
Shawford Down – conserving our downland heritage



Shawford Down is an important fragment of downland habitat that survives from the earliest days of the settlement by people in the Winchester area. For hundreds of years the down formed part of an extensive common, grazed by sheep, cattle and other livestock, covering a large area

to the south of Winchester. Following the enclosure of the Malme Common in 1814, there has been a progressive reduction in the extent of the common and its original downland habitats due to cultivation and the pressures of modern farming, house building, roads and, most recently, the M3 construction. Today just a few acres of chalk downland still exist, owned and managed by Hampshire County Council's Countryside Service.

In 2005 there was a series of meetings about the future management of the down with the Parish Council, County Councillor Charlotte Bailey and local residents, and an article was published in the parish magazine outlining the County Council's proposals for the management and conservation of Shawford Down. The views of residents were sought and kindly collated by Mrs Tricia Caffyn in January 2006. Overall there was general support for the re-introduction of cattle grazing to the down in order to conserve the downland habitats, and for the site to be managed in a sustainable way.

More recently, the County Council has secured a Higher Level Stewardship grant from DEFRA to support a ten year restoration and conservation programme for Shawford Down. The Stewardship grant will enable stock fencing for cattle grazing to be erected around the main downland area, coupled with new access gates and a wheelchair accessible path. In addition, scrub will be removed from the lynchet banks, and from areas of grassland as part of a continuing downland restoration programme and to maintain the extensive views.

Cattle grazing will help to conserve the downland habitats by removing the dense mat of high tussocky grasses, and to control the spread of scrub, thus allowing herb-rich

chalk grassland to develop. Grazing is the best (and the only truly sustainable way) to maintain such habitats for their flora, blue butterflies and other insect species. The project will enable all of the surviving downland (approximately 50% of the site) to be grazed while the main woodland areas and lower lynchet banks will remain unfenced and open to walkers as at present. The permissive bridleway route over the down would also be unaffected.

Details of the scheme were reported to the Parish Council at their meeting on 3rd October 2006 and the Countryside Service has recently started the work of mowing and scrub removal to clear the new fencelines. It is expected that the new fences will be erected from mid/late November onwards.

Access to the down will not be affected: new kissing gates, bridle-gates, wheelchair-accessible gates and field gates will be incorporated within the new fencelines at all the main entry points to the down. The fences will also be carefully sited so as to minimise their visual impact by placing them against existing boundary features wherever possible.



A small number of Highland cattle (around six cows) will be introduced to the downland area early in 2007, to graze for a period of 1-3 months, and then taken away for the summer season. These cattle are docile and have been used successfully on a wide variety of sites including Shawford Knoll (immediately to the west of the M3) and Avington Park, where they have already proved very popular with visitors. Dog walkers will not be restricted from entering the area while the cattle are present, and will be free to enjoy the down as before.

The Countryside Service has agreed to keep the Parish Council and local residents fully informed of progress with the scheme, and will erect temporary notices on site to inform visitors about the works taking place and to ensure that they are aware of any livestock present.

For further details please contact:

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