

Suggested text for a letter for residents of Barton Common Road and any other householders the Town Council would like to write to individually.

Dear

New Milton Town Council held a public consultation with local people in the autumn about the future management of some of its green spaces. These sites contain grassland, heathland, woodland and wetland habitats. Of particular interest are two sites which the Council wants to manage better for wildlife; Barton Common and Ballard Water Meadow (near Ballard School in New Milton).

This consultation was advertised on notice boards on the sites themselves, in the local newspaper and other local publications such as the Barton Bugle.

You may have attended the consultation evening which was held at the Memorial Hall in New Milton but, as residents living very close to Barton Common, the Town Council would like to make contact with you individually to talk to you about the plans.

There was a very positive response to the proposals, which have been suggested by the New Forest Land Advice Service (who give free independent advice on wildlife habitat management) and the Council are therefore keen to move forward with the suggested management over the coming years.

The Common and Meadow are Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation which means they have been designated special local sites for wildlife by Hampshire Biological Information Centre, Hampshire County Council and other relevant organisations.

Natural England, the Government's advisory body for the countryside, have offered NMTC a grant called Environmental Stewardship for management of the sites for wildlife so that the Council will have a responsibility to manage them more appropriately. In addition a number of woodland sites owned by the Council would also move into positive management through the scheme.

The Council would enter a ten year agreement with Natural England which would start summer/autumn 2013. The monies received would be used to enhance the sites for wildlife under management plans agreed between NMTC and Natural England. This will be facilitated by the New Forest Land Advice Service.

The ideal management of these sites, in order to restore traditional management and attract more wildlife to the sites, involves reintroduction of low level grazing with livestock such as New Forest ponies or a native breed of cattle, much like the management which is carried out on the New Forest itself. Both sites would have been managed like this in the past; indeed on Barton Common the cattle would have been free to wander around the site and further afield, even into New Milton! Nowadays the site would need to be stock proof so a farmer's fence (post and wire) would be erected along the edge of the Common, behind the bank in order to minimise any visual impact. There will be a number of gates for public access (see attached map for details).

On Barton Common the lack of grazing over many years has led to an invasion of scrub and secondary woodland which has reduced the value of the site for wildlife associated with the rarer grassland and heathland habitats. There is also less space now on the common for people and the views across to the Isle of Wight are being blocked by the vegetation.

These plans for conservation management would not prevent local people from using the sites; on the contrary all access would be maintained and in some cases the Scheme would fund improvements to paths and access points. Any fences that would need to be erected for livestock management would include kissing gates and gates for horse riders in order that people can continue to use the sites in the same way as is currently possible. Similarly dogs will still be able to be walked on the common and meadow as long as they are under control, as is currently already required on these sites.

A similar project is already underway in Milford on Sea where the Parish Council have been working with the New Forest Land Advice Service to reintroduce grazing to one of their sites, Studland Common. The animals will go on for the first time this spring.

As Barton Common is a Registered Common under the Commons Act 2006, consent has to be sought from the Planning Inspectorate for any works carried out on the site and the New Forest Land Advice Service will be helping us to do the application for that in the next few weeks.

We hope very much that you will be supportive of these plans and might enjoy seeing grazing animals on the Common once more. Please do contact us with any questions.

Yours sincerely

Cllr Geoff Blunden