

Report of Meeting with Rob Havard in November 2017

Mark and I met with Rob Havard, our Natural England adviser, mainly to discuss the future management of the grassland in the first field.

He appreciates the problems about hay cutting, which applies to a number of sites, and was not too worried about it not being cut this year but we must get it cut or grazed next year to remove the excess grass.

He made the following points:

Stewardship money must go on environmental management – mainly grassland.

We could cut the hay from the beginning of July (two weeks earlier). This may be more attractive to farmers as it may be before harvest time for cereals. But fewer plants will have seeded so it may reduce the rate of spread of wildflowers. On the other hand it might reduce the dominance of false oat grass which seeds early.

We can change from hay cut to grazing. Ideally we would do both. Grazing could take place anytime from August to April. He thought the changes to the balance of the flora would not be too significant and no species would be lost.

He suggests grazing in Spring which would help to reduce the coarse grass and also late Summer/ Autumn to reduce the sword height for the winter. Both would be ideal but either would be acceptable (or even in winter).

We could use an electric fence to divide up the site into 2 or 3 lots - along paths to allow access. Graze each lot in turn for a short time with a good number of sheep. This would have to be agreed with any farmer willing to put sheep in field 1. A water supply would be needed eg from the small stream which feeds the moat or a bowser.

He also suggested a permanent line of posts for setting up electric fence – which might be acceptable in some parts.

Field two

He is very happy with the results of the grazing regime here. He confirmed that it is OK for Nick to bring supplementary feed for his sheep in the winter (our original agreement says 'no supplementary feeding').

RH has not yet sent the suggestions in writing!

We would probably have to buy the electric fence (we have some bits) but would save the cost of strimming the ant hills area.

WEJ
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