The Gaywood Valley Conservation Group met at Roydon Crossroad on the 02.09.19. for a walk around the fields and woods of Congham with Sue and Sally leading the Group.

The first plant identification was by Sue who found a single blue flowered Harebell plant just near the park swings which had survived surprisingly well given the activity on the site. The continuing part of the walk was through nearby woodland which was dominated by many tall silver birch trees with the occasional oak tree growing at a lower level. It was suggested that the silver birch around the oak trees ought to be removed to allow the oak trees to grow more rapidly instead of their current very slow growth in the shade of the much taller silver birch. That silver birch was a primary colonizer was shown by the fact that individual trees were prospering in the crack of the concrete in the patch behind the factory. The area the Group then moved across was a SSI site because it contained a whole variety of niches and plants from shallow pools, to marsh, and to plants like the grasses, sedge, rushes and small silver birch trees. The trees are kept down by the ponies that have been put on that site for that purpose.

On the Stoney Lane that led to Congham, the houses were large with large front gardens where in many the garden had been relegated to gravel covered areas totally devoid of plants. It was assumed that there were good reasons for discarding any front garden and with it the colour it would bring to each house. Once past the line of houses the road took us on to the turning to Congham, before we branched off before the old railway bridge. This took us along the side of a hedge row separating two fields where one was
the stubble of barley or wheat almost totally weed free which must have been a consequence of a regular application of herbicides. On our side of the hedge row, which was suffering badly for some reason, the plants had again been harvested but the stubble was from forage beans. Unlike the cereal field the soil was completely covered by small low level dicotyledonous weed plants. Here it was assumed that because the crop was a dicotyledonous it was much more difficult to spray it to keep the weeds down. It was notable that in all these fields there was no ‘set aside’ edge of the fields given to wild flowers to encourage insect life. Instead there was a very small edge in one cereal field which was dominated by green Spurge plants. These were confirmed by Sally who showed that the cut stem pumped out a milky exudate. On the opposite side a very large tractor and trailer was collecting small salad potatoes from the field where the driver assured us that they would be in the Supermarket by tomorrow. The next stage of our walk took us through Congham Woods which were dominated by plantations of Beech trees which because of their dense foliage there was no undergrowth. There had also been planting of pine and fir trees where the stands were populated largely by very tall straight stemmed conifer of unknown type. Beyond Congham Wood, a large field of sugar beet had patches where the plants seemed to have died. It was suggested that this was occurring on patches of very sandy soil where the plants had just run out of water. The warm sunshine had tempted out many butterflies including Painted Ladies and Red Admiral. Sally suggested that for some reason the butterflies like the Red Admiral were very large this year. No reason for this could be provided.
St Andrews Congham church was a beautiful, small, perfectly formed building surrounded by trees whereas beyond that there were magnificent vistas of cut cereal fields with large bales of straw over the surface. The harvesting season appears to be well advanced. Congham Hall by comparison had a large area devoted to colourful flowering plants and herb plants.

Thanks are given to Sue and Sally for leading the group and for ensuring that stragglers like Hamish kept up.