

“The Hoylake Willows” – 2 years and ongoing!

Background

After three willow trees near to Manor Road Station in Hoylake were pollarded in February 2020 the site was heavily covered with woodchip - the stumps presented a forlorn image. The site is too small an area to have much status, but a botanical survey was undertaken by Dr Hilary Ash, and 88 newly emerged plants species were named and DAFOR coded.

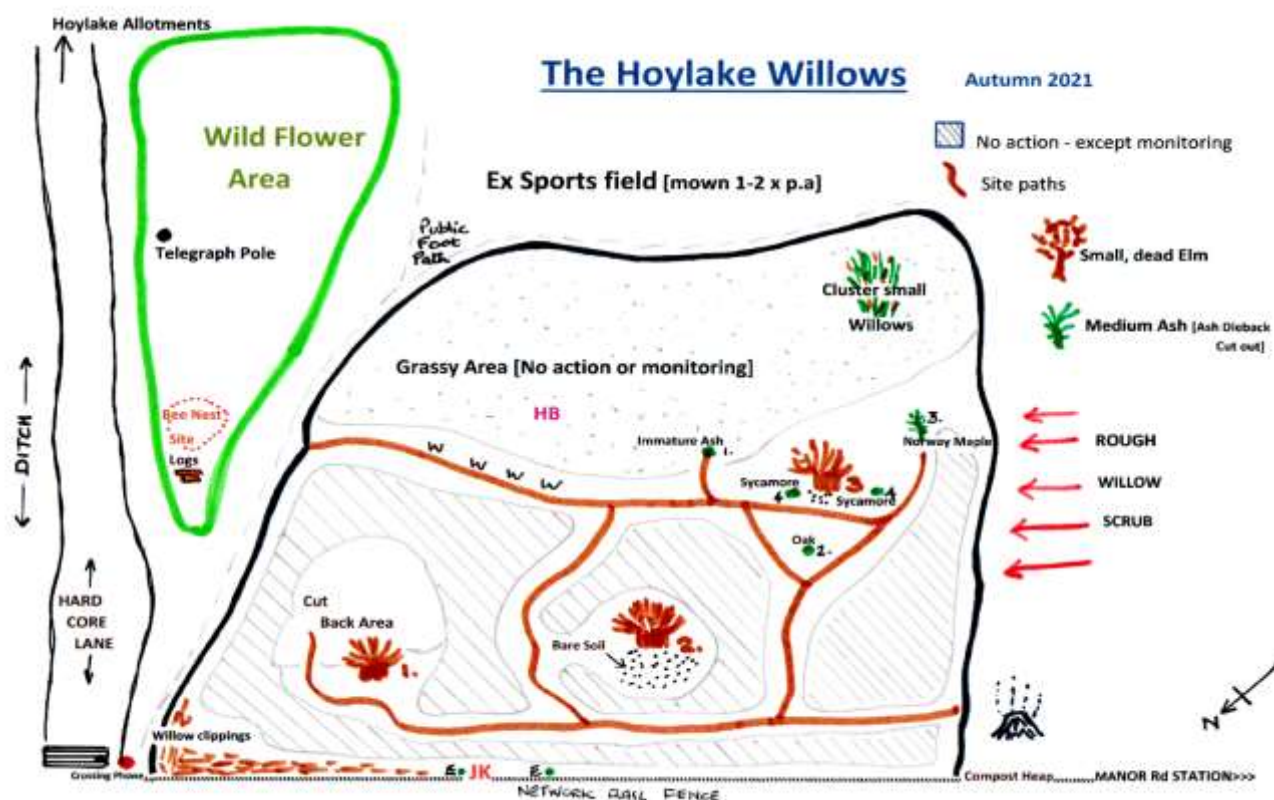


February 2020



Early days – the view across the Wild Flower area

“The Hoylake Willows” project has grown now it has two strands – the original wooded area which has a ‘rewilding’ focus and a wildflower garden, called the Triangle. in which the ground is more actively managed and pollen-rich plants are deliberately planted. Though different, they share the same environmental aims of offering habitat space to promote biodiversity and to increase the chance of green spaces linking up to form corridors.





The 'planting-up' beds start to take shape



Wirral MBC signs gave clues about the aims

Overall Aims and Objectives.

1. To increase in Biodiversity and make a contribution to Green Corridors and Green Space in line with good environmental practice and Wirral Council policies.
 2. To continue working with Wirral Borough Council – this is seen as vital ... renewed connections with appropriate Officers need to be made after the disruption of Covid and the various pressures under which we are all operating.
 3. To continue to learn more of the complexities of this small, semi-urban wild space, including informed advice from other people and using webinars and other accessible on-line information.
 4. To gradually extend informal monitoring of the species, in both the Wildflower Garden and the Rewilding area, beyond our current work with plants, especially fungi and fauna.
 5. To spread the word in our local community and to welcome visitors to enjoy the space.
- A new 'private' Facebook page called **The Hoylake Willows** has been set up, which we hope will provide a space for information about, and photos of the site, as well as comment from members, interested in rewilding and wild flower policy – it serves as an informal 'blog'.

Progress and Current Objectives in the Triangle Wildlife Garden

Work Progress

- a. **Ground preparation...** the ground is relatively fertile, with a strong growth of ground elder, nettles, coarse grasses, docks, creeping thistle and umbellifer species, this rough vegetation including the root mass was manually removed and composted off site prior to planting. By Dec 2021 eight flower beds - approx. 39 m² were created, (including a 4 m² 'no-digging' bed for Yellow Rattle)



Seedlings in the greenhouse



Sunflower, Nettle-leaved Bell Flower and Red Clover seedlings in the ground

b. Planting ... New, less competitive species were planted in the prepared beds, mostly raised from seeds, cuttings, or generated from existing roots - the seeds were purchased or donated... wherever possible native species were chosen and garden plants only used if they were pollen and nectar rich, non-invasive and low maintenance. In all, 32 plant species were present in the Triangle, including 9 annuals, and 23 perennials.



b. Yellow Rattle [an annual hemiparasite] was used as an **experiment** to tackle the coarse grasses. 21 Yellow Rattle plug plants were planted in Spring. The seeds produced were collected and raked into the soil in the autumn... we look forward to the new seedlings sprouting in the spring of 2022.

Objectives In the Triangle Wildlife Garden

- a. In 2022 new plants will mostly be spring flowering species, to team up with whatever has survived from last winter. Flower rich patches will be added along the grass edge of the lane, so gradually establishing a "green corridor" along the lane. This planting could include low growth and low maintenance trees and shrubs - these reportedly provide 60% of nectar source for pollinators.
- b. A nesting site will be constructed for mining bees, which nest on bare soil or soil with sparse vegetation. This new nesting site is near the pollen sources provided by the Triangle, the Rewilding area and the adjacent field.
- c. Make a log pile to provide shelter, basking place, and hunting ground for a variety of invertebrates and other animals. This will be placed at a sunny spot.
- d. Continue the flora and fauna survey in the Triangle area and feed the information to the nationwide invertebrates monitoring and recording database whenever possible.



Immature Ladybird



Bumblebee

Work and Objectives in Rewilding area

1. Care of the Trees

a. The established Willow trunks are huge and have regrown dense 'crowns' of long, thin branches. Recently the lower branches have been cut back to the trunk - all round on Tree 2 and to a lesser extent on Tree 3, this has increased the variety of habitats, including bare soil.



Tree no.3 after the trim

b. The immature trees continue to be checked... this includes an Ash, an Oak, a Norway Maple and two small Sycamores.



Norway Maple



Oak



Ash .. no sign of Ash Dieback...yet!

- c. Two established, but small elder trees [one formed from a shoot coming from very old elder log] needed no further action.
- d. Willow whip/shoots growing from the original root systems have appeared in various parts of the site, these have been cut right back except a line along the main path [shown as a line of Ws on the map], these will be kept trimmed to start a 'hedge'.
- e. Two small Horse-chestnuts have been removed off site on advice from Dr Hilary Ash.

2. Creation of a range of micro-habitats

a] In a margin of 20-30cm on each side of most of the paths the herbaceous plants been strongly cut back to a few inches or ground level. A largish area [near to Tree 1] has been similarly cut back, low growing plants started to colonise very quickly, and small molehills have appeared here. [The waste cuttings were removed from the site]



b] Some of the logs originally from the 2020 pollarding had not been removed – now the bark has mostly fallen away and has been left to create new micro-habitats



c] The removal of the whippy branches from 2 of the willow trees has exposed bare soil, the cut off branches are piled along railway fence and a small wood pile has been created using larger bits of branches at the foot of tree 3.

3. Paths

Paths have been established and maintained using woodchip, making visits by members of the public more welcoming and reducing a 'trample effect'.



4. Invasive plants have been monitored and dealt with ... including

- a. **Himalayan Balsam**... [shown as **HB** on the site map] in the first summer two large plants flowered, but they appear to have not seeded! Only a few very frail looking plants have appeared this year.
- b. **Japanese Knotweed** ... [shown as **JK** on the site map] A few plants reappeared in the expected places, but they seemed greatly diminished, despite no spraying by the Council. All visible JK material including roots has been securely removed and incinerated.
- c. **Convolvulus** the recent growing season produced a massive population of this plant - the degree to which it is allowed to continue in such profusion will be monitored. We need more knowledge/expertise to understand the impact of this 'determined' plant on other species!

5. The Regular Informal Monitoring of the Rewilding area has continued...



Hoary Plantain

A few species have been lost, including Hop Trefoil and the one or two specimens of Slender CornCockle, that were identified in the first season.

Other species have prospered/spread eg. Common Vetch, Purple Loosestrife and most recently Snowdrops. We have seen some large swathes of flowering plants, eg Lesser Celandine, Ivy, Meadow Sweet and Goose-grass and a small stand of Hoary Plantain has appeared.

[The **grassy area** on the south-east side, nearest to the field – was originally not thought of as part of the Hoyle Willows site... to date we have just noted there is a great deal of grass and Phragmites]

6. The Rough Willow Scrub outside the site on the western edge has been cut back to prevent it encroaching on and completely overwhelming the site



We want to offer our continued sincere thanks to

- Counsellor Liz Grey, Dr Hilary Ash, Cheshire Wildlife Trust, Kate Rice and Peter Wilson for their early, and ongoing, encouragement and support and recently Josh Styles.
- Wirral Borough Council staff members have provided support and a link to the Council.
- Rose Chandler and the other members of the Hoylake Allotment Association community.
- Family and Friends, including Rosie Saville for her Facebook skills and general advice.



White Campion and Meadow Sweet



Elderflower



Plenty of Thistledown

Our work will continue.....

***Sally Scott and Yan Wang
The Hoylake Willows***

Spring 2022