

Land Management Plan 2025/26

Introduction

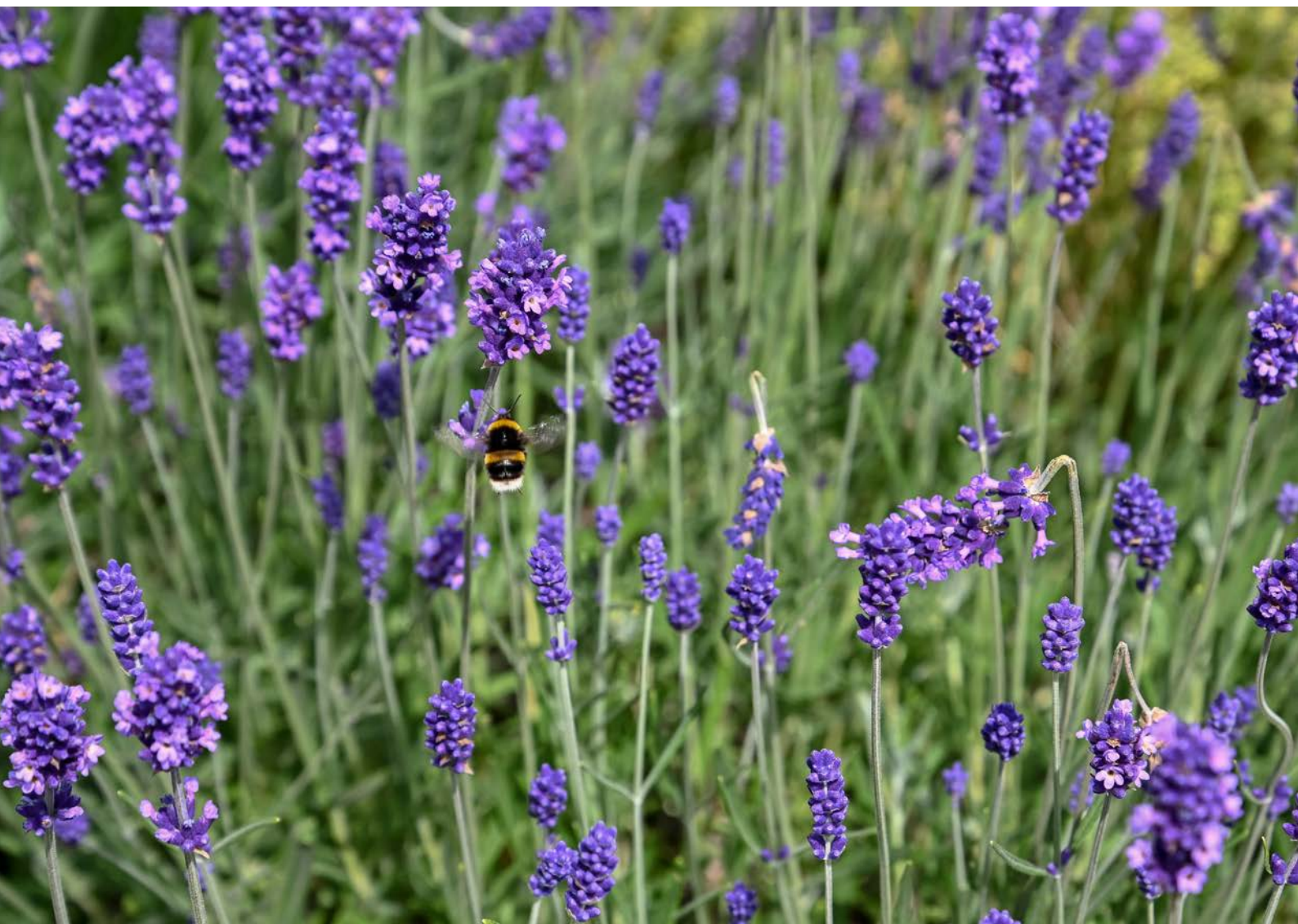
As well as the thousands of visitors that Ely Cathedral and its surroundings attract every year, the Cathedral grounds are a popular destination with the local community. Areas made available to the public are used for worship, fairs, wedding photographs, concerts, picnics or simply a space to pause and take stock.

Inspired by their participation in **A Rocha UK's Eco Church** scheme and being awarded the prestigious **gold award**, Ely Cathedral is committed to managing their land in a way that supports biodiversity, maximises carbon capture and storage, and provides everyone with an opportunity to enjoy nature and a sense of wellbeing.

We believe that the more we do, and the more we explain, we are visibly changing therefore encouraging our community and visitors to think about the positive impact we can all have on nature and to start to make changes themselves.

To ensure best practice, we work with local and national organisations including:

- East Cambridgeshire District Council (ECDC)
- A Rocha UK
- Caring for God's Acre
- Wildlife Trust BCN
- Shepreth Wildlife Conservation Charity (SWCC)
- The Botanical Society for Britain and Ireland (BSBI)



Our Actions

2024/25 Review

- We took part in *No Mow May*, a campaign run by the charity Plantlife for the benefit of nature, communities and the climate.
- 4 hedgehogs, a near threatened species, rescued by the SWCC, were released on Cathedral land.
- In conjunction with Ely Wildlife Watch, we ran *Discovery Morning: Bugs & Bees* as part of Churches Count on Nature 2024 (CCoN).
- 12 Cambridgeshire varieties of apple trees were planted in the Dean's Paddock in January 2025.
- A volunteer *Biodiversity Team* was formed to support our work to increase habitats and biodiversity on Cathedral land.
- Further spring bulbs were planted on Cross Green, with the permission of ECDC.
- C1300 bulbs were planted in the East Lawn Mary Garden to attract pollinators throughout the growing season.
- Volunteers and staff continued to work on existing projects, including the Cathedral Apiary and wildflower bed.

2025 / 26 Planned Actions

- Maintain existing projects.
- Investigate scything as an environmentally-friendly method of grass cutting.
- Develop the flower bed in Oyster Lane to grow plants for the Flower Guild.
- Investigate development of the East Lawn Wildflower bed.
- Work with King's Ely Prep Eco Committee on the area in front of Canonry House.
- Consult local experts regarding planting hedges and monitoring swifts.
- Take part in wildlife surveys including the RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch and CCoN 2025.
- Continue talks with A Rocha UK to become a Partner in Action.

Long-term Objectives

- Investigate the possibility of a pond(s) in the Dean's Meadow to increase biodiversity on our land and act as a carbon sink.
- Install bat boxes.
- Plant more hedges and scrub areas. This would provide nesting sites and foraging habitat (invertebrates in summer and berries in winter) for birds and pollen for invertebrates at critical times of year.
- Expand our participation in *No Mow May* by creating a labyrinth, based on the one underneath the West Tower of the Cathedral, using unmown grass as the boundaries.
- Inspect the Dean's Meadow and Cherry Hill to draft future plans.

Our Land

Almonry Garden (under Cathedral management)

Accessible to the public during the Almonry Restaurant's opening hours, visitors can enjoy the beautiful Almonry Garden all year round. The variety of plants, shrubs and trees make this area a haven for wildlife.

We support the wildlife living in the garden by providing food, water and shelter. As well as the bird boxes and hotels for bees, bugs and butterflies, there is a hedgehog house and also a highway to allow them to roam between different parts of Cathedral land.

Hedgehogs are very welcome in the garden as they eat slugs and insects, and their presence is a sign of a healthy ecosystem. Inspired by the *Hedgehog Recovery* campaign run by ECDC we contacted SWCC and four rescued hedgehogs were released in the garden. 'Our' hedgehogs are registered with Hedgehog Street (<https://bighedgehogmap.org>), a national campaign to save the UK's only spiny mammal.



Cherry Hill (under Cathedral management)

This area, also known as Castle Mound, is a scheduled monument and not currently open to the public. The variety of trees and shrubs, and its secluded nature, allow wildlife to thrive, undisturbed.

Cherry Hill Park (under ECDC management, play area under City of Ely management)

This popular public park, although owned by Ely Cathedral, is managed by ECDC. They have committed to mowing the areas they are responsible for approximately every 3 weeks and will continue to leave areas of long grass which provide wildlife corridors.

Cross Green (under ECDC management, a disused burial ground)

Cross Green is also under the remit of ECDC as it is a closed churchyard. As with Cherry Hill Park, the grass is mown every 3 weeks. ECDC support the planting of spring bulbs around the trees on Cross Green, by Cathedral volunteers. These are a source of early pollen for insects.



Dean's Paddock (under Cathedral management)

Traditional orchards are designated as *Priority UK Biodiversity Habitats* and we are aiming to re-create such an area in the Dean's Paddock. 12 Cambridgeshire varieties of apple trees, sourced from the East of England Apples and Orchards Project, were planted in January 2025, with space and scope to expand over the following years.

In addition to ecological reasons, there is also historical precedent for re-establishing an orchard. Ordinance Survey maps show the Dean's Paddock was part of a larger orchard from 1886–1951. The same area is shown to be covered with trees, quite possibly an orchard, on John Speed's much earlier map of 1611.

Although not accessible to the public on a daily basis, the Dean's Paddock will be open at specific times, e.g. during Churches Count on -Nature Week, so people can learn more about our work to improve biodiversity.

We will also be encouraging pre-arranged visits from organisations such as schools and local interest groups to come and explore the area.

The Dean's Paddock is also the home of the Cathedral Apiary.



Dean's Meadow, including Oyster Lane (under Cathedral management)

The meadow is grazed by cattle during the spring and summer. One of its most notable features is the standing dead tree in the Dean's Meadow. Its value as a habitat for roosting bats, nesting birds, fungi, and deadwood-feeding (saproxylic) invertebrates is considerable. Deadwood, in the form of fallen or cut branches in the meadow, is also retained as a potential habitat for fungi and saproxylic invertebrates

Recognising the importance of hedgerows, a group of young people from Café Church planted a mix of native hedging plants (Blackthorn, Hawthorne, Hazel, Field Maple and Dog Rose) along Oyster Lane in March 2022. This hedge will produce oxygen and capture harmful particulates improving the air we breathe; provide food, shelter and travel corridors for invertebrates, birds and mammals; and help sustain pollinators.



East Lawn (under Cathedral management)

As well as being a popular area to relax with the local community and visitors, the variety of planting in this area attracts many different pollinators.

The wildflower bed on the south side of the lawn, made up of native plants, is managed for the benefit of wildlife. This, along with the Physick Garden bordering the north wall and the Mary Garden along the east wall, provide a wide variety of plants that flower throughout the spring, summer and autumn, ensuring a constant and plentiful food supply for native wild pollinators, as well as the Cathedral honeybees. Signs explain the significance of the planting and the volunteers who work on these projects are always happy to stop and chat about their work.

An area of grass on the East Lawn is left uncut throughout May and into June, as we participate in *No Mow May*, with notices available to explain what is happening. Mowing less often and not cutting the grass as short helps improve the biodiversity of the sward which provides a food source for pollinators. It also increases root depth which is important as deep roots prevent soil erosion and make the grass more resistant to drought, which is becoming a more common occurrence.



Ely Cathedral is committed to:

- Avoiding the use of harmful chemicals (pesticides, herbicides, fertilizers) in the management of our land wherever possible. All licences regarding our land reflect these stipulations.
- Wherever possible, planting native species of trees and plants and encouraging others to do the same.
- Monitoring, controlling and, where necessary, eradicating invasive species of plants.
- A sustainable mowing regime. We mow areas of recreational grassland every 3 weeks during the spring, summer and autumn months; set the mowers at a higher setting; and leave some areas of grass untouched for *No Mow May*. Other areas of grassland are cut 2-3 times a year, with the grass collected.
- Investigating solutions to picking up large quantities of grass cuttings. This is an important part of grassland management as cuttings, if left, can smother delicate plants and increase fertility which encourages rank growth at the expense of wildflowers.
- Liaising closely with the ECDC Trees Team to ensure the trees on our land are cared for professionally, in recognition that they are essential to nature recovery.
- Managing green waste through composting or creating mulch. Waste is collected and taken to our area by Whitgift House, where soft matter rots down as compost and twiggy stiff is used to create mulch and used around the Cathedral.
- A policy of no fires, except in exceptional circumstances.
- Having a restricted number of beehives on Cathedral grounds. We appreciate that too many honeybees can dominate resources and be a threat to other pollinators. We undertake to provide habitats and food sources for all pollinators.
- Taking part in, and encouraging others, to take part in citizen science initiatives such as the BSBI New Year Plant Hunt, Churches Count on Nature and RSPB *Big Garden Birdwatch*.
- Continuing professional development through appropriate training and learning materials.

Landscape Conservation Plan

In the creation of this Land Management Plan, we have referred to our Landscape Conservation Plan (within the Framework Conservation Plan) and its policies for managing the site*.

We fully recognise and embrace the historical and cultural significance of the precinct as well as its natural value. The preservation of the character and layout of the existing designed schemes of the last 200+ years is approached with the policies set out said Landscape Conservation Plan firmly in mind.

The parkland, gardens, open green spaces, framed views, planted boundaries etc. are important assets to conserve as far as possible through this approach, taking care to enhance planting schemes and reintroduce them where appropriate. This ethos has been the starting point for our Land Management Plan, and the reintroduction of an orchard in the Dean's Paddock demonstrates this well.

In addition, we highlight that the Landscape Conservation Plan 'permits change which evolves from social, economic or environmental needs as long as the landscape's significance is maintained'. In terms of ecology within the precinct, we also reiterate that we seek to 'maintain and, where possible, enhance its ecological biodiversity within the framework of retaining its historic significance'.

* Ely Cathedral and Precinct Framework Conservation Plan 2011, Purcell Miller Tritton et al.

To be reviewed February 2026

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