

Comments on Application 20/00990/ Havant Thicket Reservoir from Havant Climate Alliance and Havant Friends of the Earth.

We accept that the Reservoir will be needed in future, although the loss of ancient woodland, defined by Natural England as "irreplaceable habitat", is a high price to pay. We think it will be justified if it enables water extraction from the Rivers Itchen and Test to stop, as these rare chalk streams, with their unique habitat, are at risk.

We have a number of concerns:

Compensation for ancient woodland

It is appreciated that the siting and design of the Reservoir have been adjusted to reduce the amount of ancient woodland which will have to be removed. However, 14 hectares will still have to go. It is important that replacement native species trees and shrubs are planted over at least the same size area due to be lost. The opportunity should also be taken to plant additional, much larger areas with trees and shrubs, as a contribution to carbon reduction.

During the summer many of the saplings, that had been planted in Spring 2020, died, and will have to be replaced. This does not give us great confidence in the effectiveness of a future Environmental Management Plan. It is important that commitment is made to the care and management of the new woodland, in perpetuity. It should be accepted that in the first few years, during extended dry spells, the young trees may need watering if they are to become established.

Flora, fauna and habitats

Very detailed and comprehensive surveys of wildlife and ecological assessments have been carried out of the area around and within the prospective reservoir site and pipeline route. There is also very detailed advice about further survey work needed, how habitats, trees, flora and fauna can be protected from harm and enhanced, and how best to mitigate or compensate for loss, during the construction of the reservoir and pipeline. If these proposals can be delivered in full, the site may achieve the ultimate aim for a net gain in bio-diversity. To be successful, this will require a lot of work, especially during the construction phase. It is vital that adequate numbers of people are employed to protect remaining habitats and in the creation of new ones. Portsmouth Water plan to employ an Ecological Clerk of Works to oversee delivery of the Biodiversity Mitigation and Compensation Strategy. The scope of the ecological work needed during construction is vast and one asks whether a single Ecological Clerk of Works will be sufficient. It is also important that the post of Ecological Clerk of Works should not just be "window dressing" but should have sufficient power and resources (including manpower) to be able to ensure that work fully follows advice detailed in the plans.

An independent Ecologist "with teeth" should be fully funded and have responsibility for checking that the work is being done as advised in the Plans.

Once new habitats are established, the work level will reduce, but it will still be vital that enough people are employed in the management of new and remaining habitats. Not everything can be done by volunteers. An Ecologist should be employed long term as sites need to be managed in perpetuity. We hope that an effective Ecological Management Plan can be agreed between Portsmouth Water, Hampshire County Council and Forestry England.

Green Jobs

Because of the requirements detailed above, there should be scope to create some green jobs, employing local people to undertake work associated with the creation and maintenance of habitats around the reservoir site and along the Pipeline route.

Saving Electricity

It is understood that although this will be a "pumped storage" reservoir, it will not be possible to generate a great deal of electricity when water is being drawn down. However, Portsmouth Water should seek to save energy wherever possible and make use of renewables e.g. solar panels on the visitor centre and elsewhere, to generate as much of their own electricity as possible.

Visitor Centre

We are concerned about the positioning of the Visitor Centre so close to the Wetland Nature Reserve. While one wants people to have a positive experience, this is outweighed by the importance of minimising disturbance to birds and wildlife. We agree with the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust that the Centre should be placed as far to the north-west of the Reservoir as possible.

Portsmouth Water should take the opportunity to create a Visitor Centre which is an exemplar of self-sustainable building, using renewable or recycled materials, and built to environmental standards, using renewable technologies e.g. having solar panels on the roof, and using solar gain, minimising waste and heat loss and recycling water.

Cycle and pedestrian access

This can be an opportunity to increase cycling and walking, to benefit health and well-being. We should be maximising access by bike and on foot, so that visiting the Reservoir will not be another car journey generator.

We support the submissions made by Mike Ashton on behalf of Cycling UK that a number of routes are needed round the reservoir site and across it, for commuter purposes. He has detailed where cycle paths within the site need to link in with those outside it. Standards should conform with The Local Transport Note 1/20. This advises against cyclists and pedestrians sharing routes in urban areas, but suggests that it may be acceptable in more rural locations. However, as it is hoped that any routes will become popular, separate cycle and pedestrian paths should be created. Cycle routes need to be surfaced with sealed asphalt or tarmac. These will last much longer than a loose surface and will be less prohibitive to inexperienced and less able cyclists.

Pedestrian routes need the same hard surfacing, to make them fully wheelchair accessible. All too often wheelchair routes can be over rougher surfaces, which cause an uncomfortable ride, thus becoming prohibitive. It is also not acceptable only to tarmac a short stretch of path for wheelchairs. People in attendant and self-propelled wheelchairs, may wish to explore the full extent of the site, as much as anyone else.

