

Scrub Land on Outskirts of RWB

Client: John Loran and Dave Gardner

Location: Swindon Road, Royal Wootton Bassett, SN4. Grid Ref: SU081830

Site Introduction

On the northern outskirts of Royal Wootton Bassett (RWB) lies approximately 1.8 acres of waste land which has seen housing development adjoining the southern boundary and the busy A3102 Swindon Road to the north.

The rectangular stretch of land is under the management of RWB Town Council and the RWB Rotary Club. Their aim is to manage the land better for wildlife and use by the local community, namely through making it into a more accessible and family friendly 'nature reserve'.

At the present time the site is under minimal management in the form of mown pathway clearance and grass strimming around the main pond. The site is currently in an overgrown state with an extremely high coverage of dense bramble. The client requested Wild Landscapes to carry out an initial site assessment to gain direction in the clearance works and ongoing management needed to be able to improve the site.

It was suggested that the follow up report should aim to highlight some basic management prescriptions and an overview of how the site may be used. These two factors are very much interlinked. This document aims to address the issues as indicated by the site assessment.

Overview of current site and future development



Aerial satellite image of site (Google Earth)

The site currently has one main walkway where the grass is brush-cut/mown to clear brambles. It is used mainly by local residents walking their dogs. The main pathway only passes through the far eastern two thirds of the site, exiting through a gateway into an amenity parkland.

Discussions with the client led to the understanding that the site would benefit more as a nature trail, with winding pathways leading off a central all-weather path. Different zones were also discussed, including improvements to the existing pond area, a woodland area, several seating zones and possibly a mini orchard.

Before the existing scrub can be cleared and managed appropriately, it was agreed that it would be important to define these potential new zones and areas so that any suggested scrub clearance would be suitable and in-line with overall plans. Further to this a basic concept sketch has been drawn up to provide a possible outline for the site after significant scrub management.

A final design would need to be agreed between all stakeholders to indicate areas where complete scrub clearance needs to take place and other areas where it could simply be managed.

Below are some images to provide inspiration for elements of the site.





Overview of site

- 1) Informal wildlife/community orchard – apple, wild cherry etc. Looped walkway around orchard area with seating spots along the route. Pathway could be a mown grassed walkway, a simple timber edged bark chip or compacted hoggin pathway, making the area usable in all weathers/seasons
- 2) Areas marked with diagonal lines would be 'islands' of scrub (bramble) to keep and manage for wildlife, offering refuge for birds and other wildlife and providing screening to create different 'zones' to explore. It is important to leave a mixture of free standing 'islands' as well as scrub and bramble areas alongside hedgerows to provide a transitional habitat for wildlife
- 3) Potential picnic area for families – hard standing surface, timber edged area with bark chippings and picnic benches. Fence lines of houses behind is currently exposed – potential to plant some native species such as coppicing Hazels, Elders, Dogwood etc.
- 4) Trees depicted with an 'x' in the middle indicate existing trees, trees depicted with a 'o' in the middle indicate areas where new trees could be planted. Suitable species to benefit wildlife include Field Maple, Silver Birch, Oak, Hawthorn, Rowan, Hazel, Elder and Crab Apple.
- 5) The existing pond area could be improved by adding an all-weather surface area to the western boundary with a bird viewing screen. Screens such as these are used on Wiltshire Wildlife Trust reserves including Langford Lakes and Lower Moor Farm. The chequered area alongside the pond is currently grassland which is regularly strimmed. This area would benefit from a less intensive cutting regime and by introducing native water-edge plant species. Mixes suitable for this habitat include [Pond/River Edge MAS-WWILD7](#) and/or [Wetland Areas MAS-WWILD6](#) from Meadow Mania. Planting up the area would greatly enhance it for both wildlife and aesthetically for people. Log piles would also be beneficial if placed between the pond and the existing hedgerow to provide additional transitional habitats.

Other considerations would be locating dead wood piles around scrub and tree areas to provide habitats for invertebrates and small mammals. Bug hotels could be created by the community and bird/bat boxes installed on larger more mature trees throughout the site.

Scrub Clearance

Management of scrub zones to remain

Scrub can be very valuable for a wide range of wildlife, providing a continued source of nectar, fruits, seeds, shelter and roosting sites. A stand of scrub with varied plant species, age and structure will support a great variety of species. Scrub is the transitory stage between open habitats such as grassland and closed canopy woodland.

Some tall herbs, often associated with scrub edge, are vital to many grassland invertebrates that need nectar-rich shrubs to complete their lifecycles. Species such as blackthorn, hawthorn, bramble and herbs provide early pollen and nectar, as well as foraging habitat for herbivorous and predatory invertebrates in both adult and larval stages. Standing and fallen dead timber is valuable habitat for fungi and wood-boring insects.

Since scrub is a transitory habitat, it needs management to maintain it otherwise it will develop into woodland or can become invasive and reduce the biodiversity of a site, such as that in question here. Initially it is important to look at a site and plan how it is going to be managed

to ensure a balance with other features of the site such as open habitat, species of conservation importance or geological features.

Work on scrub is best carried out in the autumn/winter, ideally early February, and should never be done during the bird nesting season (March – July). Work on berry-bearing scrub is best delayed until after December, leaving valuable autumn and winter fruits and seeds as food for wildlife. Bramble scrub typically matures at about 5-6 years, so coppicing 1/5th every year, i.e. a 5 year rotation, is a good rule of thumb. Where scrub is almost entirely composed of bramble, such as in this case, the rotation can be shorter to provide a mosaic of bramble at different stages of growth. The site can be split into three compartments and 1/3rd of each compartment can be cut each winter. These compartments have been highlighted in green. So each green compartment would be coppiced/cut back by one third each year on a three year rotation.

On a site such as this large-scale machinery will not be feasible, so use must be made of hand tools. It is important to use tools appropriate to the task and ground conditions, ranging from hand held tools, to mower, chainsaw and brush-cutter. Herbicides can be used to help with eradication of scrub, by treating stumps to prevent re-growth. Careful consideration should be given to the methods of applying chemicals to avoid any adverse impacts on the surrounding wildlife. Hand held applicators or painting of stumps are targeted approaches with little impact on the surrounding wildlife and good long term results. To be effective it generally needs to be done soon after cutting, before the stems callous over. The use of machinery such as chainsaw and brush-cutter and the application of herbicides will require specific training to comply with health and safety law.

Scrub reduction/clearance

In areas where the aim is to clear and reduce bramble and scrub to allow access and other features for wildlife and people, such as trees, shrubs, picnic zones, the scrub will need regular intensive clearance to prevent regrowth. In these areas, scrub will require hard cutting/strimming each year for a number of seasons, monitoring regrowth rates. Eventually regrowth will become more minimal and cutting may be less of a necessity every year. Particularly in the first two to three years, these areas will require a minimum of one hard cut back each winter. If regrowth is fast (for example, a mild winter encourages early regrowth), it may be beneficial to cut back once at the end of the summer nesting period (October) and once again in late winter (February). All cuttings should be removed from site, or if not possible, chipped down and composted on site in an unused area or under established hedgerows.

Before putting together a plan for scrub clearance and reduction all stakeholders should agree on the future usage of different zones and areas of the site. This will be true whether the basic design above is followed or another different design.

Once agreed, a number of areas can be targeted for clearance, within the first management year aim to reduce the bramble scrub by around 1/3rd across the site. Following the rough design outline shown below target the highlighted areas - **yellow areas can aim to be cleared in year one/immediately** and **red areas in year two/following years**. This will give wildlife and the habitat time to adjust to the changes and will also make the workload more manageable and practical. The green areas should be sustainably managed on a rotation as described previously.



Green areas: Scrub/bramble to be coppiced/cut back by 1/3rd in each area every year on a three year rotation.

Yellow areas: Scrub/bramble to be cleared immediately/year one. Continue to clear each season to keep areas open and accessible.

Red areas: Scrub/bramble to be cleared in year two/subsequent years to allow site to adjust to change/reduce immediate impact on wildlife. Continue to clear each season to keep areas open and accessible.

Moving Forward

If there are any questions or queries about anything included within this document, please feel free to get in touch. Wild Landscapes can produce a more detailed management plan if required and provide quotes for any management/project works.

Chelsie Phillips & Nick Self

Wild Landscapes – Project Officers

Business Development & Community Engagement

Phone: 01380 829051

Email: WildLandscapes@wiltshirewildlife.org

Wiltshire Wildlife Trust | Elm Tree Court | Long Street | Devizes | SN101NJ