

3 Site Baseline Reports and Five Year Enhancement Plans

3.1 Site 1. Common Lane, Great Witchingham

Photographs



Key Facts:

- Size of the Site: 0.79ha
- Habitats present: **Modified grassland; Bramble scrub; Tall forbs; Individual trees; Line of trees; Native hedgerow.**
- Tree Preservation Orders, Conservation Areas, County Wildlife Sites (CWS), Roadside Nature Reserves, Priority Habitats, Statutory Designated Sites present on site? **CWS present offsite to the south and Priority Habitat deciduous woodland present adjacent to Site.**
- Recommended habitat measures in LNRS: **restore and enhance existing grassland.**

Baseline Habitat Description and BNG Calculation

- 3.1.1 The Site mostly comprised unmown modified grassland recently planted with tree whips. The flora had moderate richness with 6-8 vascular plant species per square metre on average including wildflowers such as lesser stitchwort *Stellaria graminea*, imperforate St John's wort *Hypericum maculatum*, yarrow *Archillea millefolium*, germander speedwell *Veronica chamaedrys* and sedge *Carex sp.* The grassland was found to be in **good condition** as per the BNG habitat condition assessment criteria.

- 3.1.2 A second area of modified grassland was present adjacent to Common Lane which was mown and in **poor condition** with low floral diversity and dominated by perennial ryegrass *Lolium perenne*.
- 3.1.3 There was a line of trees in the west of the Site comprised of semi-mature oak *Quercus robur*, ash *Fraxinus excelsior* and sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus* in **moderate condition**.
- 3.1.4 There was a native hedgerow along the east boundary in **moderate condition** which was gappy and comprised of sycamore, oak, bramble *Rubus fruticosus agg.*, hawthorn *Crateagus monogyna* and elm *Ulmus sp.*
- 3.1.5 A small patch of tall forbs in **poor condition** was present on the southern boundary which was dominated by common nettle *Urtica dioica*.
- 3.1.6 Patches of bramble scrub were present along the northern boundary, in the south-east corner and in the west of the Site.
- 3.1.7 Four individual trees in **moderate and good condition** were recorded in the west of the Site including: two horse chestnuts *Aesculus hippocastanum*, one oak and one ash.
- 3.1.8 In total, the habitats on Site represent **5.84 Habitat Units and 0.46 Hedgerow Units** as shown in Tables 1 and 2 below.

Table 1. Baseline BNG Calculation of Habitats

Habitat	Area (hectares)	Ecological Distinctiveness	Condition	Habitat Units (HU)
Modified Grassland	0.6563	Low	Good	3.94
Modified Grassland	0.0446	Low	Poor	0.09
Bramble scrub	0.0788	Low	N/A	0.32
Tall forbs	0.0148	Low	Poor	0.03
Individual trees	0.0692	Medium	Moderate	0.55
Individual trees	0.0764	Medium	Good	0.92
Total	0.79 (excluding trees)			5.84

Table 2. Baseline BNG Calculation of Hedgerows

Habitat	Length (kilometres)	Ecological Distinctiveness	Condition	Hedgerow Units (HeU)
Line of Trees	0.037	Low	Moderate	0.15
Native hedgerow	0.079	Low	Moderate	0.32
Total	0.12			0.46

3.1.9 A map of the baseline habitats is provided in Figure 1, Appendix 1.

Proposed Biodiversity Enhancements

- Scrub: Remove dead whips and replant small groups of native scrub plants;
- Grassland: Manage central grassland areas as long grass with one/two cuts per year to achieve greater floral diversity and a categorisation of 'other neutral grassland'. Mown paths around perimeter and through center;
- Hedgerow: Enhance native hedgerow on eastern boundary from native hedgerow to species rich native hedgerow; and
- Install one bird nest box and one bat box.

Specification of Management Actions

3.1.10 A map of the proposed enhancements is shown in Figure 1, Appendix 2.

Scrub:

- Remove all dead whips and associated guards from the grassland;
- Replant 60-90cm height bare root whips of mixed native species at 2m centers such as hawthorn *Crateagus monogyna*, blackthorn *Prunus spinosa*, dog rose *Rosa canina*, guelder rose *Viburnum opulus* and hazel *Corylus avellana*. Whips to be notch planted in groups of five plants (12 groups in total) from November-March inclusive (not in frozen ground) and protected with a suitable biodegradable guard to protect from vole and deer damage, bamboo cane and tie. The area around the whips should be cleared of vegetation and mulched generously with woodchip to a depth of 50-100mm, taking care not to bury the stems of the newly planted whips.
- Whips will need to be watered generously and regularly in hot dry summer spells for the first two years post planting.
- Check whips annually and top up mulch/clear weeds to limit competing vegetation.
- At year three, remove canes, guards and ties if whips are established. Remove and replace any dead whips.

Grassland:

- To reduce the prevalence of coarse grasses and encourage greater wildflower abundance and diversity, the long grass areas highlighted in Figure 1, Appendix 2 will be managed using a two-cut system for five years.
- The first cut will be undertaken in late February/early March each year. The grassland will be cut to a height of approximately 50mm and the cuttings removed from the Site or placed in a designated compost heap.

- For the second cut, timing is very important. The second cut will be undertaken once wildflowers have flowered and set seed (it typically takes 6-8 weeks from flowering to seed set). Setting of the seed is crucial to encourage a greater abundance of wildflowers. The second cut timing will likely vary slightly from year to year but it should generally be undertaken in late August/early September when conditions are dry. The cut should be undertaken with a scythe, strimmer or other suitable mowing equipment that can cut vegetation to a height of 50mm. Cuttings must be left in situ for 1-7 days to allow seed to shed. The cuttings must then be removed offsite or to a designated compost heap. Note: cuttings may be used as a top of mulch for the scrub.
- Small areas selected at random of the long sward (10-20%) may be left long over winter to provide shelter for invertebrates.
- Following the second cut, the sward must be kept short throughout the winter, particularly given the milder winters and increased growing season lengths so further 'cut and collect' mowing is likely to be required from late September – November.
- No herbicides, fertilisers or commercially bought grass seed will be applied to the grassland at any time.
- Occasional areas of bare earth will be created annually using hand tools/scarifying (1-5% of the grassland area) to promote greater floral diversity.
- Paths as shown in Figure 1, Appendix 2 through the long grass may be mown as regularly as is necessary.

Hedgerow:

- The dead elms, sycamore and large areas of bramble will be removed from the hedgerow (some bramble can remain in small areas).
- Gaps created will be infilled with whips of at least four native hedgerow species, planted in a double staggered row with approximately five plants in each metre. As with the guidance for scrub planting (above), plant whips from November – March with appropriate tree protection and mulch. Water in hot dry spells, and remove canes/guards/ties after three years and replace any dead/dying individual plants. Keep mulch topped up annually.
- Prune hedgerow once every three years to maintain tight bushy growth. Maintain height and spread of hedgerow generally. Pruning should try to achieve a hedgerow with an overall 'A' shape with a flat top. Prune from September-February inclusive to avoid the bird nesting season.

3.1.11

Bird and bat boxes:

- Install one bird box and one bat box on separate horse chestnuts located in the west of the Site as shown in Figure 1, Appendix 2. Guidance on suitable boxes for trees is

provided in Appendix 3 along with specifications for installation heights and aspects.

Five Year Biodiversity Enhancement Plan

3.1.12 Following the management specification and guidance above, the Table below provides the timing of management actions over five years.

Habitat	Management Action and Timing				
	2025/2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
Scrub	Remove dead existing whips. Replant with 12 groups of five plants from November-March.	Water regularly in hot dry spells. Keep mulch topped up.	Water regularly in hot dry spells. Keep mulch topped up.	Remove canes/guards/ties in the winter. Replace any dead/dying individuals.	N/A
Grassland	First cut and collect in late February/ early March. Second cut in late August/early September. Remove arising after 1-7 days. Create bare patches in 10% of sward. Mow paths regularly as required. Scarify small patches randomly.	Same as 2025/2026.	Same as 2025/2026.	Same as 2025/2026.	Same as 2025/2026.
Hedgerow	Remove dead elms, sycamore and large bramble patches. Infill with whip planting.	Water whips regularly in hot dry spells. Keep mulch topped up. Prune hedgerow September-February.	Water whips regularly in hot dry spells. Keep mulch topped up.	Remove canes/guards/ties in the winter. Replace any dead/dying individuals.	Prune hedgerow September-February.
Bird and bat boxes	Install bird and bat boxes on suitable trees	Check bird and bat boxes remain securely attached.	Check bird and bat boxes remain securely attached.	Check bird and bat boxes remain securely attached.	Check bird and bat boxes remain securely attached.

Annual Monitoring Checklist

3.1.13 The checklist below is devised as a quick annual check to be carried out and completed by the responsible Community Asset Manager to ensure that the recommended enhancements measures above have taken place. The items in the checklist below have been replicated in a separate Annual Monitoring excel spreadsheet for ease of completion.

Annual Monitoring Checklist for Common Lane, Great Witchingham

Habitat	Management Action	Tick relevant column if completed				
		2025/2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
Scrub	Scrub planted?					
	Scrub watered, checked and mulch topped up?					
	Cables/ties/guards adjusted or removed as necessary?					
Grassland	First cut undertaken?					
	Second cut undertaken?					
	Winter cutting undertaken?					
Hedgerow	Dead elm, sycamore and most bramble removed?					
	Whips planted?					
	Whips maintained?					
	Hedgerow pruned?					
Bird and bat boxes	Installed?					
	Annually checked to make sure still safely secured to tree?					

Post-enhancement BNG Calculation

- 3.1.16 The proposed enhancements to the grassland and hedgerow will generate a BNG uplift of Habitat Units of **58.78%** and a BNG uplift of Hedgerow Units of **26.69%** over **15 years**.
- 3.1.17 The uplift in Habitat Units derives from the current modified grassland in good condition achieving other neutral grassland in good condition. The uplift in Hedgerow Units derives from the native hedgerow being enhanced to a species-rich native hedgerow with more than four species per average 30m length of hedgerow.