



**South Bucks**  
District Council

# **DRAFT FOR CONSULTATION**



**LITTLEWORTH COMMON SSSI  
MANAGEMENT PLAN 2011-2021**

South Bucks District Council  
Environmental Services

Denham  
Buckinghamshire

**Prepared for South Bucks District Council by;**

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**Figure 1 Location of Littleworth Common SSSI**

## INTRODUCTION

Littleworth Common Site of Significant Scientific Interest (SSSI) was once part of a much larger area of Heathland landscape covering South Buckinghamshire. Until the 1950's the common would have played an important role in the economic and social life of the community. The common was rough grazing land with a mixture of open grassland, scrub and gorse, woodland and heather dominated areas. Changes in land management practices resulted in the cessation of grazing leading to the inevitable encroachment of scrub and trees. Today it is a registered common.

In the 1990's, it was largely wooded although remnants of the important heathland habitat survived as a result of the maintenance of way-leaves routes under the power lines. The common has three ponds; Wigmore, Limes and Quaves. Only the latter retains water throughout the year. It has been recorded that in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Limes and Quaves ponds were used in the summer time as boys and girls swimming pools. Quaves pond is the known location of the critically endangered Starfruit (*Damasonium alisma*) plant; a red data book species and one of the principal reasons why Littleworth Common was designated as a SSSI along with its national important heathland.

An insight into the history of the common has been recorded in the Burhams historical book on Dropmore and Littleworth Commons. This book paints a very pastoral scene of an area of heathland with woodland, clear of undergrowth. Annually wood would be cut, some of it sold and the rest being burnt to

make into charcoal. Gypsies were known to visit and camp on the common and livestock were grazed. During the summer, Furze (Gorse) was burnt.

As a result of the changes in land management during the 20<sup>th</sup> century and subsequent neglect of the common it could easily appear to those who did not know of its once important community benefits and environmental importance, that it was just another area of woodland. Despite this neglect the importance of the site was recognised and in 1951 the area was designated as a SSSI because of its ponds and associated plant life; and lowland heathland habitat. This designation places a legal responsibility on the owner and/or manager of a SSSI to safeguard and manage it appropriately.

The common is owned by Dropmore Estate Holdings, but its management is the responsibility of South Bucks District Council (SBDC) as the successors to an agreement entered into in 1952 by the former Eton District Rural Council. With the work carried out by SBDC over the last 10 years, a recent survey by Natural England has described the SSSI as in an "unfavourable but in a recovering" condition. The citation reads;

***"The restoration of the open heathland is progressing well. A significant part of the eastern compartment has now been cleared of trees. There is now an urgent need to control the growth of bracken so that this does not hinder the development of heather and grass. ...."***

The District Council has been working closely with Natural England and drawing on further advice from the Ecologist at Buckinghamshire County Council and others to progress the common to a more favourable management regime. The Council has produced two management plans and in 2000, the Common was entered into the Countryside Stewardship Scheme (CSS). The main objectives of this scheme were;

1. The sensitive restoration and regeneration of the Lowland Heath
2. The restoration and management of the ponds
3. Manage access to encourage regeneration of rare plants and provide public information on the benefits of conservation management of the Heathland.

The recent restoration work carried out has started to improve the habitat management, principally in clearing areas of woodland on the eastern common and treating some of the bracken and birch regrowth. The areas around the ponds have also been cleared with help from Plantlife International. In 2004 the Starfruit was once again recorded on site.

The CSS expired in October 2010 and a new agri-environment scheme has been introduced by Government. To ensure that the conservation work continues to restore Littleworth Common SSSI to a favourable condition a new application for funding has to be made.

A new management plan is required to;

- Conduct an Environmental Review and Plan of Littleworth Common
- Prepare a 10 year management plan to follow on from the current plan
- Be of assistance with the preparation of the Higher Level Stewardship application to provide grant support of the management aims. This is the successor scheme to the Countryside Stewardship Scheme.
- Engage the local community in the future management of the common



## SITE DESCRIPTION

Littleworth Common SSSI lies in the parish of Dropmore in South Buckinghamshire. Several minor roads dissect the common, creating four distinct areas. To the north lies the town of Beaconsfield and to the south the major urban conurbations of Slough and Maidenhead. The common occupies a central location in the complex of heaths and pasture woodlands that span from the River Thames at Cookham eastwards to the junctions of the M4/M40 with the London orbital motorway the M25. The common covers 16 hectares (ha) of which 15.5 ha is designated as the SSSI. It is unfenced and criss-crossed with a series of Rights of Way and several other informal paths and tracks. The site is an area of formerly open heathland, which has developed through natural succession into an Oak-Birch woodland.

In the last 10 years an area of about 3 hectares has been partly cleared on the eastern common allowing more favourable conditions for the restoration of the lowland heathland habitat. On the western fringe of the common there are wet flushes as the ground slopes away. The eastern commons three ponds support plant communities which are both rare and declining in lowland Britain. Littleworth Common is also one of the last recorded locations for the nationally rare Starfruit (*Damasonium alisma*).

**Ownership and Designations.** Littleworth Common is a registered common (CL183) and is part of the Manorial estate

of Dropmore. It no longer has any registered commoners rights and is managed by South Bucks District Council (SBDC) by virtue of being successors in title to an agreement entered into by the former Eton Rural District Council in 1952 under the Commons Act 1899. In 1951 the common was registered as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) along with Burnham Beeches under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949. In 1986, the Common was re registered as a SSSI following the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 as a separate site. As a registered common it has further been designated as Open Access land under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CROW)

**SSSI Site status.** In a recent SSSI condition assessment by Natural England (NE), the site was described as being in an unfavourable but recovering condition.

## Present land use

There are no remaining commoners so the present use of the common is limited to recreation. Grazing probably ceased 50 to 60 years ago and this combined with the decline of the rabbit population due to myxomatosis in the 1950's allowed the area to become progressively covered by scrub and trees. Over the past 15 years the management work carried out has been for the benefit of nature conservation and public safety. The major tree felling works started in the early 2000's attracted significant local concern and criticism of the District Council brought about by poor communications and liaison.

Despite the designation as a SSSI in 1951 the conservation value of the common had been largely associated with the ponds and not the heathland. Only a narrow strip of heathland had survived immediately under the powerlines as this area was cut on a regular basis. However, by the time of the 1995-2000 management plan, the wider wildlife and conservation value of the common was becoming more widely recognised as an important remnant of the South Buckinghamshire heathlands. This was a key reason for the Countryside Stewardship Scheme agreement in 2000 which aimed to restore substantial areas to lowland heath.

As a result of the immense national losses in habitat, heathland is one of the 33 priority habitats in the UK as identified in the National Biodiversity Plan. This plan is in response to the Convention on Biodiversity (following the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992). Local Authorities have specific responsibilities under section 28 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (and as amended by the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006) have a duty to conserve biodiversity. In the LBAP for Buckinghamshire (2000), it was recognised that lowland heathland was a rare and declining habitat.

## **Physical Features.**

### **Geology**

Littleworth Common is situated on a dry, acid plateau which dips away in the west to form a series of wet, boggy flushes. It overlies the fluvio-glacial of the Reading sand and gravel beds. It was over these, that the melt waters from the last Ice Age (Devensian Ice Age) washed over creating rivers in which coarse gravel and clay sediments were laid. After this period, the area was cut through by the River Thames which moved in a southerly direction to its current position.

The origins of the ponds are unclear and subject to speculation but are thought to be ancient in origin. Observations and anecdotal evidence point to them being filled by surface waters with all but one remaining filled throughout the year.

### **Landscape**

England has been divided into a series of Landscape types known as Joint Character Areas (JCA) by Natural England. Littleworth Common is in the Thames Valley Joint Character Area. It is known from records that Littleworth Common was part of a much larger tract of heathland that stretched from the River Thames at Cookham to what are now the Black and Langley Country Parks.

Located to the north of the major conurbations of Slough and Maidenhead and west of the more highly developed area to the west of London it is a part of rural England, and a remnant of a formerly more extensive working countryside. The network of farmed countryside and blocks of woodland interspersed with commons and heathland is the historical landscape of South Buckinghamshire and Littleworth Common is an important element in that rural landscape.

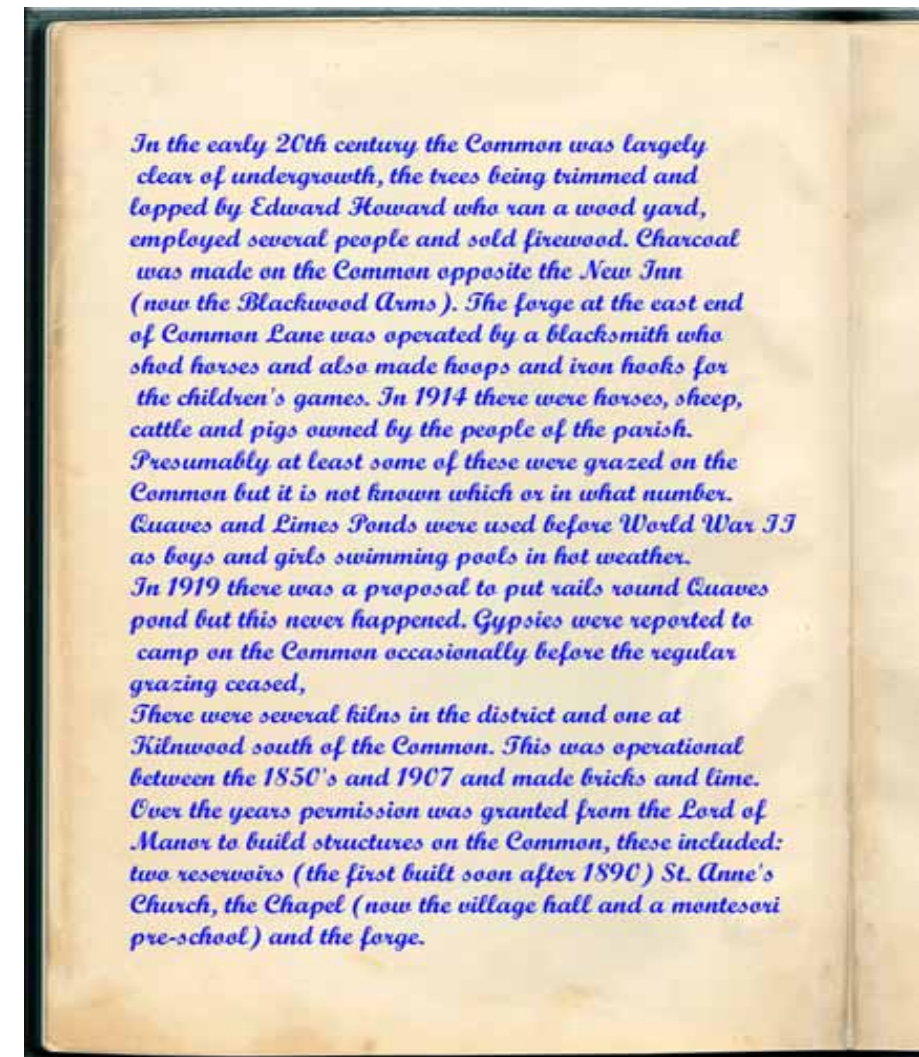
This is a landscape under great pressures. In a time of ever declining heathland habitats brought about by changes in agricultural practices and land development, Littleworth Common is nationally important area.

## Historical and Archaeological significance

The Tithe maps of 1782 and 1841 show the common as unenclosed land. At this time the common was known by two names, Widmore Common and Littleworth Common, both of which date back to at least 1770. Littleworth Common was more favoured by the Clergy and more recent maps have used this name. Early maps also refer to the area as Wigmore, Wigner and Widmere, often using the word 'heath' instead of 'Common'. The common was the focus of Dropmore Parish, which in the period 1792-1938 was dominated by the Dropmore Estate, built up by Lord Grenville but sold by his heirs to pay death duties.

Most of the outer boundary of the common is clearly marked by an old boundary bank with occasional old trees.

The following description of the common is taken from the book by Burnham Historians (1996).



The Historic Landscape Characterisation study for Buckinghamshire records the following landscape types: **Commons & Heathland** are characterised as open land traditionally used for rough grazing, collecting fuel and for certain industries. The 19th century Enclosure acts resulted in the significant loss of commons and heaths across the country. Commons generally date to the medieval period, over the past 100 years have declined rapidly and are of high sensitivity. Ordnance Survey maps of the 20th century clearly show the gradual encroachment of scrub and secondary woodland across the common at Littleworth and also the creation of a number of ponds.

**Historic settlement** refers to areas of occupation predating the OS 1st edition map. The vast majority of historic settlement in Buckinghamshire dates to the medieval period at least. It is considered of high significance. Common Edge Settlement is characteristic of south Buckinghamshire and is a settlement type that is vulnerable to change. The survival of common edge settlement in direct association with the common at Littleworth is noteworthy and is an important factor in the preservation of the subtle character of the landscape. The holdings contain some recorded monuments of local importance.

HER 12146 in parcel 5427 is the site of a formerly listed 19th century forge, destroyed by fire in 1989 or 1990. In parcel 3512 HER 08932 is the site of a 19th and 20th century gravel pit, probably destroyed by the construction of the covered reservoir in the 1970s; the gravel pit is the possible findspot of a Lower to Middle Palaeolithic hand axe, HER 01295.

Figure 2 Historic Landscape Map



## Access and Visitors

### Strategic setting

The common is a popular place for informal recreation. Several public foot paths and bridleways cross the site (Figure 3) and lies on the route of the Beeches Way; a 16 mile long distance footpath, which crosses South Buckinghamshire.

### Visitor facilities

Apart from the two car parks adjacent to the public houses there are no formal visitor facilities on site.

### Rights of Ways and path networks

Walkers, cyclists and horse riders all use the site and it is popular for families and dog walkers. The site is now designated as "Open Countryside" under the CROW Act 2000. With its two public houses, it is a very popular starting or stop off point for walkers enjoying the wider network of public rights of way in the area.



Figure 3 Rights of Way Map



## Habitats and Biology

There are three principal habitats on Littleworth Common; Lowland Heath; Ponds; Mixed Broadleaved Woodland.



Figure 4 Principal Habitat Areas Map

## Heathland and Woodland

The common was once open heathland but in the last 50 years lack of grazing has allowed the growth of trees, to a point where 10 years ago it was predominantly woodland dominated by young Oak (*Quercus spp*), Birch (*Betula spp*) and in places Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*). Since 2005 clearance work has felled some of these trees and the vegetation in the open areas is beginning to reflect dwarf heath shrub with the re emergence of heather, gorse (*Ulex spp.*), wavy hair grass (*Deschampsia flexuosa*), purple moor grass (*Molinia caerulea*) and pill sedge (*Carex pilulifera*). Bracken, brambles and young Birch regrowth is an ongoing problem. The trees that are still present are associated with a more open heathland mosaic include alder buckthorn (*Frangula alnus*), crab apple (*Malus sylvestris*), hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*) and field maple (*Acer campestre*). The western edge of the common has ancient trees on the boundary. The understory of the woodland has in places dense stands of Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*) and the invasive species Rhododendron and Shallon (*Gaultheria shallon*). The latter two are non native introductions.

## Ponds/Open Water

The ponds were once viewed as the most important biological aspect of the common. Species such as marsh pennywort (*Hydrocotyle vulgaris*), marsh St. John's-wort (*Hypericum elodes*), Starfruit (*Damasonium alisma*) have all been recorded around the pond margins. Starfruit was last seen in Quaves Pond in 2004 after an absence of 33 years.

# SITE DESCRIPTION: RARE SPECIES

## Rare Species

The species records for the common are generally poor and this is one area where improvements could be made. Appendix X provides details of the species records currently held by the local records centre.

**Invertebrates.** Following a survey of Quaves pond in 2001, some 56 species of macro invertebrates were identified including 11 which are classified as nationally scarce (including *Hydacticus seminiger*, *Hydroglyphus geminus*, *Hydrogrotus decoratus* and *Hylecoetus dermestoides*), these are all water beetles. Some 20 species of moths have been recorded on the common, although it is likely that with habitat improvements there may be changes to these.

**Amphibians and Reptiles.** The Great Crested Newt, Grass snake and Slow worm all schedule 5 species have been recently recorded. No recent records have been noted for the Smooth snake.

**Birds.** Twelve nationally scarce birds have been recorded including the Spotted flycatcher, Marsh tit and the Bullfinch. The Red Kite can often be seen soaring above the common. The last record for the Hawfinch was 1948. With improvements in the conservation management of other local sites in south Buckinghamshire, it is possible that species such as the Dartford Warbler and Hobby may become occasional visitors.

**Plants.** Some 15 different species of rare or endangered plants have been recorded. Most notable of these is the Starfruit which is a red data book listed plant. The last record for Bell Heather (*Erica tetralix*) was in 1926. In St Anne's churchyard there is a very healthy stand of this. There is also a record for the Serotine and Natters bats roosting at St Anne's Church, but there are no bat records for the common.

**Mosses and Liverworts.** In preparation for the 1995 management plan, Rod Stern surveyed the site for mosses and liverworts. Over 40 species were recorded.



Quaves Pond, Littleworth Common SSSI



*Damasonium alisma.*

Figure: Starfruit,

## PROTECTED AND NOTABLE SPECIES RECORDS

**Plants and Animals.** There are many different designations that can be given to plants and animals to classify their importance at a local, national and international level. The following are used to give an indication of the status of some of the species on the common where records are known.

**European Protection** gives protection to certain bird species under the **EC Birds Directive** and to specific plants and animals listed by the **EU Habitats Directive**.

**Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981** (as amended) gives certain species legal protection. Schedule 1 (s1) lists those where it is against the law to disturb their nests or young. Schedule 5 (**s5**) lists species where it is illegal to kill or injure and/or disturb them. Schedule 8 (s8) lists plants protected by law.

**UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP)** aims to stop the decline of certain habitats, animal and plant species. Each county draws up a Local BAP identifying those most at risk. The relevant plan is the Buckinghamshire Biodiversity and Milton Keynes Action Plan.

**The National Environmental and Rural Communities Act** further lists species of **Principal Importance (PI)** which should be managed for. The RSPB have produced the red and amber list for bird species.

## HERPTILES

Species	Last recorded	Status
Slow-worm	2008	5;BAP;PI
Common Toad	2008	BAP;PI
Smooth Snake	1964	5; BAP; PI; EU
Grass Snake	2008	5; BAP; PI;
Great Crested Newt	2008	5; BAP; PI; EU

## BIRDS

Mallard	2008	Amber
Hawfinch	1948	BAP;PI;Red
House Martin	2008	Amber
Kestrel	2008	Amber
Swallow	2008	Amber
Crossbill	2003	1
Red Kite	2009	1; Amber
Yellow Wagtail	2008	BAP;PI
Spotted Flycatcher	2008	BAP;PI ;Red
Marsh Tit	2009	BAP;PI ;Red
Green Woodpecker	2009	Amber
Bullfinch	2008	BAP;PI Amber
Redwing	2009	1; Red

## INVERTEBRATES

### Flies

<i>Ctenophora flaveolata</i>	2008	Red Data Book 2: Vulnerable
<i>Empis woodi</i>	2008	Red Data Book 3: Rare
<i>Melanochaeta pubescens</i>	2008	Nationally Scarce

## Beetles

Species	Last recorded	Status
<i>Dendroxena quadrimaculata</i>	1999	NS
<i>Helochares lividus</i>	2001	NS
<i>Helochares punctatus</i>	2001	NS
<i>Hydaticus seminiger</i>	2001	NS
<i>Hydroglyphus geminus</i>	2001	NS
<i>Hygrotus decoratus</i>	2001	NS
<i>Hylecoetus dermestoides</i>	2008	NS
<i>Platystomos albinus</i>	2008	NS

## Moths

Knot Grass	1979	BAP;PI
Beaded Chestnut	1978	BAP;PI
Green-brindled Crescent	1978	BAP;PI
Ear Moth	1979	BAP;PI
Mouse Moth	1977	BAP;PI
Garden Tiger	1977	BAP;PI
Sprawler	1978	BAP;PI
Minor Shoulder-knot	1977	BAP;PI
Small Square-spot	1979	BAP;PI
Small Phoenix	1979	BAP;PI
Orange Footman	2008	MPM
		MPM;Nationally Scarce/Nb
Rosy Marbled	1977	Scarce/Nb
September Thorn	1979	BAP;PI
Garden Dart	1977	BAP;PI
Dark Spinach	1979	BAP;PI
Shaded Broad-bar	1979	BAP;PI
Buff Ermine	1979	BAP;PI
Blood-vein	1979	BAP;PI
Oak Hook-tip	1977	BAP;PI
Dark-barred Twin-spot Carpet	1979	BAP;PI

Species	Last recorded	Status
<b>FLORA</b>		
Dodder	2009	Vulnerable; CS
Heath Spotted Orchid	1926	CS
Starfruit	2004	RDB
Floating Club-rush	2010	CS
Bell Heather	1926	CS
Cross-leaved Heath	1926	CS
Marsh St John's-wort	2010	CS
Heath Rush	1926	CS
Weasel's-snout	1961	Vulnerable
Upright Chickweed	1951	CE
Small Water-pepper	2010	Vulnerable; CR
Cornfield Knotgrass	1961	CS
Small Fleabane	1952	8;BAP;PI;Critically endangered
Lesser Skullcap	2010	CS
Field Woundwort	1966	Near Threatened
Pale Dog-violet	1926	BAP;PI;Vulnerable: NR
<b>St Annes Churchyard</b>		
Serotine Bat	1991	5;EU
Natterer's Bat	1991	5;EU
Box	2010	Rare
Dodder	1983	Vulnerable ;CS
Bell Heather	2010	CS
<i>Potentilla erecta x reptans</i>	1983	CS
Lesser Marshwort	1949	CS

#### KEY

EU -European protection; 1,5,8 -Schedule of Wildlife & Countryside Act;  
 PI –Principal Importance NERC Act: RDB – Red Data Book Species;  
 BAP – Biodiversity Action Plan; NS – Nationally Scarce;  
 NR – National Plant Rarity (Rare/Scarce); MPM – Medium Priority Moths;  
 Red/Amber –RSPB threat list; CS –County Scarce;  
 CR –County Rare: CE –County Extinct;

## Objectives and methodology

Our Vision for the Common is;

***South Bucks District Council will aim to manage Littleworth Common working with our partners to restore it to a favourable nature conservation status to meet the criteria of its SSSI designation and to provide for informal recreational access for local residents and visitors.***



*Limes pond, Littleworth Common*

SBDC will achieve this through the following.

## Aims, Objectives, Actions and targets

### Aims

1. To re-establish the lowland heath on the east common and maintain it initially through chemical/mechanical means and then through the introduction of grazing. In doing so work with partners to improve the linkage to other important wildlife and biodiversity areas in South Buckinghamshire.
2. To develop an appropriate woodland structure, creating a landscape barrier around the east common and manage the woodland on the west common creating appropriately sited glades.
3. To remove invasive species in the mixed broadleaf woodland
4. To manage and maintain the 3 ponds for biodiversity and the encouragement of the Starfruit plant, and other important species including the invertebrates and reptiles.
5. To provide an important open space for local residents and visitors creating a series of recreational linkages for walkers, cyclists and horse riders to Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common.
6. To engage the local community in the active management of the common increasing their awareness of its special qualities.
7. Working with the local community and NGOs to seek to provide an appropriate level of educational access to the common.
8. With the local wildlife trust and other NGO's seek to develop a series of surveys to increase the knowledge of what is present and monitor the success of the management methods.

## What we would like our work to achieve:

### **The site is in a favourable biological condition**

The scarce habitats and the number of rare and notable species of birds, animals, insects and plants will thrive here.

The three ponds have been managed to maintain and improve their biodiversity in particular the rare plant species, micro fauna and reptiles.

### **The local community will be proud of their common and the changes occurring there.**

Local residents will use the common for informal recreation.

Clear signposting will indicate the principal paths and trails for walkers, cyclists and horse riders

People from the local community have established a friends group to help with the management of the common and raise its educational potential.

### **That 50% of the site has been restored to open heath with some mature trees; the rest of the site is a well managed semi natural woodland of mainly Oak with Birch and Beech with a diverse age and height structure.**

The heathland on the eastern common will be a mosaic of different elements, including heather, dwarf heath and open ground interspersed with a few mature trees.

The heather will be a mixture of different ages, height and density.

Cattle have been introduced to graze the east common and trample the edges of the ponds to improve the diversity of the habitats

A woodland edge has been maintained around the eastern common.

The woodland on the western common has small discrete glades and is largely free of holly and other invasive species.

The targets and actions outlined here will be reviewed through the 10 years of the management plan and if necessary adjusted. These reviews will be conducted on an annual basis and include officers from SBDC, Natural England and other appropriate bodies.

The work that will be carried out at Littleworth Common will be proportional to the size of the SSSI, the resources available for its management from South Bucks District Council and the funding and advice available from Natural England and will contribute to the following objectives.

## **OBJECTIVE ONE: CONSERVATION**

To restore and/or maintain all key features in a favourable condition.

To maintain the current biological status of the three ponds known as Wigmore, Limes and Quaves.

To restore and manage the heathland and associated features on the east common.

To manage the semi natural woodlands on the west common and maintain a woodland fringe around the east common.

## **OBJECTIVE TWO: PEOPLE**

To maintain and manage the common for informal recreational activities and encourage local community involvement in the management of the common in accordance with this management plan.

## **OBJECTIVE THREE: RESOURCE MANAGEMENT**

To meet all legal requirements that are the responsibility of SBDC as the legal managers of the common.

The overall aim of the management of Littleworth Common is to restore it to a favourable biological condition which would be acceptable to Natural England. Three principal habitats would be restored, managed or in the case of the three ponds maintained. The woodland which lies in the north east corner of the site would during the course of this plan remain a non intervention area (excluding any public safety works that may be identified).

## OBJECTIVE ONE: CONSERVATION

South Bucks District Council aim to restore and manage all designated SSSI features, with financial support from Natural England so that they become classed as being in a favourable condition.

As a remnant of a much larger complex of heaths and woodlands in south Buckinghamshire, SBDC will work with other bodies that have an interest in the restoration and conservation of these. As a conservation and recreational unit it is important that it is not managed in isolation. Partnership working will bring together the necessary skills, knowledge and experience to maximise the recreational and conservational potential of the common.

Restoration and management will focus on three principle features types;

- (i) The ponds
- (ii) The lowland heath is a much neglected habitat. It is nationally important requiring significant restoration
- (iii) The semi natural woodlands



# CONSERVATION: THE PONDS

## THE PONDS

The management of the three ponds must be carried out in the broader context of the restoration of the lowland heath. The ponds support a variety of nationally scarce and important BAP species. Only one of the ponds (Quaves) retains water throughout the year. In the last 10 years significant restoration works were carried out by Plant Life international as part of their "back from the brink" project. In 2004, Starfruit was once again recorded following this work. The ideal management to maintain the important biological communities would be the reintroduction of grazing. This would provide a natural means of controlling the regrowth of Birch and Willow around the ponds and create an environment of poached/trampled areas to give ideal conditions for Starfruit and the Lesser Fleabane to grow. Water levels in the ponds appear to be principally fed from ground waters, although it has been suggested that a pipe did once supply Quaves Pond. Further research would be of benefit here. Around Limes and Wigmore Ponds and to a lesser extent at Quaves pond there are a significant number of overhanging trees and branches. Falling leaves and detritus from these are settling on the ponds floors and ideally these trees need to be removed.

TARGET C1: Encroaching scrub around a 5 metre margin of the ponds will be gradually removed over the period of the plan.  
Action: Regrowth of Birch and Willow will be cut by hand and as appropriate the trunks treated.

TARGET C2: Overhanging trees around a 5 metre margin of the ponds will be gradually removed over the period of the plan following public agreement.  
Action: All trees within a 5 metres margin around Widmore, Limes and Quaves ponds to be removed.

TARGET C3: The margins of Quaves pond to be trampled to poach up the mud.  
Action: To reintroduce grazing by cattle to the SSSI.

TARGET C4: 15% of the pond margins to benefit from rare plant communities and invertebrates that thrive in disturbed ground.  
Action: Reintroduce grazing

TARGET C5: Species in ponds to be 100% native.  
Action: Annual monitoring for non native species and removal as appropriate.

TARGET C6: All management work to avoid damage/disturbance to native species.  
Action: All work to be timed to avoid damage and/ or disturbance to all known native species.

## LOWLAND HEATHLAND

South Bucks District Council aims to restore and maintain up to 50% of the common to heathland and associated habitats over the period of this management plan. Heathland restoration is key to restoring Littleworth Common to a favourable condition. This work will focus on the east common and will also enhance the management of the three ponds. The work will be based upon the progress made in the last 10 years with the restoration work. The areas is now more suitable for the recolonisation by dwarf heath plants. In the restoration work it will be necessary to work towards reducing the regrowth of invasive species, principally Birch, Bramble and Bracken.

To return the common to a favourable SSSI condition it will be necessary to continue with the chemical and on occasions, mechanical treatment of the common. This will require a sensitive approach in this important habitats restoration. The work carried out annually will reflect the relatively small scale of the site. It will require the removal of areas of bracken, scrub and some trees and the disturbance/harrowing of the soil to create more favourable conditions for the growth of Heather. This is necessary to restore a varied and balanced age range and structure of heather and dwarf shrubs. In the centre of the common the stand of heather is increasing. This area will be used as the focus for planning the future heathland restoration management works.

## Restoration

A programme of restoration has been planned to create conditions where the heather and dwarf shrubs will thrive. Encroaching Birch, Bracken and to a lesser degree Brambles and their regrowth will need to be eradicated. On Littleworth Common this will mean cutting them (Birch and Bracken) and/or treating the regrowth with chemicals over a period of 10 years. In the woodland border around the eastern common, selective small numbers of Birch will need to be cut to create small scallops free of birch seedlings. While the use of chemicals is not the best means of restoration, in discussions with Natural England it is felt that until the site is in a position to be grazed this will be the most effective.

Bracken is a native species to the UK but can rapidly colonise areas. At Littleworth, bracken accounts for much of the understory of the woodland border on the eastern common and in the central and southern sections has rapidly re colonised recently cleared areas. In the immediate absence of grazing, two methods for eradication will be required. Across the central area, it will be necessary to treat with chemicals, where in the southern section it will be necessary to use a mechanical means due to the scale of the growth.

## Long-term Management Objective.

In the long term the aim is to reintroduce grazing to the common. This to maintain the area restored and keeps the regrowth of birch and bracken in check. This is the preferred management option. The introduction of grazing animals to the common may require the fencing of it. A project was undertaken by the Buckinghamshire County Council in 2005 and technically it was proved feasible to introduce measures to fence out the whole common. In consideration of the introduction of grazing we would look to introduce cattle to the common. SBDC will work with Natural England and other relevant organisations to assess the feasibility and practicability.

The introduction of a low-intensity grazing regime is often considered to be one of the most suitable and sustainable methods for managing a Heathland. It produces a wide variety of conditions for heathland plants which are unobtainable through mechanical and chemical means and is a return to a more traditional method of management. After the initial expense of establishing grazing, it is a relatively inexpensive means of management but does require regular supervision. The details of the grazing regime, such as type of stock, timing and stocking rate, require careful attention. Grazing will not completely control scrub or gorse or the encroachment of bracken so some supplementary management is required. On a site such as Littleworth Common with its important pond life it is by far the most preferable long term sustainable option for

management although chemical treatment will still be required up to the time that grazing is introduced.

Target C7: Increase the area of lowland heathland to 7ha by 2021 by restoring on average 0.35 ha of heathland per annum of which a minimum 25% will contain at least two species of dwarf shrubs.

Action: Cut regrowth of Birch and Bracken and treat as appropriate with chemicals.

Action: Chemically treat the growth of Brambles.

Action: Scarify areas of ground by harrowing or raking to create broken surfaces more suitable for the growth of dwarf heath.

Action: Cut and remove dense areas of Bracken in the southern section .

Target C8: By 2016 SBDC will aim to reintroduce grazing to the common using a local grazier and a suitable breed of cattle.

Action: Assess the feasibility of introducing grazing to the common.

Action: Obtain a commitment from Natural England to treat this as a special capital project.

Action: Identify a local grazier with suitable livestock to graze the common.

## NATIVE SEMI-NATURAL WOODLANDS

South Bucks District Council aims to;

- (i) Manage the semi natural woodlands on the west common,
- (ii) Maintain a woodland fringe around the east common and
- (iii) Establish a non intervention area on the western and north boundaries of the common.

Until relatively recently, woodland dominated Littleworth Common. Native semi-natural woodland can be a very important habitat for nature conservation. The types of woodland at Littleworth Common are;

Oak/Birch over Bracken and Bramble in the centre of the common

Oak/Beech with bramble around the edges

Smaller areas of Oak/Birch with wavy hair grass

On the south western and western boundary of the common there are some mature trees.

Holly in the western common dominates the understory. Although a native species its blanket coverage blocks out light to the understory layers and restricts growth of ground flora. Towards the western boundary, the holly is replaced by Rhododendron and Gaultheria.

The growth of Birch in the woodland areas provides an abundant source of seeds which are germinating and growing both in the understory of the woodlands and in the recently cleared areas of heathland. This regrowth poses a serious risk to restoring the common to a favourable SSSI condition and appropriate steps should be taken to reduce this.

The woodlands fall in to the following distinct sections;

Non intervention area. Area 3,

Managed mixed woodlands. Areas 1 and 2. The woodland will be selectively thinned of Holly, Rhododendron and Gaultheria over the 10 year period of the plan, to allow more light onto the woodland floor and through selective thinning to create small glades and space around the Oak and Beech to encourage more diverse flora and fauna. This will have the added benefit of improving access if further tree work is required.

The eastern common will be managed to maintain a woodland fringe and where through the selective thinning of Birch, scallops will be created to provide a better structured woodland and reduce the Birch seed source.

The block of woodlands to the north of the common will not be actively managed and left as non intervention area. Only work needed to meet any health and safety issues will be carried out.

## CONSERVATION: NATIVE SEMI-NATURAL WOODLAND

TARGET C9: To reduce Birch in the woodland margins of the east common by 30%

Action: Selectively remove up to 5 Birch trees per year to create scallops around the woodland margins.

TARGET C10: To reduce invasive species, subject to resources, in the woodland by 50% so that they account for less than 10% of the vegetation cover.

Action: To selectively thin Holly, Rhododendron and Gaultheria and treat their stumps accordingly

Action: Create woodpiles from cut and fallen trees

TARGET C11: To maintain specimen trees across the heathland to create a landscape feature.

Action: To identify key specimen trees and inspect annually.

## OBJECTIVE TWO: PEOPLE

**OBJECTIVE.** To maintain and manage the common for informal recreational activities and encourage local community involvement in the management of the common.

Littleworth Common is well provided for with a network of Rights of Way across the SSSI and with a series of ad hoc informal paths created by many years of unrestricted access. As a registered common it is also an area of designated open access under the CROW Act (2000)

The majority of users visiting Littleworth Common are local residents. Its current use is mainly informal. There are no visitor facilities and signage is restricted to the standard County Council ROW signage and two SBDC byelaw signs. The current signage is neither inviting nor informative. Improved interpretive signage should be introduced. This should include the key messages to advise residents and users of the common as to the need for and the programme of management works. In addition, the importance of the common as a remnant of a once much larger area of heathland and grazing woodlands should be included.

SBDC will work with others to find an effective means of engaging with the local residents to encourage participation in voluntary conservation projects on the common.

**TARGET P1:** To establish a friends groups who can carry out some management and educational work on the common.

**Actions:** Explore with British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV) or similar body the feasibility of establishing and working with local residents to create a “Friends of the Littleworth Common” Group.

**Actions:** Organise a meeting of local residents to discuss the management of the common.

**Action:** Agree a programme of work with the local residents including how to engage with the local primary school.

**TARGET P2:** To offer 2 school visits per year.

**Action:** The friends group to work with local schools to encourage more educational use of the common as a teaching resource.

**TARGET P3:** To design and install new interpretive signage.

**Actions:** Discuss with Natural England the needs and funding for the design, production and installation of new signage.

## OBJECTIVE THREE: RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

SBDC will endeavour to meet all legal requirements that are their responsibility as managers of Littleworth Common.

As the legal managers of the SSSI, SBDC are responsible for the management of the SSSI. SBDC is a relatively small local authority and are dependant on the continuing support of Natural England in the management of the SSSI.

Target RM1: SBDC will ensure that reasonable steps are taken to safeguard the safety of the visitors to Littleworth Common.

Action: SBDC will conduct a yearly public safety inspection to include trees, bridges, gates and fences.

Action: During/after periods of exceptional weather (e.g. storms) an officer or contractor will walk the site to inspect for hazards or risks

Target RM2: SBDC will maintain open access across the common so that the public can gain access unless there is a need to introduce a restriction under the CROW ACT 2000.

Action: SBDC will comply with the CROW Act in open access issues.

Action: SBDC will give consideration to the review of their byelaws in line with their legal responsibilities under the CROW Act 2000.

TARGET RM3: Ensure that the Public Rights of Ways are 100% free from obstructions and in good order.

Action: Annual inspection with BCC ROW officer.

Action: If a problem reported, SBDC will take prompt action in line with the targets set in the BCC ROWIP

TARGET RM4: SBDC will work with others to ensure the protection of listed species.

Action: SBDC will encourage the local wildlife trust and other relevant organisations to conduct wildlife surveys.

Action: SBDC will advise all staff and contractors contracted to carry out work on the common of the listed species and the appropriate steps to take to avoid their disturbance and/or damage to their environment.

Target RM5: SBDC will annually review progress on the Management Plan and HLS .

Action: SBDC will meet with partner bodies and representatives of local community groups to review progress and revise/update targets and actions as appropriate.

## **CAPITAL PROJECTS**

- (i) LHX-Major preparatory work for heathland recreation. An area of just under 0.5 hectares need to be removed from the southern edge of the east common.
- (ii) Bracken removal. Ongoing works are required to remove bracken from the common.
- (iii) Scarifying/Harrowing
- (iv) Scrub clearance payments
- (v) Scrub and Bracken control base payment plus payment per hectare
- (vi) Tree clearance. There is a political consideration here and guidance is required, but this work is considered essential to restore the common to a favourable condition.
- (vii) The introduction of grazing. This would fall outside the first three years of capital grant but needs to be on going discussion and agreement with Natural England.
- (viii) Signage and interpretation. There is a need to raise awareness of the biodiversity importance of Littleworth Common and the reasons why the District Council with the support and guidance of Natural England are carrying out management work.

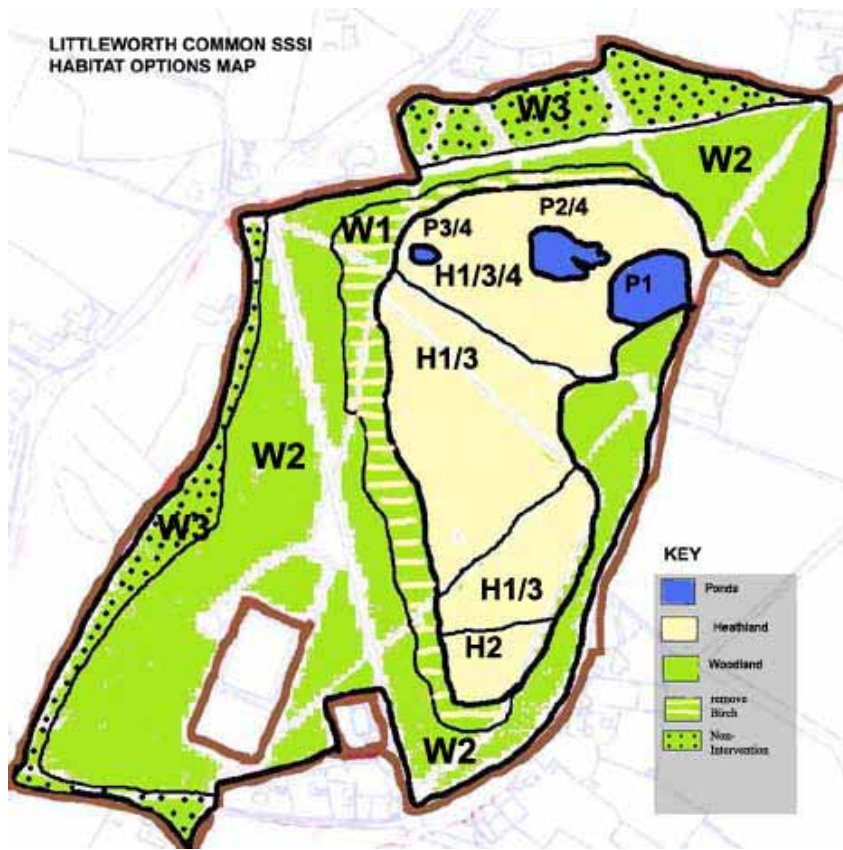
**LITTLEWORTH COMMON SSSI**

**MANAGEMENT PLAN**

**PART TWO**

**MANAGEMENT PRESCRIPTIONS**

LITTLEWORTH COMMON SSSI  
HABITAT OPTIONS MAP



<b>Conservation: To restore and/or maintain all key features in a favourable condition</b>												
			Year of Plan									
<b>Objective. To maintain the current biological status of the three ponds</b>	Where	Whom	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
C1 Clear Birch and other regrowth by cutting and treating stumps	P1 Quaves pond	V <sup>1</sup>	*			*						
	P2 Limes Pond	V		*								
	P3 Wigmore pond	V			*							
C2 Selective thinning of overhanging semi mature birch	P4 Limes/Wigmore ponds	C			⊙	⊙	⊙					
C3/4 Introduction of cattle on common (see below)		DC					*	*	*	*	*	*
C5 Annual monitoring of species		LWT	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
C6 Appropriate timing of all work		SBDC	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
<b>Objective. To restore and manage the heathland and associated features on the east common</b>												
	Where	Whom	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
C7 Cut regrowth of birch and treat stumps	H1	V	⊙	⊙	⊙							
C7 Cut/mulch dense bracken stands	H2	C	⊙	⊙	⊙							
C7 Weed wipe regrowth of bracken	H3	C	*	*	*	*	*					
C7 Harrow ground/hand rake heathland to create favourable seeding conditions	H4	C/CoL	⊙	⊙	⊙							
Maintain specimen trees on the east common		DC	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
C8 Introduce grazing on common		DC/NE					⊙	⊙	*	*	*	*

Objective. (i) To manage the semi natural woodlands on the west common, (ii) maintain woodland fringe around the east common and (iii) establish a non intervention area on the western and north east boundaries	Where	Whom	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
C9 Reduce Birch regrowth in the woodland margins of the east common	W1	C/V	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
C10 Thin Holly, Rhododendrons and Gaultheria in the woodlands	W2	C/V	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
C10 Create small woodpiles following tree work in the woodlands	W2	V	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
C11 Maintain specimen trees		DC	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
RM1 Carry out annual arboricultural safety survey annually		DC	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Establish a non intervention strip/area in the woodland on the west and north boundaries	W3											

