

## Removal and Burning of Gorse

### Q1: Why are fires seen on Charlton Kings Common?

**A1:** To dispose of Gorse bushes (and other scrub) being cut down, e.g. as part of the Restoring Cheltenham's Escarpment Grasslands project being funded by National Grid's Landscape Enhancement Initiative.

### Q2: Why are the bushes being cut down?

**A2:** To restore the important limestone grassland of the Common that is being lost under invading Gorse. To protect the characteristic open landscape views of the Cotswolds that are being hidden by Gorse.

### Q3: Why is so much Gorse being cleared at present?

**A3:** Gorse has been cut and burnt on a smaller scale by FOLK volunteers for many years, but not in sufficient amounts to prevent its spread and its undesirable effects. Funding from National Grid is an opportunity over the next few years to bring the Common back to a lost state by clearing larger areas.

### Q4: What is the justification for trying to stop change?

**A5:** The Common is nationally protected as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) for its important unimproved limestone grassland, which Cheltenham Borough Council, its owner, has a statutory obligation to protect. Clearing Gorse is part of the management that Natural England expects of the Council. The Council also seeks to deliver the landscape priorities of the Cotswold AONB. Both Natural England and the AONB support the work.

### Q5: Why does the cut Gorse have to be burnt?

**A5:** Because other ways of getting rid of cut material would damage the Common or are impractical.

### Q6: What other possibilities have been explored?

**A6.1:** Leaving the cut material in large piles.

This would: destroy the grassland under the piles; create a major fire risk; remain for a long time; make soil under the piles more fertile.

**A6.2:** Shredding the cut Gorse.

Gorse is very difficult to shred even with large machines. There is limited access for such large machines to get close to the cutting areas, much of which is on steep slopes. The shredded material would have to be taken off site as piles of it would be more damaging than those of whole plants. There is no nearby location where the shredded material could be dumped.

**A6.3:** Carrying the cut bushes off site.

This is not physically or practically possible.

We know of no site where any of these approaches have been used successfully.

### Q7: What precautions are being taken to prevent the fires damaging the site?

**A7:** Sites for fires very carefully chosen to minimise damage to flora and fauna. Fires very carefully controlled by volunteers used to burning Gorse on the site. All appropriate firefighting precautions taken.