

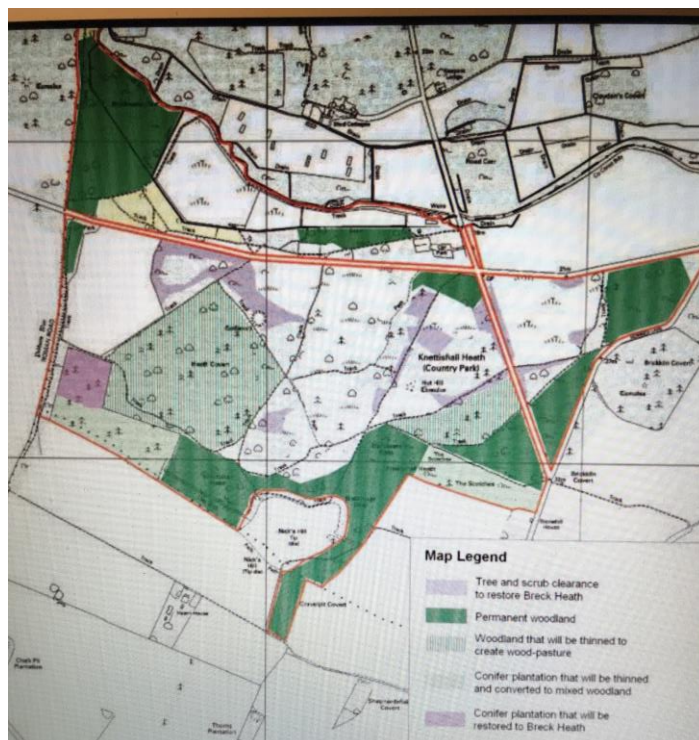
What is the plan for Knettishall? And why it is worth trying to save the remaining bits of woodland

There seems to be confusion over what further work SWT will carry out at Knettishall. Their own information regarding this ranges from “no more tree cutting” to “some tree cutting with volunteers because the funding has run out”, to their recent official statement describing their plans as follows:

“Looking ahead, we do not propose to undertake any further large scale clear felling of the remaining woodland, as the plan is certainly not to deforest the whole heath, but to create a more diverse and connected landscape. Any future woodland management will likely focus on small-scale glade creation and thinning to further encourage Breck heath plant communities to recover within the grazing enclosure.”

According to the loggers, they will be back next winter. Our own experience with SWT has been that what they tell people is not necessarily what then actually happens. So going by their official statement would seem the most likely scenario.

This statement is also very much in line with SWT’s plan as laid out in their “Vision for the future” brochure (1), which details a gradual change to open heath in ALL the woodland areas inside the enclosure. The way this will be achieved is by opening up the existing woodland by thinning and glade cutting to change it into wood pasture. The map below, taken from this brochure demonstrates the development as envisaged by SWT and their supporting organizations.



The map above, taken from the brochure, shows the planned result of the restoration work. All areas that are a light green are declared “grazed wood pasture”.

The only areas defined as “permanent woodland”, meaning woodland left to be actual woodland, are colored dark green. These areas of permanent woodland are all outside the enclosure. They will be too small to support woodland species, and they will remain isolated from the woodland areas that lied to the north of Knettishall. This connection is essential as on all other sides, the area is surrounded by big open fields.

The most impact will be on the largest remaining intact woodland area, called “Heath Covert”. The plan to cut into it and open it up started already a few years ago on the north-western and south-western sides, as well as this year’s so-called “ride-widening” along the eastern flank. See my picture below, taken three years ago after the first glade was cut into the Heath Covert woodland. Glade cutting and thinning: There is a different name for this and that’s habitat fragmentation.



Going back to the map, this also shows that the thinning and clear felling that has already been carried out along the south-eastern border of the enclosure was done in order to create a second corridor of open heath. The much reduced area of woodland that lies now between the two “corridors” is already isolated, and

does not even show up as any kind of woodland on the map, so it will most likely be gradually removed altogether.

What ought to be clear to everybody is that maintaining woodland as such and looking after it as woodland is a completely different thing to thinning it and opening it up in order that heath vegetation will take hold, with the desired end result being an open heath environment.

The presence of the ponies will help facilitate this change, as described both by SWT and WREN (2). Grazing animals are not a woodland's friend. They will do damage to existing trees and they will stop young trees from growing. We have seen already the effect of sudden wind exposure and the resulting continuing tree loss in the opened areas. The plan of SWT for the remaining wooded areas in the enclosure is gradual death – those areas will become so open that they do not resemble a woodland anymore.



Above: The results of mechanical forest thinning - the inner trees are not able to withstand the sudden increase of wind exposure.

If the still existing wooded areas were to be left alone, they may still support a certain amount of woodland species. They would then also be linked up with other forest areas, which would greatly help to boost those species.

Unless we have some written confirmation that the above plan has changed we will assume it is still valid. SWT have committed to carrying out the work as specified, so it is unlikely they will made changes to it. We say: You have done enough, leave those trees alone!

(1)[https://issuu.com/suffolkwildlifetrust/docs/knettishall heath flip sheets 12 lo/3?e=5914856/4744004](https://issuu.com/suffolkwildlifetrust/docs/knettishall_heath_flip_sheets_12_lo/3?e=5914856/4744004)

(2) <http://www.wren.org.uk/news/knettishall-heath-restoration-and-grazing-project-well-underway>