

SUBJECT	Agreement to the Statement of Common Ground for the Ashridge Commons and Woods Site of Special Scientific Interest. Which forms part of the Chilterns Beechwoods Special Area of Conservation.
SITE	Ashridge Commons and Woods Site of Special Scientific Interest within the Chiltern Beechwoods Special Area of Conservation.
REPORT OF	Simon Meecham
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER	Darran Eggleton

1. Purpose of this Report.

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to give notice that Buckinghamshire Council has authorised the decision to agree this Statement of Common Ground. This Statement of Common Ground has been prepared jointly between Dacorum Borough Council, Buckinghamshire Council, Central Bedfordshire Council and St. Albans City and District Council, hereafter referred to as 'the Parties'.
- 1.2 It sets out the confirmed matters of agreement between the Parties, in relation to the relevant Habitats Regulations Assessment, including the current position on the overall calculation and apportionment of the Strategic Access Management and Monitoring Strategy for the Ashridge Commons and Woods Site of Special Scientific Interest within the Chilterns Beechwoods Special Area of Conservation.
- 1.3 Darran Eggleton as Head of Policy and Compliance, in consultation with Councillor Peter Strachan as Cabinet Member for Planning and Regeneration has exercised his delegated authority from the Service Director for Planning and Environment Stephen Bambrick, to agree this decision.

DECISION

- 1 **That this Statement of Common Ground, attached as appendix 1 and prepared jointly between Dacorum Borough Council, Buckinghamshire Council, Central Bedfordshire Council and St. Albans City and District Council is agreed.**

2 Considerations:

- 2.1 This Statement of Common Ground provides an agreed approach to the current position on the overall calculation and apportionment of the Strategic Access Management and Monitoring Strategy. This forms one aspect of a suite of three mitigation measures to address recreational disturbance within Ashridge Commons and Woods Site of Special Scientific Interest / Special Area of Conservation.

- 2.2 Separate decisions will be taken on further measures to address recreational disturbance for Ashridge Commons and Woods Site of Special Scientific Interest / Special Area of Conservation.

4. Options available

- 4.1 To not agree this decision. This option would mean that developers, the Council and the public would not benefit from the ability to mitigate recreational disturbance from this measure.

5. Corporate Implications

- 5.1 There are no unbudgeted financial or known legal implications in publishing this decision.
- 5.2 This delegation does not require an EIA.

6. Delegated authority

- 6.1 The Council's Scheme of Delegations authorises the Service Director – Stephen Bambrick who in turn has authorised the Head of Policy and Compliance Darran Eggleton.
- 6.2 In exercising this delegated authority and as required by paragraph 2.5 of the Council's Officer Scheme of Delegations the Head of Policy and Compliance Darran Eggleton must consider whether to consult with the relevant Portfolio Holder on the exercise of delegated powers or not to exercise delegated powers but to refer the matter to the relevant councillor or Council Body to decide.

8 Exercise of Delegated Authority

I, Darran Eggleton Head of Policy and Compliance have consulted with the relevant Portfolio Holder who does not consider it necessary to further consult with the relevant councillor or Council Body as this is routine business and I consider it is appropriate for me to exercise my delegated authority for the decision. I agree the above decision.

Signed:



Dated: 03 November 2022

Darran Eggleton

Head of Policy and Compliance

Appendix 1

**Chilterns Beechwoods Special Area of Conservation
at
Ashridge Commons and Woods Site of Special Scientific Interest
and the
Habitats Regulations Assessment**

Novemeber 2022

**Statement of Common Ground
Between
Dacorum Borough Council;
Buckinghamshire Council;
Central Bedfordshire Council; and
St. Albans City and District Council**

Introduction

This Statement of Common Ground has been prepared jointly between Dacorum Borough Council, Buckinghamshire Council, Central Bedfordshire Council and St. Albans City and District Council, hereafter referred to as 'the Parties'.

It sets out confirmed matters of agreement in relation to the Habitats Regulations Assessment including the current position to the overall calculation and apportionment of Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMMS) for the Chilterns Beechwoods Special Area of Conservation (SAC) at Ashridge Commons and Woods Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

Background

The Footprint Ecology Report¹ was published on 14 March 2022. It produced scientific evidence that harm was occurring to the special features of the Chilterns Beechwoods SAC at Ashridge Commons and Woods SSSI. Following this, Natural England issued guidance to the Parties which resulted in the following procedural changes:

- That net new residential development (alongside other forms of development that could give rise to increased recreational pressures) between 500 metres and 12.6 kilometres of the SSSI will be required to identify appropriate mitigation in order to satisfy the requirements of the Habitats Regulations. This area is referred to as the 12.6 kilometre Zone of Influence.
- That similar developments proposed within 500 metres of Ashridge Commons and Woods SSSI are unlikely to satisfy the requirements of the Habitats Regulations². This area is referred to as the 500 metre Avoidance Zone.
- That the Parties jointly develop a strategy to mitigate against future harm.

Since March 2022, the Parties worked with Natural England and the National Trust to develop a mitigation strategy which provides clarity on the measures required to offset recreational pressures at Ashridge Commons and Woods SSSI. An integral part of the strategy is the need to deliver targeted measures on the protected site to accommodate the predicted pressures associated with future growth within the 12.6 kilometre Zone of Influence. Such measures are referred to as Strategic Access Management and Monitoring, or SAMMS for short.

In addition to SAMMS, Natural England advised that new development will also need to directly provide new Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (or SANG for short) or alternatively contribute towards a strategic SANG identified by the Council and agreed with Natural England.

In summary, to ensure certainty that adverse effects on the integrity of the Chilterns Beechwoods SAC do not occur, the following is needed:

¹ Available to view and download at www.dacorum.gov.uk/sac

² This applies only to land within Dacorum Borough Council and Buckinghamshire Council.

- An agreed total cost of SAMMS with agreement between the Parties as to how this cost will be apportioned to each Local Planning Authority; and
- direct delivery of SANG or appropriate contributions towards a SANG in the area.

This Statement of Common Ground deals specifically with matters relating to SAMMS.

Importantly, it agrees the total cost of SAMMS to be secured and its subsequent apportionment to each of the authorities affected. This is an important starting point in the process to enable affected development to come forward, however it remains the case that each of the Parties will need to identify SANG sufficient to accommodate planned future growth.

Total cost of SAMMS

The National Trust has identified a list of projects and interventions for SAMMS. Natural England confirms that the interventions listed meets the requirements of the Habitats Regulations, can count as SAMMS, and are deliverable. The Parties have since reviewed these costs and agree with the advice of Natural England on this matter.

The Parties agree that the effective delivery of SAMMS can only be achieved through a shared resource that will appropriately administer and monitor the contributions from the Parties to the National Trust.

The Parties agree that the overall cost of SAMMS is £18,275,510. The breakdown of these costs are presented in Appendix A of this Statement.

The apportionment of SAMMS to each Local Planning Authority

The Parties worked collaboratively with Natural England to determine the most appropriate approach to apportion SAMMS to each administrative area. This has taken into account a number of recognised approaches that are used elsewhere in the Country.

The Parties agree that the following approach represents the most appropriate option for the apportionment of SAMMS. This approach considers the level of impact relative to existing populations and communities and that the apportioned cost is reasonably balanced in light of planned growth. Further information on the detail of how the cost of SAMMS is apportioned is set out in Appendix B of this Statement.

The Parties agree to the following apportioned costs:

Council/Admin Area	SAMMS apportionment	Cost per dwelling*
Dacorum Borough Council	£9,420,275.04	£913.88 per dwelling
Central Bedfordshire	£1,626,533.37	£182.49 per dwelling
St. Albans City and District	£212,124.16	£828.61 per dwelling

Council/Admin Area	SAMMS apportionment	Cost per dwelling*
Buckinghamshire (North and Central)	£6,998,036.57	£566.23 per dwelling
Buckinghamshire (East)	£18,537.39	£87.03 per dwelling

**NOTE: The per-dwelling figures are based on the total number of planned homes likely to come forward within the timescale of adopted or emerging Local Plans. The costs do not include administration, monitoring, legal and any other fees which will be determined separately by each local authority.*

Governance

The total cost of SAMMS and its apportionment will be defined in a Governance Agreement between the Parties and the National Trust, ensuring contributions are effectively secured and delivered at Ashridge Commons and Woods SSSI in a timely manner to satisfy the requirements of the Habitats Regulations for the Chilterns Beechwoods SAC.

Monitoring and Review

The SAMMS solution identified will be subject to regular monitoring to understand what mitigation is being delivered and whether it is achieving its aims.

The Parties agree that the cost of SAMMS and the effectiveness of the mitigation will be reviewed in three years' time initially³, and at least every five years thereafter. The Parties agree that this will allow sufficient time for measures to begin to be implemented at Ashridge Commons and Woods SSSI and to determine if such measures are effective.

Signatures

Signed on behalf of Dacorum Borough Council



2 November 2022

Alex Robinson
Assistant Director for Planning

Signed on behalf of Buckinghamshire Council

³ As part of a wider review of the mitigation strategy



3 November 3, 2022

Darran Eggleton

Head of Policy and Compliance

Signed on behalf of Central Bedfordshire Council



7 November 2022

Andrew Davie

Assistant Director – Development & Infrastructure

Signed on behalf of St. Albans City and District Council



2 November 2022

Chris Briggs

Spatial Planning Manager

Appendix A – Total Cost of SAMMS

Type of measure	Measure	Description	Capital/ one-off Cost	Annual Cost	No. years (annual cost)	Total Cost	Phasing
Veteran trees	Root protection barriers and protective mulching	Interventions around particular trees to resolve & prevent issues from trampling damage. Informed by monitoring results.	£40,000	£2,500	80	£240,000	Medium
Veteran trees	Selective tree felling along rides	Tree felling to create space for path diversions around root protection zones and to create space for visitors to move and for protection barriers/root protection measures	£8,000	£2,000	20	£48,000	Medium
Veteran trees	[Next generation] veteran and notable tree root protection barriers and protective mulching	Works on next generation of veterans to ensure protection of root impact zones from trampling. To include root protection barriers and mulching.		£2,500	80	£200,000	#N/A

Type of measure	Measure	Description	Capital/ one-off Cost	Annual Cost	No. years (annual cost)	Total Cost	Phasing
Rides and path mitigation	Ride widening (Targeted as agreed with NE)	Targeted work at selected rides/sections of rides to make them more resilient by widening them to enable increased light levels and more wind to reach and dry the ground. One-off piece of work which will not need repeating, but scope for work to be spread across more than 1 year.	£20,000		1	£20,000	#N/A
Rides and path mitigation	Establishment of thick rideside vegetation	Annual phased management of vegetation, to promote the establishment of scrub species along ride edges by planting and/or temporary barriers to protect vegetation from trampling. Also includes chestnut pale fencing and dead hedging.		£7,500	80	£600,000	#N/A

Type of measure	Measure	Description	Capital/ one-off Cost	Annual Cost	No. years (annual cost)	Total Cost	Phasing
Rides and path mitigation	Soil decompaction	Equipment purchase to enable NT Staff to carryout aeration process over time, supporting faster recovery of soil compaction and mitigating against further compaction as a result of visitors numbers to the estate going forwards.	20000	2,000	80	£180,000	Medium
Rides and path mitigation	Track/path surfacing and maintenance.	Budget to support the sustainable management of visitors to the SAC. Initial funding to enable a pulse of repair work and surfacing, to improve resilience / protection of the SAC, including cost for additional repair and maintenance work to tracks, as appropriate within the landscape and where agreed with NE and other parties.	£880,000	£10,000	80	£1,680,000	#N/A
Access management infrastructure	Temporary (seasonal) ride closures, and signs / hurdles etc	Temporary ride closures using hurdles and signs etc. Includes fencing either side of temporary gates. Undertaken as necessary, informed by	£20,000	£2,000	80	£180,000	Medium

Type of measure	Measure	Description	Capital/ one-off Cost	Annual Cost	No. years (annual cost)	Total Cost	Phasing
		spatial plan and monitoring data. Where common land, options are limited but still potential for signs asking people not to use particular routes or paths.					
Access management	Access interpretation, signage and waymarking, inc. electronic interpretation	New access interpretation materials informed by spatial plan with aim of informing, influencing and guiding visitors around the estate.	£150,000	£6,000	80	£630,000	Medium
Access management infrastructure	Temporary signage	A frames or other temporary signs to provide further means of communication with visitors to inform and guide to or from parts of the estate that may be sensitive at points throughout the year.	£2,000	£200	80	£18,000	Medium
Communications (Infrastructure and Parking)	Active visitor guidance to indicate which locations / car parks are available. Mitigating against parking abuse & unwanted verge side parking	Live management of parking spaces – e.g. electronic signs or apps to give visitors live warning that parking was at capacity at particular locations	£25,000	£500	80	£65,000	#N/A

Type of measure	Measure	Description	Capital/ one-off Cost	Annual Cost	No. years (annual cost)	Total Cost	Phasing
Access management infrastructure	Provision of cycling infrastructure*	Provision of secure bike parking, dedicated signs for identified routes. Other minor infrastructure to direct cyclists and encourage more sustainable travel options (£15,000 estimated).	£15,000	£500	80	£55,000	Medium
Access management infrastructure	Provision of dog waste bins (and litter bins)	8 additional dog waste bins and budget for emptying and replacement on 10 year basis	£4,800	£3,680	80	£299,200	Medium
Staff (National Trust)	Delivery Officer x 1	Post to oversee implementation of measures, project manage elements, monitor budgets and reporting.		£50,200	80	£4,016,000	Short
Staff (National Trust)	Ranger posts	2 Permanent Staff roles to provide engagement & 'in person' communication, awareness raising, face-face contact and work with delivery officer to implement projects on the ground		£81,500	80	£6,520,000	Medium

Type of measure	Measure	Description	Capital/ one-off Cost	Annual Cost	No. years (annual cost)	Total Cost	Phasing
Staff (Local Planning Authorities)	Shared SAC Officer	1 Permanent Staff role to support the timely collection and monitoring of SAMM contributions for the partner authorities. Role will liaise directly with the National Trust to ensure measures are being delivered alongside growth, will produce regular reports for the authorities and any other responsibilities as agreed with the partners.		£47,660	15	£714,900	Short
Visitor infrastructure and parking	Protection of roadside verges and control of unauthorised parking	Range of options possible to restrict verge parking. Options include dragon's teeth, banks, verge-side posts, legal options (e.g. double red lines on all through roads, boundary to boundary of the Estate)	£50,000	£2,500	80	£250,000	Medium
Monitoring	Visitor counts	Automated visitor and vehicle counts to provide standardised data on visitor levels and use	£10,000	£10,400	20	£218,000	Medium

Type of measure	Measure	Description	Capital/ one-off Cost	Annual Cost	No. years (annual cost)	Total Cost	Phasing
Monitoring	Visitor interviews	Face-face visitor interviews to gather data on home postcodes, behaviour and general awareness (e.g. interaction with rangers)		£15,000	16	£240,000	Medium
Monitoring	Ecological impact surveys	Targeted ecological work to provide data on condition of rides, recreation impacts etc. Carefully designed to feed into adaptive management.		£3,750	80	£300,000	Medium
Monitoring	Veteran trees, health, condition and checks	Specialist monitoring of veteran trees, to check for root exposure, compaction, and compaction-related decline, further halo thinning or other interventions required in response to changing recreational impacts on veteran trees in close proximity to key areas, paths and trails throughout the SAC. This survey is in addition to the existing approach which incorporates all veteran and notable trees across the		£1,000	80	£80,000	Medium

Type of measure	Measure	Description	Capital/ one-off Cost	Annual Cost	No. years (annual cost)	Total Cost	Phasing
		estate, creating management guidance for conservation care.					
Spatial Plan	Production of prioritised spatial plan to guide monitoring and adaptive management	Work by Delivery Officer with consultant support to develop a strategy which will cover spatial elements of mitigation, plus communication and monitoring to ensure prioritised approach with phased elements and adaptive measures.	£20,000	£2,000	20	£60,000	Short
Total including contingency						£16,614,100	
10% contingency						£1,661,410	
Total including contingency						£18,275,510	

Appendix B – Calculation for the apportionment of SAMMS to the authorities

- The agreed approach takes into account both **growth** and **impact** from each council and has been adopted for similar strategic solutions elsewhere in the Country.
- The impact from each council is calculated using the data collected by Footprint Ecology, using the data for the number of visits recorded at Ashridge Commons and Woods SSSI component⁴.

Example

Number of visits to Ashridge from Dacorum (487) ÷ current population within the ZoI in Dacorum (146,155*) = Visitor Pressure per head caused by current population (0.003332074397626630)

Additional population within 12.6km (24,739**) x Visitor pressure per head (0.003332074397626630) = **51.55%** of additional visitor pressure
51.55% of total SAMM Package £18,275,506.53 = the SAMM apportionment for Dacorum is **£9,420,290.06**

£9,420,275.04 ÷ planned housing in Dacorum (10,308) = **£913.88** per dwelling

*Based on estimated households within the ZoI x 2.4 occupancy rate

**Based on planned housing within the ZoI x 2.4 occupancy rate

A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Local Planning Authority (Administrative Area)	Households within 12.6km of CB SAC	Occupancy Rate	Estimated Population within 12.6km ZoI (B * C)	Visits to CB SAC (2021 visitor survey)	Visitor Pressure per head caused by current population (E / D)	Planned housing within 12.6km ZoI
Dacorum	60,898	2.4	146,155	487	0.003332074397626630	10,308
Central Bedfordshire	55,107	2.4	132,257	88	0.000665372215266058	8,913
Buckinghamshire (North and Centre)	20,586	2.4	49,406	102	0.002064509861070630	12,359
Buckinghamshire (East)	23,637	2.4	56,729	18	0.000317299149638279	213
St Albans	3,310	2.4	7,944	24	0.003021148036253780	256

⁴ Panter. C, Liley. D, Lake. S, Saunders. P & Caals. Z, March 2022, Visitor Survey, recreation impact assessment and mitigation requirements for the Chilterns Beechwoods SAC and the Dacorum Local Plan, **Table 20, Pg. 116**. Available at: [dacorum-recreation-evidence-base-200322.pdf](https://www.dacorum.gov.uk/media/200322.pdf)

Authority (Administrative Area)	% of additional visitor pressure	Apportionment of SAMMS	Planned housing within 12.6km of CB SAC	Charge per dwelling
Dacorum BC	51.55	£9,420,290.06	10,308	£913.88
Central Bedfordshire	8.90	£1,626,536.24	8,913	£182.49
Buckinghamshire (North and Centre)	38.29	£6,998,024.68	12,359	£566.23
Buckinghamshire (East)	0.10	£18,536.33	213	£87.03
St Albans	1.16	£212,122.70	256	£828.60
	100	£18,275,506.53	32,049	