

MEDDON GREEN PROPOSED LOCAL NATURE RESERVE

DRAFT MANAGEMENT PLAN

Background

Meddon Green is a small area of grassland of nature conservation interest. It is proposed that the area is designated a Local Nature Reserve to help ensure its future as a wildlife haven. Production of a management plan is an essential part of the designation and implementation process. This consultation draft has been prepared by the Northern Devon Coast & Countryside Service with help from local people involved with the site.

Comments are sought on the draft document in order that the final plan that is submitted is as accurate and useful as possible.

Please submit any comments by **16th November 2006** to:

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1. Aim

To secure the long term future of Meddon Green through the designation of the site as a Local Nature Reserve (LNR) and by management for the benefit of wildlife, education and access.

2. Local Nature Reserves

Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) are for both people and wildlife. They are places with wildlife or geological features that are of special interest locally. They offer people special opportunities to study or learn about nature or simply to enjoy it.

Natural England recommends that LNRs should be:

- normally greater than 2ha in size
- capable of being managed with the conservation of nature and/or the maintenance of special opportunities for study, research or enjoyment of nature as the priority concern.

LNRs should also be either:

- of high natural interest in the local context or
- of some reasonable natural interest and of high value in the local context for formal education or research or
- of some reasonable natural interest and of high value in the local context for the informal enjoyment of nature by the public.

Meddon Green fits with the majority of these criteria.

3. Description

3.1 Location

Grid Ref: SS 277 177

Meddon is a hamlet of 28 houses situated approximately 13 miles west of Bideford in North Devon. It lies within the parish of Hartland, in the District of Torridge.

Meddon Green covers approximately 1.7 hectares (4.2 acres) and lies on the south west side of the hamlet, adjacent to a small residential area. It is

bounded on two sides by quiet country roads and two sides by agricultural fields.

3.2 Ownership

The site was acquired by Hartland Parish Council in 2003. No owner of the site could be found in the late 1980's and therefore the Parish Council commenced an ownership claim in 1993. This was not contested and the parish council became the legal owner in 2003.

Meddon Green was not claimed as common land following the Commons Registration Act (1965) and there are no known commoners or common rights.

3.3 Authority

It is usual for the district or county council to declare Local Nature Reserves but the legislation does allow for this duty to be delegated to parish councils. It is proposed that Hartland Parish Council should declare Meddon Green Local Nature Reserve. Correspondence regarding the delegation of this duty has already taken place Hartland Parish Council and Torridge District Council.

3.4 Soils/Geology

The geology of the area is comprised of massively bedded sandstones with alternating fine grained sandstone and shale horizons. These lacustrine deposits are part of the upper carboniferous Bude formation.

Soils comprise of a brown earth with an acidic pH of around 6.

3.5 History/Past Usage

During the 1980s a local builder put in a claim for ownership of Meddon Green in order to acquire planning permission for housing. This was subsequently turned down.

The site has suffered from the dumping of rubble and refuse on occasions along its northern boundary and at the north east corner of the site a septic tank has been installed, serving the residents opposite.

Local residents have been keen to see this area managed for wildlife and with help from the Northern Devon Coast & Countryside Service have undertaken some scrub and path clearance.

4. Habitats

4.1 Culm Grassland

Meddon Green is identified as an area of Culm Grassland on Devon Wildlife Trust's Culm Grassland Inventory. Culm grassland is the wet acid unimproved grassland found over the culm measure soils of North Devon.

The UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) recognises culm grassland as a UK priority habitat and aims to maintain and enhance 13,500 hectares and recreate 500 hectares from 1997 to 2010. It is included within the Purple Moor Grass and Rush Pastures Habitat Plan. The plan outlines the importance of managing the grassland in order to conserve it.

Culm grassland is also recognised as a nationally important habitat for the marsh fritillary butterfly (*Furodras aurinia*), a UK BAP species, which has seen severe reduction in population size both in the UK and mainland Europe in the recent past. Although the marsh fritillary has not been recorded at Meddon Green there is a good, but possibly declining, population at Bursdon Moor, just over one mile away.

The Devon BAP also recognises the importance of culm grasslands. One objective is that all culm grasslands over 0.5 hectares should have a management plan which when implemented will conserve the habitat whilst providing improved public awareness through access and education.

Culm grassland were traditionally grazed by cattle and/ or burnt. Grazing does reduce the amount of scrub clearance needed to keep sites open. Although the culm grazing is generally poor quality if a site is well fenced and the grazing is not charged for there is usually a local farmer willing to help.

Although there are around 530 recorded culm grassland sites in north and west Devon there are none designated as Local Nature Reserves. Meddon Green, if designated, would be the first.

4.2 Hazel Coppice

Hazel coppice is a very important habitat for many species in particular the dormouse. Evidence of dormice at Meddon Green has been found in the recent past and it is important that any management work carried out benefits this mammal. Dormice need hazel bushes that produce a lot of nuts which are an important food source in the autumn to build up their body weight for their long winter hibernation. If hazel bushes are too old or too young their fruiting is reduced. A programme of coppicing small amounts of hazel each year generally helps ensure a regular supply of hazel nuts.

4.3 Ponds

There are two ponds on Meddon Green. One is comparatively small and the other larger. Both are important man-made habitats that increase the biodiversity of the site. The larger pond is particularly important for breeding dragonflies. Both ponds are becoming silted up and are in need of some clearance. The larger pond is also becoming overgrown with willow. Although the willow offers good shelter around the pond, it also tends to shade the open water and it allows leaves to drop into the pond in the autumn, both of which are detrimental to the wildlife value of this habitat.

4.4 Wet Woodland

Wet woodland occurs on poorly drained or seasonally wet soils, usually with alder, birch and willows as the predominant tree species. It is an important part of culm grassland sites but it is important that it does not dominate. It is important that area of wet woodland on the site of greater conservation value are retained but those areas of less importance can be converted back to grassland. Willows can be important for their lichens. Areas of lichen interest need to be identified and kept as wet woodland.

5. Objectives

The objectives of the management plan are as follows:

- 5.1 To conserve for the future Meddon Green as a wildlife resource.
- 5.2 To provide well managed access and educational facilities that address the requirements of locals and visitors and which do not compromise other interests.
- 5.3 To maintain and, where appropriate, increase areas of open grassland and prevent further scrub encroachment.
- 5.4 To manage woodland areas for the benefit of dormice, lichens and other wildlife.
- 5.5 To manage the ponds to maintain a balance of open water and aquatic vegetation.
- 5.6 To consider the feasibility of grazing the site.
- 5.6 To monitor the wildlife to ensure that management retains and hopefully increases the biodiversity of the site.

6. Resources

- 6.1 Human resources

Much of the initial work to be carried out is labour intensive scrub clearance, stump treatment and burning. It is proposed that local volunteers under the guidance of the Northern Devon Coast & Countryside Service should be able to achieve most of this work.

6.2 Grants

Any major projects such as fencing would need grant aid to happen. It is proposed that a small management committee would be responsible for applying for grants.

The purchase of tools may be necessary, as well as training in their usage. Access improvement may require timber. Any signing or interpretation would need funding.

7. Actions

In order to achieve the objectives of the Management Plan, the following actions are proposed.

- 7.1 Cut informal paths to ensure access is maintained to allow people to enjoy the site in a controlled manner making sure sensitive areas are avoided.
- 7.2 Re-establish grassland through a scrub clearance programme. Stumps to be treated after cutting and/or sprayed with herbicide the following summer to prevent any re-growth..
- 7.3 Maintain areas of grassland by annual cutting
- 7.4 Remove grass cuttings or burn on site to prevent enrichment of the grassland, which would reduce the wildlife interest of the site.
- 7.5 Carry out woodland management programme to improve the habitat for dormouse.
- 7.6 Clear scrub around the borders of the pond to reduce shading and leaf drop into the pond
- 7.7 Raking limited amount of vegetation out of larger pond.
- 7.8 Carry out detailed surveys of the flora and fauna of the site.
- 7.9 Encourage community involvement with the site at all levels.
- 7.10 Seek external funding for projects, where applicable

7.11 Establish a steering group including local residents, Hartland Parish Council, Torrington District Council and the Northern Devon Coast & Countryside Service to help plan implementation of the management plan.

Appendix 1 ACTION PLAN

The lead partner for each of the actions is identified in bold.

Action	By Whom	Month	Frequency
Footpath Maintenance	NDCCS	One cut May Second cut July	Ongoing
Re-establish grassland by removal of scrub	NDCCS /Volunteers	December/March	Ongoing – Review after Year 2
Maintain grassland by cutting	NDCCS /volunteers	October	Ongoing
Hazel coppicing	NDCCS /volunteers	December/January	Year 2, 5,7 and 10
Scrub clearance around pond	NDCCS /volunteers	January	Year 1
Pond raking	NDCCS /volunteers	January	Year 1 – Review Annually
Consider fencing and grazing of the site if a funder can be found	Management Committee	Year 1	ongoing
Species Survey	Volunteers /NDCCS	Throughout year	Ongoing

Appendix 2. Species List

The following species have been recorded at Meddon Green since 2003
(if you have more records please send in details)

Plants

Common valerian
Scentless mayweed
Pineapple weed
Redshank
Broad-leaved-willowherb
Russian comfrey
Red campion
Ragged robin
Meadowsweet
Common fleabane
White clover
Creeping thistle
Marsh bedstraw
Cleavers
Cut-leaved cranesbill
Wild angelica
Broad leaved dock
Water parsnip
Gypsywort
Lady's smock
Water mint
Water forget-me-not
Common scurvy grass
Foxglove
Common nettle
Bittersweet
Marsh pennywort
Meadow buttercup
Birds foot trefoil
Southern Marsh Orchid
Tufted Vetch
Bush Vetch
False oat grass

Insects

Common darter
Beautiful demoiselle
Banded demoiselle
Large red damselfly
Blue tailed damselfly
Emperor dragonfly

Mammals

Dormouse

Birds

Barn owl