HLS Agreement Aftercare Visit Report

Before conducting the visit you should familiarise yourself with the agreement, current work plan and capital works, claims record, previous ISA's/IoS/SSSI assessments(For ISA visits consult the feedback letter in EDRM). Also consider potential issues on ELS and HLS progress.

As this form contains personal information you should handle and store it according to the Information Handling guidance.

Agreement Reference:	[redacted]
Agreement Type:	HLS
Agreement Start Date:	01/07/2011
Agreement Holder/ Visit Contact:	[redacted]
Contact phone number:	[redacted]
Target Area:	[redacted]
Latest Agreement Maps printed:	Unknown
NE Adviser known to the AG Holder:	[redacted]
Key Information: Known Issues on Previous visits/calls: Date of contact: Who carried out the visit/call: Type of visit/call: i.e RPAi Inspection, ISA etc	Includes [redacted] Within [redacted]

When you make the initial call/email ask the agreement holder to have their agreement documentation/maps ready for when you visit.

Date of initial contact to arrange visit:	August 2020
Date of Visit:	7th October 2020
Adviser conducting visit:	[redacted]
Time Spent on Site:	6 hours
Others Present at Visit:	None
Where Photos Taken? If so where are they stored?	Yes – see Appendices at end of this report

Areas/features visited and comments on findings

This should include both ELS and HLS options and is also an opportunity to raise awareness of key issues (See staff briefings for current topics) with the agreement holder.

RLR Parcel Reference and option code or boundary label	Comments on compliance with prescriptions and/or standard of capital works
Refer to Part 3	HL10 – see commentary later in report
"	HL12
"	HL16
"	HR1 & HR8

Capital Claims (required for capital claim plans over £5000)

[redacted]

Where a capital work plan value is greater than £5000 and the associated capital items have been claimed/ are about to be claimed, please confirm that the capital items have been completed. Exceptions to this requirement may apply where 1) capital items have already been checked at an on-the-spot check, or previous visit, or 2) the likelihood of the project not coming to fruition is considered to be low. Please document that this has been checked or give reasons why this has not been recorded.

HAP	Historical & archaeological feature protection undertaken – total grant [redacted] June 2013

Progress against Objectives/Indicators of Success

Wildlife (biodiversity)	Not currently being met across majority of the site. Current SSSI condition category of Unfavourable Recovering in question following Site Check assessment made as part of this visit. See later in report.
Landscape	N/A
Historic inc HTB & Arch features	Yes – see comments
Public Access	-
Natural resources	-
Genetic Conservation	-
Flood Management	-
Climate Change	-

If an ISA visit has been carried out previously have the actions identified in the feedback letter been actioned?

No recent condition assessment data. Last assessment 15.08.2013 - Unfavourable Recovering category.

Site Check undertaken as part of this visit

Key findings:-

Wet Heath and Blanket Bog habitats [redacted]

These occur predominantly on the upper slopes of the common [redacted] . Generally, condition of these habitats is poor, with areas on the lower slopes and in the south of the common showing signs of high browsing pressure from stock. 80% of sample points showed moderate or high browsing on heather and sphagnum cover was below thresholds at all stops. Damage to sphagnum also noted on many of the stops, where the wet heath/blanket bog abuts areas of acid grassland or dry heath habitat. High levels of stock (cattle and sheep) noted at time of visit and levels of dung also high across much of the habitats on the lower slopes. On the upper slopes in the north end grazing pressure is reduced. Across all the areas graminoid (grass) cover is higher than desirable with Purple Moor-grass (PMG) dominance at 60-70% in most locations. The range of indicator species is also generally poor and below thresholds with all stops failing to record the necessary range of species for the habitat in question.

Dry Heath ([redacted])

Key areas where dry heath occurs are in the [redacted] area, but fragmented dry heath also noted in many areas further south where it occurs in a mosaic with acid grassland. Levels of browsing were high throughout with >90% of stops indicating browsing at high levels (90%+ of

[redacted]

shoots browsed off). High levels of stock (cattle and sheep) noted at time of visit and levels of dung also high across much of the habitats on the lower slopes. The range of indicator species is also generally poor and below thresholds with all stops failing to record the necessary range of species for the habitat in question.

Valley mires and flushes ([redacted])

These follow water courses and are generally in reasonable condition with good species diversity and grazing levels that are maintaining interest. Browsing of Heather generally a bit higher than desirable, but given the range of indicator species there is a balance that needs to be maintained and current levels of browsing are deemed acceptable. It shoud be noted that distribution of these habitats is quite restricted, covering a small % of the total SSSI feature extent for the unit (i.e. wet heath/blanket bog and dry heath communities are much more extensive).

Site Check conclusion/summary

The current SSSI condition category of 'Unfavourable Recovering' is unlikely to be being met on the ground with findings from this visit suggesting recovery is not taking place. Indeed, when comparisons are made with sample points taken in the 2013 assessment it would appear that some thresholds are in fact failing by greater margins indicating a potential decline in habitat condition.

Observations, conclusions and advice given on the present state of the Agreement and its potential by the Adviser

HL10 main option – Agreement IoS (outcomes)

- All SSSI land should be in favourable or recovering condition.

Commentary following site visit 7.10.2020:- the recovering sub-category is unlikely to be occurring due to the high browsing pressure on key vegetation components such as heather along with things like sphagnum damage.

• On areas of blanket bog, at least 2 positive indicators should be frequent. Between February and April no more than 33% of Heather shoots should show evidence of grazing. Dwarf shrubs should be at least frequent. By year 10 cover of bog-mosses (Sphagnum) should be at least 33%. At least 2 dwarf shrub species should be frequent. Commentary:- Frequency of indicator species not being met, browsing levels on heather exceed target and cover of sphagnum low (<10%). Graminoid cover is above target levels (primarily Purple Moor-grass at >60% cover in most stops)

• On areas of upland dry heath, at least 10% of the area of dwarf shrub heath (including sensitive areas) should show no evidence of burning. Between February and April, no more than 33% of Heather shoots should show evidence of grazing. By year 10 flowering Heather plants should be frequent between July and September. Dwarf shrubs should be at least frequent. Commentary:- Frequency of indicator species not being met, browsing levels on heather exceed target thresholds.

• On areas of upland wet heath, at least 10% of the area of dwarf shrub heath (including sensitive areas) should show no evidence of burning. Between February and April no more than 33% of Heather shoots should show evidence of grazing. By year 5 less than 10% of bog-mosses (Sphagnum) should be damaged or dead. Flowering Heather plants should be frequent between July and September. Commentary:- As for blanket bog habitat.

• On areas of upland valley mires, springs and flushes at least 3 positive indicator species should be frequent. Between February and April no more than 33% of Heather shoots should show evidence of grazing. By year 5 flowering Cottongrass should be frequent in spring. By year 10 cover of bog-mosses should be at least 33%. Commentary:- Generally reasonable diversity and structure noted where these habitats occur. Sphagnum cover at close to target level but browsing on Heather still high (where it occurs). Valley mires, by their nature are less accessible and therefore grazing pressure is generally lower than on adjoining habitats like dry heath and acid grassland which are preferred by stock.

[redacted]

• Archaeological features identified in the FEP have suffered no further degradation. The depth of soil covering the features has been maintained. Detrimental indicators (e.g. burrows, bare patches, scrub growth, poaching and erosion) cover less than 5% of the area. By year 10 cover of scrub is reduced by 40%-100%. Cover of Bracken is reduced by 40%-100%. Commentary:- Archaeological comments

Schedule of proposed works 2019-2021
Plan # Progress
1– to 3 on track. Bracken has been significantly reduced by through application of chemical herbicide. Follow up spraying was undertaken in 2019.
4 Works to be organised. Minor gorse clearance.
5 Some bracken reduction but a follow up spray delayed due to covid
8 Spraying for 2020 postponed due to covid.
10 Planned for 2021.

HLS options

The Commoners and the NT have been very proactive at meeting their archaeological management obligations. Excluding this year (I do not know what works have taken place) they have actively managed the bracken were required in the work schedule with positive results. Due to the high overall percentage of bracken cover on the archaeology in the overall area there is still a lot more control work required, but in the context of this agreement the results and progress have been good.
HL10
- No known further degradation of archaeological sites known.
- Bracken density reduced across targeted sites as per work plan.
- More targeted bracken control works required (including non chemical control methods / volunteers)

Consider allowing supplementary feeding / shepherding of cattle in areas of archaeology covered in dense bracken to help break up the swards.

[redacted]
13 Oct 2020

Agreement Holder's Concerns, Issues and positive feedback

In order to try and address the issues picked up through this site visit it is Natural England's view that the level of stocking needs to be looked at. [redacted]. The high browsing pressure noted across much of the common can be attributed to the high numbers of stock being grazed out on the common – particularly in the autumn and winter months. The period from September through to March is a critical period when Heather and Bilberry are more sensitive to grazing and reducing pressure over this window is likely to have maximum +ve impact. It is suggested that both cattle and sheep numbers are looked at in this period.

Further Action	Type Required	By Who	By When	Completed (specify date)
Discuss with Team Leader				
Follow up letter to Ag holder	**Mandatory**			
Breaches identified				
Derogation required				
Other (please specify)				

[redacted]

Changes to Revenue Items	(Major)			
Changes to Capital Items	(Major)			
Changes to IOS	(Major)			
Ag Area/Length Changes	(Major)			
Ag holder detail changes	(Minor)			
Map board/Site Register changes	(Major)			
Specific details of amendments to be made inc Parcel numbers				

Advisers Name: [redacted] **Date:** **20/11/2020**

Please scan this document and the follow up letter in to EDRM and index them under 'Visit report' HLS Aftercare

[redacted]

Heavy browsing on Wet Heath/Blanket Bog [redacted] habitat

[redacted]