

09/02/2016

Our ref: PD/S/31

Your ref:



The Planning Officer
Peak District National Park Authority
Aldern House
Bakewell
Derbyshire DE45 1AE

Natural England
Mail Hub,
County Hall,
Spetchley Road,
Worcester WR5 2NP

Dear Sir/Madam

**PEAK DISTRICT MOORS SPA/SOUTH PENNINE MOORS SAC/THE DARK PEAK SSSI
Midhope Moor restoration – Access Matting**

Natural England write in support of the retrospective planning application for the lightweight temporary trackway laid over the soil and vegetation along the route from Lost Lad to Mickleden Grouse Butts within the above named designated sites.

Natural England approved this work as part of a wider habitat restoration project within the Environmental Stewardship Agreement AG00444068. In supporting and agreeing to these works Natural England had in mind the duty to conserve and enhance the special features of the protected sites which was the purpose of the project (erosion control, rewetting and vegetation re-establishment on deep peat habitat). In order to deliver this management it was necessary to position heavy machines on the moor and this was most effectively done by using an existing access route.

This access route was acknowledged (in previous discussions with the Estate) to be in poor condition and not ideally suited to the use Natural England had planned however, the alternative to such use required tracking over a longer distance on the SAC habitat of blanket bog.

It was determined that restoration to a use-limited track by placing a lightweight material on the surface (fixed by hand) that reduced soil impacts by (low ground pressure all terrain) vehicle passage and allowed (assisted) recovery of vegetation both within and around the route was a reasonable solution that reflected the Estate need and desire to manage their land without creating alternative routes with associated disturbance.

The purpose of the application of the plastic mesh, which is currently subject to planning permission, is to allow recovery of semi-natural vegetation cover to exposed soils in the vicinity of the route, to enable continued limited use of light vehicles (quad bike or argocat) along a specific line for the purpose of estate management without further degradation of the surface and to allow general recovery of the surrounding habitat within the SSSI.



The route is approximately 660m in length and the habitat breakdown of the ground crossed is as follows:

| | |
|-------------------------------|------|
| Dry heath | 160m |
| Dry heath/acid grassland | 190m |
| Bracken | 55m |
| Marshy grassland/Juncus flush | 180m |
| Flush/Stony ground/River bed | 25m |
| Blanket bog | 50m |

The actual condition of the ground crossed may not correspond to the habitat described in the list above due to previous use of the route, therefore Natural England does not consider that the effect of this work is the complete loss of the amounts of the habitats described. Total area of mesh laid is 1320m²

The actual route and several alternatives were, at the start of restoration works, bare ground with some rutting and some ad hoc repairs (using timber and stone). Currently there is about 3500m² of habitat affected by vehicle use along this section of the route (including what constitutes the route defined by the mesh). The use of a mesh surface will limit use and disturbance to about one third of this quantity.

The effect of the work will limit the extent of vehicle use to a narrow band at 2m width and allowing some limited recovery of vegetation using techniques of moorland restoration (spreading nurse crop grass seed and boosting growth with limited lime and fertilizer). The effects of this restoration will be greater on the disturbed area away from the mesh track where no vehicle disturbance will enable a fuller vegetation community to develop.

Natural England will be happy to support the Authority in making an assessment of this proposal with regard to protected sites and species including a Habitats Regulation Assessment.

Yours faithfully



Richard Pollitt
Land Management and Conservation Adviser - Dark Peak
Natural England
East Midlands Area Team
richard.pollitt@naturalenland.org.uk