



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 SANG Management Plans
Date:	12 October 2022
Report on behalf of:	Cllr Alan Anderson, Portfolio Holder for Place
Part:	I
If Part II, reason:	N/A
Appendices:	Appendix A – Bunkers Park Draft SANG Management Plan Appendix B – Chipperfield Common Draft SANG Management Plan
Background papers:	
Glossary of acronyms and any other abbreviations used in this report:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Appropriate Assessment (AA) - Chilterns Beechwoods Special Area of Conservation (SAC) - Easy Access Route (EAR) - Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) - Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) - Strategic Management and Monitoring (SAMM)

Report Author / Responsible Officer

Alex Robinson – Assistant Director for Planning



Alex.Robinson@dacorum.gov.uk / 01442 228236 (ext. 2208)

Ronan Leydon – Team Leader, Strategic Planning



Ronan.Leydon@dacorum.gov.uk / 01442 228257 (ext. 2257)

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
-----------------------------	--

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 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 update the Committee on the emerging Management Plans for Chipperfield Common and Bunkers Park which are proposed to be used for SANG.
Recommendation (s) to the decision maker (s):	1. That Committee notes the emerging Management Plans.
Period for post policy/project review:	

1. Introduction

1.1 This report presents emerging information on the draft Management Plans for two sites (Chipperfield Common and Bunkers Park) which are proposed to be used by the Council as Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG). This report provides an overview of the principles and broad measures that are proposed on the sites, with more details provided at Appendix A and B.

2. Background

2.1 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. 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.

2.2 Further background on the particular issues affecting the Chilterns Beechwoods SAC at Ashridge Commons and Woods Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and an overview of the legislative requirements can be found in the report that went to the 21 September 2022 meeting of Strategic Planning & Environment Overview & Scrutiny². The report set out the work that the Council has been doing with Natural England, the National Trust and a number of adjoining local authorities³, who are also impacted by the restrictions, to prepare the Mitigation Strategy.

2.3 The Mitigation Strategy is needed to avoid adverse public access and disturbance impacts from development on the integrity of the SAC and covers Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMM), Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) and Gateway Projects.

2.4 The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the SANG proposals.

Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG)

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

² [Agenda for Strategic Planning & Environment Overview & Scrutiny on Wednesday, 21st September, 2022, 7.30 pm \(dacorum.gov.uk\)](#)

³ Buckinghamshire Council, Central Bedfordshire Council and St. Albans City and District Council.

- 2.5 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.
- 2.6 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, including Council-led Strategic SANG.

This is in addition to the SAMM contributions which was discussed at the previous meeting of Strategic Planning & Environment Overview & Scrutiny.

- 2.7 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.
- 2.8 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.
- 2.9 The Council recognises that not all development sites will be able to provide a SANG site and so the Council is proposing to bring forward the following Council owned sites that can provide some Strategic SANG capacity:
1. Bunkers Park;
 2. Chipperfield Common; and
 3. Part of Gadebridge Park.
- 2.10 In order for these sites to be utilised as SANG they must have capacity to accommodate additional visits and there must be a Management Plan in place setting out the improvements that will be made. 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. Bunkers Park and Chipperfield Common Draft Management Plans

- 3.1 The Draft SANG Management Plans for Bunkers Park and Chipperfield Common are included as Appendices to this report. It is important to note that the Management Plans are currently work in progress and still to be reviewed by Natural England who will advise the Council on whether the measures sufficiently meet the specific criteria for delivering these sites as SANG.
- 3.2 The enhancement measures within the Bunkers Park and Chipperfield Draft Management Plans were identified through desktop and on-site assessments of the open spaces against the SANG criteria set out in the draft Mitigation Strategy.
- 3.3 The interventions to these sites to become SANG aim to replicate features which have been found to draw visitors to the Chilterns Beechwoods SAC at Ashridge Commons and Woods SSSI and improve access, alongside the enhancement of the site’s natural qualities.

3.4 For Bunkers Park and Chipperfield Common, the proposed works are in addition to, or bring forward, existing management actions identified through their existing Green Flag management plans.

3.5 There are a number of interventions proposed for both areas. As noted earlier in this section, these are still in draft and a short summary of the types of projects expected are presented below.

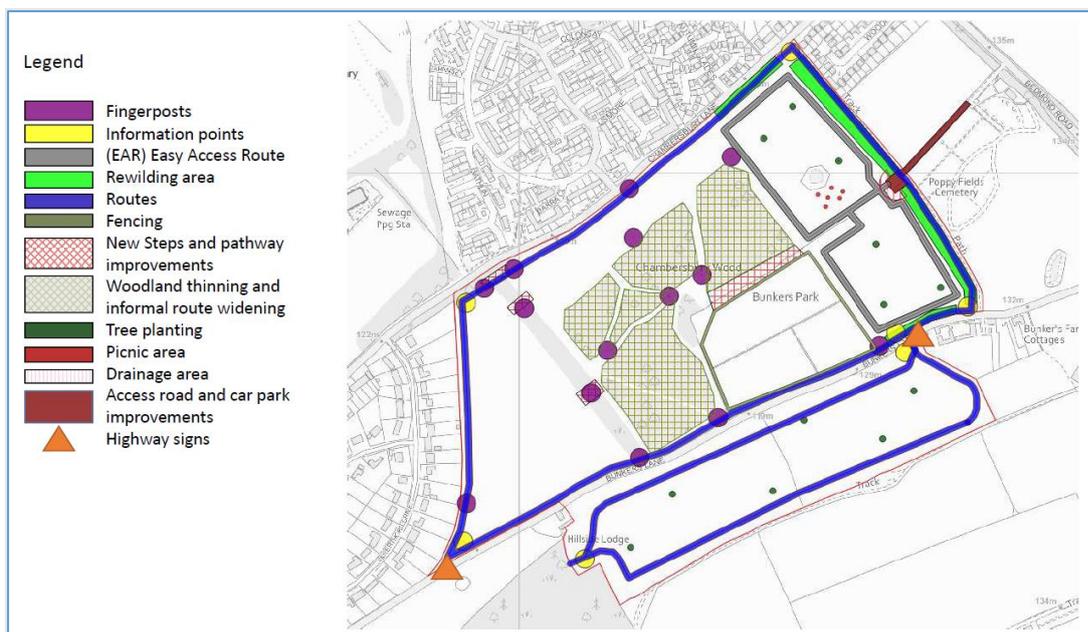
Bunkers Park

- Paths
 - New and enhanced signage and interpretation boards across the site.
 - Surfaced routes in areas liable to surface water flooding.
 - Tree surveys and subsequent works to ensure paths remain safe.
 - Replacement steps at access points along the Mattens.

- Parking
 - Access road improved.
 - Car park upgraded.
 - Cycle racks to be installed.

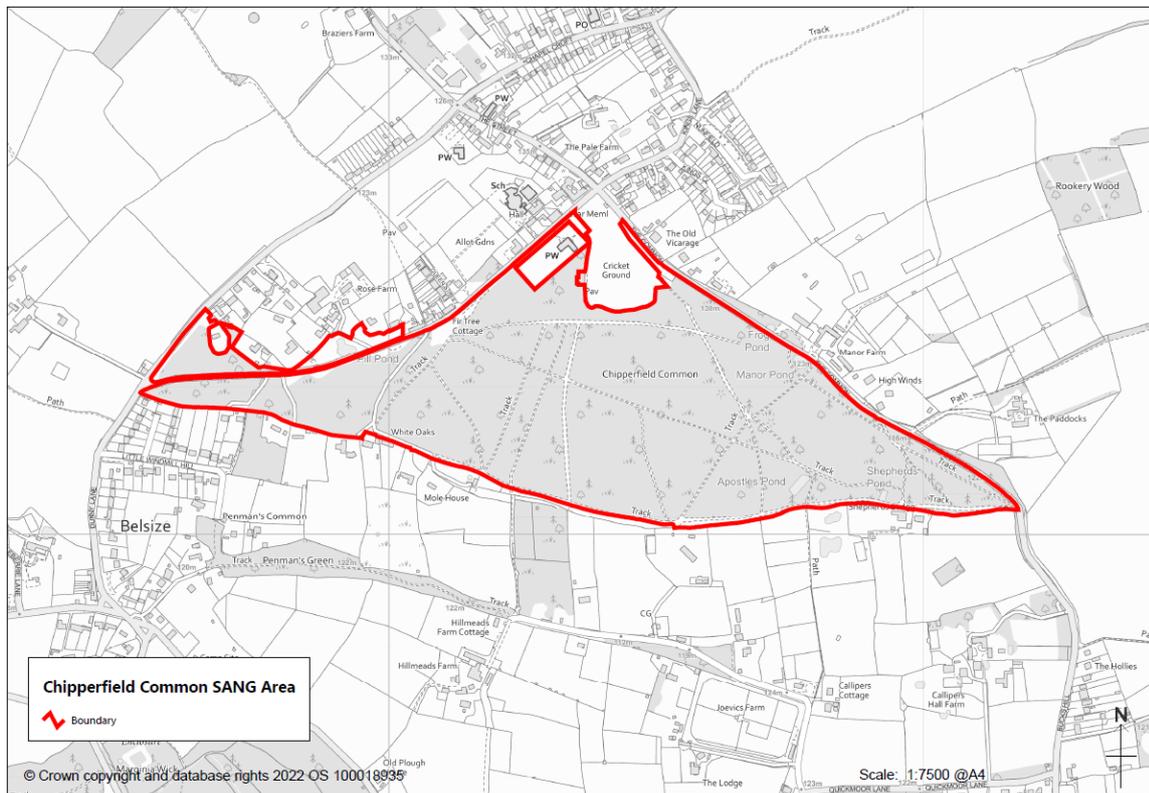
- Access
 - Replacement gates at key points to allow enhanced accessibility to the site.
 - New fingerposts at path intersections and key points.
 - New benches and bins.
 - Range of routes of different lengths identified on the site plan and waymarked.
 - Drainage works to the area around the existing car park.
 - Improved access to the mature woodland.
 - Informal routes through Chambersbury Wood to be widened.

- Character of Space
 - New rewilding areas.
 - Specimen trees to be planted to allow for better waymarking.
 - New fencing around the Mattens to allow it to continue to be grazed.
 - Thinning of Chambersbury Wood to enable it to mature successfully.
 - Hedge laying at specific locations to provide natural barriers.



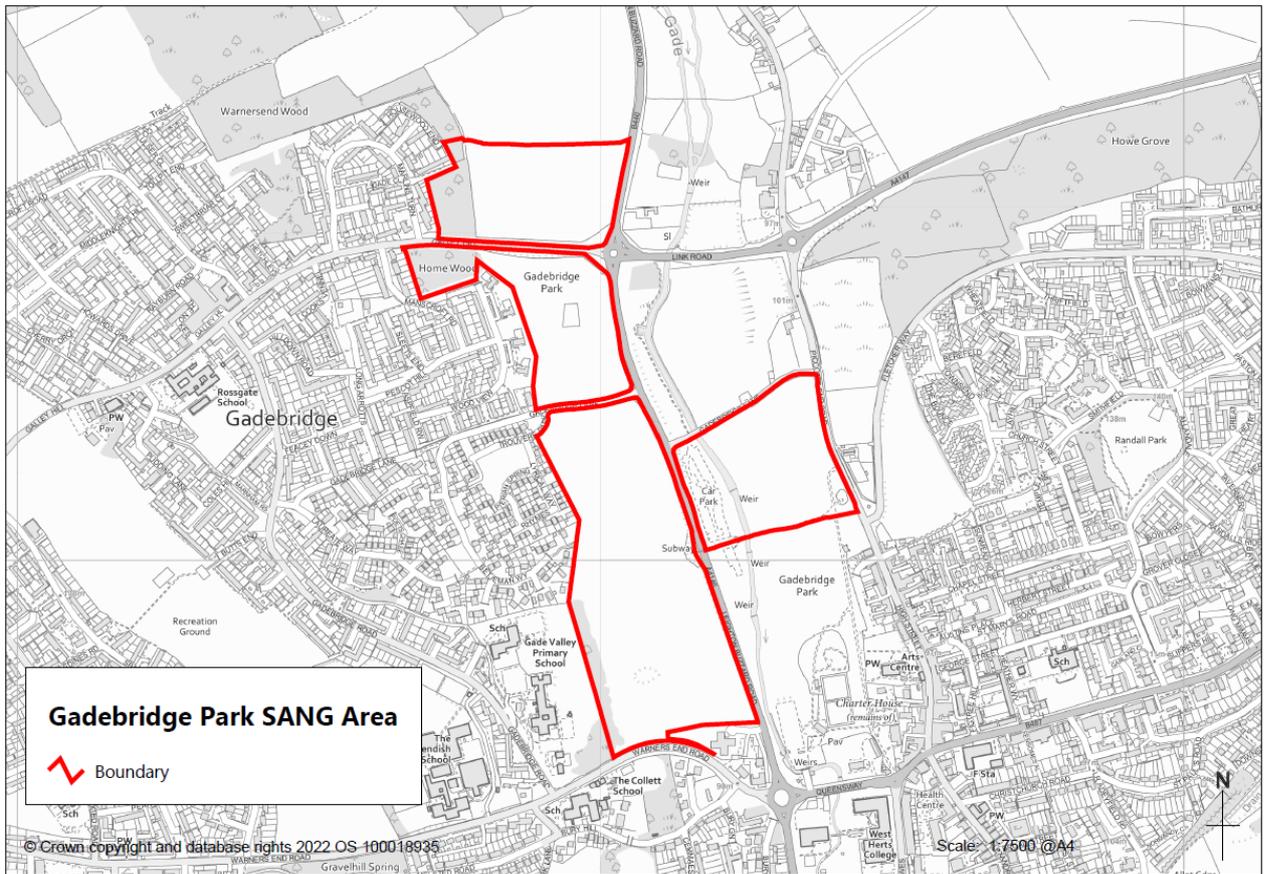
Chipperfield Common

- Paths
 - New and enhanced signage and interpretation boards across the site to provide information on footpath routes and the history of Chipperfield Common.
 - Resurfacing of the Easy Access Route to improve accessibility.
 - Additional surfaced links, including the Spanish Chestnut Path.
 - Improvements to the areas around the sweet chestnuts.
 - Tree surveys and subsequent works to ensure paths remain safe.
 - New surfaced footpath sections and steps in areas of steep and slippery terrain.
 - Barrows protected with further measures including new information boards.
- Parking
 - Resurfacing of car parks to aid year-round use.
- Access
 - Repurposed section of Cricket Ground Car Park into new visitor arrival area.
 - Easy Access Route extended to the car park and cycle parking added.
 - New or replacement fingerposts added throughout site at key intersections and routes.
 - Range of routes of different lengths identified on the site plan and waymarked.
 - New benches and bins.
 - Surfacing the area from the Easy Access Route to the picnic benches to aid use.
- Character of Space
 - Works to ponds in consultation with Chipperfield Parish Council.
 - Removal of fencing in some areas to provide improved open access.
 - Glade management to control regrowth of birch, bracken and scrub.
 - Vegetation clearance works and management around Apostles Pond to ensure the continuity of the Lime 'Apostles' heritage feature.



4. Gadebridge Park Management Plan

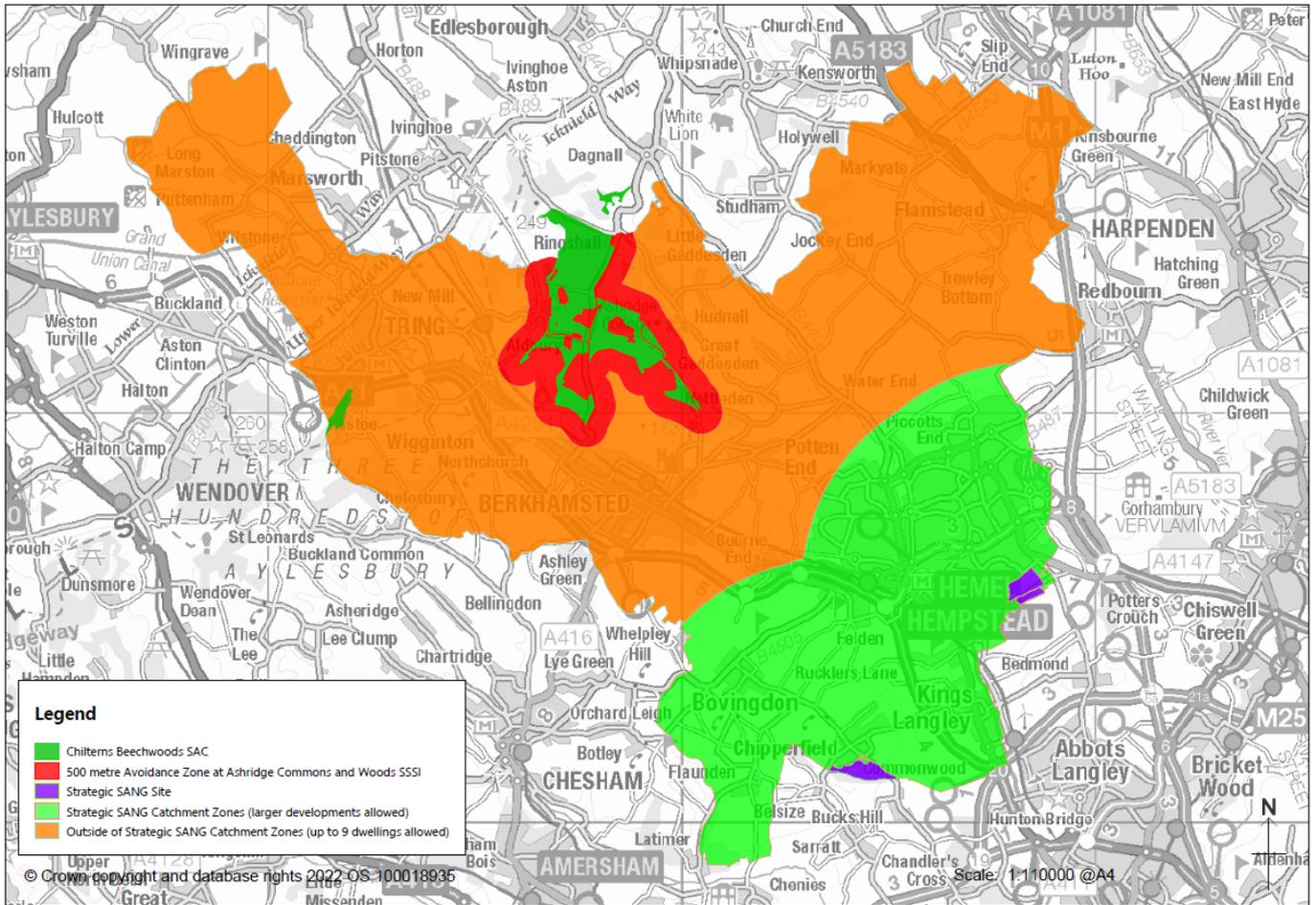
- 4.1 Work continues to progress on the visitor surveys and development of the management plan for Gadebridge Park. Work on the identification of SANG at Gadebridge Park is focussed predominantly on the more natural open spaces to the west of Leighton Buzzard Road, as shown in the map below.



- 4.2 There is an aspiration for Gadebridge Park to be a focal point for a wider network of SANG in due course, which could include enhanced links to Howe Grove, Margaret Lloyd Park and land that forms part of Hemel Garden Communities to the north-east.

5. Strategic SANG capacity and their catchments

- 5.1 Although subject to some final validation checks to ensure survey results are accurate, initial results indicate that the acceptance of both Bunkers Park and Chipperfield Common as Strategic SANG will enable the Council to support the delivery of approximately 4,000 homes.
- 5.2 These sites will allow developments of up to 9 dwellings to come forward anywhere in the borough, provided applicants agree to make contributions towards both SAMM and the Strategic SANG. This is consistent with the advice provided by Natural England and the approach used by authorities in similar situations elsewhere in the country.
- 5.3 Larger scale developments may also progress where these are located within the five kilometre catchments of Bunkers Park and Chipperfield Common. The map below presents the area to which such schemes can be considered. This includes the majority of Hemel Hempstead, Kings Langley and Bovington, and covers approximately 30% of the whole of the borough.



5.4 Strategic SANG capacity is a finite resource. It is important that this capacity is allocated appropriately and in accordance with the Council’s planning and development aspirations. It is also important that the enhancements to these sites are delivered to reduce the recreational pressure on Ashridge Commons and Woods SSSI. The Council will be setting its principles to direct the allocation of SANG to new developments.

6. Monitoring and Review

6.1 Strategic SANG will be subject to regular monitoring to ensure that measures are implemented in a timely manner alongside future growth. Contributions will support the delivery of a new team dedicated to the delivery of SANG measures across these sites and any future SANG sites that may come forward.

6.2 As with the new SAMM measures coming forward at Ashridge Commons and Woods SSSI, Management Plans for new SANG sites will be prepared cover a period of at least 80 years and will be costed appropriately.

6.3 The capturing of contributions for SANG will be monitored by a dedicated officer within Strategic Planning and Regeneration. The monitoring of projects for the Council’s Strategic SANG sites will be undertaken by the new team responsible for its implementation, working closely with Strategic Planning and Regeneration as part of this process.

7. Options and alternatives considered

7.1 If the Council decided not to bring forward its own land to be used as SANG then housing development in Dacorum would be on hold indefinitely until a third party could bring forward SANG. It is considered highly

unlikely that such a solution would come forward in the short to medium term and the consequences for housing delivery in the Borough would be severe.

8. Consultation

- 8.1 James Doe – Strategic Director (Place)
- 8.2 Simon Coultas – Operations Manager (Clean, Safe and Green)

9. Financial and value for money implications:

Financial

- 9.1 The measures contained in the Management Plans would be funded by developers wishing to benefit from the capacity provided.

Value for Money

- 9.2 None arising from this report.

10. Legal Implications

- 10.1 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.

11. Risk implications:

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

12. Equalities, Community Impact and Human Rights:

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

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

- 13.1 None arising from this report.

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

- 14.1 None arising from this report.

15. Conclusions:

- 15.1 Not applicable

Appendix A – Draft Management Plan for Bunkers Park

Appendix B – Draft Management Plan for Chipperfield Common