



Views About Management

Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 Section 28(4) (as amended)

A statement of Natural England's views about the management of Cowslip Meadow SSSI Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)

This statement represents Natural England's views about the management of the SSSI for nature conservation. This statement sets out, in principle, our views on how the site's special conservation interest can be conserved and enhanced. Natural England has a duty to notify the owners and occupiers of SSSI of its views about the management of the land.

Not all of the management principles will be equally appropriate to all parts of the SSSI. Also, there may be other management activities, additional to our current views, which can be beneficial to the conservation and enhancement of the features of interest.

This Statement does not constitute consent for any of the 'operations requiring Natural England's consent'. The written consent of Natural England is required before carrying out any of those operations. Natural England welcomes consultation with owners, occupiers and users of the SSSI to ensure that the management of this site conserves and enhances the features of interest, and to ensure that all necessary prior consents are obtained.

Management Principles

Lowland meadows require active management if they are to retain their conservation interest. In order to maintain a species-rich sward, each year's growth of vegetation must be removed. Without such management the sward becomes progressively dominated by tall and vigorous grasses which, together with an associated build-up of dead plant matter, suppress less vigorous species and reduce the botanical diversity of the site.

In lowland meadows, this is traditionally achieved by closing the fields to stock in the autumn and cutting the resultant growth as hay, usually in early July. The precise timing of the cut depends on local factors, including past management and the prevailing weather conditions, but should be after ground-nesting birds have fledged their young and any short-lived, characteristic plants have set seed. The aftermath is then grazed in late summer/autumn. Aftermath grazing is important for maintaining a species-rich sward, both through controlling competitive grasses and through hoof-prints providing suitable sites for seedlings to establish. Heavy poaching must, however, be avoided.

Whilst recognising that the optimal management regime includes grazing, in some instances it may not be a practical management option. Where this is the case, an appropriate cutting regime should be used to reduce the dominance of the more vigorous plant species. Care should be taken to ensure that the timing, frequency, height and extent of any cut would not conflict with the management of any important botanical or invertebrate interest that may be present. In order to maximise plant diversity, arisings from cutting should be removed from the site as part of this management process.

The grassland management also needs to take account of the habitat requirements for great pignut *Bunium bulbocastanum*. This species thrives in slightly taller areas of the sward, so parts of the site that are of particular importance for it should be identified, and have grazing or cutting timed for later in the season to allow it to flower and set seed.

Any surrounding, well managed hedgerows may considerably add to the habitat in providing shelter for invertebrates.

The application of pesticides including herbicides or fertilizers would be damaging but occasional dressings of lime may be acceptable.

For the damper meadows, regular and careful maintenance of surface drainage including ditches and drains may be necessary to prevent adverse changes in the plant species composition of the sward. Deepening of surface drainage should be avoided.

Date notified: 13 October 2020