



THE CRICKET
HAUGHLEY GREEN

PROPOSED MANAGEMENT PLAN

PREPARED FOR
HAUGHLEY PARISH COUNCIL

APRIL 2009

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Owned by Haughley Parish, the Cricket is at the heart of the village of Haughley Green and is currently managed by the Parish Council. It is a designated village green of approximately four acres and has County Wildlife Site status (See Appendix 1). It is an area of mainly unimproved wet permanent pasture with an area of scrub to the west and children's play equipment to the east. The area of scrub also hosts two small ponds and the whole site is completely surrounded by hedges of varying heights. The three main areas are clearly visible on the photograph in Appendix 2. With this mix of uses the site has significant recreational and ecological value.

In addition to the County Wildlife Site Status, the Cricket attracts a number of UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) species. The UK BAP is the result of the Rio Convention of 1992 which called for the creation and enforcement of national strategies and action plans to conserve, protect and enhance biological diversity. Not only is the Cricket as a lowland meadow a UK BAP priority habitat, the presence of Great Crested Newts, Barn Owls, Bullfinch and Song Thrush should be noted as UK BAP priority species to name a few. Additionally the Suffolk Strategic Partnership's local target 8 is to "Increase the percentage of County Wildlife Sites under active conservation management". MSDC are noted as one of the Supporting Partners to this target.

This Management Plan is the product of a number of meetings between parish councillors, parishioners and conservation experts. It follows increasing interest in the management of the site to maintain and improve its conservation and recreational value without wishing to change its essential character.

2.0 PROFESSIONAL ADVICE

Of particular note is the involvement of the Suffolk Wildlife Trust with Susan Stone advising on grassland and scrub management and Juliet Hawkins to provide specific advice on the management of the ponds. Naturally this plan draws the advice of the experts together in its proposals. Correspondence from Susan Stone and a report produced by Juliet Hawkins are attached in Appendix 3.

3.0 PREAMBLE

This document will take the various features and habitats of the Cricket and incorporate the advice given to propose the future management of the site. Where applicable the text is cross referenced to the photograph in Appendix 2. It concludes with a table of proposed chronology and cost estimations for the various management actions. There are a number of inhabitants in the parish prepared and willing to undertake a large proportion of the work involved. Some items will require the use of Contractors and it is hoped that grant aid may be achieved via MSDC's Community Project Grant Scheme to complement this plan and the enthusiasm of volunteers. In no particular order the main features are:-

4.0 PONDS

There are three ponds on the Cricket although this plan will concentrate of two of them. The third, whilst a part of the site has been incorporated in the curtilage of one of the neighbouring properties. The two ponds of

interest are found within the area of scrub to the west (Photo ref A1 and A2). The pond to the North is believed to have been dug to provide a source of drinking water and the other is most likely to have been a source of clay for building or for watering livestock.

Neither pond has been managed in the recent past and both have become overgrown. The advice received focuses on the need to clear the adjacent scrub particularly to the South to ensure light and warmth are able to get to the water. Once cleared continual management to control re-growth is required and some stumps should be treated with Glyphosate. As a consequence pond life should improve and increase.

Both ponds are also in need of de-silting by a reputable contractor with a digger. Because they are surrounded by scrub and trees, leaf litter has built up over a period of years in the bottom of each, which now needs cleaning. Some of the steep banks of the Northern pond would also benefit from re-grading and an area of the pond to the south may need to be deepened to provide a source of water for livestock (See 8.0 below). The clearing of scrub to the south would also enable digger access. The presence of Great Crested Newt in the southern pond should be noted and the advice to improve the Northern pond should ensure their migration to that body of water.

The Southern pond also has New Zealand Pigmyweed (*Crassula helmsii*) present. This is a particularly invasive non native plant and control has been promoted by the Suffolk Wildlife Trust. Control is proposed to ensure that less competitive aquatic plantlife is able to thrive. This would involve careful chemical control in the summer months before removal.

5.0 CHILDRENS PLAY EQUIPMENT

The main cause for concern on the Children's Play Area, is the number of "holes and mounds" previously dug by children to create a bike track (Photo ref B). This track is not used and has been constructed in the middle of what should be a small football pitch. A sizeable spoil heap remains.

If a digger is on site to manage the ponds it would be preferable to use the equipment to level the holes with the spoil to ensure that the football pitch can be used and generally tidy the area. Grass seed native to the site should be sown once the area has been leveled. This is best achieved by collecting grass seed on site and sowing.

Furthermore, the ditch to the eastern boundary (Photo ref C) has not been managed for some time and would benefit from being cleaned out. This would aid the drainage of the children's play area and make it more user friendly particularly in Autumn and Spring. Once again if a digger was on site its use to clean the ditch would be advantageous although this would require some hedge management to ensure access. The ditch itself is sandwiched on both sides by hedges. If cleaned a deeper larger diameter culvert under the pedestrian access would be advantageous.

6.0 HEDGEROWS

The Cricket is hedged almost completely around its whole boundary. It has an interesting gradient of hedges from the mature high hawthorn hedge to the North, trimmed/coppiced hedges of mixed species to the east and west and the laid hawthorn hedge to the south.

The main hedge proposal concerns the potential to lay the inner, mainly blackthorn, hedge to the east (Photo ref D) to enable the ditch to be cleaned (See 5.0) above. In order to get to the ditch the internal hedge needs management. It is considered that laying the hedge would be sufficient to enable access and ultimately provide significant conservation and screening value as it thickens in the future.

7.0 TREES

The Cricket is devoid of ancient trees. A number of self sown trees are appearing in the area of scrub to the west and a line of five oaks have been planted in the last decade (Photo ref E). There is some concern that these oaks will, in the longer term, shade considerable areas of the grassland habitat. The management of two of the better specimens as pollards is proposed by the Suffolk Wildlife Trust and removal of the balance.

In the South East corner there is also a row of small dead elms (Photo ref F). It is advisable to remove these due to their proximity to the Children's Play Equipment. Some of the dead wood should be piled on site to provide a habitat for insects and invertebrates.

Other notes on tree management are contained in section 9.0 Scrub management below.

8.0 GRASSLAND

Grassland covers the largest area on the site (Photo ref G). The Cricket's County Wildlife Site designation mentions the presence of Adders Tongue Fern and Green Winged Orchid (Appendix 1). There are at least two other species of orchid as well as many other species of hay meadow flower. Undoubtedly the extensive management of the site as either a grazing or hay meadow has benefitted many of the rarer plant species that become less competitive in intensively managed swards.

The continued management of the grassland is imperative. The two principal options are either to cut for hay or to graze. The favoured option of the Suffolk Wildlife Trust is extensive cattle grazing (See Susan Stone's letter in Appendix 3). Cutting the area for hay will generally be un-economic because the number and quality of the bales produced is unlikely to re-pay the effort to travel to the site and cut. Indeed in 2008 hay was not achieved and the area was simply mown and the clippings left behind. With this in mind and the fact that there may be grant aid available to assist with fencing, grazing in the future is the preferred option.

Grazing at the correct densities would help to achieve a more open sward. Small native breed cattle would open the sward and produce a tussocky pasture beneficial to small mammals and invertebrates which in turn is better for species like the Barn Owl. Sheep are more likely to graze the sward tight and produce a less beneficial "lawn" effect. Grazing would occur between late April to early September and approximately 2 to 3 cattle would be required to ensure extensive management.

Another benefit of grazing is that some of the area to the west of the line of Oaks would be managed. At present this rougher area is not managed because it is not suitable for hay making and will undoubtedly thicken with scrub and trees to the detriment of the pasture.

Fencing would need to be sensitive to public access (non barbed or electric), the public footpaths and the need to mow the children's play equipment. A suggestion is noted on the photograph in Appendix 2 delineated in blue. Kissing gates (or similar) would be required for public access to the grazed area. Wide headlands to the South, North and North East would also enable walking around the perimeter without

entering the grazed area and access for mowers to the play equipment. Essentially free access to the whole site needs to be maintained.

A source of water would need to be achieved which in part could be provided by the pond to the south (Photo Ref A1). Undoubtedly a mains supply would also be required should the pond dry up which is a frequent occurrence most summers.

Due to the cost of fencing and water supply, grazing would ultimately be grant dependent. It is known that there are individuals in the parish that could assist with sourcing graziers and cattle management and the Suffolk Wildlife Trust have offered their assistance if required.

9.0 SCRUB

The area of scrub to the west has been completely abandoned in the last five years. As a consequence it has encroached further into the more valuable area of pasture and is slowly thickening with self sown trees and brambles.

Grazing a part of the scrub area is proposed. This in itself will produce an entirely new habitat and will provide a gradient of scrub that only grazing can achieve.

Additionally it is important to leave an area of the scrub un-grazed and the main advice here is rotational management. This would involve cutting areas of the scrub annually and then allowing it to regenerate. In addition to the grazing this would provide a variety of scrub across the area and thus a more diverse habitat. Removing (thinning) some of the larger trees would be advantageous leaving some of the deadwood stacked on site for insects and invertebrates. Ultimately the area of scrub will not support the number trees present today in the future without significant shading detriment. Thinning these to a few specimens would be beneficial and also pollarding any multi stemmed trees of value.

10.0 ARCHEOLOGY

Adjacent to pond A2, there is the substantial remains of a World War II air raid shelter (Photo Ref H). It was constructed to serve the inhabitants of the adjoining property, Willowend, in Fir Tree Lane. It is at present overgrown and has in the past been used as a rubbish dump. It is proposed to clear this site and expose the shelter to the footpath nearby.

11.0 OTHER GENERAL MATTERS

In addition to the above the erection of bird boxes and in particular a barn owl box would be of value. This is likely to require the involvement of a tree surgeon to clear a line of sight to the box and climb a larger tree to erect it.

Information boards to educate and inform users of the work and value of the various habitats would also be advantageous. Juliet Hawkins is particularly keen for such boards in relation to the ponds to discourage the feeding of ducks and introduction of fish and plant species. These would be detrimental to the ecology in the ponds in the future.

12.0 COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

There is enthusiasm in the parish to complete a considerable amount of the work on a voluntary basis. In March 2009 over 20 local residents including the local Scout group cleared the scrub to the edge of the southern pond (Photo Ref.A1). This work is evidenced on the photographs in Appendix 4.

13.0 CONTACT

Enquiries or comments on the content of this proposed plan should be directed to

Mrs. Marilyn Bottomley
The Clerk
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01284 789303

APPENDIX 1

COUNTY WILDLIFE SITE STATUS

APPENDIX 2

AERIAL PHOTOGRAPH



APPENDIX 3

**EXPERT ADVICE FROM THE SUFFOLK
WILDLIFE TRUST**

APPENDIX 4

**PHOTOGRAPHS OF VOLUNTEER
INVOLVEMENT**



BEFORE



AFTER

