

## **Joint Statement from Hay Town Council and Hay Community Woodland Group**

The Town Council has recently received a few enquiries about markings on trees on both the Bailey Walk and Old Railway Line Footpath and reasons for felling trees. This statement is intended to clarify the council's approach and reasoning for works carried out.

### **General Management Principles**

Hay Community Woodland Group (a voluntary group) manages the footpath and Bailey Walk on behalf of and in conjunction with the Fishing & Estates Sub-Committee of Hay Town Council.

This woodland management is carried out in accordance with advice and / or information received from The Woodland Trust, Brecon Beacons National Park Authority, Natural Resources Wales, Keep Wales Tidy, Green Valleys CiC and the National Tree Safety Group. The Council also signed up to the Charter for Trees, Woods and People in 2017.

Hay Town Council as the land - owner has a Duty of Care in relation to users of the footpaths and therefore this has to be borne in mind when considering the management of the area. However, safety management is not considered in isolation and is not the prime driver, it is part of the overall management plan for the area.

Hay Town Council and the Woodland Group work on the principle that the public wooded areas in Hay are essential environmental and social assets.

They shape and enhance the visual landscape; provide habitat for wildlife; clean pollution from the air; aid in flood and erosion control and they support health and wellbeing by providing safe active travel routes and recreational opportunities.

Our (joint) overriding objectives are to provide a well - managed natural environment for both residents and visitors to enjoy whilst maintaining and enhancing the biodiversity of the area.

We are also mindful that, more than ever, proactive management of our land to mitigate climate change risks is critical to ensuring that our woodland areas can themselves adapt to the challenges imposed by climate change without loss of the ecosystem services they provide.

Guidance from the Forestry Commission states that "if we leave native woodland unmanaged and unharvested the amount of carbon being stored will decline because of the over mature age structure that is created. This can be reversed in time by regenerating the woodland and by enhanced woodland creation."

### **Woodland Management**

The Old Railway Line Footpath is a relatively recent secondary woodland created following the cessation of the railway line. This means that the canopy is predominantly of a similar age and maturity.

The Bailey Walk has more diversity of canopy age and maturity and is classified as 'semi natural, non-ancient woodland' (Woodland Trust classification 2016)

In October 2016 the following advice was provided by The Woodland Trust in respect of management of the area.

- Aim to create diversity in the age and woodland layer structure through gradual, regular and light thinning/ coppicing interventions. This will aim to encourage natural regeneration of favoured native broadleaved species and increase the currently sparse understorey. Coppicing is when certain species regrow from stump and will initially contribute to the understorey layer. Species such as goat willow, alder, sycamore, hazel and ash respond well to coppicing. The woodland is regenerating well and other than the trees in a poor condition there is no urgent threat and therefore works can be programmed in, as and when resources are available.
- As there is active regeneration taking place there is no need to undertake additional planting, unless you wish to add in a few specimen trees if suitable sites become available.
- Monitor the condition of Wych elm as several specimens are displaying signs of Dutch elm disease and have either died or have significant levels of deadwood.
- Ivy—generally retain ivy as it provides good all year around cover and is an important late food source. Sever ivy if the tree is of low vitality and the ivy has extended into its upper crown. Severing ivy will reduce the wind sail area of a tree, particularly important if it has structural weaknesses or is growing laterally over the path (although I would target such trees for felling in your thinning interventions).
- Thinning/coppicing criteria in order of priority shown below:
  - a) Fell / coppice trees that are dead and in a poor condition, that have a target (take advice from a suitably qualified arboricultural consultant, instructing them to undertake a tree condition report).
  - b) Target the goat willow for coppicing. Retain some older specimens if they do not have a target (i.e. the path) as species such as the lunar moth uses them within their life cycle.
  - c) Target the multi stemmed lapsed coppice sycamore stools for re –coppicing.
  - d) Where existing natural regeneration (seedlings and saplings) of native species exists, thin the canopy to provide them with adequate light levels. Trees will grow with phototropic tendencies i.e. reaching for the light and therefore young trees with a canopy over them will grow outwards in this case towards the path.
  - e) Aim to retain understorey shrubs, mature specimens, native species and trees of good form.
  - f) Re-space the young planted area to the south west to 3m stem spacings in to allow them to develop deep crowns. Target the goat willow for coppicing in order to create an understorey.

This is the guidance that informs the work of the Woodland Group.

## **What's Happening on The Bailey Walk**

The markings, in blue were put in by an arborist (Huw Morris) who conducted an informal survey of the trees on the Bailey Walk footpath in 2017. He identified a number of trees that were dead or diseased or needed some pruning & remedial work to help them thrive.

The blue 'X' marks indicate a tree that may need to be removed and a / indicates that some pruning is required. At an on - site meeting with the tree consultant for the BBNPA she concurred with his findings.

The council has taken something of a "wait and see" approach in relation to this work, the trees are monitored by the Woodland Group and where remedial work within the scope and ability of the Woodland Group (such as pruning or ivy removal to assist tree stability) has been possible this has been carried out, but to date none of these trees have been felled.

It is nearly two years since this inspection was undertaken and in accordance with guidance a further survey will be due soon.

A few trees have come down on the riverbank over this period (during storms and high winds) and the stump of one such tree was used to provide the first of the chainsaw carvings on the riverbank. It is particularly important that trees on the river bank that are growing at an angle of less than 90 degrees with the ground are monitored and the necessary action taken to ensure that they do not become "top heavy" as this places too much strain on the root system which then leads to them coming down in high winds or flood, thus destroying that area of riverbank where the root ball is ripped out.

## **What's Happening on The Old Railway Line Footpath**

As noted by the Woodland Trust Officer a number of trees were showing early signs of Dutch Elm disease back in late 2016. This has been monitored carefully and after the very dry summer of 2018 there was a significant increase in the progression of the disease.

There are a number of trees on the footpath with orange marks (placed in the summer of 2019 when it was easier to tell that trees were definitely dead). There are 25 trees in total marked in this way. Of these 23 have Dutch Elm disease and are dead, 1 is showing signs of Ash dieback (our first case) and the other is one dead stem of a three - stem birch tree.

Once a tree decays the carbon that it has stored is released although up to 20% may still be retained in the root system. Trees that are felled always have a good length of stump left in situ, to help with stability of the bank area. Branches and smaller logs are used to create habitat for wildlife, larger logs are taken for firewood by the volunteers with some being distributed to members of the community.

The Woodland Group have recently sourced a supplier of disease resistant elm trees and once funding becomes available and a suitable location identified, trees will be purchased to replace those that have died.

A recent project has been the creation of the wood- carving nature related sculptures, we do NOT fell trees for this purpose. The carvings are placed on stumps left behind by the felling of dead trees. This is why to some extent the siting of sculptures is not uniform, we have to work with what nature gives us. This project has received so much love and positivity from residents and visitors that it has become an unqualified success. Apart from being eye-catching the carvings also provide an educational opportunity for children to learn which animals & birds live in this natural environment.

### **Hay Community Woodland Group**

Hay Town Council is very appreciative of the work carried out by the Woodland Group volunteers. It should be pointed out that the removal of dead & dangerous trees is just a small part of what the group does, they also:

1. Manage the dog poo bins and monitor dog fouling.
2. Plant native species bulbs.
3. Control undergrowth along edge of footpaths.
4. Make general improvements e.g. Warren Close steps, Warren track bollards, repair or replace fencing and handrails on steps, install information boards.
5. Remove ivy from trees as recommended by Woodland Trust & Brecon Beacons National Park.
6. Monitor tree health & vigour.
7. Litter picking as required.
8. Manage Hay Warren Fishery to make it safe & accessible for anglers.
9. Obtain necessary consents from statutory authorities e.g. Natural Resources Wales.
10. Monitor and/or remove invasive species e.g. Himalayan Balsam, Japanese Knotweed, snowberry, Himalayan Honeysuckle, Giant Hogweed etc
11. Report identified issues to Hay Town Council & make recommendations.
12. Raise funds to buy tools, plants and anything required for project completion.
13. Provide an emergency callout service to remove fallen trees & branches from the footpaths.
14. Coordination of Hay in Bloom
15. Provide bird & bat boxes as mitigation for loss of habitat.
16. In the winter months feed birds along the footpath when their natural food is in short supply (Castle wild bird feed).

For any further information in relation to this area of Hay Town Council's work please direct enquiries through our Town Clerk (Nick Burdekin) or for Woodland Group information haycwg1@gmail.com.