

January 2024

South West Peatland Partnership
Public Summary Document:



Halscombe Allotment

Peatland restoration works
Halscombe Allotment, Exmoor
Winter 2023 - Spring 2025

Why restoration on Exmoor?

Peatlands are wetland habitats that cover much of our upland landscapes. They are formed by plants dying in waterlogged conditions meaning that they stay in a semi-decomposed state, creating peat.

Healthy peatlands are vital for water quality & quantity regulation, carbon storage, animal and plant diversity, recreation, farming and preserving a rich historic environment.

However, research estimates that only around 20% of peatlands in the UK remain in a near-natural state, meaning that these benefits are not being seen. This is due to a range of past drying and draining methods to allow for historic activities such as moorland reclamation, drainage and peat extraction.

The SWPP is a collective of organisations working in partnership across Exmoor, Dartmoor and Cornwall to restore areas of degrading peatland like at Halscombe Allotment and prevent further erosion.

The SWPP works to simply restore water to the landscape, increasing the water table and crucially, keeping this at a more stable level year round. This will have benefits for wildlife diversity, carbon storage, livestock water supply and, in time, help create conditions where sphagnum moss can colonise and peat begin to form again.

There is also great value from peatland restoration in safeguarding our cultural, historical and archaeological environment. This is intrinsic to all our planning, works and research.

Map

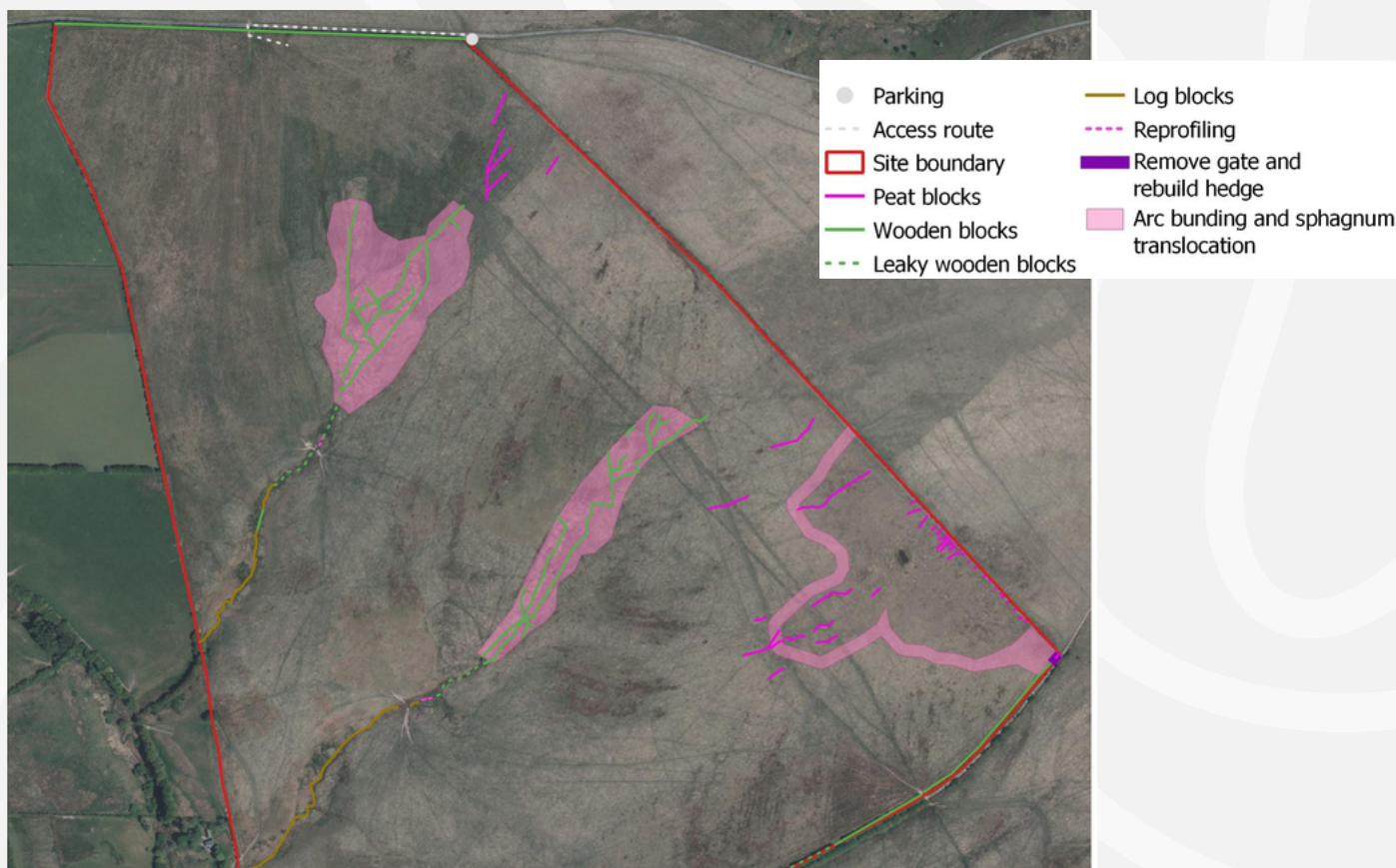


Figure 1: Map of planned restoration works and different methods to be used.

SWPP approach at Halscombe

Like much of the UK's upland areas, the peat at Halscombe Allotment has been heavily modified by past agricultural reclamation, military activity and historic peat cutting activities all impacting the blanket bog's hydrological function. As such, large areas of the site are dominated by purple moor grass with shallow peats, and little or no peat forming vegetation is able to thrive.

However, pockets of deep peat deposits reaching up to 2.5 metres can be found at the head of the two combs and there is great potential for enhancing the site for benefits to wildlife, water, carbon storage and archaeology.

SWPP practical works are scheduled to begin in January 2024, aiming to restore hydrological function to the peatland in this area, raising and stabilising the water table. Contractors working with SWPP will:

- rebuild the hedge bank to hold water on site and expand the area of mire & wet health vegetation.
- block and reprofile erosion features such as ditches, channels and peat pipes using a variety of techniques including peat, wooden and leaky wooden and log blocks and bunds to encourage water to pool and spread out.
- use fish scale bunding across the wider landscape to encourage the water to spread and pool enhancing conditions for bog forming species like sphagnum to colonise and grow.
- plant suitable sphagnum species behind the restoration features installed to expand the areas of mire vegetation on site.

SWPP staff will be present on site during restoration works. Historic Environment Officers ensure both accessing the site and carrying out the works do not damage archaeological or historic features.



Figure 2 : An area to be reprofiled during works. Water can be seen running off the peat, which will be taking peat and dissolved organic carbon away with it. Peat will continue to erode and carbon be lost into the atmosphere and waterways unless works such as reprofiling and blocking gulleys take place.



Figure 3: Phil Wright, SWPP Historic Environment Officer surveying holloways on site during restoration planning process, Summer 2023

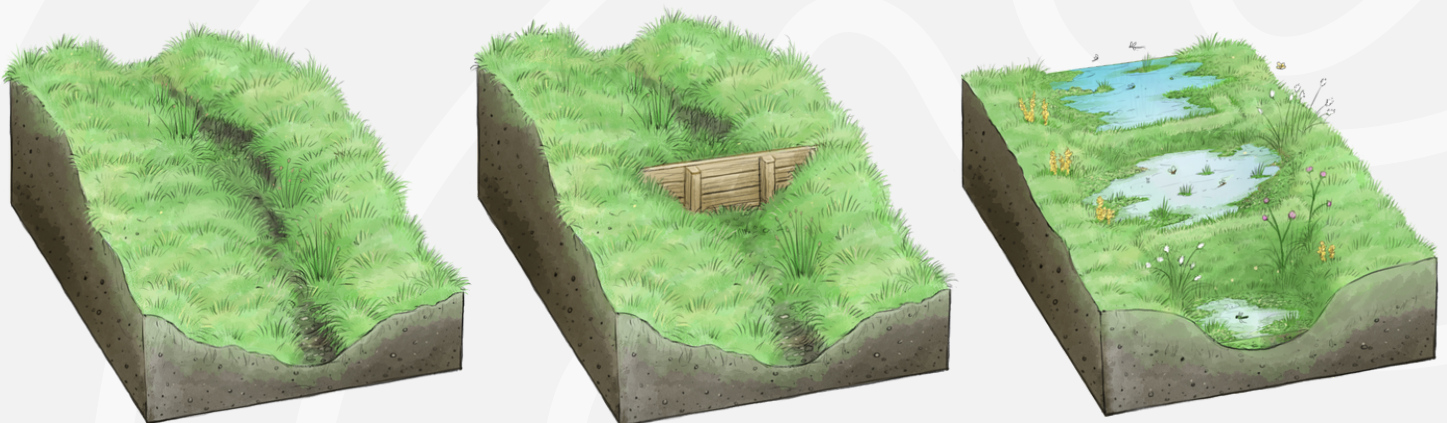


Figure 4: Illustrations showing the reprofiling of erosion channels into a shallower gradient, and adding peat & wooden blocks. This will overtime slow the flow of water, create shallow pools & reduce erosion of the exposed peat.

FAQs

What do you aim to achieve?

SWPP will be working to restore the hydrology and ecological function of the vital habitats, halt peat erosion and conserve the historic environment of the peatland at Halscombe Allotment.

Why was this site chosen?

The peat at Halscombe Allotment has been heavily modified by past management, with agricultural reclamation, military activity and historic peat cutting activities all impacting the blanket bog's hydrological function. As such, large areas of the site are dominated by purple moor-grass with shallow peats and little or no peat forming vegetation is able to thrive. Pockets of deep peat deposits reaching up to 2.5 metres can be found at the head of the two combs. Without action, this incredibly huge store of carbon, palaeoecology and peat will continue to wash away and erode as peat pipes and bare peat causes erosion into the combe.

What process have you gone through to begin works?

The SWPP has carried out a large body of work to compile a restoration plan for this site. These extensive documents contain details of site ecology, historic environment, landscape, access, land management, restoration methods, locations, timings and costs. Restoration plans are consulted and agreed upon by appropriate government bodies, landowners, farmers and commoners, following sector guidance and best practice for working on peatlands. Amongst others, key stakeholders involved include the private landowner and grazier, Natural England, Historic England, Environment Agency and Exmoor National Park Authority.

How are you protecting archaeology and other historical features?

The historic features of Halscombe Allotment were examined by the Historic Environment Officer (HEO) through methods such as examining historic maps, photography and LiDAR survey, reviewing past reports and carrying out walkover surveys of the site. Mitigation methods have been included in planned works, including the use of wide-tracked vehicles, briefings for contractors by the HEO, the use of bog mats and sensitive storage of materials until they are needed. Sensitive archaeological features have been excluded from all restoration activity to protect features such as Bronze Age cairns, hollow ways and post-medieval enclosures. Palaeoenvironmental records should also be enhanced overall by restoration works; raising and stabilizing the water table will improve preservation of organic material and palaeoenvironmental evidence.

Can I still walk here?

Yes, where sites are on open-access land, the area remains open to all. However, if you're planning on visiting these areas during works please do not approach machinery, and follow signage or contractor advice to safely enjoy the landscape whilst the restoration work takes place. Make yourself known and visible to operators and ensure you have clear acknowledgement of them seeing you and are aware of your movements.

What can we expect to see as a result of restoration?

Peatland restoration will create pools of water across the area. Over time, sphagnum mosses will colonise the pools and help create conditions where peat can form once more. Gullies where peat is visible and eroding will be reprofiled. It's our aim that restoration will bring about a more diverse range of bog plants and wildlife too.

What monitoring of your work are you doing?

Monitoring of the site pre, during and post restoration includes monitoring of vegetation, hydrology, peat depth, fixed-point photography and wildlife surveys. Restoration officers will also accompany contractors supervising practical works and monitoring progress. Regular reporting and monitoring is fed back to our partners and funders.

Can I get involved?

You can help us make a difference by getting involved in our team of volunteers, carrying out everything from willow planting to further historical research. Follow along on our social media channels, and feel free to get in touch with any further questions or to volunteer on southwestpeatlandpartnership@gmail.com