

# **EN0700005: Southampton to London Pipeline Project**

## **Written Representation on Behalf of the Rushmoor Urban Wildlife Group**

**regarding the environmental impact on Queen Elizabeth Park in Farnborough, Hampshire**

Dated: 10 December 2019

To the Planning Inspectorate

This representation is to voice concerns regarding the avoidable direct environmental impacts to Queen Elizabeth Park and the indirect negative environmental implications that will arise from this project in its current form. The main issues of concern are:

### **1. Loss of veteran trees and the associated impact on wildlife**

Although no formal surveys of the wildlife have been carried out to my knowledge, visitors to the park enjoy the frequent sightings of species typically found in a mature woodland, in particular, bats and a large variety of birds. There is also a seasonal wetland area which is home to amphibians.

The dense area of publicly accessible mature woodland to be destroyed by the project is a rare habitat locally, and the only one present in central Farnborough. The bramble varieties to be removed are locally significant plant species and the veteran trees support a wide variety of important bird and mammal species, such as bats. Esso's proposal would result in the destruction of both the dense woodland area and the seasonal wetland and, therefore, have a substantial negative impact on the current biodiversity.

In 2017, Dr. Paul Howe, ex. Biodiversity Officer at Rushmoor Borough Council visited the park to confirm the presence of bats and, as a result, volunteers from the local community (RUWG and others) subsequently installed a large number of bat and bird boxes in the park.

### **2. Degrading of the only area of woodland left in central Farnborough and the impact of this on the local community**

Queen Elizabeth Park is a unique and highly valued area of tranquillity being the only woodland left in a high density urban environment. It is widely researched and documented that trees and woods help us to breathe easier, significantly improve our health and well-being as well as bringing communities and people together. Queen Elizabeth Park plays key roles locally in:

- **Improving air quality** - Trees, woodland and other green infrastructure improve air quality by intercepting harmful particulates, which are a contributing factor to respiratory conditions such as asthma. (1)
- **Reducing stress** – Urban residents suffering from stress experience less anxiety when they have a view of trees. Physical signs of stress such as muscle tension and pulse rate are also measurably reduced when moving into green surroundings (2)
- **Alleviating depression** - Taking part in nature-based activities helps people who are suffering from mental ill-health and can contribute to a reduction in levels of anxiety and depression (3)
- **Encouraging physical activity**- Green spaces provide space to exercise which

- improves memory and cognitive function. (6) People who use parks and other green spaces are three times more likely to reach the recommended level of physical activity than nonusers. (4)
- **Reduce obesity** - Children living in areas with good access to green spaces have been shown to spend less time in front of television screens, computers and smart phones and to have 11-19 percent lower prevalence of obesity compared with children limited or no access to green spaces (5)
  - **Bringing people together** – Trees and woods can help to bring people together and strengthen communities, reducing loneliness and isolation (6)

## References

1. A.G. McDonald et al (2007). *Quantifying the effect of urban tree planting on concentrations and depositions of PM10 in two UK conurbations*. Atmospheric Environment. 41(38): 8455–8467
2. Ulrich RS, Simmons RF, Losito BD, Fiority E, Miles MA & Zeison M (1991) *Stress Recovery During Exposure to Natural and Urban Environments*, Journal of Environmental Psychology 11 : 201 -230
3. *A review of nature-based interventions for mental health care*, Natural England (2016)
4. Nowak et al., 2014
5. Dadvand et al., 2014
6. Kaplan R & Kaplan S (1989) *The Experience of Nature - A Psychological Perspective*, Cambridge University Press

### 3. The project implementation is contrary to Esso's own environmental policies

Exxon's own policies on wildlife, biodiversity and protecting the environment are stated on its website:

<https://www.exxonmobil.co.uk/community-engagement/sustainability-report/environmental-performance/biodiversity-and-ecosystem-services#landManagement>

On land management the website states: 'As part of our effort to safeguard biodiversity, we seek opportunities to enhance wildlife habitats and provide environmental education to local communities' and in another statement 'ExxonMobil manages land for the benefit of wildlife, which includes assessing habitats, developing plans to enhance or sustain wildlife and monitoring the status of our sites through certified programs.

In addition, Esso's plans to destroy 25% of an established wildlife habitat is in direct contravention of its Chairman's own letter (Oct 2018):

<https://www.exxonmobil.co.uk/Community-engagement/Sustainability-Report/Chairmans-letter>.

"The men and women of ExxonMobil are focused on meeting society's dual challenge — meeting energy needs while also minimizing the environmental impacts of energy use, including the risks of climate change."

In the case of QE2 park, Esso have not, to date, even surveyed the species present in the park and, worse still, have chosen the most destructive option permanently removing a large number of mature trees rather than drilling under the park using trenchless techniques or bypassing the park altogether with an alternative route identified in a report commissioned by the Queen Elizabeth Park Action Group.

#### **4. The scheme undermines Rushmoor Borough Council's 'Climate Emergency'**

At a meeting of the Borough Council held at the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Farnborough on Thursday, 20th June, 2019 at 7.00 pm the Council unanimously acknowledged a 'Climate Emergency'. Taking into account the responses from residents to the recent public engagement on a long-term vision for the Borough, the Council agreed to develop a plan to enable: - a green and sustainable Rushmoor; and - a carbon-neutral Council by 2030. In the developing action plan the Council resolved to increase tree cover in the Borough. The Esso scheme is contrary to this, removing mature trees that effectively sequester carbon from the atmosphere whilst improving local air quality.

#### **5. The park as part of a safe cycling and walking route**

The use of the path through the park is a popular green commuter route for pedestrians and cyclists, thereby reducing the cars off the road. The works would render this path unusable for the duration of the works. The path is also very popular with dog walkers who have no other green space in central Farnborough to use.

#### **6. The least damaging and acceptable approach to pipeline renewal in the park**

The loss of trees and permanent damage to the park is avoidable. A viable alternative route for the pipeline has been identified avoiding the park altogether or Esso could drill under the park using trenchless techniques. One can assume that Esso has chosen the cheapest method in total disregard of the impact on this valued community amenity and the degradation to an important local habitat.

In the unfortunate circumstances that the pipeline goes ahead in way outlined by Esso, it is essential that appropriate restoration is done afterwards which draws on expert advice so that the maximum benefit can be attained in terms of biodiversity of plants and insects, and so that it is ensured that any botanically important species are retained. It is of great concern that Esso stated at the Public Inquiry that certain species, such as bramble, are 'choking the park' where this is a locally important species with considerable wildlife value. This is an example of Esso making unqualified judgements on biodiversity to 'open up' areas of the park to suit this pipeline installation plan and reduce its costs. However, the objective should not be to change the character of the park, as valued by the community, to suit Esso's interests, but to retain its current character.

#### **Contact:**

Les Murrell MSc, BSc(Hons), MEnvSc, AIEMA

On behalf of the Rushmoor Urban Wildlife Group

Retired Energy and Environment Manager at Rushmoor Borough and Hart District Councils

Please note:

Whilst the previously well-supported Rushmoor Urban Wildlife Group is not presently formally constituted, as a former committee member and with the sanction of the ex-Chair, I am nether-the-less providing views which accurately reflect the sentiments expressed by its ex- RUWG members, other local organisations and numerous local residents regarding this project.