Report on Arboricultural consultation visit & advice from Saul Health, ArborSense Arboricultural Consultants

By Tree Warden, 25 March 2020

A two hour tour was held with the arboriculturalist on Friday 13 March 2020.

Mature Ash trees for TPO designation

In light of the significant loss to the parish of ash trees to ash dieback, the tree warden proposes further protection of specimen trees on the Downlands Estate: (a) one located on the twittern (footpath number 33b) that leads from The Link to sheep pasture; (b) another three on the twittern (footpath19) leading down from Michel Dene Road to Peakdean Lane that form part of a group with others in the garden of the property immediately to the south of the twittern. They seem free of ash dieback so far.

ArborSense advice is that *the trees are of an exceptional age, as ancient/veteran trees, and, as long as they remain healthy, they would warrant TPO designation.*

Proposal

That the tree warden, on behalf of the Parish Council, submit an application to the SDNPA that (a) is submitted as a candidate for TPO designation and (b) are submitted as a candidate for group TPO designation. It is likely that an assessment of their candidacy would not take place until late summer in order to properly assess their health status.

Managing tree root invasion of drains

On the back of recent works on a TPO'd Willow – photos are appended (A1&2) - on the Downlands Estate in East Dean with a history of invading the nearby foul water drain, the tree warden has been investigating what evidence-based best practice is to prevent tree roots invading drains. Neither Forest Research (attached to Forestry England), the Arboricultural Association (without being a paid up member) nor the Arboricultural & Biodiversity Officer at WDC, were able to assist.

ArborSense advice is that *in this case, comparing the tree's age with when the house was built, the drainage system has been located too close to the tree. The owners of the drain should be responsible for its structural integrity and functionality, e.g. by inserting a protective sleeve to block up holes already made by roots and to stop new invasion. The works carried out on the tree will not prevent its roots invading the drain again.*

Elm cultivars on Gilberts Drive

Further to a parishioner reporting their concerns about the condition of some of the young elms, sourced from the Conservation Foundation and planted by community volunteer/s some years ago now, the tree warden inspected them and reported to Councillor Hill that, at least, two specimens had been harmed by the trunk protectors still in situ - photo appended (B1).

On inspecting said trees with the arboriculturalist, it was noted that some solid, black plastic trunk protectors had already been removed.

ArborSense advice, having removed the remaining protectors, now redundant, is that *strimming has clearly taken place too close to the trees causing visible damage. The trees*

are now established and should not require any further maintenance. Photos appended (B2&3).

As the first mow of the season was taking place on the day of the tour, the tree warden followed this up directly with the person in charge of the mowing contractors. ***The tree warden requests that the Parish Council revise the specification of its contract with the local contractor requiring that strimming does not get closer than 1 foot away from the tree trunks, as this will allow the grass within this protective circumference to grow longer.***

Planting Downsview Lane verge
Further to the Parish Council decision to plant new trees up against the existing hedgerow beyond a 1.5 metre strip from the roadside that will be mowed annually, ArborSense advice is that *it would not be worth the time and money for new planting in this area. The existing mature hedge should instead be left to grow. The annual mow* in November/December *should only be* ***to I metre in depth****, not 1.5m, to allow the existing hedgerow to regenerate.*

It was noted that *a healthy young beech tree had been too severely cut back by the recent deep mow* - photo appended (D1). *This would have been better avoided. It would be a good idea in November/December to remove ivy on the trunks, leaving a thumb's gap, of the more mature beech trees* - photo appended (D2) - *(not the hedgerow) towards the eastern end of Downsview Lane opposite the cul-de-sac road (footpath 21b): the ivy provides valuable habitat towards the end of summer in the hedgerow.*

Playground - "Diversity Strip" & "Wild Flower Strip"
ArborSense advice is in agreement *with Cllr d'Urso's plan (a) to, in September, plant a 35 metre x 1 metre wide strip of wild flowers around 600mm in from the fence and to include yellow rattle as, being parasitic to grass, it will help the flowers get away; and (b) for new planting of traditional hedging (Hawthorn, Blackthorn & Field Maple) to fill in one long and one short gap in the existing hedge in the diversity strip* - photo appended (E1). *These could be planted by trained volunteers: a hole twice the size of the root ball should be dug, its base filled with compost, the sapling planted, the hole topped up with compost, a support stake fitted and water applied. Ongoing maintenance should include: (a) cutting bramble back annually; and, (b) watering (overwatering will not harm a tree) once a week during the first three summers.*

A hedgerow pack of 30 saplings has already been secured from the Woodland Trust and will be delivered in November. Hedgerow seeds will also be available for underplanting

It was noted that the new landscape hedgerow planting against the build out on Gilberts Drive had also been damaged on the day by strimming too close to the young saplings, including to one that had been completely uprooted - photos appended (C1&2). ***The tree warden requests that the Parish Council revise the specification of its contract with the local contractor so that strimming is only carried out, in future, against the wooden bollards, thereby, leaving a protective 1ft deep grass border in between the bollards and the new hedge***. The contractor will need reminding, though, as they mow the grass 10 times a season and often use casual labour. ***The tree warden, therefore, requests that the Parish Clerk put him in touch with the mowing contractor***.

Further useful works to the diversity strip could be carried out by community volunteers:

- *remove existing stake round one tree*
- *Holm oak nearest Gilberts Drive* - photos appended (E2&3) - *remove ivy on trunk, leaving a thumb's gap, wherever it's most comfortable to cut. Remove elder in front, first, for easier access*
- *cut bramble back annually from trees down to road.*

Cllr d'Urso will liaise with members of the NP environment, heritage & countryside working party to co-ordinate these works. *It is recommended to leave the wild area in the top corner as it is to continue as a wildlife habitat.*

The Greensward

On inspecting the young trees that the EDFRA had paid to be protected from the contracted mowing at the end of last summer, the tree warden found further damage to some trunks on the first day of the mowing season - photo appended (F). ***The tree warden requests that that the Parish Council reiterate the previously amended specification of this contract in order to avoid ongoing damage***.

A259 roadside, Friston Hill

ArborSense advice is that *elm cultivars could be used to replant in suitable gaps following the same planting and maintenance regime as described above.* ***The tree warden suggests further advice be taken as to who is most appropriate to use for planting: trained volunteers or paid contractors.*** The tree warden is in contact with ESCC and with the SDNPA for support and advice with replanting, including the provision of saplings.

It goes without saying that all proposed works for later in the year will depend on the status on non-pharmaceutical interventions, such as social distancing, at the time.