

Shawford Down

Management & Conservation Proposals



The Down after its October cut

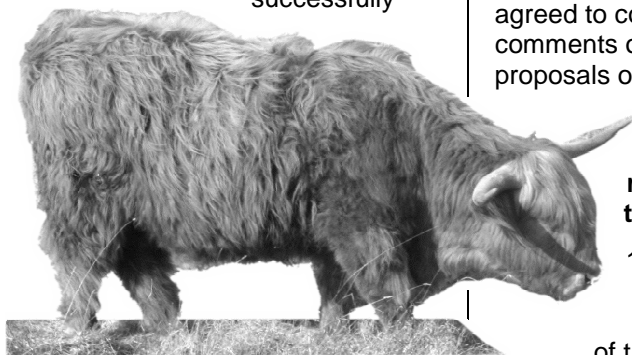
Shawford Down was a part of the Malme Common until 1814 when it was enclosed. Long before that the common had been grazed by commoners' livestock for hundreds of years, allowing a short and rich turf to develop and butterflies, orchids and other wildlife to thrive.

Today about half of the surviving remnant of the original down still has chalk grassland growing on it, but lack of grazing and mowing has allowed scrub and trees to colonise the remainder. As a result, chalk grassland, a rare and very special habitat, is disappearing and will eventually be lost. In order to maintain the grassland areas it is essential that the vegetation is removed annually, but annual mowing is no longer a realistic or sustainable option for managing the down due to the steep slopes, the

high cost of mowing and of disposal of the cut material. Mowing is also known to reduce biodiversity by producing a uniform sward.

The County Council's Countryside Service has therefore agreed to look at a more sustainable and natural way of managing the down and have prepared a medium/long-term management plan for the site, in consultation with the Parish Council, local residents and others. In the next two months we are proposing to apply for a Higher Level Stewardship grant from DEFRA in order to erect suitable fencing and to re-introduce grazing on the down using a suitable breed of cattle (such as Highland Cattle) during the winter and early spring. Grazing would remove the mat of high tussocky grasses, allowing a short, herb-rich chalk grassland to develop and increasing

numbers of chalkhill blue butterflies and other insect species. This form of grazing has already been successfully



introduced to Shawford Knoll immediately to the west of the M3.

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 from the down.

The down is heavily used by visitors and we will continue to allow full public access to the Down by means of suitable gates placed on all of the present main access points. The woodland area would be unfenced and open to walkers as at present. The permissive bridleway route over the down would also be unaffected.

We have been in discussion with the Parish Council regarding the Countryside Service management plan and have supplied copies of our management plan together with six

maps showing important features and management actions.

The Parish Council has kindly agreed to co-ordinate public comments on the management proposals outlined here.

In particular we would be interested to receive responses to the following questions:

1. How much of the down and lynchet banks should we clear of trees and scrub?
2. What do you think about cattle grazing to help conserve the downland flora and fauna?
3. Where should we position suitable gates – e.g. kissing gates, disabled access gates, bridleway gates?

In order to meet the timetable for DEFRA Environmental Stewardship applications, and to reflect the views of local people in our application, we will need to receive responses by the end of January 2006.

Please send your comments to Councillor Tricia Caffyn before this deadline, either by email to [redacted] or by phone to [redacted]

David Ball, Site Manager,
HCC Countryside Service,
Crab Wood Depot,
Sarum Lane, Winchester,
SO22 5QS.