

# Inspiring a Positive Future by Connecting People and Nature



## COOKBURY POORLANDS — A site for people and nature

The goal was to bring more wildlife into the woodland, encourage community access and to set up community structures to manage the site according to a management plan that they devise.

### Connecting to nature: What was the 'nature' and who was connected to it?

Cookbury Poorlands [SS403060] is the name given to a 1.6ha piece of woodland that was donated to the church as a field in 1850, for use as allotments by the 'labouring poor' of Cookbury. It was abandoned about 50 years ago and reverted to woodlands



It was abandoned about 50 years ago, has not been actively managed and access for people was not encouraged. Most local people were not aware of the site's potential for wildlife and the community, or how the site was managed.

The local Brandis Corner Wildlife Group led the community engagement process; organising a community site visit and specialist volunteer surveys for plants, bats and dormice. The Devon Wildlife Trust provided two of its trainee rangers to do thinning work on the site to allow in more light for understory plants and associated insects like butterflies. The thinning

has also helped create an easier access path around the site. A site management committee has been set up that includes members of the Brandis Corner Wildlife Group, the local community and the church.

### Empowering people—how was the Biosphere involved?

In 2014, the Biosphere Reserve's "North Devon Nature Improvement Area" project sent out an on-line questionnaire to parishes in the area. It asked them about what they felt needed to be done for nature on their patch. Cookbury Poorlands was mentioned in a survey response.



Championing Life

Empowering People

Different Solutions

Working Together

The Nature Improvement Area outreach team contacted Kathleen Roberts, the local vicar and organised a site visit with members of the local Brandis Corner Wildlife Group. It showed the site's potential and so a guided site visit for the local community was organised. 15 people came along which is perhaps 10% of the village. After the visit there was clear support for more active management of the site, overseen and organised by a local management group.

The site is now looked over by a management of local organisations and they are in the process of creating a Management Plan for the site that could include designation as a Local Nature Reserve. Access to it is gradually being opened up and volunteer days are being organised to help manage the site and to create opportunities for local people to be involved.

In 2015 a floral survey found 99 plant species including 21 ancient woodland indicators. Dormouse and bat surveys have also been done.



The management Group is looking for grants to improve the site and links have been made with a Shebbear project also involving a piece of woodland. By linking the two projects the management Group will have a better chance of obtaining grants.



### **What has changed for the community/people involved?**

Local people are more engaged with the wildlife on their doorstep and the community feels more empowered to look after the Poorlands for universal benefit. They feel that they have been supported in this process by staff from the Biosphere and from the Nature Improvement Area Project and can draw on that expertise and support again should they need it.

They still need some support to find grants and to establish a Management Plan for the site but the Biosphere's contribution has been as a catalyst to bring local groups and the community together to explore the potential of the site and begin the process of improving management.