and stepping stones permitting wildlife to move through the landscape.

October is a sub-optimal time to assess grassland, but a number of wildflowers including bulbous buttercup and red clover were noted. The church warden is also knowledgeable about bird species which visit the churchyard.

Continue to mow either side of the paths, around frequently visited memorials on a regular basis. This will help balance the needs of different user groups and demonstrate that the management is purposeful and the churchyard well-kept and cared for and delineate areas which are to be allowed to grow longer. Areas of shorter grass can be valuable basking areas for reptiles and invertebrates and are favoured by some more delicate flowering plants.

South of St Peter's church

This area benefits from a largely open sunny aspect and at the time of the visit appeared to have the greatest variety of wildflowers. This and the southwest corner are the areas to prioritize for conservation management.

The approach to the church and around the cremated remains will need to be managed by regularly mowing. It may be possible to reduce the frequency a little at the end of the summer to allow low growing flowers to blossom and set seed.

Beyond there may be scope to identify a small patch where mowing can be paused in early summer. On loamy clayey soils a cut and rake in late June-mid July is advised. If resources allow, follow up by allowing a second growing window for late summer interest then cut and collect in September-October. If a second cut and collect is too onerous, then mow approximately monthly after the first cut and collect in late June-mid July.

To support wildflower diversity, it is important that the cut vegetation, known as arisings, is removed to prevent nutrients being returned to the soil which favours course grasses and nuisance weeds. Arisings also need to be removed to prevent a thatch being created which can smother wildflowers.

Ensure this area is no larger than can be raked off. Most wildflowers will persist in mown grass, as long as it isn't cut too short whilst they can be diminished if the sward is left unmanaged or arisings left in situ.

Southwest corner

In this area there are a couple of recent memorials for which access needs to be maintained. It is understood that otherwise, the grass in this area has been left uncut for some while. At the time of the visit, it was being cut, and it was great to see arisings being raked off. It was difficult to assess species diversity, but a reasonable approach would be to continue to allow the vegetation to grow during the summer months then cut and rake in September-early October.

The aim here could be to support invertebrates such as grassland butterflies which benefit from grass left uncut throughout the summer. Tall grassland has been shown to support a greater abundance and diversity of invertebrates, which in turn support species such as bats, hedgehogs and several garden bird species which are reliant upon a plentiful supply. Leave to grow until the September-October. If too large an area to cut annually, sub-divide and cut half each year on rotation. As the vegetation is likley to be relatively tall, the ideal method of cutting is with a scythe or reciprocal mower, if unavailable a strimmer can be used.

This area has a reasonably open aspect so may be worth reassessing during early summer.

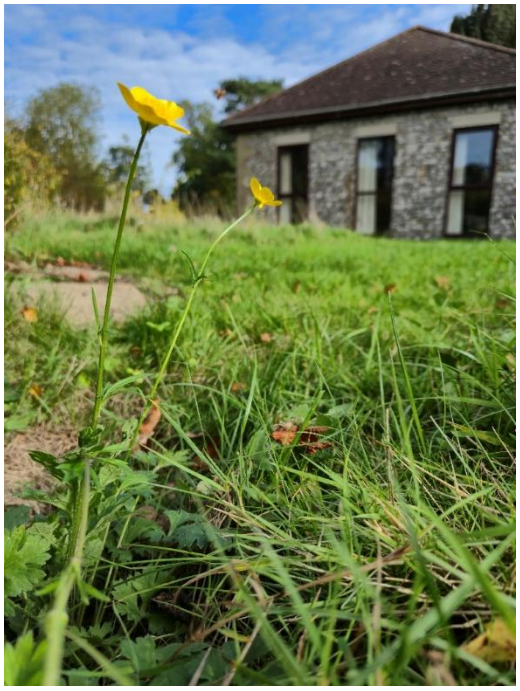
North of St Peter's church

This area is shaded by the church building, so is less likley to support a diversity of meadow flowers. A small area has been uncut and developed into tussocky grassland. All-year-round grassland supports overwintering insects; recent research shows it to be particularly valuable for grassland butterflies. An abundance of grassland invertebrates in turn supports slow worm, hedgehog and insectivorous birds.

If unmanaged for several years shrub species such as bramble and rose will colonise and this could be an acceptable outcome. If you wish to retain rough grassland, subdivide the area and then cut and rake on a two-three-year rotation in September-October. Removing arisings will help maintain a diverse sward but is less of a priority than in existing wildflower rich areas.

There is also a small patch which has been seeded with a wildflower mix. Whilst we understand that this is well intended, sowing wildflower seed mixes is not something we advise for most churchyards. Many are already species rich, in some cases are a reservoir of local provenance wildflowers and host wildflowers which have all but been lost from elsewhere in the county. Fortunately, the area chosen has not compromised the grassland south of the church where there is greatest promise of an existing flora.

What we do suggest is that there is clear messaging to the church community and wider public about the value of old grassland and if resources are limited, management of areas south of the churchyard are prioritised.



Left: Bulbous buttercup, a plant typical of permanent grassland.

©The Land app

Boundary hedges and trees

The hedge and trees along this boundary are a good nesting, feeding and sheltering habitat for birds, mammals and invertebrates. Where space permits, aim for the base of the hedge to thicken and support a wide grassy margin. This will benefit overwintering insects and species such as hedgehogs. The grassy margin can be cut on a rotational biennial basis.

Other considerations

As Suffolk is a county with very little habitat containing large areas of stone, the headstones in our churchyards provide a valuable surface for lichens to develop undisturbed. Lichens can take over 100 years to grow only a few centimetres and should not be removed from gravestones unless necessary.

Ivy is an immensely valuable wildlife plant. A study commissioned by Oxford University on behalf of Historic England in 2017 gives a detailed discussion about when existing defects in buildings can lead to ivy damage and when ivy can be protective towards historic structures, see resources. On headstones it can shade out lichens so it would be prudent to remove young ivy growth.

Any replacement tree planting should carefully consider the impact on other existing habitats, we would generally recommend tree planting to be limited to the boundaries of churchyards and to avoiding planting south of species rich grassland.

Community Engagement

There already is already a keen interest in wildlife recording and knowledge of the site. This will really help with monitoring the impact of management and can also be a tool for public engagement. We recommend lodging with Suffolk Biodiversity 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. Other apps such as Obsidentify are becoming increasingly useful, ensure that they return a high degree of certainty or are checked in a reputable field guide and that records are submitted to SBiS.

Churches Count on Nature ran from Saturday 7th to Sunday 15th of June 2025. Running an event during this annual event could be a springboard for recording effort as well as bringing in the wider public.

Other activities could include having a focus on popular groups associated with Carlton Colville perhaps hedgehogs, butterflies, swifts, house martin, or bats. There are resources available for all these species, see below.

It was a pleasure to visit St Peter's Church and share in your enthusiasm and knowledge for managing the churchyard for wildlife, do let us know how you get on.

Kind regards

Cathy Smith
Community Wildlife Adviser

Resources

Defra Habitat Maps
Magic Map Application (defra.gov.uk)

Land App
Home - Land App

Soilscapes
http://www.landis.org.uk/soilscapes/

National Biodiversity Network Atlas
https://records.nbnatlas.org/

Beautiful burial Grounds records
Home - NBN Atlas Beautiful Burial Grounds

SWT meadow creation and management
Meadows and grassland | Suffolk Wildlife Trust

The Good Meadow Guide
Plantlife-The-Good-meadow-guide-English_WEB.pdf

Butterflies
Wildlife-friendly garden practices increase butterfly abundance and species richness in urban and arable landscapes - ScienceDirect

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

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

Bird boxes
Bird and bat boxes | Suffolk Wildlife Trust

Nest Record Scheme | BTO - British Trust for Ornithology

Suffolk Swifts
Save our Suffolk swifts | Suffolk Wildlife Trust

House martins
House Martin Support Suffolk | Suffolk Bird Group

Bats
Bat Boxes - Buildings, planning and development - Bat Conservation Trust (bats.org.uk)

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

Home - Bats In Churches

Common Sense guide to risk management of trees
NTSG-full-guidance.pdf

Eco Church Award
Eco Church - An A Rocha UK Project

God’s Acre
Caring for God's Acre is a charity that specialises in the preservation of wildlife and the heritage of burial grounds, graveyards and cemeteries (caringforgodsacre.org.uk)

Engagement resources for churches
Home | Inspired Classrooms

Lichens in churchyards
Churchyard Lichens | The British Lichen Society

Ivy and historic buildings
Microsoft Word - Ivy report December_verViles.docx (ox.ac.uk)

SWT Courses
Courses | Suffolk Wildlife Trust

SWT resources for Parish Councils, community and church groups
Wilder Communities | Suffolk Wildlife Trust