

“The Commoner”

As many of you may have noticed the Estate has been clearing the birch and gorse from the areas of heathland between Fannys Road and Burdens Heath. This was achieved through funding from National Landscapes, the new title for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which supposedly, brings them into line with the National Parks.

The initial funding was for the clearance work for one man and machine for twenty-two days and this has recently been extended by a further ten days. This has made an enormous difference to this area but has resulted in large piles of organic material (I wish I had a pound for everyone who has asked me what is the Estates intention). The logical solution would be to shred these piles but this would be cost prohibitive as the machinery required is very expensive and costly to hire. Controlled burning would also be a solution but this would cause disturbance to neighboring areas.

In the short term, we understand, these rows are to be made into about four big piles/bunds on the edges of the cleared areas. This will generate some heat to assist in the biological composting process but it will take some time for this material to break down and they are better for the ecology. The site currently looks quite bare in places and this will allow for the rejuvenation of the *culluna* (heathers, erica, ling) bilberry, gorse and bracken.

It is vitally important to re-establish and maintain this valuable asset as a staggering 85% of lowland heathland has been lost in the past 150 years. This area has nightjars and other important ground nesting birds, but it will require a lot of resources to maintain this feature in the future, and hopefully this can be achieved through a sustainable, cattle grazing programme. Currently there is insufficient food sources to maintain any livestock in this area and the other areas of heathland, and obviously any grazing will require supplementary feed but this all takes time to introduce and implement.

The Estate has also submitted a planning application to upgrade the two laybys on the main Common Road (The Camp Road). These will be upgraded with new signs and surfaces, the visual splays increased and visibility improved by removal of some of the screening to reduce illegal activities.

Bucklebury Common Interest Group

The above title is the new organisation that will supplant the Commons Advisory Group. This was originally setup due to the suspension of the Court Leet to resolve any concerns of the registered Commoners. The purpose of the new group is to be more involved in the role of communication with those who have an active role in running of the Common activities and to be more dynamic. As the first meeting is on Monday, 25th March please could you send me any concerns or items that you would like raised and I will represent you during the meeting.

Motorised Vehicles on the Common

We believe that the majority of Commoners, parishioners and visitors believe that motorised vehicles should be banned from the common except for the prescribed route of access to properties or for maintenance of the common. One item that I want to bring to the attention of the Interest Group is how this can be achieved; District Councillor Chris Read has expressed a desire to raise a petition. I think we all appreciate that many of the Byways are open to all traffic while others have Traffic Restriction Orders (TROs) in place during the winter months, the current situation is ambiguous and not practical to enforce.

Furthermore, despite repeated requests no-one from West Berkshire Council has answered the question that many have asked the source of “the three-wheels or more” rule. If this is not applicable then motorbikes should also be prohibited from the byways covered by the TROs (when they are in place during the winter months) due to substantial damage they are causing to the surface. We will request District Councillor Chris Read to press the department for a full explanation on this matter and the source of this ruling.

Tree Survey

We are very fortunate to have a large number of ancient and veteran trees on the common and in the parish and these need to be surveyed and recorded. A lot of work has been done in the past but there has yet to be a definitive study of the Ancient and Veteran Trees (AVTs). The Veteran trees status drives from late maturity but different species achieve this status in different timeframes, for example an oak may be 400–500 hundreds of years in age but a 150 old birch would be considered very old. A lot of work has been done in the past but there are many trees missing and there are many on private land so this will require permission from the landowner etc. We are reaching out for assistance in this matter and would be grateful for all those interested in helping with the survey to contact me as the data had to be recorded in a specific method in accordance with English Natures Veteran Tree Initiative, for example there are over thirty-one sections on the recording form: the species, thickness of the girth at 1.3 m, ownership, location (Grid coordinates), number of trunks, tree form etc. The survey needs to be coordinated to prevent repetition and tagged discretely. We can forward the relevant paperwork and methodology but this work is particularly important prior to any works on the Common or building projects.

There is a very thorough, comprehensive study of the oaks in the Avenue (Wharton, James Butler-White 2001) and it is particularly disappointing to note that one of the trees that recently fell during the storm was marked as under threat from soil compaction - no advice was heeded. The Avenue really does require some basic maintenance to remove the ingress of silt and prevent further compaction on some of the trees.

D-Day Anniversary

Thinking further ahead to the 6th June this year, with the 80th anniversary of the allied invasion to free Europe, there will be celebrations in Bucklebury and in particular the Common's involvement. For more information, please refer to “The Oaks” and the parish website.