

## **Inkberrow Millennium Green Conservation Management report for 2020 - 21**

**The first part covers the period from mid March to the end of August – from the start of the Covid 19 lockdown and the cancellation of the regular work parties.**

It was clear at the **start of lockdown that we had to cancel the regular work parties** but decided to keep the Millennium Green open as a place where people could take exercise. A Wychavon notice about keeping 2m apart appeared at the entrance and in general visitors observed the social distancing restrictions well and are still doing so. There were more visitors than usual to the Green, particularly families and many said what an asset it was for the village in such difficult times.

A number of our **regular volunteers** decided to take some of their exercise by carrying on with the maintenance usually done at the work parties so we did not fall too far behind with the usual tasks. At first this was finishing cutting and pulling the **brambles growing out into the grassland in the second field**. We were behind with this and brambles were our focus into May. **Then we moved on to the thistles! - thousands** (not an exaggeration) were mostly pulled or cut at ground level in the good wildflower grassland in the second field where they have spread prolifically. Creeping thistle is the problem because the thistles come from underground 'roots' which spread horizontally so as one is pulled another grows. However repeated pulling weakens them. The mild wet winter then the hot spell which reduced grass growth favoured their spread. The big patch of nettles on the amphitheatre was cut (twice) and **nettles** in the good grassland were pulled. Some of the extensive areas of nettles and bindweed around the fruit trees were cut and we agreed to get these sprayed next spring if needed. The **wildflower grassland in field 2 was particularly good this summer** - as reported with pictures on Facebook.

In the **middle of May I did a 'stock taking'** of the situation regarding maintenance including a list of what needed to be done and noted then that priority was pulling and cutting thistles and nettles, plus any docks, ragwort, burdocks and hogweed, in field 2. This went on until the end of July.

In the first field Cyril Johnson kept the docks and hogweeds cut in the grassland above the moat where they are a particular problem. He and Mark Robbins also 'had a go at' the small dry valley. The rest of the grassland here was relatively free of invasive species and any that appeared were cut or pulled by volunteers as spotted.

**Regular work parties were resumed in June** when groups of 6 people from different households were allowed to meet outdoors. Volunteers brought their own tools and social distancing was observed. At the 4 work parties in June and July we continued with thistle pulling in the second field and some volunteers continued to work on an ad hoc basis as well. In the end the good grassland was much improved, around the fruit trees was cut, blackthorn suckers were removed from near the seat, the area around the old stump beyond the boardwalks was cleared, and some work was done along and at the top of the little stream valley and Tim Patrickson cleared some nettles on the silt heap.

At the first work party in August we cut the west moat bank and partly cut the northern bank. **Alan and Luke Farnsworth** strimmed the upper anthill grassland one Thursday afternoon and evening in late August. Much of this was raked into rows by Tim, Lucy Hewitt and family, and Dinah before the second August work party when raking up was completed and almost all removed and dumped – finished by Cyril and I the next morning.

Tim has also done a lot of **strimming** including around seats and picnic tables in the first field and keeping paths well cut in both fields. **Chris Bonehill** had cut the main paths round the first field 4 times by the end of August and he did a final cut in the autumn leaving the **paths** with short grass for the winter.

We had planned for Tieren Price to **cut the hay** in the first half of July (before he went away) but the weather was never settled enough. Mark took on the responsibility of finding someone else and it was finally cut by Anthony Steel in early August during a warm dry spell making large round bales – as reported with pictures in 'What's On'.

The **4 sheep** which overwintered in field 2 eventually left in May 2020 after Covid concerns and the theft of Nick Langdon's vehicle delayed their departure. The mystery of the disappearing sheep led to the discovery of a place where the **wire fence had been cut** near the seat on the western boundary. Other gaps were also found around the boundaries in the second field - was it by people wanting to make their own walking route or...? After repairs Tim spent a good deal of time filling the spaces between the double fences with bramble, dead wood etc. In August a very neatly cut gap with the fence wire totally removed was discovered by Lucy Hewitt's children behind the upper seat in field 1 - through which they had disappeared! Presumably cut by someone wanting to access the Green from the surgery area via Carmichael's wood. More time spent doing unnecessary repairs.

The **upper seat** itself became wobbly and was repaired by Roger Winn who also carried out a number of other repairs over the lockdown period - our thanks and best wishes go to him.

I carried out the butterfly '**Big Butterfly Count**' in mid July as reported earlier – numbers were about average but earlier it had been an excellent year for the marbled whites.

**There were no school visits** over the summer but I was able to claim in May 2020 for those which had taken place in June and July of 2019.

I was able to sign off the two boys doing their **DofE bronze awards**. Arran Budd had already done more than enough time and Alex Dalton completed his sessions by working with his father after lockdown.

I cannot say how many **man hours** were spent by volunteers working on the Green but I think it is quite likely that it equalled if not exceeded the usual time spent.

### **The period from September to the end of December 2020**

A plan for **work parties** was drawn covering this period concentrating on **field 1**. In September Tim oversaw the work parties when the roadside hedge was cut and the moat banks finished. The rest of the work in field 1 went to plan. We repaired exclusion zone barriers by pond 2, removed some willowherb and opened up the small stream valley which drains into the moat, cleared blackthorn from the top of this valley near the small bridge and suckers along the hedge line to either side. The hedge by the picnic tables was trimmed and invasive **brambles were cut and pulled all round the field**. The brambles were finished in December while some volunteers removed bramble and wild rose suckers from **the copse**.

**Four sheep** returned at the start of October. In the middle of November there was another sheep worrying incident when a dog was let off the lead despite the notices. Two sheep ended up on their backs but fortunately the attack was witnessed and reported straight away so none of the sheep were seriously harmed. The sheep should leave by the end of March.

In October we had a **Home Education group** visit organised by Lucy Hewitt . Each family (one parent and their children) 'played' nature bingo – which involved finding lots of fruit and seeds around the site and matching them to pictures while learning to identify trees and bushes and how seeds are spread. An additional risk assessment for groups visiting during Covid restrictions was prepared. We hoped for further visits but with the increase in Covid cases these did not go ahead. Thus we only have one visit to count towards this year's **HLS educational access agreement** which ends in May.

Alex Dalton returned at the start of December to do the **silver volunteering section of his D of E award** and although we cancelled formal work parties again in January he has been able to continue with his father again supervising/helping – they a proving a very effective team! Two boys from Pershore High School had hoped to start their bronze D of E award in January but this was postponed and they have both now found alternatives but may do their silver award on the IMG.

### **The period from January to March 2021**

Before the second 'lockdown' a plan for the 6 work parties had been made focussing mainly on **removing brambles** invading the good wildflower grassland, and also **repairs needed, in the second field**. We again decided to work as individuals taking exercise and some volunteers chose areas to concentrate on from the map on the **bramble management plan** circulated in January. Snow and the very cold weather delayed work but at the end of February the two identified patches of brambles had been cleared and much of the 'edging' has been done leaving areas of bramble to preserve cover for small birds, mammals and insects as agreed in the HLS scrub management plan.

At the end of February **debris** mainly blown off trees (or thrown on the ice) was **removed form the two ponds and moat** -the ice having melted! Some watercress was also removed from the moat. The **bird boxes** were also cleaned out with pictures taken and records made of their use.

Fruit tree cage and fence straining wire **repairs** have been identified but not yet done. Nothing has yet been done to improve either set of **steps**. By the end of March we hope to have completed the repairs, removed saplings from the **wet flush**, checked and cut back any branches if needed from the **tall hedge** between the two fields, and prepared the site for Spring by cleaning **notice boards**, updating notices, making sure **paths** are clear and removing any **litter** (this latter is done throughout the year).

Considering all the restrictions over the last year we have managed in a Covid safe way, observing social distancing etc, to do at least as much maintenance on the IMG as in previous years – probably around 500 man hours.

Wendy Johnson  
March 2021