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Dear Su

Thank you for inviting me to visit Newnham Village Green SINC. I am writing to summarise the ideas we discussed at our meeting on the 15th September, which I hope will help with your management of the site.

Grassland Areas

The area next to the pond is to be maintained and managed as a wildflower meadow. It is recommended that this is cut twice a year, early spring (April) and late summer (end of September) to allow the flowers to set seed, but no shorter than 5cm. A mown path cuts across the area and it is recommended that this is kept each year, in order to allow access, add visual appeal and minimize disturbance to wildlife.

The remainder of the grassland sections have amenity use and are cut more frequently, however it is recommended that "buffer strips" be left along a selection of the edges adjacent to the drainage ditch banks. This will create a gradation of habitats known as an "ecotone". The buffers could also be cut twice a year to prevent obscuring vehicle site lines (early spring April and late summer end of Sept).

Arisings should be removed and composted off site if possible, alternatively piling in a sacrificial area would be ok and also create additional habitat for reptiles.

Drainage Banks

The drainage banks could be enhanced with wildflower planting. A seed mix has already been sown but these have mostly been being outcompeted by existing more dominant species. Sowing seed is the most cost-effective way to create a wildflower area but due to the presence and composition of the existing sward, which contains dominant grasses and herbaceous plants, some preparation of the soil would be needed to enable the wild flower mix to establish. This would mean removing the existing plants to expose the soil. Therefore, if funding could be sought, introducing some plug plants of broadleaved perennial wildlife flower species may be more effective and would avoid removal of the existing biomass. If planted at a high density they would have more chance at establishment e.g. cowslips would be good plant to try and establish this way. The drainage banks could be cut twice a year to prevent obscuring vehicle sight lines (early spring April, and late summer end of Sept).

Suitable perennial species for a clay cap over chalk include:

Agrimony - *Agrimonia eupatoria*
Betony - *Stachy officinals*
Birds Foot Trefoil - *Lotus corniculatus*
Black Knapweed *Centaurea nigra*

Cats Ear - *Hypochaeris radicata*
Cowslip - *Primula veris*
Field Scabious - *Knautia arvensis*
Germander Speedwell - *Veronica chamaedrys*
Greater Knapweed - *Centaurea scabiosa*
Kidney Vetch - *Anthyllis vulneraria*
Lady's Bedstraw - *Galium verum**
Meadow Buttercup - *Ranunculus acris*
Ox-eye Daisy - *Leucanthemum vulgare*
Rough Hawkbit - *Leontodon hispidus*
Sainfoin - *Onobrychis viciifolia*
Selfheal - *Prunella vulgaris*
Small Scabious - *Scabiosa columbaria*
Tufted Vetch - *Vicia cracca*
Vipers Bugloss - *Echium vulgare*
Wild Majoram - *Origanum vulgare*
Yarrow - *Achillea millefolium*
Meadow Vetchling - *Lathyrus pratensis*
Yellow Rattle - *Rhianthus minor*

Together with fine grasses such as:

Red fescue*
Sheeps fescue
Crested dogs tail *
Smooth meadow grass
Sweet vernal grass*
Common bent*

“Parkland” Areas

The areas of the green with grassland and mature trees could be enhanced with some native spring bulb planting for example bluebell and wild daffodil. These will thrive best in glades and edges with available light.

Pond

The pond requires some habitat management. A fallen and cut down willow remains in sections in the pond. This needs to be removed to avoid nutrient and detritus build up. The bull rush *Typha*, sedge and other rushes in the pond are quite dominant and could be partially cut back. The vegetation around the pond bank should be left as a buffer but could be reduced in November to prevent scrub build up and encroachment that would lead to drying up of the pond. However, two issues prevent straight-forward management of the pond. First, is the presence of a protected species, great crested-newt (GCN) and second is the presence of a non-native invasive plant species, New Zealand pygmy weed *Crassula helmsii*.

In the case of GCN, habitat management works need to take place outside of the GCN aquatic phase to avoid harm or disturbance. The standard advice is for works to take place between November and late January, however the pond fills up during this time making vegetation removal more difficult. If works are carried out in September, when it is more practical, they would need to be carried out under a GCN licence by an experienced person.

In the case of crassula, as the whole pond is now covered, and it is likely to be impacting habitat quality. GCN require areas of open water to perform courtship displays. Small amounts of crassula could be removed annually as is currently planned, to benefit the GCN but the waste vegetation would need to be either buried on site, which is not ideal as the village green is a SINC, or removed by a licenced contractor to a waste incinerator plant. The cuttings from any typha and the dead willow could be composted as close to the pond as possible in a sacrificial area, in case they contain fragments of crassula. However, if this was removed at the same time as the crassula all of this could be taken away for incineration.

A longer-term plan for crassula control would be to spray the crassula with a herbicide in late summer (Sept) before the pond fills with water. Spraying crassula when it is not submerged is most effective. However, this would still leave the dead crassula in the pond and it would need to be removed to avoid nutrient build-up in the pond (in the same controlled way). It may be worth considering burial on site, if a low biodiversity area within the SINC could be identified and the temporary visual disruption was acceptable to the parish. A permit would be needed for the waste burial. The works would also need to be carried out under a conservation licence as there is potential to harm GCN, as the spraying would need to be carried out before November.

In order to obtain the conservation licence, the population of GCN would need to be established by carrying out six surveys in the spring. A survey of the pond for other wildlife would also need to be carried out. This information could then be used to produce a method statement with a plan for suitable avoidance/mitigation measures for the GCN population. Herbicides have been found to cause harm to GCN and other non-target species, therefore a decision would need to be made based on the current wildlife present and the impact of spraying vs the longer-term gains to the wildlife in the pond, if the crassula is to be effectively controlled. GCN would need to be surveyed again post works to check the mitigation measures have been successful. An estimate of costs for this work including surveys, method statement production, and a contractor would be in the region of £5000.

Timeline:

Spring: GCN population surveys

Summer: Wildlife survey of pond and SINC habitat to identify possible burial area

Summer: Method statement and licence application

Autumn: Carry out spraying and habitat management works, vegetation burial/waste removal

Planting up of the pond with some more native species could also enhance the diversity of the pond, for example introducing marsh marigold, purple loosestrife and more yellow flag iris would be beneficial to insects and aquatic invertebrates, as well as provide more structure to attract damselflies and dragonflies.

If you have any further questions, please do get in touch.

Best wishes,



Deborah Whitfield
Ecology Manager

Disclaimer:

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