

## **6. Review of Items and Matters Arising**

### **(a) Response to Mr Scruton's request to fell and plank a large oak tree in Gilman Road car park**

The oak tree in question is a large, veteran specimen which was probably one of the oldest trees on Mousehold Heath, although it may well now be dead. The tree is, however, a significant feature, a good potential wildlife habitat and does not pose a danger to visitors, so it should be retained.

Much of the wildlife value often claimed for oak trees is in fact only found on very old, even dead trees like this one, and they should therefore be retained whenever possible. Many types of insect are found only on veteran oak trees, which can also be important for fungi, lichens and as bat roosts. The noted ecologist Dr Oliver Rackham has stated 'Ten thousand 100 year old oaks are not a substitute for one 500 year old oak'.

It is acknowledged that mobile sawmills do offer an excellent way of converting trees felled for safety or conservation reasons into useful timber, and Mr Scruton may wish to explore this further with the Mousehold Conservators and Norwich City Council's Green Spaces section.

### **b) Emergency Contact Arrangements for the Mousehold Heath Wardens**

Providing emergency contact arrangements would enable the local community to assist with the wardening of the heath, acting as extra 'eyes and ears'. There is a need to ensure that any system will still work taking into account the wardens work a rota, and there will be days when a warden may not be on site due to illness or a training commitment. The provision of a duty mobile, accessed via the City Council Customer Contact Team, will enable the call to be directed to the duty warden mobile telephone for a response.

From the 1<sup>st</sup> July anyone needing to contact the Council will need only one number and will then select from a menu of options to route their call to the correct person. Outside of office hours and on a weekend the caller will be diverted to Norwich Community Alarm Service, who will then route the call to the duty warden mobile.

### **c) Works to top of St. James' Hill to Open up the view**

Email sent to Mr Marshall on 21<sup>st</sup> May 2008 following a meeting on site with Mr Marshall's partner on 16<sup>th</sup> May 2008.

Dear Mr Marshall

As we agreed last Friday (16th May), here is a summary of the various points we discussed with regard to the recent tree work on St. James' Hill. The numbers refer to the questions in your email to Sara Crowley of 24th April.

Q1. The extent of the works completed was what was originally planned to open up the viewpoint.

- The site was visited both during and after completion of the works by the Mousehold Heath Wardens, the Council's Tree Officer and me, in order to monitor progress and liaise with the work team.
- We had considered felling just enough of the trees to open up the viewpoint, and retaining the rest, but we decided against this option as any trees remaining would be very liable to wind throw, especially because (a) they were growing on a very steep slope, and (b) because trees grown so closely together and left un-thinned, as these were, tend to have poor root systems that provide little support. This was demonstrated in the major storms of 1987 and 1990, and I also have personal experience of this factor from previous work.
- Accordingly, it was decided that it would be safer to remove all the trees concerned. Two oaks, which probably pre-date the trees that were felled, are likely to have had time and space to develop stronger root systems, and are in a less exposed situation so these have been retained.

Q2. None of the trees were judged to be an immediate safety risk, but several of the hybrid poplars were found to be in a poor condition and would have required removal fairly soon. The reason for the felling of the trees was, however, based on opening up the views of the City, rather than for safety reasons.

- The trees were inspected by the Council's Tree Officer, Tree Gang and one of the Mousehold Heath Wardens prior to the works.
- A geological survey was not deemed necessary, as the key reason for the removal of the trees was to open up the views of the City, rather than because the soil depth was thought to be insufficient for trees to grow safely. Trees can sometimes grow perfectly well in very thin soils, but, as stated above, in this case the very close spacings of the trees, which would have prevented the development of good root systems, was the main issue.
- Sycamore is often considered a nuisance by both nature conservationists and foresters, as it can out-compete more valuable tree species and take over woodlands and some types of open habitats. It is, therefore, common practice to remove it, or at least control its numbers. Sycamore does have some wildlife value, but it is a common (and increasing) tree in and around Norwich. It should also be pointed out that most of the felled sycamores on St. James' Hill will coppice, i.e. they will send up new shoots. It is likely that at least some of these trees will be retained, although they will be managed to stop them obscuring the viewpoint in future.

Q3. Whilst I cannot speak for the Mousehold Heath Conservators on this, I would say that the results of woodland management work often appear to be very unsightly at first, but sites affected normally recover quickly. There is already ample natural regeneration on the slope following the recent works.

Q4. The final cost of the works was approximately £28, 000, and the works were possible due to an underspend elsewhere in the Mousehold Heath budget for the last financial year. The decision to undertake the works was made by the Mousehold Heath Conservators.

Q5. The area consisted of trees that had almost all grown up since the 1970s, with little ground cover beneath them, and was one of the poorest areas for wildlife at Mousehold. During the late 20th Century, the amount of secondary woodland at Mousehold greatly increased at the expense of heathland, a far more valuable wildlife habitat, and as most of Mousehold will remain as woodland the loss of a small area like this would not be significant. On the contrary, the wildlife value of St. James' Hill might well increase now that the works have been undertaken, as there will now be a much more varied habitat with a patchwork of scrub and open, sunny areas that will encourage a wider range of wildflowers and insects, and possibly also lizards.

Q6. The works were undertaken at very short notice to take advantage of funding that was unexpectedly available, and which could not have been carried over into the new financial year, but it is accepted that public information on the works could have been better. A new management plan for Mousehold Heath has recently been prepared, and more public consultation and involvement is envisaged in the future.

I hope that I have addressed most of your points of concern, but you would be welcome to contact me should you wish to discuss this matter further, and you could also attend the next Mousehold Conservator's meeting in person (14:30 on Friday 13th June), should you wish to address any questions directly to them.

**d) Public liability insurance and claims from members of the public**

The City Council is the owner of Mousehold Heath and would be the primary target for any claims from members relating to Conservators or Council responsibilities. Although it is possible that the Conservators could be named as defendants it is unlikely to be any cause of action against them as long as they were acting within their powers. Officers have requested further information on the extent of the existing Council insurance and will be reported orally at the meeting if available.

**e) Mousehold Heath Fun Day for 2009**

Conservators at their meeting of the 14<sup>th</sup> March 2008 supported a proposal for a Fun Day on Mousehold Heath in 2009. Councillor Brociek-Coulton has contacted the Events Team at the Council to progress this and will report more fully at the meeting.