

Reserved Matters Application / Havant Thicket Reservoir Phase 2 / Wetland

HBC ref: APP/24/00186

EHDC ref: 51680/008

I have always supported the principle of a retained wetland at the Havant Thicket reservoir site. Indeed, I was a member of the Wetland Specialist Sub-group that helped to develop the outline wetland design, having over 35 years' experience working in wetland management on Hampshire nature reserves. However, I have significant concerns regarding this Phase 2 application because many of the key habitat design elements are either not adequately detailed, are only shown indicatively, or have changed. This is frustrating and, of course, most unhelpful when trying to comment on the application. I must therefore object to the following elements of the design.

1. **The Visual Screening Mound.** This proposed embankment has been introduced throughout compartments 2-4. It is a significant departure from the original design concept and appears to be totally at odds with that design and wholly inappropriate. This embankment, which is up to 2.8m high is very likely to have an adverse effect on the natural processes of riparian succession, a key part of the original design. It will effectively stop habitats grading naturally from open water to grassland, scrub and woodland. Furthermore, wildfowl, especially those species that graze and dabble, are far less likely to utilise habitats beyond the bund as they would have no direct line of sight to the water. This then will lead to an unnecessary reduction in biodiversity net gain. In addition, the embankment will have a negative visual impact on the open landscape within the retained wetland. Whilst screening will of course be essential in some localised areas close to paths or adjacent to viewing points, an embankment of this magnitude is totally unnecessary.
2. **Compartment 1 Habitat Design.** The Wetland Specialist Sub-group strongly recommended that there should be a complex mix of water depths in Compartment 1 to maximise biodiversity. This would be achieved through an informal grid of deeper channels, depressions and scallops. This does not appear to be adequately reflected in the current application.
3. **Ephemeral Features.** The Wetland Specialist Sub-group recommended the ephemeral features in the north-east corner of the site be aligned broadly parallel to the prevailing wind (in a south-west to north-east direction) to facilitate wave ingress further up the shoreline and minimise wave action on the raised parts of these features as they establish. This does not now appear to be the case as these features are depicted in random orientations.
4. **Topsoil Dressing of the Retaining Structure.** The Wetland Specialist sub-group strongly recommended maintaining a stone surface to the retaining structure as vegetation would take longer to develop and would be less likely to encourage large numbers of gulls and geese from roosting and nesting which could have a negative impact on water quality within the retained wetland as well as on the success of other breeding bird species. However, this application indicates that the retaining structure will be dressed with topsoil and seeded to create a grass sward. A sown grass sward would certainly encourage grazing non-native geese and be more attractive to gulls.
5. **Peripheral Ditches.** It is essential that peripheral ditches are created between the shoreline and islands where islands are close to the shore and excavated to a sufficient depth and width to be fit for purpose. These ditches (sections of deeper water) deter

ground predators and prevent human access thereby minimising disturbance to wetland wildlife, this is especially important during the breeding season. They also reduce the spread of unwanted reeds and other riparian plants which trap silt and can, in the longer term, impair water flows between islands and around the compartments.

6. **Hide Locations.** The correct siting of hides and/or viewing screens is essential. They should as far as possible avoid facing south-east into the morning sun as this is when the sun is at its lowest, making viewing difficult, and the time when most birdwatchers tend to be out and about. The current application appears to have reorientated the hides/screens to face south-east and relocated some to less favourable viewing locations. I acknowledge that positioning of wildlife viewing areas at this reservoir is not easy as the shore is south-facing, but it would be sensible/good practice to ensure that hides or other viewing facilities are realigned and located in keeping with the outline design application.

I hope that the LPA will seek revised drawings from the applicant to address the concerns highlighted, which are based on many years of wetland management experience, to ensure that the biodiversity net gain opportunities the wetland can provide are maximised.