



**ALMERE FERRY FARM,
TREVALYN, ROSSETT.**



February 2010



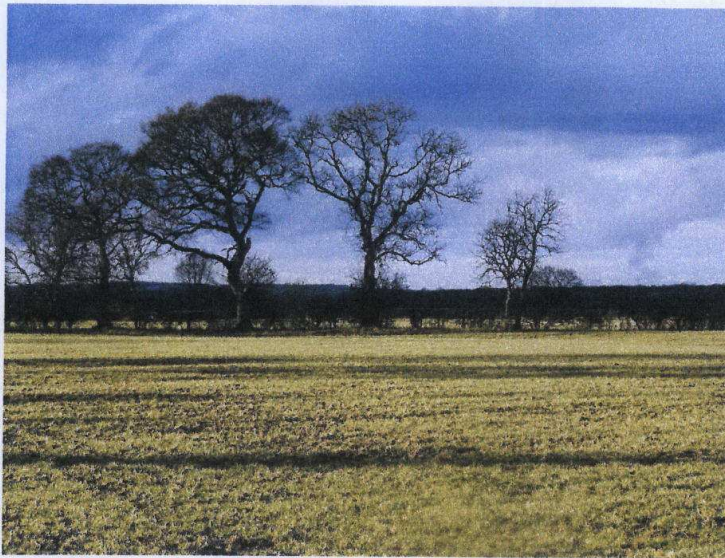
Supported by the Countryside Council for Wales
Cefnogi gan Cyngor Cefn Gwlad



Flood bank
looking north
from farm.
River Dee with
holiday homes
and jetties to
right.



River Dee
SSSI/SAC
south of farm



Hedgerow
trees and
deteriorating
hedge.



Hedges and
hedgerow
trees in flood
meadows.



Surviving black poplar



Dead tree in old
hedgerow.
Probable effect of
persistent
flooding.



Hedgerow
trees, hedge in
good condition
with associated
ditch. Note
barn owl box in
nearest tree.



River Dee with open unvegetated banks at north end of farm.



River Dee with well vegetated banks immediately north of farm buildings. Good cover for otters, scrub nesting birds, small mammals and invertebrates.



General view across
farmland looking
west towards
Wrexham hills.



Ridge and furrow .



Ash trees with extensive dieback located in a good quality hedge. Trees like this have many holes and cavities which have great potential as bat roosts, nesting sites for owls and woodpeckers and many smaller bird species. Standing dead wood is excellent for many invertebrate and fungi species also.

INTRODUCTION.

The FWAG Cymru visit to Almere Ferry Farm was on 16th February to look at the farm as part of the CCW funded project to support farmers and landowners with Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) on their land. The visit is not exclusive to the SSSI.

OVERVIEW.

The farm is located on completely flat land on the west side of the river Dee two miles east of Rossett in the County Borough of Wrexham. The land holding extends to 101 hectares (250.5 acres) and is bounded on the east side entirely by the Dee which, at this point, also forms the national boundary between Wales and England. The short southern boundary is defined by the river Alyn which joins the Dee about one quarter of a mile to the south west of the farm buildings.

The Dee and its immediate banks are within the River Dee/Afon Dyfyrddwy SSSI which is now also a Special Area of Conservation (SAC). The river Dee is Notified for its nationally important transition through a range of river types. It is also Notified for Atlantic salmon, otter, club-tailed dragonfly and its fluvial geomorphology.

John Almer, a descendant of Ithell ap Eunydd, a Welsh conqueror from the Vale of Clwyd, built a house here in the early 1500's. However regular flooding soon forced a move to Pant yr Ochain at Gresford some three miles away. Until the outbreak of the first World War there was a passenger ferry linking the villages on the Welsh side of the river with Churton on the English side. The ferry was a flat bottomed rowing boat operated latterly by one Neddy Williams.

The farm was once part of the Grosvenor Estate but was bought by the tenants in the early 1900's and has remained in the same family ever since

THE FARM.

Almere Ferry Farm is predominantly a dairy unit and all the land is maintained as pasture. No crops are now grown. Generally the fields nearest to the farm buildings are managed for silage. Apart from the raised flood banks alongside the Dee and the Alyn and around the farm house and buildings the land is completely flat. The whole area does flood on a regular basis. Exceptionally deep and prolonged flooding occurred in the winter of 2000/1 when the land was flooded for three months. An unusual feature of the landscape here is a large number of holiday chalets and caravans located alongside the rivers. There are 50 units at Almere and many more along the banks of the Dee to the north and south as well as on the English bank. Many of these have built small jetties to access boats on the river. The river is navigable for small craft downstream to Chester weir and upstream to Farndon bridge.

Alongside the river there is dense scrub and semi-mature trees including alder and willows. This provides good cover for otters which frequent the river here. The scrub is also excellent habitat for small mammals, nesting birds and many invertebrate species. At the northern end the banks become open with grazing almost to the waters edge. There is a problem of Japanese knotweed and Himalayan balsam on the river banks. The former is declining so the problem is receding. The latter is more persistent being constantly replenished by seed carried from upstream, especially on the Alyn.

The fields are mainly bounded by hedges the condition of which is variable. Some of the hedges are thin and sparse which may be due to waterlogging during periods of flood. Within the hedges are scattered mature trees, mainly oak and ash. Several are showing significant dieback and one is dead. The latter are of considerable value as dead wood habitat by supporting a range of fungi and invertebrates as well as providing holes and cavities suitable for bat roosts and owl nest sites. A barn owl box has been located on one of the trees as part of the NE Wales barn owl project. There is potential for further nest boxes for owls and other species including, possibly, tree sparrows. One mature specimen and two stumps of the nationally rare black poplar (*Populus nigra betulifolia*) were found along with one further mature specimen on adjacent land. This is Britain's rarest timber tree and there are only around 5,000 specimens still remaining in the country. In the Clwyd black poplar survey 15 years ago four mature trees were recorded at this location.

Most of the hedges have associated ditches and there is a main drain running north-south across the farm. The habitat here is potentially suitable for water voles although there are no known records at present. Mink are recorded here and control of these may be desirable if water vole are present or are recorded in the wider area.

Ridge and furrow is evident in some fields.

The farm has not been in any agi-environment scheme but the owners are interested in Glastir.

Apart from the SSSI/SAC there are no other known statutory designations. There are two public footpaths crossing the farm but these do not appear to have any associated issues or problems.

POSSIBLE WAYS FORWARD.

The owners, George, Pam and Ian Goodwin have no specific concerns about the SSSI and do want to work within the spirit of the designation. They are also keen to conserve and enhance the habitats and natural features of the farm. The following issues were discussed:

River and bank. Before coppicing any river bank trees CCW should routinely be notified. With regard to the bankside vegetation this should be retained and, as far as possible, extended at the north end of the farm, maybe through bankside fencing.

Buildings and otters. Otters are a European Protected Species and as such every care must be taken to avoid disturbance to the animal or its habitat. The proposed replacement of the old Dutch barn may need an otter survey due to its extremely close proximity to the river bank. Advice on this can be obtained from CCW's species officer, Mathew Ellis (tel. 01352 706600). The Local Authority Ecologist or Biodiversity Officer may also be able to help.

Japanese Knotweed and Himalayan Balsam. The Environment Agency should be able to advise on these. As the former is in decline the main issue is with the balsam. Until there is a properly co-ordinated eradication programme it will be virtually impossible to eliminate. Cutting and pulling before flowering does help as a temporary measure.

Hedges. There is the potential to restore some of the hedges by coppicing and infill planting. Protective cattle proof fencing is required for the period of restoration – generally 10 years. Although there are currently no grants available for this work new small scale schemes do occur from time to time. However if the work is done exclusively by the owner the overall cost is relatively small.

Trees. All trees should be retained – both dead and alive. There is the potential to plant new trees in field corners or other low value sites. The cost is minimal but the long term environmental gains are substantial. There is a compelling case for planting a small number of the black poplar and there is a source of plants available in Bangor (Gwynedd).

Water voles. This now uncommon animal could possibly be present in the area. A simple survey in the summer months by a competent ecologist would be able to ascertain whether this species is present and if so what measures could be taken to conserve and enhance its habitat and survival. Mink control may be desirable.

Nest boxes. There is potential to provide more boxes and to attract a wider range of species. John Lawton Roberts of the North Wales Raptor Group will be in touch by phone to discuss this. He was instrumental in putting up the existing barn owl box.

WHERE FWAG CAN HELP.

FWAG Cymru offers farmers and landowners hands on support and advice on all the environmental aspects of their farm or estate – both green and brown issues. WE do this either through direct membership at the higher level (FWAG Cyntaf) or as one off piece of work or through funded project work. We would be able to assist with the following:-

1. Liaise with CCW over any SSSI issues including tree management and invasive species.
2. Arrange for an otter survey around barn.
3. Organise a water vole survey and provide follow up advice and guidance.
4. Advise and prepare specifications for hedgerow restoration. Advise and help with application for Glas Tir agri-environment scheme (applications start in September 2010, scheme starts in 2012).
5. Advise on appropriate tree planting including species selection, protection etc.
6. Arrange for supply of young black poplar trees to be delivered and advise on suitable planting sites.
7. Offer further help and advice at the direction of the landowner.