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Dear Ellie Thornhill

Reference: 2025/93572

Proposal: Outline application with all matters reserved, bar vehicle access into the site, for erection of up to 123 dwellings with associated works including open space, landscaping, drainage infrastructure. | Land South of, Barnsley Road, Upper Cumberworth, Huddersfield, HD8 8NN

Thank you for consulting the Woodland Trust on this application. We are an evidence-led organisation, using our policy and planning expertise to assess impacts of development on ancient woodland and ancient and veteran trees. Our comments are based on a review of the information provided in the planning application.

Summary of Comments

The Trust **objects** to this Outline application on the basis of deterioration of Stephen Wood (grid ref: SE 20969 08421), designated as Ancient Replanted Woodland on Natural England's Revised Ancient Woodland Inventory (AWI).

The proposal would introduce a considerable number of new dwellings and associated infrastructure in close proximity to ancient woodland. At Outline stage the applicant needs to demonstrate the feasibility of mitigating the following impacts in the context of the parameters of the design:-

- Disturbance from intensified activity within and adjacent to ancient woodland
- Noise pollution and emissions from increases in traffic
- Impacts on ancient woodland from changes to surface or groundwater flows

The applicant has not provided any assessment or supporting analysis of the impact of the proposals on the adjacent ancient woodland. Therefore, it has not been demonstrated that impacts can be mitigated in line with National Planning Policy Framework para 193 (c) and Natural England and Forestry Commission's standing advice¹ (see Annex A for details).

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

Impact on Ancient Woodland

Intensified activity within/adjacent to ancient woodland

A housing development of this scale adjacent to ancient woodland has considerable potential to give rise to indirect impacts such as noise, disturbance, vegetation damage, trampling, litter, removal of deadwood, fire damage, cat predation, and pollution and disturbance from dog walking.

The proposed mitigation is a 15-20 metre planted buffer zone. Most documents refer to a 15 metre buffer, but there is also reference to a 20 metre construction offset.

The applicant's assertion that a 15 metre buffer would mitigate impacts on ancient woodland is currently unsupported by evidence or analysis. This is perhaps due to a misconception that a 15 metre buffer zone is a 'standard' rather than a 'minimum' and does not need to be tailored to the proposal. For example, the Arboricultural Impact Assessment refers to the "*influencing distance of 15 metres (statutory buffer zone)*" and the Design and Access Statement refers to the 15 metre buffer as "*significant*".

A range of factors will influence the appropriate buffer provision, including housing mix and density; current use of the woodland; position of the woodland within the landscape in relation to the development; and the design of the development, including open space and options for recreation, dog walking and play. The balance between the extent of built areas, the width of buffer and availability of public open space needs to ensure the woodland is protected from long term deterioration arising from increased access.

It is stated that the buffer would be planted, although we note that the buffer zone is not within the red line boundary. It is not clear whether public access into the buffer would be encouraged or deterred, or what the likely increase in footfall within the ancient woodland would be. There are a number of public rights of way in the area, including through Stephen Wood. The illustrative layout shows a potential connection with the right of way network.

We note that the Forestry Commission has also raised concerns about the proposed buffer width and has also referred to their standing advice. Natural England do not raise an objection, but it is important to note they can only raise an objection where a statutorily designated site is impacted. Natural England also refer to the standing advice.

Traffic

Increased traffic in proximity to ancient woodland can lead to deterioration of the ecological condition of the woodland as a result of traffic emissions and traffic noise. Emissions may increase the deposition of air pollutants such as nitrogen oxide and ammonia, affecting soils, ground flora and vegetation. Noise pollution has potential to affect wildlife, including bats, insects and acoustic predators.

The applicant needs to demonstrate that the increase in traffic associated with the proposals will not give rise to deterioration of ancient woodland.

Drainage

Ancient woodland ecosystems are sensitive to disturbance, and alterations to the surrounding hydrology can impact on soil moisture levels and the ecological condition of the woodland. Alterations to drainage patterns upstream of a woodland can cause changes to

the hydrological regime for the woodland. Implementation of SUDs could change surface or ground water flows, in turn impacting the woodland.

It is proposed to discharge surface water through the ancient woodland to the watercourse in Stephen Wood. It is not clear whether infrastructure works within the woodland would be required to facilitate the discharge. The standing advice is clear that drainage schemes should only be approved if any hydrological changes do not negatively impact ancient woodland.

The hydrology and drainage assessments submitted as part of the application have not considered the potential impact on ancient woodland.

Mitigation for Ancient Woodland

The standing advice states that larger buffer zones are more likely to be needed if development is close to residential areas or if a significant increase in traffic is anticipated. For large developments, we recommend buffer zones of **at least 50 metres** as a precautionary principle, unless it can be clearly demonstrated that smaller buffers would suffice.

Additionally, for a development of this size, part of the buffer should be treated as land that needs safeguarding rather than public open space. For example, if a 50 metre buffer is provided we would recommend **access is discouraged for a minimum of 15 metres** adjacent to the ancient woodland.

Planning Policy

The National Planning Policy Framework, paragraph 193, 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 reasons⁷⁰ and a suitable compensation strategy exists;”

Footnote 70 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 does not comply with national planning policy.

Conclusion

The Trust objects to this planning application on the basis of deterioration of ancient woodland. Protection for ancient woodland is outlined within National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) at paragraph 193(c). These Outline proposals have potential to result in long-term deterioration of the ancient woodland, contravening national planning policy.

Please contact us at planningcasework@woodlandtrust.org.uk to discuss any of the points raised in this letter.

Kind regards

C Johannesen

Programme Officer - Woods Under Threat

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*