

Highnam Parish Council – Environment Working Group Progress

As we approach midsummer 2023, this is a great opportunity to look back and reflect on everything that the Environment Working Group (EWG) has achieved during the past 12 months. Firstly a little bit of back-history of the group. We are Parish volunteers who work to achieve the environmental targets identified in the Parish Plan Refresh document (2018) and the Highnam Neighbourhood Development Plan 2011-2031. We produced a 5-year plan in mid-2020 and, since then, have worked to achieve the targets that were identified in that document, a copy of which is available to view on the Parish Council website.

Our practical work falls into one of five categories. Examples of our achievements during the past 12 months, under each of those categories, are:-

Improvement of the landscape. Pollinator patches on Oakridge were extended and supplemented by wild flower seed sowing. Hedging whips in Lassington Reach were planted plus several semi-mature trees in Mary Grove field and the playing field. Overgrown areas around the Dell were cleared, making the Highnam Church approach more attractive and accessible to all. Two further oak sculptures/benches have been added to the sculpture trail.

Biodiversity improvement. The original Butterfly Crescent has been cleared of self-seeded tree saplings and a second nearby patch introduced to add to the 'nectar bar' for attracting various species. Wild flowers around the parish have been supplemented by flower-plug planting. Yellow rattle has been introduced to weaken rank grasses and allow wild flowers to flourish. Various orchids have flourished. Our pollinator patches were mentioned favourably in the November '22 Gardeners World magazine.

Management of woods. Both Lassington and John's Wood have been thinned, to open up the areas and encourage selected tree and undergrowth species to flourish and introduce a more diverse and healthy environment. We have installed 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 undergone significant resurfacing work to facilitate buggy and wheelchair-user access.

Protection of public open spaces. Several dead hedges have been installed in both woods, to encourage walkers to keep to the newly-opened and reinforced pathways and to protect stands of wild flowers. The positions of the wildlife-themed sculptures around the village have been chosen to encourage residents to walk and enjoy our improved 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 littering and dog fouling. Despite the installation of several new uni-bins, (appropriate for both dog and general waste), we still have too many cases of littering and dog-fouling. Regular reminders are given in this forum. Duke of Edinburgh Award volunteers have assisted with litter picking and a community pick was completed.

During the next 12 months the EWG aims to introduce a Nature Trail in the woods as well as installing permanent 'engagement' notice boards to inform visitors of the environmental treasures to be found in our Parish. Woodland working parties will continue when the bird nesting season ends. If you would like to become involved with helping with any of the EWG's work, or the Heart of Highnam village improvements group, please contact Councillor Bill Badham. cllrbillbadham@yahoo.com 01452 247112