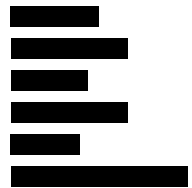




The Woodland Trust
Kempton Way
Grantham
Lincolnshire
NG31 6LL



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

14th December 2021

Dear Ken Stone,

Reference: A417 Missing Link

As the UK's leading woodland conservation charity, the Woodland Trust aims to protect native woods, trees and their wildlife for the future. We own over 1,000 sites across the UK, covering around 29,000 hectares (71,000 acres) and we have over 500,000 members and supporters.

The proposed scheme will result in the direct loss of two veteran trees alongside potential detrimental impact to several ancient, veteran and notable trees adjacent to the scheme boundary:

- Veteran Sycamore T57
- Veteran Beech T126
- Veteran Beech T127
- Veteran Ash T157
- Veteran Ash T159
- Veteran Beech T172
- Veteran Beech (ATI no: 196380)
- Veteran Ash (ATI no: 143975)
- Ancient Ash (ATI no: 143988)
- Notable Orchard Apple (ATI no: 196378)
- Notable Wych Elm (ATI no: 196853)

The ancient/veteran trees in question are referenced within the applicant's Arboricultural Impact Assessment (AIA) [APP-353] and/or verified on the Ancient Tree Inventory (ATI numbers listed above).¹

In addition, we are also concerned about damage and detrimental impact to Ullen Wood (grid reference: SO9392216273), an area of ancient semi-natural woodland recorded on Natural England's Ancient Woodland Inventory.



Ancient Woodland

Natural England² 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”

Ancient and Veteran Trees

Natural England’s standing advice on ancient trees states that they “can be individual trees or groups of trees within wood pastures, historic parkland, hedgerows, orchards, parks or other areas. They are often found outside ancient woodlands. They are irreplaceable habitats with some or all of the following characteristics... Its: great age, size, condition, biodiversity value as a result of significant wood decay and the habitat created from the ageing process, cultural and heritage value.”

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Planning policy

The **National Policy Statement for National Networks (NNNPS)** Paragraph 5.32 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.”

The **National Planning Policy Framework**, paragraph 180 also 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 reasons⁶³ and a suitable compensation strategy exists;”

Further to this, paragraph 174 of the NPPF states the following: “Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by: minimising



impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures". Where a proposal involves the loss of irreplaceable habitats, such as veteran trees, net gains for biodiversity cannot possibly be achieved.

Highways England's Biodiversity Action Plan (2015) outlines key environmental goals for minimising environmental impact: *"Biodiversity is entrenched within the Government's Road Investment Strategy and Highways England's Strategic Business Plan. In particular, the Road Investment Strategy states that by 2020, the company must deliver no net loss of biodiversity and that by 2040 it must deliver a net gain in biodiversity."*

Impacts to Ancient Woodland

Whilst the Trust acknowledges that Ullen Wood is sited adjacent to the existing A436, the proposed new A436 link road will be sited within close proximity to this ancient woodland site. Natural England has identified the impacts of development on ancient woodland within their standing advice. This guidance should be considered as Natural England's position with regards to development impacting ancient woodland:

"Nearby development can also have an indirect impact on ancient woodland or veteran trees and the species they support. These can include:

- *breaking up or destroying connections between woodlands and veteran trees*
- *reducing the amount of semi-natural habitats next to ancient woodland and other habitats*
- *increasing the amount of pollution, including dust*
- *increasing disturbance to wildlife from additional traffic and visitors*
- *increasing light pollution*
- *increasing damaging activities like fly-tipping and the impact of domestic pets changing the landscape character of the area"*

Where ancient woods are in close proximity to a new road, there can be long-term impacts of increased noise and light pollution from traffic, dust pollution during both the construction and operational phases of the road, and fragmentation of habitats from each other, including ancient woodland from other areas of semi-natural habitat; all of which will significantly impact on the woodland and likely result in the loss of local biodiversity. The woodland will also be subject to increased nitrogen oxide emissions from vehicles, which can change the character of woodland vegetation (in terms of species composition) through altering nutrient conditions.³

Impacts to ancient/veteran trees

Two veteran trees (T57 and T126) have been identified for removal within the Arboricultural Impact Assessment (AIA) [APP-353] to facilitate the construction of the new A417 carriageway. T122 is a notable Wych Elm (ATI no: 196853) which is also sited within the proposed construction compound.

Five veteran trees (T127, T157, T159, T172 and ATI tree 196380 sited within H8) are likely to be subject to root encroachment or damage from their proximity to the scheme. A notable Orchard Apple is also located within H8. In addition, one ancient and one veteran tree (ATI

³ Sheate, W. R. & Taylor, R. M. (1990) The effect of motorway development on adjacent woodland. *Journal of Environmental Management*, 31, pp. 261-267

nos: 143975 and 143988) are located within the path of the proposed highways drainage area, which is likely to result in adverse hydrological impacts from the change in both water quantity and quality.

It is **essential** that no trees displaying ancient/veteran characteristics are lost as part of the development. Any loss of veteran trees would be highly deleterious to the wider environment of veteran trees within close proximity, which may harbour rare and important species.

Where veteran trees are located adjacent to the existing road network, it is crucial that care is taken to ensure no adverse impact occurs from the upgrade works proposed.

Mitigation

It is important that for any offline construction bringing new road infrastructure within proximity to ancient woodland areas, appropriate buffer zones are considered and implemented. Natural England's standing advice for ancient woodland, states:

"Mitigation measures will depend on the development but could include:

- *improving the condition of the woodland*
- *putting up screening barriers to protect woodland or ancient and veteran trees from dust and pollution*
- *noise or light reduction measures*
- *protecting ancient and veteran trees by designing open space around them*
- *identifying and protecting trees that could become ancient and veteran trees in the future*
- *rerouting footpaths*
- *removing invasive species*
- ***buffer zones***

As such, we consider that the proposed A436 link road should be re-configured to ensure that a **50m buffer zone** can be provided to Ullen Wood. This is to alleviate impacts such as dust, noise and light pollution, run-off containing pollutants, as well as to avoid damage to tree roots. This is backed up by Natural England's standing advice which states that *"you should have a buffer zone of at least 15 metres to avoid root damage. Where assessment shows other impacts are likely to extend beyond this distance, you're likely to need a larger buffer zone. For example, the effect of air pollution from development that results in a significant increase in traffic."*

This 50m buffer zone should be kept free of development unless the proposed works would aid in further alleviating impacts on the ancient woodland, i.e., in the form of barriers, fencing, bunds or embankments. In the case of the aforementioned features, it is important that such works remain 15m away from the ancient woodland, not only to prevent impacts on the root systems of the trees that make up the woodland edge, but also to prevent other indirect impacts associated with construction works. To this end, we recommend that the buffer zone is planted prior to construction, to create a phased habitat to the ancient woodland that absorbs the indirect impacts occurring during the construction and operational phase.

Furthermore, we also have concerns with regards to potential nitrogen deposition at Ullen Wood. The Trust is of the opinion that all developments should ensure that the process

contribution of ammonia/nitrogen does not exceed 1% of the critical level and load. The applicant should therefore seek to model the distance that the road would need to be located to achieve insignificant process contributions on Ullen Wood.

Ancient/veteran trees

Where veteran trees are to be lost the only appropriate form of mitigation is total avoidance followed by the provision of a sufficient buffer zone.

Trees are susceptible to change caused by construction/development activity. As outlined in *Trees in relation to design, demolition and construction, BS 5837:2012*, the British Standard for ensuring development works in harmony with trees, construction work often exerts pressures on existing trees, as do changes in their immediate environment following construction. Root systems, stems and canopies, all need allowance for future movement and growth, and should be taken into account in all proposed works on the scheme through the incorporation of the measures outlined in the British Standard.

However, the standing advice states: *“a buffer zone around an ancient or veteran tree should be at least 15 times larger than the diameter of the tree. The buffer zone should be 5m from the edge of the tree’s canopy if that area is larger than 15 times the tree’s diameter.”* The Trust requests that all ancient, veteran and notable trees along the route are retained and afforded an appropriate root protection area as outlined in the standing advice.

Conclusion

In summary, whilst ancient woods and trees will be affected by loss and detrimental impact to facilitate the scheme, the Trust will remain **strongly opposed** to the proposed project and considers that the scheme goes against national planning policy designed to protect against the loss and deterioration of irreplaceable habitats.

We hope our comments are of use to you, but 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 sincerely,

Nicole Hillier
Campaigner – Woods under Threat