



Information Paper for Parish Councils

Suffolk Tree Warden Network

1. Background

The Tree Warden Scheme is a national initiative to enable people to play an active role in conserving and enhancing their local trees and woods. The scheme was founded, and is co-ordinated by, The Tree Council who have worked with County and District Council Tree Officers to recruit, train and support parish tree wardens. Wardens are volunteers, appointed by parish councils or other community organisations, who gather information about their local trees, get involved in local tree matters and encourage local practical projects related to the trees and woods.

Suffolk was one of the first counties to set up a network of parish tree wardens over 20 years ago. In Suffolk it was the District Councils who provided organisational support and training events for tree wardens. The programme has been taken up most widely in Mid Suffolk and Babergh and there are currently around 120 tree wardens across Suffolk.

Throughout Britain, District and County Councils are finding they no longer have the resources to support and train parish tree wardens. A meeting on 1st March 2017 attended by the Tree Council, local authority tree officers and parish tree wardens in Suffolk confirmed a strong commitment to see the tree warden programme continue but to move to a self- managed network of parish tree wardens across the county. The Suffolk Tree Warden Network was formally constituted in September 2017 to encourage and co-ordinate Tree Wardens across the County. Our aim is to have at least one Tree Warden in every Town and Parish. We held our first AGM and a highly successful Spring Forum at Denham near Eye on 14th April with 77 people attending.

2. What do Tree Wardens Do?

Tree wardens are a national force of local tree champion volunteers. As local tree champions Tree Wardens are the eyes and ears of their neighbourhoods and are often the point of contact for all things trees in the Parish. In Suffolk they are generally appointed by their Parish or Town Councils; this is an increasingly important connection given the increasing roles that are now

being delegated to Parish Councils. They gather information about their local trees, get involved in local tree matters and practical projects related to trees. Activities include:

- Championing local trees
- Planting and caring for trees
- Setting up tree nurseries using seeds collected locally
- Surveying trees and gathering information about them
- Providing early warning of pests and diseases and vandalism
- Involving local people in tree projects
- Working with local schools or groups in developing imaginative projects to encourage others to value communities' trees and woods
- Getting together like minded people for training and field trips
- Spearheading Tree Council initiatives, such as tackling Ash die back.

3. Challenges and Opportunities

Funding is an important issue both in terms of running an independent self-governing group, and delivering training programmes, events and action on the ground. Mid Suffolk, Babergh and Suffolk County Council have offered to help write funding bids and it will be important to demonstrate that we are seeking to deliver a step change rather than just looking to replace former local authority funding. As an independent unincorporated voluntary group the Suffolk Tree Wardens Network can bid for funds to support tree planting on both public and privately owned land from organisations such as The Woodland Trust. We also hope to help deliver part of a Heritage Lottery Fund bid that has been submitted by Suffolk County Council.

Suffolk County Council is developing a Tree Policy for the County that should be adopted by its Cabinet in 2018. One of the proposals contained in this policy is to put more emphasis on, and support for, tree planting carried out by tree wardens and local communities. New digital aerial photography and satellite imagery is being used to map existing tree cover under a "Canopy Cover" initiative. This has already been completed for Ipswich where the Borough Council is using the results to plan and instigate new tree planting. The County Council is keen to support parishes identify opportunities for, and to promote new tree planting.

"Ash Die Back" (*Chalara fraxinea*) poses the biggest single threat to tree cover across the UK over the next decade, and the latest survey results suggest that well over 90% of ash trees could be lost over this period. There are several other serious tree pests and diseases that threaten the nation's trees and woodlands, including Asian longhorn beetle and Acute Oak Decline. A concerted effort will be needed by government bodies, landowners, non-government organisations and local communities to counter these threats to our landscape and wildlife.

The implications of Brexit in terms of land use change could also be dramatic and may provide opportunities for tree planting on a large scale. We need to argue that TREES MATTER as Government develops its cross party 25 Year Environment Plan and ensure that funding priorities and action plans deliver the maximum return on social capital in terms of a healthy and expanding tree population.

Suffolk is a relatively large county and it can be difficult for volunteers to travel relatively long distances to meetings. Groups of tree wardens in a relatively small local area have been identified so they can meet and call on each other for mutual support.

4. Why Tree Wardens are needed

Trees are an important part of our natural heritage. We need to take action now if future generations are to enjoy the beauty and variety they bring to the Suffolk Landscape. In addition to their aesthetic value, trees bring all kinds of environmental benefits from absorbing carbon dioxide, and reducing flooding to supporting a wide range of biodiversity. As local people, Tree Wardens know their areas and can take the most effective action to protect and enhance their local environment.

- a) Does your Parish Council have an active Tree Warden?
- b) Does your Parish Council support the aims and objectives of the Tree Council and the Suffolk Tree Warden Network?
- c) If you don't have a Tree Warden will you consider appointing one?
- e) Would your Parish Council consider in principle funding tree planting and conservation projects in the Parish?

For more information please see:

STWN Website: www.suffolktreewardens.org.uk
Email: coordinator@suffolktreewardens.org.uk

and The Tree Council Website:
www.treecouncil.org.uk

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