

Nature Recovery Plan for Mepal Parish

11/02/2024

Mepal Parish Council

The plan was initially discussed and circulated at the Parish Council meeting in February (Minute Reference 120224/7 COUNCIL BUSINESS. b)

The draft plan was adopted as is, at the Annual Meeting of the Parish Council on 30th May 2024
There are still themes to be completed, and maps added, so the plan is still being developed in some areas.

Nature recovery plan: Mepal

18/01/2024, *published 30/5/2024*

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Introduction

Mepal Parish Council is passionate about reversing the decline of nature, and wants to take action 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.

This initial nature recovery plan sets out a medium-term plan for the creation of more nature rich habitats in Mepal and focuses on the land owned and managed by the Parish Council. We would encourage other land owners (e.g. the School, the Church) 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 is not complete and will be finalised over the next 12 months.

To do this, this plan has a page for each theme we'd like to take action on, setting out what we currently have, where we'd like to get to, and how we are going to get there. Some pages are blank as we are still working on them.

But to be a success, we will need your help! You can help be taking action in your own garden, or perhaps volunteering to help tidy up or manage a public space – more details in section x.

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 of 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. This collage of photos below show some great examples of habitats for wildlife, all of which were found in [area]

Action Plan

Mepal Parish Council will aim to:

1. Encourage home owners to create wildlife friendly gardens
2. Consider ways to encourage the re-instatement of the gardening club'
3. Consider running a 'most nature friendly' gardening annual competition in future

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. There is seasonal historical issues with flooding which have been reduced due to the installation of an attenuation pond, but during periods of heavy rainfall the gardens in Laurel Close all drain into the allotments and without a large project to provide pumped drainage the only solution would be to purchase or rent land elsewhere and move the existing allotments.

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: Churches and Their Grounds

Introduction

Churches have been a focus for communities for thousands of years and, alongside their primary purpose, are refuges for many species. Bats are well known for inhabiting churches due to their open structure and relative quiet.

The ancient stonework can be rich with lichens and mosses while the ledges and roofs can be ideal places for nesting birds. The church grounds have often escaped the damaging effects of fertilisers and ploughs so contain remnants of ancient grassland where fungi thrive and wildflowers flourish.

What do we have in Mepal?

St Mary's is a small unspoilt 13thc church, sensitively restored by Caroe in 1903-6 - an oasis of calm in the countryside. It stands near the centre of our small village, on the edge of a fen island, close to the New Bedford River. They are a strong though small church community, doing our best to serve the whole village as it wishes and needs,

Action Plan

Mepal Parish Council will aim to encourage the Church Commissioners to:

1. Survey the church grounds, to learn more what animals are using them
2. Work with those currently responsible for maintaining the churches and their grounds, and see what could be done to improve them for nature
3. Example actions we could do include: wildflower sowing; cutting the grass less often; install bird and bat boxes

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

1. Visiting the church grounds, and note what you see and hear
2. Help with any survey work or actions set up by the parish council or church

More reading

Caring for God's acre: <https://www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk/>

Bats in churches: <https://batsinchurches.org.uk/>

Theme 4: School Grounds

Introduction

The mem still under development.

What do we have in Mepal?

Mepal and Witcham C of E Primary School is situated in the centre of the village and serves the villages of Mepal and Witcham.

School Grounds: Action Plan

Mepal Parish Council will aim to:

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

Theme 5: Amenity Areas

Introduction

Theme under development

What do we have in Mepal?

Amenity Areas: Action Plan

Mepal **Parish Council** will aim to:

- 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).
- (Following an Ecologist site visit) choose suitable trees for the conditions (clay) & aspect
- 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.
- 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.
- Allocated a further 30 metres for 2025 Hedge/Tree planting.
- Consider further additional hedges where applicable

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

Theme 6: Trees, Woodlands and Hedgerows

Introduction

Theme under deveopment

What do we have in Mepal?

Trees, Woodlands and Hedgerows: Action Plan

Mepal Parish Council will aim to:

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

Theme 7: Orchards

Introduction

Theme under development

What do we have in Mepal?

Orchards: Action Plan

The *[area] Parish Council* will aim to:

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

Theme 8: Grasslands and Road Verges

Introduction

Part of the thinking behind the Mepal Parish Council biodiversity and wildlife improvement plans incorporates a strategy designed to encourage residents to reconsider a desire for neatness and tidiness, and to let “neatly mown grass verges become mini meadows where wildflowers and wildlife can flourish”.

Bees love displays of wildflowers such as cow-parsley, which attract insects known as diptera, on which local birdlife feed. Changing mowing regimes on road verges etc. allows more wildflowers to bloom naturally. Roadside verges in Mepal were maintained as short grassland, which in some areas may be required for road safety purposes but often it was just carried out as it has always been done this way.

It became clear to the Parish Council that reducing cutting frequencies, or creating wildflower lawns or meadows could be an effective way to provide attractive areas beneficial to pollinators and potentially reduce management costs. Likewise, hedge cutting regimes were changed to allow better structure to develop in hedgerows and flowering shrubs to bloom for longer.

The precise timing of mowing regimes depends on the vegetation being managed, with nectar-rich plants being allowed to finish their flowering period. Early flowering species such as Dandelion and Primrose are of particular value for pollinators as they emerge in the spring.

In cases where there was concern for appearance and/or road safety, it was decided that a narrow fringe be cut at the front of the verge and ‘fairy-paths’ to be cut through larger areas and in the centre of play areas.

What do we have in Mepal?

Mepal has a number of verges under the management/maintenance of the Parish Council. There is a larger verge opposite the village hall, a larger verge opposite the School Lane bus stop, the large verge along the high street next to the War Memorial, the Laurel Close Green and 75 NZ Memorial, the Laurel Close verges, the grass areas within the Laurel Close Play Park, the triangle of land opposite the entrance to the playpark, and the recreation field .

The Recreation Field is home to the Community Pavilion

Action Plan

Mepal Parish Council will aim to:

Reduce grass cutting frequency to a minimum, ensuring safety at visibility splays at junctions.

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

Understanding that this is not a cost saving exercise, but is a plan to encourage wildlife and plants to flourish in as many areas as possible. A side benefit is that reduced grass cutting also reduced our carbon footprint due to the overall reduction in resources.

Theme 9: Areas Designated for Nature

Introduction

Theme under development

What do we have in Mepal?

Areas Designated for Nature: Action Plan

Mepal Parish Council will aim to:

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

Theme 10: Farmland

Introduction

Theme under development

What do we have in Mepal?

Action Plan

Mepal Parish Council will aim to:

As a local resident, *you can help* by

Theme 11: Water (Streams, Ponds and Ditches)

Introduction

Theme under development

What do we have in Mepal?

Action Plan

Mepal Parish Council will aim to:

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

Appendix 1: Map of Mepal

Map to be added from Parish Online

Appendix 2: Summary Action Plan

The following table sets out some of the key actions the Parish Council intends to take over the period 2024-2027

Project	Description	By Who / Cost	Additional comments
Recreation Field Phase 1	Large area of hedgerow and breakthrough trees to be planted in the corner of the Recreation Field. Snowdrops and daffodils to be planted along the hedgerow	ECDC Grant	Volunteer planting group to be set up
Recreation Field Phase 2	Additional double hedge and bird/bat boxes to be added, with additional bulbs	ECDC Grant	
Playpark	Hedgerow to be planted along the side of the play area to separate access to the allotments. Additional benches to be installed	ECDC Grant	