

# Friends of Gedling House Woods

## Annual Report 2017



*In this edition . . . . .*



Woodland management plan – *professional advice on how to manage and develop the woodland part of the site*

Meadow management – *our new meadow management plan in operation*

Crown lifting and clearing – *a winter job improving the meadow trees*

Meadow 3 development – *an interpretation board so visitors can identity the wildflower species growing in the top meadow*

Educational visits – *an update on these important elements of our funding agreement*



# *News of the past year in the woods and meadows*

## *Woodland management plan*

We were successful in obtaining funding from Nottinghamshire County Council's Greenwood team to support the generation of a new woodland management brief through the Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust. Thanks go to Nic Wort of NCC and Ben Driver of NWT for their work and support in this. Preparing the plan entailed several accompanied visits and discussions before a draft document came to us for checking. Minor modifications led to a final brief which will form the basis of a new, practical, month-by-month management plan for the woodland area of the site. Work on the woodland has to take place between November and March to avoid disturbing wildlife, and this gives us the summer and autumn to put the plan together for operation at the end of 2017.



*Marginal scrub and smaller trees adjacent to meadow 3*

The long-term vision for the woods is to provide transition from the road and meadow to dense canopy mixed woodland in the centre. In the long term, we intend to move to marginal areas adjacent to the meadows which would consist of bramble, hawthorn, elder, rowan and holly, giving a height gradient from meadow to mature native broadleaf trees such as ash, oak, beech, elm and sycamore. This would include some coppicing. We currently have one glade, and the plan allows for more if we find a suitable spot.

On the lane side, from the main gate to the far end of Wood Lane, the plan is to move gradually to a marginal area of coppiced trees, particularly hazel but also making use of other species currently in place. This will involve some clearing to remove dense patches of self-seeded trees and some planting as gaps appear. As tall trees on the roadside edge come to the end of their life, they will be gradually replaced by shorter coppiced species. In the fullness of time, this will remove the overhang and allow more light into the woodland edge.

The glade has been reseeded with a shady grass mixture. This is more suited to the limited light that reaches the ground there than the original plan for a wild flower clearing. The glade is being strimmed regularly to keep weeds down and to allow the grass to dominate. A fallen tree and a large tree sloping over the glade were removed during the winter to let more light in, too. Primroses grown from local seedlings have been planted and other native spring flowers will be introduced over time.

## *Meadow management*

We have developed a month-by-month plan for managing the meadows, making use of expert advice on meadow management. This is now fully in use. The basic principles that apply to meadows such as ours cover four main areas that are linked to the seasons:

- growing, but only the plants we want to grow
- allowing plants to self-seed
- removing hay and other vegetation
- grazing to prepare for the next season.



*Late  
spring*



During the phase of maximum growth, we remove unwanted broadleaved weeds using a herbicide – we try to remove thistle, dock, nettle, burdock and teasel which can take over meadows, and ragwort, which is poisonous to horses

*Summer*

We allow the wild flowers to flower and seed. Some of the meadow flowers are perennial but many are annuals, so self-seeding ensures regeneration in the following year. Insects and the wind carry some seeds a fair distance, and they could well spread to the other meadows.



*Late  
summer /  
early  
autumn*

Contractors cut, bale and remove the hay in the late summer – most wildflowers thrive best on low-nutrient soil and leaving the grass and flower stems, cut or otherwise, to decay on the surface would increase the amounts of nutrients that wash into the soil. Baling and removing the hay is an important part of managing the meadows.



*Autumn /  
winter*

Finally, sheep graze during the winter – this establishes a clean start for spring growth by removing any remaining old growth and all new growth since mowing the meadow. The maximum length to be left is about 10 cm, but we generally achieve around 5cm as long as the sheep eat enthusiastically – we have moved to younger male sheep to achieve this in the last two years.



This broad plan is built into our agreement for funding from Natural England. In practice this means working with contractors and Gedling Borough Council to schedule and commission the work.



We also have to use volunteer help to ensure that the meadow is maintained in a way that allows easy harvesting. This involves cutting the hedges regularly during the winter. Our work in 2015/16 has allowed the contractor to cut the hedges inside the fences down to ground level, and that is reducing the extent to which the hedge tries to grow into the meadow.

To help us with this, we have purchased a large wheeled brushcutter that we are using to clear a narrow strip round the edge of the meadow. This is to prevent the hedgerow encroaching on the meadow and contaminating the hay with brambles and other woody growth.



The restored piece of grassland at the top of meadow 2 has sprung into life with vigour this year. We were concerned at the limited growth it made last year, but it is hard to tell it apart from the rest of the meadow now. The moral of this story is that meadows take many years to establish themselves.

The top of meadow 1 has also been reseeded (pictures on the front page) and grass is now coming through. We look forward to full growth next year on what has proved to be a very fertile piece of land

### *Crown lifting and clearing*

Several members of FGHW and a volunteer from Nottingham Trent University spend many hours during the winter lifting the crowns on the trees in the meadows. For the hawthorns and other tree species in the meadow, this process involved removing all branches from the main trunks lower than head height – two metres – and trimming overhanging branches to this level. Crown lifting provides better air circulation for the upper branches and enables any undergrowth to be removed more easily. Crown lifting also provides more light for the underlying meadow and allows the meadow grass to grow back under the trees.



Trees in meadows are fine, as long as they do not encourage undergrowth to spread into the meadow. Unfortunately this was happening extensively, so we took radical action to minimise this encroachment. A pair of pictures before and after the work shows the extent of what was needed on just one tree – we worked on about 15 in all three meadows, with just a few to complete next winter in meadow 2.





*Before the work took place*



*After the crown was lifted*

This involved a considerable amount of work moving the cut branches and brash into meadow 1 and a large bonfire – all safely achieved.





## Interpretation board for meadow 3

We had nothing to draw visitors' attention to the diversity of wildflowers sown in meadow 3, so have commissioned an interpretation board for that meadow. Supported by a 50% grant from Gedling Borough Council, this should be in place soon.



## Educational visits

We were able to claim the maximum available grant for educational visits from Natural England in 2016, with more than 25 (the maximum number that generates funding) during the school year. As usual, the FGHW committee would like to thank Anne Richards for her continuing support in ensuring the visits from primary schools go well. We also thank Daisies Day Nursery from Gedling House for the frequent use children make of the meadows and woods to support its Forest School curriculum.

## 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, the meadowland, hedgerows, trees and verges.

*The photographs on the front page, taken during the autumn/winter 2016 and spring 2017, show (top to bottom, left to right): Hebridean sheep grazing in meadow 3; a find of St George's Mushroom (calocybe gambosa); one of the black Hebridean sheep; autumnal scene at the top of meadow 1; buttercups in abundance; harrowing the top of meadow 1; rolling in the seed at the top of meadow 1.*

*All photographs by Andy Newton and Frank Knowles*