

Mercury 62, Knowsley

R01a_Arboricultural Note

- 1.1. This note has been prepared by Tyler Grange Group Limited on behalf of Maro Developments in relation to the proposed commercial development at Cronton Road, Prescott (22/00587/FUL).
- 1.2. We were commissioned to provide arboricultural consultancy advice relating to a woodland located to the west of the site. Our scope involved a walkover field study of the woodland to identify any arboricultural features and/or characteristics of the woodland that would indicate potential 'ancient-ness'.
- 1.3. I have also considered the findings of reports prepared by Urban Green and Orion Consultancy relating to the woodland. I have summarised the headlines of both reports below, as far as I have interpreted these:

Ancient Woodland Briefing Note prepared by Orion Heritage dated 5th July 2023:

- The historical evidence does not support a designation of any woodland within the site as Ancient Woodland.
- Analysis of historic mapping does not support the woodland as having been in place since 1600.
- The historic maps indicate the woodland as being part of a former 19th century shelterbelt plantation.

Ancient Woodland Assessment prepared by Urban Green dated 6th June 2023:

- The abundance of ground flora indicator species present is a strong indicator that the woodland is ASNW.
- A similar composition of ground flora and tree species was noted in nearby woodlands which are designated as Ancient Woodland (Old Wood North and Old Wood South).

- 1.4. In this case, there appears to be no compelling evidence to suggest that the woodland is ancient or not. As noted by the NERC248 guidance:

"In reviewing approaches to the identification of ancient woodland Graves et al. (2009c) have recommended that field evidence should be used to *support* map and archive evidence. In other words, field evidence is not a substitute for documentary evidence (the best evidence for ancient woodland is 'non-ecological' because this precludes circular reasoning in ascribing status to a site). While there are circumstances where indications of antiquity visible in the field are overwhelming, generally the inclusion of a site on the AWI will have been based on map evidence, sometimes confirmed and supported by additional field evidence. Similarly field evidence can confirm a case for exclusion of a site from the AWI."

- 1.5. My understanding of the above is that historical mapping evidence is typically used as the primary source of evidence. Field studies are then used to support the evidence base, particularly where uncertainties appear in the historic mapping evidence.
- 1.6. As noted in the Orion report, Old Wood North and Old Wood South (formerly Old Wood Knowsley prior to bisection from the highway) are classified as ANSW but were not mapped earlier than the 19th century. Orion have since liaised with NE regarding the data set and



evidence behind the mapping of Old Wood North / South. NE have confirmed these were included within the original 1980 inventory of AWs, which looked for wooded continuity to the present day using historic and current maps and aerial photographs. The original and only datasheet provide for Old Wood Knowsley provides limited information and refers to maps more recent maps dated 1924-1936 and 1976. NE also noted that a sample of sites were surveyed; however Old Wood Knowsley was not subject to a survey. It is reasonable to question the evidence base for the mapping of Old Wood North / South as ASNW, as it does not appear that NE have compelling maps or datasets to show continuity of woodland since 1600. Subsequently, it is reasonable to query any comparison of similarity of the woodland in question and Old Wood North / South, such as that noted in the Urban Green report.

- 1.7. While the Urban Green report identified a “high frequency and abundance” of indicator flora species, we would not expect those alone to confirm that a woodland is ancient. It is important to remember that the presence of an ancient woodland indicator species does not necessarily guarantee that you are in ancient woodland. Some species can colonise secondary woodland, especially if it is near sites of ancient woodland. I also note that of the over 70 ancient woodland vascular plants indicators species for Northern England, only 7 of the species listed within the Urban Green report for the woodland are understood to be indicator species. Such species may also be found in woodlands that are not ancient.
- 1.8. I also note that the Urban Green report does not note the presence of any particularly old trees or indicators of historic woodland management.
- 1.9. Our walkover of the woodland focussed on identifying arboricultural features and applying professional judgement from experience of assessing and observing ancient woodlands. The note does not address criteria under other specialist disciplines such as ecology or archaeology.
- 1.10. The criterion for assessing potential ancient woodland is listed at section 5.2.3.1 of the NERC248 Guidance. Where relating to trees, this includes:
 - “Stand structure and diversity and the broad habitats or vegetation communities present.”
 - “Living evidence relating to the past management of a wood, for example, coppice structure, aged coppice stools, veteran trees or pollards.”
- 1.11. Our walkover identified no arboricultural features that indicated historic tree management techniques or individual trees / stumps that indicate presence pre-1600.
- 1.12. The largest and potentially oldest tree identified was a sycamore measuring approximately 700mm in stem diameter. This is a mature example of the species, but certainly not an indication of pre-1600 tree cover given the species and approximate age of the tree at 80-100 years.
- 1.13. Sycamore is the dominant tree species within the woodland comprising around 60%-70% of the tree species mix. Fewer willow, oak and ash species were present. According to Section 6.1.3.3.1 of the NERC Guidance, recent secondary woods often contain sycamore, noting that while these can be present within semi natural woodlands of any age, “a preponderance may point to a recently developed vegetation and may also indicate the influence of improved, non-woodland soils.” This suggests that the tree species composition is less consistent with that of AW and perhaps more so to secondary woodland.
- 1.14. Sycamore is not native to the UK and was more widely introduced / colonised after 1600. However, AW can be cleared and reestablished many times over its existence. The point that sycamore colonised more widely after 1600 does not preclude its potential for being AW alone, however, it does indicate the possibility a former non-woodland land use.
- 1.15. Several hazel trees are present in the understory of the dominant upper canopy (mainly



comprising sycamore, willow, and ash). The hazels formed a multi-stemmed / coppiced structure and may have been coppiced in the past, however there was no evidence of more historic management practices. The largest stem diameter was approximately 200mm, thus indicating towards an approximate age of 25-40 years. The base of the hazel trees did not indicate repeated coppicing management. This can typically be identified by reactive growth from repeated cuttings, which results in larger, more gnarly coppice stools.

- 1.16. While the absence of such arboricultural features alone does not confirm that woodland is not ancient, it does provide further evidence to suggest that the woodland is more recent, and that an ancient woodland designation on arboricultural grounds would not be appropriate.

Your Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jamie Pratt', located below the 'Your Sincerely,' text.

Jamie Pratt BSc (Hons), MArborA