

Turnpike Fields Maintenance Plan based on Wildlife Habitat.

(Approved by PC Feb2021 - see *Minutes of TFWG Meeting 100221*)

As proposed in my Wildlife Report for 2020 the following is a scheme to incorporate the awareness of the different habits on the fields in our maintenance plan for 2021. Much of this already existed in the Maintenance Plan agreed in 2020 which strongly reflects the recommendations of the Cheshire Wildlife Trust Survey Report of 2019. This draft plan is an adjustment of the 2020 plan in the light of our wildlife survey results.

It is important that in formulating a plan we have a clear idea what the Fields should be. The original brief was that it should be a community amenity area. Therefore it is right that the community needs should be respected and assisted in the way that the Fields are managed. The experience of the year has been that the major use of the Fields over this time has been to provide a place for exercise, dog walking, socialising, family recreation and picnics. These needs seem to be consistent with the awareness of the importance of wild open space for personal well-being. Fortunately this is not only compatible with the nurturing of the wildlife aspect of the Fields but also strengthened by it. The place of wild nature and people is now recognised as neither a relationship of competition nor a relationship of one controlling the other but a relationship of mutual benefit. Therefore focussing on preparing a maintenance plan that respects the wildlife will also benefit the human users of the fields.

Thus, the focus of this plan is working with the natural environments in the Fields. This plan is therefore based upon habitats and these have been identified for the Fields as shown on the map at the end of this report.

Descriptions of Habits

Field 1 (North Field)

Green Car Park Area

This is not strictly speaking a habitat but represents the area for the proposed Green Car Park. It is an area of grassland that sustains very few wild flowers apart from a number of grasses. It may at present be utilised as a general recreation area with the grass mown **in MAY/JUNE** in preparation for carparking etc at village festivals).

Grassland

This area is the vast majority of Field 1. The survey showed a number of grasses present consistent with "Improved" and "Unimproved" Grassland. While this area has had treatment while in agricultural use, the CWT test showed a neutral Ph indicating that the "improving" has not been severe enough to inhibit growth of grasses common to "unimproved" grassland. This grassland land supports a considerable number of insects, including on the more southerly side a number of different crickets and grasshoppers. To enable these to flourish it is important that the grass is not cut too early. It is agreed that it be **mown annually late August/ early September. A 2 metre strip should be left along the hedgerow edges.**

The uncut grassland proved a spectacular feature in 2020 and with the mown paths through it gave special interest to this area. **The established paths should be mown through the fields in late May/June.**

Hedgerows

These follow the Green Lane, Whitchurch Road and Canal boundaries. They provide a specific habitat with trees, shrubs and wild flowers. The 2020 survey did not differentiate those particularly attracted to this habitat but plants like Garlic Mustard and Ramson were prominent. The insect and mammal life, these and other plants support, has not yet been determined.

The CWT Survey Report **recommends that parts of the hedgerow be cut on rotation every three years** to sustain the nature habitat. The Natural England leaflet "Hedgelink" also **recommends that the hedges be cut so that the lower layers are kept dense.** If we can incorporate this and other recommendations in the way the work is carried out this would be advantageous to wildlife.

The following plan is agreed:

Hedges sides face roads (Whitchurch Rd and Green Lane) be cut **annually in September**

Sections of the hedging (top and inner sides be cut according to recommendations) **a third each year in September. The sections of hedgerow marked on the map -1,2,3 indicate the year for cutting, beginning with 1 in year 2021**

Edges

This is the two metre strip beside the Hedgerows. This area is particularly important to provide a wildlife corridor. There are also a number of plants which are found in this habitat. It is important that this is left "wild" and is not tidied up. It is suggested that this should not be mown but allowed to grow as it will.

Spoil Mound

This area has proved surprisingly prolific in bio-diversity this year. A mixture of natural and feral plants has provided a great combination both for other wildlife and for human interest. This area, by its nature, seems to thrive from human non-intervention and it is recommended that this should continue. The only intervention that is helpful is the culling of the Himalayan Balsam which grows in this area. The thistles which are highly valued by pollinating insects and others should, be allowed to run their full course and whilst prolific do not impact on the diversity of plants. **It is recommended that this area is left uncut.**

Wetlands

This is the area identified below the slope which is only dry in the driest parts of summer. It therefore has a habitat which favours particular plants which are flowering later on in the season. These have the importance for providing a food source after the summer spectacular. It also sustains wet loving plants such as as Mareetail, Trefoils, various Vetch, and Rushes.

It is recommended that because of the difficulty of cutting at an appropriate time and because of the need to provide year round cover for insects and mammals that this area be left uncut.

An area between the Pond and the brook this year has seen the growth of Alder sapling trees. It is an area that does not affect human activity and therefore **it is recommended that these be allowed to grow to form a natural coppice.** There is little wooded area on the Fields and this may be a way of extending the range of habitats. It will be necessary to prevent these saplings encroaching too much on the pond area. **It is recommended that these be culled**

Brook Bank

This is a difficult area to maintain due to the abundant growth in the area. It does sustain a number of species. It is an area which needs some considerable thought before any intervention is made. The CWT Report makes recommendation for some maintenance work on the brook side vegetation. **It is recommended that an attempt be made in 2021.** This might be incorporated into the hedge cutting as suggest. It can only be carried out when the ground is firm enough to support the machinery. It is suggested that this might be made a project to attract Water Voles. The culling of Himalyan Balsam should continue.

Pond

This new installation has already seen both plant and insect life. The installation came with regular inspection included and this would be helpful if this could happen. It particular it would be helpful to have advice about the yellow/green alga which has been covering the pond and whether this will decrease as the pond becomes more "balanced" or whether it needs intervention. **It is recommended that CWT be contacted to report on the state of the pond.** The pond probably requires little maintenance from us except annual inspection and any maintenance of the perimeter fence.

Embankment

This a stretch of the canal side boundary which extend down the side of Field 1 and on up beside Field 2. This habit is the main place for birds from Blackbirds, Thrushes, finches, tits and other hedgerow birds like Robins, and Wrens. It contains a number of mature trees and shrubs as well as thick undergrowth of brambles and nettles and thistles. This creates a very rich and safe environment for mammals as well as birds. The edge of the embankment also provides a habitat for plants that like open wooded areas such as Lords-and-Ladies. This is the only wooded habitat on the Fields. Without radically clearing the undergrowth

and cutting the trees there is little that can usefully be done to improve this area. **It is recommended that it is left to grow wild except where vegetation might impinge on the pathway .**

Some maintenance will be required on the stabilizing wire on the embankment adjacent to the bridge crossing the brook. **It is recommended that this be inspected and repair made.**

Field 2 (South Field)

Grassland

There are a number of plants found in this area, at the top of the field, which are not found in Field 1 Grassland. This area could be considered for future wild flower planting , particularly the area below the Oak trees. **It is agreed that maintenance be along the same lines as Grassland in Field 1.**

The area of newly planted trees should **NOT** be mown when the other grass is cut. This area will be cordoned off.

Floating Bog

The nature of the area means that very little maintenance is required of this area. By its nature it is sustained by vegetation rotting on its surface. **It is recommended that the culling of Himalyan Balsam on the edges of the Bog continue annually.**

Boggy Land

This is an off shoot from the Floating Bog. Another wetland area which can look after itself apart again from the Himalayan Balsam which is prolific in the area. **It is recommended that the culling of Himalyan Balsam continue annually.**

Pond

As in Field 1

Field Edge

This is an area at the top of the field which runs adjacent to the stream on the boundary edge. The terrain makes this an awkward area to maintain. Some grass cutting could be included in the Grassland cutting. Himalayan Balsam gain is prolific in this area and will need attention as in other areas. **It is recommended that further assessment of this area be undertaken.**

Canal Edge

This stretch of open edge contains a number of plants which support interesting insect life including Cinnabar and Silver Y Moths. **It is recommended that this be treated in the same way as the other Edge areas.**

Other Recommended Maintenance Activities

1. Maintain Grass Paths

The paths are required for walkers to be able to navigate around the field without having to make their way through long grass. The routes of the various paths have now been set out through regular walking. **It is recommended that these and extra paths to the picnic tables should be mown to keep them clear.**

2. Assess stiles and gates Items

To be inspected annually include:

- Pedestrian gate into field from Shropshire street
- Vehicle access gate from Green lane
- Gate access to the south field from Green lane
- Stile access from the canal - public footpath near the canal can become overgrown with brambles
- Wooden bridge for signs of decay
- Footpath/Vehicle access across the bridge that crosses the brook as it emerges from under the canal.

3. Assess Trees

After completion of the tree works in 2019 completing in early 2020, the trees will be assessed to determine if there is any further deterioration or damage to trees. see Appendix A -Timetable, for schedule of inspection.

4. Control Himalayan Balsam

During 2019, flailing and pulling of Himalayan Balsam was performed around Audlem brook and the land leading down to the stream on the southern boundary. This is expected to continue for the next four of five years. The clump of balsam on the Mound in the centre of Field 1 will be continue to be monitored and controlled if its gets out of hand. The reason for controlling the balsam is to enable native flora to re-establish around the brook for the benefit of native insects.

5. Control of Ragwort

In 2020 this raised a considerable amount of debate. There are clearly different valid opinions on how best to tackle this. These opinions vary according to how the land will be used and the threat posed to neighbouring fields by spread of seeds. Recently in a agricultural setting, Ragwort has been seen to be invasive to pasture and a danger to livestock. From a wildlife point of view it is an important late summer food source for pollinating insects and the habitat of specialised species i.e. Cinnabar Moth. It is a native plant, among several others, that has flourished in 2020 as a perennial it would be interesting to see if this continues into 2021.

In the context of the Fields, as it is Public Amenity land and not Agricultural land to be used by livestock and as it is a very self-contained area without other agricultural land connected to it, the risk posed to livestock is low.

The plant is almost exclusively contained in Field 1, (the canal edge being an exception). The largest concentration is in the Spoil Mound area and the area below the Mound towards the Wetland area at the bottom. There are individual plants scattered around the edges and in the Grassland area. So in some way the most practical answer would be to cull the plants, in the Grassland areas and edges. by pulling. Those on the Mound and in other concentrated areas would be left for the benefit of bio-diversity. The other area where the plant is seen in any numbers is the Canal Edge in Field 2. The plants here have been seen to support Cinnabar Moth caterpillars (a declining species) and my be contained in this small area. Stray plants could be pulled. This could be carried out in the same way as the control of Himalyan Balsam.

6. Assess furniture

The existing furniture installed in the fields will be inspected annually to ensure it is good condition and doesn't present a danger to the public e.g. loose bolts on the tables. Items include • Bins • Picnic tables.

7. Assess ponds

The ponds will be assessed for: • the pond banks are in good condition and able to retain water whilst preventing ingress of water from flood waters of Audlem brook. • trees or branches in the ponds during stormy weather. This should be carried out in consultation with Cheshire Wildlife Trust.

Turnpike Fields Maintenance Plan based on Wildlife Habitat - Summary

To find area suggested refer to Wildlife Habit Map (page 2)

1.Green Car Park Area

To be mown in MAY and Late AUGUST [COST]

2.Grassland 1 & 2

To be mown in late AUGUST [COST]

3.Hedgerows

Cut in 1/3 sections each year in SEPTEMBER [COST.....]

Cut road sides (Whitchurch Rd & Green Lane) each year in SEPTEMBER [COST.....]

4. Grassland Paths

Paths to be mown through Grassland as per 2020 in MAY/JUNE [COST.....]

5. Other Habitats

All other Habitat Areas to be left in 2021 with reassessment at end of the year [COST.. Nil]

6. Ponds

To be assessing in conjunction with CWT [COST... Nil]

7. Brook Bank

Obtain advice on best way to maintain and enhance the Brook [COST.....]

8. Culvert Embankment

Obtain advice on repair of embankment reinforcement [COST]]

9. Control Himalayan Balsam

Annual culling to take place in JULY with voluntary force (ADAS) [COST..... Nil]

10. Control of Ragwort

Culling of plants in selective areas of fields in AUGUST by voluntary force [COST Nil]

11. Tree inspection and Remedial Work

As per Tree Survey

12. Inspection of Field Furniture

Gates, Benches, etc to be inspected in MARCH; remedial work required [COST}

Turnpike Fields Habitat Map

