

## Hope CIC Community Farm Project – Girton Local Nature Recovery Plan Group comments

The LNRP Group has discussed the ‘Hope CIC Community Farm Project’ proposal for the County Council land behind The Glebe School, that was presented to the Parish Council at the full meeting on Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> November.

We should preface the comments that follow that we are supportive of the aims of Hope CIC as an organisation.

Nevertheless, we have major concerns with the proposal as it stands. Our core concern is based on the biodiversity value of the habitat type, namely scrub, that will be lost if the proposed plan is allowed to proceed.

Scrub is a much-maligned habitat often seen (as we suspect in this case) as ‘waste ground.’ This could not be further from the truth. Scrub contains native species such as Hawthorn, Bramble, and Blackthorn – all providing food and shelter for a variety of birds and invertebrates. If one thinks of scrub as ‘spread-out hedgerow’, its wildlife value becomes clear. Birds particular to scrub habitats include a variety of warblers (Whitethroat, Lesser Whitethroat, Garden Warbler), finches, thrushes, and Turtle Doves (‘red listed’ – in danger of extinction in the UK). Pollinators such as butterflies, moths and bees feed on blossom found in scrub and will lay their eggs there. In turn, their larvae become food for birds, mammals, reptiles, and amphibians.

As the habitat map in Appendix 1 taken from the ‘Girton LNRP – Context, aims and objectives’ document<sup>1</sup> makes clear, Girton has little scrub, and this is by far the largest area we have left. This contrasts with Histon where the main area of biodiversity interest is the Croft Set-Aside part of the Abbey Fields reserve which is primarily scrub habitat. (It is worth noting that this site was selected as a County Wildlife Site in 2022, precisely because of the value of its scrub).

We acknowledge the intention of Hope CIC to implement sustainable farming practices, but do not believe the increase in cultivated land within the Parish is either desirable (much of Girton consists of agricultural land already) or can meet the criteria for Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) as set out in the Greater Cambridge Shared Planning ‘Biodiversity Supplementary Planning’ policy.

We also question the sustainability of the proposal. It makes clear that the farm cannot function without local volunteer effort (‘Local residents will be actively involved in the entire farming process, from planting to harvesting.’), and while we applaud the intent to provide skills development and opportunities for the local community, we are not clear there is sufficient volunteer ‘labour’ in the village given the existing commitments to allotments and the ‘Green Team’.

It seems to us that a community engagement opportunity is being lost. The scrub area (with some management work) would be ideal for Girton Glebe’s Forest School, providing an opportunity for educating young children about the benefits of our wild spaces.

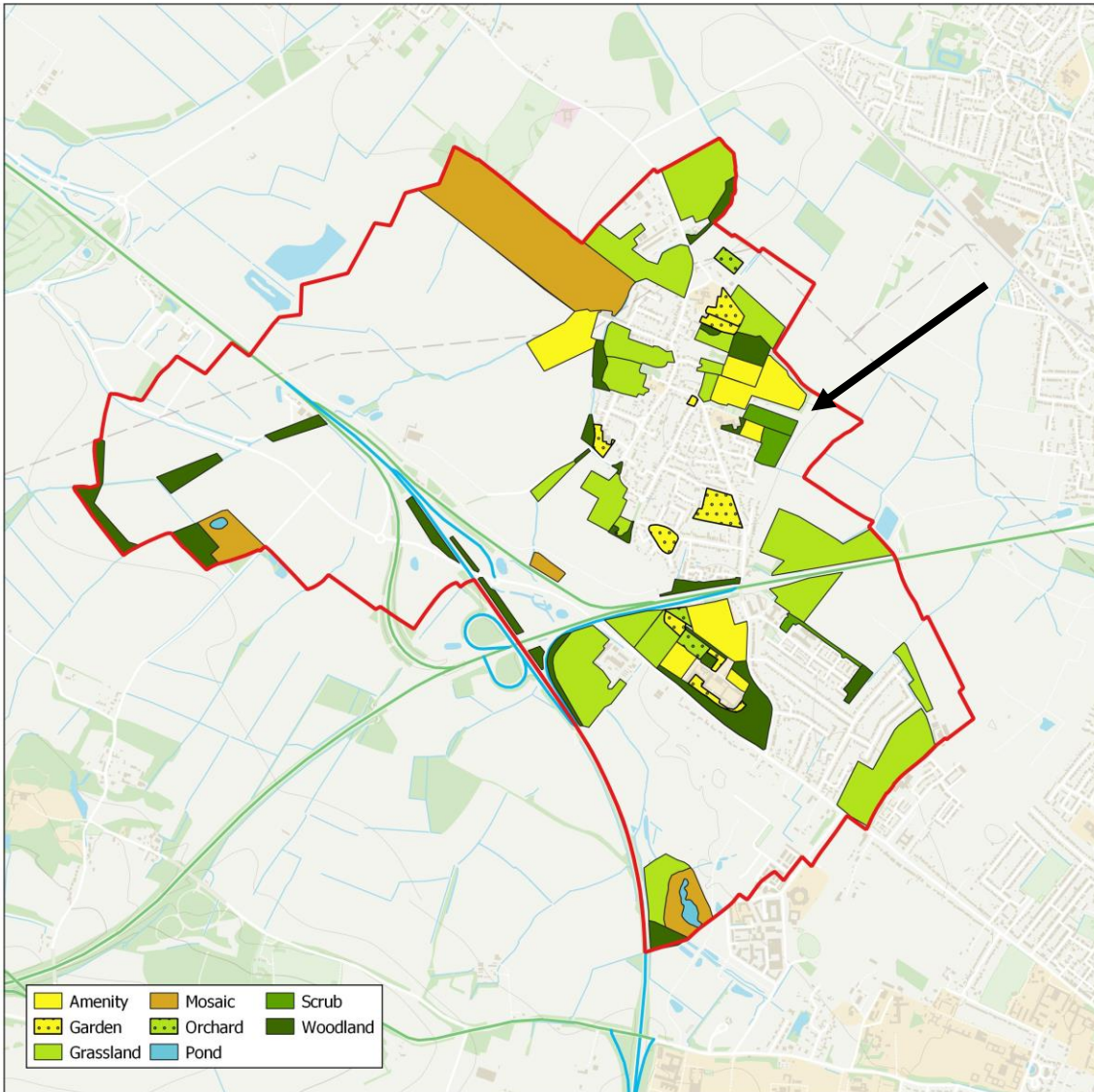
Finally, we also must question the decision of the County Council to lease this land to Hope CIC without consulting the Parish Council first. It runs counter to principles of good consultation in local planning decisions.

Girton LNRP Group

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<sup>1</sup> available at <https://www.girton-cambs.org.uk/girton-parish-council-2/local-nature-recovery-plan/>

## Appendix 1 – Girton Habitat Map



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Map showing Glebe Scrub area