

# THE GLEBE

## HABITAT MANAGEMENT PLAN

FOR WESTON TURVILLE PARISH COUNCIL

THE GLEBE, WESTON TURVILLE

15/12/2022

VERSION 1

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

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## 1.1 BACKGROUND

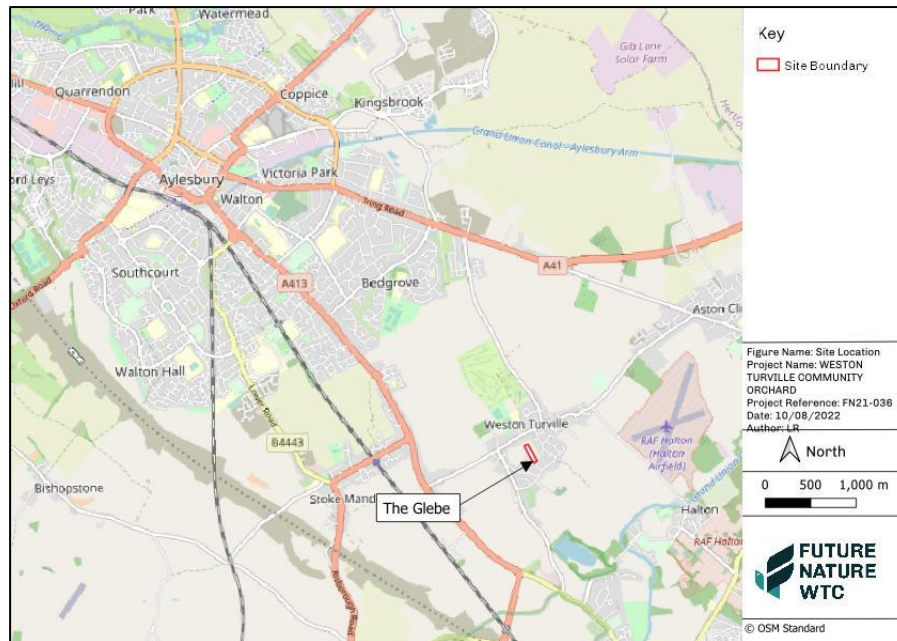
Future Nature WTC was commissioned in December 2021 to undertake a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal and to produce a Habitat Management Plan for The Glebe, Weston Turville, Buckinghamshire. The site is the location of a proposed Community Orchard.

A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal report was provided in August 2022 and this report sets out recommendations for managing the habitats on the site favourably for biodiversity. Funding for the proposed orchard will not be secured until 2023-2024 so a management plan for the current habitats on site is provided, as requested. Public access to the site is to be improved whilst maintaining and improving the site for biodiversity as much as possible.

## 1.2 SITE LOCATION & DESCRIPTION

The site is located in the village of Weston Turville, 5km south east of central Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire with an approximate central grid reference of SP 8564 1071. The survey area is in the centre of Western Turville with an area of approximately 1.02 ha (Figure 1). The site is surrounded by the village, beyond which is a mosaic of smaller villages and farmland and a golf course to the north before hitting the built-up area of Aylesbury.

Figure 1 – Site Location



The site consists of a rectangle of scrub and overgrown hedges (Figure 2). Running along either side is a species-rich mature hedgerow with species including elder *Sambucus nigra*, hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* and field maple *Acer campestre*. The north end of the site is dominated by overmature blackthorn *Prunus spinosa* scrub forming a thick canopy which is preventing most light from reaching the ground. In places the canopy is collapsing as trees have died and are rotting away. This has resulted in a very sparse ground flora including cow parsley *Anthriscus sylvestris* and garlic mustard *Alliaria petiolata* with large patches of bare ground. The centre of the site contains some more open clearings but they are largely inaccessible as they are dominated by brambles *Rubus fruticosus*, nettles *Urtica dioica* and cleavers *Galium aparine* with no pathways entering the main body of the interior. Towards the south end of the site and along the western boundary a few scattered larger, more mature trees are present including hazel *Corylus avellana* and field maple.

A footpath runs through the blackthorn scrub across the north of the site, which is badly maintained with a muddy uneven surface and low overhanging blackthorn branches, reducing the accessibility for some users.

## Figure 2 – Management Areas



### 1.3 OVERARCHING VISION

The Glebe will continue to be a haven for wildlife, especially birds like blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla* and song thrush *Turdus philomelos* which were recorded on the site. The site will be managed to enhance biodiversity with features providing habitats and foraging for a wide range of species from bats to hedgehogs. The collapsing blackthorn will be thinned out allowing healthier trees more space to thrive and allowing more light to reach the ground flora, encouraging more diversity. Some clearings will be created in the interior of The Glebe which will provide a greater range of habitats while also allowing better access to the site.

The footpath in the north will be well maintained allowing easier use for less mobile visitors and the site will be more accessible to residents and visitors via a reinstated southern footpath, leading to the new clearings. The Glebe will be a safe and attractive location for people to enjoy the wildlife, quiet relaxation and dog walking.

## 1.4 REPORT OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this report are to:

- Outline the current habitats and species present in The Glebe;
- Provide a plan to enhance existing habitats and propose potential new habitats;
- Outline the timing associated with habitat management.

## 2 FEATURES

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This section identifies the current features of The Glebe giving an overview of the species present and the condition of each feature. A vision for each feature is then suggested and a number of action points and management strategies are outlined in order to achieve these visions.

### 2.1 BLACKTHORN SCRUB

#### 2.1.1 Current status

The north of the site is dominated by dense stands of mature blackthorn scrub. As the trees have matured some have died and are collapsing. There is very little light penetrating the dense canopy resulting in very little ground flora, with large patches of bare ground. There are some wildflower species present including cow parsley *Anthriscus sylvestris* and garlic mustard *Alliaria petiolata* but there are very few traditional woodland species growing here due to the heavy shading. The low biodiversity of the ground flora is reducing the suitability of this area for invertebrates and small mammals as there are very few foraging opportunities. The collapsing scrub is overhanging the footpath that runs across the north of the site leaving very little headroom and a risk of further collapse which would completely block the path. The footpath surface has also become degraded with muddy puddles, and an uneven, narrow surface. While the habitat here could be improved and the biodiversity increased mature blackthorn stands can provide habitat for black hairstreak *Satyrrium pruni* butterflies which only lay their eggs on blackthorn older than 10 years. This area also has some potential for nesting and foraging birds.





Photo 1 – Footpath overshadowed by vegetation



Photo 2 – muddy, narrow, overshadowed footpath



Photo 3 – dense stands of blackthorn with little ground flora

### **2.1.2 Vision**

The northern area of The Glebe will have an easily accessible footpath running through open stands of thriving blackthorn, providing early spring foraging for pollinators and fruit sources for foraging birds later in the year. The ground flora will be a mix of woodland species attracting more insects to the area and providing visual interest for visitors.

### **2.1.3 Management**

The blackthorn currently directly overhanging the footpath should be cut back with any dead or dying trees within 5m of the path completely removed. The roots should be dug up and removed as blackthorn spreads using sucker growth – shoots that spread laterally underground from the original plant. If the roots are left in place these plants may continue to spread. This will widen the footpath and increase light to the area, allowing easier use of

the footpath. It will also ensure that no unhealthy trees completely collapse and block the footpath. Once these have been removed the footpath surface can be repaired to further improve access.

The entire blackthorn scrub area surrounding the footpath area can be thinned out as well. The majority of unhealthy or dead trees can be removed but five percent can remain in place to provide a source of standing dead wood, essential for some invertebrate species. The remaining healthy trees can be coppiced on a long rotation with a fifth of the blackthorn trees coppiced every two years. These can be in larger blocks or individually selected trees across the area. The removal of the unhealthy trees will allow remaining trees to thrive, giving them more space to grow. The coppicing rotation will introduce a more varied age profile into this area of the woodland, retaining some mature stands, but with some newer blackthorn growth providing habitat to a different suit of species like the brown hairstreak butterfly which will only lay its eggs on young blackthorn growth.

The removal of some of the dense cover will also allow more light to reach the woodland floor encouraging a more diverse ground flora. Woodland ground flora can be slow to regenerate and will always depend on which species are present in the seed bank in the area. Historically the Glebe has not been wooded with maps from 2003 and 2006<sup>1</sup> showing more open grassland in this location so the ground flora is unlikely to contain more shade tolerant woodland species. While there are a small number of ground flora plants present, seed, bulb and plug planting is recommended to increase the diversity of the ground flora. A woodland seed mix including bluebells, primroses, wood anemones, wood spurge, honeysuckle and wild garlic would add interest to the woodlands for visitors, and nectar and seeds for wildlife. [Emorsgate Seeds](#), [Charles Flower](#) and [Landlife Wildflowers](#) all sell suitable mixes which can be supplemented with plug planting and bulbs, depending on the budget available. Initial planting could take place in sight of the footpath where it will have the most impact for visitors. Note that plug-planting will require watering at the time of planting and in subsequent dry periods until the plants are established – this may not be practical on a large scale and should therefore be carried out in March/April or late September/October ideally.

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<sup>1</sup> Google Earth Pro

The majority of the removed trees should be removed from the site but some of the dead wood should be used to create log piles that will provide habitat for invertebrates that rely on dead wood as well as amphibians and small mammals.

#### **2.1.4 Summary**

- Remove blackthorn branches overhanging footpath
- Remove any dead or dying trees next to the footpath
- Repair footpath surface
- Remove dead and unhealthy blackthorn from the area, leaving 5% as standing dead wood
- Introduce a coppicing regime with a fifth of the blackthorn coppiced every two years
- Enhance ground flora with seeds, bulbs and plug plants

## **2.2 OUTER HEDGES**

### **2.2.1 Current Status**

The hedgerows running along the edges of The Glebe are in excellent condition with a thick dense shrub layer, a range of native species, some larger trees and thick tussocky grass along the outer margins. Species include elder, hawthorn, blackthorn, field maple, ash and wild plum. There are a number of more mature trees scattered through the hedgerow, especially along the western edge, including hazel *Corylus avellana* and field maple. The flowering and fruiting species in the hedgerow are providing foraging opportunities for invertebrates and foraging and nesting opportunities for birds. The dense hedgerow base is also a good habitat for small mammals and potentially larger mammals like hedgehog or badger. The more mature trees are another opportunity for nesting birds and are likely to be providing nesting habitat for bats as well.



Photo 4 & 5 – Outer hedgerows

### **2.2.2 Vision**

The outer hedgerows will continue to support a range of flowering and fruiting species and provide a foraging resource and shelter for a variety of fauna.

### **2.2.3 Management**

The hedgerow has not been managed for a number of years and is starting to develop into a line of trees. As this happens they will start to become less dense at the base and support fewer hedgerow species. The hedgerow could be rejuvenated by coppicing or laying the hedge, leaving the interior scrub intact or they could be left to continue developing into a line of trees.

## **2.3 INTERIOR**

### **2.3.1 Current Status**

The interior dense scrub of The Glebe is in good condition with plenty of new growth and some larger more mature trees. The previously accessible clearings have however become dominated with nettles and cleavers in the southern area and brambles towards the north of the site. In previous years, when the site was more open, there was also a path running down the centre of the site (Figure 2) but this is no longer present with no way to walk north to south through the site. This area is providing habitat for some wildlife. Butterfly larvae, including small tortoiseshell, painted lady and comma, feed on nettles as do some moth larvae and brambles are a valuable source of nectar for many invertebrates. However there is not a huge



amount of diversity, with the area dominated by only a few plant species and it is no longer a public green space that can be used by residents or visitors.

**Figure 3: Aerial photo from 2003 showing an open site with path running north to south (Google Earth)**



Photo 6 – nettles and cleavers dominating southern 'clearing'



Photo 7 – brambles and blackthorn dominating northern 'clearing'

### **2.3.2 Vision**

The interior dense scrub will continue to be a dominant feature of The Glebe providing nesting opportunities for birds with plenty of flowering and fruiting species. New growth will continue to be present creating a graded hedgerow edge with a diverse range of habitat niches. There will be accessible clearings between the hedges with a shorter grassland sward supporting wildflowers. Log piles will provide refuges for small mammals and potentially reptiles and amphibians.

### **2.3.3 Management**

The center of the area that is dominated by nettles and cleavers should be cleared to allow access to the site but approximately 10% of this habitat should be retained to ensure that species that are reliant on this area can survive. This could either be in the form of a border along the edge of the hedgerow/dense scrub or in some scattered patches around the clearing. This area was previously a more open grassy clearing between the two hedges and following the clearance this can be reinstated. This process will, however, take a number of years due to the dominance of ranker species in recent years.

For the first two years the interior area to be kept clear should be topped to keep the ranker vegetation at a lower level. All risings should be removed from the site rather than left to rot into the ground. This will start to reduce the soil nutrients, providing better conditions for any wildflower species that are still present in the seed bank. During this initial period the ground vegetation should be kept no longer than 15-20cm high to prevent the nettles, cleavers and brambles taking over. Prior to the planting of the orchard this area should be reassessed. Depending on the species assemblage a wildflower seed mix may need to be sown, but if the grassland has reestablished itself this won't be necessary. Further advice can be provided at this time, depending on the outcome of the initial management.

The dense scrub surrounding this interior area contains a high proportion of blackthorn trees. Over time these have spread into the interior of The Glebe, using sucker growth, contributing to the reduction of open space. If left unchecked these will continue to spread and completely take over the new clearings. In order to prevent this the blackthorn will need to be maintained in its current position. The blackthorn scrub can be cut back every 3-5 years but should be done on a rotation so that it isn't all cut at the same time. The scrub lining the clearings on

each side should be divided into four-six blocks and one from each side should be cut each year. This will ensure that there is always some younger growth available for species, like the brown hairstreak butterfly *Thecla betulae*, that rely on this newer growth.

Finally, if required, a path could be cut through the middle of the scrub to join the northern and southern footpaths. Before the scrub took over the interior of the site a path ran north to south through the center of The Glebe. This could be reinstated to, again, improve access but also in preparation for the creation of the community orchard.

#### **2.3.4 Summary**

- Clear area of nettles and cleavers in the central area
- Maintain clearing vegetation at a height of 15-20cm
- Maintain current extent of interior scrub with rotational cutting
- Cut a north to south path
- Use excess wood to create log piles

## **2.4 SOUTHERN FOOTPATH AND MATURE SCRUB**

### **2.4.1 Current Status**

The southern area of scrub is completely inaccessible to local residents. There is a historic footpath running along the southern fence (Figure 3) and there was also vehicle access from the adjoining residential street. Both the footpath and the access have become overgrown and impassable and the interior itself is no longer open enough for access either. There is also some dumped rubbish and litter behind the stable block in the adjacent field.

**Figure 3: Aerial photo from 2017 showing southern footpath route (Google Earth)**





Photo 8 – dumped rubbish behind stable block



Photo 9 – overgrown vehicle access (Google Streetview 2008)

## 2.4.2 Vision

The southern block of scrub will have an easily accessible footpath running through it allowing visitors and residents to access the newly cleared central areas of The Glebe. Vehicle access



will be reinstated to allow continued management of the site. There will be habitat piles and bird and bat boxes installed to encourage more wildlife to colonise the woodland.

### **2.4.3 Management**

The southern footpath should be reinstated through this southern section of scrub to allow access to the site. The previous route of the path can be seen on historical maps and whilst this route should be followed as closely as possible any larger trees should be avoided if possible. Larger logs and brash can be used to create log piles in this area and any remaining waste should be removed from the site. Vehicle access should be reinstated in the same way. The dumped rubbish and litter should also be removed from the site although some of the larger pieces of wood could be incorporated into the log piles. In order to maintain an open footpath the scrub surrounding the path should be cut back once a year, avoiding bird nesting season (March-August).

Mature trees provide habitats for nesting and roosting birds and bats. This area of scrub has developed reasonably recently and while there are some more mature trees in the outer hedgerow they are not present in the scrub areas. Bat and bird boxes can therefore be installed on some of the larger trees in this area to make up for this lack of habitat. The Bat Conservation Trust has some excellent guidance for the design and positioning of [Bat Boxes](#) and bird box information can be found on the RSPB [website](#).

### **2.4.4 Summary**

- Reinststate southern footpath
- Use brash and removed trees to create log piles
- Remove dumped waste and litter
- Instal bird and bat boxes

### 3 YEARLY MANAGEMENT SCHEDULE

	Spring			Summer			Autumn			Winter		
	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December	January	February
 = Year 1												
 = Every year												
<b>Northern Blackthorn Scrub</b>												
Remove blackthorn branches overhanging footpath												
Remove any dead or dying trees next to the footpath												
Repair footpath surface												
Cut back scrub to maintain footpath												
Remove 95% of dead or dying trees												
Coppice blackthorn scrub												
Enhance ground flora with seeds, bulbs and plug plants												
<b>Interior</b>												
Clear area of nettles and cleavers												
Mow/top ground vegetation to a height of 15-20cm (when needed)												
Maintain current extent of interior scrub with rotational cutting												
Cut a north to south path												
Use excess wood to create log piles												
<b>Southern Footpath and Scrub</b>												
Reinstate southern footpath												

Cut back scrub to maintain access												
Create log piles with removed trees												
Remove dumped waste and litter												
Instal bird and bat boxes												