

Summer Leys Gate Opening/Closing Procedure Proposal

March 2019

Background

Summer Leys is a 47-hectare nature reserve near Wollaston in Northamptonshire. The site was formerly arable land and was then quarried for gravel before becoming a Wildlife Trust nature reserve. The reserve is part of the Nene Valley Gravel Pits Special Protection Area, and is popular with locals and those from further afield, especially photographers and nature lovers.

Issues

It is a common issue of remote rural sites to attract some measure of anti-social behaviour, littering and vandalism. This is compounded at Summer Leys by the fact that a secluded, free, car park is provided and is open 24 hours per day.

Issues reported on site have included:

- Loitering, drinking and drug use in the two hides nearest the car park, which is intimidating to photographers/bird watchers.
- Using the car park as an overnight motel – this happened regularly in 2018 and culminated in one sleeper driving a car through two field gates and causing £900 worth of damage.
- Other assorted undesirable car park activities, particularly prevalent in the evenings.
- Fires, including BBQ's. In 2018 the screen of one hide was set on fire, resulting in a fire brigade call-out.
- Associated littering and/or vandalism resulting from the above, which can require expensive and time-consuming repair/tidy up work.

The car park currently has a lockable security gate, but this has not been used previously due to issues with the cost and coordination of opening and closing procedures.

Between September and December 2014 a wide-ranging and detailed consultation was undertaken – the 'Summer Leys and Mary's Lake Community Panel'. The Community Panel involved members of the public and included meetings, site user surveys and guided walks. The panel included local users, and representatives from the Wildlife Trust, Natural England and the RSPB. The top priority identified in the 'facilities' review was the desire to commence a system of locking the car park overnight in order to improve site security, particularly around anti-social evening / night time activity.

Proposal

From spring 2019 we propose to commence with a gate opening/closing procedure to restrict late evening and overnight access to the main Summer Leys nature reserve car park (off Hardwater Road). This would be undertaken, on a trial basis at first, during spring and summer 2019. If successful this would continue after that point. The aim is to try and discourage some of the anti-social activity that regularly takes place here - notorious amongst locals and regular legitimate site users - especially during spring and summer months.

The gate would be opened each morning at **05:00** and then locked at **19:30** by local volunteers. We believe that much of the anti-social behaviour (especially drinking/drug-taking and licentious activity) occurs in the bird hides and car park area in the mid-evening, before it gets dark, which is intimidating to all legitimate site users.

After the car park is locked there will still be a small amount of parking available along Mary's Lane and the reserve can still be accessed by legitimate users via entrances on that side of the site.

The Wildlife Trust would monitor the effects on anti-social behaviour and site damage, as well as feedback from legitimate user groups, and make a decision in September 2019 as to whether to continue with the car park locking on an ongoing basis.

We welcome feedback from all site users, by Thursday 18th April 2019, specifically relating to:

- Whether the decision to close the car park overnight is a sound one.
- Whether the proposed opening and closing hours are suitable.
- Any other comments relevant to this issue.

If you have any comments on the above proposal please e-mail them to northamptonshire@wildlifebcn.org, entitled 'Summer Leys Car Park consultation', by 5pm on Thursday 18th April 2019. We will acknowledge receipt of comments sent by email, but cannot provide detailed individual replies. Once the consultation period is closed we will provide a summary of points made and planned next steps via our on-line forums.

Comments can also be sent by post, to be received by the same deadline, to Summer Leys Car Park consultation, The Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire & Northamptonshire, Lings House, off Lings Way, Billing Lings, Northampton, NN3 8BE.