R.e. Assessment of the ‘For the Birds’ Art exhibition at [Redacted]

Dear Ms Peters,

Thank you for showing me around the art installation at [Redacted] on the 10th of May and for all the background information you have sent, including the ‘Site and Environmental Survey’ report and the ‘[Redacted] Park Management Plan’ by David Larkin, which I have reviewed. Below, I have outlined what I believe the impact risks are to this woodland, including specifically impacts to nesting birds and woodland flora.

From my own assessment, I can see that the woodland where the exhibition is situated is a very well used area by the public, with evidence of use by motorbikes, BMX, dog walkers and evidence of some unsociable activity (a wrecked car and motorbike were noted). The woodland is a mixture of taller canopy areas dominated by sycamore (Acer pseudoplatanus) and ash (Fraxinus excelsior), with shorter stands of hawthorn dominated woodland in places.

The exhibition follows well used paths throughout the woodland, whilst some of the displays sit in largely open areas just off these paths. It is clear that there has been no vegetation clearance or disturbance as part of the set-up of these displays and I am not concerned that the installation of the exhibitions has caused any significant disturbance of nesting birds.

Whilst at the woodland, I had the opportunity to see the displays whilst they were active, so that I could ascertain what level of noise and visual disturbance these displays would have. I can see that as a night-time experience within a woodland, the focus has been on subtlety and the decibels produced from the displays is low. The lighting of the walked route is downward facing and with the exception of three locations along the route, all significant lighting is largely baffled to be downward facing.

I noted that there was a small patch of early purple orchids (Orchis mascula) just off the path in one part of the display, with one of the flowers having been trampled. I understand there is some concern about the trampling risk of these flowers, which will re-grow from the same root each year. As the paths through the wood are regularly used by dog walkers, it is not possible to ascertain the cause of the damage, but it is not significant, affecting a single plant, which will re-grow next year. I can also confirm that all of the bluebells I noted next to the paths through the woodland are Spanish bluebells (Hyacinthoides hispanica), a non-native and invasive species which is a threat to our native bluebell.
There should not therefore be any concern of trampling of this plant (which could perhaps be a focus for removal from the wood).

I understand that concerns have been raised about the potential for birds to be disturbed whilst at their nests. During my site visit of the woodland I identified blackbird (Turdus merula), robin (Erithacus rubecula), blue tit (Cyanistes caeruleus), great tit (Parus major), whitethroat (Sylvia communis), wren (Troglodytes troglodytes), chaffinch (Fringilla coelebs) and song thrush (Turdus philomelos). All of these bird species are common and widespread throughout the UK, though the song thrush is a red-list species due to sever population declines in the UK over the last 25 years (with this species, this has largely been down to changes in the farmed landscape). All of these species are also common in parks and gardens – areas where there is regular human disturbance. Importantly, no nocturnal or crepuscular species were identified and the Park Management Plan does not identify any nocturnal or crepuscular species as resident at Park.

I do not believe that the art installations - which I understand will run for 5 nights a week to the end of May - are likely to have a significant impact upon these species. The majority of the woodland has a very thin level of ground vegetation (the exception being the main track leading from the entrance to the wood) and most nesting habitat remains to be above 2 metres in height, making disturbance risk less significant. The regular use of the site by dog walkers is more likely to pose a risk to ground level nesting birds, whilst the use of the site at night when these bird species are inactive, further mitigates the impact risk.

From my observations of the event, my main concern was an area of lighting near to the exit point out of the woodland, where there are some green uplighters illuminating the canopies of two sycamore trees. I have discussed this with you on site and I understand that it is agreed that these uplighters will be removed to avoid affecting bird and bat behaviour. Softer lighting that is baffled to prevent upward lighting is recommended if this is needed for safety reasons.

I have read through a number of concerns raised by members of the public largely relating to nesting birds on the ‘Change.org’ petition and I hope that knowing the context of the art show, which is set within a context of a regularly disturbed parkland site, they will feel satisfied that this event will have a minimal impact upon nesting birds and that the organisers appear to have taken a great duty of care in insuring there is a minimal impact to wildlife and the woodland environment. I should also like to confirm that there are no licenses required from Natural England or any other statutory bodies with respect to this type of event given that the event will not affect any European protected species or habitats.

Should you require any further advice relating to ecology and conservation matters, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Kind regards

Paul Whitby
BSc (Hons), MCIEEM, CEcol