

Weston Hills - Phase 1 - Woodland and Access Improvements - 2012

Weston Hills in Baldock is a County Wildlife Site with a lovely mix of habitats including beech woodland and chalk grassland, which is a priority Biodiversity Action Plan habitat for the county. The site is part owned by HCC's Rural Estate and part by North Herts District Council, who manage the whole site. The Countryside Management Service have worked with the DC and liaised with the Rural Estate to develop and implement a 5-year management plan that is seeing restoration of these important habitats alongside improvements for visitors.

The work includes thinning and coppicing of trees and the creation of rides and glades, to enhance the diversity of the woodland. The valuable chalk downland, one of the largest sites in Hertfordshire, is being protected from encroaching trees and shrubs to encourage a wide variety of wildlife including orchids, slow worms and lizards. Cattle and/or sheep will be introduced to maintain the restored grassland.

The site is well used by the public so access is being improved through installation of new signage, map-based interpretation panels and a new leaflet to help people learn more and find their way around. As the paths can get very slippery at times, surfacing of approx 1km of path will allow more people to visit the site throughout the year whilst the addition of more benches will enable people to take regular rests and so venture further into the woodland.

The plan has been developed through public consultation including involvement of the Friends of Baldock Greenspaces. This local group of volunteers will also be carrying out some of the work including coppicing and installing signs and benches. CMS has worked with them over the past few years to ensure they have the training and experience to undertake such work safely and competently.

Advice has also been received from the county's Biological Records Centre to ensure that work avoids disturbance to birds and protect species found on the site.

The work has largely been funded by a grant from the Forestry Commission's English Woodland Grant Scheme.