

Update on the implementation of the Town Common and St Catherine's Hill Management Plan, September 2016

Public consultation took place in February and March 2012 and there was significant support for the main objectives and subsequent adoption of the 10 year site management plan in October 2012. Since then, the Management Steering Group has been working on implementation of its action plan. Alongside the site managers, this group includes the main local organisations with an interest in the site, including West Christchurch Residents Association, Hurn Parish Council, Natural England and the Friends of St Catherine's Hill.

Selective Tree felling

The main land managers on the site (Christchurch Borough Council and the Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust) submit felling licence applications annually to the Forestry Commission, in line with the agreed management plan. The Commission granted a new licence in March 2016 but there was insufficient time to carry out the agreed work before the bird nesting season started. This followed several months of discussion both on and off site by the Steering Group. It is therefore planned to carry out further works from **1 October 2016**.

Part of the process involves focussing on areas where selective felling is required. Priority has been given to areas where: early recovery is required to allow further works; trees are in poor condition or; to enable later access to adjacent areas. You may have noticed blue paint marks at the base of some of the trees. These refer to individual trees that the Steering Group feel should be retained at the moment.

Although the plan runs for a 10 year period we decided to apply for felling licences on an annual basis to allow changes to the site to be more gradual and any potential impacts to be smaller and easier to remedy. The Steering Group has also been able to consider smaller areas in more detail. The Group will continue to have a close involvement in the implementation of required works.

The attached map shows the areas where tree felling (yellow) and rhododendron removal (blue) works will be taking place. Selected trees are initially being felled and then taken to a nearby location for chipping. To minimise vehicle size, vehicle movements and burning on site, as much material as possible will be chipped using a large mobile chipping unit. Some material will be removed as logs.

The chipping operation will generate some noise and along with rutting of tracks and creation of muddy areas, is likely to be the main impact on local residents and we apologise in advance for any disturbance caused. To reduce the effects, chipping will not take place during every day but only once sufficient material has been generated. This material will be taken to a mobile chipping unit and the woodchip will be removed from site.

Whilst we aim to minimise disturbance to site users and local residents, it will be necessary to close off individual blocks during the operations to ensure public safety. Costs will be wholly met through grant funding through Higher Level Stewardship agreements with Natural England.

Monitoring of water levels on site continues and recent drainage works have been carried out by land managers, with an aim to address specific issues on site boundaries.

Christchurch & East Dorset Landscape & Countryside Team, September 2016