



Strategic Planning & Environment

Overview & Scrutiny

Agenda

WEDNESDAY 21 SEPTEMBER 2022 AT 7.30 PM

Council Chamber, The Forum

The Councillors listed below are requested to attend the above meeting, on the day and at the time and place stated, to consider the business set out in this agenda.

Membership

Councillor Beauchamp	Councillor Stevens
Councillor England	Councillor R Sutton
Councillor Foster	Councillor Taylor
Councillor Harden (Chairman)	Councillor Timmis
Councillor P Hearn	Councillor Wilkie
Councillor Riddick	Councillor C Wyatt-Lowe
Councillor Rogers (Vice-Chairman)	

For further information, please contact Corporate and Democratic Support or 01442 228209

AGENDA

- 1. MINUTES** (Pages 3 - 12)
To agree the minutes of the previous meeting.
- 2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**
To receive any apologies for absence.
- 3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**
To receive any declarations of interest.
- 4. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**
- 5. CONSIDERATION OF ANY MATTER REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE IN RELATION TO CALL-IN**
- 6. ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES PERFORMANCE REPORT Q1** (Pages 13 - 17)

7. **PLANNING, DEVELOPMENT AND REGENERATION PERFORMANCE REPORT Q1**
(Pages 18 - 28)
8. **CHILTERN'S BEECHWOOD MITIGATION STRATEGY** (Pages 29 - 71)
9. **WORK PROGRAMME** (Pages 72 - 75)

Dacorum Borough Council

Strategic Planning and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee

06 July 2022

Present:

Councillors

Neil Harden (Chair)
Mark Rogers (Vice-Chair)
Nigel Taylor
Anne Foster
Garrick Stevens
Adrian England
Penny Hearn
Stewart Riddick
Sheron Wilkie

Alan Anderson

Officers

Alex Robinson – Assistant Director Planning
Richard LeBrun – Assistant Director Neighbourhood Delivery
Philip Stanley – Head of Development Management
Fiona Jump - Head of Finance
Laura Wood – Joint Strategic Lead
Chris Outtersides – Joint Strategic Plan Director

APOLOGIES:

Cllr Sutton
Cllr Beauchamp
Cllr Timmis
Cllr Wyatt-Lowe

Meeting start: 19:30

1. Minutes of the last meeting

Cllr England noted that he had raised some points regarding accuracy and requested that the Chair consider the minutes as not accurate.

Cllr Harden commented that the minutes were a summary of the discussion and if Cllr England was concerned that information to him from officers was not accurate then this could be looked into, but that he was comfortable with how the minutes were recorded.

Cllr England stated that his concerns were not semantic and that a report of the meeting should accurately reflect the meeting. Cllr England accepted that the minutes did not need to be verbatim and that he had outlined in an email how it was not accurate.

Cllr Harden confirmed that he would discuss this further with Cllr England, with colleague support, regarding his concerns separately.

Cllr England stated that they could not approve the minutes until they had been discussed as his concerns were substantive. It was noted that a point was amended regarding CThorpe's comment on the grass cutting time, that 8 weeks was mentioned and that it was updated to note that they do not often go over 6 weeks.

Cllr Harden advised that the confirmation of the minutes would be held until a further discussion had been held with Cllr England to clarify his concerns. The minutes would then be approved at the next meeting.

2. Apologies for absence

Apologies were noted from Cllrs Sutton, Beauchamp, Wyatt-Lowe & Timmis.

3. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

4. Public participation

There was no public participation.

5. Consideration of any matter referred to the Committee in relation to Call-In

No matters had been referred.

6. South West Herts Joint Strategic Plan

ARobinson began by introducing COuttersides and LWood and noted that the report was to consider (1) the statement of community involvement and (2) the regulation 18 consultation document. ARobinson took the report as read and highlighted some items of note. ARobinson advised that a briefing session was held last week where LWood took members through the background of the JSP. ARobinson confirmed that the

Committee was being asked to inform Cabinet of its views on the 2 documents and that, due to timescales, the report will go to Cabinet on 12th July. ARobinson asked to capture feedback of the Committee to then report back to Cabinet next week.

COuttersides commented on the papers and summarised some key issues. The 2 reports have also gone through the other Hertfordshire authorities in parallel with 16 consecutive meetings that commenced 3 months ago, and the reports and recommendations are going through all other partner authorities. COuttersides added that the Regulation 18 plan is a high-level visions and objectives plan and is not looking at growth scenarios, housing options or green belt at this stage. A detailed engagement plan has been set up to supplement the consultation to ensure there is clear messaging on what the JSP is and isn't.

Cllr England stated that he supported the JSP as it was a move out of silos. Cllr England commented that it's important that some level of the local plan process should look at the dynamic of being located next to London as this affects areas such as housing numbers and employment. Cllr England described the area as a town of two cities given that they have people who live in the area who work in London and then others who live and work in the local area who earn less. ARobinson acknowledged the comments, noting that the JSP gives them an opportunity to step back and look holistically across the area and recognise that London is next to the wider JSP boundary. ARobinson confirmed that looking at this is part of the JSP's broader horizon and won't be lost in either this or future consultations. COuttersides added that the JSP will allow them to speak to the GLA as a group of authorities and will give them a bigger voice in discussions. Cllr Anderson advised that the Chair of the Hertfordshire Infrastructure Planning Partnership is taking part in London planning meetings and representing Hertfordshire.

Cllr Foster requested that the report be provided in a printer-friendly version, to which COuttersides confirmed they would be producing both PDF and hard copies of the report. Cllr Foster noted the use of social media and asked which platforms would be used and how they would intend to reach audiences that don't follow the council or JSP. COuttersides noted previous engagement work in South West Herts in 2020 using Facebook and Instagram to reach 18-25 year olds and hard-to-reach groups, which was particularly successful. The aim was to make questions more attractive to people who didn't have enough time to respond to questions and they managed to reach 15k people across South West Herts. Similar work will also be done as part of the new engagement. The Regulation 18 consultation will be run on the website alongside more targeted engagement to engage the 18-25 and harder-to-reach demographics, using both social media and simplified versions of the consultation questions to then feed back into the consultation. A youth forum of around 15-20 18- to 25-year-olds has also been set up to test ideas, questions, imagery and videos to ensure that they are successful in reaching this group.

Cllr Foster asked if a text-only version of the document would be available. COuttersides stated that this should be possible.

Cllr Stevens requested that documents be circulated further in advance in future to allow councillors more time to read and prepare for discussions. Cllr Harden agreed, adding that they could wait for the body of the report, but that any associated documents would be appreciated in advance. ARobinson confirmed that they would release information sooner where possible, adding that the local plan was provided in advance. ARobinson

continued that they had used the member briefing to break down the information and that he recognised there was a lot of information to digest so would therefore look to provide this at least 2 weeks in advance in future.

Cllr Riddick referred to the risk implications under points 19.1 and 19.2 of the report, noting that it states that the Council or another participating council not approving the statement of the community of involvement or the JSP realising its potential is cited as one of the main risks. Cllr Riddick asked if this meant that one council could hold everyone back or if they would take a majority. COuttersides advised that if one council says no then they won't go to consultation with the success of the JSP relying on each individual authority giving their approval in accordance. Should Dacorum, or any other council, decide not to support the JSP then it won't go to consultation. COuttersides noted that this was a large risk and that councils have the ultimate veto at any stage of the process. Cllr Riddick summarised that complete unanimity was required.

Cllr Harden asked if any concerns had been raised from any other scrutiny committees. LWood confirmed that Dacorum is the only scrutiny they have been through, though similar questions as those raised tonight have been raised at other council briefings. LWood advised that all other councils so far have agreed with the JSP.

Cllr Anderson noted that around 35 revisions have taken place so far and he highlighted the work that had gone into creating a balanced document.

Cllr Wilkie thanked the team for the work put into creating the document, stating that she broadly commended the JSP and model of working across the individual parties. Cllr Wilkie referred to pages 55 and 56 of the report, noting that it says the consultation will be web and social media based, and asked what plans have been made for the older demographic. Cllr Wilkie agreed with comments on the document size, stating that this supports the need to bring the task group back as this would allow the Committee to see some documents as the report was put together. COuttersides first addressed the question on communication, stating that the social media element is a separate part of the consultation and that the majority of the consultation will be run through the website alongside virtual briefings and the preparation of packs for constituent authorities to hold in-person sessions if required. COuttersides also noted that the consultation dates have been updated and have been delayed to commence from the beginning of September, so as not to coincide with the school summer holidays, and will still run for 8 weeks.

Cllr England commented on community involvement and asked if they could get this part of the document into schools. Cllr England also asked how non-parish areas would be involved, and what number of responses they were targeting as a successful response. On schools, COuttersides confirmed he would be meeting with King Langley Primary School next week and that they are happy to reach out to as many schools as possible as this is a key part of their engagement, adding that he was looking to get some people from King Langley as part of the youth group going forward. On non-parish areas, COuttersides confirmed that they are working with all comms teams to highlight which groups need to be consulted and that the comms engagement plan could be shared, and virtual briefings can also be used to reach as many people as possible. On the question regarding responses, ARobinson commented that response rates tends to be higher with virtual consultations compared to more traditional consultations, and that they hoped the approach would ensure a wider reach across the communities.

Cllr Hearn asked how many officers would be involved in the work and what the level of commitment would be. ARobinson noted that there is a separate JSP team and a wider officer group represented by all districts who provide support into the JSP process, and comms officers in Dacorum are helping assist the communication strategy. ARobinson acknowledged there would be an additional draw on officer time as the JSP continues, though the long-term benefits of the JSP outweigh the officer resource required. Whilst resources are limited, the long-term benefits justify their use.

Cllr Wilkie noted the mention of the HRA in the document and that during the local plan the need for a development exclusion zone had emerged. Cllr Wilkie asked for further clarification of this point given the impact that the HRA had. ARobinson advised that the HRA process will be followed through as the JSP develops given that pressures on the Chilterns will not go away any time soon and officers are working on a management plan. The JSP will need to take into account any pressures and any mitigation strategies will need to be reflected in the plan. ARobinson reassured members that the JSP will continue to consider the impacts on the Chilterns Beechwoods and they would ensure the appropriate mitigation measures are in place.

The Committee noted both recommendations as outlined on page 16 of the report.

7. Provisional outturn report

FJump provided an overview of the report, noting that the report was subject to final movements on the Council's reserves and is also subject to the conclusion of the external audit process, which is likely to conclude by the end of September. FJump reported a surplus of £0.565m and that a recommendation will be taken to Cabinet to transfer the surplus to a newly created reserve, and if approved, the reserve will be named 'the inflationary pressures reserve'. The purpose of the reserve is to help the Council mitigate any unexpected in-year inflationary pressures. FJump advised that the general fund positions includes a draw down from the Council's economic recovery reserve, which was set up at the start of the pandemic to cover Covid-related pressures. FJump noted an underspend of £66k and that there were more significant variances in this position, including a more favourable variance to budget from gate fees on recycling. Against strategic planning and the general fund capital budget, there has been further slippage of around £0.335m, which has been primarily driven by delays in the delivery of the fleet as part of the fleet replacement programme. There are also pressures of £0.163m on the schemes, driven largely by expenditure on wheeled bins during the year.

Cllr Wilkie agreed with the set up of the inflationary reserve fund. Cllr Wilkie noted concerns around staff shortages and wage increases and asked if the inflationary reserve fund will help with increasing salaries to attract more staff. FJump confirmed that, as part of their medium-term financial planning, salary increases have been built in, while the inflationary reserves fund may also be available to help meet these pressures. FJump stated that this could be discussed further with HR and additional updates could be provided.

The Committee noted the report.

8. Annual Planning Enforcement Report

PStanley presented the report, noting that the purpose was to provide an update on the planning enforcement service over the last 12 months and to provide an update on the March 2022 planning enforcement audit and the service's response to the control issues raised. PStanley noted the successes highlighted in the report and noted that there are now 145 fewer live enforcement cases compared to this time last year and the corporate performance for first site visits is improving, although it is failing to meet the 100% target. PStanley advised that there are a number of challenges, including staff vacancies as there is no permanent assistant team leader and they have been unable to recruit the 1-year enforcement officer position. The audit raised a number of control issues and PStanley noted the appended management action plan. The enforcement team can't deal with all cases at the same time and therefore a focus is required.

PStanley outlined the 3 areas of focus as (1) dealing with new cases and close new cases as quickly as possible, (2) to deal with older cases in a systematic way with the aim in 2022 to look at 4 calendar years to ensure that enforcement matters don't become immune to enforcement action by virtue of the passage of time, and (3) to focus on the matters causing significant harm.

Cllr Riddick referred to item 3 on page 261 of the report, noting that it suggests a more recent trend of a significant increase in live enforcement cases was being disguised and asked what is being disguised. PStanley explained that the number of enforcement cases has increased over the last 10 years, though there has been a significant decrease in the last 12 months, and that the comment was highlighting that the trend in the last 12 months doesn't negate the overall increase in cases. Cllr Riddick commented that the report notes that the amount of live cases has more than doubled since 2014 and that this suggests more cases are coming in than are being closed. PStanley confirmed that they have closed more than they have received in the last 12 months due to receiving fewer cases and the results of the 400 plan. PStanley advised that if numbers return to 2018-19 levels then there may be a return to the team being able to handle all cases if they continue at current staffing levels.

Cllr Harden asked that the Committee's praise be passed onto the team.

Cllr Harden noted that the 400 plan is working and that the team had also benefitted from a reduction in cases coming in, and asked if they would now be looking at a 250 or 600 plan. PStanley commented that they are optimistic that they can go to below 400 by the end of the financial year and the intention was to supplement the 400 plan with a 300 plan as a sustainable rolling caseload, though it is unpredictable as a large number of new cases or complex cases could mean the team would struggle to achieve the 300 figure.

Cllr Harden asked if performance would have improved if they had hired the staff required or if they need to review the salary costs for the role. PStanley stated that if they had an additional enforcement officer over the past 12 months then they would have completed more work. Cases have been closed due to changes in working practices and deciding to not pursue some cases when it's not in the public's interest to spend further resources. On why they have been unable to recruit, PStanley outlined the 3 reasons as (1) the salary being below market expectations, (2) a national shortage of experienced planning enforcement officers, and (3) planning enforcement has a reputation of being a negative service that only deals with breaches and complaints. When the role was promoted to existing members of the planning team, there was no interest from officers.

Cllr Foster referred to the audit and asked PStanley if he was confident that controls issues raised have now been addressed. PStanley confirmed that the management action plan has covered these points and that the issues were partly linked to staff capacity, such as on dealing with older cases where there is no apparent ongoing action. PStanley advised that other measures have been put in place, such as reiterating the importance of priority 1 cases and that the enforcement team are aware of the need to visit these sites within 24 hours of a complaint being received. On dealing with matters procedurally, PStanley explained how they look at cases that show on the system as belonging to an officer no longer at the council and that there is a system in place to ensure that cases are still monitored. It was also felt by the auditor that there was no way to recognise when the team had refused to set up an enforcement case due to being a non-planning related matter, and items passed on are now stored to ensure this can be demonstrated.

Cllr Wilkie referred to the current vacancies and acknowledged the challenges already raised. Cllr Wilkie asked how they could resolve the issue. PStanley confirmed that they have advertised 3 times for an assistant team leader, that they have advertised the role in different locations and did reword the advert, though after the third time it was felt that a materially different offer was required before spending more money on the recruitment process. Discussions have been held with HR on the banding of the post as some responsibilities are not reflected in this banding, and once this process is finished, this will result in a material increase in salary. ARobinson added that there is an issue with recruitment across enforcement and that they could look to support the service through recruitment though the longer-term solution lies in how they can work better with partners and draw on resources from other authorities as required.

Cllr Taylor asked what scrutiny is in place for decisions on not taking further enforcement action. PStanley confirmed there is no scrutiny in place and it is a delegated decision where the officer reaches a conclusion in their report and this is signed off by the head of enforcement. PStanley advised that decisions are not taken lightly and if a homeowner refuses to submit planning applications then the choices are to either take formal action or close the file as not expedient, and enforcement notices can only be served if they are confident they will win the appeal against the notice, with one of the grounds of appeal being that planning permission would be granted. When a file is closed as not expedient, a judgement is made that planning permission would be granted. Cllr Taylor understood the need to use officers' discretion and asked that these cases be reported to the relevant management committee to gain their opinion and asked that it be highlighted to the Committee if this work could be undertaken. PStanley referred to the table under paragraph 35, which highlights the 135 cases noted as not expedient, and he explained there are a number of cases where a resolution is achieved, and that it would not be practical to bring 135 cases to a management committee.

Cllr Taylor recommended that there is a review by elected members to help understand if more resources are required. PStanley advised that he should first look to break down why cases are marked as non-expedient, adding that most cases are either very minor breaches or technical breaches. Cllr Taylor asked that there be some scrutiny from councillors on the process. ARobinson acknowledged Cllr Taylor's comments and agreed that they could look at the parameters, though planning enforcement is particularly complex and it's challenging to set out a codified set of responses. ARobinson stated that the discretion they have is beneficial and that providing further

explanations would provide an 'open goal' for developers, though they could look to update guidance and parameters for members to better explain which cases they would enforce against and how this squares with the resources in place. Cllr Taylor commented that they could look to consult local members when proposing to drop an action in their ward, to provide an overview, and the councillors could then request further information, and if an agreement can't be reached then it would go to the DMC.

Cllr Anderson advised that most cases that are not pursued are trivial and would not be controversial or require any democratic input. Cllr Anderson noted that PStanley provides an enforcement report on a quarterly basis that is taken to the DMC, this lists all notable cases, and any member can pre-register with the Chair to raise any enforcement cases. Cllr Taylor commented that some input to the process on closing off items would be beneficial.

Cllr Harden summarised that the Committee requires more information on why particular cases are closed to allow members to then add into the discussion.

Cllr Riddick noted that the 135 non-expedient cases was 25% of the workload and asked if there was a danger that subjective decision making could encourage others to perform similarly. PStanley advised that they serve more enforcement notices than other Hertfordshire authorities and that there is a reputation that action will be taken. PStanley stated that in cases being closed due to limited harm or for being particularly minor, if there is a repeated breach then it would be equally minor and not harmful.

Cllr Riddick noted the considerable decrease in fly-posting and noted that this has been cut down considerably in parts of the borough. Cllr Riddick commented on the prosecutions issued in Two Waters for £42k plus costs had sent out a clear message. PStanley noted this as an example of taking conservative formal action on a particular area that resulted in a reduction of cases.

Cllr Foster asked if those who notify the team of an issue are told when a case is closed. PStanley confirmed that they are.

The Committee passed on their thanks to the team in working to achieve the 400 plan.

The Committee noted the report.

ACTION: PStanley to provide further details on why particular cases are closed.

9. Paradise Employment Area Design Code

ARobinson provided an overview of the draft supplementary planning document, noting that the government are putting more emphasis on the development of design codes and that Dacorum had won funding last year to pilot the new design codes. It was decided to select the Paradise area as this had been marked for mixed use development. ARobinson explained that the design code has been developed over the last year with the assistance of an external architectural practice and that they have undertaken an extensive array of consultations as the design code has developed.

ARobinson explained that the design code is structured to set out mandatory and voluntary requirements to guide development on the site going forward. The main themes are (1) movement, (2) built for, (3) identity and (4) use. It is hoped the design code will form a baseline to guide developments and can be rolled out for all strategic growth locations across the borough. ARobinson advised that they intend to consult on the document over summer and autumn, to return it to the Committee for further review before going to Cabinet and Council for adoption.

ARobinson noted that the Committee was being asked to inform Cabinet of its views on the document prior to going out to consultation.

Cllr England commended the report, noting that it is particularly strong on movement. Cllr England remarked that it was encouraging to see the vision for cyclists and pedestrians, and the only area of concern was a preference for flat roofs, which may result in an missed opportunity to optimise solar and that they should look to maximise the amount of renewable energy they get from these buildings. ARobinson responded that the design code doesn't want to frustrate innovation in sustainable development and that the comments would be taken on board so the design code doesn't stifle this type of technology. Cllr Anderson stated that he would be happy to show Cllr England around Hemel Hempstead Day Centre that has a flat roof and solar panels.

Cllr Harden commented on the views around discouraging parking and asked if this had any influence on residents who can't park their vehicles on site and what impact this would then have on surrounding areas. ARobinson advised that the design code doesn't change parking standing policy and instead looks to influence the layout and form of parking spaces. The intention is not to change any requirements for parking and instead to ensure parking is provided in a sensitive way.

Cllr Wilkie agreed that the report was particularly strong. Cllr Wilkie referred to point 11.3 and noted that the SPD would be a national material consideration determining planning applications and asked if this point would be developed further. ARobinson agreed, noting that once the code was adopted, it would become a statutory document and would need to be regarded in any planning decisions. If it is felt the document needs to be developed before being adopted, any points will be taken on board.

The Committee noted the report.

10 Annual Waste Review

Cllr Harden noted apologies from officers who would not be presenting the review as it still has to go through internal processes. It was noted that officers suggest the review be circulated via the Committee once it has been approved internally as the review was for presentation only.

11 Work Programme

Meeting closed:



Spatial Planning and Environment

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Report for:	Spatial Planning and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Title of report:	Quarter 1 Environment Performance Report
Date:	20 th September 2022
Report on behalf of:	Councillor Graham Barrett, Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services Craig Thorpe, Group Manager, Environmental Services
Part:	I
If Part II, reason:	N/A
Appendices:	Appendix 1 – Covid performance report
Background papers:	N/A
Glossary of acronyms and any other abbreviations used in this report:	CSG – Clean, Safe and Green Ts and Ws – Trees and Woodlands CPC – Driver Certificate of Professional Competence

Report Author / Responsible Officer	
Craig Thorpe, Head of Environmental Services	
 	
Craig.thorpe@dacorum.gov.uk	

Corporate Priorities	A clean, safe and enjoyable environment
Wards affected	ALL
Purpose of the report:	1. To report of Q1 performance
Recommendation (s) to the decision maker (s):	1. To note the report
Period for post policy/project review:	

Environmental Services Overview and Scrutiny Quarter 1 – Performance Review

Introduction

Environmental Services consists of the following:

Refuse and Recycling – Domestic and Commercial Waste Collections.

- Providing scheduled collections of waste and recycling materials from over 65,000 domestic properties and 800 commercial waste customers
- Collection of over 1000 “paid for” bulky collections per annum upon request
- Collection of cess waste from private dwellings

Waste Transfer Site – ISO 14001 compliant

- Storage and bulking of over 24,000 tonnes of recycling materials for onward processing
- Separation, storage and disposal of hazardous waste including asbestos, dead animals, paints, light bulbs, electrical equipment and other flammables.

Clean, Safe and Green (CSG)

- Scheduled grass cutting on behalf of Herts County, Housing Landlord and on Dacorum owned land
- Maintenance of hedges, shrub beds and some roundabouts
- Maintenance of parks and open spaces including play equipment
- Maintenance of sports pitches
- Weed spraying
- Clearance of fly tips
- Removal of graffiti
- Removal and disposal of road kill
- Management of Trees on behalf of Herts County, Housing, Dacorum owned land, parks and open spaces and woodlands
- Management of Rights of Way and Countryside access

Environmental Projects

- Initiate environmental and / or seasonal campaigns to promote the waste hierarchy through events, online challenges, social media, website etc.
- Plan and implement new service additions, such as recycling and food waste.
- Monitoring Waste Services, Clean, Safe & Green and social media data, including tonnages, contamination and fly tipping, and collating into reports.
- Supporting the waste hierarchy in schools through presentations, quarterly e-newsletters and projects.
- Organise anti-littering campaigns with local residents and businesses.
- Produce all artwork and literature for press releases, corporate articles, collection calendars and designs for vehicles
- Represent Dacorum Borough Council as a partnering member of the Hertfordshire Waste Partnership.

Fleet Management (Vehicle Repair Shop)

- Servicing and maintenance of all the Councils fleet of vehicles to ensure legal compliance with Road Transport Law and effective running of front line services.

Resources

- Record and produce key performance data such as waste tonnages
- Check and allocate all customer service requests including the bulky item service
- Deal with resident and Customer Service Unit enquiries
- Manage the weighbridge service
- General administration of services including the cesspool emptying requests, sharps box collections and the additional garden waste service.

Service Updates

Waste Services Operations

- Continued to maintained full services despite major issues with LGV Driver shortages
- Carried out several days of agency induction training
- Successfully carried out scheduled collections on Good Friday
- Facilitated Compost Giveaway
- Successfully completed Spring Bank holiday and Queens Platinum Jubilee working
- Carried out Special Village collection for Markyate
- Carried out Electrical compliance testing and Fire Risk Assessment to all facilities at both Cupid Green Depot and Tringford Depot
- Carried out Asbestos audit to Tringford Depot

Clean, Safe and Green

- Four staff completed Hiab Grab Lorry training, took delivery of new grab lorry April for clearing flytips.
- Started to steam clean Old Town pathways
- Prepared Canal fields for green flag award - painted benches, bins etc
- Refurbed park benches Gadebridge Park
- Recommissioned the Splash Park in April.
- Removed the football goal post to renovate the goal mouths
- Started grass cutting – gardens, play areas, week commencing 28th March Ride- machines started week commencing 4th April.
- Cleaning Traffic islands completed April
- Completed cutting of the central reservation A414 on 11th, 12th ,13th May
- Reviewing Gardens maintenance responsibilities with Housing.
- Completed Summer Bedding
- Completed housing project shrub bed renovations – Marlins Turn, Driftway, Paston Road, Betty Paterson
- Continued recruitment drive – Temp to Perms, Summer Temps, Apprentices, Splash Park Warden.

Parks, Open Spaces, Trees and Woodlands

- Completed our annual Friends Group task programme prior to the summer break with a final session at Bunkers Park. Overall programme included nine tasks in Chipperfield Common and ten in Bunkers Park.
- Completed a grant application for additional tree planting via HCC.
- Continued work on the Chilterns Beechwoods SAC project with colleagues in Planning.
- Planted a Golden Tulip tree close to Queens Square for the Queens Jubilee celebrations.
- Attended Herts Tree Officers Forum.
- Progressing discussions with Procurement team about Tree Maintenance Services contract 2023.
- New wildflower map on our biodiversity page.
- Wildflower turf planted in Gadebridge park.
- Re-wilded areas created in Berkhamsted.
- 56,000 bedding plants, planted.
- Path re-laid in the Walled garden Hemel Hempstead.
- Queens Jubilee event in Tring Memorial Garden organised by Friends group.

Educational Awareness

- Our compost giveaway was a big success! 10 tonnes of compost was given away for free to residents plus packets of wildflower seeds for everyone. We also gave some bags to DENS for their garden.
- Over 320 volunteers took part in the Great British Spring clean clearing 219 bags of rubbish and 167 bags of recycling.
- In June we displayed photos and quotes from Street Champions and volunteers from our various Friends groups in the Round House volunteers building in Hemel town centre. We had a marquee and invited residents to come and see the display and ask questions about volunteering. This is still on display today.
- Launched the new Dacorum Refill & Go digital trails on the LoyalFree app to mark World Refill day (16 June). These will run until the end of August. There are six trails with six prizes of water bottles and coffee cups up for grabs.

- Supported our Sustainability team to distribute 4000 packets of wildflower seeds to local residents as part of Biodiversity day. A schools competition to win a bug hotel, planters, flowers and wildflower seeds was also run. We visited the winning school to plant the flowers and seeds with them.
- Between 1 March and 30 April, we received 96 new Street Champion registrations, bringing the total registered to 724 as of 30 April.
- Between 1 March and 30 April, we gave 2 primary school talks, and a Brownie pack talk combined with a recycling relay game.

Resources and Administration

- Total Waste Services service requests = 8993 , this includes;
 - 449 bulky item service requests
 - 352 fly tips reports collected by CSG.
- Total Clean, Safe & Green service requests = 1202, this includes;
 - 283 for Trees & Woodlands (transferred to Ezytreev).
- Requests for sharps box collections = 1237 (boxes) and requests for 682 boxes to be delivered.
- Administration staff manually weighed 1009 vehicles (e.g. outgoing food waste, garden waste and comingled recycling plus public weighs), others transactions are completed at the driver operated console.
- DBC outgoing tonnages for the quarter - Comingled Recycling = 3843.90t / Garden = 3518.88t / Food - 1228.32t

End



Strategic Planning and Environment

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Report for:	Strategic Planning and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Title of report:	Planning, Development and Regeneration Quarter 1 Performance Report 2022-23
Date:	21 September 2022
Report on behalf of:	Cllr Alan Anderson, Portfolio Holder for Place
Part:	I
If Part II, reason:	N/A
Appendices:	Appendix 1 – Performance Report
Background papers:	
Glossary of acronyms and any other abbreviations used in this report:	<p>Back Office Planning System (BOPS)</p> <p>Chilterns Beechwoods Special Area of Conservation (SAC)</p> <p>Planning Performance Agreements (PPA)</p> <p>Reducing Invalid Planning Applications (RIPA)</p> <p>Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)</p>

Report Author / Responsible Officer

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Corporate Priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A clean, safe and enjoyable environment - Building strong and vibrant communities - Ensuring economic growth and prosperity - Providing good quality affordable homes, in particular for those most in need - Ensuring efficient, effective and modern service delivery - Climate and ecological emergency
Wards affected	All

Purpose of the report:	1. To set out the performance outturn for the service for Quarter 1 of 2022-23.
Recommendation (s) to the decision maker (s):	1. That the report is noted.
Period for post policy/project review:	

1. Introduction

1.1 This report presents the performance outturn for the Planning, Development and Regeneration service for the fourth quarter (April – June) of the business year 2022-23. The full performance report is at Appendix 1.

2. Service Highlights

2.1 The following updates are provided on some of the key activities that have been underway during the last quarter.

2.2 Chilterns Beechwoods Special Area of Conservation – During Q1 the Council has not been able to issue planning decisions for new residential development across the Borough following the publication of the Footprint Ecology Report in the beginning of Q1 of 2021/22. In Q1 of 2022/23 the Council has been working with partners to develop the necessary Mitigation Strategy to allow restrictions to be lifted. A detailed report on the progress has been published for SPAEOSC for consideration.

2.3 Planning Resilience – The Council continues to develop strategies to build resilience across the service to ensure performance is maintained as far as possible and to adapt to the increased pressures the service is under. Over the coming months the Council will be considering further the operational needs of the service and developing options for how best to ensure continued high quality service delivery across Planning.

2.4 Article 4 Directions for Maylands – The Council made a number of Article 4 Directions to protect further automatic conversions of offices to residential development without the need for planning permission. Subject to feedback received during the consultation the Council will look to formally confirm these Directions in Q2 of 2022/23.

2.5 Reducing Invalid Planning Applications (RIPA) / Back Office Planning System (BOPS) – All planning records from 2001 have now been corrected and reflect an accurate history of Dacorum’s planning applications. Work to review and update spatial records for Article 4s and Listed buildings has been completed and these are undergoing further reconciliation to allow these to be uploaded to the Council’s website to allow easier access to these documents for residents. A similar process will be undertaken for Tree Preservation Orders and Conservation Area layers. The Council is also fully onboarded onto the DLUHC team working with the software developers to start progressing the software into its next phase of development; we expect to launch the Beta test version for Dacorum by the end of this year.

2.6 Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and s.106 collection - £761,081 of CIL has been collected this quarter. £24,948 of the neighbourhood proportion of CIL has been allocated to projects this quarter. This includes £14,748 towards installation of an assisted bath in Centre in the Park from Hemel Hempstead Town Centre and £10,200 from Bovingdown, Flaunden and Chipperfield towards three Speed Indicator Devices. In addition to this £157,000 of S106 funding was used to improve facilities in Canal Fields Play Area, Berkhamsted. Westwick Field games area received a further £17,800 to deliver improvements. Details of projects that have been fully or part-funded by S106 developer contributions recently can be found at [https://www.dacorum.gov.uk/home/planning-development/planning-strategic-planning/developer-contributions/developer-contributions---projects-funded-\(s106\)](https://www.dacorum.gov.uk/home/planning-development/planning-strategic-planning/developer-contributions/developer-contributions---projects-funded-(s106))

- 2.7 ESRI pilot project using GIS analytics to improve planning, monitoring and use of Developer Contributions – The Council, working with ESRI, have now completed phase 1 of this project and entered the product testing phase. We are pleased with the initial the outcome which provides us with a visual and spatial representation of monies received and infrastructure delivered using developer contributions. This project will improve efficiencies in the management of developer contributions and developer funded infrastructure. It has also provided DBC the opportunity to be recognised as being at the forefront of pilot project that could be useful to authorities across the country and wider.
- 2.8 Hemel Hempstead Bike Hire and e-Scooter Feasibility Study – The Council will shortly be commissioning a feasibility study to look at whether a funded scheme providing electric bikes and e-scooters could work in Hemel Hempstead. The study is expected to be complete in October 2022.

3. Review of Performance

- 3.1 The performance report at Appendix 1 shows a total of 34 indicators, twelve of which are performance measures with the remainder setting out other metrics for Q1. Of the twelve performance measures five are green, one is at amber and three are at red for this quarter.

Income

- 3.2 Planning fees income (FIN 16) is 18.8% ahead of target at the end of Q1 at £465,189 compared to a target of £391,493. This is largely relating to the submission of two large applications and skews the overall 20% drop in the total number of planning applications submitted in the period.
- 3.3 Search fees against profiled budget (FIN17) are also down in Q1 by 9.8% at £52,105, compared to £57,750 in the previous quarter. However, search activity did pick up considerably at the end of the Quarter. The average time taken to process local searches (LC04) has decreased 9.02 days from 7.76 days in the previous quarter. This this is below the target of ten days and therefore is at green for Q1.
- 3.4 Trends in both planning and land charges income continue to be monitored closely as activity here has a strong correlation to the local and national economic climate.

Development Management Performance

- 3.5 The number of planning applications received in the quarter dropped to 606 compared to the 756 applications received in the previous quarter (DMP02). This represents a 20% drop and is most likely linked to the SAC restrictions that were announced during the last quarter. This is particularly noticeable in the number of “full” applications being received. This is the first set of data available since the publication of the Footprint Ecology Report and associated restrictions being introduced.
- 3.6 There were 41 refusals in the quarter with 24 appeals being submitted. This represents a figure of 58.5% (DMP03). This is a surprisingly high figure and one that will need to be monitored over the coming quarter as this could have a significant resource implication for the Council as it defends these appeals. It is worth noting that over the last three months the team have had a 100% record in defending appeals.
- 3.7 This quarter there were 3 ‘major’ applications (DMP04) due for determination, down from 6 in Q4. Two of these were determined on time, resulting in performance of 66.67% which is above the target and therefore at green. This is an improvement from Q4 where performance had slipped to 50% (and was at red) but is largely a result of fewer applications being due for determination in the period.
- 3.8 There were 46 ‘minor’ applications due to be determined in the period with 31 determined within the 8-week period resulting in a 67.3% performance measure in the Quarter (DPM05). This is an improvement

from the 56% rate in the last quarter but this is still under the 70% target. The slippage in performance has been impacted by further staff losses across the service during the period and continued difficulties in recruiting. It must also be pointed out that some of the figures for determining planning applications are as a direct result of the restrictions brought about by the recreation pressures affecting the Chilterns Beechwoods Special Area of Conservation. Both resourcing pressures and the moratorium are likely to continue for several months and as such performance indicators in certain areas are likely to remain outside of target.

- 3.9 Performance in the 'others' category remains at green (at 71.66%) and is broadly in line with the previous period (76.55% in Q4). This category includes the smallest scale cases such as house extensions and other domestic development, where the service has put in place fast track arrangements for processing. The target remains at 70%. It should be noted that performance in this area has deteriorated in the last three quarters due to staff vacancies. The number of applications has also increased significantly in the period (up 20% from 260 in Q4 to 314 in Q1).
- 3.10 Performance on the Council's success rate in defending planning appeals in Q1 (DMP30) sits at 100%, which is a significant improvement from 56% in Q4. This is an excellent performance being able to defend all appeals whilst also facing times of staff vacancies and other pressure. Although the number of appeals in the period was half of that in the previous period it is still a good performance.
- 3.11 Performance in the validation of planning applications (DMP08) has increased over the last quarter with 53% of planning applications validated within 4 working days, this is up from 26% in Q4. The overall number of planning applications due for validating in the period was 714, down from 761 in Q4. A combination of high caseload and an inexperienced team has meant that there was an inability to handle cases.

Enforcement

- 3.12 The Council had 3 Priority 1 site visits due in Q1 of which all were undertaken in time, representing 100% (PE01). It is important that this measure returned to 100% (up from 75% in the previous quarter) as this was a key requirement from the recent audit of the planning Enforcement Service.
- 3.13 A total of 54 Priority 2 site visits were required to be undertaken of which 40 were carried out in time. This represents 74% of all cases which is below the target of 100%. Although in percentage terms performance is similar to last quarter there were fewer visits that took place (40 this quarter vs 55 last quarter). This is reflective of the staff shortages that were seen within the planning enforcement team as well as the volume of work they are dealing with.
- 3.14 For Priority 3 sites due a visit in Q1 82% of sites were visited in time which is broadly similar to the previous quarter's performance of 81% (Q4). The sustainment of performance needs to be considered in light of the 150% increase in the number of visits that needed to take place in the Quarter (up from 16 in Q4 to 40 in Q1).
- 3.15 Resourcing of the Council's Enforcement Team has been identified in previous performance reports but the Council is beginning to see the signs of improvements following the recruitment of additional staff into the staff, albeit on a temporary basis. It is clear that the current resourcing situation will need to be looked at if the Council is to deliver the high levels of service expected.

4. Options and alternatives considered

- 4.1 Not applicable.

5. Consultation

- 5.1 James Doe – Strategic Director (Place)
- 5.2 Philip Stanley - Interim Head of Development Management and Planning
- 5.3 Ronan Leydon – Team Leader, Strategic Planning

6. Financial and value for money implications:

Financial

- 6.1 None arising from decisions on this report though the financial indicators for Planning fees and Local Land Charges report an under recovery of income against target levels.

Value for Money

- 6.2 None arising from this report.

7. Legal Implications

- 7.1 None arising from this report.

8. Risk implications:

- 8.1 None arising from this report. Risks addressed through service level risk register.

9. Equalities, Community Impact and Human Rights:

- 9.1 Community Impact Assessment - Not applicable for this report.
- 9.2 Human Rights – There are no Human Rights Implications arising from this report.

10. Sustainability implications (including climate change, health and wellbeing, community safety)

- 10.1 None arising from this report.

11. Council infrastructure (including Health and Safety, HR/OD, assets and other resources)

- 11.1 None arising from this report.

12. Conclusions:

- 12.1 Not applicable

13. Appendix 1 - Performance Report (attached separately)

Measure Code	Measure Name	This Quarter Actual	This Quarter Target	Last Quarter Actual	Last Quarter Target	-4 Quarters Actual	-4 Quarters Target	DoT	Comments
DMP02	Number of planning applications received	606		756		908			30 Jun 2022 There was a 20% drop in the number of planning applications received versus the last quarter. Certainly the HRA moratorium is having an impact with 'Full' applications particularly effected. Market sentiment may also be having an impact.
DMP03	Percentage of planning application refusals appealed against	58.54%	35.00%	24.56%	35.00%	12.70%	35.00%		This is a surprisingly high figure and something that needs to be paid attention to over the next quarter as this could have a significant resource implication in defending appeals. It is worth noting that for the last 3 months the team have had a 100% record in defending appeals.
DMP03 (D)	Number of planning application refusals	41		57		63		n/a	
DMP03 (N)	Number of planning application refusals appealed against	24		14		8		n/a	
DMP04	Percentage of major applications determined within 13 weeks (YTD)	66.67%	60.00%	50.00%	60.00%	100.00%	60.00%		Target met and a significant improvement over the last Quarter.
DMP04 (D)	Number of major applications due to be determined	3		6		3		n/a	
DMP04 (N)	Number of major applications determined within the 13 week target	2		3		3		n/a	
DMP05	Percentage of minor applications determined within 8 weeks	67.39%	70.00%	56.04%	70.00%	70.09%	70.00%		30 Jun 2022 Slightly below target, though improvement on previous Quarter. It is worth noting that the total number of Minor applications is considerably lower than a year ago.

Measure Code	Measure Name	This Quarter Actual	This Quarter Target	Last Quarter Actual	Last Quarter Target	-4 Quarters Actual	-4 Quarters Target	DoT	Comments
DMP05 (D)	Number of minor applications due to be determined in Period	46		91		117		n/a	
DMP05 (N)	Number of minor applications determined within the 8 week target in period	31		51		82		n/a	
DMP06	Percentage of other applications determined within 8 weeks	71.66%	70.00%	76.54%	70.00%	89.83%	70.00%	✖	30 Jun 2022 Continues to perform above target, though the downward trajectory continues. The householder team are currently short on three Planning Officers, with a new Planning Officer only starting two weeks ago, filling a fourth vacancy.
DMP06 (D)	Number of other applications due to be determined in Period	314		260		354		n/a	
DMP06 (N)	Number of other applications determined within the 8 week target in period	225		199		318		n/a	
DMP07	Percentage of planning applications refused	11.26%	10.00%	11.11%	10.00%	8.13%	10.00%	✖	30 Jun 2022 This remains just above target. This can partly be explained by departing staff resolving their 'difficult' applications before they leave.
DMP07 (D)	Number of planning applications determined in period	364		396		750		n/a	
DMP07 (N)	Number of planning applications refused in period	41		44		61		n/a	
DMP08	Percentage of planning applications validated within 4 working days	53%	70%	26%	70%	53%	70%	✔	30 Jun 2022 Target not met due to influx of cases at the same time as staff shortages. Situation now improved with team fully staffed; however team remain inexperienced and will therefore be affected by a future influx, if this occurs.

Measure Code	Measure Name	This Quarter Actual	This Quarter Target	Last Quarter Actual	Last Quarter Target	-4 Quarters Actual	-4 Quarters Target	DoT	Comments
DMP08 (D)	Number of planning applications due for validation in period	714		761		983		n/a	
DMP08 (N)	Number of planning applications validated within 4 working days in period	379		196		524		n/a	
DMP30	Appeals dismissed	100.00%	70.00%	56.67%	70.00%	80.95%	70.00%	↑✓	30 Jun 2022 A truly excellent performance to be able to defend all appeals successfully across an entire Quarter at a time of staff vacancies and other pressures.
DMP30 (D)	Total number of appeals in period	15		30		21		n/a	
DMP30 (N)	Number of appeals dismissed in period	15		17		17		n/a	
FIN16	Planning Fees ytd actual against profiled budget	£465,189	£391,493	£1,416,685	£1,399,640	£420,057	£349,910	✗	30 Jun 2022 Planning fee income is 18.8% above target at Q1. This is largely due to receiving two large applications, and is not therefore reflective in the 20% drop in overall planning application numbers.
FIN17	Search Fees ytd actual against profiled budget	£52,105	£57,750	£223,522	£231,000	£69,351	£57,750	✗	30 Jun 2022 Search fees income is 9.8% below target at M3, though search activity picked up considerably at the end of the Quarter.
LC04	Average time taken to process an official Local Land Charges search	9.02	10.00	7.76	10.00	10.16	10.00	✗	30 Jun 2022 Turnaround is still under target though increased due to Annual Leave and more searches received.
PE01	Priority 1 site visits	100.00%	100.00%	75.00%	100.00%	57.14%	100.00%	↑✓	It is important that this has returned to 100% as this was a key requirement arising from audit of Planning Enforcement service.
PE01 (D)	Priority 1 sites due a visit in period	3		4		7		n/a	
PE01 (N)	Priority 1 sites visited in period	3		3		4		n/a	

Measure Code	Measure Name	This Quarter Actual	This Quarter Target	Last Quarter Actual	Last Quarter Target	-4 Quarters Actual	-4 Quarters Target	DoT	Comments
PE02	Priority 2 site visits	74.07%	100.00%	75.34%	100.00%	45.90%	100.00%	✘	This is reflective on the volume of work within the Planning Enforcement service, the one vacancy within the team, and the difficulty of focusing on both new cases being received and resolving older cases.
PE02 (D)	Priority 2 sites due a visit in period	54		73		61		n/a	
PE02 (N)	Priority 2 sites visited in period	40		55		28		n/a	
PE03	Priority 3 site visits	82.50%	100.00%	81.25%	100.00%	64.22%	100.00%	✔	
PE03 (D)	Priority 3 sites due a visit in period	40		16		109		✔	
PE03 (N)	Priority 3 sites visited in period	33		13		70		n/a	

Measure Code	Measure Name	This Quarter Actual	This Quarter Target	Last Quarter Actual	Last Quarter Target	-4 Quarters Actual	-4 Quarters Target	DoT	Comments
SPR05	Number of new homes completed	124		134		152		✘	30 Jun 2022 This could be the result of many factors, including the moratorium or uncertainty in the wider economy.
SPR20	Level of CIL receipts	761,081						?	CIL income is a reflection of wider activity in the market. The Moratorium continues to pose a risk to future income.



Strategic Planning and Environment

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Report for:	Strategic Planning and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Title of report:	Chilterns Beechwoods Special Area of Conservation: Draft Mitigation Strategy
Date:	21 September 2022
Report on behalf of:	Cllr Alan Anderson, Portfolio Holder for Place
Part:	I
If Part II, reason:	N/A
Appendices:	Appendix A – Chilterns Beechwoods Special Area Conservation (SAC) Mitigation Strategy (Appendix A).
Background papers:	
Glossary of acronyms and any other abbreviations used in this report:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Chilterns Beechwoods Special Area of Conservation (SAC) - Appropriate Assessment (AA) - Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG)

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Corporate Priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A clean, safe and enjoyable environment - Building strong and vibrant communities - Ensuring economic growth and prosperity - Providing good quality affordable homes, in particular for those most in need - Ensuring efficient, effective and modern service delivery - Climate and ecological emergency
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Wards affected	All
Purpose of the report:	1. To update the Committee on the emerging Draft Mitigation Strategy being prepared for the Chilterns Beechwoods Special Area of Conservation (SAC)
Recommendation (s) to the decision maker (s):	1. That Committee notes the progress being made on the Mitigation Strategy for the Chilterns Beechwoods Special Area Conservation (SAC) Mitigation Strategy (Appendix A). 2. That Committee sets out its views on the Mitigation Strategy to Cabinet.
Period for post policy/project review:	

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report presents the emerging Mitigation Strategy for the Chilterns Beechwoods Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and associated proposals to allow the Council to comply with its legal obligations under the Habitats Directive and therefore to allow the current moratorium on housing development in Dacorum to be lifted.
- 1.2 Since the publication of the Footprint Ecology Report¹ on 14 March 2022 and receipt of revised guidance from Natural England the Council has been unable to issue planning permission for applications for residential development. These restrictions have also impacted applications which have been permitted but where outstanding conditions ‘that go to the heart’ of the original permission have not been determined.
- 1.3 This position will remain in effect until an appropriate mitigation strategy and associated processes are in place by the Council to satisfy the Habitats Directive requirements. An emerging draft is contained at Appendix A.

2. Background

- 2.1 Dacorum is home to part of the Chilterns Beechwoods Special Area of Conservation (SAC) which is a National Site designated under the Habitats and Birds Directives. The Chilterns Beechwoods SAC is made up of 9 separate units which are located within Buckinghamshire, Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, South Oxfordshire and Dacorum. These sites form a system of important sites throughout Europe known collectively as the ‘National Sites Network’.
- 2.2 Dacorum Council is the ‘Competent Authority’ under the Regulations which confers several responsibilities, including ensuring that before giving any consent, permission or other authorisation for a plan or project (namely the new Dacorum Local Plan and individual planning applications) that the integrity of the National Site is not adversely affected. This obligation can only be bypassed if there are imperative reasons of overriding public interest.
- 2.3 In order to discharge this obligation the Council undertook an initial screening report which was unable to rule out Likely Significant effects as a result of proposed growth set out in the new Local Plan. Therefore, the Council’s appointed consultants are progressing a full Appropriate Assessment (AA) to support the Local

1 Available to view and download at www.dacorum.gov.uk/sac

Plan. As part of this consultants Footprint Ecology have carried out detailed recreational pressures surveys and ecological conditions assessments which will provide the necessary evidence to inform the AA.

- 2.4 The Footprint Ecology Report showed that around 2 million people are visiting Ashridge Estate every year (likely to be a considerable underestimate) of which around half of these enter the SAC via Monument Drive. Although the majority of visitors are Dacorum residents there is a significant draw of visitors from farther afield, confirming the status of Ashridge Estate as a major ‘honeypot’ designation site for the National Trust.
- 2.5 The Report states that “there are clear and widespread issues at Ashridge Commons and Woods SAC and these have the potential to undermine the conservation objectives for the site, through damage, contamination and fire risk”.
- 2.6 Damage is widespread across the SAC with c. 500 incidences of damage being recorded. The largest concentration of ‘severe’ damage identified is along Monument Drive (the largest car park and where the café, toilets, visitor centre and shop are located). The damage has arisen from trampling, disturbance, soil compaction, visitor parking, dog fouling and nutrient enrichment, den building, mountain biking, removal / disturbance of dead wood habitats and footpath widening (see Appendix x).
- 2.7 As a result a number of restrictions needed to be established including establishing an Inner and Outer “Zone of Influence” (ZOI) around the site where certain developments would be restricted in perpetuity (in the case of the Inner Zone) or until mitigation strategy is in place (in the case of the Outer Zone).

3. Overview of the Mitigation Strategy

- 3.1 The Council has been working at pace with Natural England, the National Trust and a number of adjoining local authorities² who are also impacted by the restrictions to prepare the Mitigation Strategy.
- 3.2 The purpose of the Mitigation Strategy is to avoid adverse public access and disturbance impacts from development on the integrity of the Chilterns Beechwoods SAC at Ashridge Commons and Woods Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).
- 3.3 The Mitigation Strategy is in two broad parts. Part A provides common guidance for the planning areas of Dacorum Borough Council, Buckinghamshire Council, Central Bedfordshire Council and St. Albans City and District Council. More specifically it relates to land within and on the edge of the 12.6 kilometre zone of influence that extends from Ashridge Commons and Woods SSSI. Part B of the document, which is being drafted, provides detailed guidance on administration that is specific to each of the authorities. This includes detailed information on the mechanisms for securing mitigation for each proposed development.

Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMM)

- 3.4 The first arm of the Mitigation Strategy will address issues at Ashridge Estate³. A list of the interventions required have been identified and agreed in principle between all the partners.
- 3.5 The Strategic Access Management and Monitoring Strategy will consists of a range of projects. These projects will be costed for a period of 80 years - 2022/23 – 2102/2103, and based on the best available information and evidence in consultation with the National Trust who manage the majority of the designated site.

² Buckinghamshire Council, Central Bedfordshire Council and St. Albans City and District Council.

³ Natural England have confirmed that the other component part of the Chilterns Beechwoods SAC located within Dacorum, namely Tring Woodlands SSSI, does not need to be considered in this Mitigation Strategy. It will instead be addressed through the new Local Plan in due course.

- 3.6 The projects are designed to mitigate the likely scale of development that will come forward within the 12.6 kilometres Zone of Influence. Strategic Access Management and Monitoring Strategy projects will need to be reviewed to ensure that they remain fit for purpose.
- 3.7 Significant progress has been made with Natural England and the National Trust on the final cost of the SAMM measures required. However, there still remain a small number of outstanding matters that need to be resolved before the total cost of the SAMM package can be agreed with the National Trust, Natural England and our partner authorities. It is hoped that agreement on the outstanding points can be made shortly allowing the final figure to be agreed and apportioned across the authorities. For Dacorum, this will result in a per-dwelling tariff that each new home will need to pay.

Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG)

- 3.8 Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace, or “SANG”, is the term given to greenspaces that are created or enhanced with the specific purpose of absorbing recreation pressure that would otherwise occur at National Sites, such as the Chilterns Beechwoods SAC at Ashridge Commons and Woods SSSI. New SANGs can be created, or existing greenspaces enhanced to create a SANG, in order to absorb the level of additional recreation pressure associated with new development.
- 3.9 SANG projects dovetail with SAMM in that they provide additional space for recreation and provide attractive alternatives for people who may otherwise choose to visit Ashridge Commons and Woods SSSI. Over time the emphasis for recreation use will shift to other sites enhanced for recreation, such as SANG.
- 3.10 All new residential development within the zone of influence must contribute towards either a) a new (bespoke) SANG or b) contribute towards suitable SANG projects elsewhere. This is in addition to the SAMM contributions as set out in the previous section.
- 3.11 Any development seeking to deliver 10 or more net new residential dwellings (or equivalent) must be located within (or on the edge of) the catchment of a SANG project. That SANG must have existing capacity, and meet any further criteria necessary to accommodate the proposed scheme.
- 3.12 Smaller development proposals for up to 9 net new residential dwellings (or equivalent) are not restricted to catchment areas of SANG. If such a development is not within the catchment area of a SANG with sufficient capacity, it can contribute towards an existing SANG elsewhere.
- 3.13 The Council recognises that not all development sites will be able to provide a SANG site and so the Council is investigating whether the following Council owned sites can provide some SANG capacity:
1. Bunkers Park;
 2. Part of Gadebridge Park where no formal recreation is provided; and
 3. Chipperfield Common
- 3.14 The Council is in the process of conducting visitor surveys of the above sites to determine their capacity. These are expected to be completed in the coming weeks. If there is sufficient capacity at these sites then the next step is to prepare Management Plans for each site with costed proposals to improve the sites. The improvements proposed will depend on a range of factors including existing levels of use of the site, the site’s particular characteristics and other existing ecological objectives.
- 3.15 Developers wishing to utilise SANG capacity provided on the Council’s own land will be required to apply to the Council under a separate process and to pay its proportion of the costs of implementing and maintaining SANG in these locations.

Gateway solution at Ashridge Estate

- 3.16 A gateway site is an innovative and emerging concept with regards to avoidance and mitigation measures at Ashridge Commons and Woods SSSI. The purpose of a Gateway is similar to that of SANG, to create an attractive alternative to Ashridge that deflect users away from there, reducing recreational pressures as a result.
- 3.17 A key difference between SANG and a gateway site is that the latter needs to be well related to the existing Ashridge Estate and importantly on land outside of the Chilterns Beechwoods SAC. A gateway site should provide equivalent attractions and facilities sufficient to draw people away from more sensitive areas within Ashridge Estate that suffer the most from substantial recreational damage. An example of this would be the honeypot location of Monument Drive which draws the majority of visitors from the surrounding area. If sufficient visitors were drawn to a nearby gateway site, it is likely that substantially less damage would occur.
- 3.18 A gateway site would need to demonstrate with reasonable certainty how visitors would be drawn away from the site, rather than encouraging more visitors through the provision of more facilities and attractions. With this, it is likely that further interventions within the protected parts of Ashridge Estate would likely need to occur in tandem.
- 3.19 Depending on the scale and location of a gateway site, it could serve as an alternative to SANG delivery that could serve one or more of the Councils within the Zone of Influence but due to the uncertainty surrounding the delivery of this no further guidance is provided on it through this mitigation strategy. The Councils will continue to work together with the National Trust and Natural England on exploring options for gateway sites alongside the delivery of SAMM and SANG.

4. Implementation

- 4.1 All net new homes granted planning permission from 14 March 2022 will need to contribute towards the SAMM projects and secure or make proportionate contributions towards the delivery of SANG.
- 4.2 In the case of SAMM the Council will pass on these contributions to the National Trust for the sole purpose of implementing these or successor SAMM projects.
- 4.3 The approach to the delivery of suitable SANG is a matter that is being progressed separately by each Council, reflecting the different stages each authority has reached with possible SANG and their respective Local Plans. Each authority will manage and maintain a list of SANG once agreed with Natural England, providing sufficient clarity on their status and capacity to accommodate additional growth as well as the catchment to which they serve.
- 4.4 The monies will be secured will be tied to relevant inflation and other build cost inflation indices. In addition, the costs of individual components may be reviewed as part of the annual update based on the outcomes of individual project evaluation if this identifies that there has been either an underestimation or overestimation of the costs attributed. These contributions are in addition to any CIL, Section 278, Section 106 or other requirements that may arise through reforms to the planning system.

5. Monitoring, Review and Governance

- 5.1 The Council's Mitigation Strategy will be kept under regular review and monitoring with costs subject to annual review and adjustment to reflect inflation and other relevant indices.

- 5.2 It is expected that the Mitigation Strategy will be reviewed in three years time (2025) and following that every five years. Should circumstances require it, future reviews may be brought forward to ensure that the strategy remains up to date and fit for purpose to mitigate the impact of public access and disturbance threats for the Chilterns Beechwoods SAC at Ashridge Commons and Woods SSSI.
- 5.3 Monitoring of SANG will be undertaken by each Council respectively, ensuring a live table of sites is maintained and updated regularly alongside the completions of affected developments. Where a SANG has reached its capacity, this will be clearly shown on the live tables so it is clear where and how much existing capacity remains within each administrative area.
- 5.4 Dacorum Borough Council, Buckinghamshire Council, Central Bedfordshire Council, St. Albans City and District Council and the National Trust are preparing governance arrangements to ensure the mitigation strategy remains relevant and is monitored, reviewed and delivered. The agreement will clearly set out measures relating to:
- the effective project management of the strategy;
 - the resources required to ensure it is maintained for a minimum period of 80 years;
 - timescales for implementation of avoidance and mitigation measures including SAMM and SANG
 - future reviews of the strategy;
 - the responsibilities of each party involved;
 - dispute resolution; and
 - any other general provisions.

6. Options and alternatives considered

- 6.1 If the Council decided not to prepare a Mitigation Strategy new housing development in Dacorum would be on hold indefinitely. This would have far reaching social and economic consequences for Dacorum, its residents and the Council.

7. Consultation

- 7.1 James Doe – Strategic Director (Place)

8. Financial and value for money implications:

Financial

- 8.1 The Mitigation Strategy is likely to increase the financial pressures on the Council as additional processes will be undertaken to protect the site and ensure monies are collected and distributed accordingly.

Value for Money

- 8.2 None arising from this report.

9. Legal Implications

- 9.1 The Council needs to ensure a robust Mitigation Strategy is in place before allowing development to proceed. Failure to do this could increase the risk of legal challenge.

10. Risk implications:

- 10.1 None arising from this report. Risks addressed through service level risk register.

11. Equalities, Community Impact and Human Rights:

11.1 Community Impact Assessment - Not applicable for this report.

11.2 Human Rights – There are no Human Rights Implications arising from this report.

12. Sustainability implications (including climate change, health and wellbeing, community safety)

12.1 None arising from this report.

13. Council infrastructure (including Health and Safety, HR/OD, assets and other resources)

13.1 None arising from this report.

14. Conclusions:

14.1 Not applicable

**Chilterns Beechwoods Special Area of Conservation
Mitigation Strategy for Ashridge Commons and Woods Site of
Special Scientific Interest**

**To support the Habitats Regulations Assessment for
Dacorum Borough Council; Buckinghamshire Council; Central
Bedfordshire Council; St. Albans City and District Council**

DRAFT

FOR DISCUSSION ONLY

12 Sept 2022

Part A – Strategic Guidance (common to all Local Authorities)

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Part B – Detailed Local Guidance for Dacorum Borough Council

In preparation

Appendices **in preparation**

Appendix A: SAMM Projects and Costs table

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Appendix E: Further reading: relevant weblinks of supporting documentation

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. The Chilterns Beechwoods Special Area of Conservation

1.1.1. The Chilterns Beechwoods SAC represents the most extensive area of native beech woodland in England. The SAC extends for 1,276.5ha and is designated for the following qualifying features:

- H9130 *Asperulo-Fagetum* beech forests ('Beech forests on neutral to rich soils')
- H6210 Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates (*Festuco-Brometalia*). ('Dry grasslands and scrublands on chalk or limestone').
- S1083 Stag Beetle *Lucanus cervus*.

1.1.2. The Beech woods vary in composition and character depending on slope, substrate, aspect and soil depth. Notable or rare plants associated with the beech woodland include Coralroot *Cardamine bulbifera*, Southern Woodrush *Luzula forsteri*, Red Helleborine *Cephalanthera rubra* and Lesser Hairy-brome *Bromopsis benekenii*. The woods have also held Ghost Orchid *Epipogium aphyllum*.

1.1.3. The grassland interest of the SAC relates to species-rich chalk grassland and this has a restricted distribution within the SAC, with the main areas being Windsor Hill and Ellesborough and Kimble Warrens.

1.1.4. The Stag Beetle is the UK's largest terrestrial beetle and the larvae live in decaying tree stumps and fallen timber where these lie in contact with the ground. Population numbers of the stag beetle are generally in decline across Europe and the species is classified as 'near threatened' by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)¹.

1.1.5. The Chilterns Beechwoods SAC is made up of nine separate sites scattered across the Chilterns. It includes sites within Berkshire (6.71%), Buckinghamshire (43.19%), Hertfordshire (35.07%) and Oxfordshire (15.03%). The component parts of the SAC are also Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and are listed as follows:

- Ashridge Commons and Woods SSSI;
- Aston Rowant Woods SSSI;
- Bisham Woods SSSI;
- Bradenham Woods, Park Wood and the Coppice SSSI;
- Ellesborough and Kimble Warrens SSSI;
- Hollowhill & Pullingshill Woods SSSI;
- Naphill Common;
- Tring Woodlands SSSI; and
- Windsor Hill SSSI.

¹ <https://www.iucnredlist.org/species/157554/5094499>

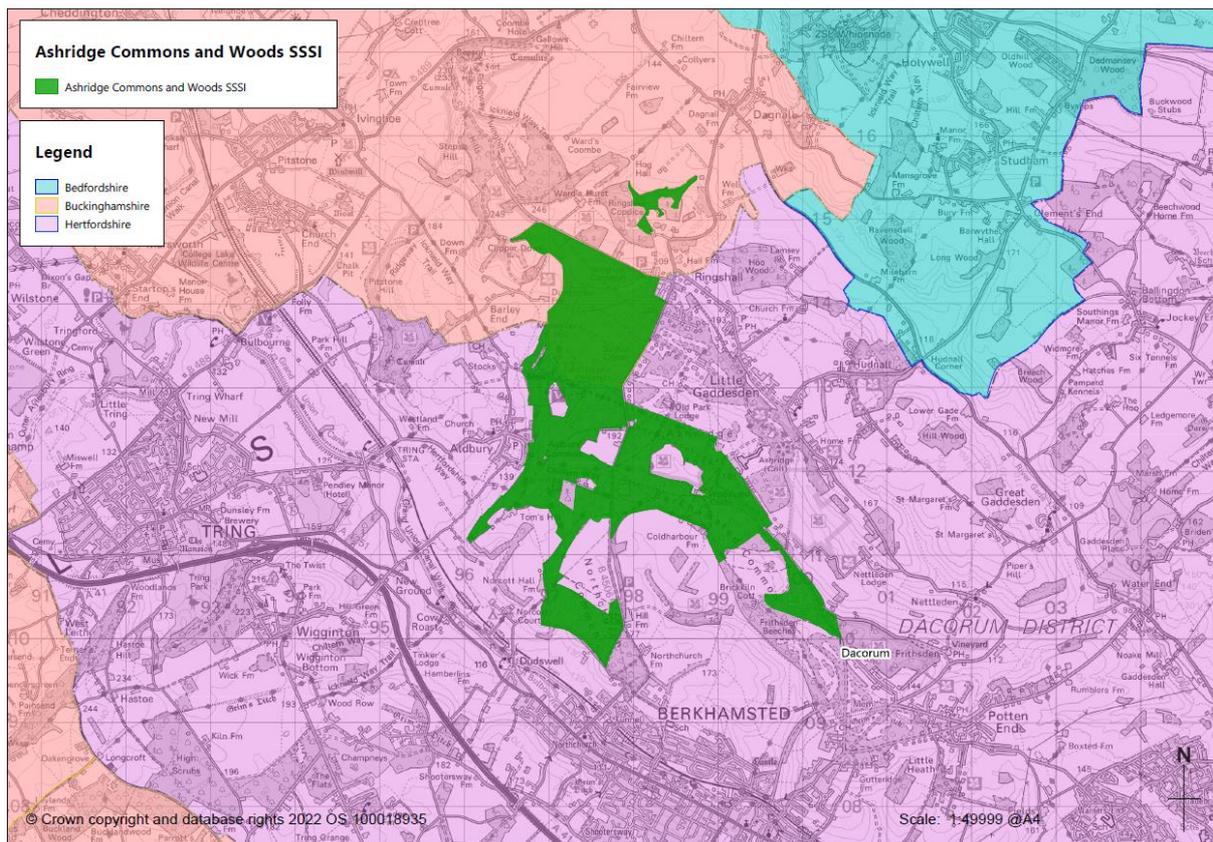


Figure 2: The extent of Ashridge Commons and Woods SSSI

1.2. Purpose and scope of the document

- 1.2.1. This document sets out a mitigation strategy to avoid adverse public access and disturbance impacts from development on the integrity of the Chilterns Beechwoods SAC at Ashridge Commons and Woods Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).
- 1.2.2. **Part A** of this document provides common guidance for the planning areas of Dacorum Borough Council, Buckinghamshire Council, Central Bedfordshire Council and St. Albans City and District Council. More specifically it relates to land within and on the edge of the 12.6 kilometre zone of influence that extends from Ashridge Commons and Woods SSSI.
- 1.2.3. **Part B** of this document provides further guidance that is specific to each of the authorities.
- 1.2.2 This document is informed by the existing report '*Visitor survey, recreational impact assessment and mitigation requirements for the Chilterns Beechwoods SAC*' that was prepared by Footprint Ecology for Dacorum Borough Council and published in March 2022.

1.3. Legislation and Strategic policy framework

Habitats Regulations

- 1.3.1. The designation, protection and restoration of European sites is embedded in the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, as amended, the 'Habitats Regulations'. Importantly, the most recent amendments (the Conservation of Habitats and Species (amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019²) take account of the UK's departure from the EU.
- 1.3.2. The Habitats Regulations require that any application for development or a strategic plan or policy that is likely to significantly affect a European site is subject to an Appropriate Assessment of the implications of the proposal for the site's conservation objectives.
- 1.3.3. The planning authority must ensure that a plan or project, including planning applications, will not have a negative effect on the integrity of the site, alone or in combination with other plans or projects. The planning authority must take account of any conditions or restrictions (including avoidance and mitigation measures) that would ensure no adverse effect, before granting permission or adopting a plan or policy.

National Planning Policy Framework (Updated 2021)

- 1.3.4. Para. 182 of the National Planning Policy framework states the following:

“The presumption in favour of sustainable development does not apply where the plan or project is likely to have a significant effect on a habitats site (either alone or in combination with other plans or projects), unless an Appropriate Assessment has concluded that the plan or project will not adversely affect the integrity of the habitats site.”

1.4. Partnership working and spatial area covered by this guidance

- 1.4.1. This document has been prepared through joint working between Dacorum Borough Council, Buckinghamshire Council, Central Bedfordshire Council and St. Albans City and District Council. The authorities have worked closely with Natural England in developing the guidance contained within this document, and with the National Trust on identifying the measures necessary to ensure compliance with the Habitats Regulations at Ashridge Commons and Woods SSSI.
- 1.4.2. The guidance applies to Ashridge Commons and Woods SSSI and a broader geographic area that extends 12.6 kilometres from this designated area. This is commonly referred to as the “Zone of Influence”. Further information on the geographic extent of this is presented in Sections 2 and 3 of this document.

1.5. Strategic Environmental Appraisal of this Mitigation Strategy

² The amending regulations generally seek to retain the requirements of the 2017 Regulations but with adjustments for the UK's exit from the European Union. Regulation 4 confirms that the interpretation of these Regulations as they had effect, or any guidance as it applied, before exit day, shall continue to do so.

- 1.5.1. The European Union Directive 2001/42/EC1 (Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive) applies to a wide range of public plans and programmes on land use, energy, waste, agriculture, transport and more (see Article 3(2) of the Directive for other plan or programme types). The objective of the Strategic Environmental Assessment (Strategic Environmental Assessment) procedure can be summarised as follows: “the objective of this Directive is to provide for a high level of protection of the environment and to contribute to the integration of environmental considerations into the preparation and adoption of plans and programmes with a view to promoting sustainable development”.
- 1.5.2. Under Article 3(3) and 3(4) of the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive, Strategic Environmental Assessment is not required for plans and programmes which “determine the use of small areas at a local level” or which only propose “minor modifications to plans and programmes”, except where the plan or programme is determined to be likely to have a significant environmental effect.
- 1.5.3. Dacorum Borough Council, acting on behalf of the partner authorities, are undertaking a Strategic Environmental Assessment Screening of this document. The three statutory consultees (Natural England, the Environment Agency, and Historic England) are consulted from XX XXXX 2022 to XX XXXX 2022 (under Regulation 9 of the Strategic Environmental Assessment Screening determination). The consultation responses will be taken account of in this document.
- 1.5.4. The Councils have concluded that this document is not likely to have a significant environmental effect and accordingly will not require a Strategic Environmental Assessment. The main reasons for this conclusion are as follows:
- The document expands on policies and principles set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and relevant adopted policies set out in the respective development plan documents for Dacorum Borough Council, Buckinghamshire Council, Central Bedfordshire Council and St. Albans City and District Council; and
 - The document does not present any policies, and serves only to provide greater clarity about the Council's expectations in relation to existing policies within existing development plan documents.

1.6. Habitats Regulations Assessment of this Mitigation Strategy

- 1.6.1. The application of Habitats Regulations Assessment to land-use plans is a requirement of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended), the UK’s transposition of European Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora (the Habitats Directive). Habitats Regulations Assessment applies to plans and projects, including all Local Development Documents in England and Wales.
- 1.6.2. Under Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive, Competent Authorities have a duty to ensure that all the activities they regulate have no adverse effect on the integrity of the national

sites network³. The competent authorities (in this instance Dacorum Borough Council, Buckinghamshire Council, Central Bedfordshire Council and St. Albans City and District Council) must assess the possible effects of a plan or project on the national sites network through a Habitats Regulations Assessment.

- 1.6.3. This process must identify any likely significant effects on a National site which may arise, either alone or in combination with other plans and projects in view of the site's conservation objective. Where likely significant effects are identified then the plan or project must be subject to an Appropriate Assessment. As part of the Appropriate Assessment, the adoption of mitigation measures may be considered to mitigate adverse impacts on site integrity.
- 1.6.4. Dacorum Borough Council, acting on behalf of the partner authorities, undertook a Habitats Regulations Assessment of this document. Natural England, the environment Agency and Historic England are consulted on the HRA Screening Report from XX XXXX 2022 to XX XXXX 2022. The HRA Screening Report concludes that the document would have no adverse impact on the integrity of any European sites either alone or in combination with other plans.

³ Following the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union, the national sites network replaces the Natura 2000 ecological network.

2. BACKGROUND: THE EVIDENCE OF EXISTING RECREATIONAL PRESSURE AT THE SAC

2.1. Recreational Use of Ashridge Commons and Woods SSSI

2.1.1. Ashridge Commons and Woods is almost entirely publicly accessible; only the northern part of Ashridge Commons and Woods SSSI (Ringshall Coppice) has no public access. Ashridge Commons and Woods is managed for its conservation and recreation value and is used for a range of outdoor activities including walking, dog walking and cycling.

Visitor surveying

- 2.1.2. *'Visitor survey, recreational impact assessment and mitigation requirements for the Chilterns Beechwoods SAC'* summarise visitor trends for the site. The surveys recorded an average of around 318 parked cars at Ashridge Commons and Woods SSSI. These counts indicated potentially around 4,700 people per day on average visiting Ashridge Commons and Woods SSSI during the summer. This roughly equates to 1.7 million visitors to the site each year.
- 2.1.3. The visitor surveys included 951 interviews with 97% of interviewees visiting directly from home, 2% visiting whilst on holiday and 1% were staying locally with friends/family. The most common activity undertaken was dog walking which accounted for almost half of all interviewees. This was closely followed by walking with less frequent activities including jogging/running and cycling.
- 2.1.4. The reason that most interviewees gave for visiting the Chilterns Beechwoods SAC at Ashridge was that it was close to home (22% of interviewees). At six of the ten locations surveyed at the site, in excess of 95% of interviewees arrived by car. Travelling by car was also high at the other locations, however higher rates of visitors by foot (20-30%) were evident at Northchurch Common, Aldbury and Norcott Hill.
- 2.1.5. Visitors typically spent around 1.5 hours on site, with some variation between survey locations and time of year. Routes walked on site were typically (median) around 3.0km.
- 2.1.6. The median distance between the interview location and the home postcode for those that travelled from home that day was 5.7km, with 75% living within 12.6km of Ashridge.
- 2.1.7. A survey of visitor parking was also undertaken at Ashridge. It was determined that Monument Drive accounts for 60% of all vehicles at car parks within 500 metres of Ashridge Commons and Woods SSSI. It was also concluded that the number of cars was generally 40% more at weekends than during the week.

2.2. Impacts from recreation

2.2.1. Recreation has a range of impacts on the SAC qualifying features. The impacts from recreation use at the site are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of recreation impact pathways for the Chilterns Beechwoods SAC at Ashridge Commons and Woods SSSI.

Type of impact	Impact	Relevant activities	Further details
Damage	Vegetation wear	All	Results in changes to vegetation composition, loss of species and structure
	Soil compaction	All	Health implications for trees through reduced water uptake, root damage i.e. verge parking
	Erosion	All	Soil loss and can include wear of historic environment features such as wood banks which add to the biodiversity importance
	Removal of deadwood	Den building	Implications for invertebrates
	Vandalism	Anti-social behaviour	Can include graffiti, damage to signs, infrastructure etc.
Contamination	Dog fouling	Dog walking	Resulting in eutrophication. Urine and faeces an issue.
	Litter	All	Risk of contamination depending on composition
	Invasive species	All	Can be spread on clothes, fur and even deliberately
Fire	Increased fire incidence	Barbeques, camp fires, arson, cigarettes	Risks from a range of activities, with scope for major incident
Other	Harvesting	Fungi harvesting/wild food collection	
	Damage to visitor infrastructure	All	Detracts staff time from conservation management
	Challenges to achieving grazing	All	Ability to graze sites can be compromised by high levels of access through conflicts between users
	Changes to public perception	All	Access results in demand for visitor infrastructure and opposition from established visitors to changes in site management

2.3. Ecological Impacts and the Need for Mitigation

- 2.3.1. Current impacts and future risk from recreation impacts are primarily focussed at Ashridge Estate, where visitor pressure is highest. Ecological surveys were undertaken in 2021 by Footprint Ecology across the whole of the site.
- 2.3.2. These surveys recorded substantial evidence of recreational impacts throughout Ashridge and were severe in some ‘hot spot’ areas. Impacts were particularly intense in the central areas north and south of Monument Drive and also at Northchurch Common.
- 2.3.3. Just under 500 incidences of recreational damage were recorded. Damage through trampling was the most widespread impact, with widened paths and widespread incidence

of bare compacted and sometimes churned ground with some path junctions now supporting extensive areas of poached ground.

- 2.3.4. In many areas, but particularly the narrower desire lines through wooded areas, trampling had resulted in the exposure of tree roots (including those of veteran trees) and damage to tree roots.
- 2.3.5. Other issues included widespread den building and damage from bikes. Eutrophication from dog fouling was widespread and a number of campfires/barbeque remains were noted.

Detailed information on the ecological impacts recorded at Ashridge Commons and Woods SSSI are set out in **Section 3** of the Footprint Ecology Report “*Visitor survey, recreation impact assessment and mitigation requirements for the Chilterns Beechwoods SAC*” which was published in March 2022.

Click here for the [High resolution version](#)

Click here for the [Low Resolution version](#)



Figure 3: Examples of recreation impacts at Ashridge Commons and Woods. Verge parking image courtesy of National Trust, all other images by Footprint Ecology.

- 2.3.6. The National Trust have instigated a range of measures at the site already, these include:
- Logs to minimise and control levels of verge parking along the public highway;
 - Demarcation of parking bays along Monument Drive;
 - Signs asking visitors to remain on paths, shut gates etc at key locations to react to current damage;
 - Path edging, dead hedging etc. to contain access;

- Social media posts when Monument Drive is closed due to volumes of visitors on site or to educate the public i.e. highlight important features on the site;
- Ranger presence;
- Improved education via the visitor centre; and
- Automated counters to count vehicles at selected locations.

2.3.7. Despite these measures, impacts are widespread and recreation pressure is impacting the integrity of the site. On the basis of the evidence as summarised in the earlier sections of this strategy, housing growth will result in further damage to the Chilterns Beechwoods SAC.

2.3.8. Additional recreation activity may make any measures to address and resolve current impacts more difficult. Natural England has advised that the cumulative effects of housing growth will therefore have a likely significant effect and mitigation measures are necessary to ensure adverse effects on integrity can be ruled out.

2.3.9. For this reason, avoidance or mitigation measures are required for new residential development and some other forms of development within a Zone of Influence (Zoi) around the Chilterns Beechwoods SAC at Ashridge Commons and Woods SSSI. Further guidance on this is set out in the next section of this strategy.

3. STRATEGIC GUIDANCE FOR DEVELOPERS AND LANDOWNERS

3.1. Overview of the Habitats Regulations Assessment

- 3.1.1. The Habitats Regulations Assessment applies to plans or projects which are likely to have a significant effect on a National site (either alone or in combination with other plans or projects), and / or not directly connected with or necessary to the management of that site.
- 3.1.2. There is no set methodology or specification for carrying out and recording the outcomes of the assessment process. The Habitats Regulations Assessment Handbook, produced by David Tyldesley Associates (referred to hereafter as the 'DTA Handbook'), provides an industry recognised good practice approach to the Habitats Regulations Assessment.
- 3.1.3. The DTA Handbook⁴ has been used to prepare this strategy, alongside reference to Government Guidance on Appropriate Assessment. The DTA Handbook is used by Natural England, the Government's statutory nature conservation organisation and is widely considered to be an appropriate basis for the Habitats Regulations Assessment of plans and projects.
- 3.1.4. Having regard to the above, the process of the Habitats Regulations Assessment is summarised in four key stages as follows:
- **Stage 1. Screening:** Screening to determine if the plan or project would be likely to have a significant effect on a protected site. This stage comprises the identification of potential effects associated with a plan or project on protected sites and an assessment of the likely significance of these effects.
 - **Stage 2. Appropriate Assessment and the 'Integrity Test':** Assessment to ascertain whether or not the plan or project would have a significant adverse effect on the integrity of any protected site to be made by the Competent Authority. This stage comprises an impact assessment and evaluation in view of a protected site's conservation objectives. Where adverse impacts on site integrity are identified, consideration is given to alternative options and mitigation measures which are tested.
 - **Stage 3. Alternative solutions:** Deciding whether there are alternative solutions which would avoid or have a lesser effect on a protected site.
 - **Stage 4. Imperative reasons of overriding public interest and compensatory measures:** Considering imperative reasons of overriding public interest and securing compensatory measures.
- 3.1.5. This section provides practical guidance and makes clear the process that the authorities will follow for the first two stages of the Habitats Regulations Assessment, namely "Screening" and the "Appropriate Assessment". If the guidance is followed, then the legal requirements of the Habitats Regulations will be satisfied for the significant majority of applications which are affected.

⁴ Tyldesley, D., and Chapman, C. (2013) The Habitats Regulations Assessment Handbook (September) (2013) edition UK: DTA Publications Limited. Available at: www.dtapublications.co.uk

3.2. Stage 1: Screening Proposals

3.2.1. The purpose of the screening stage is to determine which plans and projects have the potential to negatively impact upon the protected site at Ashridge as a result of increased recreational pressure and disturbance.

3.2.2. The key objective of this stage is to determine if a proposal is “screened in” or “screened out”. If following stage 1 a proposal is “screened in”, then it must proceed to stage 2 and be subject to Appropriate Assessment.

3.2.3. If a proposal is “screened out”, then it is considered unlikely to give rise to negative impacts at Ashridge due to recreational pressure and disturbance. It does not need to proceed to stage 2 (Appropriate Assessment) and can be progressed as normal.

3.2.4. There are a number of factors that we will consider as part of the screening process when a proposal is submitted and these are presented in turn below. These factors are informed by the background evidence set out in Section 2 of this document, and importantly considers the potential for in-combination effects with other plans and projects.

Buffer Zones and the Location of Development – 12.6 kilometre Zone of Influence

3.2.5. The recreational ‘Zone of Influence’ is an area across which 75% of people will travel to use a designated site for recreational purposes. The process for establishing this zone is calculated using an industry standard approach and informed by the visitor survey data presented in Section 2 of this document.

3.2.6. Based on the evidence gathered to date, a Zone of Influence extending from 500 metres from the edge of the Ashridge Commons and Woods SSSI to 12.6 kilometres from the edge of the same SSSI. Within this zone, new growth will likely result in an increase in visitors and use of those sites. This results in increasing recreational disturbance and adversely affect the species and habitats of the protected sites.

3.2.7. The Zone of Influence applies to the whole of Dacorum Borough Council, and some land within the administrative area of Buckinghamshire Council, Central Bedfordshire Council and St. Albans City and District Council.

3.2.8. The Zone of Influence is based on evidence gathered from visitor surveys at the site in 2021 which demonstrates that 75% of all visitors to the site fall within that zone. The map on the following page presents this zone.

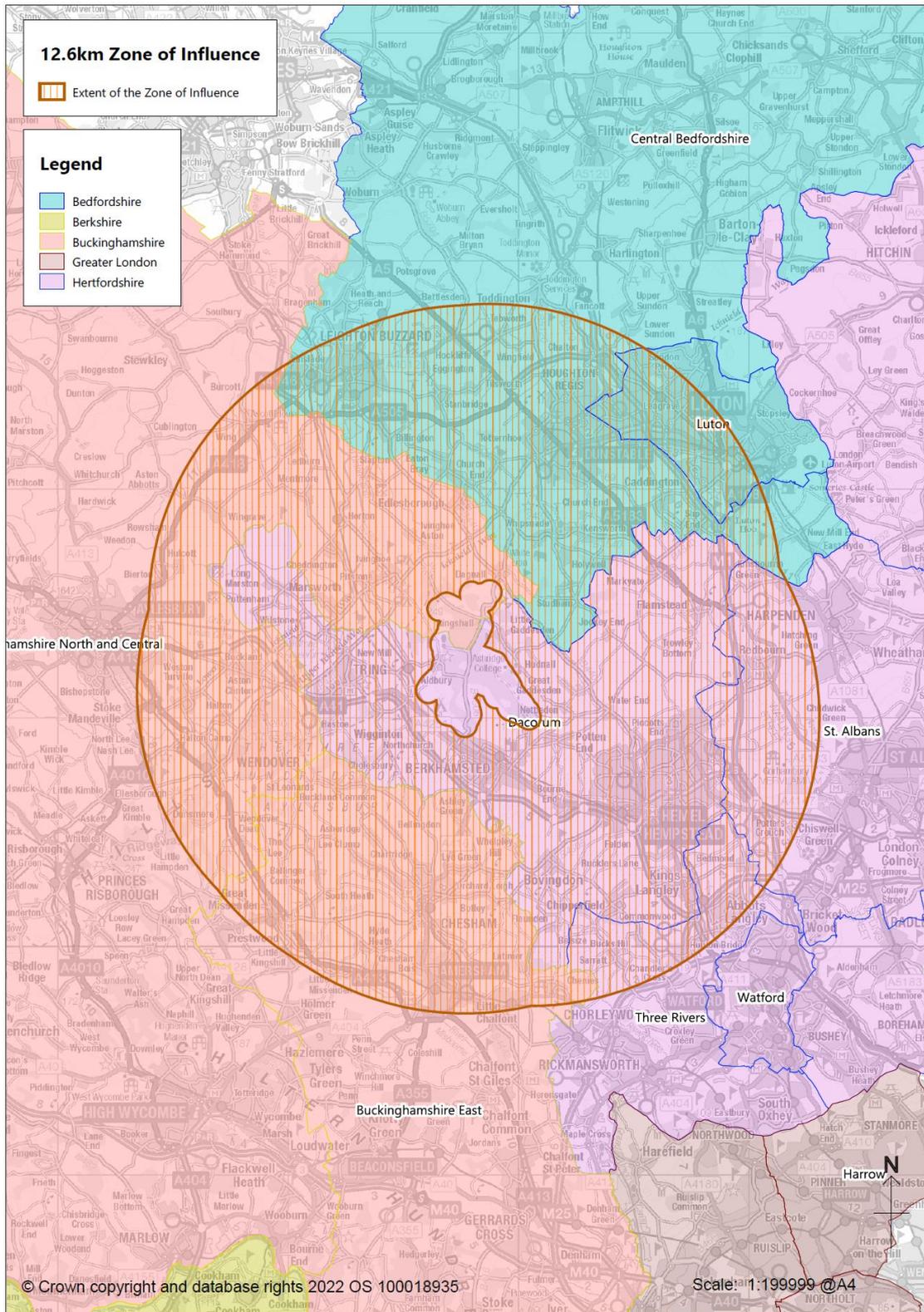


Figure 4: Map showing the defined 500 metre - 12.6km Zone of Influence

An interactive map with more detail on the extent of the 12.6 kilometre Zone of Influence is available to view online using the following link:

<http://dacorumbc.maps.arcgis.com/apps/instant/lookup/index.html?appid=a59b90f9d66f44828d802b867e6c4276>

Buffer Zones and the Location of Development – 500 metre Avoidance Zone

3.2.9. Based on the evidence gathered to date, a 500 metre 'Avoidance Zone' is established for residential development around Ashridge Commons and Woods SSSI. Within the zone there is a presumption against development, i.e. ensuring no increase in the number of dwellings there.

3.2.10. The 500 metre 'Avoidance Zone' applies only to land within the administrative area of Dacorum Borough Council and Buckinghamshire Council (North and Central).

3.2.11. There is a heightened risk to designated sites (such as the Chilterns Beechwoods SAC) from development in such close proximity to them. Recreational use is much higher from homes that are in easy walking distance of the site, and it is considered very difficult to deflect such access with alternative greenspace.

3.2.12. Fire risk, fly-tipping, light and noise and other urban effects are also more acute close to their boundary. Furthermore, mitigation approaches, such as access management and warden control, are less effective. The map on the following page presents the 500 metre Avoidance Zone.

3.2.13. The extent of the 12.6 kilometre Zone of Influence and 500 metre Avoidance Zone may change through future reviews of the evidence base and this strategy.

Buffer Zones and the Location of Development – Proposals that are partly located within a zone

3.2.14. Where a proposal partly falls within the Zone of Influence or 500 metre Avoidance Zone, only the affected development that is located wholly within the boundary of zone will be screened in.

3.2.15. As an example, there is a development proposal for five new dwellings and two of these dwellings are to be built on land within the defined zone, only those two dwellings will be screened in and subject to stage 2 (Appropriate Assessment). The remainder will be screened out.

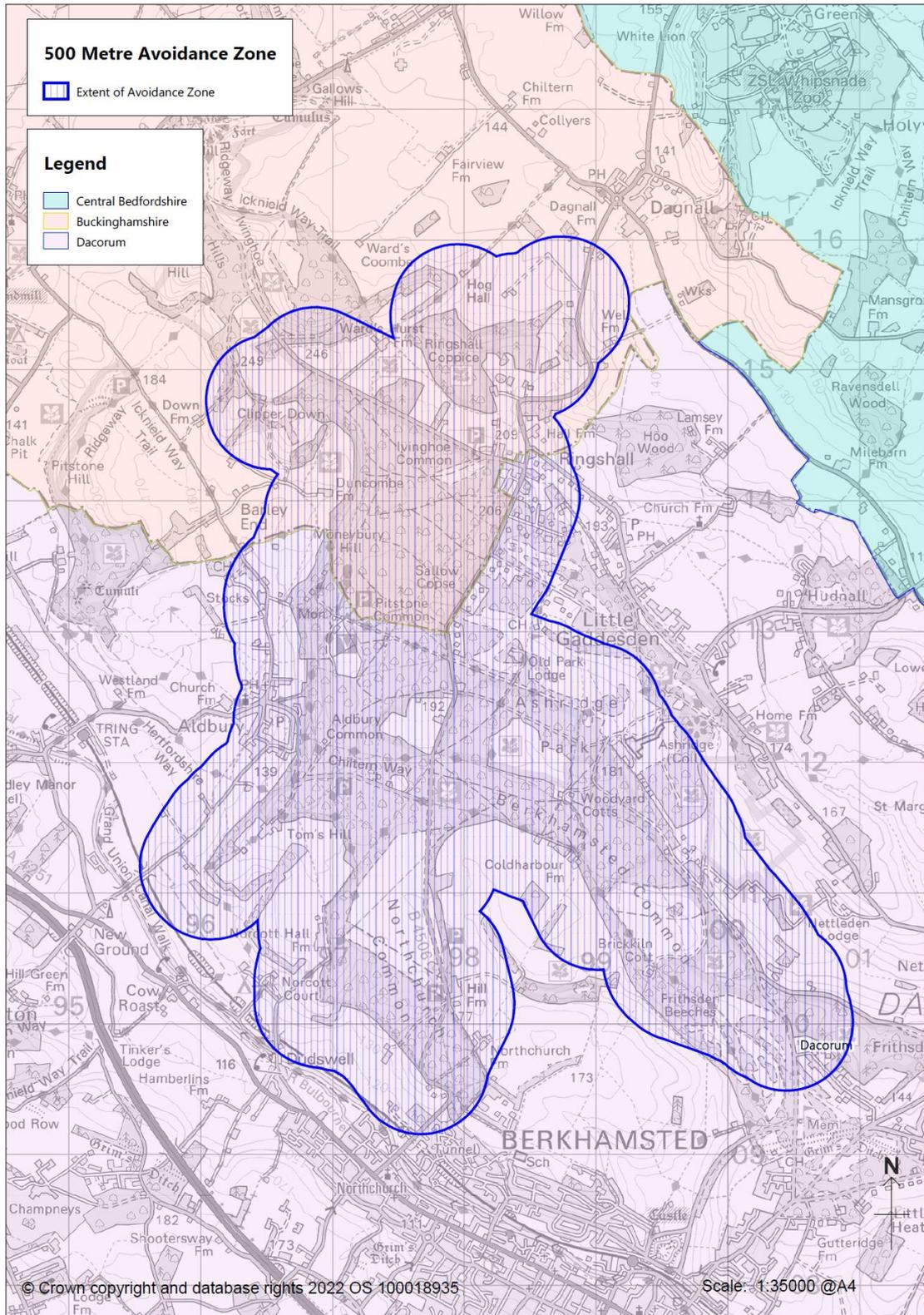


Figure 5: Map showing the defined 500 metre Avoidance Zone

An interactive map with more detail on the extent of the 500 metre avoidance zone is available to view online using the following link:

<http://dacorumbc.maps.arcgis.com/apps/instant/lookup/index.html?appid=a59b90f9d66f44828d802b867e6c4276>

Types of development proposals affected

3.2.16. All proposals which seek to deliver a **net increase in residential dwellings** and are located within the 500 metres Avoidance Zone or the wider Zone of Influence will be screened in and subject to stage 2 (Appropriate Assessment). These include proposals for mixed use schemes that include net new residential dwellings as part of a wider development.

3.2.17. Affected proposals are then subject to what is known as ‘Appropriate Assessment’, which is led by the competent authority. More information on what needs to be considered for the Appropriate Assessment stage is set out in Section 3.2 of this Document.

3.2.18. There are other forms of development which may cause additional harm and these will be considered on a case by case basis. Table 2 below presents types of development likely to be affected within the zones, highlighting which are likely to be screened in and therefore subject to stage 2 (Appropriate Assessment):

Table 2: Development Types

Use Type/Class	Screening Determination	
	500m Avoidance Zone	Zone of Influence
Dwelling Houses (C3) <i>Any net new additional dwellings</i>	Screened In	Screened In
Dwelling Houses (C3) <i>Extension or residential ‘Granny’ annexe</i>	Case by Case <i>Depends if it functions as a separate unit to the main dwelling.</i>	Case by Case <i>Depends if it functions as a separate unit to the main dwelling.</i>
Dwelling Houses (C3) <i>Replacement dwellings</i>	Screened Out	Screened Out
Residential Institutions (C2/C2A) <i>Accommodation and care to people in need of care, including Nursing Homes, hospitals and secure institutions</i>	Case by Case <i>Depends on the type of scheme proposed, the level of mobility of residents and potential for parking to be used by visitors to the SAC.</i>	Case by Case <i>Depends on the type of scheme proposed, the level of mobility of residents and potential for parking to be used by visitors to the SAC.</i>
Residential Institutions (C2) <i>School, college or training centre</i>	Case by Case <i>Depends on the type of scheme and its functional relationship to the SAC</i>	Screened Out
Hotels (C1) <i>A hotel, boarding or guest house</i>	Case by Case <i>Depends on offer and type of users expected</i>	Case by Case <i>Depends on offer and type of users expected</i>
House in Multiple Occupation (C4 / Sui Generis) <i>This also includes managed student accommodation.</i>	Screened In	Screened In
Holiday Dwellings (Sui Generis) <i>Self-contained holiday accommodation, caravan and touring holiday accommodation</i>	Screened In	Case by Case <i>Depends on offer and type of users expected</i>
Gypsy and Traveller Pitches (Sui Generis) <i>Net new pitches that are either temporary or permanent.</i>	Screened In	Screened In
Residential Boat Moorings ()	Screened In	Screened In
Café/Shop/Visitor Centre/Museum ()	Case by Case <i>Depends on offer and type of users expected</i>	Screened Out

- 3.2.19. It is important to note that the table above is not definitive. While it may be considered that the majority of affected development proposals within the 500 metres Avoidance Zone are unlikely to receive planning permission, there may be exceptions cases where development could be allowed.
- 3.2.20. Equally, there may be situations where some forms of development are considered to be screened out above, but may give rise to increased visitor pressures at Ashridge Commons and Woods SSSI. This may be due to their scale, location (within the wider Zone of Influence) and particular details. Such situations are likely to be rare. If there is uncertainty, applicants are encouraged to seek early engagement with the respective Council or with Natural England.

Application types - General

- 3.2.21. There are many avenues available for applicants to obtain permission for new development. Proposals will be ‘screened’ at the earliest stage in the planning process for their potential to impact upon the Chilterns Beechwoods SAC at Ashridge Commons and Woods SSSI.
- 3.2.22. The publication of the evidence demonstrating harm to the site in March 2022 resulted in an immediate halt in the determining of applications for those affected development types listed above. This included some applications which had already received permission but which require subsequent applications to be submitted, such as applications for reserved matters and those seeking to discharge conditions.

3.2.23. An affected development, once it has been screened-in and the Appropriate Assessment has demonstrated the risk of harm at Ashridge Commons and Woods SSSI can be mitigated (or avoided), may be granted permission. If the development is permitted and the necessary mitigation and/or contributions are secured, any related application (such as the discharging of conditions or reserved matters) can be screened out provided no further material amendments are made.

- 3.2.24. The following section presents guidance on how the Councils will approach different types of applications submitted.

Application types – Full and Outline Planning Applications

- 3.2.25. All full and outline planning applications will be screened based on the location of the scheme and type of development proposed. All applications that are screened in must be subject to stage 2 (Appropriate Assessment).

Application types – Prior Approvals / Permitted Development

- 3.2.26. Applications for Prior Approval/Permission in Principle will be screened in a similar manner to full and outline planning applications. Where such applications are acceptable, these

will be granted⁵. When this occurs, an informative must be added to the grant of permission requiring the applicant to satisfy stage 2 (Appropriate Assessment) prior to commencement of works, if it has not been demonstrated already.

Post-permission application types – Reserved Matters, Discharge of Conditions, Non-Material Amendments and Removal/variation of conditions.

- 3.2.27. These applications will be subject to screening if the affected development has not already been subject to this process at an earlier stage and/or suitable mitigation or avoidance measures have not been secured. This will normally apply to permissions granted prior to 14 March 2022.
- 3.2.28. **Planning conditions** have an important role in ensuring the delivery of high quality schemes. They are most often used to enable development to proceed (i.e. the grant of permission), where it would otherwise have been necessary to refuse planning permission.
- 3.2.29. Case law⁶ has determined that where applications for the discharge, removal or variation of planning conditions *may* be ‘screened in’, the case officer will need to undertake an exercise to determine if the condition “goes to the heart of the planning permission”. With this the case officer will determine whether the condition is an implementing one and the details are fundamental to the acceptability of the site.
- 3.2.30. The nature and wording of conditions vary greatly as no two applications are ever the same. Many require further evidence or documentation to be submitted and agreed with the relevant authority in order for development to be considered acceptable.
- 3.2.31. Applications for **minor material amendments (under section 73)** *may* be screened in if the affected proposal was not implemented prior to 14 March 2022. This includes circumstances where the original permission has fully discharged its conditions. Evidence would be required to demonstrate implementation prior to that date.

Application types not affected

- 3.2.32. The following application types will be screened out as they have no bearing on recreational pressures at Ashridge Commons and Woods SSSI.
- Lawful Development Certificates⁷
 - Householder applications
 - Demolition
 - Advertisements
 - Works to trees

⁵ The decision to grant is subject to other material planning considerations.

⁶ There are a number of cases relevant to this matter, including: *Whitley & Sons v Secretary of State for Wales* (1992) 64 P&CR 296; *R (Hart Aggregates Ltd) v Hartlepool Borough Council* [2005] EWHC 840 (Admin); *Bedford Borough Council v The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government and Aleksander Stanislaw Murzyn* [2008] EWHC 2304 (Admin); *Greyfort Properties Ltd v SSCLG* [2011] EWCA Civ 908; and *R (Howell) v Waveney District Council* [2018] EWHC 3388

⁷ There may be some very limited circumstances where lawful development certificates may be screened in.

Pre-application Advice

- 3.2.33. As no decision is provided through this service, such advice is not subject to the Habitats Regulations and therefore are not screened in. The pre-application advice service can assist a prospective applicant in better understanding the likely impacts that a proposed development may have on the Chilterns Beechwoods SAC at Ashridge Commons and Woods SSSI. This may be the case for more complex applications or where it is felt that a proposed scheme *could* be screened in, having regard to the type of development proposed (see Table 2).

3.3. Stage 2: An Appropriate Assessment of Proposals

- 3.3.1. As set out in Section 3.2 above, where proposals are screened in, they must be subject to what is known as “Appropriate Assessment”. This stage seeks to understand the impacts that development will have, alone or in combination with other plans and projects, and where possible identify measures to avoid/mitigate these likely effects.
- 3.3.2. This process is led by the respective Council to which the proposal relates, having regard to the particular merits of the proposal and evidence submitted.
- 3.3.3. The National Planning Practice Guidance⁸ sets out in more detail what an Appropriate Assessment should contain. Importantly, it states the following:

An Appropriate Assessment must contain complete, precise and definitive findings and conclusions to ensure that there is no reasonable scientific doubt as to the effects of the proposed plan or project. The competent authority [e.g. the local planning authority] will require the applicant to provide such information as may reasonably be required to undertake the assessment.

An Appropriate Assessment must consider the indirect effects on the designated features and conservation objectives, including the following principles:

- *an Appropriate Assessment must catalogue the entirety of habitat types and species for which a site is protected.*
- *an Appropriate Assessment must identify and examine the implications of the proposed plan or project for the designated features present on that site, including for the typical species of designated habitats as well as the implications for habitat types and species present outside the boundaries of that site and functionally linked; insofar as those implications are liable to affect the conservation objectives of the site.*
- *where the competent authority rejects the findings in a scientific expert opinion recommending additional information, the Appropriate Assessment must include an explicit and detailed statement of reasons which is capable of dispelling all reasonable scientific doubt on the effects of the proposal on the site.*
- *a competent authority [e.g. a local planning authority] is permitted to grant a plan or project consent which leaves the applicant free to determine subsequently certain*

⁸ The full guidance on Appropriate Assessments is available to view online at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/appropriate-assessment#what-must-an-appropriate-assessment-contain>

parameters relating to the construction phase, only if that authority is certain that the consent includes conditions that are strict enough to guarantee that those parameters will not adversely affect the integrity of the site.

In the light of this the competent authority must determine whether the proposal will not adversely affect the integrity of the site(s) [e.g. the Chilterns Beechwoods SAC]. The integrity of a site is the coherence of its ecological structure and function, across its whole area, that enables it to sustain the habitat, complex of habitats and/or the levels of populations of the species for which it was designated.

3.3.4. In light of the evidence gathered by Footprint Ecology for Ashridge Commons and Woods SSSI and presented in Section 2 of this document, proposals that are screened in at stage 1 have the potential to adversely affect the integrity of the site, either alone or in combination with other proposals within the 500 metre Avoidance Zone and the wider Zone of Influence. For this reason, such proposals are subject to Appropriate Assessment.

3.3.5. Mitigation measures are therefore required for Ashridge Commons and Woods SSSI. The core objective of these measures are to:

- Deflect visitors away from the site so that housing does not result in a proportionate increase in access to the site, by providing alternative options;
- Better manage visitor distribution and numbers within the SAC (and ideally wider area) to reduce pressures in certain areas;
- Reduce impacts of recreation by influencing visitors to change their damaging behaviours (e.g. verge parking, dogs off-lead, barbeques, straying from marked paths and trampling flora);
- Reduce impacts of recreation within the site by protecting sensitive features (veteran trees, future veterans, vegetation communities) and increasing the resilience of the site (e.g. to impacts of climate change which can exacerbate recreation impacts).

3.3.6. **Where proposals are screened in and within the 500 metre Avoidance Zone**, Natural England has advised that **there is a presumption against such development being granted** as it is unlikely that any mitigation or avoidance measures would be effective. Sufficient evidence needs to be produced by the applicant to demonstrate how their scheme would not result in a net increase in visitors to Ashridge Commons and Woods SSSI. This will be taken into account as part of the Appropriate Assessment undertaken by the Council.

3.3.7. **Where proposals are screened in and within the wider 500 metre - 12.6km Zone of Influence**, Natural England has advised that **these can be sufficiently mitigated (or avoided) through measures set out in this strategy.**

3.3.8. These measures comprise of two separate elements that all proposals will be expected to contribute towards or directly deliver and are considered in turn below:

- Strategic Access Management and Monitoring ('SAMM') involving access management and engagement work wholly within the boundary of the SAC.
- Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace ('SANG') involving the provision of alternative recreation opportunities away from the SAC.

3.4. Strategic Access Management and Monitoring Strategy (SAMM)

Key Principles

3.4.1. The intention of the Strategic Access Management and Monitoring Strategy is to directly manage and avoid impacts at its source and to better educate those visiting the Chilterns Beechwoods SAC at Ashridge Commons and Woods SSSI.

3.4.2. These measures are in addition to the regular habitat management of the site, which is also undertaken by the National Trust. Since the publication of evidence by Footprint Ecology which demonstrate harm to the integrity of the site, the National Trust have enhanced measures of their own across the site. These do not form part of the cost of SAMMs, which solely relate to predicted harm arising from future growth in the Zone of Influence.

Overall Cost of SAMM

3.4.3. The Strategic Access Management and Monitoring Strategy consists of six projects as set out in Appendix A. The table provides a description and cost of the projects. These costs cover a minimum period of 80 years from 2022. Each of these projects are costed on the best available information and evidence in consultation with the National Trust who manage the majority of the designated site.

3.4.4. The projects detailed in Appendix A have been designed to mitigate the likely scale of development that will come forward within the 12.6 kilometres Zone of Influence. Strategic Access Management and Monitoring Strategy projects will be subject to regular review to ensure that they remain fit for purpose.

3.4.5. **The total cost of SAMM, as agreed with Natural England and the National Trust is £XX,XXX,XXX.**

Apportionment of Cost to each Authority

3.4.6. The total cost of SAMMs is to be apportioned between the four authorities as follows:

Table 3: Apportionment of SAMM to each authority

Council (Administrative Area)	SAMMS apportionment
Dacorum Borough Council	£X,XXX,XXX
Central Bedfordshire	£X,XXX,XXX
St. Albans City and District	£X,XXX,XXX
Buckinghamshire (North and Central)	£X,XXX,XXX
Buckinghamshire (East)	£X,XXX,XXX

3.4.7. The precise method to which the apportioned cost of SAMMs is secured through development and processed is a decision for each individual authority and will vary. Part B of this document sets out the details of how the total apportionment will be secured for XXXX Council.

3.5. Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG)

Key Principles

- 3.5.1. Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace, or “SANG”, is the term given to greenspaces that are created or enhanced with the specific purpose of absorbing recreation pressure that would otherwise occur at National Sites, such as Ashridge Commons and Woods SSSI. New SANGs can be created, or existing greenspaces enhanced to create a SANG, in order to absorb the level of additional recreation pressure associated with new development.
- 3.5.2. SANG projects dovetail with SAMM in that they provide additional space for recreation and provide attractive alternatives for people who may otherwise choose to visit Ashridge Commons and Woods SSSI. With SAMM, visitors will become more aware of their impacts and access to Ashridge better managed. Over time the emphasis for recreation use will shift to other sites enhanced for recreation, such as SANG.

Guidance on securing SANG as part of new Development

- 3.5.3. All new residential development within the zone of influence must contribute towards either a) a new (bespoke) SANG or b) contribute towards suitable SANG projects elsewhere. This is in addition to the necessary SAMM contributions as set out in the previous section.
- 3.5.4. The identification of new (bespoke) SANG will need to be agreed with Natural England, or agreed with both and the Competent Authority and Natural England who will subject it to Appropriate Assessment. The following is required to support this proposal:
- 1: A Management Plan setting out the projects and interventions required to deliver the SANG.
 - 2: An agreement with the landowner that the SANG will be secured for a minimum period of 80 years.
 - 3: If the candidate SANG is already accessible to the public, visitor surveys are likely to be required to determine the capacity of the candidate SANG to accommodate an uplift in visitor numbers.
- 3.5.5. SANG needs to be delivered ahead of occupation of any affected development that is directly linked to it. For larger scale SANG, delivery can be phased in a proportionate manner alongside new development, reflecting the short, medium and longer term projects and interventions as outlined in the accompanying Management Plan.
- 3.5.6. Part B of this document sets out the details of how SANG will be secured for XXXX Council.

Scale of SANG

3.5.7. SANG will be provided at a rate of eight hectares per 1,000 new residents; this is equivalent to 0.0192ha per dwelling.

3.5.8. SANG needs to be of a scale for it to function properly as a space.

3.5.9. Formal open spaces such as sports grounds, playing fields or some children's play areas (i.e. those not constructed from natural materials, such as wood) are unlikely to meet the criteria for SANG. If such features are present, they should not be counted towards the overall area of SANG.

Catchment of SANG

3.5.10. The catchment of SANG will depend on their particular characteristics and location, and also their location within a wider green infrastructure network. As a guide:

i) SANG of 2-12ha will have a catchment of 2km

ii) SANG of 12-20ha will have a catchment of 4km

iii) SANG of 20ha+ will have a catchment of 5km

3.5.11. Any development seeking to deliver 10 or more net new residential dwellings (or equivalent) must be located within (or on the edge of) the catchment of a SANG project. That SANG must have existing capacity, and meets any further criteria necessary to accommodate the proposed scheme.

3.5.12. Smaller development proposals for up to 9 net new residential dwellings (or equivalent) are not restricted to catchment areas for SANG. If such a development is not within the catchment area of a SANG with sufficient capacity, it can contribute towards an existing SANG elsewhere.

3.5.13. Strategic SANG sites will serve developments within the administrative area of that SANG. For example, a SANG in Dacorum will serve proposals in Dacorum, unless an agreement has been made with a neighbouring authority that its capacity can be shared.

Guidance for Creating a Suitable SANG

3.5.14. The guidance below is broken down into relevant components. They have been compiled from a variety of sources but principally from visitor surveys⁹ undertaken across Ashridge Commons and Woods SSSI.

3.5.15. The core objective for SANG is to deliver an attractive space that is publically accessible and which would likely deflect visitors, or a reasonable proportion of their trips, away from Ashridge Commons and Woods SSSI.

⁹ "Visitor survey, recreational impact assessment and mitigation requirements for the Chilterns Beechwoods SAC", Footprint Ecology, March 2022. Available to view online at www.dacorum.gov.uk/sac

3.5.16. Candidate SANG that meet the criteria below are highly likely to be accepted by Natural England and the Competent Authority. Should a candidate SANG not meet all of the criteria, then these will be assessed on a case by case basis, having regard to the particular measures proposed. Such proposals will need to demonstrate equivalent effectiveness of mitigation being provided to ensure a robust, consistent approach is followed. Any shortfall in the criteria should be offset by other complementary means, such as an elevated provision rate, size or high-quality features.

3.5.17. Candidate SANG that deliver a 2.3 – 2.5km circular walk are considered a basic requirement by Natural England, although it is recognised that this is unlikely to be achieved on a small or linear site. This guideline does not mean that the candidate SANG will not be accepted as in specific circumstances the walk does not have to be included. It is however desirable to provide all of the criteria listed below across a local SANG network, taking into account other sites in the nearby area.

3.5.18. Table 4 below presents the criteria for new SANG to offset pressures at Ashridge Commons and Woods SSSI.

Table 4: Criteria for the consideration of a site as Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace

Paths	A minimum circular walk of 2.3-2.5 kilometres to be provided.	Expected
	Paths easily used and well maintained but mostly unsurfaced.	Expected
	Where parking is provided, circular path should start and finish at that location.	Expected
	Paths should be safe, easily identifiable and kept clear of obstructions, such as scrub cover for example.	Expected
	Information boards and/or signage at access points outlining the layout of the site and routes available to visitors.	Desirable
Parking	Parking, including for cyclists, to be provided on sites larger than four hectares, unless the site is solely intended for residents within 500 metres only.	Expected
	Parking areas are to be easily and safely accessible by car and to be clearly sign posted.	Expected
	Visitor to be able to take dogs from the parking area to the site safely off the lead	Desirable
Access	Access points to be provided based on the intended visitors of the SANG.	Expected
	Safe access route on foot from nearest car park and/or footpath.	Expected
	Access should be unrestricted within the site, with plenty of space for dogs to exercise freely and safely off the lead.	Expected

Character of space	Needs to be semi-natural, or perceived as such where close to existing development.	Expected
	If the site is larger than 12 hectares, a range of habitats should be present.	Expected
	No unnatural intrusions (e.g. odour from sewage treatment works, noise from busy roads).	Expected
	There should be little intrusion of built structures such as dwellings, buildings, fencing (not constructed using natural materials), etc.	Expected
	Naturalistic space with areas of open countryside with dense and scattered trees and shrubs.	Desirable
	Gentle undulating topography. Steep slopes are likely to deter visitors.	Desirable
	Focal point such as a viewpoint or monument within the site.	Desirable
	Provision of open water, however large areas of open water cannot count towards SANG capacity.	Desirable

3.5.19. The following section provides additional guidance to support the criteria listed above.

Paths, Roads and Tracks

3.5.20. SANG should aim to supply a choice of routes of around 2.3 - 2.5km in length with both shorter and longer routes of at least 5km as part of the choice, where space permits.

3.5.21. Paths have to be of a width acceptable to visitors.

3.5.22. Paths should be routed so that they are perceived as safe by the users, with some routes being through relatively open (visible) terrain (with no trees or scrub, or well-spaced mature trees, or wide rides with vegetation back from the path), especially those routes which are 1-3 km long.

3.5.23. Routes should make use of important views and vistas where possible.

Accessibility and Parking

3.5.24. Most visitors to Ashridge Commons and Woods SSSI come by car and want the site to be fairly close to home. Unless SANG is provided for the sole use of a local population living within a 500-metre catchment around the site, then the availability of adequate car and cycle parking on SANG sites that are larger than four hectares is essential.

- 3.5.25. The amount and nature of parking provision should reflect the anticipated use of the site by visitors and the catchment size of the SANG. A guide to parking provision should be in the region of 1.5 spaces per hectare of SANG. Parking should be clearly signposted, easily accessed and advertised as necessary for potential visitors.

Target groups of Visitors

- 3.5.26. This should be viewed from two perspectives, the local use of a site where it is accessed on foot from the visitor's place of residence, and a wider catchment use where it is accessed by car. Most of the visitors to Ashridge Commons and Woods SSSI come by car and therefore should be considered as a pool of users from beyond the immediate vicinity of the site. All but the smallest SANG should therefore target this type of visitor.

- 3.5.27. It is apparent from access surveys that a significant proportion of those people who visit the site on foot, also visit alternative sites on foot and so this smaller but significant group look for local sites. Where large populations are close to Ashridge Commons and Woods SSSI, the provision of SANG should be attractive to visitors on foot.

Buildings and other manmade infrastructure

- 3.5.28. Little or no buildings or other manmade infrastructure is found within Ashridge Commons and Woods SSSI at present apart from the provision of some surfaced tracks, car parks and facilities close to Monument Drive. Generally, an urban influence is not what people are looking for when they visit the site and many people visit because it has a naturalness about it that would be marred by such features.

- 3.5.29. However, SANG would be expected to have adequate parking with good information about the site and the routes available. Some subtle way marking would be expected for those visitors not acquainted with the layout of the site.

- 3.5.30. Other infrastructure would not be expected other than on the largest of SANG where toilets and other facilities such as a café could be provided. Such infrastructure should generally be restricted to the vicinity of parking areas where good information and signs of welcome should be the norm, though discretely placed benches or information boards along some routes would be acceptable.

Landscape and Vegetation

- 3.5.31. SANG do not have to contain beech woods or chalk grasslands (i.e. protected features) to provide an effective alternative to Ashridge Commons and Woods SSSI.

- 3.5.32. SANG should seek to avoid sites of high nature conservation value which are likely to be damaged by increased visitor numbers. Such damage may arise, for example, from increased disturbance, erosion, input of nutrients from dog faeces, and increased incidence of fires. Where sites of high nature conservation value are considered as SANG, the impact on their nature conservation value should be assessed and considered alongside relevant policy in the development plan. These sites may require an ecological discount of their proposed SANG area.

- 3.5.33. A semi-natural looking landscape with plenty of variation is regarded as most desirable by visitors and some paths through quite enclosed woodland scored highly. There is clearly a

balance to be struck between what is regarded as an exciting landscape and a safe one and so some element of choice between the two would be highly desirable. The semi-wooded and undulating nature of most of the Ashridge Commons and Woods SSSI gives it an air of relative wildness, even when there are significant numbers of visitors on site. SANG should aim to reproduce this quality.

3.5.34. Hills do not put people off visiting a site, particularly where these are associated with good views, but steep hills are not appreciated. An undulating landscape is preferred to a flat one.

3.5.35. Water features, particularly ponds and lakes, act as a focus for visitors for their visit, but are not essential.

Networks of SANG

3.5.36. The use of SANG networks, including narrow linear sites and small sites of no smaller than two hectares have potential to provide effective mitigation where traditional SANG is unavailable. These SANG areas will need to be linked and/or in proximity to an already established SANG. If effectiveness can be demonstrated of small or linear SANGs working alone, then we will assess this on a case by case basis, taking in to account the site's context amongst the wider greenspace network.

3.5.37. The provision of longer routes within larger SANG is important in determining the effectiveness of the authorities' network of SANG as mitigation. The design of routes within sites will be critical to providing routes of sufficient length and attractiveness for mitigation purposes.

3.5.38. Though networks of SANG may accommodate long visitor routes and this is desirable, they should not be solely relied upon to provide long routes.

Restrictions on usage

3.5.39. A significant proportion of visitors to Ashridge Commons and Woods SSSI use the space to exercise their dogs and so it is important that SANG allow for pet owners to let dogs run freely over a significant part of the walk. Access on SANG should be largely unrestricted, with both people and their pets being able to freely roam across significant parts of the site. This means that sites where freely roaming dogs will cause a nuisance, disturb wildlife, or where they might be in danger (from traffic or such like) should not be considered for SANG.

Additional guidance for enhancing an existing open space to become SANG

3.5.40. SANG may be provided by the enhancement of existing open land, including those already accessible to the public that have a low level of use and could be enhanced to attract more visitors. The extent of enhancement and the number of extra visitors to be attracted would vary and principally relates to the existing level of visitors that use each site.

3.5.41. Those sites which are enhanced only slightly would be expected to provide less of a mitigation effect than those enhanced greatly, in terms of the number of people they would divert away from Ashridge Commons and Woods SSSI. Examples include enhanced

access through guaranteed long-term availability of the land, the creation or expansion of a car park or the provision of a network of paths.

3.5.42. SANG which have an appreciable but clearly low level of public use and can be substantially enhanced to greatly increase the number of visitors also count in full. The identification of these sites should arise from evidence of low current use. This could be in a variety of forms, for example:

- Experience of managing the site, which gives a clear qualitative picture that few visitors are present;
- Quantitative surveys of visitor numbers;
- Identified constraints on access, such as lack of gateways at convenient points and lack of parking;
- Lack of usable routes through the site; and
- Evidence that existing routes through the site are rarely used (paths may show little wear, be narrow and encroached on by vegetation)

Management Plans for Candidate SANGs

3.5.43. A management plan is required to support any candidate SANG proposal. This must include:

- An overview of the site, its description, location and adjoining uses;
- An understanding of its topography and existing accessibility;
- Information on the recreational routes proposed within the site, including if necessary where it links to other sites in the area;
- An evaluation of the site against the preferred and desirable criteria set out earlier in this section (see Table 4);
- The proposed location of an parking, points of access and the indicative routes for visitors to use on site;
- Mechanisms for funding, including plans for enhancements, management and maintenance in the short, medium and longer term; and
- Approach to monitoring the site for its effective use as a SANG

Visitor Surveys for Candidate SANGs

3.5.44. If required, visitor surveys will determine how much capacity exists for an existing public open space to support additional visitors in the future. This will determine the extent to which that site could support new residential development, should it be taken forward as a SANG.

3.5.45. It is advised that a clear methodology is prepared and where feasible agreed with Natural England and/or the competent authority in advance of the surveys being undertaken. The following guidance is provided on what are key considerations for any such survey:

- A tally count is required for at least two weekdays and one weekend day for each candidate SANG with existing public access.

- Days do not need to be consecutive, however all tally counts should normally be undertaken in close proximity to one another (within 2-3 weeks)
- The hours of surveying should respond to the season and the amount of daylight available, taking account of other factors such as wooded areas which can generally be darker. A total of 8 hours of surveying per day is expected in summer months between 7am and 7pm. This reduces to 6 hours in winter months.
- Weather should be reasonably good for the time of year that the survey is being undertaken.
- Surveys should capture visitor access points that are generally well used.

3.5.46. Sites are likely to have additional capacity where average visitor use is less than 1 person per ha per hour¹⁰.

3.6. Gateway site(s)

- 3.6.1. A gateway site is an innovative and emerging concept with regards to avoidance and mitigation measures at Ashridge Commons and Woods SSSI. The purpose of a Gateway is similar to that of SANG, to create an attractive alternative to Ashridge that deflect users away from there, reducing recreational pressures as a result.
- 3.6.2. A key difference between SANG and a gateway site is that the later needs to be well related to the existing Ashridge Estate and importantly on land outside of the Chilterns Beechwoods SAC. A gateway site should provide equivalent attractions and facilities sufficient to draw people away from more sensitive areas within Ashridge Estate that suffer the most from substantial recreational damage.
- 3.6.3. An example of this would be the honeypot location of Monument Drive which draws the majority of visitors from the surrounding area. If sufficient visitors were drawn to a nearby gateway site, it is likely that substantially less damage would occur.
- 3.6.4. A gateway site would need to demonstrate with reasonable certainty how visitors would be drawn away from the site, rather than encouraging more visitors through the provision of more facilities and attractions. With this, it is likely that further interventions within the protected parts of Ashridge Estate would likely need to occur in tandem.
- 3.6.5. Depending on the scale and location of a gateway site, it could serve as an alternative to SANG delivery that could serve one or more of the Councils within the Zone of Influence.
- 3.6.6. Gateway sites are expected to be a medium-term project, which will be worked upon once SANG and SAMM are secured. The Councils will continue to work together with the National Trust and Natural England on exploring options for gateway sites alongside the delivery of SAMM and SANG. Further guidance may be provided on this through a future review of this strategy.

¹⁰ This provides a guide or approximate benchmark, typically busier than the relevant National Sites but less than an urban park (see Liley et al., 2015). Sites will need to be considered on a case-case basis.

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4. Implementation, Monitoring, Review and Governance

4.1. Implementation

- 4.1.1. All net new homes granted planning permission from 14 March 2022 will need to contribute towards the Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMMs) Projects (listed in Appendix A or as superseded) and secure or make proportionate contributions towards the delivery of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG).
- 4.1.2. The developer of each net new home is required to pay the Council to which the affected development is located, a financial contribution to support the implementation of SAMMs projects in Appendix A. The Council will pass on these contributions to the National Trust for the sole purpose of implementing these or successor Strategic Access Management and Monitoring Strategy projects for the Chilterns Beechwoods SAC at Ashridge Commons and Woods SSSI.
- 4.1.3. The approach to the delivery of suitable SANG is a matter that is being progressed separately by each Council, reflecting the different stages each authority has reached with possible SANG and their respective Local Plans. Each authority will manage and maintain a list of SANG that have been agreed with Natural England, providing sufficient clarity on their status and capacity to accommodate additional growth as well as the catchment to which they serve.
- 4.1.4. The sums of monies will be secured via appropriate mechanisms as set out in Part B of this document and will be subject to an inflation related clause. In addition, the costs of individual components may be reviewed as part of the annual update based on the outcomes of individual project evaluation if this identifies that there has been either an underestimation or overestimation of the costs attributed. These contributions are in addition to any CIL, Section 278, Section 106 or other requirements that may arise through reforms to the planning system.

4.2. Monitoring and Review

- 4.2.1. It is important to recognise that the SAMMs costs provided in Appendix A are taken from a base year of 2022. Consequently, these costs will be updated on 1 April each year to take account of inflation. Build costs will be based on the Construction Output Price Indices published by the Office for National Statistics. Staff and consultancy costs will be based on any annual wage increase proposed by the National Trust, changes to on-costs as a result for changes in nationally set levels of employer contributions for National Insurance purposes, and Consumer Price Index for consultancy costs.
- 4.2.2. Monitoring of the SAMMs projects and further visitor surveys have been identified within the costings set out in Table 3. The Mitigation Strategy will be reviewed in three years' time (2025) and following that every five years. Should circumstances require it, future reviews may be brought forward. This will ensure that the strategy remains appropriate and fit for purpose to mitigate the impact of public access and disturbance threats for the Chilterns Beechwoods SAC at Ashridge Commons and Woods SSSI.
- 4.2.3. Monitoring of SANG will be undertaken by each Council respectively.

4.3. Governance

4.3.1. Dacorum Borough Council, Buckinghamshire Council, Central Bedfordshire Council, St. Albans City and District Council, Hertfordshire County Council and the National Trust will operate and implement governance arrangements to ensure the mitigation strategy remains relevant and is monitored, reviewed and delivered.

4.3.2. The governance arrangements will cover a range of processes including:

- the effective project management of the strategy;
- the resources required to ensure it is maintained for a minimum period of 80 years;
- timescales for implementation of avoidance and mitigation measures including SAMM and SANG
- future reviews of the strategy;
- the responsibilities of each party involved;
- dispute resolution; and
- any other general provisions.

4.3.3. The partner authorities and the National Trust will continue to liaise with Natural England on a regular basis to ensure the strategy remains effective and that mitigation is secured.

Agenda Item 9

SPAE OSC: Work Programme 2021/22

Meeting Date		Report Deadline	Items	Contact Details	Background information
August 2022		August 2022			
21 September 2022		9 September 2022			
			Environmental Services Performance Q1 Environmental and Community Protection Performance Report Q1	Group Manager for Environmental Services craig.thorpe@dacorum.gov.uk Group Manager for Environmental and Community Protection Emma.walker@dacorum.gov.uk	
			Quarter 1 2022/2023 Planning, Development and Regeneration performance Q1	Alex Robinson – Assistant Director for Planning Alex.Robinson@dacorum.gov.uk	Quarterly performance report
			Chilterns Beechwood Mitigation Strategy	Alex Robinson – Assistant Director for Planning Alex.Robinson@dacorum.gov.uk	

12 October 2022	30 September 2022			
		Biodiversity Net Gain SPD	Alex Robinson – Assistant Director for Planning Alex.Robinson@dacorum.gov.uk	
		Infrastructure Delivery Plan Update Report	Alex Robinson – Assistant Director for Planning Alex.Robinson@dacorum.gov.uk	
		Waste Services Route Optimisation	Assistant Director neighbourhood delivery - Richard LeBrun Richard.lebrun@dacorum.gov.uk	
		PSPO annual Review	Group Manager for Environmental and Community Protection Emma.walker@dacorum.gov.uk	
		EV Strategy Approval	Melanie Parr - Melanie.Parr@dacorum.gov.uk	
		Infrastructure Funding Statement – Developer Contributions Update	Alex Robinson – Assistant Director for Planning Alex.Robinson@dacorum.gov.uk	Statutory annual report on funds received and spent through new developments via s106 agreements and Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)

8 November 2022	28 October 2022			
		Food Service Plan and Recovery Plan	Environmental and Community Protection Emma.walker@dacorum.gov .uk	
		Affordable Housing SPD	Alex Robinson – Assistant Director for Planning Alex.Robinson@dacorum.gov v.uk	
		Quarter 2 2022/2023 Planning, Development and Regeneration performance Q2	Alex Robinson – Assistant Director for Planning Alex.Robinson@dacorum.gov v.uk	Quarterly performance report
		Environmental Services Performance Q2 Environmental and Community Protection Performance Report Q2	Group Manager for Environmental Services craig.thorpe@dacorum.gov.u k Group Manager for Environmental and Community Protection Emma.walker@dacorum.gov .uk	
		Hemel Place Strategy	James Doe, Strategic Director – Place James.doe@dacorum.gov. uk	
		AQMA and AQAP update	Environmental and Community Protection Emma.walker@dacorum.gov .uk	
6 December 2022	25 November 2022	Joint Budget		

Others to be programmed

			TBC with Chair
	Stewardship Supplementary Planning Document	Alex Robinson – Assistant Director for Planning	
	Chilterns Beechwoods Mitigation Strategy	Alex Robinson – Assistant Director for Planning	