



THE WARREN NATURE RECOVERY MANAGEMENT PLAN

PROGRESS REPORT 2021/22



Wendy J Larcombe
Consultant Ecologist



Catrin Evans
Consultancy

Contents

1. Introduction	3
2. Implementation	3
3. Progress against the Nature Recovery Tasks	3
Removal of INNS (Invasive non-native species).....	3
Verge Planting.....	3
Grassland Management:.....	4
Woodland Management – thinning and retention of dead wood (W1 – car park), thinning / understorey planting (W2).....	4
Creation of a new hedge.....	6
Creation of artificial nesting / roosting provision	6
Login Brook and Castle Mound	7
Additional Activity – Restoration of the Stone Wall	7
4. Delivery Against Nature Recovery Aims	8
5. Key Achievements.....	8
6. Recommendations	9
Removal of INNS	9
Management of Verges	9
Grassland Management.....	9
Bracken and Dock Control	10
Woodland Management.....	10
Maintenance of Hedgerow (new and laid)	10
Creation of artificial nesting / roosting provision	10
Login Brook / Castle Mound	11
Restoration of the Wall.....	11

1. Introduction

A Nature Recovery Management Plan for The Warren (the Plan) was produced in June, 2021, to provide a framework for the management and enhancement of the Warren for 2021/22. The project was funded by the Welsh Government Local Places for Nature Fund, 2021/22, which included creation of this Management Plan, support by the Brecon Beacons Local Nature Partnerships Coordinator and funding for capital works during the year.

This report outlines the progress made in delivery of that Plan during 2021/22, and provides recommendations for ongoing delivery in the identified areas. It's recommended that the Progress Report is read in conjunction with The Warren Nature Recovery Management Plan.

Development of the Management Plan and Progress Report, with input from local stakeholders and community groups, was undertaken by Catrin Evans Consultancy, working collaboratively with Wendy Larcombe, Consultant Ecologist.

2. Implementation

Implementation of the Plan has been carried out by Hay Community Woodland, with support from the LNP Implementation Officer for BBNP.

There has been significant commitment from the lead person for Hay Community Woodland, which has greatly influenced the level of delivery for this area, details of which are outlined below.

A small amount of hand tools were purchased, with the majority of spend for this area being on materials for site based works and surveys to inform management. Additional funding was secured through community support, adding value to the funding secured through the Local Places for Nature Fund.

3. Progress against the Nature Recovery Tasks

Removal of INNS (Invasive non-native species)

The season for control of most INNS had already passed by the time the Management Plan was in place, therefore volunteer activity will be planned for 2022 and ongoing. From discussion with the community group, it's clear there is good awareness and intent to manage INNS species going forward.

Verge Planting

There hasn't yet been any supplemental planting of verges.

Grassland Management:

Mowing for Biodiversity Gain- mid July + cut / trial area

A hay cut was taken of the grassland area in mid / late July, tying in with the requirements of the Plan. A trial area wasn't considered a realistic option given that the farmer cutting the grass would need to return for a separate visit. It's recognised that an occasional later cut would further increase the seedbank within the meadow, however the feasibility of achieving this would be dependent on weather, availability of the local farmer, and managing visitor use, which greatly increases during the summer holidays.

Bracken control – bruise fronds mid-summer

Bracken control wasn't carried out this year, however options are being explored to take this forward next year.

Dock control / Coarse grass – topping of docks / strimming and removal of coarse grass arisings

The most prominent area of docks was topped over the summer, with the intention to continue this over the coming years. Ultimately, if the docks are brought under control, it's felt that this area would be included in areas being cut for hay.

Woodland Management – thinning and retention of dead wood (W1 – car park), thinning / understorey planting (W2)

A bat survey was commissioned by BBNP to cover woodland management activities, including the felling / pruning of specific trees. The report reinforced the importance of the site for bats, including identification of Barbastelle and Nathusius' pipistrelle, and made recommendations to be followed in tree management work, including further survey work / retention if possible, of identified trees. Avoidance of future lighting was also recommended, or if unavoidable, to be designed to minimise disturbance to bats.

Some tree management work is on hold pending discussion on requirements from the bat survey for additional survey work, but where it has been possible to progress there has been some thinning of these areas, which has included the creation of habitat piles and standing dead wood. See Image 1 (W1 – car park) and Image 2 (W2).

Image 1: W1 thinning and creation of habitat piles.



Image 2: W1 creation of standing deadwood



Image 3: W2 thinning



Creation of a new hedge

Preparatory works (removal of overhang) was carried out by a community member in September, as a contribution towards the project, with additional clearance work and creation of habitat piles carried out as a volunteer activity shortly after. The hedge was laid in December by an experienced hedgelayer, in the Breconshire style, providing a striking natural boundary to the carpark. Supplementary planting has been carried out to increase species diversity and improve structure of the hedge as it revegetates.

Image 4: Laid hedge next to the car park.



Image 5: W1: new hedge

A new hedge has also been created on the opposite side of the woodland, comprising of Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), Hazel (*Corylus avellana*) and Blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*). This will act as a natural barrier to people entering the woodland, whilst also providing additional habitat and food source.

Creation of artificial nesting / roosting provision

Two Tawny Owl boxes have been purchased and a contractor is currently being sourced to install these in appropriate places.



Login Brook and Castle Mound

There was some interest in increasing access to Login Brook for educational purposes, particularly for school groups. Some initial clearance work has been undertaken but additional species checks would need to be carried out, and no further work is scheduled this calendar year.

There is some question about the future of Castle Mound, so there has been no further progress on this patch of grassland.

Additional Activity – Restoration of the Stone Wall

In August, a need to restore a section of dry stone wall, forming a boundary wall at the Warren, was identified. Although not initially included in the Nature Recovery Management Plan, it was agreed that it met the criteria for inclusion and therefore would be delivered as part of the capital works for 21/22. The community came together to fundraise, which resulted in additional donations being made to supplement LNP funding, to allow more of the wall to be built. Ongoing publicity and engagement proved for very successful, with approximately £3,000 raised from 14 individuals and businesses, as well as work in-kind for tree work, fencing and Cock & Hen Capping to the wall. The range of donations was from £20 to £1000.

Images 6-9: Restoration of Stone Wall



4. Delivery Against Nature Recovery Aims

Activities during 2021/22 has delivered against some of the nature recovery aims, whilst measures are in place to progress or deliver against the remainder:

Reduction of INNS

Not yet achieved, primarily due to the timescale of delivery, but plans are in place to take this forward over the coming years.

An increase of nectar provision for pollinators

Planting of hedgerow species will provide additional nectar, whilst ongoing management at the appropriate time will improve species diversity of the grassland, providing increased nectar for pollinators.

Improved habitat for birds, small mammals and reptiles

The creation of new hedgerows, laying of the existing hedgerow, restoration of the stone wall and creation of habitat piles will all provide shelter and habitat for these species, as well as invertebrates. Woodland management (as detailed below) will ultimately lead to some improved structure within the woodland, providing additional foraging and nesting opportunity.

Improved woodland structure including increase in shrub layer

Some initial thinning work carried out will increase light and provide increased opportunity for regeneration, however there remains a need for increased shrub layer to improve structural diversity of the two sections of woodland.

5. Key Achievements

Involvement in this project, and delivery of the Plan, has acted as a catalyst to bring people back together in improving their local environment for biodiversity, particularly following a period of inactivity during Covid. The interest shown in restoration of the wall surpassed all expectations, generating incredible financial support from community members, and has resulted in recognition from HRH Prince of Wales.

Hedgerow restoration and creation around W1, adjacent to the carpark, is also a flagship achievement for this project, acting as a focal feature at the entrance to the site, as well as providing valuable additional habitat.

This was an ambitious plan to deliver within a short timescale and there has been excellent progress in delivery. Whilst there are some tasks that have not been carried out during this financial year, feedback from stakeholders indicate that the Plan has helped put measures in place to take forward delivery over the coming years. Support from the LNP Implement Officer has been a key enabler to delivery, alongside the ability to access funding in a relatively straightforward manner. The Plan has provided guidance and access to expertise, which has increased confidence and capacity in delivering for nature conservation.

6. Recommendations

There has been good progress in delivery against the Plan, however, there will be a need to continue management in these areas to maintain, and enhance, the nature conservation value of these sites. Additionally, there are some tasks that could not be achieved within the timescale for this project and, if possible, these should be delivered over the next few years, recognising that additional funding would be required to achieve some of these.

Building capacity within the group will be key in continuing to deliver against this plan and ongoing support from BBNP will be important in achieving this. Although a well-established group, it is reliant on a small number of key individuals, and would benefit from increasing the number of regular members taking on an organisational role. It's hoped that supporting ongoing activity will encourage greater involvement from other community members.

It is recommended that the following activities are continued over the coming years, referring back to the Management Plan for additional detail. Furthermore, it's recommended that the Nature Recovery Management Plan is reviewed in approximately 4-5 years, in order to inform future management needs.

Removal of INNS

There are a number of invasive species and garden escapees present on site, and addressing this will remain a priority for ongoing site management. Alongside control measures outlined in the Plan, monitoring and mapping of these species would be helpful to inform control measures taken forward over the coming years.

In addition to the species identified in the Plan, bamboo has also been identified on site, and it's recommended that this is included as a species to monitor, and as a minimum, to control and ensure it doesn't spread any further.

Management of Verges

These are managed to maintain access, and this will remain a requirement for the site. This should only need to be done annually, at the end of the growing season, and where possible to leave areas to scrub up and provide additional habitat, this should be encouraged.

In areas of low species diversity, where there is limited natural regeneration, some supplemental planting of native species could be carried out if there is community interest in doing so (following the guidelines set out in the Plan). Given the prevalence of INNS / garden escapees, it would also act as an opportunity to raise awareness of inappropriate planting and management of garden waste.

Grassland Management

The Warren is an extensive area of grassland which provides an excellent opportunity as a pollinator nectar source. Continuation of a later cut, as set out in the Plan, will provide greater opportunity for wildflowers to set seed, whilst also benefiting the Oil Beetle identified on site in 2021. Paths through the meadow, cut on a more regular basis to

maintain access, will remain a requirement going forward. Where possible to minimise the width of these (e.g. 1.2m as a general guide), this will increase the extent of grassland being managed for biodiversity gain.

It's noted that there may be a need to manage expectations of meadow management, particularly given the increased interest in annual seed mixes and pictorial meadows, and awareness raising activities on appropriate meadow management may be helpful in this area.

Bracken and Dock Control

Continuation of control measures, as set out in the Plan, is recommended.

Woodland Management

Ongoing efforts should be made to increase structural diversity of the woodland areas in general, in particular areas W1 and W2. This should include retention of bramble in areas, working to the basis of only clearing back a 1/3 from a given area in any one time and retention of young, regenerating trees. Where regeneration / diversity is limited, this could be supplemented by planting of a shrub layer, such as Hawthorn, Hazel or Holly.

Maintenance of Hedgerow (new and laid)

The laid hedgerow will not need any maintenance for the first few years (minimum of 2). It should subsequently be cut every 2 years, and allowed to gain a height of at least 2m. Manual cutting, if possible, is preferable, to limit disturbance, or if tractor mounted machinery is to be used, oscillating blade cutters should be used in preference to flails. The top of the hedge should be cut to create a gentle angle (rounded point, rather than flat topped hedge).

The new hedge will require ongoing maintenance, including keeping a 1m diameter area free of weeds until established (for the first 2-3 years), which will reduce competition for moisture and nutrients, and watering in drought conditions. See [Woodland Trust aftercare website](#) for further advice. It's understood that remaining brash from the hedgelaying is to be chipped, and some of this could be used as a mulch.

New hedgerow trees will need a light annual trim for about 10 years to train them into a good shape and promote basal growth. Any gaps should be filled with local provenance stock in the planting season. Tree guards should be removed once the trees are full established.

Creation of artificial nesting / roosting provision

As opportunities arise, erect bat boxes, dormouse boxes, owl boxes on suitable trees. If availability of boxes is an ongoing issue, this could be run as a volunteer event, to build bird boxes. There are numerous websites which provide guidance on this, such as [RSPB](#).

There must be a schedule/rota (with volunteers or staff) to make sure the boxes are cleaned out annually and checked for condition. Please note that checking of certain boxes, such as Dormouse or bats, require licences to open up boxes.

Login Brook / Castle Mound

Should ongoing management of these sites become secured, ongoing recommendations will be in line with that already outlined within the Management Plan, ensuring that any access improvements / opening up of Login Brook is done alongside appropriate species checks.

Restoration of the Wall

Restoration of the wall has acted as a focal point for engagement and volunteer activity, resulting in a structure which provides cultural value, support grazing requirements and provides refuge for small animals. Should funding be available, ongoing efforts to continue, and complete, this section of wall is recommended, expanding on the wildlife design features (crevices and gaps) incorporated into the first section, to create larger gaps where practical.