

**Appendix 2, Paper A**  
**Consultations sought and responses received for Odiham Commons**  
**Management Plan draft proposal 2022-2031**

Draft plan and associated documentation sent to the following: -

Local Ward Members

Odiham Parish Council

Basingstoke Canal Society (no response received)

Forestry Commission (in addition to this response, HDC liaised with FC in an extensive consultation on the overall Woodland Management Plan for site)

Natural England

Resident representatives for Poland Lane, Bagwell Lane and Potbridge

Hampshire County Council

National Trust (adjacent landowner)

Hart DC responses are shown in bold italics below and general points have been collated and address in the Odiham Management Plan 2022-31 DRAFT under Section 10.2 'Responses'.

**National Trust response:**

Dear Liz and Hart Countryside Team,

Thank you for sending over the Odiham Common draft management plan. As neighbouring landowners, I have looked over the management plan and approve the content. I believe the introduction to grazing livestock on the common will be most beneficial.

The National Trust have introduced grazing cattle to one of our woodland reserves (The Chase, near Newbury) with great success.

[The Chase | National Trust](#)

Please keep us up to date with any works planned around the hunting lodge/Wilks water. A joint venture between ranger teams in the future would also be welcomed.

**Natural England response**

Hi Liz,

As requested, please find below my feedback after sight of the management plan for the common.

Firstly, I think your vision for the woodland on page 5 of the plan corresponds well with the SSSI objectives set for the broadleaved wood and wood pasture elements of the common.

Your mention of the common acting as a green corridor on page 6 rather deftly reflects one of Natural England's main focus areas of nature recovery, as well as our future plan to create a nature recovery network that aims to ensure protected sites remain in favourable condition and that also both expands and connects protected sites within a local area.

It is promising to see the inclusion of grazing as a potential future management option in the Opportunities section of the plan, as it could help maintain a varied sward structure for the benefit of each grassland habitat's associated invertebrate assemblages across the common, in addition to supporting the maintenance of scrub cover within target for favourable condition of the site.

The management objectives covered on pages 30-31 align agreeably with the site-specific targets set for the special interest features of the common that define favourable condition for this SSSI.

Finally, it is heartening to see that over and above the detailed outline of measures to enhance biodiversity across the common, the management objectives also have a good breadth in terms of encouraging opportunities to engage with the local community, which is another key focus area of the organisation under our Connecting people with nature work programme.

I do hope this feedback proves useful!

Kind regards,

Natalie

**Follow-up response from NE to Hart DC's query about path surfacing and access:**

Natural England cannot specify particularly exacting or appropriate levels of access by the public to land that is owned by a third party. Having said that, with land that has a SSSI designation, then the management of the site concerning public access should attempt to limit both disturbance or damage to the special features of interest for which the site was originally designated.

As an example of this, path maintenance for use of by the public should be undertaken in the most practical way to reduce the risk of changing the extent of adjoining notifiable habitats, which could lead to in some circumstances to either the introduction of non-native invasive species or pollution of nearby watercourses. Any plans for enhancing public access or adapting recreational use of SSSIs should be judiciously studied to enable their compliance with the future maintenance of monitored features on site.

In relation to commons, there is a greater requirement that works reflect their locality, so local materials that mirror existing foot paths should be employed for use of in resurfacing a path.

Best,

Natalie

**Hampshire County Council response**

Odiham plan looks good. You guys know what you are doing, so nothing further from me!

**Odiham Parish Council response**

Dear Liz

I confirm that Odiham Parish Councillors discussed the Management Plan at their full Council meeting on Tuesday.

Councillors made no comment on the proposed ecological management of the Common but did support residents in their request for representation on the Consultative Committee.

Please can you keep the Parish Council updated on this. Cllr Coleman is Odiham Parish Council's representative but it would be good to be kept in the loop.

Many thanks

Andrea

*Hart response to Parish Council, following clarification discussion*

*Hi Andrea,*

*Further to our conversation today I wanted to clarify the main point we discussed. It was unclear from your email whether the objection was to have no consultative group or whether it was more to do with residents being excluded from a consultative group and not having their voices heard. My understanding from you is that it is mostly about residents feeling they have no mechanism to express their views in the new management plan proposal.*

*To be clear, the most recent consultative group for Odiham originally set up for a specific common purpose to write the previous management plan, which had a considerable amount of significant works proposed (mainly the open space creation, timber removal, etc). The group should have ended at the end of the 'project' and been replaced with more typical methods of communication in line with other sites, but for no particular reason has never officially ended (but should have done once the original purpose of the group had been met, i.e. completion of the previous 'project'.*

*I think we all agree that a positive aspect of managing our local area is engagement with residents and site users. However, the current engagement is heavily focused on a small handful of properties that are in the closest proximity to the site, but should really reflect the views of residents across the wider community Odiham/Winchfield/etc. Therefore, what we propose is to liaise with the Parish Council and Ward members who will be in tune with the needs and views of their local residents, so that you can liaise directly with us and feed back comments and queries. We feel this would provide a clear mechanism for balanced engagement with the entire community. In addition, we would continue to respond to individual resident comments/enquiries through our usual channels, e.g. via website/email enquiries, on a more ad hoc basis, as is the case in other areas across Hart.*

*For significant future projects, there will be a stakeholder engagement process that will identify the relevant people and groups, as and when such projects arise.*

*I hope this clarifies things and please come back to me with any additional comments you have from your councillors on this. I understand this will go to Overview and Scrutiny, so there will be an opportunity for further comments with those in attendance, at that point.*

*Many thanks,*

*Liz*

### **Odiham Society response**

Liz,

Sincere apologies for not responding to your requests for comments on the Odiham Common Management Plan. The Society has been a bit pre-occupied recently with the move of our archives to our new home in the Parish Room in Odiham and our launch of our first exhibition on subjects connected with the village.

We have reviewed the draft plan and we feel that it is an excellent document and forms a sound basis for the future management of this very important local natural asset.

I have a few minor comments:

1. Page 15 - Should the reference be to 'Bartley Heath' not 'Hartley Heath'? Hartley Heath may be correct but I have never heard of it.

2. Page 19 - I was interested in the reference to otters but surely these would inhabit the canal itself rather than the common as their main source of food is fish. (incidentally I gather that otter spraint has been found near Colt Hill bridge).

3. Page 29 - In para 3 note that 'plants' should be 'plans'.

I note a couple of references to the possibility of introducing grazing on the Common but this appears to be a long term objective (2030 is mentioned). If grazing is desirable, I would question why it is not being considered sooner, although I appreciate that it is a controversial issue.

As I have mentioned, the Odiham Society is now planning to arrange periodic exhibitions at the Parish Room and we would like to explore with you the possibility of having an exhibition focusing on the history and ecological importance of the common. Would you and your colleagues be interested in working with us on that idea? The exhibition could be used to promote the Management Plan.

Best wishes

Philip

### **Forestry Commission response**

Hi Liz

I hope you are well and thank you very much for your email. I am sorry it has taken so long to get back to you. As you have stated you already got an approved WMP from ourselves, so we have little to add. I would though highlight the need for active Chalara management as a priority and draw up a work programme on tackling this as sadly the situation will not improve.

I also wish to draw your attention to the fact we received numerous emails from the residents of Potbridge raising concerns over the work planned, the following is a section of a letter we received that went to our CEO and I believe the MP "agree that the proposals for thinning and Holly reduction in Potbridge be removed from the Woodland Management Plan. In my letter of 10 November I

explained again my purpose in writing to Mr Stanford was to ask him to agree that the proposals for thinning and Holly reduction in Potbridge be removed from the Woodland Management Plan. I hope our request and the reasons behind it are clear in our letters to you. All the residents in Potbridge, our District Councillors, and James Sunderland, the MP resident in Potbridge, all know that the proposed felling in Potbridge would be extremely bad”.

I trust any consultation with the residents has been include in drawing up the plan

Regards

Andy Glover

### Cllr 1 response

Many thanks for these, I've had a careful read through.

I'm hoping and expecting that the residents group will respond separately and in detail. They have built up a comprehensive knowledge of the site and its issues over the years and the more we can show we've listened to them (not quite the same as agreeing!) then the better the relationship should be and hopefully you can help them understand the difficult choices that have to be made.

From my perspective I would note:-

#### **Odiham Common Management Plan (March 2022)**

1. General, the PDF document shows as “Gypsy Traveller and....” In the tab heading. This can be fixed by editing the Document Title in the Properties (under Info in the File menu).  
**Completed**
  - a. Very happy to help with Word issues, if necessary and apologies, if you're already very familiar.
  - b. It might have been easier to circulate the Word version for comments and edits, as you can merge the comments and tracked changes.
2. Page 3 – this should auto update, but you can force that by clicking anywhere in the document, use Ctrl-A to select all and then right click and select “Update Field” **Completed**
3. 1, page 4 – I would suggest a “purpose and scope” section would be helpful to be very clear about the purpose of the document and its scope (both geographically and authoritatively).  
**Added**
4. 1.1 – It should also refer to the Hart Local Plan 2020 **Content of Hart Local Plan not directly relevant, relates more to planning policy**
5. 1.2.2
  - a. The reference to the SSSI doesn't explain how it relates to the site and reports its current condition. Suggest adding “...and this is to be maintained going forward by the policies and actions described in section x.y.z). **This section is a vision for the future and should not include information on how the site will be maintained.**
  - b. Page 5 – this is mainly description, not vision. **The vision is an aspirational description of the site as we envisage it in the future.**
6. 1.2.3 – this is also mainly historic description, which is good to have, but should be in a separate section. Any vision should be forward looking. **Couldn't find reference to historic description**
7. 2.1 – Who are the “customers”? Would help to provide some guidance. I think its members of the public using the space and any organisation paying (or needing permission) for access. **Have amended to reflect general 'customers'**
8. 2.3 – Reference to Map 1 (page 53). Unfortunately the map image is too low quality to be read. It would be helpful to also show the SSSI boundaries. **PDF version shared was lower**

- quality, but original Word Doc is in a higher quality. SSSI boundaries shown on Map 3, but have asked consultant to make this clearer**
- a. Similarly for Map 2 and several others.
  - b. The area that is the “common” includes private house that appear to be outside the SSSI designation, yet clear influence the overall site. It would benefit from some description of these features (or maybe in 2.5?) **Have added detail in Section 3.10.1.1 ‘Physical’**
9. 2.7.1 – When was the Emergency Plan last reviewed? When is that due? Does Hampshire Fire & Rescue get a copy? **Reviewed annually. Hampshire Fire and Rescue have original copy**
10. 2.7.3 – This needs a little update, as we don’t have a Dog Warden any longer. **Amended**
11. 2.9.1
- a. page 12 – its not clear which “management plan” is being referred to. **Changed wording for clarification**
  - b. The comms policy seems to be focussed at Parish Councils, rather than the Odiham Consultative Group, which includes the various stakeholders. **Have added Hart response in Appendix under ‘Responses’, which addresses the frequently raised comments/queries**
    - i. Also in section 3.1.3,
1. 2.9.2 – Suggest this should explain how those working parties will be formed. “...through specific requests to the Odiham Consultative Group, who will cascade such request to their members.” **As above**
- a. Additionally, I’m aware that the Scout Association often seeks areas to undertake service works on, so could be another source of effort.
2. 2.9.5 – Should this point to a future action to conduct a survey? **Added a line for future consideration (Section 3.9.5)**
3. 2.10.2.1
- a. Would a copy of Appendix 5 be available on the Hart website? And add the link. **Not sure which Appendix 5 is – presumable the internal document table. This is shown as a summary table – the annual recording and monitoring document will remain an internal document as it is for operational purposes and not suitable for publication.**
  - b. It would be helpful to show these features on a map, I think most show-up on the Hart GIS tool.
4. 3.2 (3) Plants -> “plans”? **Amended**
5. 3.2.1 – These targets (and KPIs) need specific dates, so that work is reasonably prioritised and spread through the plan period. **Target dates are shown in 5.1 Action plan and timetable**
6. 4.4 – There is a lot of detail here, I can only assume that it makes good sense to those that know such things! **Hopefully!**
7. 5.1 – With a “completed” column (and other information columns), would there be annual updates to this Plan or a separate progress report? **‘6.1 Operational activity summary’ is an example to demonstrate the key information that will be recorded, to help staff keep track of works internally. The rest of the plan outlines what should be delivered over the ten years and will be available to the general public. This type of recording table will be used by managers and site rangers to monitor work activities and amend as needed (e.g. where works were not completed, whether they should be moved into another year, etc). Progress reports will be a requirement by Rural Payments Agency/Natural England/Forestry Commission/etc, as requested to demonstrate we are meeting any legal requirements and agreements.**
- a. And 5.2 etc

### Ash Dieback Management Plan (Draft 2020)

1. I would recommend page, section and version numbers to ease referencing. **Amended**
2. The overall plan looks good to me, but suggest that the consideration of "risk" should be more than just property. It should include: popular paths, roads and infrastructure items (eg. telephone and power cables) at direct risk. Clearly a broken phone line is a smaller risk than a downed power cable. **The different types of risk are shown in the plan as examples, but not limited to these. Have added roads and infrastructure items.**
3. I wonder if the grades, inspection rates and actions could be more usefully added to Table 1 for easier referencing? **Inspection rates added, grades and actions already included.**
4. Table 2 to be completed. **This is an example table so does not require completing. Have added information about the current software Hart DC uses to record hazardous tree information.**

I hope that all makes sense, very happy to answer questions and explain more if that helps.

### Cllr B response

I have taken a look at the draft management plan and have seen Councillor (A)'s input which I agree and support. Below are some comments from me.

#### Section 1 Priorities and Vision.

It is clear from this section that Odiham Common is a unique challenge for Hart's Countryside team in that it is managed primarily to protect and enhance its biodiversity unlike other assets like the County Parks which are managed primarily as SANG "leisure" facilities.

1.2.2 refers to "effective engagement" with members of the public. This has historically been challenging at times in particular in achieving a joint vision of the Common as a "wild place and cultural landscape", a very different place from a country park.

This management plan is a unique opportunity to create and agree that shared vision.

#### Section 2 ,

##### 2.8.1 Past management for Nature Conservation.

The section title is significant and indicates Hart's priorities for the site. It would perhaps be useful to categorise the management activities for clarity, something like:

- what we do to enhance biodiversity
- what we do to facilitate public access and enjoyment
- what we do to control "invasive species"

This approach might better enable public understanding and engagement. This section includes the word "grazing" which has had an unfortunate negative history.

***This section (3.8.1) specifically refers to management for nature conservation, so have added the word 'habitat management' to further clarify. Public access and enjoyment is addressed in other sections, such as '3.9 People'***

My personal view is that it is now time to reconsider selective grazing as a means of natural management and an alternative to modern, disruptive and damaging mechanical management. Hart and Hampshire Wildlife Trust now have a lot of experience of selective grazing and it should not be ruled out for Odiham Common.

I note the comments in 2.10.6.4 on this topic.

## 2.9 People

When the Consultative Group was formed to support the Common Purpose, many stakeholders, such as the Open Spaces Society and others, had an interest. It is now appropriate to update the stakeholder engagement arrangements and work with those stakeholders who are most passionate and engaged with Odiham Common. Working solely with Parish Councils will in my view not be inclusive enough. Ward District Councillors and interested residents should be included. The future arrangements set out in paragraph 2.9.1 need to be updated to provide more detail.

***This has been addressed in the Appendix under 'Responses' section***

## 2.10.7.4

I welcome the opportunities set out in this paragraph including re reinstatement of occasional ranger led walks on the Common.

## 3.2 Management objectives

On the whole I support these objectives with a couple of concerns:

1. Tree felling in the plan period should be restricted to only that which is necessary to manage Ash die back.

***This has been addressed in Appendix 'Responses' section***

2. Management of existing open spaces by mechanical means should be done with great care not to damage paths and rides.

***Agreed, will partly depend on other factors such as resources, restrictions to when contractors can get onto site, National Grid and the works they carry out, but we will do***



***our best to reduce impact by working with National Grid for less visual impact, e.g. rutting.***

### 3.2.1 Targets and Performance Indicators and sections 4 Action Plan and 5 Monitoring

I don't wish to comment on particular indicators or action plan items but note that there are quite a number. A couple of comments:

1. It is not clear to me how the plan consultation responses will be handled. In the past Hart's Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) have considered evolving plans and made recommendations to Cabinet to advise on plan adoption. This might include detailed scrutiny of indicators and action plans.

***Understanding is that this will go to Overview and Scrutiny, then Cabinet for endorsement. An additional section has been added in the Appendix under 'Responses', which will be recirculated to consultees, to show consideration of key points raised and responses***

2. O&S have regular service plan reviews with heads of service. It would probably be appropriate for Odiham Common plan to be included in these service reviews.

***Head of Service has been engaged with as part of the Odiham Management Plan review process***

## **Feedback from Resident Representatives**

### **Odiham Common Management Plan – letter addressed to Cllr. Neighbour following circulation of draft management plan:**

Liz Vango circulated the new Management Plan just before the school half term and Jubilee Bank Holiday when some members of the community, including one of the residents' representatives and the Chairman of the residents association, were on holiday. We are sorry but it was therefore impossible for us to meet the abbreviated deadline.

Ever since 1994 the residents have shown a huge interest in the common. This is not surprising as they live within the ambit of the common; use the common regularly with many walking their dogs daily; they value the benefits the common provides to them through informal recreation, exercise, wellbeing, tranquillity; and closeness to nature and wildlife. The common is a key part of their daily lives. The Land Use Consultants surveys in 2009/10 confirmed the common was predominantly used by the local community. Representatives of the residents have served on every committee organised by Hart since 1994 and bring the usually unique perspectives of the user experience and public enjoyment: perspectives that Natural England, Forestry Commission and Hart Countryside do not provide.

The consultation on the new Management Plan has started for many of the residents by looking at the last ten years. We were surprised there was no review with the Consultative Committee at the end of the last Plan. What went well? What not so well? What lessons can we learn and take forward? As the residents reviewed the last 10 years they saw a common that had deteriorated. In 2010 the residents questioned the amount of open space that Hart planned to create and had doubts about their ability to cope with managing the new open space especially as funding tends to be for creating something rather than maintaining it. Those doubts proved to be fully justified. Trees were felled and replaced by bracken and bramble that is now rampant. Open spaces might be cut once but then the mowing was reduced to cutting a path through the space and then abandoned. Paths and rides were identified as problem issues in 2010 that prevented enjoyment of the common but little was done and so the problem has simply got worse. Many were waterlogged even in our survey in mid-July 2021 and of course are even worse during the winter months. Management of the paths/rides has been poor and in the next 10 years Hart barely get beyond plotting them and so there is no optimism there will any significant improvement in the paths/rides during the next plan. Grass cutting on the rides, paths and open glades has been reduced from twice a year ( see page 3 of the 2010 Plan) to once and in the next ten years it seems they will at best have a cut in the autumn with some every other year in the first five years. Many of the waterlogged paths were adjacent to areas of tree felling and we notice trees are to be 'thinned' close to an entrance on the B3016 used by visitors parking their car and adjacent to a wide ride that provides an important entry point for humans and horses and is notoriously waterlogged particularly of course in the wetter winter months. The last woodland area to be 'thinned' near Bagwell pond is now a beautiful, wall to wall carpet of bracken. Are we sure the proposed 'thinning' will not lead to greater water problems on the ride and another carpet of bracken that will deter visitors? It seems significant to us that the driest paths are where no felling has taken place and the worst close to felling.

It is of course good to learn of the great crested newts but users also like simple wildlife like ducks. Ducks had been on the ponds for at least 40 years but where are they now? Perhaps they do not like the algae and grass filled ponds. The residents are therefore pleased that two ponds will be managed during the next ten years although Bagwell Pond was dredged during the last Plan but to no good effect. It was not surprising that Hart refused to allow the consultative committee to meet from 2015 to 2019 but in 2017 we did submit the attached memorandum to Steve Lyons identifying some of the issues of importance to the users at that time although there was no evidence it was welcomed or valued. The outcome of the last 10 years is a less attractive common with a much changed landscape in need of maintenance of paths/rides, open spaces, bracken/bramble, and water management. The number of visitors has dwindled. For example some residents choose to walk on other PROWs than struggle through mud filled paths and there are fewer riders. There was an upturn in new visitors from the local community at the start of the Covid lockdown but they have not been retained.

There are two specific issues we wish to highlight. Firstly the residents are bemused by Hart official's proposal to abandon the consultative committee. There is no explanation of why this would be beneficial. It flies in the face of the DEFRA guide 'A Common Purpose: A guide to agreeing management on common land' that sets out best practice for managing a common and stresses the views of all interested parties should be taken into account. That was the process used by LUC in preparing the 2010 Management Plan but it has been abandoned for the current Plan. There is frequent mention of the importance of engagement in the Management Plan and it is difficult to reconcile this with the reduction in the engagement with the relevant district councillors and residents' representatives by abolishing the Consultative Committee. Of course the Parish Councils must be involved but, if you have interested parties with knowledge of the common willing to participate, bringing all the expertise together is surely the best option. It is difficult to think of organisations willingly abandoning direct engagement with end users. Walks on the common with the ranger are hardly a satisfactory alternative to positive engagement with all parties.

Our second issue concerns the felling in Potbridge. After a site visit in June 2020 involving the three residents' representatives and two Hart rangers it was agreed, apart from two or three specific trees, no felling would take place in the Potbridge East section of the common i.e. between Potbridge Road and the B3016 in recognition that Potbridge lay between two busy roads – the M3 and B3016 – and the trees provided a valuable sound barrier as well as a much valued character and sense of place. This agreement was confirmed in the exchange of e-mails from two of the residents' representatives on 23 June 2020, 1 and 2 July 2020 and from Hart on 1 July. For Potbridge West we suggested removing the 10%+ felling until the preparation of the ash die back plan so that the two issues could be considered in context. However, when the residents next saw the Woodland Management Plan in 2021, felling in Potbridge was included and at 30%+. We reminded Hart of the agreement and asked to revert to it. On 2 June 2021 Hart suggested for the East section having a no felling zone parallel to Potbridge Road in which only trees providing a H&S issue or standard maintenance be felled and with only a 10% felling in a strip parallel to the B3016 although the residents still favoured the original agreement. We next saw the Woodland Management Plan on 21 July 2021 and were astonished to see 30% felling was still included and again took issue with Hart as we thought they had made a simple mistake and inserted the wrong section into the document. We never received a response but assumed the document had been corrected. We then discovered in September 2021 that without any explanation Hart had submitted the Woodland Management Plan to the Forestry Commission with the East section having a 30% thinning plus a reduction of Holly (that accounts for 20% of the trees in the section), plus removal of necessary ash die back trees (5% of the trees in the section), plus haloing of a veteran tree. In the West 10% tree thinning plus removal of ash die back trees. Ash accounts for 15% of the trees in the West. Liz Vango explained that felling in Potbridge had been included 'because FC have said the entire site must be included for reasonable management techniques'. The result is that felling of some 40% of the trees to the East and 20% to the West are included in the current Management Plan. The mortality rate from ash die back is some 90% and so a 10% thinning in the West

can be expected from the natural consequences of ash die back and felling of that scale in Potbridge East would be devastating and so unnecessary.

The good news is that the Forestry Commission advised us on 29 November 2021 that 'the works proposed in the Woodland Management Plan are not legally binding, that Hart District Council will not face any action from the Forestry Commission if they do not undertake the felling'. They clarified that advice on 7 December 2021 by telling us 'The work in the Woodland Management is not legally binding and the FC do not insist that the work is carried out, we have no legal powers to enforce the felling that is in the plan. The FC whilst reviewing the works stated that felling could be carried out within areas other than those that were originally stated. There are areas of Ash trees within the common that are suffering from chalara and unfortunately a significant amount of these will die.' There is thus a very clear statement from Forestry Commission that there is no need to include thinning, et al in Potbridge in the Management plan. Natural consequences of ash die back on the West Section will more than reduce the trees by 10% and they have indicated there will be more than enough natural ash die back felling elsewhere on the common. The Hart proposals about Potbridge East ranging from no felling; a no felling zone and strip parallel to the B3016 with 10% felling; to the current 40% felling hardly suggest there is a sound scientific basis for including 40% in the Management Plan. There is no funding for the felling. It is nonsense to include an activity no one wants, that is non critical and that has no funding: if additional funding happens to become available it should be allocated to activities that are desired and will increase public enjoyment. We therefore respectfully request that felling in Potbridge be deleted except for haloing, ash die back, H&S, or standard maintenance.

A key part of good public sector management is transparency and accountability. As we have briefly set out our experience is that the track record of management activity over the past 10 years on Odiham Common has not been good. If external engagement is to be reduced we would see a need for greater internal accountability of objectives and outcomes of the Countryside Department in relation to its activities on Odiham Common.

As one household reminisce of daily walks on an attractive common with a unique character, landscape and sense of place; weekly walks with the children to feed the ducks and embed a love of nature and wildlife in the next generation; leaving food at the regular place for the fox, checking the next day that it has all gone, and replenishing it; watching in hushed silence as a deer gives birth; standing in awe as four small fox cubs run towards us thinking we were mother returning with lunch, only to realise we were mere humans that provoked a screeching stop, a magical moment as we gazed at each other before they turned turtle and dashed off. All now consigned to history and on the current common not likely to be repeated.

As we say au revoir we trust we have provided you with a picture of the common without the consultant's rose tinted spectacles and signposted for you and your Cabinet colleagues what really needs to be done. A common, even one that 200% ticks all the bio-diversity boxes, but with dwindling users and shorn of those who provide a passionate interest in its well-being, provide support and defend it, where public enjoyment is simply a luxury extra that is always lost in bio-diversity priorities is indeed a sad, dark and dank place. We fear for the future of the common especially with officials seeking to simply have their way. It has underachieved and failed to provide its full potential benefits to the local community.

The new Management Plan is merely a biodiversity plan with lip service to wider benefits and aspirations for the common. Bio-diversity of course is important and after the 2004 Public Inquiry when Hart and Natural England had their plans for the common rejected a Director of Natural England confidentially visited the residents in Potbridge to look at the common and offered removal of the SSSI designation. The residents rejected the removal of the SSSI status and so we hope you can appreciate we do support bio-diversity objectives but there is a wider remit. The pace of change should be at a rate that can manage the new maintenance requirements and does not lose sight of the unique landscape, sense of place, or character; recognition that good paths and rides provide the essential infrastructure of the common all of which are ingredients of healthy exercise and improved mental health and mood; and that public enjoyment is an essential and not a luxury. There are words about engagement and health and wellbeing but they are very lightweight – health and well-being objectives limited to liaison with the parish councils and on/off-site events and engagement actually reduced. We may have missed it but we did not see much recognition of public enjoyment. If the common is to realise its full potential and maximise all the benefits it can provide to the community a bio-diversity approach in itself is inadequate We suggest

- A change of culture is required to genuinely embrace the wider potential of the common, understand the elements that contribute to the wider potential, and be willing to accept others may have an occasional view that is legitimate and valuable
- Some of the key objectives and targets need to be sharper with progress monitored at appropriate stage points throughout the 10 years. For example we welcome the mention of rides and paths but an annual survey was part of the last plan: some of the waterlogged paths would benefit from action now but there are no targets to improve any paths and no funding. Again we welcome bracken and scrub control but in some categories there is no indication of volume or area to be controlled and a clear starting position and clear end position would help identify the effort involved, ensure adequate progress was being achieved, and areas addressed were reviewed for effectiveness of the action: we recognise bracken and bramble return and keep spreading.
- There needs to be greater accountability through the Oversight and Scrutiny Committee.
- Lessons must be learned from the last 10 years. Particularly about the rate of progress and availability of resources. There is no point in dashing into management activities that create

maintenance activities that cannot be met or maintained. For example we support the haloing of trees to provide some great veterans for future generations but 66 is a significant increase on the 20 in the last plan and using the LUC criteria this will create 3.3ha ha of open space. Can this be managed? Managing the common is a marathon not a sprint.

- The Plan indicates £5,800 pa of CS funding is available. Many of the activities are unfunded – including path repairs, ditch management in the central woods and southern pastures, glade management, and ash die back. £2151 pa of the CS funding is earmarked for haloing veteran trees (66 X £326). There is a big backlog of neglected maintenance from the last 10 years but the amount of CS resource available is only half of the funding allocated for the last plan and we ask whether all the activities included represent a realistic aspiration. We fear that any aimed at public enjoyment will be squeezed out.

We bid you Au Revoir and trust you will have the full benefits that the common can provide to the community at heart. We ask you to ensure all available resources are allocated to the neglected backlog of maintenance: water management – waterlogged paths, ditches, ponds; getting control of the rampant bracken and bramble; and adequate mowing to make the common an attractive place for humans to enjoy. The longer these tasks are delayed the worse the common will become and the more expensive to put right.

*Above letter signed by current resident representatives for Potbridge, Bagwell Land and Polland Lane.*

**The following items were received by the Council (from the resident representatives), prior to management plan draft and again following management plan draft circulation:-**

10 year plan to address the following priorities:

1. Public enjoyment and character of common become priorities
2. Waterlogged paths: repair and maintain
3. Ditches and watercourses: inspect, clear; repair and maintain
4. General maintenance: mow; remove invasive bracken and bramble
5. Ponds: clean water and return of birds and wildlife
6. Deal with diseased ash
7. Only fell healthy trees when absolutely necessary and consider the consequences
8. Obtain grants for approved work in the Plan
9. Improve Communication
10. Review work carried out

**Petition also received from Resident Representatives, signed by a number of households living in Bagwell Lane, Potbridge and Poland Lane**

Content of petition:

'You are currently considering the details of the next 10 year plan for Odiham Common. You are aware that public use and enjoyment of the common has deteriorated because of waterlogged paths, poor maintenance, and the big expansion of bracken and bramble.

- We want you to stop the decline.
- We support the response of our representatives to the inadequate draft management plan.
- We want you to positively and constructively engage with representatives of the community and abandon you attempt to terminate the local input. How can you justify termination of the Consultative Committee?
- Give equal weigh to biodiversity and mangement activities that enhance public enjoyment and include some of the latter equally in the 10 year plan.
- Scrap the 'more of the same' approach that will continue the decline of what people appreciate. The common must be a pleasant and enjoyable place for humans.'