Dear Ms Ridge,

Planning Application 14/01079/OUT: Smithy Wood Cowley Hill (Adjoining Junction 35 of M1 Motorway) Sheffield 35

I am writing to you on behalf of the Council for British Archaeology (CBA) the national amenity society concerned with protection of the archaeological interest in heritage assets. We have a membership of 620 heritage organisations who, together with our thousands of members, represent national and local bodies encompassing state, local government, professional, academic, museum and voluntary sectors.

A number of our members have contacted us in regard to the proposed motorway services development at Smithy Wood, South Yorkshire, and in particular the proposals to replace an area of ancient woodland at the site in order to allow the development to go ahead. The CBA is strongly opposed to the inclusion of Ancient Woodland in bio-diversity offsetting schemes, such as the one proposed at Smithy Wood, as we believe that the potential archaeological impact of such schemes cannot be mitigated by a programme of replanting.

Ancient Woodlands are not only important ecological habitats, but are also significant historic landscapes containing a wide range of archaeological features, including, perhaps most significantly, the living heritage of worked and veteran trees. This heritage has the potential to provide a unique insight into land use and management practices, and in the development of local industries over hundreds (and in some cases thousands) of years. In the past, woodlands were actively managed to produce essential raw materials for agriculture, construction and for local craft and manufacturing industries. The surviving traces of this important past, including surviving worked and veteran trees, should be recognised as a unique and irreplaceable part of our country’s archaeological heritage.

As you will be aware, Ancient Woodland is given special protection within the National Planning Policy Framework because of its ecological significance (NPPF, para 118). The CBA has recently been in correspondence with the Government on this matter, and has been reassured by the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Natural Environment and Science that, as far as the Government are concerned, offsetting will not result in any changes to this protection.
However, alongside this, the CBA strongly believes that additional consideration should be given to the archaeological significance of these important landscapes, and in particular to the living archaeology of the woodland itself, which is unique and irreplaceable. In this case Section 12 (specifically paragraphs 128, 129, 132 and 136) of the National Planning Policy Framework should also apply and we urge you to take this into account when making a decision on this application.

We would be grateful if you could keep us informed of any decisions on this matter. If there is anything else we can help with please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

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