Hursey Common Management Plan

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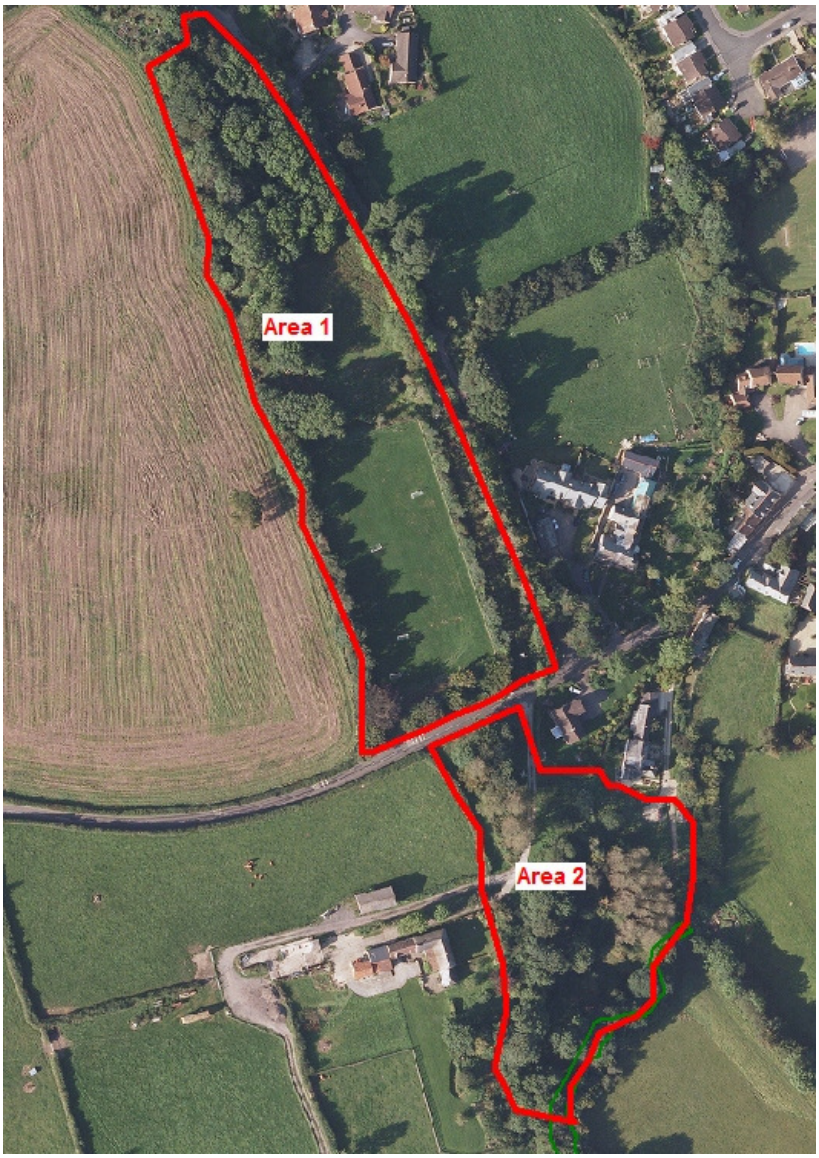
1. Introduction

This management plan has been written on request by the Parish Council for the ongoing management of Hursey Common. The plan will need to be readdressed in 10 year's time. Recommendations have been made to increase the wildlife and biodiversity interest of the site.

Hursey Common is approximately 2.5 hectares; for this report the site has been split into 2 areas. Area 1 is further split into 4 compartments.



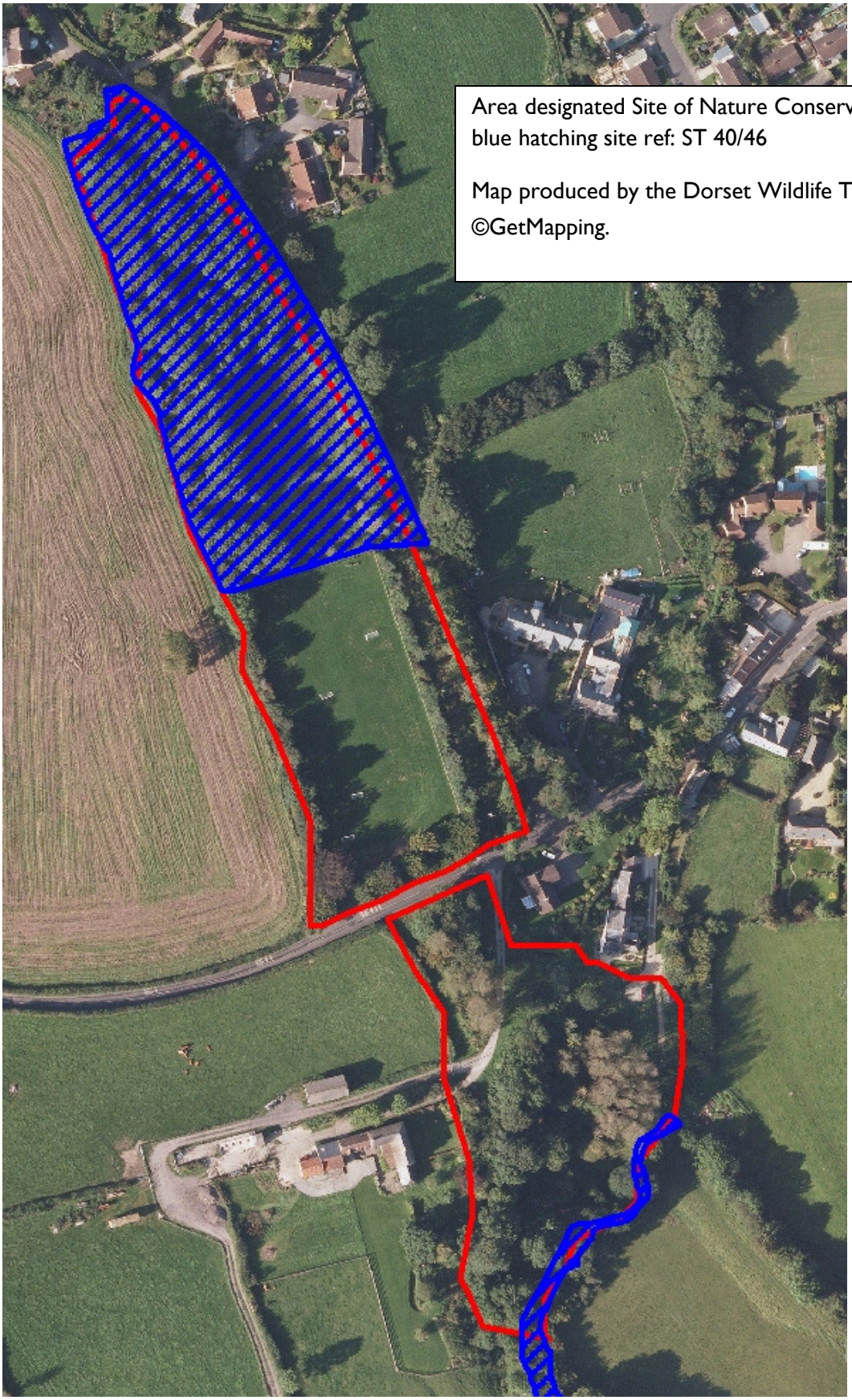
2009 Aerial Photo showing Hursey Common management areas; 1 and 2

Map produced by the Dorset Wildlife Trust. 2009 aerial imagery ©GetMapping.

Area 1 - 1.6 hectares comprises the area of the common north of the B3164.

Area 2 - 0.8 hectares south of the B3164.

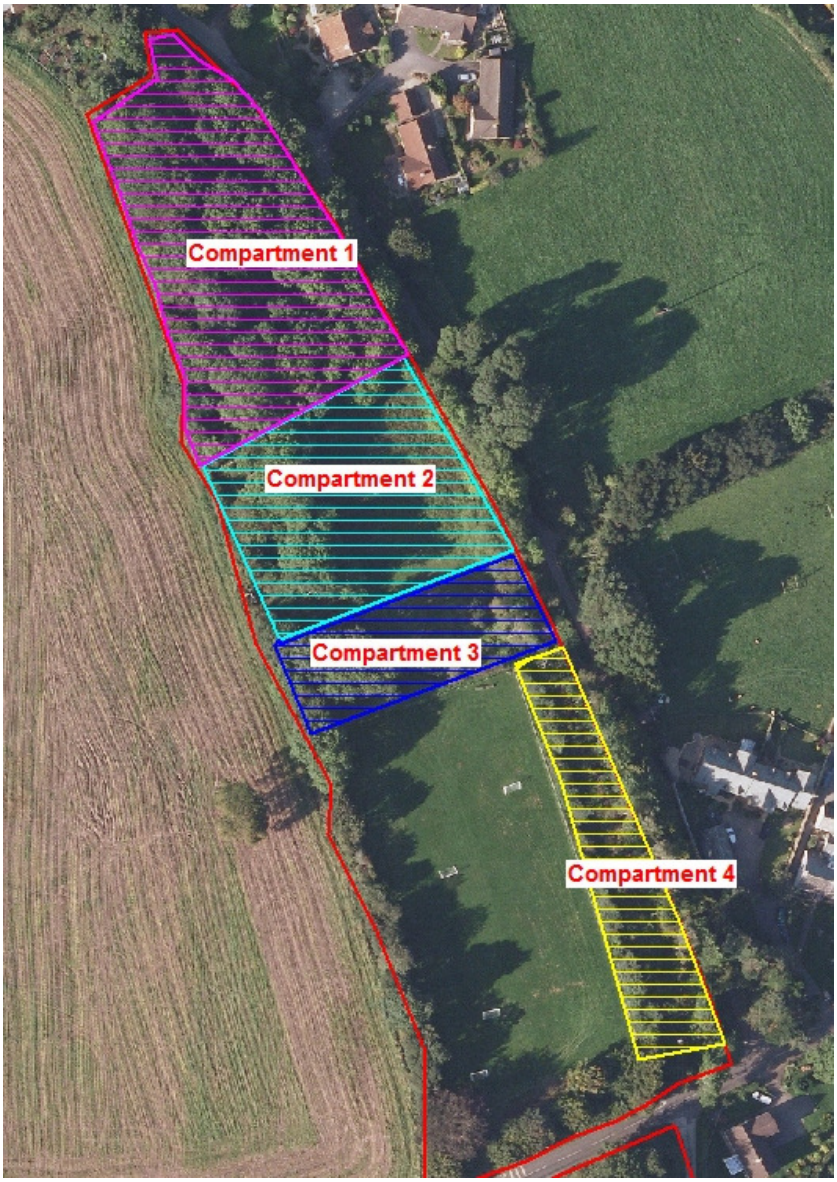
Area 1 is further split into 4 compartments based on habitat type. The playing field is not included in this management plan as it is already managed for amenity grassland use.



Area designated Site of Nature Conservation Interest shown in blue hatching site ref: ST 40/46

Map produced by the Dorset Wildlife Trust. 2009 aerial imagery ©GetMapping.

2. Area 1 Background



2009 Aerial photo showing management compartments in Area 1 of Hursey Common

2 – Area 1 background

2.1 Compartment 1

Mixed deciduous woodland designated a Site of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI). The older trees and ground flora are qualifying factors in this designation. A species list can be found in annex 1.

The history of the development of this woodland is unclear. However, the 1947 aerial photograph (see annex 2) shows the entire site (area 1 and 2) to be grassland with some scattered scrub in area 2 and a few mature trees on the north western boundary of area 1. Today it is a mixture of blackthorn, hawthorn, alder, field maple, some hazel and a lot of ash. In the past, Dorset Wildlife Trust (DWT) has suggested that some of the ash be removed; some trees were marked and removed by a community service working party in 1995. Since then some work has been done by a

few enthusiastic parishoners but predominantly the woodland has been unmanaged. An area of alder has been planted in a low lying wet area; these trees have taken well. Along the western edge of this compartment some of the older trees (which can be seen in the 1947 aerial) are still growing well and appear healthy. Included in this are some very impresssive field maples which are an asset to the wood and should be retained.

2.2 Compartment 2

This compartment (0.28 ha) contains some of the last remaining grassland from the common. The area, with compartment 1, makes up the majority of the SNCI. A species list is shown in Annex1. This compartment is slowly reverting to woodland; scrub covers approx. 50% of the originally-designated area of grassland. On the western edge of this block there are a few old coppice stools of hazel, these could be brought back into a coppice management. Advice on this in included in Annex 4.

Open areas of grassland within a woodland provide very valuable habitat for birds and insects, and will add significant value to the biodiversity of the area. Additionally, the specific grassland diversity at Hursey Common is rare, supporting a variety of grasses, sedges and flowers, which afford the area its designation an SNCI and a Biodiversity Action Plan Habitat. If this grassland is not cut annually it will succeed through scrub to woodland and the overall biodiversity of Hursey Common will decline. Annual cutting will prevent this loss.

2.3 Compartment 3

This compartment (0.12 ha) is mostly hard standing to provide car parking for the use of the sports ground. The scrub to the west of this compartment is mostly bramble and thorn. A few mature trees grow on the western boundary including 2 established yew trees which should be retained.

2.4 Compartment 4

This compartment forms a strip along the road and the playing fields. A mix of native and non-native trees, this compartment provides good habitat/food for birds and insects; pollen and nectar in the spring and berries in the autumn. The non-native cotoneaster which grows here is discussed further in management actions.

3 - Area 2 Background

This area comprises a wet boggy habitat dominated by alder and sallow. The ground flora is not as interesting as that in area 1 although some opposite leaved golden saxifrage grows alongside the stream. There are some large poplars along the western side, planted in the last 30 years or so. These poplars need further surveying to assess their stability; they are on the edge of a slope and could be unstable following heavy rainfall.

This area has value for wildlife as scrubby woodland, and the topography and soil conditions will make management difficult. It is suggested that trees are removed when they become a safety issue for anyone using this area, but essentially the area provides a good scrubby habitat, which will complement the other areas of managed woodland and grassland at Hursey Common.

Japanese knotweed and Himalayan balsam

Two invasive weeds; Japanese knotweed and Himalayan balsam grow in Area 2 of Hursey Common. It is an offence under section 14(2) of the Wildlife and Countryside act 1981 to "plant or otherwise cause to grow in the wild" any plant listed in Schedule nine, Part II of the Act.

It is not an offence to simply have it growing in your garden or on your land and there is no specific legal requirement to control it if it is (unless doing so forms part of a legally binding contract or agreement with another party). Japanese knotweed is notoriously difficult to eliminate - there is advice online on the Environment Agency's website, and there is also an advice note on controlling Japanese knotweed attached to this paper.

Himalayan balsam is an annual plant that can be easily controlled by pulling in June/July. DWT would be happy to advise or help organise volunteer tasks to aid the removal of this weed.

4 -Management Actions

4.1 Compartment 1 - Ash trees in woodland thinned by up to 50%

Action – to selectively fell up to 50% of the ash in compartment 1.

- Trees along the edge of the woodland should be crowned to make them safer in strong winds and reduce knock-on effects of wind damage further into the woodland.

Ash should be felled over a 10-year span. Taking out large numbers of trees in a woodland in one season will weaken the resilience of the trees to strong winds. Reducing numbers of ash in the woodland will create a varied structure of trees and allow for healthy regeneration.

Ash Dieback NOTE: Current advice from the Forestry Commission with regard to ongoing management of Ash is to continue as normal, but may be subject to change. More information on the disease is found in Annex 3.

4.2 Compartment 1- Selectively thin the planted alder

Action – selectively thin alder by up to 1/3

Alder planted in the low area of compartment 1 needs selectively thinning to ensure vigour in strongest stock.

4.3 Compartment 2 - Grassland/scrub cut and cleared

Action – to clear the site once a year with a cut and collect flail mower or a standard flail mower/swipe and remove, either in autumn or early spring, the decision on which will be subject to weather conditions.

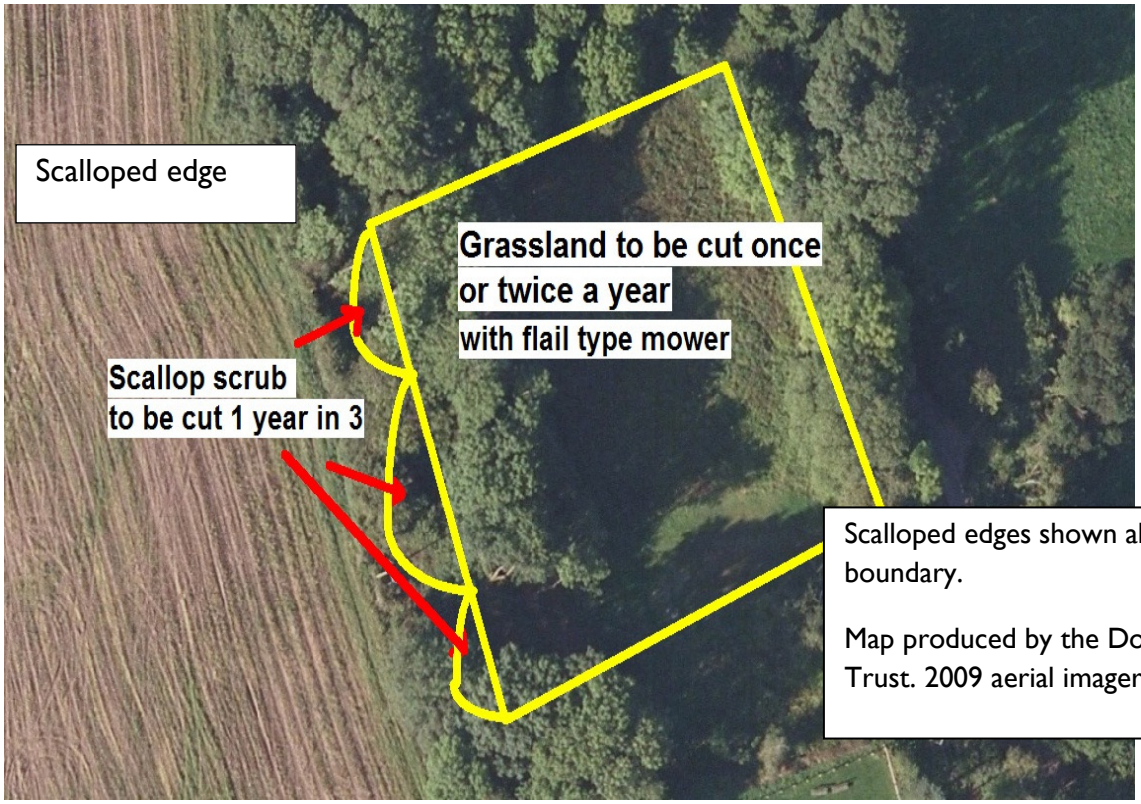
Should finances allow cut twice a year; autumn – September/Oct and again in early spring March/April.

4.4 Compartments 2 and 3 - Scallop the edges of the scrub

Action - clear scrub to create scalloped edge in the western edge of compartment 2 and 3.

Scrub on the western edge of compartments should be scalloped to create more edge habitat along the side of the grassland. Some older areas of scrub (along western edge) should be maintained as they provide good habitat in their own right, however areas of scrub along the path will benefit from alternate cutting on a rotation.

The image below – scalloped edge, gives an indication of the type of edge creation.



Scalloped edges shown along the western boundary.

Map produced by the Dorset Wildlife Trust. 2009 aerial imagery ©GetMapping.

Diverse scrub is valuable to wildlife

Scrub of varied age, species and structure supports a wide range of wildlife, as some species depend on specific growth stages of certain plants. It is important to maintain all growth stages from bare ground, through to young and mature growth, and occasional dead wood. Hursey Common has the potential to support this range ofstructural diversity.

Scrub edges are an important habitat

The scrub edge is often rich in flowering plants. These provide nectar for insects and seeds for birds and mammals. Tall herbs and grasses growing along the edge of scrub offer shelter for invertebrates, small mammals, nest sites for birds and hunting areas for barn owls and kestrels.

Scrub structure is important for birds

Birds nest in a range of scrub types. Yellowhammers, linnets and whitethroats favour young, scattered scrub. Dunnocks and willow warblers use low-growing, closed canopy scrub. Song thrushes and bullfinches use older, mature stands of scrub.

Coppicing most species of scrub encourages re-growth, and is useful for maintenance and restoration.

4.5 Compartment 4 – on-going management

This compartment will need to be managed when trees/shrubs become a danger to road users and the public. Species such as hazel and ash can be coppiced to create coppice stools which will sustain the wildlife corridor along the road.

Cotoneaster

Cotoneaster has been planted in this compartment; it is non-native; cotoneaster species are listed under Schedule 9 to the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 with respect to England and Wales. As such, it is an offence to plant or otherwise cause these species to grow in the wild. This species should be removed or at the least controlled to ensure it does not spread to other areas of the wood.

4.6 Areas 1 and 2 - Sycamore

Sycamore

Sycamore is considered a non-native species. Opinions vary, but the 16th century is widely suggested to be when sycamore arrived in the UK. It has large leaves and can create significant shading of the woodland floor and impact upon ground flora. However, within a controlled environment sycamore can provide important wildlife habitat and has been shown to support a number of red data book species. The base-rich bark of sycamore is valuable for epiphytes, including communities of *Lobarion* lichen. Sycamore is insect-pollinated and provides a pollen and nectar source for insects. Additionally, sap-sucking aphids on sycamore leaves provide a valuable food source for dormice at a critical time of year.

Action – remove newly-germinated sycamore and control established species, leave 2 or 3 good specimens within the wood.

Sycamore can be a very invasive species; it is not tolerant to low light levels so is predominantly found on the edge of the woodland. However, when the ash is felled, light levels within the wood will increase and sycamore will take advantage of this. **In view of this, sycamore within the woodland must be kept to 2 or 3 individuals; seedlings/saplings must be pulled/cut.**

Health and Safety:

Hursey Common is primarily used as a recreation area for people of the parish to walk, should the above management actions contravene any action needed for health and safety reasons; health and safety will have precedent.

Additional information:

A Tree Felling Licence may be needed depending on amount of work done:

You need a licence if you fell **more** than 5 cubic metres in any calendar quarter (e.g. Jan to Mar, Apr to Jun, Jul to Sep and Oct to Dec), as long as no more than two cubic metres are sold. Five cubic metres is roughly equivalent to one large oak tree or 50 thin chestnut coppice trees.

Contractors

Brian Ewins, Swillets Farm Broadwindsor

£35 cut and flail collect machine or flail swipe.

Guided Walks

Dorset Wildlife Trust will be happy to offer guided walks and information to parishioners about the proposed management and how it will benefit wildlife in the area.

Annex 1 - Species List for Hursey Common

Rough Chervil	Chaerophyllum temulum
Cow Parsley	Anthriscus sylvestris
Ground-elder	Aegopodium podagraria
Corky-fruited Water-dropwort	Oenanthe pimpinelloides
Pepper-saxifrage	Silaum silaus
Wild Angelica	Angelica sylvestris
Hogweed	Heracleum sphondylium
Field Bindweed	Convolvulus arvensis
Russian Comfrey	Symphytum x uplandicum
Field Forget-me-not	Myosotis arvensis
Hedge Woundwort	Stachys sylvatica
Selfheal	Prunella vulgaris
Water Mint	Mentha aquatica
Greater Plantain	Plantago major
Ribwort Plantain	Plantago lanceolata
Ash	Fraxinus excelsior
Wild Privet	Ligustrum vulgare
Common Figwort	Scrophularia nodosa
Cleavers	Galium aparine
Elder	Sambucus nigra
Moschatel	Adoxa moschatellina
Spear Thistle	Cirsium vulgare
Marsh Thistle	Cirsium palustre
Creeping Thistle	Cirsium arvense
Common Knapweed	Centaurea nigra
Nipplewort	Lapsana communis
Cat's-ear	Hypochaeris radicata
Prickly Sow-thistle	Sonchus asper
Common Fleabane	Pulicaria dysenterica
Confused Michaelmas-daisy	Aster novi-belgii
Lords-and-ladies	Arum maculatum
Hard Rush	Juncus inflexus
Compact Rush	Juncus conglomeratus
Heath Wood-rush	Luzula multiflora
Pendulus Sedge	Carex pendula
Glaucous Sedge	Carex flacca
Carnation Sedge	Carex panicea
Meadow Fescue	Festuca pratensis
Tall Fescue	Festuca arundinacea
Giant Fescue	Festuca gigantea
Perennial Rye-grass	Lolium perenne
Crested Dog's-tail	Cynosurus cristatus
Annual Meadow-grass	Poa annua
Rough Meadow-grass	Poa trivialis
Cock's-foot	Dactylis glomerata
False Oat-grass	Arrhenatherum elatius
Tufted Hair-grass	Deschampsia cespitosa
Yorkshire-fog	Holcus lanatus
Sweet Vernal Grass	Anthoxanthum odoratum
Common Bent	Agrostis capillaris
Heath-grass	Danthonia decumbens
Bluebell	Hyacinthoides non-scripta
Black Bryony	Tamus communis
Common Spotted-orchid	Dactylorhiza fuchsii
Early-purple Orchid	Orchis mascula

Hairy Sedge

Spiked Sedge

Annex 1 - Species List for Hursey Common

Field Horsetail	Equisetum arvense
Hart's-tongue	Phyllitis scolopendrium
Soft Shield-fern	Polystichum setiferum
Common Male Fern	Dryopteris filix-mas
Meadow Buttercup	Ranunculus acris
Creeping Buttercup	Ranunculus repens
Lesser Spearwort	Ranunculus flammula
Lesser Celandine	Ranunculus ficaria
Common Nettle	Urtica dioica
Pedunculate Oak	Quercus robur
Hazel	Corylus avellana
Three-nerved Sandwort	Moehringia trinervia
Greater Chickweed	Stellaria neglecta
Lesser Stitchwort	Stellaria graminea
Common Mouse-ear	Cerastium fontanum
Ragged Robin	Lychnis flos-cuculi
Red Campion	Silene dioica
Common Sorrel	Rumex acetosa
Curled Dock	Rumex crispus
Clustered Dock	Rumex conglomeratus
Wood Dock	Rumex sanguineus
Crack Willow	Salix fragilis
Grey Willow	Salix cinerea
Garlic Mustard	Alliaria petiolata
Cuckooflower	Cardamine pratensis
Primrose	Primula vulgaris
Creeping-Jenny	Lysimachia nummularia
Meadowsweet	Filipendula ulmaria
Bramble	Rubus fruticosus agg.
Dewberry	Rubus caesius
Silverweed	Potentilla anserina
Tormentil	Potentilla erecta
Creeping Cinquefoil	Potentilla reptans
Herb Bennet	Geum urbanum
Field Rose	Rosa arvensis
Blackthorn	Prunus spinosa
a rose	Sorbus intermedia
Large Bird's-foot-trefoil	Lotus pedunculatus
Tufted Vetch	Vicia cracca
Hairy Tare	Vicia hirsuta
Bush Vetch	Vicia sepium
Narrow-leaved Vetch	Vicia sativa ssp. nigra
Meadow Vetchling	Lathyrus pratensis
Black Medick	Medicago lupulina
White Clover	Trifolium repens
Red Clover	Trifolium pratense
Zigzag Clover	Trifolium medium
Gorse	Ulex europaeus
Great Willowherb	Epilobium hirsutum
Broad-leaved Willowherb	Epilobium montanum
Dogwood	Cornus sanguinea
Dog's Mercury	Mercurialis perennis
Norway Maple	Acer platanoides
Field Maple	Acer campestre
Sycamore	Acer pseudoplatanus

Annex 2 – 1947 Aerial Photo

Map produced by the Dorset Wildlife Trust. 2002 aerial imagery ©RAF.

Annex 3

Ash Die Back

Description

A serious tree disease of all ash species (*Fraxinus* spp.) caused by the fungus *Chalara Fraxinea*,resulting in leaf loss, bark lesions, crown dieback and (usually) death of the tree.

Context in UK/Europe:

The disease has caused widespread damage to ash populations in continental Europe. In Denmark, losses of 60-90% of ash trees have occurred. Britain has approx. 80 million ash trees covering an estimated 5% of all our woodland. As of 9th September 2013 the total number of confirmed findings in the UK stands at 563 sites (both plantations and wider environment).

Dorset is the 13th county in Britain to have had a confirmed record of the disease (in August 2013).

Tree diseases are a natural occurrence, causing local tree death in a woodland. Tree death opens up woodlands, allowing light to reach the floor, thereby encouraging natural regeneration. However, the problem today, is that more diseases are appearing and they seem to be more virulent than might naturally be the case. Ash dieback is **potentially a serious threat** but the anticipation of infection should not prevent or stop on-going management for conservation at this stage. The Forestry Commission website has up to date information on how you can identify and prevent spread of the disease.

http://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/INFD-8UDM6S