

Control House Planning Application – Havant Thicket Reservoir

Application reference: [Planning Application: APP/25/00988](#)

Discharge of Conditions reference: – [Planning Application: APP/25/00989](#)

It was good to see that feedback on early designs provided by stakeholders has been properly taken into consideration and that the embankment retaining structure will now be a vegetated steep slope, with a brick and flint building frontage in keeping with other buildings in the area. This will help the structure blend into the local landscape which is very important as it is located within the historic conservation area.

I fully support the revised design for the Control House and courtyard in terms of materials and appearance. However, it is important that **the Local Planning Authority ensure** that;

1. Portsmouth Water confirm where the storage area/ workshop for grounds maintenance will be before consent is granted, as that was to have been accommodated within the Control House area. The removal of the 'Site Maintenance Workshop Room' from the approved outline design represents a material change. No provision for replacement of this essential facility is currently made in the outline design layouts for buildings in the NW area of the site that were recently shared with stakeholders. If details of the alternative provision cannot be confirmed by the applicant before consent for the Control House is needed, then **a planning condition should be added to require reprovision of the facility of a minimum size before planning permission is granted.**
2. Portsmouth Water commit in writing now that tree planting and landscape enhancements will be incorporated in to the Phase 8 landscape plan, to offset the unnecessary loss of ancient woodland in this area of the site (Round Wood) as a result of the Control Room having moved north, and to improve screening of the control house.
3. Portsmouth Water confirm what ancillary infrastructure is needed in association with the Control House pipework outside of the red line boundary, and that the use of above ground structures is minimised through intelligent design. If above ground infrastructure is required, then the red line boundary should be extended to include this area as it does not represent 'landscaping' which is covered in later phases.
4. Lighting minimises the impact on adjacent habitats, including the ancient woodland, but also ensures lighting is directed away/ shielded from the new bat boxes to be placed on the Control House frontage to ensure they can serve their purpose.
5. Minor modifications are made to the maintenance regime for the vegetated embankment retaining structure to optimise its value before it is incorporated into the Landscape Environment Management Plan.
6. Portsmouth Water is required to allocate space at suitable location(s) in the Control House to enable hydro-electric power generation to be retrofitted at a later date.

Further information on why it is important to address issues 1 to 6 is set out below.

I note that the Control Building Drainage Management Plan submitted in relation to discharge of Condition 32 only consider surface water drainage from the roof and courtyard, as well as provision of a cess pit to serve the staff toilet. Yet the Control House contains the flow control structures and pipework for the daily discharge of a compensation flow to the Riders Lane Stream, drawdown pipe(s) and emergency drawdown system. **The LPA should seek clarification on;**

- When will the drainage report for these integral structures be provided, where will these pipes discharge on site, and what ancillary structures are needed? (Item 3 refers)
- Where waste water from the water quality monitoring taps and analysers will drain to? (*from the sampling & monitoring room shown on the site layout plan*)

1. **Provision of a maintenance storage area/ workshop**

Background information

In early discussions with the Portsmouth Water Operations Team managers and SCP/FE managers it was identified that storing grounds maintenance vehicles, tools and equipment at the existing Staunton Country Park facility would add significant time to every task and was not practical. Instead, it was agreed that a dedicated storage facility/ workshop area would need to be provided at the reservoir site.

Managers also identified the need for space for rangers and volunteers to store tools for working parties, clean up after, and complete indoor tasks such as maintaining tools, equipment and constructing/ repairing things such as nest/bat boxes, signs and benches. Ideally the facility was to include a toilet. Recognising that to help ensure grounds maintenance/ conservation management was cost effective very regular volunteer working parties would play an essential and large part, noting that to attract and retain a large group of regular volunteers' decent facilities would be needed.

Operations Team managers and SCP/FE managers did not believe that these facilities should be placed within the Visitor Centre building due to the potential conflict with visitors in relation to exit/entry with machinery/ tools and dirty wet staff/ volunteers making everything muddy.

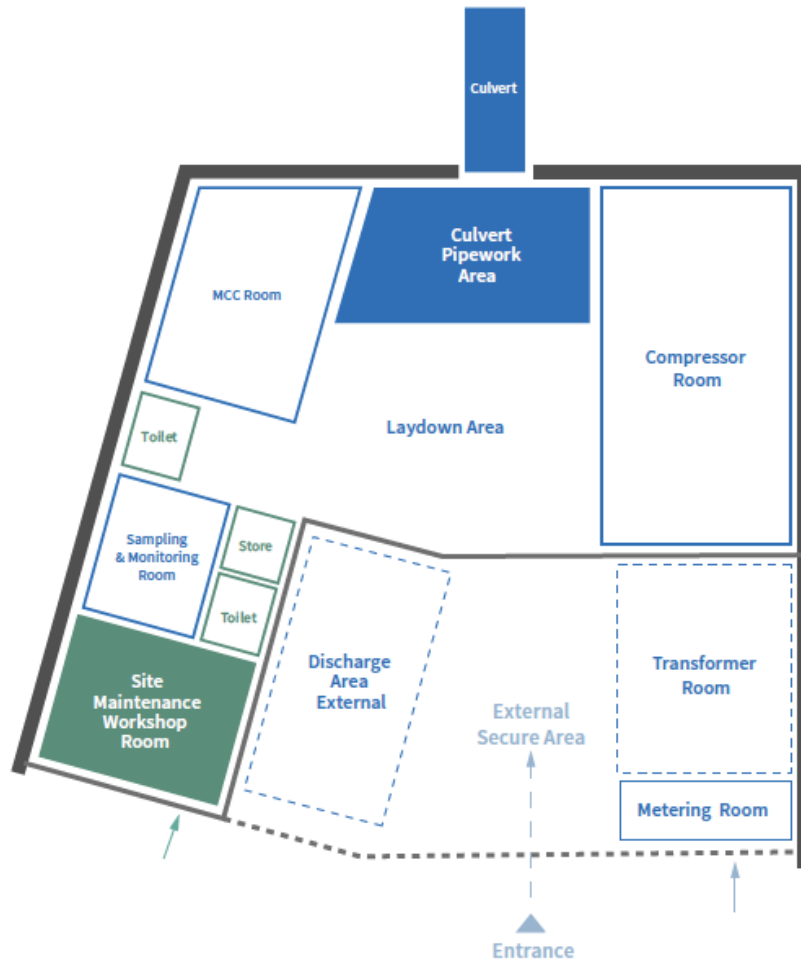
A separate stand-alone building was seen as problematic in terms of additional cost & maintenance, security (attracting vandalism & theft of machinery/ tools) and visual impact. An additional building would also be contrary to the key design objective for the reservoir site to reduce urbanisation of the site by minimising the number of buildings and access roads in order to ensure the rural character was retained.

Instead, it was proposed that the maintenance, storage and workshop facility should be located within the Control House where there was already vehicle access, power and drainage being provided. With the requirement for a separate entrance to the storage/ workshop room(s) as volunteers could not be permitted access to the operational areas of the Control House.

In the 2020 outline design to the reservoir application the Planning Design & Access Statement page 37 confirmed the **Control House would include; "a separate site maintenance and store area** for staff working on the maintenance and upkeep of the land"(Appendix A).

The facility was clearly shown on the indicative layout on page 38, copied below for ease of reference, yet this facility is NOT provided in the new design.

Figure 6.4: Indicative Layout



2020 design

Proposed new Control House layout (December 2025)

The new Control House layout does **NOT** include a Site Maintenance Workshop Room and this **represents a material change** to the outline design considered and approved by the LPA in 2020/21. This is despite the building footprint having increased from 430m² to 567m².

The applicant makes reference to consideration of providing the facility in the reservoir Visitor Centre area, but there is no clear commitment to where it will be provided, or even that it will definitely be provided. It is not shown on the drawings for the Visitor Centre, nor hub building for the NW area which were recently shared with stakeholders.

Given the current NW layout is shown with an offshore Visitor Centre accessed via a long boardwalk, that would **NOT** be an appropriate location for storage of machinery and tools. There being clear health and safety issues in terms of additional manual handling and carrying/ pushing tools with sharp blades along a narrow access shared with visitors, including children.

The separate hub building proposed would be better for access from the carpark, but insufficient space is currently available in that building as initially shown. There is also a conflict in use between a building which will provide the main food storage area for the café and a food kiosk, and storage of dirty site maintenance equipment and fuel etc.

Photographs of the facility for Site Maintenance (including a workshop and storage space) provided by Anglian Water at Rutland Water reservoir is provided in Appendix B.

Action needed by Portsmouth Water and the LPA

Given the material change to omit the Site Maintenance Workshop Room from the Control House design it is important that Portsmouth Water make it clear in writing to the LPA that this essential facility for grounds maintenance and external volunteers will be provided on site with ample space, and the location agreed with the LPA.

The LPA should NOT approve the Control House design until it is clear that a suitable alternative location for a Site Maintenance Workshop Room with adequate space and facilities will be provided on site.

If the detail cannot be agreed in writing before consent for the Control House is required, then **the LPA should include a planning condition to ensure that a suitable facility will be provided**, with the minimum size and servicing of the facility agreed with Forestry England and Hampshire County Council (SCP) management to be included in the condition wording. The location must have good vehicle access and ideally where staff and volunteers will have access to a toilet/ wash basin, a sink and power supply.

2. Landscape amendments

The Control House has been moved north to facilitate the revised embankment location/ design. As a result of this it is now clear that Ancient Woodland was felled on the north side of Round Wood that did not need to be removed.

While Round Wood is outside the application boundary for the Control House it is important that Portsmouth Water now commit in writing to replanting as much of the ancient woodland that has been lost as possible with native species trees.

There is currently no proposed landscaping, other than to seed the steep embankment slope and roof. While the applicant has indicated they will 'consider' additional landscape planting as part of Phase 8 there is no clear commitment to what will be done. Now the design for the embankment and Control House in this area is finalised there should be no reason that the applicant cannot commit to restoring part of the Ancient Woodland that they cut down. This should not be seen as a biodiversity enhancement as it is just replacing what has already been lost.

Additional mitigation in the form of hedge planting along the south side of the southern bridleway should also be provided, ideally connected into Round Wood as a biodiversity enhancement, and to improve the visual screening of the Control House from the SW. The new hedge would provide additional bird and dormouse habitat for feeding and nesting, as well as bat foraging to help offset what was lost in this area.

The LPA should press the applicant for a clear written commitment to replanting as much of the area of Round Wood that was lost as soon as possible, and also providing additional mitigation planting and screening in the area south/ south-west of the Control House before granting planning consent. With full details to be provided in the applicants Phase 8 submission.

I note that the HBC Landscape Specialist has also made comments regarding the need to incorporate additional planting / landscaping in the vicinity of the Control House.

3. Ancillary infrastructure

The Control House includes pipework that will terminate outside of the current red line boundary at the new ditch/stream shown to the south on the Control Building Landscape Plan (HTR-GHD-CB-RE-DR-T-0022 P05). There were previous discussions about the potential need for structures at the head of the new channel. For example, a structure for energy reduction, a kiosk, and structures to prevent access for children up the pipes. Some early designs of these structures caused significant health & safety, as well as visual impact concerns when shared with stakeholders. Nothing is currently shown on the Landscape Plan at the head of the new channel.

The LPA should seek written reassurance from the applicant that NO ancillary structures or hard landscape features will be needed in association with the discharge from the Control House building.

If structures are planned it would be sensible for the red line for the Control House to be extended to include these ancillary structures, as they do NOT represent landscaping, but are instead an integral part of the engineering design to make the discharges from the Control House safe in the Country Park recreational setting.

If ancillary structures are needed intelligent design must be used to minimise their visual impact and ensure they will be safe.

4. Lighting strategy

I support the inclusion of integral bat tubes/boxes at high level within the building frontage. The bat tubes are shown at slightly higher level than the wall mounted external luminaires on the façade, but lights will also be mounted on the courtyard fences.

It is important that all of the lights are the minimum power needed, only light the area being used by staff and are directed towards the ground to ensure that;

- There is no lighting of the adjacent habitat, especially the ancient woodland (Round Wood) where bat roosts have been recorded during previous survey work.
- The zone around the integral bat tubes in the building facade remains dark at all times so that they can serve their function and be attractive to bats. If necessary by shielding the lights to avoid light spill into the area of the bat boxes/ tubes.

Note: This comment is also relevant to Planning Condition 36.

The lighting Strategy ends on pdf page 42 with the following text; “Additional measures such as shielding and avoidance of illumination beyond the Control House compound. i.e. woodland edges which may be important bat foraging and commuting habitats, should be employed in future Reserved Matters applications wherever possible”.

Appendix A does not show bat roosts within the remaining remnant of Round Wood. Previous surveys have shown bats roosting in Round Wood. The roost buffer zone should include the whole of Round Wood. New lighting should not be allowed to illuminate Round Wood.

Appendix B of the Lighting Strategy includes lights directed into the courtyard area from the south-west and north-east fencing (Luminaires 1,2,5 & 6), yet page 35 of the pdf providing the visualisation of the courtyard lighting shows less lighting from these lights, even though the lighting schedule at the bottom of the drawing shows they have the same 50W output as lights 3 & 4 which are shown much brighter. Is the 3D visualisation correct?

5. **Maintenance of the vegetated embankment within the courtyard**

I welcome the inclusion of the 'Control House Retaining Wall Management Plan' with the application. I would suggest some points of clarification.

- a) The plan refers to removing any species that are not included in the original seeding mix during routine maintenance. **This should NOT apply to plant species that have self-seeded and survived from the adjacent ancient woodland or retained grassland areas.** While it is appropriate to remove species that are not currently present on site, or are invasive, self-seeded plant species from retained habitats should remain. Some of the creeping species and ground cover species currently present on site may be beneficial in helping to establish vegetation on the bank, reduce erosion and encourage biodiversity.
- b) Reference is made to watering the bank 2 to 3 times a week for the first 4 weeks. Heavy watering could wash away the new seed stock and increase erosion of the newly formed steep bank. The plan should be amended to make it clear that only light watering using a diffuse spray head should be used on the bank, and that if water starts to flow down the steep slope watering should cease immediately. This will ensure enough water for plant growth/ establishment, but not so much that it causes loss of seed and soil from the slopes.
- c) Additional inspections should take place after prolonged heavy rain to determine if maintenance actions to re-seed are necessary, rather than wait for the next routine inspection.

The LPA should request minor changes to the Maintenance Plan before it is incorporated into the whole site Landscape Environment Management Plan (LEMP).

Note: This comment is also relevant to Planning Condition 36.

6. **Alternative energy generation** (Planning Condition 29 – Phases 1 to 8)

*Page 12 of the Renewable Energy Strategy (Phases 1-8) 28/11/25 states;
Hydro-electric power, **as might be generated by the gravity flow from the reservoir down to the Bedhampton pumping station, is not considered to be economically viable.** Typically, hydroelectric schemes rely on a certain amount of reservoir outflows being exceeded for 95% of the year, which is not to be exceeded with a significant volume of water year round, given the reservoir's primary usage as water storage for use during Summer drought.*

If hydro-electric power generated by the gravity feed from the reservoir down to Bedhampton Pumping Station is not currently considered economic due to the intermittent use of the drawdown facility at the reservoir, then space should be made available in the Control House to enable hydro-electric power generation to be retrofitted at a later date, when use of the drawdown facility does become more regular, or the technology improves. For example;

- Portsmouth Water are already seeking planning permission for a new pumping station at Farlington WTW to enable more water to be transferred not only to its western supply area, but also onto Gaters Mill WTW to supply Southern Water customers in a drought. Given the poor water resource situation Southern Water finds itself in the need for this facility will only increase.
- If Southern Water plans for effluent recycling go ahead they will be pumping recycled water up to the reservoir 365 days a year, with daily gravity feed back down to Bedhampton. Under such daily operation there must be the opportunity for hydro-electric power.

At a local level, EHDC has published a Renewable and Low Carbon Study (Nov 2018) –The study identified that there is potential for significant renewable energy development including small scale hydro electric technology. This is the perfect opportunity to implement or make provision for this technology.

In the reservoir Design and Access Statement paragraph 9.8 states: “*The Scheme design shall explore the viability to use renewable technologies in the new developments such as the Visitor Centre and **the control house**.*”

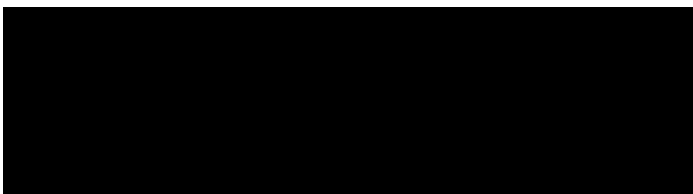
Portsmouth Water has set themselves a target of net zero operational carbon emissions by 2040. Their key deliverables over the next five years to reduce carbon emissions include;

- **Installing more renewable energy schemes**, particularly solar and battery storage
- Optimising energy efficiency at operational sites and offices.

When stakeholders were told in c.2018 that hydro-electric power from the gravity flow was unlikely to be economic in the early years of reservoir operation, there was a commitment made by Portsmouth Water to provide space within the Control House to enable it to be retrofitted at a later date when drawdown events increased, or new technology might make the provision economic.

If there is insufficient demand at the Control House for the power generated by a hydro-electric then the power could be sold back to the grid, or transferred to Bedhampton to offset the energy needed to pump water. This could be accommodated through a duct in the tunnel to be constructed between the reservoir and Bedhampton.

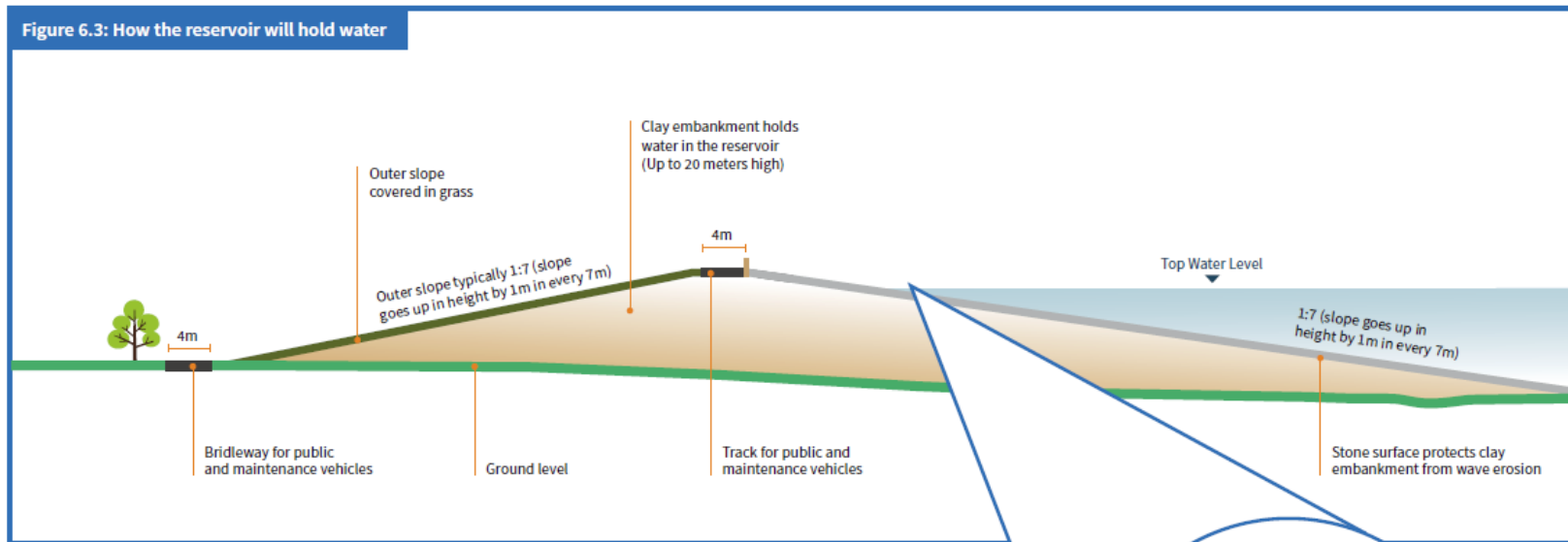
The LPA should make it a condition of any planning consent for the Control House that space is provided at an appropriate location(s) within the Control House to future proof the potential for hydro-electric power to be generated at a later date when drawdown events become more regular.



Appendix A

Havant Thicket Reservoir – Design & Access Statement (for original reservoir planning application 2020)

Extracts relevant to Control House pages 37 – 39



Control House

6.16. The control building is an operational structure required for the reservoir, the location of which is dictated by the culvert. The proposed location for the control building is within the Conservation Area and opposite the Registered Park and Garden. In response to this, Portsmouth Water has tried to reduce the visual impact of the building by embedding it within the embankment, proposing large areas of living roof and a natural palette for the material finishes. Designs will continue to develop in consultation with the Conservation Officer for EHDC and HBC to ensure sympathetic design.

Indicative Layout

6.17. The schedule of accommodation and adjacencies required has informed an indicative layout, shown in Figure 6.4. This is an approximate arrangement of the spaces and shows the following components:

- The office and toilet are located together;
- There is a separate site maintenance and store area for staff working on the maintenance and upkeep of the land;
- There is a direct external access to the culvert

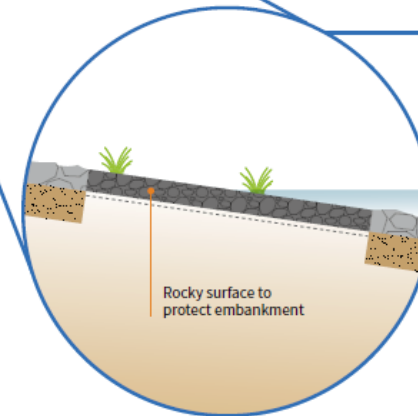
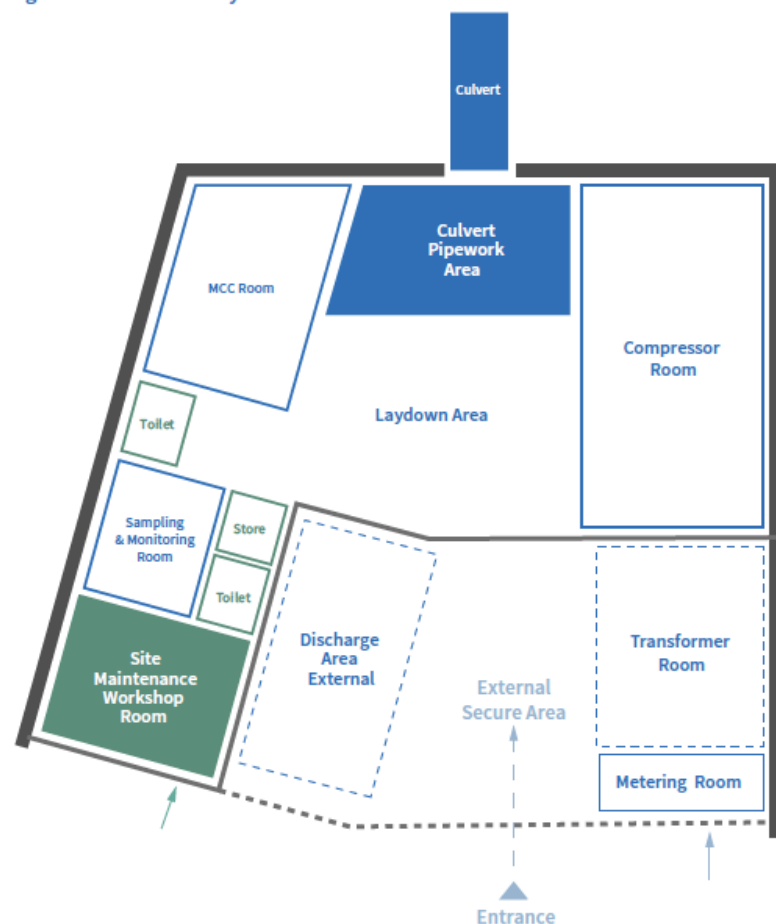


Figure 6.4: Indicative Layout



Accessibility

- 6.18. The control building has been designed as a single storey building. This is to reduce the visual impact as well as removing the need for an internal staircase and lift. The control building and maintenance store are not designed to be accessed by the general public.
- 6.19. The secure external zone will be accessed via a gate in the front wall. This will also be the entrance used for emergency vehicles and lorries.

Scale

- 6.20. A single storey, instead of two-storey building, will reduce the impact on the landscape. The visualisation (Figure 6.5) below illustrates how a single storey would minimise the visual impact of the building on the site. The proposed envelope of the building is:
- Maximum width of building frontage = 33m
 - Maximum height of building wall above external ground level = 6m
 - Schedule of accommodation total area = approximately 430m²

Roof

- 6.21. Roof plant may be required and might protrude past the roof profile, where possible this will be screened. The design will try to reduce any ventilation on the roof by using the courtyard and building façade.
- 6.22. A green roof is proposed. A living roof would provide additional wildlife habitat and an increase in biodiversity. This would also reduce the visual impact of the building when viewed from the crest embankment.

Figure 6.5: Visualisation showing control house embedded into embankment



Figure 6.6: Example of a living roof



Security

6.23. The form of the building with an internal courtyard creates a fully secured area. There will be perimeter security fencing around all accessible retained sides, with the front face of the building being a solid wall with access gates and doors.

Appearance

6.24. As this is a sensitive area, natural materials are proposed to further reduce the visual impact of this structure.

6.25. The aspiration is for the control house to use a limited palette of materials and to be sympathetic to its surroundings, with large areas of living roof and a stone clad front facade. Figure 6.7 shows an indicative palette of natural materials to be considered for the control building. The detail of the appearance and material for the control house will be subject to reserved matters applications.

A living roof would provide additional wildlife habitat and an increase in biodiversity.

Appendix B

Grounds Maintenance Building – Rutland Water Reservoir (2015)



Large secure building with roller shutter doors and big level floor area to accommodate storage of mowers, as well as large tools such as strimmer's. It provides workshop space with benches and storage for hand tools to facilitate maintenance of equipment, construction & repair of nest boxes, signs, benches etc. The space is used by volunteers and staff and houses toilets, as well as space for washing and changing.



Internal large floor area for storage of mowers, bins etc. Photos shows fixed and portable work benches and bins along with lighting and heating.