

Response from BMFC to FE November 13th 2020

Thank you for making the time to inform me of your current assessments and plans for your HRA response. I was very pleased to be able to comment on it last Friday and since, from our point of view.

May I briefly point out that model flying was concentrated at Beaulieu alone in the New Forest in the 1970s specifically to reduce any possible environmental impact generally. We believe that there was a general understanding from that time that this commitment would be honoured.

Following the New Forest Review of the 1980s and the 1987 Report the current system of yearly permissions, and the areas allocated to model flying were initiated. These conditions have been meticulously followed by model flying community up to the present time, with little if any problems.

We believe that as a result our environmental impact is very small (I have sent you a recent note on this). Additionally we have shown over a number of years that a system of limited entry while the heath is more generally closed can work well. Consequently we are keen to discuss and revise our conditions of access with a view to reducing our impact to the absolute minimum while providing useful rewarding recreational opportunity to our otherwise benign activity.

On your specific proposals for mitigation, may I make the following brief responses:

i. Time of year: 'Licence specifies permission only outside the bird breeding season, from September until January (inclusive)'.

BFMC response:

We consider this proposal is OVERLY restrictive, is NOT likely to achieve the desired conservation objectives, and IS liable to cause severe adverse impact on both the heath and other parts of the forest as illegal and opportunistic activities could become widespread and uncontrollable.

We believe that the impact of model flying on the natural habitats is MUCH SMALLER than you assess. Model flying is mostly done Easter to August Bank Holiday (i.e. March to August inclusive) and is not suitable, or even possible, in winter months.

Hence your restriction effectively destroys the recreation. This is not acceptable to a large number of forest users and will cause considerable discontent likely to be aired in the public domain.

We would prefer a more measured approach, involving a transition period in which we could establish improved practices.

ii. Monitoring approaches: 'Experimental study to check scale of impact, with bird territories mapped during spring over next 5 years in order to determine if species utilise the area given time to colonise. Results to be used as a guide for future permissions'.

BMFC response:

We support the intention to carry out studies to assess the impact of model flying on bird behaviour and would welcome the opportunity to contribute to such studies.

We consider that such a study would benefit from comparing the (very large) area where model flying DOES NOT take place to the (very small) area where model flying DOES take place. This would enable a proper scientific assessment of the difference, with little or no impact on the opportunity for species to substantially colonise.

iii. Activity specific mitigation measures: 'Fuelling restricted to car park and runway only. Fuel spill kits should be available. Plant removal on runway only as mapped in permission'. And 'Limit on numbers applied'.

BMFC response:

We have made great strides in the period since the last review (in 2015) to reduce fuel usage

altogether, and fuel spillage in particular. While there is no doubt more that could be done we are already active on this.

Plant removal from the runway is only ever carried out by hand (as specified in the current permissions document) and only to the extent that is required to enable a small take-off area to be maintained. In recent years most plant removal of this kind has been carried out by Ponies and Cattle (rather more effectively than we could achieve).

We are happy to understand your concerns on a limit on numbers and are keen to discuss possibilities.

Thank you for your consideration and I look forward to talking with you soon,
R.Sharman, BMFC chairman