



Ty Cottage  
Southern Green  
Rushden  
Herts SG9 0SW

28 June 2013

Dear Mr Robson,

**Reference: Proposed Sale of Land in Wallington (ref your letter of 30 May 2013)**

I am writing on behalf of Rushden and Wallington Parish Council to express our opposition to the proposed sale of land in Wallington at the junction of Kits Lane and The Street to a private buyer. We are keen to emphasise that our objections relate to the private sale of the land on principle, and are not personal to the adjoining landowner who has made an offer to purchase it.

We are concerned about the sale on several grounds, and we wish to propose an alternative solution. Our proposal also encompasses the patch of publicly-owned land further along Kits Lane, locally known as The Spinney.

**The reasons for our opposition to any private sale are:**

**1) Environmental**

The areas of land in question have been left to nature for many years. As a result they both provide valuable habitats for wildlife, including the following major species observed by residents on the land at the junction:

- a) Tawny owls seen and heard roosting on a regular basis
- b) Muntjac deer seen rearing their young annually – it is likely that they give birth here (Photographic evidence available if required)

This valuable natural habitat would be lost if the land began to be managed as part of a private garden, or was developed in any other way. Once in private hands it would be extremely difficult to monitor or control the management of the land. Any legal restrictions imposed on the use of the land cannot prevent environmental damage from taking place. They would merely make it possible to seek redress after any damage has already been done. Such action would potentially be very costly for all concerned, and it could take years for the habitat to be restored.

We believe that the preservation of this wildlife habitat at the heart of the village fulfils the following criteria within the "saved" sections of NHDC's local plan 1996:

Policy 14 – Nature Conservation, with particular reference to point 2.32. Whilst acknowledging that Wallington is a village rather than a town, we believe the principle applies. It is clear that valuable wildlife habitats can exist amidst other development, and the policy requires these sites to be protected from potential damage.

## **2) Historical**

Wallington is well known in literary circles for its connection with George Orwell. The village was home to the author for longer than anywhere else in his adult life. Orwell's diary and letters document the fact that he grazed his goats on the very patch of wild land at the junction of The Street and Kits Lane which is currently under discussion.

In 2012 the land in question featured in a series of well-attended walking tours which formed part of the George Orwell Festival. It is a valuable illustration of Orwell's subsistence lifestyle at the time.

A steady stream of Orwell enthusiasts visit the village every year, and the residents of Wallington are conscious that there is currently little on offer for them. As a result there is a proposal within the village to publish the walking tour as a leaflet, with accompanying discreet signposts at key points around the village. The leaflets will be sold, along with other locally-produced Orwell publications, in the village church and possibly in the village phone box, providing a useful ongoing fundraising opportunity for the community.

The authenticity of this section of the tour would be adversely affected if the land became part of a private garden, rather than remaining in the natural state in which Orwell found it.

## **3) Future-proofing**

The two small plots of land under discussion are the only areas within the village of Wallington that remain in public ownership. If this land is sold into private hands then it will no longer be possible for any future social, leisure or economic development to be accommodated within the village. It seems unreasonable to sacrifice such a valuable community "land-bank" resource in return for a one-off financial gain, the scale of which will be too small to make any material difference to the NHDC annual budget.

We understand that the grass verges, embankments and roadside parking spaces highlighted in the plan would be retained by NHDC in the event of any sale. We would like to point out that there is easy access on foot to the land at the junction of Kits Lane / The Street across the grass verge, and The Spinney is accessible from the adjoining public footpath. We hope this will reassure you that your earlier concern about the plot(s) of land only being accessible via adjoining gardens is unfounded.

Your recent letter suggested a sealed bid process for the disposal of the land. As outlined above, we believe that this approach would be inconsistent with the District Council's responsibility to safeguard the natural environment. Furthermore, we believe that such a sale would not represent best value for the taxpayer. The only way that Rushden and Wallington Parish Council could hope to be successful in such a process would be to borrow funds, forcing us to demand an increase in our annual precept to cover the cost of repayments and thereby passing the cost directly back to the tax-paying public with added interest. Alternatively, if a bid from the Parish Council were to be unsuccessful, the local taxpayer and the community of Wallington would have missed out permanently on the opportunity of a much greater future benefit from this potentially useful land.

**Our alternative proposals for the future of the land are:**

**Option 1:** Sale of the land to Rushden and Wallington Parish Council for a nominal sum

Option 1 would remove all administrative burden from NHDC whilst maintaining public ownership of the land and answering the objections listed above. Rushden and Wallington Parish Council would willingly accept the most stringent development restrictions NHDC might wish to impose, and would also accept an "overage" arrangement.

**Option 2:** Lease of the land to Rushden and Wallington Parish Council for a period of 25yrs at a nominal peppercorn rent

Option 2 also answers the objections above, whilst maintaining NHDC's ownership of the land and preserving the District Council's potential opportunity to benefit from the sale or use of the land in the future.

We would be very happy to pursue either option, but we believe that Option 2 presents the best opportunity for the village of Wallington, the Parish Council and NHDC. Whilst we would of course be prepared to cover the £500 legal cost you mentioned if our proposal is accepted, as a very small Parish Council with correspondingly low funding we would request that you consider waiving this fee if at all possible, because we would of course need to meet our own legal costs.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you would like to discuss the matter further.

Yours sincerely,



Elspeth Gutteridge

Clerk to Rushden & Wallington Parish Council

Cc: Steve Jarvis