

We are sincerely grateful to the Trustees of The Nineveh Charitable Trust for their very kind support of Caring For Life's Conservation Project over the past year. The Trustees' kind grant in November 2020 was a great help with the Species Monitoring Project enabling the conservation team to provide a wider and richer resource of wildlife footage to share with our beneficiaries during lockdown, as well as providing accurate data in assessing the success of our conservation work.

As with many organisations, the COVID-19 pandemic has greatly impacted Caring For Life's ministries. Further information regarding our reconfigured services over the past year is outlined later in this report (pages 4-6). But firstly, I am pleased to include an update on the Conservation project, and I do hope that it is encouraging for you to read (pages 1-3).

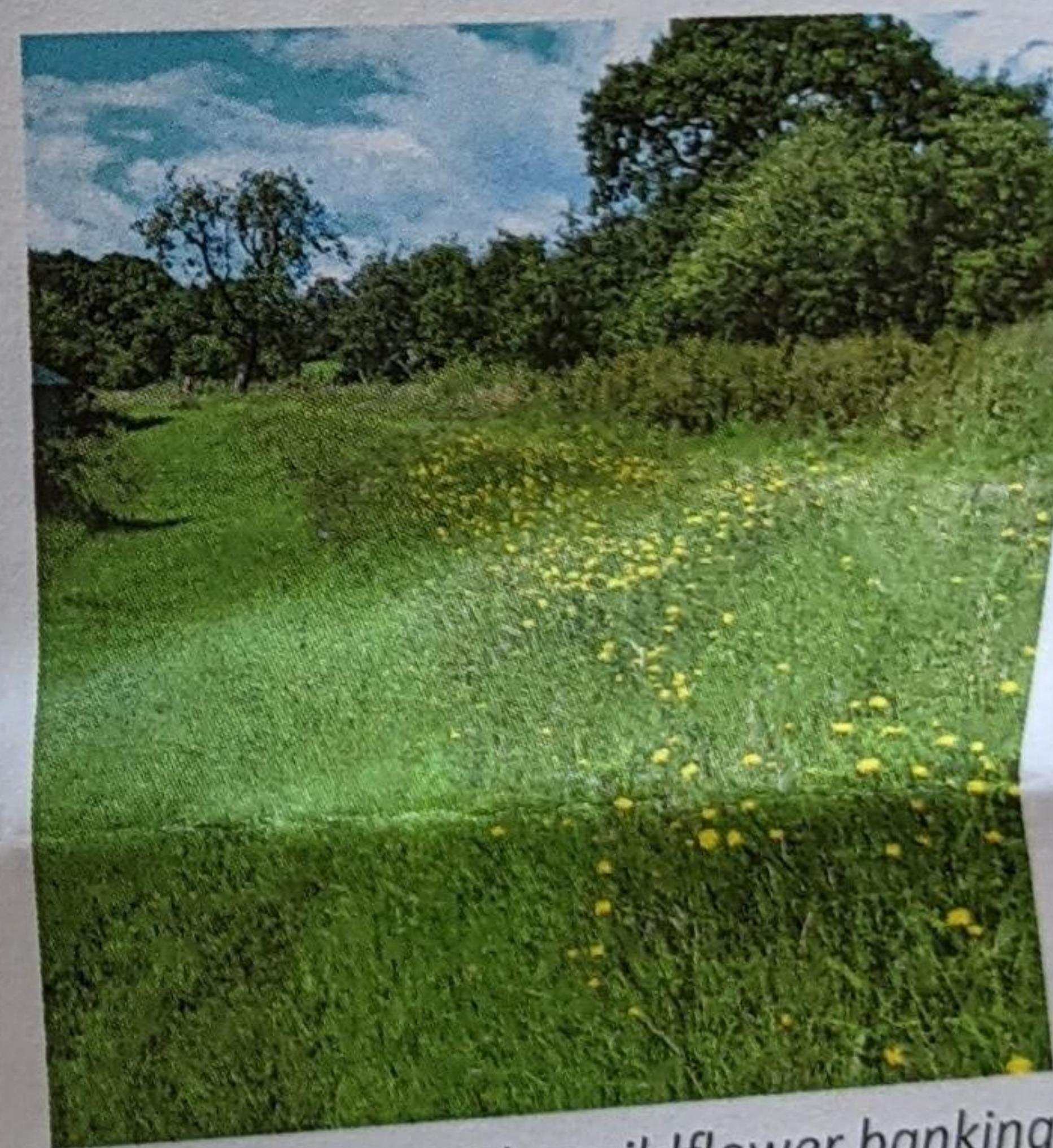
### The Conservation Project

The Conservation Project at the farm continues to be a popular venue for local conservation groups, churches, disability groups, elderly persons groups and a growing number of customers to our Granary Restaurant, Farm Shop and Garden Nurseries, although our social enterprises have been impacted by the pandemic.

Jake Auty is responsible for all the gardens at the farm and leads the Conservation Project. Jake supports a total of 14 beneficiaries on the project spread across a week, and though unable to visit the farm for most of the past year, they have continued to really enjoy learning more about wildlife and the countryside.

Much has been achieved within the conservation area over the past two years. Following the restoration of the ponds in order to enrich various areas of the conservation site and increase biodiversity of species, we embarked on a three-year programme of pond planting and wildflower planting within the following areas: a new small wildflower meadow created by the pond restoration work, wildflower bank maintenance, the fruit and nut zone woodland area, and the bluebell woodlands.

The ponds in the valley now have a resident heron, along with mallards and tufted ducks which nested on the ponds in 2020, and we have also had visiting swans. We saw an abundance of tadpoles in spring 2020, and newts in the sensory pond. Following the restoration work, the ponds were replanted with oxygenating plants and others which were put in as marginal plants along the wildflower edges. A new area created by this restoration work is to be turned into a small wildflower meadow, running next to the wildflower banking providing a mown pathway through the wildflower area for the public to enjoy. We continue to monitor the wildflowers that have colonised the area naturally, including mayweed, poppies and field pansy, and will then be sowing the full meadow.



*The wildflower banking*



*The Japanese Garden*

Before lockdown, the conservation team had planned to create a Japanese style garden in the conservation area. Due to the pandemic, the beneficiaries weren't able to be as involved in the project as planned, but Jake still ploughed on with the planning, landscaping, and planting. In recent weeks as beneficiaries have returned to the project, they have been able to help with the final stages of planting, laying the new gravel floor, and placing Bonsai trees (which have been grown in the Horticulture Project over a number of years) in the new display shelving.

## **Species Monitoring**

Throughout the 34 years of the Trust's existence, there has been a strong belief that the land the farm occupies should be properly stewarded and cared for to the benefit of people and wildlife alike. This has resulted in substantial efforts to recreate wildlife habitats including the digging and maintaining of ponds, the planting of miles of native hedging and hundreds of trees. This has led to the return of wildlife, and the development of the Conservation Project to care for the wildlife. As a result, there has been a need to carry out species monitoring, not only to see how different species are prospering from year to year, but also to evaluate what else could be done to develop the environment to increase species diversity.

This began with regular monitoring through involvement in regular bird and bumblebee surveys, the running of a moth trap, and the purchase of a bat detector, which started the process of producing accurate data for what species were resident at the farm. These activities not only produced valuable data as participants in citizen science, but also proved a very accessible way for our beneficiaries to engage in conservation work, opening up exciting opportunities to study something they had never seen before.



*A kingfisher recorded on a trail camera*

Advances in technology combined with the onset of lockdown provided further opportunities to continue species monitoring work remotely. Funds were raised, through generous donations from Trusts such as yourselves, for trail cameras that could be left running whilst projects were closed. The footage could then be sent to our beneficiaries electronically or as a DVD in the post. This was a resounding success and the wonderful footage of large mammals such as deer and badgers has been a real boost to those who had been missing being able to attend the Conservation Project and be involved with

wildlife on the farm. Support workers throughout the charity were able to use these videos to encourage, engage, and inspire even new beneficiaries who had not ever been to the farm.

The purchase of audio equipment to record bird song, barn owl boxes, small mammal traps and a nest box camera also provided opportunities for the future recording of species found here. This equipment has been invaluable in keeping beneficiaries engaged with the Conservation Project and crucially has provided a much-needed reason to keep going until they are able to use it for themselves on their return. It has been wonderful to see beneficiaries begin to return to the project in the past few weeks, not all have felt ready to return despite the reduction in numbers to allow for social distancing, but we look forward to the day that the Conservation Project is running at full strength again with beneficiaries engaging with nature, learning about wildlife, and enjoying the natural beauty of the conservation area.

## ***Objectives of the Conservation Area***

The Conservation project team would like to achieve the following objectives in 2021, subject to COVID-19 restrictions:

- Regular pond dipping to monitor species and the health of the ponds.
- Ongoing maintenance of restored ponds to avoid the over-encroachment of reeds and rushes, which formerly caused the ponds to dry out.
- Maintenance work on the ditch between the scrapes, and the scrape entrances, where the ditch empties into the scrapes, to remove a build-up of silt and keep water flowing freely through the whole system
- Selective treatment of invasive plant species, including hand removal; particularly Himalayan balsam.
- Maintenance of habitats for and monitoring of species of wild birds, mammals, amphibians, reptiles, butterflies, moths and insects on site, including the creation of further "bug hotels".
- Further planting of boundary hedges with traditional species, plus restoration of dry-stone walling, if funds allow, which is an important habitat.
- Further wildflower enrichment, specifically in the lower fruit and nut zone area.

- Moth species monitoring using a newly acquired moth trap, as well as binoculars and up to date species monitoring books and charts, to enable the Conservation Project Leader to undertake monitoring with beneficiaries.
- Continued coppicing, including use of stakes for hedge laying.
- Monitoring of the badger sett on site, to ensure there is no predation by poachers, as has formerly happened, though thankfully there has been no poaching seen on site since boundary hedging was improved, along with night security.
- Continued input to community science through uploading bird and wildlife observed on site to BTO, plus Bee and Butterfly count surveys.
- Continued use of a WhatsApp group to upload photos of sightings and notes on weather conditions, to aid in species monitoring throughout the year, feeding information into an annual report.
- Monthly bird, mammal, flower, and insect surveys, including monitoring of a barn owl box.
- Installation of a barn owl box in the hay barn and swift boxes on suitable buildings.
- Monitoring of wildlife via cameras and small mammal traps.
- Completion of the Japanese-style garden

### *Conclusion*

Although life at the farm has changed in the past year due to the pandemic, the Conservation has continued to provide a source of joy and encouragement to our beneficiaries through regular updates from Jake, including Zoom calls and videos from the species monitoring equipment. It has been such a blessing to see beneficiaries return to the farm over the past few weeks and take a keen interest again in the Conservation Project and all that has changed in the past year.



The conservation area has been so important in this last year in providing a beautiful and safe place for our support workers to take beneficiaries on socially distanced walks with a takeaway drink from our café when restrictions allowed. These facilities have also been opened up to customers of our social enterprises in recent weeks, including the children's play area, and it is wonderful to see people enjoying the area. It has been so encouraging to welcome back visitors and beneficiaries to enjoy these areas of natural beauty once again.

**We are deeply grateful to the Trustees of The Nineveh Charitable Trust for all their wonderful support of the conservation project this past year.**

## **Reconfiguration of Care in the Coronavirus Crisis**

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020 required the entire work of Caring For Life to change, with a new method of support being rolled out to ensure we could meet the needs of our beneficiaries in a new world of social distancing, restrictions, and lockdown, as well as ensuring that emergency referrals could continue.

### ***Reconfiguration of care at our supported living homes***

Residents of our two supported living homes were enabled to self-isolate, as some residents needed to shield. They were provided with round the clock staff support, with staff members avoiding overlap and taking many health and safety measures to avoid bringing infection into the home. We are grateful that to date, the residents have all kept safe from COVID-19.

Residents were supported with a programme of regular activities, to replace the therapeutic programme they formerly attended at Crag House Farm. They also benefitted from distant pastoral support from additional CFL staff and were sent photos, video clips, quizzes, activity packs, health and hygiene tips, and so forth. As lockdown continued, a weekly programme of activities was offered to all residents, to help give more structure to each day.

### ***Reconfiguration of care for our wider beneficiaries in the community***

Each person previously supported by our Being There (Housing Support) team and all attendees of the therapeutic farm-based projects were provided with:

- A named key worker from the newly formed Core Team (made up of the existing Being There team, and other members of staff, such as therapeutic project leaders, whose roles had to be adapted because of the restrictions).
- Regular pastoral phone calls from their worker.
- Food parcels, ready meals, household essentials, and prescription medication delivered to them if required.
- Photos, video clips, health and hygiene tips, competitions and quizzes which were sent out via smartphones and devices.
- A weekly programme of online activities to provide people with some structure and encourage socialisation in an isolating time, including cookery sessions, art and craft sessions, coffee and chat, football focus, and the ever-popular weekly quiz!

## **Positives During The Pandemic**

### ***Online support***

The value of enabling people to meet up online in the safe environment of our cookery, craft, quiz or football focus sessions, or our coffee and chat times, has been made abundantly clear as people have been so pleased to see their support staff and friends. There has been much laughter about DIY haircuts, and it has been wonderful to see people interacting so happily, knowing that their whole week will have been lifted by these experiences.



*Zoom catch up with the Longhorn Cows!*

Alongside activities such as the popular weekly quiz, Zoom visits to Crag House Farm enable any of the beneficiaries to see how the animals are doing and feel a part of all that is going on. This engenders a tremendous sense of belonging and ownership, which helps to give a sense of purpose in life, even when people may feel very low about themselves and their circumstances.

Zoom tours of the conservation area, the animals and sensory gardens at the farm, demonstrations of opening a moth trap, short films of the beck running through the valley, and sounds of birdsong, all provide

a window into the natural world, which has been vital for those living in high rise flats, with no garden or balcony and no safe area to walk in, due to where they live in the city.

### **Phone calls**

Daily and weekly support via the phone has been a key part of the support that our Core Team have provided to all beneficiaries throughout the pandemic. Some beneficiaries have no internet access, and it has been vital to ensure that such individuals still feel connected through regular phone calls. The value of a simple phone call was brought home to us recently, when one of our support workers phoned a beneficiary first thing in the morning, saying 'You were top of my list to phone today'. It clearly meant a lot to him, because he replied, 'I've never been top of anyone's list before'.

Caring For Life's Core Team have spent a good deal of time talking to the beneficiaries about the issues they face and also helping them to think about more positive things. They have dealt with housing issues, organised and delivered food parcels and support, answered questions about anything and everything, told jokes, and encouraged and supported each individual as needed. They have been able to set up 3-way conversations with other agencies, health professionals and doctors, so that beneficiaries get the external support they need.

### **Socially distanced physical meet ups**

As the mental health of those supported deteriorated significantly due to the pandemic, social isolation, and heightened anxiety, the Core Team stepped up the amount of physical, albeit distanced, contact made available to those most at risk. This included calling at people's homes and speaking to them on the doorstep, via an open window or in their gardens.

Socially distanced walks proved vital, helping to improve people's physical health and enabling crucial face-to-face chatting and simply listening. Visits to Crag House Farm have also been invaluable, whenever allowed. Just setting foot on the farm, chatting with a staff member, walking in the countryside, seeing the livestock, and enjoying a coffee or ice cream, has all been a tremendous boost to those who were becoming depressed and reclusive.

### **Food parcels**

Since the onset of the pandemic, through the most severe times of restriction and lockdown, as well as the times when shops have been more accessible (but when people have often been too scared to leave their homes or may not have the money to buy food), we have been providing high quality food parcels to those in need. In the case of emergency food parcel requests from social workers, we have provided food to families and individuals who had not eaten for several days. One gentleman rang to express his thanks in person saying, 'I will sleep tonight for the first time in days', and one lady commented to her social worker, 'There are good people out there'.



*Socially distanced farm visit*

## **Looking Ahead**

Alongside the government's roadmap out of lockdown, Caring For Life has been able to begin our own roadmap out of lockdown. This has started with the gradual reintroduction of beneficiaries to the farm with one-to-one walks around the conservation area with a member of the Being There team, along with a take-out drink. We have recently been able to reopen all our projects with reduced numbers to allow for social distancing.

### **Financial Stability**

Income from supporters, our chief income source, has been generous over the past 12 months despite the uncertainty. Caring For Life also relies on income from churches and support groups, which have been unable to meet for much of the last year, although we are undertaking an increasing number of Zoom presentations to continue to share about our work, and we have sought to maximise the use of social media.



*The Farm Shop at Crag House Farm*

Caring For Life's social enterprise raises income for the charity including the sale of farm produce, sold in the Farm Shop, and sales from our Garden Nurseries, both complementing the Granary Restaurant, in an award winning, beautifully restored 17<sup>th</sup> century barn. These developments, including the 1000 square meter glasshouse, were generously funded by private gifts. The Farm Shop has remained open throughout the pandemic, and the nurseries reopened initially with click and collect and delivery services and have remained open since May 2020. The lockdowns in November and January have had

a very serious impact on some aspects of our social enterprise, but as restrictions continue to ease, we look forward to being able to welcome back our much-appreciated customers to enjoy all Crag House Farm has to offer, including beautiful sensory gardens, a children's play area, and a conservation area.