

BLAXHALL COMMONS AND OPEN SPACES TRUST

STONE COMMON, BLAXHALL, SUFFOLK



A rare agricultural weed found on Stone Common - Hoary Cinquefoil

MANAGEMENT PLAN 2022-27

August 2022

Walk' was open country, probably grazed by the farm's sheep flock. This land merged into what is now known as Stone Common.

Stone Common lies near the parish church of St Peter, Blaxhall, and was once known as Church Common. It is shown as such on an 1809 map of the commons of Blaxhall (detail at fig. 2), which also shows that by this time the collection of houses along the eastern boundary of the common were already in existence. In the early 1800s part of the Common was given over to allotments and around 1802 parcels of land were rented out by the then Lord of the Manor for properties to be built on them.

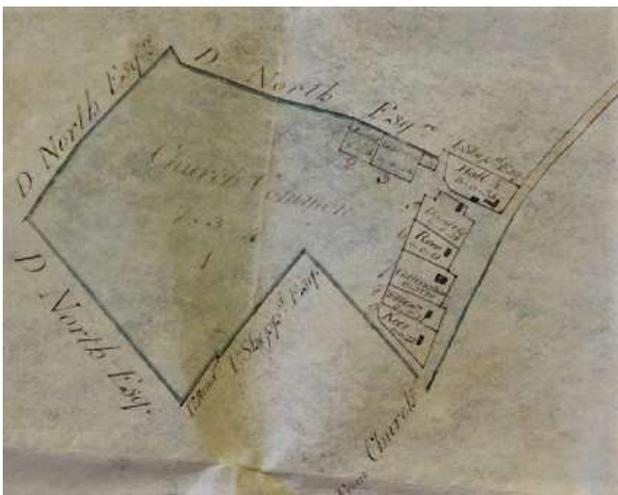


Fig. 2: 'Church Common' in 1809

The change of name to Stone Common is associated with the discovery of the 'Blaxhall Stone' near here in the 1840s or 50s, a large glacial erratic with legendary powers of growth (the stone is now at Stone Farm, on Station Road).

The Ordnance Survey map of 1904 (fig. 3) identifies the land as Stone Common, and shows the open space laid out as 'allotment gardens'. Some of the land has continued to be used as allotments, but with changing

patterns of home ownership and age demographic, demand has declined (the village is also well provided for allotments at Mill Common).



Fig. 3: Detail from Ordnance Survey map, 1904

Extent of BCOST ownership



Fig. 4: Areas coloured green and pink are in BCOST ownership

The map at fig. 4 shows the land in BCOST ownership. That part coloured pink is registered common land, and consists of small open areas of land behind and between the privately-owned properties of Stone Common. This common land has legal protection; no clearing, moving of soil, or temporary enclosure can be carried out

without approval from the Secretary of State for the Environment.

The areas coloured green represent the drives and circulation routes around the houses, and the open land to the west. The open land is crossed by two public footpaths, and consists of allotments, paddocks, woodland and some areas of scrub. Near the northwest corner is an electricity pylon, for which BCOST receives an annual wayleave payment from UK Power Networks.

Vision



Fig.5: Stone Common from the air

Over the next fifteen years (2022-2037), BCOST will:

- **Encourage increased public access**
- **Seek to return a major part of the site to acid grassland**
- **Retain and manage the woodland and**
- **Continue to make provision for allotments and grazing, in response to local demand.**

Management proposals

Grassland management



Fig. 6: Another uncommon species found on Stone Common - Smooth Cat's Ear

The overall sward is acid grasses i.e. Common Bent and Sheep's Fescue, with clumps of gorse. Any heather species have long disappeared. Existing swards contain more aggressive grasses which need to be cut, raked and removed, or a grazing regime (sheep or horses) put in place to ensure that the new sward is tight to the ground and tussock-free. The first field at the SWT reserve Captains Wood, Sudbourne is the character we are looking for at Stone Common.

Gorse will be encouraged. This is an important plant species, provides both structure and visual interest and is a good habitat for nesting bird species. Traditionally, common gorse was regularly collected from common land for a number of purposes: it provided fuel for firing bread ovens, was used as fodder for livestock, was bound to make floor and

chimney brushes and was used as a colourant for painting Easter eggs. However, there were a number of restrictions on its collection; for example, in Oxfordshire, only the amount that could be carried on the back could be cut for fuel.

Gorse has a finite life cycle of around thirty years, throughout which the plant will become increasingly woody, resulting in gradual loss of structure and ability to produce vegetative regrowth. Maintaining existing gorse will therefore involve management aimed at retaining the juvenile to mature condition (the period at which regeneration growth is greatest). Rotational cutting on a cyclical basis should involve taking back individual plants to within 150cm of ground level and scraping through the trash layer with a rake to encourage seedling germination. Revisit two or three years later to check and deal with bramble or other weed invasion or unwanted regrowth. The cutting cycle can be five to eight years rotation. Gorse cuttings can be taken from existing plants on Stone Common and then replanted, once they have a new root system.

Allotments

Allotments are a long-established feature at Stone Common, allowing for the growing of food, crops, flowers and soft fruit. The keeping of poultry and (subject to sensible precautions) bees is also encouraged. Some allotment sites have been amalgamated and used for grazing sheep or horses, while others are not currently being worked.

BCOST wishes to continue the tradition of allotment cultivation at Stone Common, but

in view of the present (and anticipated) lower level of demand, proposes to reduce provision, with allotments confined to the area of land to the north of Prevost's Path.

From September 2022 allotment fees will be payable to BCOST, and existing or potential allotment holders will be asked to sign new allotment agreements. The use of agreed parcels of land for grazing will be subject to separate agreement and payment.

Where allotments are no longer being used, BCOST will at its discretion decide whether to renew licences. Once allotment sites are formally taken out of use, any structures, fences and boundary features will be removed and the land allowed to revert to managed grassland. BCOST will ask owners to remove personal possessions before taking any necessary further steps.

Registered common land

This will be managed on a low-key basis, the drives and circulation areas occasionally mown so as not to impede pedestrian and vehicular movements, while allowing wildflowers to flourish around the edges.

Permanent parking of vehicles on the common land will require BCOST approval. BCOST will ask owners to remove any abandoned vehicles, and if no action is taken will take necessary steps to ensure removal.

Fences, barriers and structures

Ensuring public access to the land at Stone Common, and maintaining it as an open space, are central to BCOST's charitable aims and objects.

Fences and structures will only be permitted for purposes connected with the cultivation of allotments or the use of grazing land, in accordance with the relevant licence agreement. Otherwise, no fences or barriers are to be constructed without the agreement of BCOST. Existing fences, barriers and structures will be removed over time, with priority given to the removal of structures containing asbestos. BCOST will ask owners to remove possessions before taking any necessary further steps.

Rubbish and bonfires

Existing rubbish will be cleared from the site. Some can be put into a skip and some burnt.

Small, controlled bonfires are permitted within allotments, for burning allotment waste only.

Trees and hedging

Apart from possible occasional planting in the woodland area, planting of trees or hedges will be along or close to the boundary (see fig. 4). Tree species that can be planted include sessile oak, holly, sycamore, hornbeam and field maple. Suitable hedge species include hawthorn and holly.

Wildlife recording

Wildlife recording would be valuable on this site and could become a parish-wide endeavour. The record could be lodged with Suffolk Biological Records either directly or through i-Record. The i-record platform allows for groups to set up their own space for collective records and has a process for

verification. iNaturalist is an app-based identification platform (see 'resources', below).

An Ancient Tree inventory could be prepared. See 'resources', below.

Other important considerations

Some of the more mature hedge trees may be providing **bat roosts**. Bats are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (amended) and Conservation of species regulations 2017 (amended). It is an offence to intentionally or recklessly disturb a bat or group of bats in their roost or to damage or destroy a place used by bats for breeding or resting (roosts), even if bats are not occupying the roost at the time. Any tree surgery work should follow guidelines from the Bat Conservation Trust (see 'resources', below).

It is illegal to damage or destroy the **nest** of any wild bird while it is in use or being built. Activities which can disturb wild birds, particularly during the breeding season include trimming or cutting trees, bushes, hedges and rough vegetation. As a rough guide, the bird breeding season is considered as from March to the end of August.

There is a possibility that **bracken spores** are carcinogenic. The H&S Executive recommends that a suitable face mask should be worn while cutting or working in spore-producing bracken (i.e. during late July, August and September).

Resources

Bat Conservation Trust: [Roosts in trees - Bat roosts - Bat Conservation Trust \(bats.org.uk\)](#)
[Natural England](#)

Wildlife recording

[Suffolk Biological Recording Online | Suffolk Biodiversity Information Service](#)
[\(suffolkbis.org.uk\)](#)

iRecord

[Manage and share your wildlife records \(brc.ac.uk\)](#)

This is a useful video: [Setting up an iRecord activities for local groups - YouTube](#)

iNaturalist

[A Community for Naturalists • iNaturalist United Kingdom](#)

NBN Atlas

[NBN Atlas - UK's largest collection of biodiversity information](#)

Ancient Tree Inventory

[Valuing and recording Ancient Tree Forum](#)

Appendix 1: Ecological surveys, 2017 (fauna)

The survey area included the registered common, allotments and houses and gardens. The surveys are useful baselines to inform future management.

Breeding bird survey (spring and early summer 2017)

Results are pairs of breeding birds:

- 6 pairs Blackbird
- 1 pair Song Thrush *Red List Bird of Conservation Concern*
- 6 pairs Wren
- 3 pairs Blackcap
- 5 pairs House Sparrow *Red List Bird of Conservation Concern*
- 4 pairs Hedge Sparrow
- 2 pairs Nightingale *Red List Bird of Conservation Concern*
- 2 pairs Goldcrest
- 2 pairs Common Whitethroat
- 2 pairs Starling *Red List Bird of Conservation Concern*
- 1 pair Goldfinch
- 1 pair Greenfinch
- 2 pairs Linnet *Red List Bird of Conservation Concern*

Butterfly and moth survey (2017)

Peacock, Small Tortoiseshell, Red Admiral, Small White, Small Heath, Small Copper, Speckled Wood, Gatekeeper, Meadow Brown, Silver Y Moth, Yellow Shell Moth and a species of Grass Moth (Grambidae).

Dragonflies and Damselflies

Migrant Hawker, Southern Hawker, Common Darter

Appendix 2: Ecological surveys, 2017 (flora)

Species found on allotment area

Fool's Parsley	Red Dead-nettle
Common Amaranth	Swine-cress
Scarlet Pimpernel	Dwarf Mallow
Bugloss	Common Poppy
Garden Orache	Redshank
Grass-leaved Orache	Wild Radish
Common Orache	Raspberry
Shepherds-purse	Cut-leaved Bramble
Hairy Bitter-cress	Slender Pearlwort
Fathen	Groundsel
Red Goosefoot	Green Bristle-grass
Canadian Fleabane	Hedge Mustard
Bilbao	Green Nightshade
Guernsey Fleabane	Prickly Sow-thistle
American Willowherb	Smooth Sow-thistle
Treacle Mustard	Common Chickweed
Sun Spurge	Small Nettle
Petty Spurge	Common Field-speedwell
Black Bindweed	Field Pansy
Small-flowered Crane`s-bill	

Species found around habitations

Love-lies-bleeding

Late Michaelmas-daisy

Butterfly Bush

Pot Marigold

Snow-in-summer

Greater Celandine

Ivy-leaved Toadflax

Mexican Fleabane

Caper Spurge

Fennel Druce's

Crane's-bill

Stinking Hellebore

Purple Toadflax

Honesty

Oregon-grape

Garden Grape-hyacinth

Species of Daffodil

Common Evening-
primrose

Wild Marjoram

Least Yellow-sorrel

Opium Poppy

Green Alkanet

Butcher's-broom

Rose Campion

Lilac Feverfew

Greater Periwinkle

Species found on main common

Sycamore

Yarrow

Horse-chestnut

Agrimony

Common bent

Creeping Bent

Garlic Mustard

Cow Parsley

Lesser Burdock

Thyme-leaved Sandwort

False Oat-grass

Mugwort

Lords-and-Ladies

Black horehound

Daisy

White Bryony

Harebell

Chalk Knapweed

Common Mouse-ear

Little Mouse-ear

Creeping Thistle

Spear Thistle

Spring Beauty

Field Bindweed

Hazel Hawthorn

Smooth Hawk's-beard

Hound's-tongue

Cock's-foot

Foxglove

Wild Teasal

Common Whitlowgrass

Common Stork's-bill

Spindle

Common Cudweed

Snowdrop

Common Hemp-nettle

Cleavers

Lady's Bedstraw

Dove's-foot

Crane's-bill

Herb-Robert
Ground-ivy
Marsh Cudweed
Ivy Hogweed
Yorkshire-fog Wall
Barley
Bluebell
Perforate St Johns-wort
Smooth Cat's-ear
Cat's-ear
Hybrid Cat's-ear
Holly Field
Scabious
White Dead-nettle
Nipplewort
Oxeye Daisy
Common Toadflax
Perennial Rye-grass
Common Birds-foot-
trefoil
Common Mallow
Pineappleweed
Spotted Medick
Blinks
Field Forget-me-not
Bird's-foot
Lon-headed Poppy
Smaller Cats-tail
Norway Spruce
Scots Pine
Buck's-horn Plantain
Ribwort Plantain
Greater Plantain
Annual Meadow-grass
Equal-leaved Knotgrass

Knotgrass
Polypody
Hoary Cinquefoil
Cowslip
Primrose
Wild Plum
Blackthorn
Bracken
Pedunculate Oak
Red Currant
Gooseberry
Dog-rose
Bramble
Sheep's-sorrel
Common Sorrel
Broad-leaved Dock
Procumbent Pearlwort
Elder
Common Ragwort
Red Campion
White Campion
Alexanders
Greater Stitchwort
Black Bryony
Dandelion
Hare's-foot
Clover
Hop Trefoil
White Clover
Gorse
Common Nettle
Great Mullein
Wall Speedwell
Germander Speedwell
Ivy-leaved Speedwell