

**THE COLE REPORT**  
**IMPORTANT NEW ENVIRONMENTAL EVIDENCE AGAINST THE INSPECTOR'S**  
**RECOMMENDATION TO THE EFFECT THAT THE FIELDS LOCATED TO THE NORTH OF**  
**DRY STREET, BETWEEN THE BRIDLEWAY AND BASILDON HOSPITAL, SHOULD BE**  
**DESIGNATED FOR DEVELOPMENT SOME TIME AFTER THE YEAR 2001**

**Introduction**

It would appear that very little environmental evidence was presented at the public enquiry. Moreover, given the observations made in the Inspector's report, there is cause for concern about whether the Inspector visited all the sites that ought to be investigated when considering the crucial issue of the future landuse of the area in question. It has not proved possible to establish where the Inspector went when he made his tour and it would seem that this important information is not in the public domain. At the very least this means that it is hard to identify what exactly has been considered as original evidence when it comes to evaluating the impact upon the visual environment. Nevertheless it is possible to be reasonably confident that the issues raised herein constitute new matters that have a grave bearing upon the Inspector's findings and Basildon Council's dilemma when seeking to establish its best way to proceed given that its own autonomy, conviction and planning integrity were implicitly called into doubt. These new matters provide excellent cause to reject the Inspector's recommendations.

**New matters raised herein**

These take the following forms:

1. Overall landscape issues, including some misconceptions and errors evident in the Inspector's report.
1. Environmental leisure issues, including those of an equestrian nature.
1. The historical environment.
1. Impact of development so close to a major nature reserve.
1. The flora and fauna of the site itself, hitherto almost totally ignored.

**A. Overall landscape issues**

1. The Inspector does give some consideration in his report (p. 21) to landscape issues. However some serious matters are not addressed and this is in part possibly because his tour of inspection did not take in several important vantage points. The comments seriously underestimate the impact upon the landscape as viewed from parts of the golf course and of the open space of Langdon Hills.

2 Particularly serious is the impact upon the view from the slopes of Hawkesbury Bush – a much-valued part of the LangdonHillsEastCountryPark, from which the entire prospect of

Langdon Hills can be viewed and admired. It is quite one of the most spectacular views in the entire region. It is, moreover, a particularly beautiful prospect that carries with it a sense of repose and tranquil wellbeing of a kind that is hard to access in this part of the country – yet it is on the very doorstep of the new town and can be resorted to by all those folk mobile enough to undertake a mile or so's round walk. That view would be totally ruined by development of the site, materially and massively diminishing one of the greatest landscape assets of the entire neighbourhood. The development would be fully in the line of view and would constitute a substantial amount of what was seen. The intrusion would be all the more grievous given the other rich aspects of natural beauty that attend this spot: the tumbles of wildflowers, briars and brambles, the abundance of butterflies, the song of many birds, the swoop of the hawk and the mystery of badger setts long inhabited; the historical associations of what once was part of Barking Abbey; the slightly more distant prospects of rich arable farmland skillfully cultivated in due season; the yet more distant chapel that owes some of its origins to the time when the likes of John Wesley toured on circuit, preaching to the hamlet still in view and lodging at Dry Street Farm – another element in that rich landscape. Then turn the eye that little bit more, and behold the appalling intrusion of a major development, and curse the folly of whatever planners and decisionmakers were responsible for putting it there! If this seems whimsical and too much pre-occupied with matters of the spirit then so be it: much of what follows in this objection is hard-headed, but it ought not to be forgotten that the planning process concerns the needs of people, not least the people of the Basildon area (rather than of city-based officials who probably have no cause to visit), and that those needs include spiritual wellbeing.

3. The scenic value of what can be seen from the footpath to the south of Dry Street is underestimated in several respects. I have never encountered any official census of public usage of that path: the failure to institute one is a little worrying. Certainly it enjoys a great deal of use, including by ramblers' groups, individual walkers, joggers, school sponsored walkers and the like. Fundamental to their experience is the prospect to the north and northwest towards the rising ground of Langdon Hills. It includes the existing riding stables; if some of that is a little scruffy and unpleasing to the eye it is surely not beyond the wit of the CNT – the landlords of the establishment – to require some improvement. The shallowness of their commitment to what the quondam Development Corporation once planned and created is a little disconcerting. The Inspector in his report is too uncritical in this respect: in 3.1.5 he considers the aspect to be “compromised by the equestrian centre” – yet at the time when the centre was being planned the benefits to the landscape of this horse-attended enterprise were extolled by the Corporation's planners! Is the public memory so short? Can the Inspector really be allowed to get away with such opportune condemnation of what only a quarter century ago was deemed to be an asset? Dare one contemplate the conventional wisdom concerning the proposed development in twenty-five years' time? Ought we not to expect a greater commitment from our planners, who after all act in our name?

4. The Inspector (3.1.6.) appears to attach far more importance to the view from the A13 than to the view from the above-mentioned footpath – as if we all take our walks alongside major road arteries rather than through fields and woodlands. Somewhat curiously, he makes no reference to the bridle path that was constructed at major public expense within the past fifteen years between One Tree Hill and Hawkesbury Bush, and from which towards the eastern end there is clear view of the proposed development site. Moreover in his comments about intervening vegetation obscuring the views from the country parks (3.1.6) he completely overlooks the impact of coppicing cycles in the woodlands and the need for hedges to be laid from time to time if they are to be preserved as such. It is hard to escape the impression that the landscape impact of development has been addressed only in a manner that that would minimalise the arguments – and some of the arguments constitute new matters.

5. There is no consideration in the Inspector's report of the impact of development upon the views to be savoured from the hospital buildings. The role of those views, amply facilitated by some excellent windows and building design, in the sense of wellbeing for both staff and patients must surely be considerable, moreover contributing a meaningful albeit more difficult to quantify element in the recovery and amelioration of stress of the latter. The prospect of major development right up to the hospital would have a far more distressing effect.

6. It would seem that the Inspector was under something of a misconception when in 3.1.12 of his report he referred to the findings of the earlier public enquiry into the South-West Area Plan. The earlier inspector is referred to as finding that the rural scene in the WillowPark area was deteriorating through overuse. In fact the evidence presented at that enquiry dwelt substantially upon the adverse effects of so much public pressure upon the available open space as a whole – a point that was agreed and that was a factor behind the then Inspector's judgment that the proposed Willow Park development should not go ahead. The more recent inspector visited the Willow Park area "about 20 years later" and considered that the problem no longer applies. Had he turned his attention to the open space as a whole he would have been forced to a different conclusion. In the twenty or so years since the earlier public enquiry, even though the Willow Park development did not go ahead, there has been a steady deterioration in the state of some of the open space, despite some sophisticated responses from the relevant authorities. One need only view the great valley in Coombe Wood to appreciate the point, where proliferation and widening of paths and the palpable diminution of the springtime bluebell cover are there to be beheld, as is the exposure of tree roots. The earlier inspector rightly recognised the problem and appreciated that there is a reasonable limit to the number of visitors that the countryside facility could be expected to accommodate comfortably, just as he recognised the regional significance of the Langdon Hills ridge as a whole. His finding against the Willow Park proposal was appropriate (and offset by approval of other major development proposals elsewhere on the ridge). The overall public pressure upon the available open space is still there,

and would be exacerbated by any decision to build a substantial housing estate on the land north of Dry Street.

## **B. Environmental leisure issues**

1. As indicated above, there was a time not so long ago when the equestrian centre was being heralded as a major innovation that would provide facilities not only for the people of Basildon but also for other folk drawn from a very wide radius. It would be a centre of regional importance and a significant asset for the town of Basildon. As such it was the brainchild of none other than the then General Manager of the Basildon Development Corporation, Mr Charles Boniface. As direct inheritors of the vision and purpose that characterised the creators of the new town the CNT should not be allowed to escape the obligations that have fallen to them. The equestrian centre is indeed a major asset, comprising a variety of horse-related activities that attract a whole lot of people. I am not a horse owner myself and thus not in a position to adopt an expert vantage point. Nevertheless I can testify to the support that friends and acquaintances have given to Longwood. Some of them participate in events on a national scale and have spoken glowingly in the past of the importance and status of some of the events held at Longwood. Moreover some of my pupils at a school in Rayleigh have been regularly involved in events at Longwood, generally deemed to be “great” and “well good” in the parlance of the age-group. The support is real, and the potential is massive.

2. Yet the commitment of the CNT appears to be lacking. They are implicitly ready to jettison the entire venture, placing greater store in the maximisation of land values via designation for development than in the fulfilment of the earlier planning vision for the new town. Moreover as landlords of the equestrian centre they do not appear to have discharged their responsibilities terribly effectively. Over the years since the creation of the centre some disturbing events appear to have taken place. It seems that the turf was removed from at least part of one field; it is hard to reconcile this with the obligation to maintain the estate in a manner that upholds the integrity of the land for posterity. Short-term expediency would appear to have been paramount. On another occasion a substantial amount of spoil was dumped on parts of the site, in places to considerable depth. The matter was reported to the CNT as a result of which an inspection was carried out and steps were taken to cease this activity – but despite a declared intention “to have the land returned to its former condition without delay” (letter, 12 October 1995) nothing further appears to have happened. Hedgerow boundaries are not so well maintained; a fine tree has been sadly smashed; management of the pasture may be remiss. All told, the CNT appears to have failed somewhat in its supervision of the estate that it held and indeed still holds on behalf of the public interest. This would seem to suggest that the commitment to the original vision of a regionally important equestrian centre has been allowed to dwindle and die, to be replaced by a more cynical determination to dismiss the accumulated catalogue of woes at a

stroke by designating the land for development. Yet the baby still wallows in the bathwater! The equestrian centre is a great idea and past activities have demonstrated a need for what it can offer. Moreover the centre **does** fulfil one of the original intentions: to provide a sensitive and effective buffer between built-up town and surrounding countryside. It is a great idea and deserves wholehearted support from CNT and Basildon Council alike. Vision and energy are needed.

3. After all, it is the easiest thing imaginable in planning terms to designate land for house building, thereby satisfying a variety of vested interests. It is very much harder to turn the resulting sprawl of housing into a vibrant community well served with the range of activities that preserve positive outlooks, mental wellbeing and a freedom from alienation, boredom, crime and vandalism. It is very much open to doubt whether Basildon has anywhere near enough facilities for sport and recreation, particularly for younger people. Likewise it is very much open to doubt whether anywhere near enough is done for physically and mentally handicapped people. I recall my own children's involvement in a riding for the disabled scheme for youngsters amid the urban congestion of Singapore not so many years ago: it was a monumental success and could so easily be emulated here. Criticism of the existing management of the equestrian centre is easy: the Inspector indulges in some of it (3.1.9). It would be a whole lot more worthy to support the management of the centre, injecting ideas and resources and publicity (what about the pages of District Diary for mobilising knowledge and involvement?). It would appear that the Inspector was never called upon to consider the potential of the equestrian centre.

4. Accordingly it is no wonder that nowhere in his report is there reference to the massive public investment over recent years in providing a network of bridleways around and across Langdon Hills. These bridleways (as opposed to ~~the~~ Bridleway, the ancient route to the west of the threatened site – a source of potential confusion) enable horse riders to negotiate miles and miles of excellent riding that takes them across country parks and nature reserves as well as through scenic lanes. One of the biggest justifications for the location of the equestrian centre is its direct proximity to that network. The centre enjoys an informal access across the adjacent nature reserve to enable visiting riders to join that network without having to risk traffic hazards by going onto Dry Street – an enormous advantage for children on ponies, whether those provided by the centre or those brought in by lorry from elsewhere. Take away the equestrian centre now and you will help to make a nonsense of all that public investment in the network. More seriously still, you will call into question the competence of the planners. The Inspector simply does not address the issue of any replacement of the riding centre. Are we to simply accept the loss of a local facility, while piling in yet more inhabitants starved of outlets? Where else is there the land for such a facility, and how could it possibly plug in to the network of bridleways? Nowhere in the Inspector's report is there any reference to these issues.

5. If the CNT's will were allowed to prevail we would have to witness a virtually scandalous waste of public resources and money. The network of bridleways would be considerably less

credible. The cost of constructing that huge arena at the riding centre only a couple of decades ago would be largely wasted; the cost of its demolition would be substantial. The cost of installing the washland elsewhere on the site would be wasted. One would have to consider a whole range of on-costs as well, less justifiably considered under the current heading but no less real.

6. The huge arena makes it possible to exercise horses indoors during periods of inclement weather – a facility of enormous value to riders and horses alike. Moreover that avoids damaging use of the expensively provided bridledways at such times, as well as poaching of fields. It is an enormous asset: where else could such facilities be enjoyed in our area?

### **C. The historical environment**

1. There are some ancient features of the landscape that deserve strenuous efforts to preserve them. Significant among these are the locally relevant sections of the Fobbing parish boundaries, which follow the alignment of the Bridleway and the northern edge of the northwest field on the site in question (Chapel Hills on the nineteenth century maps). There is good cause to consider these boundaries to be over one thousand years old; they may well have legitimised even earlier boundaries. Certainly it is highly likely that the Bridleway is over two thousand years old.

2. The site of the medieval church of Lee Chapel has not been rediscovered in modern times and is a matter of considerable conjecture. There is circumstantial evidence of its existence, as in the apparently medieval stone slabs at Dry Street Farm, which may well have come from that site. The name Chapel Hills ought to be borne in mind. That field is located in Fobbing parish (as are all the fields currently in question) but it ought to be remembered that the original Liberty of Lee Chapel was divided up in 1432, with lands passing to some neighbouring parishes.

3. Some hedges appear to be of considerable antiquity. One or two others are rather more recent, such as that extending south from east of Fletchers (dividing up the 25 acre Lower Broad Mead of 1876, and not shown on that estate map).

4. One field, labelled Didlands in 1876, was referred to as Dedefeld in 1244 and was likely to have been held by title deed from the crown in Saxon times (see Bingley's "Fobbing: Life and Landscape", 1997, p 18). A small field adjacent to the nature reserve, it deserves respect and preservation in our own age.

5. Roman artefacts, apparently of Samian ware, were recovered from a pond on the threatened site earlier on this century. A photograph of them should still exist. This fact should be registered when it comes to considering any possible development on the site.

#### **D. Impact of development so close to a nature reserve**

1. There is good cause to believe that very little evidence was presented to the Inspector concerning the deleterious effects of locating a major housing development bang beside a major nature reserve. What little he did hear he was inclined to dismiss. Indeed, there is more than a hint of convenience thinking, as when observing (3.1.11) elsewhere in Basildon the general proximity of housing to SINC's. There are indeed places where housing is located in close proximity to nature reserves, just as there are places where junior schools are located directly beside heavily used and polluting urban roadways: it does not make the situation any more desirable. Indeed, in the light of what is learned from such situations, it is unwise to go on and repeat the same mistakes. We know from experience elsewhere that there are bad effects; we know from experience elsewhere that the effectiveness of one's investment in designating and maintaining a nature reserve is to some degree undermined by the close proximity of a housing development.

2. Thus we know from experience at Marks Hill nature reserve that there is a problem of increased numbers of youngsters building camps, chopping down saplings, lighting fires and roaring about on motorbikes. When there is space in between there is the chance to draw the teeth of the excesses, enabling wardens to cope more effectively with the remaining problems. It is known from experience at Belfairs Wood in Southend that a major housing development yields an undesirable population of cats that proceed to hunt rodents and small birds in the reserve, making it very hard to sustain populations of such sensitive species as dormice. It is known from experience at Grays chalkpit and on the Langdon nature reserve at Dunton that idle and thoughtless characters dump garden refuse and other waste onto the adjacent nature reserve land, where it either stays amid an aura of neglect or is removed at considerable cost in terms of other people's time and energy. It is not a good idea to locate a major housing development right beside an existing nature reserve.

3. Turning more specifically to the situation at Dry Street, it is possible to pinpoint some of the adverse effects that would flow from development adjacent to the nature reserve. Several species dwelling in the reserve feed on the adjacent land and the effect of development would be to reduce the populations of those species. This applies to ground-feeding birds like some of the thrushes as well as green woodpeckers and stock doves. It also applies to the badgers based within the reserve: although there are badger setts on the threatened land itself there are also identifiable tracks leading from the setts on the reserve to the meadows east of the Bridleway. Moreover the effect of developing the fields and destroying the badger population located thereupon would be to isolate yet further the reserve's population, raising longer term causes for concern about genetic viability. As things stand the badgers of the riding stables land have contact with those on Hawkesbury Bush and they in turn have territories that overlap with those on Vange Heights. To build on the riding stables fields would have the effect of

fragmenting the existing network of badger colonies. Similar concerns arise over the future of the great-crested newts: the colony centred upon the ponds on the reserve near the Bridleway might well become isolated from those colonies at the college, at Hawkesbury Bush and near Sporhams if the land and presumed colonies in between are lost to development, with grave implications for all of the colonies in the longer term. The very real danger of repeated visits by parties of youngsters fishing in and hurling objects in to the reserve ponds would not help, nor would the anticipated constant disturbance by dogs being sent stickfetching into the same ponds: yet more problems that would flow from locating a housing development close to the nature reserve. These issues would not appear to have been brought to the attention of the Inspector but they are very grave matters.

4. Some of the reserve is located to the east of the Bridleway. It is as well to bear this in mind, for the Inspector appears to have been unaware of this fact. Thus the Bridleway cannot be visualised as the effective boundary between nature reserve and proposed development. The section of reserve in question would be bounded on three sides by development – a wholly undesirable state of affairs. It is a rich and varied part of the reserve, worthy of strenuous efforts to maintain its ecological integrity.

5. Inasmuch as the Bridleway constitutes de facto an adjunct to the reserve – neither bluetits nor badgers pause at the notional boundary – it is as well to consider the impact of development upon that ancient routeway. As befits its antique status, it is graced with a truly very rich mixture of scarce wildwood tree and flower species, in turn supporting a range of bryophytes and invertebrates of the kind associated with these rare conditions. It is anticipated that details of these species will be forthcoming during the course of this season, but this is not the kind of information that can be hastily gathered: merely to argue that absence of list equals absence of species in such circumstances is of course unreasonable. A considerable compilation follows in a later section anyway. Suffice it to state at present that the Bridleway is far too sensitive a feature to be subjected to the profound upheaval of housing development alongside it. Besides, the archaeological sensitivities should also be borne in mind.

#### **E. The flora and fauna of the site itself**

1. This is a major topic. I have seen fit to divide it up into a series of categories itemising what has so far been discovered on the site. Each category comprises a list of species with occasional relevant comments followed by a commentary on that evidence. There is no point in repeating that evidence in this section. However it should be borne in mind that access onto the site has not been possible before this year, although some observations were made from back gardens of Fletchers by some of the residents in the past. It takes a lot of time and repeated visits to approach a reasonable understanding of what lives on the site. Time has not been freely

available. Moreover the six week deadline for public response to the Council's proposals has necessarily curtailed the exercise. More evidence is being accumulated. Nevertheless a great deal has been learned, as is implicit in the accompanying details. Contrary to some loosely held opinion, it is clear that the wildlife value of the site is substantial.

2. Contributions of time and expertise have been substantial (see covering letter).

**Total bird species currently recorded on or over the fields north of Dry Street, with attendant commentary.**

- Cormorant (flying over)
- Grey Heron
- Canada Geese (flying over)
- Buzzard (pair, overflying, April 1996)
- Sparrowhawk (regular resident)
- Red Kite (overflying, Sept 1995)
- Osprey (juvenile, overflying, Sept 1995)
- Hobby (washland, 11 May 1997)
- Kestrel
- Pheasant
- Corncrake (heard calling, spring 1994 and 1995, during passage period, within meadow)
- Moorhen
- Lapwing (flocks, roosting and feeding on the meadows, incl.1996)
- Snipe (regular appearances, in meadows and in the washland; breeding possibly)
- Common Gull (feeding flocks)
- Black-headed Gull (feeding flocks)
- Stock Dove (regular feeders on meadow, 3 or 4 at a time)
- Wood Pigeon
- Turtle Dove (nesting as well as feeding)
- Collared Dove
- Cuckoo
- Little Owl
- Tawny Owl
- Swift
- Green Woodpecker (regular feeder on meadows; nesting in hedgerow tree)
- Great Spotted Woodpecker (several, frequenting hedgerow trees)
- Lesser Spotted Woodpecker (nesting in hedgerow ashtree)
- Skylark (regular nester in the meadows as well as singing above)

- Swallow (nesting in stables buildings; regularly feeding over meadows)
- House Martin (nesting in stables buildings; regular feeder over meadows)
- Yellow Wagtail (summer visitor possibly nesting)
- Pied Wagtail (resident population)
- Starling (resident breeding population; important meadow feeding site)
- Waxwing (rare winter feeding flocks on hedgerow berries, incl. 1996)
- Jay
- Magpie
- Jackdaw
- Carrion Crow
- Dunnock (resident breeding population, also sustaining cuckoos)
- Wren (resident and breeding)
- Chiffchaff
- Willow Warbler
- Whitethroat (nesting confirmed)
- Garden Warbler
- Blackcap (nesting confirmed)
- Grasshopper Warbler (nesting strongly suspected)
- Goldcrest
- Spotted Flycatcher
- Robin
- Nightingale (singing in margin hedgerow, 1997)
- Ring Ouzel (rare passage migrant, 1995)
- Blackbird (resident breeding population; enhanced by continental winter feeding flocks)
- Redwing (substantial and significant winter feeding flocks on hawthorn hedges)
- Fieldfare (similar status to redwing)
- Mistle Thrush (regular breeding plus winter feeding flocks)
- Song Thrush (regular breeding plus winter feeding flocks)
- Blue Tit
- Coal Tit
- Great Tit
- Long-tailed Tit (breeding in blackthorn hedge; regular winter feeding in hedgerows)
- Tree Creeper
- House Sparrow
- Chaffinch (breeding; winter feeding)
- Brambling (winter migrant; feeding on hawthorn berries)
- Bullfinch ((breeding: winter feeding)
- Greenfinch (breeding; winter feeding)

- Siskin (winter feeding)
- Goldfinch (breeding; winter and summer feeding)
- Linnet (breeding; winter feeding)
- Yellowhammer (spring singing, possibly nesting near washland)
- Reed Bunting (washland area)

### **Commentary**

1. Some of the species mentioned in the above list are clearly migratory in nature, passing through the area in question when on passage and pausing to feed and rest. In some cases (e.g. corncrake) there is evidence of lingering for a longer period of time, up to a fortnight. These records are consistent with the status of the Langdon Hills ridge as a nationally and indeed internationally important site for bird migration. Were it possible to have greater and more regular access to the site over a longer period of time it is reasonable to suppose that rather more migratory evidence would fast be accumulated, particularly during the spring and autumn migrations. This would bear out known evidence of migration over the ridge as a whole. Inasmuch as the fields and washland in question are part of the greater whole, the development of them would have a deleterious effect upon the overall importance of Langdon Hills as a vital part of the migration routes across the country.

2. In addition to the passage migrants several species are summer migrants that move into this area for regular breeding. This applies to the warblers, swallows, house martins, turtle doves, cuckoos and flycatchers. Some of these species occur quite widely across Langdon Hills; some others (grasshopper warbler and garden warbler) are considerably scarcer and their loss would be grievous.

3. Another group involves the winter visitors, comprising many of the thrushes and several of the finches as well as snipe and flocks of lapwing. The whole Langdon Hills ridge is of major importance to winter migrants and the feeding grounds of the threatened site are an intrinsic part thereof. The hawthorn hedgerows provide a rich source of berries; the meadows and washland provide valuable sources of invertebrates; the patches of wayside vegetation provide seeds. Some of the species involved (bramblings and waxwings) are rare in this country, pointing to the importance of the threatened site.

4. The list also includes those species that are resident throughout the year. Many are familiar names and can be looked upon as common. However attention ought to be drawn to the significant woodpecker population, sustained in part by the adjacent nature reserve: should a major housing development be built on the land in question this would have a knock-on effect upon the woodpecker population of the nature reserve, inasmuch as valuable feeding grounds will have been lost (vide the green woodpecker's dependence upon ant colonies in the

meadows). The woodpeckers nest in selected hedgerow trees in the boundary hedges of the meadows (particularly ash trees). Several other bird species nest in the bushes of the hedges, including song thrushes – a species currently in serious decline nationally. Another species giving major cause for concern is the skylark which, like the song thrush, is declining alarmingly. Skylarks nest in at least one of the meadows (others are perhaps too heavily grazed under the current regime, but that could of course be modified). There are other meadows locally wherein skylarks nest – but an increasing problem is that of disturbance, by members of the public and their dogs. Horse-grazed meadows with little public disturbance constitute a valuable resource for our remaining skylark population in this area, deserving preservation.

5. Other species simply overfly the meadows in question and for the most part have little direct dependence upon them. Nevertheless some links will exist, such as the swifts' dependence upon the aerial cocktail of insect life generated by such precious green areas. It is reasonable to consider the insect life arising from unsprayed meadows and hedgerows of the kind in question to be appreciably richer and more abundant than that arising from intensively cultivated fields. It would certainly be richer than that arising from housing estates.

6. The building of a substantial housing estate adjacent to the existing nature reserve would have a very serious effect upon the birdlife of the whole area. The attendant public disturbance caused by a yet higher number of residents living nearby would constitute an intensification of pressure that the inspector in the public enquiry dismissed too lightly. Moreover domestic cats living in the housing would have a direct and wholly deleterious effect upon the breeding bird population of the nature reserve. So too would some of the dogs.

7. Further comments of implicit relevance to any public enquiry that may be called may well arise from continued observations beyond the June 2 deadline for submission of evidence.

#### **Mammals, reptiles and amphibians: species list and attendant commentary.**

- Badger (two badger setts, each quite extensive; much feeding activity on meadows and in adjacent gardens)
- Fox (including breeding population)
- Stoat
- Weasel
- Rabbit
- Hedgehog
- Grey Squirrel
- Mole

- Pigmy Shrew
- Common Shrew
- Bank Vole
- Field Vole
- Long-tailed Fieldmouse
- Brown Rat
- Pipistrelle bat
- Serotine bat (hunting over the meadows; location of roost?)
- Adder (washland; meadow margin)
- Grass Snake
- Slow Worm
- Common Lizard (washland)
- Common Frog (breeding in one of the blocked ditches)
- Common Toad
- Smooth Newt (breeding in one of the blocked ditches)
- Great-crested Newt (breeding in blocked ditch and part of washland suspected)

### **Commentary**

1. The site supports a substantial and significant badger population. Study of the badger runs indicates that some of the badgers come regularly from the long-established sett in the nature reserve, at Broomhills. In addition to these there are two complexes of setts on the threatened site itself. One of these is located close to the private gardens of Fletchers. It is clearly of badgers' making and on occasions in recent years has supported young families of badgers. This year at least part of it supports a family of foxes. The other sett is located much closer to Dry Street, adjacent to the washland; it has been the scene of a great deal of activity this spring, with much fresh excavation as well as the dragging in of a lot of bedding material. It is highly likely that cubs have been born there this year.

There is plenty of evidence of badgers foraging in the meadows, clearly seen during the late winter (especially their scrapes in the turf). Moreover some of the residents of Fletchers regularly feed the badgers that come in from the direction of the meadows, and up to ten have been seen on occasion. At least two of the badgers are of the much rarer erythristic form, of reddish coloration rather than the more typical dark grey. Breeding this year was confirmed when on 11th May a sow brought her cub to one of the gardens off Fletchers.

2. The status of the great crested newts has been difficult to confirm in what has been a drought year that has seen the areas of standing water severely reduced, in turn denying the newts their chance to breed this spring. Access to the likeliest areas of water has not been permitted in previous years. However it is possible to be definite about the scarce newt's status in the immediate vicinity. It is present and breeding in the closely adjacent ponds to the north

(Sporhams pond), east (College pond), south (Hawkesbury Bush pond) and west (ponds beside the Bridleway, on the nature reserve). It could well be breeding in the flooded ditch in normal years, as well as in the normally standing water in the corner of part of the washland. In the circumstances it would be very hard for a developer to claim that the site was free of great crested newts.

3. In addition to the more usual pipistrelle bats there is clear evidence of other species in the area. The location of their roosts has yet to be established but there is considerable probability of the buildings of the equestrian centre figuring significantly in this context. The meadows appear to be of importance as feeding grounds over which the bats fly. What appear to be Serotine bats seen over the meadows are quite possibly part of the known colony based at Vange, but it is possible that their roost is located even more closely than that.

4. The slow worm population is considerable, in turn sustaining other creatures in the foodchain, including the two local species of snake. As many as six have been encountered at a time this spring, hiding by day beneath pieces of wood. In addition to the typical form there is a very much rarer form which is dark grey in colour, with small blue spots over the surface (var. *colchica*). This has been found elsewhere on Langdon Hills in the past but its occurrence is decidedly rare. One of the slow worms encountered in the washland this spring was of this form.

5. Both adders and grass snakes are becoming scarcer in the south Essex area, largely because of the urban growth with its associated pressures. Grass snakes are hunted by cats and dogs, while adders are the object of much persecution; both species suffer from increased disturbance, while habitat loss is another major problem. The reduced public access that is a feature of putting land over to horse grazing and even more so to wash land has afforded these creatures some degree of sanctuary – ironically to a greater degree than in some parts of the adjacent nature reserve.

6. The rabbit population fluctuates considerably, in keeping with experience elsewhere. Stoats are dependent upon the rabbits to a considerable degree (although other prey is taken). Necessarily this means that the stoat population of the Langdon Hills ridge is thin. Reduction of the overall undeveloped area of Langdon Hills beyond a certain critical point – and I would not pretend to know what that point is – could undermine the longer term genetic viability of the stoat population, bearing in mind the tendency for major urban and road development to confine populations into pockets cut off from other populations of the same species. Similar anxieties could apply to other wildlife species. In the current context the overall point to bear in mind is that Langdon Hills is an area valuable for its wildlife as well as for its landscape and recreational qualities (indeed, the three issues are interdependent anyway): it is worthy of strenuous efforts to preserve its integrity, based in part upon the modest extent of the ridge. Take away a substantial chunk such as that to the north of Dry Street and you render

grievous damage to the ridge in its entirety, including to some of its vulnerable species such as the stoats.

7. The population of mice and voles, itself significant, in turn sustains other creatures in the food chain, including weasels, owls and kestrels. Some of these predators live not on the land in question but in the adjacent nature reserve areas including the woodland. To take the riding stables meadows, their hedgerows and the washland for urban development would involve diminishing the viability of the nature reserve land, since a significant range of species depend in part upon feeding grounds on the land currently at risk. The vole population of some of the unkempt land such as within the washland boundaries appears to be high, with plenty of evidence of nesting and tunnelling among the tussock grasses. Foxes have been seen hunting by day in this area and doubtless the badgers do so at night.

8. Badgers consume a large number of earthworms as part of their diet. In times of drought these are decidedly scarce near the ground surface. However the sizeable badger population of the area at risk is in part sustained by the earthworms more regularly available from the consistently moist floor of the washland.

9. Foxes, brown rats and grey squirrels, like opportunist politicians, seem always to be with us, and doubtless they would survive under any regime no matter how high the housing density. Nevertheless it would be sad to think that only these were left, and that so many other worthy creatures had been eliminated from a once beautiful part of the Basildon area. Besides, mangy, rotten-toothed urban foxes are a poor substitute for more wholesome animals inhabiting a more natural environment.

10. Further observation beyond the June 2 deadline may well yield other relevant points that would need to be considered in any public enquiry.

**Butterflies and moths: species list and commentary.**

Butterflies:

- Small Skipper
- Essex Skipper
- Large Skipper
- Grizzled Skipper
- Brimstone
- Large White
- Small White
- Green-veined White
- Orange Tip
- Small Copper
- Brown Argus
- Common Blue
- Holly Blue
- Red Admiral
- Painted Lady
- Small Tortoiseshell
- Peacock
- Comma
- Speckled Wood
- Wall Brown
- Gatekeeper
- Meadow Brown
- Small Heath

Moths :

- Angle Shades
- Blood Vein
- Brimstone
- Broad-bordered Yellow Underwing
- Buff Arches
- Buff Tip
- Burnet Companion
- Burnished Brass
- Cabbage Moth
- Chinese Character

- Cinnabar
- Clay
- Cockscomb Prominent
- Common Carpet
- Common Quaker
- Common Swift
- Common Wainscote
- Common Wave
- Copper Underwing
- Dark Spinach
- Dot
- Dusky Thorn
- Early Thorn
- Ear Moth
- Large Elephant Hawk (in adjacent gardens, several references)
- Engrailed
- Feather Gothic
- Flame Shoulder
- Flounced Rustic
- Ghost Moth
- Gothic
- Grey Dagger
- Heart and Dart
- Herald
- Knot Grass
- Large Yellow Underwing
- Lesser-bordered Yellow Underwing
- Lesser Yellow Underwing
- Light Emerald
- Lime-speck Pug
- Magpie
- Marbled Beauty
- Mother of Pearl
- Mother Shipton
- Oak Hook-tip
- Orange Swift
- Pale Mottled Willow
- Pale Prominent

- Peppered Moth
- Purple Bar
- Riband Wave
- Rosy Rustic
- Ruby Tiger
- Sallow Kitten
- Scalloped Oak
- Scorched Wing
- Setaceous Hebrew Character
- Shuttle-shaped Dart
- Silver Y
- Six Spot Burnet
- Small Yellow Underwing
- Snout
- Square Spot Rustic
- Straw Underwing
- Swallowtail
- Lesser Swallow Prominent
- White Ermine
- White Line Dart
- White Plume
- Willow Beauty
- Vapourer

### **Commentary**

1. The list of butterfly species recorded so far is a considerable one for this part of England. Of the 31 species that have been recorded on Langdon Hills since 1960 (an impressive total testifying to the richness of the ridge) 23 have been identified on or among the meadows, hedgerows and washland currently under threat. A few more are possible.

2. The more limited list of moths (relative to the number of species in Britain) is a comment on the conditions

rather than the total moth fauna of the area. Beyond the more obvious day-flying species it is harder to compile a comprehensive list without regular night-time access throughout the active months of the year. Evidence is gradually being assembled but the time available since the start of the current investigation has been very restricted and it has largely coincided with the cold winter months when little moth activity could be expected. Facilities do not exist for the regular use of a light trap actually on the site. However it has been possible to draw upon the list of

species observed at a light trap in the garden of 23 Sporhams, located within 50 metres of the boundary of the area in question. It can reasonably be inferred that such species will occur on the site.

3. The Grizzled Skippers (*Pyrgus malvae*) constitute a particularly important feature. This species, very scarce in eastern England, still occurs on Langdon Hills but has died out in all other parts of Essex. The county's remaining colony is mainly located on some of the long-established meadows of the Langdon nature reserve; the larvae feed upon creeping cinquefoil (*Potentilla repens*). The only other meadows involved are those of the land currently under threat. The meadow located in the northwest corner of the complex has a substantial amount of *Potentilla repens* and it is clear that breeding takes place in this meadow: egg-laying females have been seen and indeed photographed there during May 1997. There has been less chance to investigate the status of the butterfly in the other meadows but the foodplant is undoubtedly present. The development of the meadows north of Dry Street would be a serious blow to a butterfly that has undergone major decline over the past thirty years on account of loss of habitat. Too few unimproved and semi-improved meadows now exist; those that remain are of special significance.

4. The Brown Argus (*Aricia agestis*) was the object of a great deal of concern in recent years, amid the fear that it had died out in the county. It was gratifying to be able to point out that it still occurs quite plentifully on Langdon Hills, where the principal larval foodplant is cut-leaved cranesbill (*Geranium dissectum*). It has been in considerable evidence on the threatened meadows and washland this spring, yet again bearing out the importance of this kind of site for wildlife.

5. The Wall Brown (*Lasiommata megera*) is currently in alarming decline. Fairly widespread until only a few years ago, it has disappeared from many places where it had hitherto been a regular feature. It appears to have died out completely in Surrey and has gone from many places in Essex, with corresponding decline elsewhere in southeast England.

#### **Vascular plants and trees: species list and commentary.**

- *Equisetum arvense* (Common Horsetail)
- *Equisetum telmateia* (Great Horsetail) – in marshy ground of the stream system
- *Ophioglossum vulgatum* (Adder's-tongue Fern) – in long-established grassland
- *Dryopteris dilatata* (Broad Buckler Fern) – in shade of northern parish boundary of Fobbing
- *Dryopteris filix-mas* (Male Fern) – in northern Fobbing parish boundary
- *Anemone nemorosa* (Wood Anemone) – in ancient hedgerow of Bridleway

- *Clematis vitalba* (Old Man's Beard)
- *Ranunculus acris* (Meadow Buttercup)
- *Ranunculus bulbosus* (Bulbous Buttercup)
- *Ranunculus ficaria* (Lesser Celandine) – along Bridleway and northern parish boundary
- *Ranunculus repens* (Creeping Buttercup)
- *Ranunculus sceleratus* (Celery-leaved Buttercup) – in one of the ponds and a ditch
- *Papaver dubium* (Long-headed Poppy)
- *Alliaria petiolata* (Garlic Mustard)
- *Armoracia rusticana* (Horse Radish)
- *Barbarea vulgaris* (Wintercress)
- *Brassica napus ssp oleifera* (Oil-seed Rape) – on spoil tip
- *Brassica nigra* (Black Mustard)
- *Capsella bursa-pastoris* (Shepherd's Purse)
- *Diplotaxis tenuifolia* (Perennial Wall Rocket)
- *Sinapis arvensis* (Charlock)
- *Sisymbrium officinale* (Hedge Mustard)
- *Viola odorata* (Sweet Violet)
- *Viola riviniana* (Common Dog Violet)
- *Viola x wittrockiana* (Garden Pansy) – on spoil heap
- *Hypericum hirsutum* (Hairy St John's Wort)
- *Cerastium fontanum* (Common Mouse-ear)
- *Cerastium glomeratum* (Sticky Mouse-ear)
- *Moehringia trinervia* (Three-veined Sandwort) – in ancient hedgerow of Bridleway
- *Silene dioica* (Red Campion)
- *Stellaria graminea* (Lesser Stitchwort)
- *Stellaria holostea* (Greater Stitchwort)
- *Stellaria media* (Chickweed)
- *Atriplex prostrata* (Spear-leaved Orache)
- *Malva sylvestris* (Common Mallow)
- *Linum catharticum* (Fairy Flax)
- *Geranium dissectum* (Cut-leaved Cranesbill)
- *Geranium molle* (Dovesfoot Cranesbill)
- *Geranium robertianum* (Herb Robert)
- *Acer campestre* (Field Maple)
- *Acer pseudoplatanus* (Sycamore)
- *Aesculus hippocastanum* (Horse Chestnut)
- *Ilex aquifolium* (Holly) – in ancient hedgerow of the Bridleway
- *Euonymus europaeus* (Spindle) – in Bridleway hedgerow

- *Cytisus scoparius* (Broom)
- *Galega officinalis* (Goat's Rue)
- *Lathyrus latifolius* (Broad-leaved Everlasting Pea)
- *Lathyrus nissolia* (Grass Vetchling)
- *Lathyrus pratensis* (Yellow Meadow Vetchling)
- *Lotus corniculatus* (Common Bird's-foot Trefoil)
- *Lotus pedunculatus* (Greater Bird's-foot Trefoil)
- *Medicago arabica* (Spotted Medick)
- *Medicago lupulina* (Black Medick)
- *Medicago sativa ssp sativa* (Lucerne)
- *Melilotus officinalis* (Ribbed Melilot)
- *Trifolium dubium* (Lesser Yellow Trefoil)
- *Trifolium medium* (Zigzag Clover) – almost certainly this species; flowering awaited
- *Trifolium pratense* (Red Clover)
- *Trifolium repens* (White Clover)
- *Vicia cracca* (Tufted Vetch)
- *Vicia hirsuta* (Hairy Tare)
- *Vicia sativa ssp segetalis* (Common Vetch) – the widespread form
- *Vicia sativa ssp nigra* – the indigenous taxon, growing in NW meadow
- *Vicia sepium* (Bush Vetch)
- *Vicia tetrasperma* (Smooth Tare)
- *Agrimonia eupatoria* (Agrimony)
- *Crataegus laevigata* (Woodland Hawthorn) – in ancient Bridleway and field hedges
- *Crataegus monogyna* (Common Hawthorn)
- *Geum urbanum* (Wood Avens) – in Bridleway hedgerow
- *Malus domestica* (Apple)
- *Malus sylvestris* (Crab Apple) – in ancient hedgerow of the Bridleway
- *Potentilla reptans* (Creeping Cinquefoil)
- *Prunus avium* (Wild Cherry) – in ancient Bridleway and field hedgerows
- *Prunus spinosa* (Blackthorn)
- *Pyrus communis* (Wild Pear)
- *Pyrus pyraster* (Wild Pear)
- *Rosa arvensis* (Field Rose)
- *Rosa canina* (Dog Rose)
- *Rosa stylosa* (Short-styled Field Rose) – in ancient hedges
- *Rosa tomentosa* (Downy-leaved Rose) – in ancient hedges
- *Rubus fruticosus* (Blackberry)
- *Rubus ulmifolius* (Elm-leaved Bramble)

- *Sorbus aria* (Whitebeam) – bank of the washland
- *Sorbus aucuparia* (Rowan) – self-set in spoil area
- *Sorbus intermedia* (Swedish Whitebeam) – self-set on bank of washland
- *Sorbus torminalis* (Wild Service Tree) – in ancient hedges
- *Chamerion angustifolium* (Rosebay)
- *Epilobium ciliatum* (American Willowherb)
- *Epilobium hirsutum* (Great Hairy Willowherb) – in streams and ditches
- *Cornus sanguinea* (Dogwood) – in ancient hedgerows
- *Hedera helix* (Ivy)
- *Anthriscus sylvestris* (Sheep's Parsley)
- *Apium nodiflorum* (Fool's Watercress) – in washland outlets
- *Conium maculatum* (Hemlock)
- *Daucus carota* (Wild Carrot)
- *Heracleum sphondylium* (Cow Parsnip)
- *Sison amomum* (Stone Parsley)
- *Torilis japonica* (Hedge Parsley)
- *Bryonia dioica* (White Bryony)
- *Euphorbia amygdaloides* (Wood Spurge) – in Bridleway ancient hedgerow
- *Euphorbia lathyris* (Caper Spurge) – near stables
- *Mercurialis annua* (Annual Dog's Mercury)
- *Mercurialis perennis* (Dog's Mercury) – ancient parish boundaries of north and west margins
- *Polygonum aviculare* (Common Knotgrass)
- *Rumex acetosa* (Common Sorrel)
- *Rumex acetosella* (Sheep's Sorrel) – acid hilltop of long-established meadow
- *Rumex conglomeratus* (Clustered Dock) – near washland watercourse
- *Rumex crispus* (Curled Dock)
- *Rumex obtusifolia* (Broad-leaved Dock)
- *Urtica dioica* (Stinging Nettle)
- *Humulus lupulus* (Hop) – in long-established hedge by the stream
- *Ulmus procera* (English Elm)
- *Carpinus betulus* (Hornbeam) – in Bridleway ancient hedgerow and northern parish boundary
- *Corylus avellana* (Hazel) – in Bridleway ancient hedgerow
- *Quercus robur* (Pedunculate Oak)
- *Salix alba* (White Willow) – in washland
- *Salix caprea* (Goat Willow)
- *Salix cinerea* ssp *cinerea* (Grey Sallow)
- *Salix cinerea* ssp *oleifolia* (Rusty Sallow) – one apparently: needs conf. later in season
- *Salix x reichardtii* (*caprea/cinerea*) – by washland

- *Salix fragilis* (Crack Willow)
- *Salix viminalis* (Osier)
- *Anagallis arvensis* ssp *arvensis* (Scarlet Pimpernel)
- *Primula vulgaris* (Primrose)
- *Fraxinus excelsior* (Ash)
- *Calystegia silvatica* (Large Bindweed)
- *Convolvulus arvensis* (Field Bindweed)
- *Solanum dulcamara* (Woody Nightshade)
- *Antirrhinum majus* (Snapdragon)
- *Linaria purpurea* (Purple Toadflax)
- *Odontites verna* (Red Bartsia)
- *Rhinanthus minor* (Yellow Rattle) – in long-established meadow
- *Veronica arvensis* (Wall Speedwell)
- *Veronica persica* (Common Field Speedwell)
- *Veronica serpyllifolia* (Thyme-leaved Speedwell)
- *Ballota nigra* (Black Horehound)
- *Glechoma hederacea* (Ground Ivy)
- *Lamium galeobdolon* (Yellow Archangel) – in Bridleway ancient hedgerow
- *Mentha aquatica* (Water Mint) – plentiful in the washland
- *Prunella vulgaris* (Self-heal) – plentiful in long-established meadow
- *Rosmarinus officinalis* (Rosemary) – self-set on spoil
- *Stachys sylvatica* (Hedge Woundwort)
- *Plantago lanceolata* (Ribwort Plantain)
- *Plantago major* (Greater Plantain)
- *Galium aparine* (Goosegrass)
- *Lonicera periclymenum* (Honeysuckle) – in Bridleway ancient hedgerow
- *Sambucus nigra* (Elder)
- *Symphoricarpos rivularis* (Snowberry)
- *Dipsacus fullonum* (Wild Teasel)
- *Achillea millefolium* (Yarrow)
- *Artemisia vulgaris* (Mugwort)
- *Aster tripolium* (Sea Aster) – washland, several plants
- *Bellis perennis* (Daisy)
- *Centaurea cyanus* (Cornflower) – well established on disturbed ground
- *Centaurea montana* (Perennial Cornflower)
- *Centaurea nigra* (Knapweed)
- *Cirsium arvense* (Creeping Thistle)
- *Cirsium vulgare* (Spear Thistle)

- *Crepis vesicaria* ssp *taraxacifolia* (Beaked Hawksbeard)
- *Hypochoeris radicata* (Common Catsear)
- *Lactuca serriola* (Prickly Lettuce) – both forma *serriola* and forma *integrifolia*
- *Lapsana communis* (Nipplewort)
- *Leontodon autumnalis* (Autumn Hawkbit)
- *Leontodon hispidus* (Rough Hawkbit)
- *Leucanthemum vulgare* (Ox-eye Daisy)
- *Matricaria recutita* (Scented Mayweed)
- *Picris echioides* (Bristly Ox-tongue)
- *Picris hieracioides* (Hawkweed Ox-tongue)
- *Pulicaria dysenterica* (Common Fleabane)
- *Senecio erucifolius* (Hoary Ragwort)
- *Senecio jacobaea* (Common Ragwort)
- *Senecio squalidus* (Oxford Ragwort)
- *Senecio vulgaris* (Groundsel)
- *Sonchus arvensis* (Corn Sow-thistle)
- *Sonchus asper* (Prickly Sow-thistle)
- *Sonchus oleraceus* (Smooth Sow-thistle)
- *Taraxacum officinale* agg. (Dandelion)
- *Tripleurospermum inodorum* (Scentless Mayweed)
- *Tussilago farfara* (Coltsfoot) – plentiful in the washland
- *Allium vineale* (Crow Garlic)
- *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* (Bluebell) – in Bridleway ancient hedgerow
- *Juncus articulatus* (Jointed Rush)
- *Juncus effusus* (Soft Rush)
- *Juncus inflexus* (Hard Rush)
- *Luzula campestris* (Field Woodrush) – in long-established meadow
- *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* (Common Spotted Orchid) – in banks of the washland
- *Orchis morio* (Green-veined Orchid) – in long-established meadow
- *Arum maculatum* (Wild Arum) – in shady hedgerows and along Bridleway
- *Lemna minor* (Common Duckweed) – in blocked ditch
- *Carex flacca* (Glaucous Sedge) – in long-established meadows and in washland
- *Carex spicata* (Spiked Sedge) – in washland
- *Carex otrubae* (False Fox Sedge) – in washland
- *Agrostis capillaris* (Common Bent)
- *Agrostis stolonifera* (Creeping Bent)
- *Alopecurus geniculatus* (Marsh Foxtail)
- *Alopecurus pratensis* (Meadow Foxtail)

- *Anisantha sterilis* (Barren Brome)
- *Anthoxanthum odoratum* (Sweet Vernal Grass)
- *Arrhenatherum elatius* (False Oat-grass)
- *Avena sativa* (Oat)
- *Brachypodium sylvaticum* (Wood False-brome) – in Bridleway hedgerow
- *Bromopsis ramosa* (Hairy Brome) – near Bridleway
- *Bromus hordeaceus* (Soft Brome)
- *Cynosurus cristatus* (Crested Dog's Tail) – in long-established meadow
- *Dactylis glomerata* (Cocksfoot)
- *Deschampsia cespitosa* (Tufted Hair-grass)
- *Elytrigia repens* ssp *repens* (Common Couch)
- *Festuca ovina* (Sheep's Fescue) – on heathy section of NW meadow, small amount
- *Festuca pratensis* (Meadow Fescue) – meadow in NW corner of site
- *Festuca rubra* (Red Fescue)
- *Holcus lanatus* (Yorkshire Fog)
- *Hordeum murinum* (Wall Barley)
- *Lolium multiflorum* (Italian Rye-grass)
- *Lolium perenne* (Perennial Rye-grass)
- *Melica uniflora* (Wood Melick) – in Bridleway ancient hedgerow
- *Milium effusum* (Wood Millet) – in Bridleway ancient hedgerow
- *Phleum bertolonii* (Lesser Cat's-tail)
- *Poa angustifolia* (Narrow-leaved Meadow-grass) – incl. excellent spread in washland
- *Poa annua* (Annual Meadow-grass)
- *Poa humilis* (Spreading Meadow-grass)
- *Poa nemoralis* (Wood Meadow-grass) – along Bridleway ancient hedgerow
- *Poa pratensis* (Smooth Meadow-grass)
- *Poa trivialis* (Rough Meadow-grass)
- *Triticum aestivum* (Wheat) – casual on spoil
- *Vulpia myuros* (Rat's-tail Fescue)

## **Commentary**

1. The list of species already recorded on the site this year is a very considerable one, testifying to the variety of habitats represented. Further examination later on in the season would undoubtedly yield further species but time does not permit such thoroughness: this survey has to be completed before 2 June.

2. Many of the species listed are typical of this part of Essex. They can be visualised as common hereabouts, or at least used to be common: inasmuch as a very great deal of the south

Essex landscape has now been built upon or put over to intensive modern agriculture what not so very long ago was typical and commonplace is fast becoming exceptional and worthy of preservation. There was a time when the new town was being built when many of the above species were plentiful. Anecdotal evidence tells of many an orchid-growing meadow disappearing under houses and roads in the early days, when to have spoken up in protest would have involved seeking to defend the unremarkable. After several decades of unprecedented urbanisation we are left with a scarcity of further building land coupled with an all too vulnerable handful of meadows that represent a mere fragment of what once had been extensive. The meadows that remain harbour a cross section of species that deserve to be safeguarded, as indeed they can be if those meadows are kept under a sensitively co-ordinated grazing and haycutting regime within a well-run equestrian centre.

3. Some of the meadow species are more remarkable. Adder's-tongue fern (*Ophioglossum vulgatum*) is rare and there are few sites elsewhere in Essex for it apart from those on Langdon Hills. It grows in particular profusion in part of one of the meadows (that which is referred to as Chapel Hills on an 1876 sale catalogue) as well as quite possibly other meadows in the complex. A few Green-veined Orchids (*Orchis morio*), a considerable amount of Yellow Rattle (*Rhinanthus minor*) and Glaucous Sedge (*Carex flacca*) and some Fairy Flax (*Linum catharticum*) together make up a significant community of species associated with traditionally maintained meadowland on base-rich London Clay. The meadows have clearly been improved or at least modified at some stage: they do not on the whole support the range of species that characterises the SSSI meadows of Martinhole and Hawkesbury Bush, but some of them (Chapel Hills and Spring Field to the south of it) are not so very dissimilar. Given their richness in invertebrates and their value to birds and mammals as feeding grounds they ought not to be built on. Horse grazing has clearly been beneficial and, properly managed, would be the best continued landuse.

4. Some features of the landscape are ancient and support a correspondingly rich flora. This applies particularly to the alignment of the Bridleway, which is almost undoubtedly a pre-Roman routeway complete with sunken lane characteristics. Moreover it marks the ancient parish boundary of Fobbing, as does the boundary to the north of Chapel Hills. Hedgerow pollard oaks, centuries old, testify to the antiquity; they support a rich variety of invertebrates, the more so because they bear evidence of time-honoured decay of the kind that is so very important for some insect species and which it is impossible to replicate. The tunnels created by larvae of lesser stagbeetles bear out the point. These pollards grow in species-rich ancient hedgerows that contain such indicator tree and shrub species as hornbeam, field maple, crab apple, holly, wild cherry, woodland hawthorn, spindle, hazel, dogwood, blackthorn and English elm; among them grow such climbers as honeysuckle, old man's beard and the scarcer species of wild rose; beneath them grow such remnants of the original wildwood ground flora as bluebell

(*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*), yellow archangel (*Lamiastrum galeobdolon*), wood spurge (*Euphorbia amygdaloides*), three-veined sandwort (*Moehringia trinervia*), wood anemone (*Anemone nemorosa*), lesser celandine (*Ranunculus ficaria*), wood meadow-grass (*Poa nemoralis*), wood melick (*Melica uniflora*), wood millet (*Milium effusum*). These sites with their scarce species derived from the ancient wildwood are too valuable to be mistreated. They are a vital part of our common inheritance, the more so given the destruction of so much else of our historical landscape during the building of the new town. They should not be built upon, nor should development be attempted in close proximity: backyard abuse, witless destruction and piecemeal spoliation would be the inevitable consequence.

5. Some of the field hedgerows bear similar features. One follows the alignment of the stream that flows from the west and beneath the Bridleway onto the site; it follows the southern boundary of Spring Field and flows out into the stream alongside Dry Street immediately to the east of the riding stables yard. Very sadly, part of its length has been spoiled by the wanton tipping of spoil in recent years but other parts still bear rich features of the traditional flora, including wild service tree (nationally a scarce species), English elm, pedunculate oak, goat willow, grey willow, blackthorn, elder and field maple. Other hedges are also well endowed with species of a kind associated with considerable antiquity: scarce rose species (*Rosa stylosa* and *R. tomentosa*), wild cherry, ash, field maple, oak pollards, English elm and blackthorn accompany the more usual common hawthorn. Hedges involved include those to the south and south east of Chapel Hills and two hedges between the Fletchers housing area and the hospital complex. They fulfil a delightful role as features of the landscape while moreover supporting a wide variety of wildlife throughout the seasons, in addition to their purpose as field boundaries. Far from being seen as a despised and redundant nuisance they should be visualised as vital parts of a rich landscape, set in their full context of a beautiful natural and semi-natural hillside backdrop to the existing new town.

6. The washland that was created a couple of decades ago towards the southern end of the site has its own distinctive flora. It already supports a variety of wetland species that have been able to colonise by means of seeds adhering to birds' feet (the sedges and rushes would be likely candidates) or alternatively by wind dispersal (the various willows and sallows, coltsfoot, sea aster). In addition there is a rich flora of small herbs and grasses that clearly supports a very impressive invertebrate fauna, all the more so given the shelter created by the depression together with the south-facing aspect, particularly of one of the banks. This is where a lot of butterflies are able to breed, along with a wide array of solitary bees, bumble bees, spiders, beetles and other invertebrate groups: the flora is part of the rich and complex structure of this world. Spotted orchids grow on the banks, along with clovers and composites; spiked sedge, glaucous sedge, false fox sedge and jointed rush grow very well in the moist base of the washland, creating a plant community unique in the area. Manmade in origin – but there is not a

square foot of the English landscape that does not bear the direct or indirect impact of humankind – it has fast developed into a rich habitat worthy of preservation. Besides, one day it will rain very heavily again, just as it did in 1958/9, and if the washland has been preserved as it should be the town will be spared millions of pounds of damage by flooding.

7. The dumped spoil is a pity. So too is the eternally smouldering (not rotting) horse manure. A wide variety of ruderal weed species, transient in nature, has appeared on the dumped spoil. These include some of garden origin now naturalised into the English flora as well as others more traditionally associated with cultivation and other disturbed soils and substrates. They have their value for wildlife but are hardly the basis for a graceful landscape. The CNT in a letter to Mr R A Partridge (12 October 1995) declared their intention to have the land returned to its former condition “without delay” but clearly delay would appear to have been the case. Even so,

there is no need to believe that the landscape has been permanently ruined: beneath the spoil there still lies the original soil layer, complete with a rich seedbank of indigenous species that will be able to germinate once the right conditions have been created (see pages 26-9 of my study of the flora of the Langdon Hills).

8. All told, the site supports a pleasantly varied flora worthy of preservation via the maintenance of the hedgerows and watercourses in the time-honoured manner. The pastures should be maintained without the abuses of overgrazing that would otherwise be detrimental to stock, flora and wildlife alike. The washland, created so expensively from the public purse, should be maintained as a vital part of the local infrastructure, meanwhile generating a subtle byproduct of wildlife habitat during the long periods when it is not needed for its main purpose.

#### **Bryophytes: species recorded so far**

- *Brachythecium rutabulum*
- *Calliergon cuspidatum*
- *Amblystegium serpens*
- *Grimmia pulvinata*
- *Tortula muralis*
- *Tortula ruralis*
- *Ceratodon purpureous*
- *Bryum bicolor*
- *Fissidens taxifolius*
- *Fissidens incurvus*
- *Eurhynchium praelongum*

- *Orthotricum diaphanum*

### **Commentary**

1. Rather more is yet to be identified. *Fissidens incurvus* has only been found once before on Langdon Hills and as such must be seen as a scarce species. It is associated with moist clay substrates.

### **Other groups of plants and animals**

#### **Commentary**

1. Survey work has been undertaken that should yield a considerable amount of information about the site. Such material as becomes available in time for the submission of this case will be appended to this document. All further material will be gathered gradually and added to the overall wealth of data that has steadily been accumulated. It will be relevant to whatever investigations and enquiries are held subsequent to this round of public consultation and thus is considered as a fundamental substantiation of the case. It should be appreciated that the six week period allowed for public response is not a sufficient length of time for the accumulation of a comprehensive set of data. Many organisms have a lengthy metamorphosis that yields the adult and identifiable form later on in the year. Moreover the gathering of representative samples of organisms is merely the first stage: there follows an often time-consuming process in the laboratory and with complex identification keys before some of the material can be properly evaluated. Those who have volunteered their help are dedicated folk with full-time jobs and family responsibilities and it would be reasonable to make allowance for this fact. The higher order creatures and plants are more readily observable and thus a greater wealth of information was available. It will also be appreciated that the period during which the future of the equestrian centre and washland site has become a major issue has coincided very largely with the long winter period when much wildlife activity in a northern temperate environment is dormant or even absent.

2. Such observations notwithstanding, it is clear that the site supports a wealth of invertebrate life. It was impressive enough a week or so ago (mid May) to see so many solitary bees and bumble bees, of a striking variety of species, gathering pollen and nectar from among the early spring flowers. It was even more striking to come upon one bumble bee that seemed curiously immobile: closer inspection made it clear that this large and seemingly powerful bee had been seized even as it had settled upon a clover bloom by a yet more powerful spider – a crab spider, possibly *Xysticus cristatus* – that had lain in wait beneath the flower. Discoveries like this do not happen every day; this incident demonstrates just a part of the complexity of the wildlife that inhabits the threatened site. Even as we await the names of the bee species present on the site we can appreciate some readily observable and significant features, such as the concentration of

bumble bees' nests in the rank tussock grass that surrounds the washland and some of the grazing land. The queen bees in spring seek out disused mice and voles' nests wherein to build the new season's beenests. We need the tussock grassland because we need the small rodents' nests; we need the rodents' nests because we need the bees' nests; we need the bees' nests because we need the bees in our gardens and on our fruit trees. Take a good hard look around the town and then take fright at the lack of tussock grassland: intensive arable land gives way to roads and houses and regularly mown grass wherein next to nothing breeds. Not even the roadside verges are allowed to escape the mowers' patrol. Then appreciate that a site such as the one in question, so easily despised and dismissed, is in fact an enormous asset wherein exists a microcosm of beauty and subtlety and necessity. In it, among all the other dimensions of scarce local wildlife, there are the bees' nests that are destined to be torn apart by grub-seeking badgers, the small rodent communities destined to feed predators and house bumble bees, and the bumble bee communities that among other things sustain some powerful little spiders. It is a complex web and we are fortunate indeed to have this on our doorstep. All told, it is too valuable to part with, and indeed with a sensible policy of upholding riding centre, grazing land and essential washland we need never have to.

### **Acknowledgements**

The information contained herein has been drawn from a variety of sources. Records and observations have been received from Peter Basham, Bill and Edna McCready, Denis Nottingham (birds and some mammals); Anthony Millwood (amphibians); Ron de Lemos (varied observations and much of the moth data); John Skinner (lichens and non-marine gastropods); Peter Furze (bryophytes). Don Hunford has inspected the badger sites and contributed useful evidence. Further information concerning some of the badgers was provided by Colin Wind. Valuable historical insight and evidence was provided by Randal Bingley. Entomological survey work has been undertaken by Roger Payne from whom details will be forthcoming once the results have been analysed and collated. Further records are being compiled by John Skinner following a further visit and examination of the lichen flora. It was useful to be able to discuss some of the botanical evidence with Arthur Copping.

### **Conclusion**

1. There is little more that can be added. The richness of the wildlife has been demonstrated beyond all reasonable doubt. The natural history of the threatened site, as detailed, must surely represent new matters as defined in planning and public enquiry terms: absolutely none of the information about the intrinsic wildlife value of the site was discussed in the public enquiry.
2. Indeed, there was much about the procedure surrounding that enquiry that could be criticised. It will be recalled that the original plan drawn up by Essex County Council and endorsed locally by Basildon Council envisaged that the land in question would be designated as

green belt. When it came to the public consultation on that plan it could hardly be expected that people would have to amass a wealth of evidence to support what was being envisaged: life in a busy world just is not like that. The Councils' proposals seemed eminently sane and sensible and one could hardly imagine anyone calling them into question – least of all the CNT, the direct successor of the very planning organisation that had created the equestrian centre in the first place. Only subsequently did it become apparent that the CNT had indeed objected and was seeking medium term authority to develop the site. I am unaware of any appeal for evidence of a wildlife nature with which to challenge the CNT's objection. It would appear that the public enquiry was undertaken in most unfortunate circumstances, with many people unaware of the gravity of developments. The shock generated by the Inspector's eventual recommendation to the effect that the CNT's objection should be upheld was profound, and there was a widespread feeling that this had not been an entirely fairly conducted business. Had a formal proposal been drawn up and published to the effect that permission was being sought to designate the site for development there would have been the clear opportunity for all parties to mobilise their arguments and evidence in the time-honoured manner. After all, that had been the procedure adopted by the CNT's predecessors when they had sought permission to build in this sensitive Dry Street area via the Basildon Master Plan and then later the South West Area Plan: in each case the subsequent public enquiry was exhaustive, thorough and seen to be as objective as could reasonably be expected. It is hard to escape the feeling that this latest exercise involved a degree of sleight out of context with all that local people had come to expect. This is one of the principal reasons why Basildon Council ought to consider very seriously whether its original will should be thus upset.

3. There was a further feeling, to the effect that central government had developed a flair for what might by some be termed asset stripping, realising the value for many hitherto publicly-held assets via sale on the private market. Inasmuch as this suspicion became relevant in the current context a doubt came to nag, that perhaps motives might be more related to an exercise of raising maximum revenue for central government and less concerned with the considerations more immediate to Basildon's wellbeing. There is a widespread school of thought that the recent general election saw a heartfelt rejection of all that might have generated such misgivings. I for one sincerely hope that that is indeed the case.

Rodney L Cole

#### **THE COLE REPORT**