

SKELSMERGH WOODLAND MANAGEMENT PLAN

MONITORING REPORT AND THIRD REVIEW 2019

The Management Plan, adopted in 2005, provided for a review in 2010 and thereafter at 5-yearly intervals. The second review took place in 2016. This review has been brought forward to acknowledge the onset of ash die-back disease.

Objectives of the Plan

To manage the woodland to maturity, encouraging a diverse understorey and ground-flora whilst maintaining access to and views from the seat.

To encourage wild birds to nest.

To enhance the local landscape and interest in the site by shrub and wildflower planting.

To ensure accessibility to the local community.

To encourage use by local schools.

Assessing achievements against objectives:

1 Managing the trees to maturity and enhancing the local landscape

In the nineteen years of its existence the woodland has achieved the characteristics of an established woodland plantation. A substantial coppice coupe in the alder / willow/ aspen area, recovered vigorously and will require thinning during the coming five years. Elsewhere, hazel has been coppiced in small groups every year since 2014 and shows strong regrowth.

Birch and ash have reached a stage where thinning can take place, especially in the case of Ash due to Ash die-back disease (*Hymenoscyphus fraxinea*) which has been confirmed since the last review. The aim should be to concentrate on thinning ash each year to allow slower-growing species, such as oak, to raise their canopy without losing the essential character of the woodland. Other species such as willow and hazel may be coppiced by hand. In relation to the ash especially it would be prudent to continue to employ professional labour to fell and to recover some of the cost from sales of firewood, which worked well in 2018/19.

A second, more significant issue arises in relation to the tall, mature Ash on the boundary with Joiner's Lane. This has been professionally surveyed, together with all other boundary trees and, although showing no signs of ash die-back in November 2019, will need to be kept under close scrutiny due to its proximity to the public highway and adjacent overhead power-lines. The cost of removal in this case will be considerable and assistance from Electricity NW should be requested.

The problems with blackthorn and bramble previously identified have abated to some extent since the treatments applied under the last review. Bramble responds to shading and only needs cutting back where it impedes access. However, in the case of blackthorn open areas need to be regularly trimmed. Both species have considerable value to wildlife as food and cover, especially for ground-nesting species. Former concerns regarding roe deer are no longer an issue: the creatures are present but at a tolerable level.

Proposal 1

To thin ash, birch, willow and hazel in small annual amounts, ash and birch to be marked and offered for sale, hazel to be hand-cut with product offered for sale as bean poles, pea sticks and firewood, mature boundary ash to be monitored for disease annually and referred for expert advice, if necessary. Contact with Electricity NW should also be made.

A canopy has formed over much of the woodland, extinguishing the growth of coarse grasses. A woodland floor is forming aided by introduced ferns and wildflowers, including primrose, cowslip, bluebell, wild daffodil, snowdrop, wood anemone, wild garlic, ferns and dogs mercury, giving the land a satisfyingly established 'feel'. Natural regeneration of tree species is also evident and this is a process to be welcomed. A baseline wildflower survey was carried out in 20011/12 and this should be repeated.

Proposal 2

To encourage the spread of woodland flora species and manage natural regeneration of tree species. To carry out a further update wildflower survey in 2017.

Trees and shrubs below the overhead cables are pruned periodically by United Utilities. It would be desirable to keep this pruning under local control as far as possible, with the exception of any trees requiring professional climbing skills.

The boundary walls on the East and western sides have received extensive and expert attention from the Dry Stone Walling Association volunteers to whom donations have been made in recognition. Other sections of boundary will need to be monitored during the review period.

Proposal 3

Control growth under power cables. Monitor boundaries and seek assistance from DSWA as necessary.

The bench has suffered a collapse and will need repair or replacement. The shed and gate require periodic applications of preservative. A section of boundary wall on the eastern boundary with Mr Jameson's land needs repair.

Proposal 4

To repair/replace the bench.

To apply preservative to the shed and gate in Spring 2020.

In 2009 the Council granted a licence to a beekeeper, Mr D Walmsley, for the siting of hives. This has proved successful and has led to the use of the land as a 'beekeeping' school on summer Sundays. There are multiple benefits in terms of conservation and public education. Though granted for a nominal sum, a valuable donation of honey has produced a useful annual income. A second licence has been granted on similar terms to Sarah Deane, who has taken over some of Mr Walmsleys hives.

The management plan envisaged the planting of memorial trees of which there are some 19 on site. It is already the council's policy not to mark individual trees but a record is kept to ensure that none

are included in any pruning proposals. Opportunities for further planting are bound to be limited but space should be found if the need arises. The council's policy is to ensure that any tree is of a suitable species and simply to ask for a donation which can go to upkeep of the woodland as a whole.

Proposal 5

To permit suitable native trees to be provided with an invitation to donate towards woodland funds. To maintain a record and discretely mark such trees.

2 Encouraging wild birds

Making nest boxes was a popular activity with children on Open days. Many have been put up around the woodland. The owl box has been occupied but three cold eggs discovered in November 2019, together with a mass of nesting material suggest the birds were driven out by jackdaws.

The bird boxes which have attracted use in previous years suffered from not being thoroughly cleaned in 2019 and deteriorated badly. Most will need replacement. The metal plates which deter woodpeckers can be recycled.

It would be a good thing to recruit a keen ornithologist to monitor nesting species and their success.

Proposal 6.

To recruit a local ornithologist to survey monitor wild birds. To make and erect seven new bird boxes.

Access for recreation

Since the last review in 2016 evidence of local use has declined, being largely confined to 'volunteer days' but anecdotal evidence suggests that visitors have found the woodland enjoyable. There is still plenty of scope for volunteer days focussed on hazel coppicing and scrub clearance.

Proposal 7

To continue to encourage/organise volunteer days.

4 Use by schools

Selside Primary School, which used to be regular visitor, now has its own woodland access and no longer visits. Since 2016 there has been no attempt to promote school use. If such use was requested it should be encouraged.

Proposal 8

To continue to encourage use of the woodland as an open-air classroom.

Summary

The woodland has established itself as a well-known and appreciated local feature. The original objectives of the plan continue to be relevant and, subject to the eight proposals, should continue to guide the management of the land until the next review in 2024.

Signed: A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J Chapman', is written over a horizontal dotted line. The signature is fluid and cursive.

John Chapman, Tree Warden , Skelsmergh and Scalthwaiterigg Parish Council

19 December 2019