



Department of Regeneration

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Dear Ruth,

BRACKEN: BAILDON MOOR

I refer to your letter dated 19th July which was addressed to Councillor Anne Hawkesworth. Councillor Hawkesworth has asked me to reply direct to you.

You write on behalf of the Parish Council asking that bracken control on Baildon Moor is stopped. This is based on a paper by Dr Mark Fisher which has been presented to the Parish Council.

I would welcome the opportunity to discuss this matter in more detail with the Parish Council and, possibly the Friends of Baildon Moor as we do not agree with everything in Dr Fisher's paper. In the fairly regular public meetings that we have attended concerning Baildon Moor, one of the most regular complaints from users of the moor is the extent of bracken cover and what steps we are taking to combat this. It came as a surprise therefore to read that the Parish Council wants this to cease.

We accept that bracken has a conservation value and that care must be taken in choosing which areas to control. We do feel that this care was taken and the criticism of the work done was a little unfair. A quick assessment of the extent of bracken cover on the moor shows that almost 40% of the moor is under bracken. Our approach on the fairly limited areas where we have intervened, has been to reduce (not eradicate) bracken cover and encourage a wider range of vegetation which has benefits for a wider range of wildlife and makes using the moor, particularly walking on the paths a little more pleasant.

This is not an attempt to eradicate bracken altogether as we realise that is unrealistic and undesirable. Neither is it an attempt to turn the moor into a heather covered landscape, as we recognise that Baildon Moor is different. Nor is it an attempt to create additional grazing for sheep as we accept that grazing levels on the moor are very low, if non-existent at present. The common rights to graze sheep on the moor, however, still exist and could still be exercised at a point in the future. We are therefore under some obligation to try and maintain the moor so that this could be



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accommodated if and when. An amusing thought is that the common register for Baildon Moor shows that there are rights to graze a total of 3,500 sheep, plus about 200 cows. Imagine the scene if those rights were ever exercised. More seriously, we are also under an obligation, as good neighbours to prevent bracken from spreading into adjacent pasture – something that we know is a concern for neighbouring farms.

Thus, I feel that we are justified in carrying out some bracken control in proportion and in the right places. It is difficult, therefore for us to comply with your request to cease completely.

Perhaps a more important point to debate is what is the future shared vision for the moor given all these sometimes conflicting needs and aspirations, not just conservation related, but recreation interests, public opinion, economics, archaeological and so on. You ask whether we have a management plan for the moor – the answer is no. Perhaps we should have one given the wide range of issues and this could be something to be drawn up in collaboration with the Parish Council and Friends.

We are currently exploring the possibility of entering into a Higher Level Stewardship agreement for the moor with Natural England. This would, if successful, secure long-term funding for the management works on the moor, in line with an agreed management prescription. This would seem to be an ideal opportunity to jointly draft a prescription for the moor that achieves the shared vision. We would happily work with Dr Fisher and the rest of the Parish Council to move this forward.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D Jackson', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Danny Jackson
Countryside and Rights of Way Manager