

The Meadows

Regular users of the Meadows will not fail to notice that significant work has just been undertaken to cut back the dense thickets of brambles, and some of the hedges around the site. It is many years since any such work has been undertaken, and therefore a harder cut has been necessary to try and ensure that this growth does not encroach on the paths and open areas (especially behind the Grange). Also, the dense growth of brambles was beginning to choke the main stream that flows through the site.

This work can only be undertaken at specific times of the year. Birds nest season begins in March, running through to August, and to ensure, firstly, that butterflies and moths have sufficient habitat and secondly, berries and other fruit, are there for the birds into the autumn, the window of opportunity for this work is very narrow.

We all know the Meadows is for much of the year a very wet spot, and this year the autumn has been particularly rainy. So, undertaking the hedging work has inevitably led to some damage to the field surfaces. Nature always heals itself, and we plan to give it a helping hand in the spring, when it is drier, by flattening the worst areas with a special roller – but this cannot be done in the wet. We are also considering strengthening the surface of some of the paths to make them more weather resistant to winter weather, but without making the area look more like an urban park. Brambles and sallows will recover, probably with a vengeance, but we don't expect to undertake a cut of this magnitude for some years.

One sad fact this work has uncovered is the amount of rubbish hidden by the undergrowth, especially near one of the picnic benches where numerous empty beer cans were found.

There is still more of this work to be done. Firstly, it was too wet to cut the growth on either side of the allotments, and this will now probably be left until early autumn, unless we have a very hard frost before the end of February. Secondly, at some stage, we will be removing the line of fir trees alongside the path from the car park to the allotments, and some dead elm trees in the hedge line near the main gate by the other end of the car park. The firs are overgrown *leylandii* and are now too big and are also not appropriate for the Meadows. These will go as commercial timber, whilst the trunks of the elms will be stacked in the area behind the Grange to form a large bug hotel.

Contractors to undertake the work have been carefully selected, not just by price but by proven experience of delivering what we need, and we oversee the work on site.

To more than compensate for all this, the plantation areas will be extended, using native species saplings sourced from the Woodland Trust.

This is all part of a long-term plan for the Meadows approved last autumn by the Parish Council to ensure that the Meadows can thrive as a wildlife area, whilst continuing to serve residents as a recreation area. We have consulted with local specialists on butterflies, moths and birdlife in developing the overall plan.

Motcombe Parish Council

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