

From: Marie Jones
Sent: 09 October 2019 07:28
To: Samantha Taylor
Subject: Planning Objection - 19/01705/OUT

Dear Samantha,

I object to the planning application 19/01705/OUT for the following reasons:

Section 4.2 of the Ecology report is inaccurate as it states that there are no designated sites of ecological interest in the local area. The adjacent Slade has two non-statutory designations as a Local Nature Reserve, a District Wildlife Site and is close to meeting Local Wildlife Site criteria. Whilst these designations are relatively recent, the site has been of considerable educational and ecological value to the local area since the early 1970s. Many local school children have benefited from field trips to The Slade over the past 50 years and this will continue into the future with regular use by Bloxham Primary School and Warriner School's "Wild About Bloxham" club. TVERC surveyed the site in 2015 and found 107 species of flowering plant. During the 1980s the site was managed by Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust who recorded 70 bird species, 148 flowering plants, 22 butterflies, 23 moths, 3 dragonflies, 8 bumblebees, 12 mammals and 17 fungi. The biodiversity within The Slade is extraordinarily high for such a small site and provides incredible value above and beyond a local amenity for recreation.

I also dispute the comments made in section 4.3 of the Ecology report. Whilst the report acknowledges that there will be increased visitor pressure on The Slade LNR, the level is extremely underestimated. I believe the increase in visitors will be enormous. The reason for this is the dramatic reduction of the walking distance from a road. Current access to the nature reserve necessitates a walk of over 300m from the nearest parking opportunity. We have found that this distance is enough to deter a heavy visitor presence. Visitors tend to be people who purposefully go out of their way to travel to the nature reserve to enjoy the wildlife, peace and tranquillity that it currently offers. We have previously suffered from occasional acts of anti-social or destructive behaviour such as litter, fires and camping but as they have been few and far between, the habitats have been able to cope with the current level of visitors. This proposed housing development could potentially provide vehicle access within a few metres of the nature reserve entrance. This will make it much easier for visitors to carry picnics, camping equipment, BBQs etc. and this intensified level of use cannot be sustained by these fragile habitats.

Whilst the Parish Council have welcomed and encouraged local people to discover The Slade, it has not advertised the reserve widely, and recognises the fragility of the wetland habitat in this small and diverse reserve. According to a Natural England report (NECR012, 2009), "the effects of trampling is greater on wet soils".

The reserve is managed by a group of local volunteers who monitor the habitat damage from trampling and make adjustments to the pathways accordingly. The preservation of the biodiversity within The Slade is taken very seriously by this local group. Many hours have been spent maintaining the pathways and constructing boardwalks and bridges to ensure that visitors keep to the pathways.

Two of the habitats within The Slade (Lowland fen and wet woodland) are valued habitats in Oxfordshire and priority habitats in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan and this is alluded to in section 4.4 of the Ecology report:

“Proposals should ensure that the current hydrological regime of the local area is maintained to ensure that there is no change to the hydrology of the local nature conservation sites as some of these are designated due to wet grassland compartments.”

It is absolutely imperative that the hydrology is not affected by the development as The Slade is a great example of a wetland habitat which supports a huge number of invertebrates.

The habitat section of the Ecology report (4.4 again) recommends a buffer zone. I do not think that the buffer zone is large enough. Should the development go ahead there should be a planning condition to ensure that no buildings or public roads are built to the west of Hedgerow H1. This hedgerow has a HEGS grading of 2 and should be preserved. The entire westerly field should be managed as a wet meadow habitat and non-intensive grazing with livestock at certain times of the year would increase the biodiversity of this area.

The development alone will decrease the surrounding green countryside that helps the reserve support its many species. The reserve itself is very small and it relies on the surrounding countryside to provide valuable feeding resources. Bats use the area to forage and buzzards hunt in the surrounding fields. Our landscape is already fragmented and to develop 95 houses on the reserve's doorstep will increase human disturbance physically, light the area at night and create more noise. This cannot be acceptable.

On a separate note, Bloxham Primary School is fantastic and I am tremendously concerned that the school would be forced to expand. It is already a large school compared to others in the area but it still manages to hold on to a lovely village feel and community familiarity. I fear that if it was forced to expand the pupils and staff will suffer as it will be impossible to maintain the friendly atmosphere in which my two children have enjoyed learning.

Should the planning permission ever be granted, the following conditions must be insisted upon:

- The Parish council should be able to authorise the management plan for the open space adjacent to The Slade to ensure that it does not compromise the biodiversity and seclusion of the nature reserve.
- The lighting recommendations in the Ecology report should be written as conditions and strictly adhered to.
- All the recommendations made by the Ecology report referring to bat tubes in buildings, boxes on trees, sustainable drainage, wildlife ponds should be incorporated into the planning permission as conditions.
- Hedgerow H1 should not be compromised. No houses should be built to the west of this hedgerow.
- All houses should be built with swift bricks incorporated.
- The buffer zone should be in place and respected at the start of the build process.

Marie Jones

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Voluntary Warden of The Slade Local Nature Reserve