

Date: 20 September 2018
Our ref: 259129



Epping Forest District Council
Harlow District Council
East Hertfordshire District Council
Uttlesford District Council
Broxbourne Borough Council
Brentwood Borough Council
London Borough of Waltham Forest
London Borough of Redbridge
London Borough of Newham
London Borough of Haringey
London Borough of Hackney
London Borough of Tower Hamlets
London Borough of Barking and Dagenham
Lee Valley Regional Park
Essex County Council
City of London Conservators of Epping Forest
MOU Oversight Group -BY EMAIL ONLY

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Dear All

Emerging strategic approach relating to the Epping Forest Special Area of Conservation (SAC) Mitigation Strategy. Interim advice to ensure new residential development and any associated recreational impacts on Epping Forest SAC are compliant with the Habitats Regulations¹

At the last MOU Oversight Meeting (25th July 2018) Natural England was asked to clarify the Zones of Influence for recreational impacts on Epping Forest SAC and the implications for local planning authorities when determining planning applications for residential development within these zones. This letter therefore provides Natural England's interim advice relating to any interim residential planning applications (i.e. coming forward ahead of the Epping Forest Mitigation Strategy) which have the potential to impact on Epping Forest SAC to ensure compliance with the Habitats Regulations. It does not address the potential air pollution impacts as the updated Habitats Regulations Assessment for the Epping Forest District local plan is required before Natural England can provide further advice on this matter. **This advice therefore applies to those LPA's identified in Table 1 which are partly or wholly within the defined recreational Zone of Influence (ZOI).**

For further information on Epping Forest SAC, please see the [Conservation Objectives](#) which explains how each site should be restored and/or maintained.

Recreational 'Zone of Influence' (ZOI)

As part of the work required to produce the Mitigation Strategy, Footprint Ecology undertook a visitor survey to identify a recreational zone of influence and to identify the

¹ Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, as amended (commonly known as the 'Habitats Regulations')

distance the majority of visitors will travel to visit Epping Forest SAC. This report identified that 75% of visitors travelled up to 6.2Km to the SAC. *Natural England therefore advises that in this interim period a zone of influence of 6.2Km is used to determine whether residential applications will have a recreational impact on Epping Forest SAC.*

Table 1 identifies the Local Planning Authorities which fall either partly or completely within the 6.2 Km Zone of Influence for recreational pressure impacts:

Table 1

LPA	Within 0-3Km ZOI	Within 3-6.2 Km ZOI
Epping Forest District Council	✓	✓
London Borough of Redbridge	✓	✓
London Borough of Waltham Forest	✓	✓
London Borough of Enfield	✓	✓
London Borough of Newham	✓	✓
London Borough of Tower Hamlets	X	✓
London Borough of Hackney	X	✓
London Borough of Haringay	X	✓
London Borough of Barking and Dagenham	X	✓
Harlow	X	✓
Broxbourne	X	✓
Uttlesford	X	X
East Hertfordshire	X	X
Brentwood	X	✓ (just clipped by zone)

In the context of your duty as competent authority under the provisions of the Habitats Regulations², it is anticipated that new residential development within this ZOI constitutes a likely significant effect (LSE) on the sensitive interest features of the SAC through increased recreational pressure, either when considered ‘alone’ or ‘in combination’. As you will be aware, the Epping Forest Mitigation Strategy is a large-scale strategic project which involves a number of authorities working together to mitigate these effects. Once finalised, the Mitigation Strategy will comprise a package of strategic mitigation measures to address such effects, which will be costed and funded through developer contributions. The final Mitigation Strategy will address:

- Recreational pressure impacts (through Strategic Access Management Measures and Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANGS) provision)
- Air quality impacts (Mitigation measures still to be identified following updated HRA of EFDC Local Plan)

² Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, as amended (commonly known as the ‘Habitats Regulations’). Requirements are set out within Regulations 63 and 64 of the Habitats Regulations, where a series of steps and tests are followed for plans or projects that could potentially affect a European site. The steps and tests set out within Regulations 63 and 64 are commonly referred to as the ‘Habitats Regulations Assessment’ process. The Government has produced core guidance for competent authorities and developers to assist with the Habitats Regulations Assessment process. This can be found on the Defra website. <http://www.defra.gov.uk/habitats-review/implementation/process-guidance/guidance/sites/>

There is now an initial draft of costed Strategic Access Management Measures which has been prepared by the City of London Conservators of Epping Forest. This package of measures (once updated with relevant information from Epping forest DC) can therefore be used in this interim period until the full Mitigation Strategy has been completed. It should therefore be noted that the tariffs may be subject to change once the final Mitigation Strategy has been completed and costed to address air pollution impacts and any requirements for the provision of SANGS.

It is recognised that a considerable proportion of the residential allocations in your local plans will already be coming forward as planning applications, prior to the adoption of the Mitigation Strategy. In the interim period until the final Mitigation Strategy is in place and the necessary developer contributions are known, it is important that any recreational impacts from residential schemes such as these are considered in terms of the Habitats Regulations through a project level Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA). We offer the following advice to guide you on this:

Interim consultation arrangements

Natural England has already developed a set of [Impact Risk Zones \(IRZs\)](#) which helps guide planning authorities on the types and scale of development that we should be consulted on.

We advise that we should continue to be consulted in line with these arrangements (i.e. where there are other IRZs triggered in addition to the RAMS)

We will shortly be refining the residential IRZs for Epping Forest SAC to align with the 6.2KM zone of influence for recreational impacts. The following types of development which fall within the 6.2Km ZOI should be considered:

- New dwellings of 1+ units (excludes replacement dwellings and extensions)
- Houses in Multiple Occupancy (HMOs)
- Student Accommodation
- Residential care homes and residential institutions (excludes nursing homes)
- Residential caravan sites (excludes holiday caravans and campsites)
- Gypsies, travellers and travelling show people plots

We advise that this should include new applications as well as those with outline planning permission where this issue has not previously been assessed through the HRA process.

In the interim period, we have included a map in Annex 1 to this letter to show the current ZOI and how this affects each LPA, we advise that the following protocol should be followed to ensure consistency and fairness in securing recreational pressure mitigation for these development types:

Interim approach to avoidance and mitigation measures

For larger scale residential developments (100 units or more, or equivalent, as a guide):

- Well-designed open space/green infrastructure within the development, proportionate to its scale. This can help minimise any predicted increase in recreational pressure to the European sites by containing the majority of recreation within and around the development site boundary. We advise that the Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space (SANGS) guidance *attached as Annex 2* can be helpful in designing this; it should be noted that this document is specific to

the SANGS creation for the Thames Basin Heaths SPA, although the broad principles are more widely applicable. This information is therefore provided as a guide only, until specific guidance for Epping Forest is available. As a minimum, we advise that such provisions should include:

- An appropriate extent of high-quality, informal, semi-natural areas
- Circular dog walking routes of >2.7 km³ within the site and/or with links to appropriate public rights of way (PRoW) networks
- Dedicated 'dogs-off-lead' areas
- Signage/information leaflets to householders to promote these areas for recreation
- Dog waste bins
- A commitment to the long term maintenance and management of these provisions

Natural England would be happy to advise developers and/or their consultants on the detail of this at the pre-application stage through our charged Discretionary Advice Service, further information on which is available [here](#).

- The unique draw of Epping Forest means that, even when well-designed, 'on-site' provisions are unlikely to fully mitigate impacts when all residential development within reach of the forest is considered together 'in combination'. We therefore advise that consideration of 'off-site' measures is also required as part of the mitigation package for predicted recreational disturbance impacts. As such, prior to commencement, a financial contribution should also be agreed with and collected from the developer on the basis that it can be used to fund strategic 'off site' measures (i.e. in and around Epping Forest) . These measures should be targeted towards increasing the resilience of Epping Forest SAC/SSSI to recreational pressure in line with aspirations of the emerging Mitigation Strategy. In this interim period, this would include funding towards measures set out within the costed Strategic Access Management Measures provided by the City of London Conservators of Epping Forest. A suitable delivery mechanism for the measures must be agreed to secure them and ensure they are implemented from the first occupation of dwellings. Alternatively, it may be acceptable at the outline planning stage to include a suitably-worded planning condition which secures full adherence with the emerging Mitigation Strategy at the Reserved Matters stage.

For small scale residential development (0-99 houses, or equivalent, as a guide):

- A financial contribution to strategic 'off site' measures as set out in the costed Strategic Access Management Measures provided by the City of London Conservators of Epping Forest (see above)

We have also attached a template which can be used for undertaking the project level HRA's for residential developments which are within the 6.2Km zone of influence (see

³ Taken from *Jenkinson, S., (2013), Planning for dog ownership in new developments: reducing conflict – adding value. Access and greenspace design guidance for planners and developers*

Annex 3). We have provided this as a suggested way forward to help streamline the assessment process

Interim Funding Mechanism

Natural England understands that during this interim period in some instances it may be inefficient to seek contributions for strategic mitigation in certain circumstances, especially where there are relatively low numbers of housing allocations being proposed within the Zol. Whilst it must be recognised that where new dwellings within the ZOI are found to have a likely significant effect in-combination, we consider it is a matter for your authorities to consider how the mitigation should be funded. In coming to a decision on this it is necessary for you to ensure that the overall sum of money required is collected to deliver the necessary mitigation for the total quantum of housing which is having the impact. If it is decided to exclude certain applications from contributing towards mitigation it would mean that other developments would need to cover the waived contributions from the excluded dwellings.

We understand that Epping Forest District Council have proposed a mechanism for collecting developer contributions during this interim period but are awaiting confirmation that this is acceptable (as contributions would not be sought from all the LPA's in the Zol). If this suggested approach is not agreed in this interim period our advice would be that all new housing within the zone of influence found to have a likely significant effect would need to contribute to mitigation by a suitable mechanism.

For any queries relating to the specific advice in this letter only, please contact Jamie Melvin on 02080261025 or at jamie.melvin@naturalengland.org.uk.

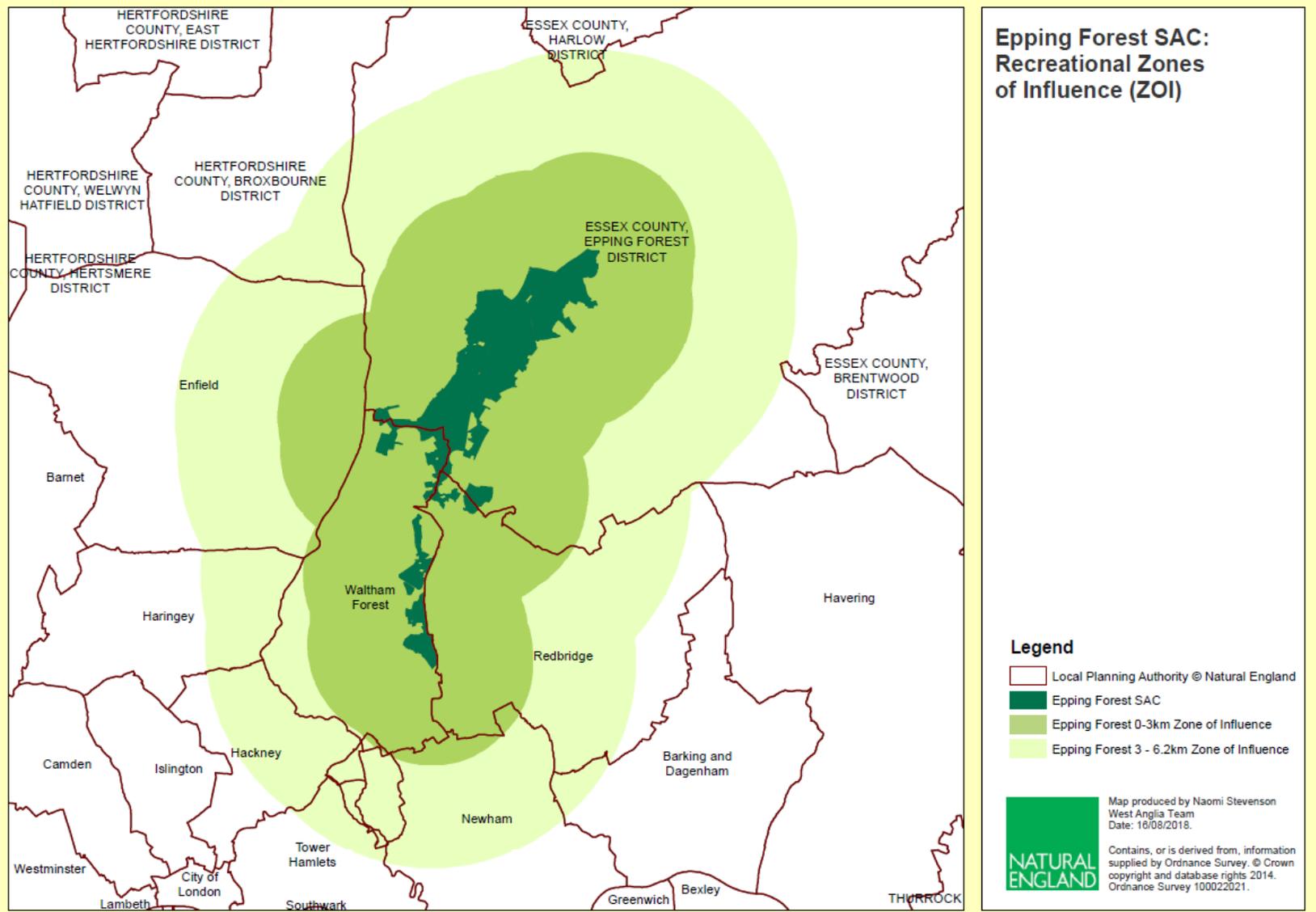
In the context of the above advice, we would be happy to provide you with some training on the use of our IRZs, the HRA process etc. through our charged Discretionary Advice Service (DAS), further details on which are available [here](#). The way to progress your request is to complete a [DAS Request Form](#), including the training request, and send it to our consultations hub (consultations@naturalengland.org.uk).

Yours sincerely

Aidan Lonergan

Area Manager – West Anglia Team

Annex 1



Annex 2

Guidelines for the creation of Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space (SANGS)

INTRODUCTION

'Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space' (SANGS) is the name given to green space that is of a quality and type suitable to be used as mitigation 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). SANGS are intended to provide mitigation for the potential impact of residential development on the SPA by preventing an increase in visitor pressure on the SPA. The effectiveness of SANGS as mitigation will depend upon the location and design. These must be such that the SANGS 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 SANGS. It provides guidelines on

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

These guidelines relate specifically to the means to provide mitigation for housing within the Thames Basin Heaths Planning Zone. They do not address nor preclude the other functions of green space (e.g. provision of disabled access). Other functions may be provided within SANGS, as long as this does not conflict with the specific function of mitigating visitor impacts on the SPA.

SANGS may be created from:

- existing open space of SANGS 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 SANGS

The identification of SANGS 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 SANGS, the impact on their nature conservation value should be assessed and considered alongside relevant policy in the development plan.

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 public access, though in some areas this is restricted by army, forestry or other operations.

A recent survey 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.

GUIDELINES FOR THE QUALITY OF SANGS

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 SANGS 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 10 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 SANGS. 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 SANGS 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 SANGS 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 SANGS should be attractive to visitors on foot.**

Networks of sites

The provision of longer routes within larger SANGS is important in determining the effectiveness of the authorities' network of SANGS as mitigation, because a large proportion of visitors to the SPA have long walks or run or bicycle rides. The design

of routes within sites at the smaller than about 40 ha will be critical to providing routes of sufficient length and attractiveness for mitigation purposes.

Where long routes cannot be accommodated within individual SANGS it may be possible to provide them through a network of sites. However, networks are inherently likely to be less attractive to users of the type that visit the SPA, and the more fragmented they are, the less attractive they will be, though this is dependent on the land use which separates each component. For example, visitors are likely to be less put off by green areas between SANGS than by urban areas, even if they restrict access to rights of way and require dogs to be kept on leads.

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

Specific guidance on individual SANGS is summarised in Appendix 2. An information sheet for individual SANGS can also be found in Appendix 4.

Paths, Roads and Tracks

The findings suggest **that SANGS should aim to supply a choice of routes of around 2.5km in length** with both shorter and longer routes of at least 5km as part of the choice, where space permits. The fact that a considerable proportion of visitors were walking up to 5km and beyond suggests **the provision of longer routes should be regarded as a standard**, either on-site or through the connection of sites along green corridors.

Paths do not have to be of any particular width, and both vehicular-sized tracks and narrow PRoW type paths are acceptable to visitors.

The majority of visitors are female and safety is one of the primary concerns of site 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.

A substantial number of visitors like to have surfaced but not tarmac paths, particularly where these blend in well with the landscape. This is not necessary for all paths but **there should be some more visitor-friendly routes built into the structure of a SANGS, particularly those routes which are 1-3 km long.**

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, **SANGS 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

SANGS 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 considered to be 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. SANGS 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 majority of the people using most of the SPA sites come to walk, with or without dogs. At two or three sites there were also a significant number of cyclists and joggers. A small amount of horse riding also occurs at some sites.

The bulk of visitors to the SPA came to exercise their dogs and so it is imperative that **SANGS allow for pet owners to let dogs run freely over a significant part of the walk. Access on SANGS 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 SANGS.

It may be that in some areas where dog ownership is low or where the cultural mix includes significant numbers of people sensitive to pets, then the provision of areas where dogs are unrestricted can be reduced. It should also be possible to vary restriction over time according to the specific needs of a community, providing effective mitigation is maintained. SANGS proposals which incorporate restrictions on dogs should be in the minority of SANGS and would need to be considered on a case by case basis in relation to the need for restrictions.

Assessment of site enhancement as mitigation

SANGS 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.

SANGS which have not previously been open to the public count in full to the standard of providing 8ha of SANGS per 1000 people in new development in zone B. SANGS 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)

SANGS with no evidence of a low level of use should not count in full towards the Delivery Plan standards. Information should be collected by the local planning authority to enable assessment of the level of increased use which can be made of the SANGS. The area of the site which is counted towards the Delivery Plan standards should be proportional to the increase in use of the site. For example, a site already used to half of its expected capacity should count as half of its area towards the standards.

Staging of enhancement works

Where it is proposed to separate the enhancement works on a site into separate stages, to deliver incremental increases in visitor use, the proportion of the increase in visitor use arising from each stage should be estimated. This would enable the granting of planning permission for residential development to be staged in parallel to ensure that the amount of housing permitted does not exceed the capacity of SANGS to mitigate its effects on the SPA.

Practicality of enhancement works

The selection of sites for enhancement to be SANGS 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 SANGS in attracting recreational use that would otherwise take place on the SPA. The enhancement should not result in moving current users off the SANGS and onto the SPA. The specific enhancement works proposed should also be considered in relation not only to their effects on the SANGS mitigation function but also in relation to their effects on other user groups.

REFERENCES

CLARKE, R.T., LILEY, D., UNDERHILL-DAY, J.C., & ROSE, R.J. (2005). Visitor access patterns on the Dorset Heaths. *English Nature Research Report*.

LILEY, D., JACKSON, D., & UNDERHILL-DAY, J. C. (2006) Visitor access patterns on the Thames Basin Heaths. *English Nature Research Report*.

LILEY, D., MALLORD, J., & LOBLEY, M. (2006) The "Quality" of Green Space: features that attract people to open spaces in the Thames Basin Heaths area. *English Nature Research Report*.

SITE QUALITY CHECKLIST – FOR A SUITE OF SANGS

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

The wording in the list below is precise and has the following meaning:

- Requirements referred to as “must” are essential in **all** SANGS
- Those requirements referred to as “should have” should all be represented **within the suite** of SANGS, but do not all have to be represented in every site.
- All SANGS should have at least one of the “desirable” features.

Must have

- 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 SANGS and the SPA.
- It should be possible to complete a circular walk of 2.3-2.5km around the SANGS.
- 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 particular visitor use the SANGS is intended to cater for.
- The SANGS must have a safe route of access on foot from the nearest car park and/or footpath/s
- All SANGS with car parks must have a circular walk which starts and finishes at the car park.
- SANGS 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 too urban in feel.
- SANGS 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 SANGS larger than 12 ha must aim to provide a variety of habitats for users to experience.
- Access within the SANGS must be largely unrestricted with plenty of space provided where it is possible for dogs to exercise freely and safely off lead.
- SANGS must be free from unpleasant intrusions (e.g. sewage treatment works smells etc).

Should have

- SANGS should be clearly sign-posted or advertised in some way.

- 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.

Desirable

- It would be desirable for an owner to be able to take dogs from the car park to the SANGS safely off the lead.
- Where possible it is desirable to choose sites with a gently undulating topography for SANGS
- It is desirable for access points to have signage outlining the layout of the SANGS and the routes available to visitors.
- It is desirable that SANGS 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 on part, but not the majority of sites is desirable.
- Where possible it is desirable to have a focal point such as a view point, monument etc within the SANGS.

SITE QUALITY CHECKLIST – FOR AN INDIVIDUAL SANGS

The wording in the list below is precise and has the following meaning:

- Requirements referred to as “must” or “should have” are essential
- The SANGS should have at least one of the “desirable” features.

Must/ Should have

- 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 SANGS and the SPA.
- It should be possible to complete a circular walk of 2.3-2.5km around the SANGS.
- 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 particular visitor use the SANGS is intended to cater for.
- The SANGS must have a safe route of access on foot from the nearest car park and/or footpath/s.
- All SANGS with car parks must have a circular walk which starts and finishes at the car park.
- SANGS must be designed so that they are perceived to be safe by users; they must not have tree and scrub covering parts of the walking routes.
- Paths must be easily used and well maintained but most should remain unsurfaced to avoid the site becoming too urban in feel.
- SANGS 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 SANGS larger than 12 ha must aim to provide a variety of habitats for users to experience.
- Access within the SANGS must be largely unrestricted with plenty of space provided where it is possible for dogs to exercise freely and safely off lead.
- SANGS must be free from unpleasant intrusions (e.g. sewage treatment works smells etc).
- SANGS should be clearly sign-posted or advertised in some way.
- 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.

Desirable

- It would be desirable for an owner to be able to take dogs from the car park to the SANGS safely off the lead.
- Where possible it is desirable to choose sites with a gently undulating topography for SANGS
- It is desirable for access points to have signage outlining the layout of the SANGS and the routes available to visitors.
- It is desirable that SANGS 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 on part, but not the majority of sites is desirable.
- Where possible it is desirable to have a focal point such as a view point, monument etc within the SANGS.

Annex 3 – Epping Forest Recreational Mitigation Strategy Habitat Regulation Assessment (HRA) template

PLEASE NOTE: Undertaking the HRA process is the responsibility of the decision maker as the Competent Authority for the purpose of the Habitats Regulations. However, it is the responsibility of the applicant to provide the Competent Authority with the information that they require for this purpose. This template is to be used only for Epping Forest SAC which has been scoped into the emerging Epping Forest Mitigation Strategy (see below) where recreational pressure is the only HRA issue. The use of this template is not mandatory but we have provided it in an attempt to streamline the process and make it as straightforward and consistent as possible for the authorities involved in the RAMS.

Application details	
Local Planning Authority:	
Case officer	
Application reference:	
Application description:	
Application address:	
Status of Application:	
Grid Ref:	
HRA Stage 1: screening assessment	
<p>Test 1 – the significance test: Based on the development type and proximity to Epping Forest SAC, a judgement should be made as to whether the development constitutes a ‘likely significant effect’ (LSE) to a European site in terms of increased recreational pressure</p>	
<p>1. Does the planning application fall within the following development types?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New dwellings of 1+ units (excludes replacement dwellings and extensions) • Houses in Multiple Occupancy (HMOs) • Student Accommodation • Residential care homes and residential institutions (excludes nursing homes) • Residential caravan sites (excludes holiday caravans and campsites) • Gypsies, travellers and travelling show people plots 	
<p>YES – proceed to point 2 [delete as necessary]</p>	
<p>NO – the application is outside the scope of the Epping Forest Mitigation Strategy, no LSE in terms of increased recreational pressure [delete as necessary]</p>	
<p>2. Is the development within the 6.2KM Zone of Influence (Zol) for the Epping Forest Mitigation Strategy?</p>	
<p>YES – can conclude LSE, proceed to HRA Stage 2: Appropriate Assessment [delete as necessary]</p>	

- It is considered that, without mitigation, all new residential development within regular walking/driving distance of the above European site constitutes a LSE through increased recreational pressure, when considered either 'alone' or 'in combination' with other such development. The unique attraction of the Forest presents a strong draw as a place to undertake recreational activities on a regular basis; such activities (e.g. walking, dog walking, etc.) can lead to negative impacts on the sensitive interest features of the SAC (both habitats and species) through, for example, trampling of vegetation, compaction of soil, damage to tree roots and eutrophication of soil etc. Further information on the SAC and its notified interest features is available through the [Conservation Objectives](#).

Visitor surveys have been undertaken to understand the distances within which residents from such development will travel to visit the SAC; this distance is referred to as a Zone of Influence (Zoi).

Following the recent CJEU 'People Over Wind' (or Sweetman II) ruling, avoidance and mitigation measures can no longer be taken into account as part of a planning application at this stage of the HRA process. Therefore, all relevant development within scope of the Epping Forest Mitigation Strategy must progress to HRA Stage 2: Appropriate Assessment, even where mitigation is proposed.

NO – the application is outside the scope of the Epping Forest Mitigation Strategy can conclude no LSE in terms of increased recreational pressure [delete as necessary]

HRA Stage 2: Appropriate Assessment

Test 2 – the integrity test: The applicant must provide sufficient evidence to allow the Appropriate Assessment to be made, which is the stage at which avoidance and/or mitigation measures can be considered

For larger scale residential developments within the Epping Forest Mitigation Strategy Zoi (100 houses +, or equivalent, as a guide) [delete as necessary]

- **[Insert agreed mitigation in line with Natural England's revised interim advice note (NE ref: 259129, dated 20th September 2018) which sets out the considerations for this scale of development]**

Once the necessary mitigation has been agreed between the LPA and developer, Natural England must be consulted on this Appropriate Assessment record.

For smaller scale residential development within the Epping Forest Mitigation Strategy Zoi (0-99 houses, or equivalent, as a guide) [delete as necessary]

- **[Insert agreed mitigation in line with Natural England's revised interim advice note (NE ref: 259129, dated 20th September 2018) which sets out the considerations for this scale of development]**

Provided this mitigation is agreed between the LPA and developer, Natural England does not need to be consulted on this Appropriate Assessment record, unless the

development is directly adjacent to the SAC.

Summary of the Appropriate Assessment : To be carried out by the Competent Authority (the local planning authority) in liaison with Natural England (where necessary)

In line with the previous section, does Natural England need to be consulted for bespoke advice on this AA?

YES – consult Natural England for bespoke advice on the proposed mitigation before reaching a decision on adverse effect on integrity (AEOI) to European sites [delete as necessary]

NO – it can be concluded that this planning application will not have an adverse effect on the integrity (AEOI) of Epping Forest SAC without the need to consult Natural England, for the reasons given below: [delete as necessary]

- Having considered the proposed avoidance and mitigation measures above, [INSERT LPA] conclude that with mitigation the project will not have an Adverse Effect on the Integrity of the Epping Forest SAC included within the Epping Forest Mitigation Strategy.

Having made this appropriate assessment of the implications of the plan or project for the site in view of that site's conservation objectives, and having consulted Natural England and fully considered any representation received (see below), the authority may now agree to the plan or project under regulation 63 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017.

Natural England Officer: **Not applicable (see above) [delete as necessary]**

Summary of Natural England's comments:

Not applicable (see above) [delete as necessary]