

South Downs National Park Public Inquiry

Part 2: Boundaries

Woods Mill

(Section K, Map 19)

Proof of Evidence

by

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Head of Conservation, Sussex Wildlife Trust



on behalf of



March 2004

Biography

My name is Dr Anthony Whitbread. I work for the Sussex Wildlife Trust as Head of Conservation, a post that I have held since 1991.

Prior to 1991 I worked for the Royal Society for Nature Conservation co-ordinating the response of the Wildlife Trusts in the South East to the great storm of 1987. Before that I carried out a range of contracts for the then Nature Conservancy Council (now English Nature). This work included ecological surveys of ancient woodland and Sites of Special Scientific Interest, the compilation of ancient woodland inventories and conservation policy work.

Over the last 10 years I have represented the Wildlife Trusts on Wildlife Link's forestry group, the Forestry Commission's Advisory Panel and the Forestry Stewardship Council's standards group. I now sit on numerous local, county and national committees including Environment Agency Committees, Woodland Forums, Local Nature Reserve Advisory Committees, the Regional Advisory Committee for Forestry Commission and the England Woodland Biodiversity Group.

I have two degrees (Applied Biology BSc and Grassland Ecology PhD), both gained at Hatfield Polytechnic. I am a member of the Institute of Ecology and Environmental Managers and of the British Ecological Society.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 I am presenting this evidence on behalf of the South Downs Campaign (SDC). It has the support of the Shoreham District Ornithological Society.
- 1.2 The SDC submits the following proof of evidence for the boundary of the designated South Downs National Park within Section K, Map 19 of the Countryside Agency Designation Order boundary maps.
- 1.3 The SDC is a network of organisations working for the best possible South Downs National Park, representing over 80 national, regional and local groups and organisations¹.
- 1.4 This proof of evidence is part of a series of submissions to the Public Inquiry by the SDC and should be read in the context of the SDC's written proofs of evidence 'SDC 'In Principle' Support for the South Downs National Park'² and 'SDC Boundary Process'³.

¹ SDC Biography – Inquiry Document No: 3275/1/1

² SDC 'In Principle' Support for the South Downs National Park – Inquiry Document No: 3275/2/1

³ SDC Boundary Process – Inquiry Document No: 3275/3/1

2 Detailed Boundary - Section K, Map 19: Woods Mill

2.1 Description of the Area and its Boundary

- 2.1.1 The boundary is described using regularly spaced Ordnance Survey six figure Grid References (GR) to assist with relating the written description of the boundary and coincides with Map 1 in Appendix A⁴.
- 2.1.2 The proposed boundary deviates from the designated boundary at GR TQ 217 124, where it follows the edge of Tottington Wood northwards until it reaches the built area of Small Dole. It then skirts the eastern boundary of the settlement and joins the A2037 until the junction with Horn Lane. It goes along Horn Lane to encompass the entrance to Woods Mill Countryside Centre before heading south along the boundary of the Countryside Centre, before following the northerly stream through the site to its source south of Oreham Manor. It then follows field hedges to exclude the Manor but to include the field to its north. Heading east the proposed boundary follows the field boundaries south of Catsland Farm, then, avoiding the properties near the corner of the Bramlands Lane, follows the southern side of the Bramlands Lane to rejoin the designated boundary at GR TQ 243 139. In this proof of evidence this area is referred to as Woods Mill.

⁴ Map 1, Appendix A – (attached to this document)

3 Justification for Inclusion in the South Downs National Park

3.1 Countryside Agency's Reasons for Excluding Woods Mill

3.1.1 The Countryside Agency's reasons for excluding the area are not particularly clear, in common with other areas in and adjacent to the Adur Valley. Although Woods Mill is mentioned in Position Paper 2⁵, no reasoning for its exclusion is given. Indeed it is necessary to go back to the Local Authority Consultation documents for any specific mention of Woods Mill with any form of response, although it can be seen that the response itself fails to mention Woods Mill:

*"This area contains attractive views to the Downs, but the countryside is unexceptional in terms of quality. It contains several features unsuitable for inclusion in the national park, including a mobile home park and many paddocks."*⁶

3.1.2 It is worth noting that the above description is not an accurate description of the area proposed for inclusion by the SDC, more a description of the land to the north.

3.1.3 The Countryside Agency does make a statement about the whole landscape area north of the chalk escarpment, but again it is very generalised and does not offer any real clue as to why the designated boundary was drawn where it was:

*"This section comprises the Low Weald landscape adjacent to the chalk escarpment. It is transitional both in terms of its quality and the extent to which it borrows character and sense of place from the escarpment. Close to the escarpment it demonstrates a close association with the chalk, both historically and visually. Further north these associations lessen."*⁷

⁵ Position Paper 2 - The South Downs National Park Boundary, Countryside Agency, July 2003, Annex 4, page 21 – Inquiry Document No: CD 070

⁶ A South Downs National Park: Consultation with Local Authorities Report (CA 111) - May 2002, page 60 - Inquiry Document No: CD 027

⁷ South Downs National Park: The boundary & the reasoning for it. (CA 133), page 13 – Inquiry Document No: CD 023

3.2 Justification Against Criteria – Natural Beauty

- 3.2.1 The SDC acknowledges that Woods Mill lies in the Low Weald in an area of transition that stretches from the Downs northwards to Henfield and Woodmancote. It is an area typical of the Low Weald, with east-west greensand ridges interspersed with shallow river valleys typified by marshy grassland. The fields are small and well marked with strong hedge lines and small copses. However, the SDC considers that the quality of the landscape does not drop off as dramatically as is perhaps suggested by the designated boundary.
- 3.2.2 From the Woods Mill area, there are strong visual links to the Downs, in particular to the south and east⁸, but also to the west across the Adur valley. The Downs provide a strong backdrop to the shallow river valleys, with Newtimber Hill and Wolstonbury Hill dominating the landscape to the east, even when the scarp slope to the south is less visible. On higher ground, such as on the footpath to the north of Oreham Manor, the full majesty of the scarp slope is apparent, dominating the views across the horizon and providing a strong sense of place in this tranquil and deeply rural landscape. From this perspective, the whole of the river catchment area, east of Woods Mill, for this particular tributary to the River Adur is visible. The streams that feed the Woods Mill Nature Reserve emerge from the Downs in Fulking and Edburton and intrinsically link this area to the neighbouring downland landscape.
- 3.2.3 The SDC's proposed boundary would include this whole area, which would have important management implications. This landscape could then be treated in a more holistic way and make enhancement of the area easier to achieve.
- 3.2.4 Woods Mill itself, as opposed to the Woods Mill area, is a place of considerable historic and wildlife interest⁹. A water mill was recorded in Domesday Book. The current 18th Century Mill and 18th Century Mill House, together with 15 acres of land were acquired by the Sussex Wildlife Trust in 1966 and serve as its headquarters and as a visitor and education centre.
- 3.2.5 As an educational and recreational resource the Woods Mill Countryside Centre is exceptional, for within a relatively small area there is an ancient woodland at Hoe Wood, a lake, two streams, a marsh, a reedbed and a meadow with ancient hedges. The wide range of wildlife habitats attract an extraordinary diversity of wildlife and most of the site is designated a Site of Nature Conservation Importance. In addition, there are also excellent opportunities for interpreting the geology of the South Downs and the Weald.
- 3.2.6 From the above evidence, the SDC considers that Woods Mill is outstanding, not only for the wildlife it supports but also for the way it attracts people to enjoy, understand, survey and research wildlife and the surrounding landscape. In this way the SDC considers the site and the surrounding area, with its strong borrowed character, meet the natural beauty criteria for inclusion within the South Downs National Park.

⁸ See Photos 1-3, Appendix B – (attached to this document)

⁹ See Appendix C, Woods Mill Wildlife Records – (attached to this document)

3.3 Justification Against Criteria – Opportunities For Open-Air Recreation

- 3.3.1 As the headquarters of Sussex Wildlife Trust, Woods Mill Countryside Centre has great significance as a symbol of conservation throughout Sussex. It is also the location for the Sussex Biodiversity Records Centre.
- 3.3.2 The Countryside Centre is a well-used visitor facility with a proven track record as a deliverer of high quality environmental education for children and adults, and has provided a superior recreational experience for over 40 years.
- 3.3.3 About 3500 schoolchildren per year come on school trips; mainly in the primary sector but some secondary and 'A' level groups. Every year the schools programme is fully booked in the summer and autumn terms. All programmes relate to the national curriculum which is delivered not just through biology and science but also through numeracy, literacy and art.
- 3.3.4 Woods Mill has now developed as a centre for professional training for teachers with 10 training days per year run for 200 teachers. This now includes whole school staff training days.
- 3.3.5 Courses and training programmes are run for adults by the Sussex Wildlife Trust and also in partnership with other organisations. Over 1000 people a year attend these courses.
- 3.3.6 A comprehensive family-based events programme attracts 2000 people a year to experience contact with wildlife through a whole range of activities including art, drama and music.
- 3.3.7 The nature reserve is open throughout the year and attracts 5000 people annually on a casual basis, the majority being families who are able to enjoy a safe and accessible reserve.
- 3.3.8 In 2004, an 'access for all' path was constructed that will enable visitors with special needs to reach areas of the reserve that were previously inaccessible to them. It will also enable special education programmes to be developed for children with special needs as well. The path also gives accessibility to the reserve all the year round.
- 3.3.9 The different habitats contained within the nature reserve provide a wide range of wildlife in a small accessible area.
- 3.3.10 The SDC considers the Woods Mill Countryside Centre one of the most valuable recreational resources in the South Downs area. It has the longest continuous history of providing a superior recreational experience in the county and has an excellent reputation in linking the interpretation of environmental information to access and enjoyment. It is inconceivable that one of the most valuable recreational resources along the Downs should be left out of the National Park.

- 3.3.11 The area is overlooked by the viewpoint at the National Trust property of Devil's Dyke, one of the busiest 'honeypots' on the South Downs, attracting around 1 million visits per year¹⁰. It is also visible from the popular South Downs Way as it heads west towards Truleigh Hill and the Adur Valley, thus forming an important part of people's appreciation of the Low Weald landscape.
- 3.3.12 The area proposed for inclusion includes a number of designated footpaths and a bridleway that provide excellent access both to it and the area beyond included within the designated boundary.

3.4 Additional Considerations

- 3.4.1 It is acknowledged that this is a transitional landscape where the drawing of a boundary is difficult, with few distinguishable features on the ground in places. However, the designated boundary is hard to follow to the east of South Tottington Sands farm and is drawn such that it excludes the Woods Mill Countryside Centre, Sussex Biodiversity Records Centre and headquarters of the Sussex Wildlife Trust.
- 3.4.2 The SDC considers that the boundary it is proposing, drawn only to include land that fulfils the statutory criteria, is clearer and more logical on the ground.

4 Conclusions

- 4.1 Woods Mill has an exemplary record as one of the best visitor facilities on the South Downs. Its link with the Downs is clear. Viewpoints from Woods Mill are used to interpret the South Downs to visitors and the millstream emerges close by from the Downs. The area is also visible from one of the busiest 'honeypots' on the South Downs at Devil's Dyke. In terms of both natural beauty and as a resource providing a superior recreational experience, this site and the area around it is recommended for inclusion within the South Downs National Park.

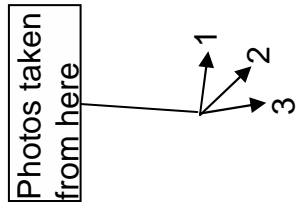
5 Recommendation

- 5.1 The SDC considers that this area meets the statutory criteria for National Park designation and the Countryside Agency's policy and approach for defining National Park boundaries and requests that the Inspector recommends to the Secretary of State that the area described in this proof of evidence as Woods Mill should be included within the South Downs National Park.

¹⁰ From National Trust's Devil's Dyke Estate Management Plan – January 1998 (not attached)

Appendix A

Map 1: Woods Mill



Key

- Designated Boundary
- SDC Proposed Alternative Boundary

NOT TO SCALE
Based on the Ordnance Survey map with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office.
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Appendix B

Photos

Photo 1: View east towards Wolstonbury Hill (left), Newtimber Hill (right of centre) and North Hill (right) (all are owned by the National Trust)

Photo 2: View south-east towards North Hill (far left), Devil's Dyke (large clump of trees left of centre), Fulking Hill, Perching Hill and Edburton Hill (far right)

Photo 3: View south towards Edburton Hill (left) and Truleigh Hill (right)

Appendix C

Woods Mill Wildlife Records

1. A great deal of species information has been collected in the nature reserve at the Centre. A butterfly transact has been recorded since the mid-1970s as part of the programme run by the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology, enabling the Trust to build up a comprehensive knowledge of their population over a 30 year period. Similarly, regular moth-trapping over the same period has taken place.
2. A number of rare moths have been trapped for identification and recording at the Woods Mill Centre. These include Festoon (*Apoda limacodes*), Orange Footman (*Eilema sororcula*), Water Ermine (*Spilosoma urticae*), Large Thorn (*Ennomos autumnaria*), Evergestis pallidata (a pyralid), Great Oak Beauty (*Hypomecis roboraria*), Kent Black Arches (I), Waved Black (*Parascotia fuliginaria*), Webb's Wainscot (*Archarara sparganii*), Mocha (*Cyclophora annulata*) and Cream-bordered Green Pea (*Earias clorana*). The first two of these species are listed as 'Biodiversity UK Long List species', and the status of the remaining species is 'Notable'.
3. The reserve has 5 of the 6 native breeding amphibians. Over 50% of the native dragonfly species have bred on the reserve. A wide range of birds breed annually including important species such as great spotted woodpecker, sparrowhawk, tawny owl and nuthatch, while an especially erected nestbox in a meadow has encouraged both barn owl and kestrel to nest. Kingfishers are recorded frequently and have also bred.
4. A large number of research, survey and monitoring projects have been done at Woods Mill, of importance in their own right and as an aid to education and interpretation at the Countryside Centre. Included amongst these are the following:
 - Amphibians in Sussex – A site Inventory (1980 – 89)
 - Monitoring of butterfly abundance (1976 – 1985)
 - Woodland survey in South East England (1988)
 - Sussex Geological Sites Survey (1960 – 1999)
 - Woods Mill fungi list (1968)
 - Fungi at Woods Mill (1988)
 - Significant Breeding Birds of Sussex – Sussex Ornithological Society (1999 – 2001)
 - A River Corridor Survey, Adur River Catchment (1994)
 - Research into locations of historical starfruit (*Damasonium alisma*) sites (1998)
 - Plant Domin abundances in Hoe Wood (1993 – 99)