

Nature Recovery Plan for Mepal Parish



Nature Recovery Plan - Mepal Parish Council
Revision December 2025, *approved 11/12/2025*

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Introduction

Mepal Parish Council is passionate about reversing the decline of nature and wants to act protect what is special about Mepal, create new habitats and get more people involved in caring for and enjoying the natural environment which is all around us.

The nature recovery plan has been created only for the specific areas owned by the Parish Council and sets out a medium-term plan for the creation of more nature rich habitats in Mepal. We would encourage other landowners (e.g. Cambridge County Council, East Cambridgeshire District Council, the School, the Church and residents) to follow a similar plan and make Mepal an even better place to live in.

This plan sets out what we want to achieve over the next ten years but can be amended as required. We welcome any specific written proposals from anyone living on Mepal who would like to see changes or improvements to any areas owned by the Parish Council.

This plan has a page for each theme we'd like to act on, setting out what we currently have, where we'd like to get to, and how we are going to get there. To be a success, we will need your help! You can help be acting in your own garden, or perhaps volunteering to help tidy up or manage a public space.

Our Five Point Recovery Plan Objectives

1. To make Mepal Parish an even better place for nature and for local people, recognising that access to nature also helps improve our health and wellbeing.
2. To inform, inspire and encourage the active participation of the community in helping nature to flourish and biodiversity to increase in the Parish.
3. To protect, and where possible enhance, the most special natural environment spaces in Mepal, specifically the Recreation Field and its surrounds, Brangehill Drove and Lilibet Woods.
4. To create new habitats, with a special focus on woodlands and hedgerows and nature wildflower beds.
5. To see anecdotal, or measurable, if possible, gains for wildlife, such as increases in bird numbers, more sightings of hedgehogs, a richer and more plentiful variety of butterflies, and an increase in tree cover and hedgerow quality.

Theme 1: Gardens

Introduction

Together, the UK's gardens are larger than all our National Nature Reserves combined. They play a key role in connecting habitats, especially across urban areas, and provide safe refuges for wildlife in an ever-busy environment. Gardens do not have to be large to benefit wildlife and less is more when it comes to management. It's not necessary for individual gardens to offer everything a species needs if nearby gardens contribute too, for example a blackbird will nest in one garden but forage and bathe in others.

What do we have in Mepal?

There are approximately 390 homes in Mepal, therefore we have approximately 390 gardens, each of which can be a mini oasis for wildlife.

Action Plan

Mepal Parish Council will aim to:

1. Encourage homeowners to create wildlife friendly gardens
2. Consider running a 'most nature friendly' gardening annual competition in future (councillor & volunteer numbers depending).

As a local resident, **you can help** by:

1. Choose native plants whenever possible
2. Choose bee and insect friendly flowering plants
3. Install a bird, bat or hedgehog box
4. Make sure there are small gaps in the boundary wall or fence, so small creatures can roam freely (but not so big that dogs, cats, foxes or larger animals become a problem)
5. Purchase a compost heap, but make sure it is turned regularly to prevent it becoming a home for unwanted pests
6. Put in a small pond or other water feature – even something as little as an old washing up bowl will attract wildlife!
7. Let the grass grow in part of your garden

More reading:

Wild About Gardens – Encouraging wildlife to your garden with RHS and the Wildlife Trusts [Wild About Gardens / RHS Gardening](#)

RSPB – Gardening for Wildlife <https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/advice/gardening-for-wildlife/>

National Trust - Nine ways to build a wildlife friendly garden
<https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/discover/gardening-tips/nine-ways-to-build-a-wildlife-friendly-garden>

Theme 2: Allotments

Introduction

Allotments often have many of the same features as gardens but without the physical boundaries between plots so offer a large area for wildlife to utilise.

What do we have in Mepal?

Mepal Parish Council manages allotments which are offered to villagers.

We have 12 plots located at the back of the play park and bordered by gardens in Laurel Close.

The allotments are surrounded on two sides by wooded areas, with trees and hedgerows which are a haven for wildlife.

Action Plan

Mepal Parish Council will aim to:

1. Survey our current allotment area, identifying what parts of it are good for nature, and what parts have potential for enhancement
2. Each year, provide a certificate or prize to the allotment holder who, alongside growing crops, does so with nature in mind
3. Provide tips and ideas to allotment holders, on what they can do to help the natural environment on their plot
4. Consider improving or expanding the number of allotment plots, and encourage more people to take up a plot

As a local resident, ***you can help*** by:

1. Consider taking up an allotment plot, if one is available, or register your interest.
2. When you have a plot, think about planting flowers that will attract bees or butterflies...or simply leave one or two 'misshapes' or bolting vegetable to flower naturally (for example, don't cut and throw away a bolting leek – let it flower, and it will attract a host of bees and insects)
3. Go organic, rather than use pesticides

More reading:

National allotment society - <https://www.nsalg.org.uk/>

Theme 3: Amenity Areas

Introduction

The Parish Council would like to develop amenity areas on land it owns. Areas where people can enjoy nature and appreciate the benefits that having areas dedicated to wildlife and plant life and managed more sensitively.

What do we have in Mepal?

The Parish Council in conjunction with an informal nature group have been awarded Pride of Place grants from ECDC to develop the area at the back of the recreation ground running adjacent to the Attenuation Pond. This glade is designed as a nature rich area with trees, hedgerows and longer grass, with paths cut into and around the area and is designed as an amenity area for residents to enjoy nature.

We are also looking at what can be implemented around Brangehill Drove as subsequent projects to take advantage of the trees planted as Lilibet Woods.

Amenity Areas: Action Plan

Mepal **Parish Council** will aim to:

1. Increase biodiversity & community enjoyment of our village's Recreation Field, by planting 60 metres of Species Rich Hedgerow with Grow Through trees (all UK grown native species).
2. (Following an Ecologist site visit) choose suitable trees for the conditions (clay) & aspect
3. Support a diverse range of Insect, Bird, Plant & Invertebrate life by including in the deep Hedgerow species such as Hawthorn, Elder, Hazel, Dog Rose, Dogwood, & Crab Apple.
4. Double the amount of life the Hedgerow can support, by planting 'Grow Through' trees at intervals along the Hedge. The species will include Field Maple, Alder, Goat Willow, Dogwood, & Silver Birch.
5. Allocate a further 30 metres for 2025 Hedge/Tree planting.
6. Consider further additional hedges where applicable.
7. Identify areas where grass can be left longer with shorter pathways cut through.
8. Create a signed Nature Trail to help local residents identify the animals and plants in selected locations

As a local resident, ***you can help*** by:

Getting involved in the nature group and helping with planting. Actively making project proposals if specific actions are identified.

Theme 4: Verges & Green

The Parish Council owns the Laurel Close verges, and the Village Green located at the end of the High Street where it meets School Lane.

Only the verges in Laurel Close are maintained by the Parish Council, all other verges are now under the control of Cambridge County Council.

There are two Cambridgeshire County Council verges in the Parish, where residents are particularly sensitive to the grass height. These two areas are the verge around the High Street Memorial and the verge opposite the Village Hall where the village sign is located. The Parish Council will therefore monitor those two areas and will carry out additional grass cutting (in those two areas only), to supplement Cambridgeshire County Council grass cutting. The cutting schedule will be available on the Parish Council website, and Appendix 3 of this document.

Verges and Greens: Action Plan

Mepal **Parish Council** will aim to:

1. Maintain grass in areas managed by the Parish Council in accordance with the published plan.
2. Identify if there are any discreet areas where grass can be left longer with shorter pathways cut through.

Theme 5: Trees, Woodlands and Hedgerows

Introduction

Mepal Parish Council has a considerable tree and hedge stock on land it owns. This theme only relates to Parish Council owned assets. Responsibility for all other hedges and trees falls mainly to Cambridge County Council, except for Meadow Way and River Close where East Cambridgeshire County Council are responsible.

What do we have in Mepal?

The Parish Council owns the Recreation Field, including the Pavilion, Play Park and Allotments, the area of land behind Meadow Way (accessed from the end of Brick Land, running to Brangehill Lane) known as Brangehill Drove, including the land known as Lilibet Woods, the Laurel Close Greens and the Village Green located at the end of the High Street where it meets School Lane adjacent to the bus stop.

The Parish Council carried out the first comprehensive tree survey in December 2021 (Arboricultural Condition Survey and Hazard Assessment with Work Recommendations). With finite resources, the Parish Council take expert opinion and carry out work as and when budget and identified priorities allow. The 3 locations surveyed are areas of green space with public access.

1. The first area is the village recreation ground, play area with a small area of woodland to the east. The trees in this area are a range of predominantly deciduous species, ranging from young to mature. [Appendix 1 Map 1a]
2. The second area is Laurel Close. This includes a strip of grass along the High Street, the Memorial, and an area of grass to the south of the Memorial. The trees here are predominantly deciduous and are all semi-mature or mature. [Appendix 1 Map 1b]
3. The third area is a large area on the west side of the village, running for approx. 250m from Brick Lane to Brangehill Lane. The area contains a mix of tree species, ranging from young to veteran. [Appendix 1 Map 1c]

If there are areas of concern with residents, common law permits such residents to cut branches and hedgerow overgrowth, and work will be carried out with as light touch as possible to preserve wildlife habitats wherever we can.

Sparrow Sanctuary

Sparrow conservation focuses on providing food, nesting sites, and insect-rich habitats by planting native shrubs, leaving hedges, avoiding pesticides, and installing nest boxes, as these birds face declines due to habitat loss and lack of food/insects, with efforts targeting both rural (farming practices) and urban areas (garden changes).

Monitoring suggests a severe decline in the UK House Sparrow population, recently estimated as dropping by 71% between 1977 and 2008 with large falls in both rural and urban populations. Their numbers are still dropping in England. House Sparrows are much rarer than they used to be – since 1970, almost 30 million of these little birds have vanished from the UK.

Citizen science projects and community involvement are key, alongside habitat restoration like creating wildflower patches and conservation headlands. House Sparrows have quite short wings and aren't strong fliers, so they like to stick close to vegetation, ready to dash for cover if a predator appears. Reasons for their decline in areas like ours are thought to be reduction of places to nest, loss of habitat for foraging and loss of insect life.

The Sparrow population has declined catastrophically in Mepal and there is one last area (see Map 1a trees 8-18) which still has a population. To support this population, it is vitally important to have areas that are allowed to grow wild (untidy shrubs and brambles), but these areas need to be managed to avoid them just becoming woodland over time. These sociable little birds like to live in loose colonies. Pairs often stay together for life and return to the same nest site each year. They usually feed and socialise within a few hundred metres of their nests. Leave hedges and shrubs such as hawthorn, to flower and fruit – more food for insects and birds. House Sparrows like hedges, shrubs, and climbing or rambling plants like ivy, bramble and wild roses – to roost, hide from predators and socialise in.

The area from tree 8 -18 on Map 1a (Appendix 1) will be divided into 5 approximately 1m wide bays and annually one of these sections will be cut back completely to the hedgerow. This will ensure that the Sparrow area is maintained without completely cutting back all brambles.

Trees, Woodlands and Hedgerows: Action Plan

Mepal Parish Council will aim to re-assess hedgerows and trees every two years and will carry out identified high priority actions as soon as possible and will identify budget in subsequent years to carry out lower priority recommendations.

We want to adopt a light touch to maintenance to preserve as much habitat as possible and will only carry out tree removal where we have no other choice, or where an identified hazard is known.

As a local resident, ***you can help*** by:

- Understanding that all work requires budget and spend must go through the appropriate process and to a budget.
- View hedges as wildlife habitats and accept that cutting hedges frequently damages those habitats.

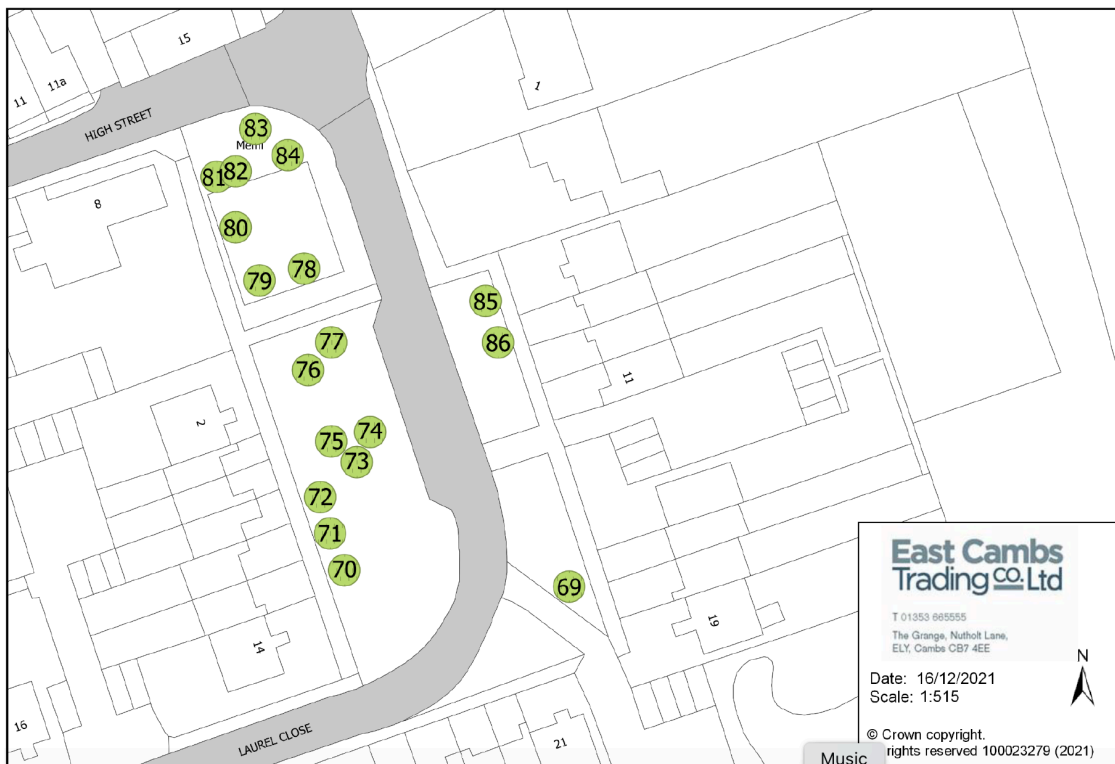
Appendix 1: Map of Mepal

Trees owned by the Parish Council

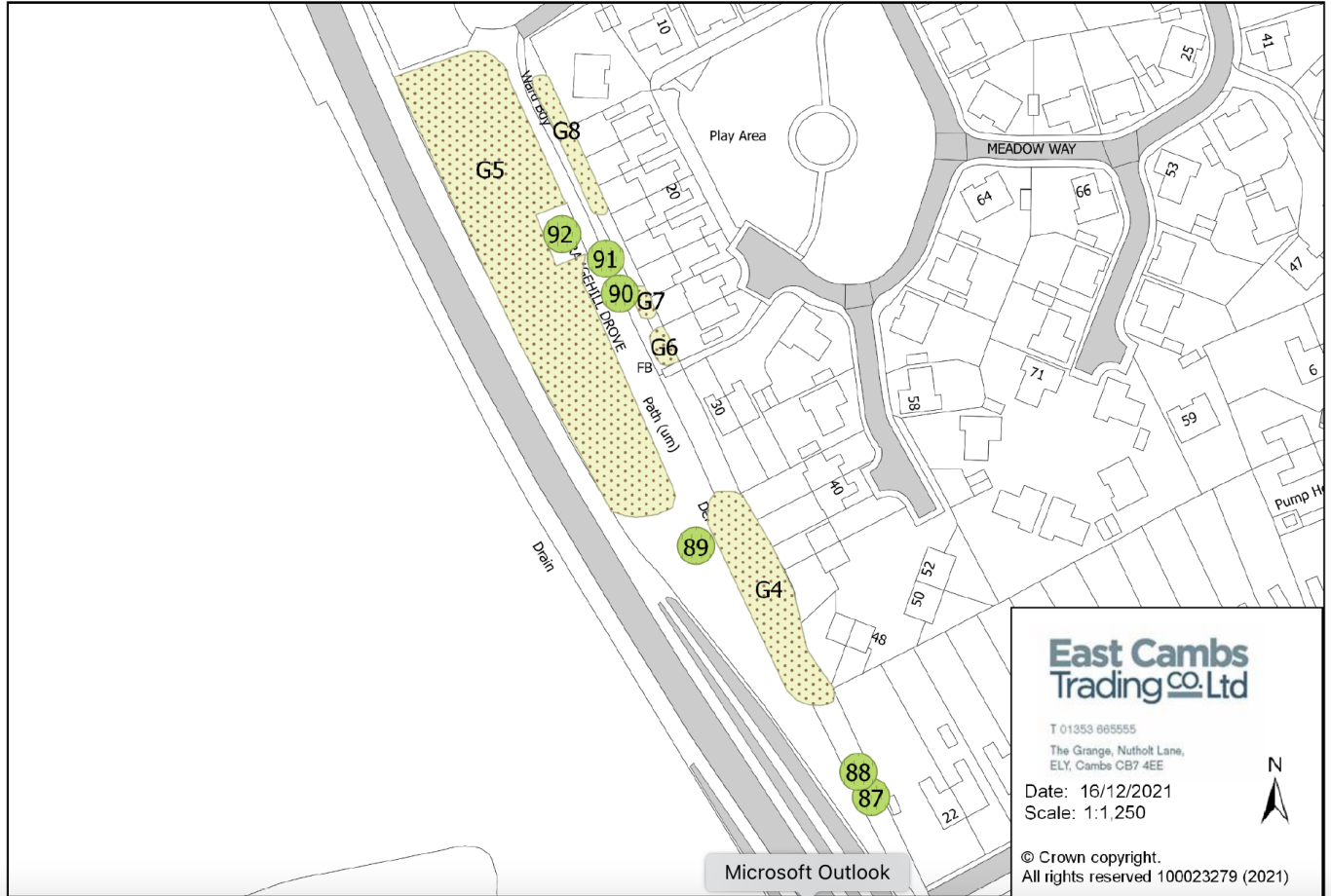
Map1a:



Map 1b:

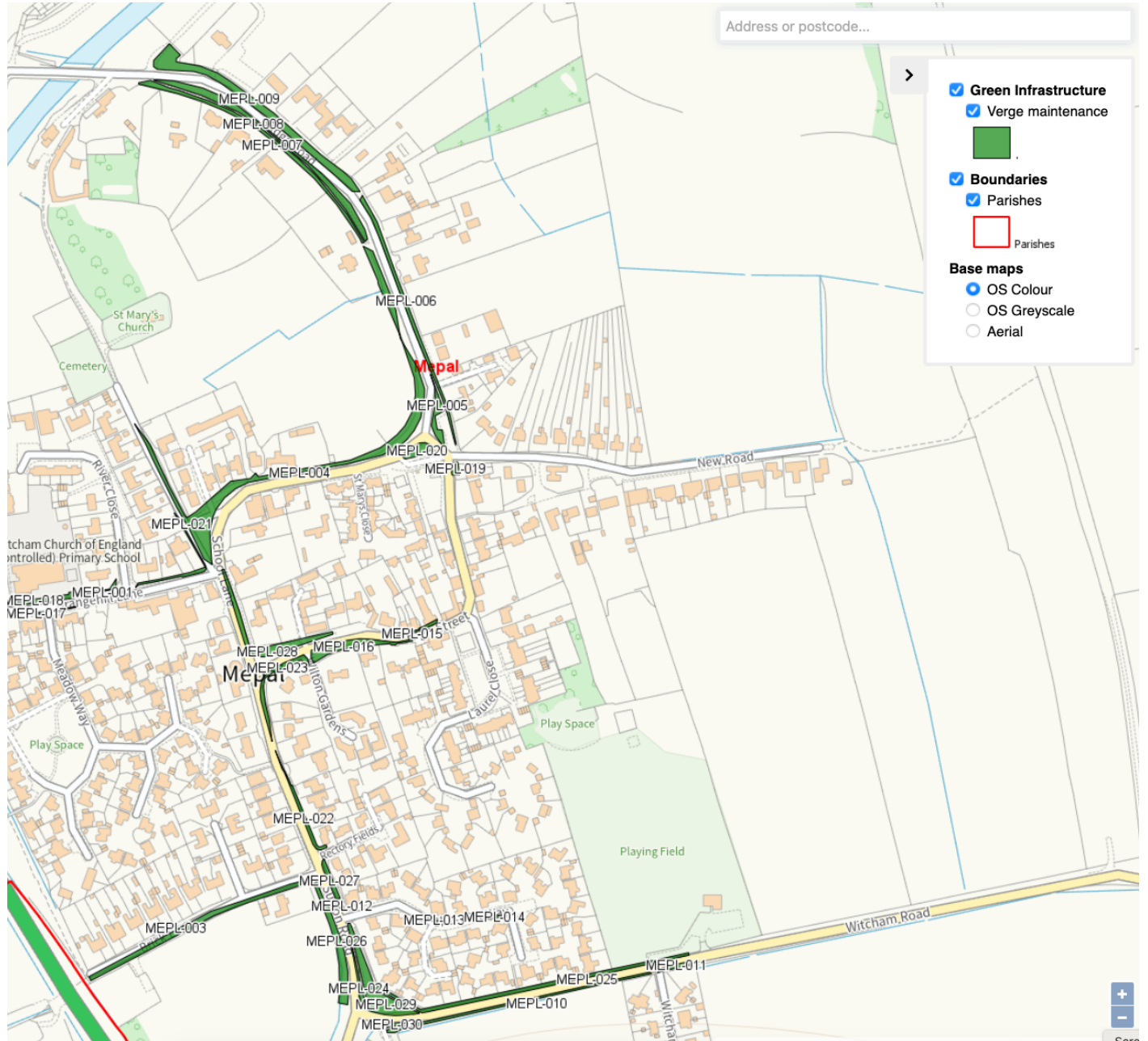


Map 1c:

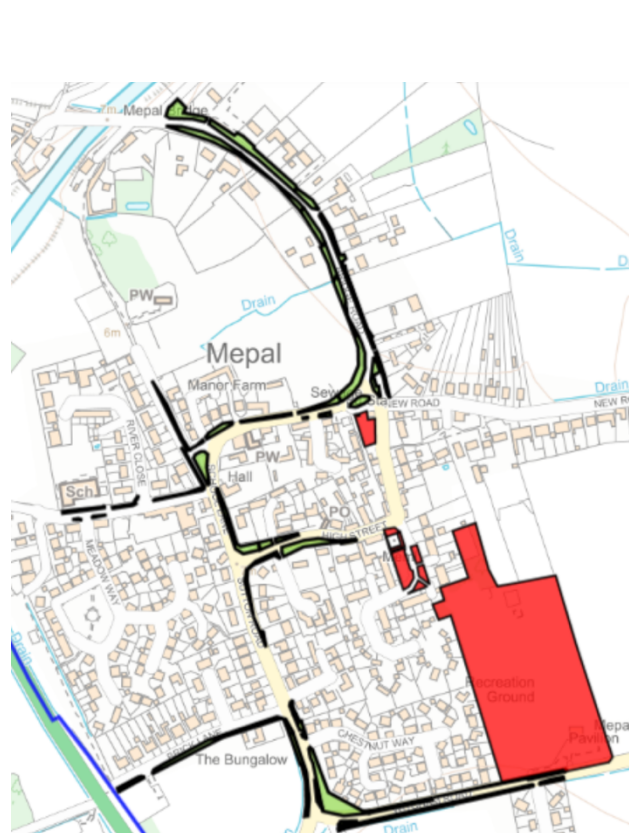


Appendix 2: Map of Cambridgeshire County Council Verges

[Link to maps](#)



Appendix 3: Parish Council grass cutting schedule 2025



Parish Council Areas

County Council Areas

Mepal Parish Council will manage the grass cutting highlighted in “red” as indicated above. Cambridgeshire County Council will cut areas under its ownership (marked in green) under their own management programme.

The Cambridgeshire County Council cutting agreement formalised some years ago has now been passed back to their ownership. As the payment for this has not increased over the last 10 years, the Parish Council no longer receives sufficient income to conduct the parishes desired cut and therefore must concentrate only on Parish owned land.

Annual Schedule

Parish Council owned land	March-October	In-house
County Council owned land	Managed under CCC scheduling	CCC

Maintenance of land not owned by the Parish Council will be undertaken by Cambridgeshire County Council or East Cambridgeshire County Council as applicable. At this stage the majority of the verges, hedgerows, highways and paths are under the responsibility of Cambridgeshire County Council, however Meadow Way and River Close remain under the management of East Cambridgeshire County Council.

Mepal Memorial (High Street) and the verge which sites the village sign are “verges” and fall under the ownership of Cambridgeshire County Council. Under the new agreement this means both areas will form part of the County cutting programme and not that of the Parish Council.

We wish to reassure parishioners that these areas will be maintained to protect their standing within our community should the CCC schedule fail to meet parish expectations. Having listened to Parishioner feedback we feel that, although an additional financial burden as it is likely to require weekly or bimonthly cuts as this land is not ours, this is the correct decision for the Parish.

Appendix 4: Summary Action Plan

The following table sets out some of the key actions the Parish Council intends to take over the period 2026-2029

Project	Description	By Who / Cost	Additional comments
Recreation Field Glade	Large area of hedgerow and breakthrough trees planted in the corner of the Recreation Field. Snowdrops and daffodils planted along the hedgerow. Additional double hedge and bird/bat boxes have been added, with additional bulbs	ECDC Grant	Glad is now established, with two new benches installed. Volunteers continue to assist with maintenance and grass cutting is undertaken to maintain a clear patch around the Glade without disturbing taller grass next to the hedgerow.
Playpark	Consider ne hedgerow along the side of the play area to separate access to the allotments.	ECDC Grant	
Sparrow sanctuary	Area along Witcham Road to have dedicated sparrow sanctuary area where the brambles and hedgerow will be left uncut.	ECDC grant for new posts, volunteer to help install and manage with signage.	New information signs to be added.
Lillibet Woods	Continue to assess light touch management and removal of plastic tree protectors.	Volunteers.	