



Sandhurst Town Council



**Shepherd Meadows North SANG  
Open Space Enhancement Plan**

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

*December 2019*

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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 Borough Council is legally obliged to make sure that no adverse effect on the integrity of the SPA will arise from new development. As a result, the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area Supplementary Planning Document (SPA SPD) was approved in 2018. The SPA SPD identifies measures to avoid and mitigate adverse effects arising from proposed new residential development. The SPA SPD provides an integrated, holistic package of measures which includes both on-site and off-site measures to make the SPA less attractive in addition to making other areas of open space more attractive. A summary of the avoidance and mitigation measures, which will ensure that there will be no adverse effect upon the integrity of the SPA, can be found in section 3 of the document. These comprise:

**Provision of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG)** to attract people away from the SPA and hence reduce pressure on it.

**Access management and monitoring measures** on, and monitoring of, the SPA to reduce the effect of people who visit the SPA; and potential air quality mitigation measures.

Natural England has agreed that the implementation of this package of measures will ensure that harm to the SPA is avoided. The reasoning behind each of the measures, and their contribution towards avoiding harm to the SPA, is explained within the SPA SPD. This Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace Plan (SANG plan) deals solely with the implementation of one of the specific measures; enhancing an existing area open space.

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

## 1.2 Open Space Management Plans

This report comprises an open space management plan which outlines the enhancements required for the site known as 'Shepherd Meadows North SANG'. This will also enable avoidance and mitigation measures to be closely linked to contributions from specific developments as detailed in the SPA SPD.

## 1.3 Identification of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG)

The SPA SPD went through an extensive process to identify areas of open space as suitable alternatives to the SPA. The sites selected are in close enough proximity to warrant appropriate length walking routes, making each site more accessible as part of the wider greenspace network.

## 1.4 Shepherds meadow north SANG as an alternative to the SPA

On 28 March 2017 BFC undertook a site visit to Shepherd Meadows with Natural England. In the minutes of this meeting NE agreed in principle that there is potential to extend existing Shepherd Meadows SANG. A detailed proposal was sent to NE in the following months and in October 2017 NE agreed to this. Within this OSEP the agreed extension area is to be referred to as Shepherd Meadow North SANG and managed with links to the existing Shepherd Meadows SANG.

The extension to Shepherd Meadows SANG will increase the amount of strategic SANG available to developments of 10 or more dwellings within its catchment area (5km) and

developments of 9 or less dwellings further afield. The site is currently open to the public and therefore a visitor survey was carried out on 24 – 29 June 2017 in order to work out discounted SANG capacity (see section 2.3). Following this it was agreed with Natural England that the SANG capacity available (based on the minimum 8ha per 1000 new residents SANG standard) is 1,036 persons which is equivalent to approximately 448 dwellings or 8.29ha of SANG (based on the dwelling occupancy in Bracknell Forest of 2.31 person per dwelling).

The SANGS assessment checklist is used in section 5 to demonstrate how the Shepherd Meadows North SANG is suitable as an alternative to the SPA and how enhancements will enable it's use as such. As Seeby's meadow and Seeby's Copse are local wildlife sites (LWS) and part of Blackwater meadow is designated as a site of special scientific interest (SSSI) special attention will be given to ensuring that the provision for increased visitor use will include opportunities to enhance the ecological value of the site.

## **2 Site Management Statement**

### **2.1 Description**

#### **2.1.1 Introduction**

The SANG comprises of four notifiable habitat features known as Seeby's Copse, Seeby's Meadow, Sandhurst Memorial Park Pond and Blackwater Meadow. These areas are immediately adjacent to one another and have no formal boundary, allowing free public access between them.

#### **2.1.2 Location**

The proposed SANG is located at the western end of the existing Shepherd Meadows SANG in the south eastern corner of Bracknell borough, within the parish of Sandhurst.

OS grid reference: SU843 610

Area:

- Seeby's Copse – 2.23ha
- Seeby's Meadow – 3.6ha
- Sandhurst Memorial Park Pond – 1.55ha
- Blackwater Meadow – 2.61ha
- **Total SANG area** (excluding pond area as agreed with NE) – **8.5ha**

#### **2.1.3 Adjacent land**

The south of the site is bounded by the Reading to Gatwick railway line with a small section in the South-eastern corner bounding the Berkshire-Hampshire county boundary. To the east is the existing SANG of Shepherd Meadows. Along the western boundary is the open space known as Sandhurst Memorial Park with the north-eastern boundary meeting the Marshall Road (A321).

#### **2.1.4 Access**

Visitors may access the site through car parks at both the existing Shepherd Meadows SANG (off of Marshall road) as well as within Sandhurst Memorial Park (off of Yorktown road).

Pedestrian access is noted through several pathways within Sandhurst Memorial Park with additional pedestrian access across a footbridge over the railway line leading to the large residential area in Frogmore, Yateley.

### **2.1.5 Geology and Soils**

Mainly sandy and loamy drifts of Swanwick series, overlaying alluvium and river gravels. Soils are sandier and drier to the north where the profile is a good sandy loam, but less free draining to the south and a sandy clay in the bottom meadow.

### **2.1.6 Topography**

As part of a flood plain, the land is very flat and lies just below the 60m contour line. Any gradient slopes towards the river and from west to east.

### **2.1.7 Drainage and flooding**

Due to the nature of the flood plain, much of the site adjacent the river is susceptible to seasonal flooding however, a series of open ditches and culverts exist to retain water.

### **2.1.8 Wildlife and biodiversity**

Seeby's meadow and Blackwater meadow are predominantly composed of neutral semi-improved grassland (lowland meadow) with a mosaic of more marshy areas prevalent in Rushes and Sedges, stands of Reed Sweet-Grass and Red Canary-Grass.

The drier areas incorporate grasses including Yorkshire Fog, Creeping Bent, Meadow Foxtail, False-Oak Grass and Floating Sweet-Grass, with herbs including Lesser Stitchwort, Meadow Vetchling, Marsh Bedstraw, Common Sorrel and Red Clover. In wetter areas, Sharp-Flowered Rush, Jointed Rush and Greater Bird's-Foot Trefoil are prevalent, and there are patches of Brown Sedge and Common Sedge along with small areas of Common Spike-Rush and Carnation Sedge.

The site also includes areas of scrub woodland, which grade into 'wet woodland' in places. The canopy species in this area are generally Alder, Oak and Willows, with an understory of Hazel, Hawthorn and Holly. The ground cover is largely confined to Common Nettle, Ivy and Bramble, with the wetter areas containing substantial amount of Remote Sedge, alongside Yellow Iris and Reed Canary-grass.

Seeby's Copse is a woodland block where the canopy is predominately Alder, which towards the north, grades to Oak and Ash where the structure becomes denser with scrub and young trees. The understorey consists of previously coppiced Hazel. The woodland has both affinities to a W6/7 and W10 NVC communities. Eighteen ancient woodland indicators have been recorded and include Wood Anemone, Wood Sorrel, Pignut, Yellow Pimpernel and Remote Sedge. Previous Alder coppicing has opened up areas where a variety of wetland species are present and include Bugle, Yellow Loosestrife, Ragged Robin, Lesser Spearwort, Common Valerian and Greater Bird's-Foot Trefoil.

### **2.1.9 Recreational uses and routes**

Shepherd Meadows and Sandhurst Memorial Park are used by the local community for a range of recreational activities. Shepherd Meadows including the extension area are regularly used by local dog walkers and wildlife enthusiasts, where this is currently catered for by a network of informal and formal pathways.

The Memorial Park offers a children's play area, multi-sport area, skate park, along with other on-site facilities ranging from the Coffee Spot to the Community Hall, while the presence of the Police Point and Town Council offices ensure that the site is a focus for local people. Formal recreation is focused at the Sandhurst Memorial Park site, through its football and cricket pitches, with the site being home to numerous local sports and other clubs.

## **2.2 Legal and Planning Framework**

### **2.2.1 Land Ownership and Management**

The majority of the area is owned and managed by Sandhurst Town Council, with the exception of the following;

- Blackwater Reach Meadow is owned by Sandhurst Town Council with some management activities carried out by Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership.
- Seeby's Meadow is owned by Bracknell Forest Council and leased to Sandhurst Town Council, although meadow cuts for the area are arranged by Bracknell Forest Council's Parks & Countryside Team.

It is agreed, following a site visit on the 20<sup>th</sup> August 2019 that STC, as land managers will continue to manage and maintain the site following SANG enhancements. BFC will be utilised in a project management capacity using their SANG enhancement experience to assist with the implementation of the agreed enhancements to progress the site as a suitable SANG. Furthermore BFC as land managers of the existing Shepherd Meadows SANG will be available to ensure and advise enhancements are effective as an extension to the existing SANG.

### **2.2.2 Byelaws**

There are a series of byelaws made under sections 12 and 15 of the Open Spaces Act 1906.

### **2.2.3 Designations**

Seeby's Meadow along with the western section of Blackwater Meadow are noted as Local Wildlife Sites (LWS), where the eastern section of Blackwater Meadow forms part of the Blackwater valley SSSI.

Seeby's Copse is noted as ancient & semi natural woodland and is a LWS. The copse also has a blanket Tree Preservation Order (TPO 114) covering the woodland block.

## **2.3 Resource Evaluation**

The site is of high conservation importance as reflected by the various designations where the river followed by nature/wildlife are considered as key features. The development through the more 'wilder' sections of the extension area will further enhance visitor experience.

Visitor surveys were carried out as part of the Shepherd Meadows —proposed SANG extension during June and July 2017.

### **Visitor Usage**

- The annual visit projection for the new SANG area alone is 4,400
- The SANG area is mainly used for exercising the dog (60%) followed by walking (33%) with smaller numbers using the site for cycling (3%) and visiting the playarea within Sandhurst Memorial Park (13%).
- More than 60% of visitors frequent the site either daily or 2-3 times a week, with most people spending an hour on the site (37%).
- 99% of visitors felt safe within the open space.
- 50% of visitors travelled to site by foot, 46% by car and 4% by bike. 81% spend less than 10min travelling.

## **2.4 Constraints and Issues**

- Sensitive visitor management will be required to protect the valuable habitats designated as LWS and SSSI.
- Dog fouling may be an issue in places and would require action to educate users.
- Seasonal waterlogging may restrict management activity and options for works.

## **2.5 Management Objectives**

The following provide the overarching, existing management objectives for the sites. These are in addition to the primary objective of this Open Space 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 Sustainable Community Strategy 2008-2014**

- Priority 1a – Opportunities for everyone
- Priority 2a – Sustainable development
- Priority 2b - Protecting the environment
- Priority 2c – Travelling around the Borough
- Priority 3b – Enjoying life
- Priority 3c – Being & feeling safer

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

- To provide a high quality recreation resource.
- To manage and enhance the biodiversity and landscape value of the site
- To develop the sites strategic importance within the context of the developing BFBC Greenspace Strategy and SPA Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy (2018).

## **2.6 Management Strategies**

These strategies are taken from those set out in the Sandhurst Memorial Park management plan:

- To provide a high quality, accessible and inclusive site for informal and formal recreation.
- To provide a variety of resources and facilities for informal and formal recreation and community use with best value in mind.
- To maintain the site landscape and facilities in a sustainable manner to the highest possible standards.
- To participate in ongoing and productive communication with the community and wider public regarding the site, its management and future development.
- To form partnerships and agreements with neighbouring and other organisations in order to draw upon their expertise and maximise the site's potential.
- Ongoing maintenance and upkeep of site, recreational areas, wildlife habitats and facilities.

### **3 Site Proposals for SPA Mitigation**

As the site is currently available for use enhancement works will be completed in separate stages, initially looking to improve access and therefore allowing affective use of the SANG before fulfilling further enhancements. This would enable the granting of planning permission for residential development to be staged in parallel to incremental increases in visitor use ensuring the amount of housing permitted does not exceed the capacity of the SANG to mitigate its effects on the SPA.

The measures within this plan were identified by using the Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space (SANG) assessment checklist included 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 sites. 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 sites' natural qualities.

Enhancements incorporated within this plan are designed to provide a semi-natural, semi-wooded landscape providing the relative wildness seen as desirable by visitors. Habitat improvements will be provided to maintain an enhanced visitor experience as well as the wildlife value of the site. This is done through a waymarked route as well as variation in access improvements such as boardwalks, surfaced and unsurfaced paths. Particular sensitivity is to be taken within the LWS and SSSI as to reduce unnecessary disturbance and provide a suitable wildlife habitat alongside increased visitor usage. The habitat improvements laid out in section 3.4 and table 6 are seen as a minimum to enhance the site to SANG standard in line with the quality guidelines set out in section 5, where any further biodiversity improvements are to be considered additional to SANG requirements, providing biodiversity net gain.

The attached table in section 6 lists these works and provides a breakdown of the costs of each element. A selection of the main works is also shown on the annotated site map. The proposals are intended to continue the informal nature of the Shepherd Meadows North SANG whilst providing easy access and information appropriate to the site. The proposed works are as follows:

### **3.1 Information and Interpretation**

- **Fingerposts** directing site users around the SANG will be provided at all entrances and will link to the existing Shepherd Meadows SANG.
- **New interpretation boards** will be installed at the main entrance to the SANG as well as further habitat/wildlife interpretation around the site.
- The existing **SANG leaflet** for Shepherd Meadows will be updated to include the proposed extension.

### **3.2 Access**

- Current entrances/access points into the SANG will be 'opened' up to better encourage site visitors and link through to the existing Shepherd Meadows SANG.
- A long boardwalk is to be installed provided safe access across a seasonally very wet section of woodland. A boardwalk will have less impact to site vegetation than a surfaced path as well as provide a pleasant feature to meander around the woodland.
- A number of small culvert crossings will be enhanced with improved new bridges.
- Further path improvements will be provided across wet/muddy sections and better define the walking route.

### **3.3 Furniture**

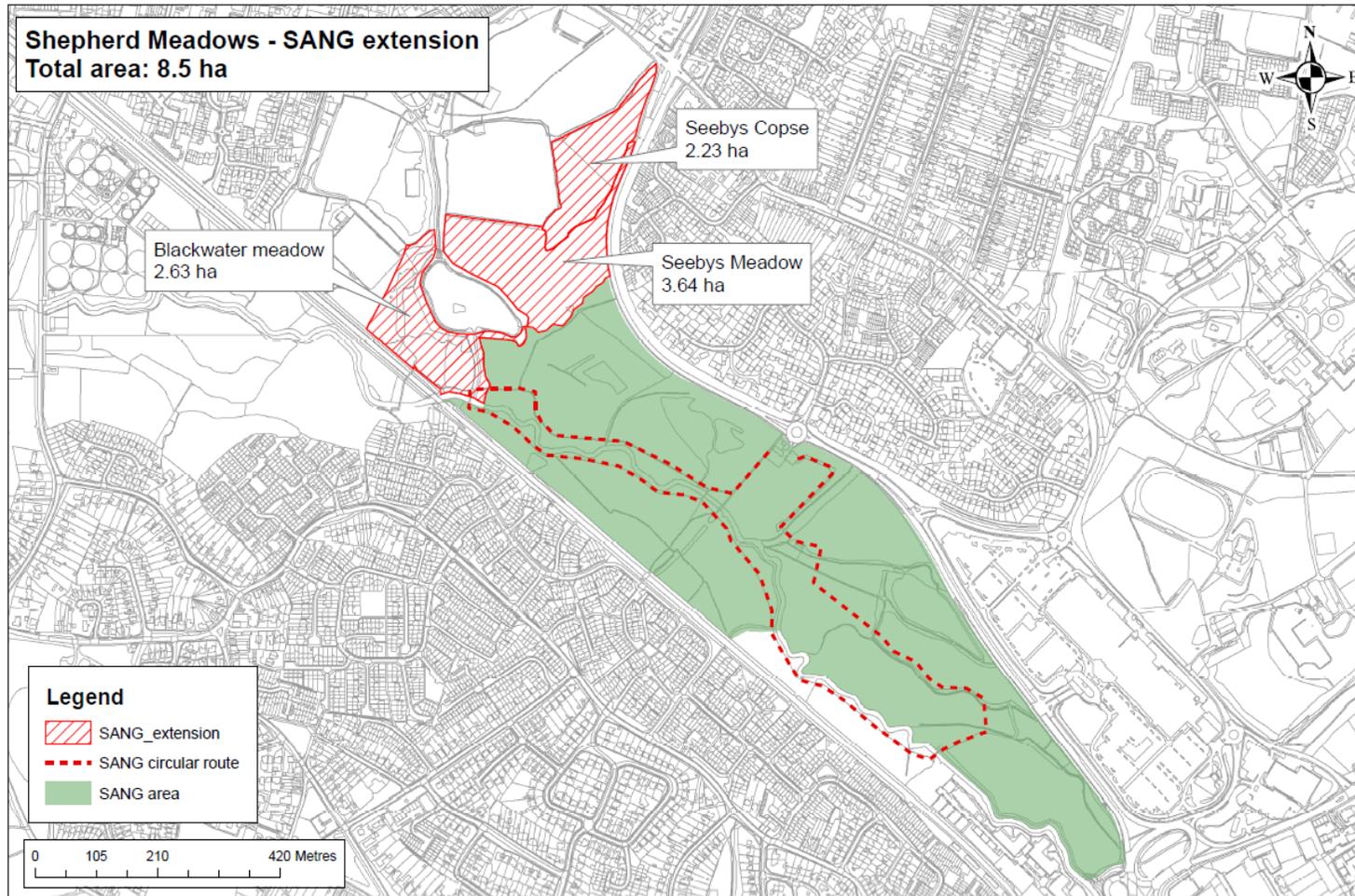
- Furniture will include seating at strategic points around the SANG, an archway sculpture over the main entrance and platform to pond dip and view the small pond.

### **3.4 Habitat Management**

- Coppicing within the LWS of Seeby's Copse will be planned over several years to provide a suitable age structure to the woodland and increase light levels to ground flora. Trees will be re-stocked where necessary.
- Encroaching scrub will be selectively cleared around both Seeby's and Blackwater Meadows enhancing the important wet meadows.
- The degraded small pond will be greatly improved provided an additional wildlife area and focal point to the SANG.
- Ecological surveys will ensure a better understand of site wildlife and assist monitoring.

## 4 Site Plan

### 4.1 Site Plan – Shepherd meadows and Shepherd Meadows North SANG extension





## 5 Quality - SANGs Criteria Checklist Extension

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 based on Natural England guidance.

	Criteria	Current	Future
<b>Must/should haves – criteria essential for SANGs</b>			
1	Parking on all sites larger than 4 Ha (unless the site is intended for use within 400m only).	The extension will use 2 formal car parks, at Sandhurst Memorial Park and the existing Shepherd Meadows SANG car park off of Marshall road.	Enhancements include improved links and signage from car parks.
2	Circular walk of 2.3-2.5km	Shepherd Meadows SANG counts with a circular walk (2.6km) and further secondary paths and links to 23km route along Blackwater Valley. The extension counts linking paths and connections to Shepherd Meadows SANG.	New signage; improve links with Shepherd Meadows SANG.
3	Car parks must be easily and safely accessible by car and should be clearly signposted.	All the improvements to the car park were made during the previous plan period.	N/A

4	Access points appropriate for particular visitor use the SANG is intended to cater for.	The extension counts with 8 pedestrian entry points.	Main entrance points to be upgraded to enhance attractiveness and accessibility.
5	Safe route of access on foot from the nearest car park and/or footpath/s.	Paths connect Shepherd Meadows SANG with extension.	The extension will be appropriately linked with improved footpaths and boardwalks where needed. The extension will be indicated from the car parks with new fingerposts and updated interpretation panel.
6	Circular walk which starts and finishes at the car park.	The extension will link to the existing Shepherd Meadows SANG increasing the walking route to/from the car park	Improved links, signage and information on routes from car park into and around the new site.
7	Perceived as safe – no tree scrub cover along part of walking routes	Open views through site in grassland areas. Damaged area in Seebys Copse caused by overnight visit and fire making.	Management of shrub and overgrown trees with widening of main route through woodland; clearance and restoration of area used to make fires overnight. Enhancement of the route alongside railway line in Blackwater Meadows. Regular inspections by onsite staff.

8	Paths must be easily used and well maintained, but mostly unsurfaced.	Mix of surfaced and unsurfaced paths.	In meadow areas, main path to be mowed. Boardwalk to be installed in muddy areas in Seebys Copse, otherwise left as natural. Path alongside Northern drain in Seebys Meadow to be cleared of bramble.
9	Perceived as semi-natural spaces with little intrusion of artificial structures.	Minimal way-marking and site furniture.	Some benches and signage to be added to enhance visitor experience but remain in-keeping with environment.
10	If larger than 12Ha then a range of habitats should be present.	Large areas of grassland, hedgerows, trees and woodland. The river and pond form a key feature.	Experiences will be enhanced through interpretive material and habitat enhancements.
11	Access unrestricted - plenty of space for dogs to exercise freely and safely off the lead.	Most paths are largely unhindered; Meadow areas provide a good area of dogs off lead.	Boundary between Shepherd Meadows SANG and extension to be smooth and unrestricted.
12	No unpleasant intrusions (e.g. sewage treatment works, smells etc.).	No unpleasant intrusions.	No unpleasant intrusions.

13	SANGS must be clearly signposted or advertised in some way.	Road sign & site entrance signs. Interpretive panels at car park. Site webpage. Site leaflet	All elements to be updated with new SANG details and map
14	Leaflets or websites advertising their location to potential users (distributed to new homes in the area and at entrance points and car parks).	Site webpage and leaflet available to download online (joint with Sandhurst Memorial Park).	BFC Webpage updated with site information and news. Also promoted through the Thames Basin Heaths Partnership website.
<b>Desirable features</b>			
15	Can dog owners take dogs from the car park to SANGs safely off the lead.	Links and signage from car park into site were improved during the previous plan period	The extension land is adjacent to Shepherd Meadows SANG; no further improvements are needed.
16	Gently undulating topography.	Shepherd Meadows SANG already counts with areas with some undulating topography.	N/A
17	Access points with signage outlining the layout of the SANG and routes available to visitors.	Minimal site interpretation. Main entrance points do not provide information about routes.	New interpretive panels and directional fingerposts and waymarkers around site.

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.	Mix of large areas of open space, meadows, hedgerows and woodland. Balancing pond between Seebys Meadows and Blackwater Meadow.	Habitat enhancement works to improve wildlife and landscape value. Management of trees and shrub within the meadows. Management of Seebys Copse to recover vegetation structure and promotion of ground flora through coppicing.
19	Focal point such as a view point or monument within the SANGS.	The balancing pond provides a central focus for the extension site leading walks around it. Open meadow areas make possible appreciating the landscape.	Vegetation clearance to enhance views in Blackwater Meadow.

## 6 Costs

Works	Location	Unit Cost	Quantity	Total Cost
<b>Information &amp; Interpretation</b>				
Interpretative panel	Interpretation at main entrance	£2,500	1	£2,500
	Update car park interpretation panel	£500	1	£500
	Meadow interpretation	£2,500	1	£2,500
	Update/add relevant interp to existing SANG	£2,500	2	£5,000
Fingerposts	Car park	£150	2	£300
	Alongside route	£150	5	£750
Revised SANG leaflet	N/A	Allowance	15,000	£2,000
<b>Total</b>				<b>£13,550</b>
<b>Access</b>				
Pedestrian entrance/path clearance	All entrances	£350/day	5 days	£1,750
	Links with main Shepherd Meadows SANG	£350/day	2 days	£700
Boardwalk	Woodland	£300/ m	100m	£30,000
Path improvements	Main route	£75/m	150m	£11,250
Ditch crossings	Over culverts	£1,000	3	£3,000
<b>Total</b>				<b>£46,700</b>
<b>Furniture</b>				
Benches (incl installation)	(Seeby's copse-meadow, Blackwater meadow)	£400	2	£800
Sculpture feature	Archway over main entranceway			£3,500
Pond platform	Blackwater meadow			£3,000
<b>Total</b>				<b>£7,300</b>
<b>Habitat Management</b>				
Coppicing	Seeby's Copse	£300/day	15 days	£4,500
Tree planting	Seeby's Copse / Blackwater meadow	£330/day	3 days	£990
Scrub management	Seeby's meadow / Blackwater meadow	£300/day	5 days	£1,500
Copse restoration and management	Seebys Copse	£300/day	10 days	£3,000

Wildlife features (bird boxes, bat boxes, etc)	Across site	allowance	allowance	£500
Pond feature	Blackwater meadow	Allowance	allowance	£5,000
Ecological surveys	Across site			£3,000
<b>Total</b>				<b>£18,490</b>
<b>Total</b>				<b>£86,040</b>
<b>Total including inflation allowance</b>	<b>In order to accommodate inflation for enhancement work an inflation calculator is incorporated based on anticipated life of the project, spending profile and rates of inflation</b>			<b>£97,517.93</b>

## 7.0 Glossary

<b>LNR</b>	Local Nature Reserve
<b>LWS</b>	Local Wildlife Site
<b>SANG</b>	Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace. (plural SANGs)
<b>SPA</b>	Special Protection Area. Designated under the EU Directive 79/409 of the Conservation of Wild Birds.
<b>SPA SPD</b>	Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area Supplementary Planning Document.
<b>TPO</b>	Tree Preservation Order
<b>SSSI</b>	Site of Special Scientific Interest

## 8.0 References

Shepherd Meadows Open Space Management SANG Plan (July 2009)  
Sandhurst Memorial Park and Shepherd Meadows site management plan (2018-2027)  
Bracknell Forest Borough Council (2018) Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area Supplementary Planning Document (SPA SPD). \*  
Shepherd Meadows (north) Local Wildlife Survey Report (2016)

\*Documents available to download from [www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk](http://www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk).