

Green Infrastructure South West Web Portal: Delivery Case Study



Oak Frith Wood nature reserve

Location

Urchfont, Near Devizes, Wiltshire



Lead organisation

The site is maintained by the Friends of Oakfrith Wood community group. Contact: countryside@wiltshire.gov.uk

Main issues raised and highlighted:

In 1946 when the Estate was purchased Oakfrith Wood was not viewed as a high priority land space. There was little management for many years until the Friends of Oakfrith Wood were formed in 1994 as a reproduction of a partnership between the local college, Wiltshire Wildlife Trust, the County Council and the local community.

Main Partners

Wiltshire Council own the site who work in partnership with Friends of Oakfrith Wood community group to manage and develop the site.

Funding Streams

The maintenance and development of the site is funded through donations, grants and the sale of timber and wood products to local residents.

Aims of Project

The aim of the group is to promote the long-term, multi-purpose, sensitive management of Oakfrith and to restore its ancient woodland character, whilst encouraging sound woodland management. The wood was designated a Local Nature Reserve (LNR) in May 2004. As the opportunities arise the views of local residents have been sought on what features they would like to see in the woods.

Description of project



Oakfrith Wood LNR is located at the western edge of the village of Urchfont and can be accessed via the Byway (leading from the B3098) or from the village and the grounds of Urchfont Manor via a permissive path across farmland.

Oakfrith Wood Local Nature Reserve (LNR) forms part of the Urchfont Manor Estate, the former home of the Pollock family. The woodland which extends to 14.1 hectares was purchased by the Council along with the rest of the estate in 1945 to establish a residential adult education college.

Oakfrith is one of the largest remaining areas of ancient semi-natural woodland in the Pewsey Vale and although most of the wood has been replanted over the years a small area of the ancient woodland remains, with ancient woodland ground flora remaining in many parts of the woodland. Following a major felling in 1917 for the war effort the wood appears to have been neglected until 1928, when Rivers and Eveline Pollock took it in hand. Most of the woodland was then replanted during the early 1930s (85% broadleaf/conifer mix and 15% pure conifer). Much of the conifer planting has been removed through thinning over the years and the final area of pure conifer was felled in 1996. An additional area of trees, adjoining the wood, was planted in 2000 to celebrate the millennium.



Delivery mechanism/long-term adoption of project:

The wood is being managed as a local nature reserve to maintain and enhance the habitat for all forms of wildlife. Various surveys are undertaken from time to time to monitor the status of different species and in particular the transition of the extension to the wood from arable to woodland, opening up of existing habitats and establishing the pond as a new habitat.

Regularly reviewed management plan.

Outputs/outcomes/benefits

Oakfrith provides a much valued amenity of rich wildlife where local people and visitors can relax in a peaceful setting. The recently established project for the essential thinning of the wood has enabled firewood to be supplied to the local community for wood burning stoves/fires, thus lessening the use of non renewable fossil fuels.

There are currently some 30 local people actively involved in various ways as volunteers including monthly working parties and the woodland thinning and logging project. People with mental health issues are involved in a woodland skills and crafts project managed by the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust (funded by the NHS) much valued by local people.

Access has been much improved by the Friends of Oakfrith Wood with the creation and regular maintenance of a network of rides (trackways) and paths within the wood and enhancement and re-surfacing of the adjacent byway. A small car park has been established and some provision has been made for disable access, building on the recommendations of a disability audit.