

Open Spaces Herne Hill Report Ilminster Town Council

This report has been written to provide a look into the work that the Open Spaces Team has been carrying out on the Herne Hill woodland and surrounding area. Images have been provided to help aid interpretation.

The work that we have been carrying out has been in accordance to the Herne Hill Management Plan, which can be viewed from the councils website.

Also included within this report is a section describing the future tasks the Open Spaces Team plan to carry out with regards to Herne Hill.

Access:

Maintaining and improving access to and within the woodland is an ongoing priority for the Open Spaces Team. As you are aware access onto the site can prove difficult due to the areas topography. Steps are in place in areas leading onto the site and within the woodland itself which we maintain.

We are currently working to replace all the sections of steps due to their deterioration.

This work has already been completed for the small section of steps at the ridge path, the steps to the west of the Cleeves Close area and within the woodland for the section of steps adjacent to the bluebell area. Handrails were also replaced along with the steps.



New steps and handrails leading the Herne Hill.

The site's footpaths are maintained by use of the tractor mounted flail device and handheld brush-cutters. The width of the paths are determined by the width of the flail device, which is approximately 2 metres in width. This allows site users to easily pass one another.

The greater width of the paths also reduces maintenance due to the increased time it takes for nature to grow back onto cut areas.

Woodland management:

As per the Herne Hill Management Plan, the section of hazel band in the northwest corner of the woodland has been coppiced. This work if carried out routinely will prolong the life of the hazel and provide a varied structure to the woodland, improving biodiversity.

Within this area is an active and well established Badger sett. Care was taken not to disturb the sett by marking out the area with hazard tape to ensure trees surrounding the sett were not coppiced.

Branches with a diameter larger than 4 inches were then stacked into log-piles on the woodland floor, which will provide habitat for small mammals, invertebrates and fungi, before they rot down providing further nitrification of the soil.

Brash less than 4 inches has been used to create dead-hedging around the coppiced area, sectioning it off into coups. This will help prevent browsing by Deer, increasing the chances of the hazel regenerating successfully.

An amount of the hazel brash has also been chipped, which the Open Spaces Team can use to improve accessibility where required during the winter season.



Area of Hazel coppice, showing log pile stack and marked off area surround Badger sett.



Dead-hedging, constructed of Hazel brash to prevent Deer browsing.

A section of the northern face of the hill has also been cleared of bramble, ready for the first bluebells to emerge in spring. This work is carried out to increase the visual appearance of the area for walkers. A number of standing dead trees were also cleared from this area, with the arisings stacked into log-piles and remaining brash chipped.



Area of scrub cleared ready for Bluebells in the spring season.

Future planned work:

The further two sets of steps on the hill are planned to be replaced and handrails installed. These are the steps close to the OS triangulation point and at the northwest entrance.



Old steps to be replaced due to weathering and erosion.

A report is being completed which will suggest a series of 3 routes through the woodland. Each route varies in accessibility and would include waymarkers to direct site users. These will be combined with interpretation signs which would provide information on the sites ecology and history, as well as providing a map and emergency contact information. I have requested prices from 5 different companies and will provide the council with a report once I have compiled their responses.



Proposed location of 3 waymarked routes through the woodland.

The large area of overgrown bramble at Cleeves Close has now been cleared, along with the bramble that had grown up into the trees in the area. It is our intention to now manage this area to prevent the bramble from developing into large thickets once again. There is no long term plan for this area. It could present an opportunity for the possibility of a project, perhaps involving local schools, clubs or members of the public to enhance the areas wildlife or cultural value. A report providing options can be provided following completion of the waymarker/interpretation sign report.



Cleeves Close, showing bramble cut back.

It is currently possible for members of the public to gain access onto the Herne Hill woodland with vehicles. This is due to the open access onto Brittens Field via the football club car park, then through the ridge path. The previous gate has been removed due to weathering. We plan to replace this gate in the near future.



Site of previous gate, preventing access by vehicle onto the hill.

The information provided in this report is accurate to the best of my knowledge.

Adam Willis
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Ilminster Town Council