

**Bridport Town Council
Asker Meadows & New Zealand Management Plan
2019-2025**



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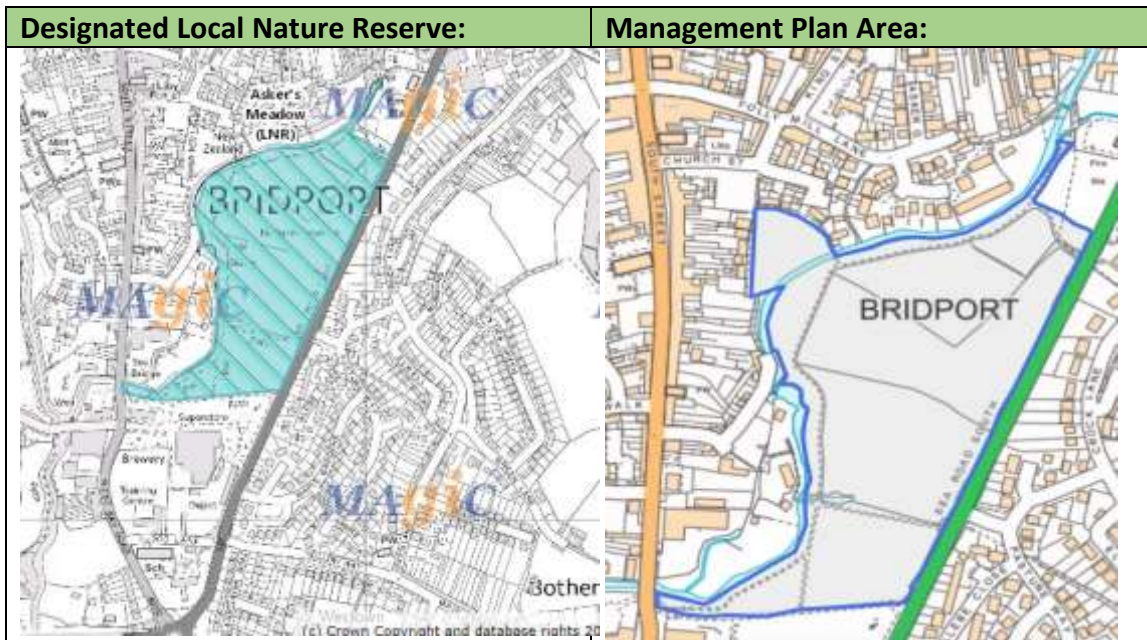
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1. Background

Asker Meadows is a 9.16 Ha riverside meadows running alongside the River Asker. Owned by Bridport Town Council the area is an important lung of green space between the town of Bridport and the busy A35 and surrounding parish of Bothenhampton.

Over the last 5 years the Town Council, working with the Asker Meadows Nature Reserve Group, have undertaken a number of practical improvements to the area. More activity now needs to be considered and planned for and requires a Management Plan to define aims, objectives and actions over the next 10 years.



In developing the management plan for Asker Meadows Nature Reserve it is intended to include prescriptions for the adjoining area known as New Zealand.

The river Asker is part of the West Dorset Catchment and is subject to an Environment Agency Flood Defence Scheme. Around 420 properties are within the 1% annual probability flood extent (ignoring the influence of defences). In the future, this number is expected to increase to 590. 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 700 properties are at risk.

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 Dorset County Council
Dorset County Council transferred 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

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 closely involved in developing this management plan and will be instrumental in delivering the actions set out in the plan, especially the survey and volunteer input.

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

** *In the summer 2014, volunteers harvested seed from Dorset's Coronation Meadow, Lady's Mead at Kingcombe, before its scheduled mid-July hay cut. The seeds were dried and stored ready for sowing into seed trays in August and September - once grown, these plugs be planted into Askers Meadow to commence the restoration works.*

2. Management Plan Consultations

It is important that the management plan for Asker Meadows and New Zealand ensures that the interests of wildlife and the many users are balanced and mitigations are put in place to address community concerns.

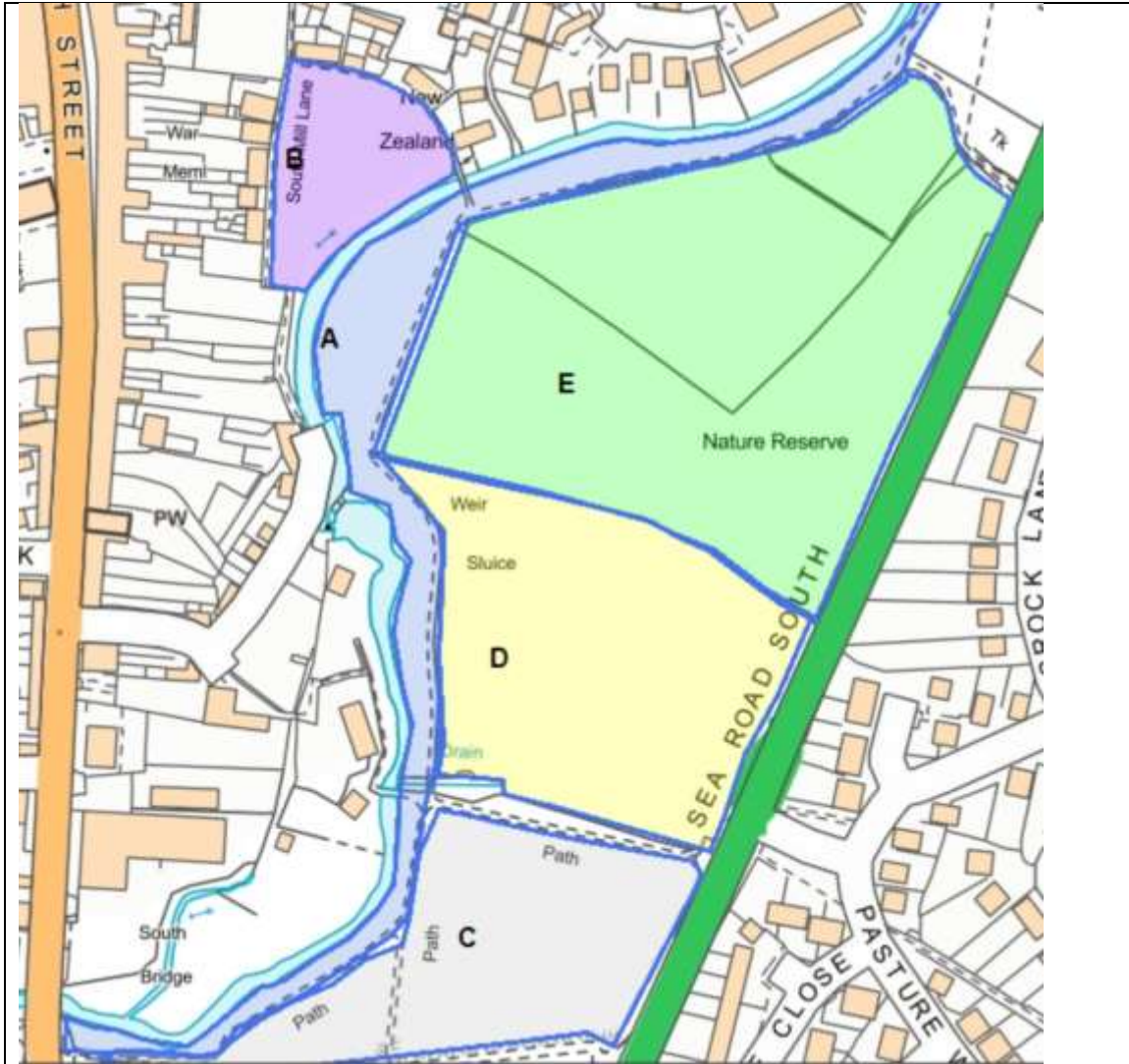
During December 2018 a consultation exercise took place to gather the views of users and residents about the management of Asker Meadows and the New Zealand site. This was followed by a formal public consultation on a draft management plan that was launched in February 2019 and closed on April 5th 2019.

A revised management plan was adopted by Bridport Town Council in May 2019.

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 aims and objectives in 2025.

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 Fields

Area D- Weir Field/ Show Field

Area E - Wildflower Meadow restoration areas inc Coronation Meadow/ Boot Fields

3.1 Objectives of the Asker Meadows Management Plan:

Maintain and enhance the grazing meadows for their wildlife interests.

Safeguard wildlife interest along the river corridor, including non- intervention/ sanctuary areas.

Undertake tree planting and hedge management to provide wildlife interest and structure.

Maintain surfaced paths as shared spaces for walkers and cyclists.

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

Create seating/ picnic areas to encourage people to enjoy and get to know the area.

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

4. Management Plan -2019 -2025

4.1 Overall Plan

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

Management plan objectives in priority order:

- Nature Reserve
- Access for all
- Walking/Cycle route
- Show Field

4.2 By Habitat Type:

| | |
|--|---|
| River/ banks/ pond | <p>Erect non intervention fenced enclosures as sanctuary areas for wildlife.</p> <p>Leave areas of scrub on river banks to provide further protection.</p> <p>Create an off line pond in New Zealand area.</p> |
| Wildflower Meadows – including defined area of New Zealand | <p>Restoration/ diversification of sward.</p> <p>Hay cut after 15 July.</p> <p>Grazing of aftermath.</p> <p>Maintain all boundaries (fenced/walls).</p> |
| Other grassed areas – incl Morrisons Fields and New Zealand | <p>Maintain as amenity grassed areas, Regular mowing 1.5m - 3m all path margins.</p> <p>Morrison’s field sculptured cutting between trees and benches 4 times a year.</p> <p>3m mown area in front of South Mill Lane properties.</p> |
| Hedges | <p>Manage hedges in the wildflower meadows as linear woodland.</p> |

| | |
|------------------------------------|--|
| | <p>Manage hedges outside wildflower meadows on a rotational hedge laying cycle of 7 years.</p> <p>Restock all hedges with whips/ standard trees as required.</p> <p>Plant new hedges along selected fence lines to provide structure and diversity for boundaries of the wildflower meadows.</p> |
| <p>Trees/ Tree planting</p> | <p>Manage safety issues through a 5 yearly insurance arboricultural survey. Deal with dangers, leaving dead wood either standing or on site.</p> <p>Plant small clumps of native standards in the wildflower meadows for structure and visual impact.</p> <p>Plant new woodland blocks at A35 entrance and opposite BTC Compost Area</p> <p>Add additional native whips to enhance the existing trees and create structure in the Morrison's Fields.</p> |
| <p>Access/ Path</p> | <p>Maintain and promote open access to all areas.</p> <p>Maintain main surfaced path as a pedestrian/ cyclist shared route.</p> <p>Maintain 1.5m cut margins to all access routes through regular mowing.</p> <p>Maintain access route/ gate through to A35/ Crock Lane.</p> <p>Maintain access route through to Morrison's. Look to improve safety access across Morrison's car park.</p> |

| 4.3 By Management Block: | |
|---|---|
| <p>AREA A – RIVER CORRIDOR Riverside – area from river up to surfaced paths,</p> | <p>Mow area annually.</p> <p>Erect three sections of fenced enclosure (2m x20m) along riverbank to deter dogs – strim area annually.</p> <p>Riverside trees (willow/ alders) managed. Need to take account of interventions by EA as part of flood alleviation scheme prescriptions.</p> |
| <p>AREA B – NEW ZEALAND</p> | <p>Create off line pond and plant up margins.</p> <p>Define meadow area, cut for hay after July 15th.</p> <p>Extend surface walking/cycling path by 1m between River and South Mill Lane</p> <p>Maintain a 1.5m – 3m mown margin either side of paths around New Zealand.</p> <p>Maintain a 3m mown area in front of houses.</p> |
| <p>AREA C – MORRISON’S FIELDS Trees and mown areas and picnic benches – amenity space</p> | <p>Infill plant areas of existing trees with native Whips to create a more structured planting scheme.</p> <p>Define tree planting areas with un cut grassed margins.</p> <p>Cut open areas 4-6 times per year.</p> <p>Maintain 1.5 m path margins to surface and un surfaced path.</p> |

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>AREA D – SHOW FIELD</p> | <p>Agree limits to number of events in year with residents.</p> <p>Prioritise Community events.</p> <p>Restore/ maintain dry stone wall boundary.</p> |
| <p>AREA E – WILDFLOWER MEADOWS – Coronation Meadows /Boot Field plus defined area of New Zealand site</p> | <p>Collect wildflower seeds Hay cut after July 15th each year Grazing period and intensity managed Sept – March (annual grazing licence)</p> <p>Undertake grassland restoration/ diversification with wildflower plugs and seed distribution.</p> <p>Plant a small number of standard trees (Sessile Oaks/ Native Limes) for structure in the Boot Field.</p> <p>Plant a new double row native hedge along fence between Coronation/ Boot Field.</p> <p>Manage existing hedgerows as linear woodland, including A35 boundary hedge.</p> |
| <p>Bridport Town Council Composting Area</p> | <p>Define and screen area with tree planting.</p> <p>Repair and maintain all gates.</p> |

5. Action Plan - Actions Year by Year:

5.1 2019/20 Actions

| What | When | Who |
|--|--|---------------------|
| Wildflower Meadows | | |
| Survey Coronation meadows | May/June/July | DWT |
| Collect seed from Meadows for sowing in autumn | July/ August | Volunteers |
| Hay cut | After July 15 th | Tenant/ contractor |
| Graze aftermath with cattle (defined in grazing license) | Sept/March | Tenant |
| Other Grassed Areas | | |
| Mow 1.5 m either side of all paths | Monthly Increase to 2 weekly May- Aug | BTC |
| Morrison's Fields sculptured mowing to leave margin around tree planting areas | March – May – July – Oct | BTC |
| Access | | |
| Re surface cycle path | Summer | BTC |
| Mow 1.5 m margins either side of all paths | Monthly increasing to fortnightly May-Aug) | BTC |
| Install Picnic benches in Morrison's Field. | Spring | BTC |
| Remove benches from riverside area opposite New Zealand | Spring | BTC |
| Trees | | |
| Plant native whips as understorey and extension to existing areas of trees in Morrison's fields | Winter | BTC with volunteers |
| Plant native trees to create small wooded copses by BTC Compost Area and A35/Crock Lane entrance | Winter | BTC with Volunteers |
| River | | |
| Kick sampling for water invertebrates | Summer | Volunteers |

5.2 2020/21 Actions

| What | When | Who |
|--|--|---------------------|
| Wildflower Meadows | | |
| Collect seed from Meadows for sowing in autumn | July/ August | Volunteers |
| Hay cut | After July 15 th | Tenant/ contractor |
| Graze | Sept/March | Tenant |
| Sow wildflower seed/ plant plugs | Sept/Nov | Volunteers |
| Other Grassed Areas | | |
| Mow 1.5 m either side of all paths | Monthly Increase to 2 weekly May-Aug | BTC |
| Sculptured mowing of grassed areas in Morrison's Fields to leave 1.5m margin around tree planting areas. | March – May – July - Oct | BTC |
| Access | | |
| Mow 1.5 m margins either side of all paths | Monthly increasing to fortnightly May-Aug) | BTC |
| River | | |
| Erect 3x20x2m non intervention fenced enclosures along riverside | Summer | BTC |
| Kick sampling for water invertebrates | Summer months | Volunteers |
| Trees | | |
| Plant 1-6 standard native trees (Sessile Oak/ Limes) in wildflower meadows – individually fenced to protect from cattle | Winter | BTC with volunteers |
| Hedges | | |
| Infill planting of hedgelines as required | Winter | BTC |

5.3 2021/22 Actions

| What | When | Who |
|---|--|--------------------|
| Wildflower Meadows | | |
| Collect seed from Meadows for sowing in autumn | July/ August | Volunteers |
| Hay cut | After July 15 th | Tenant/ contractor |
| Graze | Sept/March | Tenant |
| Sow wildflower seed/ plant plugs | Sept/Nov | Volunteers |
| Other Grassed Areas | | |
| Mow 1.5 m either side of all paths | Monthly Increase to 2 weekly May-Aug | BTC |
| Morrison's Fields – sculptured to leave margin around tree planting areas | March – May – July - Oct | BTC |
| Access | | |
| Mow 1.5 m margins either side of all paths | Monthly increasing to fortnightly May-Aug) | BTC |
| River | | |
| Strim non intervention fenced enclosures (2x20m) | Autumn | BTC |
| Kick sampling for water invertebrates | Summer months | Volunteers |

5.4 2022/23 Actions

| What | When | Who |
|---|--|--------------------|
| Wildflower Meadows | | |
| Collect seed from Meadows for sowing in autumn | July/ August | Volunteers |
| Hay cut | After July 15 th | Tenant/ contractor |
| Graze | Sept/March | Tenant |
| Sow wildflower seed/ plant plugs | Sept/Nov | Volunteers |
| Other Grassed Areas | | |
| Mow 1.5 m either side of all paths | Monthly Increase to 2 weekly May-Aug | BTC |
| Morrison's Fields – sculptured to leave margin around tree planting areas | March – May – July - Oct | BTC |
| Access | | |
| Mow 1.5 m margins either side of all paths | Monthly increasing to fortnightly May-Aug) | BTC |
| River | | |
| Strim non intervention fenced enclosures (2x20m) | Autumn | BTC |
| Kick sampling for water invertebrates | Summer months | Volunteers |

5.5 2023/24 Actions

| What | When | Who |
|---|--|---------------------|
| Wildflower Meadows | | |
| Collect seed from Meadows for sowing in autumn | July/ August | Volunteers |
| Hay cut | After July 15 th | Tenant/ contractor |
| Graze | Sept/March | Tenant |
| Sow wildflower seed/ plant plugs | Sept/Nov | Volunteers |
| Other Grassed Areas | | |
| Mow 1.5 m either side of all paths | Monthly Increase to 2 weekly May-Aug | BTC |
| Morrison's Fields – sculptured to leave margin around tree planting areas | March – May – July - Oct | BTC |
| Access | | |
| Mow 1.5 m margins either side of all paths | Monthly increasing to fortnightly May-Aug) | BTC |
| Hedges | | |
| Lay section of hedge running up to Fire Station entrance | Winter | DWT Volunteers |
| Fence off and plant a mix of native hedgerow trees to create new hedge between Boot Field and Wildflower meadow | Winter | BTC with volunteers |
| River | | |
| Strim non intervention fenced enclosures (2x20m) | Autumn | BTC |
| Kick sampling for water invertebrates | Summer months | Volunteers |

Appendix 1
Summary of Community consultation responses

What we know about Asker Meadows:

Brown Trout, Sea Trout, Salmon, Brook Lampreys.

47 species of bird, 10 mammals (apart from pets), 15 insects, 5 amphibians, reptiles and fish.

Goldfinches x 40, Slow worms, Hedgehogs, Egret, Sparrow hawk, (garden on South Mill Lane) Wonderful!

Residents survey – South Mill Lane.

Water voles, Bats – Pipistrelle & Daubenton's , Dormouse, Wood mouse, Squirrel, Hedgehog, Otter, Fox, Rabbits.

2012 vegetation survey baseline.

| What people liked about Asker Meadows | What issues needed addressing: |
|--|---|
| <p>The tranquil stroll along the river Asker with cattle grazing to one side and the occasional spotting of a Kingfisher or Egret makes a significant contribution to the quality of life for residents and visitors alike</p> <p>A free, open space for all ages and dogs</p> <p>An enclave of peace</p> <p>It's remnant wildness</p> <p>Blackthorn in flower</p> <p>In autumn I pick Sloes, Blackberries and elderberries.</p> | <p>Don't over develop it – no car park!</p> <p>Avoid hard landscaping, flowerbeds etc</p> <p>Don't over tidy it</p> <p>Development should be natural and sympathetic to wildlife</p> <p>No rash changes</p> <p>Concerns about the escalation of events on the weir field, both in scale, impact and frequency</p> <p>Keep it's wild character</p> <p>Ensure area remains 'countryfied'</p> <p>Importance of wilderness for wildlife</p> |
| <p>The ever changing river</p> <p>Always something delightful to see</p> | <p>Safeguard existing character</p> <p>Accepting some community events should take place, I don't feel the field should become a 'cash cow' for the Council.</p> |

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>A special place we are lucky to have</p> | <p>Manage the trees and hedges – More trees planted More fruit trees planted I would like to see additional species of native shrubs planted: Hawthorn, Spindle, Guelder rose and Wayfarer to add to the existing Blackthorn, Crab apple, Alder, Elder and Willow etc.</p> <p>Expand the tree planting near Morrisons to create a copse?</p> <p>Employ stone wallers and hedgelaying</p> <p>Coppicing and pollarding over time will create a variety of age, height and density to the structure of the shrubs that would not only add visual interest but will maximise habitat value.</p> |
| <p>Paths that walkers and less mobile can use</p> <p>I often have a chat with other members of the public using the paths and fellow dog walkers</p> <p>Cycle route to work – a ‘rural ride’ into town</p> | <p>Information about the area and what is going to happen</p> <p>Benches overlooking the river</p> |
| <p>The grazing cows</p> | <p>More attention should be given to maintaining the pathways which are subject to having large puddles in low spots. The filling in of these low spots and regular maintenance would make a considerable improvement to what is a fairly busy pedestrian route.</p> |
| <p>An invaluable community resource which currently balances the needs of community and wildlife.</p> | <p>Grassland area planted with wildflowers</p> <p>The grassland could also be managed in a patchwork effect with rotational strimming. Alongside the rank areas containing Burdock, Nettle, Ox-eye daisy and Hogweed there might be strimmed corridors and pathways linking areas</p> |

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|--|---|
| | New Zealand important to retain the 'untouched' meadow areas |
| A safe car free environment to travel by foot or bike from Bothenhampton and West Bay into Bridport town The social aspect of walking my dog. | Creating a pond is an option, to benefit dragonflies and amphibians. A still water habitat will augment the relatively fast-flowing River Asker and will attract additional species |
| Invaluable for exercise and clears my head! A place that replenishes and lifts the spirits | There are 100 dogs in the area on a daily basis – not conducive to wildlife! |
| The weir at South Mill is beautiful, especially with the willows | Create river beach area for swimming |
| | Keep scrub on east bank of the Asker as protection for bank dwelling/ nesting mammals/birds |
| | Better balance as an area for dog walking and as a nature reserve. |
| | Impact of dogs on the vole population needs investigating |