

Matthew Rees
Planning Officer
London Borough of Hounslow
Civic Centre
Lampton Road
Hounslow
TW3 4DN.

14 September 2018

Dear Mr Rees,

System Reference: P/2018/3196
Hounslow Heath Golf Course, Staines Road, Hounslow, London TW4 5DS

River Crane Feasibility Study
Ecological Management Plan

Following the deposition of a number of documents in relation to the above application, including the above documents in discharge of Planning Condition 33, Friends of the River Crane Environment (“FORCE”) has the following comments which pertain to the application as a whole.

FORCE is disappointed that there remains no commitment from the developer to provide public access into the site by means of a public footpath on the east side of the River Crane or the Mill Stream. Instead, a perimeter security fence is proposed, which will present an unattractive and potentially intimidating aspect to residents walking along the west bank of the River Crane. FORCE understands that the developer remains open to the possibility of enabling public access once the facility has been open and operational for a period. However, the best time to plan for such access is now, at the design stage, rather than later when the facility is already operational and when any change will involve additional cost and changes to established procedures.

FORCE believes that such access could be provided relatively easily and with significant benefits for the public and the site operator. A path could run the entire length of the site, utilising the existing pedestrian underpass near to Baber Bridge. A new pedestrian bridge over the river could be provided at low cost, which would enable attractive circular walks for residents and adoption of the site for events such as Park Run, providing additional public health benefits. A café could be provided, accessible to both paying users of the facility and members of the public attracted by the paths: the nearest competing riverside cafés are located several kilometres distant, at Cranford Park in the north and Kneller Gardens in the south.

FORCE believes that public access into the commercial facilities could be controlled by the issue of wristbands, and that security staff should be deployed to check wristbands and engage potential customers rather than to police breaches of the

perimeter fence. Experience at the adjacent site of Feltham Marshalling Yards suggests that no matter the level of investment in fencing, motivated individuals will succeed in breaching it on a regular basis.

FORCE believes that the provision of public access would be in the commercial interest of the developer, as it would enable passing visitors to view the facilities at close range and potentially convert into subsequent paying customers. It would also potentially reduce vandalism and encourage greater community acceptance of the facility: without public access, residents will merely experience the noise intrusion of the facilities from a distance, and feel and express alienation at the sight of a perimeter fence.

FORCE also believes that provision of public access could greatly enhance the public benefit of the development by linking in with potential improvements at adjacent sites. To the south, improvements are already well advanced at Pevensy and Little Park, and the planned development of a temporary signalling depot on Feltham Marshalling Yards provides an opportunity to resolve outstanding public access issues at the east side of that site. To the north, the London Borough of Hillingdon is starting a major National Lottery project to develop Cranford Park, the developer SEGRO is committed to public-space improvements at the Causeway site, and interest is building, including from the council and Heathrow Airport Limited, in improving Donkey Wood and Brazil Mill Wood adjacent to the Hounslow Heath site. FORCE is very keen to see the Hounslow Heath development fully integrated into these improvements.

There is great potential to preserve and improve areas of heathland and acid grassland within the site – so as to help preserve the unique Hounslow Heath habitat. This is partly acknowledged in the proposals – but there are no maps which explicitly identify the areas to be protected and enhanced. Without these areas being clearly identified then any general commitment to this issue has little real value. In the same way, the specific locations, numbers and sizes of hibernacula need to be specified.

FORCE remains keen to work with the Council and with the developer to bring these improvements about. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss our proposals further.

Yours sincerely,

Gary Backler,
Trustee, Friends of the River Crane Environment