

Gait Barrows National Nature Reserve

Habitat Restoration Project 2018

Frequently asked questions

Q: Where is Gait Barrows National Nature Reserve (NNR) and what is special about it?

A: Gait Barrows NNR is located 2km northeast of Silverdale in north Lancashire, within the Arnside & Silverdale AONB and is a designated Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Special Area of Conservation (SAC) for its rare limestone habitats, wetlands and rich flora and fauna.

Q: What are the purposes of the project and what are the key things that will be done?

A: The overall aims of the project are to restore the rare and internationally important habitats of marl grassland and alkaline fen at the reserve and to improve the visitor experience. In order to achieve this, the following actions will be carried out:

- an area of beech plantation and secondary woodland adjacent to Hawes Water will be removed and the timber extracted in order to reconnect the grassland and fen on the lake edge to the adjacent grazing pastures and to restore open views of Hawes Water from the pastures to the east and north;
- the remaining area of beech plantation will be thinned in order to allow more light into the understorey and allow future management;
- conservation grazing by native breed cattle will be introduced into these areas in order to ensure appropriate ongoing management of the grassland and fen and create a mosaic of open habitat, trees and scrub;
- a small sluice gate will be installed in the man-made ditch that flows from the smaller Little Hawes Water into Hawes Water, in order to allow control of water levels and reinstate more natural hydrology; and
- the existing boardwalks will be removed and a new raised wider boardwalk will be installed in order to improve disabled access.

Q: Who is responsible for this project and how will it be delivered?

A: Natural England own and manage Gait Barrows National Nature Reserve and are responsible for this project. Specialist local contractors, Bergen Tree Services, based in Holme, will be delivering the works, guided closely by Natural England staff.

Q: How will visitors be affected during the works?

A: There will be some temporary closures for public safety reasons and to allow for the practical management of the works. Lancashire County Council have given permission to temporarily close the public rights of way through the site while felling and extraction is being undertaken. The duration of the footpath closures will be kept to a minimum and will only be closed when there is a risk to public safety through tree felling and use of large machinery for timber extraction. An alternative permissive footpath route will be signposted. The public carpark at Gait Barrows will be closed through most of February and March as this will be used for machinery and timber storage. Visitors are asked to make alternative arrangements during this time.

Q: Why are trees being felled?

A: An area of approximately 1.3ha of woodland is to be felled where trees have previously been planted or encroached, for example part of the beech plantation and younger willow scrub. Tree removal will allow restoration of the rare habitats of marl grassland and alkaline fen, by enabling conservation grazing by cattle to be introduced and preventing further scrub encroachment, and will also restore vistas over Hawes Water.

Some distinctive trees and shrubs will be retained such as individual mature ash, scots pine, alder buckthorn and juniper along with standing deadwood where there is no risk to public safety. Trees/shrubs/deadwood to be retained will be identified on a site visit with the contractor and clearly marked by Natural England before felling begins.

Responding to public comment, 0.5ha beech plantation will now be retained. This area will be thinned by removing up to 50% of the beech/sycamore to

allow more light into the understorey to encourage the growth of the scrub layer and ground flora.

Q: How will the sluice gate affect water levels in the area?

A: The installation of the small sluice gate in the manmade ditch connecting Little Hawes Water to Hawes Water will enable regulation of water levels in the higher Little Hawes Water basin. The intention is to gradually raise water levels in Little Hawes Water to increase the extent of open water and surrounding alkaline fen there, restoring a more natural hydrological system. Water levels in Hawes Water itself will not be affected. However the process will be carried out slowly over time and the effects will be very carefully monitored.

Q: Why are the board walks by Hawes Water being removed?

A: The existing board walk close to the lake is positioned on part of the rare marl grassland habitat. Removing it will improve the habitat condition for rare plants such as bird's-eye primrose and fragrant orchid. The other existing board walk is also to be removed because it is in poor condition. A single new timber board walk replacement will be installed, which will be wider and set higher. This will improve disabled access and retain views across the lake. Tree removal as part of the wider project will mean that new vistas across the pastures will be opened up improving the visitor experience.

Q: What permissions are in place for the works to be carried out?

A: Forestry Commission have issued a Felling Licence for the project and Lancashire County Council have permitted the temporary closure of the public rights of way.

Q: How is the project being funded?

A: Natural England have been successful in securing a grant from Defra's Water Environment Improvement Fund to implement the project; the majority of the project works must be completed by end March 2018.

Q: Who can I contact for further information?

A: Please contact Glen Swainson, Natural England Senior Reserve Manager by email for further information: glen.swainson@naturalengland.org.uk