

Beaulieu Model Flying Committee (BMFC)

To:
Julian Lewis MP
3 The Parade,
Cadnam SO40 2NG

C/o 18 Blenheim Avenue
Southampton SO17 1DU
Tel: 023 8055 838
Mob: 07414 0923

10th Jan 2021

re: ForestryEngland proposed restrictions on Model Flying in the New Forest

Dear Sir,

(I am not a constituent of yours, but I am contacting you on behalf of many members of my organisation, BMFC, who are your constituents. Also, your constituency contains the area of the New Forest of interest).

I contacted your office last week and spoke to your PA who informed me that you had received a letter from one of my members, Mr Ian Mould, about the ForestryEngland proposed restrictions on recreational model flying at the ex-WW2 Beaulieu Airfield. I trust he was polite and informative. I have recommended that my members refrain from too many contacts as I know MPs are extremely busy with national matters such as Covid, Brexit and others at present. I, and my committee, have been working hard to resolve our problem at a local level, but it is becoming increasingly clear that we may need higher level help, such as yourself, to fully resolve this. I am very grateful for your interest in our case.

Model flying has been a popular and recognised recreational activity at Beaulieu since the 1960s, and done only there at the Forestry's direction since the 1980s, with yearly renewals of a licence. The BMFC is the sole contact point between the Forestry and the model flying community (up to 300 people each year), and pays a substantial licence fee. It issues individual permits to model flyers who have the requisite insurance, CAA registration, and legal competence requirements. It establishes good practice, offers training and certification, and helps maintain the physical aspects of the environment there. It has had good relations with the Forestry and is proud of its excellent safety record.

However, in November 2020 we were suddenly informed by the Forestry that model flying was to be restricted to the winter months only, September through January, for the next 5 years. Of course, since ours is a recreational outdoor activity this effectively ends it. Most flying takes place in the period March to August when better weather, and improved visibility can be expected.

The Forestry's claim is that there has been a significant decrease in some bird species due to recreational pressure. **Their justification** is that Model Flying "might" disturb the behaviour of ground nesting birds on Beaulieu Heath during the period February to August and should therefore be prevented. They need to submit an HRA assessment to NaturalEngland soon showing their management of the SSSI and other protected areas of the forest and fear that it may not be accepted if the total recreational pressure of all human access to the heath is too great.

Our, BMFC, position is that while we understand the environmental concerns, and in general support the Forestry's conservation policies, we maintain that

1. **Model Flying cannot be a significant harm the Beaulieu Heath bird population**, because it is carried out at only one point (the remaining hard runway) and covers only a very small area amounting to just 1% of the total heath. Additionally the Forestry's own observation and research (as shown in research publications made available to us via an FOI request) shows that the area used is not one that the endangered species inhabit, and that other human activities of a more widespread nature are more likely to be responsible.
2. **No scientific study on the adverse affect of model flying and bird breeding behaviour generally** is known to have been published in this country, or abroad, as shown by a detailed investigation by NaturalEngland (information obtained by FOI requests). Contrary to this, the study of bird behaviour using close flying UAVs (drones) is documented as an emerging method of study by ornithologists, and has been shown to be non-intrusive and non-disturbing.
3. NaturalEngland approved of model flying in 2015 at the last HRA review of the New Forest SSSI. Since then there has been no consultation or investigation which proves it is harmful. Instead the management of model flying has been significantly improved and the activity itself improved.

We therefore feel justified in claiming that our long-standing and popular recreation should be entitled to continue as before. We would very much appreciate your advice on how to establish this position with ForestryEngland (Chief Executive Bruce Rothnie).

Yours sincerely,

Dr Richard Sharman, Chairman, Beaulieu Model Flying Committee

Forestry England

Rt Hon Dr J. Lewis
3 The Parade
Southampton Road
Cadnam
SO40 2NG

South England Forest District
The Queen's House, Lyndhurst
Hampshire, SO43 7NH
Tel 0300 067 4601

Date: 25 January 2021

southern.enquiries@forestryengland.uk
[forestryengland.uk](https://www.forestryengland.uk)

Bruce Rothnie
Deputy Surveyor

Dear Julian,

Re: Beaulieu Heath Model Flying Club

Thank you for your letter dated 15 January 2021 in which you shared a further correspondence on this issue, sent to you by Dr Sharman.

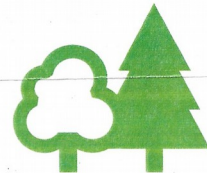
I have reviewed the correspondence and believe that the issues raised in this letter have been addressed in my previous letter to you on this topic (12 January 2021). However, if you require any additional information, I would of course be happy to provide this.

I would also like to take this opportunity to highlight that we have been working with Dr Sharman directly on this issue for some months now. Our permissions team have been discussing with him the changing requirements of the Habitat Regulation Assessment (HRA) we are obliged to carry out on all activities seeking permission to take place on the New Forest. This has included working through a range of practical ideas and solutions to help meet the needs of the flying club and the legal requirements placed upon us to protect this special habitats and landscape.

As we develop the new HRA, we will continue to work closely with the flying club, and other organisations running activities on the New Forest Crown Lands. It is our intention to be able to agree and clarify the new HRA with Natural England later this spring and for it to come into force in the summer. This will allow time for all organisations and groups to adjust and make any necessary changes.

Finally, I would like to restate that it is not our aim to curtail organised activities on the New Forest. As the land manager, it is our responsibility to find a way to meet the legal requirements placed upon us to protect the protected habitats and species while at the same time trying to support the genuine benefits to people of recreational activities on the Forest.

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I am positive that by working together with groups such as the flying club we can find a satisfactory way through these issues and my team are committed to achieving this.

If we can be of assistance with any further information or questions you may have on this specific case, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bruce Rothnie', with a stylized, cursive script.

Bruce Rothnie,
Deputy Surveyor and South Forest District Forest Management Director



Forestry England

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Bruce Rothnie
Deputy Surveyor

12 January 2021

Dear Julian,

Beaulieu Heath Model Aircraft Flying

Thank you for your letter dated 4 January 2021 regarding the flying of model aircraft at Beaulieu Heath and the concerns raised by your constituent.

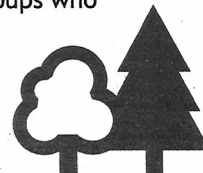
The New Forest is one of the last remaining strongholds in the UK for many rare habitats and species, and much of it has the highest possible conservation status. As a Site of Scientific Special Interest, it is protected by law and any activities that are potentially damaging to the designated features may have to be restricted or subject to conditions which reduce the impacts to acceptable levels. Events or organised group activities planned on the Forest require formal permission of the landowner before taking place.

As the land manager for the Crown lands of the New Forest we have a legal responsibility to demonstrate that any activities we permit do not unduly impact on ecologically sensitive features.

Consequently, any activity requiring permission must undergo a Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) which must be agreed with Natural England, the government body responsible for monitoring compliance with the legislation. Our HRA must be reviewed every 5 years and is due for renewal in this year.

Some months ago, it became clear that the next HRA would need to reflect more recent case law in regard to mitigation requirements. It also needs to adapt to the earlier onset of the breeding season for ground nesting birds due to climate change. We began discussing the implications of this with local user groups who

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have current permissions for activities. We secured an extension from Natural England to agree the new HRA and this give us more time to work through any potential implications with these groups and discuss any necessary adjustments.

These discussions are ongoing and this includes those with the Beaulieu Model Flying Club. Model aircraft flying is one activity that has the potential to impact upon nesting birds, and to comply with the HRA process, it is our duty to reassess any possible impacts at this time.

I would like to make it clear that we are not seeking to ban the use of permitted controlled model aircraft flying at this site. We want to find a way to allow it to continue whilst also satisfying the legal requirements of the HRA process.

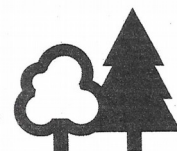
Many of the suggestions made in the letter to you from your constituent are positive, constructive and have already been considered in our planning on this topic. For example, we are aware of the need to avoid model flying being solely a winter activity and are looking at ways to avoid this. The suggestion of moving to a position where all model aircraft used at the site are electrically powered is also being considered.

We have noted with interest the suggestion made by your constituent regarding the establishment of Beaulieu Airfield as a private flying club requiring all those taking part to have specific qualifications or registration. We will explore this idea further in our discussions with the Beaulieu Model Flying Club.

We accept that there are other activities contributing to the potential disturbance of wildlife, including habitual behaviour of other visitors such as disturbance to ground nesting birds caused by dogs not kept under control. We have a series of measures in place seeking to address this.

We include groups such as New Forest Dog Owners Group in our ground nesting birds campaign, sharing details of sensitive sites and supporting the education of their membership on this topic. During the ground nesting bird season itself we place highly visible signage, asking dog walkers to stick to the main tracks and keep dogs under close control, at sensitive nesting sites and nearby areas. We also engage in an ongoing communications campaign with other forest organisations, such as the New Forest National Park Authority, to communicate consistent messages and encourage appropriate behaviours. Ultimately, of course, we depend on and expect all those using the forest to take responsibility and help us protect this special place.

May I restate that it is not our aim to curtail organised activities such as model aircraft flying on the New Forest. As the land manager, it is our responsibility to find a way to meet the legal requirements placed upon us to protect the protected habitats and species while at the same time trying to support the genuine benefits to people of recreational activities on the Forest.



This is a difficult balancing act and we are working hard with local user groups to support them and find a suitable solution.

We will continue to work with Beaulieu Model Flying Club and appreciate their support in helping us to conserve this special corner of the New Forest.

If I can be of assistance with any further information or questions you may have on this specific case, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,



Bruce Rothnie
Deputy Surveyor

