

Brief report on progress of the Woodland Project Group for August 2021 meeting of CHAFT trustees

1. Spraying of the aspen (poplar) suckers. This has been carried out in two rounds of spraying, the first aimed at catching the bulk of suckers and then a return visit a couple of weeks later to spray suckers missed on the first visit. The sprayed suckers need to be left in place for two to three weeks to ensure the chemical has time to travel fully into the root system.

The operative was briefed in advance that there must be no spraying on the CWD bank or anywhere on the CWD side of the bridle path and that spraying should only take place on a week day while children were in school. A WPG member met with the operative on site to discuss the spraying plan and to ensure that the briefing was respected. Signs were put up during the process to advise the public that spraying was in progress and, as far as possible, families known to make use of the play area with small children during weekdays were personally notified.

Suckers growing very close to existing shrub planting were not sprayed, to minimise damage to the planting. These suckers and suckers along the CWD bank will need to be cut back manually. The sprayed suckers also now need to be cut back.

2. Wood chip. The bridle path and the Debar footpath have both received a second layer of chippings. There are two retained piles of chipping which the WPG plans to use to mark out pathways and glades within the woodland tree whip planting layout.
3. Ongoing maintenance of the woodland area. Peter Busby and the Charney Army have kindly carried out mowing back of nettle growth and also, at Anna Moffatt's advice, an interim pruning of the restored willow arbour. This is thriving. Tim Fitzgerald O'Connor has provided mowing around the woodland area and, now that the suckers have been sprayed, will be harrowing the ground in preparation for replanting.
4. Benches and table. The new bench has been installed by the woodland, looking out to the play area so that it can benefit those walking in or near the woodland and also family members wishing to keep an eye on children within the play area. The picnic table will be incorporated into a woodland glade area as part of the replanting plan. We hope to be able to extend the life of one of the old benches.
5. The insect haven woodpile. Steph and John Wright are moving this to a better location and restructuring it.
6. Dry hedging. Positioning for the hedge lengths has been decided; suitable fence posts have been acquired by donation. The WPG will be seeking to involve families in building and ownership of stretches of dry hedge lengths, including small animal and insect 'hotels'. This will make use of the existing longer lengths of shrub and willow prunings, and future lengths from winter prunings of the willow arbour, cornus stands etc can be used each year to top up the dry hedging.
7. Village consultation and replanting plan. Ruth Clements has been encouraging response to the WPG consultation on residents' ideas for the woodland redevelopment. We have received feedback on species suggestions to encourage a range of wildlife, and professional advice on best groupings of species planting for tree viability, as well as ideas on how to improve the woodland area as a community nature resource. Responses have also included suggestions for the field more generally. Ruth is putting together the findings in a short report and we plan to involve Wessex Woodland

Management in discussion of this for decision on the preferred species and rough planting layout. We will then take this back to the Forestry Commission Officer for agreement of the increased species mix.

8. Whip planting. We are aiming at full planting this autumn, ideally in November/December, maybe linking in with National Tree Week (Saturday 27 November – Sunday 5 December) which marks the start of the tree planting season. Our intention is to make this a village event to mark the new woodland as a community resource.
9. Jubilee planting. The Woodland Trust is encouraging the nation to plant a tree for the Queen's Jubilee in 2022. There are a number of tree and hedging resources on offer free to community groups and the WPG is looking at applying for a hedging pack. The intention would be to use this as another way of adding in species diversity and the timescale would probably be autumn 2022, allowing us to concentrate on fulfilling the Forestry Commission licence requirements in 2021 and if necessary, spring 2022, and also to assess any loss of whips during the first year.

There is also the possibility of acquiring a single specimen tree to be planted as the official village Jubilee tree (cf the Jubilee Oak on the bus stop green). The WPG would like the CHAFT trustees to consider if this is something desired: might this be located somewhere on the Charney Field? Or should we recommend the idea to the Parish Council for location somewhere else in the village?

10. Long term plan and budgeting. The WPG has begun work on the maintenance and development plan. We are seeking to identify tasks for annual, biennial and longer-term maintenance and to identify associated costs. Some of these are small recurring costs. Others, such as periodic professional tree health surveys and remedial work, are less frequent more substantial costs but subvention funding should be set aside on an annual basis towards this.

Specific further development projects will need to be considered as part of a grant funded approach. This will include evaluation of ideas not related to tree species which have come forward out of the village consultation.

L. Gildersleeves