

SHAPING THE FUTURE OF CANNOCK CHASE

LAND MANAGEMENT WORKING GROUP

Report of the workshop held 28th November 2016

CANNOCK CHASE – LAND MANAGEMENT WORKING GROUP

Report of the workshop held 28th November 2016

1 Attendees

Stephen Dean	County Archaeologist
Trevor Barber	Silvertrees Holiday Park
Glen Probert	Entrust – Shugborough Outdoor Education Centre
Mark Swinnerton	Swinnerton Cycles
Peter Pearson	JLAF
Ian Jones	Walton Chasers
Michael Copleston	RSPB
June Jukes	Friends of Cannock Chase
Sue Sheppard	Staffordshire County Council - Biodiversity

Facilitators – Sarah Bentley, Hilary Foxley

2 Introduction

This report provides a summary and word for word record of a workshop held on 28th November 2016 of the Cannock Chase working group. The working group is a subset of the stakeholder group which is developing habitat management options appraisal for Cannock Chase Country Park and Bevin's Birches. The group was balanced to represent different sectors and interests. Its remit, agreed by the group, is set out in appendix 1. The group agreed guidelines to work to, set out in appendix 2.

3 Summary of Key Points from the Workshop

Considering Habitat Solutions

Grazing and managing stock and access – key messages

- Detailed pros and cons of different types of fencing (permanent, temporary and invisible) and how they could be used need to be explored.
- Learn from experience elsewhere to look at best methods.
- Key issues were getting the right type of stock, raised in the right way, managed in the right way on site and at the right times to deliver benefits and minimise potential problems. E.g. animals that are docile, good with dogs, etc.
- Costs need to be carefully evaluated.

Type of stock

- All agreed that cattle were the top priority
- 2/3 of the group felt that sheep were 2nd priority
- 1/3 of the group felt that ponies were 2nd priority
- All agreed that goats and pigs were low priority at this stage

Who could manage the stock

- All agreed that local farmers and private graziers were the priority to focus on, with a potential role for local agricultural colleges to be explored.

Benefits

- Potential benefits included educational value, potential for people to get involved, adding interest to the site, branding and promotional value, etc.

Chemical Management – key messages

- Having a clear plan to demonstrate how chemical treatment fitted in as part of the overall management approach, why it is being used and evidence of benefits.
- Better information on what is used and why, safety information, etc. A more concerted approach to getting information out was required.

Burning – key messages

- There was debate about the potential impacts and benefits of burning, particularly potential negative impacts on invertebrates and nutrient loading.
- Overall the group felt it was part of the mix but with a focus on small area swift burns on sloping ground where other methods are less suitable. Back burning should be avoided due to perceived nutrient impacts.
- As above, good evidence-based information should be provided with carefully presented messages.
- There are practicalities to address around availability of trained and experienced people to undertake the work.

With both burning and chemical treatment there was discussion about addressing underlying nutrient loads and whether the issue could be addressed more at source. Risks however, of methods like turf stripping include impact on archaeology.

In relation to all management methods, the need for monitoring and evidence base, education and effective information / communication was highlighted, plus relating all to a coherent plan or strategy.

Word for word report



4 Session 1: Considering Habitat Solutions

Grazing and managing stock and access



Challenges – How to solve

- Permanent fencing - could we go for electric fencing that can be renewed
- Confinement – goats everywhere. Could we have electric fencing
- Would goats be better as they eat everything. They have been used on other nature reserves. Cost of permanent fencing prohibitive. Would smaller animals be less of a concern if they escaped.
- Need to be careful that Open Spaces Society would not be horrified with permanent fencing. Need to keep open views
- Moving fencing and making robust - temporary fencing could be labour intensive
- Invisible fencing an option?
- Who owns? Branding opps.
- Health concerns with cattle, e.g. TB - impacts for other animals
- Goats not very selective
- Is it particular areas or the whole lot - would be a way of managing impacts
- Is it particular compartments or landscape-scale – influences amount of fencing
- Previous studies concluded cattle best for vegetation type - sheep would take flowers
- Complex list of challenges outweighs the benefits. Impacts on local people (1)
- (1) Could be benefit for local people.
 - New Forest – people slow down
 - more animals – could we slow traffic
- (1) But big impact on people walking dogs
- Good thing to slow cars down
- Grazing trial on Chase – small pilot.
 - if fence area, low numbers of stock – less issue?
 - people not used to it - winning public confidence
- Need right stock and engage people in looking after
- Get right stock
 - site in Stone, Hednesford
- Experience
 - have done elsewhere so can be done
- E.g. Sherwood - public access for cycling, walking;
- Longhorn cattle
 - right stock
 - husbandry
 - awareness
 - warden presence
- Can improve keeping dogs on leads

- Important tool
 - cost effective
 - historic management
 - long term management – would be hard to do without grazing
- Learn from areas already doing it
- Quick easy wins can be hollow
 - may not work
- Can we target breeds to keep key areas for specific outcomes
- Right breed, raised right way, welfare and grazing technique
- Deer browsing already there
- What outcome do we need
 - conservation and people engagement
- Chase created by extensive grazing
 - has given us what we have today
- Used to be 7-8000 sheep (across larger area)
- Stocking rate key or can have negative impact
- Overgrazing in pastures
 - different outcomes
- Extensive grazing
 - perimeter fencing, lookering, security, water
 - cattle good at finding weak spots
- Pulse grazing – electric, but often stolen
- Concern to address – regular dog walking impact
 - should we start with trial
 - keep areas with no grazing for dog walkers
- May only want stock on for 6 months
- When does costing come in?
- Possible funding in next HLS for costs
 - mechanical also costs
 - know what some projects have cost
- Need to cost early as HLS may not cover costs particularly with fencing
 - may need extra funding

		
<p>Sheep</p> <p>6 – 2nd priority</p>	<p>Historical Precedent. Hardy breeds – range of options. Light-footed – less damage to soil. Don't often get run over. Not intimidating to people.</p>	<p>Can overgraze – flowers. Dog worrying – more vulnerable. Easy to steal. Die easily! (lots of illnesses / issues) Sheep-sick landscape – overgrazing. Often all year round. Get through small holes – need better fencing. Need a lot of management. Leave mess.</p>
<p>Horses/Ponies</p> <p>3 - 2nd</p>	<p>Graze things others won't. People slow down more for horses. Not as intimidating to people. Could be part of mix.</p>	<p>Horse riders can be nervous – ok if no stallion. If people feed can be a pest - but Exmoor's less likely. Can be intimidating to people. Can result in horses being put on site illegally.</p>
<p>Cattle</p> <p>9 – top priority</p>	<p>Good grazers for grass-heath balance. Graze early in season. Low numbers – limits erosion/soil impact. 6 months. Best for heathland. Create bare ground, manage bracken, birch etc – depends on breed/how raised. Grazier could manage? – SWT example Marketing opportunity</p>	<p>Need in-bye land. TB – testing, etc. Can get out. Handling facility (£15K) – may need specialised kit for rare breeds. Could need mobile handling facility</p>
<p>Goats</p> <p>Lower priority</p>	<p>Could be part of a mix with temporary fencing. Not as intimidating as cattle. More tolerant of dogs.</p>	<p>Graze anything. Escape.</p>
<p>Pigs</p> <p>Lower priority</p>	<p>Trial at Arne to explore impacts. May be good for bare ground – good for invertebrates but may be easier methods Tend to be used to regen woodland – Brocton? (but archaeology) Branding and people engagement. Historical precedent.</p>	<p>Impact on archaeology</p>

Noted - Educational benefit – seeing a range of animals being used for active management – acknowledge that deer and rabbits have a role – management?

WHO		
<p>Local Farmers</p> <p>PRIORITY</p>	<p>Experienced – know their stock. Take liabilities. Is feasible – best if local. Farmer may be into vision and develop brand - ↑ income? Good examples elsewhere</p> <p>County Farms tenants – greater control?</p>	<p>Tend to want to fatten animals. Disadvantage to farmer – taking on risks and liabilities. Less control on grazing, less flexibility. Conflict of interest – tend to want low stock rates - not as good for farmer. Takes time to build relationship. May be hard to find willing farmer. Does not make much money.</p>
<p>County Council/RSPB</p>	<p>Has County Farms section and tenants. May be political buy-in. Greater control.</p>	<p>Don't have hands on skills. Expensive. Need to bring in skills. Risks & liabilities – include animal movements, cross compliance, etc.</p>
<p>Private Grazier</p> <p>PRIORITY</p>	<p>Could use corridors – FC. If create in-bye then limits movements issue. Roving stock for time you want them. Liabilities and risks kept by grazier. BPS can attract graziers - grants uncertain Expertise & flexibility – can work well for both parties with right licence. If annual can adapt and change</p>	<p>May not be anyone in area. Would need support for lookering - could get volunteers. Volunteers would need training and there may not be enough. Need to evaluate risks and liabilities for lookering. SCC has no BPS entitlement.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Grazier would want longer →</p>
<p>Commoners (22 attached to properties)</p>	<p>Could put few animals on. Liabilities sit with others.</p>	<p>Rights only to apply to certain areas. Risk of over grazing. No current expertise. No current use of rights for grazing. TB issues.</p>
<p>Rare Breed Organisation</p>	<p>May have right kinds of stock. Positive message re rare breed survival. May be willing to provide animals</p>	<p>Tend to be small herds. Tend to avoid public access due to rustling risks. Want to keep breed pure. TB issue.</p>

		Pure breeds not always best.
Wildlife Trust of Similar	They would have liability. Conservation interest. Access to volunteers.	Currently employ others so don't have resource locally. Do they have facilities for when stock need to come off. May be lack of expertise. RSPB tend not to.
Agricultural College POSSIBLE SUPPORT ROLE	Have skills. Could help with training. Could have a role. Maybe stewardship funds for education access.	Distance to travel. Too big-scale.

Notes:

- Could use drones for lookering
- Temperament of stock key

Benefits – How could grazing bring benefit to people and the community too?

- Education and awareness of land management - break down barriers
- Culturally and historically relevant
- Managing people as well as land
- Downside
 - need to ensure we don't prevent people enjoying site - barriers
- Some people like to see the animals, adds to interest of site
- Enriching experience for people who wouldn't see stock
- Breeds
- Access to manure
- Branding for animals - promotional value
- Get people more directly involved - lookering, etc.
- Improves site for everyone – holistic vision
- Benefits for wildlife
- Reduction in traffic speed

5 Chemical

How could this take place to deliver benefits and overcome challenges and concerns?

- Having really clear outcomes and management plan
 - what is it going to achieve and why
- Extremely cost effective labour, well trained
 - mitigate risks
- Costs high – would be assumption/perception
 - in Chase have reduced costs – focussed down
 - dealing with people's concerns – herbicide
- Be clear about people's concerns, education, knowledge understanding
 - people 'fear' chemicals
- How do we go about - education - Parish Councils, etc.
- People ask if it is safe to pick bilberries, etc
- Information is critical
- Difficult to reach all the people
 - maybe local press
- If could manage without herbicides we would
- Efforts about minimising use
- Getting site into favourable conditions
- Using chemicals limited period of time
- Use herbicides recommended
 - won't hurt animals or aquatics
- Changes in chemicals
 - keep up to speed
 - minimise risk
- Target spray (1)
 - helicopter used 1-2 times but not again
- Messages
 - say what you are not using as much as what you are
- Reduce impact
 - raindrop nozzles
- Careful to protect water sources
- (1) helicopters
 - may have to use again
 - evidence base
 - messaging what worked
- Overcome challenges
 - what, why, photographs, targeted, selected 99% safe to all households
- Communication
 - press releases
 - hazard notices/information notices
- We put messages out as we do things – maybe needed sooner
 - longterm vision
- Will give more credence to grazing perhaps
- Underlying cause too high nutrients
 - can keep spraying but will come back
- Cost effective method, if can't address source issue
- Can you eradicate problem

- tried already, multiplied by 10x underground
- Is there a need
 - is there a tool that would help
- Don't know where (2) (point of debate) harvesting does reduce height but not density
- Look at nutrient management (2) cost, landscape impacts
- Information/overall plan
- Part of the jigsaw
- Brindley – nutrient problem
- Has a place, but targeted. Part of overall package

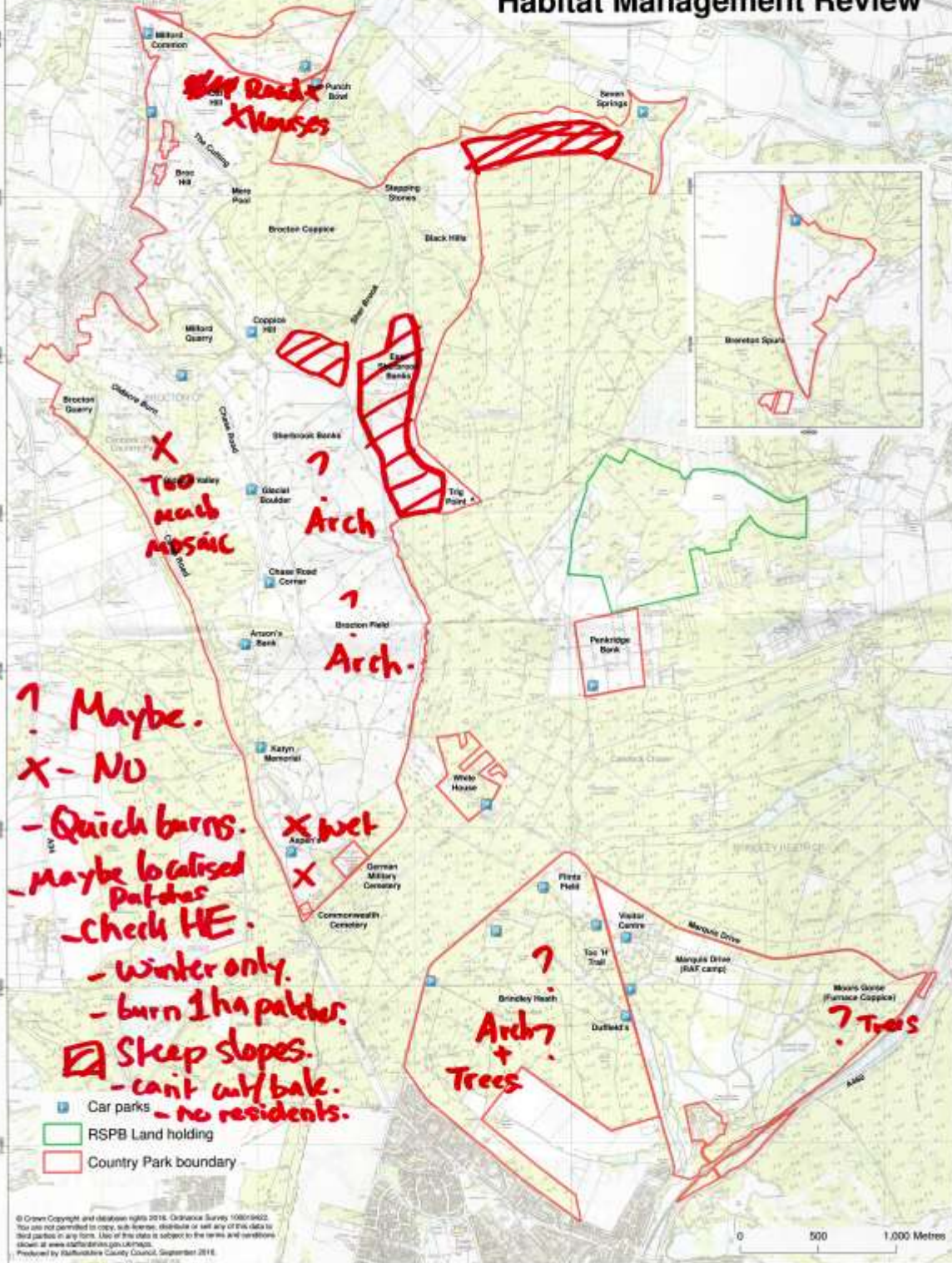
6 Burning

- Right skills and people at the right time (1)
- Right equipment to hand
 - right beaters
 - decent burners
 - fire breaks
- Last done 2 years ago – under a hectare at a time
- Small vandalistic burns usually (one was 56 ha though!)
- (1) do you buy in the skills
 - is it cost effective to use own people/or buy in
- RSPB codes of practice
- Do we do it all?(1)
 - why not, CC has had it in the past
- Considerations for invertebrates
 - argument to say catastrophic
- Extensive burning
 - is it an appropriate practice (1)
- What are core policies
 - comes back to outcomes
- Swift burns
 - there are places
 - part of the management it does suit
- Concern could affect the dating structure (of archaeological deposits) if ash/sulphate works down
- Have big enough area if burning
- Fire breaks - fire plan in place
- Right place – right scale
- Has its place
- Public could view negatively
 - less visual effects of burning keep people on side
- Communications
 - Letting people know why burning and how burning is used
- Concerns be cautious (1)
 - does it have negative consequences
- Education
 - getting the message
- Not intended to impede access
 - depends how you want to manage it

- Tend to be small burns on steep slopes
- Why it is being done
 - get message across
 - can't just leave
- Involve community - get them involved
- Control arson
- Burning affects ecology
- Tend not to do back burns. If burn brush, nutrient loading – be aware
- Better response to heather burning
- Have had live ammunition on the Chase so caution
- Be aware where we are doing it
- LIDAR survey may help identify
- Chase has already been burnt extensively in the past
- Robust monitoring/reporting in place
 - measurably improved – evidence based benefit challenges
- Targeted
- Use evidence that we have already got
- If grazing – appropriate places
- Monitoring – improves evidence base
- Advising future management strategy
- Using volunteers
 - scientific out there too
- Education
 - work with schools
- Land management/people management
 - how do we get message across
 - long term – heritage, scout groups, other groups
 - public does have responsibility on the Chase
- Education and working with groups
- Education/monitoring

CONTROLLED BURNING

**Cannock Chase
Habitat Management Review**



7 Mapping Exercise – additional comments

Mechanical - Winter

- Review where people are before looking where 4 options should go
- Can you identify where most appropriate
- A lot of landscape close to the surface

Mechanical on Open Heath

- Reluctant at present to identify specific areas
- We need all the information – LIDAR, bird survey, people, etc.
- Layers of information, i.e. dry heath areas, identify, etc.
- Identified areas of dry heath could be cut or grazed
 - need all the evidence
 - use methods appropriately
- Trying to get public stakeholder evidence
 - have specialist to look at it
- Look at the quality to drive decision making but knowing you get the support
 - focus where best placed, comes back to evidence
 - knowing all 4 options are in the mix
- Circle 'honey pot' areas not included in burning
- Have documents with information
 - have the right information
 - could list things you need to take into account
 - you specialists have the right knowledge, i.e. water for grazing

Burning

- Reasons for burning – steep slopes, small, tiny, small areas – give numbers do in phases – communication, information, education, localised patch burning – maybe small and localised patch burning – maybe small and localised quick burns – surface vegetation
- Maybe other areas

8 Habitat Management Review – Commentary on maps

Two maps were drawn up to consider issues concerns and approaches; these were for 'Controlled Burning' and 'Grazing'. The comments below reflect the discussions held in the Working Group and current management approaches of SCC and/or RSPB land managers.

Controlled Burning

The map indicates areas where there are the steepest slopes that are difficult to manage by cutting and baling (Seven Springs, East Sherbrook Banks and upper Sherbrook Banks areas). Current practice is that burn areas aims to be less than 1 hectare in size so these

slopes would be burned in stages over a period of time. Quicker burns with the wind have less impact on the litter layer and invertebrate hibernacula. Burning is also only done in winter so does not affect ground nesting birds.

Other areas of heather-dominated heath could be burned but can be more difficult in valleys where wind is insufficient (needed to direct the fire). Also need to consider impact on historic environment (applies to all areas though).

The bracken/heath areas around Milford and Oat Hill are close to residents so this approach is less favourable here.

Oldacre Valley comprises more of a small-scale habitat mosaic with areas of heather not large enough for burning to work well. This may change as heather areas consolidate however, especially on the steeper slopes. There is a significant amount of archaeology in this area to take account of, however.

Heathland in the Katyn to the Cemeteries area tends to be wetter (humid heath) which is more difficult to burn.

Heathland at the White House and Penkridge Bank fragments tends to be in too small patches for heather burning to be easily achieved. Heathland in Brindley Heath and at Moors Gorse could be burnt in small patches, but can be more difficult where the heather is on flatter ground (insufficient wind to direct the fire). There is also archaeology to consider in all these sites.

Grazing

Satnall Hills has been transferred to the National trust so is not for consideration here.

Brereton Spurs is an outlier site with little heathland present (marked with an 'X').

All other parcels of the Country Park and the Bevin's Birches area could be grazed (marked with '?'). There is an argument for phasing or excluding grazing from some areas e.g. Brindley Heath, Moors Gorse, White House, Penkridge Bank and north of Brocton Coppice. Whether or not to include Brocton Coppice for grazing (as a wood pasture habitat) needs further consideration especially due to the high presence of *Phytophthora* disease there. Currently, Brindley Heath has a lot of over-mature heather and less grass so may be less scope for grazing at present.

All areas marked as possible for grazing also contain important archaeology which needs to be taken into account. A lot of grazing is currently being done by deer and rabbits in Oldacre Valley which also needs considering in any grazing scheme, to avoid overgrazing areas.

There is a need to consider the possible role of the heathland corridors in FC land currently within the Connecting Cannock Chaser project (arrowed areas).

Options could include fencing off areas along roadsides coupled with invisible fencing to allow flexibility as to where the livestock would go, e.g. a larger area could be broken into subcompartments using invisible fencing; this would be less intrusive in the landscape.

Other considerations for a grazing scheme include managing visitor use, provision of suitable access for visitors and re-visiting firebreak management across the Country Park.

NOTE: The commentary above was put together after the event by SCC to try to explain the context of the points on the map, and reflect the discussions these represented.

9 Vision and Critical Success Factors

The Group considered a revised vision and critical success factors which were based on the technical report and the outcomes of the first phase of stakeholder engagement. No changes were proposed to these.

Draft Revised Vision

A beautiful, tranquil landscape where wildlife thrives, heritage is celebrated and people enjoy themselves. There is a wide range of recreational activities taking place which coexist peacefully with each other and with the wildlife and heritage of the site.

People are working together to ensure that the landscape, wildlife and heritage flourish in the long term, with an open character, plenty of heather, little bracken, many mature trees and healthy populations of characteristic plants and animals. The area is managed sustainably and is safe and welcoming to visitors.

Draft Revised Critical Success Factors

1. Legally compliant
2. Get / keep habitats in favourable condition
3. Reconnect habitat blocks
4. Support the needs of key species
5. Fit in the landscape and protect tranquillity
6. Protect historic environment features
7. Keep sites welcoming and accessible for recreational activities
8. Affordable and sustainable
9. Practical and deliverable
10. Acceptable to the majority of stakeholders

Appendix 1

Role and Responsibilities of the Working Group (WG)

Primary Goal of the WG is to:

- Develop and refine habitat management solutions to guide the technical specialists prior to the next round of engagement

In particular:

- Note that all the management measures have sufficient support to go forward, so the role of the group is to suggest how benefits can be realised, and how concerns can be mitigated or managed - this will include suggesting ideas for where, when and how different management might best take place

The role of the working group is to:

- Build on the work and progress made from the first workshop
- Work TOGETHER on behalf of all the stakeholders (not for your own specific organisation or interest)
- Continue the ethos that developing habitat management solutions is a shared endeavour
- Work to the 'vision' of what stakeholders said at the first workshop
- Take into account all the main interests: environment, heritage, recreation, community and business

PLEASE NOTE:

- The WG does not have the right to veto, overturn or ignore work that has gone before (again noting that **all** solutions have sufficient support to go forward for in depth).

Appendix 2

Guidelines for working together

- ❖ Everyone has the right to be heard and express their view
- ❖ One person speak at a time please
- ❖ Please be concise
- ❖ Aim to keep on task
- ❖ Aim to use language all can understand
- ❖ Check that what is written is what you mean
- ❖ All points are recorded - but not attributed (unless you have evidence or data that needs following up)
- ❖ Breaks are tight
- ❖ Mobile phone off please
- ❖ Feel free to disagree..... but not to be disagreeable!