

Hazeley Heath Consultative Group 08/02/2017

Victoria Hall, Hartley Wintney

Present: Leigh Wallace (Hart DC, chair), Mike Coates (RSPB), Phil Maund (Hart DC, Secretary), Julian Bishop (Commoners), Therese Abbott (Easement holders), John Collman (naturalist), Lindsay Mackay (Small land owners), Sarah Daly (HW Parish), Matt Taylor (Natural England)

Apologies: David Sexton (Mattingley Parish)

1. Minutes from previous meeting

Minutes were considered and approved.

2. Matters arising

LW: Hart have not found any photos of the old army camps on the heath.

LW: The substrate for the proposed ponds is still pending investigation. **ACTION: LW**

MT: Are there natural depressions in the areas of wet heath?

LW: There is no permanent standing water. The idea of the proposals is to create areas of deeper water that will provide for dragonflies, damselflies, etc.

LW/MC: Whitewater article will be considered after the application proposals have been finalised.

LW: Yellow hatch markings on the layby opposite Arrow Lane will be created this month. An alternative access route for horse-riders will also be considered as part of the future fencing scheme.

LM: For the benefit of the woodland and for the sake of installation, the invisible fencing should fence out the privately-owned land at his property.

PM: Hart and the RSPB will be meeting with DogFence (an invisible fencing contractor) soon. Will phone LM when on-site and near to his property if he would like to attend. **ACTION: PM**

3. Winter works

LW: Hart winter works have been as follows:

- The scrapes for bog asphodel were recently carried out (details in previous minutes). Chris Hall (ecologist) will plant the bog asphodel transplants when they defrost and monitor the results.
- Some small scrapes to target rare sedges.
- The tank winch ramp has been cleared of soil and vegetation and the surrounding area thinned of trees. Further small scrapes have been created nearby.

- Some of the main paths near the landfill will be levelled by an excavator before the end of the financial year.
- The tank tracks have been removed and placed on the concrete track, for the time being. Interpretation will be created with Heritage funding.

MC: RSPB have paid for copyright for photos of heath-army activity. Will share with Hart Council. **ACTION: MC**

MC: RSPB winter works have been as follows:

- Scrapes.
- Fire-breaks mown and some tracks widened.
- Mowing of gorse and mulching the stumps, working to reduce the large stand.
- Routine heathland tree removal.
- Some roadside trees marked for removal or delimiting (not Highways' responsibility on the track to Purdies Farm).
- Planning some glade creation.

TA: *Is the removal of oak trees causing reduced fungi populations?*

MC: Many fungi are woodland-associates, however there is still plenty of suitable habitat on-site. The commercial picking of fungi is still a problem.

MT: New Forest have a code of conduct regulating fungi-collecting, however there is no evidence yet of its success/

JB: May be worth reminding pickers that they are committing a crime, through theft.

4. Public consultation and grazing scheme

a. Summary of 2nd public consultation

The following addresses the issues raised during the consultation, as summarised in the report from Footprint Ecology.

Issue	Comments
Footpaths and bridleways	LW: Resolution is in progress
Movements of deer and hazards to traffic	LW: Not easy to control movements nor traffic incidents without a culling programme, which is not being considered at this time
Efficacy of invisible fencing	LW: Hart have gathered evidence from other sites using the technology successfully
Free access across the heath	LW: This will be maintained
Signage (access)	LW: Hart are intending to replace signposts and boards soon MC: RSPB will install 'No unauthorised vehicles' signs where requested by residents. RSPB are reluctant to clutter the site with too many signs, therefore will be reactive to requests, rather than presumptive
Suitability of access gates	LW/MC: Structures will be appropriate
Dog mess	LW/MC: There are restrictions on where bins can be placed, which limits their availability on-site

	LW: Education through the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area wardens and awareness schemes are the only options JB: Even biodegradable bags take years to degrade
Costs of management	LW: Difficult to say at this time due to EU situation. Hart will find the money to manage the site whatever happens MC: The site needs to be managed and RSPB will find the money to do so
Grazing concerns	LW: Herd would be very familiar with public access sites and there have been no previously recorded incidents on any Hart sites
Future monitoring	Considered in section 5

JC: Unclear In the report what constitutes a good turn-out of respondents. This is important for showing credibility when applying to the Planning Inspectorate.

LW/MC: Footprint Ecology expressed that they were impressed with the turn-out. A good turn-out would be forty responses; each day of this consultation had over eighty.

b. Process

LW: Footprint Ecology will complete the application, covering both Commons. This will be advertised in local papers and site entrances. There will be twenty-eight days for responses, to which the site managers can respond to objections. A decision will be made within six months, provided there is not a public enquiry.

c. Approval

All present approved the plan to proceed with the application. A letter will be sent to Mattingley Parish Council seeking approval, which will include a deadline wherein consent by default would be applicable.

ACTION: LW/MC

d. Questions and comments

PM: The corral on the Hart side would be located away from the landfill, to prevent issues with installation. This would be accompanied by some capping of the emerging rubbish with substrate, which would cover the waste and improve vehicle access to the corral.

JC: Should there not be a corral for each grazing compartment?

MC: RSPB are planning to invest in a mobile handling facility.

JB: Are there issues with the grazier?

LW: Elizabeth Miller is losing some winter lay-back land, which will affect how her business operates.

MC: There are back-up options, though they would be more costly.

MC and LW are expecting to meet with Liz Miller soon. **ACTION: LW/MC**

JC: There is concern that areas of the site will be left behind in future management, such as the land to the west of the B301 I.

MC: This land is left out of grazing due to the logistical issues. However, RSPB will continue to manage this area by other means.

LW: A new management plan is due, which will include these areas.

5. Future monitoring

The following refers to a report from JC regarding the future of monitoring on Hazeley Heath, for which Hart and RSPB have expressed gratitude.

JC: There are two types of recording at Hazeley: professional paid surveys and amateur hobby recording.

MT: The Natural England guidance is that surveys are carried out every 6 years. Well-managed sites tend to be less frequently, due to the already active involvement. MT needs to find out when the Natural England field units (ecologists) are due at Hazeley.

ACTION: MT

PM: The priorities for monitoring, considering time and expense, need to relate to the site designations based on national legislation. These are the heathland habitat for which the Site of Special Scientific Interest applies and the Special Protection Area (SPA) birds. The heathland should be monitored with Common Standards Monitoring [MT: Which is currently under review] at least every 2 years. This could be carried out by staff and/or contracted professionals. Surveying for the SPA birds is currently carried out by volunteers.

LW/MC: Hart and RSPB expect to have specialist surveys every 5 years, liaising with Natural England regarding their schedule of field surveys.

MC: Butterfly transects are currently in use on-site and RSPB are looking for arachnid and Odonata surveyor volunteers. There are routine reptile surveys carried out by volunteers as well.

MT/PM: Aerial photos are useful for the habitat extent of heathland, using Magic and Hart mapping.

[<http://maps.hart.gov.uk> and <http://magic.defra.gov.uk/MagicMap.aspx>]

MC: Ground survey will be required as well to clarify extent of habitat. MC would like to investigate with reserves ecology team how they go about assessing habitat extent.

ACTION: MC

TA: *How are reptile numbers on-site?*

MC: Declining – following national trends.

MT: *Are the pits where the tank tracks have been excavated being filled in? These could produce good hibernaculum.*

LW: Yes, due to safety reasons. Hart usually bund on top of logs and other spoil to create hibernaculum.

PM: Future monitoring needs to consider local factors too, which have been raised in the consultation (visitor numbers, footpaths/bridleways, deer-traffic incidents and grazing issues). These will rely on public-reporting and staff survey. Visitor numbers may be collected through counters, which could be installed on-site to measure pedestrian numbers passing by them.

LW: Detailed plans for monitoring all factors will be included in the management plan.

6. Planned summer works

LW: Hart summer works are as follows:

- Bracken-spraying.
- Ragwort-pulling along paths.
- Removing Himalayan balsam.
- Weeding the scrapes.

MT: Is the balsam inside grazed areas? It is often grazed effectively.

LW: No, but the population is manageable at the moment.

MC: RSPB summer works are as follows:

- Bracken-spraying.
- Treating scrub regrowth.
- Removing Himalayan balsam.
- Ragwort-pulling along paths.
- Responding to fly-tipping incidents.

7. Any other business

a. Horse-rider access at the ford near Bramshill Plantation

LW: Complicated issue, due to there being no identified land-owner. The channel needs unblocking and some minor landscaping work is required to make the route safe. It is considered a relatively straightforward job. The plan would have been for Hartley Wintney Parish Council to complete the work through an Environmental Enhancement grant from Hart Council. However, this would make the Parish liable for its future maintenance. Hart and the RSPB are advising local horse-riders to pursue designation of a bridleway adjacent to the existing pedestrian bridge. In the meantime, LW is still looking at options:

ACTION: LW

MT: Who is responsible for public liability at present?

LW: Noone – however this would be adopted by the Council that carries out the work, were they to do so.

b. Wardens and volunteers

JC: How do we recognise Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area wardens?

LW: They wear a maroon Natural England-issued uniform. Jono is the most active of the local wardens.

MC: RSPB also have residential volunteers, including Matt who is currently on a six-month placement staying in the RSPB accommodation until June. After that, RSPB will have two interns who will work across their reserves in the Surrey and Hampshire Heaths area.

c. Naming of places on the heath

JC needs a copy of a blank map of the heath in order to propose some names for specific areas. LW will send this for him to complete by next meeting.

ACTION: LW/JC

d. Bridleways designation

MC: Legal paperwork is in progress for the designation of the police college track as a bridleway and also the route around Crabtree Lodge.

e. Dartford Warblers

JC: There have been Dartford's recorded on both sides of the heath. March is usually the hardest month for them, so they need to go through it before we can be too hopeful of their future success.

8. Date of next meeting

It was agreed by all present that the next meeting should be 11th of April 2017 from 10am onwards. SD will check availability and book the room.

ACTION: SD