

REPORT TO PROPERTY COMMITTEE

6 SEPTEMBER 2022

AGENDA ITEM 12

Green Lane

Further to the discovery that Nettleham Parish Council owns Green Lane (Bridleway 219), the Property Committee wished to investigate how the Lane could be improved.

A meeting was held on 13th July with [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] of Nettleham Woodland Trust to discuss how this could be achieved from a biodiversity and ecology aspect as well as its amenity value to the village and nearby residents.

Hedgerows are on the decline in England yet they are invaluable in helping to clean the air, capture carbon, increase biodiversity and provide wildlife corridors. There has been no significant work carried out in Green Lane for decades and it was felt this was an ideal opportunity to take a radical approach to rejuvenate the area by significantly reducing the number of trees and re-introducing native hedging, particularly on the east side (All Saint's Lane) and attempt to eliminate the tunnel effect formed by the excess tree canopy. Green Lane was originally bounded by hedgerows which provided a far more beneficial habitat and the aim would be to re-create this as far as possible as the area is now quite sterile.

The proposal would be as follows:

On the east side (All Saints Lane) - Remove all sycamores and ash trees and other failing/damaged trees. Remove everything which hangs over gardens. Reduce existing hawthorns and hazels to a suitable height and interplant with other native species to form new hedging along the length of that east side. We would retain the field maples, hollies and limes but control their growth.

On the west side (Police HQ) – Thin out the sycamore and ash trees to produce fewer but better trees and prune back overhanging branches to create a more open aspect. This will also benefit the new tree planting on the police field as more light will be available to encourage their growth. More sunlight on the lane itself would enable it to dry out more effectively in the winter months when it can become very muddy. Wildflower planting would also be more successful in these conditions.

Professional contractors would carry out the main work but it is anticipated that planting and the more routine maintenance would be carried out by volunteers from the community, including members of Nettleham Woodland Trust. This does however raise a potential difficulty with the Council's Volunteer Policy. It was felt asking everyone to sign up to this will destroy spontaneity of people coming to help when they see the work happening and it would be a significant stumbling block to community participation. It was suggested that perhaps a copy of the policy and a signing-in sheet available on the day with the group leader giving a safety briefing might be possible. In the hope large numbers will turn out, as they did for all the police field planting, this seems like a reasonable way forward to avoid jeopardising the project.

Ideally work would start in autumn this year before the 2023 bird nesting season. Due to the high cost, it is accepted that the project, if approved, might have to be staged in two parts with a preference for starting on the All Saints Lane side first. Taking it over two seasons would also allow a period of transition from tunnel to hedgerow.

Quotes for this work have been requested from two contractors (the third declined to quote due to the size of the job) as follows:

Contractor 1 – [REDACTED] (excludes cost of work on trees with TPOs but it has been established there are no longer any in this category)

Contractor 2 – [REDACTED] + VAT

Suitable logs would be left available for residents to take away, everything else would be chipped and retained for mulching purposes.

New planting costs would be approximately £260 for 250 hedging whips and wildflower plugs approximately £120 for 150. An application for £500 has been submitted to LCC under their Community Wildlife Grant which has been accepted and will cover the cost of hedging whips/guards. It is possible we could obtain further hedging whips through LCC's tree scheme next year if required.

There is currently £3600 under budget heading 1142 for village facilities (trees). It was previously agreed that any underspend on trees would also be held in an earmarked tree reserve. Whilst it is an expensive initial outlay, savings would be made in the long run as the Council would inevitably incur tree felling/maintenance costs as the trees age whereas, once established, a hedgerow would require minimal maintenance.

It came to light two weeks ago that a licence might be required from the Forestry Commission to fell this many trees. A site visit took place on 1st September with the local Forestry Commission Woodland Officer and he was sympathetic to the proposal but advised a licence would be necessary and that five trees are required to be planted for every tree felled which equates to roughly 130 trees. However these can be of a variety compatible with a hedgerow scheme. A licence lasts for five years and takes approximately two months to process. As a courtesy the Tree & Landscape Officer at WLDC has been approached for comment but to date none has been forthcoming.

A letter setting out this proposal was sent in August to relevant residents on All Saints Lane and The Rookery asking for comments. To date five very positive responses have been received including offers of help with the project. An article was submitted to the September issue of Nettleham Matters and it has been posted on the Parish Council and village Facebook sites.

Feedback from the general public is likely to be mixed which is inevitable when such a big change is proposed. A lot of residents have only known Green Lane as it is now but that is no reason not to take the opportunity of revitalising the area and creating a more diverse and thriving habitat.

Cllr. Janice Clayton

It should be noted that [REDACTED] declared an interest as *their* property backs on to Green Lane