

## **A Briefing for Seend Parish Councillors on the Proposal to Create a 20 acre Extension of the Great Western Community Forest at Seend**

Seend Community Land & Asset Trust CIC (Seend CLT) exists as a community-led organisation working in the interests of the Seend community to provide community assets for the benefit of Seend as a not-for-profit enterprise. Current CLT subscriber membership stands at 260. Seend CLT was set up as part of the community impetus to publish a Seend Neighbourhood Development Plan 2020 – 2030.

In this paper, all references to Seend should be taken to mean the Civil Parish of Seend.

Parish Councillors may recall the circa 2019 proposal of Avon Needs Trees (ANT) to acquire approximately 20 acres of land on the northern slopes of the Seend ridge at Bollands Hill for reforestation as part of ANT's initiative to reforest the Bristol River Avon catchment for the purposes of climate change mitigation. The ANT project fell at the archaeology survey because ANT's charitable aims did not include the expenditure of funds on archaeology. At that time, it was considered that any reduction in tree planting density to protect archaeology was not best value for charitable funds. ANT had received significant funding from the National Lottery Fund.

As the Bollands Hill land remained unsold, in early 2023 Seend CLT approached the National Lottery Fund to request the financing of a resurrection of the ANT project. In the interim period Seend CLT had negotiated a different approach to the archaeology issue with the County Archaeologist. The proposal Seend CLT presented to National Lottery was a two-stage project with community-led archaeology taking place whilst a community tree-planting project went ahead in those areas not affected by any site investigation. Where archaeology was to be preserved for future investigation or study the tree planting scheme would allow for it. National Lottery thought the risk too great for such a small community and that the community would not be capable of meeting all the National Lottery project deliverables, of which there are many.

Time to take another tack and pursue Trees for Climate!

See: (a) <https://englandscommunityforests.org.uk/trees-for-climate/>

(b) <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/500-hectare-planting-boost-for-englands-community-forests>

Seend CLT contacted Eden Speller, who is the Green Infrastructure Programme Manager, Strategic Growth and Place at Swindon Borough Council. Eden is dealing with the Seend CLT application for funding via the Trees for Climate Fund (TfCF).

Some of the criteria for funding eligibility under TfCF are.

- a. Proposed woodland must be adjacent to a community and have community support for its creation.
- b. There must be public access to the woodland.
- c. There must be an organisation available to take both ownership of the asset and to care for it into the future.

As part of the TfCF project and Woodland Management Plan funding is provided by TfCF to establish and care for the woodland. The Seend project would become part of the UK Government's 25 Year Environment Plan and provide a protected block of woodland helping to extend and link community forests across the south-west.

### How does this project fit with the Seend Neighbourhood Development Plan?

The extract from HM Land Registry shown below shows the location and extent of the woodland project site outlined in red. The green line delineates David and Prue Hawkins' land holding and is not included in the project proposal.

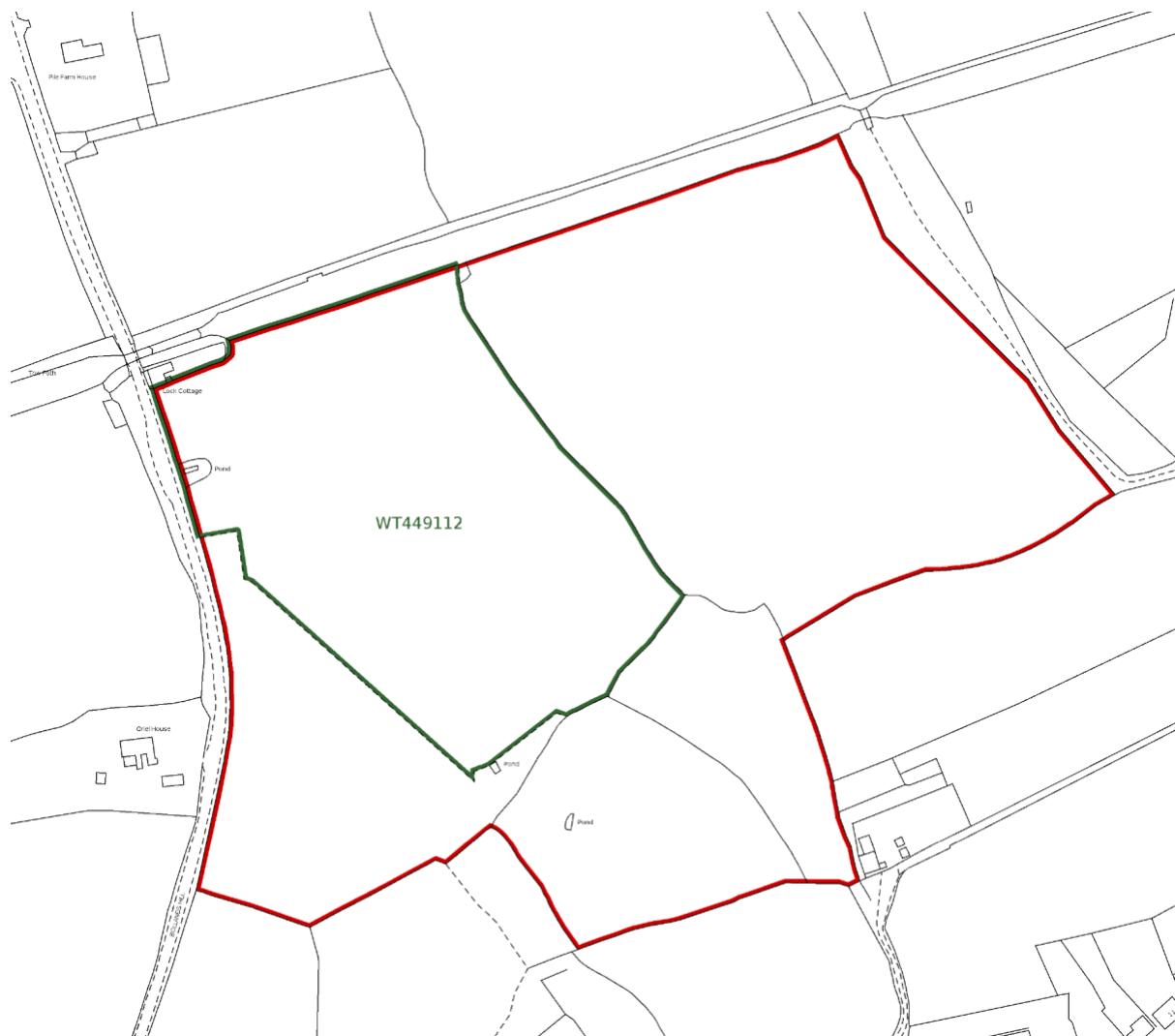


Figure 1 Extract from HM Land Registry Title Plan

Most of the field enclosures within the overall 19.72 acres at Figure 1. above have public right of way (PROW) access via SEEN6, SEEN27, SEEN29 and the bridleway SEEN44. Within the project there is an opportunity to extend a bridleway loop into the woodland from SEEN44. Stiles could be eliminated from the points of entry by kissing gates.



Figure 2 Taken from PRoW map, Wilts Council

All field plots include part of the extensive network of public rights of way in and around Seend and are much valued by the residents of the Parish and visiting canal users - as detailed in **Section 5.2 Green Infrastructure section of Seend Neighbourhood Plan 2020-2030** (Seend NDP). Section 7 of the Seend NDP deals with Future Projects and Aspirations. Section 7.1 of the Seend NDP says,

*Consultation events have recorded numerous requests for more trees to be planted. The Parish is fortunate that a local resident had the foresight and opportunity to plant a wood, called Giles Wood after the owner. The public have been given access from the PRoW to this wonderful place, by the owner.*

*Opportunities should be taken to plant trees wherever appropriate, either by taking the offer of grants or by gifts from probate residents. A potential area for tree planting has been identified for a new wooded area in the field by The Barge.*

## **Policy SP7 of the Seend NDP deals with the Kennet & Avon Canal.**

SP7 says, *Along the route of the Kennet and Avon Canal and its setting, as indicated on Figure 13 and summarised in the Seend Parish Character Statement (2020), development will only be supported where it:*

- i. protects and enhances the canal setting, character, biodiversity and historic value;*
- ii. maintains or improves access to and along the Canal which encourages use for sport leisure and recreational purposes;*
- iii. does not result in the loss of any buildings locks or other structures originally associated with the canal.*

Policy SP7 further says,

*In the event that a Melksham Bypass is proposed to pass in part through the Parish, the effect of the infrastructure proposal on the following elements of the canal's setting will be expected to demonstrate how they will be mitigated:*

- iv. tranquillity*
- v. light pollution*
- vi. biodiversity assets in recognition of its status as a County Wildlife Site*
- vii. heritage assets, including archaeology*
- viii. access to the canal*

As indicated by the extract from HM Land Registry plan at Figure 1. the larger field enclosure is riparian and so provides an opportunity for biodiversity enhancement with wet woodland creation. Wet Woodland is a DEFRA designated priority habitat.

**Policy SP4: Landscape and Local Key Views** says, *The valued qualities of our distinct and sensitive landscape must be protected and enhanced.*

Rusty Lane to the north-east of the site is a bridleway. The acquisition of the land, under a Trees for Climate grant, would provide an opportunity for improved public PRow access from Rusty Lane and the creation of an extension for access on horseback with the creation of a community woodland walk loop and community orchard. Pedestrian routes could be designed in as part of any future archaeology protection. The smaller south enclosures, higher up the slope, are ideal for allowing the process of natural succession to continue - should that be a recommendation of the Woodland Management Plan.

The current land use is for grazing, though the pasture has not been grazed regularly and for some. Natural succession processes are already taking place as southern parts are reverting to scrubland. The Wiltshire PRow mapping, Figure 2. shows how the land interacts with and supports enhancement of the local footpath network.

The Seend NDP makes some mention of biodiversity enhancement. Creation of a community woodland on this site supports the green infrastructure corridors of both Melksham and Seend Neighbourhood plans. This is a key long-term aim of the woodland project with a biodiversity baseline survey being part of the project plan and included in the funding. We can expect the support of Wiltshire Wildlife Trust for these

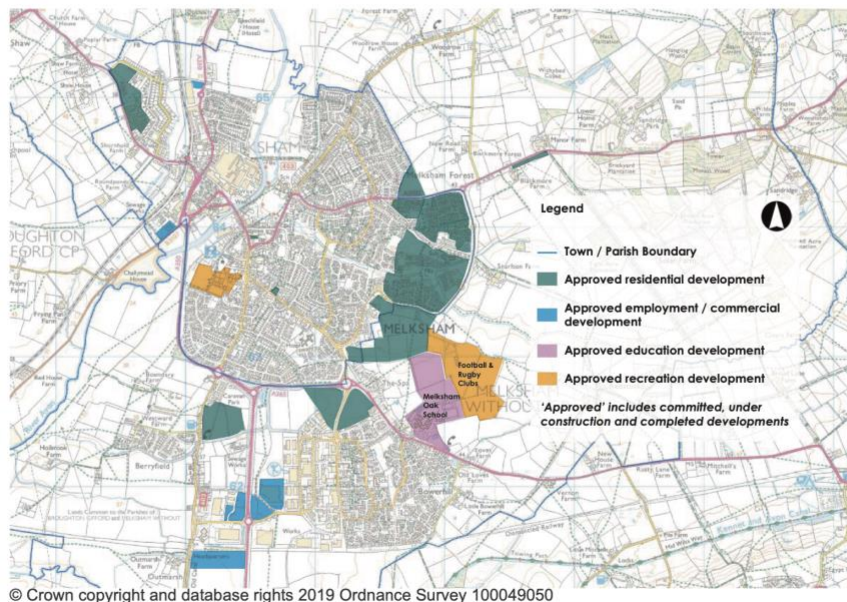
longer-term aspects. We also hope this project will generate community interest and the engagement of interested community volunteers and Seend Primary School. There will be little or no cost to the Seend precept unless the implementation of the woodland project generates other future initiatives.

### Strategic View of the Importance of Melksham’s South-East Expansion and Impacts on Seend

When we consider the Figure 3 map image below, taken from the Joint Melksham Neighbourhood Plan 2020 – 2026, now being called Melksham Neighbourhood Plan 1, and compare it to the next image taken from the current draft of the Wiltshire Local Plan to 2038 (WLP2028), we see the historic and intended future direction and extent of travel for Melksham’s south-eastern development. Those with concern for preserving our Seend rural environment, mitigating impacts of climate change and preserving our quality of rural life should focus on sites 1, 4 and 5 shown in the map from WLP2028 – particularly site 5 in the south of Melksham exploiting increased land values within a canal waterside environment and site 4 exploiting the access provided by the A365 Melksham – Devizes road. Also, notice how site 5 encloses Giles’ Wood and omits the C-route option for the proposed Melksham by-pass, which may in future run west-east through the centre of site 5. The canalside land premium, the A365 and the possible by-bass will all encourage development extension in our direction.



Figure 4: Major planning permissions granted during the current Wiltshire Core Strategy (Adopted 2015) period (at September 2020)



© Crown copyright and database rights 2019 Ordnance Survey 100049050

Joint Melksham Neighbourhood Plan 2020 - 2026

15

Figure 3 Map image from Melksham Neighbourhood Plan 2020 - 2036

## Selecting sites

Seventeen sites were considered reasonable alternatives for new homes and assessed through sustainability appraisal. (See map below)

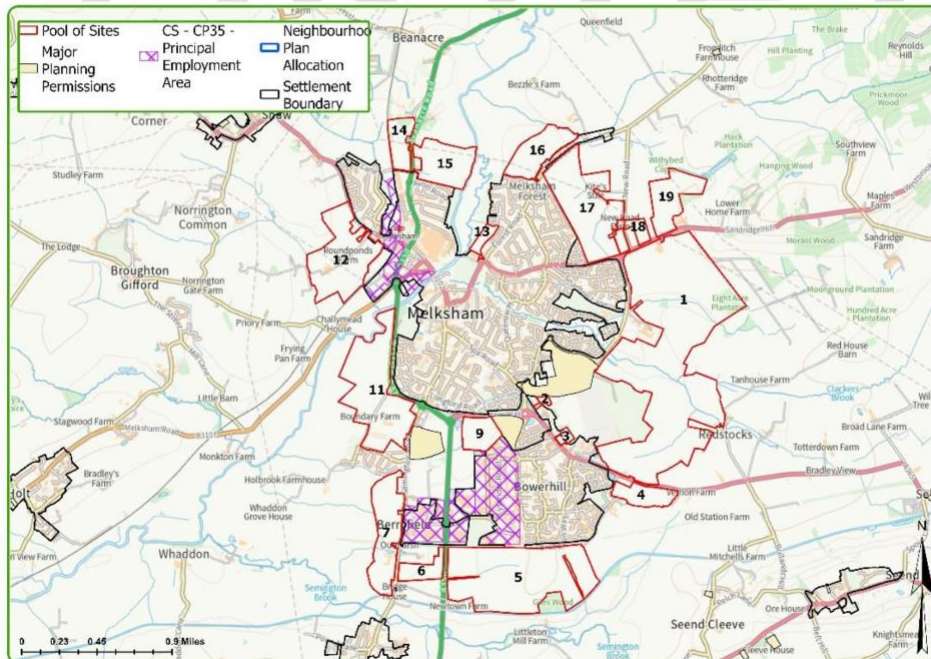


Figure image

Figure 6. The pool of sites for sustainability appraisal at Melksham.

Wiltshire Draft Local Plan to 2038

4 Map from

Our small community has both the opportunity and power to punch above its weight and influence these matters if, together, we exploit the tools open to us through Localism to access funds assigned to mitigating climate change through the Government's 25-year Environment Plan. There may be additional future opportunities for community forest land designation if we identify further land assets of community value. This is something that should certainly be addressed by building on the framework of the current Seend Neighbourhood Plan, carrying forward more clearly defined policies and aspirations to the coming update to that plan.

## Creating the Bollands Hill Community Asset of Value

The current Bollands Hill landowner vendor is not interested in assisting the Seend community in any way and is not receptive to delaying the sale whilst the TfCF process is undertaken. The landowner has no interest in the archaeology and probably considers it an impediment.

The current situation is that woodland creation project funding is available and TfCF plan to value the Bollands Hill land by the end of July. Seend CLT & TfCF interest in the land has been notified to the land agent Woolley & Wallis, (Marlborough) who in turn advise the land is under offer. As this seems to be the case, Seend CLT has exercised its option to apply for listing of the land as an asset of community value (ACV). This tactic may not be successful in preventing the land from being sold. The owner is not obliged to accept the community offer. The ACV listing expires after 5 years. The land may return to market at some future point so it would be wise to ensure the community maintains an ongoing interest in ownership.

Parish Councillors may recall the enthusiasm with which the Seend community greeted ANT's former proposal back in 2019. After mounting a couple of public consultation sessions ANT's fundraiser stood at around £8k when they withdrew from the project. The cash was subsequently transferred to ANT's Hazeland project (Calne), which is now complete.

Seend CLT has been reticent in publicly promoting this project as 2 attempts at getting it launched have borne nothing except a lot of learning. That said, the proposal now looks like it could bear fruit through TfCF and part of this fruitfulness is going public to achieve the necessary support once again.

The CLT realises this is a lengthy document, but we feel it is important to have the history, a strategic view we perhaps agree on and the current facts.

Every year more than 100 English villages are subsumed by urban expansion. If Seend plants a perpetual forest in the way of that development, we can preserve our rural environment and help our planet.

Can I please urge councillors to firstly approve the ACV listing and urge the people of Seend to do likewise through the planning portal under Planning Reference: ACV/2023/00016.

Here is the clickable link to the planning portal:

[https://www.hugofox.com/community/Seend-Parish-Council-18482/planning-tracker/application-7010155?utm\\_source=Seend Parish Council-18482&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=planning](https://www.hugofox.com/community/Seend-Parish-Council-18482/planning-tracker/application-7010155?utm_source=Seend%20Parish%20Council-18482&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=planning)

Steven Vaux  
Chair  
Seend Community Land & Asset Trust CIC

21<sup>st</sup> July 2023