

Barnham Cross Common

Conservation works Winter/Spring 2017

Barnham Cross Common is internationally important for its chalk and grass heaths along with their associated plants and animals. Due to the lack of grazing that was traditionally carried out on the site, large areas of scrub and trees have colonised the grass areas.

During this winter areas of trees and scrub shown on the map will be removed to increase the area of chalk and acid grassland for which the site is designated. These areas became established due to the lack of appropriate grazing. Once these areas have been cleared grazing livestock will be introduced to prevent trees and scrub re-colonising and to provide ideal conditions for the many species of Brecks plants and insects that once occurred here on one of the most important sites in the region. The map on the right shows the 11 areas of scrub and trees that will be removed.

Areas of existing grassland will be reconnected so that plants, animals and insects can move and re-establish more freely. Further scrub and tree removal works will be carried out over coming years.

We hope you bear with us during these activities to improve the conservation value of the site and for you own wellbeing please comply with any site safety notices whilst this vital work is carried out.

Thank you for your cooperation

This work is supported by Plantlife, Natural England and WREN funding coordinated by Future Environments. If you would like to find out more about the Common or get involved as a volunteer for the site then contact Roz Barnett Thetford Town Council on 01842 754038.



The Background

Barnham Cross Common is a local nature reserve and a site of 'special scientific interest' because it is rare grassland heath. The Town Council has a responsibility to comply with legislation regarding the conservation and maintenance of a site of 'Special Scientific Interest'. Sadly over the last 50 years the Common has been neglected and scrub and trees have colonised the heath and threatened the native species. The Town Council has a management plan for the site which has been approved by English Nature. This plan sets out how the site should be managed and English Nature provide annual payments to the council to complete the conservation work. An important part of this management plan is reintroduction of grazing animals and in 2015 consultation took place and permission was given by the Secretary of State to fence the common.

In the last few months the fencing has gone up and the removal of the scrub and trees has begun. Over the next few years varied works will be carried out to encourage seeds that may be dormant in the soil to grow and to provide conditions suitable for natural or human reintroduction. 5 hectares of scrub have been removed over the last 5 years and a further 10 hectares will be cleared of invasive scrub and trees and this will drastically change the landscape opening up the common. The majority of the tree felling will take place during January, February and March 2017 after which there will be smaller scale scrub clearance on an annual basis.

Grazing animals will be introduced in the spring of 2017. It is expected that initially this will be 15-20 cattle. However experts recommend a mixed grazing programme that includes sheep and ponies. Any grazing will be agreed under a licence and any graziers will have to meet a number of stringent criteria to ensure that legal and health and safety requirements are met.

Thetford Town Council has been working with PlantLife, the national plant charity, to bring this nationally significant site back to its former glory. Once this area is regularly grazed it should produce a varied grass sward and open patches suitable for many of the Brecks specialties such as Spring and Fingered Speedwell, Prostrate Perennial Knawel, Spanish Catchfly, Field Wormwood and Tower Mustard. By working in partnership with Plantlife a large proportion of the conservation work is being completed at minimal cost to the tax payers of Thetford.

Time scales

- *Fencing completed with gates January 2017.*
- *The bulk of the felling of the trees will happen in January after which there will be smaller scale scrub removal.*
- *The Town Council will provide information and consultation on grazing regime February/March.*
- *Advertising for graziers end of January 2017.*
- *Interviews with graziers February.*
- *Animals on site by March/April.*