



Bepton Parish Council

By Email Only

October 2023

Dear Sirs

**Cowdray Home Farm
Countryside Side Stewardship**

We write to notify you of works our Farm team will be undertaking over the next 3 winters in the Bepton area under our Countryside Stewardship Scheme (CSS)

CSS is a scheme administered by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) which supports farmers, foresters and land managers to make positive changes to maintain and improve land for the environment.

CSS is a series of Options that farmers can choose from to apply to their land; these Options range from grazing parcels of land at the right time, planting buffer strips next to water courses, to planting over winter cover crops to protect the soil. There are also a series of capital options for things like tree planting, hedge laying and school visits.

Our Farm entered a Higher-Tier CSS at the start of 2023; a Higher-Tier is the most demanding level of the Scheme and must be supported by Natural England. We were delighted to have been accepted on to the Scheme.

As part of this Scheme and our wider environmental aims, we are going to be restoring hedges through laying and coppicing; and restoring and creating ponds.

Hedges are vital in the landscape and provide multiple benefits to the environment. However, after a period of time, they do need intervention as they can become over tall and turn in to lines of trees at which point they start to lose the majority of environmental and habitat benefits. There is some excellent information regarding the importance of hedgerows and their lifecycle on the Hedgeline website which explains things much better than we can in this letter <https://hedgeline.org.uk/guidance/>

Again, with ponds they are a vital refuge for a diverse mix of species throughout the year. The official guidance in the CSS directs us to the Fresh Water Habitats website which too has excellent explanations of the importance of ponds. <https://freshwaterhabitats.org.uk/>

As mentioned above, we have Options on several hedges and ponds in the Bepton area that require our intervention to restore them back to a good hedge. There are two techniques for restoring a hedge: the first is the laying of a hedge which is exactly as it says; laying the existing hedge over to promote new growth; the second technique is coppicing. Following a meeting with two local expert hedge layers, it was decided that the best technique for several hedges



was to coppice them; this is a process of cutting the existing hedge off at ground level and removing it entirely which stimulates multiple smaller stems to grow in its place. Hedges grow back within a couple of years much thicker and full of flowers, nuts and seeds.

Whilst the works are consented by Natural England and will be undertaken in accordance with all statutory requirements, we appreciate that the act of coppicing is a significant intervention. We are therefore keen that the community is aware in advance of both the works and the reasoning for them being undertaken in such a way.

With the ponds in the area, they have become shaded by trees with many growing out of the pond itself. Following the Fresh Water Habitats and Natural England guidance, we will be removing $\frac{3}{4}$ of the trees from around the ponds, especially on the southern side to let more light in which will in turn reinvigorate life into the pond.

We attach a plan showing the primary locations where we will be undertaking hedging coppicing and tree removal work associated with the restoration of the ponds.

As well as the hedge coppicing and pond restoration, we will be planting 6-metre-wide margins of flowers around many of the fields; these are seed mixes which are designed to flower in the summer to benefit pollinators and provide food in the form of seeds and berries deep into the winter.

Having worked to design the Scheme on paper for 18 months, we are all excited to see the positive impact the Options will make to local wildlife.

If you have any questions, then please do not hesitate to get in contact on the details below.

Your faithfully

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