

A Community Wood for the Wychwoods

In the June / July edition of *The Wychwood*, I asked if you would like to help create a local wood for the Wychwoods a place for trees, flowers and wildlife, with public access. The answer is clearly, "Yes". Many people have said they like the idea, including those at Wychwood Primary School; the Parish Councils of Milton and Shipton support the proposal.

Some of those who have already offered support attended a meeting in late August at Shipton, to discuss the nine-acre field site, west of Dog Kennel Lane. Andrew Beer of the Woodland Trust explained the thinking behind the Trust's *Woods on your Doorstep* scheme. Unanimously those attending the meeting wanted this site to become a community woodland for the Wychwoods.

After the meeting, Craig Blackwell, The County Ecologist, said: "This is a super site. It will contribute to the historic landscape of the Wychwoods, and with its excellent access from Dog Kennel Lane, it will be an asset to local villages. If well designed, the woodland will improve the site's ecological value, especially for birds and butterflies". It will also be an educational resource for our local school.

The suggested timetable is that we build up a group of key supporters this Autumn, followed by a major fund raising campaign next Spring. Next Summer the Woodland Trust hope to acquire the site, and the local community will work with the Woodland Trust to plan and design the wood, with community planting in late Autumn 1998. The woodland will be owned and managed by the Woodland Trust, with full public access.

The Woodland Trust is Britain's largest charity dedicated solely to the conservation and creation of woodland. The Woodland Trust owns 15 existing woods in Oxfordshire, and has just purchased the first *Woods on Your Doorstep* site at Deddington. The Wychwood Project, which wants to restore tree cover in this area to levels present in Norman times, also supports the proposal for a community wood in the Wychwoods. There are already such woodlands at Charlbury and at Dean Common, near Chadlington. Why not the Wychwoods?

To create these *Woods on your Doorstep*, the local community usually has to raise half the costs of acquisition and planting, with the Woodland Trust providing the other half from Lottery funds. However, several offers of substantial donations have already been made to help buy this site. But this will still leave a lot of money to be raised locally.

If you or your business or your community group like the idea, and are prepared to help in any way, please contact me on 01993 831403 or Belinda Flitter, Wychwood Project Officer, on 01865 810217.

Charles Keighley