



These comments supplement a fuller set, mailed through on 13th February. They set out concerns and objections of the Upper Dearne Woods Conservation Group for which I act as Chair. The Group has been active for 30 years and maintains Upper Stephen Wood which abuts the southern perimeter of the development site.

Building on this stretch of green belt will degrade the ecology of the Woods, reducing the access corridors for wildlife. The proposal pre-empts the Authority's own plans to re-allocate development land across Kirklees by 2027.

The Group has major concerns about the increase in footfall across the woodlands this development will encourage. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the current footfall level is already creating ecological pressures, for example in contributing to a decline in nesting wood ants across the woods, one of its signature species.

We are particularly concerned that the proposed footpath access by Greenwood House may encourage increased footfall and unlimited cycle access into the woods. This would not only be a major source of disturbance but cycling is expressly forbidden under the terms of the Kirklees Access Agreement with the owners, Hepworth Iron.

The Group has major concerns about the drainage of the site and its effects on Park Dike. The development will disrupt the flow of springs from the current fields. They are a significant contributor to the Dike's flow, particularly in times of drought. The steep slope of the site, and the extensive areas of hard standing, will lead to significant runoff into the Dike, adversely affecting its current high water quality. The Huddleston flood risk report (5.3.1-5) also posits the Dike as the repository of any overflows. This will affect not only water quality but also increase flooding and erosion risks downstream, at the ford and near the Dike's confluence with the Dearne.

We understand that a 15 metre protective buffer for ancient woodland is national policy. Although the plans suggest that it is being met, we would argue for a buffer of at least 30 metres, considering the steep slope of the site. We are also concerned that no one would appear to be responsible for its maintenance.

Without this, we fear that the buffer area would become a dumping ground and the source of unofficial routes into the woods. This would degrade the quality of the woodland edge, a key ecological niche.