



## **Views About Management**

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

### **A statement of Natural England's views about the management of Johnsons' Meadows Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)**

Natural England has a duty to inform the owners and occupiers of land within Johnsons' Meadows Site of Special Scientific interest (SSSI) of its views on how to manage the habitat of interest for nature conservation. This statement sets out our views on how the species-rich lowland neutral grassland can be conserved and enhanced.

Not all of the management principles outlined in this statement will be equally appropriate to all parts of the SSSI. There may also be other management activities, not outlined here, which could be beneficial to the conservation and enhancement of the feature of interest.

This Statement does not constitute consent for any of the 'operations requiring Natural England's consent'. You need to have written consent from Natural England if you want to carry out any of those operations. Natural England welcomes discussion with owners, occupiers and users of the SSSI to ensure that the management of this site conserves and enhances the feature of interest, and that all necessary prior consents are obtained.

### **Management Principles**

Neutral hay meadows and pastures 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. Otherwise 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 neutral hay meadows, the above objective is traditionally achieved by closing the meadows 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 current 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 be avoided, however.

On land managed as pasture the conservation of the interest feature is achieved by grazing. The precise timing and intensity of grazing will vary both between and within sites, according to local conditions and requirements (such as the type or availability of stock or the needs of individual plants or animals of conservation concern) but should aim to keep a relatively open sward without causing excessive poaching. Light trampling can be of benefit by breaking down leaf litter and providing areas for seed germination.

No other management should be routinely required. Any surrounding, well-managed hedgerows may considerably add to the habitat in providing shelter for invertebrates. The application of pesticides including herbicides or fertilisers (including manure or slurry) would be damaging but periodic dressings of well-rotted farmyard manure may be acceptable on meadows managed as hay meadows. Occasional dressings of lime may be acceptable.

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

**Date notified:** 31 January 2020