

Dear Marshfield Parish Council,

Thank you for asking me to consult on your new management plan for Ringswell Common.

South Gloucestershire Council do not own the common and so are not responsible for its management but we are happy to comment on the proposed management plan. The ownership section of the Commons Register shows Marshfield Parish Council as the owners. I understand you were going through the process of registering ownership with the Land Registry. Please note the final decision for any changes that take place to the common within legislative regulations does of course rest with you.

The common is a registered SNCI (Site of Nature Conservation Interest) for what was its Calcareous Grassland interests, I have not seen an up to date Phase 1 Habitat Survey so am unsure as to how relevant this designation is anymore. When grazing was abandoned, it is evident that the site has slowly become scrub and young growth trees with areas of surviving grassland. If left the whole site would eventually become a closed canopy woodland and biodiversity would decline. It is also shown on the DEFRA MAGIC map as having areas of priority woodland within the common, it is not clear what if any protection this affords these areas.

It should be noted by the council that most of the common falls within the conservation area and so any tree works require permission first. Tree removals have taken place without these permissions in place and given the inevitable future loss of the remaining ash, I suggest that any further tree removals will need to be well justified. The section to the south of the Sewage plant which your management plan proposes to leave as an area of woodland, falls outside of the conservation area boundary. The tree officer noted some elm and oak specimens in this area upon which he will place TPOs. Please refer to the guidance below.

It is very important that you highlight the issue of Ash-Dieback with your residents. This disease is likely to affect/kill off 80% to 90% of all the ash trees around the UK. If you own the trees, you are responsible for recognising this health and safety risk and taking the necessary steps. Removal of large numbers of trees can be quite shocking for residents who have not been informed of the need for this work and this can lead to conflict. There are many ash trees on this site that will need to be removed as they succumb to the disease. It is important to highlight why you are removing them and also to take steps to replant new species where possible and highlight these replanting efforts to residents.

The management plan proposes some significant visual changes across the site, which may well appear quite shocking to local residents, so you should take this into account and ensure you communicate very clearly with users of the common as to what the overall aim is. The site if left unmanaged would eventually lose biodiversity becoming a closed canopy woodland. The plan if followed would leave the site with a mixed range of habitats which will provide many benefits for wildlife and site users. I am unsure of the need to recreate the grassland to the extent proposed in the middle of the right hand section of the common. There are surviving patches of grassland along this side which could just be expanded without the loss of all the scrub but equally a species rich calcareous grassland is a habitat that has faced huge declines and so is worthy of bringing back.

A word of caution however, a grassland is a very difficult habitat to recover. They can take upwards of 20 years before being considered to be of good condition. Restoration of Calcareous grassland is not a quick project, it will take time and dedication to stick to the management plan over the long term. If the graziers decided this is not for them, does the PC have the resource necessary to carry on this restoration into the long term? If you do decide to stick with the proposals for grassland restoration I would recommend the use of wild flower plug plants as well as seed. This can speed the process up and help other users of the site see quick benefits such as increased colour and insect interest whereas relying solely on seeds can take some years before you see any difference.

The proposed replacement of x6 trees in the Western section of the common is to be applauded, a good mix has been proposed and the use of fruit trees will provide a new free to use food source for all local residents. It might be worth seeking out local fruit varieties or asking around to see what residents would like to eat as a good means of bridging local site users on board with the changes. I would suggest 'Whole Life' planting so the trees do not compete with each other for resources and have the full space they desire to grow. They will be a great asset to the site in years to come.

Returning some form of grazing to the site will benefit the biodiversity as long as this is well managed. It is not a big site so very low density grazing is recommended and it may only be suited to occasional grazing through the year or a small block of grazing as aftermath once the grassland has been cut and collected. Due to its size I would be surprised if grazing can take place all through the winter without causing damage. Grazing will return cow poo, vital for insect restoration, if possible encourage the graziers to put out stock that have not recently been treated with insecticides. They will cause a certain degree of poaching which is good for breaking up grass and allowing wildflowers to colonise and if the right breed are used they will be good for restoring an age range of scrub across the site, again beneficial for many insects and small birds.

The proposed restoration of a nearby hedgerow is to be applauded and will help further connect the common with other surrounding habitats. The proposal to increase the amount of dead wood around the common is very good and should be fully encouraged. Log piles are incredibly important habitats.

A few points to note:

- The common is under the ownership of Marshfield Parish Council and so you have the final say over what happens with the site as long as it does not conflict with the rights of the registered commoners, the rights of all persons to use the common as access land or other legislation.
- Any change in grazing is down to the Parish Council as owners.
- Access to the whole common must be maintained at all times of the year for all persons. There are very limited conditions in which it is acceptable to restrict access, please see attached.
- You should note that there is a Climate and Ecological Crisis and so care must be taken to ensure this proposal does not contribute to these crisis but helps combat them.
- All Common Land is protected under the Commons Act 2006 which principally protects it from development.
- It is advisable to assess all land the Parish Council owns for Ash Die Back infected trees and put a removal and replanting plan in place.
- Recommend no applications of any pesticides across the common.

Trees in conservation areas

Trees can make a significant contribution to the character and fabric of Conservation Areas. Anyone wishing to top, lop, fell, uproot or cut down a tree within a conservation area must give the council six weeks advance notice of the intention to do so. Where appropriate the council will make Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) to protect trees in conservation areas and will take into account their visual, historic and amenity contribution in deciding whether they are worthy of protection. Where appropriate the council may require planting of new trees to replace any lost in development.

If you want to carry out works to a tree in a conservation area, regardless of whether it has a TPO, you can apply by completing the form [Work to Trees](#).

The penalty for undertaking work to a tree in a conservation area is the same as for a tree with a Tree Preservation Order (TPO).

Apologies that it has taken so long for me to respond. I hope this information is of use to you.

Best Regards

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