

CONSERVATION ADVISOR SITE VISIT REPORT – The Wadd, Benhall Green

Adviser: Cathy Smith, Community Wildlife Adviser

Date of visit: 20/05/2026

Name of Project leader: Coral Duncan, Parish Councillor

Owner: Benhall Estate

Managed by: Benhall and Sternfield Parish Council

Location: Benhall Green IP17 1HT

Grid Reference: TM385611

District Council: East Suffolk

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Enquiry

A village wildlife group is interested in helping to look after and monitor The Wadd on behalf of Benhall parish council. The site is a valuable resource for people and nature in the area.

Annual cutting and collecting has not always been possible. The Parish Council are considering an approach by Sizewell C who are interested in collecting green hay from the meadow.

SWT last advised in 2022 and much of this report echoes findings from that visit.

Site summary

Soilscape 27: Fen peat soils

Surrounded by **Soilscape 10:** Freely draining slightly acid sandy soils

Approximate area: 11,000m², 1.1ha

Habitat connectivity

The Wadd forms part of the Benhall Green meadows County wildlife site (CWS). Together with Manor Farm meadows, another County wildlife site creates and a wildlife corridor comprising both good quality semi-improved grassland and deciduous woodland. The ditch network also forms part of an extensive wildlife corridor along the river Fromus valley.

Suffolk Local Nature Recovery Strategy, LNNRS

Possible measures proposed by the LNNRS.

Northwest of the ditch: lowland meadow restoration, margins of the ditch – deciduous woodland restoration, southeast of the ditch: deciduous woodland restoration.

Species

A full search of the biological records has not been undertaken; the records below can be found within 1Km of the National Biodiversity Network Atlas.

Protected species

Otter, badger, water vole

Species of Principal Importance NERC Act 2006 – otherwise known as Priority Species

Brown hare, hedgehog, bullfinch, dunnoek

Birds of Conservation Concern, Red listed (in addition to those listed above)

Greenfinch

The site is known for Moschatel *Adoxa moschatellina* in the woodland and southern marsh orchid *Dactylorhiza praetermissa* in the meadow. For a small area of land, the biodiversity in and around is notable and a testament to long-standing community management.

Management proposals

A condition assessment of the Wadd together with a management plan, would indicate methodology for monitoring to ensure that interventions are having the desired result.

The land is divided into two compartments with the northwest area, identified on the Priority Habitat inventory as lowland meadow and lies above water retentive fen soils. The parcel of land southeast of this is recognised as priority deciduous woodland habitat.

The ditch which winds its way between the meadow and woodland is a delightful feature and an additional habitat feature within the Wadd, the ditch network extends along the southwest boundary. We are told that the stream floods across the road and into the southeast area of the Wadd. The River Fromus is classed as a main river by the Environment agency.



Grassland management, northwest of the ditch

It is understood that historically management has been through a single late summer cut and collect and continuity of management is a positive choice when meadows remain in good condition.

Sizewell are interested in reaching agreement with the Parish Council to cut the Wadd and harvest green hay for enhancement of their meadows. This could secure cut and collect management for one year and should provide some benefit to grassland condition of the Wadd.

To safeguard the seed bank at the donor site, Natural England's advisory sheet recommends that a third to a fifth of the site is left uncollected in any one year and areas rotated each year. To facilitate management and maintain a fine sward unharvested areas could be located along the margins.

For green hay collection it is likely that a mid-July-August cut and collect will result in a good range of species for meadow enhancement. This time window is likely to also be suitable for the Wadd. When there is late summer growth, a second late cut and collect in October will help to reduce the dominance of tussocky grass and favour more delicate wildflowers.

Future tree planting is best reserved for the area southeast of the ditch or along the banks on the north side of the central ditch.

Having a clear pathway through the grassland directs footfall and reduces compaction and disturbance to other areas. The boardwalk and bench are in both need of repair, there is an interpretation board at one end, a second could be considered and funding sought, see resources below.

A stand of bamboo, a garden escape has established in the southwest corner. The species is unknown so the risk of spread difficult to assess, if one of the those with runners then the urgency of removal is greater than if it is a clump forming variety. The most reliable way to remove it is with a digger and to reduce the risk of accidental spread, dispose off-site to a licensed garden waste facility.

The potential for a replacement barn owl box could be discussed with Barn Owl Support Suffolk.

[Southeast of the ditch potential woodland restoration](#)

The ground flora in the woodland is nettle dominated, a combination of shade, disturbance from previous land use and periodic flooding. Management of ground flora is best seen as a low intervention with rotational mowing, every 3-5 years to maintain some open glades.

Once moschatel has died back in May-June, cutting back of tall vegetation, with a high cut of around 15cm (to prevent harm to reptiles) beside the path will facilitate access along the woodland boardwalk and encourage more delicate wildflower. Also be mindful of the potential for breeding birds.

Around the margins there is bramble scrub, an important habitat woodland component. Scrub habitat provides good nesting, roosting and feeding habitat for birds such as turtle dove, wrens, dunnock and members of the tit family as well as pollen and nectar sources for pollinator species. Low growing scrub such as bramble is important for hedgehogs, a key site for breeding and hibernation nests.

To manage bramble cut on rotational basis every 3-5 years during October - February. This timing avoids the bird breeding season, but reptiles may still be active until November so delay work in reptile foci or work on a warm day when reptiles can more quickly escape. Hedgehogs may utilise woodland edge bramble and scrub for nesting and hibernation, autumn management is the best time to avoid disturbance in these locations.

There is a reasonable supply of decaying standing and fallen dead wood, which is to be encouraged. Where not interfering with pathways or management, logs left in situ on the ground provide more valuable habitat for invertebrates reliant upon rotting dead wood, such as saproxylic beetles, such as stag beetle.

Standing deadwood will benefit invertebrate species reliant on them as well as cavity nesting birds such as starling and woodpecker. Peeling bark, rot hollows and crevices also provide excellent homes for bats. There is guidance about tree safety in the 'Common Sense risk management of trees. Note that under the Forestry Act, it is illegal to fell trees in Great

Britain without prior approval, although there are exceptions for trees below a specified size, dangerous trees, and very small-scale felling operations. Any tree surgery carried out to the mature trees should also follow the guidelines from the Bat Conservation Trust.

Benhall is at northern extent of the range for Stag Beetles, although there are records nearby so a large stag beetle stumpery to be created on a suitable site nearby. Stag beetles require free draining loamy soils in dappled sunlight close to tree lines, mature hedges or woodland edges. Parkland, orchards and gardens can also be suitable habitats for stag beetles. Stag beetle stumperies are created using logs, approximately a meter long and 25cm diameter or greater from mixed broadleaved species and placed approximately vertically into a hole 50-80cm deep such that two thirds of the log is below ground level. Then stumpery is then back filled with soil and left undisturbed.

Subject to a more detailed appraisal, other actions could include: building of an artificial otter holt by Wild Benhall, diversification of tree species through the addition of black poplar, habitat pile creation for grass snake, pollarding or coppicing willow trees.

Ditches

As the river Fromus is a main river, the Parish Council and Wild Benhall should be aware of guidance on working near a main river. Flood risk maps also indicate that much of The Wadd is on the floodplain, which is borne out by local knowledge about the land southeast of the ditch being subject to flooding.

Regulated activities include but are not limited to the following:

You may need to apply for permission to do any of the following regulated flood risk activities:

- *any activity within 8 metres of the bank of a main river, or 16 metres if it is a tidal main river*
- *activities carried out on the floodplain of a main river, more than 8 metres from the riverbank, culvert or flood defence structure (or 16 metres if it is a tidal main river), if you do not have planning permission (you do not need permission to build agricultural haystacks, straw stacks or manure clamps in these places)*

If you are not sure if your work is regulated and requires a permit, contact the Environment Agency.

No protected species surveys were carried out, but there is potential for otter and water vole, both fully protected under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended).

Further investigations would be required, neighbours consulted and permissions granted but there is the potential to restore ditch levels to their historic level to create greater water holding capacity to benefit aquatic invertebrates, amphibians, and water voles. One bank would be left unmanaged as a refuge, the other re-profiled in sections between September - March and vegetation allowed to naturally regenerate. Typical timescales for de-silting ditches are over a 5-7 year rotation, although local conditions will influence this.

Wild Benhall

Opportunities for Wild Benhall include light summer management of paths, together with supplementary provision through making nest or bat boxes and/or otter holt. There is also the possibility of applying for funding for public engagement events such invertebrate hunts, night walks, artist led exploration or storytelling, perhaps taking in the wider land use and cultural history. The Suffolk Wildlife Trust Festival of Nature may provide a source of inspiration. The Wadd could inspire wider initiatives to support wildlife in the village, including locations such as the primary school, The Green, churchyard and gardens.

There is scope to further interest in biological recording, this could be led by Citizen Science projects such as Birds in Green Spaces or the Pollinating monitoring Scheme.

It was a pleasure to meet you and discuss opportunities for habitat enhancement, we would love to hear how you get on.

Yours sincerely

Cathy Smith
Conservation Adviser

Resources

MAGIC (DEFRA maps)

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

Soilscapes:

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

Suffolk Local Nature Recovery Strategy

[Local Nature Recovery Strategy \(LNRS\) - Suffolk County Council](#)

River and ditches

[Statutory Main River Map](#)

[Technical map - Check your long term flood risk - GOV.UK](#)

[Owning a watercourse - GOV.UK](#)

[Ditches - Freshwater Habitats Trust](#)

Common sense risk management of trees

[fcms024.pdf \(forestresearch.gov.uk\)](#)

Woodland management

[managing-your-woodland-for-wildlife.pdf \(woodlands.co.uk\)](#)

[Woodland management | Suffolk Wildlife Trust](#)

[Suffolk Tree Warden Network - Championing Suffolk's Trees & Hedgerows](#)

Bat Conservation Trust

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

Tree health citizen science project

[An early warning system for tree health and tree disease - Observatree](#)

Tree felling: getting permission

[Tree felling: getting permission - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Meadow management and enhancement

[Meadows and grassland | Suffolk Wildlife Trust](#)

[The-Good-meadow-guide-Plantlife.pdf](#)

[Natural England Technical Information Note TIN063](#)

Bamboo

[Bamboo Control in Gardens | RHS Advice](#)

Bird and Bat boxes

[Bird and bat boxes | Suffolk Wildlife Trust](#)

Barn Owl

[Barn Owl Support Suffolk | Suffolk Bird Group](#)

National Biodiversity Network Atlas

[https://records.nbnatlas.org/](#)

Stag beetle

[Stag Beetles - record your sightings for the Great Stag Hunt - PTES](#)

[Suffolk Stag Beetle Survey Results | Suffolk Biodiversity Information Service](#)

[Stag Beetle | Suffolk Wildlife Trust](#)

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](#)

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

[ObsIdentify - Apps - Observation.org](#)

[Pl@ntNet identify](#)

[Birds in Greenspaces | BTO](#)

[Welcome to the UK Pollinator Monitoring Scheme \(PoMS\) | PoMS](#)

[Welcome to the Record Pool](#)

[Hedgehogs - People's Trust for Endangered Species \(ptes.org\)](#)

Engagement ideas

[Festival of Nature | Suffolk Wildlife Trust](#)

Funding

[Nature First small grants scheme | East Suffolk Council](#)

[Home | Funding 4 Suffolk](#)