

Proposals to create a naturalistic parkland at Blackwell Grange



The following proposals have been developed over a number of years and have been based on information contained within the "Blackwell Grange Statement of Significance" by Archaeo-Environment and "An Ethnohistoric Study in the Community of Park West and the Parish of Blackwell, Darlington County Durham" by A & M Green, independent studies by TGP Landscape Architects and meetings and dialogue between Darlington Borough Council, the design team and Historic England.

The restoration of the parkland surrounding Blackwell Grange presents a fantastic opportunity to reverse the inevitable loss of biodiversity that will have occurred when the site was converted into a golf course back in 1971. The floristically species-poor, intensively managed grassland, which covers most of the site, currently provides few opportunities for wildlife to thrive. The restoration plans therefore include the creation of a naturalistic landscape through large expanses of colourful wildflower meadows, which will attract a wide range of invertebrates such as butterflies, moths and bees, as well as the smaller insects that birds and bats feed on. These grasslands require specific management to allow the flowering plants to proliferate and annual hay cuts are planned.

The restoration will also see improvements to the original park infrastructure such as the Ha-Ha around the hotel and boundary walls to ensure their continued survival. New surfaced footpaths will be created to improve circulation and links to the wider town via a new pedestrian entrance on Grange Road. Mown grass footpaths will be created throughout the wildflower meadows to maximise the recreational use of the parkland.

The small pond to the south of Blackwell Grange Hotel has become overgrown with dense common reed, and this will be removed and the pond re-instated to its original, larger size. The waterbody is known to be used by great crested newts and other amphibians and the pond will incorporate a range of features that provide habitat niches to maximise the value of the pond to wildlife. Elements will include the introduction of a variety of aquatic plants that are favoured by newts for egg-laying, shallow water areas for frogs to swim in and deeper water for frogs and invertebrates to use in the winter. Emergent plants will also be introduced, which are used by some dragonfly and other invertebrate larvae to climb out of the water before suating and emerging as adults.

Most of the trees in the parkland, including the peripheral boundary woodland belts, will be retained and managed, although some of the more recent soft course plantings will be removed to reinstate the form of the original Lime avenue. A number of additional trees will be planted to provide replacements for the mature specimens that will eventually succumb to old age. These trees will be large oakland species and a mix of native trees and more exotic ones to maximise species diversity, laid out in a naturalistic style to reflect the design influences from the parkland's history. A community orchard is proposed within the parkland or possibly the walled garden to the rear of the hotel. This would see the introduction of fruit and nut trees, some of which could be heritage varieties, which will further improve biodiversity and provide food for wildlife and people alike.

New habitat features will be created in addition to the meadows and tree planting, bird and bat boxes for a wide variety of bird and bat species will be sited around the parkland on the existing trees and hibernacular for hedgehogs and amphibians will be installed in suitable locations to provide shelter over winter for these species.

Interpretation boards will be installed throughout the parkland explaining the historic features such as the former ice house and line of Mill Lane and ecological benefits of the proposals.



Wildflower Meadow



Bird Boxes and Bat Boxes



Hibernacular



Espalier Fruit Trees



Habitat creation



- KEY
- Trees to be retained.
 - Trees to be removed.
 - Proposed trees.
 - Re-establish historic views.
 - Indicative Development areas.
 - Existing Ha Ha.
 - Existing footpaths / grassland walks.
 - Proposed hard surfaced footpaths.



Low Key Footpath



Mown Grass Paths



Existing Ha Ha



Existing Ha Ha



Existing Ha Ha



1790 Map of Blackwell Grange



1802 Map of Blackwell Grange



Existing Pond



Wetland Pond Restoration



Interpretation Board



Common Alder



Horse Chestnut



Common Hornbeam



Small Leaved Lime



Common Lime



Weeping Willow



English Walnut

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The final phases of work on the restoration of Blackwell Grange Parkland will see the introduction of new seating and litter bins throughout the park, allowing people to rest and take in the surroundings and views.

The boundary walls of the parkland will be repointed, stabilised and missing sections will be replaced, ensuring the long term survival of this original feature. The existing railings along the entrance driveway will be removed and replaced with new estate rails to match the existing.

The initial works to restore the parkland will be carried out over a few years but in order to ensure the proposals are established sustainably, there will need to be a long term management and maintenance programme in place over the following 30 years. For example the wildflower meadow areas may well take 5 years to establish.



Timber Seating



Cast Iron Seating



Timber Litter Bin



Cast Iron Litter Bin

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Scarlet Oak



Copper Beech



Cedar of Lebanon



Rowan



Sweet Chestnut



European Larch



Tulip Tree



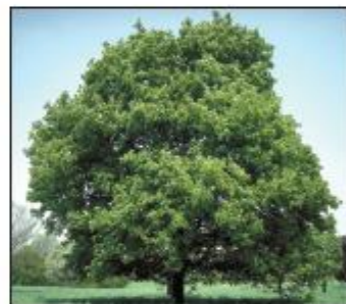
Existing Boundary Wall



Existing Boundary Wall



Dawn Redwood



Norway Maple



Common Beech



English Oak



Existing Estate Railing



New Estate Railing



Existing Boundary Wall