

## CONSERVATION ADVISOR SITE VISIT REPORT - Homersfield Wood

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Date of visit: 25/01/2022

Name of Project leader: Lucy Hammond, Councillor

Other members of the group present:

Mark Timms, tree warden

Angela Skokes, chair of Parish Council

Nearest postcode: IP20 0EU

Grid Reference: TM286853

### Enquiry

Homersfield Parish Council manage a 4-acre community woodland of mixed coniferous and deciduous wood - possibly quite ancient. The Angles Way, a long-distance footpath, runs through the wood and St Mary's church sits just to the north. The Parish Council would like advice on management.

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### Summary of the site

This is a mixed deciduous and coniferous woodland on a sandy ridge.

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

**Owner:** Parish Council

**Area:** Approximately 4acres, 1.62 hectares.



©National Library of Scotland 6" OS 1884

How long woodland has been at this site it is uncertain but the OS map of 1884 shown above provides one indication that a woodland has existed here for some while.

It was suggested that the historical records of the Adair family who were major landowners for over 200 years, might have records of the wood and provide insight into its prior management.

### Public Access and amenities

There is no designated parking, but nearby roadside parking is possible.

The Angles way runs through the wood (National Footpath). Unsurfaced paths circle around the perimeter taking in glimpses of the river Waveney and countryside beyond.

There is a picnic bench as you enter the wood by the church.

Some local children play in the wood, den building is encouraged within a small area.



## Species

The time of the visit was a little early for ground flora, but Alexanders *Smyrniium olusatrum* was noted to be dominant across large areas of the woodland floor. It is understood that at the southern end of the wood there are English Bluebells and at the northern Spanish Bluebells.

There is known to be a good population of slow worms, especially associated with the churchyard and this is reflected in the number of local records.

There is also believed to be a good number of common lizards along the south and west facing slopes of the wood, it is likely that records are under-representing the population.

A local bat expert has also recorded Barbastelle bats. This is a species particularly associated with veteran trees and woodlands. The NBN provides records of 8 species of bats in total.

It is also understood that there are antlions just beyond the churchyard, local records of glow worms and breeding swifts in the village.

Some of the records below may not be associated with the woodland, and may not be a complete record, but never-the-less is an extensive list and gives an idea of the biodiversity richness of the area.

## The National Biological Atlas records within 1km:

### Protected Species:

Great Crested Newt (2019)

### Priority Species:

Common Toad (2014)	Barbastelle bat (2016)
Hedgehog (2020)	Serotine bat (2016)
Grass Snake (2013)	Daubenton's bat (2016)
Common Lizard (2013)	Natterer's bat (2016)
Slow worm (2015)	Nathusius's Pipistrelle (2016)
Water vole (2004)	Common pipistrelle (2016)
Water shrew (2013)	Soprano pipistrelle (2016)
	Brown long-eared bat (2016)

### Birds of Conservation Concern:

**Red:** Skylark (2019), Swift (2019), Cuckoo (2009), Yellowhammer (2019), Greenfinch (2019), House martin (2019), Corn bunting (2016), House sparrow (2019)

**Amber:** Sparrowhawk (2018), Teal (2011), Mallard (2019), Whitethroat (2019), Black headed gull (2019), Stock dove (2019), Wood pigeon (2019), Kestrel (2019)

## Habitat Connectivity

The woodland is adjacent to the Homersfield churchyard and stands on a sandy ridge above the river Waveney and floodplain meadow to the west. To the northeast is Homersfield Lake created by gravel extraction.

There is reasonable connectivity through the hedgerow corridor to woodland at Timber Scrubs to the southwest. Timber Scrubs is a County Wildlife Site designated for ancient woodland ground flora. Additional deciduous woodland exists to the east including Flixton woods and beyond in Flixton where Heavyland wood is a CWS although from aerial maps connectivity appears fragmented.

As the Angles way exits the woodland is Roadside Nature Reserve 191 on Mendham Lane, C950. The RNS is designated for a legally protected species.

## Woodland habitat

A full survey was not undertaken but there is a variety of tree species.

Sycamore	Scot's Pine
Oak	Wych elm
English elm	Beech



There are several trees exhibiting die back, believed to be a result of drought stress. It is not known if there are additional factors such as tree diseases, this would be worth monitoring.

Many other trees are exhibiting veteran features such as hollowing out. These veteran tree features are valuable for bats, fungi and beetles of decaying wood as well as many other invertebrates which in turn support lizards, great crested newt and small mammals.



There is some decaying wood and tree stumps on the ground but scope to increase this habitat. (Up to a fifth of woodland species depend on dead and decaying wood).

There are a couple of notable oak trees, one on the left of the Angles way as you enter the wood from the path beside the church. This oak tree is of significant proportions and has a large amount of epicormic growth around the base of the trunk. Given the sandy soils this oak tree may be older than it first appears as sandy soils typically stunt growth.

The notable tree stands further into the wood overlooking the river Waveney and road beneath. Again, an old oak tree which has divided at ground level into two large twisting trunks so is difficult to age.

It is good to see that some of the elm trees have remained apparently healthy despite being taller than typically affected by Dutch Elm disease.



Where opportunity has presented, replacement tree planting has been carried out using native species acquired by the tree warden.



The boundary of the wood shows a little gradation to scrub on the steep sloping southern aspect. This is where the foci of the lizards are. Reptiles such as the common lizard are reliant on warmth from the external environment, they are more often associated with structurally diverse habitats such as woodland glades and scrub than dense woodland. However, the proximity to cooler shady areas allows reptiles to avoid overheating. Retaining glades with an open canopy is important to provide for their habitat requirements. Slow worms are less reliant on basking but will benefit from open grassy glades and a deep litter layer.

Grass snakes and great crested newts are more mobile and are likely to be more associated with wetter habitats, but the woodland is likely to be a contributing factor to their presence locally.

Of particular value to reptiles and many other species is the gradation between habitats, often referred to as ecotones. Within Homersfield Wood, this gradation can be enhanced by planting or nurturing saplings of scrub species in glades and woodland edges and allowing long grassy edges to develop in the more open areas. Species which associated with dry oak woodland are hazel, hawthorn, holly, rowan, guelder rose, crab apple and elder.

Bramble provides a variety of wildlife resources, these include both food (nectar, pollen, flowers, fruit, leaves) and physical structure that provides habitat for birds. However, if it is unmanaged, bramble can have negative effects on the ground flora and the volunteers have already undertaken work to control the dominance of the bramble.

### Ground Flora

The ground flora is dominated by a non-native plant, Alexanders *Smyrniololus*. There is also known to be both Spanish bluebells near the church and English Bluebells *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* at the RNR end of the wood. The UK is home to almost half of the world's population of *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*. Globally, this species is threatened and one significant threat to English bluebells is hybridisation with Spanish bluebells. Action could be taken to reduce and limit the spread of the Spanish bluebells in the wood.

English Bluebell is the only ground flora species indicative of ancient woodland recorded in Homersfield Wood but this may reflect the dry soil conditions and there is a possibility that other indicator species have been lost. An ancient woodland is described as having



continuous woodland cover since 1600AD, alternatively the site could be a planted ancient woodland site, one in which there is evidence of a former ancient woodland but has been subsequently planted. Homersfield Wood is shown on the OS map of 1884 but not shown on the ancient woodland inventory. It is however recognised as Priority Deciduous Woodland Habitat on MAGIC maps provided by DEFRA. Further research through local records as described above may shed more light on the matter.

### Management proposals

- Where not over-ruled by tree safety considerations, standing dead wood is a valuable habitat and should be retained. A qualified arboriculturist would need to advise on this. Also be aware 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.
- There are good records of bat populations in the locality. 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 guide-lines from the Bat Conservation Trust.
- Monitor tree health through 'Observe a tree'. This is a citizen science project is encouraging people to report signs of tree disease.
- Increase the amount of dead wood habitat in the wood, aim for 6-10 dead trees either standing or fallen. Tree stumps left in situ or part buried large logs generally provide a better habitat for beetles of decaying wood than above ground log piles. This method and the choice of large diameter logs also reduces the likelihood of disturbance from woodland play activities.
- Maintain structural diversity with an interrupted canopy to promote low vegetation cover and basking places along the southern aspect especially in the scalloped edge, known to support common lizard populations.
- Create a few habitat piles for cover and additional habitat. They are favoured by reptiles if the core is of more compacted vegetation with an outer layer of brash on top.
- 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. Hedgehogs may utilise woodland edge bramble and scrub for nesting and hibernation, autumn management is the best time to avoid disturbance in these locations.

- The non-native Spanish bluebell could be removed to prevent hybridisation and protect with the native English bluebells. It is recommended that they are dug up once the plants have finished flowering, with their leaves intact and left in the sun to dry out for as long as a month. This will ensure that the bulb has been killed and they can then be composted. Note it is only legal to dig up wild plants on your own land.
- Bird boxes and bat boxes could be placed on some of the mature trees. 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.

## Community Engagement and surveying

- As a community group, you may be interested in our Team Wilder initiative. The platform is still under development, but we plan to invite community groups to plot their project on the map with information about their project and, if they are happy to network with others involved in or planning a similar project, their contact details. We are also looking at offering individuals and groups Team Wilder branding and a logo which they can use electronically to demonstrate that they are part of Team Wilder as a county-wide movement for nature's recovery.
- 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 i-naturalist.
- To survey for reptiles, artificial refuges such as 50cm-1m square roofing felt can be put out. Refugia need to be exposed to sunlight for at least part of the day where there is light vegetation away from flower rich areas. Leave them undisturbed for a few weeks before surveying in April, May and September. Avoid July to August and November to February.
- A community survey could record veteran and ancient trees across the parish and enter them on the Ancient Tree Forum website or via their app.
- There is potential for a community swift box set including call system in the village. There are limited number of sets available free or for a donation. See our website for further information or contact Eddie Bathgate, Suffolk Swift Group.

It was a pleasure to meet you and discuss the opportunities for enhancing the wildlife value of Homersfield Wood, do let us know how you get on.

Yours sincerely  
Cathy Smith  
Community Wildlife Advisor



## Resources:

National Library of Scotland

[Home | National Library of Scotland \(nls.uk\)](#)

MAGIC Maps DEFRA

[Magic Map Application \(defra.gov.uk\)](#)

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](#)

Forest research tree diseases

[pests and diseases resources and advice - Forest Research](#)

The UK Forestry Standard

[The UK Forestry Standard - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Ancient Tree Inventory

[Ancient Tree Inventory - Woodland Trust](#)

Tree felling: getting permission

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

Reptile Conservation Handbook

[Habitat Management Handbooks | The Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust \(arc-trust.org\)](#)

Bluebells for Britain – report by Plantlife

[Blubells for Britain.pdf \(plantlife.org.uk\)](#)

Bird and Bat boxes

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

SWT TeamWilder

[Team Wilder | 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](#)

[iNaturalist](#)

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



Surveying for reptiles

[Reptile-survey-booklet-3mm-bleed.pdf \(froglife.org\)](#)

Suffolk Swift Group contact

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

Suffolk Swifts

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

### **Accompanying fact sheets**

Woodland management