



Osprey Lake.

Transformed country estate will attract arborists

INCREASING NUMBERS OF NATURE LOVERS ARE VISITING A COUNTRY ESTATE THAT WAS ONCE AN ACTIVE QUARRY AND IS NOW BEING TRANSFORMED INTO A RURAL UTOPIA, WITH A SPECIAL FASCINATION FOR ARBORISTS AND TREE LOVERS.

THE quarrying company Tarmac has owned the 1,000-acre Panshanger Park in Hertfordshire since the 1950s. Now, sand and gravel extraction has been completed and the company has been restoring the quarry to a country park and nature reserve. It is already attracting an abundance of wildlife and thousands of visitors every year.

Panshanger Park is a registered Grade II historic park and garden, with much of the parkland created by Humphry Repton in the late 18th century and other parts previously landscaped by Lancelot 'Capability' Brown. Owned by the Cowper family from the late 17th century to the early 20th century, the Panshanger estate was shaped around the Mimram Valley.

Tarmac is working with the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust, along with a variety of local stakeholders and dedicated volunteers, to carry out carefully planned restoration and land management, to create a mosaic of agriculture, wetlands, grasslands and

woodlands. During the spring and summer months, a multitude of wildflowers, butterflies, dragonflies and birds bring the park to life.

Large numbers of wildfowl migrate to the park from northern Europe to spend the winter on the lakes. The extended chalk stream is inhabited by trout and water vole.

Panshanger Park is home to nearly half of the species of dragonflies and damselflies found in the UK and is the second richest site in Hertfordshire for these stunning insects. The park is now host to a range of sporting, educational and community events including the annual Festival of Wildlife.

Tarmac has appointed Maydencroft Ltd to assist in the running of the park and to help ensure a sustainable approach to its management, now and for future generations. A specialist team will be responsible for its day-to-day management, working in partnership with the owner and Hertfordshire and Middlesex Wildlife

Trust.

Tim Hill, conservation manager with the trust, has been in charge of an important, ongoing arb project at the park, caring for its large collection of ancient and veteran trees.

There are over 800 veteran and ancient trees, and each one represents its own living history and an important link with the past. They are living ancient monuments.

The portfolio of antique trees includes the Panshanger Great Oak, the largest 'maiden' or single-stemmed oak in the country, and a sapling at the time of King Henry VIII. It was once visited and greatly admired by Queen Victoria.

Tim said: "Unchallenged, oaks grow for 300 years, rest for 300, and then decline gracefully for 300 years or more. The Great Oak is about 500 years old now, more than 20 metres high, nearly eight metres in circumference and the lower branches are getting a bit droopy, just as people do."



The Orangery



The new chalk river.



Pashanger's Great Oak.

“One of the large branches has come down and re-rooted. It has naturally created a daughter, which will give it new life, just as we children support our parents in their old age.

“There are many fissures in the bark of the old tree, which support birds, rare bats such as the barbastelle, and thousands of insects. In fact, the old oak has become a nature reserve in its own right. Where branches have fallen off, there is rotted wood ideal for supporting insects which feed on dead wood. Eventually, the rot creates cavities which provide nesting places for birds such as nuthatches.

“Our policy is to nurture these ancient trees in their dotage. We are doing this by ‘haloing’, a process of very slowly removing competing scrub and trees from around the ancient trees so that they have room to breathe. A group of volunteers have been helping with this and other habitat management activities at Panshanger Park since 2014.

“They perform the ongoing task of clearing the undergrowth around the ancient trees, allowing them to be shown off in all their glory for visitors to appreciate and enjoy. What we need to do now is ensure there is continuity to the habitat provided by the veteran and ancient trees.

“We will do this by ensuring middle-aged trees are properly cared for such that they will live on to become the ancients of the future.”

Maydencroft Ltd, based on a working farm near Hitchin, with regional offices in Letchworth Garden City and Windsor, is the UK market leader in a range of environmental services. The company consists of specialist teams who are experts in forestry, farming, rivers, wetlands, historic landscapes and gardens. It also manages new



developments which include the creation of nature reserves and urban landscaping projects.

It has a dedicated team, including two assistant countryside rangers based at Panshanger Park, supported by an estates manager. This multidisciplinary team will deliver a range of projects focusing on heritage, public amenity and biodiversity.

Alan Everard, head of estates and geology at Tarmac, said: “I’m delighted to

welcome Maydencroft Ltd to Panshanger Park. Their experience managing historic landscapes makes them the ideal company for this role. I’m sure their capability, knowledge and dedication will be a great asset to the park.”

Tom Williams, managing director of Maydencroft Ltd, said: “Panshanger Park, situated between Welwyn Garden City and Hertford, consists of open parkland, woodland, lakes and the River Mimram, as well as the remains of the manor house and orangery. Now that mineral extraction has finished, we’ll bring our expertise to the final phase of transition.”

He added: “There was one key missing feature at Panshanger. Humphry Repton painted an 18th-century landscape of the park, revealing how he envisaged it should look. He painted a herd of English longhorn cattle grazing the verdant meadows, but according to the historians they never arrived.

“My company owns a herd of English longhorns which means we can at last add the final piece of the jigsaw to the landscape. Although they have long horns, they are docile enough and safe to be grazing on public sites assisting with something known as conservation grazing.

“They have one calf a year and do not have to be milked. We’re particularly excited about the park being grazed by our majestic English longhorn cattle starting in the summer of 2019.”

The longhorn cattle were introduced to the park in April to provide low intensity grazing that will naturally help to manage the land and support biodiversity. They are currently being cared for in a barn by the park ranger team until all the calves are born, before being released into designated areas of the park for grazing at a later date.

Dale le Vack