

Dacorum BC Community Impact Assessment (CIA) Template

Policy / service / decision

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

Description of what is being impact assessed

What are the aims of the service, proposal, project? What outcomes do you want to achieve? What are the reasons for the proposal or change? Do you need to reference/consider any related projects?

Stakeholders; Who will be affected? Which protected characteristics is it most relevant to? Consider the public, service users, partners, staff, Members, etc

It is advisable to involve at least one colleague in the preparation of the assessment, dependent on likely level of impact

Dacorum is home to Ashridge Common and Woods SSSI, and Tring Woodlands SSSI, which are part of the Chilterns Beechwoods SAC, an area that is internationally recognised for its importance to nature conservation and designated part of the national site network under the Habitats Directive. This places a responsibility on the Council to ensure that the integrity of the sites is not adversely affected by new planning proposals such as the new Dacorum Local Plan and individual planning applications, and a legal requirement to undertake a Habitats Regulations Assessment.

To understand the current and future impact of growth on the protected sites, the Council commissioned a Visitor survey, recreation impact assessment and mitigation requirements report. This found Ashridge Commons and Woods SSSI to be under increasing visitor pressure and concluded that more protection measures were needed to safeguard the site from additional visitor pressure generated by new development. It established the need for a number of restrictions including establishing an Inner (500m) and Outer (12.6km) 'Zone of Influence' around the site where certain developments would be restricted in perpetuity (in the case of the Inner Zone) or until a mitigation strategy is in place (in the case of the Outer Zone). The entirety of Dacorum Borough lies within the Zone of Influence. As a result the Council worked with Natural England, the National Trust and a number of adjoining local authorities who are also impacted by the restrictions to prepare a Mitigation Strategy and supporting documents and plans.

The Mitigation Strategy aims to ensure that there will be no adverse effect on the integrity of the Chilterns Beechwoods Special Area of Conservation (CBSAC) at Ashridge Commons and Woods SSSI arising from new development within Dacorum.

The Mitigation Strategy is in two parts:

Part A provides common guidance for the planning areas of Dacorum Borough Council, Central Bedfordshire Council and St Albans City and District Council.

Part B provides detailed guidance specific to Dacorum Borough Council including detailed information on the mechanisms for securing mitigation for each proposed development.

The Strategy Access and Management Strategy is designed to address issues at Ashridge Estate and mitigate the likely scale of development that will come forward within the Zone of Influence. It will deliver a range of projects to protect vulnerable habitats, improve the site's resilience to and recovery from recreational pressure, better manage visitor parking and access, encourage the uptake of sustainable transport, and educate and inform visitors, alongside additional monitoring of the impact of the measures. New qualifying development will be required to pay a per-dwelling tariff towards the required SAMMS interventions.

Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace 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 Chilterns Beechwoods SAC. New SANGs can be created or existing greenspaces enhanced to create a SANG, in order to absorb the level of recreation pressure associated with qualifying development. The Mitigation Strategy requires qualifying development to either provide new (bespoke) SANG or contribute towards Strategic SANG projects elsewhere. The Strategy provides guidance on the criteria for providing SANG and the allocation procedure for Council owned Strategic SANG.

The SANG part of the strategy will increase the overall provision and quality of natural greenspace within the Borough, as the identified sites must be maintained specifically for SANG and cannot be counted towards other uses, including formal recreation and activity. SANG sites must have a semi-natural feel without intrusions such as built development. SANG will be expected to have features that will enable all members of the community to visit and enjoy the sites. These will include – an appropriate level of parking for vehicles and bicycles; information boards and signage; easy to use paths, with a minimum circular walk of 2.3-2.5km; areas to walk a dog off lead; and a focal destination point. The Strategy also sets catchment areas for SANG, meaning

that development must be within an accessible distance of its related SANG. The SANG criteria are designed to make the area attractive to visitors to draw them to the site as an alternative to the Chilterns Beechwoods SAC.

Alongside the Mitigation Strategy, the Council approved two Council owned sites that can provide some Strategic SANG capacity – Bunkers Park and Chipperfield Common. SANG management plans have been prepared for these sites, which set out the improvements that will enable each to achieve SANG standard and the enhanced management and maintenance regimes that will ensure they continue to perform as SANG over the required 80 year period. Developers wishing to utilise the Council owned Strategic SANG capacity are required to pay their proportion of the costs for delivering the improvements needed.

The Council intends to bring forward a further phase of SANG sites to provide a future supply for development. It is expected that Gadebridge Park will shortly become available as the next SANG site. Following on from this the sites under assessment are Margaret Lloyd Park, Howe Grove Wood Local Nature Reserve and an extension to Bunkers Park.

Evidence

What data/information have you used to assess how this policy/service/decision might impact on protected groups?

(include relevant national/local data, research, monitoring information, service user feedback, complaints, audits, consultations, CIAs from other projects or other local authorities, etc.). You should include such information in a proportionate manner to reflect the level of impact of the policy/service/decision.

Footprint Ecology, Visitor survey, recreation impact assessment and mitigation requirements for the Chilterns Beechwoods SAC and the Dacorum Local Plan (2022)

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

Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area Supplementary Planning Document Equality Screening (Runnymede Borough Council) <https://www.runnymede.gov.uk/downloads/file/834/equality-screening>

Improving access to greenspace: A new review for 2020

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/904439/Improving_access_to_greenspace_2020_review.pdf

The Chipperfield Common (Green Flag) Management Plan

The Bunkers Park (Green Flag) Management Plan

Who have you consulted with to assess possible impact on protected groups? *If you have not consulted other people, please explain why? You should include such information in a proportionate manner to reflect the level of impact of the policy/service/decision.*

Councillor Sheron Wilkie – Portfolio Holder for Planning and Infrastructure
 Sara Whelan – Assistant Director - Planning
 Luke Johnson – Trees and Woodlands Team Leader, Clean Safe and Green

Analysis of impact on protected groups (and others)

The Public Sector Equality Duty requires Dacorum BC to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations with protected groups. Consider how this policy/service/decision will achieve these aims. Using the table below, detail what considerations and potential impacts against each of these using the evidence that you have collated and your own understanding. Based on this information, make an assessment of the likely outcome, **before** you have implemented any mitigation.

- *The PCs of Marriage and Civil Partnership and Pregnancy and Maternity should be added if their inclusion is relevant for impact assessment.*
- *Use “insert below” menu layout option to insert extra rows where relevant (e.g. extra rows for different impairments within Disability).*

Summary of impact		Negative impact / outcome	Neutral impact / outcome	Positive impact / outcome
Protected group	<i>What do you know? What do people tell you? Summary of data and feedback about service users and the wider community/ public. Who uses / will use the service? Who doesn't / can't and why? Feedback/complaints?</i>			
Age	The SANG part of the Strategy will provide more and better access to natural greenspace through its requirement for development to either provide new bespoke SANG or contribute towards Strategic SANG. Access to natural spaces has found to create positive impacts for people of all ages, but particularly younger and older people.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

	<p>There is a large body of evidence pointing to the physical, mental and social development of children being enhanced by playing and learning in green environments, and further evidence suggests that poor health outcomes are reduced in children who have greater access to green space.</p> <p>A number of studies found that older people also benefit from increased access to green spaces through improved physical health and social well-being. Evidence suggests that access to green space can potentially reduce the disproportionate levels of social isolation and loneliness experienced by older people in society.</p> <p>The House of Commons research briefing 'UK disability statistics: Prevalence and life experiences' (published August 2023 data from 2021/22) stated that disability prevalence rise with age, with 45% of adults over State Pension age, and 58% of people aged 80 and over reporting a disability (compared to 23% of working age adults). Therefore, many of the specific points raised under 'disability' could potentially create positive impacts for the majority of older people.</p>			
<p>Disability (physical, intellectual, mental)</p> <p><i>Refer to CIA Guidance Notes and Mental Illness & Learning Disability Guide</i></p>	<p>There is growing evidence that increased access to natural spaces, and spending time in the natural environment, benefits the physical and mental wellbeing of all people, but particularly for people with disabilities and/or long-term health conditions.</p> <p>Improved access to green space is particularly beneficial to people's mental health. Studies support that improved access to green space can reduce rates of anxiety and depression (the most commonly diagnosed mental health condition in Britain).</p> <p>The Council's SANG management plans for Chipperfield Common and Bunkers Park also detail a number of specific improvements for</p>	<p>□</p>	<p>□</p>	<p>☒</p>

	<p>each site that could provide a positive impact for people with disabilities.</p> <p>Both plans include access improvements by: creating new surfaced Easy Access Routes or enhancing existing; surfacing areas where access becomes difficult during wet weather; regularly maintaining footpath routes to ensure they are clear of obstructions. Works to footpaths will particularly benefit individuals with physical/mobility disabilities as it will improve their access.</p> <p>The Council SANG sites will also offer new circular walking routes that will be signposted through information boards, route markers and wayfinding, increasing the overall legibility of the sites. This particularly benefits people with sensory, developmental, memory and learning disabilities.</p> <p>In terms of access to and from the areas, the provision of resurfaced car parks and marked circular routes to and from car parks will ensure that individuals who rely on personal transport to access spaces can do so.</p> <p>New facilities on the sites such as benches for places to rest, and waymarked routes indicating difficulty levels, will ensure the spaces cater for a range of user interests and capabilities.</p> <p>Lastly, a new management regime will be introduced at the Council's SANG sites that will include monitoring the condition of the sites and the success of the access and inclusion measures.</p>			
<p>Gender reassignment</p>	<p>No material impact on this protected group</p>	<p>□</p>	<p>⊗</p>	<p>□</p>

Race and ethnicity	No material impact on this protected group	□	⊗	□
Religion or belief	No material impact on this protected group	□	⊗	□
Sex	No material impact on this protected group	□	⊗	□
Sexual orientation	No material impact on this protected group	□	⊗	□
Not protected characteristics but consider other factors, e.g. carers, veterans, homeless, low income, loneliness, rurality etc.	The Mitigation Strategy is intended to protect the integrity of Ashridge Commons and Woods SSSI. This will be beneficial to the wider community as it will safeguard the important natural capital and ecosystem services the area provides. These are the benefits humans gain from the natural environment such as carbon storage, water and air quality improvements and diversity in wildlife.	□	□	⊗

Negative impacts / outcomes action plan

Where you have ascertained that there will potentially be negative impacts / outcomes, you are required to mitigate the impact of these. Please detail below the actions that you intend to take.

Action taken/to be taken <i>(copy & paste the negative impact / outcome then detail action)</i>	Date	Person responsible	Action complete
n/a	Select date		<input type="checkbox"/>
	Select date		<input type="checkbox"/>
	Select date		<input type="checkbox"/>
	Select date		<input type="checkbox"/>
	Select date		<input type="checkbox"/>
	Select date		<input type="checkbox"/>
	Select date		<input type="checkbox"/>
	Select date		<input type="checkbox"/>

If negative impacts / outcomes remain, please provide an explanation below.	
n/a	
Completed by (all involved in CIA)	Claire Covington, Assistant Team Leader – Strategic Planning Keeley Mitchell, Assistant Officer – Strategic Planning and Regeneration Officer
Date	18/12/2023
Signed off by (AD from different Directorate if being presented to CMT / Cabinet)	Mark Brookes
Date	22/12/2023
Entered onto CIA database - date	
To be reviewed by (officer name)	
Review date	