

## **Judith's Wood**

### **A project of Skelsmergh and Scalthwaiterigg Parish Council**

Judith's Wood is two fields near Gurnal Bridge created by a new section of road replacing one that was washed away during Storm Desmond. The land, a river terrace alongside the River Sprint, was formerly owned by the late Judith Helling and has since passed into the ownership of the Robert Stephenson Charities, (RSC) Ten years ago a roadside hedge was planted together with a number of native trees in the smaller field. More recently the larger field was sparsely planted with trees but not maintained. Nevertheless over 100 survived. The river has continued to erode the riverbank making a section of the footpath unsafe. RSC created a diversion for the path and fenced the new route. This had the added benefit of making the fields stock proof. RSC invited the Parish Council to manage the land in conjunction with an existing access agreement on the adjoining riverbank.

A partnership was created between local residents, the Parish Council and Kendal Conservation Volunteers to carry out the project initially on a fifteen-year licence. A grant was gained from Westmorland and Furness Council as part of their goal to plant a tree for every resident – 370 in the case of our Parish!

RSC arranged for mature trees along the boundary to be made safe. This involved lopping some overhanging branches of ash affected by disease, felling two rotten trunks and reducing the height of two more dead trees. Two more trees were coppiced and will regrow. Where possible, dead wood was left standing or in situ where it fell. The remainder was chipped and used to maintain the riverbank path.

Meanwhile, volunteers restored the existing hedge and trees. This involved removing an inner fence for access, freeing up the mature plants from their guards and putting deer proof guards round the younger surviving trees. The old guards have been reused to protect these young trees. The fencing and posts have also been salvaged for reuse.

There were enough guards to also protect the new planting of 750 native trees. This work was undertaken on four volunteer days by local residents and Kendal Conservation Volunteers during the winter and spring. Stakes were purchased and 420 trees were donated by the Woodland Trust a mix known as their 'Working Wood' selection. KCV contributed 80 hazels and local residents contributed trees grown from locally sourced seed, especially oak. A further 120 trees were purchased to add diversity to the mix of species.

A wide path through the new wood has been left. This creates diverse edge habitat and meadow as well as providing access. This was planted with 60 wildflower plugs purchased from KCV. The woodland will, in part, stabilise the riverbank and shade the river, a SSSI for white clawed crayfish and home to many other riparian

plants and animals including dipper, otter and aspen. Wildlife monitoring has begun creating a baseline for the changes in the wood. The data will be used to inform future management decisions and shared with the Cumbria Biodiversity Data Centre.

The land will be known locally as Judith's Wood in memory of the original owner. Signage to this effect has been commissioned and a bench made by a local resident has been donated.

Future volunteer days will maintain the tree protection, continue to record wildlife for the Cumbria Biodiversity Data Centre, monitor the changing habitat, and introduce new species if and when appropriate to encouraged diverse and resilient habitats. The dry-stone wall, a feature on one side of the field, will be restored.

The five acres will close a gap in the wildlife rich woodland corridor running along the River Sprint from Sprint Mill well into Longsleddale. The work is congruent with the Cumbria Nature Recovery Plan for the area which encourages landowners to care for, restore and enhance a corridor of woodland and flower meadows along the valley.

The Parish is grateful for advice from The Woodland Trust, Cumbria Wildlife Trust and Natural Kendal. A case study of the project has been submitted to the Cumbria Association of Local Councils. We have been invited to give the case study in a county wide webinar for councils promoting nature recovery in July.

We thank Judith Helling's family, the Robert Stephenson Charities and Westmorland and Furness Council for making the project possible.

Chris Loynes

Skelsmergh and Scalthwaiterigg Parish Council

May 2026









Update: 17th March 2026

The felling has taken place.

The hazel and willow have been coppiced.

The ash has had a couple of the overhanging branches removed.

The cherry came down and is lying along the bank as dead wood.

The other ash has been pollarded at about 5 metres.

The logs have been stacked as dead wood habitat.

The wood chip has been spread on the muddy sections of the path - none left for mulching the new trees though.

The path along the north edge is churned up but everywhere else tidy.

There is now room for a couple of oaks in the NW corner by the bench I think.

KCV were on site again today completing the placement of tree guards and stakes on the trees planted last week - thanks again folks!