

Shropshire Hills AONB Conservation Fund 2015-16

Final Project Report

Name of Project: Bromlow Callow Gorse Control

Applicant: Leigh Hall Estate

Project Reference: CF/1516/24



Bromlow Callow 1999



Bromlow Callow 2014

Bromlow Callow is an important local landmark and visitor attraction within the Shropshire Hills AONB. It consists of a 1.66 acre clump of trees (primarily Scots Pine) on the top of a conical hill through which runs a permissive footpath. A 32 acre area of unimproved permanent grassland (neutral and acid) surrounds the site. The area is designated as right to roam and is an important site for wildlife.

Gorse had established itself on the Callow and was spreading rapidly, covering approximately 50% of the area, as shown in the images above. The gorse also restricts visitor access and enjoyment.

We planned to remove 80% of the gorse (about 13 acres) using a tractor mounted FAE mulcher over a period of two or three years, with some gorse being retained, in clumps, for the bird species that it supports.

We wanted to improve the acid grassland by removing the dominant gorse and grazing. Our aim is to restore the acid grassland and increase the diversity of the grassland sward.

This funding application requested funding for year 1, to remove 4-6 acres of gorse. Results of work carried out in year 1 will be reviewed before work commences in years 2/3.

We received advice and help from Cath Landles, Mike Kelly (Shropshire Hills AONB) and Fiona Gomersall (Shropshire Wildlife Trust), including the following:

- Local Wildlife Site (LWS) - We wanted to explore the possibility of putting the site forward for adoption as a LWS. Shropshire Wildlife Trust has recognised the important wildlife value of Bromlow Callow. LWSs, of which there are over 600, represent some of the best ecological areas in Shropshire. LWSs take into account the most important, distinctive and threatened species and habitats. The recognition can also open up funding opportunities to assist with their management. SWT recognised the wildlife value but the site and survey results had to be presented at the Shropshire Local Sites Partnership (LSP) meeting in November 2015 before the LSP committee could agree to Wildlife Site status.
- Grassland Survey - Andrew Robinson (SWT) carried out the survey in May and produced a survey report, including management recommendations. At a cost of £300, the Stiperstones Corndon Landscape Partnership Scheme agreed to fund this.
- Management Plan – Fiona Gomersall (SWT) produced this for the site FOC, once the site was adopted as a Local Wildlife Site.
- We are taking a phased approach to practical work – Ideally over 3 years but 2 if this works better. A phased approach, using the mulching machine, allows for work to be carried out in one plot, then review, before proceeding with work on the next plot.

The project outputs for phase one (year 1) were successfully achieved, as follows:

1. Removal of 4-6 acres of gorse at Bromlow Callow (year 1) – **7.5 acres removed**
2. Conduct grassland survey and produce survey report, including management recommendations. **A grassland survey was carried out and a report produced by Andrew Robinson (Shropshire Wildlife Trust).**
3. Pursue adoption as a Local Wildlife Site with Shropshire Wildlife Trust (SWT) and subsequent Management Plan produced - **The site and survey results were presented at the November Shropshire Local Sites Partnership (LSP) and the committee agreed and adopted Bromlow Callow to Wildlife Site status. A Management Plan for the site has also been produced by Fiona Gomersall (SWT).**

How was the work be carried out, who did it, when was it done?

A tractor mounted FAE mulcher will tackle virgin gorse areas, plus areas previously cut with a flail cutter, if regrowth is evident. This should destroy most root stock and inhibit regrowth (whereas the flail cutter generally will not). A picture of the mulcher machine is shown below.

The use of the FAE mulcher is generally accepted as the most effective mechanical approach to gorse control and H. R. Gould are experienced operators. They are approved contractors by the Forestry Commission and regularly carry out work at Cannock Chase. They have specific experience of mulching gorse.



Tree or scrub removal work should not take place after 1st March and before 31st August. Therefore, work at Bromlow Callow will take place after August 31st 2015 and before March 1st 2016.

There will be regrowth from the large seedbank but attempts will be made to control this through tighter stocking of sheep on the site.

Did the project draw on best practice from elsewhere and/or trial new approaches?

As suggested by AONB and SWT staff, we are following the RSPBs Gorse Advisory Guidance regarding best practice for managing gorse. This can be found at http://www.rspb.org.uk/Images/gorse_england_tcm9-207524.pdf

How our project benefits the Shropshire Hills AONB and how it links to the conservation priorities for the AONB?

The statutory primary purpose of AONBs is to conserve and enhance natural beauty. This is the highest priority for the AONB Management Plan. Conserving our landscape includes looking after the biodiversity, heritage and geology found within it, as well as scenic quality and tranquility, improving ecological networks across the landscape, enhancing the benefits to people from the natural environment (ecosystem services) and engaging and involving people with the landscape.

Bromlow Callow is an important local landmark and landscape feature within the Shropshire Hills AONB. We feel our project addresses the AONB's primary purpose and we aim to do this by maintaining in good condition a quality site and habitat. Important sites include Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and Local Wildlife Sites. We are pleased to report that, through this project, Bromlow Callow has been adopted as a Local Wildlife Site. Acid grassland is also a priority habitat in the AONB.

Our project delivers on both the Conservation Funds priorities; will benefit the Shropshire Hills AONB and links to the following conservation priorities for the AONB:

- i. Conserve and enhance the natural beauty, landscape, wildlife and heritage of Bromlow Callow.
- ii. Educate and raise awareness of Bromlow Callow and its conservation to locals and visitors. Bromlow Callow is also only a few hundred yards from a residential home for severely disadvantaged and challenging children for whom enjoyment of their local physical environment is part of their rehabilitation process.
- iii. Improve the acid grassland by removing the dominant gorse and implement an effective grazing regime.
- iv. Restore the acid grassland and increase the diversity of the grassland sward.
- v. Enable greater visitor access, improve the visitor experience, benefit wildlife and restore unimproved acid grassland.

Next steps - Phase 2:

Work on the site will be carried out in accordance to the recently produced Bromlow Callow Management Plan, the following recommendations will help to restore the local wildlife site to its' former condition:

Management of acid and upland rough grassland

General Aim: To manage and restore the grassland

Prescriptions:

- Grazing is extremely important for grassland management. In the absence of stock, coarse grasses and scrub are quick to invade
- A combination of both cattle and sheep on Bromlow Callow would be beneficial, particularly during the restoration phase
- It is important that stock are put on the hill as soon as possible as there is a thick layer of brash lying over the grassland and gorse seedlings have started appearing
- Cattle will disperse the gorse brash with their hooves and sheep will nibble on the regenerating gorse

- There will not be sufficient grass keep for the year and so stock should be removed when poaching starts
- On site feeding is not recommended since this encourages weeds and the growth of coarse grasses
- In subsequent years, summer grazing, with a 'spring bite' for a month in March is recommended
- The table on the Management Plan provides a guide to stocking levels: the habitat on Bromlow Callow is predominantly acid grassland/heath.

Lessons learnt:

Progress was slower than expected and we had breakdowns - mulching is pretty tough on the equipment. The contractor was helpful but in order to give the contractor more time on site and less time travelling, on his second visit he stayed over and we did an extra day. The result being that we have done an extra 7.5 acres against an estimate of 4-6 in the first year. The mulcher does seem to have done a good job and we will need to monitor the site to see if the grass will come back on its own or whether we need to re-seed, in which case we will need advice on what to sow.