

Turnpike field is owned by Audlem Parish Council and by extension all 2000 residents of the parish. It is managed by the Turnpike Field Working Group consisting of five Parish Councillors and six volunteers from the Community.

The group seeks advice on management of the vegetation and wildlife habitats from Cheshire Wildlife Trust, Natural England and other similar organisations. There are many differing views as to the optimum way to manage the field, but the group endeavours to satisfy as many objectives as possible.

It is important to remember when seeking advice from organisations that the scale, aspect, context and soil type is unique to Turnpike Field and needs to be taken into consideration. The large field especially has been used for agriculture in the past and is 'improved grassland' meaning that fertiliser has been used there for some years. This means that certain plants grow better than others would do in the natural world. The effects of the diminishing residues will be there for some time and need to be taken into account when seeking advice and considering optimum maintenance plans to meet our needs.

Specific issues being addressed currently are explained below.

1. Ragwort

There are concerns that Ragwort needs to be controlled. In summer 2022 it was especially prolific and belated attempts to cull it by hand proved extremely demanding and hard work for our many volunteers. The Maintenance Group have considered a variety of options including application of herbicide using a weed wiper and/or by spot spraying, culling by hand, mowing, pulling the flower heads. There are pros and cons for all methods, but we have concluded for this year to take the following actions:-

- Spot spray with glyphosate in mown areas near to field boundaries to reduce dispersal of seeds to neighbouring fields and gardens- done early June
- spot spray with Grazon 90 where there are clumps among the unmown areas. This will be done sparingly, it does not affect grasses but can kill other plants. It is our intention to sow locally collected wild flower seed from Melverley Meadows into some of the areas sprayed with Grazon 90 in the hope that they will eventually take up residence, once the ragwort is destroyed in those patches.
- allow remaining plants to flower to enable enjoyment of visitors to the field and to benefit insects especially bees

2. Wild Flower patch (item 6 see Turnpike Fields Habitat Map 5 June)

Whilst the whole field (with the exception of the Spoil Heap) contains wild flowers, it was felt that introducing a patch of wild flowers would create interest, introduce new species and help to resolve the proliferation of Scotch and Creeping Thistle adjacent to the pond in the large field. It would have proved extremely labour intensive and not wholly successful to dig up the plants growing in heavy clay so it was decided to apply glyphosate to the area, being a relatively small patch. The intention now is to sow seeds harvested from Melverley Meadows, a local wildlife site. These seeds will be of local varieties suited to our locality and of course our climate, albeit this is ever evolving.

3. Outer edges areas 2-3 and 7 (see Turnpike Fields Habitat Map 5 June)

These are deep borders of brambles, which grow and expand rapidly, encroaching on the field. They need to be contained to enhance the enjoyment of the perimeter path. We employed a contractor in spring to cut back the vegetation up to five metres in places, it is of course regrowing and the plan is to cut it back again in autumn, and in successive years. Noted that, in preference to applying herbicide, the roots help to soak up the water leaking under the canal which contributes to the muddiness at the southern end of the bridge.

4. Himalayan Balsam

Regarded as a non-indigenous invasive plant, the advised method for controlling it's spread is to manually pull it up. It is also seen as beneficial to insects.

The method adopted in previous years has been to seek volunteers to pull up the plant as it is shallow rooted. Activity will be concentrated on the banks of the stream to reduce the spread of seeds on to neighbouring land. Some plants will be left for the benefit of insects.