

East Suffolk Greenprint Forum – visit to Gunton Wood and Gunton Woodland Burial Park

19.7.2015



A walk and talk about the Gunton Woodland Community Project, and the Gunton Woodland Burial Park.



The Woodland

Fuelled by some excellent scones and sausage rolls we strolled around Gunton Wood and learnt about this wonderful accessible network of way marked paths amongst lightly managed woodland and the volunteers who treasure it.

Gunton wood was once part of the ornamental gardens for Gunton Old Hall. When the Fowler dynasty died out it fell into disrepair and for more than 30 years invasive sycamores, brambles and vegetation limited human use of the site beyond walking the main path and dumping garden waste. In 1997 at a public meeting local residents expressed their enthusiasm for taking control of it again and turning it into accessible, wildlife friendly woodland for all to enjoy. They united to form the Gunton Woodland Community Project (GWCP). Over the following 18 years a band of willing volunteers have garnered support of various funding and support bodies and local organisations and created the calming, bird song filled local nature reserve we enjoyed today. It is well worth a visit – and a lovely place for dog walkers who clean up after themselves.



The Gunton Woodland Burial Park

Initially a collaboration between GWCP and St Peter's church (who own the land) to create a positive human and wildlife site to avoid other potentially damaging use this is now run by the Gunton Woodland Burial Trust, registered charity number: 1156621.

It began with an idea, a church team researching that and initiating 18 month water table surveys and obtaining planning permission. It was developed further with research into other sites. It is now a 33 acre site and on three cold and sometimes wet days up to 80 volunteers and one school group planted 6000 native trees leaving five glades for up to 390 burials. The sheer number of volunteers is a testament to local support for this project and the combined engagement powers of the Church and GWCP.

The first (human only) burials are projected to take place in 2016 with the cost expected to be in the region of £600 and the interment of ashes costing around £300.

Once the trees are established there will be a wildlife enhancing, healthy green walk which incorporates the Burial Park, Gunton Woods, Corton Wood, Gunton Nature reserve and Foxburrow wood.

Six of the tips shared

- 1) Engage people from the start with a public meeting and personally delivered invites to it.
- 2) These things take time – be patient and keep making small, visible improvements and communicating plans to keep people on board.
- 3) Keep volunteers enthused by focusing on developing friendships and social activities and celebrating successes.
- 4) Make use of all contacts and thank regularly – funding and/or other support has come from:
 - Suffolk Wildlife Trust – Field Survey and Management Plan
 - Environment Agency
 - Waveney District Council
 - Local schools and businesses
 - The Local Church
 - Exxon/Mobil, Shell
 - The Woodland Trust
 - Tesco, Co-operative Society
 - Pleasurewood Hills
 - TCV
 - Gunton Park Residents Association
 - And other members and friends of GWCP.
- 5) Have a five year vision for the site but also for the committee – plan in training, engaging new people and succession in an open and flexible way.
- 6) If annual income is over 5k setting up as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation is ideal to limit trustees personal liability and create a credible money handling organisation.