



2020

Woods Meadow Country Park Management Plan



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Woods Meadow Country Park – Management Plan

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1.1 General information

1.1.1 Location

Woods Meadow Country Park is located west of Lowestoft in the Parish of Oulton. It has various access points by foot and by horse riders. To the west and north west is an area of land under the Broads Executive (Broads National Park) and the River Waveney. Oulton and Carlton Marshes to the south west are Nature Reserves managed by Suffolk Wildlife Trust and are under the European designation Special Protection Areas (SPA)



Grid Ref: TM 51581 94370

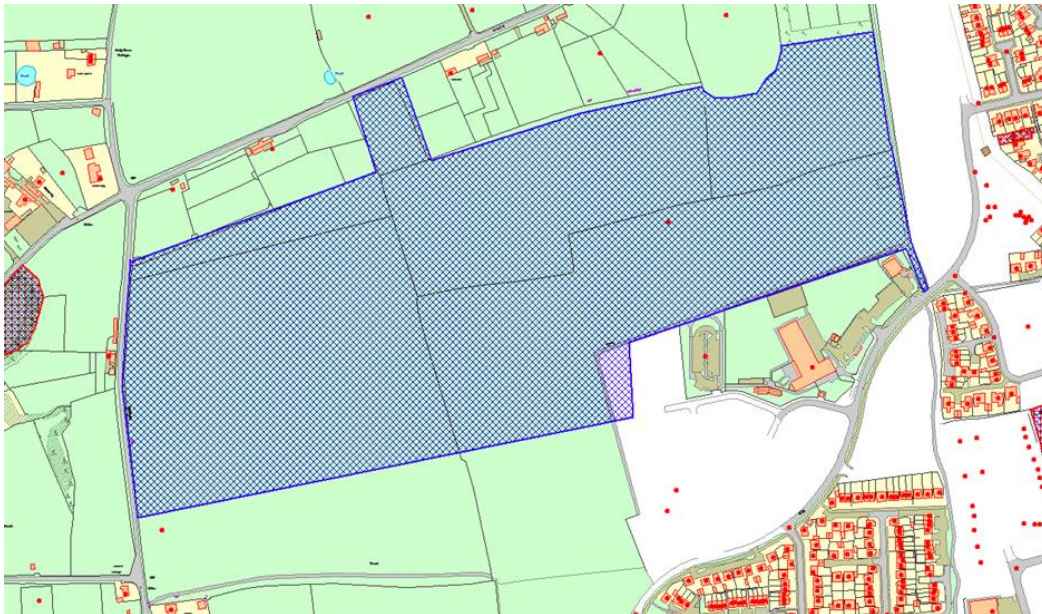
Address: Hall Lane, Oulton, East Suffolk, Suffolk, East of England, England, NR32 5DL

1.1.2 Designations: Country Park (CP)

“The purpose of a country park is to provide a place that has a natural, rural atmosphere for visitors who do not necessarily want to go out into the wider countryside. Visitors can enjoy a public open space with an informal atmosphere, as opposed to a formal park as might be found in an urban area.”

1.1.3 Size: 48.8 Acres

1.1.4 Land Tenure: The entire land holding is owned by East Suffolk District Council.



1.1.5 Surrounding land use: To the south the Country Park will be surrounded by new housing by Persimmon Homes and to the east the Park is bordered by the Lymes Primary Academy School and Longfield Footpath. To the north the land that borders the Park and Hall Lane was once used for landfill and is now used mostly by horse stables. To the west lies Camps Heath and north west is Broads Authority land which is a designated National Park.

Oulten and Carlton Marshes which lie to the west and south west are Nature Reserves managed by Suffolk Wildlife Trust and are under the European designation Special Protection Areas (SPA)

“Large portions of Suffolk are within European designated sites, ‘Special Protection Areas’ (SPAs) together with Special Areas for Conservation (SACs) were born from the Birds and Habitats Directives and form a network of protected sites across the EU known as Natura 2000. SPAs designated for their bird interest cover 27,404 ha of Suffolk (over 7%) and SACs designated for their significant habitat interest cover 6,385 ha of Suffolk (over 1 %). Suffolk also has 6 RAMSAR sites, an international designation which recognises significant wetland habitat.”

1.1.6 Legal details:

1.2 Environmental information:

1.2.1 Soil and geology: The Lowestoft Formation forms an extensive sheet of chalky till, together with outwash sands and gravels, silts and clays. The Eastern half of the site has a higher clay content soil, which is evident by pools of surface water in wetter weather.

1.2.2 Climate: Lowestoft's climate is classified as warm and temperate. The average temperature in Lowestoft is 9.9 °C / 49.8 °F. The annual rainfall is 591 mm / 23.3 inch.

1.2.3 Hydrology / hydrography:

A Sustainable Urban Drainage System (SUDS) was installed in the Park by Persimmon Homes in Compartment 3. This is an ecologically sensitive way of coping with surface drainage of water. It is essentially an excavated area with a drainage pipe entering it. In wet weather surface water runs into it and then drains away.

Excess water from the Park vicinity tends to drain to the south. Bonds Meadow which lies south of the Park has an area of Alder Carr habitat. This habitat forms in areas that are continually wet. Alder is a tree that thrives in these conditions and 'mature carr woodland is a largely undisturbed wilderness - a tangle of woody species, shade-tolerant herbs and lower growing plants.' *Broads Authority*

Persimmon Homes installed a fowl sewer which runs from the Woods Meadow development, across Sands Lane and then through the low-lying area of Bonds Meadow to ensure drainage of Woods Meadow development. There has been a significant decrease in the water levels of the ponds in Bonds Meadow since installation.

1.2.4 Flora: A botanical survey of the site was undertaken by Lowestoft Field Club in 2019 which listed 103 plants. A Bee Orchid was notable on the northern boundary of the site comp 5. Slender Thistle and was notable in being a long way from its usual coastal habitat.

1.2.5 Fauna: The land having lain fallow since its last harvest in 2017 has attracted good numbers of seed eating birds with large flocks of Linnets and Goldfinches. Seven male Skylarks were recorded singing over the site in the Spring of 2019. This red-listed bird will be a key conservation species of the site. Deer prints in the mud indicate the presence of Muntjac. Further Records will be collated over time.

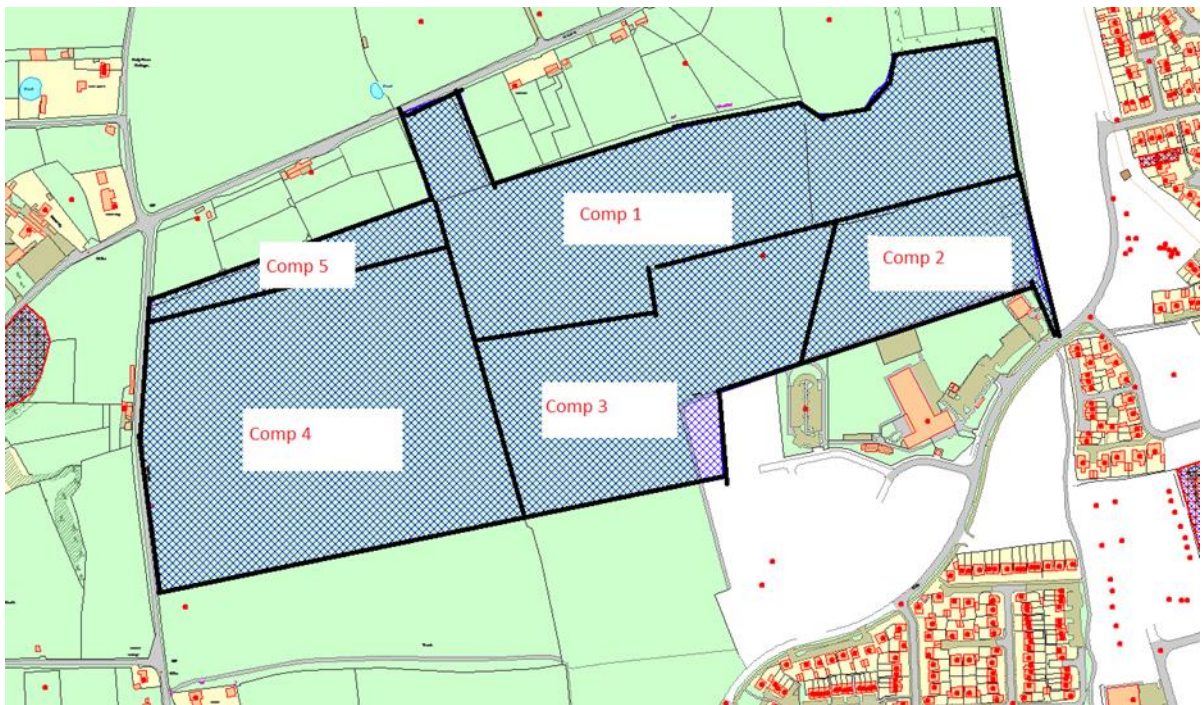
1.2.6 Fungi: Fungi casually recorded so far are Shaggy Parasol and Agaricus Barnardii which is a national rarity.

1.2.7 Archaeological information:

Follow the link for the most recent archaeological dig in the area.

https://www.academia.edu/31606114/An_Archaeological_Excavation_on_land_Off_Lime_Avenue_Oulton_Suffolk_Phase_1

1.3 Site description:



Compartments

1.3.1 Compartment 1:

The comp is bordered by a row Wild Plum *Prunus domestica* on its western border and Longfield footpath makes up its eastern border. To the north it borders stables and Laurel Farm, it also 'doglegs' at its western end for a small length to make a small rectangle of land that borders Hall Lane and is bordered by stable land both east and west. Along its long southern border is with comp 2 and 3 is made up of a broken scrubby hedge line with interspersed mature trees.

It is intended that horse riders can access this comp from Hall Road and comp 4 and take a route along its northern border to exit into Longfield Footpath or visa versa.

This compartment is around 5.6 hectares and it has been proposed, that a mixed deciduous woodland is planted covering the entire compartment. Incorporated within the woodland would be open spaces in the form of rides and glades, these areas are known for their diverse wildlife and provide tranquil, welcome spaces for visitors to walk and relax in. Hazel coppice coupes can be planted ensuring a transitional habitat within the wood and continuing community involvement in coppicing activities

Planting a new woodland would be an ideal way to involve the local community and foster a sense of ownership. The project will also be a plus in the global fight to slow down climate change.

“On average, one acre of new woodland can sequester about 2.5 tons of carbon annually. Young trees absorb CO₂ at a rate of 13 pounds per tree each year. Trees reach their most productive stage of carbon storage at about 10 years at which point they are estimated to absorb 48 pounds of CO₂ per year.”



Wild Plum *Prunus domestica* in blossom

1.3.2 Compartment 2:

The comp is bordered by the Limes Primary Academy School to the south, Longfield Footpath to the east and comp 3 to the south. Around 1.5 hectares this area would be a valuable scrub area. As this area loses its dense quality, it can be coppiced and cut back to regenerate scrub. It will also help mitigate the removal of scrub by Persimmon Homes phase 3 when they clear the Fat and Bone area which is at present excellent scrub habitat.

Scrub is a valuable wildlife habitat and sometimes underrated. It provides dense vegetation that many shy retiring bird species favour. The dense regrowth provided a suitable habitat for a pair of Pheasants to nest in 2019. Reed Buntings have also been seen in this area several times. As the scrub goes through its transition through different stages of density, different bird species will be attracted to it. Small mammals such as voles and wood mice thrive in this habitat as do many invertebrates including butterflies. Limited path ways that snake across the area could allow visitors to get closer to wildlife but limit disturbance. Regularly cut for visitor access, will enable them to cross the area in different ways.

The compartment takes in part of Longfield Footpath as it enters off Lime Avenue.

1.3.3 Compartment 3:

The third largest compartment contains a Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (S.U.D.S). This feature was created by Persimmon Homes to aid drainage of surface water around the new houses. In 2019 it still retained water all through a relatively dry summer due to the clay content of the soil in this area. A fence around this feature will prevent young children from entering the water and disturbance to wildlife. Planting with reeds and marginal plants will increase the wildlife value.

The wider compartment could be managed as wild flower grassland with a late summer cut to encourage wildflowers. It is unlikely in the future that ground nesting birds such as Skylarks will continue to nest in this area as visitor activity increases. It is an area where dogs off leads could be encouraged as it will be away from suggested horse riding routes.

Planting of clumps of trees along the comps southern boundary will, in time soften the view of the new development. Planting clumps of trees in the right-angle corners of this comp will soften the current agricultural impression.



Sustainable Urban Drainage System (S.U.D.S.) Feb 2020

1.3.4 Compartment 4:

This largest compartment is where a concerted attempt at conserving the now red-listed Skylark should take place. If disturbance by visitors can be limited and the comp is used as a late summer cut hay-meadow the conservation of Skylarks will be successful. A local farmer has agreed in principal to take a late hay crop. If such steps that are outlined below do not take place the Skylarks will almost certainly be lost from the site. Although intensive arable farming doesn't offer the best habitat for this bird it did provide much less disturbance by man and his dogs.

An inner fence to this comp could keep visitors outside the hay crop through the bird nesting season from March until the end of August. From September until the end of February visitors could enter the hay field and run their dogs off leads for 6 months and the perimeter fence will stop them disturbing horse riders riding around the field on the other side. During the period that public access is prohibited there could be a wide pedestrian and horse riding route around the perimeters of this large comp. Dog walkers at this time of the year could be asked to keep their dogs on leads so that horse riders are not disturbed. Horse riders will be able to exit or enter this comp either on Woods Lane, north west corner or in the north east corner of this comp.

Corners of this comp could be softened by planting individual trees or clumps. Room along its southern boundary should be left for tree planting to break up the view of the future development.

1.3.5 Compartment 5:

This comp forms a thin wedge shape bordered by stable land to the north, comp 4 to the south, Woods Lane west and comp 1 east. It slopes slightly up from comp 4.

This area is part of the old landfill site and is noticeably undulating in places. There are several metal inspection covers across the comp which must be considered in any mowing operations.

It appears that a derelict fence along the border with comp 4, that it was once used for grazing horses. Rabbits presently keep most of the grass sward grazed, which has ensured a botanical interest with a good selection of wildflowers and grasses including Bee Orchid. The scarce fungus *Agaricus bernardii* was found in this comp 2019.

This comp could be a dog free area where picnic benches might be placed. The fences that make up the boundaries of the stable land are mainly post and wire strand and easily entered by dogs. If dogs are allowed in this comp this must be addressed.

1.4 Factors influencing management

1.4.1 Past management:

Most of the site was previously under arable cropping with the last harvest in 2017. Large areas of volunteer crop plants such as Beat and cereal crops have covered the site since the last harvest. Presently (February 2020 the land is waiting to be cultivated and reseeded.)

In the Summer of 2018 Persimmon Homes spread many tones of soil over the site with agreement in principal only of East Suffolk Council. The timing of the operation would have meant that several pairs of Skylarks had their nests destroyed. Many bricks, curb stones and other building site waste were mixed in with the soil and might damage any future cultivating equipment. Compartment 5 was once part of land used for Landfill and have several small inspection covers across the compartment which need to be marked to aid mowing operations.

1.4.2 Biological/environmental trends:

Grassy margins and in some years cereal crops have been used by Skylarks for nesting. This declining red-listed bird will be a key conservation species of the site and given high consideration in future management. Whitethroats and Blackcaps nest in outgrown hedges where thick Bramble occurs

1.4.3 Man-induced trends:

As ex arable land it will retain relatively high levels of nitrates for a period which will prevent plants that thrive in nutrient poor soil to an extent.

1.4.4 Management agreement/obligation/constraints:

It was agreed by Persimmon Homes and East Suffolk Council that 50 acres of the Woods Meadow land bought by Persimmon Homes, would be given to East Suffolk Council to create a Country Park as part of the 'Section 106 Agreement' arrangements, Persimmon Homes have contributed funding for the development and maintenance of the 50-acre park for the next ten years. East Suffolk Norse took on the management April 2019.

A 3 year contract has been made with the previous Farmer of the Country Park land, Paul Button to take a late summer hay crop from compartment 4 this will provide suitable Skylark habitat.

The Council has an obligation within the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (NERC act) to maintain and enhance biological diversity on its land holdings.

2. Objectives

2.1 Objective 1

To create and maintain a welcoming Country Park that is accessible by all. Providing a 'green lung' for local people to escape urban confines and improve their physical and mental health.

2.1.3 Objective 2

Transform the arable land into biologically diverse habitats, creating an oasis for wildlife with some consideration to climate change and carbon storage.

2.1.4 Objective 3

Provide information for visitors to raise their awareness and appreciation of the habitats, wildlife and for safety considerations within the Country Park.

3. Management proposals

3.1 Access

There will be an emphasis in providing access for 'All'. Wheel chair access should be enabled where possible and within budget constraints.

Horse riding has historically taken place along field margins and tracks. Special access gates should be provided that enable the horse to step over a bar which alternatively excludes unwanted motorbike access. Horse riding routes should be clearly marked and signs should be provided requesting that dogs need to be on leads when dog walkers are using these routes.

Pedestrian paths can be delineated by regular cutting the vegetation. It should be made clear by interpretation and signs where dogs should be on leads. This will help to reduce possible user conflicts and disturbance to wildlife

Fences that delineate the sites boundary will also direct visitors through access gates where site information can be placed.

Kissing gates will also exclude unwanted motorcycle access. Motorbike access to the site has increased since the last crop was harvested in 2017.

The redirected Footpath from Longfield Footpath will follow the school fence line in comp 2 and 3 and then just passed the SUDS will take a diagonal line to the south west corner of comp 3 where it will exit into the residential area. It would be desirable if this path could enable wheelchair users to access the Park.

A 3 metre wide tarmac cycle path, complete with street lighting had been planned to enter the Park. This was contested by the Norse Countryside Team as not following the ethos of a Country Park and would be more appropriate on the development land. Suffolk County Council (SCC) Right Of Way (ROW) had worked with Persimmon Homes and had planned the route to enable children to cycle to school so keeping them off the road. It was loosely agreed at a site meeting that the track should go ahead in comp 3 but must

keep tight to what was the Parks boundary and should re-enter the phase 3 development land.

3.2 Practical habitat management:

Local Authorities have an obligation under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (NERC act). Although the primary function of a country park is not necessarily nature conservation, local authorities have an obligation to retain and enhance biological diversity. A species such as the sharply declining Skylark should be paid special attention.

The creation of a woodland around 5 hectares would encourage a more diverse selection of wildlife to the site and provide a welcome and contrasting habitat for visitors to enjoy. It will also store carbon adding to the global push to address climate change and can be largely planted by the local community so fostering a sense of ownership. The woodland could include several Hazel coppice coups that could include local volunteers to be included in its future management.

Around 2 hectares could be managed for scrub. As scrub is a transitional habitat to woodland, eventually a cycle of coppicing and cutting back will need to be undertaken in order to retain this rich wildlife habitat.

A large area of grassland should be managed to retain and enhance the habitat for nesting Skylarks. With the inevitable increase of visitors as surrounding new houses are inhabited, visitors should be excluded by a fence, otherwise this red-listed bird will be lost from the site due to disturbance. This grassland area can have a late hay crop taken which will help retain the habitat. A local Farmer has already agreed to take the hay crop. Volunteers can help in keeping the sward free from Ragwort which is toxic.

Wildflower areas could be established so that flies can feed on their nectar. The long grasses and vegetation providing cover for small mammals such as Bank Voles and Wood Mice that then go on to provide food for hunting birds such as the Kestrel.

The sustainable urban drainage systems (S.U.D.S) which was installed by Persimmon Homes has retained some water even in the driest part of the summer so should provide a year round wetland habitat. House Martins were seen collecting mud from its margins during the Spring of 2019. The habitat can be improved by planting reeds, oxygenating plants and marginal. The area can be fenced with a suitable picket fence. This will have the dual purpose of preventing young children venturing into the water and leave the habitat and wildlife undisturbed. The fence could be gated so that groups can enter with the site Ranger or Volunteer.

A Woods Meadow volunteer group will be established which can be involved chiefly in habitat management but can potentially take on other aspects of site management depending on their skill sets.

3.3 Education

The new Lymes Primary Academy School and Nursery that sits alongside the site will be able to make good use of the Park. It is envisaged that pupils will be able to take part in tree planting sessions. Teacher or Ranger led walks in the Park will help pupils to learn about such subjects as habitats and food chains in a fashion that meets objectives of the school curriculum.

Ranger led guided walks in the Park can be used to raise awareness of the sites wildlife. These walks will be important in getting people 'onside' with the aims and aspirations for the Park.

3.4 Surveys

Surveying wildlife needs to be undertaken firstly to know what wildlife is present and after to Record species additions or losses on the site. It can be a good way to include local people that may have a wildlife specialism.

Main taxonomic groups will be recorded such as birds and plants. Other groups will be recorded on a more ad-hoc basis.

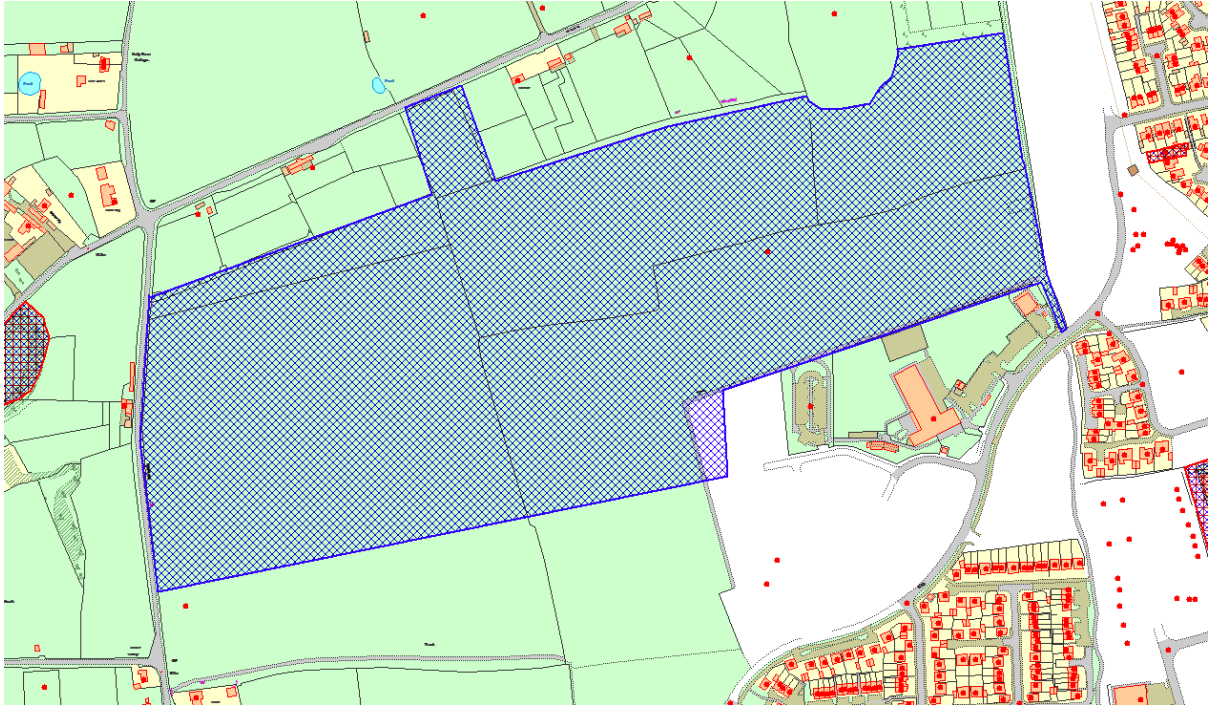
Visitor surveys would be valuable in understanding the use of the site and visitors aspirations for the Park. These may eventually be undertaken with volunteer help

3.5 Interpretation

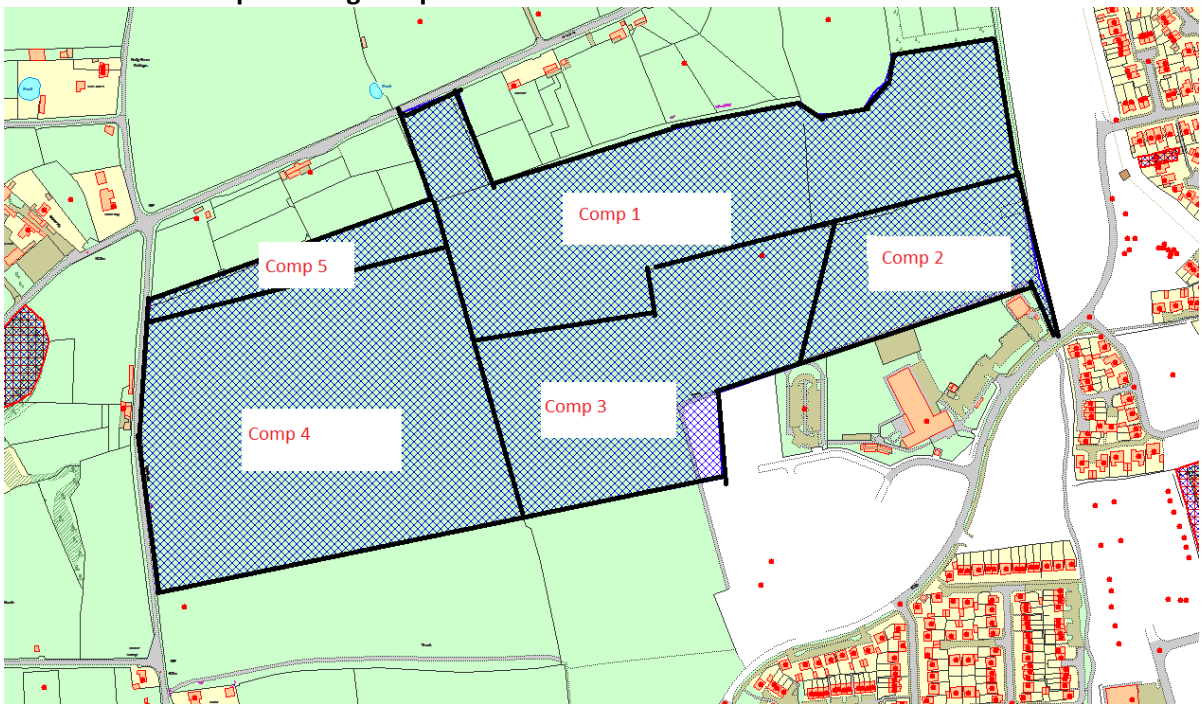
Interpretation should play an important part in raising awareness of Visitors to the sites habitats and wildlife and cultural history. It should help the visitor develop a personal relationship with nature This should also raise the appreciation of visitors and help in their compliance with any steps implemented to limit wildlife disturbance.

4. Appendices

4.1 Map of land tenure



4.1.2 Map showing compartments



4.3 Botanical species identified

A hand written list of over 100 species was compiled by Lowestoft Field Club in 2019

4.4 Bird species identified:

Carrion Crow
Rook
Jackdaw
Jay
Magpie
Black-headed Gull
Herring Gull
Lesser Black-backed Gull
Kestrel
Sparrow Hawk
Goldfinch
Greenfinch
Whitethroat
Lesser Whitethroat
Blackcap
Chiffchaff
Reed Bunting
Skylark
Meadow Pipit
House Martin
Barn Swallow
Robin
Blackbird
Dunnock
Cuckoo
Blue Tit
Great Tit
Long-tailed Tit
Coal Tit
Barn Owl

4.5 Fungi Species identified:

Shaggy Parasol
Agaricus Barnardii (rare)

