

# Sitlington Parish Council



## The Emroyd Project

## Design and Access Statement

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### **The Project**

The Emroyd woodland is a 14ha woodland, adjacent to Middlestown village and publicly owned by Sitlington Parish Council. The Parish Council in partnership with a Community Group, Friends of Emroyd, aim to improve the value of the woodland for local residents and others seeking countryside recreation from surrounding urban areas. The improvement will cover a number of aspects but is fundamentally dependent upon a scheme to extend the footpath and bridleway network within the wood.

The aim of the project, as set out in the attached Project Report, is to improve the value of the Emroyd woodland by:

- a) opening up the woodland by creating new paths for walking, cycling and horse riding;
- b) increasing local awareness of the area - its history and ecology;
- c) increase the educational value of the area
- d) improving the ongoing management of the woodland through establishing local involvement.
- e) providing memorials for the contribution of parish residents to the First World War and the contribution made by horses to that war effort.

The scheme provides for a significant extension to the existing cycling and horse riding route which is currently provided by the permissive bridleway which runs east-west across the higher more accessible southerly part of the site closest to the village (see layout plan included). The existing bridleway will be refurbished and the new route has been designed in terms of gradients to provide for as easy pedestrian use as possible.

### **Planning Issues**

The main planning context particularly relevant to the current application and its site is its:

1. Location within Green Belt
2. Status as a Local Wildlife Site and
3. Inclusion within a designated Countryside Recreational Opportunity Area and its contribution to improving recreational provision.

### **Green Belt**

Whilst it is acknowledged that development of this nature is classified as inappropriate development within the Green Belt, the Parish Council consider that this statement sets out sufficient exceptional circumstances to justify its approval in this case.

The Parish Council also takes the view that the direct impact upon Green Belt policy is minimal as the routes, which are contained totally within the woodland, will have virtually no impact on the openness of the Green Belt whatsoever, which is the main concern of the policy.

## **Ecological Considerations**

One of the aims of the project is to improve the ongoing management of the woodland. The Parish Council and the Friends of Emroyd are taking great care to ensure that the proposed routes do not unduly damage the ecology of the woodland. The Friends of Emroyd have been liaising with the Wakefield Biodiversity Group and a short report is attached of a visit made by the Chairman. In addition the Parish Council have commissioned a report to check whether Great Crested Newts occupied the small pond area within the wood. The report confirms that great crested newts are not present. In any event the route construction is unlikely to have any impact on the pond and associated ephemeral wet areas.

The Biodiversity Group report confirms that Emroyd provides a valuable but not exceptional area of relatively young woodland and the development of the route network as proposed should not harm the overall value of the area. Other elements of the Project will be aimed at improving the ecology of the woodland, for example by improving the quality of the pond area and developing a wildflower meadow on the open meadow on the northern portion of the site..

With regard to direct effect upon trees (Policy D7), the routes will for the most part follow existing rather narrow, informal footpaths through the woodland. However, there will be no need to fell any large trees, but because the woodland has been left over many years to regenerate it will be necessary to widen the routes by clearing a number of smaller trees (<4m in height). However, the overall impact on the woodland as whole will be very limited.

A further sensitive ecological issue is the presence of badgers within the vicinity. Specific information on this subject is deliberately not made publicly available. However, a member of Friends of Emroyd has joined the Wakefield Badger Group and is monitoring the situation closely and will keep the Friends of Emroyd Management Group informed should the new routes be judged to having an unreasonably severe impact on badger activity in the area.

Parish Council and Friends of Emroyd believe the above demonstrates the commitment being made to retaining and enhancing the ecological value of the woodland and the strong desire to implement mitigation measures should any more serious ecological impacts be identified up to and including the construction phase.

## **Improvements to Countryside Recreation**

The site falls within a Countryside Recreation Opportunity Area as shown on the Wakefield Development Plan Policy Map and therefore the Emroyd Project will help to further the aims behind this designation. The improvement will cover a number of aspects but is fundamentally dependent upon a scheme to extend the footpath and bridleway network within the wood. It is considered this aim is fully in accord with Policies L5 and L6 of the Wakefield Development Plan and that the Project fully meets the conditions within Policy L5 regarding the capacity of the area to absorb the improvements proposed.

In conclusion therefore the Parish council considers that the benefits for countryside recreation, not only for local residents, but for those who visiting the area from nearby urban areas (Ossett, Horbury and including Thornhill in Kirklees District) fully justify them being considered as exceptional circumstances to Green Belt policy.

## **Access**

Further issues of relevance to this statement are access and accessibility.

The site does not have direct vehicular access from the surrounding road network but maintenance and construction traffic will have access along the existing track on the northern edge of the site,

subject to the consent of the owner, which gives access via an entrance at the north-western corner. WMDC Footpaths Section have recently implemented drainage and surface repairs to significantly improve the quality of this track.

Access for horses, cyclists and walkers to the new route for which planning permission is being sought will be taken from the existing permissive bridleway through the site from New Road opposite the junction with Green Lane on the south-western side of the site to Thornhill Road beyond the eastern edge of the site. There is also a well used footpath entrance to the site from Nell Gap Lane, as well as the footpath along the northern edge of the site. No new accesses are being sought from the public highway.

### Quality of the New Route.

The route is proposed to be a 2m wide route with a hard crushed stone surface, capable of providing for horse riding, cycling and walking. (See attached Route Specification Document) Consideration has been given to wheelchair usage and it is hoped that the new routes and resurfaced existing bridleway will encourage push-chair and wheelchair usage. The current paths within the wood are not suitable for such use at present. The choice of surfacing is considered to be a compromise between keeping the route in a more natural but rougher state and a fully tarmaced path of a more urban character.

Unfortunately the topography of the site is not particularly conducive to manually operated wheelchairs proceeding between the northern and southern ends of the site. (There is a height difference of some 40m). However it is hoped that improvements planned for the existing bridleway will provide an easier but still worthwhile route though the wood. As powered wheelchairs become more common it is hoped they will more easily be able to take advantage of the whole route. Special arrangements have to be made at the entrances to the site for wheelchair users to deter usage by motorcycles.

### **The Memorials**

Permission is also sought for locating two small memorials for those parishioners who fell in World War 1. At present the names of parishioners who fell in the First World War are recorded in a number of memorials scattered throughout the parish, the aim would be to create a consolidated memorial stone.

It is also proposed to create a memorial for horses who served in the war in recognition of their significant contribution. This is likely to be smaller and constructed in wood.

It is proposed to locate these memorials at two corners of the meadow area at the northern end of the site as shown on the Layout Plan.

Neither memorial has been designed yet and it is suggested the designs could be reserved matters if it is considered necessary.