

# Friends of Gedling House Woods

## Annual Report 2015



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### *10-year contract with Natural England*

FGHW has negotiated a new contract with Natural England to manage the meadows. The meadows, not the woods, are the most valuable asset of Gedling House Woods as they form an example of land that has not been used for anything other than a meadow for a very long time – an ancient meadow. This means we are able to claim funding annually to support our work in maintaining the meadow.

We have joined the Natural England's Higher Level Scheme, which provides regular basic funds for maintenance of the three meadows, and one-off grants to support identified developments. The funding is provided through the EU's common agricultural policy. Our scheme involves an annual meadow management plan, set out below, that generates funding annually.

We are also claiming one-off funding to clear the bramble areas in the first and second meadows, over two years. The one-off funding also provides income based on the number of educational visits that take place, for which we receive £100 per visit up to 25 visits. Even so, the cost of managing the meadows and woods each year exceeds our grant income.

The whole process took several months and we needed to employ an agricultural consultant to support us in writing the bid, as well as holding several meetings with Natural England staff to finalise the detail. While it was a demanding process, it has provided a stable income stream for the Friends of Gedling House Woods until 2024.

Members will recall from last year that we also negotiated an extension of our contract with Gedling Borough Council to manage the woods for a further year so that we could provide a guarantee to Natural England that we could show 'ownership' of the meadow for the full ten years. This means that both contracts will come up for renewal at the same time in 2024.



### *Meadow management*

To manage the meadows to the brief set out in Natural England's agreement, we are required to include a number of key features.

- annual spot weedkilling to remove invasive and non-native species such as dock, creeping thistle and nettles – done in the spring
- mowing to harvest the season's growth from the grass and flower mix that is in the meadows – done in the late summer
- bale and remove the hay to avoid it providing nutrients for the soil – meadows grow best with minimal nutrient – done a few days after cutting the hay
- graze the meadows with sheep to reduce the grass and wild flower mix to less than 10 cm – done in November.

The haymaking is a big task and we need to use a local farming contractor. Similarly, we need to use accredited contractors for spraying. The ‘flying flock’ of Hebridean sheep from the Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust is, of course, a familiar sight as they graze in the meadow in the autumn.

### *Wildlife habitats*

Many times FGHW members have expressed their concern at the loss of brambles and other scrub, usually found in woodland edges, because they provide excellent shelter and nesting places for birds, butterflies and many other insects. As the meadow is the main focus of our contract with Natural England, we have been asked to clear both meadows of the scrub as that was encroaching on the grassland. We have started with the second meadow this year to minimise the risk that the loss of all the cover at once would place on wildlife. This is in addition to the loss of elder and bramble when we cleared and reseeded the third, D-section top meadow.

Our plan is to maintain bramble and similar shrubbery where we can at the boundaries of the meadows, but to maximise the meadow area within the fencing. We also intend to clear a narrow path outside the third meadow fence. All the undergrowth from that point to the trees will be allowed to grow naturally to provide the habitats that have been removed from the meadows. We have a well-maintained set of hedges now, and these also provide similar habitats for birds and insects which were not present when we took over the management of Gedling House Woods and its meadows.

### *The top meadow*

The top meadow (D-section) was sown with a grass and wildflower mix in the autumn and is now showing green grass and wild flowers almost all over. For this meadow, we will mow two or three times in the first year and leave the grass in the meadow – there will not be sufficient to collect and this is always advised for new meadows. We hope it will be open to the public again in the summer of 2016.



## ***Boundaries***

During one Sunday afternoon in April, the fencing near the gate to the woods at the top of Yew Tree Lane was breached to enable a young motorcyclist to get through and ride down to the meadow. Demolition of the kissing gate then enabled the motorcyclist to get into the meadow where he rode his motorbike around for some time. The incident was reported to the police and is one of a number of similar incidents they have noted locally.

If any visitors to the woods notice any such vandalism or misuse of the meadow, it would be helpful if they could dial 101 on their mobiles to report the incident while it is taking place, before reporting it to a member of the FGHW committee. Thanks to all those who use the woods for keeping us in touch with what is happening from day to day – it is very helpful.

While on the subject of boundaries, we have discovered that the fencing and verge along Military Road belongs to Carlton-le-Willows Academy, although the hedge and inner fence belong to Gedling Borough Council and are managed by FGHW.



We are experimenting with how we restore the verge on Wood Lane where it has been damaged by heavy lorries associated with building work passing parked vehicles. To try to avoid any new topsoil being washed down the lane, we are placing a sod from higher up the bank at the road edge and then backfilling the verge with topsoil. We hope this proves more effective than previous repairs.

## ***Educational visits***

Schools and nurseries made three educational visits to the woods and meadows this school year, with more expected before the end of term. Again, the FGHW committee would like to thank Anne Richards for her continuing contribution that ensures these visits go smoothly, along with help from Dave Richards. In addition, Daisies Day Nursery from Gedling House is increasingly using the woods and meadows to support its Forest School curriculum. Forest schools help students develop confidence and creativity by teaching practical, outdoor skills.



## ***The aims of Friends of Gedling House Woods***

*A reminder of what we are here for . . .*

To protect, maintain and develop the local natural environment of Gedling House Woods Local Nature Reserve and its immediate surroundings, including wildlife, woods, adjacent meadowland, hedgerows, trees and verges.

*The photographs at the bottom of the front page, taken in May 2015, show (left to right): Dryad's saddle (polyporus squamosus); Spring fieldcap (Agrocybe praecox), Primrose (primula vulgaris); and Sweet violet (viola odorata).*