
Downley Common Newsletter

Quarterly Newsletter of the Downley Common Preservation Society - Issue 7. September 1998

Thank you Isaac Lord

The Common Preservation Society has recently acquired a substantial set of tools to help with maintenance of the common. These include saws, loppers, billhooks, scythes and rakes and were supplied by Isaac Lord in High Wycombe. We would like to thank Isaac Lord for their generosity in supplying these tools at a substantial discount.

The tools are currently under the stewardship of Bill Thompson at The Cottage on the far side of the Common and are available to borrow whenever there's someone in. There will be a system of signing the tools out so as to minimise the chances of any tools being mislaid.

Bonfire

As autumn approaches, it's time to start thinking about harvesting all that excess woody growth that's accumulated over the past year and donating it to the Downley Common Bonfire to be built in the middle of the Common. Several people have already approached us with garden trees (especially leylandii) to be cut down and these are all gratefully received. These can be taken to the

bonfire via the gateway opposite the Dairy. A notice to be erected will indicate from where to obtain the key to get through the gate. Regrettably, this year, the access to the Common will not be left open due to abuse in previous years by people dumping builder's rubble and garden refuse, none of which, surprisingly is very flammable!

The diary below also lists the weekends when there will be working parties to collect bonfire materials (principally from the coppicing) and to build the bonfire itself. This is a fairly onerous task and we would really appreciate as much help as we can get.

Tractor repair and grant

Since the last newsletter, the tractor has returned from servicing and its performance is much improved. It also arrived back with a rather large invoice which generally caused a sharp intake of breath! It is therefore with some relief that the Society records its thanks to Wycombe District Council who picked up the bill and to Ms Jo Tiddy (WDC Heritage Officer) and Anthea Hardy who steered it through the appropriate committee. Thank you all.

Ideas for Millenium

As I write, there are only 500 days

Local Democracy Initiative

Come to a meeting at the Town Hall on 20 October 1998 to express your opinion on the level of community charge versus the level of services in Downley

to go before the end of 1999 and the dawn of the new Millenium, give or take 365 days depending on how you wish to define the millenium. In common with many others, the Preservation Society has decided to commemorate January 1, 2000 with a memorial suitable for the time and place and we are therefore canvassing for ideas for what that memorial should be.

One idea that has been floated is to plant a Millenium Yew Tree, which one might hope would still be alive in another thousand years from now (no doubt still being tended by the Downley Common Preservation Society).

What do you think of this idea? Can you think of a better one?

Diary

13 Sep 1998, 10.00am	Working party	LeDe Spencers
1 Oct 1998, 8.00pm	Annual General Meeting	Memorial Hall
27 Sep 1998, 10.00am	Working party,	LeDe Spencers
11 Oct 1998, 10.00am	Working party to collect bonfire wood	Bonfire site
18 Oct 1998, 10.00am	Working party to collect bonfire wood	Bonfire site
25 Oct 1998, 10.00am	Working party to collect bonfire wood	Bonfire site
31 Oct 1998, 10.00am	Bonfire building working party	Bonfire site
1 Nov 1998, 10.00am	Bonfire building working party	Bonfire site
5 Nov 1998, 6.30pm	Bonfire and Torchlight Procession	Commonside
8 Nov 1998, 10.00am	Clear-up bonfire working party	Bonfire site

Coppicing

Maintaining scrub (in the sense of promoting it for its own interest as distinct from stopping it from invading grassland) is one of the most challenging of all aspects of ecological management.

Dense thickets offer crucial cover for birds and small mammals and of course provide nectar and fruit for anything from hoverflies to fieldfares. Blackthorn, hawthorn and elder produce their beautiful masses of blossom which we enjoy - not to mention sloes and elderberries for sloe-gin and wine. The flowers of gorse reach their own golden peak in spring though always have a few flowers to show, whatever the time of year (hence the allusion to the kissing season). In fact gorse has declined drastically in the Chilterns, so ensuring its survival at Downley is all the more important.

However, scrub will always develop into woodland given the chance, and this can only be checked by recourse to cycles of coppicing. It is therefore proposed to start coppicing the area shown on the map so as to ensure the rejuvenation of scrub as a viable habitat by coppicing selected stands back to ground level.

The area shown will be coppiced on a ten year cycle by dividing the area into ten mini-compartments, each about 11 metres wide. Stems will be cut cleanly to ground level and cut material from the treatment area will be removed for burning on the bonfire site. It will be



Figure 1 Location of Area (shaded) to be Coppiced

necessary to control any invasive species that appear such as Japanese knotweed and possibly to diversify the stands, for example by sowing or planting gorse.

As always volunteers will be welcome to assist in the cutting of the first stand which will commence this autumn.

Chilterns Commons Seminar Report

The DCPS hosted a seminar, organised by the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Officer, Steve Roddick, on 2nd July at Downley Memorial Hall. Various Chilterns organisations were represented, including Bucks County Council, Wycombe District Council, BBONT, Nettlebed Commons Group, Lane End and Cadmore End Group and Chorleywood Commons Group.

Exchanges of information and

experience were most valuable as was the presentation by BBONT of their lottery bid for funding for commons management schemes in the West Chilterns. The DCPS made it very well known that Downley is definitely in the West Chilterns area, and this was agreed by BBONT!

The delegates then went on a guided tour of Downley Common, the highlight of which was the sight of two dragonflies at Mannings Pond, just emerging from their larvae stage and drying their wings before flying off on their maiden flight. The morning ended with a buffet lunch courtesy of the AONB office.

Application for Membership

Name: _____

Address: _____

Telephone Number: _____

Class of membership: **Family £6, Individual £4, Student/Senior Citizen £2 - please circle**