

Introduction

We have been quiet over the Summer I know but that doesn't mean that we haven't been thinking.

The visit of Ruth from The Conservation Volunteers made us realise that we have to make a change since, well, we are getting older; no villagers have volunteered to join us; and there is much to do at times. We hear that there have been some complaints about the verges becoming overgrown. Really all we have done this summer has been keeping the paths open and overseeing the cutting of some of the grassland. Such jobs as doing the verges are now more than we want to do. I will come to that later.

The visit of Ruth from The Conservation Volunteers persuaded me to visit the Little Chalfont Nature Park and there I saw a model of how some areas of the Common could be managed. An advantage we have is that the Common is 3 x larger than the Nature Park so that there is plenty of space for some areas to be managed more suitably for the aesthetics of some other villagers and leaving plenty to be wild and suitable for wildlife. We met with some of the people who have overseen the establishment of the Park and they showed us around and related the tale of how it originated and was designed.

Two significant differences between the Park and the Common are that the population of Little Chalfont is 10x ours and most interesting to me anyway is that the Nature Park is new, having been developed recently with the local community, through the Parish Council. So some of the community have more of a connection with it, unlike our Common which has been here for hundreds of years but is at the present a redundant facility for most of the villagers so it seems of little interest. However, if our new proposals are successful that may not remain the case.

The Objective

The objective is to encourage volunteers to join us and take over some of the tasks. Then, some by becoming associated with the Common might come to appreciate both its social value to the village and also its value as a habitat for local wildlife and develop an interest in its conservation.

The Suggested Plan

What we are proposing is a staged takeover of some tasks of the management of the Common by village volunteers.

Some detail then. Firstly we suggest dividing the Common into 3 areas with different management objectives as follows:

Amenity areas.

Managed areas.

Wild unmanaged areas

Areas designated as 'Amenity Areas'. These would be the verges, the entrances to the Common, the paths, maintenance of the bridges and later on other areas that we develop that could be useful to villagers for socializing or relaxing.

The Managed areas. Areas mostly within the Common that need management due to the tendency of some vegetation, like brambles and bracken to invade the paths and the grassland. This is more complicated to explain but certainly either routines or boundaries could be set.

Wild, unmanaged areas. As I mentioned, our Common is easily big enough that we could allow much of the Common to develop naturally and probably go through the natural succession process. For instance along Barracks Hill there is a long wooded area which was once mostly fine big Hawthorns but now the bigger trees are shading them out and taking their place. Other places trees have fallen within these areas and we have left them where they are to become habitats for many creatures.

The feeling is that this plan may proceed in stages. It depends upon how villagers respond. At first we will set some standards but in consultation with the volunteers. I hope we may find someone willing to manage this work but we would remain involved since we have more knowledge of the Common.

For the verges, which we thought could be managed by volunteers, they are now planned to be done by a contractor.

Next, The Projects

There are potential projects and maybe, more with a bit of creative thinking and input from villagers.

Firstly, you may have noted the drainage amelioration work that has gone on at the junction of Windmill and Chalk Hill. The workmen used a digger to get out a lot of willow stumps for us. Then it was cleared by us. We will be planning to plant it up.

Next, the Common Pond which doesn't hold water for long in the spring which means it is not much use to the Amphibians that try to breed there. I don't think it is the fault of UK Networks boring through of the electricity cable but it has highlighted the problem. I have got some advice from the Environment Agency about how we may re-seal the base of the pond.

Then onto new projects for the Common and here we may be using a bit of creative thinking. We would plan work parties but some could be 'inclusive' meaning family tasks mornings. We could set up a task for adults to work on and also have a task which children could undertake at the same time. If we could get such a plan to work it might create a good working model and importantly introduce families and children to the Common. We could employ a Forest School teacher who is also a naturalist. With some of our funding they could be employed for a Saturday morning once in a while to help the children have some fun on the Common and maybe learn a few things about Nature.

By Projects we mean facilities that could be set up on the Common such as we observed at Little Chalfont Nature Park. We could try to make the Common more accommodating to villagers. The potential picnic area/s could be developed. More seating could be constructed.

Then a children's play area next to the picnic areas here they could build dens etc. This could be an extension of the occasional Forest School morning. A lot of what we do could or should do would be for the benefit of the children of the village. We were trying to think of someone in the village who might be good at organising events for the children as we don't feel that we are.

The reply from Roger Funk of the Little Chalfont Nature Park

I am not sure that I would describe our community as having a sense of ownership and pride although this does apply to a degree to those who helped to fund the project from the outset, as I am aware of quite a few who feel that they 'bought a piece of it'! There is no doubt that many residents welcome its existence but its continued popularity relies on quite a few things – not least the regular promotion of its benefits.

Below is a list of what we do and can only suggest that you consider those that will work for you.

We identified both flora and fauna, plus the history of the land.

- Created leaflets and used the material in our website. We also have Facebook.*
- Decided on the Unique Selling Points and use these in our promotions.*
- Developed an outline of an educational resource and now encourage visits by the local schools for educational purposes.*
- Maintain a relationship with the uniformed groups, which arrange visits and activities from time to time. (They all were roped in to help in the early stages when we were tidying up the park.)*
- We make use of the 4 newsletters that are produced each year by the Community Association and Parish Council. Each has a section on what is happening in the park. (This plays a major part in keeping the park in front of the community and we hope that you will be able to make use of an existing newsletter or other network.)*
- At our annual Village Day, there is always a stall promoting the nature park. (Do you have a similar event and/or church fete that you could attend?)*
- Created 'Friends of the Nature Park' and from that membership, draw on enthusiasts to join monthly working parties.*
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I have just had a look at your PC's website and see that you already have a page that covers the Common, to which you regularly contribute. If this could be supplemented with printed newsletters (or messages that reach all residents that point them to the web page), you may find that this raises the profile. Also, I have seen and skim read the 2014 Management Plan, with its wealth of detail on ecology, so you clearly have all the data that you need to confirm the value of the Common. It prompts me to think that one way of generating the interest and involvement would be to put a project together that will require funding and one from which the community will be able to benefit on the Common. Hopefully, being asked for contributions, would draw the community into taking more interest.

Kind regards,

Roger

PS Have you discussed the aspiration with BBOWT?