

Thames Basin Heaths SPA
Access Management

Part 2: Draft SSSI Access Management Plans

15 January 2007

Issuing office London

T: 020 7467 1470

F: 020 7467 1471

E info@lda-design.co.uk

Version history		
VERSION	DATE	COMMENT
0.02 (draft)	15 January 2007	Final Draft

This document has been prepared and checked in accordance with ISO 9001 : 2000

Contents

1.0	Introduction to Draft SSSI Access Management Plans.....	2
2.0	Draft Access Management Strategy Ash to Brookwood Heaths	4
2.1	Introduction and Baseline Information	4
2.2	Factors Influencing Access Management	7
2.3	Access Management Objectives and Recommendations	9
2.4	Phase 2 Consultation Comments	10
3.0	Draft Access Management Strategy Bramshill	17
3.1	Introduction and Baseline Information	17
3.2	Factors Influencing Access Management	18
3.3	Access Management Objectives and Recommendations	20
3.4	Phase 2 Consultation Comments	21
4.0	Draft Access Management Strategy Castle Bottom to Yateley and Hawley Commons..	25
4.1	Introduction and Baseline Information	25
4.2	Factors Influencing Access Management	28
4.3	Access Management Objectives and Recommendations	31
4.4	Phase 2 Consultation Comments	32
5.0	Draft Access Management Strategy Chobham Common.....	42
5.1	Introduction and Baseline Information	42
5.2	Factors Influencing Access Management	44
5.3	Access Management Objectives and Recommendations	46
5.4	Phase 2 Consultation Comments	46
6.0	Draft Access Management Strategy Hazeley Heath	50
6.1	Introduction and Baseline Information	50
6.2	Factors Influencing Access Management	51
6.3	Access Management Objectives.....	52
6.4	Phase 2 Consultation Comments	53
7.0	Draft Access Management Strategy Whitmoor Common.....	56
7.1	Introduction and Baseline Information	56
7.2	Factors Influencing Access Management	58
7.3	Access Management Objectives.....	59
7.4	Phase 2 Consultation Comments	59

1.0 Introduction to Draft SSSI Access Management Plans

The Thames Basin Heath (TBH) Special Protection Area (SPA) covers thirteen Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). The following draft access management plans address access management at the SSSI level. The SSSI Access Management Plans are advanced to a second draft stage, following a two phase consultation process, and will be subject to further development and consultation by Natural England.

The SSSI Access Management Plans are intended to be read in conjunction with the Thames Basin Heaths Access Management Part 1 Strategic Report. The strategic report addresses the following:

- Introduction to the study
- Aim and objectives
- Methodology
- A spatial overview of the Thames Basin Heaths SPA
- Access Management and Ecology of the SPA
- Consultation report
- Developing the access management recommendations
- Access management at the scale of the SPA

This work reports on Natural England Contract *FST 20/02/016 Access Management Plans for the Thames Basin Heaths SSSIs*. The work has been undertaken by LDA Design, Baker Shepherd Gillespie and Alison Millward Associates between September 2006 and January 2007.

It comprises the second part of the work undertaken, and is a component of a three-fold approach to the management of the SPA promoted by Natural England. The approach incorporates the following components:

- The strategic planning of housing allocations, tied to the provision of alternative natural greenspace, to absorb additional visitor pressure and divert it from the SPA.
- Land management measures to ensure that the bird habitats and populations are as robust as possible.
- Access management to protect wildlife and facilitate public enjoyment of the heaths. This is the focus of this work.

Document Status

It is important to note that the Part 1 Strategic Review and Part 2 Draft SSSI Access Management Plans are drafts which will be subject to further consultation.

It is recognised that the plans may contain measures which are potentially controversial and which will need wide public support to be deliverable. Although some of the measures proposed have been welcomed by those involved in consultation meetings to develop the plans to this draft stage, they have not been worked up in detail and have not been formally accepted in any case. In addition a wider consultation process is required and this may include more detailed consultation with landowners and managers as well as wider public consultation. Controversial measures may only be acceptable where wide public support can be established, or where there are no alternatives for preserving the special interest of the SPA.

These current drafts are based on current information made available for this work. Future changes in habitat cover, SSSI condition, bird populations and visitor pressure need to be monitored and access management priorities adapted accordingly.

These draft documents are consultants' reports and Natural England will undertake further work to take the draft access management plans forward.

2.0 Draft Access Management Strategy Ash to Brookwood Heaths

2.1 Introduction and Baseline Information

The following Draft SSSI Access Management Plan addresses access management at the SSSI level. This plan is advanced to a second draft stage, following a two phase consultation process, and will be subject to further development and public consultation by Natural England. The Draft SSSI Access Management Plan for this particular SSSI is intended to be read in conjunction with the Thames Basin Heaths Access Management Part 1 Strategic Report.

2.1.1 Introduction

Ash to Brookwood Heaths is located in a central southern position within the Thames Basin Heaths SPA as a whole, situated to the east of Farnborough and north of the A3. Ash to Brookwood Heaths is one of the largest SSSIs that comprise the Thames Basin Heaths SPA, encompassing over 1000 hectares.

Ash to Brookwood Heaths is a relatively unfragmented site and is the largest area of heath unbroken by a main road. This SSSI is comprised of two parts; Ash and Brookwood. A large proportion of the site is within a Military Danger Area. It also comprises in the larger section adjacent to Ash, Pirbright Common and Ash Ranges, and a smaller area near to Brookwood known as Bullswater Common is located adjacent to the settlement of Pirbright and Brookwood Cemetery.

Ash is much larger than Brookwood and is situated east of Farnborough and Mychett, and north east of Aldershot and these urban conurbations fringe the western side of the Ash part of the SSSI. The eastern and south eastern side of Ash comprises mixed farmland and small villages. To the north is a coniferous plantation and a railway line and north of that is the Colony Bog and Bagshot Heaths SSSI.

Brookwood is separate from Ash and much smaller, and comprises Bullswater and Pirbright Commons. It is located some 1 to 1.5 kilometres to the east of Ash and south east of the village of Pirbright and is fringed by mixed farmland, Brookwood Cemetery and villages.

The SSSI citation report describes Ash to Brookwood Heaths as follows:

'The commons, army ranges and other heaths included within this site form the largest area of dry heathland remaining anywhere in the London Basin together with extensive wet heath, bog and associated habitats. They support rich communities of plants and animals, many of which, like the heathland habitats upon which they depend, are becoming increasingly rare.'

'The major part of the site consists of a large block of heathland centred on the army ranges of Cleygate, Wyke and Ash Commons and part of Pirbright Common. Three other extensive heathland areas lying to the east, Brookwood Cemetery, Bullswater Common to the south of this, and Stanford Common (Cobbett Hill), are also included.'

Ash to Brookwood Heaths is noted within the Thursley, Ash, Pirbright and Chobham Special Area of Conservation (SAC). The primary reason the SAC has been notified for three habitats, as follows:

1. Northern Atlantic wet heaths with *Erica tetralix*
2. European dry heaths
3. Depressions on peat substrates of the *Rhynchosporion*

2.1.2 Baseline information

A large proportion of the Ash section of the SSSI is a military Range Danger Area, and extends from ranges in the south west corner, to those in the north east and east. Access by the public to the Ranger Danger Area is denoted by flags, which usually restrict access between 6 am and 4 pm seven days a week. Access restrictions are lifted during some public holidays, notably at Christmas, Easter and for a period during the summer, however access is unpredictable.

The PROW network is extensive to the north, east and south of the site. It is noted that there is no PROW or waymarked paths within the Range Danger Area. Fire breaks and military tracks are utilised by visitors in this area. It is noted that the Range Danger Area is fenced and a surfaced track runs the full length of its perimeter. A bridleway and footpath connect the eastern settlement edge of Farnborough to the north western edge of the SSSI and a number of isolated properties. In this area the footpaths are terminated to the north by the Hook to Woking railway line. A number of footpaths and bridleways to the east and south of the main body of the SSSI connect the SSSI edge to neighbouring villages and settlements, and via the local road connect the main body of the SSSI with Brookwood Heaths. Brookwood Heaths are traversed in a north west to south east direction by a Byway Open to All Traffic (BOAT), which is noted as a location for a number of informal car parks.

The habitat and distribution of Annex 1 bird species is discussed below for each section of the SSSI, and is illustrated in Figure 13.

Ash – Pirbright Common and Ash Ranges

Habitat Distribution

This is the larger of the two parts of the SSSI extending some 4 to 6 kilometres north to south and generally 3 to 4 kilometres east to west. The bulk of the Ash section of the SSSI is within a Military Danger Area with remaining areas outside of MoD restrictions on the northern edge, a narrow fringe on the southern edge and two small areas on the eastern edge of the site. Footprint Ecology has mapped the broad habitat types on the heath using high resolution aerial photographs from 2005 and some limited ground truthing.

In summary, the central area covered by the Military Danger Area is largely open heathland with some areas of mature coniferous woodland. The open areas support a mosaic of dry heath and mixed heath, whilst the mature coniferous woodland has small patches of recently clear felled and young plantation. Grassland habitats including acid grassland are also present associated with the rifle ranges situated along the western and eastern fringes of the SSSI.

To the north of the Military Danger Area the site is dominated by mature coniferous woodland although there are up to four areas of open land of varying size within the forest plantation that support dry heath and mixed heath. There are two areas of farmland habitat and areas of clearfell or young plantation.

The southern edge of the site outside the Military Danger Area is also dominated by mature coniferous woodland with a few areas of open dry heath and mixed heath habitat that is continuous with the main Military Danger Area heathland habitats.

The eastern edge of the Ash site outside the Military Danger Area is similar to the southern edge and is dominated by mature coniferous woodland with a few areas of open dry heath that are continuous with the open heathland habitats for the Military Danger Area.

Public Visitor Pressure

The research undertaken by Footprint Ecology for Natural England has mapped different levels of disturbance from visitors to the SSSI. These are presented in Figure 15.

In summary, the highest levels of visitor pressure are experienced in the areas outside the Military Danger Area. This is not surprising given the restrictions placed on public access to the Military Danger Area. There are isolated and relatively small areas of Ash that are subject to high to very high visitor pressure, principally associated with the location of a number of scattered informal car parks.

SPA Bird Distribution

The distribution of Dartford warbler, nightjar and woodlark have been mapped by Footprint Ecology and are presented in Figure 13. Almost all of the records for these three species are within the central Military Danger Area of the site. Dartford warbler and nightjar are evenly distributed throughout this central area, whereas woodlark is located in the north and western thirds of the open heathland area. In the northern area outside the Military Danger Area nightjar is also recorded where it is associated with clearings and clearfell within the mature coniferous plantation in this part of the site.

Nightjar has been recorded in lower numbers (70 territories) than Dartford warbler (132 territories) but greater numbers than woodlark (39 territories).

In the southern areas outside the Military Danger Area there are a handful of records for nightjar and Dartford warbler within the mixed heath that is continuous with the habitats of the Military Danger Area.

There are also a small number territories recorded in the eastern arm of the Ash site south of the road linking Pirbright and Littlefield Common. These records appear to be within mature coniferous woodland, but checking against aerial photographs indicates that this part of the SSSI does support open areas of heath.

Relationship between Birds, Pressure and Habitats

It is apparent from the data provided by Footprint Ecology that the areas of open heathland habitat that are least disturbed in the Military Danger Area are the parts of the SSSI that support the highest densities of breeding birds. In addition, the site is not subject to high levels of visitor disturbance over much of its area. This combination of high quality habitat and low levels of disturbance provide good conditions for breeding birds and it is for this reason and the extent of habitat that Ash supports the highest numbers of all three species for any one site within the SPA. The south western corner of the Military Danger Area is one of the few parts of the site that is subject to high visitor pressure owing to the close proximity to urban settlement. There appears to be fewer bird territories in this area, but this may partly also be due to the nature of the habitat at this location which includes the firing ranges that comprise strips of heath and grassland between scrub and woodland. As well as high visitor pressure the density of bird territories may also be influenced by the proximity to the edge of the site as described by Liley *et al.* (in publication).

Outside the Military Danger Area the Ash part of the site is dominated largely by mature coniferous plantation with birds restricted to clearings and clearfell areas. These areas in addition to the quality of habitat, may also be influenced by proximity to the edge of the site as described by Liley *et al.* (in publication).

Brookwood – Bullswater Common

Habitat Distribution

Brookwood supports a mosaic of mature coniferous woodland with some areas of clearfelled or young plantation and dry heath. Although not picked up by the aerial photograph analysis it is known from interviews with the site managers that the dry heathland in the northern part of Brookwood is in fact damp to wet in places but much is suitable for nesting Annex I birds. The largest area of open heath in 2005 was located in the northern half of the site.

Public Visitor Pressure

The research undertaken by Footprint Ecology for Natural England has mapped different levels of disturbance from visitors to the SSSI. These are presented in Figure 15.

Brookwood is subject to very high visitor pressure, although variation across this area has been noted with less visitor pressure or disturbance in the north and within the middle of this part of the site.

SPA Bird Distribution

There are few records of territories for the three bird species for which the SPA is classified and these are presented in Figure 13. The northern half of the site supports all but two of the records including 5 records for Dartford warbler, 5 records for nightjar and 1 record for woodlark. There is 1 territory recorded for Dartford warbler and 1 for nightjar on the southern edge of the Brookwood site.

Relationship between Birds, Visitor Pressure and Habitats

The Brookwood part of the site appears to have a concentration of territories of all three bird species in the northern half of the site yet the whole of the Brookwood part of the SSSI is subject to high visitor pressure as mapped by Footprint Ecology. Information provided by site managers indicates that the damper uneven ground in the northern half of the site may discourage visitors from straying too far from the main public right of way that crosses this part of the site. In addition, habitat restoration work has been more recent in the southern part of the site.

2.2 Factors Influencing Access Management

2.2.1 Access management constraints

The vast majority of the main body of site is owned by the MoD Defence Estates and managed under contract land agents Landmarc. The MoD Defence Estates ownership extends beyond the boundary of the Range Danger Area. A number of smaller areas are under private ownership including Cobbett Hill area to the South East of Ash Ranges. Bullswater Common is owned by Woking Borough Council and two small areas under private ownership. Pirbright Common is owned by Guildford Borough Council. The land ownership is illustrated in Figure 11.

The large majority of the site is designated as 'Open Country' under Section 4 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, and is therefore not Registered Common Land, but is considered 'access land' under the act. It is noted that Range Danger Areas are excluded from CROW 'access land'. A section of the eastern portion of the main body of the SSSI and small parcels of Bullswater and Pirbright Commons are also designated as 'Open Country'. The access baseline for this SSSI is illustrated in Figure 12.

2.2.2 Recreational Use and Current Objectives

The majority of visitors to the SSSI are described by consultees as local. The north western section of the SSSI is traversed by the Ash Vale to Woking railway line, a section of which is through a tunnel, and Mytchett Place Road. Consultees stated that the number of railway lines to the north and west, the Basingstoke Canal to the north and west and the A331 create significant barriers to movement from the west and the north towards the SSSI. Visitor pressure at the western edge of the site is therefore mostly, though not exclusively from local residents.

The primary recreational use for the site is considered by consultees to be dog walking. A circular walk encompassing Bullswater Common, Pirbright Common and Fox Corner to the south is popular. A number of other recreational activities are undertaken under permit on MoD Defence Estate land. These include orienteering, horse riding, camping and filming, for example. Clay Pigeon shooting is known to occur on private land to the north east of Bullswater Common, within the SPA boundary. Consultees noted a number of incidents of

illegal activities within the SSSI, and incursion into the SSSI by motorbikes. It is suggested by consultees that the incidents of illegal activities is reduced because of a level of informal surveillance from local residents.

2.2.3 Existing Land Manager / Owners Management Objectives

Existing documents which should be referred to in conjunction with this Access Management Plan include:

- Defence Estates, English Nature & Army Training Estate (2000). *Ash and Pirbright Training Areas and Ranges Management Plan*.
- Defence Estates (2004). *Aldershot Training Area ILMP. ATE Home Counties Version 2*.

Ash to Brookwood Heaths is subject to a number of existing management measures. Recreational activities on the MoD Defence Estates land are subject to a permit scheme, implemented in liaison with Natural England and designed to control recreational pressure. In addition, this area is wardened seven days a week by MoD staff. It is noted that MoD improved the site fence over Christmas 2006 and Surrey Wildlife Trust will begin grazing a large portion of the Range Danger Area over the next 6 months.

Bullswater Common and Pirbright Common have undergone a number of habitat management measures, including fencing and grazing of some areas by the Surrey Heathland Project, and as a result of the presence of a variety of habitats and features, including fire breaks, areas of taller heather by paths, patches of gorse and purple more grass, there has been inadvertent control of pedestrian movement.

2.2.4 Potential SANGS

There are a number of potential SANGS identified by LUC within close proximity of Ash to Brookwood Heaths. They are principally located within the urban fabric of Farnborough to the west, south of the Hook to Woking railway line near Pirbright and on the north western edge of Guildford.

An area of woodland adjacent to Normandy, to the south of the SSSI, has been identified as a potential SANG. It is considered by consultees to be already well used and popular with dog walkers.

Potential SANGS to the north west of Pirbright have been restored to heathland by the Surrey Heathland Project, and would therefore offer the same visitor experience as the SPA. Brookwood Cemetery to the north east of Pirbright is currently disconnected from Pirbright and Bullswater Common. It does however, contain areas of heathland and it is suggested by consultees that there is the potential to improve links between these areas, contributing to a redistribution of visitor pressure.

Potential SANGS identified within Guildford and at the north western settlement edge include the Riverside, Chantry Wood, Lakeside near Aldershot and Effingham Common, and form a part of the Guildford Borough Council SANG Strategy. The Guildford Borough Council SANG Strategy has undertaken visitor surveys for these sites and considers that at present their use is Low to Medium, and they are currently implementing a number of access infrastructure measures and marketing and promotion to encourage future use of these sites.

2.2.5 Implications for management

'Priority Management Areas' have been identified and are illustrated in Figure 16. Four scenarios A to D for priority management have been identified, and are discussed further in the Part 1 Strategic Report.

At Ash, large areas, notably SSSI management units 11, 14, and 16, contain good quality habitat, low visitor pressure and high bird numbers, and as a result are identified as high priority management areas, Scenarios A and B. These areas contain the best asset as far as the SPA is concerned and the priority here should be access management which prevents disturbance increasing beyond a point where there is likely to be a decline in bird density or breeding success.

The remainder of Ash is considered fragmented, with patches of Scenario C lower priority management areas, low priority habitats and coniferous woodland managed on rotation throughout SSSI management units 6,9,10, 13 and 17. In Scenario C areas there are low numbers of bird territories and low visitor pressure; the key factor is likely to be the low quality of the habitat. The priority in these areas should be to consider habitat management measures, although access management may be important to support these. The overall priority of applying access management in these areas therefore depends on specific habitat restoration or management measures proposed and also on whether the habitat management measures are likely to lead to increased visitor pressure.

At Brookwood the majority of the site is considered as high priority management areas, Scenario B, particularly in SSSI management units 2 to 4. These Scenario B areas are the priority areas within the SPA for reducing the impacts of visitor pressure, or visitor pressure itself, to improve the breeding success of bird densities. The remainder of the site is coniferous woodland managed on rotation and future changes in the habitat should be considered.

2.3 Access Management Objectives and Recommendations

2.3.1 Access Management Issues

Ash

- Pressure from Aldershot, Farnborough and Mychett to the west.
- Isolated and relatively small areas of Ash are subject to high to very high visitor pressure, principally associated with a number of scattered informal car parks.
- The highest bird populations are concentrated in the heath habitat in the middle of the Military Danger Area; conversely, the peripheral areas contain low numbers of birds. The majority of the peripheral areas are coniferous woodland with fire breaks. Dog walking on peripheral areas outside the Military Danger Area is thought to be a key pressure, particularly from the west.

Brookwood

- High to very high modelled pressure on relatively small areas of dry heath, however use is thought to be local.
- Informal car parking along roads near Pirbright Common may encourage wider infiltration into this heath.

2.3.2 Access Management Objectives and Recommendations

Ash

The overall access management objectives for the Ash section of the SSSI should be to:

1. Reduce visitor pressure across the site as a whole, in particular in areas of moderate and high modelled pressure on the western edge of the site.
2. Avoid displacement of the pressure to other parts of the SSSI or to other parts of the SPA, in particular SSSI unit 5, maintain low levels of modelled visitor pressure.
3. Reduce visitor pressure and disturbance of the heath habitat during the breeding season.
4. Control access to recently clear felled forestry units in the peripheral areas of the site outside the MoD Danger Area.

5. As part of these, maintain the current level of public access restrictions to the Military Danger Area and review and minimise disturbance to the Military Danger Area from the public and MoD licensed activities during the bird breeding season where compatible with current and future military objectives.

Ecological rationale:

The highest density of the three breeding birds species for which the SPA is classified occur within the MoD Danger Area. This area is also subject to a low level of visitor pressure and as such any increase in disturbance is considered likely to result in a reduction in numbers of breeding birds. There are a few records for breeding birds within the peripheral coniferous forestry areas. It is considered that birds will take new opportunities to nest in areas of recently clearfelled areas and that excessive disturbance of these areas may result in breeding failure or prevent any breeding attempts.

There is suitable habitat cover in the western shooting ranges for birds; although these areas contain low population densities, measures should seek to reduce disturbance.

The area of high pressure to the north is outside the SPA. To the north-west, the high modelled pressure is in an area of coniferous woodland. Both of these areas are of lower priority due to the habitat cover except in the open clearings which support bird species and with less disturbance have the capacity to support significantly higher populations of Annex I birds.

Brookwood

The overall access management objective for the Brookwood section of the SSSI is to:

1. Reduce high to very high modelled visitor pressure on these relatively small areas of dry heath to provide additional capacity to offset future increased pressure.
2. Reduce visitor pressure during the bird breeding season to the whole of this part of the SSSI, with priority being given to the northern half of the site.
3. Ensure access management complements restoration of the southern part of the heath.

Ecological rationale:

This part of the SPA is subject to high levels of visitor disturbance and this is considered likely to increase with the construction of new homes within 5 kilometres of the SPA. The site is small in extent and supports a small number of breeding birds and increased visitor disturbance is likely to result in a reduction in breeding bird numbers or increased risk of breeding failure.

It is noted that the SAC habitat should not be compromised by access management measures.

2.4 Phase 2 Consultation Comments

The respondents to the phase 2 consultation workshop generally welcomed the contents of the Access Management Plan. The following general comments were made:

- The vast majority of the site has only a small number of visitors and public access should remain at present levels.
- Control of dogs on leads is crucial to all these areas during the nesting and breeding season. It is noted that dog walkers encourage dogs into ponds across the site, which are very important dragonfly habitat, and that dogs enter heather from footpaths. A strategy for dogs on leads is required and commercial dog walking is a problem. At Ash most of the dog walking is in woodland or on well used military roads.
- Bird numbers are high due to low visitor impact (numbers) combined with military access restrictions and a great deal of investment in habitat management.

- At Brookwood there is the potential for some reduction in local car parking. Parking could be more restricted in Chapel Lane. To control visitor numbers closing the car park at either end of BOAT, and improving the second car park at the north western end of BOAT is noted. Wish to keep two car parks on western edge of site, and close down the northerly of the line of four along the western edge and note that the most southerly of this line of four no longer exists.
- At Ash Ranges the status quo on car parking is considered fine and informal 'rough' car parking limits numbers. There is considered no need to formalise the car parks here.
- At Cobbett Hill access is limited by available car parks as well as private (non-open access) status.
- In support of a positive approach combining a number of plans to educate and 'control' where required.
- Whole heartedly agree with the principles of this strategy and would welcome landowners/managers workshop to give consensus to specific access and habitat management objectives.
- This site has benefited from the fires of '86 showing that fire is the best form of restoration of heathland. Also the period of burning is now obvious to be about 20 years. The increase in scrub has now reached a point where it needs to be dealt with to maintain the required habitat cycle.
- Bulswater and Pirbright Common are part of the MoD Estate memorial common land sold to Guildford Borough Council for £1.
- It is noted that none of the SANGS are in place yet.
- It is noted that Brookwood is 'Section 193' land but not registered as such.

Access management objectives and recommendations are suggested below, in order to address the access management issues listed previously. These objectives and recommendations are specific to Ash to Brookwood Heaths and should be read in conjunction with strategic and SPA wide objectives and recommendations detailed in Part 1 of this report.

Ash

	Objective	Recommendations	Detail	Rationale	Deliverability
1	Reduce impact on peripheral areas from residential areas of Aldershot, Farnborough and Mychett to the west.	Soft measures	Public education initiatives, including dogs on lead during breeding season, signage at key locations (main entrances and car parks), supported by wider package of soft / education measures.	Aim to change the behaviour of visitors and reduce the numbers of visits to accommodate capacity for future predicted increases in visitors. Reducing adverse effects of dog-walking pressure on these areas should help to buffer extensive areas of valuable heathland habitat in more central areas.	Needs further discussion with MoD. There is potential for delivery through a review of byelaws (which might, for example encourage dogs on leads at certain times of the year) but enforcement of dogs on leads is difficult. Phase 2 consultation respondents generally agreed with this objective.
2	Reduce impact on peripheral areas from residential areas of Aldershot, Farnborough and Mychett to the west.	Encourage local visitors to use the Blackwater River and Basingstoke Canal as an additional recreational resource, subject to appropriate review of the resource through a local SANGS delivery plan.	String of SANGS to deflect attraction of western edge of site.	Reduce visitor pressure (or neutralise, taking into account potential increases in pressure arising from future development).	Subject to local SANGS delivery plan. Phase 2 consultation respondents generally agreed with this objective.

	Objective	Recommendations	Detail	Rationale	Deliverability
3	Reduce pressure from isolated and relatively small areas which are subject to high to very high visitor pressure, principally associated with a number of scattered informal car parks.	Restrict informal parking, reduce unofficial parking areas.	<i>Informal car park locations and formal car parks to be investigated during ground truthing exercises.</i>	Focussing parking to formal car parks which are of a known size should help limit visitor numbers (at least those arriving by car) and subsequent pressure. Currently parking and access to parking is limited, particularly along the North, East and South of the site and this should be maintained.	Dependant on liaison with local highways authority and further consultation with MOD. Should be subject to ongoing review. Phase 2 consultation respondents generally agreed with this objective.
4	Reduce impact on peripheral areas from residential areas of Aldershot, Farnborough and Mychett to the west.	Zone the shooting ranges according to habitat cover during the sensitive breeding bird period and encourage visitors to avoid key areas at this time	Allow dogs-off-leads in some areas, ensure dogs-on-leads in others during the sensitive breeding bird period.	Match pressure from dog walking with habitat which is more capable of absorbing the disturbance caused by dogs and less likely to support SPA bird species. This should also be undertaken in combination with consideration of the impacts on the SAC habitat, in particular dry Atlantic heaths.	
5	Maintain low levels of modelled visitor pressure on SSSI unit 5.	Maintain woodland buffer around peripheral path, where this does not impact upon SAC, SPA or SSSI interest features.		Discourage infiltration into heath.	

	Objective	Recommendations	Detail	Rationale	Deliverability
		<p>Monitor visitor pressure as there is currently good habitat, birds present and low visitor pressure.</p>		<p>If pressure raises to an unacceptable level, consider rationalising car parking and providing a circular route in the non-open portions of the remaining forestry plantation. Also consider removing small lay-bys along road.</p>	

Brookwood

	Objective	Recommendations	Detail	Rationale	Deliverability
6	Reduce high to very high modelled pressure on relatively small areas of heath.	Restrict car parking at Pirbright Common.	<p>Reduction in informal parking along roads, lay-bys, parking on verges, etc. Rationalise bigger car parks in consultation with locals.</p> <p>Informal parking on Chapel Lane should be considered for reduction, in line with promotion of formal car park or alternative car park locations and physical measures to prevent unwanted informal car parking.</p> <p><i>Informal car park locations and formal car parks to be investigated during ground truthing exercises.</i></p>	Informal parking along the roads is thought to encourage wider infiltration into this heath. A reduction in the number of visitors who arrive to the site by car.	<p>Liaison with local highways authority necessary. Subject to ongoing review.</p> <p>Phase 2 consultation respondents generally agreed with this objective, although one disagreed.</p>
7		Maintain tussock vegetation at edge of BOAT to discourage people straying onto it; alternatively fence at a distance from the BOAT, where compatible with the legal status of the site.	The BOAT through the centre of the site is already thought to be a principal movement axis; vegetation cover discourages infiltration into the heath. Reinforce these access patterns.		

	Objective	Recommendations	Detail	Rationale	Deliverability
8	Reduce high to very high modelled pressure on relatively small areas of heath.	Engage and enable local volunteer groups.	Develop community links, potentially using a wide range of soft measures, including wardening/volunteer presence on site, local information boards, local forums, education and interpretation. Use local volunteer groups to develop appreciation of asset.	A significant proportion of the user base is thought to be local. Local users are thought to have been supportive of management such as grazing and burning; nurture this through continued efforts to build community stewardship for the heath.	Could be encouraged through strategic SPA-wide wardening / delivery partnership with education officer. Phase 2 consultation respondents agreed with this objective.
9	Reduce high to very high modelled pressure on relatively small areas of heath.	Encourage wider linked network of heathland type sites as a circular walk.	The BOAT through the centre of the site is already thought to be a principal movement axis, for example it is used as a link to Fox Corner, further extend this link to draw people towards heathland restorations to NW and beyond to other SANGS, potentially taking in the canal. Approach can be used as access management for a number of SPA sites (see Colony Bog recommendations).	Draw people away from areas of preferred breeding and nesting habitat on this site. Effectively this is reinforcing patterns of use which are already evident.	Subject to local SANGS delivery plan. Phase 2 consultation respondents generally agreed with this objective.
10	Ensure access management complements restoration of the southern part of the heath	Monitor birds and people on these areas, including PROWs.			
		Soft measures, including signage, information boards, wardening, etc.			

3.0 Draft Access Management Strategy Bramshill

3.1 Introduction and Baseline Information

The following Draft SSSI Access Management Plan addresses access management at the SSSI level. This plan is advanced to a second draft stage, following a two phase consultation process, and will be subject to further development and consultation by Natural England. The Draft SSSI Access Management Plan for this particular SSSI is intended to be read in conjunction with the Thames Basin Heaths Access Management Part 1 Strategic Report.

3.1.1 Introduction

Bramshill is located to the west and north west of Castle Bottom to Yateley and Hawley Commons and in close proximity of the settlement of Bramshill. Bramshill SSSI is located to the west of Blackbushe Airport and to the north of the A30. Bramshill comprises Warren Heath to the south of the Bramshill to Eversley road, and Bramshill Plantation to the north, and Bramshill Forest. Bramshill is one of the smaller of the SSSIs that comprise the Thames Basin Heaths SPA and covers approximately 650 hectares, however in conjunction with the neighbouring Castle Bottom to Yateley and Hawley Commons covers a significant swathe of the landscape to the west of Frimley. As a result, access management at Bramshill should be considered in conjunction with the Access Management Strategy for Castle Bottom to Yateley and Hawley Commons and Hazeley Heath.

The SSSI citation for Bramshill describes the area as follows

'This site is notified for a series of shallow acid ponds and associated mire, which support a rich assemblage of dragonfly and damselfly, and rotationally felled conifer plantation, which provides habitat for internationally important populations of nightjar, woodlark and Dartford warbler.

*Bramshill comprises extensive areas of conifer plantation together with a series of shallow acidic ponds within relic wet heathland and a small unimproved grassland area adjacent which provides habitat for the nationally rare small fleabane *Pulicaria vulgaris*. Management of the pine plantations results in a sequence of clearings and young coniferous trees which are utilised by breeding nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus*, woodlark *Lullula arborea* and Dartford warbler *Sylvia undata*. The site also contains small breeding populations of hobby *Falco subbuteo* and little ringed plover *Charadrius dubius*.*

The pond areas differ in character, the northern and middle areas occupying former gravel workings, whilst the southern series occupies a damp valley and was formed by damming a small acidic stream.'

3.1.2 Baseline information

Bramshill SSSI comprises Warren Heath to the south and Bramshill Plantation to the north, and Bramshill Forest. The area is managed by the Forestry Commission.

There are a number of PROW across the area, connecting to a more extensive network to the north east. There are two footpaths that cross Bramshill Plantation, one running east west and the other running north east south east. The forest rides and tracks are also well used as a means of accessing the site, including a permissive footpath that runs around the perimeter. There are a number of footpaths across Warren Heath including forestry tracks and rides, and a bridleway which runs north west to south east connects Warren Heath to Castle Bottom Nature Reserve, Blackbushe Airport and Yateley to Hawley Commons. There are limited access points

and formal car parks for this site, in comparison with others within the study area. The principle car park is located along the Bramshill to Eversley road, indicated by consultees.

Habitat Distribution

Bramshill Plantation which forms the north part of this SSSI is dominated by plantation forestry. Much of this is semi-mature to mature but parts have been recently clearfelled or have been recently planted and currently support young plantation. There is one small area of dry heath on the eastern boundary of the site, a couple of small areas of wet heath and a number of ponds.

Warren Heath which forms the southern part of the SSSI is also dominated by coniferous plantation forestry over 50% of which is semi-mature or mature coniferous woodland. There is a couple of large clearfell and recent plantation areas and associated small patches of dry heath in the southern half of Warren Heath. Adjacent to this area is a quarry. Other smaller areas of clearfelled or young plantation and small patches of dry heath occur in the northern half of Warren Heath.

Public Visitor Pressure

The majority of both Bramshill Plantation and Warren Heath are subject to very low visitor pressure. Pressure points where visitor pressure is modelled as moderate are associated with car parks on the western and northern edge of Bramshill and car parks along the Bramshill to Eversley road.

SPA Bird Distribution

The distribution of Dartford warbler, nightjar and woodlark have been mapped by Footprint Ecology and are presented in Figure 19. Nightjar held 27 territories in 2004 and in 2006 Dartford warbler held 10 territories and woodlark 17 territories. Almost all of the records for these three species are closely associated with clearfelled areas, plantation edge, dry heath and young plantation. As such the distribution of bird territories for all three species reflect the pattern of clearfell and young plantation blocks with the SSSI.

Relationship between Birds, Visitor Pressure and Habitats

As stated above the Bramshill Plantation and Warren Heath are subject to low visitor pressure. As such disturbance does not appear to exert a strong influence on the distribution of bird territories within this SSSI and it is considered likely that habitat quality and in particular forestry plantation age and structure is having a stronger influence on the number and location of bird territories.

In addition, as a managed forest plantation it has been suggested by Liley *et al* (to be published) that visitors may be more inclined to stay on pathways and less likely to walk through recently felled areas or young plantation, because of the nature of the terrain and the ease of walking along the pathways. These areas may also not have the same attraction as large open heathland areas where dogs are often let off the lead. Consequently whilst visitor pressure is low at the current time the disturbance effect of visitors may also be less compared to open heathland sites because of differences in the behaviour of visitors in forestry sites compared to predominantly heathland ones.

3.2 Factors Influencing Access Management

3.2.1 Access management constraints

Bramshill Common is managed by the Forestry Commission. A portion of the land is owned by the Forestry Commission, with the remainder owned by a number of private aggregate companies. This current landownership is illustrated in Figure 17. It is noted by the consultees

that Forestry Commission freehold land will come under the CROW Act in the near future. Therefore, the extent of land available for managed access has increased on FC estate via changes in ownership and progress on land reinstatement following minerals operations.

3.2.2 Recreational Use and Current Objectives

Bramshill Plantation and Warren Heath are sites managed the Forestry Commission. They are subject to a variety of recreational use, principally including dog walking and horse riding under permit.

3.2.3 Existing Land Manager / Owners Management Objectives

Existing documents which should be referred to in conjunction with this Access Management Plan include:

- Forestry Commission (2006). *Thames Basin Heaths Forest Design Plan, South East England Forest District 2006-2036*.

The Forestry Commission are currently undertaking a number of management initiatives at the site. Entry points to the site have been banded to ensure that visitors use the car park provided and informal parking is reduced. Signs have been introduced at access points to reduce informal parking and discourage illegal activities, including fly tipping. New PROW are being considered and a permit scheme for horse riders maintained. Forestry Commission staff and rangers are often on site on a regular basis.

3.2.4 Potential SANGS

There are a number of potential SANGS located in relatively close proximity to the SSSI. These are illustrated in Figures 8 and 21. Those identified in the LUC study include Blackbushe Airport to the east, Wellington Country Park, Heckfield Heath and Great Danmoor Copse to the west. The airport is currently active and it is suggested that this is no longer considered suitable as an alternative for recreation with no capacity for public open space. Wellington Country Park is currently promoted for public access and recreation and is part of the estate of the Duke of Wellington. The park includes 350 acres of woodland, parkland and lakes, and numerous visitor facilities.

The Blackwater Valley, to the north and east of Yateley, and the number of potential SANGS located within it are considered to provide a significant opportunity for future recreational provision, in particular if this is in combination with the PROW resource and the promotion of the Basingstoke Canal. The Blackwater Valley is located between the borders of Berkshire, Hampshire and Surrey, and currently offers opportunity for a range of recreational activities in the countryside. It is suggested by a number of consultees that a 'Blackwater Country Park' could function as a cross-border partnership to address cross-border SPA mitigation issues. Within the Blackwater Valley there are a number of current mineral consents, and when restored to gravel pit lakes could provide the focus for the 'Blackwater Country Park' with a new visitor centre and access and recreational infrastructure.

3.2.5 Implications for management

'Priority Management Areas' have been identified and are illustrated in Figure 22. Four scenarios A to D for priority management have been identified, and are discussed further in the Part 1 Strategic Report.

The priority management areas at Bramshill are considered particularly fragmented, particularly across SSSI management units 1 and 2. SSSI management unit 3 is the most consolidated, the

majority of which falling within Scenario A for high priority management. These areas within SSSI management unit 3 are, as a result of data analysis, considered to contain the best asset as far as the SPA is concerned and the priority here should be access management which prevents disturbance increasing beyond a point where there is likely to be a decline in bird density or breeding success. Within SSSI management unit 1 there are fragmented areas of lower management priority, Scenario C. In these areas, there are low numbers of bird territories and low visitor pressure; the key factor is likely to be the low quality of the habitat. The priority in these areas should be to consider habitat management measures, although access management may be important to support these. The overall priority of applying access management in these areas therefore depends on specific habitat restoration or management measures proposed and also on whether the habitat management measures are likely to lead to increased visitor pressure.

Scenario A and B areas make up a relatively small proportion of Bramshill, and the remainder of the site is coniferous woodland managed on rotation.

It is essential that the prioritisation of access management in the SSSI is reviewed continually. This is particularly important with commercial forestry, which is managed on rotation at Bramshill. As areas are felled and re-stocked, new habitat becomes available for the SPA birds. The access management priorities should reflect this. Other changes in habitat cover, such as permanent restoration to heathland relating to forestry or gravel extraction also need to be identified for this purpose (see strategic report section 4.6.2).

3.3 Access Management Objectives and Recommendations

3.3.1 Access Management Issues

- Pressure points where visitor pressure is modelled as very high are associated with informal car parks on the western and northern edge of Bramshill and car parks along the Bramshill to Eversley road. Visitor pressure at this site is relatively low for the SPA.
- Potential for disturbance of bird species in areas of clearfell and younger plantations; visitor pressure may become more important once these areas are cropped.

3.3.2 Access Management Objectives and Recommendations

The overall access management objectives for Bramshill should be

1. Ensure that visitor pressure on the site is not increased. In the context of the wider SPA, this is one of the less visited sites. It is noted that mature and semi mature woodland and plantation can most easily absorb visitors.
2. Focus efforts on reducing visitor pressure during the breeding season on those parts of the site with open heathland habitat and prevent access to recently clear felled forestry units; rotations must be considered as part of access.
3. Management of access by a fluid policy linked to detailed habitat distribution.
4. Visitor pressure and parking at this site is relatively low for the SPA; ensure this balance is maintained with potential future increases in visitors.
5. With areas of mineral extraction being returned to heath in the southern part of Bramshill, ensure that future access patterns are compatible with created habitats.

Ecological rationale:

The site is dominated by conifer plantation and birds are taking advantage of recently cleared blocks of plantation or young plantation. These areas are subject to light to moderate levels of disturbance. It is thought that the combination of habitat and visitor pressure can withstand

current levels of visitor pressure. Nevertheless, increased control of access into felled blocks would increase the chances of successful breeding taking place and may result in an increase in breeding pairs.

3.4 Phase 2 Consultation Comments

The respondents to the phase 2 consultation workshop generally welcomed the contents of the Access Management Plan. The following general comments were made:

- Visitor pressure into parts of Bramshill can be increased, through the managed access across the existing network of hard surfaced tracks for walkers, cyclists and horse riders. Good tracks and PROW, reduce pressure on cleared areas.
- Access into potential / future bird breeding areas can be controlled by a mix of hard and soft measures.
- Bramshill can accommodate many more people without any perceived detrimental effect to breeding birds. Much of this area is gravel extraction and conifer plantation and there is currently very little public access onto restoration sites.
- It is considered that a higher level of appropriate behaviour by legitimate visitors will reduce antisocial activity which has greater impact on this area than current legitimate visitor pressure.

Access management objectives and recommendations are suggested below, in order to address the access management issues listed previously. These objectives and recommendations are specific to Bramshill and should be read in conjunction with strategic and SPA wide objectives and recommendations detailed in Part 1 of this report.

Bramshill

	Objective	Recommendations	Detail	Rationale	Deliverability
1	Ensure the relatively low modelled visitor pressure at this site is maintained and avoid bird disturbance in areas of clearfell and young plantation.	Habitat management and visitor zoning in line with Forestry Commission rotations. FC should limit access to recently felled forestry areas, which are likely to be favoured by SPA birds.	<p>Provision of circuit walks which avoid preferred habitats for SPA birds. Consider redirection of visitors and reinforcement of problem areas with fencing if necessary.</p> <p>In addition, temporary closure of rides and redirection of routes to remove pressure from plantation.</p> <p>In key access areas, fence plantations to avoid disturbance by dogs.</p> <p>Leave vegetative screens on the edge of clear-felled areas.</p> <p>Relatively low pressure at this site should be factored into any wider strategic spatial plan which links SANGS.</p>	<p>It is thought that many of the visitors to this site drive some distance and visit for longer walks. Circuit walks and paths should ensure pressure is steered away from suitable bird habitat (open heath, clearfell and young plantations).</p> <p>It is noted by phase 2 consultation respondents that this area can absorb more visitors if managed and controlled.</p>	<p>Tied to forestry management plans. Control and monitoring to be considered as part of this.</p> <p>Specific measures in relation to rotations to be delivered on site by FC managers / wardens.</p> <p>Phase 2 consultation respondents wholly agree.</p>

	Objective	Recommendations	Detail	Rationale	Deliverability
2	Ensure the relatively low modelled visitor pressure at this site is maintained.	Soft measures	<p>A package of soft measures to encourage responsible use of the site. E.g., interpretation at car parks on ecology of site, dogs on leads during breeding season in certain habitats, etc.</p> <p>Temporary information in conjunction with FC activities, as appropriate to reducing pressure on SPA bird's preferred habitats.</p>	A package of supportive soft measures to ensure relatively low pressure on this site is maintained with future increased visitor pressure.	<p>Tied to forestry management plans. Also potential support from SPA-wide delivery organisation.</p> <p>Phase 2 consultation respondents wholly agree.</p>
3		Monitor visitor pressure and bird numbers in conjunction with habitat cover.	Monitor visitor pressure to ensure that future capacity can be increased.	Detailed information is essential to allow ongoing review of appropriate access management measures.	FC, potentially supported by SPA-wide delivery organisation.

	Objective	Recommendations	Detail	Rationale	Deliverability
4	Ensure no increase in pressure associated with parking.	<p>Periodically review car parking in areas other than the formal car parks.</p> <p>Provide signage if necessary, i.e. 'works' access – no parking'.</p> <p>Encourage use of formal car parks.</p> <p>Don't allow car parks to become bigger.</p>	<p>Consider implementation of various measures if increase in pressure determined.</p> <p>Phase 2 consultation respondents note the need to consider an opportunity to rationalise car parking and provide opportunity for a safe and secure facility for cyclists and horse riders. This is considered with the provision of alternative parking. It is noted that there is a possible parking / de-boxing site for horse riders at north west corner of SSSI unit 2.</p>	Maintain broadly dispersed pressure associated with parking.	<p>Needs to be tied to forestry management plans. Control and monitoring also to be considered.</p> <p>Phase 2 consultation respondents generally agree.</p>
5	In areas of mineral restoration, ensure that future access patterns are compatible with created habitats.	Areas to be restored to heath from minerals extraction should be maintained at very low visitor pressure.	Access should be discouraged, for example by screening and fencing parking on the northern edge of the heath and discouraging parking.	The minerals extraction areas, if restored to heath will be one of the most extensive areas of habitat suitable for the SPA birds on this site.	Subject to restoration plan.

4.0 Draft Access Management Strategy Castle Bottom to Yateley and Hawley Commons

4.1 Introduction and Baseline Information

The following Draft SSSI Access Management Plan addresses access management at the SSSI level. This plan is advanced to a second draft stage, following a two phase consultation process, and will be subject to further development and consultation by Natural England. The Draft SSSI Access Management Plan for this particular SSSI is intended to be read in conjunction with the Thames Basin Heaths Access Management Part 1 Strategic Report.

4.1.1 Introduction

Castle Bottom to Yateley and Hawley Commons is one of the westerly SSSIs that comprise the Thames Basin Heaths SPA, extending from the west of Frimley to Bramshill. This SSSI is one of the most linear within the SPA as a whole, and is comprised of just less than 1000 hectares of heath and woodland. The site is located between the Blackwater Valley to the north and the River Hart and Fleet to the south. To the north of the M3 it is located in close proximity to the settlement of Yateley.

Castle Bottom to Yateley and Hawley Commons includes Yateley Heath Woods and Hawley Common to the south of the A30, and Yateley Common Country Park and Castle Bottom National Nature Reserve to the north of the A30. Warren Heath and land west of A327 are discussed as part of Bramshill.

The SSSI is notified for the following reasons

'This site is notified for its heathland and young conifer plantation which supports an internationally important population of Dartford warbler and populations of two other internationally important species, woodlark and nightjar. The scrub/heathland interface supports a particularly rich invertebrate fauna including a number of nationally scarce species. It also supports an outstanding Dragonfly assemblage.'

It is described in the SSSI citation as follows

'Castle Bottom to Yateley and Hawley Commons is one of the largest remnants of lowland heathland in the Thames Basin.'

Castle Bottom to Yateley and Hawley Commons is discussed for the purposes of this section of the report in four component parts, each with differing baseline circumstances and access management requirements. The interrelationship between these four component parts and the role of the site as whole within the SPA is also discussed, where appropriate.

4.1.2 Baseline information

This SSSI comprises Yateley Common Country Park, Castle Bottom Nature Reserve, Yateley Heath Woods and Hawley Common under the ownership and management of the MoD Defence Estates. Hawley Common is currently used by the MoD Defence Estates for dry training and is associated with Minley Barracks. This MoD area has no restrictions for public access, although it is governed by MoD bylaws.

There is an extensive PROW network north of A30, in particular through Yateley Common Country Park connecting to the settlements of Yateley and Blackwater. This network is limited at Castle Bottom Nature Reserve and across Hawley Common. There are no PROW across Yateley Heath Woods, although some access is provided along forest rides. A large proportion of the PROW network is comprised of bridleways that principally run in an east west alignment. Car parks are principally located along the A30, with a larger car park at Hawley Park to the east and a private car park at Hawley Lake Fishing Club. Other access

points are clustered around Yateley Common Country Park and along the A30, resulting in a very high visitor pressure across the country park. Additional areas of high visitor pressure are concentrated at the eastern end of Castle Bottom National Nature Reserve, and the eastern and southern edge of Hawley Common adjacent to the settlement edge of Hawley. Yateley Heath Woods are noted for their very low visitor pressure.

It is noted that the A30, the M3, and the active Blackbushe Airport are significant barriers to visitor movement within this area. The area is very popular with the local population, although visitors from a wider area have relatively easy access to the area from the A30, at which point they are considered by consultees more likely to visit the country park to the north, rather than the Hawley Common MoD Defence Estates training land to the south.

This baseline information is illustrated in Figures 22 to 26.

Yateley Common Country Park

Habitat Distribution

Three main habitats are found in the country park; coniferous mature woodland, dry heath and grassland. The woodland areas are generally located around the boundary, with the heath and grassland forming a mosaic throughout.

Public Visitor Pressure

Visitor disturbance is high throughout the entire site, which is likely to be due to the high density of PROW that crisscross the country park and because this part of the site has been established as a location for recreation in a country setting. Very high levels of disturbance affect all of the habitats found in the country park. Eight car parks are also found throughout the country park and the PROW can be seen to radiate out from these. Public visitor pressure is illustrated in Figure 27.

SPA Bird Distribution

Bird records exist for Dartford warbler, nightjar and woodlark at a very low density in the eastern and western sections. In 2004, there were only 4 nightjar territories recorded all of which were from the central open heathland area. In 2006, only 2 territories of Dartford warbler were recorded from the open dry heath in the eastern part of the site and 3 territories of woodlark were recorded; 1 in the eastern part of the site and 2 in the western. This distribution is illustrated in Figure 25.

Relationship between Birds, Pressure and Habitat

Disturbance is uniformly high across Yateley Common Country Park which is considered likely to be having an adverse effect on the three bird species for which the SPA is classified either through poor breeding success or reduced breeding territories.

Castle Bottom Nature Reserve

Habitats

Castle Bottom National Nature Reserve is the smallest section of the SSSI. Three main habitats occur within the reserve; coniferous mature woodland and dry and wet heath, with the woodland generally being found around the boundary.

Public Visitor Pressure

Visitor pressure is generally low with medium visitor pressure occurring at the eastern end of the reserve associated with an access point to the east. This is illustrated in Figure 27. Only two PROW exist through the reserve, one at the north eastern edge and another bisecting it through the middle. No car park facilities are available and access is by foot only.

SPA Bird Distribution

Dartford warbler, nightjar and woodlark have all been recorded from the reserve. In 2004, 4 territories of nightjar were recorded from the central and eastern parts of the reserve. In 2006, a few records of Dartford warbler and woodlark were recorded from the central and western parts of the reserve. This is illustrated in Figure 25.

Relationship between Birds, Disturbance and Habitats

The territories of all three bird species are strongly associated with open heathland and woodland edge habitats, which are located in the areas of the reserve with low levels of disturbance.

Yateley Heath Woods

Habitat Distribution

Yateley Heath Woods are dominated by coniferous mature woodland, with a large area of clearfell or young plantation in the northern section and smaller fragments to the south east. Small areas of 3 – 6 year plantation are located in between these areas. A tiny section of grassland is located to the south east and other small fragments of dry heath are situated to the north, near the boundary with the A30. This habitat distribution is illustrated in Figure 25.

Public Visitor Pressure

Public visitor disturbance is generally low throughout Yateley Heath Woods with medium visitor pressure hotspots located around access points, of which there are six around the site boundary. This is illustrated in Figure 27. There are no PROW.

SPA bird distribution

Woodlark and nightjar have been recorded from Yateley Heath Woods. In 2004, 11 territories of nightjar were recorded and in 2006 2 territories of woodlark were recorded. All records are associated with clearfell or young plantation areas. The distribution of bird territories for these two species reflect the pattern of clearfell and young plantation blocks within this part of the SSSI.

Relationship between Birds, Pressure and Habitat

The birds have been recorded in clearfell or young plantation in areas of generally low visitor pressure. The disturbance does not appear to exert a strong influence on the distribution of bird territories within this part of the SSSI and it is considered likely that habitat quality and in particular forestry plantation age and structure is having a stronger influence on the number and location of bird territories.

In addition, as a managed forest plantation it has been suggested by Liley *et al.* (to be published) that visitors maybe more inclined to stay on pathways and less likely to walk through recently felled areas or young plantation areas, as a result of terrain and ease of walking along these pathways. These areas may also not have the same attraction as large open heathland areas where dogs are often let off the lead. Consequently whilst visitor pressure is low at the current time the disturbance effect of visitors may also be less compared to open heathland sites because of differences in the behaviour of visitors in forestry sites compared to heathland ones.

Hawley Common

Habitat Distribution

In the northern part of the common mixed heath dominates the eastern half and dry heath dominates the western half of this part of the SSSI. These areas of mixed and dry heath are generally fringed by mature coniferous plantation woodland, although it is noted that there is a short section where the heathland comes up to the boundary with the A30.

The southern part of Hawley Common is dominated by mature coniferous plantation woodland. There are two moderate to large dry heathland blocks in the south western half of this part of the SSSI and in the north eastern part is a long thin expanse of sand heath surrounded by mature coniferous woodland.

Public Visitor Pressure

The public visitor pressure, illustrated in Figure 27, ranges from low in the western and south western parts of the site to high along the eastern periphery near Hawley, Fox Lane and north Cove. There are areas of relatively high pressure adjacent to three main car parks, which have a capacity of approximately 20, 30 and 50 spaces respectively. It is noted that the visitor pressure is also modelled to include visitor pressure from Hawley Lake private car park. The modelled pressure on the eastern edge is perhaps of lower concern in terms of disturbance to birds as the habitat cover is coniferous woodland, although it is noted that as this habitat type changes in the future visitor pressure will need to be reviewed. Conversely, on the northern part of the common, near the A30 are areas of dry and wet heath which are currently subject to low to moderate levels of disturbance.

SPA Bird Distribution

The distribution of bird territories is strongly associated with dry and mixed heathland on the northern part of the common and the larger patches of dry heath in the south western corner of the common, north of Hawley Lake. These parts of the common support all three species for which the SPA is classified, including 15 Dartford warbler territories, 13 woodlark territories and 8 nightjar territories. There were no records in 2004 for nightjar and 2006 for woodlark and Dartford warbler from the south eastern quarter of the common which is dominated by mature coniferous woodland.

Relationship between Birds, Pressure and Habitat

There is a strong association between heathland habitat types and the location of bird territories. There are no birds recorded in the eastern / south-eastern corner of the heaths near Hawley and Fox Lane, for example which is dominated by mature coniferous plantation. The main heathland areas are also all subject to low visitor pressure and it is not possible to identify an association between bird distribution and disturbance.

4.2 Factors Influencing Access Management

4.2.1 Access management constraints

Castle Bottom to Yateley and Hawley Commons is owned by three primary landholders, Hampshire County Council, the Forestry Commission, who manage Yateley Woods, and the MoD Defence Estates. The ownership boundaries are illustrated in Figure 23. There are a number of smaller private landowners also with interests at this site. It is noted that the Forestry Commission lease has only 20 years to run, which could provide a constraint on the deliverability of long term access management measures. In addition, there are a number of areas with minerals consent both north and south of the A30 which should also be considered.

Yateley Common Country Park is listed as Section 15 land under the CROW Act and therefore provides certain rights of access to the public. Areas of Registered Common Land, under the CROW Act, are located to the south of A30 in SSSI units 5 and 6, and north of Blackbushe Airport in SSSI unit 7.

At Castle Bottom the National Nature Reserve designation was designed to protect areas important for wildlife habitat and geological formations, and as places for scientific research and public access.

4.2.2 Recreational Use and Current Objectives

Castle Bottom National Nature Reserve (NNR)

Castle Bottom National Nature Reserve is a small lowland site owned and managed by Hampshire County Council. It contains *'one of the most important valley mires in southern England, with associated heathland and woodland habitats'* (www.hants.gov.uk/countryside/castlebottom/index.html, 30.11.06).

At Castle Bottom NNR car parking is very limited, with a small verge adjacent to the main gate. Car parking provision at Blackbushe Airport or Yateley Common is promoted by Hampshire County Council for visitors to the NNR. The site has only one designated public right of way leading from the 'middle gate' north towards the site of the old cottages. However, there are a number of permissive footpaths running across the site. Within the site itself horse riding and cycling is prohibited because of the particular nature of the habitat. There is however, a permissive bridleway running along the eastern edge of the site and connecting with Forestry Commission land along the southern boundary of the NNR. This site is considered not a high pressure site. This is currently interpreted with on site information regarding the relationship between dogs, birds and wildlife. A dogs on leads policy is currently in operation between March and July, the bird breeding season.

Yateley Common Country Park

Yateley Common Country Park is subject to very high visitor pressure and favoured for a number of recreational activities, particularly walking and dog walking. It is noted that the site does not have a visitor centre or visitor facilities. The site is currently a target for a number of illegal activities, including incidents of arson, fly tipping and abandonment of cars, and has been the focus of a number of traveller encampments. The site is also well used by motorcyclists who use access points along the A30.

The site is also noted locally for its archaeological value contained in the presence of Mesolithic finds and the presence of WW2 artefacts associated with the airport.

Yateley Heath Woods

Yateley Heath Woods is used for a number of recreational activities including walking and cycling on permissive routes. There are no PROW across this area therefore access is controlled to some extent through bunding at access points to prevent car parking and through a permit scheme for husky training, orienteering and rally driving.

Hawley Common

Hawley Common is actively used by the MoD for dry training. This is considered by consultees to have an impact on the local perception of the site, and contributes to a lower visitor pressure, which is locally based. The primary recreational uses are walking, dog walking, cycling and the use of motorbikes. Horse riding is managed using a permit scheme.

4.2.3 Existing Land Manager / Owners Management Objectives

Existing documents which should be referred to in conjunction with this Access Management Plan include:

- Hampshire County Council (2004). *Forest of Eversley Countryside Access Plan*. Draft November 2004. HCC
- Forestry Commission (2006). *Thames Basin Heaths Forest Design Plan, South East England Forest District 2006-2036*.
- Castle Bottom National Nature Reserve. *Aims, Objectives and Management* (www.hants.gov.uk/countryside/castlebottom/aims.html).
- Hampshire County Council (2005). *Castle Bottom NNR Management Plan 1st Revision*.

A number of organisations in addition to landowners and managers who are actively involved in the management of Castle Bottom to Yateley Heath and Hawley Commons include:

- Yateley Common Country Park Management Committee
- Yateley Society Volunteers and Conservation Group
- Blackwater Valley Partnership and Countryside Volunteers

Castle Bottom National Nature Reserve (NRR)

The Castle Bottom NNR is managed by Hampshire County Council. They are supported by the Yateley Society Volunteers who undertake practical conservation and management on a regular basis.

Yateley Common Country Park

Hampshire County Council (HCC) currently manage Yateley Common Country Park. There is no permanent presence on the site, although the management team includes a senior ranger, a part-time ranger and a site manager. Currently the focus of the on site management is habitat management and heathland restoration, tidying up following illegal activities and education. HCC organise a number of educational events throughout the year at the Country Park for both primary and secondary schools and other local groups including the Scouts and Guides.

4.2.4 Potential SANGS

There are a number of potential SANGS located in relatively close proximity to the SSSI, illustrated in Figure 27. The largest of which identified in the LUC study is Blackbushe Airport. The airport is currently active and it is suggested that this is no longer considered suitable as an alternative for recreation, with no capacity for public open space. There a number of potential SANGS located to the south of the M3, which creates a significant barrier to movement. These should also be considered unsuitable for the displacement of visitors from this site across the M3.

The Blackwater Valley, to the north and east of Yateley, and the number of potential SANGS located within it are considered to provide a significant opportunity for future recreational provision, in particular if it is in combination with the PROW resource and the promotion of the Basingstoke Canal. The Blackwater Valley is located between the borders of Berkshire, Hampshire and Surrey, and currently offers opportunity for a range of recreational activities in the countryside. It is suggested by a number of consultees that a 'Blackwater Country Park' could function as a cross-border partnership to address cross-border SPA mitigation issues. Within the Blackwater Valley there are a number of current mineral consents, and when restored to gravel pit lakes could provide the focus for the 'Blackwater Country Park' with a new visitor centre and access and recreational infrastructure.

4.2.5 Implications for management

'Priority Management Areas' have been identified and are illustrated in Figure 28. Four scenarios A to D for priority management have been identified, and are discussed further in the Part 1 Strategic Report.

Castle Bottom National Nature Reserve (NRR)

The majority of Castle Bottom NNR (SSSI management unit 3) falls within a high priority management area, Scenario A. Under these circumstances the overall priority here should be access management which prevents disturbance increasing beyond a point where there is likely to be a decline in bird density or breeding success.

Yateley Common Country Park

Access management priority is relatively fragmented across the country park, with areas of high priority management, Scenario B, in SSSI management units 1, 2 and a small portion of unit 7. SSSI management unit 1 contains the largest area of Scenario B. In this location, the data analysis indicates that primarily visitor pressure is having an adverse effect on bird densities, or at least on bird breeding success. These areas are the priority areas within the SPA for reducing the impacts of visitor pressure, or visitor pressure itself, to improve the breeding success of bird densities.

Yateley Heath Woods

High priority management areas are concentrated in the northern half of Yateley Heath Woods, within SSSI management unit 13. They comprise primarily Scenario A but also Scenario B areas. The remainder of Yateley Heath Woods is coniferous woodland managed on rotation, with the exception of a very small portion of Scenario B management area and a low priority habitat along the northern edge of SSSI management unit 6.

It is essential that the prioritisation of access management in the SSSI is reviewed continually. This is particularly important with commercial forestry, which is managed on rotation at Yateley Heath Woods. As areas are felled and re-stocked, new habitat becomes available for the SPA birds. The access management priorities should reflect this. Other changes in habitat cover, such as permanent restoration to heathland relating to forestry or gravel extraction also need to be identified for this purpose (see strategic report section 4.6.2).

Hawley Common

The northern portion of Hawley Common, SSSI management unit 5, is virtually entirely a high priority management area, Scenario A, considered to contain the best asset as far as the SPA is concerned and the priority here should be access management which prevents disturbance increasing beyond a point where there is likely to be a decline in bird density or breeding success.

The southern portion of Hawley Common, primarily within SSSI management unit 14 is coniferous woodland managed on rotation. Prioritisation of access management in this part of the SSSI should be reviewed continually as this unit is managed as commercial forestry (see note on Yateley Heath Woods (above) and strategic report section 4.6.2).

4.3 Access Management Objectives and Recommendations

4.3.1 Access Management Issues

Yateley Common Country Park

Visitor disturbance is modelled as very high across the site, linked to the number of PROWs which cross the site and the proximity of urban areas; the boundaries of the northern part of the Country Park are porous. The Country Park is modelled as the most disturbed area of this part of the SPA.

The site is a target for a number of illegal activities and a large number of medium-sized car parks are served by local roads.

The Country Park is managed to promote access, pressure mapping and bird data indicate that this currently conflicts with nature conservation issues.

Castle Bottom Nature Reserve

The modelled visitor pressure is medium to high at the eastern and western end of common, although visitor pressure is noted by consultees to be relatively low in comparison to other areas of the SSSI and SPA.

Yateley Heath Woods

There are modelled hotspots of visitor pressure around car parks, of which there are six around the site boundary of Yateley Heath Woods.

Hawley Common

Modelled visitor pressure identifies pressure from car parks, two of which have a capacity of 30 or 50 cars, respectively. Primary recreational uses are walking, dog walking, horse riding and illegal motorbiking, although it is considered that MoD use of the site discourages higher visitor pressure.

4.3.2 Access Management Objectives and Recommendations

The overall access management objectives for Castle Bottom to Yateley and Hawley Commons are

1. Reduce areas of very high modelled visitor pressure, giving priority to the Country Park, to provide capacity to offset against future increases in visitor pressure.
2. Reduce levels of disturbance on open heath habitats in particular during the breeding seasons.
3. Avoid displacement of visitor pressure from the Country Park to areas of the SSSI south of the A30.
4. Maintain and limit access, through control and redirection, to the MoD Defence Estates land and reduce disturbance to this area by the public and from MoD activities during the breeding season, where this is not detrimental to MoD objectives.
5. Reduce visitor pressure across all the sites through the promotion and implementation of the 'Blackwater Country Park' and other potential SANGS.
6. On the eastern edge of Hawley Common, avoid disturbance to coniferous forestry rotations which will in the future have the potential to support SPA birds.

Ecological rationale:

Hawley Common supports the greatest number of all three SPA bird species within the Castle Bottom to Yateley and Hawley Commons SSSI. Maintaining MoD activity and restrictions these place on public access will assist in maintaining the low visitor pressure to this part of the SPA. Lower disturbance levels are considered likely to encourage improved breeding success. The south western part of this section of the SSSI supports breeding Dartford warbler and woodlark largely associated with open heathland. Lower disturbance levels are considered likely to encourage improved breeding success.

Yateley Woods is dominated by conifer plantation and birds are taking advantage of recently cleared blocks of plantation or young plantation. These areas are subject to light to moderate levels of disturbance but increased control of access into felled blocks would increase the chances of successful breeding taking place and may result in an increase in breeding pairs.

Yateley Common Country Park is subject to high visitor pressure and central areas of the Country Park with open heathland habitat support limited breeding SPA birds. A greater number of birds are recorded from heathland in Castle Bottom NNR. Lower disturbance levels are considered likely to encourage improved breeding success.

4.4 Phase 2 Consultation Comments

The respondents to the phase 2 consultation workshop generally welcomed the contents of the Access Management Plan. The following general comments were made:

- At Castle Bottom NNR and Yateley Common Country Park some of the access points are noted as either misplaced or non-existent. The parking at Castle Bottom western entrance is limited to one car parking space.

- Car park at north eastern corner of Hawley Common noted and at eastern edge of Hawley at the end of the bridleway.
- Car park at Hawley Lake noted as no access for general public.

Access management objectives and recommendations are suggested below, in order to address the access management issues listed previously. These objectives and recommendations are specific to Castle Bottom to Yateley and Hawley Commons and should be read in conjunction with strategic and SPA wide objectives and recommendations detailed in Part 1 of this report.

Yateley Common Country Park

ID	Objective	Recommendations	Detail	Rationale	Deliverability
1	Reduce very high modelled visitor pressure in Country Park.	SANGS provision in the Blackwater Valley.	A string of alternative sites to draw visitors away from Country Park. Make use of gravel pits to north of Eversley. Potential for visitors' centre at the new site, to draw people away from SPA Country Park and NNR. Visitors' centre to include education in relation to SPA.	Extremely high visitor pressure on Country Park likely to be linked to low recordings of SPA bird species.	Opportunities exist for delivery through Blackwater Partnership. Support from SPA wide delivery organisation. Phase 2 consultation respondents disagree, noting that this would only go some way to alleviating the problems.
2		Package of education measures to promote the site's ecology.	Could include visitor's centre (non-SPA mitigation site); could build on existing measures including 'Heath Week'; and a volunteer wardening service.	Perception that there is not a high level of understanding of importance of SPA and that the interpretation of SPA and what it means differs locally.	Deliverability opportunities exist, e.g. through Blackwater Partnership, but opportunities for should be considered as part of SANGS delivery plan.

ID	Objective	Recommendations	Detail	Rationale	Deliverability
3		Rationalise footpaths and cycleways within the Country Park.	<p>Attempt to direct visitor flows away from areas of open heath.</p> <p>Stop cycle paths crossing open heathland areas, put around edges of heaths.</p> <p>If it is not possible to control visitor flows, consider surfacing path and habitat management adjacent to path to keep people to certain principal routes.</p>	<p>Site contains a matrix of wooded and open habitat types, hence an opportunity exists for reviewing rights of way across site to limit impacts on SPA species and their habitats. It is noted that habitats are dynamic and that this measure should be reviewed in the future.</p>	<p>Unenforceable as common land but could nevertheless potentially benefit site's ecology.</p>
4		Review parking in the Country Park.	<p>Consider informal lay-by parking areas for closure.</p> <p>Site has a number of medium-sized car parks.</p> <p>There are a number of lay-bys on A 30 which seem to encourage some infiltration into the site; closure could help reduce visitor pressure on SPA species. This should be undertaken in consultation with the highways authority and others. <i>Car parks to be verified during the ground truthing exercise.</i></p> <p>Consider shifting capacity from eastern car park in SSSI unit 1 to car parks to west.</p>	<p>View of consultees that there is no opportunity for closing formal car parks at Yateley but that lay-bys might be considered for closure.</p> <p>Car park in east seems to encourage access to fragments of heath which contain Dartford Warbler.</p>	<p>Liaison with local highways authority.</p>

ID	Objective	Recommendations	Detail	Rationale	Deliverability
5		Seek to curtail anti-social behaviour in the park.	Part of co-ordinated illegal activity strategy.	To free time for wardens to work on habitat and access management.	

Castle Bottom National Nature Reserve

ID	Objective	Recommendations	Detail	Rationale	Deliverability
6	Ensure no increase in visitor pressure.	Monitor visitor pressure.	Full repeated visitor surveys and counts.	<p>The site has constrained access by vehicles. In addition, much pedestrian access is channelled along boardwalks as the heath is wet. Therefore a reduction in visits made by car or pedestrians is not compatible with the objectives of the NNR, however visitor pressure should be monitored to ensure no increase.</p> <p>This is also important in the context of restoration of unit 12 to SSSI, whereby pressure on any heathland habitat created should be kept to a minimum, using a range of access control measures.</p>	

Yateley Heath Woods

ID	Objective	Recommendations	Detail	Rationale	Deliverability
7	Reduce hot spots of pressure around car parks.	Package of soft measures to increase understanding of value of site.	Signs at car parks, etc. Wardening.	Little scope for physical measures.	Supported by SPA-wide delivery organisation with wardens and education officer.
8		Reduction in capacity of car parks.	Undertake a review to reduce capacity of car parks.	To ensure no increase in modelled visitor pressure.	

ID	Objective	Recommendations	Detail	Rationale	Deliverability
9	Ensure that visitor pressure does not impact on areas of clearfell and young plantation.	Habitat management and visitor zoning in line with coniferous forestry rotations. Limit access to recently felled forestry areas, which are likely to be favoured by SPA birds.	<p>Provision of circuit walks which avoid preferred habitats for SPA birds. Consider redirection of visitors and reinforcement of problem areas with fencing if necessary.</p> <p>In addition, temporary closure of rides and redirection of routes to remove pressure from plantation.</p> <p>In key access areas, fence plantations to avoid disturbance by dogs.</p> <p>Leave vegetative screens on the edge of clear-felled areas.</p> <p>Relatively low pressure at this site should be factored into any wider strategic spatial plan which links SANGS, whilst taking into account future coniferous forestry rotations.</p>	Circuit walks and paths should ensure pressure is steered away from suitable bird habitat (open heath, clearfell and young plantations).	<p>Tied to forestry management plans. Control and monitoring to be considered as part of this.</p> <p>Specific measures in relation to rotations to be delivered on site by site managers / wardens, potentially supported by SPA wide wardening service.</p>

Hawley Common

ID	Objective	Recommendations	Detail	Rationale	Deliverability
10	Reduce pressure hot spots from car parks.	Consider in the interim a reduction in car park size. In the long term closure is a possibility.	<i>Car parks to be verified during the ground truthing exercise.</i>	MOD methods to cope with new residents and increased visitor pressure: limit access and close car parks.	Liaison with landowners and highways authority. Phase 2 consultation respondents generally disagree, noting that access is from housing estates to the east of the site by foot.
11		Package of soft measures to increase understanding of value of site.	A package of soft measures to encourage responsible use of the site. E.g., interpretation at car parks, dogs on leads during breeding season in certain habitats, etc.	A package of supportive soft measures to provide capacity for offsetting future increased visitor pressure.	Phase 2 consultation respondents generally agree, if measures are deliverable and funded.

ID	Objective	Recommendations	Detail	Rationale	Deliverability
12	In eastern part of site, particularly where visitor pressure is modelled as high, avoid bird disturbance in areas of clearfell and young plantation.	Habitat management and visitor zoning in line with forestry rotations. MoD might limit access to recently felled forestry areas, which are likely to be favoured by SPA birds.	<p>Provision of circuit walks which avoid preferred habitats for SPA birds. Consider redirection of visitors and reinforcement of problem areas with fencing if necessary.</p> <p>In addition, temporary closure of rides and redirection of routes to remove pressure from plantation.</p> <p>In key access areas, fence plantations to avoid disturbance by dogs.</p> <p>Leave vegetative screens on the edge of clear-felled areas.</p> <p>Relatively low pressure at this site should be factored into any wider strategic spatial plan which links SANGS, taking into consideration future coniferous forestry rotations.</p>	It is thought that much of the pressure modelled on the eastern part of the site comes from adjacent urban areas. Circuit walks and paths should ensure pressure is steered away from suitable bird habitat (open heath, clearfell and young plantations).	<p>Tied to forestry management plans. Control and monitoring to be considered as part of this.</p> <p>Specific measures in relation to rotations to be delivered on site by managers wardens, potentially in co-ordination with SPA-wide ranger service.</p>

Castle Bottom to Yateley and Hawley Commons SSSI

ID	Objective	Recommendations	Detail	Rationale	Deliverability
13	Reduce high modelled pressure	A package of soft measures to promote the site's ecology.	Educational leaflets, wardening, etc.	Physical access management options seem limited in potential at this site. Soft measures may be the main option for long-term influence of behaviour.	

5.0 Draft Access Management Strategy Chobham Common

5.1 Introduction and Baseline Information

The following Draft SSSI Access Management Plan addresses access management at the SSSI level. This plan is advanced to a second draft stage, following a two phase consultation process, and will be subject to further development and consultation by Natural England. The Draft SSSI Access Management Plan for this particular SSSI is intended to be read in conjunction with the Thames Basin Heaths Access Management Part 1 Strategic Report.

5.1.1 Introduction

Chobham Common is located in the north east section of the SPA, to the north of Chobham and straddling the M3. It is one of the larger sites of the Thames Basin Heaths SPA, comprising in the region of 650 hectares of land. For the purposes of this report it will be considered in two parts, one part to the north of the M3 and one part to the south of the M3.

The SSSI citation describes Chobham Common as follows.

'Chobham Common is an area of extensive, open land which supports dry and wet heathland, bog, scrub and woodland, forming one of the largest surviving heathlands in the Thames Basin. It supports a rich variety of characteristic heathland plants and animals, including many which are rare or scarce. The heathland bird community is particularly rich, and includes nationally important breeding populations of nightjar Caprimulgus europaeus, woodlark Lullula arborea and Dartford warbler Sylvia undata, all birds listed on Annexe 1 of the Birds Directive.

Open heathland has been part of the Surrey landscape for thousands of years, during which time traditional grazing and gathering of brushwood and bracken maintained its character. Western Surrey was, at one time, largely covered by these open habitats, but drainage and development for intensive agriculture, forestry, housing and roads have severely reduced their extent, and many remnants have become invaded by scrub. Surviving examples of open heathland are thus particularly important.

The heathland has developed on the acidic soils of the tertiary sand and gravel deposits of the London basin (mainly Bagshot Sands). A prominent central ridge runs diagonally across the generally undulating terrain; in the north of the site lies another ridge and two linear depressions where the ground is waterlogged and valley bogs have developed.

Large areas of dry heath and acid grassland occur on the higher ground along with extensive areas of bracken, gorse, birch scrub and invasive pine. Depressions in the southern part of the Common contain bog, carr, wet heath and acidic marshy grassland communities. Extensive areas of secondary mixed woodland occur around the margins of the site and at Gracious Pond, a former mediaeval fish pond. There are several small acidic ponds on the common, but these are of recent origin.'

Chobham Common is also noted within the Thursley, Ash, Pirbright and Chobham Special Area of Conservation (SAC). The primary reason the SAC has been notified for three habitats as follows:

1. Northern Atlantic wet heaths with *Erica tetralix*
2. European dry heaths
3. Depressions on peat substrates of the *Rhynchosporion*

5.1.2 Baseline information

Chobham Common is located between the settlements of Sunninghill to the north and Chobham to the south. The northern boundary is principally defined by the Sunninghill to

Virginia Water railway line and Wentworth Golf Course. The north eastern boundary is defined by the development site on Burma Road at the 'Tank Factory'.

The site is bisected by the M3 and a number of smaller roads, including the B383 running north south through the western section of the site, and the B386 and Staple Road running either side of the M3.

Chobham Common has numerous PROW, including footpaths and bridleways that cross the area, connecting with both local settlements and the wider countryside, as a result of previous access management that sort to increase access opportunities at the site. There is one non-vehicular crossing point under the M3, linking the northern and southern sections of the SSSI. A vehicular crossing point is provided at the junction between the M3 and the B386. It is noted that there is no public access or PROW through the Gracious Pond area of the SSSI. Numerous car parks are located at the perimeter of the site and along Staple Road. The largest car parks are along the B383, at Staple Hill, Staple Road and at the southern edge of Gracious Pond. The consultees noted there are a number of informal car parks around the Common and that the legality of these on common land requires consideration.

The majority of the site, with the exception of Gracious Pond, Sunningdale Golf Course land and Wentworth Golf Course land, was designated as a National Nature Reserve in 1994. It is recognised as one of the finest examples of lowland heath in Europe.

The baseline information is illustrated in Figures 29 to 33.

Habitat Distribution

Chobham Common supports a range of habitats including mature coniferous woodland, recently clearfelled areas and young plantation, open dry heath, acid grassland and wet heath, illustrated in Figure 31. In terms of the distribution of these habitats the site has for the purposes of this description been divided into two roughly equal sections separated by the M3 motorway.

The section to the north of the M3 is dominated by open heathland and grassland supporting dry heath, wet heath and acid grassland communities. There are also stands of mature coniferous woodland within which there are patches of recently clear felled plantation or young plantation.

The section of the Common south east of the M3 is also dominated by open heathland habitats comprising wet heath and dry heath. Mature coniferous woodland is restricted to the northern and southern fringes where it generally forms a relatively narrow fringe to the site. The most eastern part of this section extends into a narrow arm and this area is dominated by mature coniferous woodland although there are also some larger blocks of open dry heath habitat.

Public Visitor Pressure

The research undertaken by Footprint Ecology for Natural England has mapped different levels of disturbance from visitors to the SSSI. These are presented in Figure 33.

A range of visitor pressures are predicted for the common ranging from very high to very low. The areas with high visitor pressure are largely located along the southern boundary of the site with a triangle of disturbance running along the minor road that runs roughly parallel to the M3 along the north western edge of the eastern half of the common. This is perhaps not surprising given that there are five car parking points along this road. There is also a predicted level of high visitor pressure in the arm in the south eastern corner of the site.

Visitor pressure in the eastern part of the Common reduces towards the central and northern parts of this section of the SSSI. A similar pattern of decreasing disturbance is also predicted for the Common north of the M3 with visitor pressure reducing towards the northern boundary.

SPA Bird Distribution

The distribution of the three bird species for which the SPA is classified has been mapped by Footprint Ecology and is presented in Figure 31. In 2004, 52 territories of nightjar were recorded. In 2006, 96 territories of Dartford warbler and 11 territories of woodlark were recorded from the SSSI. Dartford warbler and nightjar records are spread throughout the SSSI and are strongly associated with mixed, dry and wet heath habitats. A greater number of nightjar territories (31) were recorded south of the M3 whereas Dartford warbler territories exhibit a more even split between the two parts of the SSSI either side of the M3. 9 of the 11 woodlark territories were recorded in 2006 north of the M3 and only 2 to the south. The territories in the northern part of the SSSI were also located in the western half of this part of the site.

Relationship between Birds, Pressure and Habitats

The distribution of bird records indicates a strong association between bird territories and heathland habitats, which dominate this SSSI. Although heathland habitats are dominant there are no bird territories recorded from the mature coniferous woodland areas which is the next most common habitat within the SSSI. The remaining 2 records are from small clearings within mature coniferous woodland. Of the woodlark records 9 out of 10 are from dry and wet heath and only 1 record is from small clearings within coniferous woodland.

In terms of visitor pressure as predicted by Liley *et al.* (to be published), 16 of the nightjar territories recorded in 2004 are located within areas of moderate to high visitor pressure. The remaining 36 territories occur in areas of low visitor pressure. Of the woodlark territories recorded in 2006 only 2 are located within areas subject to moderate to high visitor pressure, the remaining 9 territories are in areas of the site subject to low visitor pressure. 16 territories of Dartford warbler recorded in 2006 are located in areas of high to moderate visitor pressure, the remaining territories are within areas of low visitor pressure.

5.2 Factors Influencing Access Management

5.2.1 Access management constraints

The vast majority of Cobham Common is owned by Surrey County Council and managed by the Surrey Wildlife Trust. A small portion of the SSSI to the north of the Sunninghill to Virginia Water railway line is owned by Wentworth Golf Course and managed by the Surrey Wildlife Trust. Glovers Pond is privately owned but managed by SWT, and is not covered by CROW Act access designations. The western portion of the site north of the M3 is owned and managed by Sunningdale Golf Course, which lies adjacent to the western edge of the SSSI.

All of the rest of Chobham Common, except for the small portion to the north of the Sunninghill to Virginia Water railway line, is Registered Common Land, and all of the Common is covered under Section 15 of the CROW Act and is land accessible to the public under the enactments of Section 15. It is noted that Chobham Common was purchased from Lord Onslow in 1968 by Surrey County Council for the public benefit and the people of Chobham. In addition, there is a small portion of 'Open Country' located on the eastern edge of the common adjacent to and north of the M3.

5.2.2 Recreational Use and Current Objectives

Chobham Common is used by visitors for a variety of recreational activities, of which walking and dog walking are considered the most popular, with a number of local people using the site for horse riding. It is noted by consultees that the majority of visitors to the site arrive by

car, favouring the large car park at Staple Hill. This has also been noted as a site for informal events is considered important by local and national horse riding associations.

A visitor information centre is located at Staple Hill car park and a number of circular walks are promoted. These are detailed on the Chobham website (www.chobham.info), and take in a number of aspects of the Common including Fish Pool, Monk's Walk, Round Pond and Chobham Place Woods, Monument and Long Arm Pond, and Jubilee Mount.

5.2.3 Existing Land Manager / Owners Management Objectives

Existing documents which should be referred to in conjunction with this Access Management Plan include:

- Chobham Common local information website www.chobham.info.
- Chobham Common NNR Management Plan 2002-2012 (Draft).
- Surrey Wildlife Trust forthcoming draft Management Plan.

A number of organisations in addition to landowners and managers who are actively involved at Chobham Common include:

- Chobham Common Liaison Group

Current management at Chobham Common has to balance a variety of pressures, including recreational amenity, the requirements of a number of ecological and conservation designations and their objectives, and the particular requirements of the private local landowners.

The site currently has a full time Surrey Wildlife Trust ranger, responsible for both conservation management and liaison with visitors and the local community. Surrey Wildlife Trust provides a variety of information on the site for visitors, and organises a number of visitor events throughout the year, for example 'cut your own organic Christmas Tree', and work with local volunteers.

5.2.4 Potential SANGS

There are a number of potential SANGS identified by LUC within close proximity of Chobham Common, illustrated in Figure 33. The largest of which is Wentworth Golf Course, which will not be considered further in this report. There are two potential SANGS identified to the east of Chobham Common, one of which is Fox Hills Golf Course and is therefore discounted, the other is at Stonehill and Queenwoods. A smaller potential SANG is located adjacent to the M3 on the western edge of Chobham Common, at Valley End. This site is already served with a car park and picnic site.

5.2.5 Implications for management

'Priority Management Areas' have been identified and are illustrated in Figure 34. Four scenarios A to D for priority management have been identified, and are discussed further in the Part 1 Strategic Report.

The majority of the site is a high priority management area, encompassing both Scenario A and B, with the exception of small areas of coniferous woodland managed on rotation along the western southern and northern edge. SSSI management units 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 11, 13, 14, 19, 20, 22, and 23 fall within Scenario A and the priority here should be access management which prevents disturbance increasing beyond a point where there is likely to be a decline in bird density or breeding success. SSSI management units 2, 12, 15, 17, 18, 21, 25, and 26 fall within Scenario B and the priority here is to reduce the impacts of visitor pressure, or visitor pressure itself, to improve the breeding success of bird densities.

5.3 Access Management Objectives and Recommendations

5.3.1 Access Management Issues

- A zone of high modelled pressure around the Staple Hill car park on Chobham Road in the northern part of the site. The majority of users arrive by car, favouring the large car park at Staple Hill.
- High visitor pressure from monument and round about car park.
- An area of high modelled visitor pressure along Staple Hill Road, which runs north-south through the southern half of the site.
- Areas of high modelled visitor pressure along the southern boundary of the site, near local settlement.
- Thought to be local concern about any attempt to reduce access; people in Chobham thought to be protective of access rights. Site was purchased by SCC for the public benefit; this needs to be balanced against disturbance to the SPA.
- Potential development at eastern end of northern half of site, on existing Qinetiq site.

5.3.2 Access Management Objectives and Recommendations

The overall access management objectives for the Chobham Common are to

1. Reduce the area of very high modelled visitor pressure and provide capacity to offset against future increases in visitor numbers; prioritise those areas modelled by Footprint Ecology to be most under pressure, ensuring no displacement into areas with currently modelled low visitor pressure.
2. Reduce visitor pressure particularly during the breeding season on the central area of the Common with open heathland habitat to the south of the M3 and in the north eastern side of the Common.

Ecological rationale:

Chobham Common supports good numbers of all three SPA bird species, yet some areas of good habitat are subject to high visitor pressure. Reduction of visitor pressure during the breeding season is considered likely to increase the number and success of breeding attempts.

It is noted that the access management measures should not compromise the SAC interest features, including wet heaths and valley mires.

5.4 Phase 2 Consultation Comments

The respondents to the phase 2 consultation workshop generally welcomed the contents of the Access Management Plan. The following general comments were made:

- Car park control: The roundabout car park can be reduced in capacity to control visitor numbers. There is real potential to close monument car park on road safety grounds and this is considered to have a good effect on the SPA birds.
- Access: There should be on foot access with rights of access from any highway.

Access management objectives and recommendations are suggested below, in order to address the access management issues listed previously. These objectives and recommendations are specific to Chobham Common and should be read in conjunction with strategic and SPA wide objectives and recommendations detailed in Part 1 of this report.

Chobham Common

ID	Objective	Recommendations	Detail	Rationale	Deliverability
1	Reduce modelled high visitor pressure.	Comprehensive car park strategy.	<p>Around Staple Hill Car Park - reduce size of car park: Restrict number of visits starting at this car park by reducing the number of spaces. Seasonal reduction in spaces might be considered as one option. Consider charging for car parking.</p> <p>Also consider the roundabout and monument car parks in terms of potential reduction closure and or charging.</p>	The majority of visitors to Chobham Common are thought to arrive by car to this or monument, or roundabout car parks; reducing visitor numbers from these car parks could reduce visitor pressure on the northern part of the SPA. Any such measure would need to be part of a site-wide strategy, for instance taking in SANGs which improve parking and recreational opportunities for visitors arriving by car.	<p>SCC and the Wildlife Trust appeared supportive of investigating this approach at initial consultation. Clearly further consultation is required on a site where local users are protective of access rights.</p> <p>Any change of car parking or works on this site are likely to be controversial and should be subject to public consultation and liaison, via the Chobham Common Liaison Group.</p> <p>Phase 2 consultation respondents generally agree.</p>

ID	Objective	Recommendations	Detail	Rationale	Deliverability
2			Detailed consideration of car park measures around Staple Hill Road. Consider and consult upon seasonal closure of Staple Hill Road. This road has a number of car parks of capacities in the range 11-25+ spaces, which seem to support fairly wide-spread visitor infiltration into the southern part of the common. Traffic calming might be considered as part of this.	Reduce visits to this part of the common during the breeding season, for example, might increase the SPA bird species populations. Some of the car parks may not be legal because they are on common land, this needs further investigation. Ensure visitor displacement along the north-eastern edge of the SSSI does not occur.	Further consultation with SCC and Surrey Wildlife Trust needed. Extensive public consultation will be needed to support parking strategy. Phase 2 consultation respondents wholly agree.
3	Reduce visitor pressure across the site; reduce visitor pressure on the southern boundary of the site.	Attract people to nearby SANGS.	As part of a well-considered approach to parking control measures, provide an equivalent number of parking spaces at nearby SANGS sites. Stanners Hill and Valley End Woods are two adjacent SANGS which have the potential to diffuse visitor pressure from the main part of Chobham Common.	Reduce car visits made to this site to reduce disturbance to SPA species.	Needs to be considered as part of the local SANG delivery plan. Potential also as part of SPA-wide spatial plan for SANGS. Phase 2 consultation respondents generally agree.

ID	Objective	Recommendations	Detail	Rationale	Deliverability
4	Reduce the area of very high modelled visitor pressure and provide capacity to offset against future increases in visitor numbers.	Package of soft measures.	Accurate and detailed visitor monitoring. On-site rangers, review update and improve existing information boards at car parks, and other measures to increase an understanding of the ecology of the site.	Need to develop responsible use and stewardship of this site in a way which dispels local fears about losing access rights.	<p>Could be encouraged through strategic SPA-wide wardening / delivery partnership with education officer and wardens. Also make use of existing initiatives.</p> <p>Phase 2 consultation respondents wholly agree.</p>
5	Reduce visitor pressure across the site.	As part of any future strategy to fence and graze the site, consider the possibility of an approach which enables zoning of movement pattern across the site, without restricting or removing on foot access.	To be developed as part of any management plan which advocates fencing and grazing (without internal grazing units or paddockization of the site).	Consultees discussed potential future fencing and grazing as habitat management. This should be integrated with access management as there is potential for fencing and grazing to zone access to site at certain times of the year.	<p>Integrated with future habitat management plans.</p> <p>Phase 2 consultation respondents generally agree.</p>

6.0 Draft Access Management Strategy Hazeley Heath

6.1 Introduction and Baseline Information

The following Draft SSSI Access Management Plan addresses access management at the SSSI level. This plan is advanced to a second draft stage, following a two phase consultation process, and will be subject to further development and consultation by Natural England. The Draft SSSI Access Management Plan for this particular SSSI is intended to be read in conjunction with the Thames Basin Heaths Access Management Part 1 Strategic Report.

6.1.1 Introduction

Hazeley Heath is located in the west of the study area to the north of Hartley Wintney, in close proximity to Bramshill and Castle Bottom to Yateley and Hawley Commons. Hazeley Heath is one of the smaller of the SSSIs that comprise the Thames Basin Heaths SPA, covering less than 200 hectares of land.

The SSSI citation describes Hazeley Heath as follows:

'Hazeley Heath occupies a north-west/south-east ridge of Bracklesham Sands capped by plateau gravel and is in the Hampshire sector of the Thames Basin. The heath embraces a wide range of heathland plant communities including acid grassland and bracken Pteridium aquilinum on less leached soils; heather Calluna vulgaris/bell heather Erica cinerea dry heath; Calluna/purple moor-grass Molinia caerulea/cross-leaved heath Erica tetralix 'humid' heath; and extensive dense monospecific stands of gorse Ulex europaeus. Wet heath and incipient bog plant communities occur around and below a spring line on the easterly-facing slopes of the common. The Callunetum has been locally modified by fire and subsequent

Molinia domination, whilst birch Betula colonisation is widespread. Though it possesses no unique features, the site is notified because it comprises a relatively large tract of heathland which is a habitat with distinct national scarcity value: it moreover exhibits a great variety of heathland plant communities related to topography, soils and land use.'

6.1.2 Baseline information

Hazeley Heath is a relatively small SSSI. It is located immediately to the north of Hartley Wintney and in close proximity to Castle Bottom to Yateley and Hawley Commons. It is located either side of the B3011, which connects the M3 with the A33. The majority of this site is located to the north east of this road.

PROW are principally limited to the perimeter areas of this site creating a circular route around the whole of the site, with only a limited number crossing the site. Principle access points and permissive laybys are located off the B3011, with secondary access and car parking provided in the village of Hazeley.

The baseline information is illustrated in Figures 17 to 21.

Habitat Distribution

Hazeley Heath is a linear site that supports dry heathland, mature coniferous woodland, a very small area of clearfelled plantation and several blocks of grassland, the largest of which is neutral grassland on a former landfill tip at the southern end of the site. The dry heathland habitat is primarily located in central and north eastern parts of the site. These areas are surrounded by mature coniferous woodland that provide a wooded fringe to the SSSI. The northern point of the site is dominated by coniferous plantation woodland with a few small areas of grassland.

Public Visitor Pressure

The majority of the site is modelled as being subject to medium to high visitor pressure, with hotspots of very high visitor pressure at the northern and southern ends of the site adjacent to the settlement

edges and car parks. Phase 1 consultees questioned the modelled high pressure on the northern end of the site, suggesting that this is a quiet part of the site. Consultees were nevertheless supportive of the medium to high modelled pressure at the southern end of the site.

SPA Bird Distribution

All three bird species for which the SPA is classified have been recorded from the site. In 2004, 2 territories of nightjar were recorded from the central part of the SSSI. In 2006, 3 territories of woodlark were recorded from the heathland and heathland edges of the site and 1 territory of Dartford warbler was recorded from the central heathland area.

Relationship between Birds, Visitor Pressure and Habitats

All of the areas from which bird territories have been recorded are in areas considered to have a lower visitor pressure. As such disturbance does not appear to exert a strong influence on the distribution of bird territories within this SSSI and it is considered likely that habitat quality and in particular the quality and extent of heathland habitats and woodland edge habitats is having a stronger influence on the number and location of bird territories.

Future increased visitor pressure may affect breeding success or the number of breeding territories in the open heathland area of the site.

6.2 Factors Influencing Access Management

6.2.1 Access management constraints

Hazeley Heath is owned and managed by two principle land owners, The Timpany Trust and Hart District Council. A number of private landowners own parcels of land at the perimeter of the SSSI. The current landownership is illustrated in Figure 17.

Hazeley Heath is Registered Common Land under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. The south eastern portion of the site is registered as 'Section 15' land under the CROW Act. Here previous statutory access rights apply to the land. The access baseline is illustrated in Figure 18.

6.2.2 Recreational Use and Current Objectives

Hazeley Heath is well used for a variety of recreational activities, including dog walking and horse riding. It is noted by consultees that many visitors arrive by car and that approximately 80% of visitors use the south eastern section of the site owned by Hart Borough Council. The north western section of the site is popular with horse riders who access from the Bramshill to the north. The north western section of the site is less well used by walkers. The B3011 has limited places for visitors to stop in this section of the heath and the strong tree belt along the road reduces views into the remainder of the site.

A number of illegal activities occur on the site including motorcycling and joyriding.

6.2.3 Existing Land Manager / Owners Management Objectives

Existing documents which should be referred to in conjunction with this Access Management Plan include:

- Atkins (2006). *Hazeley Heath Management Plan Consultation Process*. Development of Management Objectives Working Draft.
- Dilly Lane Development and HWAG Visitor Surveys.

A number of organisations in addition to landowners and managers who are actively involved in the management or consultation on management at Hazeley Heath include:

- Open Spaces Society
- Heathland Project
- Hazeley Heath Management and Steering Group

Hart Borough Council employ two volunteer wardens for the south eastern section of the SSSI. Informal surveillance from the neighbouring residential population contributes to access management on the site.

6.2.4 Potential SANGS

Potential SANGS have been identified by LUC to the north west of Hazeley Heath and to the south of Hartley Wintney. The potential SANGS to the north west include areas of Heckfield Heath and Great Danmoor Copse. Wellington Country Park is noted as an existing recreational resource near Hazeley Heath. Wellington Country Park is part of the estate of the Duke of Wellington and features 350 acres of woodland, parkland and lakes, although it is noted that there are charges for admissions. It includes nature trails, picnic and barbeque areas, and welcomes visitors with dogs.

6.2.5 Implications for management

'Priority Management Areas' have been identified and are illustrated in Figure 22. Four scenarios A to D for priority management have been identified, and are discussed further in the Part 1 Strategic Report.

The focus for access management has been identified as the central section of SSSI management unit 2 and the northern, southern and eastern sections of SSSI management unit 1. These areas are high priority management units, the majority of which fall within Scenario A. The priority here should be access management which prevents disturbance increasing beyond a point where there is likely to be a decline in bird density or breeding success.

The remainder of the site is considered coniferous woodland managed on rotation and habitats considered low priority.

Prioritisation of access management in the SSSI should be continually. This is particularly important with coniferous woodland. As areas are felled and re-stocked, new habitat becomes available for the SPA birds. The access management priorities should reflect this. Other changes in habitat cover, such as permanent restoration to heathland relating to forestry also need to be identified for this purpose (see strategic report section 4.6.2).

6.3 Access Management Objectives

6.3.1 Access Management Issues

- Visitors are thought to arrive to this small site by car; car parking is dispersed and informal. A significant number of visitors also arrive on foot from Hartley Wintney and Hazeley villages.
- High modelled pressure at south-eastern end of site reflects consultees' view that this is the most visited part of the site and the area of high visitor pressure is principally associated with the open area on the restored landfill, which considered valuable for insects on the site. The north-western end of the site is not thought to be intensively visited.
- Informal parking in lay-bys along B3011.
- Dog-walking is a primary use of this site, in addition to horse riding in the north western section.

6.3.2 Access Management Objectives and Recommendations

The overall access management objective for Hazeley Heath is to

1. Reduce visitor pressure to ecologically sensitive habitats in areas modelled as having high visitor pressure to offset potential future increases in visitor pressure and maintain low visitor pressure in other areas of the SSSI.
2. Reduce visitor pressure during the breeding season on the open heath habitat modelled as having high visitor pressure and maintain low visitor pressure in other areas of the SSSI.

Ecological rationale:

Areas of the site that support areas of open heathland habitat support comparatively low numbers of breeding birds. Reduced levels of disturbance, in conjunction with appropriate habitat management,

will improve breeding success of these birds and persuade them to colonise other areas of the SSSI where they are not currently recorded. The ends of the heaths are thought to be more robust than the central areas; the southern end because of an area of rough neutral grassland; the northern end because of visitor pressure which is thought by consultees to be low.

6.4 Phase 2 Consultation Comments

The respondents to the phase 2 consultation workshop generally welcomed the contents of the Access Management Plan. The following general comments were made:

- The visitor pressure arrangement is considered inaccurate of reality, particularly in the north western section. The majority of the visitor pressure is mainly in the landfill area of the site to the south. The visitor data appears to disagree with local knowledge and perception of Hazeley Heath as a site with low visitor pressure.
- All objectives should be to manage visitor pressure in appropriate habitat areas.
- Maintain public rights through S193 which still applies.

Access management objectives and recommendations are suggested below, in order to address the access management issues listed previously. These objectives and recommendations are specific to Hazeley Heath and should be read in conjunction with strategic and SPA wide objectives and recommendations detailed in Part 1 of this report.

Hazeley Heath

ID	Objective	Recommendations	Detail	Rationale	Deliverability
1	Reduce high modelled visitor pressure at south-eastern end of the site.	Develop local user groups.	Hart DC have suggested inclination to use an educational approach. Users are involved in consultation of management plan and are therefore being exposed to discussions about access.	Help to further develop understanding and stewardship of local asset.	Through forthcoming management plan. Phase 2 consultation respondents generally disagree, noting that the priority should be to manage pressure during the bird breeding season and ensure there is no displacement of pressure from the landfill area to other areas of the site.
2	Reduce high modelled visitor pressure at south-eastern end of the site.	Further soft measures, including signage at main car parks or access points, including transition points to open heath habitat.	Encourage ecologically responsible use of site. Place signs along main routes which enter into open heath areas to request dogs on leads, etc. Conversely, where entering areas which may be able to accommodate dogs off leads (e.g. the rough grass area at the south-eastern end of the site) then signage to advise that this is acceptable.	Opportunities for physical measures are limited but with perceived local patronage, soft measures should help develop stewardship.	Signage of common land may be problematic. Phase 2 consultation respondents generally agree, with the priority to manage visitor pressure during the breeding season in open areas.

ID	Objective	Recommendations	Detail	Rationale	Deliverability
3	Reduce high modelled visitor pressure at south-eastern end of the site; Reduce visitor pressure during breeding season in open habitat.	Deflect pressure from site by encouraging visits to SANGS.	Wood pasture to south of Hartley Wintney and Country Park further into Fleet are potential SANGS. Combined with developing local user groups.	Encourage visits elsewhere.	<p>Considered as part of SANGS delivery plan.</p> <p>Implemented through liaison with the Forest of Eversley Group to promote the general wider countryside.</p> <p>Phase 2 consultation respondents generally agree.</p>
4	Reduce high modelled visitor pressure at south-eastern end of the site; Reduce visitor pressure during breeding season in open habitat.	<p>Reduce size of lay bys/car parks to 2-3 cars, where possible or consider closure of lay bys.</p> <p>Review informal parking along the road.</p> <p>Overall capacity must not be expanded and should be maintained.</p>	Current poor parking is a good deterrent but strategic reduction in size of car parks in south-eastern section, combined with measures to encourage visits to alternative sites and to encourage responsible use, would help reduce high modelled pressure. Displacement of visitors to parking elsewhere or on local roads should be considered.	<p>Fewer visits by car could lead to fewer visits, or a more local patronage.</p> <p>Availability of informal parking along the road seems to encourage visitors into the heath.</p>	Phase 2 consultation respondents generally agree.
5	Reduce visitor pressure during breeding season in open habitat.	Measures to control dogs.	<p>Dogs on leads policy during breeding season on heathland areas, potentially complemented by dogs off lead policy on rough grassland at southern end of site.</p> <p>In combination with soft measures, notably education to improve dog walkers behaviour and to encourage appropriate use of the site.</p>	Deflect pressure from areas used by nesting birds.	<p>Through forthcoming management plan.</p> <p>Phase 2 consultation respondents generally agree.</p>

7.0 Draft Access Management Strategy Whitmoor Common

7.1 Introduction and Baseline Information

The following Draft SSSI Access Management Plan addresses access management at the SSSI level. This plan is advanced to a second draft stage, following a two phase consultation process, and will be subject to further development and consultation by Natural England. The Draft SSSI Access Management Plan for this particular SSSI is intended to be read in conjunction with the Thames Basin Heaths Access Management Part 1 Strategic Report.

7.1.1 Introduction

Whitmoor Common is located in the south east of the study area on the northern edge of Guildford, within close proximity of Ash to Brookwood Heaths. Whitmoor Common is one of the smaller SSSIs that comprise the Thames Basin Heaths SPA, covering approximately 160 hectares.

The SSSI citation describes Whitmoor Common as follows:

*'Whitmoor Common is an extensive area of London Basin heathland characteristic of the soils of the Bagshot and Bracklesham Beds. The site contains a range of heathland habitats, as well as areas of woodland, grassland, and both standing and running water. A mosaic of wet heath and acidic grassland dominates the open areas. There is also an extensive area of dry heath as well as smaller stands of bracken and neutral grassland. Approximately half the site is covered with woodland, which varies in its age and composition. This site is the location of a rare spider, a scarce beetle, and two plants which occur only rarely in Surrey. It supports many characteristic heathland birds, including a strong breeding population of nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus*, a bird listed on Annexe 1 of the Birds Directive.'*

7.1.2 Baseline information

Whitmoor Common is located on the northern edge of Guildford. It is bisected in a north south alignment by the Woking to Guildford railway line, effectively splitting the site into an east and west component. The SSSI also comprises two disconnected parcels of land associated with Britrens Pond and Stringers Common along Salt Box Road, to the south of the main body of the SSSI. The southern edge of the common runs along or close to the urban edge of north Guildford whereas the northern, eastern and western sides of the Common are fringed by open countryside that supports coniferous plantation, broadleaf woodland and farmland. To the west the village of Worplesdon touches the edge of the Common.

There are a limited number of access points and PROW across this SSSI, although the whole site is access land under the Crow Act 2000. The two main car parks are located at the western end of Salt Box Road and at the Jolly Farmer Public House on Burdenshott Road. There are a number of informal access points off Burdenshott Road and the Woking to Guildford road that both cross the eastern section of the site. It is noted by consultees that the Woking to Guildford road is considered dangerous for pedestrians and is therefore unlikely to be a primary access point into the site. The Woking to Guildford railway line is noted as a barrier to movement east west across Whitmoor Common, and only one bridleway crossing is provided at the southern edge of the SSSI. The PROW network is well connected to the settlement edge of Guildford and Worplesdon, and is primarily concentrated around the perimeter of the SSSI, with few formal footpaths criss-crossing the site though many desire lines and informal footpaths do occur.

The main body of the SSSI is registered as a Local Nature Reserve. Surrey County Council states that *'the common has been declared a Local Nature Reserve in recognition of its proximity to the northern outskirts of Guildford, and the significant numbers of local residents that visit the site'* (http://www.surreycc.gov.uk/sccwebsite/sccwspages.nsf/LookupWebPagesByTITLE_RTF/Surrey+County+Council+Local+Nature+Reserves?opendocument, 4 December 2006).

There are two Scheduled Ancient Monuments within the SSSI; one, a 'linear boundary' located to the west of the Woking to Guildford railway; and a 'disc barrow' located at the eastern corner of the site.

The baseline information is illustrated in Figures 35 to 38.

Habitat Distribution

In summary, the triangular area of the Common to the east of the railway line supports a mosaic of mature coniferous woodland and open dry heath habitats with both habitats covering approximately half of the area of this part of the Common. To the west of the railway line there is a large continuous area of open dry heath habitat that dominates the southern half of the western part of the Common. This open heath is fringed along the southern and western boundaries by a thin strip of mature coniferous woodland. Immediately to the north of this open heath area is mature coniferous woodland with 5 isolated blocks of varying size of dry heath within the overall coniferous woodland cover. These isolated blocks of open heathland and the main block that dominates the southern half of this part of the Common collectively make up just under half of the total area of the western part of the common. Further to the north in the western part of the site the Common is dominated by mature coniferous woodland, although there is a large area of clearfell or young plantation woodland in the north western arm of the common. Additional habitats include small patches of grassland that do not occupy a significant area within the Common.

Public Visitor Pressure

The research undertaken by Footprint Ecology for Natural England has mapped different levels of disturbance from visitors to the SSSI, presented in Figure 39. The majority of the SSSI is subject to a modelled moderate to very high visitor pressure, as a result of its proximity to the northern settlement edge of Guildford. Only the north western corner of the site is modelled as being subject to lower visitor pressure. High visitor pressure areas occur at the south west corner of the site and either side of the Woking to Guildford railway line. It is noted by consultees that there is less visitor pressure in the north west corner of the site because of a number of perceived barriers to movement including the golf course and adjacent Local Nature Reserve.

SPA Bird Distribution

The records indicate that all three of the species for which the SPA is classified have been recorded on the site and that all records are associated with open dry heath or mature coniferous woodland edge habitats. In 2004, 11 territories of nightjar¹ were recorded within the open heathland habitats with 9 territories on the western part of the site and 2 to the east of the railway line. In 2006, 5 territories of Dartford warbler were recorded with 3 occurring to the east of the railway line and 2 to the west. Only 1 territory of woodlark was recorded in 2006 in open heathland habitat to the east of the railway line.

Relationship between Birds, Pressure and Habitats

All of the territories recorded in 2004 and 2006 are strongly associated with open dry heathland. There are no territories recorded from the large area of clearfelled or young plantation woodland in the north western corner of the site where there is modelled low visitor pressure and no territories were

¹ The nightjar territories are not shown on Figure 38, as they were not included in the 2004 data supplied by Natural England (see Strategic Review, 3.2.1). The record of 11 territories is sourced from Figure 10 from Liley et al.'s draft report 'The effect of urban development and recreational access on the distribution and abundance of nightjars on the Thames Basin and Dorset Heaths' (draft dated 06/12/06). The nightjar data have therefore not fed into the prioritisation of access management (figure 40 and 7.2.5 in this part of the SPA) through the bird density mapping (strategic report, section 4.6). Nightjar density is only one of the factors which feeds into the prioritisation of access management: habitat type and condition, visitor pressure and the population densities of Dartford warbler and woodlark are also taken into account. This omission should not have effected the prioritisation of management in this part of the SPA, as high visitor pressure is the main factor influencing the scenarios on open heath areas of Whitmoor Common.

recorded from the mature coniferous woodland within the SSSI. The research undertaken by Liley *et al.* indicates that at high levels of visitor pressure the breeding success of nightjar and the density of territories is likely to reduce. It is therefore interesting to note that the nightjar territories are largely recorded in areas with moderate visitor pressure compared to the highly disturbed areas of the open heathland along the southern boundary of the site and in the south western corner of the SSSI suggesting that disturbance may be affecting distribution. All the territories of Dartford warbler and the single territory of woodlark were recorded in 2006 in areas of high or very high modelled visitor pressure.

7.2 Factors Influencing Access Management

7.2.1 Access management constraints

The whole of Whitmoor Common is owned by Surrey County Council and managed on a 50 year lease by the Surrey Wildlife Trust. It is all registered as Common Land and Section 15 access land under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.

The Local Nature Reserve designation is for both people and wildlife, with a primary focus on access to wildlife and education.

7.2.2 Recreational Use and Current Objectives

The site is situated adjacent to the northern settlement edge of Guildford. The site is therefore well used by local residents, in particular for walking and dog walking. The recreational focus at Brittons Pond is fishing, with little opportunity for walks, because of a lack of PROW in this area. The car park here is however well used by visitors to the remainder of the Common.

7.2.3 Existing Land Manager / Owners Management Objectives

Existing documents which should be referred to in conjunction with this Access Management Plan include:

- *Whitmoor and Rickford Commons Management Plan 1999-2004.*

The site is currently managed by Surrey Wildlife Trust. The site condition is considered to be 'declining', therefore the primary focus of recent input has been habitat management. There is currently one full time ranger on the site who also manages other sites in the area, and a number of local volunteer groups who are actively involved in the management of the site. The consultees noted a very active 'Friends Group' who regularly meet at the Jolly Farmer Public House for lunch and a walk. The site is noted as well provided for with signboards, used to post community information.

7.2.4 Potential SANGS

There are a number of potential SANGS identified by the LUC study in relative proximity of the site. The majority of these are located within or on the settlement edge of Guildford and are illustrated in Figure 39. There are also two potential SANGS located to the north and east of the site. There is a potential SANG located adjacent to the north west corner of the site. Stringers Common to the south of Salt Box Road is noted by consultees as a possible potential SANG. The site is located within the settlement edge of Guildford, and as a result of the close proximity of a relatively large urban population is considered to be under some visitor pressure already, and the capacity of the site would require further investigation. In addition, Broadstreet Common, located to the west of Guildford has been noted by consultees as a potential SANG, and is noted for the potential to accommodate visitor displacement from both Whitmoor Common and Ash to Brookwood Heaths.

7.2.5 Implications for management

'Priority Management Areas' have been identified and are illustrated in Figure 40. Four scenarios A to D for priority management have been identified, and are discussed further in the Part 1 Strategic Report.

High priority management areas are confined principally to the central section of this site, within SSSI management units 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, and 9. The majority of these areas fall within Scenario B for access management, and within these areas the data indicates that visitor pressure is having an adverse effect on bird densities, or at least on bird breeding success. These areas are the priority areas within the SPA for reducing the impacts of visitor pressure, or visitor pressure itself, to improve the breeding success of bird densities.

The remainder of the site is coniferous woodland managed on rotation. The prioritisation of access management in the SSSI should be reviewed in the future as habitat management and access management measures are undertaken. This is particularly important with commercial forestry, which is managed on rotation at Whitmoor Common. As areas are felled and re-stocked, new habitat becomes available for the SPA birds. The access management priorities should reflect this. Other potential changes in habitat cover, such as permanent restoration to heathland relating also need to be identified for this purpose (see strategic report section 4.6.2).

7.3 Access Management Objectives

7.3.1 Access Management Issues

- The majority of the site is modelled as having very high visitor pressure as a result of the proximity of the northern edge of Guildford.
- Site well used for dog walking.

7.3.2 Access Management Objectives and Recommendations

The overall access management objectives for Whitmoor Common are to

1. Reduce very high modelled visitor pressure to provide additional capacity to accommodate future increased pressure, without encouraging the negative displacement of visitors.
2. Reduce visitor pressure to the open heathland areas during the bird breeding season with priority given to the land to the east of the railway track that bisects the site and the northern central part of the site.
3. To improve the heathland habitats and ensure displacement of visitors does not prevent re-colonisation of restored habitats by Annex I birds.

[NB: ground truthing is required to ascertain the nature of disturbance on both sides of the railway line, plus reconnaissance as to why main area of heath west of the railway has low bird numbers.]

Ecological rationale:

There are few records for nightjar, woodlark and Dartford warbler from the site, with the highest number of records from the eastern section of the Common. This may reflect low recorder effort as well as bird distribution response to disturbance. The high level of disturbance across the whole Common is considered likely to depress breeding attempts and affect the success of those birds that try to breed.

7.4 Phase 2 Consultation Comments

The respondents to the phase 2 consultation workshop generally welcomed the contents of the Access Management Plan. The following general comments were made:

- Agree with assessment of issues and objectives. It is suggested that may have to accept that Saltbox Road Car Park will have a 'sterile' area in its vicinity but there is scope to reduce the impact by the measures outlined.
- There is a large block of agricultural land enclosed by the Common on the QE side. If the old redundant farm buildings were given planning for industrial this large block of meadow could be included in the Common and so reduce internal pressure elsewhere.
- There is an enormous car park at Brittens Pond, east of the railway line.

Access management objectives and recommendations are suggested below, in order to address the access management issues listed previously. These objectives and recommendations are specific to Whitmoor Common and should be read in conjunction with strategic and SPA wide objectives and recommendations detailed in Part 1 of this report.

Whitmoor Common

	Objective	Recommendations	Detail	Rationale	Deliverability
1	Reduce very high modelled visitor pressure; reduce visitor pressure to the open heathland areas during the bird breeding season.	Rationalise formal and informal car parking along Saltbox Road.	<p>Main car park is at southern end of SSSI unit 6 and is well used. Rationalising informal parking in lay-bys could help reduce widespread very high modelled visitor pressure.</p> <p>Review car parking in line with emerging package of SANGs and strategic land acquisitions.</p> <p>Review car parking along Saltbox Road and at the Jolly Farmer public house.</p>	<p>Reduce infiltration into the site from the northern edge of Guildford, which seems to be main source of visitor pressure.</p> <p>Relocate pressure to SANGs which are better able to accommodate change.</p>	<p>Subject to further consultation with SCC / SWT and local highways authority.</p> <p>Phase 2 consultation respondents generally agree.</p>
2	Reduce very high modelled visitor pressure.	Develop circuit walks on edge of heath.	Draw people away from main areas of SPA bird habitat.	Reduce disturbance.	<p>Further information on site useage may need to be ascertained through closer work with the community, through the existing liaison group, and accurate visitor surveys, etc.</p> <p>Phase 2 consultation respondents strongly agree.</p>

	Objective	Recommendations	Detail	Rationale	Deliverability
3	Reduce very high modelled visitor pressure; reduce visitor pressure to the open heathland areas during the bird breeding season.	Package of soft measures.	Package of soft measures to include education, enabling volunteers and on-site rangers. Work with existing rangers and active user groups to develop wider stewardship of site. Signage, interpretation at key access points to encourage responsible behaviour. Effort to be reinforced during breeding season.	Site is physically and legally constrained so soft measures are likely to be important component of any access management package.	Landowners forum has been suggested by consultees as a vehicle for putting together access management tools for this site. Opportunities for support from a SPA-wide delivery organisation. Phase 2 consultation respondents generally agree, although note that this measure will have to be delivered in conjunction with other tools to persuade visitors to travel to an unfamiliar site.

	Objective	Recommendations	Detail	Rationale	Deliverability
4	Reduce very high modelled visitor pressure; reduce visitor pressure to the open heathland areas during the bird breeding season.	Encourage visits to alternative sites.	<p>Network of SANGS in the Wey Valley could provide strategic solution to diffuse existing and future potential visitor pressure from this heath. Renew efforts during the breeding season.</p> <p>SANGs for this site should include strategic purchase of land to the south to bridge the land between the main part of the site and Britten's Pond. There is also potential for strategic purchase of land to the south of Britten's pond.</p> <p>SANGs strategy might focus on the issue of car parking.</p>	Provide alternative attractive sites to encourage visitors elsewhere. Reduce pressure on SPA habitat.	Subject to local SANGs delivery plan, potentially supported by wider strategic spatial plan for SANGs.
5	Reduce pressure from dog walking.	Develop dogs strategy with local community.	As part of a package of soft measures to encourage responsible use of this site, develop a dogs strategy with the local community which considers the following options: a) a 1-in-3 visit to a non-heath site (or similar); b) signs to encourage dogs-on-leads during certain seasons c) wardening.	Reduce disturbance during the breeding season.	<p>Through local user base, which will need to be developed.</p> <p>Phase 2 consultation respondents agree.</p>

