

## **Vicar's Wood Management Plan - Version 8, September 2020**

### **Principles**

- preserve existing amenity value, but continue to avoid too much human activity away from the main paths
- provide more shelter for wildlife, by mowing less often and less short, by modifying pruning practices, and by providing nest boxes and rotting wood
- encourage wildlife by gradually reducing the number of exotic trees and shrubs in favour of native plants chosen to provide not just visual appeal but shelter and food for wildlife too
- use voluntary effort where appropriate, to provide both physical help and expertise.
- minimise the amount of 'gardening' required - to save effort, to encourage natural habitats, and to minimise disturbance.

### **Overall Plan Outline**

- evolution, not revolution - retain all the largest trees forming basic structure
- limited and gradual felling to remove exotic smaller trees/bushes and maintain rather more light than complete tree cover would give (for amenity reasons and to encourage varied habitat with more wild flowers)
- retain central area of short grass, and keep paths clear of encroaching vegetation, especially if it's thorny or stings

### **Short-term Plan (next 5 years)**

NW area - develop hazel coppice with standards (existing walnut, ash, newly planted oak), prevent most other tree growth/regrowth; reduce ivy groundcover (but not the 'bushes' covering stumps).

Central triangle - introduce more wild flowers to grass area and verges; encourage raspberries and gooseberries in northern half; eliminate nettles and ivy; nurture birches; keep grass short (25 to 75mm).

NE area - maintain orchard theme, nurturing planted fruit trees, retain but thin wild plums, encourage wild flowers around young oaks.

SE area - gradually remove snowberry, replacing where necessary with native shrubs/small trees; begin to gradually trim back one of becksides yews, reducing impact of its eventual removal to allow remaining three to flourish (2 already removed).

SW area - gradually remove philadelphus, replacing where necessary with native shrubs/small trees; continue to thin wild plums to encourage succession; begin to reduce smaller plane, to minimise impact of its later removal; nurture cherry, hazel, holly & wayfaring tree plantings; maintain SW corner, keeping new plantings especially bluebells free of nettles, brambles, elder and exotic or over-dominant weeds.

All areas - allow ivy to climb a few selected trees, prevent it climbing remainder (dead growth when cut periodically is unsightly); retain nettles and brambles (wildlife value and reduced disturbance) except where noted; cut path verges within 0.6 metre of path edge where necessary to prevent vegetation encroaching, but not too short and relatively infrequently (this really needs improved machinery 'trimmer on wheels'), such that vegetation height is mostly kept in range 75 to 200mm, and with more variation so that verge becomes less like a mown

strip - assist this process by selective removal of nettles and brambles near paths; leave felled timber to rot where possible; continue to cut back ash/sycamore stump regrowth and seedlings; introduce and maintain more bird and bat boxes.

#### Distribution of maintenance tasks

Council to maintain paths, verges, seats, fences, notices, and fund some purchase of plants; Council-funded contractor to undertake lopping and felling; volunteers to undertake other tasks including clearing around new plantings and removing stump regrowth. All work and plans to be discussed between nominated councillor (Janice Clayton) and lead volunteer (Bill Ball) in advance.

#### **Long-term Plan (5 to 25 years)**

Experience and unexpected events will affect the long-term plan. The items mentioned here are only those which can be reasonably foreseen at this stage. None of the large trees is expected to reach the end of its safe life in this period, but one or two may need to be removed to prevent overcrowding or excessive shade. Where tree removal can be predicted as likely, this helps to plan for replacement if required. This is the main purpose of this forward look.

NW area - thin oaks planted in 2007 to four, and keep their lower trunks clear of side shoots; gradually fell 4 sycamores as oaks need more room/light; coppice hazel in rotation - say 3 per year or 5 every other year to give 8-10 year cycle. The walnut should be retained while safe, but may need removal by end of this period. An unknown to bear in mind is possible loss of the 2 large ash trees to die-back disease (not detected so far).

NE area - one of sycamores and/or maple may need removal to reduce crowding and increase light. The ash may succumb to die-back. The four oaks planted 2016 should eventually be reduced to one.

SE area - complete removal of snowberry

SW area - the plane tree nearest the path is gradually losing out to the other one, and its removal may be advisable at some stage.

All areas - ideally the Spanish bluebells should be removed and replaced by English, but so far latter have proved difficult to establish. If this is successful, the Turkish Squills might be similarly replaced by native bluebells. Similarly the double snowdrops would ideally be gradually removed and the single native forms allowed to replace them.

#### **2020/22 Plan**

Following substantial new plantings in the last 10 years, no further major projects are planned, as we need to wait for the trees to grow and the disturbed ground flora to find a new equilibrium without too much continued 'gardening'. Therefore volunteer work in 2020/22 is expected to be confined to the central triangle work and other maintenance tasks in the short-term plan.

#### Past Progress

Some things on earlier plans have been done and crossed off, here's a few reminders: Substantial plantings of oak, hazel, holly, guelder rose, wayfaring tree, birch, privet, pear, crab apple, sloe. Wildflowers successfully established: red campion, wild strawberry, woodruff, hedge bedstraw, great celandine, herb robert, shining cranesbill. Exotics removal: cotoneaster, false acacia, bladder nut.