

# Trust claims mansion plan will hit wildlife

## Scheme would mean loss of biodiversity, says expert

By David Green

CONSTRUCTION of a country mansion in a centuries-old woodland will lead to a "net loss" to wildlife diversity, according to a conservation group which has lodged a late objection to the project.

The Suffolk Wildlife Trust's criticism of plans to build the nine-bedroomed mansion in an area known as The Wilderness at Westleton, near Saxmundham, arrived with Suffolk Coastal District Council too late for inclusion in a report distributed to councillors in the run-up to today's planning committee.

However, a letter from the trust is due to be read out before councillors vote on the controversy.

Leading architects, Suffolk Coastal MP John Gummer and the Suffolk Preservation Society have all expressed support for the develop-

ment application, submitted by Sara Low of nearby Darsham.

They believe it falls within a Government planning policy loophole which allows the development of new country houses in the open countryside if they are of outstand-

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### 'Impacts from construction will be widespread'

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ing architectural value and will enhance the landscape.

However, Suffolk Coastal's planning officers believe the plan is not of sufficient merit and would damage a semi-natural and possibly ancient landscape. They are recommending that planning permission be refused.

Dr Simone Bullion, conservation

officer with the Suffolk Wildlife Trust, has now written to the planning authority claiming that the semi-natural part of the woodland displays some "ancient" characteristics.

She says the proposed siting of the house is within the oldest parts of the woodland and within an area of high nature conservation value.

"The impacts arising through construction are likely to be widespread and severe within these areas and cannot be mitigated for.

"Although the report (accompanying the application) indicates that this development will bring about the opportunity to manage the woodland and its various habitats to maximise their nature conservation interest and potential it is our belief that this development will, on balance, deliver a net loss to biodiversity.

"Taking this a stage further, this means that this is a departure from the principles of sustainable development," Dr Bullion says.

Suffolk County Council has also registered a late objection, claiming the development would be contrary to policies in the county structure plan.

Paul Acland, of Paul & O Architects, agents for Mrs Low said, yesterday: "We are surprised at the contents of the wildlife trust's letter because the trust was contacted at the outset of the planning process with a request for input. They expressed no misgivings about the project."

He added: "Our client wants the opportunity to enhance the Suffolk landscape."