



Commons Link

Newsletter for the Friends of Ludshott and Passfield Commons



Issue 29 - October 2020

The Next Step Forward for Ludshott

To everyone's delight, and quite unexpectedly, DEFRA approval for the grazing project on Ludshott Common came through towards the end of August.

Such good news coming in the midst of the pandemic!

This is the culmination of a long, long process, carried out over many years, and spear-headed by Head Ranger Chris Webb.

Due to the unprecedented circumstances in which we find ourselves, nothing tangible on the ground has been done yet. However, the permission gives three years for the fencing to be completed. So the Team are sorting out a fencing contractor who will be able to start next winter and in the meantime, weather and season permitting the Team hope to start clearing the fence line.

The final piece of the jigsaw will be completed during 2021 which will be to contact all neighbours who have a boundary with the Common, to ascertain what sort of barrier or access they would prefer.

And thus in sight is the goal of introducing conservation grazing animals, to provide a more sustainable, traditional system of management of the Common.

2020 was to have been a year of Celebration to mark the National Trust's 125 year history, but obviously with the onset of Covid-19 all these plans had to be shelved. A great disappointment both nationally and locally but we continue to hope that 2021 will be kinder to everyone.

Thus, there was no newsletter in the Spring, and why all members will have received this issue by post.

Countryside Stewardship Agreement

More good news.

At the end of last year a Countryside Stewardship Agreement for Ludshott Common was reached with Natural England.

The aim of this plan is to maintain and increase the areas of heather and the rare lowland heath habitat. The forestry work described on page 3 is all part of this plan. As well as this, year on year, the scrubby areas will be controlled mechanically. Until grazing commences, blocks of bracken will be sprayed, not ideal but without animals and the traditional way of life of Commoners, this is the only way of containing it.

When conservation grazing animals are introduced to the Common (see left), they will browse the scrub, graze the grasses, and trample the bracken whilst also eating its new shoots.

The Stewardship Agreement will last for the next 10 years and means that the Team will receive a grant every year with which to achieve its aims.

This, then, is the very beginning of a return to a traditional and sustainable future for Ludshott Common.



Coronavirus Pandemic

Our Commons remain, as they always have been, open 24/7 all through any lockdown restrictions, providing much needed fresh air and open space. Also these green lungs are a well-being life-line to those confined, and to many who have never visited before, or walked the Commons on a regular basis.

However, during the first lockdown there was a big downside. The amount of litter that was left behind around Waggoners Wells and Ludshott Common, was at least 6 skip loads higher than would normally be expected, and which in clearing it up took time away from the Team's actual work programme. It is appalling to have to report that this happened in our countryside, and especially on a Site of Special Scientific Interest. Hopefully, with the second period of lockdown visitors will show more responsibility and *take their rubbish home*.

But on the upside, Area ranger Jim, who was the only one of the Team to continue working throughout (the others being on furlough), and, latterly, assistant ranger Mandy have been monitoring the increase in people, and often have been able to engage many in conversation. The visitors were always happy to have a socially distanced talk, and their responses were very positive when the rangers described and explained the habitat, and the future plans for Ludshott.

National Trust Reset programme

There has been much on the news regarding personal and business loss of income, but charities also have suffered. On the right are parts extracted from a letter sent, at the beginning of October, to the Local Committee, and others, by the Director General of the National Trust, Hilary McGrady, giving an update on the present situation within the Trust.

Local result of Reset programme

As far as our Team is concerned, their portfolio of responsibilities has widened, and, very unfortunately, one of our assistant rangers, Simon, has reluctantly accepted voluntary redundancy. We thank Simon for all his work and support over the years and wish him well for the future. We will miss him.

Thus, in a nutshell, the Team have more work to do with fewer people. And with these challenging times still upon us, we 'watch this space'.

Committee Finances

As you will realise, and see from Hilary McGrady's letter, money is very tight, so much so that the Team had to apply to the Committee to be able to get their tractors serviced within in a suitable time-scale, and to buy a new winch. We were very happy to support them from our locally held funds, which we have built up from special events like the quiz, and Friends subscriptions.

But with expenditure such as this our funds are depleting quite rapidly. The annual Friends Subscription has not increased in over 20 years.

So, in these unprecedented times if any supporter feels able to donate further, directly to us, and/or increase the amount of their standing order we would be very grateful.

Contact our treasurer Janet on 01428 751980 for details of where to send cheques, or for our details in order to make a bank transfer.

With many thanks.

Letter from the Director General

As you know in July we announced that job losses and budget cuts were inevitable as a result of the impact of the coronavirus pandemic. Since then the National Trust has been undergoing one of the biggest redundancy consultations in its 125-year history.

We proposed making almost 1,200 compulsory redundancies. However, after considering more than 14,500 pieces of feedback from staff, volunteers and Supporter Groups during the 45-day consultation, we're now making 514 compulsory redundancies and we've also accepted 782 voluntary redundancies. These will help us to save £100m to support our conservation work each year.

Following the wide-ranging consultation, a number of changes have been made to the original proposals, including retaining roles focused on helping children learn, keeping curation specialists increasing buildings maintenance roles, and introducing new specialist roles for land use, soils and carbon reduction.....

Despite retaining these roles, it's with deep sadness that we still have to make any redundancies. This is a very painful time for so many organisations, businesses and communities. And we're well aware that the Trust is only as strong as it is because of its people – our staff, volunteers and supporters.

However, in making these changes now, we're confident we'll be well-placed to face the challenges ahead, protecting the places that visitors love, and nature needs, and ensuring our conservation work continues long into the future.

In addition to staff redundancies, we've confirmed that we'll save £41m from non-pay budget cuts..... We've also already announced we're stopping or deferring £124m of projects, and we've introduced a recruitment freeze to reduce our staff costs.....we also drew on the Bank of England's emergency coronavirus loan scheme and we're grateful for support from some rescue and stimulus packages.....

The places and things the National Trust cares for are needed now more than ever and will continue to play an important role as our nations recuperate and recover their spirit and wellbeing. Our focus will remain on the benefit we deliver to people, every day – bringing them closer to nature, beauty and history. We must now focus on emerging from this crisis in a strong position.

Hilary McGrady

Forestry

Contractors are carrying out felling work in the wooded areas on Ludshott Common.

This removal of mainly self-seeded Scot's Pine has been agreed by National Trust, Forestry Commission and Natural England to be part of the management required under the Countryside Stewardship Agreement which aims to increase the area of heathland.

The Team have put signs up, and provided access tracks for walkers separate from the machinery going to and from the wood stacking area.

Last winter, Liss Archaeology completed a detailed survey of the Common. And so that no destruction of artefacts takes place within the forestry work areas, all of the WWI trenches and WWII sites have been identified, and also a large circular feature which has a boundary bank, in places up to 2ft high, together with a surrounding ditch. This interesting feature, which is possibly a mediaeval animal enclosure, will be surveyed further by the archaeologists at a later date.

Within the areas which are marked for 'clear felling', there are trees to be retained. These include any Scot's Pine of about 90 years old, and broad-leaved species such as Sweet Chestnut, and Oak.



Trees ready to be cut



Cutting trees



Stacked ready for the sawmill

Carbon footprint

Over the years the NT has been very aware of the effect of climate change and of the need to capture carbon. Thus it has been taking steps nationwide to reduce its footprint by planting as many trees as possible, in appropriate places on its land.

We are conscious that by the forestry work, we may appear to be going against this objective. However, Sessile Oak, being a broad-leaved, hard-wood species and living in some cases for hundreds of years, has a much better effect on the environment than the shorter-lived, soft-wood pines being cleared. So as part of the on-going forestry process it is planned that Sessile Oak saplings will be planted in Gentles Copse which will maintain the rare habitat there.

Over the years this replenishing of the tree stock has helped to develop the varied age structure of the Copse by supplementing the self-seeded young sessile oaks. Once again the saplings used will be grown from acorns produced by the existing trees so that the DNA pool remains unpolluted. However, this time, the normally-used tree guards will be replaced by more robust enclosures to deter vandalism, and also, so that the deer and rabbit populations cannot again enjoy many of the young plants as luxury snacks!

Ash Die-Back Disease

Last winter, as part of the normal tree health survey and the resultant arboriculture work that is carried out every year, many diseased Ash trees were felled around the Passfield and Conford area.

This year, despite all the problems of the Covid-19 pandemic, the National Trust has been surveying nationwide and assessing the state of the Ash tree stock on its properties.

On our patch there will be a 5-year programme to remove all the dead and dying trees. It is planned to start this work during the winter period, targetting all those trees near to footpaths which could endanger visitors.

Ash die-back disease was described in Commons Link issue no. 19, March 2015 downloadable from ntludshott.org.uk Also visit the Woodland Trust for more information about this majestic tree species.

www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/trees-woods-and-wildlife/british-trees/a-z-of-british-trees/ash/

Quiz Night March 2020

Our popular annual NT Quiz Night took place on the evening of Friday 13th March 2020. An auspicious date and one, with hindsight, we probably won't forget.

As usual, it was held at Headley Village Hall and was very well attended. Little did we know that just ten days later the whole Country would be asked to stay at home due to the Coronavirus pandemic and to only go out, as strictly necessary, for essential journeys.

The participants enjoyed a fun-packed evening. This year, once again, the questions were set by Simon, one of the Rangers, and his wife, Jayne. Unfortunately, Simon could not attend as he was having an operation on one of his knees, but fortunately Matt, who was standing in for Chris whilst he was having a career break, stepped in and did a very good job as question master, ably assisted by his partner. The questions were a good mix, giving everyone an opportunity to participate and comprised of four rounds and a marathon.

The evening was split into two halves with an ample ploughman's supper being provided during the interval. There was a popular selection of cheeses served, with french bread, apples, grapes and chutney, and everyone brought their own drinks. After supper the raffle was drawn, with prizes including National Trust cream teas for two at both Hinton Ampner and Uppark. There was also the ever-popular heads and tails game. The members of the winning quiz team each received a bottle of wine.

In all, an excellent evening's enjoyment, raising over £550 for local funds. This money goes directly to support the work of the Rangers managing Ludshott and Passfield Commons. So we would especially like to thank all those who attended and contributed.

We hope to be able to run a quiz next year and if you would like to attend please look on line at our website ntludshott.org.uk for details of the next date, and make up a team.

We look forward to seeing you when these unprecedented times are over.

Conservation Grazing returns to Passfield Common

We reported in our March 2019 issue that there were no longer any cattle grazing on Passfield Common, and at that time there was a great deal of mechanical conservation and restoration management being undertaken, to enhance the ecology of the site prior to the reintroduction of livestock.

During December 2019 seventeen British Longhorn cattle were released, these being monitored and managed by their grazier. Since then the cattle have done a fantastic job of browsing and grazing back the scrub willow and *Molinia* grass. During October they were taken off the Common as part of the grazing management regime but soon eight will be returned to overwinter.



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*Ludshott Commons committee -
Visit our website*

www.ntludshott.org.uk

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Becoming a Friend costs only £5.00 for a year. Contact the Membership Secretary, Colin Brash on 01428 713256.