



Hawridge and Cholesbury Commons Preservation Society March 2009

Litterblitz

Spring is the time when we launch our campaign to gather as much litter from the Commons as we can before vegetation hides it from view. It is surprising how much litter I can collect when I go on the short walk to the post box from our house. This is an opportunity for all residents to take a walk on the Commons, with gloves and carrier bags. Any rubbish collected can be placed in one of the black sacks that will be provided near the Cricket Pavilion, on the Common opposite the school and at the top of Parson's Path at Hawridge. Last year, the Litterblitz was held while the weather was really awful, with cold, torrential rain, and I don't think that many of us managed to collect much. However, it is so worthwhile and lovely to see the Commons free of rubbish. The dates we have chosen for the Litterblitz are **28 March - 5 April**.

Heathland Regeneration

According to the Hertfordshire Environmental Records Centre, heathland used to extend from Tring Park to Heath End, including the (present) woodland area known as High Scrubs on Kiln Lane, and Hawridge and Cholesbury Commons. The Buckinghamshire Biodiversity Action Plan includes objectives to re-establish lowland heath and acid-grassland and it is this objective to which we are contributing by carrying out heather regeneration projects. Hawridge and Cholesbury Commons are unusual in that they are sited on acid soil and have never been improved with fertiliser and therefore provide the ideal conditions, in parts, for lowland heathland.

As a continuation of our aim to enhance the ecological value of the Commons, we have recently carried out another project to encourage the regeneration of heathland. The area near the top of Horseblock Lane follows on from a successful test area straight downhill from the Old Mission Hall beside the school. The top layer of thatch has been removed and seed from the local heather has been scattered. We expect it to take up to a year to germinate and probably another 2 years for it to flower. The original test area now has hundreds of young heather plants and other heathland species developing. If you want to see how we expect the present area to look in a couple of years, you can get some idea from this test area.

The material removed from the new heather area has been deposited beside Horseblock Lane and formed into low ridges. The aim was to fill in some of the erosion caused by vehicles driving off the road, and to create a low bank to discourage further driving on the Common. The ridges will be no higher than verges in other parts of the Common. Although unsightly at the moment, we expect it to settle to a lower height and green over when the growing season gets started. A risk assessment was undertaken before the work started, but once it was underway, some concerns were expressed that the banks make difficulties for horse riders and pedestrians. The Society takes such concerns seriously and we are considering advice from various people to see if we should improve the situation. We have also received several supportive comments from other Commons users who do not see a problem.

As part of the process of keeping the woodland in check and increasing where possible the area of acid grassland (in addition to keeping the paths and rides open), the Society has a tractor, which has been lovingly maintained by Windsor Thomas. However, towards the end of last year, the engine developed a fault that required major works and so we have been investigating the options open to us.

- The first was a new tractor – we quickly realised we could not afford this option.
- The second was to buy a reconditioned second-hand tractor. Although they were within our price range we took advice and decided that the models that would suit us were similar to the one we already have and were therefore quite old. We realised that a tractor with an unknown history of that age could still require a lot of repair work to systems other than the engine and so concluded that this was not a sensible route to follow.
- We were therefore left with the option of getting our present tractor repaired.

The Committee decided to ask Brown's to fit a reconditioned engine and make the other necessary mechanical repairs. When the Society can afford to, we will do some repair and maintenance work to the bodywork.

We are very fortunate that the Chilterns Conservation Board support the work we do and have agreed to give us a grant of up to £3,000 from the Sustainable Development Fund towards this conservation work. This has come at a particularly good time, as the tractor repair work will be expensive.

Another project we have recently undertaken is an attempt to improve the drainage on the bottom ride in two places where deep mud is present in all but the driest weather. We have scraped away wide channels in the hope that water will run along them and into ditches at the side of the Common, thereby drying out the surrounding areas. We are not sure whether this will work and will be monitoring it over the next year in various weather conditions. The reason for using wide channels is that we want to ensure that horses and walkers are able to find a safe footing and do not injure themselves.

Summer Party, 2009:

This year's party will be held on **Saturday 4th July**, so please note the date in your diary. We have enjoyed three wonderful Summer Parties at Hawridge Place, and Carys and Eric have always given us a very warm welcome. However, the cost of hiring marquees and other items has increased considerably. In view of this, the Committee decided to approach Annie and Peter Alberto at The Full Moon and they have very generously offered us the use of their marquees at a reduced rate, in the Paddock beside the pub garden. As they did last year, they will cook the meat and provide a chef to carve and help serve it. This was a great success, and their help is very much appreciated once again.

The party is a great opportunity for the community to come together, and we hope that you will be able to help make it a success by contributing food, moving chairs and tables, providing sponsorship, and by coming to the party! Tickets will be available from Committee Members in May/June.

Working Parties

The working party that was scheduled to be on 22 March (Mother's Day) has been shifted to **29 March**. This will be the last working party of the year and it is planned to spend the time cutting, collecting and distributing any logs that have been piled up as a result of clearing on the Commons. Isobel has a list of people who have received logs from the Society in the past. If you are aware of a neighbour who requires a little extra help, please would you let Isobel know on 758987 or Isobel@cholesbury.com and she can then add them to her list.

Fifteen people attended the working party on 8 March. As a result of the snow in October 2008, two huge limbs had half fallen from an oak just to the east of Shepherds Cottage. The aim for the morning was to clear these, but the group was large enough to split into three. One group went off to clear fallen trees on the manorial waste at Hawridge, while another was able to clear trees and branches on the bottom track. It shows what can be done if lots of people come to help and it is very encouraging for the core team who routinely organise and participate in all the work. As always, everyone was sustained by Lindsay, who brings hot, and cold drinks and cake for the workers. Our heartfelt thanks go to her and everyone else who turns up to help on these occasions. They work in all kinds of weather and we are very grateful for all that they do to keep our Commons in good heart.

Linden Bevan-Pritchard.