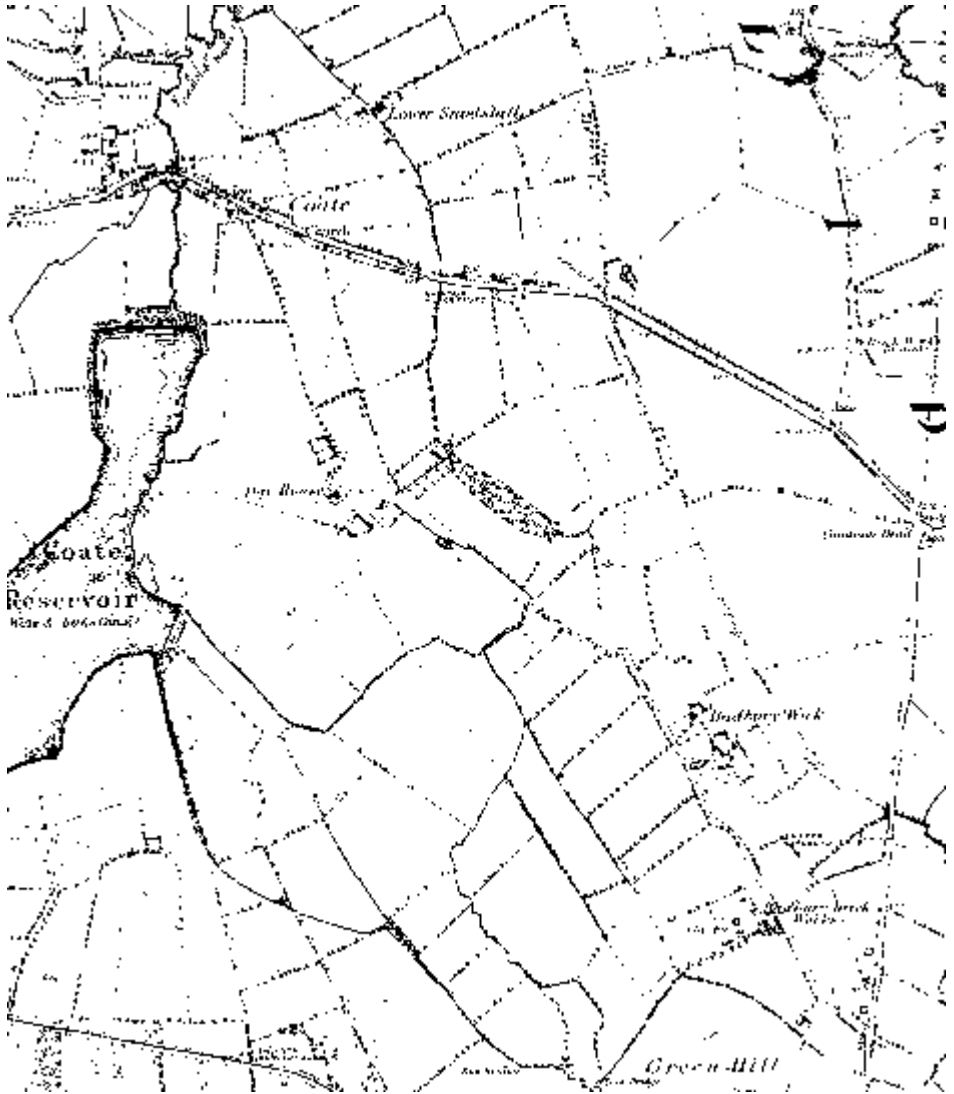


Jefferies Land Conservation Trust

An alternative use for 'Jefferies Land'



December 2009



Detail from Ordnance Survey 6-inch map, Wilts 16, surveyed 1878, published 1882, contemporary with Richard Jefferies' time

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Opening Statement

What follows demonstrates how land between Coate Water and the Marlborough Downs in Wiltshire could be utilised as an alternative to inappropriate major development of the countryside.

A 'Jefferies Land Conservation Trust' was established as a registered charity in 2005 with a vision to preserve the unique environmental, literary and historic aspects of the area, to enhance existing qualities and to bring added worth to its more subtle merits.

This document was prepared originally in December 2005 after consultation with supporters of the Save Coate! alliance.



Included in this proposal is a background and overview of the site in question, followed by a description of the Jefferies Land Conservation Trust, its principal aims and details of the initial plans. Further possibilities for the area are outlined under a separate heading. The proposal examines what might be realistically accomplished.

To achieve these goals will require major investment to acquire some existing buildings and farmland. Should it be successful in this first major step, managing and operating the Trust will not be simple. It will require an ongoing membership and some fund-raising aspects in the plan. The logistics and "growing pains" associated with the maintenance of a Trust are discussed more fully in the Conclusion.

Planning history of the 'Coate' area

The special quality of the landscape at Coate has long been recognised by Swindon Borough Council [SBC] and Wiltshire County Council [WCC]. The area has been protected by several planning policies. In 1968 the Silver Report, that studied the creation of a town for over 200,000 people at Swindon, took the view that the open foreground between the town and the Marlborough Downs should be preserved "to form a fine setting to the New City".

At this time, in the late 1960's, the designation of the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty [AONB] was under consideration. The foothills of the Downs to Coate Water were originally proposed to be included in the national designation. Regrettably it was decided that the newly created M4 motorway and A419 trunk road were useful lines on a map to limit the AONB. Nonetheless, the Wiltshire County Development Plan of 1970 identified the land at Coate as an "area of great landscape, historic or scientific value lying outside the AONB".



View of Coate Water nature reserve from Liddington Hill

A planning application for a Coate Water Business Park was rejected in 1988 by the Borough Council, whilst a second planning application was rejected on appeal by the Secretary of State for the Environment. Even though the only proposed buildings were located north of Day House Lane, there was still public outrage against the proposal.

In 1998, SBC ruled out major development at 'Coate'. An area that was considered "developable" was based on the use of a 65 hectare [ha] area abutting the Marlborough Road. Much of this land is now taken up by the new Great Western Hospital (GWH) and a proposed Park and Ride site. SBC considered Coate so "severely restricted by the significant environmental assets that need to be protected such as the AONB and Coate Water SSSI" that the area was never taken forward as an option for growth.

Without any prior public consultation, WCC and SBC proposed changes to both the Structure [in 2003] and Local [in 2004] Plans in order to earmark all the farmland [about 500 acres] between Coate Water Country Park, the new hospital and the motorway as a potential development area.

By April 2005, the Swindon Gateway Consortium composed of Redrow Homes, Persimmon Homes, the University of Bath and the Swindon and Marlborough NHS Trust submitted planning applications to build a university campus for 10,000 students around Coate Water nature reserve that included 5 storey buildings next to the most sensitive part of the Site of Special

Scientific Interest [SSSI]. 1800 houses were proposed between the hospital and the motorway and between the hospital and the north-east boundary of Coate Water. A seven-storey pyramid office block was proposed for the south-east corner. A small hospital extension was proposed along with a medical research faculty. Whilst the new hospital also generated hostility, this scheme has been the most bitterly resented so far in Swindon and has generated opposition by tens of thousands of people who have called for a one kilometre buffer of undeveloped land next to Coate Water. The University of Bath pulled out of the partnership followed by the hospital trust. The planning application went through several changes but the final proposal was thrown out by the Secretary of State in 2009. By this time over 52,000 people had signed a petition opposed to the plans.

SBC committed itself to promoting a university in Swindon town centre as part of the urban regeneration scheme. However, the forward planning team is still promoting the Coate area as suitable for the development of 750 houses and for business use albeit that most of the target area is east of Day House Lane.

Overview of Existing Site

The area of most interest to the Trust lies between the North Wessex Downs to the south-east and Swindon to the north-west. It is bounded to the north by the Marlborough Road [A4259], to the east by the A419 trunk road, to the south by the M4 motorway and to the west by Coate Water Site of Special Scientific Interest [SSSI], which forms part of Coate Water Country Park. Swindon's new Great Western Hospital (GWH) borders the north east corner while the south west corner extends across Broome Manor Lane.

Day House Lane is the main route through the area, bisecting on a south east to north west axis. It is a narrow country lane providing access to the farmsteads and few houses along it and to villages in the Downs. It is a lane much used by cyclists, walkers, horse-riders and joggers – the lane is used as the first rural leg of the yearly half-marathon held in October. Broome Manor Lane, another small country road, provides access to the hamlet of Hodson via a bridge across the motorway. The 'Curly Bridge', a footbridge across the motorway, links Coate Water Country Park with Chiseldon. It was recently upgraded as part of the National Cycle Network [Sustrans] route 45 that will run from Gloucester to Salisbury. Several public footpaths and bridle-ways also cross the site.

Gently undulating open farmland, mostly used as permanent pasture, is grazed by agricultural livestock and by horses. The main field along the eastern edge of Coate Water is rich arable land. Planted up with borage in 2004, the crop added to the stunning views across to Liddington Hill and the North Wessex Downs from Coate Water [see front cover illustration].

These particular fields are particularly prominent in the landscape set on a high ridge. On the eastern side of Day House Lane, the views drop away and rise up again near the hospital. The hospital is a major intrusion on the landscape from both Coate Water and the Downs. At the southern end, the landscape between Coate Water and the motorway is flat but it rises up at Green Hill, the highest point of land at over 125m in the south east corner.

Buildings and outbuildings are quite sparse along Day House Lane, mostly concentrated at Coate Farm, Day House Farm and at Badbury Wick along with the tiny hamlet of Coate next to the old Coate Lane. There is a farm and cottages on Broome Manor lane. Behind Green Hill is a depot next to Junction 15 on the M4 that is used by the Highways Agency. The farmland and houses are all privately owned.

There is no main river on the site although the Coate reservoir was originally created by a dam across streams and brooks that flowed into the area



from the south. The Dorcan Brook takes away overflow from the north of the lake and is a tributary of the River Cole.

Tree cover mainly follows hedgerows and field boundaries. Day House Copse is a County Wildlife Site (CWS) and is centrally located east of Day House Lane. Nightingale Wood CWS – part of Burderop Wood - is in the far south western corner. There are numerous strong ecologically and historically important hedgerows throughout the site although some hedges have been grubbed out to create larger fields.

Two Scheduled Ancient Monuments (SAMs) are located in the northern part of the site east of Day House Lane – a Neolithic stone circle opposite Day House Farm complex [the stones have been buried over the years, illustrated on p.4] and a Bronze Age barrow where Day House Lane enters the site from Marlborough Road. Recent excavations have revealed that the entire area is covered in archaeological finds predominantly from pre-history dating back to 4000 years BC. Several stone circles and lines of sarsens are known to have existed in the area that may have ritual value.

There are five Grade II listed buildings in the Coate/Badbury Wick area. Coate Farm' illustrated below, [part of which is now the Richard Jefferies Museum], a milestone along the old Coate Lane [pictured right] and Day House farm are listed at Coate.



Numbers 44 and 45 Day House Lane are listed in the Badbury Wick area. At Badbury Wick a substantial Medieval settlement existed and has been identified as archaeologically significant. A Bronze Age settlement has been identified to the south of Coate Water. There are numerous other Neolithic, Roman and Medieval archaeological finds across the area.

About 11 hectares of land was used for landfill/landraise to the south-west of Day House Lane, near Badbury Wick. Part of this was formerly the site of an old brickworks and clay pit quarry where Silver Grey bricks were produced.

Ecology Of Area

The Coate area is rich in wildlife and habitats both within and beyond the influence of the SSSI and nature reserves. Surveys

have revealed evidence of nationally protected species that include badgers, water voles, otters, four bat species, common lizard, slow-worms, adder, brown hare, reed bunting, bullfinch, owls, song thrush and many other threatened species. The bittern is a yearly visitor to Coate Water nature reserve's reed beds. The otter has made a welcome return and has been seen in the streams that feed Coate Water and in the lake itself.

There are five County Wildlife Sites (about 60 hectares and 0.3 kilometres of waterway) including two ancient woodlands - Burderop Wood North and Day House Copse. There are five areas of mature woodland covering about 11 hectares including one that is part of Coate Water SSSI. A Tree Preservation Order has been placed on over 170 trees in the area many of which date back to the 17th century.





Coate Water Local Nature Reserve is a wetland, including 4 meadows that are traditionally grazed with sheep over the winter months and mown in the summer after the wild flowers have flowered and seeded. Coate Water is one of the largest still water bodies in Wiltshire and due to its varied water habitats has a diverse waterfowl population including the great crested grebe, kingfisher, heron and water rail. Within the nature reserve the extensive reed beds are one of the most important breeding sites in Wiltshire for the reed and sedge warbler. The site is also home to over 15 species of damsel and dragonfly.

The Coate Water Rangers are responsible for the oversight and management of the country park with the help of volunteers.

It is not simply these known conservation areas that are important for wildlife. Ecology is far more complex. Such areas provide 'wildlife corridors', which connect with larger habitat areas, sustaining the integrity of eco-systems. Conservation areas also enhance the quality of life for local residents by providing cleaner air, as well as space to enjoy the outdoors.

About the Trust

The Jefferies Land Conservation Trust formed on 13 September 2005 and was formally constituted on 10 December and then registered as a charity.

The Trust's aim is to promote the most environmentally sustainable use of the countryside between Coate Water, the M4 motorway, the Great Western Hospital and the Marlborough Downs that adds value to the ecological, literary, educational, recreational and historic quality of the landscape.

Proposed alternative use of the land would retain and enhance all these assets for future generations and bring prestige to Swindon.

A dedicated team of volunteers and Trustees would move the vision along, until such time that professionals might be employed. A Land Fund has been created to deposit donations with the intention of buying land in the area once it becomes available.

'Jefferies Land' is a special place and a beauty spot much loved by many generations of Swindonians. Under constant threat by developers, this insecurity needs to be removed once and for all.

Why 'Jefferies Land'?

Richard Jefferies [1848-1887], one of England's most individual writers on nature and the countryside, was born and bred in Coate. The surrounding area inspired much of his work, produced during a tragically short life. Jefferies' old house in Coate, now a Museum, is dedicated to his memory. He was a prolific writer in a variety of literary styles and subjects. His works include the children's classic books 'Bevis' and 'Wood Magic' that are set at Coate. His mystical philosophy was expressed via his autobiography 'The Story of My Heart', inspired by walks to Liddington Hill. Agricultural/social commentary is represented in 'Hodge and His Masters' and 'Toilers of the Field.' In addition he wrote numerous nature books and essays.

References and associations to Coate and adjacent areas are abundant throughout his works. Literary assessments, recognising this, see him foremost as a topographical writer. Prof W J Keith, in his critical study of Richard Jefferies published in 1965, wrote:

"We call the region around Coate farmhouse 'Jefferies' Land' not merely because it was the country about which he wrote but because, in a very real sense, it was the country that he himself created. He taught us to view it as nearly as possible with his eyes which, we are ready to admit, are keener than our own... It is not only that we see with Jefferies' eyes; what we see with and through them is his own personal vision."

Our Vision

The Trust's vision for 'Jefferies Land' would place Swindon squarely on the map as a literary heritage site, a place for visitors to enjoy a special rural climate, and a centre for study of the environment and historic landscapes a true "open air" university. It would require the acquisition of farmland and existing buildings in the area. The Jefferies Museum and house at Coate would play an important role in the project, under the continuing direction of the Richard Jefferies Society and with the co-operation of SBC who own the property.

The main elements of the Trust's Vision are to:

- maintain the landscape setting of Coate Water in the countryside; to preserve the adjoining Jefferies land as an ideal place for "rambles" to see the links to Jefferies' writing; and ... just simply a "place" to relax and enjoy.
- enhance the biodiversity of the Site of Special Scientific Interest and the nature reserves at Coate Water, Day House Copse and Burderop Wood North. Extensive new habitats and wildlife corridors would be created, stressing the ecological value of streams, trees and hedges, etc.
- provide a centre to study and appreciate literary landscapes as an inspiration to UK writers; the history of British nature writing; and to include a special focus on Richard Jefferies' key role in this evolution ;
- demonstrate and study traditional crafts and environmentally sensitive alternatives that reduce man's impact on the land, including managing land organically as an educational tool and for local food production;
- feature the archaeological qualities of the area and the links to others at Liddington Hill and Barbury Castle;
- provide educational opportunities for local children linking in with local schools and community groups

Breakdown of Vision's Plans for the Site

There are two specific goals:

- 1 To capture how the area might have influenced Jefferies' writing and to demonstrate how literary landscapes play an important part in social history.
- 2 To protect and enhance the area as a wildlife sanctuary.

Integrating these features as best as possible, without one over-riding the other, will be a challenge. In order to turn this vision into a reality, aspirations range from an ambitious bid for the whole area, buying up a substantial part of Jefferies' Land, to the more modest acquisition of a particular section.

For the purpose of presenting a holistic picture, the supposition of acquiring access to the complete area is made.

Use of General Land

A Public Health White Paper 'Choosing Health' pinpoints our natural environment as one of the major factors for improving public health. It calls for green spaces and countryside to be

prescribed as part of our perfect medicine in order to provide exercise and to reduce mental stress that is now the most common cause of sickness absence. A walk around Coate Water lake is all the more valuable as a result of its rural setting and the additional chance of spotting wildlife.

Both Coate Water, Day House Lane and the footpaths are valuable public recreation areas for horse riding, cycling, walking and running. Many Swindonians stable their horses at Coate. With open and distant views of the AONB and Liddington Hill, it is not surprising that this is a treasured landscape. Day House Lane forms the first rural leg of Swindon's half-marathon that draws in hundreds of participants and spectators each year. This local countryside amenity is all the more important in the face of accelerated growth pressures on Swindon to expand.

The Trust would maintain this idyllic setting of 'Jefferies Land', while increasing the habitats to enhance the biodiversity of the complete area, especially the Coate Water Nature Reserve.

Walks that inspired Jefferies writing across to Liddington, Chiseldon and Hodson would be flagged up.

It is impossible to have certainty about the size of buffers and wildlife corridors required to protect and enhance biodiversity. The buffer sizes proposed so far by developers have been inadequate not only to enhance the wildlife value but would surround key archaeological features with modern buildings.

Quality arable farmland could be preserved for growing food for local markets or as allotments. In addition small fields could be used to grow cereals, creating an atmosphere close to Jefferies' time. Other fields would be managed as pasture land for livestock and horses and as flower-rich hay meadows. The old brickworks site and clay pit could form part of the Community Forest. Bronze Age, Medieval and Roman archaeology would remain protected and further exploration encouraged.



Use of Specific Fields and Areas

Most of the high quality farmland is located directly next to Coate Water. There is a second large area of land between Day House Lane, Day House Copse and the A4259 of similar quality. Some of these fields form a valuable foraging area for wildlife, particularly adding to the biodiversity of Day House Copse. Some fields could continue in use for arable farming but would be managed organically.

At one time there were allotments alongside the hamlet of Coate on the high quality agricultural land – this land would be reserved for similar use.

The main part of the field next to Coate Water where the borage was grown in 2004 would be planted up as a flower rich hay meadow and would be traditionally grazed as part of an environmentally sensitive management process.



There is very little buffer land between Coate Water lake and the agricultural land particularly next to the nature reserve around the south-east leg of the lake. The wet D-shaped field would be incorporated into the wetland area, planted up with reed beds in order to enhance the habitat for birds. New woodland areas might be created particularly linking Coate Water and Burderop Wood.

The land south of Coate Water could still be used as farmland but managed organically.

The former in-filled clay pit might be planted as community forest. Other tree planting would take

place to soften the visual impact of the Great Western Hospital and reduce noise from the main roads.

A certain portion of land in the NE corner of the site is expected to be used as an extension for the GWH to meet the health needs of a growing and elderly population.

There is potential to placemark the missing stones of the Day House Stone Circle and other Neolithic remains that once graced the area. In consultation with the County Archaeologist and English Heritage, much could be done to enhance the archaeological interest of the area.

Use of Buildings

The buildings under consideration are mainly at Coate Farm, Day House Farm [illustrated to the right] and Badbury Wick noting the Grade II listings.

A Visitor and Information Centre is proposed that would provide an educational resource on the history and ecology of the area linking Day House Farm with Coate Farm and the Jefferies' Museum and the former Agricultural Museum and Information Centre at Coate Water. Out-buildings would be used to demonstrate traditional crafts. A shop



would provide a market for local produce and crafts, Jefferies books and various other guides to trees, birds, wild flowers, etc.

The farm-houses would also become a Writing and Study Centre. The linkage to Jefferies provides an ideal atmosphere to develop a unique centre of learning for students wishing to study writers who owe their inspiration to nature and landscape. This would include not only the proud history of country and wildlife writing, but also the evolution of this movement. A Library devoted to nature studies and country life writing would also be part of this structure.

The study centre would also provide educational opportunities for local schools and community groups related to art, literature, geography, history, environmental studies and for open air events. This might include courses on organic gardening and other environmentally aware initiatives.

Badbury Wick's main role would continue as a centre for farming. A residence for the tenant farmer along with associated outbuildings will be retained. The farm would be run on a mixed use basis and demonstrate traditional farming methods, best use of waste materials including composting and even selling food crops grown on the farm.

Use of Roads

Day House Lane would continue in its present role, providing access, and links to the villages in the Downs. Speed limits of 20mph would be put in place to assist the safety of cyclists, walkers and equestrians. Broome Manor Lane would not be changed. No new roads would be built.

Management of the Site

Management of the fields would require a small operating farm holding (tenant) on the Badbury Wick site. It would be run in conjunction with an overall Site Supervisor, headquartered in the Information Centre. Auxiliary staff would be added when necessary and feasible.

Other Potential Uses And Ideas For The Site

- Plant an oak tree on top of Green Hill as a symbolic "corner stone" of the Sanctuary. It might have a Sarsen stone or plaque commemorating the day the "earth was broken".

- Expand writers' centre into one for ecological and social studies- specifically to record and examine evolving conflicts between human needs, desires and nature. This is especially relevant considering why the need for the Trust has arisen.
- A mini 'Centre for Alternative Technology' might be established demonstrating best practice in sustainable living and building techniques. The scope is enormous in what this might achieve as an educational resource in its own right. It might include a "Nature House" built of suitable low impact materials that could display information about local ecology, wildlife, bird migration, soil dynamics, the effect of the seasons, etc.
- Replicate a farm labourer's cottage from Jefferies' time e.g. circa 1865, to demonstrate how people lived in rural Wiltshire around this time.
- An extension of the Library's activities could be devoted to publishing out of print country writers or relevant books. This would probably be arranged with an independent publisher.

Funding opportunities

A business plan would be drawn up to define all the potential income opportunities as a result of these ideas that would help the 'sustainability' of the project. There will be links and opportunities for local business whilst the tourist value would not only put Swindon on the map but also draw in income that might be used to support Coate Water's maintenance.

Conclusion – "Nothing is Written" (T E Lawrence)

Though the prospect of taking on such a gigantic project and solving the overwhelming need to raise millions of pounds appears quixotic, it is not impossible.

The Trust has set up a Land Fund in a savings account as a first step. Some good creative thinking will have to go into developing commercial concepts, implying a sense of the awareness and importance of self-sufficient management.

In considering this proposal, as challenging as it may be, it is vital to remember the continued building pressures for use of the land. The Trust will be dedicated, creative and boldly assertive in presenting a clear and desirable alternative.



This report was originally drafted in August 2005 by Patrick Esmonde as a consultation document. It has gone through several amendments and updates to take account of new information.

Further comments or general inquiries should be e-mailed to info@Jefferieslandtrust.org.uk or telephone 01793 783040

For information about the Jefferies Land Conservation Trust and membership go to jefferieslandtrust.org.uk.
Visit jefferiesland.blogspot.com for news updates.