

# The Common, Winchmore Hill

March 2022-December 2023

## Introduction

Winchmore Hill is a village in Penn Parish, midway between High Wycombe and Amersham, with the Common lying to the west of the main village.



The Common, Winchmore Hill. Wildflower patch after scarifying October 2022. Credit: Chris Beck

Residents in Winchmore Hill had been discussing how to manage the Common differently in order to protect Harebells (*Campanula rotundifolia*) that were growing there and to enhance parts of it for wildlife. After agreeing an area to work on, in November 2021 WHRA purchased and sowed some Yellow Rattle (*Rhinanthus minor*) seed. In early 2022, members of Winchmore Hill Resident's Association (WHRA) contacted the Rough Around the Edges Project Officer for advice on what to do next. As Penn Parish council are the de facto owners and custodians of the common, WHRA sought agreement from them to lead and co-ordinate the project on behalf of the villagers.

## Summary of actions

An initial informal survey showed that there were several wildflower species across the site including Goat's Beard, Common Mouse-ear, Yarrow, Black Medick, Lesser Stitchwort and Field Speedwell. The project that we developed together aimed to reduce the dominant grasses in the selected area and encourage wildflower growth by altering the mowing regime, sowing more Yellow Rattle and wildflower seed, and adding local native wildflower plants to the site. In summer 2022 we had an activity day where families could help plant some wildflower plugs for that year and make a nestbox to take home and put up. In September 2022, the area was cut and the arisings removed, and then scarified before sowing with a wildflower seed mix. Some more yellow rattle was added as well. Over this time, Chris Beck secured funding for a sign

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explaining the management of this part of the Common. We worked on design and text for the new sign which was installed in later in the year. The Common was cut again in early 2023, and the Parish Council engaged the Chiltern Society to scythe the site at the end of the summer, which we hope will be a long-term engagement. There have been regular articles in the Village News about the project. Members of the WHRA worked with the Project Officer to monitor the growth of wildflowers, which they are continuing to do.

The project area is approximately 1,100 square metres (0.11Ha), visible on the ground by the existing footpath and a cut grass boundary of approximately 10 metres.

### Budget

£1000 budget was committed to the group. We spent:  
£250 on nestboxes and interpretation materials  
£435 on wildflower plugs  
£325 on wildflower seed

### Outputs

- Built 8 bat boxes with families
- Held 2 activity days for 25 people
- Planted over 300 wildflower plug plants
- Sowed wildflower seed
- Created a new interpretation board (Veolia funding)

More people now walk through to see what flowers are coming up and it seems people do stop at the interpretation board.



Wild Carrot, Sorrel and Fescues in the first year after scarifying and sowing. Credit: K. Horgan

Although it may take a couple of years for area to develop, the plants coming through have increased. The list below is not comprehensive but these species have been identified on the Common (Latin name in italics):

- Common Mouse-ear     *Cerastium fontanum*
- Goats Beard            *Tragopogon pratensis*
- Common Sorrel         *Rumex acetosa*

- Wild Carrot *Daucus carota*
- Black medick *Medicago lupulina*
- Yarrow *Achillea millefolium*
- Creeping Cinquefoil *Potentilla reptans*
- Creeping Buttercup *Ranunculus repens*
- Meadow Buttercup *Ranunculus acris*
- Ribwort Plantain *Plantago lanceolata*
- Oxeye Daisy *Leucanthemum vulgare*
- Common Daisy *Bellis perennis*
- Ragwort *Senecio jacobaea*
- Devil's-Bit Scabious *Succisa pratense*
- Lesser stitchwort *Stellaria graminea*
- Yellow Rattle *Rhinanthus minor*
- Greater knapweed *Centaurea nigra*
- Rough Hawkbit *Leontodon hispidus*
- Field Speedwell *Veronica persica*
- Hogweed *Heracleum sphondylium*
- Red Campion *Silene dioica*
- Mouse-ear Hawkweed *Pilosella officinarum*
- Harebell *Campanula rotundiflora*
- Red Fescue *Festuca rubra*
- Yorkshire Fog *Holcus lanatus*
- Timothy *Phleum pratense*
- Cocksfoot *Dactylis glomerate*
- Yellow Oat grass *Trisetum flavescens*
- Common Bent *Agrostis capillaris*
- Sedge sp. *Carex sp.*



Harebell, July 2023. Credit: K. Horgan

## Impact on people and wildlife

The list above shows that there has been an increase in wildflowers on the Common, and although we haven't had any formal surveys, it's likely that the increase in wildflowers and the longer grass has benefitted the invertebrates that live there. They will have more places to shelter and more food plants - for example, butterflies need grasses to lay eggs on and for the caterpillars to feed on.

For WHRA, involvement in the project and support from BBOWT helped to give a point of reference for ideas and questions, along with knowledge and enthusiasm. Members of WHRA also felt that they learnt about getting funding and that there is lots of community funding around.

They found the Fun Days also helpful for increasing enthusiasm. As one person said:

*"It was lovely for young people to have it going on and to have the education of returning an area to wild meadow rather than seeding each year with pretty flowers."*

People who were involved felt that it was nice to have support for a variety of activities, and that the project increased contact between some people, for example with the allotments, as people would comment or talk about it.

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Learning about how to create wildflower areas also helped people involved think about small steps and a longer-term approach, which helped them slow down and notice more. One person commented that they now find themselves exploring the area a bit more and having look at what's growing there.

As a result of the project someone else said they started using wildflower identification apps and taking more photos.

One resident commented that they know that being outside improves their mood – there are studies showing that 25 minutes in greenery gives you a lift – so anything that gets people out has to have a positive effect. They felt they were lucky to have the Common on the doorstep. They also said that the project shows how you can bring together and make something happen, and it's a joy to see it.

## Challenges

It was initially difficult to communicate what they wanted to do, partly because of a lack of knowledge in general and also because people had different ideas about what to do after seeing pictures in the media of lovely verges. The group needed to increase their understanding of different kinds of flowers and management and share that with other residents and the Parish Council. It was helpful to have someone external – the Rough Around the Edges Project Officer - as a point of reference and for advice on how to achieve what they wanted.

Another challenge was to achieve this with such a small group - WHRA only have about 10 active members. They feel people are still not that aware at the moment of what they have been doing because it isn't just lots of pretty flowers and they have taken a longer-term view of the management of the Common. Group members emphasized how important it is to talk to and work with others, and that you need a sociable community for success. Especially if it is a long-term project where it might be difficult to maintain enthusiasm for it. It's really important to look after the relationships that have been built.

WHRA have learnt that you really need champions for a successful project – your own and external - and 3-4 people who want to get stuck in.

There was a lot to learn about how to involve people and about the bureaucracy of managing land. WHRA are really grateful for support from the Parish Council.

## Future plans

WHRA are having ongoing discussions on how to manage other areas for wildlife and are looking at choosing some and finding funding for this. They want to see if they can do something different in other locations. The groups want to involve families again – there will be one more planting session on the Common this Spring. Common.