

Agenda Item 78.

Application Number	Expiry Date	Borough	Parish	Ward
190900	EXT	Wokingham/ Bracknell Forest	Wokingham	Wescott; Wokingham Without;

Applicant	Kingacre Estates Ltd
Site Address	Land to the South of Anne's Manor
Proposal	Full planning application for the proposed change of use of land from nil use to D2 for proposed Suitable Alternative Greenspace (SANG) with associated landscaping. To be read in conjunction with applications 190914 & 191068.
Type	Full
Officer	Emy Circuit
Reason for determination by committee	Major (EIA) application related to the South Wokingham SDL

FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Planning Committee on Tuesday 18 th May 2021
REPORT PREPARED BY	Assistant Director Delivery and Infrastructure: Place and Growth

SUMMARY
<p>The application is for full planning permission for the change of use of a 7.83 hectare site from a nil use to class D2 assembly and leisure. The site is situated in designated countryside to the east of the borough: the Hilton St Anne's Manor hotel lies the north, the A329M to the east, the Reading-Waterloo railway line to the south and the western boundary is contiguous with Buckhurst Meadows, an area of Public Open Space (POS), associated with the development at Montague Park. The application site is proposed to connect to Buckhurst Meadows, to create a single, larger area of public open space. The site straddles the boundary with Bracknell Forest Borough (counterintuitively it is the eastern part of the site that lies in Wokingham).</p> <p>The application is one of a suite of three applications for the second phase of development within the South Wokingham Strategic Development Location (SDL) (see paragraphs 1-7 of the appraisal for more detail). Although the site itself lies outside the SDL boundary, the intention is that the land will be used as a Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) to mitigate the impact of development within the SDL upon the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA).</p> <p>SANG is an informal recreational use rather than being a land use in its own right. To be used as SANG, public open space must fulfil certain design and quality criteria. However, case law has established that, where an application is made for SANG alone it should be assessed simply as an assembly and leisure use; whether the proposal would meet SANG design and quality standards is properly assessed at the point where residential development seeks to rely on the land to mitigate its impact upon the SPA. Hence, the current application must be assessed primarily on the appropriateness of the intended use - i.e. informal outdoor recreation; a use that is acceptable in principle in this location - and the main issues are the impact on the landscape and ecology of the site and its accessibility.</p>

While the acceptability of the applications for housing is dependent on provision of adequate SANG, the reverse is not true: informal recreational use (as SANG) does not have to be connected with a specific proposal for residential development to be acceptable.

The proposal is subject to an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) because of the cumulative impact with other development within the South Wokingham SDL and other strategic sites: one overarching Assessment has been carried out for the Project (i.e. all three applications within Phase 2) with a separate Assessment for each of the three individual Proposals (applications).

No new dwellings are proposed so there is no need for an Appropriate Assessment.

The application is before the planning committee because it relates to the change of use of more than a hectare of land, so constitutes a major development proposal. Furthermore, it is associated with the delivery of the South Wokingham SDL.

As it is a cross-boundary proposal, a duplicate application has been submitted to Bracknell Forest Borough Council (BFBC) for determination. Bracknell have indicated that their intention is to approve the application under delegated powers providing the Wokingham Planning Committee resolve to approve it. Given the location of the SANG adjacent to the existing SANG at Buckhurst Meadows and South Wokingham Development, the proposals are considered acceptable.

PLANNING STATUS

- Countryside (CP11)
- Ancient woodland/semi-improved acid grassland
- Trees to the north of the site and along the railway to the west of the site are included in TPO-1359-2010
- 100 metre Badger consultation zone
- The western part of the site is in a landfill gas & potentially contaminated land consultation zone
- Ordinary watercourse
- Emm Brook Nitrate Vulnerable Zones for surface water
- Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) Impact Risk Zones
- Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area Linear Mitigation Zones: 5km Linear Mitigation Zone (CP8 SAL05)

RECOMMENDATION

That the committee authorise the GRANT OF PLANNING PERMISSION subject to the conditions and informatives as below:

Conditions

Timescale for development

1. The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of three years from the date of this permission.

Reason: In pursuance of s.91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended by s.51 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004).

Approved details

2. This permission is in respect of the submitted drawings numbered:

P18-0963_06U-04 *Indicative Masterplan (St Anne's SANG)*

P18-0963_06Y-02 *Framework Plan (for purposes of identifying development parcels referenced in other conditions)*

P18-0963_81K *Indicative Phasing Plan*

P18-0963_139E *Site Location Plan (Land to the South of St Anne's Manor)*

P18-0963_160A-01 *Phase 2 of the South Wokingham Strategic Development Location (The Project)*

P19-0052_02N *Green Infrastructure Provision*

P19-0052_13D *St Anne's SANG Illustrative Landscape Plan*

P19-0052_14D *St Anne's SANG Detailed Landscape Plan*

The development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details unless other minor variations are agreed in writing after the date of this permission and before implementation with the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: For the avoidance of doubt and to ensure that the development is carried out in accordance with the application form and associated details hereby approved.

Construction of the footpath network including access to the site

3. Before the use of the land hereby approved commences, the footpath network, including a connection into the primary footpath network at Buckhurst Meadows SANG, shall be laid out in accordance with details which have first been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The details shall include:

- i) the route of the paths;
- ii) a specification for the construction of each path type; and
- iii) a methodology for the construction.

Reason: to ensure provision of appropriate access to the site and that the paths are constructed to a suitable standard for their intended purpose, without harm to nearby trees, hedgerows and habitats in accordance with Core Strategy policies CP1, CP2, CP3, CP6 and CP7 and Managing Development Delivery Local Plan policies CC03, TB21 and TB23.

Earth mounding and contouring

4. No earthworks shall take place except in accordance with details that have first been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. These details shall include the proposed grading and mounding of land areas including

the levels and contours to be formed, showing the relationship of proposed mounding to existing vegetation and surrounding landform.

Reason: No material earthworks are currently proposed but should it transpire that such works are required to facilitate construction of the footpath network or other works associated with delivery of the development, details should be first approved in the interests of the amenity and landscape character of the area, tree protection and ecology in accordance with Core Strategy policies CP1, CP3 & CP7 and Managing Development Delivery Local Plan policies CC03, TB21 & TB23.

Landscaping

5. Prior to the commencement of the development, full technical details of both hard and soft landscape proposals shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. These details shall include, as appropriate:
 - a. scheme drawings;
 - b. proposed finished levels and contours;
 - c. means of enclosure (having regard to ecological permeability, safe exercising of dogs, grazing livestock as part of the maintenance of the site and provision of a sufficiently secure boundary to deter trespass on the railway);
 - d. other vehicle and pedestrian access and circulation areas;
 - e. specification of hard surfacing materials;
 - f. specification and minor artefacts and structures (e.g. furniture, refuse or other storage units, signs, lighting, external services, etc.); and
 - g. measures required for ecological mitigation or biodiversity gain;

Soft landscaping details shall include planting plan, cross-sectional soil profiles, specification (including cultivation and other operations associated with plant and grass establishment), schedules of plants, noting species, planting sizes and proposed numbers/densities where appropriate, and implementation timetable.

All hard and soft landscape works shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details prior to any part of the development being brought into use or in accordance with a timetable approved in writing by the local planning authority. Any trees or plants which, within a period of five years after planting, are removed, die or become seriously damaged or defective, shall be replaced in the next planting season with others of species, size and number as originally approved and permanently retained.

Reason: In the interests of visual amenity and to ensure mitigation of ecological impacts in accordance with Core Strategy policy CP3 and Managing Development Delivery Local Plan policies CC03 TB21 and TB23. These details are fundamental to the proposal so are required before commencement of development.

Retention of trees and shrubs

6. No trees, shrubs or hedges within the site which are shown as being retained on the approved plans shall be felled, uprooted wilfully damaged or destroyed, cut back in any way or removed without previous written consent of the local planning

authority; any trees, shrubs or hedges removed without consent or dying or being severely damaged or becoming seriously diseased within 5 years from the completion of the development hereby permitted shall be replaced with trees, shrubs or hedge plants of similar size and species unless the local planning authority gives written consent to any variation.

Reason: To secure the protection throughout the time that development is being carried out, of trees, shrubs and hedges growing within the site which are of amenity value to the area in accordance with Core Strategy policy CP3 and Managing Development Delivery Local Plan policies CC03 and TB21.

Protection of trees

- 7.
- a) No development or other operation shall commence on site until a scheme which provides for the retention and protection of trees, shrubs and hedges growing on or adjacent the site in accordance with BS5837: 2012 has been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority (the Approved Scheme); the tree protection measures approved shall be implemented in complete accordance with the Approved Scheme for the duration of the development (including, unless otherwise provided by the Approved Scheme) demolition, all site preparation work, tree felling, tree pruning, demolition works, soil moving, temporary access construction and or widening or any other operation involving use of motorised vehicles or construction machinery.
 - b) No development (including any tree felling, tree pruning, demolition works, soil moving, temporary access construction and or widening or any other operation involving use of motorised vehicles or construction machinery) shall commence until the local planning authority has been provided (by way of a written notice) with a period of no less than 7 working days to inspect the implementation of the measures identified in the Approved Scheme on-site.
 - c) No excavations for services, storage of materials or machinery, parking of vehicles, deposit or excavation of soil or rubble, lighting of fires or disposal of liquids shall take place within an area designated as being fenced off or otherwise protected in the Approved Scheme.
 - d) The fencing or other works which are part of the Approved Scheme shall not be moved or removed, temporarily or otherwise, until all works including external works have been completed and all equipment, machinery and surplus materials removed from the site, unless the prior approval of the local planning authority has first been sought and obtained.

Reason: To secure the protection throughout the time that the development is being carried out of trees shrubs or hedges growing within or adjacent to the site which are of amenity value to the area, and to allow for verification by the local planning authority that the necessary measures are in place before development and other works commence in accordance with Core Strategy policy CP3 and Managing Development Delivery Local Plan policies CC03 and TB21. To avoid harm to trees, protection measures need to be in place before any other works commence. Hence, details are required before commencement.

Landscape and ecological management plan

8. Prior to the commencement of the development a landscape and ecological management plan, including long term design objectives, management responsibilities, timescales and maintenance schedules for all landscape areas, shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The landscape management plan shall be carried out as approved.

Reason: In order to ensure that provision is made to allow satisfactory maintenance of the landscaping hereby approved in accordance with Core Strategy policies CP3 and CP7 and Managing Development Delivery Local Plan policies CC03, TB21 and TB23. These details need to be considered in conjunction with the landscaping proposals which are fundamental.

Public art

9. Before the development hereby permitted is brought into use, a strategy for delivery of public art throughout the site, setting out principles for:

- a. public engagement;
- b. the nature of the artwork;
- c. number of pieces;
- d. broad locations;
- e. procurement; and
- f. phasing of delivery

shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority and the strategy shall be implemented as approved.

Reason: to ensure a high quality development which contributes to a sense of place in accordance with Core Strategy policies CP1, CP3 and paragraph A7.52 and South Wokingham Supplementary Planning Document Design Principle 1e(iv).

Archaeology

10. No development shall take place except in accordance with either a statement confirming the use of non-intrusive working methods that will preserve in situ any archaeological features present or (should the proposed methods change and there be potential for ground disturbance that would cause harm to archaeological significance) an archaeological watching brief to mitigate the impact via preservation by record which has first been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: The site is identified as being of high archaeological potential (or is otherwise known as being likely to contain archaeological remains) and measures should be implemented to avoid disturbance or where this is not possible to ensure recording of any archaeological features or artefacts before disturbance by the development in accordance with National Planning Policy Framework Section 16 (Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment), Core Strategy policy CP3 General Principles for Development and Managing Development Delivery

Local Plan policy TB25 Archaeology. Confirmation is required before development commences to ensure harm to archaeology is avoided.

Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP)

11. No development, including any works of demolition, shall take place, until a Construction Environmental Management Plan has been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The Plan should include amongst other things:
- i) Phasing of development;
 - ii) measures for the control of dust, odour and other effluvia;
 - iii) measures for the control of noise;
 - iv) measures to prevent queueing outside the site;
 - v) pollution control measures;
 - vi) a construction travel protocol or Green Travel Plan for the construction phase;
 - vii) construction traffic management plan comprising:
 - a. analysis of the volumes of construction vehicles during construction phases for both light and heavy vehicles;
 - b. vehicle routes and notably lorry routes, with volumes of lorries; and
 - c. traffic management proposals including any mitigations, hours of operation and signage
 - viii) site construction access;
 - ix) details of any site construction office, compound and ancillary facilities;
 - x) cycle storage and motor vehicle parking and turning for site operatives and visitors;
 - xi) loading, unloading and storage of plant and materials;
 - xii) measures to prevent deposit of mud on the highway;
 - xiii) lighting;
 - xiv) A site security strategy;
 - xv) protection of important trees, hedgerows and other natural features
 - xvi) relevant ecological mitigation measures for protected species and species of principle importance;
 - xvii) contact details for complaints construction liaison officer;
 - xviii) Communications Plan to keep local residents, town/parish councils and ward members informed;

The Plan shall be implemented in accordance with the approved details throughout the construction period.

Reason: to safeguard the amenities of people living and working in the area, protected species and habitats and highway safety and convenience in accordance with Core Strategy CP1, CP3, CP6 & CP7 and Managing

Development Delivery Local Plan policies CC06 & TB23. The condition is intended to manage operations during development, so is required before works start.

Hours of work

12. No work relating to the development hereby approved, including works of demolition or preparation prior to building operations, shall take place other than between the hours of 08:00 and 18:00 Monday to Friday and 08:00 to 13:00 Saturdays and at no time on Sundays or Bank or National Holidays.

Reason: To protect the occupiers of neighbouring properties from noise and disturbance outside the permitted hours during the construction period. Relevant policy: Core Strategy policies CP1 and CP3 and Managing Development Delivery Local Plan policy CC06.

Contamination

13. If, during development, contamination not previously identified is found to be present at the site then no further development (unless otherwise agreed in writing with the local planning authority) shall be carried out until a remediation strategy detailing how this contamination will be dealt with has been submitted to, and approved in writing by, the local planning authority. The remediation strategy shall be implemented as approved.

Reason: To ensure that the development does not contribute to, and is not put at unacceptable risk from or adversely affected by, unacceptable levels of water pollution from previously unidentified contamination sources at the development site in accordance with paragraph 170 of the National Planning Policy Framework; and Core Strategy policy CP1.

Sustainable drainage

14. The use hereby permitted shall not commence until a sustainable drainage scheme for the site has been completed in accordance with details (including future management and maintenance) which have first been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The sustainable drainage scheme shall be managed and maintained thereafter in accordance with the agreed details.

Reason: To prevent the increased risk of flooding, and to protect water quality. Relevant policy: NPPF Section 14 (Meeting the Challenge of Climate Change, Flooding and Coastal Change), Technical Guidance on the NPPF (Flood Risk), Core Strategy policy CP1 and Managing Development Delivery Local Plan policy CC09.

Informatives

Reason for approval

1. The development accords with the policies contained within the adopted development plan and there are no material considerations that warrant a different decision being taken.

Relevant policies

2. You are advised, in compliance with The Town and Country Planning [Development Management Procedure] [England] Order 2010 that the following policies and/or proposals in the development plan are relevant to this decision:

National Policy	NPPF	National Planning Policy Framework	
South East Area Plan	NRM6	Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area	
Adopted Wokingham Borough Core Strategy DPD 2010	CP1	Sustainable Development	
	CP2	Inclusive Communities	
	CP3	General Principles for Development	
	CP4	Infrastructure Requirements	
	CP6	Managing Travel Demand	
	CP7	Biodiversity	
	CP8	Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area	
	CP11	Proposals outside development limits (including countryside)	
	CP21	South Wokingham Strategic Development Location	
	Adopted Managing Development Delivery Local Plan 2014	CC01	Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development
		CC02	Development Limits
CC03		Green Infrastructure, Trees and Landscaping	
CC06		Noise	
CC07		Parking	
CC09		Development and Flood Risk (from all sources)	
CC10		Sustainable Drainage	
TB12		Employment Skills Plan	
TB21		Landscape Character	
TB23		Biodiversity and Development	
Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD)		South Wokingham Strategic Development Location Supplementary Planning Document (2011) Infrastructure Delivery	

Proactive engagement

3. The Local Planning Authority has acted positively and proactively in determining this application by assessing the proposal against all material considerations, including planning policies and any representations that may have been received and subsequently determining to grant planning permission in accordance with the presumption in favour of sustainable development as set out in the NPPF.

Environment Agency

4. The Environment Agency are pleased that the foul drainage from this site will connect to the existing foul drainage network to the north of the Proposed Project Development

Highways Agency

5. Highways England will be consulted on the Construction Environmental Management Plan to comply with condition 11.

Landscaping details and specification

6. The landscaping details to comply with condition 5 should include, among other things:
 - a. A wider planted buffer adjacent to the A329;
 - b. more diversity in the planting mixes;
 - c. a separate woodland mix;
 - d. a landscape specification incorporating a planting matrix for areas of tree and shrub planting and woodland planting; and
 - e. details of ground preparation for all types of planting including the wild meadow planting; and
 - f. The details should include details of any benches and other minor artefacts together with a specification for their installation.
7. The applicant is encouraged to enter into informal discussion with the Local Planning Authority before submission of the Arboricultural Method Statement pursuant to condition 7.
8. Landscape and Ecological Management Plan to comply with condition 8 should include more information on each type of area and how these will be managed in the short and long term and on woodland management, to include the initial woodland management works might be and the ongoing management.

Crime Prevention Design Advisor

9. The CEMP to comply with condition 11 shall have regard to the Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2015 at <https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/priced/hsg151.pdf> which provides advice on Site boundary treatments; Access control; Compound Security and Security

precautions and advises the contractor to liaise with their local police crime prevention design advisor.

Network Rail landscaping requirements

10. Having regard to Network Rail's consultation response (11 October 2019), the landscaping scheme and boundary treatment details pursuant to conditions 5 shall include a substantial, trespass proof fence of at least 1.8 metres in height along the development side of the existing boundary fence; hedges should not allow the fence to be scaled and the scheme should avoid the use of tree species that are not permitted adjacent to the railway:

Permitted: Birch (*Betula*), Crab Apple (*Malus Sylvestris*), Field Maple (*Acer Campestre*), Bird Cherry (*Prunus Padus*), Wild Pear (*Pyrus Communis*), Fir Trees – Pines (*Pinus*), Hawthorne (*Cretaeagus*), Mountain Ash – Whitebeams (*Sorbus*), Willow Shrubs (*Shrubby Salix*),

Not Permitted: Alder (*Alnus Glutinosa*), Aspen – Poplar (*Populus*), Beech (*Fagus Sylvatica*), Wild Cherry (*Prunus Avium*), Hornbeam (*Carpinus Betulus*), Small-leaved Lime (*Tilia Cordata*), Oak (*Quercus*), Willows (*Salix Willow*), Sycamore – Norway Maple (*Acer*), Horse Chestnut (*Aesculus Hippocastanum*), Sweet Chestnut (*Castanea Sativa*), London Plane (*Platanus Hispanica*).

Network Rail will be consulted on the detailed landscaping proposals pursuant to condition 5.

Bat informative

11. Should any bats or evidence of bats be found prior to or during the development, all works must stop immediately and an ecological consultant or the Council's ecologist contacted for further advice before works can proceed. All contractors working on site should be made aware of the advice and provided with the contact details of a relevant ecological consultant.

Great Crested Newt informative

12. Should any Great Crested Newts or evidence of Great Crested Newts be found prior to or during the development, all works must stop immediately and an ecological consultant or the Council's ecologist contacted for further advice before works can proceed. All contractors working on site should be made aware of the advice and provided with the contact details of a relevant ecological consultant.

Public Art

13. The details of public art pursuant to condition 9 require a strategy for delivery of public art for the development, which need not be within the application site boundary providing a coordinated approach has been demonstrated.

SUMMARY PLANNING HISTORY
There is no relevant planning history

SUMMARY INFORMATION	
Site Area	7.83 hectares
Previous land use(s) and floorspace(s)	Nil use
Proposed Land Use	D2 for proposed Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) with associated landscaping
Proposed car and cycle parking	None

CONSULTATION RESPONSES	
Berkshire Archaeology	No objection subject to a condition requiring either confirmation that the proposed construction methods would not result in disturbance of archaeology or a Watching Brief. (<i>Officer Note: condition 10 refers.</i>)
Berks, Bucks and Oxon Wildlife Trust	No comments received.
Bracknell Forest Borough Council	No comments received.
Crime Prevention Design Advisor	No objection subject to suitable site security during construction and measures to prevent trespass on the railway. (<i>Officer note: condition 5 & informative 6 refer.</i>)
Environment Agency	No objection subject to a condition and informative (condition 13 and informative 4)
Fields in Trust	No comments received
Health and Safety Executive	The site is not within the consultation distance of a major hazard site or major accident hazard pipeline so there is no need for further consultation.
Highways England	No objection and no conditions recommended but ask to be consulted on the CEMP in order to consider any overlap with other committed developments at north and south Wokingham and their Smart Motorway Scheme. Informative 5 refers.
Historic England	No comments made
Local Strategic Partnership	No comments received
National Grid	No comments: their assets would not be affected.
Natural England	No comments: the application is not likely to result in significant impacts on statutory designated nature conservation sites or landscapes and the LPA can assess consistency with national and local policies on the natural environment.
Network Rail	No objection: precautions should be taken where development is proposed within 2-3

	metres of the railway sidings but – if there is no development nearby - Network Rail has no further comments. <i>(Officer Note: the SANG landscaping proposals show that the nearest development (paths within the SANG) would be over 20 metres from the railway boundary.</i> Network Rail provided guidance on development adjacent to the railway. <i>(Officer Note: condition 5 and informative 10 refer.)</i>
NHS Wokingham Clinical Commissioning Group	No comments received
Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue	No comments received
South East Water	No comments received
Southern Gas Networks	No objections/comments on the proposals: details of gas mains in the vicinity were provided <i>(Officer Note: none are shown on or immediately adjacent to the application site).</i>
Sport England	No objections/comments on the proposals.
SE Power Distribution	No direct interest in this application, other than its connection to the applications for Phases 2B & 2B
Thames Valley Police	No comments received
Thames Water	No comments received
Ramblers Association/ Mid and West Berkshire Access Local Forum (MWBLAF)	No comments received
WBC Children's services/Education (School Place Planning)	No comments received
WBC Cleaner & Greener (Waste Services)	No comments received
WBC Community Sustainability	No comments received
WBC Conservation Officer	No objection and no conditions recommended. The proposals pose no harm to identified heritage assets.
WBC Drainage	No objection
WBC Ecology	No objections subject to conditions to secure ecological mitigation. <i>(Officer note: conditions 55.g & 11xvi) refer.)</i>

WBC Economic Prosperity and Place (Community infrastructure)	The proposal falls below the 1,000m ² threshold for requiring an Employment Skills Plan (ESP)
WBC Environmental Health Officer	No objection and no conditions recommended.
WBC Green Infrastructure	No objection subject to the existing footpath in the Buckhurst Meadows SANG being extended to connect to the path within the application site & further detail being provided. (<i>Officer Note: Conditions 3 & 5 refer.</i>)
SDL Growth and Delivery (Planning Policy)	No objection subject to detailed assessment.
WBC Health and Wellbeing	No comments received
WBC Highways	No objection subject to conditions: a CEMP in would ensure the construction access and potential impacts from construction traffic would be mitigated (<i>Officer Note: condition 11 refers</i>).
WBC Libraries and Information Services	No comments received
WBC Tree & Landscape	No objection subject to conditions to secure the landscaping and management of the site (<i>Officer Note: conditions 5 - 8 and Informative 7 refer.</i>)
WBC Public Rights of Way	No objection/comments

REPRESENTATIONS

Wokingham Town Council: Object. (*Officer Note: identical comments were submitted in relation to this and applications 190914 & 191068: full comments are attached but only those relating to this application have been summarised here*)

The location has been chosen for SANG use because it cannot be built on, due to its location next to the railway and A329(M). It would not fulfil the purpose of SANG (walking for residents) because it is nowhere near the development/separated by the railway line and a busy road. If the use is approved provision should be made for noise barriers and pollution control. (*Officer Note: sections 2, 6.3 & 8.1 refer.*)

The Town Council noted the findings of the ecological surveys within the ES in terms of the range of species present, importance of the site as a habitat for them and impact on them. The increase in development would reduce wildlife in adjacent areas, thus making them 'available' for future development. (*Officer Note: This presupposes that ecological impacts are not adequately mitigated. Section 5 refers.*)

Wokingham Without Parish Council: the Parish Council's comments, which are attached, cover this and applications 190914 & 191068 but none of them relate specifically to the SANG application.

Local Members:

Object to the overall scale of development in South Wokingham but, if the council does not succeed in having housing numbers reduced (*Officer Note: the request to reduce housing numbers relates to the number of dwellings to be allocated through the Local Plan update rather than those already allocated in the Core Strategy. See sections 1 & 2*) the following should be considered:

An equalities impact assessment should be carried out (in accordance with the motion passed by full council on 18 July 2019) to assess access for all users, especially those with special needs (*Officer Note: see the section on the Public Sector Equality Duty (Equality Act 2010) at the end of this report*).

WBC declared a climate emergency on 18 July 2019. The SANG should contribute to the aim of achieving a carbon neutral borough by 2030: it should be carbon neutral or offset other non-carbon neutral developments (190900 and 190914); where trees are lost there should be sufficient replacement planting to replicate the carbon update of lost trees within three years; the assessment of the carbon impact of the proposal should contain measurable outcomes and take into account the impact of travel to and from the site and site maintenance. (*Officer Note: the application must be assessed on its own merit. If applicants subsequently choose to rely on the site to mitigate the impact of other development in the vicinity, then that mitigation would need to be secured through conditions and/or a legal agreement pursuant to the planning permission for the development requiring mitigation*). The extent of tree loss proposed is very limited and would be offset by landscaping elsewhere on the site – condition 5 refers. Vehicle trips would also be limited (section 6.2 refers).

Surveys of fauna and flora should take place before works begin and monitoring should take place during the development; WBC should have the power to stop works if they result in unacceptable loss of wildlife. (*Officer Note: the ecological impact of the proposal and need for mitigation is considered in section 5. Any breach of conditions would be dealt with through normal planning enforcement procedures, although it would be unusual for harm to be of such magnitude that it would warrant serving a Stop Notice. Protected species are also protected under separate legislation.*)

Neighbours: 19 representations have been received including submissions on behalf of the Arts Society Wokingham and Great Langborough Residents Association (GLRA). Some relate to this application only and some to all three consortium applications. The majority raise general objections to development at South Wokingham which are not directly relevant to the assessment of this application. In summary, the points which relate to the proposed SANG use are:

The principle of development: one objects to the change of use of the land but does not explain why.

Need for SANG: the SANG is only being proposed to mitigate the development south of the railway, which is not required as the council has demonstrated a five year housing land supply (*Officer Note: the proposed houses are part of the planned development of the borough as explained sections 1 & 2. Also, the fact that the proposal has potential to facilitate housing delivery is not a reason to resist otherwise acceptable development. Section 2 refers.*)

Ecological impact: the area is ancient oak woodland covered by TPO and has been untouched for decades: it has rich biodiversity and supports a variety of wildlife including protected species. Removal of trees and hedgerows, introduction of paths and increased use would have a negative impact on the existing woodland, grassland and wetlands (*Officer Note: section 5 refers*)

How would the SANG be maintained? (*Officer note: if the site is to be relied upon as SANG in future, the transfer of the land to council and commuted sums for future maintenance would be secured through the application for housing.*)

Access: the SANG would be inaccessible except via an existing SANG (*Officer Note: The two sites would function as a single SANG. Section 6.3 refers.*)

Public Art: consideration should be given to the inclusion of public art - permanent, accessible, site-specific sculptural or mural works created to have an impact on passers-by - which helps create a sense of place, can act as a focal and meeting point, gives pleasure and stimulate discussion. (*Officer Note: paragraphs 40-41, condition 9 and informative 13 refer.*)

Other issues: the town and its infrastructure (roads, sewage system, schools, surgeries) cannot cope with additional housing and the associated traffic and pollution. The proposals would result in loss of green space, trees and wildlife and reduce the separation from Bracknell. How can the impact of c1,500 homes on local ecology including the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area be mitigated? The proposals do not fit with the approach of planned development supported by infrastructure and should not be progressed until the outcome of the consultation on the quantum of new development becomes clear. The description of development does not reflect the number of dwellings proposed. (*Officer Note: as explained in section 0 this application is one of a suite of three applications for the second phase of development in South Wokingham. This application – which must be assessed on its own merits - proposes use of land for information recreation without any associated housing.*)

PLANNING POLICY		
National Policy	NPPF	National Planning Policy Framework
South East Area Plan	NRM6	Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area
Adopted Wokingham Borough Core Strategy DPD 2010	CP1	Sustainable Development
	CP2	Inclusive Communities
	CP3	General Principles for Development
	CP4	Infrastructure Requirements
	CP6	Managing Travel Demand
	CP7	Biodiversity
	CP8	Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area
	CP11	Proposals outside development limits (including countryside)
	CP21	South Wokingham Strategic Development Location

Adopted Managing Development Delivery Local Plan 2014	CC01	Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development
	CC02	Development Limits
	CC03	Green Infrastructure, Trees and Landscaping
	CC06	Noise
	CC07	Parking
	CC09	Development and Flood Risk (from all sources)
	CC10	Sustainable Drainage
	TB12	Employment Skills Plan
	TB21	Landscape Character
	TB23	Biodiversity and Development
Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD)		South Wokingham Strategic Development Location Supplementary Planning Document (2011)
		Infrastructure Delivery and Contributions Supplementary Planning Document (2011)
	BDG	Borough Design Guide

PLANNING ISSUES

1. Background

1. The Wokingham Borough Core Strategy establishes the need to deliver over 13,000 new homes during the period up to 2026, the majority of which will be in four Strategic Development Locations (SDLs) (Core Strategy policy CP17 *Housing Delivery*). Of these 2,500 are to be in an urban extension south of the existing settlement of Wokingham. Core Strategy Policy CP21 *South Wokingham Strategic Development Location*, amplified by Appendix 7 and two Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) – the *South Wokingham South Wokingham Strategic Development Location SPD* and the *Infrastructure Delivery and Contributions SPD* – set out the council's expectations in terms of the comprehensive delivery of these new homes, together with the infrastructure required to support them. Of direct relevance to the current application, this includes provision of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) to mitigate the impact of new residential development upon the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA).
2. The South Wokingham SDL is divided into two distinct parcels by the Reading-Waterloo railway line, which runs broadly east-west across the site.
3. Outline planning permission for the area north of the railway line (approximately a quarter of the development planned in the SDL) was approved in 2012 (application reference O/2010/1712) and the development of Montague Park (formerly known as Buckhurst Farm) is at an advanced stage. The supporting infrastructure included the first stage of the South Wokingham Distributor Road (SWDR) (which will ultimately continue to Finchampstead Road) and a 12.48 hectare SANG on the

eastern side of the development (now known as Buckhurst Meadows), adjoining the site that is the subject of this application.

4. The area of to the south of the railway is still to be developed.
5. Planning permission for the second section of the SWDR, including a bridge over the railway line and connection to Waterloo Road, was granted in February 2018 (planning permission 172934). An application for the continuation of the SWDR to Finchampstead Road and associated off-site mitigation works are reported elsewhere on this agenda (applications 192928 & 203535).
6. A consortium of developers is bringing forward much of the remainder of the development within the South Wokingham SDL. This application is one of a suite of three applications being reported to planning committee together: the others are a hybrid application for up to 1,434 dwellings (Phase 2b, application 191068) and an outline application for up to 215 dwellings (Phase 2a, application 190914). A further application for up to 190 dwellings and associated infrastructure to the west of the SDL, east of Finchampstead Road is also under consideration.
7. Thus, while the current proposal is a separate application, to be assessed on its own merits it also needs to be understood in the wider context: the intention is that the proposed public open space would be a SANG, to mitigate the impact of residential development within the SDL on the SPA, itself a planning policy requirement. While the applications for Phases 2a and 2b would be reliant on the current application for mitigation of the impact upon the SPA, the current application is not dependent on the other applications in the same way.

2. The principle of development – use of the land for informal, outdoor recreation

8. The National Planning Policy Framework establishes an underlying presumption in favour of sustainable development which is carried through to the Development Plan: applications that accord with the Development Plan will be approved, unless material considerations indicate otherwise (Managing Development Delivery Local Plan (MDD) Policy CC01 *Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development*).
9. The application site is located beyond development limits, in the Countryside to the east of the Major Development Location of Wokingham (Core Strategy policy CP9) and west of Bracknell.
10. The site has no established use. Hence, there is no planning reason to resist the change of use to an alternative, acceptable use.
11. At the time of submission, the proposed Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) use fell within class D2 assembly and leisure but, under the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) (Amendment) (England) Regulations 2020 which came into force on 1 September 2020, it would be considered a class F2 local community use. Where applications were submitted prior to 1 September 2020 date and are determined before 31 July 2021 – as is expected to be the case here - the application should be determined with reference to the use classes as originally submitted. Upon first occupation, the classes defined under the new regulations will be applicable.

12. SANG is essentially semi-natural public open space for walking and other informal, outdoor recreation. This constitutes a countryside based activity which contributes to recreation in and enjoyment of the countryside. As such, it is acceptable in principle under Core Strategy policy CP11 *Proposals outside development limits (including countryside)*. The proposed use would also be consistent with the aim of protecting the separate identity of settlements. The new public open space would effectively form an extension to the existing SANG at Buckhurst Meadows, so is also consistent with MDDL policy CC03 *Green Infrastructure, Trees and Landscaping* which requires development to provide new or protect and enhance the Borough's Green Infrastructure networks, including mitigation of the impact of new development.
 13. Use as a Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) falls within class D2 assembly and leisure/F2 local community use, rather than being a use in itself. Therefore, its suitability for use as a SANG is not fundamental to the acceptability of the proposal, which is acceptable in principle.
 14. This was confirmed by a recent appeal decision (Land south of Reading Road and Arborfield Road, east of Chestnut Crescent, west of the River Loddon, Shinfield, PINS ref APP/X0360/W/19/3235895, WBC ref 181631) which established that the primary matter for determination was the change of use of land to recreational use and associated operational development; whether it fulfils the requirement for SANG should be assessed through the Appropriate Assessment for the application for residential development that seeks to rely on the land to mitigate its impact on the SPA.
 15. However, the current application differs from the appeal proposal in one significant respect: in the case of the appeal proposal, the proposed SANG was not connected to any specified housing development whereas it is known that the proposed SANG is intended to mitigate development within the South Wokingham SDL. It is apparent from the description of development and the parallel applications that the intention is to rely on this land to mitigate the impact of development in South Wokingham on the SPA and – although not critical to the acceptability of the proposal – it is therefore reasonable to consider whether it is capable of meeting Natural England's SANG design and quality criteria (paragraphs 22-23 refer).
- 3. Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA) and the requirement for Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG)**
16. The Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area was designated under European Directive due to its importance for heathland bird species. Southeast Plan Policy Southeast Plan Policy NRM6 *Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area* and Core Strategy Policy CP8 *Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area* establish that – alone or in combination - new residential development within a 7km zone of influence is likely to contribute to a significant impact upon the integrity of the Special Protection Area. This impact is capable of being avoided and mitigated through the provision of SANG.
 17. The South Wokingham SDL falls within the 5km zone of influence and, accordingly, Core Strategy Policy CP21 *South Wokingham Strategic Development*

Location, amplified by Appendix 7 and Design Principle 1c(vi) requires provision of SANG as part of the network of green infrastructure supporting the development. MDDL P SAL05 *Delivery of avoidance measures for Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area* allocates a number of sites, including Buckhurst Meadows (land west of St Anne's Manor Hotel) as SANG but does not preclude the use of alternative sites. It is the applicant's intention that the land that is the subject of this application would be used as SANG to mitigate the impact of residential development elsewhere within Phase 2 of the SDL. The site is outside the SDL boundary but this does not prevent it being relied on to mitigate the impact on the development, providing it is within suitable walking distance. This is a matter for consideration under the associated applications for residential development. However, from the considerations in paragraphs 58-59 it is apparent that there is unlikely to be any objection on these grounds).

18. SANG is intended to provide alternative, more convenient destinations for informal recreation to reduce use of ecologically sensitive areas within the SPA. The *Thames Basin Heaths Design and Delivery Strategy* establishes various design criteria for SANGs to ensure they provide a high quality, natural environment that would be attractive for informal recreational use and allow them to fulfil their intended purpose.
 19. The use of the land for informal recreation is acceptable in principle (see paragraph 11) and – providing the proposal is otherwise compliant with Development Plan policy – it is not essential for it to comply with the SANG Design Quality standards for the application to be acceptable. However, it is explicit in the application that this is the intention and therefore, it is reasonable to consider whether the proposals do fulfil these design quality standards.
- 3.1. *SANG capacity*
20. If used as SANG, this 7.83 hectare site would have the capacity to mitigate the impact of 978 people (at 8 hectares/1,000 population) which equates to 407 dwellings (at an average of 2.4 people per household) (Core Strategy paragraph 4.49). This would be approaching quarter of the up to 1,649 homes proposed by the consortium applications in Phase 2 (190914 & 191068).
 21. Buckhurst Meadows is 12.48 hectares which - combined with the proposed 7.83 hectares extension – would give an overall area of over 20 hectares.
- 3.2. *Compliance with SANG design quality standards*
22. Where SANG is required to avoid the likely significant impact of development upon the SPA, it should be and maintained in perpetuity in line with the quality and quantity standards advocated by Natural England (Core Strategy paragraph 4.49).
 23. The Thames Basin Heaths Delivery Framework requires SANG to be at least 2 hectares in size, which the proposed site is, and to meet Natural England's quality standards. While this is not critical to the acceptability of this application, it would be necessary to achieve this if the development with phase 2 of the South Wokingham SDL is to rely on the land to mitigate its impact. The applicant's Design and Access Statement (DAS) includes an assessment against these standards, which demonstrates that the SANG would meet the 'must have' and 'should have' criteria as well as three of the five 'desirable' criteria.

24. The proposal would deliver a 1.2km footpath loop which combined with the Buckhurst Meadows SANG would achieve the required 2.3-2.5km circular walk. In addition it would provide appropriate access for visitors (see paragraphs 58-59); be perceived to be safe by users (the proposed management of the site would ensure this; see paragraph 33); incorporate easily used and well maintained paths without appearing too urban (see paragraph 36) have a semi-natural character (see sections 4.1 & 4.2); be free from unpleasant intrusions (see paragraphs 67 & 68); have unrestricted access with space or dogs to exercise freely and safely off-lead (see paragraph 37); include signage (condition 5); and provide a naturalistic space with a variety of woodland and more open areas (paragraphs 32-34).

4. Character of the area

25. Consistent with national planning policy in the NPPF, Core Strategy Policies CP1 *Sustainable Development* and CP3 *General Principles for Development* require a high quality design that respects its context: among other things, development should “*maintain or enhance the high quality of the environment*”, be “*attractive, functional, accessible, safe, secure and adaptable*” and “*contribute to a sense of place in the ... spaces themselves and in the way they integrate with their surroundings ... including the use of appropriate landscaping*”.
26. Core Strategy Policy CP21 *South Wokingham Strategic Development Location*, the Concept Rationale (Core Strategy Appendix 7) and the Masterplan SPD for the South Wokingham SDL all emphasise the importance of the landscape setting and management of the transition between town and country, including maintenance of the separation from Bracknell and Binfield, to the successful integration of the new development within the landscape.
27. The proposed use of the land would provide opportunities to enhance the site in terms of landscaping, ecology and amenity, assisting with both the transition at the settlement edge and the separation of settlements.

4.1. Landscape Character

28. MDDL policy TB21 *Landscape Character* and the SPD for South Wokingham (Design Principles 1a, 1c & 1d) require new development to draw on the existing landscape context and enhance its quality and condition.
29. The council's Landscape Character Assessment identifies the area to the South of Wokingham as N1 *Holme Green Pastoral Sandy Lowland*. It is a gently undulating, agricultural landscape defined predominantly by pastoral farming. It is sparsely settled and peaceful, despite proximity to Wokingham Town. Tributaries of the Emm Brook form a network of narrow, shallow valleys creating some variation in the landform although these brooks are not visible in the landscape being hidden within woodland and trees. It has an ‘unmanaged’ character, with gappy hedgerows retained in places.
30. It is a landscape of moderate quality, condition and sensitivity. The strategy is to enhance the existing character through management of the urban fringe, with conservation and reinstatement of hedges, active management of the agricultural landscape including appropriate management of grassland by grazing, increase

the extent of native deciduous woodland, planting hedgerow trees and creation of woodland on the urban fringe.

31. The western part of the site lies within G1 Easthampstead Wooded Estate, a gently undulating landscape centred on the historic Easthampstead Park, with remnant parkland features including avenues, a lake and woodland. The woodland on the site is part of the area of Big Wood Ancient Replanted Woodland which in turn is part of Big Wood Ancient and Semi-Natural Woodland to the south of the railway line. As such it an important component of this character area, of high value and susceptibility, resulting in high sensitivity.

4.2. *Landscape proposals*

32. The western 3.28 hectares of the site (the part within Bracknell Forest) is broadleaved, woodland (contiguous with woodland to the north, in the grounds of St Anne's Manor) a while the eastern part (within Wokingham) consists of more open grassland, contained by woodland around the boundaries with St Anne's Manor Hilton Hotel, the A329 (Berkshire Way) and the Reading to Waterloo railway line. The site falls gently (by about seven metres) from north-east (along the A329) to south-west (close to the railway line adjacent to Buckhurst Meadows) (DAS 2.23).
33. The woodland is classified as ancient, replanted woodland and forms part of the wider 'Big Wood' area of ancient woodland (DAS 2.28). It is mostly coppiced, with areas of more open wet woodland or with a dense rhododendron understory towards the centre of the site. It is proposed to reinstate management of the woodland including selective removal of young trees and phased removal of the non-native rhododendrons to allow natural regeneration, increasing biodiversity and recreational value (Landscape and Ecological Management Plan paragraph 2.6). This would also increase openness and instil a sense of safety for users which is one of the Natural England criteria for SANG (DAS 3.12).
34. The grassland towards the east of the site is contained by boundary vegetation and divided by a hedgerow with an existing field oak, which forms a focal point in the centre of the open area (DAS 2.29). Combined with additional, native hedgerow planting this would create pockets of space and a sense of discovery (DAS 4.8). The existing improved grassland and marshy grassland would be retained and managed, with wildflower enhancements in some areas, to increase botanical diversity and, hence, visual amenity and biodiversity value. Invasive species would be removed from the existing scrub vegetation around the periphery and retained blackthorn would be reinforced with native shrub and tree planting (DAS3.9), improving connectivity and biodiversity value as well as screening the adjacent roads and railway.
35. The landscape officer has no objection to this approach but considers that visual containment and the landscape structure could be improved by increasing the width of the buffer planting adjacent to the A329, including woodland block planting in the eastern corner, to reduce direct views between the SANG and the A329(M). Subject to the landscaping details to comply with condition 5 addressing this (informative 6 also refers), this approach would be consistent with the requirement of MDDL policy CC03: *Green Infrastructure, Trees and Landscaping* to incorporate high quality, ideally, native planting and landscaping

as an integral part of the scheme and also to the landscape strategy for the area (see paragraph 30).

36. The main circular route is proposed to be 2.5 metres wide, with regular refuges through the woodland section (to facilitate occasional maintenance access). The precise route through the woodland would be informed by woodland management and the need to avoid trees with bat roosting potential. The surface treatment is proposed to vary depending on the ground conditions with self-binding gravel in areas of dry woodland and through the grassland, bark chips in areas of wet woodland and boardwalks to allow year round access in saturated areas of woodland (DAS 3.7). Through the woodland there would be a single pathway, the constructed with a cellweb system to minimise the arboricultural impact (DAS 3.8). Additional informal paths would consist of wood chippings or timber boardwalks within the woodland areas and hoggins or similar in the meadow areas. The specification for the paths would be secured by condition 5.
 37. Heavy post and rail timber fencing and pig stock wire fencing to prevent dog escape is proposed on the boundaries with St Anne's Manor Hilton Hotel, the A329 (Berkshire Way) and the Reading to London railway line (either new or upgraded) (condition 5 & informative 10 refer). The existing fencing would be removed from the boundary with Buckhurst Meadows to allow integration of the two part of the public open space.
 38. The applicant's Landscape and Ecological Management Plan establishes principles for the initial establishment and longer term management of the SANG but requires amplification: Condition 8 refers. Also informative 8.
 39. Subject to the recommended conditions 5- 8 and informatives 6-8 the landscaping associated with the change of use would make a positive contribution and there would not be a significant effect on either character area.
- 4.3. *Public art*
40. Core Strategy Appendix 7, paragraph A7.52 and South Wokingham SDP Design Principle 1e(iv) require a strategy for delivery of public art as an integral component of the development and the landscape framework.
 41. The applicant's Design and Access Statement acknowledges that one of the three sculptures secured under the planning permission for Montague Park is due to be installed in Buckhurst Meadows, close to the boundary with the application site. It does not include any proposals for incorporation of public art at this stage but condition 9 and informative 13 would secure implementation of a strategy for delivery of public art within the remainder of the SDL (which may or may not include art within the St Anne's SANG site).
- 4.4. *Tree protection*
42. MDDL policy CC03 *Green Infrastructure, Trees and Landscaping* and Core Strategy paragraph A7.52 establish that development proposals should protect existing trees and hedges, incorporating them in the layout.

43. None of the trees on the site are protected by Tree Preservation Order (TPO) but the woodland on the western side of the site (within Bracknell Borough) is Ancient Replanted Woodland.
44. A woodland and a group of six oaks to the north of the site plus an area along the north side of the railway line, west of the site are protected under TPO 1359/2010. No works are proposed adjacent to these boundaries so there would be no direct impact upon the protected trees. Similarly, Big Wood, to the south of the railway (in Bracknell Borough) is ancient semi-natural woodland and protected by TPO 1/1963 but would not be directly affected by the proposals.
45. The applicant's Arboricultural Method Statement (AMS) explains that the proposed route of the footpath through the woodland has been designed to minimise the impact on the woodland and trees of individual merit: 16 trees have been identified for removal but these are not significant in the local or wider landscape. Five further trees are identified for removal due to their condition (BS5837:2012 Category U).
46. It is accepted that some trees would need to be removed to allow formation of the path through the woodland and there is no objection to the extent of the works proposed, subject to more specific detail of the extent of removal and any canopy/branch reduction being provided before works commence: although precise details won't be known before work commences the AMS should establish a set of requirements and criteria for how the works take place. Conditions 7 & 6 and informative 7 refer.

5. Ecology

47. Core Strategy policies CP3 *General Principles for Development* and CP7 *Biodiversity* establish that proposals should not have a detrimental impact on ecological features. Species and habitats of conservation value should be protected and the ability of a site to support fauna and flora, including protected species, should be maintained and enhanced. Where necessary provision should be made for mitigation or compensation. In addition, MDDL policy TB23 *Biodiversity and Development* requires proposals to enhance and incorporate new biodiversity features, provide appropriate buffer zones between development and designated sites as well as habitats and species of principle importance for nature conservation and ensure ecological permeability. These principles are reiterated in Core Strategy A7.46 and SPD Design Principle 1b. Bracknell's Local Plan contains similar requirements.
 - 5.1. *Designated sites of ecological importance*
 48. Wykery Copse Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is approximately 0.97 kilometres from the site, Farley Copse Local Nature Reserve (LNR) is 1.29 kilometres away and there are a number of and Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) within a kilometre, the closest being Big Wood which lies immediately to the south of the railway. Due to the distance from the site no impacts are anticipated either directly or as the result of pollution events on site.

5.2. *Conservation value of habitats found on the site*

49. A Phase 1 habitat Survey was undertaken although, due to the low predicted scale of impacts on the application site, additional species-specific surveys were not undertaken for this site.
50. The western part of the site is broadleaved woodland (Wet Woodland and Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland); it is ancient woodland, Priority Habitat of county level importance. Other habitats found on the site include marshy grassland (not a notable habitat type but of local importance), a single species-poor hedgerow (a Priority Habitat but only of site level importance given the number of similar or better quality hedgerows in the vicinity), scattered scrub and improved grassland (common and widespread habitats, supporting a low diversity of species and are therefore of negligible importance). The grassland on the site is heavily managed, so of limited value, but the woodland and hedgerows provide suitable habitats for species that are known to be present in the vicinity. The small loss of habitat associated with construction of footpaths would be offset by habitat creation elsewhere on the site. The application is accompanied by a Landscape and Ecological Management Plan which, subject to amplification, would ensure the ecological value of the habitats on the site is maintained and enhanced (condition 8 refers). The site would also integrate with the existing green infrastructure network including the railway corridor and the Buckhurst Meadows SANG.

5.3. *Conservation value of species found on the site*

51. The woodland edges provide foraging and commuting habitat for bats – of county level importance - and many of the trees support Potential Roosting Features (PRFs). The intention is to plan the precise route of the path to avoid the fell or trim back trees with roosting potential which, combined with provision of bat boxes (condition 5.g refers), would maintain the favourable conservation status of the protected species. Should any Potential Roosting Features be identified for removal, either or formation of paths or as part of the initial management of the site, further surveys would be required (condition 11 xvi) refers).
52. The site is of local level importance for terrestrial invertebrates and site level importance for badgers, European Hedgehog, birds (farmland species), reptiles (slow worms and common lizard), amphibians (although it is unlikely that Great Crested New are present as none have been recorded within 500 metres of the site and there is an absence of suitable waterbodies on the site).
53. Condition 11 xvi) would secure mitigation of temporary, short-term impacts during construction. Once operational, the recreational use has the potential to result in degradation but with suitable management this is likely to be negligible and habitat management – secured through the Landscape and Ecological Management Plan - would result in a minor beneficial effect (condition 8 refers).
54. The SANG would benefit from having established (in part, ancient) woodland and grassland with some botanic interest. This limits the potential for biodiversity net gain but there are still opportunities to improve the condition of the existing habitats, which would more than off-set the small loss of habitat resulting from construction of the surfaced path.

6. Access and Movement

55. Core Strategy Policies CP1 *Sustainable Development* and CP6 *Managing Travel Demand* require proposals to reduce the need to travel, particularly by private car. Development should be located to minimise the distance people need to travel and facilitate travel by sustainable modes, as well as mitigating any adverse effects on the transport network.

6.1. Location

56. The proposed development would effectively be an extension to the existing Buckhurst Meadows SANG and visitors would approach through it. Buckhurst Meadows extends westwards (between the Floreat Montague Park Primary School and Montague Park neighbourhood centre) as far as William Heelas Way, some 200 metres north of the approved bridge over the railway. Thus, the proximity of the site to existing and allocated – but as yet unbuilt - residential areas would facilitate travel by sustainable modes.

6.2. Traffic generation

57. The proposed public open space is intended to serve occupants of development within the South Wokingham SDL and – given this intention and the potential for sustainable travel - is unlikely to attract a significant number of car trips from South Wokingham or further afield. Nor would it have an adverse effect to the transport network.

6.3. Access to the site for visitors

58. Following on from the requirements of Core Strategy policy CP6, the South Wokingham SDP (Design Principles 5a & 5b in particular) and the Borough Design Guide (especially principles, S5, S6, S8, S9, S10 & S11) require developments to provide a hierarchy of streets and paths creating an interconnected network and choice of routes through the development as well as good connections to local destinations. Accordingly, any development in the SDL south of the railway that relies on the proposed St Anne's SANG as part of its green infrastructure provision would need to demonstrate good pedestrian and cycle connectivity to the site. Routes between proposed residential areas, south of the railway to the approved bridge are considered as part of the assessment of the current applications for Phase 2 (or any subsequent applications).

59. Once visitors reach the new bridge there will be a three metre wide foot and cycle path continuing along William Heelas Way to the closest of the six entrances to the SANG, referred to in paragraph 56. Within the existing SANG, provision of a variety of types of paths and routes was a prerequisite, although the primary network would need to be extended to the boundary to connect with the new routes within the application site (to be secured by condition 3).

6.4. Car and cycle parking

60. Core Strategy policy CP6 d) requires provision of appropriate vehicle parking, in accordance with MDDL policy CC07 *Parking*.

61. In this case the proposed public open space is intended primarily to serve residents from the local area, so the majority of trips are likely to be on foot and – given the size and location of the SANG – no parking is proposed. Furthermore, it

would function as an extension of Buckhurst Meadows SANG. This SANG already has a car park, accessed from William Heelas Way, which provides ten car parking spaces, including one disabled bay. (Seven were originally approved to meet SANG design standards but the car park was extended to allow dual use with the marketing suite and it was subsequently agreed the additional spaces could be retained.) There are also three Sheffield stands providing parking for six bicycles.

7. Flooding and drainage

62. Consistent with the NPPF, Core Strategy Policy CP1 *Sustainable Development* and MDDL Policy CC09 *Development and Flood Risk (from all sources)* require a sequential approach which directs development away from the areas at highest risk of flooding (from any source). Furthermore, development should avoid increasing and, where possible, reduce flood risk on the site and elsewhere. Surface water should be managed in a sustainable manner (MDDL Policy CC10 *Sustainable Drainage*).
63. The application site is located in Flood Zone 1, where the risk of fluvial flooding is low (less than 1 in 1,000 (<0.1%) annual probability of river or sea flooding) and all forms of development are appropriate (the SWDR drainage proposals would not alter this). The risk of flooding from surface water and other sources is also low. Furthermore outdoor sport and recreation is classified as “water – compatible development”. Therefore, the sequential test does not need to be applied.
64. Nevertheless, the site areas is over one hectare, so a Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) was required. The proposals would not increase impermeable surfaces or the risk of flooding on the site (including allowances for the effects of climate change). Nor would they exacerbate flood risk to neighbouring property. There is no need for mitigation measures.
65. No significant landform alteration is proposed and exceedance flows would be incorporated into the SANG, recognised existing topography in the levels design.

8. Environmental Health

8.1. Noise

66. Core Strategy Policy CP1 *Sustainable Development* seeks to avoid development in areas where noise may impact on amenity and MDDL Policy CC06 *Noise* reinforces this, requiring proposals to demonstrate how noise impacts on sensitive receptors (both existing and proposed) have been addressed.
67. The proposed use is not one that would generate significant noise when operational but the site is immediately adjacent to both the A329(M) and the Reading-Waterloo railway line, so could be affected by noise from these and potentially from the SWDR.
68. The applicant’s noise assessment considered the site as a sensitive receptor, where people are sensitive to noise and vibration. Using survey data and modelling of future scenarios (including changes in traffic flows resulting from SDL and other committed development) it demonstrated that noise levels on the site would be acceptable for the proposed use, without the need for mitigation.

69. The works required to layout and landscape the site would be unlikely to generate significant noise during the construction phase. Hence, the Environmental Health Officer has not recommended a condition restricting the hours of work. Nevertheless, the CEMP (condition 11) will be expected to include controls on the times at which noisy activities such as tree felling take place.

8.2. *Air quality*

70. Core Strategy Policy CP1 *Sustainable Development* requires development to minimise the emission of pollutants. Risk to users arising from poor air quality is also a material consideration.

71. The site is not located within an air quality management zone. Nevertheless the application was accompanied by Air Quality assessment, which considered the air quality impacts of the development within Phase 2 of the SDL and also the air quality conditions for future users.

72. The proposed use of the land would not generate emissions and there would be no significant impact upon local traffic flows resulting from the use. Cumulatively development from the SDL and other consented development would lead to an increase in the volume of traffic on the A329(M) but this increase is expected to be outweighed by reduced emissions, so the effect on air quality on the site would not be significant.

73. The works required to layout and landscape the site would be unlikely to generate significant dust or air quality effects during the construction phase.

8.3. *Contamination*

74. Core Strategy policy CP1 *Sustainable Development* requires development to avoid areas where pollution may impact upon the amenity of future occupiers and also to limit any adverse effects on water quality (including ground water).

75. The applicant's desk based assessment concludes that, based on historic and current use, the risk of contamination is low. condition 13 would ensure appropriate remediation of any contamination that should be found during laying out of the SANG.

9. Infrastructure impact mitigation

76. Core Strategy policy CP4 *Infrastructure Requirements* requires infrastructure to be secured to meet the needs of new development, taking into account cumulative impact.

77. The proposed use would not result in any effects requiring mitigation. However, a connection between the site boundary and the footpath network in Buckhurst Meadows should be secured (paragraph 59 and condition 3 refer). A S106 legal agreement will be required to secure either delivery of the path under licence or a financial contribution for its delivery.

78. The application is for informal recreational use of the land with the potential to be used as a SANG, which is in itself infrastructure: indeed Core Strategy Policy CP21, Appendix A7.53 and the Infrastructure Delivery and Contributions SPD require provision of "*necessary measures to avoid and mitigate the impact of*

development upon the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area". While the explicit intention to use the land as a SANG to mitigate the impact of residential development within the South Wokingham SDL is not critical to the acceptability of the proposal it does weigh in its favour.

10. Phasing of development

79. SANG is part of the package of infrastructure to support the SDL development and required to be available for use before first occupation of any dwellings that rely on it. Its timely delivery would be secured though the applications for housing that rely on it. timely delivery would appropriately.

11. Employment and skills

80. MDDL Policy TB12 indicates that proposals for major development should be accompanied by an Employment and Skills Plan (ESP) to show how the proposal provides opportunities for training, apprenticeship or other vocational initiatives to develop local employability skills.

81. The proposal constitutes major development due to the site area but does not involve the creation of floorspace, so falls below the 1,000m² threshold for requiring an ESP. (However, the associated applications for residential development exceed the threshold).

CONCLUSION

The proposed use of the land for informal recreation is acceptable in principle in this Countryside location and the impact on the character and ecology of the area is acceptable, subject to the conditions set out in the report.

The Public Sector Equality Duty (Equality Act 2010)

In determining this application the Council is required to have due regard to its obligations under the Equality Act 2010. The key equalities protected characteristics include age, disability, gender, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief. There is no indication or evidence (including from consultation on the application) that the protected groups identified by the Act have or will have different needs, experiences, issues and priorities in relation to this particular planning application and there would be no significant adverse impacts upon protected groups as a result of the development.

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