

## Introduction

Cowslip Meadow in Biddenham, Bedford, is a small conservation area, owned by Bedford Borough Council and managed as a public amenity area. It lies within Bedfords' main Green Corridor, formed by the River Great Ouse. Cowslip Meadow is easily accessible from nearby Church End and footpaths around The Bedford Golf Club, the River Great Ouse and Bromham Bridge. It is proof that even small green spaces can be important refuges for wildlife and peaceful places for people to escape from everyday pressures.

It is proposed that a new Friends Group is set up to take on the management of the site on behalf of the Council. For more details of the history of Cowslip Meadow, see Appendix C.



The aim of this Management Plan is to bring together into one document the site's history, development as a conservation area and future plans. It should enable future site managers to build on past experiences.

This plan encompasses the Friends vision for the meadow and surrounding public footpaths. The purpose of the plan is to guide the actions required to help preserve, maintain and enhance the wildlife and habitats of the plan area. The plan sets out the activities to be undertaken over the period 2017-2021 by Bedford Borough Council and the Friends of Cowslip Meadow.

## Site Summary

Name:	Cowslip Meadow
Ownership:	Bedford Borough Council
Management:	Friends of Cowslip Meadow
Location:	Church End, Biddenham
Grid reference:	
Area:	
Conservation Status:	No formal status
Access:	Pedestrian access from Church End, Biddenham, Coffin Path, Biddenham, Bromham Road, Bedford Western Bypass adjacent to The Bedford Golf Course

The meadow is open at all times.

## Site Location and Plan

Cowslip Meadow is located to the west of Biddenham close to the Bedford Western Bypass, on the eastern side of the River Great Ouse (see map on next page). It is situated adjacent to the A421, in



repair with rubble and an expanding nettle bed that does not provide an attractive introduction at the main entrance to the site. The boundary hedges are becoming more overgrown in places and if left unmanaged will soon become scrub.

### **Habitat and wildlife**

The site contains a wide variety of habitats including semi-improved and species rich neutral grassland, lowland mixed deciduous woodland/hedges and a small pond. The meadow especially contains a good diversity of herbs including common spotted orchid, wild liquorice, and yellow rattle. In summer there is a wide variety of butterflies, bumblebees and other invertebrates. Mammals include rabbits, badgers and muntjac deer.

### **Overall Objectives**

Cowslip Meadow was gifted to Bedford Borough Council when ....xxx... However there are very limited funds available to maintain the meadow to a standard that will avoid the land becoming scrub and reduce its attractiveness as a conservation area to local people. The council currently mow the meadow once per year, around September, and do not remove the arising which is usually bailed and rolled in to the hedgerows.

Cowslip Meadow is bounded by a mixture of hedgerows and fences, but there are several gaps leaving open spaces to adjacent fields and major roads. This means the meadow is not suitable for grazing and all maintenance will have to be provided by volunteers from the Friends Group. A local group have performed an audit of the wild flowers in the meadow and 1xx species have been identified. The audit is attached as Appendix A to this management plan.

The objectives of the Friends Group will be to:

- Monitor the wild flowers within the meadow to maintain the quantity and variety
- Improve the access and security of the site by reworking the access point at Church End
- Create and maintain, by regular mowing, footpaths across the site to link the access points
- Ensure that the meadow does not drift into a state of scrub
- Provide a local amenity that will be of use to casual walkers, school and youth groups

### **Health & Safety Policy**

Friends of Cowslip Meadow Constitution specifies that the group should adhere to BBC's Health and Safety Policy. The group has therefore developed its own health and safety procedures which have been approved by BBC. Members who volunteer, are given a BTCV health and safety guide (downloaded, with permission, from BCTV's website) plus Cowslip Meadow's Health and Safety Briefing document (see Appendix B). Casual volunteers are talked through the latter guide. All volunteers sign-on at each working party to acknowledge they have understood the guides.

Training for power tools, such as the strimmer and mower, is provided by BBC's countryside services. All volunteers are assisted with the use of tools they are unfamiliar with.

Risk assessments for the various activities undertaken have been drawn up by BBC's Health and Safety Officer with help from project leader, xxx. They are available on site and the project leader should check that volunteers are following the guidance as best they can. The risk assessments are available on request as a separate set of documents.

To try to make the site pleasant to visit and work in, Cowslip Meadow is designated a Dogs on Lead site under BBC's Dog Control Order and it is also an offence not to clear up your dog's mess. There are dog control signs on site to draw these rules to visitors attention.

### **Clean and well maintained**

As a conservation site Cowslip Meadow is not expected to be manicured! However, it is recognised that it should be kept appropriately clean and tidy. It is also important that the waste created on site is disposed of with as little impact on the environment as possible.

The arisings from the meadow cutting is the biggest annual problem. There is insufficient space to compost several tonnes of arisings on site, so the aim is to remove them from site to a composting area, where they can be recycled. For the last few years the bailed arisings have been pushed into hedgerows causing ..... What can be done to avoid this problem in the future?

#### *Ragwort*

A significant effort has been made to remove large quantities of ragwort that .....

Any value that the arisings may have for animal feed or bedding is severely impacted by the presence of ragwort.

The Friends of Cowslip Meadow will continue to remove the ragwort each year to reduce it's impact.

Following the ragwort pulling in August 2016 BBC Countryside Services and Grounds Maintenance have co-operated with volunteers to successfully remove the pulled ragwort to another location for disposal.



### **Sustainability**

The management of the site is based on organic cultivation and the use of sustainable materials. No chemicals are planned to be used in the maintenance of Cowslip Meadow.

The site is over rough ground and no attempt will be made to provide wheelchair access.

There are no immediate plans to install any seats or benches.

### **Local involvement**

Members of Friends of Cowslip Meadow will meet once a year at the AGM and will be kept informed of developments through a letter/email that will be produced at least twice a year.

The site is visited daily by dog walkers and for gentle exercise. The current challenge is to encourage younger people to become involved and use the meadow regularly.

## **Marketing**

Cowslip Meadow is primarily a wildlife site, so human activity by definition, should be limited to low impact leisure. Friends of Cowslip Meadow has used a number of means to publicise the site to date, for example at local events such as the Biddenham Show, in local newspapers and through the BBC Community Volunteering Newsletter. The group also has its own webpage on the Biddenham website ([www.xxxx.org.uk](http://www.xxxx.org.uk)) and has produced an information leaflet with a membership form. There is a link to this website from the BBC's website.

The entrances do not have the site's name or purpose displayed and this is off putting to new visitors and residents who are unsure about public access. Small signs should be mounted at the entrances to direct visitors to the site similar to those promoting the Biddenham Heritage Trail.

An information board with a brief outline of the site's history and purpose and a plan of the site in a style similar to that of the Biddenham Heritage Trail would better inform all visitors about the site. Funding will be sought to introduce this at the earliest opportunity.

Education is a long-term aim and will commence with the proposed information boards, sharing of knowledge with volunteers and through public events. As a voluntary group, Friends of Cowslip Meadow is limited in its ability to produce educational material in any form, by finances and volunteer time.

## **Management Responsibility**

BBC owns Cowslip Meadow, so has responsibility for overall public safety at the site.

The Friends of Cowslip Meadow has responsibility for managing Cowslip Meadow. The group is fully constituted and has a committee which meets around six times a year. Project leader and Chair of the Friends, Chris Jones, has dedicated many hours to researching management techniques, as well as learning about local flora and fauna.

## **Aims, Objectives and Vision Statement**

### **Aim:**

To ensure that the management of the meadow improves over time to provide an open space that is used regularly for recreation.

### **Objectives:**

1. To manage the various habitats within Cowslip Meadow for the benefit of wildlife, using organic techniques where at all possible.
2. To inform local people of the importance of wildlife within their local environment.
3. To bring the local community together in the management and maintenance of Cowslip Meadow.
4. To provide a pleasant and safe environment for people to enjoy and learn about the local flora and fauna.

### **Vision Statement:**

To maintain and where appropriate, improve, the different habitats at Cowslip Meadow for the mutual benefit of wildlife and people for the foreseeable future.

## **Management Plan**

The incentive for developing Cowslip Meadow as a wild flower conservation area is to preserve the local habitat and prevent it turning to scrub land. The meadow forms a discrete area between Biddenham and Bromham alongside the Bedford Western Bypass that runs between the two villages. Today, Cowslip Meadow is an important open space with many wild flowers that are in danger of disappearing as the borough council have limited funds to spend on non statutory expenditure such as meadow management. A local Friends Group will have to step into provide the additional resources required to maintain and develop the meadow for future generations to enjoy.

From a community point of view, the site has become an important place from which to enjoy a taste of the countryside. Residents of Biddenham, Bromham and Great Denham use the site as part of their regular walks. Local Nordic Walking groups include the site as one their regular routes.

Volunteers enjoy the camaraderie of working together on a site they love and it is hoped that a new generation of people will follow them through the engagement with local schools and youth groups.

## **Clean and well maintained**

Cowslip Meadow is intended to be an example of wild countryside but keeping it looking cared-for is an important way of discouraging vandalism and potential development. A small team of volunteers is required to cut the short grass areas 2-4 times a month during the growing season. The policy remains that the entire meadow will be cut once per year, most likely in September which is best done in one session rather than several smaller ones.

## **High Level Management Plan:**

- Form or join another Friends Group to formalise the volunteers to manage the meadow on behalf of the BBC
- Train the new volunteers in the use of tools and equipment
- Create a footpath plan for the site and implement after the annual mowing
- Acquire, via the Parish Council, a new mower to maintain the footpaths across the meadow to improve access and encourage more use of the meadow
- Use other tools available from the local community to maintain the access points and hedgerows (eg strimmer and hand tools)
- Agree with the local council a mowing plan that integrates with the volunteer activities
- Liaise with the adjacent landowners to create a hedgerow plan that will improve and control access to the meadow over several years
- Design, procure and display a small information sign at Church End
- Design, procure and display signs at each other entrance (3)
- Continue the ragwort pulling exercise started in August 2016 that over time may lead to the hay having a use offsite
- Update website pages.

## **Monitoring use of the meadow**

There are two aspects to monitoring Cowslip Meadow; public use and wildlife benefits.

The latter is easier to monitor, as surveys will be conducted each year of the flora and fauna.

Friends of Cowslip Meadow will gauge the success of the site by:

- sending out a simple questionnaire to members each year and review the results at the AGM where feedback can be accommodated in future plans
- collect information from visitors to the meadow to capture the public's impression of the meadow.

## Finance

Friends of Cowslip Meadow will need to raise funds or obtain sponsorship to fund its objectives. The biggest risk for the coming years will be financing the annual meadow cut if BBC is no longer willing to pay.

Will the Friends of Cowslip Meadow require any specific insurance?

Membership estimates are relatively low with similar schemes in the area attracting xx members at £x per year. This would bring in around £xx and a number of members may make donations also.

## Appendix

Appendix A - The history of Cowslip Meadow

Appendix B - Wildlife Records

Table 1 - Plants recorded at Cowslip Meadow - 2016

Table 2 - Birds recorded at Cowslip Meadow - xxx

Table 3 - Insects recorded at Cowslip Meadow - xxx

Table 4 - Other wildlife recorded at Cowslip Meadow - xxx

Appendix C - Health & Safety Policy

Appendix D - Contacts

### Ownership

Owner of Cowslip Meadow - Bedford Borough Council, High Street, Bedford ???

Principle contact:

Phone:

Email:

### Management group

Friends of Cowslip Meadow

Principle contact: Mr xxx, Chair.

Phone: 01...

Email:

Website:

Zone	Vision from 2017 to 2021	Tasks to be undertaken by the Friend (F) with support from Bedford Borough (BB)	Outcome at 2021
<b>1. Meadow</b>	<p><u>Priority 1. Access to meadow</u></p> <p><u>Controlled access for motor vehicles from Church End</u></p> <p><u>Priority 2. Biodiversity</u></p> <p>Manage as a wild flower meadow</p> <p><u>Priority 2. Interpretation of site</u></p> <p>Consider installing three interpretation boards – possibly one at the site entrance at bottom of meadow near the golf course, one at the top near Bromham Road and one at the main entrance near the church.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gateway is repaired and short fence installed to enable access for motor vehicles</li> <li>• Plan and deploy new walking routes across the meadow and cut them regularly throughout the growing season</li> <li>• Pull ragwort during spring and summer (F). (BB) to remove material from site for destruction.</li> <li>• Improve signage to encourage visitors to enter and use the new footpaths across the meadow. (F)</li> <li>• Arrange the cut, collect and removal of grass in the autumn. (BB)</li> <li>• Set up working group in 2016 to take forward the interpretation boards. (F)</li> </ul>	<p>No illegal access is made to the meadow.</p> <p>Reduction of ragwort and other undesirable species to no more than 5%.</p> <p>Increased use of the meadow as a peaceful place for residents and visitors.</p> <p>Interpretation boards erected.</p>
<b>2. Hedgerows</b>	<p>Priority 1. Biodiversity</p> <p>Retain hedgerow as part of former field boundary</p>	<p>Cut back bramble and scrub as and when required to prevent it from encroaching on the meadow. (F)</p>	<p>Well defined boundaries to the meadow</p>
<b>3. Wet land</b>	<p>Priority 1. Biodiversity</p> <p>Consider clearing the wet land so that it is more visible, but leaving it shaded.</p>	<p>Clear scrub to aid visibility of wet area to maintain no more than 25% shade. (F)</p> <p>Clear debris annually (if and when required) (F)</p>	<p>Wet land clear of scrub with no more than 25% shade.</p> <p>Features maintained by annual light clearing.</p>
<b>4. Western tree belt</b>	<p>Priority 1. Biodiversity</p> <p>Maintain as screening from bypass.</p> <p>Develop graduated woodland edge by allowing some scrub to</p>	<p>Cut back scrub annually (if required) to encourage a graduated woodland edge and prevent encroachment onto meadow. (F)</p>	<p>Woodland retained.</p> <p>No scrub encroachment onto meadow.</p>

Zone	Vision from 2017 to 2021	Tasks to be undertaken by the Friend (F) with support from Bedford Borough (BB)	Outcome at 2021
	grow 0.5m from edge and periodically cutting it back.		
<b>Whole site</b>	Maintain a record of flora and fauna on site	<p>Ask Bedfordshire Recorders for advice on surveying the site. (F)</p> <p>Take up offer of advice from the Wildlife Trust on: Monitoring the Courtyard to prevent courser species becoming more prevalent; and monitoring for deer damage. (F)</p> <p>Record flora and fauna throughout the year. (F)</p> <p>Decide on fixed points from which regular photos could be taken. (F)</p>	Records reflect a general increase in diversity