



## REPORT ON BROOMHEATH FROM TRANSITION WOODBRIDGE

### Introduction

The following is a report from Transition Woodbridge into work they would like to carry out at Broomheath.

### Transition Woodbridge Report

'An investigation into Broomheath since the fire of 2016 by Transition Woodbridge 'Broomheath is a small area of natural green space which overlooks Martlesham Creek which adjoins the River Deben.....the site is predominantly acid grassland and gorse heathland with trees located mainly around the margins'. This habitat and several of the species of birds and animals recorded there feature on the list of UK & Suffolk Biodiversity Action Plan list of Habitat and Priority Species. (From Woodbridge Town Council's website). It is also a very popular area for walkers and visitors with lovely views over the river. It has been an area where nightingales could be heard in Spring.

In May 2016 there was a fire at Broomheath which destroyed an area of gorse and reduced the habitat for the many species which could be found there. As some of these birds and animals are endangered it is important that their habitat is protected. In Autumn 2017 members of Transition Woodbridge, a local community group, discovered that the site was not recovering from the fire. The burnt gorse had been chipped and spread over the site but the gorse was not regrowing obviously due to the rabbits which are abundant there. We considered that an area of fencing would be a good idea to protect the gorse stumps. We had seen an example of this at Melton Riverside where an area had been fenced off from rabbits and now there is an abundance of cowslips and other wildflowers.

Members of Transition Woodbridge asked at an Amenities Council meeting in the autumn of 2017 if the Town Council would consider fencing off part of the burnt area to allow the gorse to regrow and accept help in this from Transition Woodbridge. The committee decided fencing was not needed and the gorse would regenerate naturally. Transition members were doubtful of this and asked a local experienced and qualified biologist, Jenny James, to look at the area. She went on to write a report in which she stated ' to give this site a chance of regeneration it should be surrounded by rabbit-proof fencing for a period of several years to give the plants a chance to get established'.

In November 2018 a Transition Woodbridge member noted that there was no regrowth and there was evidence that rabbits were still there. Following the dry summer of 2018

it seemed the whole area was under stress and the grass area was also very sparse. In some areas the soil was quite bare and therefore vulnerable to erosion.

In February 2019 Suffolk Coasts and Heaths were offering funding for 'community and conservation activities including practical work' for areas within the AONB. A member of TW enquired if this funding could apply to Broomheath and was told that although it is not within the AONB it is adjacent and as wildlife does not observe borders then if wildlife were supported in Broomheath it would be of benefit to the AONB. Suffolk Wildlife Trust was contacted and asked for advice. They offered the services, free of charge, of a volunteer conservation adviser. Simon Leatherdale, a retired and experienced Head Forester, met two TW members on site and then produced a report in which he states 'In order to regenerate the small burnt area, I would recommend rabbit fencing a portion of it (approx. 140m of fence) which would be temporary and could be re-used in 4-6 years on an adjacent plot.' Steps could then be taken to encourage plant growth even further by scattering cut gorse and heather over the area to spread seed. He also advised planting 2-4 native trees. TW members considered that if the fencing was put up by a professional fencing contractor and paid for at least partly by funding from the AONB then they would be capable and happy to do the work voluntarily within the fenced area, the scattering of gorse and heather cuttings and the tree planting. They would also be prepared to monitor the site taking photos to record change.

The AONB provided a list of local fencing contractors and two estimates of cost for 140m of rabbit proof fencing were obtained, one for £1,700 and another for £700 + VAT, so about £890.

Volunteers on Suffolk Wildlife Trust sites have offered gorse and heather cuttings which they cut in the autumn to spread within the fenced area. Native tree saplings could be found, grown on or purchased.

Transition Woodbridge consulted again with the AONB who confirmed that funding would be available to help with the cost of the fencing but they would hope that as Woodbridge Town Council owns Broomheath that it would also be prepared to pay at least half of the cost.

Having done this research Transition Woodbridge can now confidently say that the burnt area at Broomheath does need a fence to protect it from rabbits, that this could be put up at a relatively small cost, possibly with some financial support from the AONB, and that they would be prepared to voluntarily do any work within the fence to aid regeneration of the plant life. This in turn would be of great benefit to the wildlife in Broomheath and the surrounding area and help improve the appearance of this very popular area for the long term future.

May 2019

**Email from Suffolk Wildlife Trust to Transition Woodbridge**

Hi Carol,

It was a pleasure to meet you and Debbs yesterday at Broomheath.

This is an interesting site with much potential from a biodiversity point of view as well as being very attractive as a public open space.

Woodbridge Town Council have here the opportunity to deliver both high quality conservation along with first rate public amenity (albeit in a small space). Being adjacent to the AONB it acts as a fine backdrop scenically and as a buffer to more developed areas. The views from within, looking out to Martlesham Creek are first rate.

From a conservation perspective this site has significant potential. With a little investment and continued sympathetic management it can deliver for priority habitats (Acid Grassland and Lowland Heath) and struggling species (Grass Snake, Adder, Slow worm, Common Lizard, Stag Beetle, Nightingale and Dartford Warbler). The necessary management (with the exception of the fencing) would lend itself to voluntary work parties and would be very cost effective - a lot can be delivered here for a very modest investment.

I've summarised the points we covered below:

1. In order to regenerate the small burnt area, I would recommend rabbit fencing a portion of it (approx. 140m of fence) which would be temporary and could be re-used in 4-6 years on an adjacent plot. I would estimate the cost at approx. £700.
2. Within the fence a few (2-4) native trees could be planted on the lowest side (Oak/Rowan etc.).
3. Some of the mature gorse to be cut (above rabbit browse level) and the cut material put to cover some bare areas of soil in the burnt area.
4. A few bags of Heather leaf litter scattered over bare areas within the fence may induce heathland to re-establish.
5. It would be of interest to have the site regularly photographed to record change.
6. It may be possible to approach your District Councillor for a grant from their locality fund to cover the relatively small cost of the fence.

If you think a further site visit is of use with any interested Town Councillors, please don't hesitate to get in touch.

Regarding the very fine Poplar tree you showed me, I'll re-visit it when it's in leaf in order to have a better stab at identifying it to species level.

All the best,

Simon Leatherdale (SWT conservation advisor)