

Ellery Rise Nature Reserve Management Plan

Hambleton Parish Council

Version 02 (Draft)	October 2023
Version 03 (Draft)	March 2024
Approved by Full Council	March 2024

The field at Ellery Rise, Frieth (Postcode RG9 6PH, Grid Ref SU796904) is owned by Hambleton Parish Council and is managed as a Nature Reserve. It has an area of 0.65 hectares (1.6 acres). The field was designated as a Local Wildlife Site on the 11th of December 2019. The field is grassland with hedges on the east and south sides and hedge with trees on the north and west sides.

History:

Before the field was acquired by Hambleton Parish Council in December 2019, it was let by Wycombe District Council to a farmer who used the field for grazing horses. It is not known whether fertiliser was applied to the field.

Aims:

- To increase and maintain biodiversity by creating a variety of habitats that offer food and shelter for birds, mammals, amphibians, reptiles and invertebrates.
- To promote the growth of wildflowers, fungi, mosses and lichens.
- To achieve a good mosaic of sub-habitats, including areas of short turf, bare ground, long grass and a limited amount of scrub.
- To monitor and record the biodiversity through conducting regular surveys (at least three times a year).
- Restoring a species-rich wildflower meadow can take a long time, in excess of 15 years, and there is usually a succession of species. In some cases, additional wildflower introduction may be required, especially if a two-phased introduction of wildflower seed has been undertaken. This may involve using plug plants or sowing seeds of particular species. Or, if the restoration has not been successful you may need to look at the plants that were used in the context of a soil nutrient test, or there may be other environmental conditions such as if the land is prone to drought.

Grassland management:

- As the grassland is the key feature on this site the management should be concentrated on maintaining and enhancing the botanical interest and species diversity.
- Lowland Calcareous Grassland and Lowland Meadow are classified as Priority Habitats. They are now scarce and threatened habitats. The key to their restoration and conservation is maintaining low fertility by grazing or by mowing with removal of the cuttings. However, management should aim to achieve a good mosaic of sub-habitats, including areas of short turf, bare ground, long grass and a limited amount of scrub.
- Managing the area as a hay meadow with an annual hay cut (late July to September – timed to retain seeds), preferably followed by grazing (light grazing in February or March), should deliver the maximum benefit for the botanical interest. Grazing animals can create small pockets of bare ground which have dual value – providing habitat for a range of invertebrates and a niche into which plants can seed and spread. In the absence of stock consider artificially creating open areas by scarifying small areas. Alternatively, it is possible to manage chalk grassland purely by grazing.

- If after-grazing cannot be undertaken, a mat of vegetation, or thatch, will build up over the soil surface. Mechanical removal of thatch using chain or tine harrows will help enable wildflowers and grasses to set seed. The removed thatch should be disposed off-site so that it doesn't decompose and add nutrients back to the soil.
- There is scope for creating 'softened edges' by mowing a wavy or scalloped edge rather than cutting tight to the hedges. This will produce a softer edge, allowing a more natural transition from shrub to grassland. The scalloping will also provide localised pockets of shelter and warmth for butterflies and other invertebrates. The scrub-grass interface can be an extremely valuable habitat for a range of invertebrates.
- Mown paths will help guide visitors and limit trampling. Consider fencing off areas for special conservation.
- As the grassland matures and anthills develop, grazing should replace mowing.
- Blackthorn, dogwood and other scrub species can spread out from the hedge line and will need to be kept under control.
- Consider running scything courses on the site. This could generate income for the site and is a gentler way of cutting and removing the sward, allowing the more mobile insects and small mammals to move to uncut areas.

Hedgerow management:

- Hedgerows, managed sensitively, provide a valuable habitat throughout the year for a range of species. Blackthorn flowers are a good nectar source in early spring and the fruits of Bramble, Blackthorn and Hawthorn sustain birds and small mammals through late autumn and early winter.
- A well-managed hedge with dense growth and well-developed structure, including associated grassland also provides nest sites and shelter throughout the year.
- Hedges form important wildlife corridors through the landscape, allowing small mammals, birds and a range of insects to move between habitats and expand into new areas.
- Hedges identified for management should be cut in rotation such that no more than a third of the hedges are cut in any given year. This ensures a supply of fruits and flowers each year. If this is not possible then try to cut only one side of the hedge at a time to maintain a supply of food.
- Ideally cut each hedge or section of hedge no more frequently than once every three years to maximise berry production.
- Avoid any management of hedges during the bird nesting season, March-August. The preferred months for cutting are January and February.
- As hedges age and become thinner at the base consider hedge-laying.
- Encourage the development of a margin of dense, tussocky ground cover either side of hedges to provide shelter for a range of species and creating a softer transition between habitats with a gradation into adjacent grassland.
- Deadwood, leaf litter and debris beneath hedges all provide important habitats for invertebrates and mammals such as hedgehogs and should be encouraged.
- Where possible, allow trees to grow and take their natural shape above the hedge to create structural diversity. Dead standing wood should be retained where it is safe to do so.

Habitat Creation:

- Consider creating a pond and/or wetland habitat
- Consider planting fruit or nut trees to create a small community orchard
- Install nest/roost boxes for Birds, Owls and Bats
- Create a hibernaculum for amphibians and reptiles and a bee/bug hotel
- Improve public accessibility and keep visitors to defined areas by creating and maintaining a circular mown path.

Additional Information:

Grassland

<http://www.magnificentmeadows.org.uk/>

<https://meadows.plantlife.org.uk/>

<https://farmwildlife.info/how-to-do-it/existing-wildlife-habitats/flower-rich-grassland/>

<https://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/33007>

<https://www.buglife.org.uk/resources/habitat-management/lowland-calcareous-grassland/>

Hedgerows

<https://hedgeline.org.uk/hedge-hub/>

<https://www.nigeladamscountysidemangement.co.uk/hedge-management-plans.php>

<https://ptes.org/hedgerow/managing-hedgerows-top-tips/>

<https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/wildlife/managing-land-wildlife/how-manage-hedgerow-wildlife>

<https://defrafarming.blog.gov.uk/sustainable-farming-incentive-pilot-guidance-plant-and-manage-hedgerows/>