



THE WOODLAND, FLORA & FAUNA GROUP

Working for local countryside & wildlife

Report on land north of Highfield Drive relating to Planning Application 11/01391/OUT

The parish biodiversity study undertaken by The Woodland, Flora & Fauna Group surveyors in 2005 indicated that all hedgerows were species rich (ancient hedgerows) containing up to 10 hedgerow species. These therefore are of significant value in their own right and as habitat for wildlife.

The UK Biodiversity Action Plan Tranches 1 & 2 Habitat Action Plan defines ancient hedgerows as follows:-

'Ancient hedgerows, which tend to be those which support the greatest diversity of plants and animals, may be defined as those which were in existence before the Enclosure Acts, passed mainly between 1720 and 1840 in Britain and from the mid seventeenth century in Ireland. Species-rich hedgerows may be taken as those which contain 5 or more native woody species on average in a 30 metre length, or 4 or more in northern England, upland Wales and Scotland.

Hedges which contain fewer woody species but a rich basal flora of herbaceous plants should also be included but practical criteria for identifying them have yet to be agreed. Many of the thin straight hawthorn hedges which characterise later parliamentary enclosures, as well as most hedges which consist mainly of beech, privet or yew or non-native trees, are excluded. Recently planted species-rich hedges are included.

Hedges which consist only of an earth or stone bank or wall are not covered in this action plan, which is limited to boundary lines of trees or shrubs. Where such lines of trees or shrubs are associated with features such as banks, ditches, trees or verges, these features are considered to form part of the hedgerow.

It is recognised that hedges are important not just for biodiversity, but also for farming, landscape, cultural and archaeological reasons.

Hedgerows are important habitats in their own right. They are a primary habitat for at least 47 extant species of conservation concern in the UK, including 13 globally threatened or rapidly declining ones, more than for most other key habitats. They are especially important for butterflies and moths, farmland birds, bats and dormice. Indeed, hedgerows are the most significant wildlife habitat over large stretches of lowland UK and are essential refuge for a great many woodland and

farmland plants and animals. Over 600 plant species (including some endemic species such as a whitebeam Sorbus devoniensis), 1500 insects, 65 birds and 20 mammals have been recorded at some time living or feeding in hedgerows.

Hedgerows may also act as wildlife corridors for many species, including reptiles and amphibians, allowing dispersal and movement between other habitats, although this is difficult to prove conclusively.

Hedgerows adjacent to roads, green lanes, tracks and wooded ground tend to be particularly species-rich'.

The southern hedge is the richest and together with the line of trees is of great value to the bat population we know are regularly witnessed in that area. The hedgerow and the adjacent trees attract a great variety of insects which bats prey on and they utilise trees and hedgerows as navigational landmarks for their nocturnal flight path. Trees and hedges provide linear features which create a corridor for bats to commute from one area of countryside to another, such as from their roost site to new foraging grounds. We know from local sightings that this strip of hedgerow and trees provide such a directional flight path from the Millennium Garden area to the Belmont Lane trees and beyond.

Even though the hedgerow/trees are being retained, the close proximity of the proposed housing could have an adverse effect on this. The street lighting could also have an impact on these routes as scientific biological studies have shown that lighting from street lights reduces bat activity dramatically and delays the onset of commuting behaviour.

The study results demonstrated that light pollution could have a significant negative impact on the selection of flight path routes for bats and that such anthropogenic disturbance is a major cause of worldwide declines in biodiversity. The Woodland, Flora & Fauna Group have planned and are currently installing bat roosting boxes to accommodate these bats in the Millennium Garden and on route near Belmont Lane. The boxes being an artificial substitute for the lack of natural sites remaining to sustain populations of bat species.

The 2005 biodiversity study also noted badger droppings although no setts were discovered. It would indicate that development of this site would further reduce of the natural area available to them to feed and travel across in search of other food locations.

Generally Hurstpierpoint & Sayers Common Parish countryside and wildlife has been monitored, enhanced and protected by numerous initiatives by The Woodland, Flora & Fauna Group. SNCI conservation and parish tree planting initiatives are being continuously pursued to enrich our local countryside. 40 owl nesting boxes have been installed to protect barn and tawny owls across the parish and scores of bat nesting and hibernation boxes have mounted in parish trees and woodlands. Each box inhabitant requires a suitable surrounding natural habitat to sustain them. Barn Owls in particular need a territory of 2 km radius of potential hunting ground around a nesting site. All artificial nesting sites have been located to meet this criterion with great success.

Open areas of countryside such as the one identified in this planning application form part of this territory and are vital in providing the natural habitat necessary for wildlife to freely roam and hunt for food. It is therefore an issue of considerable concern when a further reduction in our already diminished parish countryside is proposed.

The continuous erosion by man of natural habitat is the prime cause of the dramatic decline in wildlife species worldwide and one that must be addressed.

Submitted by Michael Nailard. Chairman of The Woodland, Flora & Fauna Group. June 2011

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