

8 week date	Application No.	Date of meeting	Report No.
19.05.06	GR/2006/0250	17.05.06	5

Jeskyns Farm, Henhurst Road/ Jeskyns Road, Cobham

Circular 18/84 consultation in respect of provision of recreational infrastructure involving new highway access and car parking; picnic area; ponds and wetland areas and access for pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders in connection with a proposed community woodland and greenspace.

The Forestry Commission.

Recommendation:

To be set out in a supplementary report

1. Site Description

Jeskyns Farm is located to the south of the A2 and Channel Tunnel Rail Link and west of Cobham Village and comprises an area of 147 hectares of agricultural land.

The site comprises three blocks of land – the largest is immediately south of the CTRL and east of Henhurst Road and extends south to Jeskyns Road wrapping around Owletts, a National Trust property and extending east towards Battle Street, and Cobham and Ashenbank Wood; the smallest block of land is a parcel of the land to the west of Henhurst Road; the third block of land is on the south side of Jeskyns Road and extending south towards Round Street.

The land is gently undulating and is of very high quality agricultural land. The Agricultural Land Classification Map shows the whole of Jeskyns Farm as Grade 1 land within an area of mixed grade 1 and grade 2 land but more detailed survey of the agricultural land quality undertaken by the applicants shows that nearly all of the land is within the 'best and most versatile category' (grades 1 to 3a) but the majority of the land is grade 2 with 16 per cent of the land being grade 1.

The site currently comprises open arable land with few features other than some mature hedgerows and occasional solitary mature trees. Historically the land was used for agriculture with orchards and some woodland cover. Hops were grown over the site up until the 1960's. The last orchards were removed in the mid 1970's and subsequently woodland (at Court Wood) was cleared.

There are no water bodies, ponds, rivers or streams within or adjacent to the site.

The land is crossed by existing public footpaths and byways (which are open to all traffic). These are footpaths NS 177, 177A and 187 and byways NS 311 and 195. There are some other public footpaths just beyond the perimeter of the site.

The existing rural roads adjoining the site – Henhurst Road and Jeskyns Road are typical rural carriageways allowing two-way movement of traffic but are winding and with restricted forward visibility in places. Two other rural roads that adjoin the site on the other hand – Dabbs Place Road and Round Street are more single carriageway width with passing places.

There are some overhead electricity lines crossing the site.

2. Planning History

Planning permission was given for a new vehicular access onto the east side of Henhurst Road just south of the junction with Church Road in January 2005 for access for farm vehicles.

There were consents in the 1950's and 1960's for overhead electricity lines in the southern part of the site.

3. Proposal

These proposals for recreational infrastructure, highway access and car parking to create a community woodland and greenspace at Jeskyns Farm are not submitted as a planning application. They are submitted by the Forestry Commission as a consultation in accordance with,

- Part IV of Government Circular No 18/84:(Crown Land and Crown Development) and
- Part 7 of Schedule 2 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995 – prior approval procedures.

This is because the Forestry Commission as a Government Department is exempt from the need to apply for planning permission and also the nature of the development (in part for afforestation) is in any event “permitted development” not requiring planning permission.

The proposals are in essence to provide public access to the land which is to be created as a community woodland and greenspace although not dissimilar to a country park.

The site is proposed to be divided into five key areas which are:

- Jeskyns Wood – a substantial broadleaf wooded area designed for recreation and access that will enhance and extend the woodland habitat along the A2 transport corridor. The majority of the recreational facilities (car park, circular trails and furniture) will be located in this part of the site on the east side of Henhurst Road close to the junction with Church Road.
- Jeskyns Glades – an open area of wildflower meadows with occasional pockets of planting and some areas reserved for natural woodland encroachment around the margin
- Jeskyns Meadows – an area of grazed meadows which protects archaeological interests, retains open space around Cobham and allows open views across the site

- Jeskyns Orchards – informal blocks of traditional orchard planting for amenity use interspersed with wildflower meadows with paths passing through
- Jeskyns Grove – an open area with informal woodland and orchard planting giving structure to a wildflower meadow landscape

Descriptions of elements within the scheme are provided below:

- Access and parking - an approximately fifty space car park (open from dawn to dusk) is proposed in the north west corner of the site adjacent to Henhurst Road
- Overflow facilities would also be provided in this location
- Six new access points to the site are proposed
- Pathways – all existing pathways and public rights of way are to be retained. Four additional types of routes are proposed with the purpose of providing access for different user groups which are:
 - All-ability trails and surfaces
 - Cross-country path
 - Grass rides
 - Access for maintenance
- Furniture and signage - perches, bench perches, benches and picnic tables will be located throughout the site with a greater concentration in the north-west of the site nearby the car park. Three benches will be designed with the community as art projects and will be placed in key locations. There will be no lighting on the site.
- Planting – the landscape within the site is to include eight categories of proposed planting:
 - Orchards (apple, plum, cherry, walnut and hazelnut)
 - Broadleaf, deciduous woodlands (oak, ash and sweet chestnut)
 - Shrubs (hawthorn, dog rose, blackthorn, wild cherry and holly)
 - Wildflower meadows
 - Grass mixes
 - Coppices (sweet chestnut and hazel)
 - Hedgerows (predominantly hawthorn and blackthorn)
 - Pond planting
- Implementation works – the proposed programme for implementation is:
 - Hardworks (paths, car park, signs etc) – Summer 2006
 - Seeding – Autumn 2006
 - Planting – Autumn 2006/Winter 2007
 - Project completion by end March 2007

- Under normal circumstances, implementation operations are likely to take place from dawn until dusk between Monday and Friday. Under exceptional circumstances, additional work may be required outside these hours
- A temporary site access off Henhurst Road is proposed between Henhurst Cottages and the A2 junction. Storage of site materials will also be predominantly in this area
- Ground preparation works will be kept to a minimum but where soil plough plans exist, it is proposed that this broken to a depth of 40cm to break the plough plan. There is no contaminated land on site and all soil will be kept on site.

The application includes design plans of the recreational infrastructure and a general layout of the scheme. An Environmental Statement (ES), including a non-technical summary has also been submitted to provide further background information, although this does not form part of the circular 18/84 consultation. According to the applicants the ES demonstrates that the proposed scheme will generally have a beneficial or neutral effect upon nature conservation, biodiversity, landscape and quality of life for the surrounding population, particularly beyond the implementation phase.

4. Development Plan

Strategic and local planning policies relevant to the site are set out in

- The approved Kent Structure Plan (KSP) 1996
- The emerging Kent and Medway Structure Plan (KMSP), Deposit Plan September 2003
- The approved Gravesham Local Plan First Review (GLP1) 1994
- The Gravesham Local Plan Second Review (GLP2) Deposit Version 2000, adopted for the purposes of development control

In general policy terms the whole of the site in all the development plan documents is shown to be within the Metropolitan Green Belt and apart from the smaller block of land on the west side of Henhurst Road most of the site is within the North Downs Special Landscape Area.

The eastern part of the main block of land is within the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding National Beauty. The site is within an area of special significance for agriculture in the adopted Gravesham Local Plan First Review although that particular area based notation was not included in the adopted Kent Structure Plan but it is within an area shown to be best and most versatile agricultural land.

The site adjoins to the east a site of Special Scientific Interest (Shorne and Ashenbank Woods) and to the south and east adjoins The Cobham Village Conservation Area. There are a number of statutory listed buildings adjoining the site.

The relevant policies and policy considerations are as follows:-

General Countryside

Policy ENV1 (KSP)
Policy E1 (KMSP)
Policy C0 (GLP1)

These policies give protection to the countryside in general and to ensure any development maintains and enhances the countryside.

Green Belt

Policy MGB3 (KSP)
Policy SS9 (KMSP)
Policy GB2 (GLP1)
Policy RA2 (GLP2)

Within the Green Belt there is a general presumption against inappropriate development unless it is amongst other things for agriculture and forestry or essential facilities for outdoor recreation which preserve the openness of the Green Belt.

Special Landscape Area

Policy ENV4 (KSP)
Policy E5 (KMSP)
Policy C4 (GLP1)
Policy NE2 (GLP2)

Long term protection is given to the landscape over other planning considerations.

Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Policy ENV3 (KSP)
Policy E4 (KMSP)
Policy C3 (GLP1)
Policy NE1 (GLP2)

The primary objective of these policies is to protect and enhance landscape character and natural beauty. Proposals should make a positive contribution to the environment and a high standard of design and careful siting of buildings are expected.

Agriculture

Policy ED6 (KSP)
Policy FP8 (KMSP)
Policies C1 and C2 (GLP1)
Policy NE14 (GLP2)

These policies give long term protection to best and most versatile agricultural land unless there is an overriding need for development and no alternative site on land of poorer quality is available.

Landscape and Nature Conservation

Policy ENV2 (KSP)
Policy E3 (KMSP)
Policy C6 (GLP1)
Policies NE11 and NE12 (GLP2)

These policies give protection and enhancement to landscape and wildlife habitats.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

Policy ENV5 (KSP)
Policy E6 (KMSP)
Policy C7 (GLP1)
Policy NE9 (GLP1)

Development will not be permitted where they would directly or indirectly affect the scientific nature or conservation value of Sites of Special Scientific Interest or other designated sites.

Trees, Woodland and Hedgerows

Policy ENV7 (KSP)
Policy E9 (KMSP)
Policy TC10 (GLP1)
Policy NE5 (GLP2)

These policies seek to maintain tree cover and hedgerow network and to encourage the creation of new woodland and new habitats at appropriate locations.

Rural Lanes

Policy ENV13 (KSP)
Policy E14 (KMSP)
Policy NE8 (GLP2)

Ancient rural lanes of landscape, amenity, nature conservation, historic or archaeological importance are given protection and enhancement by these policies.

Conservation Areas

Policy ENV17 (KSP)
Policy QL7 (KMSP)
Policy TC3 (GLP1)
Policy BE4 (GLP2)

Development within or adjacent to conservation areas that would harm the character will not normally be permitted.

Other Policies

There are also general policies in the various plan documents relating to listed buildings, archaeological sites, leisure and tourism.

Community Forests and Woodlands

Proposals for Community Forests and Woodlands are considered in policy ENV8 of the approved Kent Structure Plan. The preamble to the policy states:-

“National forestry policy now places greater emphasis on the social and environmental benefits to be gained in terms of achieving improvements for the landscape, nature conservation and informal countryside recreation. The Government, through the Countryside Commission and Forestry Authority, is promoting the concept of community forests to provide these benefits. Such forests, especially of native species, can have a value in enhancing the landscape, creating recreation opportunities, and boosting the local economy. Care needs to be taken that existing wildlife habitats, such as grasslands of ecological value and landscape character, are protected. The scope for community forests and woodlands and their value to communities will be greatest adjoining Kent’s main conurbations and larger towns, particularly associated with significant new urban development in urban fringe locations, and where they could help to restore areas of damaged land. Where potential for community woodland sites is confirmed, it will be appropriate to include proposals for these in local plans, and support applications for the Forestry Authority Woodland Grant Scheme community woodland supplement. (More details of how the scheme is being applied in North Kent are to be found in the Forestry Authority’s publication “Community Woodlands for North Kent”.)

Policy ENV8 provides the strategic framework for the development of community forests and woodlands, associated with damaged land and/or major urban development, in Thames Gateway and at Ashford. At other appropriate locations in the county, smaller community woodland planting (such as those proposed at Thanet, or in the former East Kent Coalfield) will be encouraged where the larger scale of forest planting may be inappropriate.”

The policy states:

Policy ENV8:

The potential for community forests or community woodland sites will be investigated and where appropriate pursued through the local plan process in Thames Gateway, at Ashford, and at other appropriate locations

There is a similar policy in the Kent and Medway Structure Plan as Policy E10.

Government Planning Guidance

National planning advice on development in the countryside is set out in PPG2 (Green Belts) and PPS7 (Sustainable development in rural areas). PPG2 advises that development is not inappropriate if it is for agriculture or forestry or essential facilities for outdoor sport and recreation which preserve the openness of the green belt. Annex A (Land Management) advises that Local Authorities can assist landowners in maintaining and improving their land by working together with them, with voluntary organisations and with statutory bodies such as the Forestry Commission. The aim should be to enhance the countryside especially those areas of land within the Green Belt or adjacent to it which are suffering from disuse or neglect.

PPS7 advises that the Government's forestry policy has two main aims – the sustainable management of existing woodlands and forests and a continued expansion of woodland area to provide more benefits for society and the environment.

Regional Planning Advice

The South East Plan Core Document March 2006, draft for submission to the Government, includes regional policy for Green Initiatives (policy KTG10) for the Kent Thames Gateway

5. Reason for Report

Proposals are of major public interest and at the discretion of the Director (Planning and Regeneration).

6. Consultations and Publicity

Consultations

Conservation Officer, Gravesham Borough Council

Views awaited

Head of Public Health and Community Well Being - Leisure

Views awaited

Head of Regulatory Services – Environmental Health

No comments.

Kent Highways

Views awaited

Head of Environment and Waste, Kent County Council

The full response of KCC is appended to this report but the main points they make are as follows:-

This purchase by the Forestry Commission has created a great opportunity to increase the land available for public access and informal recreation linked to adjacent sites, enhance the landscape and improve biodiversity.

Links with surrounding area

The future development and management of Jeskyns Farm needs to relate to and connect with the surrounding countryside in order for it to be a beneficial site for people and wildlife. It should link in landscape terms, for example by allowing natural regeneration in the eastern edge of the site, allowing the creation of woodland in a more appropriate place and facilitate the extension of an already established woodland. It should link in respect of visitor movement between sites and be

considered in the context of the nearby land also available to the public for informal recreation at Shorne Woods Country Park, Ashenbank, Cobham, Ranscombe Farm.

Access

In general terms KCC are happy with the access proposals. There would be benefits to working with adjacent site owners (as appropriate), to create a series of quality waymarked trails that link other areas of open space. It should be possible to accommodate walkers, cyclists and horse riders with a range of routes.

Biodiversity

The design options that have been explored and presented in the Environmental Statement have overlooked potentially more beneficial options.

Habitats shown by the Kent Landscape Information System as having the potential for establishment on the Jeskyns Farm site are calcareous grassland, acid grassland and neutral grassland. These are priority habitats in the UK and Kent BAP (listed as Lowland Calcareous Grassland, Lowland Dry Acid Grassland and Lowland meadows). Other UK and Kent BAP priority habitats applicable to this site include Ancient and/or Species-rich Hedgerows, Cereal Field Margins and Lowland Wood Pasture and Parkland. The greatest benefit to biodiversity would be achieved if the design of the site focused on these habitats.

Woodland and orchards are not a priority for this site as they are less threatened by development in this area than the other BAP habitats. The Kent Wildlife Trust has shown that 33% of the species rich neutral grassland in the Thames Gateway area will be impacted upon by development, more than 8% of Kent's total. Some orchard planting on site and natural regeneration of woodland in the area adjacent to Ashenbank Wood would be acceptable but not to the extent of the current design. Any planting that occurs on site should comprise native species of local provenance.

Indigenous broadleaved woodland creation is the focus of Policy E9 in the Kent and Medway Structure Plan (KMSP), but it states that it should be focused in appropriate locations. For the reasons above, this location is not regarded as appropriate.

It is suggested that more attention be paid to the breeding bird survey in developing the design and management of the site. Significant biodiversity gains are possible if this site is a predominantly grassland and arable habitat with scrub and species rich hedgerows.

Education

The establishment of a mixed grassland and arable habitat at this site could have enormous potential for education with opportunities to demonstrate "best practice" in management of access and biodiversity. If the site were entered into the Environmental Stewardship Higher Level Scheme it could show links between landscape and food (the provision of local produce) giving great scope for educational activities with groups and general visitors to the site. With access designed into the scheme, information and interpretation could provide an insight into the management of the site and its benefit to the landscape, the local population and biodiversity.

Conclusion

KCC are keen to see the site developed in such a way that maximises opportunities for biodiversity, access provision and landscape enhancement. This would mean a design on a traditional agricultural landscape with grazed species rich neutral; grassland, arable fields, species rich hedgerows with small areas of natural woodland regeneration and orchard planting. Management should focus on biodiversity, public access and education. There is an opportunity to provide a showcase for agriculture rich in wildlife and incorporating well managed public access.

KCC Archaeology

Views awaited

KCC Country Parks

Views awaited

KCC Public Rights of Way

Views awaited

Cobham Parish Council

Views awaited

Shorne Parish Council

Views awaited

Environment Agency

The Environment Agency has no objection to the principle of the proposal and welcomes schemes which have a positive impact on the environment, but would comment as follows:-

Groundwater Protection

This site lies within Source Protection Zone 3 of a public water abstraction. A Source Protection Zone (SPZ) is the area over which recharge is captured by an abstraction borehole. SPZ's are designated by the Environment Agency and are delineated to protect potable water supplies against the polluting effects of human activity.

Public water supplies are therefore at risk from activities at the site and all precautions should be taken to avoid discharges and spillages to the ground both during construction and subsequent operation.

The Agency would wish to be consulted on the detailed design of the car park drainage, pond construction and any other works which involve extensive digging or drainage systems when they are available.

Whilst the EA appreciate receiving the information available to date, further information will be necessary in order for the EA to assess the schemes impact on the underlying major aquifer.

- The submitted drawings do not indicate how the ponds and lakes are to be constructed. For example, are they to discharge to ground or are they to be fully lined?
- No details have been submitted to indicate how surface water run-off from the formal and informal car parking areas is to be dealt with. This information should again be submitted to the EA for comment.
- It is noted that excavated material is to be reused on site. Whilst there is no objection to this, no material shall be deposited at the site other than clean, uncontaminated naturally occurring excavated material, brick and concrete rubble. This is to prevent pollution of the underlying aquifer and groundwater environment.

Biodiversity

According to the Environmental Statement there are no habitats or species present or proposed which fall under the remit of the Agency. The EA would however, advise that English Nature and the Kent Wildlife Trust should be consulted on this proposal if they have not already.

The Agency welcomes the inclusion of marsh areas with the pond on Jeskyns Farm. However the submitted plans unfortunately do not provide the detail that the EA require to advise fully for this project.

From the information supplied the EA would suggest that both the pond and marsh area should be fully lined with one consistent liner. This is also the case with the marshland area located across the track on drawing number JG15. The EA assume that the water that feeds this area is the adjacent pond. If this system is to be rain water fed then it can be lined separately.

The marshy areas will also need to be filled with appropriate substrate that will allow the absorption of water in the wetter months, be appropriate for the planting regime, and dry to an appropriate consistency in the summer months.

If any further advice is needed for these areas please contact a member of the biodiversity team who will be happy to discuss things further.

Kent Fire Brigade

Views awaited

Kent Police

Views awaited

Countryside Agency

Views awaited

English Nature

The application site lies close to the Shorne and Ashenbank Woods Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). As you are aware, where SSSIs are involved, Section 28G of the *Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981* (as amended) includes a duty on public bodies, to “*take reasonable steps, consistent with the proper exercise of the authority’s functions, to further conservation and enhancement of the flora, fauna or geological or physiographical features by reason of which the site is of special scientific interest*”. In addition, public bodies are required under the Act to give notice to English Nature before carrying out (S28H), or authorising others to carry out (S28I), any operation likely to damage any of the features by reason of which the site is of special scientific interest.

This letter represents English Nature’s formal consultation response under Section 28 of the *Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981* (as amended). On the basis of the information provided, this application would not appear to have implications for the SSSI. Therefore, **English Nature has no comment with regard to this issue, subject to the proposals being carried out in strict accordance with the terms of the application and the submitted plans.** However, should there be any modification or amendment to the application which may affect the SSSI, English Nature must be consulted.

On the whole, English Nature (EN) welcomes the range of measures that have been put in place for biodiversity enhancement and providing access for local people at Jeskyns Farm. However, EN would like to raise a number of general points which we feel are pertinent to the proposals. Given the strategic importance of this site in Kent Thames Gateway and the opportunities it provides for people and wildlife, English Nature is keen to ensure that the maximum benefit is derived from proposals for the site.

EN believe that it is most appropriate for the site as a whole to incorporate a range of habitat types, rather than being dominated by a single or limited number of habitats. Evidence gathered for the ES should provide a basis for design of the site and wherever possible, proposals should aim to retain areas of existing biodiversity value. Although EN are broadly in agreement with the balance of habitats detailed in the ES, EN feel that the site would benefit from the retention of a proportion of arable land. This part of Kent is of regional importance for scarce and rare arable weeds and populations of farmland bird species (including five UKBAP species) have been found to be breeding at Jeskyns Farm. Arable fields at Jeskyns Farm could be managed to encourage the establishment of arable weeds and appropriate management of arable land could also benefit farmland birds. Given the range of species groups and habitats that the site has the potential to support, and their relative conservation interest (particularly with regard to UK and Kent BAP/HAP targets), it is our view that the retention of arable land would best be achieved predominantly through a reduction in proposed woodland coverage across the site. The site offers an excellent opportunity to showcase the integration of biodiversity, recreation and access with farming.

The ES does not provide details of measures to secure adequate funding for the long-term management of the site. EN would advise that these measures are put in place as a priority in order that appropriate management of the site can be secured in perpetuity.

English Heritage

Views awaited

Highways Agency

Views awaited

British Telecom

Views awaited

British Gas

Views awaited

Transco

Views awaited

National Grid

Views awaited

Southern Water Services

Does not wish to comment.

Seeboard (EDF)

Views awaited

Union Railways

No comments.

Kent Wildlife Trust

A full response of Kent Wildlife Trust is appended to this report but the main points they make are as follows:-

Kent Wildlife Trust (KWT) has viewed with interest the development of proposals for Jeskyns Farm, and is grateful for the opportunity to comment on the Environmental Statement. The site's purchase by ODPM and subsequent adoption by the Forestry Commission demonstrate clearly the commitment of these bodies to environmental enhancement. However, the Trust has strong reservations about the detailed proposals, which we believe are not based on sound evidence nor on clear strategic thinking. KWT cannot support the plans put forward in the recently issued Environmental Statement, and would encourage an urgent and thorough review of the proposals.

KWT would suggest that:

- The landscape may be better enhanced by maintaining its open feel, rather than larger scale planting of woodland and scrub

- If the site is to be a managed and productive landscape, then it serves people better if it is a real productive landscape, rather than a country-park version of farmland countryside
- The site will only function well as a bridge to the countryside if it reflects, in its form and management, the countryside around it. If the urban fringe countryside of North Kent is to accommodate increased numbers of visitors from urban areas, then both the visitors and landowners will be served best if people have an opportunity to experience and learn about the farmed landscape in a 'safe' environment where they know they are welcome and where they will not risk damaging economic farmland.
- There is real potential to use the site not just to educate visitors but as a demonstration of effective and ecologically sound urban-fringe farming
- Retaining working land as part of the site would allow it to contribute directly to sustainable regeneration of the town, for example by growing local provenance wildflowers to provide seed for habitat creation and landscaping scheme in urban areas

Therefore, KWT would propose a different approach is taken to Jeskyns Farm. In KWT's vision, the site would include

- Extensive areas of carefully planned, grassland restoration to create species-rich neutral, acid or calcareous grassland habitats, as appropriate, over around two-thirds of the site.
- Up to one-third of the site retained as arable land (scattered across the site, to provide the mix of arable and permanent grassland, which is important for breeding farmland birds), which might also be used to grow wildflower seed in bulk.
- Restoration or creation of thick hedges with scattered trees
- Smaller areas of scrub and/or tree planting in field corners and edges
- Limited areas of woodland restoration (by natural regeneration) along the margin of Ashenbank Wood.

Dickens Country Protection Society

Views awaited

CABE

Views awaited

Woodlands Trust

The Woodlands Trust (WT) as owners of the majority of Ashenbank Wood to the east of Jeskyns Farm welcomes the ES for the proposed plan for Jeskyns Farm and supports the overall proposals put forward to provide a recreational facility within a woodland setting

Buffering ancient woodland:

One of WT's Corporate Objectives is to buffer ancient woodland sites and extend or expand them with new planting and or natural regeneration as WT have carried out at their Hucking Estate and are beginning to do so at Victory Wood.

WT therefore welcome this opportunity to buffer and extend Ashenbank Wood which is ancient woodland, through the use of natural regeneration. The fields of Jeskyns Farm which abut Ashenbank Wood were until FCE ownership intensively farmed arable areas, whose management had the potential to effect ground flora and the wider habitat within the Ashenbank Wood through spray drift. WT would suggest the following amendment:

- The area to be wooded adjacent to Ashenbank Wood should cover a larger area than is currently shown.
- To bolster the natural regeneration (which can't be guaranteed to be 100% successful) WT would like to see some advance planting of site native trees of irregular group size and shape, which could be planted through the community and the Woodland Trust's Tree For All Campaign (T4A) by visiting school children.
- The buffer need not necessarily be woodland but could also be other types of semi-natural habitat.

Landscape and Habitats

The extent to which the area is planted with trees should be dictated through landscape considerations to ensure that what is proposed fits the character of this area of North Kent. Other Stakeholders Groups would have more to say on this.

The proposal to plant more orchards and house part of the Brogdale collection will fit in really well and would be a useful added attraction for the public.

Other features WT would suggest should be addressed are:

- Connectivity of differing habitats perhaps by putting back some or all of the old field boundaries by planting species rich hedges. Some of the hedges could be traditionally kept and some left to grow wild to become small shaws.
- Concentrating the new woodland area and any other semi-natural habitats adjacent to Ashenbank Wood to provide a really effective buffer and extension to Ashenbank.
- Establishing grassland types which fit the need of local and national priority habitats.
- Grazing some of the field/meadow areas traditionally and others at low intensity so allowing part of the site to become colonized by scrub, perhaps in the area(s) nearest to the new woodland buffer near to Ashenbank Wood. The scrub habitat to be maintained as such within a mosaic of grassland by mechanical cutting or increased grazing pressure rather than let it develop into woodland.

- WT would welcome the existence of grazing animals which incidentally could also be used in Ashenbank Wood again, as this historically was largely managed as wood pasture.

Access:

As the ES demonstrates there is growing need to provide recreational facilities in the Thames Gateway are close to the urban conurbations of the Medway Towns. The Cobham and Ashenbank Management Scheme (CAMS) along with Shorne Wood Country Park and WT's own wood at Ashenbank are all contributing to the facilities in this area. The proposed development of Jeskyns Farm will add to and perhaps reduce the impact on the current facilities.

WT therefore welcome a proposal to construct a network of paths for different countryside users and to build a car park. WT's own car park at Ashenden Wood should also be considered as a point of entry into Jeskyns Farm with a developed pedestrian link to Jeskyns Farm. Ashenbank Wood is a pedestrian only access site due to its size and the nature of the path network, however the inclusion of horse routes at Jeskyns Farm is a vital facility here.

This part of North Kent is subjected to a continuous threat from 4x4's, motorbikes, quads and horses trying to access woodland and paths which they have no legal right to be on. Measures have already taken place at Jeskyns Farm to help keep users of Scotland Lane to this route through robust fencing and barriers which is to be applauded.

Ramblers Association

Views awaited

National Trust

Views awaited

Kent Downs AONB Unit

A full response of the Kent Downs AONB (KDA) unit is appended to this report but the main points they make are as follows:

KDA think that Jeskyns Farm could add considerably to the countryside recreational resource in an important growth area, and welcome and support its purchase. KDA also welcome the fact that ODPM investment has been used outside the growth area boundary as KDA think the countryside outside the specified growth area boundary if an important resource for the growth areas, and existing communities, providing a setting, place for managed recreation and the opportunity to renew the relationship between the town and countryside.

Clearly land purchase and management is an important part of what should be a wider strategy which meets the needs and wants of the new and existing communities.

Part of Jeskyns Farm lies within the Kent Downs AONB – it is all important to the setting of this nationally important landscape. KDA think that the characteristics of the AONB which makes this landscape valued should be an important consideration for

the future management of Jeskyns Farm and that a landscape character assessment basis should be used for the future landscape management of the site.

KDA know that a 'broadly agricultural future' may not be what was initially envisaged, nor is it what has emerged following the impact and early design stages, but KDA think it would have significant merits.

The Kent Downs AONB is a much valued landscape which is about 70% farmed and 25% woodland – this sort of split would be appropriate for Jeskyns Farm.

KDA believe that this approach should include arable agriculture as well as grassland and orchards, but managed in an exemplary form, strongly supporting landscape character, and managing in a way which supports farmland biodiversity. In practical terms this could support the farmer who is working at Ranscombe and resources could be shared meaning that grassland reversion and arable agriculture take place where the soil type makes it suitable to do so. This approach could also provide an income for the future management of the site. This approach is part of the 'bigger picture' which KDA believe Jeskyns Farm could support.

KDA understand that soils in Jeskyns Farm would support high quality, environmentally sustainable arable farming; this would support the defined landscape objectives for this area and be much more likely to fulfil priority Biodiversity Action Plan targets for farm species, such as arable field wild flowers and farmland birds. KDA would suggest that visitors to the site would be excited by dramatic flower rich arable margins and nesting skylarks as much as they would by the sort of wildflower grassland achievable on rich soils.

KDA's overall approach would be to recommend a design based on a landscape character approach but which would recognise other important issues such as access, biodiversity and the relationship with the views of local communities.

KDA are concerned that the design which has been proposed does not respond adequately to these important priorities and takes a country park approach which is, in KDA's view, not the best future for this area.

Richard Lloyd Hughes (Rural Planning Ltd)

Views awaited

Publicity

The proposals have been advertised on the site and in a local newspaper as development adjacent to a conservation area and adjacent to and affecting the setting of statutory listed buildings and under Article 8 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995.

The owners/occupier of 89 adjoining dwellings have been notified of the proposals.

The following representations have been received to date:-

A M Barker, Orchard Cottage, Round Street, Cobham

The Forestry Commission are planning to use a public footpath, which crosses his land, as an entrance to the proposed "Jeskyns Orchard" (Footpath NS185). Initially the Forestry Commission assured him verbally that there would be no access from Round Street so as to avoid any traffic and parking problems. They told him that the only entrance to the Jeskyns Farm project would be from a point close to the A2.

Since the Forestry Commission acquired this land people are parking in Round Street and using the footpath to gain access. The northern end of Round Street is a hamlet on a very narrow, single track country land with few passing places. These parked cars could cause an obstruction to emergency service vehicles, a situation which cannot be allowed to continue, and could worsen when the park is officially open.

The section of this footpath is already fenced, and he has requested that the continuation of the path where it turns at a right angle and runs along the western boundary of the Forestry Commission land, be similarly fenced. Stresses that this would in no way obstruct or interfere with the public footpath. This fencing would only prevent access to Forestry Commission land from this, the narrowest part of Round Street, and would, in effect, solve the parking problems. There are other entrances from both North and South Round Street and there is really no need for three entrances. However, there is a need to prevent nuisance parking.

Has written to the Forestry Commission expressing his concerns, but to date they have refused to fence the footpath, stating that they cannot deny the public access from a public right of way on their land. He has, however, pointed out that what they are actually planning is to give the public access to their park from a public footpath on land they do not own, i.e. his land. Questions the legality of this, but more importantly it is the cause of the nuisance parking in Round Street.

If the Forestry Commission do not fence this public footpath, then the only solution would seem to be to divert this path across their land on the footpath they are planning anyway, so that the entrance is from the northern end of "Jeskyns Orchard", instead of from this very narrow part of Round Street.

Also mentions that there is also nuisance parking at the northern of Round Street, where the Forestry Commission are planning an entrance for horses adjacent to Tollingtrough Green. People are regularly parking here in order to exercise their dogs on Forestry Commission land. Has pointed out to them that this is a junction of four roads – Round Street, Copthall Road, Church Road and Dabbs Place, and have suggested it would be safer for horse riders to gain access to their land via Dabbs Place, where there is seldom any traffic and where parking is impossible because of the narrowness of the lane. To date they have declined to amend their plans.

Dr R R Ellis and Mrs L Ellis, Jeskyns Court, Jeskyns Road, Cobham

Objects to the proposed plan, both as residents of Gravesham and as immediate neighbours to the community greenspace.

The land has been farmed for many centuries and to alter the landscape to the extent proposed by the Forestry Commission would fundamentally alter a traditional and productive area of green belt land in the Borough. They already enjoy excellent wooded areas in adjoining Ashenbank Wood, Shorne Country Park and Cobham Woods (which of course are currently being restored through the CAMS partnership). They do not disagree with the aims to make the area more accessible to walkers,

cyclists, etc. but would ask Gravesham Borough Council to consider the Forestry Commissions' plan in the context of the wider public space in the area. Asks would it not be more of an asset to the Borough if Jeskyns Farm was environmentally enhanced farmland which then connected into the adjoining wooded parkland thus providing a balanced mix of public open space?

As far as being residents living in middle of the proposed park, they have a number of concerns. The Forestry Commission have so far omitted putting forward proposals for the large farmyard complex at the centre of the park which adjoins their garden. Since there are 'no plans'. we and others are denied the opportunity to comment at this crucial time.

With regard to the design plans, they have the following concerns, which they hope Gravesham Borough Council will note. They fear there may be safety issues by excavating a large pond/lake. Believes the park will bring extra traffic along Henhurst Road and hope that Gravesham Borough Council/Kent County Council will not alter the village character of Cobham by widening roads and will also look at measures to calm the traffic. Hopes that the banks and verges of Henhurst Road and Jeskyns Road can be landscaped and that parking will not be allowed in the road or anywhere on the verges by members of the public wishing to avoid parking charges.

M J Booth, Stable Cottage, Scalers Hill, Cobham

Whilst the design plans look good has reservations about the ability of the Forestry Commission to deliver such a project and manage it successfully.

Has a number of concerns, namely the increase in the amount of unauthorised access and nuisance from motorbikes and 4x4's and the damage caused to byways, that Ashenbank Wood is a no go area for children and females and would be concerned if this happened to Jeskyns Farm, and that there is no long term plan for funding, maintenance and a warden for the area.

Would prefer to see a design with a greater emphasis on low intensity agriculture with a farmer as the warden and not a government body.

7. Director (Planning and Regeneration) Comments

The Forestry Commission purchased Jeskyns Farm in April 2005 as part of its commitment to improving public access to community woodland and with the support of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

The Forestry Commission gave a presentation to the Council's Planning and Sustainable Development Cabinet Advisory Panel on 13 July 2005. Cabinet also received a report on the approach the Borough Council would like to see the Forestry Commission taking towards Jeskyns Farm at its meeting on 18 July 2005.

At that meeting it was resolved that the Borough Council,

- (1) welcomes the opportunity provided by the purchase of Jeskyns Farm to build a network of projects with complementary aims, and urges the Forestry Commission to fully engage in this process;
- (2) on the basis of current information, feels that an approach based around the concept of a "traditional Kentish farm" provides a good starting point;

- (3) expects that the detailed design process will fully involve the local community, whilst taking account of the wider benefits;
- (4) raises various issues of concern that will need to be addressed in the environmental statement;
- (5) notes the opportunities to help access enhancements in the immediate area.

Subsequently the Forestry Commission undertook extensive public consultations.

The current proposals are stated to be based on the consultation exercise and that alternative options for the site were considered which included a higher proportion of woodland. However those options were not pursued as it was felt that they reduced the openness of the site, would obstruct views out of the site and would provide an insufficient variety of opportunities for recreation.

A number of the consultation responses received to date, notably from English Nature, Kent Wildlife Trust, Kent County Council and the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Unit, raise concerns over the design of the project in primarily ecological and landscape terms and suggest the proposals ought to have included a more agricultural approach. This would mean smaller fields and the inclusion of some crops, former orchards and grazing with livestock – i.e. a traditional Kentish Farm appropriate to the Cobham context and which would also include significant tree and hedge planting. This would set the site apart from the other countryside projects in the area and provide a valuable educational resource.

However what is being proposed is something like a conventional country park.

There are also concerns expressed by local residents on increased public access and parking and traffic concerns.

In view of the fact that there are still a large number of consultation and local resident responses awaited, any further responses and a recommendation will be set out in a supplementary report.

Consultation expiry date : 21.05.06

Recommendation

To be set out in a supplementary report.