

CAMBRIDGE CITY COUNCIL

REPORT OF: Head of Streets and Open Space

TO: Planning Committee

WARDS: Trumpington

30th May 2012

OBJECTIONS TO TREE WORKS PROPOSED TO TREES GROWING ON LAND AT THE SOUTHERN END OF EMPTY COMMON ALLOTMENTS.

1.0 INTRODUCTION – DECISION MAKING

- 1.1 The Council would like to undertake works to trees growing on land at the southern end of Empty Common Allotments. The Council's Tree Works Protocol outlines the process to be followed when The Council wishes to undertake such works. As part of the consultation three objections and one letter of support have been received to the proposed works. Under the terms of the Tree Works Protocol the matter is referred to Members to make a recommendation on the proposed works.
- 1.2 After the matter has been considered by Members of the Planning Committee it will be referred to the Director of Environment for a decision using delegated powers. The Director is required to consult with the relevant Executive Councillor and, if it is agreed that Planning Committee's recommendation shall be followed, the Director will make the decision.
- 1.3 If the Director, having consulted the relevant Executive Councillor, is of the opinion the decision may be contrary to the views of the Planning Committee, the formal decision shall be made by the appropriate Executive Councillor at a Scrutiny Committee meeting.
- 1.4 The Director of Environment is responsible for open spaces.
- 1.5 The trees are growing within the Brooklands Conservation area. However, because the land is managed by the City

Council, the trees are exempt from the statutory notification procedure. A location plan is available at Appendix 1.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 To advise the Executive Councillor for Arts, Sports and Public Places that the Committee supports the proposal to fell the trees. Subject to appropriate planting of replacement native and fruit trees in new positions at the same location.

3.0 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The request to undertake these tree works has been made by the Streets & Open Spaces Technical Officer, following advice from the Nature Conservation Officer and Tree Officer.
- 3.2 The proposal to fell these trees has been made in order to reduce the considerable waiting list (currently in excess of 100) for the Empty Common allotments and to meet the current interest in 'growing your own food' and local food production, for which this land is primarily designated. The plan is to integrate new small starter plots with a community food-growing project, which will achieve greater capacity for food growing in New Town, whilst respecting the existing biodiversity.
- 3.3 Many of the trees were planted approximately 10 years ago, when the area of land was laid out as an environmental area due to a lack of uptake of allotment plots and perennial weed issues.
- 3.4 The trees are generally in good health, in selecting trees for removal the Tree Officer has specified trees of poor form, in danger of overcrowding or potential future issues such as shading watercourses or obstructing footpaths. Key considerations being to increase light levels and reduce the impact of root plates, thus creating areas suitable for cultivation.
- 3.5 The trees of greatest habitat and aesthetic value have been identified and will be retained, including one Oak, two Ash, Hawthorn and some of the mature Hazel coppice stools.

4.0 CONSULTATIONS

- 4.1 In accordance with the Tree Works Protocol the following were consulted in April of 2012:-

Executive Councillor for Arts, Sports and Public Places

City and County Ward Councillors for Trumpington

- 4.2 A period of public consultation was held in April 2011. The proposals were sent to residents associations, advertised on the City Council Website and site notices were placed on the trees inviting comment. In addition site meetings have been held with representatives of the Empty Common Allotments and a presentation given to the Empty Common Allotment AGM in March 2012.

5.0 OBJECTIONS REPRESENTATIONS POINTS OF CONCERN

5.1 Summary of objections, representations and points of concern

The full representations are available to view in the Appendices of this report. All representations are from existing plot holders at Empty Common Allotments.

1. In Favour. Supporting proposed felling. Due to need for additional plots

1. Objection to the felling. Citing concern for loss of wildlife habitat and insufficient consultation with stakeholders.

2. Objection to felling. Citing concern for loss of wildlife.

3. Objection to the felling. Citing concern for loss of wildlife.

5.2 Comments on the objections, representations and points of concern

5.3 The sites falls within an important wildlife corridor including Hobson's Conduit, Vicar Brook, Clare Wood, the Accordia site and allotments. Together they link the River and Sheep's Green / Coe Fen County Wildlife Sites to the emerging Clay Farm open space, Nine Wells Local Nature Reserve and the wider countryside.

5.4 Officers have identified a number of features on the Empty Common site that will be retained, enhanced and managed into maturity. For example the two Ash, single Oak, some Hazel coppice, the native hedge, mature hawthorn and some Goat willows. The Vicars Brook watercourse is of primary importance and by allowing increase light officers hope to diversify the aquatic plants present and their associated invertebrates, fish etc.

5.5 Officers have been sensitive to the aesthetics of the site and sought to retain the feeling of being enclosed within a glade of trees and the screening of adjacent property, whilst allowing in sufficient light for growing crops. Recognising that the edge habitat is of primary importance for species such as Speckled Wood butterflies.

5.6 This spring officers are working with the Hobson' Conduit Trust, the Local Wildlife Trust and Cambridge University Press to write a nature conservation management plan for the green corridor between Brookland Avenue and Long Road. This will include the southern end of the allotments and advocate biodiversity principles in the design of the new growing spaces. For example insect habitats, bird boxes, Fruit trees, forest gardening techniques etc. The reduction of shade onto the Vicars brook will be a primary objective.

5.7 Following recent discussions at the Empty Common Allotment meeting it was proposed that the management plan and food growing project would include the planting of additional fruit trees along the Vicar brook track and at the northern end of the allotments, adjacent to Brookland's Avenue. This planting, including traditional local varieties, will help to mitigate the proposed loss of trees.

- 5.8 Officers appreciate the time scale has been short, driven by a desire to see new allotment holders on site this growing season. We have sought representation from the existing allotment holders and hope they will assist with the future development of this space and would welcome feedback on our draft management plan once produced.
- 5.9 Any works that are due to be undertaken within the bird nesting season will be supervised by a qualified ecologist to ensure no unlawful disturbance take place

6.0 CONSIDERATIONS

- 6.1 A total of 53 trees are proposed for removal. Many of these are small Willow, Hazel coppice or self set Sycamore. One large Leylandii Cypress is also requested for removal due to it shading the proposed plots and adjacent water course. A map and complete schedule of the proposed works are detailed in Appendix 1 and 2.
- 6.2 The trees are currently too dense to allow the area to be used for allotment extensions or alternative forms of food production. Notwithstanding the current proposals, officers would likely seek to thin this stand of trees in the near future to retain biodiversity interest and health of the tree stock.
- 6.3 Removal of the selected trees will create an area that can accommodate both new allotment plots and room for the proposed food-growing project. However, the works are likely to have a short-term minor impact on the biodiversity of the site. This amenity can be replaced over time by planting in the same location with species that will mature to similar dimensions.

Cost implications:

- The cost of tree works, approximately, for felling and removal of root balls is £5000
- The cost of replacement planting, is approximately £1000

- These costs are budgeted for within the existing allotment revenue budget

6.4 If the selected trees are to be retained then an alternative site would need to be found to proceed with the additional allotment plots and proposed community food growing project.

Cost implications:

- Unknown

7.0 CONCLUSIONS

7.1 The trees require selected removal in order to achieve the desired number of new allotment plots and a space to develop as a community food-growing project.

7.2 A site wide management plan will guide the sensitive development of the site for biodiversity

7.3 The proposals seek to mitigate the loss of amenity by appropriate replacement planting of native and fruit trees elsewhere on the plots.

8.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 To advise the Executive Councillor for Arts, Sports and Public Places that the Committee supports the proposal to fell the trees and plant replacement native and fruit trees in new position at the same location.

9.0 IMPLICATIONS

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------|
| (a) Financial Implications | Revenue Spend |
| (b) Staffing Implications | None |

- | | |
|--|-------------------|
| (c) Equal Opportunities Implications | None |
| (d) Environmental Implications
biodiversity impact | Short term, minor |
| (e) Community Safety | None |

BACKGROUND PAPERS:

The following are the background papers that were used in the preparation of this report:

Representations appear in the attached appendices.

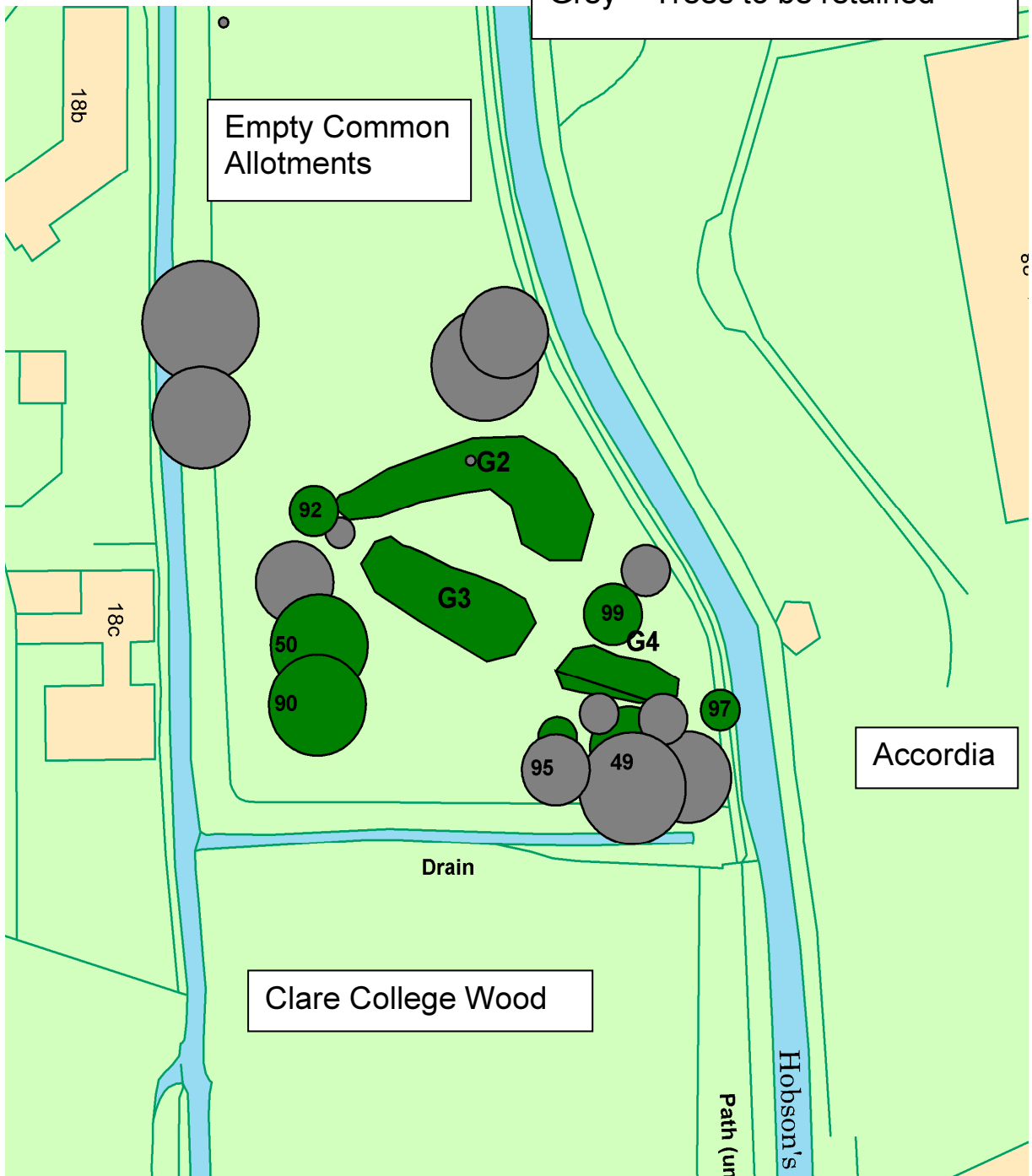
The author and contact officer for queries on the report is Guy Belcher on extension 8532

Date originated: 17 May 2012

Date of last revision: 18 May 2012

Appendix 1 – Location Plan

Green = Trees proposed for removal
Grey = Trees to be retained



This map is reproduced from Ordnance Survey material with the permission of Her Majesty's Stationery Office (c) Crown copyright. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings." Cambridge City Council (Licence No. 100019730) 2006.

Appendix 2

Proposed Tree works

(please cross reference with Location plan)

Tree group No: 2 Hazel

Remove - tree by root (x 25 trees)

Tree group No: 3 Goat willow

Remove - tree by root (x 10 trees)

Tree group No: 4 Goat willow

Remove - tree by root (x 11 trees)

Single tree No: 49 Leyland cypress

Remove - tree by root (x 1 tree)

Single tree No: 50 Sycamore

Remove - tree by root (x1 tree)

Single tree No: 90 Sycamore

Remove - tree by root (x 1 tree)

Single tree No: 92 White willow

Remove - tree by root (x 1 tree)

Single tree No: 95 Poplar species

Remove - tree by root (x 1 tree)

Single tree No: 97 Poplar species

Remove - tree by root (x 1 tree)

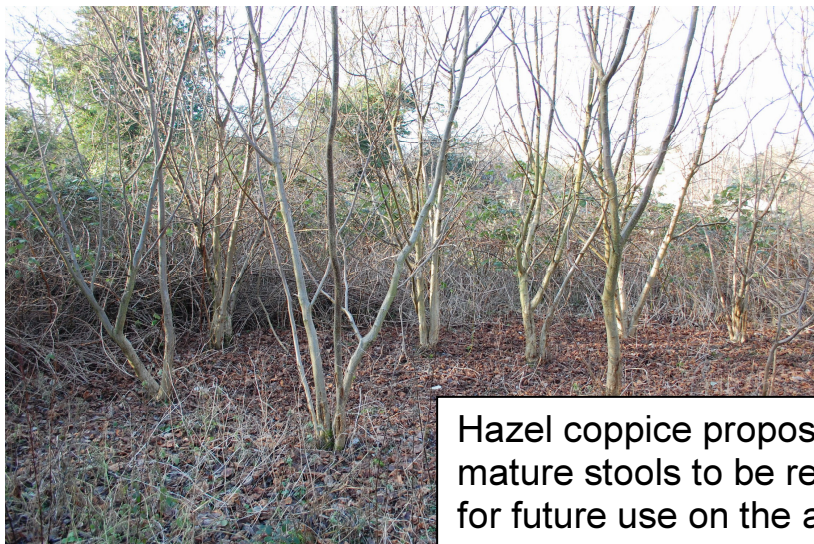
Single tree No: 99 Hawthorn

Remove - tree by root (x 1 tree)

Appendix 3



Goat Willows selected for removal.



Hazel coppice proposed for removal. Some mature stools to be retained and coppiced for future use on the allotments. New hazel will be planted elsewhere on the site.



Leylandii Cypress proposed for removal.

The adjacent Birch and Poplar are to be retained.



Pedunculate oak to be retained as long term large tree for the space.

Appendix 4

In Favour 1.

I am writing to say I strongly support the plan for bringing the south end of the Empty Common allotment site back into cultivation, which will involve felling the trees that have grown up. As you know, this plan was endorsed at the AGM of the allotment society in March.

Objection 1:

Thank you for your response. It is lovely to know that a city council ecologist exists.

I do not wish to draw my objection. I wish for my objection to be presented for consideration by the planning committee.

I do not understand why it makes sense to cut down some trees - cultivated and maintained over many years - only to include additional planting of trees at a later date. It is poor practice. How about just not cutting down the trees that are flourishing?

Yes, the timescale as you say, has been very short. And short sighted. There was no consultation beforehand with the allotmenters who know the area very well. This recent destruction of the wildlife area at the end of the allotments has been led by the new incumbents of the Accordia development. We, the allotmenters, proposed the inclusion of allotments as part of the Accordia development to the council years ago. This was not implemented and now a wildlife area is being destroyed to quench the voices of Accordia buying for allotments. Why did the City planners did not require the developers to provide space for allotments at the time?

Those of us who have allotments at the southern end of Empty Common know how much wildlife there is : deer, pheasants, numerous species of birds etc If you put 50 mini allotments there with concomitant footfall, plastic, noise, garden tools, sheds, grass cutting machinery in a relatively small area, it will not be attractive to wildlife, no matter how many "biodiversity principles" are included in the design. Just leave it wild.

As you say, it is "an important wildlife corridor". Why on earth then are you attempting to destroy it in order to meet the current interest in "growing your own food"? You must be aware that "growing your own food" is a fashion. Nobody depends upon this food to live. It is a middle-class trend. Why on earth should the council be pandering to this trend, as opposed to a more long term concern for wildlife and the environment? Why not dig up some of the flat green lawn areas of Accordia to provide allotments? This will not cause too much destruction, as wildlife does not favour lawns.

It would be really lovely for once to see some council activity that does not favour: cutting down trees where birds nest, clipping grass verges where ducklings nest, removing brambles where wildlife seek shelter, bulldozing riverbanks, removing shady glades.

In other words, please leave it alone.

Thank you for your email. I would be very happy to talk to you sometime. I'm sure we care about the same things.

Objection 2.

Thanks for your message to me and Sarah on this matter I appreciate your aim to maintain the treasured ambiance of Empty Common while also providing more plots for people on a long waiting list.

I think there are two things to be said about this. It would be a huge pity to lose the woodland glade aspect that you describe. It could be said to be almost beyond price to so many people in a growing city. Many visitors to Empty common have been surprised and charmed by its natural blend of quiet woodland and wildlife. Much of this is due to the mature hardwood trees and the bird and other wildlife they attract. It is true that the large

sycamores along Vicar's Brook throw some shade on allotments, but perhaps this is the price we all have to pay for the nature of the place. And horticulturally speaking, some shade is no bad thing. I am sure that if the trees are felled and the shrubs and rough ground manicured, the magic of the place will be gone. I think your idea of a compromise between the idyllic and clearing the site for more allotments is a hope too far. I do not think it possible.

Certainly, clearing the south of the site from brambles (a haven for wildlife) and the shrubs and rough natural growth as has already been done along a section of Vicar's Brook, is devastating to wildlife and I hope it will not be continued. Picking brambles in the autumn was also popular and part of the scene. Apropos the protection of the wildlife corridor, it seemed strange that the clearances done at the south end of Empty Common took place during the nesting season. Again, I know there is a respected view that shade is bad for aquatic life in streams, but as an inveterate fisherman of many years, I beg to differ.

Planting new trees or standards to replace the felling of mature trees is poor practice and a poor solution. Timeous new planting should take place at least a generation before growing trees are felled. One must take account of the here and now as well as future generations. The planting of saplings as an exchange for the loss of mature woodland is a hard idea to sell.

There is a general point about the waiting list for allotments that is rather beyond this discussion, but I hope you will allow it as I may copy this note to those more concerned with it. It is that while the City has an obligation to provide allotments (of statutory size), this has been largely neglected over the years. For instance, some of us at Empty Common had a discussion with the developers of the Accordia site before planning consent and we proposed the inclusion of allotments on the site for residents, but this was not followed through. The question arises as to why the City planners did not require the developers to provide space for allotments at the time, which would have demanded only a small fraction of the open space on that large site. The consequence of not doing so is the increased pressure for plots at Empty Common. We see space at Accordia given over to childrens' playgrounds, football, lawns and flower beds, but none for allotments. Why was this overlooked? One may wonder also whether the City has

considered planning requirements to provide allotment space at Clay Farm and Trumpington (and other) coming developments.

Objection 3.

As a tenant of an allotment for over 20 years on Empty Common, I am writing to object to the proposed felling of yet more trees on the site. As a Zoologist I know that the value of the site to wildlife is being eroded all the time. The best habitat is old trees, ivy and brambles all of which provide just what is needed for a thriving population of insects which in turn provide food for birds. Over the last few years since previous "tidying up" by the council I have noticed a decline in the small population of Speckled Wood butterflies which like dappled shade from trees along the Vicars Brook path and a decline in Gatekeeper butterflies which feed on Brambles. Over ten years ago I had meetings with Council Staff and the Wildlife Trust on site which I thought was going to lead to an improvement.

At the same time the Hazel coppice was planted at the request of some of the allotment holders. I understand this is now under threat just as it has reached maturity.

It is now right in the middle of the bird nesting season and all disturbance on site should be avoided. I ask that tree felling should be stopped and that plenty of ivy, brambles and general cover should be left alone.