

Report to District Development Control Committee



**Epping Forest
District Council**

Date of meeting: 4 April 2011

Subject: Confirmation Of Tree Preservation Order EPF/119/10 –
Town Mead Playing Fields, Waltham Abbey

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Committee Secretary: S Hill Ext 4249

Recommendation:

That Tree Preservation Order 119/10 be confirmed without modification

Background

1. A planning application (EPF/2105/10) was received (and later withdrawn) for a driving range on part of the Town Mead Playing Fields. A further application (EPF/0046/11) has been submitted but is subject of current discussions between Officers and the Applicant and will come to the Committee at a later meeting. Both applications showed the removal of a woodland covering approximately 2 acres. This woodland borders Waltham Abbey Waste Disposal and Recycling Centre to the east, the embankment of the M25 to the south, and the sports grounds to the west and north.

2. The woodland is on a raised mound and is planted with, poplar, willow and ash. As a woodland they provide an important screen for the fields as a whole from the raised section of the M25, and also for the Recycling Centre. The playing fields are well used both for sport and dog walking, and as such these trees provide a key amenity feature within this open recreational area.

The Grounds of Objection

3. An objection has been received from the Architects dealing with the planning application. The reasons given are;

- (1) That the woodland is scrubby and is not aesthetically pleasing.
- (2) That, during the winter months, it does not offer an effective screen.
- (3) The mound on which the woodland stands is just a spoil heap left over from the construction of the M25 and was not intended to be permanent.
- (4) The whole area is unkempt, is used as a dumping ground and some of the trees are in poor health.
- (5) The current trees have no historical merit or amenity value, a new landscape scheme would have greater benefits than a TPO on trees which have no significance other than as a screen from a refuse site.

Additionally, on 21st February 2011, and too late to be included in the report before the Area Planning Sub Committee the Town Council wrote supporting the above points, and making additional points which were:

- (6) That the sports provision on Town Mead is part of the Council's pro-active stance that has led to it meeting standard for quality status for nearly 8 years; the sports provision is wide ranging with a considerable amount of investment in recent months.
- (7) That the park is well used by the public as an open space, for general recreation including dog walking and there are events scheduled there, the Town Councils see Town Mead as a sports hub for the town and that it is important to continue to improve what is on offer in terms of sport. The golf driving range, situated in the south east corner of the park will achieve that, as well as improving visual amenity at the entrance to the park.
- (8) The mound, trees, and the effects of the various anti social behaviours which are sheltered by the trees have a negative impact on visual amenity.
- (9) The current screen is of poor quality and does not achieve the purpose intended.

The Town Council therefore request that the Order be not confirmed so that the site can be developed to its full potential; in particular they believe that screening of the site can be easily achieved by alternative means.

The Director of Planning and Economic Development comments as follows:

4. The woodland is approximately 30 years old and consists of a mixture of fast-growing trees, clearly deliberately chosen for swift establishment and for their screening potential. They are chiefly willow and poplar, but with other native species, such as ash, and some under storey plants. There has been additional seeding into the plantation with elder and other shrubs.
5. An inspection of the site showed litter although no obvious evidence of the anti social behaviour that is reported to take place in the area although this is not disputed. What is clear is that some of the trees have not grown well. In particular the willows appear to be suffering from Bacterial Canker. However, the poplars and other trees are growing well and there is no reason to believe that they should not continue to do so. The artificial mound appears to have been designed to have raised the level of the planting closer to the level of the motorway and so to give greater screening from traffic.
6. From north to south the woodland is just over 100 metres in depth. It is slightly less in width, but with the amenity recycling site set into the south east corner. The total width of the Town Mead boundary with the M25 is around 380 metres, so that the woodland protects between a quarter and a third of the total boundary.
7. It is suggested that the woodland has several functions. It provided screening for the amenity site, but it is suggested much more importantly for the motorway, in terms of noise and visual screening. The remaining screening comes from a single line of trees which is far less effective. The depth of the woodland is greater than is necessary for this screening however, it is suggested that to be effective it should be 30 metres deep at least. It is agreed that adequate screening could be provided for the amenity and recycling site without the woodland.
8. The woodland is also a habitat which is important by diversity, and is an important green and generally attractive visual feature.

9. In terms of its condition it is agreed that in some areas it is thin, and that as stated, the willows in particular are of poor quality and would be better removed. Were the woodland retained however, in whole or in part, new planting of different species could be added, and it could be improved both visually and in terms of wild-life value.

10. In terms of the specific grounds of objection, and briefly, the majority of the woodland consist of trees that are growing well and with active management the appearance could be improved. While in winter the screening is partial removal of the woodland could hardly be an improvement. The screening could best be improved by a thickening of the woodland. Whether the mound was intended to remain is irrelevant, nevertheless, it appears to have been deliberately shaped and created as a platform for the tree planting which in itself is clearly deliberate, with even spacing and even aged trees. While anti social use of an area is difficult to control there are measures, for example, planting thorny shrubs, that could assist, as would more active management.

11. In relation to point 5, an alternative landscape scheme, the issue is space. As stated, to be effective as motorway screening the depth of the woodland needs to be 30 metres. In the proposed development the space left is barely enough for a double line of trees which would not in any way compensate for the loss of the woodland nor provide adequate screening for the motorway, although it would provide screening for the amenity/recycling area.

12. In relation to the later Town Councils comments, the importance of the Town Mead is completely accepted and there is no intention to obstruct improvement of the facilities. The concern is that loss of the woodland would remove essential screening from the motorway, to the detriment of the long term potential of the facilities. It would be preferable to see the future of the woodland in relation to a plan for the landscape of Town Mead as a whole, and in particular the whole M25 boundary, also looking at the space available for enhancing the facilities.

13. At the time of drafting the report no discussions had taken place directly with the Town Council, however it is hoped to arrange this before District Development Committee and the results of that will be reported orally if appropriate.

Conclusion :

14. It is recommended that the Tree Preservation Order be confirmed without modification.