

## CONSERVATION ADVISOR SITE VISIT REPORT - Huntingfield St Mary's Church

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Date of visit: 30/06/2022

Project leaders: Emma Ward, church warden

Deanery: Blyth Valley

Location: The Street, Huntingfield, Halesworth, Suffolk

Grid Reference: TM336743

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### Enquiry

The PCC would like a SWT sign to explain that the churchyard is being managed for wildlife.

### Summary of the site

**Soilscape 9:** Lime-rich loamy and clayey soils with impeded drainage

**Current management arrangements:** Paths are frequently mown, longer grass left over the summer then stirmed and cuttings raked off.

**Habitat connectivity:** The churchyard forms part of a network of habitats threading their way through a largely arable landscape. However, approximately 800m to the east is a large area of priority habitat, deciduous woodland and to the southeast a mosaic of priority habitats centred around the Blyth valley.

## Species

### Records of protected species within 1Km include:

Great crested newt  
Grass snake  
Otter  
Bat spp.

### Birds of Conservation Concern, red listed

Swift (2017), greenfinch (2014), house martin (2017), herring gull (2009), yellowhammer (2011), linnet (2009), spotted flycatcher (2011), house sparrow (2014), grey partridge (2010), marsh tit (2017), turtle dove (2014), starling (2009)

Additional records including amber listed birds of conservation concern can be found on the NBNAtlas.

### Species noted on the day

Swifts, screaming party in the centre of the village by the Inn

Red clover  
Barren strawberry  
Yarrow  
Mouse eared hawkweed  
Cat's ear  
Herb Robert  
Ground ivy  
Common sorrel  
Ribwort plantain  
Ox eye daisy  
Cinquefoil  
Cowslip  
Black medick  
Red campion  
Ragwort  
Knapweed

Ringlet butterfly

*This is by no means a complete record, the churchyard was buzzing with insect life, hoverflies, bumbles and butterflies, a joy to see.*



## 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 are also estimated to store up to 500 more carbon than grassland swards so make a vital contribution to ameliorating climate change.

Continue to mow the paths 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. The areas of shorter grass are also valuable basking areas for reptiles and for many invertebrates.

The best time of year to mow is between mid - late July, then if grass growth is vigorous, a second mow in September- October. The second cut mimics traditional 'aftermath grazing' Knapweed is a valuable pollinator plant but if it begins to dominate, then move the mowing forward a little. Each time arisings should be raked off, ideally following a couple of days left in situ for the seeds to fall off.

It is important that arisings are removed to prevent nutrients being returned to the soil which favours coarse grasses and nuisance weeds. Arisings also need to be removed to prevent a thatch being created which can be detrimental to wildflowers. Some arisings can be used to create a small habitat pile in a less floristically rich part of the churchyard.

When resources are limited then focus your efforts on the more floristically rich areas of the churchyard, this is usually in the sunnier aspect of the churchyard, in this case as you enter from The Street and also to some extent in the north east corner.

The small area of sown wildflower under the west window is looking attractive and seems to have established well. Another option of for enhancing wildflower interest in a churchyard is through green hay. The SWT green hay register which aims to link donor and recipient sites, contact Graham Hart for details. Enhancing meadows through the use of green hay is an effective and nil cost way of recolonisation by using seed of local provenance.



The trees in St Mary's churchyard are also a feature and provide complimentary habitat, important for invertebrate species, and in turn a food supply, roosting and nesting sites for bird and bat species.

There is the possibility of leaving some of the edges under the trees unmown over winter on a two or three rotation. Queen bumblebees will overwinter in tussocky grass and leaving some vegetation uncut extends the seed availability for birds such as linnets and greenfinches.

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.

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.



### Supplementary nesting provision

1. If the Inn or other property owner near the green was interested in putting up a swift box and call system, Suffolk Bird Group can help assess and advise on the best siting.
2. Bird boxes could be placed on some of the mature trees and assembling bird boxes from preprepared kits is a popular family activity. A hole size of 32mm gives access to a greater range of species than those with smaller diameter entrances, there are plans for making bird boxes on our website. It is good practice to clean out bird boxes between 1st September-31st January (outside the breeding season), so choose boxes which can be easily opened for the purpose. To prevent overheating, face the box away from full sun, ideally in a north-east orientation.

3. Whilst bats can take a little longer to take up residence in bat boxes, they are still worthwhile considering. The Bat Conservation Trust gives instructions to make the Kent bat box and guidance on where to place them. The Bats in Churches project as a source of further information. Subject to availability, volunteer run Suffolk Bat Group may be able to assist with surveys or bat walks.

## Community Engagement

1. Encourage the church community and residents to record their sightings of wildlife through the Suffolk Biological Records website or through the i-record platform. 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 linked iNaturalist and Seek apps. 'Plantnet' and Birdnet or Merlin are also recommended.
2. Al Rocha runs an Eco Church Award which encourages church communities to review how they include environmental awareness in different aspects of church life: buildings, worship and teaching, land, community and global engagement, and lifestyle. Both Al Rocha and God's Acre both provide resources to help with public engagement activities.
3. Churches Count on Nature ran from Saturday 4th June – Sunday 12th June 2022. Running an event during this annual event could be a springboard for wider engagement with the local community.

It was a pleasure to meet you and to discover your beautiful churchyard which provides a fine setting for the Parish church.

We will replace the sign explaining that the churchyard is being managed for wildlife with our new TeamWilder one when available.

We would love to hear how your get on with your project to promote the wildlife in the churchyard to a wider audience, do keep in touch.

Kind regards

Cathy Smith  
Community Wildlife Advisor

Graham Hart  
Conservation Advisor

## Resources

Defra Habitat Maps

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

Soilscapes

<http://www.landis.org.uk/soilscapes/>

National Biodiversity Network Atlas

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

Biological recording

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

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

Nest box recording scheme

[Nest Record Scheme | BTO - British Trust for Ornithology](http://bto.org.uk)

Making bird boxes

[Bird and bat boxes | Suffolk Wildlife Trust](http://suffolkwildlifetrust.org.uk)

Bat Boxes

[Bat Boxes - Buildings, planning and development - Bat Conservation Trust \(bats.org.uk\)](http://bats.org.uk)

Bats and Tree surgery

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

Bats in Churches

[Home - Bats In Churches](http://batsinchurches.org.uk)

Suffolk Bat Group

[Suffolk Bat Group | Suffolk Wildlife Trust](http://suffolkwildlifetrust.org.uk)

Eco Church Award

[Eco Church - An A Rocha UK Project](http://anarocha.org.uk)

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 \(caringforgodsacre.org.uk\)](http://caringforgodsacre.org.uk)

Lichens in churchyards

[Churchyard Lichens | The British Lichen Society](http://britishlichen.org.uk)

Ivy and historic buildings

[Microsoft Word - Ivy report December verViles.docx \(ox.ac.uk\)](http://ox.ac.uk)

Suffolk Swift Group contact

[swifts@suffolkbirdgroup.org](mailto:swifts@suffolkbirdgroup.org)

Suffolk Swifts

[Save our Suffolk swifts | Suffolk Wildlife Trust](#)

National Churches Trust visitor website

[www.explorechurches.org](http://www.explorechurches.org)

Suffolk Wildlife Trust TeamWilder

[Team Wilder | Suffolk Wildlife Trust](#)

**Factsheets attached**

Churchyard Management

Ragwort