

HERTFORDSHIRE ECOLOGY

Providing ecological advice to Hertfordshire's Local Authorities and communities

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Mark Peacock
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The Campus, Welwyn Garden City,
Herts AL8 6AE.

Your Ref: 6/2018/1635/OUTLINE
Ask for: M J Hicks
Tel: 01992 556158
Date: 29/08/2018

Dear Mark

Application: Outline permission for the change of use of land to airfield with runway and support facilities including a clubhouse, hangar and car park with all matters except layout reserved

Address: Historic De Havilland Grass Runway Ellenbrook fields Hatfield Business park Hatfield Herts

Application No: 6/2018/1635/OUTLINE

Thank you for consulting Hertfordshire Ecology on the above application, for which I apologise for the delay in responding. I note it has yet to be determined and I have provided the following comments:

1. The proposed location for the airstrip is in the middle of Ellenbrook Fields Country Park. This currently supports a large expanse of open grassland which has been the focus of the development of a Country Park to offset the impacts of previous development within the former airfield site. The northern section appears slightly less ecologically interesting in respect of its grassland whilst the southern section has recovered considerably following cessation of airfield and filming use, encouraged by cattle grazing. The open grasslands provide a powerful expression of countryside and local enhancement west of Hatfield.

2. The airfield runway would damage those grassland areas of the park now developing ecologically. It may have to be levelled in places given previous disturbance, would be re-sown and regularly mown to provide a safe take-off and landing strip. The adjacent grassland areas would also need to be mown sufficient to enable proper functionality of the airfield. Outer lying areas could be left and managed as meadow, although the airfield itself would presumably need to be securely fenced to prevent public access or dogs onto the airfield. This would not enable any livestock grazing within this area. There would also need to be additional buildings, car parking and proposed viewing areas. The site would become an airfield.

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3. The proposed arrangement will not bring any ecological enhancements to the site more than is happening already. Furthermore, the direct impact would degrade the grassland and immediately adjacent land, although some areas may be less disturbed than at present. However, there is no evidence presented to suggest this would represent an overwhelming ecological benefit sufficient to offset the impact.

4. The airfield would represent a significant intrusion into the existing country park, effectively defeating the policy objectives of the park as a large area of open, publically accessible land. Whilst this may not wholly destroy the park's ecological interest, together with influencing patterns of subsequent use I consider the net result to be damaging to the ecology of the site, over and above any impacts on amenity use or character – for which I provide no comments. However the overall impact will remove ecological resource and management flexibility, as well as public amenity value and also change the character of this resource. The hundreds of people watching the airfield commonly seen at Panshanger (as stated in the DAS) hardly equates to a peaceful, rural setting as described.

5. Whatever the merits of relocating an airfield to this site, I consider the net environmental impacts will be damaging. The still emerging ecological benefits of the existing grassland areas will be lost or degraded – at least in part - and the use and airfield management of the remainder will increase disturbance and use of the open areas and degrade these areas accordingly or impact on their management. Consequently I consider the development of such a facility is inconsistent with the area's use as informal parkland of increasing ecological value. Without any supporting information to the contrary, on this basis I consider that the application should be refused.

6. If, however, other considerations prevail and the proposals are considered acceptable, it is essential that sufficient Biodiversity Offsetting is provided to compensate for the impact of the development. This would also need to consider the management required to maintain any new areas of species-rich grassland created elsewhere.

I trust these comments are of assistance,

Regards,



Martin Hicks MCIEEM
Senior Ecology Officer, Hertfordshire Ecology