

Environmental Stewardship

Case study: Hampstead Park

The logo for Natural England, featuring the words "NATURAL" and "ENGLAND" stacked vertically in a white, sans-serif font, set against a solid green square background.

Name:	Hampstead Park
Region/County:	South East / Berkshire
Address:	Hampstead Park, Berkshire
Farm Size/Type:	262 hectares/14th Century park, mixed/arable
Cropping:	340 acres of cereals
Stocking:	100 ewe lamb and organic cattle
Land features:	Dry acid grassland, species rich lowland meadows, mature and veteran trees, ancient woodlands, semi-natural woodland, ponds and watercourses, schedule 1 birds, historic designed landscape, national scheduled monuments and archaeology, and listed buildings
Key objectives	Maintenance of the parkland and wood pasture, improving the conservation value of the grassland, creation of flower meadows and restoration of Grade 1 listed piers

Hampstead Park which dates back to the 14th Century is an estate of national importance in respect of its history, landscape features and ecology. It has been more or less left alone over the ages and therefore has a high wildlife and nature conservation value.

Approximately 15% of the land is in the agreement, with the other 70% let on a grazing licence to a farmer who brings on organic cattle and 15% let to a shooting syndicate.

Alun Jones, the Estate Manager says “The Higher Level Stewardship Scheme (HLS) has been a natural successor to our Countryside Stewardship Scheme as we wanted to continue with the habitat and woodland management/improvement. Our main reasons for joining the scheme were that we would get access to capital grants, it would help supplement the agricultural plans that we have in place and the scheme included a free parkland and archaeological survey. I also have a great interest in wildlife and stewardship of the land and the scheme allows me to have pride in this.”

Hampstead Park is registered as listed and the estate dates back to the 12th century. There are two motte and bailey castle remains and the remains of a medieval village and fishponds, providing important information on the diversity of medieval settlement patterns and farming economy between regions and through time.

The Grade 1 listed gate piers to the first Earl of Craven's mansion built in the 1660's and burned to the ground in 1718 still remain. Gate Piers are the stone supports from which gates are hung and with the help of HLS funding the Landowner is negotiating with English Heritage to have them restored. The pillars now sit in an extensive grassland setting following arable reversion to grass.



Gate piers from Hampstead Park

Other HLS options taken up include wood pasture and parkland restoration. The restoration pollarding of veteran ash trees undertaken as part of the agreement is being used by an expert in ancient trees in his lectures around the world as an example of good practice. Pollarding is the cutting of branches and limbs of a tree and is important for

preserving its size and shape, as well as allowing the tree to achieve a great age and wildlife value. Alun Jones commented that “the pollarding gives me a great sense of achievement and the ancient ash is now growing back really well”. Seeds from the ash are a favourite winter food of bullfinches and its berries attract many bird species.

The estate encompasses Enborne Copse which is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). This is due to its small-leaved lime ancient woodland which is very rare in Berkshire. The production of viable seed in this species is dependent upon high temperatures during pollination, and in many parts of Britain it rarely, if ever, produces fertile seed. Small-leaved lime provides an important link in the food chain and its sweet-smelling summer flowers attract huge numbers of insects looking for nectar.

Enborne Copse SSSI is being managed under a woodland grant from the Forestry Commission to help restore the native broad leaved woodland, and reverse damage caused by conifer planting and deer browsing.

In 2011 an inspection on progress of the creation of species-rich grassland on the estate concluded “The grassland at Hampstead is really special with some superb flora. On my visit I saw plenty of positive indicator species – indicators of the ‘health’ of an environment - such as harebells, tormentil, bird’s-foot trefoil, grass vetchling, sneezewort, meadow vetchling, mouse-eared hawkweed and eyebright”.

The HLS agreement supports the grassland management by targeted control of bracken and extensive grazing which creates uneven lengths of grass and offers different habitats that in turn attracts a wider range of species. Some former arable fields outside of the park have been sown with wildflower meadow species to create additional species-rich habitats nearby.

Natural England advisor Des Sussex, who works closely with the estate says “Hampstead Park is a really special place for many reasons including the wonderful tree population (including veteran trees), flower-rich grasslands and the superb historic landscape full of archaeological interest. It is great that the owner is committed to protecting and restoring so many different aspects of the park through his own efforts and with support from HLS funding.”

Where can I find out more?

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