

Sheffield Moors Partnership

Burbage, Houndkirk and Hathersage Moors

Stakeholders' Update on 9 July 2014

The long awaited landscape improvements on these Moors will begin at the start of August.

This is by far and away the most significant and inspiring initiative these moors have seen, probably ever. There will be huge benefit not just to landscape but also to the many people who enjoy the area (for all sorts of different recreation) and to biodiversity. Agreeing some of the detail, often concerning fencing, is difficult and contentious but this can not detract from the overall impact of a really positive initiative.

No fence is intended to restrict access, and all have been hotly debated. They have been kept to a minimum and will be temporary for protection of new woodland planting, species like water voles, some archaeological features and for road safety. Stiles will be provided on established informal paths (called desire lines), and if more are needed in different places these can be added. At the same time a small herd of heifers will be introduced – about 35 in all – whilst sheep numbers, now reduced from a high of 1000 to about 500, will further reduce to 180 – 200. There will be no bulls, no calves and no winter grazing by cattle.

The land is owned by Sheffield City Council and is currently leased to the National Trust. Funding comes from those organisations but significantly too from the Dark Peak Nature Improvement Area (NIA), High Level Stewardship (HLS) and the England Woodland Grants Scheme EWGS). The Sheffield Moors Partnership (SMP) brings together all stakeholders to make decisions and oversee the smooth delivery of the vision for the area.

Surprise View – Secret Garden

Birch colonised this area after a fire in 1976, which has resulted in a single age woodland. Some birch will be thinned. Species like native oak and rowan will be introduced along with some general woodland management to make a more diverse woodland. This work will be spread over a 15 year period. Two smallish areas will be fenced within the woodland but neither will be particularly visible or conflict with desire lines for informal paths.

Stony Ridge Cattle Pen

There will be some re-ordering and general tidying up of this area.

Eastern Edge bounded by Sheephill Road

In this less visited part of the area natural clough woodlands will be enhanced. This will entail some fencing.

Jumble Road

The fence which separates Lady Canning's Plantation from Jumble Road will go, but a new fence will be erected on the moorland side of Jumble Road to keep cattle out of the plantation. At the same time the harsh edge of the plantation will be thinned to allow a gentler gradation between the Plantation and the open moor, with native species predominating.

The entrance to Jumble Road from Ringinglow Road will be set back. It would have seemed sensible to put cattle grids in here and by Parson House, but highways legislation does not allow cattle grids on Byways Open to all Traffic.

This will allow much easier access for mountain bikers and dog walkers to permitted routes within the Plantation.

Fiddler's Elbow

Stone flags will be airlifted in and installed to reduce erosion where the informal path from the car park down to the Great Britain Plantation edge crosses wet flushes.

Great Britain (Burbage Valley) Plantation

This 35ha plantation, laid out roughly in the shape of Great Britain appeared in 1969 and was universally condemned when it did. Scotland and Wales, as it were, were planted on the western or Carl's Wark side of the brook. Devon and Cornwall never got planted at all because there some Canadian munitions were thought to have been dumped during the war in that area. No access was provided and, besides being totally out of place in the landscape it presents a very serious fire hazard with much wind blown predominantly poor quality timber dominating parts of the interior. As most climbers and walkers will know, the Plantation also hosts a range of other activities!

Well its going, and its going now with work starting in August. Great.

To begin at the end – what we should finish up with is something like a continuation of the landscape of scattered native woodland below Toad's Mouth, predominantly along the brook side, into the Burbage Valley. Some conifers will be left, mostly along the Burbage North / South brook bank and at the top end on the other bank, largely for the benefit of birds that nest in them. There will also be some planting pretty much in the gap between Burbage North and Burbage South, but avoiding desire line paths to the Long Tall Sally area.

Timber felled on the west bank (ie Scotland and Wales) will be airlifted by helicopter to a temporary depot at Burbage South. Earlier plans to skyline it across the brook have been abandoned. The remainder (ie England) will be harvested conventionally using forest harvester and forwarder, and taken by a newly installed trackway to the Burbage South depot.

The line of track, to where it meets the Green Drive, is marked out already on the ground with wooden stakes. A narrowed version of this track will be left in situ to allow for management access to newly planted areas, and will become an alternative informal path along the waterside for walkers who wish to avoid horses or mountain bikers on the Green Drive. This desire line essentially exists already.

Most of the harvested timber – between 7000 and 8000 tonnes – is of poor quality and will go for woodchip but any that is of better quality may be sold for other uses.

There will be limits on access along the bottom of the Green Drive, and around the work area, during the week, but not at weekends. An alternative route will be signed. In practice as the whole area is Open Access Land this will not make too much difference as long as you avoid working areas.

The harvesting work should be completed this year or early next though some of the restorative work is likely to take a bit longer.

Archaeology and Habitat Management

In addition to all this there has been a new archaeological survey of Carl's Wark, Toad's Mouth and Nell Croft.

A range of habitat measures is also envisaged including heather management, bracken control and re-wetting of some blanket bog areas.

Ring Ouzels

Ring Ouzels are pretty particular about their territories and nine distinct territories have been defined around the Burbage Valley. Where birds nest on climbs, or on descent routes, the BMC agrees voluntary restrictions, and this arrangement will continue.

In practice this has only been deemed necessary at one or two sites each year, and these are always signed discretely on site. The nesting season has all but finished this year and was reasonably successful.

Incidentally, sonogram recordings have revealed that our Stanage and Burbage ring ouzels have distinct and different song features from their cousins in Yorkshire. Peak birds are local to the Peak. One male which did not have a local song failed to attract a partner this year, try as he might. So our birds really are very special indeed.