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The Planning Inspectorate
National Infrastructure Planning
Temple Quay House
2 The Square
Bristol
BS1 6PN

3rd June 2019

Dear Sir/Madam,

Reference: M42 Junction 6 Improvement Representation

As the UK's leading woodland conservation charity, the Trust aims to protect native woods, trees and their wildlife for the future. Through the restoration and improvement of woodland biodiversity and increased awareness and understanding of important woodland, these aims can be achieved. We own over 1,000 sites across the UK, covering around 24,000 hectares (59,000 acres) and we have 500,000 members and supporters.

The proposed development will impact an area of ancient woodland known as Aspbury's Copse, designated as a Plantation on Ancient Woodland Site (PAWS) on Natural England's Ancient Woodland Inventory. The Woodland Trust is currently engaging with Highways England to establish a Statement of Common Ground, but we feel it is pertinent to highlight our concerns, and our objection to the scheme, for the Planning Inspectorate's consideration.

Ancient Woodland

Natural England¹ defines ancient woodland "*as an irreplaceable habitat [which] is important for its: wildlife (which include rare and threatened species); soils; recreational value; cultural, historical and landscape value [which] has been wooded continuously since at least 1600AD.*"

It includes: "*Ancient semi-natural woodland [ASNW] mainly made up of trees and shrubs native to the site, usually arising from natural regeneration*

Plantations on ancient woodland sites – [PAWS] replanted with conifer or broadleaved trees that retain ancient woodland features, such as undisturbed soil, ground flora and fungi"

Both ASNW and PAWS woodland are given equal protection in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) regardless of the woodland's condition.

National planning policy

The National Planning Policy Framework, paragraph 175 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*

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/ancient-woodland-and-veteran-trees-protection-surveys-licences>

ancient or veteran trees) should be refused, unless there are wholly exceptional reasons⁵⁸ and a suitable compensation strategy exists;"

Paragraph 5.32 of the National Policy Statement for National Networks states: *"Ancient woodland is a valuable biodiversity resource both for its diversity of species and for its longevity as woodland. Once lost it cannot be recreated. The Secretary of State should not grant development consent for any development that would result in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats including ancient woodland and the loss of aged or veteran trees found outside ancient woodland, unless the national need for and benefits of the development, in that location, clearly outweigh the loss. Aged or veteran trees found outside ancient woodland are also particularly valuable for biodiversity and their loss should be avoided. Where such trees would be affected by development proposals, the applicant should set out proposals for their conservation or, where their loss is unavoidable, the reasons for this."*

Woodland Trust concerns

Whilst the Trust acknowledges that Aspbury's Copse borders the existing M42 motorway, the proposed improvements will result in further direct loss to an irreplaceable habitat. Natural England has identified the direct impacts of development on ancient woodland or veteran trees including:

- *"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 around the tree roots*
- *polluting the ground around them*
- *changing the water table or drainage of woodland or individual trees*
- *damaging archaeological features or heritage assets"*

Furthermore, the Trust is concerned that for the remaining woodland, there will be additional impacts of increased noise and light pollution from traffic, as well as dust pollution during construction of the proposal. The woodland will also be subjected to increased nitrogen oxide emissions from vehicles, which can change the character of woodland vegetation (in terms of species composition) through altering nutrient conditions².

Conclusion

In summary, whilst Aspbury's Copse will suffer direct loss to facilitate the scheme, the Trust will remain **strongly opposed** to the proposed project and considers the scheme goes against national planning policy designed to protect against the loss of irreplaceable habitats.

We hope our comments are of use to you, if you would like to get in touch with the Trust further to discuss any of the points raised please do not hesitate to do so.

Yours faithfully,

Nicole Hillier
Campaigner – Ancient Woodland

² Sheate, W. R. & Taylor, R. M. (1990) The effect of motorway development on adjacent woodland. Journal of Environmental Management, 31, pp. 261-267