BETTER OUTCOMES ON UPLAND COMMONS

A project inspired by HRH The Prince of Wales:

‘Better Outcomes on Upland Commons’ aims to improve working relations between organisations to strengthen our ability to safeguard and manage the uplands. This report presents data from five upland commons across England to draw out the characteristics of the successful delivery of multiple outcomes over the same area of land. The purpose is to inform the development of upland policies and programmes for these cultural landscapes which are cherished and visited by millions. Common Land was used as the focus of the project as it encompasses many of the conflicts and challenges of the wider upland countryside.

Editors: Julia Aglionby and Robert Morris
June 2014
Better Outcomes on Upland Commons

Executive Summary

Inspired by HRH The Prince of Wales the purpose of ‘Better Outcomes for Upland Commons’ is to improve long term working relations between organisations to strengthen our ability to safeguard and manage the uplands.

Through working with over fifteen national organisations and local stakeholders across five upland commons in England three objectives were addressed;

• How better outcomes for each stakeholder can be delivered simultaneously on the same area of upland common,
• How grazing commoners and common owners can be paid for the delivery of ecosystem services on common land by the market as well as the state, and
• How the respective rights and responsibilities of all parties active on common land can be understood and recognized and then incorporated into management practice

In each case study we sought to discover what success looks like, the attributes of successful management and what local stakeholders considered is needed to deliver this in the future.

The project concluded that respectful and long enduring relationships between individuals and groups are at the heart of delivering better outcomes on upland commons.

Commons are known for their diversity, and these five case studies reflect that diversity, yet interestingly this project identified many shared attributes that characterise the successful delivery of multiple outcomes on upland commons. These are:

• Strong and adaptive leadership and co-ordination
• Good and regular communication
• Effective and well established networks
• Respectful attitudes
• Clarity on rights and outcomes
• Trade-offs negotiated fairly
• Fair and transparent administration
• Payments that reflect respective contributions and benefits
• Value local knowledge and provide local discretion over prescriptions
• Time: continuity of service, time for negotiations and duration of interventions

With regard payments for ecosystem services (PES) the project concluded that payments from market sources are likely to remain limited in the amount they will generate for the next 5-10 years. Stewardship schemes are considered essential to catalyse and sustain the provision of public ecosystem services therefore the continued delivery of these public benefits is at present dependent on the state paying farmers and landowners for these extensive but diffuse benefits.

These attributes of success will also result in a respect for and clarity on rights and responsibilities. In particular they lead to more effective use of local knowledge, the ability to negotiate trade-offs and the fairer administration of schemes. All these attributes characterise better outcomes for public and private interests. In short success is down to the attitudes of institutions and individuals and how they approach the challenge. As summed up by one case study co-ordinator:

Danby Moor Common has just as many issues as any other moor but it is the attitude with which they deal with those issues which makes it successful.
Better Outcomes on Upland Commons

Executive Summary

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Chapter 4 – The Long Mynd Case Study Report
Clare Fildes and Cath Landles, Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership

1. Description

1.1 Biophysical characteristics
Situated in the midst of rolling Shropshire Hills, the Long Mynd is a dramatic, isolated whaleback hill with an open plateau expanse of heather moorland and deeply cut valleys with hill streams. It is a landscape with significant archaeology and geology that has been modified by human activity over thousands of years. It lies within the Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), a national designation with the primary purpose to conserve and enhance natural beauty. The Long Mynd Common covers most of the higher central part of the hill and the eastern valleys, but excludes areas on the southern, western and northern fringes of the hill (see map below).

The Long Mynd reaches its highest point of 517 metres (1,595 ft.) at Pole Bank. It is a Biological and Geological SSSI, the largest in the West Midlands.

The common is situated on the south-eastern margin of upland habitat in Britain. This is an important transitional area and the vegetation includes a mix of species which are typically northern or southern in their distribution.

There are many special habitats, including:
• Dwarf shrub heath
• Acid grassland
• Grass heath mosaics
• Some herb rich grasslands associated with shallow soils
• Mires and flushes
• Upland streams

According to the SSSI citation, the Long Mynd is the most important site in Shropshire for upland birds, including merlin, red grouse, wheatear and curlew.

The Long Mynd SSSI forms the type locality for the Longmyndian succession of rocks, which are Precambrian in age. It is the thickest, more stratigraphically complete and most important exposure in Britain of ancient, non-marine sediments deposited to the south east of the Iapetus Ocean. All the type localities for the seven group subdivisions in Longmyndian stratigraphy are included within the site.

1.2 Cultural and legal characteristics
The Long Mynd simply means 'Long Mountain' referring to the central ridge of the hills from the old English Lang (long) and the Welsh mynydd (mountain).

There are many historic sites on the Long Mynd. These include:
• Barrister’s Plain, Devil’s Mouth and High Park cross-ridge dykes
• Over 20 Bronze Age barrows, including “Robin Hoods Butts” and the Shooting Box Barrow, which is the only known example of a disc barrow in Shropshire.
• The Port Way is an ancient trackway, which runs the length of the Long Mynd, and is the largest historical feature on the Long Mynd, at just over 5 miles (8.0 km) long.
• Bodbury Ring Hill Fort, dates from the Iron Age, c. 500BC

During the 18th Century, Church Stretton began to grow in the wide valley between the Long Mynd and Caer Caradoc, as a spa town. Historically the town was known for its textiles, specifically in Carding Mill Valley. The Carding Mill was built in the 18th Century.

The Shropshire Hills AONB includes all of the Long Mynd and was designated in 1958. A large area of the Long Mynd (almost all its upland area) was bought by the National Trust in 1965.

The Long Mynd is extremely popular for recreation, having around 300,000 visitors a year, with significant economic benefits to the area. Around 250,000 visitors go to Carding Mill Valley, of whom around 30% will also visit the town of Church Stretton which is a ‘Walkers are Welcome’ town. Around 33,000 school children also visit the common, along with 2-3,000 taking part in Duke of Edinburgh Award expeditions. The common is increasingly being used for mountain biking and challenge events, such as fell running, with occasionally up to 1,000 competitors taking part. There is an old reservoir, which is now sometimes used for wild swimming. The hill is an important location for gliding and paragliding, though the key launch sites lie just outside the common.

1.3 History of Management and Interventions
The National Trust own 2,322 hectares of land. The majority of the Long Mynd in the Trust’s ownership was acquired by public subscription in 1965. 10 hectares in the Batch were added in 1978 and 120 hectares in Carding Mill Valley in 1979.

2,214 ha of the land owned by the Trust is a common, which was registered in 1965 under the Commons Registration Act. In 1965 there were around 110 holdings with Commoners Rights. There are now 16 active graziers. Rights are for sheep and ponies. There were 12-14,000 sheep in the late 1990s; there are now 3,000, under one of the largest Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) agreements in the country. It is run by a voluntary association with no statutory powers that a Board of Conservators or a Commons Council have.
The HLS agreement, and the ten year Environmentally Sensitive Area agreement which preceded it, have successfully influenced levels and patterns of grazing to improve the condition of the heathland. There is also a programme of controlled heather burning, and bracken composting has been successfully piloted.

1.4 Identify current stakeholders

The key stakeholders involved in the common are as follows:

- Long Mynd Commoners Association
- Long Mynd and District Bridleways Association
- National Trust staff, wardens and volunteers
- The Long Mynd Liaison Group, which includes representatives of recreational users including walkers, mountain bikers, horse riders, fell runners and Commoners
- Local walking groups,
- Informal recreational users
- Special interest groups concerned with the historic and natural environment
- Schools
- Duke of Edinburgh’s Award organisers and participants
- Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership
- English Heritage
- Local residents and businesses
- Shropshire Council as the access authority

2. Data

2.1 Who was interviewed and the most quotable quotes (not attributed)

The following people were interviewed:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Contact</th>
<th>Notes/ key themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National Trust</td>
<td>Pete Carty- Manager</td>
<td>General overview Rangers and volunteers HLS agreement and grazing/ management Income from range of activities SAMs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Trust volunteer</td>
<td>Eric Brown - Leader of Tuesday Task Force</td>
<td>Orienteering Volunteering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commoners Association</td>
<td>Peter Willcox- Agent with Halls and landowner</td>
<td>Commoners HLS agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commoners</td>
<td>Dave Jones- Farmer, Commoner and active grazier</td>
<td>Grazing and common management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commoners</td>
<td>Margaret Morris- Farmer, Commoner, active grazier and Secretary of the Long Mynd</td>
<td>Grazing and commons management LMCA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>Contact Person</td>
<td>Contributions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walking tourism</td>
<td>Alan Garner- owner, Secret Hills Walking and Chair of Church Stretton Area Tourism Group</td>
<td>Economic value of the common to business Walking Health and wellbeing benefits Dealing with landowners and commoners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mountain biking/tourism</td>
<td>Alan Timbrell- owner Plush Hill Cycles</td>
<td>Economic value of the common to business Mountain biking Health and wellbeing benefits Dealing with landowners and commoners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horse riding</td>
<td>Lucy McFarlane, Long Mynd Bridleways, Shropshire Council ROW Officer and National Trust volunteer</td>
<td>Resolving conflicts with other users Dealing with landowners and commoners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural and cultural heritage</td>
<td>Caroline Uff- Ecologist, National Trust</td>
<td>HLS development, biodiversity monitoring, SAMs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Wildlife Group</td>
<td>Leo Smith- representative from Upper Onny Wildlife Group and bird expert</td>
<td>Ornithology, bird ID courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools</td>
<td>Chris Stratton, National Trust Learning Officer</td>
<td>School visits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership</td>
<td>Phil Holden- Manager and recreational user</td>
<td>Wider landscape Walking, running, cycling, cross-country skiing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ramblers</td>
<td>Trevor Allison- Footpath Secretary for Ramblers Association, Shropshire area</td>
<td>Walking Footpaths and ROW</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Quotes:

- “Very important to me, it’s the heart of my ethos and well-being and highly valued. Very few other places I would consider living”
- “What I enjoy most about the hill is its change of mood”
- “In 2013, our education work pulled in £68,000 income to the National Trust and is increasing year on year. About one quarter of the total income of the National Trust Shropshire properties comes from Carding Mill Valley”.
- “It’s good for my well-being, therapy for friends and provides inspiration for creative writing.”
- “I’m at my happiest when I’m on the hill”
- “I love it, always known it and love coming home to the hills”
- “USP on Long Mynd is ‘natural trail riding’, therefore we don’t want the site to become too manufactured or sanitised but at the same time we have to make it easy for trail users to find their way around”
- “Still feel National Trust promise more than they actually do with the Commoners”.
- “Commoners not aware of other users, they see the common as theirs, don’t realise that others value it too.”
- “Long Mynd is in much better condition now than in the 1990s. Much more functioning ecosystem.”
- “Investment is needed to maintain wildlife benefits at a landscape scale”.
- “It’s all a matter of scale and balance.”
- “Management meetings with Long Mynd Commoners Association and National Trust need to be reinstated. It’s essential to go through detail of proposed plans together, e.g. tree planting and gorse/bracken management.”
- “Leave only footprints, take only memories.”
2.2 Workshop description

The interviewees were invited to a meeting in Church Stretton to discuss the findings of the study and raise any further points. 11 of the 13 interviewees attended. Rob Morris from the Foundation for Common Land set the scene with a short presentation about the Better Outcomes for Upland Commons project, followed by Peter Carty, Manager of the common for the National Trust, who gave a brief history of the management of the Long Mynd. Cath Landles then presented the findings of the interviews and the interviewees were split into two groups to discuss the findings and draw out any other points. The results of this are incorporated in the discussion below.

2.3 Key Themes Arising under the Three ‘Topics of Inquiry’

The following summarises the responses to questions around the three Topics of Inquiry:

Concurrent delivery and enhancement of multiple outcomes

Long Mynd common is used concurrently for a wide range of activities, by a wide range of people. The main outcomes delivered are:

- Improvements to the local economy through farming livelihoods, resulting from the grazing rights of commoners.
- The provision of environmental benefits through agri-environment schemes and other businesses, such as tourism and food and drink
- Better quality habitats for a wide range of wildlife, facilitated by the Higher Level Stewardship agreement
- Improved awareness and knowledge of wildlife, geology, land management and cultural heritage
- Protection of resources, including water quality, carbon storage, air quality and genetic resources
- Enhancement of health through recreational activities that improve fitness and relaxation, such as walking (including dog walking), fell running, mountain biking, horse riding, wild swimming, wild camping and orienteering. Challenge events are getting increasingly popular
- Improved wellbeing through providing inspiration for the arts, wonderful views, tranquillity, feeling of freedom and perception of ‘wildness’
- Conservation of the historic environment and cultural heritage

The delivery of some of these outcomes may, at times, be at odds with each other, such as challenge events for mountain bikers and the provision of safe nesting areas for red grouse or using the common for tranquil contemplation.

The common provides open access with few stiles and much of it is therefore very accessible, with opportunities for those with less mobility and for families. There are, however, steep slopes and it can be inhospitable in poor weather conditions.
Payments for Ecosystem Services

There are a wide range of Ecosystem Services delivered by the common. These included:

- Habitat and wildlife diversity and resource protection - carbon storage, flood attenuation, water protection and private water supply, erosion control, fresh air.
- Grazing maintains an open landscape.
- Health and wellbeing - tranquillity, solitude, inspiration for creative writing and the arts, spirituality, keeping fit
- Recreation and leisure - walking, mountain biking, horse riding, fell running, Shropshire Hills Shuttles, events
- Farming and food production - lamb, wool products, genetic resource, traditional farming techniques
- Education for all - e.g. schools and other users, talks, walks and events

The cultural heritage of the common was not prominent in the responses of interviewees, beyond mention of the presence of the 24 scheduled monuments.

Some of these ecosystem services were paid for, others not. This is discussed in more detail below.

Understanding Rights and Responsibilities

Rights
Most people were aware of access rights and that Commoners had the right to graze. More specific rights were mentioned, such as the National Trust not having rights to graze, plant trees, change vegetation or manage the common without the agreement of the Commoners.

Responsibilities
Everyone understood the need to be responsible and respect the common. Responsibilities mentioned included:

- Looking after and caring for the common
- Leaving only footprints
- Respecting other users
- Not disturbing wildlife
- Protecting the common for future generations
- Working with National Trust to protect sensitive habitat
- Telling people about the common and its management

3. Successful delivery of multiple outcomes on this common

3.1 Who pays for and received the benefits from outcomes?

The outcomes are paid for as follows:

- The National Trust, as the owner of the common, pays for much of the maintenance of paths, the car park and for information and interpretation resources. They also pay the salaries of those working there, whether they are monitoring wildlife, liaising with commoners or leading school groups. Some of these costs will be covered by National Trust membership fees but the majority (around £200,000pa) is earned through the activity carried out by the staff, including guided walks and events, car parking fees, the shop and café. The role of the volunteers and wardens in the maintenance of the site should not be underestimated.
- The National Trust are starting to charge participants of challenge events an extra £1 per entry as a contribution for the management of the common. This has been well received so far though does not cover the full costs the event imposes on the environment.
• Natural England is contributing £2.4 m from 2010 to 2020 through the Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) agreement with the Commoners. This compensates the Commoners for reduced stocking rates.

• One of the Commoners pays for the upkeep of the ponies on the common despite them not having a commercial value these days. This is continued as a cultural tradition because people like to see them on the hill.

• Shropshire Council as the highways and access authority is responsible for some aspects of the Rights of Way on the common and for overseeing freedom to roam on commons and other open country.

• The golf course pays for the maintenance of the course for their members and visiting golfers, primarily for recreational use.

• The Shropshire Hills Shuttle buses are managed by the Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership and paid for through Shropshire Council, National Trust, Natural England and the Church Stretton Area Tourism Group.

• Community Wildlife Groups have received external funding for their activities. This includes EU LEADER funding and the Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership’s Sustainable Development Fund.

The beneficiaries:

• Local businesses benefit from the high quality environment and natural and cultural heritage of the common through:
  o Leading walking, cycling or mountain biking tours
  o Selling outdoor activity equipment and clothing
  o The Golf Course
  o Charging for events
  o Providing refreshments and other services in Church Stretton and in surrounding rural pubs
  o Providing accommodation for visitors
  o Being involved in the supply chain for the tourism industry

• Commoners benefit from being able to graze their livestock on the common, helping contribute to the overall viability of their farming businesses. The compensatory payments from the HLS agreement will also help with this. They have also found that the sheep benefit from being on the common in terms of improved health and welfare, thus reducing vets bills.

• The local community and visitors benefit from the fresh air, scenic quality, wildlife, wilderness, spirituality and tranquillity of the common and see it as providing health and wellbeing benefits. They also benefit from the increased knowledge and awareness, provided in part through the resources created and delivered by the National Trust.

• National Trust staff benefit from being employed to look after the common, with volunteers and voluntary wardens gaining health and wellbeing benefits from the range of activities they undertake.

• The Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership benefits from this iconic hill being well managed as part of the AONB landscape.

• The nation benefits from the conservation of important natural and cultural heritage for future generations.

It was felt that some businesses from outside were benefiting from the common but keeping the funds in-house, thus not maximising the benefits to the local economy. This can have a negative impact on other similar businesses locally.

3.2 How are relations between stakeholders managed?

Delivering multiple outcomes on the same piece of land relies on excellent relationship building. This was cited along with good communication, as the most important factors in
resolving conflicts on the common by all parties. Relationships between the National Trust staff, commoners, local people, trail users and businesses were all considered important, along with the willingness to change. The Long Mynd Liaison Group was useful to many people, although it was felt that the Commoners didn’t take full advantage of it. Good communication and facilitation were recognised as essential, and the National Trust and Natural England staff were generally praised in this regard. The role of the National Trust Property Manager is key and Pete Carty was singled out as being important for making things happen, both his management and his long period of management providing continuity.

It was important to know and be able to contact the right people to get things resolved.

Other issues were resolved through better information, such as a mountain bike map helping ensure cyclists kept to the tracks, guided walks and talks, monitoring of wildlife and condition of tracks and taking action. The National Trust staff, volunteers and wardens play a part in this.

Mountain bike representatives asked for more contact with the Commoners to help understand any issues they might have.

3.3 **What would constitute success for this common and its management in 5-10 years’ time? What is required for this to happen?**

In 5-10 years’ time the following aspirations were raised:

- Better habitat management through mixed grazing (e.g. introducing cattle or more ponies), increased heather burning, better bracken management, more tree planting, especially in the hollows, limited grazing and access in key protected sites and predator control, to benefit ground nesting birds. Improved ecological networks between the common and surrounding farmland.
- More sustainable solution to bracken control. The current methods are expensive and the availability of Asulox to control bracken depends on annual exemptions to its ban.
- Better resource protection and improved role of wetland areas to hold water and help flood attenuation.
- Path erosion repaired.
- The successful running of a Commoners Court discussing issues, such as bracken control.
- Mechanisms for payment for ecosystem services (PES) in place, although they were not sure what the mechanisms might be. Examples suggested included charging more for challenge event participants, and a more general visitor giving scheme. Biodiversity offsetting and flood alleviation payments could also be considered.
- More activities for young people, especially around increasing awareness and understanding of wildlife and the common in general.
- Educational resources and interpretation about upland farming and the management and history of the common for the general public and other organisations. This would include increasing awareness that what people often see as ‘wilderness’ is actually only as it is through centuries of management by man, and the importance of continued management into the future.
- Awareness; raising of issues with s and livestock.
- The retention of tranquillity and the ‘natural’ feel of the trails and the wider common.
- The development of a ‘Long Mynd Lamb’ brand to help sell the benefits of grazing of the common, and to achieve a higher margin for farmers and a contribution to the National Trust for ongoing maintenance.
- Fewer traffic and dog incidents involving livestock.
- Better understanding of the dangers, or perceived dangers of mountain biking for other users.
• Reduction of litter especially that left behind by Duke of Edinburgh groups.
• The development of a hydroelectric scheme, alongside the log-fired boiler at Carding Mill Valley, will act as an example of more sustainable living in the future.

For these aspirations to be met there needs to be better relationships between users and stronger connections with the local community, with more management meetings between Commoners and the National Trust and more discussions between mountain bikers and farmers to understand any concerns.

Habitat improvements could be delivered by having more land owned by the National Trust, or improved wildlife management on adjacent farmed land, possibly through further agri-environment schemes. Habitat improvements on the common could include planting more trees to shade bracken and gorse in the steep valleys to benefit grassland habitat or more mixed grazing, i.e. cattle. The Commoners expressed concern about tree planting and this will need further negotiation. Cattle grazing rights were not generally registered, so old rights would have to be re-established to enable cattle grazing to occur. The legalities of this would need investigating.

A sheep themed event/ weekend to raise awareness of farming on the common, covering sheep breeds, sheep lifecycle, shepherd’s year and dog worrying could help raise awareness. This could involve breed societies, National Sheep Association, Commoners, chefs, butchers, knitting groups, crafts people, children’s activities etc.

Issues with dogs could be alleviated through dog training sessions, working with the Kennel Club, school campaigns, PAWS for the future (project in Peak District National Park where dog owners are talking to other dog owners).

Retaining the tranquillity and naturalness of the area could be achieved by limiting signage on the common and the number of challenge events, encouraging mountain bikes trails elsewhere (such as on Forestry Commission sites), better information and a stronger presence of National Trust staff on the hill, helping alleviate issues and providing information and support.

4. Concluding remarks

All the interviewees agreed that everyone has the right to use the common but that everyone should seek not to damage the very things that are valued:

• Landscape quality
• Wildlife
• Tranquillity
• Wildness

The key word here is balance. There needs to be mutual understanding between users of the common. This works well where people know each other and are regularly meeting. The Long Mynd Liaison Group is successfully achieving this goal for many users, although more involvement by the Commoners would be appreciated.