



**Great Hollands
Open Space Enhancement Plan**

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

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1 Introduction

1.1 The Thames Basin Heaths SPA

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

Bracknell Forest Council is legally obliged to make sure that no adverse effect on the integrity of the SPA will arise from new development. As a result, the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area Avoidance and Mitigation Supplementary Planning Document (March 2012) (hereafter referred to as TBHSPA SPD) was produced, which identifies measures to avoid and mitigate adverse effects arising from proposed new residential development. The TBHSPA SPD provides an integrated, holistic package of measures which includes both on-site and off-site measures to protect the SPA. A summary of the avoidance and mitigation measures, which will ensure that there will be no adverse effect upon the integrity of the SPA, can be found in section 3 of the TBHSPA SPD. These comprise:

- Provision of or contributions towards Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space (SANGS)
- Contributions towards Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMM)
- Restrictions on development within 400m

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

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

1.2 Open Space Enhancement Plans

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

1.3 Identification of Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space (SANGS)

The TBHSPA SPD went through an extensive process to identify areas of open space as suitable alternatives to the SPA. Appendix 4 provides a rationale for the identification of areas of open space and Appendix 5 makes an appraisal of the necessary quality enhancements.

Therefore, this report builds upon the information and research presented within the TBHSPA SPD to provide more detailed works and costs on how Great Hollands could be brought up to a suitable standard to provide an alternative to the SPA.

1.4 Great Hollands as an alternative to the SPA

Great Hollands is adjacent to the proposed TRL SANGS and will directly link with this site in the future. Linking Great Hollands with TRL will mean that a longer walk (at least 2.3 - 2.5 km) will be possible across the two sites, as this cannot be achieved on the Great Hollands site alone. The link also increases the area available for informal recreation in the area and

provides additional semi-natural space as an alternative to the SPA. It is also adjacent to other formal recreation space in the wider Great Hollands recreation ground. Pedestrian routes also make it possible to walk between Great Hollands and the Peacock Meadows SANGS at Jennett's Park allowing for longer walks between these two sites.

Natural England visited the site and in a letter dated 14th July 2014 agreed in principle that Great Hollands is suitable as a SANGS and could be combined into a larger SANGS with the proposed TRL SANGS when the latter is delivered. The larger SANGS will be managed jointly, with consistent signs and other infrastructure and will be promoted as one. The TRL SANGS will need to be delivered before Great Hollands can operate as a combined SANGS to achieve the necessary 2.5 km walk. The TRL SANGS has been secured in an outline application for the wider TRL site. Further details of the TRL SANGS will be submitted with subsequent reserved matters applications.

The whole of Great Hollands Recreation Ground (14.95ha) was deemed not suitable as a SANG as stated in Appendix 8 of the Thames Basin Heaths SPA Technical Background Document to the Core Strategy DPD (June 2007). This was reviewed and part of the site (4.78ha) was deemed suitable as set out in the Thames Basin Heaths SPA SPD (March 2012) which was agreed by Natural England. In Appendix 7 of the same document, the notes to table 14 explain that this site was not brought forward as a SANGS at that time as it was not required for mitigation purposes at that stage.

The situation has now changed and there is increasing pressure on the Council to provide SANGS as more development comes forward. The Council is therefore working with Natural England to bring this site forward.

The SANGS assessment checklist is used in section 5 to demonstrate how Great Hollands is suitable as an alternative to the SPA and how enhancements will enable its use as such.

2 Site Management Statement

2.1 Description

2.1.1 Location

Great Hollands is situated in the ward of Great Hollands South, south-east of Bracknell Town, accessed from Nine Mile Ride. Great Hollands is directly north of the TRL site.

OS grid reference: SU 851 665

Area: 4.78 hectares

2.1.2 Adjacent land

The southern border of the site is formed by Nine Mile Ride, beyond which is the former TRL site. To the west is South Road, and further areas of coniferous plantation. To the north of Great Hollands SANGS is Great Hollands recreation ground, which consists of formal sports and play provision. To the east of the site is residential development.

2.1.3 Access

There is a car park to the north of the site, which is accessed from South Road. Pedestrian access onto the site is from Great Hollands recreation ground, South Road and Woodenhill to the west. There is also an access directly onto Nine Mile Ride near the junction with Crowthorne Road.

2.1.4 Geology & soils

Most of the site lies over Bagshot Sands. The south-east corner of the site is over the Windlesham Formation, which are interlayered clays, silts and sands. Soils are typically sandy, well-draining acidic soils, typical of the former heathland landscape much of which is now commercial forestry.

2.1.5 Topography

Great Hollands is largely flat, with the centre of the site being at most five metres above the edge of the site.

2.1.6 Drainage & flooding

Due to the geology and soils, Great Hollands is not liable to flooding and is not within any flood risk zones.

2.1.7 Landscape & views

Great Hollands is a former coniferous plantation, so views to and from the site are limited. The surrounding landscape is largely coniferous forest, both current commercial forest and now abandoned plantations.

2.1.8 Wildlife

An ecological survey of the site was carried out by Acorn Ecology Ltd. The report notes that the main habitats on the site are mixed deciduous woodland, broad-leaved plantation and coniferous plantation. There are also areas of grassland associated with rides and glades within the woodland areas. A number of protected and notable species have been recorded from Great Hollands including bats, grass snake, slow-worm, bullfinch and stag beetle.

2.1.9 Archaeology & Heritage

There are no known sites recorded on the Historic Environment Record within the boundaries of Great Hollands SANGS. There are a number of sites recorded in the vicinity, as follows:

- Ice house at Easthampstead Park, to the N
- Scheduled bowl barrow at Woodenhill, a short distance to the E

- Cropmarks (unknown date) in the cemetery area to the NW
- Ice house at Hut Hill to the SE
- Transport Research Lab complex

The bowl barrow is a nationally important monument and of a type which does not occur in isolation, meaning there are likely to be other Prehistoric remains in the area. These may survive below ground within the SANGS area. Any proposed works should have consideration for the possible presence of other features of historic importance.

2.1.10 Recreational uses

The site is used for informal recreation, largely by dog walkers.

2.1.11 Recreational routes

A number of informal paths run through the site. A cleared ride runs through the middle of the site. A footpath (Crowthorne footpath 11) starts approximately 150 metres to the west of the junction of South Road and Nine Mile Ride.

2.1.12 Interpretation & events

There are some way markers for the Wokingham Way leisure route on site. Great Hollands is featured on the Bracknell Town Council website in the parks and open spaces section.

2.2 Legal and Planning Framework

2.2.1 Land ownership

Great Hollands is owned by Bracknell Forest Council and is managed by Bracknell Town Council under a lease agreement.

2.2.2 Fences & hedges

The boundaries of Great Hollands are unfenced and there are no hedges on site.

2.2.3 Site furniture

There is currently no furniture provided on site.

2.2.4 Byelaws

Great Hollands is subject to 'The Fouling Of Land By Dogs (Bracknell Town Council) Order 2014' and 'The Dogs on Lead (by Direction) (Bracknell Town Council) Order 2014'.

2.2.5 Designations

Great Hollands has no designations.

2.3 Resource Evaluation

The site provides an attractive atmosphere for visitors in a woodland setting. Its links with the nearby recreation ground and the future TRL SANGS will increase the value of the site for public access and recreation.

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

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

Total annual visits – 19,000

Estimated number of visitors – 113

Table 1: SANGS capacity calculations

A. SANGs	B. Total visits per annum to SANGS	C. Equivalent no. of visitors p.a¹	D. Estimated Area (ha)	E. Capacity to Mitigate (D / 8x1000)	F. Residual Mitigation Capacity (E-C)	G. Residual Area of SANGs capacity available (F / 1000x8)
Great Hollands	19,000 visits	113 visitors	4.78 ha	597 persons	484 persons	3.87 ha

Great Hollands SANGS will have a catchment of 5 km to mitigate for new residential development.

2.4 Constraints and Issues

- The varying levels of existing visitor pressure needs to be carefully managed in order to provide additional capacity whilst protecting the semi-natural environment which makes the sites attractive.
- The pine trees are approaching the end of their natural lifespan and will need to be carefully managed to ensure the area remains safe for recreation while at the same time managing the woodland to ensure its long term future.
- The site is managed under lease from Bracknell Forest Council by Bracknell Town Council. Management requires the co-operation of both Councils to ensure the long term cohesion of the site.
- Dog fouling is a common issue at dog walking sites and will require action to educate users and improve behaviour. Positive action includes close liaison with the dog warden and an annual educational event held at a nearby park.

2.5 Management Objectives

The following provide the overarching, existing management objectives for the site. These are in addition to the primary objective of this Open Space Enhancement Plan, which is to enhance alternative green space to divert visitors from using the SPA.

2.5.1 Bracknell Forest Council medium term objectives

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

Linking to:

4) To keep Bracknell clean and green

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

2.5.2 Bracknell Forest Council Community Plan policies

¹ Calculated by dividing the number of visits to the site per annum by the average number of visits made by users per year (168). See Thames Basin Heaths SPA Avoidance and Mitigation Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) March 2012 Appendix 4

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

Linking to:

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

2.5.3 Site-based Objectives

- A. To provide a high quality recreation resource.
- B. To manage and enhance the biodiversity and landscape value of the site.
- C. To develop the site's strategic importance within the context of the developing BFBC Greenspace Strategy and TBHSPA SPD.

2.6 Management Strategies

These are based on the existing management plan:

2.6.1 Site Maintenance

- A1 To maintain and improve the nature conservation value and interest of the woodland areas.
- A2 To enhance the character of the site through appropriate management

2.6.2 Visitor Management

- B1 Aim to provide an area open to the public for informal recreation.
- B2 Ensure all access points are usable.
- B3 Ensure all paths are up to the standard set for this site
- B4 Ensure public safety
- B5 Provide related furniture on site where needed
- B6 Provide a site leaflet in conjunction with other BFC leaflets

3 Site Proposals for SPA Mitigation

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

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

The attached spreadsheet in section 6 lists these works and provides a breakdown of the costs of each element. A selection of the main works are also shown on the annotated site map (section 4). The proposals are intended to continue the informal nature of Great Hollands whilst providing easy access and information at Great Hollands. The proposed works are as follows:

3.1 Information and Interpretation

- Small site signs will be installed at key pedestrian entrances to identify the sites.
- New site sign, notice board and interpretive panel to be provided at the main site entrance including a new site map to highlight the connections between sites, with a range of routes marked.
- Fingerposts linking the site to other recreation areas and providing a clearly marked route within the more informal areas of open space. Fingerposts will also link the SANG with adjacent areas and other Public Rights of Way in the local area.
- A way-marked route to link Great Hollands with the TRL SANGS via a dedicated highway crossing will be provided and detailed on information boards in both the Great Hollands and TRL SANGS. The crossing will be signal controlled and is the safest and most direct route between Great Hollands and TRL SANGS. There will be no link to the nearby footpath. This shown indicatively on the site plan (section 4), but this will be connected in the most appropriate place once the TRL SANGS has been finalised.
- Site leaflet to promote use of the site and raise awareness of their suitability for visitors, particularly those with dogs. This will also highlight disabled access, biodiversity and archaeological aspects of the site. Distribution through libraries, the Look Out Discovery Centre and on the website will ensure a wide audience whilst marketing through estate agents will target new residents.

3.2 Access

- Main entrance: enhance main site entrance to ensure safe access and improve the visual impact
- Existing pedestrian entrances: Clearance around pedestrian entrances to improve visibility into the site and the provision of staggered entrances where these are onto roads.
- Paths: provide a surfaced circular route around the site.
- Improve capacity of the car park by resurfacing and line marking

3.3 Furniture

New site furniture will enhance visitors' use of the site as well as providing a more welcoming and attractive appearance to the area.

- New seating will be provided at strategic points around the site to allow visitors to enjoy the visual amenity of the site and also where rest points may be required.

- New bins will be installed at entrances. These will be combined litter and dog-waste bins in line with the Parks & Countryside Service's policy of using combined bins. Designs will be chosen so as to be in-keeping with the natural theme of the SANG.

3.4 Habitat Management

Vegetation works will be carried out in order to enhance the nature conservation interest of the site by creating a variety of vegetated areas and habitats for different species.

Vegetation clearance and management will also increase the safety and security of the site for users.

- Selective thinning of canopy pine trees to create glades and to allow regeneration of native broadleaved trees
- Clearance of Rhododendron from the understory to encourage regeneration of native shrub species by cutting and treating the resulting stumps
- Supplementary planting of native shrub species (such as holly, hawthorn, and field maple) to provide habitats for wildlife and screening of roads and development
- Management of bracken to reduce its dominance of the ground flora by cutting and spraying
- Enhance central ride and create glades to improve internal visibility by cutting the vegetation on rotation
- Sowing of woodland wildflower species to improve botanical diversity of ground flora
- Tree management to ensure safety of users on principal and secondary paths.
- Wildlife features such as bat boxes, bird boxes and log piles to be installed within different areas of the site to improve opportunities for biodiversity.

3.5 Implementation

3.5.1 Funding

Funding for the proposed works as costed in section 6 will come from new residential development within the Borough which is likely to have an adverse effect on the SPA, as set out in the TBHSPA SPD. This states that legal obligations under Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act will be entered into before a planning application is determined. A proportion of the total amount payable under this agreement will go towards open space enhancement measures and on-going management associated with these measures as detailed within this plan. These measures will ensure the site is suitable as an alternative to the SPA and will attract new residents away from the SPA.

3.5.2 Prioritising Works

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

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

The timing of works will relate to planning approvals and the availability of Section 106 and Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding.

3.5.3 Monitoring

ODPM Circular 05/2005 on Planning Obligations requires that planning obligations are implemented or enforced in an efficient and transparent way, in order to ensure that contributions are spent on their intended purpose and that the associated development contributes to the sustainability of the area. This will require monitoring by local planning authorities through the use of standardised systems to ensure that information on the

implementation of planning obligations is readily available to the local authority, developer and members of the public. Regular reports on the monitoring information will also be provided to the Thames Basin Heaths SPA Joint Strategic Partnership (JSPB).

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

A proportion of the funding obtained through the S106 agreement will provide resources to ensure the full package of avoidance and mitigation measures are monitored to ensure their continued effectiveness.

3.6 Consultation

This plan has been developed in consultation with Natural England. Work has been led by the Bracknell Forest Council Parks & Countryside Service including the Biodiversity Officer and Bracknell Town Council site managers.

3.7 Conclusion

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

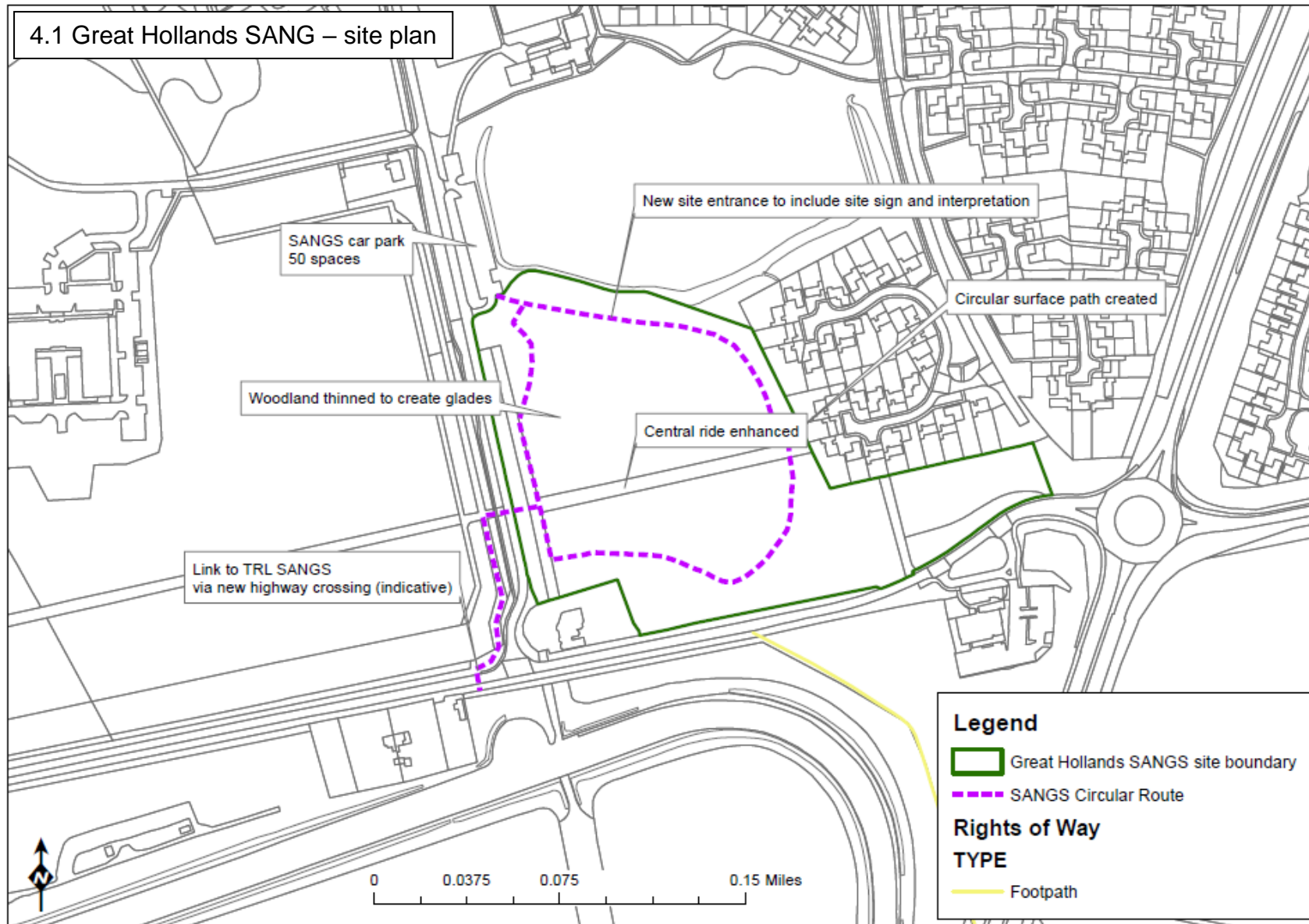
The works will enhance Great Hollands as an open space that provides a range of conditions for visitors of all abilities. The site will be promoted to local residents and new residents through targeted publicity as an attractive alternative to the Thames Basin Heaths SPA.

Alongside the capital programme, day to day management is needed to sustain these improvements and ensure that any increased use of the site continues to be attractive to visitors.

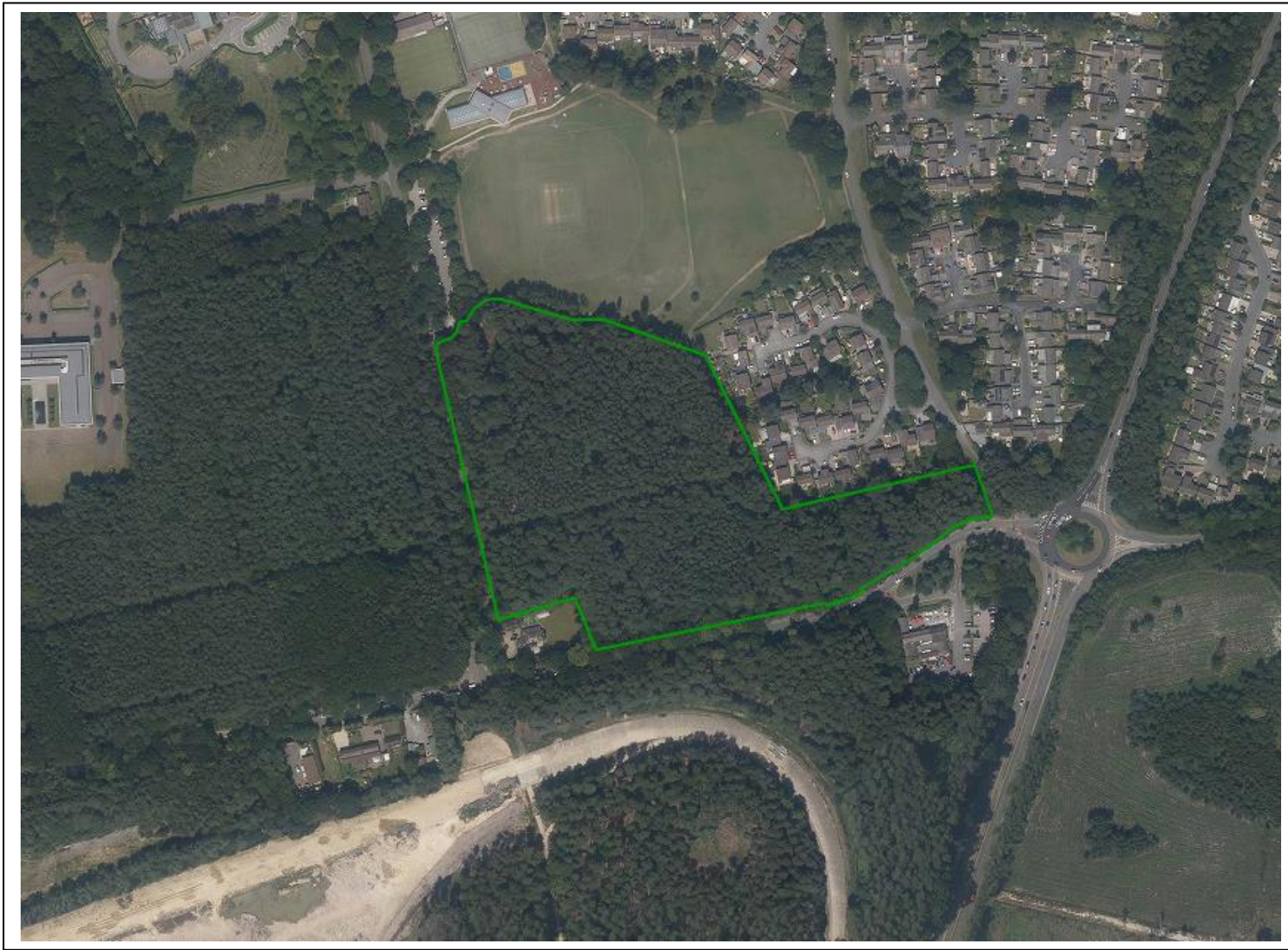
As a component of a wider package of measures the works detailed within this plan will avoid the adverse impacts of recreation arising from new residential development on the SPA and enable sustainable development within the Borough.

4 Site Plan

4.1 Site Plan – Great Hollands Proposed SPA Mitigation Works



4.2 Site Plan – Great Hollands (aerial)



5 SANGS site quality check list

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 site's suitability to meet SANGS criteria.

Must/should haves – these criteria are essential for all SANGS			
	Criteria	Current	Future
1	Parking on all sites larger than 4ha (unless the site is intended for use within 400m only)	Car park provides 60 spaces	Improve capacity through line marking and resurfacing
2	Circular walk of 2.3-2.5km	Currently many informal paths	Route of 0.8 km possible, but will link to TRL SANGS in the future
3	Car parks easily and safely accessible by car and clearly signposted	Great Hollands Recreation Ground sign posted from Nine Mile Ride	SANGS car park to be signed from South Road
4	Access points appropriate for particular visitor use the SANGS is intended to cater for	Pedestrian access points from adjacent recreation ground and Nine Mile Ride.	Future access into TRL SANGS
5	Safe access route on foot from nearest car park and/or footpath	Yes, safe access from car park	No change
6	Circular walk which starts and finishes at the car park	Yes, but short	Site will link in to circular walks via TRL SANGS
7	Perceived as safe – no tree and scrub cover along part of walking routes	Coniferous woodland with dense shrub cover. However, 100 % of visitors always or usually felt safe when visiting.	Reduce shrub to open views; create glades in woodland
8	Paths easily used and well maintained but mostly unsurfaced	Paths unsurfaced	Main circular route will be surfaced
9	Perceived as semi-natural with little intrusion of artificial structures	Yes	Inclusion of natural play equipment; ensure roads remain screened
10	If larger than 12 ha then a range of habitats should be present	n/a	n/a
11	Access unrestricted – plenty of space for dogs to exercise freely and safely off the lead	Yes	No change
12	No unpleasant intrusions (e.g. sewage treatment smells etc...)	None	No change

13	Clearly sign posted or advertised in some way	Signs from the road	Install new sign from South road and provide info board
14	Leaflets or website advertising their location to potential users (distributed to homes and made available at entrance points and car parks)	Mentioned on BTC website	New leaflet;
Desirable features			
	Criteria	Current	Future
15	Can dog owners take dogs from the car park to the SANGS safely off the lead	Yes	No change
16	Gently undulating topography	No	No change
17	Access points with signage outlining the layout of the SANGS and routes available to visitors	No	News signs and info board will highlight links to other sites
18	Naturalistic space with areas of open (non-wooded) countryside and areas of dense and scattered trees and shrubs. Provision of open water is desirable.	Coniferous forest	Habitat management will increase diversity and introduce open space into woodland
19	Focal point such as a view point or monument within the SANGS	None	No change

6 Costs

Works	Location	Unit Cost	Quantity	Total Cost	Priority
Information & Interpretation					
Site entrance signs					
main entrance	car park	350	1	£350	2
secondary entrances	South Road	300	1	£300	2
	Woodenhill	300	1	£300	2
	Nine Mile Ride	300	1	£300	2
Site notice board with combined interpretative panel	car park	3000	1	£3,400	2
Fingerposts	At key link locations	350	3	£1,050	1
Waymarkers		350	10	£3,500	1
Installation costs		allowance		£1,500	
Access					
Pedestrian entrance / path clearance	All entrances	300/day	3	£900	1
Path improvements	main circular route	35/m	220	£7,700	1
Car park improvements (white lines, knee rail)		allowance		£5,000	1
Furniture					
Bins (incl. installation)	Site entrances	350	3	£1,050	2
Staggered entrances	Pedestrian entrances	350	3	£1,050	2
Seating - benches (incl. installation)	Around site	350	3	£1,050	2
Installation costs		allowance		£1,000	
Habitat Management					
Canopy tree thinning		410/day	5	£2,050	1
Understorey scrub clearance		410/day	5	£2,050	1
Ride enhancement		allowance	1	£3,000	3
Bracken management		300/day	4	£1,200	2
Native shrub planting		allowance		£1,500	3
Woodland wildflower planting		allowance		£1,000	3
Wildlife features (bird boxes, bat boxes, etc)		allowance		£500	3
Tree management		410/day	2	£820	1
TOTAL COST				£40,570	

7 Glossary

Core Strategy	Document within the Local Development Framework which sets out
DPD	strategic development proposals until 2026
LWS	Local Wildlife Site
LNR	Local Nature Reserve
SANGS	Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space
SPA	Special Protection Area. Designated under the EU Directive 79/409 on the Conservation of Wild Birds
TBHSPA SPD	Thames Basin Heaths SPA Avoidance and Mitigation Supplementary Planning Document

8 References

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

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

Bracknell Forest Borough Council (2006) Core Strategy Development Plan Document. Available to download from www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk.

Bracknell Forest Partnership (2005) Bracknell Forest Sustainable Community Plan. Available to download from www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk.

Thames Basin Heaths SPA Avoidance and Mitigation SPD at <http://www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/thames-basin-heaths-spa-avoidance-and-mitigation-spd.pdf>