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Dated: 26th May 2023

To Michael Meredith
Ecological Owlthorpe

Dear Michael

Thank you for your email which I received on 17th May and in the post on 22nd May.

I personally found it helpful that you found me at the Tree Fayre on 20th May which gave us an opportunity to discuss some of the matters that you raise in your letter in person. I hope you found it useful too.

I have now had the opportunity to read the links etc in your letter as I promised for my follow up response below.

In answer to your direct question in the letter.

No, I do not know of any link between the concerns about building on coal that you highlight (which is outside of our area of expertise) and the designation of sites C&D as local Wildlife Sites (in practice extending the existing Owlthorpe Fields LWS boundary to include these two sites). As I explained when we met, Owlthorpe Fields Action Group collected and commissioned up to date ecological data for sites C, D and E that were all under potential threat from development (site F was not at that time) and I supported the group to check if this data met the criteria for LWS designation - it did under the grasslands and broader LWS criteria. The LWS Panel (on which I represent SRWT) supported the proposal to include C&D in the Owlthorpe Fields LWS designation. This has been carried forward into the draft new Local Plan along with Local Green Space Designation that OAG applied for themselves. The Local Plan has not yet been adopted. I am afraid I have not seen recent (in the last 10 years) and site-specific ecological data for site F that could be put through the same LWS process to see if that would also qualify.

I understand your upset about the potentially negative impact on the nature trail and grassland grazing project from potential development in the Owlthorpe area.

As you know SCC have been both owners and managers of the site and are responsible also allocating different plots for development over the years - albeit different departments within SCC. I agree that including a site in a Higher Level Stewardship scheme whilst also allocating it for housing is questionable (this was the case for a while for Site C although not anymore). However, my understanding is that plot F, which was in HLS was not allocated for housing in the UDP at the same time.

As you know, it has now been put forward as a potential housing site in the new draft Local Plan. I do not have information about whether the HLS scheme was renewed/extended this spring or not (10 years after the scheme started ref: <https://magic.defra.gov.uk/magicmap.aspx>) - you would have to direct that enquiry to SCC Parks, Woodlands and Countryside Dept.

You said you did put in comments about the Plot F in the Sheffield Local Plan consultation - as I explained, this official route will be considered more than a petition - the SCC response to the consultation comments received will be in July so will all see what is said about the site and other sites then and if there are further opportunities for comment or not. Site allocations are based on evidence and so any responses also need to have supporting evidence (including ecological evidence)

If the site is to be considered for housing then when any application comes forward, an appropriate ecological surveys would need to be undertaken and a Biodiversity Net Gain of at least 10% would be required. There would be site-specific conditions in the Local Plan if it is allocated. Any proposals will be open to public consultation.

As I explained to you I do not know enough at the moment about the ecological value and condition of Plot F but this would be assessed and taken into account. Access including footpaths etc will also be considered, so I would hope this would include consideration of the heritage trail which I understand goes around the perimeter of the site (although as I explained I have not visited plot F and it is not terribly clear on the photo of the interpretation boards. We do not comment on highways traffic matters in planning applications

I hope this answers your questions from SRWT's point of view

Kind regards

Nicky

Dr Nicola Rivers, MCIEEM
Advocacy and Development Manager

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Advance notice of leave 29th May-5th June inclusive

Dr Nicola Rivers MCIEEM

(She/Her)

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