

Minutes of a meeting of Bucklebury Commoner Association Committee held at the Victory Room, Bucklebury on Monday 24th April 2023 at 6:30pm

Present: Jason Allum (Chair); Alasdair Jones-Perrott; Teresa Jennings; Jerry Kent; David Southgate (Secretary)

Apologies: None.

Introductions: Conducted

Brief on the next Scope of Works - Time Frame and details:

Alasdair provided a summary of the future scope of works (more details in Annex 1). The intent remains as per the published plan to restore the common to heathland with a greater level of management to create a greater level of biodiversity. The Silver Birch and Holly had arrived through a lack of management of the common.

Heathland restoration (LH2)

To create a relatively treeless area of open heath from birch and oak woodland. Retain existing heathland vegetation where possible. Retain feature trees and small clumps of trees. Remove all other trees, including their stumps, leaving patches of a textured bare gravel surface suitable for heather regeneration.

Wood Pasture creation (WD2)

To create a more open woodland with clearings and rides, and to 'halo' veteran trees, and future veteran trees. Veteran trees are sensitive to sudden changes, so it is recommended to only clear a short distance from tree in the first few years.

Wetland tree clearance (part of WD2)

Remove the trees from areas of wet ground to create good conditions for vegetation regeneration.

Bucklebury Estates (BE) were working with Natural England (NE) on the countryside stewardship agenda to begin Jan 2024 and all parties were keen to get on with it with applications having been submitted by the end of April. The aim is to create heathland and woodland pasture.

Regrowth of Heathland will be positively managed with a supporting rotational burning fire plan during October. The ground works will use mechanical restoration but will be limited from September to February to protect the ground nesting birds. Fringe woodland will be removed and the boundaries ditched /banked to stop vehicular access. The aim will be to create a mosaic habitat. Elsewhere gorse will be managed using a rear swipe. Scrapes & ponds will be created.

Belted Galloway empty cows will be reintroduced in small numbers to help change the monoculture of the heathland. These will be managed using a no fence system

as any alternative would require Secretary of State Approval. A Scandinavian system will be used based upon GPS where the livestock are initially conditioned on grass. As the heathland is poor quality the animals will also need supplementary feeding and water initially.

Mature trees will be left on the heathland to provide diversity and avoid a scorched earth approach. The current heathland is the most significant in the AONB and will be expanded significantly.

Clearly where livestock are deployed dogs will need to be controlled.

The aim is to open up the common in all areas except Holly Wood. There will be tree felling as a result and discussion is ongoing with Wessex Woodland and the Forestry Commission for a felling licence. The majority will be silver birch where all material will be removed from the site and potentially chipped for biopower production. The existing carpark areas are likely to be used as loading sites and the clearance is likely to be done in one year. BPC should be contacted as part of any clearance but this does not seem to have happened for the recent Redhill clearance.

Clearance will move from Redhill, to Littlefence Wood, Lodge, Scotlands, Westwood, Headscott and then Carbinswood.

The issue of communication from BE to the wider community was raised by the BCA regarding recent changes to the common and a more proactive approach was encouraged. BE were considering visual easels but will also look to wider community forums including the Parish Council, Bucklebury Community and NWN.

Situation with gates and fencing:

The gates & limited fencing have been installed to replace the concrete blocks and Heras fencing employed by WBC to enforce the TROs. In future the gates will be locked in winter. More gates will be added as required.

The cycleway is being used with limited felling and surface damage however the weather was not good during the installation. Sally Jennings is the WBC Rights of Way Officer.

Again the point was made by the BCA that better communications before construction started by BE would have reduced the level of concern raised when construction began unannounced. People forget what was briefed out months earlier as part of a general brief.

Proposed TREC use of the Common:

BE and BCA were not aware of the detail of the TREC plans. Consent for use of the common was given at Christmas by BE. Further discussion would be had by BE with the organisers to minimise the impact on sensitive areas on the common and protect footpaths.

Slade Ponds and proposed new sites:

The nature of the pond clearances need to be communicated such that all can understand the condition of the pond post remediation. The purpose of the partial clearance is to maximise the value to wildlife habitat and ecology rather than aesthetics.

Allotments and Greens:

There are several areas of allotments on the common with many on a historic longstanding turnip a year rental agreement and some areas now being abandoned. Access to such land is limited, usage unclear in places and demand in the common is believed to be high. It was agreed that BE and BCA would review usage at the next meeting which is proposed as a mobile tour of such amenities. The will include The Slade, Turners Green, Miles Green, The Avenue and any other areas identified by BE or the BCA. BE had concerns over encroachment onto Common Land, are looking to ensure that the allotments are enhancing the local environment and will review the regulation of these areas.

AOB:

Dogs on Leads

In accordance with the CROW Act 2000. (The Countryside and Rights of Way Act)... it's the UK Law..

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-countryside-code/the-countryside-code-advice-for-countryside-visitors>

TRO

BCA raised the desire to encourage WBC to exclude all motorised vehicles in future TROs as conducted on the Ridgeway.

Carparks

BE are looking to reduce where cars can pull off and open up the approved areas to improve safety on the common to access the proposed circular routes. Westrop Green is seen as the example to follow. Other areas such as Fishponds, Commons Road x 2, Fanny's Lane & Ramsey Corner will change. BE have concerns over the use of the Briff Lane carpark.

Stewardship Scheme

Many of the local landowners in the parish have signed up to the stewardship scheme.

Pillow mounds

West Berks Countryside Society volunteers conserving the pillow mounds on 18th May 23 – Tony McDonald

Next Meeting:

June/July TBC

Annex 1

Bucklebury Common

Capital works specifications

Client: Bucklebury Estate

Date: April 2023

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1 Heathland restoration (LH2)

1.1 Aim

To create a relatively treeless area of open heath from birch and oak woodland. Retain existing heathland vegetation where possible. Retain feature trees and small clumps of trees. Remove all other trees, including their stumps, leaving patches of a textured bare gravel surface suitable for heather regeneration.

1.2 Specification

Three areas

1. All trees within the defined boundary, except those marked by the site manager, are to be felled and their stumps removed using a root fork or similar. Stumps are not to be mulched or ground out.
2. All timber, roots, and brash are to be processed and removed from site.
3. Burning in not permitted.
4. The contractor is responsible for all site health and safety, and environmental protection (oil spills etc).
5. Areas of historic significance, eg boundary banks, mounds etc, are to be protected and avoided when using heavy machinery.
6. Low ground pressure tyres and tracks must be used.
7. Access routes and stacking areas will be agreed with the site manager in advance. These must be made good at the end of the job.

2 Wood Pasture creation (WD2)

2.1 Aim

To create a more open woodland with clearings and rides, and to 'halo' veteran trees, and future veteran trees. Veteran trees are sensitive to sudden changes, so it is recommended to only clear a short distance from tree in the first few years.

2.2 Specification – haloing

Trees across the common

1. Fell all trees 5m beyond the drip line of the identified veteran (or future veteran) trees.
2. Protect the veteran tree from damage by machinery, including its roots.

2.3 Specification – clearing creation

Clearings across the common

1. Fell all trees to create a 25m x 25m clearing
2. Apply an appropriate herbicide to the cut stumps, either by painting or using ecoplugs (or similar).
3. Remove timber off site where practical, stack brash and any remaining timber in the surrounding woodland.

3 Wetland tree clearance (part of WD2)

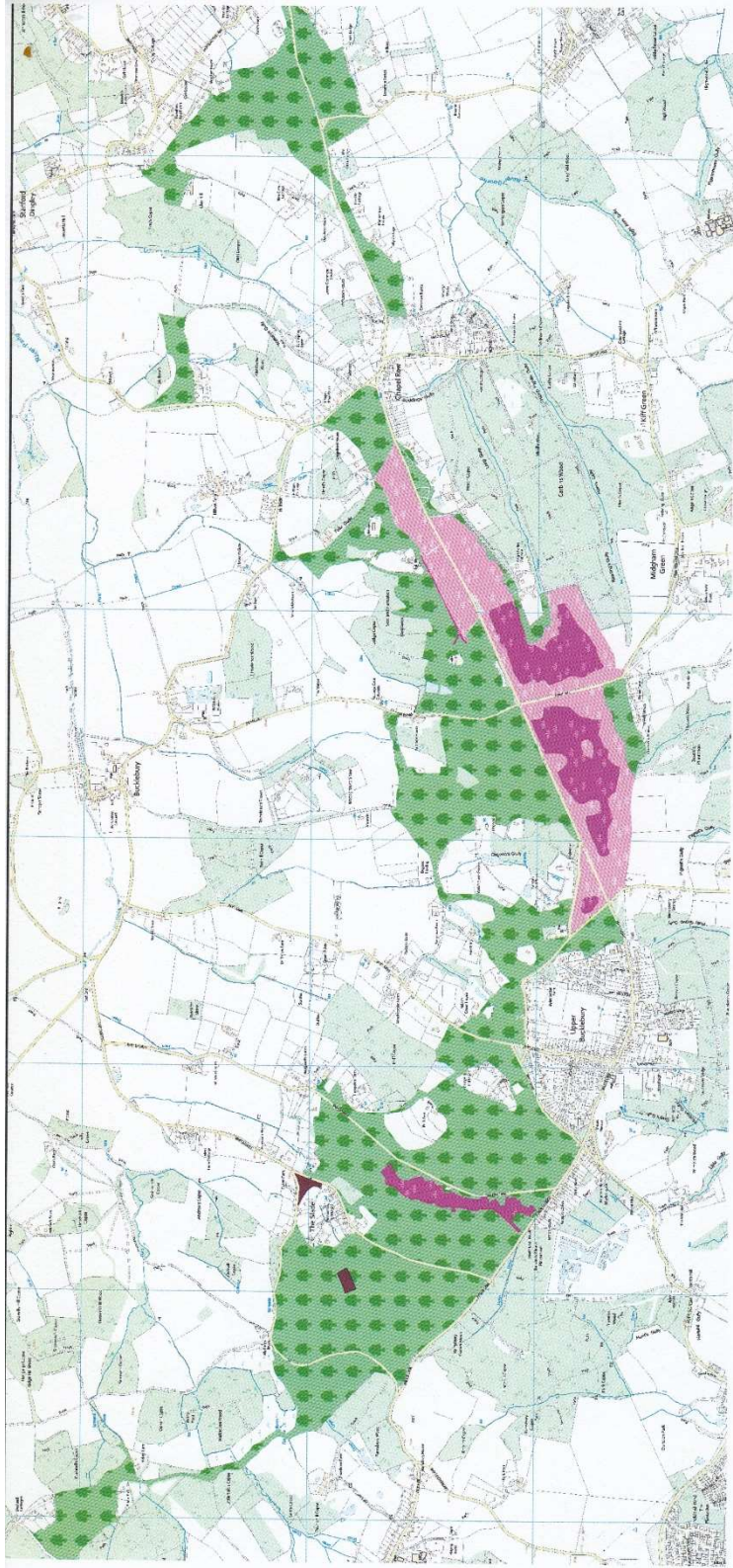
3.1 Aim

Remove the trees from areas of wet ground to create good conditions for vegetation regeneration.

3.2 Specification

Patches across the common.

1. Fell all trees to within the identified wetland area, except those marked.
2. Do not damage the ground conditions with inappropriate use of vehicles.
3. Remove timber off site where practical, stack brash and any remaining timber in the surrounding woodland.



CS Higher Tier

- new open heath (LH2)
- open heath (LH1)
- species rich grass (GS7)
- wood pasture (WD6)

Map title

Proposed Countryside Stewardship Options

Project Name

Bucklebury Common
Countryside Stewardship -
Higher Tier

1:25,000

Date

21/04/2023

Author

Alex Cruickshank

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