

The following proposal suggested by the AONB has been discussed and reviewed by the Clerk and Steve Maund for accuracy and viability.

The management of Malvern Wells Village Green – a proposal July 2022

The site

The village green at Malvern Wells adjacent to The Crescent is approximately 1ha in size. It is a small but important area of local green space, hosting both the annual village fete as well as the remnant of a species-rich hay meadow. Up to 50 species of native grass and wild flower have been recorded from the site and the grassland was described as 'outstanding' by an experienced botanist during a 2021 survey of grasslands in the AONB. Sites like this are now very rare with an estimated 97% (over 7 million acres) of lowland hay meadow having been lost in England in the last 100 years.

Current management of the site

One part of the village green (covering approximately 40% or 0.4ha of the site) is notably rich in wild flowers and grasses. Very laudably, this area is left to grow in the spring and summer during which time it produces a beautiful display as well as a rich and valuable resource for bees, butterflies etc. It is cut by Steven Maund at the end of July/early August. This mimics the traditional cycle of hay management to be found in a species rich meadow. The cuttings from the meadow are removed by Steven. The grassland across the remainder of the village green (approximately 60%) is cut by Steven with a petrol mower every two weeks from approximately early March until the start of September when the site is made ready for the village fete.

Proposed future management of the site – a pilot

In 2023 it is proposed that the majority (all open areas) of the village green are left to grow as a meadow between March and the end of July/early August, at which time it will all be subject to a hay cut. The grass will be cut – at no or minimal cost to the Council – by local farmer Matt Gardner using a small tractor, at the same time as he is cutting the meadow at the adjacent St Wulstan's Nature Reserve. The cut grass will be baled, removed and fed to cows. From March of the same year it is proposed that Steven Maund will cut and maintain paths around the edge of the Green and through the meadow to facilitate access and enjoyment. As now, people would also be able to walk through the longer meadow grass. At the end of August/early September the green will be prepared for the village fete. One option is for the County Council Greenspace Team to do this when they are in the area cutting roadside verge nature reserves. A flail mower would be used with raking if necessary. Alternatively, a cut and collect machine (like the one used at Welland Green) could be used.

The benefits of the proposed change in management can be summarised as follows:

- Reduced cost to the Council – through reduced mowing.
- Reduced pollution/reduction in greenhouse gases – through reduced mowing.
- Support to a local farmer – harvested grass is put to productive use as cattle feed rather than being left to rot.
- Boon to nature – seeds from the species-rich part of the site would be expected to spread to other areas of the Village Green. This process could be speeded up if seeds from the core area were collected and strewn around the rest of the site. The AONB Unit would be happy to manage this process and local people – perhaps the local cubs and scouts – could participate in this process.

It is recognised that the suggested management approach would lead to a loss of short, amenity grass on the site for approximately 4 months of the year.

Paul Esrich, MHAONB Partnership Manager



The site in summer, showing the longer grass of the meadow and closely mown sward



Machinery used to cut and bail hay at St Wulstan's LNR



The BCS flail mower used for roadside verge cutting