

Policy Statement - Ash Priors Common

Ash Priors Common was declared a Local Nature Reserve (LNR) on 22 November 1995, following consultation with the owners, commoners, English Nature and Somerset Wildlife Trust. It was identified in the West Deane Local Plan (Jan 92) along with three other potential sites.

The purpose of the LNR is to sympathetically manage the mosaic of habitats present and to make the common more accessible to people on foot.

The common is of local significance for a number of reasons:

1. It serves as a wildlife oasis in an intensively managed agricultural landscape.
2. It is a County Wildlife Site and so important on a County scale. It is protected under County structure Plan Policy against development (NCI).
3. It contains three significant habitat types (unimproved neutral grassland, wet heath and semi-natural deciduous woodland). The first two habitats are of high county importance.
4. It contains 78 notable species, thirty of them plants mainly in the grassland and heath eg orchids, moschatel. (See Section 4 of Management Plan).
5. It is an important site for passerines.
6. The site supports a small localised population of chamomile (*chamaemelum nobile*). This plant is nationally scarce and very rare in Somerset.
7. The common is the first LNR declared by TDBC. In the Council's Biodiversity Plan, there is a recommendation that the Council should aim to develop one heathland and one neutral grassland site as a LNR.

The main targets of the Management Plan for the common are to:

1. To maintain the area of lowland heath and unimproved neutral grassland.
(The bracken on the heathland is cut on rotation by the Council's Direct Labour Organisation each year. The grassland is cut on a yearly basis by the owner.)
2. To maximise the value and range of the habitat types, linking all open areas with rides
(Work has been undertaken clearing scrub and bracken, coppicing hazel and thinning trees in the woodland area. This work is being phased over a number of years to minimise the ecological and visual impact.)
3. To make the common more accessible to the general public by foot.