

BUSH WALK WOODS COMMUNITY BIODIVERSITY PROJECT KETTERING, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE (PHASE 2) AREA 7 EMAD, KIER HIGHWAYS

BIG Biodiversity Challenge Award Category: *Community Engagement*

Project overview

Working collaboratively with the woodland owners and alongside their 'Corporate Social Responsibility' agenda, the Environment Team of Area 7 continue to voluntarily steer the management of a protected ancient woodland and proactively build on links with the local community through educational outreach via a second phase in 2018-9.

What were the biodiversity conditions on site, prior to the enhancement?

The Ginpat Charitable Trust strives to promote the protection of the natural environment for public benefits, a value shared by Kier Senior Ecologist Dr James Littlemore who personally volunteered to offer specialist advice on how to manage their unique asset. Bush Walk Woods is a 26 acre 'coppice with standards' ancient woodland afforded protected status as a SSSI. Rich in ancient woodland indicator species (*Plate 1*) but over-run with deer, key management recommendations to maintain the SSSI in favourable condition are ongoing and include coppicing, ride (or forest track) management and halo-thinning around the oak standards.

What were the reasons behind this project?

Kier's input has been twofold: (1). to enhance the nature conservation and biodiversity value of the wood through the synthesis of a woodland management plan to maintain the favourable SSSI status, and (2). to increase awareness of its special character by co-ordinating engagement to broaden public awareness of biodiversity and woodland resilience issues. This is by driving Natural Capital initiatives through hosting local wildlife awareness walks, practical woodland work parties and working with local stakeholder groups (*Plate 2*).



Plate 1: Bush Walk Woods is a Site of Special Scientific Interest based on its unique and colourful spring flora.



Plate 2: The 'Walk on the Wildside' event attracted over 30 local people and all agreed it was a great way to spend an summers evening!

What were the biodiversity measures taken?

Now in phase two, the Kier approach continues to foster true collaboration amongst multiple stakeholders to ensure envisaged biodiversity targets are achieved. The previous woodland management plan has been revised by involving and mentoring University of Northampton undergraduate students and liaising with Natural England. Long-term aims will maintain a site of low intervention, but locally create a more diverse woodland structure and promote tenure of woodland grant aid to assist in future tree thinning operations as well as encouraging natural regeneration by coppicing. Work in phase 2 (2018-9) has tackled 'Action A' in managing lowland mixed deciduous woodland under the Northamptonshire BAP (2015) by re-instating traditional coppicing to certain areas of the wood (Plate 3).

Community awareness activities and projects have proven key, including in particular bat walks, practical conservation work parties over the winter and specialist bird walks hosted by The University of Northampton (Plate 4). Members of the public were invited to the private wood to participate in these events. Key to the success of these endeavours was liaison and attendance at meetings with others including Orlingbury Parish Council and with all Trustees of the GCT. Additional organised conservation work parties were implemented over the winter months, which implemented the measures outlined in the revised management plan. Kier staff have even overseen the use of materials liberated from the wood by green woodworkers.

All of this hard work has been accomplished by Kier ecologists who have continued to volunteer their own time, clearly demonstrating their enthusiastic commitment to the biodiversity cause and going above and beyond normal business practice.



Plate 3: Re-instatement of coppicing to the woods has led to greenwood country crafts instruction, including the production of traditional split hazel wattle hurdles.



Plate 4: Community outreach has helped to co-ordinate events, including this woodland bird walk hosted by The University of Northampton.

Further information

The case-study of Bush Walk Woods SSSI provides an ongoing and legacy building opportunity for Kier Highways staff to work with multiple stakeholders on common goals of sustainable woodland management, biodiversity gain and community awareness. Survey work carried out with local students suggests that the ecological condition of the wood has improved. The project team have been able to share expertise and train each other and others across disciplines and are looking forward to phase 3 of the work in tandem with the GCT. In terms of mechanisms for community outreach a useful tip to pass on is that using social media to advertise public events will only go so far – to be fully inclusive, Kier staff here went the extra yard to attend extensive community meetings and engage with the local population in more old fashioned ways! Fitting perhaps, given the ancient legacy of the site and our future plans (including the setting up of a ‘Friends of...’ group) steered by enthusiastic individuals with measurable practical outcomes to ensure Bush Walk Wood remains in favourable condition for future generations to enjoy (Plate 6).

Project Team

Voluntary leader: James Littlemore (Kier)

Partnership organisations: Ginpat Charitable Trust (Trustee, Dudley Gibbard); The University of Northampton (Associate Professor of Ecology, Dr Duncan McCollin); Orlingbury Parish Council (Deputy Chair, Deborah Ambrose-Coombs).

What was the motivation for carrying out the enhancement?

After one event, a participant said: *‘I’ve driven past this wood for years and didn’t even realise all this was here. I’ve come along tonight and really enjoyed learning about wildlife, tried some wild foragers tea and even made some new friends! I’m all signed up to the next practical conservation event too!’.*

This statement encapsulates the social ethos driving this community project and demonstrates the importance of engaging with, and understanding synergies between, people and biodiversity.



Plate 5: Time for toasting marshmallows by the open fire and making new friends at a Bush Walk Woods community event – a true ‘green prescription’ to combat nature deficit disorder.



Plate 6: Innovative community engagement at Bush Walk Woods has resulted life-long learning with a positive ‘thumbs up’ from one young attendee!