

Update on the implementation of the Town Common and St Catherine's Hill Management Plan, October 2014

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, Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust and Sembcorp Bournemouth Water) submitted felling licence applications to the Forestry Commission in 2013 in line with the agreed management plan. Having considered these submissions the Forestry Commission granted licences for the work. This followed several months of discussion both on and off site by the Steering Group and works for winter 2013/14 were agreed. Unfortunately, due to the extreme weather conditions last winter these works had to be delayed. It is now planned to carry out the works between **10 November 2014 and 31 March 2015**.

Part of the process involved 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 it was decided to apply for felling licences, at least initially, on an annual basis. This allows 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.

A hydrologist has been fully consulted to advise the site managers on any necessary mitigation or working methods to minimise potential impacts. Drainage monitoring is also in place to ensure this is achieved in practice.

The adjacent map shows the blocks where works will take place. Selected trees will initially be felled and then taken to a nearby location for chipping. To minimise vehicle size, vehicle movements and burning on site, all parts of the trees will be chipped using a large mobile chipping unit. The only exceptions are where chipper access is not possible, in the two north western blocks.

The chipping operation will generate noise and is likely to be the main impact on local residents and we apologise in advance for any disturbance caused. To reduce its 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 using tractor-drawn grain trailers. As the contractors are locally based, they will be flexible in terms of work days on site and able to avoid inclement weather. Work will also be progressed gradually through the next few months.

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 largely met through grant funding through Higher Level Stewardship agreements with Natural England.

Christchurch Countryside Service, October 2014

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