

8. Hurn, Avon & Sopley Commons & Ramsdown NEW 204 & NEW 206

8.1 Location *(See Location Map)*

Hurn Forest covers a total area of 440 Ha and is located between the eastern margins of the Moors River and Barnsfield Heath. The A31 lies immediately to the north of the block and the A338 runs along its eastern boundary. The minor road known locally as Matchams Lane bisects the block to the east and separates Hurn main block from Sopley Common. Bournemouth International Airport lies to the south west of the block and the Bournemouth / Christchurch conurbation is some 4 Km to the south.

Ramsdown covers a total area of 51Ha and is located immediately to the south of Sopley Common close to Hurn Village. The B3073 runs along its south western boundary and the A338 lies immediately to the east. Outlying urban areas of the Bournemouth / Christchurch conurbation are located within 1 Km to the south.

8.2 Landscape Context

Hurn Forest has a flat topography with the land generally lying below 20 Metres above sea level. Views into the forest are limited to glimpses from boundary lane in the north and Matchams lane to the south east. Passengers on incoming and departing aircraft from Bournemouth Airport are treated to extensive aerial views of the block. The forest can therefore be designed as if it were flat and felling will be generally screened from wider view by tree height.

The land at Ramsdown lies mostly on a western facing slope rising to a plateau some 50 metres above sea level. Extensive views over Bournemouth and the Isle of Wight to the south and as far as Ringwood to the north can be seen from the plateau and a purpose built viewing platform and seating has been provided for this purpose. Previously, areas of Ramsdown were colonised by dense rhododendron but control programs are gradually reducing the amount of rhododendron coverage and opening up views.

It is proposed to manage Ramsdown on a largely, continuous cover basis to further develop the diverse nature of the woodland.

8.3 Current Woodland Structure *(See Habitat Structure and Age Structure Charts)*

Hurn Forest has a predominantly coniferous character located as it is on nutrient poor, freely draining soils. There are elements of broadleaf woodland within the forest located to the north where two tongues of bog woodland extend into the forest and adjacent to the Moors River where more fertile soils can be found. The age structure of the woodland is largely between 20 to 60 years with a small proportion of younger and older woodland. Inclusion within the Forest Design Plan of areas managed by continuous cover and areas of felling and replanting during the initial phase of the plan should diversify the woodland age structure.

Open space exists throughout, both as a result of heathland ride widening and as a result of larger scale heathland restoration carried out as part of the Forests and Heathlands initiative. Although considerable scope exists to develop more heathland habitat within Hurn, the local community remain firmly opposed to further heathland expansion.

Ramsdown Plantation has a diverse structure as a consequence of the wide variety of coniferous species planted during the 1950s and 1960s. Broadleaves are limited to naturally regenerated Birch which is scattered on the open heathland sites or exists in mixtures with the conifers. Rhododendron is abundant within the wooded area and dominates some parts of the woodland. Age structure is fairly uniform with the majority of the woodland being between 40 to 50 years old. As the woodland is to be managed predominantly on a continuous cover basis the age structure should diversify during the period of the plan.

Open space exists along ride edges and where areas have been reinstated to heathland and will further expand as areas of rhododendron are cleared and restored to heathland.

8.4 Conservation *(See Site Designation Map)*

The Moors River SSSI runs along the eastern boundary of Hurn Forest incorporating the meadows adjacent to the river and a strip of broadleaf and mixed woodland lying to the east of the meadows. Parts of Hurn Common SSSI lie within the FE boundary comprising two tongues of bog woodland to the north of the block and an area of lowland heath at Avon Common adjacent to and immediately west of the A338 Spur road. Parts of Town Common SSSI are located within the FE boundary at Sopley Common and within Ramsdown Plantation. All are areas of lowland heath and have been designated for heathland plant communities and the rare species associated with these habitats.

In addition there are a number of more localised sites of nature conservation interest including heathland ride edge habitat created during the past decade through ride widening treatments. Approximately 25 Hectares of lowland heath has been restored as part of the Forest Enterprise Forests and Heathlands initiative undertaken some ten years ago. This heathland block is located to the south of Hurn and runs contiguous with Barnsfield Heath SSSI. A number of sites of conservation interest have been identified by Dorset Wildlife Trust and these are shown on the Design Concept Map. They correspond with areas designated SSSI or associated bog woodland and with rides noted in the plan as important heathland links.

8.5 Recreation

Car parks are located at either end of Hurn Forest adjacent to the Matchams Road and Boundary Lane and public access is heavy at these points consisting mainly of local dog walkers. A caravan park and campsite are located close to the north west boundary of the forest and access to the forest can be gained directly from these facilities. The central portion of the forest is some way from any access points and beyond the range of most informal walkers. As a consequence it is usually very quiet.

Ramsdown is located close to the outlying residential areas of Christchurch. Extensive views over Bournemouth, The Isle of Wight and as far north as Ringwood can be gained from the plateau on the eastern edge of the woodland. Many people are therefore attracted to the woodland and usually take a circular walk from the car park to the plateau and back. A viewing platform and picnic tables have been provided on the hill top.

8.6 Archaeology *(See Site Designation Map)*

There are four Scheduled Ancient Monuments within the plan area. One lies adjacent to Barnsfield Heath, another on Sopley Common and two are located in Ramsdown Plantation. They are all Bronze Age Bowl Barrows (funerary monuments). There are a further nine unscheduled monuments within the plan area all of which are Bronze Age Barrows.

All of the Scheduled Ancient Monuments have current management plans approved by English Heritage. The Unscheduled Ancient Monuments will be afforded the same protection as scheduled monuments and will be managed to establish shallow rooted cover in an open heathland setting.