
OXFORD CITY COUNCIL AND CRIPLEY MEADOW ALLOTMENTS ASSOCIATION**CRIPLEY MEADOW ALLOTMENTS****TREE MANAGEMENT PLAN****Nicholas Pearson Partnership****20 December 2016****1.0 INTRODUCTION**

1.1 This Tree Management Plan sets out the tree maintenance and management operations to be carried out by Oxford City Council within the Cripsey Meadow Allotment Association's lease area west of the University of Oxford Castle Mill Graduate Accommodation.

1.2 The area covered by this plan is defined by the lease from Oxford City Council to the Cripsey Meadow Allotments Association, outlined in red on the attached figure 1. This plan does not formally cover the management of trees outside the lease area, but does describe existing tree management and makes recommendations where trees outside the lease area are under the direct control of the City Council (areas outlined in green on figure 1).

2.0 EXISTING CONDITION**2.1 Historic Background**

Cripsey Meadow was a low lying flood meadow, historically created as an island in the eleventh century by the formation of Castle Mill Stream. The meadow was truncated on the east side by railway lines by 1850 but, in 1876, a number of pollard willows was first plotted along Willow Walk (north of Castle Stream) and along the west boundary of Cripsey Meadow, Fiddler's ditch. Only seven or eight trees lay south of Castle Mill Stream. Cripsey Meadow was also subdivided at the time by a ditch, also lined with willows.

By 1899, the meadow area had been raised by the tipping of municipal waste, infilling the central drainage ditch, and allowing the whole site to be converted to allotments. By 1921, part had been reallocated to railway sidings, and it is this area which has since been redeveloped, with Castle Mill Graduate Accommodation as the last phase. Sometime after 1937, the southern tip of the allotment site reverted to mixed scrub woodland.

2.2 The above history is reflected in the four main areas and types of trees on the site, mapped on figure 1.

1. *Orchards.* About five years ago, the northwest corner of the allotments (a marsh area plotted in 1876) was planted with locally traditional fruit tree varieties, supported by grant aid. The triangular area is

enclosed by young willow pollards and scrubby hedgerows, one boundary cut each year, on a triennial regime, to a height of 1.5 to 1.8 metres. Although the fruit trees are on dwarfing rootstock, and the hedges and pollards are regularly cut, the area also supports a fine, maturing weeping willow and several semi-mature planted native trees, including oak, birch and hornbeam. The area floods periodically, and it is a slow growing orchard due to flooding, and early damage by Muntjac deer. Another area of orchard trees were planted by Oxford University as a gift to the association to mitigate the inconvenience to members in the building of Castle Mill. This is in an area that could no longer be readily used for allotments.

2. *Non-Intervention Area.* The southern tip of the allotment lease area is fenced off with dense riverine woodland, mainly willow, with some ash. It encloses a badger sett. It is, in essence, non-intervention woodland, believed to have grown up in the last forty years. Management is limited to periodic pruning and pollarding of trees along the boundary fence which shade out allotment plots or threaten to damage the boundary fence. This is now overdue with cracked willow and other trees now overgrowing and threatening the allotment fence. It seasonally conceals modern housing at Venneit Close from the west, and views of the Castle Mill Graduate Accommodation from a short section of the main river tow path.
3. *Boundary Pollards.* The west and north boundaries comprise mature pollarded willows, some apparently pre-dating 1876. These were last pollarded in 2011 on the west side where adjacent to the south field plots and in 2007 on the west and north side, after a long period of neglect, as a result of which some trees had split, and fallen branches had, in some cases, regenerated. Some willows on Fiddler's Bow side of Fiddler's Ditch were not pollarded in 2007 and now cause concern to the allotment. Public criticism of reopened views to the Castle Mill Graduate Accommodation following pollarding of Willow Walk, north of the stream, has delayed planned re-pollarding of the willows along the north and west boundary. A scattering of other trees (two sycamores, hazels, a Norway spruce and a walnut) have grown up between these widely spaced pollards on the north side, now twenty to thirty years old. Most recently, a badger fence has been erected, mostly to the allotment side of the trees, to protect the allotments.
4. *Allotment Trees* A small number of the above pollard willows and the two sycamores grow on the allotment side of this new fence, mapped as '4' on figure 1. One sycamore is on plot 1. Where is the other?

2.3 **Tree Management outside the allotment site**

Although outside the terms of this management plan, three areas of trees north and west of the site provide the landscape context to the allotment site, owned and managed by Oxford City Council. These areas are:

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5. *Willow Walk* was already laid out with pollard willows and benches by 1876. The setting of Willow Walk was changed by development of the railway, including the Walton Well Road overbridge and later car park, prior to the development of the Castle Mill Graduate Accommodation. The pollard willows were last pollarded in 2012, which opened up the Castle Mill Graduate Accommodation to views from Port Meadow during construction, attracting substantial public criticism. The willows are due for re-pollarding in 2016/17. This should be delayed if Cripsey Meadow boundary willows are pollarded as is necessary. Since 2012, a number of hawthorn and poplar trees have been planted in cattle guards between the pollard willows. Either end of the Willow Walk is marked by well-established specimen trees; a Holm oak at the west end, and lime tree at the east end.

 6. *Fiddler's Island*. Although this area was open, grazed meadow on the historic map and photographic records, Fiddler's Island is now heavily wooded with overgrown pollarded and regenerating willows, as well as tall poplars. Some of these trees and branches have fallen across Fiddler's Island stream. (This work was planned for November 2016.. It has not been done. The trees thin out at the southern end, where the island tapers into just a towpath on a bank between the river and Fiddler's Island stream.

 7. *Fiddler's Bow* is a similar, but narrower, island between Fiddler's Island stream and Fiddler's Ditch, forming the boundary of the allotment lease area. The latter ditch is heavily silted, layered and overgrown. Some willows on Fiddler's Bow, younger than those along the east side of the ditch, were last pollarded in 2011, at the same time as those along the ditch. Fiddler's Bow does not support the height of trees found on Fiddler's Island, due both to history, and the marshy nature of the ground. Several of the older willows have collapsed, creating gaps until regeneration occurs. (Cripsey Meadow planted 4 alders in one such gap in 2012. These have grown well.)

3.0 OBJECTIVES

3.1 Following a meeting between Oxford City Council, Oxford University and Cripsey Meadow Allotments Association on 5 October 2016, the following objectives were drafted:

- To enable continued safe and productive use of the allotments, including tree management to protect structures and fences from fallen trees and branches, and to protect the allotments from undue overshadowing.
- To maintain areas of nature conservation interest. (The major conservation interest here is the allotment site
- To allow for safe, efficient and sensitive management of the allotment lease area trees, fences and boundaries.

- To manage trees so as to continue and, where possible (and where not contrary to the needs of allotment growing) enhance seasonal visual concealment of the Castle Mill Graduate Accommodation buildings from external public viewpoints including, in particular, from Port Meadow, but also from the Thames towpath.
- To maintain tree belts appropriate to the physical conditions, local and historic landscape character, adjoining Port Meadow and the Jericho Conservation Area. (The proposed new tree belt in front of Castle Mill is unsuited to planting with more willow as the allotments consider this to now be more of an urban view)
- To seek to coordinate essential tree management works across ownership boundaries, to avoid accidental reopening of view gaps across the allotments to Castle Mill Graduate Accommodation.

4.0 CONSTRAINTS

4.1 At a site meeting between Oxford City Council, Oxford University and Cripsey Meadow Allotments Association on 17 October 2016, the following constraints were identified:

- Access to the trees concerned is highly constrained, and largely limited to pedestrian access and narrow tracked machinery, in particular due to the new allotment badger fence. This makes tree maintenance more expensive, partly prevents the use of raised working platforms, and precludes complex, regular maintenance of individual trees.
- The high water table poses challenges to the stability of tall, densely-planted trees, increasing the risk of extensive windblow, or poor height growth of less flood-tolerant species (both the specimen Holm oak and lime along Willow Walk are less than half the typical height of the species). Some alternative species like poplar are very fast but open-grown, with sparse crowns, and short growing seasons, and therefore of limited use for visual screening.
- The pollarded willows which are so characteristic of the local landscape and historic views require regular management. Without periodic pollarding, the trees will split and collapse, causing damage and the need for expensive remedial works. Even if the willows do not collapse, the risk of such damage generates the need to reinstate or continue pollarding, at considerable cost. Such work is ongoing at present on private land west of the Thames.
- The Environment Agency can require or carry out tree management works where trees affect either the navigability of the main river channels, or the flood performance of main and side channels. (Castle Mill Stream adjacent to the allotment is now of a very reduced width. This now allows access from the bridge onto land where river used to be. Similarly, public rights of way, and railway lines, need to be kept safe and accessible.

- **As leaseholders, the Allotments Association have the right under the lease to have tree growth affecting use of the plots to be controlled. This is an obligation upon the City Council under the lease.**

5.0 PROPOSALS

Recognising the above objectives and constraints, the following proposals are put forward for consideration:

5.1 Tree Management

The tree management method for coppicing or removal of trees within the lease area should not require access through allotment plots, so avoiding any risk of damage to these plots. (The November pollarding of a willow on plot 4 required access across a working plot)

5.2 Non-Intervention Area

It is not proposed to alter the existing, non-intervention management of the southern badger sett area, but to propose continuation of the existing regime to, periodically, prune back, or pollard branches overhanging the allotment fence. (Now necessary)

5.3 Pollard Willows outside the badger fence

To maintain the historic landscape character, allotment boundary and badger fence, it is proposed to continue the existing periodic pollarding regime, on an 7 year rotation to the west side, due to proximity of the fence and light issues; **and on a 8 year rotation to the north side, including pollarding and coppicing the understorey regeneration from fallen branches south of Castle Mill Stream.** As the northern boundary willow pollards were not a continuous line historically, the landscape character could be maintained by infill planting with native black alder, *Alnus glutinosa*. This species meets the tree management objectives, and will only require periodic topping or coppicing at, say, 30 year intervals, when the trees start to die back.

5.4 Trees inside the badger fence

Overgrown pollard willows inside the badger fence impact upon the allotment plots, and at least one is considered to be at risk of splitting apart. **It is proposed that mature pollard willows inside the fence be brought into short (5 year) rotation management,** and could be reduced in number as gaps outside the fence are infilled by replacement trees.

Semi-mature sycamore trees and hazel bushes west of the allotment entrance seem not to be an issue to plot holders, and could be appropriate long term amenity trees, balancing the specimen lime on the opposite, north bank of Castle Mill Stream.

5.5 Tree planting

The Cripsey Meadow Allotments Association does not want the number of trees within its lease area to increase in number. It is therefore proposed that each new tree planted will require the removal of another tree, to ensure that the overall number of trees is not increased. The replacement tree planting should be with species that do not need pollarding.

5.6 Coordination of tree management with off-site trees

Coordination of the timing of pollarding works is needed to ensure that these trees continue to contribute towards mid-level tree concealment of Castle Mill Graduate Accommodation. Oxford City Council manages lines of trees around most parts of the north and west allotment boundary. Sketch sections illustrate this point on figure 3.

Current gaps in the planting can be filled by using truncheon planting of willow, during pollarding work, to rapidly infill these gaps in a locally traditional manner. There is also scope, for example, to replant three or four pollard willow truncheons or alder on City Council land just north of the allotment entrance, providing the original full channel width of Castle Mill Stream is retained. (We do not want any further willow)

Previous replanting along Willow Walk has unfortunately diluted the visual character and simplicity of the walk, by planting poplar, rather than willow. This is slightly less quick to establish, but also provides a less dense foliage screen. By contrast, replanted hawthorns provide good mid-level screen density throughout the year, and are consistent with the traditional character of Port Meadow; they may have originated as part of a thorn enclosure for Willow Walk.

Whether or not these modest off-site enhancements by planting are achieved, the scope to provide very young mid rotation and mature vegetation can be demonstrated by the following draft programme for tree maintenance by Oxford City Council both within, and outside, the allotment lease area.

Allotment Lease	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029
Pollard willows		✓								✓				

outside badger fence, north side (8 year rotation).														
Coppice/pollard regrowth, north side, outside badger fence (8 year rotation).				✓								✓		
Pollard willows inside badger fence, north side (5 year rotation).	✓					✓					✓			
Pollard/infill gaps willows outside badger fence, west side (7 year rotation).			✓							✓				
Adjacent Areas														
Pollard/infill gaps Willow Walk south side (10 year rotation).					✓									
Pollard/infill gaps Willow Walk north side (10 year rotation).							✓							
Fiddler's Island thin/coppice/pollard alternate halves (10 year rotation).				✓					✓					✓
Fiddler's Bow Thin/coppice/pollard alternative halves (10 year rotation).	✓					✓					✓			

This programme should be redrafted at five or ten year intervals, to ensure sensitive areas are worked several years apart, but also to allow for adjustment in the event of storm damage, tree disease, river works by the Environment Agency, or similar external events.