



Presentment to December 2020 Verderers Court

Alteration to Hatchet Pond car park

Purpose

We are seeking the Verderers agreement to adjustments of the car park at Hatchet Pond that will result in a net increase of 693m² of land to grazed habitat. The primary purpose of this adjustment is to reduce impacts on the water quality, wildlife, and habitats of Hatchet Pond.

Background

Hatchet Pond is the New Forest's largest body of fresh water and one of Britain's top 7 ponds in terms of its ecological value. It supports many rare and endangered species lost from many other parts of the country. Consequently, it is designated, in its own right, as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and a Special Area for Conservation (SAC).

A total of 133 wetland plant species have been recorded here. This includes 11 species classified as extremely rare and important for nature conservation, making Hatchet Pond home to 87% of the rarest wetland plants in the UK.

It is a well-known attraction for visitors and a very popular place for families, dog walkers and fishermen.

The Pond is an artificial feature and relies on the integrity of the retaining dam for its survival as a water body. Its capacity of 75,000 m³ requires a 12-monthly inspection of the dam under the Reservoirs Act 1975, Section 10(2).

The ecological status of Hatchet Pond is under major threat from pollution and over-use and its important and rare wildlife are in decline. The SSSI assessment in 2013 classified it as unfavourable declining because of these issues. The increased visitor pressure during the recent easing of lockdown has increased the pace of decline and it is failing its condition assessment.

A survey by the Environment Agency in 2015 highlighted the increase in phosphorous in the pond and a later study by Footprint Ecology (commissioned by the Freshwater Habitats Trust, Natural England and Forestry England) in 2018 analysed the impacts and options for improving water quality and protecting the wildlife.

Alteration of Hatchet Pond Car Park

A partnership of organisations, led by Forestry England, and including the Freshwater Habitats Trust, Natural England and the Environment Agency, have agreed a plan to work together to take forward actions to halt the Pond's decline and restore its ecological condition.

Summary of issues

These are the issues that need to be considered in the plan:

- disturbance of sediments in the water from recreational use and the activity of non-native bottom-feeding fish
- pollution of the water from sediments draining off the car park area
- increasing nutrient levels
- baiting of fish and feeding of birds
- presence of exotic plants.

The lower parts of the car park also flood after prolonged rainfall and there is a pollution risk from the toilet block.

Fuller details and recommendations are set out in the 2018 Footprint Ecology report.

Plan of Actions

The plan was informed by a stakeholder (including the Verderers) and public information event in 2018 held in East Boldre where the issues were presented and proposals to address them.

The key actions include:

- Remove and rehome the carp and other non-native fish. This action has been completed.
- Engagement with local stakeholders and the local community. This has been achieved through newspaper articles, social media posts and direct correspondence with key local stakeholders, with responses collated by Footprint Ecology.
- Moving the car park back from the fringe of the Pond to higher ground, to allow for drainage to be contained within swales away from the pond.
- Removal of the toilet block (under notice of demolition with the planning authority) taking place week commencing 15th December. Alternative public toilets exist at Beaulieu.
- Provide improved information signs about why the Pond is so important and how the public can help protect the site.
- Increase Ranger patrols to the site to manage public use.

Alteration of Hatchet Pond Car Park

Car Park Alterations

The plan attached provides the detail of the proposal, which will require planning permission. The application is in progress and will be submitted to the planning authority shortly.

The car park will be re-located away from the pond on the higher ground adjacent to the existing access track.

The adjustment of car park footprint is calculated to provide a net gain of 693m² of grazed habitat.

The green hatched and dashed areas on the plan show the proposed new gravelled areas and the red hatched areas show existing gravel to be restored to grazed habitat. The turves that will be lifted from the new areas to be gravelled and re-located as part of the restoration of the lower car park.

The pink circle on the plan represents the only small tree on site that will have to be removed to facilitate the change of the car park footprint. A barrier will be installed to prevent cars driving down into the old car park area but will still allow for emergency access if needed.

Although the revision of the car park footprint delivers a net gain of habitat, the new car park footprint will provide the same capacity (50 spaces) as before but in a far more efficient lay out.