

HENFIELD COMMON TEN-YEAR MANAGEMENT PLAN 2018

*Written by Dolphin Ecological Surveys
on behalf of the
Henfield Commons Joint Committee*



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1.0 BACKGROUND

1.1 Location, Ownership & Status

Henfield Common covers 18.62ha of land at central grid reference TQ220156 and adjoins the southeastern edge of Henfield village in West Sussex. The majority of the Common lies on the north side of the A281 road with a narrow strip of land to the south of the road.

The Common is owned by Horsham District Council (HDC) who finance its management. Day to day management of Henfield Common (along with two other Commons in the Parish) is under the control of the Henfield Commons Joint Committee (HCJC) whose members include Parish Councillors, District Councillors and co-opted, non-voting members.

Part of the Common is leased to the Parish Council and used as sports pitches and a regularly mown amenity area (the Memorial Field).

Henfield Common is registered Common Land and the northern part of the Common has been designated as a Local Wildlife Site (LWS) of high biodiversity importance that supports rare and special wildlife.

1.2 Local Stakeholders

Henfield Common is a highly valued community asset of historic value. There is a considerable body of historic information about Henfield Common held at the Parish Council offices and at the local museum including a wealth of old photographs. There are also more recent fixed point photographs that were taken on the Common in the late 1990s.

Villagers' memories of the Common stretch back to before the Second World War. For example John White's family ran Holvedean Farm for many years and he is the last remaining Commoner whilst Eddie Colgate remembers attending the village school during the 1940s.

The Common is an important part of the local landscape and is easy to reach for most village residents as it is effectively part of the village, not remote from it. It is a treasured area of open green space that is used for different types of sport and informal recreation. The annual Summer Fayre takes place on the Common.

Henfield Common has a prominent position on one of the main entrances to the village. There are houses immediately adjoining the Common on both sides of the road and these residents inevitably have a direct and special interest in the Common and its management.

Henfield Common is put to a variety of uses by Henfield residents and it means different things to different members of the community. Dog walkers make up a high proportion of the regular visitors to the Common but there are also horse riders, bird watchers and those who simply enjoy the experience of being out in the woods and open spaces of the Common.

1.3 The Management Plan

This ten-year management plan was commissioned by the HCJC and covers land on both sides of the A281, all of which is registered Common land and most of which is within the LWS boundary. Figure 1 shows the habitats and features of the Common which are included within the management plan. Those parts of the Common which are leased to the Parish Council are excluded from the plan.

There has been growing concern expressed by various stakeholders over the condition of the Common in recent years. The purpose of this management plan is to define an agreed set of management objectives and provide a long-term schedule of management actions to meet these objectives.

Although it is a relatively small site it has quite complex geology with areas of very wet ground and it supports some rare and fragile wildlife. It is no easy task to manage the Common in the best way to conserve its very special nature and maintain its place in the heart of the community.

Implementing good and consistent management on the Common will take time but with the support of the community and with help from specialist advisors it can be done.

Inevitably the financial and labour resources available to HCJC for management of the Common are limited. All the management recommendations made in this plan are important and should be implemented if possible but it is recognised that some actions may need to be held in abeyance at times.

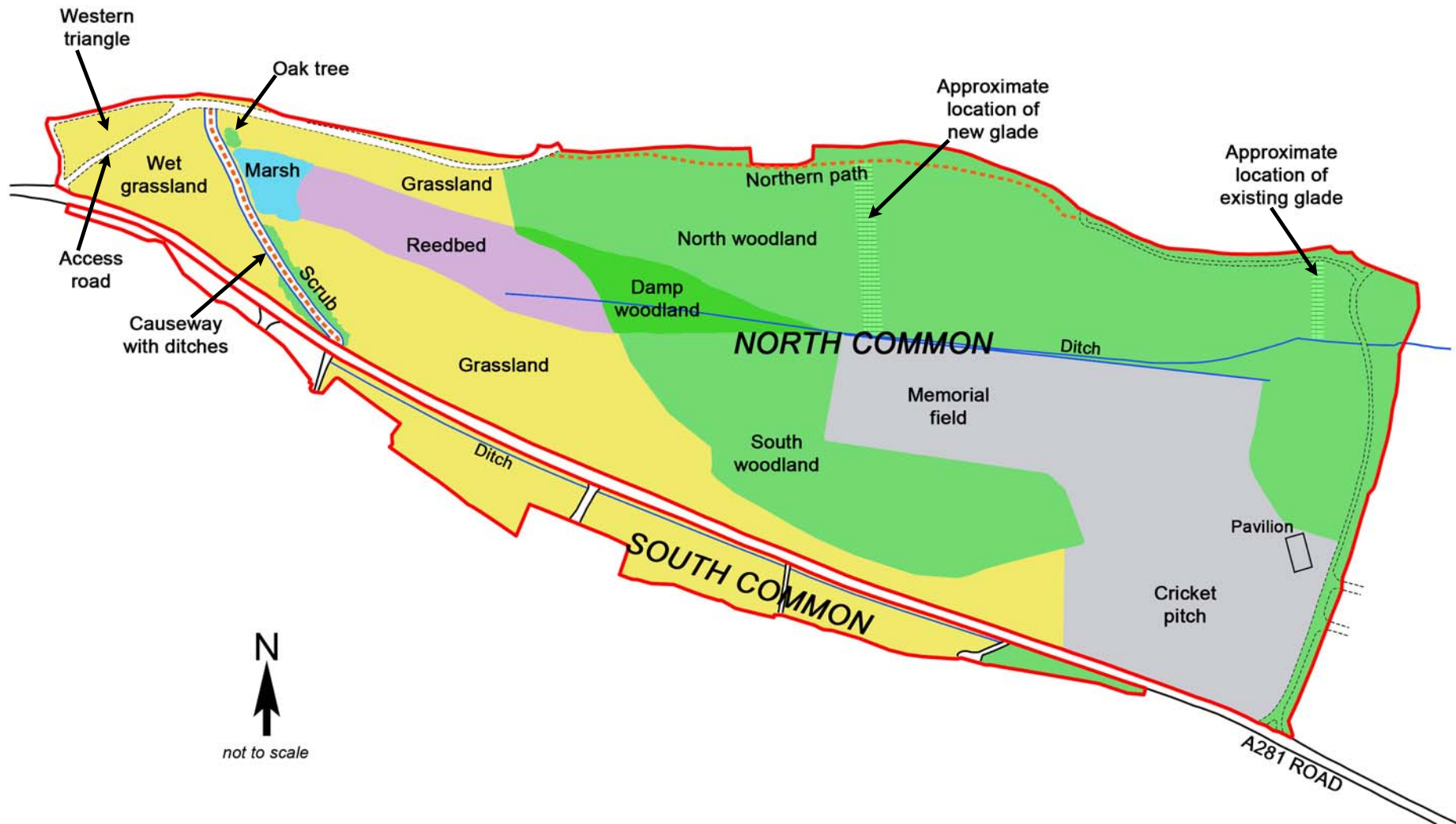
At Henfield Common LWS the most important management priorities for biodiversity are:

- To focus management effort on the open marsh and grassland habitats that have undergone long-term deterioration and are at risk of losing their diverse and special characteristics. As an absolute minimum these areas need to be mown more often, on a more complex rotation with the cuttings always removed.
- To manage the reedbed by rotational mowing with cut material and scrub removal in an attempt to prevent further spread of reed-dominated and woody vegetation.
- To control invasive, non-native plant species that are having an adverse impact on native habitats and species.

The re-introduction of livestock grazing on the Common would be the single most effective and sustainable way to address the top management priorities. It would help to halt the decline of wildlife and restore aspects of its lost diversity in a way that mowing cannot achieve.

Some of the rare native wildflowers that are currently only just hanging on would thrive under a cattle grazing regime and the more widespread species that are gradually being lost from the open grassland areas would have much better conditions to allow them to flourish again.

Figure 1 - Henfield Common Habitats & Features



2.0 BIODIVERSITY & PAST MANAGEMENT

2.1 Biodiversity Data

There have been several documented wildlife surveys of the Common over the last 30 years and also much informal recording of fauna and flora. Despite being recognised as an important site with rare wetland and unimproved grassland habitats, systematic biological recording appears to have been infrequent.

Copies of recent biological surveys and reports relating to Henfield Common are held by HCJC and contain a wealth of information about the site, which is not reproduced in full here. The most recent (Thompson 2017) is a draft review of the Local Wildlife Site but also includes information on the South Common. This document includes good summaries of the habitats and vegetation of the site as well as a comparison with its condition in 1992 when it was originally designated a LWS (formerly known as Sites of Nature Conservation Interest).

The Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre (SxBRC) provided a data search of the records held on their database at 14th August 2018. In summary there are records of 14 species with international designation, 55 species with national designation and 113 species with other designation. However this information should be treated with care because not all the records relate specifically to Henfield Common. Conversely the numbers alone do not really reflect the outstanding nature conservation value of the uncommon and fragile habitats of Henfield Common.

2.2 Habitats & Species

Henfield Common has a range of different habitats present including wet and dry grassland (species-rich in places), marsh, reedbed, ditches and woodland. An area of heathy vegetation that was present up to the early 1990s is now believed to be lost.

Historically many uncommon plants of wet and heathy habitats were known from Henfield Common, for example marsh violet *Viola palustris*, marsh cinquefoil *Comarum palustre* (= *Potentilla palustris*), sundew *Drosera* sp., bogbean *Menyanthes trifoliata* and chaffweed *Centunculus minimus* (= *Anagallis minima*) (Wolley-Dod 1937). These specialist plants are now long gone because the habitats have changed profoundly due to the cessation of livestock grazing and alterations in drainage on the Common.

Nationally and locally uncommon plant species that are associated with wetland habitats and damp grassland still occur on the Common, though their populations are believed to be in decline. These include bog pimpernel *Anagallis tenella*, marsh pennywort *Hydrocotyle vulgaris*, common lousewort *Pedicularis sylvatica*, sneezewort *Achillea ptarmica*, creeping willow *Salix repens* and betony *Betonica officinalis*. There is a large colony of southern marsh-orchids *Dactylorhiza praetermissa* in the marsh area which is a well-known feature of the Common's flora to many local residents.

The grassland areas also support good numbers of more widespread wildflowers such as common knapweed *Centaurea nigra*, bird's-foot-trefoils *Lotus* spp., devil's-bit scabious *Succisa pratensis*, tormentil *Potentilla erecta* and marsh thistle *Cirsium palustre*. A few patches of acid grassland turf with characteristic fine grasses such as heath grass *Danthonia decumbens*, sheep's fescue *Festuca ovina* and mat grass *Nardus stricta* were also noted in the 2017 LWS survey as was common cow-wheat *Melampyrum pratense*, a

declining plant of shady conditions on well-drained acid soils. The 2017 survey also comments on the increased dominance of grasses on areas that were formerly described as “species-rich”.

The South Common is outside the LWS boundary but was surveyed in 2017 and found to support a mixture of rank grassland with relict patches of more species-rich sward. Common spotted-orchid *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* and small numbers of southern marsh-orchid were recorded in this part of the site (Thompson 2017).

A survey of invertebrates on Henfield Common in 2018 (Hodge 2018) found several notable species associated with the bog/marsh area. These include the soldier beetle *Cantharis fusca*, a leaf beetle *Chaetocnema subcoerulea*, the weevil *Sitona puberulus* and a capsid bug *Adelphocoris ticinensis*.

The extent of rare and fragile habitats has undoubtedly declined on Henfield Common over recent decades. Secondary woodland has spread across the eastern part of the Common, where there was once more open heathy vegetation and acid wood pasture on the sandy soils. In the western part of the Common the single species reedbed has expanded at the expense of more fragile, complex and ephemeral wetland vegetation of marsh and bog habitats.

Nevertheless, Henfield Common as a whole remains an important site for wildlife. The fragments of old, species-rich grassland and the marsh are particularly valuable habitats in their own right as well as supporting most of the uncommon plant species recorded from the Common.

Some very large, open-grown oak *Quercus spp.* trees within the woodland areas date back to a time when livestock grazing on the Common was the norm. These old trees are likely to be of particular value to a range of fauna, lower plants and fungi. The 2018 invertebrate survey recorded a weevil *Abdera biflexuosa* that is usually found in ancient broadleaved woodland and parkland and is associated with dead wood. It was found on the pair of oak trees that have established in the marsh on the edge of the causeway.

Parts of the woodland have a rather uniform age structure and sparse shrub layer, which provides very little of the dense, scrubby habitat favoured by many woodland breeding birds. This is especially true of the southern woodland. However, the eastern end of north woodland has a more varied age structure and understorey including some stands of hazel *Corylus avellana* coppice and holly *Ilex aquifolium* shrubs.

For the most part the secondary woodland areas are not botanically rich though the damp woodland fragment adjoining the stream east of the reedbed has some plants of interest including lesser skullcap *Scutellaria minor* and sphagnum moss *Sphagnum spp.*. However the wooded areas add some structural variation to the site and there will be niches for a different range of fauna in the woods than are present in the open areas of the Common.

Most of the surface ditches on both parts of the Common are in a poor state ecologically with overgrown margins, locally dense emergent vegetation, woody species colonising the channels and almost no open water. Restoration and careful ongoing management of the ditch network would create good conditions for species of open water such as dragonflies and other wetland invertebrates, amphibians and aquatic plants. In particular restoring function to the ditches alongside the causeway may help to slow the flow of water over the site and promote re-wetting of the marsh and reedbed.

The SxBRC report shows that, unsurprisingly, there are bats in the vicinity of Henfield Common. The Common is likely to provide a rich feeding ground and potential roost sites for bats and targeted surveys

would undoubtedly reveal more about the way these mammals use the Common. Slow worm *Anguis fragilis* has been recorded recently on the Common but it is also likely that other species of reptile and amphibian occur on the site.

2.3 Historic & Recent Management

Until the late 1940s the Common was routinely grazed by Commoners' livestock in spring. A crop of hay would have been cut later in the year.

Cattle were last grazed on Henfield Common some 70 years ago and at that time the southern woodland formed part of the grazing land (John White *pers.comm.*). This part of the Common would have been equivalent to an acid wood pasture habitat with at least some useable forage growing on the sandy soils below the large oaks. It was probably where most of the heathland plant species such as ling *Calluna vulgaris* and petty whin *Genista anglica* occurred.

When grazing stopped and the secondary woodland developed much of the ground layer vegetation would have been shaded out.

Fluctuating rabbit numbers were considered a problem even in those days and populations were controlled using ferrets in late winter when necessary.

The natural spring-fed hydrology of Henfield Common has clearly been modified over the years by installation of land drains and surface water ditches. A drainage map of 1952 (held by HCJC) shows several main drains running across the Common.

At one time there was a sluice fitted to the small stream that runs from west to east from the reedbed and along the north edge of the Memorial Field. The 1992 SNCI/LWS description states "*the site is being actively managed. Drying-out of the reedbed has been addressed by fitting a sluice to control water levels and removing invasive trees. The grassland is cut for hay each year and a later cut has been suggested to allow herbs to set seed*".

The sluice was no longer functioning by 2002 (Dolphin Ecological Surveys 2003) and could not now be reinstated, even if that was desirable, due to more strict controls and legislation on impeding the flow of natural watercourses enforced by the Environment Agency.

In 2003 the following management recommendations were made:

- Annual mowing in late season and removal of cuttings from all grassland areas. (It was noted in 2003 that the western area had an accumulation of thatch, perhaps due to lack of mowing or cut material left in situ).
- Discourage garden waste dumping on the northern edge of the Common.
- Stream edge vegetation on alternate banks to be cut back on rotation. Vegetation to be removed.
- Repair sluice to maintain water level in the reedbed.
- Periodic mowing of the reedbed and fen edges.
- Cut main reedbed on a four year rotation.
- Removal of invasive non-native species (INNS) from the woodland.

- Glade creation and woodland edge management to enhance its structure and edge habitats, promote ground flora growth and prevent woody species encroaching into the grassland areas.
- Woodland path edge coppicing, thinning, scalloping and periodic strimming to keep paths open, drier and promote species rich path edges.
- Selective thinning of birch *Betula spp.*, oak and apple *Malus sp.*
- Selective coppicing of mature sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus* to reduce seeding.
- Management of the (then newly created) bund by regular mowing.

Subsequent surveys (Bramley Associates 2016 & Thompson 2017) generally endorsed these management recommendations though both reports noted that the extent of open wetland habitats and the abundance of uncommon and characteristic plant species had declined since 2002.

2.4 Current State & Future Management

Henfield Common is a special site with many rare features of which the village residents should be very proud. Its importance to wildlife at a county level is recognised in its designation as a LWS and maintaining this aspect of the Common is the top priority of the management plan.

This plan focuses on biodiversity but does not exclude or minimise the other uses of the Common. Management for wildlife will not stop Henfield Common from being a beautiful and peaceful place where residents can sit quietly to enjoy the far-reaching views, an area where children make camps in the wood, where people walk their dogs and where the annual fair takes place.

Annual, late season mowing of the open areas of Henfield Common and rotational cutting of the reedbed have been the recommended primary management actions for almost two decades.

In recent years the annual mowing has been carried out by a local farming contractor. Because the hay is cut late in the year and is also likely to be contaminated by dog faeces it is not used as livestock feed by the farmer but has instead been disposed of by burning the bales on his farm.

The results of botanical surveys carried out in 2002, 2016 and 2017 all make it clear that under this management regime the Common is losing its rare plant species and its special habitats are shrinking in size. In order to stop the deterioration of ecological interest and reverse the trend of species losses a new management regime at Henfield Common must be adopted as a matter of urgency.

This management plan includes recommendations for future management of Henfield Common based on a revised mowing regime of more than one cut per year. This is designed to help slow the observed loss of botanical interest.

However, it is strongly recommended that in addition to mowing, traditional management in the form of low intensity, seasonal livestock grazing should be restored on the non-wooded parts of the Common.

Continued management by mowing alone cannot hope to reproduce the fine-scale variation in sward height, patches of bare ground and other habitat complexities that are a natural result of livestock grazing and which are essential to conserving the characteristic flora and fauna of the Common.

Restoration of grazing has inherent complexities and would require the site's owner and managers to carry out consultative and planning work with the local community and others. Appendix 1 contains more

information on the key considerations and actions that would be needed to take this management recommendation forward.

Carrying out the more nuanced mowing regime which is set out in this management plan may not be a practical or attractive prospect for a local farmer to undertake. In future a specialist conservation contractor, or possibly staff from a partner organisation such as HDC or SWT, may be more willing to take on some or all parts of the mowing contract at Henfield Common.

3.0 HENFIELD COMMON TEN-YEAR MANAGEMENT PLAN

3.1 Management Plan Objectives

The main objective of the plan can be summarised as:

To set out the management actions needed to restore, enhance and conserve the special features of Henfield Common Local Wildlife Site (LWS).

The recommended management actions will also help to:

- ***Improve the accessibility of the Common for people***
- ***Engender greater appreciation of the unique nature and special features of the Common***
- ***Recognise the value the Common has to the local community for a range of recreational uses***
- ***Encourage educational use of the Common***

These secondary objectives are all entirely compatible with carrying out high quality and evidence-based management that is tailored towards enhancing the ecological value of Henfield Common.

3.2 Rationale

The primary purpose of the management plan recommendations is to guide land management that will help to conserve existing wildlife and restore some of the rare but declining ecological features of the site.

Recommendations for actions that will enhance people's access, enjoyment and understanding of the Common are also included but are not the main focus of the management plan.

Biological surveys of Henfield Common LWS carried out since at least 1992 have highlighted a steady deterioration in its semi-natural habitats and levels of biodiversity. The causes of change are most likely to result from a combination of factors, uppermost of which are the cessation of livestock grazing and changes in the site's hydrological functioning.

Carrying out consistent and sustainable land management at Henfield Common will not be easy but it is certainly not impossible. The most important areas to focus on are those open habitats that have undergone long-term deterioration and are at risk of losing their diverse and special characteristics. These are the marsh, the species-rich grassland and the reedbed.

3.3 Management Processes

3.3.1 Principles & Priorities

- It is essential to monitor the impacts of management and be ready to modify prescriptions if necessary
- Removal and ongoing control of invasive non-native species from all parts of the Common is a high priority
- Management aims to reduce the extent and spread of woody species in order to maintain areas of open habitat

- Some areas of vegetation need to be mown and cuttings removed more often than annually (at least in the short-term)
- The use of chemical herbicide, pesticide or fertiliser can be very damaging to native flora and fauna. They should not be used on the Common unless it is essential for control of an invasive species
- Because the Common has many plants that are associated with particular soil types, any materials that are used on the Common to consolidate or dry out sections of path should be of appropriate pH and ideally from a local source
- Any fallen trees or branches should be left in the woodland to provide deadwood habitat if it is safe to do so
- Grass cuttings from the Parish Council controlled amenity areas should not be dumped in the woodlands
- The annual work programme should be used to help contractors, grounds staff and volunteers plan their tasks in advance and promote consistent management

3.3.2 Vegetation Management by Livestock Grazing

Restoration of a traditional livestock grazing regime to the non-wooded areas of the Common where biodiversity loss is most severe would be the single most effective way to meet the ecological objective of the management plan.

The proposal that HCJC should consider reinstating grazing at Henfield Common must be presented to the local community with great sensitivity and include a consultation that will take full account of the views of all users of the common.

On registered common land there are legal requirements that must be met and a formal process to go through in order to allow livestock grazing to take place (see Appendix 1). This may seem daunting but it is a well-established procedure that has been carried out successfully on many areas of common land in Sussex and any difficulties are certainly not insurmountable.

The process would take time to instigate but there are partner bodies and experienced individuals who can assist HCJC. A successful scheme would have direct long-term benefits for Henfield Common in terms of ongoing costs, sustainability of management, biodiversity conservation, historic and landscape aspects.

3.3.3 Vegetation Management by Mowing

Irrespective of whether or when livestock grazing can be restored to the Common there is an urgent need to adopt a more complex yet consistent mowing regime that will attempt to slow the loss of rare and uncommon plant species on the Common.

In the short term mowing the grassland areas of the Common more often than once a year and introducing a more complicated rotation of areas being cut will help to suppress the growth and spread of robust grasses. These bulky grasses have increased in recent years and out-compete the wildflowers and fine-leaved grasses in areas of formerly species-rich sward.

Removal of the cut material is essential to prevent an accumulated thatch of dead vegetation which smothers new growth and adds nutrients to the soil. A more reliable mechanism for removing the mown vegetation from the Common is needed. It is recommended that its disposal at a local off-site composting facility should be arranged.

Mowing vegetation does not create the same structural diversity and variety of microhabitats as the action of grazing livestock, which is the primary reason why the vegetation of Henfield Common has undergone a steady loss of species over recent decades.

For the first five years of the management plan it is recommended that most open areas receive more than one cut per year in order to reduce the accumulation of thatch and slow the increase in competitive grasses. There may be a short-term reduction in the flowering display of some of the perennial wildflowers but they will nevertheless benefit from reduced competition from more robust plants.

Details of the mowing regime should be carefully recorded each year, particularly the timing of the cuts and areas mown along with any problems or observations. This will allow the impacts on the vegetation to be assessed so that after the first five year period the mowing regime can be revised or renewed as appropriate.

In any event the practice of grassland management solely by mowing should be reviewed as soon as there has been a community consultation on the proposal to restore livestock grazing to the Common. If and when it becomes possible to graze livestock on the Common then the grassland mowing regimes will inevitably need to be re-assessed.

3.3.4 Wetland Management

Good management of most of the wetland habitats at Henfield Common is inextricably tied up with the vegetation mowing regime and any possible future livestock grazing regime. The wet grassland, marsh, reedbed and ditches would all benefit from less accumulated dead vegetation. This can be achieved at least in part by manual removal of cut material but the grazing action of livestock would be ecologically preferable and considerably easier.

The wet woodland, stream and woodland ditches should all be subject to gradual, rotational management that will maintain a balance of light and shade whilst promoting structurally diverse vegetation.

Recommendations for ditch vegetation management aim to enhance these linear habitats for wildlife and improve the function of key ditches to retain water, re-wet soils and slow surface water flow across the common.

In the past the long ditch that spans much of the south common has been sprayed with herbicide in an attempt to control vegetation growth. However the use of non-selective herbicide is not only an ecologically damaging way to manage this habitat but the dense vegetation and scrub that is colonising this ditch suggests that herbicide use is not an effective way to control the vegetation growth or maintain ditch function.

There is considerable anecdotal evidence that the reedbed has become drier in recent years. It has also undoubtedly spread in extent across the North Common since the surveys of 1989 and 2002. Re-wetting the reedbed is a key objective of the management plan and achieving this will be supported by management actions that take place across the whole site, not just in the reedbed itself.

The reedbed currently has very uniform structure and vegetation composition. Reedbed edges are usually the most diverse part of this habitat, supporting most of the associated fauna. A greater diversity in age of vegetation, depth of standing water, presence of pools, plant species and structure will increase its value to a range of wildlife particularly invertebrates. As a dynamic ecosystem the reedbed needs to have management input that will promote a variety of conditions to support its biodiversity and conservation value.

Management recommendations for the reedbed are focused on a combination of rotational mowing with excavation of woody plants, silt and reed rhizomes. This is intended to prevent further spread of reeds into higher value, more diverse wetland vegetation and create a better mosaic of species-rich wet areas and open water. The overall aim is to reduce the area of reedbed and increase the area of marshy vegetation.

Rotational mowing and removal of material from reedbed will be needed for the foreseeable future but details of the recommended management regime should be reviewed if livestock grazing is restored to the Common.

Summer cutting of reedbed vegetation helps to reduce the dominance of common reed *Phragmites australis* and promotes a more diverse plant assemblage. It is also easier to carry out as the ground is generally drier and allows safer access with handheld machinery. However it does risk disturbance of nesting birds and other fauna so must be carried out with care and only on a proportion of the reedbed not the whole area at one time. Cutting in winter can be more difficult as the ground is likely to be too wet for machinery though reed was traditionally cut (for use in thatching) in January or February when the stems were dry and leafless.

If cut reed is flooded it slows re-growth, which is why creating deeper pools or scrapes whilst removing any scrub in areas where reed has been cut will help to diversify the wetland vegetation and promote more species-rich marshy habitat rather than pure reedbed.

Disposing of cut material from the reedbed can be problematic. Ideally a local market for cut reed for thatching would be developed to support a return to the traditional method of reedbed management. RSPB research (White et.al. 2013) suggests that 1ha (c.2.5 acres) of reedbed may produce around 1,000 bundles of thatching reed but whilst there is a demand for this product there is a shortage of commercial reed harvesters and thatchers.

The next best disposal alternative would be to create a long-term reed stacking area where cut reed could be allowed to compost over time. Reed litter heaps provide excellent habitat for fauna but need a reasonable amount of space.

Unfortunately the small size of Henfield Common would make it difficult to find a suitable area for a long-term reed stack. A pragmatic approach would be to arrange for disposal of cut reed along with other grass cuttings from all parts of the site at the local green waste recycling plant (Olus Environmental at nearby Wineham).

Removing areas of accumulated plant matter, silt and willow roots will help diversify the reedbed habitat but re-wetting the soil could also be promoted by the creation of a low bund to slow the flow of surface water using some of the excavated material. Plans for this have already been discussed by HCJC with the Ouse and Adur Rivers Trust (OART) and this possibility could be investigated further when financial resources allow.

3.3.5 Woodland Management

The woodland areas are generally of lower ecological importance and are certainly much less fragile than the open parts of Henfield Common. Woodland management is important but implementing most of the recommendations for this habitat is not as urgent as the need to improve management of the open grassland and wetland habitats.

The highest management priorities for the wooded areas are:

- To prevent trees and shrubs spreading from the woodland into the rest of the Common
- Path management
- The control of invasive non-native plant species.

The latter action is a particularly important in the woodland areas and will have both ecological and public access benefits.

Other recommended actions in the woodlands aim to enhance woodland structure and include thinning dense stands of spindly or even-aged trees, especially around mature oaks, creating glades and coppicing selected areas. These will all help to increase the amount of light reaching the woodland floor which in turn will promote the growth of woodland wildflowers and encourage the development of a more varied and dense shrub layer.

Planting trees and shrubs in woodland is not always ecologically desirable or successful. However, where thinning or scallop/glade creation in the north woodland opens up areas with a sparse shrub layer, planting a mixture of native, local origin shrubs that are rich sources of pollen, nectar, berries or other food sources for fauna would be valuable. Suitable species include hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, spindle *Euonymus europaeus*, guelder-rose *Viburnum opulus* and hazel.

Most of these management recommendations for the woodlands will also help to to keep footpaths open and promote safe access. The wooded areas are very popular with visitors to the Common for informal recreation.

There is a large heap of grass cuttings in the Southern woodland, derived from mowing the Parish Council controlled amenity areas. Disposing of grass cuttings anywhere within the LWS woodland areas is not appropriate as it will have an adverse impact on the habitat. As the cuttings rot there will be localised soil enrichment that will promote the growth of plants such as nettle and docks. A better solution would be to build a formal composting area away from the LWS, perhaps near the cricket pavilion car park, where grass cuttings and any other organic matter can be safely stored. Alternatively this material could be disposed of at an off-site green waste recycling facility though this would probably have quite high cost implications.

3.4 Targets

Setting defined targets is a useful way to help the site managers measure progress towards achieving the management objectives. The key targets at Henfield Common should include the area or proportion and condition of key semi-natural habitats i.e. marsh, species-rich grassland, reedbed and woodland.

The continued presence and increased population size of key species (either habitat indicators or rarities) should also be included in the site management targets.

The details of agreed targets should be informed by the results of biological surveys that are recommended as part of the site monitoring process, in particular the habitat mapping survey. Until the exact area of each habitat or size of key populations is known it is not possible to set the target for what that area or population should be in 10 years' time.

Some broad, preliminary ecological targets should be:

- To prevent any further increase in the extent of woodland and wooded habitat on the Common
- To reduce the extent of reed-dominated vegetation by 50% over 10 years
- To at least double the extent of diverse marsh vegetation into areas formerly dominated by reeds over 10 years
- To have approximately equal areas of reedbed and marsh habitat by the end of the 10 year management plan period
- To halt the deterioration in the quality and diversity of the species-rich grassland vegetation
- To restore species-rich grassland to good condition across the Common by the end of the 10 year management plan period

Setting targets for access, recreation and educational uses of the Common is outside the scope of this management plan but should be considered and set by HCJC with help from expert partner bodies.

For example, the Dove Nursery School operates from the cricket pavilion. Children who attend the nursery would have easy access to the Common, which they could use for Forest School activities or other outdoor learning.

An annual report on management actions carried out, progress towards meeting targets and any refinements needed to the recommended management actions must be compiled by HCJC and submitted to HDC. This will help assess whether the management plan is being successful and whether funding levels available to the site managers are sufficient to support the recommended management.

3.5 Management Actions

3.5.1 Invasive Species Control

- Removal of invasive non-native species (INNS) is a high priority.
- Montbretia *Crocsmia* sp. and Michaelmas daisy *Aster* sp. of garden origin are present in the marsh and reedbed habitats. Other such species may occur in future and should not be allowed to become established.
- INNS control in the north woodland is a high priority. Key species to tackle are the concentrations of bamboo and cherry laurel *Prunus laurocerasus* along the northern path. The scattered rhododendron *Rhododendron ponticum* and Wilson's honeysuckle *Lonicera nitida* within the woodland should also be removed to prevent further spread.
- Ragwort *Senecio jacobaea* and bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* south of the road should be monitored and may need control in future years.
- There are patches of bracken in and around the south woodland. This is unsurprising on the sandy soils of this part of the Common but the extent and any spread of bracken should be mapped and monitored to ensure it does not become over-dominant.

3.5.2 Mowing Grassland & Marshy Areas

3.5.2.1 All Areas

- There must be a degree of flexibility within the mowing regime on the Common to allow for differing weather conditions and vegetation growth rates between years. The suggested timings given in this management plan are intended as a guide.
- Every few years a delay in the last cut of the year is desirable so that flowering perennials can set seed.
- Selected areas of unmown, tall grassy vegetation should be retained over the winter months each year to provide habitat for over-wintering invertebrates. Such areas can be strips along woodland edges and corners in less accessible parts of the site.
- Monitoring the effect of the mowing regime on the grassland sward and on areas of wetland vegetation is crucial. The timing and frequency of cuts may need to be adjusted to deliver the best outcome in different parts of the site.

3.5.2.2 North Common

- The western triangle of grassland and the edges of the access road should be managed as short sward areas and mown regularly throughout the growing season. This will improve public access and amenity in the western part of the common nearest to the village.
- The main grassland areas north of the road need to be cut and arisings removed more than once a year to knock back competitive grasses and reduce the accumulation of thatch. Two cuts per year, in late April and again in late September/early October, are recommended for a trial period. Ideally the areas managed in this way should be cut in patches on a rotation so that not all sections are cut at the same time

- The wet grassland and marsh adjoining the reedbed are currently mown annually as part of the grassland hay cut. This management has not been enough to maintain the fragile wetland flora and its rare species. The impact of two cuts per year on these areas must be monitored carefully.
- The sward on the roadside bund should be cut two to three times per year and cuttings removed to reduce the dominance of coarse, tussocky grasses and tall herbs.

3.5.2.3 South Common

- Grassland areas south of the road need more frequent mowing and removal of cuttings to reduce the vigour of the coarse grasses and herbs that are taking over the sward. Three cuts per year are recommended for first 5 years with careful monitoring and review of the outcome.
- Some concern was expressed by consultees that ragwort is becoming more frequent on the South Common and bracken encroachment is also a potential problem on the dry grassland in this area. The abundance of both these plants should be monitored under the new mowing regime and if necessary manual control could be carried out by the conservation volunteers.

3.5.3 Reedbed

- A shorter mowing rotation for the reedbed is recommended for the duration of this management plan. Cutting a third of the reedbed each year, rather than a quarter, will help to reduce the vigour of common reed and prevent further spread of the reed-dominated vegetation into the adjoining marshy areas that are of greater ecological importance.
- Reed at Henfield Common should be cut using brush cutters or a pedestrian operated reciprocating mower to allow maximum flexibility in the areas cut and cutting height. This is labour intensive but has the advantage of allowing more structurally diverse habitat to be created than would be possible using large, tractor-mounted mowing equipment.
- Cutting in summer will help to reduce reed vigour but will need to be carried out with care to avoid disturbance to nesting birds. Areas to be cut should be checked carefully for signs of nesting birds before mowing begins.
- Removing the cut reed is crucial to ensure that the reedbed is maintained as a diverse habitat and to slow its natural succession to drier, scrubby vegetation.
- Reducing the amount of willow *Salix spp.* scrub, bramble *Rubus fruticosus* and dead vegetation in the reedbed is a very high priority. In alternate years when ground conditions are sufficiently dry, willow roots and the associated blocks of silt, accumulated vegetation and reed rhizomes should be dug from recently cut sections of the reedbed using a small mechanical digger. This will create pockets of deeper standing water and shorter, more diverse marsh vegetation.

3.5.4 Ditches

- Ditch restoration and vegetation management needs to be done carefully, consistently and wherever possible without using heavy machinery. The frequency of vegetation clearance needed in and along each ditch will vary with growth rates therefore some judgement and flexibility in the cutting regime will be needed.

- Preliminary restoration work to remove substantial amounts of accumulated vegetation and silt from the ditches will probably require a mini-digger to be used.
- Initially annual management of ditch vegetation in autumn is recommended but if ditches become very overgrown before autumn then either one bank or just the affected sections could be cut back earlier in the year. Conversely if growth is sparse there is no need to cut all margins annually.
- Rotational management of ditch vegetation is highly desirable to provide a range of different conditions across the ditch network as a whole. Not all ditches should be cleared at the same time.
- The parallel ditches along the causeway in particular may need bankside vegetation mowing more often than once per year as well as periodic clearance of silt. Bramble stands alongside the edges of these ditches should be cut back as necessary (approximately every 2-3 years) to prevent them from encroaching onto the ditches and footpath.
- The long ditch in the South Common is currently very overgrown and is being colonised by trees and shrubs. This ditch should also be managed by regular but careful vegetation cutting with removal of the arisings.
- The parallel ditches that run along the northern edge of the Memorial Field within the north woodland are very shaded in places. Coppicing and thinning of selected trees and shrubs on the ditch banks will allow more light into the southern ditch which will benefit its aquatic and marginal vegetation. This management will also promote more structurally diverse vegetation to develop along the woodland edge. The gnarled, lichen-rich oak *Quercus robur* trees that occur along the banktop should be retained as valuable features of the woodland edge habitat.

3.5.5 Paths

- The main paths across the Common along the causeway, the access road edges and much of the wooded northern path should have 1m wide strips of vegetation along their edges mown regularly during the growing season to keep them open and easy to use.
- Vegetation such as bramble, scrub and tall herbs that grows further than 1m from path edges should only be cut in sections on rotation in autumn where it is necessary to maintain good access.
- The path along the causeway would benefit greatly from either heavy thinning or ideally complete removal, of the young oak trees and scrub along both its edges. This would make access easier, open up sight-lines and dry out the footpath. It would also do much to reduce shading of the adjoining ditches. There is a single large hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* shrub considered to be of some local historic interest on the causeway that could be retained.
- Mowing 1m swathes along the edges of the access road will help to prevent further woody saplings from becoming established in the open, western part of the Common.
- The northern path will benefit from selective coppicing, invasive species control and scalloping along its edges. These management actions will combine to increase light and air flow along the path which will help to dry the ground in wet weather and make this route far more accessible and attractive to use for visitors to the Common.

3.5.6 Woodland & Trees

3.5.6.1 North Woodland

- The western edge of the north woodland needs the selective removal of groups of young trees and shrubs. This will create scalloped woodland edges and help to stop the spread of woody plants into the adjoining wetland and open grassland habitats.
- Canopy reduction by removing overhanging branches will also help to reduce shading of the valuable woodland edge vegetation in the transition zone between open and wooded habitats.
- The eastern end of the reedbed is a high priority area where selective felling of young birch *Betula spp.* and removal of overhanging branches will restore lost wetland habitat.
- Rotational management of the tall herb and shrubby woodland edge vegetation as it develops will promote a varied age profile and complex structure. Each year 20m long sections of edge vegetation should be cut back on a three year rotation.
- Within the woodland all path edges can be scalloped and small glades created by selective coppicing and thinning of even-aged stands to enhance the vegetation structure and make paths less shaded.
- A new woodland glade should be created parallel to the power line glade by widening the existing informal path that runs from the northern path to the bridge over the stream. Cutting back trees and shrubs on both sides to widen the path up to a maximum width of 10m will allow more light to reach the ground layer and help dry the path surface. Split timber from felled trees can be used to consolidate very wet sections along this route.
- The existing glade under the power lines was created by the conservation volunteers and should be maintained by periodic coppicing. The canopy here is almost closed and should be opened up by selective thinning of the tall and spindly trees on the glade edges to increase light reaching the woodland floor.

3.5.6.2 South Woodland

- The southern edge of the southern woodland has some good fragments of scrubby, scalloped edge habitat that are likely to be very valuable to fauna including invertebrates and reptiles. Extending this type of edge vegetation structure around more of the woodland would be very beneficial.
- There are tiny fragments of heathy vegetation in parts of the south wood, though much of the former vegetation of acid wood pasture has been lost due to the cessation of grazing and its subsequent transition to shady, secondary woodland. Creating deep scallops on the woodland edges may allow some of these heathland plants to re-emerge if they persist in the seedbank.
- Gorse *Ulex europaeus* is present on some edges of the south wood and is a valuable component of the woodland edge vegetation. It should be managed by cutting on rotation to maintain a varied age structure and prevent the shrubs becoming leggy and senescent.
- Thinning the dense, even-aged growth of birch trees, holly and other woody species from around the largest parkland oaks (known as “halo thinning”) in the south wood is recommended. This will

help to ensure that the mature oaks remain in good health and continue to support their associated fauna, flora and fungi.

3.5.6.3 Non-woodland trees

- Ideally the large oak on the edge of the causeway should be removed as it is certain to be drying the soil in this important wetland area. Extracting the root ball would create a deep pool on the edge of the marsh. However, there may be objections from residents or visitors to felling the tree as it is a prominent feature in the west of the Common. A preliminary compromise would be to raise its canopy by removing the lower branches to allow more light to reach the area below the tree. This oak appears to have multiple stems and may in fact be two or more individuals that have been cut to ground level or perhaps coppiced in the past and grown with intertwined trunks.
- The various trees and shrubs along both sides of the causeway should be removed (see 3.5.4). The “army hawthorn” that became established on the Common when it was fenced off in the Second World War (Eddie Colgate *pers.comm.*) could be retained as an historic feature but it is currently being swamped by more recent woody growth on this formerly completely open part of the site.
- Young ash *Fraxinus excelsior* saplings and various woody shrubs that have started to establish along both sides of the access road should be removed or cut to ground level before the regular mowing regime begins.

3.5.7 Site Infrastructure

- A new information board should be installed in the western triangle and the text of the existing board near the south woodland should be updated. These information boards could provide better interpretation of the importance and special nature of Henfield Common to visitors. Production of a site leaflet to be made available in the village is also recommended.
- The information boards could showcase historic photographs of the Common showing cattle grazing and open views as a means to introduce and illustrate the aspiration to restore traditional management practices.
- There are some benches in the west of the Common but at times they are hard to reach due to overgrown vegetation. More regular mowing around benches to keep them accessible and inviting is recommended.
- A new bench could be installed near the proposed interpretive board in the western triangle.

3.5.8 Rabbit Management

- Considerable concern was expressed by some consultees over the impact of high numbers of rabbits on the Common. This included both damage to the turf of the Memorial Field as well as the dangers of rabbit holes to walkers and riders on the Common.
- Rabbit populations fluctuate naturally, especially as a result of disease cycles, but where suitable habitat exists their numbers can increase rapidly. Habitat management for biodiversity will inevitably create structurally complex vegetation that rabbits will readily inhabit.

- In the absence of sufficient natural predator pressure to control rabbit populations, human intervention can sometimes be appropriate. If rabbit damage is considered by the site managers to have reached unacceptable levels then direct control of their numbers will need to be considered.

3.6 Surveys, Monitoring & Reporting

3.6.1 Surveys

- The biological information currently available for Henfield Common is patchy. There are recent and reasonably thorough botanical surveys but data on fauna, fungi and lower plants is less comprehensive and much of it is old.
- The most important survey work needed to inform the management plan is a baseline habitat mapping exercise. This should be carried out by a professional ecologist and will provide an accurate picture of the current extent of different vegetation types against which to measure progress and monitor the change in extent of habitats over time.
- Gathering information about the wildlife of Henfield Common will be an ongoing process and will rely on a combination of work by amateur and professional naturalists. Much will depend on the financial resources available but Henfield is the home of a particularly skilled and long-standing natural history group (Henfield Birdwatch) whose members may be willing to assist with surveys. Working in partnership with the Sussex Wildlife Trust and the Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre will also be essential.
- There is anecdotal evidence that the Common, and particularly the grassland south of the road, may be of importance for its fungi, including the waxcaps *Hygrocybe spp.* that are characteristic of old grasslands. A survey of fungi would be an excellent starting point for the wildlife survey programme.
- Other groups of fauna and flora associated with the habitats present on the Common should be targeted for surveys when funding and/or expertise allow. These include, for example, lichens, moths, hoverflies, bees, wasps, spiders, amphibians, reptiles and small mammals.

3.6.2 Monitoring

- One of the key aims of management at Henfield Common is to change the proportions of different habitats present with, broadly speaking, an increase in wetland and species-rich grassland versus a reduction in reed-dominated habitat and woodland/woody vegetation.
- There should be clear milestones to meet and target areas to achieve for each habitat type. Actual targets can only be set once the habitat mapping has been completed.
- The habitat mapping survey will provide a crucial baseline against which to measure progress towards the aim of habitat change.
- Fixed-point ground level photography and aerial photography are very useful ways to measure gross change in habitat structure and gradual changes to vegetation and views over time.
- It is strongly recommended that the services of a professional ecologist are employed to develop and oversee a monitoring programme for the Common. Recognising and recording changes in the vegetation and habitats across the Common needs a well-designed monitoring programme. This

will allow ongoing assessment of the impact of management actions and should include elements such as:

- Monitoring the population size and extent of rare species and habitat indicators for example bog pimpernel *Anagallis tenella*, lousewort *Pedicularis sylvatica*, sneezewort *Achillea ptarmica*, heath grass *Danthonia decumbens* and common reed *Phragmites australis*.
- Monitoring the population size and extent of invasive species, such as Michaelmas daisy *Aster sp.* and montbretia *Crocasmia sp.* on the north common, bamboo and cherry laurel *Prunus laurocerasus* in the north woodland and ragwort *Senecio jacobaea* and bracken *Pteridium aquifolium* on the south common.
- Assessing the condition of grassland swards that were formerly classified as species-rich.
- Measuring change in extent of different vegetation types.

3.6.3 Reporting

An annual report should to be prepared by HCJC and submitted to HDC to document progress towards the meeting targets and objectives of the management plan.

Annual reporting will help to ensure that all stakeholders are kept informed of successes and failures throughout each year as well as any other management issues that need to be addressed.

TEN-YEAR MANAGEMENT ACTION PLAN

ACTION	LOCATION	TIMING	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	WORKFORCE
Invasive Non-Native Species control													
Montbretia Michaelmas daisy	Marsh and reedbed	September to October	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Conservation volunteers
Laurel, bamboo rhododendron, Wilson's honeysuckle	North woodland	November to February	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Conservation volunteers
Grassland Area Mowing													
Regular mowing during the growing season	Western triangle	April to October	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Contractor
Mowing on rotation twice or more per year with cuttings removed Mowing regime to be monitored annually and fully reviewed in year 5	North Common: marsh	Late April and early October	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓						Contractor
	North Common: Wet grassland west of the causeway	Late April and early October	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓						Contractor
	North Common: Areas east of the causeway leaving unmown edges & corners	Late April and early October	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓						Contractor
	Roadside bund	Late April, late July and mid to late October	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓						Contractor
	South Common	Late April, late June and late September	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓						Contractor

Henfield Common Ten-Year Management Plan – Dolphin Ecological Surveys 2018

ACTION	LOCATION	TIMING	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	WORKFORCE
Reedbed Management													
Cut 33% of reeds annually on rotation	Reedbed	July or August	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Volunteers
Remove woody plants	Reedbed	July or August	✓		✓		✓		✓		✓		Volunteers or contractor
Remove blocks of silt & vegetation	Reedbed	July or August	✓		✓		✓		✓		✓		Volunteers or contractor
Ditch Management													
Ditch channel vegetation & silt clearance in sections as needed	North Common	October	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Contractor
	South Common	October	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Contractor
Ditch edge tree and shrub thinning	Memorial field/north woodland edge	November to February	✓			✓			✓			✓	Volunteers
Regular rotational vegetation management on ditch banks as necessary	North Common	September to October	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Volunteers or contractor
	South Common	September to October	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Volunteers or contractor
	Memorial field/north woodland edge	September to October	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Volunteers or contractor
Path Management													
Regular path edge vegetation mowing as necessary	Causeway	April to October	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Contractor
	Northern path	April to October	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Contractor
	Access road	April to October	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Contractor

Henfield Common Ten-Year Management Plan – Dolphin Ecological Surveys 2018

ACTION	LOCATION	TIMING	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	WORKFORCE
Tree, scrub and tall herb management along paths. Ad hoc removal of saplings, thinning, canopy reduction	Causeway	November to February	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Volunteers or contractor
	Northern path	November to February	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Volunteers or contractor
	North woodland internal paths	November to February	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Volunteers or contractor
Woodland Management													
Remove selected trees, shrubs and overhanging branches on the woodland edge	North and South woodland (especially adjoining the reedbed)	November to February	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Volunteers and contractor
Rotational cutting of 20m sections of woodland edge vegetation	North and South woodland	November to February	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Volunteers
Path edge vegetation management & scallop creation	North and South woodland	November to February	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Volunteers
Create a linear glade by coppicing and selective felling along the existing path	North woodland	November to February	✓										Contractor
Thin areas of even-aged trees, selectively coppice power line glade edges and old hazel stands	North and South woodland	November to February	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Volunteers and contractor as appropriate

Henfield Common Ten-Year Management Plan – Dolphin Ecological Surveys 2018

ACTION	LOCATION	TIMING	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	WORKFORCE
Halo thinning around open-grown oaks	North and South Woodland	November to February			✓			✓			✓		Contractor
Non-woodland Tree Management													
Tree canopy reduction/canopy lifting	Solitary oak eastern edge of the causeway	November to February	✓										Contractor
	Trees around the reedbed and woodland edges	November to February	✓		✓		✓		✓		✓		Contractor
Remove young trees and saplings	North common open areas	November to February	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Volunteers
	Causeway and its edges	November to February	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Volunteers and contractor
	Access road edges	As soon as possible	✓										Volunteers
Site Infrastructure													
Install and update information boards	Western triangle	Any	✓										HCJC/Parish Council
	Car park at South woodland	Any	✓										HCJC/Parish Council
Maintain benches and short sward vegetation	Western triangle	All year	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Contractor
	North common	All year	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Contractor
Compost grass cuttings outside the LWS	Pavilion car park or South wood car park	As soon as possible	✓										Parish Council
Rabbit control if necessary	South woodland	February	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓						Contractor

Henfield Common Ten-Year Management Plan – Dolphin Ecological Surveys 2018

ACTION	LOCATION	TIMING	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	WORKFORCE
Survey, Monitoring & Reporting													
Baseline habitat mapping	Whole site	June to August	✓										Ecological contractor
Develop a biological monitoring programme	Whole site	As soon as possible	✓										Ecological contractor
Set defined ecological targets	Whole site	After baseline mapping is done	✓										Ecological contractor
Biological surveys of key groups as funding or expertise allows	Whole site	As appropriate for each group	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Specialist volunteers or ecological contractors
Fixed-point photo monitoring	Whole site	At least annually	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Volunteers
Aerial photo monitoring	Whole site	Summer	✓		✓		✓		✓		✓		UAV Contractor
Monitor changes in the extent of key habitats	Whole site	June to August		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Ecological contractor
Monitor spread of ragwort and bracken	South Common	June to July	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Volunteers
Report on progress towards ecological targets	Whole site	December		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	HCJC
Review management and modify actions if necessary	Whole site	December					✓						HCJC and Ecological contractor

Figure 2 - Henfield Common Management Action Summary

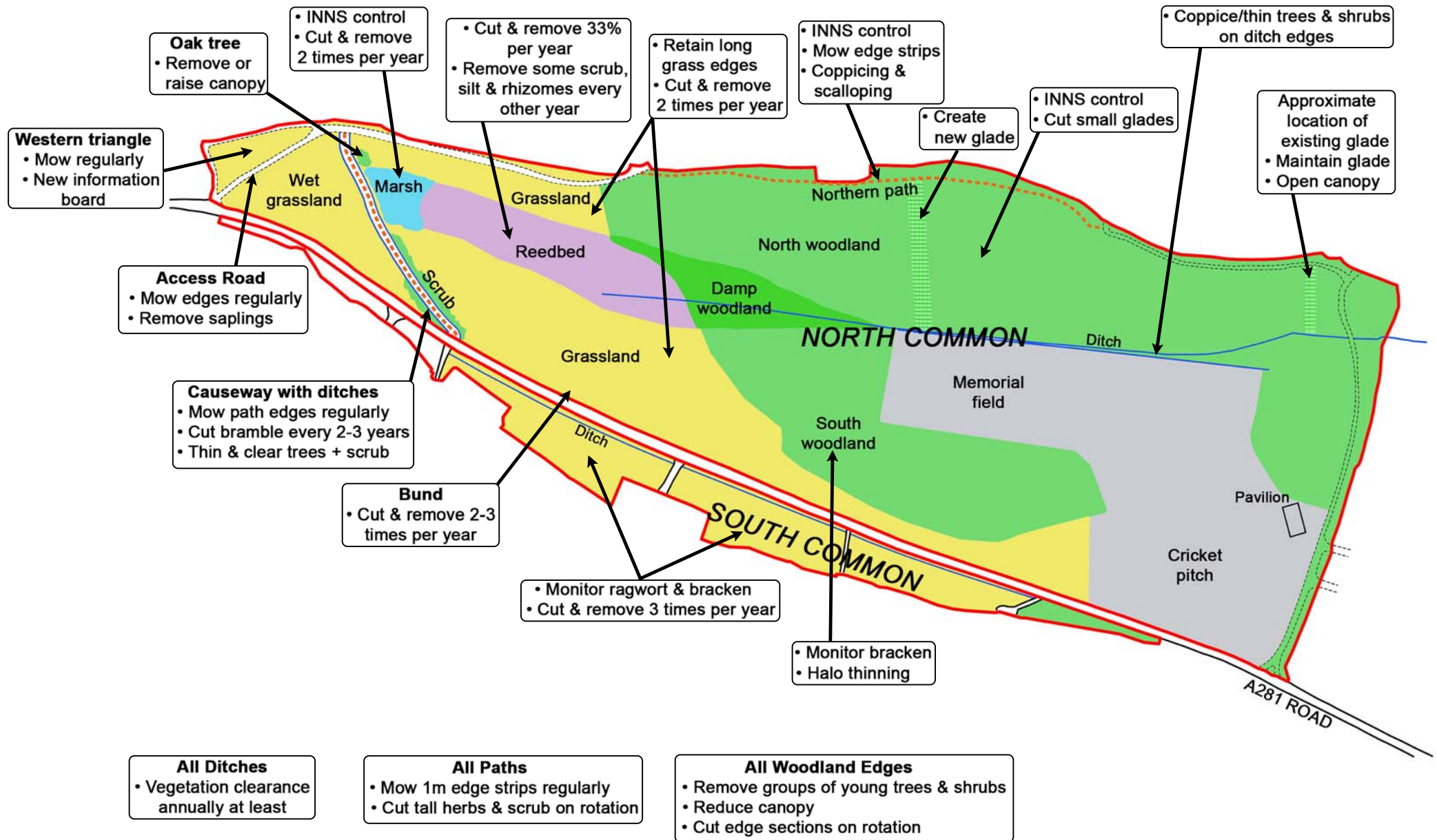


Figure 3. Improving the Special Features of Henfield Common

	WHAT FEATURES MAKE HENFIELD COMMON SPECIAL?			
	A Local Wildlife Site that supports rare habitats and species	An easily accessible area for recreation and amenity	Common land of historic interest	A valued part of the village landscape
What is the condition of these features?	Rare habitats are shrinking in size and uncommon species are declining	Largely in good condition but some paths are narrow and wet in places A busy road bisects the Common and is a potential hazard for dogs and horses being exercised on the site	Historic uses and management have ceased (grazing, material for basket weaving etc.)	Cessation of traditional management has caused gradual but significant changes to the landscape of the Common and radically changed the formerly open views
What would improve the conditions of these features?	More consistent habitat management Re-introduction of traditional management practices, in particular livestock grazing	Improved management of vegetation along the path network Drier path surfaces in places Short vegetation around seating areas	Better appreciation and interpretation of the historic importance of the Common A return to traditional management practices	Restoration of more open aspects and views across the Common to the South Downs
How can this be achieved?	Adoption of an agreed 10 year management plan Stakeholder consultation on the options available for managing the Common. Ideally this would result in public support for an application to the Secretary of State to carry out conservation grazing on parts of the Common	Adoption of an agreed 10 year management plan that addresses access issues on the Common through a range of management actions	On site interpretive material, leaflets available in village outlets, guided walks by local experts, exhibits in the village museum, articles in local publications and newsletters, involvement of village societies	Adoption of an agreed 10 year management plan that includes prescriptions for tree and scrub control in open areas as well as woodland management

APPENDIX

Possible Reintroduction of Livestock Grazing on Henfield Common: Some Key Considerations

Preparation of the 10-year management plan for Henfield Common has brought to the fore a pressing need to re-assess the way that the Common is managed. A steady and documented decline of the wildlife and landscape value of the Common over a period of years under the current management regime makes it clear that new management options should be considered seriously by HCJC as the site managers in consultation with HDC as site owners.

From an ecological perspective the reintroduction of livestock grazing to the open parts of the Common is the most obvious management recommendation to make. However, there are legal requirements and potentially social constraints to implementing this proposal.

This appendix summarises some of the preliminary and vital steps that need to be taken by HCJC in order to pursue livestock grazing as a management option at Henfield Common. It also provides some brief outlines of the options associated with livestock grazing support, advice and infrastructure that need to be included in any discussion.

An essential reference guide is provided in the publication:

A Common Purpose. A guide to community engagement for those contemplating management on Common Land. Revised edition 2012. Prepared by Natural England and endorsed by DEFRA.

An equally important document that should form an integral part of this process is:

Finding Common Ground (2010). The Open Spaces Society. This publication sets out how to take account of public interest in determining management solutions for Commons. It also contains detailed information about the background of common land and the legislation that affects it. There are several case studies which clearly illustrate the potential pitfalls of insufficient consultation and community engagement when planning management for common land.

Henfield Common is registered common land and is thus subject to the regulations of the Commons Act (2006). Any works which have the effect of preventing or impeding access to or over common land, or involve the resurfacing of common land, require consent under Section 38 of the Commons Act. This includes fencing, banking and ditching, or surfacing with concrete, tarmac or similar.

An application to carry out work that requires consent under Section 38, for example fencing to allow livestock grazing, has to be considered by the Planning Inspectorate. The planning inspector must have regard to:

- The interests of owners, occupiers and rights holders, especially those exercising rights of common
- The interests of the neighbourhood
- The public interest, including nature conservation, conservation of landscape, protection of public rights of access and protection of archaeological or historic features

Long before a decision is taken by HCJC on whether to submit a Section 38 application, it is essential that the local community and all those with an interest in the Common should have their views and concerns considered.

There is also scope under Section 43 of the 2006 Commons Act to apply for an exemption order on specific work that would normally require consent from the Secretary of State (ref Appendix 3 of Finding Common Ground). There are strict conditions that apply to such exemptions but it is possible to propose a pilot management trial to test different options, for example erecting temporary grazing enclosures, using this provision.

The Defra endorsed guidance contained within “A Common Purpose” sets out a series of steps for managers of common land to take. Henfield Common is a relatively small common that is owned by the Local Planning Authority (Horsham District Council), which will tend to simplify the process of engagement and consultation.

Some of the preliminary steps recommended in the guidance have been at least partially addressed already as part of the management plan preparation. Gathering background information, discussing and agreeing management objectives with the landowner and managers and some early stage stakeholder engagement have already been carried out. Widening the consultation of stakeholders to village residents, site visitors and others, including statutory consultees, should be the next step of the process.

Henfield Common has been managed under the auspices of the HCJC for many years with biodiversity conservation as a high priority objective of management. There is already a history of stakeholder and community involvement in this process via their committee meetings which are open to the public. Stakeholder consensus over management decisions is not always achieved but a forum for discussion of different views and airing concerns already exists through this established committee.

The HCJC should be willing to accept the help of experienced partners, particularly the Sussex Wildlife Trust who are based locally, to assist with future stakeholder engagement work. The HCJC, together with HDC as landowner, should also give serious consideration to engaging a professional facilitator to ensure that this crucial work is carried out in an inclusive, effective, objective and timely way.

Taking forward the process of stakeholder engagement and public consultation over the different management options for the Common is outside the scope of the site management plan, though the basic steps are set out in Figure 4.

Following the detailed guidance for public consultation provided by Defra and the Open Spaces Society will help to build a solid consensus amongst stakeholders and avoid the need for a public inquiry into any proposals that are ultimately submitted to the planning inspectorate.

It would be premature to propose the details of a future grazing regime on Henfield Common before the consultation process is further advanced and indeed such information is outside the scope of this management plan. Nevertheless the options need to be considered and should be fully discussed at an appropriate point in the consultation process.

This management plan recommends that only some of the habitats present on Henfield Common should be managed by livestock grazing. This recommendation is made for ecological reasons but

there would also be access and recreation benefits to having areas where grazing animals are always absent. It should be emphasised that restoring livestock grazing would not need to restrict public access to any parts of the Common and that livestock would only be present on the site for relatively short periods of time at certain times of year.

The practicalities of restoring livestock grazing to Henfield Common also need to be addressed. These include making decisions on how best to design and install the infrastructure needed to contain livestock on the Common. These could include permanent fencing or temporary fencing around grazing compartment(s) with gates to maintain existing public access or cattle grids (with associated traffic calming) on the main road.

The Open Spaces Society is generally opposed to fencing on commons in principle, though it will not always object to applications for fencing on common land (OSS 2010 Appendix 2). It is highly advisable to engage with OSS at an early stage of the consultation process to discuss with them the best options for Henfield Common.

If cattle grids were to be installed on the A281 then there would need to be a means to prevent livestock entering the gardens of properties around the edge of the Common. There would also need to be a mechanism to protect those semi-natural habitats and recreational areas where grazing is not required.

If permanent fencing, such as post and rail, was installed its visual impact would be significantly reduced by setting it within the existing bunds and banks on the edges of the open habitats of the North Common. The bund along the north side of the A281 was installed in 2002 to prevent unauthorised vehicle access to the Common from the road and it continues to serve this function.

A livestock grazing proposal outline should include the following:

- The likely costs and possible sources of funding.
- The most suitable type of livestock to use. Cattle or ponies would be most viable and a breed with appropriate characteristic should be chosen. Examples include Dexter, Sussex or Belted Galloway cattle, Exmoor ponies.
- Appropriate grazing duration and stocking rates of livestock. Spring grazing with cattle was carried out by the last active Commoners and may well remain the best option for the site.
- Reference to the existing grazing agreements between HDC and SWT along with other livestock management partnerships on conservation sites which work well. These could act as a template for a partnership arrangement at Henfield Common.

Figure 4. Summary of the Steps Needed for a Livestock Grazing Proposal

ACTION	LEAD GROUPS
Establish a core group with representation from interested bodies to guide the process	Henfield Common Joint Committee (HCJC) Horsham District Council (HDC) Henfield Parish Council (HPC) Sussex Wildlife Trust (SWT)
Employ a professional facilitator	HDC/HCJC
Carry out stakeholder engagement	Core group
Carry out wider public consultation	Core group
Engage with the Open Spaces Society	Core group
Secure agreement for the necessary funding for infrastructure	HDC
Secure an outline grazing agreement	HDC/SWT
Consider a pilot grazing trial under Section 43 of the Commons Act	Core group
Carry out pilot grazing trial	HDC/SWT
Develop and submit an application under Section 38 of the Commons Act	Core group
Restore livestock grazing if the application is successful	HDC/SWT
Review the impacts of grazing on the Common via a robust monitoring programme	Core group

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