

## Great Ayton Floodplain Meadow Creation

Great Ayton Parish Council, in conjunction with its [Brighten Up Great Ayton group](#), are working on a 2-year project to create a floodplain meadow on riverside land behind the old Friends School.

The riverside area below the junior football pitches was originally created as a mill pond. The bund creating the mill pond was removed in the 1950s to develop the pond site into school playing fields for the recreation of pupils of The Friends School. In 2011, the area was adapted to divert and hold flood waters from the river when in spate, therefore reducing the risk of flooding in the village and the area has now become a popular walk for many residents.

Following the development of a [Pollinator Plan for Great Ayton](#) in 2019, the field itself has been identified as a potential '[floodplain meadow](#)' a habitat with a nationally rare plant community. Now plans are underway to protect and improve the area; already in hand are maintenance and improvements to the footpaths, fences, bridge and flood conduits by the Parish Council grounds team. Local expert botanist Martin Allen will guide the Parish Council in the appropriate management of the area, removing invasive non-native weeds (Himalayan Balsam, Fringingcups etc.) and adding other interesting and rare varieties of planting to extend the flowering season through working with the local community. An interpretation board and section on the [Bug Trail website](#) will allow the Brighten Up Great Ayton group to share the area's history and inform the public of its special flora and fauna.



*Potential floodplain meadow behind old Friends School*

Meadows (meaning grassland cut for hay) used to be found on river floodplains in medieval times and it is likely that Great Ayton had some in the old Applebridge Field west of the village as well as smaller amounts upstream to the east. It was usually very productive land, and so valuable, rich in wildflowers and was managed by cutting for hay followed by grazing and then it often flooded over the winter months. After Enclosure occurred in 1658 bunds of earth were placed next to the riverbank to stop the River Leven flooding onto the fields and that land where those floodplain meadows were would have been ploughed too, destroying all the meadow wildflowers.

The project is funded by Great Ayton Parish Council and a grant from the Margaret K. Mawston Environmental Trust with the aim of both increasing the biodiversity within the village and helping to engage and increase the skills and knowledge of local people and visitors with regards to the importance of the floodplain habitat.

Normally an assessment of the soil fertility, water levels, and soil structure would be carried out to assess whether a typical floodplain meadow grassland community was suitable but given that it would be difficult to change much of what is present on site Martin Allen thinks the best option is to attempt an increase in botanical diversity for the site using seed collected from local populations of wildflowers, rather than an exact replica of the published description of a floodplain meadow grassland community. As such it will be important to continue the plant introduction process over a couple of years as not every species we try to add will necessarily spread successfully on site; however, that will give an opportunity for local people to be actively involved in collection and monitoring of the change in biodiversity at the site over a number of years.



*Example of a wildflower rich floodplain meadow at Billingham Bottoms*

## Proposed plan

Year 1 - 2022	Activity	Dates
Early spring	Audit and plan	Early May
Mid spring	Intro walk: plant ID and history of meadow	29 <sup>th</sup> May
Late spring/early summer	Advanced walk: Technical ID of plants	19 <sup>th</sup> June
Late summer	Seed collection Cut and remove hay Seed sowing: scarify, turf removal, community sowing	
Autumn	Information panel	
Autumn	Project webpage	
Year 2 - 2023		
Mid spring	Intro walk - plant ID and history of meadow	
Late spring/early summer	Advanced walk - Technical ID of plants	
Late summer	Seed collection Cut and remove hay Seed sowing: scarify, turf removal, community sowing	
Autumn	Project report	

The walks will start in Waterfall Park at 2pm.

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