

**THAMES BASIN HEATHS SPECIAL PROTECTION AREA
SUITABLE ALTERNATIVE NATURAL GREEN SPACES
POLICY REVISION**

Background Information

- 1 The Thames Basin Heath, which cover parts of Surrey, Hampshire and Berkshire, is a rare example of lowland heathland, being home to three important bird species, the Nightjar, the Dartford Warbler and the Woodlark. It is protected by European law and is designated as a “Special Protection Area” (SPA), the heaths and the birds that nest and breed there being easily disturbed by people and their pets, the extent of the SPA being shown on the map at Annex 2.
- 2 As part of the work to prepare the old South East Plan the local authorities surrounding the Thames Basin Heath undertook a considerable amount of work to develop ways to ensure that any new development, particularly residential development, minimised the impact on the heathland and its birds. Advised by a number of other partners, including the Government Office for the South East and Natural England, the local authorities established the Thames Basin Heath Joint Strategic Partnership.
- 3 The Partnership’s Board developed a Delivery Framework which sets out measures to be implemented to help avoid likely significant effect on the SPA arising from new development, the County Council being represented on the Board by the Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport.
- 4 The Delivery Framework is a non-statutory document and was endorsed by the Partnership Board on 12 February 2009. The Partnership Board recommended the local authorities affected by the SPA to use the Delivery Framework to guide the production of local avoidance and mitigation strategies and appropriate policies in their Local Development Frameworks (now Local Plans), the Board continuing to guide implementation of the Delivery Framework and the access management and monitoring work.
- 5 The Delivery Framework has two main elements:
 - access management on the SPA, and
 - provision of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces (SANGS).

Access Management

- 6 The Delivery Framework acknowledges that owners of SPA land have a duty to improve the quality of the SPA to “favourable condition” status. The County Council owns a considerable area of prospective SPA land, which includes Chobham, Ockham and Wisley, Whitmoor, and Bisley and West End Commons. All this land is part of the Council’s Countryside Estate and is managed by Surrey Wildlife Trust, the Trust working with Natural England to improve the nature conservation value of the land to “favourable condition”, the condition of the habitat being assessed by Natural England according to nationally agreed criteria.

- 7 Access management of SPA land has to be undertaken by existing landowners and land managers under arrangements co-ordinated by Natural England. The Delivery Framework sets out an overarching strategy for access management on the SPA and SANGS, which include
 - a consistent SPA/SANG message which may include signs, leaflets, educational material, etc
 - guidance on access management on the SPA eg including rangers, seasonal restrictions, campaigns, etc
 - guidance over access management on SANG, eg provision of attractive facilities.
- 8 Access management on the SPA was intended to be funded by developer contributions which are sought at planning application stage of new development proposals, any SANG being provided in perpetuity which has been legally defined as a period over 80 years. A proportion of the developer contributions will fund necessary monitoring, including habitat condition, bird numbers, access management and visitor surveys.
- 9 The new access management regime could potentially be valuable in providing guidance to members of the public who use the SPA heathland by advising them of the reasons why, for example, dogs need to be controlled in such areas.
- 10 The County Council have agreed to participate in the new arrangements with its partner, the Surrey Wildlife Trust.

Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace(SANGS)

- 11 Under the old South East Plan and detailed in the Delivery Framework, SANGS are created in order to provide alternative recreational land to attract new residents away from the SPA's, SANGS being delivered by local authorities, and currently funded by developer contributions, in perpetuity. SANGS are to be provided for any new development lying within a "zone of influence" which is defined as any area between 400m and 5km from the perimeter of the SPA, there being a presumption against any development within 400m of the SPA's perimeter. The text of the old South East Plan policy NRM6 "Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area" is set out in Annex 1 Appendix A .
- 12 Under the Delivery Framework SANGS should be provided on new or existing public open space taking into account existing patterns and rights of public use, any existing nature conservation interests and its relationship within a wider accessible open space or any network of green infrastructure.
- 13 Appropriate references to SANGS and other SPA related impact avoidance measures are made in each of the local authority's Local Plans, supported where appropriate by supplementary planning or guidance documents.
- 14 Guidance documents are being produced by each of the affected local planning authorities, being called "avoidance strategies" and avoidance strategies have been produced by Elmbridge, Guildford, Runnymede, Surrey Heath, Woking and Waverley Borough Councils; the avoidance strategies indicating and describing potential SANGS sites in each of the Borough's.

- 15 The Guildford Borough Council Avoidance Strategy 2009-2014 has proposed SANGS on three sites owned by the County Council, namely:-
- Broad Street and Backside Common,
 - Stringers Common, and
 - Tongham Pools.
- 16 The first two sites are part of the Countryside Estate and are leased to and managed by Surrey Wildlife Trust. The third site was acquired by the County Council for the construction of the Blackwater Valley highways route, but as it is not part of the highway corridor it is currently managed by the Estates and Property Service, in conjunction with the Blackwater Valley Countryside & Management Partnership.
- 17 It is likely over time that Avoidance Strategies in a number of local authorities will include proposals for SANGS on County Council land, local authorities in Hampshire and Berkshire already seeking the provision of SANGS on County Council land, because of the lack of availability of suitable land in their own areas.
- 18 SANGS provision is currently funded by developer contributions collected by the local authority and is provided in advance of occupation of the new development. The calculation of contributions can take account of any land acquisition costs, upgrading costs and maintenance and management costs in perpetuity.
- 19 Contribution tariffs are currently set out in the avoidance strategies and are based on the size of new dwellings in terms of the number of bedrooms proposed, as a reflection of the number of additional residents and include the cost of identified works on SANGS sites, tariffs being updated on an annual basis in line with the Retail Price Index.
- 20 With the advent of the Community Infrastructure Levy, and the transfer of the collection of the majority of developer contributions from s106 to the Levy, tariffs will have to be assessed upon the sq metre size of the new development that is being proposed in the future.

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