

The site of the Polish Church (now demolished), off Manor Road, Whitchurch

Notes made by Sally Woolhouse & Gill Goodwin (WoTHabs) following site visit on 12/04/2017 with Jon Steward & Pete Woolhouse

General comments

Jon has made very good progress with clearing debris and unwanted undergrowth and dead wood from the site (assisted by several able helpers). We walked round the site, evaluating what the next steps should be, with the broad aim of a bio-diverse community space in mind.

Notes & agreed actions for each part of the site

1) Row of fir trees on boundary

Jon explained that a tree surgeon had been invited to quote for clearing the lower branches on these trees to a height of 6m. We decided that this was unnecessarily radical (and an avoidable cost) and all that was required was the removal of only the **dead** lower branches, with clean cuts flush with the trunks and possibly a few really low live branches that might catch people in the eye. Visually we felt this would be a more sympathetic approach. The ivy growing up into the trees should be cut off at ground level.

Jon agreed to carry out this task. The dead wood would be neatly laid along under the base of the trees (near the far Coombe park boundary wooden fence, to provide refuges for small mammals and invertebrates).



2) The chain link boundary fence

We agreed that this was unsightly and not in a good state of repair and should be replaced by a post & rail wooden fence which would be similar to the existing wooden post & rail on the Coombe Park side of the fir trees. Jon agreed to arrange for this work to be done through the Parish Council. This should be done as soon as possible because it will cause some mess and disruption on the site. The contractors may also request that access is made available via the Coombe Park back drive.

3) Small beech trees in the chain link fence at N end

There are 3 small beech trees, which may have originally been planted as hedging (or are overgrown seedlings) which have grown up into the firs and are interfering with the trees surrounding. We agreed that these should be cut down at least to fence height or alternatively, to ground level (if more practical). They should not be allowed to re-grow higher than fence height in future.

Jon agreed to fell these as soon as possible; the trunks and thicker branches to be stacked in one place for taking away for firewood and the brash should be laid under the firs (as in (1)).



4) Group of small trees

There is a group of 3 small trees at the west end of the spinney (see photo) consisting of an elm and 2 sycamores, (Marked with a red cross on the map below). They are all in poor condition and should be felled.

Jon agreed to do this, separating the resulting timber as in (3), except that Pete requested that the trunk of the elm be kept in long lengths, because it is useful straight timber for fence posts or other purposes.



5) Multi-stemmed sycamore

There is a medium-sized sycamore, probably coppiced in the past, which should also be felled (behind yew in photo below). It is close to the yew tree, to the SE. (Marked with a red cross on the map below). Jon agreed to do this, separating the resulting timber as in (3).

(Note: we agreed that no sycamore should be allowed to grow on the site at all because they will eventually get too big and overbearing).



6) The trees and undergrowth in the spinney

The remaining small trees in the spinney are mostly elm and hawthorn. It was agreed that most of the ivy should be left growing up into the elms because it provides good food for bees etc. The undergrowth should be cleared sufficiently to be able to walk through the spinney from end to end, in a meandering route. All bramble should be cut off to approx 20cm (allowing fresh regrowth which can then be treated with herbicide). Brambles to be burnt on the bonfire with other general debris.

Note: there is a pile of asbestos rubbish at the E end of the spinney near the neighbouring boundary fence. This should be removed by the council.

Jon agreed to clear the bramble and arrange for the asbestos removal.

Sally agreed to plant some snowdrops and primroses in suitable places in and on the edge of the spinney, transplanted from her garden.

7) The main grass area

We agreed that winding pathways (approx 2m wide) should be close mown regularly, linking up the path through the spinney and the entrance path which will lead on towards the stone path to the church memorial area (see below). The path should avoid the main lumps and bumps of the anthills in the SE corner, and keep to the flattest route for ease of walking. The remaining grass areas should be kept longer, for contrast and interest, and only mown and when appropriate. (It may be possible to develop a wild meadow area but this TBC).

Jon agreed to undertake the mowing.

On the sketch map below, an approximate position of the pathways is shown with orange lines.

8) The church area

This area is quite different in its flora because obviously it is where the church once stood. There is no grass, just a mix of small plants which are gradually colonising, including violets (and thistles). Jon and Anna both report that petunias grow there but no evidence of them yet.

It is universally agreed that the way this part of the site should be managed and developed and be led by those residents who used to worship in the church. We understand they wish to install a cross or similar memorial but where exactly this will be positioned and what will be around it also needs to be discussed and decided. The existing flagged pathway probably should be restored and improved.

Jon agreed to contact Anna and pass this part of the site development over to her.

9) The tall panel fence on the N boundary

This fence belongs to Coombe Park and it has been taken down in the past to gain easier access for the removal of the church building. At present it is still part standing but repairable.

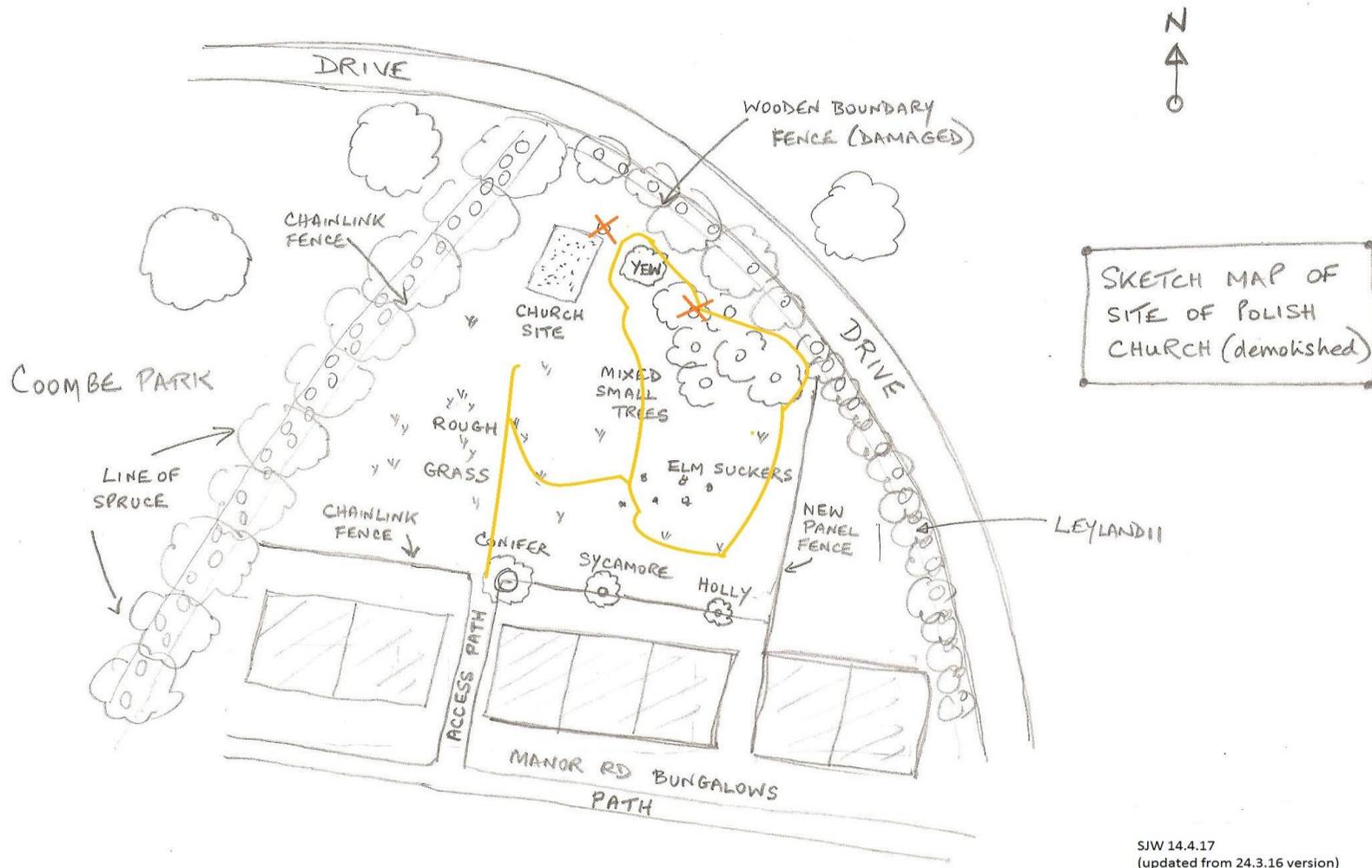
Although it looks unsightly, it is probably a good idea to leave it as it is until the fencing work, firewood removal and possibly wood chippings for pathways are completed. If Jon can arrange with the appropriate person to get permission for temporary access, that would save a lot of wheelbarrow work.

Pete has agreed to properly repair this fence when appropriate.



10) Seating

It was agreed that initially some simple bench type seats should be installed in two or three appropriate places but no definite decision was made about who would organise these, as yet.



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 (updated from 24.3.16 version)