

Inkberrow Millennium Green Conservation management report for AGM March 2018

The first part of this report covers the period from April to September 2017

Throughout the summer we have been cutting / pulling brambles, nettles, and thistles and generally maintaining the site including paths and boardwalks, and removing litter . In April we planted some hazels and other native shrubs on the southern side of the tall hedge between the two gates into the second field; they have since been watered and cleared of grass, and seem to be established even though a bit overgrown. *Unfortunately most of these were cut by Anthony Steel when he unexpectedly turned up and topped the grass in September!* We also put 4 hazels in the hedge by the main entrance to fill gaps. We made and kept clear access points to the ponds for the school visits.

Tim, with a little help from other volunteers, strimmed the moat boardwalk edges and kept the areas round the seats, picnic tables and notice boards strimmed throughout the summer. Chris Bonehill **cut the paths** round the first field about once a month (7 times in all) keeping the first field easily accessible. This management makes the site look inviting and cared for even when the grass is looking a bit bedraggled!

However Anthony Steel **did not cut the hay** as promised. In late September (or was it early October?) he turned up without letting me know and topped the grass although I had previously explained to him that topping did not meet our HLS agreement (unless we then raked it all up!). The weather had been very difficult for hay and harvest so there is some excuse but the situation is not acceptable from our point of view as we broke the terms of our HLS agreement. I informed our **HLS advisor** in September and Mark and I met him in November to discuss future management of Field 1. We will not suffer any penalty for not meeting the agreement this year (ending May 31 2018) so long as the grassland is either grazed or hay cut (or preferably both) next summer/autumn.

The **wildflower grassland** in field 1 was not as colourful this year due to the peculiar weather and the dominance of coarse grasses although all our usual flowering plants were present. The improvement along the **little stream valley** down from 'Gores' to the drain hole has continued with hemp agrimony, meadow sweet and fleabane becoming established. Cyril has cut the paths on each side with our old mower and Tim has strimmed them. It is a favourite route with children and provides various points of interest.

The **wildflower grassland in the second field** was not as good as last year but noticeably better than in the first field. The key flowers such as meadow vetchling, birdsfoot trefoil, agrimony, bedstraw, yellow rattle and knapweed ,which define our grassland, continue to spread and there was slightly more field scabious. Three orchids were seen but they never flowered properly – I think something ate their tops! We had intended to have the main beds of nettles sprayed with Grazon Pro in the Spring but the weather conspired against us being too wet, too windy, too hot.... so eventually in July we decided spraying would no longer be effective enough to warrant the cost. The next few work parties were therefore spent cutting nettles (and pulling/cutting thistles to prevent seeding). Cyril (scything) and Tim (strimming) also spent some hours on weekdays cutting nettles mainly on the top by the fruit trees.

The **silt heap** which still has a lot of nettles near the big ash tree was again cut twice by Cyril but nettles have grown yet again. However the area still continues to improve overall with lots of cranesbill flowers and more grass. We finally left the second field to the sheep after the last August work party.

I did the 15 minute **Big Butterfly Count** again in mid July; numbers were in line with other surveys in this area. (See report). There were good numbers of marbled whites in both fields again this year.

Ten of Nick Langdon's **sheep** and lambs returned to the second field in August. They had an immediate impact on the long grass and the management regime for this field seems to be working really well so long as we can keep the nettles and thistles under control. On 12th September a dog attacked one of the ewes causing serious injury; the sheep survived but cost Nick Langdon many hundreds of pounds in vet's bills and it was not returned to the Millennium Green. The incident is fully reported in the 'News' section of the web site. Since sheep worrying is a criminal offence it was agreed to report any further incidents to the police immediately. Extra wire netting was fixed to the bottom of the gates between the two fields so dogs could not get through.

On Monday May 22nd the **Duckworth Worcestershire Trust** came to assist with the required repairs to the site as listed and reported at the March Trustees meeting. The fence posts, and planks for seat repairs, were ordered from Richardsons who delivered them early in the morning; we had enough of the other timber needed already on site left over from earlier repairs. The DWT volunteers replaced the gate post on the upper gate between the two fields; completely rebuilt the 'back steps' and replaced a good number of the fence posts. Cyril replaced all 3 planks on the upper seat in field 1 and the rotten one plank on the seat by pond two. Tim and I (and Gill for a short time) fetched and carried, cleared vegetation and helped with posts. We contributed about 20 man hours and the DWT around 27. The following work party Tim organised the repair of the fence by the stream near the picnic tables with the help of a new D of E volunteers (see below).

I updated the repairs list a couple of times over the summer and there are still a number of posts needed in the west and north fences in field 2 (*March 2018*) but it is sheep proof at present – although in February one of the sheep was found eating grass in Field 1 having learned to push the upper swing gate and get round it! Also the roadside fence by Church Hill still needs a number of posts replacing (*March 2018*). Cyril repaired the broken plank in the boardwalk in field 2 in August and I stapled the wire netting after they became unsafe. Later in the month we made a temporary repair to the boardwalk by the moat which was a trip hazard. Cyril also repaired the boardwalk fence in late July after it was vandalised and Tim removed the logs from the moat when the tarpaulin was stolen from the island a week or so later. The police were contacted about the theft and vandalism and agreed to include the bottom of Church Hill in their patrols in the evening.

Alan Farnsworth strimmed the good wildflower grassland on the upper slopes in mid September and the cut grass was raked up and dumped in a variety of places mainly along the hedges and fences at the edge of the field or under the trees.

There were **five school visits** over the summer, including the reception class, studying ponds and habitats, being 'nature detectives' and exploring the Millennium Green. The year four visit in May enabled me to claim for 5 school visits for the 2016-17 HLS year. With two visits in June and two in July we already have the minimum of four visits for the 2017 -18 year. The children seem to really enjoy the hands on learning whatever the weather and we hope it also gives them a sense of 'ownership' of the Green so they will respect and appreciate it in future.

Numbers at **regular work parties** have fluctuated but with around 6 regular volunteers and the extra time put in by Tim, Cyril and myself we have managed to get a lot of maintenance work done. Early in the summer we had help from Ed Clinton for a few Sundays and he hopes return. Since then we have been helped by two girls Emma and Alice who are pre D of E volunteers who have to show commitment in order to be accepted onto the scheme. Their fathers have also come along so this extra help has been very useful. About **150** man hours at **regular work parties** and about **150** man hours of **extra volunteer time** have gone into maintaining the site this summer including the DWT time (27) and helping with school visits and raking up the grass strimmed by AF to in September.

The winter work plan runs from October 2017 to March 2018

Another **sheep** incident occurred in October as the ram was brought to join the ewes when the board walk was being repaired; the ram ended up in the moat! This is also reported on the web site with pictures. In December one sheep was found dead and another unable to stand but later recovered. There was no sign of any attack or injury and it was put down to natural causes or eating too many sheep nuts! So for the rest of the winter there were 8 sheep which made a very good job of grazing down the grass in Field 2 before they were removed at the end of February the day before 'the beast from the east' struck.

The reconstruction of the boardwalk round the moat took place in October. We kept the best of the planks and wire netting for repairs to the boardwalks in the second field. This was done by the Duckworth Worcestershire Trust when they came on November 13th.

Apart from one cancelled work party because of the snow on December 10th the regular work parties up to Christmas went more or less to plan. We cut the roadside hedge in October; and later trimmed the other hedges round Field 1. In November we also cleared vegetation round the ponds and moat bank though did not remove any vegetation from the ponds this year. Willowherb and other excess growth was cleared down the small stream valley and brambles were cut back in the first field.

In January brambles and some tree saplings were cut in the copse, behind pond 1 and between the ponds. The work party then moved on to the invasive brambles in the second field where they also removed eye level branches from the fruit trees and some ash saplings and willow herb from the wet flush. Because of the extra help from Alice, Emma and her father, and Aidan who has joined us to do the volunteering section of his DofE silver award, a lot of good work has been completed and Tim was able to organise the cutting of our side of the beech hedge on the boundary above the moat. Most of the nest boxes were cleaned out in February by Rod Talboys with help from Gill and Gareth; Cyril did the two new ones which need screws removing. All but 4 had been used over the last two years and one had two field mice inside.

In March we removed a lot of twigs, branches and litter from the moat and ponds and also cleaned the information boards. Cyril altered the spring on the upper gate to make it shut the other way so sheep can't get out. The proposed Duckworth Worcestershire Trust visit on 19th March was postponed due to the weather. We should finish the planned winter work at the second March work party with general clean up and check of site.

We have again put in about 150 man hours at the regular work parties and around 50 at other times plus the volunteer work done by the Duckworth Worcestershire Trust on their two visits – about another 50 man hours.

WEJ
March 2018