

Aims of the plan

The overall aim of scrub management is not to remove all scrub from the commons but to:

- Reduce its extent and coverage to around 50% of current levels
- Manage remaining stands to introduce and maintain structural age and species diversity

The result: a more balanced and better quality grassland/scrub mosaic that delivers for a number of target species including nightingale, butterflies, bats and dormice.

Timescales and priorities

The plans that you have are a starting point for discussion and further consultation.

Following consultation with Natural England it has been decided that rather than setting out a 10 year work programme, we identify priority works for the first 3 years and then revisit and update the plan after this. There are two reasons for this: firstly, the commons are a very large site making it difficult to set out a 10 year work programme as priorities can change with time; and secondly, work programmes have a tendency to slip – for a number of reasons - rendering the plan out-dated after a period of time.

A 3 year plan will allow effort to be focused at high priority areas and determine what is achievable with the resources available over a given period.

The Work Plan

The recommendations below set out what at this stage are viewed as the priority areas for work. Detail is given on the immediate priority areas for the first 3 years. Secondary and low priority areas are summarised below this.

Note: More detailed guidance and mapping will be produced in the final agreed scrub plan to guide the clearance works.

Detail for years 1 to 3 – high priority areas (yellow hatching on maps)

Spur to Harely & Assley Commons - point 1

Scrub encroachment has been severe in this area in recent years as is evident in aerial photo's. Some attempts to clear scrub have been made in the south but this was undertaken with a bulldozer, which is an unsuitable method as it creates a large amount of soil disturbance on which thistles and other weeds readily establish.

The remaining small patches of scrub that remain in the partially cleared area in south should be removed and the edge cut back by between 2m and 5m where possible to create a larger open area. The thistles will also need to be topped.

Two tracks run north from this, which eventually converge into a single track leading to Harely & Assley Commons. The two tracks should be widened to 25m each, leaving a fringe of scrub along each boundary and a strip running through the middle. This will enable and encourage cattle to move more freely northwards and also result in less poaching of the ground. The scrub removal should ideally focus on less mature stands as the grassland will restore more readily underneath this. Wherever possible the edges should be curved/scalloped to create a sinuous rather than straight track.

Above where the tracks converge, the scrub should be cut back on each side to create an area with an average width of around 45m. Again the edges should be scalloped.

Previously cleared patches between spur and Lance Coppice – point 2

A significant patch of scrub has recently been cleared from this area along with a few smaller ones. Follow-up treatment is urgently needed here to prevent the bramble and blackthorn from re-establishing itself, which is already beginning to happen.

A number of individual young ash have been left in this area. These should all be removed as they will encourage the establishment of scrub around their trunks.

East of Oakhall Cottage – point 3

This area consists of a large block of mature scrub in the east, with smaller blocks to the west of this along with some re-growth from previously cleared areas. Follow-up treatment is required to prevent re-establishment on the cleared areas. The two blocks to the south of this (nearest to the hedge boundary) should be reduced in size by 50%, removing all ash but leaving any oak and willow.

Ride/glade to the west of Oakhall Cottage – point 4

Historically there was a wide ride on the south side of Oakhall/Horwood Coppice running down to the track that leads to Bucklesbury Farm. This has since closed over. Rides like this are incredibly important for butterflies and bats and it is recommended that it is opened-up, for at least part of its length, to provide habitat connectivity to Green Trench.

An opening should be created and initially all young scrub and grass cut, with a view to clearing the more mature scrub later in the plan.

Draft schedule of works

Year 1
<i>Spur to Harely & Assley Commons - point 1</i> In south cut back edge and clear any remaining small patches of scrub. Top thistles. Widen one of the tracks leading north to the convergence point.
<i>Cleared patches between spur and Lance Coppice – point 2</i> Cut scrub regrowth in this area and remove all young ash.
<i>East of Oakhall Cottage – point 3</i> Cut bramble and thorn regrowth from the previously cleared areas.
Year 2
<i>Spur to Harely & Assley Commons - point 1</i> Widen the other track leading north to where they converge into a single track.
<i>Cleared patches between spur and Lance Coppice – point 2</i> Revisit this area again to control any scrub regrowth.
<i>Ride/glade to the west of Oakhall Cottage – point 4</i> Create an opening into this relict ride and cut back all immature scrub and grass.
<i>East of Oakhall Cottage – point 3</i> Revisit this area again to control any scrub regrowth.
Year 3
<i>Spur to Harely & Assley Commons - point 1</i> Clear area in north above where the two tracks converge to leave an open area approximately 45m wide leading up to Harely & Assley Commons.
<i>Cleared patches between spur and Lance Coppice – point 2</i> If necessary revisit this area again to control any scrub regrowth.
<i>East of Oakhall Cottage – point 3</i> The two blocks to the west of the large block of scrub should be reduced in size by 50%, removing all ash but leaving any oak and willow.
If necessary revisit the previously cleared areas again to control any scrub regrowth.
<i>Ride/glade to the west of Oakhall Cottage – point 4</i> Cut the edge of this now partially cleared area back by a further 5m where practical.

N.B Follow-up work will be required from year 1 onwards to all of the areas listed above.

Secondary Priority Areas - years 4 to 6 (red hatching on maps)

Wood Cottage area – point 5 The patches of scrub in this area should be reduced by 50% removing all ash.

Road between Inglestone Farm and Clematis Cottage – point 6 The scrub on the north side of the road especially should be cut back by at least 50% where practical with narrower strips cleared in other areas. The block of scrub at the junction of the track to the Wildlife Trust should also be reduced in size.

Spoil Coppice woodland edge, behind The Old Shop – point 7 The blackthorn edge should be cut back by up to 5m in sections over a period of time, removing ash.

Oakhall Cottage area – points 8 & 9 The edge of the large block to the east (point 8) should be cut back to introduce age structure and to prevent the ride between the block and the hedge from closing over.

The block on the west side of the track (point 9) will soon become joined to the woodland. The aim here is to create and retain an open ride between the two by managing the edge of both the scrub and woodland. This work should push through to the area that has been cleared recently, thereby creating links and connectivity between all of the rides/trenches in this area.

Also, further work may well be required at point 4 to enlarge this ride.

In addition to the above proposals we need to consider the management of the trenches. For example, the edge of Green Trench requires coppicing and the grass cutting in the centre.

Low Priority Areas

The scrub at Hawkesbury, Harely & Assley Commons is seen as a lower priority than the above. This is not to say that the scrub should not be managed here; rather it can wait until later in the plan when higher priority locations have been addressed.