

The Lammas Lands:

Vision and management objectives

The Lammas Lands is an area of grassy floodplain meadows running alongside the River Wey in the centre of Godalming managed by the ranger service of Waverley Borough Council. The site is an important flood relief plain, open space and local amenity for the town of Godalming.

The history of the site as flood meadows goes back to Norman times although over the years the area has been reduced in size by adjoining development and is now about 32ha. The hydrology of the site was changed by the construction of Hell Ditch as a relief channel during the fifteenth century, the Wey navigation channel in the eighteenth century and the construction of the railway in the nineteenth century. The site is a locally designated Site of Nature Conservation Importance for its plant communities and grassland flora, including Meadow Saxifrage, Black Knapweed and Meadow Barley. It is also important for its wetland invertebrates and birds. Part of the area is also categorised as an Area of High Archaeological Potential and designated as an Area of Strategic Visual Importance by Waverley Borough Council and the whole area is registered common land with public rights of access.

It is important that the meadows continue to be managed both as an uninterrupted flood plain and for its landscape, amenity and wildlife. The Council are producing a management plan for the site to guide management over the next ten years.

Although not nationally designated the area has high local importance as a flood plain (reducing the risk of flooding to adjoining parts of the town) and for its biological and archaeological interest and landscape. It is also valuable amenity land, heavily used and much loved by the local community as an open space for walking, dog walking and nature study.

For all the above interests, it is important that the site be retained as open grassland, as without management, it would speedily revert to scrub and woodland. The most sustainable and traditional management is by grazing with cattle or hay cutting and this has been the management over much of the area for many years.

As part of the process of preparing a management plan, the Council are keen to get the views of local organisations and individuals who know or visit the area. The most important parts of any management plan are the vision, objectives (each with a rationale) and prescriptions for the site, in this case for a ten year plan. The draft vision, objectives and prescriptions are detailed below and your views are sought on these. They are also reproduced on the Council's web site.





Vision

The Lammas Lands continue to provide a valuable flood relief, recreational, wildlife, landscape and historical feature within Godalming. After heavy rainfall, water flows onto the open meadows from the river Wey and is stored safely before draining back to the river through a system of well-maintained ditches and culverts. The meadows are heavily used by walkers and dog walkers as well as nature lovers and others, using the well-maintained access points. The meadows are also used by the local community for a number of public events. Following experimental work a programme to revert parts of the grasslands to flower-rich meadows has been successful and there are thriving assemblages of breeding and wintering birds in the wetter areas. The fringing woodlands and trees are in good health and have been reinforced with some additional planting which has not affected the views of the town but has added to the views across the meadows. There is an enthusiastic group of volunteers who help with the management, monitoring and research into the history of the site.

Objectives and prescriptions

Objective 1: Carry out management and maintenance of the Lammas Lands without restricting their important function as a flood plain to the River Wey



Rationale

The Lammas Lands are part of the floodplain of the River Wey. At times of flood, water from the Wey floods runs onto the meadows from the river and either exits into the Hell Ditch marking the northern edge of the main field system or passes down the meadows to the east before exiting to the river further down. The slightly higher land around Lammas Lands is largely built up and the meadows form a vital part of the flood relief measures helping to prevent or alleviate flooding of these properties. It is therefore important that nothing is done to prevent or obstruct the free flow of water across the meadows, and that the open nature of the site is maintained.

Prescriptions

- Maintain close liaison with the Environment Agency over any proposed works on the Lammas Lands.
- Prevent the growth of thick herbaceous vegetation, scrub or woodland on the Lammas Lands where this could restrict the free flow of water during flooding by the River Wey.
- Prevent/remove blockages in Hell Ditch caused by waterside trees.
- Contain any tree management or planting to existing tree lines or the side of the railway embankment.
- Notify the Environment Agency of any work required to maintain free flows of water on existing conduits and drains.

Objective 2: Return significant parts of the Lammas Lands to a flower-rich floodplain meadow community

Rationale

The Lammas Lands have been managed meadowland for upward of 1,000 years and retain remnants of the flora of this former management despite agricultural improvements having been carried out in the last century (including fertilisation and reseeding). The hydrological status of the site suggests that restoration of a typical flood plain flora may be possible. However before this is attempted, further investigation of the existing vegetation and soils is required. This will benefit from expert advice and subsequent monitoring by a contract botanist.

Prescriptions

- Seek advice from the Floodplain Meadows Partnership¹ as to the steps necessary to investigate the suitability of Lammas Lands in whole or in part for restoration to a traditional flood meadow flora.
- Following advice, collect and analyse soil samples.
- Investigate possible sources of seed or hay for re-establishing a characteristic wet meadow flora.
- Carry out experimental restoration work in plots in suitable locations and monitor against control plots. If successful, adopt more widely across the meadows.



Meadow saxifrage (left) and black knapweed (below) once flourished on the Lammas Lands.



¹ <http://www.floodplainmeadows.org.uk/>

Objective 3: Maintain the dry grassland communities by cutting and/or grazing, having regard to the use of the site by the public



Rationale

Historically the Lammas Lands have been grazed (probably by cattle, as has been the case in the last 50 years or so) and cut for hay. This management should be continued with a variety of cutting and grazing regimes to maximise the diversity of the drier grassland habitats for wildlife. The site is heavily visited by the public, many with dogs and some of whom could be wary or nervous of cattle.

Prescriptions

- Manage the site by a combination of grazing and cutting to maximise diversity of grassland habitat.
- For grazing, use a docile breed with animals acclimatised to people and dogs, and put in place a procedure for prompt removal of any problem animal.
- Maintain a grazing pattern that results in some parts of the area being free of grazing animals at any one time and advise the public of the movements of animals on and off the area via notices at entrances and a website.
- Ensure that the grazer meets all requirements for the movements and health and safety of the animals, and that a grazing risk assessment and Animal Health Plan are in place.

Objective 4: Provide suitable habitat and disturbance-free conditions for re-colonisation by a wetland breeding bird assemblage and to enhance existing conditions for wintering birds.

Rational

Parts of the Lammas lands were noted for their breeding and wintering bird communities in the past. Most of the typical wetland breeding birds have disappeared in line with a general decline in such species nationally. Some wintering bird interest remains and is associated with the wetter areas and permanent ponds. The use of the site for recreation causes some disturbance to potential breeding and wintering birds. However areas of potential habitat for breeding and wintering birds are limited in extent and could be managed to provide more suitable habitat and to reduce disturbance, without significantly affecting the use of the Lammas lands by the public.



Prescriptions

- Manage the vegetation around the existing ponds in Overgone and Cattershall Meadows and the existing swamp vegetation in the south-east of Cattershall meadow and the north-eastern end of Almshouse meadow to maintain dense summer vegetation for breeding Sedge and Grasshopper Warblers, Reed Bunting, Water Rail and other potential breeding birds.
- Carry out rotational cutting to prevent the colonisation of wet areas by trees or scrub and to provide areas of shorter vegetation for wintering birds
- Investigate the hydrology of the existing swamp areas with a view to maintaining wet conditions in winter for wintering Snipe and other waders
- Investigate the re-opening of existing ditch systems and the provision of new ditches/temporary fencing to facilitate grazing and habitat management

Objective 5: Maintain and create favourable conditions for invertebrates associated with wet meadows, swamps and dead wood

Rationale

Previous surveys have located a number of scarce and local invertebrate species associated with swampy conditions and dead wood. No further invertebrate survey work has been carried out in recent years.

Prescriptions

- Create small areas of wet swamp and shallow open water throughout the year in existing swamps.
- Maintain a variety of swamp vegetation by cutting, grazing and non-intervention zones for a variety of invertebrates.
- Establish flower-rich areas on the drier grassland which is not grazed or cut until late summer.
- Create additional log piles in existing tree belts using willow and alder either from on-site or from nearby sites where cutting is taking place and there is a surplus of suitable logs.



Short-winged conehead

Objective 6: Maintain the facility for roosting bats and encourage use of the site by otters.

Rationale

There is only a modest mammal interest on the Lammas Lands. Otter has been recorded from Hell Ditch in recent years and under the previous management plan an otter holt has been constructed. Given the levels of disturbance by people and dogs, and the use of a path along much of the length of the Wey, otters are probably always going to be shy and nocturnal here. The only other large mammal seen in the area is roe deer, where similar considerations pertain particularly as regards dogs. There is already a facility for bats in the WWII pillbox.

Prescriptions

- Maintain the facility for bats in the WWII pill box and check usage from time to time in association with Surrey Bat Group.
- Investigate whether a suitable site exists to create a second potential holt for otters and if successful, create a further otter holt.



Objective 7: Carry out a systematic survey and monitoring programme of major groups of flora and fauna using volunteers or professional surveyors as available and appropriate and encourage the submission of casual records



Rationale

No detailed surveys of some groups of flora and fauna have been carried out for some years. Some volunteer monitoring is undertaken (e.g. for birds) but collection of data is not systematic. Many members of the public visit the site regularly but no mechanism exists for the collection of casual records or sightings. A number of visitors have expressed an interest in the wildlife of the area.

Prescriptions

1. Arrange for comprehensive surveys of plants, National Vegetation Classification mapping, an updated invertebrate survey and a reptile and amphibian survey of the site using volunteers where possible but commissioned surveys if necessary.
2. Set up a suitable facility and encourage visitors to the site to record their sightings and records.
3. Encourage the formation of a volunteer network to record specific species or groups (e.g. birds and reptiles/amphibians).
4. Carry out periodic monitoring of the use by otters of the holts using a licenced surveyor.

Objective 8: Maintain all the historic features of the site and encourage collection of further data on history and archaeology

Rationale

The Lammas Lands have a long history and there is a small number of known surviving artefacts on site mostly from WWII. Part of the area has been designated as of High Archaeological Potential and there are, in places, the remains of former ditch and sluice systems reflecting past management as flood or water meadows. All these features are a valuable reminder of the history of the site.

Prescriptions

- Maintain the existing known features of the site including the WWII pillbox and the surviving dole stone.
- Survey and re-form former ditch systems to recreate former features and create additional wildlife habitat subject to advice from the Floodplain Meadow Partnership.
- Encourage historical research into the history of the Lammas Lands.
- Encourage archaeological research on the site under the supervision of the County Council Heritage Conservation Team and Surrey Archaeological Society.



Objective 9: Maintain the views across the Lammas Lands and from within the meadows to the features of the town.

Rationale

The Lammas lands lie in the middle of Godalming and form an important landscape feature in the town. Residential properties look down on the meadows from the north and south and there are views of local churches, the river Wey and the town from the meadows. In some places the views are glimpses through the surrounding trees which add interest and variety to the landscape. The maintenance of the landscape features of the site and its rural feel are an important consideration for visitors.

Prescriptions

- Maintain the open landscape of the meadows by preventing the growth of trees and scrub.
- Maintain the views from the meadows of the features of the town.
- Maintain the tree belts and individual trees around the edges of the site.
- Maintain and reinforce the traditional line of willows alongside Hell Ditch in Hell Ditch and Overgone meadows
- Establish a small area of woodland and scrub for the benefit of wildlife along the eastern side of the railway embankment in Overgone and Hell Ditch Meadows

Objective 10: Continue to promote the Lammas Lands as a safe, enjoyable and educational facility for the local community and visitors to the area

Rationale

Lammas Lands are a popular recreation facility for walkers, dog walkers, nature lovers and other visitors as well as a local amenity for events such as the annual firework display and bonfire. Access onto the common land is of right and the use of the area for local events follows a long tradition of community use of common land which should be conserved and encouraged. Users of the site should be encouraged to give consideration to other users and use the site safely.



Prescriptions

- Carry out maintenance on the main footpaths on the site and particularly the gateways to make and keep these safe and passable but with a continued rural character.
- Maintain the gates as fit for purpose and replace any stiles with gates.
- Provide information boards in keeping with the rural feel of the site at the main entrances to Overgone and Cattershall Meadows
- Provide up-to-date information of grazing animals presence on site.
- Encourage the use of the site for local events compatible with the other uses and interests.
- Dog walkers should be encouraged to keep their dogs under control and to pick-up dog waste in the interests of other users
- Cyclists should continue to be confined to the tow path.
- Users should be encouraged to minimise disturbance to the wetland features of the site, including appropriate temporary signage.
- A network of volunteers should be established and encouraged to assist with management and survey and monitoring and the provision of help and information to other users.

Objective 11: Carry out all statutory and other duties as site manager

Rationale

As site manager Waverley Borough Council will need to meet all its statutory obligations both to manage the site for its wildlife and to ensure the well-being and safety of the visiting public.

Prescriptions

- Meet all requirements for statutory consents and approvals for work on the common
- Carry out regular Health and Safety checks on the features of the common
- Follow H & S guidelines for warning the public during management activities on the site and ensure that contractors, licencees or others working on the common follow the same procedures
- Continue to take steps to prevent undesirable activities on the common which could pose a hazard to the wildlife interest or the visiting public.

Objective 12: Liaise with other landowners, community organisations and statutory bodies as necessary over management of the site

Rationale

Waverley Borough Council will need to liaise with other site owners and statutory bodies over its management of the site.

Prescriptions

- Liaise with other landowners or their representatives over management plans for their land
- Liaise with other statutory organisations, particularly the Environment Agency, County Archaeologist and others as necessary over site management
- Liaise with other local community and amenity organisations as necessary over site management and access issues

A drop-in day has been arranged between 10am and 4pm on Saturday June 11th at The Church Hall, Godalming United Church, Bridge Street at which Council staff and consultants will be present to discuss the proposals and hear your views and comments. You can also write to James Caldwell, Waverley Borough Council, The Old Stable Block, Summers Road, Farncombe, Godalming, GU7 3BH or e-mailing james.caldwell@waverley.gov.uk.