

Levington and Stratton Hall Parish Council

REPORT

of the

CHURCH FIELD MANAGEMENT WORKING PARTY

February 2005



1. Introduction

Since Church Field was given to the village, issues concerning its use, development and management have periodically arisen, often with strongly held but differing views being expressed within the village. What has never been explicitly formulated is an agreed 'vision' for the field within the village, from which a development and management strategy could be drawn up. The Working Party was set up by the Parish Council in September '03 to look at the history of the field, consult the current residents of the village, and set out both a vision and management strategy. If these can be agreed, they will provide a framework against which it is hoped that all can work together to maintain and protect this most wonderful asset.

2. Working Party

The Terms of Reference set out by the Parish Council are given in Appendix 1.

Initially it comprised:

Mr P Owen chairman
Mr B Barker
Mr D Pryke

Following the resignation of Mr Owen from the Council, Mr Pryke became chairman and Mr B Hawtin joined the group.

3. The History of Church Field and Trickers Wood

While the prime issues concern what to do with the field now and in the future, it was considered important to review the past events that have shaped the development so far and to ascertain and evaluate the intentions behind them. From a comprehensive trawl through Council minutes and papers since 1978, the very fascinating history of the field has been collated and is summarised in Appendix 2.

4. The Current Situation

The field and the major features and plantings within it, have been surveyed and a map of the whole area is attached in Appendix 3. Further work is needed to complete the mapping of all the major trees, but this will be better done after necessary maintenance work in Tricker's wood is complete. The trees and shrubs in the three areas planted in 1992/3 have been identified on plans updated in September 2002 by Mrs H Thompson; Appendix 4

While it is important to always consider Church Field and Tricker's Wood as a 'whole', it is helpful to look at the individual main features.

4.1. Tricker's Wood

A small area of young and mature trees, adjacent to the road. The main mature trees, plus those in the adjoining property, are protected by a Tree Preservation Order - Sycamore, Beech, Ash, Turkey Oak, Hawthorne and Holly. Many self sown sycamores and elder have grown up and need thinning or removal. Aconites,

bluebells plus a few snowdrops and daffodils appear in the spring, though bluebells in particular, are frequently browsed by the deer and do not mature. In summer, an undergrowth of nettles and cow parsley grows up.

4.2. New plantations

South of Tricker's Wood, are the three areas of mixed trees and shrubs planted in 1992/3. Specimen trees within these areas, though still relatively young, have now reached 20-30 feet and the 'undergrowth' of trees and shrubs such as dog rose and hazel is quite thick. The lower areas were quite densely planted and with earlier pruning now form almost impenetrable thicket interspersed with some stunted specimen trees up to 20 feet. As originally intended, the three areas provide very effective screening of the 'occasional' car parking area when this is in use. Old deer fencing has been taken down and rolled up but remains to be removed or redeployed.

Also in this area, are three young oaks that have been planted along the southern boundary of Tricker's Wood.

4.3. Central Horse Chestnut

This tree, planted ~ 1985, stands alone almost in the centre of the field (which at that time was open grazing). It was no doubt intended to become a major feature in the future and will certainly do so.

4.4. Pilot's Way

Adjacent to Pilot's Way is the line of beeches planted to replace the diseased elm scrub plus a number of oaks and a sweet chestnut planted earlier. Only remnants of the islands of low shrubs have survived the two very dry summers since they were planted.

4.5. Open Field Area

About 60-70% of the original field remains as open grassland, sloping downwards on the southern side and providing wide views of the river and towards Broke Hall. The grass requires periodic cutting, and the Council and the village are indebted to those who have kindly volunteered to undertake this task in recent years. There are several patches of thick nettles on the southern boundary.

5. The Place and Function of the Field in the Village

One thing that is revealed by looking at the history of the field is that a 'vision' of its purpose, place or use within the village has never been explicitly formulated. Its status in planning terms was changed to a 'Playing Field' and villagers and Parish Council members were asked more than once for suggestions for its use. The proposed and actual uses of the field were many and various including letting for grazing, events such as car boot sale and hog roast, use as a caravan site, use by The Ship for outside eating area, site for a new village hall and village car park.

The main development, the planting of new areas of trees within the field, arose from a plan to create a car park behind the wood – an idea spawned from a chance enquiry from Suffolk County Council seeking public car parking in the area - and the coincidental receipt of information on the District Council's tree planting scheme.

The central contention of the working party's investigation is that the development, maintenance and use of the field and wood should be based on an agreed overall 'vision' of their place and function within the village and surrounding area.

5.1. Village Consultation

To assist the formulation of such a vision, the working party invited all residents to express their views. Disappointingly only four written responses were received, three of which were from residents close to the field and a fourth in the form of two very comprehensive, informed and structured papers received from Mrs H Thompson. One in particular addresses the 'vision' aspect within a useful framework and while the group do not subscribe to Mrs Thompson's viewpoint or emphasis on every issue, her structured analysis of the issues is very much in line with, and has contributed greatly, to that adopted by the group. To preserve this framework, this paper is summarised separately in Appendix 5.

All other points from the responses received are summarised in Appendix 6.

The Working Party is grateful to all those who took the time to communicate their views.

6. A Suggested 'Vision'

In defining the place and function of Church Field within the village, we believe that several different but interconnected aspects need to be considered:

- The landscape context – its place in the surrounding landscape
- A 'natural' place
- A Place for Recreation
- Wildlife and conservation
- A *village* space
- Security of the field
- Security of villagers.

6.1 Landscape

Church field is located in an area to the south of the village, of exceptional rural beauty. The major characteristic of the whole area is of openness with the wide views across the valley to Broke Hall, Home Wood, the creek and river. Church Field is an integral part of that landscape - a place for experiencing that openness, and an open space that is part of the views back to our lovely church from the river and creek. In considering any uses, development proposals and management regime, this must be the major factor – preserving the openness and the ability of villagers, now and in the future, to enjoy it. It is also in keeping with the wishes of the donor of the field who wrote in 1978 "*My purpose in buying this land in 1948 was to prevent any sort of*

development which could spoil the view of the river from the church and of the village from the river” to be “kept as an open space for all time” (his underlining).

6.2 A ‘Natural’ Place.

The field sits in a natural rural setting of which it is a part. It is itself a natural, not built amenity and greatly valued as such by the village. It must be maintained and managed to preserve both its harmony with the surrounding landscape and its own natural beauty.

6.3 A Place for Recreation

Again, an intention of the original donor. There are many ways that the village can use the field for recreation:

- A place to walk, picnic or just sit and enjoy the view.
- A place for occasional village events. The village is very fortunate to have such a lovely site for events such as the Millennium Fair. The suitability for such functions must be maintained by keeping the open grass area unobstructed and appropriately maintained.
- An occasional car park for village and church events.
- An area for play. To date, villagers have been against the construction of a children’s play area and colourful modern play equipment would not be appropriate in the landscape context. But, there may well be other more subtle ways of enhancing the natural attractiveness as a place for youngsters to play.

6.4 Wildlife and Conservation

Conservation of our natural environment and encouraging wildlife are desirable goals per se. Developments and a maintenance regime that encourage wildlife through an enrichment of habitat can significantly contribute to enhancing the enjoyment of the field and wood and are to be encouraged. However, they must be subservient to the maintenance of the field as an open space. It is not the purpose of the field and wood to be areas for wildlife projects for their own sake – a kind of village wildlife ‘allotment’.

6.5 A Village Space

The field and wood belong to the village and should be maintained as a quiet **village** space. It should **not** become a ‘county’ public facility like Nacton Shore, frequented by large numbers of outside visitors and undesirables.

6.6 Security of the Field

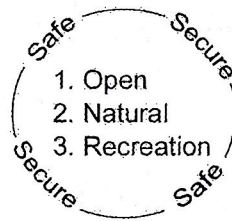
The amenity of the field would be lost or compromised if there were unauthorised vehicular access, and the potential legal cost of removing unwanted occupants is high. Keeping it secure from the road is essential.

6.7 Safety of People

- The roadside fence must prevent young children dashing into the road.
- The field and wood are well used and, thankfully, there have never been any reported incidents of personal attack or vandalism. Developments and plantings must not create places where an attacker might hide, or facilities that might encourage unwanted congregation of undesirables. A Risk Assessment has included this aspect and must be regularly reviewed and acted upon. It would be appropriate to seek the guidance of our local police.

6.8 In summary:

- An open space from where the beauty of the surrounding landscape and wildlife can be enjoyed and that is part of the views back to the church from the river and creek.
- An open space of natural beauty and wildlife that can be enjoyed in its own right.
- A safe and secure village area for recreation.



7. Management Principles

We believe that management of the field and wood should be governed by the following principles.

1. The wishes of the original donor that the field should be kept as an open space for recreation should be a first guiding principle in evaluating any proposals. However the legal restrictions that must be observed are those laid down in the Deed of Assent.
2. The historically rural and 'natural' character of the field and wood must be preserved, avoiding any development that introduces man-made features more characteristic of an urban park.
3. Any planting to be of native species only, in keeping with the surrounding rural landscape.
4. Any planting and pruning to be such that, now or in the future,
 - a. The open views from the field are not obscured,
 - b. The open views from the road & Pilot's Way are preserved,
 - c. The views of the church from the river and creek are preserved,
 - d. The views of those living in the area are not obscured (see 6. below), subject to 7. below.

5. Developments that enhance and enrich the field and wood as habitat for wildlife are to be encouraged, but must be subject to 4. above.
6. 'Good Neighbour' principle. Use of the field and wood are not to detract from the amenity enjoyed by those living nearby, now or in the future – subject to 7. below.
7. The field and wood is a village asset and it is the responsibility of the Parish Council to manage them for the benefit of the whole community. Development/planting or use of the field that compromises 4d) or 6) may be justifiable if the benefit to the village as a whole is deemed to outweigh the loss of amenity.
8. Maintenance to be directed at
 - a. preserving the amenity (pruning, grass cutting, planting)
 - b. keeping it a safe place for people to enjoy
 - c. keeping it secure against intruders.

8. Management Plan

Over the years a number of management plans and development recommendations have been formulated:

- SCDC Landscape Officer's plan of 1992 on which the new plantations were based.
- The deliberations of the Millennium Committee while in charge of Church Field 1999-2000. (See Appendix 2)
- The observations of a Conservation Officer from Suffolk Wildlife Trust.
- Reports from Mr M Matthews and Mr D Long in their capacity as Tree Warden.
- Various comprehensive proposals from Mrs H Thompson including those submitted to this Working Party, backed up by a site visit.
- Observations and advice given to the Working Party by Mr R Hardwick.

Many of these have much in common. All have been carefully reviewed and the detailed recommendations and advice weighed against the vision and management principles formulated above.

The development and management of the field and wood need always to be against an overall plan and objective, but it is helpful to consider a number of individual areas.

8.1 Tricker's Wood

The whole of Tricker's Wood was made the subject of a Tree Preservation Order in 1984. The Order is worded "trees specified by reference to an area" i.e. falling within the boundary of the wood. Any work necessary on a tree covered by a TPO has to be done by qualified professionals and with the specific permission of the District Planning Authority. We have clarified with the District Council that the trees covered by the order are specifically those that were present when the order was made. All the trees in the wood at that time were identified and plotted, but since then, many have been destroyed by the '87 hurricane and subsequent gales, the wood has been

divided with the building of the bungalow, new trees have been planted and many self-seeded trees have grown up.

There is an urgent need to revise these records, and as a start, we have identified with the District Council's Arboricultural Officer those remaining trees covered by the Preservation Order. He has also confirmed that they are safe and healthy and require no attention apart from removing some small side growths from the base of one tree adjoining the path – a task we may do ourselves. Written confirmation of the issues discussed with him is awaited.

Maintenance and Development

i) There is general consensus of advice that the self-seeded elders (many already dead) and multi-trunked sycamores that have grown up, should be removed. This will open the canopy and allow some specimen oaks and beeches to be planted in the space created. Larger pieces of timber removed can be stacked to provide habitat for wildlife.

ii) Central Glade

There is a central glade in which bluebells, snowdrops and a few daffodils emerge in spring. This is an attractive feature visible from the roadside footpath that should be nurtured and improved. Both native and 'imported' bluebells are present, and the latter should be removed as they will hybridise the natives. Aconites and wood anemones can be added. The summer undergrowth should be allowed to grow and die back naturally in autumn.

iii) New Pathway

A new pathway going from the gate through to the SE corner has been suggested, constructed of wood chippings generated from the smaller debris removed in a clear up. While this would enable people to enjoy the wood more intimately, such access could also provide a place for 'lurkers', and on balance we believe this should not be pursued.

iv) Fencing

To date, fencing the roadside boundary has been regarded as unnecessary or a low priority, but after a clear up, it might be felt that the road boundary needed to be fenced. A suggested holly hedge as an alternative would be unsuitable, blocking the view into the wood and central glade spring flowers.

v) Roadside Verge

Nettles are a problem along the verge. It is periodically mown but the fall of the ground into the wood makes it difficult to control the nettles adequately. Use of a specialised weed killer might need to be considered.

vi) Bat and Bird Boxes

The wood is a good site for bat and bird boxes. They should be restricted in number, preferably be constructed of natural rather than sawn wood and be inconspicuous. With appropriate advice, they might include an owl box high in one of the mature trees.

The work to be done:

- Draw up a plan of work and mark any trees for removal.
- Get costs of any professional work needed.
- If some work can be done ourselves, this can be organised.
- This work should be done this winter. Larger pieces of removed timber to be stacked in suitable locations as shelters/habitat for wildlife.
- When clear, we will be able to see what we have got and assess any potential/need for new planting – e.g. new standard trees such as Beech and Oak (both already present).
- Re-map the position of all trees in the wood. This needs to be kept up to date in the future.
- In spring identify the plants and prepare plans for any additional planting the following autumn.
- In autumn/winter plant new specimen trees as decided.

8.2 New Plantations

8.2.1 Plantation 1, south of Tricker's Wood.

The overall aim was to create a mixture of low trees and shrubs permeated by a few specimen trees growing to maturity. The deer fence that protected the area since planting, fell into disrepair and has been removed. Specimen trees need lower side branches removed and a suitable (e.g. spiral) guard put in place to protect from deer damage; some already evident. The rest of the growth needs to be reduced in height to promote lower thickening by coppicing, pollarding and thinning as appropriate. There is general pruning to be done to manage brambles, dog roses and self spread hawthorns, but coppicing needs to be done in small areas on rotation and with removed brushings used to provide protection of the new growth from deer.

8.2.2 Plantations 2 and 3 on the south border.

While the original aim was as in plantation 1, this is an area which is very sensitive in respect of effect on neighbouring properties where concern has

been expressed that trees left to mature to full height would impair the views currently enjoyed. A decision was made some time ago to maintain these areas purely as 'thicket' and the working party would endorse this in line with the 'good neighbour' principle outlined above. To maintain as thicket, again requires rotational coppicing and pollarding. Some specimen trees may not survive this treatment and will have to be sacrificed.

The work needs to be carried out by professionals, or volunteers working under the direction of an expert.

8.3 Other Trees south of Tricker's Wood

The planted trees to the south of Tricker's Wood and the Horse Chestnut in the centre of the field seem to be thriving and need no attention apart from a deer guard.

8.4 Pilot's Way

The new beeches have been well mulched and are growing well but continue to need monitoring through hot dry summers. The trees at the SE corner of the field are now well established. The majority of the saplings forming the three islands of natural scrub did not survive the exceptionally dry summer following their planting. The few that did were thoroughly mulched this year. The islands, to be maintained at 3-4 feet, were planted as a compromise between replacement of lost wildlife habitat and retention of the widely appreciated, new open vistas across to Home Wood and Broke Hall. Whether to replace those saplings that have died and retain the islands needs to be judged against the vision of the field and management principles set out above and on this basis, it is proposed that surviving saplings in the lower two islands are replanted in the area nearest the Ship.

A 2 metre wide strip along the line of the beeches, within the field, should be left un-mown to provide cover for wildlife and to encourage wild flowers – the same principle as is used in the nearby grassland meadows.

8.5 Grassed Area

The grassed areas provides the prime utility area – where people walk, sit, can have picnics or hold village events and needs to be kept cut through the summer. The current mowing regime is reckoned to be doing a good job at maintaining the grass. Specific points of detail for attention are:

- (a) If clippings are not collected, care must be taken to avoid large clumps of clippings which can be damaging.
- (b) A buffer zone of uncut grass and vegetation, ~ 2 m wide should be left along Pilot's Way and the whole of the southern boundary, except where we have a nettle problem.

(c) Nettle problem areas

There are several large patches of nettles along the southern boundary which need to be eradicated by frequent mowing (using 'Arthur') through the summer. If this does not work after a couple of years, a special weed killer should be used.

(d) Wild Flower Area

Establishment of a wild flower area has been suggested many times. It would enhance the field and be in keeping with the natural setting so it should be tried. However, it is not an easy project, requiring infertile soil, and success is not guaranteed. The expert advice is to leave an area uncut April – August and see what comes up before thinking about wild flower seeds or plants. When cut, it needs to be first disturbed by walking over it and the grass raked off afterwards. Further cuts October and March if necessary. The most appropriate area is to the south of the path across the field, within the 'bay' formed by the curve of the fence. The area that can be used is restricted by a patch of nettles that needs to be eradicated as above.

8.6 Fencing

Maintaining the fences is essential to keeping the field and wood secure from vehicular intrusion. The post and rail fence along the roadside has recently been installed. A fence along the Pilot's Way boundary should be avoided if possible. The post and wire fence along the southern and western boundaries will need to be repaired or renewed in the near future. It should be maintained as post and wire as this is the least visually intrusive.

The deer fencing removed from around the plantations needs to be cleared away, retaining any items that could be reused for repairs or tree guards.

9. Future Management Arrangements

A major issue which has been identified by several people in the past is the need for properly organised management. As the field has been developed, the maintenance demands both in terms of the amount of work and the level of expertise needed, has escalated. The village is fortunate in having many hard-working volunteers, but some future work will need to be done by expert contractors.

The field is 'minded' and currently managed by the Church Field Warden. It is recommended that a small working party of three councillors, be set up to manage the field. It would appropriately continue to be called 'The Church Field Management Working Party', but would have different terms of reference and different members from the current working party. It need not be chaired by the Church Field Warden, but should include both them and the Tree Warden. It would be empowered to co-opt people that could help. The working party would manage the field in accordance with the vision and principles laid down and advise the Council each year of work to be done in the following year together with any financial implications. On getting clearance from the Council for

that work, it would organise volunteers or professionals as necessary.

The current working party could prepare the new terms of reference in time for the Council to set up the new working party at its annual meeting in May. As previous groups set up in the past to manage the field have not always been successful, the Council would review the situation again in a year's time.

10. Further Developments

a) Wheelchairs and pushchairs.

At present the lovely views and natural surroundings provided by the field and wood cannot be enjoyed by anyone confined to a wheelchair – just the people who would appreciate it most, spending much of their time indoors. It would spoil the field to create formal tarmac paths across it, but the possibility of more natural alternatives should be investigated – perhaps creating a network of smooth grass paths.

b) Further Benches

There is scope for more benches but the danger of providing sites for unsavoury behaviour needs to be considered. They are of low priority.

A picnic table has been suggested but the danger of misuse, and of making the field into a 'county' attraction is prohibitive.

c) Children's play area

A children's play area is wanted by parents in the village (recent questionnaire) and deemed by the District to be needed. Villagers were very against a play area on the field (village plan meeting Oct '02) and it is difficult to see how a safe enclosed area could be built without spoiling the natural nature of the field. A less formal play area of old logs has been suggested.

List of Appendices

- App 1 Terms of Reference
- App 2 History of Field and Wood
- App 3 New Map of Field
- App 4 Planting Plan of New Plantations
- App 5 Summary of "Church Field: A Framework for Management"
 from Mrs H. Thompson
- App 6 Summary of Responses from Village Consultation

Levington & Stratton Hall Parish Council

Church Field Management Working Party

Terms of Reference

1. Background.

Since Church Field was given to the village, issues concerning its use, development and management have periodically arisen, often with strongly held but differing views being expressed within the village. The previous council, wisely and appropriately, consulted the whole village on certain proposals, but always recognised that there was a need to define some more formal management framework for Church Field. Fundamental to this is for the village to be clear about what it wants the field to be, subject to the conditions and restrictions put on it by the original donors.

2. The Task.

- a. To recommend to the Council a structure for the management of Church Field. This must take account of the formal responsibilities of the Council together with the practical issues.
- b. To recommend to the Council a strategic plan for Church Field, which will guide the management and development activities and against which any future proposals can be evaluated. The plan will need to be based on a clear vision of the use and role of the field within the village and its environment.

3. Work of the Group

A great deal of investigation and consultation will be needed in order for the group to formulate its recommendations and to ensure that the Council is presented with all relevant information. The group should include:

- a. Establishing definitively, the terms and conditions laid down by the original donors.
- b. Investigating the history, basis and purpose of all developments, planting and maintenance that has taken place.
- c. Consulting widely within the village on views as to what should be the nature of the field and its role within the village. The group should ensure that all residents have the opportunity to contribute and that the final result represents the views of the village as a whole.
- d. Critical evaluation of all aspects of the current situation on Church Field in relation to c) above, including a risk analysis.
- e. In formulating any recommended actions resulting from this analysis, seek the views of relevant expertise.

4. Timescale

The group should report to the Parish Council, at the latest, in time for consideration at its meeting in January 2004.



The History of Church Field and Tricker's Wood

Church Field and Trickers wood were purchased in **1948** by Mr F C Smith upon the break-up and sale of the Broke Hall estate. It was originally part of the much larger field including Tankard Meadow, purchased at that time by Mr Hurlock and now owned by Mr Rackham. It was fenced and used for grazing.

In 1978, Mr Smith applied for planning permission for two houses in the wood, an action that generated a strong reaction within the village. A petition was received from several residents, a strong letter of protest sent and the District Council was approached re a tree preservation order on the wood where trees had been felled due to Dutch Elm disease. Both the Parish Council and the District Council refused planning permission.

A letter from Mr Rains suggested that the wood be bought for the village and the Parish Council contacted Mr Smith to see if this might be possible. Mr Smith replied (1st April '78) saying that:

- it was his "intention to give the greater part of the land (wood and meadow) to the Parish" in his will'
- his "executors would retain a small piecefor building a small house"
- "My purpose in buying this land in 1948 was to prevent any sort of development which could spoil the view of the river from the church and of the village from the river and I would make it a condition of the bequest that there should be no development there, but that it be kept as an open space for all time"

Mr Smith confirmed in a letter July '78 that he had changed his will:

- " which provides for the larger part of the land to be left to the Parish, with a condition that no building shall at any time be erected on it but that it shall remain grass and woodland as at present".
- A small piece of land would be left to his daughter-in-law in case she wishes to build a small house there.

Mr Smith died in **March 1981**. A letter from Birketts (solicitors) re the terms of the will and land bequeathed to the Parish stated that:

- Land...to be held by the Council....as an open space for the benefit of the inhabitants of Levington....subject to certain conditions:
 - a) Re. fencing
 - b) Prohibition was imposed that no building should be erected on the land apart from such permanent or temporary facilities as the Council decided were required in connection with the use of the land as a place for public recreation.
- Council given power to manage the land and to let for grazing but not for allotments.

A Deed of Assent to formally accept the bequest was signed by Mrs C Gladstone (Chairman) and Mr M Ralph (Vice-Chairman) in **March '82**.

In September '82 the Council sought and obtained, planning permission for a change of use to a "Playing Field", and for some time subsequently, it is referred to as such including the opening of the Levington Village Playing Field Fund.

The field was fenced and the entrance built with the help of a grant from the District Council.

In '83, planning permission was sought and granted for a bungalow in the retained part of the wood. A condition was that a Tree Preservation Order was placed on the "several Sycamore, Beech, Ash, Turkey Oak, Hawthorne and Holly trees in Trickers Wood"

Jan '84 Mr A Cotton suggested use of the field as a Caravan Club site for 5 caravans. The Caravan Club was consulted and plans drawn up, but parishioners were totally opposed, so the proposal was dropped.

The next few years, are characterised by a background of mutual antagonism between the village/Parish Council, and Mrs Smith, Mr F Smith's daughter-in-law. There was much opposition and resentment at the building of her bungalow (now The Driftway). Later, the council sought to get her to plant a screen of trees to hide the bungalow from the river but was frustrated to find that while this had been a condition of the original planning permission, it had not been included in the subsequent detailed permission.

The field was let for grazing when possible and councillors were asked for suggestions for its use e.g. village bonfire. In consultation with the District Council, trees were planted "in the hedge of village field" and in Trickers Wood, plus a horse chestnut planted in the middle of the field. Work was done to tidy up the wood and scatter seeds of wild flowers. Keeping the fence in repair, using help from the Community Council, was a recurring issue.

The hurricane of **October '87** saw four mature beeches blown down in the wood.

The field was used for the occasional village event e.g. car boot sale, and a "committee of willing workers" was formed to organise such events including a hog roast.

In '89 a well attended village meeting supported a proposal for building a new village hall behind Trickers Wood. This was vehemently opposed by Mrs Smith, and her brother-in-law, who threatened legal action, asserting that this would be against the terms of the original bequest. Legal opinions were gained supporting both sides, but the matter was never resolved as attention was diverted to a series of alternative offers from Mr C Ayres to build a village hall at Red House Farm along with houses. One offer involved Mr Ayres having the existing village hall site plus a long lease at low rent on the grazing on church field. A referendum of both Parishes on the alternatives was conducted, but the District Council eventually refused planning permission for a hall on Church Field.

In October '91, Suffolk County Council and the Suffolk Heritage Coast Warden contacted the Parish Council, seeking its opinion on various sites for making a public car park in the area for up to 10 cars. The Parish Council decided a car park in Trickers Wood would be of benefit to the village – the deeds to be checked to see if this allowed.

In its March and May in '92 meetings, the Council considered a number of options for use of the field:

- Grazing horses – following a request to do so. The fences were inspected and extensive repair/renewal would have been necessary.
- Using part for an outside eating area for The Ship.
- Use of part (behind Trickers Wood) for a car park.
- Mr Ayres proposal to erect a new village hall plus houses at RH Farm in return for him having current village hall plus grazing rights to the field on a long lease at low rent.

Mr Ayres proposal was rejected, and the majority of councillors were in favour of use by the pub, and the construction of a car park (funded by SCC).

Coincidentally, information had been received from SCDC on its Parish Tree Planting Scheme for 1992, (trees provided free as long as volunteers found for planting) and the PC thought the village ought to take advantage of this offer. *"A suggestion was made that a woodland area could be planted in Church Field as a screen to any car park and where people could walk"*. The clerk, Mrs H Thompson, wrote to the District Landscape Officer for advice on the suggestion that *"an amenity woodland area could be established on part of the remaining field bordering the car park, which could screen the park and act as a recreational and wildlife resource"*.

Following a site meeting, Mrs A Westover of SCDC produced a car park and tree planting scheme which was considered July '92.

"The aim would be to create a small picnic-amenity area bounded by new tree planting south of Trickers Wood, with mown grass paths leading across the field to join up with the path running south from the Ship, at the south-east corner of the meadow. A grassy area could be left for occasional informal car parking near Trickers Wood....."

The scheme proposed four areas of new plantation, behind the wood, creating a picnic area between two of them and enclosing an area to be used for a car park.

Despite the fact that the Suffolk Heritage Coast Warden was now more interested in a car park at the creek and so not able to provide funds for a car park at Tricker's Wood, Council agreed with the proposal and that the scheme should be started with the planting, that Autumn, of 90 trees in the two area on the edge of the field. Volunteers were sought and a very successful tree planting day was organised by Mr and Mrs Thompson on 28th Nov '92, involving volunteers and children from the village, the Ship and OOCL. Later, the two areas were fenced to protect them from deer. A photograph taken on the planting day was used in a District Council leaflet "Enhancing our Environment".

The following year ('93), a second village planting day, created the middle plantation with 106 trees including 20 sweet chestnuts. It was deliberately located further towards the horse chestnut than on the original plan in order leave more space for informal car parking. Area 1 on the plan, was never planted.

The next year ('94), bluebells were 'rescued' from Melton Wood, (being developed), and planted in Trickers Wood and later, Mr and Mrs Thompson organised the planting of 20 trees (to replace some that had not survived?) plus replacement of 100 damaged guards.

Throughout this time, the Council periodically used GB Contracts to cut the field, verges and undergrowth in Trickers Wood.

Sept '96, Mrs J Denny agreed to be (the first) Tree Warden.

In Aug '98, a full village meeting rejected a proposal to try to purchase Ship Hill field, but proposed a working party be set up to examine and improve the present facility (Church Field). The **Millennium Committee** was formed **Dec '98**. It comprised four parish councillors with active help and involvement from a number of villagers and was chaired by the PC chairman. It organised various fundraising events leading to the Millennium Fair on Church

Field in June 2000 and the Millennium Seat. More importantly in this context, it actively took on the maintenance and development of Church Field & Tricker's Wood.

The principal issues raised and actions taken were:

1. Mr and Mrs D Long agreed to be wardens for Church Field & Tricker's Wood
2. A Play Area to be considered.
3. A wild flower area proposed in the hollow on the south of the field – this was not created before the demise of committee.
4. A clear-up day was organised.
5. Fencing inspected and length opposite church replaced.
6. The tree plantings:
 - I. Mr I Thompson explained they "*were not intended to be forests but thickets for wildlife*". Committee agreed some management was needed but generally agreed to leave as planted and not transplant.
 - II. Mrs Westover of SCDC was consulted for advice; after inspecting the field she reported:
 - virtually all the specimen trees in one of the planted areas had been decapitated;
 - rose require pruning in Spring;
 - diseased elms on footpath needed to be cleared
7. Work on field – a long term project. Requirement for group of volunteers to look after the field.
8. Mr M. Matthews became Tree Warden
9. Dead elms, noted by Mrs Westover, bordering Pilot's Way, were removed and replaced.
10. A WI oak and a replacement for an existing one were planted.
11. Petrol strimmer demonstrated and purchased – "Arthur".

The Pilot's Way Clearance and Replanting

In **Sept 00**, Mr B. Hawtin presented a report prepared by an arborist, Mr Paul Jackson, noting that virtually all the elms were dead or diseased and suggesting the felling of all of them and replanting. The Parish Council felt the £600 cost prohibitive but later, Suffolk County Council introduced Locality Budgets and the County Councillor, Mrs Candida Snow, allocated £500 from her budget for "*tree planting and landscaping in Church Field*". Council consulted village opinion by paper survey and a village meeting (**18 Dec 00**) and combining the views of those present and the survey results, a large majority were in favour of removing the elms and replanting (with small-leaved limes – later changed to beeches following further advice). The chairman took notes but no minutes were produced **at the time**. However, at a "special council meeting" at his house a few days later, (minuted, but no

public present), he reported that *"the meeting had proposed that a row of fifteen small-leaf lime trees should be planted with box or yew tree infill, under planted with bulbs and aconites"*.

Council decided to go ahead, the cost of new trees to be met by sponsorship. SCDC was consulted re under-planting and by **Mar 01**, all elm scrub had been removed and all but one of the new trees planted. No further under-planting was possible until the Foot and Mouth restrictions on footpath were lifted.

The trees were watered through the hot dry summer by volunteers.

Early in **2002**, Mrs Thompson wrote to the Council expressing concerns over the maintenance of trees in Church Field – her letter was discussed at the **May 02 AGM** when it was decided to set up a Working Party, the Church Field Committee, comprising Mr Hawtin, Mr Long & Mrs Thompson. The minutes of that AGM indicated that *"the under-planting will consist of bluebells to the left of the new trees and native species to the right to form a hedgerow"*.

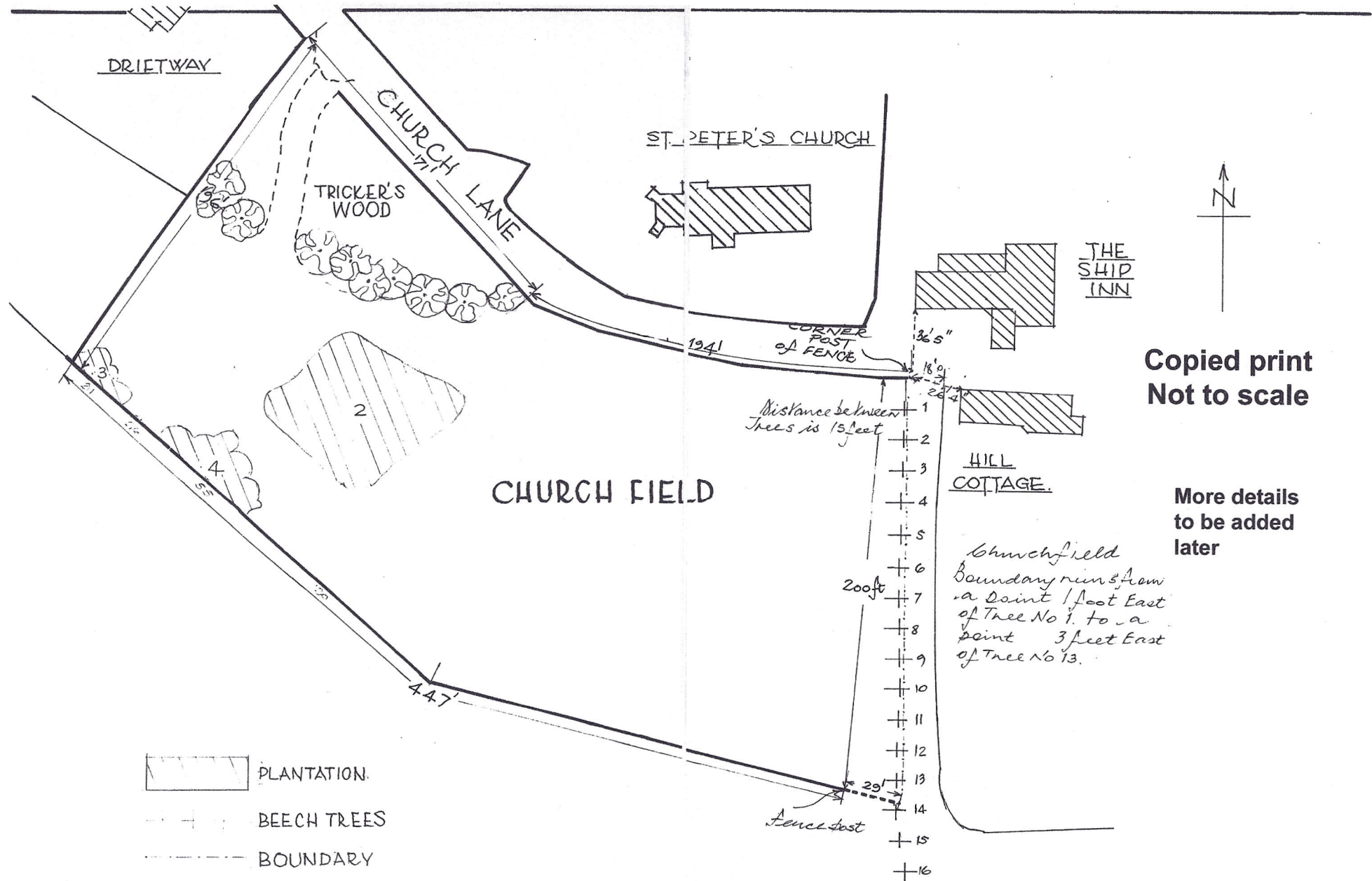
A meeting of the sub-committee took place at Mrs Thompson's house 10 June 02, Mr Ian Thompson also being present though in no official capacity. A report of the meeting prepared by Mr Long, was vehemently contested by Mrs Thompson at the next council meeting in July, especially re under-planting along Pilot's Way, maintaining that the village meeting had proposed a hedge of mixed native species running parallel to the new trees. It was resolved that the chairman would consult the original notes of the village meeting 18 Dec 00 to confirm the accepted views of villagers and convey them to the committee to act upon.

These notes, which did not support Mrs Thompson's assertion, together with a paper from her entitled, "Church Field/Pilot's Way Under-planting: A Framework for Discussion" were discussed at the Sept council meeting and it was agreed that the chairman would chair a meeting of the committee with Mrs A Westover of SCDC present. In the event, the committee met without Mrs Westover and reported to the **Nov 02** council meeting that agreement had been reached on under-planting in Pilot's Way. *"Native species to include hawthorn, hazel, dog rose, holly, blackthorn, gelder rose, are to be planted in an island near the laburnum. There will be two further islands of similar planting down the walkway behind the trees. In between these islands will be areas of natural scrub. The overall height of the islands will be kept to 3-4 feet and planting will be away from the beeches by 2 metres"*. £110 remained in the tree fund for the project.

The islands were planted by Mr Hawtin and Mr Long in **Jan 03**, but there followed a bitter dispute as a result of Mrs Thompson and Mr Abbott not being involved and an assertion that they were not all in the correct place. The Church Field Committee was dissolved.

The summer of 2003 was exceptionally hot and dry and resulted in many of the saplings not surviving and an allegation that this was due to neglect. Those that did survive were mulched this year.

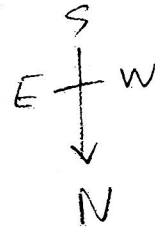




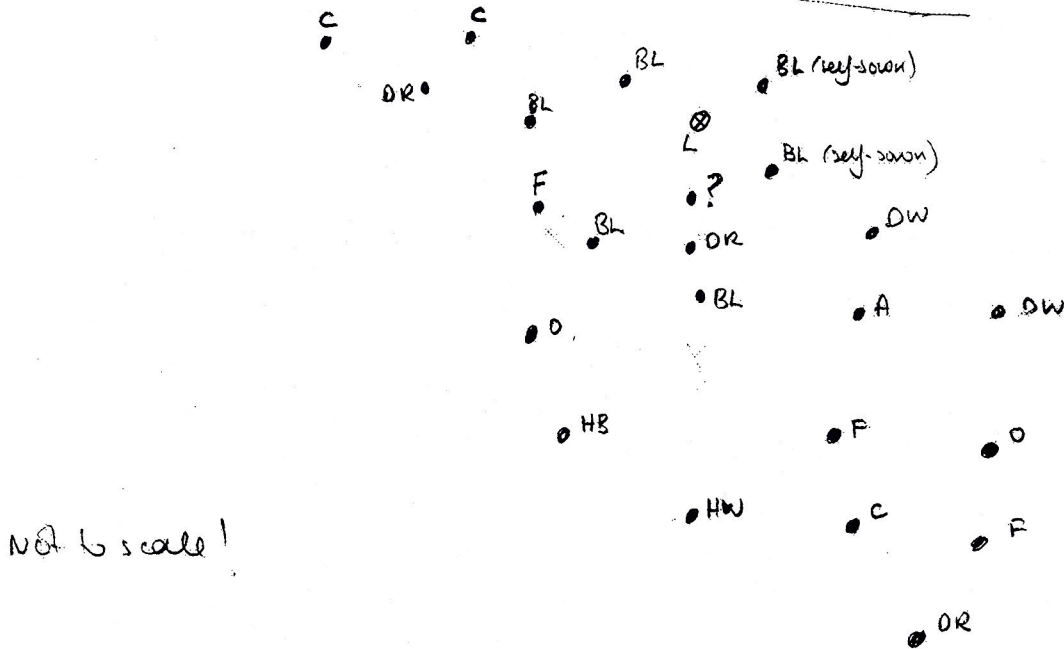
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Church Field Community Planting
 Area 3 on original planting diagram
 Surveyed September 02



Southern boundary fence



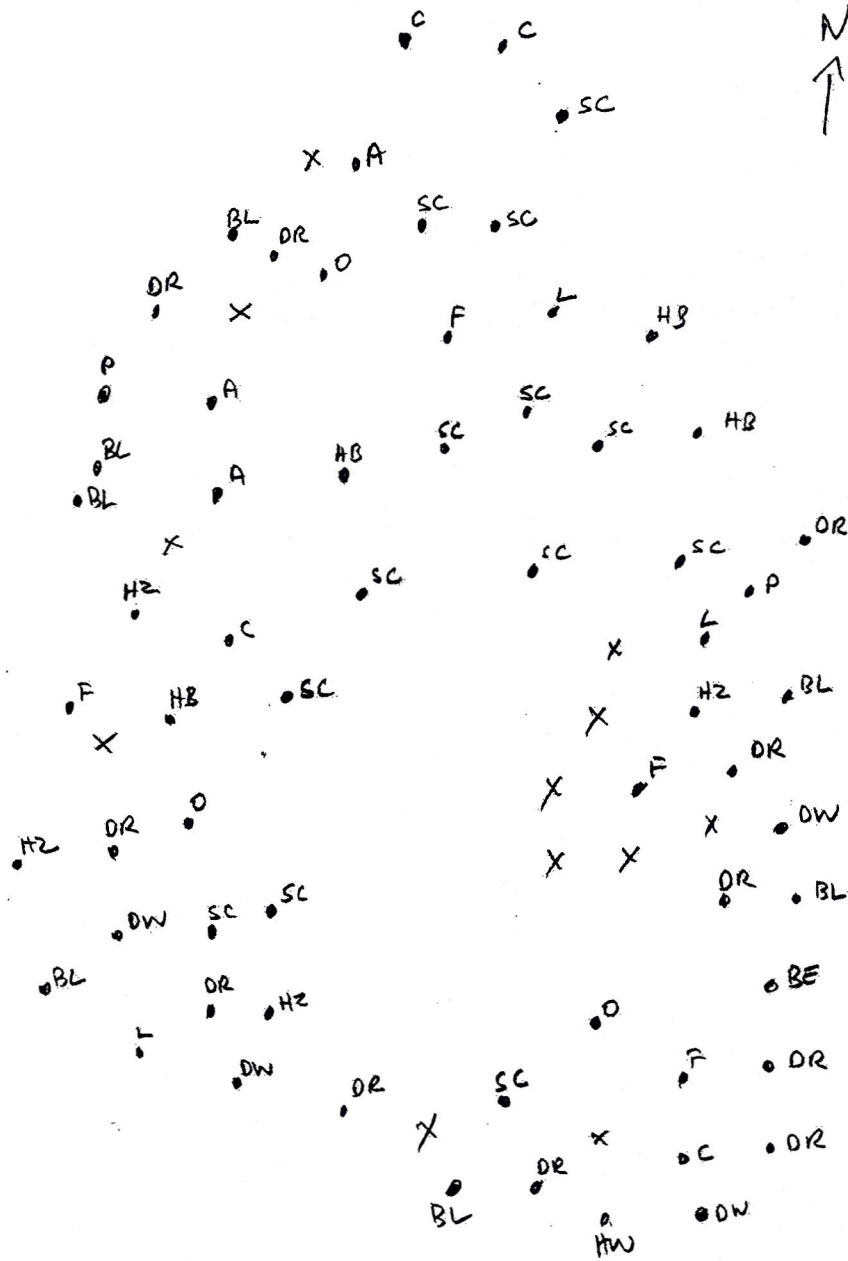
NOT to scale!

NB Area ① on original planting plan was never planted.

Key

- | | |
|-----------------|---------------------|
| • tree | O oak |
| X dead tree | L small leaved lime |
| ⊗ possibly dead | A ash |
| F field maple | C cherry |
| DW dogwood | HB hornbeam |
| DR dogrose | BE beech |
| BL blackthorn | SC sweet chestnut |
| | P privet |
| | HW hawthorn |
| | HZ hazel |

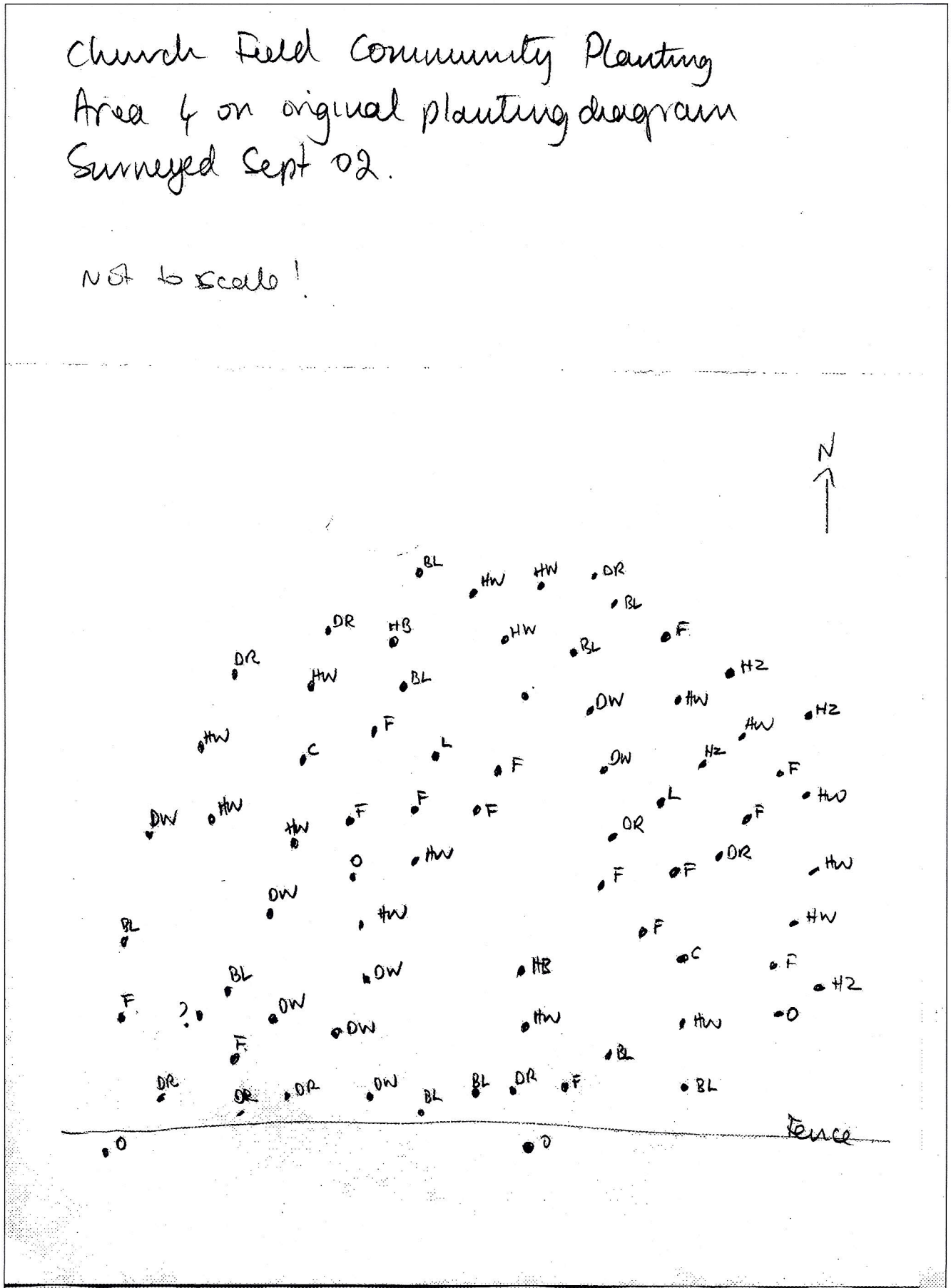
Church Field Community Planting
Area 2 on original planting diagram.
Surveyed Sept 02.

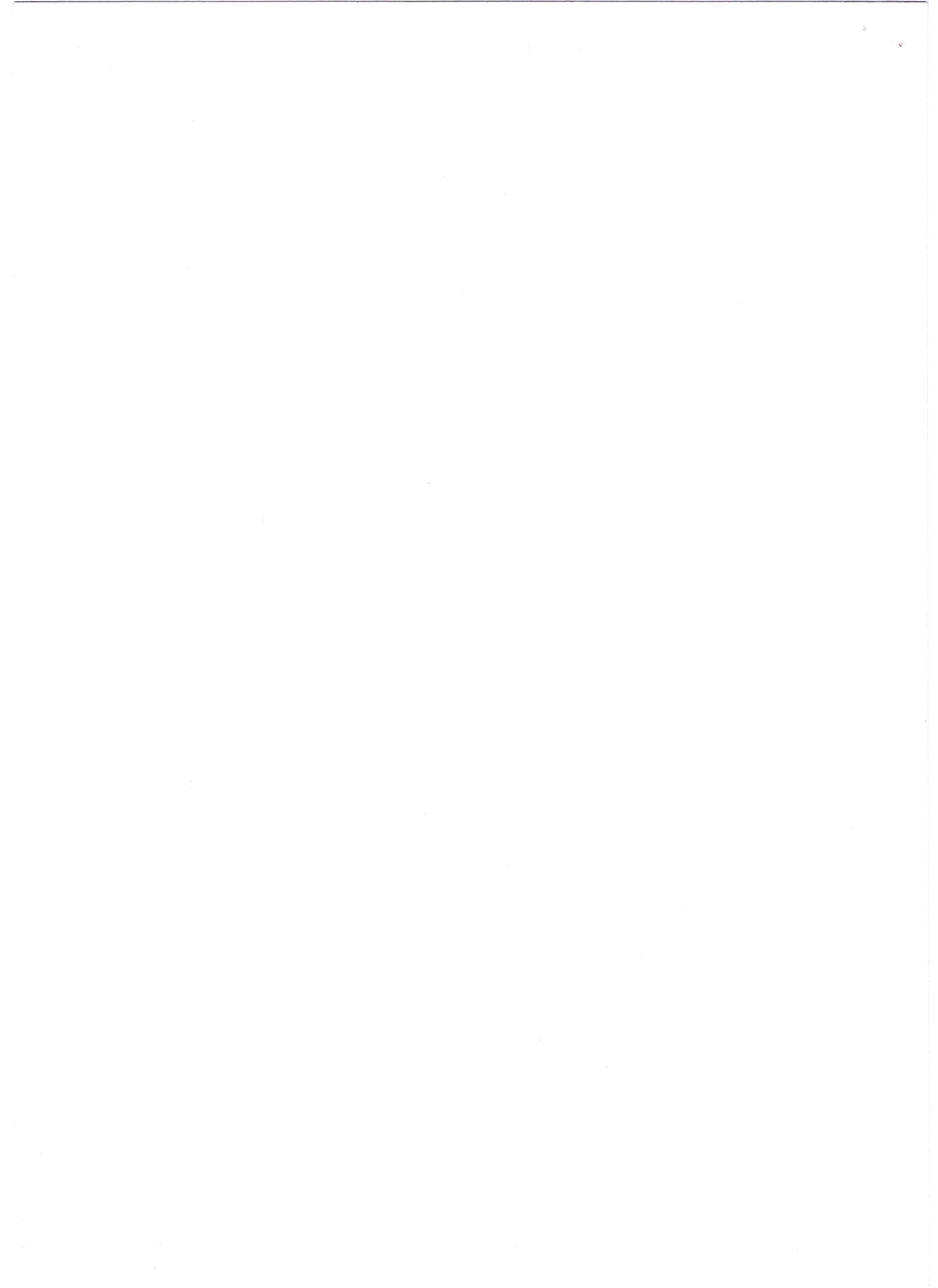


Not to scale!

Church Field Community Planting
Area 4 on original planting diagram
Surveyed Sept 02.

NOT to scale!





Summary of 'Church Field: A Framework for Management' from Mrs H Thompson**1. Community Use**

- a. A 'community asset' - for the benefit of the village community.
- b. Place for village events
- c. Car park for village events
- d. Open area for recreation.
- e. Where landscape and wildlife of our area can be appreciated
- f. Where projects to enhance these aspects can be carried out.

2. Rural Context and Character

Church Field is part of the rural farmland environment of woods, fields and hedgerows; therefore any planting should be of native species that are characteristic of our locality. Not box and yew and not 'garden' flowers and bulbs.

3. Wildlife/conservation aspects

National loss of wildlife habitat generally – Dutch Elm disease, two severe storms and loss of hedgerows; but our area is still wildlife rich. If villagers want to enhance and protect the environment & encourage wildlife, the village-owned Church Field provides the best opportunity and scope. Past actions have included:

- a. New plantations in Church Field plus additional individual native trees.
- b. English native bluebells planted in Tricker's Wood.
- c. Dead Elm scrub along Pilot's Way replaced by line of beeches.
- d. Islands of hedgerow trees and shrubs planted within field along line Pilot's Way boundary.

A conservation officer from SWT has made some further suggestions.

4. Landscape

Church Field sits in prime position within Suffolk Coasts & Heath AONB. Views from field are magnificent; when viewed from afar, field provides foreground for our lovely church. The impact of any development and planting on this aspect must be taken into account.

- a. New plantations were sited to provide a vista to the valley and to offer a more enclosed and shaded 'glade'.
- b. The Millennium bench is well used and provides excellent viewing point.
- c. Post and wire fencing is relatively visually inconspicuous – post & rail could be more intrusive.

5. Security and Access

- a. Possibility of unauthorised access if boundaries not vehicle-proof.
- b. Additional benches/equipment raises the fear of vandalism, but hopefully not in our community.
- c. Planting schemes should take into account personal safety, but probably not much relevance in Church Field given the small scale of plantings, proximity of houses and the 'Ship' and no history of problems.
- d. Any facilities (e.g. play equipment, picnic tables) that are to be accessible by wheelchairs and those with difficulty in walking, must be suitably located.



Summary of Responses from Village Consultation

1. Fencing

- Field should be treated as open common land with no fencing along the road, raising the existing grass hump at the edge to prevent incursion.

2. Tricker's Wood

- Don't 'over manicure' Trickers Wood and leave undergrowth uncut
- New pathway through to eastern corner
- Plant an oak in gap in canopy to help shade out nettles
- Put up nest/bat boxes – could be community/children's project
- Plant holly hedge along roadside

3. New Plantations

- Aim: Mixed habitat of tall mature trees & lower under storey species.
- Select trees to be allowed to mature
 - need protection from deer
 - may need selective pruning for good shape
- Lower trees and shrubs – rotational coppicing and pollarding to keep height down.
- Lower plantations will block views of those nearby - should be maintained as thickets ~ 6 ft high
- Grave concern that existing views enjoyed by those living in Barrack Row and The Drift will be lost as new plantations get higher – request thinning out and restricting height.

4. Islands of hedgerow species along eastern boundary (Pilot's Way)

- Replace saplings that have died.
- Mulch and protect with guards
- Keep open views at Pilot's Way – no hedge.
- Strongly against planting things next to the Beeches along Pilot's Way – let nature take its course.

5. Playground/Picnic Area

- Needed – more children; noted in recent questionnaire results
- Suggest look at Blaxall
- Traditional playground inappropriate
- Alternative suggestions:
 - large tree trunks (maybe some hollow) & large toadstool table
 - low grassed mound incorporating a slide
 - living willow tunnel
- Play area or more seating would bring too much risk of creating a hang out for trouble makers.

6. General

- Be aware of personal safety issues re height and position of planting.

