



giving
nature
a home



Environment
Agency



The Moors at Arne Project, Stakeholder Liaison Group

13 November 2019, 17:30 – 19:30, Wareham Town Hall

Attendees:

Project Team

Helen Morgan – Environment Agency Project Manager

Kevin House – Environment Agency NEAS (National Environment Assessment Service)

Vanessa Dare - Environment Agency Comms and Engagement Officer

Catherine Farrugia - Environment Agency Advisor (Flood & Coast Risk Management)

Dante Munns – RSPB Area Manager

Ian Alexander – Natural England

Chair – Peter Moore, Independent Chair

Representative of Ridge Farm

Representative of Ridge Yachting Centre Ltd

Representative of Ridge Residents Association

Representative of Dorset Wildlife Trust

Representative of Purbeck District Council

Representative of Ridge Moors Action Group

Representative of Dorset Bird Club

Representative of Arne Parish Council

Representative of CPRE

Representative of Open Spaces Society

Two Ridge Residents

Welcome

Welcome and introduction by the Chair. Brief recap of ways of working of the group, reminder to respect others and that we hope to have honest, open discussions.

Review of notes from last meeting

Notes from last time agreed, noting that they are not detailed records of the meeting but aim to capture the main points of the discussions. All drawings and notes from the meeting will be used by the project team in developing the design.

Brief project update and discussion

The project team are continuing with the outline design and modelling of the project. The proposed locations of the banks has not changed since we last met.

CF gave a brief overview of the types of things the intertidal and the freshwater modelling are assessing and what the outputs will look like. The draft outputs from the intertidal model were also briefly discussed. Siltation is a separate piece of work that is still ongoing in conjunction with the modelling. We expect silt levels within the site to rise so that they become similar to current levels at the edges of the site (ie just outside of the present flood bank) and it is also likely that the borrow pit on site will fill with silt over time.

Feedback from Public Exhibition

90 people attended which is a good number for a project like this and 13 feedback forms were received. A feedback report was circulated with the meeting agenda. The main concerns highlighted on the forms have changed over the last year and the focus this year was more on traffic and less on flood risk. It was noted at the meeting that there might be less discussion about flood risk but local residents and businesses are still anxious about this and are awaiting the modelling results with interest.

Purpose of Lagoons Discussion

A paper about the lagoons and their purpose was circulated with the agenda ahead of the meeting. Questions were asked by the attendees to clarify the details within the note.

The northwest part of the site is designated as a Special Protection Area (SPA) for the function it provides to birds as a high tide roost and feeding area. The regulations (the published regulations taken with subsequent court judgements) indicate that if you can mitigate (i.e. take away the effect) of your proposed development on the function of the SPA then you should. This tells us that, at the moment, we should plan to build the northern lagoon within the SPA, if further engineering investigations tell us this isn't possible then we can move it.

The southern lagoon is mostly outside of the SPA and there are a variety of reasons justifying its inclusion in the project. We need to provide scientific certainty that the project will not degrade the interest of the SPA. While we expect, for much of the time, that the northern lagoon will provide this having another adjacent lagoon increases our confidence in making this prediction particularly as it will allow us to temporarily take the northern lagoon out of commission for maintenance without losing the high tide roosting function from the area. While the majority of the site is not within the SPA it is supporting habitat for the birds (the SPA interest features) as they use it sporadically. Some account needs to be taken of this loss of supporting interest. Also UK planning guidance says that you should undertake your development so that you enhance the environment i.e. provide Net Gain and this is part of the net gain that we will be providing.

It was questioned why the second lagoon is not in the east of the site. Part of the Ramsar designation, which covers the whole site, is about the naturalness of the area and if the lagoon is on the eastern side of the site it would detract from the naturalness on this more natural side of the site (where there is still a near natural transition from dry heath through wet heath and mire to saltmarsh and mud). If it is possible from an engineering perspective to put the lagoon in the west, it should go there.

It was noted that the southern edge of the southern lagoon is not expected to fill with water on most tides. This is advantageous ecologically as it will provide a variety of water depths, it also allows a smaller embankment to be built as the ground levels where we are proposing to put the bank are higher. This means a less obtrusive bank and also that less

material needs to be imported to build the structure, reducing construction traffic. However, this does provide a smaller area behind the embankment and the requirements for the size of this area will be reviewed once the freshwater modelling work is completed.

Update on Public Access Discussions

DM presented the current suggestions for public access to the site. This uses the existing Sunnyside Farm car park with a disabled car park space at the eastern side of the site. An off road walking route could also be provided from the main car park at the Arne Reserve as RSPB are in the process of acquiring the Hydes Heath land to the east of The Moors. A circular route could be provided around the western embankment area and include an extension to the northern lagoon.

Concerns were raised about the continued use of the Arne Road for people to access the Arne Reserve and The Moors and whether the car park with 15 spaces would be enough. The prospect of a circular walk was welcomed as was the extension to the Northern Lagoon as this would keep bird watchers away from the village and the boatyard. The off road walking route was also welcomed and it was asked if this could be extended to include a cycle route.

Questions were asked about how many visitors were likely to want to come, comparison studies with other similar sites are needed to answer this. A question was asked if the three areas of Open Access Land could be made accessible to the public, currently there are no footpaths to get to them. This will be considered, however note that the area to the east of The Moors would be very susceptible to disturbance if there was extensive use of this area.

Concerns were raised about whether more could be done to separate traffic from pedestrians within Ridge, the RSPB are working with the Parish Council and Ridge Residents already on this. Suggestions were made about opening viewpoints in phases to help manage visitor numbers and also the amount of publicity for the site would influence visitor numbers and is within the control of the RSPB, if there are too many visitors would they consider making changes to reduce numbers, social media can also significantly influence visitor numbers. Questions were asked about a contingency if the Sunnyside Car park gets full, it was noted that the field adjacent is not within the SSSI so could in theory be used, this would likely require approval from the planning authority. Now that there is a proposed public access plan the project team can discuss this with the Highways Authority. Further changes are likely as these and other discussions and suggestions are explored.

DM gave a brief update on other projects in the area which includes an extension to the offices at Arne. This is planned for April 2019 and will be in modular form to reduce the number of lorries needed. Planning permission has also been granted for moving Coombe Hide closer to the water's edge.

Next Steps

The project team are continuing with both their investigations and the outline design work. The group discussed possible dates for their next meeting and agreed that early May would likely be a good time, with a focus on the Flood Risk assessment and another update on Public Access.