Waldringfield tree warden's comments on the submission for Brightwell Lakes Phases E1, W1, E1a and W1b

1 Overall concept

The phases here detailed are residential developments, the first four areas of the several required to complete the site. The layout of these is necessarily quite tight incorporating houses and flats, garages and parking spaces, cycle storage, footpaths and roads. There are few opportunities left for landscape planting of trees, hedges, shrubs and herbaceous material, and grasses. However where these exist they have not been used to their full advantage.

2 Wildlife corridors

Although mention has been made of wildlife corridors in past documents these now seem to consist almost entirely of the peripheral bridleways which are already in existence for the main part and the necessary open spaces or SANGs including the main one around the lake not yet fully designed. There is no attempt to take the wildlife corridor into the housing development where it might link up with gardens. In these layouts gardens do not back onto open areas but very largely onto other gardens meaning they are surrounded by tall (1.8m) grey closeboard fencing. The back gardens are turfed. There are no trees or climbers in the gardens whatsoever native or otherwise (see condition 12).

3 Proposed Trees

Proposed trees are spaced 15m apart along both sides of main access roads. Trees within the development are a mere sprinkle. There are no groups of trees of different sizes and species. There are many dwellings within the development where there will not be a single tree visible from a window until residents (hopefully) start to plant them.

4 Tree canopy on maturity

On the planting plan all proposed trees of whatever species or initial planting size are shown as circles of diameter 5m. It is not known at what stage of their development they are meant to be illustrated. However many are very narrowly fastigiate trees. These are suited to restricted spaces such as city courtyards. There is a lot of the upright growing field maple Acer campestre Streetwise. This is predicted to reach a diameter of 3m after 25 years (using data from Hillier Nurseries). Carpinus betulus Franz Fontaine will reach 2.5 crown diameter, ornamental cherry Prunus Amanogawa only 1m wide after 25 years. Fastigiate birch may make 1.5m wide spread and Pyrus Chanticleer (ornamental pear) 3m. Therefore all of these will be much narrower columns than shown on plan. Only Acer Elsrijk may reach 6m after 25 years and Liquidambar is predicted to reach 5m diameter.The others would be much smaller than the circles shown on the plans, half as big or less in some cases.

These severely upright trees cast less shade, and are mostly without the contrast of more

spreading forms as shown on the optimistic illustrative sections. They will not provide much leafy mass to complement the buildings.

The exception Silver Birch is a native tree but shortlived. It has a limited lifespan of 60-80 years. There are very few shown although these are very good for wildlife supporting many insect species.

5 Species of trees selected

The cultivar of Field Maple Streetwise is a clone. Therefore although providing food for wildlife in the seeds and leaves they are identical genetically which would mean a disaster if a disease struck. All the cultivars are genetically identical so similarly the cultivars of Hornbeam would be identical with each other.

Among the tree species represented there are no oak, which is the main forest tree in this area in the woods bordering the larger overall site to the north and west. There is no hazel, no willow, no holly and in fact there are no native shrubs whatsoever. It seems that the wildlife travelling through will not find much sustenance. There are no pines to tie in visually with the existing tree belt of Austrian Pine, with one exception.

6 Survival of trees

This area has had severe droughts in the past few summers and these very tall rootballed specimen trees are going to need plenty of watering. Generally, smaller trees survive better. No watering system is specified. Either an underground fitted irrigation system or a water bag to deliver water over a period may be necessary to combat drought and see the survival of these trees. Examples exist nearby of tall specimen trees planted and subsequently dying in numbers (e.g. Silver Birch at BT Adastral Park)

Liquidambar is a fine tree from North America. It prefers a well drained but moist soil.

7 Shrubs: maintenance

All ornamental, these are planted in 1m wide bands around the housing. They are maintained by the contractor in the first year. After this there is no management plan that we know of so far. Do the residents clip them? There are topiary yews and bay in pairs at several of the entrances. Are these maintained by the resident or visiting contractors? This seems rather a quirky idea. If contractor, they may end up like the planting at nearby Martlesham Heath Retail Park which is all cut by hedge trimmer to the same height, often removing flowers and berries. Most of these shrubs will outgrow their position if not carefully maintained.

8 Use of poisonous shrubs

There are quite a lot of varieties of spindle (Euonymus) in the planting which is close to footpaths and house frontages. The native spindle is highly poisonous in all parts. These

foreign relatives of it are also marked as injurious, may cause skin irritation. It is used very widely throughout the site in many cases close to where pedestrians will walk and ultimately the residents may decide to cut these themselves and would have to handle the foliage.

9 Non-native shrubs

The Taylor Wimpey Environmental Strategy states that 'all new sites (will) have planting that provides for local species throughout the seasons'. None of the many thousands of shrubs or hedges is a native species. While many have flowers and berries which may support our wildlife – Choisya and Hebe for example are good for bees when in flower – generally they are planted for their decorative foliage and do not provide 'food and shelter' for wildlife throughout the site. While not expecting a design with entirely British wild plants it is as though these have been excluded entirely.

10 Basin (in E1)

This damp area receiving drainage from the swales is to be sown with a wetland wildflower and grass mix. It could be enhanced by adding a few groups of shrubby willows, dogwood and/or alder. This would increase its wildlife potential greatly.

11 Swales

These are part of the Suds system and could provide useful habitat if they are maintained with the longer grass and flowers cut on a less frequent programme as described. The swales, about 8m long, are meant to be surrounded by shorter grass it would appear. I have not found a section drawing showing the depth and slopes of the swales.

12 Private gardens

These are to be turfed and surrounded by fencing with no further planting.

13 Suggestions for greening the site

A number of fairly easy things could be done to improve the appearance and wildlife potential of the new residential areas:

13.1 Residents with gardens could be offered a choice of small trees to plant in their gardens, such as Rowan , Crab Apple, Cherry Plum or varieties of domestic apple which would attract birds and bees into their gardens at the very least and soften the overall effect of the stark closeboard fencing.

13.2 Residents could also be offered a climber to go on their fence with a trellis attached for them (less work than clipping topiary) such as a climbing rose, clematis or honeysuckle, or an ornamental ivy, which they could select from. These would all provide nesting sites and soften the appearance of so many fences.

13.3 Street trees which are 15m apart could be at least doubled in number and do not have to be entirely fastigiate. The narrow forms suit tight spaces, they are not necessary where the trees have plenty of space all around them. Whitebeam, Rowan, Crab apple, Wild Pear and larger growing trees such as Wild Cherry, Small Leafed Lime, Oak and Scots Pine could be placed where space permits.

13.4 Native hedges could be incorporated in some areas including fruiting plants for wildlife such as hawthorn, elderberry, dogrose, cherry plum, dogwood, holly, which all grow in the area.

14 In conclusion

The plans are disappointing on a number of fronts.

Wildlife and nature seem to have been far from the minds of whoever drew up the plans.

The canopy effect will be very sparse even if all the trees grow to maturity.

There is no relationship between the coastal location in Suffolk, with low rainfall and extremely sharp drainage, and the proposed vegetation on site. These proposals could just as easily be in any county in England.

There are very few native species included.

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