

Report to Stody and Hunworth Parish Council  
Conservation and management work carried out on Hunworth Common  
Spring 2021 - Spring 2023

**Aim**

For volunteer work parties to continue the work begun in 2020 to manage and maintain the woodland of Hunworth Common in a sensitive and sustainable manner.

**Volunteers and working 2021/2/3**

The team of regular volunteers has grown to seven at the time of writing but anyone is welcome and residents of Stody, Hunworth and the surrounding area who are interested are encouraged to contact the PC who can in turn pass details on to the conservation group.

All the volunteers come with with a passion for nature, conservation and caring for the common, additionally the group benefits from the knowledge and experience of a former forestry worker and tree expert along with a trained and insured tree surgeon.

Operating mainly on Saturday mornings in 2021, the volunteer group worked a total of 89 man-hours or 11 days, in 2022 169 man-hours / 21 days and so far in 2023 the total so far is 60 man-hours.

**Coppicing**

Coppicing of hazel has continued during each winter to create a rotation of up and coming hazel with approximately 40% of stools on the common coppiced so far. Coppicing of hazel is completed for this season (winter 2022/3). A number of very large stools have ben left as they are still very alive and as this is not a commercial woodland they provide a very lovely architectural structure to the woodland. In time they will be coppiced especially if they become dangerous or or a threat to walkers or other trees.

**Thinning and tree management**

There are areas on the common where large numbers of self-seeded sycamore have established but often are not viable due to overcrowding or have suffered barking by deer and grey squirrels. These trees are being selectively thinned and may return as coppice or where stronger specimens are found they are brashed for protection and left to grow on in the hope they will eventually make mature trees.

An area of ash trees was planted in 1980 (know as the Queen Mother's plantation). It is believed that this area was not managed in any way after the planting and consequently the trees that have survived are disproportionately tall for their age and many have been affected by ash dieback. Three of these trees have been topped out to remove dead and dangerous branches and left as standing habitat. Where identified as unsafe trees will be felled, cleared and stacked for habitat. This work is always carried out in consultation with and approval of North Norfolk District Council (NNDC) tree officer.

Management of the woodland and increased human footfall on the common has resulted in many of the paths remaining passable so it has been possible to limit clearing to hand tools and only one session with a petrol brush-cutter, much less than in previous seasons.

**Bracken and bramble**

Over time bracken and bramble have advanced and dominated areas of the common which would have historically been open and clear, the group has carried out selective clearing in a number of test areas to control the advance of bracken and bramble and encourage the return of flora suppressed by them. This was commented very positively on by a surveyor from Norfolk Wildlife Trust who visited the common in the summer and autumn of 2022. He observed that it would take several years of continuous clearing for an area to return to it's pre-bracken state.

**Planting**

Over winter of 2021 and 2022 trees and shrubs have been planted around the common in carefully chosen areas. Sourced from NNDC and the Trust for Conservation Volunteers (TCV). The trees planted are a part of the national Queen's Green Canopy initiative which has pledged to plant a million trees in public spaces around the UK. The trees planted on the common are a broad mix of native species that will create hedgerow, understory and canopy which will add greater balance to the existing tree cover and reintroduce understory shrubs and coppice varieties that will improve and broaden the biodiversity of the common.

In 2021 500 saplings provided by NNDC were planted across the common 300 of which were planted in close order in an area on the northern edge to create a dense area for wildlife. These trees have been left unguarded so a low wire fence was erected to deter deer. Despite the very hot and dry summer of 2022 the survival rate was well over the norm of 50%.

25 Feb 2023 a team of 10 volunteers (including a 7 year old a most welcome representative the youth of the village) planted 650 trees creating hedgerow and small clump habitat across the common.

Trees planted included;

Aspen, Common Oak, Common Alder, Blackthorn, Bird Cherry, Dogwood, Dog Rose, Downy Birch, Field Maple, Hawthorn, Hazel, Green Beech, Hornbeam, Rowan, Silver Birch, Spindle, Sweet Chestnut.

For the most part the trees are guarded which is a condition of the donation process primarily to protect them from deer the guards will stay until the trees are 2 - 3 years old. Most of the tree guards used are recyclable and when the trees are ready guards will be removed and disposed of responsibly.

### **Visit by Norfolk Wildlife Trust**

In the summer of 2022 a surveyor from NWT visited the common to carry out an assessment of as one of the County Wildlife Sites they oversee.

Visiting in July and September the surveyor observed that the extreme heat and prolonged dry summer meant that he was not getting a true picture of the range and diversity of flora and fauna on the common but produced a most encouraging reporting over ninety species of plants and trees including sixteen ancient woodland indicator species.

Unfortunately NWT have limited resources but it is hoped that there will be another visit to look at the common when conditions are less extreme and more suited to such a survey.

### **Future work**

It is hoped that the PC, residents and visitors to the common can see, sense and appreciate the impact of the group's work and will continue to support us as this is a long-term process.

The group will continue it's work on the common including monitoring the newly planted saplings, older trees, healthy or ailing, where appropriate sensitively thin or coppice hazel and sycamore, keep paths clear and continue the work to manage bracken and bramble spread along with surveying and observing areas worked on.

It would be nice if we could expand the group in the future, both to spread the workload and to bring more people onto the common and to get to know this rare and very special place better.