

The SLP – Heronscourt & Colville Gardens (the RAs) response to the Applicant's Revision 2.0 of Site Specific Plan APP Document 8.58 dated March 2020

General

The revised SSP for Turfhill is primarily concerned with a detailed construction plan, apparently conforming to BS5837:2012. Much of the wording is structured to give reassurance that every possible contingency has been considered. The RA's are confident that the ExA will recognise this as a complete smokescreen. The RA's are certain that this plan **cannot be delivered** without contravening the Standard, causing severe damage to trees on Turfhill and in residents' gardens, and endangering the integrity of the water main.

The following sections substantiate this statement:

3.2 Vegetation Removal

3.2.2

A further trees survey has been carried out along F1a+.

However, once again, this survey is fundamentally flawed. The survey team measured the extent of the Order Limits from the fence line of the bordering properties along F1a instead of from the bottom of the adjacent ditch, the actual extent of the properties' boundaries.

This means that a one metre strip of the most dense woodland all along the southern boundary of F1a, has not been included in the survey.

In reviewing the map showing the trees to be removed, it is noted with astonishment, that only one tree has been added from the first survey, despite the Guildford Road sector now being included, and that a vast number of trees in excess of 75mm diameter, will be retained within the Order Limits despite having RPAs extending well across them.

If these are added to those to be removed and the groups of trees to be retained, a number in the region of 200 is arrived at. If those missing from the one metre strip are then added, it makes a total of well over 250 which are facing a direct threat of removal.

This is the very estimate that the RAs have been including in their predictions of hundreds of trees needing to be removed, throughout the Examination.

The complexity of laying a pipeline along this route, now having to negotiate all of these remaining multitude of individual tree root spreads and as yet, the unknown location of the water main, presents an almost impossible task for any Contractor.

However, the Contractor has a way out. The Applicant has stated, on a number of occasions, that it will be left to the Contractor to decide how many trees need to be removed. Could it be that the RAs original predictions that hundreds of trees would be removed is now a certainty?

It is also very unclear as to why the Applicant is replacing more trees than are being removed.

3.2.4

‘Vegetation screening and trees will not be removed....’, however it is highly likely that even without the route of the water main being known, the Applicant intends to lay its line in close proximity to these trees and particularly, at some points, extremely close to major trees in Residents gardens. This is despite stating a clear intention that the pipeline would be laid along the southern boundary of the Order Limits.

It is inconceivable, given all of the challenges of this route, that serious damage to the integrity of their roots can be avoided resulting in either immediate removal or, of more concern, subsequent collapse endangering life and property.

3.5 Open Cut

As previously stated, in the RAs response to the first version of the Applicant’s SSP for Turfhill, when conforming to BS5837:2012, under the conditions existing along F1a+, trenchless methods should be employed.

3.5.4/5

The standard makes it clear that extensive open cut using hand digging and air spade methods are unlikely to be either acceptable or practicable. BS5837:2012 states;

7.2.1 To avoid damage to tree roots, existing ground levels should be retained within the RPA. Intrusion into soil (other than for piling) within the RPA is generally not acceptable, and topsoil within it should be retained in situ. However, limited manual excavation within the RPA might be acceptable, subject to justification. Such excavation should be undertaken carefully, using hand-held tools and preferably by compressed air soil displacement. NOTE *Due to the demands that manual excavation places on a development project, and limitations arising from health and safety considerations, it is not realistic to plan for excavation using hand-held tools where there is a need for trench shoring or grading the sides of the excavation to a stable angle of repose.”*

On both counts;

- as root patterns of remaining and bordering trees, would be encountered along at least 90% of the total length of F1a+, hand held tools and air spade methods would not only be impractical but be in direct contravention of this paragraph
- as it would be for using Open Cut methods where trench shoring is needed. F1a stands on deep Bagshot Sand and by definition, as there will considerable work carried out in an expanded trench at each weld joint, for health and safety reasons, shoring will be essential.

A copy of a map of the local geology of the area is attached as Appendix A.

In para 7.7.2, it makes it clear that in cases such as F1a+, trenchless methods should be used and only for 'shallow service runs' might using hand held tools be acceptable. F1a+ is not a shallow service run.

However, should the Applicant continue to disregard its commitment to the standard and therefore good working practices by Open Cut working; (a) there is no statement committing to protection of roots exposed to the air (b) how the soil removed will be replaced to protect the integrity of the roots and (c) that any soil removed should be retained in situ and replaced as soon as possible. BS5837:2012 is very specific on these and similar issues in paras 7.2.2 to 7.2.4.

3.5.9

Similarly, there is no commitment to avoiding contamination of the site from construction activities which frequently involve a variety of phytotoxic materials. BS5837:2012 states in para 6.2.4.3 that any materials whose accidental spillage would cause damage to a tree should be stored and handled well away from the outer edge of its RPA.

BS5837: 2012 is entirely focussed on protecting the long term health of trees that could be impacted by construction activities. The RAs and other Local Authorities welcomed the commitment of the Applicant to apply it strictly to this project for this very purpose. It is clear from this SSP that it intends to ignore that commitment and is not concerned about the long term health of the trees along F1a+.

3.5.10

It is to be stressed, as it was in the RAs response to the Applicants first SSP for Turhill, that the RPAs shown are based on minimum calculations. Scientific views based on ground radar studies indicate that root spreads are more generally 120% of tree height. In the case of Turhill, root spreads are visually obvious to be greater than the minimums and in many instances blend with bordering trees to cover the total width of the Order Limits of F1a+.

It is obvious from the map attached to the SSP showing the line of the pipeline that it cuts through almost all of the RPAs along the Folly and Guildford Road and even some of those along F1a.

So to say that the pipeline alignment has been designed to avoid RPAs is a complete nonsense. The RAs find it hard to credit how an organisation can make this brazenly untrue claim.

3.5.12

It is also nonsense to show the alignment of the line without any detailed knowledge of the route of the water main which will have a major influence on where the pipeline will have to go.

Despite giving Residents notice that a survey to identify its route was to be carried out on two different occasions, to date the RAs have no evidence that this survey has been done nor have the Residents been advised of any further attempt.

The obvious conclusion is that by the end of this process, the water main's actual location will still not be known and it will be left, once again and unacceptably, to the Contractor.

3.6 Reinstatement

3.6.1

It is ironic that the Applicant has maintained throughout this process that one of its major considerations for switching to F1a+ was to avoid being in breach of EU Directives on damaging heathland. In what appears to be in flagrant breach of these Directives, it now plans, in constructing the Compound, to destroy a considerable area of wet heathland which will never truly regenerate.

At a recent meeting with Natural England (NE) and Mr Gove, it was clearly stated that this area of wet heathland was 'very precious' and of great concern to NE as it was of significant ecological importance. It is difficult therefore to understand how NE has endorsed this proposal unless their words have been taken out of context or misapplied in some way.

3.6.5 - 3.6.7

The present wording is insufficient and should be replaced with;

'Woodland will be reinstated using semi-mature trees of an appropriate native species in good condition and of a height not less than three metres planted in adjacent positions to the trees removed whilst outside the 6.3m pipeline easement and that of the water main. Replacement trees and vegetation will be subject to a five year after care period that ensures their continuing health and development with replacements as necessary.'

Appendix B Construction and Reinstatement Plans

There are obvious comments which need to be made;

- F1a is not a straight pathway and curves away out of sight from the Guildford Road, northwards at approximately midpoint and pipelines do not bend in straight lines!
- it makes no mention of the water main, unless the dotted red line is meant to indicate its position and which, in the absence of any actual survey, can only be an optimistic guess.
- even given that the RPAs of retained and bordering trees are shown using minimum calculations, the proposed line cuts through a considerable number of them. In some cases, it runs nearly through the middle of the indicated RPA. No apology is made for reiterating a statement made in the RAs response to the first SSP, that an RPA is not 'a no damage likely to be done' but is more 'a tree is unlikely to die immediately and may eventually recover.'
- at approximately midpoint, along the northern boundary, the line comes extremely close to a number of properties, in particular Nos 29 & 31 of Heronscourt and No 20 of Colville Gardens, where there are very substantial trees bordering F1a.

Summary

From this SSP, the RAs can only predict;

- long term damage to Residents trees.
- long term damage to bordering trees.
- hundreds of trees in excess of 75mm diameter at the mercy of the Contractor and at high risk.
- disruption to the water supply to southern Lightwater during construction and subsequently, potential contamination through hydrocarbon leakage.
- permanent disturbance of the flood management system.
- permanent damage to the landscape.
- irreparable damage to a major community amenity.

By comparison, and now as NE has confirmed no ecological preference between the routes, the use of F1c or the Alternative route proposed to the ExA, would have none of these outcomes.

It remains inexplicable to the RAs why the Applicant persists in its determination to stay with F1a+. Can it be that the Applicant has some undisclosed concerns about the use of F1c?

Quite separately in a submission to ExA, the RAs have raised the issue that the Applicant has never responded to requests for comparative studies of the biodiversity net impact of using F1a+ or F1c or the Alternative route proposed. Under the Habitats Directive article 6(4), in these circumstances, the Applicant has to justify that there are 'Imperative reasons of overriding public interest' (**IROPI**) for choosing F1a+. The RAs adamantly believe that the reverse is true.

Given all the above, it is very difficult to see how the ExA can consent to the Applicant's SSP for Turfhill Park.

Heronscourt Residents Association
Colville Gardens Residents association
Lightwater Residents

Appendix A

