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

25<sup>th</sup> June 2019

Dear Sir/Madam,

**Reference: West Midlands Interchange Representation**

As the UK's leading woodland conservation charity, the Trust aims to protect native woods, trees and their wildlife for the future. 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.

Natural England's Standing Advice on veteran 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... A veteran tree may not be very old, but it has decay features, such as branch death and hollowing. These features contribute to its biodiversity, cultural and heritage value.*"

The proposed development will result in impact to five veteran oak trees (T153, T159, T175, T178 and T279) either through direct loss of specimens in order to facilitate construction or through damage to the root systems via encroachment of root protection areas (RPA). It is essential that no trees displaying ancient/veteran characteristics are lost or damaged as part of the project. 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.

**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 ancient or veteran trees) should be refused, unless there are wholly exceptional reasons<sup>58</sup> 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**

Due to the significant concentration of trees displaying veteran characteristics in the area, the veteran trees likely to be lost are providing key habitat for the often rare species that are associated with decaying wood habitat, aging bark and old root systems, such as saproxylic invertebrates and certain species of bats and birds. The larger the concentration of old trees in an area and the longer they have been present on site, the richer the variety of species you will find among them.

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.

The Trust notes within the arboricultural impact assessment that the applicants are considering translocation of the veteran trees outlined for removal. Translocation should only be considered as a last resort solution in an attempt to save trees which are otherwise approved to be felled. This method should not be considered as a viable alternative to the protection, management and retention of these trees in their original location. Translocation of veteran trees is a highly risky method that has a very low chance of ensuring the continued survival of such trees – it is a process much more suited to young trees.

### **Conclusion**

In summary, unless all trees displaying veteran characteristics are retained and adequately protected with a RPA in line with Natural England’s Standing Advice of 15 times the diameter (or 5m beyond the canopy if that’s greater), the Trust will remain strongly **opposed** to the proposed project and considers the scheme in direct contravention of national planning policy due to 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