

MADEIRA WALK NATURE CONSERVATION – PLEASE JOIN US

Woldingham Residents Community Interest Company

Call for Volunteers – Sunday 18th and Wednesday 28th February and Thursday 1st March 2018

As many of you will know the area of woodland and downland known as Madeira walk along and above Long Hill is now owned by the Woldingham Residents CIC (WRCIC). The initial group of shareholders is still resolving some of the practical issues associated with the creation of this community asset. One issue is the maintenance associated with keeping the current designated status as a Site of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCI). This work is undertaken by the Downlands Partnership but we have to pay them for the work they undertake. However we can significantly reduce this ongoing cost by having the Downlands Partnership train local volunteers.

We need to carry out some days of small scrub clearance - by hand and by brushcutting across the whole open area, including the bit below the bridleway, in order to maintain and enhance the biodiversity of the SNCI.

We now know that the Downlands Partnership will carry out this work Sunday 18 February with further work on Wednesday 28 February and Thursday 1 March. The Downlands Partnership and WRCIC would like to encourage local people to join in with their volunteer task days on our site, so that longer term they can be trained to take on some of the management themselves. Having a member of DP staff on site provides expert guidance on the work, plus instruction on safe tool use, tools/gloves, first aid cover, tea/coffee/biscuits. Volunteers working with them would be covered by Surrey County Council's insurance.

Notices will also be put up on site to advertise this opportunity for local residents to join them to learn about this Site of Nature Conservation Importance and to start to form a group of local volunteers who can help look after this site into the future.

Please join us.

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Notes on Chalk Grassland.

Chalk grassland is one of the richest habitats of Western Europe, containing a great diversity of plants and animals. It is now very rare and fragmented, and is of international conservation importance, the UK holds 50% of the world's surviving old chalk grassland resource, most of that in southern counties, across the South and North Downs and the Downs of Wiltshire and Dorset.

Up until the Second World War, traditional grazing practices ensured that chalk grasslands were grazed in a low intensity, wildlife friendly manner. The combination of sheep grazing over several hundred years and the thin chalk soil, which is deficient in most plant nutrients, has allowed the development of short, springy grassland which is botanically very diverse – as many as 40 plant species per square metre.

From the 1940s onwards, more efficient farming techniques such as better drainage and chemical inputs, together with farming subsidies, all contributed to change the way our grasslands were used: many areas were either 'improved', ploughed up for crops, or left un-grazed and gradually taken over by scrub and woodland. Other areas were lost to development, quarrying, road construction and tree planting.

Since then, traditionally managed wildflower-rich grasslands such as neutral, acid and chalk grasslands have declined nationally by 97%; their disappearance is thought to have led to the drastic decline of many species including bumblebees, butterflies, farmland birds and wildflowers.

Chalk grassland supports a number of rare plants and animals, many of which have unique associations with this habitat and cannot thrive, or survive, elsewhere. The fragmentation of many areas of grassland has resulted in populations of a number of species being isolated and prone to local extinctions.