

## **Statement for Princes Parade Stopping Up Order Public Inquiry from Martin Whybrow, Save Princes Parade**

**Summary:** My evidence considers the likely impact of the proposed Princes Parade stopping-up and diversion Order upon the Royal Military Canal and its setting, with particular focus upon biodiversity and wildlife. It highlights species of local and national importance, including red-listed birds, on the site. ~~Among the clear detrimental effects considered in my evidence is related to lighting from the road, so close to the canal.~~ In my opinion, because there is no adequate, full environmental plan of mitigation, that is sufficient evidence to justify the Secretary of State declining to confirm the Order.

### **1. Introduction**

1.1 I am speaking as a resident in the ward in which Princes Parade lies. I am also a Hythe town councillor and a former Kent County Councillor for Hythe and Hythe West.

1.2 Over 25+ years I have spent time on and around Princes Parade on an almost daily basis, usually with my binoculars, as it has always proved to be an interesting site for wildlife.

1.3 I have recorded sightings over those years and have built up a comprehensive picture of the wildlife, on the site itself and on the eastern section of the protected Royal Military Canal.

1.4 I do not want to repeat what others have said, so will concentrate on the biodiversity aspects of what is proposed.

### **2. Mitigation**

2.1 I believe the mitigation measures that have been secured in relation to environmental impacts related to the stopping up of the road are inadequate.

2.2 Paragraph 8.200 of the Officer's Committee Report on the planning application states: "*The ES [Environmental Statement] identifies that the completed development would represent a fundamental change to the habitat status of the site, as well as introducing physical barriers to movement, lighting, human disturbance, traffic and predation by pets into the area.*"

2.3 The stopping up of the road is a fundamental part of that impact. Indeed, this is accepted in the District Council's May 2021 response to the statutory consultation (Buckles Response to Statutory Consultation May 2021):

2.4 "It is accepted by the Council that the closure and diversion of part of Princes Parade as it passes through the development will directly contribute in part to the identified environmental impacts for the development."

~~2.5 The fact that there has not been a full Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) exercise is admitted by Lloyd Bore on behalf of the council: Ecological Method Statement (Lloyd Bore 2021) Ref. 3609-LLB-RP-EC-0015 (Page 3-1.6).~~

2.6 In my opinion the above uncertainty means that the proposed stopping-up and diversion Order should not be confirmed given the absence of a full ecological appraisal.

### **3. Impact on wildlife on the Princes Parade site**

~~3.1 There will be significant adverse environmental impacts to wildlife and flora as a direct consequence of the road closure, diversion and construction.~~

3.2 The site itself is an important habitat for **breeding migrant birds**. In particular, Whitethroats, Blackcaps and Chiffchaffs are common breeders here. An early sign of Spring is when the first Whitethroat is spotted, establishing its territory on Princes Parade for the new breeding season.

3.3 The site is also an important breeding and feeding area for **local resident birds**. Regularly sighted are Starlings, House Sparrows, Dunnocks, Linnets and Wrens. These are common birds but, certainly in the case of Starlings and House Sparrows, with worrying local and national declines in numbers. Indeed, the national decline in Starlings and House Sparrows has led to them being red-listed in the most recent 'Birds of Conservation Concern' publication.

3.4 Other birds that commonly feed on or above the site are Swallows, Swifts, House Martins, Goldfinches, and Kestrels; a less commonly recorded feeder has been Barn Owl. This reflects the diversity of insects, small mammals and flora on the site.

3.5 There was been no full wintering birds survey, something that was flagged in 2017 by Kent County Council Ecology in objecting to the planning application for the development and not subsequently addressed.

3.6 Princes Parade is also important for arriving and departing **migrating birds**. Its dense scrub provides a safe haven on a heavily developed coastline with no other natural coastal havens until the Folkestone Lower Leas to the east and beyond the army ranges as far as Dymchurch to the west.

3.7 In the council's own words, as relayed by Lloyd Bore: "The on-site grassland community is not common within the immediate local landscape. For this reason, the on-site grassland community is of local botanical importance." (Page 7, 2.10 Ecological Method Statement).

3.8 There have been rare migrants recorded here including, in Summer 2020, Night Heron, which roosted in thick scrub on the site. Other scarce migrants that have been recorded on the site and eastern section of the Royal Military Canal include Great Northern Diver, Black-necked Grebe, Slavonian Grebe, Scaup, Jack Snipe, Short-eared Owl, Hoopoe, Shore Lark and Snow Bunting.

3.8 In addition, the site is of local importance for slowworm, common lizard and grass snake. While some mitigation work has been carried out in relation to reptiles, I consider this to have been inadequate and primarily focused on the southern edge of the site, rather than the northern section, where the road realignment will run.

#### **4. Impact on wildlife on the canal**

4.1 In terms of the impact on the canal wildlife, as the Lloyd Bore Ecological Mitigation Strategy 3/7/18 makes clear, the new road will be as close as 13.32 metres to the canal, which is clearly contrary to Environment Agency advice – which was initially for a 25 metre ecological buffer and, if not achievable, a 20 metre buffer, as a planning condition.

4.2 The eastern end of the canal, as well as providing a tranquil area for walking for residents and visitors, is similarly important for wildlife. It includes resident breeding red-listed Cetti's Warblers, along with Reed and Sedge Warblers, Mute Swans and Moorhens, plus Water Rail in winter.

## **5. Other fauna**

5.1 The canal supports a wide range of freshwater invertebrates. The canal is designated for its rare plant species, as well as twelve species of Odonata (dragonflies and damselflies), birds, grass snake, common toad, and foraging pipistrelle and Daubenton's bats.

5.2 Indeed, the Royal Military Canal qualifies as 'Eutrophic standing water', which is a Habitat of Principal Importance.

5.3 There are a wide range of invertebrates that can be found on the site, including the recent colonist, Rambur's Pied Shieldbug and the scarce moth, Coast Bramble Pigmy.

5.4 A study in March 2016 (again referred to in the Lloyd Bore Ecological Method Statement P8-9 2.26-2.33) recorded 28 common toads in the canal section directly adjacent to the application site. Common toad is a Species of Principal Importance.

5.5 An invertebrate survey and habitat assessment of the site and adjacent canal section undertaken in May and July 2016 (Invertebrate Report, Jonty Denton, 2016), referred to in the Lloyd Bore Ecological Mitigation Strategy, showed the site supports three nationally notable invertebrate species: Lesne's earwig, mallow flea beetle and a weevil species (*Trichosirocalus dawsoni*).

5.6. A bat activity survey undertaken between May and September 2016 (Lloyd Bore Ecological Mitigation Strategy) covered the application site and adjacent section of the canal. A total of eight bat species were confirmed using the canal and margin habitats: common pipistrelle, soprano pipistrelle, Nathusius' pipistrelle, noctule, serotine, Leisler's, brown long-eared and Daubenton's bat.

## **6. Street Lighting**

~~6.1 The road lighting will mean that species are displaced and disturbed where there is currently a dark and undisturbed habitat corridor. There is no mitigation proposed for this so it is likely to have a significant detrimental effect on many of the species listed above.~~

~~6.2 To quote The Campaign for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE) ([www.nightblight.cpre.org.uk/what-is-light-pollution](http://www.nightblight.cpre.org.uk/what-is-light-pollution)): "There is increasing awareness of the impact that light pollution can have on~~

wildlife, by interrupting natural rhythms including migration, reproduction and feeding patterns. Man-made light is known to cause confusion to migrating birds, often with fatal outcomes, and many of us will have heard birds singing late into the night in trees lit by a streetlight."

6.3 Indeed, a recent study (by UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology and reported in the Science Advances journal) found that LED streetlights produce even worse light pollution for insects than traditional sodium bulbs. The abundance of moth caterpillars in hedgerows by rural roads in England was 52% lower under LED lights and 41% lower under sodium lights when compared with nearby unlit areas. In grass margins, moth caterpillar numbers near LEDs were a third lower than in unlit areas.

6.4 The white LED lights produce more blue light, say scientists, which is the colour predominantly seen by insects. Moths are important pollinators and provide essential food for birds and animals, but the total abundance of moths in Britain has dropped by a third over the past 50 years.

6.5 The realigned road would create significant light pollution, impacting wildlife on the Princes Parade site itself and the Royal Military Canal. The Ecological Impacts of Lighting document (Appendix 7) states that light spill into the canal corridor—"of ecological importance for foraging bats at the County level"—will be reduced due to mitigation. However, there is no escaping the fact that this will mean a current dark corridor will become lit.

6.6 And there are expert doubts about the effectiveness of that mitigation: KCC Ecology in their 2017 response objecting to the planning application state: "The submitted information has recommended the inclusion of a condition that there will be maximum illuminance level of less than 1lux upon the canal path and embankment—we query if this is something that can actually be achieved via a condition particularly when you consider the proposed road requires lighting." The below 1lux modelling seems to be related to light spill from the development per se, not the road, as far as I can tell.

## **7 Conclusion**

7.1 To quote the report produced in 2016 for the council (D:SE Design Review: Princes Parade, Document 111 on the Core Document List):

The scheme "brings an intrusive roadway close to the scheduled ancient monument, and to the series of trails and paths which run along side it, urbanising it and creating the need for it to be protected by a bund".

7.2 The proposed Princes Parade re-alignment would in my opinion wreck, for human and non-human residents and visitors alike, the essential peace and quiet of this much-loved site and this part of our area's unique scheduled ancient monument.

7.3 On the basis of my evidence, together with that given by other Save Princes Parade witnesses and third party objectors, I urge the Secretary of State to conclude that he should decline to confirm the Order because the harm which would flow from making it outweighs the benefits.