

Case study: Establishing a Wild Flower Meadow Beauchief Nature Park, Beauchief Drive, Sheffield 8

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The Beauchief Environment Group was established in 1988 as a local volunteer group in Sheffield. Much of the 'patch' we manage and associate ourselves with is owned by Sheffield City Council and consists of woodland, largely ancient woodland, a golf course and two areas of ancient meadow. These meadows were managed first under the DEFRA Countryside Stewardship scheme and currently Higher Level Stewardship.

Four years ago we decided to ask the Council if we might use a derelict area of land, formerly a Council tree nursery, as a resource for wildlife and particularly, since wildflower meadows are now such a scarce habitat. We asked if we could attempt to create an area of meadow with native grasses and wild flowers in a substantial part of the site. We were able to offer to fund the preparation of the ground and the purchase of seed thanks to a legacy the Group had received.

The area in question had very few trees, apart from a few around the perimeter, but the growth of bramble, docks, nettle, and willowherb was rampant and about shoulder high in parts. We were advised that all the growth would have to be killed off by spraying and this was carried out twice by a farmer using a tractor and sprayer. A lot of hand digging was also done to remove stubborn bramble and other roots. The field was then harrowed to provide a bed for the seed which was finally sown in spring 2015.



January 2015 after second spraying. Credit D Holland and T Marshall

The seed was sourced from a specialist supplier and we chose a mix of native grass species suitable for that particular soil, and a wide variety of both native annual and perennial meadow wild flower species. We had been advised to include the annual meadow species which will germinate and grow to maturity in one season, will give colour in the first year and for the soil to be quickly covered in vegetation helping to prevent undesirable species coming back.

The resulting spectacle in the summer and autumn 2015 was amazing with the annuals in flower – cornflower, corncockle, field camomile, field poppy, corn marigold and red campion being most evident.



August 2015 flowering annuals meadow view. Credit D Holland and T Marshall

The perennials also began to establish themselves with red clover, tufted vetch, meadow vetchling, bird's-foot trefoil and yarrow flowering. The late sowing meant that it was difficult to decide when to cut the meadow as we were hoping to harvest as much seed as possible for use on other Council sites. Our group collected ripe seeds to use the following year but collection for Council use was not possible. In early spring 2016 we scattered some of the seeds of the annual species collected the previous autumn.

The summer of 2016 produced a completely different picture in the meadow with the perennial species dominating but still with many annuals present. The numerous insects enjoying the abundant nectar were happy either way! Unexpectedly, viper's bugloss was also found growing in several places and its seed collected. The meadow was cut at the end of summer and some of the cut vegetation containing seed was collected by the Council for use on their other grassland projects. The meadow grew well in 2017 with grasses well established and the perennial wild flowers were flourishing too. The land on which the meadow is growing is nutrient rich so plant growth was extremely tall and dense. The meadow was cut and some of the vegetation containing seed was once again saved for the Council. A second cut was required due to the density of the vegetation. Yellow rattle seed collected from Gulleys Wood Meadow, one of the meadows with Higher Level Stewardship, was sown on areas where open soil was exposed, mostly molehills. Eventually as yellow rattle becomes established it should help to reduce the vigour of the grasses.



July 2016. Credit D Holland and T Marshall

This has proved to be a truly exciting and worthwhile project enjoyed by all who see the meadow at whatever time of year. We still have to sort out some management issues – periodic grazing would be good, but fencing is very expensive. Otherwise 'cut and remove' is not difficult but needs to be affordable. Hopefully the seeds will continue to be a valuable resource.