Deputation on Hybrid Planning Applications APP/20/00990 and APP/20/00991
Havant Thicket Reservoir and associated Pipeline
on behalf of Havant Borough Tree Wardens (HBTW)

The description of "Ancient Woodland" and "Veteran & Ancient Trees" as "irreplaceable" is in danger of becoming a glib cliché, as easily used but as misunderstood as the word "sustainable".

The contentious situation surrounding construction of HS2 points to the very high environmental and social costs of large infrastructure projects: deforestation, habitat degradation, biodiversity loss and social disruption.

So why are Ancient Woodlands irreplaceable, and why does it matter if it is sacrificed to necessity of, in this case, a reservoir?

Even though AW occupies just 2.4% of the UK landmass, it is unique. It offers a plethora of habitats that cannot be found elsewhere, making it vitally important for wildlife and biodiversity.

Ancient Woodland is the country's richest terrestrial wildlife habitat, home to 256 'species of conservation concern' as listed on the UK Biodiversity Action Plan. Each AW is incomparable: each has its own local soil, environment, wildlife and cultural history. Each AW is a rich, complex ecosystem that has taken many hundreds of years to develop, but is easily degraded.

Ancient Woodlands are rich in complex communities of trees, plants, fungi, micro-organisms and insects that rely on these unique, undisturbed ecosystems. Each tree and the species they support, whether lichens, invertebrates, birds or mammals, is unique. In many cases, ancient woodlands are the last strongholds of threatened species such as hazel dormice, nightjars, glow worms, stag beetles, rare bat and moth species, plants and lichens.

The soil created by AW also has its own rich nutrient character which makes it the perfect environment for everything that lives within it – it cannot simply be dug up and relocated, any more than the rich flora and fauna of AW can be mitigated for by planting saplings nearby in plastic tubes.

This project claims that ecosystems damaged and destroyed by the project can be recreated and compensated for.
But this focus on mitigation for AW loss or, as a last resort, compensation methods such as translocation or new woodland creation, considers only the very basic benefits of the woodland.
The project's aim to have *'no net loss of biodiversity'* ignores the loss of particular ecosystems and skews the statistics, which makes compensation plans look more effective on paper than they really are – AW habitat cannot be re-created.

There is also failure to take account of additional damage from 'Edge Effects' (e.g. woodland opened up to additional intrusion, lighting & trampling) and pollution from construction, additional traffic etc. Neither does it take into account the cumulative impacts of this further fragmentation of Ancient Woodland in the area.

A mere 7% of Britain's native woodlands are currently in good ecological condition, including many AW. Conservation of AW and restoration of those in poor condition is an urgent national priority that aims to develop future ecosystems with greater ecological integrity and resilience. *(1)*

The reality is "Biodiversity is declining faster than at any time in human history. Current extinction rates, for example, are around 100 to 1,000 times higher than the baseline rate, and they are increasing. Such declines are undermining Nature's productivity, resilience and adaptability, and are in turn fuelling extreme risk and uncertainty for our economies and well-being" (2)

We have two major criticisms of the project:

Havant Thicket woodland is a **public asset** that should be protected for future generations.

The proposed reservoir will become a **private asset**:
A consortium, Greensands Holdings Ltd, owns Southern Water.
The parent company of Portsmouth Water is Ancala Partners, an independent mid-market infrastructure investment manager.

- A more inclusive approach is needed to bring together stakeholders; and,
- Decision makers should take into account the loss of benefits and multiple values provided by Ancient Woodland, grasslands and local streams.

There is no overriding reason for the permanent loss of Ancient Woodland, particularly since:

- The reservoir capacity is excessive, intended to export water elsewhere in the Southeast
- Local Communities will not benefit from the new water supply, but suffer the impacts of increased traffic, woodland loss etc.
- The depth of stored water will prevent recreational use.
- There are no details as to how Leigh Park will be protected from flooding
- It will not protect local chalk streams such as The Ems from current over-abstraction.

These points need frank assessment.

In addition, HBTW ask that plans to compensate for habitat loss should be assessed against all the Aichi Targets (3), and request any planning decision is delayed to allow for disclosure of detailed information, Aichi Target assessments and a full agreed implementation plan.

Notes

1. https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/state-of-uk-woods-and-trees/

2. The Economics of Biodiversity The Dasgupta Review ... - Gov.uk

3. https://www.iucn.org/theme/species/our-work/influencing-policy/convention-biological-diversity-cbd/aichi-targets