

# **Southwood Country Park SANG**

## **DRAFT Interim Management Plan 2021-2023**

### **1 Introduction**

- 1.1 The Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA) is a network of heathland sites that was designated by European legislation in 2005 for its breeding populations of ground-nesting birds, namely the Dartford Warbler, nightjar, and woodlark. Studies have shown that the designated species have been declining in numbers since the early 2000s. The decline is thought to be due to increases in housing within South East England, which has led to unsustainable recreational pressure on the SPA birds. To endeavour to alleviate pressure, a mitigation strategy has been formulated across Berkshire, Hampshire, and Surrey, to provide Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces (SANG) at 8ha/1000 new residents. It is hoped that SANG sites will provide natural habitat, away from the SPA, and alleviate recreational pressure within the designated sites. Southwood Country Park has been identified as a SANG to serve new development planned within Rushmoor Borough Council's Local Plan.
- 1.2 The delivery of the Park has been progressed in two phases. Phase 1 has delivered the immediate infrastructure required by Natural England to enable the former Golf Course to provide SANG mitigation. This included the provision of signage, car parking, fencing and circular walks. An Interim Management Plan was prepared for the initial 12-18 month period (Southwood Country Park Interim Management Plan 2019-2021).
- 1.3 Phase 2 will enable the Park to fulfil its purpose of alleviating recreational pressure on the SPA in the longer term, by undertaking further habitat work to naturalise the site and to provide additional facilities to attract visitors. The Council has been exploring options and progressing the delivery of the following facilities and services in phase 2:
- The employment of staff including a ranger to manage the SANG
  - A visitor centre, café, toilets and ranger's office
  - All weather paths
  - A pedestrian crossing on Ively Road to provide a safe link between the eastern and western sections, subject to traffic assessment and Hampshire Highways
  - A playground constructed of natural materials close to the Ively Road car park.
  - A fenced dog exercise area and washdown facilities
  - Cycle paths to encourage use of the SANG by cyclists, especially families

- Creation of focal points and/or adventure structures
- CCTV to provide security around buildings
- Educational aids such as a pond dipping platform for use by schools and clubs to study wildlife

## **2 Progress of Phase 2 planning since 2019**

2.1 Due to Covid and other factors, Phase 2 of the Country Park has been delayed. As a result, the Council needs to prepare an updated Interim Management Plan for the next 2 years. There are interim arrangements currently in place to manage the SANG on behalf of the Council and options are currently being explored for the longer-term management of the site. A longer term (10 year) Management Plan will be prepared once these arrangements are in place.

### ***The Southwood and Cove Brook Floodplain Improvement Project***

2.2 The Cove Brook is a tributary of the River Blackwater, part of the wider Loddon and Thames catchments. The closure of the golf course and the plans to create Suitable Natural Alternative Greenspace now offers an opportunity to restore the habitats and physical processes associated with the Cove Brook corridor and associated floodplain, creating a more resilient ecosystem for the benefit of people and wildlife. Therefore, the Council has entered partnership with the Environment Agency, to progress a project which will achieve river floodplain and habitat improvements on the Southwood Country Park and Cove Brook as part of the Phase 2 development. The objectives of this project include:

- Improve the Water Framework Directive Status of the Cove Brook and its tributaries through physical habitat enhancement
- Enhance the biodiversity and ecosystem functioning of the project area
- Re-establish hydrological connectivity between the river and its floodplain (where this does not compromise the SANG)
- Increase tree cover within the former golf course to provide woodland and wet woodland habitat within the headwaters
- Create opportunities for nature-based recreation and education
- Identify any opportunities to secure flood risk benefits for local people (including the consideration of natural flood management interventions)
- Improve the biodiversity value of the four associated Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) namely
  - Cove Valley, Southern Grassland
  - Cove Brook Grassland

- Southwood Woodlands
  - Southwood Country Park
  - Improve the landscape value of the project area
- 2.3 Consultants have been appointed to manage and lead on this project. A Baseline Report and Longlist of Options and draft Concept Designs has been prepared. Work is currently underway on the detailed design and the flood modelling work. The design will be published for public comment in summer, the Council then intends to tender for the Phase 2 works later in 2021, before work commences on site in early 2022.

#### ***Southwood Country Park Visitor Centre***

- 2.4 The Council has also been considering the options regarding a visitor hub on the site and is now progressing the design development for a Visitor Centre and Café.

#### ***Pedestrian Crossing***

- 2.5 The plan for the creation of Southwood Country Park includes provision of a pedestrian crossing. This has been subject to technical work and is awaiting confirmation from Hampshire County Council as to the requirements following submission of the relevant data.

#### ***ESSO Pipeline***

- 2.6 A Development Consent Order (DCO) was granted in October 2020 for the Southampton to London Pipeline Project that will replace 90km of aviation fuel pipeline. Part of the new pipeline crosses the western and eastern sections of the park. A phasing plan has been published by Esso and is available, along with further information on the project, at [www.slpproject.co.uk](http://www.slpproject.co.uk). Works affecting the park are expected to take place between May and October 2022, with some vegetation clearance in December 2021. Any interim or Phase 2 works will need to take the pipeline route into account.

### **3 Site Description**

- 3.1 Southwood Country Park is a 57ha site, owned by Rushmoor Borough Council (the Council), incorporating a former golf course and adjacent land. Cove Brook, and four Sites of Interest for Nature Conservation (SINCs) support the most biodiverse habitats on site, however since the last interim management plan natural habitats have started regenerating across the site.
- 3.2 The Park is made up of two distinct parts – the area to the west of the A327 Ively Road ('western section') and the area to the east ('eastern section'). The Country Park was opened to the public in September 2019.

- 3.3 Southwood Country Park is located to the south west of Farnborough, within the Borough of Rushmoor in Hampshire, OS grid reference: SU8554. It forms a green oasis in a heavily urban environment and is a prominent natural feature within the local landscape. The site is visible from busy roads leading into Farnborough from neighbouring Fleet. Due to the size of the site and the habitat connectivity with Southwood Woodland and other open spaces views from the golf course are largely of naturalised habitats rather than urban sprawl.
- 3.4 The Country Park is directly adjacent to Southwood Woodland SANG to the west, comprising 30ha of oak/birch woodland and wet woodland, containing open acidic grassland glades and bog habitats. The head of the Ively stream is located within the woodland. This stream then forms the northern boundary of the site throughout the western section of the Country Park. There is no formal boundary and visitors can move freely between the two green spaces.
- 3.5 Southwood Playing Fields and the EA Flood Mitigation area are to the north of the SANG with Cove Brook bordering to the east. Cove Brook then runs under Cove Road and the Five Arches railway bridge before continuing through the Cove Brook Greenway and Horley Meadows, before joining the Blackwater within Blackwater Valley.
- 3.6 The site is predominantly flat though in a few places, the topography has been altered. The underlying geology is based on Windlesham Formation (sand, silt & clay) beds. Both the geology and recolonization of acid grassland indicate that there are likely to be opportunities to extend the acidic grassland habitats throughout the site.
- 3.7 Due to the site being low lying floodplain, it is prone to seasonal water logging. Surface water from the site is passed down open ditches and culverts towards the Ively stream, which then flows away to the east into the Cove Brook. The eastern land parcel drains into the Marrow Brook, which then flows into the Cove Brook before meandering northwards through Cove Brook Grasslands SINC and Cove Valley Southern Grasslands SINC into Cove. Floodplain grazing marsh and wet woodland habitats have formed within the SINCs, along the drainage network and within low lying areas of the site.
- 3.8 Southwood Country Park contains three Sites of Interest for Nature Conservation (SINC) identified as of County importance for their wet habitats. Cove Brook Grasslands SINC supports a wide range of marshy grassland, swamp and floodplain habitats, with willow Carr scrub further diversifying the habitat complex. Cove Valley Southern Grasslands SINC is less diverse with much of the scrub having developed into species poor wet woodland. Within the area of open grassland, a good diversity of species is still present. Southwood Country Park SINC is designated for its wet woodland and remnant grazing marsh habitats.

## **4 Changes within the natural habitats since 2019**

- 4.1 Since the golf course closed there has been limited management on the site. The ecological management detailed within the initial plan was felt to be inappropriate once the invertebrate surveys were analysed, and the habitat was seen to be regenerating naturally. It was decided, in consultation with Debbie Salmon (RBC ecologist), the EA and Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust that the habitats should be unmanaged for a few seasons to allow them to recover from former intensive management, with regeneration being monitored. It is intended to undertake a flora survey this year to record the flora communities present on site. This will then be compared with the survey undertaken in 2017 to assess the increase in floral diversity.
- 4.2 Within the east, acidic grassland has become increasingly biodiverse. The surveys undertaken in the park identified an important community of terrestrial invertebrates, with many rare and vulnerable species noted. The bog habitat within the Cove Brook Grasslands SINC and the wet woodland within Southwood Country Park SINC were hotspots for terrestrial invertebrates, with some evidence these species were recolonising the regenerating habitats within the east.
- 4.3 The western side of Southwood Country Park is less biodiverse than the east, however there are signs of early acid grassland colonisation in some areas. The bunkers and areas within the grassland now contain acid grassland species, with the wetter areas beginning to form wetland flora communities. The rough grassland previously recorded on site appears to be diminishing, being replaced by fescue dominated grassland.
- 4.4 The habitats now require significant work to bring them into rotational management. The Council will bring the habitats into active management, within the Interim Management Plan period, in partnership with Blackwater Valley Countryside Project (BVCP) and the EA. This will ensure that the habitats and the associated fauna become increasingly diverse
- 4.5 In addition to the habitat work site furniture and trim trail will be installed, to provide facilities for the visitors. Signage will be reviewed throughout both Southwood Woodlands and Southwood Country Park to provide better way marking and information on the habitats and species present on site.

## **5 Interim Management**

- 5.1 This Interim Management Plan relates to the management of the Country Park for the next 12 to 24 months (2021 – 2023). Within this time the Council, in partnership with the EA, will have undertaken the Phase 2 works and a longer term (10-year) management plan will need to be prepared and agreed.

- 5.2 The immediate infrastructure and changes required by Natural England to enable the former Southwood Golf Course to provide SANG mitigation at the earliest opportunity have now been delivered on site. A new car park was opened adjacent to Kennels Lane in April 2020, over 9km of mown paths were provided including circular walks and the site was fenced in 2019/20. Temporary signage was erected at all official entrances providing a map of the site and the footpath network. An all-weather path of 2.4km is to be constructed this summer within the western section, however due to the route of the ESSO pipeline it is unlikely that the all-weather path proposed for the east will be delivered, until the pipeline work is complete.
- 5.3 Under the interim arrangements, Southwood Woodlands and Southwood Country Park are now being managed as a single site by BVCP, with ranger and materials costed for both sites. Calculations show that the two sites require 1.5 rangers to undertake the habitat works and visitor engagement within the sites. As visitor engagement increases additional budget may be required to provide another 0.5 ranger, to provide staff to the level budgeted for within the original SANG calculations. Funding for the rangers, infrastructure and habitat works will come from developer SANG contributions for new residential development.

## **6 Management of the Habitat Complex**

### ***Grassland Management***

- 6.1 An annual mowing regime will commence on site, within the grassland habitats in 2021 to reduce the predominance of invasive grass species and ensure the ground remains depleted of nutrients. The mowing will be undertaken on a three-year rotation to ensure there is shelter and overwintering habitat for reptiles, amphibians and invertebrates present on site. Care will be taken to ensure that reptiles which may bask on the close-cut paths, are not harmed. Mowing will take place after the end of August (*see Map 1, Grassland A Management*).
- 6.2 In the west, the grassland will be topped in the spring 2022 to control the invasive grass species and enable the tender species to grow and seed. Mown paths will continue to be maintained by SERCO as currently.

### ***Wetland Creation and Management***

- 6.3 Cove Brook Grasslands Area SINC supports the most important habitat on site. The bog and grazing marsh habitats contain rare flora species with both the habitats and species identified within the SINC designation. The habitats provide ideal conditions for many rare invertebrate communities and the entire populations of palmate newts and common lizard found on site.

- 6.4 The Cove Brook Grasslands Area SINC will be managed on a 10-year rotation with a tenth of the site mown each autumn. Habitats on the periphery of this site have become over-run with invasive species such as reeds. In these areas, scrapes will be provided to provide opportunities for recolonization by more valuable flora species and provide additional habitat for wetland birds, reptiles, amphibians, and invertebrates. Scraping and scrub clearance will be undertaken to help to maintain a complex of habitats in different stages of growth.
- 6.5 There are opportunities to create wetland habitat adjacent to the Southwood Country Park SINC where the grassland is naturally wet. This habitat will provide opportunities for the invertebrate population within the woodland to expand into this habitat, as well as providing additional grazing marsh habitat to compliment that found within the SINC. The wetland area identified within map B will be stripped within the summer 2021 and seeded within green hay from the bog habitat when this is cut in August. The colonisation of this area will be monitored throughout 2022 with a further green hay seeding applied if required in August 2022 (*see Map B Wetland Management*).

#### ***Woodland, Copses, Hedgerows, Scrub and Trees***

- 6.6 Work to the woodland blocks at Southwood Country Park SINC and Cove Brook Southern Grasslands will be delivered as part of the Southwood and Cove Brook Floodplain Improvement Project, with thinning of the canopy undertaken to increase light to the waterways. Any further access work required within the SINC's will be undertaken after the wider works are carried out in the winter of 2021/22.
- 6.7 However, it is proposed to plant a woodland edge, copses and to re-establish the historic hedgerow network throughout the western section of the site within the interim period. Some of this planting will be undertaken in September, using existing voluntary groups from Southwood Woodlands and Cove Brook Greenways Groups. Negotiations with Community Matters Partnership Project are ongoing to run a planting day for companies. It is possible that the volunteer days could deliver all the planting required, but if not either the rangers or contractors will complete the planting. Areas will need to be left unplanted until works are completed by ESSO and the Council. 1500 shrubs will be provided by Farnborough Airport to offset carbon, however a budget will need to be provided for the trees within the copses, as these need to be significantly larger than any offered by Carbon Footprint. Some additional shrubs are also likely to be required as the proposed planting will cover a significant area.
- 6.8 On opening the Country Park to the public, a schedule of works was drawn up to undertake health and safety works on a number of trees, most of which were conifer. The high and

medium priority works were undertaken in 2020, after the trees had been checked for bats. The low priority works will be completed in 2021/22, with bat surveys undertaken on all trees that require work.

- 6.9 Within the wider management plan the vision is to restore the landscape back to the 1800s and add a number of small copses to increase the habitat complex on site. From an ecological viewpoint it would be extremely beneficial to remove all the conifer species on site, as these will seed into the acid grassland and need to be removed by hand each season. Coniferous habitat is poor in biodiversity with few species using the trees, other than to nest and little flora being able to colonise the grassland within the tree's canopy. Therefore, all conifer will be felled, whatever its condition, with replacement tree planting carried out to create the copses and provide standards within the hedgerow network.
- 6.10 To ensure a diverse habitat complex within the Country Park, it is important that we provide some scrub habitat in which the reptiles, amphibians and invertebrates can shelter. Currently there is little scrub on site, with popular regeneration dominating the scrub habitat present. To create biodiverse scrub habitats mowing will not be undertaken in strategic areas. Popular scrub will be kept under control using hand tools to ensure no harm to the taxa using the habitats. To ensure this habitat remains as scrub, the areas selected will be coppiced every 7 years (*see Map C for the Woodland/Copse/Hedgerow/scrub network*).

#### ***Cove Brook, tributaries, and the ditch drainage network***

- 6.11 It has been agreed that due to the extensive works to be undertaken to Ively Stream and Marrow Brook as part of the River enhancement, and the very poor ecological quality of the bankside vegetation along these tributaries, any works and management required will be undertaken within and after the wider river restoration works in 2022/23.
- 6.12 The drainage network this is currently very engineered with water piped into ditches. It has also been noted that this system can cause flooding to the surrounding properties and therefore needs to be cleared to ensure the safety of the properties. By naturalising the ditch network, the system will function as part of the riparian network with flora slowing down the water and the recreated wetland absorbing any excess flows before the water reaches the properties. The ditch network will be naturalised and connected into the riparian system as part of the Southwood and Cove Brook Floodplain Improvements project. This will be done in consultation with John Trusler and Helen Bristow, who currently manages the ditches for the council.

6.13 Work along Cove Brook will be undertaken during the winter of 2021 to clear the invasive vegetation, particularly the bramble, to enable bankside flora to regenerate and become more biodiverse. The bramble will be cleared on a two-year rotation to ensure cover is present throughout the river corridor for the invertebrates, otter and other fauna that use this corridor. The vegetation will be cut in 200m stretches, with 200m being cut on one side of the river, with a staggered 200m stretch cut on the alternate bank. The two-year rotational management will ensure a contiguous corridor of cover. This management will be undertaken in the winter months to avoid harm to nesting birds, reptiles, amphibians, and invertebrates (see Map D for the river and drainage network).

#### ***Bare Ground habitat, The Bunkers***

6.14 Bare ground habitat is essential for many of the invertebrate species present within the site, as they use these areas to hunt. Bare ground also creates basking opportunities for reptiles. However, it has been noted that acidic grassland habitats are establishing on many of the bunkers. Therefore, to endeavour to establish a balance between these two important habitats, the bunkers will be reprofiled to create south facing slopes and scraped on a 10-year rotation. As there are 30 bunkers on site, three bunkers will be reprofiled and scraped per year, commencing in 2021. This will provide habitats in different phases of regeneration, increasing opportunities for colonisation by a wider and more varied invertebrate assemblage. (See map E for a plan of the bunkers and other invertebrate habitat found on site)

## **7 The benefits of habitat creation, management, and enhancement to species**

### ***Bats***

7.1 Five species of foraging bats were recorded on site, common and soprano pipistrelle, Daubentons, noctule and an unidentified Myotis species. Most of the bat activity was focused along the tree lines and the woodland. This management plan will provide a diverse woodland edge and linear foraging routes providing greater areas over which the bats can hunt. By increasing the invertebrate populations bats will also be provided with more plentiful food. In the longer term, as the copse habitat matures, additional roosting opportunities will become available, enabling a greater number and diversity of bats to roost on site.

7.2 Lighting should be kept to a minimum, with the site preferably remaining dark. If works are required on mature broadleaved trees, bat surveys should be undertaken, with the appropriate licences obtained if roosts are to be impacted.

### ***Badgers***

- 7.3 Two outlier badger setts have been recorded within the western section, associated with the main sett within Southwood Woodlands SANG. Latrines were noted within the eastern and western parcels. The woodland complex will increase the foraging potential, providing fruit, nuts and berries and more varied invertebrate and vertebrate food sources. In the longer term the copses will provide shelter for sett creation, enabling the badger community to grow and expand.

### ***Birds***

- 7.4 36 bird species have been recorded on site. Bullfinch, house sparrow, reed bunting, song thrush and starling are listed in the Biodiversity Action Plan due to the sharp declines in numbers in recent years. The complex of habitats proposed within this management plan will increase habitat for species already using the site and encourage a greater diversity of birds. The woodland/copse/hedgerow habitat will enable woodland birds to expand their territory, with the heathland and wetland habitat providing additional foraging and nesting habitats for species which use more open habitats. The proposed scrapes within the bog area will provide habitat for wetland birds. The wetland habitats will be supplemented by a naturalised river network and further scrapes and ponds within the Southwood and Cove Brook River and Floodplain Enhancement Project. Bird boxes for a wide variety of species will be erected as part of a school's project in 2022, with monitoring undertaken by the children within the summer months.

### ***Reptiles***

- 7.5 A peak count of eleven common lizards were recorded, comprising 5 adults and 6 juveniles, comprising a medium breeding population of common lizard. All common lizards were recorded within Cove Brook Grasslands SINC. A peak count of 20 slow worms were recorded comprising 10 adults and 10 juveniles, with the site supporting an exceptional breeding population of slow worms.
- 7.6 The woodland/ copse/hedgerow network will increase shelter and provide a greater diversity of fauna for reptiles to hunt. This complex will be supplemented by log piles and other hibernacula positioned in strategic locations. The management of the open habitats will increase foraging and basking opportunities, with rotational scaping of bunkers creating a variety of basking and hunting conditions. The Southwood and Cove Brook River and

Floodplain Enhancement Project will increase wetland habitats for common lizards outside the bog by recreating and enhancing the riparian, floodplain, pond, and ditch network.

### ***Amphibians***

- 7.7 A peak count of 20 Palmate newts were found within the bog habitat indicating that a good population within the Cove Brook Grasslands SINC. A peak count of 4 frogs were found within the bog indicating a low population.
- 7.8 The creation of scrapes and the management of the bog habitats will provide more varied wetland habitats and thus increase foraging and breeding opportunities. The Southwood and Cove Brook River and Floodplain Enhancement Project will increase opportunities for amphibians outside the bog by recreating and enhancing breeding habitat and increasing the floodplain and ditch network used to hunt.

### ***Aquatic Macroinvertebrates***

- 7.9 The waterbodies and watercourses are considered to support aquatic macroinvertebrate communities of moderate to low ecological value. The pond in the north/north east is of highest value, whereas the ditches in the western section are of lowest ecological value. The presence of concrete and a thick layer of silt and leaf litter and the slow sluggish flows within the ditch/ stream network is having an adverse impact on the aquatic invertebrates, suppressing diversity. By providing scrapes within the bog and additional wetland adjacent to Southwood Country Park SINC, some temporary habitat will be provided to support aquatic invertebrates. However, the biggest benefits for this taxon will be provided through the Southwood and Cove Brook River and Floodplain Enhancement Project, which will re-naturalise the stream and ditch network, improving the water quality within the riparian system.

### ***Terrestrial Invertebrates***

- 7.10 The terrestrial invertebrate survey, undertaken 2019 found 596 species of which 37 had conservation status. This was the highest total of any three-visit survey carried out by the author. Looking at the site at a landscape scale, including Southwood Woodlands, an impressive 952 species have been recorded overall, with 73 having conservation status.
- 7.11 Within the Country Park the invertebrate interest was largely focused around the bog in the east and the wet woodland in the west. Some species have spread into the Country Park since the management has been relaxed, but the golf course habitats and the intensive mowing have blocked most of these specialist species from colonising new areas

- 7.12 A full invertebrate survey is six days, but only three days were commissioned for the Country Park as the invertebrate value of the site was unknown at this time. As the site supports an important extremely biodiverse invertebrate population,, an additional three visit invertebrate survey has been commissioned to ensure RBC has a full data set of the rare species that require conservation, to monitor the invertebrate colonisation of the site and provide advice on any future management required, above what is in this plan.
- 7.13 Due to the importance of this taxa, this management plan has focused heavily on providing for their needs. Within the west the Woodland/copse/hedgerow network will provide routes out of the Southwood Country Park SINC into newly created wet woodland interspersed through the site. The rotational management of the grassland and bog will ensure that overwintering habitat is available, with rotational scaping of the bunds providing habitats in different stages of progression, including bare ground in which many species hunt. The scrapes within the bog and the green hay seeding adjacent to the Southwood Country Park SINC will provide a more biodiverse wetland habitat complex for the species using the bog and the wet woodland and the hibernacula will provide additional overwintering habitat and shelter during the summer months. (See map E for a plan of the bunkers and other invertebrate habitat found on site)

#### ***Invasive Non-Indigenous Species (INNS)***

- 7.14 Four schedule 9 species under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) were noted within the survey. Signal crayfish cannot be controlled.
- 7.15 Unfortunately, the variegated yellow archangel is spreading through the site, due to garden waste dumping from the adjacent housing. This is also an issue within Southwood Woodland. All garden waste needs to be removed from the site and a concerted effort made to try to stop this practice. This may include legal action if the offenders can be identified as it is an offence to spread schedule 9 species onto other people's land. However, before this action is taken the ranger will visit the properties surrounding the park with information regarding the damage done to ecological habitats from dumping and endeavour to persuade the occupants to dispose of their waste responsibly. The variegated yellow archangel will be sprayed this year to try to limit spread, but it is likely to require digging out which will be very labour intensive.
- 7.16 The Himalayan Balsam is contained within a small area adjacent to the EA bund. A work party pulled much of this last year. The site ranger will check for regrowth and control as required.

- 7.17 The crassula has now been sprayed for two years and has not spread further than first recorded. This spraying will continue this year, with the pond being filled within the Southwood and Cove Brook Floodplain Improvement Project.

## **8 Access and Infrastructure**

### ***Natural England Requirements***

- 8.1 Natural England has published criteria for SANG to be used as mitigation or avoidance land to reduce recreational use of the Thames Basin Heaths SPA. Some of these criteria are considered essential and others are desirable – further details of these criteria and how they have been met in the Southwood Country Park are set out in Appendix C.

### ***Car Parking and Access***

- 8.2 The former golf course car park, consisting of 75 spaces with approximately 20 spaces in the overflow area, serves the eastern parcel, with a new 29-space car park, with 2 additional accessible spaces and cycle provision, off Kennels Lane serving the western section. There is capacity to extend this car park if required. There is some informal parking along Kennels Lane which serves the Southwood Woodland SANG and Southwood Country Park SANG.
- ~~8.3~~ Pedestrian access points are via Ively Rd and Kennels Lane for the western parcel and via the Southwood Playing Fields, Ively Rd, Kempton Court and Cove Brook Greenway (Bridge Rd) for the eastern parcel.
- 8.4 All vegetation will be controlled to ensure clear sight lines into the site for pedestrians, cyclists, and motorists. Chicanes have been placed within the eastern car park to secure access onto the site, with field gates to ensure access for vehicles required to manage the site. Directional signage will be provided in 2021 to inform the public of the location of the site and car parking. In addition, planting will be provided to screen the Council's compounds off Kennels Lane and Ively Road.

### ***Circular routes***

- 8.5 2.4km circular routes are available through the eastern and western parcels of Southwood Country Park. Paths are already significantly longer than the minimum required, at over 5 km within the western parcel and over 4 km within the eastern parcel. The network comprises existing hard surfaced paths linked by mown areas, providing strategic links to Southwood Woodland in the west and Southwood Meadow and the Cove Brook Greenway in the east. Due to the wet nature of the site an all-weather path of 2.4km will be constructed in the

spring/ summer of 2021, with a further 2.4km all-weather path planned for the east or as soon as the ESSO pipeline is completed.

### ***Signage and information***

- 8.6 Temporary signage has been erected at all entrances, with a view to permanent signage being installed during 2021. Interpretation signage will inform visitors of the reason for the SANG designation, the scale and diversity of the site, and provide a site map of the Southwood Country Park with a range of routes marked.
- 8.7 Fingerposts and way markers will link the SANG to Southwood Woodland and other long-distance paths, providing a clearly marked route within the more informal areas of Southwood Country Park.
- 8.8 Information about Southwood Country Park will be made available on websites and via social media to promote the site as a SANG and encourage its use as an alternative to the Thames Basin Heath SPA, especially by new residents moving into the area.

### ***Fencing and gates***

- 8.9 Dog-proof fencing has been provided along the busy and open boundary with Ively Road, the southern boundary of both western and eastern parcels (Ively Rd), along Kennels Lane (western parcel) and Bridge Rd (eastern parcel). In 2021 the area along the southern boundary along Elles Road and the boundary with Hazel Avenue, along the EA bund will also be fenced.
- 8.10 A field gate has been provided at Ively Road to limit access of vehicles into the western area with an accessible kissing gate along the Ively Road boundary as pedestrian entrance. A secure entrance at the Ively Road car park creates a sense of entrance.
- 8.11 Additional fencing is required in a small area adjacent to Elles Road and along the EA bund.

### ***Other infrastructure***

- 8.12 Combined litter and dog refuse bins have been provided close to all entrances accessible by road. New site furniture is planned to be erected in 2021 to enhance the visitor experience by providing a welcoming and attractive appearance and facilities that can be used by all residents regardless of age, or disability. Site furniture will include picnic benches and seating at strategic points around the site.
- 8.13 A combined trim trail and nature trail will be provided across the site with strategic stops to undertake physical and/or ecological activities.

- 8.14 Work will be undertaken to decommission the golf course infrastructure, including the pumps and pits in the summer of 2021. Bridges over the small ditches and watercourses within the site will be replaced or removed in 2021 to manage access and improve safety.

## **9 Maintenance**

- 9.1 All hard infrastructure, including car parks, fencing, gates, signage etc will be checked on a regular basis to ensure it is safe and accessible, with repairs or vegetation clearance undertaken as necessary.

## **10 Visitor Usage**

- 10.1 A visitor survey was undertaken by Footprint Ecology in 2018. However, since closure as a municipal golf course, the site has become publicly accessible, visitor numbers have increased, and the site is now very busy. The Council will commission BVCP to undertake an updated visitor survey, in the spring/summer of 2021, to monitor the increases in visitor numbers and provide an estimate of the total numbers of visitors likely to use the site when Phase 2 is delivered. This data will be used to inform the design of the visitor centre and provide evidence of use to Natural England in relation to the SANG. People counters will also be positioned in all official entry points to monitor use.

## **11 Monitoring and Review**

### ***Habitat Monitoring***

- 11.1 The site will be managed by BVCP until at least January 2022. Details of how the SANG will be managed, and the organisation that will be responsible for the management in the longer-term will be set out in the 10-year Management Plan, likely to be approved after the delivery of Phase 2 in 2022/3. The SANG charge includes provision for a review of the management plan and appropriate monitoring surveys to take place on a 10-yearly basis.
- 11.2 Habitat monitoring will be undertaken throughout the interim management plan period by the BVCP, with flora surveys planned to provide a full up to date data set of species within the open habitats.
- 11.3 The invertebrate community will be monitored for increases in numbers and spread within the survey proposed.

### ***Service Level Agreement Management and Monitoring***

11.4 The SLA is overseen by a steering group consisting of officers from the Council and BVCP. There is ongoing communication between the Council and the BVCP Ranger and monthly reports are provided by BVCP detailing the works undertaken and the hours worked.

## **12 Conclusion**

12.1 This Interim Management Plan has been developed to provide a clear schedule of works for BVCP to deliver. The Plan will provide benefits for access and the visitor experience as well as increasing diversity of the habitat complex within the site and management of existing ecological habitats.

12.2 The long-term management of the SANG will depend on the final site design, on which decisions are expected to be made in 2021. The design will incorporate decisions made on the EA feasibility study and wetland habitat proposals and the uses of the buildings. Consultation will be undertaken on the final site design with the public, Natural England, the Environment Agency, and any other interested parties. The long-term management plan will be signed off by Natural England, the Environment Agency, and the Council.

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**Appendix A**  
**Schedule of Works**







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**Appendix B**

**Habitat Creation and Management Maps**

*Maps are currently being prepared*

**Appendix C**  
**Criteria for Suitable Alternative Natural Green  
Spaces**

SANG Criteria	Phase 1	During Phase 2 and ESSO pipeline works	Phase 2
For all sites larger than 4ha there <u>must</u> 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 SANGS and the SPA	The car park serving the western parcel can accommodate 29 cars, 2 accessible spaces and cycle provision. An overflow car park is available for events.  The car park serving the eastern parcel can accommodate 75 spaces with approximately 20 spaces in the overflow area.	Both car parks will remain fully operational, with unimpeded access during the works	There is space for further car parking spaces to be constructed in the Kennels Lane car park if required.
It should be possible to complete a circular walk of 2.3km – 2.5km	Walks of over 9km have y been created throughout the Country Park	Some paths may need to be closed to pedestrians but there will always be at least one 2.5km walk available.	
Car parks <u>must</u> be easily accessible by car and should be clearly signposted	The eastern and western car parks are easily accessible from Ively Road and Kennels Lane respectively. The Country Park will be clearly signposted	Both car parks will remain open, with access unimpeded during the works.	
The accessibility of the site <u>must</u> include access points appropriate for the visitor use the SANGS is intended to cater for.	There are many access points throughout the site which enable pedestrians, car drivers and cyclists to access the site from any direction.	All access points will remain open throughout any works.	
The SANGS <u>must</u> have a safe route of access on foot from the nearest car park and/or footpaths	All access points are safe Some of the pedestrian routes into the site are along busy roads and dogs should be kept on lead.	If routes adjacent to Kennels Lane require closure, alternative routes will be clearly signposted	A pedestrian crossing over Ively Rd will provide safe access between the eastern and western parcels.
All SANGS with car parks <u>must</u> have a circular route that starts and finishes at the car park.	Both car parks serve at least one 2.5km circular route around the park	Throughout the works at least one 2.5km route is available from each car park.	
SANGS <u>must</u> be designed so that they are perceived to be safe by users; they must not have tree and scrub cover along parts of the routes.	The routes within the SANGS have been designed to mirror the desire lines of existing users. All-weather paths will improve accessibility within the winter months	Any areas impacted by works will be fenced off and clearly signposted with alternative routes provided.	
Paths <u>must</u> be easily used and well maintained but most should remain unsurfaced to avoid the site becoming too urban in feel	Existing hard surfaced paths have been retained and linked by mown paths boardwalks or hard surfaced routes are required due to	Paths will be kept open wherever possible.	

<b>SANG Criteria</b>	<b>Phase 1</b>	<b>During Phase 2 and ESSO pipeline works</b>	<b>Phase 2</b>
	inaccessible wetland habitats.		
SANGS <u>must</u> 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.	See Management Plan for proposed habitat creation and management	There may be some disruption to the natural feel of the site during the works and until the new habitats have established,	The Southwood and Cove Brook Floodplain Improvement Project will complement the rewilding of the site
All SANGS larger than 12ha <u>must</u> aim to provide a variety of habitats for users to experience.	The relaxation of the management has increased the diversity and spread of acidic grassland and wetland, Phase I habitat creation and management will enrich the habitat complex present on site.	The variety of existing habitats will remain during the works with restoration and mitigation providing further habitat enhancement.	With the completion of Phase 2, the site could contain a riparian, acid grassland, grazing marsh, hedgerow, scrub, and wet and dry woodland habitat complex.
Access within the SANGS <u>must</u> be largely unrestricted with plenty of space provided where it is possible for dogs to exercise freely and safely off lead.	The 57ha site comprises largely open habitats and provides plenty of space for visitor's dogs and nature to co-exist.	Only a small proportion of the site will be inaccessible at any time	
SANGS <u>must</u> be free from unpleasant intrusions (e.g. sewage treatment works, smells)	There are no intrusions on the site except for a large structure associated with Farnborough Airport	There may be localised disturbance due to the works.	
SANGS should be clearly sign posted and advertised in some way	Signage will direct visitors to the Country Park and demarcate the routes within the site. .	No change	
SANGS should have leaflets and/or websites advertising their location to potential users. It would be desirable for leaflets to be distributed to new homes in the area and be made available at entrance points and car parks.	Information about the Southwood Country Park will be made available on websites and via social media.	Websites and social media will be used to keep the public informed of the works and any impact on visitors	
It would be desirable for an owner to be able to take dogs from the car park to the SANGS safely off lead.	Fencing will be provided along busy roads abutting the site. The Kennels Lane car park will lead straight onto the site.	Some areas in or near both car parks may be disrupted due to planned works to restore the headwaters (Kennels Lane) and works to the buildings (Ively Rd).	There may be a need to keep dogs on leads around the car park off Ively Road as this area is likely to contain a playground, café, and visitor centre.
Where possible it is desirable to choose sites with a gently undulating topography for SANGS	This site is largely flat however there is some slight gradients.		Some of the topography maybe altered as part of the Phase 2 works, but this will not impact on the paths

SANG Criteria	Phase 1	During Phase 2 and ESSO pipeline works	Phase 2
It is desirable for access points to have signage outlining the layout of the SANGS and the routes available to visitors	Signs have been erected at all access points containing maps of the path network.	No change	Permanent signage and information boards will be designed and erected by 2022.
It is desirable that the SANGS provide a naturalistic space with areas of open (non-wooded) countryside and areas of dense scattered trees and shrubs. The provision of open water on part but not the majority of sites is desirable	Copses/hedgerow/ woodland/ scrub complexes will provide a more varied experience and biodiversity links into Southwood Woodland beyond. The site will support predominantly open habitats.	Works may impact on the natural views within the site for a short period of time, but this will be limited to small areas of land.	Small collections of ponds and scraps are planned within the works, but no large waterbodies are being created.
Where possible it is desirable to have a focal point such as a viewpoint, monument etc within the SANGS	There are views looking across the SINC and towards Southwood Woodland that are particularly attractive.	No change	Phase 2 will include visitor facilities as a trim trail, a nature trail and pond dipping facilities. Education will be provided.

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