

Chalkeith Reserve Management Plan

1. Introduction

Chalkeith Nature Reserve comprises a mosaic of calcareous grassland, young woodland, and scrub habitats. These habitats support a diverse range of flora and fauna, including species of conservation importance. Situated to the South-east of Needham Market the plant community is unusual in Suffolk, but quite typical of the chalky hinterland of the River Gipping in and around the Needham Market area. Many of the plants recorded here are associated with chalky soils. The site has become a refuge for a myriad of insects including some nationally rare species. This management plan sets out objectives and actions to conserve and enhance biodiversity, maintain habitat condition, and balance ecological needs with appropriate public access.

2. Site Description

The reserve lies in part on calcareous soils derived from chalk or limestone, supporting species-rich grassland, on 8.24 hectares/20.3 acres of farmland which has not been cropped since 1991. Areas of scrub and young woodland have developed through natural succession. A series of ponds exist, some of which have the potential for development for ecological benefit and improved habitat. Other pools offer the possibility to be managed for flood mitigation on Needham Road. These should be treated as separate entities as run-off from fields and ditches will have a detrimental effect on a wildlife pond. The site primarily will be a refuge for wildlife but will also be used for low-impact recreation and education within the local community. This will be encouraged by regular guided walks explaining the management objectives and progress to date. Chalkeith Nature Reserve will be managed for all key habitats with priority given to the chalk grassland which has developed over time.

Key Habitats

- Calcareous grassland.
- Scrub (hawthorn, blackthorn, bramble, dogwood, etc.)
- Young woodland (early successional broadleaved species)
- Ponds
- Hedgerows

3. Management Objectives

1. Maintain and enhance species-rich calcareous grassland.
2. Control scrub and woodland succession to prevent grassland loss.

3. Develop structurally diverse scrub and woodland to benefit wildlife.
4. Support priority and locally important species.
5. Maintain safe and sustainable public access.
6. Encourage local community involvement and provide interpretation and signing.
7. Monitor habitat conditions and adapt management as required.
8. Promote dead-wood habitat where possible.
9. Increase the size of the existing pond and create new ponds where ground conditions allow.
10. Create suitable access for work vehicles.
11. Manage hedgerows to improve or conserve diversity
12. Layer and regap hedge adjacent to Mill Lane

4. Habitat Management Prescriptions

4.1 Calcareous Grassland

Objectives

- Retain open, species-rich sward.
- Promote chalk grassland restoration.
- Protect characteristic calcareous grassland plants and invertebrates.
- Encourage continued rabbit grazing, but erect exclosures to investigate species regrowth.

Management Actions

- Ensure all operations are minimal intervention.
- Control scrub encroachment through hand-cutting or mechanical removal during autumn and winter.
- Create grassland by deeply scalloping edges of scrub and young woodland
- Avoid fertilizer, herbicide and pesticide use.

- Retain small areas of varied sward height for invertebrates.

4.2 Scrub

Objectives

- Maintain scrub as a valuable habitat without allowing excessive spread into grassland.
- Provide varied age structure for birds, invertebrates, and mammals.
- Create openings in dense scrub to enable light ingress and increase grassland.

Management Actions

- Implement rotational scrub management with a view to maintenance on a 5–10 year cycle.
- Retain dense scrub for nesting birds while creating deeply scalloped edges to promote grassland wherever possible.
- Remove scrub selectively from grassland margins.
- Control invasive or non-native species if present.
- Leave some cut material in discreet piles for reptiles and invertebrates.

4.3 Young Woodland

Objectives

- Develop healthy, structurally diverse woodland.
- Prevent excessive shading of adjacent grassland.
- Create deeply scalloped edges to promote chalk grassland.

Management Actions

- Thin young trees to promote varied structure and native species.
- Monitor for disease.
- Retain deadwood (standing and fallen) where safe to do so.
- Control natural regeneration at woodland–grassland boundaries.
- Encourage native ground flora through selective canopy management.

- Build stumperies for additional invertebrate habitat.
- Encourage bramble regeneration.

4.4 Ponds

Objectives

- Improve existing ponds.
- Investigate potential for biodiversity flood prevention.
- Carry out Great Crested Newt survey.
- Identify areas for pond creation.
- Investigate possible restoration of ghost pond shown on old maps.

Management Actions

- Open up Southern edge of existing larger pond to allow more light ingress.
- Enlarge existing ponds and pools to help retain water and mitigate flooding to Needham Road.
- Create habitat piles for amphibians.
- Control non-native invasive plants if present.

4.5 Hedgerows

Objectives

- Provide habitat, shelter, and food for wildlife (birds, insects, small mammals).
- Maintain hedge health, density, and longevity.
- Encourage native plant diversity.
- Maintain hedge as a landscape feature and boundary if required.

Management Actions

- Cut sections in rotation rather than the whole hedge.
- Allow some trees within the hedgerow to reach maturity.
- Layer or coppice hedge every 10-20 years. (protect regrowth)

- Allow a rough grass margin to develop for insects and mammals.

5. Species Management

- Protect nesting birds by avoiding scrub and woodland clearance during the breeding season (March–August).
- Maintain habitat features for priority species such as orchids, butterflies, reptiles, or bats where present.
- Allow areas of bare ground to develop for invertebrates and basking reptiles.
- Create feeding plot for turtle dove.
- Continue species recording and carry out dormouse survey and if present install dormouse boxes.
- Encourage climbing species such as dog rose, honeysuckle and clematis in scrub.
- Install and maintain bird and bat boxes and hedgehog hibernaculum where appropriate.

6. Access and Public Engagement

- Maintain current locally created desire lines or create new footpaths to minimize trampling of sensitive habitats.
- Provide interpretation boards at all entrances explaining habitat management and wildlife value.
- Encourage public interaction with guided walks of the reserve.
- Encourage responsible dog control, particularly during bird nesting periods.
- Support volunteer involvement in habitat management and monitoring. Organise regular volunteer work parties.
- Encourage student involvement with study and monitoring the site and species within.
- Keep the site unfenced except where Health and Safety issues are a concern.

7. Monitoring and Review

- Conduct regular habitat condition assessments.
- Monitor key indicator species and scrub extent.
- Review management effectiveness after 18 months.

- Adapt management in response to monitoring results and climate change considerations.
- Carry out revisions to the plan based on site experience to ensure that scarce species are not negatively impacted.

8. Health and Safety

- Carry out risk assessments for all management activities and volunteer tasks and ensure appropriately trained first aiders are available and suitably equipped.
- Provide suitable signage where hazardous work is being carried out.
- Ensure annual tree safety inspection is carried out by suitably qualified individuals.
- Clearly mark paths and manage hazardous trees near public areas.
- Ensure contractors and volunteers are appropriately trained and certificated where necessary.
- Ensure all tools are safe and appropriate for the task in hand.

9. Implementation

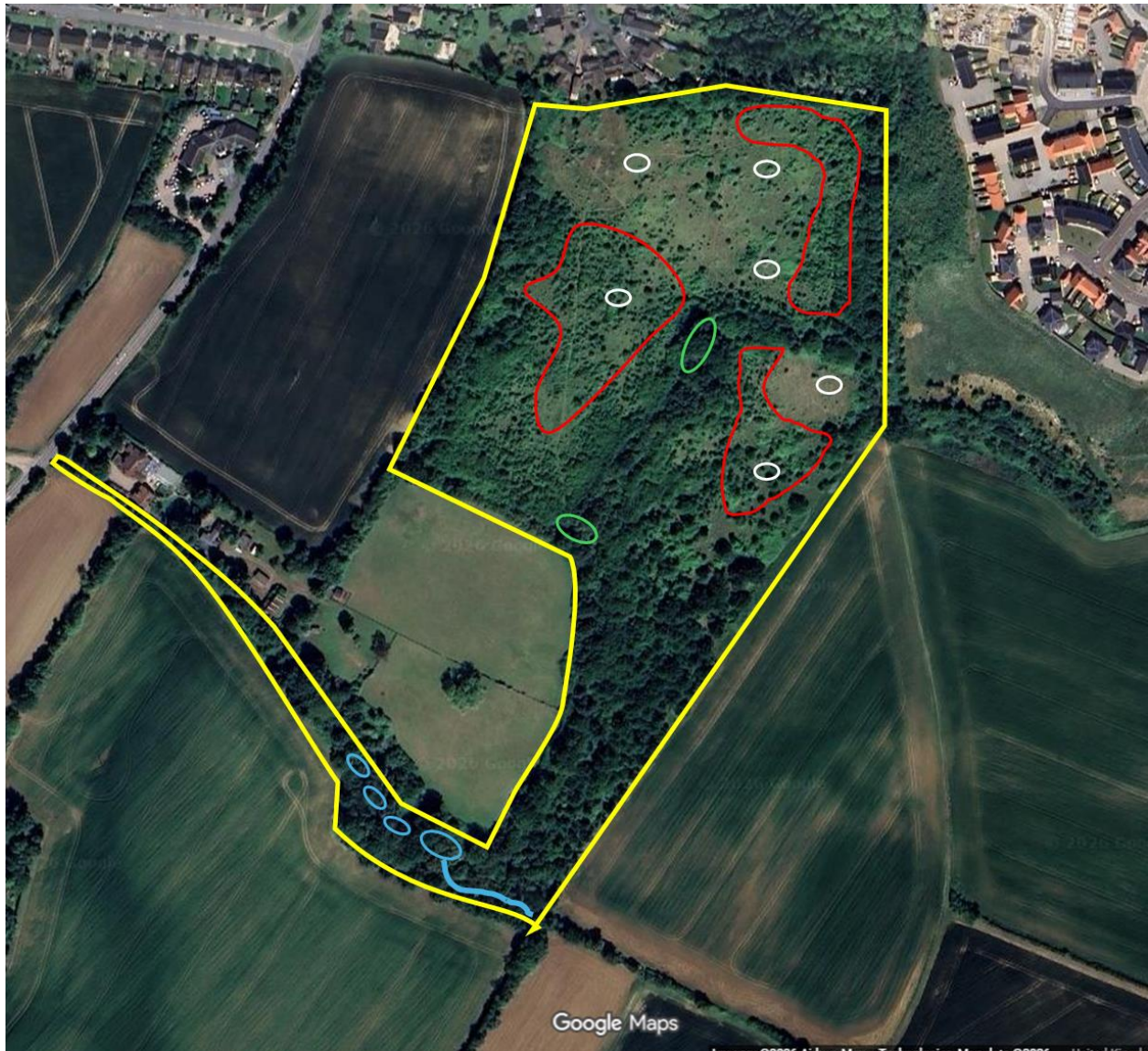
Management will be delivered by Chalkeith Conservation in partnership with volunteers and contractors, subject to available funding and resources.

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Revision: 1.0

Approval date: 11/06/2026

Review date: 11/06/2027



Site map showing management objectives. Red = Scrub removal and chalk grassland restoration; White = Bare ground/scrape creation; Green = Wildlife Pond creation/restoration; Blue = Surface water flooding mitigation via ponds and leaky dams along existing drainage ditch.

Initial Plan duration: 18 months

First review: By March 2028

Date: 14/5/2026