Site Visit Assessment Form – Aldwincle Field 1, Northamptonshire



Site Name	Grid Ref	County		
Aldwincle Field 1	TL018820	Northamptonshire		
River	Ownership	Designation Size (ha)		
Nene	Lillford Estate	Local	4.12	
	(Society of	Wildlife Site		
	Merchant			
	Ventures)			
Date	Meeting with	Managed by		
22 June 2017	Matt Johnson and	Tim Hankins		
	Tim Hankins Plus			
	Pete Stroh (BSBI).			
	David Gowing,			
	Emma Rothero			
	and Irina			
	Tatarenko			
Management and History				
Agri environment agreement				

Fields went into Countryside Stewardship in early 1990's under an arable reversion scheme. Had 2 lots of 10 year blocks of CS and are now in the 5<sup>th</sup> year of an HLS agreement.

Trees were planted in the middle of field in 1999 (cricket bat willows). Grow in 9-13 years, but not done so well in this field. Do better along the river bank. Objective in this field is for birds. Have visiting snipe and curlew are in the area. Also reed warblers, barn owls etc.

### **Current management**

Cut and aftermath grazed every other year, otherwise is grazed (aftermath grazing till November, aiming for about 2 inches of grass to be left). If cut, gets mown 15<sup>th</sup> July onwards, and grazed till November. If grazed cattle are put on after 15<sup>th</sup> May till November. Don't cut for hay among the trees.

#### Restoration

# Technique used/Dates

Initially left land to regenerate naturally then took hay bales from adjacent meadow. Hay was cut (mid-July) and stored, then spread in October of the same year. Greened up quite quickly, and sheep were grazed. Topped with a tractor to control docks. For two years in a row put hay on from adjacent field, letting sheep spread it around. Since then field has been cut and aftermath grazed every other year, otherwise is grazed (aftermath grazing till November, aiming for about 2 inches of grass to be left).

# Hydrology

Flooding regime
Water management
Soil-water levels (indicated by auger hole/any other data)

Meadows grow well through the summer which suggests some GW irrigation. The site does flood regularly, but water doesn't sit long enough on site to result in grass kill. Controlled river levels on the Nene might help. Ditches all around the site tend to be the main drainage path. Landowner thinks water moves off quite quickly.

#### **Historical information**

This field was historically a meadow, but was then ploughed and cropped. The landowner took over the farm in 1982 (ish) and tried to crop it for a couple of years (spring rape/wheat) but flooding was a problem.

#### **Current site interest**

Donor site has lower soil fertility but higher wetness and pH than any of three restoration fields. Very high abundance of Yorkshire fog *Holcus lanatus* on the donor field doesn't occur on Alwincle 1 field where creeping bent grass *Agrostis stolonifera* substantially dominates over other species across most of the field. The presence of Yorkshire fog *Holcus lanatus* and other species related to MG4 *Holcus lanatus* subcommunity have led to a reasonably high score in MAVIS for this community (53.95%). However, the top score (56%) belongs to MG15a - *Alopecurus pratensis-Poa trivialis-Cardamine pratensis* grassland, *Agrostis stolonifera* subcommunity.

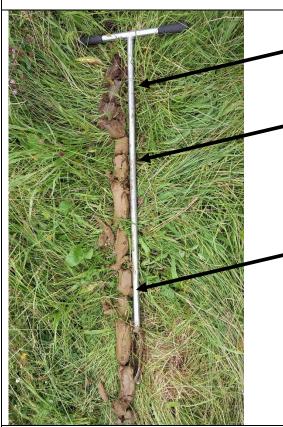
In general, vegetation on the field is quite uneven. The area next to the double line of trees across the meadow, where no hay cut is taken, is shaded and dominated by very large tussocks of tufted hair grass *Deschampsia caespitosa* over 1 m tall and hard rush *Juncus inflexus*, again over 1 m tall and 2 m wide. These make it almost inaccessible for grazing animals; there are many docks. Areas away from the trees are very grassy, with patches of couch grass *Elytrigia repens*, rough-stalked meadow grass *Poa trivialis*, wavy hair grass *Deschampsia caespitosa*, and an overall dominance of creeping bent grass *Agrostis stolonifera*. The area is relatively species poor (7-10 species per 1 sq m). Vegetation on a narrow strip along the river is more diverse with up to 19 species on quadrat 119 (see the map). A small area of typical meadow species was noticed in the corner of q 121. In this area creeping buttercup *Ranunculus repens* dominated, but there were also species such as yellow oat-grass *Trisethum flavescens*, ragged robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi* and Timothy grass *Phleum pratense*, suggesting the drainage and soil structure were effective in this area of the field.

Surveyed in 2015 by Wildlife Trust (Matt Johnson) and 2008 (Wildlife Trust) but after the hay cut

# **Phosphorus levels**

Not known

## Soil profiles



#### Soil profile from Quadrat 116

A horizon

0-20 cm, active root zone, plenty of organic matter

B horizon

20-40 cm Silty clay, river deposit. Pale clay, uniform distribution of organic material

50 cm grey clay. Indicates that water table sits at 40-50 cm.

50 cm-120 cm. Grey clay, permanently waterlogged

# Site manager aspirations/objectives

Deliver agri environment agreement

#### Management recommendations

For a more species rich meadow, annual cutting works more effectively. At the moment, the areas under *Deschampsia caespitosa* and *Juncus inflexus* are not suitable even for grazing. Keep drains well maintained. If a species rich meadow is an objective, then a change in management and consideration of further green hay spreading may be sensible. The soil-water levels in the area of the auger suggested that the water sits at about the right height for a more species rich meadow.

	Aldwincle			
	Field 1	Field 2	Field 3	
Ellenberg F (moisture	5.8	5.44	5.72	
tolerance)				
Ellenberg N	5.6	4.96	5.56	
(fertility)				
Ellenberg R	6.4	6.12	6.04	
(Reaction)				
Species/quadrat	10.7	16.3	13.5	
(mean and range				
/1 m x 1 m)				
NVC (top 2 MAVIS	MG15a	MG6a	MG4b	
subcommunities)	MG4c	MG6d	MG4v2	