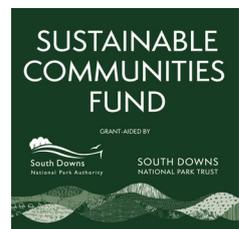


Restoring Bar End Meadows, Winchester

An evaluation of the Magnificent Meadows Project: Year 1 report

December 2024

CPRE Hampshire



The countryside charity
Hampshire

Our Magnificent Meadows

The Magnificent Meadows project aims to bring life back to precious meadows and species-rich grasslands, ensuring they thrive now and for future generations.

Meadows and chalk grasslands have been a vital part of the Hampshire landscape for thousands of years. They nurture wildflowers, offer ideal habitats for wildlife, and provide essential resources for pollinators, contributing significantly to biodiversity.

In doing so they act as important stepping stones for wildlife, creating interconnected habitats that cumulatively cover large areas. They also play a crucial role in intercepting rainwater, which helps reduce flooding, and they mitigate the effects of heat waves by lowering temperatures.

However, sadly we have lost over 97% of our species rich grasslands in England and Wales. The remaining 3% are vital homes for species such as the Duke of Burgundy butterfly and Green Woodpeckers. Despite their beauty and ecosystem services, the value of meadows as habitats for wildlife and people is at risk. When neglected, fragmented sites become overgrown and lose their iconic species such as Cowslip, Ox-eye Daisy and Kestrel.



Cowslip Field hay harvest area and stacked bales

Meadows are created via traditional practices such as livestock grazing and hay making but without the yearly cycle of grazing or cutting, they soon scrub over. Through the Magnificent Meadows Project, we aim to:

- **Raise Awareness:** by educating people about the importance of grass areas and meadows in enhancing biodiversity and supporting ecological health in the area.
- **Engage the Community:** by fostering a deeper connection between the local community and highlighting the difference they can make to the environment on their doorsteps.
- **Inspire People to Take Action:** by fostering a sense of pride in the community and offering people the opportunity to take part in grassland activities.
- **Bring People Together:** to enable effective ongoing management.



The view from the Cowslip Field cyclepath, watching volunteers box baling the hay

Grassland Surveys

Many of the garden lawns in Highcliffe and Bar End contain special communities of wildflowers and grasses that are found on the chalk downs, which we have named Chalk Hill Jewels. These lawns are really special because they contain plants that have been lost from local fields due to modern herbicides and chemicals.

However, many gardens are at risk of being converted to driveways or replaced with artificial grass. Through the Magnificent Meadows project we're highlighting the value of lawns because, collectively, gardens across Hampshire cover a large area which significantly impacts biodiversity and water filtration.

In the first phase of the project, we've worked with the local community to survey some of the chalk grasslands to help them understand the value of their gardens, as well as providing advice on mowing and harvested seeds from species-rich gardens to enhance others in the neighbourhood.

35

different plant species identified in our Chalk Hill Jewel Garden Surveys

By documenting these valuable grasslands, supporting residents to maintain their unique lawns and ensuring that wildlife can move between these spaces, we aim to preserve species-rich gardens as part of our local heritage and as a resource for future generations of both people and wildlife.

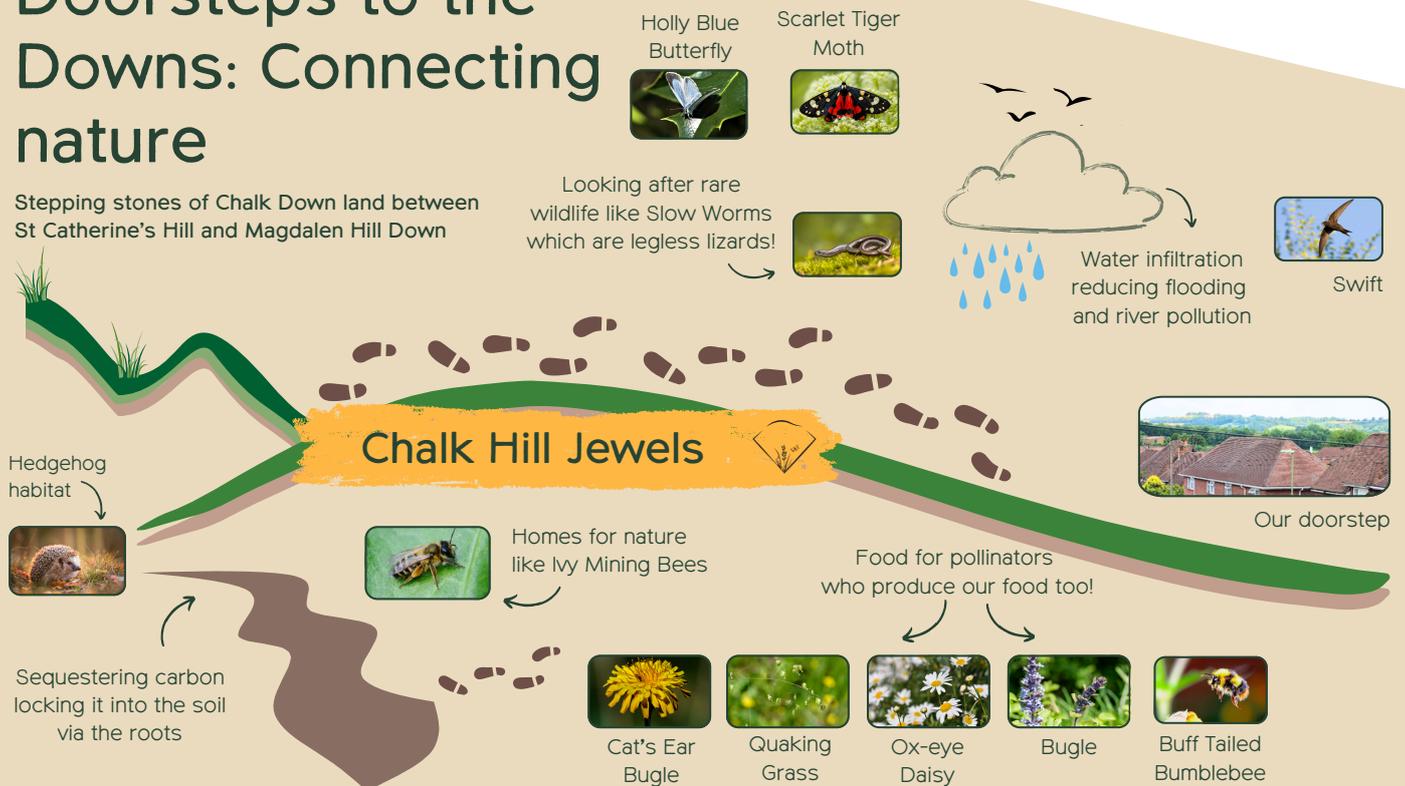
Future Promotion and Engagement:

- Chalk Hill Jewel Branding: Promote via social media and publicity.
- Garden Visits and Advice: Continue visits, provide mowing advice, and target new areas to understand habitat spread.
- Aerial Analysis: Investigate aerial photos to map chalk grassland resources.
- Branding and Enhancement: Seek funding for branding Chalk Hill Jewel front gardens, enhance less species-rich areas with harvested seeds, and integrate shared use garden spaces.



Doorsteps to the Downs: Connecting nature

Stepping stones of Chalk Down land between St Catherine's Hill and Magdalen Hill Down



Habitat Management

Nestled on the urban fringe and straddling the edge of the breath-taking South Downs National Park, the Magnificent Meadows' project area stretches between St Catherine's Hill and Magdalen Hill Down. Both of these areas are recognised as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), home to rare and endangered plant species and unique animal habitats.

Our Magnificent Meadow pilot projects are located at sites that contain fragmented habitats of chalk grassland. If neglected, these important habitats can become overgrown, losing their ecological value and the benefits they provide to both wildlife and people.

However, with the help of Rachel Remnant, a Winchester-based ecologist we're supporting local partners at each pilot site to restore precious grasslands. With our guidance, they can establish ideal habitat conditions so that delicate wildflower species can thrive. Activities include community haymaking, support to cut and collect vegetation and enhancing species diversity by planting wildflower seed.

In addition to the pilot sites, our feasibility study, conducted in collaboration with the community and local landowners, investigates the financial, ecological and community value of nature connection via hay making, smallholder grazing and coppicing activities.

In doing so, we have explored how the next phase of the Magnificent Meadows project could secure more habitats for chalk grassland species, whilst offer local residents in Bar End and Highcliffe additional opportunities to engage with nature and land management on their doorstep.

Further details of all sites we have been working with can be found in the feasibility study.

Our seven pilot project sites:



Cowslip Field SINC,
Hampshire County
Council Highways



Flyover Field, National
Highways



Garrison Ground,
Winchester City
Council



Chalk Ridge Road
Verge, Winchester City
Council



KGV, Winchester City
Council



Leisure Centre,
Winchester City
Council



University of
Winchester Sports
Stadium

“We’re making informed decisions for habitat management and restoration, especially on designated sites in the Bar End area that are neglected or damaged.”

Making Hay by Hand

As part of our efforts to connect residents on the urban edge of Winchester with the nearby chalk grasslands, we invited people to learn how to make hay by hand.

The first step involves using a scythe which is a traditional agricultural hand tool to mow the grass. It uses a rhythmic swinging motion to cut the vegetation at its base and is an efficient tool for managing meadows and grasslands.

The comprehensive scythe training session covered a range of essential topics, including:

- Safe use of the scythe
- Understanding scythe parts and setting up for various cutting situations
- Proper movement and technique
- Sharpening the scythe
- Peening using a jig
- Cutting different types of grassland
- Mowing, both individually and as part of a team

In addition to the scythe training, volunteers made hay by hand in the Hampshire sunshine as well as producing Tree Hay, a dried animal fodder, by harvesting leaves and twigs from trees.



Volunteers learn how to peen the scythe blade to sharpen it ready for cutting

Our Magnificent Meadow volunteers learnt how to:

1. Cut the Sward: Using a scythe, cut the vegetation at its base with a rhythmic swing. The best time for scything is early morning before the dew evaporates.
2. Turn the Cut Vegetation: Spread and turn the grass to speed up drying. Repeat this process as needed based on weather conditions.
3. Rake into Windrows: Once partially dry, rake the grass into high windrows. This improves air circulation and protects the grass from sun bleaching, ensuring it is fully dry before baling. Incompletely dried hay can become mouldy or even catch fire.
4. Bale the Hay: Load the hay into a box baler by hand, compress it with a plunger, and tie it with twine to form small, rectangular bales.

197

Volunteers hours spent learning how to scythe, turning, peening and baling hay



Caring for the Countryside

At CPRE Hampshire, we understand the significant impact that road building can have on the countryside. The construction of the M3 resulted in the loss of local livestock grazing land, with 1.7 hectares built on and 3.6 hectares sold off, leaving about 2 hectares remaining.



The wildflower rich hay is fed to the allotment sheep.

45

Bales of hay produced for local livestock

Through our Magnificent Meadows project, we hope to address this important issue by actively managing neglected pockets of land which can enhance food security and improve biodiversity.

The Tree Hay created by volunteers, is a dried animal fodder which provides important nutrients and trace elements. It also allows animals to express natural behaviours, selecting food they prefer to eat. In addition to the Tree Hay, volunteers produced 45 bales of hay, using a hand baler to feed local sheep and chickens.

In the next phase of the project, 2.35 hectares of chalk grassland could benefit from grazing animals as an alternative to cut-and-collect mowing. By preparing local grassland sites for conservation grazing through scrub clearance, perimeter fencing, and gates, there is a real opportunity to restore grazing land for local livestock keepers.

If we don't take action soon, we will lose the opportunity to safeguard a mosaic of species-rich habitats.

Volunteer feedback

“I have spent 12 hours over 2 days this week volunteering with CPRE Magnificent Meadows project. Tasks have included tree hay making, turning windrows and boxbailing. These are new skills to me and the training has been expertly given by Rachel of Land Lore Consulting. I have thoroughly enjoyed these days, appreciating the importance and management of meadows, meeting new volunteers and talking to passers by to gain their understanding and interest of the tasks we were undertaking. I will certainly look forward to future work parties.”



Through their dedicated hours spent nurturing the land, Our Magnificent Meadow Volunteers provided the equivalent of £4,300 in match funding.

Connecting people with nature

Through the Magnificent Meadows Project, we aim to connect local residents with the wildlife and ecosystems of the South Downs.

At CPRE Hampshire, we believe in making the countryside and green spaces accessible to everyone. Our Magnificent Meadow locations are often within a 10-minute walk for many, making them a valuable space for community engagement and nature connection.

So we're particularly pleased to have seen a remarkable increase in community interest and participation. More and more local people are eager to learn about the unique ecological treasures and the vibrant biodiversity right in their own backyard. This growing curiosity and engagement highlight the deep connection people feel to their local environment and the importance of preserving these precious habitats.

“As somebody very interested in nature and wildlife, I have spent a considerable amount of time walking through meadows and fields like Bar End, but I found that this experience provided a sharper appreciation of such micro-habitats.”



Rachel updates the CPRE National team about the project's progress at Cowslip Meadow

Wellbeing in Nature walks

Organised in conjunction with Winchester health walk, our nature walks are an opportunity to explore Cowslip Field with a coffee and catch up at a nearby cafe after the walk.

Children's Visits

All Saint's Pre-school and The Vineyard Children's group loved their walks to the Cowslip Field, looking for signs of autumn and discovering the wildflowers that grow in the meadow. The children were fascinated that the meadow used to be a road.

Meadow Walks

Our meadow walks are an opportunity to join ecologist, Rachel Remnant, as she explains the importance of rejuvenating forgotten meadows to bring biodiversity back to the local area.



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People have attended our Magnificent Meadow Walks and Talks

Celebrating our the success of our pilot

We have been overwhelmed by the local community's positive response to the Magnificent Meadows project. The generous crowdfunder contributions, high interest, and volunteers have surpassed our expectations.

As a result, we are successfully raising the profile of city-edge, species-rich grasslands, highlighting their value for nature, nature recovery, local food production, carbon sequestration, climate change adaptation, and community benefits.

However, we've faced several logistical challenges. Securing land owner permissions can be a lengthy administrative process, which doesn't always match with seasonal windows of opportunity. With multiple sites involved, securing resources in time for the meadow season and coordinating with various landowners took longer than expected.

Despite these hurdles, the enthusiastic community support has co-created strong connections between individuals and partners, laying the groundwork for growth and continued success in future initiatives.

The table below gives a budget summary for the Magnificent Meadows Year One 2023/24.

Income	£
SDNPA	5,000
HCC	500
Crowd Funding	500
Cameron Bespolka Trust	750
Winchester City Council	1,125
Spurgin Trust	1500
LM Grant	200
	£9575



What's next?

We are keen to take this pilot project to the next stage, building on the impressive successes we've achieved so far. By leveraging the strong community support and the valuable lessons learned, we aim to expand and enhance our efforts, ensuring even greater positive impact on our local landscapes.

Key recommendations include

- Resume Chalk Grassland Management: Focus on cutting and removing scrub.
- Establish Land Ownership: Determine ownership and management responsibility for grassland fragments.
- Devise a Management Plan: Safeguard chalk downland wildlife and community connection through hay making, smallholder grazing, and coppicing.
- Explore Funding Sources: Investigate future funding opportunities
- Survey and Map: Chart chalk grasslands in gardens to connect doorsteps to the downs
- Educational Outreach: Share information with universities and pre-schools, and tap into existing groups for promotion.
- Create project specific communication tools: Commission a professional infographic, install interpretation at the Cowslip Field and Create videos and reels about the project, places and people
- Widen the area covered to include wider Winchester urban meadows and species-rich grasslands
- Harvest seed to enhance nearby areas in the Local Nature Recovery Strategy

About CPRE Hampshire

We are CPRE Hampshire, the countryside charity, promoting, enhancing and protecting a thriving countryside that enriches all our lives.

We believe in countryside and green spaces that are accessible to all, rich in nature and playing a crucial role in responding to the climate emergency.

Thank you!

This pilot project has kindly been supported by Highcliffe Community Forum for Action, Winchester City Council, Hampshire County Council, Butterfly Conservation, Highcliffe Allotments, The Friends of St Giles Hill, Emmaus, All Saints Primary School, The University of Winchester Sports Stadium, and All Saints Pre-school.

We would also like to thank our valued partners, funders, people who have donated to our crowdfunder and those who have generously given their time to help make the Magnificent Meadows Project a success and to Rachel Remnant, Land Lore Consulting for leading this project and supplying the photos for this report.



Spurgin Trust



Cameron Bespolka TRUST
Bringing children and nature together



The countryside charity
Hampshire

To find out more about the Magnificent Meadows project please contact rachel@landloreconsulting.com