



ROTHERFIELD

Dear Resident,

Due to concerns around the condition of many trees on Noar Hill and the regular windblow occurrence we commissioned an external consultant to produce a tree safety survey of all of the Public Rights of Way on our landholding at Noar Hill. Unfortunately, this survey identified an unacceptable level of risk of harm to the public due to the volume of dead and dying ash trees and has recommended that we close these rights of way until we have addressed the safety issues.

This is not a decision we have taken lightly, nor one that we relish, but sadly as a responsible landowner we have no choice. We have liaised closely with the rights of way team at Hampshire County Council, and we will begin to work on opening a limited amount of paths immediately.

We will also be putting in place several path diversions, over and above the request from Hampshire County Councils access team to try and reduce the disruption to the rights of way network as much as is possible. We are grateful to Blackmoor Estate and our tenants for their help facilitating these diversions.

The rights of way will remain closed for up to one year while we undertake tree felling operations on Noar Hill.

A map of the paths affected by the path closures and of the diversions can be found at the end of this document.

Why Now?

Any woodland management work with a Site of Special Scientific interest such as Noar Hill must be covered by a consent from Natural England (NE). We have been working with them for over 2 years now to try and secure a consent which would enable us to address the risk to the rights of way network from the ash trees we knew were degrading, and to enable us to come up with a plan to continue to manage the woodland on Noar Hill sustainably into the future. We have been struggling to gain much traction with NE on this and undertook the tree survey to underpin the urgency of our request to undertake work. We received the results of the survey last week and have immediately begun the process to address the recommendations.

We will be able to undertake a limited amount of work on some paths to get them open within a 21 day period of initial closure, we will then have to suspend operations until after the 1st of August to meet our SSSI consent obligations and avoid the disturbance of nesting birds, ground flora and European Protected Species like the dormouse.

Once our consent enables us to begin work on the rest of Noar Hill (after the 1st of August) we will begin work on felling any dangerous trees alongside the rights of way, aiming to complete this work as soon as possible and to re-open the paths in a far better condition than they are now.

What is Ash Dieback?

Ash Dieback is a fungus affecting ash trees. First identified in the UK in 2012, it has spread rapidly, and Government guidance indicates it is likely to destroy 80-90%+ of the native UK ash population in a very short space of time.

The fungus can affect ash trees of all ages, but younger trees are more susceptible. When a tree is affected, in the early stages it will have dark patches on the leaves in the summer, with leaves then wilting, discolouring and shedding early. As the infection progresses the tree will display extensive dieback of shoots, twigs and branches. Ash dieback also makes the tree more vulnerable to other infections.

The infection of ash on Noar Hill is severe, and due to natural regeneration of ash post the hurricane in 1987, ash is a dominant species within the woodland. Once the crown of the tree begins to die back, it can shed twigs and branches at any point, particularly in high winds. The roots of the tree also die off below the ground, which makes them very susceptible to windblow.

What is our approach to forestry and Ash Dieback management on Noar Hill?

We take a long-term approach to forestry management across the estate. Our main aim is to maintain continuous and healthy tree cover in forested areas whilst also creating a good environment for natural regeneration. Where we are having to fell infected ash trees, we are taking advantage of the higher light levels and encouraging natural regeneration of the species on site. In some areas, where permitted by regulation, we are re-planting with a diverse mix of native species to add resilience to our woodlands for the future.

Our objectives for Noar Hill are to restore and maintain the SSSI woodland as natural broadleaf and beech hanger woodland as per its citation; to improve the overall health and structure of the woodlands in the context of the changing climate, the adjoining wider environment, and the woodlands history; and to improve and maintain the network of Public Rights of Way within the woodland.

This work will be being carried out by our employed woodland team and specialist contractors to ensure our approach to Ash Dieback is in line with best practice guidance. All of this work is within our Forestry Commission approved Woodland Management Plan and covered by a felling licence.

This work is covered by a consent from Natural England to work in the SSSI, and we are working closely with them to come up with a plan for the rest of Noar Hill that will enable safe access for the future and a healthy, resilient SSSI woodland.

How will we ensure the safety of the public?

By closing the Public Rights of Way, we are removing the risk of anyone being hurt or killed by falling trees, and from the risk of harm during a forest operation. They will remain closed until our work is complete. The closures will be well signed and marked. Please help us to keep you safe by adhering to all closures and following all signs and directions from our team.

If you have any questions, please contact me via the Estate Office on 01420 588207.

If you would like to receive updates and additional communication about our work on Noar Hill, which could include a public meeting if there is demand, please email office@rotherfield.com with 'Noar Ash' as the subject line to register your interest.

Thank you.

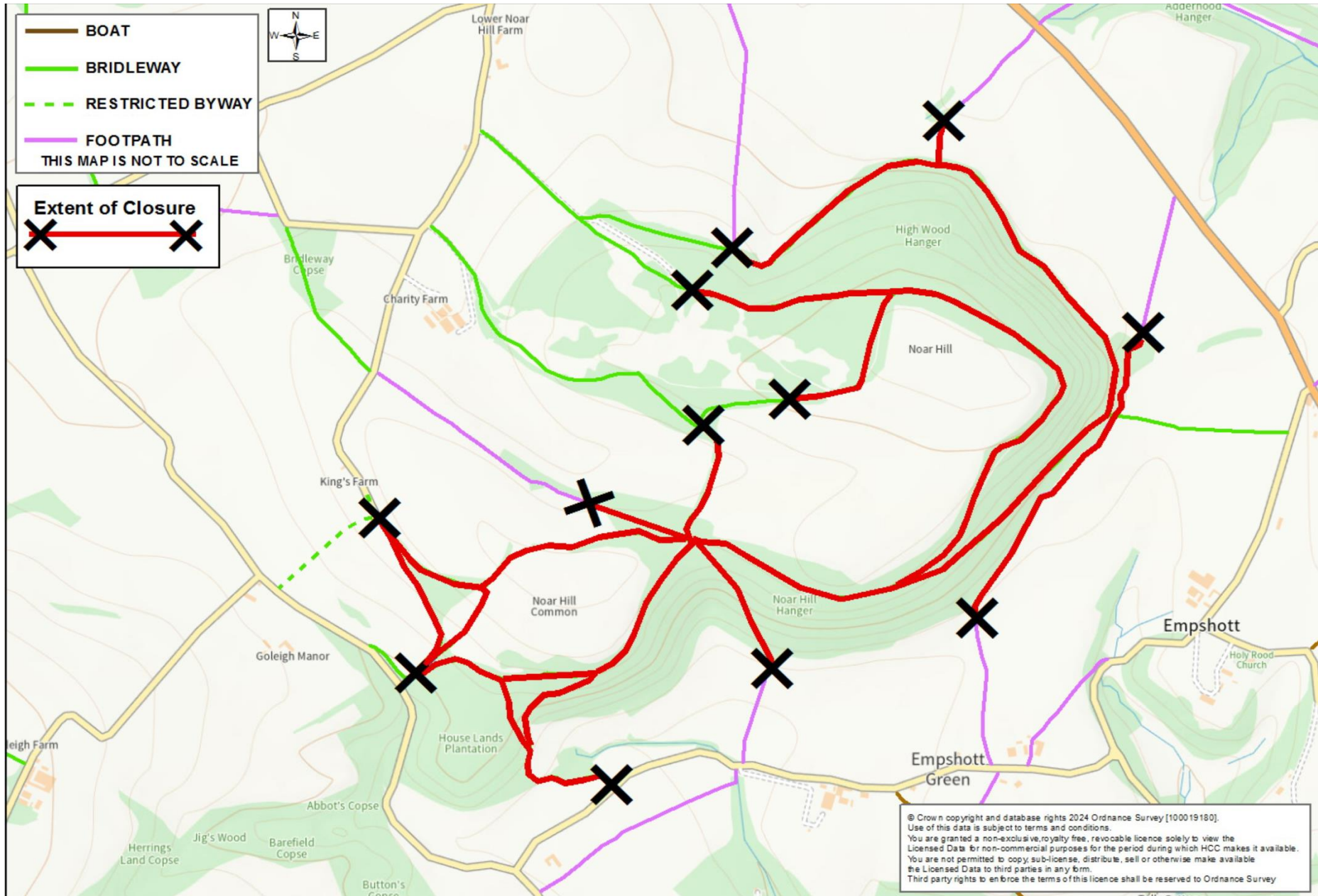
Jamie Diplock
Woodland Manager
Rotherfield Farms LLP

Please see maps on the following pages.

Map 1 showing initial closures for 21-day period.

Map 2 showing closures and alternative routes for remaining closure period.

Map 1 showing initial closures for 21-day period.



Map 2 showing closures and alternative routes for remaining closure period.

