

Botusfleming Parish Council Climate and Ecological Emergency Report

January 2022

1. Tree Planting.

On 16th January twenty new “whips” were planted in the tree plantation along the A388 verge in order to fill in some of the gaps resulting from losses to the original plantings. The whips were purchased using a donation from Cllr Ellis’s “Cardinal’s Hatt Quiz Fund.” The species planted were

- 5 Common Alder “*Alnus glutinosa*”
- 5 Hornbeam “*Carpinus betulus*”
- 5 Hazel “*Corylus avellana*”
- 5 Dogwood “*Cornus sanguinea*”

Hazel and Dogwood were chosen as the original plantings of these species seem to have done well here. Alder is known to do well in soils that are often waterlogged, which the plantation often is. Hornbeam was chosen as something of an experiment. It is found mainly in the south of England and is comparatively rare.

This site on the A388 verge is far from ideal for establishing young trees. There is a top layer of clay which varies in thickness underlain by horizontal mudstone or “shillet” which is relatively impervious. This combination means that in winter the site is often waterlogged, while in summer dry spells the ground is baked hard and dry. However, given the limited sites available to us here in the Parish, this was the most viable option. More optimistically, as the verge continues northwards it is thickly covered with young ash trees, so trees can certainly thrive here once established. Sadly most of the ash trees will succumb to ash dieback, so our decision to replace some of them with other species less prone to disease was probably a good one.

2. Trees are not the only Option!

There is something of a “tree mania” sweeping the country at the moment. We have the Forest for Cornwall, the Queen’s Green Canopy” and similar initiatives elsewhere. All very laudable and necessary if done sensitively and as part of a wider drive to redress the devastation done to our national ecology during the last one hundred years. The UK has the lowest tree cover in Europe at 13%. The European average is approximately 32%, so we certainly need to up our game here.

However, it has to be the right tree in the right place. For decades the Forestry Commission and private landowners covered thousands of acres of upland Britain with mostly non-native conifers. The planting was so dense that they out-competed all other trees, shrubs and other plants. If you’ve ever walked in those forests you’ll know that

they are dark, rather eerie places with no other sign of life. The remaining areas of natural British woodlands have a rich variety of trees, shrubs and plants. There are natural glades and clearings where old trees have fallen due to age or storm damage. This kind of habitat supports a wealth of mammals, birds, insects and wild flowers.

So, if we're serious about increasing biodiversity, the current tree-planting drive should be seeking to recreate as near as possible this diverse type of woodland with open spaces too, rather than simply planting as many trees as possible.

It's also worth remembering that peat bogs store more carbon than all the earth's forests put together.

Cllr Malcolm Fletcher.