

AEG case for protecting the Old First School site from development (March 2021)

AD5/H Chapel St - This is the location of the Old First School. Although this site occupies the footprint of the former school buildings and is technically a brownfield site it, together with adjacent land, is a site with a **very high intrinsic biodiversity value**. Following closure of the school, the whole site is rewilding. There is a mosaic of habitats including the running water of the beck on two sides, woodland along the edge of Back Beck, boundary hedgerows with hedgerow trees, and tussocky grassland, with a wet flush. **We regard any development on this site as unacceptable for housing** on the following grounds:



- These habitats support **highly diverse wildlife populations**. Butterfly recording has shown this to be one of the best sites for butterflies in the Village both in abundance and diversity. The site also has good bumblebee populations and a wide range of birds. Chiffchaff, kingfisher, tree creepers and woodpeckers are all regularly seen along with more common birds. It is also an important foraging site for bats (pipistrelle, soprano pipistrelle and noctules have been recorded), brown trout and bullheads occur in the beck, and there have been otter sightings;
- The site forms part of the Back Beck/Long Riddings 'green/blue infrastructure' corridor linking the green spaces within the village to the open countryside beyond, **providing connectivity and a tranquil space for both wildlife and people**.
- The inevitable **light and noise pollution** caused by construction and subsequently by new homes would create further continuing disturbance leading to loss of wildlife;
- We also **strongly oppose the housing on the site on the grounds of access**. The proposed new access from School Lane would severely damage beck, woodland and grassland habitat that occur in the designated local green space adjacent to the site leading to overall loss of biodiversity. Equally access from Chapel Street, would also be unacceptable. Even a small increase in traffic, would adversely affect the tranquillity of this part of the Back Beck Lane green corridor and damage a very well-used safe walking route to the Primary School for village children;
- The Landscape Character Assessment of the Neighbourhood Plan Area commissioned by the Parish Council as part of the evidence base, supports the importance of the whole site as part of the Addingham Enclosed Pastures landscape character area, now that the site is rewilding.

We consider that the whole site should be designated as Local Greenspace for its biodiversity value and managed as a village Wildlife Reserve. To this end we would support a Community Asset Transfer.

We also recommend a full ecological survey to assess the full biodiversity of the site against Local Wildlife Site criteria for a mosaic of habitats.

As a wildlife reserve the intermittent occurrence of flood water would be of little concern. Indeed it could be a positive attribute contributing to Natural Flood Management measures that may be implemented in this part of the village in future”.