

Orchard Farm, Pershore – Tiddesley Wood

Applicant meeting with Natural England & Worcestershire Wildlife Trust, 19.04.24

Attendees

Hayley Fleming (HF) - NE
Marc Turner (MT) - NE
Steve Bloomfield (SB) – WWT
Rob Allen (RA) - WWT
Michael Davies (MD - Savills
Julian Forbes-Laird (JFL), Sylvan
Alistair Baxter (AGB), Sylvan

Not present

Joanna – NE off sick

1. AGB: Malvern Hills SSSI provides an element of context: if mitigation for visitor pressure effects can be found there, then there must equally be a solution to Tiddesley Wood, which is a local rather than a regional issue. However, HF confirmed that the position of Malvern Hills SSSI is not resolved in any event as NE has a holding objection on the Local Plan.
2. JFL set out the aim of the mitigation package (Sylvan TN06 180424) was to create spare visitor capacity – JFL emphasized that the list of measures at TN06 3.1.2 is not a closed list, and asked NE/ WWT to identify anything additional which they would consider helpful. JFL summarized the mitigation package as comprising:
 - a. Visitor access management measures
 - b. Land transfer open space on site
 - c. Gift woodland to WWT – under their stewardship
3. RA stated that WWT *could* implement some of these measures themselves, but have chosen not to do so, as in his view this risks turning the reserve into more of a country park by changing its character of the into a visitor attraction. He cited wardening as an example.
 - a. JFL noted that the reserve is actively promoted on WWT's website — guided tours are currently being offered to the bluebells – and wardening is listed as an objective in the management plan
 - b. RA – flagship marker is not for promotion but to allow for concentration of resources, though he noted that some elements of visitor pressure mitigation were not put in hand due to resourcing issues (70 sites to consider)
 - c. Wardening is considered important – a resourcing issue for WWT – and WWT wish to update the management plan as this is nearly 10 years old (2015)
 - d. An additional option could be to close the carpark for a day a week to rest the wood

- e. RA – concerned that if they create a more attractive site more people will come
 - f. Cats/ dogs will be an issue from the development
 - g. RA does not like the mitigation package – at present WWT is choosing not to implement visitor management measures
 - h. SB – mitigation package is to improve infrastructure; but people are still going onto difficult paths at present – bluebell season is the most sensitive
 - i. SB – Public choice – use of dead hedging [for path closure] is an option but – people will do what people want to do
 - j. SB – WWT are doing some visitor access management – wardening is helpful as it compensates for ‘sign blindness’ by the public – need sufficient uplift in wardening for 300 houses that are not in the Local Plan
4. AGB – people already penetrating the wood on damaged paths
- a. Case studies – MK – Howe Park Wood – plus Linford Wood AW – SB noted that he would like to visit these
 - b. Management for long term security of outcome
 - c. It is Gov’t policy – per Keepers of Time – to encourage access into AW near to where people live
 - d. JFL noted that even in the absence of development, e.g. if Sylvan were advising NE, it would still make the same recommendations at the SSSI in regard to visitor access management
5. MT – NE would like to see case studies – SANG and other sites; AGB agreed to supply
6. MD – Pressure for housing is not going away – South Worcester’s housing target is being exported to Wychavon as Worcester can’t expand. Pershore – can’t go east or south (flood plain); Orchard Farm is the only plausible site and Inspectors will see this
7. MT points – bridleway link from site to SSSI – is currently in poor condition, but even if it is made it more difficult to use, people will still use it. People can be determined
- a. Agreed with RA – people like the feel of remoteness on sites they visit
 - b. Part of problem is people are willing to use degraded paths. Example when MT was on site – family got out of car; read signs, but had wellies so went off into the woodland on damaged paths¹
 - c. 300 houses = ca. 100 houses with dogs
 - d. Buffer zones – the SSSI is 80ha – how big is the green space buffer zone provided on site; how long is the circular walk; not SANG but a SANG-like solution is needed for it to work; SSSI has 10km of walks; need a reasonable alternative green space to divert people

¹ Sylvan comment: this demonstrates the fallacy in allowing path deterioration as an access deterrence measure: access still occurs, and damage intensifies

- e. Do not include too much more infrastructure in the woodland; bins at entrances only by car park and from site PROW are acceptable; bins need to be emptied – what is cost of these – need a vehicle if internal to the woodland;
 - f. Waymarking – need virtual/ finger posts. MT considers spine route in SSSI is very good; MT agrees with suggested measures in TN06
 - g. MT noted that people new to the area will stick to main route if well signposted
 - h. Closing car parks – to be added to Sylvan list of mitigation measures
 - i. Volunteers on site – tools and equipment for them to be added to mitigation list
 - j. Wetter areas – Example of National Trust Chilterns Beechwoods: they delineate paths by putting logs down either side and it helps people stick to them – add to mitigation list
 - k. PROW [Sylvan path ident 3] is getting wider – main gateway into site – treatment of pathway here needs to be looked at in more detail;
 - l. Need boardwalk in places
 - m. Bracknell - Wickery Copse SSSI (<https://www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/parks-and-countryside/parks-visit/wykery-copse>) – Bloor Homes 100 houses – boardwalk installed throughout – woodland now in best condition SSSI has ever been in
 - n. MT noted that in-perpetuity funding solution would be essential. AGB: this is a key journey for the developer as this is not on the table as yet. MD community engagement will assist with this, as if can get new residents interested and involved they can become stewards for the woodland and have a sense of ownership – then voluntary management can assist with in-perpetuity funding
 - o. MD – lives next to a golf course and has a dog, but chooses not to walk dog at the golf course for shorter walks, instead uses incidental green space. People will generally not want a long walk during the working week – especially into dark woodland in winter – so v few people will go through the wood most of the time. Buffer and incidental green space will absorb most shorter dog walks
 - i. MT – Newbury – Greenham Common – has seen people out at 5am
 - ii. Tiddesley Wood is not SAC but if was then would need to plan for a worst-case scenario
 - p. MT – v positive that the developer was proposing land transfers, including its area of SSSI to reserve – but developer has a duty to manage this anyway – so can't count as mitigation. JFL agreed: this would just rationalise the management. MT opportunity and risk lens – would fall into the opportunity lens
 - q. MT – wants more information about buffer land – links to other footpaths – parish council land to north
8. Sylvan – would like to see that with the right offer and perpetuity response NE can update its position to something more nuanced that we can move forward with
9. Sylvan to prepare meeting note and write to NE inviting a formal response

10. RA noted that dogs tend to empty themselves at the start of walk, hence no need for bins within the woodland. Northern part of the wood is currently where people walk – RA likes this; southern section less damaged²

11. SB – 3 matters to be resolved:
 - a. Efficacy of proposed mitigation – case studies – WWT want to understand success of directing public choice – including how to encourage formal path use
 - b. WWT want to understand mitigation as ‘uplift’ – can the SSSI accommodate more harm – JFL: the correct test is whether it would be left in better condition afterwards vs before
 - c. Understand longevity and security of outcome – S106 could run out of money: outside developers control and Council might not manage it properly – can money come to Trust direct? – how is in-perpetuity assured? – AGB asked MT about how SAC funding is secured – MT Thames Basin Heaths SPA take mitigation money and invest into safe portfolios – index-linked tracked solutions – new model in Surrey where rent from a few houses goes direct to the Council – to funding the in-perpetuity contributions (Wisley Airfield)

12. HF – flexibility to adjust management being done on the ground – who would cover additional costs – AGB agreed there was a need to build in a contingency. JFL noted the inherent variability from effects of climate and weather; unpredictability of visitors; habitat response to management etc

13. AGB – Mitigation would also include homeowners’ info pack – map of SSSI; how to use the site responsibly; identifying green spaces to use, etc

14. AGB noted that his MK case studies are on clay soil per Tiddesley Wood

The meeting concluded with thanks for NE/ WWT attendance and generally positive outcome was welcomed.

² Sylvan note: however see Sylvan path serviceability assessment (TBN 190224) at Enc.3