

**Assets, Community and Environment Committee meeting
9 July 2020**

ACE008.a – To receive updates on Horsefield Green Maintenance Plan

Horsefield Green –Habitat Management Proposals

The proposals below build on the existing management plan and if agreed, can be distilled into a monthly diary of works required.

It is understood that preserving the views to the Downs is fundamental to the site.

1. Meadow Grassland

Current Status

Some wildflowers are clearly established including knapweed, oxeye daisy, meadow buttercup and a large swathe of bulbous buttercup although many of these species maybe from the original seedbank.

It is also clear that some of the coarser grasses and dock are starting to establish. The seed mix for the sown part of the meadow was 80% grass seed and 20% flower seed. (Emorsgate EM2 std meadow mix).

Any mowing must ensure removal of all cuttings to reduce fertility of soil.

Proposal

Ideally would recommend hard mow in August followed by scarification and some re-sowing with a 100% wildflower mix (Emorsgate EM4F - 1.5 grams per sq m so approx 3kg – cost £500 – funding would be possible through Lund. The meadow was actually cut in June, so will just have to see how it recovers but weather may be key.

2. Community Orchard

Proposal

To plant 20 half standard trees including apple, cider apple, pear, plum and cherry with 8 on part of the downslope and grown on dwarfing rootstock M9 (will require permanent staking) and 12 on semi dwarfing MM106 rootstock in the hollow by the container. Allow for 5m distance between trees.

Clearing the hollow of bramble will require a significant amount of work. Once bird nesting season is over (August), first step would be strimming the bramble down to 6in above ground and then treating with glyphosphate. This may take two to three applications with seeds in the soil giving rise to further bramble in following years. With increasing concern over the use of glyphosphate this may be an opportunity to trial other herbicide free products e.g. foam / Foamstream (currently being trialled by Lewes Council).

Ideally trees should be planted in early to mid-winter to allow maximum time for roots to settle and to take advantage of any winter rains. Depending on bramble treatment, trees might be planted in winter 2020 but if any trees need grafting and

with suppliers short of stock due to covid, it is probably much more likely that any planting would not take place until winter 2021.

Stakes, irrigation tubes, rootgrow mycorrhizal powder, netting and vole guards will all be required so including trees themselves about £60 each. Watering in early years is critical.

The following apples varieties have Sussex origins nearest to Cuckfield, namely Coronation, Ashdown Seedling, Green Custard, Tinsley Quince, Crawley Reinette, Crawley Beauty, Doctor Hogg, First & Last and Edmund Jupp. Varieties would need to be chosen that also provide compatible pollination groups.

It would be good to move the small oak tree on the downslope at the same time as it is not well placed.

The orchard would need the backing of and involvement of the local community to be successful. Brighton Permaculture who have set up numerous orchards in Sussex may be of help while also useful to establish whether there is any appetite for a Friends group. Funding would be possible through Lund.

3. Pond

Current Status

About a third of the water surface is currently visible with a thick mat of what looks like to be water fern (*Azolla filiculoides*), a non-native invasive species at the north end that is creeping down the pond. There is also a substantial clump of Sweet grass (*Glyceria notata*) that is native but clearly rampant too. All the ash trees at the pond appear to have dieback.

Proposal

To remove material in Oct / Nov, leaving at least two thirds open water – leave material at side of pond for a few days and then remove. This is probably either a job for a group of volunteers or a mini digger.

Regarding the ash trees, there is some upcoming hawthorn and blackthorn but a couple of suitably placed alders may do well and provide useful replacements.

4. Hedging - Southern and Eastern Boundaries

Current Status

On the eastern boundary, the vegetation is predominantly blackthorn with much being the progeny of the boundary trees but there does appear to be a very densely planted, 4-5m stretch of blackthorn hedge too.

The southern boundary is generally bramble although there are some suckering grey poplar trees that will provide a useful wind break in time although the parent tree does appear to be dying.

Proposal

The eastern boundary just needs strimming back to prevent further encroachment on the meadow preferably in Dec / Jan. The 4-5m hedge can be looked at in the winter to decide best course of action.

On the southern boundary, after some clearance, a hedge using hazel, elder, field maple, alder buckthorn, guelder rose and hawthorn could be planted in the autumn / winter 2020. Once it grows to the height of the roof top of the adjacent building at Longacre Farm, it could be laid so probably in 3 to 4 year's time. It would then require laying periodically every 4 to 5 years depending on growth. The residual post and wire fencing at the northern end could all be removed.

5. Trees / Woodland Copse

Current Status

Many of the trees on site are ash and showing signs of die back. These will need to be managed year by year with action taken where safety becomes an issue – it's possible that one is showing resistance and will be monitored accordingly.

The brick pit is full of bramble and scrub and nearly impenetrable but provides great habitat and cover and should be left to develop naturally.

Proposal

To plant various saplings e.g. mountain ash, hazel, field maple and oak as replacements in the autumn of 2020 or 2021. It may be possible to obtain further free trees from the Woodland Trust.

Planting bluebell bulbs and red campion plugs would also be useful for enhancing the woodland flora.

6. Container

Current Status

Painted green but still clearly visible.

Proposal

Plant 4 ivy – it's a quick grower and should physically attach to the container and may indeed afford some protection from the weather. It's also a great plant for wildlife, providing cover, nectar and food for insects and birds alike. In time, it may be possible to add further climbing plants e.g. traveller's joy or clematis that can use the ivy as a climbing frame. Should the orchard proceed, it may also be possible to grow hops using wires extended down from the container.

Adrian Podmore
Councillor
1 July 2020