

# BELL HILL COMMON

Written for South Downs National Park & Petersfield Town Council  
by Jenny Edbrooke June 2017

MANAGEMENT PLAN  
2017-2022

# Bell Hill Common

## 1. BRIEF

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Following the publication of the Petersfield Neighbourhood Plan 2013-2028 and discussions regarding the strengthening and enhancement of a green infrastructure to link Petersfield with the surrounding countryside of the South Downs National Park, Petersfield Town Council have decided to review the management of this small, roadside site.

## 2. OWNERSHIP & LOCATION (SEE MAP 1)

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This site (0.71ha), owned and managed by Petersfield Town Council, is located to the north west of the town centre on Bell Hill and straddles Bell Hill Ridge. It was managed for wildlife, as part of Hampshire Wildlife Trusts Parish Environment Initiative in the 1990's, which encouraged the involvement of local people with the management of such sites. More recently management seems to have been limited to annual grass cutting by PTC.

OS Map 1:50,000

Sheet no. 197

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## 3. SUMMARY DESCRIPTION

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Originally common land, this site is now designated as a Town Green. It is an area of scrub and woodland, with some unimproved grassland and a small pond on the south side of Bell Hill Ridge. In the phase 1 habitat survey carried out in 1996, it was stated that 'the site was formerly heathy common and is known to have supported Sand Lizards' and prior to 1990, the uncommon liverwort *Reboulia hemispherica*. However, no recent records of either of these have been found and looking at the size and type of habitat remaining this seems unlikely to be the case today.

## 4. CONSERVATION STATUS

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Bell Hill Common was registered as a Town Green in 2009 under the Commons Act 2006. A Town Green is a small area of land on the edge of a settlement, traditionally used by local people for sport and lawful pastimes.

## 5. HABITAT AND MANAGEMENT COMPARTMENTS (SEE APPENDIX 1 HBIC SURVEY)

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Only the 1996 survey is known to have been carried out on the site and this recorded the habitats as follows:

HABITAT	ESTIMATED HECTARES
A111, Woodland: broadleaved, semi natural	0.45ha
B212, Grassland: neutral, unimproved lowland	0.05

For the purposes of management, the site has been divided into 3 compartments.

### COMPARTMENT 1 Semi natural woodland (See Map 2)

This compartment comprises two areas of broadleaved woodland and scrub running along the northeast boundary, between an area of unimproved grassland and the housing off Coxes Meadow and the southern half of the site bounded by the Bell Hill, Bell Hill Ridge and housing in the southeast corner.

In the 1996 survey a number of Ancient Woodland indicators were recorded including Giant Fescue (*Festuca gigantea*), Creeping Soft-grass (*Holcus mollis*) and Bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*) amongst the ground flora and Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*) in the understorey. This layer also contains some Hazel (*Coryllus avellana*), Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), Bramble (*Rubus fruticosus*) and Dogwood (*Cornus sanguinea*). The canopy layer consists largely of native Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) and Pedunculate Oak (*Quercus robur*), but there is some Silver Birch (*Betula pendula*). There is also Sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatinus*), Norway Maple (*Acer platanoides*) and Horse Chestnut (*Aesculus hippocastanum*).

The woodland does not appear to have been actively managed for some time.

### COMPARTMENT 2 Unimproved grassland

This compartment is an area of unimproved grassland between Bell Hill and the woodland on the northeast boundary. The 1996 survey recorded one notable species, Devil's-bit Scabious (*Succisa pratensis*), which is the food plant of the UK BAP priority species the Marsh Fritillary Butterfly. Devil's-bit Scabious has steadily declined over the last 50 years and is now much rarer than Field Scabious (*Knautia arvensis*). During a visit in June 2017, the Common Spotted Orchid (*Dactylorhiza fuschii*) was also recorded at the site and although this is the most widespread of all orchids in Britain it is still an important plant on this site.

### COMPARTMENT 3 The pond

This compartment consists of a small pond in the southeast corner of the site, between Bell Hill Ridge, a house on the west side and the woodland to the north. At the time of visiting (June 2017) it was completely covered by duck weed. A duck house has been placed in the middle of the pond and the area has been seriously encroached by the neighbouring house with steps having been constructed to lead down to a seat placed on the bank. The pond is very shaded by surrounding vegetation from which there is likely to be considerable leaf fall.

## 6. PRESCRIPTIONS

The aim of managing this small site is to improve and enhance the recreation and wildlife value for local people. It has been divided into 3 compartments for management purposes. This section recommends prescriptions suited to the habitat found in each compartment.

### COMPARTMENT 1 Semi Natural Woodland

The objective of this compartment is to improve and enhance the structure of the woodland. Thinning the canopy trees and coppicing the shrub layer will not only increase the age range of the trees and shrubs but also, let light into the woodland floor to encourage a greater diversity of ground flora. The woodland edge adjacent to the unimproved grassland should be scalloped to increase valuable transitional habitat and prevent the scrub from encroaching the grassland.

Any woodland management should be carried out on an annual cycle between November and March.

**Table 1: Semi Natural Woodland, Compartment 1**

COMPARTMENT OBJECTIVES	PRESCRIPTION	PRIORITY/YEAR				
		1	2	3	4	5
To maintain and enhance the woodland structure.	Remove non-native species including young sycamore, Norway maple between November and March. Monitor regrowth to ensure new saplings do not establish.	*				
	Thin the canopy layer between November and March to diversify the age range. Retain a range of native species, ages and sizes.		*5%	*5%	*5%	*5%
	Coppice the Hazel to increase the age range and let light onto woodland floor.		*10%	*10%	*10%	*10%

## COMPARTMENT 2 Unimproved Grassland

To maintain and enhance this area of unimproved grassland the sward should be allowed to flower and set seed each year. Low soil nutrients are vital to the success of any wildflower meadow as this will ensure they are not out competed by stronger growing plants such as nettles and docks. The grass here should be cut and very importantly, cleared twice a year, in March and again in late September. This late cut will allow plants such as Devil's bit Scabious to flower and seed before cutting takes place and protect other plants such as the Common Spotted Orchid from mistimed cutting.

**Table 2: Unimproved Grassland, Compartment 2**

COMPARTMENT OBJECTIVES	PRESCRIPTION	PRIORITY/YEAR				
		1	2	3	4	5
To maintain and enhance the unimproved grassland	PTC to consult and inform local people regarding the management of the Town Green on Bell Hill. To recruit volunteers and particularly any who were involved when the site was managed under Hampshire Wildlife Trusts Parish Environment Initiative in the 1990's.	*				
	PTC to cut and clear twice a year in March and late September with the help of local volunteers and to scallop the woodland edge.	*	*	*	*	*

**COMPARTMENT 3 The Pond**

There has been considerable encroachment of this part of the site by a neighbouring property which has adopted the pond as part of its garden. It is illegal to extend the boundary of a property onto a Town Green and PTC should take action to protect it for the enjoyment of future generations. Indeed, civil or criminal proceedings maybe taken in serious cases. Appropriate enforcement action is recommended to restore the pond at Bell Hill as part of this Town Green.

The nutrient levels of the water are likely to be high as indicated by the presence of Duck Weed (Lemna minor) covering the surface of the pond. It is essential to improve the water quality if the health of the pond is to be enhanced. To do this, it is recommended that the duck house is removed from the centre and the surrounding tree canopy is cleared or seriously thinned. Ducks will eat plants both in and around a pond and this, together with the annual leaf fall and reduction of light levels has led to a likely decrease in oxygen and an increase in nutrient levels in the water here.

**Table 3: The Pond, Compartment 3**

COMPARTMENT OBJECTIVES	PRESCRIPTION	PRIORITY/YEAR				
		1	2	3	4	5
To maintain and enhance the pond	Take action to prevent existing and future encroachment of the Town Green, including the pond area and any other part of the site.	*				
	Remove the duck house and any other structures placed in or around the pond by the neighbouring property	*				
	Thin/clear as necessary, the surrounding wood/scrub to let light and prevent leaf fall into the pond.	*				
	Monitor the water quality using local volunteers	*	*	*	*	*

