

Public Consultation Draft

GREAT TORRINGTON COMMONS MANAGEMENT PLAN 2019 – 2024

April 2019



APPENDIX

No.	Title	Scale
TC/M1	Management Strategy	1:10,000
TC/M2	Great Torrington Common	1:5000
TC/M3	Mill Street/Castle Hill Common	1:5000
TC/M4	Norwood Moor Common	1:5000
TC/M5	Path and Place References	1:10,000
TC/M6	Annual Initiatives 2019-2020	1:10,000
TC/M7	Improvement Areas 1-2	1:1250
TC/M8	Improvement Areas 3-4	1:1000
TC/M9	Improvement Areas 5-6	1:2500
	Registered Common (Devon CC)	1:10,000
	Public Rights of Way (Devon CC)	1:10,000
	Great Torrington Common Act Plan 1889	1:10,560
	Great Torrington Commons Act Text	
	Great Torrington Commons Bye laws	

Summary (Quick Read). The first four plans above set out the bare bones of the proposals, whilst the fifth shows the proposed initiatives for the first year. For a quick read, these are the best source, though it is hoped comments will be made on the whole document which will give a better understanding of the rationale.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 **Purpose.** Torrington Commons are managed by a Board of 15 Conservators elected every three years. The aim of the management plan is to establish a permanent process to inform strategic planning and provide the framework for day-to-day maintenance operations. It divides the Commons into a number of management regimes based on the type of wildlife habitat and the nature of human use. This allows the Board, employees and the public to be aware of the basis on which the Commons are being managed and the underlying reasons. The management plan is intended as an on-going process with annual reviews and up-dating every five years. The draft has been prepared by Keith Funnell, a retired landscape architect and landscape manager via a steering group of conservators comprising Mandy Harrison, Mandi Farinacci, Jim Mann and Alan Crawley plus the Head Ranger Alan Mitchell and in consultation with the Board of Great Torrington Commons Conservators (GTCC).

1.2 **Sources.** The five documents that are listed below provide a good basis for preparation of a comprehensive management plan covering the whole commons area.

- (i) ***The Need for Conservation (Andrew Moulton 1993)*** – this BTEC dissertation is a good review of available information and Commons habitats 26 years ago.
- (ii) ***Draft Management Plan for 1995-2000 (SW Ecological Surveys 1994)*** -the format follows Nature Conservancy Council (NCC) guidance, again centres on wildlife interests and is a second valuable benchmark for conditions on the Commons in the mid 1990s.
- (iii) ***Great Torrington Parish Biodiversity Audit (Green Ecology Ltd June 2010)*** – this assessment is based on data supplied by the Devon Biological Records Centre (DBRC).
- (iv) ***County Wildlife Site Monitoring Form (Aug-Sept 2014)*** - The Devon Biological Records centre (DBRC) latest survey provides a good record and includes management advice.
- (v) ***Great Torrington Commons : Key Management Recommendations (2015)*** - Devon Wildlife Trust (DWT) recommendations focus on the most notable wildlife areas; they provide a useful source for future management, although limited to under half the area.

Restrictions on management (e.g. fencing and viability of grazing) make the Commons different from a nature reserve. Topics such as human history, land uses (historic + current), landscape (e.g. views) and GTCC management resources are not prominent in the wildlife surveys and have been added using the skills within the steering group.

1.3 **Structure of Document.** The format follows that recommended in guidance on the preparation of management plans for wildlife habitats and recreational use. The next section sets out the

survey data concerning resources and use; issues such as Commons history have been summarised, with reference to secondary sources if further detail is required. Section three examines wildlife, landscape and land use issues that may affect future management of the Commons and states landscape and wildlife objectives. The final section (four) identifies management principles affecting the Commons as a whole, then divides the area into compartments of similar character and specifies detailed prescriptions for each, ending with a programme for implementation.

2. SURVEY

GENERAL INFORMATION

- 2.1 **Location, Size and Access.** The Commons wrap around the north, west and south sides of Great Torrington and extend to 131 hectares (323.71 acres) with over 32km (20 miles) of footpaths. They lie entirely within the parish of Great Torrington and the wider Torridge District Council. Most of the landholding is registered common (see appendix plans). Three small parcels outside the inviolate land in the 1889 Act were sold off in 1978 as pasture fields and two (to the east of Taddipport bridge and north of the Torridge) were re-acquired later. A small plot of land just west of the Taddipport Bridge and north of the Torridge has been registered to the GTCC. The western section of the former canal corridor now filled in and known as the 'Rolle Road' was purchased from Clinton Estates. These areas are included in the management plan.
- 2.2 **Past Management.** In 1194 a large waste called the common was given to the people of the town by the Lord of the Manor, William Fitzrobert. Following a number of disputes in C19, the Great Torrington Commons Act 1889 '*vested Great Torrington Common, Castle Hill Commons and other lands in the borough of Great Torrington in the county of Devon in an elected body of 15 Conservators and settled questions between the Commoners and the owners of the Rolle estate and for other purposes*'. The act extinguished ownership of the soil by the Lords of the Manor, which had been a source of discord hitherto. The earliest management was mainly concerned with control over grazing rights and quarrying. The main tasks of GTCC today are enforcing the bye-laws, maintaining public rights of way and caring for the different wildlife habitats and recreation areas. Burning of broom (furze) and gorse, known as 'swayling', was banned in 1889 but did continue intermittently in the earlier part of C20. Grazing on the Commons declined after WW2 and ceased in 1981. More information on the history of the Commons is contained in George Doe's booklet 'Great Torrington Commons' (1929).
- 2.3 **Requirements of 1889 Act.** Certain legal obligations apply to the land vested in GTCC under separate schedules in the 1889 Act. The most relevant to future management are set out below :

- 28. *The Conservators shall keep the Commons open, uninclosed and unbuilt upon and shall by all lawful means prevent, resist and abate all encroachments ...*
- 29. *The Conservators shall not lease or grant or in any manner dispose of any part of the Commons.*
- 30. *The Conservators shall subject to the provisions of this Act at all times preserve as far as may be the natural aspect of the Commons and to that end shall protect the turf, gorse, heather, timber and other trees, shrubs and brushwood thereon.*

Under clause 31 the Conservators are given powers concerning employees, drainage, planting, cutting turf or digging gravel, felling timber for profit, making roads and ways, making and maintaining ponds. They may rent, sell or mortgage land under the first schedule (coloured pink on the 1889 plan in the appendix) and use the monies for the benefit of the Commons.

2.4 **Status and Bye-laws.** Most of the site is a registered common (CL46) under the Commons Registration Act 1965, having been registered in 1967 and confirmed in 1973. Two small additions were added in October 1969 and confirmed in August 1972 (CL247). Other areas south east of the sewage works ('Shepherds Ham'), either side of the Taddipport Bridge and the western section of the Rolle Road through the Old Creamery are not registered common. The GTCC objectives are to conserve, maintain and improve the natural environment of Great Torrington Commons for the enjoyment of present and future generations. The bye-laws are made by the Conservators under Section 32 of the Great Torrington Commons Act 1889. They cover access (camping and fires), vehicles, horses, wildlife management, stock management, land management, dogs, structures, games, dumping and pollution of water. They were last updated in August 2010 and approved by Defra; a copy is included in the appendix.

2.5 **Commoners Rights.** The Commons are subject to common rights which are available to all residents living within the parish of Great Torrington. They comprise :

- (i) rights of grazing – up to 1700 grazing units;
- (ii) rights of piscary – to fish from the riverbank;
- (iii) right of estover – to collect deadwood for fires or bracken/gorse for bedding;
- (iv) right of turbary – to cut peat and turf;
- (v) right to minerals – to remove gravel from the bed of the Common Lake Stream.

2.6 **Designations.** Most of the Commons (127ha) is a **County Wildlife Site (CWS)** and the original reasons for designation are :

*Woodland (recent woodland with diverse structure & 10+ ancient woodland indicator species);
Grassland (unimproved acid grassland – U1 over 0.5ha);*

Mosaic with bat and butterfly interest.

The current reasons for CWS designation (2014) were confirmed as :

Over 0.5ha of acid grassland (U1/U4);

Over 0.5ha of non-ancient woodland (W10, W10e, W8, W16)

Over 0.5ha of wet woodland (W7)

All of the registered common is designated as access land under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 and shown as such on the Devon County Council website dealing with public rights of way (PROWs).

- 2.7 **Workforce and Resources.** GTCC are supported by a part-time clerk (0.4) and a part-time treasurer (0.4). The day-to-day maintenance of the commons is the responsibility of the Head Ranger (0.6) though often in practice closer to full-time. He has one part-time assistant (0.4) who is an arborist and further tree surgery contract support as necessary. The direct labour force is also supplemented by a number of volunteers averaging 0.4 per week and they are responsible for most of the grass mowing of recreation areas and paths. A metal container north east of the Old Bowling Green is used to store less portable maintenance equipment such as strimmers and mowers, which from the 2019 season will include a larger ride-on machine. A local landscape contractor undertakes the annual cutting of meadows and the arisings to date have been left rather than collected and removed.
- 2.8 **Arrangements with Local Authorities.** Torrington District Council (TDC) are responsible for the toilets directly abutting the Old Bowling Green car park on the east side (within the curtilage of the cemetery) and for removal of litter and dog poo bags collected by both TDC and GTC staff from various accessible locations around the Commons. GTCC are working closely with Torrington Town Council who are helping with the preparation of this document for public consultation. There have also been meetings to discuss Stonemans Lane and the adjacent landholding known as Jubilee Wood, which was recently transferred from TDC to the Town Council.
- 2.9 **Friends of Torrington Commons.** The Friends were set up by conservator Stephanie Easton in 2008. Their members keep the Commons near to the town free of litter and report any fly tipping occurrences. There is no formal constitution and no membership fee. All the friends (currently 22 in number) are volunteers. New members have an induction which incorporates the bye-laws, medical condition declaration, emergency contact details, health and safety guidelines. Each friend is allocated an area to focus on, though there are also group sessions. The Friends meet once a month for a coffee and review any issues to bring before GTCC.

PHYSICAL LANDSCAPE

- 2.10 **Geology and Soils.** The underlying geology is predominantly shales and slates of the Culm measures from the metamorphic period. This leads to the formation of acid soils, although richer soils are found close to the River Torridge. Drainage is generally good, leading to dry grassland and lowland heath communities. More impermeable soils are present in valley bottom areas resulting in local marsh and mire communities. The soil type for the majority of the Commons comprises 611c Manod type soils (Soil Survey of England and Wales). The main characteristics are well drained, fine loamy or fine silty soils over rock. The soil can be shallow in places with exposed rock locally and steep slopes common. A different soil type – 541 Neath – is present in the vicinity of the Old Rifle Range on Norwood Common to the north east. Here the soil profile displays slowly permeable sub-soils and some seasonal water-logging.
- 2.11 **Landform.** The Commons occupy much of the north bank of the Torridge valley from Furzebeam to New Mills. The south-facing slopes are often quite steep with gradients from 1:2 to 1:10 rising from 10-20m AOD to 80m-100m AOD. At Staple Vale, the valley of the Common Lake Stream projects due east from the River Torridge to the north of the town and divides into two smaller valleys around the School Lane crossing. Here also the valley slopes to both north and south are steep (1:3 – 1:6) with a narrow and flat bottom.
- 2.12 **Water.** In the early 1990s the Common Lake Stream was designated Class 3 (class 1 cleanest and class 4 most polluted) because of the high ammonia (NH₃) levels, possibly resulting from the decomposition of organic nitrogenous wastes. The pond in the valley is fed by a separate channel with an inflow pipe and control valve and gabion reinforcement to direct water flow. The margins and meadowland on the north side of the River Torridge are subject to flooding during periods of intense rainfall. For many years the Torridge has suffered pollution from agricultural run-off, siltation from clay workings upstream and raw sewage from combined sewage overflows in the older part of the town. The GTCC Fisheries Officer recorded 17 incidences in 2017. After joining 'Fish Legal', which fights such incidents on members' behalf, 2018 was pollution free.
- 2.13 **Climate.** The nearest Met office weather station representative of the local area is at North Wyke. The average temperature range is 2.5 – 7.7c in January and 12.0-19.9c in July. Days with air frost are highest in February with 8.1 on average. Sunshine hours per month range from 51.0 in December to 189.7 in June. Rainfall averages vary from 13cm in December to 5.6cm in June; the annual total is 105cm. Wind speeds at 10m range from 6.3knots in July and August to 10.4 knots in February.

BIOLOGICAL LANDSCAPE

2.14 **Flora and Fauna.** For the purposes of a general description, the Commons have been divided into five areas (following the divisions in the Parish Bio-diversity Audit 2010), which are based on roads, ownership and/or land use.

- (i) **Furzebeam Wood** is located in the north-western corner of the Commons and is a moderately sized (3 ha) area of semi-natural broadleaved woodland. DBRC records that the wood appears to be a good example of acidic oak woodland. The canopy is dominated by sessile oak *Quercus petraea* with hazel frequent in the understorey plus occasional holly and sycamore. The ground flora is quite species-rich in places though with abundant bracken and bramble *Rubus fruticosus agg.* Species recorded by DBRC include frequent wood sage, common dog violet and false oak-grass with occasional flowering plant species such as red campion, greater stitchwort and devil's-bit scabious. Ten ancient woodland indicator species are recorded including bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*, hard fern *Blechnum spicant*, great wood-rush *Luzula sylvatica* and scaly male-fern *Dryopteris affinis*.

Key habitat :

Lowland mixed deciduous woodland (UK BAP)
Oak woodland (Devon BAP, North Devon BAP)

Key species :

Small Heath (UK BAP)
Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary (UK BAP)

- (ii) **Great Torrington Common** to the north west of the town is an extensive area with an interesting mosaic of habitats present. These include unimproved acid grassland, semi-improved neutral grassland, species-rich scrub, acidic broadleaved woodland and bracken stands. Part of the site is also a golf course. A complex network of footpaths cross the area and link to other parts of the Common. Grassland, bracken and woodland clothe the north facing slopes of the small valley containing the stream known as 'Common Lake'. The steep south-facing slopes are extremely sunny and sheltered, providing valuable habitat for birds, butterflies and small mammals. DBRC records the golf course as containing areas of tightly mown semi-improved grassland on the greens and fairways, with good acidic grassland in the areas kept as rough. Elsewhere, the areas of most ecological importance are the unimproved acid grassland, the largest of which slopes gently north-west from the semi-improved amenity grassland area next to the car park and picnic area. This acid grassland is quite species-rich with common bent *Agrostiscapillaris*, sheep fescue *Festuca ovina agg.*, Tormentil *Potentilla erecta* and Yorkshire fog *Holcus lanatus*. Flowering plants include yarrow *Achillea millefolium*, common dog violet *Viola riviniana* and bird's-foot trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*. The most

species-rich area is located next to Common Lake Stream and is slightly damp. This area is very colourful and attractive in late spring and early summer. Here species include frequent betony *Stachys officinalis*, orange hawkweed *Hieracium aurantiacum*, yellow rattle *Rhinanthus minor* and ivy-leaved bellflower *Wahlenbergia hederacea* – a Devon notable plant species. On the opposite side of the valley to the car park there is an area of acid grassland which slopes steeply to the south. It is very sunny and there are abundant butterflies and grasshoppers. The sward is closely cropped by grazing rabbits and is quite flower-rich with occasional heath milkwort *Polygala serpyllifolia*, betony *Alliaria petiolata*, devil's-bit scabious *Dactylorhiza praetermissa*, common dog violet and bird's-foot trefoil.

Key habitats :

Flower-rich meadows & pastures (Devon BAP)
Lowland dry acid grassland (UK BAP)
Rivers, streams, floodplains and fluvial processes (Devon BAP)
Lowland mixed deciduous woodland (UK BAP)

Key species :

Yellowhammer (UK BAP)
Adder (UK BAP)
Pearl-bordered Fritillary (UK BAP)
Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary (UK BAP)
Wall Brown (UK BAP)
Marsh Fritillary (UK BAP, Devon BAP)
Brown Hairstreak (UK BAP)
Barn Owl (UK BAP, Devon BAP)

- (iii) **Norwood Moor Common** is an extensive area of broad-leaved woodland and scrub with remnants of semi-improved neutral grassland. It forms the northern finger of Great Torrington Commons and compared with other parts is fairly inaccessible with few footpaths. The woodland is wet in places with abundant grey willow *Salix cinerea ssp. Oleifolia*, as well as frequent blackthorn and hazel. Ground flora in these wetter areas includes hemlock water-dropwort *Oenanthe crocata*, meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria* and some Himalayan balsam *Impatiens glandulifera*. Part of the site is included on the culm grassland inventory but at the time of the 2005 survey appeared no longer to be culm grassland, having been invaded by bracken with few wetland areas present. Rank grasses have become dominant in this area reducing species diversity. Here the sward is dominated by false oat-grass, cock's-foot and bracken but wetland species such as marsh violet *Viola palustris* and common valerian *Valeriana officinalis* are still frequent.

Key habitat :

Lowland mixed deciduous woodland (UK BAP)
Wet woodland (UK BAP); Alder/willow wet woodland (Devon BAP)
Species-rich hedges (Devon BAP, North Devon BAP); Hedgerows (UK BAP)

- (iv) **Mill Street/Limer's Hill Common** is a mosaic of habitats including semi-improved acid

grassland, semi-improved neutral grassland, species-rich scrub, broad-leaved woodland and bracken stands. A complex network of footpaths cross the area, linking it to other parts of the Commons. The site slopes steeply south west towards the River Torridge. As much of the land is south facing, the scrub patches are extremely sunny and sheltered, providing valuable habitat for birds, butterflies and small mammals. Typical acid grassland in this area has abundant sheep's sorrel *Rosa arvensis* with frequent common bent and red fescue *Festuca rubra agg.*, with wood sage *Viburnum lantana*, cat's-ear *Hypochaeris radicata* and bird's-foot trefoil. The scrub is relatively species-rich particularly where there are rocky outcrops and includes abundant gorse, bracken, oak, wood sage and localised bell heather *Erica cinerea*. The scrub grades into young woodland dominated by sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus* and English oak *Quercus robur*, with blackthorn *Prunus spinosa*, hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* and hazel *Corylus avellana* in the understorey. The ground flora includes traveller's joy *Clematis vitalba*, common dog violet, sanicle *Sanicula europaea*, wood avens *Geum urbanum*, remote sedge *Carex remota* and pendulous sedge *Carex pendula*. There is much sycamore regeneration within the woodland.

Key habitats:

Flower-rich meadows & pastures (Devon BAP)

Lowland dry acid grassland (UK BAP)

Lowland meadows (UK BAP)

Lowland mixed deciduous wood (UK BAP)

Wet Woodland (UK BAP)

- (v) **Castle Hill Common** is located on the south side of Great Torrington and has very good public access, with footpaths crossing the whole site and two car parks close by. The area is mainly dense scrub and bracken on a very steep, south facing slope leading down to the River Torridge. There are pockets of species-rich grassland as well as scattered trees. The eastern edge of the site either side of New Road is semi-natural broad-leaved woodland. Other habitats comprise areas of scrub, bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* and tall herbs as well as more species-rich areas with rocky outcrops where a more heathland type flora exists. The scrub habitat areas are of high wildlife value with species-rich areas dominated by common gorse *Ulex europaeus* with false oat-grass *Arrhenatherum elatius* and wood sage *Teucrium scorodonia* plus occasional great mullein *Verbascum thapsus*, sheep's bit *Jasione montana* and localised areas of bell heather *Erica cinerea*, English stonecrop *Sedum anglicum* and sheep's sorrel *Rumex acetosella*. This area has numerous young scrubby English oaks *Quercus robur* and some acidic rock outcrops. There is also a small pocket of moderately species-rich unimproved acid to neutral grassland (approximately 0.3 ha). The more neutral areas are quite tall with frequent cock's-foot *Dactylis glomerata* and common bent with common knapweed *Centaurea nigra*, yarrow and smooth hawk's-beard *Crepis capillaris*.

The more acidic flora includes frequent wood sage and sheep's sorrel. Castle Hill Common has abundant butterflies, grasshoppers, bees and other invertebrates.

Key habitat :

Flower rich meadows and pastures (Devon BAP)

Lowland dry acid grassland (UK BAP)

Lowland meadows (UK BAP)

Lowland mixed deciduous woodland (UK BAP)

Key species :

Small pearl-bordered fritillary (UK BAP)

2.15 **Communities.** The DBRC survey in 2014 recognised a number of habitats and, where possible, linked these to the nearest category in the National Vegetation Classification (NVC).

Woodland Most is secondary woodland, some displaying affinities with W10 (pedunculate oak–bracken–bramble) or variants typical of neutral to acid woodlands on free-draining soils in lowland UK. Other areas are more typical of W8 (ash–field maple–dog's mercury) or W16 (oak–birch–wavy hair–grass) or variants that are restricted to acid or nutrient poor soils. Local wet areas are closest to W7 (alder–ash–yellow pimpernel) on moist to wet alkaline soils that are nutrient rich. Some dense scrub is succeeding to woodland as W1 (grey willow–common marsh bedstraw) woodland.

Hedges The total length of hedging is very limited and predominantly planted, with occasional hedgerow trees.

Bracken/Scrub The variety here is in part due to the type and extent of woody vegetation and includes W23 (gorse–bramble) and W25 (bracken –bramble).

Grass/Scrub There are affinities here with U1 (sheep's fescue–common bent–sheep's sorrel) and U4 (sheep's fescue–common bent–heath bedstraw). The nutrient poor, acid soils vary from species rich to species poor. They support a variety of insects restricted to this type that have reduced substantially in the UK over last century. Some locations have affinities to MG1 (false oat–grass grassland) and others to MG6 (perennial ryegrass–crested dog's tail) grassland.

Mown Grass The main area of improved grassland is on the Old Bowling Green, as a result of regular mowing and frequency of trafficking; smaller areas are located at the southern corner of Mill Street Common, on the north bank west of the river bridge at Taddipport and on the south side of the Barley Grove car park.

Wetlands There is a small area of lowland fen with similarities to M27 (meadowsweet–wild angelica) mire.

Invasive weeds recorded in 1993 were Japanese Knotweed (*Reynoutria japonica*), ragwort (*Senecio jacobaea*) and hybrid poplar (*Populus* var.). No Himalayan Balsam is mentioned at this time but is now widespread.

HUMAN AND CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

2.16 **Archaeology.** There are four sites of interest recorded in the County Sites and Monuments Register by Devon County Council.

- (i) **Rolle Canal.** This waterway was built between 1823 and 1827 and passed through the Commons above the River Torridge from Furzebeam Hill to New Mills. It was closed in 1870 and briefly turned into a toll road in 1875.
- (ii) **Covety or Coverny Well.** The 'sacred' well consists of an excavation in the side of the hill above the Common Lake Stream. It was thought to have medicinal qualities, especially for eye conditions.
- (iii) **Old Mill Leat.** This was fed by the Common Lake Stream and may have been associated with C16 or C17 mills.
- (iv) **Obelisk.** The monument on the east side of Castle Hill Common was erected in 1816 by the ladies of Torrington to commemorate those killed in the Battle of Waterloo.
- (v) **Old Rifle Range.** This was located on Norwood Common. It was 1000 yards long and crossed both the Weare Gifford and Gammaton Roads. The alignment is shown on the plan accompanying the 1889 Act.

2.17 **History.** Parcels of the Commons land have provided for an extension to the cemetery, allotments, the Rolle Canal, Staple Vale Woollen Factory and land required by the Southern Railway and North Devon Clay Company (now part of the Tarka Trail). Quarrying was carried out in C19 at Dewsdale (upstream from the railway) and under Castle Hill until risk of landslip led to this being moved to Marshwood Hill beside New Road. Clarke's Meadow off School Lane and the golf course were used for food production during WW2. Covety's Well on the steep slope from the Old Bowling Green to the Commons Lake Stream was believed to have medicinal qualities, notably curing of eye infections due to the zinc content. The Old Bowling Green has also been used for shinty, women's hockey and football and was the venue for the Coronation Sports of 1902. A nine hole golf course was established there in the 1890s and persisted until WW1, after which it transferred to Darracott and then to its present site at Furzebeam in 1932. The Old Bowling Green is also the site for the Torrington Cavaliers bonfires held every few years as a major charity event; the next is scheduled for August 2020 and will commemorate the sailing of the Mayflower.

2.18 Activities and Facilities.

Old Bowling Green (inc. Cavaliers Bonfires). Permission is sought from GTCC for the Cavaliers bonfires with meetings and liaison to ensure a full risk assessment, method statement and insurance confirmation. Extra car parking provision has been granted in the past. There is usually a donation to GTCC from bonfire proceeds, either in-kind or monies. The full restoration of the site immediately north of the Old Bowling Green is agreed in advance. The Cavaliers also hold an August fun day event every year with games, activities for children and families, barbecued food, cream teas and other refreshments, beer tent and live music from later afternoon until late evening. Finally, a boot sale is held here every summer Sunday morning from 1st May to 30th September.

Tree Trail. This has been established over a circular route of 4km to the north west of the town on each side of the valley containing the Common Lake Stream and extending as far as Furzebeam Wood at the north west extremity. It aims to include as many native or common species as possible. Some are growing locally and others have been introduced. A leaflet supports the Trail and this lists 55 species.

Self-guided Walks. There are a number of self-guided walks over the Commons. Some are publicised on display boards at the edge of the Old Bowling Green and the viewpoint near the Barley Grove car park. Others have been promoted by Devon County Council over the years and these often incorporate routes beyond the Commons.

Cycling Links. A potential link from the Tarka Trail to Taddiport and onward to Town Mills (and RHS Rosemoor) along the Rolle Road is under consideration, having been first mooted over 20 years ago with the building of the Tarka Trail/Rolle Road access tunnel in 1997. There has been an on-going assessment of a possible cycle route between the Tarka Trail and the Town. The Station Hill route published in 2008 has not been progressed.

Horse Riding. Horse-riders are not permitted to use the designated footpaths but access trails have been agreed with new signage along a number of designated routes across the Commons.

Golf Course. A 9 hole gold course was established on the Old Bowling Green in the 1890s, moving to Darracot in the 1920s and its current site at Furzebeam in 1932. There is free access to walkers over the golf course as it is a part of the Commons. The original clubhouse was sited in a field corner abutting the Commons. Permission to re-build it as a single storey unit was granted in 1981 with a second storey permitted in 1993, after some disquiet was expressed about visual impact. Extension of the implement store was also given permission in 1993 and re-contouring of the SE extremity of the course (6th/15th and 7th/16th holes) was approved in 2008. Successive wayleaves have been granted by GTCC for the maintenance facilities and their later upgrading, whilst an annual donation is made by the club towards the upkeep of the Commons.

Fishing. The River Torridge is well known as a salmon and sea trout fishery and the setting for Tarka the Otter. Fishing rights were part of the gift to the people of Torrington under the 1889 Act defined as families recorded on the electoral register but excluding visitors. The game fishing season runs from 1st March to 30th September and several access steps have been installed for less mobile anglers.

Site Furniture. There is a variety of different benches, seats and picnic tables throughout the Commons, often at prominent viewpoints or near facilities (refreshments, toilets etc). Litter and dog bins are also provided at convenient locations, to supplement those installed by Torridge District Council (generally nearer to the town).

2.19 **User Survey 2017.** A user survey was undertaken in 2017 via the local news magazine 'The Crier' which is delivered to all homes in the locality on a monthly basis. Of the 460 respondents, nearly three quarters were female and over 80% lived in the parish of Great Torrington. The age breakdown was 1.6% under 17, 4.9% between 17-25, 20.8% between 26-40, 59% between 41-65 and over 65 was 13.7%. Frequency of visit was daily 19.7%, most days 22.4%, weekly 35%, monthly 11.5%, less than once a month 10.9% and never 0.9%. The main reasons for visiting were dog walking 20.4%, exercise 17.8%, quiet enjoyment 21.1%, golf 1.3%, wildlife 10.7%, refreshments 13.9%, car boot sale 7.9% and play area 7.2%. In terms of attitudes towards the Commons landscape, nearly three quarters liked the Commons as they are and it was equally balanced between those that wanted more openness and those that wanted more woodland. When asked about possible future grazing 26.7% opted for ponies, 22.9% for sheep, 15.5% for cattle, 19.2% for goats and 15.7% for none at all. Finally, over three quarters thought the Commons very of well managed, 21% satisfactory and 3.2% poorly.

2.20 **Public Rights of Way (PROW).** The Commons are criss-crossed by a network of public footpaths with informal paths further increasing the density. There are over 32 kms (20 miles) in total. Many were established in the 1890s, their construction giving work to the unemployed, and a number have been given commemorative names. Re-surfacing has been undertaken periodically, most recently in the 2000s. Some paths are tarmac, others crushed stone and the remainder grass. Most of the public routes on the definitive rights of way map are numbered '**17**' which precludes individual reference. The exceptions are :

No.2 – the full length of the Rolle Road north of the River Torridge;

Nos.3 & 4 – across and to the east of Tanton's Plain;

No.7 – from the cemetery to Jubilee Wood via Dartington Glass

No.18 – along the track east of the golf course.

The only Commons parcel without any public footpaths is part of Norwood Moor to the north east opposite the former meat factory and east of the road to Gammaton Cross. One route through Clarke's Woodland has now transferred to grassland on the south side by common usage and another east of the A386/A3124 junction is currently inaccessible due to a landslip.

2.21 **Informal Paths.** The network of footpaths created by public rights of way across the Commons has been significantly extended over the years by the creation of desire lines that have become paths. Not merely has this increased the overall length of paths substantially, it has also provided or completed essential links within the PROW network. Of particular note are :

- (i) the links across Reeds Field from the Torridge to the Common Lake Stream, the Tarka Trail, the Rolle Canal route to Beam and up to the golf course;
- (ii) the continuation of the riverside walk from the sewage works north to the Rolle Road;
- (iii) the matrix of short routes between Alexander Path and Carriage Path;
- (iv) the continuation of the riverside public footpath east of the Taddipport bridge to meet the Rolle Road;
- (v) the routes across the grassland north of the cemetery to link with the Roman Road and the valley of the Common Lake Stream;
- (vi) the network of routes across Clark's Meadow to the north east of School Lane and Bastards Lane.

2.22 **Maintenance Access (Vehicular) and Routes.** Many pedestrian routes across the Commons are unsuited to access by larger maintenance vehicles due to their width, surface treatment and/or gradient. Those that offer the easiest access comprise :

- (i) the Roman Road from the Old Bowling Green across the valley of the Common Lake Stream and along the eastern side of the golf course to the Weare Gifford road;
- (ii) Barmaids Path throughout much of its length;
- (iii) the Rolle Road throughout its length;
- (iv) Watery Lane to the north of the Old Creamery lands (wet in winter);
- (v) Carriage Path (the historic route from Rothern Bridge to the town).

There is also direct access from School Lane on to Clarke's Meadow and from the Weare Gifford road on to Tanton's Plain.

2.23 **Riparian Rights and River Uses.** Fishing rights extend along most of the River Torridge's northern bank from New Mills to Rothern Bridge, with a further short section to the extreme north west from the Tarka Trail bridge to the land boundary with the Clinton Estates. The one gap is opposite the sewage works. There is occasional use of the river for canoeing whilst dogs are often encouraged to swim by their owners. Such is the amount of timber and debris brought down

the river during flood conditions it causes obstructions to build up upstream of the bridges; this has to be cleared periodically during the summer months.

2.24 **Surrounding Land Uses and Access.** The Commons wrap around the north, west and east sides of the town like a horseshoe. They often abut rear gardens, car parks or small field parcels between the two. Former agricultural processing uses (the old creamery and meat factory) abut Clarke's Meadow and Mill Common/Limers Hill respectively; re-development primarily for housing with some small industrial units has been granted recently. The north west boundary abuts the Tarka Trail with a pedestrian link provided, whilst land south of the Common Lake Stream west of School Lane abuts the Town Council's Jubilee Wood. The town cemetery is adjacent to the Old Bowling Green, whilst the Torrington station to the north east of the A386 road bridge includes the Puffing Billy restaurant, a cycle hire business and rolling stock on the rail track. The sewage works lies between the Rolle Road and the River Torridge to the south of the Tarka Trail bridge.

3. EVALUATION AND OBJECTIVES

IMPACT OF RECENT LAND USE CHANGES

3.1 **From Grazing to Cutting.** The Commons were formerly maintained as part of a husbandry regime based around grazing, which declined after 1945 and ceased in 1981. The major cause of the reduction in species-rich grassland has been the withdrawal of grazing. This has led to the extension of bracken and scrub and the gradual succession to woodland. Recent virus infection of the rabbit population and the consequent fall in the population has also had an impact locally. The alternative of machine cutting and removal does not entirely replicate grazing and, more importantly, is limited by available resources. The pace of change is evident from a study of early photographs and ordnance survey maps. The re-introduction of grazing on common land with very high recreational use and a restriction on creating permanent enclosures is fraught with problems. The current management plan rationale is not to pursue this option. The consequent task is to determine the important grassland and heathland communities that merit retention and can be effectively maintained without grazing. Access by machinery and suitable gradients are important considerations.

3.2 **Development Pressures.** Recent approvals for built development, most notably the old creamery site and the former meat factory, abut the Commons and have considerable implications for landscape, wildlife and the pattern of use by local residents because of their scale. The first comprises 146 residential properties and some light industrial units with a further 50 units and more light industry on another part. The second, which was designated for industrial use, has received permission for 143 homes with a further application for 50 homes plus small industrial units pending.

Both of these developments directly about the Commons and will have considerable visual impacts, which are easier to determine, and effects on landscape features and habitats due to increased recreational use and boundary pressures; the latter are more difficult to predict and may increase over time. Although the timescale could be protracted, the management plan must respond to these land use changes in terms of compartment types and operations.

ECOLOGICAL APPRAISAL

3.3 **CWS Comments (DBRC 2014).** The CWS monitoring exercise in 2014 summarised key issues and management recommendations. *The site has not been grazed in many years and as a result the majority of the site has developed into dense bracken and scrub and most of the remaining grasslands have become coarse and rank with little botanical interest. The areas of grassland that still exist would benefit greatly from management through grazing and/or cutting to avoid further loss to scrub. The site also supports some areas of mature woodland with many areas of younger secondary woodland. The site is also infested with Himalyan balsam in many areas.* The recommendations for future management at the end of the survey were fourfold :

- (i) **removal of Himalayan Balsam** throughout the Commons would be very beneficial in promoting the growth of native flora;
- (ii) **removal of other non-native and potentially invasive species** (e.g. monbretia and Wilson's honeysuckle);
- (iii) **removal of areas of dense scrub** and restoration to species-rich grassland;
- (iv) **basic woodland management** such as thinning dense areas, coppicing regimes and creation of glades and rides.

As an indication of relative value, Commons woodlands were assessed as medium-high and scrub plus grasslands as low-medium.

3.4 **Management Recommendations (DWT 2015).** These focused on two aspects :

- (i) **bracken and scrub control associated with fritillary butterflies** on south facing slopes above Reeds Field and Rice Point Path (east end), Mill Common and Castle Hill;
- (ii) **culm grassland restoration along old rifle range** located within secondary woodland and scrub on Norwood Common to the east of Gammaton Road.

DWT also recommended on-going monitoring of areas within item (i) above plus the remnant culm and wet grassland habitats. In the case of the specific areas mentioned in item (i), it is considered they should be ranked in order of relative tranquillity, which has resulted in the slopes above Reed's Field and tract above the eastern end of Rice Point Path and the central section of Barmaids Path being prioritised.

- 3.5 **The Sycamore Problem.** Whilst the undue competition from the fast-growing and highly prolific sycamore is a factor throughout the Commons, it is most serious close to town, especially on the south-facing slopes above the River Torridge. This is a landscape as well as an ecological problem, with the erosion of historic panoramas much loved by the local population and described by W.G.Hoskins. The current control measures require high inputs of labour, which could otherwise be deployed on ecological enhancement. Thus far, cutting has partially contained the problem but sycamore continues to grow in density and area. Given that steep slopes preclude grubbing of roots, the application of a brushwood killer is considered the only viable alternative. Certainly younger saplings can be grubbed up easily with a mattock; where slopes are not too steep some of this work could be undertaken by volunteers.
- 3.6 **Invasive Alien Species.** The prevalence of Himalayan balsam is probably the most notable in terms of area, to the extent that it has changed the local character along some stretches of the River Torridge. Normally eradication starts at the top of the catchment and works downstream, but it cannot apply in this case. Priority should be given to the north bank of the River Torridge before the Common Lake Stream (it is spread throughout the emerging scrub and woodland on Norwood Common). There are a few patches of Japanese knotweed and these are being dealt with by the head ranger and his team. The other alien species noted by DBRC in 2014 are monbretia and Wilson's honeysuckle. Survey work for this plan also recorded cotoneaster, berberis and laurel in local areas near the town and these should be removed when works take place in the locality.
- 3.7 **Non-native Trees.** There are non-native trees in various parts of the Commons, most particularly around the urban fringe and along the Rolle Road with a few beside the Common Lake Stream. Those close to the town are often important to its setting and the main consideration here is the option of eventual replacement with a native tree when it has to be removed. The poplar plantation to the north of the sewage works is set out on a grid system of c.9m between centres and rows. It may have been planted to screen the sewage works or as a commercial venture. A few have already fallen and the rest (c.46no.) are mature or over-mature. The gradual replacement of this plantation with a wetland including native shrubby willows to contain views of the filter beds and ephemeral water areas is an attractive option, given the paucity of wetland areas locally. The first obvious step is a feasibility study.

VISUAL APPRAISAL

- 3.8 **Historical Views.** The landscape historian W.G.Hoskins began his gazetteer entry for Great Torrington in 1954 as follows ... *Great Torrington is one of the most finely sited towns in Devon, on top of a cliff rising steeply from the meadows of the Torridge. Indeed, the best things about the*

town are the distant views of it from the adjacent hills, and the exceedingly beautiful views from it, especially of the deep wooded valleys of the Torridge and its tributaries as seen from the bowling green where the castle formerly stood. This description also applies to many other elevated locations within the Commons on the south side of the town or on the higher slopes north of the Common Lake Stream and Reeds Field. The old photos of the Commons confirm that their open quality largely pertained during the inter-war period and only in the 1950s does significant woody regeneration begin to appear, initially on the steep slopes either side of New Road (A386). The OS maps of both 1919 and 1946 show the only woodland as being on Furzebeam Hill.

- 3.9 **Current Views.** Many of the distant views eulogised by Hoskins remain today and it could be argued they have been improved by the increase in trees and woodland in the middle and long distance. This has created a more intricate landscape that is pleasing to the eye and serves to hide or disguise the increasing scale of built development. A tipping point is however being reached whereby the extent of woody regeneration – most notably sycamore – is beginning to threaten the much appreciated panoramas available from Marshwood Hill, Castle Hill and Mill Common. The same can be said for the more rural views that have been available from Coronation Path and Rice Point Path above the Common Lake Stream and Reeds Field respectively. Another recent change in the landscape has been the appearance of masts and wind turbines, the most significant group being west of the B3232 at Huntshaw to the north east of the Commons. The Old Creamery and Old Meat Factory remain as brownfield eyesores which because of the vertical scale in the first case and elevated location in the second are visible from many adjacent parts of the Commons.
- 3.10 **Consequences of Landscape Changes.** The gradual loss of grassland to bracken, scrub and then woodland has meant the loss of the formerly open landscape. The contrast with the old photographs of the Commons is now very marked and derives from the complete change in land usage (most notably the loss of grazing) in the last 50-75 years. It has also reduced the habitat for certain species such as butterflies, which has diminished the uplifting experience of a summer walk on the Commons. At the same time, the increase in visual enclosure has reduced the impact of recent and planned built development and absorbed greater numbers of visitors, making the Commons appear less busy, even at peak times. The 2017 survey of user attitudes showed majority support for the status quo, with the remainder equally divided between those who aspired to more woodland and those who desired more openness. The gradual improvement of the golf course on the top of Furzebeam Hill and the introduction of conifer planting, especially cypress, between large areas of close mown grass has led to a significant landscape change. It has also resulted in access being channeled along public footpaths rather than the more widespread rambling exhibited elsewhere.

LAND USES AND COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS

3.11 **Recreation.** The 2017 user survey is a valuable snapshot into activities on the Commons. Presented in priority order, choices made by respondents were **quiet enjoyment > dog walking > exercise > refreshments > wildlife > car boot sales > children's play**. Many were also regular visitors. It supports the current pattern of three zones of reducing intensity of human use :

- (i) **'honey pot' area** (Old Bowling Green) where the main organised activities take place supported by parking, refreshments and toilet facilities;
- (ii) **intermediate area** (surrounding Old Bowling Green, north and east of cemetery, Reed's Field, Clarke's Meadow, Mill Common and higher parts of Castle Hill) where the greatest amount of dog walking and exercise takes place;
- (iii) **outer quiet area** (Furzebeam Hill and Rice Point, valley sides of Common Lake Stream, Torridge riverside/Rolle Road, Norwood Common/Clarke's Wood/Tanton's Plain.

There is a strong case for enhancing facilities at the Old Bowling Green and sustaining a pattern of access on the Commons that reduces from the urban fringe to the outer areas. To a degree visitor usage is influenced by the type of path surface - tarmac, stone or grass – and this needs to be borne in mind in future maintenance. It is not possible to preclude access on the Commons but it can be channelled to more convenient and robust settings, so that quieter areas are more attractive to wildlife that avoids undue disturbance.

3.12 **Dog Walking.** This is a very significant activity on the Commons to the extent that some residents may chose to live in Torrington because of the extensive access for dog walking. It presents three main management challenges :

- (i) **unruly dogs** creating tensions with other dog walkers or other users e.g. picnicking;
- (ii) **dog faeces** left in situ through neglect or lack of diligence (worst affected areas are closest to town (top of Castle Hill, Mill Common, around cemetery and Old Bowling Green);
- (iii) **disturbance to wildlife** usually when off the lead.

Long (extendable) leads deal with the first point and should be encouraged, they may also help with the second by making owners aware of their dog's activities at all times. There are considered to be sufficient dog bins and it is a question of ensuring owners pick up, do not even temporarily leave bags on the side of the path but carry them to the nearest bin. Dog walking reduces with distance from the main access points, so that the channelling of access in terms of surface treatment and clearance also applies here.

3.13 **Cycling.** Cycling is currently precluded on the Commons by the bye-laws but there is nonetheless almost daily use of bikes. The most frequented routes in order are Rolle Road, Station Hill, Station Path, Carriage Path and Alexander Path. There are two evident objectives in this pattern of use :

(i) ***a link from the Tarka Trail to Taddipport, New Mills and RHS Rosemoor;***

(ii) ***a link from the Tarka Trail to Torrington town centre.***

To some extent GTCC has encouraged the former by supporting the tunnel access from the Tarka Trail to the Rolle Road that was formed by a partnership including Devon County Council and Sustrans in 1997. It appears to have been presumed at that time that the link facilitated cycling but no action has been taken to amend the bye-laws. A Rolle Road link through to New Mills (and thus on to Rosemoor) would present no conflicts with other users due to the width (9m) and presence of the former towpath. The link to the town is more problematic due to the gradient and potential conflict with walkers. None of the alternative routes is ideal but the least worst in terms of impact on the Commons is probably that up Station Hill closest to the A386.

3.14 **Golf.** The nine hole course has been long established in its current location (1932) and gradually upgraded to a high standard compared to the early days when stock grazed on the area occupied by the course. It is by no means unusual for a golf course to be located on common land but it does require give and take. The upgrading of the course has in no way reduced the right of general public access, though in practice walkers tend to keep to the public footpaths. A waymarked link down the northern edge would allow a circular route around the edge of the course and could encourage greater use of the clubhouse, which is open to the public. The pattern of mown grass, rough, bracken, scrub and tree groups is a potentially valuable wildlife mosaic which could be enhanced with adoption of similar management actions to those elsewhere across the Commons - on the understanding that this would be consistent with convenient use of the course. The 'framework' of the course comprising the copse at the north corner, the hedged boundary to the north and the tree belts east of the Roman Road public footpath are very important to the setting of the Commons and should be the direct responsibility of GTCC. The management of areas outwith tees, greens and fairways and the use of chemicals on the Commons should be the subject of a management agreement between the club and GTCC.

3.15 **Litter.** The main provision for disposal of litter is on the Old Bowling Green and at the top of Castle Hill, at the start of Old Maids Walk and near the Barley Grove car park. It mainly arises from refreshment outlets and items imported in cars. Recent fitting of lids to some bins has reduced the problem of windblow, which is a real issue on these elevated locations. The other action that would help is to minimise the waste brought on to the Commons from fast food outlets is to ensure all wrappings are bio-degradable. A campaign run jointly with the Town Council could assist the aim of waste minimisation so that far less has to be disposed of. Litter collection has been the primary

activity of the Friends to date and the aim must be to reduce the litter problem such that volunteers can focus on meaningful conservation work, rather than just tidying up other people's mess.

3.16 **Utilities.** The Commons are criss-crossed by a variety of utilities due in part to the attraction of avoiding routes through the urban area. The main constraint of the various underground services (gas, sewerage, water and telecoms) is on any earthworks or tree planting in the vicinity. The 11kv overhead lines on timber poles create more restraints on management, as they affect the type of landcover. Recent clearance under lines by contractors has been disappointing, as it has focused on creating a minimum distance to lines without due regard for the consequences on retained woody vegetation. In many cases it is better to coppice rather than leave trees looking like lop-sided coat hangers. It makes sense to create 'glades' or to coppice belts of variable width along such routes to avoid a corridor effect.

FACTORS INFLUENCING MANAGEMENT

3.17 **Fencing.** In order to erect stock-proof fencing on the Commons it is necessary to obtain consent from the Secretary of State (Law of Property Act S.194 and the Commons Act 2006). This process can take a very long time and it is unlikely that approval would be gained for any permanent internal fencing on the Commons. It is thus not possible to re-introduce grazing as a management tool by using small enclosures in the scattered parcels where this is desirable. The cost would also be prohibitive. It is however permissible to install temporary fencing to protect newly planted nursery stock or areas that have been re-seeded. Post and rail fencing has also been used to keep the public away from quarry edges, steep slopes or main highways.

3.18 **Workforce and Resources.** Both the labour and machinery available and the budgets to support them are modest in the context of the Commons size and management requirements. There are a number of possible options to increase such inputs :

- (i) ***re-configure the current workload*** to free up more time and/or resources (e.g. controlling sycamore to reduce the workload and easing the regularity of grass cutting in some areas);
- (ii) ***make greater use of volunteers*** (e.g. by widening the remit of the Friends and attracting new participants);
- (iii) ***secure more human resources*** (e.g. through apprenticeships or training partnerships);
- (iv) ***seek grant aid for specific projects*** (e.g. recreational facilities or wildlife habitats).

These options will take time to bear fruit and thus the early part of the plan period must assume working within current constraints.

3.19 **Machine Access and Disposal of Arisings.** The control of bracken and the cutting of meadow areas plus removal of arisings will rely on machine access, apart from small-scale action by hand works. Those areas that have adequate machine access along existing routes and suitable gradients for safe working are most suitable for restoration to grassland. The second part of the equation is the collection and removal of cuttings, preferably as hay that can be utilised for fodder. This may well demand small rather than large bales. The use of arisings from bracken areas is more problematic, although a green waste or biomass outlet might offer an option. Here again, some feasibility work is required to see whether equipment and markets are available locally.

LANDSCAPE AND WILDLIFE OBJECTIVES

3.20 **Human Activities.**

- Sustain current pattern of usage with greatest intensity around Old Bowling Green;
- Upgrade facilities, site furniture and signage with good design and a consistent style;
- Discourage litter and random dog fouling through public campaigns;
- Use type of path surfacing to influence intensity of usage with rolling programme of works;
- Support cycling links from Tarka Trail to Taddipport, Town Mills and Torrington centre;
- Ensure panoramic views from high ground are kept open and that seat locations reflect this;
- Screen approved built development sites with trees and woodland;
- Make representations on proposed developments where this affects wildlife and/or human use.

3.21 **Ecological Enhancement.**

- Remove alien and invasive species;
- Increase quantity of deadwood in woodland;
- Minimise use of chemicals, water, carbon fuels and bonfires;
- Eradicate single use plastics e.g. refreshment outlets;
- Introduce phased programme of first thinning and then coppicing where needed in woodlands;
- Clear paths within bracken on south-facing slopes and restrict further scrub regeneration;
- Increase area of grassland by reducing bracken/scrub, cut annually and remove arisings;
- Supplement specimen trees close to urban area and focus on use of native species;
- Maintain hedges by laying periodically once they reach a suitable height;
- Establish small wetland areas as and when opportunity arises to tackle current deficit;
- Agree management of golf course landscape along lines set out in management plan.

4. MANAGEMENT PRESCRIPTIONS

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

4.1 Ecology.

- (a) **Encourage wildlife and species diversity** by applying DBRC and DWT proposals (2014-15) for habitat management and allowing more remote areas to become less accessible.
- (b) **Reduce invasive and alien species by**
 - (i) *continuing eradication of Japanese knotweed* as first priority and *reducing Himalayan balsam*, first beside River Torridge and then elsewhere;
 - (ii) *removing ornamental species* beyond immediate urban edge (cotoneaster, berberis, laurel etc);
 - (iii) *controlling regeneration of sycamore* and reducing population where most beneficial to wildlife diversity and/or views (pull seedlings, grub up saplings, fell more mature trees, grub up stumps or treat with approved brushwood killer);
 - (iv) *containing spread of bracken* and reducing in grasslands (follow recommendations for bruising/cutting in Natural England's Technical Information Note TIN048).
- (c) **Natural regeneration and colonisation** is the preferred option for conserving and enhancing habitats and encouraging the diversification of any newly created habitats.
- (d) **Seeding and planting** will only be considered in the future where there is a clear need, such as dealing with erosion or specific amenity concerns, provided this does not conflict with other management objectives.
- (e) **Fauna will not be introduced** into the areas unless part of an approved re-population programme.
- (f) **Records of species observed on site**, both fauna and flora, will be kept and made available to biological recording projects and the conservation agencies as appropriate (the annual monitoring inspection proposed later in this section is considered the most suitable occasion for this to take place).

4.2 Deadwood.

- (a) **all deadwood should generally be maintained in-situ** and, where surgery is required for safety reasons, cut timber should be left to rot down in the locality in partial shade;
- (b) **large diameter felled timber should be allowed to rot down** in stacks under canopies and any brushwood left in piles, unless an impediment to access or future management;

- (c) ***a continuity of timber should be sustained*** by working towards a good population of trees in all age classes;
- (d) ***trunks and lower branches of dead trees should be retained*** by reducing the crown, so that a resource of standing timber is kept and safety is observed.

4.3 Human Activities.

- (a) ***Use of water*** will be kept to the absolute minimum;
- (b) ***Use of energy*** in day-to-day maintenance operations will be arranged in a manner to minimise overall consumption;
- (c) ***Use of plastics*** will be minimised with no single use items at food outlets or events;
- (d) ***Use of chemicals*** will be kept to the minimum with a general presumption against, except where other management methods are inappropriate, ineffective or have failed (application will only be undertaken by those with a current certificate of competence);
- (e) ***Use of flail cutters on woody vegetation*** that tear or rip rather than cut is precluded;
- (f) ***Local sourcing of resources*** used in both construction and maintenance will be the aim, consistent with the need to achieve fitness for purpose and cost effectiveness in an environmental context (e.g. distance and frequency of any transportation of goods);
- (g) ***Litter will be cleared on a regular and systematic basis*** from all hard landscape areas, tree, shrub and grass areas including any fly tipping, with variable frequency linked to the pattern of use over different parts of the Commons; it will be undertaken prior to any other maintenance activity on any area, most especially grass cutting to avoid shredding items and at no longer than monthly intervals; arisings will be carted off-site to a suitable waste outlet, with all recyclable material kept separate from other rubbish (operations will reflect the responsibilities and requirements of the Environmental Protection Act 1990);
- (h) ***Dog owners responsibilities will be conveyed through publicity*** focusing on immediate clearance of all dog faeces (bags should not be left by side of path or hanging on bushes) and containment of aggressive canine behaviour by use of leads.

4.4 Views and Access.

- (a) ***Panoramic views will be protected*** by giving priority to Castle Hill, Mill Common and Rice Point Path in that order followed by those from other elevated locations;
- (b) ***Landscape quality of the urban fringe will be enhanced*** via a more balanced age population of specimen trees near town and visual containment of new developments;

- (c) **Good accessibility will be sustained** by clearing and/or defining paths, securing funds for a surfaced cycle route from Tarka Trail to Taddipport and Rosemoor, reviewing the best route from the Tarka Trail to the town centre and increasing the number of routes suitable for mobility vehicles.

COMPARTMENT PRESCRIPTIONS

4.5 Woodland (W).

Location and Extent. The total area of woodland is about 71 ha (175 acres). Incidental trees and tree groups also occur within bracken and grassland areas and along roads and rivers.

Future Management. The main objective is high forest with oak predominant and constituents varying in relation to soils, slope and aspect. Alder-willow will be more prevalent in some wetter areas, with oak-birch on drier ground. Locally, hazel will be coppiced with oaks retained as standards and elm will gradually be converted to a coppice cycle to restrict reinfection with DED. Some oak regeneration in most compartments requires thinning and everywhere the spread of sycamore requires control measures. Ash dieback will be monitored throughout the Commons and the species will be excluded from any new planting. Bonfires are to be avoided wherever possible in favour of leaving log and brushwood piles or 'dead hedging' to enhance deadwood resource. Open structured flowers, such as umbellifers and hawthorn, will be encouraged for their value to invertebrates by ensuring there is sufficient light into tree groups through thinning as necessary.

Site Specific Actions.

W1 *Lockbeam Copse (affinities with NVC communities W8 and W10)*

- (a) remove all brash, branches and cuttings deposited to rear (north) of golf maintenance area.

W2 *Furzebeam Wood (affinities with NVC community W10e)*

- (a) thin young oak and fell/remove sycamore generally;
(b) coppice hazel on west side near Tarka Trail bridge and on lower slopes in SE corner.

W3 *Chestnut Copse*

- (a) encourage further regeneration over bracken area to NE;
(b) translocate or plant more sweet chestnut across bracken area.

W4 *Barmaids Wood West (affinities with NVC community W10)*

- (a) sustain current views from Rice Point path by local felling and/or coppicing;
(b) control spread of sycamore by felling and/or removal.

W5 *Barmaids Wood Centre (affinities with NVC community W10)*

- (a) coppice alder and willow on south side of Common Lake ponds and intermittently along stream course to allow more light in;
- (b) control sycamore spread by felling and/or removal;
- (c) commence coppicing of elm near Coronation Path on basis of 1/7 per year.

W6 *Stonemans Shaw*

- (a) secure cessation of sewage discharge directly from plastic pipe north of Moorland Terrace;
- (b) clear arisings from discharge pipe on and below embankment;
- (c) clear surface metal items and other rubbish on and below embankment;
- (d) after clearance is complete form new path along base of bank with steps at east end;
- (e) encourage woodland extension with exception of overhead lines and path corridors.

W7 *Rolle Wood West*

- (a) thin saplings and young trees by favouring species other than sycamore which is already well established,
- (b) coppice etiolated saplings to each side of Tarka Trail bridge to give good clearance.

W8 *Rolle Wood East + Marshwood Hill (affinities with NVC community W10)*

- (a) thin oak and fell or remove sycamore;
- (b) commence coppicing of elm near Coronation Path on basis of 1/7 per year;
- (c) sustain views from Monument Path and currently open section of Sliding Rock Path.

W9 *Barmaids Wood East (affinities with NVC communities W8 and W10)*

- (a) coppice hazel and willow to create larger glades on valley floor where grassland present;
- (b) coppice hazel on slopes between Coronation and Barmaids' Paths.

W10 *Clarke's Wood (affinities with NVC community W7)*

- (a) clear surface metal items and other large rubbish within woodland area;
- (b) coppice largest partly fallen willows and leave arisings as piles for deadwood;
- (c) translocate or plant young alder in some of gaps created to diversify wetland species.

W11 *Norwood Common Wood*

- (a) sustain currently open areas and public footpath routes by annual cut of herbaceous and any woody vegetation;
- (b) otherwise pursue a policy of non-intervention apart from control of Himalayan Balsam when resources allow, (though this is spread widely throughout both main compartments).

4.6 Bracken and Scrub (B).

Location and Extent. The total area of bracken with some scrub is about 19 hectares (47 acres) distributed over five locations – west of the Golf Course, either side of the Common Lake Stream, Mill Common and Castle Hill.

Future Management. The objective is a random mosaic, interspersing woody scrub with bracken and grassland margins as a rich, patchwork habitat of particular value to bird and butterfly species. Fritillary butterflies require light/moderate bracken cover amongst grassland with plentiful violets. The reptile population present in these areas must be protected and encouraged as part of management operations. This means retaining a proportion of scrub for cover. A network of inter-connected paths will be created through the bracken areas c.1m wide formed within the matrix by cutting in June and possibly again in August if the bracken is very dense. Cuttings will be raked into piles for over-wintering animals. Different areas of scrub should be cleared in consecutive years in a sequential pattern across each compartment, with as much work as possible completed by December. Where scrub is dense or excessive, cut stumps should be treated with an approved brushwood killer to discourage re-growth. The priority is to arrest extension of the scrub and control self-sown tree species from adjacent woodland areas. The overall canopy coverage of scrub should not exceed c.25% of the total area.

Site Specific Actions.

B1 *Rice Point Path (affinities with NVC community W23)*

- (a) restrict spread of woody vegetation by cutting back/grubbing;
- (b) thin oak stand at northern extremity by 30-50%;
- (c) cut c.1m wide swathes through bracken as random mosaic ensuring different routes are created each year;
- (d) cut 20% of gorse each winter and remove any sycamore regeneration;
- (e) undertake annual monitoring of butterfly populations.

B2 *Coronation Path West (affinities with NVC communities W23 and W25)*

- (a) remove recent woody vegetation by cutting/grubbing and/or treating with brushwood killer;
- (b) cut c.1m wide swathes through bracken as random mosaic ensuring different routes are created each year;
- (c) cut 20% of gorse during each winter and remove any sycamore regeneration;
- (d) undertake annual monitoring of butterfly populations.

B3 *Alexander Path (affinities with NVC communities W23 and W25)*

- (a) ensure unrestricted access along paths and trails within area by cutting back as necessary;
- (b) cut back scrub, bracken and bramble growth in local areas where grass species most prevalent and link up with narrow corridors;
- (c) elsewhere, accept gradual regeneration of woody species (apart from sycamore) and establishment of woodland.

B4 *Mill Common (affinities with NVC community W25)*

- (a) remove sycamore, giving priority to higher ground and seed bearing trees;

- (b) cut swathe of bracken of variable width between upper and lower footpaths and between lower footpath and recreation area to encourage grassland;
- (c) encourage secondary woodland to establish over southern corner abutting Limers Hill and opposite approved housing site by cutting bracken/bramble and tree planting.

B5 *Castle Hill*

- (a) control woody regeneration, most especially sycamore, giving priority to higher elevations;
- (b) grub smaller sycamore and treat larger stumps with approved brushwood killer;
- (c) prevent encroachment of bracken/bramble on to footpaths or adjacent grassland by cutting hard back.

4.7 Grassland and Scrub (G).

Location and Extent. The total area is about 26.5 hectares (65.5 acres) and grasslands are present over all the main Commons sub-divisions.

Future Management. The objective is a random mosaic of species-rich grassland, with occasional native trees and shrubs retained locally whilst other areas will be kept free of woody vegetation to benefit open habitat species. Along all margins, a tiered edge of woody and herbaceous plant canopies will be created and sustained. Grassland areas need to be managed to prevent succession to bracken, scrub and then woodland. This will involve a regime of cutting in the late autumn with the removal of cuttings as hay bales for fodder to reduce nutrient levels in the soil. A two year rotation (50% per annum) is less demanding on resources and will retain areas of tall dead vegetation for over wintering invertebrates. Where cuttings cannot be removed they will be placed in piles on the margins to create hibernation sites.

Site Specific Actions.

G1 *Reeds Field*

- (a) extend eastern margins up lower slope as far as gradients allow, especially where grass species are still present, and avoid straight line boundary;
- (b) clear bracken/bramble around mature sycamore at southern corner as far as gradients allow;
- (c) remove ragwort so that baled hay can be used for fodder;
- (d) assess potential for excavating ephemeral pond in marshy ground on north side with new overflow ditch down to willow scrub with two culverts for path crossings.

G2 *Tanton Plain (affinities with NVC community MG6)*

- (a) cut mower width along public footpaths crossing grassland four times each growing season and cut hay in autumn;
- (b) plant native shrubs/trees south of farm building on N. side to form copse;
- (c) coppice elm in shaw on east side on 7 year rotational basis.

- G3** *Coronation Path East (affinities with NVC communities U4 and U5)*
- (a) increase size of grassland by cutting/controlling bracken and shrubby species;
 - (b) cut whole area in autumn and remove arisings where gradients allow;
 - (c) review timing and number of cuts in third year.
- G4** *Cemetery North (affinities with NVC community MG6)*
- (a) extend grassland as far in all directions as slopes/site features allow by cutting back emerging scrub, bracken and bramble;
 - (b) cut local areas of more vigorous grass growth in autumn and remove arisings.
- G5** *Carriage Path*
- (a) extend area by cutting back bracken and bramble as far as slopes allow;
 - (b) cut nettle area north west of Old Bowling Green (old bonfire site) 6-8 times per year to establish permanent grass sward;
 - (c) cut areas of more vigorous grass growth in late summer and remove arisings;
 - (d) retain willow shaw east of Old Bowling Green as visual containment for Cavaliers bonfire site, coppice nearest before 2020 bonfire to preclude fire damage/spread.
- G6** *Station Path North + Limers Hill East (affinities with NVC community MG6)*
- (a) retain best individual trees (mainly oak) across area north of Station Path to grow on and remove remainder (c.50%) to create more open habitat;
 - (b) plant narrow belt of native shrubs close to A386 to limit traffic impact;
 - (c) cut line of public footpath four times per season to sustain route across area;
 - (d) cut all three areas in the autumn and remove arisings;
 - (e) treat linear area between Limers Hill and Woodland Vale the same as area to south, with cut of footpath margins four times per year and whole area in autumn.
- G7** *Shepherds Ham*
- (a) leave 3m uncut margins along narrow north and south sides;
 - (b) cut meadow area once in June and again in September and remove arisings;
 - (c) ensure bramble and scrub on riverside margin is kept cut back to prevent line of public footpath migrating into meadow area.
- G8** *Taddipport Bridge East*
- (a) area received Reeds Field hay in 2014 and should be surveyed each year to assess species diversity;
 - (b) continue with single late hay cut in autumn unless conditions suggest otherwise;
 - (c) leave uncut the developing reed area in centre beneath overhead line.
- G9** *Castle Hill East (affinities with NVC community MG1)*
- (a) prevent woody regeneration on north side by cutting/coppicing apart from

- wooded boundary margin beside adjacent housing;
- (b) cut any areas of long grass above 50cm in September and rake up cuttings to form compost/hibernation piles around edges.

G10 *Clarke's Meadow (affinities with NVC community MG6)*

- (a) continue to leave band of variable width on north side against woodland uncut;
- (b) leave 3m strip uncut on road margin to west and south;
- (c) re-plant road margin to west and south as predominantly thorn hedgerow over period of plan (one third per year over 2021-24);
- (d) undertake single late hay cut across main area in autumn.

4.8 **Mown Grass Areas (M).**

Location and Extent. The closer mown grass recreation areas are four in number, all close to the urban fringe and comprise 2.5 hectares (6 acres) in total.

Future Management. Frequency and timing of cuts will depend on the prevalent weather conditions and initially on the extent of pernicious weeds. More frequent cutting may be necessary to control emerging nettles, thistles and ragwort. The aim will be to sustain a consistent, visually attractive and hard-wearing sward. The principal operations are set out below.

- (i) *Mowing Equipment.* All grass cutting machinery will give a clean, even cut without damaging the grass and be guarded so as to present no danger to the operator or any person in the vicinity of the operations. All re-fuelling of machines will take place away from the sward.
- (ii) *Mowing Regime.* Regular mowing will maintain the length between the height limits of 50-100mm throughout the year. In drought conditions the interval between cuts will be increased. The frequency will mean cuttings do not need to be removed.
- (iii) *Obstructions.* Where mowing is interrupted by site furniture, the item will be trimmed around by hand tools and no herbicides are to be used.
- (iv) *Bulbs and Corms.* Areas of grass containing bulbs will not be mown until seven weeks after the bulbs have flowered and thereafter maintained to the standard of the areas in which they are located.

Site Specific Actions.

M1 *Old Bowling Green*

- (a) assess potential for improving drainage over northern part of area;
- (b) repair surface each autumn with soil/seed over grass and stone on access routes;
- (c) implement tree works as identified on plan and review options for A386 boundary bank.

M2 *Mill Common South*

- (a) reduce area of close mown grass to 20-30m oval around goal and cut more frequently;
- (b) allow remainder of area including banks to revert to meadow but remove or mow out any noxious weeds (e.g. stinging nettles) before relaxing mowing regime;
- (c) undertake annual autumn cut of meadow area;
- (d) translocate and/or plant spring wildflowers (e.g. primose) on banks and margins;
- (e) extend existing hedge northwards to existing close gap and plant trees inside hedge to screen new development across Limers Hill.

M3 *Taddipport Bridge West*

- (a) close mow area at east end and around seat plus footpath towards weir;
- (b) allow other marginal areas to grow on as meadow and cut once in autumn.

M4 *Barley Grove (South)*

- (a) continue with closer mowing around picnic benches and bins on south side;
- (b) allow meadow to develop on mound to north east with annual autumn cut and clear;
- (c) translocate/plant spring wildflowers (e.g. primose) on banks and margins;
- (d) remove 3no. trees overhung by neighbours and plant new specimens to north and on mound to eventually replace mature specimens.

4.9 **Golf Course (GC).** The course is located on the top of Furzebeam Hill at the extreme NW end of the Commons. It extends over about 12 hectares (30 acres). The objective, beyond playability of the course, is a mosaic of the plant communities present elsewhere on the commons and to :

- (a) keep close mowing to the minimum necessary beyond greens, tees and fairways in order to enhance the area of rough and semi-rough;
- (b) thin trees in linear belts between and around fairways to favour native broadleaved trees and gradually replace cypress;
- (c) ensure there is no impediment to public access over this part of the Commons and remove all branches and green waste rather than deposit locally;
- (d) manage areas of rough in same manner as grassland/scrub (G);
- (e) assess potential for footpath along north side of course next to hedge to allow circular route and greater use of clubhouse facilities by the public;
- (f) arrange bi-annual meeting with club to review management.

The management types and actions should be defined on a plan, the aims discussed and agreed with the club and set out in a management agreement. The copse to the north of the car park, the hedgerow to north of the course and the shaw to east of the Roman Road (excepting tees and surrounds) should come within remit of the commons management team.

LINEAR AND LOCAL FEATURES

4.10 **Specimen Trees and Groups.** There are important specimen trees on the western and southern edges of the town (Limers Hill, Mill Common, Old Maids Walk and Barley Grove). An avenue of lime trees contains the road to Weare Gifford (from Barmaids Path to the allotments access), though now with gaps and some self-sown trees that have diluted the effect. Trees also line the A386 down the hill to New Mills with more occasional small trees each side of the A386 west of the town. The proposed actions are twofold :

- (a) undertake an annual arboricultural inspection to assess the health and thus safety of all mature trees lining the highways that dissect the Commons;
- (b) implement a programme of new planting to create specimen trees in all age classes, focusing on native species – oak, beech, lime, hornbeam and field maple.

4.11 **Hedges.** Hedges occur to the north west of the cemetery, at the southern extremity of Mill Common near Limers Hill and west/south of Clarke's Meadow (proposed). The objective is to create dense hedgerows of mixed species, with thorn predominating, and incidental standard trees where appropriate. Variation of management through clipping and laying will create further diversity. Taller, thicker hedges are generally more valuable for wildlife, although the containment they create can influence fauna on adjacent grassland habitats. Maintenance will comprise :

- (a) removing tree species from under overhead line NW of cemetery and plant elsewhere;
- (b) undertaking annual trimming on newly planted hedges initially (not with a flail cutter) to ensure gapping up is effective and new hedges form a dense barrier;
- (b) laying hedges thereafter on a 10-15 year cycle.

The ground flora beneath and by the hedge is very important for wildlife and will not be regularly cut back, unless woody sucker growth needs to be controlled.

4.12 **Wetlands.** There is very little wetland on the commons beyond the two main water courses, the Common Lake ponds plus that in Reeds Field and the aim is to increase the area. The objective will a range from wet meadow to inundation communities, with marginal and emergent vegetation, as follows :

- (a) undertake a feasibility study into the gradual removal of the over-mature hybrid poplar plantation east of the River Torridge and north of the sewage works and the creation of a wetland area with shrubby willows as a belt beside the sewage works boundary;
- (b) hand dig some trial depressions in the swampy ground on the east side (centre) of Reeds Field with a view to creating an ephemeral pond and pedestrian walkway;

- (c) cut back or coppice riparian woody vegetation (chiefly willow and alder) where it is unduly shading water bodies and streams (e.g. Common Lakes).

4.13 **Fishery.** It is important that the east bank and gravel beds on the River Torridge are kept in good condition for recreational use (both access and fishing) and the following is proposed :

- (a) inspect recently installed steps and handrails and ensure they remain fit for purpose;
- (b) clear access routes to river's edge of woody and herbaceous vegetation as necessary to allow unimpeded access through the growing season;
- (c) regularly monitor water quality, report findings and alert regulator to any pollution incidents;
- (d) remove any litter, including plastics, that may be deposited by floodwater during regular inspections of the bank and gravel beds.

4.14 **Paths and Hard Surfaces.** There are three main categories of path and three types of surface which are reflected in the objectives below :

- (a) keep public footpaths open at all times as a first priority with a minimum of 1.5m width and 2.5m height clearance by cutting back herbaceous and woody vegetation as necessary;
- (b) ensure the same standards on main informal routes that form important links in the public rights of way network as a second priority;
- (c) apply these standards on other informal routes as a third priority;
- (d) inspect all hard surface paths on at least an annual basis, prepare and implement a schedule for repairs to tarmac and stone paths respectively, paying particular attention to avoiding trip hazards;
- (e) cut the grass margins to hard surfaced paths and the full width of grass paths to ensure access is not impeded by herbaceous vegetation;
- (f) cut away the turf growing over the edges of tarmac paths on at least an annual basis;
- (g) liaise with County Highways concerning flooding of Station Path (NW end above Tarka Trail and SE end near Limers Hill) and Rolle Road (under Tarka Trail bridge) that appears to result from inadequacies in drainage system from A386 Station Hill and Limers Hill;
- (h) liaise with Devon PROW unit to reinstate public footpath in SE corner of Commons on Marchwood Hill by New Road (A386)
- (i) define edges of pink concrete over Rolle Road through Old Creamery by road line paint.

4.15 **Site Furniture (seats, litter bins, vehicle deterrents, markerposts and signs).**

There is a clear need for a 'house style' for all site furniture on the commons (not the subject of this management plan). All items should be as sustainable as possible with a certain long term supply (to preclude future non-availability) and introduced on a gradual basis when replacement is required. The operations are as follows :

- (a) keep signs upright, firm in the ground and easily readable;
- (b) repair any damage to fencing or gates as soon as it is noticed or reported;
- (c) repair any damage to seats, benches and vehicle barriers where possible or else replace;
- (d) ensure all litter bins are cleared regularly and preclude dispersal during strong winds;
- (e) clearly demarcate undefined boundaries of Commons with adjacent land by marker posts (e.g. Furrzebeam Wood;
- (f) control advertisements posted on grassland SW of Station Hill.

Regular liaison with county and district council officers should ensure their signage is kept to the minimum and cleaned regularly; dog poo bins should be cleared regularly to prevent unpleasant smells and lids must be secure and effective.

ANNUAL INITIATIVES. (derived from site specific actions)

4.16 **Context.** The actions set out earlier under the different types of vegetation, features and artefacts are of two types :

- (i) ***maintenance changes*** which involve fine tuning the annual care for individual areas;
- (ii) ***local and specific improvements*** that are required to enhance particular areas by changing the management type and/or the operations undertaken.

Most woodland (W) management falls into the latter category and needs to be programmed in the schedules overleaf. Adjustments to the care of grassland (G), apart from the expansion of areas, come under the former. However, the general aim to cut, collect and remove late cut hay is dependent on machine access and the necessary clearance of sufficiently wide rides will be implemented in the second half of 2019; in some grasslands, trees on the edge or within the area also need to be removed. The new regimes would thus commence in 2020. Bracken/scrub vegetation type is partly in each category, some areas requiring the preparatory work before new management techniques can be applied. Finally, improvements to some locations nearer to the urban edge are more diverse and smaller scale and these have been set out on

six sketch plans. It is proposed that that an **annual initiatives plan** is prepared showing the location and nature of the various works and at the same time the agencies for implementation – direct labour, contractor, volunteers – should be agreed at the autumn planning meeting with both the Head Ranger and the Volunteer Co-ordinator present.

4.17 Year 1.

W2(a) Furzebeam Wood - thin young oak and fell/remove sycamore generally;
W6(a) Stonemans Shaw - secure cessation of sewage discharge north of Morland Terrace;
W9(a) Barmaids Wood East - coppice hazel/willow to create larger glades on valley floor;
B1(a) Rice Point Path - restrict spread of woody vegetation by cutting back/grubbing;
B1(b) Rice Point Path - thin oak stand at northern extremity;
B4(a) Mill Common - remove sycamore, giving priority to higher ground;
B4(b) Mill Common - cut bracken near top path + north of R2 to encourage more grassland;
B5(a) Castle Hill - control woody regeneration especially sycamore prioritising higher elevations;
Grassland Generally – provide machine access for hay cutting/collection and cut back scrub around edges (most important in order are G1, G3, G5,G4,G6);
G5(d) Carriage Path – coppice nearest willows in shaw east of Old Bowling Green bonfire to preclude fire damage/spread;
M1 Old Bowling Green – implement all tree works on schedule and plan;
M2 Mill Common South – implement all works on schedule and plan;
M4 Barley Grove – implement all tree works on schedule and plan;
GC Golf Course – meet with club and negotiate management agreement;
Wetlands - undertake feasibility into felling poplar plantation and restoring as wetland.

4.18 Year 2.

W2(b) Furzebeam Wood - coppice hazel on west side and on lower slopes in SE corner;
W4(b) Barmaids Wood West - control spread of sycamore by felling and/or removal;
W5(a) Barmaids Wood Centre - coppice alder and willow on south side of Common Lake ponds;
W6(b) Stonemans Shaw - clear arisings from discharge pipe on and below embankment;
W6(c) Stonemans Shaw - clear surface metal items and other rubbish;
B2(a) Coronation Path West - remove scrub by cutting/grubbing and/or treating with herbicide.

4.19 Year 3.

W5(b) Barmaids Wood Centre - control sycamore spread by felling and/or removal;
W6(d) Stonemans Shaw - form new path along base of bank with steps at east end;
W7(a) Rolle Wood West - thin saplings/young trees by favouring species other than sycamore;
W10(a) Clarke's Wood - clear surface metal items and other large rubbish within woodland area;

B3(b) Alexander Path - cut back scrub, bracken/bramble in local areas where grass present;
G10(c) Clarke's Meadow- re-plant road margin as thorn hedgerow (year 1 of 3).

4.20 **Year 4.**

W8(a) Rolle Wood East + Marshwood Hill - thin oak and fell and/or remove sycamore;
W10(b) Clarke's Wood - coppice large partly fallen willow and leave arisings for deadwood;
W10(c) Clarke's Wood - translocate or plant alder seedlings in gaps;
G10(c) Clarke's Meadow- re-plant road margin as thorn hedgerow (year 2 of 3).

4.21 **Year 5.**

W9(b) Barmaids Wood East - coppice hazel between Coronation and Barmaids paths;
G10(c) Clarke's Meadow- re-plant road margin as thorn hedgerow (year 3 of 3).

4.22 **Increasing Management Inputs.** The programme is loaded towards the early years to enable changes in management type, operations and/or area to take place as soon as possible. Implementation could be by direct labour, volunteers and/or contractors depending on availability, aptitude and resources. Much of the grassland and bracken initiatives rely on contractors' machinery. Possible opportunities for increasing current management inputs are :

- (i) **apprenticeship or student placement** to increase the direct labour force;
- (ii) **expansion of the remit and number of volunteer numbers**, both working with the ranger service and through the Friends, arranged by a designated volunteer co-ordinator;
- (iii) **applications for grant aid to fund improvements** via more inputs from local contractors.

Year 1 commences in autumn 2019 with a cut of designated grassland and bracken areas and the winter work programme on woodlands, trees and hedges. The annual review would take place in the following autumn and should be agreed by GTCC at the regular October meeting.

4.23 **Fundraising.** The TCMP is not a financial business plan, which is being dealt with separately in the light of significant changes to past funding sources and the need to support the increased management inputs identified in the last paragraph. There will be a substantial shortfall in the existing budget, due to anticipated reductions in, and/or potential loss of, current grants. Various means of fundraising from voluntary contributions and from grants are being studied, including both one-off contributions and regular support from those that use and appreciate the Commons (or represent user groups) and wish to enable the enhancement of its landscape and wildlife.

4.24 **Quinquennial Reviews.** A plan review every five years is proposed and agreement reached on any changes to the prescriptions. It will update or amend annual measures and techniques for the

coming five year period, again with options where appropriate. The objective throughout will be to ensure that the various habitats and uses meet the stated objectives in the context of changing natural and human circumstances through a continuing consensus.

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