**PROJECT TO CREATE A SECOND RIDE IN LITTLEHEATH WOODS**

Following the successful the creation of the Fields Path ride, another ride is planned on part of the section of the Vanguard Way which runs from the bottom of Fields Path towards the Croham Valley entrance.

Work Schedule

We expect contractors to come in over the winter period and take down some of the canopy trees, mainly those that are damaged or diseased but a few good specimens will be left to provide a wind breaks or “buffers”.

What is a Ride?

Rides are open, sunny corridors through the woodland, where taller trees have been removed to allow more light in, helping a wider variety of wildlife to flourish. At the edge of the path grow short, small plants such as grasses, herbs and flowers, which butterflies will thrive on. This short vegetation gives way to the shrubby growth like bramble, and then further from the path edge there are small trees that graduate into full woodland with taller, more mature trees and a shadier understory.

According to the Forestry Commission, the greatest benefit is gained when the width of the ride is equal to or greater than the height of the adjacent canopy trees. It is unlikely that the rides in Littleheath Woods will attain that width, especially the Vanguard Way, as the sides will be scalloped but nevertheless there will still be great benefits.

Why are Rides Important?

Establishing woodland edge habitats, which are sunnier and warmer than the woodland proper, create a high level of species diversity. The Forestry Commission estimates that a greater number of species inhabit the first 10 meters of any woodland edge or ride edge than inhabit the remainder of the woodland.

Although Littleheath Woods contains two fields and therefore, it would seem, plenty of “woodland edge”, mostly the tall, canopy trees grow around the boundaries, thus negating the benefit of the edge habitat.

Edge habitats benefit many species, particularly rare and declining woodland butterflies such as the small pearl-bordered fritillary and the white admiral. The latter, a classic woodland species in the UK has recently suffered a decline in numbers. These big butterflies can be seen from late June until early August, flying up and down ride edges under the dappled light. The Butterfly Conservation Society also lists skippers, black hairstreaks, fritillaries and purple emperors as particular beneficiaries of rides.

The herb layer supports a larger invertebrate population generally with subsequent benefit to birds and small mammals

Maintenance

No one can fail to notice the extensive bramble ground cover in Littleheath Woods and, whilst bramble does have great benefits in terms of shelter, nesting sites and food supply to a variety of species, it is possible to have too much of a good thing! Bramble does tend to be invasive and smothering, so in order to maintain a good “herb” layer at the Ride edge, the bramble will be cut once a year.

The Friends group will regularly remove anything of any size that emerges in the herb layer as well as coppicing the any hazel on a rotational basis.