Case study

Havering Farm

Tilhill

BSWGROUP member of binderholz

Woking Borough Council (WBC) offered a work package by competitive tender which was awarded to Tilhill. The works included clear felling three areas of coniferous woodland, replanting with broadleaves and carrying out ongoing maintenance.

The land was a recent acquisition purchased with the long-term aim of provision as public open countryside access. This initial operation was to replace a semi-mature coniferous plantation with mixed broadleaved woodland, with the inclusion of open space and paths for public recreation.

The site consisted of 4 ha covered predominantly by a spruce plantation. The conifers had most likely been planted as a Christmas tree crop but after many years of neglect by the previous owner the trees had grown tall and thin forming a very dense inaccessible forest. The resultant thick canopy meant that little light could reach the forest floor, limiting the opportunity for biodiversity.

Access to the site was extremely limited with only one road in and little space for lorries to turn around. To provide the most economical return to the client, as much of the timber as possible would have to be removed and sold to market. However, with little previous silvicultural management the trees had not put on girth meaning the valuable timber yield would be relatively low. Tilhill drew on the skills of our experienced harvesting managers in order to find the best market prices for as much of the timber as possible. This would return the maximum value from the assets back to the client. By the end of the project Tilhill had extracted to market a total of 469 tonnes of timber.

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Havering Farm – *continued*

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To access the site, Tilhill used a reputable and experienced haulage company with purpose-built smaller capacity timber lorries. To facilitate the timber removal a new turning area was built. After sustained access for a few weeks it became clear that the existing track surface was not going to remain in a suitable condition to last for the duration of the work. To avoid any unnecessary further disturbance to the foundations of the track, we opted to resurface the track to a higher specification which would allow continued and future access.

The harvesting team utilised high specification, purpose-built machinery. This meant they could quickly, safely and efficiently get onto site and process the trees from standing crop to timber with residual branches and tops. Once all the trees had been felled and stacked by the roadside the haulage lorries began transporting the products to their markets. This included logs sent for milling into products for the landscaping and fencing industry. Smaller, poorer quality logs went for biomass to create renewable energy – all sustainable options that help create a truly circular economy.

Once the site was clear of trees, the client had specified removal of brash (foliage, branches and tops of the trees) off site. This would have been an expensive option with potential further road damage, so Tilhill proposed a more innovative and economical alternative. Our choice of ground preparation was to mulch the brash (flailing the wood into much smaller particles that rot down more easily and faster) with the retained arisings acting as a natural soil improver to help the replanted trees to grow.

This turned out to be extremely helpful as the following summer included a prolonged hot and dry spell with many young trees struggling to find enough moisture. The mulch on this site helped to retain moisture meaning the planted trees did significantly better than others in neighbouring areas.

The harvesting works started on the 5th December and young trees were in the ground by the 15th of February. Using our trusted planting teams, Tilhill planted all 2480 new trees at the site quickly and efficiently, using high quality trees, best silvicultural practice and careful plant handling skills to ensure the highest plant survival rate and optimum growth. After the planting works were complete the site was left neat, tidy and secure.

Tree shelters were employed on each tree to protect them from the unwanted attentions of voles, rabbits and hares. Any browsing or nibbling of the young, replacement woodland can remove years of successful growth, so shelters are commonly employed in all our broadleaved planting.

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As an addition to the original works Woking Borough Council asked Tilhill to remove the highly invasive exotic weed, Himalayan Balsam from the site before it started competing with the newly planted trees, they also asked us to remove a row of Lawsons cypress. These tall trees were in very close proximity to the client's boundary presenting a potential major risk if they were to grow further and eventually fall during a storm.

Tilhill carried out this work using bespoke machinery to safely and efficiently remove the trees.

Our ability to encompass all operations from preparing the access road to tree felling, replacement planting, site maintenance and capacity to easily undertake extra works meant the client could achieve best value whilst also having peace of mind that Tilhill had complete control of the site.

Maintenance of the project will include creating weed free spots around the trees to stop other vegetation from shading out the new trees or indeed collapsing on top of the trees and physically damaging them. This also stops the vegetation from putting down roots close to the new tree roots that would otherwise compete for space, moisture and nutrients.

Tilhill will also perform a 'beat up', to replace the small proportion of trees that will naturally die from environmental factors. Regular monitoring inspections and ensuring timely maintenance undertakings are implemented is extremely important to ensure that the trees planted have the best opportunity to grow, safe guarding the time and money spent in the first year of the project.