

APP/19/00374 | To create a Habitat Mitigation Zone for Brent Geese and Solent Waders (linked to the current planning application APP/18/00450). | Forty Acres, Havant Road, Havant, PO9 3LW 19.0905

Thank you for consulting me on this application.

The application is for the establishment of a permanent refuge for brent geese and other wintering bird species associated with the nearby Solent Special Protection Areas.

The proposed refuge area does not include any land to the south of the proposed housing development. In all recent correspondence between the applicant's ecologist, Natural England and myself, it has been understood that a swathe of land at the eastern end of the southern edge of the entire site would be incorporated into the permanent refuge. It also does not include a section of land in the extreme north-eastern corner and I am unsure why. Again, the previously-submitted site plan shows the refuge occupying the entirety of the eastern fields.

I am not convinced that the removal of the line of alder trees at the western boundary of the proposed refuge is necessary or justifiable at this time. Brent geese have been recorded within this parcel of land and it would appear that the existing trees are not a significant deterrent: I suspect that there are multiple factors affecting the birds' use of this site and that removing the trees would not provide a significant uplift in suitability. Whilst open grassland would be preferable, in this location it would be very difficult to justify the loss of so many trees solely for the purposes of one of several ecological constraints, and especially within the bird nesting season. I would suggest that the issue of tree removal is assessed at a later stage (i.e. the trees are retained at this time) and, where considered necessary, tree removal is undertaken in a staged manner and at a more-appropriate time of year (avoiding potential nesting bird issues).

I would also request justification for the importation of soils to the refuge site. The refuge does not need to be level, so some explanation of this is necessary. Why can't the existing soils be levelled to facilitate sowing of the proposed grassland mix? This would avoid the need for so many vehicle movements.

The importation and use of soils across much of the site needs to be reconciled with the need to minimise nutrient loads at the site. Will the importation of soils influence the site's nutrient budget?

I would query the need for fertilisation. I would suspect that the existing soils are sufficiently nutrient-rich to allow successful establishment of permanent grassland. Again, the application of fertilisers would act against measures to reduce nitrogenous inputs.

Finally, there needs to be information on the long-term management of the refuge. The submission contains no details on annual monitoring or management to check that establishment is successful. The permanent refuge will require a long-term (perpetuity) management plan.

If you have any queries, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Kind regards,

Tristan Norton
Senior Ecologist
Ecology Team