

**Bridport Town Council  
Asker Meadows & New Zealand Management Plan  
2025-2030**



**This version  
FINAL APPROVED  
January 2025**

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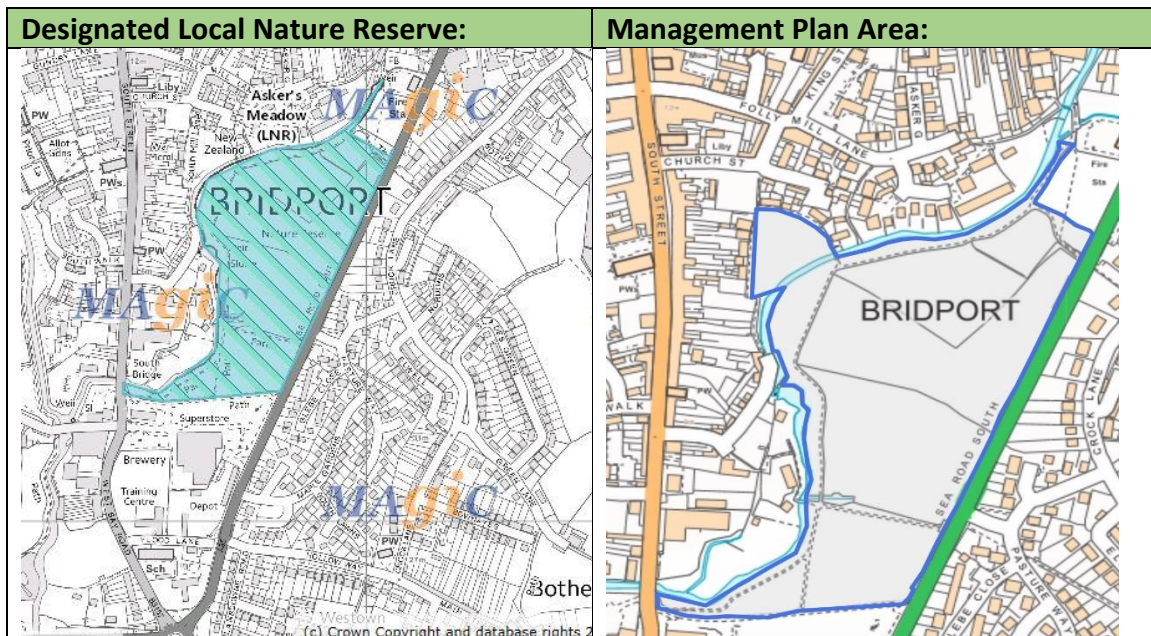
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## 1. Background

Asker Meadows is a 9.16 Ha Local Nature Reserve comprised of a series of riverside meadows forming the flood plain of the River Asker. This management plan for Asker Meadows includes prescriptions for the adjoining area known as New Zealand. Owned by Bridport Town Council the two areas are important 'green lungs' between the town of Bridport, the busy A35 and Bothenhampton.

The first Asker Meadows management plan was produced in 2019. In 2024 the Town Council agreed to undertake an extensive consultation process to review the delivery of that first plan and to update the actions it contains to address community needs and concerns.

Since 2019 the Town Council, working with the Asker Meadows Nature Reserve Group, have undertaken a number of practical improvements to the area. A significant number of trees have been planted and experimentation with diversifying the grassland areas.



The river Asker is part of the West Dorset Coastal Rivers and Streams Catchment and is subject to an Environment Agency Flood Defence Scheme.

The ongoing operation of the Flood Defence scheme will impact on the ambitions and delivery of this management plan. It is essential that the Environment Agency are fully engaged in the consultation phase for this draft plan.

### **Brief history of the site:**

1991 Land gifted by Mr Humphries to West Dorset District Council  
Early 2000s West Dorset District Council incremental transfer of site to Bridport Town Council

Local Nature Reserve status acquired in 2004\*  
2004 Defra Countryside Stewardship award to establish grazing  
Nature Reserve Group formed 2005

2014 meadow restoration as part Coronation Meadow Project  
Grazing License negotiated annually

2017 – 2024 Show Field activities – Food Festival, Circus, Jurassic Coast Challenge etc

2019 Tree planting with help from Bridport Tree Group

2024 Pavilion of Regenerative Practice Project

### **Site Management**

The Asker Meadows Nature Reserve Group was formed in 2005 as a means of representing local views and organising volunteer action. The Group hold regular meetings and elect officers each year at their annual general meeting.

The Group has been involved in developing this management plan and will be instrumental in delivering the actions set out in the plan, especially surveys and volunteer activity.

\*See: <https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/SiteLNRDetail.aspx?SiteCode=L1084817&SiteName=&countyCode=12&responsiblePerson=&SeaArea=&IFCAArea=>

## 2. Management Plan Consultations

It is important that the management plan for Asker Meadows and New Zealand safeguards the interests of wildlife and that the use of the area for informal recreation are compatible with mitigations put in place to address any community concerns.

During July – September 2024 a consultation exercise took place to gather the views of users and residents about the management of Asker Meadows and the New Zealand site. This was supplemented by a series of consultation walks and talks held on site during September 2024 -**SEE APPENDIX 1**.

We would like to hear from you to help shape the next five years.

What do you like best about Askers Meadows?

If you could change anything, what would it be?



Bridport  
Town Council



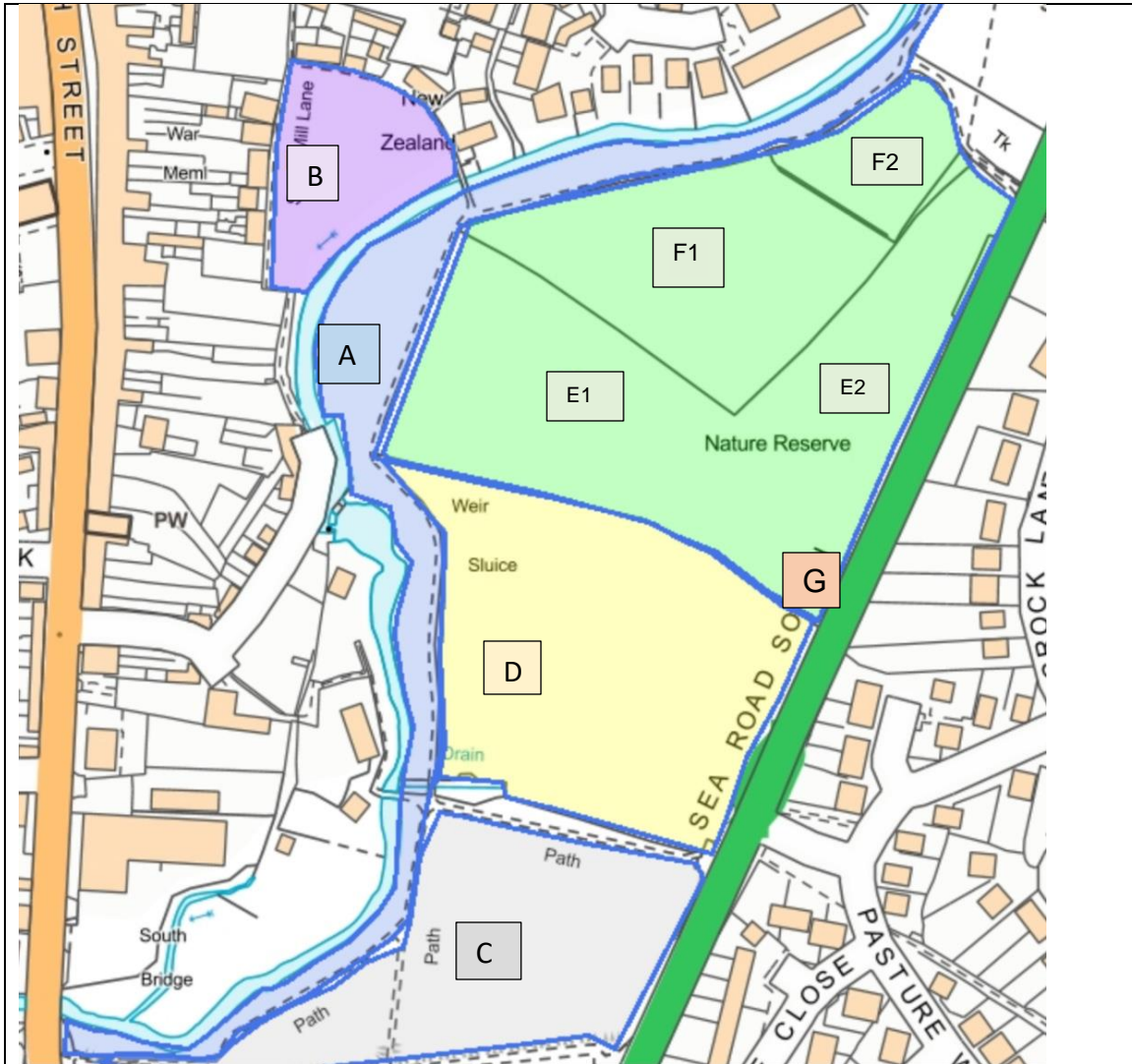
You can also email your comments to  
[caroline.pearce@bridport-tc.gov.uk](mailto:caroline.pearce@bridport-tc.gov.uk)

A draft plan was available for formal public consultation in December 2024. This revised management plan to cover the period 2025-2030 was approved by the Town Councils Environment Committee in early 2025.

Bridport Town Council, with input from the Asker Meadows Nature Reserve Group, will review the delivery of management plan actions on an annual basis with a view to undertaking a formal review of the management plan in 2030.

### 3. Vision for the Nature Reserve

An area rich in wildlife enjoyed by local people for informal recreation.



Key:

- Area A - River Corridor
- Area B - New Zealand
- Area C - Morrison's Field
- Area D- Weir Field/ Show Field
- Area E1 - Boot Field    Area E2 – Coronation Meadow
- Area F1 and F2 – Wet Meadows
- Area G – Council Compound

### **3.1 Objectives of the Asker Meadows Management Plan 2025-2030:**

**Maintain and enhance the grazing meadows for their wildlife interests.**

**Undertake a standard baseline assessment and develop a wildlife enhancement and access plan for submission to the Brit Catchment Landscape Recovery Project in 2025.**

**Hedge and tree management to provide wildlife interest and diversify the structural habitats.**

**Maintain surfaced paths as shared spaces for walkers and cyclists. Introduce regular mowing of non-surfaced paths during the Spring and Summer.**

**Run education events to promote awareness and appreciation of wildlife and encourage responsible behaviours.**

**Establish a programme of practical management sessions with volunteers.**

**Manage the Show Field for a select number of community events.**

## 4. Management Plan 2025 - 2030

### 4.1 Overall Plan

Unimproved flood meadows with hedges and trees managed primarily for wildlife with a recognition of the range of uses enjoyed by local people.

Management plan objectives to be carefully balanced to consider:

- Flood scheme management,
- Maintaining access for all,
- Action to improve wildlife,
- Education and volunteering and
- Community events on the Show Field.

### 4.2 By Habitat Type & Management Block:

#### River Habitat

##### AREA A – RIVER CORRIDOR

Area from river up to surfaced path

Management of Bridport Flood Relief Scheme by the Environment Agency.

Environment Agency will mow 6 - 8 m margin occasionally and manage riverside trees (willow/ alders) as required for safety and flood management.

#### Grassland Habitat

##### AREA E2 – CORONATION MEADOW

Wildlife space

Cut and collect hay after July 15<sup>th</sup> each year.

Grazing period and intensity managed Sept – Nov (see annual grazing licence).

##### AREA E1 – BOOT FIELD

Wildlife space

Area to be grazed by small number of cattle each summer May – September. Grazing period and intensity managed through annual grazing licence.



	<p><b>ENHANCEMENT OPPORTUNITIES</b></p> <p>Experiment with ‘in field’ enclosures by erecting two 10 sqm (approx) to allow for natural regeneration and additional tree planting areas.</p> <p>Provision of winter food resources for resident and wintering bird species.</p>
<p><b>F1 and F2 – WET MEADOWS</b> Wildlife space</p>	<p>Area to be grazed by small number of cattle each summer May – September. Grazing period and intensity managed through annual grazing licence.</p>
	<p><b>ENHANCEMENT OPPORTUNITIES</b></p> <p>Provision of winter food resources for resident and wintering bird species.</p> <p>Create shallow ponds with gently sloping edges, less than 1m in depth, which hold rain or flood water seasonally but stay damp for most of the year.</p>
<p><b>Area C – MORRISONS FIELD</b> Amenity space</p>	<p>Maintain 1.5 - 3m mown margins to surfaced path.</p> <p>Monthly summer mowing of paths across the Morrisons Field to include creation of small picnic areas.</p> <p>Cutback overgrown vegetation as required for safe use of the site.</p>
	<p><b>ENHANCEMENT OPPORTUNITY</b></p> <p>Creation of pollinator resources for bees and other insects (e.g. cultivated flower-rich strips).</p>
<p><b>Area B – NEW ZEALAND</b> Amenity space</p>	<p>Regular mowing 1.5m - 3m margin from surface path.</p> <p>3m mown area in front of South Mill Lane properties.</p>

<b>AREA D – SHOW FIELD</b> Amenity space	Grass area regularly mown for events and for dogs exercising off lead.
	<b>ENHANCEMENT OPPORTUNITIES</b>  Create 6m margin to the eastern field boundary and introduce experimental with planting wild bird seed mixes.  Explore with local dog walkers appetite for a dedicated ‘dog socialisation’ area.
<b>Boundaries – Hedges &amp; Walls</b>	
	Produce a Hedgerow Tree Plan by the end of 2025, including consideration for installation of Bat Boxes.  Manage hedges around the Boot and Wet Meadows as linear woodlands. Aiming to retain veteran trees, manage die back and develop a replacement tree planting scheme.  Manage hedges around the Show and Morrisons field by ‘A’ shaped hedge cutting on a three year cycle.  Initiate a rolling programme of dry stone wall repair. Run dry stone walling training sessions for staff and volunteers.
	<b>ENHANCEMENT OPPORTUNITIES</b> Experimental fencing/ roundel markers to extend hedge/ woodland edges and allow natural regeneration to add structure.  Commission a bat survey and amend management prescriptions accordingly.

<b>Trees/ Tree planting</b>	
	<p>Manage safety issues through a 5 yearly insurance arboriculture survey. Deal with dangers, leaving dead wood either standing or on site.</p> <p>Aim to retain veteran trees for as long as safe and practical. Manage Ash Die Back and replace lost trees with suitable species as required.</p>
	<p><b>ENHANCEMENT OPPORTUNITIES</b></p> <p>Commission a Bat survey.</p> <p>Identify opportunities for additional tree planting along fenced boundaries.</p>
	<p><b>Access</b></p>
	<p>Maintain 1.5 - 3m cut margins to main access route through regular mowing.</p> <p>Maintain and improve access to all areas whilst allowing for quiet zones.</p> <p>Maintain main surfaced path as a pedestrian/ cyclist shared route.</p> <p>Maintain access route/ gate through to A35/ Crock Lane.</p> <p>Maintain access route through to South Street.</p> <p>Deal with wet, muddy and uneven gateways with surfacing improvements as required.</p>
	<p><b>ENHANCEMENT OPPORTUNITIES</b></p> <p>Regular summer mowing of grass paths to support user needs whilst starting to direct paths in such a way as to create experimental quiet zones for wildlife.</p> <p>Disability Discrimination Act assessment of all access gates and actions to ensure all comply.</p>

<b>Education and awareness raising Volunteering</b>	
	<p>Work with partners to organise and run education events and activities to support delivery of Asker Meadows management plan.</p> <p>Assess use and impact of recent nature trail installation and consider improvements and additions in 2026.</p> <p>With input from the BTC Outdoor Team establish regular volunteer sessions to undertake a programme of practical site management, including dry-stone walling training sessions.</p> <p>Support establishment of a dog walkers' group to run events, activities and awareness raising inspired by the Dorset Dogs project.</p> <p>Work with regular dog walkers to develop a dog walkers trail.</p>
	<p><b>ENHANCEMENT OPPORTUNITY</b></p> <p>Develop an effective programme of survey, monitoring and data management to inform and communicate progress with nature conservation measures.</p>

<b>Bridport Town Council Composting Area</b>	
	<p>Install low fence to define screen planting area and refresh with additional trees.</p>
	<p><b>ENHANCEMENT OPPORTUNITY</b></p> <p>Invest in an industrial composter to deal with grass cutting arisings from BTC landholdings and make compost available to the community.</p>

## 5. Action Plan - Actions Year by Year:

### 5.1 2025/26 Actions

What	When	Who
Baseline survey of meadows.  Nature Conservation enhancement programme developed and submitted to Brit Valley Landscape Partnership.	Spring 2025  By Dec 2025	BTC working with Brit Valley Team
<b>Wet Meadows, Boot Fields</b> Grazed by small number of cattle.	Summer May – September	Annual grazing licence with local farmer
<b>Coronation Meadow</b> Cut and collect hay. Grazing by small number of cattle.	After July 15 <sup>th</sup>  Aug - Oct	BTC Grillo  Annual grazing licence with local farmer
<b>Morrisons Field</b> Maintain 1.5- 3m mown margins to surfaced path.  Mowing of paths across the Morrisons Field to include creation of small picnic areas.  Cutback overgrown vegetation as required for safe use of the site.	Monthly summer    As Required	BTC Outdoor Team
<b>New Zealand</b> Regular mowing 1.5m - 3m margin from surface path.  3m mown area in front of South Mill Lane properties.	April - Oct	BTC Outdoor Team
<b>Show Field</b> Grass area regularly mown.	April - October	BTC Outdoor Team

<b>What</b>	<b>When</b>	<b>Who</b>
Install low fence to define screen planting area and refresh with additional trees.	Winter 2025	BTC outdoor Team BTG
Produce a Hedgerow Tree Plan including consideration for installation of Bat Boxes.	By the end of 2025	BTC working with Brit Valley Team
Manage hedges around the Show and Morrisons Fields by 'A' shaped cutting.	A third of hedge length managed on a three year cycle.	BTC Outdoor Team
Repair sections of dry-stone wall.	Two volunteer walling sessions in summer 2025 with local walling trainer.	BTC Outdoor Team ANRP

Manage tree safety issues through a 5 yearly insurance arboriculture survey. Deal with dangers, leaving dead wood either standing or on site.	As required	BTC Outdoor Team
Aim to retain veteran trees for as long as safe and practical. Manage Ash Die Back and replace lost trees with suitable species as required.	As required	BTC Outdoor Team
Install new benches	March 2025	BTC Outdoor Team ANRP
Maintain 1.5 - 3m cut margins to main access route through regular mowing.	April - October	BTC Outdoor Team
Regular mowing of grass paths to support user needs.	April - October	BTC Outdoor Team
Deal with wet, muddy and uneven gateways with surfacing improvements as required.	As required	BTC Outdoor Team ANRP
Run events, activities and awareness raising inspired by the Dorset Dogs project.	Organise two events for dog walkers – Summer 2025	BTC ANRP

## 5.2 2026/27 Actions

What	When	Who
Begin implementation of the nature conservation enhancement programme. <i>(Dependent on securing external funding)</i>	Summer 2026	BTC working with Brit Valley Team
<b>Wet Meadows, Boot Fields</b> Grazed by small number of cattle.	Summer May – September	Annual grazing licence with local farmer
<b>Coronation Meadow</b> Cut and collect hay. Grazing by small number of cattle.	After July 15 <sup>th</sup>  Aug - Oct	BTC Grillo  Annual grazing licence with local farmer
<b>Morrison's Field</b> Maintain 1.5- 3m mown margins to surfaced path.  Mowing of paths across the Morrison's Field to include creation of small picnic areas.  Cutback overgrown vegetation for safe use of the site.	Monthly summer     As required	   BTC Outdoor Team
<b>New Zealand</b> Regular mowing 1.5m - 3m margin from surface path.  3m mown area in front of South Mill Lane properties.	April - Oct	BTC Outdoor Team
<b>Show Field</b> Grass area regularly mown.	April - October	BTC Outdoor Team

<b>What</b>	<b>When</b>	<b>Who</b>
Manage hedges around the Show and Morrisons Fields by 'A' shaped cutting.	A third of hedge length managed on a three year cycle.	BTC Outdoor Team
Repair sections of dry-stone wall.	Two volunteer walling sessions in summer 2025 with local walling trainer	BTC Outdoor Team ANRP
Manage tree safety issues through a 5 yearly insurance arboriculture survey. Deal with dangers, leaving dead wood either standing or on site.	As required	BTC Outdoor Team
Aim to retain veteran trees for as long as safe and practical. Manage Ash Die Back and replace lost trees with suitable species as required.	As required	BTC Outdoor Team
Maintain 1.5 - 3m cut margins to main access route through regular mowing.	April - October	BTC Outdoor Team
Regular mowing of grass paths to support user needs.	April - October	BTC Outdoor Team
Deal with wet, muddy and uneven gateways with surfacing improvements as required.	As required.	BTC Outdoor Team
Pilot volunteer workdays to assist with site management.	Monthly sessions March - Nov	BTC Outdoor Tema ANRP
Run events, activities and awareness raising inspired by the Dorset Dogs project.	Organise two events for dog walkers – Summer 2025	BTC
Assess use and impact of nature trail installation and consider improvements and additions.	Spring 2026	BTC ANRP



### 5.3 2027/28 Actions

What	When	Who
Continue implementation of the nature conservation enhancement programme. <i>(Dependent on securing external funding)</i>		BTC working with Brit Valley Team
<b>Wet Meadows, Boot Fields</b> Grazing by small number of cattle.	Summer May – September	Annual grazing licence with local farmer
<b>Coronation Meadow</b> Cut and collect hay. Grazing by small number of cattle.	After July 15 <sup>th</sup>  Aug - Oct	BTC Grillo  Annual grazing licence with local farmer
<b>Morrison's Field</b> Maintain 1.5- 3m mown margins to surfaced path.  Mowing of paths across the Morrison's Field to include creation of small picnic areas.  Cutback overgrown vegetation as required for safe use of the site.	Monthly summer     As Required	   BTC Outdoor Team
<b>New Zealand</b> Regular mowing 1.5m - 3m margin from surface path.  3m mown area in front of South Mill Lane properties.	April - Oct	BTC Outdoor Team
<b>Show Field</b> Grass area regularly mown.	April - October	BTC Outdoor Team
Manage hedges around the Show and Morrison's Fields by 'A' shaped cutting.	A third of hedge length managed on a three year cycle.	BTC Outdoor Team
Repair sections of dry-stone wall.	Two volunteer walling sessions in summer 2025 with local walling trainer	BTC Outdoor Team ANRP

<b>What</b>	<b>When</b>	<b>Who</b>
Manage tree safety issues through a 5 yearly insurance arboriculture survey. Deal with dangers, leaving dead wood either standing or on site.	As required	BTC Outdoor Team
Aim to retain veteran trees for as long as safe and practical. Manage Ash Die Back and replace lost trees with suitable species as required.	As required	BTC Outdoor Team
Maintain 1.5- 3m cut margins to main access route through regular mowing.	April - October	BTC Outdoor Team
Regular mowing of grass paths to support user needs.	April - October	BTC Outdoor Team
Deal with wet, muddy and uneven gateways with surfacing improvements as required.	As required	BTC Outdoor Team
Continue pilot volunteer workdays to assist with site management.	Monthly sessions March - Nov	BTC Outdoor Team ANRP

Delivery Partners:

BVP – Brit Valley Landscape Recovery Project

ANRP – Asker Nature Reserve Project

BTG – Bridport Tree Group

## Appendix 1 Consultation Feedback

<b>What People liked about Asker Meadows:</b>	
Peace, quiet, nature, cows, accessibility from town, lack of formality/ countryside feel with open fields, positive impact on mental health and ability to socialise. Plenty of bins.	
<b>Suggestions for change:</b>	
<p><b>Young people</b></p> <p>Two suggestions of small areas of grass to be cut for children to play on</p> <p>More incentives for young people and spaces for them along the lines of the pavilion project</p>	<p><b>Wildlife</b></p> <p>Several requests for more interesting varieties of trees and shrubs</p> <p>Many keen to have more biodiversity, nectar rich and bird food plants and habitats for wildlife</p> <p>Several mentions of a dog free field to allow nature to flourish</p> <p>Himalayan balsam referenced a few times – people think it needs to be removed</p>
<p><b>Dogs</b></p> <p>Of those that mentioned dogs, 60% were in favour of no change and 40% either didn't like dogs being there or wanted restrictions such as dogs on leads or banned from the river due to the fear they are damaging wildlife and water quality.</p> <p>Those keen on restrictions also mentioned more dog related signage.</p> <p>Dog walkers said they were mindful of water voles, some wanted access to the river for dogs.</p> <p>No one liked doo poo being left including dog walkers who felt it tarnished their reputations.</p>	<p><b>Gateways</b></p> <p>One of the most cited negatives were the gates being broken or locked.</p> <p><b>Pathways</b></p> <p>Bumpy and boggy by gates and a few people mentioned other walkers using stone from dry stone walls to fill holes.</p> <p>Request for chippings to go down.</p> <p>The path is generally regarded as good but a bit hard for small wheels to navigate where it is gravelly</p> <p>Brambles unpopular in places where they encroach the path: they catch the</p>

Dog walkers like safe places for dogs off leads.	runners, reduce path width and are not good for the visually impaired  Mown pathways through the long grass popular
<b>Signage</b>  Mixed reaction to signage. Many love the information signs, some don't want too many signs as they feel too intrusive.	<b>Seating</b>  This didn't come up often but three people asked for more imaginative seating and there was a suggestion for a fixed BBQ to avoid tables being scorched or melted by disposable BBQs.
<b>Cyclists</b>  A few mentioned the speed of cyclists and not hearing them approach as they aren't using bells.	<b>Events</b>  Those that mentioned events mostly had no issue with noise but some residents did mention noise and question why events are permitted on a Nature Reserve.

From the consultation feedback we identified three main themes that would be the focus for this management plan review:

- The river, water quality and flood management,
- Wildlife,
- Access – including paths, dogs and education.

In September four consultation walks/ talks were organised on site to provide space to understand each theme and explore options for actions that could be included in the management plan review. Residents were joined by invited speakers who provided valuable knowledge and expertise.

**Session 1 – Introducing the management plan review with Bridport Town Councillors. An informal discussion about the process of management plan review, sharing the consultation feedback and checking that the key areas of concern were supported by residents and site users.**

**Session 2 - All About Water talk – Thursday 12th September attended by Will Yeates Asset Performance (W Dorset Advisor), Henry Quinney Assets & Maintenance Engagement Officer and Alistair Homer, Biodiversity Officer from the Environment Agency (EA)**

### **Discussion summary:**

Bridport rivers are all fed from rapid response catchments. Meaning that water levels rise quickly and fall quickly after rainfall. Most catchments are small, with significant gradients between headwater and the sea. The Environment Agency (EA) has responsibility for the main rivers Asker, Brit and Simene as far as Symondsburry.

Bridport has a long history of flooding from fluvial and hard surface run off and ground water. One of the serious flood events took place in 1970s which led to a substantial investment in building flood defences and manipulating river courses to convey water quickly through the town. There are 2.5 km of raised and engineered embankments and 2.5 km of flood walls. The Bridport Flood Scheme was reviewed in 2023 and found it to be functioning effectively and in good state of repair.

In general, the degree of flood hazard is low, with a small number of properties at risk from a moderate or significant hazard due to deep or fast flowing floodwater. In more extreme flooding up to 900 properties are at risk.

Natural Flood Management schemes are being undertaken in upper catchments to delay flow and help manage peaks of flood waters. Sediment load in rivers associated with land use is increasing and has a big impact on aquatic invertebrates. EA are currently working to identify and address the land management issues causing sediment loading.

### **Management options for the water environment:**

EA officers reported that there are no plans to change current approach of conveyancing water through Bridport and out to sea as quick as possible. This has implications for riparian management through Asker Meadows. EA manage the 8 metre margins to the main river, cutting back vegetation and removing trees/tree debris that might slow flow of water.

Proposals for tree planting along the main river need approval by the EA as will any proposals for new ponds or scrapes. EA would need to assess the flood risk up and down stream of any actions related to water management.

EA advised not to over focus on trying to eradicate invasive species. Some, like Himalayan Balsam, are effectively naturalised now as to make eradication pointless. It is offence to let invasive species spread but it is very difficult to prove who is responsible.

## **All About Wildlife – 17th September attended by Nick Gray, Dorset Wildlife Trust and Luke Phillips, RSPB**

### **Summary of Discussion:**

Residents and visitors alike certainly appreciate the opportunity, so close to housing, to enjoy contact with nature - The mosaic of grassland, scrub, thick hedgerows and traditionally managed flood meadows as well as the river are identified as important to a wide range of site users.

The tree planting undertaken since 2019 have established well, including the hedgerow and in field trees in Coronation Meadow. Attempts to diversify the species in the Coronation Meadow have been less successful. Despite several attempts to introduce more diverse native grasses and wildflowers, establishment has been limited.

Professor Tom Brereton kindly undertook an independent review of wildlife and conservation at Asker Meadows nature reserve in a response to the consultation on this plan (*see appendix 1 for list of wildlife interests provided by Tom*).

Concerns were expressed about the population of Water Voles within the Meadows. Along the river corridor there is significant evidence of Water Vole activity. Concerns are largely around disturbance of habitat by walkers and dogs. The Town Council responded last winter and put-up notices along a short section of river where Water Vole activity had been noticed. There appears to have been a positive response to the notice and levels of walking along the river there have declined. Worth noting that Water Vole numbers face a number of threats, in particular from Mink predation.

EA staff advised not to over focus management prescriptions for single species – aiming instead to take actions for a diverse and balance ecosystem.

Town Council has expressed interest in including Asker Meadows in the [Brit Catchment Landscape Recovery Project](#) being run by West Dorset Wilding. Over the coming year the Town Council will be working with other landowners to agree a plan for landscape-scale ecosystem restoration. If approved the project may lead to funding for habitat and access improvements identified in the Asker Meadows management plan.

### **Management options to support wildlife:**

Several sources recommend avoiding drastic change to any of the existing habitats stating a preference for slow and incremental changes. A number of respondees support a **gradation of activity** across the Meadows from the busy Morrisons field to quieter, less visited areas beyond the Boot field.

**Creation of pollinator resources** for bees and other insects (e.g. cultivated flower-rich strips), especially as few summer nectar sources are apparent on the reserve (following hay cutting) and to mitigate any impacts of the Honeybee Hives. Other measures for invertebrates could include creating small earth banks along the eastern perimeter for mining bees, solitary wasps and rove beetles.

The Bridport area is important as breeding site for **seed-eating bird species** so anything that increases winter food sources are welcome. The wet meadows area could be suitable as a transition to a **boggy wet reedy field** which would encourage breeding birds. Reed beds don't need to be constantly wet.

With clear evidence of the impacts of Ash Die Back around the Meadows now is the time to assess and plan for changing character and structure of the **linear woodland/Hedgerows**. Tree inspections undertaken for the Town Council have flagged a few mature trees as diseased and due for felling. Keeping Veteran trees and dealing with dangers to walkers needs careful consideration. Dead Wood is an important, if undervalued, resource and steps should be taken to keep trees standing or retain dead wood piles. When re stocking the linear woodlands should consider climate adapted species as well as species such as Field maple which grows quickly and is great for all sorts of species.

Survey of **Bats** is needed, especially if older trees are to be lost.

**Greater consideration given to in field fenced areas** to encourage non disturbance and natural regeneration or **wood pasture enclosures**.

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## **All About Access – 25th & 26<sup>th</sup> September attended by Dana Assinder, West Dorset Wilding**

### **Summary of discussion:**

**Gates** – the general accessibility of the gates across Asker Meadows were raised. Issues include width of kissing gates, catches and surfacing within gates. Concerns raised about gates being left open and cattle getting out of the fields. Recent work has been undertaken to instal kissing gates to prevent cattle escaping.

Question as to whether all gates on site sit well with requirements under the Disability Discrimination act. BS5709-2001 states that stiles should not be used for new barriers and that gaps should be the first choice followed by gates and thirdly Kissing Gates.

**Surfaces** – the Meadows are part of the river asker flood plain and will inevitably be wet or under water for part of the year. The surfaced path as well as unsurfaced areas suffer from standing water, puddling and mud after heavy rainfall.

**Cattle** – There is a longstanding arrangement with a local grazier to bring a small family group of cattle onto the meadows for the summer period. Grazing cattle are an important management tool and the sight of animals on the meadows are much appreciated by users.

Concerns were expressed about dog waste left in the grazing fields which can contain within it a neospora or sarcocysts, parasite type organisms that can infect cattle.

The Town Council and grazier seek to follow HSE advice regarding cattle in public access fields: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/ais17ew.pdf>

### **Dogs:**

Asker Meadows is a popular area for dog walking. It is a flat, easily accessed and a good size. Since 2020 dog ownership has increased. Not all site users are comfortable with the level of dog walking across the whole meadows. Concerns about dogs were identified; dog waste, the behaviour of dogs when off lead and the impacts on Water Voles and potentially chemical pollution from dogs entering the river.

The use of flea treatment on **pets could be causing problems in rivers**. Three insecticides used widely in tick, flea and worm treatments (fipronil, permethrin and the controversial neonicotinoid imidacloprid) – are present in English rivers in concentrations that exceed accepted [safe limits for wildlife](#). Vets and pet owners have a very important part to play in reducing the risk posed by these chemicals.

A number of dog walkers proposed organising **sessions for dog walkers** as a way of raising awareness of site management and encouraging responsible use of the meadows. Ideas around education session included; dog agility classes, training session, developing off and on lead trails etc.

This review of the Asker Meadows management plan has been supported by Dorset Dogs. Dorset Dogs are a well established group championing access for dog walkers across Dorset's coast and countryside. They offer advice and feedback; for people who manage land where people walk, on best practice canine access management and for dog owners promoting wildlife friendly and happy, healthy stress-free walks.

### **Doggy Do Code:**

<https://www.dorsetdogs.org.uk/doggy-do-code/follow-doggy-do-code/>



### **Education and awareness raising:**

A nature trail funded by Wessex Water was installed in summer 2024. A number of wildlife-related events have been run for Bournemouth University, Mountjoy and Bridport Primary schools and Bridport Cubs/Beavers.

Well-maintained and informative Facebook page and a website are maintained by Asker Meadows Local Nature Reserve Group. Bridport Town Council regularly promotes nature reserve activity via its Facebook page and through press releases.

### **Management options for improving access, including education and awareness:**

Introducing regular mowing of paths could be used as a tool for varying walking routes around the meadow fields. Over time, by shifting the regular walking routes it might be possible to create some quiet/ refuge areas which would benefit wildlife. Temporary fencing may be required to consolidate the creation of wildlife areas. These will help extend the existing linear woodlands and encourage natural re generation along field boundaries.

Many of the issues raised concerning gates and gateway surfaces will be addressed as part of regular maintenance. All gates should be assessed against the Disability Discrimination Act standards and action taken to ensure all gates comply.

Consultations have identified a need to develop an effective programme of survey, monitoring and data management to inform and communicate progress with site management and in particular nature conservation measures.

The use and impact of the nature trail installation should be assessed and consideration given to improvements and additions in 2026.

With input from the BTC Outdoor Team regular volunteer sessions would be a valuable addition to help undertake more regular programmes of practical site management.

There appears to be interest in working with regular dog walkers to help establish a dog walkers' group and run events and activities to ensure actions to promote wildlife are understood and have support from all site users.

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Professor Tom Brereton kindly undertook an independent review of wildlife and conservation at Asker Meadows Local Nature Reserve in relation to the 2024 Management Plan Review. His findings have informed the development of this management plan:

### **Habitats**

The reserve contains the final section of the River Asker before it's confluence with the River Brit above Palmers Brewery. The river is ecologically significant because it is the most westerly end of the most westerly chalk stream in the UK.

### **Species**

Species are described in relation to Protected and Priority Species policy. Protected species in the UK are listed under schedules of the amended Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981). European protected species are described in the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations (2017). Priority species for England are listed under Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006

### **Mammals**

Four Protected/Priority Species occur - including Otter (UK and European Protected), Badger, European Hedgehog and Water Vole (UK Protected). Population size, occurrence and trends for these species are uncertain due to data deficiencies. Water Vole breeds along this stretch of the River Asker. Environment Agency surveys in July 2021 yielded 21 records

Otter is occasionally recorded and has been observed feeding on European Eels (Tom Brereton pers. obs. 2020). A dead Otter was found in October 2023 along Sea Road North by Morrison's (Tom Brereton)

There are several Badger records (source DERC), with a sett reported to be present at New Zealand in the late 2000s. No setts are currently present and due to it being small in extent and enclosed by housing, a busy road and a river, the species is now presumed to be an infrequent visitor.

Dorset is an extremely important county for bats. Bats recorded in the Bridport area since 2010 and which may possible use the area for foraging include Greater Horseshoe, Lesser Horseshoe, Daubenton's, Natterer's, Noctule, Leisler's, Common Pipistrelle, Soprano Pipistrelle, Nathusius Pipistrelle, Serotine, Barbastrelle and Brown Long-eared. Other mammals recorded include Brown Rat, European Mole, European Rabbit (present in small numbers), Grey Squirrel, American Mink and Red Fox.

## **Birds**

The most important bird species - Red Listed (rapidly declining and most threatened), and Amber Listed (declining, less threatened) Species of Conservation Concern were surveyed across the Bridport area by Bridport Bird Club in 2021 and 2022 (excluding Woodpigeon and House Sparrow) with House Sparrow Roosts in late winter 2022 (Brereton et al. 2022). The distribution of territories and roosts detected is shown in Figure 7. Asker Meadows was not found to be especially important for breeding birds relative to elsewhere within the Bridport area, supporting only a few breeding pairs of Wren and Dunnock, plus one Greenfinch territory. Other breeding birds recorded by the survey include Woodpigeon, Long-tailed Tit, Robin, Blackbird and Chiffchaff.

House Sparrow roost survey of the Bridport area in 2022 (Brereton 2024 unpublished) located several House Sparrow roosts in hedgerows and dense scrub

Casual recording has detected a range of other species.

Regular visitors include Carrion Crow, Magpie, Blue Tit, Great Tit and Goldfinch.

Starlings roost from time to time in New Zealand scrub.

The reserve is of value as a foraging habitat for local Red Listed breeding birds including Herring Gull, Starling, Swift, House Martin and House Sparrow, plus a range of other species including Song Thrush and Swallow.

River birds using the area for feeding periodically include Cormorant, Little Egret, Kingfisher (specially Protected under the WLCA 1981), Dipper and Grey Wagtail (Amber Listed, breed locally), and Goosander (2-3 birds have occurred the last two winters). A pair each of Moorhen and Mallard (Amber Listed) bred in 2024.

Small numbers of birds pass through on migration, with sightings including Willow Warbler, Meadow Pipit and Grasshopper Warbler. Scarce records have included Red Kite, Osprey, White Stork, Black Redstart, Firecrest and Yellow-browed Warbler.

## ***Fish***

Four Protected/Priority Species occur - Brook Lamprey (UK and European Protected), European Eel and Brown/Sea Trout (UK Protected) and Bullhead (European Protected), all of which were recorded in recent surveys by the EA in 2021 (Source NBN Atlas). No information was found on abundance, frequency of occurrence or changing status of these species.

### ***Invertebrates***

Over 130 species of invertebrate have been recorded (DERC), though the total number of species occurring is likely to be far higher.

Beautiful and Banded Demoiselle dragonflies breed along the river.

Breeding butterflies include Small Skipper, Common Blue, Holly Blue, Orange-tip, Green-veined White, Gatekeeper, Meadow Brown, Ringlet (New Zealand and hedges by Compartment C1), Peacock, Comma and Small Tortoiseshell with compartment E being a favoured breeding locality).

Resident moths include Jersey Tiger and Scarlet Tiger (a Comfrey-feeder)

Of the other insects, noteworthy species include the Yellow-shouldered Nomad Bee, a parasite of solitary bees which is rare in the UK and classed as Endangered in the Red Data Book; and two nationally scarce beetles *Riolus subviolaceus* and *Dorytomus filirostris*.

Wasp Spider is recent colonist.

### ***Higher Plants***

Over 260 species of higher plant have been recorded since 2000, though a substantial number of these are (temporary) annuals associated with ground disturbance or non-native garden escapes. However, there are number of Dorset Notables present, associated Lowland Meadow and riverside habitats e.g. Birdsfoot Trefoil and Corky Fruited Water Dropwort.

A varied selection of ferns associated with old walls occurs amongst them Black Spleenwort, Wall-rue, Maidenhair Spleenwort, Rustyback, Hart's-tongue, Intermediate Polypody and Polypody.

In 2021, Toothwort was found at New Zealand. This was an exciting discovery, as the plant in scare in Dorset, with the nearest known location being in ancient woodland at Netherbury.

The presence of old records of Adder's-tongue Fern (ca1900) strongly suggest the area previously supported unimproved grassland.

### ***Fungi***

Fungi are extremely under-recorded. Species recorded include Red Cage (DERC) and Chicken of the Woods (Tom Brereton)