

WHY I OPPOSE THE SITE OF THE COMMUNITY WOOD

LET ME SAY AT THE OUTSET that I am in favour of planting trees and creating new woodlands, as many and as often as possible – not just for the Millennium but at all times. This is why I own three woods and am a life member of the Woodland Trust. What I cannot agree with is the proposed site of the new community wood off Dog Kennel Lane from which flow the springs which for hundreds of years have fed the lakes and provided the water features in the Wild Gardens.

Despite being the adjacent land owner I was not informed of the site or the advanced plans for the community wood until this March. My first words to Jack Wilkinson and Charles Keighley were that this would seriously affect the water supply to the Wild Gardens. Both were honest enough to say that no one had given this any consideration.

As is usual when such hiccups occur, experts' advice has been sought. Basically they think, well, maybe, perhaps, in the long run...etc. that I shouldn't worry unduly. I cannot agree and contend there are enough common-sense reasons and definite facts to make a crystal ball unnecessary

1. Twice last summer and even in January 97, one of the driest on record, so small was the trickle of water arriving from the springs that none got over the sluice gates at the far end of the Wild Gardens. When we have these dry spells it is very difficult to stop the slow-moving water from seeping away, this despite the fact that in 1989

I repaired the sluice gate and reduced the level of water required to clear it by ten inches – see cutaway portions on the sluice as evidence.

2. We know we must expect and are receiving less rainfall than in the past.

3. Growing trees take up hundreds of gallons of water EACH AND EVERY DAY. Planting small trees may seem harmless now but a woodland is for life – in fact it is for much longer and it is the long term view which must be addressed.

4. If you plant trees in a wet meadow which contains water springs and has never has a rooted crop of any type then you are bound to use up a percentage of that water and this will increase every year otherwise how are the trees to grow ?

It has been pointed out to me that it is intended to plant only 50% of the field on the higher Milton side as if this should make it alright. Not so.

If you look at the site from its Dog Kennel gate there is an obvious gully which runs across and towards the Milton side of the field. It is indisputable that excess rainfall on the high bank has for evermore seeped down into this catchment gully and, as is visually clear, channelled itself to the supply coming under Dog Kennel Lane into the Wild Gardens

I could go on but hope I have illustrated that when there is already insufficient annual rainfall to be certain of an adequate quantity to service its ancient and established feature, then it must surely be wrong to further put this supply at risk.

continued

The analogy would be that you can drain the water out of one half of a sponge without affecting the other half – it just doesn't stand up.

Since purchasing the Wild Gardens in 1987 I have spent ten years, spent being the operative word, clearing the giant hogweed, brambles, fallen trees and debris. I have drained and cleared both lakes, rebuilt the retaining walls and trodden nine loads of blue clay to seal the lake edges. The disintegrated water channel between the two lakes has been rebuilt.

Twenty loads of stone has been used to reinstate roads and paths, the boundary walls with the cricket club and Dog Kennel Lane have been restored and expensive tree surgery work undertaken to preserve the enormous ancient cedar and other trees.

I have planted over 1,000 new trees of more than 30 species and a further 100 plus scrubs and bushes and put in two new bridges for access. I have financed all of this work and expenditure myself and have not received a penny from grants or aids although these have been offered and available.

When I bought the Wild Gardens I removed the "PRIVATE WOODLANDS / KEEP OUT" signs which forbade the people of the Wychwoods from visiting and enjoying this amenity. It would be very sad if such notices had to be posted again but no one can be expected to see their philanthropy abused.

The Wild Gardens are now 14 acres of unique land and waterscape of wildlife, a mature and mixed aged varied woodland planted to ensure continuity.

They are also a blazing spectacular display of snowdrops, aconites, daffodils and bluebells.

They have also been made FREELY available to the people of the Wychwoods to enjoy and are used by the Girl Guides and schools for field work. Further, a linking gate has been installed to assist access for residents of Tall Trees.

I can quite understand that those planning the new community wood, fired with enthusiasm, do not relish finding a new site at this stage but it is not my fault that I was not able to make this case earlier having not been informed of their plans.

However I should consider it an extremely ungrateful action if, now that the case has been made, they are not prepared to say "thank you" for the free facility that exists and go to create another, elsewhere which does not threaten it.

In fact, as someone who has spent his life in forestry and timber work, I can assure them that if, as they appear to be, they are spending some £66,000 of public money, they could obtain good land and create a wood three or four times bigger and better than planting 50% of a boggy nine acre field.

Perhaps it might take a season longer but who is going to consider the planting date or deadlines in 50 or 100 years hence?

As the man said "If you don't fight for what you've got – you don't get nuthin"

Brian Gorton.