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CHANTRY PLAYING FIELD

BIODIVERSITY AUDIT

SUMMER 2026

For

THORNBURY TOWN COUNCIL

CHANTRY PLAYING FIELDS

BIODIVERSITY AUDIT

1 INTRODUCTION

This plan is one of a series commissioned by Thornbury Town Council with the aims of assessing the biodiversity interest of green spaces in the town, identifying any changes that have taken place since a similar series of surveys was carried out in 2022, and making enhancement proposals where appropriate.

A site survey was carried out on 23rd May 2026. It covered vegetation types and plant species, insects and birds; potential for other groups was assessed.

2 SITE DESCRIPTION

2.1 Summary

Chantry Playing Fields is dominated by two rugby pitches, which are regularly mown. Strips of grassland along some of the site boundaries have been allowed to grow tall since 2022. There is a continuous hedge, with semi-mature trees, along the Church Road boundary on the northern edge of the sites and the western boundary has a line of trees. Other boundaries have walls and fences with gappy vegetation.

The Playing Fields form part of a chain of green spaces in northern Thornbury, lying between the playing fields of The Castle School and Oakleaze Green to the south-east, and the grounds of St Mary's Primary School and St Mary's Churchyard to the north-west. Beyond these sites are the grounds of Thornbury Castle and open countryside.

2.2 Vegetation

The areas described below are shown on the attached map.

Area 1

As in 2022, the majority of the site has close mown grassland, which is dominated by perennial rye-grass (*Lolium perenne*), with other grass species including creeping bent (*Agrostis stolonifera*), red fescue (*Festuca rubra*) and cocksfoot (*Dactylis glomerata*). There is not a high diversity of herb species within the sward but species present include dandelion (*Taraxacum vulgare agg*), common catsear (*Hypochaeris radicata*), yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*), ribwort plantain (*Plantago lanceolata*) and smooth hawksbeard (*Crepis capillaris*).

The herb component is higher on small banks in the southern part of the site, where in addition to the species mentioned above, lesser trefoil (*Trifolum dubium*) was recorded.

Area 1 a)

There is little variation in the composition of the sward across the grassland area, but it is slightly more diverse in the south-eastern part of the site. Additional species here

include fiddle dock (*Rumex pulcher*), field bindweed (*Convolvulus arvensis*) and germander speedwell (*Veronica chamaedrys*).

Area 2

This is the boundary hedge along Church Road. It is narrow – approximately 1 metre wide – and tall – approximately 2.5 metres. It has a mix of native shrub species: hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), field maple (*Acer campestre*), dogwood (*Cornus sanguinea*), ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), English elm (*Ulmus procera*), blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*) and dog rose (*Rosa canina*). There are several semi-mature trees – lime (*Tilia x europaea*), sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*), crack willow (*Salix x fragilis*), grey poplar (*Populus x canescens*) and false-acacia (*Robinia pseudo-acacia*) – on the southern side of the hedge. Ground flora species associated with the hedge include black horehound (*Ballota nigra*) and cyclamen (*Cyclamen hederifolium*).

The tall grassland strip along the hedge is dominated by false oat-grass (*Arrhenatherum elatius*) with associated herb species including spotted medick (*Medicago arabica*), hedge woundwort (*Stachys sylvatica*) and field poppy (*Papaver rhoeas*).

Area 3

The eastern boundary of the site has a wall with some exotic planting nearby. The wall supports rustyback fern (*Asplenium ceterach*) and maidenhair spleenwort (*Asplenium trichomanes*), together with a moderately diverse growth of lichens.

The tall grassland strip along this boundary is dominated by false oat-grass, soft-brome (*Bromus hordaceus*) and cocksfoot. Herb species include germander speedwell (*Veronica chamaedrys*), crow garlic (*Allium vineale*), grey sedge (*Carex divulsa*), field poppy and long-headed poppy (*Papaver dubium*).

Area 4

The southern boundary of the site abuts domestic gardens and has sections of wall and fence. A strip alongside the boundary has been left unmown. This has tall grassland dominated by false oat-grass with frequent bramble (*Rubus fruticosus agg*) and cow parsley (*Anthriscus sylvestris*). Other plant species here include stinking iris (*Iris foetidissima*), wood avens (*Geum urbanum*) and black horehound, with encroaching scrub species including elder (*Sambucus nigra*), English elm and stag's-horn sumach (*Rhus typhina*).

Area 5

The western boundary has an open line of trees, which include lime, sycamore, grey poplar, horse chestnut (*Aesculus hippocastanum*), walnut (*Juglans regia*) and cypress (*Cupressus macrocarpa*). Several smaller trees, which include pedunculate oak (*Quercus robur*) and rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*), have recently been planted here. The ground flora below the trees is dominated by false oat-grass and also includes cyclamen, French crane's-bill (*Geranium endressii*), musk mallow (*Malva moschata*), hollyhock (*Alcea rosea*), teasel (*Dipsacus fullonum*) and stinking iris. The area of tall

grassland is slightly more extensive than it was in 2022, and additional herb species here include greater knapweed (*Centaurea scabiosa*), hemlock water dropwort (*Oenanthe crocata*) and germander speedwell.

2.3 Fauna

2.3.1 Birds

The following were recorded in 2022:

Area 1 (grassland): Carrion crow;
Area 2 (Church Road boundary): Wood pigeon;
Area 5 (western boundary): blue tit, wood pigeon.

The following were recorded in 2026:

Area 1 (grassland): Carrion crow, jackdaw and starling, with swift feeding overhead;
Area 2 (Church Road boundary): Blue tit, goldcrest, goldfinch, robin, wood pigeon and wren;
Area 4 (southern boundary): Dunnock, goldfinch, robin and wood pigeon.
Area 5 (western boundary): Blue tit, coal tit, dunnock, great tit, wood pigeon.

2.3.2 Insects

The following were recorded in 2022:

Area 2 (Church Road boundary): *Lyonetia clerkella, Parornix devoniella, Stigmella plagicolella* moths.
Area 4 (southern boundary): Red admiral butterfly; hornet, ivy bee, buff-tailed bumblebee; *Eristalis tenax, Eristalis pertinax, Myathropa florea, Volucella inanis, Volucella zonaria* flies;
Area 5 (western boundary): *Aspidapion radiolus* beetle.

The following were recorded in 2026:

Area 2 (Church Road boundary): *Lyonetia clerkella* moth; common carder bee; 24-spot ladybird and *Oedemera nobilis* beetles; *Eristalis tenax, Xanthogramma pedissequum* and *Meliscaeva auricollis* flies.
Area 3 (eastern boundary): *Ditula angustoriana* and *Glyphiteryx simpliciella* moths; 16-spot ladybird, seven-spot ladybird and *Oedemera nobilis* beetles; *Chrysopilus cristatus* fly.
Area 4 (southern boundary): Common carder bee and buff-tailed bumblebee; 24-spot ladybird, cockchafer and *Gastrophysa viridula* beetles; *Episyrphus balteatus* and *Platycheirus albimanus* flies.
Area 5 (western boundary): Red-tailed and garden bumblebees; seven-spot ladybird, *Pseudapion rufirostre, Rhopalpion longirostre, Malvapion malvae, Adisapion radilolus, Phyllobius pomaceus, Rhyzobius liturus* and *Scymnus suturalis* beetles; *Pentatoma rufipes* and *Neolygus viridis* bugs; *Eumerus strigatus* and *Chrysotoxum cautum* flies.

2.4 Amenity

The rugby pitches are the dominant amenity provision on the site. Otherwise, it is well used for informal recreation. An unofficial and unsurfaced path across the eastern side of the park is well used, particularly by students from The Castle School.

3 EVALUATION

3.1 Introduction

Various criteria are used in assessing the biodiversity value of sites. These include rarity, in terms of either habitats or species, which can be viewed in a range of contexts from international to local and also degree of threat: some species remain widespread but are of conservation concern because their populations have declined rapidly. Some habitats take many centuries, or require very specialised conditions, to develop their full diversity and those that cannot be recreated are more highly valued than those that can be readily created. The extent and connectivity of habitats is of importance, since many species rely on large areas of habitat or on having access to different habitat types at different stages in their life cycle. This can be particularly important in urban areas, where species can be lost from small and isolated areas of habitat, even if these remain in good condition. Conversely, sites can have value in a wider context if, for example, they allow wildlife to colonise gardens and other sites in the surrounding area or if they allow wildlife to move into and across otherwise inhospitable areas. In accessible urban areas the public appeal or visibility of wildlife is also a factor in contributing to public enjoyment and wellbeing.

Guidance on site evaluation is given in various sources, including the South Gloucestershire Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) and the 2006 Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act, and has been followed here.

3.2 Habitats

The grassland that dominates the site has been intensively managed and the use of fertilisers in particular has excluded all but the most tolerant species of plant. Frequent mowing means that the grassland is not of significant value for invertebrates, or for other animals.

The grassland across most of the site is of minimal nature conservation value.

The grassland in the south-eastern corner of the site is only slightly more diverse, but it does include germander speedwell, a plant that is associated with species-rich grasslands. Fiddle dock, which was found here, is an uncommon plant that has been recorder from fewer than ten sites in South Gloucestershire, and from only three others since 2000. It is listed as Near Threatened in the Great Britain Red List.

The grassland here is of nature conservation value in a local context.

The hedge at area 2 is moderately diverse in woody species and the proximity of standard trees adds to its potential for birds and other wildlife. The presence of a strip

of tall grassland alongside the hedge adds to its value for wildlife, in particular for invertebrates.

The hedge is of nature conservation value in a local context.

The strip of vegetation at area 4, on the southern edge of the site, is of some value for invertebrates. A large plant of flowering ivy here was attracting very large numbers of insects at the time of the 2022 survey. These include ivy bee (*Colletes hederae*), which is a recent colonist of Britain, as well as hornet and two hoverflies that mimic this species: *Volucella inanis* and *Volucella zonaria*, both of which are scarce in South Gloucestershire.

The vegetation here is of nature conservation value in a local context.

The western boundary of the site (area 5) is of interest for its mix of tree species and the associated tall grassland. The ladybird *Scymnus suturalis,* which is associated with pine, has been recorded at one other site in South Gloucestershire. Four of the beetle species recorded along this boundary are weevils associated with hollyhock; all appear to be rare in South Gloucestershire (only *Malvapion malvae* has been recorded previously). This is doubtless in part due to their small size, but it does indicate that the population of this non-native plant supports a rich invertebrate fauna. The bug *Neolygus viridis* has only been recorded at one other site in South Gloucestershire. It was on lime, its main food plant, here.

The vegetation along this boundary is of nature conservation value in a local context.

3.3 Protected and Invasive Species

No signs of any protected species were seen on or around the site. It is likely that bats use the tree lines on the edge of the site for foraging and commuting and there are potential roosting opportunities in the trees at area 5, on the western edge of the site.

The grassland is mown too frequently to be used by groups such as reptiles.

No scheduled invasive species were recorded on the site.

3.5 Trends

The retention of small areas of tall grassland has increased the diversity of insects recorded along the hedgerows: the additional species recorded include grassland specialists such as 24-spot and *Rhyzobius litura* ladybirds, *Chrysopilus cristatus* fly, common carder bee and cockchafer, showing the impact that even small measures can have on biodiversity.

The diversity of birds recorded was also higher in 2026 than in 2022. In part, this is due to the earlier timing of the 2026 survey, but it may also reflect a genuine increase in bird populations. Species such as dunnock may have benefited from the provision of tall grassland corridors. Starling was recorded at several of the sites surveyed in

2026, whilst it was not seen at all in the 2022 surveys. The Avon population, by contrast, has fallen by around 50% over the same period. It is unlikely that changes at Chantry Playing Fields alone have had a significant impact on the local starling population, but it is possible that biodiversity measures across the town are having a positive impact on this threatened species.

3.5 Summary

Area	Scale of Interest	Features of Interest
1 (main grassland)	Minimal	
1 (south-eastern corner)	Local context	Fiddle dock (locally uncommon plant)
2 (hedge on northern boundary)	Local context	Value for birds and insects, potentially foraging bats
4 (vegetation on southern boundary)	Local context	Value for insects
5 (western boundary)	Local context	Value for birds and insects, potential for foraging and roosting bats

4 MANAGEMENT

4.1 Aim

To maximise the biodiversity interest of the site whilst maintaining its value for amenity and other interests.

4.2 Objectives

To extend the area of tall grassland on the site.

To extend the area of wooded habitats on the site.

4.3 Constraints

The main constraint on management for biodiversity here is the need to retain rugby pitches on the site, together with short grass around the margins of the pitches. This means that no changes to management can be proposed for a large area in the centre of the site. It is also important to maintain the appeal of the site for informal recreation and to ensure that the informal path across the south-eastern corner of the site remains open.

There are ecological constraints on enhancement opportunities. Most importantly, the soil across most of the site is very fertile (as revealed by the composition of the existing vegetation) and this means that measures such as the creation of wildflower meadows are impractical without drastic interventions to change the soil chemistry.

There are also practical constraints on some potential measures. Initiatives such as the creation of beds of wildflower planting would be worth consideration if there is support and enthusiasm for such measures but have not been recommended here

because they require a commitment to relatively intensive management if they are to be maintained in the long term.

4.4 Rationale

Several of the measures recommended in the 2022 report have been implemented here: management has been relaxed along the site boundaries, allowing tall herb and grassland vegetation to develop; management of lengths of hedge has been relaxed; and bird and bat boxes and insect hotels have been installed. The scope for further measures is constrained by the need to maintain sports pitches, but some further enhancements may be possible.

4.5 Management Proposals

1 Maintain management as at present over most site but avoid fertiliser use on any area not within the rugby pitches.

2 In the area shown as being of higher diversity on the attached map, relax mowing regime, so grassland is cut once a month from May to September, with mower blades set at 70 mm.

3 Cut strips of tall grassland once every three years but otherwise leave uncut.

4 Plant trees on site boundaries as possible.

5 Replace bird and bat boxes as necessary.

6 Maintain bug hotels

Measures such as drilling holes in wooden posts can also provide nest sites for solitary bees.

7 Retain any dead wood as a habitat feature, place in partial shade in area 5. Logs should be kept in as large sections as possible, because this makes them difficult to move and also provides optimal habitat for wildlife.

4.6 Work Planner

Task	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Maintain amenity grassland over most of site, avoid use of fertilisers	Throughout	Throughout	Throughout	Throughout	Throughout
Mow herb-rich grassland, set mower blades at 70mm	May-Sept	May-Sept	May-Sept	May-Sept	May-Sept
Mow one-third of tall grassland strips on a rotation, so each area is cut once every three years	Sept	Sept	Sept	Sept	Sept

Plant trees and shrubs	As possible
Maintain bug hotels	As necessary
Create dead wood piles in area 5	When possible



