

WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE – 1 MARCH 2016

Title:

**THAMES BASIN HEATHS SPECIAL PROTECTION AREA (SPA)
AVOIDANCE STRATEGY (REVIEW): DRAFT FOR CONSULTATION**

**[Portfolio Holder: Cllr Brian Adams]
[Wards Affected: All Farnham wards]**

Summary and purpose:

New visitor survey information for Farnham Park shows scope for increasing the capacity of the park to provide Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) in accordance with the SPA Avoidance Strategy. In order to release the extra capacity, the Avoidance Strategy needs to be reviewed, including the current tariff for developer contributions towards the provision of SANG and the programme of strategic access management and monitoring (SAMM). Consultation is required with Natural England and other constituent members of the SPA Joint Strategic Planning Board.

How this report relates to the Council's Corporate Priorities:

SANG is part of the Council's strategy for providing appropriate mitigation of the impact of new residential development within the zone affected by the SPA and accords with the Council's priority of protecting the environment. The Avoidance Strategy allows planning permission to be granted for new housing in Farnham in accordance with the Council's priorities. If further SANG is not released, acceptable schemes in Farnham may not be able to be progressed

Financial Implications:

The current SANG tariff has been reviewed in the light of the potential increase in the SANG capacity of Farnham Park.

Legal Implications:

In order to discharge its legal obligations under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010, the Council must have in place avoidance measures in the form of SANG and SAMM.

Introduction

1. SANG capacity at Waverley's only current resource at Farnham Park is monitored in accordance with the Thames Basin Heaths SPA Avoidance Strategy (adopted 2009; update May 2013). Regular reports to the Council's Western Planning Committee (WPC) have shown a slowly declining capacity in terms of dwelling numbers. In August 2015, the WPC noted an adjustment to the SANG capacity of the park, based on monitored occupancy levels of permitted new housing.

2. At the latest WPC meeting (3rd February 2016), it was reported that the unallocated SANG capacity stood at 307 dwellings (equivalent to 610 residents at the current average occupancy rate of 1.99 ppd). This will be sufficient, in the short term, to allow appropriate new housing sites to come forward. The more critical long-term issue, however, is the identification and delivery of enough SANG to support the emerging spatial strategy of the local plan.
3. The most appropriate opportunity to address this issue lies in investigating the scope for enhanced SANG capacity at Farnham Park. In that respect, a new visitor survey of Farnham Park, undertaken in May/June 2014 by Footprint Ecology, showed that the overall capacity of the park can be significantly enhanced. The method of re-assessment has been endorsed by Natural England, including the survey results that showed that current levels of car parking are sufficient to serve the enhanced capacity.
4. If the overall SANG capacity at Farnham Park was to be increased in accordance with the findings of the visitor survey, the current unallocated capacity would increase to 1,462 dwellings. To what extent this enhanced capacity would act as sufficient long-term mitigation, however, will depend on the scale of the housing allocations for the Farnham area that will be included in the local plan.
5. Given that any potential new SANGs are very much long term options, the immediate opportunity to increase capacity at Farnham Park should now be taken as a matter of urgency. This will not only allow the Council to continue to discharge its duties as local planning authority in determining planning applications, but will also demonstrate that sufficient SANG can be identified to support housing allocations well into the local plan period, and at least until any new sites that may be required can be identified.
6. In order to release this enhanced capacity, it is necessary to revise the SPA Avoidance Strategy. As well as recognising the enhanced capacity, the revised Strategy will need to include updated guidance on the calculation of financial tariffs, and the extent to which new or improved enhancement and management measures may be required.
7. The revised Strategy will form part of the evidence base for the new local plan. The preliminary timetable for its preparation and approval is -

(i) Draft Avoidance Strategy approved for consultation	1 st March 2016
(ii) Public consultation (6 weeks)	March/April 2016
(iii) Community O & S Committee	8 th March 2016
(iv) Review representations and amend document	April/May 2016
(v) Executive approves new Avoidance Strategy	7 th June 2016
(vi) Council adopts new Avoidance Strategy	19 th July 2016

Recommendation

It is recommended that the draft Thames Basin Heaths SPA Avoidance Strategy (Review) be approved for public consultation.

Background Papers

Farnham Park Visitor Survey, Footprint Ecology (September 2014)

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