



# Greener Ettington

Progress report, April 2021 (Councillor Gavin Lambert)

## Recommendations:

1. invite members of Greener Ettington to weed out unwelcome plants in unmown parts of the recreation ground, or arrange for the groundsman to do this;
2. explore ways to secure the safe removal of tipped waste from the remnant pond in Rogers Lane, opposite Ryepiece Barn;
3. confirm arrangements for managing the orchard on the Spitfire and Ryepiece Orchard housing developments, and the possibility for volunteer involvement;
4. note the other aspects of the report, including on workshops, school liaison, biodiversity on new development sites, and great crested newts breeding within the village.

## Introduction



Greener Ettington formally launched on Facebook in late March 2021, and now has more than 160 online members. They include a parish councillor from Pillerton Hersey who is involved in similar efforts there, offering the prospect of an exchange of ideas and joint working. There has been enthusiastic initial discussion on Facebook, with various villagers sharing photographs of their bird boxes, bug hotels, hedgehog shelters and wildflower planting. There is clearly already a great deal of activity to support wildlife in the village, but with co-ordination, this can be increased.

At present the focus is on the village of Ettington, but this does not mean that Fulready is excluded.

Greener Ettington has no formal organisational structure, or a constitution. These will become necessary if the group embarks on projects that require funding. There is a low-profile core group that includes people with useful contacts or expertise, including in fundraising.

Contact has been made with Warwickshire Wildlife Trust, with a view to obtaining guidance on possible projects and priorities. These will depend on a pool of volunteers being established.

At present the focus is solely on enhancing biodiversity by welcoming more wildflowers and wildlife into the village and wider parish, and raising awareness. Research shows that contact with nature enriches life for humans too.

## **No-mow trial**

We thank the parish council for writing to the owners of Ettington Chase to ask them to forego mowing during summer in the area on the village side of the car park screening bund, as happened during lockdown in 2020.

We also thank the council for agreeing to leave some parts of the recreation ground unmown as an experiment, in line with the recommendations of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (and more recently, the TV gardener Monty Don). A productive meeting has already taken place with Councillor Ruth Hawksworth to agree trial areas for non-mowing. As councillors are aware, this is a tentative first step. It will result in long grass and the emergence of some wild flowers that were already latent in the soil; it will not bring on the profusion of specially-sown wildflowers that some villagers have seen alongside main roads in cities. Creation of wildflower meadows is somewhat more involved but it is a possibility that Greener Ettington would be pleased to pursue if the no-mow trial is well received. No-mow areas will, however, provide shelter in spring and early summer for wildlife; if the trial is successful, other habitat creation measures such as provision of log piles and bug hotels could be considered for future years.

It is important that when the longer grass is eventually mown, in July or August, care is taken to ensure that any resident wildlife can escape. An article on the Country Life website recommends mowing from the centre outwards. See:

[https://www.countrylife.co.uk/gardens/restore-orchard-meadow-61553?fbclid=IwAR2vdJPsn3IEm4fQF9sHlamtmJiSHcz9i6uh\\_EpLeI3UkfTL3vrfsXg6ZKQ](https://www.countrylife.co.uk/gardens/restore-orchard-meadow-61553?fbclid=IwAR2vdJPsn3IEm4fQF9sHlamtmJiSHcz9i6uh_EpLeI3UkfTL3vrfsXg6ZKQ)

## **Spring blossom**

Councillors are encouraged to look out for the emergence of blossom on trees in Rogers Lane, alongside the boundary of the recreation ground: they make a spectacular display. There are gaps in the line of blossom-bearing trees along the hedge – could more of the same species (cherry?) be planted, here and in other parts of the village?

## Unwelcome plants?



The westernmost corner of the recreation ground, by Rogers Lane, has already been left unmown, apart from the public footpath. A profusion of wild plants has appeared, including cow parsley, red dead-nettle, cuckoo pint, and daisies. However, we are also seeing the emergence of a significant number of dock plants and thistles and these should be controlled.

If the parish council agrees, then members of Greener Ettington can volunteer for this work.

It appears that a large number of tree seedlings may also grow up in this corner. This may mean it becomes necessary to mow the affected area sooner than planned.

## Further sites for wildflowers



*Flowers on the old Halford Road verge*

Members of Greener Ettington have begun exploring other potential areas of the village that might benefit from some strips of grass being left unmown. Affected residents would have to be consulted and their wishes respected, so this may not be achievable this year.

We would like to make special mention of the efforts that have already been made by a long-established village resident to encourage wildflowers in the churchyard and along one of the verges of the closed-down stretch of the old Halford Road. These are now proving successful, with the promise of being even better in years to come as they become more established.

The verges on the former Warwick Road are another possible area for allowing wildflowers to grow. We understand the verges along single-track minor roads around the Pillertons have been declared Local Wildlife Sites, and this is a possibility in Ettington.

These are in addition to the nationally-important cutting, verges and traffic islands on the Ettington by-pass, which are home to pyramid orchids and a very rare variant of bee orchid. Butterfly populations are also carefully managed in the area of the roundabout.



*Wildflowers on the old Halford Road verge*

## **Workshops**

It is important for members of the community to see something happening at an early stage, and move beyond merely discussing aspirations. A village resident has been invited to lead the first of a series of planned community workshops on making bug hotels, bird boxes, hedgehog shelters and similar in order to increase wildlife populations. A timetable is being drawn up.

## **Education**

Contact has been made with Ettington Primary School, which is already looking at its own environmental projects, and Greener Ettington has been well received at a governors' meeting.

## Ponds... and newts



*Great crested newt, pictured in Ettington on 30 March 2021*

A great crested newt was photographed crossing a village street at night in March, and we are aware that both smooth newts (also known as common newts) and great crested newts are breeding in a new garden pond within the village. We are not aware of previous records of sightings in the village of great crested newts, which are officially an endangered species but have healthy populations in parts of south Warwickshire. A biodiversity audit of the village in 2012 referred only to reports of smooth newts.

Great crested newts require access to a series of good-quality ponds – known as pondways - within a small area in order to thrive. They have suffered serious loss of habitat in the past 50 years. A report by the charity Froglife notes that “all too many of our remaining countryside ponds are almost lifeless, polluted puddles...” and this would be a good description of the pond in Rogers Lane, opposite Ryepiece Barn. It has held water through the winter and into April, but also an old oil drum, a bin liner full of waste, and floating chunks of polystyrene. A dense thicket of trees has grown up, shutting out sunlight and resulting in the pond becoming filled with leaves, which turn to a toxic sludge. The rubbish should be cleared away, but this appears hazardous; it is not clear whether restoration is feasible, or whether the owner would consent.



*Rubbish in pond by Rogers Lane, March 2021*

Another former pond on the edge of the adjoining field is hidden by new tree planting. It was described as “dried up” in the 2012 biodiversity audit.

The pond at Ettington Chase is currently very choked with plants and with the Chase currently closed, it appears unlikely this situation will change. A survey for newt DNA may be possible.

The biodiversity plan for the Ryepiece Orchard development stipulates that a “pond” near the entrance to the site should be fitted with a butyl liner, but we understand this may not happen. Given the need for more habitat for great crested newts, this is disappointing.

On the other hand, it has been heartening to learn through our Facebook page that new ponds have been created at Grove Farm, in consultation with Warwickshire Wildlife Trust.

Creation of new ponds in gardens – even small patches of water to act as staging posts for newts on the move – would help amphibians thrive. This can be challenging (and costly).

## **Orchards**

We are keen to learn what arrangements are being made for a promised community orchard on the Ryepiece Orchard housing development in Rogers Lane. We are aware the developer intends to negotiate this when work on the homes is complete, but the established fruit trees on site already need maintenance, and there will be fruit to pick in the autumn.

Councillor Hawksworth has also kindly offered to investigate what arrangements exist for the management of an established old orchard in the south-east corner of the Spitfire development at the eastern end of the village. There is no mention of an orchard in the landscape plan for the estate; ten apple trees are identified but grouped with non-fruit trees in an area described as a “spinney”. The ground is overrun with nettles and weeds, as well as some wildflowers, and there have been no habitat-creation measures, such as log piles.

The landscape plan for the Spitfire estate says trees must not be pruned in late winter/early spring – the exact time when pruning of apple and pear trees *should* be done. Other landscaping on the site is a public benefit, but grass that has been left to grow long as a natural feature is now suffering from “thatching”: it does need some cuts during the year. Such problems, along with departures from the biodiversity plan for Ryepiece Orchard and damage to protected hedgerow on another site, suggest a need for closer scrutiny of developers’ biodiversity schemes and their implementation. Greener Ettington may embrace this task.



*The surviving orchard on the Spitfire housing estate*