

Speaking note for the O&S Committee Odiham Common Management Plan

I speak on behalf of the local people who live on or near the common.

The common is much valued public space used by the local community to enjoy informal recreation. The people we speak for use the common regularly and it is a key part of their daily lives. They are Hart's key customers, stakeholders, and are most affected by changes and activities on the common.

The difficulty of successfully managing Odiham common lies in its dual purpose – it is a SSSI but it also provides public enjoyment to the community – and a successful plan will balance ecological diversity with human use for the benefit of both. The current plan is a biodiversity plan and of course that is essential. The 2010 Plan was also a biodiversity plan but it also embraced human use. It saw the common contributing to quality of life; establishing strong agreement between the various stakeholders; including local people in the management of the common; encouraging enjoyment of the common; and the need for sensitive management to maintain the character with gradual, incremental changes to improve biodiversity. Some of those values and vision have been lost. Biodiversity, enjoyment, engagement should all mix seamlessly into the plan but the list of key performance indicators illustrates the lack of balance. Over the last 12 years public enjoyment and visitor numbers have reduced. One reason has been that the pace of change has outstripped the ability to maintain the changes created.

Potbridge lies between two noisy roads – the M3 and B3016. After a site visit in June 2020 it was agreed no felling would take place in the larger Potbridge compartment and Hart suggested a 10% thinning in the smaller compartment. However when the Woodland Management Plan was submitted felling in the larger compartment had been included to the extent that almost 40% - over 1700 - of the trees would be felled. The smaller compartment we now know has 15% ash. Hart explained that the felling was included because Forestry Commission insisted the entire site was included.

However when we explained to the Forestry Commission the detriment that would be caused they suggested a solution to the problem by the substitution of trees in Potbridge by trees that will have to be felled across the common as

a result of ash dieback. The Forestry Commission e-mail is included in the Appendix.

The Plan proposes replacing the consultative committee by liaison with the parish councils in order to bring a balanced engagement with the entire community. But Odiham Parish Council supports the residents request for continued representation on the Consultative Committee. Winchfield Parish Council has not been consulted. The local residents with their intimate knowledge and use of the common bring a unique perspective to the committee. Given the turbulent history of the common engagement is important. There is nothing to suggest the liaison proposal will achieve the Hart objective or how it would work. We do however agree the present committee does not work well. A revised consultative committee of local stakeholders genuinely sharing ownership of the problems, options for solutions, priorities, and importantly outcomes (with of course the executive authority remaining with Hart) could act as a catalyst.

There is an annual grant of £5,800 but much of this is earmarked for haloing 66 trees and haymaking. Pages 50 and 51 of the plan list 41 habitat operations but only 11 have funding and for example there is no funding for other operations such as path repairs. There is a Hart allocation of £32k but much of this is for a ranger and some of the activities will require contractors.

We attach in the Appendix requests to improve the plan that the Chairman and committee might use.



APPENDIX

1. Invite Cabinet to re-assure itself of the financial viability of the plan

2. In the light of the response from Odiham Parish Council, the residents, and the lack of consultation with Winchfield Parish Council all of which throw doubt on the wisdom of the proposed 'liaison' arrangements: **invite Cabinet to consider alternative, more effective consultation arrangements that would bring together and unite the key stakeholders at a local level**

3. **Ask Cabinet to appreciate that for a common such as Odiham Common – a SSSI site that offers potential to provide many benefits for people in the community – a successful plan should embrace biodiversity and wider public benefit objectives in a mutually supporting way and that the plan is weak on 'public enjoyment' objectives**

4. Paths and rides provide the essential infrastructure for public enjoyment and poor paths are one of the major factors preventing enjoyment of the common: **invite Cabinet to prioritise repair and maintenance of waterlogged and muddy paths and earmark any unused resource from the £32,227 budget allocation for this purpose**

5. **Invite Cabinet to ensure biodiversity objectives, targets, and performance indicators that particularly enhance public enjoyment are afforded priority and with this in mind:**

a) **Make reduction of bracken a priority with achievement targets at 2 year intervals rather than simply at the end of the plan**

b) **Review the much reduced mowing regime after 2 years to ensure it is adequate for ensuring Odiham Common is an attractive place for visitors**

c) **Prioritise ditch and water management to keep the common free of unnecessary excess water and its ponds attractive**

6. **Invite Cabinet to remove from the plan the non-critical, unfunded tree felling in the small compartments in Potbridge that would be detrimental to the people**

The Forestry Commission e-mail

Dear [REDACTED]

Thank you for your letter regarding Odiham common . The Forestry Commission appreciate and welcome your views on the work within the common .The work in the Woodland Management also is not legally binding and the Forestry Commission do not insist that the work is carried out, we have no legal power to enforce the felling that is in the plan . The Forestry Commission whilst reviewing the works stated that felling could be carried out within the 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. As this area is heavily used by the local community the Local authority have a duty of care to monitor the trees following health and safety regulations and best practice . I suggest you contact the local authority directly with any concerns you have regarding the felling of the Ash trees.

The woodland Management plan was approved on the 19th November 2021 and is valid until 2031. AS the plan is approved I suggest that you contact the Local authority to remove the mention of Holly clearance in the Plan. The Holly Clearance does not fall under the Forestry regulations act of 1967 so therefore out of our remit . It is our understanding that there is a capital grant that has been awarded by Natural England for the removal of the Holly . For further information regarding this I suggest that you contact Natural England . The contact details for this are enquiries@naturalengland.org.uk

Regards

[REDACTED]

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