

## Climate Change Member Advisory Board

### Mini-Meadows Update – September 2020

#### **Introduction**

According to Plantlife – the conservation charity that Medway Council works very closely with at Ranscombe Farm.....

- **Ninety seven percent** of the flower rich meadows present in the 1930's, have now disappeared.
- Nearly **1,400 species of pollinators and other insects** rely on these meadows for their survival.

Here in Medway, we have done a great deal to redress this loss. As a Council we own and manage nearly 2000 ha of land much of which is amenity grassland. Alongside the work at Ranscombe Farm, our two Country Parks and sites such as Darland Banks, the Great Lines Heritage Park and Rede Common are key sites in our efforts to protect this hugely important habitat.

We also know that meadows play a crucial role in the sequestration of carbon from the atmosphere, with over 10kg more carbon held per square metre compared with amenity grassland.

We need to manage our greenspaces for a multiplicity of uses; formal sports such as football and rugby, dog walking and children's play. However, there is also plenty of space available for biodiversity and carbon capture.

This report looks at the work done this year to introduce new meadows to our greenspaces and how this can then be taken forward.

#### **Mini-Meadows**

Medway Norse proposed to the Council six sites where small meadow habitats could be developed in order to understand how best we can manage this new approach to our urban greenspaces:

Cliff Road Play Area  
Broomhill Park  
Gillingham Park  
Kings Frith  
Queen Elizabeth Court  
Vinall Park

In addition, the members of St. Margaret's Church in Rochester also joined the scheme allowing the church yard, which is also managed by Norse, to become a summer meadow.

#### **Roadside verges**

Medway Norse have already been working in partnership with the Kent Wildlife Trust to create 24 areas of roadside nature reserves and large areas of verges on our major roads have been left uncut this year.

The success of this policy is best summarised by the report "Wild About Rainham" produced by the Eco-Group volunteers in Rainham which is appended to this report (Appendix 1). As well as looking

at the success of this for wildlife they also gathered the views of residents and over 70% were in favour of this approach to managing our verges.

### **Medway Urban Greenspaces Forum (MUGs)**

The Medway Urban Greenspaces Forum now represents over 30 different Friends and similar volunteer groups. All of them are keen to introduce meadow habitats to the areas they care for.

### **Pollinators and surveys**

Alongside the initiative to introduce meadows to our urban greenspaces the MUGs Forum has been working in partnership with the Bumblebee Conservation Trust to support the Friends groups. A training course on the identification of key pollinating bees was a huge success with over 20 volunteers attending online. The survey work they have been doing following the training is showing some really encouraging results.

Other surveys have also been conducted, notably at Rede Common, and are showing equally good results. At St. Margaret's churchyard over seventy-one species of wildflower have been recorded.

### **Next Year – Lessons Learned**

As the summer draws to a close we now have a much clearer picture of the beauty and importance of Medway's meadows, the variety of the wildflowers and the importance of their place in our community.

The Council now needs to think about next year.

Important sites for inclusion are Jacksons Fields in Rochester, which is already known to support a number of important chalk grassland species such as Pyramidal and Man Orchids, and plans are underway to work in partnership with Kent wildlife trust in the Horsted valley.

A detailed plan is needed to look at where and how we can introduce meadows to many more of our greenspaces and these plans should consider a number of key points:

- Public perception and understanding
- Measuring success through detailed wildlife surveys
- Cutting, removal and composting of arisings

Lessons can be learned from how other organisations such as the National Trust, the Royal Parks in London, Kew and Wakehurst which have combined meadows and recreation with great success, through use of interpretive boards and careful mowing regimes.

We have already seen the success of including the Friends groups in this initiative and they are very willing and able to help with the survey work and the actual management of the meadows.

The wildflower meadow initiative, lead by Medway Norse, has been very positive resulting in a number of compliments from the public. They are also making savings on the "no cut" verges which are now being used to fund planting for next year.

The partnership between Medway Council, Norse and Kent Wildlife Trust is proving very productive, alongside the involvement of our local communities through the Friends groups.