Snape Common Management Plan

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Produced for:
Snape Parish Council

Factual Summary

Map reference TM397582

Area 1.75ha / 4.3 acres approximately

Access Open to the public via both public and informal footpaths

History

The site was once part of the Suffolk Sandlings heaths which stretched from Ipswich in the south to Lowestoft in the north. As with many of the smaller heaths they have gradually lost their heathland components and have developed into secondary woodland. The old Ordnance Survey maps in 1884 and 1928 show the site as heathland with sand pits and this was still the case according to the 1945 aerial photographs. However, since that time the reduction in rabbit numbers due to myxomatosis and the heaths no longer being used as sources of fuel such as gorse, bracken for bedding and areas for small scale grazing, trees have gradually taken over.

Ecological Value

The site lies in the Suffolk Coast and Heaths Natural Character Area. It is one of the driest parts of the country, with local rainfall typically only two thirds of the national average. The distinctive landscape character is a product of its underlying geology, shaped by the effects of the sea and the interactions of people.

Snape Common is classified as secondary woodland as the site has evolved through changes in land use over the last 70 years where woodland has established on unmanaged heathland through natural succession.

Oak *(Quercus robur)* is the dominant species with sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus)*, silver birch (*Betula pendula)* and holly (*Ilex aquifolium)* and the road edge has English elm (*Ulmus procera)* scrub with scattered hazel Hazel (*Corylus avellana)*, blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa)*, yew (*Taxus baccata)* and singles of scots pine *(Pinus sylvestris),* beech *(Fagus sylvatica),* cherry (*Prunus avium)* and *(Chamaecyparis lleylandii)*. There are some areas where honeysuckle *(Lonicera periclymenum)* is growing, and this should be retained wherever possible as it is an important nectar source and the food plant for the white admiral butterfly.

The understorey is dominated by invading holly, bramble (*Rubus fruiticosus)*, a small area of snowberry (*Symphoricarpos)*, some rhododendron (*Rhododendron ponticum)*, common gorse *(Ulex europaeus)* and in the northwest corner the ground is covered in periwinkle *vinca minor* a garden escape.

Holly is spreading throughout the wood and if not controlled will dominate and shade out the ground flora and any tree regeneration.

The southwest compartment has an extensive active badger sett with entrances covering much of the pit sides, much of this compartment's understorey is sparse except for the southwest corner which has good bramble cover. The remainder consists of scattered ground elder (*Aegopodium podagraria)*, common nettle (*Urtica dioca)* and a Lamiuim species (garden escape). The north west corner is covered in the garden escape Russian vine *Fallopia baldschuanica* and ideally should be removed if time and labour is available.

The northeast compartment is more heavily wooded, but holly is dominating the understorey creating dense stands which will inhibit any tree regeneration or establishment of a more diverse ground cover.

Objectives

- To continue to maintain a wild space for the community for education, recreation and wildlife.
- To control the spread of holly through the wood
- To diversify the boundary along the roadside and reduce effect of cars eroding the edge.
- Plant native shrubs and flowers within the wood to add diversity and aesthetic appeal
- To increase the wildlife value by erecting bird nest boxes and bat boxes
- To monitor the wildlife on an annual basis.
- To increase ecological connectivity and diversity within the parish of Snape.
- To maintain the path network in a safe and useable condition and provide some inform seating in open areas.

The objectives need to be achievable given that all management work is to be undertaken by volunteers and so a realistic work programme is required.

Vision

The site is an important recreation area close to the centre of the village and maintaining the existing footpath network will reduce the creation of new paths enabling some areas to remain quiet for the benefit of wildlife.

Increasing the diversity of the understorey by planting native shrubs and flowers, planting areas of native hedging, and removing and containing the invading holly along with installing and maintaining bird and bat boxes will increase the sites diversity and can act as an example to residents and neighbouring villages.

Management

For management purposes the site is divided into two compartments southwest and northeast see Map 1. The plan runs for 5 years and should be reviewed regarding progress periodically.

As the site is open to the public it is essential to keep the footpaths well maintained to prevent new paths appearing. These paths should be checked annually for hazards and findings recorded and any remedial work must be undertaken i.e., removal of dead branches overhanging paths or raised tree roots.

To help assess progress and demonstrate the effectiveness of the management various surveys should ideally be carried out annually. A breeding bird survey each spring will hopefully show an increase in the site's population, this should include monitoring the nest boxes and ideally submitting records to the BTO (British Trust for Ornithology) via their nest record scheme. This enables bird populations to be compared nationally. Bat boxes should be checked in the autumn, if bats are found then checking must be carried out by a licensed bat handler, until bats are found however they can legally be checked by volunteers.

A baseline vegetation survey is also useful to monitor change and can be repeated every 5 years.

The easiest way to record change particularly where management is carried out is to take a series of fixed-point photographs. These are far more reliable than human memory and can act as demonstration that the management is working particularly if there is any local opposition to change.

Southwest compartment

The southwest compartment should remain relatively undisturbed due to the presence of a large active badger sett. Monitoring the sett using trail cameras would help to understand how active the sett is and give an indication as to how many animals are using the site. Deploying the camera from February to May should confirm breeding success and will provide results before vegetation grows and obscures the view.

A hedge should be planted along the road boundary which will increase the diversity and prevent encroachment and the rhododendron currently growing should be removed to prevent it invading the site.

Northeast compartment

The northeast compartment is where most activity should be concentrated. This is divided into four separate areas conveniently split by the existing footpaths and track.

Area 1.

This is at the northern edge of the site and closest to houses and gardens. This has the most diverse species of trees some probably planted by adjacent homeowners. The periwinkle should not be allowed to spread further and reduced if time and manpower allows. There is a large blackthorn thicket which would benefit in coppicing to provide a dense shrub layer.

Area 2

This is the main central area and comprises mainly of mature oaks and a dense shrub layer of holly. The holly should be reduced to allow light into the ground layer and enable regeneration of other species. There is a small stand of old gorse probably the last remnant of heathland species on the site, this is again being swamped by holly and would benefit from being opened up, removing the holly and coppicing the gorse to enable it to regenerate. There is also a single beech tree that is being shaded out with holly which should also be cleared around. The open glade areas both existing and created by holly removal should be planted with native shrubs such as hawthorn, guelder rose, hazel, spindle and elder and native wildflowers such as bluebell, snowdrops, primrose, wood anemone and wood sorrel.

Area 3

This section runs parallel to the road and has the remaining evidence of the old sand pits. In the eastern corner there is a stand of snowberry which will need to be monitored and kept in check to prevent invading the rest of the wood. Along the road edge the elm is suffering from Dutch elm disease and would benefit from coppicing and any gaps should be planted with native hedging, this will help in reducing the erosion caused by cars.

Area 4

This section in the southwest corner divided from the other areas by the track is dominated by oaks but holly is also encroaching and will need to be controlled. A stand of rhododendron close to the track should be removed. There is good bramble cover which will need controlling adjacent to the foot

paths. There are some dead branches overhanging the track which should be monitored and or removed. Addition of planted shrubs and wildflowers as in Area 2 would be beneficial.

Holly removal

Concentrate on removing small seedlings by cutting or ideally digging up and cutting out stems less than 80mm diameter. If possible, cut stumps should be treated with glyphosate to prevent regrowth. All material can be stacked in one or two areas and left to rot down.

Where possible leave all dead wood on the ground

Bird and bat boxes

The site will benefit from installing a range of nest boxes across the site. These should be constructed from treated softwood or plywood and erected around 3m from the ground to prevent tampering. Checking and recording occupation during the spring and then cleaning and carrying out any repairs between October and January. The site will absorb many boxes but suggest 20 tit boxes initially along with one or two tawny owl/stock dove boxes. Box plans are in the appendix.

Bat boxes should be constructed from untreated timber (treated timbers can transfer chemicals to the bats as they groom). Larch is ideal as it has natural insect and moisture resistant qualities. Boxes are best placed three on each tree facing north, southeast and southwest at 3m plus from the ground. They should be sited adjacent to paths, tracks and clearings with clear access allowing the bats to fly unimpeded into the box. Twenty one boxes would be suitable to start with. Box plans are in the appendix.