

Mill Leese Wood – Position of Saltwood Parish Council.

1. Residents of Saltwood and Hythe have very recently expressed concern about plans by the Environment Agency to undertake extensive tree felling along both sides of the old railway embankment that borders the footpath from Saltwood Castle southeast to Blackhouse Hill.
2. Neither Saltwood Parish Council nor Folkestone and Hythe District Council were ever officially informed by the Environment Agency about these plans. The Parish Council only became aware of this in mid-July from one of our District Councillors who had been approached by a Hythe resident who had got wind of this. There does not appear, either, to be any evidence that Kent County Council has been properly consulted.
3. Together with our District Councillor, the Parish Council arranged for an on-site meeting with the Environment Agency which took place on 10 August. This meeting was also attended by the owner of the land in question who is resolutely opposed to the Environment Agency plans.
4. The Parish Council will discuss this issue very shortly in order to take a formal position, although individual Councillors have already made clear their concern.
5. However, the two Parish Councillors who were able to attend the on-site meeting were entirely unconvinced by the purported rationale given by the Environment Agency officials for the planned work and made this clear during the meeting.
6. Subsequently, concern has increased. During the on-site meeting, reference was made to an Environment Agency report, dated 14 June 2021, that had been obtained by the landowner under a Freedom of Information request. This report had been very heavily redacted (parts of the text blacked out so that they cannot be read). When asked why this had been done, the answer was “security concerns”, with the clear implication that the information redacted could be of use to terrorists. This seemed far-fetched at the time. This was confirmed a few days later when the Environment Agency (no doubt having had second thoughts about trying to defend such a ludicrous rationale) provided the landowner with an un-redacted copy. This shows that the text the Environment Agency had sought to conceal concerned only the practical difficulties the Environment Agency might face in carrying out these works in the face of opposition from the landowner and, in Appendix 3, an assessment of the importance of the site as a nesting and foraging area for, legally protected, bats, of which 11 species are assessed to be present.

Frank Boland
Chair, Saltwood Parish Council

25 August 2021