

Stoke Holy Cross Parish Council Habitat Management Policy 2024

Management of plant species classified under the Weeds Act 1953 on Jubilee Meadow

In some cases it will be necessary to control certain plants on the Meadow to ensure a balance of species and also to conform to any legal or best practice guidance. This policy specifically addresses the latter.

1. Reference documents used to inform this policy

- Weeds Act 1959
- Ragwort Control Act 2003
- DEFRA Ragwort control 2003 guidance
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/stop-ragwort-and-other-harmful-weeds-from-spreading>
- DEFRA Code of Practice On How To Prevent The Spread of Ragwort (Revised March 2007)
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/code-of-practice-on-how-to-prevent-the-spread-of-ragwort>
- Kent Wildlife Trust “Control of ragwort, thistles and other problem plants”
<https://www.kentwildlifetrust.org.uk/sites/default/files/2018-06/KWT%20Land%20Mgt%20Advice%20Sheet%206%20-%20Control%20of%20ragwort%26other%20problem%20plants.pdf>
- Suffolk Wildlife Trust “Thistle Management and control”
<https://www.suffolkwildlifetrust.org/thistle-management-and-control>

2. Species classified under the Weeds Act 1959

2.1 Creeping & Spear Thistles

Thistles are native species and are immensely valuable to nature. To quote from SWT “Thistles provide a succession of micro-environments and food for a range of birds such as siskin and insects feeding on green leaves, flower heads, dead heads and stems.” However Creeping and Spear Thistle are classified as harmful weeds and we therefore have a responsibility to control the spread. The following control measures are being taken to limit the extent and spread

Creeping thistle rarely propagates itself by seed; the fluffy fruit heads often have no fertile fruits. Instead its root propagation is very effective - fragments of rhizome can remain dormant in the soil for years. We control by cutting and pulling. Timing of cutting is crucial, this should take place just before the flower bud turns purple, as this is when maximum reserves from the thistle roots are being used to produce seed. Cuttings are removed to prevent seed ripening. This is likely to be July depending on weather conditions.

Spear thistle. Digging out or destroying the rosette can be very effective with spear thistles.

2.2 Common Ragwort

Common Ragwort is native and abundant in Britain and Europe and its value to wildlife is significant. It is estimated that 177 species of insect use it as a source of nectar or pollen and 7 species of beetle, 12 species of fly and 8 species of moth feed on it exclusively. The 2003 DEFRA “Code of practise to prevent spread of ragwort” acknowledges its value and states that “This code does not seek to eradicate ragwort. Ragwort, as a native plant, is very important for wildlife in the UK. It supports a wide variety of invertebrates and is a major nectar source for many insects. In many situations ragwort poses no threat to horses and other livestock. It is a natural component of many types of unimproved grassland and is used by some invertebrate species that have conservation needs. However, it is necessary to prevent its spread where this presents a high risk of poisoning horses and livestock or spreading to fields used for the production of forage. A control policy should be put in place where a high and medium risk is identified.”

Paragraph 13 of The Code goes on to define risk levels:

“High risk - ragwort is present and flowering / seeding within 50 metres of land used for grazing by horses/ livestock/ or land is used for feed/ forage.

Medium risk - ragwort is present and flowering/ seeding within 100 metres of land used for grazing by horses/ livestock or land is used for feed/ forage production .

Low Risk - Ragwort or the land on which it is present is more than 100m from land used for grazing by horses and other animals or land used for feed/forage production.

The distances given above are guidelines only and when assessing risk, account should also be taken of particular local circumstances and other relevant factors such as prevailing winds, topography, shelter belts, natural barriers, soil type and vegetation cover of receiving land. Whether or not the density of ragwort is high or low, the risk factor will be determined by the likelihood of it spreading to land used for grazing and/or feed/forage production.”

It is worth noting that Common Ragwort is the subject of considerable misunderstanding and the risks it poses can be exaggerated, for example although Common Ragwort produces a lot of seed it does not disperse widely. For information see

Ragwort: problem plant or scapegoat? | Friends of the Earth

<https://friendsoftheearth.uk/nature/ragwort-problem-plant-or-scapegoat>

Ragwort Facts

<https://ragwortfacts.com/index.html>.

Regardless, we clearly have a responsibility to control Common Ragwort in accordance with government guidance. As far as we are aware, the adjacent farmland is currently used for grazing of cattle and food/forage production and as such has a dense sward. The Meadow is separated physically from the farmland by a mature hedge that is almost 2m high.

Where Ragwort is growing within the 50m 'high risk' zone (see Appendix 1), it is being controlled by manually "pulling out" and disposing in accordance with the required safeguards and by removing flowers before seeding.

2.3 Docks

As well as potentially becoming dominant, Curled and Broad-leaved Docks are classified as harmful weeds and therefore the spread will be controlled by cutting and pulling.

3. Management by Jubilee Meadow Makers

The above information is the legal framework and guidance within which the Meadow Makers manage the Jubilee Meadow on behalf of the Parish Council. The Jubilee Meadow website and Meadow Job Calendar gives a yearly schedule of work including "Selective control of potentially dominant species, "injurious weeds" e.g. thistle and Ragwort or invasive species"

It should be noted that any control measures undertaken will not involve the use of herbicides unless there is no other reasonable alternative. To date we have not resorted to any use of chemicals in the development of management of the Meadow

The Meadow Makers are a group of volunteers who have twice a month working groups to manage the Meadow. The working groups are flexible in terms of work needed to promote and develop a well managed Meadow including management and control of Ragwort, thistles and docks.

Gill Jinkerson (Stoke Holy Cross Parish Council)
and
Dave Jones (Jubilee Meadow Makers)

17th June 2024

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Appendix 1 Jubilee Meadow Common Ragwort Action plan

With reference to the risk levels defined in the Defra Code of Practice, Common Ragwort on the Meadow will be managed in three zones

Google Maps Jubilee Meadow zone 1



Zone 1 high risk: Best endeavours will be used to control Common Ragwort through pulling and/or removing flower heads. The extent of Ragwort will be monitored on an on-going basis. Disposal of waste on site beyond the high risk zone

Google Maps Jubilee Meadow zone 2



Zone 2 medium risk: The extent of Common Ragwort will be monitored. If the amount present appears to be significantly increasing and/or it is likely to spread into zone 1 control measures will be employed

Zone 3 low risk: No action will be taken to control unless it is considered necessary for other reasons such as maintaining a balance of species in the area