

IVY – Friend or Foe?

Here on Barnes Common, we are happy to have ivy as positive part of our ecosystem. Flowering in late autumn, it is a vital source of late-season nectar for invertebrates and pollinators, as well as a winter nutrition source for birds and other hungry wildlife. It offers safe harbour for many creatures, including one species of invertebrate here on the Common that is on the rare and endangered red book list. Ivy is not parasitic – it obtains its nutrition from the ground, not from its host tree.

The danger that ivy does present is when its weight and mass increase the 'sail area' of the tree, making it more prone to being blown over in winter storms; particularly where ground may be waterlogged, or where the tree's vigour is reduced for any reason, limiting its ability to compete with the ivy.

The Friends of Barnes Common takes advice from the Borough Tree Officer. In line with Council policy, we recognise ivy's important role in providing habitat and nutrition for pollinators, invertebrates and birds. We aim to manage sympathetically the balance between tree vigour/safety and the vital role ivy has as within our ecosystem.

A site assessment in January 2017 identified trees of potential concern that would benefit greatly from the 'banding' of ivy from base to approx. 1.5m on trunks, along with clearing around the base to facilitate a much-needed clear view of tell-tale signs of concern such as:

- fungal fruiting near the base (a sign of rot in the root system)
- ground heave (when the tree starts to move and the soil cannot hold firm)
- 'bark inclusions' where the tree has multiple trunks where the bark in the fork holds damp and can lead to fungal attack
- poorly healed scars or cracks in the bark

This treatment can also help reduce the sail area (once the ivy dies back) and reduce the risk of the tree being blown over.

This is in line with our existing policy to clear from good specimen trees and those near to paths and roads, whilst leaving more than enough habitat. We are now also clearing from trees thought to be at risk, for whatever reason, so that the trunks of these trees can be checked periodically. As with much of our conservation work, this will not be carried out in one fell swoop, but gradually as part of our three to five-year plan, working within the seasons which will cause least disruption.

We hope this answers questions but are always happy for people to [get in touch](#) to share information or ideas.