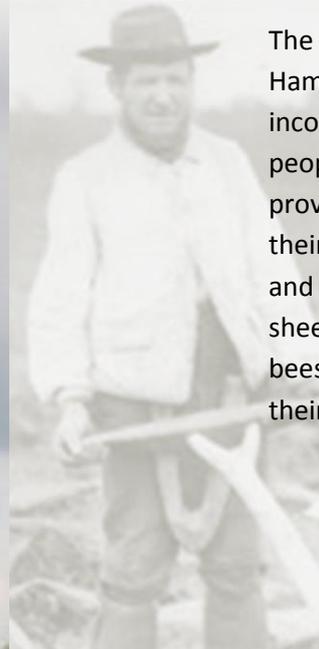


Hazeley Heath

We'd like your views on its management

Hart District Council and the RSPB, owners and managers of Hazeley Heath Common, invite your views on the future management of the Common for people and wildlife. Further information together with a background paper and questionnaire can be obtained from the contact overleaf.



The heathland commons of Hampshire were a source of income and livelihood for local people for centuries. The heaths provided timber and thatching for their cottages, gorse, small wood and turves for fuel, grazing for their sheep and cattle, honey from their bees and useful products around their homes and farms.



As social and agricultural advancements led to the decline of subsistence farming, the commons lost their former value and were seen as waste land, to be put to the plough or planted with trees.

Over the last two centuries nearly 90% of UK heathlands have been lost. What is left, including Hazeley Common, is a unique cultural landscape formed and maintained by generations of local people and now a highly prized local amenity and a nationally important site for wildlife.



The heaths are no longer exploited for their local products and trees, scrub and bracken are encroaching. Inputs of atmospheric nitrogen from agriculture, industry and transport are encouraging a change from heather to grass. The commons will only survive as valuable open spaces for people and havens for wildlife if they are actively managed.



Hazeley Heath Common is owned by Hart District Council, the RSPB and some private owners. The majority of the site is managed by the Council and RSPB. An earlier consultation led to the production of the present management plan and a grazing trial with livestock in enclosures on the heath.

The two organisations now need to look at the options for sustainable management of the common for the benefit of both people and wildlife. To this end, they have appointed experienced consultants, Footprint Ecology to advise them.



Silver-studded blue



Nightjar



Green tiger beetle



Common lizard

Management, to be effective, will need to mimic the type of activities that maintained the commons down the centuries using modern methods. But all these methods have pros and cons. Cutting and mowing is cost-effective but uses heavy machinery and fossil fuels. Controlled burning can remove some of the built-up nutrients and encourage regeneration of the heather communities, but leaves temporary unsightly areas.

Grazing and trampling by stock creates a varied habitat structure for flora and fauna and can encourage heather dominance by suppressing grasses, but requires the right types and levels of stock and needs fencing to keep animals away from traffic. Turf cutting can damage archaeological and historical features, but removes accumulated nutrients. Combinations of these management methods also have pros and cons.

To do nothing and let the commons deteriorate as a public open space and nationally designated site for its wildlife is not an option, so a way forward has to be found. The site is currently classified as “unfavourable” for wildlife, due to the encroachment of bracken, scrub and woodland onto the open heath. The two organisations have made no decisions as to the way forward and are keen to get the views of local communities and organisations and users of the commons before making choices on future management.

A short background paper which explains the issues in more detail and a questionnaire are available on the Council website at www.hart.gov.uk/hazeley-heath. The questionnaire can be filled in on line by following the link on the Council website. If you would prefer to fill out a paper copy, please contact Fenella Lewin at commons@footprint-ecology.co.uk or 01929 552444. Once completed, return it to Fenella at Footprint Ecology, Forest Office, Cold Harbour, Wareham, Dorset BH20 7PA. We also want to hear from those who might wish to give views in more detail and would welcome these either by emailing or writing to Fenella at the address given.

The Council and RSPB will be holding a drop-in day to discuss the issues and seek your opinions. This will be held at: The Victoria Hall, Hartley Witney, on Saturday 16th January 2016 between 10am and 4pm. Do come along and give us your views

