

8. Environment & Countryside

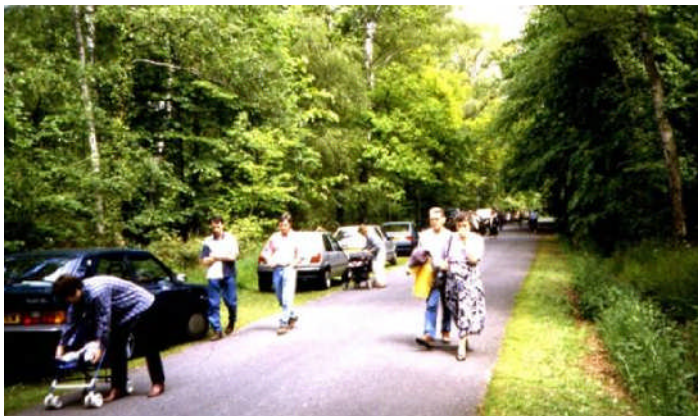
Woodhall Spa is described as an ‘oasis’ in Lincolnshire, chiefly because of its woods. The overall environment in which residents live attracted a great deal of comment in the household survey. Woodhall Spa’s very name comes from its abundance of natural provision, the spa, woods and the nearby river all play vital part to its continued success as a whole. Tourists and residents alike place a high value on its natural beauty.

The woods in and around Woodhall Spa are extremely important to the parishioners with an overwhelming 98% of respondents saying that they are ‘important’ or ‘very important’. An equally high number of residents were concerned about the ‘like for like’ replacement of trees, around 95% agreeing that it was important that the same species, or at least a similar one, was used. These strongly held views are made by an informed community, where 59% of the population walk the woods at least once a week.

Trees and Woods

It is easy to explain the evident strong attachment residents have to the local woods and trees. Their unique ambience and character is due to the geology of the area. The soil in the majority of Woodhall Spa and to the east of the village is of sands and gravels. This has given rise to two happy outcomes.

The first is that the agricultural value of the land has been much lower than in the more fertile surrounding areas. Much of the land remained uncultivated or fell into disuse and naturally evolved to the extensive birch and oak woodland such as that to be found along Kirkby Lane, now largely as part



of Kirkby Moor and Roughton Woods Nature Reserves. Substantial land off Kirkby Lane was purchased by the Forestry Commission in the late 1940’s and planted with Scot’s Pines, which are now at their mature and most delightful phase in Ostler’s Plantation.

The second is that this light acid land, with a fairly high water table, can grow trees, especially pines and also shrubs like rhododendrons, very quickly. The Victorian and Edwardian forefathers
Residents enjoying the woods on Coronation Road

of this potential and the wonderful grounds surrounding the Petwood Hotel and in the original Pinewoods and the internationally famous Golf Course are a superb legacy of their knowledge, foresight and planting skills.

Because of these special conditions, it is no wonder Woodhall Spa has been described as looking like “the Surrey of the North”.

The Pinewoods

We are unbelievably fortunate that a substantial part of the centre of the village (over 19 acres) has been preserved and protected as The Pinewoods. There is probably no other large village in England with such a huge proportion of its centre given over to woodland, freely accessible to the public. It has, however, had a chequered history. Originally attached to the Victoria Hotel and planted largely with Scots Pine and various exotic trees, it provided a spacious and genteel surrounding for promenading. After the disastrous hotel fire in 1920 it slowly fell into disuse. This process was accelerated in the Second World War when the army moved in and destroyed parts of



it. Since then it has been largely unmanaged and has been naturally regenerating with oak, beech, birch, sycamore, rowan and holly.

The Pinewoods has been protected by a Tree Preservation Order since the early 1950's. This was thought insufficient to protect it from risk of proposed building development in the early 1980's, so it was purchased as a 'woodland rescue' by the Woodland Trust, who are the current owners. Because of financial pressures their management has been very limited and as a result these woods have become overgrown and degraded as an amenity.



The Woodland Trust is aware of this situation and is currently seeking substantial grant aid to widen paths, clear undergrowth, create picnic areas near the periphery and improve access and drainage. It is not certain if their grant application will succeed. It would be prudent to prepare alternative solutions, such as

Information sign in The Pinewoods possibly creating a 'Friends of The Pinewoods' charity to help fund and

contribute to the future management of this important amenity. Sources of valuable free labour have already been identified. The ELDC Tree Preservation Officer has indicated that the District Council would favourably view such management proposals.

Trees in Woodhall Spa - Gardens and Public Places

It is necessary to acknowledge that many of the large trees that provide so much of the character and views in the village, especially within the Conservation Area, are coming to the end of their lives. Planting new trees now, as replacements, will help reduce the impact of the loss of these old friends. Some of these trees, for example around the old cemetery adjacent to the main crossroads, or those which mark ancient field boundaries are historically important and merit special attention.

Trees in Woodhall Spa - Roadside Verges

Large Common Lime trees are a significant feature of The Broadway, Horncastle Road, Witham Road, Stixwould Road, Tattershall Road, Stanhope Avenue and other verge plantings in the village. These trees are mature but not yet over-mature, so this moment in time is an ideal opportunity to consider future replanting policy. Recent replacements by LCC Highways have been of Flowering Pear and Birch (e.g. in the Golf Hotel area) and are considered uncoordinated and inappropriate.

We need to decide which tree species would be appropriate for the future with climate change in mind. This needs the involvement of ELDC and LCC Highways officers because the selection of street tree species is a specialist subject. The final recommendations should then be put to the Parish Council for approval since this an important and long-term landscape feature that affects all residents.

Monument Road

Large oak trees line the pleasant walk along Monument Road from Stixwould Road to Sandy Lane. In places there are large gaps in these hedgerow trees that could be planted up with native species. The LCC has indicated it would favourably view a verge planting scheme. Alternatively, grants may be available for adjoining landowners.

Existing Public Footpaths and Viking Way

All public footpaths in the village and especially the Viking Way need to be surveyed for adequate signage, clearance of encroaching vegetation/litter or any other obstructions to free passage of pedestrians.

New footways - Coronation Road, King George Avenue and Kirkby Lane

Ever-increasing numbers of walkers and of road traffic are creating difficulties for both types of users. Separation of the two by creating new tarmaced footways will significantly improve safety and amenity. It is proposed that new paved footways should be made along Coronation Road from Stixwoud Road to the Kinema in the Woods and along the full length of King George Avenue. Along Kirkby Lane the existing tarmac footway terminates at the Cemetery. It is proposed that it should be extended through the dangerous blind bends beyond and up to the two Ostler's Plantation entrances. This would create a safe circular walk from Horncastle Road in Woodhall Spa to Horncastle Road in Roughton.



Kirkby Lane

New footways and cycleway - Kirkstead Bridge to Stixwoud Station

The latest link in the Lincoln to Boston Footpath and Cycleway project (called the Water Rail Way) is due to be completed in 2006 by Sustrans. It will create a new route along the River Witham from Lincoln to Bardney (already completed) and now on to Kirkstead Bridge. This will be an opportunity for a circular route from Woodhall Spa to Kirkstead Bridge to Stixwoud Station and back to Woodhall Spa (or in reverse, of course) for both walkers and cyclists. The existing Harwich to Hull Cycleway will be rerouted along this new Kirkstead-Lincoln stretch, when complete. It will bring many additional cyclists to the area. They should be encouraged to come into Woodhall Spa for refreshments and accommodation.

Lincolnshire Waterways Partnership (LWP)

The existing River Trent - Fosdyke Canal - River Witham Navigation currently terminates in Boston. The LWP is seeking to create a link between Boston and the River Nene and ultimately the River Ouse. This is an expensive and long-term project with an uncertain outcome. To justify its cost it will need to create jobs and support local economies. If the proposed link becomes a reality Woodhall Spa, being half-way between Lincoln and Boston, is well placed to take advantage of this. Proposals for the future may well vary from small scale upgrading of existing riverside



Moorings at Kirkstead Bridge

facilities such as pubs and cafes to major projects such as the possible creation of a new marina at Kirkstead Bridge.

Lincolnshire Limewoods Project

The Lincolnshire Limewoods Project is a partnership between a number of local and national organisations working to enhance and promote the natural and historic landscapes of the project area. Currently funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and partner contributions it will initially run for five years (2005 - 2010).

The project is centred on the concentration of ancient small-leaved lime woodlands around Bardney and includes Woodhall Spa at the southern end of the project boundary. Bordered by the River Witham to the south-west, the area also includes a remarkable concentration of medieval monasteries including Kirkstead Abbey.

A range of projects will be undertaken including access improvements, provision of visitor information, woodland management and new woodland planting to join up existing ancient woodlands. A Project Officer is employed to work with partners and local communities to develop these projects and to raise awareness of this important historic landscape.

What we want to achieve What do we need to do

To encourage the management, with the Woodland Trust, of The Pinewoods as high-quality amenity woodland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Widen paths and make more accessible by use of bark chippings • Create seating and picnic areas near the periphery • Clear out the ditches to help drainage • Clean-up brambles, undergrowth, saplings, etc.
A better utilisation of the River Witham and all it has to offer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work in conjunction with the Lincolnshire Waterways Partnership on their proposed scheme to link the River Witham with the River Nene. There is potential for the promotion of a marina on the north side of Kirkstead Bridge. Link this in with Woodhall Spa through foot and cycle paths.
More than just the historic Pine woods, we see our trees as precious and characteristic of Woodhall Spa - they need care and attention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We want the Parish Council to be much tougher on development that removes trees - they must be replanted with a traditional species appropriate to the character of Woodhall Spa • We want to see trees such as Lime planted in the new estates to bring them closer to the ambience of Woodhall Spa • Work with LCC to maximise local benefits of the Lincolnshire Limewoods Project, especially in the vicinity of Kirkstead Abbey • We need to maintain a register of our special trees not just those with TPOs. • Encourage owners to anticipate the loss of old and large trees by planting replacements now • We want to see the pines on Woodland Drive protected and replanted as required • We want to have tree planting schemes on Monument Road and Abbey Lane. • LCC Highways needs to maintain our existing stock of roadside verge trees and replant as closely as possible like for like as and when required. The implications of climate change will influence choice of tree species



For the existing public footpath system, especially the Viking Way, to be well-signposted and fully accessible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey all our public footpaths for ease of access and adequacy of signs. Ensure that LCC and/or the owners maintain the footways to a high standard
Create new footways to improve safe access for people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coronation Road and King George Avenue - clear back verge to create wide paved or tarmac footways • Extend the tarmac footway along Kirkby Lane all the way to Ostler's Plantation entrances
Make the most of Ostler's Plantation for the benefit of the whole community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find out the Forestry Commission's (FC) timetable for clear-felling remaining blocks of mature Scots Pines • Seek to clarify the FC's latest policies for replanting with deciduous trees. Currently, felled areas are being replanted with Corsican Pine - not even Scots Pine! • Request the FC that road signs to be installed at Kirkby Lane junction with Horncastle Road and at the entrance to the Plantation to guide tourists and newcomers to the main car park • Seek the cooperation of the FC to preserve part or all of the soon-to-be magnificent plantation of Douglas Firs opposite Bainland Park and of some of the Western Hemlock and Scots Pines elsewhere • Ask the FC to address dog mess and litter problems, especially in or near the main car park • Ask the FC to provide better picnic facilities • Ask the FC to reinstate their annual ride scrub and weed clearance programme, especially near the main car park • Ask the FC to publicise, locally and in advance, sporting and recreational activities taking place in these woods e.g. regional archery, cross-country running, mountain-biking events, so as to create local interest and support
We'd like to improve and protect for wildlife the areas of: Kirkby Moor, Moor Farm and Roughton Woods Nature Reserves	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek clarification from the Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust (LWT) of policies for heathland creation and regeneration, especially where they affect existing woodland • Ask the LWT to address litter and fly-tipping problems on Trust land along Kirkby Lane and their entrance leading to Ostler's Plantation main car park



