



## **CARNYORTH COMMON**

**“IN UNFAVOURABLE CONDITION”**

Some Natural England responses to SPM queries

July 2015

Some edited responses from Natural England following questions from SPM about the success – or otherwise – of the 10 year HLS agreement on Carnyorth Common that started on 1st August 2007 and ends on 31st July 2017.

1. Management undertaken through Higher Level Stewardship [HLS] agreements aim to re/establish and manage the habitat mosaic through the different stages of the heathland cycle.
2. The agreement holder is required to deliver a programme of management including grazing, cutting, control burning and bracken management, to deliver the indicators of success for the option on this Common grazing began during May 2008.
3. Natural England [NE] sets up agreements and maintains a watching brief over these agreements and their advisers undertake aftercare visits and aftercare calls to check that land is being managed according to the option prescriptions, and also to check that progress is made against indicators of success.
4. NE guidance for the HLS aftercare programme allows for an average of two site visits per ten year agreement. However for this particular site there has been at least one visit each year since the agreement was set up to observe that prescriptions are being delivered in accordance with the agreement. In NE's opinion the agreement land is making progress towards delivering the indicators of success.
5. Individual agreements are selected for compliance monitoring by the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) on a risk basis, NE provides aftercare support to agreement holders

- throughout the term of agreements; DEFRA and the European Commission undertake monitoring to assess the success of their programmes.
6. NE recognise that the heathlands in Penwith may not be the same as heathlands elsewhere in the UK and therefore certain targets may need to be adjusted to reflect local distinctiveness.
  7. Carnyorth Common was subject to a detailed National Vegetation Classification [NVC] survey in 2013 undertaken by Hewins Ecology, at a cost of about £3,177, as part of the study for the potential notification of land in Penwith as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). A habitat condition assessment against national generic targets for lowland heath set by the Joint Nature Conservancy Council JNCC was carried out at the same time.
  8. The condition status of the common was assessed as ‘unfavourable’ although Hewins Ecology observed that on nine out of twelve attributes for lowland heath habitat the site passed. Because livestock grazing has been restored to most parts of the site where lowland heath has been mapped, coupled with recent firebreak mowing, they adjusted their assessment of the site to ‘recovering’ condition.
  9. SSSI condition assessment is usually expressed as follows: *Unfavourable; Favourable; Unfavourable no change; Unfavourable improving; Unfavourable declining*. The condition assessment associated with the NVC survey was necessarily based on national generic targets as site specific targets have not been set because the land isn’t a SSSI and favourable condition targets have not yet been set. Any future assessments based on site specific targets may reach a different conclusion from the assessment carried out by Hewins Ecology in 2013.

10. NE note that some habitats such as lowland heathland may take longer than a 10 year management agreement to fully restore to favourable condition, active management is required to maintain the balance of habitat in favourable condition once it has been achieved.
11. NE have no immediate plans to undertake a further detailed survey of the site before the end of the agreement [in 2018].
12. ARCHAEOLOGY: The agreement holder has informed NE that bracken management was undertaken in 2013 and 2014 on areas in the vicinity of Carn Kenidjack, the barrows towards the stone circle, Hogs Well and the ancient village towards Boslow. Further cutting/rolling will be undertaken in August this year [2015], together with around ten acres using asulox which should offer more effective and long lasting control than cutting or rolling alone.
13. With regard to the relative condition of the barrow features, Historic England has expressed 'delight' with the improvement in condition of barrow features under this HLS management agreement. The hut circle and the two barrows on Carn Bean were classed as at high risk at the commencement of the agreement, these have now been removed from the Heritage at Risk register. Four remaining barrows were at medium risk but declining condition, these remain medium risk but are now in 'improving' condition. Natural England will continue to work with Historic England and the agreement holder to ensure that progress is maintained and the appropriate management objective is achieved.