

When to mow

Frequent heavy mowing over the years has taken a toll on the wildlife of our commons: the plants and animals we once had in Shamley Green have been unable for so long to complete their life cycles that only a small number of the more resilient species are left. If we are to reverse the decline, as a start we need to mow less often.

Grasslands can't just be left without management or they would quickly become scrub and then woodland, so we do need to mow (or have sheep or cows doing the job for us). But when? Hay meadows are cut in midsummer, which gives many early plants the opportunity to flower and set seed and means the grass doesn't get too long and is easier to deal with, but is disastrous for the animals living there. A later cut would be much better for them, but even August or September is too early for some.

So, in the areas which are big enough and not needed for the fete and for cricket, we are going to try an October mowing: this will be far better for those invertebrates that lay their eggs in the long grass in August, such as grasshoppers, to reach adulthood. A later mowing will help amphibians as well, especially the juveniles, which can still be about when the weather is mild, and long grass will also give cover to small mammals like voles, which in turn will provide food for birds like kestrels and owls.

Some invertebrates require two years to reach adulthood, so we are also recommending a trial of biennial mowing in two small areas, and you will see notices there explaining what we are doing.