

WYCHAVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

HERITAGE CONSULTATION RESPONSE

TO: Sean Herbert	DATE: 11 th June 2023
REF: 23/00270/FUL	
DESCRIPTION: Construction of a Solar Farm and battery energy storage system (BESS) facility together with all associated works, equipment and necessary infrastructure.	
LOCATION: Land At (Os 9911 5879), Earls Common Road, Stock Green	
APPLICANT: Mr Conor McAllister	

Consultation response:

The relevant heritage policies for the scheme are contained within the NPPF 2012 (revised February 2019) Section 16 paragraphs and the Local Plan policies SWDP6 and SWDP24 pertaining to the Historic Environment and its management. These require the conservation and enhancement of heritage assets.

NPPF paragraph 200. Any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within its setting), should require clear and convincing justification. Substantial harm to or loss of:

- a) grade II listed buildings, or grade II registered parks or gardens, should be exceptional;

NPPF paragraph 197 states that 'in determining applications, local planning authorities should take account of: the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets.'

Paragraph 199 also states that 'great weight should be given to the assets conservation' when considering applications which may affect the significance of a designated heritage asset.

NPPF paragraph 203 states that 'The effect of an application on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset should be taken into account in determining the application. Applications that directly or indirectly affect non-designated heritage assets, a balanced judgement will be required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset

SWDP6 states that 'development proposals should conserve and enhance heritage asset' also that 'their contribution to the landscape or townscape should be protected. These are subject to the provisions as set out in SWDP24.

Site description:

The application site is surrounded by designated and non-designated heritage assets. As previously explained in the screening response.

Unfortunately, the applicants Environmental Statement Chapter 3 'Cultural Heritage' is rich on policy reiteration and slim on actual analysis of the impacts on the designated and non-designated heritage assets.

The Environment Statement also give very low weight to the damage that the proposal will have to Church of Nicholas in Dormston. This is a Grade 1 listed building the highest level of designation available for a listed building. Although the graveyard surrounding the church has some mature trees and hedging there will be clear views of the proposal from the rear of the church and from the bell tower. Views of this type will have a detrimental impact on the significance of the Grade I listed building. This has not been clear analysed by the supporting document supplied by the applicants. If there mitigating proposals for screening the proposal it would be as below with 'Leasowes' half the time of the permission the impact will be significant and on the higher level of less than substantial and then slightly reducing or the other half of the permission.

The assessment that the removal of the proposed solar panels from the field directly adjacent to 'Leasowes' and that some additional planting will reduce the harm to negligible, to the wider setting of the listed building is patently nonsense as the analysis also points out that the proposed screening will take up to 15 years to be effective which is almost half of the permission period. So, half the time the heritage asset will have higher end of the less than substantial harm to its significance and then another 20 years of lower end of less than substantial. No weight has been given to the name of 'Leasowes' which means green pasture and it seems likely that this name is very old name and is mainly found in the West Midlands and Welsh Marcher land. The loss of this strong connection with its past will be highly damaging.

There will be one non-designated heritage asset that certainly will have its setting destroyed and that is 'Stockwood Lodge Farm' which has timber frame '17th century barn and the house is probably considerably older as the main monumental chimney stack is not located centrally on the ridge by is behind the ridge which usually indicates an inserted stack into a former hall house. This is without doubt an important non-designated heritage asset which will be surrounded by the proposal. The only access into the complex will be through the application site and the site will be clearly seen when approaching and leaving. The supporting document supplied by the applicant fails completely to give enough weight to the damage that the proposal will have on the setting of this site it will be on highest end of the less than substantial. The Environment Statement has failed to carry out a balanced assessment regarding weighing the public benefits of the proposal against the damage to this and other heritage assets adjacent to the proposal site.

The Environment Statement denies any strong influences this area had on J R R Tolkien and his creativity. This statement has excluded the writings of Andrew Morton which presents new and previously un-researched material on the author's life and the authors own writings extoling his pride in his Worcestershire roots.

Tolkien had a childhood of contrasts. They permeate all his work. The contrasts are the English rural idyll, that became literary phenomenon in the late 16th Century (Spencer's *Faerie Queene*, Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, *Midsummer Night's Dream*) and rapid and despoiling industrialisation. Let us consider the second of these first. It framed his childhood experience that included being orphaned and moving repeatedly.

Industrialisation and Urbanisation

When the family moved back to the UK, they lived in some 9 homes in 16 years. Firstly, he lived in what is now Hall Green. He lived in a small cottage, close to Sarehole Mill and Moseley Bog. This was a contrasting landscape. The ponds and vegetation would have contrasted from the steam-powered mill visible from his home. However, the area around Sarehole, now Hall Green, was still a mixture of urban and countryside, but, like all of what is now southern Birmingham, being eroded. Development was everywhere and Tolkien would

have been well aware of it, especially moving to Moseley age 7. A couple of years later, it was written:

“The present year has seen the development for building purposes of the sandpits on Welchs Hill, and a large number of houses of small rental are to be shortly erected. So far, however, Moseley has been an exclusive suburb, the residences being chiefly large villas - mansions better describe many of the modern homes - but there is a tendency in these days, with the development of the tramway system, to give the artisans of Birmingham an opportunity of enjoying the purer atmosphere of the district by erecting dwellings suitable to their requirements.” (Article on 'Old Moseley (Worcestershire)' from the 'Birmingham Mail' of 15th October 1903)

The reference to the 'purer atmosphere' is important. The move to Moseley was to allow him to travel by train into Birmingham to attend school, and by extension, witness the 'polluted atmosphere' every day.

The 1903 article continues

“The cutting up of the several important estates has largely contributed to the change. Probably the greatest development has been made on either side of the old village, stretching on the one hand away to Sparkbrook and Hall Green on the Anderton, Greenhill, and other estates and on the other, to what is known as the Taylor estate and Moseley Park. It is only a few years ago since 'The Rookery', a graceful line of trees along the Alcester Road, was felled to make way for a row of well-built shops now known as Victoria Parade.” 9 “On the same estates Park Road, Park Hill, Chantry, and Salisbury Roads have been cut, and in conjunction with the development of the adjoining Russell estate the Reddings will ere long be handed over to the builder. Fortunately, the Moseley Football Club hold an unexpired lease of that part of the Reddings on which the game is still played, but 'The Reddings' fields and footpaths are soon to disappear.”

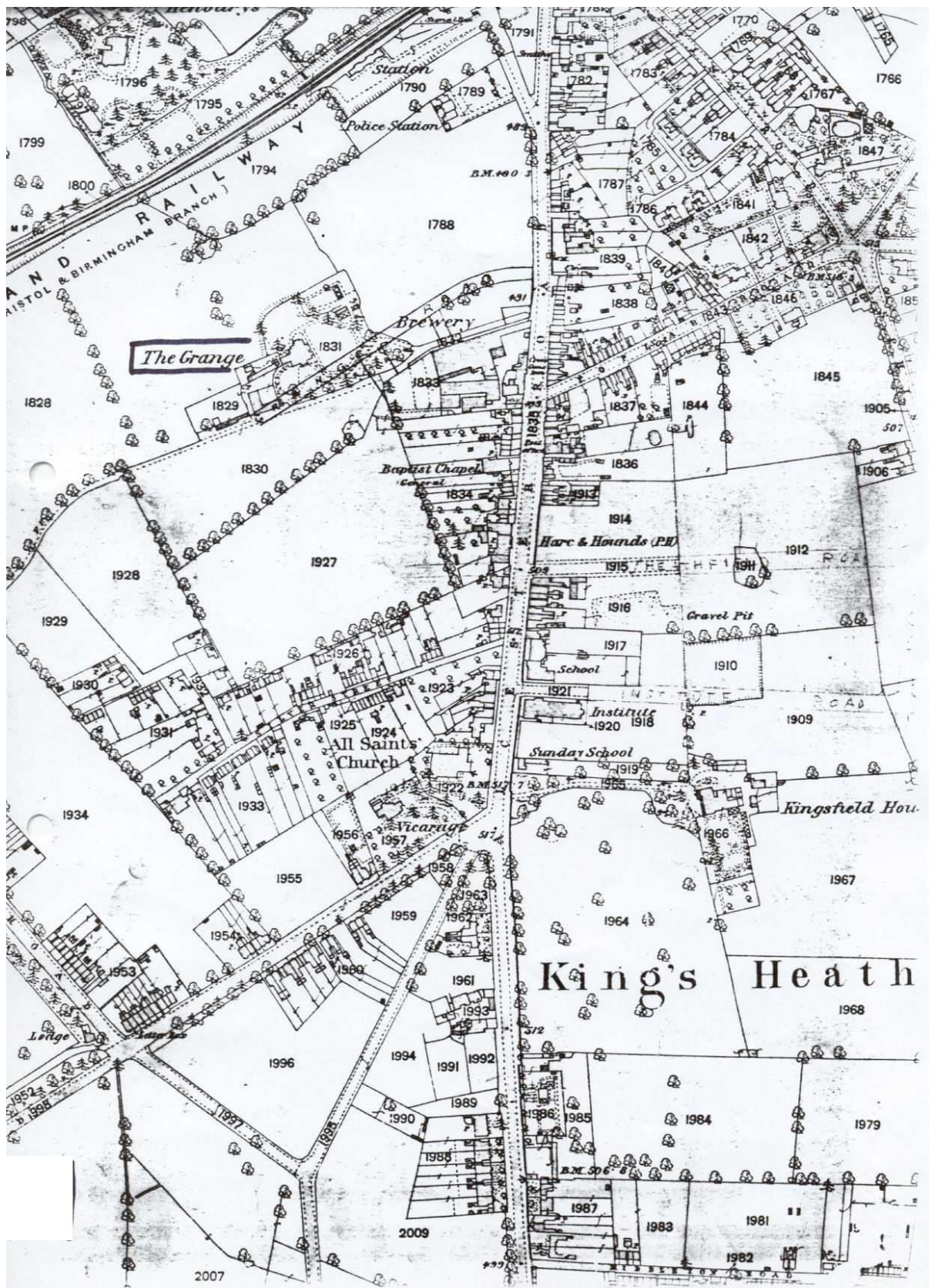
He then spent time in King's Heath. This was a very new urbanisation. Tolkien, a scholar mindful of words would have recognised he lived in a place that had quite recently been a place of nature and royal hunting in its medieval past.

Most usefully, King's Heath History society has researched its development.

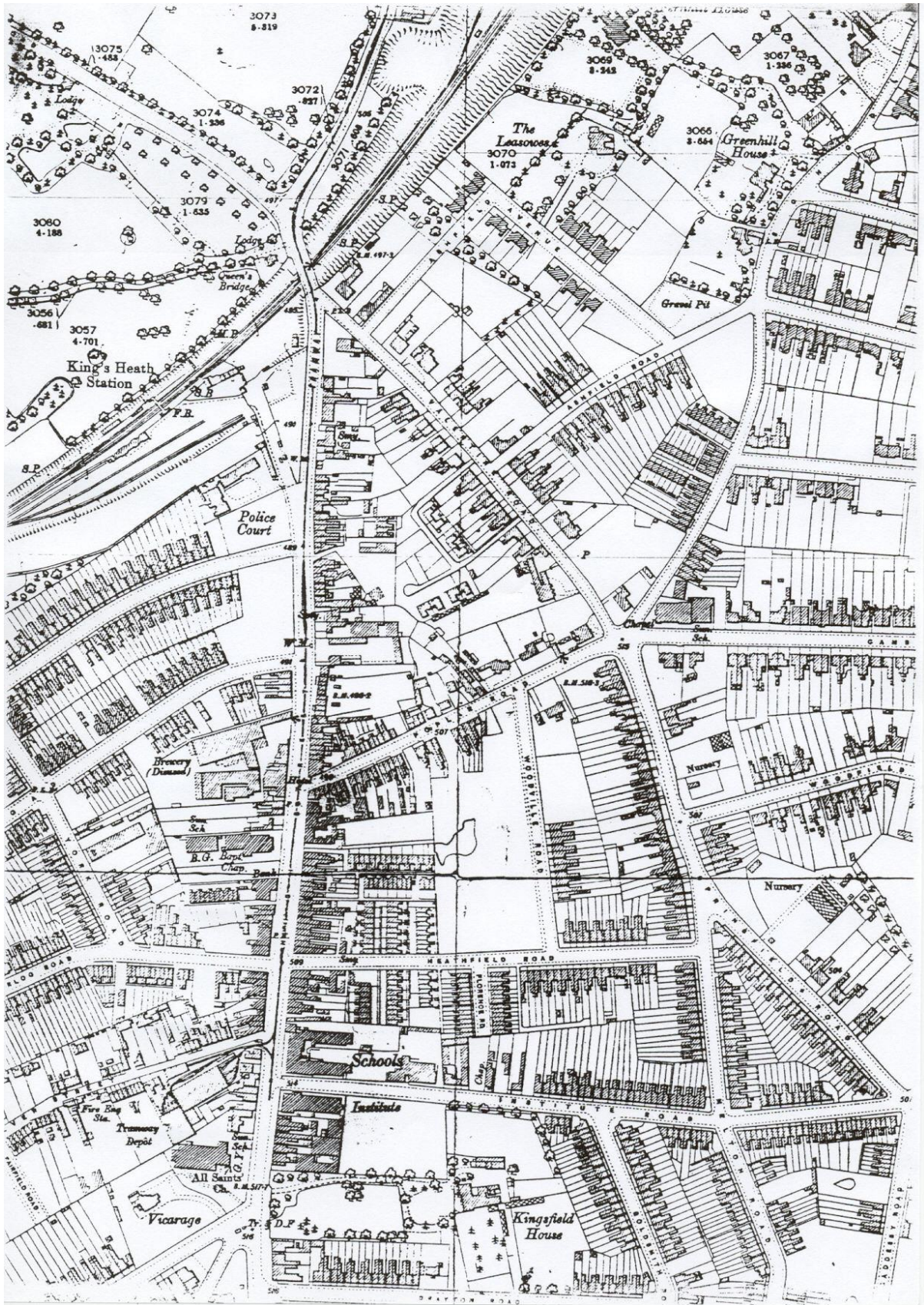
“It developed uniform rows of terraces with larger houses for the better off. In 1871, there were 410 houses and a population of nearly 2,000. By 1891, both figures had more than doubled to 940 and 4,610. In 1901, the population was 10,078.”

<http://www.kingsheathhistory.co.uk/history1.htm>

Tolkien was one of the many newcomers. But, crucially, at that time, King's Heath was not universally urban. Lanes lead away from the centre to some remaining fields and farms. These were consumed with development over the years of Tolkien's youth. He would have met people in the King's Heath would have witnessed and be complaining about the destruction of the countryside.



1887, about 15 years before Tolkien moved to King's Heath, age 3.



1904, when Tolkien was 11

So, Tolkien's childhood was one of seeing unconsidered (there no planning processes) ripping up of the rural environment.

Anyone familiar with his work will see parallels to two important themes: 1) The wanton destruction by Saruman of the countryside around his tower in his pursuit of power 2) The destruction of the dwarves of Moria through groining two deep into the mountains in pursuit of wealth and a new industrial product, mithril, that would grant them invincibility.

When Tolkien ventured on train (his house in King's Heath was even next to the railway line, so would have been covered repeatedly each day in sooty smoke) he would have seen the landscape that Queen Victoria had diarised age 13 (1832)

: "The men, women [sic], children, country and houses are all black. But I cannot by any description give an idea of its strange and extraordinary appearance.

"The country is very desolate everywhere; there are coals about, and the grass is quite blasted and black. I just now see an extraordinary building flaming with fire. The country continues black, engines flaming, coals, in abundance, everywhere, smoking and burning coal heaps, intermingled with wretched huts and carts and little ragged children."

Anyone familiar with Tolkien's description of the destruction wrought by Saruman, its landscape and his description of the eugenic breeding of orc and man he undertakes to produce Uruk-hai, as so well portrayed in Peter Jackson's adaptations, will see Tolkien's inspiration in this landscape. Indeed, Mor-dor means, in the language Tolkien created Elvish Sindarin, 'Black land'.

So we know that Birmingham and the Black Country powerfully influenced his preoccupation with destructive forces and of man unchecked. We know others in the area held similar views. In 1911, the Moseley Society Journal complained 20 years of "ruthless onslaughts" with "deplorable effect" that had made it "a continuation of, rather than apart from, the city's bustle and noise."

From this, some have pointed at Mosley Bog as inspiration for the other aspect in his work, the rural idyll as exemplified in The Shire. Indeed, Tolkien remarked it was largely untouched in the first decade of his life and that some of the locals seemed, on reflection, rather like hobbits. But that mill belched smoke (which would easily have reached their home only about 200m away when the wind blew from the SE). It would have made noise that could be heard in the country around. Tolkien nick-named the miller as the 'White Ogre' and imagined the mill was run by midget underlings. But they were perhaps enslaved hobbits. So if Mosley Bog inspired him, it was only in part.

He then went off to war and witnesses the Somme. He is taken seriously ill and sent back to England. After the war, he is trying to build a career as an academic and writing early pieces that hint towards the imagining of Middle Earth that will follow. By the twenties, the destruction of any sense of pastorality was complete in Moseley, Hall Green, and Kings Heath.

Preserving the rural idyll

That was certainly not true when he visited his scholarly aunt, Jane Neave in Dormston at the Manor, which Jane is now calling by its 18th Century name, Bag End. Bag End will be the home of BOTH of the heroes in his major works, *The Hobbit* (1937) and *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy (1954-7). When he visited there (Andrew Morton has shown this was often)

barely any cars and much agriculture still requiring horses, he was in the type of pastoral that had been hinted at by Mosely Bog and which, in Dormston, continues to this day (albeit with more traffic).

We know from his correspondence that he sent a copy of *The Hobbit* to his aunt soon after it was published.

But we have more compelling evidence that Dormston is so central to Tolkien's creative process. The answer to that is unsurprising if we consider he studied Latin, French, German, Ancient Greek, Old English, Norse, Gothic, Welsh, and Finnish and invented half a dozen of his own in considerable detail. It lies in words.

Let us consider what the name Bag End would have meant to Tolkien. The etymology of Bag is to old Norse, *baggi* and through into medieval French as *bagge*. For such a short word, it is rich in meaning. To bag is to hunt or steal. To be 'left holding the bag' is to be the victim of a swindle. Tolkien persuades the dwarf prince Thorin Oakenshield to take him on his journey to the Lonely Mountain in *The Hobbit* as Bilbo is a 'thief' (but Bilbo is not a thief, far from it). Eventually, Bilbo will end, back at back Bag End with the bag used in a different way as in 'to bag' meaning to gather in the harvest; appropriately rewarded for his labours. In the Ring, Frodo will also be labelled a thief, by Gollum. But he will prove not to be a thief and will end bringing a harvest of peace to Middle Earth. It is impossible that so great a linguist would not have seen the contradictory meanings in his aunt's house name and see how perfectly they silently revealed the plot line of *The Hobbit* and on to the *Ring*. Further, there is another interesting word connection that would not have escaped Tolkien. To 'bag' is to hunt. The land of Dormston was part of the old Freckenham forest a royal hunting ground, just as the now 'destroyed' King's Heath of his youth, whose destruction he had witnessed, once was. 'Bagging' had ended in both places, but in reinstating the old name for the farm, Jane Neave had re-found that ancient time, just as Tolkien did in using it in his book.

Many other nomenclatures exist in both works. Some Tolkien scholarship is required but several nomenclatures have already been identified and there are doubtless more. Underhill (Moreton Underhill) is the false name under which Frodo, the hero, travels in Lord of the Rings. Withy is the name of a river. Stock is a town in the Marish. Withybed (Withy stream) becomes Withywindle, (Withy winding stream), a tributary of the Brandywine River.

We can through language identify a further inspiration. The less educated, but charming and engaging hobbit characters are given an idiom you can find among farming folk in Worcestershire even today:

"No doubt you can," retorted Sam, "and I dare say, there's more truth in some of them than you reckon. Who invented the stories anyway? Take dragons now."

If the connection through language disappoints, the 1937 first edition of *The Hobbit* includes a sketch by Tolkien of Bag End farm towards Roundhill Wood. It is perverse for the applicant to suggest there is no connection of the literary works when *The Hobbit* includes a picture of the very fields they wish to build on! In the illustration alongside the title page he pictures a square building rather like St Nichols square towered church and a clutch of English vernacular buildings. The landscape continues in fields and hedges towards a hill into which the hobbit burrows are situated. It is on the slopes of the hill going up to the wood that the building is proposed.

Cultural Significance

It is important to understand why this aspect of Tolkien's work is so culturally important. One might simply say 'everyone has heard of Lord of the Rings.' That is true, and the books are an important part of our culture. But the significance of The Shire is much greater than being core to the novels. They reflect on one of the most important themes in English literature, the pastoral.

The Shire is a motif in all his works for a threatened rural idyll that equates to this trope in English literary canon. It is so ubiquitous, that giving examples is almost pointless. It is "This is other Eden, this demi-paradise" of Richard II, it is the forest of As You Like It:

And this our life, exempt from public haunt,
Finds tongues in trees, books in the
running brooks, Sermons in stones, and good in everything.

It is "bower and field, tuft of grove or garden-plot" and "thick-woven arborets" of Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

It is Wordsworth's:

These plots of cottage-ground, these orchard-tufts,
Which, at this season, with their unripe fruits,
Among the woods and copses lose themselves,
Nor, with their green and simple hue, disturb
The wild green landscape. Once again I see
These hedge-rows, hardly hedge-rows, little lines
Of sportive wood run wild; these pastoral farms,
Green to the very door... (*Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey*)

And notably it is the world that Edward Thomas and Wilfred Owen, contemporaries of Tolkien, but killed by war, felt was being obliterated in the trenches at the same as Tolkien was seeing it being destroyed by urbanisation.

The Shire then is culturally very important. Yes, is a literary invention that is much loved. But The Shire is much more than this. The matter of the greatest import in *Lord of the Rings*, is not the defeat of Sauron (that is merely a means to an end. The desire of the reader is that The Shire not be destroyed. It matters so much that 150 million copies of the book have been sold, the films have netted \$3 Billion world-wide the BBC's Big Read poll in 2003 saw it voted the best loved book of all time. The theme that the English pastoral idyll is lost (Elliot's *The Wasteland*) or a matter of only of desire against reality (Heaney's *Blackberry Picking*) continues to be a central theme in our literature to this day. Tolkien offers us a hope that that evil can be defeated and that rural idyll can be saved. It is a core part of Englishness, and has at least been since Shakespeare had his players sing:

Under the green wood tree
Who loves to lie with me,
And turn his merry note
Unto the sweet bird's throat,
Come hither, come hither, come hither
Here shall he see
No enemy
But winter and rough weather

So Dormston was a font in the creative process of Tolkien. We know he deplored destructive urbanisation. We know he valued the preservation of the rural idyll. We know the site of this proposal was so core to that idyll, he used local names for not simply nomenclature but to embody the plot itself.

Of course, he would doubtless approve of the potential of renewables to help our environment. But to destroy with industrialisation a site so important to his work, seems remiss. But when we consider that in defending the English rural idyll, he was locating himself in a cultural tradition that goes back at least to Shakespeare in our language, it seems a defeat of our heritage to damage this place.

Conclusion

Solar farms are needed. But it would be a bitter irony if, to help the global environment, we gave consent to the very type of industrialisation of our English countryside Tolkien wrote so compellingly about and which billions of people have engaged with and been moved by.

It is clear that this proposal will negatively impact a Grade I listed building, a grade II listed building and several important non-designated heritage assets will have their direct setting compromised and three other listed buildings will have their wider settings damaged to

There must be a balance always between progress and protection of what is special in our landscape. This area is part of our cultural heritage and not just another piece agricultural land that can be lost.

It is concluded that the proposal will not preserve the character of the setting for the adjacent and surrounding designated and non-designated heritage assets and their significance as heritage assets. As such it does not accord with the conservation aims of policies SWDP6, SWDP21 and SWDP24 of the South Worcestershire Development Plan 2016 (SWDP). The proposal is also considered to meet the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework including chapters 12 and 16.

RECOMMENDATION: Refusal

Rosie Burton, Conservation Officer

11th June 2023