Planning Inspectorate
Room 3/25B, Hawk-Wing,
Temple Quay, House,
2 The Square,
Temple Quay,
Bristol, BS1 6PN

6th November 2015

Dear Sirs,

Application by the Sussex Wildlife Trust under S 38 Commons Act 2006 to Fence Iping & Trotton Common

It has come to my notice that the SWT have applied to the planning inspectorate for permission to fence Iping and Trotton Common, having encountered (according to their application) "general support". I am writing to lodge my objections, having already written to the trust and also signed a petition along with over a hundred local residents and users of the common which was sent to them.

I am somewhat surprised therefore that they consider that they have the support of the local community for their plans as this is certainly not my impression.

I live locally and have walked and ridden on the common with my children and dog for many years and have enjoyed it as a local amenity along with many friends and acquaintances.

My objections are as follows:

1. None of the other local landowners will agree to the fence so the line has to exclude their land. This means the fence would cut through the common at (my) Trotton end and also running south of the main car park. It fences off the area of pine trees where currently there are bike tracks, jumps etc. This would not only be awkward for walkers and riders it would also adversely affect the views across the common with unsightly fence lines and gates.

2. The fencing apparently needed so that cattle can graze and it is a fact that the cattle grazing on nearby Stedham Common last winter were slaughtered as a result of a positive bovine Tb case. Prior to this West Sussex was deemed to be low risk with 4 year rolling rotation of Tb testing in place. Since Tb was positively identified in this cow local farmers surrounding Stedham Common, and the other local commons used by the Sussex Wildlife Trust have been moved to 6 monthly testing. 30 cattle from the dairy farm at Minstead have now been slaughtered, with testing ongoing there. The financial implications for our local farming neighbours are clear. The strain of bovine Tb found in the cow belonging to the Trust was from East Sussex, where there is a Tb hotspot and where they own other cattle. This particular animal had not been in East Sussex for at least 6 years but still managed to become infected and bring this infection to Stedham Common. Although it is not known how the Tb spread there is always a risk in moving cattle, in bringing vehicles, feed and personnel from a known infectious zone. It appears that the Wildlife Trust do not appreciate the devastating cost of this to the farmers here. Their response has been a decision to restock in West Sussex. They are blithely dismissing concerns about their role in spreading Tb from a hotspot area to a formerly very low risk area.
3. The rational for the fence is that cattle grazing will enhance the heathland. However in an analysis of conservation evidence (2015) Groom & Shaw found: “Both dwarf gorse and downy birch increased markedly in parts of the grazed wet areas indicating that low intensity grazing was insufficient to prevent encroachment. An increase in birch sapling density has also been observed following grazing with belted Galloways at Rodborough Common, Gloucester.” They conclude that “low intensity grazing was insufficient to prevent scrub encroachment”. It seems that Sussex Wildlife Trust may have selectively used evidence which suits their purpose.

4. Those who ride, like me, with small children on leading reins have raised objections to the proposed gates, with the opening only sufficient for one horse, and the rapid swing action to close it, as children cannot hold the heavy gate and the potential for accidents is very real. Currently Iping and Trotton are used by these riders precisely because there are no roads, it is a wonderful place to ride without the gates which exclude them from Stedham Common.

5. The map of the proposed fence includes 7 kissing gates. These are impossible to negotiate for those with pushchairs or in motorised scooters such as the disabled use. The swing gates are also not accessible for the disabled unless they are accompanied.

6. This is an open space, it is common land. Sussex Wildlife Trust have currently a planning application to put a car park and other signs on every gate around Stedham Common. The reason they want these signs, as stated on their application, is to establish ownership. A fence around parts of Iping and Trotton Commons will clearly do this too. I strongly object to this type of creeping takeover of common land, which has been enjoyed by a community for many many years.

Finally, I am concerned that the SWT (a charity) whose first stated purpose (as per their latest report and accounts) is: “To conserve the Sussex land and seascape, its wildlife and habitats for the public benefit” is acting here entirely contrary to this aim. In my view (and that of many others), fencing this common land is NOT for the public benefit, but in truth for the benefit of the SWT and its intention of pointlessly grazing cattle on public land.

Yours faithfully,

Tania Slowe