

Castle Point Wildlife Group



People working for a better environment

****THIS NEWSLETTER CONTAINS IMPORTANT INFORMATION RE WEST WOOD****

Welcome to the latest newsletter and update from Castle Point Wildlife Group. As many residents will be aware we are a registered charitable group who manage Westwood under a licence from the woods owners Castle Point Borough Council. A woodland Management Plan was developed and is in place covering the 25 year period from 2010. This plan was written to cover the regeneration of the wood and to ensure habitats for wildlife as well as maintaining the wood for a wide range of users.

The group is made up of volunteers and we welcome anyone to assist us in our works. We also manage another woodland in Castle Point (North Benfleet Hall Wood) located adjacent to Woodside Park off Manor Road in Thundersley.

Full information on the group and its activities can be found on our website www.castlepointwildlifegroup.co.uk

As part of our aim to have local woods for local people, we try to keep as many local residents and woodland users updated on the group's activities within the woods, as well as other projects that are planned that will involve the woods or the direct area around them.

Over the autumn, winter and early spring period our works have mainly been on coppicing within Westwood and in managing the glades within North Benfleet Hall Wood. Coppicing is a traditional woodland management technique where areas of trees are thinned and felled allowing regeneration of ground plants and regrowth of trees. It can appear quite harsh when first undertaken but after a couple of years the growth is strong and it improves the whole woodland area by allowing trees to develop as well as the wild flowers. We have also completed works on repairing bridges and in improving the paths and tracks through the woods. As we move in to spring and summer our works will continue with further improvements planned to pathways as well as managing the previous coppice areas by cutting back bramble etc. We will publish a list of dates when we will be working in the woods on our website together with other activities. It is our intention to hold walks through the woods at Bluebell time and we will also hopefully hold some evening bat walks so please do check our website or the notice boards at the entrance to both woods.

We would like to update on a large project that is shortly to be started within West Wood.

As many will be aware Prittle Brook runs through West Wood. In the past few years there have been occasions when the brook has overflowed at times of heavy rain and storms, and regrettably this has caused flooding to properties. As a group we have undertaken works at our expense to create what are known as scrapes to hold and store water at times of heavy rainfall. These scrapes also provide a valuable wildlife habitat. In addition we have dug out the main pond at Westbourne Close to increase the depth and we have also reinstated the pond at Hedge Lane as well as improving ditches to slow down the flows of water to Prittle Brook. A holding pond has also been reinstated at the top of the woods at Daws Heath again to hold excess water at times of heavy rain.

Last summer we were made aware of a scheme being developed by Essex County Council to build what is known as a bund across Prittle Brook where the current ford style crossing is located.

After much investigation work, this project is now to go ahead.

This project is being funded and completed by Essex County Council. We as a group understand the issues with flooding and the need to look at alleviating flood risk.

Essex County Council has now obtained full planning permission to construct the bund. The bund is in simple terms a raised bank and it will mean the current footpath either side of the brook will be raised by about 1.5 meters. The brook will be piped under the bund and this means that when there is heavy rain the flow through the brook it will be controlled and the excess water will be held back by the bund. This means that the areas north and south of the brook to the west of the bund will occasionally flood and then drain once the rain stops and the brook flow drops. Castle Point Wildlife Group is NOT undertaking any of the works and the project is fully the responsibility of Essex County Council who will be using a contractor (Topbond) to undertake the works.

As a group we have been active in looking to protect the woodland during the development of the plans and have made a number of representations.

As detailed the works are due to start imminently, and we have agreed with Essex County Council to provide this update within our newsletter. All enquiries about the project should be addressed to Essex County Council.

As part of the planning process, various ecological surveys and tree surveys have been undertaken. These show no environmental issues. A few small trees have been removed and we have undertaken this work ourselves as part of our overall management of the wood. During the works an archaeological survey will also be undertaken.

The works will mean that there will be plant working and moving through the woods and the area around the ford will be closed off during the works. This will temporarily affect the pathways and the bridleway.

We are advised the work will last for around 12 - 14 weeks. The preferred but yet to be confirmed access route during the construction of the bund is via The Gill entrance and then bridleway 85 which runs from this entrance west to the ford.

We have been assured that upon completion of the works all paths and tracks will be returned to the current condition (or better with surface dressings). During the works we will be liaising with the Council and the contractors.

If you are using the woods during the works please ensure you follow any signs and keep an eye on any plant moving through the woods. As above while we are not involved in the project directly we will be watching the works and are happy to take up any concerns with the contractor or the Council but these should in the first instance be directed to the contractor or the Council. We are unable to assist on any technical points or any issues about path / bridleway closures.

Once construction work of the bund starts on site Kevin Carney of Topbond who are the contractors will be the site supervisor and can be contacted on 07526 259085.

If you require further information on the scheme you can contact the Essex County Council flood team via the following link: <http://flood.essex.gov.uk/contact-us/> :

We would like to thank Essex County Council who has funded the printing of this newsletter.

Neal Warren

Secretary - Castle Point Wildlife Group - February 2017