

WILDLIFE HABITAT PROTECTION TRUST

Willow Farm, Church Fenton, Tadcaster,
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04/01/23

Hambleton Hough annual report 2022.

Our efforts during the last 12 months have been putting measures in place to control bracken and undergrowth to allow the new trees to grow and mature unhindered as our initial planting programme resulted in the loss of about 80% of stock when the Hough was first replanted.

After discussion with Tilhill contractors it was decided that the best course of action would be to put in place a programme that involved strimming round each individual tree and spraying the cleared area to give the trees the best chance of survival. This work will be carried out each year until the trees have grown sufficiently to overcome the encroaching bracken.

This was carried out and any areas that needed replanting were done and that gave us our full compliment of new trees, totalling around 4000. These were made up of Alder, Oak, Silver Birch, Sycamore, Cherry, Holly, Hazel, Blackthorn and Hawthorn. These species of trees provide a whole range of benefits to wildlife and insects that the previous woodland made up of Scots Pine could not deliver.

It will be slow progress as the trees grow but already the wood is getting some character back and we have had a lot of good feedback from visitors to the site. In particular, a lot of people have commented on the fact that they can now sit on top of the hill and see 360 degrees as far as the eye can see which on a clear day is a great view.

Unfortunately, once all the work had been carried out and the Wood was finally planted up to specification, a large section of the Hough was destroyed by fire. This was first reported at around 5.00pm on April 22nd and it took fire crews from a number of stations until around 9.00pm to finally get the fire under control which was about 200 metres wide at its peak. Thankfully the pathways that had been created stopped the fire from spreading otherwise the fire crews said they would have struggled to get it under control.

We met with the police and fire crew the next morning to assess the damage which was considerable. Over 800 trees, stakes and guards had been destroyed as the fire destroyed everything in its path and on investigation it was discovered that the fire was started by a campfire that got out of control. We were informed by a number of local people that a group of teenagers were seen leaving the site as the fire started but obviously, we had no proof that they were to blame for starting the fire. There were a lot of beer bottles and cans thrown in the wood where the fire started so it was assumed by the police that they had been in there drinking and the fire got out of control as it was tinder dry at that particular time with all the dead bracken.

The area has now been replanted but the overall cost to do this and get the wood back in line with the Forestry Commission terms was over £6000.00. The woodland is used by a lot of people daily, but it is impossible to monitor who goes in there, so we just hope this does not

happen again. We do intend to put notices up to warn of the fire risk and ask people not to have campfires at any time of the year.

We still tend to get a few petty complaints from we assume people living at Gateforth who seem at pains to make life as difficult as possible ever since we took the wood over. The latest complaint to Selby was that trees and branches were encroaching on to the road causing problems for vehicles, bikes and horse riders who were having to swerve to avoid them. This proved to be absolute nonsense and was again someone with far too much time on their hands wasting other people's time and money who then have to then investigate non-existent problems!

We have also encountered problems with residents blocking off the upper carpark area just because they don't want people driving up there. A number of times we have been up there only to find the entrance blocked with tree trunks and one occasion they had actually put a fence up. We dealt with this problem accordingly using a JCB and have since not encountered any further problems from the phantom fence builder.

Fortunately, the huge number of people who enjoy using the Hough far outweigh the small minority who seem intent on inventing problems and whinging just because they do not get their own way. These complains are slowly falling away as these people begin to realise that their made up problems are falling on deaf ears from our point of view as we are all very busy and have far more important matters to deal with.

Moving forward, it is now just a case of regular maintenance of the woodland, making sure all the paths are clear and replacing any trees that do not survive the re-planting. Tilhill contractors will again be employed in the spring to make sure the bracken is not restricting the trees and carry out any necessary work.
