

1. INTRODUCTION

Knodishall Common is a valuable community asset and occupies a focal location in the parish. It offers informal recreation and open space for local people and is an integral part of the landscape, character, natural and social history of Knodishall parish.

The Common is a good example of the heathland habitats typical of the Suffolk Sandlings. It is a mosaic of priority habitats such as heathland and acid grassland as well as scrub, and early successional/ruderal vegetation communities which support a wide range of associated wildlife. Priority species records of note include linnet, nightingale, turtle dove, small heath butterfly, common lizard and adder.

All pictures were taken prior to the fire of 2022 but have been retained as they better illustrate management principles and desired habitat structures.

2. POLICY STATEMENT

Knodishall Parish Council will endeavour to manage Knodishall Common for people and wildlife.

Knodishall Parish Council is responsible for the management of the Common¹ on behalf of the residents of Knodishall and the parish council has the following objectives:

- To conserve and enhance the landscape and biodiversity of the Common
- To provide appropriate access and enjoyment of the Common
- To work in partnership with other organisations wherever practical to ensure conservation and parish objectives are met and to ensure the most effective use of resources.

3. SITE DESCRIPTION

3.1 LOCATION AND EXTENT

The OS grid reference for the centre of the Common is TM425605 – OS Landranger series 1:50,000 – sheet 156. The Common is divided into several blocks all situated to the west of the B1069 Leiston Road through Knodishall. See Appendix 1 – location map.

3.2 TENURE AND LEGAL OBLIGATIONS

Knodishall Common was registered as common land under the Commons Registration Act 1965. The registered area includes an area of land known as Coldfair Green. See Appendix 2 – extent of Registered Common. The total common area is just over 14ha.

¹ There are some small areas of the Common in private ownership and therefore do not come under the remit of the parish council, see section 3.2

With the exception of a few small areas in private ownership the common land is recorded on the Commons Register as having no known owner.

There are Registered Rights of Common associated with two properties:

- Myrtle Cottage: grazing rights for 3 horses and 2 goats and rights for keeping ducks on the pond.
- Cozy Cottage: taking turf, firewood, sand and soil over a specified area.

Full details of rights are given in the Commons register – a copy of the Knodishall Common register entry is held by the Parish Council.

Since 2006 the land has been designated as Open Access land under the framework of the CROW Act. The land is crossed by a number of permissive footpaths and a public footpath crosses the northwestern part of the Common.

There is an unmade track which runs approximately south to north from the main road to properties on the northern edge of Common over which the residents have legal rights of access. See Appendix 3 – key features of the Common.

Until 2012, the Common land was managed by Suffolk Coastal District Council (SCDC) under a Scheme for the Regulation and Management of Common Land. In 2012 Knodishall Parish Council took on the Scheme of Regulation from SCDC and the parish council is now responsible for the management of the Common. Common Rights as listed above remain, and byelaws are in operation.

In the recent past, much of the area of Knodishall Common was covered by the former Natural England Countryside Stewardship scheme (CSS). The CSS agreement was held by SCDC which provided some financial support for management. This agreement expired on 30th September 2012 and SCDC began the process of applying for Higher Level Environmental Stewardship (HLS) in 2012 to help fund future management of the Common. Suffolk Wildlife Trust (SWT) helped to prepare the Farm Environment Plan required for the HLS, made management recommendations and facilitated the HLS application on behalf of SCDC and Knodishall Parish Council.

The HLS application was successful and a ten year HLS agreement commenced on March 1st 2013. This HLS agreement is between Knodishall Parish Council, Rural Payments Agency and Natural England and the parish council is responsible for ensuring that the management prescriptions of the agreement are met. The HLS provides annual funding for management works to maintain and enhance the semi-natural habitats within the agreement area. The HLS agreement was due to expire on 28th February 2023 but has been extended for 5 years April 2023 until March 2028.

Section 4.3 of this management plan makes specific management recommendations for the parts of the Common covered by the HLS agreement. See Appendix 4 – extent of HLS and HLS Options Map. Section 4.4 covers some more generic management recommendations that are applicable to the wider Common as well as the area in HLS.

In summary, Knodishall Parish Council is now entirely responsible for the management of the Common (with the exception of the small areas in private ownership). The parish council is therefore responsible for all aspects of the Common's management including:

- Safeguarding the interests of the commoners as required by Commons legislation.
- Consulting with any other landowners of the Common
- Implementation of the HLS agreement (including production of a management plan/implementation plan)
- All matters relating to health and safety including assessment and management of fire risk.
- Maintenance of some tracks and car parks

3.3 HISTORY AND ARCHAEOLOGY

Knodishall Common was a pasture common, shaped by activities such as grazing, gorse cutting for fuel and wind-proofing livestock enclosures, bracken cutting for winter bedding and sand and gravel taken for local building works, typical of the impoverished sandy soils of east Suffolk. However, these activities have all but ceased, though are still reflected in the few remaining Common rights (See section 3.2).

Just as it is today, the Common would also have been a place for walking and meeting. The part of the Common known as Coldfair Green was the site of a winter fair until the early years of the 20th Century. This event has been revived in recent years and this area of the Common has been cleared of gorse to become an open gathering area once more.

Part of the Common was cleared, levelled and adopted as a football pitch in the 1970s, (see Appendices 3 and 6), but this has fallen out of formal use and reverted back to acid grassland. A more formal fenced recreation ground and play area is now situated to the east of Sparrow Cottage. See Appendix 3 - key features of the Common.

3.4 GEOLOGY

Knodishall Common is underlain by free draining sand, gravels and crag and therefore has nutrient poor, drought prone soils typical of the Suffolk Sandlings. The Common slopes gently down to the Hundred River which runs approximately north-south through the site. There is a strip of more fertile alluvium in the immediate vicinity of the river.

3.5 WILDLIFE

The semi-natural vegetation of the Common is a mosaic of heathland, gorse, acid grassland, bare ground, bramble, bracken, and young woodland, some naturally regenerated and some planted (western edge). The structure of the vegetation has significantly been altered since the fire in the summer of 2022. Much of the overblown gorse was burnt leaving predominantly young regenerating gorse with only small stands of older gorse which escaped the fire.

Areas of bare ground and well-worn tracks give opportunities for ruderal plant communities to form including the nationally scarce mossy stonecrop which is associated with compacted ground. Notable species recorded include linnet, nightingale, turtle dove, bullfinch, common lizard, adder, common toad,

harebell, mouse-ear hawkweed, bell heather, meadow saxifrage, early and changing forget-me-nots and spring vetch. Additional diversity is provided by the River Hundred that runs through the Common and the two ponds – one ephemeral and one on the course of the river.

Knodishall Common is a designated County Wildlife Site in recognition of its importance for heathland habitats and species. See - 5 CWS designation, map and CWS information sheet.

Some of the habitats /species are widely recognised as priorities for conservation and key targets for HLS, such as lowland heathland and acid grassland along with associated species like linnet and common lizard. Other habitats are perhaps lower profile, such as bracken, scrub and ruderal plant communities, but are equally important for wildlife. These habitats add structural diversity and graded edges to the Common and increase the range of wildlife habitat available and therefore the range of species likely to occur. All the habitats found are typical of the Suffolk Sandlings.

Appendix 5 includes species recorded to date at the Common. Appendix 6 is the Farm Environment Plan (FEP) showing different habitats on the Common.

3.6 PUBLIC INTEREST AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

The Common has always been used for informal re-creation, particularly dog-walking and offers a valuable open space to enjoy the outdoors.

Management of the Common should therefore aim to not only deliver biodiversity and landscape targets, but also be compatible with the wishes and what is feasible for the local community.

It is important that all plans for the Common are carried out with extensive local consultation to ensure that work meets the needs of the local community as well as maintaining the wildlife and landscape value of the Common.

4 MANAGEMENT

4.1 PAST RECENT MANAGEMENT

Until 2012, Suffolk Coastal District Council managed Knodishall Common and management followed a plan drawn up by SCDC which was linked to the Countryside Stewardship Agreement (CSS). Both the CSS agreement and management plan expired in 2013.

4.2 MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

Knodishall Parish Council is required to produce a 10 year management plan for the parts of the Common covered by the HLS agreement. See Appendix 4. Suffolk Wildlife Trust (SWT) has been commissioned to produce this plan in consultation with the parish council and Natural England.

The management recommendations have been divided into those specific to the HLS agreement (Section 4.3) and those that are not only important and applicable to the HLS but is also relevant to the wider Common (Section 4.4)

4.3 HLS MANAGEMENT

Appendix 4 shows the extent of the HLS agreement. The agreement commenced on 1st March 2013 and expires on 28th February 2023. Following the extension of the HLS for a further 5 years, the management plan has been reviewed and updated to include the years of the extension. This agreement expired on 28th February 2023 but has been extended for 5 years until March 2028. The management recommendations throughout this section are tailored to meet the objectives and prescriptions of the HLS.

4.3.1 HLS MANAGEMENT OPTIONS

HLS includes two types of options:

ONGOING OPTIONS which require some management in most years of the agreement and apply to areas of the Common i.e. the option payment is calculated by hectareage. These options receive an annual payment under the HLS agreement.

The on-going options at Knodishall are:

HO2 – Restoration of lowland heathland (which covers a major area of the Common)

HC15 – Maintenance of successional areas and scrub (belt of roadside scrub)

CAPITAL WORKS. The capital works of the previous HLS agreement have been completed. These were one off specific tasks assigned to a specific year(s) of the agreement. These included:

SS +SB – scrub management which is aimed at reducing the dominance of gorse in some parts of the Common

BMA +BMB –an area of mechanical bracken control

TS2 x 3 – re-pollarding of 3 riverside willows

TRE x 2 – removal of 2 poplars

Subject to availability of funding it may be possible to apply for additional capital works as part of the extension or seek funding from other sources.

Appendix 4 shows the HLS options on Knodishall Common.

Sections 4.3.2 -4.3.5 set out the objectives and methods for each of these options in a way that hopefully explains the underlying principle that heathland management is rotational and needs to be flexible. Decisions are best made on an annual basis on the ground, rather than trying to rigidly stick to pre-set areas.

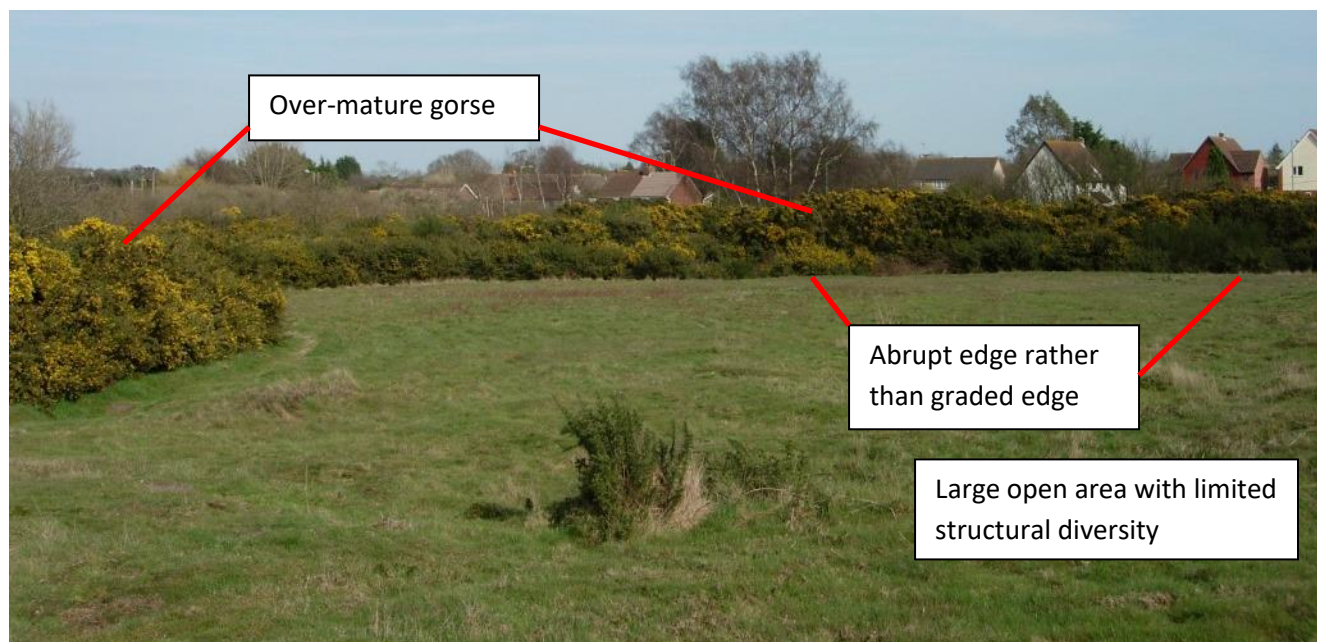
The HLS agreement also sets out specific prescriptions, giving methods, timing and expected amounts of work to be achieved in order to comply with the agreement. It is therefore important that HLS prescriptions are referred to in conjunction with this plan, and for this reason, the HLS prescriptions are included in Appendix 7.

4.3.2 HEATHLAND RESTORATION H02 HLS OPTION

Much of Knodishall Common is a mosaic of gorse, bramble, scrub and acid grassland.

In July 2022, a fire on the common swept through much of the gorse leaving sporadic patches around the edges of the common untouched.

The previous balance of the 'mosaic' was in favour of mature gorse. The fire has set back the dominance of the gorse which had become over mature. During the period it's of regrowth, the gorse can be managed to improve its structural diversity and avoid some areas developing abrupt edges and thereby blur the previously sharp contrast with areas of open ground. Management to enhance the structural diversity would increase the capacity of the Common to support a wider range of species as well as add to its visual interest.



The aims of management under this option should therefore be to

- To manage the regrowth of gorse in some parts of the Common to avoid its previous dominance.
- To create variation in the structure and age of the regenerating gorse.
- To create and enhance gradations between gorse/scrub habitat and more open areas.
- Maintain and enhance areas of lowland dry acid grassland and heather.

4.3.2.a Reduction of area of gorse:

In July 2022, a fire on the common swept through much of the gorse leaving sporadic patches around the edges untouched. Prior to the fire it was estimated that gorse occupied circa 65% of the HO2 areas. During the course of the previous 10-year agreement, it was recommended to reduce this total cover to 40% cover (a reduction of circa 2.14ha of gorse from the current total of 5.44ha). It is now estimated that due to the fire, gorse cover has been reduced to in excess of this 40% target – total coverage estimated to be 5%

In order to manage the regrowth of gorse in some parts of the Common to avoid its previous dominance, it is worth identifying and prioritising areas where gorse may clearly encroach on more floristically diverse areas during its recovery e.g. where bell heather is struggling in shade or where patches of lichen heath are developing. SWT can provide on site advice.

Where opportunities for reptile hibernation have been reduced by the loss of gorse from the fire, identify opportunities to create more hibernacula and basking sites. Survey of the Common for reptiles and seek advice on likely hibernation sites and manage the common for them. Appendix 10 gives information on reptile hibernacula.

Managing the total area of gorse regrowth to the original 40% requires treating selected gorse stumps with glyphosate² to ensure it does not re-grow. Eradication of stumps by digging out or grinding is **not** recommended due to the possibility of reptiles using the root zone for hibernation and cover. Any necessary cutting back and treating of gorse is best done in autumn/winter. Stumps should be cut flush with the ground, so they do not hinder future vegetation management e.g. brush cutting/tractor topping. It is possible that in parts of the Common where rabbit grazing is intense, low re-growth may be eaten off and thereby negating the need for glyphosate treatment in this area. If rabbit grazing proves insufficient stumps may need subsequently treatment with glyphosate. It is recommended that small areas of gorse management are undertaken at a time and phased over a number of years.

Target the creation of small open glades, or 'keyholes' within the gorse and widen narrow paths with 'interlocking' scallops either side and minimise disturbance to wildlife and visual impact. The glades and keyholes will be sheltered and relatively undisturbed basking areas for reptiles and invertebrates whilst the scalloped paths will give better graded edge habitat as well as making existing paths less cramped and shaded by gorse.

Appendix 8 is the SWT scrub management fact sheet which outlines scrub control and scrub rotational management and is therefore relevant to section 4.3.2 and 4.3.3.

Section 4.4.3 covers brash disposal (page 18).

² NB Those using glyphosate on public land need to hold the appropriate qualifications and certification and appropriate health and safety measures must be implemented.



4.3.2.b Create structural variation with gorse management by rotational coppicing.

As the gorse matures again in the years following the fire of 2022, it will eventually become leggy and lose its value as nesting for target species such as Linnet and makes it more prone to collapse and damage, particularly by fire and heavy snow fall. In addition, overblown gorse can give an oppressive 'closed' in feel to parts of the Common.

As the gorse matures again, introduce a programme of rotational coppicing. Priority should be given to the areas which represent a substantial fire hazard or are likely to collapse over paths and tracks – e.g. along either side of the track leading to Cozy Cottage and Sparrow Cottage at the north end of the Common.

Coppicing is cutting blocks of gorse back to ground, or if there is a rabbit problem just above rabbit grazing reach (1-2ft) and allowing it to regrow. The work is best carried out in the autumn and winter and just as for gorse removal should be carried out in small blocks spread across the Common, rather than doing large blocks in one year (see section 4.3.2a above and also scrub fact sheet Appendix 8). Ideally, no more than a tenth of the total area of gorse to be coppiced should be worked in any one year.

By working in small blocks, coppicing will not only create a varied height and age structure in the gorse but can also be planned to maintain a screen or cover by coppicing mature gorse that is 'behind' younger blocks and then returning some 3-4 years later to coppice the 'front' gorse when the other gorse has re grown.

The photographs below show the common prior to the fire of 2022 and are used again to give a visual aid to future management of the gorse and bramble as this vegetation re-establishes following the fire.

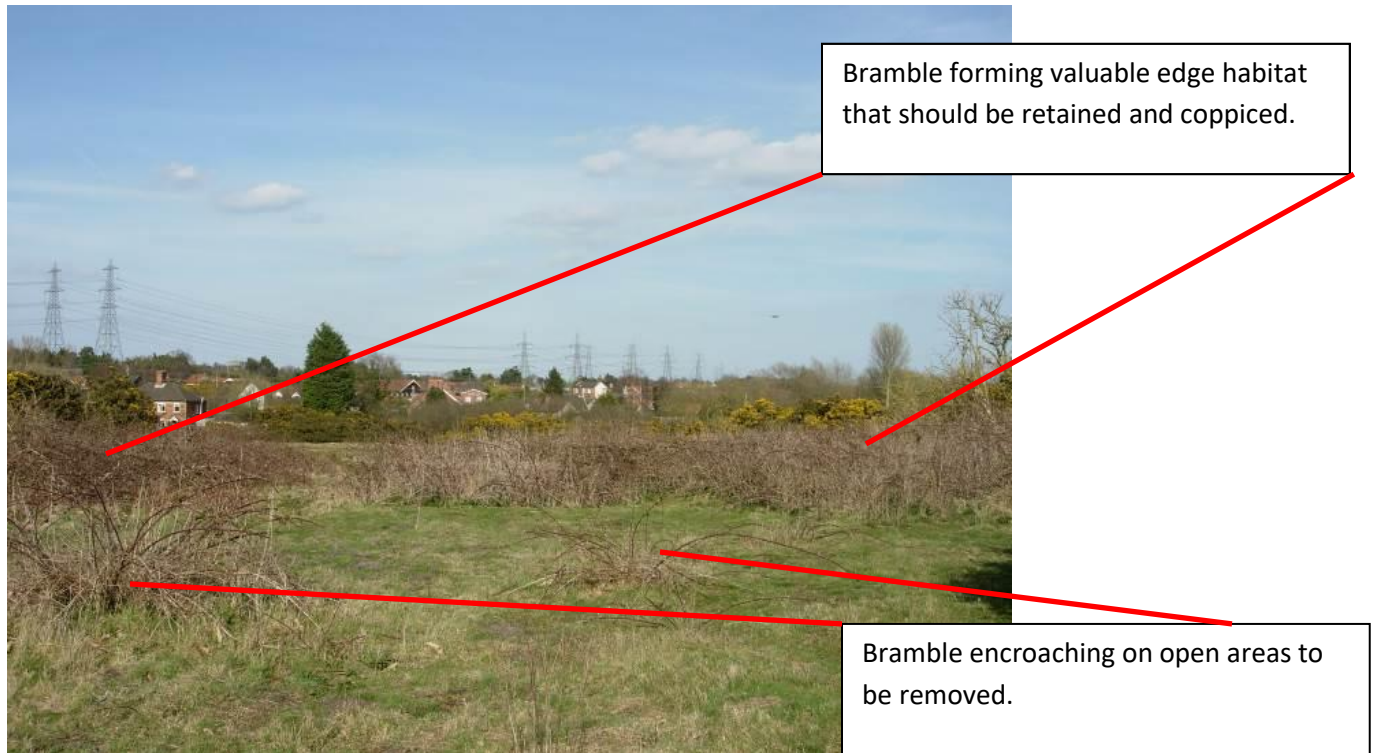


Coppice 'behind the red line' and return to coppice younger gorse once in is older and the gorse behind has had a chance to regrow.

Coppicing should aim for an on-going 10-15 year rotation for all the gorse on the Common.

In some areas of the Common there are valuable patches of bramble that provide good cover for nesting birds and reptiles.

However, in addition to being an important part of the heathland mosaic, bramble can also invade open areas and also become leggy just like gorse. It is therefore recommended that the spread of bramble is controlled (method as for gorse) and rotational coppicing where it is valuable edge habitat. Ideally bramble benefits from a shorter coppice rotation than gorse (5-7 years).



Further information on bramble and gorse management can be found in scrub fact sheet Appendix 8

Disposal and processing of brash created by gorse and bramble management is dealt with in 4.4.3 (page 18)

If work is to be done by a contractor, it may be worth carrying out both gorse coppicing and reduction every other year, thus reducing the number of visits to make the tasks more economically viable. If this 'alternating years' method is adopted, then the total area needing to be worked in any given alternate year will be double that than if work is carried out annually.

4.3.2c Create and enhance gradations between gorse and more open areas

One of the most valuable areas for wildlife is the interface between scrub and shorter vegetation. Avoid abrupt edges forming as the gorse regrows and matures, particularly where rabbit grazing is intense, or gorse has been extensively cleared. Many of the target species for the Common such as reptiles benefit from having a more graded edge, where gorse scrub grades into tall herb, tussocky grass and dwarf shrubs.



Abrupt edge created by rabbit grazing.



Graded edge with grass growing up into young low gorse is better for wildlife.

By setting up a careful rotational coppicing programme for the gorse areas– these graded edges will naturally arise at different stages of the coppicing cycle.

4.3.2d Maintain and enhance areas of lowland acid grassland and heather

The open areas of acid grassland, lichen heath and heather are unlikely to require much if any management. Many of the open areas of the Common are self- sustaining, being grazed/disturbed by rabbits, or maintained by footfall. The free draining, drought prone soils are also a limiting factor on growth. The main threat to these open areas is encroachment by gorse, bramble and bracken – however, this should largely be prevented by the intended gorse reduction/management and natural rabbit grazing. A really good example of an open area maintained by rabbit grazing is the former

‘football pitch’. Open areas should be monitored and if it is felt that bramble or gorse are becoming invasive and/or rabbit grazing is insufficient to keep the areas grassy and open it may be worth ‘topping’ or brush cutting encroachment. This is probably best done in winter to minimise any possible disturbance. Not all open years should be cut /topped in any given year.

Common ragwort - *Senecio jacobaea* readily colonises open areas on light land, particularly where there is a lot of rabbit grazing as the scrapes and ground disturbance provides ideal opportunities for ragwort to seed. Ragwort is a natural component of heathland and acid grassland and as the Common is not being grazed or harvested for forage, quite high levels of the species can be tolerated, especially as the species is important for a wide range of invertebrates. None the less ragwort levels should be monitored and if it is becoming dominant, then some control may be necessary. In addition, the HLS prescriptions require ragwort to be kept below certain levels (see Appendix 7) - the current level of ragwort is below these levels, but ragwort increases and exceeds these levels then some control may be required. See Appendix 9 – fact sheet on Ragwort.

4.3.2e Bracken Management

Bracken is part and parcel of the heathland mosaic and can be very valuable for wildlife particularly reptiles. However, managing bracken after the fire of 2022 should continue where it creates a dense and uniform structure. Previous management was limited to an area to the north of the Common – adjacent to the firebreak by Cozy Cottage (see Appendix 4 - HLS map) and so it worth continuing to manage bracken in this area and prevent the buildup of litter which can also quite a substantial fire risk. It will also continue to favour other vegetation, soften the edges and reinforce the efficacy of the firebreak. Mechanical control of bracken is either by cutting or bruising with a suitable roller.

- **Cutting**

The best time to cut bracken is when it has just reached maturity – usually late June beginning of July and then again in August. The cut bracken should either be removed off site – or piled into habitat piles on the edge of the bracken area where it will not present a fire hazard. It is also advisable to rake off as much of the litter layer as possible.

Because the timing of bracken cutting is within the nesting season, it is important to ensure that no birds are nesting in the area before doing the work. Bracken cutting generally happens when reptiles are active, and they are likely to move out of the area being managed without being harmed. However, it is good practice to walk the area prior to cutting to encourage any reptiles to leave the area and also to identify ahead of planned work whether the area to be managed includes reptile hibernacula. If it does, then some cover should be left over hibernacula. See also Appendix 10 - fact sheet on mowing techniques and habitat piles for reptiles.

- **Rolling**

Light weight rollers with crimped edges are used and towed behind an ATV or tractor. Rolling has a similar effect to cutting as it reduces the vigour of bracken rhizomes. Timing and risks to other wildlife are the same as for cutting, so precautions such as checking for hibernacula and walking the site prior to rolling should be followed.

4.3.3 MAINTENANCE OF SUCCESSIONAL AREAS AND SCRUB - HC15 HLS OPTION

The Common has a valuable area of more mixed scrub along the southern edge. See Appendix 4 - HLS Agreement Map and Appendix 6 - FEP Map. This scrub is a mixture of over-mature gorse, blackthorn and goat willow and occasional scrubby oak and is an extremely valuable habitat. It is particularly for nesting birds. Linnet, bullfinch and nightingale have all been recorded at Knodishall and all benefit from good scrub habitat along with a range of more common garden bird species and other summer migrants such as whitethroat, blackcap and chaff-chaff. This belt of scrub also provides an important visual and sound screen to the road and plays a role in discouraging inappropriate access on to the Common.

The aim of HC15 is to encourage the rotational coppicing of the scrub in this area, to maintain and enhance its 'thicket' structure which will benefit wildlife as well as retaining a roadside screen.

4.3.3a Maintenance of scrub by coppicing

The method for setting up rotational coppicing of this area will be comparable to that of coppicing gorse described in 4.3.2.b. However, the rotation will be on a longer cycle of 15-20 years.

Just as for gorse, no more than a tenth of the area should be coppiced in a given year and coppicing blocks should be chosen to ensure that 'roadside' scrub alternates with Common side scrub to ensure that a visual and physical screen between the Common and the road is retained at all times.

The fact sheet in Appendix 8 outlines the principles of scrub management.

4.3.4 RE-POLLARDING OF WILLOWS AND REMOVAL OF POPLARS UNDER HLS CAPITAL WORKS

The early years of the HLS agreement provided capital funding for the— re-pollarding of 3 riverside willows **TS2 x 3** and the removal of 2 poplars **TRE x 2**. See Appendix 4 - HLS map. This work has been completed and will therefore maintain the characteristic river side willow pollards. The poplars were not characteristic and too large for the site.

No methodology was given for tree works as the size of the trees involved required a professional tree surgeon. However, all tree works should be carried out in the winter and trees should be assessed for the likelihood of bats before undertaking the work. Bats are fully protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1982 so it is important that any work is timed and carried out in a way that will not adversely affect them.

4.3.5 NON-INTERVENTION AREAS WITHIN THE HLS AGREEMENT (NO OPTIONS)

There is a strip of woodland/scrub/bracken running down the southwest side of the Common. See Appendix 6 - FEP Map. This has some planted trees, and currently has an under-storey which is a mosaic of bracken, gorse, rough grass. It also includes some features such as 'habitat' piles that would be suitable for reptiles. It is a valuable buffer to the adjacent arable fields beyond.

Although this area isn't formally covered by any HLS options, it is none the less part of the HLS agreement area. The expectation of the HLS agreement is therefore that this area would remain as semi-natural habitat and not be substantially altered in anyway. To ensure compliance with the HLS, it

is advised that any management proposals for this area are drafted to Natural England before going ahead. There may be some benefit in keeping its current 'open' characteristics rather than letting it close over to woodland, so retaining a mosaic of glades, scrub and trees. This would certainly benefit reptiles. This could be achieved by selective thinning of trees and occasional cutting of bracken if it becomes too dominant.



4.4 GENERIC MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations that follow are relevant to both the area within the HLS agreement and the wider Common.

4.4.1 FIRE RISK

Like most heathland sites, the Common has a high fire risk, particularly in periods of prolonged dry weather. An important part of managing the Common is regularly assessing fire risk, maintaining and updating a risk assessment and code of practice.

Fire risk is inherent on dry lowland heaths but can be reduced through the maintenance of fire breaks, ensuring any brash generated by management is burnt/disposed of in a way that does not increase a fire hazard e.g. on bare ground/raised tin or off site (see 4.4.3 below). It is also vital that all those working and living on and around the Common are aware of risks and know what to do in the case of a fire emergency.

The Common has a number of incidental firebreaks in the form of tracks and roads. In addition, a firebreak has been established and is maintained around some isolated properties at the northern end of the Common – Cozy Cottage, Sparrow’s Cottage and Elm Tree Cottage. This consists of an earth bank immediately adjacent to the properties bordered by a firebreak of approximately 6m wide that is kept short and therefore of low flammability. This should be maintained by regular cutting as required. If it is felt necessary to strengthen the firebreak, establishment of a cultivated strip may be considered. Guidance on the method and timing of creating such a strip should be sort prior to carrying out such work. Another firebreak is maintained by cutting beside the fence line of properties along the eastern edge of the smaller block of common between Office and Mill Roads.

Due to the fire of 2022, it is recommended that the Parish Council confer with the local fire service on all aspects of fire safety at the common and follow any professional advice given. Where this may impact with the HLS agreement or management plan, Natural England should be informed.

4.4.2 TREES

Heathland habitat is generally a mosaic of scrub, dwarf shrub and acid grassland, with few if any mature trees. In addition, many trees species such as self-sown birch and sycamore can be very invasive on heathland – gradually shading out the vegetation beneath.

For this reason, it is recommended that there is a presumption against allowing any more mature trees to develop and there should certainly be no planting of trees on the Common.

Currently, the Common has relatively few mature trees, so tree control is not really a current issue. In addition, some of the mature trees are part of the character of the Common, such as the older ‘scrubby’ oaks. However, it is recommended that if seedling and sapling trees are exposed by gorse control and coppicing, that these be removed at the same time and that spread of invasive species such as birch and sycamore is monitored and addressed as necessary. For method for tree removal see section 4.3.2a on gorse reduction.

On the small area of common there is an on-going problem with poplar suckers from a mature tree on the edge. To some extent these will be controlled by rotational cutting of the open areas, but they can also be controlled by annual cutting and spot-treatment in the same manner as for gorse.

4.4.3 BRASH DISPOSAL

The management work set out in sections 4.3.2, 4.3.3, 4.3.4 and 4.4.2 above will generate a lot of material that will be in need of processing and disposal. A number of options are possible and may be used in combination:

- A limited amount of material can be shredded and used to make habitat piles. See Appendix 10 fact sheet on mowing techniques and habitat piles for reptiles. The location of these sites needs to be carefully selected so they will not need to be disturbed, are not damaging valuable vegetation beneath, are not a fire hazard and are accessible to those carrying out the work. The same locations should be used each year and the number of piles not allowed to proliferate. The 'woodland' area along the southwestern edge of the Common with no HLS options on it might be a suitable location for some habitat piles.
- It may be possible to have some 'burn sites' on the Common, to enable brash to be burnt for example in an area of recently coppiced gorse, within a scrub clearing. These should be on raised tin so that the ash can be removed. Burn sites should be selected that will not damage the underlying vegetation or spread into adjacent vegetation and will not be a fire hazard. See Appendix 7 - HLS prescriptions. The burn sites should be kept small and controlled and manned at all times. Burning should only take place in the autumn/winter when surrounding area is 'damp' so reducing the fire hazard.
- Material may be able to be carted off site with tractor and trailer and disposed /burnt off site with the agreement of a local farmer. Shredded material may also be carted off site and go to a green waste processing plant.
- Larger firewood size material may be offered for collection to local people, provided this complies with any existing Common Rights and Firewood Regulations.

4.4.4 LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

It is important that all work carried out on the Common complies with any legal obligations that the parish council may have— considerations include:

- Meeting the requirements of the Commons Acts 1876 and 1899, the Law of Property Act 1925 and the Commons Registration Act 1965 particularly with regard to any Common Rights and preventing encroachment on to the Common
- Meeting all necessary Health and Safety requirements for activities and work on the Common

- Ensuring all work is timed and done in such a way to comply with wildlife legislation e.g. taking in account the possible presence of reptiles when carrying out work, not working during the bird nesting season, checking for bats prior to tree surgery.
- Ensuring work takes into account and does not damage any utilities e.g water services, overhead wires. NB it is possible that the utility companies may carry out their own maintenance which may affect areas within the agreement. To ensure that such work does not affect the terms of the agreement – the parish council should let Natural England know when such work is undertaken.

4.4.5 PUBLIC INTEREST AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

The Common is a focal and valued local asset which already has considerable support from the community. However, it would be beneficial to increase local engagement with the area by:

- Encouraging monitoring/recording/research on the Common. Recent biological records for the Common are relatively few, so it would be good to update records. The records would also be extremely useful to help inform management.
- Highlight some of interest features through appropriate interpretation etc. website, on village noticeboard etc.
- Hold informal events on the Common to explore its natural, social and landscape history.
- Encourage the local school to use the Common as an outdoor classroom.
- Consider forming a 'Friends of the Common' Group to help with work on the Common, whether through work parties, litter picks, recording or co-ordinating communications such as website.

Suffolk Wildlife Trust's Team Wilder could help with increasing community and school involvement. Further details of this project can be found on the Suffolk Wildlife Trust Website.

5 ANNUAL/ROUTINE MANAGEMENT SUMMARY

Management and timing	Method	HLS Option area
Tree management (December – February)	Selection and removal of occasional trees/saplings causing shading issues e.g. self-seeded silver birch	H02,HC15
Gorse coppicing as and when required. (October– February)	Rotational cutting of gorse to encourage thicker re-growth and improve structure and stability	H02
Scrub coppicing (December – February)	Rotational cutting of scrub such as bramble/blackthorn to encourage thicker re-growth and improve structure for nesting birds particularly nightingale	HC15
Gorse reduction as and when required. (October - February)	Cutting back and treating stumps if required	H02 and Capital works SS +SB First two years of the agreement.
Firebreak maintenance (March- October)	Cut regular and keep short as required	H02
Bracken management (Cutting/rolling late June and again in August Raking up litter October – February)	Control of Bracken though cutting and or rolling. Raking up litter	H02 and Capital works – BMA + BMB
Dwarf shrub (heather)/grassland management (August-September)	Rotational cutting down to about 2-4” to maintain diverse age structure and to check bramble encroachment. (Important to avoid scalping of ground when cutting)	H02
Re-pollarding willows and removal of poplars (November- February)	As set out in HLS capital works plan	Capital works TS and TRE First two years of the agreement
Monitoring and Recording (All year round)	Ongoing survey work and recording to monitor key species and effects of management	Throughout the Common

6. FURTHER READING AND USEFUL INFORMATION

Whilst this management plan aims to be as comprehensive as possible there are other publications and sources of information on heathlands and commons that would provide additional relevant information.

SCDC produced a Knodishall Common Management Plan in May 2002 which includes useful information on the Common, including maps, past management, a copy of byelaws and species information. A copy of this is held by Knodishall Parish Council, SCDC and SWT.

Natural England's Farm Environment Plan (FEP) Manual (Third edition) and Higher Level Stewardship Handbook (Fourth Addition) are useful for interpreting the FEP and HLS options.

The full Knodishall HLS agreement - reference AG00408986— held by Knodishall Parish Council and Natural England (only parts are reproduced in the appendices of this management plan).

The RSPB publication – A practical guide to the restoration and management of lowland heathland by Symes N C and Day J (2003) is a very good guide to practical heathland management and can be purchased from the RSPB website.

The 'commons toolkit' fact sheet series by Natural England provides useful information on many aspects of common management.

The Natural England Scrub Management handbook has excellent information on all aspects of scrub management including gorse and again can be downloaded in full or in sections from the Natural England website.

The Amphibian and Reptile Conservation publication - Reptile Habitat Management Handbook by Paul Edgar, Jim Foster and John Baker (2010) can be purchased or downloaded from the Amphibian and Reptile Conservation website.

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Westleton Common Friends and Parish Council for permission to use Westleton Common's management plan as a template for this plan.