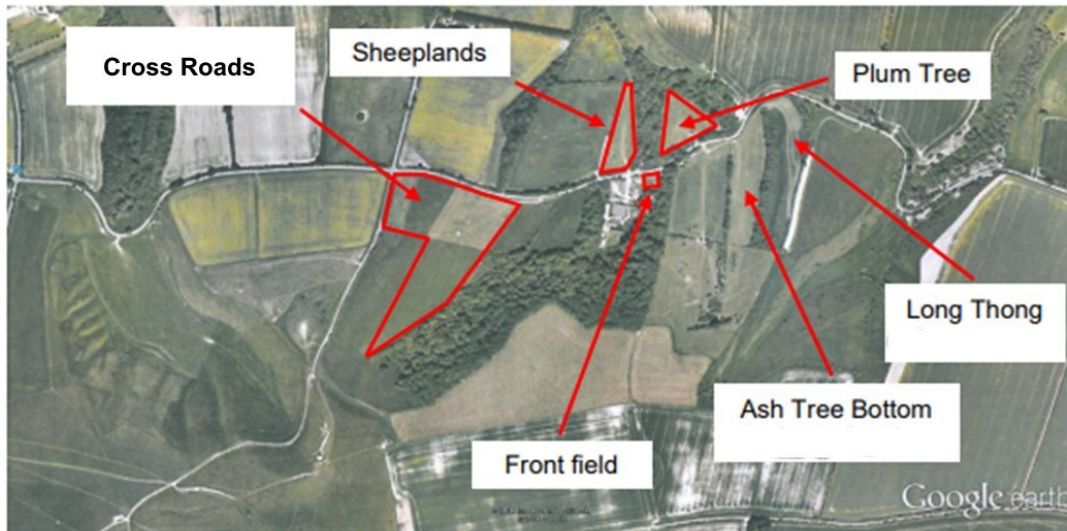


Uffington Parish Council Annual Assembly 11 April 2022- Britchcombe Farm history

In the absence of the CEO of Lovat Parks, I have been asked to bring the meeting up to date on what has been going on at Britchcombe Farm. So this is a potted history of recent events.

Marcella Seymour died on 13 July 2019. Over the years she had built up a camping business in six of her fields; they are:



In 2014 and 2016 Mrs Seymour obtained planning approval from the Vale for the use of her fields as campsites, for tents, motor homes and touring caravans. These went through on the nod, because she had been doing it for so long, without complaints locally, or questions from the Vale. Queries have been raised about the Vale's determination of these applications, as there appear to be inconsistencies (if not errors) in what was approved, but we are advised that it is too late to challenge them.

In 2019 / 2020, the farm was sold in 5 lots. Lot 1, comprising 140 acres, the farm buildings and 140 acres of land, including all the fields comprising the camping fields was bought by a holiday company specialising in caravan parks, mobile homes and lodges, called Lovat Parks.

I have visited two Lovat Parks sites – in the New Forest, and at Padstow. There is little doubt that Lovat Parks are on to a very good thing commercially, as 'staycations' become more popular. It has to be accepted that if you live in a flat in a big town or city, a holiday in a caravan park in Cross Roads could be very attractive. Conceivably, it might also bring employment benefits locally, but having seen other Lovat Park sites (New Forest and Padstow) the camp's central facilities are very comprehensive; they try to keep you on site.

The lodges / mobile homes are very densely sited and the whole thing resembles nothing so much as a POW camp.

Greenhill Farm, in the New Forest:



In May 2021, Lovat Parks submitted what it called its Screening Opinion request to the Vale, asking whether it needed an Environmental Impact Assessment for what it wanted to do in Cross Roads. This was described as under Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017, Formal request of a Screening Opinion for Bases for Caravans, Surfacing for Car Parking, Works for Minor Internal Access Roads, the Laying of General Utilities (Water/Electricity) and Drainage, in Cross Roads. The Vale said no EIA was needed; this surprised us but we know that an EIA can be required when a planning application is submitted. The (scanty) detail given in this planning application has been our only source of information to date. It is therefore a pity that the CEO of Lovat Parks has been unable to attend our March or April meetings, at which we were planning to ask him what his intentions were.

In autumn of 2021, various Woolstone and Uffington residents became aware that Lovat Parks was seeking expert advice for the landscaping of all 140 acres as caravan parks. So the Britchcombe Farm Working Group (BFWG) was formed, done properly with a Constitution and a bank account, consisting of c8 voting members, including a planning barrister, and about the same number of interested third parties – e.g., NT, FOR, NWD AONB, Open Spaces Society – the unifying factor was that none of us want to see Cross Roads developed as a permanent caravan park; the field lies in the AONB, under Dragon Hill, Whitehorse Hill, close to Uffington Castle and the Ridgeway – all historic, ancient sites set in the wonderful landscape of Whitehorse Hill.

Cross Roads (seen from the Shepherd's Steps):



The BFWG has spent the last few months thinking through its responses to a planning application, including arranging for professional experts to advise on Landscape and Heritage aspects.

Very recently, we decided to become more proactive so that on Day 1 (when a planning application is submitted) we can instantly go onto the offensive, in gathering support and funds to fight the application. Two PR professionals are now advising us. They are drafting a PR strategy and organising a website and crowd funding platform for us. The website will be similar to that set up for a very successful campaign in Swindon Borough Council area, which stopped a very large warehouse development in Lower Wanborough - the South Swindon Protection Group. They used the expression – ‘Good idea, wrong place’. Much the same applies here. One of the effects of their advice is that the group is now called the Whitehorse Hill Action Group (WHAG).

Those who attended the talk by David Miles, a very distinguished archaeologist and author of *The Land of the White Horse*, in February will have heard him say that the sort of development currently expected would be disastrous for the Landscape of the White Horse. David and other well-known people, locally and nationally, are being approached by the PR strategy to speak publicly about this landscape and the need to protect it. David is not the only one; this is what William Morris said:

The future is now: local impacts

Uffington White Horse was dear to Morris's heart. It is 13 miles from Kelmscott and he visited it annually. In his mind's eye the landscape was alive with the people who created it. He felt connected to them through respect for the earth. It was a '*country-side worth fighting for...worth taking trouble to defend its peace.*' With sadness he noted the contrast between the glories of nature and noble relics of the past and the drudgery and exploitation inherent in capitalism.

It was with an uncanny foreboding that Morris saw how vulnerable the countryside was: '*The beauty of the landscape will be exploited and artificialized...in quiet places like this it will vanish year by year (as indeed it is now doing) under the attacks of the most grovelling commercialism.*'

A recent initiative is to seek to have Whitehorse Hill (and surrounding area) designated ('inscribed') as a World Heritage Site. This is definitely not a 'quick fix' to stop the development of a caravan park in the AONB, as it takes 10 to 15 years to come to fruition, but it might serve as a deterrent. The idea has been put to Uffington Parish Council, which agreed the following at the March meeting 'in principle, to support the application to inscribe the Landscape of the White Horse as a World Heritage Site and to investigate further'. So that is in the public domain. We are currently debating the size of the area to be inscribed. This is happening in great haste, as Expressions of Interest have to be submitted to DCMS by mid-April and completed applications forms by 5 July. Whatever the size of the area, there are a great many stakeholders and it appears that they all have to be in favour.