

## The Community Wood for the Wychwoods - A Reply

**T**HE PROPOSED Community Wood for the Wychwoods, partly funded by the Millennium Commission is intended to compliment the Wild Garden, not compete with it. We all appreciate the hard work Mr Gorton has put into restoring the Wild Garden. The two adjacent woods will have a greater nature conservation impact than two similar woods apart, and together will help create a continuous belt of woodland. The new woodland, permanently accessible, will relieve some of the existing pressures, especially from dogs, on the Wild Garden. Our proposal is quite simply a tribute to Mr Gorton's efforts, and both woodlands will provide an amenity for future generations.

Readers will know that several articles were published in this magazine over the last 18 months, setting out our proposals. Early in the year signs were put up marking the proposed site. After a leaflet drop throughout the Wychwoods a full public meeting took place on 1st March, at which it was unanimously decided to proceed with the proposal. Jack Wilkinson kindly agreed to notify Mr Gorton of this decision as quickly as possible.

No more than 50% of the site will be planted, and much of that will be small trees and shrubs typical of the ancient Wychwood. The lower part of the site will be kept open, with any planting well away from the stream. (Incidentally, any other owner could plant the entire site with trees without further ado.)

Mr Gorton's concern did surprise us. This spring is one of many which rise along the sides of the Evenlode valley, some well within mature woodland at Cornbury. Nevertheless, we immediately decided to take expert advice. We contacted the County Ecologist, the Forestry Authority and the Environment Agency. Their consensus is, in the words of the Environment Agency, that they "do not consider your woodland proposal will have any significant effect on the amount of water rising from the spring and therefore on the Wild Garden." We are arranging a site meeting with Mr Gorton, who lives in Witney, to see what progress can be made in view of this advice.

Mr Gorton also suggests the proposal is not good value for money. The net cost to the Wychwoods is likely to be about £15,000, most of which has already been pledged. This must be good value for money, for a site which will be accessible in perpetuity, and which will be maintained by The Woodland Trust at no charge to local parishes. And if we do not benefit from this lottery funding, some other community elsewhere in England and Wales certainly will.

Many of us have worked hard for this project, and many more have pledged financial support. Ultimately, the decision whether we proceed is not mine, nor Mr Gorton's, but that of our community. I hope we can proceed unanimously.

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