Neston Action Group

21 Moor Green Neston SN139SG

May 10th 2020

Sir

TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING ACT 1990

APPELLANTS NAME: Mr Mervyn Dobson

APPEAL SITE: Land South of Westwells road, between Rowan Lane & Jaggards

Lane, Neston, Corsham

PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT: Residential development for up to 81 dwellings that includes 8 Self

Build dwellings, roads, footpaths, balancing areas and open

space.

INSPECTORATE REFERENCE: APP/Y3940/W/19/3243873

APPEAL START DATE: 27 April 2020

I would like to take this opportunity to draw to your attention, to the feelings and concerns that abound, in Neston, in connection with the Appeal against Wiltshire Councils refusal to allow the development of land at Westwells, known locally as 'The Donkey Field'

The Neston Action Group, would like to point out from the very start, that we are not a NIMBY organisation.

We exist, simply to seek and represent the views and the feelings of our village community, and to ensure that matters such as major developments, be they housing or industrial, are communicated, explained and discussed by those village members who are interested.

Collectively, the 5 members of the NAG team, have just over 165 years history of living in the village, and we know a 'thing or two' about what people want, and how they would like to see the village develop and progress.

In the following pages, we would like to correct a number of inaccuracies that occur in the Appeal Statement of Case, and to try and illustrate and explain why this site has been the subject of so many applications for a variety of developments since the 1960's.

You will have noted from the delegated officer's report that all of these applications have been refused and where they have gone to appeal, they have been dismissed.

We have included a selection of photographs in the Appendix, that attempt to show *how* determined 'would be developers' have deliberately destroyed a very pleasing and well used natural break (amenity) between the Commercial and Military Establishments, and the residential areas of Westwells and Moor Green which form the primary access to the village of Neston from the Westerly direction.

These changes have been bought about by using earthmoving equipment, forestry clearance, defoliant control and allowing fly tipping.

The matters that we would like to address are:

- The assertion that this site was a former MOD establishment
- The quality of the temporary buildings that were constructed 79 years ago
- The condition of the site as is stands at the current time
- The scale of the 'amenity devaluation' of the site by successive owners including the current owner
- The assumed intention for further 'development potential', of an adjacent site. if this appeal is upheld.

Tim AWMACK
Lead for Neston Action Group.

Site History

The appellant claims in Section B/2.7 of the Background that 'The appeal site comprises a brownfield site, being previously developed land as a redundant former MoD site.

There are repeated claims about the site being ex MoD throughout the SoC

Because of the preponderance of military sites in and around the greater Corsham area for the past 70/80 years, it has always been assumed that the Westwells site was in fact an ex wartime military site.

The situation has also been 'confused' further, by local 'knowledge' that the site was also a wartime refugee camp.

NAG decided that it might be helpful to seek definitive evidence and establish exactly what purpose the site served and when it was occupied, and by whom.

Following extensive archive investigation, it seems that this site was in fact requisitioned by the Ministry of Works during the Second World War, in 1940, for the purpose of providing what was then described as 'Temporary Hostel Accommodation' for the thousands of workers required to transform the extensive underground stone tunnel network based on Spring Quarry and Box Tunnel into underground factories, that were protected from German bombing. These factories were primarily involved in the production of wartime aircraft parts such as engines, gun turrets and landing gear.

As can be seen in the appendices, some 10,000 Irish 'navvies' were recruited, and of course had no accommodation immediately available. The responsibility for creating this vast number of hostel placements fell to an off shoot of the then Ministry of Labour called the National Service Hostels Corporation Ltd.

Westwells was the first site to be completed and as can be seen from the table, this site was given the 'identifier' of HS1, and provided accommodation for 1000 men. It occupied an area of 114,452 square feet on both the existing proposed development site and an adjacent area where a plastics factory is currently located.

Having completed the task of creating underground factories, throughout the greater Corsham area, these workers left the 'Temporary Hostel Hutments' to presumably return to their respective homes, both in in the UK and Ireland.

At this point, for the remainder of the War, and for some time after, this accommodation was indeed used to house refugees who came primarily from Latvia and Poland.

In a letter from Wiltshire Council, dated May 1st 1957, it states 'Ministry of Works E.V.W. (European Volunteer Workers) Hostel to be closed in autumn 1957. No re-occupation envisaged'

We were unable to find any evidence/ documentation that the Westwells site was ever occupied or used as a military establishment.

This calls into question the oft repeated claim that the Westwells Site was a former MOD establishment and we suggest that there is therefore, no relevance to Wiltshire Core Policy 37.

At some undetermined date in the late 1950's or early 1960's, the site was acquired by a local business known as Simba Motors, who owned and ran a garage business immediately opposite the site on northern side of Westwells.

We believe that the earliest planning applications were for garage related projects such as the storage of vehicles etc.

Supporting documentation in the Appendices.

Quality of the 'Temporary Hutment' structures

The appellant claims 2.16 that 'The site therefore comprises previously developed land in accordance with the definition set out in Annex 2 to the Framework.

The framework states

- Land which is or was occupied by a permanent structure......
- Land where the remains of the permanent structure (including fixed surface infrastructure) <u>have blended into the landscape is excluded</u>.

Because of the intended use, and one presumes short term requirement for these Hostels, the buildings constructed were referred to as 'Temporary Hutments'.

NAG have been able to secure two documents dated September 1946, one of which details the construction detail of these buildings, and the second which is an invitation to the Ministry of Health to ask if they might be interested in taking over the site, from The Ministry of Works on a 'Long Term Loan'.

In the document, dated September 18th 1946 and signed by a Walter Rutman-Edwards, the comment is made

• 'While the hutments could be made into suitable temporary dwellings, it appears unlikely that this conversion could be carried out within the cost laid down by the Ministry of Health'

All of the above would indicate that the buildings were certainly never permanent structures.

It is unquestionably the case that from the 1956 until the mid-1980's (a time span of 30 years) the fixed infrastructure had certainly 'blended into the landscape' and it is only because of continuous attempts by the current and previous owners of this site, to 'reveal' this infrastructure by means of earth moving machinery, tree removal and constant use of defoliants, that a claim is now being made that this fixed infrastructure is clearly evident.

The included photographs illustrate why and how this natural 'buffer 'has provided so much enjoyment to the villagers over such an extended period.

Supporting documentation in the Appendices

5

The Condition of the Site at the Current Time

The appellant claims 2.18 '....the great majority of the remainder of the site remains open and unchanged from when it (the site) was fully developed save for the removal of the superstructure of the former buildings'

A further claim 2.18 is that '...underneath that tree cover and across the remainder of the site, the clear presence of rubble from demolished buildings, roads and access ways, hard standing and foundations.....'

As the photographs in the appendices show, a large part of the central site is indeed now open, following the de-forestation of this area since the mid 1980's.

The presence of tree stumps, many of which have a diameter in excess of 300mm, in the central area are testament to this clearance as is some of the remaining large scale lumber that has 'survived' 30 years laying on the surface.

There is also in excess of 20 Maple tree stumps that are all attempting to regenerate, despite regular attention to prevent this.

Having spent an hour walking the site recently, there is no evidence at all of any of the claimed building rubble. This is fortuitous as it would seem that all of the hutments had asbestos roofing. There are however numerous mounds of soil and vegetation that are clearly recent accumulations, and these have been created by the appellant's contractors 'scouring' the hard standings

The last recorded visit to the site, by a site contractor was on March the 11th this year. During a conversation with one of the two machine operators, he confirmed that they were based in Buckinghamshire and were engaged to maintain the removal of ground vegetation cover on the hard standings.

There also seems to have been no attempt to prevent further degradation of the site by way of Fly Tipping, and this is clearly shown on the photographic appendices.

Even given the existing Lockdown and Covid 19 situation, two families with young children on bikes and a runner out for exercise, visited the site during the short time I was on site.

Supporting evidence in the appendices

The scale of the 'amenity devaluation' of the Site

Sadly any amenity, especially one as important as an established, natural, open space that is denied to a community, is a loss.

Whether it is dog walkers, or families with young children learning how to ride their first bicycle, or simply individuals wishing to go for a run and have that all-important exercise, a natural habitat, that is close to where people live, is an incredibly important amenity.

With its numerous Rights of Way and Footpaths, this amenity was (and still is) used extensively by the villagers. Regrettably, at the moment, a stroll in the fresh air is not quite as enjoyable as it once was.

There is also a specific, additional benefit that this small area of land provides, and that is that it provides a 'buffer' between commerce, industry and a major Military Centre.

This was certainly the belief of a Building Inspector when a previous appeal was dismissed on the 25th July 1989 (T/APP/J3910/A88/098283/P3)

Since then, an amazing amount of work has been undertaken by Local Councils, throughout the UK, to develop Local Neighbourhood Plans. These instruments enable local communities to evolve and to grow in a manner that meets a raft of local requirements, and take account of the differing needs that various parts of society require.

In the case of Neston, the 'official' classification has been given, as that of a 'Small Village', and as such, it is anticipated, that in the current planning cycle, which lasts until 2026, that a 'small amount of in-fill development might be required to satisfy local need'.

In the past 30 years, Neston has seen enormous changes and development, which have largely been embraced and welcomed into the community. Housing development on 'genuine' redundant industrial land such as disused mines, a major Stone Processing Works and an explosives storage area have enhanced the 'village spirit' and we now enjoy a vibrant and thriving place to live.

We understand that new house building will always been contentious in some circles, and that is a given.

However, when a development of 180 houses (yet to be started) 19/07339/REM will appear less than 700 meters from this appeal site at the top of Westwells, on a redundant area of an active MOD base, the village of Neston, not unreasonably, asks the question:

'Is this development really needed?'

We strongly believe it is not.

Supporting evidence in the appendices

The possibility of further development on adjacent land

Should this site be granted permission to develop, it is the opinion of Neston Action Group that a further application will be made at some stage in the future, to develop a parcel of adjacent land, described in the appellant's 'Description of the Appeal Site' (2.4) as a paddock.

'To the south of the site is an open paddock separating the appeal site from a former brownfield MOD site known as Royal Arthur'

It has come to the notice of NAG that this paddock is also in the ownership of the appellant and was purchased in August 2018.

Appendix 1 Requirement for mass labour provision 1940

Underground Factories

German bombing raids on Bristol in September 1940, which killed 160 workers, convinced the Ministry of Aircraft Production to make dramatic changes in Britain's manufacturing facilities.

Suddenly on 7 December 1940 the Ministry requisitioned various quarries still being worked by the Bath and Portland Company, mainly Spring Quarry. The move surprised the workers, who dropped their tools where they had been working and abandoned lamps, saws, and half-cut blocks of stone and lifting cranes.

The Ministry intended to move vital, military production factories into safer underground locations. Their costings estimated an investment cost of £100,000 and a completion time of six months.

The original plan was to move the Bristol Aeroplane Company's Hercules Bomber engine plant from Filton, together with Parnell's gun turret facilities from Yate, Bristol, and the Dowty Company's undercarriage plant at Gloucester. The Spring Quarry was chosen because of its 55 acres of underground tunnels. McAlpine, the clearance contractors, recruited 10,000 navvies mostly from the Irish Republic

The National Service Hostels Corporation

This organisation was set up in 1941 by Ernest Bevin, the Minister of Labour and National Service, as an independent non-profit making organisation to cater for the needs of workers arising out of their employment during the Second World War. In particular, there was difficulty manning the armaments industries because workpeople had to be sent from their homes to places where there was not enough living accommodation, and therefore the government decided to set up hostels in those areas. The Corporation was registered under the Companies Act 1929 as a company without share capital, within the bounds of ministerial policy and control. Lord Rushcliffe, the former Minister of Labour, was appointed Chairman of the Corporation. By the end of the War, the Corporation was managing 58 industrial hostels and providing over 30,000 places.

Appendix 2 Accommodation solutions for mass labour provision 1940

The hostel sites were run by the National Service Hostels Corporation Ltd... (an agency of the Ministry of Labour) and planned by Alexander Gibb and Partners.

Construction of the hostels began in 1941 at Westwells, with construction of the married quarters commencing in 1942. By the end of March 1942 c.3, 000 hostel places were completed.

Table 1 indicates the scale of the hostel complexes both in size and the number they were proposed to accommodate, (locations are identified on Fig. 11).

Those plans of hostel sites identified (Westwells (HS1), Gorse Farm (HS1) and Kingsmoor (HS10)) show that in addition to the accommodation blocks the sites comprised hospitals, stores, recreation halls, welfare centres, launderettes, offices and hairdressers.

The accommodation blocks were simple single-sex, one-storey structures; the welfare buildings included canteens where food was provided and each had its own cinema.

Some also had dance halls such as that at Lypiatt which survives, with the dance floor remaining unchanged and the bar (to the left of the entrance).

Appendix 3 *Map showing the locations of Ministry of Aircraft Production Worker Hostels*



Appendix 4 Hostel specifications from Ministry of Labour

SITE	LOCATION	AREA OF BUILDINGS	TYPE OR CAPACITY	OWNERSHIP AND DEVELOPMENT	
Hostel	Sites				
HS1	Westwells	114,452 sq ft	1,000 men	Transferred to National Hostel Corp by 1947 (McCamley 2007). The hostel site has largely been lost although one substantial structure survives, remaining in use as a Plastics Factory. Close inspection of this structure was not possible.	
HS2	Gorse Farm	112,650	1,000 men	Transferred to RAF by 1943 (McCamley 2007). This lies within the current MOD Rudloe site, surviving buildings include accommodation blocks, a laundry block, stores and the 'canteen and welfare' building.	
HS3	Thorney Pits	130,690	1,000 men	Transferred to National Hostel Corp by 1947 (McCamley 2007). This site remains undeveloped; the location of former structures is indicated by disturbances and mounds in the landscape.	
HS8	Potley	119,344	1,000 men	Transferred to War Office 1943 (McCamley 2007). This site has been redeveloped as Leafield Industrial Estate, access was not possible to ascertain if any MAP buildings survive but it is considered to be unlikely.	
HS9	Westwood	107,424 sq ft	Unknown	Transferred to National Hostel Corp by 1947, community centre left for light industry until 1972 (McCamley 2007). Cartographic sources suggest this site has not been developed, although some housing is extant immediately to the south.	
HS10	Kingsmoor	160,000	1,000 men	Transferred to Admiralty 1943 (McCamley 2007). This site remained in use as HMS Royal Arthur but is now derelict. Hostel buildings remain extant.	
HS14	Rudloe	Unknown	Unknown	Transferred to MOWB in 1943 for experimental work (McCamley 2007). Rebuilt as married quarters but not used. Transferred to Local Authority for redevelopment in 1963/4. A large estate is now situated in the location of the hostel/married quarters.	
HS15	Lypiatt	122,837	1,000 men	Transferred to War Office in 1943 (McCamley 2007). The site is now in use as the 'Cotswold Centre' by the MOD and many hostel buildings survive including the comunity centre and residential buildings.	
HS16	Leafield	141,742	1,000 men	Transferred to Admiralty by 1947 (McCamle 2007). This site is undeveloped.	

Appendix 5 Photographs of site taken in July 2018, showing the scale of re-wilding prior to site 'devastation' by the current owners





Appendix 6

Photograph taken July 2018

Prior to the site devastation by the current owners



Appendix 7 Photograph taken late 1990's



Appendix 8 Site scrapings described as Building Rubble in the SoC May 2020



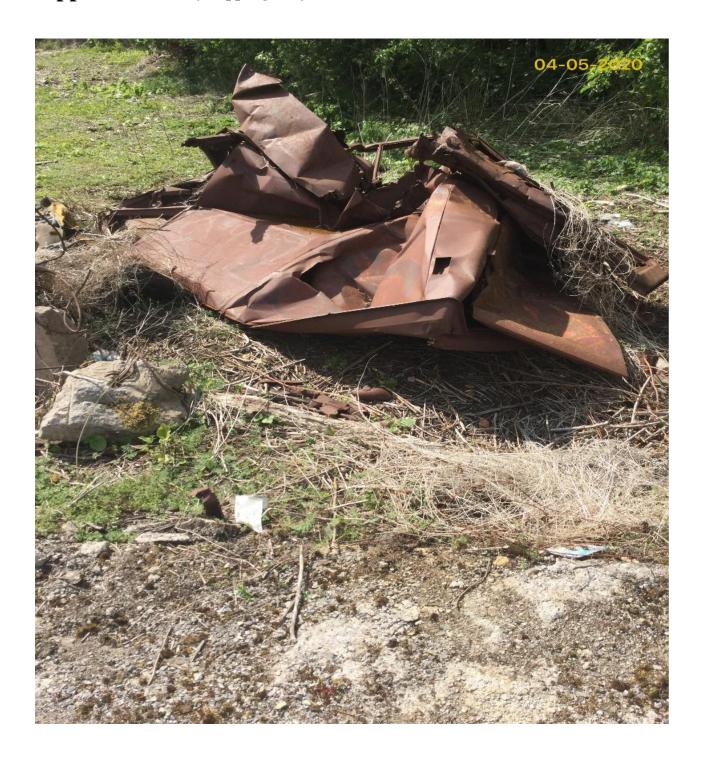
Appendix 9 Site scrapings described as Building Rubble in the SoC May 2020



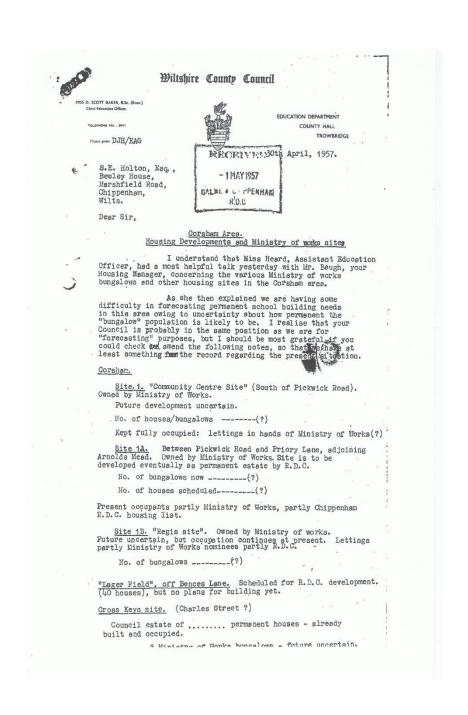
Appendix 10 Fly Tipping May 2020



Appendix 11 Fly Tipping May 2020



Appendix 12 Wiltshire Council notice of Site Closure (1) 1957



Appendix 13 Wiltshire Council notice of Site Closure (2) 1957

Rudloe Estate. Ministry of Works - converted Hostel buildings.

Ho. of units/bungalows----(?)

R.D.C. do not envisage either continuing to maintain the bungalows or replacing by permanent housing. Férmission is being sought of Ministry of Works to allow this estate to "run down" gradually by not replacing families who move out. This "running down" is likely to take some years yet. Families are re-housed mainly in Corshau and Box. (?)

Boxfields Estate. Ministry of Works bungalows. (no.____)

Lettings from R.D.C. housing list. No change in present situation yet envisaged, though eventually the bungalows have to be demolished and the land restored for agricultural use.

West Wells. Ministry of Works E. V. W. Hostel. To be closed in Autumn 1957. No re-occupation envisaged.

Thorneypits Hostel. To be closed in Autumn. No re-occupation envisaged.

R.A.D. Rudloe. Permanent Ministry of Works estate 78 houses at Leafy Lane. No plans to increase No. of M.Q. known to R.D.C.

Hudswell. W.D. estate. ____? permanent quarters -No change from present situation. continue

Lypiatt. No. 23 Hilitary Families (transit camp), to continue for as is known. No permanent housing envisaged by R.D.C. in this area.

Neston. No further R.D.C. housing development envisaged.

Yours faithfully,

of Chief Education Officer.

21

Appendix 14 1946 letter offering Hostel Hutments on permanent loan

					, /
Tel. No. 26671. MINISTRY OF HEALTH, 19, Woodland Road, Bristol, 8.	Tour Ref: 12 NOV 1946 LANGE & CHIPPERSON, Serry, Quec. Apostom. Secondo. Lizar, Lizar Lls. Heartel. Lizar, Lasra Chiralls. Heartel.	I have to refer to the Department's letter of Account class and to enquire whether you are yet in a	position to reply thereto. Tours faithfully,	slad to Athladon R.D. C.	
12 SEP1946 Tel: BRISTOL 26671. R.D.C. 19, Woodland Roed, BRISTOL, 8. Yr. Ref: Dear Sir,	Address of Camp Country Mousing. Mather occurred by sourtiers Arthur Antilet not available for whe country referred to above, whilst not available for	permanent transfer to this Department, is offered on long term loan by m. of Wash. In this connection I have to invite your attention to the	accompanying Memorandum and to request you to be good enough to state without delay whether the Council are prepared to take over	this camp. Yours faithfully, (Africal As the for Principal Housing Officer.	Trackon.

Appendix 15 1946 Hostel Hutment building Specification and Condition Report

REPORT ON WESTWELLS CAMP. HOSTEL SITE NO.1.

This site is situated at the Westwells end of the main built-up area at Hawthorn, and consists of a number of Hostel hutments, each having two wings containing subicles, with a centre Ablution SITUATION.

Elock. There are twelve such blocks, but two have been convested into a Galley with Dining Huts.

SERVICES All services are available.

CONVERSION. Since the hutments are in the same condition as left when occupation ceased, there is a fairly considerable amount of work to be done to effect satisfactory conversion. The walls are of 4" hollow tile construction with lined asbestos roofs. A considerable amount of stripping would be necessary in the Ablution blocks, but most of the fittings, such as basins, W.C. cisterns, etc., could be re-used.

Most of the area around the hutments has been laid with hardcore and ashes, and some clearance would be necessary in order to provide gardens, eto.,

While the hitments could be made into suitable temporary dwellings, it appears unlikely that the conversions could be carried out within the cost laid down by the Ministry of Health.

81 gnod. halker tudman

Sept. 18th, 1946.

Appendix 16 Photographs showing regrowth from felled Maple Trees and other native flora







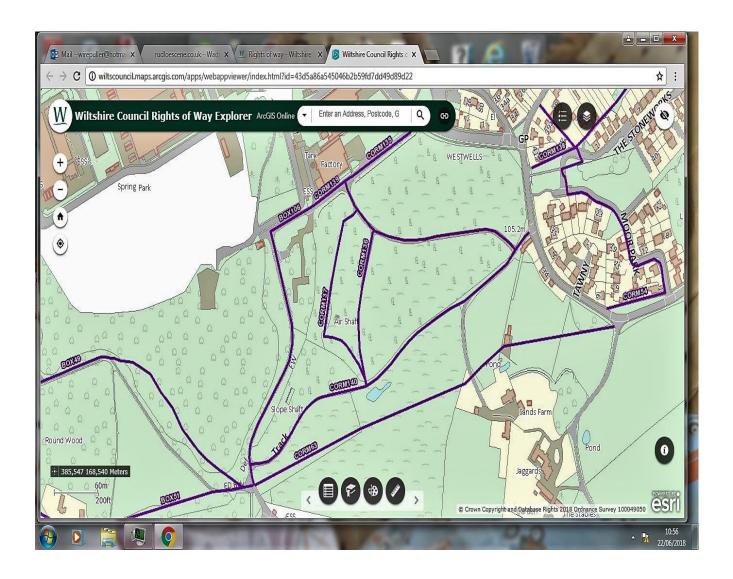
Appendix 17 Evidence, throughout the site, of the of the scale and size of trees removed.



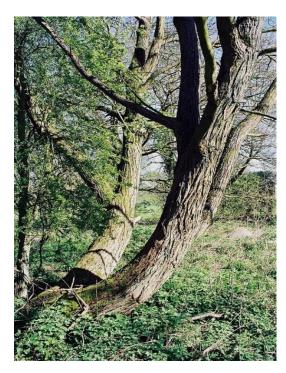




Appendix 18 Rights of Way across the Site



Appendix 19 Evidence of the scale of the destruction of this woodland





Goat willow at Sands Quarry (aka The Donkey Field) in the mid-90s before the devastation wreaked by the Ashfield Land Company of Bristol in 1999



Appendix 20

Letter from a resident confirming both the former status of this site as Woodland, and confirming that this site has had valuable amenity value to Neston for more than 45 years

Tel: 01225 810408 e-mail: pjturner@lineone.net 29 Springfield Close Corsham Wilts. SN13 0JR

18th May 1999

James Gray MP House of Commons London SW1A 0AA

Dear James.

Thanks for your letter of 28th April enclosing the response from Ashfield Land regarding the destroyed woodland at Westwells. As the woodland is gone, there seems little point in pursuing the matter ad infinitum but I must point out that the statements and euphemisms in Mr Faber's letter are unreasonable.

Local residents have not "misunderstood" anything. I have walked in this woodland for the past 25 years. Over this period, I have enjoyed and documented the unusual floral combination which was to be found here. The people of Corsham have, during the month of April, been able to enjoy some of the woodland scenes through an exhibition of photographs in the local library. They were also able to see the devastation which Ashfield Land's "landscape architects" have wreaked on the area.

Are Ashfield Land and the "landscape architects" aware of anything that they have destroyed? Did they enjoy the woodland? What did they think of the unusual fauna? Did they appreciate its importance as wildlife habitat? I presume the "management work" being undertaken is to a plan. Perhaps we local residents who lack understanding could see the plan - then perhaps we will understand.

With regard to the unlawful tipping. This is a problem throughout the area, not just on this site. I could have collected together the rubbish on this site in one day, called North Wilts District Council to remove it, and charged nothing. Perhaps Mr Faber could explain the logic behind his reasoning of: problem - rubbish in woodland; solution - remove woodland. The illogicality of this is actually indicated in his letter when he states "... additional work is required ... which will involve securing boundaries to avoid further unlawful tipping". So that was the solution all along!

Before modern man came along to "manage" woodland, it seemed to get along fine by itself - Britain was once 95% wooded. Often, woodland management is undertaken by organisations attempting to justify their own existence by being seen to be doing something. In this case, I believe the euphemism "woodland management" is being used for other reasons which have not been divulged.

Mr. Faber states that "the site has suffered from ... lack of management and general neglect". The exhibition of photographs showed the local community something of which I was already painfully aware, that this was infinitely preferable to its current state. The beauty of Westwells Wood was that it was neglected.

Yours sincerely

Paul Turner

Copies to:

Mr. R. Faber Ashfield Land Limited 7 Berkeley Square Clifton Bristol BS8 1HG

Mr & Mrs J Doohan Neston Action Group 34 Westwells Corsham Wilts

Appendix 21

A selection of photographs of the Westwells Woodland taken by
Paul Turner who was the author of the letter in App. 20, and is a
keen local naturalist who has 'walked' this site extensively for the
past three decades.













