Westerfield Neighbourhood Plan

Landscape and Biodiversity Evaluation 2023

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DISCLAIMER

This report has been compiled in accordance with BS 42020:2013 Biodiversity - Code of practice for planning and development, as has the survey work to which it relates.

The information, data, advice and opinions which have been prepared are true, and have been prepared and provided in accordance with the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management's Code of Professional Conduct. We confirm that the opinions expressed are our true and professional bona fide opinions.

This survey was carried out and an assessment made of the site at a particular time. Every effort has been made to date to provide an accurate assessment of the current situation, but no liability can be assumed for omissions or changes after the surveys have taken place.

It is our policy to submit any biological records to the Suffolk Biodiversity Information Service, in accordance with BS42020 (6.4.7). We will do this 3 months after the submission of this report. If you wish to discuss this, please contact us within this time period.

Executive Summary

SWT Trading Ltd: Wilder Ecology, the consultancy of Suffolk Wildlife Trust, was instructed by Westerfield parish council to undertake a landscape and biodiversity evaluation of the parish as part of their Neighbourhood Plan preparation process. This document seeks to provide the Neighbourhood Plan Working Group with an evaluation of landscape character and highlight specific habitats, species and associated ecological networks as a rich source of biodiversity.

The principal landscape character type within the parish of Westerfield is 'Ancient Rolling Farmlands'. There are no statutory or non-statutory (County Wildlife Sites) designated wildlife sites within the parish. Three Priority habitats have been identified within the parish, which include Lowland Deciduous Woodland, Hedgerows and Ponds.

Across the Parish a range of protected and Priority species have been recorded including otter, hazel dormouse, hedgehog, great crested newt and several Priority bird species including skylark and yellowhammer. There is also a significant number of stag beetle records, which are a Priority invertebrate species.

Species-rich hedgerows in the south and north of the parish form the backbone of the ecological network of the parish. Habitat creation and enhancement within in the parish should look to find opportunities to link the Ipswich Garden Suburb Country Park, with habitats which already exist within the parish such as the wildlife friendly planting at Westerfield train station.

Development Management guidance for any new developments within the area covered by this Neighbourhood Plan should seek to protect existing landscape and ecological assets and restore, enhance and reconnect the ecological network.

Contents

1. Introduction

1.1 Brief and Terms of Reference

SWT Trading Ltd: Wilder Ecology, the consultancy of Suffolk Wildlife Trust, was instructed by Westerfield Parish Council to undertake a landscape and ecological evaluation of the parish as part of their Neighbourhood Plan preparation.

Westerfield Parish Council made an application to East Suffolk Council in accordance with the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012, to designate a Neighbourhood Area which was approved in September 2021[1]. The Civil Parish of Westerfield, within its formal parish boundary, is the 'Neighbourhood Area' for the purposes of the Plan.

The Westerfield Neighbourhood Plan is now being prepared.

This report will provide the Westerfield Parish Council with an evaluation of landscape character across the parish and in particular, highlight specific habitats and associated ecological networks within this landscape as a rich source of biodiversity.

1.2 Parish Location and Statistics

Westerfield is a village located in the south of the county within the East Suffolk district area, to the north of Ipswich. It covers roughly 307 hectares and its central point grid reference is close to TM 174 482. The parish also shares boundaries with the Suffolk civil parishes of Witnesham, Tuddenham St Martin, Akenham and Ipswich.

The Suffolk Coastal Local Plan defines Westerfield as a small village[2]. Data from the 2011 census shows that the village has a population of 442, with 197 dwellings[3].

[1] Westerfield-Neighbourhood-Area-Determination-and-Decision.pdf (eastsuffolk.gov.uk)
[2] East-Suffolk-Council-Suffolk-Coastal-Local-Plan.pdf (eastsuffolk.gov.uk)
[3] Westerfield-Village-Profile.pdf (eastsuffolk.gov.uk)

2. Planning and Development Context

An outline of elements of the current planning system and associated strategic documents will help to place this present evaluation in context:

2.1 Localism Act (2011)

The Department of Communities and Local Government promoted the Localism Act (2011)[4]. The subsequent Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations (2012) provide the statutory framework for Neighbourhood Development Plans. These allow communities to establish the general planning policies for the development and use of land in a neighbourhood. 'Neighbourhood Plans allow local people to get the right type of development for their community, but the plans must still meet the needs of the wider area'.

2.2 National Planning Policy Framework

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is statutory guidance published by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2021), which provides national planning policy[5].

Of particular relevance to this project are Paragraphs 174, 175 and 179, under Chapter 15 'Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment', which states

174. Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:

a) protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan);

b) recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland;

c) maintaining the character of the undeveloped coast, while improving public access to it where appropriate;

d) minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures;

e) preventing new and existing development from contributing to, being put at unacceptable risk from, or being adversely affected by, unacceptable levels of soil, air, water or noise pollution or land instability. Development should, wherever possible, help to improve local environmental conditions such as air and water quality, taking into account relevant information such as river basin management plans; and

f) remediating and mitigating despoiled, degraded, derelict, contaminated and unstable land, where appropriate.

175. Plans should: distinguish between the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites; allocate land with the least environmental or amenity value, where consistent with other policies in this Framework; take a strategic approach to maintaining and enhancing networks of habitats and green infrastructure; and plan for the

[4] http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2011/20/contents/enacted

[5] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2

enhancement of natural capital at a catchment or landscape scale across local authority boundaries.

179. To protect and enhance biodiversity and geodiversity, plans should:

a) Identify, map and safeguard components of local wildlife-rich habitats and wider ecological networks, including the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites of importance for biodiversity; wildlife corridors and stepping stones that connect them; and areas identified by national and local partnerships for habitat management, enhancement, restoration or creation; and

b) promote the conservation, restoration and enhancement of priority habitats, ecological networks and the protection and recovery of priority species; and identify and pursue opportunities for securing measurable net gains for biodiversity.

2.3 Suffolk Coastal Local Plan

Suffolk Coastal District Council, now formally part of East Suffolk District Council, has a Development Plan against which all planning applications and other development proposals will be assessed.

In September 2020 a Local Plan[6] was adopted setting out the planning policies and housing allocations for future development of the district to 2036. This Local Plan consists *inter alia* of Neighbourhood Plans (as developed by local communities).

In the Local Plan, Policy SCLP10.1: Biodiversity and Geodiversity is particularly relevant to this report.

There are two allocations in the Suffolk Coastal Local Plan in Westerfield**:**

SCLP12.67 – Land South of Lower Road, Westerfield

Allocation for 20 dwellings on 2.45ha of land with public open space provision.

SCLP12.23 – Land off Lower Road and Westerfield Road (Ipswich Garden Suburb Country Park)

24.5ha is allocated to form part of the country park associated with the Ipswich Garden Suburb development to the north of Ipswich.

2.4 Biodiversity Net Gain

The Environment Act 2021, which received Royal Assent on 9 November 2021, mandates biodiversity net gain and is likely to become law in 2023. The Environment Act 2021 set out an approach to biodiversity net gain which includes[7]:

- Minimum 10% net gain required for planning applications
- Habitat secured for a minimum 30 years
- The mitigation hierarchy of avoidance, mitigation and compensation still applies

[6] East-Suffolk-Council-Suffolk-Coastal-Local-Plan.pdf (eastsuffolk.gov.uk)
[7] Biodiversity net gain | Local Government Association

- Net gain must be measurable using the Biodiversity Metric (3.1 being the latest version) designed by Natural England

Defra is currently consulting on the details of biodiversity net gain regulation and implementation in order to determine how net gain will work in practice. Although 10% Biodiversity Net Gain is not yet required in law, this level is already being implemented as good practice across the country.

3. Methods

3.1 Field Survey

A 'Phase 1 type' field survey and ecological audit of the parish was undertaken on the 14th November 2022. The objectives of the field survey were to investigate and record land use, habitat types and notable plant and animal species and take digital images to illustrate these features. Using public highways, bridleways and footpaths it was possible to view and comment upon all but a small percentage of the parish land area.

3.2 Desktop Survey

A variety of existing source material was consulted including:

- Suffolk County Council website and other documents
- East Suffolk Council website and other documents
- Suffolk Biodiversity Information Service website and databases[8]
- The MAGIC website (provides geographic information about the natural environment from across a range of government sources) including Sir Dudley Stamp 1933-1949 Land Use Inventory[9]
- Suffolk Hedgerow Survey – County Report (2012)[10]
- Suffolk Pond Survey (1999)[11]

3.3 Evaluation of Landscape and biodiversity Assets

The descriptions and evaluation that follow in the report draw on information collected during the field and desktop surveys. For convenience and clarity, elements concerned with the wider landscape are considered first in Section 4. These are then followed in Section 5 by wildlife elements, from protected sites through to wider ecological network habitats.

However, these two sections should be considered together as there is integration of significant landscape and wildlife elements, resulting in a network of landscape and wildlife features.

[8] Suffolk Biodiversity Information Service | Sharing information about Suffolk's wildlife (suffolkbis.org.uk)
[9] Magic Map Application (defra.gov.uk)
[10] Suffolk Hedgerow Survey 1998-2012, Guy Ackers, Suffolk Coastal District Council, Greenprint Forum, 2012
[11] Sibbett, N. (1999) The Distribution and Abundance of Ponds in Suffolk. No. 333 English Nature Reports. English Nature, Peterborough

4. Evaluation of Landscape Assets

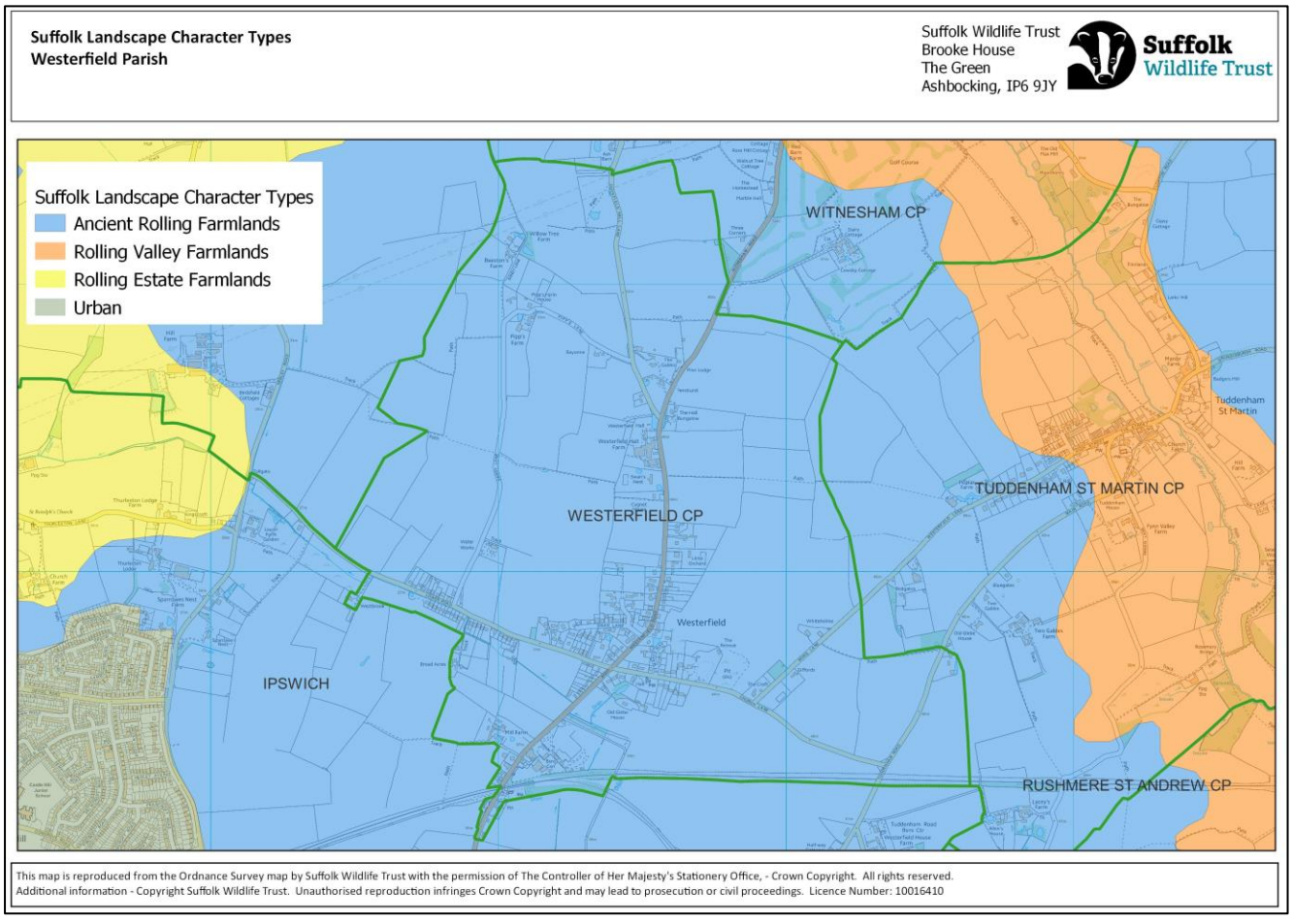
4.1 Suffolk Landscape Character Assessment

In 2008, Suffolk County Council completed a project to describe landscapes throughout Suffolk in detail and assess what particular character and qualities make up the different landscape areas of the county. This is known as the Level 2 Suffolk Landscape Character Assessment (LCA)[12]. The guidance required the preparation of landscape character assessments in order to review and/or replace local landscape designations. The results of these assessments could then be used as supplementary planning guidance and to help produce landscape management guidelines.

Suffolk County Council worked in partnership with the Living Landscapes Project based at Reading University, private consultants and all District and Borough Councils in Suffolk, using methodology in which discrete units of broadly homogeneous land were identified according to a set of physical and cultural characteristics. These characteristics were defined by four principal attributes: physiography, ground type, landcover and cultural pattern, which in turn were derived from six mappable datasets: relief, geology, soils, tree cover, farm type and settlement. Application of this methodology maintained a consistent approach across Suffolk. There is one landscape character type identified in Westerfield parish:

- **Ancient Rolling Farmlands**

Figure 1: Westerfield Parish Landscape Character Types



[12] https://suffolklandscape.org.uk/map/

For each of these Landscape Character Types, Suffolk County Council has produced written guidance involving detailed descriptions of:

- key characteristics
- sensitivity to change
- key forces for change
- development management guidelines
- land management guidelines

SCC notes highlight that the guidance documents have been written principally to address the needs of development management. That is, to provide a summary of the forces that have been and are at work in the landscape and the key forces for change operating in the landscape at the time of writing.

However, the caveat is added that guidance cannot be considered to be definitive for a particular site, nor is it exhaustive. Rather it is intended to give a clear indication of the issues raised and principles to be followed when dealing with a particular type of development.

This evaluation for the Neighbourhood Plan therefore distils the essence of the information provided - as it applies to Westerfield - as a guide for any future development here. Much of the discussion on development guidance is taken verbatim from the documents, but linkages and comments are added that make it relevant to this parish.

4.1.1 Ancient Rolling Farmlands

This landscape character type covers the extent of the parish of Westerfield. It is a landscape of rolling claylands with river valleys, often with ancient field patterns, species-rich hedgerows and ditches. The main soil type is chalky clay formed in the great Anglian Glaciation, with more varied soil types formed along river valleys.

Key characteristics of this landscape type as they refer to Westerfield are:

- Rolling arable landscape of chalky clays and loams.
- Random field pattern of ancient enclosure retained across much of the parish.
- Substantial open areas created by post WWII agricultural improvement.
- Hedges of hawthorn and elm with oak, ash and field maple as hedgerow trees.
- Network of winding lanes and paths, often associated with hedgerows.

Key potential changes and Development Management guidance related to this landscape type:

- Expansion of garden curtilage: management is required to ensure that new or expanded curtilage fits into the local context, with appropriate boundary fencing or hedging.
- Change of land use to horse paddocks: Design, layout and stocking rates should be managed where possible to limit impacts to landscape and ecology. Screening with planting should be considered, as well specifying fencing types, and location of shelter and storage areas. Historic field patterns should be maintained where possible.
- Impact of deer on the condition of woodland cover: New woodland and hedgerow plantings, including for screening and mitigation schemes, will require effective protection from deer to support their establishment.

- Settlement expansion eroding characteristic form and vernacular styles: Development should reflect the local settlement pattern, as ribbon development can have considerable landscape impacts.
- Conversion and expansion of farmsteads for residential and other uses: Unless the site is well hidden, it may be necessary to impose clear conditions relating to lighting, design and finishes, the extent of garden curtilage and how this is screened from the wider landscape.
- Large scale agricultural buildings in open countryside: Choices relating to siting, form, orientation and colour will mitigate impacts. Siting should relate to existing clusters of buildings, with new planting used to mitigate landscape impacts ensuring long-term management of planting is secured via planning condition.
- Other development: Opportunities to create landscape enhancement through hedgerow planting should be sought, in order to compensate for landscape impacts.

Typical view across this landscape character type – View south-west from public footpath

Land Management guidelines for this Landscape Type relevant to Westerfield include:

- Reinforce the historic pattern of regular boundaries.
- Recognise localised areas of late enclosure hedges when restoring and planting hedgerows.
- Maintain and increase the stock of hedgerow trees.
- Maintain the extent, and improve the condition, of woodland cover with effective management.
- Maintain and restore the stock of moats and ponds in this landscape.

4.2 The Significance of the Landscape for the Neighbourhood Plan

The parish does not lie within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

As well as adherence to Local Plan Policy, development management guidance for any new developments within the area covered by this Neighbourhood Plan should consistently reflect the Development Management and Land Management Guidelines drawn up within the Suffolk Landscape Character Assessment.

5. Evaluation of Wildlife Assets

5.1 Statutory and non-statutory designated sites for biodiversity

The quality of the natural environment in Suffolk is reflected by the extent of its land area with statutory protection for its wildlife. 8% of the county has national designation as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), reflecting the importance of habitats and species found here.

County Wildlife Sites (CWSs) are areas known to be of county or regional importance for wildlife. CWS designation is non-statutory but is recognition of a site's high value for biodiversity. Outside of areas with statutory protection (such as SSSSIs, Local and National Nature Reserves), CWSs are therefore the most important areas for wildlife in Suffolk and can support both locally and nationally threatened wildlife species and habitats. Many County Wildlife Sites support UK Priority Habitats and Species. They complement the statutory protected areas and nature reserves by helping to buffer and maintain habitat links between these sites.

Westerfield parish contains no statutory or non-statutory designated sites for biodiversity.

5.2 Biodiversity Action Plans and Priority habitats

The UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UK BAP, 1994) was the UK Government response to the 1992 International Convention on Biological Diversity. The UK BAP listed a range of habitats, plus a number of birds and species from other taxa of conservation interest. National targets and priorities were set in order to address the particular needs of those species. The list was amended in August 2007 to include additional species and habitats to reflect concerns over continuing declines. Much of the work previously carried out under the UK BAP is now focused through from country level down to local level through the creation of local biodiversity strategies. However, the UK BAP lists of priority species and habitats remain important and valuable reference sources.

In addition, Section 40 of the 2006 Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act states that 'Every public body must, in exercising its functions, have regard, so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity'. UK Priority habitats and species, listed within Section 41 of the Act, are normally taken as a good benchmark for demonstrating biodiversity duty.

In January 2014, Suffolk Biodiversity Partnership (SBP) - a consortium of over 20 organisations working for wildlife within the county - published revised statutory lists of Priority Habitats and Species occurring in Suffolk and these have been subsequently updated and amended. In a small number of cases where previously no national BAP existed, certain species are described as Suffolk Character Species to reflect their particular importance within the county.

The following section deals with the Priority habitats and species that are present in Westerfield parish. For the majority of species, they are only referenced if they were noted during the field survey or are recent records (post 2002) held by Suffolk Biodiversity Information Service.

5.3 Suffolk Priority habitats in Westerfield

Of the 24 Suffolk Priority habitats three are known to be present in Westerfield parish:

- Lowland mixed deciduous woodland
- Hedgerows
- Ponds

The Priority habitats are described in more detail below to highlight the significance of these ecological assets within the parish. The format is in three parts:

1. General descriptions of the habitats as they relate to Suffolk

2. These are followed by descriptions of the Priority habitat as found in Westerfield during the field survey, noting any associated UK and Suffolk Priority species

3. Finally, reference is made from the Suffolk BAPs (or other sources) to those development activities that are most likely to affect the Priority habitat as it exists in Westerfield

5.3.1 Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland

General description of this Priority habitat in the context of Suffolk

This Priority habitat includes all broadleaved stands and mixed broadleaved and coniferous stands which have more than 80% of their cover made up of broadleaved species. It also includes patches of scrub of above 0.25 hectares forming a continuous canopy, areas of recently felled woodland and other successional types, along with the other integral features of woodland such as glades and rides. These woodlands may be ancient (where cover existed before c1600) or recent (where cover has been created since c1600). Both of these age designations may have semi-natural cover or plantation cover, depending on past management. Management can vary from coppice or coppice with standards to wood-pasture, high forest or minimum intervention.

Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland Priority habitat in Westerfield

There are limited examples of Priority habitat within the parish of Westerfield, however there is a small area of Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland to the east of Westerfield Road in the south of the parish. This area of woodland is likely to support Priority species which have been recorded in the parish including stag beetle, bullfinch and house sparrow.

Activities and developments most likely to affect Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland Priority habitat in Westerfield

- Further fragmentation of and within the existing woodland area;
- Intensification of management between woodland fragments reduces the ecological value of edge habitats and the connectivity between woodland blocks in the landscape;

- Increasing recreational pressure within woodlands next to the urban fringe;
- Overgrazing and over-browsing by expanding deer populations changes woodland structure through reduced regeneration;
- Lack of canopy management leading to over-shading and decrease in quality of ground flora.

Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland – small area of woodland to the east of Westerfield Road

5.3.2 Hedgerows

General description of this Priority habitat in the context of Suffolk

Hedgerows are boundary lines of trees and/or shrubs, sometimes associated with banks, ditches and grass verges. Those considered ancient or species-rich or both are an important reservoir of biodiversity in the farmed landscape as well as being of cultural, historical and landscape importance. Hedges act as wildlife corridors, linking habitats of high biodiversity value such as woodland and wetland, thus enabling bats, other small mammals, and invertebrates to move around under cover from predators.

Ancient hedgerows, which support a greater diversity of plants and animals than subsequent hedges, may be defined as those that were in existence before the Enclosure Acts, passed between 1720 and 1840.

Species-rich hedgerows contain five or more native woody species on average in a 30 metre length. Those which contain fewer woody species but have a rich flora at the base of the hedgerow may

also be considered as important. The Hedgerow Regulations 1997 define 'important' hedgerows as those with seven woody species, or six woody species in a 30m length, plus other defined features.

Key Priority species in Suffolk which use hedges and associated grassy verges include: brown hare, grey partridge, song thrush, linnet, turtle dove, corn bunting, tree sparrow, bullfinch and various species of bats. Hibernating reptiles and amphibians and invertebrates such as white-letter hairstreak butterfly on elm hedges, also make use of this Priority Habitat.

Hedgerow Priority habitat in Westerfield

Hedgerows are widespread across the parish, but the main concentration of species rich hedgerows are in the north of the parish along Cockfield Hall Lane and in the south of the parish, south of Lower Road. The random field pattern which still remains across these areas of the parish, which is consistent with old maps of the parish from the late 1800s[13], suggests some hedgerows may have been in existence since enclosure and therefore could be considered to be ancient hedgerows.

Hedgerows are generally moderately species rich. Recorded species include hawthorn, blackthorn, dog rose, field maple, hazel with English oak and ash as standard trees.

During the field surveys, it was noted that the hedgerows across the parish are typically well managed for wildlife, being allowed to grow wide and tall where space allows. These hedgerows are likely to provide habitat for hazel dormouse which have been recorded locally, although there have been no comprehensive surveys of the parish. Where hedgerows are being more intensively managed, they are less valuable for wildlife.

Hedgerows are important for a number of Priority species. Several bird species have been recorded in the parish that are typical of this habitat: yellowhammer, linnet, house sparrow, dunnock and redwing. There are also records of stag beetle and hazel dormouse locally which are also likely to use hedgerows within the parish, in particular where they contain deadwood and are linked to areas of woodland habitat.

Westerfield was one of the many parishes covered by the Suffolk Hedgerow Survey, 1998-2012. The 2012 report on this project shows that out of the 55 hedges surveyed for woody species:

22 contained 4 species or fewer
20 contained 5, 6 or 7 species
13 contained 8 species or more

Therefore at least 60% of the sampled hedgerows within the parish can be deemed species rich.

It must be noted that this summary is based on data collected in the early stages of the Suffolk Hedgerow Survey (2004) and that changes will have occurred since that time, both positive and negative. However, it remains broadly true that the hedgerows in the parish are an important reservoir for wildlife and evidence from the recent field survey of the parish found many species rich hedgerows and some which may be considered ancient hedgerows.

[13] Old Maps Online

Hedgerow in the north of the parish to the west of Cockfield Hall Lane

Activities and developments most likely to affect Hedgerow Priority habitat in Westerfield

- Removal to facilitate development, subsequent fragmentation of the hedgerow network arising from development;
- Under-management and neglect of hedges leads to a reduction of their biodiversity value due to changes in their structure (and occasionally leads to their complete disappearance);
- Over-management from too frequent flailing can lead to a change in structure and if carried out in successive years, loss of hedgerow fruit in autumn, as flowering and fruiting normally takes place on second year growth;
- Mature hedges with a minimum grass strip separating them from arable land may suffer damage to tree and shrub roots through ploughing;
- Fertiliser and other agrichemical drift may degrade plant and invertebrate populations, especially where a crop extends to the hedge base.

5.3.3 Ponds

General description of this Priority habitat in the context of Suffolk

For the purposes of classifying this Priority habitat, ponds are defined as permanent or seasonal standing water bodies up to 2 hectares in extent which meet one or more of the following criteria:

- Habitats of international importance
- Species of high conservation importance, for example ponds supporting Priority Species
- Ponds of high ecological quality, as determined by standard survey techniques

Ponds Priority habitat in Westerfield

Information provided by Suffolk Biodiversity Information Service and from aerial photographs indicate that there are approximately 25 ponds broadly spread throughout the parish. This may be an underestimate as this does not include all ponds within individual gardens. This represents a density of approximately 8 ponds/km^2 indicating that Westerfield contains a higher pond density than the rest of Suffolk Coastal (6.2 ponds/km^2) and a higher pond density than the entire Suffolk County average of 5.9 ponds/km^2 [14]. The high number of ponds in Westerfield represents a significant biodiversity asset of the parish. Ponds across the parish support a number of protected and Priority species including great crested newt, common toad and common frog.

As access was limited it was only possible to visit a few of these ponds during the walkover survey, but reference to Google Earth imaging suggests that the majority still exist. Many of the ponds visited during the walkover survey were in a good condition for wildlife, with ongoing management to reduce overshading and good water quality. There may also be an additional network of garden ponds, which it was not possible to identify during the field survey.

Pond to the south of Westerfield village hall

Activities and developments that could affect the Ponds Priority habitat in Westerfield

Ponds are dynamic systems, being both lost and created over time. However, loss or degradation of ponds - even if they are at low densities within a landscape network - may lead to a reduced diversity of wildlife as ponds become more isolated from one another, compromising species that may rely on a network of ponds for their survival. Examples of how such changes may occur include:

[14] The distribution and abundance of ponds in Suffolk. English Nature.pdf

- Complete infilling due to loss of economic value or new development;
- Loss of terrestrial buffer zones in areas of intensive land use;
- Diffuse or point source pollution from nutrients or other chemicals;
- Inadvertent or deliberate introduction of non-native species such as New Zealand pygmyweed (*aka* Australian swamp stonecrop), least duckweed or ornamental fish;
- Neglect and/or lack of management resulting in heavy shading and drying out.

It should be noted that some apparently neglected ponds and many ephemeral ponds are of great value for biodiversity and that a pond survey based on a standard procedure can do much to inform management decisions.

5.4 Other habitats of note in Westerfield

There are several areas of semi-improved grassland across the parish which are bordered by hedgerows and scrub, there is evidence that some of these areas are being grazed by livestock. In particular, areas of grassland south of Lower Road and either side of Westerfield Road, as well areas of grassland to the west of Cockfield Hall Lane are of local importance within the parish. There are also several veteran trees in the parish, associated with the hedgerow network or as stand-alone trees. These provide valuable habitat for a range of species including birds, bats and invertebrates.

Westerfield railway station has local value for wildlife. The land surrounding the railway station is managed by the local community. Mixed planting of native wildflower species and herbaceous perennials, shrubs and trees, as well as other features such as a small pond and bug hotels provide habitat for a range of local wildlife, such as pollinators, birds and small mammals.

Additionally, there are a number of patches of scrub within the parish, mainly associated with the edges of the woodlands and field corners. Scrub is an undervalued habitat and is particularly important for nesting bird species including Red Listed Birds of Conservation Concern such as linnet, and migratory species such as nightingale and turtle dove.

Proposed development within the parish should consider impacts to several protected and Priority species including breeding birds, bats, reptiles and Priority invertebrates (stag beetle). Hedgerows present on allocated sites have particular value for wildlife and should be retained on-site.

5.5 Suffolk Priority species in Westerfield

Suffolk Biodiversity Information Service has provided records of species within the Parish. Those that are listed as protected or Priority species are as follows:

Mammals: Common pipistrelle bat have been recorded in the parish. Hazel dormice have been recorded within the hedgerow network locally, and species rich hedgerows within the parish are likely to support this species. Otter have been recorded in the parish. There are a significant number of hedgehog records throughout the parish, as well as brown hare records for the arable farmland. Badger is also recorded and whilst is not a Priority species, it is protected under its own specific legislation.

Birds: A good number of Red and Amber Listed Birds of Conservation Concern (BoCC[5])[15] have been recorded, most of which are also Priority species. Some will breed in the parish, others arrive as winter visitors or are recorded on passage, such as fieldfare and redwing. Key species likely to be associated with hedgerows, scrub and farmland include skylark, meadow pipit, yellowhammer, linnet and bullfinch. The species recorded in the parish associated with settlements include starling, song thrush, house sparrow and dunnock.

Invertebrates: There are a high number of records of stag beetle within the parish as well as a Priority species butterfly; wall butterfly.

Reptiles and amphibians: There are no reptile records for the parish, however there are a significant number of great crested newt records throughout the parish. There are also records of smooth newt, common frog and common toad.

Plants: Three Suffolk rare plant species have been recorded including black poplar, chicory and sainfoin.

It is also noted that there is a record of wall cotoneaster, which is a plant listed as invasive on Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). There is also a record of Chinese muntjac in the parish.

5.6 Built Environment and Associated Habitats

5.6.1 General description of this habitat in the context of Suffolk

This habitat refers broadly to the wide range of structures, materials and microhabitats found in the built environment, including (though not exclusively) farm buildings, houses, gardens, allotments and also land which may have a previous history of development but is now currently unused. Notably, certain previously developed 'brownfield' sites over 0.25 hectares with specialist vegetation communities can meet the criteria of the Priority Habitat 'Open Mosaic Habitats on Previously Developed Land'.

Land associated with gardens and associated spaces can form a significant proportion of the land use within a settlement, but still provide a wide range of habitats with significant biodiversity value. All provide opportunities, and in some case refuges, for a wide range of species to complete their life cycles. The conservation importance of such habitats also lies as much in the opportunities they provide for people to have close contact with wildlife as in the protection of common and scarcer species. Becoming familiar with the wildlife in a garden often stimulates interest in species and habitats within the wider countryside.

5.6.2 Built environment habitat in Westerfield

The main settlement in Westerfield is to the south of the parish along Church Lane and Westerfield Road.

The general description underlines the importance for wildlife of the buildings and gardens within the parish, and aerial images on Google Earth show just how interconnected the houses and

[15] bocc-5-a5-4pp-single-pages.pdf (bto.org)

gardens are, particularly the gardens to the east of Westerfield Road. This stretch of gardens will provide valuable habitat for wildlife, particularly where gardens are managed with wildlife in mind.

5.6.3 Activities and developments that could affect this habitat in Westerfield

In terms of wildlife associated with houses and gardens, rather than note adverse actions, there is a wide range of information and websites generally available on wildlife gardening[16]. Some of the positive actions than individual gardeners can consider include:

- Creating ponds and mini wildflower meadows;
- Putting up swift boxes on buildings;
- Creating hedgehog highways between gardens;
- Composting and creating deadwood areas;
- Harvesting rainwater;
- Avoiding garden chemicals;
- Relaxing mowing of some grassland areas (manage on rotation).

5.7 Ecological Networks and Connectivity

5.7.1 The significance of ecological networks and connectivity

Maintaining and improving connectivity between habitats is important in ensuring the longer-term survival of biodiversity in an increasingly fragmented landscape and with a changing climate.

An ecological network is the basic natural infrastructure that enables biodiversity assets (both habitats and species) to become re-established if damaged or in decline and become resilient to the impacts of climate change. Integrated with the natural cycling of water, soil and nutrients, biodiversity provides what are increasingly recognised as vital 'ecosystem services'. These services are not only of intrinsic of social and economic value but will create social and economic problems if they fall too far into deficit.

The major components of an ecological network can be identified as:

- Core Areas: existing areas/features/resources of importance for biodiversity
- Corridors: existing linear features providing structural connectivity between Core Areas and into the wider landscape
- Stepping Stones: existing habitat patches providing functional connectivity between Core Areas and into the wider landscape
- Restoration Areas: areas/features with the potential to become future Core Areas, or to improve connectivity, if they are enhanced or restored
- Buffer zones: can be included around all these elements to lessen the likelihood of direct or indirect impacts upon them

As already noted, the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2021 states that Plans should take a strategic approach to biodiversity. It includes a range of requirements to conserve and enhance the natural environment, among them requiring Local Plans (and by association Neighbourhood Plans) to: '…promote the conservation, restoration and enhancement of priority

[16] Wildlife gardening | Suffolk Wildlife Trust

habitats, ecological networks and the protection and recovery of priority species.' Consequently, it is essential that decision makers have access to high quality ecological advice in order to meet these requirements.

5.7.2 Ecological networks in Westerfield

There is potential to link habitats to the south of the parish, south of Church Lane; which include semi-improved grassland and Priority habitats including lowland deciduous woodland and hedgerows; to the future Ipswich Garden Suburb County Park. The hedgerows in the south of the parish are of particular importance because of their species richness and management for wildlife and should aim to link with the new network of hedgerows and green spaces which forms part of the Ipswich Garden Suburb development.

Future greenspace and wildlife habitat creation within the Ipswich Garden Suburb Country Park, within and outside of the parish, should also seek to link to land managed for wildlife along the railway line and at Westerfield train station. Any opportunities to improve the connections between these two areas of habitat for people and wildlife should be sought.

There is also a corridor of species-rich, well managed hedgerows and semi-natural habitats, such as ponds and semi-improved grassland, along Cockfield Hall Lane to the north of the parish. There are several areas of semi-improved grassland which are grazed by livestock to the west of Cockfield Hall Lane. Here, relic field patterns are still present, however some hedgerows have been removed to create larger arable fields since 1880s maps. Opportunities to reinstate hedgerows and relic field patterns to improve the area for wildlife should be sought[17].

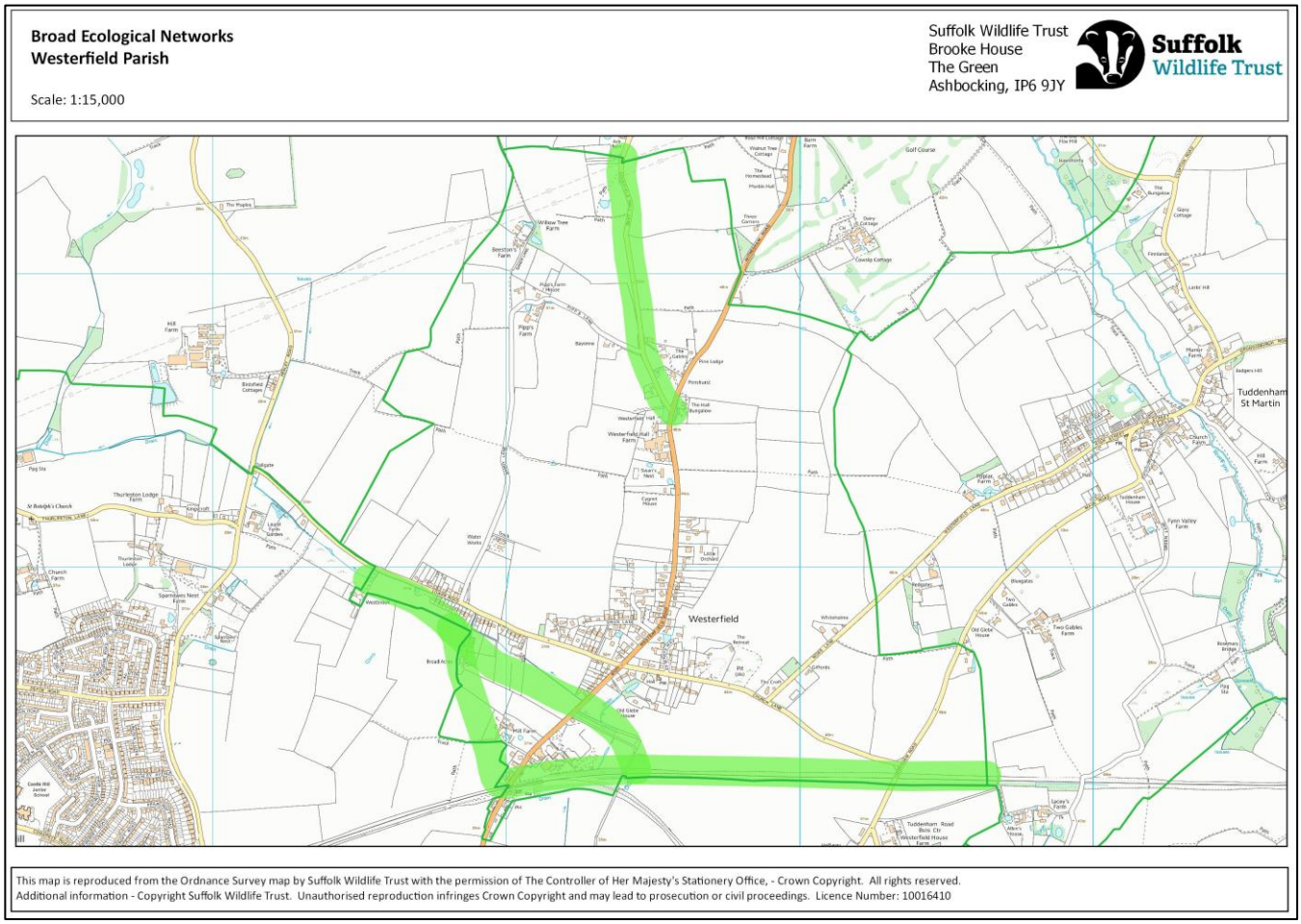
It is notable that these networks extend beyond the parish into the neighbouring parishes of Ipswich and Witnesham in particular.

Figure 2. broadly identifies where there are existing wildlife corridors within the landscape which contribute to the ecological network. The absence of a line on the map should not be taken as absence of connectivity as parts of the parish have not been fully assessed but do contain residential gardens which offer a degree of connectivity.

These ecological linkages should be safeguarded and also strengthened whenever such opportunities arise. Additional habitat creation in the wider landscape such as new hedgerows will enhance the network, particularly in areas where such connections are less defined.

[17] View map: Suffolk LXXV.4 (Ipswich; Rushmere St Andrew; Tuddenham; Westerfield) - Ordnance Survey 25 inch England and Wales, 1841-1952 (nls.uk)

Figure 2. Broad Ecological Networks



5.8 The significance of wildlife and ecological assets for the Neighbourhood Plan

Westerfield parish does not contain any statutory designated sites or County Wildlife Sites. Westerfield parish contains three Priority habitats: lowland deciduous woodland, ponds and hedgerows. Hedgerows and ponds within the parish have local significance for wildlife. Westerfield contains a higher than average number of ponds per km^2, providing habitats for protected species such as great crested newts and other amphibian species. Several hedgerows in the parish are quite mature, some may be ancient hedgerows; indicated by the relic field pattern still present across some of the parish as well as features such as veteran trees and coppice stools within the hedgerows. A significant number of protected and Priority species have been recorded in association with these habitats, and any records are likely to under-represent the true number of species within the parish.

Development Management guidance for any new developments within the area covered by the Neighbourhood Plan should ensure to protect the existing ecological assets of the parish and restore, enhance and reconnect the ecological networks.

6. References

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17. View map: Suffolk LXXV.4 (Ipswich; Rushmere St Andrew; Tuddenham; Westerfield) - Ordnance Survey 25 inch England and Wales, 1841-1952 (nls.uk) [Accessed: January 2023]

7. Appendices

Appendix 1: Westerfield Parish Boundary