

Queen Elizabeth II Field – Biodiversity Enhancement & Management Plan



Monmouth Town Council

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Version 1. Draft for discussion

Queen Elizabeth II Field – Biodiversity Enhancement & Management Plan

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1. Introduction

Monmouth Town Council (MTC) wish to improve biodiversity within the town boundary and as such have adopted a town council biodiversity policy.

The Queen Elizabeth II Field, also known as the “Town Field” is a “Field in Trust” owned by MTC and offers itself to biodiversity enhancement due to its location, current use, and current conditions (please see the report “Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) at The Town Field” Cllr Steve Wadley 2023).

The current use of the field is classified according to the Handbook for Phase 1 Habitat Survey (JNCC) as amenity grassland with riparian feature and boundary scrub.

Current use of the field:

- Dog walkers and Wye Valley footpath users
- Rotary Club bonfire night event
- Raft race event
- Rowing Club regatta events

To action the planned biodiversity enhancement, a meeting was held between town councillors and interested parties on 18th April 2023 to discuss possible limitations and opportunities. The following is a breakdown of those discussions:

A – Discussion of areas where no objections were raised included a mowing regime to allow a wildflower meadow to develop over a section of the boundaries.

B – Hard standing, some of which is regenerating naturally. Suggestions of breaking concrete to hasten this or applying a layer of thin poor soil.

C – Any areas that need mowing to have cut and collect management, possible site for on -site compost.

D – Single layer hedge, discussed possibility of widening this to double thickness

E - Additional infrastructure to include bird and bat boxes along the tree line of the A40.

F - Recommendation from Dr. Stephanie Tyler (Monmouthshire Meadows Group) was to have a first cut in August, followed by another cut and removal of cuttings in Oct or November.

G – The possibility of installing bat and bird boxes was discussed and generally agreed.

There was no formal discussion around the larger section of the field at that meeting, but an opinion put forward that it should be retained as short grass for purposes of dog exercise area and that part of the field boundary be managed for wildflowers and enhanced biodiversity.

On the 19/06/2023 – discussion between Councilor Martin Sweeny and Dan Cowton of the rowing club. The rowing club has no objection to further regrowth of a broader area of the field, but they use the field for their regatta in May and would request shorter grass then and in late autumn. However, it should be noted that the rowing club own two fields to the north-east of the town field which are used for parking and camping during events.

Further discussions held between Cllr Wadley, Cllr Sweeny, the Rotary Club and members of the Rowing Club, identified a need for a seating and food stall area near to the rowing club building during rowing events, and parking for vehicles with boats within the two fields owned by the club. The rowing club have recently requested permission from MTC to upgrade the access to the two fields via the town field gate. (See section 4.5)

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Fig. 1 Proposed enhancement area

2. Management Plan

2.1 The management plan is based on attaining the maximum benefit for biodiversity whilst fully considering the needs of the public for recreation and the needs of the Rowing Club & Rotary Club for events.

A survey of the field carried out by Cllr Steve Wadley in early September 2023 and again in early October 2023, showed the level of daily footfall on the actual field area is minimal with most users following the river footpath to Dixon Church and beyond. Whilst most of the dogwalker's use the footpath along the south- east side of the field, a low number of dog walkers allow dogs to run "off lead" onto the field.

Occasionally, pedestrians and dog walkers cut diagonally across the field to save time walking around the rowing club building.

The management plan considers the practicalities of the proposed mowing regime and general maintenance of existing habitats.

The current ecological quality of the field is of low value, so ecological enhancement will be of real benefit to biodiversity locally.

The management plan is further based on the protected and priority habitats and species along the River Wye SAC and Wye Valley Woodlands SSSI which will benefit from increased biodiversity at the town field.

The management plan will aim to increase the quality of the habitat for the following species:

- Birds
- Reptiles
- Amphibians
- Bats
- Otters
- Butterflies
- Moths
- Dormouse
- Wildflowers

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This will in turn provide, a more aesthetic amenity area for relaxation and recreation and will improve the environment for future generations using the field.

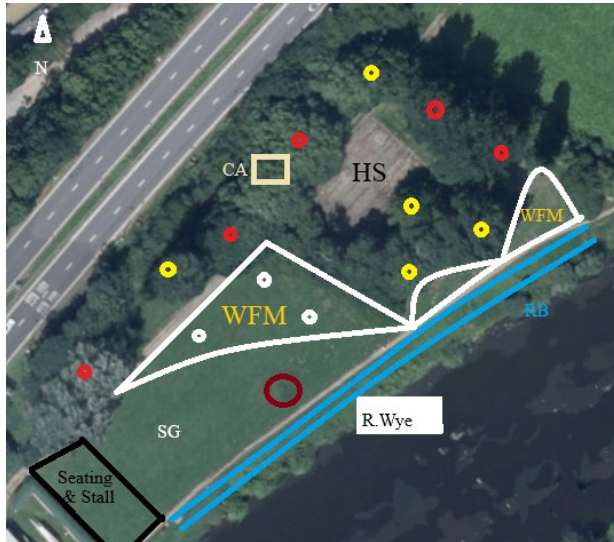


Fig 2 Proposed biodiversity enhancement map.

Key

- Red dots - Bat boxes
- White dots – Fruit trees
- Yellow dots – Bird boxes
- CA – Composting area
- WFM – Wildflower Meadow
- HS – Hard standing
- SG – Short grass
- RB – Riverbank habitats
- Purple circle – Position of bonfire.

2.2 Mowing Regime

2.2.1 WFM.

It is anticipated the mowing regime of the wildflower meadow area marked WFM on the enhancement plan (Fig 2) will consist of a single cut in mid-late August and removal of cuttings followed by a further cut in late November and removal of cuttings which will be deposited in the composting area (CA). This will encourage the natural growth of “Yellow Rattle” which is parasitic upon grass species so will naturally reduce the amount of long grass on site.

Scarifying of the WFM area could and should be carried out after the first November and a one-off local wildflower seed mix sown onto the area. This would accelerate the growth of Yellow Rattle and further reduce grass growth as well as increasing native wildflowers in the WFM area.

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Fig 3. Sown wildflowers



Fig 4. Yellow Rattle

Photos courtesy of Cllr Steve Wadley

2.2.2 SG.

It is anticipated that the short grass area marked SG on the plan (Fig 2) will be cut as usual following the service agreement with Monmouthshire County Council. This will allow sufficient room for recreational use by the public and use for events such as the regatta, raft race and bonfire night.

2.2.3 RB

The riverbank section between the main footpath and the river will be managed as usual within the service level agreement. However, the current growth of Bramble along the river-bank is a very beneficial food source for numerous species and should be managed sensitively to maintain the food source.

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2.2.4 HS

The hard standing area (HB) should be partially broken up to allow natural vegetative regeneration and create habitats for reptiles and amphibians. Some of the rubble from the works should be used along the tree line to the north to create habitat for these species. The shallow brook to the north of the hardstanding should remain “unmanaged” to allow a wildlife corridor and foraging area to establish.

2.2.5 New Tree Planting

It is proposed to plant trees which will be beneficial to biodiversity. The following is a planting and management schedule for the trees.

2.2.6 Tree Species

A mix of UK native species trees should be planted in the wildflower area and near the hardstanding, in November – December

Tree species suggested for planting are:

- Hawthorn
- Crab Apple
- Damson
- Hazel
- Rowan
- Holly

The trees should be protected by tree guards and stakes. This is to prevent mowing damage and browsing by animals.

If any of the trees die or are vandalised, they should be replaced as soon as possible between September and March.

The trees should be planted at least 5 meters apart to allow for growth.

2.2.7 Management of existing trees

The existing trees on site should be managed in accordance with recommendations made in the tree safety survey report 2023.

2.2.8 Bat and bird boxes

5 Bat and 5 bird boxes should be installed into existing mature trees on site as shown in fig.2.

2.2.9 Boundaries

The hedgerow at the rowing club should be enhanced by planting native species hedgerow plants such as hazel, blackthorn, hawthorn, and field maple to provide a double layer hedge which is species rich. The remaining boundaries should be managed sensitively to promote the growth of bramble and saplings whilst maintaining the safety of field users.

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3. Monmouth Town Council - Biodiversity Policy

This biodiversity policy has been created in line with the following legislation and planning guidance:

Country	Relevant Statutory Regulations	Primary Legislation	Planning Guidance and Statements
Wales	Conservation of Habitats and Species 2017 (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019	Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 Environment (Wales) Act 2016 Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015	Planning Policy Wales 2012 Technical Advice note Tan 5 Nature Conservation and Planning 2009

3.1 Legislation and Policy

3.1.1 Environment (Wales) Act 2016

Part 1 of the Environment (Wales) Act sets out Wales's approach to planning and managing natural resources at a national and local level with a general purpose linked to statutory 'principles of sustainable management of natural resources' defined within the Act.

Section 6 - Biodiversity and resilience of ecosystems duty

Section 6 of the Act places a duty on public authorities **to 'seek to maintain and enhance biodiversity'** so far as it is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions. In so doing, public authorities must also seek to **'promote the resilience of ecosystems'**. The duty replaces the section 40 duty in the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (NERC Act 2006), in relation to Wales, and applies to those authorities that fell within the previous duty.

Public authorities will be required to report on the actions they are taking to improve biodiversity and promote ecosystem resilience.

Section 7 - Biodiversity lists and duty to take steps to maintain and enhance biodiversity

This section replaces the duty in section 42 of the NERC Act 2006. The Welsh Ministers will publish, review and revise lists of living organisms and types of habitats in Wales, which they consider are of key significance to sustain and improve biodiversity in relation to Wales.

The Welsh Ministers must also take all reasonable steps to maintain and enhance the living organisms and types of habitats included in any list published under this section and encourage others to take such steps.

Part 1 of the Act, including Sections 6 and 7, came into force on May 21, 2016.

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3.1.2 Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

The Well-being of Future Generations Act became law in April 2015 and is concerned with **improving the social, economic, environmental, and cultural well-being of Wales.**

It will make the public bodies in Wales listed in the Act think more about the long-term, work better with people and communities and each other, look to prevent problems and take a more joined-up approach.

To help public bodies achieve the same vision, the Act puts in place seven well-being goals. Linked to the goals a set of National Indicators are currently under development to help measure whether we are achieving the goals including the Resilient Wales goal.

Conserving biodiversity includes, in relation to a living organism or type of habitat, restoring or enhancing a population or habitat...”

3.1.3 Monmouth Town Council - Biodiversity Statement

Monmouth Town Council recognises its duty to protect, conserve and enhance biodiversity in line with the following documents:

The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (amended 2019)

The Environment (Wales) Act 2016

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (As amended)

Monmouthshire Local Biodiversity Action Plan

3.1.4 The Town Council will:

Periodically survey our green open spaces such as the Town Field to identify, protect and conserve protected and priority species and habitats including any new species recorded during organized biodiversity awareness events.

Liaise with and consult Monmouthshire County Council biodiversity team regarding green infrastructure projects and biodiversity enhancement projects.

Follow best practice guidelines regarding any cutting and removal of trees or vegetation, for example:

- Letting grass grow longer at certain times of year and in certain places provides a more varied structure, encourage wildflowers, and enhance wildlife habitats.
- Allowing some weedy areas to provide food for birds and animals.
- Retaining dead trees where safe to do so.
- Aim to use only organic pesticides and fertilizers.
- Reduce the amount of water we use as a town council and promote reducing water use to the public.
- Time buildings or grounds maintenance work appropriately, for example to avoid nesting or breeding seasons of wildlife.
- Seek to enhance biodiversity habitats with the use of bird boxes, bat boxes, hedgehog boxes and planting of hedgerows where possible in line with the County Councils Green Corridors map.
- Use sustainably sourced native tree / plant species in new planting schemes wherever possible.
- Seek opportunities to plant edible nut and fruit trees.
- Replace any Town Council tree which is felled or has fallen naturally, with a native species tree.
- Avoid the use of invasive non-native species and remove them where this is recommended.
- Use beneficial woodland / tree management practices, including (where consistent with health and safety considerations) leaving dead wood on site and possibly dead wood retained within the canopy when deemed safe to do so.

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- Seek, through long-term planning, to enhance the biodiversity value of sites in Monmouth Town.
- Promote public access, interpretation, and involvement in our sites to raise public awareness of biodiversity issues.
- Lead by example - well-managed sites can demonstrate the positive role of sensitive site management to businesses, other organizations, and the public.
- Integrate biodiversity into town council training and seek to promote biodiversity in town schools.
- Ensure current good practice guidelines and biodiversity legislation are followed.
- Seek expert advice when needed, for example from Monmouthshire County Council biodiversity team or Natural Resources Wales.

4. Discussion

4.1 In producing the proposals for the biodiversity enhancement of the town field, the continued use of the field for recreation and events has been fully taken into consideration. The proposals are therefore a balanced compromise between the current use of the field and Monmouth Town Council's aim to increase biodiversity in the town in line with the Monmouth Town Council biodiversity statement and the Future Generations (Wales) Act.

4.2 Members of the rowing club have been consulted and have generally agreed the approach taken as the proposed management plan would have a negligible impact on rowing events.

The Rotary Club were also consulted as they use the field for the bonfire night event. The event is held on November 5th which is after the wildflower meadow area has been cut in mid to late August. The current bonfire location is also within the short grass area. Therefore, there is no anticipated impact to the event organisation.

4.3 The proposed biodiversity management regime will not significantly impact the raft race event as there is enough room within the short grass area and at the rowing club steps to accommodate rafts.

4.4 The use of the field area by dog walkers is regular but low level. Most dog walkers use the footpath along the riverbank side of the field and dogs are mostly kept on leads. A few dog walkers allow their dogs to run off the lead and onto the field. Consideration should be given to encouraging all dog walkers to keep their dogs on leads at the town field so that any biodiversity along the riverbank or within the biodiversity enhancement area (Nesting birds, otters, hedgehogs, water voles etc.) is not impacted. It is noted that dog walkers with nervous dogs would also greatly benefit from all dogs being controlled on leads at the field.

4.5 The details of the (Rowing Club) proposed track upgrade along the north-west side of the field will need to be discussed to ensure there are no impacts to biodiversity. Details of the works must include the depth or extent of surfacing involved and the type of materials to be used, also, the upgrade may need SAC approval if the area exceeds 100 sq.m.

The County Council have advised the following:

"We would advise that you engage in our Pre-Application Advice Service which would allow a Planning Officer to review your proposals and advise you on what would be considered acceptable, along with what you would need to submit with a formal planning application if needed, policies you need to be aware of, etc. The discussions you have will be followed up in a written report. Please note, drawings are not required at this stage"

Please note: Charges may apply for this service so this should also be discussed with the rowing club.

