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Letters to the Editor

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These ancient woodlands are too precious to be sacrificed

JOHN Penfold (23 July) usefully explains the background to the Pink (Western) part of the Pink/Blue Arundel Bypass route, including his father Frank's role in protecting Binsted Woods from the Bypass. But like many others he mistakenly thinks that while Binsted Woods are Ancient Woodland, Tortington Common (where the Pink route would go) is not.

Tortington Common IS Ancient Woodland. A recent statement by Tony Whitbread, Chief Executive of the Sussex Wildlife Trust and a spokesman on woodland issues for the Wildlife Trusts nationally, defines Ancient Woodland as that which has been under woodland

management for 400 years or more. The two sorts of Ancient Woodland - 'ancient semi-natural' and 'ancient replanted' - are both ancient woods and are protected to the same level in policy. He states that ecologically, the presence of conifers, or other replanted trees, has a variable effect on Ancient Woodland. Some sites, and he considers that Tortington Common is one of them, retain much of their semi-natural component under the replanted canopy and are as rich, or can be restored to be as rich, as semi-natural Ancient Woodland.

Tortington Common was added to the Binsted Woods Complex SSSI in 2003. The reasoning included: 'The woodland ground

flora is very diverse and reflects the site's complex geology with soils that range from acid and sandy to waterlogged, base-rich areas. The paths and rides are especially species rich and Scotland Lane supports an outstanding wet ride flora that includes at least 11 species of sedge including a county rarity at its only recorded West Sussex location.' The description called Tortington Common 'ancient semi-natural woodland' with areas of conifer plantation.

Woodland at Tortington Common is being restored. The various wood plots that make up Tortington Common are now owned and managed by a number of conscientious and proud custodians who

are endeavouring to improve the woods for the benefit of the ancient flora and fauna by providing valuable habitats and wildlife corridors. Some owners are also planning increased public involvement in management of their woodland through trips from schools and other groups.

Together with Binsted Woods, Tortington Common makes up a huge, very varied area of Ancient Woodland. Both are far too precious to be sacrificed to a road scheme.

Alternatives involving less new road building must be sought.

Emma Tristram
Binsted

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