

Native black poplar conservation works

Parks

12 October 2021



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Introduction

The Native black poplar (*Populus nigra* ssp. *betulifolia*) is a rare and endangered tree within the United Kingdom, with an estimated 7,000 trees left remaining. The Borough is fortunate to host over 70 specimens, this includes 44 mature trees that are of national importance due to unique genetic identity, this genetic uniqueness may provide a source of trees that can be propagated and result in saplings being produced and spread throughout other areas of the country to increase the genetic diversity of the national population and greater resistance to disease such as poplar scab, which poses a major threat to the survival of this species.

The Richmond Biodiversity Action Plan includes a Species Action Plan for the borough's native black poplar. The action plan makes it clear that this is a species of importance, that should be safeguarded and sets out several actions to ensure its conservation.

Many of the actions have now been achieved, which has helped us to understand the population in greater depth, we now have records of the number of male and female trees and testing has been carried out to identify each tree's genetic identity. This work has helped to underline the uniqueness and importance of our native black poplar.

One of the biggest threats to this species is lack of management, for example without remedial action being carried out, trees with significant structural defects could suffer catastrophic collapse, if the environment around a native black poplar is not being managed it can often result in destructive competition establishing, causing shade and blocking light to our native poplars as well as competing for available water and nutrients. Ultimately, lack of management can result in the decline, death, and loss of these unique and rare trees.

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The stretch of Barnes towpath, running from Queen Elizabeth Walk to the Harrods Village is host to over 40 native black poplar, 37 of these trees are genetically rare and 11 are genetically unique. In addition to their unique composition, these trees form part of a group of Thames towpath trees that is the **only known surviving natural population in the UK**.

These trees are extremely important; however, many are facing high levels of undesirable competition from neighbouring vegetation and management at this time is crucial to best support their survival and ensure that genetically unique trees are not permanently lost.

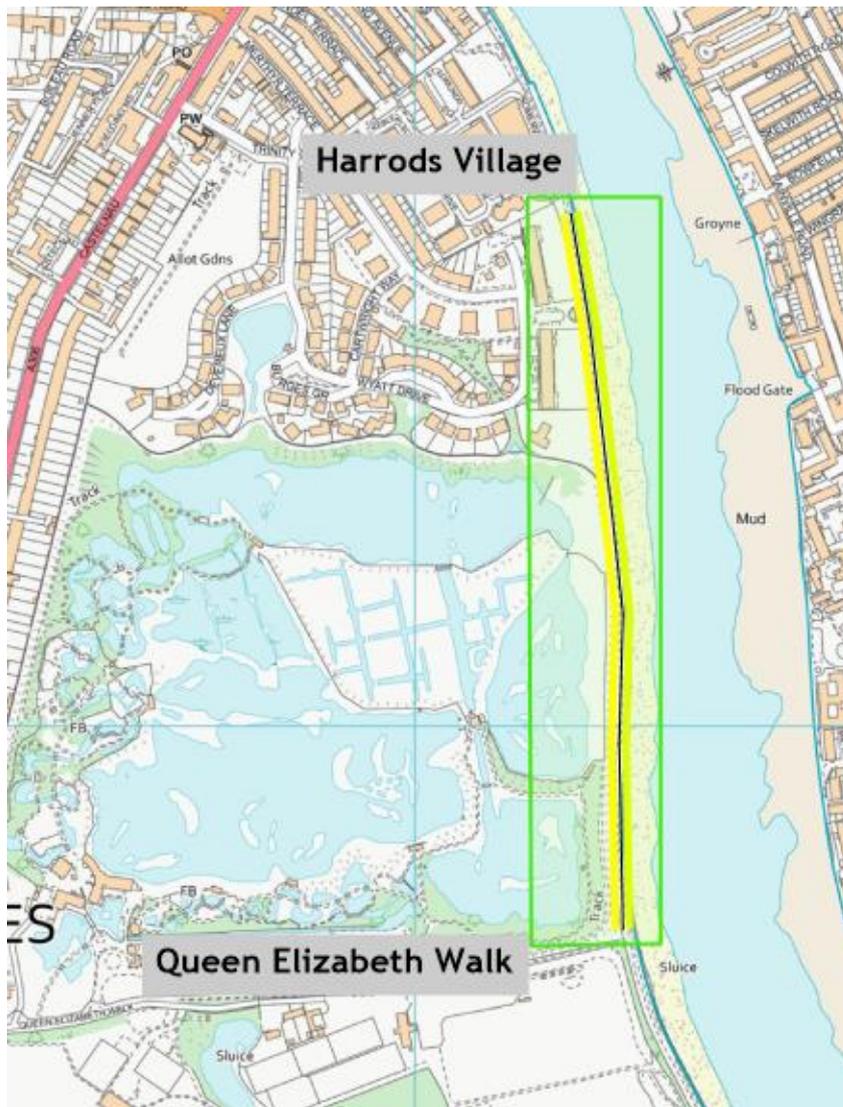
Richmond Council has been working with conservation specialist, Jamie Simpson of Trees and Woodlands to formulate a plan of works for this population and management of competing vegetation will now be carried out through the practice of 'Halo Clearance', this is the careful pruning and pollarding management of vegetation that is shading the established and next generation of native black poplars, this practice will also involve the coppicing and removal of smaller developing trees that pose a threat. It is important to note that this work may at first appear to be destructive, however this is an important step in a long-term conservation effort.

Work location and timing

Halo clearance will be concentrated on all native black poplar on the Barnes tow path as shown on the below map, works will begin close to the entrance with Queen Elizabeth Walk and will progress north, ending close to the Harrods Village.

Works will begin on Monday 18th October and will continue for a period of around three weeks.

Area of works (area of towpath as highlighted yellow):



Long-term conservation of native black poplar

This is the first phase of works that will be reviewed upon completion, this will ensure that the trees and environment continue to be managed in attempt to safeguard some of the most important trees in the Country.

This conservation project has been a collaborative approach between a local arborist, Friends of Barnes Common, Richmond Council and Richmond Biodiversity Partnership. If you would like to find out more about this project, Black Poplars on the Thames towpath or Black Poplars in Richmond Borough – Please visit: [Black Poplar Project - Friends of Barnes Common](#)

Further information about native black poplar can be found within the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames Biodiversity Action Plan: [Richmond upon Thames \(habitatsandheritage.org.uk\)](#)

Information relating to the practice of Halo Clearance is provided by the Ancient Tree Forum here: [VETree – Veteran tree management | Ancient Tree Forum](#)

The work as proposed accords with component 7 of the adopted tree management policy: [tree_policy.pdf \(richmond.gov.uk\)](#)