

20th November 2023

Work begins today on the first stage of preserving the Dark Hedges for future generations. The avenue of trees on the Bregagh Road near Stranocum, Co. Antrim was planted as a grand entrance to Gracehill House around 1775 and has achieved worldwide fame through its use as a location in HBO's Game of Thrones.

The beech avenue is now around 250 years old while the life expectancy of such trees is 150-200 years.

Tree management experts Arbor Consulting undertook a survey of the site in June 2023 and concluded that unfortunately 6 of the 86 mature trees on Bregagh Road must be felled.

Cllr Mervyn Storey, Chair of the Dark Hedges Preservation Trust, commented:

“While it's sad that we must see the loss of 6 trees we've been able to agree an approach with Roads Service that meets health and safety requirements while also preserving the aesthetic qualities and very special nature of the site. “

In addition to the removal of 6 trees work will be undertaken on preserving the health of the remaining 80 trees in the avenue. Mr Storey went on to say:

“The report from Paul Hawksford and John McNamara at Arbor Consulting gives us a solid base to move forward with the future management of the Dark Hedges. Combined with better traffic management this should allow the site to be loved and appreciated for many more years.

We may have been able to get to where we are today earlier but, thanks to the key stakeholders including DfI Roads, the landowners on Bregagh Road and the Causeway Coast and Glens Heritage Trust, we're now in a position where we can move forward for the benefit of this incredible location and its many users.”

The Dark Hedges will be closed from today until the first stage of the work is completed. Timbertec (NI) has been appointed to undertake the work on behalf of the landowners and Dark Hedges Preservation Trust. The Principal of Timbertec is Islay man Dominic Harrison with 35 years of tree work experience under his belt. Dominic commented:

“These veteran trees have been important to the people of this area long before it became the Kings Road of Game of Thrones fame. It is such a rare sight to see a whole avenue of ancient trees reach their full maturity.

It is a privilege to be once again requested to carry out this essential work and while of course it is a shame to see them felled, the key for the future is planting to replace what has been lost.”

It is expected that in the coming months responsibility for the Dark Hedges will pass from the Dark Hedges Preservation Trust to the Causeway Coast and Glens Heritage Trust. CCGHT CEO Graham Thompson commented:

“CCGHT plans to establish a new Dark Hedges Management Forum which is expected to consist of relevant statutory organisations, landowners and other interested parties. It is

envisaged that in future the issues at the site will be managed in a co-ordinated strategic manner. This includes a management plan ensuring the longevity of the tress, while giving full consideration to health and safety issues; visitor management at the site including dealing with parking and traffic issues; educating and informing visitors to the site across a range of media; and importantly identifying funding sources for future site management.”

Notes of interest:

The Dark Hedges are situated alongside the Bregagh Road near Stranocum in County Antrim. An avenue of beech trees was planted to form a grand entrance to Gracehill House in around 1775 by the landowner James Stuart.

Common beech trees have a usual life expectancy of 150-200 years. The Dark Hedges trees are almost 250 years old. Their advanced age has caused them to grow in an unusual, twisted manner creating the universally recognised atmospheric phenomenon we see today.

While the Dark Hedges has been a site of local myth and legend for many years it has become internationally recognised over the past two decades. This has been due to the use of the iconic site in tourism promotion, advertising and perhaps most famously as its use as “The King’s Road” in the HBO series Game of Thrones.

For further information

Graham Thompson, CEO, CCGHT

graham@ccght.org 07568 158 061

Mervyn Storey, Chair, Dark Hedges Preservation Trust

mervynstorey@aol.com 07697 795 684



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