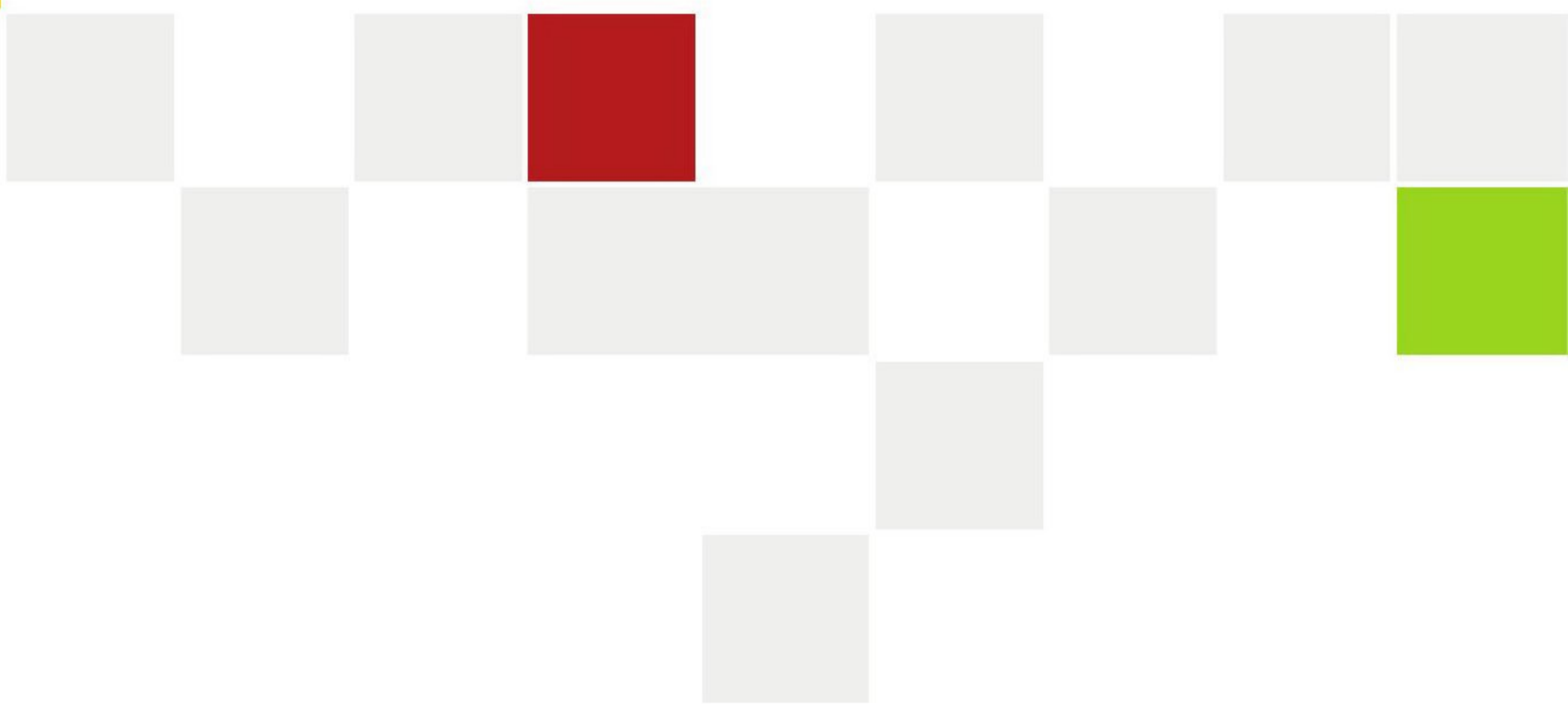


Land at Newlands Farm, Wokingham

Planning Statement



Boyer

Report Control

Project:	Newlands Farm, Old Wokingham Road, Wokingham
Client:	Bloor Homes Southern
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APPENDICES

Appendix One – Newsletter

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This Planning Statement has been prepared on behalf of The Thomas Family & Bloor Homes Limited ('the Applicants') for submission to Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) and Bracknell Forest Council, in support of a Full planning application at Land at Newlands Farm, Old Wokingham Road, Wokingham ('the site').
- 1.2 The site lies primarily within Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) although the access road on Old Wokingham Road lies within Bracknell Forest Council (BFC). The application is therefore submitted jointly to Wokingham Borough Council and Bracknell Forest Council.
- 1.3 The planning application to which this Planning Statement relates seeks Full planning permission for the change of use of Land at Newlands Farm from Agricultural to Outdoor Sport or Recreation (Class F2c), for use as a Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG).
- 1.4 The description of development, as set out on the application form is as follows:

Change of use of agricultural land to outdoor sport or recreation (Class F2c), for use as Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG), plus associated landscape and drainage works, SANG car park and access from Old Wokingham Road.

Accompanying Documentation

- 1.5 This planning application is supported by the following suite of documents and plans:

Table 1: Drawings for Approval

Drawing Number	Drawing Title
10930-FPCR-XX-XX-DR-L-0017 P02	SANG Red Line Boundary (Site Location Plan)
10930-FPCR-XX-XX-DR-L-0002 P03	SANG Car Park General Arrangement
10930-FPCR-XX-XX-DR-L-0005 P05	SANG General Arrangement Plan
10930-FPCR-XX-XX-DR-L-0008 P02	SANG General Assembly Planting Plan
10930-FPCR-XX-XX-DR-L-0009 P02	SANG Detailed Planting Plan Sheet 1 of 5
10930-FPCR-XX-XX-DR-L-0010 P02	SANG Detailed Planting Plan Sheet 2 of 5
10930-FPCR-XX-XX-DR-L-0011 P02	SANG Detailed Planting Plan Sheet 3 of 5
10930-FPCR-XX-XX-DR-L-0012 P02	SANG Detailed Planting Plan Sheet 4 of 5
10930-FPCR-XX-XX-DR-L-0013 P02	SANG Detailed Planting Plan Sheet 5 of 5
10930-FCPR-XX-XX-DR-L-0014 P02	Typical Surface and Boundary Treatments

Drawing Number	Drawing Title
10930-FPCR-XX-XX-DR-L-0015 P02	SANG Furniture & Signage Strategy
10930-FPCR-XX-XX-DR-L-0016 P02	Typical Ponds and Scrapes Sections
J32-6699-PS-002 Rev L	Proposed SANG Access
J32-6699-PS-003 Rev B	Proposed Indicative Pedestrian Footpath
J32-6699-AT-A03 Rev C	Swept Path – Large Car Inbound
J32-6699-AT-A04 Rev C	Swept Path – Large Car Outbound
J32-6699-AT-A05 Rev C	Swept Path – Refuse Vehicle (Turning Head)
NL-LE-GEN-XX-DR-CE-400	Proposed Drainage Strategy
NL-LE-GEN-XX-DR-CE-1000	Bridges Layout (Sheet 1 of 2)
NL-LE-GEN-XX-DR-CE-1001	Bridges Layout (Sheet 2 of 2)

Table 2: Drawings for Illustrative Purposes Only

Drawing Number	Drawing Title
10930-FPCR-XX-XX-DR-L-0001-P09	Illustrative SANG Masterplan

Table 3: Documents in support of the Planning Application

Document	Prepared by
Planning Application Form	Boyer
CIL Form	Boyer
Planning Statement	Boyer
Ecological Appraisal	FCPR
Ecology Technical Note – Biodiversity Net Gain Calculations	FCPR
Landscape and Ecological Management Plan	FCPR
Transport Statement	Mode Transport Planning
Flood Risk Assessment	Link Engineering
Arboricultural Assessment	FCPR
Breeding and Wintering Bird Survey Report	FCPR

Document	Prepared by
Landscape and Visual Appraisal	FCPR

- 1.6 The Planning Statement deals specifically with the development proposed by the Full Planning Application. It considers the proposals in the context of both relevant national and local planning policies.

Structure of the Planning Statement

- 1.7 This Planning Statement is structured as follows:
- Section 2 provides a description of the site and the surrounding area;
 - Section 3 provides an overview of the planning history for the site;
 - Section 4 provides an overview of national and local planning policy and guidance relevant to the determination of the application;
 - Section 5 provides an assessment of the proposed development against the identified planning policy framework; and
 - Section 6 provides a summary of the application and benefits of granting planning permission.

2. SITE AND SURROUNDING AREA

Site Description

- 2.1 Extending to 16.38 hectares, the irregularly shaped site is made up of a number of grazing pasture field parcels and areas of woodland, which lies to the west of Old Wokingham Road.
- 2.2 Access to the site is from Old Wokingham Road to the east. This access road is shared with Newlands Farmhouse and associated agricultural buildings, which lie outside the site's red line boundary.
- 2.3 Within the north western part of the site is an existing expanse of wet woodland across low lying areas. The majority of the existing site is currently open grassland across central, southern and eastern portions. The site is bound by tree belts and scrubland along the north eastern and south eastern boundaries.
- 2.4 There is a 110 metre stretch of existing Public Right of Way (PROW) that crosses the eastern part of the site. This is a grass path which follows no defining ground features. The PROW (ref no. FPWOK8) connects the site to Easthampstead Road to the north and Honey Hill to the south.
- 2.5 There are no statutory landscape, biodiversity, ecological or heritage constraints on the site itself.
- 2.6 None of the trees within the site are covered by a Tree Preservation Order (TPO). There are also no Ancient or Veteran trees on the site.
- 2.7 There is an area in the north east of the site that falls within Flood Zones 2 and 3.
- 2.8 The site lies around 1.5 kilometres from the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA) and is therefore within the 5km buffer. The site is also c600m from the Gorrick Plantation Local Wildlife Site (LWS), c500m from the Wokingham Road/ Peacock Lane LWS, c600m from the Beauford Park LWS and c300m from the Thames Basin Heaths Biodiversity Opportunity Area.

Site Context and Designations

- 2.9 Whilst the site is located within the administrative area of Wokingham Borough Council, Old Wokingham Road is within the Bracknell Forest Council administration.
- 2.10 The site stretches from Old Wokingham Road to the east to near Honey Hill on the west. To the north of the site is agricultural land comprising Sutton Court Farm, Brookfield Farm and Newlands Farm Industrial Estate. To the south of the site is open agricultural fields and to the west is woodland, beyond which are homes along Honey Hill.

- 2.11 To the immediate south east of the site access track, there are two private dwellinghouses, one of which is the farmhouse for Newlands Farm, and the Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses. To the east of Old Wokingham Road, opposite the site, there are a number of substantial dwellinghouses. To the immediate south east of the site is Pinewood Activity Centre; a local community hub providing accommodation for a wide range of sport, leisure and recreation groups which is managed by Wokingham Without Parish Council.
- 2.12 The site is within close proximity to the South Wokingham Strategic Development Location (SDL), to the north, which is proposed to be extended southwards in the emerging Wokingham Local Plan Revised Growth Strategy. The emerging Local Plan recognises the SDL as including a new residential community supported by a new primary school and neighbourhood centre, with a major new sport hub to be delivered in the short term.

3. PLANNING HISTORY

- 3.1 There is no relevant planning history that relates to the application site.
- 3.2 The adjacent Newlands Farm has had planning activity in recent years all of which relates to its current agricultural use.
- 3.3 In 2021, planning permission (ref. 213255) was granted for a new agricultural building following demolition of an existing agricultural building.
- 3.4 In February 2023, planning permission (ref. 223562) was granted for an agricultural and light industrial building following demolition of an existing barn.

Pre-application Engagement

- 3.5 In advance of the submission of this Full Planning Application, the applicant engaged in pre-application discussions with WBC, BFC and Natural England.

Wokingham Borough Council Pre-application

- 3.6 Pre-application engagement (ref. 230306) was held with WBC in relation to the compliance of the proposal with the relevant development plan framework.
- 3.7 A pre-application request was submitted to WBC on 7 February 2023. The pre-application engagement sought advice from WBC on the acceptability of the proposed SANG and matters of detail to be addressed in the future planning application.
- 3.8 An initial meeting was held with Officers on 13 April 2023, followed by a site meeting on 13 September 2023. The key points raised by WBC Officers are as follows:
 - The location of the SANG is in accordance with Policy CP11 relating to proposals outside development limits (including countryside);
 - An application for the change of use of land from agricultural to F2(c) would not necessarily need to meet SANG design criteria in order to be acceptable as the proposed SANG is not linked to a specific housing development;
 - The site is identified as having potential to mitigate housing development within 4km of the site. Whilst the SANG does have potential to mitigate development pressure from the South Wokingham SDL Extension, the SANG could also potentially mitigate other acceptable housing schemes within 4km; and
 - The PROW Officer noted that the surfacing of the primary SANG walking route may undermine Public Footpath 8 (FPWOK8), unless the surface is upgraded to the same standard.

Bracknell Forest Council Pre-application

- 3.9 A separate pre-application request (ref. PRE/23/00086) was submitted to BFC on 23 February 2023. The pre-application engagement sought general planning advice from BFC, but in particular highway advice given the access to the proposed SANG would be on land within Bracknell Forest Council's control.
- 3.10 Following engagement and a highways site meeting on 18 October, it was agreed that:
- The location of the access is acceptable, but the design would need to be carefully considered to accommodate anticipated traffic movements and service vehicles;
 - Whilst visits of larger vehicles may be limited, the need to maintain road safety of this new access is paramount. BFC advised that the access radii should be 7.5 metres and the width of the access road increased;
 - A pedestrian footway should be provided along Old Wokingham Road from the site access to the Pinewood Activity Centre exit to improve pedestrian connectivity towards the Nine Mile Ride roundabout and Crowthorne to the south;
 - More than the minimum number of car parking should be provided; and
 - Right turn lane markings at the proposed access, similar to that provided elsewhere on Old Wokingham Road, is acceptable.

Natural England Pre-application

- 3.11 FPCR engaged with Natural England through their Discretionary Advice Service (DAS). Following a site meeting on 20 March 2023, Natural England provided a written response on 27 March 2023 advising that:
- The circular route of the primary path should be a minimum of 2.3-2.5km;
 - The separation distances between the parallel paths should be a minimum of 100m in open land. Where woodland or vegetation can be planted to reduce intervisibility between the paths, the 100m distance can be reduced; and
 - The SANG can also contribute to Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) subject to additionality being proven over and above what would have otherwise been required to meet SANG guidelines.

Statement of Community Engagement

- 3.12 Pursuant to the pre-application engagement with WBC, BFC and Natural England, the Applicants are also engaging with relevant local stakeholders.
- 3.13 Newsletters informing residents and other stakeholders of the planning application and how to comment has been distributed to households in a half a mile radius of the site. A copy of the Newsletter is provided in **Appendix 1**.

4. PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

4.1 This Full Planning Application seeks planning permission for the:

Change of use of agricultural land to outdoor sport or recreation (Class F2c), for use as Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG), plus associated landscape and drainage works, SANG car park and access from Old Wokingham Road.

4.2 The Applicants are seeking planning permission for a new 16 hectare SANG to offer residents within the local area a convenient and attractive location for recreation away from the Thames Basin Heaths SPA and for biodiversity enhancement.

SANG Design

4.3 The proposed 16 hectare SANG is designed in accordance with Natural England's guidelines for SANG.

4.4 The proposed footpaths will comprise a circular primary route of 2.31km, which complies with Natural England's guidelines and will predominantly run through open areas of natural habitat. In total, 2.98km of footpaths are proposed within the SANG. The SANG circular walk will begin and conclude at the car park; details of which are provided below.

4.5 The proposed SANG footpaths will connect with the existing PROW to enable wider connectivity to the surrounding area and improve the accessibility of the SANG from Easthampstead Road, Honey Hill and the surrounding area. Replacement footbridges are proposed where the SANG connects to the existing PROW network.

4.6 In accordance with Natural England guidelines and given the overall extensive size of the SANG, the circular route will allow those using the SANG to experience a variety of habitats including woodland, meadow, wetland and scrub.

4.7 The western proportion of the site will form an open wetland area with carefully positioned boardwalks to ensure year-round use and with the drier east of the site forming a meadow grassland habitat with scattered trees.

4.8 Appropriate signage and information boards will be provided at the entrance on Old Wokingham Road, at the start of the circular route, and at appropriate locations within the SANG.

4.9 In accordance with Natural England guidelines, part of the SANG will be available for users to allow their dogs off the lead to run freely. Access to the SANG will be unrestricted. Appropriate separation is therefore provided to the neighbouring private farmland so users are clear on land which is publicly accessible and to avoid potential conflict with farm animals and other farm activities in neighbouring fields.

4.10 Proposed footpaths comprise mown grass paths, boardwalks and self-binding gravel paths to provide variety to the user and to respond to the ground conditions and vegetation.

- 4.11 Further details are provided on the SANG Framework Plan which accompanies the planning application.

Landscaping and Ecological Enhancements

- 4.12 The design provides the natural looking, varied, semi-woodland landscape that is recommended in Natural England guidance as well as providing additional wetlands and ponds to act as a focal point.
- 4.13 To integrate the proposed circular route, extensive new woodland and planting is proposed around the site boundaries. The interior of the SANG will retain the expansive and open appearance of the surrounding land. The majority of the circular route will be through the peripheries of the site, with only a small portion through the new woodlands.
- 4.14 At pinch points to the west, where the separation distances between parallel paths fall below 100 metres, new structural planting and woodland is proposed to reduce intervisibility. The accompanying SANG Framework Plan identifies pinch points to the west of the site where new planting is proposed.
- 4.15 The proposed SANG will be well maintained. The primary path will comprise self-binding gravel paths, boardwalks and mown grass routes. This will enable the path to be easily used and accessible, without becoming urban in nature.
- 4.16 The primary route will largely consist of self-binding gravel and hoggin paths, with the exception of boardwalk that will loop around ponds with wetland planting. The secondary route to the west of the site will be made up of 2 metre wide boardwalk.
- 4.17 Dry woodland tree and scrub planting will be implemented throughout central, southern and western portions of the site outside the Flood Zone 3. In northern and eastern most portions of the site that are more prone to flooding, wet woodland tree planting will integrate into the existing landscape.
- 4.18 Ponds with surrounding wetland planting will make up portions of the site to the east within the secondary route loop. Temporary scrape ponds with wet grass seed will also be planted in the eastern portion of the site.
- 4.19 Mown grass paths will connect the different parts of the circular route across the central and western parts of the site. These paths will allow users of the SANG to cut across central sections of the primary route if they wish.
- 4.20 New footbridges are proposed to be erected over existing watercourses throughout the site in order for the overall primary and secondary routes to be easily accessible for all users throughout the year.
- 4.21 Wetland features to the west of the site will be planted with appropriate marginal vegetation mix that will provide good nesting opportunities for several notable species and encourage on-site breeding.

- 4.22 Additional ecological enhancements are proposed including *inter alia* log piles for reptiles/amphibians and bat and bird boxes in selected trees. Further details of proposed ecological enhancement measures are provided in the Ecological Appraisal.

Access

- 4.23 The site will be accessed from Old Wokingham Road to the east in the form of a simple priority junction. This junction is appropriate as the SANG will generate relatively modest vehicle movements and be generally spread throughout the day.
- 4.24 The existing gated farm access to the site is to be upgraded to a simple priority T-junction. It is proposed to add a 'right turn arrow' within the carriageway which will be consistent with similar access arrangements along Old Wokingham Road and which has been agreed with BFC.
- 4.25 Vehicular access for refuse and servicing vehicles will be via the main access point on Old Wokingham Road. A height barrier is proposed at the entrance of the SANG car park to avoid unauthorised use of the SANG car park by large vehicles. However, the barrier will be openable by authorised large service, emergency and maintenance vehicles. Prior to the height barrier, a turning head will be provided to allow larger vehicles to turn around before exiting the site.
- 4.26 Two controlled crossing points across the access road are provided to enable the controlled movement of cattle.
- 4.27 A new pedestrian footway is proposed from the site entrance southwards along the western side of the carriageway along Old Wokingham Road. This will provide pedestrian connectivity to the SANG from Buckler's Park and the residential area of Crowthorne to offer users of the SANG an alternative to arriving by car. The proposed pedestrian footway is shown on drawing J32-6699-PS-003 Rev B.

Car Parking

- 4.28 A new SANG Car Park is proposed comprising space for 27 cars. The car park will include two disabled bays closest to the proposed primary footpath route. The circular route will start and finish at the car park.
- 4.29 The car park will also include 4 cycle parking spaces in the form of two pairs of 'Sheffield stands'.
- 4.30 A lockable height barrier, which is capable of being opened by service and emergency vehicles, is proposed to ensure the car park can only be used by cars and other small vehicles. The number of parking spaces will be of sufficient size to meet year-round use and will exceed Natural England's standards of 1 bay per hectare. Connections to the SANG primary footpath route are located to the north and south west of the car park.

- 4.31 A turning head is located prior to the car park height barrier, with pedestrian crossing points provided. The turning head is set back from Newlands Farmhouse to the south to allow for planting along the boundary.
- 4.32 The design of the car park includes a loop arrangement around a central island of 14 car parking bays. The car parking bay dimensions have been set out in the accompanying Transport Statement.
- 4.33 Information boards will also be erected adjacent to the car park, informing visitors of the footpath routes available and details of wildlife habitats throughout the site.

5. PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

- 5.1 This section outlines the relevant planning policy framework, against which the proposed development has been prepared and against which it should be determined.
- 5.2 Section 70(2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, indicates that the local planning authority shall have regard to the provisions of the Development Plan, so far as material to the application, and to any other material considerations. Section 38 (6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that regard is to be had to the Development Plan and confirms that applications for planning permission must be determined in accordance with the Plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
- 5.3 The development plan for WBC comprises the Wokingham Borough Core Strategy (2010), Managing Development Delivery Local Plan (2014) in addition to saved Policy NRM6 of the revoked South East Plan.
- 5.4 The development plan for BFC, which is particularly relevant to the proposed access which lies within the Bracknell Forest administrative area, comprises Bracknell Forest Local Transport Plan (2011).
- 5.5 Further material consideration should be given to the National Planning Policy Framework (2023).
- 5.6 Consideration should be given to the Guidelines for Creation of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) (2021).

Guidelines for Creation of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) (2021)

- 5.7 These Natural England guidelines are designed as an Appendix to the full guidance on Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces (SANG) to be used as mitigation (or avoidance) land to reduce recreational use of the Thames Basin Heaths SPA. The guidelines states that a SANG must have:
- Adequate parking for visitors, unless the site is intended for local use, i.e. within easy walking distance (400m) of the developments linked to it. The amount of car parking space should be determined by the anticipated use of the site and reflect the visitor catchment of both the SANG and the SPA;
 - A complete circular walk of 2.3-2.5km around the SANG;
 - Car park that are easily and safely accessible by car and should be clearly sign posted;
 - Access points appropriate for the visitor use the SANG that it is intended to cater for;
 - A safe route of access on foot from the nearest car park and/or footpath/s;
 - A circular walk which starts and finishes at the car park (where a car park is required);
 - A design that is perceived to be safe by users; i.e. they must not have tree and scrub cover along parts of the walking routes;

- Paths that are easily used and well maintained but most should remain unsurfaced to avoid the site becoming too urban in feel;
- Semi-natural spaces with little intrusion of artificial structures, except in the immediate vicinity of car parks. Visually sensitive way-markers and some benches are acceptable;
- A variety of habitats for users to experience (for all SANGs larger than 12 ha);
- Access which is largely unrestricted with plenty of space provided where it is possible for dogs to exercise freely and safely off lead; and
- Be free from unpleasant intrusions (e.g. sewage treatment works smells etc).

5.8 In addition, the Natural England guidelines suggest that a SANG should:

- Be clearly sign-posted or advertised in some way; and
- Have leaflets and/or websites advertising their location to potential users.

5.9 Finally, the Natural England guidelines suggest that the following is desirable:

- For an owner to be able to take dogs from the car park to the SANG safely off the lead;
- To choose sites with a gently undulating topography for SANG;
- For access points to have signage outlining the layout of the SANG and the routes available to visitors;
- The SANG to provide a naturalistic space with areas of open (non-wooded) countryside and areas of dense and scattered trees and shrubs. The provision of open water is encouraged and desirable on sites. However large areas of open water cannot count towards capacity; and
- Have a focal point such as a viewpoint, monument etc.

Local Planning Policy

5.10 Local planning policies from these documents which are considered to be relevant to the determination of this application are set out below.

Wokingham Borough Core Strategy (2010)

5.11 Policy CP1 (Sustainable Development) sets out the standards developments should follow for enhancing the overall sustainability of the area through minimising impact on the environment.

5.12 Policy CP3 (General Principles for Development) establishes an overarching requirement for high quality, attractive design that maintains or enhances the high quality of the environment.

5.13 Policy CP6 (Managing Travel Demand) states that planning permission will be granted for developments which, amongst others, provide appropriate vehicular parking and mitigates any adverse impacts on the local and strategic transport network.

5.14 Policy CP7 (Biodiversity) establishes that proposals should not have a detrimental impact on ecological features.

- 5.15 Policy CP8 (Thames Basin Heaths SPA) makes clear that any new development within the Thames Basin Heaths SPA will be required to demonstrate that adequate measures to avoid and mitigate any potential adverse effects are delivered.
- 5.16 Policy CP11 (Proposals outside Development Limits) seeks to prevent development outside of Development Limits, unless (inter alia) the development contributes and/or promotes recreation in the countryside.

Managing Development Delivery Local Plan (2014)

- 5.17 Policy CC03 (Green Infrastructure, Trees and Landscaping) states that development should demonstrate how it has provided new or enhanced green infrastructure networks, protected and retained existing trees and landscape features and incorporate high quality planting within the scheme.
- 5.18 Policy TB21 (Landscape Character) requires new development to draw on the existing landscape context and enhance its quality and condition.
- 5.19 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.

Bracknell Forest Local Transport Plan (2011)

- 5.20 Policy TP1 is focused on accessibility and seeks to ensure that new developments are accessible to sustainable modes of transportation.
- 5.21 Policy TP8 promotes walking and cycling in new development by ensuring pedestrian and cyclist requirements are fully considered.

National Planning Policy

- 5.22 Chapter 8 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2023c) refers to promoting healthy and safe communities.
- 5.23 Planning policies and decisions should aim to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places which (*inter alia*) enables and supports healthy lifestyles, especially where this would address identified local health and well-being needs – for example through the provision of safe and accessible green infrastructure, sports facilities, local shops, access to healthier food, allotments and layouts that encourage walking and cycling.
- 5.24 Paragraph 102 states that access to a network of high quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and physical activity is important for the health and well-being of communities, and can deliver wider benefits for nature and support efforts to address climate change.

- 5.25 Paragraph 180 states that decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by (*inter alia*) providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures.
- 5.26 Paragraph 186 states that, when determining applications, local authorities should apply the following principles including (*inter alia*) supporting development whose primary objective is to conserve or enhance biodiversity and improving biodiversity in and around developments, especially where this can secure measurable net gains for biodiversity or enhance public access to nature.

Planning Practice Guidance

- 5.27 The Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) brings together planning practice guidance for England in an accessible and usable way.
- 5.28 The PPG sets out guidance on a wide range of topics, including those which are deemed relevant to this application:
- Climate Change
 - Community Infrastructure Levy
 - Healthy and Safe Communities
 - Natural Environment
 - Open Space, Sports and Recreation Facilities, Public Rights of Way and Local Green Space

6. CONSIDERATION OF PLANNING ISSUES

Principle of Development

- 6.1 Policy CP11 seeks to prevent development outside of development limits, unless the development contributes and/or promotes recreation in the countryside. The proposal seeks planning permission for a new recreation facility and is therefore in accordance with Policy CP11.
- 6.2 It was agreed with WBC as part of the pre-application engagement that the location of the SANG is in accordance with the relevant local policies. The SANG will ensure there is capacity to mitigate the impact arising from potential future housing development on the Thames Basin Heaths SPA.
- 6.3 For the avoidance of doubt, this planning application is for a stand-alone 16 hectare SANG, does not contain any proposed housing development, and is not directly related to any proposed or future housing development. It will however offer the potential to mitigate future housing development that may come forward and which would be subject of a separate planning application.
- 6.4 As has been agreed with officers and as part of discussions with Natural England, the principle of outdoor recreation and SANG is acceptable in this location.

SANG Design Considerations

- 6.5 In accordance with Natural England's guidance, the proposed primary circular route exceeds the minimum distance of 2.3 kilometres and will start and end at the new SANG car park, offering its users an attractive and convenient walking route.
- 6.6 The primary route offers the users of the SANG a range of natural experiences and use of self-binding gravel paths, boardwalks and mown grass paths across existing woodland, proposed deciduous woodland and wetland. The path types have been agreed in principle with Natural England to provide natural material across the site, whilst maintaining suitable access for year round use.
- 6.7 Given the size and shape of the SANG, the secondary walking routes will measure 0.48 kilometres, and these will connect the primary routes across central parts of the site.
- 6.8 In accordance with Natural England's guidelines, the distances between parallel paths is generally well in excess of 100m in open land. Where the distance between parallel paths is below 100m, woodland or additional vegetation is proposed to reduce intervisibility between the paths.
- 6.9 There are pinch points between the parallel primary route paths towards the west of the site where the separation distances are less than 100 metres. Where these points are located, new structural planting and woodlands are proposed to reduce intervisibility between the paths.

6.10 Therefore, the design of the proposed SANG complies with Natural England's guidelines.

Landscape and Visual Impact

- 6.11 The site does not lie within any statutory landscape designation, is not a valued landscape, and is not within the Green Belt.
- 6.12 In accordance with Policy CC03, the development will provide the surrounding area with an enhanced green infrastructure network. The proposed soft engineering works will protect and retain the majority of the existing landscape features on site as well as incorporating high quality planting within the scheme.
- 6.13 The planning application is accompanied by a Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA).
- 6.14 The proposed footpaths and car park will have a natural appearance to integrate into the existing natural environment. As set out in the Landscape Strategy, new structural planting is proposed around the site boundaries to provide separation from surrounding context. Despite the rural location of the site, boundary planting will further protect views into and out of the site.
- 6.15 The LVA considers the site and immediate surroundings to be of medium landscape value in its current form. The LVA has assessed the visual impact the proposed SANG will have from residential, vehicular and pedestrian receptor points from the PRow footpath.
- 6.16 In regard to receptor points from the PRow to the north and south, the overall visual effects is assessed as 'moderate to minor beneficial' to the landscape. The LVA also identifies that footpath receptors within the Pinewood Activity Centre to the south will have a 'moderate to minor beneficial' impact.
- 6.17 In relation to residential receptor points to the east from Newlands Farm, properties along Old Wokingham Road and Honey Hill Road, the overall visual effects will have 'negligible' or 'no impact' on the landscape. Vehicular receptor points from Old Wokingham Road are also assessed to have 'negligible' or 'no impact' on the landscape.
- 6.18 The proposed SANG has the potential to successfully integrate into the local surroundings without any unacceptable landscape or visual effects. As the LVA has identified, the SANG will benefit the visual landscape in many cases by enhancing external viewpoints. Therefore, the proposals are compliant with Policy CC03.

Biodiversity Net Gain

- 6.19 NPPF paragraph 180 recommends that planning policies and decisions should minimise impacts on and provide net gains for biodiversity.

- 6.20 The site is to serve two purposes; to provide a SANG for informal recreation to mitigate the impact of future housing development on the Thames Basin Heaths SPA, and to provide Biodiversity Net Gain units, to mitigate the impact of future development and enable development to achieve the requisite net gain in biodiversity. Given this dual purpose, a two-stage approach to the BNG assessment and calculation is necessary.
- 6.21 The first stage of the assessment considers the habitat value of the habitats necessary to create the semi-natural environment necessary to satisfy the principles of SANG. The second stage of the assessment considers the potential uplift to the habitats forming the SANG area. This second stage uplift provides the biodiversity net gain for the site.
- 6.22 The Ecological Appraisal identifies that the site provides a mix of habitats including fallow arable land (the two south-eastern fields), improved grassland (northernmost and westernmost field), two areas of woodland (at the northern site boundary), two hedgerows containing a mix of Willow, Gorse, Bramble, Blackthorn and Silver Birch, four treelines including Oak, Willow, Blackthorn and Elder, scrub (along the southern site boundary and western grassland field parcel), three ditches and two watercourses.
- 6.23 The Ecological Appraisal outlines the surveys undertaken to support this planning application which identified that:
- There is no evidence of Great Crested Newts, Otter or Water Vole;
 - There was records of Common Toad, Frog, Smooth Newts, Palmate Newts, Slow Worm and Common Lizard although most of the site holds limited potential for reptile and amphibian species;
 - The ditch network has potential to support Toad, Frog and Grass Snake;
 - Records of at least six species of Bats; including two trees with features suitable for roosting bats, and foraging and commuting habitats;
 - Records of Badger setts and habitat suitable for Badger foraging and sett building (although the area is wet for extended periods which reduces its suitability);
 - Records of Hedgehog and associated habitats; and
 - Records of Stag Beetle.
- 6.24 The proposed SANG development results in a site value of 137.40 habitat units and 4.25 hedgerow units and 19.83 water course units. This represents a gain of 60.04 habitat units (78.5%), 1.06 hedgerow units (33.08%) and 4.24 water course units (27.22%).
- 6.25 As set out in the accompanying Ecology Technical Note – Biodiversity Net Gain Calculations, the available BNG credits for the site (minus those achieved through SANG creation) are 49.87 habitat units, 0.72 hedgerow units and 1.92 water course units.
- 6.26 These calculations show that the site is capable of providing habitats suitable for use as a SANG. The enhancements to the site will achieve additional BNG credits capable of mitigating future developments.
- 6.27 Therefore, the proposals are in accordance with the NPPF as the SANG will achieve additional BNG credits over what is usually required for developments of a different nature.

Biodiversity

- 6.28 The relevant NPPF paragraph (186(d)) states that 'development whose primary objective is to conserve or enhance biodiversity should be supported'. This paragraph goes on to say that opportunities to incorporate biodiversity improvements should be encouraged, 'especially where this can secure measurable net gains for biodiversity'.
- 6.29 The accompanying Ecological Appraisal advises that the habitats and species present within and around the site do not pose a constraint to the proposed SANG. The proposals are likely to lead to long term benefits for all potential notable species present as well as encouraging the colonisation of the site by new species.
- 6.30 All existing habitats of value (woodlands, treelines and hedgerows) are to be retained, enhanced and integrated into the circular SANG path. New habitat types will be created including species rich grassland, native shrub and tree planting, and creation of wetland habitat.
- 6.31 Any short term impacts during the soft engineering construction phase will be avoided through sensitive working practices.
- 6.32 Therefore, the proposals are in accordance with Policies CP8 and TB23 as the SANG will not only mitigate pressure on the Thames Basin Heaths SPA, but also lead to long term biodiversity benefits for present and future habitats.

Arboriculture

- 6.33 NPPF paragraph 136 states that 'applicants and local planning authorities should work with highways officers and tree officers to ensure that the right trees are planted in the right places, and solutions are found that are compatible with highways standards and the needs of different users'.
- 6.34 The accompanied Arboricultural Assessment identifies no. 7 individual Category A trees (T26, T27, T75, T79, T80, T81 and T83) and part of one group (G8), three individual Category B trees (T24, T29 and T82) and part of two groups (G10 and G24), and four Category C trees (T25, T28, T84 and T87), two full groups (G1 and G9), and part of one group (G21) will require removal to accommodate the creation of the SANG. Three Category U trees (T7, T44 and T46) will also be removed. These trees are predominantly located towards the site entrance and their removal is necessary to improve the restricted site access and to enable a safe entrance/exit for both drivers and pedestrians.
- 6.35 Therefore, the impacts to retained trees and the proposed minimal tree removals are necessary to facilitate the access of the site. In addition to the enhancements across the site, such minor tree removals should not be considered a constraint on development of the site.
- 6.36 There are no Ancient or Veteran trees within the site or affected by the proposal.

- 6.37 The proposed development will retain the majority of trees with some minor encroachments into the buffers. The proposed boardwalk also incurs into the root protection areas (RPA) of some trees (T92, G20, G25 and W3) although the incursions are minimal and hand dug posts with concrete footings lined with geotextile membranes will minimise the risk to the trees. The self-binding gravel footpath also incurs slightly into the RPA of G15, W1 and W3 although again these incursions are minimal (<5%) and do not result in the removal of any trees in G15, W1 or W3. The Arboricultural Assessment therefore concludes that there will be no negative affect on the structural or physiological condition of the trees.
- 6.38 The Arboricultural Assessment sets out measures for tree protection and future tree management to support the habitat creation and enhancement.
- 6.39 Accordingly, the proposals are in compliance with Policies CC03 and TB21 and NPPF.

Access and Highways

- 6.40 The site is located off Old Wokingham Road, which acts as the administrative boundary between the Unitary Authorities of Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) and Bracknell Forest Council (BFC).
- 6.41 Included within the Transport Statement are trip generation surveys at nearby SANGs in Wokingham and Bracknell Forest. The surveys and associated capacity assessment has been undertaken to demonstrate that the SANG can operate without traffic queuing along Old Wokingham Road for vehicles waiting to turn right into the site.
- 6.42 Crucially, the data has identified a peak hour of 10:00–11:00 at weekends, where there where would be no. 22 two-way vehicle trips at the site. During the week, the peak hour of 17:00-18:00 would see 15 two-way trips into the site.
- 6.43 The Transport Statement also details Personal Injury Collision data for Old Wokingham Road. The data demonstrates that the anticipated trips to the SANG will not have any adverse impact on highway safety.
- 6.44 Therefore, the proposed site access and junction onto Old Wokingham Road is suitable in terms of accommodating the calculated net increase in vehicle movements and right-turning traffic into the site.
- 6.45 It has also been established at pre-application stage that the proposed 27 bay car park exceeds Natural England SANG guidance. Natural England parking standards for SANG states that a minimum of 1 car parking space is required, per hectare. This would equate to 16 spaces for the proposed 16 hectare SANG.
- 6.46 The accompanying Transport Statement and access strategy therefore accords with local policies and pre-application discussions with WBC and BFC officers.

Flooding and Drainage

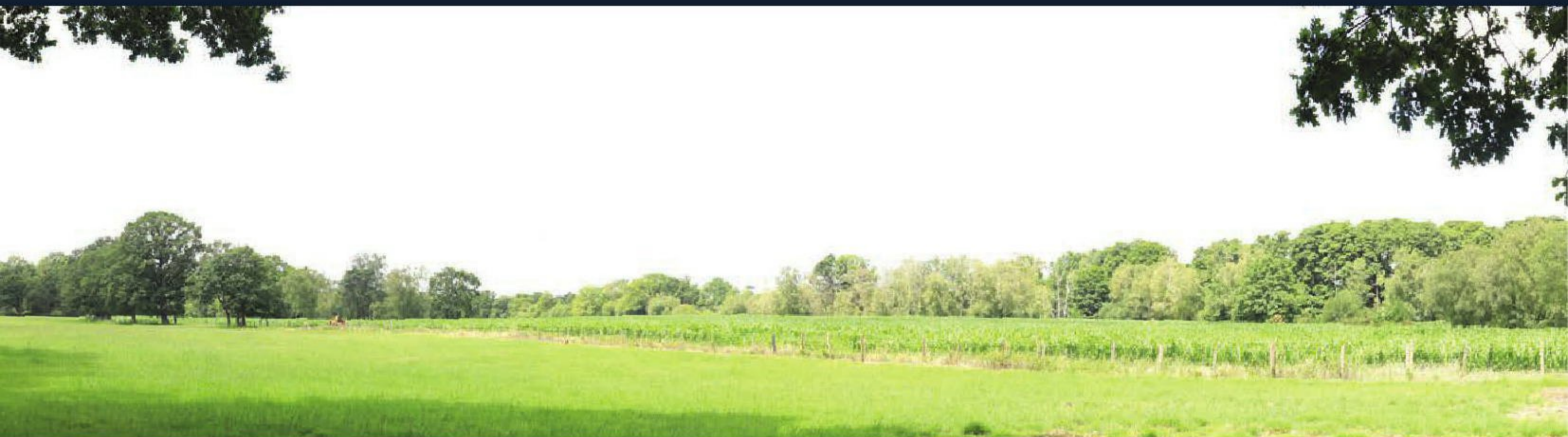
- 6.47 The Flood Risk Assessment has been prepared to assess the proposed SANG and its impact on flood risk.
- 6.48 In order to mitigate the flood risk, the SUDS assessment proposes that infiltration systems in the form of a filter drain are suitably placed on the geology of this site. Porous paving consisting of graded gravel, perforated pipes, an attenuation tank and a flow control have also been identified as the most effective method to drain the site without increasing flood risk.
- 6.49 The accompanying Flood Risk Assessment and Drainage Strategy has demonstrated that an appropriate drainage system for surface water can be provided on the site which discharges to a suitable outfall. The development should proceed without being subject to significant flood risk. The development will also not increase flood risk to the wider catchment area.
- 6.50 Therefore, the flood risk mitigation measures and drainage strategy is in accordance with the NPPF and Policy CC09.

7. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

- 7.1 This planning application to which this Planning Statement relates is submitted on behalf of The Thomas Family & Bloor Homes Limited and seeks full planning permission for the Change of use of agricultural land to outdoor sport or recreation (Class F2c), for use as Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG), plus associated landscape and drainage works, SANG car park and access from Old Wokingham Road.
- 7.2 The SANG will ensure there is capacity to mitigate the impact arising from potential future development on the Thames Basin Heaths SPA. The proposed SANG will also create Biodiversity Net Gain credits which will be available for purchase to enable future development to achieve the required net gain in biodiversity.
- 7.3 The proposed SANG is in accordance with Natural England guidelines and given the extensive size of the site, the circular route will allow those using the SANG to experience a variety of habitats including woodland, meadow, wetland and scrub. In accordance with Natural England's guidance, the proposed primary circular route exceeds the minimum distance of 2.3 kilometres and will start and end at the car park, offering its users an attractive and convenient walking route.
- 7.4 The primary route across the site includes self-binding gravel paths, boardwalks and mown grass paths across existing woodland, proposed deciduous woodland and wetland. This will offer the user year-round access to the SANG and a variety of natural environments for recreation.
- 7.5 This Planning Statement has demonstrated that the proposed development would comply with local and national planning policies. The SANG will improve the landscape, natural habitats and provide Biodiversity Net Gain credits that far exceed minimum requirements of development.
- 7.6 The proposals accord with national and local planning policy and are consistent with the Natural England guidelines. This application is therefore in accordance with the development plan and should therefore be approved.
- 7.7 The planning application and supporting documentation are therefore commended to Wokingham Borough Council and Bracknell Forest Council for due consideration in order to deliver the proposed SANG at Newlands Farm.

APPENDIX ONE - NEWSLETTER

Proposed Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) on land at Newlands Farm, Old Wokingham Road, Wokingham



Overview

The Thomas Family and Bloor Homes Southern are pleased to confirm that a full planning application will be submitted to Wokingham Borough Council in the coming weeks, for a Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) on land at Newlands Farm, Old Wokingham Road, Wokingham.

This newsletter provides further details regarding the plans which include provision of publicly accessible open space as a SANG including access, new landscaping, woodland planting, footpaths and car parking provision.

About the proposals

The proposals have been informed by positive pre-application engagement with Officers at Wokingham Borough Council and Bracknell Forest Council, as the site crosses both administrative boundaries. Key consultees including Natural England have also provided valuable input which helped to inform our initial work and progression of the plans.

The proposals will deliver the following.



A circa 16 hectare SANG to provide a publicly accessible and natural space for local recreation and biodiversity enhancement



A circa 2.3km circular walking route together with secondary routes across the site to start and finish at the SANG car park



Retention of existing woodland together with new planting including trees, flowering grassland and wetlands to offer significant habitat enhancement



Connections to the existing Public Right of Way network to enable pedestrian access from Easthampstead Road and Honey Hill



A SANG car park (circa 27 car parking spaces) to provide adequate space for those wishing to arrive by car plus 4 cycle parking spaces



New site access from Old Wokingham Road in the form of a simple priority junction



Proposed Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG)
on land at Newlands Farm, Old Wokingham Road, Wokingham











Illustrative Masterplan

The illustrative masterplan and associated site access strategy accords with local planning policy and pre-application discussions with Officers of Wokingham Borough Council and Bracknell Forest Council.

The proposals include a suitable access arrangement onto Old Wokingham Road, including for pedestrian connections.



Key

-  Site boundary
-  Existing woodland, trees & vegetation
-  Existing wet woodland accessed for management only – no public access
-  Existing watercourses
-  Proposed deciduous woodland trees and scrub planting
-  Proposed wetland (ponds and scrapes)
-  Proposed car park [to include 27 spaces with interpretation / map signage]
-  Proposed vehicular access
-  Existing Public Right of Way [c.110m through site]
-  Primary loop route



Proposed Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) on land at Newlands Farm, Old Wokingham Road, Wokingham



Contact us

Following submission of the planning application, you will have the opportunity to comment directly via the Council's own consultation process.

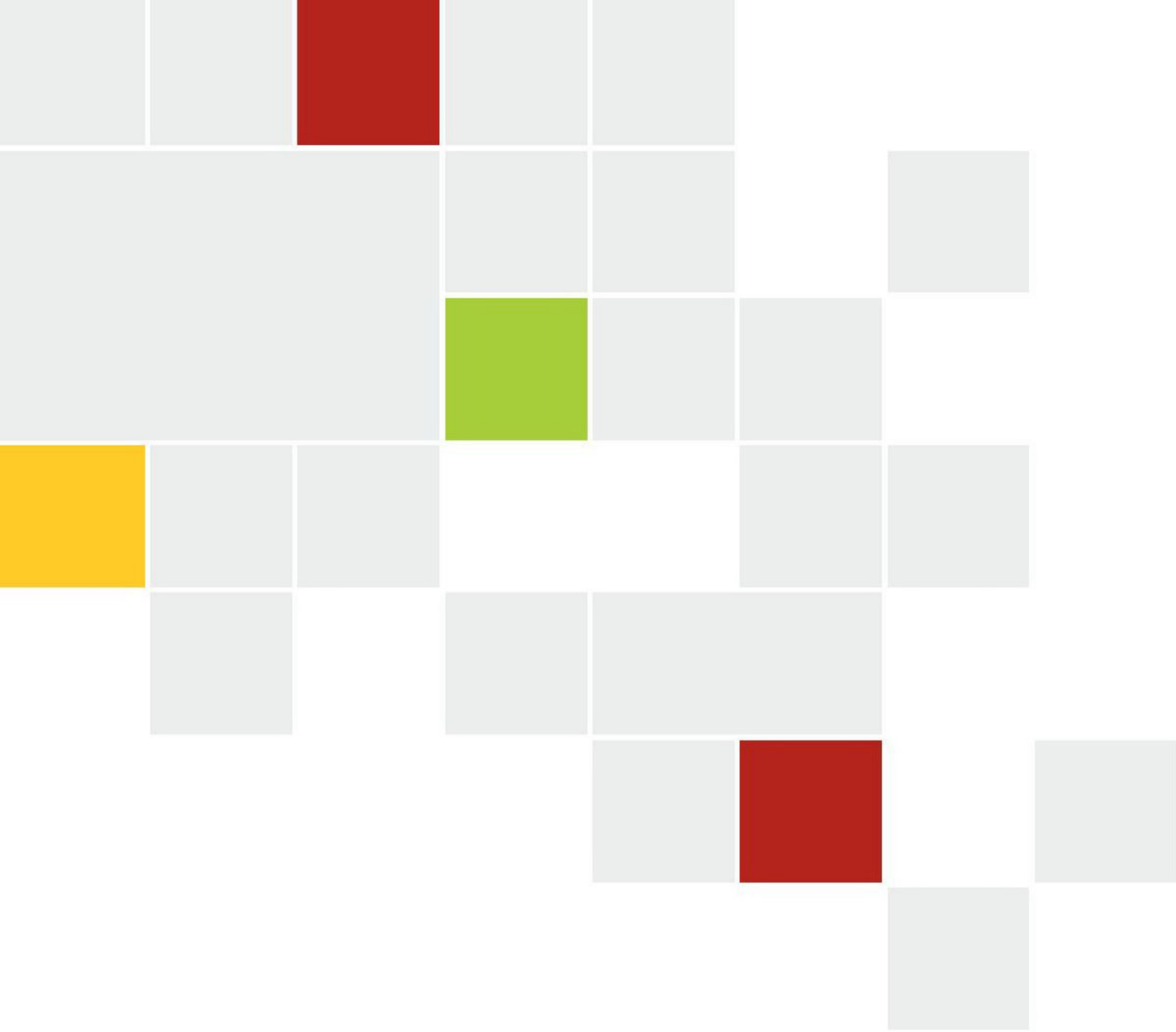
In the meantime, please do get in touch if you require any further information or would like to provide any feedback regarding the proposals.

You can contact us by:

 Freephone: [REDACTED]

 Mobile: [REDACTED]

 Email: [REDACTED]



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