**Coed Cymru Report**

As an update and to follow up with last weeks visit to Colwinston wood there a few issues that you may need to address.

I have marked the wood for thinning and offered more advice to the representatives that met me on site including Ed Lewis, Sasha and two other ladies whose names I didn’t note down I’m afraid.

I walked the wood with Ed pointing out details and major issues with hazardous trees. ***I have marked trees for removal with a paint spot, and those that urgently require removal with three dots. Trees with potential issues but less urgent are marked with two dots and most if these are the larger ash that if left might end up blowing down towards the road or neighbouring property.***

To that effect I cannot assure site safety for any of the remaining larger ash trees and therefore marked 95% for removal due to the presence of advancing ash dieback which is likely to affect most if not all of the ash in time. As the site is to be intended for public use and its location adjacent to the road I have no choice but to advise you to consider felling all the ash bar a few that are not presenting a cause for concern at present.

There are some large specimens that have major defects within the wood you may wish to retain for biodiversity as pollards but make safe by removing the crown. This is going to be expensive but may be of benefit long term. Some of these trees are in an advanced stage of deterioration and it is unlikely that anyone would be willing to climb them to remove the larger branches to create a pollard. This is a subject for debate with a specialist arboricultural contractor to offer specific advice.

There are numerous roadside trees that need removal, the most urgent have three paint dots, a total of five on my record. There are others in the wood that are hazardous due to extensive stem decay and shown on the map. These should be avoided by all until made safe so I would suggest a site notice be put up to alert the public to the presence of dangerous trees and not to enter the site. The lower urgency trees those with two dots, are generally more healthy or have no obvious major defects but still present significant hazard mainly because of their proximity to the road, stem lean or sheer size.

I have therefore marked 76 ash for felling most are large, 50 sycamore and 13 elm, most of which are quite small trees. This will affect the appearance of the wood significantly with large openings created when the ash are removed. The large elm are to remain but you must be aware there is a risk that these may be affected by storm damage following the removal of the ash. I am trying to establish their provenance and still unsure whether these are English or some other type of elm or hybrids. I will be asking for some help with this as they appear healthy and therefore of interest for study and possibly propagation as part of the UK elm restoration scheme.

I would recommend you seek the advice of a professional arborist to remove all the category three tree next to the road urgently as one, (tree 7) is dead and leaning over the road and could fall at any moment. The remainder could be dealt with during the course of the felling work but some of these will probably require the services of arboricultural contractors to ensure they are felled safely.

I will submit the felling licence on your behalf which requires the agent authority form completed and returned to me, preferably by email please.

As the amount of ash to be felled has now increased dramatically, there should be a reasonable income generated from the sale of timber to help offset some costs. I will provide an estimate for you but if you worked on a roadside price of around £60/tonne that would be a reasonable start. There will be a good proportion of sawlog, approx. 50% of the ash will generate timber large enough for sawmilling depending on the absence of significant internal defect. I will get you estimates for all this once the licence has been completed.

Enclosed is a map showing the main tree issues although on the ground you can follow the marking system, remove all three dot marked trees as soon as possible. These do not require permission to fell as they are dangerous. The enclosed NRW agent authority form needs signing and returning to me by email please to accompany the licence application Anyone on the Council steering group may sign.

**Clerks Observations**

I have now read several times Mike's report on the wood and it raises a number of serious issues, which need to be considered carefully.

The report makes a compelling case that the wood is not a safe place and that the tree felling to make it safe is extensive. It represents a significant risk both in terms of:

Health and safety: Mike advises the erection of signs warning the public of danger. Irrespective of ownership issues, as a community organisation we could erect signs as a public service. Certainly, none of our volunteers should enter the wood on the instruction of the Community Council. The question the Community Council must ask itself is: what if something happens on this site and somebody gets hurt? We have no written confirmation from our insurers in respect of third party liabilities and their view of the risk might change if they read Mike's report. The Community Council does not at present own this land, so does the exposure to risk, and the potential legal costs if somebody is injured, outweigh the benefits to the community of the woodland project?

Cost: The number of trees that need to be removed will, as Mike's report states, involve considerable expense. Until such time as ownership is achieved, how can the Community Council justify such expense? Making the wood safe cannot reasonably be the sole responsibility of the Community Council. The cost of the work proposed by Mike must be clearly understood, otherwise a successful adverse possession application might leave the Community Council responsible for an asset it cannot manage and exposed to health and safety and financial risks beyond its resources.

Therefore, based on Mike's report I advise that the Community Council should consider carefully its next steps. Quite simply - is the wood worth the risk which you and the other community councillors may find yourselves responsible for and exposed to?

I appreciate the work so many have put into this project and the attachment to it, but Mike's report represents a significant challenge to the Community Council, which members need to consider very carefully before proceeding further.

**Coed Cymru**

The Clerk is correct to point out liability but this is your decision as to whether you want to make the woodland accessible and safe. That is why I have considered your position as a community group and in order to reduce the risk on a long term basis the ash trees will need to be removed. The costs are yet to be determined but I am working on that. Most of the felling may be carried out by forestry contractors but some trees may require more specialist arb contractors to safely dismantle the difficult ones. This will only be revealed once contractors have had a chance to examine the site. If the adoption of this land asset by the community may be in some doubt who is currently the landowner and therefore responsible?

The issue of signs is purely common sense I have identified trees which present a high risk and therefore need alerting to any member of the public as the wood is not fenced. As mentioned already this information has been provided and it is the responsibility of someone to act whether that be the landowner or local community. To do nothing is negligent.

The amount of felling envisaged was not a surprise, but a core of mature trees will remain and if sound some ash could be kept also. These may of course deteriorate in due course hence my advice on removing all the ash. The younger trees form an understory if sorts and include saplings of several species. These will remain but a number of sycamore and a few elm have been marked for thinning each of which will have a reason for removal, mostly the presence of decay and major defects.

If one of the objectives for management is for recreation including forest schools activity, I have no doubt this is the correct decision.

**Chairman**

Thank you for your reply which is very much appreciated. The woodland does not have an owner as we have already searched land records using our legal advisors and the Vale of Glamorgan Legal department. This is why we are seeking to obtain title for the woodland and the wetland alongside through the adverse possession route.

We think that the Vale are going to address the roadside trees and remove them.

We have applied for a Communities Grant also from the Vale and I believe that we may get £20k which will not be sufficient for all that we need to do. Half of the money will go on restoration of the well area and a small area by the Clapper Bridge. We intend to apply for further Grants as taking a longer view, we will end up with a great asset for the Community in the future. We have an allocation in the proposed budget for fencing the site and possibly some of the at risk trees can be removed. I look forward to your cost approximations.

We have already told our volunteers to stay out of the woodland as a safety measure and they are actively looking for additional sources for funding.

We will keep in touch and I will let you know if the Vale are going to take the roadside trees down.

**Coed Cymru**

Thanks Ed its early days, perhaps take one step at a time. Will give you some estimates of cost and revenue as soon as I can.

My reports suggested that there are a small number of trees that could be pollarded to retain a presence within the wood for biodiversity but reduced to a safe level, the problem with this is potential higher cost of the activity which is why I have identified high priority trees at or near roadside for immediate attention, the remaining marked trees for removal at a later date. Its up to you how the work is approached.

The trees of higher concern are marked with three dots some of which are within the wood.

If you need more detail on this I can go over my records and check whether I need to be more specific about their removal but they need felling yes, the contractors will explain how this is done.