

Nature Recovery Plan for Swaffham Prior

Swaffham Prior Parish Council

by Mike Barker SP Community Land Trust

Introduction

Swaffham Prior (SP) residents are concerned about reversing the decline of nature, and want to help the Parish Council to take action protect what is special about this Fen Edge village, create new habitats and get more people involved in caring for and enjoying the natural environment which is all around us.

This nature recovery plan sets out early actions and may be updated in due course to have more medium-term plans for the creation of more nature rich habitats in the Parish.

This plan sets out early actions we want to achieve over the next ten years.

To do this, this plan has a double page for each theme we'd like to take action on, setting out what we currently have, where we'd like to get to, and how we are going to get there.

But to be a success, the residents of SP will need to help! We can all help be taking action in our own gardens, or perhaps volunteering to help tidy up or manage spaces in the village.

Our Five Point Recovery Plan Objectives

1. To make Swaffham Prior Parish an even better place for nature and for local people, recognising that access to nature also helps improve our health and wellbeing.
2. To inform, inspire and encourage the active participation of the community in helping nature to flourish and biodiversity to increase in the Parish.
3. To protect, and where possible enhance, the most special natural environment spaces in Swaffham Prior, associated with the fen landscape and chalk grassland higher ground
4. To create new habitats, with a special focus on fens, ponds and chalk grasslands and connecting hedgerows joining woodlands.
5. To see anecdotal, or measurable if possible, gains for wildlife, such as:
 - More garden ponds and birdbaths;
 - increases in amphibian (especially toads and frogs) numbers;
 - more sightings of hedgehogs;
 - a richer and more plentiful variety of bee species, butterflies and other insects (like grasshoppers/bush-crickets); and
 - an increase in swifts and nest numbers in the village.

Theme 1: Gardens

Introduction

Together, the UK's gardens are larger than all of our National Nature Reserves combined. They play a key role in connecting habitats, especially across urban areas, and provide safe refuges for wildlife in an ever-busy environment.

Gardens do not have to be large to benefit wildlife and less is more when it comes to management. It's not necessary for individual gardens to offer everything a species needs if nearby gardens contribute too, for example a blackbird will nest in one garden but forage and bathe in others.

There are approximately 300 homes in Swaffham Prior, most with gardens or associated outside green spaces, each of which can be a mini-oasis for wildlife.

What are the essentials for a wildlife garden?

The essentials of successful wildlife gardening are based on four things: trees, deadwood, water and variety of planting. Any of these features will encourage wildlife to our gardens. Resist the urge to tidy up in autumn! Seed heads left uncut will be enjoyed by birds.

5 tips on how to transform your garden into a wildlife haven

- Plant native plants and also flower-rich nectar-rich plants that are bee-friendly vegetation, see RHS Plants for Pollinators...
- Build a Hedgehog highway connecting your garden to other spaces and make logpiles...
- Let areas of your grass grow for No-Mow May and bug hotels ...
- Care for local birds and bird boxes...
- Create a pond or a birdbath.

More reading:

Wild About Gardens – Encouraging wildlife to your garden with RHS and the Wildlife Trusts

<https://www.rhs.org.uk/get-involved/wild-about-gardens>

RSPB – Gardening for Wildlife <https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/advice/gardening-for-wildlife/>

National Trust - Nine ways to build a wildlife friendly garden

<https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/discover/gardening-tips/nine-ways-to-build-a-wildlife-friendly-garden>

<https://www.rhs.org.uk/science/conservation-biodiversity/wildlife/plants-for-pollinators>

<https://www.hedgehogstreet.org/help-hedgehogs/link-your-garden/>

<https://www.froglife.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/JAW2014-for-printing-HLF1.pdf>

Theme 2: Allotments

Introduction

Allotments often have many of the same features as gardens but without the physical boundaries between plots so offer a large area for wildlife to utilise.

Allotments: Action Plan

The Parish Council will aim to:

1. Survey our current allotment area, identifying what parts of it are good for nature, and what parts have potential for enhancement.
2. Each year, provide a certificate or prize to the allotment holder who, alongside growing crops, does so with nature in mind
3. Provide tips and ideas to allotment holders, on what they can do to help the natural environment on their plot
4. Consider improving or expanding the number of allotment plots, and encourage more people to take up a plot

As a local resident, you can help by:

1. Consider taking up an allotment plot, if one is available, or register your interest.
2. When you have a plot, think about planting flowers that will attract bees or butterflies...or simply leave one or two 'misshapes' or bolting vegetable to flower naturally (for example, don't cut and throw away a bolting leek – let it flower, and it will attract a host of bees and insects)
3. Go organic, rather than use pesticides

Theme 3: Churchyard, The Cage/Pound, the Village Hall and School

Introduction

Churches have been a focus for communities for thousands of years and, alongside their primary purpose, are refuges for many species. Bats are well known for inhabiting churches due to their open structure and relative quiet.

The ancient stonework can be rich with lichens and mosses while the ledges and roofs can be ideal places for nesting birds. The church grounds have often escaped the damaging effects of fertilisers and ploughs so contain remnants of ancient grassland where fungi thrive and wildflowers flourish.

The slightly less old Pound and Cage and even younger village hall and school have outside spaces that can add ecological value.

Churches and other Grounds: Action Plan

The Parish Council will aim to:

1. Survey the church grounds, and outside spaces to learn more what animals are using them
2. Work with those currently responsible for maintaining the churches and their grounds, and other spaces (like the school and village hall) see what could be done to improve them for nature
3. Example actions we could do include: wildflower sowing; cutting the grass less often; install bird and bat boxes

As a local resident, you can help by:

1. Visiting the church grounds, and note what you see and hear
2. Help with any survey work or actions set up by the parish council or church

More reading

Caring for God's acre: <https://www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk/>

Bats in churches: <https://batsinchurches.org.uk/>

Theme 4: Verges and other green spaces around the village

Introduction

There are a number of biodiverse road verges and green spaces in the village, including the Steep bank on Cage Hill; Betty's Bank on Green Head Road and the bypass verges. This latter area has Bee Orchids and other chalk grassland specialists. On Rogers Road Wild Clary has been recorded a very localised species.

Verges and other green spaces: Action Plan

The Parish Council will aim to:

Manage the grass cutting and other maintenance with wildlife in mind, including where practical adopting a 'No Mow May' approach in most spaces when safe (visibility splays etc); although in some places a later no mow period may be more appropriate. Where possible cuttings should be removed.

Swaffham Prior Parish Council and also the village Community Land Trust both are interested in managing and enhancing the various green spaces to improve them for wildlife, particularly pollinators.

There is also a slightly separate planting project up at the allotments/cemetery where some clearing and re-planting has been suggested.

Simplified Plan for 2024

This consists of an application for a grant via the Nature based Pride of Place grant scheme run by East Cambs. District Council to undertake:

1. a spring planting spree in early spring 2024 in Swaffham Prior in the various green spaces to enhance them for wildlife, particularly pollinators by planting spring and summer pollinator bulbs;
2. Plug planting of attractive native wildflowers along banks and the bases of hedges and walls including:
 - Primroses
 - Cowslips
 - Lesser Knapweed
 - Greater Knapweed and
 - Field Scabious

The planting of the bulbs and plugs will enhance the visual attractiveness of the village's public green spaces and also enhance the biodiversity of the village by supporting pollinators such as butterflies and bees.

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There is also a slightly separate planting project at the allotments/cemetery where the Garden Team will assist in the clearing and re-planting the area that has been suggested.

Organisation making the grant application

Having discussed with **the village Community Land Trust** they are interested in principle in making the application and administering the process.

Who will do the planting

Rosie who heads the **Garden Team at the Prospect Trust** are keen to do the planting and estimated that a couple of days with two teams might be enough.

However, to engage the residents of SP we will apply and order slightly more bulbs and plants – and the surplus not planted by the Prospect Trust Garden Team will be given away at the planned CLT jumble sale in early 2024 to **village residents** to plant in and around the village.

If the grant application is successful – the CLT will set out with the Garden Team **a map of the areas to plant** and this will be agreed in advance by the parish Council in early 2024.

Allotments, cemetery and churchyard

For the Churchyard specifically, the plan will be to purchase extra seeds, plugs and blubs to enhance the short mown areas; add nectar rich spring planting (cowslips, bulbs etc); extra yellow rattle; larger plants for nectar sources – like rosemary and lavenders could be planted. Bird and bat boxes could also be installed (carefully – where appropriate given the Listed status).

Future vision

In the longer term it would be great to have a wider strategy for the Fen Edge Parishes looking at mapping priority areas for ‘rewilding’/enhancement across at least the three parishes of Reach, Swaffham Bulbeck and Swaffham Prior. If it is high level it might be sensible to run it across the Lode and Burwell so it is the whole southern edge to the Wicken Fen Vision Area. This should reference and align with the Nature Recovery network mapping.

The aim will aim to map habitats, picking out existing habitats and existing key gaps and then making the leap to opportunity mapping of the ideal habitats to fill the gaps and actions that can be taken by landowners and the PCs to deliver these areas on the ground.