

Proposal by the Kingston Nature Recovery Group (KNRG) to KPC for changes in land management practices to enhance biodiversity in the parish.

1 Background

1.1 Following the **“Nature Recovery Opportunities in the parish of Kingston near Lewes”** Report (May’23), the Kingston Nature Recovery Group (KNRG, a working group reporting to Kingston Parish Council) was established in June’23 to develop and support plans for nature recovery within the Parish. The report highlighted the opportunities and recommended **“allowing sections of the grassland areas to grow, and introducing more diverse habitats in the Greens, the verges, and in gardens, in conjunction with recreation and people & nature areas”**. The report was welcomed and approved by the Parish Council in June’23.

1.2 This paper to KPC from KNRG provides an overview of the recommended actions to enhance the biodiversity of land owned by the Parish Council itself, as well as land owned by other statutory local authorities, over which, KPC has an influence on its management. Increasing the areas of wildflowers and longer grass in the village will support more butterflies, bees and other pollinators.

The proposed initiatives tie in with similar activities in Lewes, such as [The Lewes Mosaic Project](#), and Brighton, such as [Greening the Cities](#) and [Wilder Verges](#). These projects are improving management of green spaces to benefit wildlife and biodiversity, as well as bringing the wildflowers of the South Downs into towns to provide vital habitat stepping-stones in more urban environments. Importantly, they are also starting a conversation with residents about the local environment and heritage by bringing the Downs to their doorstep.

The Kingston Priorities Statement Community Survey in November 2023 showed that 76% of respondents felt “A biodiverse place that is rich in wildlife and connected to outlying local wildlife sites” was a high (4 & 5) priority. 55% of respondents gave a high priority to “Support for the promotion of Nature Recovery and bio-diversity on St Pancras Green, provided any activity is not irreversible or impinges on the playing of team games “ (**however this question was confused on the questionnaire as it mistakenly referred to the Pavilion not St Pancras Green, this was a missed opportunity to clearly find out what respondents thought – fact check**)

1.3 The KPC owns the Village Green, most of St Pancras Green and the verges in The Avenue except for those east of Lockitt Way (which are owned by East Sussex County Council (ESCC)). It also owns the tracks known locally and unofficially as Fox Twitten and Bumpy Lane. Fox Twitten, a bridleway, connects Bumpy Lane with Lockitt Way. Bumpy Lane, part of which is also a bridleway, runs from Mushroom Field to Ashcombe Lane. As the KPC Parish Clerk has very recently confirmed with ESCC, it is responsible for ensuring that these paths are clear to a minimum width of four metres. Beyond that, the Council is content to leave management to the KPC.

All other verges in the village are owned by ESCC. Lewes District Council (LDC) owns the green at Snednore and the former allotments at Gow’s Croft. One of these allotments is unused. The other is currently rented from LDC by the Kingston Action Group (AG) and is being transformed into a Community Wildlife Garden. Land around the church, including a small section of St Pancras Green is owned by the Parochial Church Council (PCC).

1.4 The Action Group's creation of meadow areas on the Village Green from 2020 onwards has - anecdotally at least - proved popular. Many people in the community are increasingly aware of and interested in biodiversity issues. The Kingston Wildlife WhatsApp Group established last year already has 96 members.

1.5 At the KPC meeting on 13th September'23 a proposal to create a wildflower area (based on that recommended and detailed in **Nature Recovery Opportunities in the parish of Kingston near Lewes** see annex) on St Pancras Green was approved on a much smaller scale than originally proposed. This was in recognition of the need for more detailed consideration and consultation to ensure views from all sections of the community could be taken into consideration.

1.6 This document is a proposal for:

- Actions for changes in the management of various green spaces owned by KPC and other authorities.
- Actions to increase the biodiversity of St Pancras Green.
- A possible community consultation process for gaining further views on increasing the biodiversity of St Pancras Green and other KPC land.

1.7 Elsewhere in the village, the Kingston Action Group (AG) will continue to use its own resources to expand existing planting programmes including those of snowdrops on The Avenue and The Street, wildflowers around the tennis court, primroses elsewhere and a variety of plants on the Community Wildlife Garden.

1.8 Surveys of the flora and fauna of the parish are being planned, including the Pavilion green roof. This will perhaps to be undertaken freely by experts in the village. This was suggested by the latest judge in the Parishes in Bloom competition, who was very impressed not only by the green roof but by many of the other measures the village has already taken to enhance biodiversity. (Kingston has again been awarded a gold certificate).

2 KPC's Environmental Policy

2.1 In May 2021 KPC agreed an **Environmental Policy and Action Plan**. This most welcome step committed the Council to "manage the land we own to minimise environmental pollution and....**to promote biodiversity**". The Council also committed itself to reviewing the contracts for managing the Village and St Pancras Greens to see what improvements might be made. As far as we are aware, a review has not yet taken place and it is therefore overdue.

3. Proposals for Future Management

3.1 There is scope for changes in the management of much of the land owned by the Parish Council, as well as land owned by other statutory local authorities over which the KPC has an influence over management practices to increase its biodiversity.

4. Current management and proposed changes

4.1 Village Green

The Village Greens primary uses are recreation and children's play. Grass at the Village Green is closely mown, except for two areas managed by the AG since 2020 where wildflower meadows have been established. Here the grass is cut only in autumn and removed by the AG. This change in management has resulted in an explosion of colour on the Green and in summer 2023 many butterflies, as well as ladybirds, spiders, grasshoppers, and other invertebrates were recorded where there were virtually none previously. As late in the year as early October, 17 species of plants were still recorded in flower. The AG has also planted hedges on the Green, notably along the western side. This hedge, adjoining the newly installed zip wire, has been underplanted with bulbs and primroses. Anecdotally these changes have been seen as very positive by the Village Green users and have not restricted the other activities which take place on the green.



Photo 1:

Turf cutting on the Village Green to show pre-planting ground preparation



Photo 2:

Village Green summer 2023

Proposed change for 2024

Non for 2024. The AG will continue with the current management regime and continue to monitor the results in terms of species diversity and abundance.

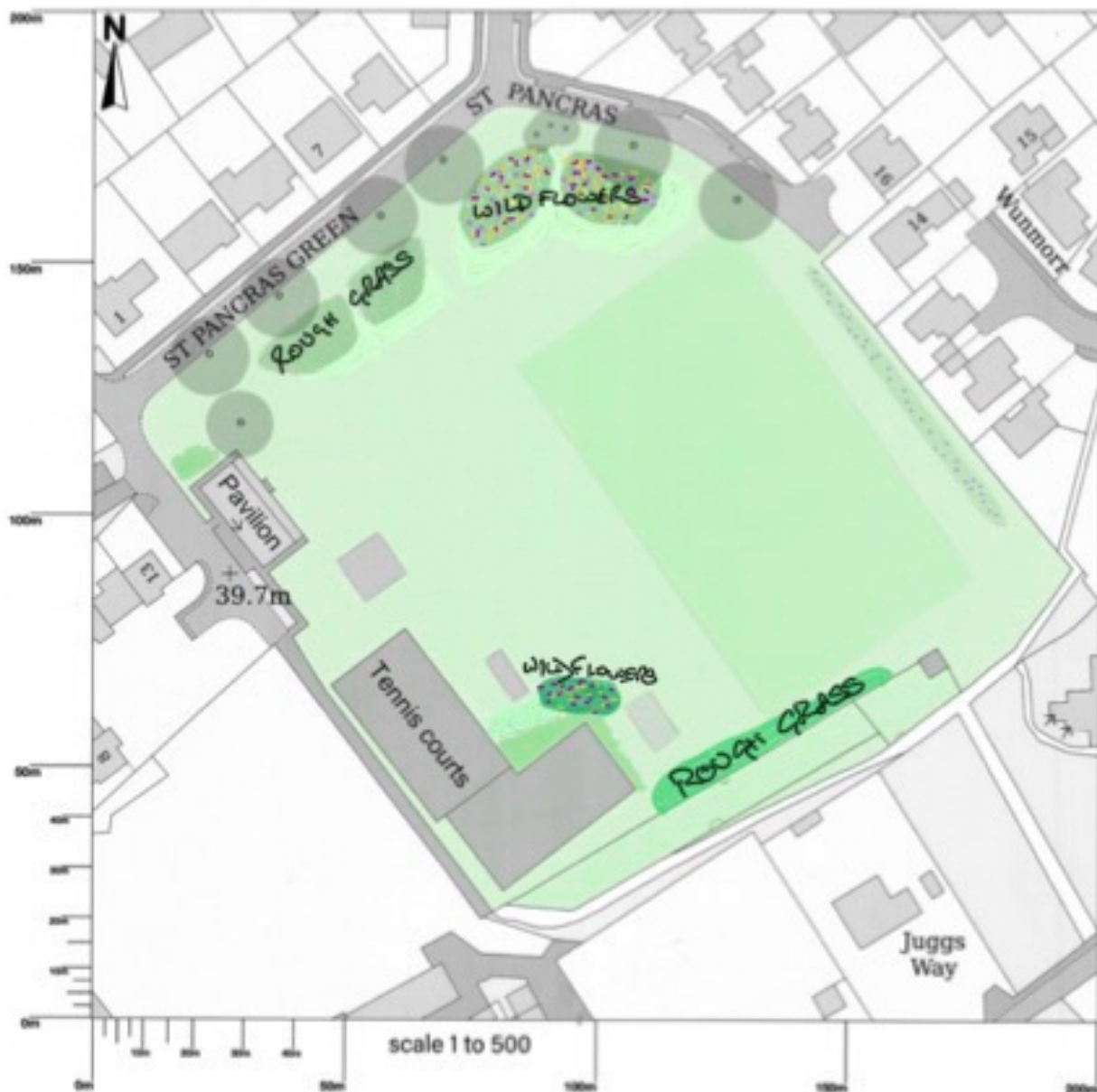
4.2 St Pancras Green.

St Pancras Green is a much larger recreation field with a football pitch and other sports equipment, its primary purpose is sport and recreation. The following proposals are to enhance the biodiversity without compromising its primary use and is in line with changing ideas about land management across the country. Most of St Pancras Green is close-clipped rye grass, cut at frequent intervals throughout the summer. It is of relatively low wildlife value. The small area of woodland on the church side of this Green – which has three separate owners – is effectively unmanaged other than when broken branches or fallen trees block the bridleway which runs along that side. Some of the area next to the lower tennis court has been planted with bulbs by the AG and sown with a wildflower mix. The AG has also planted bulbs around The Pavilion and beneath some of the trees. Between the two tennis courts is a large, unmanaged patch of nettles and bramble, excellent for nesting birds like dunnoek, wren, and robin. The green roof of The Pavilion is undoubtedly useful to a variety of wildlife. In September 2023 KPC approved a new triangular patch of wildflowers next to the new sports equipment and a 1m wide strip of spring bulbs on the NE border of the green.

Proposal for implementation from 2024 onwards subject to approval

- Create 2 additional new wildflower patches on the green (ensuring wide paths between and a network of smaller paths within). This would involve stripping the turf and sowing wildflower seed in autumn or early spring. This work would be undertaken by members of the AG.
- Trial 2 patches of uncut grass. This would involve leaving the patches unmown from early spring until mid-August (or just prior to the village fete if that is sooner).
- Reducing the frequency of cut of the green, except for the football pitch, its immediate surround, around the new sports equipment and paths across the green. Cuts to be reduced from 16 per year to 12 in 2024 as a trial. The football pitch, paths etc will continue to be cut at the current frequency of 16 cuts per year. One of the full cuts (except for the wildflower patches) to be timed for just prior to the village fete.
- Leaving a 2-3m wide strip unmowed along the SE boundary by the woodland area. Paths to still be mowed through any usual access points. This wild edge of longer grass will assist with flood and water management on the SE boundary preventing muddy standing water collecting. The strip would provide a more connected wildlife corridor with some flowering plants, and taller grasses which are valuable resource for wildlife.
- Early flowering spring bulbs to be planted under the trees at the northern end of the green (snowdrops and crocus tommasinianus), mowing to commence once they have finished.

The proposed altered management regime is not intended to compromise the prime use of St Pancras Green which will remain an area for sports, games and recreation. All the above changes are reversible, and it is proposed they are undertaken on a trial basis



4.3 The **banked verge on the western side of Ashcombe Lane**, below the Village Green, was designated by English Nature (one of the predecessor bodies of Natural England) at least **30** years ago as a wildflower verge, presumably in recognition of its large colony of Cuckoo Flower, food plant of the Orange Tip butterfly. The AG has planted scores of wild primroses along this bank, nearer to The Street.

Proposed change for 2024

The number of Cuckoo flowers is declining. This is likely to be the result of a combination of factors including increased shading, drying conditions and poor verge management. The verge is owned by ESCC. The Parish Clerk has been in contact with ESCC to seek discussions on how to improve management. This will include

- Removing lower branches of some of the trees now shading out the bank.
- Changes to the cutting regime and ensuring that cuttings are collected.
- Relocating inappropriate spring flowers such as daffodils.

4.4 **Verges in The Avenue** are, by tradition, managed by householders rather than the KPC. Some householders have effectively annexed the KPC-owned verges, incorporating them into their own front gardens, action apparently never challenged by the Council. Many of The Avenue's verges have been planted with snowdrops by the AG, with the approval of householders, some of whom have added a variety of other bulbs. Most of the grass verges are kept short by householders or their contractors. When The Avenue was established in the 1920s, apple trees were planted in each of its verges. While just a small handful of these ancient trees now survives, the AG has filled some of the gaps left by the deaths of the original trees with new trees, all of them old Sussex varieties. The trees concerned were paid for either by the AG itself or, more recently, by KPC.

Proposed change for 2024

- Future ancient apple trees which die to be left standing as deadwood provided they have been made safe
- Additional apple trees to be planted in verges where the householder agrees
- Householders to be asked by the KPC to ensure that they or their contractors do not inadvertently damage the young apple trees when using mowers or strimmer's. The Action Group will protect these trees with tree guards.
- Additional snowdrops in some verges (where householders agree) to be planted in February.

4.5 There has been little or no planting in either **Bumpy Lane or Fox Twitten** so the vegetation there is largely adventitious, an exception being laurel trees planted without KPC permission outside the house adjoining Ashcombe Lane. Other vegetation is managed by KPC contractors.

Proposed changes for 2024

- Some spring-flowering bulbs to be planted in October and some autumn flowering Cyclamen to be planted in Spring. (There are Cyclamen there already)
- Some **small** shrubs, selected for their value to wildlife, to be planted in autumn

4.6 There are **grass verges on some of the roads in the estate** – Lockitt Way, Monckton Way, St Pancras Green, Cordons and Bramleys. Although these are managed by ESCC contractors, many householders have assumed responsibility themselves and several verges have been extensively planted with bulbs and others with wildflowers. Other householders have, in recent years, been happy merely to allow the grass to grow unchecked. There are some birch trees in the verges, all planted by ESCC when the estate was built. However, ESCC's current policy excludes tree planting on verges altogether while, officially at least, any form of planting at all requires a cultivation licence from ESCC as well as the agreement of all affected householders. The KPC has recently agreed a new management regime with ESCC under which the verges are cut far less frequently.

Proposed changes for 2024

- KPC to consider taking over the management of the verges from ESCC
- If this is impractical or too expensive, KPC to ask ESCC to reduce the frequency with which verges are cut to twice a year
- KPC to ask ESCC to allow householders to plant spring bulbs in verges without a cultivation licence. Householders to be informed of the outcome.
- AG to continue to pursue options with ESCC that would allow new tree planting.

4.7 The **former allotment** at the junction of The Street and Gow's Croft is now managed by the AG as a Community Wildlife Garden. The AG has spent about £2000 here on plants including trees, bulbs, climbers and other perennials, most of them selected for their wildlife value.

Proposed change for 2024

No changes are proposed for this area beyond expanding the current range of planting and making the site more appealing to visitors

4.8 The **green at Snednore**, managed by LDC, has been planted with around 12,000 crocus by the Action Group over the last six or seven years. At the request of the AG, LDC has postponed cutting the grass in the spring to allow the crocus plants time to die back.

Proposed change for 2024

If Action Group funds allow, more crocus bulbs will be planted here in the autumn.

4.9 Many of the **verges in Ashcombe Lane and Wellgreen Lane** have been planted with bulbs either by the AG or householders. Most of these are daffodils and of little wildlife value but there are also extensive plantings of snowdrops.

Proposed change for 2024

None, beyond the possibility of additional planting of primroses along the eastern part of the bank between Ashcombe Lane and the Village Green.

4.10 The **bridleway linking The Street and St Pancras Green** (ownership unknown but believed to be shared between the Parochial Church Council (PCC) and the former owners of the house in The Street known as Juggs Way) has been actively, if intermittently, managed by the AG for some ten years. Here - among the nettles and brambles - there are primroses, hemp agrimony, alliums, teasel and ivy – all of them especially attractive to wildlife.

Proposed change for 2024

None.

4.11 Some areas of the **churchyard** are intensively managed while in other areas the grass is left uncut for the summer. The large area of ivy here is of enormous value to bees, butterflies and hoverflies, especially in late summer and early autumn, as well as nesting and sheltering wrens.

Proposed change for 2024

The KNRG will be contacting the PCC separately to discuss their future management plans for this whole area of land.

4.12 Most of the few **verges in The Street** are too narrow and too liable to be damaged by parked vehicles to be of any interest but there are two exceptions in the upper part of that road. The area opposite the three cottages (Friars Cottage and Nos 7 & 8, The Street) has been planted by a householder with a variety of bulbs and perennials while the verge at the very end of the road outside Kingston Manor is full of snowdrops planted by the AG, as is the area opposite. The Street is also notable for its array of colourful native and exotic wildflowers which have established themselves in various pavement cracks and hollows. Species include Hollyhock, Hemp Agrimony, Red Valerian, Cow Parsley, Ivy-leaved Toadflax and others.

Proposed change for 2024

None

5. Costs and Funding

The proposals could be accomplished by spending well under the £6000 which the KPC has already notionally allocated to the Action Group for the financial years 2023/24 and 2024/25. It is therefore proposed that these funds are used for this purpose.

6. Possible consultation process / options if required.

If it is felt necessary by KPC we propose a consultation process to take place between May and July 2024 to solicit the community's opinions on the changes to date and to understand attitudes to further increasing biodiversity as proposed for implementation from autumn 2024.

- Create a very short survey (five questions max) to be distributed as widely as possible in village.
- Survey to be carried out from mid-May to end June 2024 (to be approved at the May 2024 Council meeting).
- Survey to be completed and results collated in time to be presented for discussion at the July 2024 KPC meeting. Prior to the survey being administered the Parish Council should agree what results would constitute support or not for further biodiversity proposals.

It is suggested the survey could be advertised and administered in one, some or all of the following ways:

- Highlighted in the June edition of The Kingston News. To include a copy of survey with a range of options for returning it as a hard copy and QR code so it can be downloaded to phone for completion.
- An agenda item at the Village meeting in June. An opportunity for questions and debate. Survey forms available to complete
- Survey form advertised three times on Kingston massive WhatsApp group and available to complete on phone.
- Survey form made available on the KPC website
- Village noticeboards, pub and other venues to have a notice informing villagers of survey and explaining how to get a copy to complete.

Annex 1 Nature Recovery Opportunities in the parish of Kingston Report proposal

PROPOSAL FOR
St Pancras Green

Sports pitch: The whole area will largely remain unchanged and be used as it is now, for sports and dog walking throughout the year.



Wild boundary: In autumn the whole green will be cut, but an uncut wild boundary will remain along the tree line, which will improve soil drainage and provide woodland edge habitats.



People & nature zone: In spring and summer, the sports pitch zone will be maintained, and paths will be mowed in the 'people and nature recreation zone' to encourage access and provide areas for recreation, otherwise the grass will be left to grow.



Wilder gardens: Wildlife friendly gardens can support greater connectivity between the Green and throughout the village, helping animals like hedgehogs and bees.



St Pancras Green is the largest public green space in the village (1.5ha), but also the most homogenous, with mostly mown lawn. There is the potential to diversify the use to introduce more nature to aid more human-nature connection in the spring and summer while still maintaining its recreational uses. Here we propose a zoning approach as illustrated by the map and associated images.

