

2 October 2014

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(by e-mail)

cc. Steve Weaver, Havant Borough Council

Dear Tristan

APP/14/00627 | Construction of a new depot building (incorporating part of the existing car park) and alterations to track layout | Hayling Seaside Railway, Eastoke Corner, Sea Front, Hayling Island | 14.0965

On behalf of Hayling Seaside Railway I am writing to clarify some ecological matters raised in your response of 29 July and to set out a proposal for some off-site mitigation (compensation) which I believe Steve Weaver has already discussed with you in principle.

The possibility of the development affecting shorebirds, e.g. by noise during construction, is definitely not an issue. I am fairly certain that this section of shore is not used to any great extent by waders, as it lies next to one of the main car parks along south Hayling, and is regularly disturbed by people and dogs (the car park itself is used by roosting gulls in winter, but these are not of ecological importance in this context). Even less disturbed stretches of the coast here only attract relatively small numbers of waders (I have seen small flocks of species such as Turnstone and Sanderling further east from here). Secondly, the beach rises up here to a mounded ridge, which means that the development will be mostly hidden from view from the intertidal section of beach, and the ridge would also act as a barrier to noise. Thirdly, waders feeding on the shore at low tide would be at least 125m from the development, which is too far to be affected by most forms of noise.

I have marked the proposed railway depot and some other areas on the map below (**Figure 1**), which is based on the currently available Google Earth aerial photo. This conveniently shows the extent of grassed-over and bare shingle present here and the arrangement of cars during what was probably a relatively busy summer period. Please note that the areas shown are approximately drawn. The map shows a section of the Beachlands East SINC (orange line) - this also continues to the west, but not to the east. The beach to the south and east is part of Hayling Island Beach SINC which is unaffected by the development and not shown here. It can be seen that this section of the Beachlands East SINC includes a large area of strongly compacted, unvegetated shingle used for car parking lying to the south of the application site. Within this part of the SINC the grassland visible on the map is largely species poor and of relatively low ecological quality (described in my previous report).

Within the application site approximately 450m² of the SINC is taken up by the station platform, existing track and an ornamental planted border. The new car park access road

(white line) measures roughly 65m². Area A is the revised footprint of the depot, which measures 19.5 by 13 metres, so covering an area of just over 250m². It is mostly situated on the bare shingle, but its construction will lead to the loss of c.48m² of species poor, trampled grassland. Areas B, C and D will be affected by the laying of new tracks, which may entail the removal of much of the existing vegetation, but there would be the opportunity to retain corridors of grassland between the tracks, and as briefly noted in my report, these could be reinstated by replacement of turfs or allowed to recolonise naturally (see further comments below). About 98m² of species poor grassland would be lost from B, 83m² from C and 60m² of moderately herb rich grassland from D, making a maximum total of 289m² for areas A-D. The green line is the proposed fence to keep visitors off the railway tracks.



Figure 1: Map of application site based on Google Earth aerial photo.

The compensation proposal relates to an area of land situated 160m west of the application site adjoining the west side of the coastguards building (see photos below and plan of the site, **Figures 2-4**). This is currently also part of a car park. To prevent future use by cars the area would be marked with wooden posts ('dragon's-teeth') at 1.5m intervals, as shown on the plan. The existing posts along the southern edge of the area could be moved to the new alignment. The proposal would remove about six or seven potential parking places; however, it is understood that there is ample parking on this part of the beach, so this will not be an issue. Moreover, the area usable by cars actually consists of loose, unconsolidated shingle, so is not ideal to park on. The total area as shown on the plan measures 294m² in area, so would compensate in full for the loss of 289m² of grassland from the application site as estimated above.



Figure 2: Proposed compensation area west of coastguards building. Dragon's-teeth posts to be moved back to follow the blue dotted line.



Figure 2: Plan view of proposed compensation area.

A small part of the proposed compensation area is presently vegetated, comprising a 5m diameter circle of grassland around the telegraph pole and a variable width strip next to the building (**Figure 4**). It can be seen from the photographs that much of the area has been eroded by vehicles driving around the telegraph pole. The existing grassland is species poor, rather trampled and of poor quality, though some Sea Campion survives around the existing posts to the west of the building. The beach to the south of the area currently supports semi-natural shingle vegetation with Sea Kale *Crambe maritima*, Sea Beet *Beta vulgaris* subsp. *maritima* and Rest-harrow *Ononis repens*.



Figure 4: View of compensation area.

Although it is not likely that the whole of the compensation area will re-vegetate completely, removal of cars from the area, and remedial work (see below) would improve the quality of the vegetation here significantly by allowing recolonisation of the unconsolidated shingle and re-establishment of moderately herb rich vegetation over the more compacted areas.

Regarding the application site I agree with your comment concerning reinstating natural vegetation to the area, rather than any formal landscaping; however, the species you suggest are plants of unconsolidated shingle beaches and would not be appropriate to be introduced here. As noted above the compensation proposal will have a small benefit in allowing some natural recolonisation of shingle flora to take place. The aim on the application site should be to encourage a moderately herb rich neutral grassland as already exists, with an element of maritime species resistant to salt spray, which might include some of the coastal clovers for example. However, I would prefer to allow natural recolonisation rather than attempting to introduce any species to this area by planting or sowing by seed, etc. There will be sufficient seed source in the substrate to allow this to happen, though it may take a few years for some of the herbs to become established.

My recommendations for grassland reinstatement and management are as follows. I do not know the exact method that will be used for laying the new tracks next to the depot, but it is likely that the existing grassland will firstly be removed, to allow the area to be levelled off and in order to create areas of bare shingle for laying the tracks. My suggestion is to remove turfs where feasible and stockpile these for re-use around the site and on the compensation area when construction has been completed. Where the grassland is too thin to remove turfs it would be best to scrape it off with the top 10cm or so of substrate, then mix, level off and compact down again to provide a uniform surface. Alternatively, it could be stockpiled in a mound and used later to infill between the tracks. The mixed material will quickly revegetate from the grass rhizomes and seed source within, even if initially stockpiled for several months.

Future management of the re-established grassland should be by regular mowing to a height of c.10-20cm to prevent taller grasses and perennial herbs from dominating and allow clovers, Bird's-foot Trefoil and other low-growing herbs to flourish. However, the initial disturbance will free up nutrients in the soil and allow taller 'weedy' plants to grow up over the first two years or so, during which time mowing may need to be carried out at least monthly. Restoration of the compensation area will require the soil to be loosened slightly to reduce the amount of compaction. This could be done by scraping off the top 10cm of substrate, as above, then mixing, replacing and levelling off. Any surplus material from the laying of the railway tracks can be mixed in and hence disposed of here. Management will also be the same for this area, but the more intensive trampling by people may mean that less regular mowing is required.

Yours sincerely



John Norton BSc. MCIEEM