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linking community & countryside

SOUTHBOROUGH COMMON MANAGEMENT PLAN REVIEW UPDATED FOR PERIOD 2012 to 2017

DRAFT FOR CONSULTATION

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Introduction

The Kent High Weald Partnership has been engaged by Southborough Town Council and the Kent Partnership, via the Kent Biodiversity Partnership, to review and update the management plan for Southborough Common. Previous plans for the common covered the periods 2000 to 2005 (Moyse, 1999) and 2005 to 2010 (Anon, 2005).

The Kent High Weald Partnership has formerly been involved in commissioning and writing surveys and management plans for Southborough Common. It has also acted on behalf of Southborough Town Council to apply to enter the site into English Woodland Management Grant Schemes, and Countryside Stewardship. During the late 90s and into the early 2000s, KHWP organised and led a number of volunteer task days at Southborough Common, clearing scrub and helping to maintain the site's acid grassland habitat. KHWP officers have previously organised for the design, production and installation of two interpretation panels on the common.

A great deal of work was carried out between 1999 and 2005 in an attempt to implement a set of management recommendations for Southborough Common. Specifically, Moyse (1999) recommended conducting a project to help restore areas of the common to a heathy wood pasture habitat once more. Despite lengthy public consultation, and a decision by Southborough Town Council to apply to the Secretary of State for permission to fence certain areas of the common, the plan was dropped in 2005. Defra, on receipt of a number of complaints concerning the proposal, requested that a public inquiry take place to determine the appropriateness of this course of action. Due to the cost of such an inquiry, which the town council would have had to pay for, the plan was abandoned.

Between 2005 and the writing of this plan, Southborough Town Council has continued to manage the site as an amenity for the local community. All works at the common are currently carried out by the town council's grounds staff, who are overseen by the Clerk to the Town Council. The Woodland Grant Scheme that had formerly supported habitat works at Southborough Common has now lapsed, and the Countryside Stewardship scheme for the common was never taken up, due to the abandonment of the 1999 management plan aims.

The production of this document marks a change in approach to management planning for Southborough Common. Since restoration work was abandoned in 2005, new guidance has been made available on developing management prescriptions for commons, and new legislation regarding consent for works on commons has been passed. In light of these changes, and following guidance from the KHWP, Southborough Town Council opted in July 2011 to begin the process of developing new management for the common with a period of consultation.

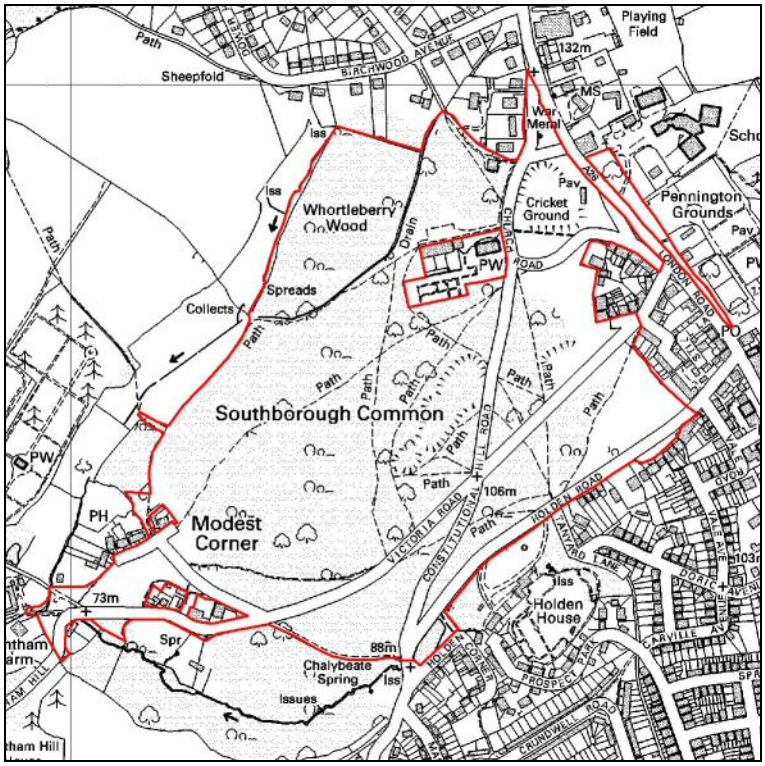
The report from the consultation, which is appended to this plan, details both the process and findings of this new approach. Through a series of workshops, drop-in sessions, newsletter bulletins and email responses, members of the local community worked together though the consultation to develop a new, outline plan for the common. This plan, which is informed by the findings of the consultation as well as current guidance and legislation, represents a new community-led initiative for the common. This will help to ensure its positive management for landscape, access, wildlife, and nature conservation in the years ahead.

Section A – Administrative Details

General Information

Site Name Southborough Common

Site Location Southborough Common is located to the north-western edge of Southborough, in the borough of Tunbridge Wells. It is edged by the main A26 London Road to its east, by Holden Road and the town of Southborough to the north and south, and by Southborough Cemetery and grazing pastures to the west.



Southborough Common, OS Map Scale 1:10,000

Grid reference of centre of site: TQ 574 426

Area of site: For the purposes of this management plan, Southborough Common is taken to include Whortleberry Wood, but to exclude St. Peter's Church and some areas of built development. On this basis, the area outlined above is approximately 33.5 hectares (83 acres).

Ownership Details

Southborough Common is owned and managed by Southborough Town Council. At time of writing works are predominantly conducted by the town council's grounds staff, overseen by the Clerk for the Town Council.

Landscape and Nature Conservation Status

Southborough Common forms part of the TW27 Southborough Common Local Wildlife Site, which was designated by the Kent Trust for Nature Conservation (now the Kent Wildlife Trust) in 1986. The important habitats of the site are noted to be acid heathy grassland, wood pasture, mature broad-leaved woodland, and streams and flushes (Weightman, 2010).

The Common lies within the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the High Weald Special Landscape Area, the Metropolitan Green Belt, and a Conservation Area. As such, and at time of writing, Southborough Common is covered by a number of saved policies from

the Tunbridge Wells Borough Local Plan (2006). It is also covered by policy 4 of the adopted Core Strategy of the borough council's Local Development Framework (2010). The following policies would need to be taken into account in regard to any proposed development at Southborough Common:

Policy MGB1 *Metropolitan Green Belt*

The openness of the Metropolitan Green Belt, as defined on the Proposals Map, will be preserved and no development which would conflict with the purposes of including land within it will be permitted. Within the Metropolitan Green Belt, planning permission will not be granted other than for:

1. The construction of a new building or buildings for one of the following purposes:
    a) agriculture or forestry;
    b) essential facilities for outdoor sport or recreation, for cemeteries or other uses of land which preserve the openness of the Metropolitan Green Belt and do not conflict with its purposes;
    c) limited affordable housing to meet local needs in accordance with POLICY H8;
    d) development within a Major Developed Site, as defined on the Proposals Map, and provided that any proposal is in accordance with POLICY MGB2;
2. Extension, alteration or replacement of a dwelling, provided it is in accordance with POLICIES H10 and H11;
3. The re-use of a building, provided any proposal is in accordance with POLICIES H13 and ED5 and does not include any associated uses of land around the building which might conflict with the openness of the Metropolitan Green Belt or the purposes of including land in it; and
4. The carrying out of an engineering or other operation or the making of any material change in the use of land, provided that it maintains the openness of the Metropolitan Green Belt and does not conflict with its purposes.

Policy EN1 *Design and other Development Control Criteria*

All proposals for development within the Plan area will be required to satisfy all of the following criteria:

1. The nature and intensity of the proposed use would be compatible with neighbouring uses and would not cause significant harm to the amenities or character of the area in terms of noise, vibration, smell, safety or health impacts, or excessive traffic generation;
2. The proposal would not cause significant harm to the residential amenities of adjoining occupiers, and would provide adequate residential amenities for future occupiers of the development, when assessed in terms of daylight, sunlight and privacy;
3. The design of the proposal, encompassing scale, layout and orientation of buildings, site coverage by buildings, external appearance, roofscape, materials and landscaping, would respect the context of the site and take account of the efficient use of energy;
4. The proposal would not result in the loss of significant buildings, related spaces, trees, shrubs, hedges, or other features important to the character of the built up area or landscape;
5. There would be no significant adverse effect on any features of nature conservation importance which could not be prevented by conditions or agreements;
6. The design, layout and landscaping of all development should take account of the security of people and property and incorporate measures to reduce or eliminate crime; and
7. The design of public spaces and pedestrian routes to all new development proposals should provide safe and easy access for people with disabilities and people with particular access requirements.

Policy EN15 *Local Wildlife Sites*

Development proposals that would have an adverse impact on the nature conservation interest of a statutory Local Nature Reserve or non-statutory nature conservation site, will only be permitted if all of the following criteria are satisfied:

1. The need for the development would outweigh the nature conservation interest of the site;
2. There would be no reasonable, less damaging alternative solutions; and
3. The design and layout of the scheme would minimise the potential impact on the important features of the site.

Policy EN25 (LBD1) *Limits to Built Development*

Outside of the Limits to Built Development, as defined on the Proposals Map, all proposals for development will be required to satisfy all of the following criteria:

1. The proposal would have a minimal impact on the landscape character of the locality;
2. The development proposal would have no detrimental impact on the landscape setting of settlements;
3. The development proposal would not result in unsympathetic change to the character of a rural lane which is of landscape, amenity, nature conservation, or historic or archaeological importance;
4. Where built development is proposed, there would be no existing building or structure suitable for conversion or re-use to provide the required facilities. Any new buildings should, where practicable, be located adjacent to existing buildings or be well screened by existing vegetation; and
5. Where an extension or alteration to an existing building is proposed, it would respect local building styles and materials, have no significant adverse impact on the form, appearance or setting of the building, and would respect the architectural and historic integrity of any adjoining building or group of buildings of which it forms part.

Policy EN26 & EN27 *High Weald AONB and Special Landscape Area*

Superseded by Core Policy 4 of the Core Strategy (TWBC, 2010):

Environment

The Borough's built and natural environments are rich in heritage assets, landscape value and biodiversity, which combine to create a unique and distinctive local character much prized by residents and visitors alike. This locally distinctive sense of place and character will be conserved and enhanced as follows:

1. The Borough's urban and rural landscapes, including the designated High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, will be conserved and enhanced
2. The Borough Landscape Character Area Assessment 2002 will be utilised to manage, conserve and enhance the landscape as a whole
3. A hierarchical approach to nature conservation and the protection of biodiversity and geodiversity will be applied across the sites and habitats of national, regional and local importance within the Borough. The objective will be to avoid net loss of biodiversity and geodiversity across the Borough as a whole
4. Opportunities and locations for biodiversity enhancements will be identified and pursued by the creation, protection, enhancement, extension and management of green corridors and through the development of green infrastructure networks in urban and rural areas to improve connectivity between habitats
5. The Borough's heritage assets, including Listed Buildings, Conservation Areas, Scheduled Ancient Monuments, archaeological sites and Historic Parks and Gardens will be conserved and enhanced and special regard will be had to their settings
6. The positive management of heritage assets through partnership approaches and measures will be encouraged, including by the use of Conservation Area Management Plans.

Policy R1 *Recreation Open Space*

Proposals that would result in the loss of recreation open space, as defined on the Proposals Map, or open land with existing or potential recreation value which is not protected by other policies in the Plan, will only be permitted where:

1. No deficiency in accessible open space in the area exists or would result from the development, or alternative provision, of at least equivalent size, suitability and accessibility is made within the locality; and
2. No suitable alternative previously-developed land is available to accommodate the development.

Southborough Conservation Area

Southborough is subject to its own Conservation Area Appraisal (Fullwood, 2003), which covers in detail the architectural and historic interest of the town. The appraisal considers the character of the settlement, including the relationship between the buildings and landscape elements. It provides guidance to the Local Planning Authority on what gives the area its special character and what should, therefore, be conserved or enhanced. Southborough Common and adjoining areas are considered in detail in the CAA, which will continue to influence development in the area as a 'saved' Supplementary Planning Guidance document under the current Local Development Scheme.

Policy EN4 *Demolition in Conservation Areas*

Development involving proposals for the total or substantial demolition of unlisted buildings which contribute positively to the character or appearance of a conservation area will not be permitted unless an overriding case can be made against the following criteria:

1. The condition of the building, and the cost of repairing and maintaining it in relation to its importance and to the value derived from its continued use;
2. The adequacy of efforts made to retain the building in use, including efforts to find compatible alternative uses;
3. The merits of alternative proposals for the site, and whether there are acceptable and detailed plans for any redevelopment; and
4. Whether redevelopment will produce substantial planning benefits for the community, including economic regeneration or environmental enhancement.

Policy EN5 *Development in Conservation Areas*

Proposals for development within, or affecting the character of, a conservation area will only be permitted if all of the following criteria are satisfied:

1. The proposal would preserve or enhance the buildings, related spaces, vegetation and activities which combine to form the character and appearance of the area;
2. The siting of development would be similar to adjoining building frontage lines where this is important to the character of the conservation area;
3. The layout and arrangement of the building(s) would follow the pattern of existing development and spacing of adjoining plot widths where this is important to the character of the conservation area;
4. The scale, massing, roofscape, use of materials, detailing, boundary treatment and landscaping would preserve or enhance the character of that part of the conservation area in which the proposal would be situated;
5. The use, or intensity of use, would be in sympathy with the character and appearance of that part of the conservation area in which the proposal would be situated;
6. The proposal would not result in the loss of trees, shrubs, hedges or other features important to the character of that part of the conservation area in which the proposal would be situated; and
7. In meeting the car parking and access requirements, the character and amenity of the area would not be adversely affected.

Section A – Administrative Details

Policy EN21 *Areas of Important Open Space*	Proposals for development affecting Areas of Important Open Space, as defined on the Proposals Map, will only be permitted where no significant harm would be caused to the appearance or open character of the designated area and the development would not materially detract from the contribution which that area makes to the locality.
Policy EN23 *Important Landscape Approaches*	Proposals for development affecting the important landscape approaches to settlements, as defined on the Proposals Map, will only be permitted where no significant harm would be caused to the appearance and character of the approaches and the development would not materially detract from the contribution which that approach makes to the locality.

Section B – Survey Information

Previous Surveys

A comprehensive ecological survey of Southborough Common was conducted by Richard Moyse during May and June of 1999. The survey included vegetation, terrestrial invertebrates, aquatic invertebrates (from the stream and Holden Pond), and birds. The report also made reference to existing records of fungi, bryophytes, and mammals at Southborough Common. These results were drawn from the regular monitoring of the site by the Kent Wildlife Trust and Kent Field Club.

More recent survey data for Southborough Common comes from the 2010 monitoring report for the Local Wildlife Site, and recording undertaken by members of the Butterfly Conservation Trust. The former, conducted by the Kent Wildlife Trust, includes new survey observations alongside existing data that remains accurate at the time of the survey. Copies of this monitoring report are available from KWT on request.

The Kent Reptile Amphibian Group maintains records of all herpetofauna for the county. These records include professional surveys, as well as observations submitted by the general public.

The following is a summary drawn from the surveys mentioned above, the 2005 review of management written by KHWP, and submissions made during the consultation period:

Vegetation

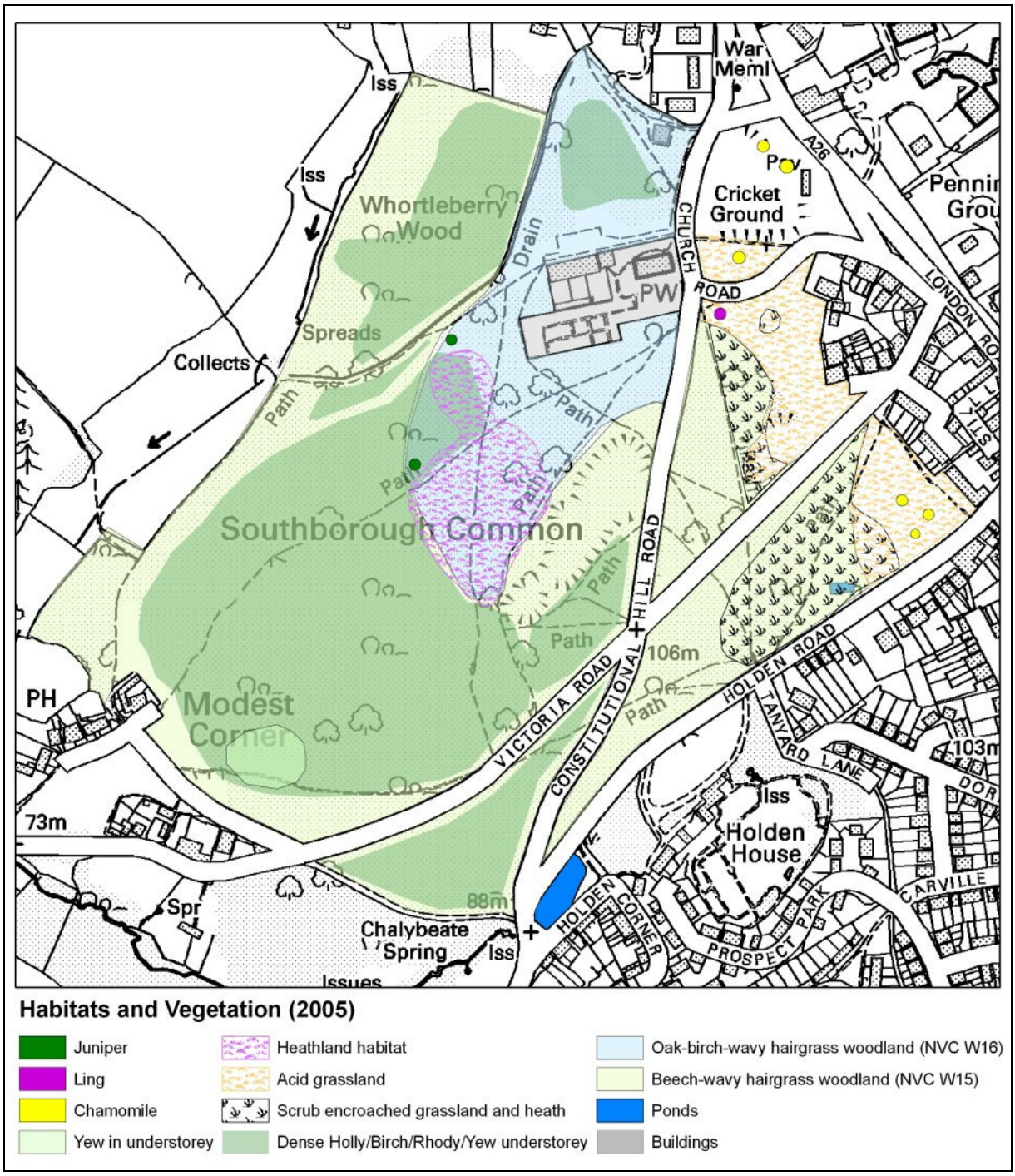
The following page features a map describing the habitats and vegetation of the common, as recorded in 2005 and still broadly accurate today. The 2010 LWS monitoring report describes the habitats of the common as two distinct types of woodland, an area of acid heathy grassland, a stream, and a pond managed for angling. The 2005 vegetation map provides additional detail that includes the extent of the relic heathland area within the wood pasture woodland; an indication of the extent of scrub encroachment over the acid grassland; the character of the woodland understorey across the site; and the location of notable or unusual species. One significant change in the vegetation since the time of this map's creation is the loss of juniper, which had been a notable plant in this location

Whortleberry Wood, and Beech Woodland to the South and West

Beech trees dominate Whortleberry Wood, with some yew in the understorey and stands of locally dense holly. Ancient Woodland Indicator species featuring in the more open areas of this woodland include bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*), common cow wheat (*Melampyrum pratensis*) and bitter vetch (*Lathyrus montanus*). The southern boundary of Whortleberry Wood is marked by a large dry ditch and woodbank running approximately east to west across the site. This boundary also marks a change in the character of the woodland habitat; between the more florally rich ancient Whortleberry Wood, and the wood pasture and secondary woodland to the south and east of the wider common. The western edge of Whortleberry Wood is bound by a stream running north-south. The damper soils occurring here support eared willow (*Salix aurita*),

which is uncommon in Kent, golden saxifrage, and a rich bryophyte flora in a series of spring-fed boggy flushes.

Vegetation Map - 2005



The beech-wavy hairgrass woodland to the South of Whortleberry Wood and the wood pasture area (shown above in blue), is less botanically diverse. A dense understorey of holly, birch, *Rhododendron ponticum* and yew means the ground is heavily shaded, and pathways have become enclosed. Where pathways and rides have been kept open, a range of species occur sporadically that are typical of woodland, heathland, and wood pasture. These include hard fern, broad buckler fern, bluebell, bilberry, ling, and cow wheat. Gorse is also very occasional along these edges and path sides.

Wood Pasture

The former wood pasture woodland to the south and west of St. Peter's Church has maintained a more open character, but is increasingly subject to shading and encroachment as establishing trees and bramble grow tall. Mature oaks, including pollards, are noted to posses a good lichen flora here. In more open areas, the woodland floor is grassy, with the heathland species common bent, wavy hairgrass and purple moorgrass all present. Heathland shrubs occur here, including bilberry and ling. Cow wheat is also present in the wood pasture area, and rushes and sedges occur where the soil is wetter.

Cow wheat (*Melampyrum pratense)*

Cow wheat is a host plant for breeding heath fritillary butterflies. It also has a symbiotic relationship with wood ants which, lured to the plant by a sugary secretion under its petals, transport the plant's cocoon shaped seed back to their underground nests.

Acid Grassland

The acid grassland of the common runs along the southern edge of the cricket pitch, and downhill over a south-facing slope; bordered by roads, houses and a partially mown woodland edge. Some notable species of plant recorded in these areas includes chamomile, early hair grass, and heath grass. Anthills are dotted through the central area of grassland between Church Road and Victoria Road, where ling and sheep's sorrel continue to grow. Where soils are more neutral, hardhead (*Centaurea nigra*), sorrel (*Rumex acetosa*), and bird's-foot trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*) are present. Cow wheat is also present in the scrub woodland here.

Fungi and Bryophytes

The 1999 survey notes that, at time of writing, an impressive 245 species of fungi and 55 species of bryophyte (mosses and liverworts) had been recorded at Southborough Common. This is attributable to the long-term stability of suitable habitat, which includes dead wood, and large, old trees. The damp conditions and acid soils of Southborough Common also create conditions ideally suited to fungi and bryophytes.

Mammals

A badger sett at Southborough Common dug amongst the roots of a mature oak tree

A limited amount of data is available on the mammal interest of Southborough Common, however records do exist for nine different species, including badger and pipistrelle bat. During the consultation, it emerged that a significant roost for noctules had been abandoned during the 1990s. This was attributed by the member of the Kent Bat Group submitting this information, to a decline in the availability of suitable prey, which was in turn attributed to the loss of open habitats.

Birds

Although over 60 species of bird have been recorded at Southborough Common, the 1999 survey comments that the site appears to be "not … particularly rich in bird life". This is attributed to a lack of structural diversity throughout the woodland. Species of bird recorded at Southborough Common to date include little and tawny owl, spotted flycatcher, nuthatch, treecreeper, lesser spotted woodpecker, great spotted woodpecker, and kingfisher.

Reptiles and Amphibians

The Kent Reptile and Amphibian Group has records of common frog, common toad and smooth newt, as well as grass snake from the Holden Pond area of Southborough Common. In addition to this, they note that it would be reasonable to expect to find viviparous lizard and slow worm at

the site. The habitat of the common could also suitable for adder, although the nearest record of this species comes from 1.68km north of the common, in Tonbridge.

Great crested newts have been recorded within the vicinity of Southborough Common. This species is afforded the highest level of protection in law, as a European Protected Species.

Terrestrial and Aquatic Invertebrates
The 1999 survey of terrestrial invertebrates focused specifically on true flies (Diptera), beetles (Coleoptera) and moths (Lepidoptera), as wood pasture and ancient woodland often support important fauna in these groups. The aquatic invertebrate survey was more general, and took samples from Holden Pond and the stream to the west of the common.

As predicted, Southborough Common contained several notable species of beetle and true fly, as well as uncommon moth, wasp and bush cricket species. Many of these are specifically associated with lowland wood pasture habitat. The aquatic invertebrate interest of Holden Pond was considered to be surprisingly high, in light of its management for angling. This was attributed to the large amount of submerged and floating weed in the pond, providing a good deal of structural variety, as well as cover from predatory fish.

The Local Wildlife Site citation for Southborough Common also notes a number of butterfly species. These include the uncommon species purple hairstreak, and ringlet butterfly; both of which are associated with woodlands. Species of butterfly that are more widespread include meadow brown, gatekeeper, speckled wood and small copper.

Recommendations for further/ongoing survey work
The wood pasture, former heathland, and woodland over acid soils at Southborough Common all provide important habitat for some specialist vegetation, reptile and invertebrate fauna. Due to the extent of the woodland and the age of the trees, it is also likely to be an important roosting site for bats. Although the 1999 ecological survey was fairly comprehensive in its coverage, it did not include lichen, bats, reptiles, or amphibians.

Lichens
As with invertebrates, lichen identification is a highly specialist skill, and often requires follow-up work in a laboratory. Members of the British Lichen Society may conduct ‘snapshot’ surveys on request. However, given the importance of wood pasture for lichens, it would be desirable to commission a professional survey. This would provide a baseline of data against which future monitoring (through ‘snapshot’ surveys) could be measured.

Mammals, including bats
There appears to be very limited data available on the mammal interest of Southborough Common. Due to the Local Wildlife Site status of the common, it may be of sufficient interest to the Mammal Society and the Kent Bat Group to undertake some mammal trapping and field survey monitoring. These surveys are often conducted by trained volunteers. Alternatively, grant funding could be sought to commission a professional mammal survey.

Reptiles and Amphibians
The Kent Reptile and Amphibian Group survey report for Southborough Common advocates that a full reptile survey be undertaken for the site, employing methodology appropriate for detecting adder. This may be undertaken over the course of a year by a professional ecologist, or by trained volunteers. A number of corrugated tin and felt refugia would need to be placed around the common, and then monitored from early spring through to autumn. Volunteer surveyors may be recruited from KRAG’s existing database.

Local Wildlife Site Monitoring
The Kent Wildlife Trust currently conducts a walkover survey of all Local Wildlife Sites every ten

years. This will be due to occur again for Southborough Common in 2020, and will make recommendations for any updates to the details of the citation. All data gathered from surveys conducted in the meantime should be forwarded on to KWT, to help feed into this ongoing monitoring of the site.

Community Recording Days

A number of charismatic animal groups are resident, hold territories, or hunt and forage within Southborough Common. Bird surveys, bat walks and minibeast hunts all offer the opportunity to engage the public in the biological monitoring of a site. Following basic training, surveys and monitoring programs may also provide valuable field work experience to students or keen amateur naturalists. Any such community recording event helps to build a more complete record of a site's biological interest, and can help to direct any funding available for professional survey work towards the areas of greatest interest.

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Section C: Site and Situation of the Property

Physical

Altitude:	90 - 130m above sea level
Soils:	Slightly acid loamy and clayey soils with impeded drainage, and moderate to high fertility. Typical habitats over this soil include a wide range of pasture and woodland types.
Geology and aspect:	The underlying geology of Southborough Common is fairly uniform, with almost the entire site lying on Tunbridge Wells Sands. The common slopes away in a north-easterly and southerly direction along a ridge, with its highest point to the war memorial on the north-east corner.
Hydrology:	A stream flows north-south along the valley to the western edge of Whortleberry Wood and the common. The spring-fed Holden Pond lies at the southern-most corner of the common.

Cultural

Public Access:	Southborough Common (excluding Whortleberry Wood) is designated Open Access land under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000). Other rights of way include bridleway WS13, which runs alongside the stream to the west of Southborough Common, and through Whortleberry Wood. Public footpaths WS6, WS10, and WS23 all connect to the site from the urban edge of the common, with WS7 joining the site from the western, more rural edge.
Legislation pertinent to the Common:	The Commons Act 2006 enables commons to be managed more sustainably, with powers to regulate grazing and other agricultural activity. It provides improved protection against abuse, encroachment and unauthorized development. It also prevents the severance of common rights, preventing the sale or lease of rights away from the property to which they are attached. Section 38 of the Commons Act 2006 requires the Secretary of State's consent for any works which prevent or impede access to or over the land, which may include erecting fencing, constructing buildings, digging ditches or resurfacing land. The Act makes clear those works which do not require consent, and those that are exempt. Guidance on these works from the government's Planning Portal (2011) is appended.
Southborough Conservation Area:	The Conservation Area Appraisal for Southborough comments that the Common has been a major determinant in the layout of Southborough, with the town originally comprising a series of discrete hamlets linked by the Common's roads and footpaths (Fullwood, 2003). As such, the Common forms around half of the designated Conservation Area.

Section C: Site and Situation of the Property

Landscape

National Character Area: 122: High Weald (NE, 2011)

Borough Landscape Character Area: Speldhurst Wooded Farmland (TWBC, 2002)

Adjacent land use: The site is bordered by housing to the north and south-east. The A26 runs along the north-eastern side of the common, bordered along its eastern edge by the Hand and Sceptre pub, Meadows School, and the Pennington Grounds open space. South of the cricket ground, the common is edged by housing and a small number of businesses.

South of the common, to the south of Victoria Road, lies a further area of woodland. Although not within the boundary of Southborough Common, this area forms part of the designated Local Wildlife Site.

The western edge of the common is bordered by farmland, and Southborough Cemetery. The pasture surrounding the cemetery is being managed under a Countryside Stewardship Agreement, due to end in 2012.

Section D: Site Structure, Importance and Use

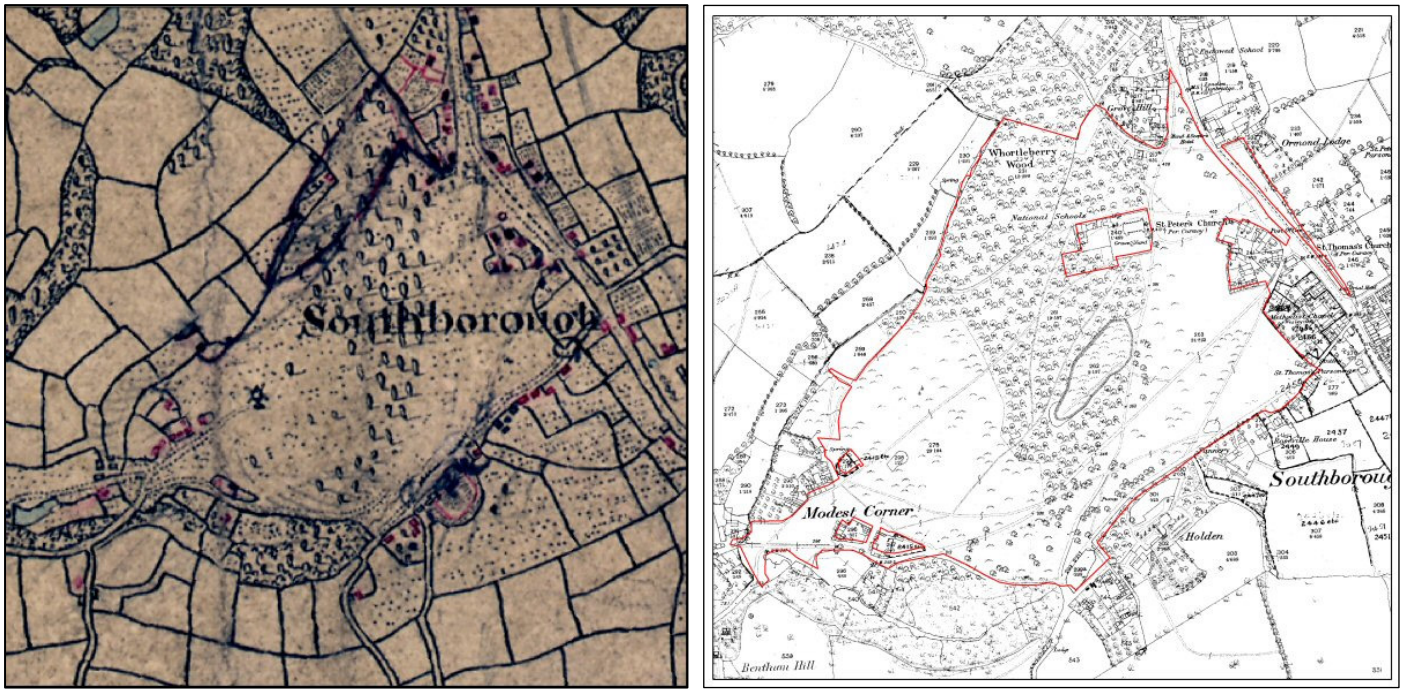
Site History

The following has been compiled from a number of secondary sources, most notably Richard Moyse's interpretation of the common's history within the 1999 management plan; the Southborough Conservation Area Appraisal (Fullwood, 2003); and several accounts of the history of the Common by McCooey (1998; 2000) and members of the Southborough Society. To help illustrate the following, maps have been provided by the High Weald AONB Unit.

Rackham (2003) describes a characteristic straggling outline of wood-pasture commons. This echoes the distinctive horned shape of Southborough Common, as it funnels out towards its edges where the common land is crossed by roads. The boundary houses that have been built fronting on to the common would have had to fence their gardens *against* grazing animals. This practice of individual properties putting up fencing to keep grazing animals out, rather than a landowner fencing a parcel of land to keep grazing animals in, accounts for the unusual shape of commons compared to more conventionally managed farmland.

Richard Moyse wrote of the likely provenance of the existing wood pasture on Southborough Common. In considering the age of the older trees, he concluded that grazing pressure on the common was likely to have eased during the early 19th century. This allowed trees to become established in what had remained an open area of the common from the middle-ages up until this time. In addition, he notes that the existence of the large oak at the corner of Victoria Road and Constitutional Hill may hint at an earlier generation of wood pasture. The 1800 Ordnance Survey surveyor's draft shows Southborough Common largely to be open habitat, with a band of trees running north-south. The post mill, in operation at Modest Corner from 1789 to around 1826 (Davies, 1977), is also indicative of how open the common used to be.

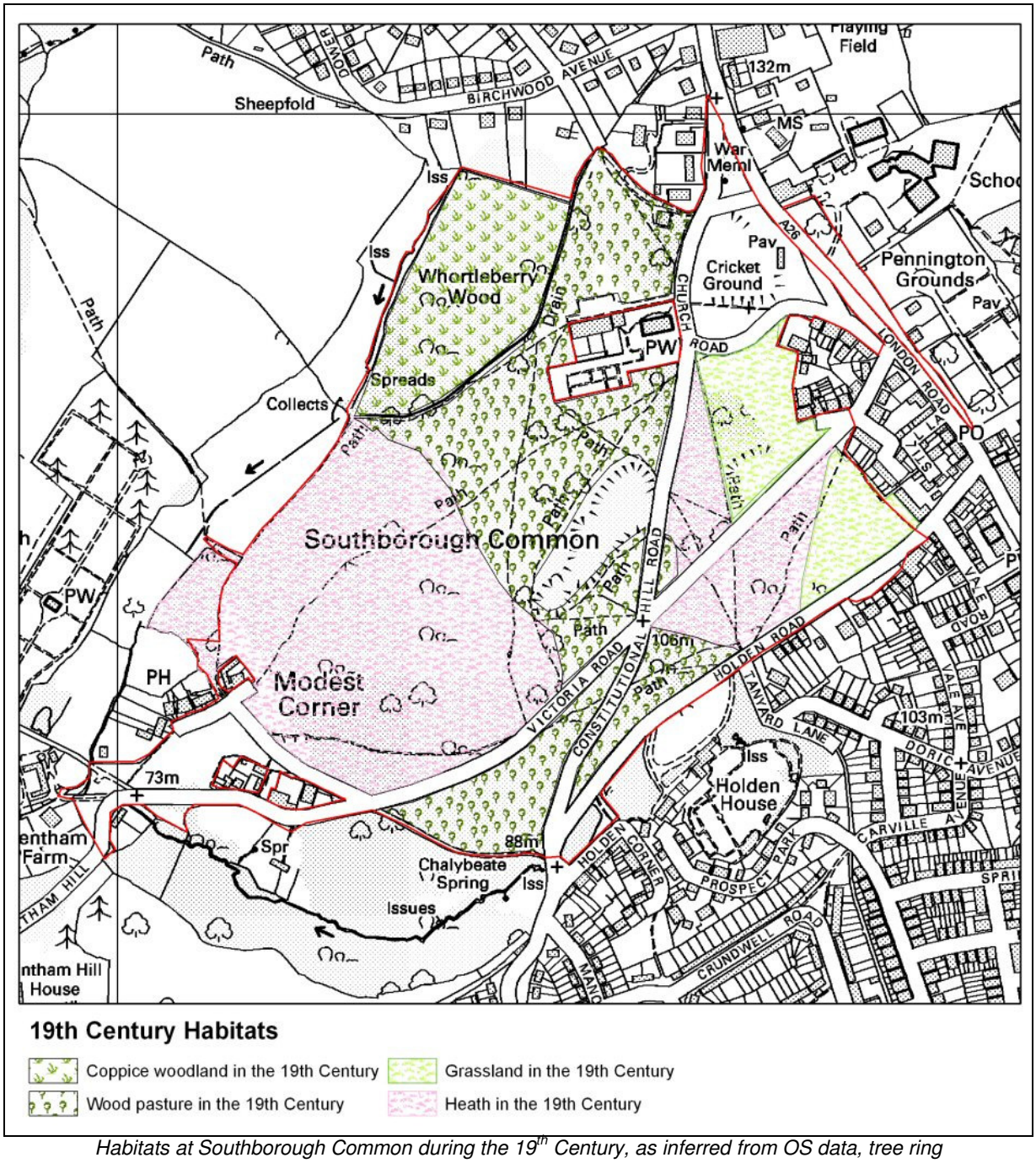
The quarry that opens out on to Constitutional Hill appears on the first Ordnance Survey map. The post mill had gone by the time this map was produced, but the site on which it stood is clearly marked as a separate land parcel. This land went on to be managed as an allotment, and was excluded from the area designated as common land under the 1899 act. It remains outside of the common today.



Extracts from the Ordnance Survey surveyor's draft, circa 1800, and the first edition County Series Ordnance Survey map produced between 1843 and 1893 (courtesy of the High Weald AONB Unit)

Section D: Site Structure, Importance and Use

The first OS map provides an indication of the habitat composition of the common during the early 19th Century. A depiction of this habitat distribution is shown over the modern OS 1:10,000 map below.

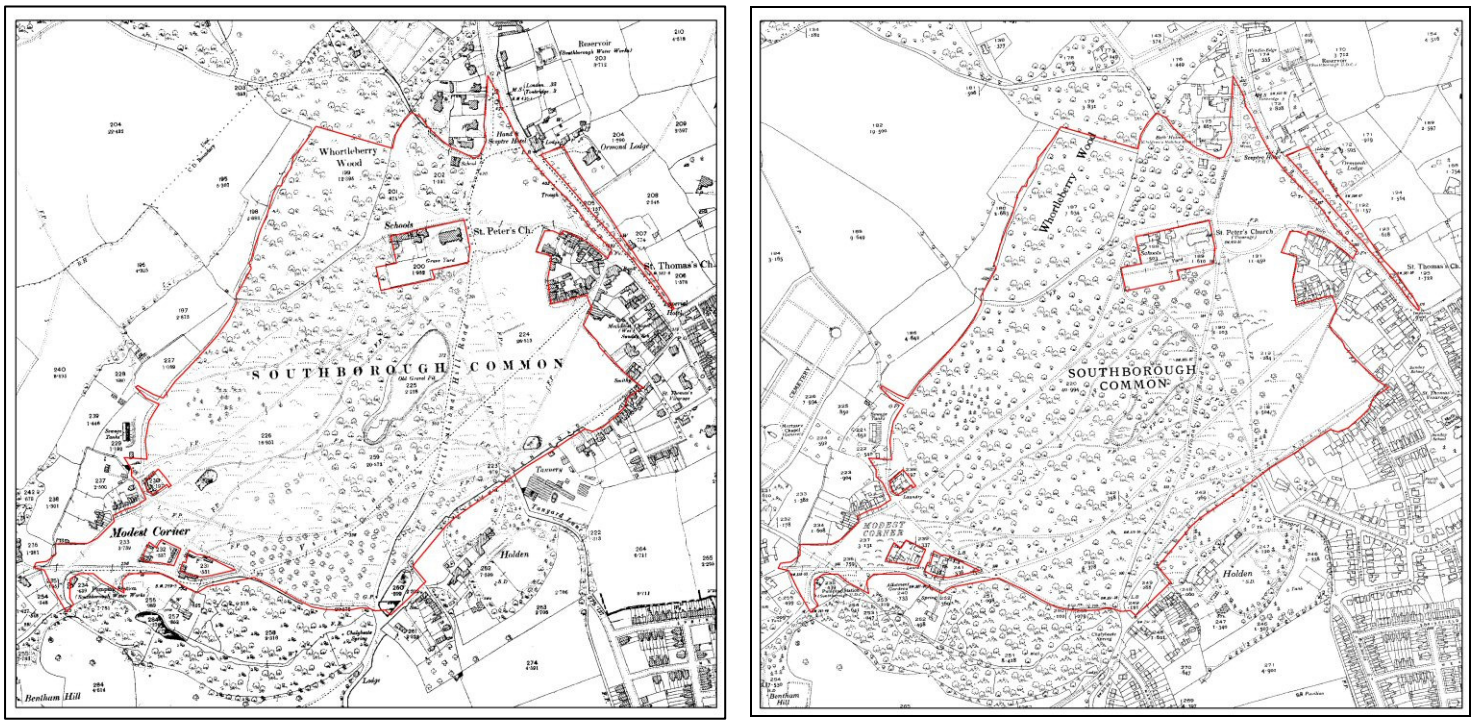


Habitats at Southborough Common during the 19th Century, as inferred from OS data, tree ring counts, and the habitats of the common today.

Photographs and paintings from the late 1800s onwards generally depict the more open areas of the common, often with houses either as a backdrop or focal point for the image. Many of these images also depict people at leisure, and help to illustrate the long-standing use of the common for recreation. Southborough Common was still grazed at this time by the Penticost family, who farmed out of Modest Corner. The Penticosts remain the only family with the established right of common to graze a significant number of cattle at Southborough. Their application for this right was submitted in 1970, although the Penticost's dairy had ceased operation during the previous decade (McCooey, 1998).

By the early 1900s, the habitats of the common were becoming less open than those shown on the first edition Ordnance Survey maps. The primary factor in this habitat change is likely to have been an ease in grazing pressure, which allowed scrub and young woodland to develop. A comparison

between the first revision County Series map, published between 1897and 1912, and the third revision, published between 1919 and 1943, helps to illustrate how in a period of less than a century, the open heathland of Southborough Common was largely gone.



On the first revision County Series map (dated 1891-1912), the south-east and west of the common still appear to be open heathland and grassland. By the date of the third revision (1919-1943), these areas appear to have closed over.

Despite the changing habitat composition of the common, two accounts from the time of the production of the OS map revisions indicate that certain elements of the common's character still remained. Moyse (1999) provides the following quote from an 1885 promotional publication:

> "a portion of Southborough Common is open grassland, but more than half is well wooded … at the top of the common all the trees are oaks … Lower down are some splendid beeches, and lower still almost all the trees are birches. On one part of the common is bracken fern, on another purple heather, on a third golden gorse."
>
> *Thurstan (1885)*

McCooey (1998) provides a similar account, but from the *Southborough Official Guide* (Ninth Edition), published in 1941:

> "Flaring holly trees, grey-green juniper bushes and stretches of heather and bracken add variety of colouring in any weather, and to stand amid the golden glory of the gorse is enough to cheer the most dismal of mortals."

Although grazing pressure was easing at Southborough Common from the 19th century onwards, it appears that the ongoing effect of the reduced degree of cattle grazing was to slow or arrest the change to more enclosed woodland. This meant that characteristic plants of the common, such as heather, gorse and juniper, remained as key components of the common's landscape character. McCooey (2000) features recollections of Southborough during the 20th century, including this account from childhood during the Second World War:

> "The Common was great for climbing trees and much less overgrown with holly back then. The Pineys was a favourite place, 'almost British Columbia', remembers Hugh who was born in Canada. We had favourite trees. The 'A Castle' was a hawthorn tree near the steps opposite the Tanyard. The first footholds on that tree were so well used that they used to shine like glass. Mr Chapman was the ranger then and he lived near the forge at the top of Holden Road. You made

> sure that he didn't catch you with any holly or heather that you'd taken from the Common. To look down from a tree and see Mr. Chapman's face looking up was absolutely terrifying!"
>
> *Hugh Aviss, Wally Usherwood and Stan Hodd recall their wartime childhood.*

The Southborough Conservation Area Appraisal (Fulwood, 2003) comments on the change in character of parts of the common during the 20th century, from open heathy woodland to scrub and impenetrable areas of silver birch, holly and young oaks. The establishment of tree seedlings and scrub, also now encroaching on the wood pasture and Whortleberry Wood, is attributed to the cessation in grazing over the past 100 years. Fullwood (2003) comments on the danger of losing rare species and habitats through this encroachment, and the threat that this poses to the visual, historic character and recreational value of the common. Given that the common is a key feature of the Conservation Area, he calls for future management to provide an appropriate mechanism to protect the fragile character and significant value of the site.

Site Description

Habitat composition and structure

Southborough Common is now a predominantly wooded 33.5ha site, flanked by several small areas of grassland to the east. Holden Pond, which is managed for angling, is located at the southern tip of the common, and a stream runs north-south across the common from Whortleberry Wood. At the centre of the common lies an old quarry, which has been colonised by trees over the last century.

The woodland of Southborough Common varies in age, structure, and species composition across the site. The wood pasture which occupies the high, flat ground in the centre of the site, to the south and west of St. Peter's Church, belongs to the oak-birch-wavy hairgrass woodland of the National Vegetation Classification W16 (*Quercus* spp-*Betula* spp-*Deschampsia flexuosa* woodland). The woodland here is dominated by very large oaks together with a smaller number of beeches; in places Scots pine has been planted. These trees form a high, even, but still fairly open canopy in places which allows a considerable amount of light to reach the woodland floor. Where light does reach the woodland floor it is quite grassy, with the heathland species common bent, wavy hairgrass and purple moorgrass all present, as well as more widespread species, such as Yorkshire fog. The heathland shrubs bilberry also occur here, as does a very small patch of ling. There is dense regeneration of birch, beech and oak in this area, confining ground flora to the sunnier, more open patches.

North of the church, the wood is somewhat different, and scrub is dense and impenetrable in places, with a serious encroachment of the non-native cherry laurel (*Prunus laurocerasus*). Similar tree species to the woodland west of the church are present, although the trees here are younger; forming even aged stands in places. The gaps between trees are filled with scrub and sallow, with regenerating oak and beech. The woodland floor is generally quite weedy, with broad-leaved dock, broad-leaved willowherb and ground elder all present. The more typical woodland species, wood dock and enchanter's nightshade, can also be found, as can some native bluebells.

The majority of woodland at Southborough Common may be categorised as beech woodland of the NVC community W15 *Fagus sylvatica-Deschampsia flexuosa*. At Whortleberry Wood, in the extreme north-west of the site, beech is very dominant, and forms almost pure stands in places, with a scattered holly understory and bilberry on the woodland floor. Elsewhere, however, the woodland is more typical of its type: beech dominates the canopy or co-dominates with oak, with birch in the gaps, and a dense understory of holly. Introduced cherry laurels have colonised edges and gaps increasing the density of the shrub layer, and further shading the woodland floor. The ground flora under the beech is generally sparse, with many species restricted to path edges. Typical woodland ground flora here includes hard fern, broad buckler fern, wood melick, enchanter's nightshade and bluebell, while heathland/wood pasture species are represented by ling, bilberry, cow wheat and pill sedge. Gorse occurs here, probably as a remnant of former heathland.

The stream which runs down the western boundary of Whortleberry Wood adds some further interest to the site. Alders and sallows, including the uncommon Kent species eared willow, occur by the streamside, and there is a good range of ferns. Other wetland and damp woodland species to be found are opposite-leaved golden saxifrage, water horsetail and tutsan.

Section D: Site Structure, Importance and Use

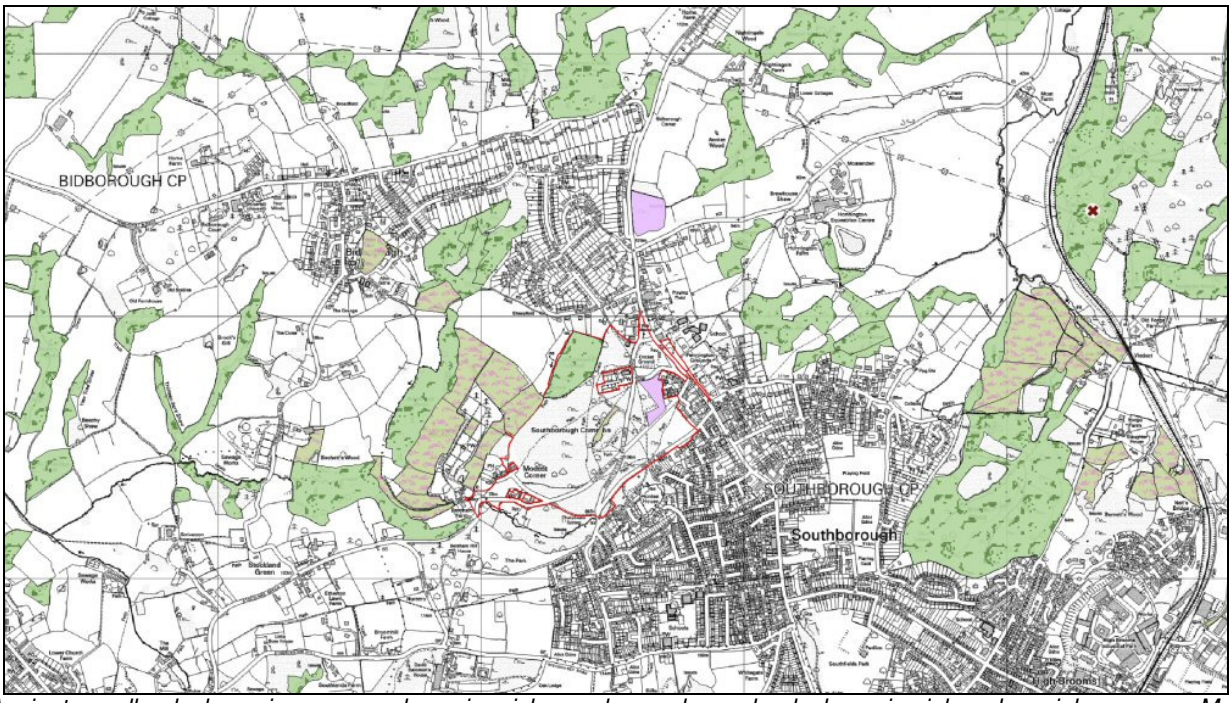
At Modest Corner are areas of old oak coppice and oak/hazel woodland. Much of the woodland here is scrubby and young, achieving an almost impenetrable density in places. Trees include both sessile and English oak, as well as beech, alder, ash, holly and hazel. Woodland and woodland edge ground flora species, although very sparse, include lesser celandine, wood avens, greater stitchwort, dog's mercury, bluebell and wood sedge. A number of introduced species are naturalised here, such as snowberry and cherry laurel. A small area of mown amenity grassland is maintained opposite the cottages.

To the north-eastern end of Victoria Road is an area of unimproved, acid grassland. The key acid grassland species present are sheep's sorrel and heath bedstraw, and a small area of heather dominated vegetation is located on the woodland edge against Church Road. Scrub encroachment from the woodland into the grassland has been managed in recent years through mechanical clearance. Anthills, which indicate that the grassland here has been undisturbed for decades, and possibly centuries, are abundant in this area. Unfortunately, mechanised clearance work has led to some of the anthills being damaged or scalped by the machinery used to mow.

South of Victoria Road, the grassland has also suffered encroachment by scrub, and is now kept in check by regular mechanical clearance works. The area is mown and maintained as amenity grassland.

Habitat connectivity

At a landscape scale, Southborough Common is located at the outer limits of development within Southborough town. Edged by the built environment, farmland and Southborough Cemetery, the common provides both a link to the surrounding countryside, and a buffer against urban development. Nearby to Southborough Common, areas of ancient woodland and species-rich grassland are likely to hold reserves of species that would have been widespread several centuries ago, before changes in farming practices and urban development led to their fragmentation.



Ancient woodland, shown in green, and species-rich meadow and grassland, shown in pink and as pink on green. Map reproduced courtesy of the High Weald AONB Unit.

Mobile species of bird, mammal, reptile, amphibian and invertebrate may travel along hedgerows, belts of scrub, and trees to colonise other sites. Similarly, seed may disperse from adjoining areas into habitat that has been opened-up by management works. Southborough Common falls within the High Weald Biodiversity Opportunities Area (KBP, 2011a). The identification of BOAs aims to maximise biodiversity gains by taking a targeted, landscape-scale approach to planning habitat restoration.

Section D: Site Structure, Importance and Use

Nature conservation importance and notable species

Wood Pasture and Whortleberry Wood

Wood pasture is recognised to be a rare and declining habitat within the UK, with the South East of England having one of the highest proportions of wood pasture in Western Europe (KBP, 2005). The habitat is derived from the traditional practice of grazing grassland or heathland beneath trees, most frequently on wooded commons, and dates back to Anglo-Saxon England (Read & Frater, 1999). To avoid browsing by livestock, young trees were pollarded at a height which the animals grazing underneath it could not reach. Trees were usually pollarded at an age of 25-35 years, with subsequent cuts made at intervals of 12 to 15 years, to gather timber and wood for small scale building and domestic fuel (Read & Frater, 1999).

The practice of pollarding leads to trees living for longer than if left in their maiden state. This longevity leads to an increase in the ecological importance of the tree, as decaying heartwood, dying limbs, loose bark and sap runs all provide niche habitats. The range of species supported by old and veteran trees in a state of decay includes: fungi and invertebrates on rotting wood; birds and bats roosting in cavities formed by rot; insects with aquatic larvae that exploit water-filled hollows within the tree; vertebrate and invertebrate life living in dying branches; and mosses and invertebrates exploiting moist areas around sap runs (Read & Frater, 1999). Older trees also provide a greater range of surfaces suitable for epiphytic bryophytes and lichens.

Hericium erinaceus, also known as the hedgehog fungus, is a Red Data Book species of fungi that has been recorded at Southborough Common.

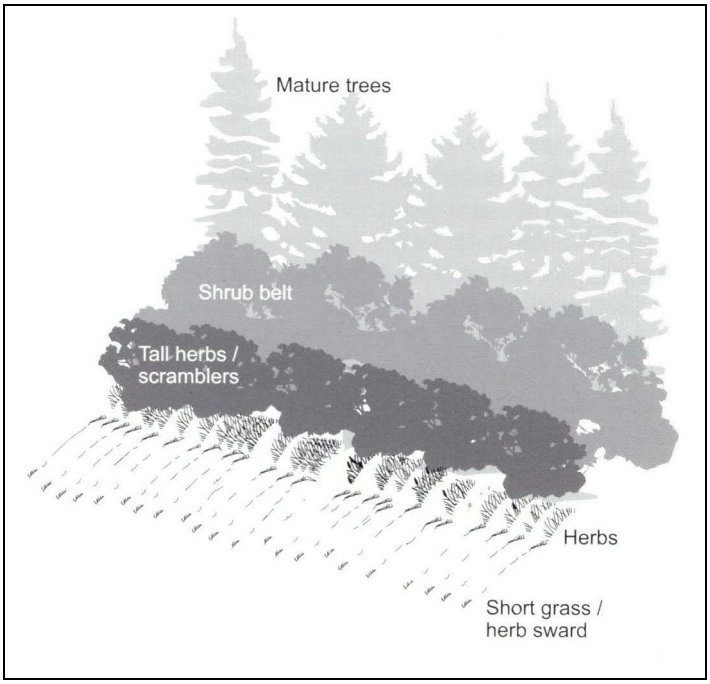
The 1999 ecological survey of Southborough Common found four of the five nationally notable species of beetle within the wood pasture. It also identified the area as important for fungi and lichen, although the latter was not covered by the survey.

Conservation management of wood pasture should aim to maintain the microhabitats mentioned above by ensuring the survival of old and veteran trees. Both excessive shading, and sudden exposure to greater light levels, can threaten the nature conservation value of wood pasture (Sutherland & Hill, 1995). Grazing and mechanical clearance can maintain open space around trees, and limit tree regeneration and the subsequent effects of shading. All changes should take into account the presence of veteran trees, however, to ensure that sufficient time is allowed for a gradual change in their surrounding habitat conditions (KBP, 2005). Consideration should also be given to the creation of future veteran trees through re-instating the practice of pollarding. This may not be suitable for veteran trees, or necessary for the existing oaks of the wood pasture that are around 180 to 200 years old. Oak trees tend to be long-lived, and 'self-pollard' by shedding branches naturally so that they become wide, squat and hollow, but remain healthy (Read & Frater, 1999).

Of the other areas of woodland, Whortleberry Wood, with its mature trees, dead wood habitats, and stands of bilberry, is also ecologically important. The woodland adjoining Modest Corner to the west of the wood pasture, being more densely shaded by regenerating holly and birch, is the least biologically diverse woodland of the common. This area has the potential either to be restored to a more open, wood pasture type of woodland with an acid grassland/heathland ground flora.

Woodland Rides and Glades

Woodland rides and glades are important for biodiversity, as the open sunny conditions tend to support a different flora and fauna than the rest of the woodland (Warren & Fuller, 1993). A ride is defined to be any linear opening or track within a wood, including the area between trees, and either side of a pathway. A glade is a permanent non-linear opening within woodland, which traditionally would have been kept open through grazing livestock or by cutting for hay (Warren & Fuller, 1993).



From Ferris & Carter (2000), ideal woodland 'ecotone' to provide maximum structural diversity

Large numbers of light-demanding species that thrive in rides and glades will also occur in suitable habitats outside of woodland. Others rely on the interface between grassland and woodland habitats, and may solely be confined to woods, or woodland edges (Warren & Fuller, 1993). The edge effect of one habitat meeting and grading into another is referred to as an ecotone (Ferris & Carter, 2000), and may be seen in glades and along ride edges as the transition from grass, to taller herbs and scrambling plants, into scrub and then mature trees. Many invertebrates rely upon this range of habitat types to complete their life-cycle, making the interface between habitats particularly important. Where invertebrates have restricted dispersal abilities, a range of food plants, micro-climates and egg-laying sites within close proximity, are particularly valuable (Bacon, 2003).

At Southborough Common, the open ground between trees is of key nature conservation importance. The adults of many wood pasture insects feed on nectar and pollen, so the presence of well-lit, open areas is as important as the dead wood upon which the species' larvae feed.

Acid Grassland

The remaining extent of acid grassland in Kent is largely confined to the High Weald and Greensand Ridge. The 2003 Kent Habitat Survey indicated that 375ha of acid grassland remains in the county, with over half of this occurring in patches of 4ha or less (KBP, 2011b). Grasslands are especially rich in scarce species of invertebrate (Price, 2003) and, although small, the acid grassland of the common is notable for this group.

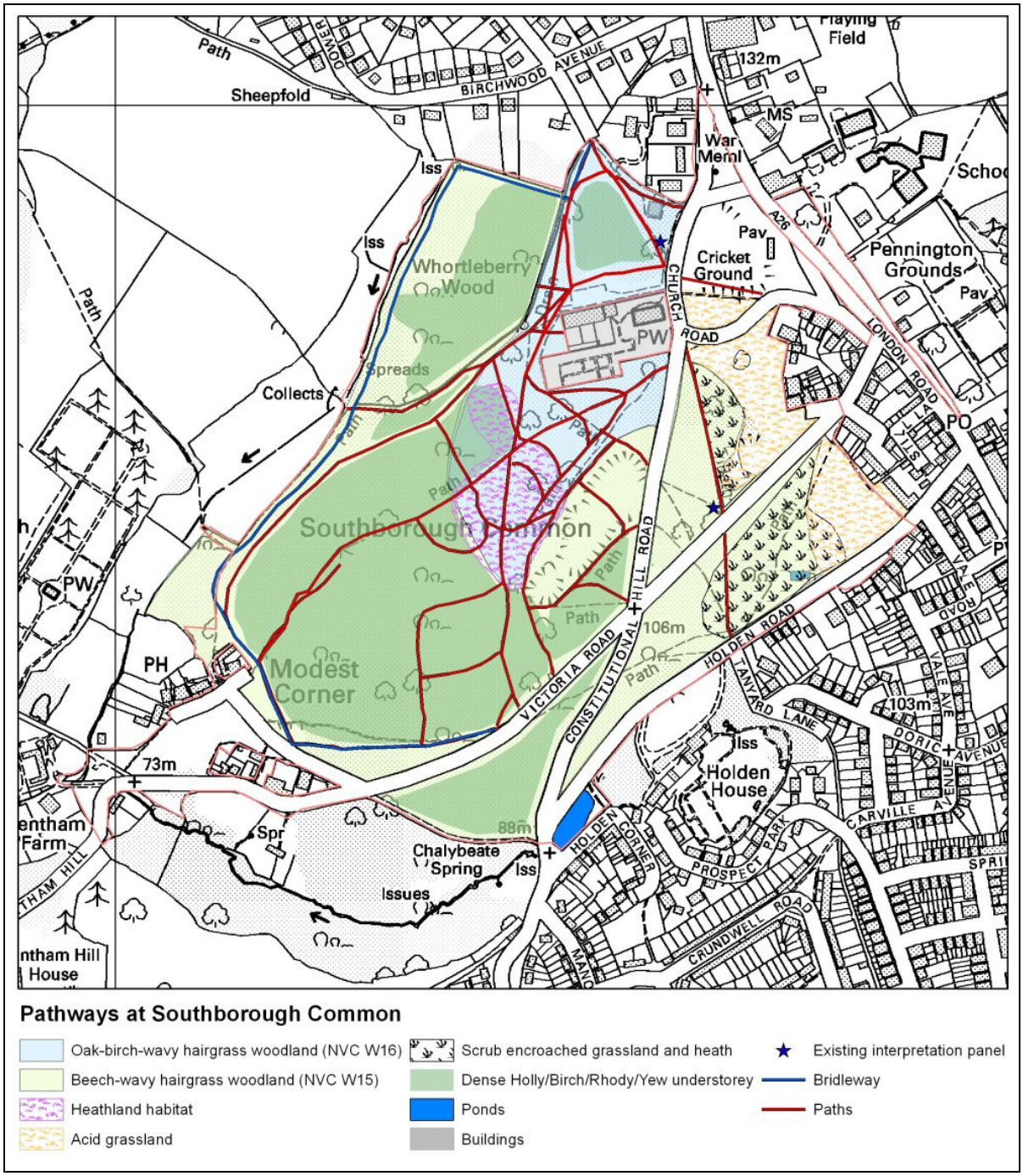
Wetland Habitats

The stream and Holden Pond support some interesting invertebrates, but are more important for the locally uncommon wetland plants eared willow, narrow buckler fern, bristle clubrush and small sweet grass. The nearby record of great crested newt indicates that the common is likely to be a foraging ground for this European Protected Species. However a lack of suitable water bodies means it is unlikely to be currently breeding at the site.

Recreation

For well over a century, Southborough Common has provided a well-used, and much-loved location for informal recreation. Many of the recreational functions of the common, such as dog walking, meeting friends, having picnics, and letting children play, may more often be associated with formal parks. In similar fashion, different areas of the common provide a focal point for different recreational activities. The cricket pitch and open grassland areas to the south are favoured locations for picnics and playing. The wood pasture and pathways through to Modest Corner are extensively used by dog walkers. Holden Pond is important to local anglers as a peaceful place in which to fish and watch wildlife.

The network of pathways and a formal bridleway provide access across the site, and include a section of the Tunbridge Wells Circular Walk. Some smaller pathways towards the centre and west of the common are currently enclosed by dense stands of holly. This is likely to discourage people from entering these areas, as the lack of visibility may provoke a sense of unease. An all access path that circles a route to the north of St. Peter's Church, with an adjoining spur that terminates within the wood pasture, has become quite sunken; leaving it seasonally waterlogged and poached in places.



Two interpretative panels, one near Holden Road, and the other near Church Road, have been installed at Southborough Common. The consultation identified that it would be desirable to develop a new interpretation plan for the common, which includes education and interpretative events as well as static information boards, leaflets, and trails' information accessible via a range of media.

The Gravel Pit, once a focal point for play, was also identified during the consultation as an underused recreational resource. Accounts of childhood in Southborough from the inter-war period indicate that the common was once a favourite location for play:

> The Common was a wonderful playground for us all – we built camps, buried treasures, then dug them up again, played 'houses' in amongst the large roots of some trees.
>
> *Joyce Edna Cosham (nee Stevenson), recalling the 1920s and 30s (McCooey, 2000)*

Workshop participants in 2012 felt that the Gravel Pit in particular may again lend itself well to 'natural play' activities such as den building, tree climbing, and other outdoor games, and that new

management should be developed to support this end.

Rights of Common

The Oxford Dictionary defines a "Common" to be land belonging to a community, especially unenclosed waste land. A "Right of Common" is defined to be a man's rights over another's land. Commons today are a remnant of the manorial system around which the country's economic life was based during the middle-ages. Every manor would have been largely self-sufficient, with arable crops grown on the best land, whilst land over poorer soils (the waste land) was used for grazing or for gathering fuel. Although the land was vested to the Lord of the Manor, the rights of cottagers to graze or gather fuel was accorded legal recognition by the courts. The Lord of the Manor was therefore prevented from enclosing the 'common land' in order to prevent commoners from exercising their rights, unless granted permission to do so by Parliament (Clayden, 1985).

Through the implementation of part 1 of the Commons Act (2006), all commons registration authorities were obliged to bring their registers up-to-date by recording past changes affecting the commons registers, and to keep the registers up-to-date by recording new changes affecting the registers. Following this update, the register for Southborough Common remained unchanged. The following extract from a Southborough Society newsletter, published in 1976, provides further background on the history of Rights of Common, as registered for Southborough:

Southborough Common originally came under the jurisdiction of the Lord of the Manor of Southborough, at one time residing at Great Bounds, who also owned land in the Mount Sion area of Tunbridge Wells. Since 18th October 1967 Southborough Common consisting of about 71 acres of land has been registered by the Southborough Town Council (formerly the Southborough Urban District Council) and this registration was undisputed and became final on 1st October 1970. In 1969/1970 twenty four householders in Modest Corner, Holden Road, Victoria Road, Church Road, Ruscombe Close and adjacent areas claimed and were granted the rights of vehicular, pedestrian and in one case animal access from the public highway over land registered and known as Southborough Common. Easements to carry drainage, gas, electricity, water and telephone pipes under the land were also included. The landlord of the Sceptre Hotel was granted a right to display a signboard on such land and this exists today opposite the Sceptre.

There are generally six recognised Rights and these are defined briefly as follows:

Common pasture:	The Right to turn stock on to the Common to graze.
Pannage:	The Right granted to an owner of pigs to go into the wood of the grantor for them to eat acorns and beech mast fallen on to the ground but the Commoner must not pick the acorns off the trees or shake the trees for his animals.
Estovers:	The Right to take small branches for fuel; or to repair fences or buildings; or to collect bracken or brushwood for litter for the Commoner's animals.
Turbary:	The Right to dig turf or peat for use in the Commoner's house.
Piscary:	The Right to fish in another person's lakes, ponds and streams but the fish must be taken in reasonable quantities for consumption by the Commoner's own household.
Common in the Soil:	The Right to take sand, gravel, stone, minerals for use on the Commoner's holding.

Some of the above Rights have fallen into disuse in many places and ceased to exist. For this reason and to conserve their Rights under the Commons Registration Act of 1965, upwards of 14 local householders living near the Common took advantage of the Act and applied for registration of their Rights of Grazing, Estovers, Turbary and Piscary in the period of 1968, 1969 and 1970 and these were granted in August 1972.

A current copy of the register for Southborough Common is available from Kent County Council.

Section E: Identification and Confirmation of Important Features

This section of the plan is written with reference to the Kent Biodiversity Action Plan (2005), the Tunbridge Wells Borough Local Biodiversity Action Plan (2008), and the Tunbridge Wells Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2002).

Site Location

The location of Southborough Common marks the end of the urban development of Southborough and Tunbridge Wells, and the beginning of the Speldhurst Wooded Farmland Borough Landscape Character Area (TWBC, 2002). In this respect, the common acts as a gateway to the wider countryside: both for people via the long-distance Tunbridge Wells Circular Walk, and for wildlife via the habitats of the landscape beyond. Southborough Common is acknowledged to be a characteristic component of the historic landscape here, distinguished by its wood pasture and acid grassland habitats (TWBC, 2002).

The housing around Southborough Common would historically have been inhabited by commoners claiming rights over the land. For the community now living locally to the common, it is likely that their interest in the site remains just as keen as for those who supplemented their livelihood from its natural resources. This close interest provides a significant potential to involve the community in the future management of Southborough Common. As well as helping to safeguard the common for the enjoyment of future generations, this would help to achieve the following two objectives from the Tunbridge Wells Habitat Action Plan for Built up Areas and Gardens (TWBC, 2008):

- Actively involve the local community in safeguarding their local environment;
- Actively seek opportunities to extend and improve green areas to improve habitat connectivity, particularly on a landscape scale.

BAP Habitats, and Priority and Protected Species

Lowland Wood Pasture & Parkland

Approximately 4.5ha of Southborough Common is currently managed as wood pasture, with clearance works carried out by contractors to maintain an open habitat beneath the mature trees. The ongoing management of this area supports some of the most notable species found at Southborough Common, as well as a number of species for whom specific conservation actions have been identified as necessary under the Biodiversity Action Plan for Kent.

Wood pasture is considered to be a priority habitat under the Kent BAP, and is covered by the Habitat Action Plan for Lowland Wood-Pasture & Parkland (KBP, 2005). The objectives of this plan have been adopted into the Tunbridge Wells Local Biodiversity Action Plan and expanded upon to provide additional, local context. The good management of Southborough Common may help to achieve the following LBAP objectives:

- Halt the loss and degradation of historic parkland and pasture woodland;
- Achieve favourable conservation condition of all historic parkland and pasture woodland;
- Create new areas of habitats, where appropriate, focusing on diminishing fragmentation.

Native Woodland

The 3ha of ancient semi natural woodland that comprises Whortleberry Wood is considered to be a priority habitat in Kent. Conservation objectives under the Kent Biodiversity Action Plan for Native Woodland (KBP, 2011c) are as follows:

- Maintain the net extent of existing native woodland;
- Maintain the extent of ancient semi-natural woodland;
- Achieve improved condition for ancient semi-natural woodland and other native woodland.

Lowland Dry Acid Grassland

Approximately 2ha of Southborough Common is acid grassland. This considered to be a priority habitat under the Kent BAP, and is covered by the Habitat Action Plan for Lowland Dry Acid Grassland (KBP, 2011b). The objectives of this plan have been adopted into the Tunbridge Wells Local Biodiversity Action Plan and expanded upon to provide additional, local context. The good management of Southborough Common for its nature conservation value should aim to achieve the

following LBAP objectives:

- Halt the loss of acid grassland;
- Restore, maintain and enhance acid grassland;
- Increase the overall extent of acid grassland and reduce habitat fragmentation, i.e. adjacent to existing meadows;
- Improve habitat connectivity on a landscape level;
- Create, where appropriate, new acid grasslands, i.e. on historical sites.

Fungi

245 species of fungi have been recorded at Southborough Common, including the BAP Priority Species *Hericium erinaceus*, also know as the Bearded Tooth or Hedgehog Fungus. The Kent priority species statement (KBP, 2004) mentions Southborough Common as one of the very few sites in the county at which the fungus has been recorded.

Hericium erinaceus is classified as an endangered species in Great Britain. It is specially protected under Schedule 8 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, meaning that the species is protected from being picked, uprooted, destroyed and sold, and is included on the provisional European red data list for fungi (KBP, 2004).

Management of sites at which this fungus grows should ensure the long-term continuity of suitable trees. This requires the protection of suitable young trees, the establishment of new pollards and re-pollarding existing host trees where appropriate (KBP, 2004). The latter may not prove viable for Southborough Common, as the fungus appears to have been recorded growing on a dead beech tree.

Birds

Two species of bird subject to their own BAP priority species statement have been recorded at Southborough Common. These are the spotted flycatcher, and the song thrush. Both species are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, as all birds, their nest and eggs are protected by law. They are also both listed on the Birds of Conservation Concern Red List, which holds species whose breeding range has contracted by 50% or more in the preceding 25 years. Spotted flycatchers and song thrush are also listed in the Kent Red Data Book as vulnerable.

Conservation management methods advocated by the KBP statement for spotted flycatchers include the creation and maintenance of woodland clearings, such as rides and glades. Measures advocated to help support breeding populations of song thrush include the provision of cover within urban greenspaces through the provision of tree and shrub cover. Fruiting species will be of particular benefit as they supply a food source as well.

Mammals

Pipstrelle Bat

This Kent BAP priority species has been recorded at Southborough Common, and may still be roosting in the many holes, cracks and splits that older trees can develop. It is important, when planning any tree work, to be aware that all British bats and their roosts are protected under Schedule 5 of the 1981 Wildlife & Countryside Act. They are also protected under Schedule 2 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations, 2010. This makes it illegal to kill, injure, capture or disturb bats or obstruct access to, damage or destroy bat roosts. Under the law, a roost is any structure or place used for shelter or protection. Because bats tend to reuse the same roosts, the roost is protected whether the bats are present at the time or not.

The UK is a signatory to the Agreement on the Conservation of Bats in Europe, set up under the Bonn Convention. The fundamental obligations of Article 3 of this Agreement require the protection of all bats and their habitats, including the identification and protection from damage or disturbance of important feeding areas for bats.

Badger

Badgers are protected under the Protection of Badgers Act, 1992. In essence this Act protects badgers and their setts against virtually all deliberate damage/destruction, with certain exceptions outlined within the Act itself.

Amphibians
Biological records for Southborough Common indicate that the site provides terrestrial, and possibly aquatic, habitat for great crested newts. The great crested newt *Triturus cristatus* is protected under all elements of Section 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. It is also protected under parts 1 and 2 of Regulation 39 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 and the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. This legislation taken together prohibits the following:

- Deliberately, intentionally or recklessly, injuring, killing and capturing
- Deliberately, intentionally or recklessly disturbing
- Deliberately, intentionally or recklessly taking or destroying eggs
- Deliberately, intentionally or recklessly destroying a breeding site or resting place or damaging or obstructing a resting place used for shelter or protection
- Keeping, transporting, selling or exchanging; offering for sale or advertising.

Consequently not only are the animals themselves protected, but so is their habitat, and activities that damage or impede the use of this habitat are prohibited.

General Amenity Value
The general amenity value of Southborough Common is high. It is a popular site for walking and relaxing, and forms an important and significant open space within the heart of the town. The common's location makes it highly accessible to a large number of people, and its majestic oaks, open grasslands and ancient woodland make for an enriching experience in close contact with nature. The cricket pitch and Holden Pond are both focal points for more formally organised recreation, and both hold a long association with the human history and changing landscape of the town. Footpaths, although overgrown in places, also offer a circular route around the common, taking in a diversity of habitats and historic buildings along the way.

Summary of Nature Conservation Importance
The following table provides a summary of the key habitats and species of Southborough Common:

Feature	National Importance	County Importance	Local Importance
Wood pasture habitat	Low	High	High
Acid grassland	Low	High	High
Ancient semi-natural woodland	Low	Medium	High
Wetland habitats	Low	Medium	High
Habitat connectivity and restoration potential	Low	Medium/High	High
European protected species (bats, great crested newts)	Low	Medium	High
Other protected species (fungi, birds, badgers)	Low	High	High

Summary of Historic and Cultural Importance
The following table summarises the historic and cultural importance of Southborough Common:

Feature	National Importance	County Importance	Local Importance
The common's traditional High Weald landscape features	Low	High	High
Historic land use and common land status	Low	High	High
The role of Southborough Common in the evolving landscape and history of the town	Low	Medium	High
Historic use for recreation	Low	Medium	High
Local amenity value today	Low	Low	High

Threats and Constraints

The volume and speed of traffic across the common, and parking on verges was identified throughout the consultation as both a threat to wildlife, and the community's enjoyment of the common. This, coupled with the loss of open habitats and views across the common, was considered to be the major detractor in the common's character, and the greatest challenge for future management.

Another considerable threat to the common's character and wildlife value comes from the concentration of invasive non-native species that has developed in places. Shrubs such as *Rhododendron ponticum* and cherry laurel have spread throughout the woodland and along road edges. Bulb planting has also introduced non-native species to the common, some of which can hybridise with native species to the detriment of their wildlife value. Non-native species can threaten native habitats and wildlife by outcompeting native species for resources, altering the pH balance of the soil, and harbouring disease. In the case of *Rhododendron ponticum*, all three of these negative influences may be brought to bear as it acidifies the soil, and is a vector for the *Phytophthora ramorum* pathogen; the causal agent of Sudden Oak Death.

The important habitats of Southborough Common may also be viewed as under threat from the lack of long-term support through statutory grant schemes, such as Woodland Management Grant. This lack of grant support will pose a financial constraint on what may be achieved at the common, with Southborough Town Council having to support the full cost of all works. The future management of the common should therefore include securing grant support from the Rural Development Program for England, preferably through a scheme that considers the site's natural, historic and cultural importance.

Another threat and potential constraint to management at Southborough Common may stem from a lack of understanding and support for management. For many communities access to common land has been a key part of daily life for centuries. The fresh air, sense of belonging and identity, and countryside environment that it offers will be highly valued, with any perceived threat to this likely to provoke strong disagreement (Natural England, 2005). The consultation carried out in the preparation of this plan has started the process of communicating need, and understanding what the local community values about Southborough Common. During the implementation of this plan, it will be important to maintain an evolving understanding of both the issues facing the common, and the values that the community hold. This will help to ensure the successful delivery of this plan, achieved with both the support and the help of the town.

The location of Southborough Common alongside the town, and the sense of remoteness and enclosure that the site possesses in places, makes it potentially vulnerable to the effects of anti-social behaviour. This may include littering, fly-tipping, and vandalism. A notice from the Southborough Local Board, reproduced by McCooey (1998), indicates that the latter of these has occurred at the common for well over a century.

SOUTHBOROUGH
LOCAL BOARD

£1 REWARD.

WILFUL AND WANTON DAMAGE.

WHEREAS, on Sunday night, the 10th August instant, and upon several previous nights, wilful and wanton damage has been committed by some evil disposed persons or person, in taking up and damaging the Seats on the Common, breaking down and damaging Stiles, Fences, and Tree Guards in various places in Southborough, and also committing many other acts of malicious damage to property.

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN,

that the above Reward will be paid to any person giving such information to the undersigned as will lead to the conviction of the offenders.

Dated this 11th day of August, 1890.

PHILIP HANMER,
Clerk to Local Board.

Local Board Offices, Southborough.

J. H. CANE, Printer, 92, London Road, Southborough.

The possibility of vandalism should be taken into account when considering on-site interpretation, or the installation of benches, fencing and new access infrastructure. The negative effects of anti-social behaviour can in part be ameliorated by good design, and the use of durable materials that sit well within the landscape. Public engagement and fostering a sense of ownership also forms a key method by which to lessen the problems of anti-social behaviour; helping to empower people to prevent such behaviour from blighting their local open spaces.

Due regard must also be given to the presence of protected species at Southborough Common, as outlined in the previous sections. Legal restraints and limits to habitat works, such as the existence of Tree Protection Orders, should be considered prior to any practical works taking place.

Section F: Management Aims

The following management aims and objectives were developed through the Southborough Common consultation, the detail of which is appended to this plan. The delivery of these aims and objectives will provide new, community-led management for the common for the period 2012 to 2017.

Management Aims

1) **Restore the common's formerly open areas, enhancing middle and long-distance views;**
2) **Prevent the loss or decline of existing valuable habitats, and identify and develop opportunities for additional habitat creation and restoration;**
3) **Reduce the impact of traffic and parking;**
4) **Enhance leisure opportunities;**
5) **Develop opportunities for education and community engagement;**
6) **Ensure all legal obligations are met.**

Management Objectives

Aim 1: Restore the common's formerly open areas, enhancing middle and long-distance views

Objective 1a: Increase the area of open space within the common's woodland by creating glades, and create vistas within the common by establishing a system of rides;

Project 1a1: Review the contour map of Southborough Common and surrounding land to consider opportunities for opening middle and long-distance views from the common to neighbouring countryside. Liaise with the High Weald AONB Unit to produce mapping to show the ideal location of permanent glades and wider rides in terms of landscape opportunities.

Project 1a2: Cross-reference the maps and locations identified in project 1a1 with woodland prescriptions under management aim 2. Ensure that veteran trees are afforded appropriate protection, and that rotational clearance works and any follow-up grazing are coordinated to compliment the program of glade creation and ride maintenance.

Objective 1b: Re-open the long and broad view from the war memorial to Holden Road;

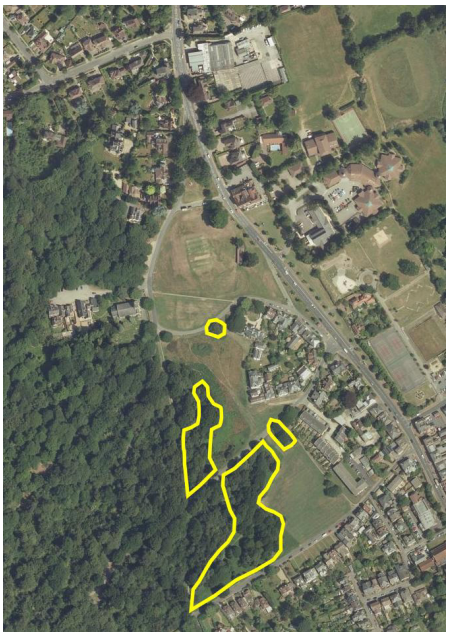


Figure 1b: Proposed clearance zones for landscape enhancement works (image courtesy of Clive Maier)

Project 1b1: Within the boundaries edged in yellow in figure 1b, identify trees to be removed along Victoria Road, and within the acid grassland zone between Church Road and Victoria Road. Consult with Tunbridge Wells Borough Council's Tree Officer to ensure that these trees are not protected.

Project 1b2: Within the boundaries edged in yellow in figure 1b, identify the area to be thinned and managed as a woodland edge habitat, in keeping with prescriptions under management aim 2.

Project 1b3: Conduct a door-to-door survey of households neighbouring on the common to canvas opinion on the proposed landscape enhancement works.

Project 1b4: In keeping with the results of project 1b3, schedule clearance and coppicing works that follow the timings and techniques described under management aim 2 for acid grassland and secondary woodland habitat improvement works.

Section F: Management Aims

Objective 1c: Improve the infrastructure (e.g. path width, drainage, surfacing) of the common to enhance access and improve the prospect of attracting commercial interest in management. Review how the footpath and bridlepath network links Southborough Common to extended routes and long-distance trails;

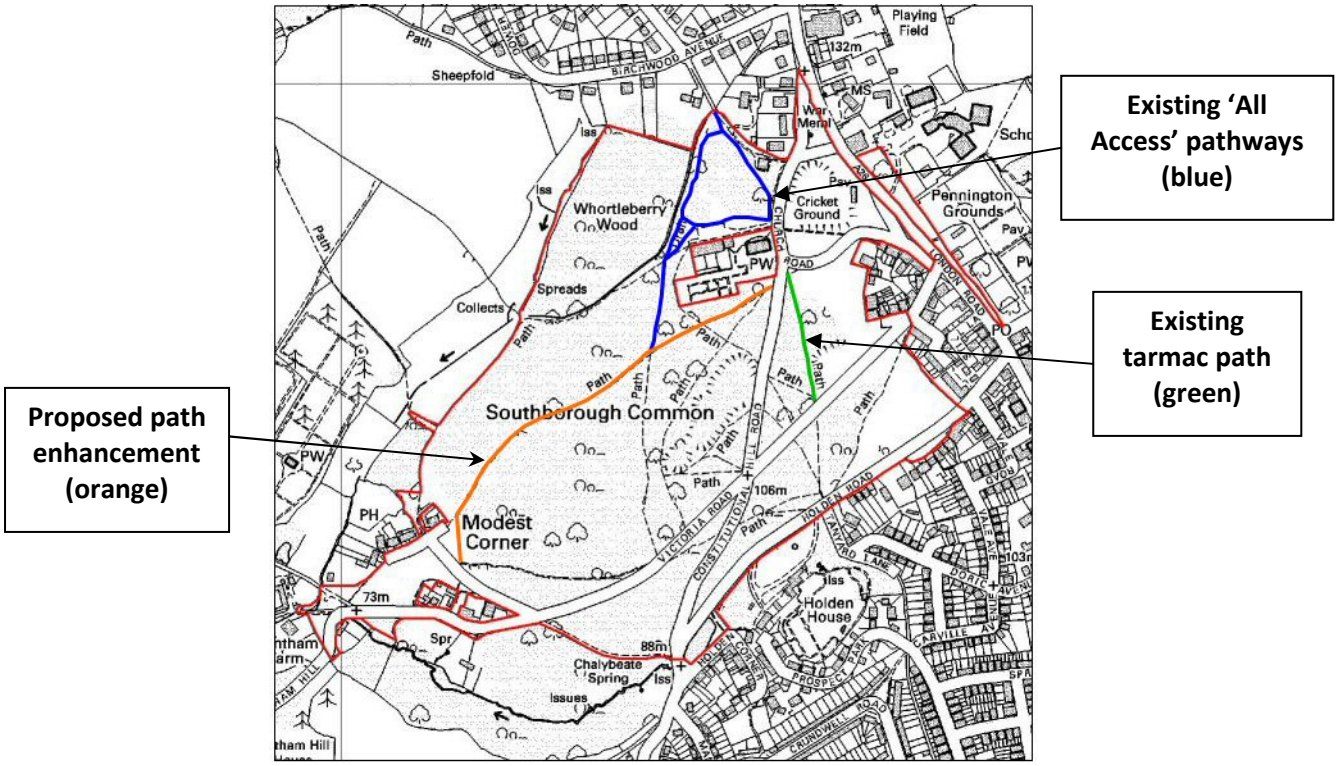


Figure 1c: Surfaced pathways and proposed pathway enhancements at Southborough Common.

Project 1c1: With reference to woodland prescriptions under management aim 2, investigate the feasibility of developing a timber extraction route that runs from Modest Corner to the junction of Constitutional Hill and Church Road (as shown above). This should take into account vehicle access on to the common from the road, clearance heights and widths, current path conditions and the need for any surfacing or drainage works.

Project 1c2: Develop a specification for the improvement or surfacing works identified under project 1c1. Seek competitive quotes for the works, and identify potential funding streams.

Project 1c3: Proceed with works as specified in project 1c2 *with reference* to access enhancements as identified under management aim 4.

Project 1c4: Collate information on the long distance Wealdway and Tunbridge Wells Circular routes that pass through Southborough Common, as well as long distance trails that link to these routes. Ensure that the relevant organisations maintaining these walks are updated as to path and access improvements at Southborough Common. Identify and develop opportunities to link leisure enhancements and interpretation works (management aims 4 and 5) to this network of walks.

Objective 1d: Work with local landowners to improve landscape connectivity;

Project 1d1: Review the rural land-based schemes in place that neighbour on Southborough Common via **www.magic.gov.uk**. Consider the type and duration of these schemes with a view to co-ordinating future works for landscape scale benefit.

Project 1d2: Review adjoining habitat types and farming practices with a view to joint working, contracted services, access improvements, and public education.

Section F: Management Aims

Objective 1e: Retain tree and scrub cover as a buffer against noise and the visual intrusion of traffic;

Project 1e1: Seek to maintain tree or scrub cover along roadsides throughout the common to a depth of between 5 and 10m. Where possible, manage this buffer as a woodland edge habitat (see Section D: *Woodland Rides and Glades*) to promote the ongoing protection of both a scrub and tree layer.

Objective 1f: Carry out a baseline survey to assess Southborough Common's economic (as well as commercial) value, and link this plan to the Tunbridge Wells Green Infrastructure Strategy.

Project 1f1: The economic importance of Greenspaces in supporting the wellbeing of local populations is, at time of writing, the subject of national research. Review the current literature on the economic value of Greenspaces and seek guidance from Natural England as to a rapid assessment methodology that may be applied to Southborough Common.

Project 1f2: At such time as guidance under project 1f1 becomes available, undertake an assessment of Southborough Common. Repeat this exercise on a yearly basis throughout the course of the management plan. Circulate the findings of this assessment with a view to informing the future progress of the Tunbridge Wells Green Infrastructure Strategy, and seeking further support for ongoing management works.

Aim 2: Prevent the loss or decline of existing valuable habitats, and identify and develop opportunities for additional habitat creation and restoration

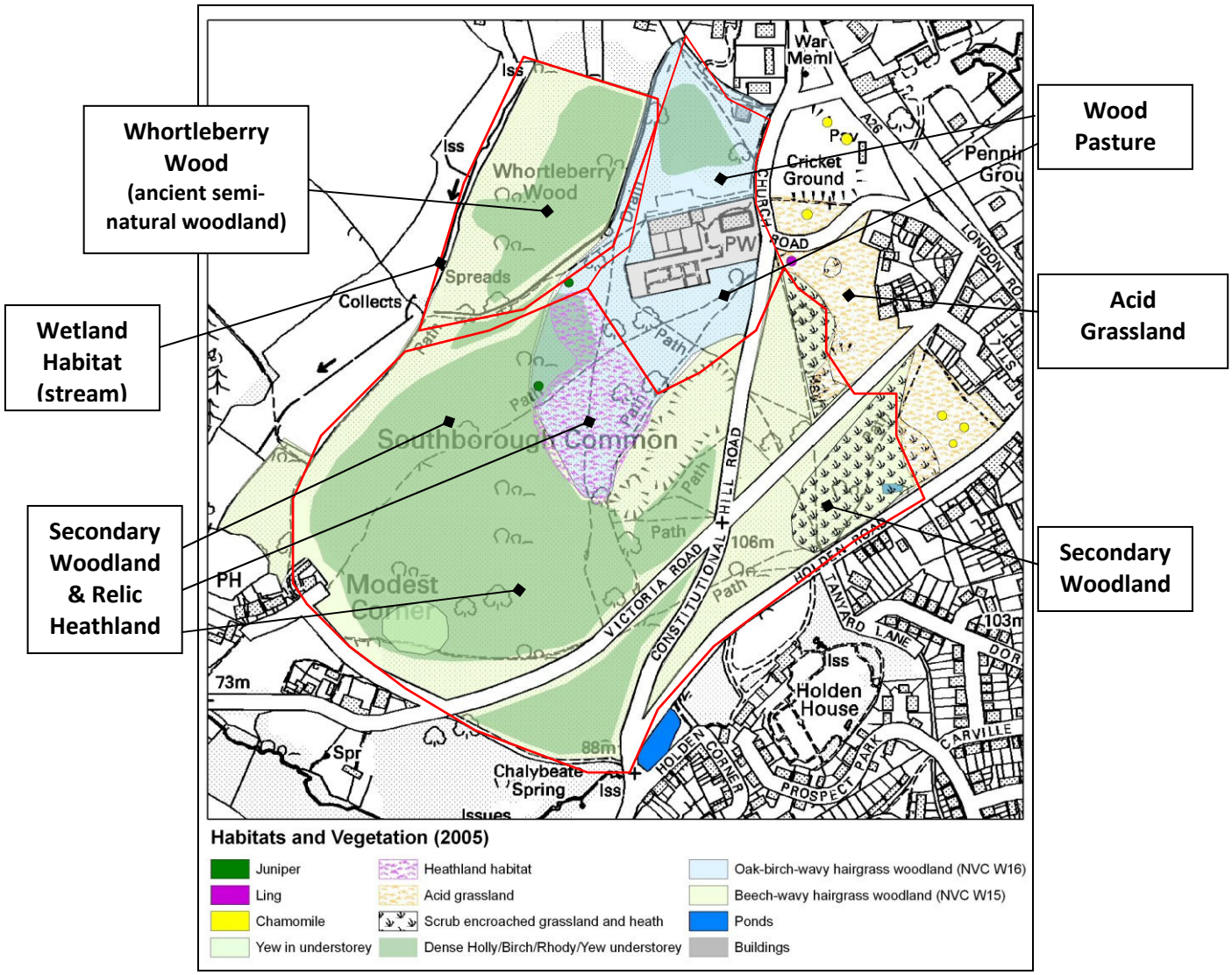


Figure 2: Habitats at Southborough Common

Section F: Management Aims

Secondary Woodland/Relic Heathland

Objective 2a: Reduce the overall cover of secondary woodland to allow for heathland and grassland restoration. Restore heathland patches by creating glades in relic heathland areas. Zone and graze areas to maintain a dynamic range of habitats and keep re-growth in check;

The secondary woodland and relic heathland areas of the common differ in character across the common. Areas of woodland adjoining the gravel pit and to its south along Victoria Road, are dense with holly. The more central and western edges of this woodland area, to the north of Modest Corner, feature more of a birch scrub with some mature yew, and oak and beech standards.

Figure 2a (appended) provides an outline for sectional clearance works over a 9-year rotation.

Project 2a1: Coppice trees and clear scrub on a yearly basis in the indicative areas shown on the clearance rotation map (figure 2a). Ensure that the areas being cut are no smaller than 25m by 25m. Stack timber of at least an 8cm diameter in piles of no more than 1m height, in partial shade to the edges of rides and clearings, ensuring no more than 10% of the ground is covered in this way. Do not create log piles on areas of apparent botanical interest. Dispose of smaller wood and brash through burning, and any excess timber off-site or at firewood collection points for those holding rights of common. Keep bonfire sites to a minimum, and away from paths, entrance points, or frequently accessed clearings. See project 2b3 for guidance on veteran trees.

Project 2a2: Recruit and train a group of volunteer livestock checkers. Training in the welfare of grazing animals in conservation grazing systems is available from both Hadlow and Plumpton College. Risk assess the forthcoming grazing season to ensure the welfare of livestock can be well managed.

Project 2a3: During March/April of each year, publicise the forthcoming grazing season through on-site notices, articles in the Southborough and High Brooms Newsletter, on local websites, through social media networks, and via the Commons Watch system (see management aim 5). Erect the temporary fencing system, including access gates, at least 7-days prior to animals being moved on to allow time for any issues with access to be addressed.

Project 2a4: Subject to completion of projects 2a2 and 2a3, graze the areas cleared under project 2a1 in temporary fencing for a period of 2 to 6 weeks, depending on stocking densities (see 'Acid Grassland' prescriptions below) and advice from the grazier as to forage availability. Stocking levels should attempt to ensure both re-growth is kept in check through browsing, and the litter layer is broken-up to expose the soil and seed bank.

Project 2a5: In compartments of dense holly growth, coppice trees to at least a 2m width along either side of the pathways. Assess the likely response of these trees to coppicing, and monitor the ground for any signs of dormant ground flora returning.

Project 2a6: Following on from project 2a5, determine whether to develop the management of these compartments as either open habitats, or to promote them through coppicing to scrub habitats suitable for nesting birds, reptiles, amphibians and small mammals.

Objective 2b: Manage pollarded trees in this area on rotation. Ensure veteran trees are assessed and managed for their wildlife value;

Project 2b1: Survey the secondary woodland for mature pollards and veteran trees, recording species, approximate age and time since pollarding, presence of dead wood in the canopy, signs of disease, and indications of bat roosts. Use GPS to record exact locations of trees and develop a photo database. If resources permit, conduct this as a project with volunteers following the provision of training and equipment.

Project 2b2: Feed in the results of project 2b1 to projects listed under objective 2e with a view to attracting commercial interest in the active management of pollards.

Project 2b3: The important microhabitats that exist within the structure of veteran trees are susceptible to both sudden increases in light levels, and excessive shading. A buffer zone should be established around veteran trees during clearance works to help maintain a set of stable conditions. The dimensions and nature of this buffering will depend on surrounding vegetation, aspect and exposure, and so each tree will need to be assessed on an individual basis (cf. project 2b1).

Project 2b4: A number of beech pollards, including some veteran trees, have become top-heavy at Southborough Common resulting in a risk of 'failure'. Work on these trees should be prioritised to ensure no future loss of significant pollards or veteran trees on the common. Where appropriate, engage a professional arboriculturalist to assess the extent of fungal infection in some beech trees, and whether re-pollarding may be possible.

Objective 2c: Widen the existing 2 major paths from Modest Corner to create open "rides" for better access, and to benefit wildlife;

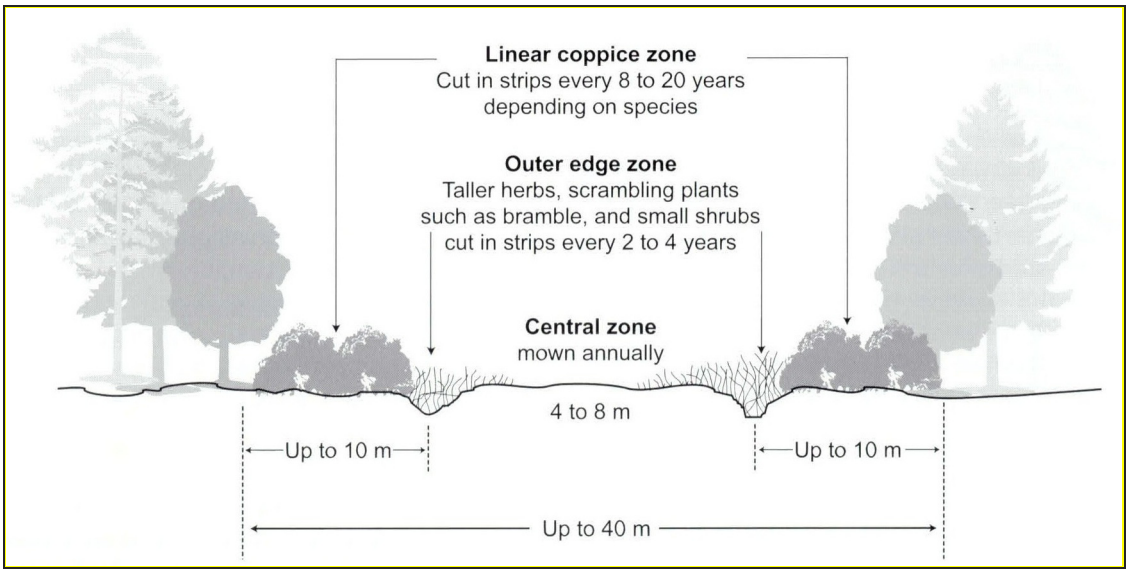


Figure 2c: Ideal ride cutting system for woodland of high conservation value (Ferris & Carter, 2000)

Project 2c1: Following the guidance described in figure 2c, and with reference to the rotational clearance map (figure 2a), clear and coppice along path edges to the west of compartments 1 and 3 during Year 1; to the west of compartment 6 in Year 3; and to the west of compartments 2, 4 and 5 in Year 5. The final cut in year 5 may provide opportunity to fell mature beech trees that are currently shading the bridle path. If so, consideration should be given to the commercial value of these trees (cf. objective 2e), and whether access would permit their removal from site. Cut and clear timber as described in project 2a1.

Objective 2d: Reduce and remove invasive, non-native species;

A number of invasive, non-native species occur in dense stands around Southborough Common. At present these stands are largely confined to the edges of the common and areas of past disturbance. Priority must be given to tackling these invasive species, as clearance works may potentially provide further opportunities for them to spread into new areas. As species such as rhododendron and cherry laurel age, they also produce an increasing number of seed and berries which, again, makes their spread into neighbouring habitat more likely. Figure 2d (appended) shows 'hot spots' for invasive, non-native species.

Project 2d1: Cut cherry laurel (*Prunus laurocerasus*) and rhododendron (*Rhododendron ponticum*) at the base, and treat the stump with a suitable herbicide such as Glyphosate, or

ammonium sulphamate. Follow-up chemical stump treatment should be selected according to the timing of the works. If cutting between June and September, ammonium sulphamate will be most effective. If cutting between October and February, Glyphosate will have greatest effect. Foliar herbicide application may be required during the following growing season to treat any re-growth from still living stumps.

Project 2d2: If surrounding grassland is of botanical interest, then treat areas of winter heliotrope at the junction of Constitutional Hill and Holden Road with an application of Glyphosate. Time the works to take place just after flowering in February/March time, and in dry weather to minimise the likelihood of run-off.

Objective 2e: Explore the potential commercial value of the secondary woodland area of the common with a view to its sustainable management in the future;

Project 2e1: Consult with the Kent Wildlife Trust on tendering for interest in the commercial value of the secondary woodland the wood pasture areas, and Whortleberry Wood.

Project 2e2: Consult with the Forestry Commission as to potential funding streams for improving access to help support the commercial value of woodland at Southborough Common.

Project 2e3: With reference to the outcomes of projects 2e1 and 2e2 undertake any supported access improvements to the common (cf. projects 1c1 - 1c3) and develop a tender document that outlines the potential interest of the site, as well as the constraints set by access, the timings of work, and the nature conservation status of Southborough Common.

Project 2e4: Evaluate the tenders, and procure the services of the favoured contractor in-line with best practice guidelines for local authorities.

Objective 2f: Engage, support and oversee conservation volunteers in the management of this area.

Refer to Management Aim 5 'Develop opportunities for education and community engagement'.

Acid Grassland

The anthills present in the acid grassland are many decades old, and may possibly have started to form early in the last century. In general, the soil that comprises anthills is more friable than that which surrounds it, has a lesser water content, and a higher pH. It is often the case that anthills feature a different assemblage of plants to the grassland that surround them. This is true of Southborough Common, where the height of the anthills has helped to ensure the ongoing presence of flowering plants in a habitat otherwise dominated by grasses.

Where bracken has encroached on the grassland, and mechanical methods have been used to clear it, a number of anthills have been scalped or destroyed. Should these areas be returned to grassland rather than bracken stands, the ants may well re-colonise the area (Dr. Ian Beavis, pers. comm.). For this to happen, however, an extensive program of bracken control will be required.

The density of bracken litter varies across the acid grassland as a whole. Bracken covers approximately 1/3 of this area and forms a dense, continuous stand in summer. Despite annual mowing, this stand has continued to spread to the detriment of the grassland habitat. It emerged during the consultation that both the presence and spread of bracken here is of concern to local residents, as dying back bracken fronds may pose a fire risk.

Bracken is also patchily dense in the secondary woodland that edges the acid grassland. Whilst bracken is often a constituent species of native woodlands in the High Weald, its presence in secondary woodland (as here) can work to prevent the survival of relic grassland or heathland species. Controlling bracken in this secondary woodland is also, therefore, desirable in the restoration of a more open, botanically diverse habitat within the acid grassland.

Section F: Management Aims

The practice of mulch mowing has led to a dense layer of bracken litter collecting over the soil. This mulch, if left, will add nutrients soil that will provide an increasingly rich and fertile growing medium for the bracken. Clearance of cut material is therefore necessary to prevent this enrichment effect.

Objective 2g: Maintain the existing extent of acid grassland habitat. Develop a program of bracken management to halt its spread and reduce its dominance;

Project 2g1: Control bracken through a mixture of cutting and spraying. Cut twice, by hand, in summer (once in June and again in mid-July), and either remove all arisings from the site or determine a sacrificial area in which they may be stacked and composted.

Care must be taken when working with bracken. Bracken spores, which are released outside of the cutting period recommended above, are recognised to be carcinogenic, and fronds may lacerate bare skin. Arms, legs, hands and feet should all be covered and cuffs at wrists and ankles should be tight when working to control bracken by hand.

Project 2g2: In years one and two, scarify the ground where mowing has left a mulch of bracken litter to expose the soil. This litter layer varies in depth across the site, from 1-2cm at the northern end to around 5cm at the southern edge of the stand.

Project 2g3: In the third year, spray bracken with a suitable herbicide towards the end of August when the plant will take the poison down into its rhizomes. Repeat the herbicide application during the fourth and fifth years as necessary. Care must be taken when using herbicides or other pesticides and all instructions and regulations followed. Signs will be required, and barriers may be necessary to prevent entry for a short period into sprayed areas.

Objective 2h: Restore areas through selective felling and clearance where scrub, woodland and bracken have encroached, as preparation for heathland and grassland management in the longer term;

Project 2h1: Clear the establishing oak scrub and other small trees from the remaining extent of acid grassland. Where possible, ensure the grazing area will incorporate clearance areas in order to keep re-growth in check.

Project 2h2: Once the extent of bracken is reduced or significantly weakened, locate potential local donor sites for heather, and request cuttings from any late autumn management of mature and over mature heather. Carefully transport heather to ensure any seed shaken from cuttings is captured.

Create narrow scrapes in the former bracken stand to remove a layer (to an approximate depth of 5cm) of fertile topsoil. If resources permit, use machinery to create heather litter from the heather cuttings in situ, for spreading within the scrapes. Otherwise spread the cuttings and chop with loppers to help to dislodge seed. If reduced to litter, leave cuttings in situ otherwise remove large woody stems from the site after 14 days.

Project 2h3: Exclude newly establishing vegetation from the grazing regime for the first two years. Once vegetation is well established, bring these areas into grazing management to help keep less desirable species, such as bramble and small trees, from colonising the sward.

Objective 2i: Manage existing areas of gorse by controlling and reducing bramble encroachment;

Gorse (*Ulex europaeus*) is an important species for birds and invertebrates. It provides refuge and nesting opportunities for a number of birds, including specialist heathland species, and its long flowering season provides a valuable early spring and early winter source of nectar. During 2009/10 a section of the gorse within the acid grassland was cut back.

Project 2i1: Cut and pull bramble roots from the gorse patch to help lessen their dominance. Coppice the small trees that have become established in the gorse patch.

Project 2i2: Monitor the re-growth of the cut area of gorse, and assess the likely success of further coppicing the species to help prolong its life. If necessary, scarify by hand an area of ground adjoining the gorse patch to help provide opportunities for colonisation.

Grazing and small-scale disturbance are important in maintaining acid grasslands, to prevent their encroachment by scrub, or invasion by species more typical of rank and unmanaged grasslands (Price, 2003).

Objective 2j: 'Mob' graze in small areas for short periods of time to control re-growth and prevent further loss of anthills;

Project 2j1: Follow the methodology outlined in projects 2a2 and 2a3 to help recruit support and raise awareness of the grazing season.

Project 2j2: Subject to the successful completion of project 2j1, develop a grazing regime in partnership with a specialist conservation grazier that takes into account the specific restoration needs of the acid grassland area, welfare of livestock, forage availability, appropriate stocking densities and grazing periods. Erect temporary fencing for a period of 2 to 6 weeks to allow 'mob' grazing (grazing of higher than usual numbers for short periods of time) in keeping with the following guideline levels:

Table 2j: A guide to stocking levels for lowland acid grassland (to maintain sward for conservation) (number of animals per hectare).

No. of grazing weeks per year	*Sheep*	*Cattle*
2	50	12
16	6	1.5
36	3	0.5
Annual stocking rate LU/ha/yr	0.2	
Equivalent no. of sheep (ha/yr)	1.6	

Notes: Sheep, 60kg live weight = 0.125 livestock units, Cattle, 250kg live weight = 0.5 livestock units. The annual stocking rate is the livestock units per hectare that can theoretically graze throughout the 52 weeks of the year.

(Price, 2003)

Objective 2k: Engage, support and oversee conservation volunteers in the management of the common's acid grassland areas.

Refer to Management Aim 5 'Develop opportunities for education and community engagement'.

Wood Pasture

The results of the consultation on the future management of Southborough Common indicated that the local community would prefer to see the wood pasture area of the common managed by hand, or by mechanical means, for the duration of this plan. Clearance carried out in this way will help to re-instate a more open character to this part of the common.

Clearance works in this area should be conducted on rotation to minimise the impact on existing wildlife. This will also provide a sequential series of openings for ground flora, and the species that exploit woodland flora, to re-colonise areas within the wood pasture. Figure 2l (appended) describes an indicative rotational clearance map for the wood pasture habitat.

Section F: Management Aims


The wood pasture of Southborough Common has remained open in place (pictured left) where clearance works have been conducted in the past ten years. In areas where clearance has not taken place (pictured right) small trees and brambles have grown up, leading to the loss of the characteristic openness wood pasture ordinarily exhibits. Photos taken May 2012.

Objective 2l: Maintain and stop further deterioration of existing identifiable wood pasture through pollarding, ride management for wildlife, and clearance for access. Identify areas where wood pasture may be restored and reinstate this habitat through pollarding and clearance works;

Project 2l1: Within the wood pasture area, fell all trees and scrub under 30cm diameter at breast height, with the exception of an hawthorn, gorse, juniper (if found), heather and bilberry which must be retained. Retain any trees over 30cm diameter at breast height. Cut stumps as close to ground level as possible, and treat with a suitable herbicide. Leave no more than 10% of the site covered with stacked timber in providing dead wood habitat.

Project 2l2: Restore a wood pasture habitat within the woodland to the north of St. Peter's Church by clearing holly and thinning around 10% of young, maiden trees on a biennial basis. Select suitable specimens of young oak and beech for pollarding. Retain any hawthorn, gorse, juniper (if found), heather and bilberry. Pollarding should be conducted by a professional or suitably trained volunteer to help ensure the success of this management technique.

Project 2l3: Where heathy ground flora is already established, and in compartments cleared under project 2l1 and 2l2, remove all regenerating tree seedlings/saplings on a biennial basis. Saplings over 1cm basal diameter may be cut at ground level using loppers, or by careful use of a brush-cutter fitted with a power-saw blade. Thinner saplings and seedlings can be dealt with *en masse* by sweeping the area with a brush-cutter, fitted with a scrub-blade, or just below the top of the surrounding heather/bilberry.

Project 2l4: Control the invasive, non-native species cherry laurel (*Prunus laurocerasus*) and rhododendron (*Rhododendron ponticum*) by cutting at the base, and treat the stump with a suitable herbicide such as Glyphosate, or ammonium sulphamate. Follow-up chemical stump treatment should be selected according to the timing of the works. If cutting between June and September, ammonium sulphamate will be most effective. If cutting between October and February, Glyphosate will have greatest effect. Foliar herbicide application may be required during the following growing season to treat any re-growth from still living stumps.

Objective 2m: Explore the potential commercial value of the wood pasture area of the common with a view to its sustainable management in the future;

Refer to projects 2e1 to 2e4 under 'Secondary Woodland/Relic Heathland'.

Objective 2n: Engage, support and oversee conservation volunteers in the management of the common's wood pasture.

Refer to Management Aim 5 'Develop opportunities for education and community engagement'.

Section F: Management Aims

Whortleberry Wood

As an established area of semi-natural ancient woodland, minimal intervention will be required to maintain the wildlife value of Whortleberry Wood. As such, any works should focus on safety, maintaining the health of the stock of maturing trees, and ensuring opportunities for the regeneration of appropriate native species. At time of writing, a number of beech trees in Whortleberry Wood are exhibiting signs of disease similar to that affecting veteran beech pollards in the Secondary Woodland area.

The boundary of Whortleberry Wood is marked by a significant ditch and bank (pictured left). Conservation of this key archaeological feature of the common should ensure that the bank and ditch are protected from forestry operations.

Objective 2o: Maintain the existing ancient semi-natural woodland through selective thinning of mature trees and clearance works;

> **Project 2o1:** Control invasive, non-native species such as cherry laurel by the method described in project 2l4.
>
> **Project 2o2:** For the beech pollards present in Whortleberry Wood, follow projects outlined under objective 2b. Commission any tree safety works (e.g. re-pollarding top-heavy beech trees) as required, including for maiden beech trees along the southern stream edge.

Objective 2p: Explore the potential commercial value of Whortleberry Wood with a view to its sustainable management in the future;

Refer to projects 2e1 to 2e4 under 'Secondary Woodland/Relic Heathland'.

Objective 2q: Engage, support and oversee conservation volunteers in the management of Whortleberry Wood.

Refer to Management Aim 5 'Develop opportunities for education and community engagement'.

Wetland Habitats

The wetland habitats of Southborough Common consist of the stream running north-south through Whortleberry Wood and along the edge of the secondary woodland, and Holden Pond. An ephemeral wet flush is also present at the southern edge of the acid grassland area. Holden Pond is not considered in detail by this plan, as it is currently well managed by the Town Council as an amenity for local anglers.

Objective 2r: Increase light over the stream to benefit associated plants and wildlife by selective clearance of woody species;

Tree thinning to meet this objective will be achieved by projects 2c1 and 2o2.

Objective 2s: Maintain the stream profile with minimal intervention;

> **Project 2s1:** The pools, riffles, eddies and varied bank profiles of the stream are likely to support a rich aquatic fauna. Woody detritus in this area will also provide a substrate for bryophytes and fungi, and perches for carnivorous insects. Ensure that forestry works do not disrupt the stream profile, and retain woody detritus both in and alongside the watercourse.

Objective 2t: Explore the possibility of establishing a new wildlife pond on the common;

> **Project 2t1:** As clearance works take place across the common, consider whether ground conditions and access requirements would support the creation of wet scrapes. These small excavations should have shallow and irregularly shaped edges, and should not exceed a depth

of 50cm at any point. If the potential exists, then a cluster of scrapes created over a series of years can provide a succession of ecological conditions that support a diversity of invertebrate, amphibian, mammal and bird life. Scrapes should not be created at the expense of existing valuable habitat.

Objective 2u: Engage, support and oversee conservation volunteers in the management of the common's wetland habitats.

Refer to Management Aim 5 'Develop opportunities for education and community engagement'.

Aim 3: Reduce the impact of traffic and parking

Through the Southborough Common consultation, it became apparent that traffic and parking is one of the major problems facing the common in 2012. The following objectives provide an outline as to how these issues may begin to be addressed for Southborough Common. However, to lessen the chances of simply moving the issues experienced at the common into adjoining areas, the further refinement of these objectives should take into account traffic and parking in Southborough as a whole. This additional development work should be conducted in partnership with local groups and community initiatives, such as the Southborough Town Forum.

This section of the plan will require updating as progress is made towards addressing the issues of traffic and parking across Southborough as a whole.

Objective 3a: Consult with local residents and stakeholders over the introduction of residents only parking, permit schemes and parking restrictions;

Objective 3b: Consult with local residents and stakeholders over the formal provision of parking areas at Modest Corner;

Objective 3c: Following on from 3.1 and 3.2, conduct a feasibility study into the costs of establishing and implementing the supported scheme;

Objective 3d: Secure funding to engage consultants, such as Jacobs, to review traffic and the road systems around the common, and the potential for introducing traffic calming measures, speed limits, and notices;

Objective 3e: Form a working group of local residents and stakeholders, the Town Council, and special interest groups to raise funds in support of changes advocated by 3.3 and 3.4, and to work with Kent Highways on their implementation;

Objective 3f: In recognition of traffic as a Southborough-wide issue, seek to engage groups and community initiatives (such as the Southborough Town Forum) in the development and implementation of this aim as part of a Southborough-wide solution.

Aim 4: Enhance leisure opportunities

Access to good quality and well maintained urban green spaces promotes physical activity, positive mental wellbeing and healthy childhood development (CABE Space, 2010). Children with access to safe green space are more likely to be physically active and less likely to be overweight. Outdoor play encourages healthy brain development and promotion of well being through adulthood (CABE Space, 2010).

For the early part of the 20th century and beyond, the gravel pit was a focal point for play at Southborough Common. The steep terrain, hollows and dips lent themselves to what is today termed 'natural play'. During the consultation it was remarked that, following the 1987 storm, the pit has fallen out of use for play, much to the regret of many participants.

Section F: Management Aims

Southborough Common offers many opportunities for informal recreation. This aim seeks to sensitively build upon these opportunities in a way that broadens the recreational value of the common, suggests a 'zoning' of site use, and raises awareness of the sites important features.

Objective 4a: Identify and develop opportunities to enhance the common for natural play e.g. the Gravel Pit through initial clearance of shallow access and sightlines across the pit;

Project 4a1: Clear trees and scrub to create a total of two or three openings into the Gravel Pit at shallow points, from the path that encircles it. Cut and dispose of the arisings as outlined in project 2a1.

Project 4a2: As a safety measure, selectively clear vegetation along the northern edge of the circular path to ensure sightlines exist across the pit. At entry points where bike use is in evidence, ensure vegetation is adequately cleared back to promote a clear view both into, and out of the pit. Cut and dispose of the arisings as outlined in project 2a1.

Project 4a3: To the east of the pit, the path encircling the Gravel Pit rises sharply; making entry and exit from the area a challenge. Access at this point may be improved by the sinking of a short series of chestnut poles into the ground. This would help to provide 'hand holds' to walkers to assist them on this route. Encouraging access on this path will also help to prevent the likelihood of anti-social behaviour in the Gravel Pit, as such problems tend to occur less frequently in well-used and overlooked areas.

Objective 4b: Develop a series of self-guided walks linked to waymarked paths and 'active maps' available to access via the internet. Link these walks to the wider town, and the culture, history, wildlife and industry of Southborough;

Project 4b1: Work in partnership with Explore Kent, the Southborough Society, nature conservation groups and local residents to develop a library of research on local routes, history, and the wildlife value of the common.

Project 4b2: Where possible, link any self-guided walk to the wider landscape, historic trails around the town, and long distance routes across the Weald and beyond.

Project 4b3: Publish the walks in a range of media that helps to enhance their accessibility. Mark the route through a series of physical waymarking posts. Consider including QR codes on the posts to help provide walkers with further information on points of interest at that location.

Objective 4c: Develop and implement a series of works that will improve the accessibility of the common for people with additional needs.

Project 4c1: Secure resources to re-surface the existing all access path as shown in figure 1c. Path surfacing should be of an inert material such as granite or Kentish ragstone, finished with a compacted layer of crushed stone from 5mm down to dust.

Project 4c2: Should projects 1c1 to 1c3 proceed then link the all access path to the enhanced route from Constitutional Hill to Modest Corner.

Project 4c3: With reference to aim 3 - *'Reduce the impact of traffic and parking'*, consider potential improvement works to create a safe road crossing between the tarmac path at the acid grassland, and the entry to the Wood Pasture at the southern edge of St. Peter's Churchyard.

Project 4c4: Ensure all interpretative materials, such as guided walks may be made available in a range of formats, and that they may be translated into other languages.

Section F: Management Aims

Aim 5: Develop opportunities for education and community engagement

Objective 5a: Collate information on Southborough Common and raise awareness of its importance;

Project 5a1: Work with local residents and stakeholders, special interest groups, and local education providers to gather information on the history and role of the common in local life, as well as other features of interest.

Project 5a2: Develop a program of engagement and interpretation based upon 5a1, and secure resources in their support.

Project 5a3: Develop a schools education pack and program of events to help educate people and raise awareness about the historic, cultural and wildlife importance of Southborough Common, and secure resources in their support.

Objective 5b: Engage the local community in the further developing and executing this management plan;

Project 5b1: Develop a comprehensive program of opportunities for volunteering that includes a commons watch system, helping with practical task days and educational events, survey works such as veteran tree surveys, and the involvement of young people.

Project 5b2: Secure resources to help train volunteers and equip them with skills required to help in the delivery of this management plan.

Project 5b3: Seek to broaden management responsibility for the common by supporting the development of a 'Friends of'-style community group that would oversee the management of the common, and assist with implementing works and raising money in support of them.

Section G: Work Program

Work Program for Southborough Common – 2012 to 2017

Project	Priority	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Project 1a1: In liaison with the High Weald AONB Unit, map ideal locations for permanent glades.	M	✓				
Project 1a2: Cross reference maps to woodland habitat works.	M	✓				
Project 1b1: Identify trees for removal along Victoria Road. Check with TWBC regarding TPOs.	M	✓				
Project 1b2: Identify areas to thin/manage as a woodland edge to the west of the acid grassland.	M	✓				
Project 1b3: Consult with local residents over the detail of the landscape enhancement works.	M	✓				
Project 1b4: If broadly supported, schedule clearance works outside of the bird nesting season (Oct – Feb)	M	(✓	✓)			
Project 1c1: Assess the feasibility of developing a timber extraction route across the common.	M	✓	✓			
Project 1c2: Develop a specification for the timber extraction route, seek quotes, and identify funding streams.	M	✓	✓			
Project 1c3: Proceed with works, potentially in combination with improvements to the All Access Path (Project 4c1) to help minimise costs and disruption.	M		✓			
Project 1c4: Collate information on linking long distance trails and cross-reference with Projects 4b1 – 4b3, 4c1 - 4c4, and 5a1 – 5a3.	M/L	✓	✓	✓		
Project 1d1: Review adjoining land management schemes on www.magic.gov.uk. Identify opportunities for coordinating works for a landscape scale benefit.	M	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Project 1d2: Consider opportunities to work with neighbouring landowners to spread costs of contracted services, improve access, and on public education.	M	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Project 1e1: Maintain a buffer of scrub and trees to a depth of 5m – 10m along all road edges.	H	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Project 1f1: Review literature on the economic value of green spaces and consult NE as to a rapid assessment methodology.	M	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Section G: Work Program

Project	Priority	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Project 1f2: Undertake an assessment of the economic value of Southborough Common (cf. Project 1f1)	M	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Project 2a1: Clear scrub and trees in the identified clearance compartment (cf. Figure 2a)	M	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Project 2a2: Recruit and train volunteer livestock checkers	H	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Project 2a3: During March/April, publicise the forthcoming grazing season.	H	**n/a**	**(✓)**	✓	✓	✓
Project 2a4: Subject to completing 2a2 and 2a3, graze clearance compartments in temporary fencing for 2 – 6 weeks.	H	**n/a**	**(✓)**	✓	✓	✓
Project 2a5: Carry out experimental coppicing on path edges in compartments with dense holly.	H	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Project 2a6: Determine whether to promote compartments with dense holly growth as scrub or open habitats.	M		**(✓)**	✓	✓	✓
Project 2b1: Survey mature pollards and veteran trees with the help of volunteers.	H	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Project 2b2: Use results from 2b1 to help inform the development of a commercial tender (2e1 – 2ef).	H	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Project 2b3: Maintain a buffer around veteran trees to ensure no sudden changes in their environment.	H	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Project 2b4: Commission professional assessment of top-heavy beech pollards with a view to re-pollarding. Assess other beech trees for disease, and pollarding potential.	H	**(✓)**	✓	✓	✓	✓
Project 2c1: Develop a 3-tier cutting system for the two major pathways running East-West across the wooded section of the common.	H	✓		✓		✓
Project 2d1: Cut and stump treat invasive, non-native species (cherry laurel, rhododendron).	H	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Project 2d2: If surrounding grassland is of botanical interest, treat areas of winter heliotrope with an application of glyphosate during Feb/March.	M/L	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Project 2e1: Consult with KWT over producing a commercial tender for timber and wood at Southborough Common.	H	✓	✓	✓		
Project 2e2: Consult with the FC about potential funding for	H	✓	✓	✓		

Section G: Work Program

Project	Priority	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
access improvements.						
Project 2e3: With reference to 2e1 and 2e2, carry out pathway improvements.	H		✓	✓	✓	
Project 2e4: Evaluate tenders and procure the services of the preferred contractor.	H		✓	✓	✓	✓
Project 2g1: Control bracken through cutting by hand in June and July.	H	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Project 2g2: Scarify the ground where a mulch of bracken litter has developed.	H	✓	✓	(✓)		
Project 2g3: Spray bracken with a suitable herbicide towards the end of August.	H			✓	✓	✓
Project 2h1: Clear oak scrub and small trees from the acid grassland.	H	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Project 2h2: Use heather cuttings from nearby heathlands to re-seed the bracken stand.	M			✓	✓	✓
Project 2h3: Exclude areas of newly establishing target species from the grazing regime for at least two years.	H	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Project 2i1: Cut and pull bramble and coppice trees from the gorse patch.	H	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Project 2i2: Monitor gorse regrowth and consider scarifying to promote new seedlings.	H	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Project 2j1: Recruit and train volunteer livestock checkers. If proceeding, publicise the upcoming grazing season.	H	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Project 2j2: Develop a grazing regime for the acid grassland in consultation with a conservation grazier.	H		✓	✓	✓	✓
Project 2l1: In keeping with the rotation shown in Figure 2l, fell trees within the wood pasture of less than 30cm d.b.h.	H	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Project 2l2: Clear holly and thin young maidens in the woodland to the north of St. Peters. Pollard young oak and beech.	H	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Project 2l3: Clear tree saplings and seedlings by brushcutter on a biennial basis in the cleared wood pasture compartments.	M		✓		✓	
Project 2l4: Control cherry laurel and rhododendron by cutting and stump treatment.	H	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Project 2o1: Control cherry laurel and rhododendron in Whortleberry Wood by cutting and stump treatment.	H	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Project 2o2: For beech pollards	H	✓		✓		✓

Section G: Work Program

Project	Priority	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
in Whortleberry Wood, follow methodology outlined under objective 2b						
Project 2s1: Ensure forestry works do not disrupt the stream profile, and maintain woody detritus in situ.	M/H	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Project 2t1: Consider creating wet scrapes of wildlife value within the newly cleared areas of the Secondary Woodland.	M		✓	✓	✓	✓
Project 4a1: Clear trees to create a total of two or three entrances into the Gravel Pit from the circular path.	M	✓	✓	✓		
Project 4a2: For safety reasons, selectively clear vegetation along the northern edge of the circular path around the Gravel Pit to promote sight lines.	M	✓	✓	✓		
Project 4a3: As a safety measure, clear views into and out of the pit where bikes may be being ridden.	M	✓	✓	✓		
Project 4a4: Put in place chestnut uprights as hand holds on the steep bank down into the Gravel Pit from the wood pasture.	M		✓			
Project 4b1: Research and develop a library of information relevant to developing a series of self-guided walks incorporating the common.	M	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Project 4b2: Link self-guided walks to the wider landscape, historic trails, and long-distance routes across the Weald.	L		✓	✓	✓	
Project 4b3: Publish the walks in a range of media, and physically waymark the routes.	M			✓	✓	✓
Project 4c1: Secure funding to resurface the existing all access path around the wood pasture	M		✓	✓	✓	
Project 4c2: Link the all access path to any major improvement of access for commercial reasons.	H		✓	✓	✓	
Project 4c3: Work with wider groups on traffic controls that may include a safer crossing between the acid grassland and the wood pasture at St. Peter's Church.	M	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Project 4c4: Ensure all interpretative materials can be made available in alternative formats and different languages.	M		✓	✓	✓	✓
Project 5a1: Gather information on the history and role of the	H	✓	✓	✓		

Section G: Work Program

Project	Priority	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
common in local life, as well as other features of interest.						
Project 5a2: Develop a program of engagement and interpretation, and secure resources in their support.	H	✓	✓	✓		
Project 5a3: Develop a schools education pack and program of events to help educate people and raise awareness. Secure resources in their support.	H/M	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Project 5b1: Develop a range of volunteering opportunities for Southborough Common.	H	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Project 5b2: Secure resources to train and equip volunteers with the skills they require.	H	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Project 5b3: Support the formation of a 'Friends of …' group for Southborough Common.	H	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Appendices

Figure 2a: Secondary Woodland/Relic Heathland Rotational Clearance Map
Figure 2d: Invasive, Non-Native Species Hot-Spots
Figure 2l: Wood Pasture Rotational Clearance Map
Southborough Common Consultation Report
Section 38 – Guidance on works outside of Secretary of State consent process
Section 38 – Guidance on works exempt from Secretary of State consent process