



Friends of Leckhampton Hill & Charlton Kings Common

# NEWSLETTER

Free to members; non-members 25p

Issue 40 Autumn  
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**Welcome to the 2012 Autumn FOLK newsletter.**

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## **Iron Age Ramparts and Trig point to be spruced up**

Owing to the number of visitors taking advantage of the Hill, damage to the hill fort ramparts and the Trig point has got to a stage where repair work is needed.



Wayne Sedgwick has been working with Paul Nichols of the County Archaeology service, Dave Burwell of the Cotswold wardens and FOLK to agree a plan for repairs and to marshal volunteers to help with the work.

Work to clear scrub from the Iron Age fort and Roman burial mound and repairs to erosion round the trig point, will start in mid-September using a specialist contractor with volunteers from the Cotswold wardens and FOLK.

Damaged areas will be reinstated with north Cotswold stone and grassed areas will be re-turfed

with material cut from the local area. Extra care will be exercised to protect the archaeology and ecology of the site.



This is a major project lasting three to four months. Areas repaired will be fenced off temporarily whilst turf and vegetation re-establish. Hopefully we will be able to enjoy the refreshed landmark in the spring.

**Wayne Sedgwick Senior Community Ranger**

**Cheltenham Borough Council**

## **Managing the Grassland**

### **Background**

Documents laying out the particular objectives relating to an organisation, activity or area and how they are to be achieved, that is *Plans*, are a dominant feature of modern life. The Charlton

Kings Common and Leckhampton Hill Management Plan, dating from 2002, does these things for the area that FOLK seeks to protect and provides a template for the activities of FOLK Work Parties. With the establishment of the Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) Scheme for the site in 2011, Natural England demanded that a series of new Management Plans be produced, one for each of the major plant communities on the Common and the Hill. I was asked by the Borough Council to help in the preparation of these plans and have so far drafted a Grassland Management Plan.

### **A Little History**

Management Plans for woodlands and for farms have a long history, but it was not until the 1970s that it became expected that countryside conservation sites should have such documents. I wrote my first management plan, for a nature reserve that had until then “survived” for over 80 years without a formal plan, over 30 years ago! In my case “writing” consisted of little more than filling in the boxes of a supplied format with the knowledge I had accumulated over the previous decade or so and my interpretation of what I thought was the right way forward. After that naïve beginning I spent 20 years closely involved with managing land for nature conservation and with the way in which such management should be planned. Those 20 years saw the development of a whole new discipline of management planning for sites in the countryside. Just as our bank statement and utility bills have changed beyond recognition since 1990, as expectations have changed as what we should be told and how that information is best and most clearly presented, then so the format of countryside management plans has changed dramatically. The 2002 Plan that is currently the document that guides the Council’s management reflects one of the approaches to planning that was still hanging on in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, but which is probably no longer fit for purpose. Natural England’s requirement that new plans be produced is therefore very timely. In the rest of this article I will explore some of aspects of the Grassland Plan I have drafted.



### **Ends or Means**

In the 1970s and 1980s the emphasis in countryside management planning was on management, that is what work should be done, or in the eyes of most writers of plans, had to be done, to keep the site in its desired state or to move it towards that state. Plans were therefore heavily weighted towards tasks and work programmes, the *means* by which it was assumed the desired, but rarely stated, outcomes would be achieved. This approach soon lost favour for three main reasons. First, it was very rare that managers had the resources to carry out all the specified works, so the plan’s credibility was undermined. Second, without a clear statement as to what a site should “look like”, that is *ends*, it was always unclear whether or not management was having the desired effect. Finally, rigid specification of tasks created a straightjacket that didn’t allow managers to react to changing circumstances.

These weaknesses lead to four new approaches to the content of plans. First, a greater emphasis on why a site was important and its key features, together with a clear statement of the hoped for state of the site in future. Associated with this was the recognition that managers needed to monitor the features of a site to assess whether or not the hoped-for state was being maintained or moved towards. This replaced the perceived need to tick boxes to record that management tasks had been completed. Thirdly, it was recognised that when resources were limited, management works needed to be prioritised. Finally, that rigidity needed to be replaced by flexibility, allowing the

manager to react appropriately to change or to take advantage of opportunities.

How are some of these differences reflected in the existing Management Plan and the new draft? The following is an example. The 2002 Plan identified compartments that contained some grassland and suggested percentages of scrub that should be cleared from them, but made no recommendations as to which precise areas might be cleared, over what time scale clearance should take place, or what vegetation should replace this scrub. In contrast, the present draft maps existing areas of grassland and suggests targets for each, such as the extent of the grassland, the plant species that are present and the maximum amount of invading scrub that should be present. Regarding scrub clearance, the new Scrub Management Plan will distinguish between *scrub clearance* and *scrub management* and will include an analysis of the types of scrub currently present and will suggest some criteria that could be used to select areas for clearance.



### **Idealism or Pragmatism**

The example above suggests that the draft plan focuses on outcomes, or at least the desired outcomes. But how should we decide what we want? Of course in a complex site such as ours, with a multiplicity of important features, such as access, amenity, ancient and industrial archaeology, wildlife, et cetera, part of the decision making needs to involve discussion between the different stakeholders as to how any conflicts of interest can be resolved. However, as far as grassland is concerned we have two definitive statements; the now dated Designation Statement

for the SSSI and very recent HLS Agreement, as to what others might expect the outcomes to be. The draft plan seeks to translate these expectations into SMART delivery targets. SMART in this context stands for: Specific; Measureable; Achievable; Relevant: Time bounded.

Some may see the formulation I have adopted as being unrealistically idealistic and not being achievable. Much has changed on the site since the SSSI was designated in 1954 and re-notified in 1986. Future climate change may lead to further changes. We cannot be sure that the new extensive grazing scheme will deliver the vegetation structure and species composition that we predict. But Natural England's expectations can be seen as society's informed judgement of the plant communities it would like to see conserved for future generations. Also, ideal objectives based on these expectations give an absolute, nationally consistent, set of specifications against which the conservation performance of the Council and FOLK can be judged. Ideal objectives also raise the bar in terms of the work, and hence the resources, that will be needed to deliver them. There is of course no guarantee that the need for more funding will be met, but at least there is hope that part of a large budget bid will amount to more than part of a small bid. The element of modern plans that allows objectives, and thus their associated management needs, to be prioritised provides a pre-established template that enables a manager to respond to any shortage of funds.

### **Time Scales**

SMART objectives should have an element that relates to *time bounding*, the point in the future by when they should be delivered. But SMART objectives should also be *realistic*. These two requirements present a dilemma that is very difficult to resolve in countryside planning, as it is very rare that we can confidently predict how soon we will be able to move events in the direction we wish. In the draft plan I have only rarely sought to specify by when the grassland should reach its ideal state. However, it has been possible to specify points by when certain of the key steps

towards that state should be achieved, for example by when invading scrub should be removed or how frequently certain areas of grassland should be cut.

### **From Theory to Practice**

In the previous sections I have tried to lay out the background to the draft Grassland Management Plan of which FOLK will soon be asked to comment. But how does this thinking translate to words in a document. The draft is far too long to reproduce here, so I will just give two examples from it of objectives that might be adopted.

Overall high-level aims applying to whole site

- to increase the extent of the grassland that can be defined as species rich;
- to increase at a local scale the abundance of dicotyledonous plant species characteristic of the limestone grasslands of the Cotswolds.

Objectives for a particular area of grassland

- The extent of grassland is at least as great as that in 2012.
- Any areas identified in the Scrub Management Plan as having high potential for the development of calcareous grassland have been cleared of scrub and are occupied by "good quality" calcareous grassland.
- In March of each year at least 80% of the grassland is at or below the height specified in the HLS agreement.
- At least 40% of the grassland meets the HLS criteria in terms of the range, abundance and flowering of indicator dicots.
- The only trees present are those identified in the Scrub or Woodland Management Plans as having conservation value.
- There are no isolated seedlings or saplings of woody species older than 3 years.

- Management of the grassland has not led to any decrease in the abundance of any other biological feature of interest for which the site was designated SSSI.

The specific objectives for the eleven distinct grassland units that have been identified has created over 40 specific management tasks, many of which have to be performed in several of the units. Some of these tasks may need to be continuously in place, such as grazing by cattle, some may need to be carried out each year, such as the removal of Ragwort, and others may need to be implemented only periodically, such as the removal of invading woody bushes. The draft plan finishes with a tabulation of the tasks that indicates the years up to 2020 that they may need to be carried out. This section of the plan will provide a guide to FOLK as to what tasks work Parties may be asked to carry out. What is clear from this table is that input from FOLK will be vital if the plan's objectives are to be achieved.

### **John Harvey**

## **Membership Subscriptions**

The Executive Committee has been reviewing the amounts charged to members, as this has not changed since the group was formed more than 10 years ago. The reasons for this being looked at now are twofold: firstly, the supply of the current membership leaflet is low, and a new batch will be needed within the next 12 months. If the membership subscriptions are to change, these should ideally be reflected on the new forms. Secondly, the income from subscriptions has, until recently, covered our expenditure on TCV (The Conservation Volunteers, previously BTCV) membership, insurance and associated costs. But as these have risen (albeit in fits and starts) over the years, it is not expected to do so over the current 5 year membership cycle. There are 2

main ways of maintaining and achieving the balance sought: firstly is to increase the number of members, and secondly to increase or vary the membership subscriptions and/or categories. Whilst the first has potentially greater benefits, such as widening the volunteer pool, increasing the knowledge and experience base and spreading the costs over a larger number of people, it requires time and effort by committee members and/or other volunteers to bring about. Increasing the subscriptions, albeit from a very low rate (how many other groups have fees set at less than 10p or 5p for pensioners a week?) is a less time consuming and therefore more passive route. Consideration was also given to raising or withdrawing the concessional rate for pensioners and others. At the same time some concern has been expressed over the decision made to spend more on the cost of printing the newsletter, in the hope of increasing the quality of production, thereby potentially negating any benefit of a higher subscription.

In the end, it was felt that increases to the following amounts were the way forward: annual/5 year subscriptions - Full £6/£25, Concessions, Associates £3/£12.50, Family £9/£35, Organisational membership unchanged. However any decision on this is not that of the Executive Committee alone. Any proposal to increase the subs needs to be put to the membership at the AGM (as directed by the Constitution) and to be approved by the majority of those present before implementation, hence the inclusion of the motion on the formal notice of the AGM 2012.

**Serena Meredith FOLK Treasurer**

## **Cycling update**

### **Daisybank dirt jumps**

Despite the very narrow windows of opportunity for bike riders to use the dirt jumps in Daisybank Fields due to the frequent wet spells, this year has seen some amazing progress in the use of the very challenging trick line that is now being regularly used.

The original two lines of jumps allow less experienced riders to learn the necessary skills to jump a bike as they can land on top if they are not totally committed to clearing them. We call them "table tops". However the third line is more "full on" and the three jumps have gaps between the take-off and landing ramps. You don't want to come up short....



A mixture of mountain bike and BMX riders have been using this third line a lot this summer and I have seen serious tricks pulled off by some of them. These jumps are really the only ones around Cheltenham and Gloucester area, although there are the Skate parks in Pittville and Churchdown, but they don't allow such tricks to be attempted.

It is unfortunate that there is the on-going problem of litter being left by a small minority of riders and I want to thank those who have walked through the site regularly and helped remove much of this. I have continued to encourage especially the younger riders up there to be responsible and take their litter home. It will always be an issue I fear though.



### **Mountain bike access on Cleeve Common**

After having reached a compromise about some mountain bike routes in Buckholt Woods, Cranham, the local cycling community is being requested to restrict its access of Cleeve Common by the Cleeve Common Conservators. The common is admittedly an SSSI. Liaison will be fronted by Cheltenham & County CC and Winchcombe CC, the two cycling clubs that use the area the most. Many non-club riders also ride on the hill though.

It is early days at the moment and so no formal proposals have been put forward by either side but the general feeling within the cycling community is one of much frustration. However, no doubt some form of compromise will be aimed for on both sides in time. Any restrictions to access have the potential to increase riding on Leckhampton Hill. I hope to be able to provide more details on the progress of any discussions later in the year.

**Roger Smith.**

**Cheltenham & County Cycling Club.**

[corrective@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:corrective@blueyonder.co.uk)

## **FOLK Work Party Report Late**

### **Summer 2012**

The summer work parties have been very successful with an average of 7 volunteers attending each of our work parties (we always have a drop in numbers in the summer months with volunteers away on holiday). We have been

very lucky with dry days in this very wet summer but the mud and puddles seem to have been on the hill all though the summer.

We appear to have had a lot fewer problems with litter this year, probably the wet weather has reduced the Camping and Parties on the hill. Although on one work party when clearing weed over growing the path on the Cotswold Way footpath up the side of Salterley Quarry, we did do a tidy up in Salterley Quarry car park clearing the fire sites and other fly tipping rubbish. This took most of the morning for 3 volunteers and we had help from Cheltenham Borough Council to transport away the rubbish. If you see areas of litter please let us know and we will do our best to clear the site as soon as we can.

As part of the Management Plan, the control of Ragwort has become even more important this year, with the cattle grazing all of Charlton Kings Common. Common Ragwort grows up to 120cm and has a flower with an inner disc of regular shaped yellow florets. Ragwort leaves contain an alkaloid poison which can remain in the plants even when dried for hay. The active ingredients can destroy the livers of livestock over a period of months. We therefore try always to dig out the plant with a special fork and remove it from the hill

We have also been very active in removing Hemp Agrimony from Charlton Kings Common. This large upright plant grows to over 90cm, with flower heads that form dense clusters of purple and pink. The plant has been spreading at an alarming rate on the common. The Romans were aware of this plant and it was used as a poultice or made into an ointment with hog's lard. It was a good wound-healing herb but as a cure for dropsy and jaundice writers described it as a rough medicine violent in its effects – which should be used with caution. FOLK have used 3 work parties to remove Hemp Agrimony and the Community Service Team has also spent a number of days clearing it. We remove the plant because it takes over large areas of the common grassland and does not allow grass or other wild flowers to grow.

I finish with a footnote to again thank all the volunteers who turn out month after month in all weathers and I am sure you have noticed some of the work we have completed, if you think there are areas on the hill that need attention please let us know. We will always try to act on suggestions that fit into the management plans for the hill and our works programme

You are always welcome to join us on one of our work parties, Tools are provided by FOLK and we start at 9.30, working for approximately 3hrs. For

your own safety please wear stout footwear and tough gardening gloves. We meet at Tramway Cottage Car Park Daisy Bank Road at 9.30am on the dates below.

**Michael Donnelly FOLK work party co-ordinator**

### Work parties for 2012/2013

November 2012	Thursday 8 <sup>th</sup>	Tuesday 20 <sup>th</sup>	Sunday 25 <sup>th</sup>
December 2012	Thursday 13 <sup>th</sup>	Tuesday 18 <sup>th</sup>	Sunday 23 <sup>rd</sup>
January 2013	Thursday 10 <sup>th</sup>	Tuesday 15 <sup>th</sup>	Sunday 27 <sup>th</sup>
February 2013	Thursday 14 <sup>th</sup>	Tuesday 19 <sup>th</sup>	Sunday 24 <sup>th</sup>
March 2013	Thursday 14 <sup>th</sup>	Tuesday 19 <sup>th</sup>	Sunday 24 <sup>th</sup>
April 2013	Thursday 11 <sup>th</sup>	Tuesday 16 <sup>th</sup>	Sunday 28 <sup>th</sup>

## FOLKtalk

### Grassland monitoring

As trailed in the last newsletter, the monitoring of plants in the limestone grassland habitat of the Hill was completed successfully, despite the monsoon conditions at times, by a team of volunteers over the summer. John Harvey and Wayne Sedgwick are working on the data collected and the results will be reported in the autumn.

Coincidentally, Natural England carried out their six yearly formal assessment of the state of the Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) on the Hill and Common. This is a very important process as it gives a verdict on how the Hill is being managed and how we can improve the overall environment of the Hill that we all enjoy. Results of the

assessment are due to be reported in the autumn, hopefully in time for the AGM.



## Organisational Members

I would like to remind all such member organisations that they are entitled to appoint at least one and up to two individuals to represent them and to vote on their behalf at meetings of FOLK. For a schedule of forthcoming meetings, please email me at [gmeredith308@btinternet.com](mailto:gmeredith308@btinternet.com)

**Serena Meredith, FOLK Treasurer & Acting Secretary**

## Name that calf - new arrival due

We haven't had a big response to our invitation to suggest new names for the expected arrival of five new calves over the coming weeks.

There is still time to give us your ideas for the first new arrival, expected towards the end of October. So let us have your suggestions. Naming suggestions (for boys and girls) please to **Anne North** [anorth@leckhampton.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:anorth@leckhampton.fsnet.co.uk)

## And Finally Autumn and the FOLK AGM around the corner

After an indifferent summer, we start to think about the forthcoming busy season of activities on the Hill. Our AGM will be in October with a date to be announced for the gathering at the Leckhampton Primary School.

If you have any comments on the Newsletter or would like to contribute an article to the next edition later in 2012 please contact Peter Whalley on 01242 517024 or email to: [whalley-p@o2.co.uk](mailto:whalley-p@o2.co.uk)

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*The views expressed in the articles are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of FOLK or its Executive Committee*