

DALLINGTON PARISH COUNCIL

TREE WARDEN

Report to PC, November 2016

Since being appointed Tree Warden for Dallington Parish in June this year I've been doing the following: -

1. Establishing the duties expected of a Tree Warden
2. Publicising my role to Dallington's Parishioners
3. Complaining to the Forestry Commission about their environmentally-damaging work in Dallington Forest
4. Making contact with sources of relevant information, advice and funding
5. Establishing future plans for this role

The duties expected of a Tree Warden

According to information I found on ESCC's website, a Tree Warden's role is to: -

- Keep an eye on local trees and deal with any relevant matter that might arise
- Be proactive and promote trees and their proper management
- Be a link between East Sussex County Council and the local community

The ESCC Dutch Elm Disease Officer wrote that *"the basic job of a tree warden should be to champion the maintenance of the current parish tree stock, either by checking that on-one is felling trees they shouldn't (keep an eye on local planning applications involving tree work), helping people who do need tree work by advising or signposting to reputable contractors or advisors, looking out for any pests and diseases, etc., but probably most importantly, getting the local community involved in tree planting of any kind, e.g. woodland, orchards, memorial trees, etc."*

So, no pressure then!

Publicising my role to Dallington's Parishioners

In June and July I made a number of postings on the Dallington Village website, posing questions and inviting response by email from website visitors. I had very few responses so I don't think the website is getting to many parishioners (or they aren't interested in Dallington's trees).

In future, as well as the website I feel the Parish notice boards should carry short postings of tree-related activities and requests for parishioner involvement.

Any other suggestions on more effective communication would be gratefully received.

Complaining to the Forestry Commission

While only a small part of Dallington Forest lies within Dallington Parish I felt I had to complain – in a personal capacity – to the Forestry Commission about tree-felling and processing work that was being conducted in May, the peak of the song bird nesting season.

Their response was, to put it mildly, disappointing. The crux of their argument for continuing this work is “The law states that for birds, any loss or damage to individual birds or their nests that arises as *‘the incidental result of a lawful operation that could not reasonably be avoided’* does not constitute an offence.” In other words, they don’t care about the damage they were doing to song birds because they’ve got a legal get-out.

I copied my correspondence to the RSPB who were very supportive and while acknowledging the FC’s legal position encouraged me to make similar complaints whenever it appears that nesting birds are being disturbed – and I would ask that everyone else in Dallington keeps an eye open for damage to nesting habitat and lets me know about it.

Making contacts

I have made contact with Anthony Becvar the Dutch Elm Disease Officer for ESCC who is based in Lewes, The Conservation Foundation (organisers of the Churchyard Trees Conferences) and with Jamie Simpson, a new resident of Dallington.

Anthony Becvar, Dutch Elm Disease Officer for ESCC

Anthony Becvar has provided me with a range of documents about trees, their value and the threats and challenges. I’ve not fully digested the contents but I’m working through the documents. If anyone would like copies of the documents please let me know.

‘Churchyard Trees’ conference

The Conservation Foundation, together with the C of E, ran a series of ‘Churchyard Trees’ conferences and I attended the presentation in London on Nov 2nd. Most of the presentations were interesting and provided me with a number of ‘take-home’ facts:

- If all the English churchyards were combined into one its area would be greater than a National Park;
- Most churchyard Yews had been growing for more than a thousand years before humans planted a church nearby;
- Ancient trees, gigantic and long-lived, are the ‘Blue Whales’ of our countryside;

- The ecological value of a tree increases exponentially as it moves from middle- to old-age;
- Old trees are a haven for bats, so if parishioners want to minimise the bats' use of the church roof for their roosts then look after the trees;
- Any work on a tree wounds it irreparable - 'lopping and topping' is anathema and those espousing it should be avoided at all costs;
- It can be unlawful to disturb the ground holding a tree's feeding roots (extending a radius of 12 times the trunk diameter as measured 1.5 m from the ground);
- Ancient German lore has it that anyone damaging a tree would have his belly-button cut out and nailed to the tree!

Three of the presentations were of particular relevance to us in Dallington; Revd Dr Mark Betson had performed a survey of 40 Sussex churchyards and of visitors' views on their spiritual and natural value (and is inviting more input from parishes not included in the first survey), Russell Ball provided much valuable information about the care and maintenance of churchyard trees, and Revd Canon Nigel Cooper discussed churchyard trees and Church and State Law. I have copies of all the presentations.

What became clear is that we need to understand what our churchyard has now and to establish a plan for maintaining all its ancient and veteran trees in a way that benefits the trees, their ecosystems, and the people that use the churchyard. I would like to talk with the Churchwardens about producing a 'Statement of Significance' (CofE-speak) covering the Parish Church and its grounds as a starting point.

From various speakers it is clear that funding for tree-related preservation work should be available from the Forestry Commission and from local authorities (i.e. ESCC and Rother).

Jamie Simpson

Jamie has recently moved into a property in Brightling Road (where his replacement of an established hedge with an indigenous species hedge attracted some attention) and I came across him working his patch of coppiced woodland in Dallington Forest. He is ex-Kew Gardens and is a licensed tree-surgeon.

I've been impressed with his passionate commitment to identifying, maintaining and preserving ancient and veteran trees, and was delighted to learn that he is already involved in a project to locate and identify such trees in the Dallington area. He is very interested in working with the Parish in this survey and in helping to put together a Parish-wide tree management plan.

He is also hosting an event in his woodland one day in February 2017 for one of the woodland charities and has asked me if I could help him find parking spaces for up to 40 cars as there is no room on the Glaziers Forge track for this number of vehicles. He had contemplated asking ESCC for temporary closure of Rookery Lane (to Rushlake Green) but I've advised him against this due to the disruption to both light and heavy traffic this would cause.

A number of alternatives have been suggested to him; a deal with the village school for use of their car park in return for tree-related activities for the children, ditto Punnetts Town school, parking in The Street between the school and the triangle. I believe Dallington should support Jamie's interest in our Parish and I'd be grateful of any other workable suggestions the PC might have for parking the cars.

Establishing future plans

I plan to

- complete a survey of all the rare, veteran or ancient trees in the Parish, posting photos and information on the village website
- publish the findings on the village website and provide the PC with a documented record of the state of our trees
- work with the PC and interested Parishioners to produce a management plan for adoption by the Parish
- work with the Churchwardens to produce a management plan for the trees in the churchyard
- act as the focal point for establishing village tree-related events (I don't have the skills or aptitude for arranging this myself).

The Parish Council can help me by

- a) alerting me to any planning applications that include, or could include, work on or disturbance of trees or the ground in their vicinity
- b) helping to communicate with our Parishioners
- c) helping me organise tree-related events in Dallington
- d) putting me in contact with the Churchwardens.

I would also like to establish whether the PC can reimburse expenses, such as travel costs attending relevant meetings and events, and whether the PC would be able to source funds to finance tree-related events in Dallington. While lack of reimbursement wouldn't stop me from fulfilling my responsibilities, a little financial support would be welcome.

End of report.

Doug Edworthy

Larches Cottage, 05/11/16