

## Biodiversity Report, October 2021.

### 1. Tree Planting A388 Verge.

After two full growing seasons (2020 and 2021) it was time to take stock.

- **Weed control.** During 2020 there was relatively little incursion of perennial “weeds” such as brambles or annuals such as vetches. This was probably thanks to the thorough clearance of several decades of dense bramble growth by contractor Nick Brown. The same brambles had also suppressed germination of any annuals. However, during 2021 some bramble regrowth was noted among the trees. What was more noticeable though was the rapid growth of many annual and perennial “weeds” such as bindweed, nettles, thistles and grasses. The ground between the trees is now completely covered by various species of annuals and perennials. The height of these was such that they will have had a negative impact on the growth of some of the trees by competition for water, light and nutrients.

During the season only intermittent weed control by strimming has been possible due to adverse weather conditions, Covid restrictions and work and personal commitments of volunteers. All the trees had been provided with mulch mats after planting, but these were soon overwhelmed by the weeds during year two. The area around the trees has, however, now been strimmed to an acceptable level.

- **Mortality.** The original grant of trees from the Woodland Trust in March 2020 consisted of 104 “whips” of mixed species: rowan, dogwood, birch, hawthorn, wild cherry and hazel. Residents planted c. 25 more self-sown specimens from their own gardens mostly oak, hazel, one beech and one horse chestnut. A check done on 17<sup>th</sup> October revealed that there are 107 trees in good health consisting of: 24 hawthorn, 14 oak, 15 birch, 20 hazel, 14 dogwood, 6 wild cherry, 2 goat willow, 4 rowan, 1 beech, 1 horse chestnut, 4 unidentified.

Why the mortality? Probably a combination of:

- Drought
- Weed overgrowth
- Rabbit damage
- Poor planting (too deep/shallow, firmed in too much/not enough.
- Disease. All the rowan and some of the hawthorn seem to have been affected to a greater or lesser degree by fire blight. This is caused by a bacterium (*Erwinia amylovora*), introduced from the US in the 1950s. There is no treatment for it. On mature trees it is recommended to cut back to healthy wood. However, on these juvenile trees this is not practical.

May I suggest that the tree be planted in the Recreation Field to celebrate our purchase of said field? Perhaps a plaque/stone with a suitable inscription to inform future generations too? As to who plants it, how about asking for as many as possible of the Parish's children to come along to each contribute a small spadeful of earth into the planting hole, thus giving them an investment and incentive to look after it? Invite to local press perhaps?

### **3. Ash Dieback and Traffic Hazard.**

BFPC reported two potential hazards to traffic and pedestrians to Cornwall Council. There are several ash trees showing clear signs of ash dieback on the north-west verge of Hatt roundabout. They overhang the footpath and would constitute a danger to pedestrians and traffic if they fell. These have now been marked with yellow paint by CC and will be removed.

On the corner opposite to Rumbullion Farm entrance the branches of a lime tree have now grown over the carriageway to such an extent that HGV's and large agricultural vehicles pull over across the midline of the road to avoid this. Such a manoeuvre is dangerous for oncoming vehicles. CC accept this and will be taking remedial action.

Cllr Malcolm Fletcher, October 2021.

- **Replacements.** Taking into account the additional plantings in autumn 2020, we have lost about 30 trees which it would be good to replace. In addition, I believe there is space for at least another 30 trees. Given the mortality so far, I believe this would act as insurance against future possible losses, which will always occur. A call has gone out for residents to contribute any more self-sown trees. Depending on the response, the Parish Council might want to consider purchasing some replacements to supplement the “freebies.” Given our experience so far, it might be better to avoid rowan and hawthorn in favour of oak, hazel, birch and dogwood.
- **Future maintenance.** Counter intuitively, the Woodland Trust does not recommend mowing grass and weeds around the trees as this will add to soil fertility and encourage more grass growth. They prefer mulching with mats or bark chippings. As we have seen, mats were not very effective, so bark chippings around each tree would appear to be the best way forward. If this is considered appropriate, the mulching can be done any time between now and March 2022.

In addition, I believe we need to recruit a small number of volunteers who can commit to a once-a-month selective weed control operation between March and October each year. This would be to remove any regrowth of brambles, thistles and nettles, as these are unlikely to be controlled by mulch. As for the other “weeds”, I would suggest that these just be monitored to assess the benefits for pollinators and other wildlife. Some of the “weeds” such as fleabane, teasle, vetches and oxeye daisies are indeed welcome visitors, and should be encouraged.

## 2. Landmark Tree.

As part of the “Forest for Cornwall” project all local communities across Cornwall are being offered (free of charge) the chance to plant a celebratory landmark tree in their community to celebrate what is special to their community. BFPC applied and was successful in its bid for an English oak (*Quercus robur*). The tree can be planted anywhere in the community so long as there is good public access. There must be a commitment to care for the tree for a minimum of 15 years, Detailed guidance is provided about planting and suitable protection measures. The tree will be delivered in time for planting in National Tree Week: 27<sup>th</sup> November – 4<sup>th</sup> December 2021.

