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On 27<sup>th</sup> May 2022, Rosie Kelsall and Wendy Abbott from DMG's committee and Ann Harris, DMG member and responsible for writing the management plan for the community project, visited the fields at York Lodge, Parkend. A walkover survey was undertaken, recording meadow and other species. A walk-over survey is only a superficial record of the plants present at the date of the visit: 43 plant species were recorded.

### **The site**

The site is approximately 10 acres of semi-improved pasture split into 2 fields and comprises 4 main areas, with a long drive to York Lodge running roughly north/south, separating area 1 and 4 from areas 2 and 3. To the West and North, the site has a boundary with RSPB Nagshead SSSI, so is surrounded by mature woodland. The site has a west to east slope running down to Hughes Terrace on the East boundary and the site of the old railway line. Areas 2 and 3 are separated by a mature hedgerow. Area 4 in the bottom south west corner of the site is fenced and was previously a Christmas tree plantation and has been open to forest sheep. This area was only briefly surveyed by Wendy Abbott at the end of the visit. The walkover survey focused on areas 2 & 3, which were considered the most species rich, especially on the lower slopes, and close to the railway line in area 3, and were more species rich and less grassy than area 1. An aerial view showing the areas is attached for reference.

The following history of the site was provided by Ann Harris.

The fields were managed for 48 yrs by a local grazier who confirms he has never fertilised (inorganic or organic) or sprayed (herbicide) the land. The fields have predominantly been grazed extensively by ponies, with only 2 ponies for at least the last 5 years, out all year round, fed with local (non-rye grass) hay over winter, as needed. Occasionally grazed with cattle, never sheep, hay occasionally taken but no longer viable due to wild boar rooting. The ponies had access to the whole site but favoured the 'drive' field, area 3. The ponies left in early 2020 and the fields have been unmanaged since.

The fields are in close proximity to a lesser horseshoe bat maternity roost in the Memorial Hall. Boar and 3 species of deer also access the site. Glow worms have been seen near the fence line on the eastern boundary.

The local community has expressed an interest in creating an orchard.

The fields were generally grassy, with a very thick thatch beneath, with bracken beginning to encroach from around the edges.

The most species rich areas, and therefore those with the greatest potential for management as wildflower meadows are areas 2 and 3, although at present the lower slopes of these 2 areas are the most diverse. With reinstatement of some management, it is likely that the whole of those areas would increase in species richness. Area 1 is generally less diverse - however, with appropriate management it is likely that some of those species already found across areas 2 and 3 will spread into area 1 by transfer of seed.

In areas 2 and 3, there were a few species which could be considered troublesome: broad leaved dock, creeping thistle and bracken can all become an issue if management isn't undertaken. The bracken will continue to creep in from the edges unless it is either cut or pulled. Dock and thistle are opportunist species which will particularly thrive in areas of disturbed soil, such as where boar have rooted, or in gateways etc. If a regular appropriate management regime can be implemented, the spread of these species should be contained.

The community interest in creating an orchard could be accommodated through widely spaced planting of, ideally, local varieties of fruit trees. The trees would need substantial protection from grazing animals, both livestock and deer. Given the proximity of the bat roost, a linear orchard could be created, linking the bat roost with the woodlands, either along the eastern boundary, or via the area previously used as a Christmas tree nursery.

Ideally trees wouldn't be planted in the areas of meadow with greatest wildflower diversity, as, eventually fruit and leaf drop would increase the soils' fertility, and shade would change the conditions for those species already present.

In addition, there could be some scope for improving the 'batscape' in the area through the planting up of any gaps in the hedgerows. Horseshoe bats like to fly along linear features to get from roosts to feeding grounds, so filling in gaps or planting new hedges to make these connections is valuable.

In terms of future management of the whole site, there are a number of options. All of which should aim to result in a short sward at the beginning of the growing season.

Hay management - there are some challenges taking hay from a site like this - the ground is very uneven in places, with tussocks and ant hills which should be avoided as they are of value in themselves, providing conditions and habitat for other species. Also, any rooting by boar will impact on a hay cut, due to the bare soil impacting both the quality of the hay, and the hay making machinery.

If hay is taken, it should be done as late in the season as is practical, and certainly not before the end of June. As many years as possible, and no less than one year in three, hay should be taken after 15<sup>th</sup> July to maximise seeding - all cuttings should be removed. This would ideally be followed by aftermath grazing, with any grazing animals being removed before bare ground or poaching occurs.

As this is a large site, it may be that not all of the meadows are cut each year, and there could be some rotation of management. However, the areas with greatest species diversity would benefit most from regular management.

Structural diversity is also important, so any management should aim to include areas of 'edge' left un-mown to provide habitat for invertebrates, small mammals, amphibians and reptiles throughout the year.

As the site has been maintained by grazing in the past, this could also be a continued option. Low intensity grazing throughout the year, with local provenance wildflower rich hay used for winter feeding. Grazing should be monitored, and any grazing animals should be removed before the ground becomes bare or poached. Care should be taken with sheep on the fields during spring/summer, as they selectively graze wildflowers.

The north west corner of area 1 has a dead cedar, which will be of significant value to wildlife: birds, bats and invertebrates.

The table below lists all the species noted during the visit in areas 2 & 3. This will not be a complete list as it was a brief survey and other species will be found in different seasons.

Additionally, the following species were noted by Wendy Abbott in area 4: Marsh thistle, Germander Speedwell, Common Vetch, Sorrel and Field Woodrush.

**Table showing all plants noted on 27<sup>th</sup> May and 6<sup>th</sup> June 2022 in areas 2 & 3:**

G = a grass; H = plant typical of hedgerow or woodland.

Shrubs & trees are not recorded.

Latin name	Common name	
<i>Achillea millefolium</i>	Yarrow	
<i>Anthoxanthum odorata</i>	Sweet vernal grass	G
<i>Briza media</i>	Quaking grass	G
<i>Arrhenatherum elatius</i>	False oat-grass	G
<i>Centaurea nigra</i>	Common knapweed	
<i>Cerastium fontanum</i>	Common mouse-ear	
<i>Cirsium arvense</i>	Creeping thistle	
<i>Cirsium palustre</i>	Marsh thistle	
<i>Conopodium majus</i>	Pignut	
<i>Cynosaurus cristatus</i>	Crested dogs tail	G
<i>Dactylis glomerata</i>	Cocksfoot	G
<i>Dactylorhiza fuchsii</i>	Common Spotted-orchid	
<i>Epilobium hirsutum</i>	Great willowherb	
<i>Euphrasia nemorosa</i>	Common Eyebright	
<i>Festuca sp.</i>	Fescue	G
<i>Heracleum sphondylium</i>	Hogweed	

<i>Holcus lanatus</i>	Yorkshire fog	G
<i>Hyacinthoides non-scripta</i>	Bluebell	
<i>Hypochaeris radicata</i>	Cat's-ear	
<i>Juncus effusus</i>	Soft rush	
<i>Lathyrus pratensis</i>	Meadow vetchling	
<i>Leontodon Hispidus</i>	Rough hawkbit	
<i>Lotus corniculatus</i>	Birds foot trefoil	
<i>Luzula campestris</i>	Field woodrush	
<i>Myosotis sp.</i>	Forget-me-not species	
<i>Pilosella officinarum</i>	Mouse-ear-hawkweed	
<i>Plantago lanceolata</i>	Ribwort plantain	
<i>Potentilla erecta</i>	Tormentil	
<i>Primula veris</i>	Cowslip	
<i>Prunella vulgaris</i>	Selfheal	
<i>Ranunculus acris</i>	Meadow buttercup	
<i>Ranunculus ficaria</i>	Lesser Celandine	
<i>Ranunculus repens</i>	Creeping buttercup	
<i>Rhinanthus minor</i>	Yellow-rattle	
<i>Rumex acetosa</i>	Sorrel	
<i>Rumex obtusifolius</i>	Broad-leaved dock	
<i>Scrophularia nodosa</i>	Common figwort	
<i>Stellaria graminea</i>	Lesser stitchwort	
<i>Trifolium campestre</i>	Hop trefoil	
<i>Trifolium pratense</i>	Red clover	
<i>Veronica chamaedrys</i>	Bird's-eye or Germander speedwell	
<i>Veronica serpyllifolia</i>	Thyme-leaved speedwell	

Wendy Abbott and Rosie Kelsall 2022

