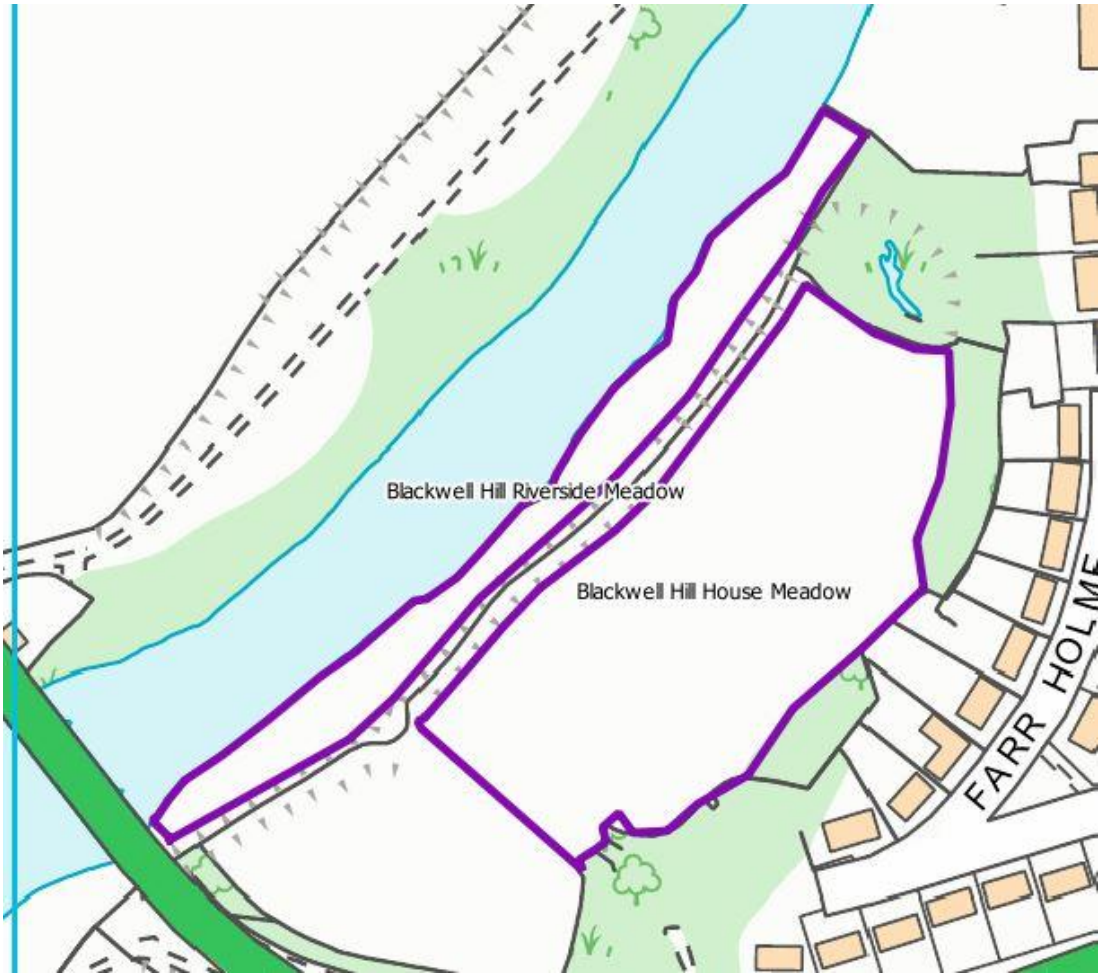
**Site Visit Assessment Form Blackwell Hill Meadow (House and Riverside Meadows), Durham**




| **Site Name**<br>Blackwell Hill Meadow | **Grid Ref**<br>House Meadow NZ272 126<br>Riverside Meadow NZ272 127 | **County**<br>Durham | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **River**<br>Tees | **Ownership**<br>Blackwell Hill Community Trust (Moansey Ltd) | **Designation**<br>None | **Size (ha)**<br>4.305 |
| **Date**<br>17th July 2018 | **Meeting with**<br>David Youldon and Michael Hall (residents), Carole Subkowiak, Elizabeth Elliot, Jill Cunningham, Donald Griss and John Turner (Field Club) | **Managed by**<br>Moansey Ltd, who are contracting hay cut. | |
| **Management and History** | | | |
| **Agri environment agreement** | | | |
| Not currently, but are looking at applying for Stewardship to help with fencing and restoration costs. | | | |

**Current management**

Have just cut the site (17th July), but left the arisings.
Management is patchy, no regular hay cut and no grazing, as fence is damaged.
In recent years, grazing has stopped and site has deteriorated, becoming unmanaged.

**Restoration**

Technique used/Dates

Establish a more regular pattern of annual hay cuts, following on from abandonment and amenity cutting.

Hope to supplement with additional seeds and plug plants.

| **Hydrology** | Site occasionally floods in extreme rainfall events, but the floodbank prevents water in general from overland flooding, and even on the riverside of the floodbank, there is not much flooding. The land opposite is lower lying and tends to take more of the flood flow. There is an old pond and possibly back drain that historically took water from the bottom of the bank out to the river. River levels are controlled by reservoirs upstream (Cow Green) and a barrage further downstream. |
|---|---|
| Flooding regime<br>Water management<br>Soil-water levels (indicated by auger hole/any other data) | |

**Historical information**

The Moansey Ltd company is the group of owners of houses in Farr Holme at the top of the bank. Each home owner has a few shares of the land, to be managed as amenity for the local residents and for wildlife.

Was used as a golf practise range for some years (late 1990's-early 2000's). Not sure how was managed at that point, but likely to have been cut fairly regularly through the season (weekly?). Not thought to have been re-seeded.
Pre-2003 it was left unmanaged.
From 1972 was grazed until 1985-ish then probably cut for amenity purposes

| **Current site interest** | Attach excel spreadsheet for botanical data |
|---|---|

Riverside meadow is a long and narrow space between the tree-lined river bank on one side and the floodbank on the other side. As a result of shading, the meadow contains some plant species which are more characteristic of floodplain woodlands including ground elder *Aegopodium podagraria*, and Lesser burdock *Arctium minus*. Nettle *Urtica dioica* is also present. Meadow vegetation is also affected by invasive species including giant hogweed *Heracleum mantegazzianum* and Himalayan balsalm *Impatiense glandulifera*. Large patches of cock's-foot Dactylis glomerata, false oat-grass *Arrenatherum elatius* and hogweed *Heracleum sphondylium* are typically found on well-drained, drier soils, a reflection of the sandy substrate here.

The House Meadow represents a small, nice piece of typical floodplain landscape with a seepage of ground water along the bottom of the slope at the back where

some wet-loving species including hairy sedge *Carex hirta* and common spike-rush *Eleocharis palustris* were found. In the corner of the meadow where the seepage is the most prominent, and/or the historic pond was possibly located, there is a large patch of southern giant horsetail *Equisetum telmateia* a species that requires constant ground water. In the soil profile taken in the middle of this patch, mottling was observed at a depth of 100 cm. It indicates the depth where ground water regularly sits even though the soil is very sandy. Well drained sandy soil was also found in the soil profile in the middle of the meadow. The top soil is very deep, 40 cm, forming a uniform layer of organic-rich and well-structured sandy clay. The clear borderline between this top layer and the deeper, poorly structured and infertile layer (40 to 80 cm) probably indicates a change of management, which allowed the long-term formation of the fertile and undisturbed soil on top.

| **Phosphorus levels** | Soil analysis shows relatively low P (Index 1/2) |
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**Soil profiles**

**SP1**

0 - 40 cm Very uniform sandy clay, enriched with organic matter

40 - 80 cm Sandy clay, pale-grey, very infertile

80 - 120 cm Dark-grey sandy loam with silt

100 cm A level where some iron comes up into the soil profile in small amount

Some small stones along the profile

**SP2**

0 - 10 cm slightly organic silty loam/clay/sand

10 – 100 cm sand with some silt

100 cm evidence of mottling

100 – 120 cm - sand

**Site manager aspirations/objectives**

Species rich meadow and a haven for wildlife

**Management recommendations**

Annual hay cut making sure that arising are removed. This is essential. If arising are left on the ground, they will increase the soil fertility and prevent any seedlings from germinating.

In 2-3 years' time after regular hay cuts (end June) with possible second hay cuts (September, depending on the season), consider sowing seed and/or plug plants to increase diversity if not already happening without. Ensure there are sufficient bare patches (there was plenty of bare patches under the thatch currently without having to create more, but a judgement will need to be made when ready to supplement with seeds).