



A Management Plan for **BUCKLEBURY COMMON**

Introduction

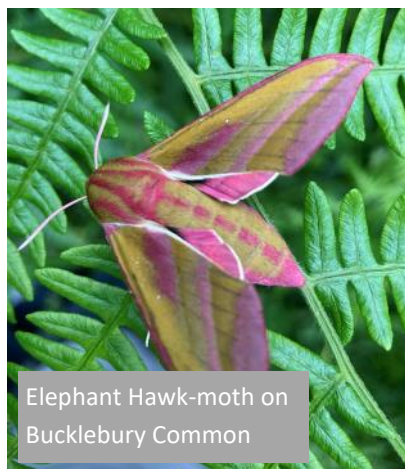
Bucklebury Common is a very special place for people and for wildlife.

It is a 340 hectare (840 acre) tract of land in West Berkshire, stretching from Cold Ash in the west to Bradfield Southend to the east.

The Common lies on a gravel plateau with gentle gullies cut into the slope to the north, towards the Pang Valley. Over many centuries, rainwater has washed the nutrients from the gravel leaving poor soils, ideal for the formation of heathland.

Common land used to be much more extensive. It sustained the poorest people who didn't own land themselves. As agriculture developed, more land could be 'improved' for farming so many landowners excluded commoners, restricting them to smaller areas, like Bucklebury Common.

Now, the common is registered under the 1965



Elephant Hawk-moth on Bucklebury Common

Commons Registration Act, protecting it from development.

It is privately owned by the Bucklebury Estate but the public have the right of access across the common. In addition, a number

of local people are 'registered commoners' giving them certain rights like collecting firewood or grazing cattle, which are listed on a register.

The common has a complex and colourful history. The fish ponds to the east of Pease Hill were built to provide fish for Reading Abbey in the 12th century. The nearby Medieval pillow mounds were constructed as warrens to house rabbits which provided valuable meat and fur. During the Second World War, large areas of the common were bulldozed to create a level surface for a truck depot. Bucklebury Common was home to the famous bowl turners, William and George Lailey. Their hand-crafted wooden bowls were sold in Harrods of London.

Most of Bucklebury Common is now covered in woodland but, historically, it would have been much more open, with trees kept in check by human activities and grazing livestock. Before that, large wild herbivores like deer, Aurochs and Wild Boar are likely to have maintained a much more open habitat than we see today.

Now, the heathland areas of the common are among the most valuable because they support lots of rare wildlife not found elsewhere. Vast areas of heathland have been lost across the country and with it their unique plants and animals. The remaining patches of heathland at Bucklebury Common, which have been maintained by the hard work of local volunteers, are home to Adders, Nightjars and Woodlarks, all of which rely on the open heath for food or nesting.

Most of the woodland on the rest of the common is relatively recent, having started growing as local people became less reliant on the common. There are a significant number of older 'veteran' trees scattered through this younger woodland which have lots of features like rot holes and deadwood. These trees are remnants of when the common was more open. The ancient woodland at Holly Wood, where there are more veteran trees and more diversity, are great for wildlife, and the younger woodland can be made more diverse through management.

This plan shares Bucklebury Estate's Vision for Bucklebury Common, to make it better for people and for wildlife. The plan identifies **features** which can be enhanced through management, explains the **vision** for that feature and then gives a summary for how that vision can be achieved—the **management prescription**.

If you would like to find out more about what is happening at Bucklebury Common, please visit: www.SundewEcology.co.uk/bucklebury-common

Thank you for your interest in Bucklebury Common.

Each page has a glossary box to explain some of the terms used.

Common land: Land which has an owner, but specific people have the right to undertake a certain activity, such as collecting firewood.

Agricultural improvement: Making land more productive but often less good for wildlife.

Ancient woodland: Woodland older than 400 years, often with lots of diversity and rare wildlife

Bucklebury Common, Existing condition

boundaries of features are indicative

Meadows

These areas of longer grass are becoming less species-rich and dominated by a few coarse grass species.

Allotments

These are important resources for local people, and an historic element of The Common. Their condition varies, depending on their use.

Wood Pasture

This has the potential to be a very wildlife-rich habitat, with a mosaic of veteran trees, scrub and open habitats. Its extent is currently limited and there is no sustainable management in place to maintain it

Ponds

Many of the ponds are full of silt and leaf litter. They are over-shaded by scrub and trees, and they don't support as much wildlife as they could.

Greens

The greens around the areas of settlement lack plant species diversity and many are kept mown short for the whole year.

Wet Gullies

These are wet valleys which have been eroded by water emanating from springs below the Bucklebury plateau. They are over-shaded and don't have the ground flora that might be expected.

Open Heath

The remnants of open heath have been maintained in good condition by a dedicated group of volunteers. A sustainable way to control invasive birch and to create as much diversity as possible is desirable.

-  open heath
-  woodland
-  wooded gully
-  wood pasture
-  new open gully
-  green
-  meadow
-  pond
-  bracken
-  cemetery
-  allotments

Beech Woodland

These woodlands are dark and lacking in ground flora. There is little diversity in the age of trees, and dense Holly dominates many areas. Veteran trees and future veterans are over-crowded. Damage by deer and squirrels is frequent, reducing the diversity of plants and causing problems with tree health.

Veteran Trees

There are numerous trees which can be considered 'veterans' – having some of the features of ancient trees – including the iconic Avenue. Many of the trees within the woodland are crowded by younger trees, causing potential health problems, and reducing their value for other wildlife.

Oak and birch woodland

This is the dominant habitat on The Common. Much of it is young, having grown since the cessation of grazing and other commoning practises. Veteran trees are frequent through the woodland, but the woodland lacks diversity and open habitats

Bucklebury Common, Vision for **woodland** features

boundaries of features are indicative

Climate change

The Common will be managed in a sustainable way to maximise its potential for carbon sequestration. Enhanced wetlands; thriving, dense woodlands; and wildlife-rich grasslands will all store more carbon.

Wood Pasture

The extent of good-quality wood pasture will increase significantly. This habitat is a mosaic of veteran trees, scrub and open habitats with the capacity to support lots of wildlife.

A suitable and sustainable management regime will be in place to ensure that it is maintained in favourable condition.

New 'Open' Gullies

These areas will be wildlife hotspots with lots of aquatic vegetation, dragonflies, and an enhanced ability to store water. Some of them will be more open, allowing the ground flora to flourish. The flow of water will be more complex, reducing downstream flooding and creating pools which will home to wildlife and store more carbon.

Veteran Trees

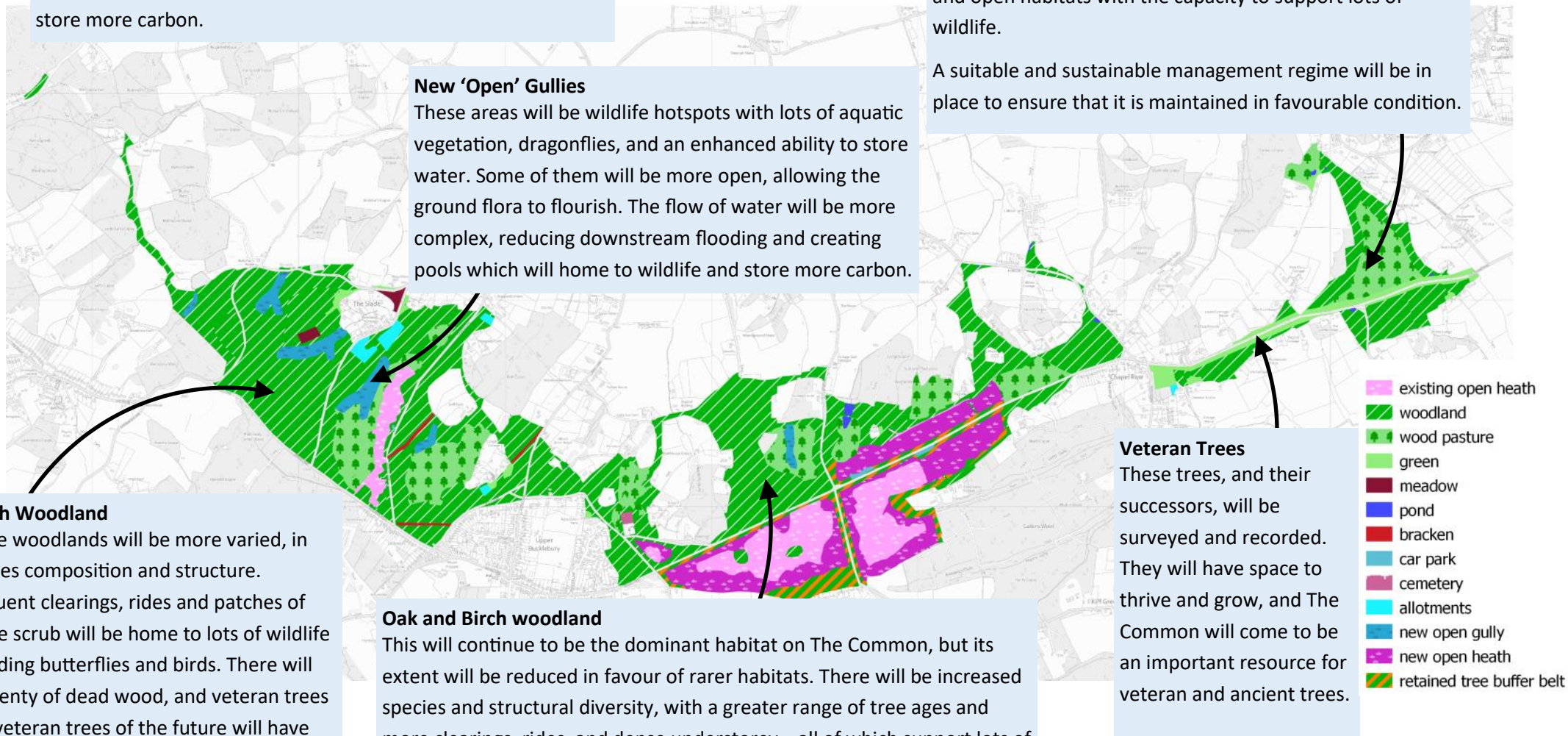
These trees, and their successors, will be surveyed and recorded. They will have space to thrive and grow, and The Common will come to be an important resource for veteran and ancient trees.

Oak and Birch woodland

This will continue to be the dominant habitat on The Common, but its extent will be reduced in favour of rarer habitats. There will be increased species and structural diversity, with a greater range of tree ages and more clearings, rides, and dense understorey – all of which support lots of wildlife. Veteran trees, and their successors, will have space to thrive and there will continue to be lots of dead wood – an important habitat.

Beech Woodland

These woodlands will be more varied, in species composition and structure. Frequent clearings, rides and patches of dense scrub will be home to lots of wildlife including butterflies and birds. There will be plenty of dead wood, and veteran trees and veteran trees of the future will have space to thrive. Damage by deer and squirrels will be much reduced.



The Common will remain mostly wooded, but with more structural diversity—more variation in the age and size of trees; more rides and clearings; and more patches of denser scrub.



A Marbled-white butterfly

Feature 1: Wood Pasture

After the Ice Age, large numbers of herbivores roamed across the British Isles grazing and browsing on vegetation. Auroch, Elk, Bison, deer, Wild Boar and Tarpan all created and maintained a varied landscape of woodland, scrub and open habitats. This complex and dynamic mix would have been rich in wildlife and self-sustaining.

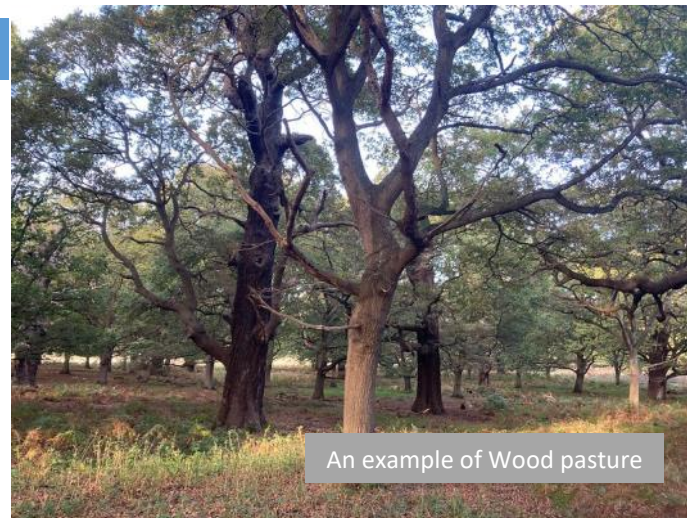
When people arrived, they hunted many of these animals to extinction, upsetting the balance of nature and changing the landscape.

Wood Pasture is the modern equivalent of that ancient and biodiverse landscape.

Large veteran trees dominate the habitat, with patches of younger woodland and scrub. Clearings have a flower-rich sward, and patches of thorny scrub gradually turn to woodland as new saplings are protected from grazing.

One of the overarching threats to Wood Pasture is lack of awareness. The habitat has been historically understudied and undervalued.
(People's Trust for Endangered Species)

Wood Pastures are extremely rich in wildlife. The open-grown trees develop more complexity than woodland trees, supporting more fungi and deadwood-eating insects. The trees live for longer because there is less competition for light, allowing the formation of rot-



An example of Wood pasture

holes and cracks—home to bats, beetles and birds.

Sunlight warms the trunks and soil, creating the perfect conditions for epiphytic plants and fungi. On the ground, wildflowers and fungi abound and the soil is rich with microorganisms.

Patches of dense scrub and young trees are home to birds and butterflies which feed on the copious berries and nectar.

All of these features, in a close-knit matrix, support more wildlife than they would on their own. Many species rely on different resources to complete their

Tarpan: Ancient extinct horses

Auroch: Ancient extinct cattle, which are the ancestors of modern cattle.

Veteran tree: A tree which is not necessarily ancient, but has features such as rot holes, cracks and dead branches.

life-cycle so are only able to thrive in wood pasture.

At Bucklebury Common, the presence of veteran open-grown trees amongst young, dense woodland demonstrates that wood pasture was once widespread. The younger trees have grown since grazing stopped, casting shade on the older trees, and threatening their longevity. The ground flora becomes less diverse and some populations of plant and animal will decrease.



A veteran
Beech pollard
at Bucklebury
Common

A Vision

Wood Pasture will be more abundant, with areas fringing the open heath and patches where veteran trees are frequent.

The habitat will be more open, but with areas of scrub and younger woodland which will be home to many birds and insects. Most of the veteran trees will be uncrowded by neighbouring younger trees, allowing them to become ancient, with all the benefits to wildlife that brings.

Some of the trees will be pollarded to further increase their longevity and increase the diversity of habitats.

The ground flora will be more varied, although it is likely that Bracken will dominate, especially in the early years.

Management Prescription

The creation of wood pasture from dense woodland will require the removal of some trees. Areas around veteran trees and ‘veterans of the future’ will be ‘haloed’ to allow more light to reach them, and clearings will be created.

Dead wood will be left where possible, both on the ground and in the trees—home to lots of wildlife.

Some patches of trees will be coppiced to promote dense regrowth and areas of scrub will be retained.

Young trees will be encouraged to become ‘veterans of the future’ by protection and management.

Grazing livestock are an essential component of maintaining wood pasture. A suitable grazing regime will create a diverse ground flora, slow the growth of dense woodland and break up patches of scrub. Their dung adds to the diversity—supporting insects and fungi.

Further reading:

www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/trees-woods-and-wildlife/habitats/wood-pasture-and-parkland/

ptes.org/campaigns/wood-pasture-parkland

Feature 2: Beech Woodland

The western end of the common, at Holly Wood, is dominated by mature Beech woodland with an understorey of Holly.

Once the trees are in leaf, Beech woods tend to be dark so little grows underneath them, except specialist plants which can cope with the low light conditions like Bluebells, Wood-sorrel and Sanicle.

At Bucklebury Common, the Holly is very dense in places, inhibiting other plants and making access difficult.

Many of the Beech trees are veterans, or future

Coppice: regrow from a cut stump

Coupe: an area of coppice, often about 1ha in size

Derelict: unmanaged Hazel, which is overgrown, less bushy and more likely to fail.

Scrub: Small trees like Hawthorn, Blackthorn and Field Maple which form dense patches of vegetation.



Bracken used to be collected from the common for animal bedding

veterans, with rot holes, cracks and dead branches. These features are great for all sorts of wildlife, especially deadwood-eating insects which are, in turn, food for birds, bats and other wildlife. The beechnuts (mast) and foliage provide food for small mammals, birds and insects.

There are some areas of more diverse woodland, with derelict Hazel coupes and other trees, especially in the low lying, wet areas.

A Vision

The Beech woodland will continue to be dominated by mature Beech trees but with more open space in the form of rides and glades. These will attract butterflies which bask in the sun and feed on nectar from the abundant flowers. There will be more birds singing in the dense scrub and using the veteran trees for nesting.

Holly will be less dominant, but will still form a significant component of the woodland, providing patches of dense understorey which is home to nesting birds and other wildlife. A variety of scrub species will replace Holly in some areas.

Many of the mature trees will have more space and light to increase their longevity, and some younger trees will be identified as ‘future veterans’ and managed in the same way.

Some Hazel coupes will be coppiced on rotation, creating more diverse habitats for wildlife.

Beech woodland provides an important habitat for many butterflies, particularly in open glades and along woodland rides. (Woodland Trust)

Management Prescription

Some areas of the Beech woodland will be thinned of trees, creating glades, rides and halos around veteran trees. ‘Veterans of the future’ will be identified—some of which will be pollarded and protected to allow

them to mature.

Holly will be significantly thinned and, in some small areas, fully removed to encourage a more diverse ground flora and understorey.

Some areas where Holly has been removed will be planted with a more varied scrub mix, including Rowan, Hazel, Crab Apple, Buckthorn, Wild Cherry, Field Maple and Spindle. This will attract more wildlife and create a more diverse woodland.

Coppicing of derelict Hazel and other scrub-forming trees will be reinstated, but protection from deer will be required to allow it to grow without damage.

Grey Squirrel and deer control should be considered as part of the Woodland Management Plan.

Feature 3: Wet gullies

Bucklebury Common sits on a plateau of gravel and sand. The land drops away to the north, into the Pang Valley. Along this slope are a number of springs which have cut gentle gullies running northward towards the Pang.

These gullies are home to areas of wet woodland and more open habitat with rushes and other water-loving plants. This habitat is often rich in wildlife such as

Haloing: Clearing trees around a notable tree to provide more space and light.

Pollard: Removal of most of the branches of a tree, leaving just the trunk, and allowing it to regrow. This increases the longevity of the tree.

craneflies, dragonflies and amphibians.

Some of these gullies appear to have been relatively treeless until recent years – the trees are still young and there are remnants of ground flora more indicative of open habitat. It is likely that the cessation of grazing has allowed these areas to become covered in trees, losing some of the special wildlife associated with a more open habitat.

Other gullies are dominated by Alder trees. These gullies are likely to have been covered in trees for longer and this woodland has its own special flora and fauna.

A Vision

These areas will be wildlife hotspots with lots of aquatic vegetation, dragonflies, and an enhanced ability to store water.

Some of them will be more open, allowing the ground flora to flourish, while some will develop into mature wet woodland, with lots of deadwood and boggy areas.

The flow of water will be more complex, reducing downstream flooding and creating pools which will be home to wildlife, and store more carbon.

Management Prescription

Some of the gullies, especially those with Alder woodland, should be left to mature into good quality wet woodland. To increase complexity, and thus increase biodiversity and slow water flow, some trees



A veteran Oak of the future, surrounded by Birch trees

can be coppiced and moved into the bed of the gully. These will act as large woody debris and aid natural flood management.

Gullies that are identified for 'opening up' can be cleared of smaller trees, leaving the occasional veteran if present. Some of the felled trees should be used for Natural Flood Management and pool creation.

These areas can be occasionally grazed by livestock ,

further increasing complexity and maintaining their open condition. Care should be taken to not cause too much 'poaching' in the wet areas, although a limited amount of poaching is desirable.

Feature 4: Oak and Birch woodland

This is the dominant feature over most of Bucklebury Common. Much of it has formed relatively recently on former heathland— it is shown as heathland on the 1900 OS maps—and therefore it doesn't support as much biodiversity as older woodland or heathland habitats. In some places, heathland plants still survive under the young birch trees and any clearings in the woodland are dominated by heather and gorse.

This type of woodland is very common on sandy and gravelly soils across the region. Much of the woodland is lacking in structural diversity—the majority of the trees are a similar age and size, reducing the woodlands value for wildlife.

Natural Flood Management: the use of natural processes to reduce the risk of flooding.

Poaching: Cutting up of the ground by animals' hooves.

Secondary Woodland: Areas of trees that have grown up relatively recently and so have less value for wildlife than older woodlands.

Structural diversity: The variety of different ages and sizes of vegetation which can support more wildlife.

Understorey: The layer of small trees and scrub between the canopy and the ground.

Rides: a linear clearing in a wood, once used for woodland management or access, and allowing light to the ground level, encouraging ground flora and butterflies.

The woodland is valuable for wildlife—many woodland birds have made their home within it and butterflies and other insects can be seen flying among the clearings

Much of the wildlife within our woodlands now relies on active management to provide a mix of different habitats, from piles of dead wood which can help beetles and fungi to open glades which help butterflies.
(The Wildlife Trusts)

There are some notable trees within the woodland, especially on boundaries, including veteran Oaks and some open-grown Scot's Pines.

Some of the birch woodland here was coppiced to produce material for horse jumps, but this has now ceased.

There are some patches of non-native invasive plants in the woodland, notably Rhododendron and Cherry Laurel. If unchecked, these will spread, further damaging the habitats.

Woodlands are important for storing carbon, especially young woodlands which grow quickly and sequester more carbon than older woods.

A Vision.

The Oak and Birch woodland will continue to mature, gaining more features that are good for wildlife.

Diversity of the woodland will increase, both in tree

species and structure, attracting more birds, insects and fungi associated with older woodlands.

There will be more rides, glades and dense patches of scrubby trees — all important features which support lots of wildlife. The rides and glades will allow light into the wood, encouraging flowering plants to grow and attracting butterflies like the Speckled Wood and White Admiral.

Some areas of this woodland will be restored to open heath or wood pasture. This will involve clear-felling trees in some areas and heavy thinning in others. The fringes of existing open heath and areas where there is heathland vegetation under the trees will be the priority.

Veteran and other notable trees will be retained and, where they remain in woodland, will be given more light and space to mature.

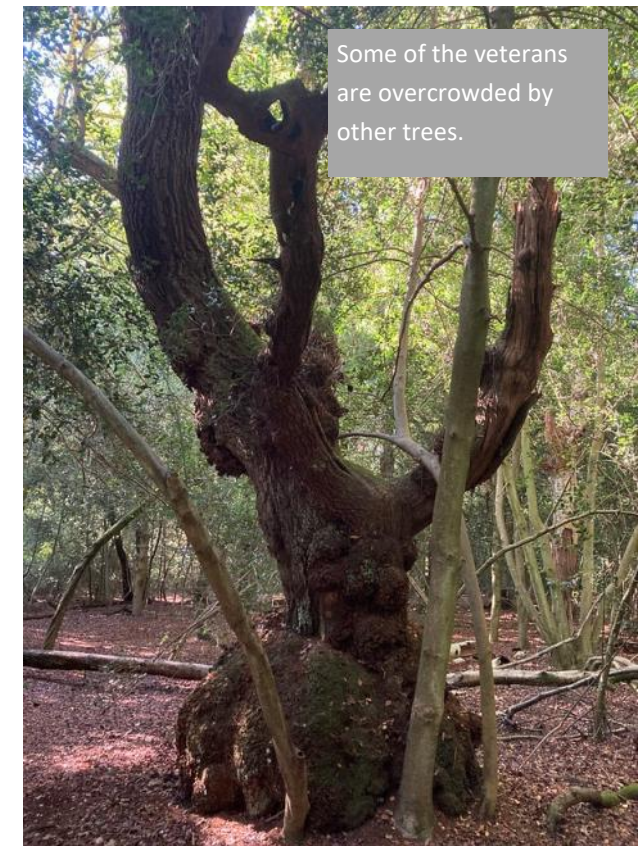
Non-native invasive plant species will be eradicated and the impact of deer and Grey Squirrels will be reduced.

Management Prescription

The structural diversity of the woodland will be enhanced by creating rides and glades, and by coppicing some areas to create denser scrub.

Veteran and other notable trees will be protected and given more space by 'haloing' around them.

Non-native invasive plants like Rhododendron and Cherry Laurel will be eradicated by cutting them and removing their roots.



Some areas of woodland, especially those fringing, or between, existing open heath will be restored to open heath by felling the trees and pulling up the roots. This will create the ideal conditions for heather regeneration, and expand the areas of open heath.

Other areas will be more heavily thinned to become a wood pasture habitat.

Non-native invasives: Plants or animals which have been introduced by people and which cause environmental, social and/or economic impacts.

Feature 5: Veteran Trees

Bucklebury Common's most iconic features are the Avenues of Oak trees, planted to commemorate the various royal occasions which have visited Bucklebury over its history.

In addition to these, there are numerous veteran trees, mostly Oaks and Beeches, scattered across the common. Some of these have been pollarded, while others are clearly boundary trees

Some of the older trees are now acquiring veteran features like rot-holes, signs of decay, dead branches, cracks and crevices, all of which are extremely valuable for wildlife like owls, woodpeckers, beetles



A veteran Oak near The Slade

and fungi.

Some of the trees have an important history including the, now fallen, Coronation Oak and Big Foot at the western end of the Avenue.

To ensure their further longevity and ability to support wildlife into the future, these trees need careful protection and management.

Ancient and other veteran trees are a vital and treasured part of our history, and our natural and cultural landscape, and Britain is thought to have the greatest number of ancient trees in northern Europe. (Ancient Tree Forum)

A Vision

The veteran trees on Bucklebury Common will thrive well into the future and will continue to support lots of special wildlife as they become ancient trees.

Each of them will be recorded and a brief, individual management regime identified.

Veterans of the future will also be identified and managed appropriately.

Management Prescription

Each veteran, and future veteran, tree will be recorded and a photo taken.

Each tree will be managed appropriately to ensure that it retains its important features, but it remains

healthy and safe for the future.

The ground underneath each veteran trees will also be managed appropriately as this has a significant impact on the health of the tree. Activities such as over-mowing or soil compaction can have a significant impact.

Epiphytes: Plants that live in trees, such as ferns mosses and lichens.

Bucklebury Common, Vision for **non-woodland** features. boundaries of features are indicative

Allotments

These will continue to be important resources for local people and will be maintained in good condition.

Historic features

There will be a better understanding of the numerous and varied features of interest, and of the management required to maintain them in good condition. This is likely to involve the removal of trees from some of them to make them more visible and protect them from damage.

Ponds

The ponds will be managed so that their ability to support wildlife is maximised. Some ponds will be desilted, and over-shading scrub removed. The aquatic vegetation and fauna will thrive, with dragonflies, amphibians and other wildlife increasing in abundance. New ponds will be created in suitable areas, creating a diversity of wetland resources across the landscape.

Meadows

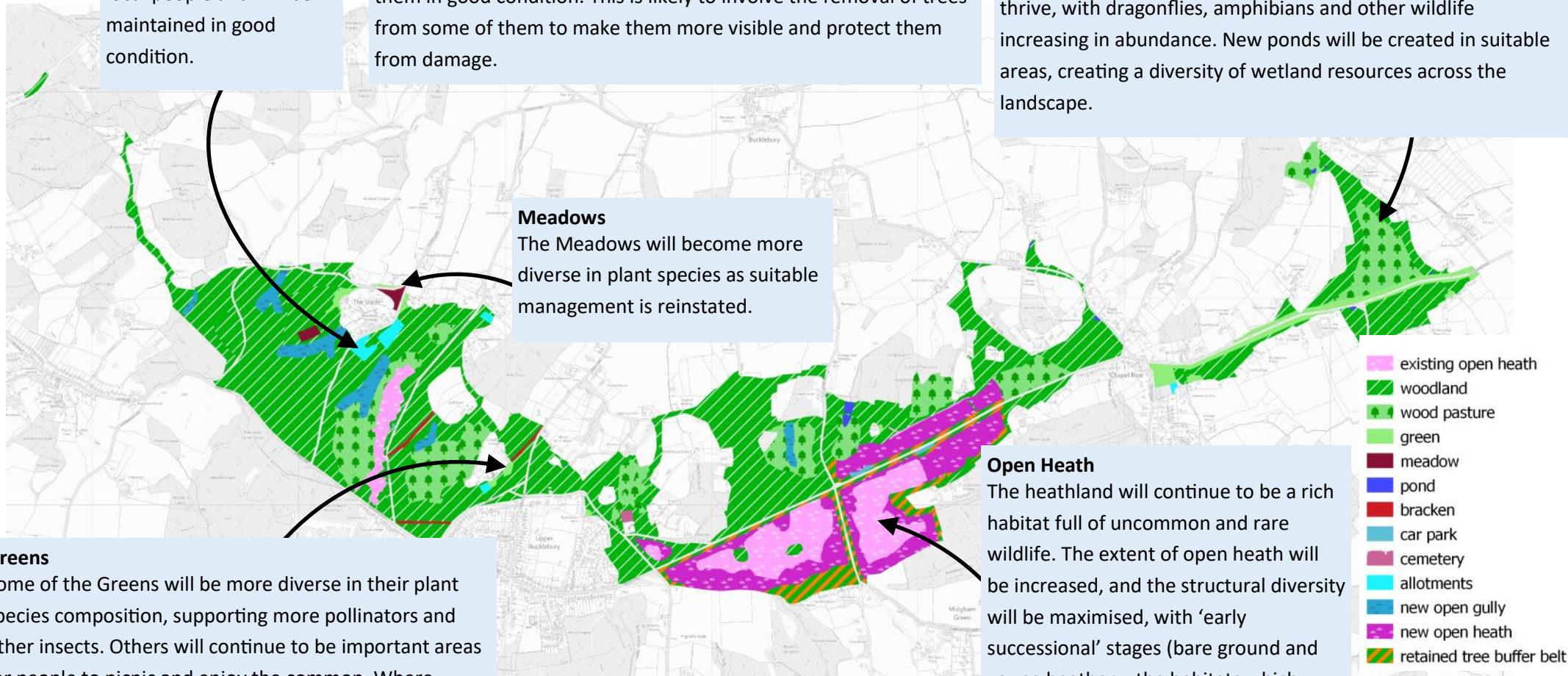
The Meadows will become more diverse in plant species as suitable management is reinstated.

Greens

Some of the Greens will be more diverse in their plant species composition, supporting more pollinators and other insects. Others will continue to be important areas for people to picnic and enjoy the common. Where greens are home to veteran trees, these will be managed appropriately to ensure the future of the trees.

Open Heath

The heathland will continue to be a rich habitat full of uncommon and rare wildlife. The extent of open heath will be increased, and the structural diversity will be maximised, with 'early successional' stages (bare ground and young heather – the habitats which support lots of rare wildlife) being in abundance. Birch and pine invasion will be reduced and there will be a programme of sustainable management in place.



- existing open heath
- woodland
- wood pasture
- green
- meadow
- pond
- bracken
- car park
- cemetery
- allotments
- new open gully
- new open heath
- retained tree buffer belt



There are three species of heather on Bucklebury Common, including Bell Heather

Feature 6: Open Heath

Lowland Heathland is an internationally important habitat because of the rare wildlife that lives on them.

Birds such as the Dartford Warbler, Nightjar and Woodlark need open heath to forage and breed, Common Lizards and Adders bask in the treeless conditions and rare plants like sundews and orchids



Bucklebury Common is one of the few places where you can still see Adders in Berkshire

grow amongst the heather.

Heathlands thrive on poor, sandy and gravelly soils and often have wet areas which have very special plants and animals. Patches of bare ground support solitary bees, beetles and low-growing plants.

Bucklebury Common would have been predominantly open heath for many hundreds of years before now.

This habitat was maintained by the activities of local people, making a living by grazing their livestock and cutting birch, bracken, gorse and heather for fuel, animal bedding and building.

Since the industrial revolution, heathland has been lost across the country as these practises died out. The

heathlands became overgrown with scrub, and lots of the special wildlife was lost.

At Bucklebury there are three main areas of open heath left. Some of this was bulldozed during WWII and then kept open by cutting birch for horse jumps and occasional grazing.

More recently, the remnants of open heath have been maintained in good condition by a dedicated group of volunteers, but birch is starting to take over again, and the heather is all a similar age, so it can't support as much wildlife.

Heathland: an open landscape dominated by dwarf shrubs, but with some areas of wetland, scrub and trees

A Vision

The areas of open heath at Bucklebury Common will be mostly treeless, but with a few trees to enhance the landscape and provide perches for Nightjars and other birds.

Some areas of young secondary woodland will be restored to heathland by felling trees and creating the right conditions for heather to germinate. This will extend the existing heathland and join together fragmented areas.

A few, small patches of birch and gorse scrub will be present within the heath adding complexity to the habitat, and providing shelter and food for insects, birds and other wildlife.

The remainder of the heath will be dominated by heathers and other dwarf shrubs, with frequent forbs and occasional graminoids. There will be a mosaic of dwarf shrubs at different growth phases, and bare ground - maximising the number of species that the heath can support.

Areas of boggy ground and open water will be present, providing resources for aquatic plants and animals.

Management will be effective, efficient and sustainable, emulating the historical practises which maintained the heathland for so long.

Management prescription

The open heath will be restored to favourable

condition through a variety of mechanical and manual projects.

Birch seedlings will continue to grow because of the rain of seeds from neighbouring woodland. Ideally these should be pulled out with their roots so that they do not coppice. This can be done using handheld tools like 'tree poppers' or by an excavator and grab.

Alternatively, weedwiping can be used, but this spreads herbicide across the site and can have patchy results.

Once the heath is in good condition, it can be maintained by regular, manually cutting or pulling scrub, and mowing or burning the heather in small patches.

All cut vegetation must be removed from site or burnt so that it does not add to the nutrients in the soil— heathlands thrive on poor soils.

New areas of open heath will be created by felling young secondary woodland on areas of former heath. The roots will be pulled up and disposed of.

Grazing with a suitable breed of livestock is the most effective and sustainable way of managing heathland. This creates a desirable mosaic of vegetation structure and removes nutrients from the system. Livestock will slow the growth of scrub and produce dung—a fabulous resource for many insects and fungi.

Further reading:

[A Practical Guide to the Restoration and Management of Lowland Heathland \(RSPB\)](http://www.wildlifetrusts.org/habitats/heathland-and-moorland/lowland-heath)

www.wildlifetrusts.org/habitats/heathland-and-moorland/lowland-heath

www.buglife.org.uk/resources/habitat-management/lowland-heathland

Grazing



Before people had a significant impact on the landscape, large grazing animals like Aurochs (wild cattle), Bison, Red Deer and Wild Boar roamed the countryside, grazing the vegetation and maintaining patches of open habitat and dense scrub in a dynamic mosaic with ancient woodland.

When people arrived in the UK, these wild animals were replaced with livestock which maintained and often extended these patches of open habitat, creating the wildlife-rich heathlands and downlands that we know today.

Grazing on these marginal areas of land ceased because of economic reasons and the increase of traffic on adjacent,

Dwarf shrubs: heather, Bilberry and Dwarf Gorse

Forbs: herbaceous flowering plants

Graminoids: grasses, sedges and rushes

unfenced, roads. Many open heaths, and their unique wildlife, were lost to young woodland.

Now, people are once more using grazing to maintain heathland and wood pasture, but with nature conservation as the primary objective.

A appropriate grazing regime has many benefits over mechanical heathland maintenance. Cattle and ponies will selectively eat grasses, leaving space for heather and other plants. They create a diverse structure of vegetation from small patches of bare earth to short turf and taller plants. They reduce the spread of scrubby species and they remove nutrients from the system to maintain the ideal conditions for heathland. Their dung provides a whole new resource for beetle and flies which are otherwise absent in an ungrazed landscape.

It is vital to get the level of grazing right—too many livestock at the wrong time of year can lead to the loss of species like Adders and certain plants, while not enough will reduce their impact.

Periodic grazing, where the livestock are removed to other pastures for parts of the year, is likely to be beneficial. Sheep are not normally used because of conflicts with dogs.

New technology allows the careful control of livestock without the need for expensive and intrusive fencing.

Feature 7: Ponds

Bucklebury Common is home to numerous ponds.

Many of these appear to be artificial, having been created by damming streams to hold fish or to water livestock, or by digging gravel or clay.

Others are more natural hollows and shallow depressions which hold water for some, or all of the year.

Ponds are really important for all sorts of wildlife, especially ponds away from roads and agriculture where the water is less polluted. Dragonflies and amphibians rely on ponds for much of their lifecycle, and ponds often support uncommon plants.

Ponds support an extraordinary two thirds of all freshwater species, and creating clean new ponds is one of the simplest and most effective ways to protect freshwater wildlife. (Freshwater Habitats Trust)

Ponds naturally dry out, either partially or fully, in dry conditions. This isn't necessarily a problem as it creates unique 'drawdown zone' habitats, inhibits fish from colonising (a good thing for a wildlife pond), and allows silt and leaf litter to decompose and dissipate.

The ponds on the common are likely to have developed their fauna and flora over a long time in open conditions, and it is only more recently that they have become shaded by neighbouring trees. This means that the wildlife that they support is likely to be



more suited to a less-shaded environment. Too much shading inhibits the growth of some aquatic plants, cools the water and causes leaf litter to build up in the pond.

One of the ponds in The Avenue is choked with the non-native invasive plant *Crassula helmsii*. This spreads easily and has proved almost impossible to eradicate in other locations.

Weedwiping: brushing the undesirable plant with herbicide.

Drawdown zones: the gently sloping edges of a waterbody which are exposed when the water level recedes. These are often home to uncommon wildlife.

***Crassula helmsii*:** a low-growing non-native invasive plant which grows in shallow ponds. It spreads easily and inhibits the growth of other plants.

Eutrophication: Suffering from too many nutrients which leads to excess algal growth and potentially the death of other plants and animals in the pond.

A Vision

There will continue to be numerous ponds on Bucklebury Common. These will be varying in size, depth and character. All will have clean water and support a rich flora and fauna.

Ponds will be free from non-native invasive plant species.

More ponds will be unshaded by trees, allowing the aquatic plants to flourish, and more ponds will have silt-free bases, so that they hold water for longer and do not suffer from eutrophication.

Management Prescription

Working with the Newt Conservation partnership, the ponds on Bucklebury Common will be assessed and selected for restoration by removal of surrounding trees and scrub as appropriate, and by removing silt and reprofiling the pond.

New ponds will be created where appropriate, providing a variety of conditions to support as much wildlife as possible.

Ponds will be free of non-native invasive species—the pond with *Crassula* will receive special treatment to eradicate this plant from the common.

Feature 8: Meadows

A meadow is an area of grassland that is mown for hay or silage. Traditional meadows can be very flower-rich and important resources for insects like grasshoppers and butterflies. Owls often hunt for small mammals



Areas of taller grass at Bucklebury Common are home to grasshoppers and butterflies

which form tunnels in the long grass.

The most diverse meadows are those which have not been fertilised, sprayed with weedkiller or reseeded with more commercial species. All of these activities reduce the number of wildflowers.

Meadows are treasured for both their wildlife and for the unique rural traditions that developed as part of their farmed history. (The Wildlife Trusts)

If meadows are uncut for a number of years they can become less species-rich and scrub may take over.

At Bucklebury, there are a few small areas of grassland

that could be considered meadows, where the grass is allowed to grow longer and which have been historically cut for hay.

These areas are no longer managed in this way, and so have become rank with few wildflowers.

Rank: dominated by a small number of competitive grass species

Fine grasses: Grasses such as bents and fescues which are low-growing and have narrow, needle-like leaves. These are indicative of more diverse grassland, and allow wildflowers to co-exist.

A Vision

The areas of meadow on Bucklebury Common will be alive with grasshoppers and butterflies, feeding on the diverse wildflowers and fine grasses.

A traditional, sustainable form of management will be in place to ensure their future.

Management Prescription

Meadows need to be mown to maintain their species-richness, so a mowing regime should be implemented. Mowing after the flowers have set seed, but before the grasses die and their nutrients return to their roots is important, so a later summer cut is normally appropriate.

Aftermath grazing with cattle, sheep or ponies immediately after the hay cut is also desirable. If they have enough food, and the field isn't too wet, they can stay on the meadow until the end of winter.



Turner's Green

No herbicides or fertilisers should be used and it is important to remove all cut vegetation as this can smother new seedlings.

Soils should be tested before attempting to make the sward more species-rich. Nutrient levels need to be low for success in introducing wildflowers like Knapweed, Oxeye Daisy, Meadow Buttercup and Lady's Bedstraw. These plants can be introduced by sowing an appropriate seed mix on a lightly harrowed surface after a hay cut is taken.

Feature 9: Allotments

The allotments on the common are leased by the landowner to nearby residents. They would have been, and continue to be, an important resource for local people to grow food and keep livestock.

They vary in intensity of use—some appear to have been abandoned, while some are bursting with produce.

Allotments can be important for wildlife, and add diversity to the landscape and habitats. Slow-worms and Grass Snakes breed in the compost heaps, insects pollinate the crops, amphibians lay eggs in the ponds, and birds will visit the feeders.

A Vision

The allotments on Bucklebury Common will continue to be an important resource for local people to grow produce and they will be as good for wildlife as possible.

Management Prescription

Allotment holders will be encouraged to manage their allotments in a nature-friendly way by, for example, reducing the amount of pesticides and using natural pest control methods, creating wildlife ponds, and encouraging some wildflower-rich patches.

Feature 10: Greens

The greens are areas of short grass, and other vegetation, on the common, normally adjacent to habitation.

They are kept in this condition by a combination of mowing, trampling, car parking and light grazing by deer and rabbits.

Some of the greens have a diverse flora, with plants like Tormentil, Yarrow, hawkbits and wood-rushes. These attract insects which feed on the varied pollen and nectar, fruits and foliage. Where the ground is left undisturbed, large anthills can form, creating more diversity.

Many of these greens are mown repeatedly throughout the year so they have come to resemble garden lawns, with little diversity and little value for wildlife. These become potential 'no-go areas' for visitors to the common as they appear to be part of someone's garden.

Aftermath: Literally 'after the mow'.

A Vision

More of the greens at Bucklebury Common will be flower-rich, attracting more diverse wildlife.

The vegetation will continue to be short and the areas will be well used by residents and visitors, but will not be used excessively for parking and other encroachments, and they will not give the impression of being a private garden.

Management prescription

In order to maintain a short, but flower rich sward, the greens can be mown multiple times a year. Ideally the cut vegetation should be removed to maintain a low nutrient environment and maximise plant diversity.

Herbicides or fertilisers must not be used.

Where greens have become species poor, but they remain dominated by fine grasses, increasing the diversity by adding wildflower species should be considered. The species mix must be carefully selected to ensure that it matches other, more species-rich, areas of green on the common. Mowing short, scarifying the ground and sowing the seeds in late summer is likely to be successful.

Feature 11: Historic environment

Because Bucklebury Common has remained mostly unchanged for so long, it retains many historical features which tell us about its past use.

Ancient boundary banks surround the common and



delineate enclosures. The pillow mounds are medieval rabbit warrens. Old gravel pits, are now wet depressions and ponds. The old pound at Brown's Gate was used to hold animals not authorised to be on the common.

More recently, the military use of the common during WWII has left many artefacts like the concrete tracks and large heaps of bulldozed earth.

These, and likely many more unrecorded, features are worthy of protection and potential restoration.

There are no statutory designated historic sites or features on the common.

A Vision

The historical features on Bucklebury Common will be well understood and in good condition so that they can be passed on to future generations.

Habitat management work will take the historic environment into account and will ensure that no harm is done.

Management Prescription

All historical features will be recorded appropriately and, if significant, will have a brief management plan produced to identify the appropriate management.

Some features, such as the pound, will be restored and interpretation produced to explain their significance to

local people and visitors.

Boundary banks and other earthworks will be protected when undertaking habitat management work.

West Berkshire Council's Historic Environment team will be consulted, as appropriate.

Feature 11: Climate change

Bucklebury Common can play an important part in combatting climate change, but it is also likely to suffer from its impact.

Natural habitats can store large amounts of carbon in their vegetation and soils, and sympathetic management, such as coppicing and rewetting areas, can increase sequestration of carbon.

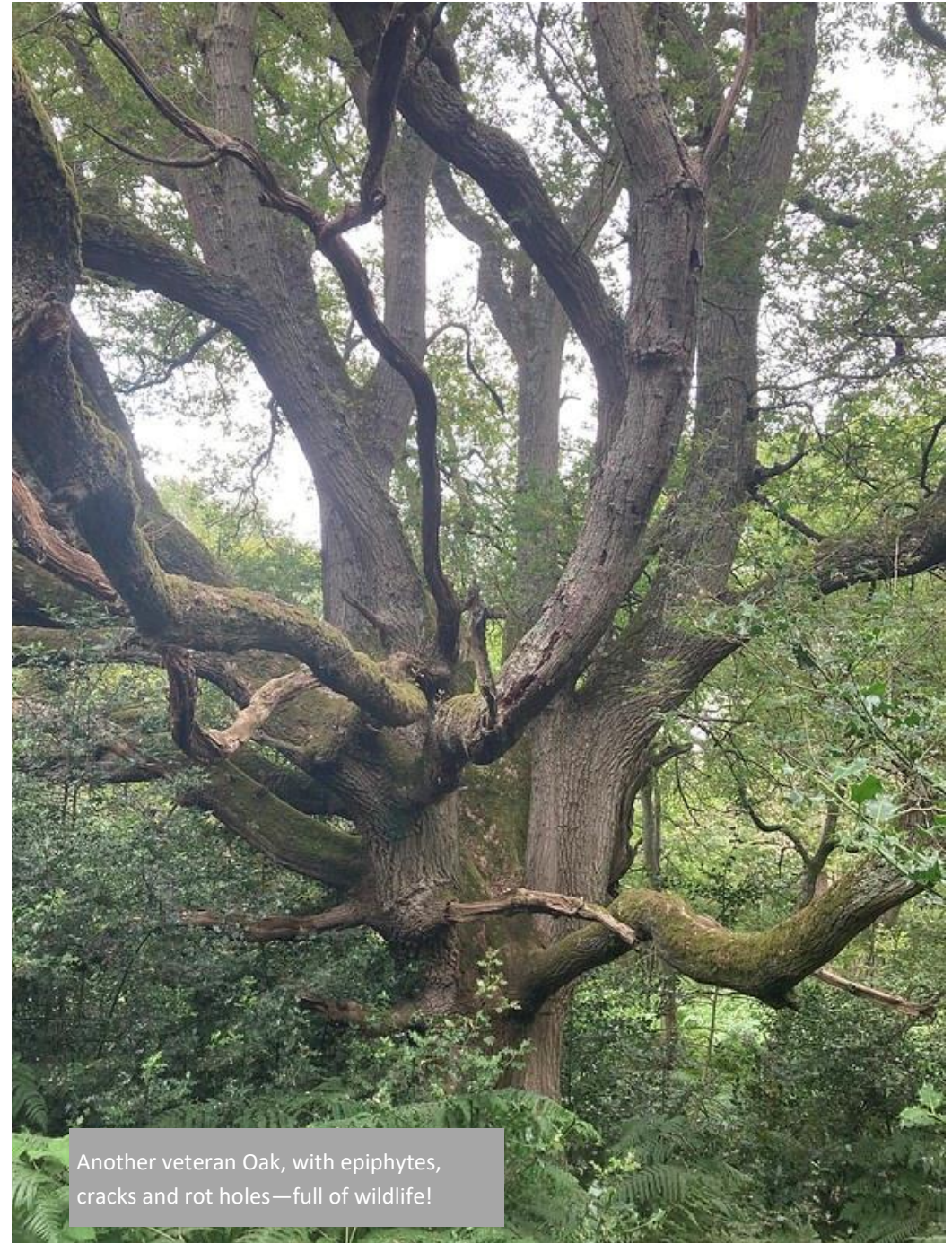
Climate change is likely to bring more flood events. Natural flood management on the common and on farmland to the north can help to mitigate the impact further downstream by slowing the flow into the Pang.

Some trees, for example Beech, are likely to suffer in times of hot weather and drought because their roots are shallow.

The ability of habitats to help combat climate change and the likely impacts should be a key consideration when determining future management.

Further reading:

[publications.naturalengland.org.uk/
publication/5419124441481216](https://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/5419124441481216)



Another veteran Oak, with epiphytes, cracks and rot holes—full of wildlife!

Bucklebury Common, Access vision. location of features are indicative

Access

People will continue to enjoy visiting The Common for quiet recreation. Their visits will be enhanced by improvements to the infrastructure and interpretation, ensuring that their visit will have minimal impact on other people and the environment. Visitors will have a good understanding of the importance of the area for the environment

Upper Bucklebury to Chapel Row off-road cycle route

Using existing tracks and creating a new routes where necessary, this will offer a safe route for cyclists away from the road.

Holly Wood Walk

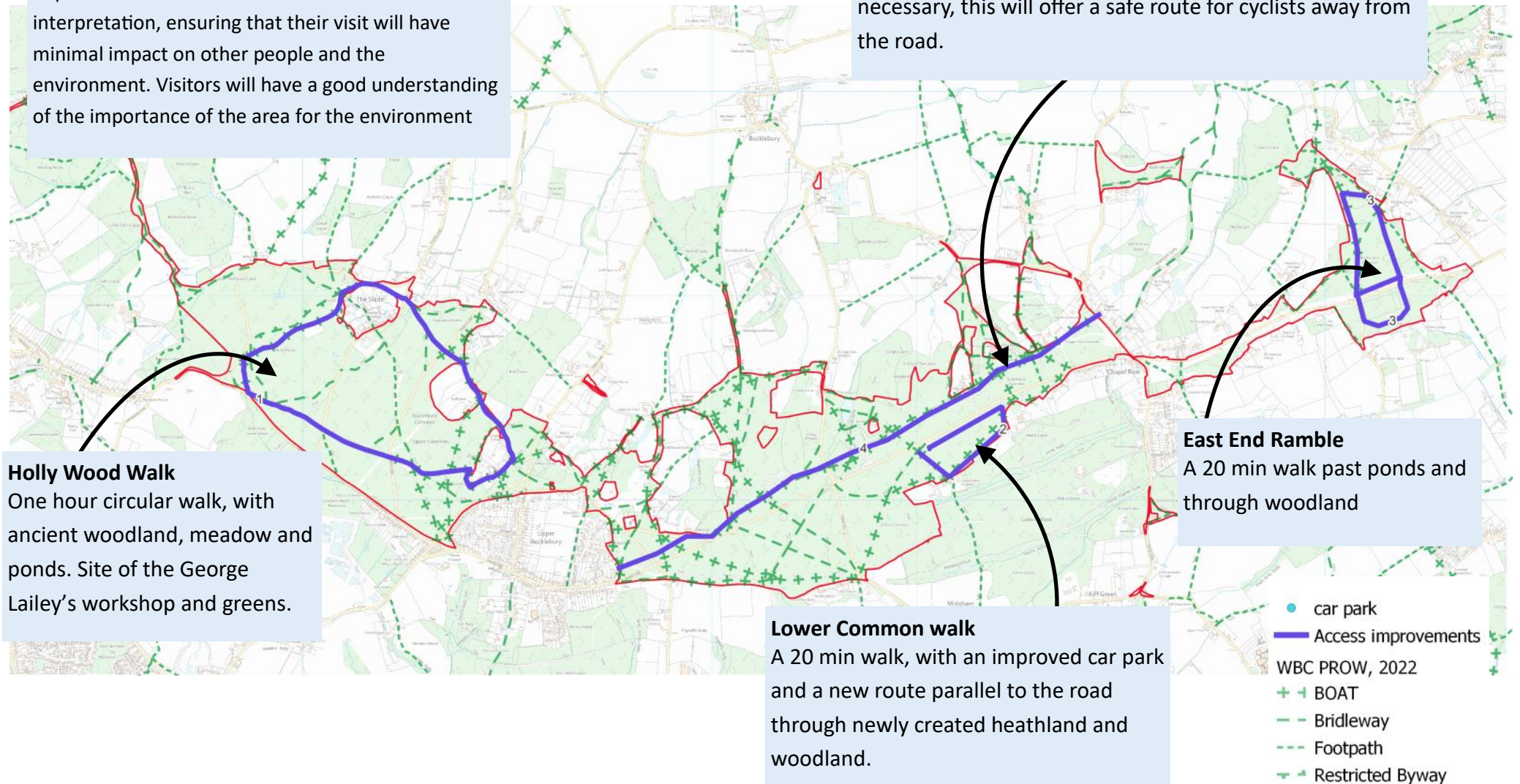
One hour circular walk, with ancient woodland, meadow and ponds. Site of the George Lailey's workshop and greens.

East End Ramble

A 20 min walk past ponds and through woodland

Lower Common walk

A 20 min walk, with an improved car park and a new route parallel to the road through newly created heathland and woodland.



Feature 12: Access

Bucklebury Common is a vital asset for the local community and for people visiting from further afield.

Because it is registered common land, although it is owned by the Bucklebury Estate, everyone has the right to walk anywhere on the common under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act, 2000. Numerous tracks criss-cross the common created by people walking, often with their dogs.

In addition, there are abundant public rights of way, giving additional access to those on bikes, horse and in vehicles. It is said that Bucklebury has the densest rights of way network of any parish in England.

There are several formal and informal car parks allowing people to drive to the common for a walk, and signs and interpretation panels have been installed, although these are suffering from age.

Some access to the common causes damage, such as inappropriate use of four wheel drive vehicles both on and off the byways, or disturbance to rare ground-nesting birds by uncontrolled dogs.

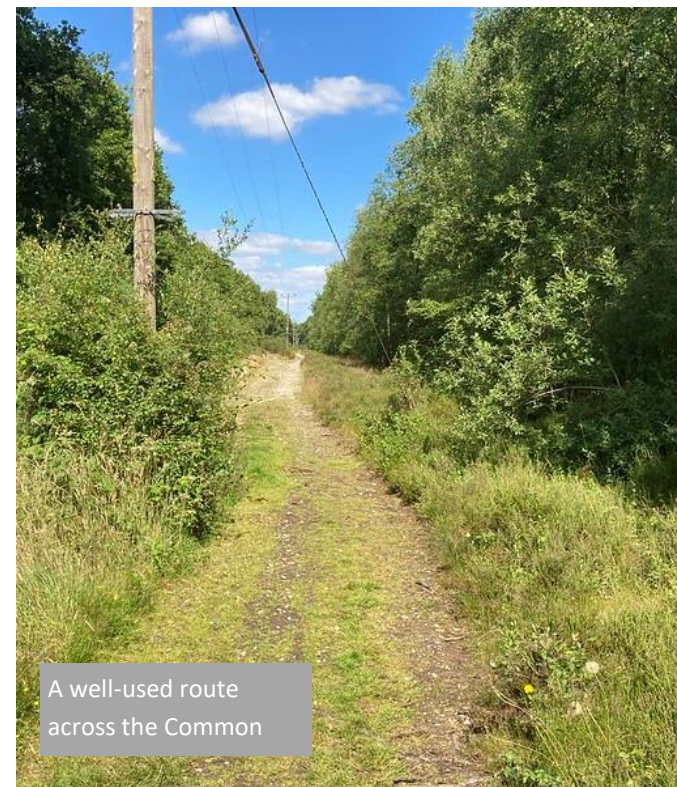
A Vision

Bucklebury Common will continue to be a pleasant and enjoyable place for all visitors for quiet, informal access.

Working in partnership with West Berkshire Council, inappropriate access will be reduced as much as possible.

A cycle route between Upper Bucklebury and Chapel Row will be created providing a safe alternative to the dangerous road.

A number of circular routes will be promoted, highlighting some short, pleasant walks around the common.



A well-used route
across the Common

Prepared on behalf of The Bucklebury Estate
Ref: BE3(1.2), November 2022
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