

Studland Common Scrub Management Plan and Higher-Level Stewardship (HLS) Scheme

In the summer of 2012 Milford-on-Sea Parish Council agreed to apply to Natural England (NE) for funding to undertake conservation work on Studland Common. This was undertaken in conjunction with New Forest – Land Advice Service (NF-LAS) who were asked to comment and advise on various points of the proposed scheme.

Capital funding and annual payments were both applied for. The Capital funds were used for fencing the area determined by the scheme and to install access gates at proscribed locations. Regular funding was required to enable the clearance of scrub that had somewhat overtaken the land, making much of it inaccessible.

It was agreed that 50% of the scrub should be removed, allowing Studland Common to achieve 50% grassland and 50% scrub for wildlife habitat.

A detailed map was drawn up showing the areas (scrub blocks) which would be cleared over a 10-year period.

It was further agreed that cattle should be allowed to graze the land to reduce the need for mechanical flailing and for better management of the land.

There was some controversy over the removal of some well-established trees and several were retained within each scrub block.

The area met with the requirement to become a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) and this was subsequently granted, giving the area an additional layer of protection for the future.

Work started in earnest during 2013 with the installation of fencing and gates and in 2014 the first scrub block clearance started with the help of Milford Conservation Volunteers (MCV).

Grazing the land with 4-5 dexter cattle also began in 2014.

Studland Common has a size of 5.5ha (hectares) and in 2012 only 1.1ha was grassland and therefore 1.65ha of scrub needed to be removed as part of both the capital works and annual clearance.

For those working in acres, 0.5 hectares is just over 1 acre.

Each year from 2014 the Parish Council, along with advice from the MCV, identified which area to clear next, what trees should remain and what depth of the hedgerow should be kept.

Over the next ten years volunteers, Parish Staff and occasionally contractors, worked tirelessly clearing the scrub blocks, thus enabling enhanced conservation benefits and greater access to residents and visitors alike. Other tasks included the removal of ragwort, stump grinding, removing bramble and ivy from established trees and grass cutting.

In 2022/23 the HLS agreement came to its end. However, it was noted that ongoing maintenance to prevent the land reverting back to its overgrown state was still required. The Parish Council agreed to apply for additional funding for a 5-year period to help undertake this. This funding was granted by the Rural Payments Agency (part of DEFRA).

Work continues at Studland Common preventing scrub encroachment and plans to place a few more benches on the common were agreed in 2025.

It should be noted that the HLS agreement also includes Baskes Field at Keyhaven, Studland Meadow and Hordle Fiels (next to Scholars Retreat). All these parcels of land require some management during the year.

If you are interested in becoming a volunteer member of the MCV then please do not hesitate to contact them or visit the Parish Office for more details.