



COLNEY HEATH PARISH COUNCIL

Highfield Park Office
Hill End Lane
St Albans
Hertfordshire AL4 0RA
Tel: 01727 825314
Email: clerk@colneyheathparishcouncil.gov.uk

Colney Heath Village Office
83 High Street
Colney Heath
Hertfordshire AL4 0NS

A trial to evaluate alternative methods for the control of Hawthorn

Currently Warren field, which is part of Colney Heath Common suffers from the encroachment of Hawthorn which if left unchecked will cause significant harm to this locally rare habitat.

The proposal is to carry out trial this summer to evaluate an alternative approach, this will require the agreement of Colney Heath Parish Council. The trial was approved to go ahead by Full Council 21 March 2019.

Background

Warren field is acidic land supporting locally rare flora but is surrounded by Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*) shrubs which seeds and has rapidly spread into Warren field, if left unchecked the field will be lost to residents and much of the current wildlife.

Conservation cattle grazing has been used with limited effect. Digging out is very labour intensive and is only suitable for the smaller plants.

The current recommended control is cutting down in the winter, but this suffers from a well-documented draw back that resulting growth is even more vigorous than the removed growth.

Considering the physiology of the plant, an alternative approach would seem more appropriate. It is well understood that harder woody plants are pruned in winter the greater the following season growth will be. The reverse occurs in summer, cutting down woody plants in summer greatly reduces the following years growth. The longer the shrub is without or with reduced foliage the greater the impact will be, so mid-summer pruning has greatest impact.

After the longest day most plants are unable to make new growth from dormant buds but will continue to make extension grow from existing growing shoots. The risk is that some members of Roseaceae family, of which Hawthorn is a member, can grow from dormant buds in shortening day lengths.

Proposed trial

Select two areas

- a) area with small Hawthorn seedling < 440mm
- b) area with larger Hawthorn < 1.5m.

Mark out trial areas with posts on each corner approximately 450mm high painted red together with a sign on each site giving details of the trial for residents, this will stay in place for about 15months.



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The area of the small Hawthorn will 40x10m the for the large Hawthorn has been identified by Councillor Derrick Crump.

Trial layout

Plot	Treatment
Control	No action
Treatment 1	Winter pruning, cutting down as low as possible (simulating current practice)
Treatment 2	Summer cutting by machine (strimmer) early-mid July
Treatment 3	Summer cutting by hand (lopper) early-mid July

Evaluation will take place in the summer 2020.

Mike Rawlins
13/3/19