

From: campaigning@woodlandtrust.org.uk
Sent: 15 October 2021 11:57
To: Aldridge, Steven
Subject: Re: Ancient Woodland Adjacent to Lea Castle site, Wolverley, Worcs

Dear Steve,

Thank you for re-consulting the Woodland Trust on the following application, I have reviewed the attached information, as well as the information provided in your email of the 1st October 2021.

The Woodland Trust is guided by Natural England's position with regards to ancient woodland, so we would be interested to view Natural England's consultation response once available.

If Natural England agrees that the areas of woodland subject to the evidence review below are not considered to be ancient (with specific consideration to the unnamed woodland at grid reference: SO8369279511) , then the Trust would have **no further comments** to make on this application. However, should Natural England consider ancient woodland present adjacent to the site, we would like to refer you to our previous consultation response (9th September 2021) with respect to ancient woodland protection:

"If the adjacent woodland is determined to be ancient, then the woodland should be afforded protection under paragraph 180 of the National Planning Policy Framework. Given the likely significant impacts posed by quarrying activity (i.e. dust and noise pollution, likely hydrological impacts etc.), the Trust adopts a precautionary principle and would advise a buffer zone of 100 metres to the extraction site."

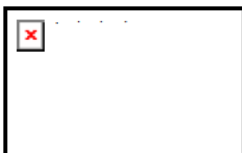
I hope the above is helpful, but please do let me know if I can be of any further assistance on this application.

Kind regards,
Nicole

Nicole Hillier
Campaigner - Woods under Threat

Email: campaigning@woodlandtrust.org.uk

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Stand up for trees

From: Aldridge, Steven <SAldridge@worcestershires.gov.uk>
Sent: 12 October 2021 07:58
To: campaigning@woodlandtrust.org.uk <campaigning@woodlandtrust.org.uk>
Subject: FW: Ancient Woodland Adjacent to Lea Castle site, Wolverley, Worcs

Dear Nicole,

With regard to Lea Castle Farm Quarry (Ref: 19/000053/CM). A new Planning Agent – Bob Williams of Alder Mill has taken over from Robin Smithyman of Kedd Limited as the agent for the Lea Castle Farm Quarry application. Further to comments from yourselves, the County Ecologist and County Landscape Officer and my consultation email to you (see attached) regarding the potential Ancient Woodland at the site. The new agent has looked into this matter and has provided the response below and attached. In view, of this I would be most grateful for your comments on this further information, as soon as possible, ideally by **22 October 2021**. If this is not possible, please let me know.

Please note I have also consulted the County Ecologist, County Landscape Officer, District Ecologist and Natural England.

Kind regards

Steve

Steven Aldridge

Team Manager – Development Management

Worcestershire County Council

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From: Aldridge, Steven
Sent: 12 October 2021 07:56
To: 'consultations@naturalengland.org.uk' <consultations@naturalengland.org.uk>
Cc: Burlachka, Yana <Yana.Burlachka@naturalengland.org.uk>
Subject: FW: Ancient Woodland Adjacent to Lea Castle site, Wolverley, Worcs
Importance: High

Hi Yana,

With regard to Lea Castle Farm Quarry (Ref: 19/000053/CM). A new Planning Agent – Bob Williams of Alder Mill has taken over from Robin Smithyman of Kedd Limited as the agent for the Lea Castle Farm Quarry application. Further to comments from the Woodland Trust, County Ecologist and County Landscape Officer and my consultation email to you (see attached) regarding the potential Ancient Woodland at the site. The new agent has looked into this matter and has provided the response below and attached. In view, of this I would be most grateful for your comments on this further information, as soon as possible, ideally by **22 October 2021**. If this is not possible, please let me know.

Please note I have also consulted the County Ecologist, County Landscape Officer, District Ecologist and Woodland Trust.

Kind regards

Steve

Steven Aldridge

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From: Bob Williams <aldermill@btconnect.com>
Sent: 11 October 2021 20:32
To: Aldridge, Steven <SAldridge@worcestershire.gov.uk>
Subject: Ancient Woodland Adjacent to Lea Castle site, Wolverley, Worcs
Importance: High

Hi Steve

As I advised, I have asked one of my colleagues to look into the ancient woodland issue and his findings are below.

If your colleagues are still of the opinion that the woodland is ancient, perhaps they will send their proof of this to us so that we can look at the issues again.

Regards
Bob

Robert Williams



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Email: aldermill@btconnect.com

From: Mark Singlehurst
Sent: 11 October 2021 19:19
To: Bob Williams <aldermill@btconnect.com>

Subject: Ancient Woodland Adjacent to Lea Castle site, Wolverley, Worcs

Importance: High

Hello Bob,

I have now looked into the Ancient Woodland question at Lea Castle, Wolverley, in some detail and this is an account of my findings.

First of all, the sites identified on the Worcestershire Habitat Inventory and Ancient Woodland Catalogue as “Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland” (ASNW) are as follows:

- WOLVERLEY LODGE (87023) is the name given to the woodland that curves around the west and northern edges of the proposed quarry’s “Phase 1”, immediately to the east of which used to be the Lea Castle mansion and its formal grounds.
- WOLVERLEY CARR (87026) is the woodland occupying the land between the two arms of the Staffs. & Worcs. Canal, to the north-west of the site, which is actually shown as marsh, not woodland on the 1881 Ordnance Survey 25” map!
- RESERVOIR WOOD (87024) is a rectangular block of woodland to the north-east of the site, above Wolverley Lodge. The northern part of this block is shown as rough grassland, with a few scattered trees, on the 1881 map. This one is only mentioned in Cody Levine’s 7/10/2021 email to Steven Aldridge, and not in any of the earlier consultation responses.

To be formally classed as ‘ancient’, the woodland in question must have existed before 1600 and continuously since then, as in the definition you sent to me the other day. To prove this needs a combination of documentary and map evidence and also the presence of several ancient woodland indicator plants, such as wild service tree, bluebells, primroses and herb paris. Just the presence of indicator species is not enough, by itself, to prove the wood existed prior to 1600 – some documentary evidence is needed as well.

According to the Desk-Based Archaeological Assessment previously prepared for this site, the earliest known map covering this area in detail is the 1838 Wolverley tithe map, the relevant extract from which is attached. Unfortunately, this map shows the plot boundaries and reference numbers, but does not clearly distinguish between woodland and grassland. Faint, blue-grey outlines indicate which land was either woodland or pasture, with yellow outlines indicating arable fields, but that’s as far as it goes. All earlier mapping was not at a large enough scale to show such natural features as woodland or field/plot boundaries.

The first map to clearly show the extent of the woodland was the 1881 25” Ordnance Survey; the relevant extract is the second attachment here. The names used above appear to be modern; none of this woodland is named on any OS map of any date that I have seen. As mentioned above, the Wolverley Lodge woodland existed by that date and part of Reservoir

Wood, but Wolverley Carr was just marshland! That was still the case on the 1938 OS map, so the current woodland there can scarcely be called 'ancient'!

Similarly, Axborough Wood, at some distance to the east and on the edge of Wolverley parish, is classed as ancient semi-natural woodland in the county inventory and elsewhere (such as the 'Kidderminster North Green Infrastructure Concept Statement'), yet the Victoria County History of Worcestershire states that Axborough Wood was first planted after the Enclosure of the parish fields in 1775 – so, again, that fails to qualify as ancient woodland (ASNW) by the 'pre-1600' criterion.

Since the mapping evidence is not of much help, I looked at the general history of Wolverley and Cookley: it appears that Burgred, King of Mercia, granted a charter in AD 866 which allowed pasture for 70 pigs in the wooded common known as 'Wulfferdinleh' [= Wolverley, Worcs.] and the gathering of timber for building purposes and as firewood. Wolverley was then one of the most wooded parts of England, although the regular practice of large-scale coppicing and compartmented wood pasture were already in existence at that time. An incidental side effect of the coppicing activity was the establishment of woodland flowers such as primroses and violets.

At the time of the Domesday Book (1086), Wolverley had no woodland available for pannage (i.e., grazing pigs), but after the Manor of Wem was created, the Lord's tenants were granted various rights, including pannage, in the Lord's 'North Wood'. The settlement of Wolverley may have involved the clearance of the western margin of North Wood, which was mentioned in 1304. North Wood is believed to have lain on the eastern boundary of Wolverley.

The account of Wolverley in the Victoria County History of Worcestershire (VHCW) states that there was some 372 acres of woodland in the parish. Some of this was ancient, i.e. Birch Wood, Bodenham Wood and Cookley Wood (made up of Spring and Solcum Coppices). The draft version of the Wolverley Conservation Area Character Appraisal also calls Middle Wood "semi-ancient", although where this is I have not been able to ascertain. Birch and Bodenham Woods are near the parish's western boundary and Cookley Wood is some distance away to the north-west, with Solcum Coppice lying to the south of Blakeshall Common and Spring Coppice being in the north-west corner of the parish.

Wolverley lay within the Forest of Kinver for a while after 1066, but was outside the boundaries of the Forest as recorded in 1300. No mention was made in the VCHW of the woodland to the immediate north and west of Lea Castle. The Lea Castle mansion was built around 1809 and it seems that some plantations were created at that time as part of its parkland landscaping. A drawing of 1814 already shows the house surrounded by woodland (= third attachment).

According to the archives of the *Worcester Journal*, the Lea Castle Estate included commercial woodland grown for timber by February 1818, which grew near the Staffs. & Worcs. Canal and was mostly fir and elm, with some sycamore, poplar and small numbers of other species. This does not, therefore, sound like ASNW. The *Morning Chronicle* for 27/11/1819 included a sale advertisement for the Lea Castle Estate, referring to a total size of over 1,300 acres and the inclusion of ornamental plantations and woodland. “*The property is finely wooded and the plantations are in a very thriving state.*” This suggests recently planted trees rather than pre-existing ancient woodland.

Finally, the plant known as *Cephalanthera grandiflora* (the white helleborine, a non-native species) was recorded in Lea Castle Woods before 1867 by Scott (the author of a history of Stourbridge) and at Knight’s Walks, Wolverley in 1789, by Dr Stokes. That this was an introduced species again seems to suggest that the woods at Lea Castle may have been created to beautify the mansion rather than already being there before it was built, though that cannot be proven.

In summary, the Habitat Inventory would appear to be a rather unreliable source as to what is truly ancient woodland, in the sense defined by Natural England and the Woodland Trust. I suspect that the Council’s ecologists lack the necessary map or documentary evidence to prove that the woodland around the former Lea Castle really did exist before 1600, so it would be interesting to know what evidence they think they have for drawing that conclusion. Whilst it is clear that extensive woodland did exist in this area by the 9th century, we cannot now be sure of its exact location and extent, since Wolverley is quite a large parish and includes more than one settlement. Nor can we be sure that all the existing woodland is ancient; in fact, some of it clearly isn’t, such as the area now called ‘Wolverley Carr’.

I think we should therefore challenge the assumption that the woodland at Wolverley Lodge, Wolverley Carr (especially) and Reservoir Wood is ancient semi-natural woodland, unless the Council can produce any convincing and conclusive evidence that such is the case (which I rather doubt). The woodland may still have significant ecological value, but that is not the same thing as being ‘ancient’.

Hope that helps.

Regards,

Mark Singlehurst

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