

Land at South Farm, Wickwar (APP/P0119/W/23/3323836)

Ecology Briefing Note Addendum

edp6190_r019c

QA: TWi/NPR_EDa/NHa_071123

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This Ecology Briefing Note Addendum has been prepared by The Environmental Dimension Partnership Ltd (EDP) on behalf of Bloor Homes (South West) (hereafter referred to as 'the Appellant'), in relation to proposed residential development of Land at South Farm, Wickwar (hereafter referred to as 'the Appeal Site').
- 1.2 This Addendum provides an update on the matter of potential recreational impacts on Lower Woods SSSI, as was discussed within EDP's Ecology Briefing Note of 29 September 2023 (report reference edp6190_r013a), which was submitted to the appeal as Appendix JR3 to Mr Richards Proof of Evidence on planning matters.

2 LOWER WOODS SSSI MITIGATION STRATEGY

- 2.1 As was set out in Appendix JR3, potential recreational impacts on Lower Woods SSSI resulting from the appeal proposals will be avoided through a combination of the following:
 - On-site Public Open Space (POS) to provide residents with alternative opportunities for recreation and visual amenity;
 - Connections from the Appeal Site to the wider Public Rights of Way (PRoW) network, thereby providing direct access to the countryside and alternative walking routes for new residents;
 - The provision of educational resources to a new population in the form of 'Welcome Packs'; and
 - A financial contribution to Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust (GWT), which owns and manages the SSSI, to fund delivery of Strategic Access Management and Monitoring Measures (SAMM) across Lower Woods SSSI.
- 2.2 At the time of writing of Appendix JR3, a proposed SAMM contribution of £34,740 had been offered to GWT without prejudice by the Appellant, but had not been accepted. GWT's position in this regard was reflected in an objection letter dated 16 October 2023, a copy of which is included as Appendix EDP 2 to the LPA's Rebuttal Proof of Evidence.

- 2.3 Following submission of Appendix JR3, EDP, acting on behalf of Appellant, engaged in further dialogue with GWT to identify an appropriate financial contribution and an outline programme of works to which the funds would be allocated. In an email from GWT on 05 October (a copy of which is provided as **Appendix EDP 1**), an amount of £100,000 was put forward by GWT to cover the following mitigation works:
- Tree safety – re-assess usage zones and associated remedial action required, in particular in view of ash dieback, with an assumption that works would be required over a larger area;
 - Entrance and exit ways - assessing and replacing gates and measures to stop paths from expanding in boggy areas due to people avoiding the mud;
 - Signage - new signage to inform people about why Lower Woods is important and why it needs to be protected, and encouraging responsible behaviour. The meadow just off Horwood Lane (which would be the most likely route that residents of the proposed development would take to access Lower Woods) would be a priority location;
 - Habitat creation in other areas of the wood to mitigate for the additional disturbance; and
 - Staff time to plan this work, assess tasks to be undertaken, appoint contractors, install signage and gates.
- 2.4 In recognition of the above, the SAMM contribution proposed within the draft Section 106 (s106) Agreement has been increased to £100,000. More recently, in a letter to the Inquiry dated 02 November, GWT provided a more detailed breakdown of these costs.
- 2.5 GWT has also suggested that an additional payment of £2,500 per annum is required to cover ongoing management. However, this request has been made in the context of GWT maintaining its objection to the proposed development, confirmed in an email to EDP on 27 October 2023 (a copy of which is provided as **Appendix EDP 2**), which states: “...we still have concerns over the longer-term cumulative impact that this development, together with the other recent development in the area, will have on Lower Woods SSSI.”
- 2.6 Overall, having considered the correspondence received from the GWT, the Appellant agrees that a contribution of £100,000 towards mitigation measures at the Lower Wood SSSI is appropriate, in order to ensure that there would not be any adverse impacts to the SSSI.
- 2.7 Since it is not incumbent upon the proposed development to address the impacts of other recent developments, this additional request for £2,500 per annum is not reasonable or proportionate and would not meet the legal requirement for s106 contributions to be:
- “necessary to make the development acceptable in planning terms;
 - directly related to the development; and
 - fairly and reasonably related in scale and kind to the development.”

3 CONCLUSION ON SSSI IMPACT

- 3.1 It is EDP's conclusion that, since the SAMM contribution within the s106 agreement has now been increased in line with the detailed cost breakdown provided by GWT, there is yet further certainty that impacts will be avoided.
- 3.2 It therefore follows that no weight should be attached to any adverse impacts on Lower Woods SSSI in the planning balance.

Appendix EDP 1
Correspondence with GWT
05 October 2023

Tom Wigglesworth

From: Laura Chester <laura.chester@gloucestershirewildlifetrust.co.uk>
Sent: 05 October 2023 11:33
To: Emily Williams
Subject: RE: P22/01300/O Planning Consultation Response. FAO Meyrick Brentall

Hi Emily,

Further to my email last week, we have had a chat within GWT around the work that would actually be required to help to mitigate the impact of the additional recreational pressure from the proposed development in Wickwar and are in agreement that £34,740.00 would not be near enough to do what is needed. To give you some context, the work required includes:

- Tree safety- With the location of the development being towards the south of the woodland it will increase the footfall in this area of the wood. Things we will need to do because of this:
Reassess usage zones- based around footfall in an area, this helps inform what remedial action we might take on tree safety. If an area increases (which is highly likely) then it will increase the amount of work we need to do. With Ash dieback being a big problem in lower woods, we will need to address a much larger area than we do currently. This is heavily weather dependent due to Lower woods geology and topography, plus specialist with the team we require to do it.
- Entrance and exit ways- We will need to review these and improve access ways. This should involve:
 - Gates- these will need assessing and replacing- some areas which are boggy might need reviewing to stop paths from expanding due to people trying not to get muddy.
 - Signage- It would be good to have new signage created informing people about why lower woods is important and why it needs protecting, how we want people to behave. Just to give one example, there is a meadow just off Horwood Lane (which would be the most likely route that residents of the proposed development would take to access Lower Woods) which is incredibly diverse and would really need efforts to protect.
- Habitat creation in other areas of the wood to mitigate for the additional disturbance.
- Staff time- In order to plan this work, assess what needs doing, appoint contractors, install signage and gates. We would need to cover as much of our costs as possible.

I'm sure you can appreciate that this is going to cost a substantial amount, in the region of £100k+ but we would need to look at this in more detail.

Best regards,
Laura

Laura Chester

Building with Nature Lead

(My current working pattern is Monday, Thursday, Friday)

Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust

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From: Emily Williams <emilyw@edp-uk.co.uk>
Sent: Friday, September 22, 2023 9:53 PM
To: Info - Glos Wildlife Trust <info@gloucestershirewildlifetrust.co.uk>
Subject: P22/01300/O Planning Consultation Response. FAO Meyrick Brentall

Good afternoon Meyrick,

I trust you are well. EDP have been appointed by Bloor Homes to provide ecological advice and support in relation to their outline planning application to South Gloucestershire Council (SGC) for residential development of Land at South Farm, Wickwar. We have been involved with the project since 2020, having undertaken the initial baseline ecological surveys at the site. I hope you don't mind me contacting you directly; at Bloor Homes request, I am writing in relation to Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust consultation response to the planning application (reference: P22/03100/O), dated 21st July 2023, and specifically your concerns raised in relation to the potential for development to result in increasing recreational pressure upon Lower Woods SSSI and the reserve managed by GWT.

To summarise the mitigation strategy currently proposed and presented within the Ecological Addendum (report reference: edp6190_r010) submitted to the South Gloucestershire Council (and which you'll already be familiar with) this includes the provision of alternative opportunities for recreation within the development combined with the creation of onsite connections to existing Public Rights of Way as follows:

- The provision of c.2.04 hectares (ha) of open green space along the full western and northern boundaries of the Application Site. Such areas are proposed to accommodate new landscape planting including species-rich amenity grassland, wildflower meadow, trees and shrubs, as well as orchards and an allotment;
- The provision of additional open green space around the remaining peripheries of the Application Site, accommodating sustainable drainage features, species-rich grassland and/or shrub planting amounting to 0.98ha;
- The inclusion of attenuation basins designed with levels no more than 1:3, accommodating species-rich grassland to provide additional habitat for wildlife and benefits to visual amenity;
- The inclusion of LAPs/LEAPs (amounting to c.0.09ha) integrated with open green space to provide further opportunities for recreation; and
- Provision of a new footpath link in the north-western corner of the Application Site, connecting development to the wider PRoW network

Following ongoing consultation with, I understand this strategy has now been accepted by Natural England and SGC's Ecological Advisor. However, and in conference with Bloor Homes, the following additional mitigation has been proposed pending agreement with relevant parties:

- The provision of a Welcome Park to every home within the proposed development, to include as a minimum, details pertaining to the location and sensitivities of Lower Woods SSSI, along with guidance and recommendations to avoiding impacts, including the promotion of alternative recreational sites and publicly accessible footpaths/bridleways. The aim of this would be to 'educate' potential users of the woodland and promote good practice when enjoying the countryside; and
- Provision of a financial contribution, subject to agreement with relevant parties and subsequent Section 106 or other legal agreement. In the first instance, we would propose a contribution of £193.00/residential unit to deliver Strategic Access Management and Monitoring Measures (SAMM) across Lower Woods SSSI within GWT'S ownership. These may include, for example, maintenance of infrastructure; provision of education boards; habitat monitoring; etc. Given proposals are for up to 180 residential units, a total financial contribution would amount to: £34,740.00. This mitigation proposal would be consistent with the strategic mitigation strategy adopted by, for example, Cotswold District Council for the management of recreational pressures across Cotswold Beechwoods Special Area of Conservation (SAC) which is similarly designated for woodland habitats.

In consideration of the above, and at your request within GWT's consultation response, we would be happy to consult directly with yourselves further on options for additional mitigation measures that may be delivered in respect of Lower Woods SSSI.

If you have any comments on the above, please don't hesitate to contact me. In the meantime, have a lovely weekend.

Kind regards

Emily

Emily Williams BSc (Hons), MSc, MCIEEM
Associate



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The Environmental Dimension Partnership Ltd

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Appendix EDP 2
Correspondence with GWT
27 October 2023

Tom Wigglesworth

From: Laura Chester <laura.chester@gloucestershirewildlifetrust.co.uk>
Sent: 27 October 2023 16:51
To: Tom Wigglesworth
Subject: RE: APP/P0119/W/23/3323836 Land at Sodbury Road, Wickwar

Categories: Email (d) follow up - leave in inbox

Hi Tom,

Thanks for your patience whilst we discussed this with our exec team.

Although we appreciate Bloor Homes offering the section 106 contribution that we recommended would be needed for us to manage the extra footfall and do work required to help mitigate the impact, we still have concerns over the longer-term cumulative impact that this development, together with the other recent development in the area, will have on Lower Woods SSSI. Therefore, our position will still be to object to the proposal.

We will acknowledge in our final letter to the case officer ahead of the inquiry starting, that the applicant has worked with us to understand what GWT could do to reduce the impact on Lower Woods and hope that should the development be given the green light by the inspector, these measures would still stand to ensure the development causes as minimal an impact on Lower Woods as possible.

Kind Regards,
Laura

From: Tom Wigglesworth <tomw@edp-uk.co.uk>
Sent: Friday, October 27, 2023 1:44 PM
To: Laura Chester <laura.chester@gloucestershirewildlifetrust.co.uk>
Subject: RE: APP/P0119/W/23/3323836 Land at Sodbury Road, Wickwar

Hi Laura

I appreciate you said it would likely be early next week before you could get back to me, but I just thought I'd get in touch in case an earlier response might be forthcoming.

All the best

Tom

Tom Wigglesworth *BSc (Hons), MSc, MCIEEM*
Director

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From: Laura Chester <laura.chester@gloucestershirewildlifetrust.co.uk>
Sent: Thursday, October 26, 2023 9:56 AM
To: Tom Wigglesworth <tomw@edp-uk.co.uk>
Subject: RE: APP/P0119/W/23/3323836 Land at Sodbury Road, Wickwar

Hi Tom,

Thank you for your email and for conforming that Bloor Homes have agreed a £100,000 s106 contribution.

Before we can move forward, we need to discuss this with our board, which I'm hoping to do tomorrow, and then I will be able to get back to you early next week.

I hope this is okay!

Best Regards,
Laura

Laura Chester (she/her)

Building with Nature Lead

(My current working pattern is Monday, Thursday, Friday)

Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust

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From: Tom Wigglesworth <tomw@edp-uk.co.uk>

Sent: Thursday, October 26, 2023 9:31 AM

To: Laura Chester <laura.chester@gloucestershirewildlifetrust.co.uk>

Subject: RE: APP/P0119/W/23/3323836 Land at Sodbury Road, Wickwar

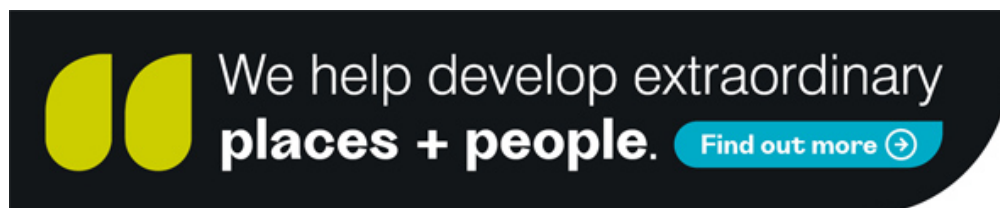
Hi Laura

I sent you the email below on Tuesday but I had a auto reply saying you are off sick. I hope you are feeling better, and I am just getting in touch again to see if you are now back at work and able to assist with my request?

All the best

Tom

Tom Wigglesworth BSc (Hons), MSc, MCIEEM
Director



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From: Tom Wigglesworth
Sent: Tuesday, October 24, 2023 9:57 AM
To: laura.chester@gloucestershirewildlifetrust.co.uk
Cc: Emily Williams <emilyw@edp-uk.co.uk>
Subject: APP/P0119/W/23/3323836 Land at Sodbury Road, Wickwar
Importance: High

Dear Laura

I am getting in touch following on from your recent correspondence with my colleague Emily Williams regarding the proposed development at Sodbury Road, Wickwar and GWT's request for a contribution towards the future management of Lower Woods SSSI and GWT Reserve.

Having taken onboard your responses our client Bloor Homes is willing to increase the proposed contribution to the level you have requested, i.e. circa £100,000, and the draft Section 106 agreement which is to be put before the Inquiry is to be updated to reflect this.

With this in mind, could I please request a confirmation email from you that provision of this level of contribution would address GWT's concerns regarding increased recreational use at Lower Woods, and an approximate breakdown of the costs against the items of work you identified in your previous correspondence. This is to assist the Planning Inspector in determining whether the proposed contribution is reasonable.

Given the limited time before the Inquiry is due to commence, I would be grateful for a response on this at your earliest convenience.

All the best

Tom