

Beaulieu Model Flying Committee

18 Blenheim Avenue, Highfield
Southampton, SO17 1DU
30th November 2020

Bruce Rothnie, Forest Management Director (FMD) Deputy Surveyor,
South District, Forestry England
The Queen's House, Lyndhurst, Hants SO43 7NH

Subject: Model Flying Permission at Beaulieu Heath, New Forest

Dear Sir,

As you are no doubt aware, model flying has taken place on Beaulieu Heath since the 1960s, under licence, and has been popular, and successful without causing harm. We have taken great care to look after the site and abide by the rules. Now, in late 2020, we have suddenly been advised by the Permissions officers that model flying should be restricted to the 5 winter months only, Spring and Summer forbidden, until 2025. No transition period, or adjustment of conditions has been offered, the process seemingly high handed and overbearing, although the local permissions officer has been considerate and helpful. The justification given is to make habitats available for rare and endangered bird species, although recent Forestry wildlife studies show that no rare or endangered birds nest on this part of the airfield (it is unsuitable). Over the last 30 years there has been no noticeable diminution of common species. We believe that this is the wrong policy to protect wildlife on the heath and will result in increased illegal activity, such as off-road vehicle abuse which is currently somewhat deterred by our presence.

Model Flying operates on a small segment of the historic airfield and only there, within the New Forest, at the direction of the Forestry in the 1970s. In 1986 it was re-organised by Mr R E Hughes, Office of Deputy Surveyor, with a system of yearly Permissions, creating an exemption from the 1982 ByeLaws. This permission has been renewed each year since then, with the associated substantial fee paid, and the recreation has been managed by the Beaulieu Model Flying Committee without any problems, enabling many keen and dedicated modellers to enjoy the activity, and appreciate the forest, over many years.

In 2015 there was an HRA assessment, by Bridget Leyden (Natural England), resulting in approval for model flying to continue as a licensed activity, subject to constraints on noise, pollution and disturbance to wildlife. Since that time great strides have been made to improve these factors. Under the current licence the models are restricted in size and power, and only fly over a highly restricted area which is approximately 1% of the total heath. Models take off and land on the small remains of the historic airfield (registered by the airfields charity as a significant site), the only area of the heath actually accessed on foot.

We are, however, aware that other recreational pressures are extreme. Dog walkers roaming over the entire heath, usually with one or more dogs off-lead, and are a major factor in bird losses. Also the free roaming of trail bikes, ramblers, cyclists, and other ad hoc unlicensed activities contributes increasingly to environmental pressures on the SSSI, none of which is due to model flying.

The proposed severe restriction on model flying, which is not supported by any evidence (as documented in the Forestry's own ecological studies) is a bitter blow. It will effectively destroy the licensed recreation of model flying without yielding any wildlife benefit. We therefore hope that we can have your support, and the Forestry can cite the mitigation of the current licence conditions in the HRA for the 2020/25 period. We feel sure that NaturalEngland will accept this, as they did in 2015, and allow many people to continue enjoying this activity in the future.

yours sincerely (on behalf of the BMFC, and all model flyers)
Dr. Richard Sharman, Chairman Beaulieu Model Flying Committee, BMFC

ref: *A Survey of Ground nesting birds in 2020*, Russell Wynn and Marcus Ward (Directors, Wild New Forest)

ref: *Airfields of Great Britain Conservation Trust*, K.P Bannerman www.abct.org.uk

ref: *British Model Flying Association, BMFA*, National governing body of model flying, www.bmfa.org