MIDHOPE MOOR – Access Matting

Retrospective Planning Application - Supportive Statement

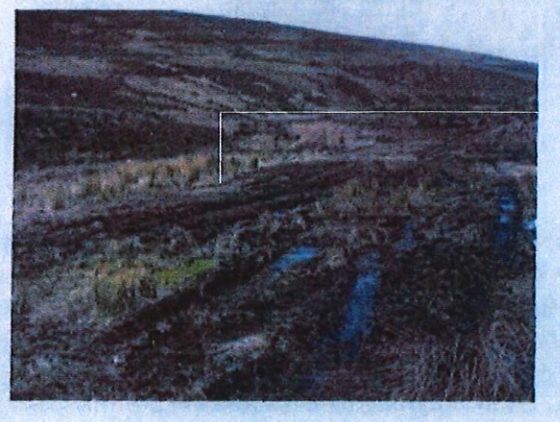
Introduction:

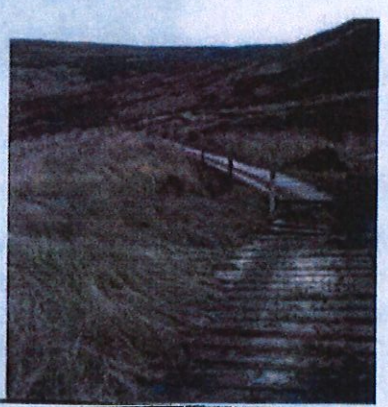
Davis & Bowring have been instructed by Wakefield Farms Ltd to prepare a retrospective planning application for the retention of plastic access matting on Midhope Moor.

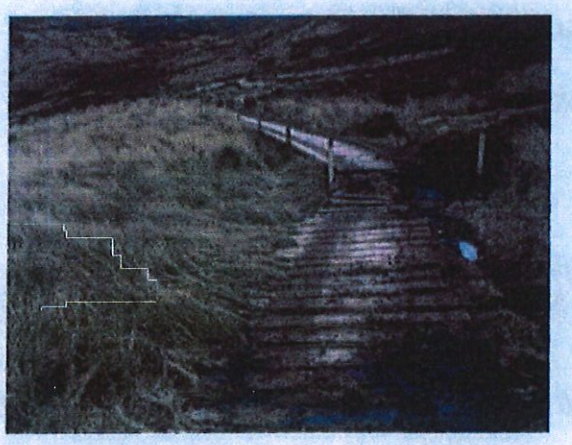
The purpose of this document is to support the planning application and provide further information.

1. **History**

The current owner purchased Midhope Moor in July 2012. At the time of purchase access routes across the moor had suffered from excessive vehicular usage by the previous owner which had caused deterioration to the surface vegetation and in parts rutting to the underlying substrate. This was of concern to the new owner and Natural England. The section from the cut gate path across the Mickleden Beck suffered particularly, due to the gradient and wet nature of the underlying soils. The previous owner had erected a number of timber structures through this section to reduce rutting, rather unsuccessfully. The below give an indication of the severity of this and were taken in 2009.







Photographs before installation 2012

2. Established Need:

Since the change in ownership a Higher Level Stewardship Scheme was agreed with Natural England to restore the wider blanket bog and works implemented to improve the existing access across Mickleden beck. The works involved with this scheme can be seen on the restoration plan attached. In order to facilitate the restoration of the land West of the Mickleden Beck repairs to the existing route were undertaken to facilitate safe access and egress whilst undertaking the works and for future land management purposes.

The route is the only safe point for accessing the land to the West via ATV. The route will be used to undertake the works identified on the attached restoration plan. The matting is required to facilitate vehicular access to a remote part of the moor, primarily for the restoration of the adjoining moor to the West of Mickleden Beck, these restoration works can bee seen within the supporting documents. They included, peat hag re-profiling, grip blocking and re-profiling footpath damage. These works are further bolstered by the High Level Stewardship Scheme in place over the moor to safeguard it for the future.

In addition to the works highlight the route was recently used to transport 20,000 sphagnum plants and labour safely to the moor to the west of Mickleden Beck. These works are to enhance the resilience of the blanket bog and increase carbon capture. Subject to the matting remaining this is something the owner is keen to expand on. If the matting has to be removed further works will have to be curtailed.

More importantly the installation of the matting has reduced further erosion, minimised impact and enabled the ground to be restored towards favourable condition. This is the only access route to this part of the moor and will enable safe access and egress for staff and necessary supplies to undertake the restoration works required. In the event of an accident it will also provide a swift route to extract a casualty or attend the incident.

There is a flock of hill ewes that graze the moor and this access route allows safe access and egress over difficult terrain whilst monitoring and gathering stock.

The route is also used by the Estates staff as part of their daily duties.

There is an established need for the retention of the matting to permit ATV access across a steep section of difficult terrain. Previously access to this remote section of hill was difficult and causing damage to the vegetation, without the installation of this matting access and continued restoration of the wider moor was virtually impossible.

- The route has been used for a number of years to access this remote part of the moor, with upgrades to the surface taking many guises by the previous owner.
- The upgrade to the plastic matting is one which has been accepted on many upland areas and reduces damage to the vegetation and underlying substrate as a recent study by Natural England showed.
- The works were undertaken with the support of Natural England who are striving towards achieving favourable SSSI status.
- In the event of an emergency, the route will provide swift vehicular access to the heart of the hill.
- Husbandry of the hill flock will be improved by allowing access to the heart of the hill whilst stock grazes the moor.
- Increased prolonged dry spells and wild fires becoming more prominent in the area, in the event of such an occurrence, the matting will provide a vital link to access and control such a fire. The route was used to gain machinery and man power to the recent Fire on the adjoining National Trust Moor

3. **Other Alternatives:**

Given this is a retrospective planning application the alternatives have been considered and disregarded.

Two alternatives were considered, laying a stoned access road or leaving the route in its current form and cause further to damage the vegetation/substrate.

The proposal of a stoned road was disregarded due to the nature of the underlying soils and the inability to get materials to site easily. It was also felt a stone road would be visually intrusive given the inability to maintain or encourage vegetation growth and incompatibility to planning policies.

The second option of leaving the route in its current form was unpractical and undesirable, when considering the wider moorland restoration programme. In order to undertake the restoration of the moor to the West of Mickleden Beck multiple passes by machinery would have further deteriorated this route. This would have caused rutting and an increased issue with runoff, something of particular concern given the siting of Langsett Reservoir downstream. Continued usage of such access also puts employees at greater risk of an accident, it also precludes swift access in the case of an emergency. It was also undesirable from the aspirations of the owner and Natural England.

4. **Designations**

The site is designated under the Dark Peak SSSI, South Pennine SAC and Peak District Moors SPA. The site also falls within the boundaries Peak District National Park.

Natural England undertook a Habitats Regulations Assessment on the whole restoration works which include the matting and granted consent to the works being undertaken, a copy of which is provided.

5. **Construction Methodology**

Description:

The construction methodology adopted was to lay 2 meters wide green plastic access matting onto the existing vegetation. The total length is 700 metres with matting laid to 670 meters, at a width of 2 meters. There are breaks in the matting at the cut gate path and Mickleden beck existing ford crossing. In addition, the width will be doubled to 4 meters for 20 meters at the Western end to allow room for turning and parking. It should be noted the matting is only to be used by ATV's.

Given the historic use of this route it was necessary to level the undulations by running a tracked vehicle over the route. The section running immediately south of the Cut Gate Path was steep and uneven. Moving a vehicle along such a gradient was therefore too dangerous. The ground was manipulated for approximately 45 metres using an inversion technique by experienced contractors to provide a level stable surface upon which to lay the matting. It should be noted that this section is non interest feature vegetation and was previously damaged through excessive

vehicle usage. Down the gradient the surface was loose rutted stone which was flattened out reducing the ruts. The old wooden structures were removed. The existing material was re-aligned along the line of the access route onsite and consolidated the line into one desired line to reduce existing and future erosion. For the wider restoration works required daily access along this route over multiple years was required and so the plastic matting was decided upon to provide a long term wearing surface.

In the bottom the material was taken from within the line and placed on the bottom side, turning the material over to create a surface flat for the plastic to be pinned too. This created a suitable route for the restoration project and also improved the area for the future by reducing erosion.

Some materials used were also reused from previous repairs by previous owners. The plastic matting was then laid onto the existing surface and pinned into place at intervals as required. In sections of wetter soils it may be necessary to double up the number of pins. In addition these areas of wet ground may require the laying of log rafts in due course.

The entire route was then seeded and additions of lime and fertiliser repeated until a suitable coverage of vegetation is achieved.

In the event of the wet flush sections are not facilitating adequate access and allowing regeneration, a log raft will be laid on top of the matting and anchored at either end, if required.

Site Considerations:

The route has been carefully selected to avoid areas of blanket bog and deep peat, whilst not altering the existing route. The majority of the route passes over shallow peat, with the main vegetation type being acidic grassland, bracken and soft rush. There are sections of heather and bilberry to the Eastern end.

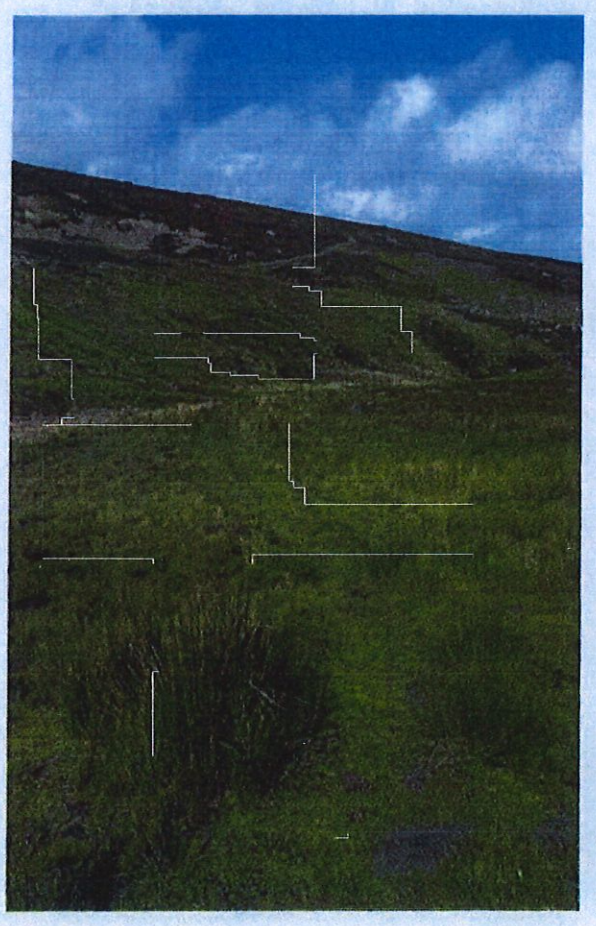
The existing route was also retained due to the existing ford water crossing and the desire to restore the degraded vegetation. It should be noted in parts the width of the route historically ran to 10 meters in parts and the whole has been restored.

Breeding Birds:

To avoid disturbance to breeding birds, construction was undertaken during the period 1st July – 14th April.

6. Visual Impact:

The site sits 2.5 miles from the nearest public road. Whilst the route is visible from other parts of the adjoining moorland the majority of visitors to this remote part of the moorland do not leave the cut gate path due to the difficult terrain. The siting of the matting is on the edge of a small valley which has aided in dramatically reducing the landscape and visual impact.



The two metre matting was only available in a green at the time of installation. Whilst to begin with it appeared rather stark, a large volume of seed has been applied to the route since the matting was laid to enhance the restoration and blending of the matting into the surrounding moorland. In parts it has completely disappeared into the vegetation as can be seen in the photograph below.

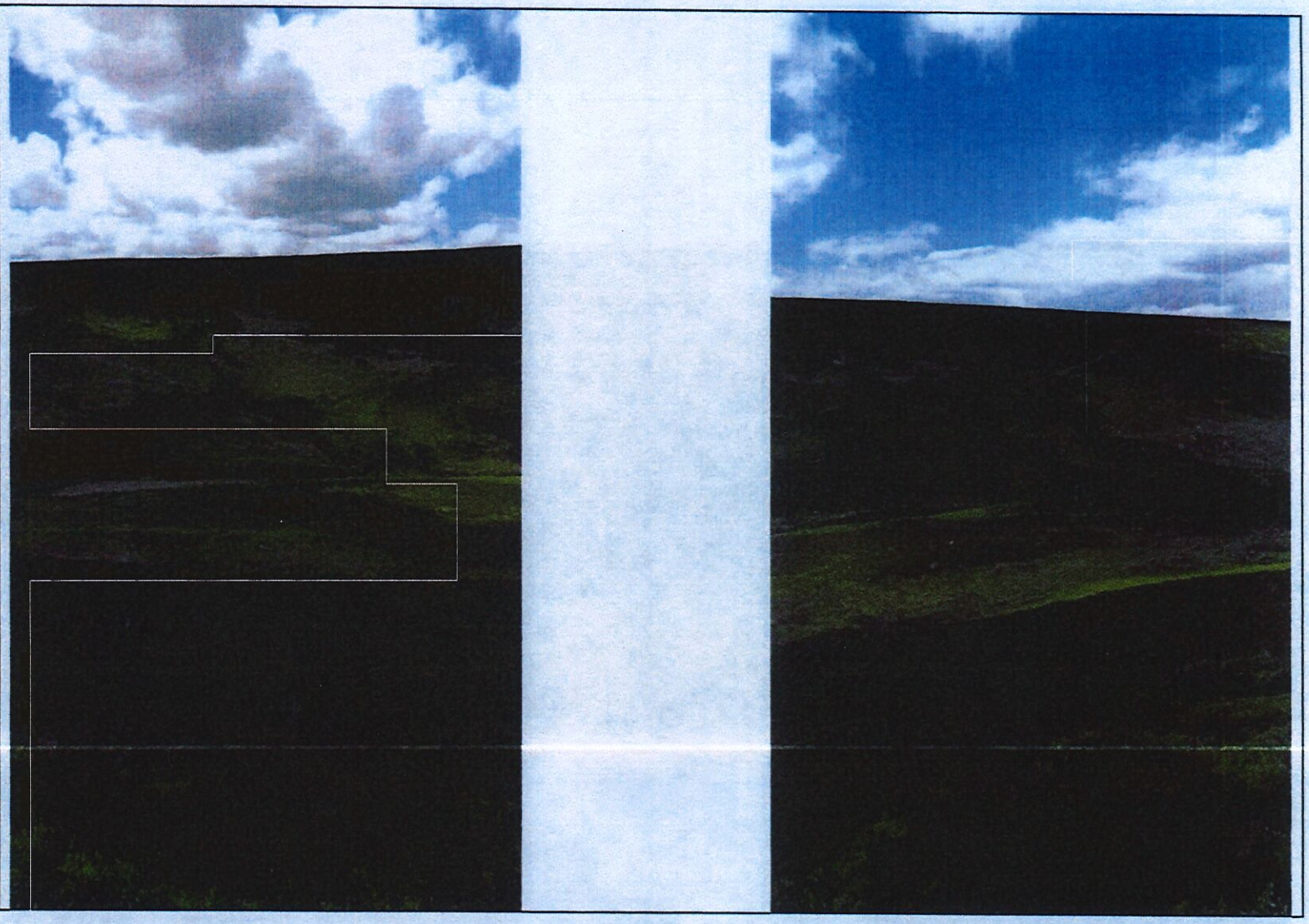
The site cannot be viewed from any public road and visually the route can only be seen from the cut gate path. It is also only visible for a total of 780 metres, part of which is obscured due to the terrain or only visible edge on. The cut gate path is used heavily by mountain bikers, most of which are travelling at speed or concentrating on traversing the difficult terrain.

The following photographs were taken on the 15th June 2017. Photographs taken with Samsung S6 mobile phone at 16 megapixel. All grid references were taken using a Garmin etrex GPS unit with an accuracy of 10 metres.

Point	OS Grid Reference	Photograph
A	SK 1921 9818	

B	SK 1924 9811	

C	SK 1928 9795	

D	SK 1930 9785	

E	SK 1934 9776	

F	SK 1935 9770