

HIGHNAM PARISH COUNCIL – ENVIRONMENT WORKING GROUP (EWG)

ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT AS AT MAY 2023

The Environment Working Group (EWG) is a volunteer group of residents who are tasked with implementing the wishes of the residents of Highnam Parish, via Highnam Parish Council (HPC), as identified in the Parish Plan Refresh document published in 2018 and also the Highnam Neighbourhood Development Plan 2011-2031.

The main environmental themes identified by residents in these documents were:

- Improvement of the landscape and setting of Highnam
- Biodiversity improvement
- Management of Lassington Woods for the benefit of nature and residents
- Protection of public open spaces
- Reduction in the incidence of littering and dog fouling

To this end, the Environment Management Plan 2020-2025 was produced by the EWG and agreed by HPC on 14/07/2020. This report details the progress that has been made on the Plan during the 12 months April '22 to May '23.

Improvement of the landscape and setting of Highnam

Following the completion of the new path around the village spine road, the pollinator patches on Oakridge were extended, and supplemented by wild seed sowing, to encourage more wild species to flourish. The completion of the path itself disturbed the soil, precipitating a colourful display of poppies throughout the year.

The planting of 100 hedging whips in Lassington Reach, and 9 semi-mature trees in Mary Grove field and the playing field, also helped to improve the setting of the parish.

Significant work was undertaken to clear the overgrown areas surrounding The Dell, to make the approach to Highnam Church more attractive and accessible.

The addition of two further carved oak pieces to the sculpture trail around Highnam, (one an oak-themed bench in Lassington Reach and one a Hubert Parry-inspired rustic piece overlooking the mini roundabout), have further added to the rural and historic setting of the parish.

Biodiversity improvement

The original Butterfly Crescent, which had become overgrown with saplings, was cleared of the tree seedlings and returned to a more open habitat that will be more attractive to the butterfly species we wish to attract. The Crescent has also been joined by a second Butterfly patch, close by the first, which will add to the 'nectar bar' that we are providing for the different butterfly species.

The species of wild flowers around the parish have been supplemented by flower-plug planting, especially yellow rattle plants to discourage the lush grass growth and encourage native flowers to spread. The Parish pollinator patches were mentioned in the November edition of Gardeners World magazine, as a significant achievement of a small parish in our effort to increase biodiversity.

We meet annually with Tewkesbury Borough Council and UBICO to agree a mowing regime for the village green spaces and review how this has impacted the flora we wish to encourage.

Management of Lassington Woods for the benefit of nature and residents

We have continued this year with our efforts to thin out Lassington Wood and John's Wood, to allow chosen species saplings to flourish and open up the undergrowth to provide a healthy mixed environment. This work is allowing both woods to become attractive places for walkers and an even more attractive environment for wildlife. We have installed 25 further bird boxes this year, including two built especially to attract particular species of owl.

The pathways through both woods have been cleared and Lassington Wood, in particular, has benefited from significant re-surfacing work to make the pathway closest to the playing field into one that can safely be used by walkers, parents pushing buggies and wheelchair-users.

Protection of public open spaces

This year we have installed several dead-hedges in both woods, to encourage walkers to keep to the newly-opened and reinforced pathways, and to protect stands of wild flowers such as our native bluebells in Lassington Wood.

The installation positions of the environmentally-themed sculptures around the village have been particularly chosen to encourage residents to walk and enjoy our village environment without encroaching on precious and environmentally important flora.

Pollinator patches have been marked out and identified, in order to protect them from walkers who might stray from the village pathways.

Reduction in the incidence of littering and dog fouling

Despite the installation of several new uni-bins, (which are appropriate for both dog and general waste) we have, sadly, still too many cases of littering and dog-fouling. Regular reminders in the monthly EWG piece of the LINK magazine seem to make little difference. Duke of Edinburgh Award volunteers have assisted with litter picking and a community pick was completed.

ASSISTANCE IN ACHIEVING 2022/2023 GOALS

In addition to the core volunteer EWG group, we have been significantly assisted in achieving our goals over the past 12 month by the following groups and individuals, who we thank most sincerely:

RSPB

Butterfly Conservation

Glos Wildlife Trust

Wild Highnam Group

Two Duke of Edinburgh Award volunteers

Gloucester Pay Back team

Heart of Highnam group

Tewkesbury Borough Council

UBICO

EWG PLANS FOR 2023/2024

We will continue to monitor and review our Pollinator Patch strategy, to ensure that our plans for the development of biodiversity are achieved. Selective supplementation of species will also continue.

We will work to achieve increased public awareness of all environmental aspects of the parish. To this end, permanent 'engagement' notice boards will be commissioned and a Nature Trail installed.

We will continue to encourage Highnam community wildlife and environment group activities, such as litter picks, woodland working groups, botanical surveys and wildlife surveys.

We will continue with the ongoing work of maintaining sculptures/benches/steps/stiles/gates/pathways.

We will replace and/or supplement trees and hedges, where environmentally appropriate.

CONCLUSION

The EWG is comfortably on track to achieve all the targets that were set in its original 2020-2025 Plan.

Following a review of financing for the 5-year EWG plan, a new '22-'23 annual budget was agreed with the Parish Council and the budget for '23-24 is in the process of being agreed. The EWG has achieved all its targets this year, within this reduced budget, other than one planned wooden sculpture which had to be sacrificed.

The EWG will continue with the ongoing activities required to see the published Plan through to completion at the end of the 2024/25 financial year.