



Magnificent Meadows

Connecting urban communities to
species rich chalk grasslands on their
doorstep

100
YEARS



Campaign to Protect
Rural England
Hampshire

www.cprehampshire.org.uk
Registered charity number: 1164410

Introduction

Now entering its second year, Hampshire's Magnificent Meadows project is building on a highly successful pilot and continuing to grow from strength to strength. Across Winchester, many people pass by our urban meadow areas without realising what they are or how ecologically valuable these fragments of chalk grassland can be. This project is changing that.

At the heart of Magnificent Meadows is community involvement. We recruit local volunteers, offering training and hands-on opportunities to help care for these precious green spaces. Their practical work doesn't just restore habitat - it attracts attention, sparks conversations and brings new understanding to residents who may never have connected chalk downland so close to home. In this way, the project supports cultural restoration as much as ecological recovery.

Chalk grasslands are among the UK's richest habitats, supporting an extraordinary diversity of plants, fungi, insects and other wildlife. Decades of fragmentation, however, have weakened these ecosystems. By restoring and reconnecting even small pockets of meadow, the project helps rebuild their ecological function.

Though modest in scale, these urban meadows act as vital stepping stones for wildlife. They strengthen pollinator corridors, help cool the city, intercept rainwater, capture carbon and give local people a daily, tangible connection to nature.

Residents have shown real enthusiasm for learning about these landscapes and are often surprised and delighted to discover such rare habitat right on their doorstep.

We are proud to share our expertise, empower local volunteers and inspire the community to help make Winchester a wildflower city.



Our Achievements in 2025

The Magnificent Meadows project has significantly increased the visibility and appreciation of species-rich grasslands by combining practical conservation action with community engagement. As a result, local people now have a stronger understanding of wildflower meadows, chalk downland, and the role these habitats play in our natural and cultural heritage.

Building skills and ecological awareness

A diverse programme of activities has enabled the local community to develop traditional land-management skills, including scything and haymaking. Volunteers can now confidently identify characteristic meadow species such as cowslip, yellow rattle, ox-eye daisy, selfheal and quaking grass and assess when seeds are ready for harvesting. These skills are already contributing to improved habitat management across multiple sites.

Expanding community reach through events and partnerships

Working closely with partner organisations and hosting a wide range of events has helped the project reach broad and varied audiences.

- Wildflower oversow events during Winchester Green Week brought people together to learn about South Downs wildlife and techniques for establishing wildflowers in isolated urban grasslands.
- Our November Night Walk offered a new and memorable way for residents to discover local meadows during winter evenings.

Supporting landowners to improve meadow management

We collaborated with six key landowners, helping them restore, manage and troubleshoot issues in existing meadow and grassland sites. Our dedicated volunteer team now provides sensitive mowing and thoughtful, habitat-led management, improving conditions for wildlife across multiple locations.

Strengthening the local circular economy for wildflower seed

Through our green hay harvesting and strewing activities, the project has demonstrated how locally sourced wildflower seed can drive sustainable habitat restoration. This work has increased awareness of a local circular seed economy and generated further demand for restoration projects planned for 2026.

Celebrating chalk downland in residential spaces

Our Chalk Hill Jewel garden surveys uncovered previously unmapped fragments of chalk downland in local front gardens. Residents embraced the significance of this finding and received tailored advice and locally collected seed to enhance their wildlife-rich lawns. Many have expressed interest in staying involved by contributing seed in future and supporting restoration efforts across the wider community.

The Magnificent Meadows project has become an inspiring model for motivating neighbouring communities and partners to support and restore meadows on the edges of urban areas.

Magnificent Meadow Volunteers

The Magnificent Meadows project thrives on the energy of its volunteers and the revival of traditional meadow-management skills.

Here are some of the added benefits of managing meadows using traditional methods and a trained volunteer team:

- Engaging local people brings powerful social benefits, fostering community cohesion and offering a meaningful, seasonal activity that brings people together outdoors. The work itself becomes a spectacle - rows of wildflowers swaying, the soft rhythm of scythes and the shared sense of purpose create a welcoming atmosphere.
- Volunteers often become approachable ambassadors for the meadow, sharing knowledge with passers-by and inspiring others to take an interest in nature's recovery.
- Traditional hand tools also make the work quieter, safer and more peaceful, avoiding the noise and projectiles associated with machinery. This approach delivers ecological advantages too: a single slicing cut is less harmful to wildlife, and hand-cut material contains no frass, helping to strip soil fertility more effectively and give wildflowers space to thrive. Working by hand also allows volunteers to navigate around sensitive features such as bee nests, orchids, railings and stones, providing a level of care and precision that machinery cannot match.
- Importantly, hand-cut meadow hay retains a higher nutrient value than mechanically made hay and the green hay gathered from species-rich patches becomes a valuable resource for local nature recovery, helping to kick-start new meadows in the surrounding landscape.

Together, volunteer energy and traditional meadow management form a powerful combination - strengthening communities, nurturing wildlife, and sustaining the living heritage of our meadows for generations to come.

15

Number of
Meadow sites
managed in
2025

363

Number of
volunteers taking
part in meadow
activities in
2025

723

Number of
volunteer hours
contributed to the
project

10

Number of
partners we
worked with in
2025

2

Number of schools
worked with
involving
50
young people

123

Number of bales
of hay harvested
by hand

Meadow Activities

see appendix 1 for full details of all our Magnificent Meadows activities



LEARNING TO SCYTHE COURSES

We delivered two beginner scything courses, training 11 new volunteers, along with one refresher course. In total, 16 meadow volunteers received scythe training in 2025.



HAY MAKING ON TOUR

In August (16–21), we held our first Hay Making on Tour week, working across smaller sites in Winchester, including Joyce Gardens, St John's Churchyard and the Leisure Centre. Species-rich green hay from Joyce Gardens provided an ideal 1:3 ratio for enhancing the Leisure Centre grassland, with thanks to Chris Lickley, Ranger for the South Downs National Park, for transporting the seed-laden hay. From these sites, we produced 6 bales at St John's Churchyard, most of which were sold for guinea pigs and 35 bales from the Leisure Centre.



HAY MAKING BY HAND

We delivered three weeks of hay making by hand activities over the summer. In June (17–21), we held 12 sessions at Cowslip Field with 33 participants contributing 129 volunteer hours, resulting in 21 bales of brambly meadow hay and 14 bales of meadow hay, all used by local allotment graziers.

In July (25–28), a further 12 sessions engaged 53 people who contributed 227 volunteer hours and harvested an additional 47 bales of meadow hay. Across both periods, one acre of meadow was successfully mown by hand, demonstrating the efficiency of traditional scything techniques.



Meadow Activities



WALKS AND TALKS

Alongside our practical habitat work, we delivered a programme of walks, talks and tailored activities to help people connect with the species-rich chalk grasslands on their doorstep.

We developed strong working relationships with Winchester Go-LD and Perlins, both supporting adults with learning disabilities, and each group took part in two sessions on our meadow sites over the summer.

These activities ran alongside visits from school groups and participants in our wellbeing walks, broadening engagement across the community.



Being outside, learning new things, meeting new people in a small group. Just what's needed when things are exasperating.

feedback from the wellbeing in nature walk



"I would like to do more night walks in addition to walking in the day. I would also like to 'notice' things more when I am out walking, rely more on my senses etc, stop and look, listen and 'feel'.

feedback from the night walk



Meadow Activities



CHALK HILL JEWELS GARDEN SURVEYS

Many of the garden lawns in Bar End and Highcliffe host distinctive communities of wildflowers and grasses typically found on the chalk downs - they're like miniature versions of St Catherine's Hill.

We carried out 20 garden surveys to help residents identify chalk grassland species in their lawns and to offer guidance on how to care for and nurture these special habitats so they can continue to play a role in our local natural heritage.

Species found in the Chalk Hill Jewels Garden surveys included: Marjoram, Ox-Eye Daisy, Hedge Bedstraw, Red Clover, Birds-Foot-Trefoil, Bugle, Selfheal, Field Madder, Crested Dog's-Tail, Quaking Grass and Sweet Vernal Grass.

We issued certificates to local residents to celebrate the importance of their garden lawns, recognising them as vital stepping-stone habitats. Together, these wildlife-rich lawns form a connected network that links our doorsteps to the downs, helping chalk grassland species thrive across the community.



HARVESTING LOCAL SEED

Many of the garden lawns we surveyed contain a staggering 20 or more chalk grassland species - a rare and valuable resource right on people's doorsteps.

As a result, with permission from homeowners, we collected seed from the most species-rich gardens. These locally sourced seeds are now being used to enhance other lawns within the neighbourhood, helping to spread chalk grassland species and strengthen the ecological network across Highcliffe.



Project locations

In this second year of the project we have noticed more landowners want to participate in the project. This can be due to availability but it's also due to the success of the pilot project attracting interest and people understanding what we do.

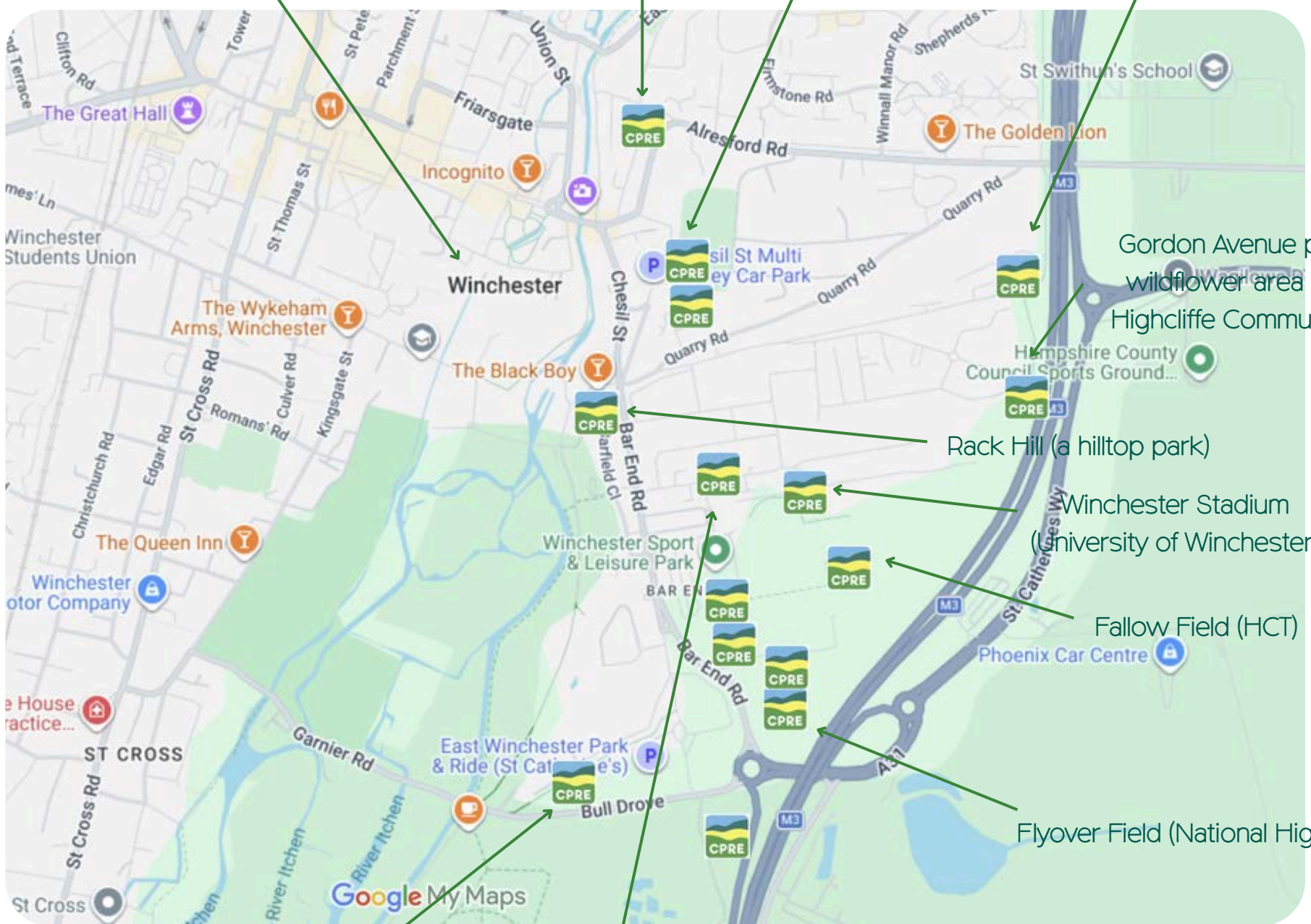
We have worked with:

We worked with 20 Chalk Hill Jewel Gardens, providing yarrow, marjoram, quaking grass, rough hawkbit, mouse-ear hawkweed, and bee orchid seeds that were carried and scattered on the wind

Joyce Gardens (WCC) supplied a diverse mix of species-rich meadow seed, including yellow rattle, cowslip, sweet vernal grass, selfheal and oxeye daisy. The area can be scythed in under two hours by a team of three. Thanks to the drought and heatwave, we were able to transport the green hay in just two trips, with valuable support from the South Downs Ranger team.

St Giles Hill (working with the city council and the Friends of St Giles Hill)

Chalk Ridge (a road verge)



Gordon Avenue playground wildflower area (WCC and Highcliffe Community Forum)

Rack Hill (a hilltop park)

Winchester Stadium (University of Winchester)

Fallow Field (HCT)

Flyover Field (National Highways)

Cowslip Field (road verge and a meadow)

At the leisure centre (WCC), haymaking and green-hay strewing were carried out on the sloped bank, where limited access prevents the use of cut-and-collect machinery. Scything and hand-work provide an effective alternative. Monitoring regrowth has indicated that the soil is highly fertile. Soil testing, along with additional cut-and-collect cycles throughout the growing season, would help reduce fertility and create better conditions for wildflowers to establish.

Meadow Calendar

Hay making might peak in summer, but behind the scenes it's a year-round effort, guided by the Great British weather.

September - January

Cut and collect, scrub management, review and plan management including troubleshooting.

April - May



Enjoy the wildflowers and emerging insects and animals.

July

Peak hay making with hot, long days. Seed & green harvest harvesting when seed is ripe. Oversowing begins.

September



Cut and rake or collect, continue oversowing of sites needing enhancement.

November - December

Yellow rattle needs exposure to cold for spring germination.

Feb - March



Monitor site, cut and collect if there is vigorous grass growth, to make space for yellow rattle germination.

June

Haymaking on fertile areas, weed control by cutting and raking close to flowering time. Start collecting ripe seed such as cowslip and yellow rattle.

August



Hay crop browns off but provides structure for invertebrates and fauna - can retain species rich areas with low fertility. Continue oversowing of sites needing enhancement.

October

Mop up cut and collect or oversowing sites.

What we have Learnt

Now in its second, more developed year, the Magnificent Meadows project has brought more volunteers together across more sites and partners, giving us a valuable opportunity to understand what consistently works well.

Key learnings:

- Traditional practices such as making hay by hand continue to be successful, while activities such as wellbeing walks and school visits have seen more variable levels of participation.
- Working with nature means embracing unpredictability, and we have benefited greatly from strong relationships with partners and the flexibility to seize new opportunities as they arise. A highlight this year was surveying a two-hectare privately managed meadow as part of our Chalk Hill Jewels work. This site will become an important green hay donor location from 2026 onwards.
- The hot, dry summer provided valuable learning for fertile, well drained sites. These would benefit from hay making in June / July, rather than August, before they brown off and carry nutrients back into the ground.
- Habitat restoration is a long-term endeavour, and each year enhances our understanding. This growing knowledge allows us to contribute more effectively to site management, applying the practical skills our team brings. Above all, we enable progress - helping things happen.



**“Seeing is believing,”
and this has been
particularly true in year
two. Landowners have
become more actively
engaged after
witnessing what is
possible and many are
now planning their own
grassland restoration
work.**

- This year we have enjoyed developing new partnerships with Perlins, Winchester GoLD, Wonderseekers, Winnall Primary School and Buglife. Many of these connections grew from presenting at conferences and building on existing networks, helping us strengthen relationships across the patchwork of sites and communities we work with.
- Meaningful local engagement often takes time to build, and our Chalk Hill Jewels garden surveys have provided a valuable way to connect directly with residents. By walking local streets, identifying species-rich lawns, and knocking on doors with information in hand, we were able to meet people where they are. Many householders shared deeply personal stories about their gardens. In particular, one resident told us how her lawn was originally laid when the M3 was built and how her father and neighbour were fined for taking the turf.
- Offering a wider range of short, accessible volunteering opportunities such as one-hour over-sowing sessions has helped us reach more local people.
- We continue to think creatively about engagement, whether selling hay to families with guinea pigs or providing locally collected seed to those eager to enrich their own lawns with wildflowers. It has been especially encouraging this winter to be approached with new ideas from the community itself, such as the Scouts offering to take up scything or Parents for the Future making a planting pledge.
- Our volunteer base spans the county and beyond, and the traditional meadow skills they learn are carried back to their own communities. This county-wide network provides a reliable and knowledgeable team that local residents can engage with repeatedly, supporting deeper learning and sustained involvement.



Thank you so much for all the enthusiasm and expertise you shared with us, as well as your warmth and kindness. We loved learning about the seeds, and as we walked home, we reflected on how we'd heard [the world news] and felt so hopeless about so much that's happening in the world... and yet to do something as simple, humble yet as deeply profound as planting seeds on an early autumn evening with a group of local people brought a most powerful sense of hope and healing to us both."

feedback from the seed harvesting session

Recommendations

To ensure the Magnificent Meadows project continues to flourish, we've outlined some actions that will help strengthen our approach, protect the ecological progress already achieved, and support the growing community of volunteers who make this work possible. By investing in these next steps, we can secure a thriving future for Winchester's precious chalk grasslands.



Annual monitoring of species-rich meadows

Regular monitoring is essential to understanding how restoration work is affecting our species-rich meadows. Annual soil analysis and rapid grassland assessments provide the evidence needed to justify ongoing funding and to clearly demonstrate the impact of our efforts. Consistent, year-on-year monitoring also helps identify emerging issues early. By catching problems sooner, any corrective action is simpler, more cost-effective, and far more likely to protect the meadow's long-term ecological health.



Peri-urban meadow management

Managing small, fragmented or hard-to-access peri-urban meadows can be difficult using conventional machinery. Our community-based approach offers an effective and environmentally sensitive alternative—particularly when working on sites that are too small or awkward for contractors and heavy equipment.

Inspired by traditional techniques, and drawing on the revival of scything championed by practitioners such as Janne Wester in Sweden, this model reconnects people with low-impact, heritage skills while delivering practical land management.

Meadows rely on an annual hay cut to maintain their species richness. Although this can be mimicked with cut-and-collect machinery, our monitoring of small urban sites shows that contractors often end up cutting and mulching instead. The “collect” element which is vital for meadow health is frequently not carried out. This leaves thick mulch on the ground, which suppresses delicate wildflowers and increases soil fertility, allowing robust grasses to dominate.

A more effective solution is to make hay by hand. Using scythes and wooden hay rakes, volunteers can cut and gather material cleanly, enabling landowners to collect it afterwards. This gentle, precise approach protects sensitive plant communities, reduces nutrient build-up, and helps maintain the diverse structure characteristic of species-rich meadows.



**The Magnificent Meadows project was
filmed by BBC South today on 26th July 2026
[https://youtu.be/4bigMb-138M?
si=8Pa1N5uhTWV79ges](https://youtu.be/4bigMb-138M?si=8Pa1N5uhTWV79ges)**

Appendix 1

2025 Magnificent Meadows Project - Activities Log

Date	Activities April - June	Number of People
29/04/25	Launch Event & walk	27
3/6/25	Chalk Hill Jewels Garden Survey	1
6/6/25	Learning to Scythe - Refresher Course - Winchester Stadium	5
16/06/25	Learning to Scythe Course	6
17/06/25	Hay Making by Hand - Cowslip Field Scything 8am - 11am Hay making 12pm - 4pm Hay making 6pm - 8pm	5 3 1
18/06/25	Hay making scything 8am - 11am Hay making 10am - 2pm Hay making 6pm - 8pm	4 5 1
19/06/25	Hay making 12pm - 4pm Hay making 6pm - 8pm	3 1
20/06/25	Hay making 11am - 3pm Hay baling 6pm - 9pm	3 2
21/06/25	Hay making scything 9am - 11am Hay making baling 11am - 5pm	1 6
30/06/25	All Saints Pre school Treasure Hunt	20

Date	Activities - July	Number of People
07/07/25	All saints preschool visit cowslip meadow	20
07/07/25	Talk at PG Wells bookshop	26
22/07/25	Well Being Walk - Winchester Go-LD	15
25/07/25	Hay Making by Hand - Cowslip Field Scything 8am - 11am Hay making 11pm - 4pm Hay making 6pm - 8pm	9 8 2
26/07/25 South Today Filming	Hay making scything 8am - 12pm Hay making 12pm - 2pm Hay making 2pm - 4pm Hay making 6pm- 8pm	6 3 4 4
27/07/25	Hay making 11pm - 2pm Hay making 4pm - 8pm	4 7
28/07/25	Hay making 11am - 9pm	6
29/07/25	Wildflower oversowing St Giles Hill 3pm - 6pm	6
31/07/25	Heritage seed Harvesting and sorting	1
01/08/25	Scythe stadium oversowing	8

Date	Activities - August / Sept	Number of People
01/08/25	Wellbeing walk Winchester Go-LD	15
11/08/25	Pollinator Monitor Training - Bug Life	15
16/08/25	Green hay scything - Joyce gardens	2
17/08/25	Learning to Scythe Training Course	5
18/08/25	Hay Making on Tour - Leisure Centre Scything 8am - 11am Hay making 10am - 4pm WCC vol day Green Hay strewing 10am - 12pm Hay making 2pm - 4pm	5 5 5 5
19/08/25	Hay making on tour - St Johns Churchyard scything 8am - 11pm	3
20/08/25	Hay making leisure centre 11am-8pm	5
21/08/25	Hay making leisure centre & St Johns 11am - 8pm	2
31/08/25	CPRE Countryside Day - Daisy Meadow Farm - Talk & Demo	15
12/09/25	Chilcomb Rec scythe green hay and seed harvest Leisure Centre green hay stre and seed	5 2
20/09/25	Winchester Green Fair	5
22/09/25	Chalk Ridge Rake & Sow Rack Hill Rake & Sow	6 13

Date	Activities - Oct	Number of People
12/10/25	Gordon Avenue scythe mow for sow rake and sow	3 6
14/10/25	Magdalen Hill Down and Chilcomb Rec scythe, seed harvest, rake & sow	5
28/10/25	Chalk Hill Jewels Garden survey	1
5/11/25	Chalk Hill Jewels Garden survey	1
27/11/25	Night Walk - Wellbeing in nature	9
3/12/25	Wellbeing in Nature Walk	7
26/1/26	Meadow Nature Walk - Winall Primary School	30

KEY

WELLBEING WALKS

GARDEN SURVEYS

LEARNING TO SCYTHER TRAINING

HAYMAKING BY HAND

SCHOOL VISITS

SEED COLLECTION & SOWING EVENTS

TALKS & EVENTS

Sponsors & Supporters

Thank you for all your help & support

**SOUTH DOWNS
NATIONAL PARK**



**Funded by
UK Government**

Supported by the UK Governments'
Shared Prosperity Fund awarded by
Winchester City Council



Winchester
City Council

Winchester
Rotary



Supported by
Hampshire
County Council



Winchester Round Table

Stage coach

We are pleased to announce that we have just secured funding from the National Lottery Community Fund to extend our work into other peri-urban chalk grassland sites across Hampshire and are currently in discussions with potential partner organisations regarding further funding.