

Sustainable Drainage Strategy Update - Survey of Blackgreen Wood

Appeal Inquiry – APP/B1930/W/24/3338501

Bricket Wood Sports and Country Club, Paintball Site and Bricket Lodge, Lye Lane, St Albans AL2 3TF

Outline application (access sought) for the demolition of existing buildings, the construction of up to 115 dwellings, the creation of a new access and associated highways improvements.

Background

1. On 19th June 2024, I was informed that that when the cricket pitch was laid in the 1960s a formal drainage system was introduced which drained eastwards to the river. This information was brought to the attention of the Inspector and Council at the earliest opportunity. On 20th June, Inspector Coyne allowed the Appellant two weeks (to 5th July) to examine the veracity of this claim and its potential to update the Sustainable Drainage Strategy (CD 1.9). Hertfordshire County Council, as the LLFA, would then have a further 2 weeks (19th July) to respond.
2. On the morning of Saturday 22nd June, I visited the Site prior to the start of paintball activities. I found numerous “channels” running across the woodland. Some of these appeared to be drainage ditches whilst some, I was assured by an employee of the paintball operation, had been created to enhance the paintballing experience.
3. Close to the south-east boundary of the Appeal Site (beyond the extent of the active paintballing area), I sourced what I thought could be an outlet for the ‘cricket pitch’ drainage system and the presence of a ditch running eastwards. Whilst time prevented further exploration, I considered the claim of an historic drainage network from the Appeal Site towards the River Ver to be worth further investigation.
4. Mr South of GeoSmart was informed of the above but was unable to attend the site at such short notice and recommended a survey be produced. Three potential surveyors were approached, of which only one could attend the site in time.

5. On Wednesday 26th June, I attended the Appeal Site with SDP Surveys of St Albans (“SDP”). The following should be read alongside SDP’s Drainage Ditch Survey (“the DDS”)

The On-Site Survey

6. The survey took place on Wednesday 26th June. On Friday 28th June, SDP Surveys provided a Drainage Ditch Survey which identified the presence, routes and nature of three drainage ditches – (see the DDS).
7. The survey started at the potential “outlet” identified a few days earlier (photo 1).



Photo 1: the outlet (dark circle in bottom right-hand corner) feeding Ditch 2

8. SDP identified that the outlet as a drain from the Appeal Site into Ditch 2 (see the DDS). There was no running or standing water in the ditch.
9. Ditch 2 ran eastwards for c. 30 metres to a very boggy area, with no running or standing water over, which had been a laid a temporary bridge (Photo 2).



Photo 2: an area where water appears to have pooled in the past, identified by a blue circle on Ditch 2 (Appendix 1). The bed was very boggy and did not take my weight (hence the two footprints which subsequently filled with water). A concrete catchpit can be seen on the far side of the 'bridge'.

10. Immediately beyond the bog is a catchpit from which the concrete cover had been removed. A catchpit is an empty chamber that is installed into a drainage system to prevent silt and debris from building up. Catchpits play an important role in preventing blockages and water contamination in drainage systems. Without them water could back up in a drainage system and cause localised flooding.
11. The catchpit on Ditch 2 was found to be completely filled with mud which explains why water had backed up and caused the pooling. The mud was dug out and the presence of pipes (1 x 100mm and 1 x 150mm) was confirmed. By the end of the survey, it was noted that the catchpit had begun to fill with water (Photo 3).



Photo 3: after the catchpit was cleared of mud, the presence of pipes was confirmed and the chamber began to fill with water.

12. To the east of the catchpit, the route of Ditch 2 could be followed but it was found to be filled with dry leaves and other detritus. There was no running or standing water. The ditch ran eastwards to the boundary between the woodland and the rear curtilages of houses on Park Street Lane and then southwards where it was joined by Ditch 1 (see the DDS).
13. Ditch 1, which ran in a north-eastwards direction from the southern boundary of the woodland, was dry, too, with no running or standing water (Photo 4):



Photo 4: part of Ditch 1

14. Where Ditches 1 and 2 joined, a ditch ran eastwards into the rear garden of 222a Park Street Lane. This ditch, too, had no running or standing water (Photo 5).



Photo 5: the fallen tree marks the approximate rear boundary of 222a Park Street Lane.
A dry ditch can be seen entering the garden from the woodland.

15. The walkover continued along the eastern boundary of the woodland under the ownership of the Appellant. This boundary appears to have been subject to some re-engineering, possibly the result of spoil from excavations for household projects/development, such as the tennis court at no. 228 Park Street Lane. Any ditch that may have existed on the boundary is no longer visible under the spoil, undergrowth and/or fallen leaves.
16. The woodland south of 228 Park Street Lane and north of the M25, which slopes gently down to Park Street Lane, is under the control of a 3rd Party and could not be accessed.
17. The woodland to the west was explored and a third ditch was surveyed (see the DDS). Ditch 3 ended west of the start of Ditch 2. The area between was boggy suggesting that water had pooled here in the past. It may be that the Ditches 2 and 3 are linked but that could not be proven at the time.
18. SDP's Drainage Ditch Survey was submitted to GeoSmart on 28th June 2024.