

The History of the Commons

History from 1066	1
The creation of the Southrepps Commons Trust	4
Aerial history	7
The Site of Special Scientific Interest	8
School Common	10
School Meadow	12
Jubilee Boardwalk and Scouts' Pond	13
Pit Common	14
Bradford Road Common and Mill Common	15
Fox's Beck	17
Awards and Funding.....	18

History from 1066

In 1066, William the Conqueror rewarded William de Warrenne with lands in North Norfolk, the Manor or Soke of Gimingham consisting of eight villages: Gimingham, Knapton, Southrepps, Northrepps, Trunch, Sidestrand, Trimingham, and perhaps Hulver in the parish of Antingham, as recorded in the Crown Pleas Roll of 1286. The Manor remained in the de Warrenne family until 1318-19, when it was granted to Thomas Earl of Lancaster and from there to John of Gaunt.

The Manor of Gimingham was then sold to the City of London by Charles I in 1628 and then sold on by the City to Edward and John Feilder in 1652. In 1653 the Manor was sold to Edmund Britiff, and the estate passed to the Harbord family through marriage as Harbord Harbord the first Lord Suffield was son of Sir William Harbord, 1st Baronet, by Elizabeth Britiffe, daughter of Robert Britiffe son of Edmund.



Sir William de Warrenne

How long has it been Common land?

It was decreed in the duchy of Lancaster, in the 36th year of Henry VIII that the King's tenants of his manors of Gymingham, Antingham, Thorp, Bradfield, Trunch, and South Repps adjoining to the common, should have their accustomed right in the commons between the said towns We can therefore say with confidence that the Commons have been recognised as such at least as far back as 1545.*

The Commons we have today are the last remnants of the vast Antingham and Walsham Common that extended between Thorpe Market and North Walsham as shown on BA Biederman's 1784 map of the Gunton Estate and Faden's 1797 map of Norfolk.



*(North Erpingham Hundred: Thorp-Market', *An Essay towards a Topographical History of the County of Norfolk: volume 8*, pp. 171-175).

The creation of the Southrepps Commons Trust

Norfolk County Council had, with the agreement of the Gunton Estate, been carrying out conservation work on the commons in the late 1980s. On the death in 1988 of Dame Cecilia Harbord, the last direct connection with the Gunton Estate, negotiations began to transfer ownership of the Southrepps Commons to the Parish Council.

On the 9th March 1989 a public meeting was held to propose a management plan. Approximately 60 Parishioners attended and the first committee was elected. The first Chairman was Vic Purdy who remained Chairman until 2009.

Plans and funding were already in place to lay a boardwalk from Warren Road to the Social Club car park. In April 1990 YTS (Youth Training Scheme) trainees constructed a 100m section of boardwalk and built the bridge nearest the car park. The full length of boardwalk was completed in June 1990 by a combined group of YTS trainees and local volunteers.

In July 1990 the area of the Commons from Warren Road to Fox's Beck and then all the southern area to Bradfield Road and the Social Club was designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). In August 1990 all the Commons were designated a Local Nature Reserve.

Legal formalities were completed in August 1990 and the committee took full control of management. Ownership remained with the Parish Council. The County Council continued as an active partner in the early years, giving legal and management advice as well as practical and financial help.



Aerial view 1981

Throughout the early years of the management of the commons, the committee members and trustees maintained them with some financial help through government schemes, grants, and prizes they had won. The cutting programme was done either using an Allen scythe or by contractors. This was often not done at the best time for the plants, therefore

reducing their ability to seed. By 2004, discussions were taking place about buying a cutting machine and taking on the maintenance of the SSSI as specified by English Nature, as well as managing the rest of the commons.

Milestones in this period include:

- Shell awarding us a “Better Britain” grant of £350 in 1991.
- Starting the renovation of the pit in 1993
- Adding the extension of the boardwalk to Bradfield road in 1997.
- The completion of the Jubilee Boardwalk in August 2002.

A decision was taken to restructure the organisation in order to gain access to charitable funds and technical advice and support, and on 4th April 2005 Southrepps Commons Trust came into being as a Registered Charity (no. 1108814)

In addition to the routine maintenance commitments and winter vegetation clearance programme, Southrepps Commons Trust is proud of its many other successes over recent years. These have all been the result of our volunteers’ expertise and labour. The following is a selection of these achievements:

- Purchase of an Agria heavy-duty cutter (see picture)
- Building of a multi-purpose handcart
- Purchase of a petrol winch for hauling cut vegetation on tarpaulins
- Clearance and construction of Outdoor Classroom – School Meadow
- Boardwalk replacement – Southrepps Common SSSI
- Bridge Replacement – Fox’s Beck
- Provision of Information Point and Donations Box – adjacent to Car Park
- Creation of Forest Schools Area – School Common
- Negotiation of wayleave payments from EDF and BT
- Sponsored Bird Box Scheme – all areas
- Comprehensive wildlife and plant surveys
- Opening up of Pit Common and clearance of The Pit
- Emergency wildlife rescue, repairing and re-stocking of The Pit
- Provision of observation point and seats – Southrepps Common SSSI
- Control of Himalayan Balsam – Southrepps Common SSSI
- Clearance of encroaching scrub - Southrepps Common SSSI
- Re-design and production of publicity leaflet and information signs
- Full revision of Trust website
- Boardwalk extension and pond-dipping platform – Bradfield Road crossroads



- Securing long-term maintenance funding under the Higher Level Stewardship Scheme
- Negotiating diversion of the main Southrepps sewer away from the Common
- Creation of an Orienteering Course
- Installation of a tool store
- Celebrations of our 25th anniversary as a Local Nature reserve and SSSI
- Celebrations of 10 years as a Southrepps Commons Trust charity
- Otters have been recorded again on the Beck after being absent for many years
- Species of the month feature on website and information point
- Plant of the month feature on the website and information point
- Invasive saplings removed using new TreePopper tool

Aerial history

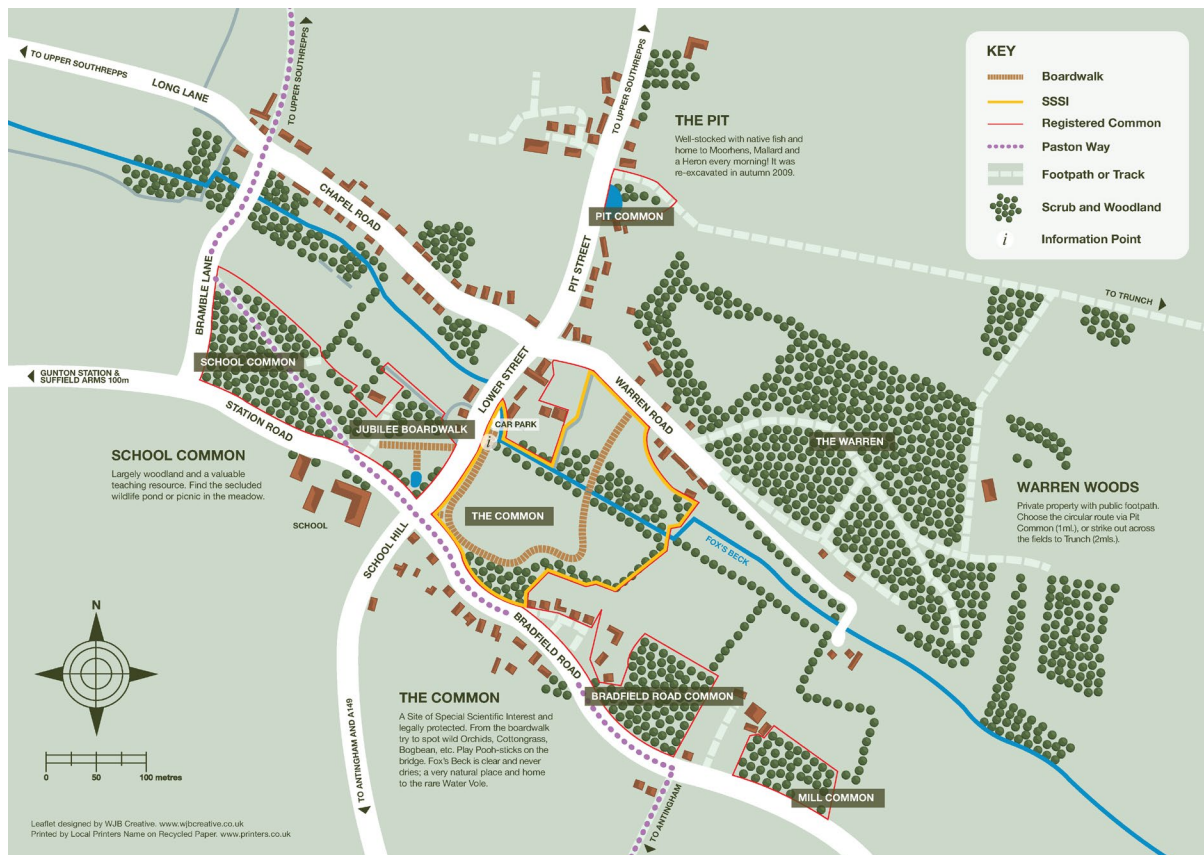
This series of aerial photographs taken over a period of 42 years, until just prior to the hand-over to Southrepps Parish Council, demonstrates the rapid growth of vegetation as traditional management activities declined.

The arrows show the particular tree growth on School Common, but note how trees have extended to many other areas as well, notably along Fox's Beck, which runs from top right to bottom left of these images.

(Photographs courtesy of Norfolk County Council)



The Site of Special Scientific Interest



This is just one area of the Commons. It is the land through which the main boardwalk runs, and is crossed by Fox's Beck. This 5.3 hectare area was designated a SSSI on the 25th July 1990 because it supports a variety of damp grassland and calcareous valley fen types now rare in East Anglia. A wide range of vegetation types and wildlife habitats have developed which if left unmanaged would be severely compromised.

Some of the key indicators of the diversity found here include the presence of Grass of Parnassus, Southern Marsh Orchid and Marsh Helleborine. A number of rare and notable Diptera (true flies) have been recorded from the site, and the conditions are favourable for nesting sites of Reed Bunting and Sedge Warbler. The management plan for the SSSI is specified and overseen by Natural England and the cutting and disposal carried out by our volunteers is done in a manner that will best preserve the plants and wildlife habitats listed in the designation.

The photograph shows what the common was like about 100 years ago. Today trees border the beck obscuring the view of the houses and if the area were left untended it would become woodland.

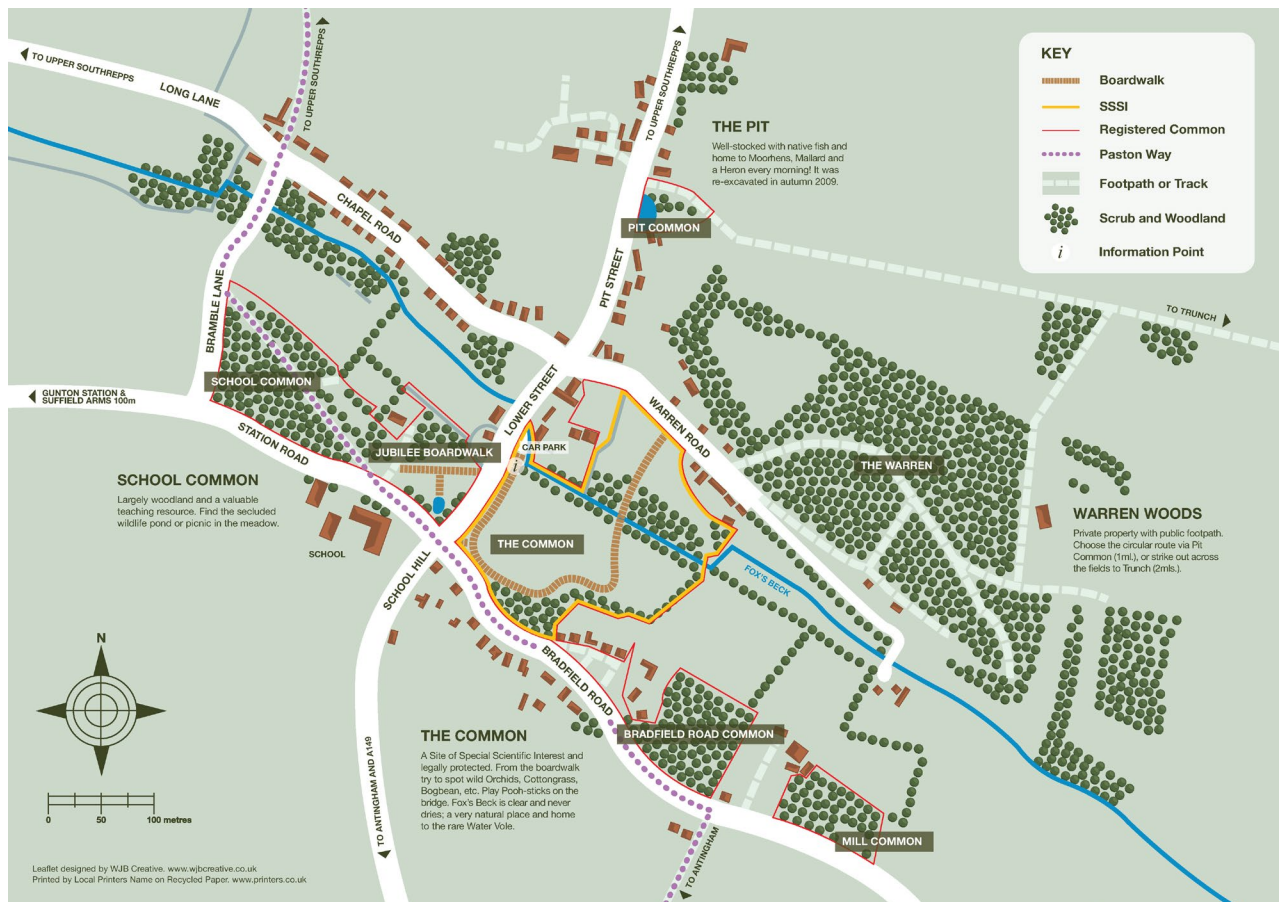
On the north side of Fox's Beck, in particular villagers used the Common to collect firewood, for grazing and shooting and for raw materials, for drying their washing and for recreation.

Animals have been grazed as recently as the 1980's; Trigger the horse being particularly fondly remembered.



Taken from Bradfield Road early 1920s

School Common



The wooded area opposite the Primary School, extending to 2.5 hectares, was originally mostly open land, with a number of individual large trees. A survey measuring the girths of the 15 large Oak trees on School Common in 2014 calculated that the oldest oak dates to about 1820. Villagers recall the furze on School Common being burned annually to control the growth. This practice seems to have stopped with the arrival of the electricity wires in the 1950's and the open land gradually became entirely wooded.



The School viewed from School Common, c. 1920

The School and Common have always had a very close relationship; an entry in the minute book of the school board is as follows;

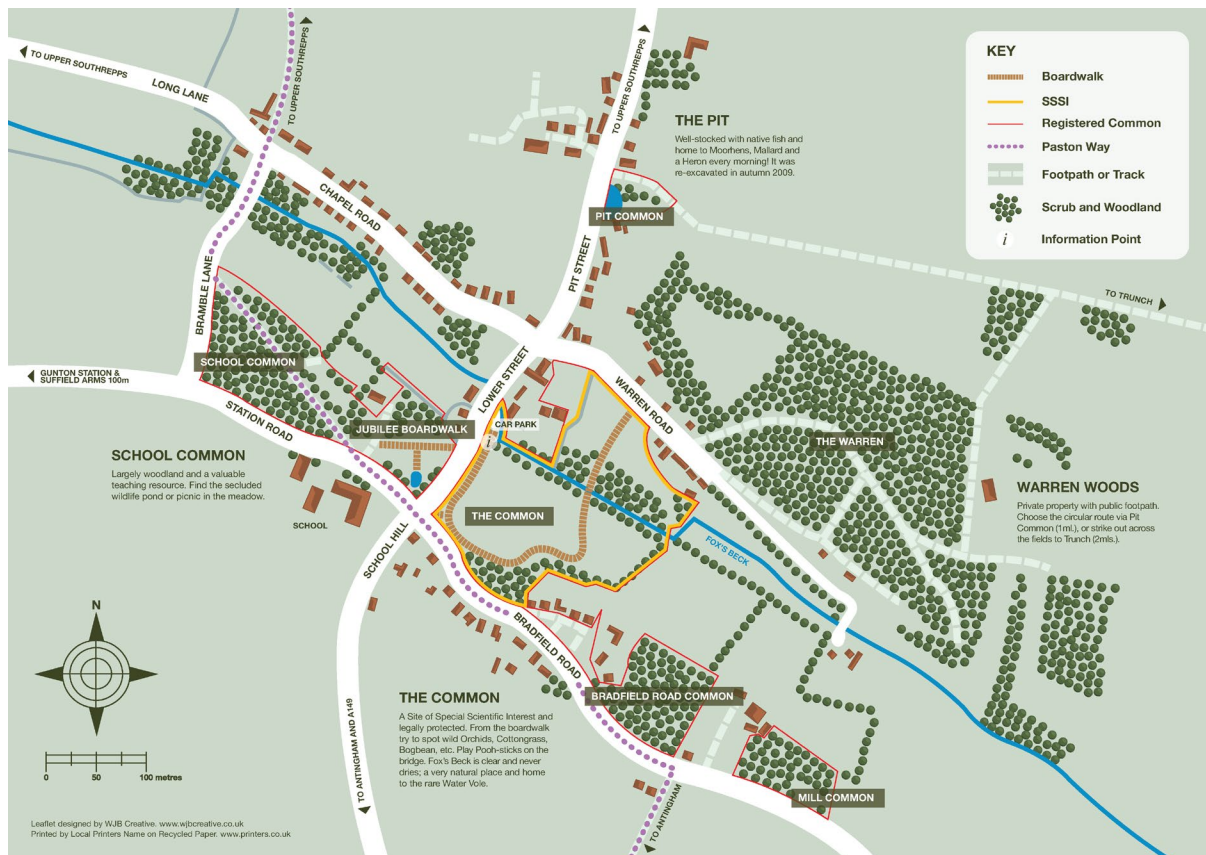
Nov 4th 1878: A rule was made that the children should play on the playground only, at dinner hour as the board objecting to their playing on the common.

Many former pupils from the 1970's recall playing on the Common at lunchtime.

Trenches were dug on the Common to be used by the school in the event of air raids in the Second World War.

The sand pits on School Common were used by the school for sport. Looking at the deep hollows sand has been excavated there for many years particularly at the Bramble Lane end where the land falls steeply away from the road.

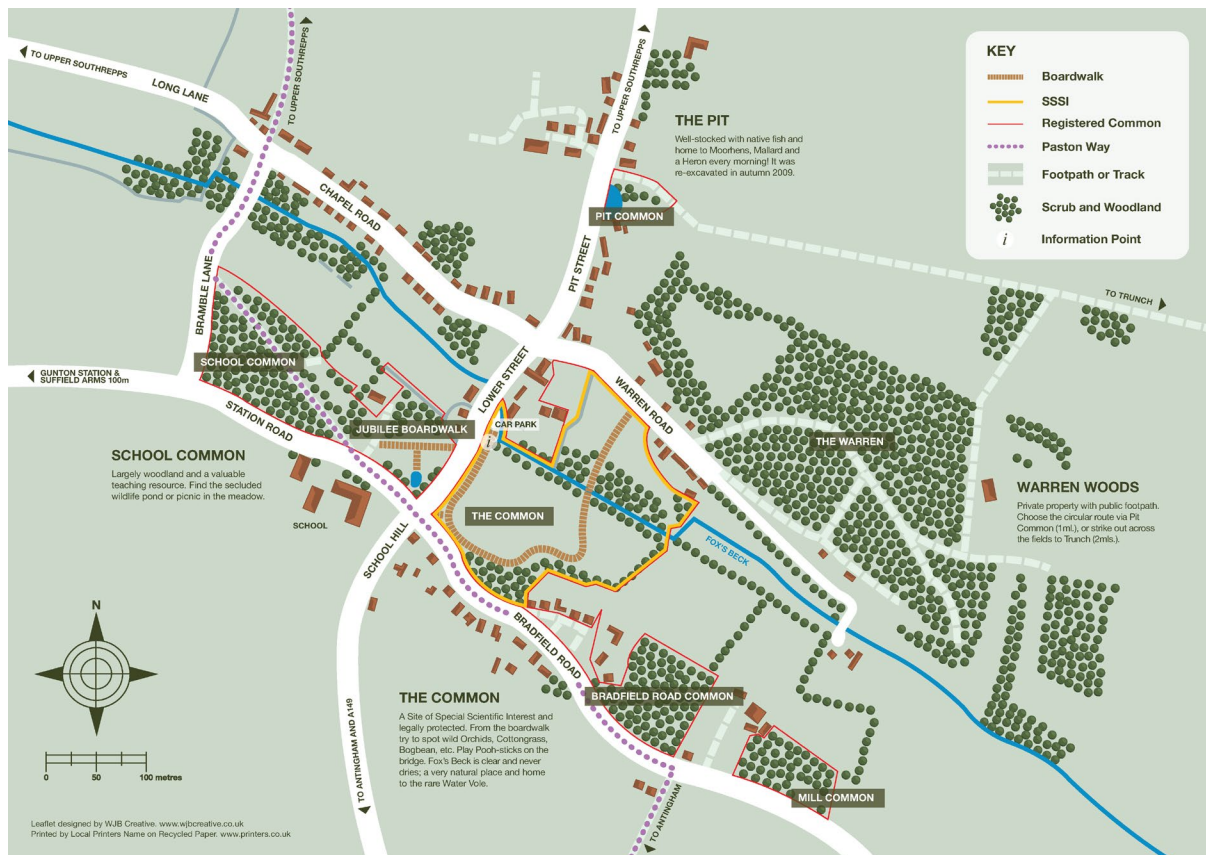
School Meadow



Adjacent to School Common, this small area (0.13 hectare) of grassland is known to have been used in earlier times for the grazing of tethered horses and ponies. In 2007 it was improved by the planting of additional hedging to screen it from the adjacent property, and the installation of tables and benches for use as an outdoor classroom and picnic area. It receives regular maintenance from volunteers of all ages.



Jubilee Boardwalk and Scouts' Pond



This area of approximately 1 hectare of wet carr links the SSSI and School Common, and was made accessible by a boardwalk constructed by volunteers in 2002. A branch boardwalk with dipping platform was added with the aid of the North Walsham Scouts in 2010 to give access to the pond created in 1990/91 at Letterbox Corner (named from when the post was left there for the village). Over the years the pond has had mixed fortunes due to a constant battle with *Crassula helmsii*, a non-native invasive plant that suffocates ponds due to its prolific growth. So far, a means of controlling it has still not been found.



An interesting letter in the Trust archives recalls an abundance of wild flowers growing opposite the school where the swings can now be found.

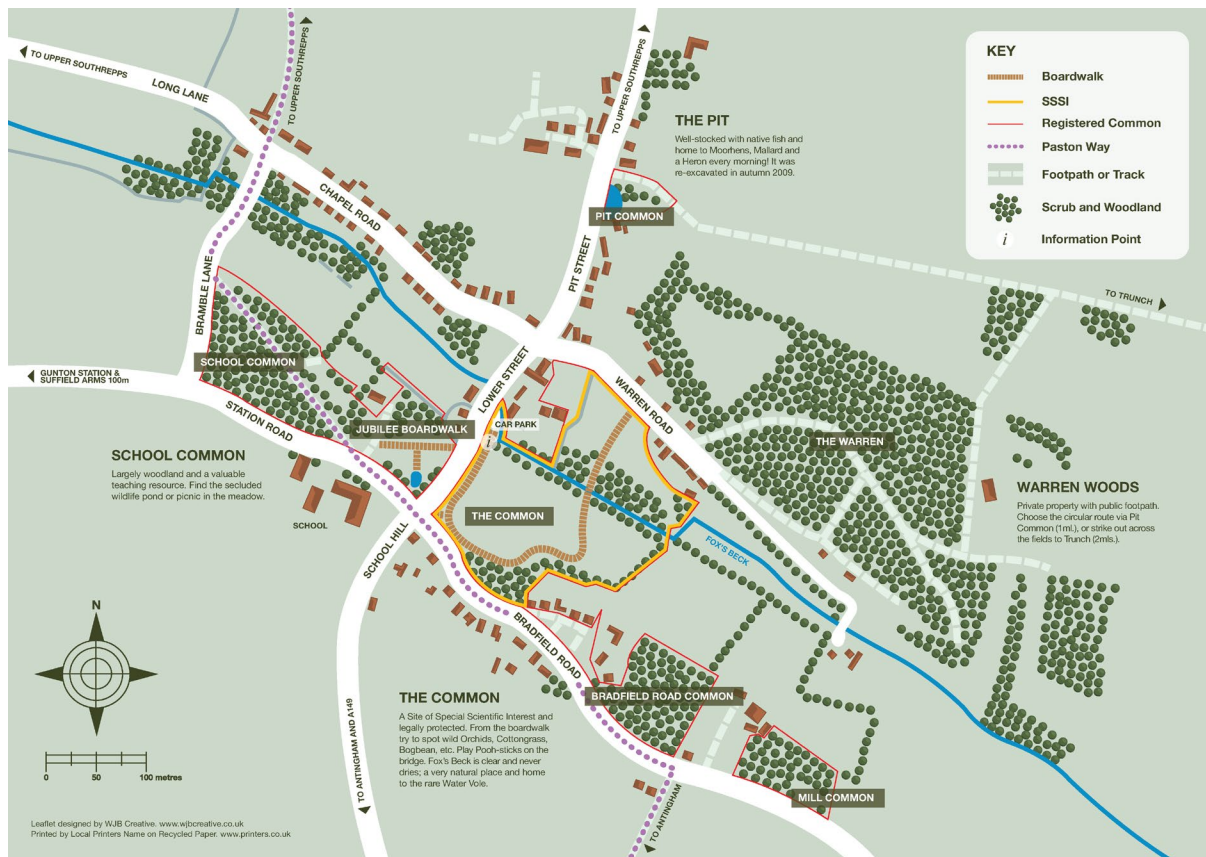
Pit Common

A most unromantic name for a pond, it probably comes from the fact that its existence is due to the quarrying of the area for sand. If you walk into the trees behind the pond you can see the steep walls of the quarry. It is said that the pit was used to water animals on their way to market. It has been renovated several times: first in 1980 by the Southrepps Society, again in the 1990's by the Southrepps Common Management Committee and then in 2009. Due to years of silt coming off the road the depth of the pond had decreased to such an extent that in that dry summers the pond began to run dry. The fish were rescued into paddling pools, much to the delight of the local heron that learnt to stand on the edge and let the fish out on to the ground gobbling them up with practised ease! Thanks to the generosity of a local contractor, the pond was dredged back to its original clay lining. A small island was created for nesting ducks and over the years the moorhens have also put it to good use. Mundesley fire brigade partially refilled the pond, letting nature do the rest.

The pit has recovered so well from the dredging that annual bulrush culls have to be undertaken to prevent them from filling the entire pond.



Bradford Road Common and Mill Common



Bradfield Road Common

This measures some 1.7 hectares and is formed of two separate areas. Some of the oldest houses in the village are found here around the green, one was a pub, the Red Lion (1854-1890) which sold liquor from a small window in the side of the building. Further east is an area of bracken and woodland, where the oldest trees on Southrepps Commons are found.



Formerly The Red Lion pub

Mill Common

Mill Common, measuring 0.9 hectares, gets its name from the two post mills that were once in use here. They were flour mills. We are not sure when they ceased to function but an old mill is shown on the 1885-1900 OS map. The location is probably at or near Mill Farm. One is depicted on the Lower Southrepps village sign showing the importance of the mill to the local economy.

There is evidence of a former pond, which has dried out, probably due to lowering of the water table.

Fox's Beck

The stream is a typical fast flowing stream with a gravel bed over chalk. Rising in farmland a short distance beyond the railway, it passes under the embankment in a culvert. It flows east to join the River Ant and from there into Barton Broad and thence to the sea. The Beck was an important source of water for the village being used for drawing drinking water, watering animals and latterly for refilling passing steam vehicles, these activities occurring where the stream passed under the road near Beck House. The access was of sufficient width to allow passage of a cart from the road. Children did, and do still play in the stream, although these days this happens further downstream near the bridge on the boardwalk. The original bridge built in the 1990's was rebuilt by volunteers in 2008.

In the 1950's rabbits were shot in large numbers before the onset of the myxomatosis epidemic. The presence of large numbers of rabbits would have helped to keep down the growth of scrub and trees which have since grown up along the course of The Beck. Eels were caught in The Beck, these have not returned but the otters have.



Awards and Funding

Over the years, the Commons have been successfully entered for a number of grants and awards, among them being:

1991 Shell Better Britain Award and a grant of £350 for purchase of a brush cutter and tools

1992 Norfolk Village Ventures Competition

1994 Norfolk Rural Action grant £702. For extending the Boardwalk to Bradfield road

2006 O2 It's your Community Award £500 for Boardwalk repair

2007 Group Category in the Community Biodiversity Awards

2007 Campaign for Rural England for projects that enhance Norfolk 1st Prize

2007 NNDC Environmental Awards 1st Prize

2008 NNDC Environmental Awards Highly commended for the Forest Schools and £25

2009 NNDC Environmental Awards received an apple tree.

2011 Queens Award for Voluntary service

2011 NNDC Environmental Awards runner up in Raising Environmental Awareness

2014 Norfolk Biodiversity Awards for Commons and Churchyard category winners



The Queen's Award for
Voluntary Service,
2011