CAEN MEADOW MANAGEMENT PLAN

A close up of a plant

Description automatically generated

2024-29

A map of a town

Description automatically generated

The meadow and surrounding area from a 1839 map showing buildings in the vicinity of what is now the Memorial Ground

Front Cover Photo: Green Alkanet (*Pentaglottis sempervirens*)

A non-native species, introduced from south-west Europe in the 1700s and long associated with human habitation.

CONTENTS

1. Background

2. Brief History

3. Existing Data

(a) Norfolk Biodiversity Information Service

(b) Tree Survey

4. Surveys 2024

5. The Habitats and Species of Caen Meadow and the surrounding area

6. Evaluation and Priorities

7. Conservation Objectives

8. Public Engagement and Involvement

(a) Engaging with the Community

(b) Communication

i. Website

ii. Social Media

iii. Noticeboard

iv. Signage

(c) Dealing with Anti-Social Behaviour

i. Engaging with the Police

ii Engaging with the School

iii Site Warden

9. Community Engagement Objectives for Caen Meadow

10. Work Plan

11. Review

**1. Background**

Wroxham Parish Council issued a brief outlining the requirements for a Management Plan for Caen Meadow in 2023. The Council wished: “…to appoint a third-party expert to write a Management Plan which provides a framework for the management, maintenance and development of Caen Meadow and Trafford Memorial Ground for the benefit of the local community, visitors and wildlife”. Dr Colin Studholme, wildlife consultant and former Director of Conservation with the Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust, was appointed to produce the plan.

The process was to involve a series of site visits during the spring and summer of 2024 to survey the wildlife present on site, assess its relative conservation value and priority, and devise a work plan for on-going management to protect and enhance the site.

**2. Brief History**

[To be added]

**3. Existing Data**

**(a) Norfolk Biodiversity Information Service**

The Norfolk Biodiversity Information Service (NBIS) is a Local Environmental Record Centre holding information on the species, habitats, protected sites and geology of Norfolk. Every county has a LERC under an accrediting umbrella Association and they operate under the guidelines of the National Biodiversity Network. The aim of the NBIS, as with all LERCs, is to make biodiversity information available to inform decisions, whether this be to assess the impact of a built development or to provide data to assist with the management of wildlife sites. Data services are provided for a fee to consultants and commercial organisations, but basic data searches are provided free of charge to parish councils, community groups and individuals wishing to obtain data for local wildlife projects.

The data held by NBIS comes from a wide variety of sources. While some of the data comes from professional surveys carried out by conservation organisations and consultant ecologists, much of the species data is derived from observations made by amateur experts. The data from these knowledgeable naturalists is lodged with the NBIS to build a picture of the county’s biodiversity. From this, atlases of important species can be prepared and conservation priorities identified, along with trends and threats. The information received via a data search by NBIS is not a definitive record of what is actually present in a given area at a given time, but is a record of what has been recorded historically. It provides a valuable starting point in determining the likely biodiversity value of an area and informing future surveys.

The Parish Council requested a data search from the NBIS in March 2024 and a summary of the findings is given in Table 2 (page 18).

The biodiversity data gathered during the survey work for this plan will be lodged with the NBIS.

**(b) Target Trees Tree Survey**

A professional tree survey was carried out by an arboriculturist company – Target Trees - in October 2023. They surveyed trees on all of the Wroxham Parish Council-owned sites, including Caen Meadow. 68 trees were surveyed on Caen Meadow (numbers 42 to 110 on the report map, pages 7-12). A number of recommendations were made regarding some of the trees surveyed, ranging from crown raising, through coppicing to felling.

**4. Surveys 2024**

Four survey visits were made to Caen Meadow during 2024 to record the species present and to identify and map the different habitats, as follows:

19th March, 23rd April, 28th June and 2nd August.

Surveys focused mainly on identifying the plants species present, but other species (insects, birds, mammals) were noted when seen. This coverage allowed early spring vegetation to be recorded, woodland flora, meadow flora and finally species of the wet woodland and river. Visits were also made to adjoining properties and to the nearby churchyard.

A full list of the plants, birds and insects recorded on these visits is given in Table 1 below .

**5. The Habitats and Species of Caen Meadow and the surrounding area**

Caen Meadow consists of 3 broad habitat types, but its position in the wider landscape is also important. In addition there are a number of non-native plant species on site of some concern.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Habitat Type** | **Location (see map)** |
| Woodland, scrub and mature trees | W1, W2, W3, W4, W5 &W6 |
| Grassland ad tall herbaceous vegetation | G1, G2, G3, G4, G5, & G6 |
| River and bankside vegetation | Forms the site’s western boundary |
| Wider landscape corridor | The context of the site |
| Non-native species | Sycamore – scattered but mainly in W4  Himalayan Balsam – W3  Muntjac – browses in all woodland areas  Variegated yellow archangel - entrance |

A plan showing the distribution of the different habitat types, broken down into sub-compartments for evaluation and management purposes, is given in Plan 1 (page 9).

**TABLE 1. LIST OF SPECIES RECORDED AT CAEN MEADOW ON FOUR SITE VISITS DURING SPRING AND SUMMER 2024**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Common Name** | **Scientific Name** | **DAFOR\*** |
| **Plants** |  |  |
| Alder | *Alnus glutinosa* | LO |
| Alexanders | *Smyrnium olusatrum* | O |
| Angelica | *Angelica sylvestris* | R |
| Ash | *Fraxinus excelsior* | O |
| Autumn hawkbit | *Leontodon autumnalis* | LF |
| Blackthorn | *Prunus spinosa* | O |
| Bird’s-Foot | *Ornithopus perpusillus* | R |
| Bird’s-Foot Trefoil | *Lotus corniculatus* | R |
| Bracken | *Pteridium aquilinum* | LF |
| Bramble | *Rubus fruticosus* agg. | LF |
| Board Buckler fern | *Dryopteris dilatata* | R |
| Broad-Leaved Dock | *Rumex obtusifolia* | O |
| Buck’s Horn Plantain | *Plantago coronopus* | R |
| Burdock | *Arctium minor* | O |
| Cat’s Ear | *Hypochoeris radicata* | O |
| Cleavers | *Galium aparine* | O |
| Cock’s-Foot | *Dactylis glomerata* | F |
| Common Bent Grass | Agrostis tenuis | LF |
| Common Sorrel | Rumex acetosa | O |
| Common Stork’s-Bill | *Erodium cicutarium* | R |
| Cow Parsley | *Anthriscus sylvestris* | O |
| Creeping Bent Grass | Agrostis stolonifera | O |
| Creeping Buttercup | Ranunculus repens | O |
| Daffodil (cultivated) | *Narcissus* sp. | R |
| Daisy | *Bellis perennis* | O |
| Dandelion | *Taraxacum officinale* agg. | O |
| Dog Rose | *Rosa canina* | R |
| Dogwood | *Cornus sanguinea* | R |
| Elder | *Sambucus nigra* | O |
| English Elm | *Ulmus procera* | O |
| English Oak | *Quercus robur* | F |
| False Oat Grass | *Arrhenatherum elatius* | F |
| Few-Flowered Garlic | *Allium paradoxa* | LA |
| Field Bindweed | *Convolvulus arvensis* | O |
| Forget-Me-Not | *Myosotis sylvatica* | O |
| Foxglove | *Digitalis purpurea* | LO |
| Garlic Mustard | *Alliaria petiolata* | O |
| Germander Speedwell | *Veronica chamaedrys* | R |
| Goat Willow | *Salix caprea* | R |
| Gorse | *Ulex europaeus* | R |
| Green Alkanet | *Pentaglottis sempervirens* | F |
| Great Hairy Willow-Herb | *Epilobium hirsutum* | O |
| Greater Pond Sedge | *Carex riparia* | LF |
| Ground Elder | *Aegopodium podagraria* | LF |
| Ground Ivy | Glechoma hederacea | LF |
| Guelder Rose | *Viburnum opulus* | R |
| Hazel | *Corylus avellana* | LO |
| Hawthorn | *Crataegus monogyna* | O |
| Hemp Agrimony | *Eupatorium cannabinum* | R |
| Herb Bennet | *Geum urbanum* | R |
| Herb Robert | *Geranium robertianum* | O |
| Himalayan Balsam | *Impatiens glandulifera* | LO |
| Hogweed | *Heracleum sphondylium* | O |
| Holly | *Ilex aquifolium* | R |
| Hop | *Humulus lupulus* | R |
| Ivy-Leaved Speedwell | *Veronica hederifolia* | R |
| Knapweed | *Centaurea nigra* | LF |
| Lesser Celandine | *Ranunculus ficaria* | LF |
| Lesser Trefoil | *Trifolium dubium* | R |
| Lords and Ladies | *Arum maculatum* | R |
| Male Fern | *Dryopteris filix-mas* | R |
| Meadow Buttercup | *Ranunculus acris* | O |
| Meadowsweet | *Filipendula ulmaria* | O |
| Mouse-Ear Chickweed | *Cerastium fontanum* | O |
| Osier Willow | *Salix viminalis* | LF |
| Ox-Eye Daisy | *Leucanthemum vulgare* | R |
| Ragwort | *Senecio jacobaea* | LF |
| Rat’s Tail Fescue | *Vulpia myuros* | LF |
| Red Campion | *Silene dioica* | O |
| Red Clover | *Trifolium pratense* | O |
| Red Dead-Nettle | *Lamium purpureum* | O |
| Red Fescue | *Festuca rubra* | LF |
| Remote Sedge | *Carex remota* | R |
| Ribwort Plantain | *Plantago lanceolata* | O |
| Rosebay Willow-Herb | *Chamaenerion angustifolium* | LF |
| Rough Meadow Grass | *Poa trivialis* | O |
| Sheep’s Sorrel | *Rumex acetosella* | LF |
| Silverweed | *Potentilla anserina* | O |
| Snowdrop | *Galanthus nivalis* | LF |
| Stinging Nettle | *Urtica dioica* | LF |
| Spear Thistle | *Cirsium vulgare* | O |
| Spurge sp. | *Euphorbia* sp. | R |
| Sweet Vernal Grass | *Anthoxanthum odoratum* | R |
| Sycamore | *Acer pseudoplatanus* | O |
| White Campion | *Silene alba* | R |
| White Clover | *Trifolium repens* | O |
| Yarrow | *Achillea millefolium* | O |
| Yellow Archangel (cultivated) | *Lamium galeobdolon* | LF |
| Yellow Flag Iris | *Iris pseudocorus* | R |
| Yellow Oat Grass | *Trisetum flavens* | R |
| Yorkshire Fog | Holcus lanatus | F |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
| **Birds** |  |  |
| Blackbird |  |  |
| Blue Tit |  |  |
| Carrion Crow |  |  |
| Chaffinch |  |  |
| Chiffchaff |  |  |
| Collared Dove |  |  |
| Dunnock |  |  |
| Grey Lag Goose |  |  |
| Great Tit |  |  |
| Great Spotted Woodpecker |  |  |
| Long-Tailed Tit |  |  |
| Mallard |  |  |
| Pheasant |  |  |
| Wood Pigeon |  |  |
|  |  |  |
| **Insects** |  |  |
| Buff-Tailed Bumblebee |  |  |
| Meadow Brown Butterfly |  |  |
| Red Admiral Butterfly |  |  |
| Common Tortoiseshell |  |  |
| Comma Butterfly |  |  |
|  |  |  |
| **Mammals** |  |  |
| Mole |  |  |
| Muntjac |  |  |
| Rabbit |  |  |
|  |  |  |

\*The acronym DAFOR stands for **D**ominant, **A**bundant, **F**requent, **O**ccasional or **R**are and a letter is given to each plant recorded to represent its relative abundance within the survey area, not national status. E.G., one dandelion plant found on site would be given the status Rare. The letter “L” is used before the above letters to indicate that the plant is **L**ocal within the site and not distributed evenly throughout the site.

Plant nomenclature follows Stace, C.  *New Flora of the British Isles, 2nd Edition, 1997.*

(Scientific names are always used for plants for recording purposes as common names may vary in different parts of the country).

**THE HABITATS AND SPECIES OF CAEN MEADOW AND SURROUNDING AREA**

**Plan 1 Habitat Map**

**A map of a garden

Description automatically generated**

**(a) Woodland, Scrub and Mature Trees**

The woodland block which forms the northern boundary of the site consists of three vegetation types.

W1 - On flat ground at the top of the slope, adjoining gardens on two sides, is an area of dense shrubs mainly blackthorn and hawthorn, with some garden “escapes” such as Snowberry. The ground is uneven here and in a few more open areas there is abundant growth of nettles and other common tall herbaceous species and more garden escapes, such as cultivated Daffodils and Snowdrops. The lush growth of vegetation here reflects the high nutrient status of the soil, both inherent and probably supplemented by dumped garden waste. In conservation terms this type of habitat is of low value. But in a local context such sites, if left undisturbed, provide habitat for species such hedgehog and breeding birds such as blackbird. Because such sites are not considered significant they are vulnerable to clearance and “tidying”, and by a slow process of attrition habitat for common species slowly disappears.

W2 - Midway down the wooded slope on the northern boundary, the shrub species, mainly Hawthorn, but also including some Elder, are more mature and taller creating a closed canopy which allows less light into the woodland floor. As a result much of the ground beneath these trees is bare soil and leaf litter, but with again Nettles in places. Notably, however, there are many large clumps of cultivated Snowdrops in this area which are a conspicuous feature in late winter. While not of any significant conservation value they provide a welcome sight at the end of winter and enhance the amenity value of the site.

The other notable feature in this area, and in the adjoining grassland, is the presence of a number of mature/veteran oak trees. Oak trees are very important for wildlife and the trees present at Caen Meadow are one of its main conservation features. The English Oak (*Quercus robur*) is a native tree species widespread in Norfolk - in oak woodlands; as a roadside tree and in parkland where they can spread their branches in the absence of other competing trees and grow into fine specimens. The Caen Meadow oaks are such trees. As a tree that attracts wildlife oaks are unsurpassed. Oaks are known to have associated with them over 250 species of insects which feed on their leaves or burrow into the bark. Mature trees provide nest sites for birds and roosting sites for bats beneath the bark. As oak trees (as with all trees) mature and become veteran, fungus species colonise and begin the natural process of nutrient recycling, with trees becoming hollow and branches starting to die back. This is a natural process, which supports its own biodiversity such as rare wood boring beetles. But standing deadwood is also an increasingly rare habitat as all too often it is seen as hazardous and removed.

W3 - At the bottom of the slope on the northern boundary the woodland composition changes. Here in the floodplain of the River Bure wet woodland has developed with Alder and Willow species replacing the Hawthorns and Oaks. On the boundary between the wet woodland and grassland near the river is a large stand of Osier Willow (*Salix viminalis*) – the type used for basket making. This area of woodland also has a more interesting ground flora including Greater Pond Sedge, Remote Sedge, Hemp Agrimony, Yellow Flag Iris and Broad Buckler and Male Ferns. There are a number of fine Alder trees along the river at this point. The invasive non-native species Himalayan Balsam is present here.

W4 - In the south eastern corner of the site (outside the Council’s remit) lies an area known as The Dell. This area (presumably once quarried) is now wooded with Oak, Sycamore and Ash. From here woodland stretches into the Council’s area to the north. It is composed of a number of common tree species, but again with a number of very mature oak trees of high conservation value. The ground flora is sparse with some Bramble and Nettle.

Between the two ownerships is a defunct post and chicken wire fence, which has collapsed in places and no longer functions as a boundary between the two properties. It does however act as a barrier for small mammals such as hedgehogs. In managing any site for wildlife a basic objective should always be to remove any obstacles to animal movement and increase connectivity within a site. Ideally the best option would be to remove the fence completely. However, as the Council is required to maintain a boundary between the two properties the best option would be a post and two strand wire fence (wire top and middle) or a post and rail fence. Both do create a maintenance burden, especially the latter as the rails are likely to need replacing in time (c10 years). Neither option would particularly deter anyone wishing to access the Dell from the Council’s property but either would provide a sufficient barrier denoting the extent of the two properties while at the same time allowing animals to move relatively unobstructed through the woodland.

W5 - Running down the slope in the central part of the site is a narrow strip of woodland with mature trees and shrubs, including a conspicuous pollarded sycamore and holly. This area is surrounded by tall herbaceous vegetation acting as a transition between the woodland and grassland.

W6 - Between W4 and the river is another area of woodland. This again is comprised of common tree species, some fallen, and at the northern end the trees thin out and the ground flora is dominated by Bracken, creating a natural glade, the bracken being a valuable habitat for invertebrates and reptiles providing basking sites. At the southern end, however, where the woodland borders the Memorial Ground the ground flora is dominated by an unusual naturalised species – Few-Flowered Garlic (*Allium paradoxa*). The plant covers an extensive area of the woodland and is also present on the other side of the path which runs along the edge of The Dell. This plant is an old culinary plant introduced into the UK from the Caucasus (western Asia) in the1820s and would have been planted in the gardens of the cottages which once occupied the site. Today it is considered invasive (which we can see it is) and it is actually illegal to plant it in the wild. It is not common in Norfolk, with “A Flora of Norfolk\*” listing it being known in the wild from 35 sites, mainly in Broadland. It is not of any conservation value but is a fascinating historical relic. Although the properties are long gone their garden plants remain to tell the tale. A line of Ash trees is also present through the edge of the wood suggesting the original boundary of the properties.

**(b) Grassland and Tall Herbaceous Vegetation**

The narrow track as you enter from Church Road; the flat area at the top of the site with seating; the central slope; the main area immediately adjacent to the river and the Memorial Ground are all grassland with varying types of management. Often between the managed grasslands and the wooded areas are fringes of unmanaged open areas where tall herbaceous species such as Nettle, Rosebay Willow-Herb and Hogweed have become established.

G1 – Three areas of grassland at the top of the site have been left to grow long during the summer and are cut at the end of the season, emulating traditional hay meadow management. The grass here is a fairly typical example of urban grassland. The pH of the soil is neutral and it is high in nutrients as can be seen from the coarse grasses which are growing there – mainly Cock’s-Foot, False Oat and Yorkshire Fog. There are some finer grasses in parts such as Red Fescue which may be naturally occurring or have been sown historically. There are some wildflowers of interest including Knapweed and Common Sorrel but the scope for a greater diversity of flowers to become established will always be restricted by its high nutrient status.

G2 and G3 - The grassland on the main slope down the centre of the site is actually composed of two different vegetation types, one of which is of conservation interest. The soil on the slope is shallower here than that on the flatter area above for the most part and this, along with the cutting regime and human footfall, means that the grass remains short, and in places has been eroded away completely, leaving hard, compacted bare soil. In conservation terms this is not an issue as it provides another niche that certain invertebrates will benefit from, but in terms of visitor infrastructure it may need to be addressed.

Beneath the southern half of the grass slope the soil is neutral G2) whereas the soil beneath the vegetation on the northern half is more acid (G3) and this has resulted in a marked difference in the plants growing there. G2 is essentially the same as G1 but kept constantly short rather than allowed to grow. G3 however supports a completely different range of plants less common in an urban setting including Rat’s-Tail Fescue, Sheep’s Sorrel, Buck’s-Horn Plantain and Bird’s-Foot (not to be confused with Bird’s-Foot Trefoil). This acid influence also stretches into uncut tall herb area adjacent to the north as can be seen from the large amount of Sheep’s Sorrel growing among the tall herb vegetation. These are plants more typical of the sandy acid soils of Breckland. It is unclear what the underlying influence is here but the result is a tiny bit of Breckland in Wroxham!

G4 - The grassland at the bottom of the slope is essentially flood-plain grassland. This is neutral in character with nutrient enrichment which would primarily come from seasonal inundation by flood waters. The central area immediately behind the beach is cut short and is a continuation of G2, whereas on either side (G4) the grass is uncut and meadow flora has developed. This has the usual common grass species as in G1, especially Yorkshire Fog, but with the wetland influence there is frequent Meadow and Creeping Buttercups and other plants associated with wet meadows.

**What makes a grassland important?**

For a grassland to be of high conservation value they need to have an inherent low nutrient status. Never having had additions of chemical fertilisers they support a wide range of plant species. Once fertilisers are introduced a few coarse grass and plant species dominate and the more delicate species are lost to competition and the high nutrient levels. Grasslands of significant conservation value are now rare in the UK. Historically grasslands would have been managed as hay meadows or with light grazing. The only nutrient input would have been from the livestock grazing the site, and in the case of hay meadows, nutrients would have been kept low as the crop of hay would have been removed each year and not allowed to decompose on site. With the advent of modern agriculture, however, ploughing and reseeding and nutrient enrichment with the addition of fertilisers has transformed grasslands with the bulk of grasslands in the wider countryside now classed as “agriculturally Improved”, with little or no floristic interest. Some are classed as “semi-improved”, meaning that they still contain some interesting wildflowers, but fewer of 3% of UK grasslands are classed as “unimproved” and full of wildflowers. Most of these are now protected by law as Sites of Special Scientific Interest. Such grasslands are ancient habitats derived from centuries of unintensive management. By definition they cannot be recreated once lost, so new “wildflower meadows”, though important as sources of nectar for bees and butterflies, lack the complex biodiversity of ancient meadows.

G5 - Between the woodland compartments W1-3 and the grass slope (G2-3) is a large area of unmanaged rough grassland (G5 ) with tall herbs such as nettle and ragwort. A similar habitat borders woodland compartment W5 on the other side of the slope but here it contains other species such as Hogweed and Rosebay willow-herb. Also present in these unmanaged areas are rabbit burrows. Rabbits are not a species native to the UK but are well established here having arrived with the Romans and are probably our most well-known and frequently encountered mammal. However, concern is sometimes raised about damage caused by burrowing rabbits and the potential hazard which burrows represent. But viewing rabbit burrows as “damage” immediately creates the idea that they are a problem that needs dealing with rather than seeing them as a place where rabbits live and raise their young on a site which is managed for both people and wildlife. Local authorities may decide to take action to remove rabbits if someone mentions health and safety, rather than finding a way to live with them. And eradicating cute furry animals on a public site can, and has, resulted in bad press for the land manager! As long as burrows are confined to the areas of unmanaged grassland the risk they pose is minimal as the vast majority of visitors will stick to the mown areas when walking around the site. And most parents and children will enjoy seeing rabbits. If burrows appear in mown/path areas they should be filled in as by keeping an area mown visitors are clearly being invited to walk there. General signage (see xxx) should remind visitors to keep to mown paths as a way of avoiding “uneven ground”.

Similarly, moles are present on site as is apparent from the conspicuous “hills” they create when digging their underground tunnels. Moles are a native mammal and as the Council is not seeking to maintain a pristine lawn or bowling green their presence should be tolerated (welcomed!) and their fascinating underground life even explained via on site interpretation. Again landowners sometimes decide to eradicate moles from their land (but they will come back) and it also runs the risk of bad press. As a mole hill cannot seriously be considered a trip hazard, given their conspicuous nature, and as grounds maintenance contractors have no problems cutting grass on a site with moles, it is a case of learning to live with them, and adding them to the species list.

G6 - The area known as the Memorial Ground is cut short for amenity purposes and is species poor so of little inherent conservation value. There is a large Weeping Willow and scattered Snowdrop plants.

Common throughout the site in uncut areas, especially along the entrance path but also around the Memorial Ground is a very conspicuous naturalised species called Green Alkanet (see front cover). It has blue flowers and is one of the first flowers to bloom in spring. It gets the name “Green” from that fact the it is evergreen and its leaves persist over winter. It is usually associated with human habitation and is presumably another relic from when dwellings were present on site. It has no great culinary value but an extract from its root was reportedly used as a dye.

**(c) River and Bankside Vegetation**

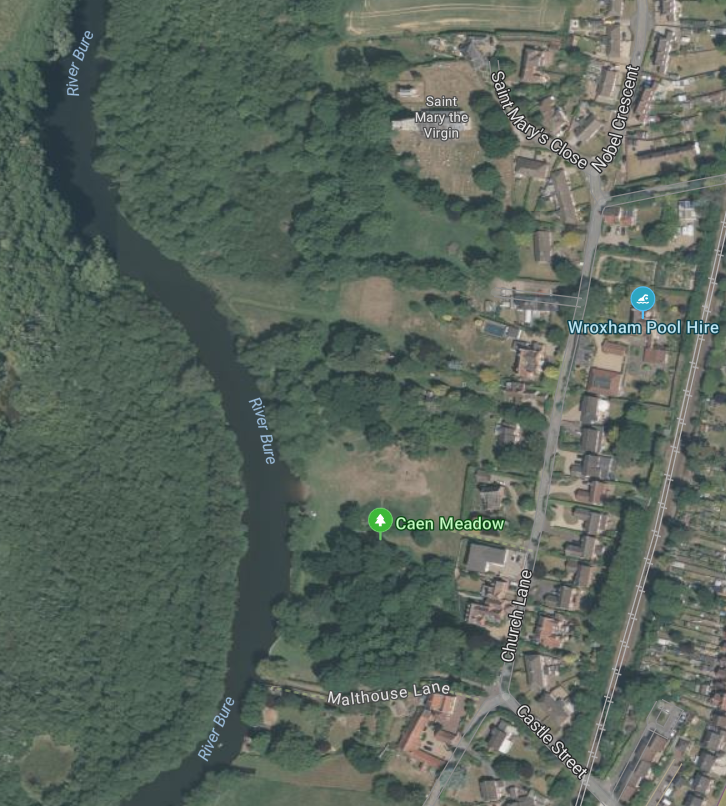
The River Bure is an important watercourse for wildlife. Rising at Melton Constable above Aylsham it eventually empties into the sea at Gorleston after a sinuous route 51km route through Broadland. At Caen Meadow the bankside vegetation is typically mature trees (mainly Alder) and shrub species including Hawthorn, Dogwood and Willow. In more open areas away from the trees Purple Loosestrife and Meadowsweet have become established. The area known as The Beach is largely devoid of bankside vegetation and is kept open by people accessing the river for recreational purposes in the summer months. The balance between the natural bankside vegetation and unvegetated beach area seems about right. Vegetation does not appear to be encroaching on to the beach so therefore no management is required to keep it open. Similarly, the open area does not appear to be expanding so there is currently no need for reparatory action. As long as the Council is satisfied that the current access to the river meets the needs of visitors no management should be necessary. In particular no vegetation should be removed, especially trees, as these act as a stabilizing factor protecting the river bank from erosion. Erosion is probably the main potential issue which the Council may face and should be aware of, as the unprotected bankside at the beach could be where erosion is initiated, which may occur when the river is in spate or after a storm. This can happen suddenly and quite unexpectedly. The recommendation here is to retain the status quo, resist any suggestion to expand the area of the beach in case it becomes a precursor to further erosion, but keep a watching brief in case erosion starts to occur. It appears unlikely but if erosion does occur the Norfolk Rivers Trust should be contacted for advice. They have a current project on the Yare at Earlham/UEA where excessive public access has caused erosion to the riverbank and they are installing hurdles and “woody debris” as a way of stabilising the bank and encouraging vegetation to grow.

The wildlife value of rivers is not only determined by the quality of the water and the management and use of the river but also by the adjoining habitat in its floodplain. Many UK rivers have lost their wildlife value because of cultivation to the top of the river bank destroying bankside and floodplain habitat and facilitating runoff of pollution and silt-laden rain water into the river. Caen Meadow is a tiny element of the floodplain of the River Bure but nevertheless contributes to the integrity of the wider River Bure corridor and the wildlife it supports.

**(d) The Wider Landscape Corridor**

Photo 1 shows an aerial (satellite) photo of Caen Meadow and the surrounding landscape. Immediately north of the Meadow are gardens which are not intensively managed with many mature trees. Beyond this are grazing meadows bounded by more trees and linking into the churchyard of St. Mary’s Church which is rich in wildflowers.

To the south are two more gardens again with mature trees then another meadow occupying the land between the river and Skinners Lane. This unintensive land use creates a valuable corridor for wildlife with good connectivity of habitats not separated by major roads or built development. On the western side of the river is an extensive area of woodland through which the River Bure flows containing an area of open water – Belaugh Broad. Habitat connectivity is an important aspect of nature conservation, as habitats which are isolated and surrounded by intensive land use or built development are vulnerable to species loss and habitat degradation.



**Photo 1 – Caen Meadow and its Wildlife Corridor**

**(e) Non-Native Species**

The presence of non-native species, especially those which are very invasive, is a major threat to biodiversity globally. Often plants and animals can become established in an area/country where their natural predators are absent causing them to flourish unchecked. The Cane Toad is a good (or bad) example. In 1935, 102 toads were introduced into Queensland, Australia from Central America in order to control insect pests in sugar cane crops. The population expanded exponentially in the absence of its natural predators and it in turn became a predator of Australia’s amphibian fauna pushing many native species to the edge of extinction. By 2011 the Australian population of Cane Toad was estimated to be 200 million! There are many examples in the UK, and four non-native invasive species are present at Caen Meadow – Muntjac Deer, Himalayan Balsam, variegated Yellow Archangel and Sycamore. Cultivated Yellow Archangel is a popular garden plant, identified by the silver centre to its leaves, and it is present at Caen Meadow along the entrance track from Church Road, where it has presumably spread from a neighbouring garden. But Yellow Archangel is also a native British plant (without the silver leaf markings) restricted to ancient woodlands where is actually an indicator of ancient woodland sites. When the two plants meet, hybridisation can occur which means the gene pool of the native plants can be lost and the pure native species disappears. Fortunately the native species is not present in the woodland at Caen Meadow so there is no risk, but it is something to be aware of.

Muntjac Deer, introduced from China in the 1900s, are however present at Caen Meadow and are a major woodland pest, nibbling the tips of young or coppiced trees, preventing natural regeneration. They also have a penchant for bluebell bulbs and can be damaging in ancient woodlands. Their presence manifests itself by tracks through vegetation, stripped bark from trees, or, in the case of Caen Meadow, relatively poor regeneration of tree species. This is a UK-wide problem and many ancient woodlands are considered to be in an unfavourable condition because of deer preventing sapling trees from growing. While there are many mature trees and younger trees at Caen Meadow, seedlings and saplings of all the tree species are notably lacking, and this is almost certainly due to browsing by Muntjac Deer.

Himalayan Balsam, introduced as its name suggests from the Himalayas in 1839, is now a major plant pest of rivers and wetlands across most of Europe. It is an annual plant which is fast growing and which produces a large quantity of seeds. It can rapidly take over a river bank or marsh, excluding all other plants. When they die back completely in winter riverbanks can be left bare of vegetation leaving them susceptible to erosion. Their flowers are extremely attractive to bees and other pollinators and there is evidence that native flowers go unpollinated as bees favour the non-native plant. Management will be an ongoing requirement as seeds will continually be washed on site from plants upstream.

Finally, Sycamore is an introduced and now fully naturalised tree, widespread throughout the UK having arrived on these shore from about the year 1500. The tree is a prolific seed producer and in a good mast year woodland floors can become covered with Sycamore seedings, which can grow on to become an established and dominant component of a woodland canopy. This has been a major concern of conservationists as the tree is capable of altering the native tree species composition in ancient woodlands, threatening the woodland’s conservation value. For this reason Sycamore removal and even eradication has long been an objective of ancient woodland management, and to a large extent still is. A reason often cited for Sycamore removal is the fact that as a non-native species it has fewer insect species associated with it compared to native species (284 for Oak, compared to 15 for Sycamore). However, species diversity is not the same as biomass. A tree species may have relatively few insect species associated with it, but if the insects which are associated with it occur in huge numbers (e.g. aphids) then that tree may harbour an important source of food for other animals, especially birds. Such is the case with Sycamore, and in light of the recent spread of Ash Dieback conservationists are re-evaluating the importance of Sycamore. There is anecdotal evidence that in parts of the country where Ash was formerly a major component of ancient woodlands (e.g. the West Country), the sudden disappearance of Ash foliage is having an impact on the breeding success of some woodland bird species, as the food they need and rely on to feed their nestlings in early Spring is no longer present. Sycamore is very attractive to aphids which occur on their leaves in enormous numbers and is therefore seen as a valuable substitute for Ash in this respect. Ash trees are also excellent hosts of lichen species and Sycamore, with a similar bark chemistry, is being seen as a tree which in time will become more important for lichen species.

At Caen Meadow, Sycamore does not present a conservation threat even though in time it may replace Ash as a sub-canopy tree species. There are mature Sycamore trees on site and on the adjoining land (The Dell) and there will always be a ready supply of seeds which will germinate in the woodland and unmanaged grassland areas. Most of these will succumb to deer browsing and relatively few will make it through to become young trees. Removing Sycamore will introduce an additional management burden without any obvious conservation gain and no action is recommended in the plan at this time .

**TABLE 2 – SUMMARY OF SURVEY DATA RECEIVED FROM THE NORFOLK BIODIVERSITY INFORMATION SERVICE – MARCH 2024**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Date** | **Species** | **Location** |
| No date | Common Pipistrelle Bat  Daubenton’s Bat  Noctule Bat  Soprano Pipistrelle Bat | Caen Meadow |
| 2014 | Barbastelle Bat  Brown Long-Eared Bat  Daubenton’s Bat  Natterer’s Bat  Noctule Bat  Soprano Pipistrelle Bat  Nathusius’s Pipistrelle Bat | Church of St. Mary |
| 2015 | Hedgehog | Church of St. Mary |
| No date | 21 Moth species | Garden on Norwich Road |
| 2010 | Swift | House of Norwich Road |
| 1997 | Hedgehog | Garden on Norwich Road |
| 2015 | Otter | River Bure (south of Caen Meadow) |
| 2015 | American Mink | River Bure (south of Caen Meadow) |
| 1997 | Water Vole | River Bure (negative record, i.e. searched for but not seen) |

The table above summarises the records held by the Norfolk Biodiversity Information Service for Caen Meadow and the surrounding area. The bat records would have been gathered as part of a dedicated search for bats in the area and the species would have been identified using a bat detector which picks up the different high frequency sounds emitted by bats as they are hunting for insect prey.

**WHY ARE BATS IN DECLINE?**

There are over 20 species of bat in the UK and most are threatened as a result of loss or damage to roosting and breeding sites and feeding habitat. In the summer bats breed in colonies in the roofs of houses, churches and other buildings, some in holes in trees. Very often people are not aware that they have bats until they take the roof off their house or carry out some other kind of refurbishment. Lots of bat colonies have been lost as a result of unintentional damage. In winter bats hibernate in damp cool conditions such as cellars and caves or trees. In between breeding and hibernating bats will be out feeding and will roost overnight in trees and buildings. Bats are tiny and can squeeze into the narrowest of cracks. All bats and their breeding and hibernating sites are protected by law, regardless of whether the bats are in residence. So it is illegal to destroy or prevent access by bats to a breeding site even when they are hibernating elsewhere. Bats rely on a good supply of flying insects such as moths for food. Loss of meadows has meant loss of flowers and the insects they support – and the bats which in turn feed on them. In addition some bat species will not cross open spaces but will follow hedgerows to get from a roost site to a feeding site rich in moths. If a bat roost is separated from a feeding ground by the severing of a hedgerow or other linear feature used by bats (such as by a new road) they will not be able to reach their food supply.

Records of Hedgehogs are held by NBIS but the last date was 2015. However, I was informed by residents during my surveys that they have seen hedgehogs in their gardens recently.

Presumably someone living on Norwich Road has/had a moth trap and submitted records of moths that they had caught in their garden.

A swift was recorded in Norwich Road in 2010. I did not see or hear swifts on any of my survey visits during 2024.

Otters are now well reestablished in Norfolk following their near extinction in the 1970s as a result of now banned pesticide residues from agriculture. Males have a home range of up to 40km so individuals are likely to pass Caen Meadow frequently.

Unlike otters, Water Voles are now virtually extinct in many parts of the UK. This is a result of unsympathetic river bank management and predation by non-native American Mink. Water voles` appear to have been searched for nearby in 1997 but not seen. We can presume that they are still no longer present.

In addition to the species recorded during my surveys and information provided by NBIS, I was informed by residents that I met during the course of my surveys that both Grass Snakes and Slow Worms have been seen locally. With all this information we are able to evaluate the importance of the different habitats and species present, identify priorities and objectives, and consider how they can be protected and enhanced.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Habitat/Species** | **Relative Conservation Value** | **Rationale** |
| Woodland, scrub and mature trees | High | Mature trees in particular are rich in biodiversity.  The wet woodland is a small but interesting feature on site. |
| River Bure | High | An important river and corridor for bats and other species. |
| Acid Grassland | High | Uncommon feature locally and in an urban setting. |
| Floodplain Grassland | Medium | Varied flora which in turn support insects. |
| Neutral Grassland | Low | Common habitat but of value in a local context. |
| Bat species | High | Vulnerable species which rely on connectivity in the landscape. |
| Hedgehog | High | Vulnerable due to loss of habitat and barriers to movement. |
| * In summary, the mature oak trees and the area of wet woodland are probably the most important biodiversity features at Caen Meadow. * The River Bure is a major ecological asset and the importance of Caen Meadow in this respect is that it provides an important, if small, area of semi-natural habitat in the river’s floodplain acting as a valuable buffer. * The small area of acid grassland is an unexpected feature on site and supports some interesting plant species probably not found elsewhere in the vicinity * The site provides valuable habitat for bats, hedgehogs, grass snakes and slow worms which are vulnerable and declining species * The remaining habitats are important in a local context and there is scope for their enhancement. | | |

**7. Conservation Objectives for Caen Meadow**

The following objectives reflect the need to conserve and protect the important biodiversity features at Caen Meadow along with the opportunity presented to enhance the more common habitats on site.

1. To protect the biodiversity value of the mature oak trees on site.
2. To recognise the value of the site in the context of the wider River Bure wildlife corridor
3. To protect and enhance the area of wet woodland
4. To enhance the area of acid grassland
5. To enhance the value of other woodland on site
6. To improve the biodiversity value of the wet and neutral grasslands
7. To enhance the site for key species
8. To maintain open access via a network of mown paths

(a) To protect the biodiversity value of the mature oak trees on site

The following activities will enable to objective to be achieved:

i. Only remove deadwood from standing trees if considered a high health & safety risk

ii. Leave any fallen deadwood where it falls – do not remove or saw

iii. Plan for future generation of oak trees by new planting (from acorns produced on site)

iv. Explain the importance of deadwood for biodiversity in any interpretation or literature about the site.

*Rationale: Standing deadwood is an increasingly rare habitat, home to many now rare invertebrates, especially beetles. The main reason for this rarity is the removal of deadwood on health and safety grounds. While H&S considerations are of course important there are other ways of mitigating such risks, by, for example, leaving areas beneath old trees unmanaged encouraging the growth of nettles and bramble which discourage people from getting too close to the tree. This is already the case with many of the old trees at Caen Meadow. Invertebrates will continue to exist in a fallen limb, but this is less likely to happen if branches are cut to short lengths and stacked.*

*The presence of 15-150 year old oak trees at Caen Meadow is notable by their absence, mainly as a result of historic and current browsing by deer. Some oak trees have been planted but there is very little in the way of a varied age structure in the Caen Meadow trees. The best way to overcome this is by protecting any young oaks that are found with tree guards and by growing trees from acorns collected on site. Local provenance is best.*

*Explaining the reason for the lack of removal of deadwood from standing trees will help people understand its biodiversity value.*

(b) To recognise the value of the site in the context of the wider River Bure corridor

The following activities will enable to objective to be achieved:

i. Where the opportunity arises, seek to influence management or land use in the vicinity of Caen Meadow (e.g., through planning applications) to retain the integrity of the site and corridor.

ii. Encourage neighbours in the vicinity to garden in a wildlife-friendly way

iii. Improve the “permeability” of the Meadow with surrounding land by removing barriers to movement by ground dwelling animals, e.g. making holes in fences.

*Rationale: The slow degradation of land in a wildlife corridor through insensitive management or unsympathetic development can result in the fragmentation of important sites and reduce the connectivity which allows wildlife to move around freely. Increasing the wildlife value of sites within a wildlife corridor can strengthen its integrity.*

(c) To protect and enhance the area of wet woodland

The following activities will enable to objective to be achieved:

i. Increase the density of alder and willow trees by new planting (cuttings from existing trees)

ii. Control Himalayan Balsam

*Rationale: Alder and willow trees are present, but mainly around the edge of the area. Infilling with willow and some alder will develop the woodland. Willow species in particular, like oak, are attractive to a large number of invertebrates. Cuttings from willow and alder trees will readily root when pushed into wet ground. The use of the osier trees on site will develop the site as an osier bed which, with management, could be harvested.*

*Himalayan balsam is a threat to the existing ground flora and needs to be regularly removed.*

(d) To enhance the area of acid grassland

The following activities will enable to objective to be achieved:

i. Extend the grass cutting regime into the uncut area to the north of the current cut area

*Rationale: There is scope to extend the amount of this habitat by regularly cutting a larger area than is currently cut, incorporating an area of tall grass/herbaceous vegetation. It is a relatively valuable habitat on site and should be enhanced.*

(e) To enhance the value of other woodland on site

The following activities will enable to objective to be achieved:

i. Promote tree regeneration by protecting any tree saplings found on site with tree guards

ii. Expand the population of snowdrops in compartment W2 by separating and replanting existing clumps.

iii. Plant native shrub species in the corner of the meadow adjacent to W1 to discourage access and increase shrub diversity

iv. Maintain the bracken glade (northern end of W6) as open area but prevent further spread of bracken

*Rationale: Protecting tree seedlings and saplings with tree guards before they are browsed by deer will guarantee a free supply of trees for the future.*

*Snowdrops respond well to being divided and replanted, quickly increasing their numbers. In time the floor of this relatively uninteresting piece of woodland could be covered with snowdrops.*

*There is a worn path between compartment W1 and the boundary of the adjoining houses. It leads nowhere but could increase disturbance to nesting birds. Planting an area of shrubs in the corner of the grassland would discourage access and increase the diversity of shrubs.*

*The objective here would be to maintain the site undisturbed and discourage access while continuing to allow access by adjoining householders to maintain their property boundaries*.

(f) To improve the biodiversity value of the wet and neutral grasslands

The following activities will enable to objective to be achieved:

i. Introduce a hay cutting regime whereby grass cut at the end of the summer is removed

ii Supplement existing flora by planting appropriate native plant species into the existing sward

iii. Collect seeds from plants in the churchyard and spread on grasslands after cutting.

iv. Maintain a path network through and around the grasslands

v. Widen mown area on the main central slope to spread footfall down the site

vi. Monitor erosion on slope and implement reparatory action if necessary (see rationale below)

*Rationale: By removing the cuttings from the grassland when it is cut they do not rot and increase the fertility of the sward. It also ensures that a “thatch” of dead grass does not accumulate preventing seeds from germinating. Pot-grown wild plants will readily establish when planted into grasslands and it is a good way to increase plant diversity. Once the grass is cut at the end of the summer the sward is very open and seeds will readily drop to the ground rather than being caught in vegetation. The churchyard at St. Mary’s church has a rich diversity of wildflowers. Collecting seeds from plants there (with permission) and sowing them into the neutral and wet grassland areas will introduce plants of a local provenance, with a good chance that some will germinate and become established. Maintaining a path network allows the public to view and enjoy the wild flowers while also demonstrating that the grass is being kept long for a purpose. Note: Removing grass cuttings would be a new activity for the Council and may have labour/cost implications depending on whether it is carried out by a contractor or volunteers. It would be best to experiment with a smaller area at first and then expanding it to all the sites identified if it is considered manageable.*

*Visitors should be encouraged to stay on the mown areas and not to stray into uncut areas. The new path cutting proposals at the top of the site will allow visitors to enjoy the areas being developed for wildflowers. No other management should be required to ensure safe access around the site other than the routine grass cutting. However the main central slope down to the river is prone to erosion.*

*Widening the area of cut grass on the slope to manage the acid grassland should help alleviate the erosion issue as footfall will be spread over a bigger area and the bare area may re-vegetate naturally. Should this not resolve the issue, however, the eroded area could be isolated by temporary fencing and either (a) left to see if vegetation is restored naturally, (b) scarified and left to see if vegetation is restored naturally, or (c) scarified and reseeded. A hardwearing grass species (amenity perennial rye grass and strong creeping red fescue) may be suitable, but it is worth bearing in mind that the best plants suited to a given site will be those that colonise naturally, so natural regeneration should probably be the first option. It may also be that the soil is very shallow in that area (which the existing vegetation suggests, but the depth could be tested) so establishing any vegetation there may always be problematic.*

(g) To enhance the site for key species

The following activities will enable to objective to be achieved:

i. Consider the needs of bats in any tree work

ii. Provide habitat piles for hedgehogs and grass snakes

iii. Create hibernacula for slow worms

iv Monitor the use of the site by otters using camera traps

*Rationale: All bat species are vulnerable, in decline and protected by law. They are very likely to be present in and around trees at Caen Meadow and any tree management should take this into account. Habitat piles could be created from the grass cuttings from the meadows. Piled up in discreet areas these offer suitable cover and breeding areas for hedgehogs and grass snakes. Slow worms live and breed in vegetation piles also, but are often found beneath rocks and paving slabs which offer suitable habitat for them. Reptile hibernacula – where slow worms and other reptiles can both breed and hibernate are easily constructed. Sheets of tin or squares of old carpet can first be placed in suitable areas to see if reptiles are present on site. Otters will almost certainly pass through the riverside at Caen Meadow. The use of camera traps could detect their presence.*

**8. Public Engagement and Involvement**

Involving local people in agreeing the purpose, development and management of a public site is fundamental to its success. Local people often have a sometimes long standing relationship with a site close to them, unbeknown to the site owner/manager, and sudden changes in management or implementation of objectives that they were neither involved with nor support can lead to bad feelings. So identifying what local people already think about Caen Meadow and how they use it and what they would like to see happen there is an important step in managing the site successfully.

The aim of public engagement is ultimately to instil a sense of ownership in a site so that the community value the site and support the managers in achieving shared objectives, and taking an increasing role in looking after it. With this feeling of ownership comes a desire to protect the site and ensure that it is not misused, and so anti-social behaviour can often be deterred in such circumstances simply by locals having a greater stake in a site they value. However, achieving full community engagement is reliant on many factors such as the inherent nature of a site, its primary current use, the interests of local residents (and key individuals in particular), the provision of other sites and activities nearby and the resources (not necessarily financial) to invest into developing a site hand in hand with the local community. What is clear from experience across many public sites is that a site that is not valued and respected by the local community soon becomes prone to anti-social behaviour which discourages local people even more from using it and wanting to be involved with it.

Having said that, Caen Meadow appears to be a site which is already well used by local people, either for dog walking or quiet enjoyment and other recreational activities and it is a fascinating site with lots of stories to tell. There are some anti-social activities affecting the site, but generally Caen Meadow appears to be well placed to be the focus of a community project.

The first thing the Parish Council needs to do, therefore, is to identify what it thinks is the overarching objective for Caen Meadow – its purpose. A suggested objective would be: “To manage Caen Meadow for the mutual benefit of people and wildlife”. This is in effect what is happening at the moment but it is not spelled out, and it should not be contentious. This also sets the broad parameters for any consultation which the Council may carry out and starts to preclude activities not focussed around the quiet enjoyment of the site. The previous section identifies ways in which the site can be enhanced for wildlife. This section looks at how to engage the local community and to try to deal with current anti-social behaviour.

The argument for managing for wildlife is fairly easy to justify. In addition to the fact that the Parish Council has a duty to further biodiversity on the sites it owns and manages, most people will be aware of wildlife decline locally, nationally and globally and would support the Council in enhancing Caen Meadow for wildlife and as having this as a primary objective for the site – and hopefully would wish to become involved. Managing for wildlife will not impact on what people currently use the site for so it should not present a problem. However, in this context the benefits of managing the site for wildlife are in the consequential benefits that this brings to people and the local community in terms of enhance levels of health and well-being.

The benefits to human health and well-being from being in Nature is well established. A pleasant local place to visit with trees, wildflowers, birds and water in a natural setting can reduce stress and support good mental health. This became apparent during the Covid-19 pandemic when a study revealed that nearly half of the people surveyed said that being able to get out into nature helped them cope. Visiting and noticing nature around them was important and supported their mental and emotional well-being. And just being in fresh air and getting exercise has long been recommended for improving physical and mental health. A site managed for such purposes can increase those benefits still further by revealing the wildlife on people’s doorsteps that they may never have known was there and developing a sense of interest, curiosity and discovery - things which can lead to new interests and hobbies and a new focus away from the stresses of daily life.

**(a) Engaging with the Community**

The best way to engage the community is on site. A well-publicised open day when the site is at its best (mid-June 2025) would be an ideal opportunity to engage with as many local people as possible. Councillors and Working Group members should attend and any wildlife experts that can be encouraged to come along, will be able to explain the Parish Council’s plans for the site. A short precis of the plan should be available so that visitors can readily understand what the Council’s plans are. Guided walks will help visitors to learn more about the site and activities for young children such as min-beast hunts and river-dipping could be provided which will start to introduce them (and their parents) to the hidden wildlife on their doorstep. Taking the opportunity to canvas views at this event will be very important. This is preferable and more productive than creating a survey that is available online or where the respondent is asked complete it later. A simple questionnaire should aim to gather the following information:

1. Age (range) – start to build a picture of the demographic visiting the site

2. Where is home – are they local and within walking distance or did they drive?

3. How often do they visit – daily, weekly, rarely? Weekends or weekdays?

4. Purpose of visit – dog walking, exercise and fresh air, wildlife watching, other?

5. What do they like about the site?

6. Is there anything they don’t like about the site?

7. What would they like to see happen at the site? Nothing, activities and events, seasonal guided walks, more information about the site, outdoor exercise?

8. Do they support the Council’s plans to enhance the site for wildlife and improve the health and well-being of the local community?

9. Would they like to be kept informed of what is happening? – website, social media, email, on-site notice, newsletter. Get contact details if appropriate

10. Would they like to get involved? Helping with practical work, litter picking, recording wildlife. Do they have any wildlife expertise? Get contact details.

Gathering this information from as many people as possible will allow the Council to readily see the extent of the support for its plans and whether what the Council thinks should happen at the site coincides with what local people want. Canvassing could start on site prior to the open day (helping to publicise it) and continue after it to catch people who were unable to attend. Such data is also valuable in the event of any grant applications that might be made, as funders are always looking for evidence of need.

It is likely that the vast majority of visitors to the site are local and walk to the site. This is something that the Council should be looking to encourage rather than attracting residents from farther afield who would have to drive to get to the site. It should be seen as very much a local resource (but spreading local reach further). As such there are likely to be people living nearby who never visit the site and who would not necessarily see any publicity for an open day, so a leaflet drop in neighbouring streets would target and hopefully encourage some to attend.

Preparing for an open day needs to start early. Setting a date that doesn’t clash with other local activities is probably the most difficult thing. The Norfolk Wildlife Trust may be able to provide activities for children (at a cost). And inviting along anyone else who might be able to help or contribute is key. The Norfolk Wildlife Trust also has a Broadland members group and there are likely to be members in the Wroxham area. Similarly there are sure to be RSPB members locally, and the same applies to the Norwich and Norfolk Naturalists’ Society. While it may not be easy to get any of these individuals to commit to attend on the day, making them aware of it and extending an invitation will likely mean that at least some will turn up out of interest. Advertising for naturalists via the usual parish council means of communication will also probably identify interested individuals locally. There are also other organisations who could be invited such as the Broads Authority and the Norfolk Rivers Trust. While naturalists invariably attend in an informal, personal capacity, they readily share their knowledge on the day and such interactions are often what sparks local interest.

What happens beyond the open day depends on how well the event is attended, the level of interest expressed and the feedback from the questionnaire. The best outcome would be a significant level of interest generated which ultimately develops into a self-sustaining group of enthusiastic individuals, wider than the existing Working Group, who get actively involved in looking after the site. Whatever happens next it is important to maintain momentum and ensure effective communication.

**(b) Communication**

Letting people know what is going on is important generally, and is key to maintaining interest after a specific invitation for people to get involved.

**i. Website** – a website forms the backbone of providing people with information about a site. However, it is not always immediate and is best used as a repository of more detailed reference information about a site as well as a planned programme of future events, etc. It should be updated when there are key matters to report. The current page on the parish council’s website should be updated with information and photos of the site and its wildlife along with the council’s plans for the future and an invitation for people to get involved. The current emphasis is focused on what people can’t do there which is not particularly inviting.

**ii. Social Media** – should a significant level of interest be generated the most popular form of communication is likely to be via social media. Such platforms are usually current and relevant and are a quick way of spreading information, while also providing a place where people can discuss ideas and report issues and wildlife sightings, etc. The ideal situation would be that someone emerges locally who is keen to set up and drive a social media page about the site, otherwise it would currently fall to the Working Group.

**iii Noticeboard** – it is likely however that many people would prefer to get information via a noticeboard on site. If interest is slow to develop people may not necessarily follow social media or forget to do so once they’ve visited the site. A simple noticeboard on site, kept up-to-date would probably be welcomed by many and would serve as a constant reminder to casual local visitors about what is going on.

**Iv Signage** – there is often much debate about the type of signage which should be erected at a site and what those signs should say. The thing to remember is that signs can be expensive, are prone to vandalism, can go out of date and can backfire if you get them wrong. Signs should most definitely be welcoming rather than constraining; visible but at the same time low key and should try not to be too corporate. The most important sign is at the entrance. Appropriate wording could be (for example):

Wroxham Parish Council welcomes you to:

CAEN MEADOW NATURE PARK

Please keep to the mown areas for your safety and to avoid disturbing wildlife

We hope you enjoy your visit. If you would like to know more about Caen Meadow visit our website or follow us on: xxxx. A leaflet about the site is available from: xxxx

[*The fact that the council owns and manages the site is clear, but subtle and does not need to be mentioned again other than giving contact details at the end. The title (just a suggestion) emphasises that it is a place for the quiet enjoyment of the countryside and sets the parameters of what people can expect to be able to do on site*].

The noticeboard mentioned above could be sited along the main entrance and could have a permanent sign advising people what they can and can’t do, so the rules are secondary to the welcome. These should be phrased in a way that is not deterring – e.g.:

Please respect this site (nature park), its wildlife and other visitors. To maximise enjoyment and minimise disturbance to other visitors and neighbours please:

* Keep dogs under control
* Take your litter
* Launch kayaks from the Staithe only
* Do not play loud music
* Etc., etc, as the council considers necessary

This notice should also be prominent on the website.

Interpretation is an option for the site but again boards can be expensive and are time-limited. A better option would be small signs around the site highlighting features of interest or a self-guided nature trail available as a leaflet or online link.

The overall aim should be to keep signage to a minimum and to ensure that those signs that are present are welcoming, compatible with the surroundings and up-to-date.

**(c) Dealing with Anti-Social Behaviour**

There are reports of some anti-social behaviour at the site which manifests itself through vandalism to signs, littering and occasional rowdy parties. The first two matters should become less of an issue once the community takes greater ownership of the site, although some low key anti-social behaviour is to be expected at any public site. Dealing with the latter issue, however, will require more of a proactive approach. The specific issue relates to apparent end of term parties where youths gather at the Memorial Ground to drink and play music into the early hours. Such parties are seasonal and probably predictable. Police have been called to previous incidents but have either been unable or unwilling to take any action.

**i. Engaging with the Police.**

It is likely that the police view occasional noisy parties such as take place at Caen Meadow as low key, and assuming there is no obvious malicious intent or sign that they might get out of hand they will let them play out. They see this as preferable to dispersing a gathering which may lead to greater problems elsewhere. At Caen Meadow they will see it as confined and affecting a relatively few number of people for a short period of time, despite the fact that the parish council has to clean up after the event.

The key to getting the police to consider taking action is to engage well in advance of any suspected event rather than calling them out while the party is in progress. In my experience the best way for parish council’s to engage with the police is via the regular SNAP (Safer Neighourhood Action Panel) priority setting meetings (you may already attend these for your local area). These meetings are a good opportunity to raise issues of concern and ask the police what action they can take, or at least get their advice. The meetings are usually chaired by a local councillor (District or County) and there may be solutions that could be explored with them such as a PSPO (Public Space Protection Order) which could effectively ban drinking alcohol at the Memorial Ground. If such an order was in place the police might feel more obliged to take action. Whatever happens the parish council should ensure that any future reports to the police by itself or neighbours on this issue are logged and incident numbers (CRIS number) obtained as accumulative evidence.

**ii Engaging with the School**

The other option available is to raise the issue with the local school – that is assuming that you are confident that you know which school the youths attend. Evidence could be important here if the school does not see it as their problem because there is no evidence that it is their pupils causing the problem. Assuming, however, that the school is identified and is willing to discuss the issue there are several scenarios. While the school may be aware that its students have an end of term party they may not know where it is held or what problems it creates for the parish council and those living in the vicinity of Caen Meadow, so just informing them would be a useful start. Ofsted assessments may sometimes look at issues wider than the quality of education, attainment and leadership and consider areas such as the way in which a school integrates with the local community. If this is the case locally the school may wish to actively address the matter to ensure that there are no negative elements affecting their rating. The school may able to offer an alternative site for a party (although the pupils might not necessarily want to party at school) but it is worth exploring as the pupils will undoubtedly want to celebrate their end of term exams somewhere.

**iii Site Warden**

There has been a suggestion that a seasonal warden could be employed to help look after the site and possibly address the anti-social behaviour. However, Caen Meadow is quite a small site and as anti-social behaviour there appears to be very episodic there may not be much for them to do. The purpose of a site warden should be carefully considered before embarking on that option. Wardens can be very effective in changing negative behaviours at a site, especially if the right person with good people skills is employed. Such changes usually take place over a period of time as the warden gains the trust of those causing the problem and allows them to see the error of their ways. There have been some great success stories where former vandals become champions of a site. However, it seems that those causing the anti-social behaviour at Caen Meadow are not regular users of the site who could be engaged with over time. Rather they turn up once for a specific purpose and don’t return again unless there is another party, so the educational role that a warden could deploy over time may not be appropriate in this situation. At any rate a warden should not be expected to deal directly with bad behaviour on a site which may put them in harm’s way – their role would be to call the police.

There would be a role for voluntary wardens on site if enough interest is generated locally, but their role would be restricted to such things as keeping an eye on the site, reporting issues to the parish council, updating noticeboards, engaging with visitors and encouraging them to become involved, and recording wildlife.

**9. Community Engagement Objectives for Caen Meadow**

The following objectives arise from the above assessment of the current use of the site by local people and ambitions to expand that use through engagement, education and involvement. It must be stressed that it may not be possible to implement all the objectives immediately. A phased approach will be required based on feedback from the local community. Success and the rate at which different objectives can be progressed will depend largely on the level of interest and demand and in particular the emergence of individuals wanting to get involved. However, the sequence of events given below is what the Council should be aiming for in developing the site.

(a) To determine the value placed on Caen Meadow by the local community, their wishes for the site and their potential involvement

(b) To improve communication about the site and establish a local network of interested individuals

(c) To implement a programme of activities and events to develop and secure community engagement at Caen Meadow

(d) To seek to tackle anti-social behaviour at the site

(a) To determine the value placed on Caen Meadow by the local community, their wishes for the site and their potential involvement

I. Canvas the opinion of local residents about the site and what they would like to see there.

ii. Hold an open day to show local residents the site and explain the Council’s ambitions for Caen Meadow

iii. Use feedback from the Survey to further develop/confirm objectives and devise an action plan

*Rationale: Establishing a baseline of the extent of local interest in the site and the wishes of residents will help inform next steps*

(b) To improve communication about the site and establish a local network of interested individuals

i Update the website

ii Install welcome sign, noticeboard and set up social media platform

iii Identify individuals willing to make a contribution to the development of the site in terms of basic wardening, sharing expertise and helping with management

iv Encourage people to submit records of their wildlife sitings and produce regular updates to keep people informed

v Consider the desirability and form of site/wildlife interpretation

*Rationale: Improving and maintaining communication is key to successful community engagement and the development of people’s involvement in a site. The aim of communication is to identify and promote opportunities for involvement and to increase the number of individuals making an active contribution.*

(c) To implement a programme of activities and events to develop and secure community engagement at Caen Meadow

i Hold guided walks to inform local people of the history and seasonal wildlife at Caen Meadow

ii Hold specialist activities exploring the wildlife present and using Caen Meadow – bat walks, dawn chorus walks, moth trapping, otter spotting, etc.

iii Hold activities for children during school holidays

iv Hold other activities based on feedback from survey (introduction to paddle boarding, kayaking?)

*Rationale: Holding regular activities on site will start to establish Caen Meadow valuable resource within the local community. While there may be a resource implication for the Council, grant funding may be available to promote activities and there may be untapped expertise locally who could help.*

(d) To seek to tackle anti-social behaviour at the site

i Engage with the police via the regular SNAP meetings to seek guidance on dealing with rowdy summer parties

ii Explore opportunities with the District Council for the use of PSPOs to tackle the consumption of alcohol on site

iii Engage with local school(s) to make them aware of the problems caused by their pupils and explore opportunities to resolve the matter

iv Ensure all incidents of anti-social behaviour are reported to the police

v Encourage local people to report incidents of anti-social behaviour

*Rationale: A proactive response to dealing with the main concern around anti-social behaviour should be implemented seeking advice primarily from the police in advance of any likely disrupting event. Registering the matter with the police at a SNAP meeting should be more effective than routine reporting. The above are some initial suggestions, the police may have further advice.*

**9. Work Plan**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Date** | **Action** | **Who** |
| October (Annually) | Collect acorns from oak trees and plant in pots | Volunteers/Local school? |
| October/January | Create gaps in the fence to the north of Caen Meadow to allow improved movement for hedgehogs. Remove dilapidated fence line along the boundary with the Dell | Volunteer/Neighbour |
| November/February (2024-25) | Plant shrubs in north-eastern corner of G1 and protect with tree guards (Hazel, Hawthorn, Dogwood, Spindle, Guelder Rose at 2 metre spacing intervals). Protec with tree guards | Volunteers |
| February/March  (Every 4-5 years) | Redistribute snowdrops within compartments W2 and G6 | Volunteers |
| March/April | Cut short stems from alder and osier trees and plant them randomly within the wet woodland area (W3). Manage initially, if necessary, to keep them free from tall vegetation. | Volunteers |
| April/May | Plant seeds of native grassland plant species in pots before growing on and planting into compartments G1 and G5  (Cowslip, Meadow Cranesbill, Ox-Eye Daisy, Yarrow, Ragged Robin, Knapweed, Bird’s-Foot Trefoil) | Volunteers/Gardening Group? |
| April to September | Cut and maintain the path network in compartments G1, G2 and G6. Cutting as previously cut, every 1-2 weeks | Contractor |
| April to September | Cut the grass on the slope in compartments G2 and G3 in the usual way but expand the size of G3. | Contractor |
| April to September | Cut the grass behind The Beach (G2) and at the Memorial Ground (G6) as usual. | Contractor |
| September  (weather dependent) | Rake cuttings from some or all of G1 and G4 (depending on quantity) and create piles at the woodland edge. Cutting can be done anytime after end of August when convenient for the contractor – they will usually choose a period with good weather forecast as it is necessary to cut and rake during dry weather | Contractor or volunteers |
| September | Collect seeds from wild plants in St. Mary’s churchyard and sow into compartments G1 and G4 once the grass has been cut. | Volunteers |
| May to September  (Monthly) | Control Himalayan Balsam in W3 and anywhere else it is observed by uprooting. Uprooted plants can be left *in situ* but if in flower, flowers should be removed and disposed of off site | Volunteers |
| All year round | Place tree guards around any young trees found on site | Volunteers |
| All year round | Place out camera traps to capture the nocturnal movements of otters. Video footage could be a valuable asset in promoting the site to local residents | Volunteer |
| May/July | Hold Annual Open Day. Seek to encourage local experts and naturalists to attend to help people identify species and increase the number of records for the site. The Norwich and Norfolk Naturalists’ Society (NNNS) have a lot of members who may able to help. | Volunteer/Contractor |
| To be determined | Construct reptile hibernaculum | Volunteers |
| On-going | Record all management work which takes place on site including date and activity. In particular record any plant species introduced from site noting the location, date and source | Volunteers/Clerk |
| ASAP | Start to canvas visitors to the site on their views and wishes for Caen Meadow based on the survey form suggested on page 27 | Working Group/Staff |
| ASAP | Identify date for Open Day and start to plan for event | Working Group/Staff/Experts |
| ASAP | Update Website | Clerk |
| March/April | Install Noticeboard | Clerk |
| ASAP | Attend next available SNAP meeting and seek advice from police on anti-social behaviour | Clerk/Councillors |
| ASAP | Arrange meeting with School to discuss anti-social behaviour | Clerk/Chairman |

**9. Review**

All management work carried out should be recorded and evaluated annually and work modified if necessary depending on results. This Management Plan should be reviewed in 5 years (2029) or sooner if substantial changes occur.