

**Comments on Reserved Matters Application APP/26/00574  
re. the Visitor Centre and plans for the North-West corner of the Reservoir  
from Havant Climate Alliance and Havant Friends of the Earth**

**1. Visitor Centre Location**

**a. Will cause biodiversity loss and reduce opportunities for visitors to see wild waterfowl species.**

The Design and Access statement refers to the need to provide a balance between public amenity while “creating extensive space for undisturbed habitat creation”. The balance has not been achieved, and habitats in the north-west corner will be subject to a high level of disturbance.

We object to the Visitor Centre's location over water in Compartment 4, rather than set back on the adjacent land. As well as the loss of Wetland habitat beneath the Centre, the over water location will also increase biodiversity loss by extending the disturbance zone, of noise and movement, across this Compartment. We do not agree with Middlemarch that a Visitor Centre set back on the land would create more or as much disturbance than one placed out in the water. Evidence from Richard Levett has previously been presented to show that distance disturbance buffers do not apply in the reservoir setting as they might in open mudflats or estuaries (the example from Middlemarch).

As a result the visitor experience will be diminished because only the boldest of birds will be available to view. More would be available to view from a Centre located on land, at the water's edge, without terracing, but with large windows towards the south east and north east, similar to the successful Wetlands and Wildfowl Centre at Arundel.

Having a walkway across the water plus external terraces on all sides of the Visitor Centre, will further increase noise and movement disturbance. If the Centre must be out in the water, disturbance could be reduced by removing external terraces. If people want to view the reservoir wildlife from the outside, they could do so from the picnic area or the bird hide. If terraces remain, there should be at least no cafe seating which will increase disturbance and result in litter blowing into the Wetland. At the very least there should be no terraces on the north east and south east sides of the Centre, to reduce disturbance of the Wetland and increase the likelihood of birds being seen from the Educational Bird Hide.

With the location proposed, the Visitor Centre will represent a biodiversity loss to the Wetlands. To claim that this will not be biodiversity loss, as there is currently no biodiversity on this site, is spurious. The proposed Visitor Centre will represent a loss from planned biodiversity compensation for the Reservoir.

Of the Wetland compartments, Compartment 4 is the one which would have had the most potential for biodiversity, having deeper water due to the natural valley, and because the biodiversity value of the other compartments have been reduced, due to plans to create mounds on the land immediately to their north. Compartment 4 could have attracted species such as diving ducks which are more sensitive to human disturbance.

**b. Security.**

We also disagree that more fencing and lighting would be needed for a land based Centre. There are numerous examples of Visitor Centres set back on the land which do not require this, but which are robustly built and designed to resist break-ins and vandalism. Health

and safety issues associated with the current plan for the Centre might also result in the need for more lighting (see c. below).

### **c. Health and Safety**

We remain concerned that having a bridge and drawbridge to the Visitor Centre will present a risk to the public, because of its location next to an area with high levels of social deprivation. This creates more risks, not only of vandalism, but also to health and safety. Having a drawbridge up at night will not be enough to deter some people from trying to cross to the Centre, either by swimming or using a small boat or paddle board. The Centre itself with external terraces will attract swimmers wanting to dive off them. Therefore, lighting may be needed on the bridge and around the Centre at night, for both security and safety, increasing disturbance to wildlife.

### **d. Use after dark/impact of lighting.**

We object to plans to open the Visitor Centre after dark, as proposed for “out of hours” use, in the Design and Access statement. Stakeholders were originally told that this would not happen. Use after dark was not addressed by the original Environmental Impact Assessment, and the original hybrid planning application assumed no use of the Visitor Centre nor any traffic movement after dark. Planning condition 18 said that barriers at the northern and southern entrances should be locked at night-time to prevent anti-social behaviour. A proposal for use after dark is therefore a material change.

Even if there were to be no lighting along access roads, there will still be a considerable amount of lighting around, and coming from, the Visitor Centre, which will have a significant negative impact on wildlife in the Wetland and close by. This will include bats, badgers, glow-worms, nightjars and roosting birds. Even subdued lighting and noise will have more impact because of the position of the Centre on water which will magnify their effect. If the Centre is to be open after dark, there is more likelihood of the approach roads also having to be lit, and even if not, car headlights alone could create significant disturbance.

The Wetland will be a valuable habitat. It is essential that the lighting strategy ensures that the Wetland is not lit after dark. The over water location of the Visitor Centre increases the potential for after dark use to create disturbance to wildlife.

If the Centre must be used at night, the terraces should be closed off and not lit. Elsewhere light spill should be minimised.

A Condition should be made to either prevent the Visitor Centre from being open after dark,

or for it not to be considered until an Environmental Impact Assessment has been carried out into the effects of its night-time use,

or at very least to prevent access to, or lighting of, the terraces on the north-east and south-east sides of the Centre after dark.

### **e. Services Cost**

Having the Visitor Centre on a floating pontoon will make it more difficult to run services across from the land and involve a higher cost to maintain. There is reference to the need for a “vacuum drainage system”. However mechanical systems are more prone to failure and more costly to maintain. Where services emerge on/off the pontoon, they will be more vulnerable to vandalism. More time will be needed by staff to manually move goods and waste between the Services Hub and the Centre.

## **2. Visitor Centre other design aspects, materials and sustainability**

Although we support many other design features of the Visitor Centre, which make it more sustainable, we also have objections:

We accept that the turrets will bring in more daylight and help with cooling in hot weather. However in cold weather they will make the Centre more difficult to heat, by increasing air mass, limiting their practicality. There was also a design requirement for the Centre to be integrated within its rural landscape. We do not think the turrets blend with the historic landscape of Staunton Country Park. The turrets would be better replaced with roof windows/skylights which can be opened and closed, and which can also have blinds for use after dark.

Because it is inevitable that there will be attempts at vandalism, despite the drawbridge, windows will need external metal shutters or blinds.

Oak shingles, will be too easily pulled off and stronger material is needed for outside walls.

Rainwater harvesting is good, but we would also like to see a system for grey water collection, which could be used to flush toilets.

## **3. Visitor/Services Hub**

A much larger room is needed for the Grounds Maintenance Store. As well as housing mowers and other large equipment, it will also need to act as a workshop for any repair work required as well as an area for volunteers to gather for instruction etc. As this was designed out of the Control House, there is no other designated space for it and the risk is that without it, a large portacabin or similar will need to be placed on the site.

The Services Hub needs to be considerably larger to incorporate adequate space for Grounds Maintenance. A room for this should at least be similar in size to that originally provided in the planning application for the Control House in 2020

The Grounds Maintenance Store needs to be immediately adjacent to access for maintenance vehicles, so that equipment does not need to be carried any distance between them. Vehicle access is needed between the Store and the Maintenance Track. Ideally this needs to be separate from the public access path.

As with the Visitor Centre, we think that the turret would be better replaced by more practical roof windows/skylights. This would help it blend better within the historic rural landscape.

## **4. Educational Bird Hide**

We have a number of objections to this:

### **a. Limitations on use**

We think that the Bird Hide should not have been limited to educational use, but designed for dual use. This would better meet the needs of families, disabled people and those who are unable or unwilling to walk further to the next bird hide. This would have been particularly useful at weekends and during school holidays. Under current proposals it will be standing empty at these times. We think that a larger bird hide is needed, with a moveable partition so that half of it can be blocked off for school groups.

### **b. Insufficient size**

A larger hide is needed for wheelchairs and mobility scooters to turn and manoeuvre. More space is required for visitors to set up tripods etc. It could also make possible a V-shape frontage, with views both towards the north-east and south-east.

### **c. Windows**

Sliding windows could be shut when school groups are present, to block out noise impacting the Wetland, but also be opened when adults are wanting to use binoculars and cameras. As well as having bird protection glass, one way glass is also needed to avoid movement disturbance. External metal blinds or shutters will be needed to protect windows from vandalism.

### **d. Issues with the turret**

As with the other buildings, we think that the turret would be better replaced with roof windows/skylights. The turret may well act as a deterrent to birds coming near. A bird hide needs to blend as far as possible within its immediate surroundings. This is supported by Richard Levett, an expert with 30 years experience of bird hide design. The bird hide should also blend into the historic rural view of Staunton Country Park.

### **e. Boardwalk access**

The most westerly of the boardwalks through the reeds, should be removed. Otherwise this will be the source of more disturbance to wildlife in the reed bed habitat. Access should be limited to the on-land path

## **5. Wetland access**

Landscaping alone will not be sufficient to keep people and dogs away from accessing and disturbing wildlife on the north-west shore of the Wetland. Stock mesh fencing and/or dense hedging will also be needed to protect the boundaries of Wetland area Compartment 4, including along the edges of access paths, around the Bird Hide and the Viewing Platform, around the Slipway and where the Wetland retaining barrier meets the north-west shore.

## **6. Convergence of tracks in north-west corner**

It is not clear how the various tracks at the northern end of the Southern Access Road will merge south of the Visitor Centre. Cyclists and pedestrians will be merging with horses, all travelling at different speeds and in different directions (north or south) creating the potential for accidents. More details are needed to show how this health and safety issue will be addressed, possibly using barriers and signage.

## **7. Prevention of motor cycle access**

This is a major concern as motor cycles have been causing a nuisance in Havant Thicket for many years, creating risks for other visitors. It is important to prevent their access to the site and different methods and barriers must be considered. A compromise must be found between different interest groups. Walk Wheel Cycle Trust (previously Sustrans) have concluded that motor cycle barriers don't work and cause more disruption to other users. They have been actively removing them from the National Cycle Network. They think that CCTV and motion detection lights work better. However all access points to the site should have strong and effective barriers that can be closed after dark.

## **8. Play areas**

There are health and safety concerns about the mounds around the main play area. We are thinking of younger or SEND children who might be able to run off quickly over the

mounds and then be lost to view, if parents or carers are not being sufficiently attentive. Children could be out of sight approaching the reservoir edge without being seen. It is important that parents and carers have a clear line of site across the play area towards the reservoir. We are not convinced that incorporating water play into the provision will deter every child from wanting to get into the reservoir.

The young children's play area should have a low fence or hedge around it (sufficiently high to prevent young children climbing over), with one gate access and plenty of seating for parents and carers to watch.

Play equipment will need to be strongly constructed to withstand vandalism, a further reason for the whole site to be closed off after dark.

### **9. Car Park**

We support the location of the car park and plans for EV charge points and cycle parking. We would like to see the canopies with solar PV panels extended over all car parking spaces to maximise the amount of electricity that can be generated, and also linked to battery storage, to meet the high energy demand of the Visitor Centre. This has been done successfully elsewhere, locally at Lakeside North Harbour. Given the vulnerable location of the site, canopies may need to be set higher than would normally be the case, to avoid vandalism.

### **10. Planting Strategy**

It is proposed to start tree planting early along the western boundary to allow trees to establish to provide screening before the site is open to the public. In addition, early planting should include:

- a hedge incorporating a fence along the western shore of the wetland opposite the play and picnic areas,
- and woodland planting on the landscape mounds to help screen off the recreational access paths crossing the meadow.

### **11. Inlet for dipping platform**

The artificial channel for the reed bed and dipping platform has no natural source of water when water levels drop. How will water levels be maintained?

