

## Questions for Harrogate Advertiser

### **1.HSW's expansion plan mark 1 generated a lot less controversy. Why the change in reaction?**

Since the original application over 3 years ago the world now seems a very different place. During the pandemic delivery of bottled water was stopped by some supermarkets as deemed 'non-essential'. Plastic pollution has increased dramatically with the majority of plastic still not being recycled. People's attitudes have changed resulting in reduced sales for the bottled water industry that I think accounts for the additional concerns. We know over recent years this area of woodland has become much more popular, as have the Pinewoods overall, that has helped to generate increased interest.

There were many objections to the original plans, but I suspect many people had some faith that Danone would do as promised and find suitable land to offer as mitigation. Unfortunately, this has not been the case and there could be up to a 4-acre loss of public accessible woodland.

Although the original plans were not supported, they left an important ecological green corridor between the main section of the Pinewoods to Irongate Field and Birk Crag. These new plans will see the majority of that disappear with a larger extension having a major impact on wildlife in the area.

### **2. Was mark 1 actually okay?**

No but we were willing to work with Danone on finding a site to mitigate the impact of the development following approval. After over 3 years of meetings and discussions they have failed to follow up on several sites that have been suggested, including land adjacent to the successful Long Land Common. The current proposal falls short in ecological replacement but more importantly does not address the loss of public land.

### **3. Until mark 2, relations with HSW had seemed to be on an even keel.**

#### **Can opposition and community groups still have a working relationship with them going forward?**

Absolutely. We have continued to engage with Danone's planning consultants and whilst raising concerns the various stakeholders have given hopefully useful suggestions to move the plans forward. If the larger extension is not approved, it is likely that the original smaller one will progress.

It will be vital during the detailed designs of that site that the various planning conditions are met and that the impact on the environment is minimised. We will also continue to highlight where we feel Danone or Harrogate Council are not adhering to their own policies and strategies. For example, Danone have a deforestation policy, but they claim that does not apply here. The Council also has policies to support the White Rose Forest initiative (which includes this site) and encouraging tree planting schemes on publicly and privately owned land.

We will therefore continue to hold all parties to account and ensure their obligations are at least met, if not exceeded.

### **4. HSW say this is one-off expansion to allow for long term growth, rather a trend, with the instated implication it will NOT happen again.**

**What are your thoughts on that?**

**Do you think HSW can expand without harming the environment?**

**Is that theoretically possible?**

There has been planning application after application for this site with many variations approved that have seen smaller developments and increases to HGV numbers and delivery times. As such we would not be confident that there would be no further applications. It has already been reported that the company is looking at further bore holes in the vicinity so further expansion plans cannot be ruled out.

It has been suggested that non-production staff could be relocated to another location within Harrogate. We know that this could free up space including from an executive boardroom. Unfortunately, this option was discounted.

It would be very difficult for Danone to expand without causing ecological loss not only locally but also nationally (and internationally) with increased plastic bottle production. There is also the increase in traffic with it being confirmed that the number of HGVs attending site will increase following an approval. This will impact on air quality within the area.

The minimum any organisation should do, that states it aims include “acting in a sustainable and transparent way, achieving the highest environmental and social standards” is to replace what it is taking away, ideally putting back more. This is not being done here.

**5. Under HSW's stewardship what do you think the area at the bottling plant will look like in 10 years time? Is the woodland and habitat doomed to fall victim to development of one kind or another?**

There is constant pressure on The Pinewoods from development hence the approved application to grant the entire footprint of the woods, including the Rotary Wood section, as an “asset of community value” 6 years ago. As such even if planning is approved there will be a further legal process before the council can sell or lease this public land.

If the current plans are approved, then in 10 years the woods are likely to be much smaller and more disjointed. This puts the wildlife, including protective species at substantial risk. However, as a charity The Pinewoods Conservation Group will continue to work hard preserving and improving the remaining land.

**6. How many trees are there up there right now compared to what is envisaged in HSW's mark 2 plans?**

**7. How short exactly does mark 2 fall short of HBC's 2 for 1 tree replacement policy?**

It can be seen from the paperwork submitted by Danone (figure 8) that most of the area known as Rotary Woods could be developed. This is calculated at around 4.65 acres where plans show 3.7 acres of that (80%) could be lost.

A recent tree count estimated that 2,500 trees could be at risk, a number that is supported by records held by Harrogate Rotary from the original planting indicating over 3,250 were originally purchased for this site.

It should also be noted that the ecologists report confirms that over 50% of these trees are estimated to be over 15 years old that will be a massive loss. As such it would take 15 years to get back to the current level of maturity, biodiversity, and carbon capture.

We also need to consider the loss of the more open green space that supports the deer and bats feeding within the area plus the 100s of wildflowers including increased number of orchids so should not just focus on tree numbers.

It therefore comes down to the mitigation being offered. Submitted planning paperwork states that there could be a 4.52% net gain, but our own ecologists have challenged this report. This is obviously way short of any 2 for 1 proposal that would need to show a 100% gain.

More details are still awaited on their detailed planting plans including tree numbers, but it is expected new planting will be small whips and not mature trees that currently exist so their impact on the ecology will be much reduced.

A further concern for groups is that this proposed land is not adjacent to the Pinewoods; it will not be open to the public being a privately own field; and we understand it will be leased for a period of thirty years. There is no certainty after that and there are no published plans to create a replacement public woodland resulting is a massive loss for Harrogate.

## BOTTLING PLANT EXTENSION

**Figure 8** Habitat lost / retained



Source: [Results \(harrogate.gov.uk\)](https://www.harrogate.gov.uk) Danone Biodiversity Net Gain Proposal