Document Control Table

Document Number:	HTR-POR-VC-VC-RP-K-0001
Title:	HTR Visitor Centre Statement of Community Involvement
Revision number:	P02
Classification:	Public (For submission to Local Planning Authority)
Author:	Joel Hufford, Senior Communications Consultant, Create 51
Reviewer (suitability and adequacy):	Eleanor Shipton, Portsmouth Water Communications Manager Stuart Abela, Portsmouth Water Visitor Centre Senior Project Manager
Approver (suitability and adequacy):	Ruari Maybank, Portsmouth Water Havant Thicket Reservoir Programme Director
Approval Status:	APPROVED
Policy/Document Owner:	Joel Hufford
Version Release Date:	30 July 2026
Date of Next Review:	N/A as now fully approved.

Havant Thicket Reservoir Visitor Centre Statement of Community Involvement

Contents

- **Introduction – Page 1**
- **Engaging with communities – Pages 2-3**
- **What people told us and how we have responded – Pages 3-6**
- **Conclusion – Page 7.**

Introduction

This Statement of Community Involvement supports the application for the approval of Reserved Matters relating to Phase 9: Visitor Centre for the Havant Thicket Reservoir scheme (henceforth referred to as HTR).

Phase 9 relates specifically to the Visitor Centre for the HTR site, as well as its associated facilities including a car park, educational bird hide and play and picnic areas.

The community engagement and consultation approach for the Visitor Centre reserved matters application has been informed by Havant Borough Council's Statement of Community Involvement (March 2025) and the engagement undertaken for the original planning application. Although the SCI does not specify consultation requirements for reserved matters applications, the original scheme was subject to extensive engagement reflecting its scale and significance. This Reserved Matters application represents a smaller phase of that consented development, and a proportionate consultation approach has therefore been adopted, providing continued opportunities for stakeholders and the local community to engage with the proposals.

This document describes the range of stakeholder and wider public engagement that has taken place to gain feedback on the Visitor Centre design proposals, together with people's ideas for these, from a broad spectrum of community representatives and local residents. The document also provides a summary of the

comments that have been gathered and how these have been taken into account in developing the proposed design for the Visitor Centre and it associated facilities.

Detailed records of the feedback are also available in the appendices for this Statement.

Engaging with communities

Detailed community engagement to inform the Visitor Centre Reserved Matters Application (RMA) began in April 2025. However, it is important to note that this is in addition to extensive previous engagement around recreational facilities, including a visitor centre, at the reservoir site that shaped the original HTR planning application which was approved in 2021.

Furthermore, there has been ongoing engagement on HTR, including on the issue of recreation, with around over 70 community representatives and other stakeholders (from more than 30 different organisations / areas of interest) via the dedicated reservoir project Stakeholder Advisory Group (SAG). The SAG was first established in 2004 and has been meeting on a regular basis since 2020.

Community engagement to help guide the design development of the HTR Visitor Centre and its associated facilities has taken place across a number of 'strands'. These are set out below, along with an overview of the activities delivered for each.

Stakeholders

Members of the HTR Stakeholder Advisory Group (see above) were invited to take part in a series of engagement events during 2025 and 2026. These are listed further below. Stakeholders attending the events included the following contacts:

- Elected members from Havant Borough Council, East Hampshire District Council and Hampshire County
- Elected members from Rowlands Castle Parish Council and Horndean Parish Council
- Officers from Havant Borough Council, East Hampshire District Council and Hampshire County Council
- Members of local community groups (e.g. Friends of Staunton Country Park, Friends of Hermitage Stream)
- Members of local environment groups (e.g. Havant Climate Alliance, Hampshire Bat Group, Havant Thicket for Nature)
- Staff from Forestry England (including those involved in managing Havant Thicket woodland next to the HTR site)
- Staff from the Forestry Commission
- Staff from Staunton Country Park (Hampshire County Council Countryside Service) which is next to the HTR site.

2 April 2025: HTR Visitor Centre initial design briefing to update stakeholders on the planning and design context for the centre and its associated facilities, answer people's questions and gather initial comments, suggestions and ideas.

27 May 2025: HTR Visitor Centre focus groups (Round 1) to present the initial proposed design for the centre and its associated facilities to stakeholders, answer people's questions and gather additional comments, suggestions and ideas.

26 November 2025: HTR Visitor Centre focus groups (Round 2) to present the updated design for the centre and its associated facilities to stakeholders, answer people's questions and gather additional

comments, suggestions and ideas. This included an update on how stakeholder feedback had been taken into account in the design development.

21 May 2026: HTR Visitor Centre focus groups (Round 3) to present the almost finalised design for the centre and its associated facilities to stakeholders, answer people's questions and gather final feedback (prior to submission of the RMA). This included an update on how stakeholder feedback had been taken into account in the design development.

Following each of the above events, the design presentation and other materials were circulated to **all** members of the HTR SAG via email, with people invited to send in any questions and / feedback within two weeks.

Under 18s

7th May 2025: Havant Thicket Reservoir Student Ambassador Visitor Centre Workshop. The Student Ambassador group (primary and secondary school pupils from local schools) was invited to site to take part in a workshop hosted by Urban Fabric. The children were tasked with creating a poster outlining their aspirations for the Visitor Centre, including the materials, information, activities and potential uses they would like to see. They also designed their own play parks and presented their ideas to the group.

General public

31st May 2025: HTR Visitor Centre public drop-in at Meridian Shopping Centre, Havant. A public drop in event was held at Meridian Shopping Centre, Havant, to engage with visitors on the proposed Visitor Centre designs, answer questions and gather feedback and ideas. Shoppers were able to view the proposed designs, including a scale model of the Visitor Centre. An online survey was created to gather views and measure interest in the proposals, with shoppers invited to participate. A total of 33 people completed the survey, providing valuable insight into local opinion.

May 2026: HTR Visitor Centre customer research. Formal customer research on the almost finalised design for visitor centre and its associated facilities was commissioned. This comprised face-to-face survey work with c100 adult residents in the PO7, PO8 and PO9 postcode areas, as well as an online survey of c190 U18s at Park Community School in Havant and Horndean Technology College (both secondary schools).

A summary of the feedback received from the above engagement activities is provided below, with further detail available in Appendix A (Record of feedback from v centre engagement) and in Appendix B (HTR Visitor Centre May 2026 Customer Research report)

What people told us and how we have responded

Feedback from stakeholders, Under-18s and general public

Overall, there was strong support from a broad range of stakeholders and the wider public across all aspects of the visitor centre design, including the over-arching site layout, the location of the key elements, the design of the buildings, the sustainability strategies, the location and appearance of the visitor centre.

A summary of the main feedback themes and how these have been responded to is set out in the table below. Please also see Appendix A (Record of feedback from engagement with stakeholders, Under 18s and the general public) for more detail.

An important area of discussion was around the location for the visitor centre. Whilst many stakeholders were very happy with the centre being located on water, there was a small number of people in the

stakeholder focus groups who raised concerns, both during the sessions and in their written feedback following events. By presenting a detailed environmental assessment, the reservoir visitor centre project team were able to clearly demonstrate that the proposed location was appropriate, particularly in terms of improving conditions for flora and fauna.

Across all of the engagement, there was great support for the design principles of using natural materials, increasing biodiversity and deploying innovative environmental strategies.

Feedback theme and summary detail	Response to feedback
Visitor centre location: A small number of respondents were concerned that the proposed location of the visitor centre on water would cause disturbance to shy bird species. As a secondary issue, they were concerned that servicing the building might cause challenges.	The proposed visitor centre location on water, with the building, accessed by a walkway, has already been approved in principle by outline planning consent granted in 2021. The proposed location, together with an appealing design maximising natural light and ventilation, will provide a compelling and exciting visitor attraction. This will give a unique experience for local people and other visitors, allowing them to get up close to nature in a memorable way. The design team has experience of similar visitor centres surrounded by water at Attenborough Nature Reserve in Nottinghamshire and at Brockholes in Lancashire. Both have been extremely successful and have provided an excellent means of connecting diverse audiences with nature. This is particularly helpful for people with accessibility needs who can readily access an excellent vantage point in the building and on its external terraces. Servicing challenges have been successfully addressed through a separate building which locates services best accommodated on land, as well as bulk storage for the visitor centre cafe kitchen. Furthermore, the services building provides additional toilets, a Changing Places facility and an additional café outlet. An excellent advantage of an on-water location for the visitor centre is discrete security. Land-based visitor centres require high fencing and associated security lighting, particularly where the wider site isn't closed off at night. This can be both visually obtrusive and causes disturbance to fauna (animal wildlife). Our proposal uses a drawbridge (as successfully used at the Attenborough and Brockholes centres), eliminating the requirement for fencing and minimising the need for security lighting. These precedents also demonstrate no evidence at all (with data collated over a combined total of 30 years) of people attempting to swim out to the visitor centre out of hours. Detailed assessments, drawing on documented studies and evidence, by our independent ecologists from Middlemarch Environmental Consultancy demonstrated that the on-water location was preferable in reducing disturbance to birds compared to a land-based location. The assessment reports have been included as part of the wider suite of documents for the Reserved Matters planning application for the reservoir visitor centre.

Hours of operation: Some concern was raised by a small number of stakeholders over how much the visitor centre will be used in hours of darkness.	The concern related specifically to the potential for disturbance to fauna, primarily through any requirements for lighting for use of the visitor centre during hours of darkness (for example, for evening dining or events). The proposed external and internal lighting design minimises light pollution through considered zoning, low lux levels and suitable light temperature fittings. This is set out in detail in the Environment Statement included in the Reserved Matters submission. The proposed hours of operation for the visitor centre will be set out in detail in the subsequent submission for planning approval of the Havant Thicket Reservoir Site Management Plan. It is noted, irrespective of the potential for evening use of the centre, that during winter, daylight hours may mean it is sufficiently dark to require lighting to be activated, both for amenity and public safety.
Assessment of bird disturbance: Concern was expressed by a small number of stakeholders as to whether an on-water visitor centre location would increase disturbance to birds, in particular shy bird species.	Middlemarch Environmental Consultancy were appointed to undertake independent and scientifically based objective ecological assessments (with the assessment reports included as part of the wider suite of documents for the Reserved Matters planning application for the reservoir visitor centre). Middlemarch used best-practice methodologies to assess whether shy birds would suffer greater disturbance through an on-water location for the visitor centre versus an on-land location. Their findings demonstrated that an on-water location reduced bird disturbance which they summarised as follows: '*Our independent assessment remains that positioning the visitor centre within the water is the option most likely to deliver the lowest overall impact on biodiversity.'* The assessment reports also state that: *'Evidence based upon peer-reviewed guidance has been utilised in the assessment undertaken, which on balance, clearly demonstrates that there is no conceivable benefit to the positioning of the visitor centre on land versus within water.'* *'The visitor centre, whether within the water or on land, is located within an area of highest anticipated human activity. The likelihood of bird species which are particularly sensitive to human disturbance frequenting this area is considered low. Species which are tolerant of human activity, or those which will more readily habituate to disturbance events, are most likely to be present within this area. As previously discussed, it is critical to reiterate that the reservoir has not yet been created, therefore birds which will colonise the site will do so by entering an existing system and a habitat that is characterised by the presence of the visitor centre and associated human activity. There is no incumbent bird community to disturb.'*
Education opportunities: There was enthusiasm for maximising all	We have developed the visitor centre design to provide education opportunities in a number of ways. First, the visitor centre includes a dedicated education suite, with a large

opportunities for education benefit within the visitor centre project proposals.	classroom / conference room space (suitable for a class of 30 students and their teachers) including a well-equipped learning wall, discrete provision of toilets (incorporating an accessible toilet) and cloakroom storage. This suite also has its own separate external terrace. This stand-alone provision allows the suite to operate independently to meet safeguarding requirements. Second, the educational bird hide has been specifically designed to work for school and college groups (facilitating a half-class of about 15 students and 2 teachers). It specifically differs from conventional bird hides (which will also be provided elsewhere on the reservoir site) in having a larger provision of glazed openings and a separate briefing area, together with information panels. This specifically creates an inviting educational environment for young people to encounter bird-watching. Third, the play provision at the visitor centre area has been designed to use scientific devices related to water, to entertain and educationally inform users. Finally, the visitor centre and surrounding recreational facilities, will incorporate attractive interpretative information displays explaining the nature of the reservoir and its environmental context.
Play diversity: In particular, young people we consulted were keen that the play provision was not just for young children, but appropriate for use by a wider range of ages.	The extensive visitor centre play area, incorporating a zip wire, has been specifically designed to offer stimulating and age-appropriate play opportunities to the broadest range of young people. This is set out in more detail in the landscape sections of the Reserved Matters submission.

Feedback from May 2026 customer research

The key findings from the research carried out with local adult residents, as well as local Under 18s, on the almost finalised visitor centre design proposals include the following points:

- **Support for the proposed visitor centre is widespread across local residents and students** (87% of respondents support the plans overall, with only 3% opposed).
- **The plans are seen as a positive addition to the local area, particularly for wellbeing and outdoor activities** (92% of respondents believe the site would work well as a place to relax).
- **90% of respondents like the proposed exterior design of the Visitor Centre**, while 92% like the interior design.
- **The majority of respondents (59%) prefer the proposed location for the Visitor Centre out over water.**
- **Walking and cycling routes and café facilities emerge as the strongest priorities for both local residents and students** (95% of respondents regard these as important).

The full customer research results are available in Appendix B (HTR Visitor Centre May 2026 Customer Research report).

Conclusion

This document and its associated appendices set out a clear picture of high levels of positive support, from across a variety of stakeholders / community representatives and the wider public, for the various facets of the visitor centre design. This includes the over-arching site layout, the location of the key elements, the design of the buildings, the sustainability strategies, and the location and appearance of the visitor centre.

Where queries or comments have been raised, a 'You said, we did' approach has been taken to transparently demonstrate how feedback has been carefully considered and responded to by the visitor centre design team.