

Gospel Oak to Barking Electrification Project – Parkland Walk Future Veteran Tree Project London Borough of Islington – Parkland Walk Nature Reserve

J Murphy and Sons Ltd, Network Rail, Islington Council Nature Conservation Team

BIG Biodiversity Challenge Award category: Small Scale Permanent

Project overview

The Gospel Oak to Barking Electrification (GOBE) project was selected as a pilot project to deliver a minimum of ‘biodiversity no net loss’ because of the early identification of large scale vegetation clearance requirements necessary for electrification. Network Rail and J Murphy and Sons Ltd in conjunction with Islington Council carried out biodiversity enhancement works in the Parkland Walk Local Nature Reserve.

Parkland Walk is one of Islington Council’s three nature reserves. It is a disused railway line running through the boroughs of Haringey and Islington, from Finsbury Park to Alexander Palace. It is designated also as a Metropolitan Open Land (MOL) and Site of Importance for Nature Conservation, Metropolitan Grade and is London’s longest Local Nature Reserve. The project involved identifying individual trees that have the potential to develop in the future into mature trees and carrying out enhancements to ensure they provide a more valuable habitat for wildlife.



Parkland Walk LNR location

What were the biodiversity conditions on site, prior to the enhancement?

The majority of the trees in Parkland Walk are of a similar age and have established without much thinning out work taking place meaning that there is a lot of ‘lollipop’ growth. Future veteran management encourages sturdy growth of certain trees, allowing them to grow as ‘field trees’, increasing the life of the tree. Veteranisation in a woodland of such similar growth and age increases the diversity of the habitat by accelerating ‘ageing’ i.e. decay of certain trees.

Were there any specific reasons that led to this project?

The Gospel Oak to Barking line serves as an important wildlife corridor and connective function between isolated protected and vegetated areas. The project was carried out to aid the project target of “no biodiversity net loss”. It was also a way of leaving a positive legacy in the community where we carried out our works.

What were the biodiversity measures taken?

The Future Veteran Tree Project at Parkland Walk is an important part of the development of the woodland. It involves identifying individual trees that have the potential to develop in the future into mature, strong specimens with a longer life. The older the tree, the more valuable habitat it provides for wildlife. Firstly, we needed to identify suitable trees. The principles in identifying appropriate future veteran trees were:

- To look for trees approx. 50 years old
- To choose trees with a healthy straight base, not having become ‘lollipop’ in growth.
- To ensure a variety of species are chosen.
- To choose a tree in a suitable location, where there is the possibility for it to grow like a field tree over the next 50 years.
- To identify the current works necessary i.e. ‘halo thinning’ of surrounding vegetation, to enable the identified tree to develop as a ‘field tree’ without competition.

4 specimens (or in the case of the beeches, group of trees) were chosen across the site to be managed in this way: an English Oak (*Quercus robur*); an Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*); a group of Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*); and a Field Maple (*Acer campestre*).



Log piles left in situ

Halo thinning and vegetation were removed from around the trees creating an environment where the trees can develop into mature, healthy ‘field’ trees in the future. These specimens will have a valuable contribution to the biodiversity and longevity of the woodland. The log piles left in situ from the ‘halo thinning’ create good habitat for amphibians and reptiles. Some of the brush piles were left as habitat for invertebrates, others were used by the Nature Conservation Team’s volunteers to build dead-hedges on the site to protect sensitive areas.

How would you best describe the project?

Enhancement

Further information

J Murphy and Sons Ltd and Network Rail enabled this project to be carried out over 2 visits involving the nature conservation officer, tree inspector and councils tree contractors. The project has created the environment for a selection of trees to develop into mature, healthy 'field' trees in the future. These specimens will have a valuable contribution to the biodiversity and longevity of the woodland. The management of vegetation around the specimen trees will be maintained by the Council's Nature Conservation Team and volunteers. Records were also submitted to Greenspace Information for Greater London (GIGL).

The project created an awareness throughout the team about how simple biodiversity enhancements can be carried out on our projects benefiting the environment and communities that we work in. Since carrying out the work a number of future similar enhancements have been identified for existing projects.

What was your personal motivation for carrying out the enhancement?

The project team committed to sustainability and ensuring that we left a positive legacy in the communities we worked. The enhancement contributed to our "no biodiversity net loss" target and gave us the opportunity to give something back.



Halo thinning carried out.