

## **REMOVAL OF COPSES**

**14 November 2013**

### **From Elmbridge Council:**

Dave Page and myself are sorry that our proposals have caused this reaction and welcome the opportunity to explain the importance for preserving the meadows through effective long-term management. Please be assured that Elmbridge Borough Council will not impose any management on the site that is not understood and agreed by the majority of interested stakeholders. As expressed in the past we appreciate working closely and openly with the Friends of Hurst Park to enhance and preserve the amenity and conservation value of the site in the future.. Contact: **Matthew Almond**, Green Spaces Development Officer, Elmbridge Borough Council.

**12 November 2013:**

**Elmbridge Council has plans to remove the two large copses** in the central area of the Meadows. First communication from Elmbridge circulated to the wider Friends of Hurst Park:

Just to let you know that Dave Page and myself had a meeting on site at Hurst Meadows today with John Armitage from the Lower Mole Countryside Management Project (Lower Moles). It was agreed that The Lower Moles will remove the two large copse areas of trees in the centre of the meadow (at least 2 weeks work) and burn all of the cut scrub and brash on site, providing the wind direction is not towards nearby houses (within 200m). I feel it would good to have the Friends of Hurst Parks involvement in these works and a volunteer day was discussed with John Armitage who is very supportive of the idea, however he would like to get an idea of possible numbers. The Lower Moles are intending to start work week commencing 27 January 2013, maybe we could organise a day for the following week? If you have any queries regarding the above please let me know.  
Matthew Almond  
Green Spaces Development Officer

### **Reply 12 November to Mr Almond from Friends of Hurst Park:**

Dear Matt, we are puzzled by this news as we thought you indicated a management plan to thin and lift these areas, removing some of the non-native trees. We find it disappointing that we have still not had any opportunity to engage with the management plan or even to meet with you for an exchange of information. Are the parties interested in the SNCI designation involved with your decision, and can you let us know which copses are referred to – probably with a map or drawing?

Many thanks  
Jill (Secretary)

### **Response 12 November from Elmbridge BC:**

I have attached work plan that I sent to the Lower Mole Project Officer following our site meeting for your information. We have not yet compiled the plan in writing, it is a list of desired items at the moment, and I can assure you that when written up ( hopefully this side of Christmas) you will all have opportunities to comment. Matt and I were under the impression at our site walk with the friends that when we indicated that it would be desirable to remove these two copses indicated pink in the plan to secure the long term future of the central meadow area, there was support for this from the group. I am confident that this will be a good start to active management of the meadow, as it will also restore views across the site. I hope this is all ok. We can meet up to discuss this if you want.

Kind Regards  
Dave Page, Countryside Estates Officer

### **Responses received from the wider Friends of Hurst Park:**

I have no problem in general with removing trees (Surrey is a very wooded county and it is the open areas such as grassland and heath that are threatened), but there needs to be a good reason for doing so. It's been a while since I visited and I cannot recall the composition of the copses. I would certainly support removal of non-native trees (if present) as well as 'recent' establishments such as sycamore (which can be very invasive in grassland). I seem to recall that there are a number of aspens - these have a very high value for wildlife and should be encouraged both as mature trees and suckering trees. Some scrub element around the copses is far more

valuable than a sharp boundary. Of course grassland needs active management or else it would all become woodland, so the size of the copses does need to be monitored, but their current extent balances the site and provides habitats not present in the grassland as well as enhancing biodiversity. As others have mentioned they also provide shelter, visual enhancement and screening of the man-made surroundings. I can see no need or benefit to removing them entirely. I also wonder if there has been any ecological assessment? Does the council even know what species use the copses and why? The council says it wants the Friends involvement but fails to consult until the plans are almost complete and the volunteers already booked - no wonder people are suspicious. Unless there is better communication and sound, scientific reasons are presented for this action then I think it should be strongly opposed. - Graham

It is a beautiful area, enhanced by the trees and variations in the landscape that sets it apart from the usual bland 'Rec.' with a threadbare patch of grass in the centre. It would seem that there must be an ulterior motive in this proposal, either another attempt to annex the area by the cricket club, or preparation for sale to developers. This topic is frequently discussed by users of the meadows, and I have yet to find one person who is in favour of removing the trees. A better option would be to clear some of the dead wood and manage the copses to improve the appearance and provide pleasure to all the users. - Nigel

The only reason I can see to remove any copse from Hurst Park is to get the public more used to a flat green area.....which would allow the creeping imposition of a cricket pitch, paid for from the public purse. Why waste public money on removing a few trees that are essential to wildlife? There is still a beautiful meadow area for natural flora and fauna to thrive in. I realise Elmbridge town hall may want another picture perfect cricket pitch for a few residents (any conflicts of interest to declare?), to enjoy at the expense of the many whose voices the council seems to ignore. If the people concerned really want another cricket pitch, put it behind the pavilion gym club. Behind the pavilion club is a piece of land under a sports covenant which is being prevented from being used for sport by local residents and children as some greedy owners want to bulldoze through the legal covenant and make a few quid (lots) with a large housing development. Leave our park alone for all to enjoy!!! - Alan

Thank you for bringing this to our attention and for giving us an opportunity to comment. No reason is given for the removal of these two large copse areas. In the absence of good reasons, my initial reaction is to oppose their removal. - Peter

Our objection to the proposals are the destruction of copses without an assurance that they will be replaced to maintain the flora, fauna and appearance of the area. We would like to know on what grounds it is felt necessary to remove the copses. - Dick and Annette

Do we have any idea why they want to do this? I certainly have suspicions about it, not to mention the fact that it is removing some of the diverse habitat that we have on the meadow. - Mick

I am rather puzzled as to the reason for the removal of the two copses at all. I would have thought that they have a valuable role as much needed shelter for wildlife as well as cutting the wind which makes winter walks around there very chilly. I would be extremely sorry to see them disappear. Is the final decision already made? - Judy

I agree with Peter. What reason has been given for removing these trees. The majority look perfectly healthy - David

I have viewed the map of the project and find the term 'Crown Lifting' to be too vague to fully understand what this entails. Is it the removal of an area that is too high, or does it mean building up that area? With either of those options it would be helpful to know by how much and for what reason, especially as that area is a flood plain. The entire removal of the two copses within the footpath boundary would greatly change the beauty of that area – an area we must remember - which was originally set aside for wildlife, both flora and fauna to flourish. This would leave a vast area bare of any trees. The extensive cutting of the grass is also of concern to the existing wildlife. With previous suggestions that have been put forward for this area to be used by the adjacent cricket club – which was rejected by the majority - one wonders if there may be a connection to this plan of work. - Wally

My response which I would like to be forwarded to Elmbridge Council is: I think it is a great shame that FoHP who have gone to huge lengths to liaise, build a rapport and work with Elmbridge in order to preserve our Meadow seem to be readily disregarded by the council who seem to renege on agreements with them. I recall that the original proposal was for 'thinning' and the removal of 'non-native trees.' The council have become an object of suspicion by the users of the Meadow who are also mostly residents of Elmbridge. The Council should be so proud and respectful to the local residents, through FoHP who got SNCI for this area, however I get the impression that this is meaningless to the Council. I do not trust the Council, without consulting with interested parties, to act in the meadows' best interest. I am highly suspicious, knowing that there was sympathy within the council for East Molesey Cricket Club, that this is a back door cricket pitch plan. - Hilary

I am not an expert but I can think of no good reason why you/we would support the removal of the two copses. Presumably they provide homes for birds and animals. However, it would make it easier to convert the land to a cricket pitch!! - Douglas

Why are these areas being removed? Is there a problem with them? Do they need removing and how will this improve the area? What about the wildlife that lives/uses them? Sorry to bombard you with questions - Karen

Why would they want to remove those two copses? I can't see that they do any harm, and in my opinion, they add an interesting aspect to The Meadows, plus birds obviously nest there, and I'm sure a few squirrels as well as well as other wildlife. Am I alone in thinking they should leave things as they are, or am I living in the past? If the space within the circular path is open and empty of trees, they'll be putting a cricket pitch on there next!! If there are enough people who think like me, maybe we should start a very quick campaign against it. After all, they seem to have sprung this on us without any prior discussion. Who exactly are The Lower Mole Management Project any way? !!! Would be very interested to know if my feelings are shared by any others. - Vicki

Hi. What is the reason to remove the two copses? - Jacky

Why? they should leave alone. Or are they planing for the cricket club to have the ground!! I would suggest the thinking the copse would be better ie removing every other tree to allow the light in . Can you put this suggestion and see what they say - Tony

Why do they want to remove the copses? They haven't given a reason below. Surely there is benefit to the wildlife in having the trees. Without these copses the area will look rather empty and the landscape will suffer. Unless there is a very good reason for this I am against it. I thought we needed more trees for the drainage. I hope there is no suggestion that the area will then be suitable for a cricket pitch or other sporting activities. - Grahame

We left on Monday for a holiday but we are deeply shocked by you email and can say that on behalf of all the regular users of Hurst Meadows that this suggestion amounts to the worst form of VANDALISM of a very special part of our enviroment and I oppose this action which would ruin this meadow area. Sorry but I have very limited access to emails and please let others know of our opinions. - John

Thank you for sending on the above. My question is - why? I regularly walk in Hurst Meadow and love the way the area has matured. I drove past it today and, in its autumn glory, thought how lovely the trees looked. I appreciate that they may need to be thinned out but why remove them, for heaven's sake? Or is this a war on the squirrels and other wildlife in there?! - Susie

Can I ask why they wish to remove these copses ? - Jann

What possible reason could they have for removing an intrinsic part of the joy of the meadow, other than this is a trojan horse with Molesey cricket club inside it. I vigorously disagree with this, also why on earth do they think we would help to remove them? - Heather

Totally agree with Peter's comment. Why the secrecy until the last moment? Karl

I am wondering why FoHP were not asked their opinion on removing the copses, only asked to assist after the decision is made? I cannot but think that removing these copses makes a very nice area for a cricket practice field possible. Are Elmbridge trying to pull a fast one? We should be opposing this. - Paul

I am a resident of Rivermead and have only just heard via Peter Aron that there are plans afoot to remove two large copse areas of trees in Hurst Meadows. No reason seems to have been given for the removal of these rather pleasant copses which add to the character of Hurst Meadows. Were a policy like this to be continued we might end up simply with a field at a time when residents of the area have amply demonstrated how much they care about the Meadows in their current form. Unless there is good reason for the removal of these copses that we don't yet know about, I would oppose the project if I were asked. - Barbara

It would be useful to know why they feel it necessary to remove these copses, I would have thought. The argument for removal seems to have got a bit lost in their attempt to enrol interested parties to help them, free of charge. Surely, if this is a flood plain, it would be better to have trees between the river and any housing development? Would it be possible to ask them for an appraisal of the situation? - Amanda

Why oh why are they destroying this natural habitat? I should also like to ask why this work is planned when early nesting birds such as blackbirds, robins and wrens will be nesting, laying and possibly incubating their eggs/hatchlings. It is unlawful to knowingly disturb nesting birds. - Emma

I'm very much against removal of the copses. To get rid of them completely will certainly open up views across the meadows - to the road!! They provide a certain amount of screening and hardly impinge on the grassland as they're on the edge of it. - Alison

Back in June this year I attended a meeting on Hurst Meadows with Frances Halstead of Surrey Wildlife Trust, and Council officers Matthew Almond and Dave Page. There was a discussion about the copses and because they contain many fine mature trees only thinning and crowning would be needed. I can't believe that the plan is now to change the character of the Meadow completely by the total removal of these copses. There appears to be no consultation with the people who use the Meadows or Friends of Hurst Park.. - Addy

Mr. Page I think it extremely wise to read the comments on the FoHP web site. The feeling against such action is evident. The need to know why the plans ( and why no consultation with FoHP) appears to be a top priority to avoid a protracted, publicly embarrassing (your department and Council) and high level campaign against such action.

Mr. Page I think it extremely wise to read the comments on the FoHP web site. The feeling against such action is evident. The need to know why the plans ( and why no consultation with FoHP) appears to be a top priority to avoid a protracted, publicly embarrassing (your department and Council) and high level campaign against such action. If there are sound countryside and arboricultural reasons for such actions they need to be communicated for discussion and understanding. In any event, under the freedom of information act, I would like to know who initiated the instructions to you including any member of public, senior council officers and Council members to include any and all affiliations with local residents, sports clubs and business interests within a 2 mile radius of the meadows. - Lorraine and Brian

I have read the comments of those opposing the destruction of living and thriving trees on Hurst Meadows. I agree with most of them, however, I cannot believe that this has anything to do with the introduction of a cricket pitch. I have walked these meadows every day for the past thirteen years and passed, or walked round, the East Molesey Cricket Club grounds on most days. I have very seldom found cricket actually being played. I am sure that this does happen from time to time, but to many this large area of ground should not be for the enjoyment of very few people on very seldom occasions. It cannot compare with the use of Hurst Meadows by the many, by summer picnickers, by dog walkers, by children playing and by people fascinated by the wildlife and wild plants which abound there, all day and every day all the year round. Were the field to be taken over by the cricketers there would have to be a permanent ruling to stop all this on health a safety grounds as dogs would, of course, be banned because of their habits of digging holes and fouling, and children could not play anywhere near where the heavy and highly dangerous cricket ball would be in full fly. - Nina

I am glad that so many of us local people care about our park. I think this proposal to remove the copses has come as a shock and because of this it has been misinterpreted. I appreciate that it seems quite drastic but Dave Page (EBC's Countryside Estates Officer) and Francis Halstead (Surrey Wildlife Trust) are very experienced experts and I think we should take their advice to remove the copses. I think that most other nature organisations (eg Natural England) would agree with their proposal for the following reasons. The removal of these copses would mean that we would have a much larger area of meadow which is an extremely valuable and rare habitat, especially in comparison with the copses. The meadow is the main reason the whole park was recently awarded SNCI status and this tremendous achievement by FOHP will protect the park from most threats (such as being turned into a cricket pitch). Although it is not obvious visually, the meadow actually has "*more than 90 species of wildflower (including some rarities) and over 70 species of insect*". It is vital that this rich, rare and fragile habitat is protected from the trees as otherwise they will dry out the meadow and significantly harm it's fragile ecosystem. The copses for proposed removal are on the lower-lying ground and this would be the perfect area for creating some more valuable meadowland. As an additional bonus, the lowering there is on a slight gradient (rather than the completely flat flood-plain of some meadows) and so there would be an even wider biodiversity of rare meadowland flora and fauna. I also think it would look attractive to have a defined swathe of pleasant meadow in the heart of the Park (i.e. within the confines of the circular path) and yet there would still be enough copses around it to give the whole area an aesthetically pleasing contrast between woodland and meadowland. Meadowland is an extremely rare habitat in England whereas Surrey is "*the most wooded county in England*". So *please*, let's vote to remove the copses in order to protect and increase the size of our valuable SNCI meadow. - Paul