

## **Colemere management plan 2008-2013 PLAN SUMMARY**

### **Vision**

Colemere will be a site where scientifically important species and habitats are conserved.

Visitors will be able to enjoy walking around the site through mixed broadleaved woodland, with trees and shrubs of different ages and open glades where herbs and young trees will grow. The woodland will sustain a variety of birds, mammals and insects and a variety of native wild plants such as wood anemone, bluebells and the elongated sedge. There will be walks across herb-rich meadows and pastoral fields buzzing with a host of butterflies, beetles and other insects.

The mere will support significant stands of fringe and aquatic vegetation, including noteworthy stands of the least water lily, providing suitable habitat for nesting birds, fish and a host of aquatic insects, such as dragonflies and damselflies.

Visitors will have the opportunity to explore and learn about the rich diversity of life which this site offers.

All management will be sustainable and will aim to preserve the conservation value of the site for future generations.

### **Management**

The management is based on the following 6 Features and describes their proposed management for a 5 year period between April 2008 and March 2013. Health and Safety is Feature 7 but obviously overlaps all the other features.

Open standing water and emergent fringe vegetation, Semi-improved neutral and marshy grassland within the SSSI, Wet woodland (alder dominated), Broadleaved woodland, scattered broadleaved trees (Yell Wood) and mixed plantation (Boathouse Wood), Areas of semi-improved neutral grassland outside the SSSI, Access and Recreation, Health and Safety.

A brief summary of the objectives and management prescriptions for each feature is given below.

#### 1. Open standing water and emergent fringe vegetation

The open water of the mere supports the nationally scarce Least water-lily and other notable aquatic plants invertebrate communities. Emergent vegetation around the mere was locally frequent/abundant in the late 1950's, but is currently sparse. There is potential for enhancement through appropriate management.

**Objective:** Restore the aquatic/emergent vegetation and aquatic invertebrate fauna in the open standing water habitat

**Main Prescriptions:**

Some overhanging trees and scrub need to be removed.

Priorities are the trees and shrubs along the northern and southern banks. Trees and shrubs within 10m of the bankside should be removed, leaving only occasional ones deemed to be of particular importance for conservation reasons, i.e. bat roosts. Occasional site-native shrubs and trees should also be left along the banks even where these overhang to provide small patches of shade which will add to the habitat diversity (both within and above the water).

All scrub/tree management should be carried out in the non-bird breeding season only (ie: between September and February). Consideration should be given to the requirements of the otters known to use the site and any work needs to be carried out with appropriate licences.

Notices should be posted to inform visitors about the work and why it is being carried out.

2. Semi-improved neutral and marshy grassland within the SSSI

Yell Field and Little Mill Field primarily comprise relatively species-rich, high quality, grassland/marshy grassland habitat. The fields have been in stewardship schemes since about 1992 and have principally been managed during that time as traditional hay meadows

**Objective:** Maintain the semi-improved neutral and marshy grassland

**Main Prescriptions:**

In order to maintain good condition, it will be necessary to continue to fine tune the grazing regime (or manage by cutting if grazing is not possible) so a flexible approach to the grazing needs of the site would be best. Rare breeds would be more beneficial as they are able to cope with the coarse vegetation without resorting to supplementary feeding.

Grazing with rare breed cattle (or sheep at Little Mill) should be implemented as per the Higher Level Stewardship Agreement.

Run events to highlight and limit the problem of dog control and fouling

3. Wet Woodland (alder dominated)

The wet woodland on the mereside edge has a canopy of alder with a relatively rich field layer. In 2004, about 100 tussocks of the Nationally Scarce elongated sedge were recorded in this habitat

**Objective:** Bring wet woodland (alder dominated) supporting Nationally Scarce elongated sedge into favourable condition

**Main Prescriptions:**

Control sycamore by cutting and chemical treatment of cut stumps and regrowth as well as ring-barking/herbicide treatment (with deadwood left standing). Management should be carried out in the non-bird breeding season only (ie: between September and February). A proportion of felled timber should be used to create habitat piles or left in situ.

Control rhododendron (throughout compartment C6a). Control by cutting and chemical treatment of cut stumps and regrowth. Remove, pile or burn cut material as appropriate. Management should be carried out in the non-bird breeding season only (ie: between September and February).

4. Broadleaved woodland, scattered broadleaved trees (Yell Wood) and mixed plantation (Boathouse Wood)

Much of Yell Wood comprises former broadleaved plantation. The wood is mixed with oak, beech, silver birch, sycamore, scots pine and ash saplings, including some large specimens of beech and oak. The shrub layer includes dense stands of rhododendron with yew, hazel, rowan and holly. The field layer is often rather open with male fern, patchy bracken and occasional wood sorrel, wood anemone and bluebell.

Boathouse Wood is essentially mixed woodland with poplar, beech, oak, Norway spruce, Douglas fir along with some western hemlock, larch and scots pine. Natural regeneration includes sycamore, birch, rowan, holly and hazel with alder at the mere edge. The field layer is often sparse with scattered bramble, bluebell and bracken.

It is likely that these habitats support some locally notable species such as deadwood invertebrates and possibly bats.

There is a record for the notable comb-footed spider *Theridion hemerobium* which appears to originate from Yell Wood although it is more likely from the adjacent canal. Its presence on site and the likely requirements of this species needs to be established.

**Objective:** Allow the woodland to develop through natural succession of native species and removal of non-native species.

**Main Prescriptions:**

Control rhododendron by cutting and chemical treatment of cut stumps and regrowth.

Thin sycamore by felling and chemical treatment of cut stumps and regrowth as well as ring-barking/herbicide treatment with deadwood left standing where considered safe.

Thin/group fell conifers with a view to gradual conversion to broadleaved plantation with a more semi-natural composition and structure.

Mature trees should only be felled (or their deadwood removed) where there are over-riding public safety concerns. All felled timber should be left *in situ*.

Plant up to 10 site-native trees in open locations, if survey shows less than 5 individuals under 100 years old are present.

**N.B** All management should be carried out in the non-bird breeding season only (ie: between September and February).

Establish the original location of, or survey for the presence of the comb-footed spider *Theridion hemerobium*. If present, adjust management as necessary.

#### 5. Areas of semi-improved neutral grassland outside the SSSI

Crab Mill fields provide an important buffer to the SSSI, as well as an opportunity to increase the biological diversity of the site overall.

Crab Mill Fields comprise primarily semi-improved grassland of a lower quality than within the SSSI, but with potential for enhancement through appropriate management. There are mature hedges separating most of the fields. These fields and hedges are subject to a Higher Level Stewardship Agreement. Continued low intensity management of the semi-improved grassland and the associated hedges will help maximise their biodiversity value. The fields are used by walkers and dog walkers and provide an alternate access route adjacent to the SSSI.

**Objective:** To increase the conservation value of the fields and hedgerows on Crab Mill through appropriate management

#### **Main Prescriptions:**

Manage Crab Mill Fields by grazing (or cutting if grazing is not possible). Grazing with cattle or sheep should be implemented as per the Higher Level Stewardship Agreements.

Manage Crab Mill hedges as per the Higher Level Stewardship Agreements.

Control undesirable species such as creeping thistle and ragwort

Monitor the effects of the rabbits on the sward and hedgerows and implement control if appropriate

## 6. Access and Recreation

Colemere is an important amenity, used by the local community and visitors from further afield for quiet recreation, particularly walking/dog-walking, sailing and angling. The 'peace and quiet', and 'birds and wildlife' are the most frequently mentioned features enjoyed.

Least enjoyed appear to be areas of muddy ground and uncontrolled dogs.

Colemere contains a number of features which could be of particular value for interpretation and education:

- the semi-natural habitats and associated species;
- its glacial history;
- it is easily accessible with some infrastructure.

**Objective:** To optimize sustainable access and use of the site by visitors

### **Main Prescriptions:**

Ensure access provision (gates, stiles) is in good condition.

Improve paths around the site, particularly through Yell Wood and parts of Boathouse Wood.

Improve car park surfacing and surrounding fencing

Carry out regular litter picking

Establish additional simple bench seats in appropriate areas around the site. Informal seating in the woodlands would allow restful appreciation of the scenery.

Cut the area of amenity grassland regularly to ensure that the grass is maintained at an appropriate level to allow for informal recreation.

Produce and implement an Interpretation Plan. There is need to develop an Interpretation Plan which will decide on key messages and how they are to be delivered. Information boards at the car park should welcome visitors, outline the interest of the site and suggests walks.

Liaise with local and educational groups. Liaison with other local interest groups, such as the Residents Association, would also help in informing the public about the value of carrying out management activities as well as encouraging feedback about areas of concern.

Where appropriate the visitors and local communities should be given the opportunity to get involved with site management and maintenance. Events such as guided walks or hedgelaying would help inform the public about the

site's conservation value, provide training in traditional crafts and offer health benefits associated with physical activity.

Maintain liaison with educational groups, such as the Field Studies Council and botanical interest groups. There should be a two way communication which seeks to ensure that information on species and management regimes are exchanged.

Develop a strategy to deal with dog control and fouling

Dog fouling and dogs which are not under control cause problems across the site. The worst affected areas are the amenity grass areas, which may be used by people for informal recreation such as picnicking and ball games and Yell Field. Dog fouling on this important wildflower meadow can change the composition of plant species but could also contribute to aborted fetuses in cattle. A dog mess campaign, supported by the dog warden, would help to highlight problems and hopefully encourage more responsible dog ownership.

**The Countryside Service would like to install an alternative pathway through Yell Wood whereby visitors can circumvent the steps and towpath, giving easier access around the site. Historically maps indicate that there had been a trackway along much of the proposed route.**

**The proposed route would leave the existing path at the point where it climbs up to the canal bridge (under the mature Beech), and then follow a route along the foot of the canal bank, re-joining the existing path near the foot of the steps up to the canal.**

**The benefits would be a complete circuit for wheelchair users, less able people and families with pushchairs. However, consideration needs to be given to the potential impact on the flora and fauna:**

**Where the proposed new path will start/finish is opposite the largest current colony of Least Water Lily, and is also an area that the otters have been recorded with their cubs.**

**Bluebells (another BAP species) and wood anemones also cover part of this area and the exact impact on these species will be investigated in Spring 2008.**

## 7. Health and Safety

A good level of health and safety is required on site, without compromising the conservation value of the site

**Objective:** To maintain Colemere as a safe place whereby all necessary risk assessments, inspections and works are carried out in compliance with health and safety legislation

### **Main Prescriptions:**

Carry out annual tree inspections.

Trees to be surveyed once every two years by a professional arboriculturist or tree expert

Review Site Risk Assessment for Colemere annually

Inspect the condition of all site infrastructure annually (in addition to monthly checks)

Carry out site safety checks on a monthly basis.