



H E A T H E R T O N

— 1912 —

Heatherton School –Woodland development proposal and Request for Parish Council permission and collaboration

Educational benefits for children:

As part of the pupils' educational journey, we have put a great deal of thought and time into how we might expand their knowledge of nature, and the pressing need to be more eco-friendly, through an outdoor learning environment. The forest is common land, but the Parish Council has stewardship of all the local woodland areas. We see this as a valuable but underused resource that could benefit a significant number of children by improving educational opportunities in environmental issues in the local area.

With permission of the Parish Council, Heatherton School arranged for an ecological report of the area by ARUP, and it has demonstrated that there is vast biodiversity that would be of great educational use already, but excitingly other species could be restored. We have researched carefully how we might add an unobtrusive nature trail pathway made from bark and enhance the flower meadow without adding any structures at such, just information posts. Restorative actions would include managing the woodland by clearing some of the dominant species, creating new habitats and introducing species-specific habitat features to provide opportunities for a range of wildlife. To see this woodland area flourish, Heatherton School would pay for any cost of this creation and continue the maintenance of it to ensure that the woodland is safe and secure for local children's groups to use in an educational setting. As there are many Forest School type facilities in the area already, we envisage this to be of most use to the slightly older children in Primary Schools or above. The team at Heatherton would encourage local schools or groups, such as the Brownies, to visit the woodland and see the birdboxes, bat boxes, badger setts, animal tracks, insect hotels, information posts and surrounding beauty for themselves to enhance their science, art and nature lessons or clubs.

We would encourage all groups using this facility to walk to the area or park in the Amersham car park and walk to ensure that traffic does not increase. We are also very aware that neighbours would not wish to see the beautiful woodland diminished in any way or be negatively affected. We foresee our involvement in utilising this area to be a positive, outdoor learning opportunity for local children to understand more about the natural habitat in their neighbourhood and we hope that you will support us in this. We have also spoken to Paul Stack from the Chiltern Rangers – who has worked and is working with the Parish Council to help disadvantaged children through forest management and forest school. They have a fantastic programme of supporting children's wellbeing, learning responsibility, teamwork and about conservation. Paul would be interested in using the site after development with his groups and schools. Chesham Bois Scout group and St Mary's C of E Primary School showed a particular interest in using the development.

We believe that by creating a more useable and accessible educational outdoor facility, many children will benefit in the local community. There could be an interaction between the classroom and the wood year-round, for example, growing plants from seeds in the classroom and planting in the woods, and caring for butterfly larvae to release them when hatched. The children would be able to engage with nature, see the changing seasons, learn about the local flora and fauna, understand habitats and life-cycles better, interact with their surroundings by finding tracks and observing changes in person and through cameras, and hopefully learn to love and appreciate all that the woodland offers.

Background:

The Berkhamsted Schools Group (BSG) on behalf of Heatherton School engaged Ove Arup & Partners Ltd. (ARUP) in June 2018 to provide an ecological assessment and recommendations for restoring biodiversity and creating an outdoor learning environment in the woodland next to Heatherton School.

Following on from the study and recommendations, BSG consulted an Ecological Consultants and Habitats Contactors to provide further insight and a quote to possibly carry out the proposed work.

This document aims to bring together the advice and proposed actions provided by two consulting firms, and the feedback BSG has received from stakeholders into a draft action plan.

The woodland was visited by Arup staff in June 2018 and found to contain ecological features that support biodiversity, including mature trees and ground flora. The forest has the potential to become a valuable ecological asset, in line with the recommendations laid out in this report. These include managing the woodland by clearing dominant species, creating new habitats, and introducing species-specific habitat features to provide opportunities for a range of wildlife.

A provisional plan to create an outdoor learning environment, suitable for the school's specified age ranges and possible users, has been suggested. The plan includes ecological features that could be incorporated into a learning curriculum, child safety within the woodland environment, options for an outdoor classroom and outdoor educational activities.

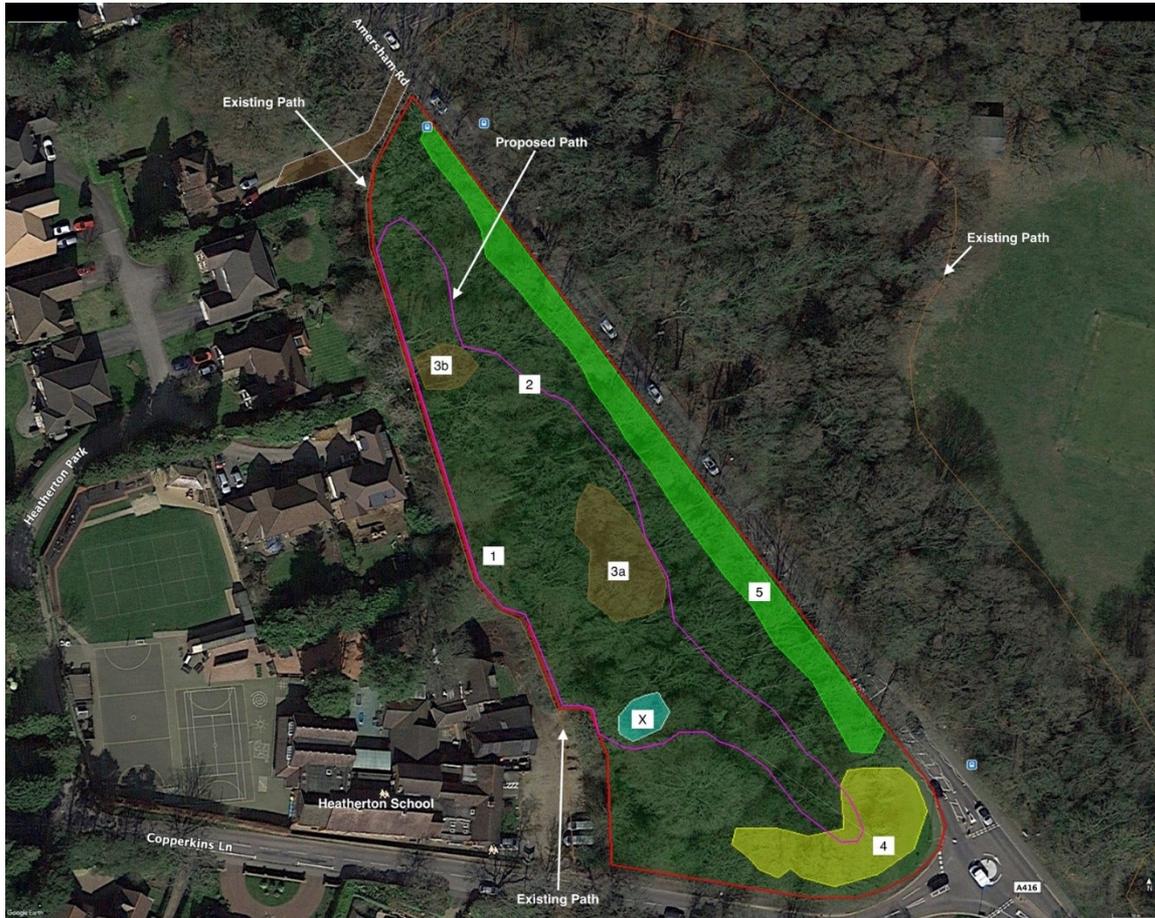
The BSG would engage the services of a suitable contractor to deliver a Council approved plan with the guidance of the ARUP Ecological recommendations and stakeholder feedback. BSG would like to propose the following action with reference to the ecological report and the possible contractor document.

Proposed actions - short-term

Ecological restorative work to be done as outlined in section 4 of the ARUP report and a contractors quote to include the following points/actions:

- A. Improvement of ground layer by addition of ground flora species, such as primrose, wild garlic and bluebells, and a variety of deadwood;
- B. Improve the understory, vary the size and species of shrubs and small trees. Encourage larger shrubs such as hawthorn, blackthorn, maple and elder by removing dominant species such as laurel and holly;
- C. The canopy layer to be managed by removing any trees that may be a safety hazard. The canopy should consist of mature trees of varying age and species to provide habitats for bats and birds.
- D. Carry out a tree survey to make sure the trees along the route are in a safe condition in conjunction with the Council.

The below proposed actions/locations are taken from the ARUP report and a possible contractor's action plan. Please see attached documents for more detail.



1. Add more logs to already existing large pile of deadwood, which offers opportunities for reptiles, amphibians, invertebrates, fungi and lichens, and a natural seating area.
2. The proposed pathway will include the below
 - Information boards at points of interests (QR codes that link to information tailored to different age groups);
 - Path to be made up of wood chips and bark (no concrete);
 - The owners of 4 Heatherton Park, expressed concerns that an information post might be placed directly behind his house. He described his house as being the only one that is very close to the fence and woodland, his kitchen and office are that side, he works from home and sits out that side of their garden. Therefore, they do not want groups of children gathering the other side of the fence for lessons / Q&As etc. He also mentioned that noise pollution has increased considerably over the last few years and that they would not want any trees removing that would decrease the natural sound barrier;
 - Nb we will **not** put up fencing as proposed in the ARUP report in sections 5.1 and 5.2 and the possible contractor's woodland conversation document. Leaders of younger children will need to maintain appropriate adult; pupil ratios and use an alternative, temporary barrier if required, e.g. barrier tape to be removed at the end of a session.
3. a and b. Proposed clearings, utilising previously cleared areas, for Forest School activities. Useful to have two separate spaces. The areas will include the below:
 - Natural wooden seating, use wood from felled trees
 - Mud kitchen
 - Firepit
 - For discussion – could we erect some kind of shelter? This will allow Forest School to be conducted during wet weather. *Wooden roofs explicitly designed to be used as a roost by bats;*

eaves created under the roof to offer an opportunity for nesting birds, such as wren and blackbird; (see figure 1)

- Wooden sculptures (a local artist to be engaged providing other opportunities for children)

4. Proposed meadow:

- Remove existing brambles
- Wildflowers to be planted
- Wild grasses to be planted

5. The proposed buffer zone instead of building a natural fence.

This area would need to have any dangerous trees or branches removed but we suggest that selected undergrowth and thickets should remain for the following reasons.

- A natural barrier instead of fencing as this is not permitted. This natural barrier will assist in keeping children safe. This should not restrict access to this part of the public wood as the access path is not affected by this proposal to leave some of the thicker undergrowth.
- The thicker area will also be beneficial to wildlife as they can hide in the undergrowth. Evidence of deer and badgers have been identified in this area. see ARUP report point 3.2
- By maintaining a thicker area, this will also act as a sound barrier for the houses adjacent to the wood.

6. Adding a bug hotel, bat boxes and bird boxes to be positioned throughout the wood – potentially with motion-sensitive cameras.

X. A potential area for pond creation in the future. The proposed location has changed due to its proximity to residential houses and the creation of a pond will **not** be part of the initial proposal.

Long-term

Monthly maintenance activities would include small tasks such as:

- clearing pathways;
- cleaning signs;
- litter picking.

Yearly maintenance would include:

- trimming back overgrown shrubs and ground flora, such as holly and bramble, where these are dominating, provide too much shade, block pathways and obscure the view from the school to the pond;
- checking for health issues present in the trees;
- looking for signs that branches or trees may be at risk of breaking or falling;
- re-seeding or plug-planting the wildflower meadow area;
- Thinning the forest out in certain areas

The above long-term maintenance may tie in with the Council's ongoing 10-year woodland maintenance plan. ARUP suggested, *A small area of the woodland could be cut back each year and allowed to regrow. This would display the different stages of succession year by year and teach children the process at the same time, as well as introducing a beneficial rotational management regime to the woodland as a whole.*



Example of a more serious, structure -possible forest school shelter?



Space for a fire to be lit and used.

