

# APPENDICES TO THE THAMES BASIN HEATHS SPA TECHNICAL BACKGROUND DOCUMENT

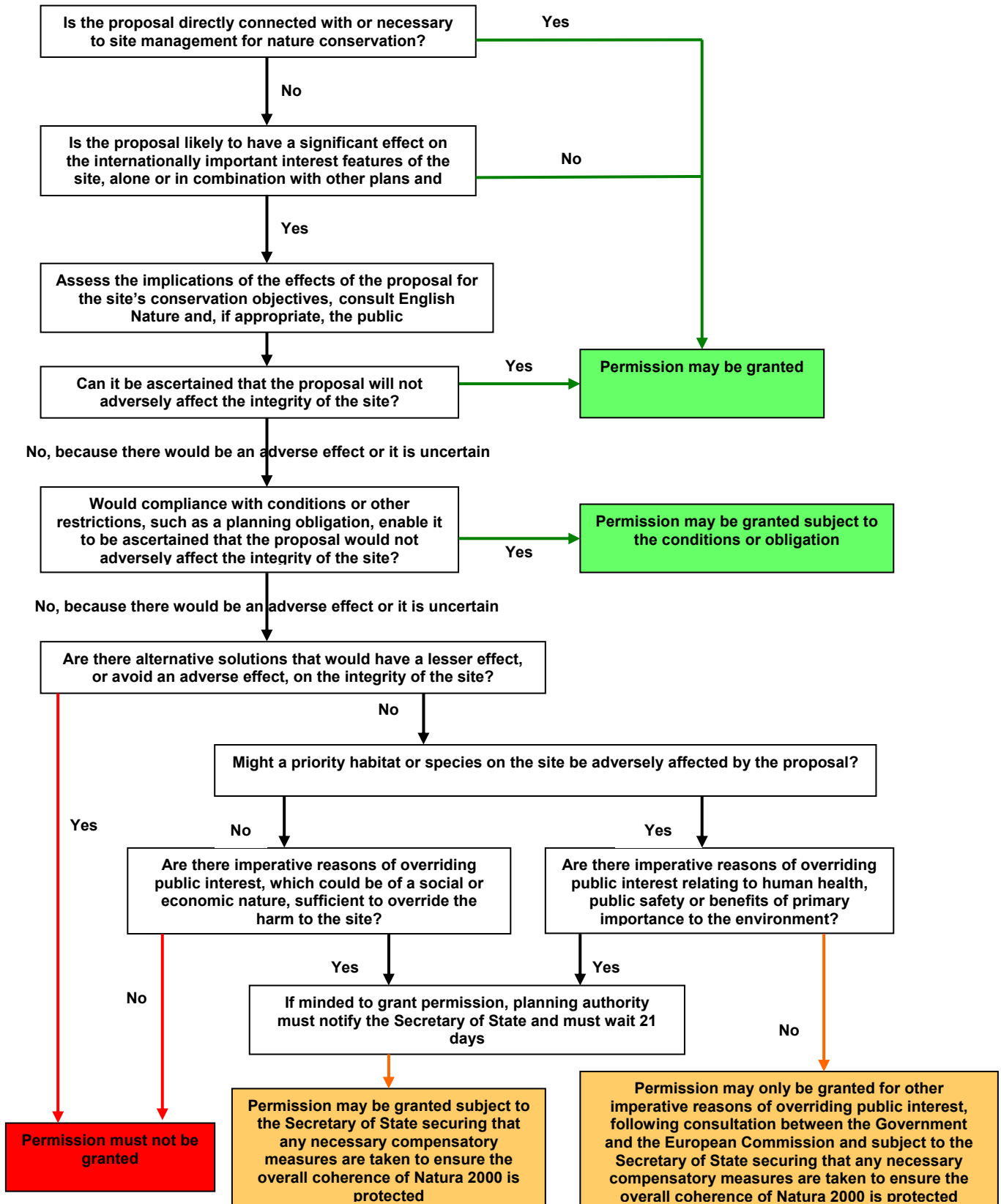
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**Appendix 1 – The flowchart summarising the decision-making process under the Habitats Regulations 1994**

Source: Figure 1 of Circular 06/2005 'Biodiversity and Geological Conservation'



## Appendix 2 – Screening Opinion

### BRACKNELL FOREST BOROUGH COUNCIL'S CORE STRATEGY AND SITE ALLOCATIONS DEVELOPMENT PLAN DOCUMENTS: IMPACTS ON NATURA 2000 SITES

#### STAGE 1: SCREENING EXERCISE

This first stage examines the likely effects of a project or plan, either alone or in-combination with other plans or projects, upon a Natura 2000 site and considers whether it can be objectively concluded that these effects will not be significant. This screening comprises of 6 steps.

- Step 1.** Determining whether the plan is directly connected with or necessary for the management of the site.
- Step 2.** Describing the plan or project and any others that in combination have the potential to significantly affect the Natura 2000 site(s).
- Step 3.** Identifying the potential effects on the site(s).
- Step 4.** Assessing the significance of these effects.
- Step 5.** Formulating a screening opinion
- Step 6.** Consultation

Within this document steps 3 to 5 have been carried out independently for the Thames Basin Heaths SPA (Steps 3A, 4A and 5A) and the Windsor Forest and Great Park SAC (Steps 3B, 4B and 5B). This is to enable a separate screening opinion for each of these sites.

When carrying out the screening, this must be viewed as a coarse filter and therefore a Precautionary Approach has been taken in the assessment of significance.

The relevant stakeholders should be consulted on the screening opinion to ensure all elements of the plan are considered which, either alone or in-combination, have the potential for a significant effect on relevant sites. This will help the Council identify potential impacts, likely pathways for those impacts and key indicators to be used for identifying impacts. The screening should therefore look at the significant effects of the plan objectives and of each individual policy.

Two screening exercises have been carried out for the Natura 2000 sites identified within the boundary of the Borough, the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area and the Windsor Forest and Great Park Special Area of Conservation, based upon best current information available to Bracknell Forest Borough Council at this current time.

**With Natural England's role as statutory body responsible for advising on nature conservation issues, Bracknell Forest Borough Council are reliant upon advice from this screening exercise in order to establish whether there are other Natura 2000 sites outside the Borough's administrative boundary, which may have potential for a significant effect and therefore should be considered at the screening stage.**

#### **STEP 1: ARE THE PLANS DIRECTLY CONNECTED WITH OR NECESSARY FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF THE SITE.** \* If yes, proceed with normal authorisation process

No – these DPDs do not introduce any management measures for conservation purposes.

#### **STEP 2: DESCRIPTION OF THE DEVELOPMENT PLANS AND ANY OTHER PLANS OR PROJECTS THAT, IN COMBINATION, HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO SIGNIFICANTLY AFFECT NATURA 2000 SITES.**

The Core Strategy DPD will set the broad local planning framework for the Borough up to 2026. It will set out a broad approach against which decisions on future development relating

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to where we live, work, spend our leisure time and how we travel, will be considered. The broad principles and policies in the Core Strategy will form the basis for more detailed policies and proposals to be prepared in other documents.

The Site Allocations DPD is being produced alongside the Core Strategy and identifies specific sites for major development in the Borough over the next 20 years. The document will identify sites which meet the broad strategy for locating development set out in the Core Strategy, identify the type and level of development on each site, and identify when and how development will be implemented.

Location	Bracknell Forest Borough Council
Distance from designated site boundaries to PP boundary	<p>Plan boundary is the whole of the Borough therefore encompasses part of both the SPA and SAC.</p> <p>Significant effects have been identified within certain zones around the SPA. The relevant land areas (as a proportion of the Borough are shown below):</p> <p>SPA habitat - 12.2%</p> <p>Within 400m of the SPA boundary (but not designated) - 7.8%</p> <p>Between 400m and 2km from site boundary - 22.6%</p> <p>Between 2km and 5km buffers - 26.1%</p> <p>Outside 5km buffer - 31.3%</p>
Total number of new and/or additional residential units	<p>The Core Strategy and Site Allocations DPDs currently set out the provision for and location of 10,780 net additional residential dwellings up to March 2026 (subject to the outcome of the SE Plan). This equates to a rate of 539 dwellings per annum over the 20 year plan period.</p>
Brief description of the manner in which the plan will be carried out	<p>According to policies listed in the plan – see appendices 1 and 2 for a list of policies.</p>
Plans which may impact in-combination	<p>The South East Plan. The Berkshire Structure Plan. The Core Strategy (and Site Allocations where relevant) from other Local Authorities in close proximity to the SPA. These include: Elmbridge BC, Guildford BC, Hart DC, Royal Borough of Windsor &amp; Maidenhead, Runnymede BC, Rushmoor BC, Surrey Heath BC, Waverley BC, Woking BC and Wokingham DC. Bracknell Forest Rights of Way Improvement Plan.</p> <p>As the majority of these plans are in production at the current time, their in-combination impacts are very difficult to assess.</p>
Projects which may impact in-combination	

### STEP 3A: CHARACTERISTICS AND DESCRIPTION OF THE THAMES BASIN HEATHS SPA

The Thames Basin Heaths SPA was proposed in October 2000, and full SPA status was approved on 9 March 2005. It is an example of a heathland landscape based within a highly active economy. It consists of a composite site covering an area of some 8274 hectares, consisting of 13 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) scattered from Hampshire in the west, to Berkshire in the north, through to Surrey.

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The habitat consists of both dry and wet heathland, mire, oak, birch acid woodland, gorse scrub and acid grassland with areas of rotational conifer plantation.

**Qualifying species:**

This site qualifies under Article 4.1 of the Directive (79/409/EEC) by as it is used by 1% or more of the Great Britain population of a species of European Importance listed in Annex I of the Directive

During the breeding season this includes:

- Dartford Warbler (*Sylvia undata*), 445 pairs representing at least 27.8% of the breeding population in Great Britain (Count as at 1999).
- Nightjar (*Caprimulgus europaeus*), 264 pairs representing at least 7.8% of the breeding population in Great Britain (Count mean (1998-99)).
- Woodlark (*Lullula arborea*), 149 pairs representing at least 9.9% of the breeding population in Great Britain (Count as at 1997).

(Reference JNCC, 2001)

The SPA supports the second largest concentration of Dartford warbler in Great Britain, the third largest number of woodlark, and the fourth largest population of breeding nightjars.

The conservation objectives for a site relate to the important populations of birds listed in Annex I of the Bird's Directive and populations of 'regularly occurring migrant birds'.

**Therefore, the conservation objective for the Thames Basin Heaths SPA is to maintain at, or restore to, favourable conservation status, the natural habitats and/or the populations of nightjar, woodlark and Dartford warbler, for which the site has been selected.** The conservation status of a species is defined as favourable when the population, range and natural habitats of the species are stable or increasing.

**Non-qualifying species of interest:**

Hen harrier (*Circus cyaneus*), merlin (*Falco columbarius*), short-eared owl (*Asio flammeus*) and kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*) (all Annex I species) occur in non-breeding numbers of less than 1% of the GB population.

**Condition:**

Based upon the condition tables for the 13 SSSIs the condition of the SPA as a whole is as follows:

- Favourable – 12.19%
- Unfavourable recovering – 58.57%
- Unfavourable no change – 9.19%
- Unfavourable declining – 20.03%
- Destroyed / part destroyed – 0.02%

In relation to the Annex I bird species the following targets must be reached to achieve a favourable condition:

**Dartford warbler:** Large unbroken dwarf-shrub layer of heather with scattered gorse; Abundance of shrub layer invertebrates; Mix of heather, trees and gorse amongst heathland vegetation; Reduction or displacement of birds; Extent and distribution of habitat area.

**Nightjar:** Abundance of night flying insects; Open ground with predominantly low vegetation, bare patches and sparse woodland/scrub cover; Reduction or displacement of birds; Extent and distribution of habitat area.

**Woodlark:** Abundance of ground surface invertebrates; Mix of shrub/ tree cover, short-medium vegetation and bare ground; Reduction or displacement of birds; Extent and distribution of habitat area.

**STEP 4A: ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE ON THE SPA – IDENTIFYING THE POTENTIAL EFFECTS OF THE PLAN ON THE SPA, AND THE LIKELY CHANGES AS A RESULT.**

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This step looks at the likely direct, indirect or secondary impacts of the plans on the designated site, alone or in-combination with other relevant plans. Different impacts are not anticipated from the Core Strategy and Site Allocations DPDs as both result in increased levels of development.

A comprehensive literature review was carried out by English Nature (Underhill-Day, 2005<sup>22</sup>) which reviews literature on the urban effects on lowland heaths and their wildlife. The table below draws upon the findings of this report.

**Potential effects on the SPA relating to development**

<b>Effect</b>	<b>Relevance</b>
Fragmentation between heathland	Development on areas which are already considered to be fragmenting the SPA could potentially compound the impacts of fragmentation and diminish the heathlands as a single area of functional heathland.
Fragmentation within heathland	On a smaller scale the proliferation of footpaths and widening of existing tracks may cause isolation of plants and animals.
Supporting habitats	A loss of foraging habitat, particularly woodland, up to 750 metres outside the breeding area for nightjars, has been shown to have a negative effect on nightjar densities.
Predation	Dogs walked off their leash could potentially have an effect on predation. The most significant effect is indirectly by temporarily scaring ground nesting birds from their nest, leaving the chicks vulnerable to other types of predation. Cats from developments as far as 1kilometre from the SPA could also have an adverse impact, albeit with diminishing significance. Natural England consider that developments within 400 metres from the SPA lead to a significant level of cat predation.
Hydrology	No policies require diversion of water supplies however run-off from the urban area could be an issue if sites are within close proximity to the boundary. Due to the strategic level of the plan further analysis is not possible, but hydrological assessments may be required for project level development to determine whether it would result in an alteration of the hydrological regime to the wet areas of the SPA. There are no water courses within the Borough which enter the SPA, therefore flooding or pollution from development upstream is not a significant issue. In addition, groundwater may be impacted upon by development.
Pollution	The distance of the re-development from the SPA ensures that any polluting run-off associated with the increase in housing would not have an impact. Fly tipping of garden rubbish is, as a rule, restricted to housing on the perimeter of the SPA boundary.
Sand and gravel working	Not relevant.
Enrichment	Dog faeces could potentially cause a significant effect if the visitor numbers increase as a result of the development.
Roads	Not relevant
Service infrastructure	Not relevant
Disturbance	Relevant as car-borne walkers, dog walkers and cyclists travel over 5 kilometres to visit the site. These activities have been shown to cause disturbance of the protected bird species.
Trampling	Relevant as an increase in recreation could cause increases in

<sup>22</sup> Underhill-Day, J C (2005) Report 623. A literature review of urban effects on lowland heaths and their wildlife. English Nature.



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Effect	Relevance
	track use, proliferation of the number of tracks and potentially cause habitat erosion. The tracks at this particular part of the SPA are very well defined and maintained, so erosion off track is unlikely.
Vandalism (including fire)	This could potentially increase if population increases in close proximity to the SPA boundary. It is understood that most vandalism occurs by young people who have foot access to the heaths from their homes.
Public hostility	An increase in the number of local residents who feel a sense of 'ownership' of the SPA may increase hostility.
Management costs	Management costs may increase if visitor use increases.

### Describe likely significant effects

Judgements of whether the integrity of the site is likely to be adversely and significantly affected should be made in relation to the features for which the European site was designated, their conservation objectives and set against the definition of integrity. The above table highlights that recreational pressure, in particular dog-walkers and walkers, can have an adverse impact on the Annex I species for which the SPA is designated. This could:

- Increase nest predation by natural predators when adults are flushed from the nest or deterred from returning to it by the presence of people or dogs resulting in reduction in species density.
- Chicks or eggs dying of exposure because adults are kept away from the nest resulting in reduction in species density.
- Accidental trampling of eggs by people, given that the woodlark and nightjar are ground nesting.
- Through predation of chicks or eggs by domestic dogs and cats resulting in reduction in species density.
- Increasing stress levels in adult birds resulting in a decreased ability to flee predators leading to reduction in species density.

Other, less significant impacts are likely to arise from:

- Development on surrounding habitats or supporting habitats.
- Changes to any water supply entering the SPA, by watercourse or groundwater.

### Individual elements of the plan likely to give rise to the above significant effects

Appendix 1 provides an assessment of the impacts of each individual policy within the Core Strategy and Site Allocations DPDs and highlights whether it is likely to have an impact on the SPA.

Additional residential development within the proximity of the SPA has the potential to increase the population surrounding the site, which could in turn lead to an increase in the recreational and urbanisation impacts listed above. Various visitor surveys have indicated people will travel relatively long distances to use such sites for recreational purposes. As a result the impacts from developments up to several kilometres away from the site must also be considered. Natural England has advised that the distance from the SPA within which impacts will occur is up to 5 kilometres.

The plans propose an amount of new housing development, in particular Policy SL1 sets out provision for 10,780 new residential dwellings and policies SL2, SG2 and SG3 propose development within the urban area or as urban extensions, which locates the majority of development within 5km of the SPA boundary. Within the Site Allocations DPD some sites are proposed within 400 metres from the SPA boundary and the majority of development areas are within 5 kilometres of the SPA boundary. Policy E4 Thames Basin Heaths will ensure suitable mitigation is provided to remove adverse impacts resulting from SL1, SL2, SG2 and SG3.

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Currently there is no standard methodology for assessing the in-combination impact of increased population and increased recreational pressure from developments around the SPA.

### Assessment of significance

The significance test can be based upon prior consultation with the relevant nature conservation agency. Natural England has previously advised Bracknell Forest Borough Council that any net increase in residential dwellings within 5 kilometres of the SPA boundary is likely to have a significant effect on the integrity of the site. The decision taken by the Council is based upon this advice.

#### STEP 5A: SCREENING OPINION – SPECIAL PROTECTION AREA

On the basis of information provided in Steps 1 to 4 it is the Council's opinion that the proposed Core Strategy and Site Allocations Development Plan Documents, to which this screening relates:

- (a) Are likely to have a significant effect on the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (both alone and in-combination with other plans and programmes)
- (b) Are not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site.

Accordingly an "Appropriate Assessment" shall be made of those effects under Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive before the Council decides to undertake or adopt this plan.

#### STEP 3B: CHARACTERISTICS AND DESCRIPTION OF WINDSOR FOREST AND GREAT PARK SPECIAL AREA OF CONSERVATION (SAC)

Windsor Great Park is a vast area of parkland and forest, starting with the Long Walk at the gates of Windsor Castle, and stretching as far as Virginia Water. The area designated as a Special Area of Conservation covers 1687 hectares. There are sections of the wider Windsor Forest within Bracknell Forest at High Standinghill Woods and South Forest.

The predominant habitat (95%) is mixed woodland with a small proportion of dry grassland. Steppes (4.5%) and inland water bodies (standing water, running water) (0.5%).

#### Qualifying features:

The primary designation of this site is a result of the Annex I habitat, old acidophilous oak woods with *Quercus robur* on sandy plains. It has the largest number of veteran oaks (*Quercus spp.*) in Britain (and probably in Europe), a consequence of its management as wood-pasture. It is of importance for its range and diversity of saproxylic invertebrates, including many rare species (e.g. the beetle *Lacon querceus*), some known in the UK only from this site, and has recently been recognised as having rich fungal assemblages.

An Annex I habitat which is a qualifying feature, but not a primary reason for selection of this site, is Atlantic acidophilous beech forests with *Ilex* and sometimes also *Taxus* in the shrublayer (*Quercion robori-petraeae* or *Ilici-Fagenion*).

An Annex II species which is a primary reason for selection of this site is the Violet click beetle *Limoniscus violaceus*. The site is thought to support the largest of the known populations of this species in the UK. There is a large population of ancient trees on the site, which, combined with the historical continuity of woodland cover, has resulted in Windsor Forest being listed as the most important site in the UK for fauna associated with decaying timber on ancient trees.

Qualifying features which aren't a primary reason for site selection are European features and are therefore still protected under the Habitats Regulations.



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***The conservation objective of the SAC is to maintain at, or restore to, favourable conservation status, the natural habitats of old acidophilous oak woods with Quercus robur on sandy plains, Atlantic acidophilous beech forests with Ilex and sometimes also Taxus in the shrublayer, and the population of Violet click beetle, for which the site has been selected.***

**Vulnerability:**

The special invertebrate interest is heavily dependent upon a continuous supply of very old and decaying trees. Both the invertebrate interest and oak woodland are vulnerable to changes in management practices. The violet click beetle is thought to be present as a very small, localised population, restricted to two decaying trees. Research into its ecology with a view to gaining a better understanding of its habitat requirements is currently in progress.

Condition:

Favourable – 42.74%

Unfavourable recovering – 57.26%

**STEP 4B: ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE ON THE SAC – IDENTIFYING THE POTENTIAL EFFECTS ON THE SITE AND THE LIKELY CHANGES AS A RESULT.**

**Potential impacts relating to development**

The Potentially Damaging Operations relating to development in the area surrounding the Windsor Forest and Great Park SSSI include the following:

- Dumping, spreading or discharging of any materials.
- Burning and alterations to the pattern or frequency of burning.
- The killing, injuring, taking or removal of any wild animal, including dead animals or parts thereof, or their eggs and nests, excluding pest control and disturbing them in their places of shelter.
- Destruction, displacement, removal or cutting of any plant or plant remains, including tree, shrub, herb, hedge, dead or decaying wood, moss, lichen, fungus, leaf-mould, turf or peat.
- Modification of the structure of watercourses (eg rivers, streams, springs, ditches, drains), including their banks and beds, as by re-alignment, re-grading, damming or dredging.
- Alterations to water levels and tables and water utilisation (including irrigation, storage and abstraction from existing water bodies and through boreholes). Also the modification of current drainage operations (through the installation of new pumps).
- Recreational activities.

It should be noted that this list relates specifically to the SSSI and are being used as a surrogate for the likely impacts from development on the SAC. The SSSI features to which the PDOs relate are not the same as the SAC features, however Natural England agree that the impacts listed do encompass those that might affect the SAC.

**Individual elements of the plan likely to give rise to the above impacts**

The above list indicates that the SAC is most likely to be impacted on from trampling, fires, dumping of materials, garden escapees, destruction of plant and plant remains and modification of watercourses and alterations to water levels. Therefore the majority of impacts could result from localised sources such as housing or industry adjacent to the SAC boundary. Increased recreation increases the risk of damage from, for example, unauthorised fungus collection and changes to inflowing water courses could have an adverse impact on the ancient trees, in particular beech, which is likely to be under increased water stress from climate change.

Appendix 2 provides an assessment of the impacts of each individual policy within the Core Strategy and Site Allocations DPDs and highlights whether it is likely to have an impact on the SAC. None of the policies propose development within 2 kilometres of the SAC boundary,

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therefore there would be no localised, direct impacts. Furthermore policy E1 will not permit development in the green belt unless it can be demonstrated that it does not cause harm to the function of the area. As the area surrounding the SAC is also designated as green belt, this policy also protects the SAC.

There may be a potential impact from trampling from recreational pressures which could occur as a result of housing further from the site boundary.

### **Assessment of significance**

Judgements of whether the integrity of the site is likely to be adversely and significantly affected should be made in relation to the features for which the European site was designated, their conservation objectives and set against the definition of integrity.

The impacts from development on the SAC are not likely to significantly impact on the qualifying features for which the site was designated. The negative threats to the qualifying species relate predominantly to management practices and any potential additional recreational pressure or trampling is not likely to lead to a reduction in habitat or a change in vegetation composition. Therefore, significant effects of the Core Strategy and Site Allocations DPDs, either alone or in-combination with other Development Plan Documents within the locality, are not likely to compromise the favourable conservation status of the SAC.

#### **STEP 5B: SCREENING OPINION – WINDSOR FOREST AND GREAT PARK SAC**

On the basis of information provided in Steps 1 to 4 it is the Council's opinion that the proposed Core Strategy and Site Allocations Development Plan Documents, to which this screening relates:

- (a) Are **not** likely to have a significant effect on the Windsor Forest and Great Park SAC (either alone or in-combination with other plans and programmes).
- (b) Are not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site.

Accordingly no "Appropriate Assessment" of the impacts on Windsor Forest and Great Park SAC is required to be made under Regulation 48, 49 and 54 of the 'Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994' before the Council decides to undertake or adopt this plan.

## ANNEX 1 – SCREENING OF INDIVIDUAL POLICIES FOR THE SPECIAL PROTECTION AREA

Key: ✘ – the policy will not have a significant effect on the SPA

✔ – the policy is likely to have a significant effect on the SPA

– \_ the policy is not relevant to this screening opinion

### Core Strategy

Action	Will this policy have a likely significant effect on the SPA?						Comments
	Fragmentation of habitat or species / trampling	Predation	Hydrology / pollution / enrichment	Disturbance	Vandalism / fire / off-roading	Prevention of management	
Draft SG1 Sustainable Principles Policy	✘	✘	✘	✘	✘	✘	
Draft SG2 Location Principles Policy	✘	✔	✔	✔	✔	✘	The use of PDL within the urban areas predominantly requires the use of land within 5km of the SPA, therefore without mitigation this has the potential to have an adverse impact. If policy E4 Thames Basin Heaths is implemented this would provide mitigation to remove any adverse impact. However, until more detailed work is carried out, the provision of suitable mitigation land cannot be proven therefore a negative screening cannot be established.
Draft SG3 Urban Extensions Policy	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✘	All urban extensions fall within 5km of the SPA, therefore without mitigation this has the potential to have an adverse impact. If policy E4 Thames Basin Heaths is implemented this would provide mitigation to remove any adverse impact. However, until more detailed work is carried out, the provision of suitable

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Action	Will this policy have a likely significant effect on the SPA?						Comments
							mitigation land cannot be proven therefore a negative screening cannot be established.
Draft QL1 Infrastructure Policy	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	
Draft QL2 – Lifelong Learning	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	
Draft QL3 - Design	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	
Draft QL4 – Community Safety	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	
Draft QL5 – Quality Communities	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	
Draft QL6 – Recreation and Culture	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	This could potentially have a positive effect as the provision of alternative open space could reduce pressure upon the SPA.
Draft E1 – Gaps and Green Wedges	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	
Draft E2 – Sustainable Resources	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	
Draft E3 – Green Belt	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	
Draft E4 – Thames Basin Heaths	—	—	—	—	—	—	This policy as worded states the Council will not permit development which, either individually or in-combination with other development, has an adverse effect upon the integrity of the SPA

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Action	Will this policy have a likely significant effect on the SPA?						Comments
Draft E5 – Renewable Energy	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Draft E6 – Sustainable Waste Management	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Draft SL1 – Overall Housing Provision	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	New developments within 5km could increase the impact of recreation, including fragmentation, disturbance and vandalism. However, until more detailed work is carried out, the provision of suitable mitigation land cannot be proven therefore a negative screening cannot be established.
Draft SL2 – Housing Location	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	The use of PDL or urban extensions predominantly requires the use of land within 5km of the SPA, therefore without mitigation this has the potential to have an adverse impact. However, until more detailed work is carried out, the provision of suitable mitigation land cannot be proven therefore a negative screening cannot be established.
Draft SL3 – Housing needs	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Draft SL4 – Gypsies and Travellers	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Draft WS1 – Retailing	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Draft WS2 – Employment	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Draft Policy TA1 – Transport & new	x	x	x	x	x	x	


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Action	Will this policy have a likely significant effect on the SPA?						Comments
Development							
Draft Policy TA2 - Accessibility	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Draft Policy BTC1 – Bracknell Town Centre	—	—	—	—	—	—	The outline planning permission for the town centre includes mitigation to remove adverse impact on the SPA.
SA1 Flexible Site Allocations	x	x	x	x	x	x	
SA2 Carry Forward Existing Proposals	x	x	x	x	x	x	
SA3 Urban Housing Potential Sites	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	The location of the majority of sites within the Site Allocations DPD would lead to the risk of a significant effect.
SA4 Urban Extensions	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	The location of urban extensions within the Site Allocations DPD would lead to the risk of a significant effect.
SA5 Defined Employment Areas	x	x	x	x	x	x	
SA6 Gypsy and Traveller Site Allocations	x	x	x	x	x	x	
SA7 Transport Scheme Allocations	x	x	x	x	x	x	
SA8 Retail Allocations	x	x	x	x	x	x	
SA9 Bracknell Town Centre	—	—	—	—	—	—	The outline planning permission for the town centre includes mitigation to remove adverse impact on the SPA.



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**ANNEX 2 – SCREENING OF INDIVIDUAL POLICIES FOR THE SPECIAL AREA OF CONSERVATION**

Key:  – the policy will not have a significant effect on the SAC

 – the policy is likely to have a significant effect on the SAC

 – the policy is not relevant to this screening opinion

Core Strategy

Action	Will this policy have a likely significant effect on the SPA?						Comments
	Fragmentation of habitat or species / trampling	Predation	Hydrology / pollution / enrichment	Disturbance	Vandalism / fire / off-roading	Prevention of management	
Draft SG1 Sustainable Principles Policy							
Draft SG2 Location Principles Policy							
Draft SG3 Urban Extensions Policy							
Draft QL1 Infrastructure Policy							
Draft QL2 – Lifelong Learning							
Draft QL3 - Design							
Draft QL4 – Community Safety							
Draft QL5 – Quality Communities							
Draft QL6 – Recreation and Culture							

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Action	Will this policy have a likely significant effect on the SPA?						Comments
Draft E1 – Gaps and Green Wedges	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Draft E2 – Sustainable Resources	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Draft E3 – Green Belt	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Draft E4 – Thames Basin Heaths	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Draft E5 – Renewable Energy	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Draft E6 – Sustainable Waste Management	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Draft SL1 – Overall Housing Provision	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Draft SL2 – Housing Location	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Draft SL3 – Housing needs	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Draft SL4 – Gypsies and Travellers	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Draft WS1 – Retailing	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Draft WS2 –Employment	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Draft Policy TA1 – Transport & new Development	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Draft Policy TA2 - Accessibility	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Draft Policy BTC1 – Bracknell Town Centre	x	x	x	x	x	x	

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Action	Will this policy have a likely significant effect on the SPA?						Comments
SA1 Flexible Site Allocations	x	x	x	x	x	x	
SA2 Carry Forward Existing Proposals	x	x	x	x	x	x	
SA3 Urban Housing Potential Sites	x	x	x	x	x	x	
SA4 Urban Extensions	x	x	x	x	x	x	
SA5 Defined Employment Areas	x	x	x	x	x	x	
SA6 Gypsy and Traveller Site Allocations	x	x	x	x	x	x	
SA7 Transport Scheme Allocations	x	x	x	x	x	x	
SA8 Retail Allocations	x	x	x	x	x	x	
SA9 Bracknell Town Centre	x	x	x	x	x	x	

## Appendix 3 – Ecological status of the Annex I species

The following outlines the current status of the three Annex I birds, Species Action Plan objectives taken from the UK Biodiversity Action Plan and current factors which contribute to population size.

### 17.1.1 NIGHTJAR

#### Ecology

The nightjar is a summer migrant, arriving in Britain in late April to mid-May and returning in August or September to sub-Saharan Africa.

The bird is nocturnal and roosts in the day either on the ground or in the low branches of shrubs and trees.

Nightjars feed on seasonally available suitable prey consisting of flying insects (such as moths, beetles and flies). They hunt mainly at dawn and dusk and in some circumstances well into the night, across a wide range of habitats/land use types. Preferred feeding habitats

*RSPB*

are heathland, deciduous or mixed woodland, orchards, riparian habitats, freshwater wetlands and gardens, though plantations are used where there is structural diversity within the woodland. The birds will travel an average 3 km from the nest site to locate suitable feeding areas, although can range further.



Source:

Their nests are usually located in patches of bare or sparsely vegetated ground, mainly on free-draining sandy soils within areas of mature dry heathland, young forestry plantations, or in woodland clearings of over 1.5 hectares. Nightjars often rear two broods a season. Normally two eggs are laid from mid May to mid July. Chicks hatch after about 19 days and fly at about 17 days old, then are reliant on the parents for about four weeks.

#### Current Status

This species has been declining in numbers and range for much of this century, reaching a low point of 2,100 males in 1981, with a decline in range of 52% between 1968-72 and 1992. There has since been a partial recovery in the size of the population which had reached 3,400 males in 1992. The species now breeds mainly in southern England, but there are scattered populations as far north as central Scotland. Lowland heathland and young forestry plantations are now the most important habitats. An increase in forestry clear-fells as a result of major storms and forest management have assisted recent increases, with over 50% of the total population found in this habitat in the 1992 survey.

#### Results of 2004 Nightjar survey (British Trust for Ornithology)

Broadmoor to Bagshot Woods and Heaths SSSI

JUNE 2007

Year	No. of churring males	Count comparison with 1992
2004	37	Up
1999	16	Up

The British Trust for Ornithology state on their website:

“The Berkshire results, compared with the last survey of 1992, were remarkable..... Very few sites have reduced their Nightjar count since 1992 and only one seems to have lost them totally, which is excellent news. To put this in perspective, part of this apparent increase may have been due to less complete site coverage during the previous survey but there have undoubtedly been substantial increases in many places particularly in the southeast of the county, where the Berkshire BTO region overlaps parts of Surrey and Hampshire. The heathlands between Crowthorne. Bracknell and Camberley and those around Pamber Heath, Padworth and Wokefield Common now hold good numbers of breeding pairs. Nationally, a total of 4,132 individual males were detected in 2004, which constitutes a 34% increase since 1992 (3,093 males). It would appear from the foregoing that Berkshire has done even better but, given the relatively small sample size and the aforementioned difference in surveyor effort, this may not necessarily be true. However it is probably safe to say that Berkshire numbers have increased by at least a third since 1992.”

### Action Plan Objectives and Targets

- Maintain a population of at least 3400 churring males.
- Halt the decline in range of the nightjar (there were 268 occupied ten km squares in 1992).
- In the long term (next 20 years), restore nightjar to parts of its former range in, for example, south-west England, west Midlands, north-west England, south-west Scotland and Northern Ireland

### Conditions required to achieve a favourable condition

Abundance of night flying insects; open ground with predominantly low vegetation, bare patches and sparse woodland/scrub cover; reduction or displacement of birds; extent and distribution of habitat area.

### Current Adverse Factors

The area of heathland in the UK has undergone a dramatic reduction during the course of this century due to agricultural land claim, afforestation and built development. For example, it is estimated that 40% of England’s lowland heathland has been lost since the 1950s. Threats continue from housing and infra-structure developments and where heathland lacks appropriate management, it will become unsuitable as nesting habitat due to invasion by bushes and trees. Nightjars require extensive areas of suitable feeding habitat, especially uncultivated land, therefore the loss of such habitats within a few kilometres of the nesting area may result in a decline in the number of birds. It is possible that a decline in the availability of large insects caused by

changes in agriculture (such as the indirect effects of pesticides) and/or climatic change, may have affected nightjar populations. In commercial forests, nightjars nest in the young stages of plantations, while there is still bare ground between the trees. If no other suitable habitat becomes available in other new or young stands, local population declines could occur as the recently planted blocks mature.

Source: UK Biodiversity Action Plan

### 17.1.2 WOODLARK

#### Ecology

The woodlark is a bird primarily of lowland heathland, acidic grassland and recently clear-felled plantations on sandy soils that support pioneer heathland vegetation. They are found breeding mainly in eastern and southern England, the New Forest, Surrey and Berkshire heaths, Breckland and some Suffolk heaths. The southern populations tend to be more sedentary, whilst the populations in East Anglia are generally summer migrants.



Source: RSPB

Woodlarks feed in areas with a high proportion of short vegetation and/or bare ground on well-drained (usually acid) soils with sparse tree cover. They feed on invertebrates during the summer and switch to seeds in the winter. Despite their name, they do not require large wooded areas, but do need some trees (for singing) and some longer vegetation (for nesting). Woodlarks utilise areas that are subject to regular ground disturbance (eg firebreaks), but avoid stony ground as they are unable to dig shallow nest scrapes.

They nest in areas of grazed heathland, recently cleared forestry plantations and open woodland, where areas of bare ground or short vegetation are mixed with patches of longer grass or heather.

Little is known of the woodlark's winter requirements and distribution, although there appears to be some movement southwards within England and to the continent.

#### Current Status

The woodlark was formerly found across Britain, south from Yorkshire, and in Northern Ireland, but is now largely restricted to five core areas. The number of ten km squares occupied in the breeding season decreased by 62% (from 198 to 73 ten km squares) between 1968-72 and 1988-91. However, since 1986 (when the population was estimated to be around 250 pairs) the population has increased with up to 620 pairs breeding in 1993, and the 1997 survey has recorded around 1,500 pairs. Results from the 1997 survey suggest that around 50% of breeding pairs across the country are now nesting on set-aside and other weedy fields.

The population increase is believed to have resulted from a succession of milder winters and storm damage which felled trees, creating additional



suitable habitat areas. This is in addition to the provision of new plantation habitats within the current core areas.

In Europe the woodlark is declining in both numbers and range.

### Action Plan Objectives and Targets

- Maintain a population of at least 1,500 breeding pairs of woodlark.
- Maintain the existing range of at least 90 ten km squares.
- Increase the range of the woodlark from 90 to 120 ten km squares, including the recolonisation of Wales and south-west England, by 2008.
- Increase the population size by 2008.

### Conditions required to achieve a favourable condition

Abundance of ground surface invertebrates; mix of shrub/ tree cover, short-medium vegetation and bare ground; reduction or displacement of birds; extent and distribution of habitat area.

### Current Adverse Factors

An estimated 40% of England's lowland heathland has been lost since the 1950s. This has led to a loss of feeding and nesting habitats for woodlarks. Whilst losses to afforestation and agriculture have declined, threats from roads and housing developments continue. Woodlarks require a mosaic of bare ground or short vegetation for feeding, and tussocks of vegetation with disturbed ground for nest sites.

Lack of appropriate management can lead to sites becoming unsuitable for the species. Rabbits play a key role in creating bare ground and short grass at many sites, and their decline following myxomatosis in the 1950s may have played a significant part in the decline of the woodlark. In addition severe winter weather and, in particular, snow cover has had an adverse impact on winter survival. The hard winters of 1962/63 and 1981/82 had considerable impact on woodlark populations on the southern heathlands.

## 17.1.3 DARTFORD WARBLER

### Ecology

The Dartford warbler is resident on the lowland heathlands of southern Britain, where it favours mature heather dominated dry heathland with dense bushes of gorse where it feeds on invertebrates. Gorse provides the predominant feeding habitat for Dartford warbler, as it is richer in invertebrate food than heather, therefore management is primarily aimed at maintaining gorse of various age and structure amongst a mainly heathland habitat. Invasive scrub and bracken need to be controlled.

RSPB



Source:

Dartford warblers hold territories of between 2 - 6 ha in size (depending on habitat quality) and nests are located in either dense gorse or deep heather. Scattered European and/or Western gorse (*Ulex europaeus* and *Ulex gallii*) cover of 5% is optimal, and should be of a range of ages to provide a continuum of suitable bushes, ie dense (6-12 years old) and up to 1.5 m high. Larger blocks of dense gorse have been shown to be especially important during periods of snow, when the birds retreat to them.

### **Current Status**

In Bracknell Forest, the Dartford warbler is rare – but increasing after a run of mild winters; a few pairs now breed in East Anglia for instance.

The last Dartford warbler survey, undertaken in 1994, recorded a national population of 1,800 pairs.

### **Action Plan Objectives and Targets**

The Berkshire Heathland and the Bracknell Forest Biodiversity Action Plans include the following objectives and targets for this species in the County:

- Continue to manage currently known breeding sites, paying particular attention to the long-term provision of suitable stands of gorse.
- Integrate Dartford Warbler management into the management of forestry and MOD areas south of Bracknell town with a view to encouraging further breeding sites.
- Establish the current extent of Dartford Warbler in the area south of Bracknell town.

### **Conditions required to achieve a favourable condition**

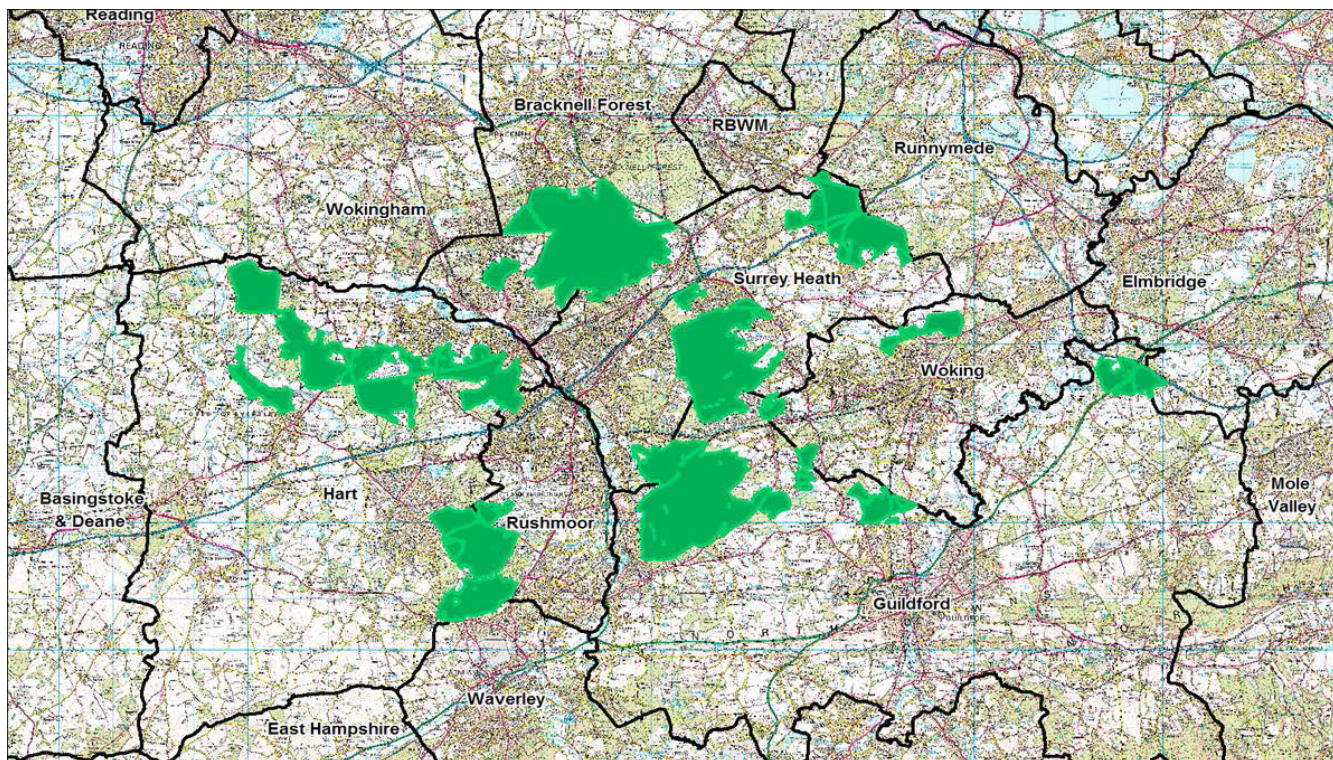
Large unbroken dwarf-shrub layer of heather with scattered gorse; abundance of shrub layer invertebrates; mix of heather, trees and gorse amongst heathland vegetation; reduction or displacement of birds; extent and distribution of habitat area.

### **Current Adverse Factors**

The species is on the edge of its European range in England, and in particular in Berkshire as it is marginally cooler than coastal populations in the New Forest and Dorset. Warm winters may therefore be a contributing factor in the increase in their population in the Thames Basin Heaths SPA. Conversely it can be severely affected by hard winters unless adequate cover is available. However, although it is vulnerable to severe winters which can result in local extinctions of the species, populations can recover rapidly and are capable of doubling every two years.

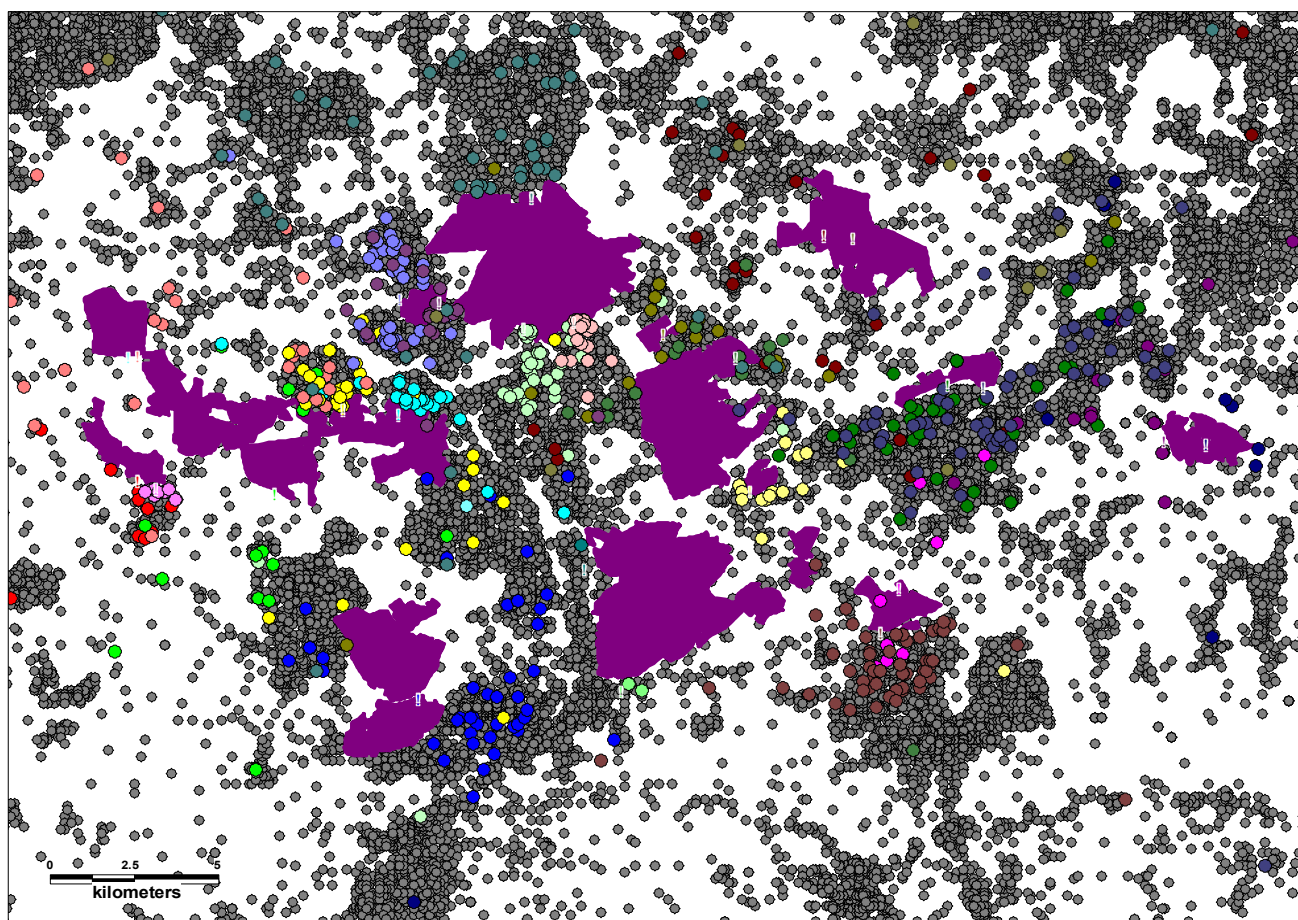
## Appendix 4 – Map of the SPA within the Borough and region

Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area regional distribution





Appendix 5 – Map of visitor use



## Appendix 6 – Summary of visitor survey information

Source: Liley, Jackson and Underhill-Day, 2005

The survey found that:

- There are 288,000 dwellings within 5km of the SPA boundary.
- Groups of up to 15 people were recorded visiting the SPA, but most people were visiting either on their own (29% of all interviews) or two people (36% of interviews).
- The majority of people visiting the SPA arrived by car (83% of people), and only 13% arrived on foot.
- The median distance people had driven to reach an access point was 3.1km and 70% of car drivers had come from within a radius of 5km from the access point.
- For those people travelling by foot, 90% came from within 1.5km.
- A variety of reasons were given for visiting the heaths, representing a broad range of recreational activities, such as cycling, fishing, picking mushrooms, flying model aircraft, wildlife watching or simply taking the children out.
- Dog walking was by far the most common reason (59% of groups) given for visiting the heaths.
- Only 28% of groups interviewed were without a dog and the total number of dogs accompanying the people interviewed was 1,271, equating to 0.6 dogs for every person visiting the SPA.
- Dog walkers walked an average of 2.5km, penetrating a mean of 760m onto the SPA.
- The number of houses surrounding each access point was a significant predictor of visitor numbers using a radius of 5km, but not further.
- The proportion of residents at different distance bands from each access point was calculated and the report suggests this is the most reliable method to model visitor levels.
- This figure was used to extrapolate an estimate of the total number of visits to the SPA per annum. A crude estimate of over 5 million visits per annum was calculated, using the assumption that the 26 access points used in the study are representative of all access points within the SPA.
- It should be emphasised that access points sampled by Natural England represent only a small proportion of the total access points to the SPA. The Natural England visitor survey estimated the total number of access points to the SPA with car parking spaces to be 150.
- The Natural England visitor survey recorded the routes taken by visitors to each of the access points and mapped these to analyse the distance travelled and degree of penetration into the SPA from the access point.

## Appendix 7 – Checklist for considering suitability of alternative open space

It must be noted that the primary aim of enhancement is to encourage further 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 space's suitability to meet SANGS criteria.

	Criteria	Must, Should, Desirable
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
2	SANGS must be clearly signposted or advertised in some way.	S
3	Car parks must be easily and safely accessible by car and should be clearly signposted.	S
4	The accessibility of the site must include access points appropriate for the particular visitor use the SANGS intend to absorb.	M
5	The SANGS must have a safe route of access on foot from the nearest car park and/or footpath/s.	M
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
7	All SANGS with car parks must have a circular walk which starts and finishes at the car park.	M
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
9	SANGS must be designed so that they are perceived to be safe by the users.	M
10	SANGS should have tree and scrub cover along parts of the walking route.	S
11	Paths must be easily used and well maintained, but most should remain unsurfaced to avoid the site becoming too urban in feel.	M
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
13	It is desirable that access points make clear the layout of the SANGS, and the routes available to visitors, by means of interpretation panels or other means.	D
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



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15	All SANGS larger than 12Ha must aim to provide a variety of habitats for users to experience.	M
16	Where possible it is desirable to choose sites with a gently undulating topography for SANGS.	D
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
18	Where possible it is desirable to have a focal point such as a view point, monument etc. within SANGS.	D
19	SANGS must be free from unpleasant intrusions (e.g. sewage treatment works, smells etc.).	M
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



**Appendix 8 – Full assessment of open space**

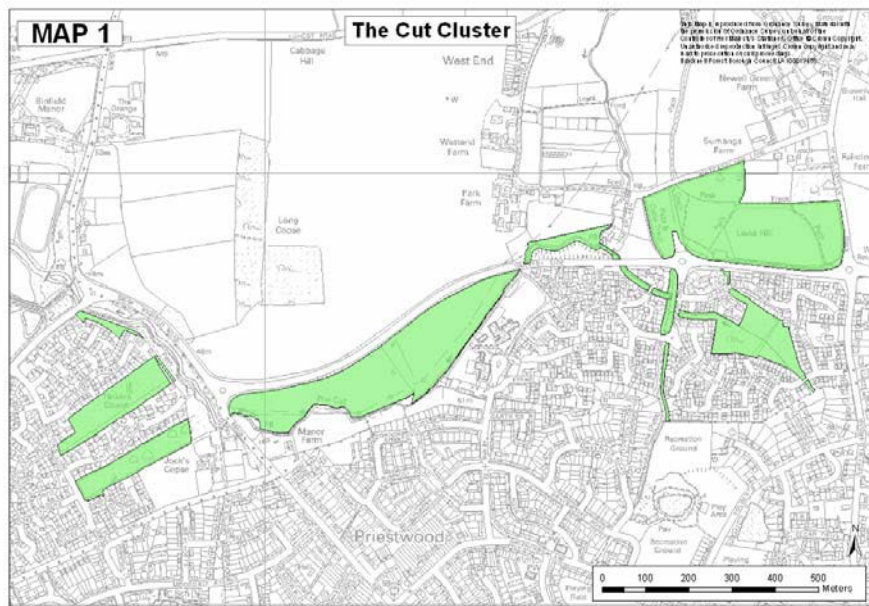




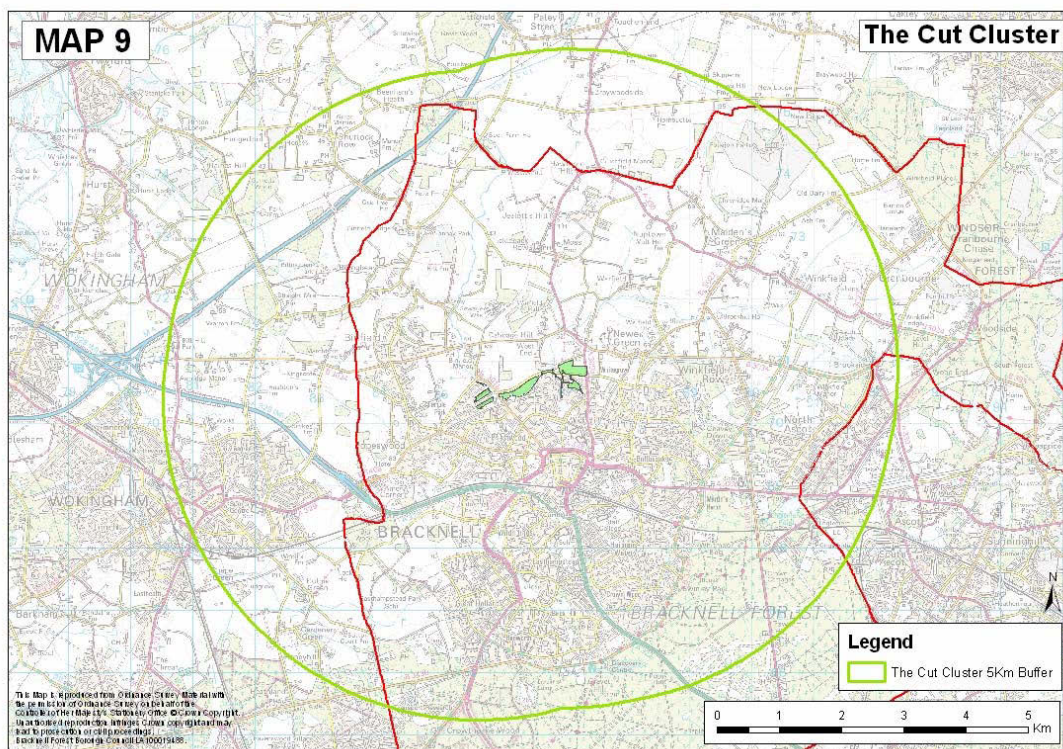
The following sites are those which have been considered to be suitable as alternative areas of recreation to the SPA.

## ‘THE CUT’ CLUSTER

The Cut Cluster consists of: Jock's Copse, Tinker's Copse, The Cut (south), Garth Meadows, Larks Hill and Piggy Wood.



The size of the 'Cut Cluster' lends itself to a 5km catchment zone as shown below:



<b>Site Name</b>	Jock's Copse / Tinker's Copse / The Cut (south)
<b>OS Co-ordinates</b>	SU 857 704
<b>Area</b>	3.63 hectares
<b>Typology</b>	E / F (urban woodland / green corridor)
<b>Ward</b>	Binfield With Warfield
<b>PPG17 Ref No's</b>	70, 141, 135
<b>PPG17 Audit</b>	Jocks Copse – 40% Average Tinkers Copse – 45% Average The Cut (South) – 39% Average

### Features

A generally naturalistic site (Bracknell Forest Borough Council, 2002) comprising a small copse (100% wooded cover) in a residential area combined with linear open space alongside the Cut river corridor (40% wooded).

Both Tinkers Copse and Jock's Copse consist of areas of ancient woodland which used to be set in an open rural farmland landscape. House building in the 1990s enclosed the copses, which had been derelict and unmanaged for quite some time prior to this.

### Nature Conservation Interests

The area now provides a valuable wildlife oasis within the urban area, with primroses and carpets of bluebells in the Spring. There are nesting species of Woodpecker and tits present along with hazel coppice and woodmice also frequent the copse.

### Legislation covering the site (SSSI, WHS, CROW etc)

Both Jocks Copse and Tinkers Copse are locally designated Wildlife Heritage Sites.

### Visitor Usage

69% of visitors usually use this open space, with the remainder visiting other spaces including: Jock's Lane, Englemere Pond, Lily Hill Park, Sandhurst Memorial Park and Ambarrow Court. The users visit on a relatively frequent basis, with a quarter of people questioned visiting more than 5 times a week.

The main reason given for visiting the site (53%) was for the children's play area, which is adjacent to the copses. Other reasons were given for dog walking (14%) and for a cut-through (14%).

94% of respondents always or usually felt safe when visiting.

81% of respondents thought this was a busy site although 50% of people would continue to use the site if the visitor numbers doubled. Only 14% would go to other areas of open space or stop using sites altogether.

### Visitor Numbers

Annual visitor projection – 52,000

### Accessibility

50% of people arrive by car, and 44% by foot. All visitors have travelled within 5 kilometres, with the majority travelling less than 10 minutes to get to the site.

### Length of footpaths

There are 3 main footpaths covering a total length of 734 metres.

### Entrances and car parks

There is no car park specifically for the woodland sites, but there is a formalised, tarmac car park for Jocks Lane open space, which is next to the wooded areas. There are 14 formal and informal entrances on foot.

The visitor survey found that the car park availability of spaces, quality and convenience were good, and nobody questioned thought car parking provision was quite poor or very poor.

### Linkages to other sites

This area could provide part of a larger route using the Cut Riverside Path and Garth Meadows.

### Potential as impact avoidance measure

In general this site was used by people using the park's facilities such as the play area, coffee shop and toilets, which lead to the site being busy in actual and perceived numbers. However, the semi-natural element of the site is quieter and has the potential to be increased in quality according to the PPG17 audit.

In isolation Jocks Lane, Tinker's Copse and The Cut (south) may not provide suitable impact avoidance for the SPA, but 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.**

<b>Site Name</b>	Garth Meadows
<b>OS co-ordinates</b>	SU 861 704
<b>Area</b>	7.1 hectares
<b>Typology</b>	D (natural & semi-natural green space)
<b>Ward</b>	Warfield Harvest Ride
<b>PPG17 Ref No's</b>	58
<b>PPG17 Audit</b>	49% Average

### Features

This is identified in the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy (2002) as a site with some natural features and 5% of the site is covered with woody planting. The remainder is open grassland grazed by cattle with a small pond.

### Nature Conservation Interests

None identified.

### Legislation covering the site (SSSI, WHS, CROW etc)

None identified.

### Visitor Usage

89% of all visitors surveyed stated this was the open space they regularly visited, which indicates a high proportion of local users. Other sites visited are Jocks Lane, Ambarrow Court and Larks Hill.

A large proportion of visitors (68%) visit more than 5 times per week, which is a higher percentage than for any other area of open space, and a further 9% visit 4 or 5 times a week.

Garth Meadows has a high proportion of dog walkers (89%) with other uses being walking (7%), jogging (%) and using it as a cut-through (2%).

The length of visit tends to be shorter for this site than for others, with 32% of people staying less than 30 minutes and a further 61% staying between 30 minutes and 1 hour; none of the visitors questioned stayed for longer than 2 hours on site. This highlights the function of this site as a local area of open space for short visits.

98% of respondents felt safe when visiting the site.

55% of people rated the site as busy, although only 7% stated it was always busy, and 32% rated it as not busy. Nearly all visitors surveyed (98%) stated they would continue to use the site, either at the same time or a different time, if visitor numbers doubled.

### **Visitor Numbers**

Annual visitor projection – 21,000

### **Accessibility**

The majority of visitors (89%) walk or run to the site, with only 11% of people arriving by car. Correspondingly over three quarters of visitors have travelled less than 1 kilometre and all visitors came from within 5 kilometres of the open space. 84% travelled less than 10 minutes to reach the site.

### **Length of footpaths**

No all-weather footpaths were identified.

### **Entrances and car parks**

There is no parking provision to these meadows and 3 formal entrances on to the site.

### **Linkages to other sites**

This area could provide part of a larger route using the Cut Riverside Path and Jock's Copse/Tinker's Copse/The Cut.

### **Potential as impact avoidance measure**

This is a semi-natural site which already provides predominantly for dog walkers, who tend to walk to the site and visit frequently. 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.



<b>Site Name</b>	Larks Hill
<b>OS co-ordinates</b>	SU 870 709
<b>Area</b>	7.44 hectares
<b>Typology</b>	D (natural & semi-natural green space)
<b>Ward</b>	Binfield with Warfield
<b>PPG17 Ref No's</b>	82
<b>PPG17 Audit</b>	72% Average

### Features

Larks Hill is a 6.7 hectare public open space situated off Harvest Ride in Warfield, north of Bracknell. The site was adopted by Bracknell Forest Borough Council in 1995, having been provided as part of the open space provision for the Quelm Park housing area.

Larks Hill was named due to the presence of skylarks and other farmland birds on the site. It now forms an important countryside link between the town and rural parishes, with fine views over the surrounding countryside. The site is a naturally regenerated grassland surrounded by a recently established ditch and hedge system, and contains young field trees and an orchard of apple, pear and plum trees.

Popular with local residents, dog-walkers and horse-riders, the Larks Hill car park is the beginning of one of a series of four Accessible Rural Routes around Bracknell, which is 2 kilometres long.

This is identified in the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy (2002) as a very naturalistic site with a fifth of the site being covered with woody planting.

### Nature Conservation Interests

The following species from the Bracknell Biodiversity Action Plan have been found at the site, illustrating its importance as a green space on the edge of Bracknell's built-up area:

- skylark
- bullfinch
- barn owl
- hobby
- cowslip
- wild service tree

Larks Hill contains two grazing paddocks which contain cows between July and October. This avoids the majority of the nesting season and the cows are moved elsewhere before the site is overgrazed, leaving suitable ground cover for the birds. The spring barley compartment provides an agricultural habitat of value to the key farmland songbirds, including skylarks and wintering flocks of buntings and finches. A colourful show of the traditional annual flora of arable farmland is also produced, including corn marigold, corncockle, corn chamomile and cornflower.

### Legislation covering the site (SSSI, WHS, CROW etc)

It is important for a number of breeding birds, including several declining farmland species such as skylark, yellowhammer and meadow pipit. However, there is currently no designation on the site.

### Visitor Usage

84% of all visitors surveyed stated this was the open space they regularly visited. Other sites visited are Jocks Lane, Englemere Pond, Lily Hill Park, Garth Meadows and Westmorland Park.

A relatively high proportion of visitors (58%) visit very regularly, more than 5 times per week.

Larks Hill has a high proportion of dog walkers (63%) with another main use being walking (18%).

84% of people stay less than an hour and none of the visitors questioned stayed for longer than 2 hours on site.

97% of respondents felt safe when visiting the site.

55% of people rated the site as busy and 29% rated it as not busy. 89% of visitors questioned stated they would continue to use the site, either at the same time or a different time, if visitor numbers doubled.

### **Visitor Numbers**

Annual visitor projection – 33,000

### **Accessibility**

The majority of visitors arrive by car or van (87%) and only 13% arrive on foot. Most visitors (92%) have travelled less than 5 kilometres and 90% of visitors travelled less than 10 minutes to reach the site.

### **Length of footpaths**

6 all-weather footpaths provide a distance of 1242 metres of pathways.

### **Entrances and car parks**

Larks Hill is open to all members of the public and a tarmac car park with 20 bays is available at the site. Six further formal pedestrian access points lead onto Larks Hill's hoggan paths which are predominantly suitable for wheelchairs and pushchairs (although some may become soft in wet weather).

The number and availability of parking spaces does not score so well, with 20% of visitors rating this as poor. Quality and convenience score slightly better although 9% rate the safety of the car park as poor.

### **Linkages to other sites**

This site is in close proximity to Piggy Wood and there is the potential for links for Jock's Copse/Tinker's Copse/The Cut and Garth Meadows.

### **Potential as impact avoidance measure**

As a very generic overview Larks Hill is used by local dog walkers, who drive to the site on a regular basis for shorter visits. The site is already well used and more visitors perceived the site to be busy at the existing level of use.

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.**

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<b>Site Name</b>	Piggy Wood
<b>OS co-ordinates</b>	SU 872 707
<b>Area</b>	2.77 hectares
<b>Typology</b>	D (natural & semi-natural green space)
<b>Ward</b>	Warfield Harvest Ride
<b>PPG17 Ref No's</b>	103,104,105
<b>PPG17 Audit</b>	60%

### Features

This is a 'natural' site (Bracknell Forest Borough Council, 2002) with 100% wooded cover.

Once surrounded by open agricultural land, the wood and wildlife corridor are now enclosed in residential housing developed in the mid 1990's. The site was adopted by the Borough Council in 1998.

### Nature Conservation Interests

Spring flowers including bluebells, wood anemone and wood avens, and cowslip and devils bit scabious have also been seen. Damsel and dragonflies are present due to the tributary of the Cut.

### Legislation covering the site (SSSI, WHS, CROW etc)

Piggy Wood is a locally designated Wildlife Heritage Site.

### Visitor Usage

83% of all visitors surveyed stated this was the open space they regularly visited, with Swinley Park and Larks Hill being the other sites frequented.

There is a range of visitor frequency, with a quarter visiting more than 5 times a week and a quarter visiting less than once a week.

Piggy Wood is mainly used for exercising the dog (50%) and a quarter of all users were cutting through this site on the way to somewhere else and 17% using the open space for jogging. A smaller proportion (8%) used the site for walking. Visits tended to be short, with 67 staying less than 30 minutes and no visitors staying more than 2 hours.

100% of respondents said they felt safe when visiting the site.

It was deemed to be a quiet area, with all respondents rating it as 'not busy' and 42% said it was always quiet. As a result of this, all visitors said they would continue to use the park as the currently do if visitor numbers doubled.

### Visitor Numbers

Annual visitor projection – 10,000

### Accessibility

The majority of visitors arrive on foot (75%) with a low percentage of visitors arriving by car (8%) and a higher than average percentage arriving by bus (8%). There appears to a high proportion of local visitors (75%) who travel less than 1 kilometre to reach the site. This corresponds with a shorter travel time than average, with two thirds of visitors travelling less than 5 minutes.

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**Length of footpaths**

Four all-weather paths cover a distance of 483 metres.

**Entrances and car parks**

There is no car park but 10 formal entrances to the wood by bicycle or on foot.

**Linkages to other sites**

This site is in close proximity to Piggy Wood and there is the potential for links for Jock's Copse/Tinker's Copse/The Cut and Garth Meadows.

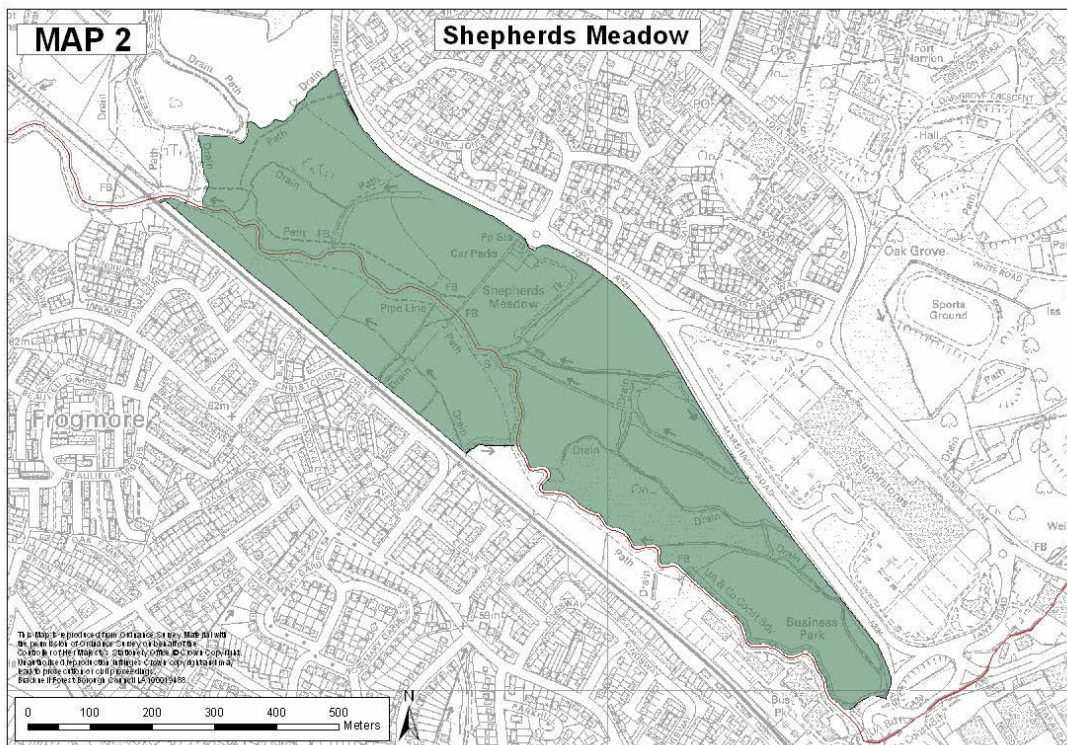
**Potential as impact avoidance measure**

As a very generic overview Piggy Wood is used by dog walkers, who walk short distances to reach the site. The site is poorly used and the perceived use is also very low.

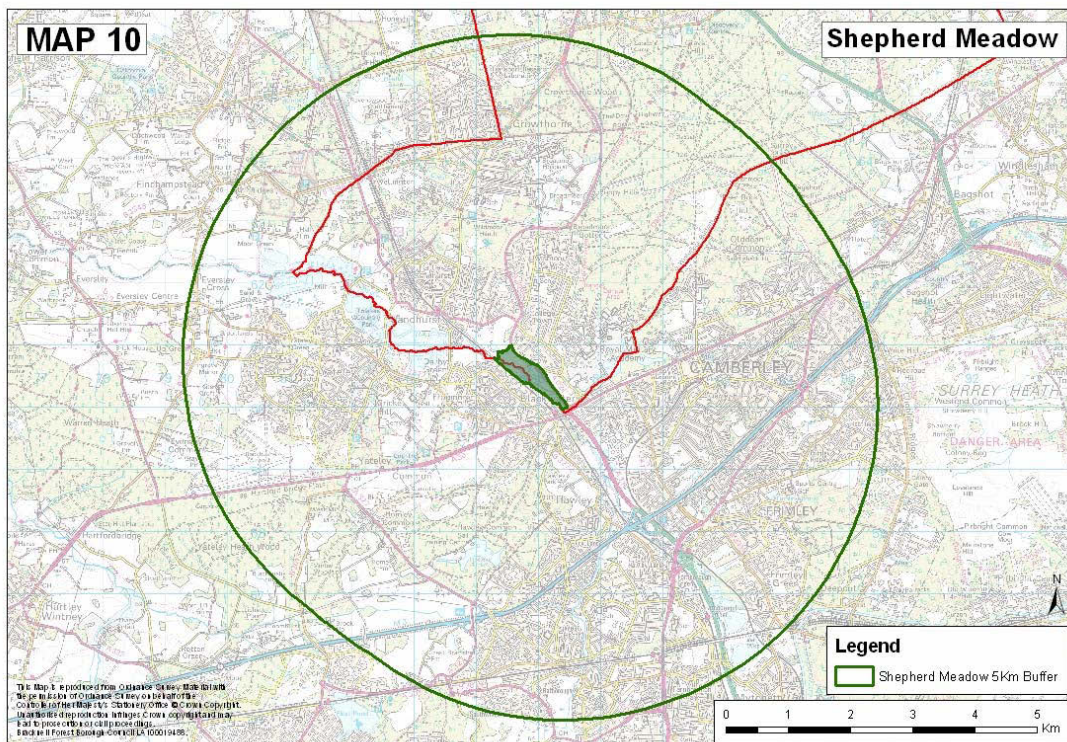
Therefore, in isolation Piggy Wood has capacity and a suitable habitat to be used as impact avoidance. **This site could potentially provide a good link as part of a circular walk including other sites.**



## SHEPHERDS MEADOWS



A 5km catchment area has been identified for this site as shown below:



<b>Site Name</b>	Shepherds Meadows
<b>OS co-ordinates</b>	SU 845 607
<b>Area</b>	33.72 hectares
<b>Typology</b>	D (natural & semi-natural green space)
<b>Ward</b>	College Town
<b>PPG17 Ref No's</b>	122
<b>PPG17 Audit</b>	78% Very Good

### Features

Shepherd Meadows, a nature conservation site named after wildlife artist David Shepherd, is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in the south of the Borough. The site covers about 100 acres of wet wildflower meadow and woodland straddling the River Blackwater at the point where the counties of Berkshire, Hampshire and Surrey meet.

Acquired by Bracknell Forest Borough Council in 1990, the site is managed for its nature conservation importance and its recreational and landscape value.

The Civic Trust's Green Flag Award Scheme is a national standard for the quality of public parks and green spaces in England and Wales. Sites are judged on eight criteria: 1) A welcoming place 2) Healthy, safe and secure 3) Well maintained and clean 4) Sustainability 5) Conservation and heritage 6) Community involvement 7) Marketing and 8) Management. In 2004, Bracknell Forest Borough Council teamed up with Sandhurst Town Council to enter Sandhurst Memorial Park and Shepherd Meadows into the scheme - resulting in the first ever joint application Green Flag Award. A management plan for the sites was developed in conjunction with BBOWT (Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust) and the Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership. Shepherd Meadows and Sandhurst Memorial Park received a Green Flag Award again in 2005/06.

This is identified in the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy (2002) as a natural site and 20% of the site is covered with woody planting.

### Nature Conservation Interests

Flower-rich meadows are now rare and about one quarter of the species associated with herb-rich grassland in Berkshire can be found at Shepherd Meadows.

The woodland at Shepherd Meadows, dominated by oak, ash, and alder coppice, includes Spring displays of wood anemone and dog violets. The meadows are also rich in animal life with over 600 species of insects. During the spring the orange tip butterfly darts low over the vegetation in search of the cuckoo flower on which it lays its tiny orange eggs. Damsel and dragonflies breed in the ditches and along the riverbanks, and in late summer the meadows echo to the sound of grasshoppers and bush crickets. The meadows become a carpet of wildflowers and plants during the spring and summer months, with golden meadow buttercups, blue devil's-bit scabious, purple meadow thistle and the yellow birds-foot trefoil. In July and August the sweet scent of meadowsweet blossoms produces a heady aroma. birdlife at Shepherd Meadows includes flocks of siskins, meadow pipits and thrushes in winter, while in summer the site is home to breeding kestrels, warblers, the spotted flycatcher and woodpeckers. The River Blackwater and the feeder channels attract many waterfowl and wading birds.



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### **Legislation covering the site (SSSI, WHS, CROW etc)**

Shepherds Meadows is a locally designated Wildlife Heritage Site and part of the Blackwater Valley SSSI.

### **Visitor Usage**

78% of all visitors surveyed stated this was the open space they regularly visited, with Wildmoor Heath the other site most visited.

There is a high proportion of very frequent users, with 41% visiting more than 5 times a week and only 6% visiting less than once a week.

Shepherds Meadows is mainly used for exercising the dog (60%) with the remainder of people using the site for used for walking (12%), cycling (6%) and relaxing / atmosphere (6%). Visits are predominantly more than 30 minutes and over a quarter of visits are between 1 and 2 hours.

93% of respondents felt safe when visiting the site. 65% of people rated the site as busy; however, 92% of visitors surveyed would continue to use the site if visitor numbers doubled.

### **Visitor Numbers**

Annual visitor projection – 90,000

### **Accessibility**

The majority of visitors arrive on foot (51%) and the remainder by car (38%) or bike (7%). As a result of this a high proportion of visitors travel from within 1 kilometre (57%) and few travel longer distances (7% travel over 5 km). The journey time for most visitors (81%) is less than 10 minutes.

### **Length of footpaths**

5 all-weather footpaths cross the meadows providing a total of 1,621 metres of pathways.

### **Entrances and car parks**

A car park provides parking for 25 vehicles and cycle parking for 7 bicycles. There are 10 formal entrances into the open space.

74% of visitors rated the number and availability of spaces as very good or quite good, although some (7%) did score this as quite poor. In addition 19% rated the safety as quite poor.

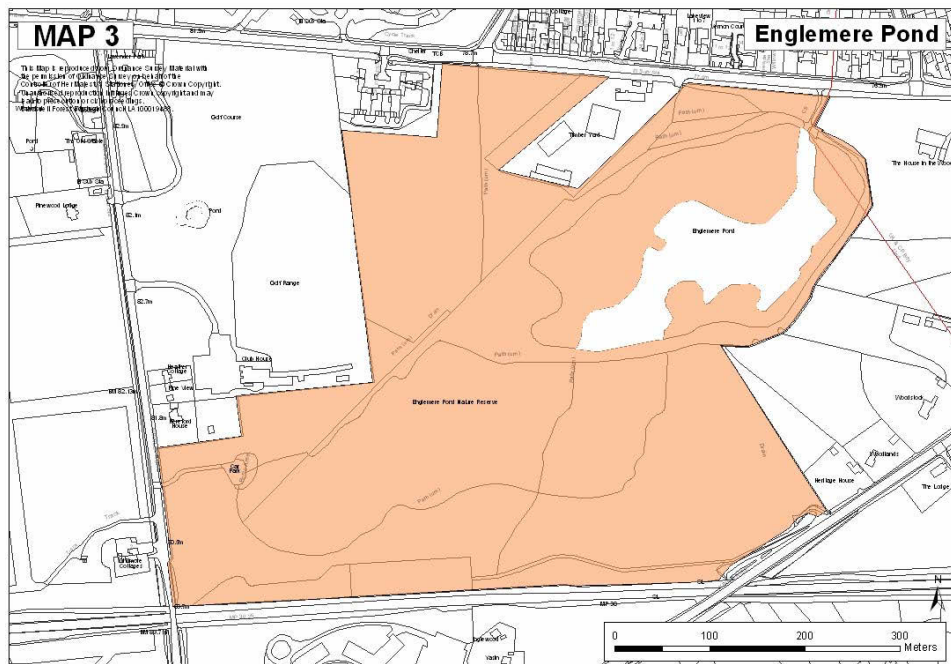
### **Linkages to other sites**

The site is part of the Blackwater Valley Path, a 23 mile long distance path following the Blackwater River. Shepherds Meadows and Sandhurst Memorial park are adjacent and have excellent pedestrian linkages between them.

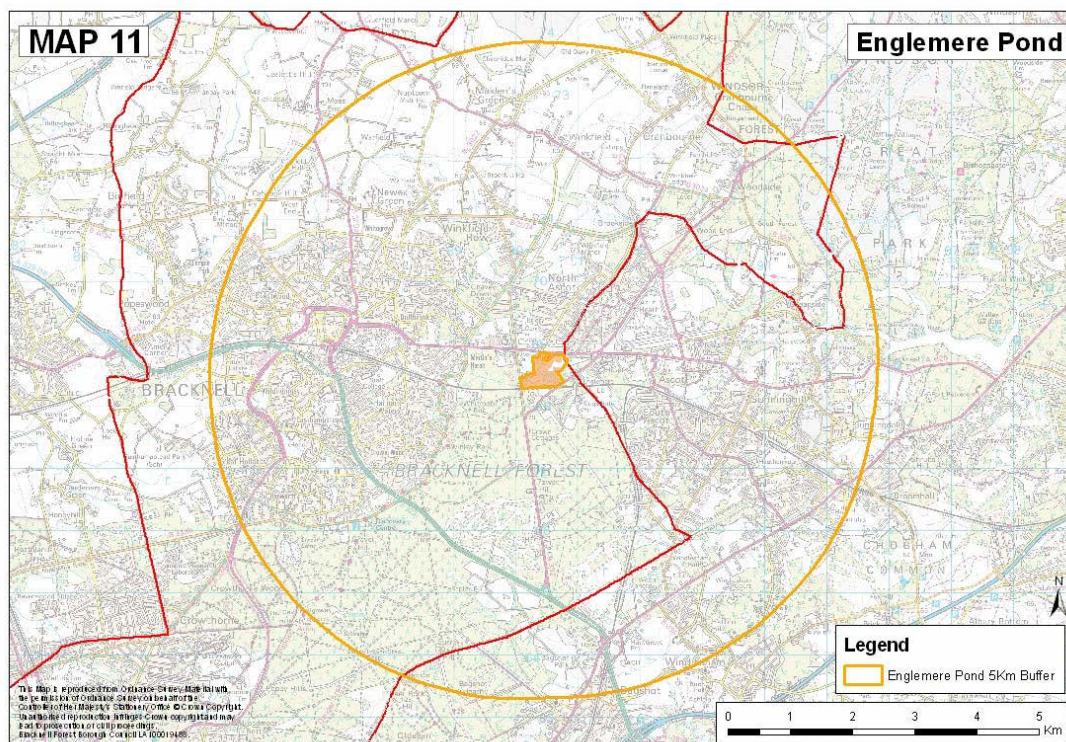
### **Potential as impact avoidance measure**

Visitors to this semi-natural site tend to visit frequently and walk to the site to walk their dog or for recreational purposes. It is a suitable site as an alternative to the SPA, as visitors also used Wildmoor Heath. Improvements would be necessary to increase potential capacity as the site is well-used and has been rated it as a relatively busy site. In addition car parking could be improved to encourage visitors from further afield. Improvements to, and links with, the Blackwater Valley path could extend the effectiveness of this site as an alternative to the SPA.

## ENGLEMERE POND



A 5km catchment area has been identified for this site as shown below:





<b>Site Name</b>	Englemere Pond
<b>OS co-ordinates</b>	SU 905 686
<b>Area</b>	27.59 hectares
<b>Typology</b>	D (natural / semi-natural green space)
<b>Ward</b>	Ascot
<b>PPG17 Ref No's</b>	46
<b>PPG17 Audit</b>	41% Good

### Features

The land was once part of the royal hunting forest which surrounded Windsor Castle, and it is still owned by The Crown Estate and managed by Bracknell Forest Borough Council.

The site's main feature is the shallow acidic lake which offers a wide range of habitats from open water to marsh, all of which is surrounded by commercial forest and heathland areas. Each of these areas provides its own variety of plant species and a home for many birds, insects and animals.

### Nature Conservation Interests

A large pond surrounded by a wide fringe of reedswamp dominated by common reed *Phragmites australis*. Away from the open water the reedswamp grades into an interesting plant community typical of base-poor conditions. The transition from open water through base-poor wetland to dry ground is an exceptionally good example of this type of habitat which is relatively scarce in the lowlands.

The species present in the reedswamp include bog mosses *Sphagnum* spp., sundew (a plant species of boggy areas which is listed on the Borough Council's Biodiversity Action Plan), spike-rush, bog pondweed and bog St John's wort. Cotton grass and lesser reedmace are locally dominant. The western margin of the pond exhibits a transition into swampy woodland carr dominated by alder. The open water plant community is relatively species-poor with much bulbous rush, but the invertebrate community is of considerable interest with a rich dragonfly fauna. The reedswamp supports an interesting community of breeding birds, including reed warblers sedge warblers and reed bunting.

The site includes a catchment area of secondary woodland, large pine, birch and oak on acid soils, together with a small fragment of heathland.

The woodland is predominantly Scots Pine with patches of heather, including ling, bell heather and cross-leaved heath, in the forest clearings. Oak, mountain ash, willow and silver birch are also to be found here, and the alder trees are a favourite haunt of wintering migrant birds such as siskins and Redpolls which feed on the seeds.

### Legislation covering the site (SSSI, WHS, CROW etc)

Englemere Pond, is a site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), a Local Nature Reserve and a Wildlife Heritage Site.

### Visitor Usage

75% of visitors usually use this open space, with the remainder visiting other spaces including: Swinley Park, Longhill Park, Lily Hill Park and Jocks Lane.

64% of users visit the site more than 4 times a week.

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The main reason given for visiting the site (82%) was to walk their dogs, with 7% for children's play and 7% for a walk.

Visits were slightly longer than average, with 61% of people staying between 30 minutes and 1 hour.

78% of visitors always or usually felt safe when visiting.

Only 18% of respondents thought this was a busy site and 72% thought it was usually or always quiet. All of the people questioned would continue to use the site, either at the same or a different time if the visitor numbers doubled.

### **Visitor Numbers**

Annual visitor projection – 10,000

### **Accessibility**

79% of visitors arriving by car with the remainder walking to the site. 93% of visitors travelled less than 5 kilometres and nobody travelled more than 10 minutes to get to the site.

### **Length of footpaths**

There is one main all-weather footpath which extends to 69 metres, however the informal footpath network and way-marked signs provides for a circular walk of approximately 1,600 metres.

### **Entrances and car parks**

There is a small, tarmaced car park for approximately 14 cars, which provides 1 of the 5 formal entrances around the site.

There may be some scope to improve the car park as 19% of respondents rate the availability of parking as satisfactory (as opposed to quite good or very good) and 14% rate the quality and convenience as satisfactory. 14% of visitors found the safety of the car park to be poor.

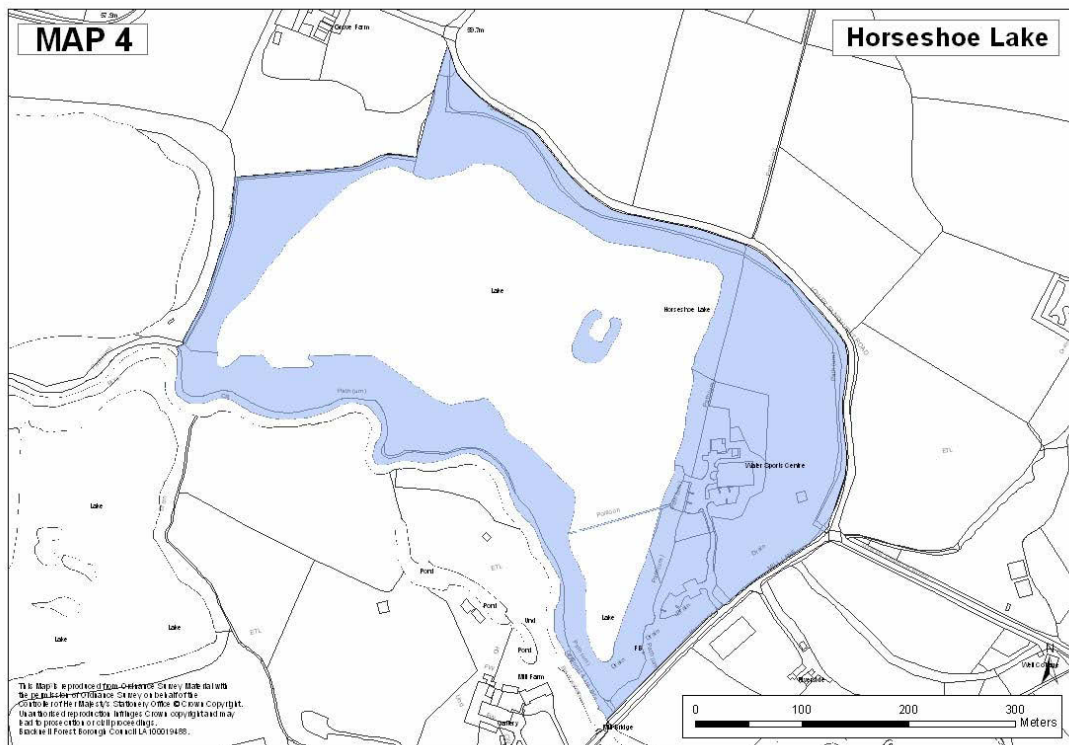
### **Linkages to other sites**

This site is adjacent to Swinley Park.

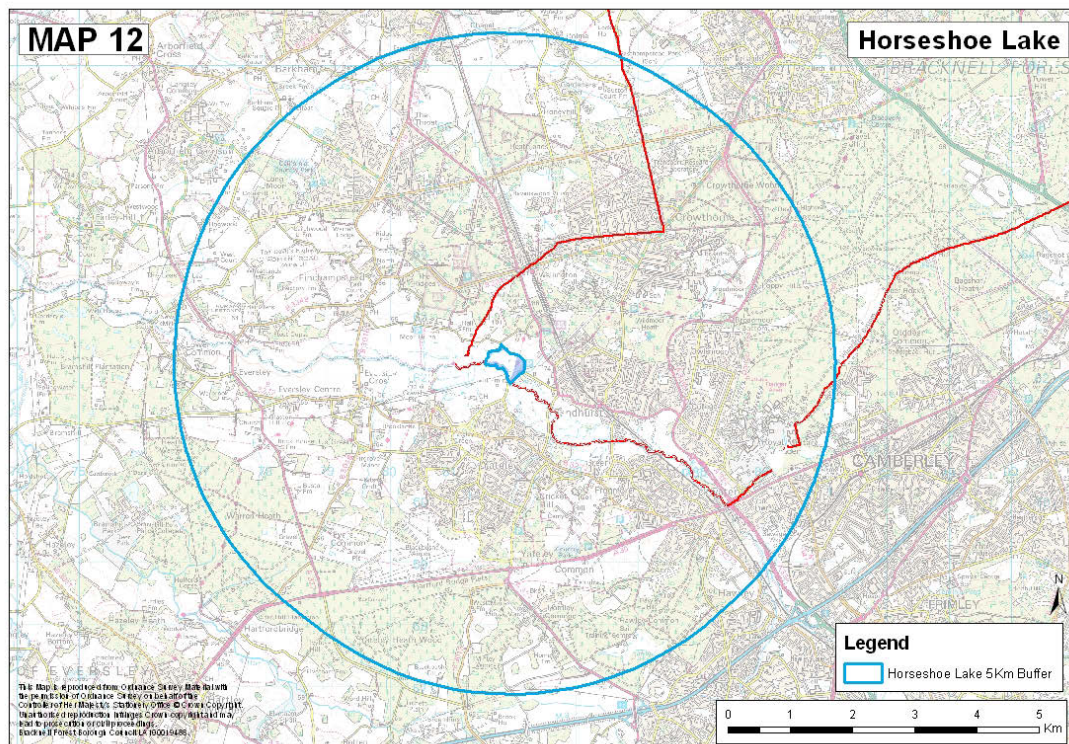
### **Potential as impact avoidance measure**

Englemere Pond generally attracts dog walkers who visit quite frequently and arrive by car. The site is suitable avoidance open space due to the varied nature of the habitats, meeting many of the points raised in Natural England's quality guidelines. It is also deemed a quiet site by current users and capable of taking more visitors as all would continue to use the site if the user numbers doubled. These enhancements could include the path network and parking safety. The amount of visitors the site could take may be restricted due to the nature conservation value.

## HORSESHOE LAKE



A 5km catchment has been identified as shown in the map below:



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<b>Site Name</b>	Horseshoe Lake
<b>OS co-ordinates</b>	SU 818 622
<b>Area</b>	19.38 hectares (including 8.9ha body of water)
<b>Typology</b>	D (natural & semi-natural green space)
<b>Ward</b>	Little Sandhurst And Wellington
<b>PPG17 Ref No's</b>	69
<b>PPG17 Audit</b>	65% Very Good

### Features

Horseshoe Lake lies about half a mile to the west of Sandhurst. Originally part of an extensive network of working gravel pits that have now been flooded, this site now occupies an attractive setting in the Blackwater Valley and is a popular venue for those who enjoy dinghy sailing, windsurfing, canoeing, birdwatching and walking.

A bridleway runs along the northern boundary and a clear path circumnavigates the lake, providing very pleasant views of the site and the surrounding countryside. Horseshoe Lake also has a well resourced watersports centre, provided by Bracknell Forest Borough Council and managed by Freetime Leisure.

### Nature Conservation Interests

Site surveys carried out at Horseshoe lake in recent years have confirmed that the site is home to a wide variety of birds, including winter visitors and breeding birds. mallard, gadwall, pochard, tufted duck, goosander, wigeon, teal, shoveler, Canada goose, mute swan, great crested grebe, little grebe, coot, lapwing, common tern, redshank, ringed plover and little ringed plover, a species listed on Bracknell Forest's Biodiversity Action Plan.

House martins, swallows and swifts can be seen swooping for insects, and the barn owl, a protected species under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and also listed on the local Biodiversity Action Plan, is also known to inhabit the site.

Other wildlife includes several species of grasshoppers and crickets, twelve species of dragonflies and eighteen species of butterflies. These invertebrates depend on the range of habitats present, including open water, marginal shallows, shingle, bare ground, rough grassland and patches of developing scrub. Cattle graze on the banks of the lake at certain times of year, and, as part of the restoration programme, some tree planting has also taken place.

### Legislation covering the site (SSSI, WHS, CROW etc)

None identified.

### Visitor Usage

82% of all visitors surveyed stated this was the open space they regularly visited, with Sandhurst Memorial Park, South Hill Park and the Look Out being other sites frequented.

Visitors tend to visit on a less frequent basis with 44% visiting less than once a week and only 8% visiting more than 5 times a week.

Horseshoe Lake is used for a wide range of purposes, including exercising the dog (31%), walking (28%), organised sport (13%), relaxing (8%) and enjoying the wildlife (8%). Visits tended to be long, with 41% between 1 and 2 hours and 10% over 2 hours.



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It was not deemed to be a crowded area, with 72% of respondents rating it as 'not busy' and nobody stating it was always busy. 92% of visitors would continue to use the park if visitor numbers doubled.

### **Visitor Numbers**

Annual visitor projection – 30,000

### **Accessibility**

The majority travel by car (69%) and the remainder by walking (26%) or cycling (5%). There appears to be fewer very local visitors than average, with only 8% from within 1 kilometre and the majority (72%) travelling between 1 and 5 kilometres. This corresponds with slightly longer than average journey times with 31% travelling between 11 and 20 minutes and 6% travelling over 20 minutes.

### **Length of footpaths**

There are 4 all-weather footpaths running around and close to the lake, providing a total length of 1,490 metres of path.

### **Entrances and car parks**

A 40 space car park is provided for recreational purposes and the watersports centre and the site can be accessed by 7 formal entrances including the car park.

62% of visitors surveyed used the car park. 29% of these thought the number of spaces was only satisfactory (as opposed to quite good or very good) and 21% thought the quality was satisfactory. In general the location was thought to be convenient, with 82% of users rating the convenience as very good or quite good. Safety of the car park could be improved as 8% of visitors rate this as poor and 46% rate the safety as satisfactory.

### **Linkages to other sites**

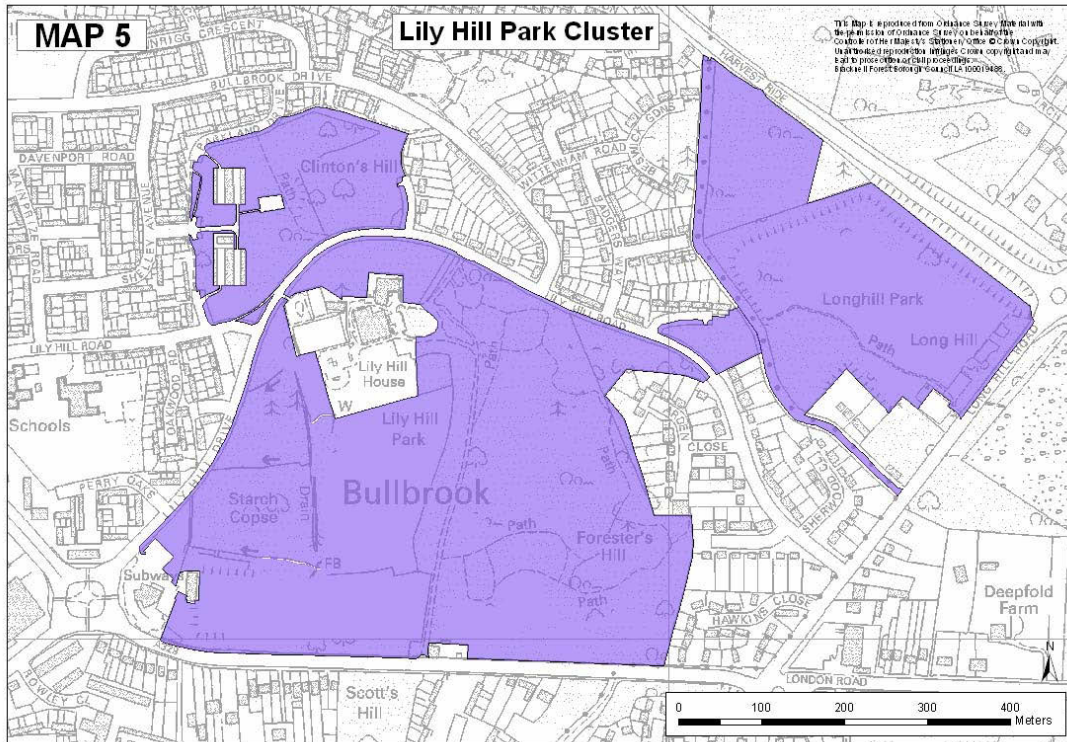
The path around the lake is part of the Blackwater Valley path which is a 23 mile long distance path following the Blackwater River.

### **Potential as impact avoidance measure**

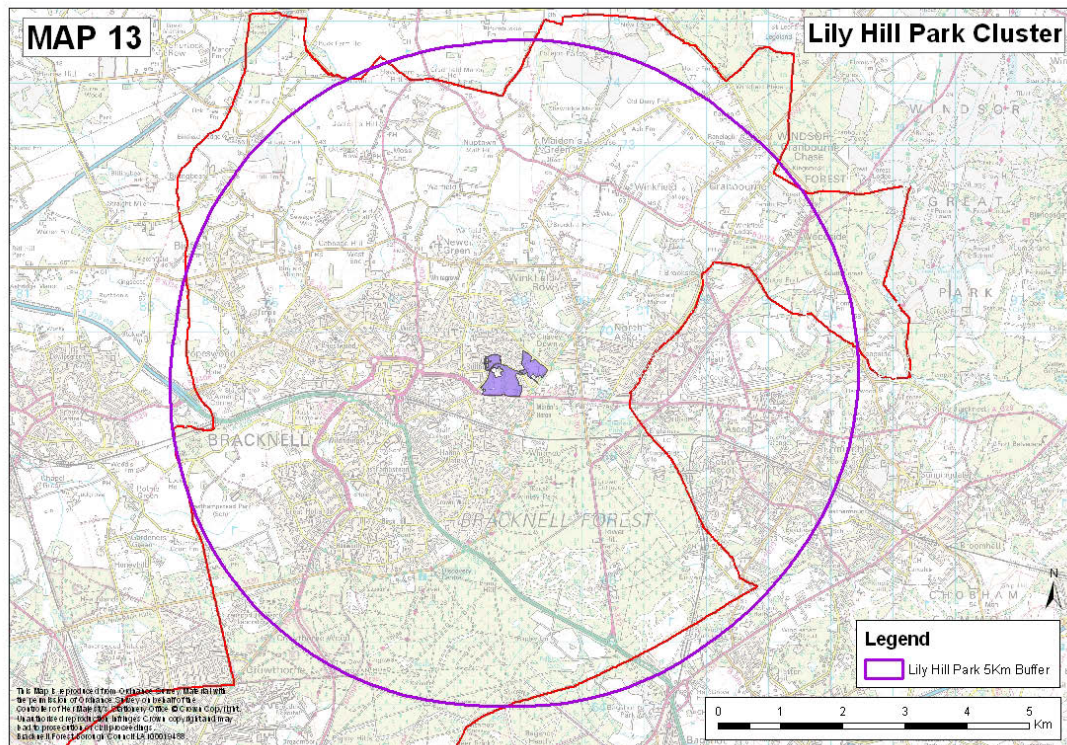
This site is an excellent alternative area of open space, as it has a large catchment of visitors, travelling by car for recreational purposes and dog walking. It has been identified by the current users as not a busy area and this belief is borne out by the low visitor numbers collected. It is a semi-natural site with good links and a range of habitats, which could be enhanced to encourage additional visitors away from the SPA as existing users go to these areas too.

## LILY HILL PARK CLUSTER

Lily Hill Park cluster includes: Lily Hill Park, Longhill Park, Milman Close, Beswick Gardens, Clintons Hill



A 5km catchment has been identified as shown on the map below:



<b>Site Name</b>	Lily Hill Park
<b>OS co-ordinates</b>	SU 885 692
<b>Area</b>	22.74 hectares
<b>Typology</b>	A (parks and gardens)
<b>Ward</b>	Bullbrook
<b>PPG17 Ref No's</b>	83
<b>PPG17 Audit</b>	81% Very Good

### Features

Lily Hill Park is one of the parks within the Borough with the coveted Green Flag Status.

The park forms part of the estate originally belonging to Lily Hill House and consists of parkland, woodland, and formal gardens. It is the focus of a £1.2 million restoration project supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund. The House and Park were originally formed as a 19th century 'gentleman's residence'. William Vincent built Lily Hill House between 1849 and the early 1850's with the park developed in phases over the next 30 years.

Many mature specimens of exotic pines and ornamental rhododendrons remain, however, the original design and 'feel' of the park had gradually been lost because of extensive natural birch regeneration. Removing much of this has reinstated vistas and views and to allow restoration the wildflower meadows that are important for butterflies.

An application was submitted to the Heritage Lottery Fund in August 2000 for a capital grant to help fund a basic restoration programme. In July 2001 the Heritage Lottery Fund awarded Bracknell Forest Borough Council a grant for £113,000 towards developing a detailed design and restoration plan.

Specialist consultants and the full-time Project Officer developed a detailed design and financial plan. This resulted in an award in March 2003 of a further £964,000 for restoring the site, forming Stage Two of Phase One of the restoration works. Phase One of the restoration project is complete, returning the eastern half of Lily Hill Park to its former glory. Restoration work included tree work and shrub management, reinstating the historic path system, central ditch and drainage. While some tree felling is necessary to ensure a healthy mixed-age woodland, new tree planting will provide for the eventual demise of the present trees, and other areas have been planted up with non-invasive shrubs.

Site furniture, including benches and tables, have also been installed, as well as interpretation boards to provide information about the site.

This is identified in the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy (2002) as a site which is predominantly naturalistic, as opposed to amenity open space, and 60% of the site is covered with woody planting.

### Nature Conservation Interests

In 1997 the following Bracknell Forest BAP species were recorded: Cowslips, Ragged Robin, Stag Beetle, Bullfinch, Hobby and Noctule Bat. The site was then surveyed by BBOWT on 1 September 1998 and 142 different species were identified.



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An ecological survey undertaken by Scott Wilson Consultancy Group (2002) has identified 5 elements in the park:

- Semi natural plantation broadleaf woodland (this is the predominant habitat).
- Scattered ruderals/bracken.
- Semi-improved rural grassland.
- Cultivated grassland.
- Marshy grassland.

Approximately 8 hectares of the site is designated as a Wildlife Heritage Site because it provides a large area of open space comprising a mosaic of habitats (including semi-natural grassland) in an otherwise urban area. The mix of tree cover and grass meadows creates a haven for a wide variety of other wildlife, including birds such as the bullfinch, jay, woodpecker, nuthatch, wren, dunnock and the spotted flycatcher. The meadows are rich in wild flowers, which provide colour throughout the summer months. Cowslips, ladies' smock, ragged robin and even the common spotted orchid help make part of Lily Hill Park one of the more diverse Wildlife Heritage Sites in the Borough.

The Scott Wilson survey identified that the plant communities found in the survey are all common within England, although semi-natural grassland is relatively uncommon in this area. The mosaic of habitats, with grassland, woodland and rush-pasture in proximity, enhances the value of the site. The woodlands have suffered from lack of management and are dominated in many areas by rhododendron. The large number of over mature trees provides opportunities for specialist invertebrates such as dead-wood beetles, as well as offering holes and cracks for roosting bats and nesting birds such as woodpeckers. A full list of species can be found in the Heritage Lottery Funding Application (July 2002).

#### **Legislation covering the site (SSSI, WHS, CROW etc)**

Lily Hill Park is a locally designated Wildlife Heritage Site.

#### **Visitor Usage**

A visitor survey carried out in 1998 (details given in the Management Plan, 2002) gave an indication that the park was used by local people who made frequent visits. There was a reasonable mix of male and female visitors, adults and children and group / lone visitors. The most significant use of the park was for walking, including dog walking, and peace and quiet, seclusion, fresh air, the countryside nature and to experience wildlife. The level of use of the park is considered to be reasonably steady throughout the day and throughout the week. 85% of visitors had heard about the area through local knowledge of word-of-mouth and 86% thought the park was peaceful. 98% of visitors stayed for more than 30 minutes.

A public consultation in March 2002 demonstrated the need for the park to be restored and upgraded, with 91% of people questioned (sample size 3400 residents) strongly supporting the scheme.

Due to the overgrown nature of much of the park, visitor pressure tended to focus on just a few areas. As a result some areas, in particular Forester's Hill, were relatively heavily used in comparison with the rest of the park, therefore subject to disturbance and erosion.

Quotes from press cuttings illustrate the nature of the park prior to works commencing.



*“Helen Tranter, head of culture and visual environment, said the park was overgrown with rhododendrons and “quite creepy” for visitors before work was started to clear up its eastern section in 2003. She said this phase, due to be completed in March, has now made the park much more open and attractive”*

**page 10, Bracknell News, Thursday, January 13, 2005**

In the Leisure-net Solutions study (2006), 79% of all visitors surveyed stated this was the open space they regularly visited, with Jocks Lane, Swinley Park, South Hill Park, Crowthorne Woods and Popes Meadow being other sites frequented.

There is a mix of frequent and infrequent users, with 39% visiting more than 5 times a week and 23% visiting less than once a week.

Lily Hill Park is used for a wide range of purposes, mainly exercising the dog (60%), but also relaxing (19%), walking (14%), jogging (4%), and enjoying the wildlife (2%). Visits tended to be of average length, with 63% between 1 and 2 hours and no visits over 2 hours.

68% of respondents felt safe when visiting the site.

Slightly more respondents rated the park as not busy than busy, within only 4% stating it was ‘always busy’, 37% stating it was usually busy and 39% stating it was usually quiet. However, 97% of visitors surveyed would continue to use the site if visitor numbers doubled.

### **Visitor Numbers**

Annual visitor projection – 86,000

### **Accessibility**

The majority of visitors travel by car (65%) and the remainder by walking (33%) or cycling (2%). 30% of visitors travel from within 1 kilometre and the majority (54%) travel between 1 and 5 kilometres. The journey time for nearly all visitors (90%) is less than 10 minutes.

### **Length of footpaths**

12 footpaths were identified as of Spring 2006, covering a total distance of 2,781 metres. This is set to increase as a result of ongoing works on site.

### **Entrances and car parks**

The car park has recently increased to include 56 spaces. There are a total of 16 entrances to the park, predominantly formal entrances.

67% of visitors surveyed used the car park and this was rated very well regarding number and availability of spaces, quality and convenience with no respondents scoring these as poor. Safety could be improved slightly however as 5% of car park users rated this as poor.

### **Linkages to other sites**

This is very close to Longhill Park, therefore semi-natural pedestrian linkages between these areas could be enhanced to create a more coherent area of open space.

### Potential as impact avoidance measure

The potential for this site to provide an alternative area of open space to the SPA has already been commonly accepted during a project level Appropriate Assessment for Bracknell town centre redevelopment (Bracknell Forest Borough Council, 2006a). It is a semi-natural park, which attracts visitors which also regularly visit the SPA. The site is generally deemed as not busy by visitors, therefore there is potential to increase capacity. Although this is acceptable on its own merits, when viewed alongside adjacent areas of Longhill Park and Clintons Hill **this becomes a considerably sized area of alternative open space.**

<b>Site Name</b>	<b>Clintons Hill</b>
<b>OS co-ordinates</b>	SU 888 693
<b>Area</b>	3.94 hectares
<b>Typology</b>	E (urban woodland)
<b>Ward</b>	Bullbrook
<b>PPG17 Ref No's</b>	32
<b>PPG17 Audit</b>	59% Good

### Features

This is identified in the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy (2002) as a naturalistic site and 90% of the site is covered with woody planting. It is an area of urban woodland.

### Legislation covering the site (SSSI, WHS, CROW etc)

Clintons Hill is a locally designated Wildlife Heritage Site.

### Visitor Usage

78% of visitors usually use this open space, with the remainder visiting other spaces including: Lily Hill Park and Garth Meadows.

The main reason given for visiting the site (44%) was as a cut-through or to use the children's play area (22%), with other users exercising the dog (11%), walking (11%) or meeting people (11%).

Only 22% of visitors always felt safe when visiting, which is considerably lower than any other sites.

Visits were usually short, with two thirds being less than 30 minutes.

Only 11% of respondents thought this was a busy site and 89% of people would continue to use the site if the visitor numbers doubled. Only 11% would go to other areas of open space or stop using sites altogether.

### Visitor Numbers

Annual visitor projection – 11,000

### Accessibility

It appears to be a locally used site with 78% of visitors arriving by foot; this may be as a result of there being no formal parking. In addition, 89% of visitors travelled less than 1 kilometre and it took them less than 10 minutes to get to the site.

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### Entrances and car parks

There is no formal car park to this area of open space and no all-weather footpaths have been identified. There is a total of 9 entrances to the open space, providing a mix of formal and informal access points.

### Linkages to other sites

This is adjacent to Lily Hill Park and Longhill Park.

### Potential as impact avoidance measure

In general this site currently attracts visitors on foot using the site as a cut-through. It is deemed to be a quiet site where people may not always feel safe. The site is of the semi-natural nature required by Natural England's quality guidelines, however there is considerable scope for increasing the accessibility and attractiveness of this site to encourage additional visitors. **This could be part of a larger area of impact avoidance open space proposed, along with adjacent sites.**

<b>Site Name</b>	Longhill Park / Milman Close / Beswick Gardens Copse
<b>OS co-ordinates</b>	SU 892 694
<b>Area</b>	10.46 hectares
<b>Typology</b>	B / E (amenity greenspace, natural & semi-natural greenspace)
<b>Ward</b>	Ascot
<b>PPG17 Ref No's</b>	86, 90, 292
<b>PPG17 Audit</b>	Longhill Park – 73% Very Good Milman Close – 41% Good Beswick Garden Copse – 21% Poor

### Features

Longhill Park is a 9.3 hectare site in the Parish of Winkfield, east of Bracknell town. It is, between Long Hill Road and Harvest Ride. The site has both open and wooded areas and is popular with dog walkers, families and children with a play area and benches provided.

Longhill Park is a former refuse site which has been reclaimed for wildlife and public recreation.

The main car park for the site is accessed from Long Hill Road. There are four pedestrian access paths to Long Hill Park, as follows:

- At the junction of Long Hill Road / Harvest Ride
- The northern point of Harvest Ride
- The rear of Timeline Green
- The rear of Milman Close.

Milman Close (0.53 hectares) is identified in the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy (2002) as a naturalistic site with 100% wooded cover and Longhill park is predominantly naturalistic with 70% wooded cover. Beswick Garden Copse is a 0.54 hectare site adjacent to Longhill Park.

### Nature Conservation Interests

The main open area of Longhill Park is managed as a hay meadow with a wide range of flora and fauna, whilst other areas include scrub, valuable old hedgerows and oak woodland at the western edge. At the last wildlife survey in 1994, 111 species were recorded at the site, including the bullfinch, one of Bracknell Forest's Biodiversity Action Plan species.

### **Legislation covering the site (SSSI, WHS, CROW etc)**

Beswick Garden Copse and Longhill Park are locally designated Wildlife Heritage Sites.

### **Visitor Usage**

71% of all visitors surveyed stated this was the open space they regularly visited, which is lower than average for the parks surveyed. Lily Hill Park is the other site mainly visited by respondents, with many also visiting the Look Out and Crowthorne Woods, amongst other sites.

Visitors tend to visit relatively frequently basis with 40% visiting more than 5 times a week. In addition, 23% travel less than once a week.

These sites are predominantly used for exercising the dog (69%) and 17% of visitors came to relax and enjoy the atmosphere. A third of all visitors questioned stayed less than 30 minutes, but half stay between 30 minutes and an hour. 10% of visitors stay for longer periods of over 2 hours.

94% of visitors feel safe when using the sites.

It was not deemed to be an especially busy area, with 38% of respondents rating it as busy and 40% rating it as 'not busy'. 88% of visitors would continue to use the parks if visitor numbers doubled.

### **Visitor Numbers**

Annual visitor projection – 26,000

### **Accessibility**

The majority of visitors travel by car (83%), 10% walk and 2% cycle. 33% of visitors travel less than 1 kilometre and 52% travel between 1 and 5 kilometres. 77% of people travelling less than 10 minutes to get to the site and 94% of people came from within 20 minutes travelling time.

The site is generally flat and reasonably accessible for the mobility-impaired. Cycling is permitted along the track to the SW of the site.

### **Length of footpaths**

There is 1 all-weather footpath which is 119 metres in length. There are a total of 13 access points onto the sites, with 7 informal and non-defined.

### **Entrances and car parks**

A car park with 18 spaces provides for all 3 areas of open space. Safety of the car park scores poorly with 19% of users rating this as poor; considerably lower than other sites.

### **Linkages to other sites**

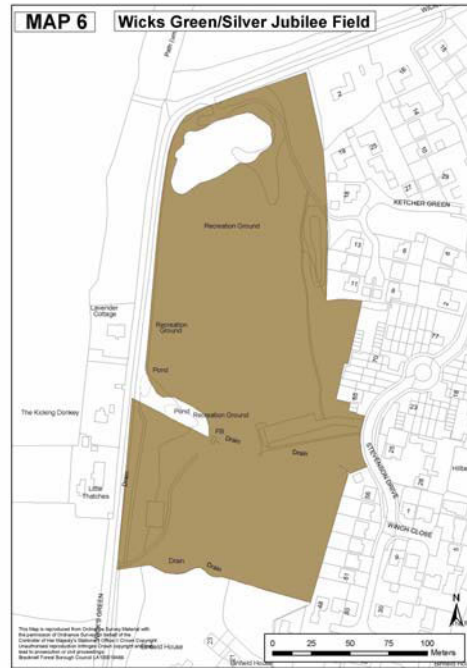
This is adjacent to Lily Hill Park and in close proximity to Clintons Hill, therefore semi-natural links could make a larger contiguous area of alternative open space.

**Potential as impact avoidance measure**

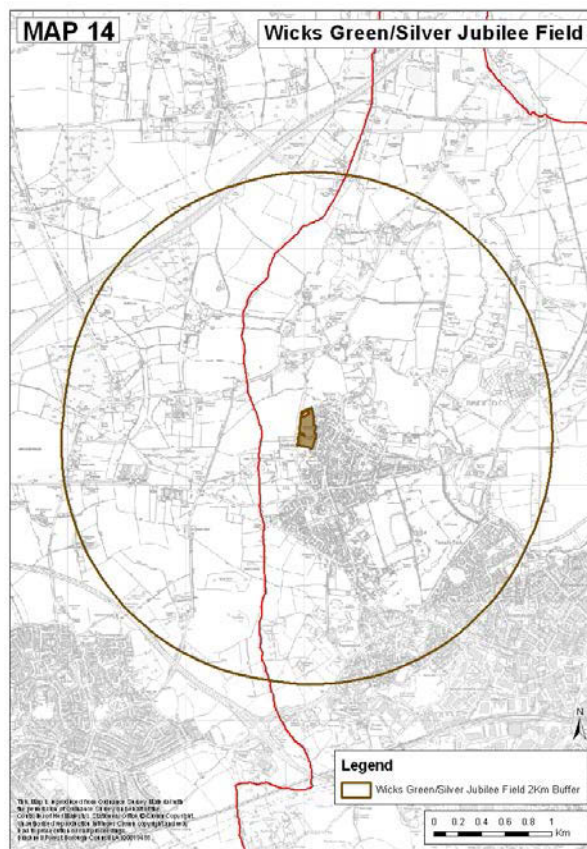
This has good potential as an alternative to the SPA, indicated strongly by the existing visitors who use both this site and the SPA sites for recreation, indicating a similar experience. Visitors differ at this site, but the predominant user group is dog walkers who have travelled a relatively short distance by car to reach the site. It is not rated as a busy site and most visitors would continue to use these sites if numbers doubled. There is a poor path network and parking facilities therefore scope for improvement. **This could be part of a larger area of impact avoidance open space proposed, along with adjacent sites.**



## SILVER JUBILEE FIELD / WICKS GREEN



Due to the size of this site it is only given a catchment area of 2km:



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<b>Site Name</b>	Silver Jubilee Field / Wicks Green
<b>OS co-ordinates</b>	SU 839 709
<b>Area</b>	3.6 hectares
<b>Typology</b>	B (amenity green space)
<b>Ward</b>	Binfield With Warfield
<b>PPG17 Ref No's</b>	149 / 182
<b>PPG17 Audit</b>	64% Very Good

### Features

Open grassed site with children play area. This is identified in the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy (2002) as a site with some natural features and one fifth of the site is covered with woody planting.

### Nature Conservation Interests

None relevant to this Appropriate Assessment.

### Legislation covering the site (SSSI, WHS, CROW etc)

There is no relevant legislation covering this site.

### Visitor Usage

88% of all visitors surveyed stated this was the open space they regularly visited.

There is a spread of both frequent and infrequent users, with 34% visiting more than 5 times a week and 31% visiting less than once a week.

This site is mainly used by people walking their dogs (47%), with the other key uses being the children's play area (22%) and walking (13%). Over half of visits are between 30 minutes and 1 hour, with 19% between 1 and 2 hours.

97% of respondents felt safe when visiting the site.

Only 22% of people rated the site as busy and 56% rated it as not busy and 85% of visitors surveyed would continue to use the site if visitor numbers doubled.

### Visitor Numbers

Annual visitor projection – 14,000

### Accessibility

The majority of visitors walk to the site (84%) with 13% arriving by car and 3% cycling. Two thirds of visitors travel from within 1 kilometre and only a small proportion (6%) come from over 5 kilometres. As a result 85% of the journeys took less than 10 minutes.

### Length of footpaths

2 all-weather footpaths provide a walking distance of 493 metres.

### Entrances and car parks

An informal parking area provides parking for approximately 12 cars. There are 6 formal entrances.

Three quarters of respondents stated the car park was satisfactory as opposed to good or very good, therefore there is room for improvement. In addition, a quarter rated it as being poor quality with poor safety.

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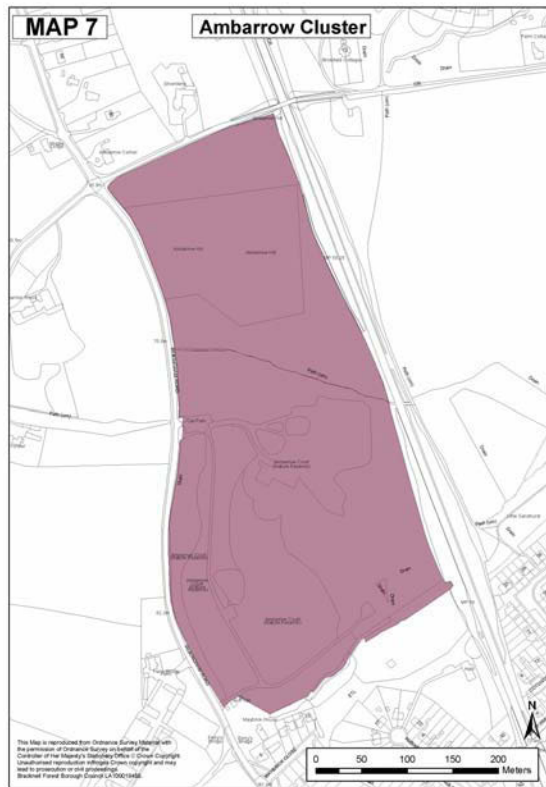
**Linkages to other sites**

This site stands alone.

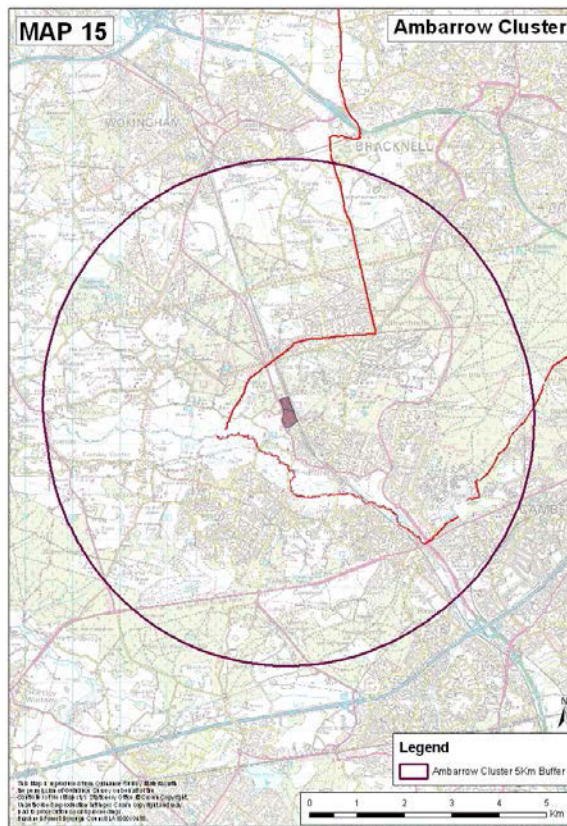
**Potential as impact avoidance measure**

This site caters predominantly for local users with the majority of visitors arriving on foot despite the provision of parking. The site is not deemed to be busy therefore has capacity for further visitors. Although the site is only partially semi-natural, this has the potential to provide for an element of the SPA users; people wanting to take their dog for short local walks up to half a kilometre in length. Improvements to the car park and path network could encourage this use.

# AMBARROW CLUSTER



This site has a 5km catchment as shown below:



<b>Site Name</b>	Ambarrow Court / Ambarrow Hill
<b>OS co-ordinates</b>	SU 824 628
<b>Area</b>	13.67 hectares
<b>Typology</b>	D (natural & semi-natural green space)
<b>Ward</b>	Little Sandhurst And Wellington
<b>PPG17 Ref No's</b>	6,7
<b>PPG17 Audit</b>	Ambarrow Court - 82% Good Ambarrow Hill - 59.2% Good

### Features

Ambarrow Court is an 8.7ha site located in Little Sandhurst between the A321 and the Reading-Guildford railway line. It forms the lower slopes of Ambarrow Hill (5ha), which joins to the north of the site and is owned and managed by the National Trust. A Local Nature Reserve and Wildlife Heritage Site, Ambarrow Court contains a range of habitats including ancient woodland, birch and hazel coppice, marshes, ponds and pools, and a meadow.

Much of the site was once managed as a Victorian country estate, although the original house of 1855, has since been demolished. Remnants of this era exist through the exotic species such as bamboo, large specimen trees and yew hedges.

A nature trail runs through the site and an interpretation board is located at the site car park.

### Nature Conservation Interests

An extensive species list has been recorded at the site, with notable plants including bluebells and other spring woodland flowers, cuckoo flower, yellow rattle and mature specimen trees such as cedar and Douglas fir. Important animals recorded include the stag beetle, noctule bat and glow worm, which appear in the Bracknell Forest Biodiversity Action Plan.

### Legislation covering the site (SSSI, WHS, CROW etc)

Ambarrow Court is a Local Nature Reserve and a locally designated Wildlife Heritage Site.

### Visitor Usage

72% of all visitors surveyed stated this was the open space they regularly visited, with Horseshoe Lake and Wildmoor Heath the other sites predominantly visited.

There is a spread of both frequent and infrequent users, with 26% visiting more than 5 times a week and 28% visiting less than once a week.

Ambarrow Court is predominantly used for exercising the dog (52%) with other uses being walking (17%), jogging (7%) and relaxing and enjoying the atmosphere (7%). The length of visit tends to be shorter for this site than for others, with 39% of people staying less than 30 minutes and a further 50% staying between 30 minutes and 1 hour. This highlights the function of this site as a local area of open space for short visits.

100% of respondents felt safe when visiting the site.

20% of people rated the site as busy and 61% rated it as not busy. 83% of visitors surveyed would continue to use the site if visitor numbers doubled.



### **Visitor Numbers**

Annual visitor projection – 32,000

### **Accessibility**

The majority arrive by car (76%) and the remainder on foot (22%) or bike (2%). A higher than average proportion of visitors (7%) had travelled more than 20 kilometres to reach the site, which corresponds with 7% having a journey time of 30 minutes or more. However 81% of visitors still travelled less than 5 kilometres and took less than 10 minutes to reach the site.

### **Length of footpaths**

2 all-weather footpaths cover a distance of 1,064 metres.

Footpaths run near to three sides of the site, with the northern boundary linked to the Ramblers Route in this way.

A disabled access path runs through Ambarrow Court, including handrails and passing places to allow wheelchair and mobility impaired users to access the range of habitats found throughout the site.

### **Entrances and car parks**

Two vehicle access points exist for the site, one to the north through the car park and one at the south. Pedestrians can enter via the vehicular access points as well as at the northern end from the National Trust land.

There are 7 formal entrances and the small car park provides parking for approximately 17 cars.

The availability, quality and convenience of parking spaces scores well, with 86% of visitors rating them as very good. However, some rate safety as poor (6%) or satisfactory (19%).

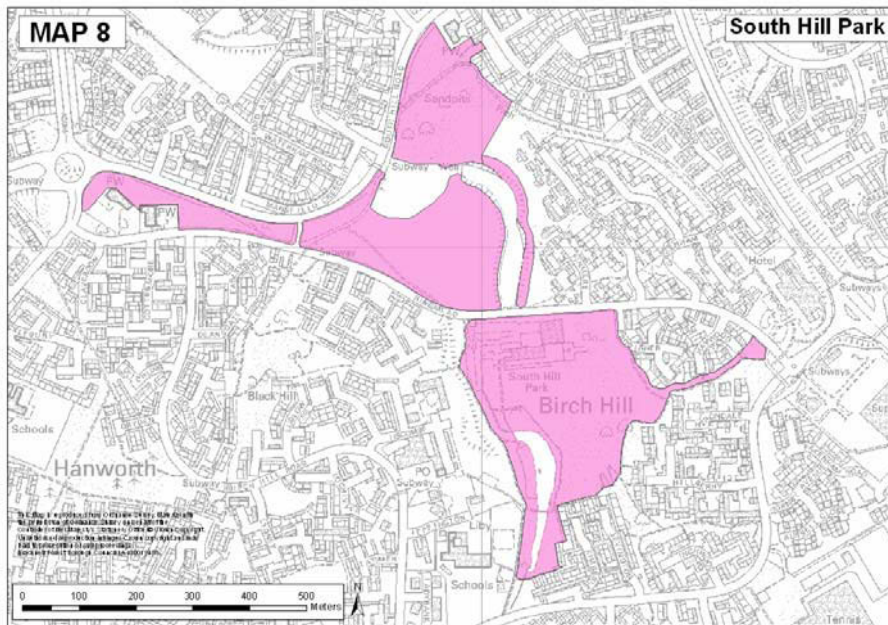
### **Linkages to other sites**

These sites are adjacent to Edgbarrow Hill.

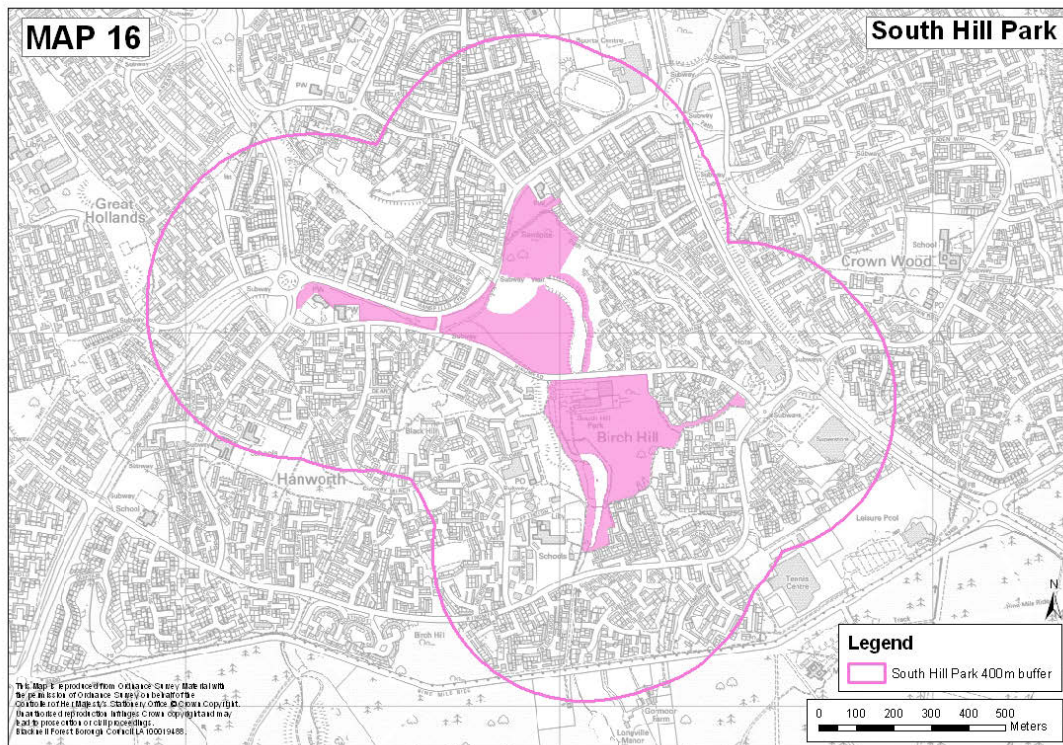
### **Potential as impact avoidance measure**

These sites are semi-natural and provide a good alternative to the SPA, indicated by visitors who visit both sites. The majority of visitors travel by car from within a small catchment for recreation and dog-walking. It is not perceived as a busy site and this is corroborated by low visitor numbers. As part of the site is owned by the National Trust, a co-ordinated approach to securing this as an avoidance measure would be necessary in order to use the whole area for impact avoidance.

**SOUTH HILL PARK**



Due to the more formal habitat of this park, for the time being it is thought that enhancements are only likely to attract new residents living within close walking distance. The catchment area has therefore been set at 400m as shown on the map below:



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<b>Site Name</b>	South Hill Park
<b>OS co-ordinates</b>	SU 871 666
<b>Area</b>	19.53 hectares
<b>Typology</b>	A (parks and gardens)
<b>Ward</b>	Hanworth
<b>PPG17 Ref No's</b>	125/126
<b>PPG17 Audit</b>	72% Average

### Features

This provides a diverse area of open space including wooded areas, open grassland, 2 lakes and some formal gardens.

Ownership and management is divided between Bracknell Town Council, Bracknell Forest Borough Council and Thames Water. The area to the south of Ringmead is owned and managed by Bracknell Forest Borough Council, whilst the northern area is managed by Bracknell Town Council. Both lakes are owned and managed by the Thames Water Authority and act as balancing ponds for the town.

In early 2005, Bracknell Forest Borough Council was successful in securing money from the Heritage Lottery Fund to prepare a restoration plan for the public park at South Hill Park. The project carried out a major review before preparing the plan; this included consultation with a wide range of interested bodies and with the public. The council appointed Land Management Services Ltd (LMS), chartered landscape architects, to prepare the plan and carry out the consultation. The Conservation Management Plan for South Hill Park has now been completed.

South Hill Park is popular with locals and visitors who enjoy walking, picnicking, dog walking and general relaxation at this attractive site. A children's play area exists at the park and a network of paths enables all visitors, including the mobility impaired, to explore the site easily. The formal Italian garden may be found at the rear of the house.

South Hill Park is Bracknell's leading venue for large public events, such as the half marathon and music festival.

This is identified in the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy (2002) as a site with some natural features and just over half of the site is covered with woody planting.

### Nature Conservation Interests

Although South Hill park is located in a residential housing area, it provides a valuable wildlife habitat and has been designated as a Wildlife Heritage Site. It contains a woodland with exotic species and birch woodland, parkland areas with formal lawns, two lakes and wetland areas. Over 130 plant species have been recorded at South Hill park, whilst the lakes are home to frogs, newts and waterfowl. A range of events and activities for schools and the public take place at South Hill Park, ranging from pond dipping to bat watching.

### Legislation covering the site (SSSI, WHS, CROW etc)

Today the house is a Grade II listed building and the site a Grade II Registered Park of Special Historic Interest. The Register of Parks and Gardens of special historic interest in England was established, and is maintained by, English Heritage and now contains nearly 1,450 sites. Its main purpose is to help ensure that the features and qualities which make these landscapes of national importance are safeguarded during ongoing management or if any change is being considered which could affect

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them. In this way, English Heritage hopes to increase awareness of their value and encourage those who own them or have a role in their protection and their future, to treat these special places with due care.

Both the north and south areas are locally designated Wildlife Heritage Sites.

### **Visitor Usage**

The South Hill Park Audience Development and Access Plan (2005)<sup>23</sup> identified that: *“There is scope for increased activity in the park. It is not as well used as it might be.”*

82% of all visitors surveyed stated this was the open space they regularly visited, with Jocks Lane, Wildmoor Heath, Sandhurst Memorial Park and Larks Hill the other sites most visited.

There is a spread of both frequent and infrequent users, with 33% visiting more than 5 times a week and 37% visiting less than once a week.

South Hill Park is used for a wide range of purposes, with the main uses being exercising the dog (29%) and relaxing and enjoying the atmosphere (24%). Other main reasons for visiting include walking (12%) and children’s play (12%). People visit the site for a range of different times, with only 12% of visits being a short visit of less than 30 minutes. 35% of people stay for between 30 minutes and an hour, then a further 31% stay between 1 and 2 hours. 2% of people stay over 6 hours, which may be a result of the facilities available in the arts centre.

96% of respondents felt safe when visiting the site.

59% of people rated the site as busy and 31% rated it as not busy. However, 87% of visitors surveyed would continue to use the site if visitor numbers doubled.

### **Visitor Numbers**

Annual visitor projection – 94,000

### **Accessibility**

A range of access options exist for South Hill park, including a large car park off Ringmead and a bus stop approximately 300 metres away. Although there are a number of bus routes passing close to the park the bus stops are not particularly well placed to serve the park. Two adopted cycle routes also cross the site, which incorporates a series of flat surfaced paths.

The majority of visitors arrive on foot (55%) and the remainder by car (41%) with 2% arriving by bicycle. 88% of visitors travel from within 5 kilometres although a few visitors (2%) have arrived from over 20 kilometres. The journey time for the majority of visitors (63%) is less than 5 minutes and a further 20% have travelled between 6 and 10 minutes.

### **Length of footpaths**

There is currently 1,690 metres of footpaths (approximately 11 different paths) on the site at this time. The Access Plan identified the main weaknesses in this footpath network to be:

- A lack of footpath access to North Lake – erosion along the edge of the lake suggests demand.
- Short accessible circular routes.

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<sup>23</sup> The Tourism Company (November 2005) South Hill Park Audience Development and Access Plan.



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- Accessible routes through the wooded area the the east of the mansion house.
- A more pedestrian-friendly linkage between the two major parts of the site, which are currently bisected by Ringmead.

It is proposed that the following specific initiatives would remove barriers to access:

- A new path (or boardwalk) around the marsh area / reed bed and along the western or eastern edge of North Lake and back to Ringmead.
- An accessible trail through the woods linking the perimeter footpath from South Lake to the arts centre terrace to provide a circular route.
- A more formal pedestrian crossing point to link routes across Ringmead.
- Delineation of some other simple trails through the woods in association with a nature trail. The consultation exercise identified this as a popular request.
- Better maintenance of the park area to reduce litter, dog mess and shabbiness and an on-site staff presence to overcome vandalism and safety issues.
- Leaflet identifying a self-guided trail around the site and occasional identification boards.

### **Entrances and car parks**

The park is unfenced and the surrounding residential areas are closely linked into the park through a network of access points and footpaths. A total of 30 formal and informal entrances have been identified in addition to good links into the Bracknell cycle network.

There is extensive free car parking near the arts centre to serve both the park and the arts centre; this totals approximately 125 spaces in one formal, tarmaced car park and one smaller gravelled car park.

Despite a large car park this is rated the poorest out of all surveyed. 32% thought the availability was poor although convenience and safety were rated much higher.

### **Linkages to other sites**

None identified.

### **Potential as impact avoidance measure**

Users of this site vary widely so are difficult to categorise. It is perceived as a busy site by some users, however this is contradicted by a recent study which identified capacity for additional visitors whilst not harming the atmosphere of the site. Visitors to this site do also use the SPA so some of the uses are comparable. Several measures have been proposed which would considerably improve the capacity of the site and its attractiveness as a semi-natural area of open space. Although there is a formal element to the site, an amount of the area is semi-natural and this would be enhanced. The location of this site between the main urban area of the Borough and the SPA would assist its ability to attract visitors as they would have to pass South Hill Park to reach the SPA.



## **Sites not suitable for alternative open space**

<b>Site Name</b>	Great Hollands Recreation Ground
<b>OS co-ordinates</b>	SU 851 665
<b>Area</b>	14.95 hectares
<b>Typology</b>	B (amenity green space)
<b>Ward</b>	Great Hollands South
<b>PPG17 Ref No's</b>	62
<b>PPG17 Audit</b>	71% Good

### **Features**

This is identified in the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy (2002) as a site with some natural features and a third of the site is covered with woody planting.

### **Nature Conservation Interests**

None identified.

### **Legislation covering the site (SSSI, WHS, CROW etc)**

None identified.

### **Visitor Usage**

74% of visitors usually use this open space, with the remainder visiting other spaces including: Sandhurst Memorial Park, Jocks Lane.

People tend to visit this site less frequently than average, with 43% of respondents visiting less than once a week and only 14% of respondents visiting more than 5 times a week.

The main reason given for visiting the site (66%) was for children's play, with 12% exercising the dog.

Visits were slightly longer than average, with 10% of people staying more than 2 hours and 53% staying between 1 and 2 hours.

100 % of visitors always or usually felt safe when visiting.

41% of respondents didn't think this was a busy site and 95% of respondents would continue to use the site if the visitor numbers doubled.

### **Visitor Numbers**

Annual visitor projection – 59,000

### **Accessibility**

59% of visitors arriving by car and 33% walked to the site. Visitors travelled further than average to reach this site, with 12% of visitors travelling over 10 kilometres and only a quarter coming from less than 1 kilometre. This is reflected in the travel time with 30% of people travelling for 10 minutes or more.

### **Length of footpaths**

There are 3 identified all-weather footpaths covering a distance of 771 metres.

### **Entrances and car parks**

There is a tarmaced car park providing for 60 cars which provides 1 of the 5 formal entrances around the site.

57% of all visitors surveyed used the car park and there is scope for improvement as 3% of visitors rated the number of spaces as poor, and 6% rated the quality as poor or very poor.

#### **Linkages to other sites**

This site is not in close proximity to other strategic sites although it is close to other areas of open space which are not suitable SANGS.

#### **Potential as impact avoidance measure**

This site provides a more formal environment, with children's play being the main reason for visiting, although there are also some natural features which attract dog walkers. The visitors in general appear to be less regular, visiting other amenity open space in addition. They tend to travel further, visit less often and also stay longer than at other sites. This suggests the catchment is relatively large. The site is deemed to be relatively busy with a high number of visitors.

<b>Site Name</b>	Edgbarrow Hill
<b>OS co-ordinates</b>	SU 833 637
<b>Area</b>	61.5 hectares
<b>Typology</b>	D (natural & semi-natural green space)
<b>Ward</b>	Little Sandhurst And Wellington
<b>PPG17 Ref No's</b>	278
<b>PPG17 Audit</b>	45% Average

#### **Features**

Edgbarrow Hill & Heath consist of woodland (Scots pine & sweet chestnut plantation) with areas of open heathland. Heathland vegetation mainly thrives in the land cut underneath the high power electricity lines. The site contains Wellington College Bog SSSI.

#### **Nature Conservation Interests**

Wellington College Bog SSSI supports just over 6ha of lowland heathland. Small numbers of silver-studded blue butterfly recorded within the last three years on Edgbarrow Hill and Heath. This site appears to have suffered a decline in silver studded blue numbers over the last 10-15 years thought to be caused by a decline in the availability of early succession heather.

#### **Legislation covering the site (SSSI, WHS, CROW etc)**

Wellington College Bog, within the site, is a SSSI and Edgbarrow Hill and Heath are locally designated Wildlife Heritage Sites.

#### **Visitor Usage**

77% of all visitors surveyed stated this was the open space they regularly visited, therefore nearly a quarter of visitors regularly visit other areas of open space. These include Shepherds Meadows, Wildmoor Heath, Sandhurst Memorial Park, Ambarrow Court and Westmorland Park.

The predominant user group (40%) is regular users visiting more than 5 times a week; however in addition to this 34% visit less frequently, either once a week or less than once a week.

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Edgbarrow Hill is mainly used for exercising the dog (57%) with other major uses being as a cut-through to reach another destination (17%) and for walking (11%). The length of visit tends to be shorter for this site than for others, with 40% of people staying less than 30 minutes and a further 49% staying between 30 minutes and 1 hour. This highlights the function of this site as a local area of open space for short visits.

100% of respondents felt safe when visiting the site.

49% rated the site as busy, although only 3% rated it as 'always busy'. 34% rated it as not busy and 9% said it was always quiet. 89% of visitors surveyed would continue to use the site if visitor numbers doubled.

### **Visitor Numbers**

Annual visitor projection – 16,000

### **Accessibility**

Just over half of visitors (51%) walk to the site and 40% travel by car. 37% of all visitors surveyed had travelled less than 1 kilometre to reach Edgbarrow Hill and a further 54% had travelled between 1 and 5 kilometres. The journey time for the majority of visitors (77%) is less than 10 minutes.

### **Length of footpaths**

No all-weather paths were identified.

### **Entrances and car parks**

There is no car park linked to the site but there are 11 entrances for pedestrians into the site.

### **Linkages to other sites**

The site is adjacent to Ambarrow Court and Ambarrow Hill.

### **Potential as impact avoidance measure**

In general visitors to this site tend to be regular, local users visiting for shorter periods of time to walk their dogs or as a cut through. It was rated as a quiet site, and had correspondingly low levels of visitors. The semi-natural and quiet nature of the site indicate this would make a suitable alternative to the SPA, however the site is not within the Borough Council's ownership, and there have been indications that the public access to this site is to be restricted because of security measures rather than extended. There is a public right of way across the site, but the additional access required to attract people from the SPA is unlikely to be secured.

<b>Site Name</b>	Sandhurst Memorial Park
<b>OS co-ordinates</b>	SU 842 612
<b>Area</b>	27.26 hectares
<b>Typology</b>	H (outdoor sports facilities)
<b>Ward</b>	Central Sandhurst
<b>PPG17 Ref No's</b>	118
<b>PPG17 Audit</b>	81% Very Good

### Features

This park, which is accessed off the A321 Yorktown / Marshall Road, is open to the public and provides a range of facilities and attractions for a variety of formal and informal activities.

Covering approximately 28 hectares, this site, managed by Sandhurst Town Council, has become one of the premier recreational sites in Bracknell Forest.

The Civic Trust's Green Flag Award Scheme is a national standard for the quality of public parks and green spaces in England and Wales. Sites are judged on eight criteria: 1) A welcoming place 2) Healthy, safe and secure 3) Well maintained and clean 4) Sustainability 5) Conservation and heritage 6) Community involvement 7) Marketing and 8) Management. In 2004, Bracknell Forest Borough Council and Sandhurst Town Council entered Sandhurst Memorial Park and Shepherd Meadows into the scheme - resulting in the first ever joint application Green Flag Award. A management plan for the sites was developed in conjunction with BBOWT (Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust) and the Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership. Shepherd Meadows and Sandhurst Memorial Park received a Green Flag Award again in 2005/06.

Since its modest beginning in 1949 when 2.4 hectares of land known as Brookside Field were purchased by Sandhurst Parish Council "for the purpose of a public recreation ground for the benefit of the inhabitants of the Parish of Sandhurst", successive Parish/Town Councils have gained the rights over adjacent farm and woodlands to make the Memorial Park what it is today.

This is identified in the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy (2002) as a site with slightly more amenity value than natural features, and 10% of the site is covered with woody planting.

### Nature Conservation Interests

None identified.

### Legislation covering the site (SSSI, WHS, CROW etc)

None identified.

### Visitor Usage

78% of all visitors surveyed stated this was the open space they regularly visited, with the Look Out the other site most visited.

There are fewer than average very frequent users, with only 9% visiting 4 or more times a week and 65% visiting once a week or less.

Sandhurst Memorial Park is used for a wide range of purposes, with the main use being children's play (44%). Other main reasons for visiting are to meet people /

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socialise (15%), exercise the dog (12%) and walk (10%). Visits are predominantly more than 30 minutes but less than 2 hours (83%).

78% of respondents felt safe when visiting the site.

44% of people rated the site as busy and 44% rated it as not busy. However, 93% of visitors surveyed would continue to use the site if visitor numbers doubled.

### **Visitor Numbers**

Annual visitor projection – 150,000

### **Accessibility**

The majority travel by car (61%) and the remainder by walking (34%), cycling (2%) or bus (2%). 29% of visitors travel from within 1 kilometre and the majority (49%) travel between 1 and 5 kilometres. The journey time for nearly all visitors (98%) is less than 20 minutes.

### **Entrances and car parks**

63% of visitors surveyed use the car park and a high percentage of respondents rated the car park size, quality, convenience and safety as very good or quite good.

### **Linkages to other sites**

This is adjacent to Shepherds Meadows.

### **Potential as impact avoidance measure**

Many of the visitors to the Memorial Park also visit the Look Out, but they did not specify whether this was for the children's play area as opposed to the natural areas. Visitor numbers on this site are already high, although the same number of people rated the site as 'busy' and 'not busy'. People visited less frequently and stayed longer, which may be a result of the type of user, visiting for the play area rather than daily dog walking. As the site already scores highly in the PPG17 audit, there is little scope for improvement, and the site because of its amenity nature does not currently attract large number of dog walkers. **As a result there is little or no potential for this to be converted into alternative open space to attract users of the SPA.**



<b>Site Name</b>	Swinley Park
<b>OS co-ordinates</b>	SU 833 637
<b>Area</b>	267.55 hectares
<b>Typology</b>	D (natural & semi-natural green space)
<b>Ward</b>	Ascot
<b>PPG17 Ref No's</b>	132
<b>PPG17 Audit</b>	47% Good

### Features

Swinley Park is an area of the Windsor Estate between Bracknell and Bagshot to the west of the A322. Owned and managed by The Crown Estate, it comprises over 260 hectares of mainly Scots Pine woodland.

### Nature Conservation Interests

This park includes the most important concentration of ancient broadleaved trees remaining in the southern sector of Windsor Forest.

Most of the area consists of conifer plantation with patches of broadleaves, but scattered throughout are a number of ancient oaks, beech *Fagus sylvatica* and sweet chestnut *Castanea sativa*, notably along the rides and edges of forest compartments. Some of the oaks are pollards of great age and, although partially shaded by conifers, the decaying hulks of these ultra-mature trees provide habitats now rare in woodland. Many rare species of insect requiring dead and decaying large timber are known to be present. The area is also of interest for its birds, both hole-nesting species and birds of prey. An avenue of lime trees *Tilia europaea* supports a good local population of mistletoe *Viscum album*.

The site also includes Swinley Brick Pits, an area of old clay pits now much overgrown by birch, pine and rhododendron and including a number of small pools providing ideal habitat for several species of dragonflies, Odonata, and secluded cover for waterfowl, as well as breeding sites for all three species of newts.

Locally, where the ground is too wet for the proper establishment of coniferous trees, a wet heath flora has developed. A small colony of marsh clubmoss *Lycopodiella inundata*, rare in Berkshire, occurs in the brick pits area.

### Legislation covering the site (SSSI, WHS, CROW etc)

This large area of private land is both a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and is locally designated as a Wildlife Heritage Site.

### Visitor Usage

78% of all visitors surveyed stated this was the open space they regularly visited, with Englemere Pond and the Look Out the other sites most visited.

There is a wide spread of frequency of user with a third of respondents visiting more than 5 times a week, but also nearly a quarter visiting less than once a week.

Swinley Park is used for a wide range of purposes, with the main use being exercising the dog (54%). Other main reasons for visiting are cycling (19%), walking (11%) and jogging (8%). No visits are less than 30 minutes and the vast majority (47%) are between 30 minutes and 2 hours. In comparison to other sites a high proportion (14%) of visits are between 2 and 4 hours.

84% of respondents felt safe when visiting the site.

Only 19% of people rated the site as busy and 68% rated it as not busy. However, 95% of visitors surveyed would continue to use the site if visitor numbers doubled.

### **Visitor Numbers**

Annual visitor projection – 30,000

### **Accessibility**

The majority travel by car (81%) and the remainder by walking (44%) and cycling (5%). This site has a higher proportion of visitors from long distance; 14% of respondents had travelled more than 20 kilometres and half of all users travelled between 1 and 5 kilometres. As a result 16% of visitors have travelled more than 30 minutes to reach the site, which is the highest for all the sites surveyed. In addition 41% of people travelled less than 5 minutes.

### **Length of footpaths**

There are 8 all-weather footpaths providing a total distance of 8,348 metres of access around the site.

### **Entrances and car parks**

There is a car park for 30 cars. There are 10 entrances around the site's perimeter. Visitors to the site do not rate the car park particularly well with 39% of respondents rating the quality as quite or very poor and only 16% rating the quality as very good or quite good.

### **Linkages to other sites**

Part of this site is adjacent to Englemere Pond.

### **Potential as impact avoidance measure**

This site has all the characteristics of a suitable impact avoidance measure against the SPA, being of a suitable size, having the potential to upgrade access and being of a low visitor usage already, therefore having capacity to absorb more visitors as a result.

However, the deliverability of this site as impact avoidance cannot be guaranteed or secured as the Borough Council does not own or lease the land, and discussions with the landowner have indicated that securing this land over the lifetime of the developments proposed in the DPD will not be possible.

It is for this reason **this site has not been included in the Appropriate Assessment.**

## Appendix 9 – Enhancements to open space

Using the criteria identified on page 51, an appraisal was made of how each area of open space already meets the quality guidelines of suitable mitigating open space. This was based upon the summaries provided in Appendix 8, site visits and discussions with the Parks and Countryside Service. As a result, potential enhancements which could improve the quality of the open space as mitigation land are identified.

Criteria which are not included in the table below, but are addressed within a separate section are:

- The site is located in a place which would make it attractive to the particular people most likely to visit the SPA – this is being addressed by the accessibility mapping to ensure proposed development is within a suitable distance of the mitigation.
- Has not been heavily used up to now and has the capacity to attract more people of the type who would visit the SPA – this issue is addressed in the capacity study of each site in Table 15 (page 55).

Key = Potential for Improvement = PFI

Criteria	Dog off the lead <sup>24</sup>	Perception of safety on site <sup>25</sup>	Provision of parking	Circular walk of 2.5km	Way-marked paths	Thin, natural paths	Water on-site	View points	Attractive in appearance i.e. semi-natural	Enhancements
Jocks Copse / Tinker's Copse / The Cut (south) / Garth Meadows / Larks Hill / Piggy Wood	Yes	Yes	Some	Not currently although PFI as a group of sites	Currently none so lots of PFI.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Production of an open space management plan.</li> <li>• Main potential for enhancement is the creation of a circular route including all the sites.</li> <li>• Improving semi-natural linkages between the individual sites.</li> <li>• Way-marked signs to direct round a circular route.</li> <li>• Improved paths on some parts of the site.</li> <li>• Additional parking spaces at different points of the route and additional non-car access (e.g. improved pedestrian</li> </ul>

<sup>24</sup> The reference to dogs being off the lead within this document does not exclude the requirements of other legislation, which requires dogs to be under close control at all times.

<sup>25</sup> Where potential for safety improvement is identified, this has been based on perceptions of safety from the current visitors surveyed during the site specific questionnaires.

Criteria	Dog off the lead <sup>24</sup>	Perception of safety on site <sup>25</sup>	Provision of parking	Circular walk of 2.5km	Way-marked paths	Thin, natural paths	Water on-site	View points	Attractive in appearance i.e. semi-natural	Enhancements
										entrances and cycle parking). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Publicise as circular walk (leaflets, internet)</li> <li>• New and/or upgraded furniture, e.g. bins and benches where appropriate.</li> <li>• Ranger presence on-site to improve safety and perception of safety.</li> <li>• Improve interpretation and promotion of the site.</li> </ul>
Englemere Pond	Yes	Potential for improvement	Yes – PFI quality	Provides for 1.6km	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Production of an open space management plan.</li> <li>• Improved way-marked signs to direct round a circular route.</li> <li>• Improved paths on some parts of the site and creation of additional paths to increase length of walk.</li> <li>• Publicise as circular walk (leaflets, internet) and improve interpretation and promotion of the site.</li> <li>• Ranger presence on-site to improve safety and perception of safety.</li> <li>• New and/or upgraded furniture, e.g. bins and benches where appropriate.</li> </ul>
Shepherd Meadows	Yes	PFI	Yes	PFI	PFI	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Way-marked signs to direct round a circular route.</li> <li>• Improved paths on some parts of the site.</li> <li>• Publicise as circular walk (leaflets, internet) and improve interpretation and promotion of the site.</li> <li>• Ranger presence on-site to improve safety and perception of safety.</li> <li>• New and/or upgraded furniture, e.g. bins and benches where appropriate.</li> </ul>
Horseshoe Lake	Yes	Yes	Yes – PFI size, safety	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Production of an open space management plan.</li> <li>• Improved way-marked signs to direct round a circular route and encourage people to extend their walk along the Blackwater Valley.</li> <li>• Improved paths on some parts of the site.</li> </ul>

Criteria	Dog off the lead <sup>24</sup>	Perception of safety on site <sup>25</sup>	Provision of parking	Circular walk of 2.5km	Way-marked paths	Thin, natural paths	Water on-site	View points	Attractive in appearance i.e. semi-natural	Enhancements
										<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Publicise as circular walk (leaflets, internet) and improve interpretation and promotion of the site.</li> <li>Ranger presence on-site to improve safety and perception of safety.</li> <li>New and/or upgraded furniture, e.g. bins and benches where appropriate.</li> <li>Better linkages between Horseshoe Lake, Shepherds Meadows and the Blackwater Valley path will provide a longer circular walk and could also provide a link to larger scale gravel pit restoration within Wokingham DC.</li> </ul>
Longhill Park / Milman Close / Beswick Gardens Copse / Lily Hill Park / Clintons Hill	Yes	PFI	Yes	PFI	No	PFI	Yes	Yes	Mainly semi-natural but PFI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Production of an open space management plan.</li> <li>Main potential for enhancement is the creation of a circular route including all the sites. Lily Hill Park has already been enhanced in a suitable manner, therefore enhancements should concentrate on the other sites.</li> <li>Improve attractiveness and semi-natural nature of Milman Close and Beswick Garden Copse</li> <li>Production of an open space management plan.</li> <li>New and/or upgraded furniture, e.g. bins and benches where appropriate.</li> <li>Improving semi-natural linkages between the individual sites.</li> <li>Way-marked signs to direct round a circular route.</li> <li>Improved path network on some parts of the sites.</li> <li>Additional parking spaces at different points of the route, improve safety of Longhill Park car park and additional non-car access (e.g. improved pedestrian entrances and cycle parking).</li> <li>Publicise as circular walk (leaflets, internet) and improve interpretation and promotion of the site.</li> <li>Ranger presence on-site to improve safety and perception of safety.</li> </ul>
Silver Jubilee	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	Some	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Production of an open space management plan.</li> </ul>



Criteria	Dog off the lead <sup>24</sup>	Perception of safety on site <sup>25</sup>	Provision of parking	Circular walk of 2.5km	Way-marked paths	Thin, natural paths	Water on-site	View points	Attractive in appearance i.e. semi-natural	Enhancements
Field / Wicks Green, Binfield										<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parking improvements and additional non-car access (e.g. improved pedestrian entrances and cycle parking).</li> <li>• Ranger presence on-site to improve safety and perception of safety.</li> <li>• New and/or upgraded furniture, e.g. bins and benches where appropriate.</li> <li>• Improve interpretation and promotion of the site.</li> </ul>
South Hill Park	Yes	PFI	Yes	PFI	No	PFI	Yes	Yes	Partially semi-natural and new path network could exploit this	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Footpath access to North Lake e.g. boardwalk around marsh area.</li> <li>• Way-marking of a circular route shown as a nature trail.</li> <li>• Improved access through the wooded area to the east of the mansion house.</li> <li>• Pedestrian-friendly linkage between the 2 major parts of the site (across Ringmead).</li> <li>• Ranger presence on-site to improve safety and perception of safety.</li> <li>• New and/or upgraded furniture, e.g. bins and benches where appropriate.</li> <li>• Improve interpretation and promotion of the site.</li> <li>• Works could be linked to a HLF bid for heritage works at South Hill Park.</li> </ul>
Ambarrow Court / Ambarrow Hill	Yes	Yes	Yes – PFI safety	PFI	PFI	PFI	No	Yes	Good	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Production of an open space management plan.</li> <li>• Improvements to existing car parks to improve safety and additional non-car access (e.g. improved pedestrian entrances and cycle parking).</li> <li>• Creation of new paths in a circular, way-marked route.</li> <li>• Production of an open space management plan.</li> <li>• Ranger presence on-site to improve safety and perception of safety.</li> <li>• New and/or upgraded furniture, e.g. bins and benches where appropriate.</li> <li>• Improve interpretation and promotion of the site.</li> </ul>

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The enhancements identified in the table above are required in order to bring each area of open space up to a suitable standard to provide an alternative to the SPA. Detailed works and costings, will be provided along with the implementation of this plan, in an open space 'mini-plan', which is likely to be within the Limiting the Impact of Development Supplementary Planning Document. It is difficult to identify the specific improvement works which may need to be carried out at each site over the next 20 years, therefore the mini-plan should be updated every 5 years (see page 56).

## Appendix 10 – Natural England Access Management specification

### The Production of Access Management Plans for the SSSIs that make up the Thames Basin Heaths SPA

#### 1. Introduction

1.1 The Thames Basin Heaths (TBH) Special Protection Area (SPA) covers 13 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) spread over three counties and within 5km of 15 local authorities (see attached map).

1.2 It is an internationally important nature conservation site, classified in order to protect three bird species that are rare across Europe, the Dartford warbler, nightjar and woodlark, which rely on the heathland habitats. The heathlands are also important for their landscape, historical and cultural values and a wide range of other wildlife species, many of which are also rare. Over the last 100 years or so, the heathland habitats have diminished and become increasingly fragmented. Much of the land around the remaining remnants of the once extensive heaths has been developed for housing and many other land uses. The three particular bird species are vulnerable to the effects of increasing urbanisation of the area around the heathlands. Effects on their habitats include those arising from the increased number of fires, rubbish dumping, changes in water levels and flow, and the fragmentation and isolation of habitats. Effects on the birds themselves include predation of the birds, their young and eggs by domestic animals, and disturbance, especially from recreational visitors to the heaths, many of which are walking or taking dogs for a walk off the lead.

1.3 Many thousands more houses are needed in the area. The heaths in the SPA are strongly protected from being built upon, but the additional houses have the potential to further affect the bird species for which the SPA is classified, through indirect effects, especially of predation and disturbance.

1.4 Natural England's Thames Basin Heaths Project sets out three specific approaches that can be made to avoid and reduce the impacts on the SPA resulting from an increase in the local population of people from new development. These are:

- 1) **On site habitat management**, where the habitat on which the three SPA bird species rely must be managed to ensure that it remains in good condition.
- 2) **On site access management** so that people can continue to be able to enjoy visiting the SPA for open air recreation in ways that do not damage the heathland wildlife and habitats; aiming to reduce unauthorised activity, guide and educate visitors to reduce preventable disturbance and to focus on protection of the most sensitive areas, and at the most sensitive times of year.
- 3) **Planning restrictions** on development close to the SPA combined with **off site avoidance measures** via the provision of new or upgraded suitable natural green space as an alternative to the SPA, which enables people to undertake all the activities currently enjoyed on the SPA heathlands whilst not increasing the number of visits made to the SPA.

1.5 This contract forms part of the second of these approaches, that of access management on the SPA.

#### 2. Project structure

2.1 The project has four important elements

- Data collation and gathering

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- Research on interrelationship between bird, visitor and habitat distribution\*
- Stakeholder consultation
- Drafting of access management plans

\* This element of the project may be managed as a separate contract

### 3. Objectives - Data collation and gathering

3.1 The aim of this part of the project is to bring together into a GIS format (MapInfo compatible) all the data necessary to produce Access Management Plans for the 11 SPA SSSIs. This will make clear:-

- distribution of habitats and their vulnerability to access
- distribution of any disturbance-sensitive species – particularly the 3 Annex I species for which the sites were notified.
- distribution of any other sensitive features (eg SAC, SSSI, historic features)
- distribution of housing within 5 km of the boundaries of the SPA sites
- points of access and parking facilities (including the number of parking spaces)
- the network of paths, tracks and roads; on-site and feeding the site
- other green space within 1km (which may be used by visitors within a visit also including the SPA)
- other green space which may be relied upon as an alternative to the SPA, to absorb additional visitor pressure from new residential development
- available information on site usage (eg training areas, forestry management operations)
- where land manager's interests are affected by visitors and where they have, or plan to, take measures to manage this.

### 4. Objectives - Research on interrelationship between bird, visitor and habitat distribution

4.1 The aim of this part of the project is to assess the effect that visitor activity is having on the distribution of the three SPA bird species and identify where habitat or visitor management measures can be undertaken to manage the effects.

### 5. Objectives – stakeholder consultation

5.1 The aims of this part of the project are to

- ensure that the **land owners and managers** of the SPA are able to contribute to the data collation and gathering
- clarify the landowners and managers interests in visitor management
- maximise support from the landowners and managers for the measures which are necessary to maintain the SPA and avoid the potential negative effects of development
- ensure that **other users of the SPA** understand and are able to contribute to formulation of the Access Management Plans, and support the implementation of these plans as far as possible
- ensure that **other stakeholders, who set the context outside the SPA**, understand and are able to contribute to formulation of the Access Management Plans, in particular to ensure that on-site and off-site measures are complementary

## 6. Objectives – drafting of access management plans

6.1 The aim of this part of the project is to produce a plan for each of the 13 SSSIs which will:

A - show how the site access and management should be modified to:-

- encourage present and potential users to use alternative green space instead of the SPA.
  - draw visitors away from the more sensitive parts of the site
  
  - modify visitor behaviour to reduce the risk that it will have a negative impact on the SPA birds
- ensure that visitor access proposals are compatible with the needs and policies of the site managers.
- ensure an integrated approach across ownership boundaries, which enables the interests of the landowners and managers to be reconciled.
  - provide attractive routes that, as far as compatible with maintenance of the SPA, serve the needs of the neighbouring communities and users of any long-distance routes that may cross the site.

B - Identify the mechanisms by which each of the access management measures required will be funded and delivered, in particular

- measures required as site maintenance, which would be carried out by the landowners or managers, perhaps in partnership with Natural England (and its successor body)
- measures that are additional to site maintenance and could form part of the mitigation package for residential development around the SPA, to be secured by planning obligations
- amongst these mitigation measures, those measures which will be effective in themselves and those which would be effective only if carried out alongside off-site mitigation measures

C – Ensure compliance with the Habitats Regulations by providing all the information necessary for appropriate assessment, for any measures that are not directly connected with and necessary for management of the site for the conservation

## 7. Methods - Data collation and gathering

7.1 The contractor will source digitised or hard copy data suitable for the purposes set out above. This may be pre-digitised or paper based information. Much of the data required is already held by Natural England in digitised MapInfo format. However, the work is also likely to involve liaison with the bodies and individuals concerned to ascertain the data they hold, its availability and format. Natural England can aid with the initial contact if necessary. All data which is not already digitised is to be digitised from source material. All digital Data should be presented as MapInfo tab files compatible with MapInfo v7 files. If the digitised information is available only in a format other than MapInfo, the work will include the conversion of such information into a single format compatible with MapInfo Version 7.

7.2 It is anticipated that most of the required information will be obtainable from landowners, local authorities or other organisations. Some site visits will be required to ground-truth or obtain information on access points, car parks and footpaths. Natural England will provide a list of sites for which visits will be required. Definitions and data structures for each data type



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will be agreed with Natural England in the first week of the project, in addition to the definitions provided below; the contractor should suggest data definitions and structures for each dataset in their response to this tender:

7.3 A table showing the information required, its current form, and its source is attached as **Annex 1[to be added]**

7.4 A list of the sensitive features which need to be included in this part of the project in **Annex 2[to be added]**

7.5 GIS standards for this part of the project are set out in **Annex 3**

## **8. Methods - Research on interrelationship between bird, visitor and habitat distribution**

8.1 This will include collation, quality assurance, categorisation and ground testing of habitat (NVC) data.

*Methods for this part of the project to be developed*

## **9. Methods - stakeholder dialogue**

9.1 The production of the plans will of necessity, be an iterative process with a considerable number of people involved. Collective or individual meetings will be conducted by the contractor. This part of the project will need to be designed and implemented carefully to ensure rapid progress to meet the necessary timetable, whilst giving adequate opportunity for the key stakeholders to contribute and develop a sense of ownership of the measures identified in the access management plans.

9.2 The stakeholders may fall effectively into three groups

- Landowners and managers
- Visitors to the SPA
- Key external influencers, including those responsible for alternative green space provision, parking, vehicular and non-vehicular routes, and information services.

9.3 Landowners and managers (listed in annex 5) have the most central role in managing access on the SPA. They are responsible for most current access management arrangements and they will need to understand and agree on where any change to these arrangements is necessary. Indeed their support is essential to the workability and long term sustainability of most measures which may be identified as necessary on site. Consultation with the landowners and managers will need to contain at least the following stages

- Introductory meetings for presentation of contextual information, discussion of the project remit and objectives, agreement of criteria for review and identification of access management measures, clarification of outline interests and ideas, testing and gathering of site information. It will be necessary to have completed much of the data collation and gathering part of the project before this stage, to enable useful discussion with consultees and proper scrutiny of the data.
- Write up of discussion on remit, objectives and criteria, circulation to landowners and managers with a request for representations on landowners interests and suggested measures
- Consideration of this input in the first drafting of access management plans
- Consultation seeking representations on the first draft of the access management plans

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- Collation of consultation responses
- A second round of meetings to discuss the collated responses
- Second draft of the access management plans
- Circulation of the second draft
- A third round of meetings to sign off and promote the final access management plans

9.4 Consultation with key influencers and visitors may follow a similar pattern, though potentially with fewer stages at the outset to agree on process. A challenge will be to engage with particular representatives of these groups who represent widely and address the greatest influences on the SPA.

9.5 The staff employed in this part of the project will need to liaise as necessary with Natural England staff to develop a full understanding of the Thames Basin Heaths Delivery Plan process before embarking on this work.

## **10. Methods – Drafting access management plans**

10.1 No further information is needed on this. The methods of drafting the access management plans are defined by the required outputs, listed in section 12 below.

## **10. Skills**

It is essential to the success of this project that the contractor employs people with the appropriate level of skills to this project. There are essentially four quite different skill sectors required:

- IT skills in the use and manipulation of GIS and associated data
- facilitation and design of stakeholder dialogue
- ornithological and habitat research
- access management in semi-natural spaces

[Research on the interrelationship between bird, visitor and habitat distribution necessitates the third of these three skill sectors. It is included in this brief but EN for the purpose of setting out the necessary order of progress but EN is minded to manage it as a separate contract].

## **Output**

The data collection and gathering will provide the following outputs:-

- MapInfo tables and workspaces (and paper maps produced from them) showing:
  - zones of sensitivity on each site
  - access points and associated car parks (classified according to their size and designation), and their level of use
  - the current network of paths, tracks and roads on each site (classified according to size and designation), and their level of use
  - current access management measures or features which have a key influence on access
  - distribution of housing within 0.5km of the sites
  - ownership / management boundaries and constraints relating to owner/manager use.
  - proposed changes to the access structure and access-associated management of each site, and the proposed timing of these changes.
- A written report which will :-
  - add detail and explanation to the above.

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- list the information identified in section 6 above
- provide the rationale behind these proposals. Where practicable, the access provision will be enhanced as part of this work. The report should comment on the affects of the proposed changes, positive or negative, on the local community.
- consider what changes might be achieved by the modification of normal management practices by the site managers and which will require outside funds and capital works to bring them about.

### **Timing**

The contract should commence in early July. Part A should be completed by the 30 September 2006 and Part B by the 15 November. Feedback on progress with the presentation of interim results will take place on a monthly basis with the project officer (and other Steering Group members as necessary).

### **Health and Safety**

The contractor is to ensure that all work is carried out by qualified staff and that all working practices are in accordance with current health and safety regulations.

The contractor is to comply with Natural England's Safety policy Statement available from Natural England's Newbury office (tel: 01635 268881). **The contractor will supply Natural England with a copy of its own safety policy statement and, if not, state the reasons for not having such a statement, eg size of firm, etc.**

The contractor will ensure that they have Public and Employee liability insurance and will supply copies of the certificates

**The contractor will carry out a risk assessment of the work and agree this with Natural England before commencing the work.**

### **Ownership of data**

With respect to information provided by any party to the contractor, the contractor agrees not to supply to others such information without explicit written consent of the data provider.

The contractor will ascertain to the best of its ability the copyright owners of all data used by the contractor in the course of this contract and abide by the conditions under which the data is supplied to them. Data ownership will remain with the copyright holders and the contractor will have no claim to own any of that data or products derived from it.

Any new data will be the property of Natural England

Annex 3

GIS standards

All data output by this contract should be in MapInfo tab format to be compatible with MapInfo Version 7.

All data should use the following projection and units:

Projection: British Coordinate Systems, British National Grid

Map Units:	Coordinate Units:	Metres
	Distance Units:	Metres (Cartesian)
	Area Units:	Hectares (Cartesian)

The recommended base mapping for digitisation is Ordnance Survey MasterMap and wherever possible MasterMap features should be copied or snapped to as such there should be no visible difference between the OS MasterMap feature and the digitised feature when printed at 1:1250.

Where a feature does not follow a feature shown in OS MasterMap it should be digitised using a heads up method as accurately as possible.

Quality assurance of the data captured should be undertaken. All attributes should be 100% accurate and boundaries should be clean and accurate.

Meta data, compliant with NBN standards, should be collected for each GIS table and linked to the GIS layer through Excel. The Excel file should be indexed to enable easy searching.

Natural England's GIS Unit will supply the following datasets to the contractor at the start of the project subject to the contractor signing third party contractor's licences:

- OS MasterMap topographic data for the project area
- UK Perspectives MAPS Aerial Photography for the project area
- Designated sites data for the project area

This data will be covered by licence and copies held by the contractor must be destroyed by the end of the project.



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Annex 5 Principal owners and occupiers of the SPA

SSSI Name Name O/O	ASH TO BROOKWOOD HEATHS	BOURLEY AND LONG VALLEY	BRAMSHILL	BROADMOOR TO BAGSHOT WOODS AND HEATHS	CASTLE BOTTOM TO YATELEY COMMON AND HAWLEY COMMONS	CHOBHAM COMMON	COLONY BOG AND BAGSHOT HEATH	EELMOOR MARSH	HAZELEY HEATH	HORSELL COMMON	OCKHAM AND WISLEY COMMONS	SANDHURST TO OWLSMOOR BOGS AND HEATHS	WHITMOOR COMMON
Aggregate Industries UK Ltd			*										
Audrey Wall rock					*								
BBOWT				*								*	
Bracknell Forest DC												*	
British Car Auctions					*								
Crown Estate				*									
Forest Enterprise				*	*								
Guildford Borough Council	*						*						
Hants County Council					*								
Hart DC (Bit outside SPA)									*				
Horsell Common Preservation Soc										*			
Lafarge Aggregates					*								
Ministry of Defence							*						
MoD (Army Training Estate HC)	*	*			*		*						
MoD (Army Training Recruitment Agency)				*									
MR J Hamilton Hamilton Frimley Trustees	*												
Mr Jordon							*						
Mr O'Brien	*												
Mr Thaw					*								
CGNN a holding company for Crest Nicholson						*							
P Kear									*				
Pieces Investments Ltd			*										
Poors Allotment Trust				*									
Prof & Mrs Allen									*				
QuinetiQ Ltd								*					
Saintgate Ltd Old Woking clay pigeon club	*												
Sunningdale golf course land some of it managed by HCT						*							
Surrey County Council Owned Surrey Wildlife Trust Countryside ServicesManaged						*					*		*
Surrey Heath Borough Council						*	*						
Surrey Wildlife Trust						*							
Timpany Trust									*				
Trustees of the Elvetham Farm & Settled Estate			*		*								
Widdlesham Parish Council							*						
Woking Borough Council	*												
Yatley Town Council					*								

Surrey Wildlife Trust and Hant an loW Wildlife Trust tenure to be updated

## Appendix 11 – Consultation responses

Ms Melissa Read  
Bracknell Forest Borough Council  
Environment and Leisure  
Time Square  
Market Street  
Bracknell  
Berkshire  
RG12 1JD

15 August 2006

Dear Melissa,

**Re: Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area ('the SPA') –  
Interim Bracknell Forest Borough Council Impact and Avoidance Strategy**

Thank you for inviting the RSPB to make early comments on the approach to the above strategy. We look forward to receiving the first draft Strategy on 7 September, and then to being included in the wider public consultation later this year. In the meantime, we hope you are able to take the following initial comments on the general approach into consideration.

**Status of the strategy**

The proposed status of this strategy is unclear. The new local development framework system is designed to work either through DPDs or SPDs. There is no encouragement to prepare other forms of local planning documents and we are not confident a "technical background paper" will carry adequate weight. We draw your attention to the Inspector's report of the inquiry into Stafford Borough Council's core strategy (published 25 July 2005). This is one of the first Inspector's reports on a core strategy, and he found it to be 'unsound'. In paragraph 3.9.6 he says:

*"During the course of the hearing sessions the Council on a number of occasions sought to rely on other supporting documents to explain the strategy and policies. This reliance on other documents to explain things is unsatisfactory in that the Core Strategy should be able to stand on its own and be read and understood without reference to other documents."*

We see no practical reason why producing the strategy as an interim mini-plan would stop the Council adopting DPDs, and the point about the SPD process being too onerous does not sit with guidance in PPS12. This says there need only be one period of consultation of 4-6 weeks, that there is no need for an examination of the SPD, and that the whole process can be completed within 12 months from starting the initial information gathering.

If the interim strategy is produced in the form currently proposed, we are concerned that the authority will encounter difficulties in defending reasons for refusal. These reasons would effectively be on the basis that the applicant did not enter into a S.106 obligation, but that requirement will have far less weight than it would if the strategy were a mini-plan or SPD.

**Methodology for calculating impact**

Quantifying "impact of other factors":

Under the heading "impact of other factors", we would like to see better quantification of these impacts, if the Council suspects they are likely to be significant. At present, the Council's suggestion that this approach over-estimates the predicted population arising from

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the DPDs due to the affordable housing element (and possibly other unspecified causes) is liable to be seized on by critics of the strategy, as justification for reducing the mitigation they should have to provide. To avoid giving up such a hostage to fortune, the Council should if possible give evidence of:

- The proportion of the predicted number of affordable dwellings likely to be built, as a percentage of new build over the plan period to 2026.
- **The origin of occupants of affordable housing – i.e. are they genuinely all from within the Borough? Furthermore, how much of the Borough is outside the 5km zone and therefore what proportion of affordable housing occupants could move from outside the 5km limit to within it, or from more than 2km from the SPA to less than 2km away?**

Calculating population and likelihood of increased visits to the SPA:

The Council has used the 2001 Census population figure for the Borough, and says this has not been extrapolated forwards ‘in order to be robust and ensure a precautionary approach is taken’. While we understand the Council’s reasoning, we are concerned that by not using consistent data (the other baseline data in Table 4 comes from 2005/06) the strategy is made more vulnerable to critics of the Delivery Plan, who will dissect these calculations. The Council should therefore use a Borough population figure extrapolated to 2005/06 to forestall one area of argument.

**Open space standards**

The RSPB is concerned that the Council has chosen to apply an average open space standard across the 5km zone, of 12ha/1,000 population. We strongly urge the Council to reconsider this approach before the draft Strategy is published for consultation.

We see no justification for this unless the Council has good evidence that the significant majority of development will be 2-5km away from the SPA (i.e. in the more distant zone). Otherwise, applying the average standard across the whole area will result in contributions from sites between 400m-2km from the SPA that fail to meet the standard required by Natural England.

***Quantifying availability and usage of possible SANGs sites***

The RSPB is concerned that for the Englemere Pond site (used as the example) there is no quantification of current usage – just a summary of the impressions of the users. Nor is there any indication of how many people the Council is intending this site to work for. There is also no information about what level of usage would start to deter or displace the people who are currently using the site. Some people questioned said they would still use it at double the level, but there is no indication of precisely how many people use it now. With such limited information, we can anticipate a scenario where the people coming on to the site reduce their own impact on the SPA but displace some existing site users into the quieter parts of the SPA. We note that the summary says that the visits were "slightly longer than average" which might make greater site penetration (distance traveled from nearest access point) more likely.

The list of potential SANGS gives no indication of the possible impact reduction that they can deliver and the costs associated with this. This needs to be worked out in considerably more detail. By comparison, Guildford Council's draft strategy does not answer all these points, but it does give a lot more detail, and that is useful in trying to work out whether their interim strategy will work.

Potential for SSSIs to contribute to meeting the open space standard

**Developer’s contributions cannot be used to bring SSSIs into favourable condition – such funds may not be used to carry out work that the landowners themselves (public or private) have a duty to undertake in law. Furthermore, as a general principle, SSSIs should be the *lowest* priority for use as open space apart from the SPA itself. They**

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**should only be included where the most careful site-specific assessment shows that there will be no significant adverse effect arising from the expected increase in use. An assessment that followed the example of Englemere Pond would not be an acceptable standard.**

#### **Pet restrictions**

Neither Natural England nor the RSPB support use of pet restrictions as an alternative to provision of SANGs except in very specific circumstances. Until there is evidence to demonstrate that they are enforceable and enforced *by the local authority* (and *not* by individual management companies), the RSPB does not believe that they can be relied upon and used as mitigation. The RSPB agrees with Natural England's stated position on this point, which is:

*“The use of conditions to prevent the keeping of pets is unlikely to be acceptable, because the condition is likely to be unenforceable. Likewise, we believe that covenants or S106 obligations, even on flats would still rely on neighbours or a management company reporting/enforcing the covenant, which is unlikely to be consistently and reliably enforced over a period of years. We consider the use of “no pets” conditions or obligations will not provide sufficient reassurance that that SPA will be protected, except in the case of sheltered accommodation for the dependent elderly or similar situations. In any event, this would only address the issues of cat predation and dog walking so we would still expect the Delivery Plan standards to be applied as a whole.”*

#### **Conclusion**

Overall, we are concerned that the authority is potentially making life harder for itself and liable to produce more confusion, by creating another new approach to the Delivery Plan concept. This approach also misinterprets or weakens the approach advocated by Natural England and the RSPB. The Delivery Plan itself suffices as a ‘technical background document’. What is needed in Bracknell is a robust and well-tested planning policy document that enables adverse effects on the SPA to be avoided whilst allowing the Council to deliver its housing requirements.

Ultimately, any interim solution should follow the final provisions of the Delivery Plan as closely as possible in terms of its criteria and methodology, or the local authority will experience unnecessary difficulties when the time comes to ‘upgrade’ to the final version of the Delivery Plan.

We hope these early comments are of assistance to you. Please do not hesitate to contact me if we can be of any further assistance.

Yours sincerely,

Colin Wilkinson MRTPI  
Planning & Local Government Officer

CC. Dan Pullan, James Dawkins, Andy Dodd, Carrie Temple (RSPB)  
Ellie Seabourne (BBOWT)  
Sam King (EN)

**JUNE 2007**

This matter is being dealt with by: Melissa Read  
Direct Line: 01344 351185, Fax: 01344 354100



23 August 2006

Mr Colin Wilkinson  
Planning & Local Government Officer  
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds  
Central England Regional Office  
46 The Green  
South Bar  
Banbury  
Oxfordshire  
OX16 9AB

Dear Colin,

**Re. Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area Bracknell Forest Avoidance & Mitigation Strategy**

Thank you for your comments on the above emerging strategy. I am concerned that as you were not party to the discussions during the workshop on 4 August, a few issues may not have been sufficiently clarified. Again, apologies I could not find a date convenient for all to attend. I hope to provide a little more information and background in this letter, but if you feel it may be useful we could meet to discuss some of your points in more detail.

**Status of the Strategy**

In your letter you indicated concern that the weight of a technical background paper to the Core Strategy would not be sufficient. However, the purpose of the background paper is to provide an explanation of how the avoidance and mitigation measures were developed, for example the justification behind changes to policy wording in the Core Strategy. The Core Strategy will still stand alone and include detailed policies aimed at implementing any measures identified.

The reason an interim mini-plan is not being produced is that both the Core Strategy and Site Allocations DPDs are due to be submitted in November. Without assessing the full implications of the plans, and proposing avoidance and mitigation measures, the plans cannot legally be adopted. An interim mini-plan would not provide sufficient certainty that the housing allocation for the next 20 years can be met, therefore the DPDs would be unsound. In addition, a mini-plan has limited weight in the planning process in comparison to DPD policy.

The detailed implementation of the Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy, i.e. the collection of contributions, will be detailed as a chapter within an emerging SPD, the Limiting the Impact of Development SPD, again giving more weight than a mini-plan.

**Open Space Standards**

The average open space standard of 12 hectares is used because evidence from within the Borough does not show that residents from between 400 metres and 2 kilometres are twice as likely to use the SPA as those over 2 kilometres; instead there is a relatively even spread of visitors coming from all distances. It was therefore felt the use of two standards



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would not be robust. The figure of 12 hectares per 1000 population is based upon Natural England's draft Delivery Plan and an analysis of windfall sites identified in the Urban Potential Study. The location of these showed a split between the zones as follows: 4.8% within 400 metres of the SPA, 33.9% in the 400m-2km zone and 61.3% in the 2km-5km zone. In addition, the two strategic housing sites, delivering a total of 2,925 new residential dwellings, are both located in the 2 to 5 kilometre zone. This shows that the majority of new housing will occur in the 2km-5km zone, for which a level of 8 hectares per 1000 population is suggested by the Delivery Plan. Therefore, the use of an average of 12 hectares will, overall, provide considerably over the amount of open space secured than if the zonal approach were used with two Delivery Plan standards.

### **Quantification of usage of possible SANGS**

The example given of Englemere Pond is very much work in progress and I can reassure you that visitor use data will be included in the next draft; the data was just not available for the example. This information is being used to carry out an estimation of additional capacity of each site, if any. This will then be used to link the additional capacity (if improvement works are undertaken) to proposed areas of development. As this is a subjective issue the question around current site 'busy-ness' also provides valuable perceptions.

In addition, in the consultation document there will be considerably more detail, and I have used the existing mini-plans as reference, as you suggested. The detailed costs of improvements are unlikely to be in this document, but will be included in the Limiting the Impact of Development SPD, which deals with section 106 contributions.

### **Potential for SSSIs to contribute**

The purpose of this initial consultation was to gain views from the statutory bodies on the ability of specific SSSIs to provide an alternative area of open space, without impacting on the site's condition. The Wildlife Trust will be providing valuable information to this end and this advice will be incorporated into the assessment of open space as potential mitigation.

### **Conclusion**

You conclude in your letter that the Delivery Plan itself suffices as a 'technical background document'. However, the draft Delivery Plan is a single-issue document dealing with recreation and open space, therefore does not provide sufficient detail on any other potential effects arising from the plans (e.g. commercial development, loss of supporting habitat etc). This is why Bracknell Forest Borough Council is advocating the Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy approach, based upon much of the information in the Delivery Plan, in order to fully meet the requirements of the Habitats Directive and Habitats Regulations.

I will be assimilating your comments, and those from other body's, into the consultation draft of the Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy, which I will be distributing for comment at the beginning of September. If you have additional comments arising from this letter then please do not hesitate to call me or we could arrange a convenient time to meet over the next few weeks. Thank you again for taking the time to respond.

Yours sincerely

**Melissa Read**  
**Environmental Policy Officer**

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Melissa Read  
Environmental Policy Officer  
Planning & Transport Policy  
Bracknell Forest Borough Council  
[Time Square](#)  
Market Street  
Bracknell  
RG12 1JD

21<sup>st</sup> August 2006

Our ref: AH/SP/BFBC/04/08/06

Dear Melissa

Re: Draft Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy – pre-consultation comments.

Thank you for inviting the Berks, Bucks and Oxon Wildlife Trust (BBOWT) to attend the meeting on Bracknell Forest Borough Council's (BFBC) Draft Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy on the 4<sup>th</sup> of August, and for requesting comments on the content of the draft strategy. I am pleased to send you our initial comments. BBOWT will, of course, provide any further comments during the formal consultation phase.

1. The Approach

BBOWT believes that the suggestion to append the Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy to the Core Strategy DPD could have significant benefits, providing the implementation of avoidance and mitigation measures is secured by the Limiting the Impact of Development SPD.

One of the potential benefits is that the Strategy would be subject to the Annual Monitoring Report (AMR), which guarantees regular assessment of its effectiveness in ensuring that new development does not adversely impact the Thames Basin Heaths SPA. However, avoiding adverse impacts will depend on two things:

- Ensuring that the mitigation proposed is adequate and enforced, and
- Ensuring that an appropriate set of indicators is incorporated to allow the AMR to accurately determine the effectiveness of the Strategy.

BFBC have asked for input from stakeholders, in order to draw up the indicators. Whilst BBOWT is not in a position to suggest definitive indicators, we would propose that the indicators covered should include:

- Visitor usage of the SPA
- Visitor usage of SANGS
- Incidence of fire setting on SPA
- Incidence of fly-tipping on SPA

The indicators chosen should clearly signify whether the usage of the SPA is increasing or decreasing, as well as providing clear evidence of whether SANGS are being used. The incidence of fire setting and fly-tipping on the SPA could be taken as an indicator of whether the suggested education campaign is working successfully.

This approach does give rise to a clear need for baseline data, and we would suggest that the Council begin visitor survey on their suggested SANGS sites as soon as possible. We would

also highlight that baseline data on the incidence of fire setting and fly-tipping on the SPA is necessary in order to show whether the mitigation proposals are effective.

It is essential that any policies, and respective indicators, for the Thames Basin Heaths be clearly distinctive from other policies (and indicators) relating to wider biodiversity issues, which are in accordance with PPS9 and the emerging South East Plan. Previous core strategy documents from BFBC, whilst including provision for the TBH, showed a concerning lack of coverage of wider biodiversity issues, it is important that the TBH issue does not completely overshadow these.

## 2. The Measures

### 2.1 Pet Restrictions

The Trust believes that the restrictions should not be considered a key part of the mitigation strategy, although in combination with other measures they may have some value. BBOWT is in agreement with Natural England (EN) that these restrictions do not provide any guarantee of protection for the SPA, and we would still expect all Delivery Plan standards to be applied, in addition to the restrictions.

### 2.2 Education

BBOWT supports the inclusion of education as a mitigation measure. The education provided should inform users of the SPA about its special interest, and aim to reduce harmful behaviour, such as fire setting and dogs off leads during the breeding bird season. New residents of the Borough should be educated about the location and benefits of their nearest SANGS. Care must be taken to avoid raising the profile of the TBH to new residents, who might then preferentially use the SPA over the SANGS.

The Trust would suggest that a key part of the education strategy should include the presence of rangers/wardens on the SPA. Knowledgeable individuals, present on site, would not only deter harmful behaviour, but would also educate the SPA users and could collect data on usage to inform the AMR. Careful monitoring of the incidence of fly-tipping and fire setting would indicate the effectiveness of education measures.

### 2.3 Presumption against development within 400m

We understand that applications within this zone will be subject to Appropriate Assessment; we endorse this measure as it complies with the Delivery Plan. Please confirm that Appropriate Assessment will be required for any application within the 400m zone, whether residential or non-residential.

### 2.4 Loss of Habitat

BBOWT is pleased by the commitment to include a new policy recognising the importance of supporting habitat in the vicinity of TBH SPA. This should acknowledge that these areas are often of value to the Annex 1 birds for which the SPA is designated. We support the suggestion that such land is subject to ecological assessment in advance of an application for planning permission. The Trust would suggest that the land is also appraised for its value in relation to grazing livestock. Grazing is crucial to maintain the SPA in favourable condition; lay-back land in the vicinity facilitates grazing persistence by providing easily accessible areas for grazing livestock during the parts of the year when grazing on the SPA would cause damage.

### 2.5 Visitor Management

BBOWT believes that the suggestions to reduce and restrict car parking and enforce dogs on leads could help control access and disturbance on the SPA. However, implementing these measures solely on the SSSI's within the Borough is likely to displace visitor pressure to those outside the Borough. For this reason we believe that BFBC ought to ensure that their measures fit with those to be proposed by Natural England's upcoming Access Management

Review. We realise that the timescales involved have the potential to cause considerable disruption, but it seems that access management measures posed in isolation may not avoid negative effects to the SPA.

## 2.6 Provision of SANGS

This is a key mitigation measure and one which will only work if provided in the right place and in the correct form. Whilst we agree with BFBC's assessment that development within the whole Borough has the potential to impact the SPA, we are not in a position to either endorse or contradict the 12ha (per 1000 new residents) SANGS provision proposed by BFBC; however, we do have concerns that by actively deviating from the Delivery Plan this approach may set a dangerous precedent. BBOWT is uncomfortable with the blanket 12ha proposed. Should the majority of residential development in the Borough fall within the 400m to 2km distance from the SPA, there will be a significant shortfall in the provision of open space necessary to offset detrimental effects to the SPA (according to the EN Delivery Plan). For this reason, BBOWT would suggest that the Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy is more likely to be judged sound if it is in agreement with the standards proposed in EN's Delivery Plan.

## 3. SANGS Sites

BBOWT is not yet in a position to evaluate the remaining 8 sites proposed as SANGS by BFBC. However, there are a number of general comments we would like to make:

- SANGS should be provided in line with the quality, quantity and locations set out in EN Delivery Plan
- BBOWT believe that if the owners/occupiers agree to accommodate access, and the special interest of the site will not be damaged by increased access, both SSSI's and Local Wildlife Sites have the potential to be used as SANGS
- Detailed information on proposed SANGS must be collected as soon as possible. This should determine the current level of visitor use in order to calculate whether the site is able to sustain additional pressure and to provide the baseline for the AMR indicators.
- There is some confusion as to whether developer contributions could be used to fund access and/or habitat management on SSSI SANGS sites – clarification should be sought from EN

## 4. Impact Prediction Calculations

BBOWT has a number of concerns relating to the Impact Prediction Calculations which were circulated at the meeting on 4<sup>th</sup> August. In particular, we are concerned by an apparent inaccuracy in the calculations, and what could be interpreted as a failure to implement the precautionary principle (a key component of the Habitats Regulations).

### 4.1 Inaccuracy

On page 4 of the Impact Prediction Calculations, in Table 4: Summary of Calculations to reach the predicted impact, the number used as the new population in the penultimate row of the table (24095) differs from the number presented in Table 3 (24634). Why is this? Has 24,095 been adjusted in some way?

Also the calculation presented in Table 4:

$24,095 \times 7.81$  does not equal 190,338, as Table 4 suggests. It is equivalent to 188,182.

Using the figure given as the new population (24634), the number of new visits would be expected to be 192,392.

It would be helpful if you could clarify the origin of these figures and possible discrepancies in the calculations.

#### 4.2 Adjustment factors

We are concerned that the inclusion of an adjustment factor for empty dwellings and the movement of current population into new affordable housing is not in line with the precautionary principle. EN's Delivery Plan highlights that previous planning decisions have indicated that similar approaches were not acceptable. BBOWT would suggest that BFBC seek EN's opinion on the validity of the current approach.

#### 5. Other issues

We also have some outstanding concerns over issues which have not been addressed or mentioned in the Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy. We would be grateful for an explanation of how and when these issues will be address by BFBC:

- In-combination effects with other plans, such as Local Transport Plan, Minerals and Waste etc
- Non-residential development in the vicinity of the SPA
- Other effects of development on the SPA (excluding recreational impacts), for example:
  - Pollution
  - Hydrology

I hope that you find these comments useful. If you wish to discuss any of the matters raised in more detail please do not hesitate to contact me. As I mentioned earlier, BBOWT would be happy to remain involved in the consultation process.

Yours sincerely

Allison L Hulbert  
Conservation & Planning Officer (Berkshire)



**Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area  
Workshop – Comments on an Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy  
for Bracknell Forest**

- Date:** Wednesday 20 September 2006, 9.30 am – 11.20 am
- Attendees:** Bev Hindle, Bracknell Forest Borough Council (BFBC)  
Melissa Read, Bracknell Forest Borough Council (BFBC)  
James Dawkins, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)  
Allison Hulbert, Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust (BBOWT)
- Apologies:** Colin Wilkinson, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)  
Sam King, Natural England (EN)  
Leslie Creedon, Government Office for the South East (GOSE)  
Susan Barnes, Government Office for the South East (GOSE)

**Introduction**

BFBC - welcomed everyone and explained the purpose of the meeting was to facilitate a 'round the table' discussion on issues which may be arising, prior to the submission of formal written comments.

**Overall approach**

RSPB - the document could be divided up in a clearer way to show the difference between meeting the requirements for an Appropriate Assessment and an Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy. More obvious sign-posting could help achieve this clarity. This change is necessary to overcome issues of doubt over the legal soundness of the approach. The Yorkshire and Humber RSS AA is suggested as a good structure to follow.

BFBC - we are using parts of the template SPD provided by EN but making it more local and applicable to the Borough.

The emerging submission SPA policy for the Core Strategy DPD was distributed.

**Projected population increase**

BBOWT / RSPB - concerns over using a fixed figure for unoccupied dwellings in the future. The current approach has predicted forward from a snapshot in time and does not consider fluctuations. It is therefore difficult to have confidence that unoccupancy will remain at this rate. Although vacant stock is needed, an initiative to fill houses could reduce the level. Discounting the current figure (of 2.5%) to potentially half of this rate would be more realistic and precautionary.

RSPB - the population figures given are unduly specific. A more realistic approach would be to round these figures up and acknowledge that there is a margin of error.

BBOWT - Table 7 (increased population arising from the plans) could include the full population, in addition to the discounted population arising from significant developments. This would help avoid confusion.

## **Regulation 50**

BBOWT - the document is contradictory, firstly stating that some developments have removed their significant effect, and then later stating that all development will have a significant effect. This needs to be clarified.

RSPB - raised the issue of how new consents would be dealt with regarding payment towards the avoidance and mitigation measures. In addition, a review of consents should address the issue of modification of any which cannot be mitigated, for example those within 400 metres.

## **Extent of impact**

BBOWT - the use of a 12 hectare standard could set a precedent, so although it may work in this Borough, it may cause problems elsewhere. The Peer Review for the SE Plan is also looking at standards in the Delivery Plan.

RSPB - have concerns about standards and zones which differ from EN's Delivery Plan. RSPB understand that visitor research shows a strong correlation of visitor figures up to the 5km point, and they understand that EN's views are that applying the Delivery Plan within the 5km zone is sufficient to resolve this.

## **Avoidance and mitigation measures proposed**

RSPB - the 400m zone around the SPA may not completely exclude vandalism. Education will also be added as an avoidance measure.

RSPB - the area of open space (hectares) should not include waterbodies, car parks etc; a footnote should highlight where these have been excluded.

RSPB - advise that the proposed 500m zone for lay-back land and feeding habitat be changed to 400m for consistency. A viable farming community is required to provide for grazing stock.

## **Total of all measures**

RSPB - raise issues around the confidence levels associated with each of the measures, for example education is very difficult to quantify. Must take care not to undermine approach by overselling these measures. They will be monitored over time and a greater degree of confidence may be gained through monitoring.

## **Monitoring**

Planning obligations will be monitored.  
BFBC seeking further advice on indicators to monitor the strategy.

## **AOB**

BBOWT - concern that favourable conservation status has been equated with favourable habitat condition; this should be clarified. In addition the conservation objectives should be expanded upon. BFBC to check this with EN.

BFBC - comments from this workshop will start to be included in the final strategy. Formal, written comments on the consultation strategy are gratefully received before  
**Monday 2 October 2006.**

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**For the remaining consultation comments, Bracknell Forest Borough Council's response to each of the points raised in the consultation letters has been added in red italic text.**

Ms Melissa Read  
Bracknell Forest Borough Council  
Environment and Leisure  
Time Square  
Market Street  
Bracknell  
Berkshire  
RG12 1JD

2 October 2006

Dear Melissa,

**Re: Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area ('the SPA') –  
Interim Bracknell Forest Borough Council Impact and Avoidance Strategy**

Thank you for inviting the RSPB to make early comments on the above strategy prior to the wider public consultation. We look forward to being included in that consultation later this year. As you are aware, my colleague James Dawkins attended the second workshop on this matter on 20 September. This response develops from the discussions at that workshop and from our previous letter of 15 August 2006 commenting on the general approach.

Our response is divided into comments on the principal issues of concern to us, and specific comments mainly relating to matters of terminology, detailed figures, etc.

Principal comments:

- 1) Status and function of the strategy. We remain concerned that nowhere in the strategy is there a clear explanation of what the status or purpose of this document is, or of exactly how it relates to the Development Plan Documents, or to Natural England's delivery plan. While we understand from your letter of 23 August that it is intended to be a technical background document to set out the rationale for the DPD policies, this is not made clear in the document itself. Even the cover page does not reduce our confusion on this point since the main title reads "Avoidance and Mitigation *Strategy*" (implying an objective/action based policy document in its own right), while at the foot of the cover page it is presented as an Appropriate Assessment of the effects of the Core Strategy and Site Allocations DPDs. As raised at the 2<sup>nd</sup> workshop on 20 September, we think the document could be divided up in a clearer way to show the difference between meeting the requirements for an Appropriate Assessment and an Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy. More obvious sign-posting could help achieve this. This change is necessary to overcome issues of doubt over the legal soundness of the approach. The Yorkshire and Humber RSS Appropriate Assessment is suggested as a good structure to follow.  
*The document structure has subsequently been amended to give this more clarity and to split the requirements of the Appropriate Assessment and the A&MS.*
- 2) Clarity of and scientific basis for the strategy. We are concerned that the intentions or purpose of this document to be overwhelmed by its great length and complexity. Also of concern to us is that some conclusions are based on very weak scientific evidence and occasionally spurious reasoning. In places, we feel that assumptions compound other, earlier assumptions, to the point that some of the predictions (e.g. numbers of visits to the

SPA predicted to be ‘saved’ by different mitigation techniques) have in fact a very weak scientific basis and may be open to challenge by those opposed to the delivery plan approach. A good example of this is found in paragraph 21.3(2). This presents unfeasibly precise calculations of reduced impact from dogs on nightjars, woodlarks and Dartford warblers, founded on huge assumptions based on research into an unrelated species not found in this SPA (red grouse). Here, as elsewhere in the Strategy, precise figures are quoted with almost no acknowledgement of the margin for error. This generic problem reaches its climax in Table 17.

*The document is based upon best available scientific evidence and identifies assumptions and limitations. Due to a lack of hard data, this cannot be a rigorous scientific study and must rely to some extent upon monitoring and review of effectiveness in the longer term. Similarly, the Delivery Plan standards are simply based upon 2 case studies, which were not typical sites, therefore it should be recognised these are not based upon a strong scientific basis.*

- 3) Obligations under the Habitats Directive. With reference to the last paragraph of 14.8 on page 24, the RSPB has doubts whether merely ‘keeping outstanding consents in the Strategy’ fully discharges the Council’s obligations under Regulation 50 of the Conservation (Natural Habitats &c.) Regulations 1994 as stated. Our current view is that to fully discharge this obligation the local authority must then act on these cases to “affirm, modify or revoke” them as necessary, as required by Regulation 50. We will consider this interpretation more fully in time for the wider public consultation but the Council may value this early opportunity to consider the full implications of the Regulations for this section of the Strategy.

*A fuller Regulation 50 review will be carried out once more guidance is available.*

- 4) Mitigation requirements beyond 5km. With reference to paragraph 14.12.5, we are still examining the implications for the wider Thames Basin Heaths delivery plan, and for the plans of the other local authorities, of requiring mitigation further from the SPA than 5km in Bracknell Forest Borough. Our finalised views on this point will form part of our response to the public consultation later this year but our current understanding is that visitor research shows a strong correlation of visitor figures up to the 5km point. Natural England’s (Natural England’s) current position is understood to be that applying the Delivery Plan within the 5km zone is sufficient to resolve adverse effects arising from development.

*Upon this advice, the 5km zone has been reinstated.*

- 5) Use of 12ha SANGS standard. With reference to paragraph 19.7, we are still examining the implications for consistency across the wider Thames Basin Heaths delivery plan, and for the plans of the other local authorities, of this approach. Our finalised views on this point will form part of our response to the public consultation later this year.
- 6) Proposed policy CS14. The proposed wording of policy CS14 (22.2 p.59/60) does not reflect the approach required by the Habitats Regulations very well. We understand a substantially altered version of this policy is likely to appear in the public consultation draft strategy. We would be pleased to discuss appropriate detailed policy wording with the Council, and will supplement our comments on this point when we respond to the public consultation phase on this Strategy later this year.
- 7) Definition of a 500m zone. Paragraph 24.1 confusingly introduces yet another ‘zone’, of 500m from the SPA in relation to assessment of proposals that could affect availability of layback land. While we agree there is a need to safeguard land for layback purposes, we see no basis for this new zone. This creates huge scope for confusion between the 500m and 400m zones and further complicates the job of development control officers in deciding what types of assessment they need to make of different developments at different distances. 500m bears no relation either to the established development zones, to the ecology of any Annex I species (especially not nightjars, which is the species most likely to use layback land as foraging habitats offsite from the SPA), or to the movement of grazing animals between sites either ‘on the hoof’ or by lorry. Layback land is needed,

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but also unless viable areas of agricultural land are retained close to the SPA boundaries, there will be no local farmers to provide and look after the stock. A viable and local farming community needs to be a part of the SPA fabric.

*Upon this advice the 500m zone has been changed to 400m. Provision of a viable farming community is outside the scope of the Core Strategy DPD.*

- 8) **Pet restrictions.** With reference to section 25, the RSPB remains concerned about the reliance that the Council appears ready to place in some cases, on pet restrictions. As the Council is aware, this is a fast-developing policy field, and the views of Inspectors in some recent appeal decisions cannot be held in themselves to be a reliable foundation for a policy if there is no supporting scientific or ecological evidence. Unless there is evidence to demonstrate that such restrictions are enforceable and the Council is able to demonstrate that it will have the resources and capacity actually to enforce such conditions (rather than relying on ‘peer control’ and management company action), the RSPB does not believe that they can be relied upon and used as mitigation. The RSPB endorses Natural England’s stated position on this matter, which was set out in our letter of 15 August 2006.

*Pet restrictions remain part of an overall package of measures although their limitations are recognised.*

**Specific comments (page or paragraph references in bold):**

As a general point, the strategy should use consistent references to Birds and Habitats Directives, and the Habitats Regulations, throughout.

**1.1:** The full name of the EC Wild Birds Directive should be stated, as with the Habitats Directive.

**1.2:** This reference should be to Annex I of the Birds Directive, rather than the Habitats Directive.

**18.4/table 1:** This should cross-refer to amended screening opinion at appendix 2, not appendix 1 as stated.

**10.3.1:** There appears to be a typographic error (“by as”) in line 1.

**10.5:** July should be included in the ‘core’ breeding season for nightjar, as they will raise two broods and do not lay the first clutch until late May. That July falls within the core breeding season is confirmed by other later sections of the strategy, e.g. paragraph 10.7.1 regarding nightjar breeding ecology.

**10.7:** The sections on ecology of the qualifying species could be placed in an appendix.

**14.9 table 7:** To calculate population increases, the time brackets in table 7 use the corresponding predicted average household size from the end of each period – e.g. for 2006-11, the household size used is 2.33 people, which is not predicted to occur (in table 4) until 2011. More correctly, the figure used here should be 2.39 people (the 2006 figure) or even an average for the period (mean of 2.39/2.33 in this example). By our calculations, the cumulative effect of the approach in table 7 is to under-estimate the future population growth by 322 people. While this difference is a small one we believe the revised methodology would be a more robust approach.

*This amendment has been incorporated into the final document.*

**14.10.3:** We wish to reiterate our concern, previously expressed in our letter of 15 August 2006, that the Council has used the 2001 Census population figure for the Borough, and says this has not been extrapolated forwards ‘in order to be robust and ensure a precautionary approach is taken’. While we understand the Council’s reasoning, we are concerned that by not using a consistent baseline for data (the other data in Table 8 comes from 2005 or 2006) the strategy is made more vulnerable to critics of the Delivery Plan approach, who will dissect these calculations. We remain of the view that the Council should use a Borough population figure extrapolated to 2005/06 to forestall one area of argument.

*The census data provides the most recent, verified population data, without relying upon estimations and extrapolations. The Council believe it is important to start with this fixed point.*



**Table 10 p.33:** The descriptions of the effect and impact against the entry for “predation” do not fully correlate. The effect describes disturbance by dogs leading to secondary predation, the impact appears to describe predation by dogs themselves, and cats.

**Table 10 p.33:** The impact of “enrichment” is not exactly as described here. Enrichment allows nutrient-loving plant species to out-compete heathland species, though the note about introduction of non-native species is correct. Furthermore, dumping of garden waste is not a “recreational activity”. This effect should more properly be described in the previous part of Table 10, as a non-recreation related result of increased population.

*This has been amended.*

**Table 10 p.34:** The last sentence in the ‘impacts’ column, describing the role of layback land, needs to be checked for grammatical sense.

**16.4.2:** The last two sentences of this paragraph, which appear on p.37, seem to suggest that reducing visitor numbers could lead directly to reduced bird populations. Taken at face value, this statement is nonsensical and runs directly counter to the scientific evidence that underlies the Delivery Plan approach, and indeed the whole rationale for the approach, which is that more people lead to a *decline* in bird numbers. The Council should redraft this paragraph to make its meaning more clear. Our reading of the Council’s concerns is that reduced visitor numbers might be seen in some quarters of the local authority as justification for not allocating as much resource to managing the site in future, and that this in turn could lead to neglect of habitats. However, we would point out that the legal obligation on landowners to manage the sites to maintain their favourable condition is independent of anything to do with provision for access and recreation. The Strategy must not give the impression otherwise.

*This text has subsequently been removed.*

**16.6:** This section introduces certain measures e.g. pet restrictions, that go beyond the scope of the introduction to this section in 16.3 (third bullet point), which talks of SANGS as the only form of off-site avoidance mitigation. We have further comments on use of pet restrictions.

**18.2:** This section contains three minor typographic errors.

**19.1.1:** There seems to be a typographic error in policy R4, which makes the size of site to which the policy will apply, unclear.

**Tables 14/15:** We found the calculations followed in these two tables extremely difficult to comprehend. The public is likely to experience similar difficulties, so the Council may wish to explain more carefully its methodology in this section.

**19.13:** We are puzzled by the reference to the need for a ‘mini-plan’ for open space in this section, which to us further compounds the lack of clarity about what the purpose and status of the current Strategy actually is (see our principal comments on this point).

*Each area of open space will require a more detailed management plan, which is the equivalent to a min-plan for that site.*

**21.3 (2):** As mentioned previously under principal comments as an example of a more general problem, this section presents unfeasibly precise calculations of reduced impact from dogs on nightjars, woodlarks and Dartford warblers, founded on huge assumptions based on research into an unrelated species not found in this SPA (red grouse). At the very least, the Strategy should do more to acknowledge the limitations of such calculations.

*The margin of error has been acknowledged and the figures rounded down taking a precautionary approach.*

**22.1** As the Council is well aware, the 400m zone was not defined for any reason relating to cat predation and the strategy should avoid implying that such reasoning exists.

*Natural England state that cat predation is a reason for the 400m zone, amongst other issues.*

**22.3:** To us, the statement at the foot of page 60 seems to run counter to the Council’s argument for a 12ha/1000 population blanket standard for the whole of the borough outside the 400m boundary. See our principal comments relating to the use of the 12ha standard, above.

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**23.1 and 23.3:** The first sentence of 23.1 and the last sentence of 23.3 seem to say exactly the opposite about effectiveness of education measures. More clarity is needed about the reliance to be placed on such measures.

**25.2:** Specifically in relation to this paragraph, there is no clarity about whether dog restrictions are intended to be used instead of or in addition to the other measures in the Strategy. For example, would a flatted development within 2km of the SPA be expected to provide less SANGS if the owners were prevented from keeping dogs? Furthermore, the Council's ability to secure enforcement in the long term remains highly doubtful: can the Council guarantee that it will have the spare enforcement capacity to carry out the additional work described in this section? What happens after the first five years if the cost of conducting annual surveys reverts to the Council?

*Pet restrictions are only proposed as part of the wider package, and would not be implemented in isolation.*

We trust these comments are of assistance to the Council. We would be pleased to meet with you again, before or after the publication of the final consultation draft Strategy, to discuss the numerous points raised here in detail.

Please do not hesitate to contact me via my email address ([colin.wilkinson@rspb.org.uk](mailto:colin.wilkinson@rspb.org.uk)) or by telephone on 01295 676463.

Yours sincerely,

Colin Wilkinson MRTPI

Planning & Local Government Officer

cc. James Dawkins, Andrew Dodd, Carrie Temple (RSPB)

Sam King (Natural England)

Ellie Seaborne (BBOWT)



Melissa Read  
Bracknell Forest Borough Council  
Environment and Leisure  
Time Square  
Market Street  
Bracknell RG12 1JD

Date: 4 October 2006

Dear Melissa

**Re: Thames Basin Heaths SPA avoidance and mitigation strategy**

Thank you for consulting Natural England on Bracknell Forest Borough Council's proposed strategy to avoid harm to the Thames Basin Heaths SPA from new residential development. The Council should be commended for the considerable time and effort that has obviously been invested in developing this strategy and we look forward to continuing discussions on the document during the formal consultation.

**General issues**

**Zones and greenspace standards**

The Council has chosen to apply a two zone approach to considering residential development around the SPA, rather than the three zone approach suggested by the draft Thames Basin Heaths Delivery Plan. The Avoidance and mitigation strategy (hereafter referred to as the AMS) also proposes to extend the 5km outer zone to incorporate the entire Borough, noting that the Liley et al (2005) visitor survey showed that 25% of visitors came from outside 5km and that an accessibility analysis of the SPA within the Borough suggested that most of the Borough was within a 10 minutes drive of the SPA. The visitor surveys referenced by the AMS also suggest that in Bracknell there is no change in visitor patterns of origin that would indicate a mid-zone would be required i.e. visitors further away from the SPA are equally as likely to visit the SPA as those nearer.

The AMS then proposes setting a single standard of 12ha for the 400m to whole Borough zone, noting that a) this is midway between the Delivery Plan 16 and 8 standard, b) the majority of the windfall sites (64%) and all allocated sites are greater than 2km from the SPA (i.e. in the Delivery Plan Zone C and thus the 8ha standard).

Natural England considers that the AMS puts forward evidence for the use of two zones, and that this evidence does not contradict the visitor surveys undertaken by Natural England. As noted in the AMS, Bracknell Forest has an anomalous site in the form of The Lookout, which attracts people from further afield than occurs at other parts of the SPA. The approach taken by Bracknell Forest therefore reflects the particular features of the Borough, and Natural England does not object to amendment to the three zones approach suggested in the Delivery Plan.

The need therefore to apply a single standard for the second zone has we feel been justified by the Council. Natural England accepts the 12ha standard as the Council has provided evidence on visitor use and accessibility, and data to demonstrate that the majority of all development will be over 2km from the SPA; regarding the latter, the use of the 12ha standard combined with the increase in the outer zone to the whole Borough will therefore in practical terms result in greater provision of greenspace than would otherwise have been provided with the 16 and 8ha Delivery Plan standards. Natural England considers that there is therefore no additional risk to the SPA from the use of 12ha as a standard in Bracknell Forest. We do however consider that there is a risk that this approach will lead to a lower degree of provision closer to the SPA and new residents within 2km. The Delivery Plan approach allowed for large sites to be up to 5km away from the relevant development, provided these sites were easily accessible; this reflects visitor survey evidence. Whilst we consider that this should still apply in Bracknell Forest, we consider that it is essential that if a single standard is adopted, the distance criteria and minimum site size proportions outlined in the Delivery Plan should apply. This will reduce the risk that new residents within 2km of the SPA will not have easy access to a sufficiently attractive site to deter them from using the SPA. We therefore disagree with the suggested approach in the AMS to place a 5km catchment zone around each SANGS regardless of size, and would refer you to our comments later in this letter.

*The distance criteria to each area of open space has been set out in the Limiting the Impact of Development SPD, which sets out the implementation of the avoidance and mitigation measures. Each area of open space has been linked to a catchment, which are within the distance criteria set out in the Delivery Plan, i.e.*

<b>Area</b>	<b>Location from New Development</b>
<i>2-4ha</i>	<i>within 400m</i>
<i>4-12ha</i>	<i>within 2km</i>
<i>12-20ha</i>	<i>within 4km</i>
<i>20-40ha</i>	<i>within 5km</i>
<i>40+ha</i>	<i>within 5km</i>

#### **Policy CS14**

Although there are a number of references to policy CS14 having a general presumption against development within 400m of the SPA, this is not made explicit within the policy. It could be considered misleading by developers in its current form and build unwarranted expectations. Natural England has also been unable to obtain a legal opinion on the wording of policy CS14 in the time available. We will provide further comments if necessary during the formal consultation.

*This policy has since been strengthened as a result of consultation comments.*

#### **Capacity calculations**

The approach taken to calculate capacity of individual SANGs raises two many questions to enable Natural England to response in the time allowed. We will therefore defer our advise until the formal consultation.

In the time available, Natural England has also been unable to fully consider the sites proposed as SANGs in the AMS. We will therefore submit more detailed comments during the formal consultation in November. Having now seen the list of proposed sites and measures, we would find it useful to visit the proposed sites and would like to agree with yourselves dates when this would be possible. We have found with

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other local authorities that have produced mini-plans that early, regular liaison over the proposed sites has enabled robust solutions to be developed that all parties are confident will ensure the Habitats Regulations requirements are met; we would welcome the opportunity to discuss Bracknell Forest's proposed SANGs further prior to the November consultation.

*The list of sites was initially presented to consultees for comment on 4 August 2006, and full details of all sites were available for comment during the 4 week consultation on this document, with a deadline of 2 October 2006.*

### **Specific comments**

#### Stage 1

19.4: It is clear from the AMS that the DPDs were initially screened as likely to have a significant effect, and that the AMS was developed to assess the impact and devise approaches to avoid or mitigate harm. This is effectively an appropriate assessment of the early draft DPDs. The measures proposed have now been built into the final plans. For the statement in 19.4 to correctly follow the stepwise tests within Regulation 48 of the Habitats Regulations, it should be noted that the revised DPDs have been rescreened and now determined (with the measures incorporated) to have no likely significant effect on the SPA.

*BFBC comment - An Appropriate Assessment report now concludes no adverse effect.*

#### Stage 2

10.2.2: We would note that conservation objectives are not in themselves measures to restore species or habitats to favourable conservation status. The objectives are related to the maintenance or restoration of the individual site, and its **contribution** towards favourable conservation status. The distinction between conservation objectives, which relate to SSSIs, and favourable conservation status appears to be unclear throughout this section; this is discussed further in our comments on 10.2.3.

10.2.3: The term 'favourable conservation status' should not be equated with the term 'favourable condition' as suggested in this paragraph in the AMS. Favourable conservation status (FCS) is defined in Article 1 of the Habitats Directive<sup>26</sup>;

*"conservation status of a species means the sum of the influences acting on the species concerned that may affect the long-term distribution and abundance of its populations within the territory referred to in Article 2;*

*The conservation status will be taken as "favourable" when:*

- population dynamics data on the species concerned indicate that it is maintaining itself on a long-term basis as a viable component of its natural habitats, and*
- the natural range of the species is neither being reduced nor is likely to be reduced for the foreseeable future, and*
- there is, and will probably continue to be, a sufficiently large habitat to maintain its populations on a long-term basis;"*

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<sup>26</sup> Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora



FCS is a trend based assessment based on the population as a whole across Europe and not on individual SPAs.

Condition assessment is a concept applied to SSSIs rather than SPAs. A condition assessment is an expert judgement of the condition of a site (that is, a site unit) at a moment in time, based upon available information on defined attributes (which may be biological, chemical or physical), for the notified features on the unit, at the date of assessment. Put simply, it is a snapshot assessment and is limited to the site in question. Condition assessment can incorporate the European features and therefore assess their contribution towards the Favourable Conservation Status of the species, but is it not designed to determine FCS and is not interchangeable.

This is relevant when carrying out an appropriate assessment, which explores the impact of a plan or project on site integrity; this can conclude, for example, that where existing pressures are not have a current, readily-measurable impact on condition, but the appropriate assessment has nevertheless identified the risk of such effects becoming manifest in the future, the existing pressure is threatening the ability of the site to ‘maintain’ favourable condition in the long term and a conclusion of ‘no adverse effect on integrity’ cannot be recorded. In these cases the **condition assessment** may currently be recorded as favourable. We would note that this is relevant in the case of the Thames Basin Heaths, particularly where Regulation 50 may apply, whereby impacts from housing may be masked by for example fluctuations in climate.

Article 4(4) of the Birds Directive is also of direct relevance, which also requires that: “Member states shall take appropriate steps to avoid pollution or deterioration of habitats or **any disturbances** affecting the birds in so far as these would be significant having regard to the objectives of this article”. This Article should be referenced within section 10.2 of the AMS.

10.3.2: The conservation objective of the Thames Basin Heaths SPA does not appear to have been drawn from Natural England’s<sup>27</sup> conservation objectives for the SPA and its component sites. We are unclear as to why the Council has developed their own objective for the SPA and would note that the condition of the SPA is assessed against the objectives devised by Natural England.

The conservation objective for the SPA is;

**to maintain\*, in favourable condition the habitats for the populations of Annex 1 species+ of European importance**

\* maintenance implies restoration if the feature is not currently in favourable condition.

+Woodlark, nightjar, Dartford warbler

The objectives for each component SSSI are similar, but we would note that the SPA and SSSI objectives are not currently compliant with Common Standards Monitoring and are as such currently undergoing revision. Whilst the objective itself does not reference the populations of the birds or the direct or indirect effect of disturbance

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<sup>27</sup> English Nature’s duties and functions have now been incorporated into the new body “Natural England” which came into being on the 1 October 2006. Where English Nature is referred to within this response, it should be considered to also refer to Natural England as the successor body.

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upon the Annex 1 birds, this may be considered through the condition assessment process. We would again note the difference between condition objectives, favourable conservation status, and site integrity; the latter which is assessed through the tests under Regulation 48 of the Habitats Regulations.

10.5: The breeding season for nightjar occurs from mid-May through into August, with a peak in June. Woodlark nest from March until July, but commence territorial activity from early February. The breeding season for Dartford Warbler is April to August, and there is some indication from research by Murison that recreation pressure will delay the onset of nesting.

10.6: We would note that the condition objectives for a number of the SSSIs do not as yet include recreational damage or disturbance impacts on the three Annex 1 birds as an indicator. A number of Surrey SSSIs have also recently been reassessed as part of our programme of condition assessments; this is likely to result in a greater proportion of the SPA being classed as unfavourable. We will ensure that the results are sent to you as soon as they are available.

*All of the above points have subsequently been amended.*

14.4.2: This statement seems to contradict 9.4 on page 13, which notes that between 1991 and 2001 there was a population increase in the Borough of 18.1%. This does not seem to support the statement that a “further fall in population size is predicted” as it is not clear what previous fall is being referred to. The data shown in Table 4 also relate to household size and not to population size; no data has been provided in the AMS to show that the population of the Borough is predicted to fall.

*This has been amended.*

14.6: As raised in our email of 23 September 2006 Natural England is concerned that the vacancy rate is solely calculated on the basis of one year. This leaves the figure open to challenge and we would advise that the prediction should be based on rates from at least five years, preferably ten or more.

*There is no additional data available on vacancy rates, and many variables, therefore the predicted rate has been reduced to include a margin of error.*

14.8: The proposed development at Staff College is listed as having a bespoke solution that will remove the adverse effect on the SPA. We would note that as yet no mitigation has been agreed on the Staff College development; it was granted planning permission prior to concerns being raised regarding recreational pressure on the SPA. The site should therefore be incorporated into the Regulation 50 review.

*The Staff College site has the ability to bring forward its own mitigation on-site, therefore has not been included within the remaining outstanding permissions likely to have a significant effect. However, this site must still be subject to the regulation 50 review.*

Table 6: This calculations within this table are confused. Paragraph 14.5.1 on page 23 notes that the Housing Allocation between 2006 and 2026 is 11,139 dwellings; this figure is also given in Table 6. The outstanding commitments of 2,956 dwellings which are considered to have supplied suitable mitigation (though please refer to our comments on 14.8) are then removed from the Housing Allocation. This does not seem correct, as these dwellings were given permission prior to 2006 and therefore form part of the previous Housing Allocation; paragraph 14.5.1 notes that only 359 dwellings are outstanding from that previous period. In addition, the outstanding permissions considered likely to have a significant effect are also removed from the total Housing Allocation; it is not clear why they are removed (indeed it would appear from para 14.5.1 that they should be **additional** to the 11,139 housing allocation) as if they are considered to have an effect, they should remain in the calculations. The

total final figure given of only 6,911 dwellings does not appear to concord with the statements in paragraph 14.5.1.

*The allocation of 11,139 dwellings incorporates some which are rolled forward from previous plans. These include: 4,228 dwellings for which the permission has already been issued but the properties have not been built plus 329 dwellings from the previous plan period which have not been issued permission. The text has been changed to make this clearer.*

14.9: In Table 7, as above, it is not clear why committed development from pre-2006 has been removed from the figures for 2006-2011. This does not seem to be in accordance with paragraph 14.5.1 which refers to a Housing Allocation of 3,054 new dwellings between 2006-11, including a shortfall of only 359 for the previous period.

*Committed development has not been removed. Only development which has been deemed not to have a significant effect has been removed.*

14.13: We would disagree that research carried out on Annex 1 birds in Dorset did not identify the main impacts arising from urban development. Whilst the Liley & Clarke survey referenced did not distinguish between various urban pressures, subsequent studies identified recreational disturbance as a significant causal factor. The Liley & Clarke study did look at some potential adverse effects including size of heaths, the amount of woodland surrounding each heath and the degree of fragmentation. None of these other factors were found to be significant for nightjar, apart from the amount of woodland surrounding each site, which was weakly significant in addition to the amount of urban development. A number of the impacts listed on page 21 of the AMS were not therefore responsible for the effects noted by the study.

14.13.2: We would also note that the Liley & Clarke study also looked at 250m and 750m, in addition to 500m and found that the three distances could not be separated as they were all highly correlated with each other. The lack of reference to impact over 750m is due to the study not considering development over 750m not because no impact was found. The AMS should not therefore focus on the figure of 500 metres as a determinant of the extent of urban impacts.

*The Liley and Clarke (2002) study makes no reference to 250m and 750m distances within the report. Results cited in this document can only refer to the published work, therefore the figure of 500m is focussed upon. If Natural England can provide this additional information this would be welcomed.*

15.2: We would note that the objective stated here is not the conservation objective for the Thames Basin Heaths SPA, and would refer you to our comments on 10.2.3 and 10.3.2.

Table 10, Public Hostility: The issue with regard to public hostility is not necessarily that of conflict between user groups, but a resistance by users or nearby residents to necessary management of the site, for example, grazing or tree removal. Where this has a direct effect on the ability of site managers to ensure maintenance or restoration of favourable condition, this may be considered to have an adverse effect on the integrity of the SPA.

Table 10, Management costs: This section is misleading and fails to recognise the duties of landowners under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) to maintain SSSIs in favourable condition. It is entirely likely that management costs would increase with increasing population; this may place a significant burden upon landowners and is certainly a factor to be considered when determining the cost of

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development. Nevertheless, it is extremely unlikely that this would result in a decrease in habitat management given the aforementioned responsibility of landowners to manage the site. Natural England would not accept sites entering unfavourable condition for such a reason and has a number of mechanisms both to assist landowners with management costs and apply regulatory controls to ensure such is carried out, where necessary.

*This text has now been removed.*

Table 10, predation: Impacts include reduced breeding success, reduced nest/territory density, and correspondingly potential impacts on population.

Table 10, disturbance: Impacts of disturbance include, in addition to reduced nest/territory density, reduced breeding success, delayed territory establishment and/or delayed egg laying. The latter results in fewer broods raised in a nesting season. The subsequent result of these impacts may be adverse effects on population and less resilience of populations to natural factors such as cold winters.

Table 10, trampling: Research at Bourley and Long Valley SSSI, part of the Thames Basin Heaths SPA indicated that 42% of visitors left the main tracks. We would suggest that although this may not be a significant effect on most heaths, some areas of the SPA will be more sensitive, and prone, to impacts of trampling and track widening; this could be identified and managed through the forthcoming access management plans.

*The above information has been added into the document.*

16.4: Whilst habitat management is essential to ensure the robustness of the SPA and maximise its ability to support the Annex 1 birds, we would note that habitat management alone cannot avoid negative impacts from recreation. Information from Dorset suggests that territory density is less where recreation pressure is high, and that this effect occurs even where the habitat is suitable. Initial data from visitor modelling on the Thames Basin Heaths supports the conclusion that even where habitat management is ideal, high visitor pressure will deter use by the Annex 1 birds. Natural England has commissioned research to explore the relationships between habitat, visitor pressure, and bird distribution which we hope will provide a clearer indication of the potential role and limits of habitat management, and enable targeted visitor management.

16.4.2: This paragraph appears to contradict completely sections in Table 10. Natural England considers the conclusions highly questionable, based on little demonstrated evidence, and which ignore the duty that the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) places on landowners to manage SSSIs to restore and maintain favourable condition. The Local Authority has additional duties under S28G of the above act. Given these legal responsibilities and those of Natural England, it is highly improbable that declining visitor numbers would result in inappropriate management and declining bird numbers. Indeed, this suggestion undermines the conclusion of the AMS that increasing visitor numbers are likely to have a significant effect on the SPA.

*This paragraph, which was based upon advice from the Countryside Service, has subsequently been removed.*

16.5: This section appears to directly contradict subsequent sections of the AMS which note that access management measures should be informed by, incorporated into and implemented by, the access management plans currently being developed by Natural England together with the SPA owners and occupiers. Natural England fully supports this approach and recommends that section 16.5.2 is amended to reflect the later intentions of the AMS.

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Table 11, predation: The focus on the 400m zone within the AMS refers largely to the impact of pets particularly cats. This does not fully reflect the reasoning behind Natural England's recommendation of a 400m buffer zone. Although predation by cats is a key factor so close to the SPA, and the zone partly reflects the mean distance travelled by cats, other significant factors include fly tipping, garden extensions, and increased likelihood of fires (the latter not necessarily restricted to 400m). The most significant factor however is that 400m is a generally accepted as an easy walking distance and is it highly unlikely that residents living within 400m of the SPA would not use the SPA nor that they would be diverted to use SANGs. We would also note therefore that sites within 400m would also have to prove that people would not use the SPA for activities such as walking even if they did not have pets; 32% of users of the SPA gave walking as a primary reason for their visit and 28% were without dogs.

Table 11, predation – increased recreational pressure: This section and the following make a number of statements regarding the effectiveness of visitor management to avoid impacts from dogs. Natural England considers that access management measures, such as the proposed wardening, may make a significant contribution towards reducing dogs off leads, but as yet no evidence has been provided as to the effectiveness and practicality of such measures. It is hoped that the current access management review will provide useful information towards this issue. Nevertheless, we would advise the Council that unless they can demonstrate the effectiveness of the measures proposed, particularly the necessary enforcement, a more cautionary tone should be taken in statements on access management.

Table 11, enrichment: We would refer you to our comments above. Much of the SPA is also common land and/or open access. Natural England is in the process of obtaining legal advice on whether enforcement of, for example, the Clean Neighbourhood Act, is possible on land covered by such designations.

Table 11: trampling: It is not clear from the AMS which parts of the SPA the Borough Council control and what area it could secure access management measures over. It is unclear why the Council considers that it has sufficient control of access to ensure provision of wardens, but does not have the means to provide a defined, well maintained, footpath network. This highlights one of the main difficulties with the inclusion at this stage of access management as part of the strategic package, out with the access management plans being developed by Natural England; namely that it may not be within the Council's gift to ensure that the measures take place. As an example, areas of Sandhurst to Owlsmoor SSSI, which are visited by residents of the Borough are in the ownership of BBOWT and not the Council. We would also note that access management is not, and should not be, part of the habitat management of the SPA.

Table 11, management costs: We would question the statement that management costs are unlikely to increase. Changes to access management are likely to be identified as necessary to ensure current use of the SPA does not harm the Annex 1 species. Furthermore, access management will be necessary to allow for those new residents who will still chose to visit the SPA even with SANGs provided. Maintenance of access management measures may be low cost, but some initial capital outlay is likely.

Table 11, hydrology: The identification of 400m as the boundary for hydrological effects does not appear to be based on a clear evidence base. Hydrological impacts can occur from developments a considerable distance away from some sites. We would like to see the basis for this determination clearly laid out in this section.



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Natural England would also be happy to advise on those parts of the SPA which may be more sensitive or conversely less likely to be affected.

*Changes to Table 11 have been made as a result of these comments.*

18: It is not clear from the AMS what the bespoke solutions referred to will consist of. Natural England has two concerns; firstly, that such solutions should be incorporated into the strategic network of SANGS and may through surplus capacity assist in windfall housing release. Secondly, that the proposed wording of the policies SA4 and SA5 is not sufficient to ensure the SPA is safeguarded. It should clearly note within the policy that unless such measures can be agreed with the Council and with Natural England, the development cannot proceed. The standards and approach advocated in the Delivery Plan and largely adopted within the AMS, rely on a strategic package of SANGs and on-site measures. Individual bespoke solutions will have to demonstrate that they can provide for the full range of likely users of the SPA, and may not be able to draw on the AMS package of SANGs to meet any shortfall in features if the AMS has not taken the strategic sites into account in the SANGs provision.

*The relevant policies state that bespoke solutions will be agreed with the Council, in consultation with Natural England, to meet the requirements of the Habitats Regulations.*

19.1.1: Natural England's concern relates not solely to current levels of greenspace, or current PPG17 standards, but also to the quality and type of such greenspace.

19.1.2 – 19.1.3: Although the studies references provide useful information, it should be made clear that the criteria used were not necessarily focused on those features which are important to users of the SPA and the results may therefore be misleading.

18: It is not clear whether publicly owned, currently non-accessible land was considered in the review. We would also question the conclusion that privately owned areas should be automatically removed from the list of potential SANGs. There are a number of approaches such as access agreements or compulsory purchase which could be explored if an area of privately owned greenspace was considered of strategic importance to the SANGS network. These measures would undoubtedly raise a number of significant obstacles, but should still be considered to determine whether these could be overcome in the short, medium or long term and what would be necessary to achieve this. We consider this particularly relevant to Bracknell Forest as the AMS covers the period from 2006 -2026 and is not therefore necessarily limited to "quick win" measures.

*There is no known, deliverable privately owned land to date, but if some came forward it could be included in subsequent versions of this Strategy.*

Table 12:

Mill Park – It would be useful for more information to be provided on this site. For example, although it is amenity open space, is there any possible of habitat enhancement and other management changes to make the site suitable in the medium to long term?

The Elms/Bill Hill – Natural England considers that, as part of a suite of SANGs, sites of 2-4ha could provide effective avoidance measures if within walking distance of the development in question (i.e. 400m). Such sites should only constitute a small proportion of the overall SANGS provision, but would accommodate a small percentage of the users who visit the SPA.

We would refer you to our comments above for the remaining sites within Table 12.

*Additional comments on these open spaces have been added into the document.*

19.3, page 45: In addition to the features listed here, users to the SPA also expressed a preference for a variety of semi-natural habitats, and varied topography.

*This has been added in to the document.*

19.5: The SPA is a large, varied semi-natural site and as such is very attractive to a wide range of users. It therefore attracts visitors from several kilometres away.

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Natural England considers that large (over 20ha) SANGS that are well designed and promoted could also act to attract visitors from a large distance and as such has advised that 20ha+ SANGs could act as an avoidance measure for development up to 5km away. This reflects the likelihood that 20ha sites could accommodate a wide range of user groups and a number of attractive round walks and other features which would provide sufficient variety to act as a viable alternative to the SPA for visitors to be prepared to travel similar distances to reach it. We do not consider that smaller sites would be attractive enough for people to drive 5km to reach them as opposed to the SPA. Such smaller sites would need to be more local to maximise their attractiveness. The Delivery Plan proposes the following;

Zone	Standard	Maximum distances for SANGs location from the development	Minimum SANGs size	Proportion of total SANGS provision by area
A	No effective avoidance or mitigation possible	No effective avoidance or mitigation possible	No effective avoidance or mitigation possible	No effective avoidance or mitigation possible
B	16 ha per 1000 new population	400 metres from development	2 -4hectares	Max 5% all sites <4ha
		2 kilometres from development	4-12 hectares	Max 20% all sites <12ha
		4 kilometres from development	12-20 hectares	Max 25% all sites <20ha
		5 kilometres from development	20-40 hectares	Min 75% all sites >20ha
		5 kilometres from development	40+ hectares	Min 25% all sites >40ha
C	8 ha per 1000 new population	4 kilometres from development	12-20 hectares	Max 25% all sites <20ha
		5 kilometres from development	20-40 hectares	Min 75% all sites >20ha
		5 kilometres from development	40+ hectares	Min 25% all sites >40ha

In the absence of evidence that visitors would be prepared to travel 5km to small sites, we advise that a precautionary approach should be taken and the catchment of SANGs less than 20ha in size correspondingly reduced.

*The catchment zones for certain areas of open space have been amended and provided in more detail in the Limiting the Impact of Development SPD.*

19.8: It is not clear from this section how the total number of annual visits were adjusted for seasonality and we would advise that more information on these

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calculations is included. Natural England has not yet fully considered the approach used to calculate the carrying capacity of the proposed SANGs and given the potential for this to be applied to other authorities we wish to satisfy ourselves that the approach is one which we are comfortable to support. We will therefore postpone providing comments on this area until the formal consultation period in November.

21.3: We are not clear how the figures in this section have been calculated. If the 32% of dogwalkers who expressed the view that they would use other sites if dogs were restricted to leads, were indeed diverted from the SPA, this could result in a 19% decrease of total visitors, not a third as stated in the AMS.

*The figures within the document are correct.*

The calculation regarding the impact of dogs is based on little evidence and draws too many assumptions to support such a precise figure. The sole research used is based on grouse, and not on any of the three Annex 1 species. It cannot be assumed that the response of grouse is likely to be comparable with nightjar, woodlark or Dartford warbler and the AMS provides no evidence to indicate that the behavioural response is the same. Grouse are generally birds of upland heaths which are a considerably different habitat and subject to far different visitor use patterns than the lowland heaths of the south east. The degree of disturbance from dogs is likely therefore to differ. It is not scientifically sound to apply the research on grouse to devise a specific figure; the most that can be deduced from the research is that dogs have a disturbance effect on ground nesting species and likely more so than people alone. We would advise that, on the information provided, there is insufficient grounds to support the calculations.

*This section has subsequently been amended.*

23.3: Whilst education as part of a package may aid the effectiveness of measures such as on-site access management and off-site alternative greenspace, we do not agree that a figure can be placed on its impact. The figure of 1% has no rational basis and is likely to be open to challenge during the public consultation. We would suggest that education is included within the package, but, unless monitoring can provide a more quantitative measure of effectiveness, no estimate should be provided of the number of visits whose effect on the SPA is assumed to be removed.

25: Natural England is concerned by the emphasis placed in the AMS on restrictions on pet ownership as an effectiveness avoidance measure to avoid harm to the SPA arising from:

- i. predation and disturbance from domestic pets accessing the SPA unaccompanied (e.g. hunting cats); or
- ii. disturbance caused by dogs being taken a walk on the SPA, and the people taking them a walk, who might not otherwise disturb the SPA birds.

The reliance that can reasonably be placed on the effectiveness of such restrictions, in terms of long term compliance and enforcement is uncertain. The avoidance of disturbance effects would not, in any event, be achieved by such restrictions. It should be emphasised that, if the conditions or obligations about pet restrictions reliably led to there being no further pets within the relevant dwellings, then self-evidently they would avoid the effects of predation and disturbance arising from the keeping of the pets. This alone, however, may not remove the potential effects of disturbance on the SPA.

Taking the issue of avoiding disturbance first, we do not consider that there is currently sufficient evidence to determine that walkers on their own do not have a

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disturbing effect on the Annex 1 birds to be satisfied that restrictions on pets would overcome the disturbance effects on the SPA. Whilst research does suggest that dogs have more impact than people alone, this should not be interpreted as evidence that walkers alone do not cause disturbance. Most studies have not attempted to separate out the impacts of walkers alone from walkers with dogs; whilst providing clear evidence for an impact from increased urbanisation and increased recreational use on heathlands, they do not attempt to differentiate between user groups. Where studies have tried to compare the effects of walkers alone, with walkers with dogs<sup>28</sup>, both have been shown to have an effect, although the impact of dogs is suggested to be greater.

As surveys by MORI (2004) and Clarke et al (2005) have shown that a substantial proportion of visitors to heathlands do leave the main tracks, walkers should also be considered to have a potential disturbing effect. Furthermore, although the Thames Basin Heaths Visitor Survey found that dog walkers were the main user group, walkers alone also constituted a significant proportion of visitors; 32% of interviewees gave walking as a reason for visiting, whilst 28% of groups interviewed were without a dog.

A restriction on pet ownership, even if Natural England were to consider that such would be enforced, does not therefore remove all the likely impacts from a residential development on the SPA alone or in combination. It does not in itself remove the requirement for mitigation of those impacts. This was acknowledged by the Inspector in appeal reference APP/T0355/A/05/1180162 who stated that he “*cannot be certain that the proposed restriction on keeping dogs would, in itself, enable me to find that the scheme would have no adverse effect on the integrity of the SPA, particularly as advice in paragraph 13 of Circular 06/2005 emphasises the need for a precautionary approach.*”

Turning to the issue of enforceability, Natural England considers that restrictions on the keeping of pets relying on enforcement by the planning authority, via a condition or a S.106 planning obligation, are generally unlikely to provide an effective avoidance measure. This is because their successful enforcement cannot be relied upon to the extent necessary to ascertain that there would be no adverse effect on the integrity of the SPA. The success of these planning measures is reliant on two issues; firstly, detection and/or reporting of breaches of the restriction, and secondly, action to enforce against an offending party by the local authority. On the first issue, in respect of most types of residential property, there is a real prospect that breaches of the restriction would not be reported, but rather breaches may encourage others to follow suit and keep a dog or cat themselves. In respect of enforcement, there is no prospect of any planning authority being able to enforce such a condition or obligation on the large numbers of dwellings that are expected in the area, as discussed in section 6 above. Natural England considers that the use of conditions prohibiting the keeping of cats and dogs would fail the tests of reasonableness and enforceability.

The use of a S.106 obligation whereby the developer covenants to impose a restriction on the conveyance of the property would similarly be unenforceable by the planning authority in practice and unreliable as an avoidance measure.

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<sup>28</sup> Taylor, E. 2006 in press, *The effect of disturbance on stone curlews Ibis* in press and Lord, A., Waas, J.R., Innes, J. and Whittingham, M.J. 2001, *Effects of human approaches to nests of northern New Zealand dotterels*, Biological Conservation, **98**(2), 233-40

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An alternative form of restriction that could, potentially, be more successful, is where the accommodation would be in flats or apartments, on leasehold, with communal areas and other communal management administered by a management company where it would be for the management company to monitor and enforce the restriction. This is the approach suggested in the AMS. In these cases the developer would covenant to establish the management company and impose the restrictions on the leases. The planning authority would not be the enforcing authority. Whilst the number of properties this could be applied to would be a relatively small proportion of the total residential development likely to come forward in the Planning Zone, Natural England does not reject the efficacy of this arrangement in terms of its potential to eliminate pets in the relevant properties. Nevertheless, no evidence has been provided to demonstrate that such companies would in fact enforce the restriction. Turning to paragraph 25.2, whilst the planning authority intend to require the developer to survey properties for five years after occupancy, it does not provide for measures to ensure enforcement for the remainder of the lifespan of the property. We would also note the lack of control of the design and implementation of such a survey in the current AMS proposals; management companies are generally required to give residents notice before entering their properties and cannot enter properties where the owner is not present. It is highly likely that as a result pet ownership may not be easily detected.

Natural England has consistently expressed concern about reliance on restrictions in respect of keeping pets. Its position is that conditions are almost certainly unreasonable and unenforceable. Where restrictive covenants are concerned, Natural England has suggested to developers that evidence is needed to demonstrate to decision makers that such covenants are effective. That evidence, presented in a rigorously systematic way or underpinned by statistical analysis is not available and the Home Builders Federation declined to commission a joint research project with Natural England to produce the evidence. Natural England is unable to fund the research alone. This is a pity, because developers are convinced that they are effective and the research could be undertaken expeditiously. If such covenants were shown to be effective in almost all cases (one could reasonably expect an occasional non compliance that would not diminish the overall efficacy of the covenants generally), then they could make a useful contribution to reducing the effects of disturbance (and predation by cats). They cannot, however, be relied upon as avoidance measures on their own, because they do nothing to reduce the effects of people using the heaths for recreation without dogs and, of course, they would not apply to freehold properties or leasehold properties with no management company. At best they would reduce rather than eliminate recreational pressures.

25.3: We would note that the figures proposed rely on the assumption that if flat dwellers were prevented from owning dogs, the proportion that would have owned dogs will not visit the SPA. This assumption is not based on any evidence; it would be more appropriate to suggest that it would prevent the increased effect caused by dogs, but not necessarily avoid the visits themselves or the impact of walkers alone. *The Council believes pet restrictions have a role to play in the package of measures.* Table 17: Natural England concurs with the comments of the RSPB that the figures used throughout the AMS and in Table 17 to list the number of visits prevented by the avoidance measures are too precise and need to reflect confidence limits. Each of the proposed calculations involved considerable assumptions and this should be reflected in the figures and text.

*Assumptions and margins of error have subsequently been included.*

Table 18: We would note that a response was provided by Natural England via email to the interim consultation, and we would request that the table is amended to reflect this.



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*The Council has no record of a written response and Natural England have been unable to provide one.*

I hope these comments are useful in developing the AMS further, and will endeavour to provide further comments on the areas deferred in due course.

Yours sincerely,

Samantha King  
Natural England  
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Ms Melissa Read  
Bracknell Forest Borough Council  
Environment and Leisure  
Time Square  
Market Street  
Bracknell  
Berkshire  
RG12 1JD

Our ref: AH/SP/BFBC/06/09/06

5<sup>th</sup> October 2006

Dear Melissa

**Re: Bracknell Forest Borough Council's Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy**

Thank you very much for inviting the Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust (BBOWT) to submit comments on the draft strategy and for agreeing to accept our comments after the deadline. The content of this letter is in addition to those concerns raised at the meeting on 20<sup>th</sup> September. We look forward to providing more detailed comments at the formal consultation stage.

**General concerns**

We are concerned that there is a general lack of clarity in the draft document. Its purpose and intended status are not clearly set out, nor is it clear how the strategy relates to Natural England's Delivery Plan. The Trust believes the lack of clarity could lead to misinterpretation of the Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy, and would suggest that clearer sign-posting should be provided within the document.

*The document structure has been amended.*

Additionally, the Trust is concerned that the approaches used to calculate reductions in visitor numbers are not based on sound scientific basis. This problem is compounded by the number of assumptions made throughout the document. We feel that the approach taken is open to challenge, particularly as no attempt is made to display the figures as 'subject to error'. Without considerable adjustment, we feel that this approach is likely to be judged as unsound. Please see our further comments, especially in relation to Table 17, for more information.

*The figures are now provided as estimated figures subject to error. Where assumptions have been made these are clarified through the document.*

We are concerned about the wording of Policy CS14, and very disappointed that there will be no formal consultation stage at which our comments can be incorporated to the Preferred Options Core Strategy Document. Additional comments will be submitted during the formal consultation stage of the Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy and forwarded to the Inspector.

**SANGS**

At this time, BBOWT feels unable to make comments on the suitability of specific sites put forward for SANGS. In order to make specific comments, we would request that the consultation version of this document include grid references, maps and

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species lists (i.e. the results of a TVERC search, plus any additional information held by BFBC or local interest groups) for all suggested sites. Sites should be screened to ensure their suitability – those that contain Annex 1 species or sensitive habitats should be excluded. Further clarification as to how visitor numbers were projected should also be provided.

*Grid references and maps have been included and all information available on each site is presented in Appendix 8 (page 111).*

### **Specific Comments**

**10.2.3** As mentioned in the meeting, Favourable Conservation Status (FCS) as mentioned in the Habitats Regulations does not equate with favourable condition. Favourable condition refers to condition monitoring of SSSIs; a full definition of FCS can be found within the Habitats Regulations.

*This has subsequently been amended.*

**10.3.2** The Trust considers that the proposed conservation objective for the Thames Basin Heaths SPA is inappropriate, and would urge the Council to engage in additional consultation with Natural England about this matter.

*This has subsequently been amended.*

**10.5** The parameters of the bird breeding season have been incorrectly described as predominantly between April and June. Several of the Annex 1 bird species regularly breed until August.

*This has subsequently been amended.*

**14.6** As mentioned in the meeting, the Trust does not believe that the current calculation and application of a vacancy rate can be considered as a precautionary approach. This figure should be discounted to avoid over-estimating the number of vacant dwellings.

*This has subsequently been amended.*

**14.8** The Trust does not believe that this meets the Regulation 50 obligation. There has been no evaluation of which, if any, of the outstanding consents cannot be mitigated for. We believe this deserves further consideration.

*This has subsequently been amended.*

**Table 6. and 7.** As was raised in the meeting, these Tables are very confusing, and should be amended to include the full population, in addition to the discounted population. Additionally, the approach taken in Table 7 cannot be considered as precautionary, as the lowest prediction for household size is used for each time period. A precautionary approach would use the highest prediction.

*This has subsequently been amended to include the predicted household size at the start of the period.*

**Table 10.** Management costs – owners and occupiers of SSSIs have a responsibility to manage the protected areas appropriately. Management costs are likely to increase with population pressure. However, there are mechanisms in place to ensure that a lack of funding for essential management does not allow the site to fall into unfavourable condition.

*These comments have subsequently been removed.*

**Table 10.** Predation - Impacts include decreased breeding success, reduced territory density, as well as potential impacts on population.

**16.4.2** This paragraph is extremely misleading and seems to be implying that decreasing the number of visitors to the SPA would decrease the number of Annex 1 birds. This is in direct conflict with all the available scientific evidence and, if it were true, would undermine the existence of the Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy. As a landowner, BFBC has a responsibility under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) to manage the SSSI appropriately, irrespective of the number of visitors. *These comments have subsequently been removed.*

**16.5.2** Access management measures imposed prior to the completion of Natural England's review, will be uncoordinated across the SPA and are likely to shift pressure to a different area of the SPA, rather than avoid pressure.

**19.1.3** There is no indication of when, why or in which areas, this independent study was conducted. Further clarification should be provided, especially with regards to this study's relation to the SPA, and the SPA user's requirements.

*This has been clarified.*

**18** It is not clear which sites the review encompassed. Did it focus on Council owned land, for example? What was the justification for removing areas in private ownership?

*This has been clarified.*

**Figure 7.** The quality of this figure is terrible and, in its current state, no useful information can be gleaned from it.

*This has been removed.*

**19.8** It is not clear how the 2006 study was carried out. What methodology was used to collect the information? For example, how many visits were made to each site, over what time period, and how many individuals were questioned?

**Table 14 & Table 15.** The calculations presented in these tables are extremely difficult to follow. We would appreciate further clarification, as it is not immediately obvious how these calculations were made. Table 15 does not take into account the areas of open space within the proposed sites which are unsuitable for recreation due to the presence of open water, car parks or buildings. Neither does it take account of the potential need to restrict visitor numbers on some sites due to ecological sensitivity. We do not believe that this table is an accurate reflection of the potential visitor capacity. A caveat regarding the potential for error within the calculations should be added.

**21.3** The Trust does not have confidence in the number of deterred visits calculated, and believes this section is overly precise with regards numerical statements. In addition we do not believe it is appropriate to use red grouse research to make conjectures about the behaviour of the Annex 1 species present on the SPA. This approach is not sound.

*This has been amended.*

**25.2** It is not clear where dog restrictions would be imposed. Whilst restrictions may be of some benefit, the Trust believes they are unlikely to be enforceable. In light of this, we believe pet restrictions should not be considered to avoid visits to the SPA.

**Table 17.** BBOWT believes these figures are over-precise and, considering the assumptions they are based on, likely to be subject to a considerable degree of error. At the very least, the potential for error should be recognised. Ideally, these figures should be re-examined, as they could undermine the chosen approach.

*Assumptions and a margin of error have been added through the document.*

I hope that you find our comments useful. We look forward to providing more detailed comments at the formal consultation stage. Please do not hesitate to contact me should you wish to discuss the matters raised in more detail.

Yours sincerely

Allison L Hulbert  
Conservation & Planning Officer (Berkshire)

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# *Jonathan Cox Associates Ltd*

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## **Bracknell Forest Borough Council's Core Strategy and Site Allocations Development Plan Documents: Assessment of Effects on the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area**

### ***Introduction***

Bracknell Forest Borough Council has undertaken an assessment of the effects of proposed policies in the Core Strategy and Site Allocations Development Plan Documents on the Thames Basin Heaths SPA. This report sets out my comments on this assessment and seeks in particular to address the following three points:-

- 1) Verify ecological aspects of the report and confirm that all the potential adverse effects have been identified.
- 2) Give a professional opinion on the impact avoidance measures proposed and their effectiveness in removing the adverse impacts.
- 3) Ensure correct process and procedure has been followed throughout.

### ***General comments***

The general impression of the report is that it has been well researched, considers the issues in a well structured and clear way and deals progressively with the various tests required by the Habitats Regulations and published Guidance in PPS 9 and other documents.

However, I feel that the fundamental structure of the assessment needs to be given further consideration. I also have a number of specific comments on the impact assessment, the effectiveness of some of the mitigation measures proposed and the rationale behind them.

### ***Structure of the assessment***

The assessment is based upon Natural England's advice summarised in figure 1. This considers that if a plan has within it sufficient mitigation and offsetting measures to avoid adverse impacts upon the SPA then a conclusion of 'no likely significant effect' can be drawn in accordance with Regulation 48(1a). This then negates the need to undertake an appropriate assessment of the plan. It is my view that this is not a sound approach to the application of the Habitat Regulations to plans being assessed. The likely significant effect test has been considered as a 'coarse filter' aimed at separating those plans or projects that are not likely to have a significant effect on the European site or sites from those that might or could (both alone and in combination). There is no guidance as to the type of assessment needed to make this judgement but it is clearly less detailed and specific than that needed to undertake an appropriate assessment. This requires that an appropriate assessment is made against the conservation objectives of the site or sites concerned and that the conclusion of the assessment must be related to the integrity of the site. Furthermore, Regulation 48(6) allows the decision maker (competent authority) to consider the effect of measures to offset the impact of the plan such that a conclusion of no



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adverse effect on integrity can be reached. Given that the 'assessment' currently contains sufficient analysis and assessment to undertake an appropriate assessment then I suggest that it should be restructured such that a conclusion of likely significant effect is accepted as indicated from the Screening Opinion. An appropriate assessment should then be undertaken following the methodology adopted in the current assessment. This is likely to conclude that in the absence of mitigation or offsetting measures the policies in the plans being assessed would have an adverse effect on the integrity of the SPA. An analysis of the avoidance and mitigation measures should then be undertaken as indicated in Step 4 of the assessment. This should then conclude that the mitigation measures will fully offset the impacts such that a conclusion of no adverse effect on the integrity of the SPA can be reached.

*These comments have been taken on board and the structure amended accordingly.*

### **Conservation objectives**

The assessment identifies the conservation objective for the SPA in paragraph 10.3.2. This generalised objective is in line with that required by the Habitats Directive and should be identified as the over-arching objective for the assessment. However, this rather general objective may not provide sufficient detail against which to make an assessment. It may therefore help to provide a set of subsidiary or secondary objectives which relate more specifically to the definition of favourable conservation status, as listed in paragraph 10.3.3 of the assessment.

*These have subsequently been amended following Natural England's advice.*

The following species accounts in section 10.7 seem excellent and contain an abundance of specific ecological data on population size, habitat requirements and range of the SPA bird species within the SPA. It may be that some of this information – particularly elements of the biodiversity action plan objectives, could also be incorporated into the Conservation objectives.

### **Impact assessment**

The analysis of impacts in section 14 seem thorough and well researched and rely on the most recent information published as Natural England research reports. The only element of impact not considered is that arising from road noise and disturbance from road traffic. This may not be appropriate to the policies proposed within the plan, but there is evidence that breeding birds are deterred by roads and road traffic noise. This is another element of urbanisation that can have adverse effects on breeding bird populations. With nocturnal species such as nightjars, it may also be that street lighting could have adverse effects on their movement and feeding behaviour, although I am not aware of any research to demonstrate this. Should the plan result in the construction of new roads near to the SPA or a significant increase in traffic along roads that currently cross the SPA, this could have adverse effects on its bird populations and may need to be considered in the assessment.

Table 10 usefully draws together the assessment of impacts against the conservation objectives for the SPA. If these objectives can be made more specific and related to the definitions of favourable conservation status, as suggested above, then it may be that this table could be transformed into something of a matrix in which objectives are assessed against objectives to give a conclusion of likely impact, in the absence of offsetting or mitigation measures.

Table 10 refers to 'public hostility' as a potential adverse effect of the plan policies. In my experience, this hostility is often expressed in relation to proposed changes to

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the management of heathland sites to improve their nature conservation value. For example, plans to reduce tree cover and restore open heathland habitat has been strongly opposed by residents adjacent to heathland sites in Dorset whilst plans to restore extensive stock grazing to heathlands in Hampshire and Surrey have also been strongly opposed by local residents. This opposition to landscape change or use can be overcome by public consultation and provision of information, but this is time consuming and ultimately can result in sub-optimal management of the SPA where public opposition cannot be overcome. Creating an increasingly urban context for the SPA can only increase the potential for these sort of conflicts and make conservation management more difficult.

Section 16 of the assessment sets out the Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy. This is related to the Natural England Delivery Plan which identifies a three part approach to avoiding and mitigating recreational impacts. This seems a sound basis upon which to develop the Strategy even if the specific details of the Delivery Plan may still be in some debate. Measures proposed as part of this Strategy are summarised in Table 11 and described more fully in the following sections.

**Strategic sites:** The assessment concludes that for those housing allocations within identified strategic sites each individual development will be required to provide sufficient mitigation, including the provision of alternative recreational open space, to offset their negative impacts. Providing this can be secured through the development of each of these sites it seems appropriate to remove the impact of these developments from the plan assessment – providing that the Borough Council is satisfied that there are no additional cumulative impacts that might arise from developing these sites that would not be assessed at a project (planning application) level appropriate assessment.

**Open space:** The analysis of open space seems well structured and researched. The sites identified to provide additional open space provision are summarised in table 13. This shows that many of the sites contain open water. It is presumed that the area calculations for these sites as recreational open space have been made without the area of open water, as clearly this cannot be used as recreational land by visitors. I also note that most of these sites are relatively small – as compared to the size of individual blocks of open space within the SPA. Whereas these sites are likely to provide attractive informal recreational open spaces for the residents of the Bracknell Forest Borough, opportunities should also be taken to provide larger strategic sites where more of a ‘wilderness’ quality of landscape can be developed of similar quality to that provided by the SPA. The identification of such strategic open spaces might be appropriate within the LDF.

However, despite this reservation, the assessment appears to have demonstrated that sufficient enhancement can be provided within the open spaces identified to provide alternative recreational open space for the planned increase in population and urbanisation predicted.

**Car parking:** The use of car park closure and reduction for reducing visitor access to the SPA needs careful assessment. Whereas it can be highly effective care must be taken to ensure that closure of car parks does not simply displace visitors to other nearby car parks around the SPA. In addition, a reduction in car park size may not have a direct impact on numbers of visitors able to use it. For example, a reduction in size by half of a 20 car space car park will not reduce the level of visitor use of that car park by half, as rarely are car parks used to capacity. To reduce access from a car park by 50% therefore requires a calculation of average use at peak dog walking times of day (morning and evening) and the number of car parking spaces reduced to

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50% of this number. At a car park close to the proposed Queen Elizabeth Barracks development in Hart District, this approach resulted in a proposed reduction in the number of car parking spaces from 90 to 5.

**Visitor access management:** This section of the assessment relies heavily on the ability to enforce a dogs on leads policy for the SPA during the bird nesting season. This is based upon the requirement of Schedule 2 of the CROW Act in relation to Access land. However, care needs to be taken as to how such access land has been identified. It is my understanding that if access land is also subject to common rights of access (as a registered common) then the provisions for restricting dogs on leads during the bird nesting season may not apply. The enforcement of such a policy will also require a significant input of wardening time and effort and is likely to be met with strong public opposition where people have customarily been allowed to let their dogs off leads. Such a situation has already developed in the New Forest, where discussion of possible restrictions on dog walkers has resulted the formation of a dog walkers action group dedicated to opposing such restrictions. Where dog walkers have become accustomed to using an area to walk their dogs off the lead, it seems likely that it will be difficult to enforce a dogs on leads policy without the provision of alternative dog walking areas, significant input of wardening time and effort and a commitment to back-up such a policy with legal action where necessary. Given that this must introduce a degree of uncertainty into the ability to deliver such a policy it is suggested that this measure may not be relied upon to deliver the level of control envisaged.

**Presumption against residential development within 400 metres of the SPA boundary:** This is a good proposal and should help reduce the impact of development immediately adjacent to the SPA boundary from cat predation, fire and possibly problems of fly tipping . However, it must be recognised that this measure will not totally stop such impacts. In particular, young people are well able to cycle over 400m to the SPA and will inevitably increase the threat from wild fires in spring and summer. Equally, cats have been documented travelling up to 1km from their homes, so that there is a potential for some cats to reach the SPA from development greater than 400m from the SPA boundary.

The assessment of **education** and **provision of supporting habitats and lay-back land** seem well considered although it must be emphasised that predictions of their effectiveness must be considered as estimates rather than definitive.

Consideration of the use of **restrictions on the keeping of pets** seems well researched and considered and I would agree with the conclusion that it is likely to provide a level of mitigation where flatted development is proposed that is managed by a management company.

The **summary of avoidance and mitigation measures** in table 17 shows the importance of the primary measures in securing the majority of the necessary mitigation. This emphasises the importance of ensuring that good quality alternative open space is provided both as a consequence of the strategic developments and as part of the open space provision proposed in the Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy.

## **Monitoring**

It seems logical and sensible that monitoring should be undertaken to assess the effectiveness of the Avoidance and Mitigation measures. However, care must be taken that this is not interpreted as an indication of uncertainty as to their effectiveness. It is a requirement of the Habitat Regulations that the competent

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authority can only approve a plan if it can ascertain that there will be no adverse effect on integrity. If monitoring is needed to assess the effectiveness of the offsetting or mitigation measures, then it could be argued that they cannot be relied upon to provide their intended benefits. Monitoring must therefore be seen as a method of fine-tuning to increase the effectiveness of the measures proposed to maximise their benefit. The competent authority must however have sufficient confidence in their effectiveness that they will deliver at least the level of mitigation needed to offset the predicted impacts of the plan.

### ***Assessment of impacts against site integrity***

In concluding the assessment it may be appropriate to consider an assessment of the likely impacts and the proposed measures to avoid or offset these within the context of an 'integrity check-list'. Such an approach has been suggested by Natural England in (ref). It was also used to consider the effectiveness of the mitigation measures proposed in relation to the Queen Elizabeth Barracks development. Copies of Natural England's guidance and the way it was interpreted in relation to this development are attached.

### ***Conclusion***

Given the suggested change to the structure of this assessment, it will be necessary to re-word the conclusion of the assessment to state that the Borough Council has ascertained that with the proposed avoidance and mitigation measures and policies to be adopted in the development plans, that there will be no adverse effect on the integrity of the SPA. If the Borough Council wishes to avoid having to make such an assessment in combination with other plans or projects affecting the SPA then it must also conclude that the proposed measures will not only prevent any adverse effects on the integrity of the SPA but also that there will be no adverse impact (or a positive impact) on the SPA.

Jonathan Cox  
9<sup>th</sup> October 2006

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**Further Natural England correspondence**

<b>Letter Date:</b> 28 December 2006
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Bracknell Forest Borough Council – Local Development Framework  
**Consultation on Bracknell Forest Core Strategy Final Sustainability Appraisal Report, and the Thames Basin Heaths SPA Technical Background Document to the Core Strategy DPD**

As discussed, due to confusion over the documents under consultation, Natural England is providing comments on the Sustainability Appraisal of the Core Strategy separate from our comments on the Core Strategy itself, which we submitted in our letter of 21 December. Our comments on the SA below also include our response on the Thames Basin Heaths SPA Technical Background Document; as agreed in our conversation on 22 December, this **does not** include our final comments on the proposed SANGs, which we will provide with our response to the consultation on the Limiting the Effects of Development SPD in early January.

We would also note that considerable information has been provided for the South East Plan Examination in Public on the Thames Basin Heaths SPA which may not have been available to the Council when drafting your LDF. In particular, we would refer the Council to the DCLG Peer Review and Legal Opinion, the submissions by Natural England and the RSPB for the November and December technical sessions, and recent research carried out by Liley *et al* (2006) on the impact of disturbance on Nightjar on the Thames Basin Heaths SPA.

Sustainability Appraisal Report

Within the Non-technical Summary, the section summarising the types of mitigation suggested by the Report, lists the addition of policies to combat the negative effects of others as a type of mitigation. Natural England supports the advice given within the SA that a natural environment policy is needed within the Core Strategy, and this is a clear omission from the Strategy. However, Natural England would also emphasise that it is important that any potentially damaging policy is furnished with its own additional wording to ensure that the natural environment is not harmed as a result of any development that may result from the policy.

Natural England supports the indicators suggested within the Sustainability Appraisal Framework table at 2.4.3, particularly noting the outdoor recreation and biodiversity targets. Again it is noted that the need for a separate nature conservation policy is highlighted, and Natural England advises that this SA proposal should be implemented, along with the other changes suggested in relation to the protection and enhancement of the natural environment. It is noted that the SA states that 97% of consultees in the Issues and Options stage agreed that nature conservation is a high priority, and this again highlights the need for an additional policy that sets out the protection, enhancement, restoration and expansion of the natural environment.

Natural England commends the inclusion of Biodiversity Action Plan objectives within the Annual Monitoring Framework, outlined in Table 17. This will yield very applicable data that will help determine the health of the natural environment and hopefully provide a clear indication of the influence of development on the natural environment, including a record of environmental enhancements as a result of beneficial development.



## SPA Technical Background Document to the Core Strategy DPD

Natural England has been closely involved in the development of the background document and mitigation strategy, and this close working has benefited the document produced. Natural England comments the efforts made and the positive approach taken to ensure that the Thames Basin Heaths SPA is not adversely affected by the impacts of increased residential development.

Natural England provided extensive comments in October 2006 on the previous draft of the document. Natural England is pleased that many of these comments have been taken on board, but is concerned that a number of points are still outstanding.

### Sections 1 to 17

The initial sections are now very comprehensive and provide an excellent background to the mitigation strategy. Natural England's concerns from the previous consultation that have not yet been addressed are regarding the figures provided for housing and the subsequent calculations of the figures likely to have a significant effect on the SPA. Additionally, research into visitor impacts is still misrepresented in some places, with significant omissions. Those previous comments where issues are still outstanding are copied below from our previous letter. Should it be considered that any comments do not warrant a change in the document text, it may be useful for the Council to provide further information or justification for any decisions made contrary to Natural England's advice on the document.

### Outstanding comments regarding sections 1 to 17, from previous consultation response letter 4<sup>th</sup> October 2006

Table 6: This calculations within this table are confused. Paragraph 14.5.1 on page 23 notes that the Housing Allocation between 2006 and 2026 is 11,139 dwellings; this figure is also given in Table 6. The outstanding commitments of 2,956 dwellings which are considered to have supplied suitable mitigation (though please refer to our comments on 14.8) are then removed from the Housing Allocation. This does not seem correct, as these dwellings were given permission prior to 2006 and therefore form part of the previous Housing Allocation; paragraph 14.5.1 notes that only 359 dwellings are outstanding from that previous period. In addition, the outstanding permissions considered likely to have a significant effect are also removed from the total Housing Allocation; it is not clear why they are removed (indeed it would appear from para 14.5.1 that they should be **additional** to the 11,139 housing allocation) as if they are considered to have an effect, they should remain in the calculations. The total final figure given of only 6,911 dwellings does not appear to concord with the statements in paragraph 14.5.1.

14.9: In Table 7, as above, it is not clear why committed development from pre-2006 has been removed from the figures for 2006-2011. This does not seem to be in accordance with paragraph 14.5.1 which refers to a Housing Allocation of 3,054 new dwellings between 2006-11, including a shortfall of only 359 for the previous period.

14.13: We would disagree that research carried out on Annex 1 birds in Dorset did not identify the main impacts arising from urban development. Whilst the Liley & Clarke survey referenced did not distinguish between various urban pressures, subsequent studies identified recreational disturbance as a significant causal factor. The Liley & Clarke study did look at some potential adverse effects including size of heaths, the amount of woodland surrounding each heath and the degree of fragmentation. None of these other factors were found to be significant for nightjar,

apart from the amount of woodland surrounding each site, which was weakly significant in addition to the amount of urban development. A number of the impacts listed on page 21 of the AMS were not therefore responsible for the effects noted by the study.

14.13.2: We would also note that the Liley & Clarke study also looked at 250m and 750m, in addition to 500m and found that the three distances could not be separated as they were all highly correlated with each other. The lack of reference to impact over 750m is due to the study not considering development over 750m not because no impact was found. The AMS should not therefore focus on the figure of 500 metres as a determinant of the extent of urban impacts.

Table 10, Management costs: This section is misleading and fails to recognise the duties of landowners under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) to maintain SSSIs in favourable condition. It is entirely likely that management costs would increase with increasing population; this may place a significant burden upon landowners and is certainly a factor to be considered when determining the cost of development. Nevertheless, it is extremely unlikely that this would result in a decrease in habitat management given the aforementioned responsibility of landowners to manage the site. Natural England would not accept sites entering unfavourable condition for such a reason and has a number of mechanisms both to assist landowners with management costs and apply regulatory controls to ensure such is carried out, where necessary.

Table 10, trampling: Research at Bourley and Long Valley SSSI, part of the Thames Basin Heaths SPA indicated that 42% of visitors left the main tracks. We would suggest that although this may not be a significant effect on most heaths, some areas of the SPA will be more sensitive, and prone, to impacts of trampling and track widening; this could be identified and managed through the forthcoming access management plans.

Table 11, predation: The focus on the 400m zone within the AMS refers largely to the impact of pets particularly cats. This does not fully reflect the reasoning behind Natural England's recommendation of a 400m buffer zone. Although predation by cats is a key factor so close to the SPA, and the zone partly reflects the mean distance travelled by cats, other significant factors include fly tipping, garden extensions, and increased likelihood of fires (the latter not necessarily restricted to 400m). The most significant factor however is that 400m is a generally accepted as an easy walking distance and is it highly unlikely that residents living within 400m of the SPA would not use the SPA nor that they would be diverted to use SANGs. We would also note therefore that sites within 400m would also have to prove that people would not use the SPA for activities such as walking even if they did not have pets; 32% of users of the SPA gave walking as a primary reason for their visit and 28% were without dogs.

Table 11, predation – increased recreational pressure: This section and the following make a number of statements regarding the effectiveness of visitor management to avoid impacts from dogs. Natural England considers that access management measures, such as the proposed wardening, may make a significant contribution towards reducing dogs off leads, but as yet no evidence has been provided as to the effectiveness and practicality of such measures. It is hoped that the current access management review will provide useful information towards this issue. Nevertheless, we would advise the Council that unless they can demonstrate the effectiveness of the measures proposed, particularly the necessary enforcement, a more cautionary tone should be taken in statements on access management.

Table 11: trampling: It is not clear from the AMS which parts of the SPA the Borough Council control and what area it could secure access management measures over. It is unclear why the Council considers that it has sufficient control of access to ensure provision of wardens, but does not have the means to provide a defined, well maintained, footpath network. This highlights one of the main difficulties with the inclusion at this stage of access management as part of the strategic package, outwith the access management plans being developed by Natural England; namely that it may not be within the Council's gift to ensure that the measures take place. As an example, areas of Sandhurst to Owlsmoor SSSI, which are visited by residents of the Borough are in the ownership of BBOWT and not the Council. We would also note that access management is not, and should not be, part of the habitat management of the SPA.

Table 11, management costs: We would question the statement that management costs are unlikely to increase. Changes to access management are likely to be identified as necessary to ensure current use of the SPA does not harm the Annex 1 species. Furthermore, access management will be necessary to allow for those new residents who will still chose to visit the SPA even with SANGs provided. Maintenance of access management measures may be low cost, but some initial capital outlay is likely.

Table 11, hydrology: The identification of 400m as the boundary for hydrological effects does not appear to be based on a clear evidence base. Hydrological impacts can occur from developments a considerable distance away from some sites. We would like to see the basis for this determination clearly laid out in this section. Natural England would also be happy to advise on those parts of the SPA which may be more sensitive or conversely less likely to be affected.

### Sections 21 to 31

Natural England notes that comments made regarding the application of pet covenants have been considered and that additional text has been included to indicate that any restriction on pet ownership cannot be taken alone to have a mitigating effect, and that it must be used alongside mitigation measures. It is also noted that comments previously provided regarding flat dwellers and pet restrictions have also been incorporated.

Natural England notes that our concerns regarding the figures used from visitor research and the effectiveness of on-site wardening are still outstanding, and the document remains confusing on these aspects. The points made in our previous letter regarding these points are copied again below for reference. Again, as previously advised, it may be helpful for the Council to explain why comments have not been taken on board, if it is still considered that they do not warrant an amendment in the document.

### Outstanding comments regarding sections 21 to 31, from previous consultation response letter 4<sup>th</sup> October 2006

21.3: We are not clear how the figures in this section have been calculated. If the 32% of dogwalkers who expressed the view that they would use other sites if dogs were restricted to leads, were indeed diverted from the SPA, this could result in a 19% decrease of total visitors, not a third as stated in the AMS.

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The calculation regarding the impact of dogs is based on little evidence and draws too many assumptions to support such a precise figure. The sole research used is based on grouse, and not on any of the three Annex 1 species. It cannot be assumed that the response of grouse is likely to be comparable with nightjar, woodlark or Dartford warbler and the AMS provides no evidence to indicate that the behavioural response is the same. Grouse are generally birds of upland heaths which are a considerably different habitat and subject to far different visitor use patterns than the lowland heaths of the south east. The degree of disturbance from dogs is likely therefore to differ. It is not scientifically sound to apply the research on grouse to devise a specific figure; the most that can be deduced from the research is that dogs have a disturbance effect on ground nesting species and likely more so than people alone. We would advise that, on the information provided, there is insufficient grounds to support the calculations.

23.3: Whilst education as part of a package may aid the effectiveness of measures such as on-site access management and off-site alternative greenspace, we do not agree that a figure can be placed on its impact. The figure of 1% has no rational basis and is likely to be open to challenge during the public consultation. We would suggest that education is included within the package, but, unless monitoring can provide a more quantitative measure of effectiveness, no estimate should be provided of the number of visits whose effect on the SPA is assumed to be removed.

Table 18: We would note that a response was provided by English Nature via email to the interim consultation, and we would request that the table is amended to reflect this.

I hope that these comments are of assistance. Comments on the proposed SANGs in the Technical Background Document will follow as part of our response to the SPD Limiting the impact of development.

**Yours sincerely**

**Samantha King**  
**Conservation Advisor**

<b>Letter Date:</b> <b>9 January 2007</b>
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**Comments from Natural England on the Bracknell Forest Limiting the Effects of Development SPD – Consultation Draft November 2006**

Comments on Chapter 8 – Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA)

Natural England welcomes the inclusion of the Thames Basin Heaths SPA Mitigation Strategy as a separate chapter within this SPD. The chapter gives a thorough summary of the detailed Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy within the Technical Document, and explains the measures necessary to ensure that an adverse effect on the SPA is prevented. Specific comments on particular sections of the chapter are as follows:

Paragraph 8.3.2 should refer to the avoidance and mitigation measures as those that have been, *'agreed between the Council and Natural England.'*

Paragraph 8.5.2 is confusing and requires re-wording. In its current form it does not give a clear message regarding the avoidance of development within the 400m zone unless there are exceptional circumstances. A suggested wording amendment for that paragraph is as follows:

*'Unless these developments can be screened out on a case-by-case basis (i.e. proven to have no significant effect), development within 400 metres of the Thames Basin Heaths SPA will not be permitted, because the effects on the SPA cannot normally be mitigated for at this short distance. Within this zone, measures in the Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy are not likely to remove any adverse effects, therefore contributions are not suitable.'*

8.8.3 As referred to in Natural England's comments on the Technical Document setting out the Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy, Natural England is concerned about the exact calculations used to determine the number of dwellings likely to have a significant effect. The figures have been copied from the Technical Document into this SPD. Natural England therefore requests that, once clarification has been given regarding the figures in the Technical Document, that this is then reflected in the SPD.

#### Appendix D – Restrictions on dog ownership

Natural England has provided comments on pet restrictions as a mitigation measure in our response to the Core Strategy DPD, and remains concerned as to their effectiveness, in the absence of evidence for or against. Nevertheless, based on the understanding that the proposed pet restrictions on certain developments are **additional** to the other requirements of the SPA and associated Technical Background Document to the Core Strategy DPD, Natural England does not object to the use of this measure.

The reference to flats should not only include those with a management company in place. It may be that a management company needs to be specifically introduced for the purpose of enforcing pet restrictions. Natural England therefore suggests the wording is amended to state:

*'Flats - wherever it is possible for a management company or housing association etc to take on the responsibility for enforcing the restriction.'*

**I hope that these comments are of assistance. Please do not hesitate to contact me if have any queries or would like further information.**

**Yours sincerely**

**Samantha King**



<b>Letter Date:</b> 12 January 2007
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Additional comments on the Thames Basin Heaths SPA Technical Background Document to the Core Strategy DPD

**As noted in my letter of 28 December 2006 I am writing to provide further comments on the above document, namely the sections concerning the proposed SANGs.**

#### **Suitability of sites as potential SANGs**

**Following site visits carried out by Kyle Lischak and subsequent meetings with yourselves, Natural England agrees that seven of the proposed eight sites or groups of sites have potential to be SANGs. Namely that they;**

- **could be significantly upgraded to improve their attractiveness to the types of users who visit the SPA**
- **have sufficient capacity, once upgraded, to absorb additional use without affecting the attractiveness of the site to SPA type users**
- **are suitable in size, once upgraded, when considered as part of the suite of SANGs**

**We do not however consider that South Hill Park could be a potential SANGs. Specific comments on the individual sites are as follows;**

- **Jocks Copse/Tinker's Copse/The Cut/Garth Meadows/Larks Hill/Piggy Wood: 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 Copse's in particular are rather isolated and links between them and the other sites currently are unattractive.**
- **Longhill Park/Milman Close/Beswick Gardens Copse/ Lily Hill Park/ Clintons Hill: Again in addition to improvements on each individual site, attention must be given to enabling use of the sites as part of various round walks that are secure enough for dogs to be off the lead the majority of the walk. We note that Lily Hill Park is already undergoing enhancement works, which will ensure that it can accommodate the Town Centre Development; the Technical Document suggests that further capacity may exist on Lily Hill Park itself and production of a scheme of works for this suite of sites could focus on linking development initially to Lily Hill Park itself before developing a schedule of upgrades for the other sites in the group.**
- **Englemere Pond: This site does appear to have potential for upgrading its accessibility and physical attractiveness to visitors. It is however a SSSI and the improvements may be limited owing to the need not to conflict with the needs of the SSSI features. In addition, further consideration is needed as to whether increased numbers of visitors would have an adverse effect on the SSSI features of interest. Natural**

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England does not consider that Englemere Pond should be rejected as a potential SANGs, but the exact capacity of the site will only be determined through further discussion over the proposed improvements. It may however be possible for the improvements to include measures that increase the sites robustness regarding visitor pressure.

- Horseshoe Lake: This site has considerable potential for improvement.
- Shepherd Meadows: This site appears to have considerable potential to upgrade its attractiveness. It is however also a SSSI and any proposed improvements must not conflict with the interest features of the site.
- Wicks Green/Silver Jubilee Field: These sites appeared to be underused, with considerable potential for enhancement. We also understand that the Council has recently purchased land adjacent to these sites for the purposes of creating a nature reserve, and would urge the Council to consider whether the aims of the nature reserve might be compatible with access and thus could be incorporated into the SANGs suite.
- South Hill Park: This site appears very heavily used. It is a very formal park, with little apparent potential for changes to habitat type or structure to increase its semi-natural “feel” and appearance and thus increase its attractiveness to SPA users. Partly this results from the position of the stately home which dominates the Park. Nevertheless, it is apparent from the largely empty nearby car park that it is likely that most current users to the Park walk. It may therefore be possible with some enhancements for the site to act as a local site, catering to development within 400m. We do not however consider that it could be made attractive enough to encourage people to drive to it instead of the SPA.
- Ambarrow Court/Hill: This site appears to have potential for improvement.

### Attractiveness

The Technical Document largely focuses upon capacity as an indicator of SANGs potential. It is noted or clearly implied at several points within the text that improvements are needed to the sites to increase their attractiveness and realise the capacity for SPA type users, but for clarity the document would benefit from ensuring this is noted in the sections discussing capacity of the sites.

Although Natural England agrees in principle that seven of the proposed sites have the potential to be effective SANGs, in order to be certain that, together with the other measures proposed in the Technical Document, they will remove all impact from individual developments linked to those sites, Natural England will need to agree with the Council the upgrade measures proposed for each site. This can be achieved through the development of a schedule of works for each SANGs, similar to that produced by other local authorities as part of their mini-plans. We note in paragraph 20.13 your intention to produce such a document and understand from your meeting with Kyle Lischak that programmes of works could be produced relatively easily. These schedules of works will need to be produced before Natural England can stop advising the

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Council that additional residential development could have a likely significant effect.

To reduce delays to delivery of housing, we suggest that it may be appropriate to concentrate on producing plans for certain key sites and/or for periods of 1-2 years. This would also enable results from monitoring the SPA and the effectiveness of SANGs to inform revisions of the plans and ensure any necessary adjustments to the SANGs measures are made on a frequent basis. We would refer you to the mini-plan produced by Guildford Borough Council for an example of the information Natural England will need before we can be sufficiently confident in the delivery of suitable SANGs to remove objections to development.

### Capacity

In principle, Natural England accepts the Council's approach to calculating capacity on the proposed SANGs. We would note that actual capacity is reliant upon upgrading of those sites to increase their attractiveness to the types of users who visit the SPA, in order to realise that capacity and ensure that they attract the new residents and/or existing SPA users to avoid a net increase in the use of the SPA.

### Catchment of individual SANGs

We would refer the Council to the following table from page 31 of the Template Thames Basin Heaths SPD produced by English Nature on behalf of the local planning authorities. This includes catchment areas of SANGs of different sizes, drawing on visitor survey information that indicates that people are more likely to travel long distances to large sites than smaller ones. The table relates to the proportion of SANGs across the SPA as a whole. Each District should reflect those proportions. Where the size and location parameters cannot be met in the right proportions within a District, the best provision achievable in that District should be provided, with appropriate adjustments to provision in adjacent Districts.

Size and Location of SANGS Provision			
SANGS Area	Location from New Development	Zone	Proportion of Total SANGS Provision by area
2-4ha	within 400m	Zone B	Max 5% all sites <4ha
4-12ha	within 2km	Zone B	Max 20% all sites <12ha
12-20ha	within 4km	Zone B Zone C	Max 25% all sites <20ha
20-40ha	within 5km	Zone B Zone C	Min 75% all sites >20ha
40+ha	within 5km	Zone B Zone C	Min 25% all sites >40ha

### Minimum site sizes

In an avoidance and mitigation strategy aiming to cover the full housing allocation for that authority rather than an interim strategy for one to two years, Natural England would expect provision of a range of sites to meet all requirements of the types of users who visit the SPA. In the Template Thames Basin Heaths SPD, English Nature produced an indication of the maximum and/or proportion in a suite of SANGs that sites of certain sizes should consist of, as shown in the above table. Given that the

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Council has modified the precautionary standard of the Delivery Plan, Natural England considers that it is particularly important that the suite of SANGs includes the full range of site sizes and does not have a disproportionate number of smaller sites which are inherently less attractive to the majority of SPA users. The local circumstances of the Borough, in having a particularly attractive SPA site in The Lookout, suggest that large alternative sites will be important in the Borough if the impact from new development is to be completely removed.

In considering the seven sites or groups of sites which Natural England agrees have potential with suitable upgrading to be effective SANGs, we note that **by area**, the suite of SANGs largely meets the above requirements. There is however a deficit in that there are no large sites of 40 hectares or above. Natural England continues to believe that a site of 40ha is required in the suite of SANGs, based on the evidence of recreational use of the SPA to date.

From discussions with yourself today, we understand that the proposed Country Park for the Peacock Farm development will be approximately 39 hectares, with an additional 14ha of nearby woodland and open space linked through green ways. The exact design of the Park as we understand not yet finalised. This site, if designed appropriately to allow for the needs of walkers and particularly dog walkers for secure round walks (i.e. dogs off lead for the majority of the walk, including along the green ways), could provide the necessary 40ha+ site. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss this further with yourselves.

We also understand that it is likely that another of the allocated sites may include SANGs of over 40ha, and opportunities may arise for cross-boundary sites with Wokingham and the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead.

Natural England urges that a site of this size is included as soon as possible in the suite of SANGs in order for the Technical Document to be suitable as an avoidance strategy for the **full** 20 year lifetime of the South East Plan housing allocation. One possible way forward could be to include a clause which would allow for housing permissions to stop being granted after a period of two years (the general period covered by interim strategies) from the implementation of the Limiting the Effect of Development SPD, if a suitable 40 hectare site had not been secured. We would welcome the opportunity to work intensively with the Council to find a way of securing at least one 40+ hectare site before the SPD, and associated Technical Document, is adopted, so as to avoid the need for such a limitation.

#### Reduction of outer zone to 5km

In our response of 28 December 2006 to the Core Strategy and Technical Document, we did not appreciate that the zone in which the avoidance and mitigation measures were to be applied had been reduced from the whole Borough to 5 kilometres. Whilst we understand this evolved from discussions in September that English Nature/Natural England were unable to attend, we would note that it is not correct to state in paragraph 14.12.5 that we had agreed to this.

Nevertheless, we note from information provided by yourselves that development in the Borough beyond 5 kilometres from the SPA is minimal, and the change of zone is therefore unlikely to result in a reduction in the total amount of SANGs provided. Natural England does not therefore object to this alteration or consider that we need to amend our advice on the hectare standards proposed by the Council at this time. Should housing patterns change and increased development come forward in the area beyond 5km, we may wish to discuss the approach further.

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**I hope these comments are of assistance and look forward to continuing to work with the Council on this issue.**

**Yours sincerely**

**Samantha King**



## Bracknell Forest Borough Local Development Framework

### Core Strategy Examination

**SCG/0038**  
**Statement of Common Ground between Bracknell Forest**  
**Borough Council**  
**and Natural England**

**April 2007**

**13 APRIL 2007**

This Statement of Common Ground relates to the issues raised by Natural England in their written representations to the Core Strategy (Submission) Development Plan Document. Agreement to the contents herein does not bind either Natural England or the Borough Council in making further comments to the Core Strategy Examination.

#### **Background**

Natural England (NE) has made representations on the Core Strategy Examination which, in general, welcome the approach being taken within the Core Strategy. However, some concerns have been raised mainly around the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area, making specific references to Core Strategy Policy CS14, the SPA Technical Background Document and the SPA Implementation Strategy (part of Limiting the Impact of Development SPD). Although this Statement covers representations on the soundness of the Core Strategy, where comments on implementation are relevant they have also been included within this statement of common ground.

The Council has worked closely with NE throughout the production of the SPA Technical Background Document and a summary of how consultation comments have been addressed up to Submission is included within Appendix 11 of the SPA Technical Background Document. NE and the Council have since met (on 10 April 2007) to discuss issues of common ground and this meeting helped inform this statement.

NE's comments include proposed amendments to policy wording and more detailed technical detail. This Statement of Common Ground aims to pick up the key issues which are fundamental to NE's objection.

Representations from NE are covered within several letters:

- **21 December 2006 - Bracknell Forest Borough Council - LDF Consultation on Core Strategy Submission Draft** (Core Strategy Representation reference number 0038)
- 28 December 2006 - Bracknell Forest Borough Council - LDF Consultation on Bracknell Forest Core Strategy
- 9 January 2007 - Comments from Natural England on the Bracknell Forest Limiting the Impact of Development SPD - Consultation Draft November 2006
- 12 January 2007 - Additional comments on the TBH SPA Technical Background Document to the Core Strategy DPD

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- 16 January 2007 - Thames Basin Heaths SPA Technical Background to the Core Strategy DPD

### **Policy CS14 - Thames Basin Heaths SPA**

NE's letter dated 21 December proposed that clarity is required within CS14 for development proposals within 400m of the SPA. They propose additional policy wording and suggest an amendment to para.s 148 and 149.

The Council feels that amending the policy to completely exclude any residential development within 400m would be contrary to the tests set out within the Habitats Regulations. However, the Council would not be opposed to strengthening the text in paragraph 148 for purposes of clarity (and to remove the objection to CS14 raised by NE), to read as follows (bold is used here only to identify the potential change).

148. This document has also concluded that any development within a 400 metre straight-line distance of the SPA will be assessed on its own merits with regards to the Habitats Regulations. If a significant impact can not be precluded a detailed project-level Appropriate Assessment must ensure no adverse effect. **Within this zone a significant adverse effect can only be avoided or mitigated in exceptional circumstances, therefore** there will be a general presumption against new residential development within **400 metres of the SPA boundary this zone which is identified as having a significant adverse effect.**

### **SPA Technical Background Document**

NE's letters dated 28 December 2006 and 16 January 2007 raised specific technical points on the Technical Background Document. Proposed changes to this document, which would clear up these outstanding technical points, are set out below:

- Paragraph 14.3.2 and Table 10 (Supporting Habitats, page 32) will be amended to reflect the evidence base.
- Table 10 (Management costs, page 31) all text will be removed.
- Table 10 (Trampling, page 31). Reference will be made to research at Bourley and Long Valley SSSI, part of the SPA, which indicated that 42% of visitors left the main tracks. Some areas of the SPA may be more sensitive and prone to trampling; this will be identified through the forthcoming access management plans.

NE also raised concern around the levels of housing identified as having a significant effect on the SPA, i.e. Table 6, Table 7 and para. 14.5.1. However, this has already been addressed, and their objection on this point withdrawn, in a subsequent letter (16 January 2007) following discussions to clarify this point.

### **Implementation of Alternative Open Space (SANGS)**

NE's letter of 12 January 2007 provided further comments on the SPA Technical Background Document, specifically relating to the suitability of areas of open space as SANGS.

#### ***Suitability of open space***

**NE agrees that 7 of the proposed 8 areas of alternative open space have potential to be SANGS if they are significantly upgraded. The remaining site,**

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**South Hill Park, is considered to be suitable only for very local users arriving on foot. Therefore, enhancements may enable it to be used as a local site catering to development within 400m of the site.**

NE has agreed that South Hill Park has the potential to be a local site and there may be the possibility for this to have a wider catchment in the longer term if significant enhancements were carried out.

The Council proposes the following update to the SPA Technical Background Document:

South Hill Park will remain within the Technical Background Document but explanatory text will be amended to reflect its limited catchment area in the short term.

### **Schedules of works**

NE's letter dated 12 January 2007 states that schedules of works to enhance potential SANGS will need to be produced before Natural England can stop advising the Council that additional residential development could have a likely significant effect.

A schedule of works for each area of open space is in the process of being produced. NE has agreed on a draft approach and will be signing off each as it is produced.

### **Catchment of individual SANGS**

NE refer to their guideline size and catchment standards for open space, reproduced from the Template Thames Basin Heaths SPD. The suite of SANGS within the Technical Background Document does not fully meet the guidelines for size and proportion. However, the general principle of using larger sites is followed as nearly 70% of the SANGS area is within areas of open space of more than 20ha, and 98% of SANGS is within areas of open space over 12ha.

The Technical Background Document and SPA Implementation Strategy will include a map indicating the catchment areas for each grouping of open space, dependant upon their size and consistent with the table reproduced within NE's letter.

### **Conclusion**

If the Inspector were to support the above proposed changes to policy, and the Council were to make the appropriate amendments to the SPA Technical Background Document, Natural England confirms that these would overcome their objections.

Therefore, the changes proposed within this Statement of Common Ground enable Natural England to agree with the SPA Technical Background Document in order to remove their objection to Policy CS14 (as raised in their letter dated 21 December 2006).

The proposed changes are minor word changes which do not affect the soundness of the Core Strategy and the Council recognises that these amendments would add clarity and could help to meet the concerns of Natural England.

The Council will continue to work with Natural England through the monitoring and review process of the SPA Implementation Strategy.