

**The Cut Countryside Corridor  
Open Space Management Plan**

**for  
Thames Basin Heaths  
Special Protection Area (SPA) Mitigation Works**

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## **1 Introduction**

### **1.1 The Thames Basin Heaths SPA**

The Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA) is a network of heathland sites designated to protect the habitat of the internationally importance bird species of woodlark, nightjar and Dartford warbler.

Bracknell Forest Borough Council is legally obliged to make sure that no adverse effect on the integrity of the SPA will arise from new development. As a result, the SPA Technical Background Document to the Core Strategy (hereafter referred to as SPA TBD) was produced, which identifies measures to avoid and mitigate adverse effects arising from proposed new residential development. The SPA TBD provides an integrated, holistic package of measures which includes both on-site and off-site measures to protect the SPA in addition to making other areas of open space more attractive. A summary of the avoidance and mitigation measures, which will ensure that there will be no adverse effect upon the integrity of the SPA, can be found in section 28 of the Technical Background Document (June 2007). These comprise:

- Bespoke solutions for strategic sites
- Enhancements to existing open space
- Visitor access management on the SPA
- Restrictions on development within 400m
- Education
- No net loss of supporting habitats
- Restrictions on pet ownership where appropriate.

Natural England has agreed that the implementation of this package of measures will ensure that harm to the SPA is avoided. The reasoning behind each of the measures, and their contribution towards avoiding harm to the SPA, is explained within the SPA TBD. This Open Space Management Plan is one of 8 plans which solely deal with the implementation of one of the specific measures; enhancing an existing area open space.

The package of avoidance and mitigation measures will be funded through the collection of financial contributions from new development. Therefore, a proportion of this contribution will fund the specific works to enhance identified areas of open space in line with the SPA TBD, as set out in the remainder of this document.

### **1.2 Open Space Management Plans**

This report comprises an open space management plan which expands upon the enhancements works required within the SPA TBD. This will also enable avoidance and mitigation measures to be closely linked to Section 106 contributions from specific developments.

### **1.3 Identification of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANGs)**

The SPA TBD went through an extensive process to identify areas of open space as suitable alternatives to the SPA. Section 20 and Appendix 8 of the SPA TBD provide a rationale for the identification of areas of open space and Appendix 9 makes an appraisal of the necessary quality enhancements.

Therefore, this report builds upon the information and research presented within the SPA TBD to provide more detailed works and costings on how sites could be brought up to a suitable standard to provide an alternative to the SPA.

#### **1.4 The Cut Countryside Corridor as an alternative to the SPA**

The Cut Countryside Corridor is a network of 6 suitable alternative greenspace sites as identified in the SPA TBD. This comprises Larks' Hill, Piggy Wood, Garth Meadows, The Cut riverside path (south), Jock's Copse and Tinker's Copse. The sites are linked by The Cut river which flows from the east to west alongside many of the sites (see section 4, site plan). This group connects to Jock's Lane, Anneforde Place, Priory Field, Quelm Lane, Garth Pond, Temple Copse and Braybrooke Recreation Ground which are used as links adjacent to the SANGs.

In considering the available evidence, the SPA TBD concluded the following:

*Piggy Wood "poorly used and the perceived use is also very low...has capacity and a suitable habitat to be used as impact avoidance."*

*Larks' Hill "well used and more visitors perceived the site to be busy...in isolation Larks' Hill does not appear to have potential for enhancements, with the site already being semi-natural in nature and an existing car park, , although there does appear to be scope to increase the capacity of the car park. However, this site could potentially provide a good link as part of a circular walk including other sites."*

*Garth Meadows "there is some perceived busy-ness but visitor numbers are relatively low, so providing some screening could increase the capacity. There is potential for enhancements to include this as part of a larger area of alternative open space, including adjacent sites."*

*Jock's Copse/Tinker's Copse/The Cut riverside path (south) "the semi-natural element of the site is quieter and has the potential to be increased in quality...the location of these sites in relation to other sites and the good parking facilities mean this area could potentially provide a good link as part of a circular walk including other sites."*

Natural England has agreed that The Cut Countryside Corridor can be used as a SANGs stating in correspondence to Bracknell Forest Borough Council dated 12<sup>th</sup> January 2007, that *"These sites appear to have considerable potential to increase both their physical attractiveness to SPA type visitors, in terms of habitat type and structure, and their accessibility. The individual sites however need to be seen as part of a cohesive unit to ensure they provide attractive round walks; the two Copses in particular are rather isolated and links between them and the other sites currently are unattractive."*

The SANGs assessment checklist is used in section 5 to demonstrate how The Cut Countryside Corridor is suitable as an alternative to the SPA and how enhancements will enable its use as such.

#### **1.5 Local Forums**

The SPA mitigation process including the open space management plans have been discussed with the Local Access Forum and the Bracknell Forest Biodiversity Forum.

## 2 Site Management Statement

### 2.1 Description

#### 2.1.1 Location

The Cut Countryside Corridor sites are located north of Bracknell town within the parishes of Warfield and Binfield (see section 4 site plan). The following sites form the agreed SANGs:

Larks' Hill:	7.58 ha
Piggy Wood:	2.06 ha
Garth Meadows:	7.12 ha
Jock's Copse:	1.44 ha
Tinker's Copse:	1.96 ha
The Cut riverside path (south)	2.48 ha*

Total area: 22.64 ha

The additional benefit of this SANGs group is that it is connected by the following sites (referred to hereafter as link sites) which although not specifically part of the SANGs but offer significant potential to provide access improvements to provide the circular SANGs walk and improve access into the SANGs:

Jock's Lane recreation ground	5.5 ha*
Quelm Lane:	0.4 ha
Garth Pond:	1.2 ha**
Priory Field:	2.9 ha

(\*owned by Bracknell Town Council, \*\*part owned by Thames Water)

Other nearby sites are also included in the plan as they provide additional semi-natural greenspace in the area but specific improvements are not proposed:

Temple Copse:	1.9 ha
Anneforde Place playing fields	0.9 ha
Braybrooke recreation ground	6.3 ha*

#### 2.1.2 Adjacent Land

This network of sites is located on the northern edge of Bracknell residential developments. Many of the sites border Harvest Ride (B3022) which runs from east to west through the group. The sites are connected by The Cut which flows from the east to west alongside many of the sites (see section 4, site plan). The Cabbage Hill Area of Special Landscape Importance is located to the north.

#### **SANGs:**

**Larks' Hill** is located north of Harvest Ride within a rural area where private pasture and widely spaced residential properties are adjacent to the north.

**Piggy Wood** is surrounded by housing and is connected to adjacent areas via Quelm Lane, a Byway which also serves as a valuable wildlife corridor.

**Garth Meadows** is bordered by Harvest Ride along the northern side and by The Cut along the southern side. Anneforde Place playing field owned by Bracknell Forest Borough Council and leased to Bracknell Town Council is adjacent to the south.

**Jock's Copse** is surrounded by housing excepting a small portion on the southeast side adjoining Jock's Lane.

**Tinker's Copse** is similarly enclosed by housing except for a small section that links to The Cut southern riverside path at the northeast end.

**The Cut southern riverside path** which joins to Jock's Copse and Tinker's Copse is owned by Bracknell Town Council and adjoins Jock's Lane.

#### **Link Sites:**

At the far east of the group, **Priory Field** has sports pitches and a large car park bordered by highways on three sides. This lies adjacent to an area of privately owned pasture to the north.

**Quelm Lane** borders Larks' Hill at the north end and travels south linking with Piggy Wood, Garth Pond and ending at Braybrooke Recreation Ground (owned by Bracknell Town Council). The southern half of the lane is surrounded by residential development which makes this a key natural corridor in the area.

**Garth Pond** is partly owned by Bracknell Forest Borough Council forming the north side of the river and partly by Thames Water on the south including the pond itself. The Environment Agency also has duties that include flood prevention that relate to the Cut. Land to the north is owned by a local farmer and residential gardens adjoin the east side of the site.

#### **Additional Open Spaces:**

**Temple Copse** is encompassed by housing and is connected to Tinker's Copse by a dedicated badger run which does not provide pedestrian access.

**Anneforde Place** adjoins Garth Meadows and is lined by residential housing to the south.

**Braybrooke recreation ground** is set within Bracknell Town and is surrounded by residential housing.

### **2.1.3 Access**

Vehicular access is gained by car parks at Larks' Hill (8 spaces), Priory Field (64 spaces) and Jock's Lane (69 spaces).

Two Public Rights of Way pass through the SANGs group: Binfield Footpath 25 at the west end of the countryside corridor travels along the western side of The Cut

riverside path and Warfield Byway 13 runs the length of Quelm Lane. Priory Field also links to Warfield Bridleway 26 (Hedge Lane) to the east.

There are at least 29 pedestrian access points ranging from open gaps to kissing gates. Sites such as Larks' Hill, Piggy Wood and Garth Meadows provide internal circular routes which are popular with users.

Two published accessible rural routes also incorporate parts of The Cut Countryside Corridor suitable for less mobile users. The first passes by Jock's Lane, The Cut, Jock's and Tinker's Copse at the west end. The second incorporates Larks' Hill and Quelm Lane at the eastern end of the SANGs group. Disabled access within individual sites is variable depending on ground conditions.

At Piggy Wood there is an area of old landfill material not included in the current capacity of the SANGs. This represents an opportunity to improve the site at a later date subject to availability of funding which is being sought from other sources.

#### **2.1.4 Grazing**

Livestock are used at Larks' Hill and Garth Meadows for the management of grassland for conservation purposes during late summer and autumn. This is managed successfully whilst maintaining access for dogwalkers including having some paths outside of the grazed area.

#### **2.1.5 Geology & Soils**

The Cut Countryside Corridor lies mainly on the London Basin clays which form impermeable layers that hold water close to the surface and claygate beds which consist of more sandy clays on the top layers. However, close to The Cut are Alluvium deposits that form gravel outcrops.

Soils are typically nutrient rich mixtures of clay and loam and sites such as Larks' Hill and Garth Meadows show evidence of past agricultural use as a result.

#### **2.1.6 Topography**

Larks' Hill lies at the base of Cabbage Hill at 65 metres above sea level and slopes gently down towards the west where The Cut flows past the site.

Piggy Wood lies between 60-65 metres above sea level, however its past use as a landfill site has made the topography uneven in areas which are not accessed by managed paths.

Garth Meadows forms a gentle south-facing slope from 45 to 65 metres above sea level with The Cut at the base.

The remaining sites are generally level in nature.

### **2.1.7 Drainage & Flooding**

The Cut has a flood zone which covers The Cut southern riverside path, a strip along the base of Garth Meadows and Quelm Lane.

At Larks' Hill, the majority of the site drains well, however some parts are prone to waterlogging during heavy rainfall. The main drainage feature is the perimeter ditch which also serves to maintain the security of the site against unwanted vehicles. On the northern boundary a section of ditch has become a seasonal pond.

A stream passes through Piggy Wood from east to west connecting to Garth Pond. The woodland is naturally damp and regularly becomes so following rain.

Lower parts of Garth Meadows tend towards localised flooding as the site drains down towards The Cut and in extreme cases the river occasionally overtops its banks.

Garth Pond is intended as a flood protection measure taking water from surrounding areas. However, its silted and vegetated condition reduces its capacity to do so. It is also likely that the site is naturally wet and may be prone to flooding due to the presence of The Cut.

The two copses (Jock's and Tinker's) are well served by ditches which effectively drain the sites except during prolonged rainfall when some areas are prone to waterlogging.

### **2.1.8 Landscape & Views**

The Cut Countryside Corridor comprises the open grassland sites at Larks' Hill and Garth Meadows that contrast with the woodland sites at Piggy Wood, Jock's Copse and Tinker's Copse. This group of SANGs are located on the boundary between the built-up areas to the south and the rural landscape to the north.

From Larks' Hill, there are good views of the landscape to the west, particularly Cabbage Hill which enhances the rural atmosphere of the site. The slope at Garth Meadows provides a view to the south over the residential developments and the town centre.

The woodland sites are visually valuable as they soften the hard landscape of the surrounding residential developments.

### **2.1.9 Wildlife and Biodiversity**

Several sites are designated for their biodiversity value as shown in section 2.2.6. In addition some are known to support Bracknell Forest Biodiversity Action Plan species such as Bullfinch, Ragged Robin, Skylark, Water Vole, Kingfisher, Barn Owl, Hobby, Cowslip and Wild Service Tree.

Priory Field consists of mown grass and has relatively low biodiversity value as its primary purpose is for sports pitches.

Larks' Hill, as the name suggests, provides habitat for Skylarks in the form of open grassland and an arable field. Areas of the site are defined by native hedgerows

which provide opportunities for a range of species. One part of the site is planted as an orchard and some areas of scrub and young trees have developed around the site. Badger tunnels are also present under the road to allow foraging badgers to cross from the habitats connected with Piggy Wood.

Piggy Wood includes some features such as ground flora which indicate it is an ancient woodland. The site supports a badger sett which is connected to foraging areas by Quelm Lane.

Quelm Lane acts as an important wildlife corridor to allow the movement of species between natural areas. The hedgerows along the lane support a variety of species by providing shelter and food resources.

Garth Meadows is similar to Larks' Hill in its provision of grassland habitat for farmland birds and a variety of invertebrates. The Cut which flows along the southern side of the site also supports wetland species such as Kingfisher.

Garth Pond consists of a variety of habitats within a small area from riverside and pond to scrub and hedgerows.

Jock's Copse and Tinker's Copse have similar woodland habitats including areas of hazel coppice, mature oaks and ground flora such as bluebells.

### **2.1.10 Archaeology & Heritage**

At Larks' Hill, the following information was supplied by Babbie using information from the Sites and Monuments Record:

*"This site was subject to archaeological investigation prior to the Quelm Park housing development. It contains the buried remains of an important Middle Iron Age occupation site (c. 3<sup>rd</sup> to 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC) containing at least two roundhouses and some ancillary features. The remains were carefully backfilled after an excavation by Thames Valley Archaeological Services in 1992 and therefore remain 'in situ' within the present open space."*

A sarsen stone named "Quelm Stone" is located on the site as a heritage feature about which there are several theories as to its significance most notably its use as a marker for a hanging site or as a parish boundary.

Prior to the Enclosure Act 1814, Piggy Wood was known as Priests Wood possibly due to its use by local priests as a refuge from persecution.

The Sites and Monuments Record provided the following information for woodland sites:

*Tinker's Copse "a middle Iron Age to early Roman rural settlement was excavated by Wessex Archaeology in 1990 in fields just to the north of the Copse prior to housing development. It is possible that elements of this settlement's field system extended outside the excavated areas towards and into the area of Tinker's Copse".*

It is thought that the names Jock's and Tinker's Copse refer to a Scottish vagrant that occupied the woods in the early 1800s.



The record also provided some general information about the area of the three copses: *“Two areas of probably Bronze Age occupation were identified within the Cabbage Hill site, one area consisted of four postholes features (SMR 4104) and the other a burnt mound (SMR 4105). Burnt mounds consist of large quantities of burnt flint, their exact function is unknown, but both cooking places and saunas have been suggested!”*

*Two other areas of archaeological potential were identified within the site, including an Iron Age boundary ditch and another possible burnt mound beside The Cut.*

*These four areas remain ‘in situ’ within the Cabbage Hill open space and these areas should not be disturbed without archaeological advice.”*

*At Garth Meadows “Fieldwalking in 1985 as part of the East Berkshire Archaeological Survey found several finds in this area, including medieval pottery and prehistoric flint artefacts (SMR 3321, 3370 and 3375). An unusual find within the site itself was the sherd of a Bronze Age burial urn. In 1989 the site was investigated by Thames Valley Archaeological Services in advance of major housing development.”*

### **2.1.11 Recreational Uses**

All sites provide paths for walking and are popular for dog walking by local people from adjacent residential developments. From Watersplash Lane there is a permissive bridleway across the northern side of Larks’ Hill with potential to meet with Warfield Bridleway 26 at the east end of Priory Field.

Adjacent to the orchard at Larks’ Hill is a small picnic area. The “Community Orchard” at Larks’ Hill provides a focus for local interest groups and a bee hive is also kept within the trees of the main paddock.

Priory Field provides facilities for sports activities through provision of sports pitches. There are also equipped play areas in close proximity to the SANGs group at Jock’s Lane and Annerforde Place.

The woodland sites at the west end of the group are more often used as through routes and for dogwalking.

### **2.1.12 Recreational Routes**

As mentioned above, Larks’ Hill, Quelm Lane and The Cut Southern riverside path are included in published accessible routes.

A permissive bridleway route is proposed to link between Watersplash Lane and the east side of Priory Field.

A cycle route follows The Cut southern riverside path at the west end of the SANGs group.

### **2.1.13 Interpretation & Events**

The current site information provision for The Cut Countryside Corridor consists of:

- Site entrance signs for Larks’ Hill, Garth Meadows, Priory Field, Tinker’s Copse and Jock’s Copse

- One interpretative panel/notice board at Larks' Hill only
- Leaflets available for Jock's, Tinker's and Temple Copse (Three Copses)
- Accessible rural route leaflets for Larks' Hill and Jock's Lane
- Webpages for Larks' Hill, Jock's Copse, Tinker's Copse and Piggy Wood on the Bracknell Forest Borough Council website at <http://www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/parks>.

The Parks & Countryside Service promote and manage the sites to hold public events such as guided nature walks and family activities.

#### **2.1.14 Community Involvement**

Work groups of conservation volunteers are also actively involved in managing the sites undertaking practical tasks such as hedge laying and ragwort pulling

#### **2.1.15 Other Land Use**

Larks' Hill car park includes a recycling point where paper, cardboard and glass are collected.

## **2.2 Legal and Planning Framework**

### **2.2.1 Land Ownership**

All sites within the SANGs group are owned by Bracknell Forest Borough Council except The Cut riverside path (south) which is owned by Bracknell Town Council. The link sites such as Jock's Lane and Anneforde Place playing fields are owned by Bracknell Town Council. Garth Pond is part owned by Thames Water.

### **2.2.2 Fences & Hedges**

The majority of site boundary fencing is post and rail although this is redundant in some places. Larks' Hill and Garth Meadows in particular are lined by hedges which in some cases make the fencing unnecessary. However, the use of grazing on the site does require the retention of some solid boundaries i.e. stock fencing at Larks' Hill and Garth Meadows. At Piggy Wood, a woven dead hedge has been used to prevent access to areas of the old landfill site.

### **2.2.3 Site Furniture**

The following features are located around the sites:

- Wooden pedestrian gates at key entrances
- Field gates, both wooden and metal, at Larks' Hill and Garth Meadows
- Benches ranging from rough planks on tree stumps to formal seating
- Litter bins are provided near entrances but vary in condition
- There are small wooden steps into Piggy Wood

## 2.2.4 Public Rights of Way

This group of sites is well linked to a number of Rights of Way (see section 4, site plan). Quelm Lane is a Byway Open to All Traffic (BOAT) but has a Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) to prevent its use by vehicles and horses. At the east end of the sites Bridleway Warfield No. 26 links to Priory Field. From Larks' Hill is Warfield BOAT No. 8 called Avery Lane which links to the north. Binfield Public Footpath 25 No. 10 follows The Cut riverside path (south) and also links to the north at the west end of the group.

## 2.2.5 Byelaws

There are no byelaws specific to these sites.

## 2.2.6 Designations

The following designations are held by sites within the group:

Designation	Piggy Wood (SANGs)	Jock's Copse (SANGs)	Tinker's Copse (SANGs)	Quelm Lane (Link)	Temple Copse (Additional)
Tree Preservation Order (TPO)	✓ (No. 79)	✓ Northeast section (No. 5)	✓ (No. 5)	✓ Mid-section (No. 89)	✓ (No. 5)
Wildlife Heritage Site (WHS)	✓ (SU87Q03)	✓ (SU87K01)	✓ (SU87K01)		✓ (SU87K02)
Local Nature Reserve (LNR)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

TPO and LNR status provide statutory protection whilst WHS is a planning consideration. The Council has also adopted the biodiversity performance indicator NI 197 and this plan contributes towards positive management evidence.

## 2.3 Resource Evaluation

This group of sites shows a large contrast in their use, habitats, size and are linked by The Cut to form an attractive network of greenspaces for a range of activities.

Visitor surveys carried out as part of the Bracknell Forest SPA Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy in 2006 indicate:

### Annual visitor projection

The Cut Countryside Corridor is of key importance in the provision of alternative greenspace in the borough due to its location adjacent to a large residential area which is undergoing continued development. The following sites were assessed to estimate the number of existing visits per annum:

Piggy Wood –10,000  
Larks' Hill – 33,000  
Garth meadows – 21,000  
Jock's Copse/Tinker's Copse/The Cut (south) – 52,000

The use of sites varies widely from Larks' Hill which is highly attractive to dog-walkers to Garth Pond which currently does not appear to attract any visitors. The woodland sites are often used as cut-throughs and are generally under-used for walking, particularly Jock's and Tinker's Copse where 53% of visitors use the sites to access the adjacent play area.

All the sites surveyed were considered to be safe and although some sites such as Garth Meadows were perceived to be busy most visitors would continue to use them if numbers increased. The strength of this group of sites is in the ability to provide circular routes of different lengths linking the sites and neighbouring housing areas. As a group the sites are estimated to provide open space to attract an additional 1,000 visitors away from the SPA.

Appendix 8 of the SPA TBD provides a full assessment of the baseline data and an assessment of the sites' potential to attract people from the SPA. An assessment of the sites' capacity to attract visitors away from the SPA was made based upon existing visitor numbers and the SPA open space standards agreed with Natural England. These calculations are described in more detail in Section 20 of the SPA TBD (July 2007), specifically Table 15.

## 2.4 Constraints and Issues

- The varying level of existing visitor pressure needs to be carefully managed in order to provide additional capacity whilst protecting the semi-natural environment which makes the sites attractive.
- The interests of adjacent landowners such as Bracknell Town Council and Thames Water need to be taken into consideration to enable the sites to be better linked and open up access to sites like Garth Pond which are currently under-used.
- The SANGs are primarily owned and managed by Bracknell Forest Borough Council but management requires the co-operation of a group of organisations to ensure the long term cohesion of the countryside corridor.
- Improvements will need to continue the existing balance between grazing at Larks' Hill and Garth Meadows and the provision of open spaces suitable for dog walking.
- The presence of a badger sett at Piggy Wood needs to be sensitively managed to minimize disturbance. In addition, part of the site is currently inaccessible due to the former landfill.
- As highlighted in section 2.1.15, Larks' Hill car park currently includes a recycling point which reduces parking spaces, creates an urban feel that conflicts with the natural character of the site and results in a local abundance of litter and fly-tipping. Therefore, the relocation of this facility is being

pursued to maximise the value of the SANGs as an attractive semi-natural site in accordance with Natural England guidelines.

- Dog fouling is a common issue at dog walking sites and will require action to educate users and improve behaviour. Positive action includes close liaison with the dog warden and an annual educational event held at a nearby park.

## **2.5 Management Objectives**

The following provide the overarching, existing management objectives for the sites. These are in addition to the primary objective of this Open Space Management Plan, which is to enhance alternative greenspace to attract visitors away from the SPA.

### **2.5.1 Bracknell Forest Borough Council medium term objectives**

2) To keep our parks, open spaces and leisure facilities accessible and attractive

Linking to:

4) To keep Bracknell clean and green

5) To improve health and well-being within the Borough

### **2.5.2 Bracknell Forest Borough Council Community Plan policies**

- Priority 2 – Protecting and enhancing the environment
- Priority 3 – Improving health and well-being

Linking to:

- Priority 5 – A town fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century
- Priority 6 – Improving travel and transport
- Priority 7 – Promoting community safety
- Priority 8 – Improving community engagement

### **2.5.3 Site-based Objectives**

- A. To provide a high quality recreational resource.
- B. To manage and enhance biodiversity and landscape value.
- C. To develop the sites' strategic importance within the context of the developing BFBC Greenspace Strategy and SPA Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy (2007).

## **2.6 Management Strategies**

These strategies attempt to summarise the detailed list of actions set out for individual sites:

### **2.6.1 Site maintenance**

- To undertake regular inspections and surveys.
- To maintain all paths, car parks, site furniture, interpretation and notice boards.
- To address any anti-social behaviour or inappropriate use of the sites.

### **2.6.2 Biodiversity**

- To manage the land to maximize its biodiversity potential.

- To manage the woodland for biodiversity to provide a variety of ages and control invasive species.
- To manage the grassland areas for wildflower diversity and enable their use by farmland birds.
- To maintain and enhance wetland habitats for a variety of species.

### **2.6.3 Visitor Management**

- Provide an area open to the public for informal recreation ensuring quiet enjoyment of the countryside.
- Improve access to the site including all major and secondary site entrances and links to the wider countryside.
- Upgrade all paths across the site to allow reasonable all year round access.
- Ensure public safety.

### 3 Site Proposals for SPA Mitigation

The measures within this plan were identified by using the suitable alternative natural greenspace (SANGs) assessment checklist in section 5 of this plan. This sets out criteria which are both essential and desirable in achieving the primary aim of providing alternative greenspace to divert visitors from using the SPA. The intention of these SANGs is to avoid and mitigate the impacts of recreation arising from new residential development, by preventing an increase in visitor pressure on the SPA.

As a result, the proposed works are in addition to existing management objectives and general upgrading of the sites. The enhancements to these alternative areas of open space aim to replicate features which have been found to draw visitors to the SPA; improving access alongside enhancement of the sites' natural qualities.

Section 6 lists these works and provides a breakdown of the estimated costs of each element. The works are also shown on the annotated site map. The proposed works are as follows:

#### 3.1 Information and Interpretation

- **Site entrance signs** at major and secondary site entrances to welcome visitors and aid users in finding the sites and formal access points.
- **Site noticeboard and interpretative panels:** these will provide information on the network of sites including their links to each other and the wider area. This will incorporate individual site information including features of interest and internal routes. Regularly updated posters and leaflets will also be displayed on noticeboards in order to inform visitors of events and seasonal site information.
- **Fingerposts and waymarkers** at strategic points (primarily site entrances and path junctions) and on the principal paths around the sites will enable visitors to navigate around the sites with ease. They will also help link the sites and raise awareness of the group as well as directing users to adjoining Public Rights of Way for longer routes into the north of the borough.
- **Site leaflet:** a glossy, colour leaflet to establish the identity of the SANGs group and associated links. This will include site and access information, background details of the different areas, nature conservation information as well as a map to help visitors find their way around. The production of a leaflet, distributed via Borough Council offices, website, libraries and information points such as The Look Out Discovery Centre will also help inform potential visitors of the sites' presence and use as an alternative recreational resource to the SPA. Marketing will also include targeting new residents; including providing information at locations such as Estate Agents.

#### 3.2 Access

A range of works will enable sites to support higher visitor numbers by making entrances, paths and furniture more accessible, attractive and durable. These improvements will also improve the perceptions of safety when using the sites.

- **Main entrance** to Larks' Hill will be widened to allow visibility and easier access by vehicles entering and exiting the site. Other entrances will also be cleared and marked to make them more obvious and attractive.
- **Car parking** capacity at Larks' Hill will be increased subject to the assessment of relocating the recycling facilities outside the SANGs. This will also significantly improve visual amenity, reduce litter and fly-tipping problems. In addition, link sites will enable further provision of car parking to access the SANGs. Cycle parking provision will also be provided at Larks' Hill.
- **Existing pedestrian entrances** will be enhanced by cutting back vegetation, and the installation of secondary site signs and new furniture. In particular, existing stiles and gates will be replaced with accessible wooden kissing gates to allow access for mobility impaired users. Gate arrangements shall take into account where cattle are grazed.
- **Informal road crossings** from Garth Pond to Quelm Lane and Garth Meadows are being pursued through discussion with highway engineers. However, if this option is not deemed suitable the site can still be linked using existing pavement along Harvest Ride.
- **Paths:** existing paths around the sites will be improved as follows:
  - Main circular routes will be surfaced using hoggins to guide the majority of users around the sites whilst maintaining a natural character. Where required, a new small crossing or raised path section will be provided to cross wet areas, such as over small ditches at Garth Meadows.
  - Secondary paths will be cleared to provide extended links throughout the sites for those users who wish to walk further.
  - Bridges will be replaced where necessary.

### 3.3 Furniture

New site furniture will enhance visitor use of the sites as well as providing a more welcoming and attractive appearance to the area. The design of site furniture shall be in keeping with the countryside character of the sites.

- New **seating** will be provided at strategic points around the sites, located to allow visitors to enjoy the visual amenity and also where rest points may be required at the furthest points from site entrances. In particular, a new picnic area will be formed at Larks' Hill.
- New **bins** will be installed around the sites adjacent to entrances to minimise litter and dog fouling. These will be combined litter and dog-waste bins in line with Bracknell Forest Borough Council policy of using combined bins.
- Old and redundant **fencing** will be removed to enhance visual appearance and create a more open landscape.
- **Natural art features** using materials from the woodland will be commissioned to provide a focus for visitors and encourage their use for recreation.



### 3.5 Habitat Management

Vegetation works will be carried out in order to increase the nature conservation interest of the sites by reducing succession of scrub in grassland areas and creating a variety of vegetated areas and habitats for different species. The attractiveness of the sites will be improved by opening up views and creating space.

- **Tree works** to safeguard key features and ensure safety of users on principal and secondary paths. Work will include trees on boundaries.
- **Ditch clearance** by removal of debris and invading scrub to ensure efficient drainage and maintain wetland habitats.
- **Scrub control** to remove young saplings from grassland areas and reduce bramble.
- **Coppicing** of larger trees or stools.
- **Hedgelaying** sections of the perimeter at sites to improve visibility and reinforce the barrier and ensure long term vitality of the hedge.
- **Wildlife features** such as bat boxes, bird boxes and other refuges will be installed within different areas of the sites to improve opportunities for biodiversity.

### 3.6 Implementation

#### 3.6.1 Funding

Funding for the proposed works as costed in section 6 will come from new residential development within the Borough which is likely to have an adverse effect on the SPA, as set out in Chapter 11 of Limiting the Impact of Development Supplementary Planning Document, July 2007 (LID). This states that legal obligations under Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act will be entered into before a planning application is determined. A proportion of the total amount payable under this agreement will go towards open space enhancement measures and ongoing management associated with these measures as detailed within this plan. These measures will ensure the sites are suitable as an alternative to the SPA and will attract new residents away from the SPA. In addition, revenue contributions will provide additional staff time to maintain a site presence which will improve the feeling of safety at the sites.

#### 3.6.2 Prioritising Works

Implementation of the proposed works will be prioritised in the following order (unless deemed inappropriate due to other site works going on at that time):

1. Site entrance and visual works
2. Path and access improvements
3. Information and interpretation provision
4. Other works (including habitat management)

The timing of works will relate to planning approvals and the availability of Section 106 funding.

### **3.6.3 Monitoring**

ODPM Circular 05/2005 on Planning Obligations requires that planning obligations are implemented or enforced in an efficient and transparent way, in order to ensure that contributions are spent on their intended purpose and that the associated development contributes to the sustainability of the area. This will require monitoring by local planning authorities through the use of standardised systems to ensure that information on the implementation of planning obligations is readily available to the local authority, developer and members of the public. Regular reports on the monitoring information will also be provided to Natural England.

To meet the requirements of the Circular, monitoring will demonstrate how the spending of contributions on enhancements to open space sites link to specific developments within their catchment area. This will also ensure the capacity of the open space, as calculated in the SPA TBD, is not exceeded and the enhancement works are effective in attracting new visitors from the SPA.

A proportion of the funding obtained through the S106 agreement will provide resources to ensure the full package of avoidance and mitigation measures are monitored to ensure their continued effectiveness. Details of the monitoring and review of the SPA TBD are outlined in Section 29 of the document.

### **3.6.4 Consultation**

This plan has been developed in consultation with Natural England, Bracknell Town Council, Thames Water and the Bracknell Forest Council Parks & Countryside team have been able to comment on the proposals in order to combine objectives and provide an inclusive plan.

## **3.8 Conclusion**

The measures within this plan were identified by using the SANGs assessment checklist (see section 5) as being necessary to attract existing users from the SPA and encourage new residents to visit the enhanced area of open space in preference to the SPA. These works are in addition to existing management objectives and general upgrading of the site.

The proposed works will greatly improve this group of sites, bringing them together to provide a large network of paths for recreation. A new drive to increase public awareness will be implemented using interpretation and publicity to maximise use of the sites as a local resource.

Alongside the capital programme, additional day to day management is needed to sustain these improvements and ensure that the sites continue to be attractive to visitors.

As a component of a wider package of measures the works detailed within this plan will avoid the adverse impacts of recreation arising from new residential development on the SPA and enable sustainable development within the Borough.



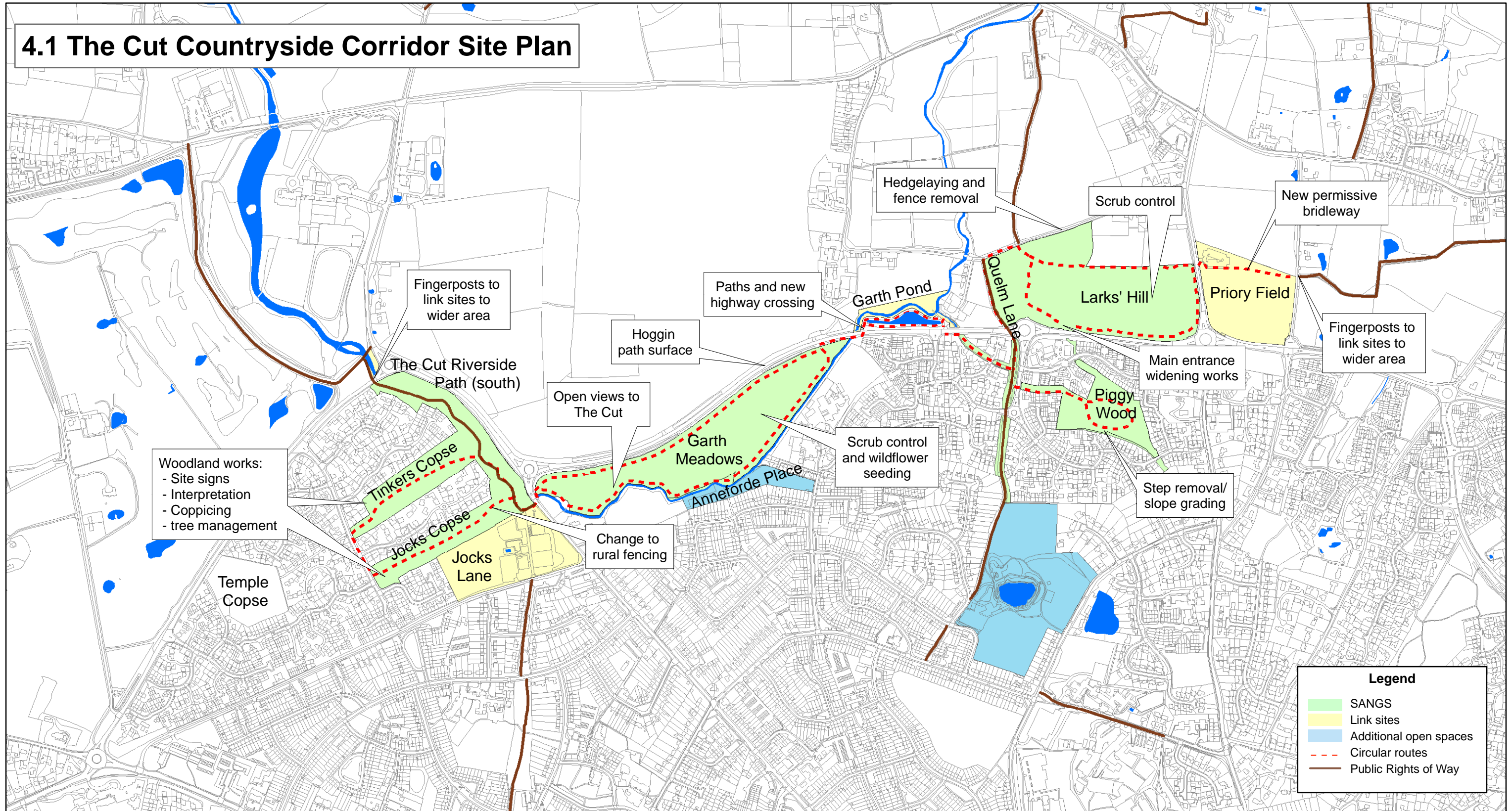
## **4 Site Plan**

### **4.1 Site Plan – The Cut Countryside Corridor Proposed SPA Mitigation Work**

### **4.2 Site Plan – The Cut Countryside Corridor (aerial)**



# 4.1 The Cut Countryside Corridor Site Plan



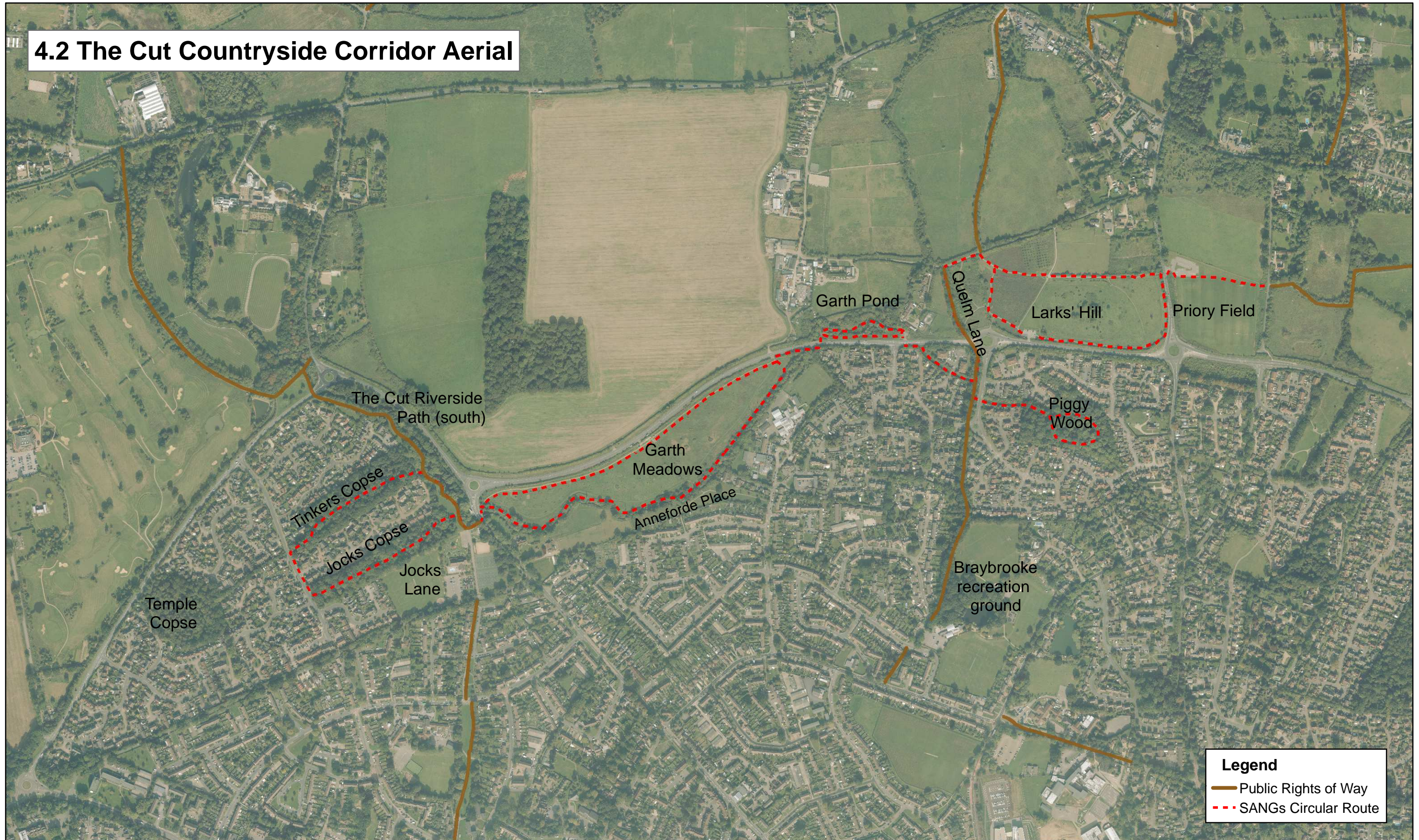
Please note this site plan shows only a selection of the proposed works, refer to section 3 Site Proposals for full details.



1:8,020

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## 4.2 The Cut Countryside Corridor Aerial



**Legend**  
— Public Rights of Way  
- - - SANGs Circular Route



1:7,327

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## 5 SANGS Criteria Assessment

It must be noted that the primary aim of enhancement is to encourage additional visitor access. Works should facilitate this by providing management for all weather access, stiles where necessary, site safety in terms of crossing between units and allowing dogs to run off the lead, plus interpretation, route marking, promotion etc. All enhancements must be undertaken prior to inhabitants moving into the dwellings to ensure that people do not develop a habit of visiting other sites, such as the SPA.

The following provides a list of relevant factors in considering a site's suitability to meet SANGS criteria.

	<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Must, Should, Desirable</b>	<b>Current</b>	<b>Future</b>
1	For all the sites larger than 4Ha there must be adequate parking for visitors. The amount of car parking space being determined by the anticipated use of the site and reflecting the visitor catchments of both SANGS and the SPA.	M	3 Formal car parks available, 141 car spaces	Improved site signage and links from car parks into and around the sites. In addition, increased capacity at Larks Hill will be pursued.
2	SANGS must be clearly signposted or advertised in some way.	S	Some entrance signs. Site webpage. Site leaflets online (over 10 years old) but lacking for some sites	New site entrance signs; interpretative panels; directional fingerposts around sites; new site leaflet linking all sites.
3	Car parks must be easily and safely accessible by car and should be clearly signposted.	S	Site entrance signs at some sites.	Road signs & new site entrance signs. Entrance widening at Larks Hill to enable cars to pass.
4	The accessibility of the site must include access points appropriate for the particular visitor use the SANGS intend to absorb.	M	Three vehicular entrances and 29 pedestrian entrances.	All entrance points to be upgraded to enhance attractiveness and accessibility where possible. All main paths to be surfaced.
5	The SANGS must have a safe route of access on foot	M	Wide choice of routes around	Improved links and signage

	from the nearest car park and/or footpaths.		sites from car parks and entrance points.	from car park and pedestrian entrances into sites and between sites.
6	It would be desirable for an owner to be able to take dogs from the car park to SANGS safely off the lead.	D	Majority of dog walkers are able to walk with dogs off lead at all sites.	Improved links, signage and interpretation from car park into site. Works to improve security of the site and open areas.
7	All SANGS with car parks must have a circular walk which starts and finishes at the car park.	M	Larks Hill - Existing circular route starts and finishes at car park. Jocks Lane – access to easy circular routes.	Improved links, signage and information on routes from car park into and between sites. New long distance circular route starts and finishes at car park.
8	SANGS larger than 12Ha must be designed to supply a choice of routes, from 0.5Km to more than 3.5Km in length.	M	Choice of a range of lengths in circular walks around the sites.	Improved signage around sites and linking sites, a new long distance circular walk (5.4km) with shorter walks included.
9	SANGS must be designed so that they are perceived to be safe by the users.	M	Open plan car parks and some views into sites.	Widening of Larks Hill car park entrance and clearance at all entrances to open views.
10	SANGS should have tree and scrub cover along parts of the walking route.	S	Mixture of woodland and open sites with areas of scrub and hedgerows.	Scrub management and hedgelaying to maintain balance.
11	Paths must be easily used and well maintained, but most should remain unsurfaced to avoid the site becoming too urban in feel.	M	Mix of surfaced and unsurfaced paths.	Principal paths to be surfaced with local hoggin to retain natural feel. Secondary paths unsurfaced.
12	SANGS must be perceived as semi-natural spaces with little intrusion of artificial structures, except in the immediate vicinity of car parks. Visually-sensitive way-markers and some benches are acceptable.	M	Little way-marking and site furniture.	Some benches and signage to be added to enhance visitor experience but remain in-keeping with environment.
13	It is desirable that access points make clear the layout of the SANGS, and the routes available to visitors, by	D	Some site interpretation at Larks Hill. Some leaflets	New interpretative panels at each site and directional

	means of interpretation panels or other means.		available.	fingerposts and waymarkers around the sites.
14	It is desirable that SANGS provide the naturalistic space with areas of open (non-wooded) countryside and areas of dense and scattered trees and shrubs. The provision of open water on part, but not the majority, of sites is desirable.	D	Contrast of woodland and open grassland sites joined by The Cut.	Enhanced habitat management to maintain the woodland, increase grassland areas and open views to the river.
15	All SANGS larger than 12Ha must aim to provide a variety of habitats for users to experience.	M	A variety of enclosed woodland areas and open grassland areas available.	Sites include grassland, scrub, hedgerows, woodland, pond and riverside.
16	Where possible it is desirable to choose sites with a gently undulating topography for SANGS.	D	Sites form a range of changing slopes and aspects.	Utilising paths that travel through a variety of topography.
17	Access within the SANGS must be largely unrestricted with plenty of space provided where it is possible for dogs to exercise freely and safely.	M	Minimal internal fencing.	Boundary fencing improved. Minimal internal fencing.
18	Where possible it is desirable to have a focal point such as a view point, monument etc. within SANGS.	D	The Cut provides a central focus and viewpoint for site and views north to the rural landscape.	Scrub clearance to enhance views across the sites and maintain open character.
19	SANGS must be free from unpleasant intrusions (e.g. sewage treatment works, smells etc.).	M	No unpleasant intrusions.	No unpleasant intrusions.
20	SANGS should have leaflets or/and websites advertising their location to potential users. It would be desirable for leaflets to be distributed to new homes in the area and at entrance points and car parks.	S	Site webpages and leaflets available to download online.	Webpages updated with site information and news. New site leaflet printed and distributed.

## 6. Costings - The Cut Countryside proposed SPA mitigation works

Works	Location	Unit Cost	Quantity	Total Cost
<b>Information &amp; Interpretation</b>				
Site entrance signs				
- Main entrance	All sites	250	7	£1,750
- Secondary entrances	All sites	250	12	£3,000
Roadside directional signs	Harvest Ride	£1,000	1	£1,000
Site noticeboard with combined interpretive panel	At main entrances	£2,500	7	£17,500
Fingerposts	At key link locations	£200	12	£2,400
Site Leaflet	n/a	n/a	20,000	£2,500
Installation costs	(as above)	allowance		£5,000
				<b>£33,150</b>
<b>Access</b>				
			(m)	
Main entrance works	Larks Hill	allowance		£10,000
Pedestrian entrance/path clearance	All sites	£300/day	7	£2,100
Path improvements	Main routes on all sites and informal highway crossings	£30 / m	5093	£152,790
Highway crossing	Garth Pond	allowance		£15,000
Installation costs				£10,000
				<b>£189,890</b>
<b>Furniture</b>				
Bins (incl. installation)	Site entrances	£300	10	£3,000
Accessible gates (incl. installation)	Pedestrian entrances	£180	12	£2,160
Seating - benches (incl. installation)	Around sites	£300	11	£3,300
Picnic benches	Larks Hill	£500	3	£1,500
Cycle rack	Larks Hill	allowance	3	£500
Ditch crossings	Across sites	£250	5	£1,250
Fencing (removal/replacement)	Garth meadows central stock fence (replace)	£25 / m	200	£5,000
	Larks Hill car park knee rail (replace)	£25 / m	30	£750
	Larks Hill perimeter north (removal)	£5 / m	200	£1,000
	Larks Hill internal fencing	£25 / m	150	£3,750
	Priory Field Lane (remove knee rail), install bollards	£25 / m	50	£1,250
	Piggy Wood to Garth Pond (removal)	£5 / m	200	£1,000
	Jocks Copse (removal)	£5 / m	300	£1,500
Slope grading/step removal	from The Cut to Jocks Copse (removal of steps)	£300/day	2	£600
	Larks Hill	£300/day	2	£600
Natural art installations	Woodland sites	allowance		£1,000
Installation costs	All sites	allowance		£10,000
				<b>£38,160</b>
<b>Habitat Management</b>				
Ditch retaining wall repair	Tinkers Copse	allowance		£2,000
Ditch clearance	All sites	allowance		£10,000
Scrub control	Garth meadows	£300 / day	5	£1,500
	The Cut (various locations)	£300 / day	3	£900
	Larks Hill	£300 / day	5	£1,500
Coppicing	Woodland sites	£300 / day	5	£1,500
Hedgelaying	Garth meadows perimeter	£300 / day	3	£900
	Larks Hill perimeter	£300 / day	4	£1,200
Tree planting	Larks Hill community orchard	£20	10	£200
Hedges (whips with stakes and covers)	Larks Hill and Garth Meadows	£3	200	£600
Wildflower seed/planting	Grassland areas	£33	50	£1,650
Wildlife features (bird boxes, bat boxes, etc)	All sites	allowance		£500
Tree management	Adjacent to paths and site boundaries	£300 / day	7	£2,100
				<b>£24,550</b>
<b>TOTAL COST</b>				<b>£285,750</b>

N.B. All costs based on a combination of published catalogue prices, actual current costs & recent estimates.

## 7 Glossary

<b>BOAT</b>	Byway Open to All Traffic
<b>Core Strategy DPD</b>	Document within the Local Development Framework which sets out strategic development proposals until 2026.
<b>LID</b>	Limiting the Impact of Development, a Supplementary Planning Document relating to planning obligations.
<b>LNR</b>	Local Nature Reserve
<b>SANGs</b>	Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace.
<b>SPA</b>	Special Protection Area. Designated under the EU Directive 79/409 on the Conservation of Wild Birds.
<b>SPA TBD</b>	SPA Technical Background Document to the Core Strategy.
<b>TPO</b>	Tree Preservation Order
<b>TRO</b>	Traffic Regulation Order
<b>WHS</b>	Wildlife Heritage Site

## 8 References

Bracknell Forest Borough Council (2007) Medium Term Objectives. Available to download from [www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk](http://www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk).

Bracknell Forest Borough Council (2007) SPA Technical Background Document to the Core Strategy (SPA TBD). Available to download from [www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk](http://www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk).

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