

EASINGWOLD TOWN COUNCIL

MILLFIELDS MEADOW MANAGEMENT

1 Introduction

- 1.1 In addition to recreation facilities, including a substantial area of closely mown grass, Millfields park includes various areas managed to benefit wildlife, including woodland (managed by the Woodland Trust), an enclosed area of wetland, and two areas designated as meadows.
- 1.2 The **North Meadow** is the bulk of the area north of the woods.
- 1.3 The **South Meadow** is the area south of the woods and wrapping round to the south of the wetland, to the main path.
- 1.4 **The purpose of this paper is to set out Easingwold Town Council's (ETC's) plan for managing the meadows.**
- 1.5 Until 2023, the meadows were managed in accordance with informal advice from the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust (YWT) several years previously. This involved cutting the meadows twice each year (Spring and Autumn), leaving a different 20% uncut each time. In 2023, for a variety of reasons, the Spring cut was delayed; with the benefit of hindsight, this cut was too late and was probably detrimental to both wildlife and flowers.
- 1.6 Many would like to see more wildflowers in the meadows and it is intended that the management plan achieves this without detriment to wildlife including mammals, amphibians and birds. In developing the plan, advice was taken from a trustee of the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust (YWT) (Professor Alastair Fitter¹). His advice is appended at Annex A, and is consistent with earlier advice provided by Claire Burton of the YWT (Annex B).

2 Objective

- 2.1 **The objective is to make the meadows more attractive, with a greater diversity of hay meadow wildflowers.**

3 Management Plan

3.1 General

- 3.1.1 Both North and South meadows will largely be managed as a hay meadows, specifically to encourage hay meadow wildflowers. This should not be detrimental to wildlife, which can migrate to the wild refuge areas around the main open areas, including the woods, the wetland, the hedgerows along Millfield Lane and the permissive route.
- 3.1.2 The meadows will be cut in early September (with the arisings allowed to dry before being taken away, ideally as usable hay). If the cut is missed (e.g. due to inclement weather), the alternative is to cut at some other time through the autumn/winter but no later than February.
- 3.1.3 The meadows will be cut mechanically, ideally using a scythe bar (reciprocating) mower. As an alternative, a tractor drawn mower may be used (but not a flail or rotary mower as the arisings will tend to mulch, which will be very difficult to remove and will add unhelpful nutrients to the soil). The sward will be cut short (mimicking grazing), but not so short that there will be a danger of damaging the cutting equipment.

¹ <https://www.york.ac.uk/biology/research/plant-biology/alastair-h-fitter/>, <https://www.abebooks.co.uk/book-search/title/wild-flowers/author/alastair-fitter/>

- 3.1.4 **The key to a successful hay meadow is the removal of arisings.** The removal of arisings is essential to reduce nutrients in the ground: nutrient-rich soil favours grass and dominant species such as thistles, docks and nettles; ‘poor’ soil will encourage a greater diversity of wildflowers. So, arisings will be removed, ideally bailed and taken away as hay. Alternatively, volunteers will rake up the arisings, stacking in piles at the edge of the woodland, or on the area between Jacko’s Way and the permissive route².
- 3.1.5 Throughout the growing season, volunteers will check the meadow regularly for Ragwort, carefully digging up and disposing of any found; Ragwort is poisonous to livestock and its presence will render hay unusable.
- 3.1.6 Yellow Rattle³ seeds will be sown by volunteers after the final cut in 2024, and no later than December. Advice will be taken from Professor Fitter on the sowing of other wildflower seeds to improve diversity/attractiveness. As an alternative to sowing seed, plug plants could be used. NB wildflower seeds need to be in contact with the earth to germinate. Patience will be needed to allow the mix of plants to develop over a period of several years.

3.2 North Meadow

- 3.2.1 The following areas will be managed as hay meadow i.e. cut once annually in September, with the arisings removed:
- between Jacko's Way and the woods (N1)
 - the small area between Jacko’s Way and the rear boundaries of 1 Penny Lane and 25 Larch Rise (N2)
- 3.2.2 The area between the blackthorn and Jacko’s Way (N4) will be cut three times each Summer in 2024 and 2025 to prevent regrowth of the blackthorn that was cut back in 2023. The situation will be reviewed in 2025-26 in the hope that N4 can be managed as meadow thereafter.
- 3.2.3 To prevent encroachment onto the path, a 1.5m strip either side of Jacko’s Way will be mown monthly April-October.
- 3.2.4 Two paths will continue to be mown across North Meadow monthly April-October to encourage walkers to cross the meadow without walking on the areas where the flowers grow.
- 3.2.5 To prevent the re-encroachment of the blackthorn at the back of Larch Rise, the path between the blackthorn and the house boundaries will be mown monthly April-October.
- 3.2.6 Except for the 1.5m mown strip along the path, the area between Jacko’s Way and the wood (N3) will be left to re-wild.
- 3.2.7 The area between Jacko’s Way and Millfield Lane/the permissive route will also be left to grow wild.

3.3 South Meadow

- 3.3.1 The following areas will generally be treated as hay meadow and cut once annually in September, with the arisings removed:
- between the Bike Track and the woods (S1)
 - the area in which the Bike Track sits (S2)
 - between the Bike Track and the convergence of the main path and Jacko’s Way (S3)

² Example of hay rake https://www.diy.com/departments/faithfull-eal020100-wooden-hay-rake-faiwhr/5023969217482_BQ.prd

³ Yellow Rattle is semi-parasitic on grass so will weaken the grass which will benefit wildflowers, but it may also reduce the commercial value of the hay

- the area adjoining the Friendship Garden, between the main path and the wetland, the historic site of the fishponds (S4)
- 3.3.2 Monthly, April-October, a 1.5m strip alongside the paths will be mown, and a 1m strip along both sides of the route of the Bike Track will be strimmed.
 - 3.3.3 Two paths will continue to be mown across the meadow monthly April-October to encourage walkers to cross the meadow without walking on the areas where the flowers grow.
 - 3.3.4 Within area S1, volunteers will manage the alders, thinning some out whilst allowing others to develop.
 - 3.3.5 In the short term (2024 and 2025), from the junction of the main path/Jacko's way towards and beyond the Bike Track, an 8m strip along the main path will be mown monthly April-October to suppress the thistles and docks. This includes the 1.5m strip mentioned at 3.3.2 above. From 2026, only the first 1.5m strip will be cut short monthly, with the rest managed as hay meadow, cut once in September (with the arisings removed); to encourage hay meadow wildflowers appropriate seeds (including Yellow Rattle) will be sown in late 2025.
 - 3.3.6 The undulating nature of parts of areas S1 and S4 may mean it is impractical to use a scythe bar, and removing arisings may be more challenging. As a minimum, to prevent it developing into scrub and eventually woodland, it must be cut once a year in September, and the site will be monitored in case particular plants predominate e.g. thistles, nettles or willowherb.
 - 3.3.7 For 2024, in area S4, alongside the 1.5m along the main path strip that is mown monthly April-October, the cultivated 2-3m flower strip will be allowed to flower for a further year, cut in September and the arisings removed. Inside that, a 5m strip will be mown monthly April-October as in recent years. The maintenance of the cultivated strip will be reviewed for 2025.
 - 3.3.8 Some cosmetic infill and levelling will be undertaken to improve the surface of the worst parts of S4, ideally so it can be cut with a scythe bar.

21 March 2024

MILLFIELDS PARK



ADVICE FROM PROFESSOR ALASTAIR FITTER OF THE UNIVERSITY OF YORK 8 NOVEMBER 2023

Managing Millfield Park for wildlife

The Park currently comprises 4 main areas

1. the wetland in the SW corner which is being managed principally for wildlife
2. the woodland in the centre which is managed by Woodland Trust; it has good potential as wildlife habitat as it matures although future management plans will be important
3. the area of grassland at the north end which is a potential site for creation of hay meadows
4. the complex area of grassland to the south and east, which is a mixture of amenity grassland, public facilities (e.g. cycle track) and rough grassland

The first point to make is that around half of the site (areas 1 and 2) is already being managed well for wildlife, so additional areas will be a bonus. There is a very clear desire to maintain multiple uses and the amenity areas will continue in that form. The question reduces quite simply to 'how best to manage the remaining grass areas'.

Grassland can be managed in various ways

- 1 Regular and frequent mowing: amenity grassland, lawns etc. This is an expensive but easy maintenance option. It is good for public use and access but of very limited value for wildlife.
- 2 Grazing: not an option on this site (nor is burning!).
- 3 Regular but infrequent mowing: the hay meadow option
- 4 Irregular and/or infrequent mowing: the timing and frequency of the mowing has large implications for wildlife, appearance and logistics, but this is the option that you may want to explore for the remaining areas

Regular but infrequent mowing (option 3): this is how to create a hay meadow which is a popular, well understood and attractive option. The key is that it is a long-established agricultural practice and so easy to prescribe, if sometimes less easy to practice. Traditionally it involved taking a hay cut in mid-summer (end June/early July), then grazing the aftermath until late autumn. Grazing is impractical here but can be mimicked by a second cut in autumn (typically October). It is essential to remove the cut grass from the first cut and highly desirable to do so for the second, depending on how wet the summer has been and how much re-growth. If arisings are not removed the cut grass will smother all the less robust plant species and the resulting meadow will be poor in species and unattractive. Ideally the cut grass is allowed to dry on site and then removed as hay, potentially a valuable crop. If that is not possible, it can be stacked up and allowed to rot down. The piles are a good (but very localised) habitat for invertebrates, but the decomposition causes local nutrient enrichment and will smother existing vegetation.

Making a hay meadow is easiest on ground with little topography and in reasonably large areas without complex edges, so as to allow the use of machinery. The best area for this on site, without

doubt, is the north meadow. It is big enough for agricultural machinery but small enough for more modest equipment (e.g. a scythe mower) if no contractor/farmer can be found for the job.

Positives for doing this are:

- The management techniques are well understood
- It's easy to explain the goals
- It's inexpensive
- Over time, it will develop into an attractive, flower-rich area
- It is good for plant diversity and, in flowering season, some insects

Negatives include:

- Timing of management matters
- It may be hard to find people willing to do the management

2 Irregular and infrequent mowing (option 4): alternatively, the goal can be to create rough grassland. Without management, grassland will simply revert to woodland, but areas that are cut occasionally will form a very different community to the hay meadow, with larger plants such as tussock grasses, sedges and more robust wildflowers (e.g. meadowsweet, purple loosestrife). In effect that is what has been created in the non-amenity parts of the south meadow.

The advantages of this form of management are:

It is very flexible: the timing of management is unimportant (although spring/early summer would normally be avoided) and various parts can be cut at different times if wished. This is especially valuable if the area is heterogeneous as the south meadows is (in terms of wetness, topography etc.).

It is still desirable to remove cuttings but much less critical that it is done.

Equipment is less critical – flail mowers work fine.

It brings greater biodiversity benefits, with richer insect and, especially, bird populations.

The main downside is that it will look untidy to some people, but that problem can be circumvented by varying cutting frequency according to distance from paths, for example cutting a swathe nearest the path say 3-4 times per year and areas further back once or even once every few years, possibly allowing areas nearest the wood to become woody (i.e. no mowing). The different frequencies of cutting will encourage quite different plant and insect communities.

From: Claire Burton <claire.burton@ywt.org.uk>
Date: Wednesday, 9 August 2023 at 11:53
To: Carl Bilson <cllr.carl.bilson@easingwold.gov.uk>
Subject: RE: Easingwold Town Council - Millfields Meadows

Hi Carl,

Thanks for your email, apologies for the late reply, it is a very busy time at the moment!

My colleague Emily who has since left YWT gave the initial advice on the wetland and I did a follow up visit a couple of years ago; I'm pleased to hear that they are still going well.

I do remember discussing the meadows at my last visit and the removal of the arisings is essential but not always easy I know.

These are the basic steps to meadow management:

1. Cut using a scythe, scythe bar (reciprocating) mower or tractor with a drawn mower for best results. If the hay is to be used for cattle (would this be an option?) an early July cut is better for the best quality hay. For conservation purposes a late July/early Aug cut.
2. Arisings *must* be removed (bailing for feed or raking away). If the arisings cannot be removed from site, on some of our reserves we stack in piles in areas where we aren't too worried about nutrient issues (under a tree in the woods, compost pile etc). Do you have a volunteer group that could help rake? Example of hay rake https://www.diy.com/departments/faithfull-eal020100-wooden-hay-rake-faiwhr/5023969217482_BQ.prd
3. Ideally 2 weeks after the arisings are removed, grazing is recommended until October; I'm guessing this may be difficult unless you have a keen farmer needing grazing land and an electric fence? If grazing really isn't possible then a second cut will be required. Importantly I would cut the same patches every time and not rotate areas.
4. Repeat yearly and have patience! 😊

Yellow rattle would be beneficial – This is an annual so won't automatically come back every year. Can be sown late summer; create gaps in the sward to sow the seeds or plug plants can be bought (but usually more expensive.) Best to buy seed of local (as possible) province.

I would also recommend a talk for one of our trustees, Professor Alistair Fitter, he recently gave a talk to us all about meadow management which was excellent and very informative; I would definitely recommend his expertise. To arrange a talk see details here: <https://www.ywt.org.uk/get-involved/talks-community-groups> Alistair's details are on there.

Do let me know if you have any further questions,

Best wishes,
Claire

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