

The Woodland Trust in the Wychwoods

Over the last fifty years this country has lost almost half its ancient woodlands, and the Woodland Trust, Britain's largest charity dedicated solely to the conservation and creation of woodland, wants to help reverse this trend.

The Woodland Trust held a well attended public meeting at Shipton Under Wychwood Village Hall on Friday 14th June, to discuss the possible purchase of Mill Field, Glebe Farm, Shipton. The aim was to create a small scale local wood with public access under the Trust's *Woods On Your Doorstep* scheme. The Woodland Trust own 15 existing woods in Oxfordshire, and is just completing the purchase of the first Woods on Your Doorstep site at Deddington.

Many people were in favour, but a number of local residents expressed their concern at the proposal. The Woodland Trust want to respond to local opinion, and a meeting on the site was arranged for the 24th June, when the Trust explained how they work with the local community in designing the woodland. Neighbouring residents were clearly worried about increased parking on the already busy Station Road, and wanted to keep the meadow in its existing state, and the Woodland Trust therefore agreed not to pursue this particular site. There are no existing rights of way across Mill Field, and the future of the meadow will now be in the hands of its eventual owners.

All the local people at the site meeting, with one exception, were in favour of creating a local wood for the Wychwoods. The problem was finding the right available site. Offers of financial support for this proposal have already come from Shipton, Milton, neighbouring Charlbury, and even from a Woodland Trust member as far afield as Abingdon. A number of people have offered to help with the project locally.

John Sargeant, the Woodland Trust's Project Co-ordinator of *Woods on Your Doorstep*, said the ideal site would be primarily unwooded, between 1 and 20 acres, near the edge of the village, with pedestrian access and preferably linked to the existing footpaths network. Vehicular access should be possible for management purposes, and the site should be suitable for at least 50% planting using native trees and shrubs.

If a suitable site can be found, the Wychwoods could become one of 200 communities nationally chosen to celebrate under this scheme, which is funded by the Millennium Commission. Local people would be involved in the design and planting of the trees, paths and open spaces of the new woodland, which would provide vital wildlife habitat and protect the character of the area into the next century.

For more information about Woods on Your Doorstep, The Woodland Trust and details of Membership please contact The Woodland Trust, Autumn Park, Dysart Road, Grantham, Lincs. NG31 6LL tel. 01476 - 581111

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