

St Catherine's Hill - Management Update - February 2015

Management works continue to progress on site. All intended trees have been felled and there has been minimal wind-blow of remaining trees so far. There is still stacked material and tidying to do on top of the hill. The situation regarding the chipper is that having suffered a major mechanical fault and having to go to Austria for repairs, it was back on site this Monday. However, a piece of chain had got into the pile and was fed into the chipper, subsequently damaging the blades. This has now been repaired again and will be back on site next Monday.

The main focus of work has now been shifted to the two blocks at the north-western end of the site, where access is very difficult and trees are on steeply sloping ground.

You are probably aware that heavy horses have been used to move the timber from the least accessible areas. This was a really successful operation, fantastic to see working and resulted in several positive stories in the local media.

As you know we agreed to create a new access to the main road by clearing an area of rhododendron, where the Council owns an area of land outside the SSSI. This is the only feasible extraction route and best way of dealing with the material, as the alternatives would involve taking material over steep heathland and down the main bridleway or burning everything and potentially causing large-scale smoke disturbance to residents. The intention was to then extract using a tractor and trailer.

It has become clear that groundwater levels are just below the surface and the ground is too soft for this to work. As a result the contractor is now using a 360 excavator to remove the material, which although larger, has lower ground impact. Not unexpectedly, repeated journeys on soft and wet ground are having an impact. The contractor has been using wooden digger mats to reduce the machine damage which has helped the situation. However, there is a large amount of material to remove in this way and the extraction route already looks very muddy. This may generate negative comments from site users, so I wanted to forewarn you and give some background, in case you have to field calls. Thank you for your on-going support.

Once extraction is completed, the contractor will re-grade the access route as far as is practicably possible and build up remaining low ground outside the SSSI with wood-chippings. We are also looking at this area to see if it could be utilised as a small buffer area for informal recreation (e.g. dog walking), as suggested by Nick. This would enable us to access budgets to make further site improvements, which could include a firmer route for any future extraction and fire access, which is largely non-existent at that end of site.