

**Increasing Wildflower distribution and abundance in Fremington Parish**

I would like to propose the following model for increasing wildflower areas and biodiversity throughout the parish to support our threatened insect populations;

**Context**

Globally, 40% of insects are declining and 1/3 are endangered. The rate of extinction of insects is 8 times faster than for mammals, birds and reptiles.

In Europe, the total mass of insects is declining by 2.5% a year over the last 25-30 years. This is unsustainable as without insects, life on earth is not possible. Main reasons are increasing intensive agriculture with heavy use of pesticides, climate change, and increasing habitat loss due to urbanisation. (source- summary of various reports in the Guardian)

The UK has suffered a 31% decline in butterflies and moths since 1976 with 4 species going extinct. Bee populations suffered huge losses between the 1950s and 1980s but the rate of loss has been slowing since the 1990s. 33% of species currently have decreasing distributions which means they are no longer found in some areas. 20 species of bee and wasp have gone extinct since 1909. (source- government report)

**Response**

Bees, butterflies, moths and hoverflies rely on flowers for food and nationally we have lost 97% of our wildflower meadows since the 1930s. Many insect species are reliant on specific wildflower species with which they have a symbiotic relationship. Increasing the abundance of wildflower species within the parish will help to halt the decline of these insects, many of which are responsible for crop pollination and form the basis of the food chain for other species.

**Plan outline**

To be effective, wildflower planting must be carried out at a large scale and this cannot be achieved by a handful of council managed sites. Initially the type of flowers envisaged are annual meadow species that require being cut in the autumn after setting seed, which suits grassed areas. Fremington parish has large amounts of suburban grassed areas adjacent to pavements which would be suitable for this. Due to the labour intense nature of planting and maintaining wildflower areas at scale, the participation of residents to adopt and maintain areas of grass verge will be needed. This enables them to take ownership and ensure upkeep and also saves the council money as less contractor input is needed.

This would be for grass areas that are separated from the road by a pavement or at least 1m. distance so as not to need the road safety and traffic management requirements suggested by county for verges that are directly adjacent to roads (DCC Life on the Verge project). Areas of flowers with mown margins can look attractive and this should be promoted.

## **Permissions**

Devon County Council Highways department have said to me they have no objections to the parish allowing areas of wildflowers within their contract with county for grass cutting as long as visibility splays are respected but this will need to have a formal request for approval submitted. Our contractors are happy to work around planted areas as long as they are notified of where they are. Suitably trained contractors could possibly be used to plant and maintain some areas if we cannot find residents to take ownership of large important areas.

## **Specifics**

I am suggesting providing starter packs which include instructions, seeds, and small "wildflower area, do not cut" signs. Marking out with stakes and string could create a trip hazard so using chalk spray could be a safer way of marking areas. Possibly loan of some tools from the Parish might be considered for those who don't have anything suitable. Local allotment societies may be able to offer this service plus being a good recruiting ground for getting residents involved.

Seed can be obtained from Goren Farm Seeds who provide seed species found in Devon.

The packs will require financial outlay, and administration with a record of who they are sent to and the verge/area they will be planting, which hopefully can be undertaken by Beechfield office staff.

Areas looked after by residents that decide not to continue can be re-assigned to other willing neighbours or taken over by our contractors if no one comes forward.

## **Recruitment**

Many local residents already 'look after' areas of verge outside or near their property by mowing more often than our contractors, and if willing to countenance managed areas of wildflowers, would be a good source of recruitment to this project. Residents can also be recruited by local advertising or leafleting around suitable sites such as the two greens by Redland Rd in Fremington.

Local community groups such as WI, scouts and guides, schools, youth groups, allotment societies etc. could be approached to adopt and maintain areas.

## **Pilot schemes**

Ideally, the process of planting an area should start in the autumn and so I suggest we start with pilot areas in the following locations this autumn;

1. Roundswell- small green on Middle Combe Drive opposite the start of Hele Lane. Possibly this can be managed by Roundswell Residents Association.
2. Tews Lane playing fields- an area of the large space between the football field and the trees on the Tews Lane side.
3. Fremington- either the semi-circular green at the top of Beards Rd. or a more prominent site on the green off the main road B3233 at Redlands Rd between the bus stop and the trees. The advantage of the prominent site would be to test local reaction and any possible vandalism issues.

Rollout of the parish scheme could then start in the summer of 2022 for our first crop in the summer of 2023.





## Creating a Meadow Wildflower Patch

Wildflowers like low nutrient soils and need to be left to set seed before they are cut which mimics the annual regime of a hay meadow . They do not compete well with grass on typical 'lawn' environments so a few things need to be done to help them flourish;

Grass can be kept down by sowing 'yellow rattle' (*rhinanthus minor*) which is a wildflower that parasitizes grass and suppresses it, which allows wildflowers to thrive. It can be bought as a separate seed or part of a wildflower mix. It is an annual plant and so needs to be allowed to set seed each year before it is cut. Removing all the cuttings each time the meadow area is cut is also important to keep nutrient levels low.

### Select your area

An area of grass in the sun is ideal but shady areas can be planted out with shade tolerant species such as foxglove. It looks neater to leave a grass strip alongside the pavement and the kerbside and your area can then be marked out spray chalk around the perimeter and "Wildflower area, do not cut" type signs posted. This will help deter over-zealous 'neat and tidy' residents from wanting to run a mower over it.

### Getting started.

Firstly in the late autumn, the area selected needs to be strimmed or cut short and then given a hard raking-off to remove all the cuttings and moss and expose areas of earth. Yellow rattle should be sown along with a local wildflower seed mix and/or planting out potted wildflowers or bulbs. The seed should be sown over the surface after any potted plants have been planted and lightly walked over. (yellow rattle germinates by being warmed by the sun in spring so needs to be on the surface).


### Growing in

The yellow rattle should germinate in Feb-March along with any bulbs planted (good for early bumblebees) and start to suppress the grass. It then flowers in late May. It sets seed in June and should die off about mid July. Hopefully this will allow the other wildflowers to establish themselves to produce a summer meadow.

### Mowing

As the flowers go over they should be allowed to drop their seed and left until September-October before the area is mown. Don't be tempted to tidy up the meadow before then and do remember to rake up all the cut vegetation to keep those nutrient levels low. You may want to establish a clump of tall perennials such as verbenas whose seed heads provide food for birds and shelter for insects. These should be left until spring and although they might look scruffy, their value to over-wintering wildlife is huge.





A spring tidy-up can be carried out and the grass cut as long as it is really early before the yellow rattle germinates. Continual removal of cuttings will give everything a good chance of establishing well and beating the grass.

Further information:

[www.tarkacountrytrust.org.uk](http://www.tarkacountrytrust.org.uk) Biosphere - Life on the Verge

[www.northdevonbiosphere.org.uk](http://www.northdevonbiosphere.org.uk) –Pledge for Nature- create a wildflower patch

[www.hazelwoodlandscapes.com](http://www.hazelwoodlandscapes.com) Case study- transforming a verge into a wildflower meadow.

Local Devon wildflower seeds can be obtained from suppliers such as Goren Farm Seeds.

## **Bee a Hero, help wildlife**

What are we trying to do and why?

I'm sure you are aware that insect populations in the United Kingdom, along with birds and mammals, have dropped significantly in the last few decades. This is due to increasingly intensified agriculture with its use of toxic chemicals, habitat loss due to increased building of houses, roads, etc. and ecological pressure from our warming and disrupted climate.

Bee populations in particular are under threat and without bees there is less pollination and not enough food for us or for wildlife. Fremington Parish Council wants to establish wildflower areas on the road verges throughout the parish council area but owing to the time and cost needed to set each one up, we need residents to help us.

Do you look after your local verges or are interested in helping nature to fight back? Would you be interested in creating a wildflower verge near you? Please contact the council office on 01271 321063 for help and information and to register the location of the wildflower verge that you will be creating.

Even if you can't commit to planting and looking after an area of verge there are still things you can do to help wildlife:

- Set aside an area of your garden to go wild.
- Try to reduce or eliminate using chemicals such as weedkillers or pesticides. Slug pellets and weedkillers on drives can be lethal to hedgehogs and other small mammals.
- Don't tidy up in the autumn, leave a few areas with dead plants to provide homes for insects.
- Plant bee and bird friendly plants in your garden rather than bedding plants.

Be kind to nature and nature will be kind back to you with more happy bugs birds and beasties to share your garden and enrich your life.