Land at Downlands Farm, Uckfield

Report to Inform a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA)

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1. Introduction and Background

1.1. Background and Proposals

1.1.1. Aspect Ecology has been commissioned by Gleeson Strategic Land Ltd to prepare a report to inform a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) in respect of proposed redevelopment at land at Downlands, Uckfield, in West Sussex, centred at grid reference TQ 4661 2223 (see Plan 5719/HRA1).

1.1.2. The site is proposed for residential development for 430 dwellings, along with associated parking, infrastructure, landscaping and access. The proposed development will also include the provision of SANG/recreation provision, to be located within the east of Site.

1.1.3. A number of European designations are located within the site surrounds, and as such, the proposed development will need to be subject to a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended).

1.1.4. The following report sets out a Shadow Habitats Regulation Assessment (including an Appropriate Assessment) of the proposed development, identifying whether the specific proposals for the site are likely to result in an adverse effect on integrity of any international designations.

1.2. Site Overview

1.2.1. The site is located to the west of Uckfield, in West Sussex, and occupies land between Snatt's Road, Uckfield, in the east, and the A22 Uckfield bypass to the west.

1.2.2. The site is bounded to the north by areas of woodland forming part of Budletts Wood and Paygate Wood, beyond which are further areas of woodland, farmland and scattered rural dwellings. To the east, the site is bound by Snatt's Road, with residential areas forming the urban fringe of Uckfield beyond this. Lake abuts the site to the south, and Fir Tree Grove is immediately adjacent to the south-east corner of the site, beyond which is Rock's Road.

1.2.3. Residential development is proposed within one large agricultural field, with a further agricultural field being used for the creation of the SANG, whilst a new vehicular access and secondary emergency access will be created from the A22.

1.3. Purpose of this report

1.3.1. The following report sets out information to inform an assessment under the Habitat Regulations of the proposed development at the site, identifying whether the specific proposals for the site are likely to result in an adverse effect on integrity of any international designations to inform the competent authority (or Inspector or Secretary of State at appeal) in undertaking its HRA/AA.

2. Legislation and Assessment Methodology

2.1. Legislation

2.1.1. All areas in England classified as Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) or Special Protection Areas (SPAs), collectively known as European sites, receive statutory protection under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (the Regulations). These

Regulations transpose into UK legislation the 'Habitats Directive' 1992 (92/43/EEC) and the 'Birds Directive' 2009 (2009/147/EC). National planning policy in the form of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) explicitly sets out that listed Ramsar sites should be considered in the same way, as if they had been classified or designated as SACs or SPAs.

2.1.2. The Regulations impose a duty on Local Planning Authorities (competent authorities) to carefully consider whether any proposals may have a significant effect on a European designation, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects. In most circumstances, permission may only be granted for a plan or project to proceed if it has been ascertained that it will not have an adverse effect on the integrity of any such designation.

2.1.3. The process for assessment is set out at regulation 63(1):

"A competent authority, before deciding to undertake, or give any consent, permission or other authorisation for, a plan or project which:

(a) is likely to have a significant effect on a European site or a European offshore marine site(either alone or in combination with other plans or projects), and

(b) is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of that site,

must make an appropriate assessment of the implications of the plan or project for that site in view of that site's conservation objectives".

2.1.4. Following this assessment, regulation 70(3) outlines when planning permission can be granted:

"… outline planning permission must not be granted unless the competent authority is satisfied (whether by reason of the conditions and limitations to which the outline planning permission is to be made subject, or otherwise) that no development likely adversely to affect the integrity of a European site or a European offshore marine site could be carried out under the permission, whether before or after obtaining approval of any reserved matters."

2.2. Assessment Methodology

2.2.1. Guidance on the process and procedures for assessment are contained in a number of documents, principally:

- Habitats Regulations Assessments: Protecting a European site (Gov.uk)[1] – government standing advice on HRA;
- National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the accompanying ODPM/DEFRA Circular (ODPM 06/2005, DEFRA 01/2005);
- Managing Natura 2000 sites 'The Provisions of Article 6 of the 'Habitats' Directive 92/43/EEC. European Commission. Nov 2018;
- Assessment of plans and projects significantly affecting Natura 2000 sites. European Commission November 2001.

[1] Habitats Regulations Assessments: Protecting a European site. February 2021 https://www.gov.uk/guidance/habitats-regulations-assessments-protecting-a-european-site

2.2.2. As set out within government standing advice and as laid out within the flow chart (Figure 1) within ODPM circular 06/2005 (see Appendix 5719/1), the procedure for assessment is an ordered process following a number of key stages as discussed below.

Stage 1 :Screening

2.2.3. Box 1 of the flow chart is not of relevance to development proposals and hence the first stage is to identify whether the proposals are will result in any 'likely significant effect' on the internationally important features of the European sites, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects (box 2 of the flow chart).

2.2.4. In line with the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) ruling (People over Wind, Peter Sweetman v Coillte Teoranta, Case C-323/17, dated 12 April 2018), mitigation measures intended to avoid or reduce the harmful effects of a plan or project on a European site should not be taken into account at this screening stage, and instead these must be considered as part of an Appropriate Assessment (Stage 2).

2.2.5. Where it is considered that a plan or project will result in no such 'likely significant effects', no further assessment is necessary and permission should not be refused under the assessment.

2.2.6. If any 'likely significant effects' are identified or where it remains unclear whether effects will be significant, the assessment procedure should follow on to Stage 2 (box 3 of the flow chart).

2.2.7. In reaching this decision, the plan or project should be considered 'likely' to have an effect if the competent authority is unable on the basis of objective information to exclude the possibility that it could have significant effects on any European designation, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects. The test of significance is therefore set at a relatively low bar, with significant effects considered as any negative effects, that are not negligible or inconsequential, which are capable of having an adverse effect[2].

2.2.8. If the proposal can be screened out for effects from it alone, it should then be screened for any potential for it to combine with any other proposal planned or underway. If, in combination the proposal could have a significant effect on a European designation, it is necessary to progress to Stage 2.

Stage 2: Appropriate Assessment

2.2.9. Should it be determined that a plan or project could result in 'likely significant effects' on a European site, as set out on the flow chart, the Competent Authority should proceed to the next stage within flow chart boxes 3 and 4 onwards. This requires an 'Appropriate Assessment' of the likely effects of the plan or project to be undertaken by the Competent Authority.

2.2.10. Under Appropriate Assessment, it is necessary to determine whether the proposals, either alone or in combination with other projects or plans, will result in any adverse effects on the integrity of the European designation as defined by the conservation objectives and status of the relevant SAC/SPA. The precautionary principle should be applied, and the focus should be on objectively demonstrating, with supporting evidence, that there will be

[2] Case C-258/11: Judgment of the Court (Third Chamber) of 11 April 2013 and Opinion of the Advocate General dated 22nd November 2012. Peter Sweetman and Others v An Bord Pleanála. Reference for a preliminary ruling: Supreme Court - Ireland

no adverse effects on the integrity of the European site. Where this is not the case, adverse effects must be assumed.

2.2.11. It is the policy of the government that Ramsar sites should be treated in the same way as European designations.

2.2.12. If it is considered that the proposal will not adversely affect the integrity of the designation, either alone or in combination with other projects, permission can be granted. If this cannot be ascertained, or there is uncertainty, the assessment procedure should follow on to Stage 4.

Stage 3: Derogations: allow exceptions

2.2.13. Should a proposal fail the integrity test, in certain circumstances, a project may still be able to proceed under a derogation.

2.2.14. Under Stage 3, it is necessary to assess if there are alternative solutions and whether there are imperative reasons of overriding public interest. If these tests are passed, authorisation may be granted subject to compensation measures being secured.

2.2.15. Further details on the above process can be found in Government Guidance on Habitats Regulations Assessments[3]

2.3. Case Law

2.3.1. The approach to undertaking Habitats Regulation Assessment has been informed and distilled through a number of court rulings. Accordingly, this assessment takes into account all such case law, and in particular highlights the following as being pertinent:

The need for no reasonable scientific doubt

2.3.2. It has been established that the competent authority may grant permission for a project following an appropriate assessment *"only if they have made certain that it will not adversely affect the integrity of that site. That is the case where no reasonable scientific doubt remains as to the absence of such effects"*[4] (our emphasis). In addition, case law advises that the decision maker should be 'certain beyond reasonable scientific doubt'[5] that no adverse effects will arise on the integrity of the designation.

2.3.3. The application of this test is further clarified by case law which advises that in reaching a conclusion, what is required is 'reasonable certainty' rather than 'absolute certainty'[6] and that the risk should be 'real' (identifiable) rather than 'hypothetical' or 'fanciful'[7].

The need for no lacunae

2.3.4. It has been established that the *assessment "cannot have lacunae and must contain complete, precise and definitive findings and conclusions capable of removing all reasonable scientific doubt as to the effects of the works proposed on the protected site*

[3] Habitats regulations assessments: protecting a European site. Government Guidance. https://www.gov.uk/guidance/habitats-regulations-assessments-protecting-a-european-site
[4] C-127/02 Landjelijke Vereniging tot Behoud van de Waddenzee & Another v Staatssecretaris van Landbouw ("Waddenzee") [2005] 2 CMLR 31 at [59]
[5] T.C. Briels & others v Minister van Infrastructuur en Milieu C-521/12 [2014]
[6] WWF Uk Ltd And RSPB V SoS for Scotland
[7] Boggis V Natural England & Waveney District Council [2009] Ewca Civ 1061 and R (Morge) v Hampshire County Council (2011)

concerned"[8] and that the assessment must *"unequivocally demonstrate why the protected habitat types and species are not adversely affected"*[9].

The need to take into account conservation objectives

2.3.5. It has been established that that *"where such a plan or project is likely to undermine the conservation objectives of the site concerned, it must necessarily be considered likely to have a significant effect on the site"*[10]

Any mitigation measures must be sufficiently certain

2.3.6. It has been established that where mitigation measures are proposed (under an Appropriate Assessment), *"it is only when it is sufficiently certain that a measure will make an effective contribution to avoiding harm, guaranteeing beyond all reasonable doubt that the project will not adversely affect the integrity of the area, that such a measure may be taken into consideration when the appropriate assessment is carried out."*[11]

The need to assess cumulative effects

2.3.7. It has been established that not only does the project or plan in question need to be considered, but cumulative effects from other relevant projects have to be assessed. It has been established that "*MN2000 makes clear that the phrase "in combination with other plans or projects" in Article 3 (3) refers to cumulative effects caused by the projects or plans that are currently under consideration together with the effects of any existing or proposed projects or plans. When impacts are assessed in combination in this way it can be established whether or not there may be, overall, an impact which may have significant effects on a Natura 2000 site or which may adversely affect the integrity of a site".*[12]

The Assessment should be commensurate with the stage of planning

2.3.8. Appropriate Assessments can be required at every stage of the planning process, from the allocation stage to the detailed or =Reserved Matters stage. At each planning stage very different levels of detail are available, and it has been established that *'each appropriate assessment must be commensurate to the relative precision of the plans at any particular stage and no more'*[13] (our emphasis).

2.3.9. These principles are well established. An example, is the case of Commission v UK C-6/04 (2005) and the opinion of Advocate General Kokott[14], which related to a complaint from the Commission that the United Kingdom had failed to transpose adequately various provisions of the Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora ('the Habitats Directive'). It discusses the detail required within an Appropriate Assessment at paragraph 49:

[8] C-258/11 Sweetman v An Bord Plenala [2014] PTSR 1092 at [44]
[9] C-461/17 Holohan v An Bord Plenala [2019] Env LR 16 per AG Kokott at [30]
[10] Judgment of the Court (Grand Chamber) of 7 September 2004, Landelijke Vereniging tot Behoud van de Waddenzee and Nederlandse Vereniging tot Bescherming van Vogels v Staatssecretaris van Landbouw, Natuurbeheer en Visserij, Case C-127/02
[11] C-164/17 Grace & Sweetman v An Bord Plenala at [51]
[12] European Commission DG Environment (Novmber 2001) 'Assessing Projects Under the Habitats Directive: Guidance for Competent Authorities, September 2011'
[13] Feeney v Secretary of State for Transport & Ors [2013] EWHC 1238 (Admin)
[14] Opinion of Advocate General Kokott June 2005. Case C-6/04
https://curia.europa.eu/juris/liste.jsf?language=en&num=C-6/04

"The United Kingdom Government is admittedly right in raising the objection that an assessment of the implications of the preceding plans cannot take account of all the effects of a measure. Many details are regularly not settled until the time of the final permission. It would hardly be proper to require a greater level of detail in preceding plans or the abolition of multi-stage planning and approval procedures so that the assessment of implications can be concentrated on one point in the procedure. Rather, adverse effects on areas of conservation must be assessed at every relevant stage of the procedure to the extent possible on the basis of the precision of the plan. This assessment is to be updated with increasing specificity in subsequent stages of the procedure".

2.3.10. In line with the judgement of R (Barker) v Secretary of State & Bromley LBC (2006-7) (European Court and House of Lords) [2007][15] 1 A.C. 470 and Wingfield, R v Canterbury City Council [2019] EWHC 1974 (Admin)[16], AA can be required at the Reserved Matters and discharge of conditions stages.

2.4. Other Relevant guidance and opinions of weight

2.4.1. In addition to the interpretation of legislation that has emerged through the above case law, relevant guidance is also available from a number of other sources, as outlined below:

The Precautionary Principle

2.4.2. The precautionary principle is a core principle of EU environmental law. The European Commission[17] sets out that "*the classic definition of 'a precautionary approach' comes from the 1992 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, which states that: "Where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation" (UNEP 1992)."*

2.4.3. Following on from the above definition, guidance sets out that "*Non-discrimination means that comparable situations should not be treated differently, and that different situations should not be treated in the same way, unless there are objective grounds for doing so" and "Consistency means that measures should be of comparable scope and nature to those already taken in equivalent areas in which all scientific data are available"* [18].

2.4.4. In addition, this guidance also sets out that "*Proportionality means tailoring measures to the chosen level of protection. Risk can rarely be reduced to zero".* And *"It is also necessary to clarify a misunderstanding as regards the distinction between reliance on the precautionary principle and the search for zero risk, which in reality is rarely to be found"*[19].

2.4.5. Finally, this guidance also further clarifies that *"measures based on the precautionary principle must not be disproportionate to the desired level of protection and must not aim at zero risk, something which rarely exists."*[20]

[15] https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200607/ldjudgmt/jd061206/barker-1.htm
[16] http://www.bailii.org/ew/cases/EWHC/Admin/2019/1974.html
[17] European Commission Science for Environement Policy (September 2017) 'Future Brief: The Precautionary Princple: decision-making under uncertainty
[18] Commission of the European Communities (2.2.200) 'Communication from the Commission on the precuationary principle'
[19] Ibid footnote 13
[20] Ibid footnote 13

3. Information to Inform a Habitats Regulations Assessment

3.1. Stage 1 - Screening

European designations that could be affected by the proposals	The following European designations are located within 25km of the site (see Appendix 5719/1): • Ashdown Forest SAC (3.4km to north); • Ashdown Forest SPA (3.7km to north); • Lewes Down SAC (10.7km to south); • Castle Hill SAC (17.3km to south-west); and • Pevensey Levels SAC/Ramsar (17.6km to south-east); Following a review of the Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA)[21] of Wealden Council's now withdrawn Local Plan (Wealden District Council, January 2019)[22], a number of these designations can be scoped out as they are well removed from the site and relatively non-sensitive. On that basis, the European designations to be considered in terms of potential effects are limited to: • Ashdown Forest SAC/SPA; • Lewes Down SAC; and • Pevensey Levels SAC/Ramsar; Other designations scoped into the Local Plan HRA are considered sufficiently removed from the site such that adverse effects resulting from the proposed development are considered to be negligible.
Identification of potential impact pathways	Based on a review of the Wealden Local Plan HRA, a number of potential impact pathways have been identified in relation the above designations, namely: • Habitat fragmentation and loss; • Urbanisation and recreational disturbance; • Hydrology and water quality; and • Air pollution.

On this basis, further detail is set out below in relation to Ashdown Forest SAC/SPA, Lewes Down SAC, Castle Hill SAC, and Pevensey Levels SAC/Ramsar, and whether a likely significant effect may occur as a result of the proposed development.

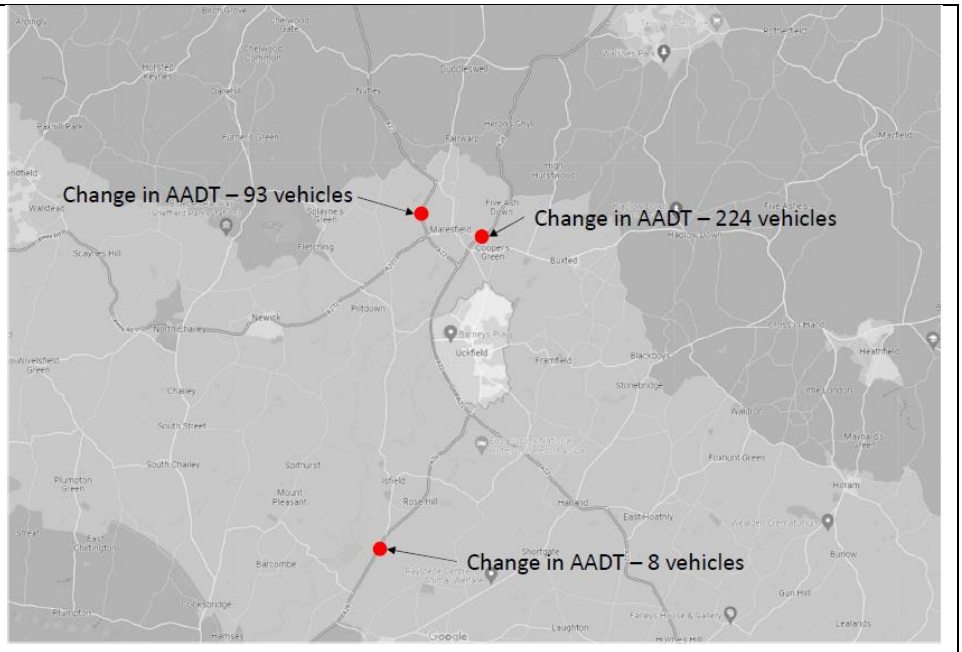
[21] Wealden Local Plan Habitats Regulations Assessment. Proposed Submission Document. Wealden District Council, August 2018.

[22] The Local Plan was found to have failed the legal compliance requirement of Duty to Co-operate, whilst the Inspector also disagreed with the reliance on a non-improving emissions scenario in terms of air quality assessment under the HRA. However, the identification of potential significant effects and overall level of growth taken into account as part of the modelling (also reflecting land use plans within surrounding local authorities) is considered to form a reasonable basis for screening of the project both alone and in-combination, whilst modelling under alternative emissions scenarios provides a detailed evidence base on which an assessment can be made. As such, despite the Local Plan being withdrawn, it is still considered appropriate for this assessment to be informed by the Local Plan HRA.

Ashdown Forest SAC/SPA

European site interest features	Ashdown Forest SAC is designated on the basis of the following features: • European dry heaths • Northern Atlantic wet heaths with *Erica tetralix* • Great Crested Newt *Triturus cristatus* (although does not form a primary reason for site selection)
Conservation objectives of the European site	The conservation objectives for the SAC are to: *"Ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained or restored as appropriate, and ensure that the site contributes to achieving the Favourable Conservation Status of its Qualifying Features, by maintaining or restoring:* • *The extent and distribution of qualifying natural habitats and habitats of qualifying species;* • *The structure and function (including typical species) of qualifying natural habitats;* • *The structure and function of the habitats of qualifying species;* • *The supporting processes on which qualifying natural habitats and the habitats of qualifying species rely;* • *The populations of qualifying species; and* • *The distribution of qualifying species within the site."* Ashdown Forest SPA is designated as it supports breeding populations of European importance of the Annex I species Dartford warbler *Sylvia undata* and Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus*. The European Site Conservation Objectives for Ashdown Forest SPA are stated as: *"Ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained or restored as appropriate, and ensure that the site contributes to achieving the aims of the Wild Birds Directive, by maintaining or restoring:* • *The extent and distribution of the habitats of the qualifying features;* • *The structure and function of the habitats of the qualifying features;* • *The supporting processes on which the habitats of the qualifying features rely;* • *The population of each of the qualifying feature; and* • *The distribution of the qualifying features within the site.*
Condition of European site	The most recent condition assessments for the Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) which underpins the European designation states the majority of units are in unfavourable recovering condition.
Threats	A Site Improvement Plan (SIP) has been produced by Natural England in relation to Ashdown Forest SAC and SPA (dated November 2014). This identifies prioritised issues (pressures or threats) affecting the designation: 1) Change in land management (largely relating to lack of appropriate grazing) 2) Air pollution – impact of atmospheric nitrogen deposition 3) Public access/disturbance (largely in relation to breeding birds) 4) Hydrological changes

Screening of likely significant effects	
Habitat fragmentation and loss	The site is located 3.4km from the SAC designation at its nearest point (see Plan 5719/HRA1), and no functional habitat will be lost as a result of the proposals. As such it is considered that no habitat loss or fragmentation will be caused by the proposals.
Urbanisation and recreational disturbance	These effects are likely to result from disturbance to ground nesting birds which are designation features attributed to the Ashdown Forest SPA (European Nightjar and Dartford Warbler). The site is within the identified 7km zone of influence in regard to recreational pressure at Ashdown Forest, where recreational disturbance is expected to occur. The HRA carried out for the Wealden Local Plan in this regard considers the effects of the Local Plan to be already mitigated through SANGS and to a lesser extent the SAMM Strategy. Recreational disturbance is identified as a secondary issue in regard to the SAC habitats. Visitors and recreational pressure has the potential to further exacerbate a decline in the condition of the site. The site is sufficiently separated from the Ashdown Forest SAC that urbanisation effects are not expected to occur. As such, potential for a likely significant effect as a result of urbanisation can be screened out.
Hydrology and water quality	The SAC contains features which are designated for wetland interest (Northern Atlantic wet heaths with *Erica tetralix).* However, these are distant from the site, with the drainage not expected to pass through those catchments contained within the Ashdown Forest. They would therefore not be affected by drainage proposals. In addition, the Accordingly, potential for a likely significant effect can be screened out.
Air quality	Under the Development, up to 424 residential units will be constructed on the site. A Transport Assessment (TA) for the Development has been undertaken (and submitted in support of the planning application), which includes an estimation of the number of traffic movements that are likely occur on the key routes from the site. within 200m of the SAC as a result of the Development. A number of locations have been identified where major roads pass within 200m of the SAC, including the A26, A22, A275 and B2026, which are shown on Plan 5719/HRA2. Although modelling data is not available for these specific locations (since they are outside the farthest extent of the model), the TA has been used to estimate the number of vehicle movements per day (AADT) at key points on the two main arterial roads to the north (A26 and A22), as shown below.



In summary, the TA anticipates that at all points, trips per day generated from the Development are 224 AADT and 93 AADT (for the A26 and A22 respectively).

This is far less than the typical threshold of 1,000 AADT that would typically trigger a potential significant effect resulting from the development alone. Since Ashdown Forest is more distant from the Development than these points, then the actual number of vehicles passing within 200m of Ashdown Forest SAC, would be somewhat lower.

Whilst this is below the 1,000 AADT threshold for a likely significant effect, based on the Wealden Local Plan HRA, in-combination increases in traffic above 1,000 AADT are predicted along these roads. Accordingly, potential for a likely significant effect as a result of changes to air quality cannot be screened out.

Conclusion – could the proposed development result in a likely significant effect?

Alone

Yes, in relation to recreational disturbance effects on the features of interest of the Ashdown Forest SPA (European Nightjar and Dartford Warbler).

No likely significant effects are identified as a result of habitat fragmentation and loss, urbanisation or hydrology and water quality, whilst increases in traffic from the proposed development alone are predicted to be below the 1,000 AADT threshold for a likely significant effect.

In combination with other plans or projects

Yes.

Whilst predicted traffic flows from the proposed development alone are below the 1,000 AADT threshold for a likely significant effect, in-combination increases in traffic flows (as set out in the Wealden Local Plan HRA) exceed this threshold. As such, further assessment of air quality effects is necessary and an Appropriate Assessment is required.

In the absence of appropriate mitigation, there is the potential for recreational disturbance effects to act in combination with other plans/projects. As such, further assessment of recreational disturbance to SPA bird species is necessary and an Appropriate Assessment is required.

Pevensey Levels SAC/Ramsar

European site interest features	Pevensey Levels SAC is designated on the basis of the following features: • Ramshorn Snail *Anisus vorticulus* Pevensey Levels Ramsar qualifies on the basis of the following criteria: • Criterion 2: supports an outstanding assemblage of wetland plants and invertebrates, including many British Red Data Book species; • Criterion 3: supports 68% of vascular plant species in Great Britain that can be described as aquatic. It is probably the best site in Britain for freshwater molluscs, one of the five best sites for aquatic beetles and supports an outstanding assemblage of dragonflies.
Conservation objectives of the European site	The conservation objectives for the SAC are to: *"Ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained or restored as appropriate, and ensure that the site contributes to achieving the aims of the Wild Birds Directive, by maintaining or restoring:* • *The extent and distribution of the habitats of the qualifying features;* • *The structure and function of the habitats of the qualifying features;* • *The supporting processes on which the habitats of the qualifying features rely;* • *The population of each of the qualifying features; and* • *The distribution of the qualifying features within the site."*
Condition of European site	The most recent condition assessments for the Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) which underpins the European designation states the majority of units are in unfavourable recovering condition.
Threats	A Site Improvement Plan (SIP) has been produced by Natural England in relation to Pevensey Levels SAC (dated October 2014). This identifies prioritised issues (pressures or threats) affecting the designation: 1) Inappropriate water levels 2) Invasive species (notably existing presence of Floating Pennywort *Hydrocotyle ranunculoides* and New Zealand Pigmyweed *Crassula helmsii*) 3) Water pollution (principally discharge from sewage treatment plants)
Screening of likely significant effects	
Habitat fragmentation and loss	The site is located 1.3km from this designation at its nearest point (see Plan 5719/HRA1), and no functional habitat will be lost as a result of the proposals. As such it is considered that no habitat loss or fragmentation will be caused by the proposals.
Urbanisation and recreational disturbance	The site is well separated from the SAC/Ramsar such that no urbanisation effects are anticipated. Recreational pressure is not identified as a threat to the SAC/Ramsar under the Wealden Local Plan HRA or SIP such that a likely significant effect can be screened out.
Hydrology and water quality	The site is located within the catchment of the SAC/Ramsar, with ditches within the wider locality forming part of the drainage network associated with Pevensey Levels. As such, potential for a likely significant effect as a result of changes to hydrology or run-off of pollutants cannot be screened out.
Air quality	The site's qualifying features are not sensitive to air quality effects. Since the SAC/Ramsar is significantly removed from the Development, the increase of traffic flows at the designation will be lower still, and at a level where it would be considered to be negligible.

Conclusion – could the proposed development result in a likely significant effect?
Alone No. The site is not located within the drainage catchment of Pevensey Levels SAC/Ramsar, such that changes to run-off or release of pollutants are not likely to result in effects on hydrology and water quality at the SAC/Ramsar. As such, it is considered that these effects can be screened out and an Appropriate Assessment is not required.
In combination with other plans or projects No In the light of the above conclusion, no residual effects would remain from the proposals which could combine with other proposals.

Lewes Downs SAC

European site interest features	Lewes Downs SAC is designated on the basis of the following features: • Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates (*Festuco-Brometalia*) (*important orchid sites).
Conservation objectives of the European site	The conservation objectives for the SAC are to: *"Ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained or restored as appropriate, and ensure that the site contributes to achieving the Favourable Conservation Status of its Qualifying Features, by maintaining or restoring;* • *The extent and distribution of qualifying natural habitats and habitats of qualifying species;* • *The structure and function (including typical species) of qualifying natural habitats;* • *The structure and function of the habitats of qualifying species;* • *The supporting processes on which qualifying natural habitats and the habitats of qualifying species rely;* • *The populations of qualifying species; and* • *The distribution of qualifying species within the site."*
Condition of European site	The most recent condition assessments for the Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) which underpins the European designation states the majority of units are in favourable condition.
Threats	A Site Improvement Plan (SIP) has been produced by Natural England in relation to Lewes Downs SAC (dated May 2015). This identifies prioritised issues (pressures or threats) affecting the designation: 1) Game management: pheasant rearing (with inappropriate management of grassland areas used for 'driving' birds) 2) Undergrazing 3) Public access/disturbance (causing trampling) 4) Air pollution: impact of atmospheric nitrogen deposition
Screening of likely significant effects	
Habitat fragmentation and loss	The site is located 10.7km from this designation at its nearest point, and no functional habitat will be lost as a result of the proposals. As such it is considered that no habitat loss or fragmentation will be caused by the proposals.
Urbanisation and recreational disturbance	The site is located a substantial distance from the SAC, such that no urbanisation effects would occur and few residents of the proposed development would be likely to make regular use of the designation for recreational activity. Accordingly, potential for a likely significant effect can be screened out. This is confirmed by the Wealden Local Plan HRA which does not identify recreational pressure as a potential issue resulting from development within the District.

Hydrology and water quality	The SAC is not designated for its wetland interest and would not be affected by drainage at the site. Accordingly, potential for a likely significant effect can be screened out.
Air quality	The A26 passes within 200m of the designation. The proposed development is considered to result in an increase in traffic flows of <8AADT along the A26 which runs adjacent to the SAC. This is below the 1,000 AADT threshold for a likely significant effect, based on the Wealden Local Plan HRA, in-combination increases in traffic above 1,000 AADT are predicted along these roads. Accordingly, potential for a likely significant effect as a result of changes to air quality cannot be screened out. The proposed development is considered to result in a negligible increase in traffic flows along the A26 adjacent to the SAC. Accordingly, potential for a likely significant effect as a result of changes to air quality alone can be screened out. However, based on the Wealden Local Plan HRA, in-combination increases in traffic above 1,000 AADT are predicted along the A26. Accordingly, potential for a likely significant effect as a result of changes to air quality in-combination with other plans cannot be screened out.
Conclusion – could the proposed development result in a likely significant effect?	
Alone No. No likely significant effects are identified as a result of habitat fragmentation and loss, urbanisation and recreational disturbance or hydrology and water quality, whilst increases in traffic from the proposed development are considered to be negligible.	
In combination with other plans or projects Yes. Whilst predicted traffic flows from the proposed development alone are considered to be negligible, in-combination increases in traffic flows (as set out in the Wealden Local Plan HRA) have the potential to result in changes to air quality. As such, further assessment of air quality is necessary and an Appropriate Assessment is required.	

Conclusion

Conclusion – in the absence of mitigation, do the proposals have potential to result in a likely significant effect on a European designation?
Yes, in relation to recreational disturbance in relation to Ashdown Forest SPA, and in relation to in-combination increases in traffic and associated air quality in relation to Ashdown Forest SAC, Pevensey Levels SAC/Ramsar, and Lewes Downs SAC. An Appropriate Assessment is therefore required.

3.2. Stage 2 – Appropriate Assessment

Ashdown Forest SAC/SPA

Do the proposals, in-combination with other relevant plans and projects have the potential to affect the integrity of the European designation, given the sites' conservation objectives?

Recreational Disturbance

New development in the vicinity of the Ashdown Forest SPA is likely to result in an increase in overall visitor numbers and could therefore result in an increase in recreational pressure / disturbance on the protected bird species without mitigation in place.

Studies carried out between 2008 and 2010 concluded that the current level of visitor pressure (at that time) was not affecting the distribution of Annex I birds, but that there will be point at which levels of visitor pressure are so great that birds will abandon suitable breeding habitat, with subsequent effects on the spatial distribution of birds, and the ability of the SPA to support the given density of birds. The overall conclusion of the studies were that "*without data on breeding success and without understanding why bird densities are low, it cannot be concluded on the basis of scientific evidence that the ecological integrity of nightjar and Dartford warbler populations is not being adversely affected by a combination of existing pressure and/or habitat management"* and as a consequence, the precautionary approach which is advocated has been adopted by Wealden Borough Council as the competent authority.

Results from the visitor surveys carried out in 2008, together with further surveys in 2016 have been used to identify an appropriate mitigation zone. Based on the work undertaken and following consultation with Natural England, a two zone approach has been identified:

- A 400m zone where it is unlikely that additional residential development can take place due to the inability to avoid or mitigate disturbance or urbanisation impacts; and
- A 400m -7km zone where contributions to Sustainable Alternative Natural Green Spaces (SANG) and Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMM) are required.

The aim of SANG is to ensure that visit rates do not increase as a result of new development. Together with the provision of strategic access management this is considered to be an essential and effective mitigation measure whereby new or enhanced green space is provided to draw potential users away from the Ashdown Forest SPA. SANGs are being dealt with individually by each Local Authority.

Policy setting out avoidance and mitigation measures (in the form of provision of SANG and SAMM payments) is provided within the Wealdon District Council Core Strategy[23]. The Council has developed a SANG Strategy by which SANG can be delivered on a strategic level (with a tariff to be applied to each new net increase residential dwelling within the 7km zone). As an alternative, individual developments are able to provide bespoke SANG to absorb recreational pressure generated by residents within that development. The Habitats Regulations Assessment carried out for the Core Strategy, concludes that subject to the successful adoption and implementation of avoidance and mitigation measures - primarily those relating to provision of SANG for residential development within Zone B (the 400m to 7km zone), and provision of SAMM, that *"effects connected with increasing recreational pressure can be satisfactorily avoided and reduced."*

The Draft Local Plan HRA (2018) (now withdrawn) sets out similar policy to the Core Strategy and also concludes that *"On the basis that mitigation is implemented within Wealden District along with the other five surrounding districts or boroughs then it is considered that there will not be any adverse effect resulting from development. Such mitigation once in place will also ensure that impacts from the limited number of visitors or tourists that may arrive from further afield will be captured by the mitigation that will be in place."*

[23] Wealden District Council. Wealden District (Incorporating Part of the South Downs National Park). Core Strategy Local Plan. Adopted February 2013.

Alongside the Downlands development, a bespoke SANG is proposed, which will occupy an area of existing grassland and woodland to the east of the residential development, and which is defined within the SANG and Woodland Management Plan (Aspect Ecology 2021) submitted with the application. The principles set out in Natural England's Standing Advice 'Guidelines for the creation of Suitable Accessible Natural Green Space (SANGS)[24]' has been followed to ensure the proposed SANG is compliant with these requirements. A copy of Natural England's SANG criteria is provided at Appendix 5719/2.

Regarding SANG capacity, Natural England's guidelines set out that these are to be provided on a basis of at least 8ha per 1000 population, based on an average occupancy rate of 2.4 persons per dwelling. Sufficient SANG should be provided in advance of dwelling completion to ensure that there is no likely significant effect on the SPA.

Based on the 8ha per 1000 population standard as set out by Natural England's SANG guidelines, the required SANG provision for the proposed development would be a minimum of 8.14ha (given an estimated population of 1,018 people based on 424 dwellings at an average occupancy rate of 2.4 persons per dwelling). However, in order to provide a 2.3km circular walk within the SANG extension itself, it is intended that a larger area of open space will be established as SANG, totalling 13.2ha. This provides sufficient capacity for 1,650 residents (or 687 residential units).

There is existing informal public access available into the majority of SANG (primarily from Snatts Road to the south) but there is only a relatively low level of current use by the public. As such the capacity of the SANG is considered unaffected, but nonetheless taking a precautionary approach, the capacity of the SANG has been discounted to account for this existing use.

Consequently, the residual capacity available for recreational use within the area of SANG has been discounted by 10%, with its functional area calculated to be the equivalent of 11.88ha. Under Natural England guidance this equates to a capacity of 1,485 residents (or 619 residential units).

As such there will be 5.06ha surplus SANG capacity (4.55ha once discounted), which could serve an additional 237 dwellings arising from other developments.

Air quality

Background information on air quality in relation to Ashdown Forest SAC is available on the APIS website (www.apis.ac.uk). This indicates that ammonia and nitrogen deposition levels are above the established critical levels/loads. Detailed modelling of air quality to inform the Wealden Local Plan HRA[25] also predicts an exceedance of the critical level for NOx across 4.61ha of the SAC, with a maximum concentration of 89.6µg/m^3.

Increases in traffic flows of up to 3,774 AADT and 4,123 AADT are predicted along the A22 and A26 respectively as a result of in-combination development up to 2028 (as set out in the Wealden Local Plan HRA). This would result in an increase in NOx, ammonia and associated nitrogen deposition relative to the comparative 'no development' scenario. Given that nitrogen deposition currently exceeds the critical load for this habitat and additional deposition could further impact on vegetation, the Wealden Local Plan HRA concludes that it cannot be ruled out that in-combination growth would not result in an adverse effect on the integrity of the site.

However, this conclusion is based on the non-improving emissions scenario A, under which there would be an overall increase in nitrogen deposition. Detailed consideration was given to the varying emissions scenarios during the Wealden Local Plan Examination, and the Inspector concluded that *"it would be unreasonable and lacking in scientific credibility to conclude that Emissions model A should be used as the basis on which to model future emissions and to assess impacts on the integrity of the SAC"* given that this

[24] Natural England. Guidelines for the creation of Suitable Accessible Natural Greenspace (SANGS). Version dated August 2021.
[25] UE Associates. Wealden District (Incorporating part of the South Downs National Park) Local Development Framework: Assessment of the Core Strategy under the Habitats Regulations. Submission Stage. August 2011.

makes no allowance for emissions improvements which is contrary to what is already known[26]. The Inspector states that Emissions model B *"is consistent with the precautionary principle established in relation to HRA",* and that the findings of the Dutch judgements (CJEU C-293/17 and C-294/17) *"do not preclude an approach which takes into account anticipated improvements in air quality when establishing the future baseline of emissions over the Plan period".* Accordingly, the conclusion of Natural England, based on the improving emissions trend (scenario B) is considered to be robust and is confirmed by the conclusions of the Inspector from the Local Plan Examination.

Under the more realistic emissions scenario B, the Local Plan HRA modelling indicates that there will be substantial improvements in terms of air quality compared to the current baseline situation, even taking into account in-combination development from surrounding districts.

Notably, effectively the full area of qualifying habitats will be removed from an exceedance of the critical load for NOx, whilst there will be an overall reduction in nitrogen deposition, averaging 1.6kg N/ha/yr within areas of qualifying habitat. Whilst there will be a marginal increase in nitrogen deposition relative to a 'no development' scenario, this is not considered to result in any measurable effect in terms of vegetation.

Further details are set out in Natural England's Regulation 19 Consultation Response to the Local Plan (dated 5 October 2018) which states that *"Natural England is satisfied that it can be ascertained that the plan or project will not adversely affect the integrity of Ashdown Forest SAC […] from air quality impacts. Natural England's advice regarding air quality is that this conclusion can be reached without mitigation measures being needed under the specific requirements of the Habitats Regulations."* Further confirmation is provided by the subsequent European Site Conservation Objectives Supplementary Advice[27] which sets out that *"assessment of improvements in vehicular technology and in particular Euro6/VI standards that all vehicles are currently being manufactured to, will outweigh impacts from new development. The improvements will be marginally retarded by additional development but future nitrogen deposition and concentration will continue to decline with the existing trend."* The Supplementary Advice continues by stating that the *"Natural England Commissioned Report 210 identifies that expected increase in Nitrogen levels from additional transport would fall below the level that would reduce species richness on the site even if the expected declining trend in Nitrogen failed to materialise."*

Accordingly, it is evident that the proposed development, alone and in-combination with other plans and projects, would not result in further deterioration in terms of air quality and would not represent a real risk to the ability of other national or local measures to otherwise reduce background pollution levels, thereby undermining the restoration aims of the conservation objectives for the SAC. Accordingly, the proposed development, alone or in-combination with other plans or projects is not considered to result in an adverse effect on integrity at Ashdown Forest SAC and there is no requirement for mitigation or avoidance measures.

Conclusion – with the implementation of mitigation, will the proposals in-combination with other plans or projects avoid an adverse effect on integrity of a European designation?

Yes.

The proposed development is not considered to result in an adverse effect on integrity as a result of changes to air quality, or recreational disturbance (following the implementation of the proposed SANG and SAMM mitigation measures). Accordingly, it is evident that the proposed development, alone and in-combination with other plans and projects, would not result in an adverse effect on integrity at Ashdown Forest SAC/SPA in view of the site's conservation objectives.

Therefore it is considered that no further assessment is required and proceeding to Stage 3 is not necessary.

[26] Letter from Inspector (Louise Nurser) on Wealden District Council Local Plan Examination dated 20 December 2019
[27] Natural England (February 2019) *European Site Conservation Objectives: Supplementary advice on conserving and restoring site features – Ashdown Forest Special Area of Conservation (SAC) Site Code UK0030080*

Lewes Downs SAC

Do the proposals, in-combination with other relevant plans and projects have the potential to affect the integrity of the European designation, given the sites' conservation objectives?
Air quality Background information on air quality in relation to Lewes Downs SAC is available on the APIS website (www.apis.ac.uk). This indicates that ammonia and nitrogen deposition levels are above the established critical levels/loads. Detailed modelling of air quality to inform the Wealden Local Plan HRA also predicts an exceedance of the critical level for NOx up to 20m from the A26, with a maximum concentration of 39.4µg/m^3. Increases in traffic flows of 5,886 AADT are predicted along the A26 as a result of in-combination development up to 2028 (as set out in the Wealden Local Plan HRA). Based on emissions scenario A, which assumes no improvement in background emissions, the Wealden Local Plan HRA concludes that there would be a significant increase in NOx, ammonia and associated nitrogen deposition relative to the comparative 'no development' scenario, with areas of grassland up to 75m from the A26 (forming the designated interest feature) subject to increases in nitrogen deposition exceeding 1% of the lower critical load. Given that nitrogen deposition currently exceeds the critical load for this habitat and additional deposition could further impact on vegetation, the Wealden Local Plan HRA concludes that it cannot be ruled out that in-combination growth would not result in an adverse effect on the integrity of the site. However, Natural England disagrees with this conclusion, with the Regulation 19 Consultation Response to the Local Plan (dated 5 October 2018) stating that *"Natural England is satisfied that it can be ascertained that the plan or project will not adversely affect the integrity of […] Lewes Downs SAC […] from air quality impacts. Natural England's advice regarding air quality is that this conclusion can be reached without mitigation measures being needed under the specific requirements of the Habitats Regulations."* This conclusion is based on the more likely improving emissions trend (scenario B) under which the designated grassland habitats would be unaffected by an increase in nitrogen deposition above the 1% critical load threshold. Detailed consideration was given to the varying emissions scenarios during the Wealden Local Plan Examination, and the Inspector concluded that *"it would be unreasonable and lacking in scientific credibility to conclude that Emissions model A should be used as the basis on which to model future emissions and to assess impacts on the integrity of the SAC"* given that this makes no allowance for emissions improvements which is contrary to what is already known[28]. The Inspector states that Emissions model B *"is consistent with the precautionary principle established in relation to HRA",* and that the findings of the Dutch judgements (CJEU C-293/17 and C-294/17) *"do not preclude an approach which takes into account anticipated improvements in air quality when establishing the future baseline of emissions over the Plan period".* Accordingly, the conclusion of Natural England, based on the improving emissions trend (scenario B) is considered to be robust and is confirmed by the conclusions of the Inspector from the Local Plan Examination. Accordingly, it is evident that the proposed development, alone and in-combination with other plans and projects, would not result in an adverse effect on integrity at Lewes Downs SAC as a result of air quality in view of the site's conservation objectives. Accordingly, there is no requirement for mitigation or avoidance measures.
Conclusion – with the implementation of mitigation, will the proposals in-combination with other plans or projects avoid an adverse effect on integrity of a European designation?
Yes. The proposed development is not considered to result in an adverse effect on integrity as a result of changes to air quality. Accordingly, it is evident that the proposed development, alone and in-combination

[28] Letter from Inspector (Louise Nurser) on Wealden District Council Local Plan Examination dated 20 December 2019

with other plans and projects, would not result in an adverse effect on integrity at Lewes Downs SAC in view of the site's conservation objectives.

Therefore it is considered that no further assessment is required and proceeding to Stage 3 is not necessary.

4. Summary

4.1. This document provides information to inform a Habitats Regulations Assessment of the proposed development, given the presence of a number of European designations within the site surrounds.

4.2. An initial assessment determined that the proposals do not relate to the management of the designations. A screening exercise has been undertaken to identify whether the proposed development could result in a likely significant effect on European designations, both alone and in-combination with other plans and projects (Stage 1).

4.3. The screening exercise has concluded that in the absence of mitigation, potential for a likely significant effect is predicted in relation to in-combination increases in traffic and associated air quality at Pevensey Levels SAC/Ramsar, Lewes Downs SAC and Ashdown Forest SAC, and that there is the potential for a likely significant effect to Ashdown Forest SPA in relation to recreational disturbance. Therefore, an Appropriate Assessment is required.

4.4. The Appropriate Assessment (Stage 2) has concluded that, in view of the designations' conservation objectives, following the implementation of mitigation measures the proposed development would have no effect on the integrity of the surrounding European designations either alone or in-combination with other plans and projects.

Plan 5719/HRA1:

Site Location and European Designations within 25km



Key:

- Site Location
- Special Area of Conservation (SAC)
- Special Protection Area (SPA)
- Ramsar Site
- 25km Buffer

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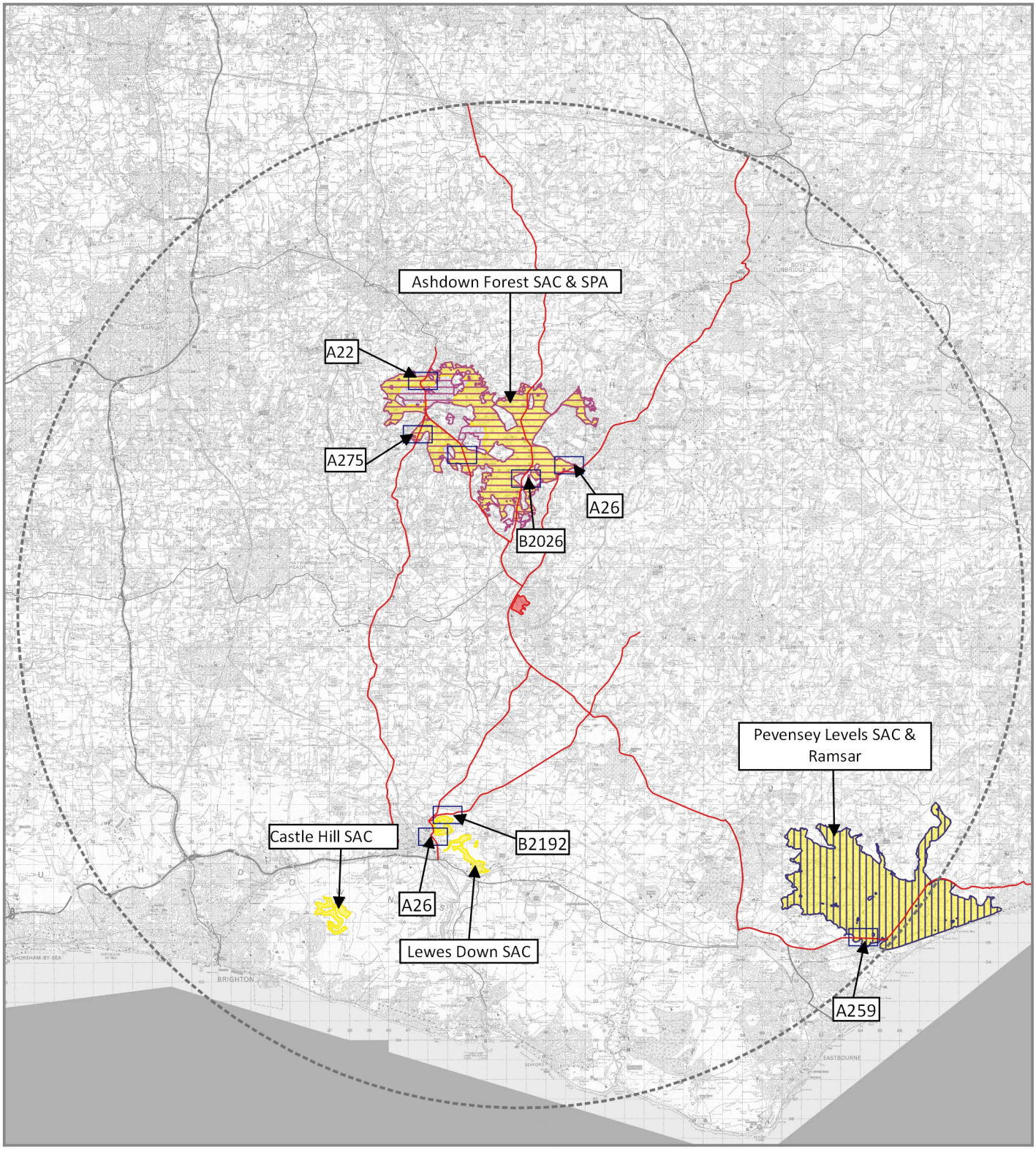
Land at Downlands Farm, Uckfield	PROJECT
Site Location & European Designations	TITLE
5719/HRA1	DRAWING NO.
B/AM	REV
May 2022	DATE

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Plan 5719/HRA2:

Main Roads Located within 200m of a European Designation



Key:

- Site Location
- Special Area of Conservation (SAC)
- Special Protection Area (SPA)
- Ramsar Site
- Major Roads
- 25km Buffer
- Sensitive Road Location

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Land at Downlands Farm, Uckfield	PROJECT
Road Locations within 200m a Sensitive European Designation	TITLE
5719/HRA2	DRAWING NO.
B/AM	REV
May 2022	DATE

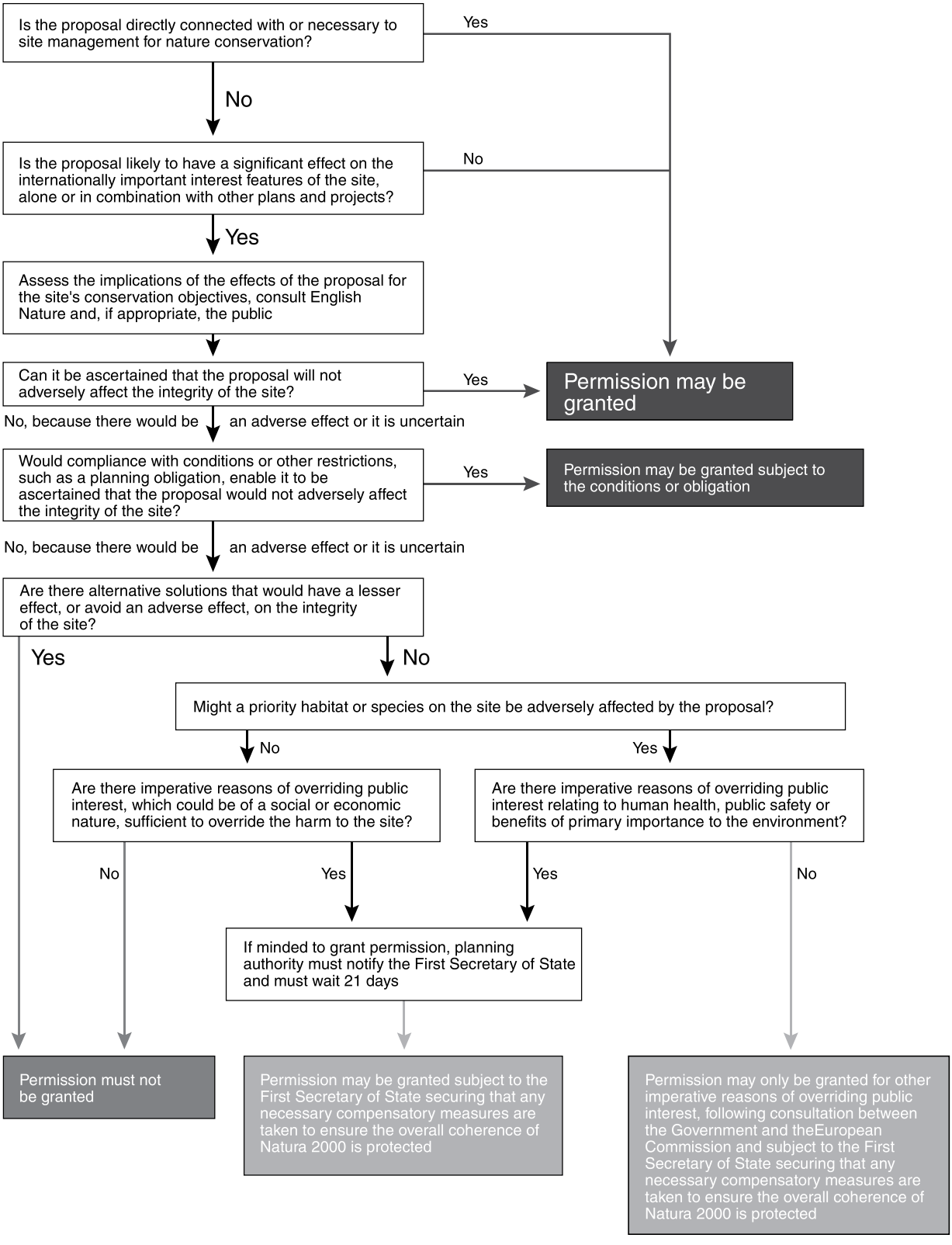
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Appendix 5719/1:

(Figure 1) within ODPM circular 06/2005

Figure 1: **Consideration of development proposals affecting Internationally Designated Nature Conservation Sites**



Appendix 5719/2:

Natural England SANG Criteria

Guidelines for Creation of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) – August 2021

Introduction

'Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace' (SANG) is the name given to green space that is of a quality and type suitable to be used as avoidance within the Thames Basin Heaths Planning Zone.

Its role is to provide alternative green space to divert visitors from visiting the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA). SANG are intended to provide avoidance measures for the potential impact of residential development on the SPA by preventing an increase in visitor pressure on the SPA. The effectiveness of SANG as mitigation will depend upon the location and design. These must be such that the SANG is more attractive than the SPA to users of the kind that currently visit the SPA.

This document describes the features which have been found to draw visitors to the SPA, which should be replicated in SANG. It provides guidelines on

- the type of site which should be identified as SANG
- measures which can be taken to enhance sites so that they may be used as SANG

It also covers the outputs of the recent Thames Basin Heaths Project 2021.

These guidelines relate specifically to the means to provide mitigation for significant impact arising from new housing within the Thames Basin Heaths Zone of influence. They do not address nor preclude the other functions of green space. Other functions may be provided within SANG, as long as this does not conflict with the specific function of mitigating visitor impacts on the SPA.

SANG may be created from:

- existing open space of SANG quality with no existing public access or limited public access, which for the purposes of mitigation could be made fully accessible to the public
- existing open space, which is already accessible, but which could be changed in character so that it is more attractive to the specific group of visitors who might otherwise visit the SPA
- land in other uses which could be converted into SANG

The identification of 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.

SANG continue to need to be delivered in advance of any associated housing stock being occupied. They should also be funded for in perpetuity as is the current process.

The Character of the SPA and its Visitors

The Thames Basin Heaths SPA is made up of 13 Sites of Special Scientific Interest, and consists of a mixture of heathland, mire, and woodland habitats. They are essentially 'heathy' in character. The topography is varied, and most sites have a large component of trees and some contain streams, ponds and small lakes. Some are freely accessible to the public and most have a degree of pubic access, though in some areas this is restricted by army, forestry or other operations.

Survey effort in 2005 showed that more than 83% of visitors to the SPA arrive by car, though access points adjacent to housing estates showed a greater proportion arriving on foot (up to 100% in one case). 70% of those who visited by car had come from within 5km of the access point onto the SPA. A very large proportion of the SPA visitors are dog walkers, many of whom visit the particular site on a regular (more or less daily) basis and spend less than an hour there, walking on average about 2.5km. Almost 50% are retired or part-time workers and the majority are women. Further detailed information on visitors can be found in the reports referenced at the end of this document. These figures have been supported in further SPA wide surveys, the most recent being in 2018.

Guidelines for the Quality of SANG

The quality guidelines have been sub-divided into different aspects of site fabric and structure. They have been compiled from a variety of sources but principally from visitor surveys carried out at heathland sites within the Thames Basin Heaths area or within the Dorset heathlands. These are listed as references at the end of this document.

The principle criteria contained in the Guidelines have also been put into a checklist format which are contained in Appendix 1.

Accessibility

Most visitors come by car and want the site to be fairly close to home. Unless SANG are provided for the sole use of a local population living within a 400-metre catchment around the site, then **the availability of adequate car parking at sites larger than 4 ha is essential**. The amount and nature of parking provision should reflect the anticipated use of the site by visitors and the catchment size of the SANG. It should provide an attractive alternative to parking by the part of SPA for which it is mitigation. **Car parks should be clearly signposted and easily accessed**.

New parking provision for SANG should be advertised as necessary to ensure that it is known of by potential visitors.

Target groups of Visitors

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 the SPA 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.

It is apparent from access surveys that a significant proportion of those people who visit the sites 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 the SPA, the provision of SANG should be attractive to visitors on foot.**

Networks of sites

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.

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

Paths, Roads and Tracks

The findings suggest **that 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.

Paths have to be of a width acceptable to visitors.

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.

The routing of tracks along hill tops and ridges where there are views is valued by the majority of visitors.

Artificial Infrastructure

Little or no artificial infrastructure is found within the SPA at present apart from the provision of some surfaced tracks and car parks. Generally, an urban influence is not what people are looking for when they visit the SPA and some people undoubtedly visit the SPA because it has a naturalness about it that would be marred by such features.

However, **SANG would be expected to have adequate car parking with good information about the site and the routes** available. Some subtle waymarking would also be expected for those visitors not acquainted with the layout of the site.

Other infrastructure would not be expected and should generally be restricted to the vicinity of car 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

SANG do not have to contain heathland or heathy vegetation to provide an effective alternative to the SPA.

Surveys clearly show that **woodland or a semi-wooded landscape is a key feature** that people appreciate in the sites they visit, particularly those who use the SPA. This is more attractive than open landscapes or parkland with scattered trees.

A **semi-natural looking landscape with plenty of variation** was 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 SPA sites gives them an air of relative wildness, even when there are significant numbers of visitors on site. SANG should aim to reproduce this quality.

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.**

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

Restrictions on usage

The bulk of visitors to the SPA came to exercise their dogs and so it is imperative 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**

along the majority of routes. This means that sites where freely roaming dogs will cause a nuisance or where they might be in danger (from traffic or such like) should not be considered for SANG.

Assessment of site enhancement as mitigation

SANG may be provided by the enhancement of existing sites, 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 from site to site. 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 the SPA. In order to assess the contribution of enhancement sites in relation to the hectare standards of the Delivery Plan, it is necessary to distinguish between slight and great enhancement.

Methods of enhancement for the purposes of this guidance could include enhanced access through guaranteed long-term availability of the land, creation of a car park or a network of paths.

SANG which have not previously been open to the public count in full to the standard of providing 8ha of SANG per 1000 people in new development. 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 easily usable routes through the site
- Evidence that the available routes through the site are little used (paths may show little wear, be narrow and encroached on by vegetation)

Practicality of enhancement works

The selection of sites for enhancement to be SANG should take into account the variety of stakeholder interests in each site. Consideration should be given to whether any existing use of the site which may continue is compatible with the function of SANG in attracting recreational use that would otherwise take place on the SPA. The enhancement should not result in moving current users off the SANG and onto the SPA. The specific enhancement works proposed should also be considered in relation not only to their effects on the SANG mitigation function but also in relation to their effects on other user groups.

TBH SPA Mitigation Project – January 2021

The Hart, Rushmoor and Surrey Heath Councils worked together with Natural England to complete a project reviewing the approach to mitigation within the Thames Basin Heaths. The work analysed eleven potential alternative options when it comes to delivering SPA mitigation. The report concluded that the role and design of SANG could be clarified further.

To be made very clear from the outset. There remains a hierarchy of SANG provision. Great weight will be given to those SANGS meeting all the existing quality criteria (shown in Appendix 1) which should be delivered in the first instance. Only if this is **not possible**, **for clearly established reasons**, should the delivery of the options outlined in the section below be considered. If any proposed SANGS do not meet all of the Appendix 1 quality criteria, then these SANGS will continue to be assessed on a case by case basis and should be **agreed** with both the competent authority and Natural England. The proposal will need to demonstrate equivalent effectiveness of mitigation being provided to ensure a robust, consistent approach continues. Any shortfall in SANG criteria should be offset by other complementary means, such as an elevated provision rate, size or high-quality features.

The evidence shows that the use of SANG networks, linear orientated 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 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.

Historically Natural England have apportioned significant weight to the requirement for a 2.3 – 2.5km circular walk, which is less likely to be achievable in a small or linear SANG. These guidelines do not remove weight from the requirement but do accept that in specific circumstances the walk doesn't have to be included within every single SANG unit. It is however desirable to provide the full Appendix 1 criteria across a local SANG network or on another SANG.

Natural England would urge all Local Planning Authorities to take note, that this approach **could** enable sites previously deemed unacceptable to Natural England, to now qualify as valid avoidance measure. Please come and speak to us if you feel that is the case.

Appendix 1: Site Quality Checklist – for a SANG

This guidance is designed as an Appendix to the full guidance on Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces (SANG) to be used as mitigation (or avoidance) land to reduce recreational use of the Thames Basin Heaths SPA.

Must haves

- For all sites larger than 4ha there must be adequate parking for visitors, unless the site is intended for local use, i.e. within easy walking distance (400m) of the developments linked to it. The amount of car parking space should be determined by the anticipated use of the site and reflect the visitor catchment of both the SANG and the SPA.
- Possible to complete a circular walk of 2.3-2.5km around the SANG.
- Car parks must be easily and safely accessible by car and should be clearly sign posted.
- The accessibility of the site must include access points appropriate for the visitor use the SANG is intended to cater for.
- The SANG must have a safe route of access on foot from the nearest car park and/or footpath/s
- All SANG with car parks must have a circular walk which starts and finishes at the car park.
- SANG must be designed so that they are perceived to be safe by users; they must not have tree and scrub cover along parts of the walking routes.
- Paths must be easily used and well maintained but most should remain unsurfaced to avoid the site becoming to urban in feel.
- SANG must be perceived as semi-natural spaces with little intrusion of artificial structures, except in the immediate vicinity of car parks. Visually sensitive way-markers and some benches are acceptable.
- All SANG larger than 12 ha must aim to provide a variety of habitats for users to experience.
- Access within the SANG must be largely unrestricted with plenty of space provided where it is possible for dogs to exercise freely and safely off lead.
- SANG must be free from unpleasant intrusions (e.g. sewage treatment works smells etc).

Should haves

- SANG should be clearly sign-posted or advertised in some way.
- SANG should have leaflets and/or websites advertising their location to potential users. It would be desirable for social media to be used as well, with the goal of reducing paper use. Although a leaflet for a new home is desirable. It could advertise the TBH Partnership website at https://www.tbhpartnership.org.uk/greenspace/

Desirable

- It would be desirable for an owner to be able to take dogs from the car park to the SANG safely off the lead.

- Where possible it is desirable to choose sites with a gently undulating topography for SANG

- It is desirable for access points to have signage outlining the layout of the SANG and the routes available to visitors.

- It is desirable that SANG provide a naturalistic space with areas of open (non-wooded) countryside and areas of dense and scattered trees and shrubs. The provision of open water is encouraged and desirable on sites. However large areas of open water cannot count towards capacity.

- Where possible it is desirable to have a focal point such as a viewpoint, monument etc within the SANG.

Appendix 2: Further clarification on the TBH Project 2021

Reliance on the length of circular walk could be given less weight in specific circumstances on individual SANG sites. A circular route is still required. This will be agreed on a case by case basis by Natural England and the relevant Local Planning (Competent) Authority and only where equivalence can be effectively demonstrated. Sites will also only be accepted where most of the other criteria from Appendix 1 are met, either individually or as part of a group of sites.

Small SANG – This will be no smaller than 2 hectares in size. Where possible all other Appendix 1 criteria should be met, and the site will be adjacent to, linked in an accessible manner to, or close to a SANG or network which can deliver the required circular walk. Small SANG should be available to residents on their doorsteps.

Linear SANG – This approach allows for the width of a SANG to be reduced, where the walk incorporates an attractive linear feature or links to other open sites. For example, alongside waterways or disused railway lines. Linear SANG should include sites with wider areas, creating irregular shapes and opportunities for dogs to exercise freely off lead. In exceptional cases a there and back walk could qualify. It would require strong evidence and visitor surveys to show that it will provide an avoidance experience like that of a traditional SANG. It would also be preferable for linear SANG to link with wider routes and/or other SANGs to provide opportunities for a variety of walks.

SANG Network – Where several SANGs are in proximity or adjacent, they can be used and visited as one single entity. This approach allows for the use of links between SANG units to deliver a circular walk and meet all the Guidelines in combination. The default position is that the SANG links would not count as having capacity or catchments but would need to be secured in perpetuity. If they happen to be a substantial unit of green space themselves then they could be included within the SANG calculation. The size of an individual SANG catchment can be increased depending on the area afforded by an overall SANG network (excluding links), in line with the quanta figures in the TBH Delivery Framework.

Equivalence – This will be required on all SANG sites not meeting the guidelines in Appendix 1. There will have to be an over provision of something else to offset the lack of the full circular walk. This would be likely to incorporate an increased provision rate, for example providing 12 hectares of SANG per thousand head of population. A significant high quality SANG in terms of amenities and habitats could also demonstrate this requirement. We are happy to discuss this matter further on a case by case basis, either through our DAS Service for developers or our Local Plan Service for Local Planning Authorities.

Appendix 3: Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace: A best practice guide

Natural England would urge that these recommendations are followed unless there is valid justification for a deviation.

A SANG can be greatly improved for visitors and wildlife by implementing some of the suggestions in this guide. They are based on Natural England's Strategic Access Management and Monitoring teams' findings from visiting SANG and undertaking visitor number and questionnaire surveys.

This guide has been produced to provide more advice to Local Planning Authorities and developers up front. These are features found throughout the current SANG suite that we feel have tangible positive impacts on the draw to a SANG. We understand that it may not be possible to adopt them all, especially in a smaller SANG. There are a lot of quick fixes in this list which will generate a substantial uplift in SANG attractiveness. Natural England are likely to raise fewer concerns through the formal planning process on a SANG which provides the majority of the following.

It is essential that Natural England visits and agrees a SANG, before any housing development can be attributed towards it. This is in line with Policy NRM6 of the South East Plan. For SANG development advice please contact Natural England's Discretionary Advice Service:

https://www.gov.uk/guidance/developers-get-environmental-advice-on-your-planning-proposals

It is advisable to contact your local planning authority at the first instance of SANG development.

Naming of SANG:

1. Use a name which highlights any attractive features within the site. E.g. meadow, copse, lake etc.
2. Avoid the use of the word 'SANG' in the name of the site.
3. Keep the name relevant to the location but dissimilar to nearby SANG's.
4. The name is different to any associated development.

Location of SANG:

1. Where possible, provision of connectivity to wider greenspace/other SANG is recommended but should ensure a SANG does not result in new and additional access and visits to sensitive sites.
2. Seek to protect and enhance any existing local wildlife site designations (e.g. SSSI/SINC/SNCI) within or adjacent to the SANG boundary.

Biodiversity:

1. Ensure habitat of SANG complements adjacent habitats. e.g by extending similar landscape or something complementary such as grassland for foraging woodland birds.
2. Ensure appropriate connectivity of landscape scale habitat features. e.g. hedgerows, tree belts etc.
3. Include features such as; dead wood, sand banks, wildflower meadows etc.
4. Where open water is included, separate dog ponds and wildlife ponds. (Case study 4)
5. Avoid frequent mowing as a tool to manage grasslands, it is an expensive technique which produces little biodiversity benefit.
6. Grazing is a good management tool. It is not suitable for all SANG, but if it possible on your SANG, a route must be provided which avoids the grazing area for the benefit of those nervous of cattle.
7. Good practice monitoring of SANG use should be built into in perpetuity management of the site, and work consistently with the SAMM Project.

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) is an approach to land management and/or development that aims to leave biodiversity in a measurably better state than before. BNG does not change existing protections to protected sites, irreplaceable habitats or protected species.

Through appropriate design and implementation BNG can complement the purpose of SANGS. These are designed to provide more natural and diverse green space for communities to benefit from and, consequently, delivering more effective mitigation to alleviate pressure on SPAs. SANG is not an automatic delivery mechanism for BNG but the two can exist on the same site. BNG on SANG is only attributable to such habitat creation or enhancement that proves measurable additionality over and above the minimum requirements of the SANG, demonstrated through use of the Biodiversity Metric stipulated by the consenting body.

For BNG to be delivered on SANG, the SANG should achieve nature conservation outcomes that demonstrably exceed existing obligations under the SANG guidance, as quantified through the metric. It is encouraged that, where applicable, additional or enhanced features at SANGs are informed by local nature or wildlife strategies and priorities, such as Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS). It is recommended that the BNG calculations for the SANG are done separately from the rest of the project calculations, in order to ensure a clear audit trail and allow for simple demonstration of the additional biodiversity unit uplift beyond the minimum SANG requirements. Any additional features provided for BNG purposes should not conflict with the principle purpose of the SANG. Consideration should be given for other ecosystem services provided by the SANG and design should ensure BNG does not compete with these but delivers alongside them. For example, a wildflower rich grassland area created for biodiversity benefits would provide additional ecosystem services but could potentially also conflict with recreational services provided by the SANG. Careful consideration should be given to the design of any additional biodiversity features introduced into the SANG to ensure they did not conflict with the SANGs principle purpose.

For the purposes of the BNG calculation, the baseline value of the SANG is the site with the Habitat Regulation key required habitat features incorporated. Enhancements should be additional to count towards BNG, in that the enhancements would not have taken place in the absence of the BNG funding (or commitment of funding) and the biodiversity benefit (as measured through the metric) should not also be claimed to compensate for another project's biodiversity impact. Further information on BNG is set out in the following guidance and standards

1. The CIEEM, CIRIA, IEMA Good practice principles for development should be followed: https://cieem.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/C776a-Biodiversity-net-gain.-Good-practice-principles-for-development.-A-practical-guide-web.pdf

2. The British Standard for Biodiversity Net Gain (BS 8683) is a process standard that describes the implementation of BNG by a project (to be released in 2021).

Equality Act 2010 Compliance:

1. This does not fall under the remit of Natural England and we will not be giving bespoke advice about it during our pre application discussions. However, we urge developers and Local Planning Authorities alike to consider the requirements of it, when designing their SANG solutions.

Paths:

1. We are concerned about sections of the circular route that seasonally are wet, muddy or flooded, and could put visitors off from visiting. In these cases, we recommend boardwalk or paths are built up, for them to remain as compliant SANG. Relating to this, if applying grip to surfaces, avoid wire netting as it can trap dog claws.
2. Path surfacing needs to remain semi natural. The highest specification surface we would accept is resin bound hoggin.

3. Avoid convoluted paths and pinch points in SANG design. By maintaining a minimum width between paths of 100 m in open ground and 50 m in dense woodland.
   If necessary, look to extend the area of the SANG, or look at a local SANG Network.
4. Avoid paths running through areas adjacent to major infrastructure with prolonged loud noise. For example, adjacent dual carriageways or motorways. Natural England look at a maximum decibel limit of 60, before requiring discounting of SANG area.

Way-marking and signage:

1. Provide a map at the entrances with an easy to follow circular walk.
2. Gates, fencing and planting following natural land features can help distinguish routes.
3. Highlight points of interest and site history.
4. Car parks well sign posted using highways specification. Where possible through use of the brown sign initiative.
5. Provide contact details for site manager at main entrance.

Bins and dog fouling:

1. Dog bins should be in convenient sections of site and near the entrances.

Car park standard:

1. Provide a minimum of 1 parking space per ha.

Safety and security:

1. Where required for health and safety purposes, the SANG should have suitable access for emergency vehicles.
2. Car parks should be designed to reduce risk of anti-social behaviour, break in or feelings of vulnerability for site users.
3. Perimeter fencing secure to prevent dogs getting out.

Amenities:
These are **not a requirement** but have proved an attractive feature in those SANG with the space available.

1. A play area is a feature that attracts those with children to visit the site, as these are not present on the SPA. If a play area is included, it should be made from sustainable natural sources and not be full of bright plastics.
2. A café or food/drink provisions often attracts more visitors to the site. (Case study 4)

To conclude
We sometimes lose track of the basic requirement for a SANG, which is to attract people away from the SPA. When designing all SANG, the visitor experience needs to be put first. Costings and even habitat creation should all fall from a strong Visitor Strategy, which should form part of the SANG Management Strategy. Sites and their information should be created in a positive manner to interest visitors and have them coming back time and time again. Though biodiversity and landscape planning are obviously important, we urge you to start by considering the local populous and what they want and how they want to interact with your site, when creating a new SANG.

Case Studies

1. Edenbrook Country Park – Hart District Council - Well surfaced paths, and provisions for wildlife.

Edenbrook is a 24-hectare country park, delivered by Berkeley in partnership with Natural England and Hart District Council.
The paths are sufficiently wide for a combination of site users (Figure 1). There is also a good network of surfaced paths which are not convoluted and avoids pinch points. This was historically agricultural fields, but through innovative design, they have delivered a site that delivers both for visitors but also for biodiversity. Hart District Council have recognised the SANG network approach here and are bolting on extra area to the SANG and linking to other SANG in the vicinity.



Figure 1: The surfaced paths at Edenbrook are located sufficiently far from one another, and from wildlife rich-areas. They are wide enough for the whole combination of site visitors to use.

2. Farnham Park – Waverley Borough Council - Provisions for dogs and wildlife.

Several of the ponds in Farnham Park are designated as wildlife ponds. These are rich in wildlife, hosting many amphibian and invertebrate species. Dead hedges were built around three of the ponds, using materials cut from Farnham Park. To provide water and an opportunity to swim, 'Friends Pond' has been kept fully accessible to dogs. It is located nearest the main entrance and is easily accessible to all visitors. The wildlife ponds are further away from the main entrance, where visitor density is expected to be lower.



Figure 2: 'Friends Pond' a dog pond on Farnham Park which allows dogs to swim and drink from, whilst other ponds are fenced to protect wildlife.

3. Bucklers Forest – Bracknell Forest Council Comprehensive and engaging interpretation.

At the entrance to the site, Buckler's Forest includes a map that shows 3 options for circular routes (measuring 3.6 km, 2.4 km and 1.3 km). It also includes information on the wildlife that visitors can expect to see on site. As well as this, it highlights the site history. The inclusion of such comprehensive signage encourages users to care more about the site.
Buckler's Forest has showcased its site history by incorporating green electrical boxes, retained from the transport laboratory, into the site design. These have been transformed into benches, bug hotels, and even mini 'museum' exhibitions. The integration of the site's history is beloved by many site visitors and it creates a distinctly 'country park' feel.



Figure 3: A mini 'museum' exhibition including some archaeological samples found on site. Located within a green electrical box present when the site was a transport laboratory.



Figure 4: A bug hotel also within a repurposed green electrical box.

4. Heather Farm – Delivered by Horsell Common Preservation Society in partnership with Woking Borough Council - Provision of amenities.

Heather Farm has proved to be a very popular SANG, particularly for of its amenities, including a café and a large car park. Whilst it is not possible, or advisable, to include a café on every SANG, at Heather Farm, it has attracted a lot of visitors, many of whom would otherwise visit the SPA. After identifying a need for additional parking provisions, Horsell Common Preservation Society added 57 new spaces to the car park. There are currently 109 car parking spaces for visitors. Heather Farm provides 4 spaces per hectare, significantly more than the suggested minimum of 1 space per hectare.



Figure 5: A view of some of the habitat creation at Heather Farm

5. Wellesley Woodlands – Rushmoor Borough Council - Waymarking and signposting.

Wellesley Woodlands has incorporated non-intrusive way-markers to clearly signpost users around the 8 trails included in the SANG. These are easy to follow for site users whilst remaining unobtrusive. Where multiple trails intersect, signposting is clear to ensure that trails can be followed with ease. Both the map and associated markers clearly identify those trails that are suitable ground for wheelchairs and those with restricted mobility.



Figure 6: A signpost clearly defining two all-ability trails, the Birch Trail and the Holly Trail.



Figure 7: A way-marker to signpost users along the Wellesley Willow Trail.

6. Biodiversity Net Gain

Examples of Biodiversity Net Gain delivered within a SANG:

A. If an extra hedgerow was put into a SANG, not for screening purposes, this could count. If it is put in for screening reasons, this is a key SANG feature and therefore cannot count towards BNG unless the hedgerow was of higher distinctives than that needed for screening purposes or maintained in better ecological condition, in which case it could count.
B. Planting wildflower bulbs on appropriately sited amenity grassland within a SANG and in turn converting it to species rich meadow could be counted towards BNG.
C. If the SANG has structures such as a toilet block or café, then BNG could be delivered through the introduction of green/vegetated roofs and/or walls on such structures.

Potential Opportunities for Biodiversity Net Gain



Appendix 4: SANG Information Form

This form is designed to help you gather information about any potential SANG. For more guidance on the creation of SANG, please also refer to the relevant Borough Council's Thames Basin Heaths SPA Interim Avoidance Plan.

Natural England, Local Planning Authorities, and other organisations will then be able to consider the potential suitability of the proposed SANG based on this initial information.

Background information

Name and location of proposed SANG	**Name:** **Address:** **Grid reference:** **(Please attach a map of the site with the boundaries clearly marked)**
Size of the proposed SANG (hectares), excluding water features	**hectares**
Any current designations on land - e.g. LNR / SNCI	
Current owners name and address. (If there is more than one owner then please attach a map)	
Who manages the land?	
Legal arrangements for the land – e.g. how long is the lease?	
Is there a management plan for the site? (if so, please attach)	

Current visitor arrangements

Is the site currently accessible to the public?	
Does the site have open access?	
Has there been a visitor survey of the site? (If so, please attach)	
If there has been no visitor survey, please give and indication of the current visitor levels on site	
Does the site have existing car parking?	**How many car parks?** **How may car parking spaces?** **(Please mark car parks and numbers of car parking spaces on the site map)**
Are there any existing routes or paths on the site?	**(Please mark these on the map)**
Are there signs to direct people to the site? (Please indicate where and what type of sign)	

Site quality checklist

Must/should haves – these criteria are essential for all SANG			
	Criteria	**Current**	**Future**
1	Parking on all sites larger than 4ha (unless the site is intended for use within 400m only)		
2	Circular walk of 2.3-2.5km		
3	Car parks easily and safely accessible by car and clearly sign posted		
4	Access points appropriate for particular visitor use the SANG is intended to cater for		
5	Safe access route on foot from nearest car park and/or footpath		
6	Circular walk which starts and finishes at the car park		
7	Perceived as safe – no tree and scrub cover along part of walking routes		
8	Paths easily used and well maintained but mostly unsurfaced		

9	Perceived as semi-natural with little intrusion of artificial structures		
10	If larger than 12 ha then a range of habitats should be present		
11	Access unrestricted – plenty of space for dogs to exercise freely and safely off the lead		
12	No unpleasant intrusions (e.g. sewage treatment smells etc)		
13	Clearly sign posted or advertised in some way		
14	Leaflets or website advertising their location to potential users		
15	Can dog owners take dogs from the car park to the SANG safely off the lead		
16	Gently undulating topography		
17	Access points with signage outlining the layout of the SANG and routes available to visitors		
18	Naturalistic space with areas of open countryside and dense and scattered trees and shrubs. Provision of open water is desirable		
19	Focal point such as a viewpoint or monument within the SANG		

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