

Date: 26 October 2012



Ms J Shepherd
jennycarlyle@aol.com

Customer Services
Block B
Government
Buildings
Whittington Road,
Worcester
WR5 2LQ

Dear Ms Shepherd

Access to information request – RFI 1710

Thank you for your request relating to Walshaw Moor Estate, which we received on 28 September 2012. Your request has been considered under Environmental Information Regulations 2004.

1. What form and process does Natural England’s “appropriate assessment” take when drawing up Consents and Management Agreements for land management on Natura 2000 sites (aka Europe 2000 sites)?

An Appropriate Assessment (AA) is carried out when any plan or project which is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of a Natura 2000 network site (defined as a Special Protection Area (SPA) classified through the EC Birds Directive 1979 and/or a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) designated through the Habitats Directive 1992) is likely to have a significant effect on that site, either on its own or in combination with other plans or projects. The assessment is made of the implications of the plan or project for the site in view of the site's conservation objectives. In the light of the conclusions of the assessment, Natural England can agree to the plan or project only after having ascertained that it will not adversely affect the integrity of the site concerned.

Our process is carried out using a standardised form which is supported by Natural England internal Habitats Regulations Guidance Notes and specialist regulation and evidence advisors. The Appropriate Assessment is a written document.

2. Is this the same as carrying out a Habitat Regulations Assessment?

No, a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) is an unofficial term for a process widely used to draw together the several tests required by the Habitats Regulations under Regulation 21 of the Habitats Regulations 2010. The Appropriate Assessment (AA) is a later stage of the HRA.

3. How many Natural England Consents for Natura 2000 sites permit blanket bog burning and draining?

Blanket Bog burning

I'm afraid that Natural England does not hold the information in the aggregated form that your request implies. However, I have been able to ascertain that:

- 106 SSSIs have some type of consent to burn on blanket bog habitat. Please be aware that some SSSIs are not also European designated sites. However, there may be a number of other consents that are temporarily superseded by other agreements eg Environmental Stewardship, but we don't hold a central record of these.

- 491 Environmental Stewardship (ES) agreements where both blanket bog and a prescription that includes burning exist. Within ES there are several options for moorland that include burning in the prescription. However in each case there is a choice of:
 - no burning
 - burning and/or herbicide treatment
 - burning and/or cutting

However, it is important to stress that just because this prescription is within the agreement there cannot be an assumption that burning has or will take place. Having the prescription within the agreement just confirms that:

- no burning
- burning and/or herbicide treatment
- burning and/or cutting

is applicable. To confirm if burning has or will take place it would require us to manually go through the documentation for each of these agreements

Blanket bog draining

From the information Natural England holds, there are no Natural England consents which would permit the drainage of blanket bog.

4. Please can I have a copy of Natural England's appropriate assessments for each of these Consents?

Please find in the folder *Q4 – AAs* the appropriate assessments that Natural England holds.

5. Are farmers/landowners whose land is in a Natura 2000 site legally required to produce a Habitat Regulations Assessment for Natural England, before Natural England can issue a Consent?

No. Natural England is the competent authority with the duty under regulation 21 of the Habitats Regulations 2010 to carry out an Appropriate Assessment (AA) under the circumstances described in our response to question 1 above. As stated above in our response to question 2, the Appropriate Assessment forms one part of the Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) process.

However, owners and occupiers of land within a SSSI and Natura 2000 network site are legally required to give written notice of their intent to carry out an operation which may directly or indirectly impact on that site and which is covered by the Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) provisions outlined in Section 28E of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). They must supply sufficient information in order for Natural England to be able to determine that notice and in order for Natural England to carry out a Habitats Regulations Assessment.

6. Please can I have a copy of the Habitat Regulations Assessment for Walshaw Moor Estate's land management proposals, prepared by Mike Webb of SLR consultancy for the 2012 Public Inquiry that heard WME's appeal against Natural England's modification of the WME Consent under the Wildlife Act 1981?

For the reasons explained in the answer to question 5, it was not possible for Mike Webb to include an Appropriate Assessment in a witness statement - he not being a Competent Authority as set out in the Regulations. However, the Proof of Evidence of Mike Webb did include a document to inform an Appropriate Assessment of the proposals of the Walshaw Moor Estate Limited at that time. Consequently, during the proceedings, an Appropriate Assessment of the Estates' proposals was completed using his information. Please find in the folder *Q6 - SLR HRA PI*.

7. Please can I have a copy of Natural England's Statement of Case in relation to its 2010 Modification of Consent for WME? and its Statement of Case in relation to its 2011 Modification of Consent for WME?

Natural England did not produce a Statement of Case relating to each modification. A Statement of Case is produced at the outset of a public inquiry to set out each parties case. **We enclose a copy of Natural England's Statement of Case presented to the Inquiry. Please find in the folder Q7 - NE SoC.**

8. Please can I have a copy of all documents and expert witness testimony presented by or on behalf of Natural England, to the Walshaw Moor Estate/Natural England Public Inquiry?

Please find in the folder Q8 - NE PI Docs.

9. Why did Natural England drop its prosecution of Walshaw Moor Estate for carrying out damaging activities on a Site of Special Scientific Interest without consent, which is an offence under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981?

Specifically:

- **What was the effect on the prosecution proceedings of Andrew Wood's emails to Martin Gillibrand in December 2011, where he explained that Natural England saw Walshaw Moor Estate as an isolated case, and that Natural England did not intend to modify other consents or HLS agreements along the lines of the 9th December modification of WME's consent - which would have the effect of banning burning on other Natura 2000 sites?**
- **In an email reply, Martin Gillibrand notes that what Andrew Wood is saying is not what Natural England's lawyers are saying. Is Martin Gillibrand's statement accurate? If so, why did Andrew Wood contact Martin Gillibrand to put a personal view which differed from Natural England's legal position?**
- **Did Natural England's prosecution collapse because Andrew Wood's emails to Martin Gillibrand allowed WME's lawyers to claim that Natural England was acting in a discriminatory manner against WME?**

The reason I ask question 9 is that Martin Gillibrand's 9th Feb 2012 Witness statement for WME's application to the High Court of Justice 2011 for a Judicial Review (Claim No CO/12569/2011) says that he doesn't understand why Natural England have "singled out" WME for "special treatment in this matter. To my knowledge it is the only estate that has been the subject of a no burn/no grazing/ no vehicle use on blanket bog".

His witness statement draws on the December 2011 email exchange between him and Andrew Wood. It continues (para 16)

"When I pressed Andrew Wood of Natural England about this, he replied by email that to the effect that there was no intention to implement this new regime on any other grouse moor than the claimant. If this is the case it seems hugely discriminatory."

Natural England's dispute with the Estate has been resolved from a regulatory perspective on the basis of the new Notice and Consent a copy of which was published on our [website](#) on 23 March 2012. The Notice and Consent will ensure that what takes place on Walshaw and Lancashire Moor in the future is managed and controlled. They replace the unacceptable burning regime that was being conducted under the auspices of the existing 1995 consents prior to the dispute being resolved.

To address your specific points:

- Andrew Wood's statement had no effect on the prosecution proceedings. It was drafted in response to a judicial review threat and therefore was very specific to that challenge. The criminal proceedings were entirely separate. As stated in our press release the prosecution proceedings were settled as part of a wider agreement with the Walshaw Moor Estate.

- Andrew Wood did not express a personal opinion, nor, in our view, an opinion that was different to the approach taken by Natural England in this case as expressed by its legal team. Martin Gillibrand clearly took a different view of the exchange.
- Natural England's prosecution did not collapse. As stated above the criminal proceedings were settled as part of a wider settlement agreement with Walshaw Moor Estate.

10. Please will you explain the response of Janette Ward, Director of Regulation, Natural England to a question from Paul Uddal MP in the House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee in May 2012?

Paul Uddal MP asked this question about Natural England's new management agreement with Walshaw Moor Estate:

“the management agreement you have is ambiguous on the idea of the whole impact environmentally, on the entire estate, whereas it is specific on some bits of the estate in terms of where there should be grass or heather burning...One of the issues was also around drainage channels. Does the agreement cover that, and did you guys check in terms of whether any unauthorised drainage channels were dug out on the moors? Does the agreement cover it and then was there any checking on that?”

Janette Ward replied,

“The agreement is taking us into the future, and that is what the agreement is about. As part of the agreement there is a management scheme which is designed to restore drainage on the moor through a procedure that is called moor gripping. What it will do is restore water levels on certain parts on the moor so restoring their wildlife interest.”

Ms Ward's answer is at odds with the Walshaw Moor Environmental Stewardship Agreement. The ESA includes capital funding of almost £400K to be spent between 2012-2015 on ” “major preparatory work for heathland recreation”, which is mainly “aimed at blocking grips across extensive areas of the moorland.”

Janette Ward's answer is also at odds with the the Notice and Consent agreed between Natural England and Walshaw Moor Estate in March 2012. The Notice and Consent specifies that maintenance of existing infrastructure is permitted – except no maintenance of moorland drainage is permitted, apart from next to surfaced roads/tracks, walls and within a 50 metre radius around grouse butts.

Please can you explain why Janette Ward's response to Paul Uddal MP's question is so at odds with Natural England's Notice and Consent, the terms of the WME Environmental Stewardship Agreement and common sense - how can gripping or moorland drainage restore water levels?

Janette Ward's reply should have stated that “As part of the agreement there is a management scheme which is designed to remove drainage on the moor which has been achieved through a procedure that is called moor gripping”. As such this statement is not at odds with the agreement or consent.

11. Please will you also provide an answer to the question of whether Natural England did check whether Walshaw Moor Estate had dug any unauthorised drainage channels in the moors before the new agreement was signed?

There was no reason or suspicion to check whether any unauthorised drainage channels were created before the new agreement.

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Yours sincerely

Darren Green
Senior Adviser – Information Access

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