

Habitat Connectivity – A Guide for Communities



CONNECTIVITY TOOLKIT>

The State of Nature

Despite a great deal of positive conservation work over the past century, the UK continues to see widespread declines in biodiversity. [The 2019 State of Nature Report](#) sets out in great detail how nature is faring, and the news is mostly negative. Clearly the status quo of protecting nature in small reserves and designated sites is not sufficient to turn the declines around.

As far back as 2010 the [Lawton Report](#) provided a template for how nature can be restored at a landscape-scale, and its principles are still widely accepted and used today. The mantra of the report is that the recovery of nature requires “more, bigger, better and joined” spaces for wildlife.

Norfolk Wildlife Trust is applying the Lawton Principles to help guide landscape-scale conservation work across the county. See: [Delivering conservation at a landscape scale](#).

The issues facing nature today are not just restricted to biodiversity. We need wide-ranging changes to restore a healthy natural environment, including rapid progress to mitigate and adapt to climate change. See: [Why landscape scale conservation is important](#).

In order to tackle the scale of the biodiversity crisis we need action at a landscape-scale. The Wildlife Trust has a [target that 30% of land and sea is well-managed for nature by 2030](#) – a goal which will require wide-ranging action across all areas of the landscape to achieve. Every one of us – landowners, farmers, local communities and individuals – has a role to play.

A Community Toolkit

What can local communities do to help nature recover?

This toolkit has the following aims:-

- Assist communities in taking action for local wildlife.
- Provide a structured approach to help communities make decisions relating to their local environment.
- Provide a basis for engaging people in the delivery of robust landscapes.



STEP 1>

Identify Community Green Spaces



STEP 2>

Understand your Site(s)



STEP 3>

Prepare a Relevant Management Plan / Statement for your Site(s)



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Understand the Context for Community Green Spaces



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Engage and Inspire the Local Community



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Build the Scale and Scope of Projects

STEP 1>

Identify Community Green Spaces



Identify all land already owned or managed by the community. These community green spaces are likely to be the areas where local people can most immediately deliver benefits for wildlife. Use maps and local knowledge to plot out these sites.

Alongside these directly managed sites, identify other community spaces, the management of which might be influenced e.g. playing fields, village greens, allotments, roadside verges, school grounds, commons and churchyards.

Consider whether there are other green spaces in the local area that could be adopted, managed or acquired by the local community.

For more advice on this see [TakingOverGreenSpace_ENG.pdf](#) (wildlifetrusts.org)

Jubilee Meadow – a community green space at Stoke Holy Cross, with a fresh application of green hay to enhance the floristic diversity of the meadow.

STEP 2>

Understand your Site(s)

Rapid hedgerow survey training, Bedingham Hall Farm.



Rapid pond survey training, Mulbarton.



Once sites have been identified, it is important to understand more about them before informed decisions can be made about their management. Some of the key things to consider are:-

Is the site already recognised as important for wildlife? Has it been designated as a SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest) or County Wildlife Site; or is it recognised in some other way – e.g. as an ancient woodland or registered common?

The [MAGIC website](#) provides free geographic information about the natural environment from across several government agencies. This includes site designation details, stewardship schemes, plus habitat and landscape information.

What habitats are present on site and what condition are they in? Do these habitats provide valuable wildlife habitat, or could they be

better managed for nature?

For example, are areas of grassland mown too frequently or too short; are hedges managed sympathetically and at the right time of year? Determining this may require the undertaking of habitat surveys. See guidance handouts on www.norfolkwildlifetrust.org.uk on how to undertake habitat and species surveys and check our What's on tab for practical training.

How is the site currently used?

Sites may be used for multiple purposes, such as sport or other recreation. However, areas of wildlife habitat can co-exist alongside such uses if appropriately planned. For examples, see the community case studies on our website www.norfolkwildlifetrust.org.uk

What species are recorded on the site? What species are recorded on the site? Knowing what is present can inform the best way to manage

a site. There may be local people who record wildlife – ask if they are prepared to share information with you. A wide range of species data may also be sourced from Norfolk Biodiversity Information Service ([NBIS Home | Norfolk Biodiversity Information Service \(nbis.org.uk\)](http://NBIS.Home.NorfolkBiodiversityInformationService.nbis.org.uk)). See guidance on how to obtain records on our website www.norfolkwildlifetrust.org.uk.

Consider whether any of the recorded species are threatened. Species data received from NBIS should tell you this information, or see [Habitats and species of principal importance in England - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#). If threatened species are present, see whether there is an action plan for them: [Home | Norfolk Biodiversity Partnership](http://Home.NorfolkBiodiversityPartnership).

STEP 3>

Prepare a Relevant Management Plan / Statement for your Site(s)



Hedgehog in heather. Photo: Elizabeth Dack.

It is important that a management plan or statement is prepared for your site(s) – this will ensure that management is undertaken appropriately and consistently, and that everyone involved with the site is clear what action is required or is taking place.

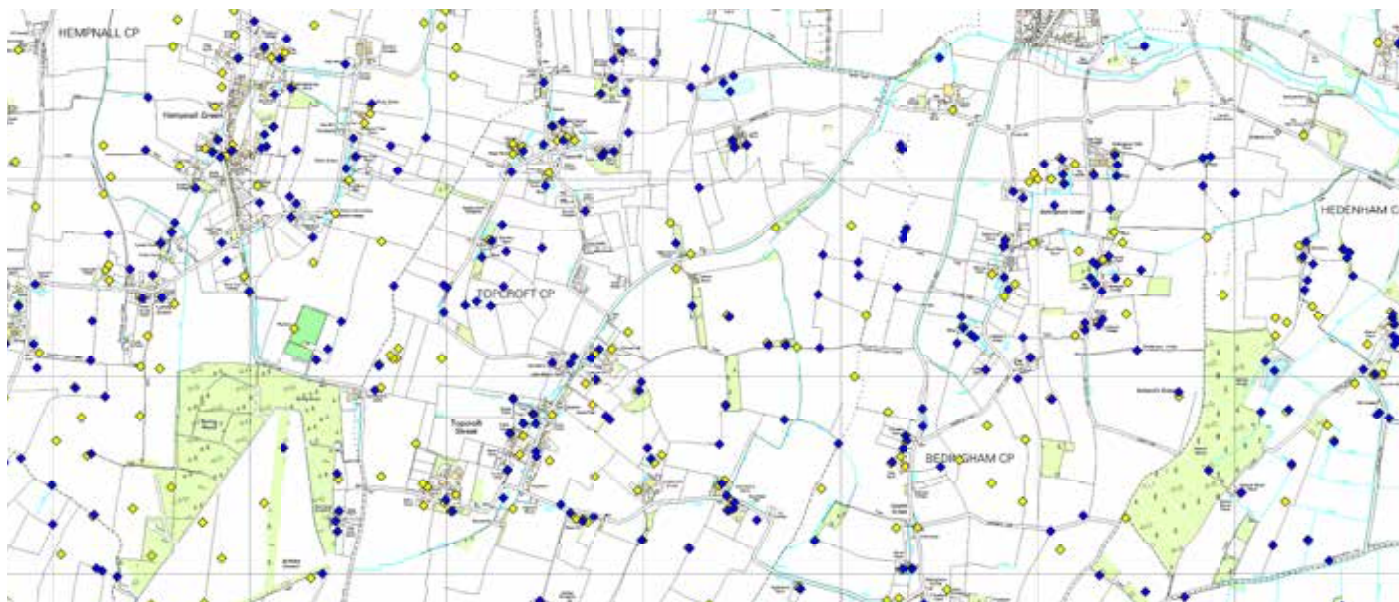
Such documents do not need to be particularly long or complicated, as long as they include relevant key information. See guidance on our website – “How to write a basic management plan” and view examples. www.norfolkwildlifetrust.org.uk



Barn owl. Photo: Brian Shreeve.

STEP 4➤

Understand the Context for Community Green Spaces



Landscape pond map. Existing ponds are shown in blue. Ghost ponds are shown in yellow.

A ghost pond is a former pond that had been present prior to 1960.

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As noted in the introduction, delivery of resilient, wildlife-rich landscapes requires consideration to be given to ecological connectivity between sites. Local communities might want to think about the context of their green spaces and whether to take wider action and influence others. Some things to consider include:-

What other habitats are found in the area? By plotting community green spaces alongside other areas of habitat, is it possible to identify potential networks for wildlife? At its simplest this could just involve looking at Google Maps, but more detailed information is available.

- [Historical Maps of Norfolk](#) – to see habitats and changes in land use over time.
- [Magic Map Application \(defra.gov.uk\)](#) – The Living England habitat map layer is particularly useful for assessing current habitats.

How might habitats be linked together? For example, is it possible to link the churchyard to the school playing field? Features making up the ‘fabric of the countryside’ will be important in achieving this. These are likely to include direct links, such as hedges, ditches, road verges and margins. Also consider ‘stepping stone’ habitats such as ponds, patches of scrub and small areas of grassland.

Does the historic environment tell us anything? While we do not want to recreate historic landscapes, looking to the past can provide pointers as to opportunities present today. For example, historic land use information can point to areas where habitat creation or restoration may be more successful e.g. ghost ponds or lost hedge lines, re-establishment of which may succeed in restoring significant historical plant assemblages. Use historic maps to track changes over time and see the [Landscape](#)

[Conservation Guidance Toolkit](#) on our website.

What species are recorded in the local area? Understanding what species are present or have been recorded in the past across a wider area (e.g. a whole parish) can help to prioritise action. See Step 2 above for advice on obtaining records.

Creating such connections is likely to involve other people’s land. It will be necessary to liaise with local private landowners to see if they are prepared to assist.

If appropriate, the community may consider if suitable areas should be adopted, managed or even acquired by the local community – see Step 1 above.

STEP 5>

Engage and Inspire the Local Community



The local community spreading green hay on Burston and Shimpling playing fields.

With growing public awareness of environmental issues and greater appreciation of the value of local green spaces (particularly following the Covid pandemic), many more people are keen to take action for wildlife. It is important that this resource is tapped.

Existing local groups and interested individuals may be able to assist with the management of sites.

Consideration could be given to initiating campaigns around action for particular species or groups of species relevant to the local area. Examples might include swifts, hedgehogs, sparrows, pollinator species, target wildflowers. Seek inspiration from the following examples:

- [Nextdoor Nature | The Wildlife Trusts](#)
- [The Chet Valley B-Line](#)
- [Home - Hedgehog Street](#)

There may be existing local groups specifically managing sites or taking action for wildlife. There may be other groups locally who could be approached e.g. Scouts / Guides, WI, Men's Shed, garden clubs etc. It may prove necessary to create a new local group. For more information on types of local group see:

- [TypesOfGroup_ENG.pdf \(wildlifetrusts.org\)](#)

There will be many ways in which people can get involved:-

- Assisting with practical tasks to manage sites.
- Undertaking wildlife-friendly gardening or other action around the garden or home (e.g. erecting different types of nest box, creating 'hedgehog highways').

- Undertaking surveys of sites or participating in citizen science monitoring projects e.g.

- [Big Butterfly Count \(butterfly-conservation.org\)](#)
- [FIT Counts: help us monitor pollinators | PoMS \(ukpoms.org.uk\)](#)
- [Wildlife Spotter Survey - Norfolk Wildlife Trust](#)

Consider whether your Parish Council or Local Authority are able to support the work you are planning.

STEP 6>

Ensure your Site Management or Project is on a Sure Footing



Introduction to scything workshop, Fir Grove Farm.

If wildlife is to survive and adapt to climate change, action to support nature must continue in the long term. It is therefore important that your activity is well planned and adequately resourced.

Do seek technical input and advice where required. There are a wide range of organisations nationally and locally that can support conservation action.

Consider the establishment of a community group – comprising local like-minded people who are keen to make a difference.

We advise that you become a constituted group – this is an informal group that has a written list of rules and guidelines. A constitution will help everyone understand the role of your group; help you to make future decisions; give you the opportunity to apply for grants; and help your relationship with local authorities. A constituted group can also be known as an ‘unincorporated association’. Such a group is run on a voluntary basis, typically with three named officers (usually a Chair, Treasurer and

Secretary), a written constitution and its own bank account. To find out more see: [ConstitutedGroups_ENG.pdf \(wildlifetrusts.org\)](#)

Alternatively, you may wish to talk to your Parish Council, to see if they can support your group: for example your group. For example your group might be covered by their insurance.

Support may also be available from your District council.

Think about up-skilling groups or individuals. Training is available on a wide range of topics, ranging from how to manage habitats, and how to survey habitats and species, to how to set up a group and secure funding. Check out our Wilder Community training programme by visiting the What’s on section found on [www.norfolkwildlifetrust.org.uk](#).

Much can be achieved through voluntary action, but in some circumstances, particularly with reference to managing sites, outside support may be required (e.g. to mow or graze larger grassland sites).

Local landowners may be able to assist if approached positively.

Otherwise local graziers or specialist conservation contractors may operate in the local area who can help. The likes of the local Wildlife Trust may be able to assist in identifying appropriate contacts.

There will inevitably be some costs associated with managing sites (e.g. buying tools and equipment, employing contractors) or running wider campaigns (e.g. publicity materials). There are a wide range of opportunities for local groups and projects to secure financial resources to support projects. For further advice see:

– [FindingFunding_ENG_mod.pdf \(wildlifetrusts.org\)](#)

– [HowToApplyForFunding_ENG.pdf \(wildlifetrusts.org\)](#)

– [HowToRunAFundraisingEvent_ENG.pdf \(wildlifetrusts.org\)](#)

STEP 7>

Build the Scale and Scope of Projects



Saxlingham Nethergate Coronation Meadows community green space - cutting green hay to spread at Stoke Holy Cross. Image shows meadow and orchard created by the community 25 years ago.

Many communities will likely start at a relatively small scale – tackling the management of particular sites or focusing on particular species. However, some communities may want to take more ambitious steps.

The scale of projects may be broadened through liaison with private landowners and other interested parties in the local area.

Consideration could be given to putting work for wildlife into a more formal context – in particular feeding into or establishing a Neighbourhood Plan.

- [Neighbourhood planning - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/communities-can-now-plan-their-own-places)
- [Locality Neighbourhood Planning](#)

Norfolk Wildlife Trust

Bewick House, 22 Thorpe Road, Norwich NR1 1RY
Tel: 01603 625540
Email: info@norfolkwildlifetrust.org.uk
Visit: norfolkwildlifetrust.org.uk
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