Environment and Biodiversity: Hedgerows, Trees & Woodland

Report for Scotforth Rural Neighbourhood Development Plan



Background

Scotforth Parish is a largely rural area, overlooked and conjoined with the nearby designated Area of Natural Beauty: The Forest of Bowland. The Parish is dissected by the M6 Motorway and the Preston/Lancashire Canal. It contains fields with hedgerows and trees as well as ancient woods and copse, and major agricultural acreage. The agricultural community consists of mainly sheep, cattle and grassland farms, managed for grazing and winter feed crops.

This Parish supports a plethora of biodiverse wildlife; Red Deer, Squirrels, Hedgehogs, Woodpeckers, Wood Pidgeon, Great Tits, Swallows, Robin, Blackbirds, Blue Tits, Chaffinch, and Wrens. Various birds of prey live or are supported in the area, namely the Hen Harrier, Peregrine Falcon, Merlin and Short-eared Owl. On the eastern edge of the parish flows the river Conder and the Lancaster Canal on the western side, home to breeding Swans and many insects and plant species; Bees, Wasps, Dragonflies, and several species of Butterflies. This rich and biodiverse landscape offers crucial habitats for wildlife, and aids in mitigating climate change.

Two animal rescue and rehoming charities are also located within the Parish as well as several private Stables. Dogs and horses are regularly exercised on the roads, public footpaths and bridleways. The public footpaths are in regular use by the Ramblers and visitors from nearby urban areas. The pathway alongside the canal is a popular, regularly used route by cyclists and pedestrians into and from the city centre. The parish residents have indicated that the use of roads within the parish as short cuts to avoid congestion on the A6 and M6 should be controlled, either by speed limits or direct traffic limitation. The dangers to residents and visitors choosing to travel by foot on roads without footpaths or street lighting and the damage to the environment are obvious.

Planning policy

The Issues and Options consultation asked "Q7 – Do you think that the NDP should have its own enhanced policy regarding hedges and woodland?" and for comments. The respondents' overwhelming requirement is that the hedgerows and woodland should be correctly maintained and protected, and where possible, new trees and hedges planted to facilitate wildlife growth. Any housing development should be not only protective of the existing flora and fauna but seek to enhance it by incorporating green areas, tree and hedge planting and encourage the use of cycle paths and footpaths. This aligns with the Local Plan for Lancaster District Part Two: Review of the Development Management DPD Policy DM44: The Protection and Enhancement of Biodiversity which sets out that 'Development proposals should protect and enhance biodiversity and/or geodiversity, to minimise both direct and indirect impacts. There should, as a principle, be a net gain of biodiversity assets wherever possible.' A starting acceptance level would be the current British Standard for Biodiversity BS 42020.

The Parish Council has already begun the siting of bird and bat boxes and further use of these strategically by developers should be encouraged. The design and spacing of developments should reflect the existing area and the topography of the landscape should be protected, especially the ancient Drumlins to the West of the Parish. Hard edges to the developments should be avoided to allow for further sympathetic integration into the existing housing and countryside.

The following Neighbourhood Development Plan policy (SR3) is recommended, having taken into consideration the overwhelming wishes of the respondents to the questionnaire, and in accordance with both Government guidelines and Lancaster City Councils stated environmental objectives as per DM45 of their development management policy paragraph 11.31 to 11.40.

Development proposals that impact on trees, hedges and hedgerows may be supported providing that they:

A. Sympathetically incorporate and retain trees and hedges of good arboriculture and amenity value into the scheme's overall design.
B. Include measures to ensure their protection during the course of the development and their continued survival in the long term.

C. Maintain a minimum buffer of at least 15 metres in width between existing, especially veteran or ancient, woodland and any development boundary.
D. Incorporate the planting of additional trees at a minimum of three trees per development.
E. Where development proposals result in the loss of trees, replacement should aim to be at the rate of 3:1 to ensure rapid canopy replacement. Any replacement should be suitable and must demonstrate local or other provenance appropriate to the site, its character and surrounding habitat.
F. Whenever a hedge is lost and replacement is considered the necessary mitigation, this should aim to be approximately double the length of the hedge which is lost to ensure an appropriate net gain to the biodiversity or wildlife habitat it contains.
G. Proposals should be accompanied by an appropriate assessment that establishes the health and longevity of any affected trees or hedgerows to demonstrate how they will be maintained.
H. No loss of any identifiable deciduous woodland or hedge/ hedgerow will be accepted.

February 2024




Bailrigg Lane


Burrow Road

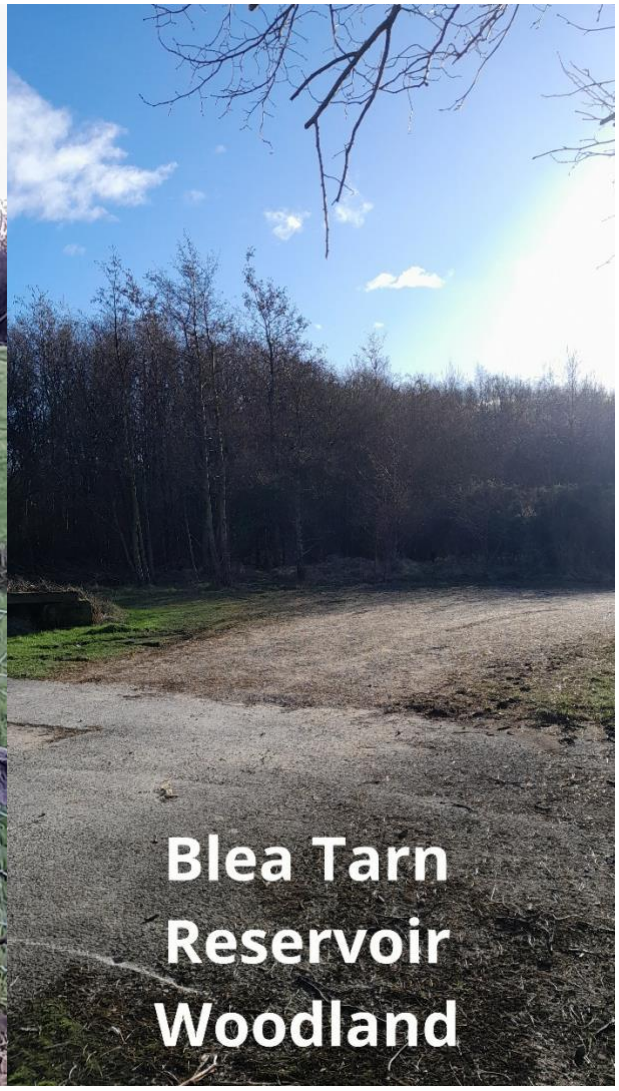

Burrow Road
Copse


Woodland from
Burrow Road


Hazelrigg Lane


Littlefell Lane
Woodland


Fishing Lake
& Wood
Blea Tarn Road


Blea Tarn
Reservoir
Woodland


Blea Tarn
Road


Five Ashes Lane