

Stoke St Michael Woodland Group April 2023 to March 2024

Chairs Report to Parish Council Meeting 9th May 2024.

This report is to give a breakdown of the work that we have conducted within the Stoke St Michael woodland over the last 12 months.

I'd like to start off by thanking Stoke St Michael Parish Council for their continued support to the woodland group. This has included a generous Grant which enable us to conduct work within the woodland this financial year. I would also like to thank the Parish Footpaths Liaison Officer for supporting us; and also, for the loan of equipment to maintain footpaths over the last 12 months. Most importantly, I would like to thank the keen and valuable volunteers that helped us conduct tasks across the site over the year, particularly during this winter's wet and cold months. Sadly, the wet weather has delayed and limited much of our planned activities on site.

Finally, I'd like to thank my fellow committee members who give their valuable time to support and manage the woodland.

Health and Safety: H&S is paramount to us enabling access for the public and community of Stoke St. Michael to the woodland, we have obligations around making sure that our footpaths and infrastructure are safe and fit for purpose. As a result, each month we conduct a health and safety assessment of the site which looks at the condition of site infrastructure like gates and steps and assesses the safety of trees and other vegetation across the site. We have records of this for the whole year. We have also over the winter removed several ash trees that were suffering from ash dieback because of these health and safety surveys at the beginning of the year. We have also resurfaced the steps entering the woodland opposite The Mead.

Management Plan: We have updated our 5-year management plan for the woodland, and we have now included some future ideas in this plan.

Tasks: As well as monthly maintenance of footpaths during the growing season we are pleased to say that despite the wet winter, we were able to conduct several volunteer tasks within the woodland with a team of local and keen volunteers.

This included in October 2023 a morning spent cutting back scrub and bramble and long vegetation to enhance access.

On another volunteer day in December 2023, we removed arisings created through habitat management work.

This was followed by a third day in February 2024 where we cleared wood arisings from hedgerow work and repaired the steps entering the woodland from opposite The Mead. We also began the process of installing a base for a bench, again donated by the parish for visitors and community members so they can sit in the woodland and enjoy the views. This work will be completed in the spring once the site dries out and we have good weather conditions.

Using funding from the parish council, we have been able to do some fantastic habitat management work within the woodland. This has included laying the hedge along the road going up towards the Hollow. This work was conducted by Chris Claxton, a local hedging expert and is in the traditional Somerset style. This hedge will provide a fantastic space for wildlife and biodiversity. Following this we used Paulton based Sam Perry who spent a day cutting and removing bramble and long grass at the bottom of the woodland. We will maintain this area as an area of short grassland for the future. This will give us a space for village events and activities. Moving forward we will continue to maintain access for the public throughout the year, including the cutting of footpaths and grassy areas, we will install the new bench and develop a further program of volunteer activities for the autumn and winter. We would also very much welcome input and ideas from the wider local community as we develop this.