

<b>Site Name</b> Church Meadows and Glebe Field	<b>Site Code</b> 98T04	<b>Grid Ref.</b> SU970873	<b>Date Surveyed</b> 17/6 and 08/07/2022	<b>Area (ha)</b> c. 3.3 ha
<b>Area</b> South	<b>Parish</b> Hedgerley		<b>Recorder(s)</b> Matt Sharp	
<b>Soils</b> 571j FRILSHAM 581c SONNING 2(Glebe)	<b>Superficial Deposits</b> Small areas of Head and Gerrards Cross Gravel		<b>Bedrock</b> Lambeth Group (Mudstone) Seaford and Newhaven Chalk	
<b>Ownership Details</b> Glebe Field - Hedgerley Parish Council Church Meadows – Parochial Church Council - leased to Hedgerley Parish Council			<b>NCA (National Character Area)</b> 115 Thames Valley	

### Qualifying Local Wildlife Site (LWS) Criteria

Core Criteria	Evidence from Surveys
<b>1. Naturalness (habitats) – Presence of UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) Priority Habitats</b>	Lowland Meadow
<b>2. Rare or exceptional features (principally for species) – Presence of substantial population or assemblage of species as defined by the species criteria.</b>	Lesser Spearwort ( <i>Ranunculus flammula</i> ) VU England Red List.  Previously recorded - Lesser Soft Brome Hybrid ( <i>Bromus x pseudothominei</i> ) and Prickly Sedge ( <i>Carex muricata</i> subsp. <i>Pairae</i> ) County Scarce.
<b>3. Size or extent of features (habitat or population) – Does the site hold a substantial proportion (see figures for %) of county resource of the habitat (or habitat mosaics) or species? OR is it a large site supporting a range of habitat types?</b>	No
<b>4. Diversity (numbers of species or habitats) – Follow species guidelines and consider in context of the number of habitats the site supports.</b>	125 species including 2 calcareous grassland species, 9 meadow species (2 frequent, 4 occasional) and 10 ancient woodland indicators.
Contextual Criteria	
<b>5. Connectivity within the landscape – Presence of green links or in close proximity to other areas of semi-natural habitat. Part of wider area used by meta-population of a species.</b>	Directly connected to LWS 98T23 and 98T06, both sites have woodland and grassland interest. Much of 98T06 is ancient semi natural woodland.
<b>6. Fragility – Sensitive species populations or habitats prone to loss from external influences.</b>	Grassland reliant on appropriate management by grazing and/or hay cutting.

<b>7. Recorded history and cultural associations</b> – Historic use of the site known and important to local community. Part of regular survey/monitoring programme.	Not identified as a BNS in past, but previously surveyed in 2008 and 2014 and actively managed and monitored by the Hedgerley Conservation Volunteers. Used for community events such as wassailing.
<b>8. Value for appreciation of nature</b> - Good access/greatly increases the aesthetics of the area.	Used by local walkers and important to local community as an area of greenspace next to the village.
<b>9. Value for learning</b> - Current use by schools, local groups or proximity to education centres and access.	Some potential for educational visits, though lack of suitable parking.

## 1. Location, Topography, Boundaries and Surrounding Land Use

- 1.1. The Glebe Field and the Church Meadows are situated in Hedgerley Village to the north of Farnham Common and to the west of Gerrards Cross at between 85m to 65m above sea level. The three fields partially surround St Mary's Church, the Glebe is to the northwest while the other fields lie to its south. They all slope broadly to the southwest, the Glebe Field is more west facing and Church Meadow East more south facing than Church



Figure 1 - Church Meadow East looking south

Meadow West. The site is bounded by post and wire stock proof fence which is well maintained with some new sections. There is a small section of iron railing around the churchyard.

1.2. The soils are well drained mainly fine clay loamy soils over chalk. The bedrock for the northern half of the site (including the steeper slopes) is Lambeth Group (Mudstone), while to the south there is Upper Chalk Formation. There are no superficial deposits.

- 1.3. St Mary's Churchyard contains several large Yew (*Taxus baccata*) trees and regularly mown grass. To the east is Church Wood LWS, the majority of which is an ancient semi natural woodland managed by the RSPB, and to the south there is a track with adjoining residential properties and a semi-improved field cut for hay. To the north is Pightle Field LWS, which is a mosaic of wet woodland, semi-improved neutral grassland, old orchard, ditches and ponds. There are several woodland LWSs within 1.5km including Sutton's Wood, Stoke Wood, Pond's Wood and Bower & Burtley Woods. Kiln Wood and Footpath (Kemsley) Wood BNSs are nearby at Hedgerley Hill.

## 2. Detailed Description Flora

- 2.1. At present all three fields qualify as Lowland Meadow Priority Habitat, the Glebe Field qualifies under Condition A, while the Church Meadows both qualify under Condition B. This is due to the frequency of grassland indicator species such as Agrimony (*Agrimonia eupatoria*), Meadow Vetchling (*Lathyrus pratensis*), Common Bird's-foot-trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*), Greater Bird's-foot-trefoil (*Lotus pedunculatus*), Cowslip (*Primula veris*), Sweet Vernal-grass (*Anthoxanthum odoratum*), and Red Fescue (*Festuca rubra*) found within the sward.

- 2.2. The Glebe Field contains an interesting mixture of apparently spring fed wet areas as well as some very dry areas at the top of the hill, with transitional areas in between. The sward contains frequent Agrimony, Meadow Vetchling, Common and Greater Bird's-foot-trefoil, Trailing Tormentil (*Potentilla anglica*), Creeping Cinquefoil (*Potentilla reptans*), Meadow Buttercup (*Ranunculus acris*), Creeping Buttercup (*Ranunculus repens*), Common Sorrel (*Rumex acetosa*), Germander Speedwell (*Veronica chamaedrys*), Creeping Bent (*Agrostis stolonifera*), Meadow Foxtail (*Alopecurus pratensis*), Sweet Vernal-grass, False Oat-Grass (*Arrhenatherum elatius*), Hairy Sedge (*Carex hirta*), Yorkshire-fog (*Holcus lanatus*), and Rough Meadow-grass (*Poa trivialis*), with occasional Creeping Jenny (*Lysimachia nummularia*), Cowslip, Selfheal (*Prunella vulgaris*), Lesser Stitchwort (*Stellaria graminea*), Cock's-foot (*Dactylis glomerata*), and Red Fescue.



Figure 2 - Sward in Church Meadow East

- 2.3. Other indicator species present include the grassland indictors Common Knapweed (*Centaurea nigra*), Common Spotted-orchid (*Dactylorhiza fuchsia*), Lady's Bedstraw (*Galium verum*), and Glaucous Sedge (*Carex flacca*), as well as the Ancient Woodland Indicators Pignut (*Conopodium majus*), Bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*), Primrose (*Primula vulgaris*), Bush Vetch (*Vicia sepium*), Remote Sedge (*Carex remota*), and Wood Millet (*Milium effusum*), and the wetland indicators Great Willowherb (*Epilobium hirsutum*) and Gypsywort (*Lycopus europaeus*) in the damper areas along with Lesser Spearwort (*Ranunculus flammula*) which is listed as Vulnerable on the England Red List.



Figure 3 - Wet grassland in Glebe Field

- 2.4. There are some dense Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*) patches towards the north and northeast boundaries of the field, as well as several Bramble (*Rubus fruticosus* agg.) and Creeping Thistle (*Cirsium arvense*) patches throughout which are associated with fire sites or piled arisings from habitat management works. Some of the Bramble patches appear to have grown in wetter areas possibly beyond the reach of a tractor mower. These patches cover approximately 7% of the field, just over the desired 5%.

- 2.5. There is a seasonal pond at the northern end of the field, it is surrounded by scrub consisting of frequent Bramble and Hazel (*Corylus avellana*) with occasional Silver Birch (*Betula pendula*). Trees including Pedunculate Oak (*Quercus robur*), Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*) and Grey Willow (*Salix cinerea*) cast partial shade onto the water's surface which is dominated by Common Duckweed (*Lemna minor*) with small amounts of a



sweet-grass (*Glyceria sp.*) present. There is a small damp zone around the pond which contains occasional Wavy Bitter-cress (*Cardamine flexuosa*) and Remote Sedge (*Carex remota*) with Pendulous Sedge (*Carex pendula*), Common Nettle (*Urtica dioica*), Bulrush (*Typha latifolia*) and Soft-rush (*Juncus effusus*) also present. There is a large fallen Pedunculate Oak to the north and a large fallen Ash lying across the middle of the pond above the water. Most of the brash landed outside of the pond, the Ash will eventually fall into the pond as it decays.

- 2.6. The Glebe Field is fringed by woodland and scrub, with a laid hedge on the southern boundary. There are some large specimens of Field Maple (*Acer campestre*) and Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*) with Sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*), Silver Birch, Hazel, Ash, Holly, Apple (*Malus sp.*), Blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*), and Pedunculate Oak. Some of the woodland reaches several meters into the field in places, almost dividing it in two near the middle. At this mid-point is a recently established Community Orchard with 17 trees, including Plum (*Prunus domestica subsp. domestica*), Damson / Bullace (*Prunus domestica subsp. insititia*), Cherry (*Prunus avium*), Pear (*Pyrus communis sens. lat.*) and Apple (*Malus pumila*), and a memorial bench. Just north of this there is a veteran Pedunculate Oak with an Owl Box attached to it, surrounded by a stand of Silver Birch, with Ash, Hawthorn, Elm (*Ulmus sp.*) and Bramble forming a scrubby ecotone along the edge.



Figure 4 - Orchard in Glebe Field (Left half of image)

- 2.7. Church Meadow West is a drier field that lies directly to the south of the Glebe Field. The grassland indicators Common Knapweed, Common Bird's-foot-trefoil, Sweet Vernal-grass and Red Fescue are all frequent, as are Agrimony, Ribwort Plantain (*Plantago lanceolata*), Lesser Stitchwort, Dandelion (*Taraxacum agg.*), White Clover (*Trifolium repens*), Common Bent (*Agrostis capillaris*), Meadow Foxtail, Cock's Foot, Yorkshire Fog and Rough Meadow-grass. With occasional Field Bindweed (*Convolvulus arvensis*), Hogweed (*Heracleum sphondylium*), Trailing Tormentil, Creeping Cinquefoil, Creeping Buttercup, Germander Speedwell, False Oat-Grass, and Field Wood-rush (*Luzula campestris*).
- 2.8. There are several patches of Lady's Bedstraw on the slope, which contains the most interesting and diverse grassland habitat in this field. The ancient woodland indicators Bluebell, Bush Vetch and Remote Sedge occur around the edges, and are most frequent around the pond in the northeast corner of this field. This was dry at the time of survey, with a sweet-grass covering most of the pond bed, and a small amount of Creeping Jenny, Broad-leaved Dock and Soft-rush. It is heavily shaded by a large Pedunculate Oak with numerous veteran tree features, and several young Ash growing up through its understory. The pond is partly surrounded by Bramble and Hawthorn scrub.

2.9. Towards the west of this field there is a patch of rank vegetation which covers approximately 8% of the grassland area. It has originated where spoil and arisings from the nearby village pond have been spread following clearance works. It is dominated by Creeping Thistle, Hogweed, Common Nettle and False Oat Grass, with a small amount of Amphibious Bistort (*Persicaria amphibia*).

2.10. The two Church Meadows are separated by an outgrown hedge containing frequent Wych Elm (*Ulmus glabra*), with occasional Hawthorn, Ash and Bramble.

2.11. Church Meadow East was identified as the most interesting field during previous surveys. The sward here contains frequent Common Bird's-foot-trefoil, Sweet Vernal-grass and Red Fescue, with occasional Common Knapweed. Agrimony, Ribwort Plantain, Creeping Buttercup, Common Sorrel, Lesser Stitchwort, White Clover, Germander Speedwell, Common Bent, Yorkshire-fog, and Field Wood-rush are all frequent, with occasional Common Mouse-ear (*Cerastium fontanum*), Trailing Tormentil, and Cock's-foot. The grassland indicators Lady's Bedstraw and Meadow Vetchling (*Lathyrus pratensis*) are also present. The area to the east of the church contains the shortest and least grass dominated sward and the highest frequency of anthills.



Figure 5 - Scrub clumps in Church Meadow East



Figure 6 - Church Meadow West - looking southwest, Lady's Bedstraw yellow in foreground and rank vegetation dark green in the distance.

2.12. There is an interesting wet flush immediately south of the churchyard which contains Great Willowherb, as well Common Fleabane (*Pulicaria dysenterica*) and Creeping Jenny. This area appears to have dried out and has lost some of its interest since the previous survey when Corn Mint (*Mentha arvensis*), Greater Birds Foot Trefoil and Cuckooflower (*Cardamine pratensis*) were all recorded. A strip of coarser vegetation runs

along the eastern boundary with the churchyard, this was once Blackthorn scrub and now contains frequent Wood Dock (*Rumex sanguineus*), Bramble, and Cleavers (*Galium aparine*) with occasional Creeping Thistle and Common Nettle. There are two small clumps of dense maturing scrub in the southeast of the field, these contain frequent Hawthorn and Bramble, with occasional Elder.



### 3. Fauna

3.1. This is not an exhaustive list but represents species encountered during the floral survey.

#### 3.2. Mammals

3.2.1. Rabbit (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*)

#### 3.3. Butterflies

3.3.1. Gatekeeper (*Pyronia tithonus*)

#### 3.4. Fungi

3.4.1. Chicken of the woods (*Laetiporus sulphureus*)

### 4. Past / current management regime

4.1. The Church Meadows were grazed by horses in 1985, and it was remarked then that there was 'nothing of particular note', however there were some interesting species present which were not found during the most recent survey including Burnet Saxifrage (*Pimpinella saxifraga*), Salad Burnet (*Sanguisorba minor subsp. minor*), Perforate St John's-wort (*Hypericum perforatum*), Marsh Cudweed (*Gnaphalium uliginosum*), Wild Basil (*Clinopodium vulgare*), and Black Bent (*Agrostis gigantea*).

4.2. The Church Meadows were previously surveyed as part of the Local Wildlife Sites Project in 2008 and 2014. On both occasions Church Meadow East was identified as a potential LWS, however it did not pass the criteria when considered in combination with Church Meadow West as part of the wider management unit due to the prevalence of rank grassland and other undesirable species in that field. The Glebe Field was dismissed as 'rather rank with tall herb species'.

4.3. The Hedgerley Conservation Volunteers, assisted by City of London staff based at Burnham Beeches Estate Office, have been managing the Church Meadows since 2002. Initially the site was grazed by sheep, and then by cattle from 2008.

4.4. Hedgerley Parish Council were awarded a National Lottery Fund Awards For All grant in January 2011 to restore the Glebe Field for informal recreation and for wildlife. It had been used for horse grazing and neglected for several years, and had become invaded by scrub, Bracken and Ragwort.

4.5. Since then all three fields have been managed together as one unit, this has successfully restored The Glebe Field and Church Meadow West to their current condition and maintained the interest in Church Meadow East. There has been a significant reduction in the frequency of False Oat-grass, Ragwort, Broad-leaved Dock and thistles in the Church Meadows since 2008.



Figure 7 - Interpretation board in The Glebe Field

4.6. Ragwort pulling and fence repairs are carried out in the spring and summer, and encroaching Brambles and scrub are cut back where necessary in the autumn. At the

beginning of August Church Meadow East is mown and the arisings are collected and piled at the edge of the field. Occasionally the other fields are mown with the arisings collected if grazing is not possible. Then from around October all three fields are grazed by cattle in sequence until the sward height is between 5-10cm. This helps to diversify the sward structure, break up patches of rank grass species and spread seeds between the three fields.

- 4.7. The partnership between the Hedgerley Conservation Volunteers and the City of London suits both parties well and is set to continue. Therefore, the ecological condition of these fields should continue to improve into the future.

## 5. Ideal management regime

- 5.1. This is intended to represent an ideal management regime to maximise the wildlife value of the site. It is recognised that this management may not be achievable or desirable for the landowner but it is hoped that he/she will consider moving towards this prescription. The management options detailed below in no way infer any criticism of the current management of the site and it is acknowledged that the current botanical diversity of the site is due to the sensitivity of the previous actions of the landowner/manager.
- 5.2. The meadows have the potential to support an even greater variety of wildflowers. Herb rich meadows provide important nectar sources and shelter for insects, such as butterflies and bees, which in turn provide food for birds. It is recommended that the site managers broadly continue with the current management regime as this will continue to improve the wildlife value of the site. Some adjustments to the mowing and grazing regime could be considered.



Figure 8 - Rank vegetation patch in Church Meadow West

- 5.3. It is important to continue to cut the ranker grassland in the western part of Church Meadow East and the flat areas in Church Meadow West annually. This should be carried out in August using a cut and collect mower and the arisings should be piled at the edges of the field.

- 5.4. The remainder of these fields and The Glebe could be left unmown for several years at a time, as grazing may be sufficient to prevent scrub and Bramble from

colonising the sward. If scrub and bramble begins to colonise in patches, cutting should be carried out in a targeted way using a brushcutter, if the spread is more uniform the field could be mown one year rather than grazed as had been carried out successfully in 2021 in the Glebe Field.

- 5.5. In the Autumn, after mowing, these grass dominated patches could be sown with Yellow Rattle (*Rhinanthus minor*) seeds, this plant parasitises and weakens the lush grasses which allows more desirable species to establish, leading to greater sward diversity. Yellow Rattle was present in 2014 but was not found on the most recent survey, this may have

been due to an early hay cut which prevented it from setting seed. It can easily be lost through mowing because it is an annual plant. If it is sown or reappears naturally, take care not to mow until after it has set seed, which is usually in July, or collect seed prior to mowing.

- 5.6. It would be beneficial to introduce a small population of Dark Mullein (*Verbascum nigrum*) to one of the drier areas of the site. Dark Mullein is the food plant of the Nationally Scarce High Priority Moth, Striped Lychnis (*Cucullia lychnitis*) which is listed on Section 41 of the NERC Act and is identified in Butterfly Conservation's Regional Action Plan for the Thames Region. Striped Lychnis may be present in the local area and it would be beneficial if it was able to colonise a sensitively managed site such as this, where it would be relatively safe from threats faced in the wider countryside.



Figure 9 - Coarse vegetation in Church Meadow East

- 5.7. As an alternative to mowing as discussed in 5.3, cattle could be enclosed in these ranker areas using an electric fence or as part of a NoFence Collar training plan, this would also help to reduce the dominance of less desirable species. The current grazing regime should continue to be used, stock are not on site during the flowering season and there is no supplementary feeding.
- 5.8. Cutting channels into the Bramble and other coarse vegetation at the edges of the fields before the cows return in the autumn may allow them to access, eat and break up the patches which will reduce their spread and increase their wildlife value.
- 5.9. During summer months remove thistles before they set seed using a brushcutter or cut and collect mower. Bash Bracken in June or July with plastic pipe or sticks, aim to knock the plant over without cutting the stem to weaken the rhizome below ground.
- 5.10. Consider 'halo release' of the two veteran Oaks to the north of Church Meadow West, and the Oak with the owl box in the Glebe Field, this involves gradually clearing young trees from within, and eventually around the canopy to reduce competition and prolong the life of the old tree. Consult with tree surgeons, or Burnham Beeches Staff, who are experienced in working on veteran trees. Buckinghamshire Council must be notified in advance of works to trees within a conservation area. This can be done through the Planning Portal.
- 5.11. Blackthorn scrub on the northern edge of Church Meadow West could be cut back. Ideally set up a rotation, divide the patch into three sections and cut back one section by 5m each year. Cut another section the following year, and so on, returning to section one in year four. This will maintain a growing edge but prevent the patch from spreading further into the field.
- 5.12. Ideally the Community Orchard area in the Glebe Field should not be greatly expanded.



- 5.13. Both of the ponds could be enhanced by clearing some of the surrounding trees and scrub to the south to increase the light levels and allow more aquatic species to establish. Only consider removing the fallen Ash in the Glebe Pond if this can be carried out without significant damage to the field, possibly using a winch. Dead wood in ponds can be beneficial to some wildlife. If pond dredging is carried out, the spoil should not be spread on the fields.



Figures 10 and 11 - Veteran Oak – Church Meadow West - possible halo release

## 6. LWS recommendation

- 6.1. Having been gradually restored by the Hedgerley Conservation Volunteers from a poor condition 20 years ago, these three fields now support a reasonably diverse grassland typical of lowland meadows with an interesting mix of wet and dry areas. The site passes on the following criteria: 1 – Lowland Meadow, 2 - Lesser Spearwort (*Ranunculus flammula*) VU England Red List; 4 – supports at least 125 species including 2 calcareous grassland species, 9 meadow species and 10 ancient woodland indicators, 5 – good connectivity forming a link between two existing LWS, 6 - species-rich grassland is particularly susceptible to loss due to changes in management including lack of management, 7 – restored and managed by a community group and used for community events, 8 – adjacent to village and 2 of the fields are accessible with paths and gates.

- 6.2. This site is recommended for designation as a Local Wildlife Site.

## 7. Local Wildlife Site Selection Panel Decision

- 7.1. Date of Panel: 25/01/2024

- 7.2. Decision: Accepted

Help and advice

Help is available from a number of sources to implement these recommendations:

Bucks & MK Environmental Records Centre (Wildlife records)	01296 382431
Bucks Invertebrate Group (Insect surveys)	c/o 01296 382431
Environmental Stewardship (local Natural England office)	03000 603900
RSPB (Farmland bird advice)	01767 693690
Chilterns Conservation Board (Wildlife-friendly farming & land use advice in the Chilterns)	01844 355000

### **Number of Vascular Plant Species Recorded**

**Date:** 17/06/2022 and 08/07/2022      **Species:** 125      **Recorders:** Matt Sharp  
125 species including 2 calcareous grassland species, 9 meadow species (2 frequent, 4 occasional) and 10 ancient woodland indicators.

### **Ancient Woodland Indicator Species - 10**

Pignut (*Conopodium majus*), Bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*), Primrose (*Primula vulgaris*), Bush Vetch (*Vicia sepium*), Pendulous Sedge (*Carex pendula*), Remote Sedge (*Carex remota*), Creeping Soft-grass (*Holcus mollis*), Wood Millet (*Milium effusum*), Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*), Wild Cherry (*Prunus avium*).

### **County Scarce Plants (BSBI Rare Plants List) - 2**

Recorded in 2008 and likely to still be present - Lesser Soft-brome (*Bromus x pseudothominei*) and Prickly Sedge (*Carex muricata* subsp. *Pairae*).

### **County Rare Plants (BSBI Rare Plants List) - 0**

### **Nationally Scarce Species - 0**

### **Red Data Book Species - 1**

Lesser Spearwort (*Ranunculus flammula*) VU England Red List

### **UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) Species - 0**

### **Birds of Conservation Concern (RSPB) - 0**

### **Habitats & Species of Principal Importance – Section 41 List from NERC Act (2006)**

Lowland meadow

### **LOCAL WILDLIFE SITE REPORT PRODUCED BY:**

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98T04 – Church Meadows and Glebe Field