To mow, or not to mow…..

In 2020 the Shamley Green Environment Group was asked to advise the parish council about how they could manage our common land in an environmentally friendly way, so we asked an expert in wild flower meadows, Prof James Hitchmough, for his advice.

Buttercups on Duck Pond Green

He observed that we had a very depleted plant population on our greens, simply because of the long history of intensive mowing. Of course this will have knock-on effects for the whole ecosystem, starting with our insects on which so much else depends: insects everywhere are in a worrying decline, and many of us have witnessed this ourselves – once upon a time on a long motorway journey in the summer your windscreen would be absolutely splattered with flying insects, but that doesn't happen now does it - very worrying!

Farming practices have been a huge culprit in the decline, but farmers now are planting wildflower areas to try and redress the balance, thousands of miles of road verges are also being allowed to flower, and we can do our bit too by mowing our village greens less. So although some people will take a while to get used to a more natural look we have come up with a patchwork of mowing regimes depending on how the various greens are used. Areas like the cricket green, playground, and around the duck pond are mown regularly, as are the road verges in the village for safety, but other areas are being cut only once a year to enable the plants there to flower and produce seed and to provide shelter for lots of small animals like mice, voles and amphibians. Importantly, by leaving the cut until October, some animals like grasshoppers are enabled to complete long and complicated life cycles to reach adulthood.

If you go to our website www.shamleygreenenvironment.co.uk you can see the latest mowing plans, and there is also a survey of insects which was carried out by Scotty Dodd in 2021: we'll be getting him back this year to see if there are any changes.

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