

Witney Woodland Volunteers

Deer Park Wood Management Plan

DESCRIPTION

The site is approximately 11 acres in size and is owned by West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC). It lies between Deer Park Road and Range Road in Witney, Oxfordshire (Grid Reference SP336100, OS Explorer Map 180). It was a royal deer park until the mid 16th century and then grazing land, according to the Victoria County History. It is currently used for informal dog walking. There have been past incidences of traveller occupation of the site. In 2010 WODC entered into a legal agreement with Witney Woodland Volunteers (WWV) to allow WWV to manage the site for peaceful recreation and the protection of wildlife.

ENVIRONMENT

A site assessment was carried out by The Wychwood Project, who support WWV in the creation of a community woodland on this site. David Rees of the Oxfordshire Woodlands Project has also offered support. The site will provide an area of peaceful recreation for the residents of Witney, and improve the natural environment for wildlife. It will also be important as an educational resource for nearby schoolchildren, who will be encouraged to carry out research there, as well as setting up tree nurseries at their school and helping with on-site planting.

OBJECTIVES

WWV seeks to implement the following projects, thereby creating a wide range of natural habitats:

YEAR ONE

- a) Remove, with help from WODC, any rubbish left on site by fly-tippers, travellers, etc.
- b) Plant a mixed native hedgerow to provide physical screening from the nearby industrial estate and a natural habitat for birds, insects and small mammals. Gaps in the hedgerow on Deer Park Road will also be planted up as a shelterbelt against traffic noise. Species will be 60% hawthorn and a 40% mix of hazel, spindle, guelder rose, wayfaring tree, wild privet, field maple, dog rose and honeysuckle.
- c) Improve access to the site for pedestrians, while keeping vehicular access limited to maintenance visits, by upgrading the existing entrance in consultation with WODC. This work will be done using contractors approved by WODC.
- d) Rustic log seats (too heavy to be moved by hand) will be installed to form an “outdoor classroom” and picnic area.
- e) A network of paths offering routes of varying length will lead around the site, with wooden seat strategically placed along the paths as resting places.

YEAR TWO

- a) Create a hazel copse with native English bluebells. The hazel will be coppiced on a seven year rotation and the coppice spars used for hedge-laying, thatching and by local gardeners.
- b) Create a scrape in the damp grassland area where there are sedges, to support a

more diverse flora and fauna.

YEAR THREE

Create a fruit orchard comprising old English/Oxfordshire varieties of apple, pear and plum, which will be freely available to local residents.

YEARS FOUR & FIVE

Develop the existing areas of native woodland tree planting, working with nature and the landscape, to increase the site's biodiversity, beauty and interest. Curves will be extended from the existing plantation and informal pathways created through it. Species will include oak, ash, silver birch, hawthorn, crab apple, hornbeam, bird cherry, small-leaved lime, beech, Scots pine, alder, osier and willow, which will create various heights and interesting woodland edges to be observed from the main grassland and pathways. All plants will be bought as whips, which are much easier to establish, sourced in Oxfordshire and protected by guards from deer and rabbits.

ONGOING

- A central glade in the existing meadow will be created, where grass is kept short for recreational and educational events, e.g. picnics and school projects.
- Some areas of grass will be scraped, dug over and sown with wildflower seed to create bee meadows, as part of the UK national initiative to save bees.
- Some rough grass will be left to protect amphibians, reptiles, small mammals and birds of prey.
- Existing tree plantations will be managed as a mixture of high forest, where thinning will be required, and successional coppice rotation. This will provide a pleasing variety of tree structure.
- Bird and bat boxes of various types will be installed at suitable locations.
- Information will be provided to enable visitors to appreciate the site.
- Surveys recording wildlife species present will be conducted.
- Aftercare, maintenance and safety checks will be carried out regularly.

CONCLUSION

The site offers an excellent opportunity to increase woodland cover in West Oxfordshire, which is scarce, especially in the Witney area. It will involve local people in a very worthwhile project to improve the town, and will provide a much-needed refuge for wildlife. WWV has the skills, support and determination to carry out the project.