



## Chapel Common report for Milland Parish Council 2018-2019



### Overview

Chapel Common is under a Countryside Stewardship agreement until December 2021. The South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) are undertaking the management of this on behalf of the owner, Hebrides Ltd. We must meet set criteria by carrying out agreed capital works, annual habitat management and grazing of the site according to their prescriptions, and at the end of the agreement the various habitats must be in a good or recovering condition. As the site is a site of special scientific interest (SSSI) all works must first be cleared by Natural England who can assess the site condition at any time. Chapel Common is also one of the site included as part of Heathlands Reunited project. This is a Heritage Lottery Funded project, with 11 partner organisation, led by the SDNPA. Its aim is to promote and restore and create new and improve existing heathland. It also aims to reengage and inspire communities to visit their heathlands, learn more about them and work together to look after them so they can be enjoyed for generations to come; this project has trained volunteers to carry out surveys on site as well as paying for some practical management. Heathlands Reunited runs till June 2021.

### Summary of activities at Chapel Common

Below is a synopsis of works from Chapel Common from Winter 2018 – Winter 2019. Most works are repeated year on year e.g. bracken spraying, ragwort removal, scrub clearance... but some are one-off works such as clearance of the Roman road.

**Volunteer Ranger Service volunteers: <https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/care-for/volunteering-2/volunteering-ranger-service/>**

- Winter 2018 - Cleared an area consisting of old Gorse, small Birch and Brambles from 'bunny valley', an area favoured by the endangered Silver studded blue butterfly. By opening up this area, we hope to increase the extent of suitable habitat (young Bell Heather and Bird's foot trefoil) and therefore boost population numbers.
- Spring 2019 - Scything bracken on the Roman Road (cleared by contractors Winter 2018) to allow Heather to get a head-start and colonise this new ride.
- Summer 2019 - Removing ragwort from 'bunny valley' and the acid grassland to allow cows to graze later this year. Historically we have pulled Ragwort with special forks just before flowering, but after advice from an ecologist we have tried scything twice this year to remove all its nutrients and kill the plant quicker. We also hope this method prevents leaving a rosette of roots in the ground and seed spreading from the 'dump pile'.
- Summer 2019 - Conducting Silver studded blue butterfly count in key areas. This information is passed to the Biodiversity Records Centre as well as Butterfly Conservation and is publically accessible.
- All year - Fixed Point Photography to record images of the site from the same points twice a year. This will allow us to track changes in the landscape and see how areas respond to management visually.

## Contact Work

- Winter 2018 - Cleared a huge area of medium Birch, bracken and other scrub from the Roman Road. This is a Scheduled Ancient Monument and so we are obliged to preserve the ground and prevent tree roots from damaging the structure. This work was delivered as a capital works item in the CS agreement.
- Summer 2019 - Bracken spraying in 'bunny valley' concentrating on areas where Silver studded blue butterflies need new Heather growth to expand their range.
- Summer 2019 – fenceline repairs to allow secure grazing.
- Summer to Winter 2019 – National Trust grazing grassland end of Summer, then whole site over Winter.
- Winter 2019 – Heather mowing to create fire breaks across site and to refresh Heather in old, leggy stands.
- Winter 2019 – Scrapes – Areas of sandy soil will be exposed to allow insects to burrow into them, as well as creating good basking and hunting ground for reptiles. This will also create age diversity in the Heather, more so than mowing.
- Winter 2019 – Scrub clearance near the pond, removing small-medium Silver Birch.

## Heathlands Reunited

- Winter 2018 - Scrub clearance in the North-East corner including the removal of medium Pine, Birch and Gorse.
- Spring 2019 - New welcome board at main entrance made from locally sourced Oak – information about works on site and events as well as Take the Lead posters will be displayed here. Take the Lead is a park-wide initiative encouraging dog owners to be responsible in the countryside.
- Summer 2019 – Dog walker engagement sessions have allowed us to ask questions and answer some at various times of the day to catch lots of different user groups. We have been promoting the 'Take the Lead' campaign, especially plugging the 'bag it and bin it' and 'stick to paths during ground nesting season' messages.
- Summer 2019 – **Wildlife Walkies event**, to teach dog walkers how to keep their dogs entertained and under control on their walk, especially when near ground nesting birds! (book by emailing [kate.dziubinska@southdowns.gov.uk](mailto:kate.dziubinska@southdowns.gov.uk) or for more info).
- Autumn 2019 – **Deadly Heathlands event**, to engage people with the unusual and mysterious history and biology of the site (29<sup>th</sup> October, no booking needed, see website).
- Winter 2019 – Sand scrapes will be created to boost mining bees/wasps/other insects and reptiles. There will be one near the pond, one in 'bunny valley' and one at the Eastern end of the Roman Road.
- Winter 2019 – Bracken scraping will be carried out on the Northern edge of the heathland to remove rhizomes from the ground and give the Heather a chance to re-establish. Some of the scraping will be done with a giant tractor-mounted rake, and some with a digger.
- Winter 2019 – We hope to get a felling license to remove some of the secondary woodland on the Southern edge of the site. Works will include full removal of timber as well as ground

preparation (stumps ground down/removed) to allow heathland to regenerate. This is not set in stone yet and relies on Forestry Commission and Natural England consent.

All in all it has been a good year for Chapel Common. The silver studded blue butterflies are out in great numbers as well as 4 Nightjars churring this year, Woodcock, Woodlark, Dartford Warblers and Stonechats nesting and even sightings of Tree pipits. Insect numbers are good and the grassland diversity is high, including orchids, oxeye daisies, a rare species of Vetch and many more indicator species of a healthy acid grassland. We have also seen an improvement in dog walker engagement across the site; although hard to quantify, we have spent many days on Chapel Common this year and have heard first-hand how the community using this site is getting friendlier and more respectful of the area...we'll always have some bad behaviour but we hope this number decreases more and more! Our two events this year will also help people to associate the site with the National Park and know that we care about it and are actively managing it.

For any further information regarding the management of Chapel Common please contact:

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For any further information regarding Heathland Reunited please contact:

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