

PRIORY WOOD ENVIRONMENTAL STATEMENT AND VEGETATION SURVEY – SERIOUS CONCERNS

Planning Application: Land North of Taylors Farm

Application Reference: UTT/25/2786/OP

Local Planning Authority: Uttlesford District Council

Submitted by:

Takeley Street Action Group (TSAG)

A local residents' action group representing +650 residents of Takeley and neighbouring towns and villages.

This document forms part of a coordinated set of technical objections submitted by TSAG in response to the above planning application.

Document Status: Formal Written Objection

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This representation is made in the public interest and is intended to assist the Local Planning Authority, statutory consultees and members of the Planning Committee in reaching a lawful, informed and sound planning decision.

Priory Wood Environmental Statement and Vegetation Survey - Serious Concerns

1 Introduction

1.1 We have reviewed the Environmental Statement “Air Quality”, the “Vegetation Survey and Assessment” (Applied Ecology Ltd).

We have also reviewed the documentation submitted on behalf of the Scout Group and by Place Services “Planning advice UTT/25/2786/OP Land North of Taylors Farm The Street Takeley”.

2 NPPF

2.1 Priory Wood is defined as “Ancient Woodland”, referred to in the NPPF as an “**irreplaceable habitat**”.

2.2 Para 193 Section C of the NPPF states:

*“....development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats—such as ancient woodland, ancient/veteran trees, and specific sensitive ecosystems—**should be refused** unless there are wholly exceptional reasons”.*

2.3 No “exceptional reasons” have been demonstrated in any of the evidence provided either by the Developer, their Consultants or Statutory Consultees

No evidence has been provided concerning the potential loss or deterioration of habitat nor how development of this scale can be future proofed to protect Priory Wood for the lifetime of the development. (We note the intention to purchase BNG Units off-site).

The site has been identified by Uttlesford as a “*technical oversupply*”.

On these grounds alone, the Application should be refused.

3 Priory Wood

3.1 Applied Ecology para 1 Summary claimed:

“A comprehensive ecological evaluation of targeted areas of two woodlands, Hatfield Forest SSSI and Priory Wood”.

It has been made clear by the Scout Group that there was **NOT** a comprehensive survey of Priory Wood. No access was possible as the area is securely fenced and gated.

Applied Ecology have since admitted in writing that they did NOT fully survey Priory Wood and did not access the fenced area.

3.2 Place Services have since commented and stated:

*“In terms of its structure and species composition, the woodland is similar on both sides of the fence. **This might not be the same conclusion** had the whole of Priory Wood been targeted for survey, but it wasn’t”.*

The species composition within Priory Wood **is not the same** on the other side of the fence – whatever that means.

3.3 The Scouts have made it clear that very rare oxlips are present **WITHIN** the Priory Wood fenced area. True Oxlips are very rare. To clarify, they have not been found in the marginal parts of the woodland outside the fenced area but within the un-surveyed fenced area.

3.4 Oxlips are rare and endangered. They are reported as “*Once on the brink of extinction*” in the Bishops Stortford Independent July 2024. They are affected by Air Quality.

3.5 We can conclude that different very rare species exist within the enclosed area that are not found elsewhere.

4 Formal and Informal advice

For an application as serious as this, ecological advice must be both formal and accurate, hence the existing documentation cannot be considered acceptable for an informed decision, particularly as Place Services admit a full survey might have had a different conclusion.

Place Services have made it clear that their advice is informal.

5 Conclusions

5.1 The Developer has **not** demonstrated that this development would **not** cause harm to an irreplaceable habitat – Priory Wood, Ancient Woodland

5.2 The Planning Application is in direct conflict with the NPPF para 193 section C.

5.3 It is of serious concern that the Developer has submitted misleading documentation concerning access to Priory Wood and the Planning Officer appears willing to accept this regardless.

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How Stansted Airport is helping the National Trust to re-establish the rare and endangered oxlip in Hatfield Forest

David James

🕒 15:02, 10 July 2024 updated: 10:41, 11 July 2024

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An endangered flower is thriving in a woodland just a few miles from Bishop's Stortford – under the flight path of Stansted Airport.

A population of oxlips – *primula elatior* – is helping the National Trust in its work to save this rare flower from extinction.

Priory Wood, located just a short distance from the airport's runway, is home to several of these delicate yellow flowers that are found only in small pockets of East Anglia.



Oxlips in Priory Wood, Stansted Airport

The project involves the NT harvesting the seeds from the airport's land, growing them in its propagation facility and carefully reintroducing them to Hatfield Forest, where the flower has declined in recent years.

Grazing deer have been responsible for much of the small, perennial, ancient woodland plant's demise in the forest, although it is hoped they will once again thrive there for future generations to enjoy.

Martin Churley, head of environment and sustainability at Stansted operator MAG (Manchester Airports Group), said: "Our work to restore the natural habitats on the land that we own around the airport has created the perfect environment for oxlips to thrive."



Oxlip seeds from flowers found near the airport's runway

"Once on the brink of extinction, they are flourishing in Priory Wood, which has become a sanctuary for these beautiful flowers.

"It is wonderful to see this plant, which only grows in a few small parts of East Anglia, now providing a much-needed boost to the National Trust's nature conservation efforts in Hatfield Forest.

"This project is one of many we are working on regarding the translocation of plants from airport sites as part of MAG's commitment to biodiversity."

James Rowland, Hatfield Forest's property operations manager, said: "This nationally scarce species hasn't been recorded in its purest form in Hatfield Forest since the 1980s due to the impact of deer and human activity.



From left, Hatfield Forest property operations manager James Rowland, Forest Nature Group chair Bob Reed and Sam Lomax, environmental specialist at Stansted Airport

"The discovery of pure oxlips at a neighbouring, enclosed woodland which was once a part of the forest presents a rare opportunity to collect seeds, propagate and reintroduce this significant species in an attempt to encourage a self-sustaining oxlip population.

"The new oxlips will be placed in specially designed enclosures next spring, safe from the risk of browsing deer and trampling, with the hope that in the years to come, oxlips will be a common sight at Hatfield Forest once again."

In recent years, the airport's environment team has been working to return several underused areas around the site back to nature.

A 2.5-acre habitat area created to the north of the runway recently celebrated its fifth anniversary. This secluded corner of the airport has become a haven for small animals, plants and even a small colony of great crested newts.

The airport has turned to traditional methods in its woodlands by using the power of the Suffolk punch horse to remove felled wood to avoid damage that modern machinery might cause.

It is all part of the airport's commitment to reducing the effects of its operation on wildlife habitats and species in and around the airport, setting a target of zero net loss in biodiversity.