

Initial Response to May '24 Hallam Submission re Alvecote Place
Ref: PAP/2018/0755

22-May-24

To: Jeff Brown, NWBC Planning
Cc: Chris Gowlett, Hallam
Mark Bassett, Freeths

Hi Jeff/All,

I am glad to see the above Application has progressed with further documents submitted to date.

We continue to be mindful and very grateful of the significant buffer planting plus wider landscaping and green infrastructure in the proposed plans. I acknowledge that they are substantially more than the legal minimum that would be required, and we endorse and support the importance that you have attached to these elements of your design.

I continue to be in opposition to this development because I feel it places an intolerable threat to the ongoing sustainability of our Alvecote Wood project, as explained below. I do feel that in a pure *habitat* sense, this project will provide a significant improvement to the area, and I am grateful for that, but I am responsible for the Woods and must do my best to preserve and protect it, as the only piece of Ancient Woodland on the eastern side of Tamworth. It represents far more absolute *habitat* value as its *ancient* origin and history (400+ years old) puts it on a different level to anything that can be created in our lifetimes. It needs to be well managed to avoid it deteriorating and it needs to be protected for the sake of future generations.

Ancient Woodland and LWS Status

I am grateful for the specific consideration of Alvecote Wood as an Ancient Woodland and LWS. However, it continues to be disappointing that the majority of the plans and narrative contained in the latest submission do not reflect the significant addition of local habitat in the form of the adjacent Betty's Wood that has also been designated as LWS for over 10 years.

Ongoing Incomplete Wildlife Surveys?

I am surprised that I was not contacted during any of the latest wildlife and habitat surveys. Consequently, the Woods, as the largest piece of nearby significant habitat, continues to be largely omitted in all of the survey reports. I mentioned this before. I would have been happy to discuss granting access for numerous survey tasks, for the benefit of all. I continue to be open to approaches along these lines.

New Woodland Buffer to the South of Alvecote Wood

Whilst I am disappointed to note the overall reduction in the total area of Green Infrastructure in this latest update to the proposal, I am heartened and very grateful that the significant area of buffer planting to the south of Alvecote Wood, adjacent to Robey's Lane, has been retained.

New SuDS Water Feature to the West of Alvecote Wood

I am also very pleased to see the latest proposals include a water feature such as we were requesting to provide mitigation against domestic cat predation into the Woods. The new SuDS basin, running north-south and facing the majority of the roadside frontage of the Woods, is an excellent solution to drainage requirements combined with cat mitigation. We are very grateful for this improvement.

Ongoing Public and School Activities

We have been continuing with our regular public Open Days and school visits. We have had 2 Open Days so far this year (monthly from end-March through to end-November) but forecast bad weather for the third Open Day this coming Sunday will be a headache for us as our elderly tractor is not waterproof and we presently don't have space in our main building to erect our visitor information display unless we put the tractor outside.

It is great that school groups keep coming with 5 groups having visited so far this year and 2 more Special Needs school groups booked to come in the next few weeks. That is all provided in conjunction with the Royal Forestry Society *Teaching Trees* programme, that seeks to promote tree and woodland engagement amongst children. Something that is especially important to us all in our Climate Change situation.

Fencing to the South and West of Alvecote Wood

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss possible fencing to be added along the southern and/or western boundaries of the Woods. This is particularly of value during the establishment period for that new buffer planting (e.g. 15+ years) as it will continue to be relatively permeable to trespassers.

There is fairly good boundary protection to much of the roadside frontage on the western side of the Woods in the form of an established hedge, but there are significant gaps. One major vulnerability will hopefully be addressed after our imminent planned improvements in fencing around our entrance gateway that we are funding ourselves.

However and for example, a section of the boundary to the north will remain very sparse and will continue to be vulnerable. After our gateway improvements, this stretch to the north is likely to become the preferential access route for unauthorised visitors/trespassers.

As before, we are happy to discuss appropriate boundary improvements during Reserved Matters, as was previously suggested.

Increasing Fear of Trespass

Notwithstanding this, our major concerns still remain in connection with the threat of increased trespass coming into the Woods. I acknowledge that the buffer planting, plus SuDS water feature, will likely help as time goes on, but my concern has always been casual trespass such as dog walkers, BBQers, kids climbing trees, cyclists, etc. I continue to maintain that this 'casual' aspect is likely to increase perhaps a hundred-fold as the nearest housing will become perhaps a tenth of the current distance away (evidence from other wildlife sites supports this view, as detailed in my previous correspondence).

We had another incident of trespass and litter in the last 2 weeks.

The Woods will be especially vulnerable to these increased risks throughout that *buffer* establishment period, as well as beyond. I acknowledge that many people will very possibly be content to walk their dogs within the proposed landscaped area, but children won't have much in the way of trees they can climb for a very long time other than by entering the Woods. Even BBQers will likely find far more seclusion, not to mention beautiful backdrops, within the Woods cf. within newly-planted green spaces.

The recent repeated dry summers have left the wildflower meadows within the Woods very vulnerable to fire and this compounds the threat from trespassers lighting BBQs etc. We have had unauthorised fires lit in the past and this is also likely to increase.

I therefore maintain that the Woods will be under a significant threat from increased trespass over a very long period and, realistically, indefinitely.

Fencing mentioned above will hopefully help, but CCTV monitoring and thus mains electricity & broadband will also be required as a second line of defence and deterrent, as raised previously. Our current battery-powered SIM Card-connected cameras are completely unsustainable as they are far too unreliable and invariably require weekly maintenance, not to mention monthly SIM Card costs also being unsustainable across the number of cameras required.

Increasing Demand for Public Engagement

In parallel with my arguments above, I think we all agree there will likely be an increase in public engagement as a result of the new residents living nearby and we may be able to attract further Volunteers from this group as time goes on. Naturally, this is potentially a good thing. However, any *Woods-promotion* initiative, to realise and drive this hoped-for benefit, will require significant additional effort on our part to initiate that engagement and arguably that will be ongoing for a considerable period of time.

Inadequate Infrastructure & Future Options?

I stated in correspondence to Hallam (cc'd NWBC) on 4th January 2023 that the way we operate Open Days etc at the Woods is presently very labour-intensive and inefficient from our point of view and arguably not at all suited to an increase in demand from visitors. E.g. we *could* run additional Open Days to explain to and hopefully involve new residents but that would be very time consuming for us in terms of setup and preparation, as well as the actual 'open' period itself. As mentioned above, there is insufficient space within our main building for any permanent public information display and there are no facilities to make these sessions more bearable for ourselves or for any helpers (e.g. we have no loos or running water, no heating and no electricity).

I therefore continue to be petrified that many of the fears I have been raising over the last 6+ years are all still present to one extent or another.

Trespass and security are still major issues for us and increasing public engagement and its sustainability are further very major concerns.

My priority has always been to protect, maintain and enhance the Woods for the benefit of the local wildlife plus the local community. That community, in terms of people within ready range of the Woods, will potentially be increasing *massively*. We are happy to look at additional public engagement activities, but this would further increase the burden upon us.

We stated previously that we are also happy to be involved in management policy and decisions regarding the woodland buffer areas within the development itself. Again, this will be a further load on us.

I have been told by Hallam that they are unable to support any kind of *Grampian Condition* or *Unilateral Undertaking* and there is therefore no legal channel by which they would be able to provide any funding to the Woods since I am a private landowner (and it is not acceptable to me to convert the Woods into a charity, for multiple reasons). I don't know if this block to funding will continue beyond initial determination of the Outline application, or if there is any scope for support via s.106 or any other channel in due course?

As a result, it is my current understanding that there will be no direct support forthcoming from the developers so I am having to look at funding a single-storey removable Modular/Flat-Pack prefabricated building (non-residential) at the Woods, myself. This would support future sustainability of public-facing Open Days and similar events, as well as the general infrastructure and surveillance that we need. Such a building could have an exceptionally low impact on the Woods (it would be sited on the footprint of the existing derelict building), as well as the building itself being temporary in nature.

If the only way to protect the Woods from the predicted increased threats is for me to pay for this building then I will have no alternative and I will pay for it, but I still feel strongly that it is morally wrong for me to be put in that position and to have to bear the full cost.

I was told previously that any Application for such a building would be best determined at the same time as the main project. I feel I should therefore produce a plan and summary design details as well as the *Bat & Bird Survey* I commissioned recently so this proposed 'workaround' could be discussed in conjunction with the main Application, at least in principle. Again, more effort for us but I am passionate about this, as evidenced by almost 8 years of patient correspondence and lobbying, since 2016, on behalf of the Woods.

Please could you advise the date of the Planning meeting where all this is likely to be debated? I will endeavour to submit at least provisional documentation in advance of that meeting.

In addition, I would be very grateful if it is possible for mains services & broadband to be brought at least adjacent to the Woods' boundary, as was discussed with and intimated as a possibility by Hallam, repeatedly (initially in our meeting at NWBC in 2018 and again in our site meeting at Alvecote Wood late in 2022). This was thought very probably achievable *early in the development phasing and very preferably well before any houses are completed*. Mains connections will be essential for our ongoing viability if so many new houses will appear as if on our doorstep.

I continue to be very open to further dialogue on any and all aspects, and will welcome any proposals that could help to achieve satisfactory mitigation/support on the above.

Thanks,

Stephen Briggs
Owner, Alvecote Wood