

Dorney Pocket Rewilding - Future Management & Community Engagement

November 2023

Current Situation

- In 2020 Ecosulis was commissioned by Thames Water to develop a “pocket rewilding” vision and management plan for the 22 hectare field
- Rewilding in progress with mainly natural scrub succession and native tree growth
- Tree planting of early 2022 to broaden species diversity mainly unsuccessful due to timing, summer drought and lack of care
- Path maintenance poor and in some places impassable
- Community engagement/communication virtually non existent and causing some local resentment
- Thames Water borehole work unsightly, disruptive and unclear if it will continue / restart
- No apparent progress / success in attracting existing wildlife (or other) charity to take over management or clarity on alternative approach
- Desire within Dorney Parish to examine these challenges and discuss with Thames Water if there is a way to set up an arrangement to improve the above with the assistance / leadership of a community group

Opportunity

- Understand Thames Water's position and any current pain points in making progress
- Reaffirm overall commitment to original / statutory rewilding / biodiversity net gains
- Examine options to set up community management group to lead the net phase
- Improve community engagement and communication
- Community access improvement
- Progress habitat management programme through proxy human (professional / volunteer) or grazing herbivore intervention
- Identify other local landowners who may want to assist in habitat management or extend (wholly or partially) to their own land

Thames Water: Legal Position

They have a statutory duty to protect and, where possible enhance, biodiversity and landscapes of natural beauty. This is under the water industry's Code of Practice on Conservation, Access and Recreation 2000. The Code gives practical guidance to water and sewerage companies and the Environment Agency on environmental and recreational duties under the Water Industry Act 1991 and the Environment Act 1995.

They have had a formal biodiversity duty since 1 October 2006 under Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006. The Act requires that when they are carrying out our work, they must "have regard, so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of [their] functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity". This includes restoring and enhancing biodiversity, as well as protecting it.

Considerations

- Legal entity / construct of community group
 - Unincorporated Community Group?
- Any restrictions the community group would need to be aware of
- Funding (Thames Water, Parish Council, local businesses etc.)
- Grants / other funding
- BNG (Biodiversity Net Gain) / other potential credits
- Thames Water continuing access needs / borehole work etc.
- Responsibility for any mature trees
- Ability to create natural ponds
- Ability to install fencing to allow herbivore grazing
- Specific habitats to protect (e.g. wasp spiders, skylarks, rare beetles etc.)
- Agreements around amount of publicity to minimise attraction of car-borne visitors
- Any other considerations

Interested Dorney residents

Andrew Oliver: 49 Harcourt Road. Currently completing attendance of the UK's first rewilding course at Embercombe, Devon. Active interest in the natural environment and helping to lead nature recovery in Dorney Parish

Theo Alexander: 51 Harcourt Road, interested in helping with nature restoration

Adam Seels: 47 Harcourt Road, able to assist with equipment and time to maintain paths

John Maynard: 53 Harcourt Road - supportive of better access

Lou Whaley: 31 Harcourt Road - supportive of better access and maintenance

Many others hopefully to be identified if we can move forward

Original Vision

P1 : Natural regeneration hedgerow thickening

Thicken existing hedge with a series of 'scallops' to deaden road noise, enhance a sense of seclusion, create a vibrant boundary, strengthen the wildlife corridor and increase an ecotone with maturing roadside oaks.

P2: Resetting succession to steer scrub and grove dynamics

Intervene in natural pasture succession on the pasture to accelerate, specified areas towards a) groves and b) bushy thickets and steer back other areas to grasslands.

P3: Natural grazing

Explore a partnership with the neighbouring farmer to maintain a small herd of Exmoor ponies and 2 to 3 Galloway cattle to graze the area and maintain and amplify the vegetation dynamics and mosaic habitat

Original Vision



- Site Boundary
- Access Point
- Permanent footpath
- Secondary footpath

Phase 1

- Rewilding Scallop

Phase 2

- Orchard
- Meadow
- Blackthorn
- Elm Thicket
- Autumn Copse
- Oak Grove
- Rose Dome
- Natural Succession

Phase 3

- Grazing routes

Next Steps

1. 21NOV23: Possible Presentation to Dorney Parish Council @1930hrs
2. 28NOV23: Pineapple Follow Up Meeting @ 1800hrs
3. DEC24: Presentation to James Palmer
4. JAN24: Presentation to Thames Water

Future / beyond Pocket Rewilding

- Examine other connected land opportunities for nature restoration / protection (e.g. Trumpers Field/M4 banks)
- Nature Recovery Plan for Dorney Parish
- Include Dorney Parish in larger scale, holistic green corridors across wider areas to aid landscape scale nature recovery / species reintroduction

Archive material

Ecological and bird surveys

<https://www.dorney-history-group.org.uk/the-natural-history-and-archaeology-of-dorney/>

Ecosulis baseline surveys?