



TREE SURVEY.

OVINGTON PARISH, NORTHUMBERLAND, SEPTEMBER 2019.

1. INTRODUCTION

EPR Consultancy was commissioned by Ovington Parish Council in September 2019 to prepare an overview survey of the principal trees and areas of woodland within the Parish boundaries. (See brief Appendix A). The Parish Council is aware that much of the Landscape Character of the Parish is attributable to the hedgerow trees and the scattered areas of woodland but is concerned that due to the age of most of the trees this character would be lost in coming decades due to disease and old age. The Parish Council concluded that this was an appropriate time to take stock and identify the steps that could be taken to encourage and initiate tree planting to ensure that what they regard as an attractive landscape is passed on to future generations. There is also an awareness that trees have a vital role to play in mitigating the effects of climate change and flooding.

2. LOCATION

Ovington Parish, one of the smallest in the county, is located on the north side of the River Tyne between Wylam and Bywell and Newton Parishes. The A 69 lies to the north with a very small section of the Parish projecting to the north of the road. The River Tyne marks the southern boundary and the wooded valley of Whittle Dean the eastern boundary. The village of Ovington is located centrally within the Parish and is the main settlement. The village of Ovingham lies immediately adjacent to the southeast corner of the Parish and Mickley and Prudhoe to the south and south east of the River Tyne.

3. LAND USE

The area within the Parish is predominantly arable fields with some grazing, mainly of horses. Two schools and the associated playing field occupy the south east corner. The Northumberland Green Belt covers the entire parish area apart from the village itself.



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4. LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

4.1 Much of the landscape character of the Parish is provided by its hedgerows, hedgerow trees, and the scattered small areas of woodland. (See Photograph 1). The Parish is bounded on its eastern edge by the western side of Whittle Dene a substantial area of mature woodland which is managed by the Woodland Trust. On the southern boundary a considerable belt of trees and woodland borders the River Tyne. Other smaller areas of woodland, largely linear extend along the West Dean, Cockmere burn and the adjacent burn. The main tree species in the Parish are Ash, Oak, Sycamore, Elm, Holly, Scots and other pines.

4.2 In terms of visual receptors of the Landscape Character, the Parish is crossed by a number of roads and public rights of way from which the landscape can be appreciated as well as from properties within and out with the Parish. From the main vehicular route, the A69, extensive views of the northern part of the Parish can be gained and other smaller roads give views over the southern and western section. Views of the eastern section are more readily gained from the public rights of way.

5. TREE SURVEY

5.1 Scope of the survey

At this stage the Parish Council required an overview of the number, distribution and species of trees in the Parish, together with a broad assessment of their age and likely lifespan. One output from the survey was to be a map showing what “assets” there currently are in the Parish followed by maps indicating broadly how this is likely to change in the next 30, 50 and 100 years if no additional trees are planted. Approval from landowners for access for the survey had not been gained at this stage and therefore all survey work was conducted from public highways and footpaths and not from private land.

5.2 Survey method

The location and numbers of the trees in the Parish were initially assessed and mapped using Google Earth and it was estimated that in the region of 500 individual trees were present in addition to a number of groups of trees and woodland. The field survey was carried out between 13th and 20th September



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2019, the weather was bright and sunny with clear visibility. Access was limited to roads and public rights of way but with the assistance of binoculars this allowed views of most of the above trees. It was impossible to carry out detailed inspection of tree health at a distance and woodlands and groups were only assessed from their outward appearance. Each tree or group was numbered and the position marked on a map. The species, age, condition and life expectancy of each tree or group was recorded on an Excel spreadsheet. The survey commenced in the northwest corner of the Parish and progressed across the Parish ending in the south east corner.

5.3 Survey Results

527 individual trees, 5 woodlands and 20 groups were recorded. Only the trees in a very small area to the south of Hunters Hill remain unrecorded as views into the area from Public Rights of Way were impossible as well as the trees within the school grounds. The survey included all hedgerow trees and significant trees in gardens and on public open space. Where the trees were so close together as to be impossible to map individually, they have been included as groups. The results have been included in an Excel spreadsheet and maps produced showing:-

- i) The trees present at the time of the survey
- ii) The trees likely to be present in 30 years
- iii) The trees likely to be present in 50 years
- iv) The trees likely to be present in 100 years
- v) The trees currently present with the Ash trees removed.

As shown in the spread sheet there are trees of a wide range of species but of the individual trees Ash is by far the most common species making up almost half, 49.1% of the trees, with Sycamore 15% , Oak 8.5%, Elm 4.5%, Silver Birch 3.6%, Holly 3.2%, Willow 2.5% and Beech 2%. Of the individual trees 37% were recorded as being mature, 39% as middle aged and 24% as young, of the young trees 59% are Ash. Ash is the most common hedgerow tree in the north of the Parish with Sycamore, Oak and Elm being more abundant in the south. There are a considerable number of field boundaries which are devoid of trees particularly in the area to the south and east of St. Andrew's Lane. (See photograph 2)



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5.4 Conclusions

The results of the survey show that the Parish Council is right to be concerned regarding the future of the landscape of the Parish, much of its character being attributable to the abundant trees and woodlands. Of the 527 individual trees recorded only 24% are young and of these young trees 59% are Ash. Over 49% of all the trees are Ash which has severe implications due to the presence of Ash dieback (Chalara, see note below). Chalara, a severe disease of Ash has been present in Northumberland for about 10 years and many of the Ash trees in the Parish are now showing early signs of die back with a small number of dead and severely affected trees on the edges of Whittle Dene. (See photographs 3, 4, and 5) Whether all of the die back is attributable to Chalara is difficult to tell especially at a distance and in mature trees. It is also impossible to predict how quickly the disease will spread through the Ash trees in the Parish and whether any of the trees will prove to be resistant. However if the spread and impact of the disease is similar in the UK to continental Europe then it is reasonable to predict that a large percentage of the young and middle aged Ash Trees will be dead in 30 years with many of the mature trees following in 40 to 50 years. **There is currently no cure for Chalara. The loss of the Ash trees will have a devastating impact on both the landscape and biodiversity of the Parish wiping out almost half of the trees.**

6. Recommendations

Clearly the results of the survey show that there is a need for urgent action if a dramatic change in the appearance of the landscape of the Parish and a reduction in its value for biodiversity is to be avoided. A tree planting programme needs to be established to plant replacements for the trees which are undoubtedly going to be lost due to disease and old age in the next few decades. It would be necessary to involve local farmers and landowners as most of the planting would need to be on their land but also to involve the local community and especially children. Sources of funding would need to be investigated. Money for planting on farmland may be available under Environmental Stewardship from Natural England, the local councillor may be able to access money from the County Council and the Woodland Trust have a scheme which offers free trees to communities and schools. Trees are available from them to plant in March 2020.



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Note.

Ash dieback is a highly destructive disease of Ash trees (*Fraxinus* species), especially the United Kingdom's native ash species, common ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*). It is caused by a fungus named *Hymenoscyphus fraxineus* (*H. fraxineus*), which is of eastern Asian origin. The disease is also known as 'chalara', ash dieback which helps to distinguish it from dieback on ash trees caused by other agents. Chalara ash dieback is present in most parts of the United Kingdom and has been present for a number of years in Northumberland. Its effects are most visible in regions where the fungus has been present for the longest time, and where local conditions are most suitable for the fungus. Chalara ash dieback has the potential to cause significant damage to the UK's ash population, with implications for woodland biodiversity and ecology, the landscape and for the hardwood industries.

Experience in continental Europe, which is beginning to be seen replicated in the UK, indicates that it can kill young and coppiced ash trees quite quickly. However, older trees can resist it for some time until prolonged exposure, or another pest or pathogen, such as Armillaria (honey fungus), attacking them in their weakened state eventually causes them to succumb.

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9 October 2019.

PHOTOGRAPHS INCLUDED BELOW ON PAGE 6



Photograph 1



Photograph 2



Photograph 3



Photograph 4



Photograph 5