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18th October 2024

Dear Hannah Darley

Reference: DC/24/1018
Proposal: Change of use of land to a mixed use including settled gypsy accommodation site comprising 2No. pitches. Retention of existing hardstanding and proposed biodiversity enhancements. Woodlands Farm Broadwater Lane Copsale West Sussex RH13 6QW

Objection – deterioration of ancient woodland

The Woodland Trust is the UK's largest woodland conservation charity and a leading voice in bringing to the attention of government, landowners and the general public the state of the UK's woods and trees. We own over 1,000 sites across the UK, covering over 30,000 hectares and we have over 500,000 members and supporters.

The Trust also campaigns with the support of local communities, to prevent any further destruction of ancient woods and veteran trees. We are an evidence-led organisation, using existing policy and our conservation and planning expertise to assess the impacts of development on ancient woodland and veteran trees. Planning responses submitted by the Trust are based on a review of the information provided as part of a planning application.

Woodland Trust Position
The Trust **objects** to this planning application on the basis of deterioration of an area of woodland (grid ref: TQ 17753 26075), designated as Ancient Semi Natural Woodland on Natural England's Ancient Woodland Inventory (AWI).

Ancient Woodland
Ancient woodland is an irreplaceable resource of great importance for its wildlife, soils, recreational and cultural value, historical and archaeological significance, and the contribution it makes to our diverse landscapes. It is a scarce and threatened resource, covering only 2.5% of England's land area, and has a high level of protection in planning policy.

Natural England and the Forestry Commission, the Government's respective bodies for the natural environment and woodlands, define ancient woodland as follows within their standing advice[1]:-

[1] https://www.gov.uk/guidance/ancient-woodland-ancient-trees-and-veteran-trees-advice-for-making-planning-decisions

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"*Ancient woodland takes hundreds of years to establish and is defined as an irreplaceable habitat. It is a valuable natural asset important for: wildlife (which include rare and threatened species); soils; carbon capture and storage; contributing to the seed bank and genetic diversity; recreation, health and wellbeing; cultural, historical and landscape value. It has been wooded continuously since at least 1600AD. It includes:-*

- *Ancient semi-natural woodland* [ASNW] - *mainly made up of trees and shrubs native to the site, usually arising from natural regeneration.*
- *Plantations on ancient woodland sites* [PAWS] - *replanted with conifer or broadleaved trees that retain ancient woodland features, such as undisturbed soil, ground flora and fungi"*

In May 2022, the Government published an updated policy statement on ancient woodland, entitled 'Keepers of Time: ancient and native woodland and trees policy in England'[2]. The Government's 'Keepers of Time' policy accentuates the importance of ancient woodland, stating: *"Ancient woodlands, ancient wood pastures and parkland and ancient and veteran trees are irreplaceable habitats which must be protected. Their long-standing presence, species and form serve as a rich cultural record of past management practices."*

Planning Policy

The National Planning Policy Framework, paragraph 186, states: "*When determining planning applications, local planning authorities should apply the following principles:-*

c) development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats (such as ancient woodland and ancient or veteran trees) should be refused, unless there are wholly exceptional reasons[67] and a suitable compensation strategy exists;"

Footnote 67 defines exceptional reasons as follows: "*For example, infrastructure projects (including nationally significant infrastructure projects, orders under the Transport and Works Act and hybrid bills), where the public benefit would clearly outweigh the loss or deterioration of habitat."*

There is **no wholly exceptional reason** for the development in this location and as such this application in its current form may not comply with national planning policy.

Impact on Ancient Woodland

The proposals include two pitches for settled gypsy accommodation, the most easterly of which would be situated within 15 metres of ancient woodland. There is a lack of detailed information in the application documents regarding associated infrastructure, including parking, foul drainage provision, other utilities and amenity space. It is stated horses will be grazed "*north of the site*". Landscaping proposals state that "*No trenching is required within 5m of any trees. Ground levels will not be required to be raised within 5m of any trees*."

The site boundary includes some of the adjacent ancient woodland at the northern and eastern parts of the site, although it appears that parts of the woodland have been subject to some form of change in land use. However, aerial mapping shows that the entire woodland area has been recently wooded. The irreplaceable nature of ancient woodland is bound to the soils and therefore irrespective of the extent of remaining tree cover, the woodland should continue to be afforded protection as ancient woodland.

[2] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/keepers-of-time-ancient-and-native-woodland-and-trees-policy-in-england/keepers-of-time-ancient-and-native-woodland-and-trees-policy-in-england

Natural England and Forestry Commission have identified impacts of development on ancient woodland within their standing advice[3] (please see the annex at the foot of this document for the full range of impacts outlined). This guidance should be considered the Government's position with regards to development impacting ancient woodland.

We are specifically concerned about the following impacts on the ancient woodland:-

- Encroachment on the root systems and rooting environments of trees within the ancient woodland from installation of utilities, landscaping, or vehicular traffic.
- Intensification of human activity resulting in increased disturbance to breeding birds and other sensitive fauna, vegetation damage, predation and disturbance from pets, trampling, litter or fire damage.
- Where the wood edge overhangs public areas, trees can become safety issues and be indiscriminately lopped/felled, resulting in a reduction of the woodland canopy and threatening the long-term condition of the woodland. It can also result in a greater need for management of important habitat features in the woodland such as deadwood, which reduces the ecological integrity of the site.
- Long-term future requirements for managing the adjacent woodland canopy for reasons of shading or TV reception.

When land use is intensified such as in this situation, woodland plant and animal populations are exposed to environmental impacts from the outside of a woodland as detailed above. In particular, the habitats become more vulnerable to the outside influences, or edge effects, that result from the adjacent land's change of use. These can impact cumulatively on ancient woodland - this is much more damaging than individual effects.

Mitigation

Detrimental edge effects have been shown to penetrate woodland causing changes in ancient woodland characteristics that extend up to three times the canopy height in from the forest edges. As such, it is necessary for mitigation to be considered to alleviate such impacts. Natural England and the Forestry Commission's standing advice contains guidance on mitigation measures to alleviate impacts on ancient woods and trees (annexed to this letter).

The applicant should ensure that the proposed works will not result in any detrimental impact on the surrounding ancient woodland in line with paragraph 186 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and Natural England's standing advice.

Buffering

Buffering ancient woodland can be an ideal mitigation measure as buffer zones can be used to establish distance between the development and habitat, which helps to alleviate harmful impacts whilst also creating new areas of habitat around the ancient woodland.

This development should allow for a buffer zone of **at least 15 metres** to prevent adverse impacts such as pollution and disturbance, and to ensure avoidance of root damage.

This is backed up by Natural England and Forestry Commission's standing advice which states that "*the proposal should have a buffer zone of at least 15 metres from the boundary of the woodland to avoid root damage (known as the root protection area). Where assessment*

[3] https://www.gov.uk/guidance/ancient-woodland-ancient-trees-and-veteran-trees-advice-for-making-planning-decisions

shows other impacts are likely to extend beyond this distance, the proposal is likely to need a larger buffer zone. For example, the effect of air pollution from development that results in a significant increase in traffic." Further information on buffer zones is outlined in the annex below.

Conclusion

Ancient woodland is an irreplaceable habitat, once lost it is gone forever. As such, it should be protected from any form of development that will result in its loss or deterioration.

The Trust **objects** to this planning application on the basis of deterioration of ancient woodland. The applicant should provide additional information to demonstrate that appropriate mitigation is in place to protect the adjacent ancient woodlands from deterioration.

We hope you find these comments helpful - if you would like to discuss any of the points raised, please contact us at planningcasework@woodlandtrust.org.uk

Kind regards

Cathy Johannesen
Programme Officer - Woods Under Threat

Annex

Natural England and Forestry Commission's standing advice:-
Ancient woodland, ancient trees and veteran trees: advice for making planning decisions

Direct and indirect effects of development:-

Development, including construction and operational activities can affect ancient woodland, ancient and veteran trees, and the wildlife they support on the site or nearby.

Direct effects of development can cause the loss or deterioration of ancient woodland or ancient and veteran trees by:-

- *damaging or destroying all or part of them (including their soils, ground flora or fungi)*
- *damaging roots and understorey (all the vegetation under the taller trees)*
- *damaging or compacting soil*
- *damaging functional habitat connections, such as open habitats between the trees in wood pasture and parkland*
- *increasing levels of air and light pollution, noise and vibration*
- *changing the water table or drainage*
- *damaging archaeological features or heritage assets*
- *changing the woodland ecosystem by removing the woodland edge or thinning trees - causing greater wind damage and soil loss*

Indirect effects of development can also cause the loss or deterioration of ancient woodland, ancient and veteran trees by:-

- *breaking up or destroying working connections between woodlands, or ancient trees or veteran trees - affecting protected species, such as bats or wood-decay insects*
- *reducing the amount of semi-natural habitats next to ancient woodland that provide important dispersal and feeding habitat for woodland species*
- *reducing the resilience of the woodland or trees and making them more vulnerable to change*
- *increasing the amount of dust, light, water, air and soil pollution*
- *increasing disturbance to wildlife, such as noise from additional people and traffic*
- *increasing damage to habitat, for example trampling of plants and erosion of soil by people accessing the woodland or tree root protection areas*
- *increasing damaging activities like fly-tipping and the impact of domestic pets*
- *increasing the risk of damage to people and property by falling branches or trees requiring tree management that could cause habitat deterioration*
- *changing the landscape character of the area*

Mitigation measures

Mitigation measures will depend on the type of development. They could include:-

- *putting up screening barriers to protect ancient woodland or ancient and veteran trees from dust and pollution*
- *measures to reduce noise or light*
- *designing open space to protect ancient or veteran trees*
- *rerouting footpaths and managing vegetation to deflect trampling pressure away from sensitive locations*
- *creating buffer zones*

Use of buffer zones

Buffer zones can protect ancient woodland and individual ancient and veteran trees and provide valuable habitat for woodland wildlife, such as feeding bats and birds. The size and type of buffer zone should vary depending on the:-

- *scale and type of development and its effect on ancient woodland, ancient and veteran trees*
- *character of the surrounding area*

For example, larger buffer zones are more likely to be needed if the surrounding area is:-

- *less densely wooded*
- *close to residential areas*
- *steeply sloped*

Buffer zone recommendations

Where possible, a buffer zone should:-

- *contribute to wider ecological networks*
- *be part of the green infrastructure of the area*

A buffer zone should consist of semi-natural habitats such as:-

- *woodland*
- *a mix of scrub, grassland, heathland and wetland*

The proposal should include creating or establishing habitat with local and appropriate native species in the buffer zone.

You should consider if access is appropriate. You can allow access to buffer zones if the habitat is not harmed by trampling.

You should not approve development proposals, including gardens, within a buffer zone.

You should only approve sustainable drainage schemes if:-

- *they do not affect root protection areas*
- *any change to the water table does not negatively affect ancient woodland or ancient and veteran trees*