

EVIDENCE BASE: CHAPTER 8: ENVIRONMENT SURVEY FOR CORPUSTY AND SAXTHORPE NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

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1968	BA Biochemistry (Oxford University)
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1978 – 2005	Taught biology at Gresham’s School, Holt
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General features

The parish of Corpusty & Saxthorpe is predominantly one of gently undulating farmland straddling the upper Bure valley. The chalk bedrock lies well below the surface but in the southern tip of the parish a chalk erratic has provided the raw material for lime production. This bedrock is overlain by till (material deposited below the ice sheet that once covered this area) which has developed into a Brown Earth soil with a generally sandy characteristic. Indeed, sand has been extracted to form the pit in the south of the village on the Thurning road.

Agriculture is almost entirely arable with most of the area classified as Grade 3 (good to moderate quality). An area in the north-east of the parish and a somewhat smaller area in the south, together about 20% of the total area, are designated Grade 2 (very good quality). About 5% of the total area, along the valley bottom to west of the village and along the tributary flowing from the south are designated Grade 4 (poor quality).

The North Norfolk Landscape Character Assessment identifies most of the parish as Tributary Farmland, distinguished by numerous small valleys and a low density of settlement. Although the character of much of the area has been changed by conversion of pasture to arable land, and by the removal of hedgerows, the river valley is recognised as being of Moderate to Good, or even Strong landscape character. This is due to the presence of elements such as hedges, unimproved grassland and relatively un-canalised water courses. An attractive feature of the valley bottom is the large number of small paddocks nestling between properties. Although the area lacks large blocks of woodland, small copses, hedgerow and roadside trees, together with woods just outside the parish boundaries, combine to give at least the southern part a generally wooded appearance.

Although Great-crested Newts have been recorded in the area, relatively few ponds persist. Those near the disused limekiln at TG119289 may be of interest. Approximately 12.5km of paths marked on the Ordnance Survey map as rights of way thread the parish.

Biodiversity

During the late 1970s and 1980s Corpusty resident Anne Brewster made detailed records of wildlife, documenting the distribution of animals such as Harvest Mouse and amphibians, recording plant species and mapping hedgerows. As a result of Anne’s work, the Corpusty area has one of the highest densities of Harvest Mouse records in the county but whether this situation has persisted is not known. Anecdotal evidence suggests that, in common with other arable land in Britain, biodiversity has fallen in the parish since the middle of the 20th century, largely due to the removal of biodiverse habitats for agricultural purposes. Despite these depletions, it is likely that the parish retains more of

its semi-natural habitats, albeit as small remnants, than many similar areas in Norfolk. Some at least of these have now been recognised as County Wildlife Sites (CWS) although this does not give them assured protection.

The River Bure flows from north-west to south-east separating Saxthorpe from Corpusty. A consequence of the designation of the Norfolk Broads as an Environmentally Sensitive Area (one of 22 in England) is that this extends throughout the whole of the Bure valley and applies to a band approximately 150m wide through the parish where farmers are required to adopt environmentally friendly management practices. As with many such rivers in Norfolk, Otters have returned to the River Bure; their spraints (droppings) are regularly seen although the animals are more elusive. Water Voles are present and Kingfishers are frequent. Although once abundant, the White-clawed Crayfish has been replaced by the alien Signal Crayfish. River valleys, such as that of the River Bure, are increasingly appreciated as corridors that allow the movement of animals through an impoverished landscape.

The most extensive areas of tall fen vegetation in the valley are within two County Wildlife Sites: the 5.6 ha site [CWS 1124: TG140306] to the south of Mossymere Wood, and the 10 ha Blackwater Valley CWS [CWS 1067: TG088300]. However, only the western fifth of the former and the northern quarter of the latter are within the parish. Corpusty Fen [CWS 1127: TG101309], a small 1.7 ha site on the floodplain just north of Town Close, is, however, entirely within the parish. Two other wet County Wildlife Sites are either partly within the parish or immediately adjacent to it, namely Tan Office Carr [CWS 2171: TG098312] and Old Carr [CWS 1075: TG09630]. Tan Office Carr is a botanically-rich mosaic of wet woodland, reed-bed and fen, of which only the eastern fifth of the 5.7 ha site is within the parish. Old Carr (3.6 ha) is an area of grazed marshy grassland entirely within the parish of Briston, but with its eastern border contiguous with the parish boundary.

Similarly, only part (about one-third, some 13 ha) of Mossymere Wood [CWS 1128: TG130313] is within the parish, the remainder being in Itteringham. This wood is mostly composed of semi-natural mature broadleaved tree species (including oak) with some coppicing and small areas of more recent planting. Rides and a narrow strip of wet grassland within the wood have a more diverse flora. New Covert [CWS 1130: TG115330] is a second, smaller (8.3 ha), semi-natural broadleaved woodland which does lie entirely within the parish. The mature trees are mainly Sweet Chestnut but with some oak, and with historical evidence of coppicing. A sandy bank on the edge of New Covert is the only Norfolk site for the Barometer Earthstar, a nationally rare fungus, first seen in 1987 but still present in 2014.

The remaining CWS [CWS 1070: TG098308] is the dismantled railway line to the west of the village and extending into neighbouring Thurning. The trackway itself has been colonised to form a dry grassland with species typical of that habitat. The embankments have developed into scrub, grading into more mature woodland at the northern end of the Blackwater Valley CWS.

Two roadside nature reserves (RNRs) have been designated in the parish, one in Corpusty [RNR 46: TG114294], at the junction of the B1149 and the minor road into Corpusty, and one [RNR 63: TG122313] about 1 km NE of Saxthorpe on the road to Mannington. The former is a small verge and gravelly bank with a dry grassland flora including Sheep's Bit and Salad Burnet. Four species of waxcap fungi have been recorded here within a few square metres. The Mannington road site is a short stretch (40 metres) of verge supporting Long-stemmed Cranesbill and Upright Brome (a grass) both of which are scarce Norfolk plants that are characteristic of calcareous grassland.

Mousetail is a scarce and rather insignificant annual plant occurring in damp grassland in only a handful of places in Norfolk. One of these is in a meadow near the bridge over the Bure at Little London.

Arable plants are annual 'weed' species which have become increasingly rare as farm practices have changed. In a recent survey (2010), 726 tetrads (2 x 2km squares) in Norfolk were identified as being important for arable plants. Of these, 12 were considered to be of European importance, including the two tetrads in which Saxthorpe and Corpusty are situated.

Some other areas in Corpusty are likely to have an interesting flora but do not appear to have been well investigated. The most significant of these is the disused Sand Pit at TG108293, now used as a shooting range, where there is nutrient-poor rabbit-grazed grassland and sand exposures that may be suitable for nesting solitary bees. The second area is that around the disused limekiln at TG119289 where a calcareous grassland flora may have persisted. The mown and rabbit-grazed grassland at Corpusty church and burial ground appears to be species-rich.

Sources

Citations for County Wildlife Sites and Roadside Nature Reserves. From Norfolk Biodiversity Information Service www.nbis.org.uk

Landscape Character Assessment (North Norfolk)
<http://www.northnorfolk.org/planning/10011.asp>

Agricultural Land Management classifications
<http://archive.defra.gov.uk/foodfarm/landmanage/land-use/documents/alc-guidelines-1988.pdf>

Maps (Environmental Designations and Agricultural Land Classification) provided by North Norfolk District Council.