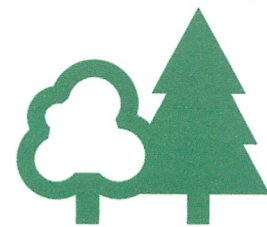




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Dr Richard Sharman,
BMFC chairman
c/o 18 Blenheim Avenue,
Highfield,
Southampton,
SO17 1DU

29 July 2021

Dear Richard,

HRA impact on Model Flying in the New Forest

Thank you for your letter dated 1 July 2021 regarding the flying of model aircraft at Beaulieu Heath.

We thank you for your clear commitment to help to protect the environment of the New Forest. I know from discussions and your correspondence with ourselves that you value the New Forest's rare habitats and species.

As was discussed with you in November last year, where an activity has potential to impact any of the qualifying features of a European site (i.e. SPA, SAC, or Ramsar) then a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) must be undertaken prior to assent for the activity being awarded by Natural England. As the land manager for the Crown lands of the New Forest we have a legal responsibility to demonstrate that any activities we issue a permission do not unduly impact on ecologically sensitive features for which the site is designated.

Some months ago, it became clear that the next HRA would need to reflect more recent case law in regard to mitigation requirements, which included cumulative impacts. It also needed to adapt to the earlier onset of the breeding season for ground nesting birds due to climate change and the greater knowledge of visitor behaviour patterns gained in the past few years.

Understanding that this would potentially impose greater restrictions on permissions we secured an extension from Natural England to agree the new HRA. The original deadline for this to be agreed was moved from the end of 2020 to July

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2021. Crucially this extension was applied to give us more time to work through any potential implications with groups such as yourselves and discuss any necessary adjustments. This is why we took the opportunity to keep you informed as the new HRA has been progressed. I am glad to hear the positive discussions you have had with our Permissions team during this period, and we hope that you can see progression for your activities from the initial discussions that were held in November.

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.

We accept that there are other informal 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. We have also worked with other groups including horse riders and cyclists, working closely with their professional associations to communicate the need to avoid disturbance directly to these groups.

More widely, we champion a series of public engagement campaigns, together with other forest organisations, throughout the year. These provide clear messages on appropriate behaviours in the Forest on a wide range of issues including ground nesting birds, the deer rutting season, cycling, fire safety, and keeping distance from livestock roaming on the Forest.

Balancing the needs of the landscape, people spending time on it, and the requirements of environmental and other legal protections and designations is a challenging task. We hope that by continuing to work with those using the Forest and helping to care for it that positive solutions can be found that protect this very special place long into the future.

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

Yours sincerely,



Sam Jones
Head of Recreation & Public Affairs

