

Many of the trees that have been felled on the common have been felled as part of a 'Grassland Restoration project'. By far the rarest Habitats on the common are the grassland habitats, nearly all of which are unimproved. These grasslands were formed 2 to 3 thousand years ago by prehistoric man clearing woodland to graze livestock, the resulting over grazing forming the low nutrient heathland and grassland habitats of which fragments are still remaining on the common .In fact less than a century ago the common remained in its' prehistoric treeless state. We are very lucky to have some of these precious grasslands left which enable us to restore low quality secondary woodland and scrub back to the way it has remained for thousands of years un- changed.

The UK biodiversity action plan (published by the government in 1994) identified that unimproved grassland habitats were in need of restoration where possible and had faced massive declines in the 20th century, with up to 98% of these habitats lost in a little over one hundred years. These massive declines have had a huge impact on UK wildlife. Many plants once commonplace in the British countryside are close to extinction or threatened (see A vascular plant red list for England 2014), many UK butterfly species are under threat of extinction locally and nationally with the Large Blue already extinct, save a few that have been re-introduced to the west country from abroad, most bird species have again seen massive declines with once common birds such as skylarks threatened along with many other birds. the list goes on and on. Much of this is due to the loss of these grassland habitats to poor management(allowing grassland to go through natural succession from scrub to woodland or cutting regimes that do not consider wildlife and the need to keep fertility low),changes in agricultural practices (due to their nature these grasslands are very unproductive agriculturally, so farmers have ploughed them up, fertilised them and sown them with vigorous non native grass species to produce higher yields of hay etc), development has again destroyed swathes of unimproved grassland habits, due to their low nutrients and poor quality for agriculture they were usually the first areas used to build housing etc, gravel extraction has again destroyed much of the lowland heath in the UK, the Heaths very acid nature derived from the sands and gravels that have been removed.

The Parish Councils manages much of the Common under terms and conditions of a Higher Level Stewardship Program from Natural England, meaning we manage the Common, in areas under HLS, how Natural England want us to and they pay us for doing so. This management is aimed at improving habitats for wildlife so that we can protect what remains for future generations, and emphasis is placed on improving the habitats which hold the highest conservation value. Again I reiterate the grasslands are the most important habitat on the Common, along with the ponds. Due to its secondary nature the woodland, on the Common, has not had time to develop in woodland with high conservation value. There is no seedbed of woodland plants because 60 years ago the woodland was grassland, therefore the seedbed when exposed is much more likely to contain grassland species, some of which may be rare or important to wildlife. This seedbed is what makes grassland restoration on the common viable, which in essence is why it is being restored to the detriment of the secondary woodland which has a lower value to wildlife.

Hope this gives you some sense of why we are carrying out this work.