

DRAFT

FOR PARISH COUNCIL

Caldbeck Village Green Conservation Area

From the results of the Parish Consultation in late 2019, it was clear that many people would like to see a change in the management/cutting regime .

We believe that this area of ancient grassland is valuable but that it would be very much more interesting if managed to allow the great variety of different plants to grow and flower and provide suitable habitats for many different butterflies and moths, for different species of bees and other pollinators as well as for dragon and damselflies and other wildlife. It has become apparent that Caldbeck has become a 'go to' destination for families. If managed appropriately, it represents a rich opportunity for children and their families both local and visitors, to learn and care for the plants and animals around us.

Get Cumbria Buzzing is a project that was set up by the Cumbria Wildlife Trust in partnership with Highways England, local authorities, Butterfly Conservation and Big Life to combat the loss of biodiversity by creating havens for pollinators throughout Cumbria. Here in Caldbeck we have the opportunity to do this;

We consider that the management aim of the Green should be to provide for wildlife conservation and enhancement as well as for general recreation.

We are seeking to find a workable proposal for future management based on the aims of management to attract back and develop the variety of indigenous flora and fauna as well as providing for public access.

Ideally, for wildlife, this area would be best if the whole area was returned to grazing only so that a rich matrix of mixed short and longer vegetation would develop, allowing for suitable habitats for a wide variety of fauna.

Given that the area attracts so many people, that is not an option! We could, however, change the timing and extent of the cuts.

1. Across parts of the area of grass on the south side of the pond, near the car park. and paths cut through the sward, 3 times a year, as at present,

This will result result in a sharp contrast between these and the rest of the area and enhance the look of the whole area whilst also allowing people easy access.

We have considered **mowing similarly along the roadsides around the Green** for the same purpose. We are not sure though whether this would be a good idea? There are enough problems with parking around the edges as it is and a mown strip may seem like an invitation to do so.

2. Grass to be cut once a year, in late July or August with the cuttings removed.

Over most of the area, (see plan)

Where cuttings are left they will damage the botanical and invertebrate interest by mulching the sward. The paths will allow access to these areas for people to see the plants and associated insects and make it clear that this is the intended pattern.

3. All issues/ ditches (and their margins, depending on the slope) to be left uncut. This will allow plants, such as marsh marigolds, to flower and will provide the essential habitats for many valuable insects.

If any problems arise from this, so that maintenance of these water courses becomes necessary on an occasional basis, it should be done, from one side, during the autumn/winter months.

4. Area shown on plan to be left uncut.

The ground here is particularly damp and difficult to cut. Leaving it will allow the development of additional habitat, with added wildlife value and interest.

Appendix

1. From Plantlife:

<https://www.plantlife.org.uk/uk/our-work/publications/road-verge-management-guide>

Although this is a guide for verge management, it applies to all grasslands and has useful information and advice

2. From the Suffolk Wildlife Trust

Manage grassland for wildlife:

Carefully managed grassland is capable of supporting a wide range of insects, which in turn support small mammals such as shrews and bats, and birds such as yellowhammers and song thrushes.

The grassland sites that tend to be more important for wildlife offer a variety of micro-habitats and enjoy a continuous system of management with no sudden changes.

Important features

The more an area of grassland has the following features, the more valuable it will be for invertebrates:

- **Topographical variation** – slopes, banks, ditches, hummocks, ant hills and even piles of rubble, with different aspects ensure structural diversity. These features will create wetter areas, over-wintering

sites, warm and droughty areas – and different invertebrates will exploit the different micro-habitats within a varied site.

- **Soil variation** – the well-drained sandy and chalky soils tend to warm up more quickly and benefit a greater range of insects. These warm and crumbly soils are easy to burrow into, compared to the relatively cold and damp, heavier chalky boulder clay which is more likely to support insects that require damp ground for much of the year.

- **Structural variation of the sward (and even better, an intimate mix in a relatively small area)** – with a succession of different types from sun-baked bare ground to patchy scrub, including short open turf, tall grass and tussocks. Tussocks are especially important in creating a micro-habitat with a different micro-climate – providing nesting and over-wintering sites for some bumble bees, ground beetles and others, and food plants for caterpillars of moths and butterflies.

- **Plant diversity and in all stages of development** – ie plants flowering, setting seed and with last year's dead seed heads and stems remaining provide a continuous season of feeding, breeding and overwintering sites. Many invertebrates will only lay their eggs on one particular food plant. The larvae of the white butterflies feed on a range of cruciferous plants, whilst the blues and copper require more specific, and often rarer, larval food plants. The larvae of the various browns and skippers feed on relatively common grasses in hedge bottoms, and then depend on flower and shrub nectar as adults. Plant seed heads and hollow stems of plants such as yarrow, knapweed, burdock and thistles provide vital dry winter shelter and food for many insects.

- **Other habitats such as scrub and hedgerow immediately adjacent** – these may provide the appropriate habitat for part of an insect's life cycle that can't be found in the grassland – to feed, rest, sun themselves, overwinter and use as a corridor, linking different areas of suitable habitat.

(.....)

Although difficult, aim to create a grassland area that has variety in height – and the more intimate the mix of heights in a small area the better. Cutting management tends to produce a fairly uniform sward unless a careful management plan is produced to create variety across the site. Consider the following:

- Set cutting equipment at different heights on different parts of the site
- Always leave some areas of grass uncut completely for a year or longer – as scattered islands or, more practically, as strips mid-field or field edge, covering up to a third of the site in any one year and more on more infertile sites. Many insects spend part of their life cycles in dead stems, grass sheaths and seed heads so a cut at any time of the year could be disastrous.
- To prevent scrub encroachment, rotate these uncut areas. Leave them uncut for three years to create more tussocky structure and on infertile sites leave uncut for even longer.

- Lightly graze the aftermath – ideally with sheep and/ or cattle – to create variety in sward structure

Cuttings should always be removed – ideally as a once a year hay crop. Where cuttings are left they will damage the botanical and invertebrate interest by mulching the sward.