

Community Woodland

1. I received a call today from the Forestry Commission's Sam Riley, whom Maggie and I met in January 2017 when he inspected the woodland and gave us very positive feedback about it.
2. This time he was calling me because he had carried out an inspection – without informing us in advance – in order to make a decision as to whether the Council should lose its Forestry Commission grant.
3. At your October 2017 meeting I reported: “The Clerk was asked to meet Emma Turner from the Rural Payments Agency for an inspection of the woodland on 12th September at less than 24 hours' notice. No report of the inspection has yet been received nor has the Council's annual payment been received but there was no indication of any major concerns. It was, however, suggested that the Council might be required to undertake some replanting in a year's time.”
4. We never received the promised report from Emma Turner, but Sam Riley informed me she referred our case to the Forestry Commission to decide whether it felt the Council was in breach of its grant conditions due to a concern, which she did express at the time, that too much of the site is open ground – the limit set in the Forestry Commission grant conditions is 20%.
5. Sam Riley now expressed three concerns, two of them in his case ones he had not expressed to Maggie and me in January 2017. He said he was concerned about:
 - Deer damage – he did speak about this to Maggie and me in January 2017
 - The large patch that is now bare of trees on the side closest to the City Council's field which is being considered as a site for spoil from the proposed floor relief channel
 - Ash dieback which he said he had observed on many of the ash trees. We were aware this disease would probably reach your woodland, but I was not aware it had done so. Ash trees were to represent half of the trees planted, according to the terms of the Forestry Commission grant.
6. I was not clear at the end of our conversation whether he would or would not recommend payment of your 2017-18 grant. I am optimistic he may do so but, if so, he is likely to impose a condition that the Council must now take steps quickly to replant the bare patch.

7. Sam Riley has also asked to have a meeting and the options are for him either to attend a Council meeting or for me to arrange a site meeting with him to which I feel it might be useful for us to invite Andy Gunn from Berkshire Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust.
8. At such a meeting we should discuss:
 - When to replant the bare patch and with which native species
 - What action to take about ash dieback and when.

Geoffrey Ferres
Parish Clerk
Wednesday 21st February 2018