

Off-Site Biodiversity Net Gain at Whirley Fold Farm



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Introduction

Whirley Fold Farm is a well-located landholding to the north-west of Macclesfield, within the borough of Cheshire East, and close to the borders of Staffordshire and Derbyshire. The surrounding habitat is largely agricultural.

The site is currently comprised of 10.3ha of poor, modified grassland that is currently used for grazing or as a hay crop.

Based on the original surveys and the landowners enthusiasm to create high quality habitats, it is foreseen that up to 43.15 BNG units are available to purchase on this site.



Figure 01: Sub-Regional Context (LandApp 2023)



The BNG Opportunity

The site comprises of species-poor modified grassland which has been used for grazing or as a hay crop. It consists of a few palatable grasses due to it's agricultural use.

The general principle of the habitat enhancement will be to turn the site from poor condition modified grassland, into a more species-rich 'moderate' condition neutral grassland. To achieve this, an Emorsgate EM4 General Purpose Meadow Mixture will be used.



Figure 02: Farm Setting (Aerial Imagery Google 2023)



Figure 03: Recent photograph of Whirley Fold Farm



Management Tasks

Prior to sowing the seed mix, the ground will be cultivated. Weeds will be removed by hand or spot treated with herbicide. Following this the soil will then be harrowed or raked to provide a medium tilth then rolled. The seed will then be sown in Autumn/Spring in compliance with the manufacturers specifications at a density of 4g/m² /40kg/ha. The seeds will be 'firmed' in and have good contact with the soil but not covered.

It is expected in the first year following sowing that the slower-growing grasses and weed species will establish first. This will be controlled by carrying out regular monthly cuts during the growing season.

Once established, the grassland will be subject to a traditional meadow cut which consists of a summer hay cut in late July/August once species have had opportunity to flower and set seed. The grass will be cut down to 50mm and arisings left for a week to set seed and dry before removal.

A second cut will also be taken in later Autumn (September/October). The second cut in each year will either be undertaken with machinery and arisings removed or with low-density beef cattle grazing between September and October, which would then be removed over-winter.

Annual management between years 2 - 30 will also include the hand digging of undesirable species such as docks to maintain their coverage below 5%. The frequency of cutting will also be dictated by monitoring in early years 1 - 5; should weed species be more prevalent than anticipated, more regular monthly cuts will be taken to control their coverage and encourage the slower-growing perennials to grow. The frequency of mowing will be decided by a Suitably Qualified Ecologist (SQE).

