

COMPASS COURTYARD

BIODIVERSITY ENHANCEMENT STRATEGY

‘Good habitats create better lives for all beings’

Purpose and Conservation Objectives for the proposed enhancement measures

As a farmyard, set in the heart of Essex farmland we have many opportunities to enhance biodiversity within our small site that can then extend like the spokes of a cartwheel out to the countryside around us. Our Biodiversity enhancement Strategy is focussed on identifying those opportunities to provide good habitats for a variety of wildlife within the limitations of a site experiencing high footfall, much vehicle access and parking areas. We are committed to creating specific areas that can be beneficial on a long term sustainable basis, that go beyond the ‘recommendations for reasonable biodiversity enhancements’ suggested by the Ecological Survey and Assessment prepared by John Dobson of Essex Mammal Surveys in January 2022. The survey found that the protected and priority species which should be considered are: Hedgehogs, Common toads, nesting birds and bees. However we are additionally looking at other aspects of the ecological cycle by enhancing habitats, with the introduction of new fertile areas for healthy plant growth, to promote increased insect activity and therefore better feeding and breeding grounds for birdlife.

Detailed designs to achieve our stated objectives

Prioritised Species – Hedgehogs Sadly hedgehogs have not been seen on the site for many years, but we hope to make them comfortable should they chose to arrive. We will ensure that new planting and infilling of hedgerows around the curtilage of the site, will enable gaps of at least 13cm x 13cm at their base to facilitate foraging. There will be no boundary fencing that obstructs the pathways of animals of this kind. We have identified a suitable place for a hedgehog nesting box that will not involve animal crossing points on vehicle access routes. This is on the periphery of the site, close to the base of the hedge, near Bridleway 24, sheltered by the electrics cabin next to the telegraph pole.

Owls and bird boxes The owners of the site have been actively enabling Barn Owl breeding in association with Essex wildlife Trust for a number of years. With advice from EWT we will position a Barn Owl box high up on the exterior of the main barn with the hope of extending the network of already active boxes in the area. An additional smaller nesting box can be placed on the electrics cabin for birds or bats which might be more attractive to smaller species. More advice needs to be sourced to make sure this is successful.

Common toad As creatures of habit and with a limited habitat in the driest part of the country, we can only hope that our damp land drains close to hedgerows will provide the environment that toads enjoy. We will maintain the edges of ditches where possible with grass to prevent soil erosion whilst ensuring blockages do not occur at times of higher water flow. New planting within the courtyard may be advantageous to them but is dependant on their curiosity to explore new territory.

Bees – Enabling good habitat for bees, butterflies and other insect life. We have considered whether beehives are appropriate within the site involving the close proximity to buildings and people sitting, working, moving around and we can suggest better positions on nearby farmland that would be more comfortable for both parties. This will be explored further. As explained later the Compass Courtyard and the Electrics Cabin area are key areas where planting will radically enhance the biodiversity strategy.

Prioritised areas for enhancing biodiversity – the Compass Courtyard The four key planting beds and adjacent planting against walls are a significant improvement on the hard surfaced concrete and hard core of a hundred years past when used as a bullock yard. Designed as a sanctuary for insect and human life the space has planting chosen specifically to emphasise visual attractiveness and pungent smells. All of the planting will thrive with topsoil and compost sourced locally for good healthy soil and subterranean life, providing minimum contamination imported from further afield. The planting includes small hedging, honeysuckles, small trees and bushes, grasses and flowering plants such as lavender, verbena, hellebore, echinacea, narcissus, myrtle and herbs – rosemary, sage, oregano, mints – all known for successful growth within the local environment sustaining local wildlife. The Electric Cabin area has always been a small piece of rough ground on the edge of field and hedgerow. It will be planted up with a wild bird seed mix to bring attention to biodiversity on farmland that is facilitating ‘green highways across the countryside’ particularly in mind for the implementation of verges and hedgerows near to footpaths and bridleways. Hedgerows are a critical addition to enhancing the biodiversity network of the site and should never be underestimated. Focus will be paid to assisting with the farm program in association with FWAG, to extend existing hedgerows particularly around parking areas with native hedge varieties including berry and fruit rich species of bird and animal interest.

Plans and locations of our proposed strategy can be seen in depth on our landscaping schedule

Persons responsible and long term maintenance for sustainability

As this strategy involves much new planting, it will need a high level of attention and nurturing particularly in the first year of implementation. It will also need close monitoring and creative versatility if (say) positioning of bird boxes should need readjustment. Volunteers from EWT have been involved with monitoring barn owls on the farm in the past and we hope to encourage any voluntary groups or interested parties to be engaged in our biodiversity programme for research purposes in the future. The landscaping will be managed on a regular part time basis by a ‘gardener’ with the assistance of an irrigation system. This has been designed as an integral part of the courtyard functionality, with rain water catchment from roofs, recycled to feed the water feature and irrigation. The water feature within the courtyard has been created to be of use for both birds to bath in and toes to dangle in, as enjoyment is as essential as safety in any good habitat.