

LITTLEWORTH COMMON CONSULTATION

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WELCOME

NEW MANAGEMENT PLAN
FOR LITTLEWORTH
COMMON 2011–2021



South Bucks
District Council

BACKGROUND



Littleworth Common is a remnant of an extensive heathland system that once covered large swathes of lowland Britain. Today only isolated fragments, such as Littleworth Common, remain. These sites are now home to many endangered species.

Many heaths like Littleworth Common are protected by legal designations such as 'Site of Special Scientific Interest' (SSSI). South Bucks District Council aims to continue the management of the common and has prepared a draft management plan for 2011 to 2021.

SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST

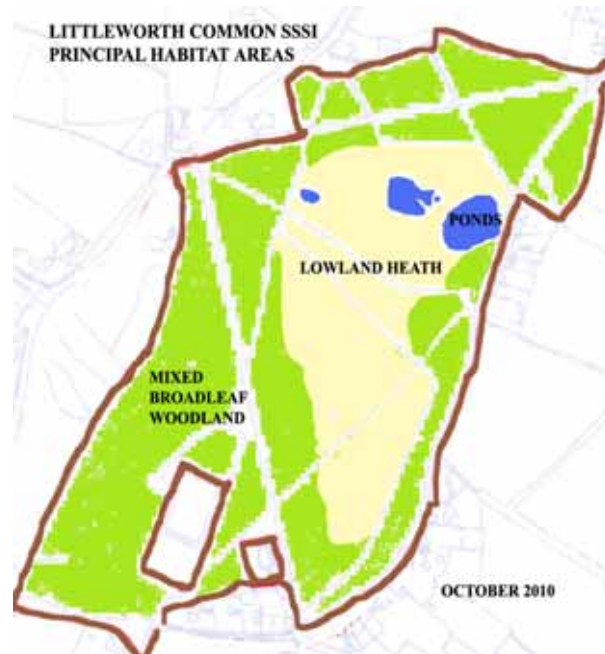


Littleworth Common Site of Special Scientific Interest

The common is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) first notified in 1951 under the provisions of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949. The common was re-notified in 1986 under the provisions of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). The site is registered Common Land, however, there are no registered rights of common and therefore there are no commoners.

The common is owned by Dropmore Holdings Limited, 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 Condition Assessment by Natural England has described the SSSI as in an “unfavourable but in a recovering” condition.

SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST



The District Council has been working closely with Natural England to progress the common to a more favourable management regime. In 2000, the Common was entered into a 10 year 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. In 2004 the Starfruit plant was again recorded on site.

The woodland, heathland and Starfruit are “notified features” on the SSSI.

SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST



As a public body managing open spaces, South Bucks District Council is required by law to comply with certain duties relating to conservation as set out in section 28G of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981, as amended), and the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (2006.)

These require the Council to take reasonable steps to further the conservation and enhancement of SSSI's.

A new management plan is required to;

- Conduct an Environmental Review 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.
- Engage the local community in the future management of the common

CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES



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.

CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES



SBDC will achieve this through the following 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 critically endangered Starfruit plant, and other important species including the invertebrates, amphibians 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 partner organisations 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 BY 2012



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.

WHAT WE WOULD LIKE OUR WORK TO ACHIEVE continued



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.

CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES

OBJECTIVE ONE: CONSERVATION

The overall aim of the management of Littleworth Common is to restore it to a favourable biological condition acceptable to Natural England.

- 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. The woodland which lies in the north east corner of the site would during the course of this plan remains a non intervention area (excluding any public safety works that may be identified).

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.

SBDC is a small local authority and is dependant on the continuing support of Natural England in the management of the SSSI. The Council's resources are limited will meet only part of the costs involved. The success of this management plan depends on identifying and securing external funding. The local community can be very effective in assisting with this.

CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES. 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 species. 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.

There are a significant number of overhanging trees and branches around the ponds. Falling leaves and detritus are settling on the pond floors which is bad for the pond habitats. Ideally these trees need to be removed to allow.

AIMS FOR THE PONDS

1: 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.

2: Overhanging trees around a 5 metre margin of the ponds will be gradually removed over the period of the plan following public agreement. This will only involve the removal of 2 or 3 trees per year.

3: The margins of Quaves pond to be trampled to poach up the mud.

Action: To reintroduce grazing by cattle to the SSSI.

4: 15% of the pond margins to benefit from rare plant communities and invertebrates that thrive in disturbed ground.

Action: Reintroduce grazing

CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES.
THE PONDS



AIMS FOR THE PONDS continued

5: Species in ponds to be 100% native.

6: 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.

CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES. HEATHLAND

Lowland heathland is a term that refers to a range of wet, humid and dry habitats, characterised by dwarf shrubs such as heathers and gorses.

Lowland heathland is a priority habitat under the UK Biodiversity Action plan, which sets targets to Maintain the extent, Improve the management, and Encourage the re-establishment of all lowland heathland.

Heathland restoration is key to restoring Littleworth Common to a favourable condition. This work will focus on the east common. It will be necessary to work towards reducing the regrowth of invasive species, principally Birch, Bramble and Bracken.

In the woodland border around the eastern common, selective small numbers of Birch trees will need to be cut to create small scallops free of birch seedlings. This will help to reduce the amount of Birch Saplings on the site.

At Littleworth, bracken accounts for much of the understory of the woodland border and in the central and southern sections has rapidly re colonised. 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.

In areas where there is less birch we aim to use local volunteers and contractors to remove it by hand.

Mulching is an effective way to remove young trees, killing roots so that no stump treatment is needed. It disturbs the soil layer, letting light in but does not remove the leaf litter layer or nutrients.

Heather needs bare ground to set seed and thrives when nutrient levels are low. Soil stripping will expose suitable ground and remove nutrients from the soil. The soil removed will be heaped in the woodland areas.

Bracken needs to be controlled because it casts a dense shade which is detrimental to heather and other plants. Methods for bracken control will include rolling, mowing and spraying.

CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES. HEATHLAND AND GRAZING

The long term aim is to reintroduce **grazing** to the common. This would keep the regrowth of birch and bracken in check. The introduction of grazing animals to the common may require the fencing of it. SBDC will work with Natural England and other relevant organisations to assess the feasibility and practicability of this.

The introduction of a low-intensity grazing regime is 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 and is a return to a more traditional method of management. 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.

AIMS FOR THE HEATHLAND

7: Increase the area of lowland heathland to 7ha by 2021 by restoring on average 0.35 ha of heathland per annum

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 .

8: 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 support this project.

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

CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES. 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.

The growth of Birch in the woodland areas provides a 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.

CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES. NATIVE SEMI-NATURAL WOODLANDS

The woodlands fall in to the following distinct sections;

Managed mixed woodlands. 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. selective thinning of Birch trees would form a scalloped edge 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.

AIMS FOR THE WOODLANDS

9: 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 a scalloped edge to the woodland margins.

10: 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

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

OBJECTIVE 2: 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 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. 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 would be included.

South Bucks District Council 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.

OBJECTIVE 2: PEOPLE.

AIMS FOR PEOPLE OBJECTIVE

1: 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 Littleworth Common" Group.

Actions: Continue with meetings with 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.

2: 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.

3: 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 3: RESOURCE MANAGEMENT.

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

SBDC is a small local authority and is dependant on the continuing support of Natural England in the management of the SSSI. The Council's resources are limited and will meet only part of the costs involved. The success of this management plan depends on identifying and securing external funding. The local community can be very effective in assisting with this.

AIMS FOR RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

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

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

2: 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.

3: Ensure that the Public Rights of Ways are free from obstructions

4: SBDC will work with others to ensure the protection of protected species.

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

5: SBDC will annually review progress on the Management Plan and the limited resources available.

FRIENDS OF LITTLEWORTH COMMON.

WOULD YOU LIKE TO JOIN A FRIENDS GROUP AND BECOME INVOLVED IN SAFEGUARDING THIS HABITAT OF INTERNATIONAL IMPORTANCE?

We will explore with British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV) or a similar body the feasibility of establishing and working with local residents to create a "Friends of Littleworth Common" Group.

Considerable manpower will be needed to carry out all the works required. Since the site is valued by local residents there are opportunities to involve the community in volunteer tasks.

What we would like to see:

The local community will be proud of the Common and the work taking place there.

- The Littleworth Common Volunteers will carry out much of the site management, including weekly conservation work tasks.
- Fundraising by the local community will provide extra revenue for important works.

PLEASE GIVE YOUR DETAILS AND FILL IN THE SECTION AT THE END OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE.

THANK YOU

IS THERE ANYTHING WE HAVE MISSED?

WHAT MORE WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE ON THE COMMON?
FOR EXAMPLE, SEATS.

(NOTE: WE CANNOT GUARANTEE THAT THESE WILL BE PROVIDED AS ANY
STRUCTURE ON THE COMMON MUST BE APPROVED BY NATURAL ENGLAND.)

THANK YOU FOR TAKING THE TIME TO LOOK AT THE INFORMATION AND
RESPOND TO THE CONSULTATION. PLEASE FILL IN A QUESTIONNAIRE.

IF YOU WOULD LIKE FURTHER INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT
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South Bucks
District Council