

Deputation Submitted Mr Luck

Planning Permission is dependent on whether 'wholly exceptional reasons' exist for the construction of Havant Thicket Reservoir under paragraph 175(c) of the NPPF, due to the loss of ancient woodland.

A beautiful and accessible landscape - designated under Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation - will be massively changed and despite the extensive and best efforts of the Biodiversity Mitigation and Compensation Scheme (both on and off site) to address the ecological losses, a biodiversity net gain cannot be achieved, due to the loss of irreplaceable ancient woodland. This places a strong moral responsibility on attendees of the planning committee to maximise and protect the changed biodiversity reality. Consequently I believe planning conditions are needed for:

Visitor Centre.

It is clear in the submitted NW CORNER map (HTR-ATK-ZZ-ZZ-DR-L-0015 REV P02) that the applicant has proposed to construct the visitor centre within the footprint of the conservation wetland on stilts surrounded by water. Value has been placed on a sense of visitor awe through a prestige location, above non-disturbance of the bird and wildlife, in which the wetland is being created to mitigate biodiversity loss. This is detrimental and ethically wrong.

It is of serious note that objections have also been made by experts on the Wetland Specialist Stakeholder Sub-group concerning the position and design. The width of the wetland from the north shore to the containing clay bund walls will vary between 60 - 100 metres (a narrow strip). In context, the proposed location of the visitor centre, occupying a very large area of 35 x 55 metres, does have an overly imposing impact on the conservation/biodiversity objectives of the wetland and the rural aesthetic character of the site and is far too close to the bird hide. It is bound to cause serious negative impacts in the honey pot pressure area. After closing hours the terraced patio could attract anti-social behaviour as a diving platform (the Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust experienced similar problems at their Testwood Lakes nature reserve, along with significant material damage in 2020 under lockdown).

The impractical Island concept design doesn't take into account the need to future proof the facilities, to allow for additional activities or infrastructure to be changed/added at a later date. Although the applicant has rejected the possibility of light low impact water sports, e.g. such as a regulated canoeing school - seasonally restricted within zone limits to protect sensitive conservation areas - the opportunity should be kept open as a possibility in the future; especially when taking into account a relatively disadvantaged community on the edge of the proposed reservoir. Other water companies manage access balances on their reservoirs

Consequently, I believe conditions should be applied to ensure that the visitor centre is restricted to the shore on solid land in the north west corner, as far back as possible (not within the sensitive footprint of the wetland as currently proposed) so that at the detailed design stage, it can be developed to avoid wildlife disturbance and promote the public good. A condition should also be applied to prevent the visitor centre outdoor cafe terrace/patio area from facing the wetland, which would dramatically increase potential for disturbance and litter entering the wetland.

Motorbike Barriers, Lockable Entrance Gates and Fencing.

I have been informed that a planning condition will be incorporated to prevent motorcyclist access to bridleways and the site via other access points. Having repeatedly experienced motorcyclists riding the bridleways and paths around and on the proposed reservoir site, including through Havant Thicket Forest, the Staunton Country Park, Blendworth Common and Dunsbury Hill Farm, this is most welcome and essential. However, I believe conditions should also be introduced to ensure that entrance gates on the northern and southern access routes are installed and locked at night to reduce anti-social behaviour and adequate and appropriate fencing is used to protect the ecology of the site; particularly sensitive areas and to protect public safety and enjoyment.

Capital Grants Scheme.

The Capital Grants Scheme of £1.2 million for proposed off-site mitigation, compensation and enhancement measures is welcome but given that irreplaceable ancient woodland and grassland will be destroyed very early in the construction programme, it is ethically wrong that the funds won't be available until 2029. Funds should start to be released and compensation started before felling begins or as soon as pragmatically possible and should be bound in an S106 legal agreement.

Mr S.Luck.