

Working to Protect the New Forest



PLANNING COMMITTEE

Reply to: -

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Sent as attachment to Email only

2 May 2016

Emma MacWilliam
New Forest National Park Authority
Lymington Town Hall
Avenue Road
Lymington SO41 9ZG

Dear Emma,

**Application 16/00242: Restoration of Avon Water to a meandering stream course; etc
WOOTTON RIVERINE WOODLAND, AVON WATER, WOOTTON BRIDGE, HAMPSHIRE**

1. New Forest Association (NFA) wholeheartedly supports this application.
2. This project is intended to improve the ecology of the New Forest; virtually all other planning applications damage it in some way. It is not about improving recreation and recreational facilities may suffer to a limited extent. It is not about improving commoners grazing, although previous schemes seem to have achieved this. It is not about preserving archaeological relicts, although one trusts any damage is minimised. It is not a flood prevention scheme although there may be benefits to those living downstream. It is not about improving landscape although past schemes indicate an improvement is likely.

Concentration needs to be on the central ecological question not on these subsidiary matters.

3. The judgement required for this planning application is the same as any other; it should not be judged against perfection. Neither is the cost or value of the project a matter for the LPA.

4. The application site is within the New Forest Special Protection Area (a strictly protected site classified in accordance with Article 4 of the EC Birds Directive) and qualifies under Article 4.1 of the Directive (79/409/EEC) by supporting breeding populations of European importance of the species listed on Annex I of the Directive as dartford warbler, honey buzzard, nightjar and woodlark. Attention is drawn to NFNPA unpublished report *Research recommendations relating to impacts of recreation on ground-nesting birds in the New Forest National Park*. At 2.4 it states that there had been a "marked decline" in the population of woodlarks and a "marked decline" in the population of dartford warblers. This report reflects anecdotal evidence from NFA members that numbers of other ground nesting birds (including snipe, lapwing and redshank) have also declined. Such a decline is unacceptable and unsustainable if the Forest is to continue to benefit from the protection of the EU directive. This wetland/riverine restoration will result in an increase in a habitat that is rare in national, European and international terms and will add value to the Forest's stock of fauna and flora.

Working to Protect the New Forest



5. This site is of very high ecological value and after the work is carried it will be of very high ecological value. However the work will be traumatic and the planning judgement is whether the game is worth the candle.

Seeking an EIA in this situation is like asking Barry Peckham to paint a Forest scene with a four inch brush. There is however the need for a considered survey to establish a base line, to estimate outcome and then to measure post works to valid estimates. NFA believe that greater emphasis should have been placed on this matter in previous projects and failure to do so adequately means the case is not proven beyond doubt. In this case NFA are satisfied that sufficient work has been done and is planned in this area. NFA believe in its current state the site environment is marginally but continuously deteriorating and that this project will correct this.

6. A further judgement is whether the trauma has been minimised both in extent and in method to achieve objectives. NFA do not consider there is cause for objection on this score.

7. NFA notes the comments of the equestrian lobby but questions the need for gravel stock crossings (the artificial raising of the stream bed for reasons other than ecological benefit). NFA believes a built in advantage of such a scheme as this is that stock should be able to cross in a multitude of places. NFA asks FC to investigate the use of crossings installed in previous schemes to judge their necessity and decide its maintenance policy.

8. While one is sympathetic to the needs of the disabled, the comments of *NF Access for All* are over the top. The chances of two wheelchair owners meeting on a crossing structure, (in fact no new crossings are planned in this scheme), are incredibly remote and the penalty suffered by one party should this ever happen is insignificant (waiting for 30 seconds). Against this is the increased visual impact and introduced hazard given that the bridge suggested would be wide enough but not strong enough to take the weight of a car. The safe solution would be a track only wide enough to take a single wheelchair.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Graham Baker'.

Graham Baker, NFA Planning Committee