

Notes of Zoom meeting of Abbey Road Village Green Working Party. 17 August 2020

Present

Roger Brown

Dave Buckett (microphone not working – but could give hand signals!)

Jo Gordon

Cllr Sarah Sullivan

Cllr Paul Campbell

Helpful advisory notes by Roger Brown are shown as an appendix.

No formal agenda but we discussed each of the following

1. *Hedgerows along roadside edge of Abbey Rd north.*

Status: Approved, and but for Covid19 would have been planted by now. Rescheduling arrangements to be confirmed.

Jo Gordon confirmed that **planting is to take place on Friday 25 September 2020.**

Dave Buckett will be responsible for all elements of the planting, including liaising with the School.

No trench – simple tee cuts with spade, fold back and replace. Hopefully, the ground will be softer by then.

Jo reported that John Fullbrook (SPC Clerk) has agreed that SPC will provide a bowser for watering as needed after the planting is done.

The hedgerow located as agreed previously, but probably only two deep rather than three as quite a few plants have been lost.

There will be plastic protectors and Dave Buckett will be permitted by Steyning for Trees to make an executive decision about whether to accede to Craig Daters' (SDNPA) request that experimentally some not be protected to see what difference that makes. Jo personally thinks that as the Woodland Trust have provided the trees and recommend protection then they should all be protected.

Roger's experience is that they will probably need protection for two years, any longer and it could be counter-productive both because lower growth is inhibited and because the plastic tends to become too brittle to recycle.

There is one elm tree to go where previously agreed. It will not now be planted by Julia Donaldson.

Because of Covid there will be no food trucks or other community element - hopefully something for next year

Jo will liaise with John Fullbrook over all the practical aspects – health and safety assessment, the bowser etc.

2. *Meadow. The central grass area of Abbey Rd north.*

Status: No plan as yet, apart from grass cutting regime

Roger will mark the Marsh Ragwort with stakes and liaise with Hazel (Deputy Clerk)/John to ensure that the grass cutting contractors do not cut this before it has seeded.

Rest of the plan for the proposed wild-flower meadow to be taken slowly.

First thing is that Roger has discussed with Ronnie Reed, who is a SCO member and an ex-employee of Sussex Wildlife Trust, who is enthusiastic about the potential for the site and would like to get her then boss and CEO of the SWT, Tony Whitbread along to take a look.

Tony has also retired, but is now President of the SWT. Roger will set something up which is convenient to them and the rest of us will try to join them.

3. *Pond area. An area approx.. 65m x 34m fills with water with winter rains. Max depth is more than 12". By mid-May, the 'pond' is completely dry.*
Status: Monitoring ongoing. An area at the eastern end of the 'pond' measuring c20m x 14m was approved for clearance and treatment of willow this summer (and has been done?).
It remains unclear what was treated with glyphosate. Some stumps are not sprouting while some are. Simon suspects it may just be the smaller ones which are harder to treat successfully. The big tree is also sprouting but that may not have been treated.
Simon recommends we get on top of the sprouting ones as they will be storing energy for a growth spurt next year.
Roger will try to deal with these with the volunteers referred to in his paper annexed.
We all agreed that it would be good to try to have a Friends of Abbey Road Village Green which would be independent from SPC and operate in much the same way as the Steyning Community Orchard Group.
This, and publicity to local residents, to be explored after the anticipated Ronnie Reed and Tony Whitbread meeting.
4. *Stream edges*
Pussy willow cuttings to be planted plus weeping willow(s) and alder plus black poplar(?). Plan needed.
See 3. Plan could be for Friends to draw up. We also need to get a response from the Environment Agency and from the Ouse and Adur Rivers Trust to whom I wrote yesterday (copies to all) to ensure any plantings do not interfere with flood control measures and/or trout breeding etc.
5. *Tree planting. TFS initiative.*
Status: Stalled. No agreed plan as yet. May be part of 4?
See 4. Probably for the Friends to draw up the plan.
6. *Community Orchard on Abbey Rd south.*
Status: Plans on hold at present due to other priorities.
As stated.

Cllr Paul Campbell

18 August 2020

Appendix – Roger Brown's update notes 16 August 2020

I thought these notes from recent Abbey Rd visits might be useful background for our Zoom meeting tomorrow.

On 23rd July (the morning of the last Amenities meeting) John called me to say that Rowan has just informed him that the pond willow cutting work had been done at Abbey Rd. I went round there in the afternoon to take a look. They had done a pretty good job. All the willows had been cut according to the plan, and the cuttings and chopped up large willow tree were stashed at the back of the site against the by-pass bank as intended.

I would say the work had been done about a week before, around the 16th July, judging by how much the cut willow had wilted.

This meant that we were not able to use some of the cut willow to re-plant on the stream bank. But since it is still not clear if the EA are dredging the stream regularly or not, and the fact that the ground is so dry that it would have been difficult to push the cut stems into the ground, it didn't really matter. We can come back to this later, using cuttings from any of the remaining Goat Willows on site.

Pond area (as of 14th Aug)

The willow cut seems to have mixed results. The cut stumps were supposed to have been treated with glyphosate. There is no reason to suppose this wasn't done, but at least half of the stumps have regrown (see pics).

But it will be a simple job to cut this new growth off during the winter, so that there is minimum growth to suck water out of the pond next Spring. (The point of doing this was to see if reducing the willow growth in part of the pond area would have any effect on water levels next Spring compared to this Spring. We should still be able to show this.)

There is fantastic display of flowering Water Mint all around the margins of the pond area. It was full of bees, hoverflies and butterflies. Lots of other wildflowers: Purple Loosestrife. Common Mallow, Marsh Ragwort, *Meadowsweet, Silverweed, Great Willowherb, Bristly Ox-Tongue, Teasel. Butterflies included Common Blues and a lovely Small Copper.

(*Meadowsweet is the plant that was protected from the second grass cut on 4th May.

Unfortunately because of the dry weather since then, it has grown very slowly and hardly flowered. But it is perennial so will be there for another year - and can now be cut when the last grass cut takes place (later this month?))

Grass area/Meadow

I found out recently that the earth mound in the middle of the grass area was seeded with wildflower seeds by girls from the Towers Convent. This was probably in Marlene Carmen's time when she ran a Conservation Volunteers group that did work all over Steyning, including here at Abbey Rd. Unfortunately there is nothing there now apart from nettles, but it is possible that some of the surrounding wildflowers are from that original sowing.

As well as the Meadowsweet, there are several large clumps of yellow Marsh Ragwort flowering.(see pic) This is a new one to me, but according to the books it is much less toxic than Common Ragwort, so is not a 'problem'.

It should be flowering in June, so it looks as though the second grass cut in May took off the flower spikes and it has taken another 3 months to come into flower. But it is stunning and again full of bees and insects, so well worth trying to encourage. It has not yet seeded, therefore another cut in the next few weeks may mean the seedbank from this plant is lost.(as it is biennial) I'd like to protect this from the cut if possible, by marking it with sticks like I did for the Meadowsweet.

As can be seen with these Meadowsweet and Marsh Ragwort examples, managing a grass area for wildflowers is not a simple thing to do! This damp grassed area does have the potential to become a fantastic wild flower meadow.

But it will take lots of planning, expert advice, a proper management plan and patience.

AR Volunteer Working party?

There are several jobs that could be done by volunteers now or by late Autumn. I have names of several people who have expressed an interest in helping. (Gerard Bagley, Ian Alexander, Simon Knowles - AR resident)

- cut and remove lots of small branches falling across mown path around pond
- removal of fresh willow growth in pond area
- creating a few small 'scrapes' to retain water longer in pond.

- planting willow cuttings on stream bank
Could we discuss setting this up?

Pictures attached.

Willow stumps and regrowth





Purple Loosestrife. (grows on river banks, wet marshes etc)



Marsh Ragwort



Small Copper butterfly on Marsh Ragwort flower

