

Caldbeck Parish Council

Biodiversity Working Group

Proposed Pilot Project for increasing biodiversity on the Green

Introduction

The Biodiversity Working Group met at Caldbeck Green on 8th April to identify areas of the Green which could be used for the creation of trial plots to encourage greater biodiversity for the benefit of insects, birds, amphibians and mammals.

These plots are discrete areas and have been chosen carefully for their location. They are also away from the popular visitor areas of the Green found at the southern end of the pond and are differing habitats which would support a variety of species.

Plot One – Semi wetland habitat

Description

An area to the North West of the Bowling Club, which is naturally bounded by drainage issues and the bowling club hedge. This ground is quite wet and is not an area frequented by many people. It has a central wet depression and is home to sieves (soft rushes).



All mapping credits: Mark Binney

Proposed management

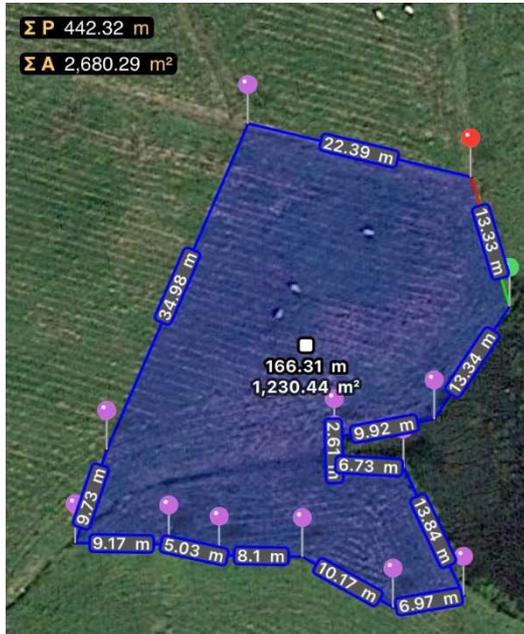
This area would be left uncut in the summer months, but would have a path cut round it and across it so that people could walk through it to observe any activity. Mark Binney would undertake a full cut in late August and take away the cuttings. The area would be attractive to a variety of species and observation over the summer months would enable the working group to build a picture of which species have been seen.

The working group also believe that this area in general would benefit from improved drainage as the issues to the SW of the plot are thick with twitch (Couch Grass) which is reducing the water flow. The sides of the issues have been pushed down in some places, further reducing the ability to drain freely and causing some erosion at the crossing point further down the issue. It is proposed that these areas are cleaned of weed and made good once the cattle are off in the autumn.

Plot Two – Wetland habitat

Description

An area immediately to the north west of the pond, which is little visited. It has natural boundaries of the pond and the drainage issues and is a very wet area, full of sieves and largely inaccessible.



Proposed management

It is proposed that this area is left entirely unmown in order to provide the necessary habitat for damselflies and dragonflies to complete their lifecycle, and to provide year-round habitat for small mammals, birds, invertebrates and amphibians. Leaving the rushes uncut would provide shelter for roosting birds in all seasons.

The area is mostly inaccessible at the moment and it is proposed to build two walkways over the issues and cut a path through the sieves which would improve accessibility for the public by providing a circular walk round the pond without having to take the long route round by the road. It would also enable people to have a closer look at the plant and wildlife activity.

(A side benefit of the walkways would be that Mark Binney could get his mower over the issues which would save time during the two main cuts of the rest of that part of the Green)

In time, it is hoped that an interpretation board would be provided, to enable the residents and visitors to the Green to have a better understanding of the history, flora and fauna of the Green, and why it is an important habitat.

It is also proposed that the drainage of the surrounding areas would be improved by cleaning the issues of twitch and ensuring better water flow. This might help to reduce the spread of sieves on the Green (in the non-blue areas) which would be beneficial for grazing livestock.

Plot Three – Unimproved grassland

Description

The area of unimproved grassland next to Cornhill House, including the steep bank.



Proposed Management

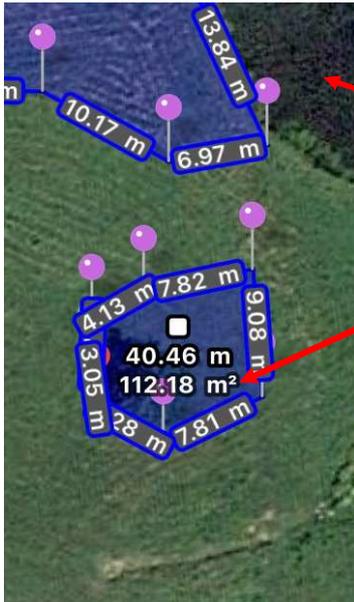
This area of ancient unimproved pasture is currently grazed by cattle and sheep. It is proposed to leave the area uncut in May to allow it to be managed by grazing alone, and to see which flower and grass species emerge as a result. Paths will be cut across the grass to allow easy pedestrian access, and a strip one metre wide will be cut along the road sides/by the finger post to ensure good visibility for motorists.

Once any flowers and grasses have gone over, then Mark Binney will cut the area and remove the cuttings. The timing will depend on the growing season, but it is anticipated that this area will be cut and cleared from mid-August at the earliest.

And finally – the Teardrop

There is an unusual Adder's Tongue fern which it is hoped can be given space to grow on the bank to the west of the pond. It is considered to be a good indicator species of ancient meadows, which are now a rarity. The Adder's Tongue fern has a bright green, oval upright frond with a central tall spike which bears the spores growing on it. It grows to a height of 10-20cm. It is proposed that a small area surrounding the fern be left uncut during the summer, and at the end of the growing season, Mark Binney would mow the area and remove the clippings.

The Teardrop location



Pond

Site of Adder's Tongue Fern



Adder's Tongue Fern

Timescale

The areas of Common land are currently subject to a Higher Level Stewardship scheme which finishes at the end of April 2023. It would seem appropriate to run the biodiversity pilot project until the HLS finishes and then review it at that stage. This would enable the areas to be monitored for two growing seasons and two winters before any major tweaks are made.

Community involvement

If the pilot project is approved by the Parish Council it is hoped to involve the wider community in monitoring plant, bird, invertebrate and amphibian species. This would be on the Biodiversity Working Group's agenda for further discussion in the weeks to come.

Aerial view of the Green with proposed plots



Example of an interpretation board which could be installed at the start of the walkway



The County Council

We would also need to let the County Council know of our proposals. The County Council has shown interest and support for the idea of encouraging greater biodiversity and we believe the County Council will be enthusiastic about the proposals.

Finances

The Working Group has consulted Mark Binney fully on the proposals and he has made very helpful suggestions. He believes that the changed management arrangements can be achieved at an additional cost of just under £60 in 2021-22. This can be readily absorbed within the Parish Council's overall grass cutting budget of £3,100 as Mark Binney's tender was £82 less than the budget. Given the uncertainty of new arrangements, it would be sensible to discuss progress with Mark Binney and see if there is a requirement for any further changes to contract terms. Any changes would of course need to be agreed by the Parish Council.

In addition, some of the extra drainage work that the Working Group and Mark Binney have identified and which Mark Binney would undertake would be carried out under the lengthsman's contract.

There would, however, be a need for investment in two walkways over the issues and ideally an interpretation board. Funding options for these can be explored. Grants for biodiversity projects may be available and the Parish Council has reserves. Parish Councillors could decide to use some of its reserves to support the project.



Plot 1, Semi Wetland Habitat

The proposed plot is on the far side of the ditch

Photo Credits: Simon Smith

Plot 2, Wetland habitat

The proposed plot sits to the right of the ditch adjacent to the pond and is covered in sieves



Plot 3, Unimproved grassland