

Asker Meadows Management Plan v.2 010219

FOR EXTERNAL CONSULTATION

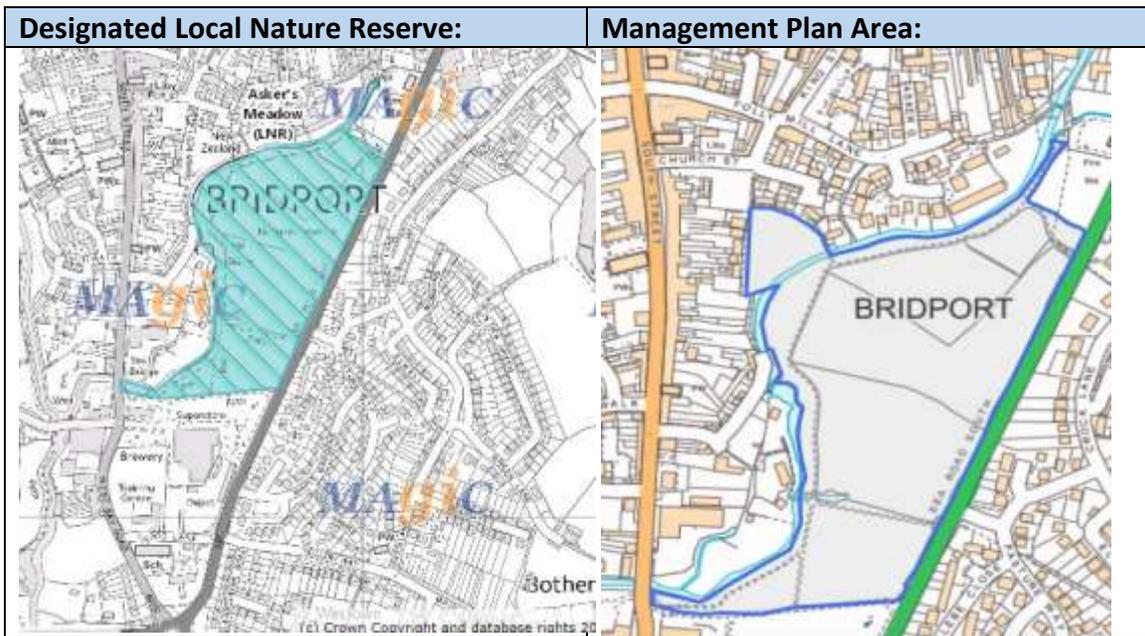
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1 Background

Asker Meadows is a 9.16 Ha riverside meadows running alongside the River Asker. Owned by Bridport Town Council the area is an important lung of green space between the town of Bridport and the busy A35 and surrounding parish of Bothenhampton.

Over the last 5 years the Town Council, working with the Asker Meadows Nature Reserve Group, have undertaken a number of practical improvements to the area. More activity now needs to be considered and planned for and requires a Management Plan to define aims, objectives and actions over the next 10 years.



In developing the management plan for Asker Meadows Nature reserve it is intended to include prescriptions for the adjoining area known as New Zealand.

The river Asker is part of the West Dorset Catchment and is subject to an Environment Agency Flood Defence Scheme. Around 420 properties are within the 1% annual probability flood extent (ignoring the influence of defences). In the future, this number is expected to increase to 590. In general the degree of flood hazard is low, with a small number of properties at risk from a moderate or significant hazard due to deep or fast flowing floodwater. In more extreme flooding up to 700 properties are at risk.

The ongoing operation of the Flood Defence scheme will impact on the ambitions and delivery of this management plan. It is essential that the Environment Agency are fully engaged in the consultation phase for this draft plan.

Brief history of the site:

1991 Land gifted by Mr Humphries to Dorset County Council
Dorset County Council transferred site to Bridport Town Council

Local Nature Reserve status acquired in 2004*
2004 Defra Countryside Stewardship award to establish grazing
Nature Reserve Group formed 2005

2014 meadow restoration as part Coronation Meadow Project**
Grazing License negotiated annually

*See:

<https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/SiteLNRDetail.aspx?SiteCode=L1084817&SiteName=&countyCode=12&responsiblePerson=&SeaArea=&IFCAAarea=>

** *In the summer 2014, volunteers harvested seed from Dorset's Coronation Meadow, Lady's Mead at Kingcombe, before its scheduled mid-July hay cut. The seeds were dried and stored ready for sowing into seed trays in August and September - once grown, these plugs be planted into Askers Meadow to commence the restoration works.*

2 Consultation Summary

Management Plan Process

It is important that the management plan for Asker Meadows and New Zealand ensures that the interests of wildlife and the many users are balanced and mitigations are put in place to address community concerns.

During December 2018 a public consultation exercise took place to gather community views about the areas. (see appendix for full listing)

A formal public consultation is scheduled for February /March 2019.

Summary of Community consultation responses

What we know about Asker Meadows:

Brown Trout, Sea Trout, Salmon, Brook Lampreys.
47 species of bird, 10 mammals (apart from pets), 15 insects, 5 amphibians, reptiles and fish.
Goldfinches x 40, Slow worms, Hedgehogs, Egret, Sparrow hawk, (garden on South Mill Lane) Wonderful!
Residents survey – South Mill Lane.
Water voles, Bats – Pipistrelle & Daubenton's , Dormouse, Wood mouse, Squirrel, Hedgehog, Otter, Fox, Rabbits.
2012 vegetation survey baseline.

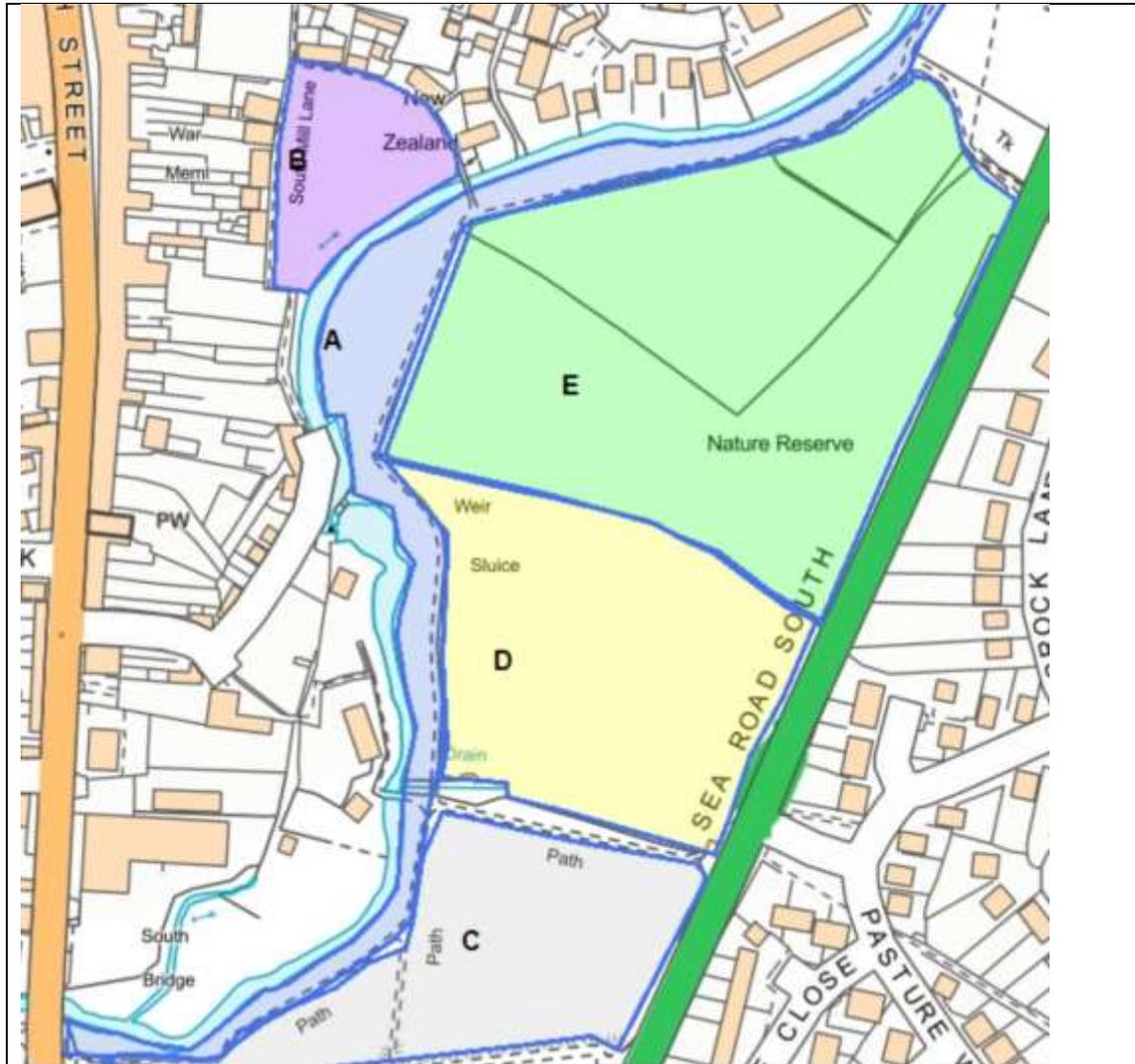
What people liked about Asker Meadows	What issues needed addressing:
<p>The tranquil stroll along the river Asker with cattle grazing to one side and the occasional spotting of a Kingfisher or Egret makes a significant contribution to the quality of life for residents and visitors alike</p> <p>A free, open space for all ages and dogs</p> <p>An enclave of peace</p> <p>It's remnant wildness</p> <p>Blackthorn in flower</p> <p>In autumn I pick Sloes, Blackberries and elderberries.</p>	<p>Don't over develop it – no car park!</p> <p>Avoid hard landscaping, flowerbeds etc</p> <p>Don't over tidy it</p> <p>Development should be natural and sympathetic to wildlife</p> <p>No rash changes</p> <p>Concerns about the escalation of events on the weir field, both in scale, impact and frequency</p> <p>Keep it's wild character</p> <p>Ensure area remains 'countryfied'</p> <p>Importance of wilderness for wildlife</p>
<p>The ever changing river</p> <p>Always something delightful to see</p>	<p>Safeguard existing character</p> <p>Accepting some community events should take place, I don't feel the field should become a 'cash cow' for the Council.</p>
<p>A special place we are lucky to have</p>	<p>Manage the trees and hedges –</p> <p>More trees planted</p> <p>More fruit trees planted</p> <p>I would like to see additional species of native shrubs planted: Hawthorn, Spindle, Guelder rose and Wayfarer to add to the existing Blackthorn, Crab apple, Alder, Elder and Willow etc.</p> <p>Expand the tree planting near Morrisons to create a copse?</p> <p>Employ stone wallers and hedgelaying</p>

	Coppicing and pollarding over time will create a variety of age, height and density to the structure of the shrubs that would not only add visual interest but will maximise habitat value.
<p>Paths that walkers and less mobile can use</p> <p>I often have a chat with other members of the public using the paths and fellow dog walkers</p> <p>Cycle route to work – a ‘rural ride’ into town</p>	<p>Information about the area and what is going to happen</p> <p>Benches overlooking the river</p>
The grazing cows	More attention should be given to maintaining the pathways which are subject to having large puddles in low spots. The filling in of these low spots and regular maintenance would make a considerable improvement to what is a fairly busy pedestrian route.
An invaluable community resource which currently balances the needs of community and wildlife.	<p>Grassland area planted with wildflowers</p> <p>The grassland could also be managed in a patchwork effect with rotational strimming. Alongside the rank areas containing Burdock, Nettle, Ox-eye daisy and Hogweed there might be strimmed corridors and pathways linking areas</p> <p>New Zealand important to retain the ‘untouched’ meadow areas</p>
<p>A safe car free environment to travel by foot or bike from Bothenhampton and West Bay into Bridport town</p> <p>The social aspect of walking my dog.</p>	Creating a pond is an option, to benefit dragonflies and amphibians. A still water habitat will augment the relatively fast-flowing River Asker and will attract additional species
<p>Invaluable for exercise and clears my head!</p> <p>A place that replenishes and lifts the spirits</p>	There are 100 dogs in the area on a daily basis – not conducive to wildlife!

The weir at South Mill is beautiful, especially with the willows	Create river beach area for swimming
	Keep scrub on east bank of the Asker as protection for bank dwelling/ nesting mammals/birds
	Better balance as an area for dog walking and as a nature reserve.
	Impact of dogs on the vole population needs investigating

3. Overall Vision for the Nature Reserve

An area rich in wildlife, enjoyed by local people for informal recreation.



Key:

Area A - River corridor

Area B - New Zealand

Area C - Morrison's Fields

Area D- Weir Field/ Show Field

Area E - Wildflower Meadow restoration areas inc Coronation Meadow/ Boot Fields

Final map to include hedge/wall boundaries and cycle routes

Objectives for the Asker Meadows Management Plan:

- Maintain and enhance the grazing meadows for their wildlife interests.
- Safeguard wildlife interest along the river corridor, including non- intervention/ sanctuary areas.
- Undertake tree planting and hedge management to provide wildlife interest and structure.
- Maintain surfaced paths as shared spaces for walkers and cyclists.
- Run education events to promote awareness and appreciation of wildlife and encourage responsible behaviours.
- Create seating/ picnic areas to encourage people to enjoy and get to know the area.
- Manage the Show Field for a select number of community events.

4. Management Plan -Draft

<p>Overall Plan</p> <p>Grazing meadows with hedges and trees managed primarily for wildlife with a recognition of the range of uses enjoyed by local people.</p> <p>Management plan objectives in priority order:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nature Reserve • Access for all • Walking/Cycle route • Show Field 	
<p>River/ banks/ pond</p> <p><i>(All actions impacting on the river will need checking with Environment Agency)</i></p>	<p>Erect non intervention fenced enclosures as sanctuary areas for wildlife.</p> <p>Leave areas of scrub on river banks to provide further protection.</p> <p>Create an off line pond in New Zealand area.</p>
<p>Wildflower Meadows – including defined area of New Zealand</p>	<p>Restoration/ diversification of sward.</p> <p>Hay cut after 15 July.</p> <p>Grazing of aftermath.</p> <p>Maintain all boundaries (fenced/walls).</p>
<p>Other grassed areas – incl Morrisons Fields and New Zealand</p>	<p>Maintain as amenity grassed areas, Regular mowing 1.5m - 3m all path margins.</p> <p>Morrison’s field sculptured cutting between trees and benches 4 times a year.</p> <p>3m mown area in front of South Mill Lane properties.</p>
<p>Hedges</p>	<p>Manage hedges in the wildflower meadows as linear woodland.</p>

	<p>Manage hedges outside wildflower meadows on a rotational hedge laying cycle of 7 years.</p> <p>Restock all hedges with whips as required.</p> <p>Plant new hedges along selected fence lines to provide structure and diversity for boundaries of the wildflower meadows.</p>
Trees/ Tree planting	<p>Manage safety issues through a 5 yearly insurance arboricultural survey. Deal with dangers, leaving dead wood either standing or on site.</p> <p>Plant small clumps of native standards in the wildflower meadows for structure and visual impact.</p> <p>Plant new woodland blocks at A35 entrance and opposite BTC Compost Area</p> <p>Add additional native whips to enhance the existing trees and create structure in the Morrisons Fields.</p>
Access/ Path	<p>Maintain and promote open access to all areas.</p> <p>Maintain main surfaced path as a pedestrian/ cyclist shared route.</p> <p>Maintain 1.5m cut margins to all access routes through regular mowing.</p> <p>Maintain access route/ gate through to A35/ Crock Lane.</p> <p>Maintain access route through to Morrisons. Look to improve safety access across Morrisons car park.</p>

Management Blocks	
Riverside – area from river up to surfaced paths,	<p>Mow area annually.</p> <p>Erect three sections of fenced enclosure (2m x20m) along riverbank to deter dogs – strim area annually.</p> <p>Riverside trees (willow/ alders) managed. Need to take account of interventions by EA as part of flood alleviation scheme prescriptions.</p>
Wildflower meadows - Coronation Meadows /Boot Field plus defined area of New Zealand site	<p>Collect wildflower seeds</p> <p>Hay cut after July 15th each year</p> <p>Grazing period and intensity managed Sept – March (annual grazing licence)</p> <p>Undertake grassland restoration/ diversification with wildflower plugs and seed distribution.</p> <p>Plant a small number of standard trees (Sessile Oaks/ Native Limes) for structure in the Boot Field.</p> <p>Plant a new double row native hedge along fence between Coronation/ Boot Field.</p> <p>Manage existing hedgerows as linear woodland, including A35 boundary hedge.</p>
Morrisons Fields Trees and mown areas and picnic benches – amenity space	<p>Infill plant areas of existing trees with native Whips to create a more structured planting scheme.</p>

<p>Morrisons Fields cont'd</p>	<p>Define tree planting areas with un cut grassed margins.</p> <p>Cut open areas 4-6 times per year.</p> <p>Maintain 1.5 m path margins to surface and un surfaced path.</p>
<p>New Zealand</p>	<p>Create off line pond and plant up margins.</p> <p>Define meadow area, cut for hay after July 15th.</p> <p>Extend surface walking/cycling path by 1m between River and South Mill Lane</p> <p>Maintain a 1.5m – 3m mown margin either side of paths around New Zealand.</p> <p>Maintain a 3m mown area in front of houses.</p>
<p>Bridport Town Council Show Field</p>	<p>Agree limits to number of events in year with residents.</p> <p>Prioritise Community events.</p> <p>Restore/ maintain dry stone wall boundary.</p>
<p>Bridport Town Council Composting Area</p>	<p>Define and screen area with a new boundary hedge.</p> <p>Repair and maintain all gates.</p>

5. Management Plan Action Plan - Specific Actions for first five years of Management Plan:

2019/20

What	When	Who
Wildflower Meadows		
Survey Coronation meadows	May/June/July	DWT
Collect seed from Meadows for sowing in autumn	July/ August	Volunteers
Hay cut	After July 15 th	Tenant/ contractor
Graze aftermath with cattle (defined in grazing license)	Sept/March	Tenant
Other Grassed Areas		
Mow 1.5 m either side of all paths	Monthly Increase to 2 weekly May- Aug	BTC
Morrisons Fields sculptured mowing to leave margin around tree planting areas	March – May – July – Oct	BTC
Access		
Re surface cycle path	Summer	BTC
Mow 1.5 m margins either side of all paths	Monthly increasing to fortnightly May-Aug)	BTC
Install Picnic benches in Morrisons Field.	Spring	BTC

Remove benches from riverside area opposite New Zealand	Spring	BTC
Trees Plant native whips as understorey and extension to existing areas of trees in Morrison fields	Winter	BTC with volunteers
River Kick sampling for water invertebrates	Summer	Volunteers

2020/21

What	When	Who
Wildflower Meadows		
Collect seed from Meadows for sowing in autumn	July/ August	Volunteers
Hay cut	After July 15 th	Tenant/ contractor
Graze	Sept/March	Tenant
Sow wildflower seed/ plant plugs	Sept/Nov	Volunteers
Other Grassed Areas		
Mow 1.5 m either side of all paths	Monthly Increase to 2 weekly May-Aug	BTC

Sculptured mowing of grassed areas in Morrisons Fields to leave 1.5m margin around tree planting areas.	March – May – July - Oct	BTC
Access Mow 1.5 m margins either side of all paths	Monthly increasing to fortnightly May-Aug)	BTC
River Erect 3x20x2m non intervention fenced enclosures along riverside Kick sampling for water invertebrates	Summer Summer months	BTC Volunteers
Trees Plant 1-6 standard native trees (Sessile Oak/ Limes) in wildflower meadows – individually fenced to protect from cattle Plant native trees to create small wooded copses by BTC Compost Area and A35/Crock Lane entrance	Winter Winter	BTC with volunteers BTC with volunteers
Hedges Fence off and plant a mix of native hedgerow trees around BTC Compost Area	Winter	BTC

2021/22

What	When	Who
<p>Wildflower Meadows</p> <p>Collect seed from Meadows for sowing in autumn</p> <p>Hay cut</p> <p>Graze</p> <p>Sow wildflower seed/ plant plugs</p>	<p>July/ August</p> <p>After July 15th</p> <p>Sept/March</p> <p>Sept/Nov</p>	<p>Volunteers</p> <p>Tenant/ contractor</p> <p>Tenant</p> <p>Volunteers</p>
<p>Other Grassed Areas</p> <p>Mow 1.5 m either side of all paths</p> <p>Morrison's Fields – sculptured to leave margin around tree planting areas</p>	<p>Monthly Increase to 2 weekly May-Aug</p> <p>March – May – July - Oct</p>	<p>BTC</p> <p>BTC</p>
<p>Access</p> <p>Mow 1.5 m margins either side of all paths</p>	<p>Monthly increasing to fortnightly May-Aug)</p>	<p>BTC</p>
<p>River</p> <p>Strim non intervention fenced enclosures (2x20m)</p> <p>Kick sampling for water invertebrates</p>	<p>Autumn</p> <p>Summer months</p>	<p>BTC</p> <p>Volunteers</p>

2022/23

What	When	Who
<p>Wildflower Meadows</p> <p>Collect seed from Meadows for sowing in autumn</p> <p>Hay cut</p> <p>Graze</p> <p>Sow wildflower seed/ plant plugs</p>	<p>July/ August</p> <p>After July 15th</p> <p>Sept/March</p> <p>Sept/Nov</p>	<p>Volunteers</p> <p>Tenant/ contractor</p> <p>Tenant</p> <p>Volunteers</p>
<p>Other Grassed Areas</p> <p>Mow 1.5 m either side of all paths</p> <p>Morrisons Fields – sculptured to leave margin around tree planting areas</p>	<p>Monthly Increase to 2 weekly May-Aug</p> <p>March – May – July - Oct</p>	<p>BTC</p> <p>BTC</p>
<p>Access</p> <p>Mow 1.5 m margins either side of all paths</p>	<p>Monthly increasing to fortnightly May-Aug)</p>	<p>BTC</p>
<p>River</p> <p>Strim non intervention fenced enclosures (2x20m)</p> <p>Kick sampling for water invertebrates</p>	<p>Autumn</p> <p>Summer months</p>	<p>BTC</p> <p>Volunteers</p>

2023/24

What	When	Who
Wildflower Meadows		
Collect seed from Meadows for sowing in autumn	July/ August	Volunteers
Hay cut	After July 15 th	Tenant/ contractor
Graze	Sept/March	Tenant
Sow wildflower seed/ plant plugs	Sept/Nov	Volunteers
Other Grassed Areas		
Mow 1.5 m either side of all paths	Monthly Increase to 2 weekly May-Aug	BTC
Morrisons Fields – sculptured to leave margin around tree planting areas	March – May – July - Oct	BTC
Access		
Mow 1.5 m margins either side of all paths	Monthly increasing to fortnightly May-Aug)	BTC
Hedges		
Lay section of hedge running up to Fire Station entrance	Winter	DWT Volunteers
Fence off and plant a mix of native hedgerow trees to create new hedge between Boot Field and Wildflower meadow	Winter	BTC with volunteers

River		
Strim non intervention fenced enclosures (2x20m)	Autumn	BTC
Kick sampling for water invertebrates	Summer months	Volunteers

Appendix 1 Community consultation feedback

What we know about Asker Meadows.

Brown Trout, Sea Trout, Salmon, Brook Lampreys.
47 species of bird, 10 mammals (apart from pets), 15 insects, 5 amphibians, reptiles and fish.
Goldfinches x 40, Slow worms, Hedgehogs, Egret, Sparrow hawk, (garden on South Mill Lane) Wonderful!
Residents survey – South Mill Lane.
Water voles, Bats – Pipistrelle & Daubenton's , Dormouse, Wood mouse, Squirrel, Hedgehog, Otter, Fox, Rabbits.
LNR Strains – 2012 vegetation survey baseline.

What we need to know?

Kick sampling for river invertebrates.
How active will users be when it comes to volunteering?!
To establish the diversity of species, protect and extend habitats.
Communicate imaginatively how this area has changed historically.

What people like best about the meadows:

The walks through the meadows. Wildlife. Good community use of the space – festivals – food, music, circus etc.
Its availability and the opportunity to watch the brown cows. Also watch many different birds. The open spaces which has variety in its make up. To see people enjoying their walk on the meadows.
Burdock! Gold finches. Siskin.
A great area for continuing dog socialisation and more importantly for people to socialise and meet new acquaintances.
I am responding to the leaflet I picked up today in Asker Meadow. My overriding comment, apart from the need to keep this as an open space, is the importance of wilderness for wildlife. New Zealand in particular could be seen as rough or wasteland but the very fact that it is untouched is so very important to the wildlife. Long grass in the meadows in the summer is also a must for wildlife. The area is not park land but managed meadow. I am sure you are aware of this resource : http://www.magnificentmeadows.org.uk/advice-guidance/how-can-i-manage-my-meadow/managing-for-grassland-habitats
Green lung – foot and cycle links to town.
Variety of field boundaries – hedges, walls – make more of these.
Highly attractive area of green space as a living for the town and also, just as important jointly owned social space where people talk to each other.
Love it – the cows and the birds.
A necessary green living for us all. Keep suburbanisation at bay. Cordon sanitaire between A35 to the town. Keeps an open aspect towards Bothen Hill. Nature on our doorstep.
Love it as it is.
That the meadows are enjoyed by more than just dog walkers.

<p>The meadows are a wonderful place! Like the sense of openness, wildlife, dog-friendly, varied walking routes.</p>
<p>Wildlife especially birds. Weir and Willow. Cycle Path. Alder up river.</p>
<p>It's wonderful for people to enjoy all the calmness of the countryside in the town – well done team!</p>
<p>Like:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. It's good to have a large green space that's been preserved so close to the centre of town. 2. I particularly like the alders that grow beside the bank between the bridge at New Zealand and the top weir. 3. The weir at south mill is beautiful, especially with the willows that are growing around it. 4. Although some have been unsuccessful, a good number the trees in the Morrisons' field, and around the path by weir-field bridge have taken well. 5. I've had some magical moments watching wildlife on the reserve, from the kingfisher flypast in the evening sun, to a breathtaking sighting of otters in the rain. Bats, dragonflies, swifts, martins and swallows, and of course the elegant egrets. 6. I use the cycle path most days, and I like that it's possible to have a 'rural' ride into town, and that this now links to the onward path to Bradpole. 7. I very much welcome the decision to have a clearly defined and robust management plan around which to base future activity, conservation and development.
<p>It's a piece of countryside close to town I like to walk my dog through the meadows by the river I enjoy watching out for wildlife such as the kingfisher and egret I often have a chat with other members of the public using the paths and fellow dog walkers It's good that we can have free access to the fields as well as using the main gravel path</p>
<p>In response to the 2 questions on the card, here are our answers. We like Asker Meadows because it is a free, open space for all ages and dogs. There are different routes across the meadows, and livestock to admire. We even support OCCASIONAL events such as the Food Fair and Circus.</p>

What are the issues/concerns the Management Plan needs to address?

More tree planting –link up with Community Orchard for fruit tree planting. Native hedging between meadows and main footpath including edible berry species.
To improve the footpath by making it wider partly because of bicycles. To make the path smoother for prams, pushchairs, bicycles, walkers as well as mobile chairs. The path at present provides a very rough surface. Could it be smoother and wider please. Keep grass cut.
Have read with some surprise and trepidation that you wish to alter this area. In my opinion it is great and does not need any interference except the grass cutting, bin emptying and benches maintaining. As for wildlife encouragement there are more than 100 dogs exercised in that area on a daily basis, not conducive to wildlife except maybe ticks and bugs. If I was being picky then the cycle path needs a little annual maintenance to keep the level up. Otherwise please leave it alone.
Asker Meadows is an invaluable place that I visit several times a week. What I like best about it is that it is an easily accessible space where I can get close to nature, such a little egret, kingfishers and water voles. It's a place that replenishes and lifts the spirits, with always something delightful to see. What the new management plan needs to address is the flooding of the gravel path in heavy or prolonged rain, that makes it impossible in places for anyone not wearing wellingtons. It would also be wonderful if some of the grass areas next to the river were planted with wildflowers suitable for butterflies and moths, to increase the numbers and varieties that feed and breed there.
I really value the open space that already exists – I usually walk that way during my lunch hour – it's invaluable exercise and clears my head. At weekends I regularly use the cycle path. I would prefer to keep the cattle as they make the space more real – keep the events but please don't make any more car parking space as the town really need this little enclave of peace, maybe introduce more wild planting and a bird hide.
I live in East Street and I walk my dog twice a day though Asker Meadows. Obviously I appreciate the number of poo bins! I am also a pensioner and I live alone so the social aspect of walking the dog, meeting other friends and neighbours and walkers, is very important to me. I also very much enjoy the wild country feel to the area, the opportunity to see horses, cows, birds, and in the autumn I pick sloes, blackberries and elderberries regularly every year. My suggestions are these: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1) That the area is not suburbanised and sanitised with more paving or cut grass, lawns or flowerbeds but remains countrified in nature and as wild as possible.2) That the bank of the river where the weir is should be dug out and a beach area created so children and families can paddle and swim in the summer. River beaches are to be found all over Europe and I never understand why we don't have them over here. It is the perfect spot.3) It would be nice to have a bench looking over the 'pond' at the weir. (I might make provision for such a thing in my will!)4) Why not plant a few more fruit trees, too, apples, plum, damson, for people to pick for free. These are my only thoughts really, although I have more when I can find out what is actually planned. Where can I access a copy of the plan please?
Dog poo bag dispenser (as Borough Gardens has) – legally dog owners should carry 3, but then absolute zero tolerance.
Manage dog use/users better to cause less damage to wildlife.
More trees by Morrisons – a stand of 'woodland'?
Too many events frighten wildlife and disturb residents.
Trees – please replace the felled trees.
More trees and scrub on bank for bank-dwelling birds/mammals.
Provide survey of river bed and banks in focus of weed species/invertebrate species. (Asker seems in poor health compared with Brid)?
Proper fence along Sea Road South to prevent animals going into main road.

Gates please get them mended (have asked several times).
Fence of parts of river bank to: A – stop water loving dogs. B – Provide better shelter for water voles.
Grow more foliage along river bed to hold it intact and help voles.
Cut and collect where managing for botanical enhancement.
Double check if 14 trees are a <u>danger</u> if not, leave them.
Don't cut all the grass on New Zealand site – it is the mix of wild areas and some mown areas that works.
Thicken hedgerow by A35 from Morrisons to fire station – to block traffic noise and fumes and give wildlife a safe boundary from dogs etc. Cows will consume less toxins.
The river is moving at a faster rate. The banks are eroding – causing distress to water voles. Can we add more trees/shrubs/rushes to the banks to slow the flow.
How do we encourage the return of the water voles? Dogs are very persistent and owners then to encourage stick throwing!
More hedges and walls – way of engaging people about their importance.
Don't cut the scrub on New Zealand – biodiversity and it looks good.
That the history of the area is imaginatively interpreted so that the links between the past uses of the site and the present (and future) environment are clear.
Show field getting very busy maybe some control and consultation with local residents camping now taking place.
Creeping suburbanisation of New Zealand site (especially Grass Cutting). Hard boundary to the east – A35 – real block for access to Bothenhampton etc.
Show field x 5 times a year now including camping!!! Folk Fest and Jurassic Music.
Improve (new) footpath. More prominent signage (eg information board). Picnic benches as permanent feature.
Bridge near South Holme. Used to be beautiful old bridge – now is a concrete slab with metal poles!
A day or two after the meeting on Tuesday night I sent a letter to my neighbours in South Mill Lane, outlining my suggestions regarding the future management of the New Zealand site, to see if there is any kind of consensus among us. So far I have had four positive responses and no negative ones. Here is the gist of what I wrote: I thought I would jot down a few ideas to see if we can establish any 'common ground' between us. If people strongly disagree with my ideas I will keep a low profile as I have no wish to fall out with my neighbours and I want a quiet life! This sort of thing does tend to raise the blood pressure in some: one man's coppice creation is to another felling a tree – an act of vandalism. My sole objective is to maximise the wildlife potential of the site and increase biodiversity. There are options open to us at either end of the spectrum: One is to closely manage the site and turn it into tidy, recreational parkland – perhaps with borders of bedding plants. I think this is what someone at the meeting might have meant when they said they wouldn't like to see it over gentrified. Alternatively the area could be left to go wild. The problem with this is that the invasive or bully species would prevail over everything else – initially brambles and blackthorn would take over, eventually succeeded by sycamore woodland that would shade out virtually everything else. The high degree of nutrient in the soil will always benefit the invasive species over the more interesting and less robust ones. What I would prefer to see is a middle course between these two extremes: a variety of different species of trees, shrubs and grassland creating a patchwork of blocks of scrub and grassland roughly 50:50 ratio, or maybe 60:40 either way. It would be advantageous to slightly reduce overall the amount of brambles and to cut back the remaining, rationally over a 5-10 year period, allowing re-growth so that there is a mix of young, vigorous growth amongst the older leggier material. The denser areas will provide better cover for small mammals and birds and might even improve the blackberries. I would like to see additional species of native shrubs planted: Hawthorn, Spindle, Guelder rose and Wayfarer to add to the existing Blackthorn, Crab apple, Alder, Elder and Willow etc. Coppicing and

pollarding over time will create a variety of age, height and density to the structure of the shrubs that would not only add visual interest but will maximise habitat value with lots of blossom, berries and nesting sites for the benefit of bees and birds.

The grassland could also be managed in a patchwork effect with rotational strimming. Alongside the rank areas containing Burdock, Nettle, Ox-eye daisy and Hogweed there might be strimmed corridors and pathways linking areas with warm, sheltered, south facing scallops plug planted with early and late flowering wild flowers such as: Dog violet, Primrose, Cowslip, Bugle, Lady's smock, Red campion and Yellow rattle (spring) and Majorum, Knapweed and Field Scabious (summer). All these species are very beneficial to nectaring and pollinating butterflies, bees and hoverflies. Due to the high nutrient level of the soil, the objective of establishing these more delicate species among the ranker, aggressive ones is aspirational, but why aim low?

Although strimming will probably be the method of managing the grassland, a tethered goat would be ideal as it would save scores of man hours. A traditional traveller (as opposed to a free-loading new age hippy) grazing his pony would also be ideal, but this may be controversial. Cuttings should be removed from site or at least used to create a habitat pile, so as to remove unnecessary nutrient from the soil.

Creating a pond is an option, to benefit dragonflies and amphibians. A still water habitat will augment the relatively fast-flowing River Asker and will attract additional species.

Ivy should be left to grow on shrubs and trees as it is beneficial for hibernating insects, also invertebrates eaten by birds. It is one of the larval food plants of a favourite butterfly of mine: the Holly Blue.

Finally, it is quite possible that we will lose the mature Ash tree on the northern edge of the site due to Ash Dieback disease. In the unfortunate event of this happening it will still be an asset to the site as dead-wood habitat. It will be a host for invertebrates and detritivores which in turn will attract Green and Greater Spotted woodpeckers. These will bore into the tree and create lots of nesting sites. Of course a dead tree on site will be an H&S issue. The Ash tree, dead or alive, will be a good location for a Barn owl nesting box. If the grassland has closer cropped areas, these will be good for Barn owls to hunt small mammals breaking cover.

I hope this is helpful. Please feel free to contact me to discuss any of my ideas.

As far as I am concerned the site can be either a dogs toilet or a nature reserve. It cannot be both. I think we are all aware (in South Mill Lane) that a number of Bridport residents have no more interest in the site other than as a place to bring their dogs to relieve themselves. I have worked on many urban sites and this was a common problem to all of them.

Unfortunately there will always be a small element of dog owners who, whether because they have a grudge against society or through sheer bloody-mindedness will take pleasure in allowing their dogs to foul an area because they know that others would rather they didn't. Having said that, if the site is to become a nature reserve, I think that the Town Council should prioritise instalment of signage to discourage fouling of the area and to request owners to keep their dogs under close control particularly in the nesting season. A number of poop disposal bins – even a supply of bags should be provided.

I should imagine that grazing is a concept that has been considered on other open sites in and around Bridport. It has the advantage of being a very effective substitute to manual labour in these straitened times although I appreciate that it may have some disadvantages. I am particularly attracted to the idea of inviting a traditional traveller, or gentleman of the road (sorry, gentleperson) grazing a pony or two short periods of the year on a site like New Zealand. This would restore a traditional and cultural link between man and the land which is largely frowned on these days. Bridport might be the sort of place with progressive attitudes where this could happen – although I doubt that it would be popular with some of the more right-wing elements of the community.

Control of aggressive plant species is a highly controversial issue for some. There is a lot of conflicting information circulating about Ragwort. Is it or is it not a notifiable weed? Whichever side of the argument you choose to believe, it is incontrovertibly a native species and a valuable nectar source which benefits many species. In any case 'pulling' as a method of control is counter productive. Ragwort is quite prevalent at New Zealand but I for one don't propose to lose any sleep over it.

Himalayan Balsam is a much more serious problem as it is non-native, highly invasive and forms dense strands which suppress native plants leading to river banks becoming destabilised and vulnerable to erosion. It is endemic not only at New Zealand but along vast swathes of the banks of the Brit, Bride and Asker. In my opinion it needs to be controlled, ideally exterminated from wherever it grows. It also is a good (late) nectar source, and its removal may well upset beekeepers and others who think it's 'pretty'.

I have mentioned the control of Sycamores in my letter to my neighbours. I once belonged to a conservation group which attempted to control the spread of Sycamores on a site in North Dorset. We were confronted by extremely hostile and aggressive opponents to our management plan who accused us of vandalism by cutting down a small Sycamore tree.

I understand from my neighbour, that you intend to extend the consultation process more widely regarding the future management of the site. Whilst I accept that this is democratic and the right thing to do, I fear the more people that are consulted the more diverse opinions will be. I hope that the Pampas Grass society doesn't have too many members in Bridport. Please feel free to distribute this to any interested party.

Instead of benches, which weather, may get damaged, and need maintenance, how about slabs of flat topped stone, impervious to weather and use, and a natural material in the environment. Also when the cattle are on the meadow, which is really good, there needs to be a contact number for the public so any issues can be raised with the farmer, recently I encountered 3 cattle out of the field on the footpath, and as the grazing was so lush compared to the fields, they were very happy there!! I was not alarmed, however some people and their dogs are not familiar with cattle in such close proximity. The gate closures seem to need maintenance, and regular checking presumably by the farmer, as the gates do not close securely, some relying on bits of string

Thoughts for the plan:

1. I'd like partners and users to be clearer that the whole area (with the exception of New Zealand) is designated as a Local Nature Reserve and for consultations and decisions to be taken in that context.
2. I'd like to see more trees planted and cared for, specifically - how about extending the line of alders south of the bridge, planting more trees by the road and expanding the planting near Morrisons to create a copse or small woodland?
3. I'd like to see scrub left free to grow on the east bank of the Asker, as protection for bank dwelling or nesting mammals and birds.
4. The vole population has declined in the last five years. This is partly due to predation by uncontrolled dogs. I'd like to see much clearer signage on the meadow side of the river that this is an offence, and for vole habitats to be preserved and developed, not destroyed as they have been by the close mowing of river banks by the EA.
5. While appreciating the value of Askers as a pleasant environment to walk dogs, I feel that the reserve needs to balance this better against the needs of nature and other users. Bank degradation, wildlife predation and habitat disturbance are examples of this. But, it's also currently rare for picnickers, young people and wildlife enthusiasts to be able to enjoy the site without being pestered by dogs.
6. I'm very concerned about the escalation of events on the weir-field, both in scale, impact and frequency. Although accepting that some community events should take place there, I don't feel the field should be used as a cash cow by the council. The impact on residents in Bothenhampton and the lower end of town for an unbroken six week period is unacceptable, and wildlife is badly disturbed, especially the notoriously skittish egrets.
7. I would like to see 'revenue generating' activity primarily focussed on the use of the site as a nature reserve, through courses, and grant applications to bodies supporting wildlife and habitat preservation and development and public access and appreciation of it.

We would not change anything; only maintain the meadows