

Mrs Eileen A Coe
Town Clerk
Framlingham Town Council
Town Council Office
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FRAMLINGHAM
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August 19th 2019

Dear Mrs Coe

The Fens, Framlingham

Thank you, the Deputy Town Clerk and fellow Town Councillors for inviting me to advise on 'The Fens' and for meeting me there on 12th August.

The Fens is clearly a much visited and loved site and it is very encouraging that there is a desire to improve the area for wildlife.

I am very mindful that any 'wildlife' enhancement needs to be compatible with current use and the resources of the Town Council to manage it. In addition, it needs to comply with any covenants and respect AK Cooper's bequest of the land to the 'People of Framlingham for walking, relaxation and contemplation'.

To achieve this, retaining the mainly 'open' grassland character of the area is clearly important and it will therefore always be necessary to continue to mow much of the area.

However, as we discussed, there is plenty of scope to vary the timing, frequency and height of mowing to introduce structural diversity. This hopefully increases visual interest and the range of habitats available for wildlife. It also gives flexibility to accommodate variables such as weather conditions, growth rates, feedback from users etc.

There is also potential to vary the relative proportion of different mowing types - allowing experimentation with what 'works' in terms of resources, public perception and use of the site.

For example, if a path is mown in the 'wrong' place it can be easily re-aligned by simply mowing a different route in the future.

Different mowing types can also be introduced gradually. Better to introduce a small amount of structural diversity and succeed than take on too much too soon. In the future, some mowing types may increase, whilst others decrease.

The following are the broad types of mowing I suggest:

- **Mowing to create a short sward circa 2-4"**

Most suited to regularly used paths, around benches, beside the tarmac path and perhaps a couple of larger areas for informal ball games/picnicking etc. The frequency of mowing will be dictated by resources, but if cutting starts with widening the existing 'desire lines', footfall will help decrease the number of cuts required.

This shorter sward can also be used to delineate areas less frequently cut and keep bramble/scrub from encroaching.

If gentle curves and sweeps are mown in this way, then an attractive network of paths and satellite open areas can be created. Avoid sharp angles and straight lines but at the same time avoid anything too complex. Larger mown areas don't need to be rectangles – circles and ovals work well.

- **Mowing to create areas of 'semi-long grass' maintained at circa 4- 6"**

The topper or mower can be set high so creating medium length grass. This will allow some low-flowering species to bloom as well as maintaining intermediate length grass which is good habitat for invertebrates and small mammals which can in turn provide food for birds such as swallow, house martin, swift, barn owl and kestrel. If cut regularly enough it should not be necessary to remove the arisings from these areas. This mowing regime is most suited to bordering short sward areas so creating graded habitat between short and long grass or where there are features such as crescents around benches that are not suited to longer grass. Again, avoid straight lines – adopting gentle curves and scallops instead.

- **Mowing twice a year and removing arisings**

Choose one or two areas of a manageable size which can grow longer during spring and summer.

One suitable area for this is the slope between the veteran oaks.

The size of area(s) will be dictated by available resources to cut and remove arisings. If a flail mower collector is used, then a larger area can be managed than if it is to be cut and managed by strimmer/brush-cutter and hand raking up.

Cut and remove arisings once in March/April and then again in September.

The arisings can either be retained on site as habitat piles or disposed off-site through a green waste recycling system. The latter may be a better option if feasible.

If any habitat piles are created, they should be limited in number and carefully located.

To avoid proliferation, the same piles should be used each year and they should not be located against the trunks of trees or where they may leach into the river (see attached fact sheet on habitat piles).

In the future it may be possible to enhance the diversity of these twice mown areas by spreading 'green-hay' from suitable local sites such as Framlingham Cemetery. However, I would suggest waiting until the management is up and running successfully. We would be happy to offer further advice on this in the future.

- **Mowing areas every other year and removing arisings**

Overwintering grass and tall herb are useful hibernation habitat for insects and provide a winter food source for seed eating birds and small mammals.

However, to prevent these areas becoming scrub they will need cutting and raking every other year.

If relatively small areas are adopted, then such areas may lend themselves to management by volunteers.

I have attached our factsheets on grassland management as supporting information for the above mowing types

- **No mowing**

There may be some areas that it is possible to stop mowing altogether and allow scrub to develop.

This will require good PR because until the scrub begins to develop it can look 'messy'. Suitable locations for this may be along the northern edge, awkward corners and scallops along the river edge and perhaps beneath the group of oaks.

If areas are allowed to develop as scrub, in time they will require rotational management. I have attached our scrub management fact sheet which explains rotational scrub management. Again, this work may be suited to a volunteer team. It would be wonderful to think that some thickets of scrub might develop that are suitable for nightingale, but in any event good nesting habitat for more common birds and a source of sloes.

As a summary of all the above I have attached an annotated map with suggested areas for each type of mowing. This is not set in stone but can hopefully be a starting point for consulting with parishioners and if needed, the basis of drawing up a management plan.

I have enquired from Sue Hooton about the feasibility of establishing a few Black Poplars along the river from cuttings from the existing Black Poplars in the area. It may well be possible but it probably easiest if I ask Sue to contact you direct regarding the detail. I will forward your contact to Sue.

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One thing to be aware of is that planting near or next to the river may require Environment Agency Consent. This may also be the case for allowing significant scrub development. For more information contact

enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk

Telephone: 03708 506 506

Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm

I hope this proves useful and along the lines that you were all thinking.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can be of any further assistance.

I wish you well with the project.

Many thanks

Susan Stone
Reserves and Conservation Adviser

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