

## **AN OVERVIEW ON WHAT HAS HAPPENED SO FAR WITH PLANS TO CREATE A WILDLIFE AREA AT WHITE LION MEADOW IN LYONSHALL VILLAGE CENTRE**

### **Background**

On the 3 August 2015 planning permission was given for the construction of five houses on the pasture between the bungalows at Burnt Orchard and the black and white house opposite the entrance to Burgoynes Marquee works. This field is called White Lion Meadow (after a pub of the same name.) One of the conditions of the planning consent was that a part of this land was to be gifted to Lyonshall Parish Council to hold as an open space for the benefit of the community. This was to take place on the sale of the houses. This latter occurred between 2018-2019. Then the Covid-19 pandemic struck and little could be done because of restrictions.

In mid-October 2021 plans emerged for the creation of a wildlife/conservation area on a strip of land in this field between the Curl Brook and the first of the new houses on the cul-de-sac also called 'White Lion Meadow'. By mid-November talks were held about the transfer of this strip to Lyonshall Parish Council. Herefordshire Wildlife Trust had already been consulted about the site's future use and funding possibilities. Councillor Kate Lomax was tasked with producing a proposal for land use which it is hoped will include a pond, a wildflower area, as well as areas of native deciduous trees. A small group of volunteers was assembled to discuss ideas of the layout and use of different areas in the plot.

Over two days in late November 2021 volunteers dug trenches to assess the potential for a pond and some clearance was undertaken of the vigorous overgrowth next to the Curl Brook. In the December 2021/January 2022 parishioners were encouraged through the parish newsletter to voice their thoughts on the project and offer constructive ideas.

The Herefordshire Wildlife Trust was approached for advice on how to prepare the ground and what was considered essential for a wildlife haven. These included using log piles, insect houses and hedgehog boxes to create mammal- and insect-friendly habitats, as well as using native trees and wildflower mixes. Information was given where to source these seeds and trees. People were asked to come forward to volunteer for such tasks as preparing the ground and for future maintenance of the site, as well as for roles such as fund-raising, advising on wildlife aspects and creating information boards and newsletters.

In December 2021 a meeting was arranged with David Griffith (Lyonshall's tree warden); Catherine Janson (from Herefordshire Meadows); Tony Norman from Pembridge (a well-known farmer with great knowledge of wildlife conservation); and Sarah Cadwallader who is the secretary of the Kington Branch of the Hereford Wildlife Trust – these are our experts.

A possible plan has been created by Councillor Kate Lomax which is outlined below. However, it is accepted that this is a long-term and flexible project, dependent on the input of ideas from Lyonshall residents: -

- 1. *The Ground*** – *The current owner will be topping the grass soon – cutting the top layer. Sheep would then be used to crop the grass over winter. That has implications for fencing and supervision. Volunteers would then rake the land of any overwintering thatch (died-down vegetation) and then rake it over again to create some bare areas of soil, a process called 'scarifying'. The idea is to create bare patches of earth (such as happens if a lawnmower is put on its lowest setting), but which does not affect the roots of dormant*

*plants. This creates an environment where the more uncommon and less vigorous plants can gain a foot hold over their more successful rivals.*

- 2. **The Pond** – The initial idea was for a pond to be dug separately from the stream. The experts then suggested that the stream could be used for the water source by creating an ox-bow pond filling from the stream and perhaps later blocked to create a more sluggish environment than the flowing brook. Either of these ideas need to be consulted on with river authorities and the planning department.*
- 3. **The line of trees and shrubs along the Curl Brook bank** – This area is better left largely untouched but with some areas cleared above the stream – this would still constitute a wildlife corridor. This could be started by the volunteers.*
- 4. **Hedging** creates a valuable wildlife habitat and would be appropriate whatever the rest of the area is used for. Some could be left to grow up and some cut and laid as a hedge.*
- 5. **Trees** – We can continue discussions with David Griffith in the hope of planting trees here and elsewhere around the parish this winter.*

By December 2022 there were fifteen volunteers who were prepared to get involved with the physical and administrative roles in such a project. A small budget was allocated by the parish council for materials and tools. Councillor Paul Avery also proposed that as the land had been donated to all Lyonshall parishioners, a full consultation should take place. An open event was suggested at the Memorial Hall in the spring or early summer of 2022 with a view to drawing together people's views on, and ideas for, the project. The response to an article in the parish newsletter about the plans for the site was very positive.

## **February 2022**

A steering group meeting was held with four volunteers and headed by Councillor Kate Lomax. Several aspects were discussed, not least the naming of the site. Two names were favoured most – White Lion Meadow or Curl Brook Meadow, both were appropriate for the site.

Soil samples were taken and the results were pending (For results, see under Late March 2022) Surveys of the flora on the site will help determine what types of flora would be best suited to which part of the meadow. The various uses of the site were discussed and it was felt that several smaller areas within the whole had different potentials from a wildlife/conservation viewpoint. For example, the area furthest from the road, which contains sorrel and some finer grasses, was considered to be the most appropriate for wildflowers. The less fertile the soil, the better it is for a wildflower meadow. A fertile soil leads to the most robust species growing the quickest – nettles, docks and bramble – which would out-compete the slower growing and, arguably, more interesting wildflowers. Certainly these latter are the less common species. The field has not been used for intensive agriculture in the recent past (last 30 years) which is good news for a wildlife area as it means fertilisers have not been used as they would have on arable fields, neither have they been intensively grazed by cattle or sheep with the resultant heavy manuring.

It was suggested that trees be planted alongside the road and the fence of the first of the new houses, with an open area next to the brook. A children's activity/learning area in the centre with logs as seating was also proposed – this would be connected by mown paths. A more formal area might also be created with wheelchair and pushchair-friendly paths, possibly made of hardcore, closest to the road so everyone would be able to enjoy using the space.

## **25 February 2022**

A field trip to the meadows at the back of the Catholic church in Weobley was arranged where we met Mike Williams, the volunteer warden for Weobley Meadows. He is co-ordinating a scheme to create a nature reserve on what is currently pasture and which will include wildflower meadows, a pond and an orchard. This is also a recent project, albeit on a larger scale and is more advanced than the one in Lyonshall. However, it will prove to be a useful comparison, and will help guide people in their expectations of White Lion Meadow.

The organisers of Weobley Meadows have found the areas best suited to the various land uses, for example finding out where the most water-retaining spots are for future ponds and finding the least fertile parts of the fields for the future wildflower meadows, accepting the inverse proportion of the most interesting wildflowers doing better on poorer soils. The phosphate levels of the Weobley pastures have also been taken with a view to reducing the soil's phosphates, as these too have an inverse relation to the success of wildflower areas.

For Lyonshall's White Lion Meadow, the idea is to manage the grassland to see what will develop naturally, rather than introducing wildflowers as brought-in seed or as plug plants. The only exception may be yellow rattle which, because it is parasitic on grass, would be a good introduction as it would check the growth of grass which would otherwise hold back less vigorous plants. Initially it is a case of waiting to see what is there, and then adding wildflower seed to the meadow area in response to the plants identified.

The importance of keeping vigorous plants in check for example nettles, brambles and dock was underlined and this is achieved by cutting back or even digging out roots. However, the importance of nettle and bramble clumps for butterflies and other insect life was also raised, so a compromise should be considered.

Similarly, the importance of getting people in the parish interested, or at least on side, was discussed. Much more can be achieved with a large number of people doing a small amount than a few doing a great deal.

## **8 March 2022**

A second meeting was held by the steering group. It was agreed that the earlier the preparatory work on White Lion Meadow is undertaken, the better for the overall outcome this year, especially in terms of planning for plants etc.

A consultation in which Lyonshall parishioners will be encouraged to discuss and note down their thoughts and feelings on plans for the site has been brought forward and will now be held on Saturday, 9 April 2022 between 2 – 4 pm at Lyonshall Memorial Hall. Free tea/coffee and cake will be offered to enhance a friendly atmosphere and those from the steering committee and volunteers will be on hand to answer questions and explain different aspects of the plans. Post-it notes, paper and pens will be provided so parishioners can record thoughts and make suggestions. This will form the core of the consultation and will be incorporated into an action plan. This latter will be delivered by the steering group and implemented by volunteers and advisors.

An A4 leaflet advertising the 9<sup>th</sup> April event was designed in mid-March by Kate and Sarah Z and is to be delivered in the April edition of the Lyonshall newsletter which is enclosed with the parish newsletter. There will also be mention of the event on social media, such as Facebook, and on the Lyonshall website,

### **First half of March**

In the first half of March 2022 six sheep were put on the White Lion Meadow with the intention of grazing down the top layer of the sward, an environmentally friendly alternative to a lawnmower. Even so, the dead layer of vegetation from the late autumn and winter, called thatch, will also need to be removed, as well as light trimming work being undertaken on the Curl Brook bank near the A480.

### **Late March 2022**

The weather turned sunny and relatively warm in late March which allowed workgroups organised by Rod Bevan to work on the site. Fridays were chosen as the work party day and, during March, at least half of the thatch was removed by hand. It was bagged up and taken to Kington recycling centre where it was put into the green waste which would then be processed and used for soil conditioning. Remaining bits of thatch were also used by birds for nesting material. A light mower was used to level out the humpy, tufty areas of the meadow, and this also removed any remaining thatch.

The soil test results were delivered. The soil pH was recorded at 5.9 and this indicates a slightly acidic soil. The test results also showed good levels of organic matter in the soil which will help to retain moisture – a good result for the establishment of wildflower meadow areas. A look back through records suggests this was in an area of little activity in the long past. In 2015 an archaeological investigation on the wider field was done prior to the five new houses being built. The subsoil and natural deposits on the field were found to be similar to that of the topsoil, suggesting little ploughing or working of the soil had taken place. However, there is some historical evidence from maps and written sources that this was under the strip field system (a field made up of thin, elongated strips, often belonging to different owners) up to the late 18<sup>th</sup> century at least, which would have meant some ploughing, although not of the modern deep ploughing form.

Work on the site in the spring of 2022 will be more of the same – physical work on the land and also organising events to bring the people of Lyonshall up-to-date and involved in what is going on. There will be the permanent logging of identified flora and observed flora in a way which should be readily accessible to those who are interested in the project.

In early June 2022 as part of Queen Elizabeth's Platinum Jubilee Celebrations it is hoped to have a display in Lyonshall Memorial Hall of work achieved so far, and what is planned and hoped for in the future.