



Blackheath Common Management Plan and Fire Plan consultation

Cllr Howard DL
Vice Chair, Wonersh Parish Council

Clerk: Lisa Davison
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How best to manage our area for:

- Climate Change:
 - Fire
 - Flooding
 - Intense freeze
 - Heat waves
 - Other disasters e.g. storm



How best to manage the area for:

- Biodiversity challenges:
 - Loss of heathland
 - need to adapt to hotter- wetter climate
- Better communications during emergencies
- Need for more volunteers to protect area
(perhaps set up or join Wonersh & Shamley Green Environment groups?)





Waverley Borough Council's Blackheath Management Plan 2014-24 – 10 year Extension Consultation

Pages 1 - 10

- Leased & Managed by Waverley Borough Council
- Site of special Scientific Interest (SSSI) Internationally rare habitat.
- Need to work with Natural England & Forestry England on the management
- Green Flag status means it is benchmarked and recognized as well managed
- Site supports all six UK reptiles including the UK's rarest reptile the Smooth Snake and has previously been a site of reintroduction for the rare Sand Lizard.
- The common is heavily used and much valued by the public for walking, dog walking, horse riding and other outdoor pursuits such as cycling, jogging and observation of wildlife.



Waverley Borough Council's Blackheath Management Plan

Pages 10 - 15

- Archeology and History of site
- Very dry, sandy site with no open water or running streams.
- Climate Change Emergency – more droughts, more mild, wet winters
- Forms part of a new “Super National Nature Reserve” as a legacy of the Heathland Connections partnership. This enables and empowers organisations to work together to manage separate areas of the wider landscape in a more joined up, holistic approach.
- Human intervention since neolithic period, Roman remains,
- The war memorial straddles four ancient Saxon boundaries.
- Was open heathland until WW2.
- There are six individual commoners at Blackheath Common, they have the option to use the product of the soil of a common, by grazing, cutting turf and fishing etc



Waverley Borough Council's Blackheath Management Plan

Pages 15 - 19

- Biological section
- Rare plants and animals
- Issues of invasive species, including the Scotch Pine – non-native
- The majority of heathland SSSI compartments are in favourable condition according to the Natural England SSSI Condition Assessment conducted in March 2024, meaning that it is 'being adequately conserved'. Only SSSI compartment 8 remains as 'Unfavourable recovering' due to blanketing gorse



Waverley Borough Council's Blackheath Management Plan

Pages 19

- **Habitat management of heathland is therefore focussed on removing colonising birch and pine scrub**, preventing wildfires with firebreaks, removing nutrients and creating an uneven aged vegetation mosaic by mowing patches of heather. Bracken also needs to be prevented from out-competing the heather by periodic spraying or cutting and to maintain the right conditions for birds, particularly the Dartford warbler, gorse needs to be coppiced every 12-15 years. **The council has an aspiration to reintroduce cattle grazing** as a traditional heathland management tool. This can be achieved through the use of virtual fencing utilising **GPS collars on the cattle, negating the need for any physical fencing**. From spring 2025, the council will be actively trialling this system on other council managed land with a view to implement this technique on Blackheath Common in the future.



Waverley Borough Council's Blackheath Management Plan

Pages 21 Aims and Actions: Heritage and Conservation

The key management principles are:

- To **maintain the designated features of interest of the SSSI** in a favourable condition, or bring into favourable condition if not currently meeting the conservation objectives.
- To ensure Blackheath Common continues **to support a range of specialist heathland plants and associated wildlife communities**, and to maintain, improve and diversify all habitats for the benefit of wildlife.
- To **provide for continued public access** to enable people to enjoy Blackheath Common through informal recreation.
- To **encourage the local community to engage with the management of the common**, and gain an appreciation and understanding of its landscape, cultural heritage, and biodiversity.
- To **manage and reduce tree risk** in line with the Council's tree risk management framework.
- For site management to **comply with the Council's Climate Change and Sustainability Strategy 2020 – 2030 and Carbon Neutrality Action Plan 2020 – 2030** with particular regards to waste disposal, use of herbicides and reducing emissions



Waverley Borough Council's Blackheath Management Plan 2014-24

Pages 22 - 25 Heritage and Conservation detailed management objectives

Page 26 - Aims and Action - Service

- Rangers to collaborate with residents, visitors, fire service , police etc to patrol and manage site
- Litter management
- Dog issues – disturbing nesting birds, nutrient enrichment Enforcement?
- Antisocial behaviour.



Waverley Borough Council's Blackheath Management Plan

Page 27 Fire Risk Management :

Fire prevention is a primary role of the Rangers during the peak fire season between March and October and close lines of communication are maintained between WBC and Surrey Fire and Rescue service. There are numerous fire breaks on site, cut as part of the current fire prevention strategy. The Wildfire Management Plan is currently being re-written to a standardised format to draw together different sources of information into one targeted document. This will be shared with and approved by the fire service and will feed into the Wildfire Response Plan for the site.

Concern about lack of joined up working. Plans for different areas coming forward at different times.

Concern about limited resources , as rangers pulled to other areas e.g. Frensham Ponds

Lack of joined up communications with locals, parish councils, BVS etc?

Need for resilient Emergency Plan?



Waverley Borough Council's Blackheath Management Plan

Pages 27 - 28 **Infrastructure Maintenance :**

- Bench management
- Signage on the heath
- Cycling
- Bit about working with other organisations to so species monitoring.

Access & Recreation - **its primary purpose is as a nature reserve.**



Waverley Borough Council's Blackheath Management Plan

Pages 29 - 31 **Sustainability :**

- In line with the Council's Pesticide Policy and Action Plan 2021, herbicides are to be used only where their use would have a lower environmental impact than alternative methods of control, or where there are no other viable means of control. Herbicide use is to be kept to the absolute minimum necessary to achieve the level of control required.
- **Use of Volunteers:**
Bi weekly volunteer sessions. *Is this working?*



Waverley Borough Council's Blackheath Management Plan

Pages 32 - 52 Series of Maps and annexes:

Concerns over MAP 6 FIREBREAK MAP ACROSS BLACKHEATH COMMON

**Query over whether it matches Fire Service map of current firebreaks.
Should proposed fire breaks be mapped in this document too?**



Surrey Fire & Rescue Service Wildfire Management Plan for Blackheath

Page 1 – 12 Basic intro describing the area – factual.

Page 13- 25 Risk Register **Check for your area**

Talks of creation by WBC of an Evacuation Plan. Has anyone seen this? Does it exist?

Talk of a Firewise Community...how is this going to happen?



Blackheath Common Wildfire Management Plan

Page 26- 28 Analysis – Evaluation of Terrain - factual

Page 29- Wildfire Prevention measures – Improving site design

Table 12 – **this is where it gets complicated ! Everyone needs to look at the detail for their area to check they are happy with the proposals.**

Page 30 - Table 13 – states management methods – no issues

Page 31 - 34 - Managing fire & fuel break and belt prevention features **This is the controversial bit.**

Page 35 – 37 Table 17 – Implementation of wildfire management plan. **Please check**

Page 38-39 Monitoring forms

Page 40 onwards Appendixes and maps – **THE INTERESTING BIT**



Blackheath Common Wildfire Management Plan

Appendix A – RISK MATRIX

Appendix B - SURVEY: MAP OF VEGETATION FUEL & HIGH/LOW PRIORITY

Appendix C - MAP OF WILDFIRE MANAGEMENT ZONES

Appendix D - PLANNED WILDFIRE PREPAREDNESS MEASURES

Appendix E - WILDFIRE PREPAREDNESS MEASURES

Appendix F - MANAGEMENT COMPARTMENTS

Appendix G - SURREY FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE WILDFIRE RESPONSE PLAN

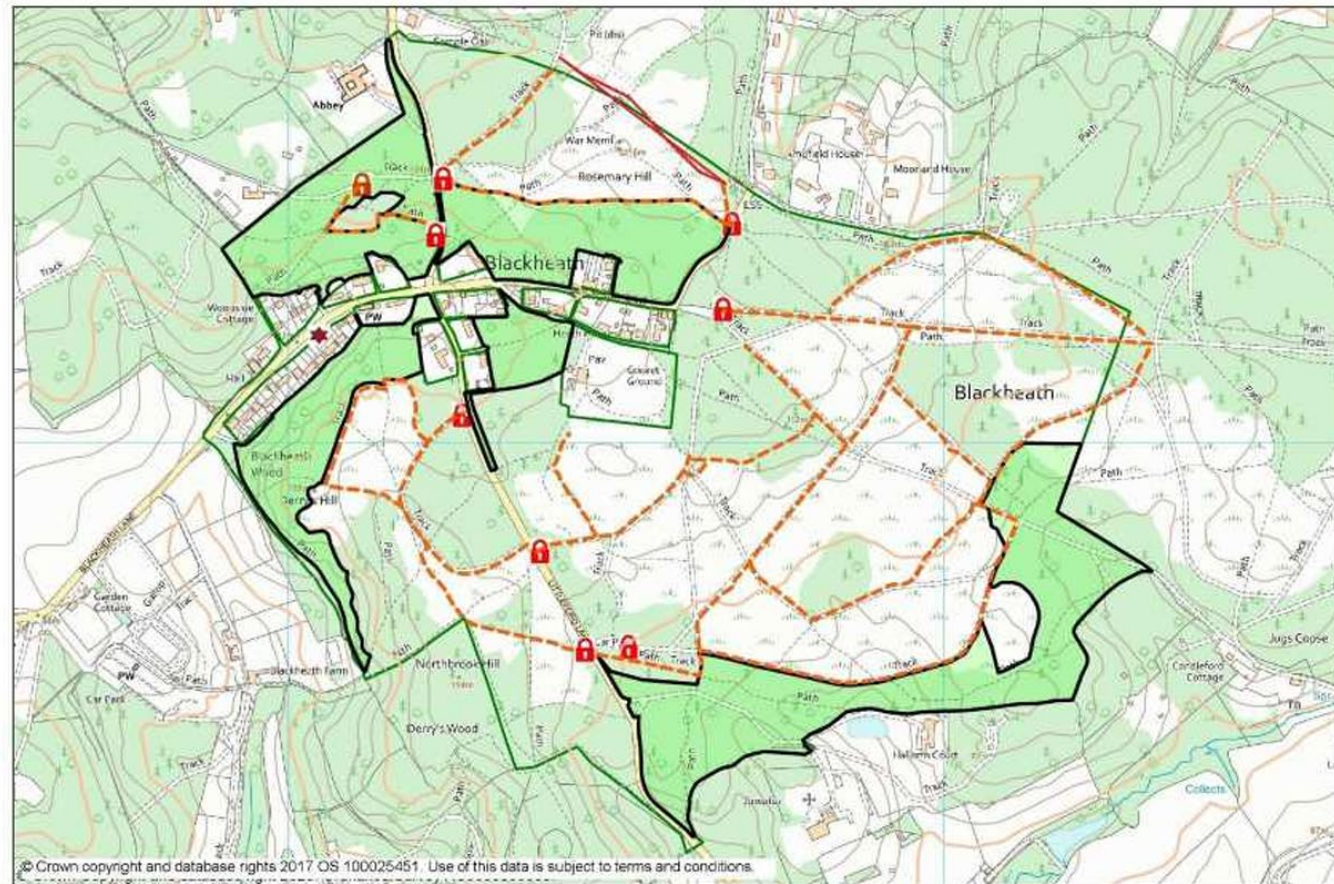
– very technical !

Blackheath Common Wildfire Management Plan



APPENDIX E – WILDFIRE PREPAREDNESS MEASURES

Green – Green Belts; Orange – Firebreaks; Padlock – Emergency access gate





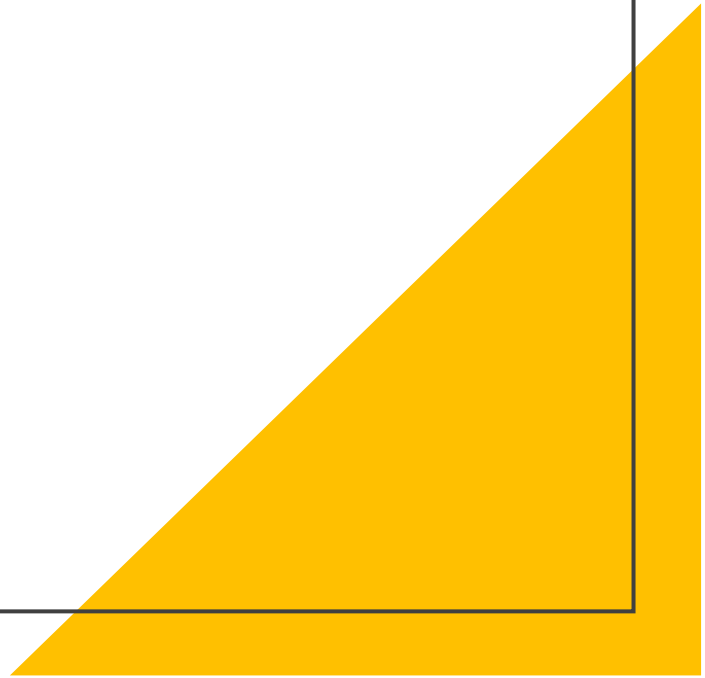
Concerns raised so far:

Issue 1:

- Page 36 (Fire Mgmt Plan) - Creation of new access point directly off Sample Oak Lane.
- Concern about Unauthorised incursion – it is very visible from the road.
- Removal of established oak trees
- Proposal for access point further along track on established bridleway.









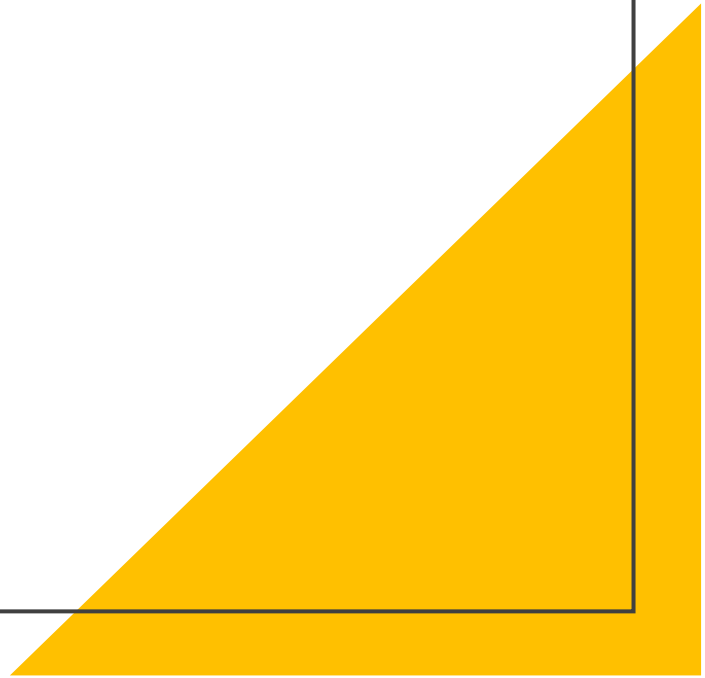
Concerns raised so far:

Issue 2:

- Page - 24 Refers to new fire break at A-7, off A8 firebreak.

This was removed from the plan after consultation 10 years ago after intervention from Natural England. (This is also an area once subject to an illegal encampment).

Why is it back in again?

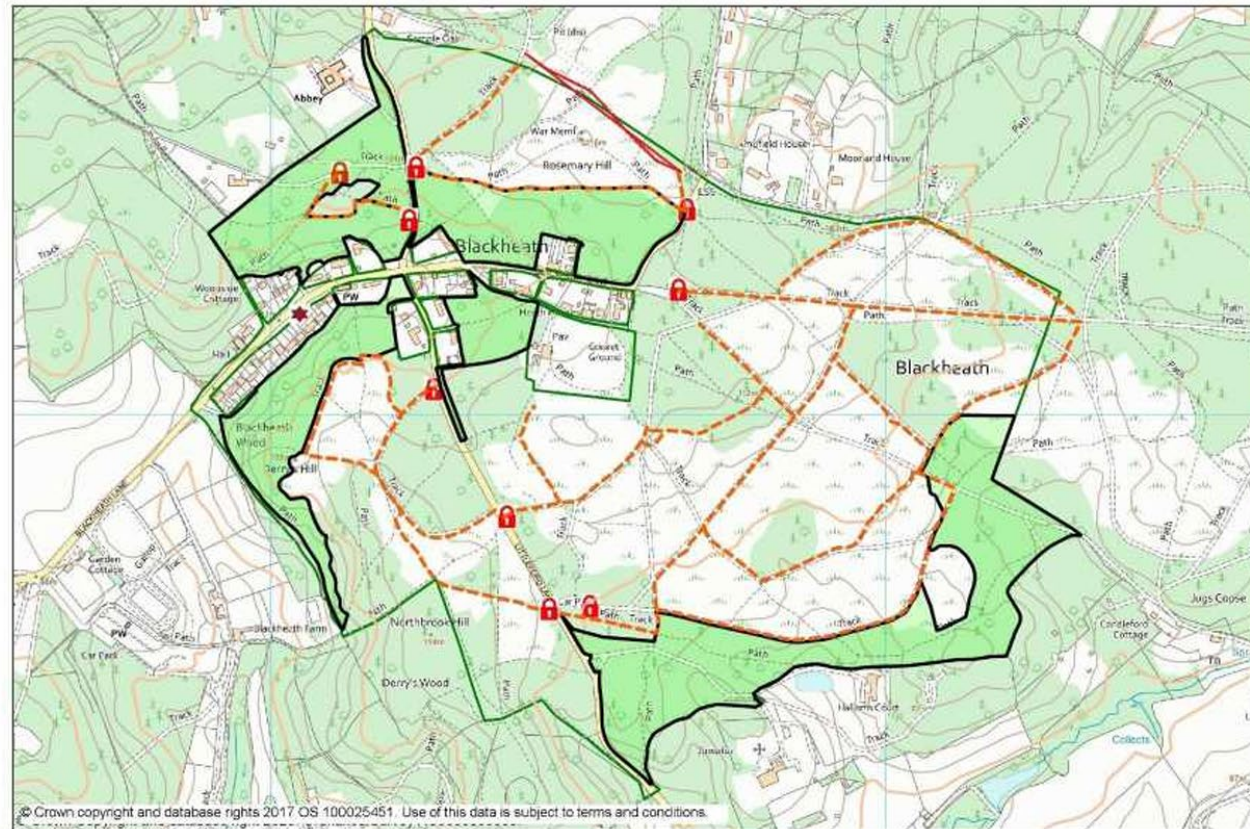




Blackheath Common Wildfire Management Plan

APPENDIX E – WILDFIRE PREPAREDNESS MEASURES

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Concerns raised so far:

Issue 3:

Appendix C only includes existing padlocked gates. There is no indication of the proposed new padlocked gate at corner of Sample Oak Lane.



Concerns raised so far:

Issue 4:

- Siting and style of gates.
- Want metal green gates that blend into countryside?





Concerns raised so far:

Issue 5:

- Concern over clarity and accuracy of the maps – they don't all seem to match up.
- Are the red lines in Appendix C new firebreaks or something else?



Concerns raised so far:

Issue 6:

- Signage or no signage?
- Type of signage ?



Signage for Blackheath put up recently



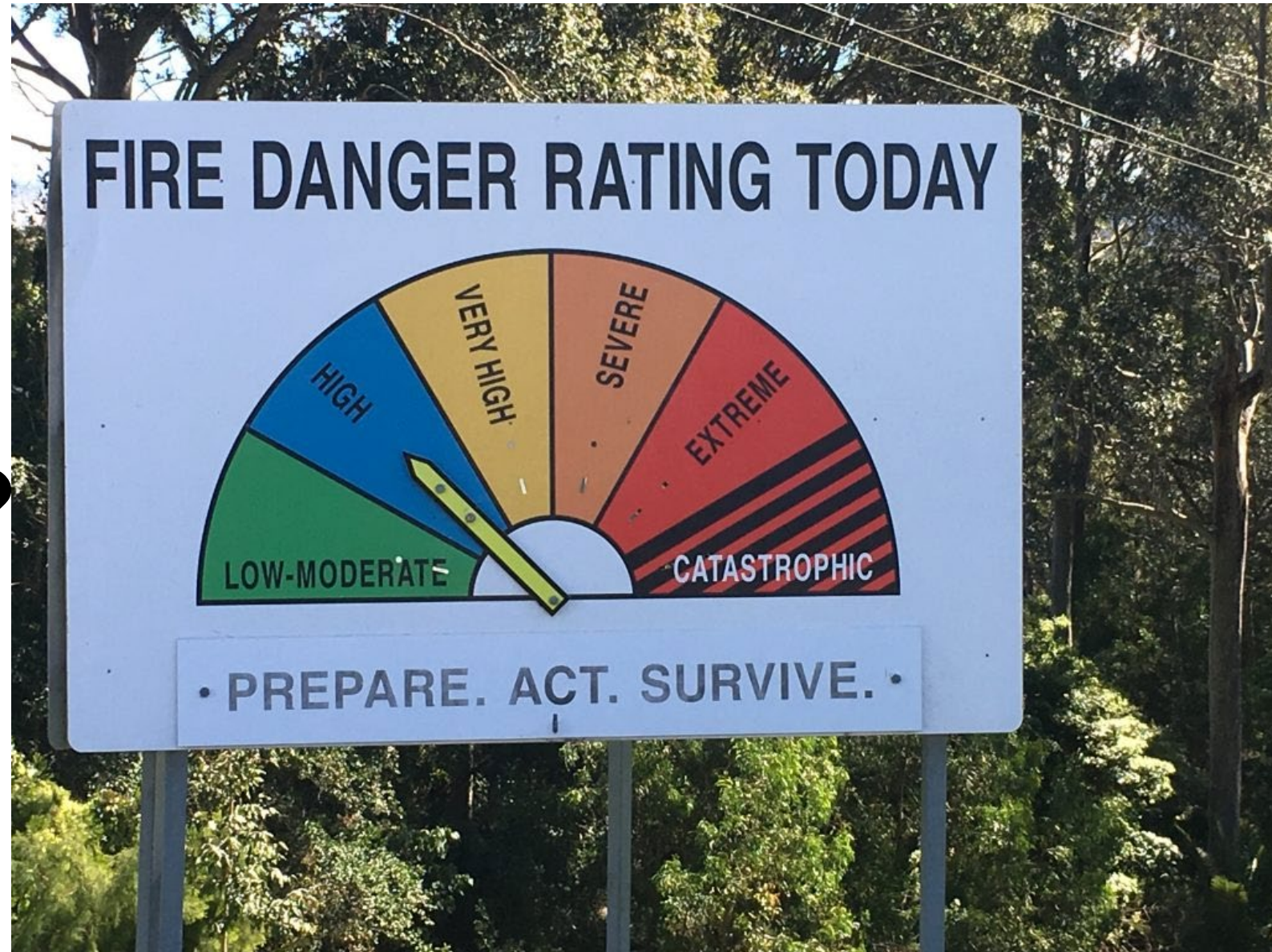


Signage for Blackheath ?





Signage for Blackheath?





Concerns raised so far:

Issue 7:

Law of Property Act 1925: Under Section 193, lighting any fire on regulated common land without lawful authority is illegal and carries a fine upon conviction

Poor awareness

Poor enforcement ...nationally

Should BBQs and bonfires be allowed in summer?

Proposal for Fire Wise Community Initiative: Page 25



There are many benefits to being part of the Firewise programme, including:

- Making your home and neighbourhood more resilient to wildfire
- Helping to build community resilience and good citizenship
- Being proactive to reducing risk
- Educating your wider community about wildfire
- Encouraging community spirit and giving the community a plan to work towards
- Having opportunities to contact and connect with other Firewise communities in the UK and abroad
- Knowing that you are actively making a difference to you and your neighbours
- How can we get this started?



What are your concerns or observations for Blackheath Fire Plan and Management Plan?





Summary so far:

Wonersh Parish Council to get clarification on new firebreaks and feedback our concerns

Introduction of more visual Fire Ban Signs ...and need for enforcement!

Education for locals and visitors – Fire Wise Community Initiative?

Maintain fire breaks – possibly with use of volunteers? Not enough Ranger resource.

Protect fire break access with padlocked gates - green

Maintain deciduous trees, where possible.

Information sharing systems – Cascading information in emergencies.

Close liaison between parish councils (esp St Martha's), village association, fire brigade, National Trust, other relevant landowners (eg Albury Estates) and the existing, then new Unitary Authority

Everyone respond to the consultation by 10th August

**SIGN UP TO WONERSH PARISH COUNCIL NEWSLETTERS & EMAILS SERVICE VIA THE WEBSITE
WWW.WONERSHPARISH.GOV.UK**