



NEW MILTON
TOWN COUNCIL

BALLARD WATER MEADOW

Management Policy

The Town Council is responsible for all work that takes place on the site and ensuring that nature conservation objectives are fulfilled. Any work undertaken by others is by consent. As of 2013, public funds were secured to achieve these objectives. As landholder it is also the responsibility of the Town Council (NMTC) to fund all major projects seeking support through Government incentives (HLS).

1. Meadow, Ditch and Stream Management Policy

It is important to know the meadow, with all its associated component species, is in its present condition largely through its management in the distant past; namely, low intensity grazing and possibly hay cutting.

The HBIC Surveys reveal a loss in some components (communities and species) over a relatively short time. The 1998 SINC survey shows the area having no management, whilst that of 2006 indicates the meadow being cut but the arisings not collected. Artificial drainage has also played a part in reducing biodiversity interest in parts of the site.

The maintenance of the grassland is the most important habitat management aspect. It may well have been the case that this land was cut for hay at one time, but this is no longer a part of modern farming. Currently, the site is so well used by dog-walkers that taking a clean hay crop is not possible. Cutting and the removal of the arisings is still an accepted and, in some cases on sites where grazing is not possible, the best and only form of management.

Cutting removes invasive species and prevents too much litter build-up (thatch) and removal of the arisings lowers the nutrient status of the soil, which is preferred by many native wildflower species. Nowadays, these cuttings can be a valuable asset to site managers, particularly when composted for re-use as a mulch or soil improver and may even provide some much-needed income. The Town Council's own composting facility may therefore be of huge benefit to the management of the meadow in future.

In an effort to restore more species-rich grassland and following a successful HLS application in 2013 with funding secured to install the necessary stock fencing and other infrastructure, grazing was re-introduced. Without grazing the rapid transition and natural succession of grassland and wet meadow to scrub and woodland is inevitable.



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It is also worth considering the type and number of livestock, which is often hugely important. Each livestock species grazes in a different way. Most animals are selective, horses and sheep more so, whereas cattle less so. Cattle are often the preferred choice therefore, when considering nature conservation restoration grazing. The number of livestock needs to be adjusted to suit the conditions and the flexibility to increase, decrease or remove altogether during periods when the ground becomes waterlogged for example, is desirable. The type of livestock used may also need to be adjusted in the light of experience.

Cattle grazing at Ballard Meadow is the ideal management tool to aid the restoration for nature conservation and it is envisaged for the life of this Plan that the current arrangement will persist. However, grazing alone will not restrict the encroachment of the more woody, scrubby vegetation. Bramble in particular can become a problem in grassland as it (along with some other species) is not palatable to cattle. Often it creeps in from the edges, particularly if the site is surrounded by woodland, and gradually will reduce the amount of available, palatable fodder. Intervention is therefore necessary to control the invasiveness of this species.

Some bramble however is essential for wildlife though, particularly when exposed to full sun. The flowers are a superb nectar source, the fruits provide energy for invertebrates, birds and mammals and the cover gives birds in particular, safe nesting sites. Cutting the grassland not only removes the previous year's growth but will also reduce the spread of bramble and this, coupled with the cutting and removal of small sections of bramble from around the edges, will ensure the maximum available grassland for livestock.

A grassland cutting regime of between 3-6 years where only one or two small sections are cut each year depending on the availability of labour, equipment and finance is ideal. If cuttings are removed this will, over time, reduce the nutrient input. This regime, followed-up with cattle grazing in autumn (aftermath grazing) will deliver maximum benefit in both retaining current species diversity and pave the way for increases in grassland indicator species in future. At the eastern end of the meadow, there is a small patch of willow, some of which has collapsed into the meadow. Some trimming-back on a regular basis, perhaps every five-years (therefore once during the life of this Plan) would allow the meadow to re-colonise whilst allowing the trees to re-grow, maintaining a valuable resource. It may be appropriate to pollard 1 or 2 trees to add variety.

The drainage ditches which cross the site have resulted in a lowering of the water table. Again, referring to the surveys undertaken in recent times, and the species recorded, the site appears to be drier now than in the past. It may be possible to restore the hydrology to some extent by artificially raising the water table by installing sluices during early February, at the southern end of the north-south ditch and at the eastern end of the west-east ditch to which it connects, thereby holding water back.



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Retaining some open water in these ditches in the spring will be of great benefit to herptiles (amphibians and reptiles) as well as numerous invertebrates. Vegetation growth will also benefit right across the site, but control of the more pernicious weed species will perhaps become more prevalent. During the winter, to avoid waterlogging if the stream on the eastern boundary (see below) is overflowing, the sluices can be removed to allow any surface water to drain.

The ditches have been cleaned-out in the past. However, it is not envisaged that any work will need to be undertaken during the life of the Plan. In the longer term, and subject to repeat surveys and monitoring of notable species, the current management policy may need to be reviewed. The stream is an asset to the overall biodiversity of the site. It marks the eastern boundary and is lined to the east with more or less even-aged oak trees with some ash and blackthorn. There are non-native species to be removed.

The landholder is obliged to maintain a free flow in the stream at all times. To prevent a build-up of material, short 20-30m sections of overhanging branches, scrub and bramble should be removed each year. Non-adjacent sections should be cut in successive years giving each cut section about 10 years to recover. Of course, should a tree or main limb fall in the meantime, this will have to be dealt with swiftly to avoid any stream blockage and unnecessary meadow flooding (particularly in autumn and winter). If the tree is from neighbouring property then there will have to be an agreement in place to ensure removal on amicable terms and in the shortest possible time.

As with the ditches mentioned above, there is no planned intervention during the life of the Plan. It must always be borne in mind though that it may be necessary to re-excavate the stream bed from time to time as there will be an inevitable build-up of silt and gravelly material which cannot be removed during regular inspections. Build-up in the bed of the stream may lead to more regular flooding of the meadow. Should intervention be required, it is proposed that the stream be minimally excavated by the responsible body, ie Environment Agency. The proposal is not to deepen the stream, merely to remove the superficial build-up of material, and work from downstream to upstream as best nature conservation practice.

2. Woodland Management Policy

Included here is the small area of blackthorn scrub isolated in the meadow. This small patch contributes significantly to the site's overall biodiversity and should be retained. Ensuring that this scrub does not encroach into the grassland is essential, however. Suckering into the grassland by blackthorn will have to be controlled as cattle will not check the growth by grazing alone. Cutting and removal of the cut material on a rotational basis, as small areas of the meadow are cut, will be sufficient to control the spread. This isolated clump is quite old and the central portion of the block requires some cutting to improve the vigour of the plants, thus ensuring that this habitat remains a feature of the site.



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Woar Copse will continue to be managed as a coppice-with-standards habitat. In order to provide the best possible conditions for wildlife the number of standard trees (oak, beech, ash) needs to reduce to around 20-25 per hectare and their age needs to vary between young (40-120 years old) and those over 100 years old with a couple of veteran trees. Felling is to be very long-term, looking at 20-25 years before the ideal number of standards is arrived at. It is proposed to fell trees every other year and removing two or three trees each time (2021/22, 2023/24 etc).

For the life of this plan therefore, over five years, a maximum of six trees should be felled. However, any trees which fall naturally or through storm damage will also count towards this total, requiring less intervention over this time. Trees to be felled will be on the southern boundaries of glades or recently coppiced areas, thus increasing the amount of light and warmth falling onto the woodland floor.

Before any felling takes place, all mature trees will be checked for bat roost sites in order to ensure compliance with protected species requirements.

As the incentive is on nature conservation and not commercial gain, the bole of one tree should be left in situ to decompose naturally over time. This action will ensure a more open canopy, allowing light to the woodland floor which will benefit ground flora and its associated wildlife. It will also encourage the coppice stools to regenerate more rapidly and, if there is long-dormant seed of woodland indicator species these may also regenerate. Some saplings need to be protected and others thinned in order to continue the natural regeneration cycle. Some hazel re-stocking will be necessary.

For coppicing to be successful with limited resources, the woodland will need to be split into smaller compartments. It is proposed that 10 compartments are to be the coppice blocks and additional areas retained as glades (see Appendix). Each coppice compartment (coupe) will be cut on a 10-year rotation (7-10 years is often regarded as short rotation).

Two small areas of the woodland should be kept open, free from woody vegetation as a glade, cutting these each year, usually in October. Splitting the area into smaller units allows for management to be successful particularly when managers are constrained by available resources. Also, the amount of cut material that has to be removed either by burning or as produce (for charcoal for example) will be less. Cut material can remain on-site and stacked into wood-walls, providing valuable dead-wood habitat, nesting sites and more natural compartment boundaries. All non-native tree species, woodland shrubs and ground flora will be removed. Dead wood will be retained as both standing and fallen timber. Ivy / honeysuckle will also be retained and encouraged to grow throughout the woodland.

3. Socio-economic and Public Access Policy

The overriding policy is to facilitate public access for all where compatible with the constraints imposed by, for example, not wishing to alter the natural character of the landscape or compromise nature conservation interests. Access for quiet recreation is promoted. The site is well used. There are no plans to change the access policy and the priority will be to maintain the site as a resource valued by local people for walking and enjoying the countryside.

There are no public rights of way across the site. All paths are informal. Apart from the recently upgraded, gravelled Greenway Path through the woodland constructed in 2018, it is envisaged that all other paths and tracks remain unsurfaced. The paths that were improved are not public rights of way but benefit from permissive access. There is a presumption against any more fencing, signs, benches or paths. Structures used by the public are maintained to a functional standard and comply with current legislation.

Working in partnership with FBWM, the Town Council become directly involved with the management that is required. Securing a grazier and introducing cattle grazing to the meadow has been a considerable step forward. However, in order to fulfil the objectives of the HLS and to secure the proposed management regime for nature conservation across the whole site, continued community involvement is essential. As landholder, NMTC is responsible for supporting and encouraging this involvement, liaising with FBWM and discussing forthcoming tasks as outlined in the annual work plan.

Currently, FBWM undertake the majority of the day-to-day management tasks, but in the past, this has been an ad-hoc arrangement where the group members spend time on site each week, doing jobs thought necessary. The group also raises funds to purchase equipment which is used on-site for the benefit of nature conservation. It is proposed that the Town Council will become more involved by their continued support for the site's management.

Annual work plans, timing and funding of tasks will need to be prepared well in advance of work taking place and a good working relationship is vital for the aims of the Plan, and nature conservation benefit, to succeed. As landholder it is assumed the Town Council will sanction and oversee all major works, particularly those where outside contractors are required. It must be also borne in mind, that volunteer groups rely on membership, which can go up as well as down.

Any management work undertaken will be recorded and its success or otherwise noted, so that in future, any necessary changes, if necessary, can be made in the light of experience.



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4. Education, Research and Demonstration Policy

There is currently little use made of the site for education and research. There is potential to expand this involvement through linkage with local schools in the area. The use of the site for demonstration of habitat management practices, particularly grassland and woodland restoration techniques, is encouraged.

Surveys undertaken by HBIC and casual surveys done by the FBWM are the only records currently available. Local community groups, birdwatchers, plant and invertebrate experts should be encouraged to record their findings and inform the landholder or a nominated recorder. At the very least, surveys and monitoring will be undertaken to record the fortunes of those indicator species highlighted in the HLS. Any future funding by Government may be outcome driven, dependent on results and granted retrospectively, in which case survey and monitoring become absolutely essential.

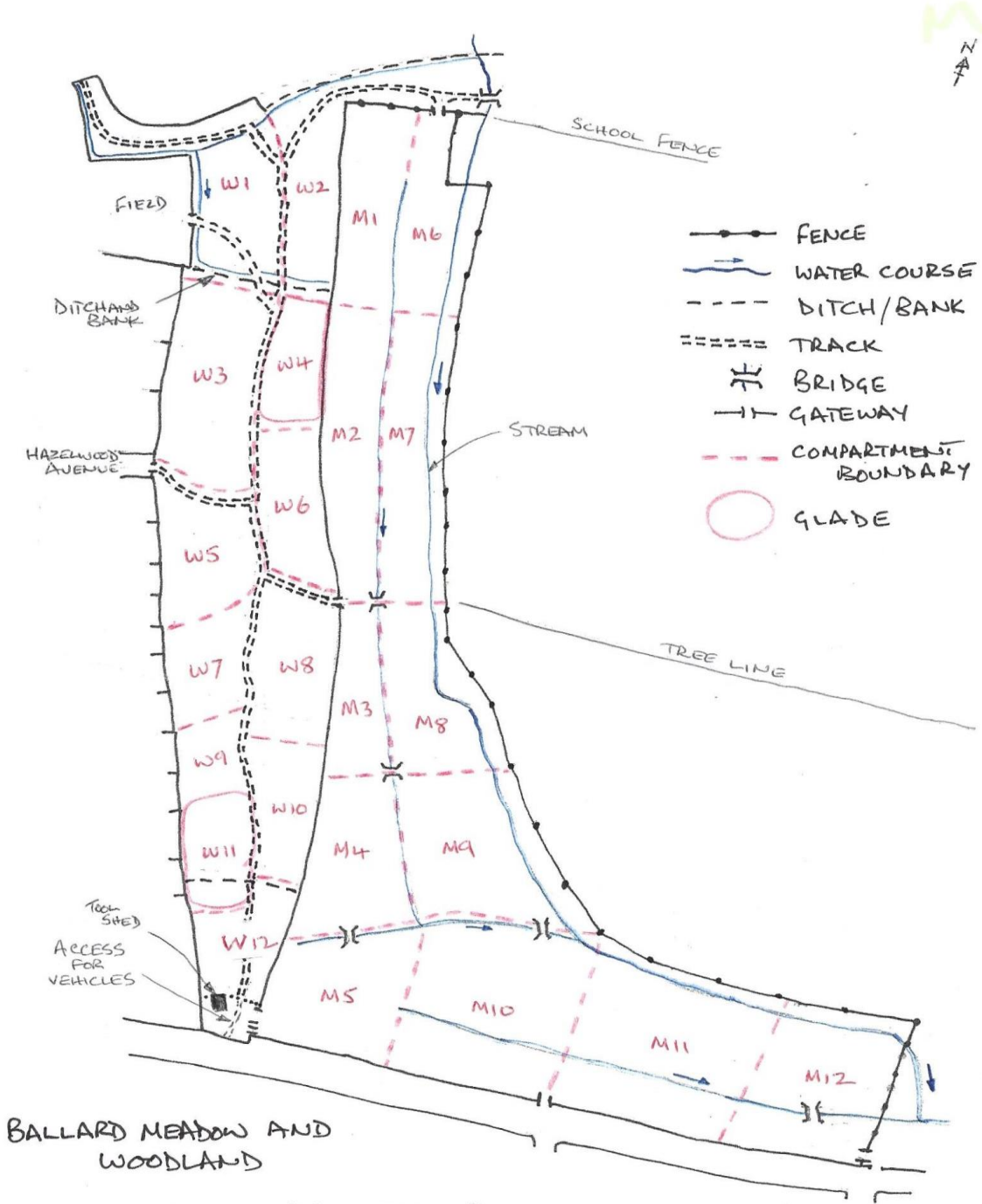
Working in partnership, the Town Council can easily expand its knowledge of the site. Where there are gaps it may be necessary to jointly support specialist surveys. In equal measure, survey, monitoring and research are vital tools, informing the landholder of what is present on the site which helps to shape management planning in future.

Annual Work Plan/Work Programme (Jan 2020–Mar 2021)

This section details the physical management tasks (work to be done) as well as other tasks necessary, in the first year of the Plan (January 2020 to March 2021). It shows what the work is, how and where it is to be done (using compartment references where relevant), by whom and in which month. This will need to be reviewed at quarterly liaison meetings (end of March, June, September and December) to look forward, plan work, book contractors and other volunteer groups as necessary.



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BALLARD MEADOW AND
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SUGGESTED COMPARTMENT MAP

(DRAFT - NOV 2019)