

Section 8- TREES

8.1 Summary

As the second of the four reviews the topic of trees considered the input from two experts from the “Living Project” offered during a walk over Tunbridge Wells Common on. Whilst they did not provide a written submission (unlike the other three components of the management plan review) their opinions and recommendations were documented at the time. They are contained in the text below. To assist the process of documenting a plan for trees a survey was conducted by members of the committee of Freehold Tenants during summer 2016. The output from that survey is illustrated on a series of six plans (two covering Rusthall Common and four covering Tunbridge Wells Common). Using a numeric reference the trees are identified on the accompanying spreadsheet. See appendices 8.1.a1, 8.1.a2, 8.1.a3, 8.1.a4, 8.1.a5, 8.1.a6 and 8.1.a7.

The trees on the commons are a mix of self-seeding species and commemorative plantings and did not have the benefit of a Lancelot “Capability” Brown or Humphrey Repton working with a blank canvass to bring order to the apparent randomness visible today.

Much of the current management of trees is based on the need to ensure the safety the public walking, horse riders and drivers on roads across over the commons; particularly the removal of fallen trees and branches and preventive roadside felling.

8.2 Recommendations

8.2.1 Planning timescales for the management of trees has to encompass a vision covering at least 25 years. Within that period there will, of necessity, be short term activities covering a period of one to five years. The activities should cover provision for maintenance of newly planted trees and work identified in an annual survey.

8.2.2 The purpose of the annual survey is to identify any issues requiring tree work before they pose a threat either to the tree itself or users of the common. Both commons should be assessed as to the frequency of the survey required and the importance of any work required. So, for example, trees adjacent to the main paths and roads across the commons should be inspected annually. Those trees within woodland dissected by minor pathways may require inspection every two or three years. All other trees may be monitored on an ad hoc basis as users of the common may, from time to time, report*¹. This process could be likened to a Red/Amber/Green process to identify scaled importance of both location and remedial action required.

8.2.3 Notwithstanding the need for period reviews as proposed above. There should be several work streams that address “good housekeeping”. Harking back to the planing of “Capability” Brown at Petworth Park the advantage of keeping deer to control the height of foliage of trees allows both walkers and horse riders to pass safely under the branches. The Forestry Commission recommend that paths and rides should have a 2.5 metre (?) clearance beneath the tree canopy. Similarly, any woodland edges coming within a “scaloping” regime should comply to a regular pruning schedule. As suggested below rare or veteran trees should be the subject of specific care programs.

8.2.3 There are several examples of trees on both commons that come within the category of specimen or veteran. Examples of each type are identified on the plans and spreadsheets referred to above. There are two Small Leafed Limes, a single Dutch Elm and several mature beeches, oaks, pines and lime trees that should be monitored annually. Any maintenance work should avoid “shock” to the trees and be the subject of professional advice. Trimming dead branches should not necessarily be taken back to the trunk. It has been recommended that ivy and nearby saplings should be cut back.

8.2.4 New tree plantings should be undertaken within the proposed 25 year vision. After planting the supporting stakes and ties should be removed when the trees become established or to avoid damage. The newly planted trees should be pruned in the first ten years after planting to ensure a well balanced mature trees result.

8.2.5 There are several invasive species on both commons. These include cherry laurel, rhododendron, holly, sycamore and silver birch saplings. The location and frequency of these species should be identified and a costed program of eradication devised. The recommendation would be to cut and remove the saplings over winter with a chemical spray to any regrowth the following spring.

8.2.6 Clearance of invasive species and planned felling should be accompanied by appropriate disposal of the timber and brush wood. It is recommended that Some timber stakes would help insects and invertebrates but that brush wood should be burnt or shredded and stumps ground out.

8.2.7 All work resulting from the implementation of the above recommendations should be subject to a written submission to the Conservators showing the tasks to be performed, the initial costs, and recurring annual costs. An example of the type of form proposed is attached (or will be soon)!