



## **Broadland County Wildlife Sites Review**



**Study carried out on behalf of Broadland Community Partnership**

**by**

**Norfolk Wildlife Trust  
March 2011**

## Foreword from ecological surveyor

*"I was pleased to be able to start this work in February, well before the beginning of the survey season in late April /early May as it inevitably takes time to find and contact the landowner. One landowner owned 4 of the potential county wildlife sites on my list and had a history of not granting access to his land; unfortunately this trend continued. However, other landowners are welcoming and charming, even offering the thirsty surveyor a cup of tea. Sometimes the Norfolk Network kicks in and one landowner can lead you to another. You have to ask a lot of questions, be persistent and enjoy a treasure hunt.*

*Sites that have multiple-ownership are a special challenge, as the meadows at Spixworth proved to be, but the rewards can be many too: discovering a species-rich flora, meeting some interesting people, and the satisfaction of covering a large site.*

*I like to think I'm successful at getting onto sites because I'm polite and friendly. It's when landowners are wavering about allowing access that it's difficult to strike the right balance of assertiveness, energy, politeness and clarifying that it is their choice in the end."*

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**Appendices – See separate document**

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## 1. Executive Summary

The Broadland County Wildlife Site Review project aims to undertake a review of existing and potential County Wildlife Sites (CWS) and other sites of nature conservation importance within Broadland District Council area. The project report is intended to provide a comprehensive and readable report on the importance of County Wildlife Sites within Broadland District and the contribution that CWS make to the biodiversity of the area.

The Broadland County Wildlife Site Review Project makes strong links to the Broadland Community Partnership's Action Plan 2008-2011 and will help deliver Broadland Community Partnership (BCP) and Local Area Agreement (LAA) targets as well as benefit the community who will in return benefit from having protected and flourishing CWS.

An extract from the business plan for this project, showing the objectives and outputs, is available in Appendix 1. In essence, the project was composed of four parts, and in the table below we summarise our original intentions, and what we have been able to deliver:

Original Aim	Results
Survey of 10, high priority, potential new CWS. Prepare CWS citation forms for all that our suitable and take forward to the steering group	9 potential CWS were surveyed in detail resulting in designation of 4 new CWS and extension of one existing CWS.
Engage with landowners to bring at least ten existing CWS into Positive Conservation Management (PCM). Use traffic lights to show progress towards target	Engagement with landowners resulted in 7 CWS being brought into PCM with a further 6 sites progressing towards PCM
Assess ecological condition of a minimum of 10 CWS that have not been visited since 1995	An assessment was made of the ecological condition of 11 CWS that had not been visited since 1995. Of these 4 were found to be in Good Condition and 6 in Reasonable Condition
Compiling an accessible and readable report of activity	This report hopes to achieve that outcome

Although there will be a continual need to gather new information on CWS and to be proactive in seeking to advise CWS managers, the CWS system within Broadland District Council area can (with certain caveats) be considered up-to-date and fit for purpose, as a direct result of the current project.

The key recommendations of the review are to:

- Continue to review and update the suite of CWS in Broadland District area in line with the County Wildlife Site Strategy.
- Continue to advise owners of priority CWS with a view to increasing the number of CWS in Positive Conservation Management. Seek funding to bring CWS into PCM.
- Promote the involvement of the local community with CWS that have public access (or would not be compromised if access were negotiated), along with non-CWS that are of value for their wildlife interest.
- Continue to support existing conservation projects/groups to enable them to involve the community in management of local wildlife sites. Support new groups that may arise.

The project highlighted a number of issues that are relevant to future projects and which provide learning points for those projects.

#### Key Learning Points from the Project:

- A key problem is acquiring permission to survey potential new CWS. This is mainly due to owner worries about restrictions that may arise from designation. However, protection of CWS within the planning system is a key plank in maintaining biodiversity in the wider countryside and we need to be upfront regarding this issue. The majority of owners will not seek to develop their CWS and many see designation as a way of protecting their land. As a result, we need to continue to promote the advantages for CWS owners of the designation.
- Although there will always be landowners/managers who are unwilling to engage with CWS work, there are many others who struggle to look after their sites and are grateful for help. We need to continue to engage with these owners by offering free conservation advice and help with seeking funding for vital conservation management work.
- Many CWS are in private ownership and do not have access for the local community. Others are sensitive to disturbance. However, as growth proposals develop it will be necessary to assess in more detail whether sites would be damaged if access were to be allowed and where appropriate seek involvement of the local community and funding for access improvements. There will also be sites that are not of CWS value but are nevertheless of value to the local community for their wildlife interest, where access could be encouraged.

A number of appendices are included. These are intended to give more detail on the background to the project and its links with other biodiversity projects and to give further information on the importance of County Wildlife Sites within Norfolk

## **2. Background**

Broadland County Wildlife Site Review Project aims to undertake a review of existing and potential County Wildlife Sites (CWS) and other sites of nature conservation importance within Broadland District Council area, particularly in areas of development pressure. A data overview of the position of Broadland's CWSs when compared with other districts across the county is contained in the 2011 CWS update (See Appendix 2)

County Wildlife Sites represent the best wildlife habitat remaining, outside of statutory protected sites and they are often viewed as a 'second tier' of sites below Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). They are therefore essential in providing sustainable biodiversity conservation on a county basis. Along with SSSIs, CWS form the key elements of green infrastructure within the wider countryside and are recognised as such in the Greater Norwich Green Infrastructure Strategy. There are currently 1300 CWS in Norfolk of which 122 are in Broadland District. The overall aim of the County Wildlife Sites system in Norfolk is to protect, maintain and enhance the existing wildlife resource of Norfolk, outside of statutory sites. For a more detailed description of the importance of CWS see Appendix 3.

The Norfolk CWS Strategy recommends that there should be a complete re-survey of the whole county every 10 years. However, this would be a major project unlikely to secure funding, particularly in the current economic climate. It was therefore decided to approach

the review of CWS via a rolling programme of local reviews with funding being sought locally from partner organisations. This approach is the most likely to ensure that review occurs as sites will be reviewed in manageable sections with the buy-in of the local community. It was considered that Broadland Community Partnership (BCP) was best placed to support the current review project, as it relates to CWS within the Broadland District Council area. Other community plan bodies such as the South Norfolk Alliance have supported similar projects in the past (2007).

Phase I of the project assessed the status and condition of CWS in Broadland District and identified potential new CWS. This work was completed in May 2009 and a detailed report provided to Broadland Community Partnership. A summary of the key findings of Phase I can be found in Appendix 4. Phase II takes forward the recommendations of Phase I and took place in spring and summer 2010. The project undertook to survey new CWS and to actively engage with owners/managers of existing CWS in order to bring sites into "Positive Conservation Management" (PCM) in line with Local Area Agreement.

Once the BCP investment ends the information collected by the project will continue to inform the County Wildlife Sites system and the Local Development Framework. Once identified, CWS are subject to planning policies and are eligible for advice to owners and managers from Norfolk Wildlife Trust (and other conservation organisations) in order to improve their biodiversity value.





Water violet at Hevingham Park new County wildlife Site

### **3. Project Findings**

#### **3.1 Survey of potential new CWS**

Sites were selected as potential CWS from work done in Phase I. However, it was recognised from past experience that landowners are not always willing to give permission for site surveys and a further 11 sites were chosen from parishes that lie within the proposed NE Norwich Growth Triangle. However, only three, Triangle Wood, Newman Road Wood and Ortolan's grove actually fall within the growth triangle. Once ownership was established and permission given it was possible to carry out detailed surveys for 9 sites.

Draft CWS citations and supporting documentation were prepared for all sites which were deemed to meet County Wildlife Site standards. These recommendations were then considered by the CWS steering group to be included in the CWS update for 2011. As a result a total of 4 new CWS have been notified totalling 130 ha. These range from Hevingham Park (owned by the Forestry Commission) a large area of woodland that currently has public access to small woodland sites in private ownership. In addition one existing CWS had been extended by 23 ha.

Table 1: sites surveyed as potential CWS

<b>Site Name</b>	<b>Size (ha)</b>	<b>Parish</b>	<b>Grid Ref (TG)</b>	<b>Habitat</b>	<b>Comments / Recommendations</b>
Hagg Wood	1.8	Salhouse	298 150	Woodland	Heavily modified. Fail
Street Wood,	4	Salhouse	311 148	Woodland	Notify as new CWS
Hall Wood	2.5	Salhouse	300 144	Woodland	Notify as new CWS
Triangle Wood	4.7	Gt and Little Plumstead	281 107	Woodland	Fail
Newman Rd Wood	2	Rackheath	279 178	Woodland	Fail
Hevingham Park	91	Hevingham	194 203	Woodland	Notify as new CWS
Land South of Primrose Farm	unknown	Reepham	078 252	Grassland	Fail
Ortolan's Grove	1.5	Rackheath	276 137	Woodland	Fail
Spixworth Bridge Meadows	32		244 164	Mosaic	Notify area east of road as extension to CWS 1396.
			235 163		Notify area to west as new CWS

None of the three sites that fall within the NE Norwich Growth Triangle were found to be of CWS standard. However, this does not mean that these sites are not of value as local wildlife areas to the local community and these are discussed further in Section 4. A detailed survey was made of one of these sites, Newman Road Wood, which is in local authority ownership and has potential for community involvement.





Hevingham Park new County Wildlife Site

### 3.2 Engage with landowners to bring CWS into PCM

Norfolk Wildlife Trust conservation advisors sought to engage with site owners/managers to seek to bring at least ten additional sites into Positive Conservation Management (PCM), or make firm progress towards positive management. NWT has developed criteria for establishing which CWS are a priority for advice (see Appendix 5) and this was the main criterion for choosing sites.

It may not be possible for a site to reach PCM in one year as this will often take place via applications for Natural England Grants or other funding applications. However, we can identify an “interim outcome” using green, amber and red.

- Green – in PCM
- Amber – not currently in PCM but progress towards PCM assessed by criteria such as owner applying to grant scheme or owner responded positively to advice but not currently able to progress
- Red – not in PCM

We were very pleased that the project target was exceeded, with NWT conservation officers able to give advice on 14 sites within the Broadland District Council area during 2010. This advice resulted in 7 sites being assessed as in PCM (coded green) and 6 sites progressing towards this state (coded amber) with 1 site remaining not in PCM. Even in this case, this does not necessarily mean that the site managers are unwilling to improve their sites but may be that there are obstacles in achieving PCM that still need to be overcome.

Table 2: CWS where management advice was given in 2010

<b>CWS Number</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Parish</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>PCM Traffic light</b>
1324	Land adjacent to Whitwell Common		Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) under consideration	
1327	Broomhill Meadow		Likely to be fenced in 2011	
1331	Moat Meadow		Being fenced summer 2010	
1332	Bates Moor Meadow		Part fenced and grazed	
1336	Ringland Hills	Ringland	HLS application started with NWT management advice	
1340	Church Hill Common	Ringland	HLS application started with NWT management advice	
1352	Whinney Hills & Common	Felthorpe	HLS application started with NWT management advice	
1380	Abel Heath		Visit with NT (owners) to discuss volunteer input into management	
1388	Mill Farm Meadow		Going into HLS in 2010	
1389	Meadows and Rough Pasture Carr		Advice given 2010	
2020	Horsford Rifle Range	Horsford	Management advice given	
2069	Botany Bay	Horsford	HLS application started with NWT management advice	
2114	Horsford Woods	Horsford	Management advice given	
2178	Horsham Meadows		Going into HLS 2010	





County Wildlife Site 1324 land adjacent to Whitwell Common

### 3.3 Provide detailed assessments of 10 existing County Wildlife Sites which have not been surveyed in detail since 1995

Phase I assessed that 26 sites, which had not been re-surveyed since 1995 should be visited as part of Phase II. Available funding allowed for 10 of these sites to be included in Phase II. However, owing to the fact that it was only possible to get permission to survey 9 new sites, it was decided to re-survey 11 sites for this part of the project. These sites were selected from the 26 possible sites using criteria for establishing CWS priorities (See Appendix 5) with an additional criterion of location within the growth triangle.

Detailed assessments were made for each site visited and written up on a standard NWT Site Condition Assessment form. This form includes an assessment of ecological condition, along with a description of management being undertaken. Significant changes to habitats or management regime had taken place for 2 of these sites since the last visit. For these sites a re-survey was carried out and the appropriate CWS citations were updated. We were pleased to find that despite not having been visited for at least 15 years that 4 of these sites were in favourable condition and 6 in reasonable condition.

Table 3: Assessing Condition of CWS

<b>CWS Number</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Parish</b>	<b>Activity/notes</b>	<b>Overall condition</b>
1322	Meadow adjacent Sandy Lane	Weston Longville	Re-survey and update citation	Unfavourable
1364	The Mermaid	Aylsham/ Marsham	HLS planned	Favourable
1380	Abel Heath	Aylsham/ Blickling	Well used by community, owned by National Trust	Favourable
1384	Lodge Farm Meadows	Aylsham/ Blickling	Lack of sufficient management	Reasonable
1395	Black Park and The Thicket	Horsford	Update citation	Favourable
1396	Spixworth Meadows	Spixworth/ Frettenham	Re-survey and update citation	Reasonable
1398	Near Chisel Hill	Frettenham	Lack of sufficient management	Reasonable
1403	Crostick Common (North)	Crostick	Lack of management	Reasonable
1417	Cow Meadow	Cantley	Site in ELS. Re-survey and update citation	Reasonable
2070	River Wensum Pastures	Morton-on-the-Hill / Ringland	In agri-environment scheme - grazed	Reasonable
2116	Waterfence	Honingham	Cattle grazed Countryside Stewardship	Favourable

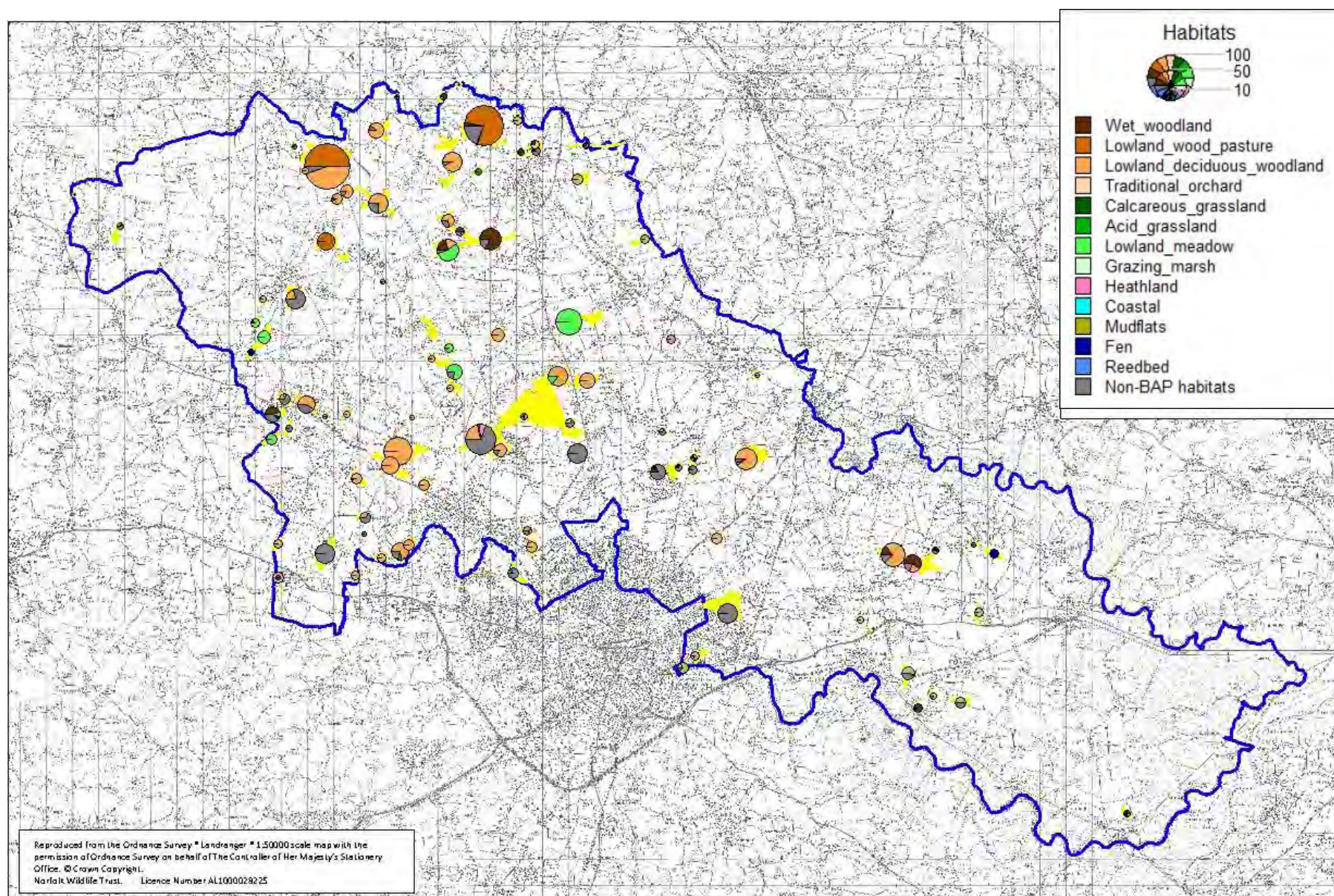
### 3.4 Presentation of data on status of CWS

Whilst this report was being prepared a volunteer with GIS mapping experience was employed to utilise information within the NWT database in order to create diagrammatic maps that illustrate various aspects of CWS information, providing a snapshot of information relating to CWS in Broadland District. Maps have been provided to accompany this report, which illustrate a basic breakdown of habitats within CWS, the number of CWS in Positive Conservation Management and the ecological condition of sites. This work is relative to this point in time and as such the maps should only be considered as illustrative of the current position of CWS in the AONB.

The habitat map shows clearly that CWS in the Broadland District are concentrated in the Western portion of the district and that the predominant habitats are woodland and grassland. This disguises to some extent the importance of heathland in the district as many woodland CWS were formerly heathland and still contain contain heathland habitats on rides and small clearings. The maps for Positive Conservation Management (PCM) gives a largely positive picture with the majority of CWS in Broadland District assessed as in PCM. Many of these sites have this assessment because they are covered by agri-environment or forestry schemes. Detailed ecological condition assessment relies on a site visit rather than a desk study assessment in relation to agri-environment or forestry schemes as is the case with PCM. As a result the map for condition assessment shows a greater number of sites where ecological condition is unknown. Some of these sites were assessed as part of the present project. NWT will continue to work to assess those sites where condition is unknown and to bring them into favourable condition, in order to improve the ecological status of CWS in the Norfolk Coast AONB.

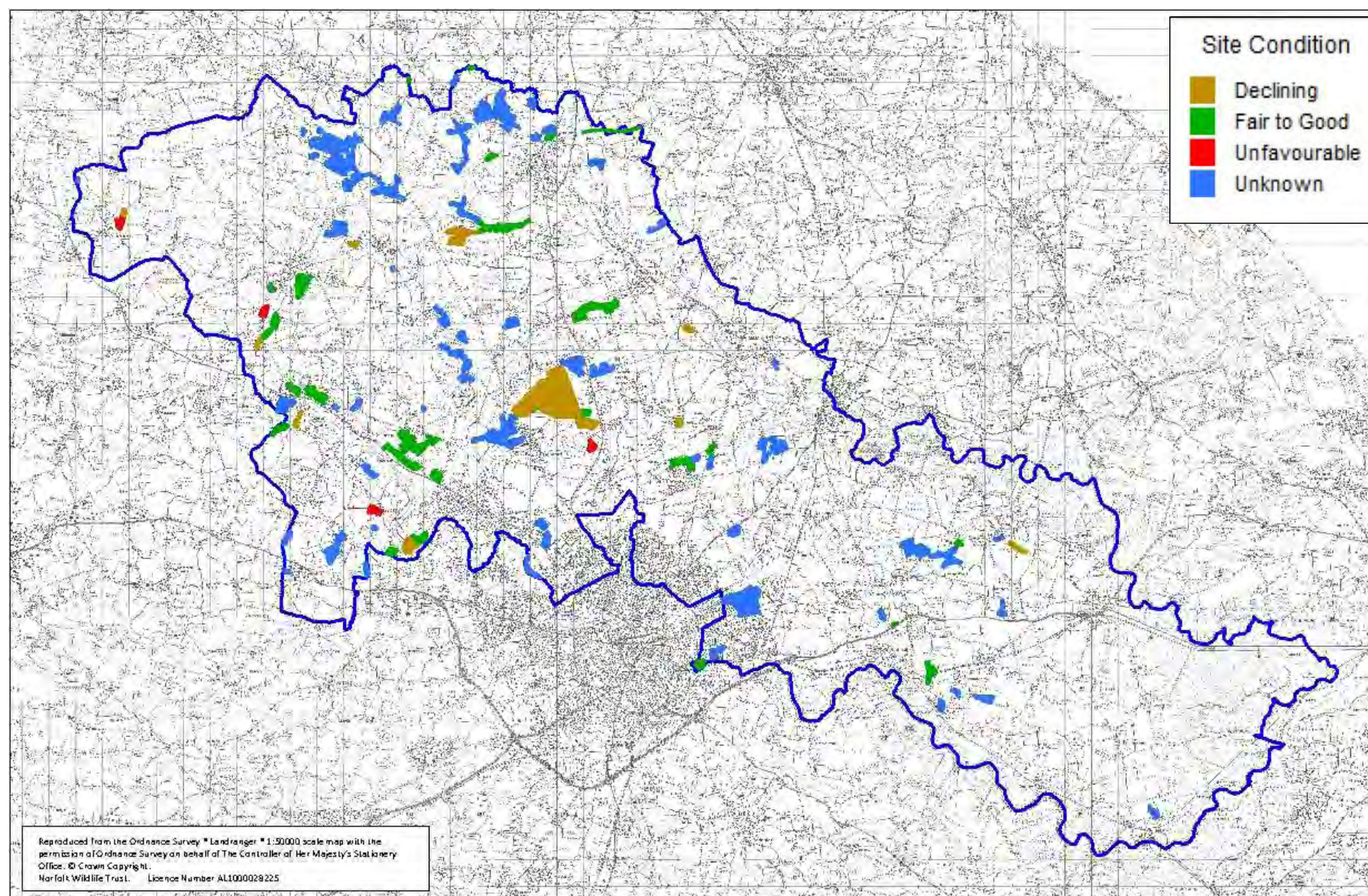


## Habitats on County Wildlife Sites in Broadland District



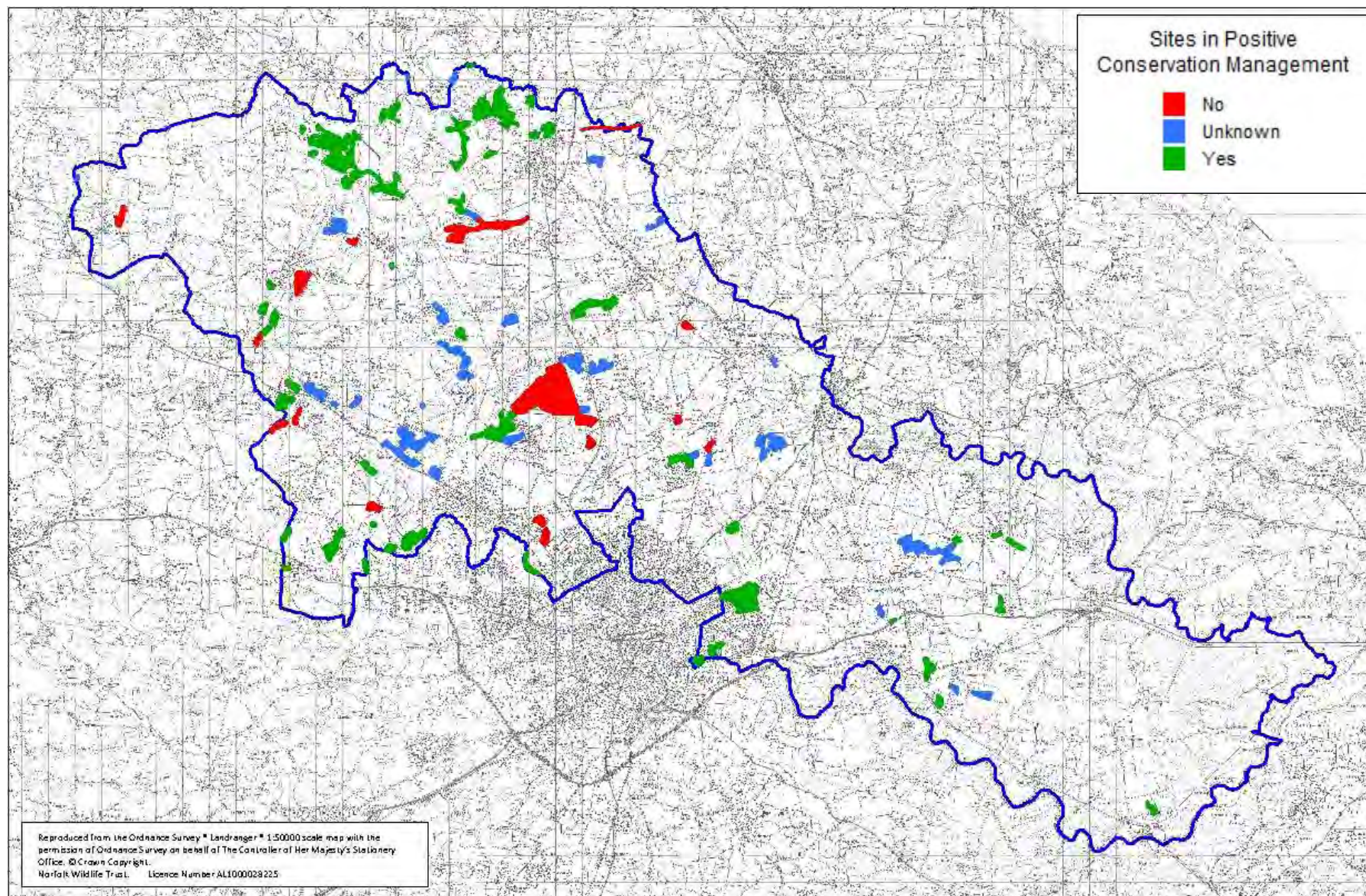


## Condition of County Wildlife Sites in Broadland District





## County Wildlife Sites in Positive Conservation Management in Broadland District





#### **4. Discussion and Key Learning Points**

The discussion and recommendations for further work (Section 5) have been grouped around three headings:

##### **4.1 Update of CWS system**

Although previous CWS update projects have taken place, most recently in South Norfolk and in the North Norfolk AONB, the current project has allowed information to be collected, within one project, on key aspects of the CWS system and advice to be given to site owners/managers with a view to bringing these sites into Positive Conservation Management. This work can therefore act as a template for subsequent area based CWS update projects.

Although there will be a continual need to gather new information on CWS and to be proactive in seeking to advise CWS managers, the CWS system within Broadland District Council area can (with certain caveats) be considered up-to-date and fit for purpose, as a direct result of the current project.

The major caveat is that potential CWS are only surveyed (and current CWS re-assessed) with the blessing of the landowner. This is mainly due to owner worries about restrictions that may arise from designation. However, protection of CWS within the planning system is a key plank in maintaining biodiversity in the wider countryside (policies to protect CWS are in place within the Greater Norwich Local Development Framework) and we need to be upfront regarding this issue. The majority of owners will not seek to develop their CWS and many see designation as a way of protecting their land. As a result, we need to continue to promote the advantages for CWS owners of the designation. These include protection against future development once the land is no longer in their possession and access to free advice on site management, which can help gain funding for this work.

There will always remain a small number of sites that are potentially of CWS value, where permission for access is not granted. Although these sites will have less protection under planning, if these areas were to become subject to development proposals, they will need to be assessed for their biodiversity value, as part of the planning process (as areas of semi-natural habitat that contribute to the green infrastructure of the district). Local authority planners and consultees, such as NWT will need to be vigilant with respect to these sites.

It was not possible to visit all CWS that should ideally be re-assessed for ecological condition. However, all the CWS in Broadland District area have now been re-visited during the last 15 years and there are only 3 CWS that haven't been visited during the last 10 years. The current project has made a major contribution to this work as 10 of the 11 CWS that were visited and re-assessed as part of the project had not previously been visited for 10 years.

##### **4.2 Management/restoration of CWS**

Table 2 shows that engagement has been made with site managers for 14 sites within Broadland District during 2010. The team were really pleased to see the positive way that CWS owners reacted to offers of advice and help with funding applications. It is great to see that the great majority of the sites visited this year are being managed to improve their biodiversity value. This engagement will need to continue in order to ensure those currently in PCM remain so and that those not currently in PCM achieve this target. NWT will endeavour to continue to give advice on these sites. Although there will always be landowners/managers who are unwilling to engage with CWS work, there are many others who struggle to look after their sites and are grateful for help. We need to continue to engage with these owners through promoting access to free conservation advice and help with funding for vital management work.

In the many cases funding and/or new resources will be required, in order to carry out conservation management work. This can be fairly expensive if it involves major habitat restoration or fencing, in order to graze the site. This can be achieved through applications to High Level Stewardship or Woodland Grant Schemes; work which is also likely to require further input from conservation advisors. However, funding is not secure for these schemes and they only contribute a proportion of the funding required. Often the owner is unable to make up the shortfall. On community owned sites or on sites that the owner cannot include as part of a whole farm HLS application there is often a need to seek this funding from elsewhere. NWT is able to contribute funding on occasion, in relation to a limited number of high priority CWS. The Norfolk County Council conservation grant is still in place at present but continuation in future years is uncertain in the current economic climate. This is an area where bodies like BCP could potentially contribute, although any funds would need to fulfil BCP priorities.

#### 4.3 Community engagement with local wildlife sites

Many CWS are in private ownership and do not have access for the local community. Others are sensitive to disturbance. There will also be sites that are not of CWS value but are nevertheless of value to the local community for their wildlife interest, where access could be encouraged.

There are a number of CWS and other local wildlife sites where there is already engagement with the local community. When this happens it is almost always under the auspices of countryside projects such as the Wensum Valley Trust or the Norwich Fringe Project, national bodies such as BTCV or local conservation groups such as the Blofield and District Conservation Group (BADCOG). BADCOG is involved in the management of 16 local wildlife sites including 2 CWS and a number of churchyards. It is important that these groups receive support to enable them to continue to involve the community in management of local wildlife sites.

An area of increasing interest, particularly in view of potential growth in the NE Norwich area is the role that CWS play in contributing to the green infrastructure of the district and in particular the potential for increased public access to these sites. The GNPD has recently contracted Norfolk Wildlife Services to carry out a desk study to show the degree of sensitivity to disturbance of CWS in the Greater Norwich area. As growth proposals develop it will be necessary to look in detail at individual CWS. This will include investigating ownership issues, assessing in more detail whether the site would be damaged if access were to be allowed, planning and seeking funding for access improvements and mitigation for impacts of access. Within a development site itself this should be the responsibility of the developers. However, there will already be CWS adjacent to existing communities that local people may wish to see enhanced for the benefit of wildlife and the local community.

There will also be sites that are not of CWS value but are nevertheless of value to the local community for their wildlife interest. These sites may receive recognition within the future as part of government proposals for green spaces of value to the local community. It may be possible to give these sites some recognition within the proposed Neighbourhood Plans, along with CWS and other sites that contribute to the Green infrastructure of a local area. Two sites that were surveyed as part of the current project that may fall into this category are Newman Road Wood, Rackheath and The Triangle, Thorpe End. As an exemplar of information that could be collected, a case study has been presented as part of this report for Newman Road Wood (See Appendix 6). Sites that fall into this category may be valuable in other ways. Newman Road Wood contains features from the Second World War, which add greatly to the historical and educational value of the site.





Newman Road Wood Rackheath

## **5. Recommendations**

### **5.1 Update of CWS system**

- Continue to review and update the suite of CWS in Broadland District area:

This can be carried out on an ongoing basis under the auspices of the Norfolk County Wildlife Sites Partnership through undertaking actions within the CWS Strategy. Further BCP funding is not required at present but a similar update project could be considered at some time in future in line with the recommendations of the CWS Strategy.

### **5.2 Management/restoration of CWS**

- Continue to advise owners of priority CWS with a view to increasing the number of CWS in Positive Conservation Management. Seek funding to bring CWS into PCM:

NWT conservation advisory staff and those of other bodies should continue to advise owners/managers of CWSs. Funding should be sought for practical works needed for restoration of CWS in order to bring them into PCM. BCP funding could potentially contribute; however, this area of work may not fall within the current priorities for BCP. This work is relevant over the whole of Broadland District, although, a more discrete project could be taken forward aimed at restoring sites that fall within and around the proposed growth triangle and as such may be eligible for GNDP funding.

### 5.3 Community engagement with local wildlife sites

- Promote the involvement of the local community with CWS that have public access or would not be compromised if access were negotiated, along with non-CWS that are of value for their wildlife interest
- Continue to support existing conservation projects/groups to enable them to involve the community in management of local wildlife sites. Support new groups that may arise.

Further information needs to be gathered on sites that are suitable for public access and engagement made with landowners and the local community in order to improve biodiversity interest, to improve access and to maximise their educational value. As an exemplar of information that could be collected a case study has been presented, as part of this report, for Newman Road Wood, Rackheath. The work could initially use information on green infrastructure mapping that has already been carried out and current work by GNDP to assess the sensitivity of CWS to public access. This work could form the basis of a BCP funded project and appears to fit well with BCP priorities for 2011.

### **6. Links to Broadland Local Strategic Partnership**

The Broadland County Wildlife Site Review Project makes strong links to the Broadland Community Plan 2008-2011 and will help BCP deliver LAA targets as well as benefit the community who will in return benefit from having protected and flourishing CWS.

The outcomes of the project are an enhanced evidence base for the LDF and other plans in relation to CWS. The work raises the profile of CWS in Broadland and along with allied mapping work that has been carried out for the Green Infrastructure Strategy provides a firm biodiversity base for dealing with the whole growth agenda in NE Norwich. This contributes directly to the Aim of the Community Plan for an Enhanced Natural Environment for Broadland through fulfilling actions within that section of the plan.

The Project falls within a number of broad themes within Broadland Community Plan. It contributes towards Theme 3; the vision to live in a place where the special character of the countryside and natural and built character is valued and Theme 9; ensuring people are proud of where they live. In general terms it will do so by enhancing the quality of the natural environment through contributing towards the identification, protection and enhancement of sites of biodiversity interest. Without this happening the natural environment of Broadland will be a poorer place in which to access the countryside and residents will have to travel to other areas of the county thus increasing their carbon footprint.

Specifically, in relation to the Action Plan 2008-11, The Project fulfils the Milestone to “Undertake a review of existing and potential County Wildlife Sites and other sites of nature conservation importance particularly in areas of development pressure”, which contributes to the Action to “Support the work of Norfolk Biodiversity Partnership/Norfolk Wildlife Trust to assist development of an ecological network for Broadland”. This action lies under Objective One, Aim One of the Broadland Community Strategy Action plan 2008-11.

The project also contributes to National Indicator 197 on Improved Local Biodiversity which has been adopted as one of key 35 indicators within the Norfolk LAA. At the beginning of 2010, 53% of CWS in Broadland (62 out of 117 CWS) were in PCM in relation to a county target for 2009/10 of 56% and for 2010/11 of 61%.

At the end of the project according to table 2, a further 7 sites were in PCM giving 59% in Broadland. If all those marked amber enter PCM during the next year this will rise to 64%. It should be noted however, that these figures solely indicate the impact of the current project and the final total reported by all bodies at the end of 2010/11 may differ as sites elsewhere in the district may have fallen out of PCM and others may have entered through joining a Higher level Stewardship or Woodland Grant Scheme.