

CHURCH FIELD MANAGEMENT PLAN

1. Introduction

The Working Party was set up by the Parish Council in September 2003 to look at the history of the field, consult the current residents of the village, and set out both a vision and management strategy.

2. Working Party

Mr D Pryke
Mr B Barker
Mr B Hawtin

3. The Current Situation (2003)

The field and the major features and plantings within it, have been surveyed and a map of the whole area is attached.

While it is important always to consider Church Field and Tricker's Wood as a 'whole', it is helpful to look at the individual main features.

3.1. Tricker's Wood:

A small area of young and mature trees, adjacent to the road.

The main mature trees, plus those in the adjoining property, are protected by a Tree Preservation Order - Sycamore, Beech, Ash, Turkey Oak, Hawthorne and Holly. Many self sown sycamores and elder have grown up and need thinning or removal.

Aconites, bluebells plus a few snowdrops and daffodils appear in the spring; though bluebells, in particular, are frequently browsed by the deer and do not mature. In summer, an undergrowth of nettles and cow parsley grows up.

3.2. New plantations:

South of Tricker's Wood, are the three areas of mixed trees and shrubs planted in 1992/3. Specimen trees within these areas,

though still relatively young, have now reached 20-30 feet and the 'undergrowth' of trees and shrubs such as dog rose and hazel is quite thick. The lower areas were quite densely planted and with earlier pruning now form almost impenetrable thicket, interspersed with some stunted specimen trees up to 20 feet. As originally intended, the three areas provide very effective screening of the 'occasional' car parking area when this is in use. Old deer fencing has been taken down and rolled up but remains to be removed or redeployed.

Also in this area, are three young oaks that have been planted by the adjacent landowner, on the far side of the fence, along the southern boundary of Tricker's Wood.

3.3. Central Horse Chestnut:

This tree, planted in 1985, stands alone almost in the centre of the field (which at that time was open grazing). It was no doubt intended to become a major feature in the future and will certainly do so.

3.4. Pilots' Way:

Adjacent to Pilots' Way is the line of beeches planted to replace the diseased elm scrub, plus a number of oaks and a sweet chestnut planted earlier. Only remnants of the islands of low shrubs have survived the two very dry summers since they were planted.

3.5. Open Field Area:

About 60-70% of the original field remains as open grassland, sloping downwards on the southern side and providing wide views of the river and towards Broke Hall. The grass requires periodic cutting, and the Council and the village are indebted to those who have kindly volunteered to undertake this task in recent years. There are several patches of thick nettles on the southern boundary.

4. The Place and Function of the Field in the Village

One thing that is revealed by looking at the history of the field is that a 'vision' of its purpose, place or use within the village has never been explicitly formulated. Its status in planning terms was changed to a 'Playing Field' and villagers and Parish Council members were asked more than once for suggestions for its use. The proposed and actual

uses of the field were many and various including letting for grazing, events such as car boot sale and hog roast, use as a caravan site, use by The Ship for outside eating area, site for a new village hall and village car park.

The main development, the planting of new areas of trees within the field, arose from a plan to create a car park behind the wood – an idea spawned from a chance enquiry from Suffolk County Council seeking public car parking in the area - and the coincidental receipt of information on the District Council's tree planting scheme.

The central contention of the working party's investigation is that the development, maintenance and use of the field and wood should be based on an agreed overall 'vision' of their place and function within the village and surrounding area.

Village Consultation:

To assist the formulation of such a vision, the working party invited all residents to express their views. Disappointingly only four written responses were received, three of which were from residents close to the field and a fourth in the form of two very comprehensive, informed and structured papers received from Mrs H Thompson. One in particular addresses the 'vision' aspect within a useful framework and while the group do not subscribe to Mrs Thompson's viewpoint or emphasis on every issue, her structured analysis of the issues is very much in line with, and has contributed greatly, to that adopted by the group.

5. A Suggested 'Vision'

In defining the place and function of Church Field within the village, we believe that several different, but interconnected, aspects need to be considered:

- The landscape context – its place in the surrounding landscape
- A 'natural' place
- A Place for Recreation
- Wildlife and conservation
- A *village* space
- Security of the field
- Security of villagers.

5.1 Landscape:

Church field is located in an area to the south of the village, of exceptional rural beauty. The major characteristic of the whole area is of openness with the wide views across the valley to Broke Hall, Home Wood, the creek and river. Church Field is an integral part of that landscape - a place for experiencing that openness, and an open space that is part of the views back to our lovely church from the river and creek. In considering any uses, development proposals and management regime, this must be the major factor – preserving the openness and the ability of villagers, now and in the future, to enjoy it. It is also in keeping with the wishes of the donor of the field who wrote in 1978 *“My purpose in buying this land in 1948 was to prevent any sort of development which could spoil the view of the river from the church and of the village from the river”* to be *“kept as an open space for all time”* (his underlining).

5.2 A ‘Natural’ Place:

The field sits in a natural rural setting of which it is a part. It is itself a natural, not built amenity and greatly valued as such by the village. It must be maintained and managed to preserve both its harmony with the surrounding landscape and its own natural beauty.

5.3 A Place for Recreation:

Again, an intention of the original donor. There are many ways that the village can use the field for recreation:

- A place to walk, picnic or just sit and enjoy the view.
- A place for occasional village events. The village is very fortunate to have such a lovely site for events such as the Millennium Fair. The suitability for such functions must be maintained by keeping the open grass area unobstructed and appropriately maintained.
- An occasional car park for village and church events.
- An area for play. To date, villagers have been against the construction of a children’s play area and colourful modern play equipment would not be appropriate in the landscape context. But, there may well be other more subtle ways of enhancing the natural attractiveness as a place for youngsters to play.

5.4 Wildlife and Conservation:

Conservation of our natural environment and encouraging wildlife are desirable goals per se. Developments and a maintenance regime that encourage wildlife through an enrichment of habitat can significantly contribute to enhancing the enjoyment of the field and wood and are to be encouraged. However, they must be subservient to the maintenance of the field as an open space. It is not the purpose of the field and wood to be areas for wildlife projects for their own sake – a kind of village wildlife ‘allotment’.

5.5 A *Village* Space:

The field and wood belong to the village and should be maintained as a quiet **village** space. It should **not** become a ‘county’ public facility like Nacton Shore, frequented by large numbers of outside visitors and undesirables.

5.6 Security of the Field:

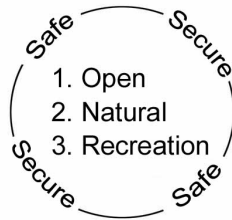
The amenity of the field would be lost or compromised if there were unauthorised vehicular access, and the potential legal cost of removing unwanted occupants is high. Keeping it secure from the road is essential.

5.7 Safety of People:

- The roadside fence must prevent young children dashing into the road.
- The field and wood are well used and, thankfully, there have never been any reported incidents of personal attack or vandalism. Developments and plantings must not create places where an attacker might hide, or facilities that might encourage unwanted congregation of undesirables. A Risk Assessment has included this aspect and must be regularly reviewed and acted upon. It would be appropriate to seek the guidance of our local police.

5.8 In summary:

- An open space from where the beauty of the surrounding landscape and wildlife can be enjoyed and that is part of the views back to the church from the river and creek.
- An open space of natural beauty and wildlife that can be enjoyed in its own right.
- A safe and secure village area for recreation.



6. Management Principles

We believe that management of the field and wood should be governed by the following principles.

1. The wishes of the original donor that the field should be kept as an open space for recreation should be a first guiding principle in evaluating any proposals. However the legal restrictions that must be observed are those laid down in the Deed of Assent.
2. The historically rural and 'natural' character of the field and wood must be preserved, avoiding any development that introduces man-made features more characteristic of an urban park.
3. Any planting to be of native species only, in keeping with the surrounding rural landscape.
4. Any planting and pruning to be such that, now or in the future,
 - a. The open views from the field are not obscured,
 - b. The open views from the road & Pilot's Way are preserved,
 - c. The views of the church from the river and creek are preserved,
 - d. The views of those living in the area are not obscured (see 6. below), subject to 7. below.
5. Developments that enhance and enrich the field and wood as habitat for wildlife are to be encouraged, but must be subject to 4. above.
6. 'Good Neighbour' principle. Use of the field and wood are not to detract from the amenity enjoyed by those living nearby,

now or in the future – subject to 7. below.

7. The field and wood is a village asset and it is the responsibility of the Parish Council to manage them for the benefit of the whole community. Development/planting or use of the field that compromises 4d) or 6) may be justifiable if the benefit to the village as a whole is deemed to outweigh the loss of amenity.
8. Maintenance to be directed at
 - a. preserving the amenity (pruning, grass cutting, planting)
 - b. keeping it a safe place for people to enjoy
 - c. keeping it secure against intruders.

7. Management Plan

Over the years a number of management plans and development recommendations have been formulated:

- SCDC Landscape Officer's plan of 1992 on which the new plantations were based.
- The deliberations of the Millennium Committee while in charge of Church Field 1999-2000. (See Appendix 2)
- The observations of a Conservation Officer from Suffolk Wildlife Trust.
- Reports from Mr M Matthews and Mr D Long in their capacity as Tree Warden.
- Various comprehensive proposals from Mrs H Thompson including those submitted to this Working Party, backed up by a site visit.
- Observations and advice given to the Working Party by Mr R Hardwick.

Many of these have much in common. All have been carefully reviewed and the detailed recommendations and advice weighed against the vision and management principles formulated above.

The development and management of the field and wood need always to be against an overall plan and objective, but it is helpful to consider a number of individual areas.

7.1 Tricker's Wood

The whole of Tricker's Wood was made the subject of a Tree Preservation Order in 1984. The Order is worded "trees specified by reference to an area" i.e. falling within the boundary of the wood. Any work necessary on a tree covered by a TPO has to be done by qualified professionals and with the specific permission of the District Planning Authority. We have clarified with the District Council that the trees covered by the order are specifically those that were present when the order was made. All the trees in the wood at that time were identified and plotted, but since then, many have been destroyed by the '87 hurricane and subsequent gales, the wood has been divided with the building of the bungalow, new trees have been planted and many self-seeded trees have grown up.

There is an urgent need to revise these records, and as a start, we have identified with the District Council's Arboricultural Officer those remaining trees covered by the Preservation Order. He has also confirmed that they are safe and healthy and require no attention apart from removing some small side growths from the base of one tree adjoining the path – a task we may do ourselves. Written confirmation of the issues discussed with him is awaited.

Maintenance and Development

- i) There is general consensus of advice that the self-seeded elders (many already dead) and multi-trunked sycamores that have grown up, should be removed. This will open the canopy and allow some specimen oaks and beeches to be planted in the space created. Larger pieces of timber removed can be stacked to provide habitat for wildlife.
- ii) Central Glade
There is a central glade in which bluebells, snowdrops and a few daffodils emerge in spring. This is an attractive feature visible from the roadside footpath that should be nurtured and improved. Both native and 'imported' bluebells are present, and the latter should be removed as they will hybridise the natives. Aconites and wood anemones can be added. The summer undergrowth should be allowed to grow and die back naturally in autumn.
- iii) New Pathway
A new pathway going from the gate through to the SE corner has been suggested, constructed of wood chippings generated from the smaller debris removed in a clear up. While this would

enable people to enjoy the wood more intimately, such access could also provide a place for 'lurkers', and on balance we believe this should not be pursued.

iv) Fencing

To date, fencing the roadside boundary has been regarded as unnecessary or a low priority, but after a clear up, it might be felt that the road boundary needed to be fenced. A suggested holly hedge as an alternative would be unsuitable, blocking the view into the wood and central glade spring flowers.

v) Roadside Verge

Nettles are a problem along the verge. It is periodically mown but the fall of the ground into the wood makes it difficult to control the nettles adequately. Use of a specialised weed killer might need to be considered.

vi) Bat and Bird Boxes

The wood is a good site for bat and bird boxes. They should be restricted in number, preferably be constructed of natural rather than sawn wood and be inconspicuous. With appropriate advice, they might include an owl box high in one of the mature trees.

The work to be done:

- Draw up a plan of work and mark any trees for removal.
- Get costs of any professional work needed.
- If some work can be done ourselves, this can be organised.
- This work should be done this winter. Larger pieces of removed timber to be stacked in suitable locations as shelters/habitat for wildlife.
- When clear, we will be able to see what we have got and assess any potential/need for new planting – e.g. new standard trees such as Beech and Oak (both already present).

- Re-map the position of all trees in the wood. This needs to be kept up to date in the future.
- In spring identify the plants and prepare plans for any additional planting the following autumn.
- In autumn/winter plant new specimen trees as decided.

7.2 New Plantations:

Plantation 1, south of Tricker's Wood:

The overall aim was to create a mixture of low trees and shrubs permeated by a few specimen trees growing to maturity. The deer fence that protected the area since planting, fell into disrepair and has been removed.

Specimen trees need lower side branches removed and a suitable (e.g. spiral) guard put in place to protect from deer damage; some already evident. The rest of the growth needs to be reduced in height to promote lower thickening by coppicing, pollarding and thinning as appropriate. There is general pruning to be done to manage brambles, dog roses and self spread hawthorns, but coppicing needs to be done in small areas on rotation and with removed brushings used to provide protection of the new growth from deer.

Plantations 2 and 3 on the south border:

While the original aim was as in plantation 1, this is an area which is very sensitive in respect of effect on neighbouring properties where concern has been expressed that trees left to mature to full height would impair the views currently enjoyed. A decision was made some time ago to maintain these areas purely as 'thicket' and the working party would endorse this in line with the 'good neighbour' principle outlined above. To maintain as thicket, again requires rotational coppicing and pollarding. Some specimen trees may not survive this treatment and will have to be sacrificed.

The work needs to be carried out by professionals, or volunteers working under the direction of an expert.

7.3 Other Trees south of Tricker's Wood:

The planted trees to the south of Tricker's Wood and the Horse Chestnut in the centre of the field seem to be thriving and need no attention apart from a deer guard.

7.4 Pilot's Way

The new beeches have been well mulched and are growing well but continue to need monitoring through hot dry summers. The trees at the SE corner of the field are now well established. The majority of the saplings forming the three islands of natural scrub did not survive the exceptionally dry summer following their planting. The few that did were thoroughly mulched this year. The islands, to be maintained at 3-4 feet, were planted as a compromise between replacement of lost wildlife habitat and retention of the widely appreciated, new open vistas across to Home Wood and Broke Hall. Whether to replace those saplings that have died and retain the islands needs to be judged against the vision of the field and management principles set out above and on this basis, it is proposed that surviving saplings in the lower two islands are replanted in the area nearest the Ship.

A 2 metre wide strip along the line of the beeches, within the field, should be left un-mown to provide cover for wildlife and to encourage wild flowers – the same principle as is used in the nearby grassland meadows.

7.5 Grassed Area:

The grassed areas provides the prime utility area – where people walk, sit, can have picnics or hold village events and needs to be kept cut through the summer. The current mowing regime is reckoned to be doing a good job at maintaining the grass. Specific points of detail for attention are:

- (a) If clippings are not collected, care must be taken to avoid large clumps of clippings which can be damaging.
- (b) A buffer zone of uncut grass and vegetation, ~ 2 m wide should be left along Pilot's Way and the whole of the southern boundary, except where we have a

nettle problem.

(c) Nettle problem areas:

There are several large patches of nettles along the southern boundary which need to be eradicated by frequent mowing (using 'Arthur') through the summer. If this does not work after a couple of years, a special weed killer should be used.

(d) Wild Flower Area:

Establishment of a wild flower area has been suggested many times. It would enhance the field and be in keeping with the natural setting so it should be tried. However, it is not an easy project, requiring infertile soil, and success is not guaranteed. The expert advice is to leave an area uncut April – August and see what comes up before thinking about wild flower seeds or plants. When cut, it needs to be first disturbed by walking over it and the grass raked off afterwards. Further cuts October and March if necessary. The most appropriate area is to the south of the path across the field, within the 'bay' formed by the curve of the fence. The area that can be used is restricted by a patch of nettles that needs to be eradicated as above.

7.6 Fencing:

Maintaining the fences is essential to keeping the field and wood secure from vehicular intrusion. The post and rail fence along the roadside has recently been installed. A fence along the Pilot's Way boundary should be avoided if possible. The post and wire fence along the southern and western boundaries will need to be repaired or renewed in the near future. It should be maintained as post and wire as this is the least visually intrusive.

The deer fencing removed from around the plantations needs to be cleared away, retaining any items that could be reused for repairs or tree guards.

8. Future Management Arrangements

A major issue which has been identified by several people in the past is the need for properly organised management. As the field has

been developed, the maintenance demands both in terms of the amount of work and the level of expertise needed, has escalated. The village is fortunate in having many hard-working volunteers, but some future work will need to be done by expert contractors.

The field is 'minded' and currently managed by the Church Field Warden. It is recommended that a small working party of three councillors, be set up to manage the field. It would appropriately continue to be called 'The Church Field Management Working Party', but would have different terms of reference and different members from the current working party. It need not be chaired by the Church Field Warden, but should include both them and the Tree Warden. It would be empowered to co-opt people that could help. The working party would manage the field in accordance with the vision and principles laid down and advise the Council each year of work to be done in the following year together with any financial implications. On getting clearance from the Council for that work, it would organise volunteers or professionals as necessary.

The current working party could prepare the new terms of reference in time for the Council to set up the new working party at its annual meeting in May. As previous groups set up in the past to manage the field have not always been successful, the Council would review the situation again in a year's time.

9. Further Developments

a) Wheelchairs and pushchairs:

At present the lovely views and natural surroundings provided by the field and wood cannot be enjoyed by anyone confined to a wheelchair – just the people who would appreciate it most, spending much of their time indoors. It would spoil the field to create formal tarmac paths across it, but the possibility of more natural alternatives should be investigated – perhaps creating a network of smooth grass paths.

b) Further Benches:

There is scope for more benches but the danger of providing sites for unsavoury behaviour needs to be considered. They are of low priority.

A picnic table has been suggested but the danger of misuse, and

of making the field into a 'county' attraction is prohibitive.

c) Children's play area:

A children's play area is wanted by parents in the village (recent questionnaire) and deemed by the District to be needed. Villagers were very against a play area on the field (village plan meeting Oct '02) and it is difficult to see how a safe enclosed area could be built without spoiling the natural nature of the field. A less formal play area of old logs has been suggested.