

Appendix A – Summary of Existing Meadow Site Conditions

Barrsbrook Meadow

A very small area of meadow to the eastern side of Barrsbrook Farm Road. The area is unlikely to have major strategic importance due to its small size and lack of meadow habitat nearby. The meadow has potential with low level of existing wildflower interest and adjacent embankment for solitary bees. Some nettle, dock and prickly lettuce are evident and so the site would benefit for these being treated with herbicide. Bramble encroachment an ongoing threat and will need cutting back annually.

Bourne Meadow

The floodplain grassland at Bourne Meadow should be a priority habitat given its value to wildlife and rarity. However, the annual cut was not conducted in 2023 and the site is now sub-optimal in its condition with last year's grass now forming a layer of thatched material which smothers the growth of wildflowers. To further complicate the future management of the grassland, several sapling copses have been planted within the meadow area to the south of the river in early 2024 which will impact upon the grassland flora and the ease of maintenance of the meadow area. The meadow is prone to annual winter flooding which causes rapid spring growth of grasses to the detriment of wildflowers. Areas where the grass was cut for tree planting over winter are noticeably more species-rich than those which were not, so a second cut in early spring is recommended. Docks, nettle and creeping thistle are evident throughout and indicate a history of inappropriate cutting or inconsistent management; the area will be prone to these undesirable species due to the dampness of the meadow so control via an appropriate cutting regime is crucial. Riverbanks and compartment edges are covered in bramble which will need to be controlled annually to prevent ingress into the grassland areas and the shrinking of compartments.

Chertsey Meads

The hay cut at Chertsey Meads is a large operation given the size and complexity of the site. The operation used to be carried out by the tenant farmer but in 2023 was done by a local farmer. There were numerous issues with the cut last year and the Council received some criticism. The botanical diversity of the site is at risk from sub-optimal management should the hay operation not be given due consideration. For example, the timing of the hay cut should be flexible given the floodplain habitat and the resident skylark population. The latter should mean the site is cut later in the summer to allow the skylarks, as ground nesters, to rear their broods. However, recent flood events have resulted in excess nutrient deposition, which can inhibit floral diversity. A way to address this could be to carry out two hay cuts but this could jeopardise the breeding of the skylarks. A further complication to the hay operation is the presence of the Chertsey Show, an important heritage event in the local calendar to celebrate the farming in the area. The show takes place around the middle of August, which is usually an ideal time to undertake a hay cut. Future management will need to take into account the competing demands of the show and the ecological needs of the grassland. Previously, Surrey Fire and Rescue also recommended some change in mowing practices to reduce the fire risk to the site in very dry conditions. Wider paths were recommended around the edges of the site but these have yet to be actioned.

Dudley Close Open Space

On the corner of Dudley Close, in a patch of land adjoining Victory Park, is a small green space containing a meadow. The area has a cut path running through the centre and is bordered by some knee rail and shrubs. The meadow itself seems to be cut more frequently

than once per annum and it is believed that neighbouring properties also keep the grass cut short. There is little prospect of establishing a healthy meadow if this is so.

Hare Hill

The meadow at Hare Hill has been present since the Second World War when the site was used for farmland. Since then, the acid grassland habitat present near the centre of the site has been maintained by an annual cut and collect operation. This operation was not carried out in 2023. The grassland is also suffering from scrub and secondary woodland encroachment and is unable to be maintained by the small group of volunteers who assist the Council with tasks elsewhere on the site. There is potential for a good quality meadow with several acid-loving species present, including ling (common heather). Importantly, these patches of heather must be avoided when area is cut. Bramble is sprouting from the centre of the meadow and demonstrates why consistent cutting is required to prevent it establishing thickets and dominating the grassland. The site management plan states that the bramble-covered edges should be scalloped annually to maintain open character of the grassland and provide microhabitats within the scallops. In order to restore the habitat to an optimal condition, some fairly large-scale scrub removal will need to take place to maximise the size of the grassland and the recommencement of the annual cut will be necessary.

Englefield Green Open Space

To the north of the Green at Englefield Green, there is a small meadow in between several road junctions (Priest Hill, Ridgemoor Road and Coopers Hill Road). The area contains some trees and a bus shelter. The meadow has plenty of wildflower interest but also frequent dock and creeping thistle and it seems there was no autumn cut in 2023. Injurious weeds should be spot treated with herbicide and a late summer hay cut instated to ensure continued presence of flower species. A spring cut may also be necessary but at present it is not possible to assess levels of grass dominance with the 2023 cut not having occurred.

Homewood Park

A large proportion of the Homewood Park SANG consists of grassland with different management regimes. Some is regularly mown amenity grass, but, there are large areas of annual grass that requires an annual cut; one is near the main car park and historically another is in the very south of the site alongside Guildford Road. Sadly, the meadow cut was not completed in 2023 so the meadow is not in a good condition. There was also a cut and drop exercise carried out on half of the meadow in Spring 2024 which will cause a further deterioration in condition. There is currently little wildflower interest in contrast with the well-managed edges of the road to Botleys Mansion which feature a number of wildflowers which could colonise the meadow. With positive and consistent management this meadow could be restored to good condition. Hay cutting is more appropriate than mowing on a meadow of this size. If possible, the meadow should be expanded to maximise the benefits that meadow habitats bring but there may need to be extra work to ensure the current meadow is brought back to good condition. Another alarming use of the meadows is for up to eight firework displays that take place over the summer months for Botleys Mansion, this poses a significant fire risk to the site in dry conditions.

Hythe Park

Hythe Park is a busy open space in Egham Hythe that contains a multitude of habitats. It contains several play facilities and a community garden, tended by volunteers. The park is bordered by housing on all sides and has trees and shrubs around most of its edge. The grass interior is a mixture of short, regularly mown amenity grass and some meadow grass for biodiversity benefit. The meadow parts are not well defined and there is little to no

evidence of meadow habitat on ground. Sparse wildflowers of a small number of species indicate a lack of appropriate meadow management. The grass is now so dominant that a double annual cut in early spring and late summer will be necessary if meadow flowers are to establish.

Marshall Place Open Space

Marshall Place Open Space is a small open space in New Haw, at the end of the Marshall Place cul-de-sac. The site contains a fairly large play area which is surrounded by the meadow and small number of trees. The grass immediately surrounding the play equipment is mown short, while the outlying grassland is managed as a meadow. However, only amenity grassland flora is evident, with frequent buttercups, daisies and dominant grass. The site becomes progressively damper from southwest to northeast making the use of machinery difficult on the soft ground. The northeastern compartment has not been cut in many years as evidenced by rank grassland dominated by large tussocks of tufted hairgrass.

Pooley Green Recreation Ground

The recreation ground at Pooley Green is a fairly large area of grass containing a small number of trees and children's play equipment. The grassland is mostly managed with a focus on recreation, with the vast majority of the grass cut regularly. However, there is a small crescent-shaped area of meadow grass towards the centre of the recreation ground. This area of meadow indicated on the map had been mown alongside the rest of the park at time of visit in March. There is little evidence of non-amenity grassland species within the designated meadow area. Cleavers are sheltering within the tree shelters of the scattered trees and will soon spread throughout meadow areas if left to grow.

Thorpe Green

Thorpe Green is a large grassland open space alongside Green Road and very close to the M25. The open space contains a play area and is a popular dog-walking site. Predominantly, as with most sites, the grass is regularly mown but the northern aspect of the site is managed as a meadow and there is good potential for a healthy meadow to establish. Frequent wildflowers are evident and the presence of yellow meadow ant nests indicates a history of sensitive meadow management. Meadow grasses are widely established with coarse grasses less dominant than on other sites. It appeared that no cut took place in 2023, which if continued will result in grass dominating to the detriment of less competitive flowers. The size of the area suggests a hay cut is more appropriate than mowing and would yield good results. However, a belt of inappropriate tree planting has separated the existing meadow area from its potential expansion towards the Rose and Crown pub. This will result in shading of parts of the meadow and has reduced the accessibility of the meadow for tractor-borne cutting equipment.

St John's Church

The open space surrounding St John's Church in Egham is mostly managed as a formal garden. The grass is mown regularly throughout the growing season. However, there in the south-west of the site is an area of meadow, managed for biodiversity. There is no evidence of meadow species on ground. The meadow area is largely shaded by mature trees which have allowed a woodland edge ground flora to develop instead of meadow species. Strong regrowth of grass has occurred over winter, so requires an additional cut and remove operation in spring. There is abundant green alkanet which should be spot treated with herbicide to prevent further spread and the bramble and blackthorn encroachment from western boundary should be cut back (if presence of reptiles and amphibians is ruled out).

Christ Church, Virginia Water

The cemetery surrounding Christ Church in Virginia Water is managed as a formal cemetery garden. The cemetery contains four, distinct blocks of meadow that are allowed to grow throughout the summer and are cut towards the end of the growing season. In the winter, the area is indistinct amongst the amenity grass, but provide a wildlife refuge in the summer. The meadow blocks are now in poor condition and there is no evidence of meadow on the ground. The grass has occasional wildflower interest but one designated meadow area seemed to be covered in rhododendron which will need clearing and stump treating.

Runnymede Meadows, Egham Town

Part of the National Trust land at Runnymede and Ankerwycke are two small parcels of land (24220m² combined) that are Council-owned. The meadows are in relatively good condition as there is an annual hay cut that has been traditionally cut by David Sheldrake (previous tenant farmer at Chertsey Meads). The two Council-owned sections form part of the larger National Trust estate and there are no markings on the ground indicating which parts are owned by whom and are managed as one parcel. The meadows are ecologically important and are in part threatened by event applications given the land's popularity. It would be advisable to thoroughly scrutinise event applications for this area given its importance.