

Upper Dearne Valley Environmental Trust (UDVET)

Response to Application No. 2024/62/91934/E – Proposed Development of 11 Wood Street, Skelmanthorpe, HD8 9BN.

ADDITIONAL OBJECTIONS, COMMENTS AND OBSERVATIONS ON TREE OFFICER'S COMMENTS ON THE CHANGED PLANS POSTED ON THE PUBLIC WEB SITE ON 28 MARCH, 2025

For the Attention of Ms. Hazel Irving and Ms. Nicole Helliwell

We refer to Ms. Irving's response to the above application posted on the web site on 15 April, 2025. We respond in paragraph order to Ms. Irving's response to Ms. Helliwell.

Paragraph 3:

We understand that a surface water drain may run along the bottom of the existing wall. In the past, there was an open 'trench' type drain when Wood Street (like many others in Skelmanthorpe) was an unmade lane which could have been subsequently piped. This matter needs investigating further.

Paragraphs 4, 5, 6:

We certainly support the observations in these paragraphs and it is refreshing to see an Officer who is willing to challenge obviously biased reports designed to unjustifiably support their client's case at the cost of professional integrity.

Paragraphs 7 and 8:

When a Consultant's Report begins with a list a caveats, it is generally a warning they are not happy with the job specification they have been given by the client and are seeking to protect themselves. This is a cursory, visual report with so much missing information as to make it inadmissible for any sort of reliable and informed decision making.

The retaining wall on the RHS of Wood Street is perfectly sympathetic to the local character and history of Wood Street. It has, in fact, been repaired successfully on the occasions mentioned – the last repair in 2016 (which we believe was carried by Kirklees Highways Structures) has not moved. We have been informed by a Structural Engineer that all retaining walls will eventually move and require maintenance irrespective of their construction.

The only bit of this wall that requires rebuilding is a section **below T4 Sycamore**. The rest of the wall does not pose a danger to the public. If that view is being accepted by the Council, then about 90% of the drystone retaining walls in Kirklees Rural would need rebuilding! Given that the LPA is now accepting sandbags as retaining wall material for supporting dwellings (Barnsley Road, Denby Dale) we find the view of this wall as hypocritical.

At the time of the OEC Report there was a low-level large bulge where the drystone walling had slipped (the effect of rain, frosts not root incursion). This bulge has now collapsed (photo sent under

separate cover) and needs a rebuild. It should be noted that concrete is evident behind the stone (of which OEC were not aware at the time).

No alternative construction methodologies have been presented. We have been led to understand that a competent waller could repair this wall in a few days work as happened in 2016 without requiring the removal of T4. **It is our view that the Council should be confidentially seeking the opinion of an experienced waller, completely independently of the applicant or their agents before making any decision on this application which also present many other issues.**

We are thoroughly opposed to the reduction in height of the existing retaining wall to 900mm. Again, we understand from a resident of Wood Street who is a professional Highways Engineer that such a reduction is against regulations given the height and weight of banking it will have to support. We understand that this person has written to Ms. Helliwell on 16 April, 2025 with a number of concerns. At the time of writing, the latter has not been posted on the application web site.

Throughout this debacle, it has been the publicly declared intention of the land owners to get rid of all the trees on this site. They have almost succeeded barring the 2 x TPOs and a small Holly tree near the entrance. Interfering in some context with the retaining wall has been used by their agents as a ruse to remove and/or seriously weaken T5 and T4. According to national (NPPF Para 187(b), Local Policies and the Kirklees Environment Strategy trees and habitats are to be protected. Is it too much to expect that these policies will be upheld? This wall is not the danger it is falsely claimed – it just wants what is a ‘matter of course’ and to be expected repair for an old drystone wall in a small part of its length.

Paragraph 9:

We certainly agree with your statements at (1) and (2). However, these should not be conditions – **they should be a requirement prior to any decision being made about this application.** We believe T4 should be retained PLUS 3x more sycamores to compensate for the destruction to woodland trees already wrecked on this site and loss of habitat.

Drawing SE/010 should raise immediate concerns with the removal of 900mm of soil within the RPA of T5. Something, surely, which should never happen either manually or mechanically.

Tuesday, 15 April, 2025 saw the removal of the 60/70 year old TPO Sycamore outside Field House, Wood Street – almost directly opposite T4. If T4 is removed there will be a significant gap in the canopy which will take decades to restore by replacement young trees.

We have little confidence on approvals with conditions. Our monitoring of other sites in the area shows that developers are ignoring conditions as both Planning Officers and Enforcement Officers have overwhelming caseloads leading to a lack of tracking, supervision and oversight of developments. NPPF Para 57 now requires LPAs to approve with minimal conditions and with issues resolved so that both Planning Officers, members of Planning Committees and the public know exactly what is to be built or information supplied prior to making a decision.

We sincerely trust you will review your position on these lovely trees which are so important to an area of Skelmanthorpe which has seen (and continues to see) a heartbreaking loss of mature trees.

Upper Dearne Valley Environment Trust (UDVET)
Reg. Charity 115754
21 April, 2025

