



# QUARTERLY UPDATE

## Happy New Year!

Looking at my article from this time last year I noted that daffodils were fairly well advanced and that we even had snowdrops in flower at the Toms Turn entrance to the fields.

I often look back at some of the previous articles I have written for WEN and one of my first articles which I came across was Spring in 2014! It gave me a wry smile to read my opening paragraph;

*“Having just had the wettest January since records began in the 1700’s, February is not looking much better, with more severe storms forecast. With the ground waterlogged our programme of work by our volunteers has been severely restricted. As one walker recently remarked to me – some areas look like the Somme”!*

Weather-wise, not a lot has changed in 11 years; although it is encouraging that the hard work we have put into the fields over this period has made a significant improvement, particularly in relation to the comments about the ground being waterlogged and almost impossible to walk over without your feet being covered in mud.

### Making muddy paths a thing of the past!

The network of paths has made a real difference, together with the improved drainage, which together have resulted and there being far fewer areas where mud is a problem. Recent trials with the HDPE matting laid last summer shows promise and it is expected that over the next 12 months the grass will grow through the mesh, which will ultimately make the plastic mesh invisible from the surface. The grass roots will interlock with the plastic mesh filaments and this helps to protect the grass from damage from heavy footfall. Comparisons have been made with areas with similar footfall and the HDPE matting has made a significant improvement as can be seen from the pictures.

Whilst not everyone may agree with everything that the Trust implements, this solution is widely used for grass reinforcement by



Typical impact of moderate path use showing damage to grass



Area of “reinforced” grass with similar use showing significant benefit of HDPE matting

many organisations including the National Trust and English Heritage. It is interesting to note that in the original Land Management Plan, which was developed after the Trust acquired the fields in 2012, a number of solutions were proposed for the improvement of paths; which included hard surfacing, reinforcement with wood chippings, use of flints – collected from local gardeners and from the fields, and transverse branches laid across the tracks.

All of these solutions were tried mostly with minimal or limited benefit – some - like wood chippings actually compounded the problem as they rotted down.

The optimum solution was the hard surfacing using MoT type 1 scalplings although it was discontinued after the major routes were finished as feedback suggested that such paths were “urbanising” the fields. This resulted in the trial of the HDPE matting.

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## Reviewing the Land Management Plan

A recent resolution at a Trustees meeting was to review the “Land Management Plan”. This is separate from the “Objects of the Trust”, which is enshrined in our Trust Deed.

The “Land Management Plan” incorporates the fundamentals of the Objectives of the Trust and endeavours to maintain the natural character that has been allowed to develop since the land was last farmed. The natural progression in the Widmer Fields since they were used for grazing animals some 60 years ago is from grass to scrub to woodland. Although a wild wood is ideal for some species of plants and animals it greatly reduces the biodiversity and range of activities which people can enjoy. Tappins Meadow (the area of land between the Oak field and Grange Road – opposite the tennis club) illustrates this, as it has been neglected for many years and is practically inaccessible.

Our plan was aimed at maximising public access whilst maintaining a balanced structure of habitats with a range of species of plants and animals within each habitat type. The plan addresses this by:

- ◆ Maintaining some trees and shrubs in a woodland setting.
- ◆ Retaining some meadow grassland with isolated mature trees and copse.
- ◆ Allowing some areas to return to dense undergrowth for the benefit of wildlife.
- ◆ Controlling the edges between these different vegetation types as important habitats for many birds, small mammals and insects.

This plan has been implemented by providing four different zones, separated by the mature trees which bound each zone.

1. The South Field (or Orchard) maintains a predominately grassland meadow with a limited number of trees. An area of this field has been designated “the Orchard” where a number of fruit and nut trees have been planted as Hazlemere and Holmer Green were renowned for their cherry orchards prior to the significant development following the war.
2. The Ash Field to the north has for the most part been left to nature with extensive areas of bramble and blackthorn islands surrounded by rough grassland, with the exception of the “Ash Walk” along the southern boundary.
3. The field to the west of the Ash Field has been allowed to develop into woodland and is populated mainly by oak trees which in the most part have been self-seeded. The grass in this area is mowed to allow better air flow beneath the trees to control the impact of oak powdery mildew which can have an impact on tree growth and in extreme cases can lead to the death of the tree.
4. The small paddock to the North of the Oak Field is also dedicated to wildlife and is also home to a number of beehives.

Overall, we believe that we are maintaining a balance between the demands of the people who use the fields and nature; several years ago many will remember that the Trust was awarded a prestigious Open Spaces Society award which was a remarkable achievement. Never the less we are always open to suggestions and welcome constructive comments from those who use the land and whose generous donations help with funding the upkeep of the land.

## The “Objects of the Trust”

This covers the fundamental purpose of the Trust and includes:

1. To provide and maintain a village green in the Widmer Fields, for informal recreation, leisure time occupations with the object of improving the conditions of life for the inhabitants.
2. To promote for the benefit of the public the conservation, protection and improvement of physical and natural environment.
3. To advance the education of the public, in particular but not exclusively, in the conservation, protection and improvement of the physical and natural environment in and around the area of benefit.

## Tackling the brambles

Over the winter period our volunteers have been continuing with our routine maintenance which has mainly revolved around cutting back the incessant bramble and blackthorn growth around the field margins.



Our newly acquired battery powered hedge trimmer has been a great success, being lighter, quieter and more environmentally friendly than our previous petrol driven machine and much to my surprise the battery life is far better than I had expected, with a fully charged battery easily lasting through a morning's work.

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Other work has involved some tree maintenance, removing some lower branches thereby lifting the crowns of some of the less mature trees, particularly on the Lime trees which were planted in the Spring of 2017, and which have shown significant growth over the last couple of years.

The photographs above in June 2024, compared with May 2017 shows the amazing growth of these trees over the last 7 years.

### Dog walkers: please mind the new sheep

The new tenant of Grange Farm has moved from growing crops to farming animals. Whilst the farmer is in the process of erecting stock proof fencing, I urge all dog owners to take particular care when walking near to our boundaries with Grange farm to ensure that their dogs do not stray into the farmland. Even the most well behaved dogs have a natural instinct to chase another animal.

The sheep are carrying lambs at present, and the result of being chased could result in them losing their lamb, or even worse.

Unfortunately only this week, a generally well behaved dog, attacked and seriously injured a sheep, to the extent of nearly severing one of its legs. Sadly, this resulted in the sheep having to be destroyed. Clearly this caused severe suffering to the sheep, distress to the farmer and dog owner, who no doubt will be faced with a claim for compensation, and potentially a criminal record for allowing it to happen.

So please, please do be extra vigilant when walking dogs near the boundaries with Grange Farm.



Finally it was sad to see one of the majestic ash trees being felled last week following its demise to disease. Unfortunately as it was close to the houses in Shepherds Lane it was necessary to employ a professional tree surgeon to fell the tree, at great expense!



However it will live on as the plan is to use the sections of trunk to create more benches around trees as we have in the past. In fact the trunks on the original bench were beginning to rot, so the first task was to replace them.

### Are you able to help us maintain the Fields?

To volunteer with us, please contact Joanna Davinson:  
[HonorarySecretary@GrangeAreaTrust.org.uk](mailto:HonorarySecretary@GrangeAreaTrust.org.uk)

As most of our work tends to be done on weekdays, newly retired people looking for exercise would be especially welcome.

Training and PPE provided.

### Can't help physically? Can you donate?

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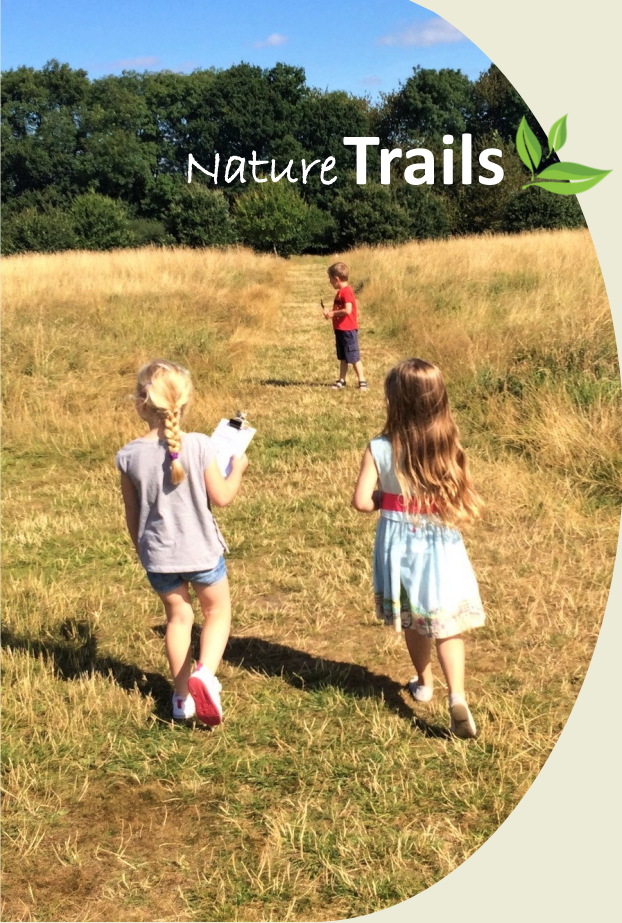
Any donation large or small would be welcomed to help meet our maintenance costs!

You can donate by scanning the QR code, visiting our website (below) or emailing us!

Any comments or suggestions should be passed to Joanna at [HonorarySecretary@grangeareatrust.org.uk](mailto:HonorarySecretary@grangeareatrust.org.uk), who will pass them to your Land Management committee for consideration / implementation.

[www.grangeareatrust.org.uk](http://www.grangeareatrust.org.uk)

# Nature Trails



Did you manage to enjoy the trail around Widmer Fields at Christmas? We got some lovely feedback on our “Christmas Songs Quiz” and are busy planning a trail to keep the kids (and adults!) entertained at Easter too.

## More fun in the fields planned this Easter!

Clues will be posted around the fields on Saturday 5th April and remain in place until Tuesday 22nd April to give you plenty of time to enjoy a spring walk and a bit of brain activity.

Follow our Facebook page for all the details:



“Widmer Fields Holiday Trails”

## Will there be trails in summer?

We'll also be bringing back our weekly trails in the summer holidays. This format is slightly different as the trail is only available on Mondays.

In exchange for a small donation, children are given a trail sheet plus a clipboard to take with them and mark off the clues as they find them. When they return, they get a sticker and a colouring sheet or mini quiz to take away.

The Monday trails are a great way for Grange Area Trust volunteers to meet younger members of the community and their parents, grandparents or carers. Why not mark them on your calendar now so you can be sure to join the fun?

And speaking of calendars, we hope everyone who bought a Widmer Fields calendar for 2025 is enjoying having a lovely picture from the fields to look at every day. We sold a record number of calendars this year, with all profits going towards the upkeep of our beautiful fields.



Thank you again to our fabulous sponsors, including Pip at Widmer End and District Funeral Directors, John and Jasia at Prestwood Property and Steve, Alicia and the team at The Wye Partnership who sponsored January, February and March respectively. Sponsorship makes a big difference to our fundraising.