



Broadland Tree Warden Network

Low Farm Wood, Postwick Lane, Brundall, Management Report

By

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Introduction

This report is the first in what will be a series of reports to Brundall Parish Council on the progress of the management of Low Farm Wood, the 'F' shape linear site that located to the north of Postwick Lane in Brundall, almost opposite the Brundall Country Park, and laying within the farmland of Low Farm. The site is owned by Norfolk Council Farm Estates and for several years has been in the care of Brundall Parish Council. The Parish boundary runs along part of the site. To the east there is a short boundary with four dwellings in Beverley Road. It is illustrated on the map below. The wood is accessed from a short muddy path adjacent to a dwelling currently under construction.

This report should be read in conjunction with the aims and objectives set out and agreed in the "Low Farm Wood Management Plan" dated 2 May 2020.



Arable land surrounds the majority of the site which is mainly wooded habitats with scattered trees and shrubs along the perimeters of its northern part. The local community has free access to the site but it appears to be little used, probably because few people are aware of its existence.

The area is plantation woodland that was planted in circa 2005 but has never benefitted from necessary sympathetic thinning or formative "pruning" of the young trees. Indeed, thinning has been long-overdue and is necessary to allow light to penetrate to the woodland floor, in turn encouraging the development of ground flora.

Progress to Date

The Broadland Tree Warden Network commenced management of the wood on Tuesday 1 June 2021 at which time it was very difficult to estimate the length of time the initial thinning wood take. That initial thinning comprises the following stages

- a) approach the task in four distinct stages/sections (approximately 25% of the total area each), one at a time, commencing at the southern entrance to the wood and progressing in a northerly direction;
- b) removal of those trees manageable with hand tools;
- c) initial management all arisings (ie all cut material);
- d) removal of all larger trees necessitating the use of chainsaws; and
- e) final management of arisings.

Removal of Those Trees Manageable with Hand Tools

It immediately became apparent that far too much goat willow, also known as pussy willow, *Salix caprea*, had been planted and it had grown to such a height in such a short space of time (as the species does) that it was shading out most other species. Populations of *S caprea* often show hybrid introgression and that in Low Farm Wood is illustrative of that.

The majority of those trees were removed with hand tools, but some were too large for that and will necessitate felling with chainsaws while some will be retained, for the sake of biodiversity, where they are not crowding out other valuable species.

There is a surprising amount of buddleia, commonly known as the butterfly bush, in the wood but it has grown very tall and its value/beauty is lessened by that. The exact species is difficult to ascertain. All has been reduced in size with most being reduced to 0.5m to 1.0m and the remainder being coppiced.

There are a number of common oak, *Quercus robur*, growing in the woodland but they have been greatly suppressed by the goat willow. They are, in the main, spindly, but now that light has been allowed to permeate the canopy, they may well yet develop into decent specimens. In addition, a number of self-set oaks have been found and, in common with other self-set saplings in the wood as they are encountered, they have been marked with canes and protected with spiral guards to enable them to grow.

Silver birch *Betula pendula* appears to be growing in abundance and the greater majority of it will be retained as the species is an excellent nurse species for the oak.



A quantity of ash, *Fraxinus excelsior*, has been encountered and what we have found is typical of the species as a result of *Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*, an Ascomycete fungus that causes ash dieback, a chronic fungal disease of ash trees in Europe characterised by leaf loss and crown dieback in infected trees. Where dieback is apparent, the trees have been removed as there is no cure. However, trees can be in stage one of the infection (there are four recognised stages) and not display symptoms.

We are very conscious of the fact that, at the current time, there is no cure for the disease nor is there hope of one on the horizon. The only hope for the future of the species in the UK is the retention of mature trees in order that the disease may hybridise and therefore we shall retain some mature ash where it is safe (for the public) to do so.

Field maple, *Acer campestre*, appears to be doing better than the oak and several potentially fine specimens have been retained following sympathetic formative surgery. We have every confidence that the species will form a major component of Low Farm Wood in future years.

There is much hazel, *Corylus avellana*, growing in the wood, particularly on the woodland boundaries. The species is easily managed and has great value for wildlife. It is an excellent lower canopy species has been retained throughout with all plants being pollarded with a view to introducing a regime of rotation coppicing in future years.

Management of Arisings

The quantity of arisings from the initial management works has been considerably more than anticipated. In addition, we have inherited a considerable quantity of 'old' arisings, stacked at the southern end of the site, from previous thinning works.

That "inherited" quantity of arisings has been retained as it is highly likely that wildlife, including insects and invertebrates, have inhabited it so we have decided to retain it, basically undisturbed, other than by adding some freshly cut arisings. In addition to enhance the natural habitat, that increase in arisings will deter the public from attempting to access the woodland from other than the two entrances provided.

To date, a chipper/shredder has been hired for 15 days at a cost of £250.80 (inclusive of VAT). That cost was somewhat distorted by the fact that the first machine was faulty and we had a reduced hire charge for the replacement. Obviously, the hire charge was adjusted to reflect the faults with the machine.

Fuel cost for the chipper/shredder has been greater than we anticipated with 36 litres being consumed at a cost of £52.50.

Whilst the clearance of the central section of the southern part of the site has been completed, we still have to complete clearance of its eastern "wing" and we estimate that will take a further 40 man-hours to complete that. That, in turn, will generate a considerable quantity of arisings requiring a further 36 man-hours to process through a chipper/shredder which will be required for a further 3 days.

Therefore, to complete this southern section of the project it is estimated that we shall require a further 76 man-hours plus a chipper/shredder for 7 days at an estimated cost of £250 (inclusive of VAT) and 36 litres of fuel at a cost of £52.50.

Dealing with the work the Network has completed to date, cut logs (ie over 50 mm in diameter) have been retained and stacked in log piles to provide varied habitats for wildlife such as hedgehogs, mice, voles and various invertebrates. They are carefully constructed to provide access and exit, but secure, routes beneath the piles. They will provide both a secure nesting place (home) for creatures plus a food larder for those that wish to feast on invertebrates. Bees may well make use of them as well.

Unfortunately, we discovered that members of the public were more interested in free fuel for their wood burners than care for our wildlife, taking (stealing) logs from the piles. They selected those of a convenient size and left the piles in a "mess". The Network therefore found it necessary to erect signs adjacent to every pile informing the public why the piles had been left and that the selecting and subsequent taking of logs from the piles is actually theft.



Smaller section arisings have been chipped and shredded with the use of appropriate machinery and the result laid along the pathways within the wood to produce a safer footway and enforce the Network's original statement that **"no vegetative material shall be burned on or removed from the site"**. Whilst that may be somewhat more time consuming, the Network believes that it is the best environmental approach.

Furthermore, it has been met with unanimous public approval as the paths apparently become very slippery during winter.



Removal of all Larger Trees Necessitating the Use of Chainsaws and Final Management of Arisings

We shall, in the near future, remove the larger trees necessitating the use of chainsaws. That will, of course, result in a further quantity of cut logs and arisings which will be dealt with in the same manner as that generated to date.

We estimate that it will require 60 man-hours and a chipper/shredder for 3 days to tackle the task.

Therefore, we estimate that we require a further 136 man-hours and a chipper/shredder for 10 days to complete the first phase of the project.

Time and Expenditure

To date, 17 September 2021, the Network has spent 382 man-hours on the project and there have also been 10 volunteer hours. If we add to that our estimate of the time required to complete the operations necessary for this first phase of the project, we have a total of 518 man-hours. At £20 per man-hour the Broadland Tree Warden Network has therefore donated £10,360 to the project.

The cost of the chipper/shredder hire was somewhat distorted by the fact that the first machine was faulty and we had a reduced hire charge for the replacement. However, to date it has cost £250.80 (including VAT) for 15 days. If we add the estimated cost for completion of this southern phase, we have a projected figure of £650 (inclusive of VAT).

Fuel cost for the chipper/shredder has been greater than we anticipated with 36 litres being consumed at a cost of £52.50. We anticipate a similar amount of fuel being required to complete the southern section of the project.

Now, with the experience gained to date and making an allowance for the final northern phase being the most demanding, we can estimate the final project cost to be as follows.

	£
2 x Broadland Tree Wardens contributing 4,000 man-hours	0.00
1 x Parish Council member volunteer contributing 80 man-hours	0.00
Hire of chipper/shredder for 70 days @ £25.00 per day	1,750.00
300 litres of fuel for chipper/shredder	<u>210.00</u>
Total	<u>1,960.00</u>

The Network estimates, allowing for the fact that much of the work will be carried out during winter with adverse weather conditions, that it will require a total of 100 weeks to complete the project (allowing for holidays and days lost to adverse weather).

Safety Signs

Whilst surprisingly few members of the public use Low Farm Wood there is a regular use and the Tree Wardens have got to know those users. Whilst most are sensible and stay at a safe distance from us whilst we are working, others approach for a chat or information. Therefore, the Network has found it necessary to erect warning notices effectively cordoning off the areas being worked. That will protect visitors and The Network

Although chainsaws and the chipper/shredder can be heard (very clearly!) there is no sound as a tree being felled by hand begins to drop.



The Network shall use these safety signs for the duration of the project.

Wildlife

During its initial work, the Network has been careful to monitor signs of wildlife is pleased to report that removal of the dark, impotent environment of the first phase of its work has realised most encouraging results. The Network has recorded sightings/evidence of fox, *Vulpes vulpe*, that obviously use the woodland for cover when hunting on the adjacent arable fields.

As one would expect in this area, there have been early morning sightings of muntjac deer *Muntiacus reevesi*. The grey squirrel, *Sciurus carolinensis*, is often seen in the wood but Broadland Tree Wardens are pleased to report that they have yet to see damage by the species to the trees.

Rabbit, *Oryctolagus cuniculus*, damage is apparent at the base of several trees in the wood and one would expect a healthy population in the area. The use of spiral tree guards should prevent rabbit damage.

The number of birds has already increased significantly since work commenced.

We must mention a subject of serious concern as, during our work on the southern section, we have discovered a number of spent shotgun cartridges. One can only assume that they are a result of attempts to "control" wildlife. Whilst the Broadland Tree Warden Network is donating so much expertise and volunteer labour to the project, the reader will understand that this is of great concern and we trust that steps will be taken to obviate such practice.

Wild Flowers and Other Ground Flora

As stated in the “Low Farm Wood Management Plan” dated 2 May 2020, the woodland floor is currently devoid of ground flora and as soon as possible planting shall be carried out comprising common bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*, snowdrop *Galanthus* spp, primrose *Primula vulgaris*, red campion *Silene dioica* and sweet violet *Viola odorata*, etc. However, as previously stated, it is envisaged that the thinning of the trees will allow light to penetrate to the woodland floor and, in turn, will permit the natural development of ground flora.

An application has been made to the Norfolk Wildlife Trust for the supply of a selection of woodland wildflowers. As stated in the Management Plan, **under no circumstances will garden flowers or any unsuitable or invasive plants be planted.**

Norfolk County Council Farm Estates

The Network is very pleased to report that it has made formal contact with Norfolk County Council Farm Estates. A chance meeting with Tim Baldry, Senior Land Surveyor with the NPS Group, who was surveying the area of land to the south of Low Farm Wood with a view to it being sold to provide privacy for the eastern of the two barn conversions on Postwick Lane, resulted in him establishing a contact for us.

Tim informed Jenna Goodall Browne, Rural Estates Surveyor with NCC’s Corporate Property Team of the work we have undertaken and the fact that we expressed concern that no official contact had been established. That resulted in Jenna e-mailing the Co-ordinator of The Broadland Tree Warden Network who, in turn, immediately telephoned her to establish a working dialogue.

Jenna requested copies of the Network’s Management Plan for Low Farm Wood plus a copy of its certificate of insurance. On receipt of those she visited Low Farm Wood to inspect the work carried out and, as a result, again e-mailed the Co-ordinator of The Broadland Tree Warden Network saying that she “*was very pleased with the work that has been undertaken so far in the woodland and am very happy for you to continue to undertake the works as per the management plan. Now you have my contact details please do contact me if you need my assistance.*”

During their telecon Jenna confirmed that NCC plans to create a public footpath from Cucumber Lane to the north-east corner of Low Farm Wood and will discuss that with this Network in due course.

Information Boards

As stated in the Management Plan, the addition of two information boards will be a great asset to the site. One at the existing entrance from Postwick Lane and the second at the entrance from the suggested new footpath from Cucumber Lane (see above).

The Broadland Tree Warden Network has submitted a design for such information boards to the Parish Council.

Suggestions for Future Events and/or Use

It is apparent from the time the Network has spent working in Low Farm Wood that few residents of Brundall are aware of its existence. In addition, a wonderful educational resource is not being used. Therefore, Brundall Parish Council may wish to consider the following suggestions.

Next spring or summer the Parish Council could hold an open day in the wood where The Broadland Tree Warden Network will be pleased to conduct informative tours and answer questions. Apart from the printing of some leaflets (a tri-folded A4 sheet printed on both sides and printed on, say, an ink jet printer) there would be zero cost.



Low Farm Wood will be an excellent teaching resource for Brundall School as well as for Guides, Scouts, Brownies and Cubs. However, such use should not be at the expense of the ecology, so no camp fires or den building.

Perhaps the WI and/or the local gardening club would like an informative tour, conducted by Broadland Tree Wardens.

The Broadland Tree Warden Network will be pleased to assist when and where required.

Richard Farley,

Broadland Tree Warden for Brundall.