

Greenspace 1- Copt Hill, Houghton-Le-Spring

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Copt Hill is an open grassland greenspace, with scrub and regenerating woodland bounded by mature hedge and adjacent to Rough Dene. It has commanding views across the surrounding landscape, looking west across to the Durham Dales and north towards Peshaw Monument. The circle of six beech trees, known as The Seven Sisters, is a local landmark. It identifies the location of an ancient burial mound which is designated as a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM).

1.2 There are a number of benches across Copt Hill with an information board about the Burial Mound at the entrance. The Stephenson Trail, a long-distance walk into the centre of Sunderland using the route of the Hetton Colliery Railway, runs alongside the edge of Copt Hill. There are a few well-used routes around Copt Hill with a central path, which rises steeply from the adjacent cycleway network.



2.0 Location and Accessibility

2.1 Copt Hill lies between Hetton-le-Hole and Houghton-le-Spring. The greenspace is bounded by a golf course to the east, farmland, woodland and public house to the north and housing to the west. To the south lies Rough Dene Burn Local Wildlife Site (LWS), which flows along the southern edge of the greenspace, just outside the site boundary, providing a steep sided wooded valley.

Two records lie within the greenspace itself, with both red list and Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act species wall and small heath butterflies. The greenspace has potential for rare and threatened invertebrates because of the species rich grassland and mature/veteran trees on greenspace.

3.0 Existing Management and Maintenance

Copt Hill is an important countryside site and local amenity. SCC manage Copt Hill with low intensity grazing by cattle to maintain areas of grassland. The adjacent footpath is a right of way and managed by the Highways Team. Environment Services empty the bins next to the picnic benches.

SCC's Area Committee have committed funding, prior to the commencement of Link Together, to improve entrances through vegetation management, re-surfacing around seating, repainting seating and designing and installing new interpretive signage. This will compliment and support the delivery of Links with Nature and maintain community interest in Copt Hill. There is a huge council commitment to improve Copt Hill.

4.0 General description and observations

4.1 Copt Hill is an open grassland greenspace, which rises steeply up from the Rough Dene. The grassland varies in quality due to encroachment from scrub and woodland regrowth, ruderal species and rank grasses. The southern area of grassland is Magnesian Limestone grassland and is good quality. It is important to maintain that quality and prevent deteriorations due to encroachment from scrub. However, the combination of scrub, overgrown hedges and regenerating woodland does provide good habitat for birds. Therefore, it is important to maintain a good balance between controlling the scrub and keeping areas of open grassland.

Access and Interpretation

4.2 There are a number of informal routes around Copt Hill and the Stephenson's Trail runs alongside the greenspace. The open nature and location of various benches could encourage long distance walkers to stop off and enjoy the views as well as local walkers. There is one major north south route, which rises steeply. There is a more informal circular route around the edge of Copt Hill. The path is narrow in places and should be widened with scrub cut-back to help create a circular walk.

5.0 Proposed Works

The locations of the proposed works are shown in the map below.

5.1 Habitat management aims at Copt Hill:

- Maintain and enhance Magnesian Limestone grassland by ensuring appropriate management continues and encroaching scrub is managed.
- Improve quality of other areas of grassland by planning a programme of scrub management to maintain open areas, putting in place suitable grazing or mowing regime
- To increase continuity of hedgerows through new planting.

5.2 Access and Interpretation

- To improve informal routes by removing encroaching scrub;
- To repair sections of footpath which have been washed away and improve cross drains to reduce recurrence.
- Consider opportunities for signing upgrades to add value understanding and connection to the visitor experience, of the sites walks, historic setting, local landscape and biodiversity.

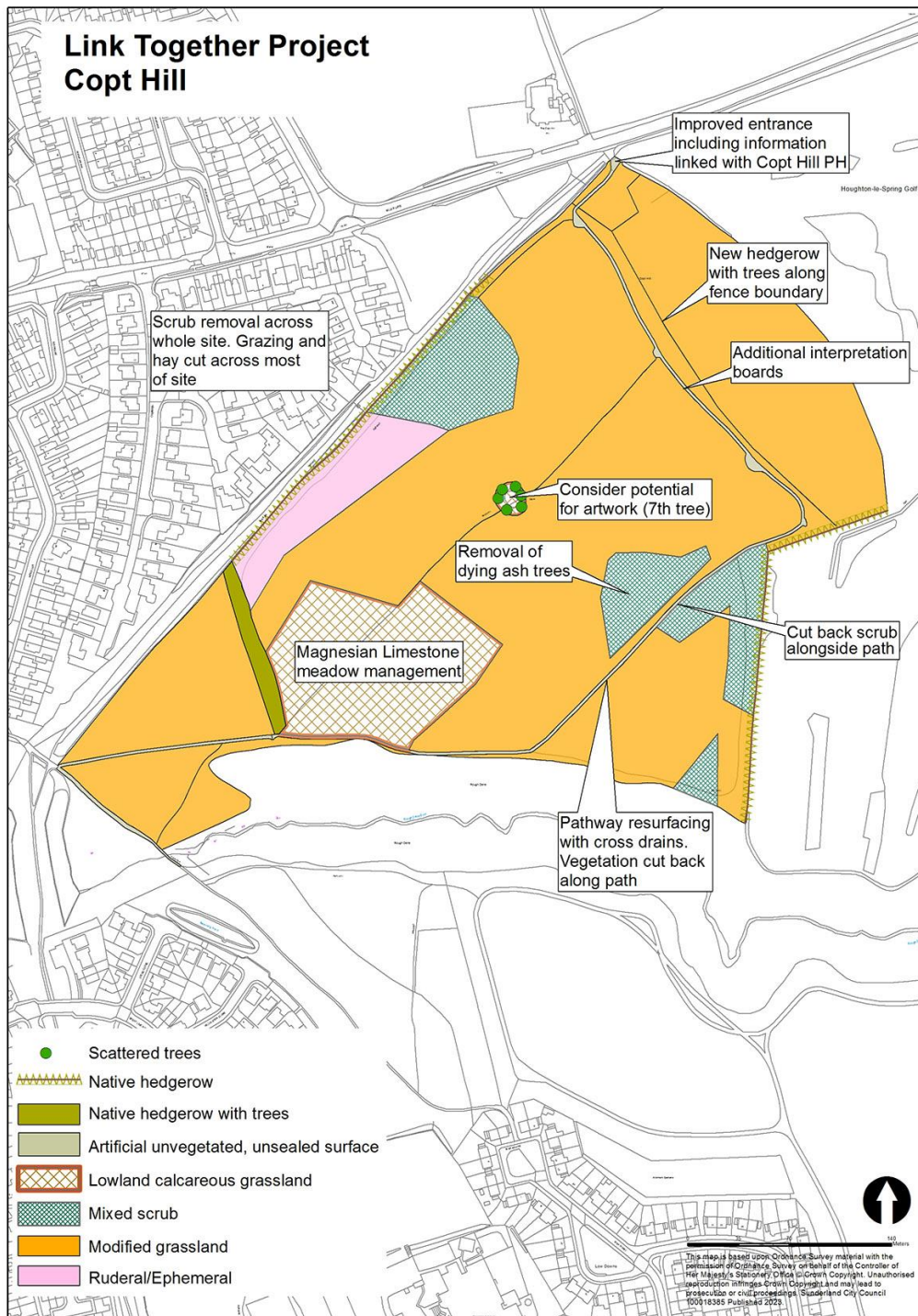
For details of the specifications for project delivery, please refer to the

6.0 Copt Hill Budget

Source of Funding	Amount (£)
Section 106	27,387
Area Committee	0
NECF	6,945
NLHF	18,251
Total	52,583

Habitat	Project	Month Completed	Budget (£)
Grassland Calcareous	Cutting or scything the grassland to remove arising	August/September	2,250
	Spreading of green hay across the site to spread seed more widely	August/September	3,478
Scrub Management	Define programme of scrub management across the greenspace to control scrub	October/February	7,698

	encroaching grassland and remove scrub		
Modified Grassland	Cut grassland	August/September	3,000
New hedgerows	Plant new 270m hedge along existing fence line	October/March	5,351
	Design Fees	-	900
Footpath	Repair footpath where surface has been eroded and install cross drains	March – July	24,648
Contingency – DWT			1,825
Contingency – SCC			3,433
Total			52583



The specification for each area of work are outlined in the Specifications Links with Nature document and details of future maintenance and management are outlined in the Maintenance and Management Plan document.