

Mrs J Harding
Parish Clerk, Harston Parish Council
By email

30th September 2026

Dear Mrs Harding,

It has come to my attention that there is a proposal to site a croquet lawn within the Harston Orchard County Wildlife Site and I would like to formally express the Wildlife Trust's response to this. The site is an important refuge for biodiversity in a changing landscape. I recommend that an alternative site is found for the proposed croquet lawn.

Harston Orchard and the adjacent meadow were designated as a County Wildlife Site in 2010 in recognition of their value for biodiversity. County Wildlife Sites (CWS) are the most important areas for wildlife outside of legally protected sites such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and National Nature Reserves (NNRs). There are approximately 470 CWS across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. County Wildlife Sites play a vital role in the conservation of the UK's natural heritage by providing essential wildlife refuges, stepping-stones, corridors and buffers linking and protecting other wildlife-rich places, both in towns and the wider countryside.

Prior to this designation, the Wildlife Trust BCN worked with Harston Parish Council to arrange wildlife surveys and habitat management tasks to understand and manage the site appropriately. The surveys recorded 27 fungi species, 157 moth species and 24 bird species using the site. The County Moth Recorder who undertook the surveys commented that "157 species is impressive for a site of this size". Amongst the fungi species was *Sarcodontia crocea* (Orchard Tooth) which is listed as vulnerable to extinction in the Red Data Book.

In 2007, Traditional Orchards were recognised as Priority Habitat under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan. A survey across England had revealed that 90% of traditional orchards had been lost since the 1950's and of the remaining orchards many were in decline. The main reason for continued decline today, is a lack of planting of fruit trees to secure the longevity of the habitat. However, this is not the case at Harston Orchard where the volunteer team has planted more fruit trees over several years and with varieties that reflect the local heritage such as Histon Favourite and Wallis Wonder. It is this commitment to the future that makes Harston Orchard stand out amongst other local orchards.

When we talk about Traditional Orchards, the term also refers to the associated habitats, and it is the mosaic of habitats that enables biodiversity to flourish. Harston Orchard is surrounded by old hedgerows, scrub, mature trees and grassland. This provides many niches for species to utilise, and





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more niches mean greater species diversity which in turn builds a healthy environment. The dense scrub provides opportunities for birds to nest and to feed on the abundance of berries while the mature trees offer cracks and holes for bats to roost in. The wildflower meadow attracts a wide range of insects which help to pollinate the fruit trees. Grasses are often overlooked as they are not as showy as flowers, but they are essential for the lifecycle of many invertebrates including butterflies and moths whose caterpillars rely on grasses to eat. A healthy and varied community of insects is vital in supporting species of bird and mammal higher up the food chain.

Harston Orchard County Wildlife Site is an important refuge for biodiversity and I recommend that an alternative site is found for the proposed croquet lawn. If planning permission is sought, then the Wildlife Trust BCN would have to object to it on the grounds of damage to a County Wildlife Site.

Yours sincerely,

Laura Osborne
Nature Recovery Officer
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