

Dear Sir or Madam,

We live next to a wetland area in Ashton Vale which is listed as a site of nature conservation interest. This is due to the abundance of wildlife which has thrived here for over forty years. On 5 September 2008, without any warning, a tractor and large construction digger arrived in the area and to our horror began tearing out all the hedgerows and trees.

Neighbours astonished and stressed by what was happening contacted the police and also Bristol City Council. After some negotiation the work ceased. However the contractors arrived again the next day and continued to clear the field. By the time the police and representatives from Bristol City Council arrived most of the field was destroyed, work ceased again. It was confirmed by The Conservation Department that some of the wildlife found in this area include, endangered water voles, rare reed bunting, traces of otters. Badgers are also common in the field along with families of foxes and deer. The deer arrived fifteen years ago and have settled in the area. The wetland is uniquely positioned away from main roads and so wildlife has thrived here.

Residents are devastated at the loss of wildlife and the way the work was carried out. The deer, foxes and many other animals lost their habitat in one day. As one resident who has lived in the area for forty five years stated, 'it took forty five years to develop this area into a wildlife haven and just forty five minutes to destroy it'.

Residents have enjoyed watching the wildlife on a daily basis, through the summer watching foxes with their cubs, which a neighbour had ironically filmed only that same morning before the contractors arrived. The area has been full of birds, dragon flies, damsel flies, birds of prey from the gorge, buzzards, two separate colony of bats, woodpeckers, heron, ducks, swans, geese and many more. Residents have also had sightings of crested newts, adders, grass snakes, slow worms, owls and kingfishers. There were also a substantial number of plant species which have been destroyed.

Since this terrible incident, residents have been trying to establish who currently owns the land which appears to have changed hands recently. There is some confusion about the name of the current land owners, the land is currently listed as belonging to Ashton Vale Project, which in turn may be related to an impending planning application in the area for a forty thousand seat multi-purpose stadium.

We have been contacting all conservation bodies and local conservation and wildlife groups hoping that someone can give us some assistance and support.

We understand that the council have been told by the present land owners that the land was being 'maintained' to enhance grazing, but representatives from the Environmental Agency have been surprised by this claim and with the way some of the work was undertaken. Some areas with widespread damage are not near a water course. The area is commonly flooded and is known as an area which has high water levels, but there appears to have been little work undertaken to clear ditches etc.

The reeds in the field are beginning to grow back but the felled trees and bushes are now deteriorating. We have managed to save some of the hedges where pools of shallow water lie beneath, but this is only because the work was halted by Bristol City Council, pending further investigations. There are some natural ponds and large oak trees in the next field. We have had reports that prosecution is very hard to achieve and that the onus on providing evidence of what wildlife was present and the age of the hedgerows has fallen to residents to prove.

We understand that some development in and around Bristol is inevitable, but Ashton Vale has had its fair share of urbanization, We are desperate to preserve some of Ashton Vale's heritage in the area and to try to encourage wildlife back into the area for our future generations. We have been looking into the possibility of lobbying the current landowners to donate this pocket of land to develop a Nature Reserve involving the local community.

We are aware this letter involves many important points, including:

The way landowners manage valuable green space, the protection of wildlife, encouraging responsible and sensitive management of land, developing areas which attract wildlife and working with communities to help improve access to space and meaningful activities in protecting the area.

We would be very grateful for any help and advice you may be able to offer in any of these important issues. We would especially welcome a visit by any local organization or group who may be able to advise us on ways we can move forward or how we can work with the land owners. There is a public footpath through the area so visiting the site is not a problem.

Thank you in advance for any help or advice you can offer.

Yours faithfully

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