

Site visit: Ottershaw Park
Date: 10/11/09

The woodland visited was arranged by Elizabeth McEntaggart to discuss potential management options for an area of woodland owned by the residents of Ottershaw Park.

Background

Part of the woodland is recorded as ancient which means that the area has been continually wooded for the past 400 years and very likely much longer. These areas are very important nationally as they can contain rare plants and they provide habitats for flora and fauna that are becoming rare due to public and development pressures. There is also an alder carr woodland area that is of specific importance as ancient wet woodlands are rarer than the dryer woodlands as many have been drained for access or development.

The woodlands have not been managed for some time and there is still evidence of windblow probably from the 1987 gales still lying in the woodlands. This natural event was beneficial for biodiversity in a number of ways as the tree canopy opened up more light was able to reach the woodland floor and the natural ground flora would have responded by germinating from seed, providing a food source for woodland birds, butterflies and other fauna.

Historic management of woodlands in the landscape has provided a diverse structure within woodland blocks due to coppice management, firewood production, thinning etc, and the native woodland flora and fauna had to develop life cycles and habits to survive in these diverse and evolving woodlands. However as woodland management in small woods has mostly stopped happening and the natural events such as the hurricane are quite few and far between the native woodland flora and fauna have been suffering. Many species have depleted in numbers as they are not able to survive in unmanaged, closed canopy woodlands.

There are many other reasons related to depletion in native flora/ fauna populations such as fragmentation of habitats due to roads, agricultural practices etc. However small woodland owners can make a difference to the native species that survive in woods by carrying out some basic woodland management. The management possibilities we discussed during the visit could be supported by grant aid and a buoyant firewood market. The below sections outline the issues discussed and my thoughts about the potential management of the site.

Grants Available

Grant aid is available through the English woodland grant scheme(ewgs) to help land owners and woodland managers to manage their woodlands for the benefit of biodiversity. The first step in effective management is a good plan and to create this plan the grant available is £1000. This plan should be completed by a competent forestry agent and I have attached a copy of the template to this document. The plan should be drawn up by the agent after finding out what the overall objectives of the woodland are and considering all of the relevant factors that will influence the management.

This plan will outline a work programme for the woodland and it will also identify where further grant aid would be relevant, this could be for any cost operations in the woodland that benefits biodiversity. Thinning was discussed in the woodland,

however as there is a demand for this type of timber as firewood I thought that this should not be a cost operation and therefore it would not attract grant funding. There is however a patch of rhododendron in the woodland that could be removed and this would attract further grant aid through a woodland improvement grant. If any felling licensing is required then this should be identified in the management plan and a licence can then be issued.

Possible management



The above picture was taken within the area designated as ancient woodland. In this area there is a great deal of ash natural regeneration (small saplings). These could be the future large trees on the site if managed in the correct way. The issues of retaining a sound barrier, the desire to keep the area as wooded as possible to deter people coming on to the land and the need to have any work carried out at minimal costs were raised and in response to this I made the following suggestions:

1. A thinning throughout the whole woodland area to improve the retained trees by giving the crowns more space to develop, this could be repeated every 8 years (removing approx a third of the trees). (cost covered by timber sales).
2. Opening up some holes in the canopy at the same time as thinning to allow more light to the ground floor to bring on the naturally regenerating ash to create areas of dense growth to become the future crop (no replanting costs, sound barrier achieved and costs covered by timber sales).
3. Deer enclosure fencing around some of the opened areas to ensure that the deer browsing is controlled (grant aidable through ewgs).



The above pictures were taken in the area not designated as ancient woodland and there was much more of a parkland feel in this area as with larger trees that had a shape that suggested they had grown in a much more open environment. In this area a different management system would be required to encourage an understorey of trees such as supplementary planting or moving trees from areas of high natural regeneration.

All of these points could be more clearly clarified in the management plan, but the important thing is to ensure that you know what you want from the woodlands and the plan should address these requirements through good forestry practice.

Potential threats that will need to be addressed

1. Rhododendron within the woodland will continue to spread if not addressed asap, also at this early stage it will be cheaper to treat the problem.

2. Garden waste being dumped in the woodland (especially the ancient woodland), this should be stopped and where possible existing waste removed asap as garden waste can introduce pests/pathogens and non native species into a natural environment. Under normal circumstances this removal could be paid for under grant, however in this case it appears that some of the actual woodland owners are doing it so public money could not be spent to rectify this situation.

3. Deer browsing- this may become more of an issue as certain areas will be targetted to encourage regrowth so deer exclosure fencing should be erected to ensure establishment of the trees.