

Ref: WSCC/030/21

I am writing to object to this planning application in the strongest possible terms. Indeed, I find it quite shocking that, in a world where environmental biodiversity, a drive to reduce our carbon footprint, and the value of open spaces is so high up on our national agenda, a planning application of this nature can even be considered.

I live in Tismans Common, on a minor road which leads directly into the woodland which would be impacted. Every morning, rain or shine, I walk my dog in the woodland in question. Like many members of my community, I live in a busy household with a young child and walking in that still, peaceful and tranquil environment filled with nothing but birdsong and the occasional bark of the deer, I am offered a form of mindfulness and sanctuary. This planning application, if allowed, would not only destroy a large section of the habitat, but taint the peacefulness of the entire area, and thus the value we derive from it.

Every morning, almost without fail, I see so many examples of our wonderful British wildlife. In the past month alone, either on the site itself or just a few meters from the proposed site, I've seen roe deer, foxes, badgers, woodpeckers, hares, slow worms, buzzards, huge numbers of songbirds and a fantastic amount of bats which swoop and dive for insects, just as the sun is rising. Some of these incredible mammals are priority species, such as the present Barbastelle Bat which is an International European Protected species. And that's not to mention the range of flora, including vibrant displays of bluebells in the spring and the huge towering oak trees, brimming with biodiversity. It truly is a paradise for nature. If this planning application was allowed, not only would one section of beautiful woodland be utterly destroyed, but the development site and HGV movements would negatively impact the entire woodland area.

It is perhaps worth noting that the reason I always walk through this woodland is because the busy A281 is situated on the opposite side of Tismans Common. The danger of that road ensures that the majority of people in our community head towards the woodland, when they want a safe location to walk with their dogs, horses, children etc. Our community is still reeling from a tragic death on the A281 in Rudgwick only recently. The locations in which we can safely walk are extremely limited, hence the woodland is so very heavily utilised. Indeed, this was never truer over the past 18 months, when we went into Covid lockdown.

During those months, I was particularly aware of the huge number of people that use the woodland in question as a much valued amenity. Quite literally (and with no exaggeration) *hundreds* of people passed our door every day, heading into the woodland area which the proposed planning application will as good as ruin for us; dog walkers, children, cyclists, joggers, horse riders, couples, families pushing prams, office workers grabbing a moment away from the daily grind. They all visited, for this woodland provides a valuable and much valued open space where we can experience peace and quiet. If this planning application goes ahead, where will our community be able to walk safely, without driving to an alternative destination?

If you allow this planning application to be granted, the peace we all value so highly would be taken from us. Not only would a large section of woodland be destroyed, but much of the remainder would become incredibly hazardous for us to walk through. At present, vehicles barely access the forestry track, which the public rights of way zig-zag across on a number of occasions. With high levels of HGVs suddenly using the woodland, not only would the tranquillity be destroyed, but the safety of visitors would also be compromised. Even if extremely low speed limits were ordered, who would legally enforce them? I personally think this would be an accident waiting to happen; a mile of apparently empty forestry track, coupled with HGV drivers operating on a deadline.

I have a young son and when he is old enough, some years from now, I can imagine allowing him to walk our dog alone in the woodland. Giving him the freedom to explore this beautiful natural environment that is on our doorstep, as he moves towards adulthood and increased independence. It is a freedom which I, and so many of us before him have enjoyed. However, if this planning application is approved, there is no way in the world that I would allow him to walk along footpaths where high levels of lorry movements take place and I am not alone in this view. Although, with increased noise, increased pollution and a major loss of habitat and biodiversity, who would wish to walk in the woodland anyway, if this planning application was granted?

I understand that as part of this planning application, footpath 792-1 (Northern Boundary) would be closed. I personally walk along this very footpath on at least 4 out of 7 mornings every week, and even more so in the winter, because many of the other footpaths become impassable with thick mud – this is one of the most easily traversable ones which continues

to provide us with access, even when the weather is very wet. The footpath is also the most direct route from Tismans to friends on Pigbush Lane and The Sir Roger Tichborne public house, requiring absolutely no use of public roads. There are few alternatives to this route, meaning we would need to take significant diversions. The application describes the closure of this footpath as “temporary”, yet it would last for 33 years? In 33 years’ time, my young son will likely have children of his own and I may well no longer be around! The very fact the authors of this application can dare to describe it as a “temporary” closure, only goes to show how very out of touch and distant they are from reality, and what a work of fiction this application likely is.

Given the disastrous outcome of the waste processing site at Crouchland Farm in neighbouring Plaistow, I am also extremely worried about potential pollution to water courses. The woodland is filled with ditches and there is good reason for this; it is the natural route for high levels of rain/snow, which we do often suffer from, particularly in the Autumn and Winter months, to disperse from the woodland and away. Of course, natural vegetation and root structures naturally deal with some of this excess water, but this application will be removing a good proportion of these. If this planning application were to be granted, I think it would be naïve to assume that only inert substances will ever be dumped there.

The increased level of traffic this planning request would generate on our minor, rural roads is also a big cause for concern. As I mentioned, I have a young child and he goes to school in Rudgwick. The route of our journey to school would be made all the more dangerous with a 300% increase in HGV traffic passing along our route. Some of the pavements on our route are single file at best, which simply isn’t sensible to attempt on a busy road with a young child. Even though we are supposed to be walking more and driving less, so many additional large vehicles would certainly ensure many of the residents with children travelled to and from school exclusively by car. Although, that in itself would be made more hazardous, particularly at the junction into Tismans Common (where the telephone box/post box is), where visibility of oncoming traffic is already particularly poor. I trust the council will weigh up the safety of residents walking to school, and remember the many other recent developments going ahead in our community, which will already significantly increase the level of traffic on local roads.

Possibly the most ludicrous part of this entire planning application is its overall purpose. “Loxwood Clay Pits” makes the enterprise sound almost noble, as though it will be helping to build houses for the next generation. But according to reports, WSCC has more than 25 years of reserves of brick-making clay and there is simply no demand. Indeed, it is understood that our national and local clay demands are fully met. But let’s not be fooled; the bulk of this scheme is not concerned with clay extraction, but the burying of commercial waste for profit. And would any council member seriously even contemplate this application, if clay extraction were not referred to? I hope the answer is a definitive no. For all of the reasons I’ve identified, and a good deal more reasons besides, this greenfield site would struggle to be a more unsuitable location if it tried.

To conclude, I can already see from the huge number of objections you have received to date that there is local uproar about this planning application, and quite rightly so. It takes everything from our community and gives practically nothing back in return; certainly, the small number of employment positions, which are not guaranteed to be filled by local residents, in no way counters the terrible damage this development would do to our local environment, biodiversity, road safety, quiet tranquillity and pollution levels. We all know that the business of waste disposal represents a serious profit for somebody, but it will certainly not be this community that benefits. As far as I can see, the only achievement of this project would be to line the pockets of the few, in return for habitat destruction and community damage on a wholly unacceptable scale, which would be carried forward into future generations. So I implore you, if you represent the safety, health, wellbeing or voice of this community in any way, shape or form, please don’t let this atrocity take place. Thank you.