

## Carham Parish Walks

### **Farm Walk at West Learmouth 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2022**

Those who happened to be passing along the lanes to the west of West Learmouth Farm this summer would have seen the spectacular display of wild flowers in the surrounding fields – these are part of the process to convert arable land into regenerative pasture by West Learmouth Farm, the location of our latest farm walk in the Parish.



The 850 acre farm - now run by Jasmin Moore, who led the walk - has been in the family since 1903, and was traditionally a mixed farm of arable and livestock. The farm converted to organic status at the start of this year. Trees have been planted on permanent grass fields and all 687 acres of arable land will have been sown with various organic mixes of legumes, grasses and flowers by the end of September, providing more biodiversity and improving wildlife habitat. This programme is managed under the DEFRA Higher Stewardship scheme, with support from Natural England and the RSPB. In a radical move, Jasmin has managed to obtain unprecedented funding for the whole farm, not just, for example, tree planting or wildlife corners.

A large group of 23 participants met at the farm, attesting to the high level of interest being shown in organic farming and changing farming methods. We set off through a low-lying area flanked by mature trees - this is an area of 11 acres recently planted mostly with oak and beech in addition to a mixture of minor species to improve resilience, diversity, shelter and appearance - including rowan, hazel, aspen, alder, hawthorn and birch. The oak plants were grown from acorns collected from Dundock Wood at the Hirsell; all other species are of local seed origin.



1

The total area of tree-planting on the farm covers 89 acres, with 54,760 new trees planted. Unfortunately, due to the very dry weather this year there have been quite a few losses, but these will be replaced. A question was asked about the plastic tree guards used; they are a problem if left indefinitely. Jasmin is hoping to get student volunteers to help in removing them at the end of their useful life.



This area follows Willow Burn - attractive with watercress, mint and brooklime - which runs through the farm; planks were provided to cross the burn - some of us did not expect the terrain to be quite so rugged - luckily, only the dog fell in!

We continued our route south along a concrete farm track between hedges – under the Stewardship Scheme a third of the total can be cut each year in rotation between the 1<sup>st</sup> January to 28<sup>th</sup> February or 1<sup>st</sup> September to 31<sup>st</sup> December - and paused at the first example of one of the organic regenerative seed mixes on the route, a legume and herb rich sward, sown in April with 16 species, including fescues, ryegrass, clovers, lucerne, birdsfoot trefoil, chicory and yarrow. This mix is very nutritious for grazing and different regimes are being considered to manage the pasture ensuring that the more competitive grasses don't outcompete other species.

While the land is undergoing organic conversion, a two-year process, it can be grazed by non - organic stock for 120 days. Two flocks of lambs from a farm near Galashiels, where there is little grass due to the summer drought, have been on the farm since the 21<sup>st</sup> August.

Passing the highest, exposed part of the farm, which had been planted by machine using the forestry technique of hinge-mounding - considered more environmentally friendly - with a mixture of Oak, Beech, Hazel, Silver Birch and Scots Pine, and surrounded by a deer fence, we continued through a field of stubble left after harvesting oats which were originally sown in September 2020. The next field we traversed was last sown with wheat in 2020 and had been topped. Both fields will be sown in the next few weeks to organic seed mixes.

There will be no arable cropping carried out at West Learmouth for the duration of the Countryside Stewardship scheme which runs from 01/01/22 – 31/12/2026. The plan is to allow the newly sown organic pastures to remain undisturbed, giving the soil time to repair itself after years of intensive farming. What comes next is uncertain.

Promising research is currently being carried out into the development of perennial arable crops which means the seed is sown once and following crops are self-seeding. This reduces the need for soil flora and fauna to be annually inverted and destroyed over years. If successfully bred, these new species could be used in the future at West Learmouth.

The route continued alongside the public bridleway known as the Lonnen, or Piperdean Lane – several of us bemoaned the fact that it is overgrown during the summer months, and that such a lovely old track, if it was more accessible, could be the highlight of the parish right of way network! Old thorn trees along the hedge line could be replaced - the fence here had been removed, along with the fences on the rest of the farm, all 26km to be replaced under the Stewardship scheme.

From the Pressen road we passed a field with another organic mix of grasses and clovers, (see appendix) supplied by Hurrell and Mclean Seeds Ltd of Driffield. The species planted have been selected because of their suitability for existing soil conditions and topography. Wetland areas around Willow Burn provide another valuable habitat. Unfortunately, some low-density tree planting was carried out in this area several years ago, before the farm prioritised conservation. A close eye will be kept on the area. (See next page)



2

Along the Sunilaws road there are several fields sown with two variations of flower-rich seed mixes; we looked at one based on low-growing grasses such as creeping red, and chewings fescue, and although wildflowers formed only 5% of the mix, there were 20+ species - they looked spectacular when in full flower (see photo at beginning of report). This mix is less nutritious than the legume and herb mix, but nevertheless grazing possibilities are being explored. Careful management, probably a combination of grazing and topping, will be required to ensure the persistence of a rich and varied pasture.

Having converted to an organic system fairly recently, Jasmin said that these planting programmes are experimental; as with any change of direction there is an element of trial and error involved! Future diversification plans include some sites on the farm being made available to self-contained campervans (already begun), and development of farm buildings into accommodation for walkers, particularly as there are ambitious plans to create a long-distance path along the river Tweed which will traverse West Learmouth along the disused Berwick to Kelso railway line.

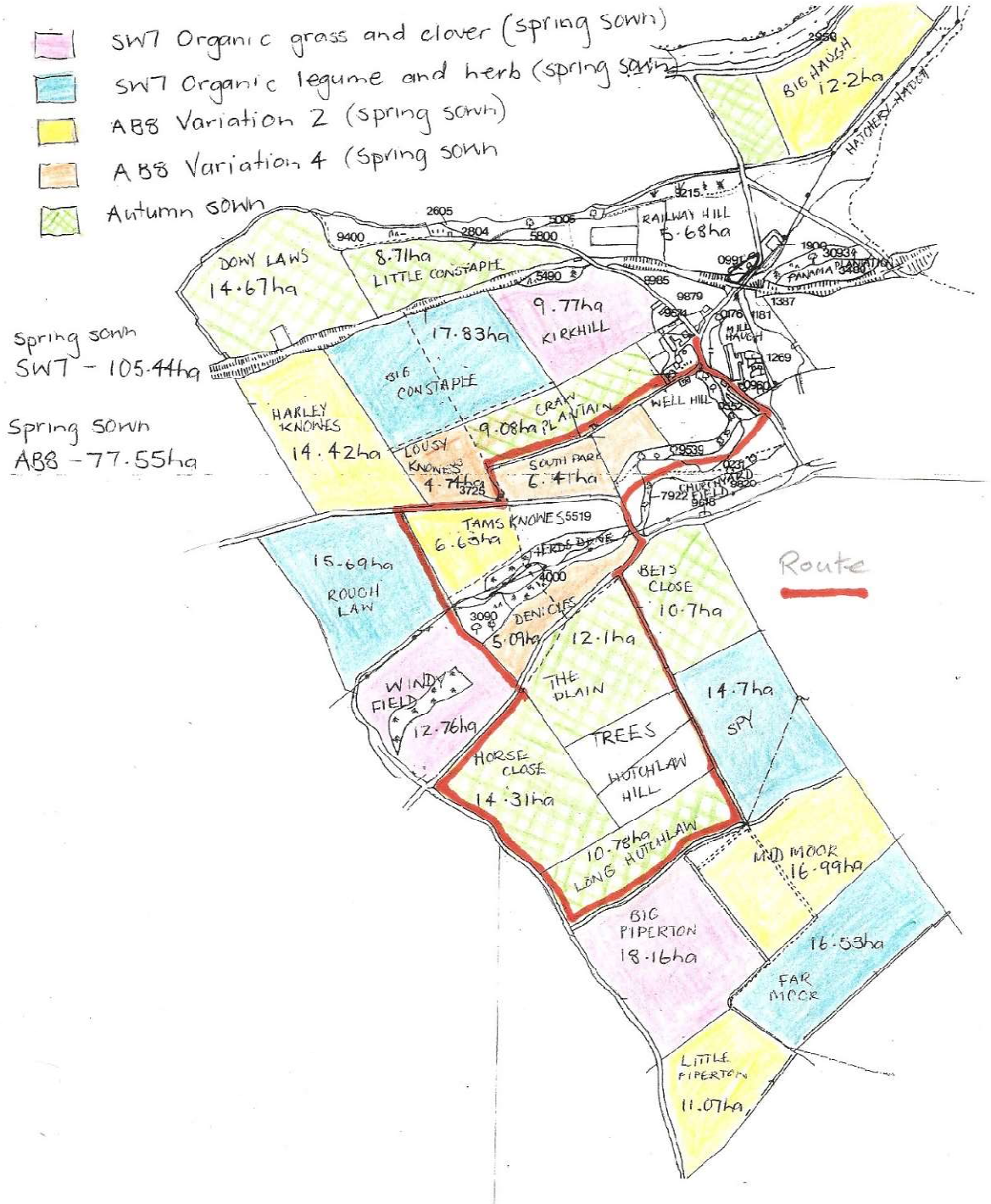
Thank you to Jasmin and all at the farm for a fascinating and enjoyable walk - we shall follow this exciting project with interest!

Extra thanks also to Jasmin for clarifying facts, and adding detail and substance to this report.

Stephen Brown (Images of Farming) - Photos 1 and 2

Appendix: Pages 5 – 7, Farm Plan and Organic Seed Mixes

# West Learmouth Farm Plan – Organic Seed Mixes



## **SW7 ORGANIC LEGUME AND HERB RICH SWARD**

Kgs

2.00	ORG Premium Perennial Ryegrass Int Dip
2.00	ORG Toddington Perennial Ryegrass Late Dip
1.10	ORG Swante Cocksfoot
1.00	Cosmolit Meadow Fescue
1.00	ORG Ragnar Timothy
0.90	ORG Harmonie Red Clover
0.60	ORG Lucerne
0.50	ORG Swaj Tall Fescue
0.50	Sheeps Burnet
0.40	Birdsfoot Trefoil
0.40	Alsike Clover
0.40	Sheeps Parsley
0.40	Tonic Plantain
0.30	ORG Rozeta Red Clover
0.30	Choice Chicory
0.20	Yarrow

12.00 Kgs

## **SW7 ORGANIC GRASS AND CLOVER**

Kgs

3.5	ORG Toddington Ryegrass Late
3.25	ORG Premium Ryegrass Int
2.00	ORG Reverent Strong Creeping Red Fescue
1.50	ORG Swante Cocksfoot
1.00	Litherald Meadow Fescue
1.00	Comer Timothy
0.50	Merwi White Clover (medium)
0.25	Perseus Festulolium
0.25	Altaswede Red Clover
0.25	Alsike Clover
0.25	Rivendel White Clover (small)
0.25	Birdsfoot Trefoil

14 Kgs

## **AB8 ORGANIC FLOWER RICH SEED MIX**

### **VARIATION 2**

60% ORG Strong Creeping Red Fescue  
10% Chewings Fescue  
9% Hard Fescue  
6% Smooth Stalked Meadow Grass  
5% ORG Timothy  
5% ORG Lucerne  
5% AP2 Eco Wildflower Mixture (20+ Wildflowers)

### **VARIATION 4**

48% ORG Strong Creeping Red Fescue  
10% ORG Meadow Fescue  
10% Chewings Fescue  
10% Hard Fescue  
5% ORG Timothy  
5% ORG Lucerne  
5% AP2 Eco Wildflower Mixture  
2% ORG Red Clover  
2% Common Bentgrass  
2% Sheeps Burnet  
1% Musk Mallow