

RAPC 421-20

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

RESOURCES, AUDIT AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE – 2 March 2020

ACQUISITION OF A SMALL MEADOW IN GODSHILL

Report by: Julie Melin-Stubbs, Manager - Wildlife and Conservation Team

Summary: A local family has offered to gift a small meadow in Godshill to the NPA, for the use of the New Forest Land Advice Service (NFLAS), to support and foster the work of the NFLAS team and to protect and enhance the meadow in perpetuity.

Recommendation:

Members recommend to the full Authority that the Authority accept the offer of the gift of the meadow to the New Forest National Park Authority.

1. Introduction

- 1.1. On 8 November 2018, NFLAS was contacted by the landowner in reference to a small meadow in Godshill which he and his family own. The family now live outside the Forest but their grandparents used to live in a cottage adjacent to the land in question and were commoners. Having learnt about the work of the Wildlife and Conservation Team, the family announced that they would like to donate the land to NFLAS.
- 1.2. During November 2018 the Wildlife and Conservation Manager visited the meadow to carry out an initial assessment. The plot is small at less than half an acre in size (0.2ha) and is semi improved. It does not have any Forest rights but it opens directly on to the New Forest SSSI. It is surrounded by fences, hedgerows and trees on all sides. A public footpath runs along the northern boundary, outside the meadow. Access is via a five bar gate.

2. Benefits of acquiring the meadow

- 2.1. The meadow has great potential to be significantly enhanced for nature. This would include the introduction of a number of habitat management techniques to enable the land to support a greater number of species.
- 2.2. It is envisaged that the meadow would be seasonally grazed by a small number of livestock, supporting a local farmer or commoner.
- 2.3. At the same time, it would provide a new site for NFLAS volunteers, offering a social, health, wellbeing and development opportunity.
- 2.4. Any work that cannot be carried out by NFLAS staff and volunteers will support local countryside contractors.
- 2.5. The meadow would be very useful as a demonstration site for NFLAS' land management and wildlife conservation training courses.

3. **Management**

- 3.1. On completion of the acquisition NFLAS would produce a management plan for the site based on nature conservation and land management training. The broad themes anticipated to form the basis of the plan would be:
 - 3.1.1 Enhance botanical interest with appropriate native species and techniques
 - 3.1.2 Reintroduce seasonal, low intensity grazing (in partnership with a young or new commoner)
 - 3.1.3 Create a small scrape/shallow pond to encourage wetland wildlife
 - 3.1.4 Restoration of existing hedgerows (in partnership with neighbours where needed)
 - 3.1.5 Restoration of ditch network (in partnership with neighbours where needed)
 - 3.1.6 Scrub management to benefit birds and invertebrates
 - 3.1.7 Carry out annual surveys and monitoring to assess soils, water, flora and fauna
 - 3.1.8 Use of the meadow as a location for developing the skills of volunteers and course attendees
- 3.2. The draft management plan would be shared with the neighbours and the Parish Council.
- 3.3. The plan would be drafted using all available existing ecological and historical information and data about the site as well as new surveys to be undertaken by NFLAS and NFLAS volunteers.
- 3.4. Memories and historical information held by the landowners would be recorded and used to inform future management.

4. **Resources**

- 4.1. A combination of NFLAS staff and volunteer time would be used to deliver management of the meadow. In the short term to medium term there would be a need to carry out a range of tasks in order to install a grazier, and restore the fences, hedgerows and ditches.
- 4.2. Income and materials brought in to NFLAS via landowner/farmer donations, plus any grants that could be acquired, would be used to acquire any necessary materials and employ contractors.
- 4.3. Income generation opportunities would be limited but might include revenue from running courses and a small annual income from a grazier. Other opportunities would be explored.
- 4.4. In terms of overheads and liabilities, the Authority would need to add the land to its insurance (likely to be c£200 per year) plus arrange valuations for accounting purposes at least every five years (costing approximately £500 a time).

5. **Summary of progress to date**

- 5.1. After the initial offer of the meadow was made, the Wildlife and Conservation Manager first contacted the Hampshire and IOW Wildlife Trust, as partners in NFLAS and owners of a large estate, to see if they would be able to take on the land on behalf of NFLAS. In April 2019 they confirmed that, due to the small size of the meadow and its location in relation to their nature reserves in the New Forest, they would not be able to take on the meadow as a Heritage Asset, rather as a meadow which they could dispose of at a later date if they chose to do so. Knowing that the landowners wanted the land to be protected in perpetuity this option was discounted.

- 5.2. Hampshire County Council's legal team, in consultation with the Authority's solicitor, have undertaken the relevant conveyancing searches over the past year and prepared the documents necessary for the transfer of the land and title with the Land Registry. The Authority are now in a position to execute the documents and proceed to completion of the purchase with the solicitors acting on behalf of the seller should Members be minded to approve the acquisition.

Recommendation:

Members recommend to the full Authority that the Authority accept the offer of the gift of the meadow to the New Forest National Park Authority.

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Papers: **RAPC 421-20** – cover paper
RAPC 421-20 Annex 1 – Location of the meadow
RAPC 421-20 Annex 2 – Photographs of the meadow

Equality Impact Assessment: No impacts have been identified.