

Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust

Briefing

Sharphill Wood and housing proposals



Proposals have recently been put forward for new housing on land to the east of Sharphill Wood at Edwalton in Rushcliffe. This area has been subject to several planning proposals, and with pressure rising to meet housing targets is seen by many as a key site for new housing development. Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust also recognises the need for a supply of affordable homes, but is seeking to ensure that new housing not only minimises impact on wildlife, but provides opportunities to enhance the natural environment.

We have previously recognised that, when looked at strategically, the land around Sharphill could provide one of the least damaging options for housing development. However, since then we have had more information highlighting the wildlife value of the wood itself and the surrounding area. Sharphill Wood is important to wildlife and people because:

- It is a **Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC)** and proposed Local Nature Reserve (pLNR), which is due for designation in 2009
- It includes legally protected and **priority habitats and species**
- It is valued by the **local community** through a Friends of Sharphill Wood group

Development proposals for new housing have recently been submitted to Rushcliffe Borough Council including 1,200 homes and a Community Park. The Wildlife Trust has objected to this application on the grounds that:

- Long-term loss of valuable habitat within **Sharphill Wood SINC** and pLNR will be unavoidable
- Historic **hedgerow habitat** resource will be lost through disturbance and fragmentation
- Habitats for **priority bird species** such as skylark and yellowhammer will be lost
- There will be a long-term adverse impact on the integrity of the local **badger population**

Key facts

Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust scrutinises more than 11,000 planning applications every year and comments on some 600 to protect and enhance wildlife

The Wildlife Trust works with planners and developers to explore areas most suitable for housing, and sits on the countywide panel to assess housing allocations

Sharphill Wood is 9.6 ha of broadleaved woodland, selected as a SINC because of its importance for plants and animals including woodland wildflowers, birds and mammals

The wood is owned by Rushcliffe Borough Council and managed by the Friends of Sharphill Wood group with help from the Wildlife Trust

The Wildlife Trust took part in a Public Inquiry in February 2009 to object to the planning application. The result of the Inquiry will be available in September 2009

Do the proposals for new housing fit with planning policy?

The 'Nottinghamshire and Nottingham Joint Structure Plan' and 'Rushcliffe Local Plan' both include policies stating that development which adversely affects SINC, LNRs, or protected species will not normally be permitted. Development can only take place if it can be clearly demonstrated that there are reasons for the proposal which outweigh the need to safeguard the nature conservation value of the site. In addition, permission will only be granted if measures are taken to:

- Mitigate the impact of the development proposals on the habitats
- Reduce disturbance to a minimum
- Provide adequate alternative habitats to sustain the current levels of species

Because of the impact of the proposed development on the SINC, priority habitats and protected species, and the lack of appropriate mitigation, the Wildlife Trust considers that the proposals are contrary to national, regional and local planning policy.

Why is the land around Sharphill Wood important?

As a SINC, Sharphill Wood provides an important refuge for wildlife. In addition, the surrounding farmland acts as a buffer that not only helps to protect the wood itself, but supports important foraging habitat for a range of species such as bats, badgers and threatened birds.

With the increasing pressures of climate change, we need to protect these existing sites, and expand or connect them to ensure our natural environment is more resilient to change. Areas like Sharphill Wood also offer important opportunities for people to access high quality local greenspace, thereby improving quality of life.

Will the proposals for a new Community Park enhance the wildlife value?

Proposals to mitigate the impacts on Sharphill Wood and the surrounding area are outlined in the Environmental Statement submitted with the application, and include a new Community Park. This would encompass Sharphill Wood itself, which would be retained as public open space, together with the establishment of new habitats including broadleaved woodland, species rich grassland and species-rich hedgerow.

The Wildlife Trust supports the principle of the Community Park and the establishment of priority habitats within it. However, as the proposals stand, we do not believe that the impacts of the housing scheme are fully addressed, that the wildlife mitigation is adequate or that there is an overall biodiversity gain. To fully mitigate impacts, the long-term future of the area to the west of Sharphill Wood would also need to be safeguarded. This would need to include areas of undisturbed habitat to provide a refuge for those species not catered for elsewhere within the Community Park.

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For further information on Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust visit our website www.nottinghamshirewildlife.org

Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust is the county's largest environmental charity run by local people for the benefit of local wildlife and wildlife habitats. Improving people's understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of the natural world is fundamental to our work. We manage more than 60 nature reserves covering more than 2,000 acres, liaise with farmers and landowners to promote and encourage conservation stewardship, campaign for the protection of threatened species and habitats and work to influence government policy and decisions affecting the future of wildlife. Our efforts are part of a nationwide network of 47 local Wildlife Trusts working in partnership to protect our precious natural heritage.