

# Friends of Batchelors Farm

Welcome to the Friends of Batchelors Farm. Some of you will have walked across the meadows of Batchelors Farm with family or friends, or dogs. Others may be interested in the wildlife of the



*Spindle Berries*

area and want to see it preserved. If you have been there recently, you will have seen that the leaves on the trees have yellowed and fallen. There are still some dark sloe berries and you may have noticed the bright pink and orange berries of the spindle tree. Be careful of these, as they are poisonous, although birds can eat them.

Burgess Hill Town Council, which owns Batchelors Farm, manages the area for informal recreation and nature conservation. However it is not formally designated as a nature reserve. There are good reasons for wanting it to have that designation. In its position at the southern edge of Burgess Hill, Batchelors Farm forms part of the green wedge between the town and the villages of Hassocks and Ditchling. It is also a key part of the Burgess Hill Green Circle and is very popular with local people. The

importance of places like this has become more obvious as a result of the pandemic. Walking, running or cycling in the open air have been among the few activities which people can do easily.

The grassland has been managed as hay meadows, and the hedgerows have grown thick, with a variety of species of bushes and trees. There are many mature oaks which, as well as being beautiful, are ecologically important. The area round the stream has been planted with black poplar and willows, and some of the vegetation has grown to form a rich wetland area. Several uncommon species of animals and plants have been seen on Batchelors Farm and, in 2018 the eggs of the brown hairstreak butterfly were found on the reserve. This is a national conservation priority species.

The community orchard in the south western corner was planted by the Friends of Burgess Hill Green Crescent. Unfortunately, planting was carried out when the ground was waterlogged, followed by a very dry summer, and some of the trees died.



*A 300 year old Oak Tree*



*View of existing Community Orchard*

An ecologist, Kate Ryland of Dolphin Ecological Surveys, recently visited Batchelors Farm and drew up a Management Plan for 2020 to 2025. She made a number of recommendations, some of which could involve volunteers.

- a small-scale project could be carried out, using green hay from the orchard area's flowery grassland to promote spread of wild flowers into the main meadows.
- a new community orchard should be created which has easy access for visitors but ideally without dogs being encouraged into it. Oak saplings growing in the existing orchard could be moved.
- It would be very useful to compile an inventory of the veteran and mature trees at Batchelors Farm.
- Visitors to the site should be encouraged to report their wildlife sightings at Batchelors Farm via the iRecord website/app (<https://www.brc.ac.uk/irecord/>).
- Monitoring activities should focus on: plant diversity in the meadows, the egg-laying success of brown hairstreak butterflies, and the development of grassland/hedgerow edge habitat structure .
- It is strongly recommended that BHTC should give Batchelors Farm formal recognition as a Local Nature Reserve (LNR).

The ecologist also recommended setting up a Friends of Batchelors Farm Group, and we have been keen to do this. However, Mid Sussex District Council has not delegated the power to set up local nature reserves to town and parish councils, so we have asked them to give Batchelors Farm that status. We will keep you posted.

17 November 2020

Councillors Janice Henwood and Sylvia Neumann