

‘A walk on the wild side in Steyning Parish’

An urban ‘Rewilding’ success story

Introduction

The Abbey Road Open Space is hidden away amongst the housing developments to the west of the A283 Steyning by-pass and is probably unknown to the majority of Steyning's residents. The site has been left largely unmanaged for the last 20+ years, apart from grass cutting and essential tree maintenance.

This has allowed the site to mature and develop to a point where it now needs some gentle attention to maintain what is there, whilst improving other areas that have become overgrown or swamped by more rampant growth.

Most people who see this site for the first time are surprised by how many different habitats are represented here, including a chalk stream, wet woodland, ditch, pond, meadow, hedgerow and scrub.

None are very extensive, but together they make up a valuable mix, that with some gentle management, has become an even more important biodiverse site in this part of Steyning.



What was the plan?

Abbey Road comprises 4.5 acres, divided by a residential road of the same name, and was designated a 'Village Green' in 2016 with support from its owners, Steyning Parish Council. In February 2020, the Council agreed to follow a new Management Plan which had been largely conceived and compiled by Roger Brown, a local resident volunteer.



The plan was to make small but effective changes. The First change was to double the frequency of grass cutting on 'Abbey Road South' and begin to plant a Community Orchard to ensure this area became a more attractive family Recreational / Parkland facility, whilst reducing the cutting regime to the grassed area on 'Abbey Road North' to create a more diverse meadow. Also north east of the road, and as part of the rewilding process, the pond was to be deepened to ensure it was less likely to dry out in Summer; trees would be planted (12 last year alone); hazel deflectors installed in the stream to trap sediment and create some more varied flow in the channel; to create and maintain walkways around the site; then to introduce some additional native fauna such as the 'Yellow Rattle' (pictured)



; to liaise with experts and agencies to ensure the correct practices are being followed; lastly, and most importantly, to set up a local volunteer group of enthusiastic residents, with the parish councils support, to complete a series of monthly working parties to improve the habitats by completing a series of sympathetic conservation workdays.

{Yellow Rattle is semi-parasitic on grass roots, reducing the grass's vigour and allowing other wildflowers to establish. Its nickname is 'The meadow maker'}

What makes this village green so special?

After two years there is tremendous progress, with the latest botany survey registering 110 different plant species. The bird surveys have reported Buzzards, Heron, Red Kite as well as the regular group of Steyning Swifts. The Bat Surveys report 4 different species; there are 11 different kinds of butterfly sighted and around the pond now reside water voles, slow worms, toads, frogs and above it flies three types of dragonflies.

The Abbey Road Volunteers now number 16 active members, led by Roger, without whom, this project would simply not have been the success it clearly is today.

Indeed, on a summers day you might be lucky enough to enjoy some moments in his company, as he explains all that can be enjoyed by walking on the wild - side at Abbey Road

For more information or to book your space follow this link -



<https://visitsteyning.co.uk/listing/a-walk-on-the-wild-side/>

For more information about the Abbey Road project visit our website - www.steyningpc.gov.uk