

Minutes Hazeley Heath Consultative Group February 2018

Chair: Mike Coates (RSPB) Secretary: Callum Cushen (Hart)

Attendees: David Sexton (Mattingley Parish), Julian Bishop (Commoners), Therese Abbott (easement holders), John Collman (local naturalist), Steve Airton (Hartley Wintney Parish), Phil Maund (local naturalist and resigning Hart employee)

Minutes of last meeting

Introduced and approved

Matters arising.

Historic Maps

Discussion about path, when it was created, need statements from people like Calthorpes of when it was created. The Hazels and Robinsons live by the track.

Therese: **Action:** Contact Robinsons

Julian: **Action:** Have a look at ditch that has been dug.

Discussion about names of individual places and whether or not the bare-ground scrapes are named.

Phil: A system for naming the scrapes would be beneficial, so as to refer to them with management and monitoring. For now, the scrapes on the Hart side of Hazeley have been mapped and categorised by the year of their creation, in the new Management Plan.

Path designations and mapping

Mike: **Action:** Map of paths till September 2018

Mike: Highway plans of the paths are not true to what is on the site. The definitive route has old trees on. Currently these 'definitive' paths are not managed, due to practicalities and the management of actual equivalent paths, so these will have to be modified on the designations. Public right of way routes have been rather badly placed due to the road danger and further connections.

Mike: **Action:** Look in to legalities of the path designations being "pending" modification.

Mike: **Action:** Map where these paths actually are.

Mike: The reality is that paths change. We need to find out if current management is in line with expected standard. Would have to cut a 2-3 metre path through 200 metres of woodland alongside a road. This is connected as to where the gates are placed. They should be placed where people walk and where the designated route is.

Phil: Section 115 consent [for gates on public rights of way] is pending, as applied for by Hart. These gates are not affected by these differing routes. PINS application still pending [UPDATE 05/18: PINS application consented]. I have used aerial mapping to show where the paths go and these are mapped in the new management plan. Not going to commit to formally manage informal desire lines outside of those mapped in the plan, as that would cause too much disturbance and fragmentation of the sensitive habitats already under pressure.

Rapid Condition Assessment of habitats on the Heath

John: Plans to complete RCA this year.

Mike: RSPB ecologists are happy to trial it.

Tree works near B3011

Mike: Haven't contacted residents at Hazeley bottom, have taken some trees out there.

Mike: **Action:** Check trees and land owners.

David: Reporting fallen trees.

Phil: Two leylandii, highways are scheduled to do it. I have met Natural England representative on site and showed him around. The landfill paths were capped with hoggin but it has become very wet and uneven in places. Natural England are amenable to the idea of applying for a SSSI works exemption to use a more appropriate path material, based on the fact that the landfill is not priority habitat and is inherently polluted.

Mike: This may not be consented on heathland habitat, however could work on the landfill area.

Completed Winter works

Phil:

- Scrub removal, mainly digging rather than pesticide use.
- Have had lots of volunteer help over several areas. Big project on border with RSPB – as a joint team/volunteer day - removing scrub for connectivity with heathland habitats, which will be good for invertebrates and ground-nesting birds in particular.
- Heather mowing and woodland work by Chris Hall's scrapes.
- Contractors have coppiced gorse at Arrow Lane to break up the age structure and improve the fire break.
- Cleared birch scrub by boardwalk, leaving islands of denser vegetation for lizards to escape when basking.
- Winch ramp area work is complete, connecting the heathland habitat and exposing bare ground for invertebrates, reptiles and heather colonisation.
- Vision is to extend the heathland.

Mike:

- Volunteers have been removing birch scrub with tree poppers.
- Older stands of gorse coppiced for variety.
- Took down gorse on other side of the road.
- Contractors in with heavy duty equipment to remove gorse and mulch stumps.
- Heather mowing, including a joint team day with Hart rangers Nick and Callum.
- Extended fire break.
- Thinned out retaining trees in the middle of the heathland.
- Put in some new scrapes in valley north of Wedgewood track and scrape near college.

Therese: Deer seem to have increased on-site?

Mike: More white so I suspect they're getting out from Bramshill

David: Wedgewood farm has bamboo colonising nearby.

Mike: Noted.

Fencing application to Secretary of State

Mike: Fencing application is waiting for decision. It's not requiring public enquiry, hearing, or site visit. Hope by the end of March for an answer. [UPDATE 05/18: Application consented].

Mike: the RSPB area manager going to meet with Adam Green (Hart head of ecology and countryside).

Hart Management Plan

Phil: (Presenting final version). Unfortunately, I am leaving the Council and will no longer be employed as of February 2018. I would like for the new management plan to be implemented, to cover the Hart area of the Heath for the next 5 years. Hart need to apply for Countryside Stewardship, which will need to marry up with the management plan. I have not had confirmation from management on what will happen with the management plan. [UPDATE 03/18: Plan has not yet been approved and discussions will take place with Natural England and the RSPB].

Therese: Who takes over from you?

Phil: Hart will replace me in due course. [UPDATE 05/18: A replacement has been employed].

John: Can this Group formally endorse the management plan?

David: Approves.

Mike: Only issue is if Natural England need to change anything alongside Countryside Stewardship. RSPB are meeting with Hart to discuss management of the site.

All: In favour of 'endorsing' the management plan.

Mike: The Group supports the plan and wants to see it implemented.

AOB

Silver-studded blue butterflies

Mike: Silver studded blue are a priority on our sites. Numbers going down nationally but on Hazeley Heath numbers are increasing due to our management. Natural England: "If everyone managed sites like this they wouldn't be declining." Natural England want to show others how Hazeley is being managed on the RSPB side. Grayling at Hazeley Heath are increasing due to our management; we are getting good results and want to show that. Silver studded blues 43% and Grayling 45% declines nationally.

John: Request this work doesn't affect dark green fritillary and silver washed fritillary.

Mike: They are in different areas but due to volunteers we should be able to manage both.

Hart Council volunteering

Phil: The management team at Hart have decided to reduce volunteering due to staffing issues and to focus on the corporate priority of retaining Green Flag status.

John: What is Green Flag?

Phil: An award scheme organised by Keep Britain Tidy to clear public routes, keep them tidy and various other factors on selected sites. Hart manages several sites with Green Flag status. They are judged annually by 'mystery shopper' or a guided walk round with judges. It's important to the Council and upcoming sites will be put in for the scheme.

Date of next meeting

All: Agree date of next meeting to be 29th of May 2018 at 10am.