

## LPA REBUTTAL

Site: Land at Sodbury Road, Wickwar

For: South Gloucestershire Council

Appeal Ref: APP/P0119/W/23/3323836

Date: October 2023

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#### 1.0 INTRODUCTION AND PROCEDURAL MATTERS

1.1 This Rebuttal has been prepared following receipt of the Appellant's Evidence submitted to the Inspectorate on the 3 October 2023.



- 1.2 It is highlighted that, in addition to the Illustrative Framework Masterplan submitted prior to the CMC and discussed at that conference, a further plan, the Illustrative Landscape Strategy, has been added to the Core Documents list.
- 1.3 In addition, an alternative bus strategy was first presented to the Local Planning Authority on the 13 September 2023 in a virtual meeting and then in a final hard copy version circulated on the 15 September 2023 to demonstrate that an alternative bus route to that currently serviced via public subsidy would be viable. This matter is addressed by Mr Julian Moss of WSP who demonstrates that the proposed bus service would not be viable. In my view this alternative bus service can be given no weight. Moreover the contribution offered by the Appellants can also carry no weight as this also will not deliver a bus service. I therefore remain of the view that the car borne nature of this proposal attracts substantial weight. This is dealt with in more detail below.
- 1.4 The Local Planning Authority expressed concerns regarding the submission of this late information in a letter to the Inspector dated 14 September 2023.
- 1.5 The Appellant has suggested that this alternative bus route solely relates to S106/contribution matters and/or that the only issue is whether an effective and viable bus service can be provided. This is incorrect. It is clear from the first reason for refusal that members were concerned that the proposed location would result in a car borne development. This would be more so without an effective and viable bus service. The provision of a long-term



viable bus service to serve this proposal and indeed Wickwar is therefore relevant to one of the agreed main issues.

1.6 The Appellant is promoting this alternative bus route as a replacement to the No. 84/85 route, with an alternative route that excludes many of the settlements to the east and west of Wickwar.



Image 1: Existing 84/85 bus route



Image 2: Proposed alternative route

1.7 In responding to the planning applications, residents raised concerns regarding the availability of public transport and the nature of the existing service and have not been consulted on or made aware of this new route which reinforces my view that it should attract no weight.



- 1.8 In relation to the proposed access which is not a reserved matter, the Local Highway Authority has raised no objection, subject to detailed design and appropriate Road Safety Audits. Following attempts by the Appellant to include reference to the Road Safety Audits being agreed within the Statement of Common Ground (Highways), without the LHA having been provided with those audits, safety audit information was submitted to both the Local Highway Authority and the Local Planning Authority on the 6 October 2023, along with amended access plans that the Appellant wished to include within the appeal documentation, in lieu of the plans currently in front of the appeal.
- 1.9 The Road Safety Audit has not been agreed by the Local Highway Authority and the Local Planning Authority has some concerns regarding the amendments shown on these plans which it has raised with the Appellant, including the need for additional information concerning the audit, particularly in respect of visibility splays and traffic speed.
- 1.10 At the time of writing, it is unknown if the Appellant intends to submit this information to the Appeal.

#### 2.0 HOUSING DELIVERY

2.1 The Appellant has sought to demonstrate that the Council has a severe historic housing shortfall through the application of Policy CS15.



- 2.3 Originally submitted with a housing target of 21,500 predicated on the desire to protect parts of the District such as the Green Belt, the NPPF required Local Planning Authorities to meet their objectively assessed housing need.
- 2.4 It was acknowledged that the assessment of housing need undertaken to support the 21,500 target did not accord with the new method for assessing housing need, nor would it take account of wider Housing Market Area.
- 2.5 The Council reviewed its housing need using the Interim Household Projections 2011-2021 and then extrapolated those figures to the end of the Plan period. This resulted in a need of 25,700 dwellings. Whilst the Inspector recognised (CD4.17 para 82) that these figures should be treated with caution, they did suggest that a cautious approach to the housing requirement should be taken. Therefore, based on the household projections, capacity from development at Filton Airfield and an allowance for windfall schemes, a housing need of 28,355 was appropriate.
- 2.6 The Inspector stated the "*Delivery of this amount of housing would exceed the 'base' levels of provision identified by others and the most recent extrapolations made by the Council whilst providing a significant 'boost' to housing supply..*" (para 83).





- 2.7 The Inspector recognised that the SHMA was not NPPF compliant and as such '*the degree of reliance that can be placed on this figure is uncertain' (para 84).* As a consequence, an early review was required, ideally prior to 2021.
- 2.8 There have been two attempts since the adoption of the Core Strategy to bring forward a new Plan. As both attempts have failed for a variety of reasons, as of 2021, the requirement set out in Policy CS15 became out-ofdate and Paragraph 74 of the NPPF applied.

"... Local planning authorities should identify and update annually a supply of specific deliverable sites sufficient to provide a minimum of 5 years' worth of housing against their housing requirement set out in adopted strategic policies <sup>38</sup>, or against their local housing need where the strategic policies are more than 5 years old <sup>39</sup>. The supply of specific deliverable sites should in addition include a buffer (moved forward from later in the plan period) of: (a) 5% to ensure choice and competition in the market for land; or

(b) 10% where the local planning authority wishes to demonstrate a 5 year supply of deliverable sites through an annual position statement or recently adopted plan  $\frac{40}{7}$ , to account for any fluctuations in the market during that year; or

(c) 20% where there has been significant under delivery of housing over the previous 3 years, to improve the prospect of achieving the planned supply<sup>41</sup>"

2.9 Footnote 39 advises:

"Unless these strategic policies have been reviewed and found not to require updating. Where local housing need is used as the basis for assessing whether a five year supply of specific deliverable sites exists, it should be calculated using the standard method set out in national planning guidance." 2.10 It has been agreed between the parties and by the previous Inspectors in both the Thornbury and Old Sodbury cases (CD 5.1 & 5.2), that CS15 is out-of-date and needs updating. Therefore, reliance cannot be placed on the 28,355 figure and housing delivery cannot be measured against that policy. Indeed the Standard Method provides the correct mechanism for calculating the requirement against which to assess the five year supply in this particular Council's circumstances.



- 2.11 The NPPF makes it clear how the requirement should be assessed once strategic policies are more than five years old. The Policy cannot be out-ofdate in relation to settlement boundaries and the location of the development, and then a material consideration of importance when considering the housing requirement as suggested by the Appellant. That approach is contradictory.
- 2.12 In accordance with the requirements of the NPPF, the Local Planning Authority has reviewed their Local Housing Need annually using the Standard Method.
- 2.13 The approach taken and resultant annual housing requirement has not been challenged by the Appellant.
- 2.14 The National Planning Practice Guidance sets out the methodology to be used for ascertaining the Local Housing Need. It is clear that any calculations should use the 2014-based Household Projections as the baseline. Paragraph: 005 Reference ID: 2a-005-20190220 states:

"The 2014-based household projections are used within the standard method to provide stability for planning authorities and communities, <u>ensure that</u> <u>historic under-delivery and declining affordability are reflected</u>, and to be



consistent with the Government's objective of significantly boosting the supply of homes." (my emphasis)

- 2.15 It is clear that the Standard Method accounts for any historic under-delivery, and is being addressed in successfully delivering housing over and above the annual requirement.
- 2.16 As referenced above, there has been two attempts to progress a new Plan since the adoption of the Core Strategy. Both of these attempts have been supported by Strategic Housing Market Assessments (SHMA). (CD 4.36 4.39), these sought to set out the housing requirement for the overall Housing Market Area, as well as identifying the Affordable Housing need within the specific Authority areas.
- 2.17 These SHMA's were produced in accordance with the NPPF, unlike the SHMA 2009 (4.32) and therefore represented an appropriate needs assessments at that time.
- 2.18 These documents were formally withdrawn following the withdrawal or cessation of progress on their associated Plans. It is not therefore appropriate to use these documents for the purposes of general housing delivery, as Paragraph 74 requires the use of the Standard Method, however, they have historically been used to inform affordable housing delivery across the administrative area, as they represent the most up to date information for the purposes of identifying need locally. The Rebuttal evidence of Mr Lee sets out the difference in assessment between the SHMA 2009 and subsequent documentation.
- 2.19 These SHMA's have subsequently been replaced by the Local Housing Needs Assessment (LHNA) 2021 (CD4.33), which is again based on NPPF guidance and provides the most up to date evidence on Affordable Housing need

within the area, in accordance with Policy CS18. It is therefore considered appropriate that this assessment is used for Development Management purposes, as a material consideration when considering the delivery of appropriate Affordable Housing.



#### 3.0 FIVE YEAR HOUSING SUPPLY

3.1 Further to the exchange of evidence there have been some updates to the disputed sites. This section should be read in association with my Proof of Evidence on 5 Year Housing Land Supply (5YHLS), as I do not intend to address each site again.



#### North Yate

- 3.2 This is a complicated multi-phased development site that started delivering housing units in 2018/19. The attached summary (Appendix 1) demonstrates how the development has increased delivery year on year since. The only year in which delivery fell slightly was 2020/21 resulting from the Covid lockdowns.
- 3.3 The most successful year to date has been 2022/23 in which 366 dwelling were delivered. 86 dwellings more than the previous year.
- 3.4 It is noted that Mr Richards has included Housebuilder Reports at his Appendix 4 (JRHLS4). These cover, largely, the 2022/23 period in which these housebuilders have delivered more than ever at North Yate. They are national reports and not necessarily reflective of local circumstance or delivery.

#### Land West of Park Farm, Thornbury

3.5 Condition 7 of the Appeal Decision (CD5.1) required the submission of a phasing strategy either prior to or alongside the reserved matters submission:



"Prior to or along with the submission of the first reserved matters application, a Phasing Strategy for the development shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority."

3.6 The phasing strategy has now been submitted (application ref: DOC23/00319), it is therefore reasonable to assume that the anticipated first reserved matters submission will follow in accordance with the Agent's anticipated timetable.

#### 4.0 **TRANSPORT MATTERS**

- 4.1 Further to the exchange of evidence, a meeting has been held to discuss the review of the Alternative Bus Route Proposal undertaken by WSP on behalf of the Local Planning Authority and attached at my Appendix 7 of the Planning Proof.
- 4.2 Some additional clarification has been provided in respect of data input into the original modelling, and discussions around patronage were had.
- As a consequence of the technical matters associated with the modelling,
   Rebuttal evidence has been produced by Mr Julian Moss of WSP, setting out
   his methodology and conclusions.

#### Incorrect Assumptions

- 4.4 The following paragraph references are taken from Mr Knight's Proof of Evidence.
- 4.5 Paragraph 2.2.3 states that the Residential Travel Plan (RTP) is agreed with the Highway Authority. This is incorrect, hence the proposed condition requiring an RTP to be submitted and agreed.
- 4.6 Paragraph 2.3.4 asserts that the High Street Shuttle Signals document has been agreed with the Highway Authority. Again this is incorrect. The document was a technical note to properly assess the junction. The document does not reference the proposed MOVA improvements and as such it cannot be agreed until it does so.
- 4.7 Paragraph 4.2.2 references speeds below 30mph. There are no speed surveys in evidence to justify this position.





4.8 Paragraph 4.2.3 suggests that there is a formal active travel route to the village primary school. It is important to state that this is not a formal route, but use of the existing footpath network.

#### Planning Policy

- 4.9 It is notable that Mr Knight's evidence does not reference the Local Plan policy position, particularly in respect of sustainable travel and his Table 5.1.
- 4.10 Policy PSP11 sets out what are considered to be appropriate walking and cycling distances:

Key Services and Facilities	Appropriate Walking and Cycling Distances					
Retail (comparison) shops and services and/or Market towns and Town Centres (Defined in policy CS14 of Core Strategy)	1,200 Metres					
(Weekly) Superstore or supermarket						
(Day to day) Smaller food (convenience) shops						
Local health services Pharmacy	800 Metres					
Dedicated community centres (defined by South Gloucestershire Council)	800 Metres					
Post Offices	800 Metres					
Public Houses	800 Metres					
Secondary school	3 Miles					
Primary school	2 Miles					
Major employers Designated Town Centres and Safeguarded Employment Areas (Defined in Policy CS12 of Core Strategy)	2,000 Metres					

Image 3: Extract from Policy PSP11

4.11 When these appropriate distances are compared with those in Mr Knight's

table 5.1 we see the following differences:

Key Services and Facilities	Mr Knights Table 5.1 (metres)	PSP11 (metres)	Difference (metres)
Secondary School	5,700	4,827	-873
Pharmacy	5,100	800	-4,300
Local Health Services	5,500	800	-4,700
Public House	1,100	800	-300
Smaller Convenience Shops	4,530	800	-3,730
Supermarket	5,320	1,200	4,120



- 4.12 No reference has been provided by Mr Knight to any major employers, a post office or community centres. All however are not available within Wickwar and travel to other villages or towns is required to access them.
- 4.13 In respect of Primary School provision, attention is drawn to the comments of the Local Education Authority (CD3.25) in which they advise the residual capacity available within the Primary School will be absorbed by demand from recent developments within the area, such that any need arising from this development will result in the need for an expansion to the existing school, or a contribution towards a new primary school, within 2 miles of Wickwar. There is no guarantee that primary school children will be accommodated within the village of Wickwar, accordingly, limited weight can be given to this suggested benefit.
- 4.14 There is no reference to any benchmark or policy document that results in Mr Knight's assumption that all the facilities are within 'accepted distance thresholds', conversely, when assessing against a Local Plan Policy PSP11, there are several that fall outside of the accepted thresholds within South Gloucestershire.

4.15 It also assumes that people will be able to walk and cycle to facilities within Wickwar, with an evaluation of the routes undertaken within Tables 6.1 and 6.2. These tables lack any methodology or underlying assessment criteria. Given there is no cycle infrastructure within Wickwar, it requires a confident cyclist to ride on the road, thus it is not suitable for all abilities, as set out in paragraph 5.8 of the supporting text to PSP11.



#### Public Transport

- 4.16 Since the exchange of evidence, the Department for Transport has relaxed the manner in which the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) funding can be spent. WECA have now been permitted to carry over any unspent monies to other projects funding bus service improvements across the region, accordingly, the DRT Westlink trial has been extended by a further 12 months and now benefits from funding to March 2026.
- 4.17 This funding is not being spent on rural subsidised services, therefore the 84/85 route will not receive any additional funding beyond April 2024.
- 4.18 At paragraph 6.6.5 Mr Knight references additional funding received by WECA and North Somerset Council from the BSIP fund. Mr Knight proceeds to make a broad assumption that he expects bus provision to increase in the future. This does not necessarily assume that bus provision serving Wickwar will improve.
- 4.19 Funding is referenced by Mr Knight as being announced on the 28 September 2023. In fact, this was a confirmation of the new round of funding available, as can be seen from Mr Knight's Appendix 5, WECA were awarded £105K in earlier rounds of funding and prior to the cancellation of the 84/85 service in April 2023.



- 4.20 There is no intention for this funding to replace the 84/85 service, with focus being placed on the DRT for rural communities, however, as set out in my evidence, the success of this service is not yet known.
- 4.21 Given the uncertainty of the ongoing delivery of the DRT and the cessation of the 84/85 service, there remains a strong likelihood that this site will not be served by any bus service in the future, with no funding available for replacement rural services. The Appellant's offer of a contribution for a period of five years would be inadequate to maintain such a service.
- 4.22 It therefore remains my opinion that the bus provision will not negate from this being a car borne development and that the Appellant's proposal is at best hypothetical and unlikely to be delivered, such that this carries substantial weight against the proposed development, not the significant benefit suggested by Mr Richards.

#### 5.0 OTHER MATTERS

#### Planning Policy

- 5.1 Within Mr Richards' Planning Proof of Evidence, he alludes to landscape and heritage policies being out-of-date due to their lack of accordance with elements of the NPPF. The stance he takes marginally differs from that agreed within the Planning Statement of Common Ground, I therefore revisited this matter.
- 5.2 Paragraph 38(5) of the Planning and Compensation Act 2004 advises us that, where there is a conflict between policies within the Development Plan, the conflict must be resolved in favour of the policy contained within the last document to become part of the Development Plan, if this is not deemed to be the correct approach, that the Development Plan should be read as a whole. I address these points below:

#### Heritage Policy

- 5.3 In the first instance he considers Policy CS9 as a 'nil harm' policy at his paragraphs 7.32 and 7.47 and that it makes no provision for the public benefit tests required for heritage matters.
- 5.4 It is acknowledged that CS9 lacks the public benefit test set out in paragraph 202 of the NPPF. The remainder of CS9 does accord with the NPPF. For example NPPF paragraph 189 states:

"When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). This is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts





to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance."

- 5.5 The starting point of any decision making in respect of heritage is to conserve, as NPPF paragraph 190 states, there should be a *positive strategy for the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment.* Where harm is identified it is agreed that in the present appeal under paragraph 11 (d)(ii) it is then necessary to weigh that harm, together with any other harm, against any benefits to see if they significantly and demonstrably outweigh those benefits.
- 5.6 Having regard to S38(5), Policy PSP17 forms part of the Development Plan and contains the necessary public benefit test that is absent from Policy CS9.
  Given that PSP17 is contained within the last document to form part of the Development Plan, it takes precedence over Policy CS9.
- 5.7 Policy PSP17 does contain a single requirement that is not in accordance with the NPPF, as the second bullet requires there to be *no other means of delivering similar public benefits through development of an alternative site.* This was identified by the Inspector in the Thornbury case (CD5.1 para 46) and deemed to be out-of-date, but in the Old Sodbury case (CD5.2) Policy PSP17 was not found to be out-of-date.
- 5.8 Policy PSP17 is comprised of many requirements that are standalone tests and the second bullet point is no different. Whilst this element of the policy is not compliant with the NPPF the remainder of the policy does accord with the NPPF and, given this single test can be readily severed from the overall Policy assessment, it would in my opinion, be unnecessary to render the entire policy as out-of-date as opposed to the single test. The removal of the flawed requirement does not undermine the principles or the function of the remaining policy.

#### 5.9 It is therefore considered that these are consistent with the NPPF.

- 5.10 If this is considered to be incorrect, then we must consider that the Development Plan must be read as a whole. Attention is drawn to the supporting text within the Core Strategy, paragraph 8.4 which makes it clear that Policy CS9 is a general policy that must be read in association with other policy documents, including the Policies, Sites and Places DPD. In the case. of heritage, Policy PSP17 must be read in association with Policy CS9. PSP17 does allow for the public benefit test, but as referenced above does contains a single requirement that is not in accordance with the NPPF, Sodbury case (CD5.2) Policy PSP17 was not found to be out-of-date. This bullet remains servable from the remaining policy and it would not be necessary to render the entire policy as out-of-date.
- 5.11 It is my opinion that when read together, as advised within the Core Strategy and as a cumulative part of the Development Plan, with the exclusion of the second bullet, these policies are considered to compliant with the NPPF and can be treated accordingly.

#### Landscape Policy

5.12 For the purposes of landscaping, Policy CS9 has not been found to be outof-date. NPPF paragraph 174 states in part:

> "Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:

> (a) protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan)"





- 5.13 Points 3 of Policy CS9 seeks to conserve and enhance the landscape, with reference again to this being a general policy which must be read in association with other policy documents, including the Policies, Sites and Places DPD.
- 5.14 In this case, Policy PSP2, which Mr Richards at his paragraph 7.33 agrees, is consistent with the NPPF as it allows for harm to be weighed with benefits and minimisation of harm.
- 5.15 In respect of policies pertaining to Heritage, regard should be given to s38(5) and priority given to Policy PSP17, save for the second bullet point. Policies CS9 and PSP17 are then considered to be in accordance with the NPPF.
- 5.16 As an alternative, whilst CS9 when read in isolation is considered to be out of date, policies within the Development are not designed to be siloed. The Development Plan is required to be read as a whole, in this regard, and in respect of heritage and landscape, when read in association with PSP2 and PSP17 (save for the offending second bullet point) it is considered that these policies are in accordance with the NPPF and are not out-of-date.

## Agricultural Land Classification

- 5.17 As set out within my Proof of Evidence, there are several plans produced by Natural England that give various Agricultural Land Classifications to this appeal site. Where the site is identified as Grade 3, they do not break the classification down into Grade 3a or 3b.
- 5.18 Without any clarification from Natural England, which has not been forthcoming, along with the content of Mr Richards' Appendix 6 (JR6), it is not intended to pursue this matter any further And consider this matter to have a neutral balance.



## Recreational Pressure on the SSSI

- 5.19 As referenced within my Planning Proof of Evidence, without reference to the Local Planning Authority, the Appellant included a contribution of £34,740.00 towards the Lower Woods Reserve.
- 5.20 In reviewing the proposal, GWT have advised that the sum proposed would not be sufficient to achieve meaningful mitigation measures to address the additional recreational pressure on Lower Woods.
- 5.21 Lower Woods is the largest ancient woodland in the southwest, formed of areas of grazed common land and wide grassy pathways known as 'trenches' which separate 23 individual traditionally coppiced woodlands that have remained unchanged for centuries. Whilst the Appellant has endeavoured to provide open space and ecological benefits on site, this will not negate the ability or desire for residents of this proposal to visit Lower Woods which is readily accessible by foot via the Public Rights of Way network connecting to the end of Pincots Lane, or by car to the centre of the SSSI itself. It is a unique environment that is simply not mitigated by open space provision or enhance BNG provision on the appeal site.
- 5.22 The increase in visitors to Lower Woods will place increased recreational pressure on the SSSI, which in turn costs money to maintain. The GWT has provided a response to the financial offer proposed by the Appellant, which is attached at **Appendix 2**.
- 5.23 The impact from the proposed development should be assessed cumulatively, having regard to any impact arising from other local development, as set out in Paragraph 180 of the NPPF. Should the Appellant wish to demonstrate that their proposal will not have any cumulative impact



on the SSSI, an appropriate assessment should have been undertaken. No such assessment has been produced.

- 5.24 The GWT has advised that increased pressure on the SSSI will lead to the need for additional fencing and gates to prevent paths expanding, additional signage and habitat creation. Further, there is a specific need to undertake a review of the Ash dieback management plan to ensure mitigation against any increased safety risks associated with increased patronage. These are anticipated to cost £100,000.
- 5.25 The Appellant has proposed their contribution based on the Cotswold Beechwoods SAC, which is not considered comparable. The Cotswold Beechwoods has a specific zone of influence, within which the scale of anticipated housing growth has been identified. The extent of mitigation for the area has been identified and costed, there are multiple schemes contributing to a 'pot' that will provide much wider mitigation measures for the SAC, known as a SAMM payment (Strategic Access Management and Monitoring).
- 5.26 In addition to that payment, every development of 50 dwellings or more is required to provide on-site Strategic Areas of Natural Greenspace. Whilst green space is provided on site, it would not meet the criteria for SANG which is usually made up of much larger areas of space, circa 15ha minimum. In those instances, a contribution towards off-site SANG is sought. In those instances an additional contribution of £480 per dwelling is sought. This scheme is set out in the Cotswold Beechwoods Mitigation Strategy at **Appendix 3**.
- 5.27 Essentially the £34,740.00 proposed contribution equates to a SAMM contribution of £193 per dwelling. If the Appellant were to correctly follow



the principles of the Cotswold Beechwood's strategy, an additional payment of £480 per dwelling would be payable, equating to £673 per dwelling.

- 5.28 As there is no such wider mitigation strategy associated with Lower Woods, there is a need to ensure appropriate mitigation is in place to preserve the SSSI for all future visitors, accordingly, the requested £555.55 per dwelling is considered appropriate.
- 5.29 It is considered that an appropriate contribution towards the management of the SSSI is appropriate to mitigate against the recreational pressure that arises from the proposed development on the area and its significance, in accordance with Paragraph 180 of the NPPF.
- 5.30 Even if the contribution is forthcoming, it remains my opinion that this impact holds limited weight in the planning balance.

#### Planning Balance and Weightings

- 5.31 The Council, myself and the Inspectors in both the Thornbury and Old Sodbury cases (CD5.1 & 5.2) (and indeed most, if not all, the Inspectors in their decisions listed in the Core Documents) have used: *limited, moderate, significant and substantial weight* with *great weight* in respect of heritage matters. Mr Stacey, the Appellant's affordable housing witness has also used this categorisation. It is a standard approach.
- 5.32 It is also a scale used by Mr Richards at recent appeals , referenced at his Appendix 1 (JR1), where he uses the Council's categorisation of both significant and substantial. These include: Land East of St Margaret's Drive, Alderton (APP/G16390/W/22/3310117); Land at Witney Road, Ducklington, Oxfordshire (APP/D3125/W/22/3297487); Land to the South of Chilvester Hill, Calne (APP/Y3940/W/21/3275477); and Land West of Old Norwich Road, Ipswich (APP/W3520/W/18/3200941) amongst other older decisions.



- 5.33 However, in reading Mr Richards' Planning Proof of Evidence it has become apparent to the Council for the first time that at this appeal he is using a different weighting categorisation. It is also clear from paragraph 8.3 of his Proof of Evidence that he was aware that he was doing so. Unfortunately during negotiations on the Statements of Common Ground it was not made clear to the Council by Mr Richards that he was using a different weighting system. This is extremely unfortunate given that the use of the categorisation of "significant weight" is being used differently by the parties. The Council, as made explicit in the officers' report to committee and as used by previous Inspectors, uses it as the second highest category whilst Mr Richards has on this occasion used it as the highest category.
- 5.34 Therefore matters of weight on which the Council had thought agreement had been reached has transpired to be not the case. It will therefore be necessary for the parties to agree addendums to the Statements of Common Ground to ensure that each party's position in relation to weight is made clear so as to avoid confusion and to ensure the smooth running of the Inquiry. Following exchange of rebuttals, the Council will endeavour to agree these addendums.

#### Assessing benefits

5.35 The Appellant has tried to allude to the provision of BNG on site and provision of an extension to the PROW will direct people away from the SSSI. Whilst GWT has sought to address this within its attached comment and previous consultation responses, it should be highlighted that the Appellant, within Mr Richards' Planning evidence, has tried to afford benefits for these elements separately under environmental and social benefits, this is considered to be effectively double counting, as they are provided solely as environmental benefits.

#### Retail Provision

5.36 The inclusion of a letter from Midcounties Co-op at Mr Richards' Appendix 8 (JR8) is noted, however, it is queried as to why an elaborate marketing strategy, as set out in the S106 Agreement, is required when the suggestion is that an end user is interested. Alternatively, if they are genuinely interested and have provided model requirements and proving layouts, why have they not entered into a subject to planning agreement, or is the site required to be a serviced site?

#### Planning Balance

5.37 In light of the above comments, I have revisited the planning balance within my Proof of Evidence and have adjusted as follows:

#### <u>Benefits</u>

- 5.38 The Local Planning Authority places **significant weight** on the delivery of market, affordable and self-build housing within the District.
- 5.39 There is no certainty and indeed much ambiguity over whether the proposed shop will be delivered. I consider that only **limited weight** can be afforded to this element of the proposal.
- 5.40 Other benefits attract **limited weight** in favour of the development.

#### **Disbenefits**

- 5.41 The loss of agricultural land, should be afforded **limited weight**.
- 5.42 The impact on the SSSI is given a **limited weight** in the balancing exercise, at best reduced to a neutral impact if a contribution is forthcoming.



- 5.43 Whilst the resultant harm to both South Farm and Frith Farm is not considered to provide a clear reason for refusal in its own right, the harm nevertheless attracts **great weight** and is a serious disbenefit of the proposal that strongly weighs against it.
- 5.44 The Landscape harm, including the harm to the character and appearance of Wickwar and its surrounding, in my view, strongly weighs against the proposed development. It is considered that **significant weight** attaches to this harm which weighs strongly against the scheme.
- 5.45 Neither contributions sought or proposed to address the provision of public transport within Wickwar will address the fundamental problem that Wickwar is a car borne location. The development is in an unsustainable location and should be afforded **substantial weight** against the proposed development.
- 5.46 In my view given the above considerations, I remain of the opinion that the adverse impacts of this proposal significantly and demonstrably outweigh its benefits and permission should be refused.



#### **APPENDIX 1**

North Yate Summary

#### North Yate Housing Supply Statement

Based on available evidence, the forecasted delivery rates for North Yate are realistic and achievable. All sites now have Reserved Matters consent, the site wide infrastructure is in place and the developers are on site with a track record of delivery.

The historic delivery rates reflect the phased approach to the development of the site, with lower levels of completion in 2018/2019 when the supply was from just two reserved matter consents.

Key elements of infrastructure such as drainage were delivered in tandem with the early Reserved Matters parcels. Condition 20 of the outline consent prevented development of more than 750 dwellings until such time as the appropriate strategic sewerage infrastructure had been completed and was operational. Condition 42 required the undergrounding of electricity cables before works could commence on the phases which the cable corridor ran through. These works have now been completed.

High levels of completions are expected on parcels 0133as, 0133ah and 0133ak in the year 2023/2024. This is already evident on site with these parcels at an advanced stage of delivery and also evidenced by the developer forms\* returned and the sales information from the respective developers websites which identify the majority of homes in these parcels as sold. There are show homes/marketing suites on site for all four developers currently operating on the site.

The following three tables show the progress on site:

Table 1 is the data presented in the 2022 AMR

Table 2 adjusts the date from the published AMR with completions data for the period 2022/2023 from the council's annual completions survey

Table 3 inputs the data from the developer forms returned to support the 2023 AMR adjusted to account for discrepancies in completions data.

\*These are the proformas referenced in paragraph 6.10 (Pg 25) of the appellants Proof of Evidence – Housing Delivery and Housing Land Supply which have been included at Appendix 2 of Ms Fitzgerald's 5 Year Housing Supply Proof of Evidence.

Phase	Parcel	RM ref	Traject- ory ref	Developer	Dwell- ings	2018/ 2019	2019/ 2020	2020/ 2021	2021/ 2022	2022/ 2023	2023/ 2024	2024/ 2025	2025/ 2026	2026/ 2027
1	14D, 22	PK17/5389/RM	0133ac	Barratt	83	25	41	7	10					
1	23A 23C	PK17/5388/RM	0133ab	DWH	77	14	46	8	6	3				
2	12B, 13B	PK18/1723/RM	0133ae	Barratt	226		73	119	34					
2	23B, 23D, 23 E	PK18/0527/RM	0133ad	DWH	73		28	45						
3	12A, 13A	P19/12246/RM	0133aj	Barratt	155				21	110	24			
3	15A, 16A, 16 B	PK18/3185/RM	0133af	DWH	106				106					
3	14E	P19/14361/RM	0133ai	Barratt	48					32	16			
3	24, 25, 26, 27	P19/11377/RM	0133as	Bellway	247				52	40	40	40	40	35
4	17A, 17B, 18A, 18B, 21	P19/2525/RM	0133ah	DWH	229				51	40	40	40	40	18
4	7, 8 ,9 ,11	P20/16804/RM	0133ak	Barratt	183					23	40	40	40	40
5	6 (part)	P21/07632/RM	0133ao	Barratt	8									8
5	19, 20, 28, 29	P21/03161/RM	0133an	DWH	138					40	40	40	18	
5	5C, 6(part)	P21/02473/RM	0133al	тw	157					42	72	43		
6	10, 30, 31	P22/03612/RM	0133aq	DWH	47							20	27	
7	2, 4A, 4B, 5B	P22/04365/RM	0133ar	Barratt	145							48	58	39
7	3, 14A, 14B, 14C	P22/02306/RM	0133ap	Barratt	201						42	74	50	35
TOTAL					2123	39	188	179	280	330	314	345	273	175

Table 1: AMR 2022/2023 figures.

Phase	Parcel	RM ref	Traject- ory ref	Developer	Dwell- ings	2018/ 2019	2019/ 2020	2020/ 2021	2021/ 2022	2022/ 2023	2023/ 2024	2024/ 2025	2025/ 2026	2026/ 2027
1	14D, 22	PK17/5389/RM	0133ac	Barratt	83	25	41	7	10					
1	23A 23C	PK17/5388/RM	0133ab	DWH	77	14	46	8	6	0	3			
2	12B, 13B	PK18/1723/RM	0133ae	Barratt	226		73	119	34					
2	23B, 23D, 23 E	PK18/0527/RM	0133ad	DWH	73		28	45						
3	12A, 13A	P19/12246/RM	0133aj	Barratt	155				21	110	24			
3	15A, 16A, 16 B	PK18/3185/RM	0133af	DWH	106				106					
3	14E	P19/14361/RM	0133ai	Barratt	48					36	12			
3	24, 25, 26, 27	P19/11377/RM	0133as	Bellway	247				52	86	40	40	29	
4	17A, 17B, 18A, 18B, 21	P19/2525/RM	0133ah	DWH	229				51	86	40	40	12	
4	7, 8 ,9 ,11	P20/16804/RM	0133ak	Barratt	183					48	40	40	40	15
5	6 (part)	P21/07632/RM	0133ao	Barratt	8									8
5	19, 20, 28, 29	P21/03161/RM	0133an	DWH	138						40	40	40	18
5	5C, 6(part)	P21/02473/RM	0133al	ТW	157						42	72	43	
6	10, 30, 31	P22/03612/RM	0133aq	DWH	47							20	27	
7	2, 4A, 4B, 5B	P22/04365/RM	0133ar	Barratt	145							48	58	39
7	3, 14A, 14B, 14C	P22/02306/RM	0133ap	Barratt	201						42	74	50	35
TOTAL					2123	39	188	179	280	366	283	374	299	115

Table 2: AMR 2022/2023 figures adjusted with completions from council survey and following years adjusted in line with completions.

Phase	Parcel	RM ref	Traject- ory ref	Developer	Dwell- ings	2018/ 2019	2019/ 2020	2020/ 2021	2021/ 2022	2022/ 2023	2023/ 2024	2024/ 2025	2025/ 2026	2026/ 2027
1	14D, 22	PK17/5389/RM	0133ac	Barratt	83	25	41	7	10					
1	23A 23C	PK17/5388/RM	0133ab	DWH	77	14	46	8	6	0	3			
2	12B, 13B	PK18/1723/RM	0133ae	Barratt	226		73	119	34					
2	23B, 23D, 23 E	PK18/0527/RM	0133ad	DWH	73		28	45						
3	12A, 13A	P19/12246/RM	0133aj	Barratt	155				21	110	24			
3	15A, 16A, 16 B	PK18/3185/RM	0133af	DWH	106				106					
3	14E	P19/14361/RM	0133ai	Barratt	48					36	12			
3	24, 25, 26, 27	P19/11377/RM	0133as	Bellway	247				52	86	109			
4	17A, 17B, 18A, 18B, 21	P19/2525/RM	0133ah	DWH	229				51	86	66	26		
4	7, 8 ,9 ,11	P20/16804/RM	0133ak	Barratt	183					48	104	31		
5	6 (part)	P21/07632/RM	0133ao	Barratt	8									8
5	19, 20, 28, 29	P21/03161/RM	0133an	DWH	138						26	62	48	2
5	5C, 6(part)	P21/02473/RM	0133al	TW	157						42	72	43	
6	10, 30, 31	P22/03612/RM	0133aq	DWH	47							24	23	
7	2, 4A, 4B, 5B	P22/04365/RM	0133ar	Barratt	145							48	58	39
7	3, 14A, 14B, 14C	P22/02306/RM	0133ap	Barratt	201							81	67	53
TOTAL					2123	39	188	179	280	366	386	344	239	102

Table 3: AMR 2022/2023 adjusted with completions from council survey and following years adjusted in line with completions and with reference to completed developer forms.



#### **APPENDIX 2**

Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust Response



Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust Robinswood Hill Country Park Reservoir Road Gloucester GL4 6SX

info@gloucestershirewildlifetrust.co.uk

www.gloucestershirewildlifetrust.co.uk Telephone: 01452 383333

16 October 2023

Charmian Eyre-Walker Principal Planner South Gloucestershire Council

# P22/01300/O | Erection of up to 180 dwellings, a local shop and associated infrastructure (Outline) with access to be determined; all other matters reserved. | Land At Sodbury Road Wickwar South Gloucestershire GL12 8PG

Dear Charmian,

I wanted to update on Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust's position regarding the development proposed in application P22/01300/O. The Trust raised concerns last year, and again this year, on the potential impact of the proposed development on Lower Woods SSSI and we maintain our position that we object to this development.

At almost 300 hectares, Lower Woods is one of the largest ancient woodlands in the southwest. It's famous for its butterflies, with 32 reported species being found here. Areas of grazed common land and wide grassy pathways known as 'trenches' separate 23 individual traditionally coppiced woodlands, the boundaries of which have remained unchanged for centuries.

Our main concern is the additional recreational pressure that this development of 180 new homes, around 400 new residents and potentially 100+ dogs (with around 28% of households now owning a dog according to the World Animal Foundation) would have on Lower Woods. As a Trust we understand that people have a desire and a right to visit and experience wild spaces and our strategy is all about re-connecting people with wildlife, however, this must not come at a cost to the integrity of the site.





Registered charity number: 232580 Registered in England number: 708575 VAT number: 535 6446 33



There are growing pressures on Lower Woods from recent development, with the village of Wickwar growing substantially in recent years due to new housing development. The potential for a direct effect on features for which the site was designated is high. The added disturbance could lead to a significant harm to biodiversity, making the development non-compliant with 180 (a) of the NPPF.

This development alone would add significant recreational pressure, leading to adverse effects to the SSSI but in combination with other recent development in the area, this impact will be even greater. This would demonstrate non-compliance with paragraph 180(b) of the NPPF. The cumulative impacts of development must be taken into account, and this should be done via appropriate assessment.

The trust acknowledges the efforts that have been made by the applicant to provide alternative recreational space, both within the development and by joining it with existing public rights of way (PROW). However, this will not be sufficient to prevent residents from using Lower Woods SSSI for activities such as dog walking, as they will naturally want to explore this unique and beautiful landscape on their doorstep.

If the development does go ahead, it is essential that the appropriate mitigation measures are put in place to help prevent degradation of the SSSI. As experts in the condition and management of Lower Woods, we have provided the applicant with context around the mitigation requirements and set out the work required to action these. This includes additional gates and fencing to prevent paths from expanding and negatively impacting biodiversity; additional signage to inform people about why Lower Woods SSSI is important, why it needs protecting and how we want people to behave; and habitat creation in areas of the woodland with less footfall, to mitigate disturbance in other parts of the woods. We would also need to carry out a review of our ash dieback management plan within the woodland, which, with additional footfall could pose a growing safety risk to members of the public. Ongoing costs to manage the site with a higher footfall also need to be taken into consideration. We have calculated that the cost of this work will be  $\sim$ £100,000 which would amount to £555.55 per dwelling, with an additional cost of ongoing management at around £2,500 per annum.

We consider this to be within an acceptable range. For example, the New Forest Mitigation for Recreational Impacts Strategy has a range of £320-£800 per dwelling. We have also recently experienced a similar comparable case, where we appealed against the planning decision to build circa 160 new residential properties on a green field site adjacent to Coombe Hill nature reserve due to concerns over added recreational pressure. As a result of the appeal, the development was granted planning permission with the caveat that £115,000 worth of mitigation funds be made available to GWT, to mitigate the impacts that would directly affect Coombe Hill Nature Reserve as a consequence of increased visitor pressures and disturbance.



@gloswildlife

Registered charity number: 232580 Registered in England number: 708575 VAT number: 535 6446 33



If the development were to go ahead without the mitigation work set out, the risk of deterioration to the SSSI would be greatly increased, which means the development would not be compliant with paragraph 180 (c) of the NPPF or CS9 (2) of the South Gloucestershire Core Strategy.

The applicant has proposed a financial contribution to GWT via section 106 which is not sufficient to address the burden on Lower Woods. In the absence of a recreation mitigation strategy for Lower Woods SSSI, the contribution offered has been provided based upon the developer contribution requirement as part of the Cotswolds Beechwood SAC Recreation Mitigation Strategy. This states a contribution of £193 per dwelling should be made for any future development granted planning permission that results in a net increase in residential units, located within 15.4km of the Cotswold Beechwoods SAC. This is a completely different site with different management and mitigation needs, with this proposal adjacent to the site, and we do not consider the application of this strategy to Lower Woods SSSI as being appropriate or relevant. In the absence of a mitigation strategy, we would expect our knowledge and expertise of the site and the requirements for its protection and mitigation to be taken into account in the decision on this application.

Regards,

Laura Chester

Building with Nature Lead Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust

@gloswildlife

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#### **APPENDIX 3**

**Cotswold Beechwoods Mitigation Strategy** 





# Cotswold Beechwoods SAC Recreation Mitigation Strategy

Durwyn Liley and Chris Panter

FOOTPRINT ECOLOGY, FOREST OFFICE, BERE ROAD, WAREHAM, DORSET BH20 7PA WWW.FOOTPRINT-ECOLOGY.CO.UK 01929 552444



Footprint Contract Reference: 497 Date: 11<sup>th</sup> May 2022 Version: Final Recommended Citation: Liley, D. & Panter, C. (2022). Cotswold Beechwoods SAC Recreation Mitigation Strategy. Report by Footprint Ecology.

# Summary

This strategy sets out a strategic approach to mitigate recreation impacts, associated with new housing growth, on the Cotswold Beechwoods Special Area of Conservation (SAC). The SAC is part of a national network of sites that are of the highest importance for nature conservation and subject to strict legal protection.

The overall objective is to provide a framework under which applications for development likely to have a significant effect on the Cotswold Beechwoods SAC can be permitted, with measures in place to ensure that adverse effects on the integrity of the SAC can be ruled out. This enables development, while ensuring sufficient protection in place for the SAC. The strategy applies to larger developments, which may affect the integrity of these sites alone, and smaller developments where cumulative effects may be the critical factor.

The strategy applies to a zone of influence of 15.4km from the Cotswold Beechwoods, with the boundary of the zone adjusted slightly to reflect the local geography, accessibility and local authority boundaries. The zone therefore encompasses all of Cheltenham and Gloucester administrative boundary and part of Cotswold, Stroud and Tewkesbury.

Within the zone of influence, all new residential growth will be expected to provide mitigation. Mitigation will involve Strategic Access Management and Monitoring ('SAMM'), which relate to managing access and engaging with visitors at the SAC. These measures involve increased staffing, signage, interpretation etc.

Alongside SAMM, there is a need to deflect access away from the SAC and provide alternative countryside destinations for people to visit for recreation. Suitable Natural Alternative Greenspace ('SANG') or other infrastructure projects, such as improvements to existing greenspace sites are therefore necessary. These can be provided directly by developers (according to guidelines set out in this strategy) as part of a development or alternatively, where such bespoke SANG is not possible, through contributions.

The strategy is a long-term approach and will be subject to regular review and will provide a rolling programme of mitigation.

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# 1. Introduction

### Overview

- 1.1 This strategy sets out a strategic approach to mitigate recreation impacts, associated with new housing growth, on the Cotswold Beechwoods Special Area of Conservation (SAC). The SAC is part of a network of European sites that are of particular importance for nature conservation and subject to strict legal protection.
- 1.2 The overall objective is to provide a framework under which applications for development likely to have a significant effect on the Cotswold Beechwoods SAC can be permitted so that any adverse effects on the integrity are avoided. This enables development, while ensuring sufficient protection in place for the SAC. The strategy applies to larger developments, which may affect the integrity of these sites alone, and smaller developments where cumulative effects may be the critical factor.

### Legislation

- 1.3 The designation, protection and restoration of European wildlife sites is embedded in the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, as amended, which are commonly referred to as the 'Habitats Regulations'. Importantly, the most recent amendments (the Conservation of Habitats and Species (amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019<sup>1</sup>) take account of the UKs departure from the EU.
- 1.4 Regulation 105 *et seq* addresses the assessment of local plans and there is also Government Guidance on the interpretation and application of the Regulations<sup>2</sup>. The legislation places strict statutory protection on European sites.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> The amending regulations generally seek to retain the requirements of the 2017 Regulations but with adjustments for the UK's exit from the European Union. See Regulation 4, which also confirms that the interpretation of these Regulations as they had effect, or any guidance as it applied, before exit day, shall continue to do so.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Habitats regulations assessments: protecting a European site. Defra and Natural England. 24 February 2021. <u>https://www.gov.uk/guidance/habitats-regulations-assessments-protecting-a-</u> <u>european-site</u> (accessed 31 August 2021)

- 1.5 The 'precautionary principle' is an accepted principle that is embedded within the wording of the legislation, and latterly within case decisions, both European and domestic. Essentially, a competent<sup>3</sup> authority should only give effect to a plan or authorise/undertake a project after having ascertained that it will not adversely affect the integrity of the European site, alone or incombination. This means that in the absence of certainty, the plan or project should not normally proceed (subject to the further exceptional tests set out within the legislation).
- 1.6 A competent authority should should apply a precautionary approach where uncertainties remain. Competent authorities should have enough evidence to satisfy themselves that there are feasible measures to prevent adverse effects. These should be feasible in terms of cost, practical implementation, timeliness and attributing responsibility.
- 1.7 This strategy for the Cotswold Beechwoods SAC provides a robust and comprehensive consideration of the avoidance and mitigation measures that will adequately prevent adverse effects on the European site in terms of recreation pressure. This strategy is therefore a solution to the legislative duties placed on the relevant local planning authorities, and is an enabling strategy, unblocking potential Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) issues at the individual development project level where recreation pressure is difficult to mitigate for on a piecemeal basis because it relies on a suite of integrated activities.
- 1.8 It is within this context that a strategic approach should be developed. A strategic approach is built on the principle that by putting together a suite of interrelated measures, that work collectively to target key mitigation areas such as visitor education, dedicated staff, visitor infrastructure improvements or providing alternative locations for some aspects of recreation, a robust multi-layered strategy can give certainty in effectiveness and resilience. The multiple measures approach across these different themes also gives certainty that if a small number of measures do not work in the way in which they were intended, they will not critically alter the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> A competent authority is defined in regulation 7 of the Habitats Regulations and in essence is any public body or officer exercising public duties, of any kind, and without any exceptions, which may undertake, adopt or give any form of consent, permission, licence or other authorisation for any plan or project that would be likely to have a significant effect on a European site.

overall objective of preventing adverse effects, if identified and rectified early through monitoring.

## 2. Cotswold Beechwoods SAC

### Qualifying features and conservation importance

- 2.1 The Cotswold Beechwoods SAC straddles the boundaries of Cotswold, Stroud and Tewksbury Districts and totals some 590ha<sup>4</sup>.
- 2.2 The SAC consists of ancient beech woodland, some secondary woodland and a small area of unimproved grassland. The qualifying features<sup>5</sup> of the Cotswold Beechwoods SAC relate to both the woodland and grassland habitats:
  - Asperulo-Fagetum beech forests; and
  - Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates (Festuco-Brometalia).
- 2.3 The Cotswold Beechwoods represent one of the most westerly extensive blocks of *Asperulo-Fagetum* beech forests and are floristically rich compared to other similar sites. The Beechwoods are mostly high forest, dominated by Beech *Fagus sylvatica*, with Ash *Fraxinus excelsior*, Pedunculate Oak *Quercus robur*, patches of Sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus* and some areas of remnant beech coppice. Understorey species include Holly *Ilex aquifolium* and Yew *Taxus baccata* with a varied and interesting ground flora. Notable plants include Red Helleborine *Cephalanthera rubra*, Stinking Hellebore *Helleborus foetidus*, Narrow-lipped Helleborine *Epipactis leptochila*, Fingered Sedge *Carex digitate* and Bird's-nest Orchid *Neottia nidus-avis*. Other taxa include a wide diversity and variety, with over 780 species of fungi being recorded at Buckholt Wood alone.
- 2.4 Wetter parts of the site are also of interest, with abundant mosses and liverworts which are important conditions for several nationally rare terrestrial snails, including; *Ena montana, Phenocolimax major, Acicula fusca and Macrogastra rolphii* - all species of ancient woodlands. Furthermore, open areas and woodland margins are important areas for butterflies such as the Silver-washed Fritillary *Argynnis paphia*, White Admiral *Ladoga Camilla* and White-letter Hairstreak *Strymonidia w-album*.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Figure from the supplementary conservation objectives.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Full details are in the <u>SAC citation</u> on the Natural England website

- 2.5 The unimproved limestone grassland of the SAC consists of areas of glades and rides within the woodland, the largest area being the cheese-rolling slope at Coopers Hill. The grassland habitat contains Upright Brome *Bromus erectus*, Tor-grass *Brachypodium pinnatum* and Sheep's-Fescue *Festuca ovina*, with Quaking Grass *Briza media* and a wide range of other flowering herbaceous plants.
- 2.6 The component Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is the Cotswold Commons and Beechwoods and the site is also a National Nature Reserve (NNR), the Cotswold Commons and Beechwoods NNR. Both the NNR and SSSI extend beyond the SAC. The Cotswold Beechwoods are also recognised for their landscape value, lying within the heart of the Cotswold Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).
- 2.7 The SAC is shown in Map 1, which also shows the SSSI, NNR and AONB boundaries for context.



#### Map 1: Location of the Cotswold Beechwoods SAC, within the context of the AONB, NNRs, SSSIs and the local authority boundaries.

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### **Recreation use**

#### *Visitor numbers*

- 2.8 The Cotswolds AONB receives an estimated 23 million leisure visits a year across the AONB<sup>6</sup>. For the Cotswold Beechwoods SAC an estimate from ORVal (Outdoor Recreation Valuation Tool) predicts 383,678 visits per year to the different areas that are included in the tool; these make up roughly two thirds of the SAC<sup>7</sup>.
- 2.9 Central to visitor access is the Cotswold Way, which runs for a total of 164 kilometres, passing through much of the SAC. It is a clear focus for access and the Cotswold Way Association estimate the path receives over 210,00 visits a year<sup>8</sup>. By contrast, ORVal puts an estimate for the Cotswold Way at 3.8 million visits a year<sup>9</sup>. The length of the Way through the SAC is 6.7 km.

#### Parking and path networks

- 2.10 The SAC is bisected by roads, has holes of undesignated land within and includes long thin strips of land. As such there a considerable perimeter and there are many access points and paths across the SAC.
- 2.11 The path network derived from OpenStreetMap is shown in Map 3. It can be seen there is a high density of paths, with only a few areas, such as Cranham Wood and Buckle Wood without many paths. Map 3 also highlights the long distance paths; primarily the Cotswold Way, but also to a lesser extent the Gustav Holst Way.
- 2.12 Parking locations which give immediate or very easy access onto the SAC are also shown on Map 3. A total of 27 parking locations are shown, including locations such as pubs and large car parks on the Cotswold Way (e.g. Barrow Wake). These locations have an estimated combined capacity of around 325 parking spaces. It should be noted that this does not include the National

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> <u>https://www.swdevelopmentplan.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/Cotswolds-AONB-Mgt-Plan-</u> 2013 18.pdf

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> ORVal developed by the Land, Environment, Economics and Policy Institute (LEEP) at The University of Exeter with funding from Defra <u>https://www.leep.exeter.ac.uk/orval/</u> Sites; ID:491 (c. SW half of the SAC): 264,526 visits per year, ID:2255 (Upton Wood) : 62,531, ID:2254 (Cooper's Hill): 56,621.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> <u>http://cotswoldwayassociation.org.uk/our-other-trails/</u>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> <u>https://www.leep.exeter.ac.uk/orval/</u> ID:12

Trust Old Ebworth Centre which is more a base for the rangers and an education hub.

Map 2: Location of current parking provision and the distribution of paths within the SAC.



### 2019 visitor surveys

- 2.13 Visitor surveys were undertaken by Footprint Ecology with members of the public who were visiting the Cotswold Beechwoods SAC in summer 2019 (Panter & Caals, 2019). The visitor survey was commissioned by the local planning authorities in the vicinity of the Cotswold Beechwoods: Tewkesbury, Cotswold, Stroud, Cheltenham and Gloucester City Council (the highway authority), as evidence to inform the HRAs and mitigation requirements of the emerging respective Local Plan documents.
- 2.14 The surveys included counts of people passing and interviews with visitors were conducted in June/July 2019 (outside of school holidays) at 12 survey point locations, for a total of 192 hours covering both weekdays and weekends. The survey points ranged from key well-known, visitor destinations along the Cotswold Way with lots of parking (e.g. Barrow Wake and Coopers Hill), to informal laybys (e.g. B4070 layby) and foot-only access points from nearby villages (e.g. Sheepscombe).

#### 2.15 Key findings included:

- Counts recorded 770 people (including 201 minors and 43 cyclists) and 213 dogs with an average group size was 2.1 people per group, of which 0.5 were minors, 0.1 on a bicycle and with 0.6 dogs per group;
- Roughly 4.3 times people were seen on weekends, than on weekdays;
- A total of 139 interviews were conducted, with 13% on holiday, 2% staying with friends or family locally and 85% of interviewees on a short visit directly from home;
- The main activities were were walking (without a dog) (45% of interviewees) and dog walking (40%);
- Most interviewees (67%) had arrived at the survey location by car or on foot (28%);
- Interviewee postcodes (those who had travelled directly from home only) showed that interviewees were from: Stroud District (28%), Gloucester District (19%), Tewkesbury District (15%), Cotswold District (11%) and Cheltenham (9%).
- The median distance between the home postcode and survey location for all interviewees was 7.2 km while for those visiting directly from home the median was 6.0 km and 75% lived within 15.4 km.
- 2.16 Visitor data are summarised in Maps 3-6. Figure 1 summarises the survey results, identifying key visitor groups based on the interview data collected. Seven groups are shown and the size of each rectangle is equivalent to the proportion of interviewees in the group. The blue group is specifically those

who considered themselves on holiday or staying with friends and not on a day trip (15% of interviewees). These groups come from a very wide area and were mostly walking. The green groups are long distance/regional visitors but who were all on a day trip (49%). Within these three groups were highlighted; a specific group for long distance walkers/runners, long distance day trippers (who were mostly on a first visit) and regional visitors who were infrequent. The two remaining brown groups are very local visitors (34%), with a specific group for those who were on site every day or every other day.

2.17 It should be noted that the weather conditions were at times variable. The number of people counted passing (and the number of interviews conducted) was relatively low compared to other European sites surveyed by Footprint Ecology. This is a finding in it' own right. The data collected are similar to those undertaken at other European sites and used to underpin mitigation strategies (e.g. Fearnley et al., 2010; Liley et al., 2006, 2018; Panter & Liley, 2019), however of particular note in the Cotswolds is that relatively few Mountain Bikers were encountered or interviewed during the survey, despite this being known to be a popular activity in the area. The visitor survey report includes discussion on the implications of these omissions and merits for further, targeted survey work.

#### Cotswold Beechwoods SAC Recreation Mitigation Strategy

<ul> <li>All visit daily or every other day</li> <li>86% dog walking</li> <li>Avg. 1.4 people &amp; 1.3 dogs</li> <li>62% on site everyday</li> <li>3/4 live within 2.4 km</li> <li>Mean route 2.5 km</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>70% visit a few times a week</li> <li>65% dog walking</li> <li>Avg. 1.7 people &amp; 1.3 dogs</li> <li>3/4 live within 4.2 km</li> <li>Mean route 2.7 km</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>On holiday/staying with friends or family. Do not live locally – 3/4 live within 147 km</li> <li>Mean route 9 km</li> <li>72% walking</li> <li>Avg. 2.6 people &amp; 0.2 dogs</li> </ul>
Daily/every other day visitors (15%)	Regular, very local visitors (19%)	Visiting on holiday/ staying with friends (15%)
<ul> <li>Live within the region – 3/4 live within 12 km</li> <li>Mean route 2.4 km</li> <li>52% dog walking</li> <li>47% walking</li> <li>Avg. 2.0 people &amp; 0.8 dogs</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>72% on a first visit</li> <li>3/4 live within 46 km</li> <li>65% walking</li> <li>Mean route 3.7 km</li> <li>Avg. 2.1 people &amp; 0.5 dogs</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Mean route 11 km</li> <li>67% walking</li> <li>Avg. 2.1 people &amp; 0.1 dogs</li> <li>3/4 live within 44 km</li> </ul>
Infrequent regional visitor (15%)	Long distance day tripper (21%)	Cyclist (2%)
	toug an annoo and an bhou (trava)	

Figure 1: Treemap of visitor profile groups based on the visitor surveys. Group title is given at the bottom and size of the group is relative to the percentage of interviewees (shown in brackets) – it is important to note this is based on the interview data and may misrepresent the cyclists, count data suggested 6% of visitors were cyclists while only 2% of those interviewed were cycling.

#### Map 3: Bar plots to show the numbers of groups, people, dogs, minors and cyclists observed at each survey point.



#### Map 4: Pie charts to show interviewee activities from surveys. Overall size indicates the relative total number of people.



#### Map 5: Route density from visitor surveys shown using a 50m hexagonal grid.



### Map 6: Routes taken by interviewees at Rodborough Common shown as a rainbow heatmap.



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### Impacts of recreation

- 2.18 Impacts of recreation on woodland habitats are varied and are summarised in a range of reviews (e.g. Corney et al., 2008; Lake et al., 2020; Lowen et al., 2008; Marzano & Dandy, 2012; Ryan, 2012). Beech woodlands tend lack vegetation at ground level which can mean impacts (such as flattened ground flora) are less obvious and people are perhaps more likely to roam away from paths. Furthermore, some of the rare species associated with the habitat, such as orchids, are patchy and not necessarily predictable in their occurrence.
- 2.19 Impacts from recreation take a wide range of forms, including:
  - Damage: encompassing trampling and vegetation wear, soil compaction and erosion, trampling can also cause direct mortality for some fauna;
  - Contamination: including nutrient enrichment (e.g. dog fouling), litter, invasive species;
  - Fire: increased incidence and risk of fire;
  - Other: all other impacts, including harvesting and activities associated with site management, for example the difficulties in achieving necessary grazing.
- 2.20 By **damage** we mean the impacts of footfall (or wheels) on vegetation and soils. Issues relate to vegetation wear, soil compaction and erosion, i.e. largely unintentional consequences from the passage of people, pets and vehicles.
- 2.21 Mechanical damage to plant tissue causes a loss of vegetation cover, changes in the plant composition of the vegetation and loss of species, a reduction in the genetic diversity of clonal species (woodland species such as Bluebell and Wood Anemone are clonal) and a reduction in plant height. Trampling can cause damage to root systems and increase water run-off, soil erosion and compaction with consequences for decomposition and nutrient cycling. Compaction can also cause a reduction in organic matter, affecting fertility and the water infiltration capacity of the soil. Compaction can also impact on mycorrhizal fungi, affecting plant uptake of nutrients from the soil.
- 2.22 Other effects of human trampling include the widening of paths and path erosion. Horses, vehicles and bikes are likely to be more damaging than people on foot (Weaver & Dale, 1978) and damage is more severe on slopes compared to flat ground (Weaver & Dale, 1978). Comparison of motorbikes,

horses and walkers showed walkers and horses were most damaging going downhill whereas bikes more damaging going uphill (Weaver & Dale, 1978);

- 2.23 In addition, damage can be deliberate, for example vandalism.
- 2.24 **Contamination** covers pollution and nutrient enrichment and also encompasses the spread of non-native species. Dog fouling is the main vector for nutrient enrichment as dog excrement and urine is nutrient-rich. The total volume deposited on sites may be surprisingly large. At Burnham Beeches NNR over one year, Barnard (2003) estimated total amounts of 30,000 litres of urine and 60 tonnes of faeces from dogs.
- 2.25 Recreation is one of the major pathways for the spread of non-native species. A systematic review and meta-analysis by Anderson *et al.* (2015) found that the abundance and richness of non-native species was significantly higher at sites with recreation and showed a consistent pattern across terrestrial and aquatic environments and with a range of different activity types (e.g. horses, walkers). Allen, Brown & Stohlgren (2009) also found a positive relationship between the number of non-native species present on sites and the number of visitors.
- 2.26 Contamination also extends to litter and fly-tipping (the latter being linked to recreation as isolated car-parks and lay-bys are often utilised).
- 2.27 **Fires** can be caused accidentally from discarded cigarettes, by sparks from a campfire, BBQs or from burning a dumped or stolen car, from fireworks, as a result of a controlled fire getting out of control, from discarded bottles in strong sunlight, from children playing with matches or similar, and from deliberate arson. While deciduous woodland and grassland habitats in the UK are relatively robust in terms of wild fire risk, there is scope for localised damage. Furthermore, climate change is likely to increase the risks of wildfire and the types of habitat affected (Jolly et al., 2015). It is likely that wildfire incidence will occur in situations and vegetation communities where it has previously been rare or very limited (anon, 2017) and increasingly site managers will have to take active measures to minimise risks on sites.
- 2.28 Public opposition can halt or delay management programmes associated with conservation, such as the control of invasive species (Bremner & Park 2007). It can be a particular problem where livestock grazing is needed and in some cases livestock grazing is untenable on sites popular with dog walkers due to worrying and death of sheep by dogs (e.g. Taylor et al. 2005). Access can also influence the distribution of deer within semi-natural

habitats, potentially meaning deer browsing might be concentrated in some areas.

- 2.29 Another potential issue relates to demand for access and pressure for particular interventions, infrastructure or facilities. On sites with current recreation use visitors may well wish for better path surfacing, toilets, cafes, dog bins etc. Where access is not encouraged or there is no access there may be demand from local people and visitors for access to be provided. These issues can bring added pressure for site managers or a need to compromise between nature conservation and recreation.
- 2.30 There is increasing interest in wild foraging. Non-commercial foraging is often seen as a valuable way in which people engage with the natural environment however, commercial foraging can be at a completely different scale and there is concern that it may in some cases be impacting on features of nature conservation importance, although this is debated. Commercial collecting is in some places prohibited, such as in the New Forest.

### Site specific information on recreation impacts

- 2.31 There has been growing awareness of the threats to the Beechwoods from increased recreation use. The combination of activities can also create tensions between different users and Stroud District Council have received complaints relating to off-road vehicles and other recreation issues. It was as a result of these growing concerns that Stroud District Council had commissioned HRA-related work and the visitor survey.
- 2.32 The site improvement plan<sup>10</sup> for the Cotswold Beechwoods SAC identifies public access/disturbance as a threat to the site. The plan states:

"Public use of the Beechwoods has grown considerably over recent years and damage is becoming more widespread. A particular increase has been the use of mountain bikes and horseriding which use the woods far beyond the limited network of bridleways. This has created numerous additional trackways and so increasing the erosion of the ground flora and potentially opportunities for water erosion. Although the routes away from bridleways are not usually permitted, much of the SAC woodland is NNR or has public access by foot. Hence efforts have been made to provide agreed permissive routes with local

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Available on the <u>Natural England website</u>

bike groups with the aim of minimising damage whilst still allowing some use. This is still experimental, and much will depend on the scale of use and whether the users stick to the permissive routes. This approach could also be tried with horseriders. Additionally, dog walking has increased within the SAC especially at Coopers Hill where car parking is available. This has become a particular issue where professional dog walkers release large numbers of dogs (up to 12) to run uncontrolled through the woods. This causes disturbance to wildlife as well as local nutrification through dog faeces."

- 2.33 The plan identifies as an action the need for a strategy to address recreation impacts and identifies the National Trust and local authorities alongside Natural England as delivery partners.
- 2.34 The supplementary conservation objectives for the SAC set targets relating to the soil nutrient status and also specifically to the soil structure around the roots of ancient trees. Trampling from human feet linked to recreation use is identified as an issue. The objectives state that recreational use is increasing.

# 3. Relevant local plans and housing growth

### Defining a zone of influence

3.1 Postcode data from the visitor survey provide a means to identify a zone of influence, within which housing growth may result in an increase in recreation use. Postcode data (distance from home postcode to interview location) are summarised in Table 1, which includes breakdowns by visit type, and weekday /weekends.

Table 1: Summary of postcode data (distance (km) from home postcode to interview location) from visitor survey (Panter & Caals, 2019). Q3 in the third quartile (i.e. 75<sup>th</sup> percentile)

Visit type	Number of interviews	Mean ± Standard Error	Median	Range	Q3		
All interviewees	126	27.5 ± 5.2	7.2	0.05 - 465.1	20.5		
All interviewees by visit type							
Visiting from home	113	14.9 ± 2.5	6.0	0.05 - 223.5	15.4		
Staying with friends/family	2	79.4 ± 67.8	79.4	11.61 - 147.2	-		
On holiday	11	147.9 ± 38.3	153	10.20 - 465.1	185.9		
Interviewees from home by weekday and weekend							
Weekday	33	18.9 ± 7.2	4.5	0.2 - 223.5	17.8		
Weekend	80	13.2 ± 1.9	7.0	0 - 73.1	12.9		

- 3.2 The 75<sup>th</sup> percentile provides a good basis for a zone of influence as it represents the area from which the majority of visits originate. The data show that the majority of visitors are relatively local, however there are always likely to be a few visitors that travel very large distances, for example the interview data included someone on a visit from home that lived 223km away from the survey point. As such, by using the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile the area from which most visitors live can be identified (see Liley, et al., 2021 for discussion, examples and best practice). Based on Table 1, 15.4km represents the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile distance for interviewees who had travelled directly from home. This is shown as a buffer around the entire SAC in Map 7, below.
- 3.3 The five LPAs of interest; Cheltenham, Cotswold, Gloucester, Stroud and Tewkesbury all had 10% or greater of all interviewees, and as a combined area accounted for a 76% of interviewees. We therefore excluded the other LPAs (Forest of Dean and Wiltshire), and also made a minor amendment to follow the River Severn as there are limited crossing points over the river and

it acts as a barrier to access. For simplicity the zone also dovetails to the Stroud District boundary and includes the peninsula of land which includes the village of Arlingham, just beyond 15.4km. These amendments produce the Zone of Influence shown in Map 7.

# Map 7: Interviewee postcodes, 15.4km buffer of the SAC (the 75th percentile distance of interviewees), and the zone of influence.



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### Relevant local plans and policy

### Gloucester, Cheltenham and Tewkesbury Joint Core Strategy (JCS)

3.4 Cheltenham, Gloucester and Tewksbury share a strategic planning document, the Gloucester, Cheltenham and Tewkesbury Joint Core Strategy<sup>11</sup> which was adopted by the three authorities on the 11<sup>th</sup> December 2017. The JCS identifies objectively assessed housing need and sets out requirements for strategic sites, covering the period to 2031. It also contains a suite of strategic development management policies. Policy SD9 relates to Biodiversity and Geodiversity. This states that any development that has the potential to have a likely significant effect on an international site will be subject to a HRA.

#### Cheltenham Plan

3.5 The Cheltenham Plan<sup>12</sup> was adopted in 2020 and runs to 2031. Policy BG1 relates to the Cotswold Beechwoods SAC and recreation pressure. This states that all development within the borough that leads to a net increase in dwellings will be required to mitigate any adverse effects. The need for this strategy is identified and the policy required development proposals to contribute towards the mitigation specified or provide information for a bespoke HRA.

### Gloucester City Plan

The Gloucester City Plan will provide the development framework for the city through to 2031. The Plan has reached an advanced stage of preparation, currently being examined by the Secretary of State (via the Planning Inspectorate)<sup>13</sup>. Public hearing sessions were held in May and June 2021 and a Main Modifications consultation will take place in February/March 2022 with the expectation that the Plan be adopted in the summer of 2022. The Plan includes Policy E6: Development affecting Cotswold Beechwoods SAC. This states that all development that results in a net increase in dwellings will be subject to Habitats Regulations Assessment for likely significant effects. Any development that has the potential to lead to an increase in recreational pressure on the SAC will be required to identify any potential adverse effects

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> See dedicated <u>JCS website</u> (or relevant local authority sites) for download

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Download link from <u>relevant page of Cheltenham Borough Council website</u>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> See relevant page on <u>Gloucester City Council website</u> for details and links

and provide appropriate mitigation. This will be in accordance with the SAC mitigation and implementation strategy or through a Habitats Regulations Assessment.

### Tewkesbury Borough Plan

3.7 The Tewkesbury Borough Plan<sup>14</sup> covers the period 2011-2031. The presubmission version (2019) has policy NAT5 which relates to the Cotswold Beechwoods. All development that leads to a net increase in dwellings will be required to mitigate any adverse effects of increased recreational pressure. Any proposals that would lead to an adverse effect must contribute towards mitigation specified in the SAC mitigation and implementation strategy or through a bespoke Habitats Regulations Assessment.

### Cotswold District Local Plan

3.8 The Cotswold District Local Plan 2011-2031<sup>15</sup> was adopted in 2018. Policy EN4 lists the Cotswold Beechwoods SAC as one of the internationally designated sites in or near Cotswold District. The policy states the development will be permitted where it does not have significant detrimental impact. Further protection for European sites is provided in Policy EN8 (and supporting text) and Policy EN9.

#### Stroud District Local Plan Review

The Stroud District Local Plan was adopted in 2015. Work is underway on the Local Plan review and a draft Local Plan was out for consultation in 2019<sup>16</sup>. This includes Delivery Policy ES6 which provides for biodiversity and includes wording to ensure adequate mitigation is necessary where there are risks to European sites.

### In-combination scale of growth

3.10 Data on potential future housing growth to 2031 were provided by the 5 relevant authorities (Cheltenham, Cotswold, Gloucester, Stroud and Tewkesbury), as a series of GIS files<sup>17</sup> indicating potential large sites/allocations accompanied with estimates of growth from small

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> download <u>link from the examination library</u>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> Download from relevant page on <u>the Cotswold District Council website</u>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Download from relevant page on <u>the Stroud District Council website</u>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> i.e. spatial data that can be loaded into Geographic Information System 'GIS' software

sites/windfall<sup>18</sup> over different areas. The data are summarised in Appendix 1 and were combined in GIS. Windfall/small sites were calculated as a set percentage uplift in the number of residential dwellings per postcode. The data for all housing across all 5 local authorities, in relation to distance from the SAC, are shown in Figure 2. These estimates of housing growth are approximate and a snapshot in time, but highlight the scale of growth requiring mitigation.



Figure 2: Summary of current and future housing with 1km distance bands of the SAC (based on the 5 LPAs of interest).

Within the zone of influence there are a currently a total of 193,349 dwellings (as of February 2020<sup>19</sup>), with 191,848 of these within the 5 local authorities (see Table 2). This estimate of potential housing growth would mean an increase of around 14% in housing within the zone.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> windfall sites being those sites that are not allocated in a local plan and are generally small in size

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Figures extracted from postcode data in GIS that gives the number of delivery points

District	Current	Future housing: windfall	Future housing: allocations/ potental large sites	Future housing total
Cotswold	13,306	491	1,909	2,400
Stroud	39,995	485	11,243	11,728
Tewkesbury	25,421	324	6,632	6,956
Gloucester	57,237	512	920	1,432
Cheltenham	55,889	748	2,933	3,681
Total	191,848	2,560	23,637	26,197

Table 2: Current and future housing within the zone of influence (15.4km). Future housing is for the period to 2031.

# 4. Mitigation

4.1 A suite of mitigation measures should function together to have confidence that adverse effects arising from recreation have been prevented. In most instances when developing a strategy for development, each measure taken alone is unlikely to give that certainty. A combination of measures, developed and targeted after analysis of available information, gives greater certainty. This is because the combination of measures working together reduces risk and builds in contingency for amending the strategy if some measures do not perform as well once implemented. Other measures can continue to function in the short term whilst some are revised. An integrated suite of measures delivered together also improves efficiency, which in turn adds to effectiveness with improved value for money.

### Mitigation approaches in other parts of the UK

- 4.2 Strategic mitigation schemes in other parts of the UK<sup>20</sup> provide a useful precedent and provide examples of different mitigation approaches that have, in some cases been long established.
- 4.3 On-site measures such as increased wardening/rangers (often termed SAMM strategic access management and monitoring) and SANGs are common themes in strategic mitigation for European sites, and all schemes include monitoring to target and hone interventions. Other measures within these schemes have included dog projects (that engage with local dog walkers and promote responsible dog walking), interpretation, changes to infrastructure, codes of conduct and various engagement approaches.
- 4.4 Burnham Beeches and Epping Forest are perhaps of particular relevance given that they are woodland SAC sites, with broadly similar issues from recreation<sup>21</sup>. Schemes are also in place or emerging for the New Forest and the Chilterns Beechwoods. Measures in place at Burnham Beeches include SANGs and also SAMMs<sup>22</sup> (electronic interpretation, carefully planned events and promotion to raise awareness, SAC ranger post, visitor surveys) and there is a presumption against any new development within 500m of the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> such as the Thames Basin Heaths, the Dorset Heaths, the Solent, Epping Forest, Burnham Beeches, South-east Devon, North Kent and Cannock Chase

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> albeit note that these sites lack steep slopes and the long distance route. Also mountain biking is not so popular at these other locations.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> E.g. see <u>Chilterns and South Bucks SAC mitigation strategy</u>

SAC. At Epping Forest, Epping Forest District Council<sup>23</sup> have developed mitigation approaches that involve a combination of SAMM and SANG.

- 4.5 Many of these interventions are widespread and commonly used and there are a range of studies that support their effectiveness (e.g. Allinson, 2018; Burger & Leonard, 2000; Medeiros et al., 2007; Williams et al., 2017), however there is little experimental work or similar to explicitly test or directly compare different approaches.
- 4.6 Many of the measures bring wider benefits besides simply providing mitigation. Enhancing access, providing better connections between local people and their environment, providing education resources and providing new green infrastructure all have wide benefits for society and potential economic benefits.

### Insights from visitor survey work

- 4.7 The access on the site appears to currently be at a moderate level, but with clear hotspots of access (Cooper's Hill being the busiest). These hotspots are different for the different user groups and therefore management will be tailored across the site walkers accounted for 70% of interviewees at the survey point behind the Royal William and 40% of them were on holiday (see tally counts in Map 4 and interview data in Map 5).
- 4.8 Around 29% of interviewees were first-time visitors. These will be unfamiliar with the site layout and potentially most likely to refer to interpretation, online sources and other information in order to decide where to go and how to plan their visit. First-time visitors and holiday-makers tended to be focussed around locations with facilities (e.g. pubs), key access points (large car parks) and points of interest (e.g. Cooper's Hill). Road signage and to a lesser extent information used to plan the visitor will be key for first time visitors who comprised 29% of interviewees.
- 4.9 Access management should be focused towards the busier weekends –
   interestingly 21% of interviewees on weekdays were on holidays (compared to only 9% on holiday on weekdays).
- 4.10 A reasonable proportion access of visitors arrived on foot (28%) and therefore might be missed if engagement was focussed around parking

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> <u>See position statement</u> on Epping Forest District Council website

locations. Providing sustainable transport routes may have some success, although 83% would not have changed their mode, if other modes been available. Cyclists were rarely able to be approached for interview, emphasizing that face-to-face engagement may be hard with this group.

- 4.11 The Cotswold Way receives a high density of visitor footfall. However, parts of the site appear to be much lower (e.g. SSSI Unit 10). It is likely these are different user groups, and the more challenging engagement is likely to be with those visitors in the quieter/more remote areas where they may be harder to intercept.
- 4.12 An alternative country park location would be popular 53% of interviewees suggesting they would use such a site. For dog walkers, this was 63%. A new alternative site with views or undulating topography would be popular (based on the alternative sites currently used). Visitors often select the Beechwoods because it is close to home, but the scenery is a very close second and is therefore important to provide alternatives which meet this criteria given the wide draw, it should be possible to provide intermediate sites which are closer.

### Mitigation approaches for the Cotswold Beechwoods

4.13 Mitigation will consist of SAMM and SANG/infrastructure projects away from the Cotswold Beechwoods. These two approaches would be complement each other.

### SAMM (Strategic Access Management and Monitoring)

- 4.14 SAMM measures at the Beechwoods are required to address recreation impacts and make the SAC more resilient to increased recreation. SAMM would comprise:
  - Dedicated staff;
  - Signs and interpretation;
  - Education & awareness raising;
  - Measures to address contamination;
  - Parking and travel related measures;
  - Monitoring.
- 4.15 Details of all SAMM measures are set out in Appendix 2, with costs for each.
- 4.16 Dedicated staff to deliver a strategic mitigation scheme are essential. Their recruitment should be prioritised over the delivery of other measures,
because they are fundamental to the effective delivery of those measures. A delivery officer is the initial requirement to project manage the delivery of the strategy and it should be the first aspect of the strategy to be implemented as funds are collected. These would provide face-face engagement and an on-site presence and would undertake wider engagement with the community.

- 4.17 A mobile ranger team is a feature of other mitigation schemes such as the Solent, the South-Devon sites, the Thames Basin Heaths and the Dorset Heaths. In these examples the rangers form a mobile team that spend the majority of their time outside, talking to visitors, influencing how visitors behave and showing people wildlife. The advantage of such an approach is that the staff can focus their time at particular sites/locations as required. This means that as particular projects are set up, as development comes forward, or if access issues become a concern at a particular location, the staff can be present and target their time accordingly. Monitoring data can help inform the ranger effort and ensure their work is directly linked to where development comes forward and where there are issues. This then leaves the delivery officer to focus on overseeing the mitigation strategy and management of specific mitigation projects. Furthermore, with on-site ranger presence, there is the scope to expand/shrink this element to provide flexibility and the ability to respond to changes in the levels of growth coming forward.
- 4.18 The ranger post provides an on-site presence and this will need to be accompanied by complementary measures and resources to raise awareness and communicate to visitors. This will include signage, interpretation and digital communication.
- 4.19 Dog fouling and litter/fly-tipping cause contamination and are particular issues. While the heightened ranger presence will help address these, further measures will include additional dog bins and resources to cover removal of fly-tipping and waste.
- 4.20 Measures relating to parking and travel will be informed by a targeted piece of work (by the Delivery Officer) to assess opportunities to influence visitor flows and numbers through the management of parking and the way people travel to the site. Measures could involve changing the number and distribution of parking spaces, provision of bike racks and other infrastructure, links to bus routes etc.

4.21 Monitoring will be important to pick-up emerging trends, such as changes in access and ensure mitigation measures are targeted to ensure value for money and effectiveness. For example, a common theme in many countryside areas is the changing pattern of cycling use as e-bikes become more affordable and popular. These make cycling a more realistic travel option for many and also influence where people go and how far they cycle. The pandemic has also influenced how people use the countryside, for example through more people working from home and visiting areas near to their homes, potentially seeking quieter areas of countryside. Monitoring is important to pick up such changes and ensure mitigation is targeted appropriately.

## SANG (Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace)/Infrastructure Projects (away from the SAC)

- 4.22 SANG is the term given to greenspaces that are created or enhanced with the specific purpose of absorbing recreation pressure that would otherwise occur at European wildlife sites. SANGs are created, or existing greenspaces enhanced to create a SANG, in order to absorb the level of additional recreation pressure associated with new development. Such sites are likely to be effective in providing areas for dog walking. SANGs are however not the only way that green infrastructure can provide mitigation. There may be other opportunities, for example through providing dedicated cycle routes or linking up existing cycle and longer walking routes to encourage use away from the SAC. In some other parts of the country, mitigation measures have included provision of dedicated cycling facilities (BMX tracks near heathlands) or very specific measures such as enhancements to parking to increase capacity at countryside sites away from a European site.
- 4.23 These SANG/infrastructure projects dovetail with SAMM in that they provide additional space for recreation and realistic alternatives to the Cotswold Beechwoods. With SAMM in place, visitors will become more aware of their impacts and access better managed and some use will be deflected away from the Beechwoods entirely. Over time the emphasis for recreation use will shift to the sites enhanced for recreation such as SANG rather than the nature reserves.
- 4.24 All new residential development within the zone of influence will contribute towards SAMM and in addition either provide bespoke SANG (e.g. as part of a large development) or contribute towards SANG/infrastructure projects. This flexibility is important as for example large greenfield allocations may

be able to provide suitable greenspace while small windfall development is unlikely to be able to deliver any meaningful SANG or green infrastructure. SANG guidelines are set out in Appendix 3.

## 5. Implementation

#### Securing developer contributions

5.1 This strategy is intended to set out an approach to enable development through the implementation of measures to rule our adverse effects on integrity for the relevant European sites. Measures are set out and established strategically to ensure they can be delivered and are effective. The option remains for individual developers to provide suitable mitigation through a different approach. Any such cases will need to provide detailed evidence (through a shadow HRA, agreed with Natural England) to support any different measures proposed and rule out adverse effects on the integrity of the Cotswold Beechwoods SAC.

#### SAMM

- 5.2 Mitigation involves both SAMM and SANG. SAMM costs are estimated at a total of £5,031,620 (as summarised in Appendix 2). With an estimated 26,197 new houses coming forward (see Table 2), the per dwelling cost is £193. This is prior to the application of any administration fee. This standard fee is calculated by spreading the cost of the necessary mitigation across the amount of planned development. The charge will be adjusted annually to reflect inflation.
- 5.3 Developer contributions for SAMM will primarily be collected through planning obligations through Section 106 agreements ('S106') or unilateral undertaking. There is scope for each authority to set the administration fee or vary the cost according to dwelling size (e.g. number of bedrooms) as relevant.
- 5.4 The value of £193 per dwelling is in line with other SAMM tariffs for
   European sites or lower. For example, SAMM costs for Penhale Dunes SAC in
   Cornwall are £180 per dwelling<sup>24</sup>; in Dorset they are £406 per house<sup>25</sup>; in the

<sup>25</sup> <u>https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/documents/35024/309543/Dorset+Heathlands+2020-</u> 2025+SPD+Adopted.pdf/bda03d74-cbc9-57c9-b3be-6253ba2825fb

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> <u>https://www.cornwall.gov.uk/media/wmvnoxzz/european-sites-mitigation-spd-july-2021-marine-and-terrestrial-sites.pdf</u>

New Forest they range from £320 to over £800 depending on the size of the dwelling<sup>26</sup>

#### SANG/Infrastructure Projects (away from the SAC)

- 5.5 SANGs/infrastructure projects will be secured through CIL or planning obligation. Some projects will be expected to be delivered directly by developers through on-site provision. The types of potential projects and guidelines are set out in Appendix 3.
- 5.6 Where a contribution is collected, this will be at a standard rate of £480 per dwelling (prior to any administration fee). Details of how this figure is calculated are set out in Appendix 4.

### **Types of development**

- 5.7 This strategy applies to any future development granted planning permission that results in a net increase in residential units (i.e. C3 Use Class), located within 15.4km of the Cotswold Beechwoods SAC. The strategy still applies to development covered by multi-stage consents even if the project had already been authorised by the first or principal consent.
- 5.8 While the strategy is focussed towards C3 Use Class, there are other uses and forms of development that may have impacts on the SAC. Examples of other uses are listed below:
  - Houses in Multiple Occupation (sui generis);
  - Residential institutions within the C2 Use Class where the residents are not severely restricted by illness or mobility;
  - Student accommodation;
  - Sites for gypsy, travellers and travelling showpeople;
  - Tourist accomodation, including self-catering, caravan and touring holiday accommodation.
- 5.9 For the above types of development, this strategy provides a means of ensuring effective mitigation can be delivered, but they will need to be assessed on a case-by-case basis. While in general each unit for the above

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> <u>https://newforest.gov.uk/media/2237/Adopted-Mitigation-</u>

Strategy/pdf/Mitigation\_for\_Recreational\_Impacts\_SPD\_May\_2021\_ADOPTED.pdf?m=6375685618 78200000

could be considered a single dwelling, there may be a need to adjust the rate of contribution for different types. For example, the rate could be adapted according to occupancy rates for tourist accommodation. Project level HRA for tourist applications will need to consider the location and type of use with respect to the Beechwoods, as for example a city centre hotel in Gloucester would have a very different impact compared to a campsite adjacent to the SAC.

#### Overlaps with other strategies

- 5.10 There are strategic mitigation schemes in place or being developed for other European sites and in some areas the zones of influence will overlap. Of particular relevance are:
  - Rodborough Common SAC: updated strategy (2022) includes a 3.9km zone of influence;
  - North Meadow and Clattinger Farm SAC: interim strategy has a zone of 8km;
  - Severn Estuary SPA/SAC/Ramsar: original strategy includes a 7.7km zone of influence, visitor survey work and update to strategy on-going in 2022.
- 5.11 Where zones overlap it will be necessary to ensure mitigation for all relevant European sites and SAMM contributions will therefore be necessary for each European sites. Depending on the SANG requirements in each strategy, multiple SANG payments may not be necessary.

#### Governance

- 5.12 The strategy relates to mitigation delivery across multiple land ownerships using monies collected from different local authorities. Governance needs to ensure appropriate use of resources and ensure a clear structure to authorise finances (allowing flexibility and adaptability to circumstances). There will be the need to make decisions relating to priorities for funding in the initial years, ensuring mitigation delivery matches housing growth.
- 5.13 An initial governance structure is summarised Figure 3 and would provide the means to ensure transparency and fairness. The structure could evolve with time, but as suggested would involve one authority acting as the accountable body, and a group comprising a member from each authority providing oversight. The working group could include site managers and Council staff and would meet to ensure smooth functioning, coordination of

mitigation delivery and practical implementation, providing support for the delivery officer.

- 5.14 Flexibility is accommodated within the structure through the potential for relevant stakeholders and organisations to apply for funding for specific projects, allowing the potential for different mitigation measures to come forward. Any such applications should be made through the delivery officer and the working group. A proforma will be made available for applications which would then be approved by the oversight group.
- 5.15 Figure 3 only includes SAMM payments, however the oversight group would also be responsible for overseeing the SANG/Infrastructure Projects, in terms of the overall approach and authorising the use of any strategic money collected.



Figure 3: Initial governance structure

### Staff hosting

5.16 Three staff are proposed in the early years of the strategy, with a delivery officer and 2 rangers. The ranger staff (and potentially the delivery officer) should be based in or close to the SAC and would ideally be based with the NNR team, however different options for hosting are possible.

#### In-perpetuity and timing of delivery

- 5.17 Mitigation needs to be effective in the long-term, lasting as long as necessary to address any impacts. It is however difficult to predict how access patterns will change in the long-term, and issues and priorities for mitigation may change.
- 5.18 Costs have been derived assuming that mitigation will be delivered inperpetuity<sup>27</sup>. Implementation of measures will be phased with housing growth, ensuring sufficient mitigation is in place before new housing is occupied. This means not all measures will be instigated at once. Some measures will be one-off or short-term in nature. For example, the delivery officer post is necessary in the short-term to oversee the initial infrastructure delivery and other elements of the strategy (and would be one of the first mitigation elements to be funded) but the post is not required in the longterm. One ranger post has funding for 75 years, ensuring a post can run from the early years through while others (such as the post with an education focus) will have a focus in the early years of the strategy only. The early years focus will enable behavioural change and change patterns of awareness that, once established can be continued with the reduced staffing.
- 5.19 Staffing levels and in-perpetuity costs should be regularly reviewed and updated as part of future iterations of the strategy. The strategy should be subject to a detailed review on a 5 year basis, and each review should draw on monitoring results to consider the mitigation delivery achieved to date, housing growth to date and future housing projections, any need for different mitigation measures to be included, the relative balance of SAMM and SANG, the need to revise or update costs and any other changes to the strategy.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> In line with other mitigation strategies this assumed to be 80 years.

5.20 Authorising budgets will be a critical role for the oversight group, as there will need to be decisions relating to setting aside money to fund long-term mitigation as opposed to implementing mitigation in the short term and priorities for delivery. The oversight group and ability for delivery bodies to bid for money will ensure funds are directed as required to ensure mitigation is effective and a 10% contingency is included, to allow for unforeseen changes to costings and provide flexibility in the funds available and how money is prioritised.

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## Appendix 1: Future housing growth

This appendix summarises the data used to estimate the future levels of growth. Housing for the period the 2020-2031 were collated, with separate figures and GIS provided for each LPA.

#### Cheltenham

Cheltenham housing data included Strategic Allocations north-west of Cheltenham and west of Cheltenham (combined total of 3700 dwellings). A further 9 smaller allocations provided an additional 583 dwellings, and sites of mixed use provided (two of which had housing figures) a further 530 dwellings. Windfall for Cheltenham was estimated to be 68 dwellings per annum so we used the figure of 748 homes over the 11 year period (for the period 2011-2031).

#### Future housing: Cotswold

The Cotswold data included provided 366 sites and a total of 3,750 dwellings – noteworthy among these was the largest, the Chesterton Strategic Site, of 1,800 dwellings. A second file of housing allocations detailed 24 sites, totalling 519 dwellings. A final mixed-use site layer included two sites, with a further 58 dwellings. Windfall was based on an average figure of 137 per annum – equating to 1,507 dwellings for the next 11 years.

#### Future housing: Gloucester

Data provided by Gloucester City Council included a total of 920 dwellings for allocations and an estimate of 512 windfall.

#### Future housing: Stroud

Data included draft plan allocations, of which there were 49 sites (43 with residential development), totalling 6,735 dwellings. A further draft plan allocations layer recognised two sites of 3,700 dwellings, and 2015 allocations accounted for a further 9 sites (2 without housing figures), and further 3,713 dwellings. Smaller sites from the current trajectory commitments layer provided 47 sites (4 without housing figures), totalling 1,568 dwellings.

Windfall was given as small site commitments by parish, with 46 parishes having housing figures, totalling 599 dwellings.

#### Future housing: Tewkesbury

Tewkesbury provided data for strategic allocations and pre-submission housing allocations. These provided 27 sites, with a total of 13,655 dwellings.

## Appendix 2: SAMM measures and costs

This Appendix sets out the proposed SAMM measures and estimated costs for each.

Shading reflects phasing for different measures, with blue shading indicating those that are initial priorities and should be implemented first.

Cost categories assign measures to one of 4 categories to allow costs to be scaled: 1 New measures that require annual funding on an on-going basis and are discrete, e.g. additional rangers. These kind of measures have no capital requirements and can be scaled up over time easily; 2 Existing measures that need to be scaled up to deal with additional recreation pressure. There are done on a regular basis and therefore have no capital pulse. These measures differ from 1) in that they are already undertaken, but need to be ramped up to provide mitigation; 3 New infrastructure or other measures that will have an initial capital cost and then subsequent maintenance costs as it is new and additional to that already in place, for example new signage, interpretation boards etc; 4 Measures where an initial capital payment is required, but no annual maintenance costs are necessary. For example, one-off funding to modify an existing car-park (the mainenance of which is already undertaken and budgeted for).

	Measure	Capital/ one- off Cost	Annual Cost	No. years to budget for annual cost	Total Cost	Notes on how cost calculated	Justification	Cost Category
Staff	Delivery Officer		£41,450	10	£414,500	Estimated at £27,000 annual salary, plus 35% (to cover NI, superannuation, etc.) and £5000 per annum support costs .	Delivery Officer, working alongside Ranger but with more of a delivery focus, freeing Ranger post for more face-face time/on site engagement.	1

	Measure	Capital/ one- off Cost	Annual Cost	No. years to budget for annual cost	Total Cost	Notes on how cost calculated	Justification	Cost Category
	1 Ranger		£39,400	75	£2,955,000	Costs per ranger would be: £24,000 annual salary, plus 35% (to cover NI, superannuation, etc.) and in addition vehicle costs and other support costs (£7000 per annum).	Ranger post, focus on face-to-face contact and on-site presence.	1
& Interpretation	1 Ranger with community engagement focus		£19,700	20	£394,000	Costs per ranger would be: £24,000 annual salary, plus 35% (to cover NI, superannuation, etc.) and in addition vehicle costs and other support costs (£7000 per annum).	Ranger post, focus on wider community engagement (including volunteer ambassadors and contact with user groups such as Mountain Bikers)	1
	Support for volunteers		£8,000	20	£160,000	Funding to support volunteer ambassador scheme, cost to cover training, equipment etc.	Part of community engagement and will extend reach of staffing	1
	Audit of current provision	£1,500			£1,500	Undertaken by delivery officer, small budget to cover costs of report production.	Initial work to review current provision, identify gaps and key locations for new provision. Audit needs to check messages and branding on current signs.	4
	Graphic design for new interpretation and signs	£8,000			£8,000	£8,000 for design of new interpretation and messaging relating to highlighting nature conservation importance, risks of fire etc.	Following initial audit	4
Signs	New interpretation boards	£16,000	£1,600	20	£48,000	£2,000 per board for production of timber frame and graphic panel, delivery and installation. Estimate of 8 boards. Annual cost based on replacement every 10 years	New interpretation will provide on- site information for all visitors.	3

	Measure	Capital/ one- off Cost	Annual Cost	No. years to budget for annual cost	Total Cost	Notes on how cost calculated	Justification	Cost Category
	New Signs, waymarking etc.	£28,000	£2,800	20	£84,000	Cost based on 25 posts at £300 per post to cover production, delivery and installation. Treated softwood marker posts, 1.6m high with slanting top and coloured band or marking incorporated. Additional £500 for waymarking discs or signs made of glass reinforced plastic for longevity. Annual cost based on replacement every 10 years.	Way-marking will help focus use in particular areas.	3
cation & awareness raising	Awareness raising strategy	£12,000			£12,000	Estimate of consultancy costs to cover production of shared comms strategy, to include messaging and how to reach horse riders, mountain bikers and dog walkers, messaging re fly-tipping, branding, communication approaches (e.g. use of social media) and hosting of online content etc. Linked to design of interpretation (for which separate budget).	Aim of education and awareness work is to raise profile of conservation and the conservation importance of sites and ultimately lead to more engagement from public and responsible access, targeted towards horse riders, mountain bikers and dog walkers. Need to influence behaviour so approach needs to be carefully thought out.	4
Edu	Social media and web- based content	£2,000	£200	20	£6,000	Costs to cover design and annual fee for updates, hosting etc.	Web-based material and social media content informed by strategy.	3
Addressing contaminat	Dealing with fly-tipping and litter		£1,500	20	£30,000	Costs to cover removal of litter and fly- tipping and measures to help prevent (e.g. management around car parks). Estimate of costs additional to measures already undertaken.	Growing issues with fly-tipping	2

	Measure	Capital/ one- off Cost	Annual Cost	No. years to budget for annual cost	Total Cost	Notes on how cost calculated	Justification	Cost Category
	Dog bins	£2,400	£3,440	20	£71,200	£600 per bin initial cost, for timber fronted dual waste bin; £400 per bin per year to empty. 8 bins, locations to be determined (see parking review). Replacement every 10 years	Additional bins to minimise impacts of fouling and also encourage responsible dog walking	3
Parking & Travel	Review of parking and travel infrastructure	£2,000			£2,000	One-off cost for consultancy support/advice. Bulk of work undertaken by delivery office. Will require all car- parks on SPA visited, plus other greenspace nearby. All parking mapped and assessed and strategic review to consider potential changes. Review should consider parking charges, reducing parking capacity at selected locations, increasing capacity at selected locations, closing selected parking locations, dog bins and other infrastructure. Also sustainable transport issues including bus routes, car charing points, bike racks. Measures need to be phased to fit with wider GI/SANGs.	Will inform potential for long term strategic approach to management of parking and travel options.	4
	Parking improvements/modificati ons	£100,000			£100,000	Potential for costs to be used in conjunction with revenue collected for parking charges; £100,000 would be the equivalent of 1 new car-park with around 25 spaces. Costs anticipated to be spread more widely for more minor changes across more car-parks.	Changes to car-parks to draw visitors to particular locations and redistribute access. Based on findings in the review.	4

	Measure	Capital/ one- off Cost	Annual Cost	No. years to budget for annual cost	Total Cost	Notes on how cost calculated	Justification	Cost Category
	Monitoring strategy	£8,000			£8,000	Strategy to set out visitor survey and monitoring approaches, ecological monitoring and other recording, establishing clear protocols and cost effective approaches for ranger team and others	Monitoring important to inform and underpin mitigation. Important that functions as early warning to pick up issues and feedback to inform implementation.	4
	Visitor interviews	£20,000			£20,000	Estimated cost for face-face interviews with visitors at stratified sample of locations across relevant European sites. Single survey, timed at around 5 years into strategy to help inform plan reviews and review of strategy.	Face-face interviews would give home postcodes, routes walked, awareness and motivations for visiting. Will inform mitigation work and potential sites for SANGs/Infrastructure Projects outside the Beechwoods.	4
Monitoring	Visitor numbers and activities		£8,000	20	£160,000	Monitoring involving repeated transects/car-park counts and other counts. Could be done by consultant, or rangers, or volunteers or automated counters. Detail informed by monitoring strategy. Needs to accurately find a way to record the numbers of bikes in different parts of the SAC.	Regular monitoring to identify the spatial use of different areas and monitor change	3
	Recording implementation of mitigation				£0	No cost as undertaken as part of core work by delivery officer		
	Levels of new development				£0	No cost as undertaken as part of core work by delivery officer/LPAs		
	Ecological		£5,000	20	£100,000	Annual sum available for targeted monitoring/match funding as required. Potential for ranger time as additional support.	Could be targeted to recording trampling damage, mapping fires etc.	3

Measure	Capital/ one- off Cost	Annual Cost	No. years to budget for annual cost	Total Cost	Notes on how cost calculated	Justification	Cost Category
Total				£4,574,200			
10% Contingency				£457,420			
Total inc. contingency				£5,031,620			

# Appendix 3: Guidelines for SANG/infrastructure projects

Alongside SAMM, all new housing will need to provide SANG/infrastructure projects. These could be any one of the following:

- 1. Bespoke SANG delivered by the developer and integrated to the development;
- 2. Contribution towards strategic SANG/infrastructure projects.

All large development (sites around 50 dwellings) will be expected to provide bespoke SANG. However, it is recognised that it will not always be possible, and in some cases, for example some brownfield sites, a contribution towards strategic

SANG/infrastructure projects will be more appropriate. Details and guidelines for the two are set out below:

## Bespoke SANG delivered by the developer and integrated to the development;

In order to have confidence that greenspace is of a suitable size and quality the following attributes will need to be met:

- SANG should be provided at a rate of 8ha per 1000 new residents; this per ha standard is equivalent to 0.0192ha per dwelling (assuming an occupancy rate of 2.4 people per dwelling).
- Sites with sports grounds, playing fields or children's play areas are unlikely to meet the criteria for SANG or if such features are present they should not be counted towards the per ha standard.
- Where sites have existing visitor use, this existing use will need to be taken into account when applying the per ha standard. This will require visitor survey data to be available. Sites are likely to have additional capacity where average visitor use is less than 1 person per ha per hour<sup>28</sup>. Where existing sites are already well used, there will be a need to demonstrate that the measures will be effective, and this may require some delivery upfront.
- The focus for the SANGs should be large sites of at least 40ha (which will accommodate suitably long routes), however smaller sites (15ha and above) may work, depending on the location and quality. For smaller

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> This provides a guide or approximate benchmark, typically busier than the relevant European sites but less than an urban park. Sites will need to be considered on a case-case basis.

sites, connectivity to the Public Rights of Way network will be essential to allow longer routes.

- SANGs should provide parking that is free or significantly cheaper than parking at the European sites (noting that parking at all the East Devon Pebblebed Heath car-parks is free). A guide to parking provision should be in the region of 1.5 spaces per ha of SANG<sup>29</sup>.
- They should be quiet countryside locations, away from traffic noise, industrial sites etc. They should have a sense of space, openness and viable alternatives to the Cotswold Beechwoods.
- They should contain a variety of habitats and be scenic, ideally with views.
- They should provide attractive, informal areas for dog walking: a range of walk lengths on relatively dry terrain, including some of at least 3km where dogs can be safely off the lead during the whole walk.
- They should provide routes that attract walkers, potentially including families. Walks are likely to need to be circuits with some interest (such as viewpoints, heritage features etc.).
- The site(s) should provide access all year round, without areas becoming waterlogged or inaccessible for signifcant periods of the year due to wet or muddy terrain.
- They could provide routes that work for cycling, potentially accommodating family cycling groups and mountain bikes as a low-key destination.
- Access points to the SANG(s) should be primarily within a 5km radius or 10 minute drive and easily accessible by road from the development. Ideally they would provide direct foot access and good access routes for cyclists. Direct access on foot would mean some SANG provision within around 500m radius of proposed housing locations.
- New SANGs should be recognisable as a 'destination' such that sporadic visitors are drawn from a wide area (i.e. not just residents in the new development). As such they will need to be positively promoted and welcoming.
- On-site infrastructure should be relatively low key, and could include the following as appropriate:
  - Small scale visitor centre/shelter (not necessarily staffed);
  - Interpretation (providing information about the area)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> This figure will depend on how close the SANG is to housing and the proportion of visitors that might arrive on foot or by bicycle. A busy SANG site might be expected to have up to 1 person visiting per ha per hour. Visitor data from the East Devon Pebblebed Heaths suggests on average a group would spend a little over an hour per visit and groups of 1.5 per car, suggesting a level of parking provision of around 0.6 spaces per ha to accommodate 1 person per ha per hour. Given that visitor numbers will not be constant every hour (i.e. there will be peak times of visiting) and easy parking is likely to be an important draw (meaning a need to ensure confidence to park), we suggest 1.5 spaces per ha.

- Wayfinding infrastructure to direct people around the site
- Some surfaced paths/boardwalks
- Wildlife viewing facilities (such as screens)
- Range of paths (some waymarked) that provide a range of different routes and circuits, potentially including some longer routes for cycling (perhaps family groups and relatively low-key mountain bike circuits) but not such that other access (e.g. appeal to dog walkers) is compromised
- $\circ$   $\;$  Access to water for dogs to drink, bathe and splash in
- Benches/informal seating
- Viewpoints
- SANGs will need to be promoted through a range of different ways, including signage, so that they are easy to find and local residents (both new and existing) are well aware of the site.
- SANGs will need to provide access in perpetuity, and therefore require some legal mechanism to ensure this.
- Sites with significant nature conservation interest (SSSI) or particualry vulnerable species present are unlikely to be suitable as SANG.

#### Contribution towards strategic SANG/infrastructure projects.

Not all development will necessarily be able to provide bespoke SANG, particularly small development including windfall. In urban areas, there may be limited potential for new SANG. As an alternative and to provide flexibility to enable growth, contributions can be collected instead and these will be used to provide SANG/infrastructure projects in suitable locations.

The contributions will be used to fund:

- The provision of strategic SANG new greenspace sites in strategic locations that will provide mitigation for development in a wide area, these would potentially be relatively close to the Cotswold Beechwoods;
- Improvements to existing open spaces which are already accessible but which could be managed or improved to make them more attractive to visitors who might otherwise visit the Cotswold Beechwoods.

Land purchases for strategic SANG will be costly and will also be dependent on opportunity – suitable land becoming available on the market. There is therefore an element of uncertainty around being able to deliver sufficient SANG using this approach. In order to provide certainty that mitigation is possible and suitable opportunities exist, it will be necessary for the Delivery Officer to work with local authorities and other partners to identify a range of projects at existing sites that could provide suitable mitigation and a likely visitor catchment for each<sup>30</sup>. This will initially focus on 'quick' wins such as existing parks, greenspace sites and the public rights of way network. It could include permitted routes for mountain bikers, changes to parking, signposts, promotion of existing greenspace sites etc. The Delivery Officer can work with local groups, landowners and managers to develop a suite of potential projects which can be approved by the oversight group prior to any funding being confirmed. Greenspace sites are shown in Map 8. These have been plotted using the Open Greenspace data from Ordnance Survey (i.e. a standard national dataset), and these have been filtered just to show public parks and gardens. It can be seen that there are a range of large sites with existing public access and therefore a range of options to draw recreation from the European sites. This would allow mitigation to be delivered in-pace with housing growth and in suitable locations, ensuring mitigation delivery matches the distribution and locations of housing growth.

The working and the oversight groups should be mindful of the potential opportunities for strategic SANG and equally, should opportunities arise, money could be used to purchase strategic SANG. There may be benefits in starting searches for potential purchases before they are on the open market. There may also be wider opportunities. New funding streams associated with nature recovery and biodiversity net gain are emerging, along with funds focused on reconciling environmental opportunities and constraints with the achievement of economic objectives, for example the River Severn Partnership and it's award of government funding to manage flood risk and pay for projects relating to carbon offsetting, habitat improvement and improved greenspaces for local people along the river network. Covid 19 has highlighted the importance of local greenspace and the role of green infrastructure for health and well-being. It may therefore be that opportunities for green infrastructure emerge that provide a means for mitigation money to be effectively targeted and used alongside other funding streams to maximise the benefits. It can be seen that from Map 8 that there is a large area around the Cotswold Beechwoods that appears to have a low density of greenspace sites, and in the long-term the aim should be to use money to address this apparent gap.

Should SANG/Infrastructure project funds accumulate and there be a lack of opportunity for the money to be spent effectively, then the funding should be used to increase the level of SAMM, for example through further wardening. Any such decisions will need to be made by the oversight group.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> In general, any small scale project involving local footpaths with no local parking are likely to relate to development within 500m; smaller sites with parking will draw people from 2.5km or so while larger sites with good parking are likely to draw people from 5km or so.

Map 8: Greenspaces (as defined by OS) around the SAC. Top 10 largest classified as parks and gardens within the buffer are labelled.



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## Appendix 4: SANG/infrastructure project costs

Should bespoke SANG provision not be provided, then SANG/infrastucture contributions will be at a rate of: £480 per dwelling.

This has been calculated on the assumption of:

- £25,000 per ha as typical land price (agricultural land)
- 0.0192 ha of SANG per dwelling (based on the 8ha per 1000 people originally used in the Thames Basin Heaths to estimate SANG delivery; we have assumed 2.4 people as typical numbers of people per dwelling)
- 0.0192\*25,000=480.

As can be seen above, the cost above does not allow any funds for in-perpetuity management of any land, simply the potential purchase cost. Land prices will however vary markedly and land for SANGs could well involve land that is not agricultural land and cheaper. The level of contribution can be refined further once an initial list of potential infrastructure projects has been established by the Delivery Officer. The charge will be adjusted annually to reflect inflation and ensure that the appropriate level of mitigation can be delivered over the plan period.