

## Wildflower Ringmer – Proposals for the Parish Council

### Introduction

Since 1940 we have lost 97% of UK flower-rich meadows and as a result thousands of our pollinating species are in decline. It is not just individual species which are disappearing; the sheer abundance of insect life in our countryside has fallen. The main cause of this is the widespread destruction and fragmentation of habitat through urban development, road building, use of pesticides and herbicides and unsympathetic green space management. Pollinators are finding themselves walled in by agricultural land, urban landscape, roads and gardens.

Ringmer, with its proximity to the South Downs and surrounding countryside, has the potential to provide habitats acting like ‘stepping-stones’ for pollinators between these areas. The village has abundant green spaces, currently under-utilised for wildflowers and wildlife but with enormous potential.

The National Pollinator Strategy: for bees and other pollinators in England published by Defra in November 2014 acknowledges these issues and provides clear recommendations for everyone who owns or manages a green space including local councils and all gardeners. The good news is that Council and community-led projects are bubbling up across the UK with some notable successes.



In Dorset, verges previously full of dock and cow parsley have been transformed in less than 6 years through reduced mowing with cuttings removed. The reduction in soil fertility has allowed suffocated seedbanks to spring back into life. Yarrow, lady’s bedstraw and pyramidal orchids are now common place along the A354.



King’s College Cambridge has exchanged its pristine striped lawn for a glorious wildflower meadow.

More locally Wildflower Lewes working with Lewes Town Council and East Sussex Highways have national recognition for their work in restoring chalk grassland habitat and improving biodiversity for pollinators. There is growing recognition that being close to nature is hugely beneficial to people’s mental health. Not everyone can or wishes to walk on the Downs. Increased biodiversity in the green spaces within our village would allow more people to enjoy and benefit from this.

Imagine Ringmer ablaze with wildflowers and buzzing with pollinating species. This can be achieved without negative impact on public green space use. The Parish Council has a wonderful opportunity

to lead by example and to motivate and inspire others to follow suit. There are barriers to overcome, not least the desire for 'neat and tidy' but most people when made aware of the unfolding ecological crisis would willingly make changes to leave the planet in good order for their children and grandchildren!

### How can we achieve this in Ringmer?

1. **When mowing always 'cut and collect'**. The vast majority of amenity grassland and urban verges may have little biodiversity value, but they have significant potential. The key to realising this lies in 'cut and collect' whereby the grass cuttings are removed from the site. Why? Because it reduces the fertility of the soil; wild flowers thrive in poor soils. Collecting the thatch of decaying grass removes nutrients and, over time, allows more wild flowers to thrive and less vigorous grass to dominate.
2. **Step back from mowing the edges** enabling some longer grass areas to increase range of habitat.
3. **Mow less frequently**; ideally once a month maximum, and follow Plantlife's (the wild plant conservation charity) #NoMowMay Campaign to enable plants to flower and set seed. Where possible extend this to #LetItBloomJune and #KneeHighJuly. Reducing mowing will have the added benefit of reducing the carbon footprint of management activities.
4. **Provide different heights of grass**. Whilst some areas of long grass are beneficial, relatively short grass is useful too. By raising the mower blades a few inches higher and using cut and collect short flower-rich grassland can be developed. Species such as clovers (*Trifolium sp.*), trefoils (*Lotus sp.*), vetches (*Vicia sp.*) self-heal (*Prunella vulgaris*), and yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*) grow quite happily at ankle height and support a huge array of pollinators.
5. **Use signage** explaining what is being done and why. This to include detailed notices with map and text explanations and smaller signs located at specific areas. In time when more species are established identification charts could be displayed.



6. **'Frame' longer grass areas with mown edges** to show that this is deliberate management rather than the council 'being lazy' or just a cost-cutting exercise. Cutting a 1-mower-width or at most 1m along the front edge of the verge frames the longer grass behind it. This lets people know that the longer grass is being left intentionally and that it hasn't just been

neglected. This approach also has two other important benefits: The area of shorter grass at the front of the verge can preserve good visibility and ensure safety at junctions. It also keeps footpaths through green space open and accessible.

7. **Promote these initiatives to the village community** encouraging residents to ‘do their bit’ to help nature in their gardens and to avoid over-mowing road verges adjacent to their houses. Research has shown that nationally private gardens could collectively be considered the most important nature reserve in the country. If we could inspire residents to allow native wildflower species into their gardens and adopt other wildlife friendly practices in their gardens this would have a significant positive impact.

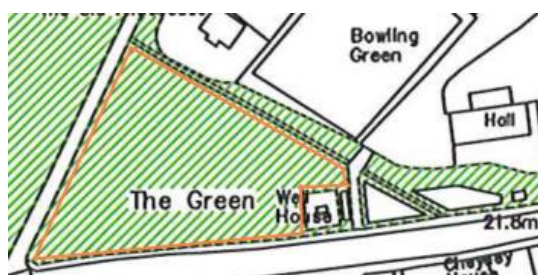
### Proposal for the Village Green

1. The banks running along the Lewes road side of the green (highlighted yellow on map)



Develop banks as wildflower ‘verges’. A 1m strip from the pavement will create approx. 330m<sup>2</sup> of improved habitat, connecting the length of the Green. Leave this unmown from April – end of August. Survey and record existing species in first summer. Augment with native species plug plants from local source in Autumn 2021.

2. ‘Triangular’ Green adjacent to Well House (outlined in yellow)



Option 1:

2-mower-width strip around all sides; rest left to grow all summer with 1-mower-width paths cut through to make a fun pattern leading to mown area around tree and bench. Mown paths maintained from April to late summer then whole area cut/mown. Fun for kids of all ages.

Option 2:

Develop as flower-rich short sward by mowing with raised blades to approx 4 inches. Cut and collect. Frame area with close mown 1-mower-width strip on all sides.



### 3. The Well House



Maintain full width mown path up to well. Develop other areas as flower-rich short sward by mowing with raised blades to approx 4 inches. Plant native species plug plants and native bulbs in Autumn e.g. primrose, native daffodil and crocus to provide interest, colour and food sources for pollinators from Spring onwards. Allow to spread.

### 4. Side path bordering Bowls Club



Close mown path 1-mower-width bordering concrete path and surrounding benches. Leave grassland behind this to grow tall by not mowing April to end of August. Leave bank on other side of ditch untrimmed until end of August.

### 5. 'Top' edge of Green



The verge area beyond the path is shaded on the Church side with much bare earth visible – perhaps from removal of Ivy? To the right side of the Delves House entrance patches of celandines where present provide a much needed respite from scalped grass and bare earth. Less mowing and some planting/sowing is needed to provide softer edges, more interest and greater food and habitat for wildlife.



There are a number of dead trees in this area. Remove these, using chopped wood to form woodpile, leaving this as habitat for invertebrates.



Leave longer grass around base of trees to provide varied habitat and soften appearance.

### Proposal for Rushey Green



A quick survey on 6<sup>th</sup> April indicated that many wildflower plants are already present; common species but useful for pollinators.

#### Option 1:

2-mower-width strip around road-facing sides; rest left to grow all summer with 1-mower-width paths cut through to make a fun pattern leading to mown area around bench. Mown paths maintained from April to late summer then whole area cut/mown. Fun for kids of all ages.

#### Option 2:

Develop as flower-rich short sward by mowing with raised blades to approx 4 inches. Cut and collect. Frame area with close mown 1-mower-width strip on all road-facing sides. Allow grass to grow longer at 'back' adjacent to ditch to provide some shelter.

### Proposal for Sadlers Way Green



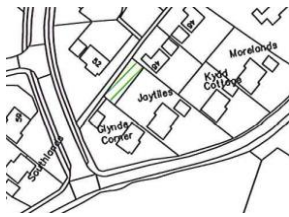
Triangular shaped area to top right of Green adjacent to wall is suitable for planting with species such as Comfrey, Vipers Bugloss, Foxgloves to provide colour and interest. These plants would provide food for a range of insects: bumblebees, Large Skipper and Painted Lady butterflies, moths, honeybees and Red Mason Bees. The wall (orange in photo) is an ideal spot for Honeysuckle to provide nectar for pollinating moths as well as myriad other insect species. Leave grass longer in front of hedge (blue line) to give cover for small mammals.



Plug plant rest of area as necessary with species that will tolerate mowing with blades raised e.g. birds foot trefoil. This will produce short flower-rich sward useful for pollinators and attractive for people whilst retaining its existing recreational use. Front area adjacent to Sadlers Way pavement already has violets, red dead-nettle, celandine and speedwell and looked beautiful before it was mown. Allow these to spread.

Planting around trees (e.g. crocus, snowdrops, winter aconite and cyclamen) to provide food for a variety of insects such as early emerging bees.

### Gote Lane Development



This strip of verge has a good population of spring flowers and is valued by residents in neighbouring houses. Manage this as a wildflower verge with appropriate signage with no mowing from December until August. If deemed necessary a 1-mower-width strip could be mown next to the path.



Avoid mowing in May and June. Mow 1-mower-width strip around edge to frame longer grass if deemed necessary.

### Village Pump



A number of wildflower species are already present in the lawn here. Develop flower-rich sward by raising mower blades. Assess biodiversity this year; add different species using plug plants in Autumn if desired.

### Gote Lane Conservation area

The majority of this verge in front of and either side of the bench has been so closely mown that wildflowers have largely been eradicated. Given the sign "WI Conservation Area" this is unfortunate. Suggestions to improve biodiversity, colour and interest:

Plant the area towards the back of the verge with larger herbaceous pollinator species e.g. foxglove, comfrey, vipers bugloss.

Plug plant areas in front of the seat and to the sides with species that will produce a short flower-rich sward e.g. clover, bird's foot trefoil, ground ivy etc. This area to be mown with blades set to 4 inches.

### Broyle Lane Areas

Leave longer grass around the field margins to provide varied habitat and cover for small mammals.

## Considerations

Reduced mowing - doesn't cost anything, could be implemented immediately;

Communications - a campaign of notices and messages is needed so that people know what to expect and why it is being done;

Planting / sowing – to be carried out in Autumn to maximise chance of success;

Workforce – volunteers from Wildflower Ringmer could take on planting as unpaid volunteers;

Funding – funding required for signage, plug plants and seed; how much is RPC willing to give in funds? Could this be 'topped-up' from other sources?

Prioritisation – identification of areas to be prioritised if funding is insufficient to cover all aspects;

Surveying over time – plant surveys could be conducted by Wildflower Ringmer throughout the year to record species and abundance.