

Sunningwell Parish Village Green

History

This Green was once part of the village's open-field system. Across it you can still see evidence of 'ridge and furrow', the corrugated surface created by centuries of ploughing by peasants along the narrow strips that were apportioned to them. On its steeper slopes are signs of stone-quarrying, another traditional use of the land by the local community. Later the area was enclosed as two fields demarcated by hedges: Upper and Lower Bury Close.



In 1870, in an exchange with equivalent fields further towards Abingdon, this land became the parish glebe, i.e. ground farmed to help provide an income for Sunningwell's rector; but villagers still exercised commoners' rights over it too. In the 1990s the church sought to sell off part of the glebe for housing, but a successful campaign to protect it was carried as far as the House of Lords (then the supreme court of Great Britain), which in 1999 ordered it to be registered as a Village Green.



The church, with its 15th-century tower, from its glebeland (now the Green) c.1900

KEY

- ★ You are here
- ▶ Entrances
- ~ Stream
- ▭ Ridge and furrow
- ▭ Benches
- ⬢ Wildflowers
- ▭ Hedge
- 🚒 Defibrillator
- ⋯ Oxford Green Belt Way
- 🌳 Oak
- 🌳 Lime
- 🌳 Poplar
- 🌳 Willow
- 🌳 Elm



Management

The Green is maintained by the Parish Council to serve as an amenity for the parish and an important part of the local environment. It is freely accessible to all, and some benches have been installed. Grazing by animals, which might interfere with that access, is not an option; therefore much of the Green is regularly cut by machine. Other parts of it are managed for wildlife. The stream at its lowest point is especially valuable. The higher ground affords extensive views of the surrounding area.

Wildflowers have been reintroduced in designated areas, and new sections of hedgerow have been set with an array of bushes, including **hawthorn, blackthorn, willow, dogwood, guelder rose** and **spindle**. Trees have been planted: besides **elm** (see left) there is young **walnut, sweet chestnut, wild service**, and especially **black poplar**, a fine but nowadays rare species. A working party meets regularly to carry out maintenance and enhance the diversity of the Green (see website below for more details).

Wildlife



Since intensive agricultural use ceased, this field has been reverting to a more natural habitat. Look out for **lady's smock**, **cowslip**, and **star of Bethlehem** in the spring; all three main species of **buttercup** (bulbous, meadow and creeping); later **teasel**, **vetchling**, and **lady's bedstraw**. The semi-parasite (but pretty!) **yellow rattle** has been introduced to reduce the dominance of grasses and enhance the range of herbaceous plants. The streamside hosts high stands of red **willowherb** and **purple loosestrife** in July and August. As for the grassland, what may at first glance appear an undifferentiated sward actually consists of a dozen or more different species, some with picturesque names like **meadow foxtail**, **cocksfoot**, **hairy sedge** and **Yorkshire fog**.



One of our local water voles



Marbled white

The Green is home to a number of animals. Commonest are **rabbits**, but **roe and muntjac deer** are often seen and **badgers** more rarely. **Water voles**, now nationally rare, still live in the stream, but you will have to be very quiet to see them. **Grass snakes** may also be found in the damper areas. Birdlife includes regular visits from **red kites**, **buzzards** and **barn owls**. There are **meadow pipits** and flocks of **thrushes** and **finches** in winter; **whitethroats** and **yellowhammers** in the hedges in summer; **green** and **great-spotted woodpeckers** throughout the year. Both owl and bat boxes have been installed. Butterflies include **meadow brown**, **gatekeeper**, **ringlet**, **skippers**, and **marbled white**.



In 2020, disease-resistant elms were planted on the Green to celebrate the centenary of the Sunningwell and Bayworth Women's Institute, and to commemorate the Sunningwell Gardening Club which closed that year. Sunningwell was previously known for its elms (now sadly gone) - we hope that these new trees will still be standing on the Village Green in another 100 years.

