



Action for the Netley & Bursledon Common Priority Area

Quick facts

Total area: 143ha (the same area as Netley village)

Designations: SINC – 48%

Location

The Netley & Bursledon Common Priority Area lies adjacent to the west of the M27 motorway corridor as it winds its

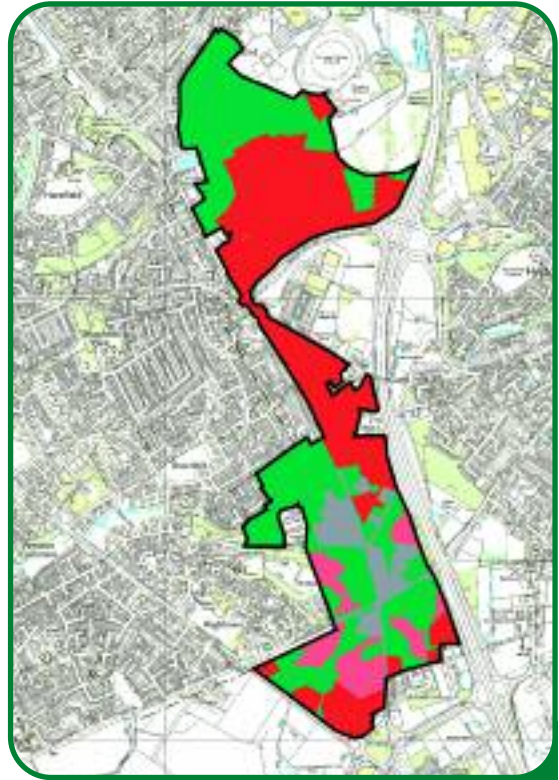
way past West End and Hedge End. It stretches southwards from the large woodland at Telegraph Hill, includes the grazed pastures adjacent to Thornhill Park in Southampton and carries on down to Windhover roundabout, just north of Bursledon where most remnant heathland is found within the borough. Scattered amongst the semi-natural habitats of the Priority Area are large houses and their gardens, and bordering the Priority Area at Telegraph Woods is the newly developed County Cricket ground.

Description

The majority of the area was formerly common land and the most important habitats now surviving in the area are remnants of this past use. Historically, common land provided grazing for the livestock of local people and was typically vegetated with heather and grasses – known as heathland.

Towards the south of the Priority Area are Netley and Bursledon Common, fragments of the once extensive areas of common land that covered this area of the Borough. Most of the common land has been built upon for housing or been converted to agriculturally improved grassland so that only about 20% remains of the area that was present in 1810.

The remaining areas of heathland are dissected by a number of roads and surrounded by housing, effectively isolating the heathland blocks from one another. Only the most mobile species are able to travel from one block to another such as some



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birds whilst others, such as reptiles and insects will have greater difficulty overcoming these obstacles. Scrub and trees are becoming established on the once open heathland, and large areas are covered in dense bracken, shading out some of the characteristic heathlands plants. This is due to a lack of traditional management practices such as grazing and rotational cutting which assist in the maintenance of open heathland and the preservation of its special fauna and flora. Some areas of the common have become completely wooded since they were fenced off from the surrounding heathland back in 1800, an example being Dumbleton's Copse to the north of Netley Common. Heather plants can still be seen in glades within the woodland but these are becoming fewer and fewer as fast-growing exotic species such as laurel and rhododendron take a hold within the wood.

Heathland is an internationally rare and threatened habitat of great importance to a wide variety of species including reptiles, birds and invertebrates, many of which are found in no other habitat. The Dartford warbler, a small active, crimson-breasted bird with a striking red eye can sometimes be seen on heathlands within the Priority Area busily foraging for insects on the prickly gorse bushes that are found scattered on the commons. Unlike all other warblers, the Dartford warbler stays in Britain for the whole year, braving cold winters

MY LOCAL AREA





that see most other species of warbler heading south to the Mediterranean and Africa.

Other than heathers, many other species of plant specialise in growing in heathlands and can be found on Netley and Bursledon Commons. Such species are often both rare and isolated in Eastleigh borough, the nearest other populations being found either in the New Forest or towards the northeast corner of the county and Surrey heaths. This increases the importance of conserving the populations here in the borough as they are likely to contribute to the genetic diversity of the species. Species that fall into this category include those which thrive in the wet heathland conditions on site including black bog-rush, bog asphodel, heath rush, and round-leaved sundew. The sundew merits particular mention as it is a member of a family of plants that have a very peculiar and gruesome habit. They eat meat, or to be more precise – insect meat.

Round-leaved sundew

Round-leaved sundews are plants that supplement their diet with items that provide them with additional nutrients lacking in the heathland soils on which they grow. The plant exudes a scent that is attractive to insects that then become stuck to the specially adapted leaves that have sticky projections on their edges. As they struggle to release themselves from the sticky trap, the leaf folds around them and slowly digests them – in a bath of acid.

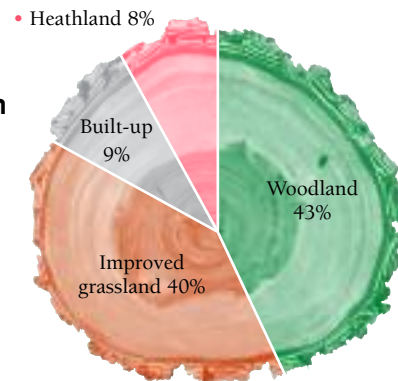
Eight species of different grasshoppers and crickets have been recorded from the area, including the bog bush-cricket which is a nationally scarce species. Reptiles including common lizards, adders and grass snakes can sometimes be seen basking in the morning sun before they move off to hunt in the surrounding vegetation.

The north of the Priority Area is dominated by Telegraph Woods, an area of enclosed common, once part of the Forest of Bere, and now composed of both broadleaved and coniferous trees. The Forest of Bere was once one of the royal hunting forests of the Norman kings and stretched across the southeast of Hampshire. It was made up of woodland and heathland and would have looked

much like the New Forest does today. Two areas of relic heath remain within Telegraph Woods and these are being restored and expanded through scrub and tree clearance work by Eastleigh Countryside Service as part of the Hampshire Heathlands Project.

Telegraph Wood supports a population of the locally uncommon southern wood ant, a species that needs well lit rides and clearings in which to make its nest so they can catch the warmth of the sun. The nests are constructed of twigs and formed into mounds about the size of beach balls. Once a common species throughout woodlands in England, research in the UK has indicated some contraction in its range, noticeably from north and east England. This is thought to be due to lack of traditional woodland management such as coppicing which leads to dark shaded conditions on the ground that do not favour the species.

Area of habitats within Netley & Bursledon Common Priority Area



NB: 3km of hedgerow also within the priority area

Eastleigh Priority Species recorded within the Netley & Bursledon Common Priority Area

Recorded in last five years

- Brambling**
- Nightingale**
- Yarrow pug moth*

Recorded 6-10 years ago

- Dormouse**
- Dartford warbler**
- Southern wood ant**
- Six-belted clearwing moth*
- Broom-tip moth*

- Rosy wave moth*
- Large red-belted clearwing moth*
- Bog bush-cricket*
- Bog asphodel*
- Round-leaved sundew*
- Black bog-rush*

* Priority species in Eastleigh Borough only

** Priority species in Hampshire and Eastleigh Borough

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Action

Issue 1 Lack of management

Current action

The Hampshire Heathlands Project provides resources and management advice to owners of heathlands to maintain and restore them for the benefit of nature conservation.

Proposed action

Continue to support the work of the Hampshire Heathlands Project to restore heathland within Telegraph Woods and on Netley Common which includes the systematic clearance of scrub and bracken.* (EBC/HCC)

Endeavour to include areas of privately owned heathland in the Hampshire Heathland Project in the near future, through consultation with their owners.** (HCC/EBC)

Seek to acquire privately owned areas of heathland in the area or to obtain leasehold of such sites to secure their long term management.*** (EBC/HCC)

Work with landowners to improve the biodiversity of woodlands in the priority area, advising them on management such as clearing invasive laurel and informing them of grant schemes available.* (EBC/HCC)

Issue 2 Habitat isolation

Current action

Government guidance to planning authorities advises that proposals for development should also include measures to enhance the nature conservation interest of the area.

Proposed action

Explore the potential of heathland creation on motorway and road verges in the area and to link the areas of heathland divided by the A27 road.** (HA/HCC/EBC)

Issue 3 Loss of habitat due to development and agricultural change

Current action

Heathland is a habitat that merits designation as a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) within Eastleigh Borough Council's Local Plan. SINC's are protected from the harmful effects of development through specific policies within the Local Plan.

Proposed action

Maintain the existing SINC designations within the Priority Area for inclusion within the draft Local Plan.* (EBC)

Bursledon and/or Netley Common to be designated as a Local Nature Reserve by 2005.* (EBC/HCC)

Issue 4 Misuse

Current action

The Countryside Unit of Hampshire County Council own and manage Netley Common as a countryside site. Rangers patrol the site to discourage mis-use and to educate visitors about the area.

Proposed action

Discourage the mis-use of areas of heathland by putting up signs in places it occurs and by liaising with the public and community groups. This should highlight the damaging effects it has on livestock and habitats.** (HCC)



WOOD ANTS

ACTION TIMESCALE

* within next
3 years

** within next
5 years

*** within next
10 years

KEY TO ORGANISATIONS

EBC

Eastleigh Borough
Council

HA

Highways Authority

HCC

Hampshire County
Council

Relevant Hampshire species or habitat action plans for Netley & Bursledon Common Priority Area are:

- Pipestrelle bat
- Hedgerow
- Heathland



ADDER

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