



WEST ACRE PARISH COUNCIL

25th January 2021
William Higgins
Brown & Co
The Fairways
Wyboston Lakes Great
North Road, Wyboston
Bedfordshire, MK44 3AL

Dear Mr. Higgins

Woodland Creation Project – West Acre Farms

Overall West Acre PC found the documentation helpful in understanding the project.

Paulownia is not a native species but we are pleased to see there has been some research to assure us there are minimal risks in this. Other elements of potential risk to existing biodiversity also seem to be taken into consideration which the PC finds reassuring.

It's good also to see that there will be extensive perimeter planting of native species as they will serve to integrate the commercial operations into the wider landscape visually and ecologically. The parish Council would seek reassurance that these native woodland belts will be at least 15 to 20m wide in order to achieve full screening and are intended to become permanent features of the landscape should the cropping of Paulownia prove uncommercial over time? We assume the longer-term management of these native woodland areas will be embedded in the arrangements between landowner and operator as a clear legally binding condition. Indeed, we assume that should commercial operations cease for any reason then there should be a plan to remove any remaining Paulownia and for the restoration of the land as native meadow and/or woodland and we seek your reassurance accordingly? There seems to be a linked issue here in that as part of the estate's rewilding project a number of woodlands are being thinned to create more open "grazing" woodlands. Given these thinning operations some residents will wonder what the overall aim is for the woodland cover on the estate as a whole. We assume cover will be increasing slowly as part of the rewilding process in combination with these new woodlands but is there an intention to quantify this and monitor the overall change in the landscape structure of the estate? We are very pleased however to read that the project does aim to contribute positively to carbon capture/reduction, and also to see that some attempts will be made to measure the success of this or otherwise.

Would there be any opportunity for community involvement in any of the planting of the native woodland margins? Local residents are likely to support such an initiative as a potentially great way to get people (especially youngsters) involved and invested in the countryside of the community where they live.

Block 1 is adjacent to a field where we have observed large numbers of hares and we could not find any mention of this species in the documentation. We are therefore wondering why these particular locations have been chosen and if ecological surveys support the choice? The village of West Acre suffers from excessive seasonal drainage run off from valley side fields and which ends up with high volumes of heavily silted surface water running through the village causing problems of siltation into the river Nar SSSI. It strikes the Parish council that block 2 will helpfully reduce some of that flow from the slopes to the south of the village as the new trees and meadows will slow and clean the flow. Block 1 however does not seem to us to achieve the same sort of benefit to the north of the village and we are wondering if an opportunity has been missed here?

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In addition, for Block 1, we feel that the perimeter planting of native woodland should continue along its southern Lynn Road boundary. We are also concerned that the loading areas on this southern boundary are relatively close to some residential properties and could have unacceptable visual & noise impacts. These areas should therefore be located to ensure they are screened from view and will not cause any noise problems for properties in an around The Warren.

Our remaining comments focus on business and operational issues.

If we understand correctly Brown & Co are overseeing a grant application process so we assume taxpayers' money is supporting the project – if so we would be interested to know more about how the project will be monitored to ensure best value for money achieved.

Our initial inquiries (with a manager in the hardwood timber industry) suggest that this initiative is not yet widely known or understood so we wonder who is managing the two blocks and its cropping? We would ask therefore are there examples elsewhere in the UK or Europe which proves how the project will succeed commercially and can you please confirm for us how the project's success will be monitored and accountability maintained.

Where is the timber going for its production and what will it be used for? With all modern largescale agricultural and forestry operations traffic between the plantations and production lines can impact significantly on local residents. We would ask for confirmation therefore as to what studies have been or will be carried out into the impact of transportation traffic on West Acre during peak cropping periods? A robust and enforceable traffic management plan should be established in order to mitigate any impacts by keeping traffic out of River Road in particular.

We look forward to your further clarification and confirmation of the issues raised in this letter before offering our full support but on balance we can see the positive potential of this project if it is managed well in order to maximise the benefits in relation to;

- conserving and restoring wildlife habitats
- woodland creation and management
- reducing widespread water pollution and run off from agriculture land into the River Nar?
- maximising carbon capture

But we seek reassurance that the potential negative impact of forestry/cropping operations in terms of traffic and noise will be properly considered.

We look forward to your reply.

Regards



Eoghan Sheils
Chair – West Acre Parish Council