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1st September 2016

Dear Catherine

R.e. Sherfield on Loddon Village Green SINC.

Thank you for inviting me out to look at the village green. This letter is just to summarise the things we discussed on the visit and to note my recommendations for the site in terms of wildlife.

The village green is designated a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) because of its unimproved acid grassland assemblages and remnant heathland. The football pitch is notable for the population of Nationally rare Chamomile (*Chamaemelum nobile*).

Football Pitch

The chamomile (*Chamaemelum nobile*) is still present across the football pitch, mainly centred on the north west quarter of the pitch. The current management regime of regular cutting seems to suit it well. The important thing to remember is that the football pitch should never receive any fertiliser or pesticides, as this could be disastrous for the chamomile.

Acid grassland (red area on map)

The main acid grassland area that we looked at still has a few species present that are typical of acid grassland, such as tormentil, lousewort and molinia. However I feel that the species diversity may have reduced since the last SINC survey by the Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre (HBIC) back in 2005. I really feel that it is important to get the greens re-surveyed, and so I'll put in a request. The results of this survey will help when arranging an overall management plan for the greens.

As discussed, the main way that this area could be improved would be to cut less often and remove the cuttings. The main aim of the management of this area should be to remove the nutrients from the seasons growth. If nutrients are allowed to build up, then course and dominant grasses take over, and smother some of the smaller, more interesting herbaceous species, resulting in a loss of diversity of the site. Plants should be allowed to flower and set seed before a cut is taken, therefore a traditional hay cut around July/ August is the best option, removing the cuttings. Depending on the season, you might find a second cut around September/ October is necessary. If we get a really warm, wet Spring, you might find a very early Spring cut- March/ April is necessary, but you should not be cutting late Spring/ early summer, as the plants wont have chance to flower.

It is vitally important that the cuttings are removed, if the diversity of the grassland is to remain or improve. They could either be collected and piled on site in a sacrificial area in the woodland, or taken off site. You mentioned the setting up of a volunteer team for the green? Perhaps this could be a task that they take on? It's not a large area for a team to rake.

I understand that the green is a multi use green, and that the amenity value is high. The area I am suggesting is relatively small, and providing there is adequate space and footpaths surrounding it, I do not feel that it would impede on peoples enjoyment or access of the green. Signs could be erected to inform people of the management and reasons. In my experience, people tend to be far more amenable if they understand why things are being managed a certain way, rather than just left.

Heathland area (yellow on map)

The heathland area is becoming quite scrubbed over now. It would really benefit from some tree removal, especially the birch and some of the young oak saplings. This again could be done with contractors, or the volunteer group, provided they are appropriately trained in chainsaw use. Although a lot could be done with a bow saw. Tree removal should be done outside of bird nesting season, so between Oct- March. When cutting birch, it is advisable to treat the stump with a suitable herbicide such as glyphosate (roundup) to prevent regrowth. Who ever is applying the herbicide should have the relevant qualifications, and care should be taken not to kill any of the surrounding vegetation when applying. A paintbrush normally works well.

This area could also benefit from some cutting, to prevent it becoming too rank. This could be done by hand using a strimmer or brushcutter. I wouldn't advise cutting everything, but perhaps just a small section once a year or two on rotation. Again, it is vital that the cuttings are removed.

Rough/ improved grassland (blue on map)

This is the area that we discussed leaving areas of grassland uncut around the base of the oak trees to add variety and break up the structure of the grassland a little. The grassland here is not species rich, but by leaving areas of rougher tussocky grass, it would benefit small mammals, invertebrates and reptiles, by providing them some cover. It would also solve the problem of not being able to get the tractor under the oak

branches.

Willow on the southern ditches

We discussed the coppicing of willow along the ditch, by the field with meadow sweet. This would be best done on rotation, with a small section done every 1-2 years. Willow is at its most valuable when about 8 years old, when it becomes a great nectar source for insects. So you are looking at quite a long rotation, before re-cutting the same section again.

Willow surrounding ponds

Some work has already taken place here to open up this area. I would advise small scale management here, perhaps coppicing a small area of willow every year, just to prevent the glades and footpaths closing up.

Ponds

Jubilee Pond would benefit from allowing a fringe of vegetation to develop around the edge. It is already looking good in places, but I would be keen to see more to improve the bankside habitat. I would also allow some of the bulrushes to spread slightly back into the pond, as currently it is pretty much clear of any vegetation, submerged or emergent. This would improve the structure and interest of the pond, but it is something that needs to be managed, as if completely left to their own devices, they will take over. They are easily pulled up, as I think you have done before. I think the message here is to manage rather than eradicate.

Unfortunately, Golden Pond has a *Crassula Helmsii* problem, common names New Zealand pigmyweed, or swamp stonecrop. I checked the ID, as I wasn't familiar with its appearance out of water. This is a very invasive, non native plant. It is the small leaved fleshy plant that is covering the whole pond. Looking back at notes, from previous advice visits, it was first identified in 2005 I think. Back then, the advice was to get a contractor to spray the whole lot with a pesticide to kill it. The contractor used was Robert Elkin of Maplewood Limited, who was experienced in this work- email eburn@maplewood.ltd.uk (not sure if this is still a current email). This obviously worked to a certain extent, but unfortunately it is a very tough and resilient plant, and it needs repeat treatment to ensure it is completely eradicated. There was very little other vegetation growing in the pond, and whilst it is still dry, I would advise this as the best course of action again. This will need to be done by a specialist contractor, with appropriate chemicals, and an Environment Agency consent is probably needed as you'll be working within/ near to waterbodies. It is likely that the herbicide used will kill everything in the pond, but considering the extent of the spread of the crassula, and lack of other vegetation, I feel this would be the most appropriate method. Treating while the pond is still dry is key to the success. After spraying, you will need to keep a watchful eye on any regrowth. This is best removed by hand, being very careful not to break off fragments, or spot sprayed again with herbicide if pond is still dry. It should not be put in green waste, and if removing by hand, the material should be covered in black plastic until dead, and/or disposed of responsibly.

Another key point to remember is to be careful of transmission across the site, into

Jubilee pond. If using equipment in Golden Pond, you should ensure it is clean before using it in Jubilee pond, to avoid spread.

Volunteers

It is great that you are setting up a volunteer group to carry out works on the green, this should prove very useful, and a great way to get the community involved.

If you did require extra help, we did discuss the use of the Basingstoke Conservation Volunteers. The contact for them is Mike Norman Mike@basingstokecv.org.uk. They usually work on SINC sites, but have a very busy schedule. Worth contacting them now if you want help next year.

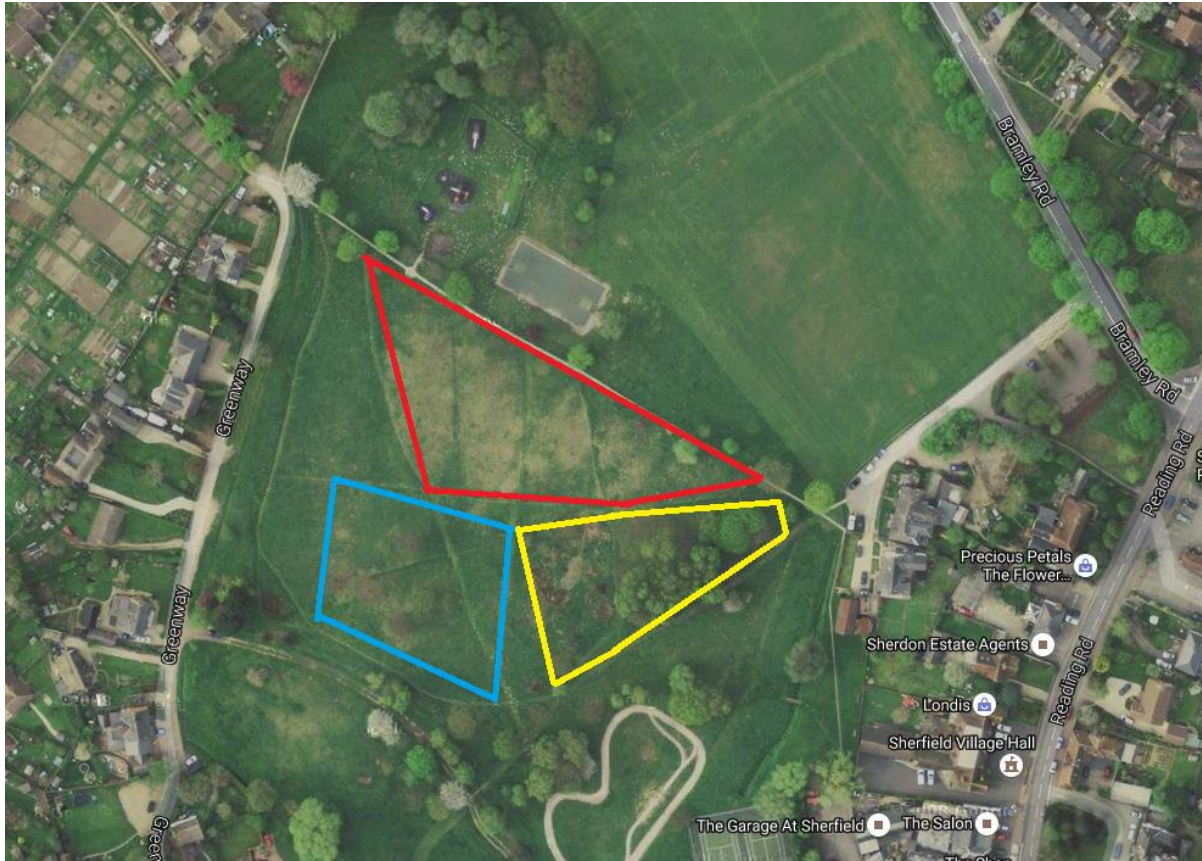
Hope this is useful, please do get in touch if you have any further questions.

Kind Regards,



Sarah Boswell MCIEEM
Conservation Projects Officer
Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust

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Google Maps.

Yellow- Heathland Area
Blue- Rough improved grassland
Red- Acid Grassland