

Notes of a site meeting at Chilswell Copse, Wednesday 4th November 2020

Present:

Andy Gunn, Berkshire Buckinghamshire & Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT)

Christine Chater (South Hinksey parish councillor)

Maggie Rawcliffe (South Hinksey Parish Council Woodland Committee)

Geoffrey Ferres (Clerk, South Hinksey Parish Council).

Pylon

1. The first thing to notice was that SSE's contractor has cleared the area underneath the pylon. The Clerk said the contractor had contacted him in advance. He had understood the work had to be undertaken and he simply advised the contractor to look out for nesting birds.
2. Andy said the work was necessary so SSE could get access to the pylon.

Replanting

3. Andy said the work day on 14th March 2020 was the last work he had done at the woodland before the first national lockdown. Volunteers had planted a mixture of native species to replace two areas of diseased Ash.
4. It was clear from observation that the cardboard tree guards have proved to be too short: lots of the newly planted young trees showed evidence of being nibbled by deer.
5. Andy said he could replace them with taller ones and he believed the Lime was pretty resilient.
6. Chris offered to ask the Council for a grant towards the cost of the replacement tree guards if Andy requested it.

Action: Andy

7. It also appeared from observation that most of the newly planted trees in both areas had survived the very warm, dry May: the Clerk admitted he had been pessimistic.
8. Andy believed the next replanting session might not happen in 2021 due to Covid-19 so he recommended that the Council takes steps to maintain interest in the development of the wood and encourage people to look forward to the chance to plant a tree in 2022.

9. The Clerk suggested articles in Echo might achieve this and offered to write for Echo whenever the opportunity arose.

Action: Clerk

10. Andy expressed the view that there is nothing so urgent it needed to be organised in 2021 even if volunteer sessions proved impossible.
11. Andy believed thinning was not necessary yet and, in any case, he believed the Forestry Commission tended to favour allowing what one might call “thinning by competition”.

BBOWT

12. The Clerk explained that the Council has only just arranged the payment to BBOWT for 2020 because of a problem with the Rural Payments Agency saying the Council did not own the whole woodland.
13. Chris asked Andy if he had any maps which record ownership. Andy said he would have a look.

Action: Andy

14. Andy said changes at BBOWT included a change to his role: he would now work across all three counties with a focus not so much on conservation as on volunteers. He would remain our contact for the time being.

Mowing

15. The Clerk had attended two of BBOWT’s Wild Parishes Webinars in the summer and asked Andy’s advice as to whether to adopt a “one cut” or a “two cuts” approach to encourage wildflowers.
16. Andy recommended a “two cuts” approach but advised there was nothing to gain by cutting now, so late in the year. The first cut should be made before the spring. Either way, the Clerk had been told it was essential to remove all the cuttings.
17. As Sanny did not have the equipment to collect the cuttings, the Council would need to thank him for his years of generous help and ask him to stop mowing as soon as it had arranged for someone else to mow the rides and remove the cuttings.
18. Andy said the public needs to have it explained that without mowing, there will not be wildflowers: too many people assume all mowing is wrong whereas some mowing is essential.
19. Andy said the City Council already cuts the area at the top of the hill and removes the cuttings so it would not be inconvenient for them to cut the rides at the same time with the same equipment.

**Action: Clerk to contact Laura Harlock and Sanny Nahhas;
Clerk to explain mowing changes to the community via Echo or Shinfo**

Paths

20. The Clerk said that BBOWT's Wild Parishes Webinars had recommended ensuring narrow paths were cut to encourage walkers.
21. The argument seemed to be that if people were encouraged to walk through the area it would help to build support for the woodland and walkers would often act as the Councils "eyes and ears" reporting if they saw anything that concerned them.
22. Andy said if paths were not created, the public often created them, but not necessarily where it was appropriate.
23. It was agreed the Council should pursue a plan to keep a narrow path cut around and across the site.

Action: Clerk

Pond

24. The Clerk had noticed a pond had been dug near the memorial bench to Clive Briffett. Andy said he had not arranged it. Geoffrey suggested in that case it had probably been arranged by Hilary Briffett and Maggie confirmed this was the case.
25. Everyone agreed it would be excellent to have a pond. Andy suggested the lining needed more protection and said he would be happy to offer Hilary advice if she contacted him

Action: Maggie to speak to Hilary

Next meeting

26. It might be many months before another face-to-face site meeting were possible so it was agreed the next meeting could be held using Zoom. Everyone would be able to visit the woodland in the intervening period, which would make up for next meeting there.

Action: Clerk to canvass dates for the next meeting

Geoffrey Ferres
Parish Clerk
Wednesday 4th November 2020