



SOMERLEYTON ESTATE

Conservation Policy



Introduction

The habitats around Fritton Lake Country Park, the Golf Course and Woodland Lodges provide an important refuge for many native plants and animals. This policy is designed to be used as a guide to staff and managers to help manage the habitats in a sensitive and appropriate way. As time permits, a thorough Management Plan will be produced, to further develop the long term conservation of these habitats.

It is recommended that a baseline survey is undertaken to record the various species found at Fritton, and this list should be added to annually. Monitoring of species should continue annually, and appropriate management actions should be prescribed as a result. This applies to invasive and non-native species, as well as BAP and any key, or notable species found at Fritton.

Major operations must be left until the Autumn / Winter when most wildlife is dormant. Where practical, eco-piles and wildlife refuges must be left to provide additional habitats to wildlife. Fires should only be had when necessary (eg Rhododendron Clearance and Garden Waste) and

Main Aims

- To maintain, enhance and conserve a patchwork of habitats at Fritton Lake
- To encourage areas to become more species rich, in which both a high diversity and high abundance of wildlife will exist.
- To monitor wildlife populations and record species present
- To manage the habitats in a sensitive way
- To create a 25 year management plan to secure the long term implementation of management prescriptions and ideas.

Specific Habitat Recommendations

Golf Course

It is recommended that the greens and fairways be cut weekly during the main season (March – October). There after they should be cut when necessary. The semi rough should be cut using the swipe (set on 5) on a monthly basis during the main season, and probably once in the Autumn prior to the first frosts. The rough and long grass areas should be left as a refuge for mammals, insects and wildflowers, and if any areas are cut, the cuttings should be removed. Attend to any trees / branches in the Winter time, and remove the grass piles to the grass compost heaps. Grass cut from the greens following chemical application must not be composted.

The bunkers may be treated with round-up two or three times a year, and the green treated with a selective weed killer following fertiliser application in May. Moles should be addressed by focussing on the marginal areas, and mole hills require levelling prior to cutting. Chemicals should not be used to control the moles, and especially the worm populations (applies to greens mainly).

Lodges

The management policy within the lodge development is focused on conserving and maintaining the area as naturally as possible. However to comply with Fire Regulations, a 4ft clear and maintained zone is necessary around each lodge (both at ground level and above roofs). It is therefore recommended to only cut 4-6ft around each lodge, leaving the areas outside that zone, as a natural barrier between each lodge. Overhanging vegetation must be trimmed back, and any major work ought to be left to the winter. Spraying must occur twice a year to control the vegetation growth immediately adjacent to the lodge, as well as on paths and car parks associated with the lodges. In the winter, some of the rough, brambly areas should be cut back in order to promote young vigorous growth and prevent them becoming too woody.

Tree inspections are required to be undertaken, and remedial work should wait until the Autumn / Winter, unless a significant hazard is recognised. Road ways require trimming back to 16ft high (to allow fire brigade clearance) and as wide as is necessary to provide access to move lodges and vehicles through the development.

In the Autumn, leaves are removed from decks, roofs and pathways, and those loaded into trailers should be deposited in the composting enclosures located in the park or development. Strimming should be kept to a minimum, due to the high number of windows, as well as the cut grass sticking to the wooden skirts of the lodge. Tidy Log piles should be established throughout the development, and small areas should be left unmanaged wherever practical

Reedbeds

Reedbed clearance work must only occur in the Winter Months. Staff must be most careful with regard to fuel and oil use (biodegradable and refuelling locations). Fires are not permitted adjacent to the reed margins, but ought to be located on less peaty ground where practical. Stumps should be treated, or allowed to coppice naturally.

Victorian Pleasure Ground

Parts of the Estate were altered in Victorian times, to create "Pleasure Grounds". These areas were planted with ornamental trees and shrubs, such as Rhododendrons, Laurel Cedars and Bamboo. Management here should be to allow the areas to develop, but restrict the spread of invasive species such as Bamboo and Rhododendron. In particular, a 50ft zone around the margin of the lake should be managed to reduce the impact of these species in favour of natural ecosystems.

Meadows and Fields

The large expanse of Agricultural Parkland should be grazed with sheep or horses. Manure should be collected where possible, and used on the gardens / mulch round trees. Fields should be monitored for Ragwort and this must be pulled, bagged and burnt. Hedges and fences must be maintained at all times, undertaking cutting back early in the New Year. Avoid cutting hedges when birds are nesting. Over grown hedgerows may be left, or pollarded to re-instate them. Paths should be cut across the fields for public access, and areas cut for hay must be checked for ground nesting birds prior to cutting. Topping should occur by August (or once all the Ragwort has been pulled), and chain harrowing and rolling in the winter months.

Woodlands

The Woodlands consist of 3 main habitats: Mixed and Softwood Plantations, Secondary and Ancient Woodlands. In all habitats, similar operations occur (such as thinning, Rhododendron Clearance, coppicing or heavy pruning). Thinning the trees enables light to reach the herb and shrub layer of the woodland. This encourages and promotes growth, creating a wider age range of trees and shrubs. As the under-story develops, so suitable habitats are created for birds and insects. In time the woodlands will benefit from a greater variety of species.

To this end all forestry operations should be undertaken during the colder months, when most wildlife is dormant. Chainsaws should use biodegradable oil, and extraction should occur when the ground is hard, to reduce damage. Where possible, timber extracted should be used on the Estate for fencing / barriers / fire wood or aesthetic purposes.

Brushwood piles, and log piles should be left, as well as any fallen trees or dead wood (that is not considered hazardous). Within these "eco-piles", beetle grubs, woodlice and other small invertebrates can be found. These creatures are vital in a woodland ecosystem, because they break down the organic matter and decompose it into useful nutrients for the surrounding plants, shrubs and trees. As insect numbers increase, so will the abundance of small mammals and birds, which feed on them. These animals will bring with them seeds and berries from brambles, hawthorns, hazel and other species, to help re populate the woodland.

Where practical replanting should only occur in areas where there is a limited under storey, however natural succession should always be favoured first. The Ancient woodlands may require very little work (path clearance and coppicing), but the focus should still be encouraging diversity in quantity. Monitoring should continue during the warmer months, recording butterflies and other notable species.

Trees that are newly planted should be watered in well, and have grass / leaf mulch spread around their base to reduce moisture loss. Use water from the lake (via the golf course pump) or from water butts in preference to water from the borehole. Do not use water from the main.

Formal Areas

Those areas maintained at a high level of presentation must still be managed in a sensitive manner. Longer areas of grass should be permitted to remain where practical, and bird boxes or refuges should be established where they are visually unobtrusive. Disturbance to wildlife must be kept to a minimum and hedges / climbers etc should all be inspected for nesting birds prior to hedge cutting, pruning. Hoeing the formal beds should be undertaken in preference to spraying. Paths and gravel areas should be sprayed with a non selective herbicide that becomes inert on contact with the ground (eg Roundup Pro Bioactive).

Grass cuttings should either be mulched or collected, and leaves collected. Both by products should be deposited in the cages for composting.

Refuges for wildlife

In all the habitats described above, consideration must be given to suitable refuges, or homes, for a variety of species including hibernating creatures, bats, nesting birds, insects, reptiles etc. This might range from bird boxes, log piles, islands of grass left long, wildlife corridors. Sensible and aesthetic location of these refuges will be not only of benefit to wildlife, but also to those that come here to see wildlife.