

EHPC Proposal for tree planting along part of footpaths 16 & 17

Adopted at the EHPC meeting on 8 June 2024

Editorial update on 19 August 2024

1. Summary of the Proposal:

We propose focused tree planting in the areas A & B shown in the location plan, Figure 1.

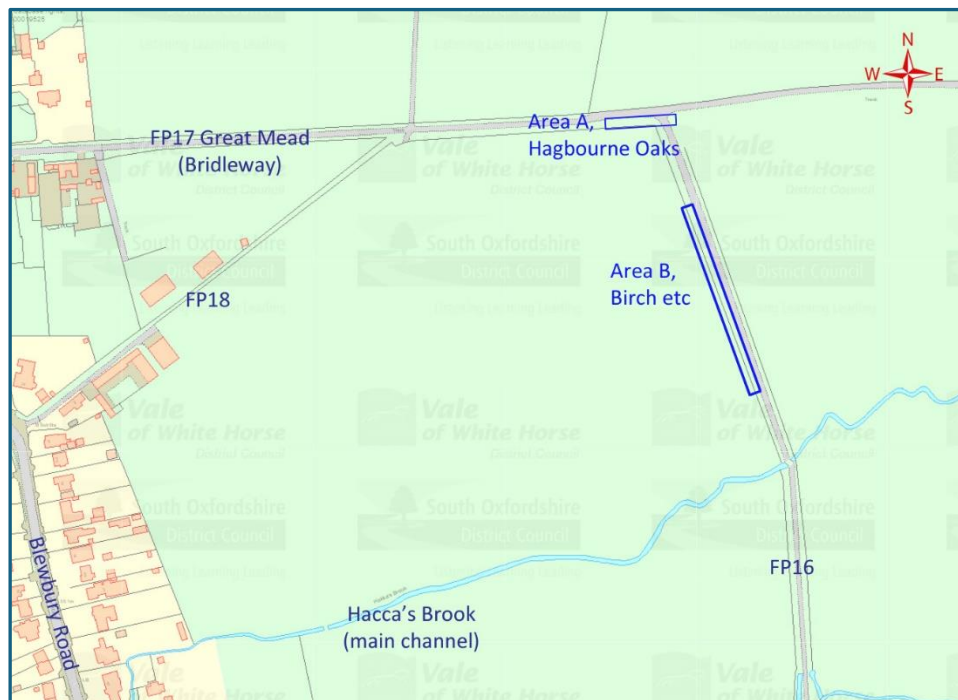


Figure 1. Location Plan

Area A. Hagbourne Oaks.

Didcot is renowned for its oak trees, but there are relatively few of these iconic trees that grow wild in East Hagbourne - one of the few that does lies just south of Area A.

We envisage 3/4 new English Oak trees along the southern edge of the FP17 bridleway, which over the course of time will grow into stately trees, providing a haven for wildlife and a source of pleasure for people walking by, as well as making a contribution to carbon sequestration.

Area B.

FP16 is classed as a footpath, but is quite wide. The eastern side of the track is heavily vegetated with some fine tall hawthorn and other species. The western (village) side has some tree/shrub growth to the north and south of Area B (hawthorn, blackthorn, wild damson), but much of it is rather rough grass of little botanical interest.

We think this could be enhanced by planting native species to provide a fringe of trees that would add rather than detract from the existing vegetation and provide benefits for both people and nature. East Hagbourne has some glorious birch trees, and we favour native birch as the main element, given that this species clearly thrives in this area. There is also space for a few hawthorn, plums or crab apple - about 12-15 trees in all.

2. Further explanation:

Background

EHPC's Climate and Biodiversity Strategy, adopted in February 2024, includes an action to identify improvements to our footpath network to make walking a pleasure while conserving and enhancing its value for nature.

Our Strategy for People and Nature (now Appendix 12 of our Neighbourhood Plan) says for the area of FP16/17 that sensitive planting of trees or hedges should be considered, particularly where it reinforces established planting e.g. along trackways or waterways.

We believe our proposal fits well with these objectives and will provide a lasting asset and even focal point for the village and those who walk from farther afield, as well as extending valuable wildlife habitat.

Choice of trees

The state of nature in our country and the stresses being experienced through climate warming are becoming familiar to us all. We do not have large areas in East Hagbourne that can be dedicated to nature, but this is one area where tree planting is practical.

In terms of benefit to nature, native species such as oak and birch rate very highly. In addition, fruit bearing trees such as plum, apple and hawthorn provide essential food and shelter for native insects, birds, butterflies and other species, many of which are currently in decline.

It is appropriate to plant native species along our pathways, especially species which have historically been found in East Hagbourne.

On this basis, we have opted for:

Oak: *Quercus robur* (this is the English or pedunculate oak).

Birch: *Betula pendula* (the silver birch).

Hawthorn and crab apple (to grow as standard trees).

Practical considerations

The site

The areas chosen for planting are currently grass, which grows rather rank, probably from over-fertilisation, and has little botanical interest. Planting of trees, particularly birch which has an open canopy, would not preclude improvement of the grassland as a later date.

They lie adjacent to the arable field owned by EHPC (the Hopfield or 11 acre field), but are separated from it by a drainage ditch.

There is adequate space thanks to the width of the two footpaths at this location, as shown in the aerial view, Figure 2, and photos at the end of this document..

We should nevertheless consult with the farmers (Gales of Appleford for the Hopfield, and Hedges of Fulscot for the field to the east), and also with OCC who are responsible for the footpath network (*this has now been done*).

Watering

New plantings will need regular watering at least through the first year until they become established - perhaps daily during hot weather - and since much of the area is some way from the nearest water supply, this will require some organisation and effort.

Water will have to be brought either from the stream (down FP16) or from the village. It might be feasible to get a small vehicle down Great Mead to the junction with FP18 to shorten the carrying distance.

Ground preparation and planting:

Given the challenge of keeping plants watered, we favour planting fairly small trees (around 1m tall), because they should establish more quickly and successfully than larger plants.

Advice for planting is to clear grass and other vegetation for a reasonable area (600mm circle minimum), but to disturb the soil as little as possible, to preserve soil structure. This area could be mulched once the tree is planted, keeping it away from the stem.

We strongly recommend planting at the beginning of the winter season (November), to give roots chance to establish before the warmer and drier spring weather.

For planting in November, bare root plants should be available.

Adequate staking and protection against rodent, rabbit and deer predation will be needed.

Risk of failures

The 3/4 oak trees, will form the centrepiece of the planting. The feasibility of the one on the eastern side of FP16 needs to be confirmed with Hedges at Fulscot, to ensure it would not obstruct access to their field (*done*).

The larger number of trees in Area B will take more effort to keep watered, although some of them are in reach of the stream, which helps.

We have a good chance of success, but some failures are to be expected. However, by planting small trees, the cost of any replacements needed should be modest.

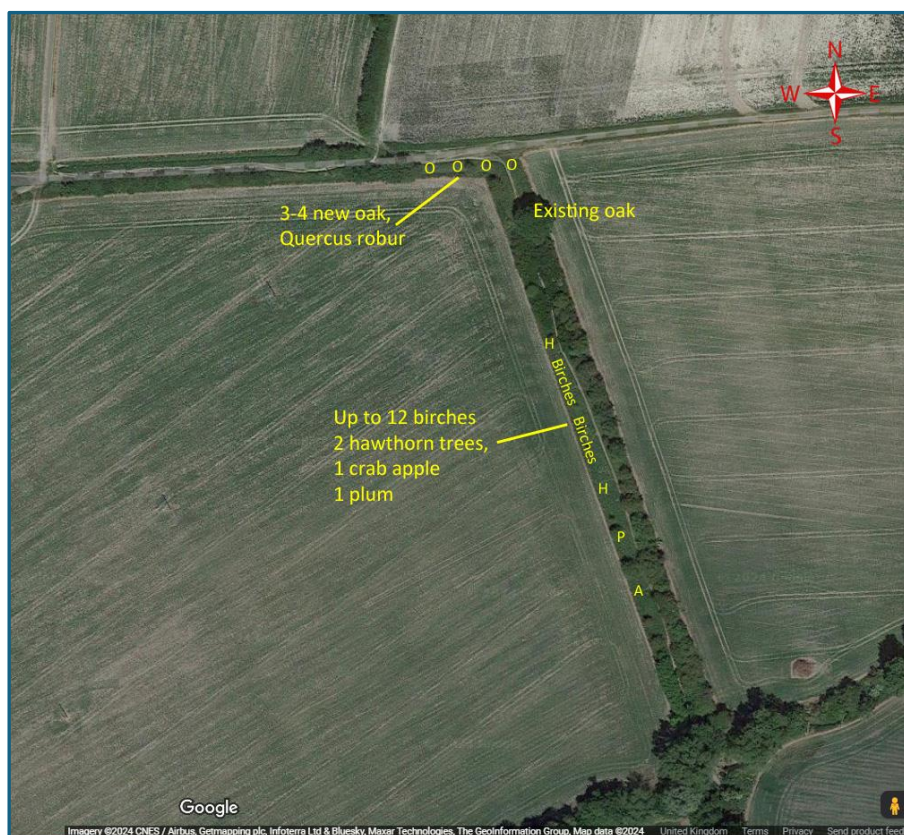


Figure 2. Planting Plan

3. Cost Estimate

The project is based on 4 oak, 12 birch, 2 apple/plum, 2 hawthorn, i.e. 20 trees.

We are advised that small (60-80cm) bare root plants are the most practical option and since the ground preparation and planting will be carried out by volunteers, the costs are not excessive.

In addition to the plants, we will need stakes, suitable protective guards and mulch to retain moisture after planting.

At its meeting on 16th July 2024, East Hagbourne Parish Council approved expenditure up to £500, however it is likely that only about half this amount will be needed immediately, with the balance covering more robust supports as the trees grow.

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Photographs of the site.



Area A : Verge south of FP17



Area A : The broad verge along FP17



Area B: Looking north along FP16