

Agenda item no.	
Report to	Burwash Parish Council
Subject	Down Meadow update report
Date	08/10/2018
From	Simon Forster + Julian Kenny

1. Overview

Down Meadow is owned and managed by the Parish Council and it is managed as a nature reserve. The Parish Council has worked with a local environmentalist (Simon Forster) and Burwash Common and Weald Residents' Association over the last few months to develop a maintenance plan for Down Meadow in Burwash Weald.

Down Meadow is bordered by some tall leylandii, the current suggestions do not include plans for the management of the leylandii, this will be managed separately, but decisions will need to be made as the trees are large and they are blocking sunlight from extensive areas of Down Meadow.

Several surveys have been carried out on Down Meadow including a survey by the Sussex Wildlife Trust Bedgebury Pinetum, as well as Simon Forster's report. This report is based on the advice received to manage Down Meadow as a nature reserve and develop the central area as a wildflower meadow.

2. Access on to Down Meadow

Down Meadow is managed as a nature reserve. It is hoped that the central path will be the only main thoroughfare and people will be discouraged from deviating from the path in order to protect flora and fauna. The path across Down Meadow is the only right of way through the meadow which the land owners (PC) ask residents stick to. Any deviation from the path is done at the individual(s)' own risk and if they do they are asked to observe the Countryside Act.

Several residents whose gardens back on to Down Meadow have created their own access routes from their gardens on to Down Meadow. These gateways have not been agreed by the Parish Council.

The Parish Council is willing to formally recognise the gateways and to look at recognizing gateways from other neighboring properties. The Parish Council will be seeking guidance on whether/how this can be done and will be in contact with all landowners affected.

Suggested Maintenance Plan

Organisation of Down Meadow

- Removal of non-native trees and selected weed trees (willows)
- The central area will be managed as a wildflower meadow
- Peripheral areas and areas below trees will be left as scrub

- The fruit trees that have been planted by local residents can remain, however, no new additional tree planting can be done without consultation with the Parish Council
- Log piles – following the felling or pruning of trees, log pile can be positioned at selected locations within the site. These will provide habitat for a range of insects including beetles, and provide refugia for small mammals, reptiles and amphibians.
- Reptile hibernacula – constructed simply by creating a trench filled with a layer rubble below logs and topped with the turf. These provide subterranean spaces for reptiles and amphibians to overwinter.
- Bird and bat boxes - located at suitable positions within the site, bat and bird boxes increase the holding capacity of the site for these species.
- It is recommended that a botanical survey is undertaken of the site in June 2019 to determine the current diversity of the site and to further inform the proposed site management and the ecological enhancement plans.

Annual schedule

- Mow in early spring, if required, to reduce sward height. Remove cuttings.
- Maintain (mow) footpath route to prevent unintentional trampling of grassland
- Any bracken should be removed by hand or 'topped' using a scythe or strimmer. Continuous removal of the bracken fronds will cause the subsoil rhizomes to die back and the plant will be eradicated. However, this is a long term process and may take a number of years.
- Mow mid-late summer (August) after the flora had set seed. Follow haymaking process by leaving cuttings to dry, turning regularly (daily) to allow seeds to drop. Once dry, remove cuttings.

Note: Ideally, the area would be used to produce hay by a local farmer on the understanding that the cut is made no earlier than mid-August and they can keep the hay. However, due to the small size of the site, this may not be financially viable and a fee may be charged to mow, dry and remove the hay.

3. Management Team

Several local residents have requested to be part of a management team for Down Meadow. It is suggested that a Parish Councillor who has responsibility for Down Meadow works with a group of 4-6 local residents and arranges quarterly meetings with the group to implement and update the management plan. Clear guidance will be drawn up from consultation between the Parish Council and the Management Team. Any changes to the management plan will have to be validated at a full council meeting.