

Annual Report of Friends of Castle Pulverbatch 2021/22

Due to the ongoing Covid pandemic 2021 the activities of the Friends of Castle Pulverbatch were once again somewhat constrained. It was not possible to organise larger activity days so the maintenance of the site has fallen onto a smaller core group of people. However as that smaller group has become more experienced the major task of the annual grass cutting has become more efficient.

Flatter areas of the site are cut by our small mowing machine and the banks mostly by scythe. The once a year later summer cut and the removal of arisings seems to be benefiting wildflowers, and good populations of invertebrates are seen. Some ranker areas are cut a bit more often, and some previously loose areas of bank have been stabilised by gradual establishment of a grass turf through cutting and spreading hay on them. In 2021 an area of the better grass was made into hay using traditional hand methods and was utilised by a local horse owner. The low key cutting that we do definitely helps the condition of the site for its value for heritage, wildlife and people.

On the Wokkon the focus has been on low key management, mainly gradual improvements to the circular path including new steps and some levelling where there are difficult cross slopes. The path is more accessible now to people with a wider range of mobility. We have also coppiced a couple of hazel stools in the woods low down, the first of which grew back 2m the next season. This helps the diversity of habitat and allows more light in for plants for a while. More recently there has had to be some clearance of trees that were brought down on the paths by the series of storms along with repairs to steps and fences. The bluebells continue to provide a beautiful display in the spring, and the grass margins now established along the upper path also have lots of wildflowers.

Around 150 native trees and shrubs have been planted in the last two years over both sites and these are being maintained. The best oaks are now 2m tall but still require mesh tubes to protect them from browsing by deer and as physical protection from the vigorous bracken which can swamp them.

The Knapp especially is very well used by visitors, who often comment on their appreciation of how it is looked after. There are occasionally minor problems with inappropriate use, but most people respect and value the place. As the site is already being well used the Friends have decided there is no need for the additional promotion of a brown tourist sign as previously suggested.

Financially the group still operates at a loss although the agreed future increase in grant from the council should help with that. A lot of minor expenses such as fuel and maintenance consumables are donated by members of the group. If any councillor would like to see our annual accounts please ask.

The group has provided a valuable way for some local people to get together, enjoy themselves outside while getting exercise, and do something worthwhile for the community.