

The Seavingtons' Village Plan Annex 1

Trees, the village landscape & environment

Prepared by the Voluntary Tree Wardens
Ry Coffman, Seavington St Michael
Jo Mills, Seavington St Mary

The Seavingtons' Village Plan, published in November 2005 set out residents' aspirations for the future development of the two village communities over the next ten years. Inter alia, the plan made detailed proposals and invited various individuals and organisations to contribute to the implementation of the plan.

This report by the Village Tree Wardens was submitted to the Parish Council as part of the village-wide consultation process which supported formulation of the Village Plan.

Introduction

The importance of landscape in the context of a village cannot be over emphasised. A rich visual aspect contributes to land and house values. Maintaining a rich landscape benefiting from trees, shrubs, wildflowers and wildlife increases the conservation value of the environment making it a sought after and healthier place for humans to live.

In these uncertain times of climate change, species loss and extinction it is the responsibility of every community to try to maintain and support the local environment as a rich source of life for ourselves, as well as the animals, birds, trees, plants and insects with which this place is shared. It is with these ideals in mind that the current Tree Wardens for Seavington St. Michael and St. Mary have been planting trees within and around the parishes for the past eight years, and offer this summary for inclusion in the 2005/6 village plan.

The landscape setting of the two villages

The parishes of Seavington St. Michael and St. Mary lie in a hollow within a larger area of low-lying hills and valleys which runs broadly East-West. This area, designated 'Low Lias Hills' by SSDC in their characterisation of the landscape areas of South Somerset (SSDC, 2000), is bounded to the North by the moors around Kingsbury Episcopi and to the south by the Cretaceous ridge of Windwhistle Ridge and sits between the fringes of the Blackdown Hills to the West and Ham Hill to the East.

The parish is approximately rectangular in shape, roughly 2 ³/₄ by 2 ¹/₄ miles with the long axis running NE-SW. Seavington St. Michael forms the NE corner of this block of land with the church of St. Mary roughly at its centre. The Seavingtons and the surrounding villages of South Petherton, Shepton Beauchamp, Lopen and Merriott are now largely un-wooded agricultural land predominantly of mixed arable and dairy farms. To the south, Windwhistle and the ridge between Dinnington and Hinton St George form a wooded backdrop of larch and beech plantations. The Dinnington valley itself has smaller fields and also has a more wooded appearance. Immediately to the north are the wooded slopes of Boxstone Hill, west of which are the parklands of Dillington House which is home to many mature and veteran trees. At the south-western edge of Seavington St. Mary the plantation, fronted by beech trees, on the western side of Park Lane is a significant landscape feature.

Recent changes to the landscape

Since the Second World War there have been four major changes to tree cover within the landscape of the Seavingtons and the surrounding villages.

- 1) Increasing mechanisation in farming has led to an increase in field size and the loss of many hedges. Many of the hedges remaining can be traced on the 1929 25" Ordnance Survey map (Somerset Sheet LXXXVIII.3) but are often in poor condition.
- 2) The outbreak of Dutch Elm Disease in the late 1960's and 1970's killed the elms which were dominant in the landscape. These are evident now only as suckering hedgerow plants that occasionally grow up to about 12 feet before once more being

affected by the disease. No planting has taken place to replace the lost mature elms and consequently very few hedgerows contain hedgerow trees resulting in an open and exposed landscape.

3) Old maps show that orchards dominated the landscape prior to the Second World War, but Seavington now contains no commercial orchards. At Hurcott approximately 5 acres of orchard survive, but within the village of St. Mary just six orchard trees, one of which died during the 2004 season, survive behind St. Mary's Close along with a single tree in a front garden in Water Street. No orchards or orchard trees survive in Seavington St. Michael. An estimated 52 acres of orchard grew in the parish (excluding the orchards at Hurcott Farm) only 80 years ago.

4) A change to the topography of the parish occurred when the A303 Ilminster by-pass road scheme by-passed the village centre in the 1980's and effectively cut Hurcott Farm off from the rest of the parish. There was much tree planting associated with the road scheme, however, it will be many more years before these trees reach maturity.

In conclusion, the landscape of and surrounding the parish has suffered tree loss in many forms in the past 50 years. The trees that remain are becoming elderly and there has been little planting to ensure a continuity of trees with our landscape. The tree-planting scheme associated with the Ilminster by-pass road scheme has yet to mature but will have a positive effect on the landscape when it does.

The Current position: Tree and wood cover within the parishes

The parish contains no woods, but the few copses of trees, for example south of Mead Farm and around Coombe Quarry are of considerable landscape and wildlife value. A recent planting (within the last 20 years) of up to 50 woodland trees to the west of the new Loxton's buildings will, with continued management, make an increasingly important habitat in the years to come.

Mature hedgerow trees are dotted across the parish, notably oaks, such as those in Davids Lane, to the south of Mead and Manor farms and those to the north of the old A303, survivals from old hedge rows, which stand within the arable fields. Old roads which are now bridle-paths/by-ways such as Saw Pit Lane, Brock Hole Lane and Bread and Cheese Lane, especially the former, provide a rich legacy of mature trees, plant ecology and natural habitat which are unique survivals of ancient road-side hedges in Seavington.

Both villages currently benefit from the planting, in the past, of specimen trees in some of the larger properties. These add considerable landscape value, for example Copper Beech, Wellingtonia and Scots Pines at the Beeches in Water Street; mature Beech, Robinia, Ash and a mixed woodland copse at the Old Vicarage in Upton Lane; and mixed planting at Southfield and Hazelwood in Seavington St. Mary. In addition Robinia in the gardens of Manor Farm, Buckrells and opposite Seavington House all add to the diversity and enhance the built parts of the villages. All of these are significant trees and they are extremely important to the visual appearance of the villages.

A fine Cedar close to the frontage of Manor Farm recently dominated Seavington St. Mary, but this succumbed to disease and has now been lost.

Both churchyards have fine, healthy and ancient Yew trees, in particular the yew opposite the south door of St. Mary's church which must pre-date the fifteenth century church. The churchyards also benefit from some recently planted ornamental trees and at St. Mary's, a good boundary hedge. There are other Yew trees in prominent positions in the villages, at the junction of the old A303 and West Street, and opposite Seavington House for example, which being ever green add important landscape value.

The main parts of the village benefited from the planting of flowering cherry trees to mark the Queen's Silver jubilee in 1977, some of which remain, those lost to disease have been replaced with rowans which are yet to fully establish themselves.

The playing field, when acquired in the 1970's was planted around the sides with trees that are beginning to make an impact on the landscape as they mature. The spinney at the southern corner provides important habitat and adds to the amenity and wildlife value of this public space. More recently the northern corner of the field was planted with two Millennium Oak trees, and gaps around the edge of the field have been planted with new trees, including three golden-leafed varieties to mark the Queen's Golden Jubilee.

To the north of the village trees have been planted to screen the commercial buildings at Branstons south of Barrington Main, and at the junction of Barrington Main and Green Lane planting of Larch, Horse Chestnut and Beech in the field corner is becoming established.

The Future

There are four areas of prime importance in the immediate and long-term future.

1. **The continued care of the existing trees** both in gardens and on farmland. This may include thinning groups of trees, where necessary, branch removal and other crown work, to ensure the longevity of the mature specimen trees and hedgerow trees. To this end we recognise the important work already undertaken, by those residents with trees within their property boundaries, to maintain the rich variety of trees which are of mature age and hence of great landscape and wildlife value.

2. **Planting new trees.** It has been noted above that many of the trees, especially native hedgerow trees and specimen trees within gardens, are now mature and although many may last for a considerable time it is important that new trees are planted to replace them when they eventually die or fall. In some areas tagging existing tree seedlings in hedgerows might be possible.

3. **Nurturing recently planted trees**, where necessary weeding, undertaking formative pruning and ensuring new trees are adequately protected from deer and cattle for example.

4. **Improvement to and continued maintenance of existing hedgerows.** Most hedges, no longer present primarily for stock control, are in places denuded and gappy, however continued care and maintenance and, where possible, improvement to the existing hedges will enhance the wildlife potential and general bio-diversity of the landscape.

Within the two villages planting opportunities are limited. There are several possible areas in which tree and shrub planting can be undertaken if the opportunities to do so arise in the future. There is also potential for planning planting of shrubs and trees as part of new development.

These are summarised below along with suggestions for larger projects:

1. **The playing field:** there is still potential for tree planting on the playing field, especially in the corner behind the Millennium Oak trees where indigenous, colourful small trees and shrubs are needed to provide a backdrop to these two important new trees and could provide valuable habitat too.
2. **Village gateways:** it has been suggested that Seavington should have village 'gateways' at the entrances to the villages. Other villages have used rough-hewn blocks of Ham Hill Stone engraved with the village name, we would endorse this as a suitable way to celebrate the entrances to the Seavingtons. Suitable planting or ornamental trees and shrubs could accompany them where appropriate. The Ham Hill Stone markers would have the advantage of being almost vandal proof and low-maintenance.
3. **Hedgerow trees:** planting and tagging suitable hedgerow trees (see above)
4. **Garden trees:** any resident even those with relatively small gardens can plant trees or shrubs. Future schemes may even provide free-trees as a recent council scheme did, these should be open to all.
5. **Community and other woodland:** Planting copses, spinneys and small woods for example in field corners or other small pockets of land will add wildlife and landscape value, the connecting hedges making excellent wildlife corridors. The year 2000 saw the development of a programme to establish community woods throughout England. Although it was not taken up in Seavington at the time such a project may become possible and would greatly enhance the village, provide habitat and food for wildlife and also a place with public access full of recreational and educational possibilities.
6. **Community orchards:** Another potential for a community project is the establishment of a community orchard. Such projects are promoted by Common Ground (1989, 32-3) and other similar organisations. The benefits to the villages compare with those cited for community woodland.
7. **Future new build and conversions:** New developments in Seavington, whether new build or conversions, should include adequate screening and landscaping which is sympathetic to a country village which will present valuable opportunities for tree planting. Where possible architects should include the planting of suitable hedges and trees within the garden design before the property goes on the market.
8. **Grassy banks:** Grassy banks bound many properties in Seavington, these have to be mown regularly. An environmentally-friendly alternative could be to use these banks and other grassy boundary areas for planting low-growing, low-maintenance shrubs. These would provide a visual enrichment and habitat for flora and fauna and only require maintenance once or twice a year.

Recommended tree and shrub species for planting.

Although it would not be right or even desirable to recommend varieties for planting in a garden environment beyond perhaps suggesting plants that are compatible with the local soil type, there is a list of recommended species for planting in wild and agricultural areas. This list was devised by SSSC (SSDC 2000) with the aim of promoting and protecting the landscape character and local distinctiveness of each area of South Somerset. It is noted above that the Seavingtons lie in an area denoted as 'Low Lias Hills' and to preserve the character of the area we recommend that only Native trees and shrubs distinctive to this area are planted outside of gardens and public spaces such as the playing field. The list is appended (Appendix 1). It is of further benefit to the local gene pool if trees and shrubs are grown locally from British stock, or better still, grown from the seeds from local trees. A future project may include the establishment of a nursery of local trees and shrubs.

Conclusions:

This plan aims to address the loss of trees in the local landscape since the Second World War, brought about by changes in farming practice, the advent of Dutch Elm disease and the declining fortunes of the cider orchards. It also aims to provide an outline for the improvement of the local environment for the benefit of residents and wildlife alike. In order to do this four areas for action have been identified:

- ◊ The continued care of the existing trees both in gardens and on farmland.
- ◊ Planting new trees.
- ◊ Nurturing all recently planted trees.
- ◊ Improvement to and continued maintenance of existing hedgerows.

In addition several possibilities for tree and shrub planting to enhance both the landscape and the environment have been identified. These range from individuals planting trees in their gardens; through small public planting schemes and planning-in planting in new developments to large community projects which might in the future become possible and supported by the village.

Ry Coffman, Volunteer Tree Warden Seavington St Michael
Jo Mills, Volunteer Tree Warden Seavington St Mary

References:

Common Ground, 1989. *Orchards. A Guide to Local Conservation.*
South Somerset District, 2000. *A species guide to tree and shrub planting in South Somerset...* (Yeovil)

Appendix 1

Tree and Shrub species guide to planting
for the 'Low Lias Hills' landscape character area

Large/medium trees:

Acer campestre (field maple)	**	H	d/h
Alnus glutinosa (common alder)	*		w/h
Betula pubescens (downy birch)	*		w/h
Fagus sylvatica (beech)	*		d
Fraxinus excelsior (ash)	***	HT	d/h
Malus sylvestris (crab apple)	*		d/h
Populus tremula (aspen)	*		h
Prunus avium (wild cherry)	*		h
Quercus robor (oak)	***	HT	d/h
Salix fragilis (crack willow)	*		w
Sorbus torminalis (wild service tree)	*		h

Small trees and shrubs:

Cornus sanguinea (dogwood)	**	H	d/h
Corylus avellana (hazel)	***	H	d/h
Crataegus monogyna (hawthorn)	**	H	d/h
Euonymus europaeus (spindle)	*		d/h
Ilex aquifolium (holly)	*	H	d/h
Ligustrum vulgare (wild privet)	*	H	d/h
Prunus spinosa (blackthorn)	**	H	d/h
Rosa canina (dog rose)	*	H	d/h
Salix caprea (goat willow)	*		h/w
Viburnum opulus (guelder rose)	*		h

KEY:

First column:	Recommended Species - Latin and (common) names
Second column:	Asterisks denote proportion of tree and shrub species typically present within woodland in the Low Lias Hills character area * - below 10% ** - between 5 and 20% *** - over 20%
Third column:	H - species commonly used in hedgerow planting HT - denotes species generally planted as specimen trees in hedges rather than as hedging plants
Fourth column:	Suitable soils d : dry, light h : heavy w : wet