

Reasons for rejecting Grove Wood

Protected Woodland status

The CMS report suggests that Grove Wood is Ancient Semi Natural Woodland and notes that any development would damage the woodland habitat and protected plants.

Whilst the TRDC Officers simply state in their comments that some of the undergrowth and small saplings would have to be removed and damage to tree roots could occur, the situation is much more complex.

Within the outline drawn by CMS there are 15 tagged mature trees with extended or intertwined root systems, plus an additional 76 mature saplings over 4 metres high which are vital to the regeneration of the wood. However, this outline is too small, as an average size for a play area is 60m x 40m – when the outline is extended to this size, there are a further 36 tagged mature trees, making 51 in all, and a further 58 mature saplings making 134 in all.

To clear site lines, additional saplings and peripheral vegetation (which has previously been recommended by CMS be retained as a habitat for birds and small animals) would have to be removed along the boundary to a length of approximately 200 metres in order to open up a view into the wood and around the blind corners..

None of this work would be permissible, as Grove Wood enjoys a Protection Order on the total entity of the woodland, not on individual trees. The landscaping Officer at TRDC has made it clear in writing that he would not support a planning application that resulted in any damage to or interference with Grove Wood. This is in line with the advice of Natural England viz: *Local Authorities have a vital role in ensuring the protection of ancient woodland and veteran trees, in particular through the planning system and supports TRDC's stated Tree Preservation Policy "to protect trees which make a significant impact on the local surroundings."*

Value for money

TRDC in their report on catchment areas only compare the four possible sites. Adding the Swillett catchment area into the statistics clearly demonstrates that, if a play area was sited in Grove Wood, there would be two play areas close together at one end of the Parish and none for the majority of children. Grove Wood would serve a comparatively small number of children, many of whom already use the Swillett play area and would, therefore, not offer Value for Money to the investors or meet their objectives..

Objections from residents

Residents of Grovewood Close (GWC) have formed Friends of Grove Wood to formalise their objections to siting a play area in Grove Wood. This organisation currently represents every household in GWC plus a large number of people in surrounding roads who value the woods as they are. The Petition presented to the Parish Council contained the signatures of 176 people who objected to the siting of a play area in Grove Wood. These represented every household in Grovewood Close, plus 71 people who do not live in the Close but in surrounding roads - these are the potential users!

Safety

Residents have pointed out the potential dangers to children due to visiting traffic, the nature of the road, which is narrow and has blind corners, falling trees and branches. These concerns have been ratified by an Independent Health & Safety Consultant.

Parking

The only available parking is in the narrow carriageway outside people's houses.

Residents are requesting that parking restrictions be implemented due to the dangerous state of Grove Way, where Commuters have reduced the carriageway to a single lane. This would also extend to cover the whole of the Close in order to avoid commuters simply moving round the corner and limit the availability of parking to users of a play area.

Anti-social behaviour

Despite the protestations of the TRDC Officers that this will not happen, a Police Officer who has patrolled Grovewood Close has stated that in his professional opinion low-level ASB (i.e aggravating to residents but not reportable to the Police) would be inevitable due to the isolated location.

Previous investigation of Grove Wood as a potential site

In 2012, Grove Wood was rejected as a potential play area site for a number of logical reasons. In the current exercise, which includes Grove Wood in a list of potential sites, external agencies and residents have been involved, with the result that the additional information outlined above has further confirmed that decision. For the sake of completeness the reasons given in 2012 were as listed below.

1. Land owned by Parish Council, therefore not the organisation with the budget for the play area
2. Close to existing play facilities at the Swillett, therefore location does not maximise the catchment of residents accessing play facilities in the area
3. Located in a quiet cul-de-sac, therefore significant impact on local residents, many of whom are older and do not have children of the age utilising such facilities
4. No formal parking and school traffic already uses this road at set times
5. Sits at the top of a hill and edge of the parish boundary, therefore would not help to service families in areas such as Lower Road, Green Street, Berry Lane, Valley Road, Hill Rise, Old Solesbridge Lane and Loudwater estate
6. Unfenced: potential safety issues
7. This option does not seem viable as it does not address the need for play facilities for majority of the residents of the community

Conclusion

Grove Wood should be removed from the list of potential sites as a planning application would fail because:

The complete woodland is protected and cannot be damaged in any way. Therefore, the Landscaping Officer would object in the strongest possible terms.

Residents of Grovewood Close and surrounding roads would object due to loss of amenity

The three Ward Councillors have stated in writing that they would not support an application to site a play area in Grove Wood.