

Chipper Case

The ground team feel the addition of a chipper to their equipment is integral in meeting long term sustainability and conservation aims.

What we do with arisings at present

At present, where possible, the brash removed from many operations undertaken on Herne Hill, as well as around the open spaces, are stacked to make habitat piles, used as dead hedging or as a last resort burnt on site!

The sheer amount of brash from operations such as hedge laying, coppicing and other woodland management operations means the quantity is far more than can be stacked without impeding future operations and achieving targets set out in the Herne Hill management Plan.

Disadvantages of current practices

Disadvantages of leaving brash:

- Shading of the ground from brash laying on the ground surface can promote establishment of shade tolerant weed species.
- If breakdown is slow, can impede access for future management operations.
- Nutrient enrichment as decay occurs.
- Loss of the aesthetic appeal of the site.
- Risk from vandalism (principally arson) if large quantities of material are left on site.
- No cost of brash management incurred but may increase subsequent management costs.

Dead Hedging

- technique is demanding in terms of labour requirement and is not as reliable as a correctly specified fence as a means of guaranteed exclusion.
- Often attracts potential fast growing weed species such as nettles and brambles.

Burning

- Requires some accumulation of brash prior to burning.
- Risk of fire spreading if not properly managed and controlled.
- The process is slow and therefore expensive due to the lengthy periods of management supervision necessary.
- Bare ground created may be vulnerable to weed species establishment, rather than the desired vegetation type colonizing.
- Air pollution issues (realign stored carbon).
- Smoke is undesirable near to inhabited areas.
- Results in a quantity of ash that must be dealt with e.g. spread used elsewhere.

Future tasks that would benefit from the woodchipper

Hedge management

Hedgerow management is an ongoing maintenance need, the photo below shows the airings from a hedge cut on Britten's field (288m) with nearly ten times the length of hedgerow across our open spaces (2935m) it's easy to imagine the amount of green waste produced.



Hazel Coppice

We use a large proportion of the hazel brush as protection from grazers however, like the hedgerows, we often get left with far more than required and it makes extracting the timber for handrails and other projects a fight to get through.

General tree management

Ash dieback

With ash dieback almost certainly going to make a massive impact on us, although at present national guidance is to monitor and only remove those trees that have the potential to cause harm immensely the sheer amount of brush and wood again is too much to just simply put into habitat piles

Thinning

Thinning areas of woodland to encourage the smaller trees to be able to grow and develop whilst improving the structure of woodland, whilst also encouraging a more diverse ground flora diversity, again all brush needs to be handled.

Halloing around veteran trees

Clear the encroaching trees that have grown up around the veterans in a 5m halo around the tree. Five years later, a further 5m band is cleared.

Dealing with the waste

There is potential to use the brash and wood chip on site especially in particularly wet and boggy areas using a traditional method of surfacing, where the thicker brash is laid across the path and then wood chip is laid on the top! This is to slow the decomposition of the wood chip in the wet clay soil and add an extra layer of firmness underfoot. This will need ongoing maintenance and topping up so having our own chipper to assist with this is integral!

We tested this method on the entrance to the hill across the access road that was previously ankle deep in mud as seen bellow





Conclusion

Herne Hill Has amazing qualities of unleashed potential, both for wildlife and recreation however there is a lot of work that needs to be done to pull it back around into a favourable condition. The sheer amount of waste arising will quite literally smother the flora we are trying to encourage and its decay and nutrient release could cause more harm than good and by burning it we are going against the principles of climate action.

Although it can be debated if Herne Hill is Ancient Woodland historical surveys have found indicator species and the Council agreed to manage the nature reserve as if it were ancient woodland to encourage these species to thrive (Herne Hill management Plan).

The use of a chipper will not replace the creating of habitats but compliment it, the chipping can be used for a number of projects across the woods and other open spaces such as path improvements and weed control in doing so allowing us to reduce waste and recycle. A chipper will reduce the need to bring in other materials for the above works, improve local walking routes whilst protecting land and nature, whilst also meeting several of the one Planet Principles also agreed by the Council;

- Zero Waste
- Materials and Products
- Travel and Transport
- Land and Nature