

EF25-022 CONSERVATION AND LAND MANAGEMENT

i) Conservation sub committee

The following was discussed at the meeting held on 28th August

1. Suggestions to improve the take-up at wildlife and habitat surveys include having contingent dates ahead of time in case of bad weather, options to join the survey for different sections e.g. 9:30 for location x, 10:30 location y and 11:30 location z.
2. Autumn work party list is largely set, just waiting for a date for the January work party, the date are as follows;

Date	Time	Location	Details
13.9	9.30-12.30	Normandy Pond	Removal of invasive non-native pond weed, edge dredging, litter removal, management of rushes and edge vegetation, ditch clearance. Need wellies, spades and shovels, loppers, saws, gloves and possibly wheelbarrow.
18.10	9.30-12.30	Manor Fruit Farm	Tree Care and Maintenance: the young trees need annual care to ensure they have the best chance of survival. We will be cutting back brambles and other vegetation, re-staking trees/adjusting tree guards and possibly mulching trees by Therapy Garden. Useful tools include loppers, secateurs, sickles, rakes, wheelbarrow, spade/shovel, strong bramble-proof gloves.
15.11	9.30-12.30	Normandy Common	Horse Ride maintenance: clearing the edges of the horse ride to create more open glades to improve biodiversity. Useful tools include loppers, rakes, bramble-proof gloves and wheelbarrow.
6.12	9.30-12.30	Normandy Common	Holly coppicing: opening up glades in the dense holly to clear around some of the mature oaks and improve light levels near the ground to increase biodiversity. Cut holly to be used to create rough dead hedges for invertebrate/small mammal cover and reduce likelihood of people and dogs entering the cut area. Useful equipment to bring – cutting tools such as saws and loppers and good quality gloves.
x.1.26	9.30-12.30	Normandy Common	Rhododendron Removal: Rhododendron is a highly invasive species that prevents other ground-level plants from growing and reduces biodiversity in woodland areas. We will continue to cut back the area previously worked on and expand into new parts. Cut wood is piled to create deadwood habitats as well.

			Useful equipment to bring – cutting tools such as saws and loppers, good quality gloves.
7.2.26	9.30-12.30	Manor Fruit Farm	Creation of dead hedge around seasonal pond by Therapy Garden. A lot of willow and other trees were cut by the seasonal pond a year ago to improve the ponds ability to hold water and enable access. We will create a dead hedge to provide a clear edge to the pond and to create habitat for invertebrates, amphibians and small mammals to live. Useful equipment to bring: cutting tools such as saws and loppers, good quality gloves.
14.3.26	9.30-12.30	Normandy Common	Rhododendron Clearance #2. Continuing the work and if the weather is suitable having a bonfire to burn the brash. We will check all areas of rhododendron prior to cutting to ensure there are no nesting birds.

3. Work at the pond needs to ensure that the RA is fully completed for this activity: The RA is on p46 of our RA pack.

In addition:-

- anyone working in the water or on the edge of the pond (currently mud but may be shallow water by 13th Sept) will be working in pairs.
 - Anyone working in the water will be in waders and will use a cutting tool, rake or walking stick to test water depth as they move.
 - All pairs in the water will have identified people on-land working nearby to support them if they get into trouble.
 - There are two life-rings at the pond which will be checked the day before and on the morning of the event to ensure they are useable and have not been vandalised.
 - The work party will not do in-water work at any point where the water is high, ie above mid-thigh.
 - The work party will not go ahead if the weather forecast is poor.
4. It was suggested to contact local Angling Societies to see if any would be interested in electro-fishing the pond
 5. Sarah Ivory-Donnelley has offered to help find ways of improving communication about the Conservation Work Parties and get more people involved, possibly including students at Merrist Wood and the University.

The Conservation Sub committee request that Estates Committee considers purchase of a brush cutter (type) machine that is capable of cutting growing willow, brambles and other scrub and can be used by members of the NPC maintenance team (or possibly appropriately trained volunteers).

Reason: the willow in the swales at MFF are overtaking the swales. Methods of reducing growth are a) treating with a herbicide, b) digging out or c) controlling growth by regular cutting and weakening the plant.

Herbicide use would probably be done with a spray as stems are small and numerous making them hard (costly) to wipe/paint and could impact non-target plants. And goes against our Pesticide policy.

Digging out is almost impossible as roots go down deep.

So cutting the best option. A brush cutter/strong strimmer could also be used to help manage areas of bramble (eg on MFF or Normandy Common ditches), keep the sides of the ditch between MFF and gardens open and similar jobs.

If our maintenance team can use this machine that would be more cost effective vs using Larkstel or another contractor, and can be done as and when required rather than guessing ahead of time the frequency and timing.

Matter for Consideration

1. Does committee agree that our maintenance team are best positioned to manage the willow?
2. Does committee agree to the purchase of a suitable cutter?

ii) Surrey Choices

Three areas of work have been identified as suitable to ask Surrey Choices to do:-

- a) 1 day - Clearing the area of ruderals opposite Quinta Cottage near the Pond. This was cleared two years ago and doing it again improves the diversity of plants that grow there. In addition there are a number of non-native plants visible in summer, but to enable access in early summer the area needs cutting back in winter.
- b) 1-2days - Clearing back vegetation along the ditch between MFF and gardens as far as the ditch goes in both directions from the culvert entrance, and again back to the holding pond. Early autumn is ideal so can see the ditch before the winter rains.
- c) 1day - Vegetation clearance at Normandy Common – the area under the pylons from Hunts Hill Car park to the stream, brambles around the two streams near the swings and sedges on the edge of the stream by the picnic area. This will all help to increase biodiversity of plants in these areas.

Cost of Surrey Choices (in autumn 2024/25) was £120 per day. This includes at least 2 leaders and 3 or 4 clients with a good set of tools including brush cutters, strimmer's and they can do chainsaw work if required and conditions are suitable.

Matters For Consideration

Does committee agree to ask Surrey Choices to do these 3 – 4 days work?

iii) **Scythe Purchase**

Three volunteers/councillors took part in the full scything training and one volunteer was there all day, but could not scythe due to a health. That volunteer already scythes, but found the information very useful.

A scythe would be useful to manage key areas of grassland such as the wet area by the tennis courts, parts of Manor Fruit Farm, the edges of the horse ride and possibly other areas in Normandy Common (e.g. grass cutting if too wet for machinery). A scythe would only be used by trained volunteers.

Costs of Scythe:

Quotes/prices for a good quality Austrian scythe that can be adjusted to fit people from about 5 ft to 5 ft10 from sites recommended by the Scything Instructor.

<https://www.scythecymru.co.uk/product/minimum-scythe-kit/> -

Total price is £163 including VAT and postage.

<https://www.thescytheshop.co.uk/>

Total Price is £172 including VAT and postage.

<https://wildscythe.co.uk/tools/>

Cost for Scythe £165 including VAT (postage cost unknown)

Matters For consideration

Should the council purchase a scythe?