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DAVID ASHTON
Leader of the Council
Councillor: Belmont Ward

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11 August 2008

DA/JH

Dear «Salutation»

Re: Wood Farm

You have recently received a letter from The Stanmore Society regarding the possible sale of part of Wood Farm. You have written to the Council, as suggested by the Stanmore Society letter, expressing concern at any possible sale, and the implied loss of local amenity and encroachment/loss of Green Belt.

I would like to clarify some of the facts behind this matter, and perhaps resolve some misunderstandings.

Wood Farm covers around 72 acres, and is agricultural land within the Green Belt. Harrow Council owns the freehold, but the land is leased under two separate leases. One lease covers the northern 43 acres, and runs to March 2086. The southern remainder of 19 acres, and an area of 10 acres in the angle of Wood Lane and Brockley Hill, is under an annual agricultural tenancy into perpetuity. **None of the area is part of Stanmore Country Park.**

There is no public access to the land, which was used for tipping until the mid 1990's. It has been derelict ever since, with an assortment of dilapidated buildings, including two homes in the area close to Wood Lane, and outbuildings/barns with concrete surfacing.

Much of the site is designated as a site of Importance for Nature Conservation, but not the area abutting the road as set out in the 2004 Unitary Development Plan.

Cont'd/

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A planning application for 10 homes on just under 3 acres was submitted around two years ago, and went through the standard consultation process. It has been held in abeyance ever since because of various surveys required relating to nesting birds, reptiles, bats and newts, which have now been completed, as have discussions with the GLA regarding what will be a vast enlargement to the Country Park.

The proposal under consideration is for the sale of a freehold interest in around 3 acres in the Pear Wood corner by Wood Lane to the holder of the leases (a company owned by CP Holdings) and release under the leases of the other 69 acres back to Harrow Council, including payment of costs towards making good the land to be united with Stanmore Country Park, receiving the same protection as the country park, which would thus be extended by 69 acres, from its present 88 acres, to 157 acres. **This would hugely enhance the Country Park, and increase this critical green resource by three quarters.** At the same time, provision would be made within this acreage for a very substantial wild life refuge, covering the entirety of the 10 acre area on the corner of Wood Lane and Brockley Hill, combined with Pear Wood (which covers 35 acres), to establish an undisturbed area for wildlife with a combined acreage of 45 acres.

This extension to the Country Park would open up an outstanding walk and recreation area, linking up to Wood Lane. It would be a great asset to Harrow.

The planning proposal referred to above is for 10 detached houses on the area presently having the majority of the already built/concreted area, an increase of 8 over those already on the site.

Effectively, the Council has a choice, leave the area as is, derelict and inaccessible to the public, or take an opportunity to protect and extend the country park and establish a large wildlife protection area. Given that the area is under long or perpetual leases, the Council has no other option as the freeholder.

The letters received by the Council refer to the basis under which Middlesex County Council acquired the land, implying that a sale not for "the purpose of open space for recreation or pleasure ground or public walk" is either inappropriate or unlawful.

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As to the sale being inappropriate, none of Wood Farm as it presently stands is available for any of those purposes. A transaction as contemplated would in fact ensure 69 acres of the 72 acres (96%) would be guaranteed for that very use, with 10 acres of that for an undisturbed wildlife habitat.

As to the sale being unlawful, I confirm that the Council has a general power to sell any land it owns provided it complies with Section 123 of the Local Government Act 1972.

The future of the site is a question of balance. In my view, and I have discussed it extensively over the past two years, particularly with Agenda 21 members, as the spokespersons for keeping Greener Harrow, and for whom I organised site visits, this would be a very positive move for Harrow residents. It would turn what is a poorly maintained private space into a valuable public amenity, preserving both the space and the view for future generations.

In summary, Harrow residents would have access to a further 59 acres of Country Park, expanding that area by 2/3 from its present 88 acres, plus the establishment of a properly protected wildlife sanctuary of 45 acres, which would be a major ecological asset to the borough.

I hope you find this helpful. It is quite detailed, but residents deserve to understand what the Council is considering. Please feel free to revert to me or Tony Ferrari, Portfolio Holder for Property, with any comments.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David Ashton", with a horizontal line underneath.

David Ashton
Leader of the Council

