

PLANNING APPLICATION REPORT

Case Officer: Tom French

Parish: Woodleigh **Ward:** Loddiswell and Aveton Gifford

Application No: 1894/17/FUL

Agent/Applicant:

Mr Allen
The Woodland Trust
Kempton Way
Grantham
NG31 6LL

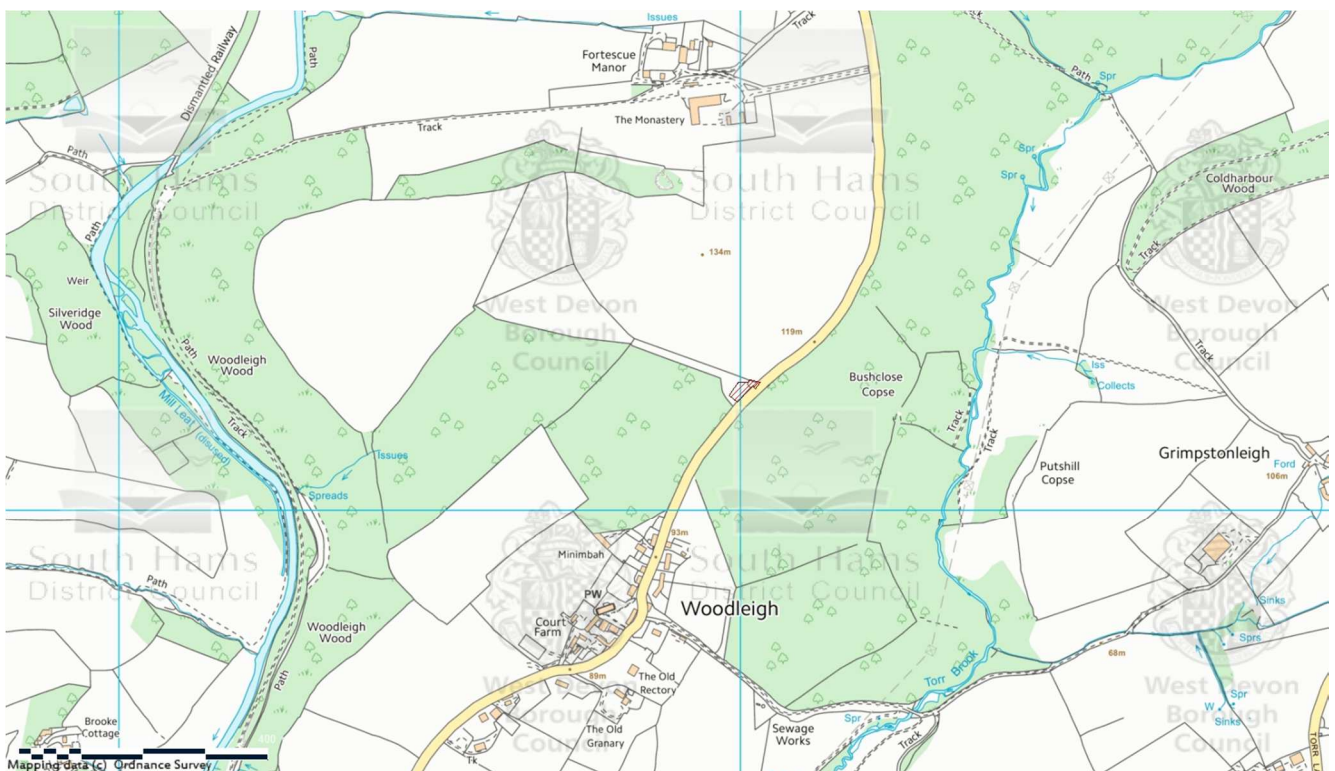
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Site Address: Land at SX 740 491 & 742 498, Avon Valley Woods, Hendon Road, Woodleigh

Development: Enlargement of existing car park to provide up to 15 spaces and new car park to provide up to 10 spaces.

Reason for committee referral: Referred by Cllr Bramble due to the parish council objection concerning lack of evidence for the development, urbanisation of the countryside and risk of fly tipping/litter.



Recommendation: Conditional approval

Conditions:

Standard time limits

Accord with plans

Provision of post and rail fence

No external lighting without consent

Key issues for consideration:

Principal of the development, impact on countryside, trees, ecology and other matters

Site Description:

The Avon valley Complex is a 140 ha mixture of ancient woodland and woodland planting in around 2000. It comprises of a number of woodlands predominately situated to the north of Woodleigh. It is the largest publically accessible woodland in South Devon. The Woodland Trust aims to improve the current visitor experience by upgrading the access facilities through better interpretation, way marking and parking. The Woodland Trust would also like to promote the woodland more widely within the local area and expand the potential range of users to include outdoor education and volunteering opportunities.

The Proposal:

The Woodland Trust aims to improve the current visitor experience by upgrading the access facilities through better interpretation, way marking and parking

Car park 1.

Purpose: This car park will provide access to approximately 66ha of continuous woodland and the River Avon through permissive paths and linking with the public footpath Woodleigh FP no. 4 and hence to the wider footpath network on the western side of the road and a further 54 ha on the eastern side of the road.

Location and capacity: (See Map 4). The existing car park (GR SX740492) will have its capacity increased from 2 cars to up to 15 cars. It will be 30m by 20m in size.

Construction: The car park will be built on former arable land which has reverted to grassland over the last 20 years. The area will be excavated to not more than 350mm. The material will be spread thin y elsewhere on site. Locally sourced stone shall be imported onto site and crushed stone spread in 3 layers, 100mm deep, and compacted between each layer. A top surface of scalplings and 'dust' will then be spread to 75mm deep and compacted to provide a fully bound surface. No additional drainage shall be required; the site has been fully assessed and shall be free draining, the natural gentle slope to the southwest of the car park will serve as a natural soakaway into the surrounding woodland.

The edges of the car park will be delineated by post and rail fencing on the northern, southern and eastern sides, and by the hedge bank to the west.

Car Park 2

The car park will provide access to 54 ha of woodland on the eastern side of the road and greatly improve the access to Woodleigh Bridleway no. 2 by stopping cars blocking it.

Hedge banks and trees: 4m of hedge bank (Map 7) will have to be removed to create a 6m entrance and to allow for adequate site lines based on the requirements in the DOT 'Manual for Streets'. This also makes a 4m allowance for access to bridleway no. 2.

There are 6 ash stools on the bank which are approximately 5m in height trees on the hedge bank (see map no. 8), with some other small shrubs of hawthorn, hazel and blackthorn. An ecological survey was carried out and no protected or rare species were found.

Consultations:

- County Highways Authority: Standing advice applies
- Woodleigh Parish Council - Objection
When the Woodland Trust first acquired and planted the land for Watkins Wood 15-20 years ago Woodleigh expressed concern at the amount of visitor traffic that would be generated, on a very inadequate road. The Trust gave assurances that these particular woods would not be heavily promoted and could be expected to receive few visitors. The parish accepts that priorities change, that the Trust now needs to make better use of a developing asset into which much money and work has gone, and that it should wish its members from outside the area to visit it and enjoy it. But the parish's concerns over traffic have proved valid and it views with anxiety any proposal that implies a further increase in the number of cars on the lanes and through the village.

The car parks proposed are large (over 1000 sq m in total) and, with the required splays, the loss of 6m of hedgerow, the fencing, the bollards and other furniture, they would represent a degradation of a natural rural environment in and alongside the SD AONB, That damage would never be reversed - experience shows that one development all too often leads to another.

These large ungated and unobserved areas of hard standing would sooner or later attract the attention of travellers, camper vans and fly tippers, as happened when the nearby car park at Blackdown Rings was enlarged. The same thing is regularly happening with car parks on Dartmoor. Height restricting barriers or bollards would only make the parks more unsightly.

There is no reason to suppose that the existence of the car parks would actually stop people parking on the road as claimed in the design and access statement. It will a ways be easier just to pull onto the verge.

The design and access statement speaks of eight cars regularly parked on a weekday afternoon at the northernmost of the existing parks. This is surprising - it is rarely if ever the case that both existing parking areas are full. The current proposals will of course not help the situation at Loddiswell Station.

Parishioners are routinely picking up litter and recently gathered thirteen large bags of it in a single day. In another incident, a parishioner removed a pile of industrial cleaning equipment dumped at one of the entrances to the woods. The amount of dog waste, for the disposal of which there are no arrangements, is in places unpleasant.

These are all significant drawbacks and the parish would prefer them not to be incurred until it is shown that the car parks are necessary and desirable. This s one of 250 sites that the Trust intends to promote and there can be no certainty that visitor numbers will actually increase. Schools and outdoor activity groups have been able to use the woods for many years and again it is uncertain that they will do so to any greater extent in the future.

The Trust is asked to withdraw the proposals for the present time and, if and when the number of visitors actually increases, to bring forward a revised scheme which addresses the parish's concerns and causes as little environmental harm as possible.

Representations:

Representations from Residents

Comments have been received and cover the following points:

Objection

- Increased traffic through Woodleigh village
- Country lanes not suitable
- Increase in dog mess
- Potential for fly tipping/illegal encampments

Support

- Good community facility
- Existing visitors have experienced problems parking
- A safe parking area allowing users to access the woodland is welcomed
- Existing parking blocks lanes and access to paths/bridleways
- On behalf of the South Hams Ramblers I support any means to improve access to the countryside.

Relevant Planning History

None relevant

ANALYSIS

Principle of Development/Sustainability:

The site is in a countryside location, any development needs to demonstrate that there is a requirement for the location proposed. The proposal contained within this planning application adheres to these requirements as the proposed car parking is to improve an existing visitor facility, which benefits both the local community and the South Devon tourist/visitor offering. The existing woodlands are an established community facility and improvements to community facilities are encouraged where they do not result in other harmful impacts. The level of proposed parking is considered to be commensurate with the area of publically accessible woodland it will serve and does not result in an unacceptable impact on the countryside.

Design/Landscape:

The proposed car parks have been designed so as to fit in with their surroundings as much as possible, through the use of crushed stone, post and rail fencing, this will ensure the car parks sit as naturally within their locality as possible, a condition requiring any external lighting to be approved is recommended although it is anticipated that external lighting is unlikely to be required. The proposals involve very little built development, the existing parking facilities and the enlarged facilities are not overly prominent in wider views and therefore it is considered that the car parks will not adversely impact the South Devon AONB and the conditions recommended ensure that elements which could cause harm, for example, controlling the erection of external lighting.

The proposals do involve some removal of hedge bank to facilitate the required visibility splays for safe access and egress, however the amount of hedging required to be removed is not excessive and when balanced against the benefits of greater accessibility/usability of the publicly accessible woodlands, it is considered acceptable.

An ecological survey has been submitted with the application, which demonstrates that no protected species would be affected by the development.

Neighbour Amenity:

There are no nearby neighbours who would be affected by the proposals.

Highways/Access:

The county highways officer has offered 'standing advice' to the proposal, the applicants have demonstrated that visibility can be achieved and the proposed accesses are commensurate with their usage.

The two car parks can be accessed from the north and south. The road through Woodleigh is a public highway and increased use of the woodland without the provision of the car parks still has potential to increase traffic going through Woodleigh but also the potential for on-street parking, for which there is limited capacity.

Other Matters:

The potential for anti-social behaviour in the form of camping, illegal encampments and fly tipping would be a matter for the police or land owner in conjunction with the LPA and would not be a material planning reason to recommend refusal of this application.

The LPA concurs with the parish council that the use of barriers would not be suitable in this location and would also require a much greater on site presence for opening and closing. The importance of reducing the need for street furniture, which has an urbanising effect is critical in this location and the proposals reflect this in the use of materials and no additional barriers, bollards, lighting.

The Woodland Trust's policy is to not provide litter or dog waste bins. The trust's litter policy is that all users are responsible for their own waste and should take it home. In respect of dog mess, the Woodland trust operates a "stick and flick" policy, which requires users to use a stick to flick dog mess away from paths and into undergrowth where it will biodegrade naturally.

This application has been considered in accordance with Section 38 of the Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act 2004

Planning Policy

Section 70 of the 1990 Town and Country Planning Act requires that regard be had to the development plan, any local finance and any other material considerations. Section 38(6) of the 2004 Planning and Compensation Act requires that applications are to be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

The relevant development plan policies are set out below:

South Hams LDF Core Strategy

CS1 Location of Development
CS7 Design
CS9 Landscape and Historic Environment
CS10 Nature Conservation

Development Policies DPD

DP1 High Quality Design
DP2 Landscape Character
DP7 Transport, Access & Parking
DP15 Development in the Countryside

Emerging Joint Local Plan

The Plymouth and South West Devon Joint Local Plan (the JLP) will replace the above as the statutory development plan once it is formally adopted.

Annex 1 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) provides guidance on determining the weight in relation to existing and emerging development plan policies.

- For current development plan documents, due weight should be given to relevant policies according to their degree of consistency with the Framework (the closer the policies in the plan to the policies in the Framework, the greater the weight that may be given).
- For the JLP, which is an emerging development plan, the weight is to be determined by the stage of its preparation, the extent to which there are unresolved objections, and its degree of consistency with the Framework.

The JLP is at a relatively advanced stage of preparation. The precise weight to be given to policies within the JLP will need to be determined on a case by case basis, having regard to all of the material considerations as set out on the analysis above.

PLYMOUTH AND SOUTH WEST DEVON JOINT LOCAL PLAN -: PUBLICATION (as considered by the Full Councils end Feb/Early March 2017)

SPT1 Delivering sustainable development

SPT2 Sustainable linked neighbourhoods and sustainable rural communities

TTV31 Development in the Countryside

TTV32 Residential extensions and replacement dwellings in the countryside

DEV1 Protecting amenity and the environment

DEV15 Supporting the rural economy

DEV20 Place shaping and the quality of the built environment

DEV24 Landscape character

DEV27 Nationally protected landscapes

DEV29 Green and play spaces (including Strategic Green Spaces, Local Green Spaces and undesignated green spaces)

Considerations under Human Rights Act 1998 and Equalities Act 2010

The provisions of the Human Rights Act 1998 and Equalities Act 2010 have been taken into account in reaching the recommendation contained in this report.

Recommended conditions:

1. The development to which this permission relates must be begun not later than the expiration of three years beginning with the date on which this permission is granted.

Reason: To comply with Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act, 1990 as amended by Section 51 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

2. The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the approved plans and documents to be listed on the decision notice.

Reason: For the avoidance of doubt and in the interest of proper planning.

3. Prior to the car parks hereby approved being brought into use, the post and rail fences shall be provided in accordance with the approved plans and maintained thereafter.

Reason: To safeguard the amenities of the locality and to ensure the car parks are properly delineated.

4. No external lighting shall be installed at either car park without the prior written consent of the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: In the interest of protecting the natural beauty of the AONB and ecology.