

“The Commoner”

The Estates Funding has now been approved to expand the stewardship scheme on the Common and I have tried below to outline the scope of the next tranche of works that will commence in September/October depending on the weather and rainfall. The stewardship scheme commenced from the 1st January 2024 and funding for the P4N (Species Special Funding) was received from the lottery on 15th May 2024.



Fig.1 (Above) The heathland at Fannys Road showing the regrowth of the heathers which are now given a chance following the removal of the gorse and birch which was taking over this area. The area to the north will take more time to recover and is very bare currently. The plan is to reseed as soon as possible, the equipment has already been acquired by the Estate.

Contracts have been awarded with Coombes Forestry who hail from Petersfield. Their work will include the opening and clearing of wood land in the five gullies that run south/north on the common. This is to encourage more light, regeneration and biodiversity into these areas. There are also plans to carry out hallowing around some of the older and veteran trees on the common.

While I agree in principle to the undertaking, I do have concerns on how much of the mature woodland is to be removed, as many of the hardwoods in these areas are the next generation of veteran and ancient trees. All the papers I have read on the subject are in agreement that mature hardwood woodland is still one of the best forms of carbon capture.

Coombes Forestry are specialist in heathland restoration and have completed similar projects on Puttenham Common. This work will involve large machinery but, unlike the forestry work carried out

in Carbins Wood, all the stumps and brash will be removed from site. The plan is also to leave stands of fir and oak in this area and not to remove all the trees that occurred previously in other areas of the heathland project.

Basically, there is funding to extend the Heathland project on both sides of the main Common Road (Camp Road) which will involve taking out most of the birch and thinning the oaks and regrowth from the extensive fires that occurred in 1976. In accordance with the plan there will be approximately 15.0 strip that will be retained with undefined sweeping borders to give a natural look. This work will not proceed during the nesting season and in reality, will not commence until very late summer, maybe early autumn. Hopefully this work will also create a natural fire-brake and anyone who can remember the fires of 76/77 will know can inform you of its importance. The common in these areas looked very different from today and much of the birch was cut and controlled after the fires and used for the fencing at Newbury Racecourse.

The two car parks on the Common Road have recently been granted planning permission to improve these amenities and remove the screening from the road which just promotes fly tipping and other salubrious activities.



Fig.2 (Above) The behind the allotments in the Slade pictured in early spring showing the regeneration of this water feature which was in the initial scope of the Stewardships scheme.

On a more positive note, the Estate is to appoint a Bucklebury Common Ranger, namely Samantha Kerr, and we look forward to working with her and hopefully this will promote more contact with all the Common and users of this landscape. We are informed that this is very much a hands-on appointment and with her knowledge as a practical ecologist will be carrying out small projects upon the Common. Common clearing is now proposed for the afternoon of Saturday 5th October but this

gives everyone an opportunity to “Meet the Ranger” in the morning and discuss the stewardship scheme in more detail.

Bucklebury Common Interest Group

Basically, this committee is the former Bucklebury Common’s Advisory group under a different name. The aim was to give the interested groups i.e. BBOWT, West Berks Council, Bucklebury Estate, Parishioners and the Commoners a forum to discuss issues arising on the common. The intention was to keep this committee as small, dynamic and proactive group as possible, to dovetail with the Stewardship scheme.

Unfortunately, this group is now bigger than ever and largely dominated by the local access forum. On this subject there is now a sub-committee that met on Friday, 26th April to discuss the way forward with implementation of the temporary Traffic Restriction Orders (TRO’s). The cost to the council has been significantly reduced with the introduction of the gates and wooden fencing but there is still a push from the council officers to reduce the numbers of winter TROs but it is absolutely contra to our position as it is imperative that these are in place in October to prevent further damage from mechanical vehicles.

There is also a perception with the officers that the damage is not caused by motorbikes which is clearly not true. The byways this year have become so badly damaged that they have been some incidences of them becoming impassable and certainly dangerous to mounted riders. Following more recent 4x4 damage on byway BUCK/15/3 - Sandy Lane the officers have now realised the problem and have installed a temporary traffic restriction order but this is only permitted for six weeks.

D-Day and the Common

As you may have been aware there was a public event on the Green in Chapel Row to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the D-day landings in Normandy. The erected beacon was lit at 21.15 hr. on 6th June to coincide with the lighting of the beacons on the beaches in Normandy and surrounding parishes in our country.



The Canadians were billeted in the area between Fannys Road and Briff Farm and to commemorate these troops involvement with Bucklebury the representatives of the Commoners had the honour of taking the flag from Fannys Road Car Park to the commemoration on Chapel Row Green.

As noted in the last edition of the “Oaks”, the Common was used as a vehicle repair depot during the war and allied troops were billeted on the Common and the Avenue was also used to billet American forces in the days leading up to D-day and these two standards were carried by the Guides and the Scouts respectively.

(Right) The splendid brazier beacon which was fabricated by Iain Brown -Walcott Limited to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the D-Day landings and the Commons involvement.

In the last few weeks, the common seems to be suffering from a never-ending series attack both natural and manmade. The picture below tells its own story and we had had a number of similar cases the worst being in the vicinity of Ramesbury Corner.



The good news is that the constabulary have visited the owners of three of these vehicles. This emphasizes the importance of obtaining registration number of these perpetrators. The police have reiterated the importance of this information but please collect these details only if it is safe to do so.

Believe me when I say some of these characters are really not too pleasant, the best way is to report 999 if an offence is being carried out.

We have also started the “Hayward App” on Whatsapp so that no individual is alone when reporting these incidents. Please contact me if you would like more details particularly those who live on the Lower Common, or Avenue areas.

The more observant of you will have noticed from time-to-time small sections of blue wood on the common and if like me wondered what can cause this phenomenon. The blue/green wood seems to appear mainly on the roots and older hardwoods and in particular on oak. This occurs on several areas of the Common and looks man-made.

However, we think that probable staining is through a fungi *Chlorociboria aeruginascens* more commonly called Green Elf Cup.

I am indebted to Phil Teal for drawing my attention to a brilliant phone app called “Merlin Bird ID”. While this is may not be 100% accurate, it is a very clever algorithm with informative software that assists with bird identification by bird song.

You just hold up your phone and the app calculates the species – how clever is that? My morning walks now take a little longer but I now have a method of distinguishing the bird song, for example between a wren and a robin.



My phone camera album seems to be filled with pictures of damage occurring on the common but the picture on the right and below are through squirrels.

They have completely stripped the bark from the lower trunk of this beech. It occurs every year but this year is particularly bad and this activity seems to increase when the temperature rises.

Their only real natural predator is the pine marten, now there's a thought ...



And to finish on a more pleasant note, these lovely pictures were sent to me by fellow Commoner Yvonne Sonsino, pictured on the left is the Common Spotted Orchids (*Dactylorhiza fuchsii*), and below a great picture of the Bee Orchids (*Ophrys apifera*). Both pictures taken near The Slade Green.



Jason Allum

Bucklebury Commers Association

