

**Rushmoor Borough Council, Hart
District Council & Surrey Heath
Borough Council**

A1 Background Paper **SPA Visitor Distribution and Access**

Final report

Prepared by LUC
September 2020



**Rushmoor Borough Council, Hart District Council
& Surrey Heath Borough Council**

A1 Background Paper
SPA Visitor Distribution and Access

Project Number
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Chapter 1

Introduction

The purpose of this background paper and the approach taken

1.1 This paper collates background information on visitor distribution and access to the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (TBH SPA) to inform the main TBH SPA Consultancy project. The main project aims to explore measures that could supplement or provide alternatives to the current approach to mitigating the effects of new housing on the Thames Basin Heaths SPA.

1.2 This background paper is referred to as 'A1 Visitor Distribution and Access'. Two other background papers are being prepared alongside this report:

- SANG background paper (A2); and
- SMM background paper (A3).

1.3 Building on the information in the background papers, three background studies will be prepared, to fill some of the gaps in information identified by the background papers:

- SANG research study (C1);
- SMM research study (C2); and
- Access research study (C3).

Aims and approach of this study

1.4 This background study collates existing information on visitor distribution and access at the SPA and nearby Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces (SANGs), using existing reports and GIS data. This information will feed into the main study, to inform the appraisal of mitigation options and selection of the preferred option/s.

1.5 The nature of existing access restrictions and visitor distribution is relevant to all of the mitigation options being considered, but particularly to the 'access management' and 'access restriction / control' options:

Group A – alternative sites / green infrastructure:

- Option 1 – SANG networks;
- Option 2 – Linear SANG;
- Option 3 – Enhancement or creation of recreational routes;

- Option 4 – Smaller SANG / facilities with smaller catchments;

- Option 5 – Larger SANG with larger catchments;

Group B - Habitat management / restoration:

- Option 6 – Expansion of SAMM Project (wardening);

Group C – Access management:

- Option 7 – Expansion of SAMM Project (education and communication);

Group D – Access restriction / control:

- Option 8 – Car Parking Availability / Access;

- Option 9 – Dog Control / Wardening; and

- Option 10 – Access Restriction.

1.6 The specific aims of this study are:

- To draw out findings from visitor surveys which may be relevant when considering the options.
- To guide the selection of mitigation measures.
- To provide a baseline to inform other research studies required for the project.

- To determine the nature and effectiveness of existing controls across the SPA.

- To identify potential for changes to access management and restriction.

1.7 Natural England and the Project Board will have an opportunity to comment on this draft report, which will be updated following comments.

The SPA and SANGs

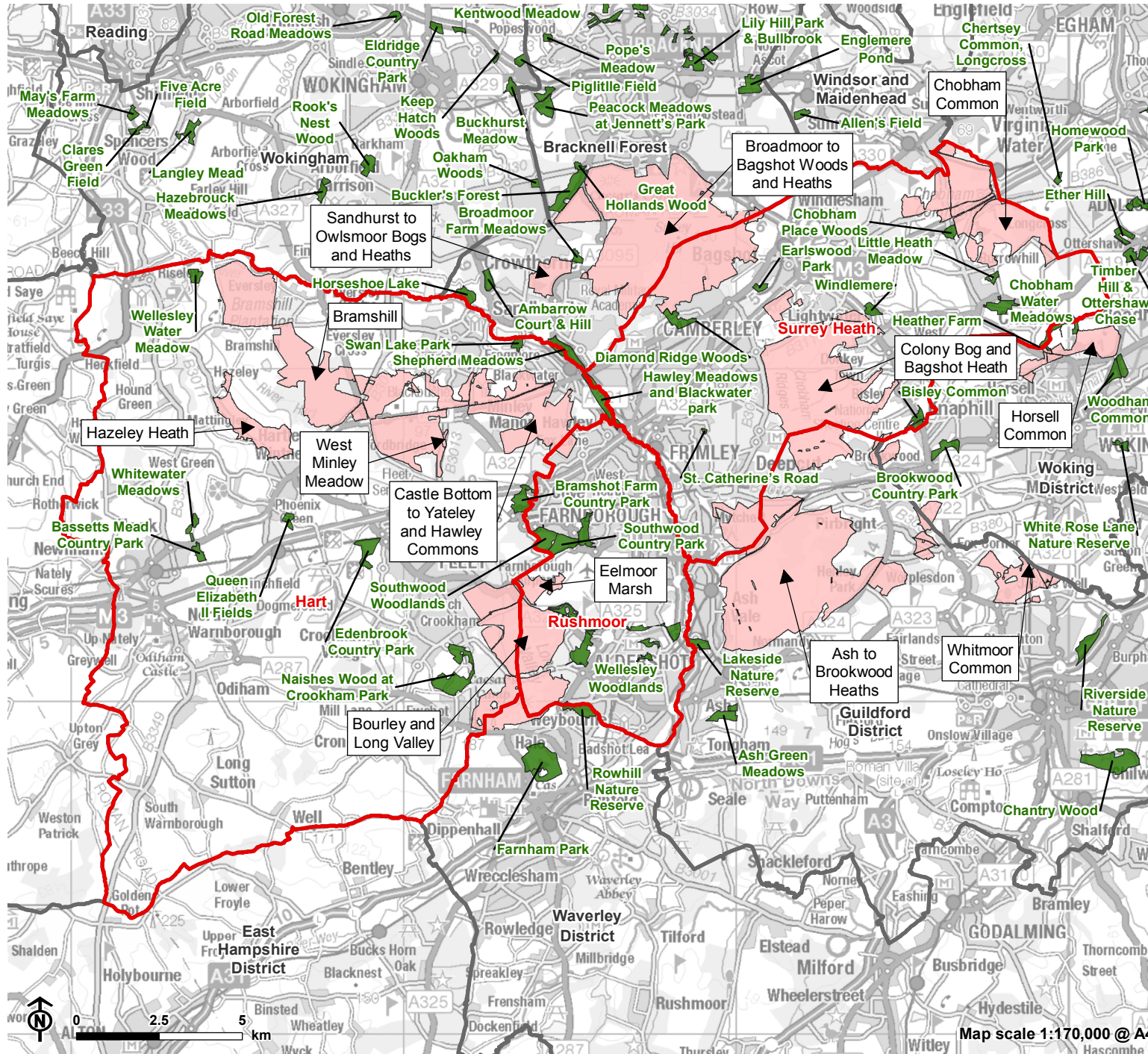
1.8 The TBH SPA is a network of heathland sites across Hampshire, Berkshire and Surrey. The portions of the SPA within Hart, Rushmoor and Surrey Heath are shown on Figure 1.1, along with SANGs that have been created to mitigate housing development associated with the three districts.

1.9 Tables 1.1 to 1.13 summarise the characteristics of each SPA parcel; the parcels are defined by each component Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) that makes up the SPA.

1.10 SANG sites are described in detail in the SANG background paper (A2). Over 60 SANGs have been delivered across the SPA area. Of these, 23 are within Hart, Rushmoor and/or Surrey Heath.



Figure 1.1: The SPA and related SANGs



- Hart, Rushmore and Surrey Heath Districts
- Adjacent district
- Thames Basin Heaths SPA
- Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG)

Table 1.1: Ash to Brookwood Heaths characteristics

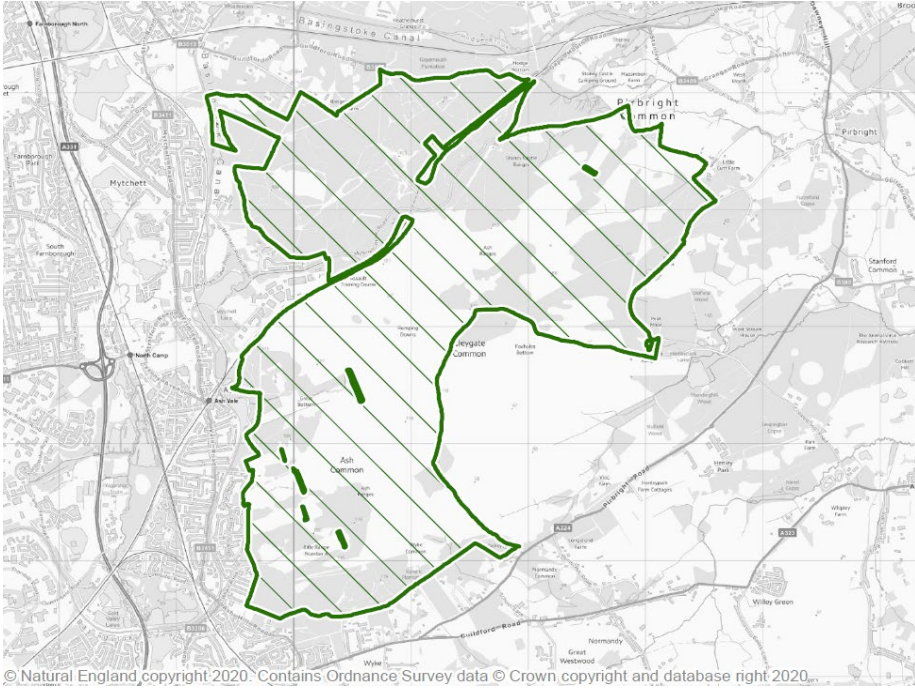
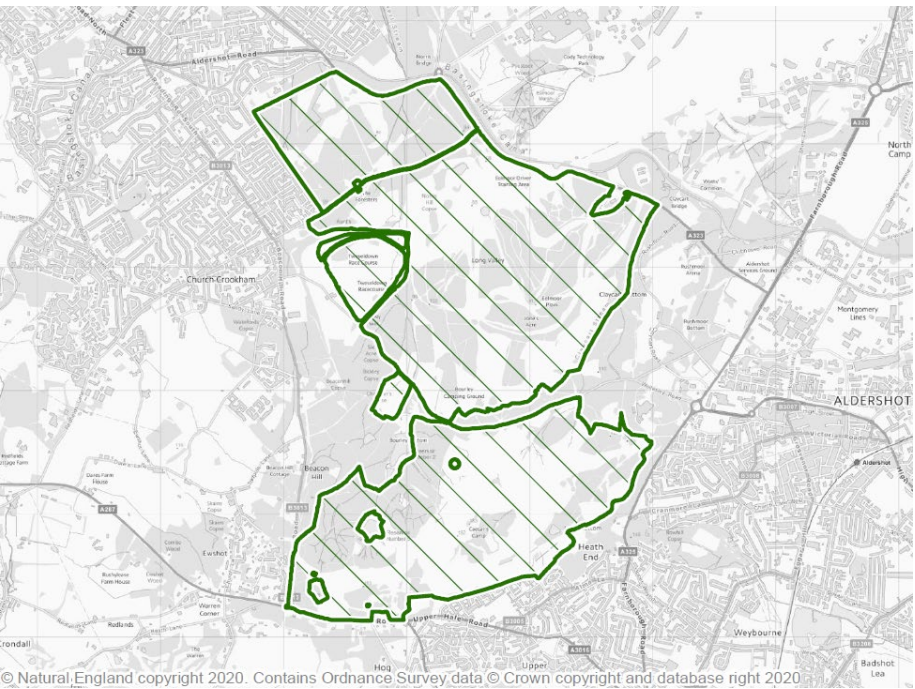
Ash to Brookwood Heaths SSSI	
<p>Location: Surrey Heath, Guildford & Woking Between Aldershot & Pirbright</p> <p>Area: 1,576 ha</p> <p>Main habitats: Heathland and bog</p> <p>Ownership / designation affecting access: The site includes large areas of MOD land (see Chapter 4).</p>	 <p>© Natural England copyright 2020. Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right 2020.</p>

Table 1.2: Bourley and Long Valley characteristics

Bourley & Long Valley SSSI	
<p>Location: Hart, Rushmoor & Waverley Between Fleet & Aldershot</p> <p>Area: 823 ha</p> <p>Main habitats¹: Heathland, woodland, mire, scrub and grassland.</p> <p>Ownership / designation affecting access: Part of the site is MOD land² (see Chapter 4)</p>	 <p>© Natural England copyright 2020. Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right 2020.</p>

¹ Taken from Natural England's 'Site Details' for the SSSIs

² <https://www.tbhpartnership.org.uk/news/long-valley-access/>

Table 1.3: Bramshill characteristics

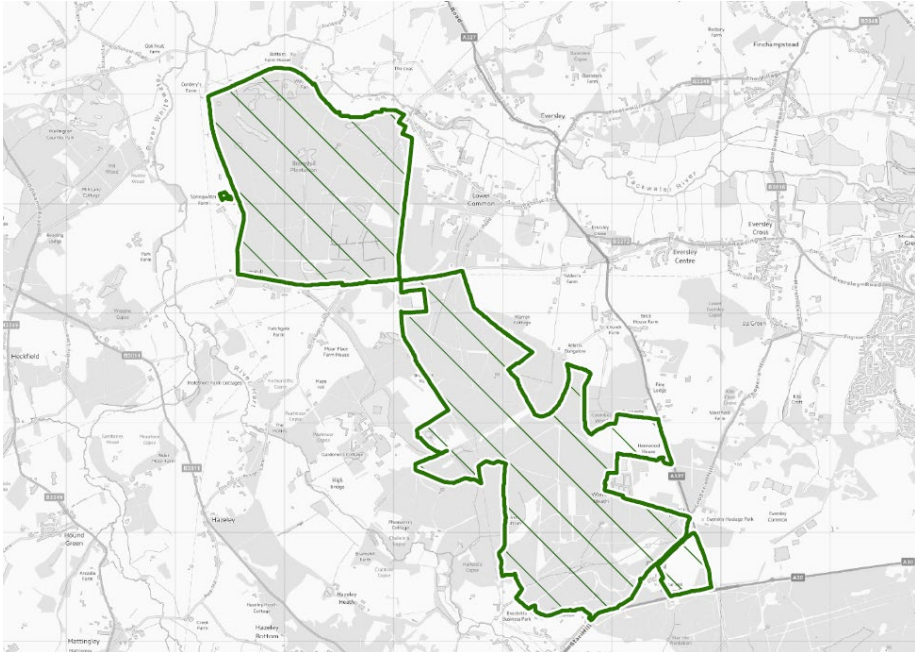
Bramshill SSSI	
<p>Location: Hart West of Eversley / Lower Common</p> <p>Area: 673 ha</p> <p>Main habitats: Conifer plantation, ponds, wet heathland and grassland.</p> <p>Ownership / designation affecting access: None identified.</p>	 <p>© Natural England copyright 2020. Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right 2020</p>

Table 1.4: Broadmoor to Bagshot Woods and Heaths characteristics

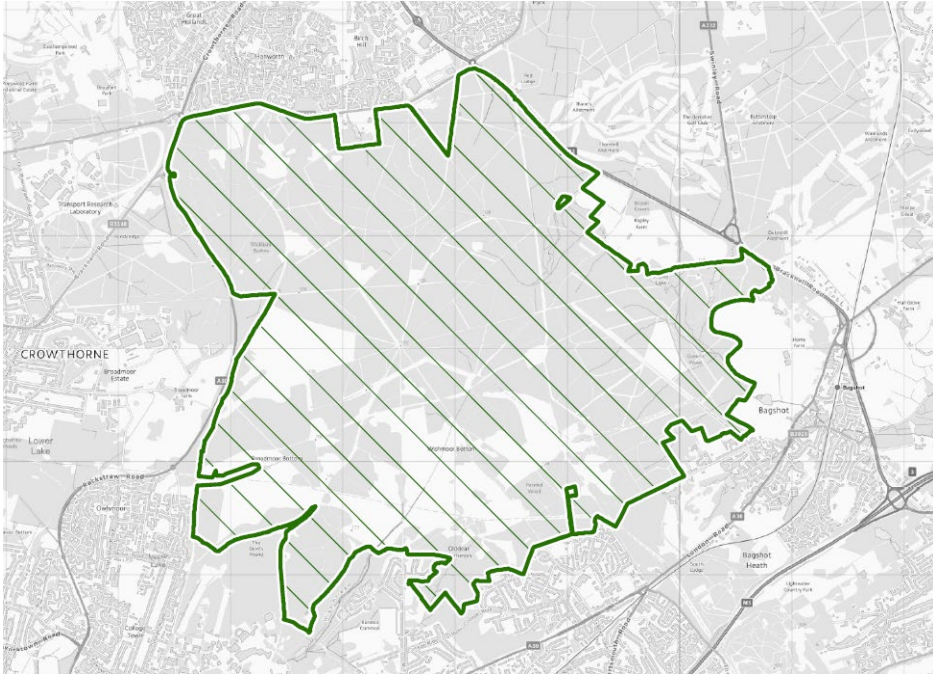
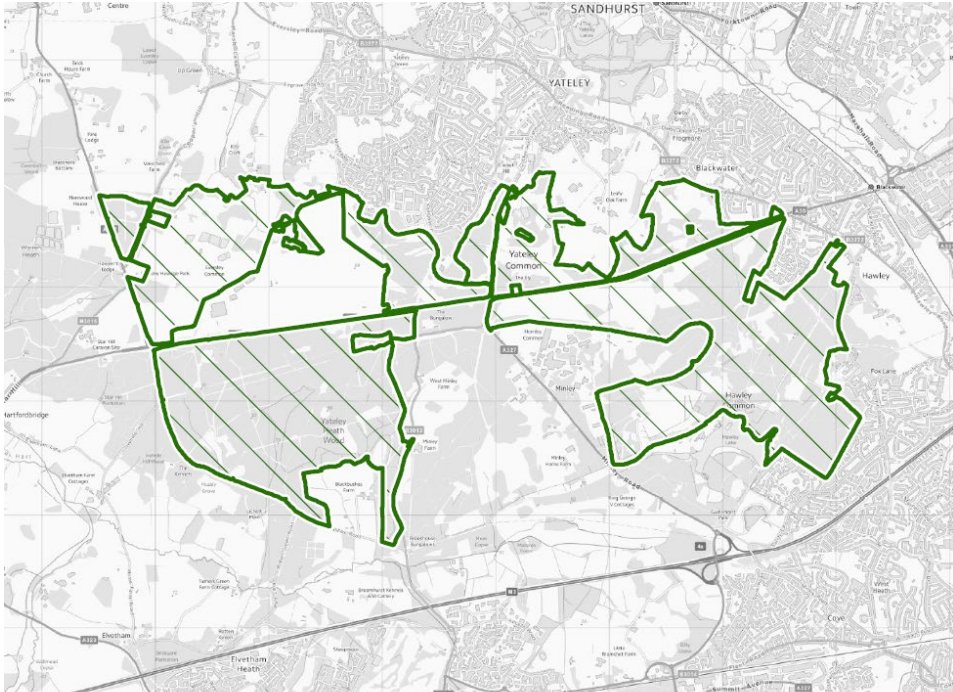
Broadmoor to Bagshot Woods and Heaths SSSI	
<p>Location: Bracknell Forest and Surrey Heath Between Camberley & Bracknell</p> <p>Area: 1,696 ha</p> <p>Main habitats: Heathland, broadleaved & coniferous woodland, mire and ponds.</p> <p>Ownership / designation affecting access: Part of the site is MOD land (see Chapter 4) Has a visitor centre, café, adventure playground and mountain biking centre.</p>	 <p>© Natural England copyright 2020. Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right 2020</p>

Table 1.5: Castle Bottom to Yateley and Hawley Commons characteristics

Castle Bottom to Yateley and Hawley Commons SSSI ³	
<p>Location: Hart & Rushmoor Composite site south of Yateley</p> <p>Area: 923 ha</p> <p>Main habitats: Heathland, conifer plantation, mire and grassland.</p> <p>Ownership / designation affecting access: Part of this site is a Country Park and part is Common Land. Much of the remainder is MOD land (see Chapter 4)</p>	 <p>© Natural England copyright 2020. Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right 2020.</p>

³ Note that West Minley Meadow SSSI, adjacent to Castle Bottom to Yateley and Hawley Commons SSSI is not part of the SPA

Table 1.6: Chobham Common characteristics

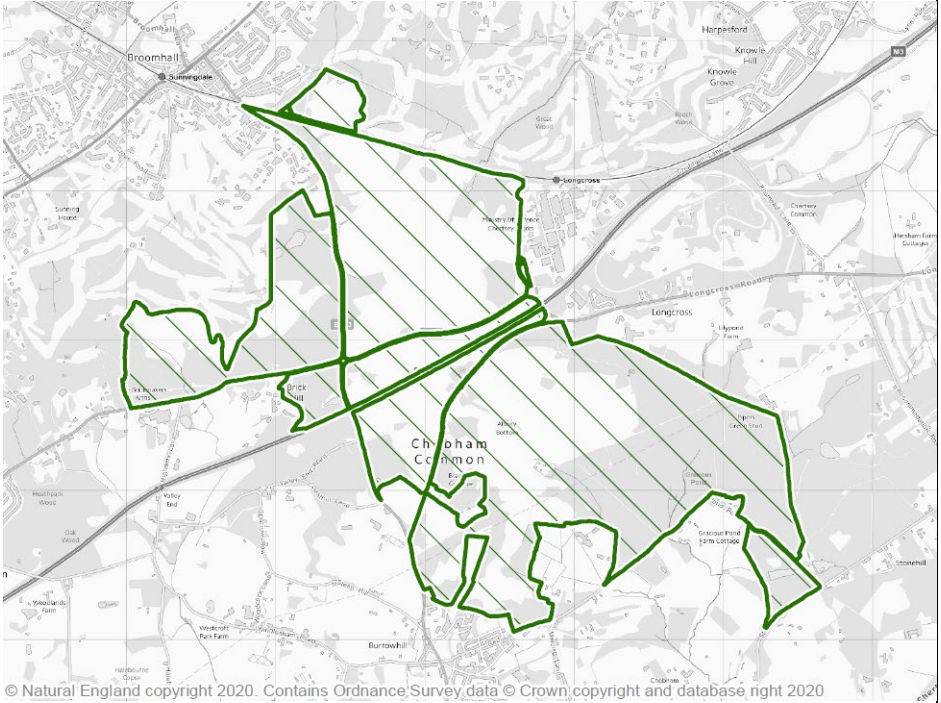
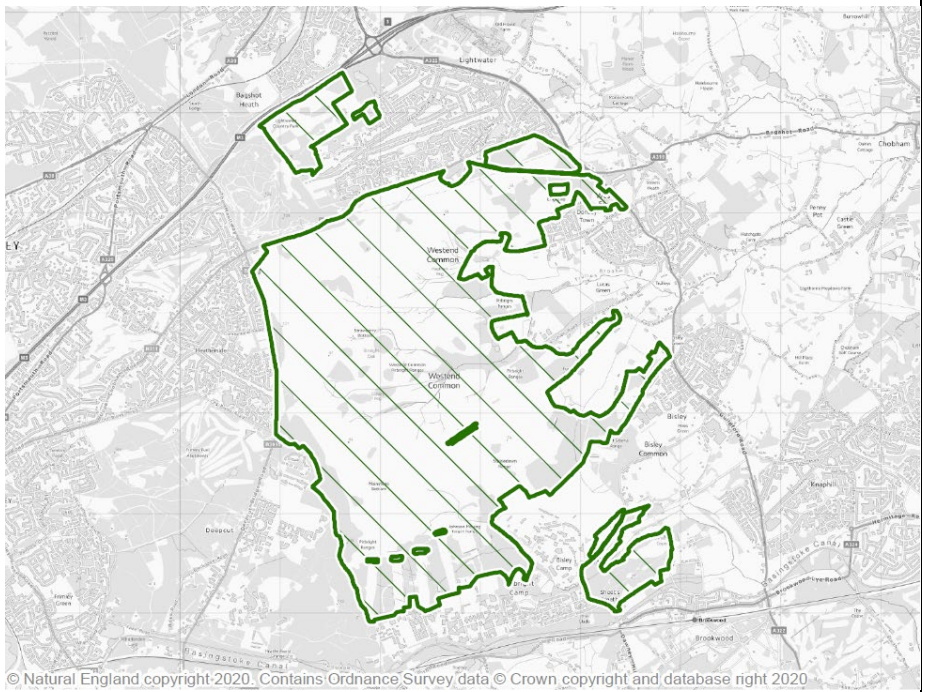
Chobham Common SSSI	
<p>Location: Surrey Heath Between Chobham & Broomhall</p> <p>Area: 656 ha</p> <p>Main habitats: Heathland, bog, scrub, ponds and woodland.</p> <p>Ownership / designation affecting access: Part of the site is a Surrey Wildlife Trust Reserve which has public access but requires dogs to be under 'effective control'⁴.</p>	

Table 1.7: Colony Bog and Bagshot Heath characteristics

Colony Bog and Bagshot Heath SSSI	
<p>Location: Surrey Heath, Guildford & Woking South of Lightwater</p> <p>Area: 1,131 ha</p> <p>Main habitats: Bog, heathland and woodland.</p> <p>Ownership / designation affecting access: The SSSI includes much of Lightwater Country Park. Much of the site is within a MOD Danger Area (see Chapter 4).</p>	

⁴ <https://www.surreywildlifetrust.org/nature-reserves/chobham-common>

Table 1.8: Eelmoor Marsh characteristics

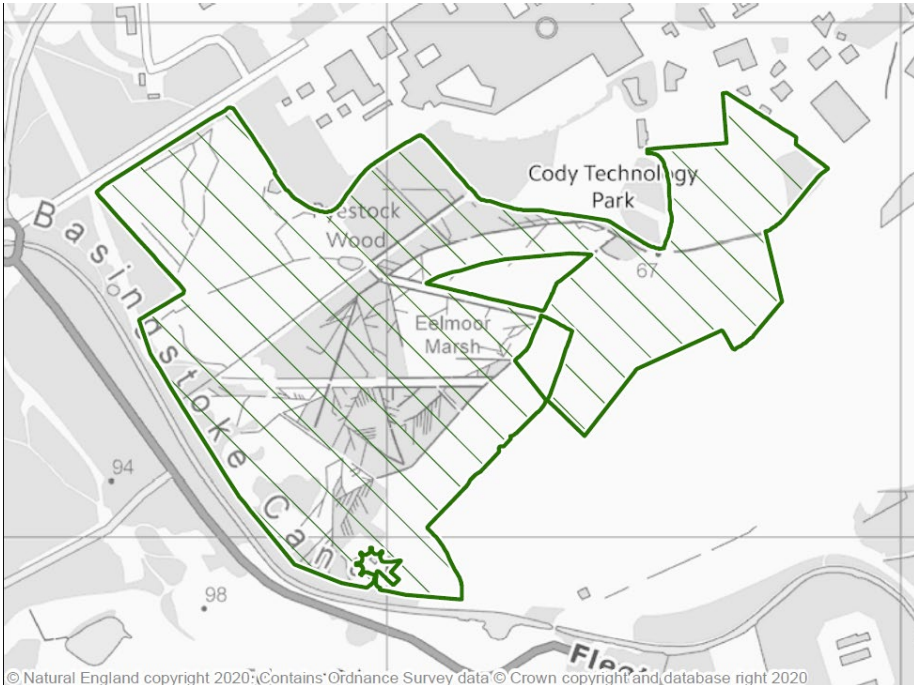
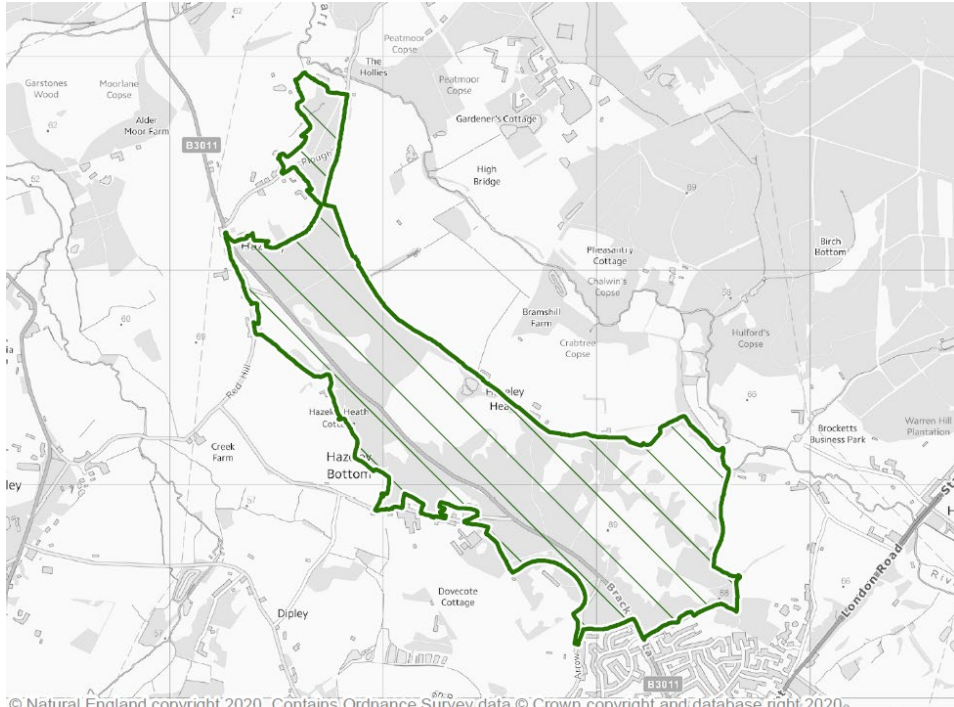
Eelmoor Marsh SSSI	
<p>Location: Rushmoor East of Fleet</p> <p>Area: 66 ha</p> <p>Main habitats: Heathland, raised bog, woodland and grassland</p> <p>Ownership / designation affecting access: Site is in private ownership and has no public access</p>	 <p>© Natural England copyright 2020. Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right 2020</p>

Table 1.9: Hazeley Heath characteristics

Hazeley Heath SSSI	
<p>Location: Hart Northwest of Hartley Wintney</p> <p>Area: 181 ha</p> <p>Main habitats: Heathland</p> <p>Ownership / designation affecting access: The northern part of the site is a RSPB reserve, which has public access⁵.</p>	 <p>© Natural England copyright 2020. Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right 2020</p>

⁵ <https://www.rspb.org.uk/reserves-and-events/reserves-a-z/hazeley-heath/>

Table 1.10: Horsell Common characteristics

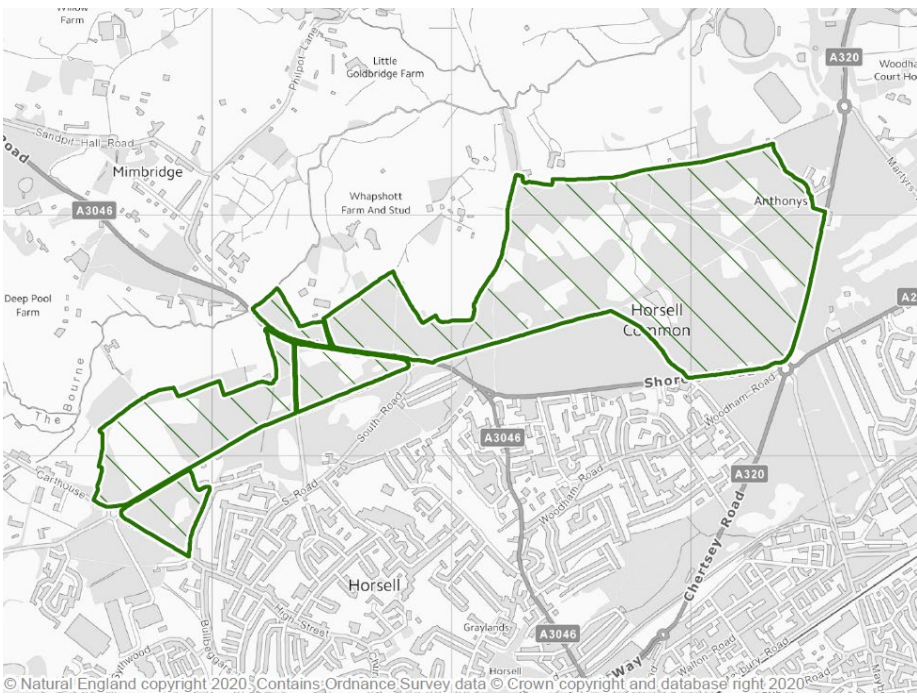
Horsell Common SSSI	
<p>Location: Woking North of Horsell</p> <p>Area: 152 ha</p> <p>Main habitats: Heathland, grassland, bog, ponds, woodland and scrub.</p> <p>Ownership / designation affecting access: The site is owned and managed by Horsell Common Preservation Society and much of the site is Common Land.</p>	 <p>© Natural England copyright 2020. Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right 2020</p>

Table 1.11: Ockham to Wisley Commons characteristics

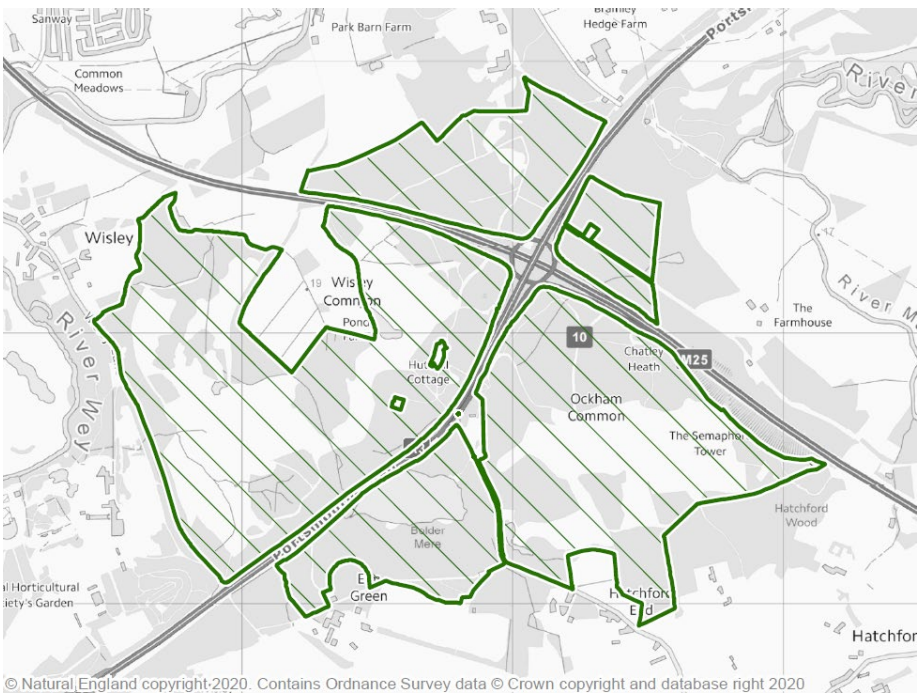
Parcel 1	Ockham to Wisley Commons SSSI
<p>Location: Guildford & Elmbridge South of Byfleet</p> <p>Area: 267 ha</p> <p>Main habitats: Heathland, bog, open water, woodland and scrub.</p> <p>Ownership / designation affecting access: Most of the site is managed by Surrey County Council as 'open space'. Several areas of the site are Common Land.</p>	 <p>© Natural England copyright 2020. Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right 2020</p>

Table 1.12: Sandhurst to Owlsmoor Bogs and Heaths characteristics

Sandhurst to Owlsmoor Bogs and Heaths SSSI	
<p>Location: Bracknell Forest Between Sandhurst / Owlsmoor & Crowthorne</p> <p>Area: 86 ha</p> <p>Main habitats: Heathland, broadleaved & coniferous woodland, and mire.</p> <p>Ownership / designation affecting access: Part of this site is managed as a 'public open space' by Bracknell</p>	

Table 1.13: Whitmoor Common characteristics

Whitmoor Common SSSI	
<p>Location: Hart, Rushmoor & Waverley Between Fleet & Aldershot</p> <p>Area: 823 ha</p> <p>Main habitats: Heathland, woodland, mire, scrub and grassland.</p> <p>Ownership / designation affecting access: Part of the site is MOD land (see Chapter 4).</p>	

Chapter 2

Getting to the SPA

Means of travel and points of entry to the TBH SPA

2.1 This section responds to the following outputs identified in the brief:

- Distribution of visitors depending on travel method (this section covers travel modes by number of visitors only; visitor distribution is discussed in Chapter 5).
- Proportion of dog walkers that arrive by car.
- Map of existing access points and car parks at the SPA.

2.2 Comparable information for the SANG sites is provided in Chapter 3.

Data used

2.3 The following visitor survey reports have been identified, as part of the main study, as containing key information on how people get to the SPA:

- Analysis of 2017 Thames Basin Heaths SPA Parking Transects & Counter Data, 2019 (Footprint Ecology);
- Visitor Access Patterns on the Thames Basin Heaths SPA – Visitor Questionnaire Survey 2018, 2018 (EPR);
- Visitor survey on the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area, 2013 (Footprint Ecology / Natural England); and
- Visitor access patterns on the Thames Basin Heaths, 2005 (Footprint Ecology / English Nature).

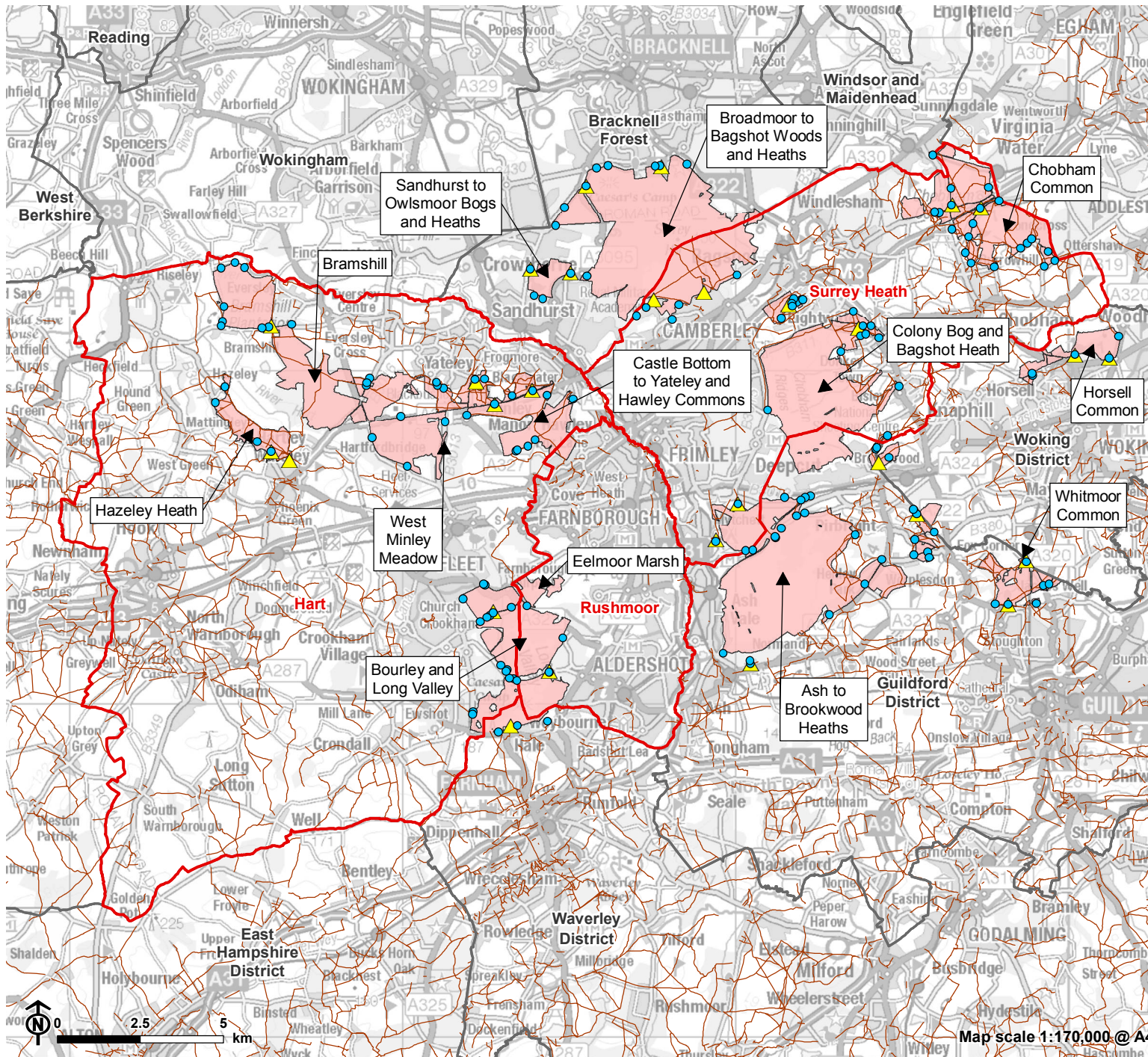
2.4 Some of the data produced for these studies has been obtained from Natural England and supplemented with data held by LUC and Rushmoor Borough Council. A full list of the GIS datasets used is provided in Appendix A.

Entry points and parking

2.5 The SPA is a large composite site with numerous formal and informal entry points. The 2019 car park transect report identifies access points with parking and access points accessible only to those on foot (as shown on Figure 2.1). In some places there are additional informal entry points, for example where there is an open boundary to the site.



Figure 2.1: SPA entry points



- Hart, Rushmore and Surrey Heath Districts
- Adjacent district
- Thames Basin Heaths SPA
- Public right of way
- ▲ Entry point
- Parking location

Travel modes

2.6 The means of travel for visitors to the SPA was gathered as part of the various visitor surveys. A comparison of data for the surveys undertaken in 2005, 2012/13 and 2018, is shown in Table 2.1⁶. This provides an indication of the proportion of visitors that arrive with dogs and the proportion of visitors arriving by different modes. Chapter 5 looks at the distribution of these visitors.

Table 2.1: Comparison of SPA visitor survey data

Data	August 2005	May / June 2012	August 2012/13	August / September 2018
People entering	3,331	2,521	3,888	3,001
Dogs entering	Not counted	1,983	2,351	1,847
Average no. dogs per interviewed group	1.11	1.21	1.15	1.2
% travelling by car/van	83%	75%	75%	80%
% travelling on foot	13%	22%	21%	19%
% travelling by bicycle	4%	2%	3%	1%
% travelling on horse	1%	1%	1%	0%
% travelling by other means e.g. public transport	0%	0%	0%	0%

2.7 The 2013 Footprint report provides data on the number of 'local visitors' and dogs arriving per group by transport mode, as set out in Table 2.2. From this, it is possible to estimate the number of dog walkers that arrive by car.

2.8 Note that the difference in figures between Table 2.1 and Table 2.2 is due to the exclusion of people not visiting from their home or on a short day-visit (ie those less likely to visit regularly). In 2012/13, c.97% of interviewed people were on a day trip / short visit from home.

Table 2.2: Number of 'local visitors' and dogs arriving per group, and transport mode

Mode	Number of people	% people	Number of dogs	% dogs
Car/van	2,878	76%	2,321	81%
Foot	771	20%	538	19%
Bicycle	92	2%	8	0
Horse	32	1%	0	0
Other	2	0%	2	0
Total	3,775		2,869	

2.9 These figures do not show that 81% of dog walkers arrive by car, as some dog walkers will have more than one dog per person (or less than one if they have arrived as a group of people with a dog). The mean number of dogs per interviewed groups (see Table 2.1) is slightly greater than 1, therefore, 81% slightly overestimates the percentage of dog walkers arriving by car. As a rule of thumb, however, the modal split for dog walkers is similar to the modal split for visitors overall.

⁶ Reproduced in part from the 2018 survey report.

Chapter 3

Getting to SANGs

Means of travel and points of entry to SANGs

3.1 The brief for this study suggests the inclusion of a map of existing access points and car parks at SANGs. However, this data was not available at the time of writing and will be presented in later studies.

3.2 Although it is not specifically required by the project brief, this section also seeks to identify the following, to compare with the SPA:

- Distribution of visitors depending on travel method; and
- Proportion of dog walkers that arrive by car.

Data used

3.3 The following visitor survey report has been identified, as part of the main study, as containing key information on how people get to the TBH SANGs:

- Thames Basin Heaths SANG Visitor Survey Analysis, 2018 (Footprint Ecology).

3.4 Some of the data produced for this study has been obtained from Natural England and supplemented with data held by LUC and Rushmoor Borough Council. A full list of the GIS datasets used is provided in Appendix A.

3.5 This report has focussed on SANGs within the Hart, Rushmoor and Surrey Heath Housing Market Area, as mitigating housing from this area is the focus of the main study; although the report draws on data from the SPA's SANGs as a whole.

Entry points and parking

3.6 It is a requirement for SANGs to have adequate parking for visitors, unless the site is intended for local use, ie within easy walking distance (400m) of the developments linked to it. Table 1.2 identifies those SANGs without car parks.

3.7 As with the SPA, it is likely that there will be additional informal entry points, particularly for visitors on foot.

Travel modes

3.8 Of the SANGs included in the visitor surveys in the 2018 Report, the following are within Hart, Rushmoor or Surrey Heath:

- Queen Elizabeth II Fields (Dilly Lane), Hart;
- Hawley Meadows & Blackwater Park, Rushmoor; and
- Chobham Water Meadows, Surrey Heath.

3.9 There is therefore limited data on how people travel to SANGs within the three districts.

3.10 The SANG surveys found that there was considerable variation in modes of travel to the sites, ranging from 7% travelling by car at one site (Hare Hill) to 96% by car at another (Horseshoe Lake). Table 3.1 shows the overall mode split across all of the surveyed SANG sites, compared with the data from the 2013 SPA survey.

Table 3.1: Comparison between mode split of travel to the SANG sites (average) and SPA

Mode	SANGs	SPA
% travelling by car/van	75%	75%
% travelling on foot	25%	21%
% travelling by bicycle	0%	3%
% travelling on horse	0%	1%
% travelling by other means e.g. public transport	0%	0%

3.11 As with the SPA data, the proportion of dog walkers arriving by car is not provided. However, while it may be that the modal split for dog walkers is similar to the modal split for visitors overall, as is likely at the SPA, there appears to be too much variation between the SANG sites to use this as a rule of thumb.

3.12 There does appear to be some differences between data for visits by dog walkers to the SANGs compared to the SPA. A mean of 0.88 dogs per *group* were found to visit the SANGs (ranging from 0.50 to 1.00 per group at different sites); or 0.61 dogs per person (total number of people in groups). This is fewer than recorded at the SPA (1.2 dogs per group in 2018; or 0.76 per person in groups). However, average group size at the SANGs was found to be 1.45, whereas at the SPA ranged from 1.5 in 2012/13 to 1.8 in 2005. People with dogs therefore tend to visit the SANGs in smaller groups than at the SPA.

Chapter 4

SPA access restrictions

Limits to where people can go within the SPA

4.1 This section responds to the following outputs identified in the brief:

- Location and nature of existing car parking controls (in/near TBH SPA);
- Areas of the SPA that have access restrictions already in place (including dog control);
- The reasons for existing restrictions being in place;
- How existing restrictions are implemented on the ground; and
- How existing restrictions are enforced.

Data used

4.2 The following sources of information have been used to identify access restrictions within the SPA:

- Information from Natural England on the SPA;
- Analysis of 2017 Thames Basin Heaths SPA Parking Transects & Counter Data, 2019 (Footprint Ecology); Visitor access patterns on the Thames Basin Heaths, 2005 (Footprint Ecology / English Nature);
- Public Access Consultancy for the Army Training Estate – Regional Report (Consultation Draft): ATE Home Counties, 2003⁷; and Government information on MOD byelaws and public access⁸.HRA for proposed charges at selected car parks in Surrey, 2018 (Footprint Ecology);
- Bramshill Forest Plan, 2018 (Forestry England)⁹;
- Defra's online mapping service 'Magic'.¹⁰

Parking availability and restrictions

4.3 The locations of parking in and near the SPA are shown on Figure 2.1. Data on the type and capacity of car parks has

⁷

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/425347/20150302-FOI01304-Annex_A.pdf

⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/byelaws-south-east>

⁹

https://www.forestryengland.uk/sites/default/files/documents/Thames%20Basin%20Heaths%20Introduction_0.pdf

¹⁰ <https://magic.defra.gov.uk>

been captured by Footprint Ecology in the 2017 car park transect report (as shown in Figure 4.1, below), although this study did not capture parking restrictions or charges at the car parks.

4.4 The car park transect report recorded 160 parking locations with a total capacity of 2,116 spaces. The 2013 visitor survey found that:

"There is a clear correlation between the number of visitors recorded entering a survey location and the estimated parking capacity at the location (Figure 6). However, there is no obvious relationship between an increase in visitor numbers (since 2005) and locations with higher capacity car parking areas i.e. visitor totals have increased at sites with both low and high parking capacity"

4.5 In 2018, Surrey County Council introduced charges at 15 out of 30 car parks across Surrey County Council's Countryside Estate, intending that a review would be undertaken 12 months after operation commenced. It was predicted that charges would produce a net revenue between £1.2m and £3.3m over a 15-year period. The charges would increase the Countryside Estate income, which would be used to conserve and enhance the landscape for visitors and future generations.

4.6 Charging was implemented at various car parks across Surrey's Countryside Estate in August 2018. Within the SPA, these are at Chobham Common, Ockham Common and Whitmoor Common.

4.7 An HRA of the proposals predicted positive and negative impacts of the implementation of parking charges to associated sites:

- + Likely to be positive in terms of recreational impact as it may deter visitors from using the sites and result in a net reduction in the number of visitors and/or the time they spend at the sites.
- + Expected to convey a message to visitors that the sites are important and should be looked after.
- - Potential negative impacts may occur if visitation is deflected away from one car-park to adjacent parking locations (potentially informal parking locations e.g. roadsides). This could result in more dispersed visitor use and more disturbance if access is harder to manage.
- - Deflection of visitors to different locations entirely, i.e. another car park, so that use increases at other sites.

4.8 As part of the HRA, Footprint Ecology conducted visitor questionnaire surveys (157 total) to identify how the implementation of parking charges might affect visitor use.

4.9 Overall 71% of site users said they would not have parked where they did if parking charges had been in place. It was considered that charges could result in the use of adjacent parking locations such as road verges etc. to avoid the parking charges, or the use of other sites entirely, which would result in localised, small increases in recreational use and redistribution of access.

4.10 The HRA predicted that results would likely be positive in terms of a net decrease in recreational use of the SPA, and localised increases are likely to occur at areas of the SPA that are already busy and well used.

4.11 The following mitigation was proposed:

- Promotion of the annual parking pass option to ensure awareness;
- Measures to limit roadside parking; and
- Additional wardening and engagement work at the sites.

4.12 The 12 month review has now been completed and the significant contribution to funds that was expected was not delivered. There was also a significant backlash from local people calling for the charges to be scrapped. At the County Council's Cabinet meeting on 26 November 2019, Council Members decided that all charges will be removed with effect from 1 April 2020. Proposals will be developed for the introduction of a voluntary payment scheme.

4.13 The Council has said that their ambition is for all residents to have access to the countryside and natural landscapes, to benefit from the related health and wellbeing advantages.

4.14 At SANGs, there are no charges for the first 2 hours at SANG car parks, but at some of the SANGs, charges apply after 2 or 3 hours.

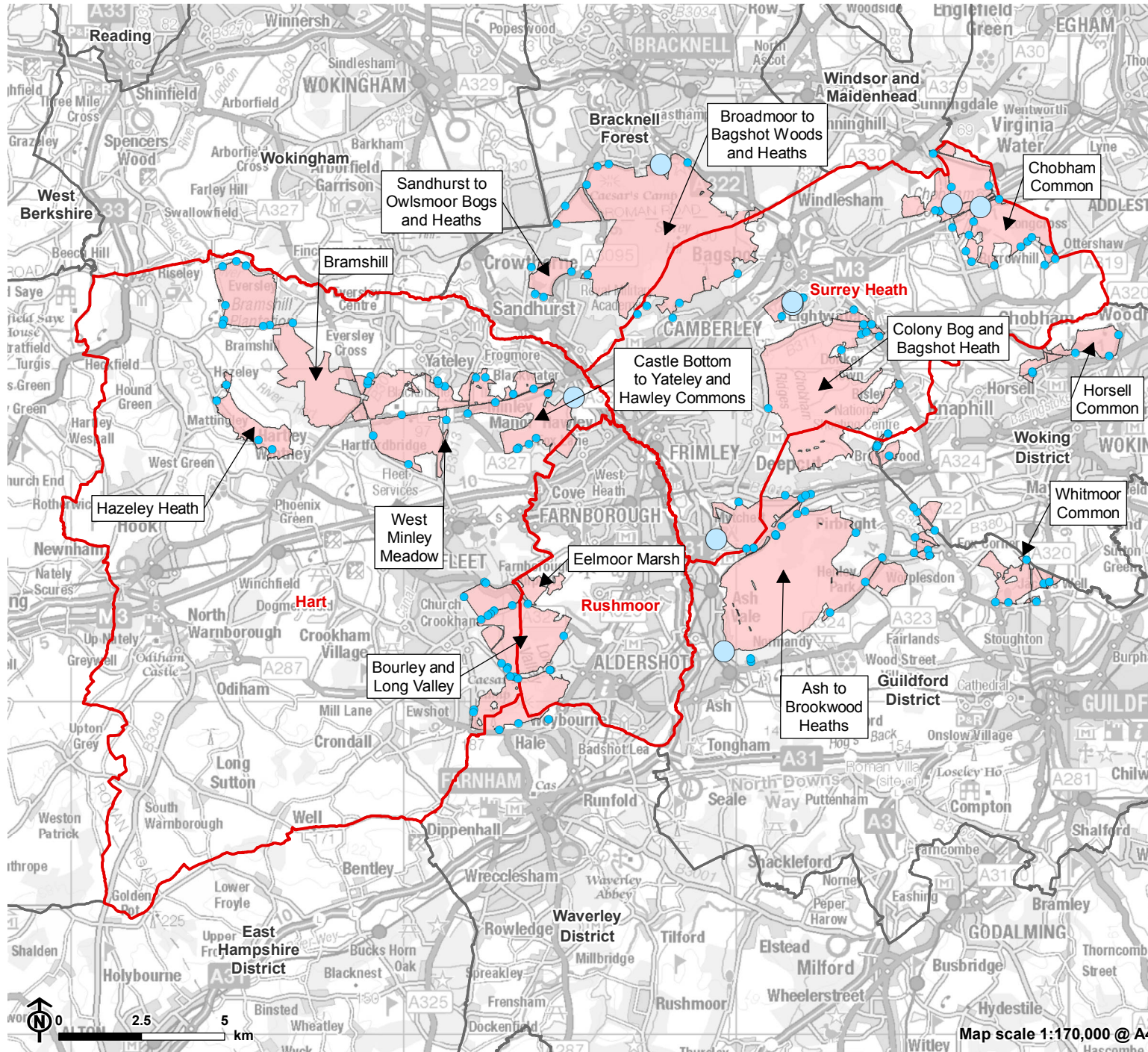


Figure 4.1: Car park locations and capacity

- Hart, Rushmoor and Surrey Heath Districts
- Adjacent district
- Thames Basin Heaths SPA
- Parking location**
- Small car park (1 - 50 capacity)
- Large car park (51 - 350 capacity)



Map scale 1:170,000 @ A4

Accessibility and restrictions within the SPA

Ministry of Defence (MOD) land

4.15 The MOD owns almost 50% of the land within the SPA. There are different types of restriction within these areas, depending on how they are used by the MOD and the risk to the public; some areas always have public access whereas others have none.

4.16 The types of restriction¹¹ that exist in these areas are as follows (and as marked on Ordnance Survey maps):

- Danger Area: areas in which life-threatening activity takes place, such as the use of live ammunition. No public access is allowed while red flags are up or red lights are on (the exception to this is Pirbright Range danger area, which is closed at all times due to unexploded ordnance). If there are public rights of way (PROW) across a danger area, the MOD uses byelaws¹² to close the paths temporarily. Firing and closure times are published online¹³.
- 'Dry Training' areas (shown as 'Managed Access' on OS maps): access is normally allowed to these areas when it is not being actively used for military training. Red flags are not used at these sites, but the MOD uses byelaws (indicated with warning and byelaw signs) to manage access.

4.17 The SPA falls within the MOD's 'Aldershot Training Area'¹⁴, which includes the five areas described below. MOD restrictions relevant to the SPA parcels are shown on Figures 4.2-4.14.

Sandhurst (Royal Military Academy)

4.18 This overlaps with Broadmoor to Bagshot Woods and Heaths SSSI and has both Danger Areas and dry training areas. The Danger Area has no public access due to its proximity to residential areas.

4.19 Public access to the dry training areas is possible at all times and there are PROWs across this area.

Pirbright Ranges

4.20 This overlaps with Colony Bog and Bagshot Heath SSSI and has both Danger Areas and dry training areas. The Danger Area has no public access due to unexploded

ordnance. Red flags are not flown in this area when firing is taking place, because the area is fenced off and out-of-bounds.

4.21 The dry training areas outside the Danger Area are criss-crossed with PROWs (footpaths and bridleways), and open access is tolerated in some areas.

Ash Ranges

4.22 Overlaps with Ash to Brookwood Heaths SSSI and has both Danger Areas and dry training areas. There are no PROWs within the Danger Area. There are footpaths, bridleways and byways within the dry training areas and there is open access to parts of the dry training area that has numerous tracks but no PROWs.

4.23 Live firing can take place on any day of the week (before 4:30pm), except for two weeks in August.

Minley Dry Training Area (DTA)

4.24 Overlaps with Castle Bottom to Yateley and Hawley Commons SSSI. This is a DTA with no Danger Areas at the site.

4.25 There are several PROWs crossing the Training Area, and in general, de facto public access is permissible throughout.

Aldershot DTA

4.26 Overlaps with Bourley and Long Valley SSSI. This is a DTA with no Danger Areas at the site.

4.27 There are several PROWs crossing the Training Area, and in general, de facto public access is permissible to most other areas except where there are restrictions (related to water catchment) in the southwest of the DTA.

4.28 This site was previously accessible to the public but access has been restricted since 2018¹⁵.

Forestry Commission land

4.29 The Forestry Commission is another major landowner within the SPA.

4.30 The westernmost parcels of the SPA (Bramshill SSSI and part of Castle Bottom to Yateley and Hawley Commons SSSI) are in Forestry Commission ownership and collectively form part of the Bramshill Forest.

¹¹ Ramblers guidance on walking on military sites:

<https://www.ramblers.org.uk/advice/safety/walking-on-military-sites.aspx>

¹² MOD byelaws: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/byelaws-south-east>

¹³ MOD firing and closure times:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/south-east-training-estate-firing-times>

¹⁴ Public Access Consultancy report for the Army Training Estate (2003):

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/425347/20150302-FOI01304-Annex_A.pdf

¹⁵ <https://www.tbhpartnership.org.uk/news/long-valley-access/>

4.31 Forestry Commission land within the SPA has public access, but in relation to Bramshill Forest, the Forestry Commission says¹⁶:

"Despite the relatively low levels of visitor infrastructure the site experiences medium to high levels of visitation and is a popular resource for walkers, dog walking, horse riding, mountain biking, running and wildlife survey/appreciation. Unfortunately, the forest blocks also suffer from problems associated with the urban fringe, this includes fly tipping, unauthorised vehicle access, burnt out cars, forest fires and commercial dog walking. In the areas managed under a leasehold agreement public access is restricted to the public rights of way. The entire forest however provides a valued resource for a number of permitted activities including motor sport (car rallies and enduro), horseriding, mountain biking, charity events and wildlife survey, monitoring & enjoyment."

Open Access Land

4.32 The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CROW Act) gives public rights of access to 'open country' and registered common land; known collectively as 'open access land'.

4.33 Government guidance¹⁷ states that:

"There's a general rule that visitors using their open access rights must keep dogs on a short lead of no more than 2 metres between 1 March and 31 July each year [bird nesting season] (except in the coastal margin) and at all times near livestock."

4.34 The CROW Act also restricts various activities such that visitors cannot "disturb livestock, wildlife or habitats with intent".

4.35 In some cases, land can be mapped as open access land but have no rights of access. This is known as 'excepted land' and includes land under MOD bylaws.

4.36 Where open access rights existed on land prior to 2000 (known as 'section 15 land'), these apply instead of the CROW Act.

4.37 Within the SPA, areas of registered common land exist at:

- Chobham Common;
- Horsell Common;
- Whitmoor Common;

- Yateley Common; and smaller areas at
- Colony Bog and Bagshot Heath.

4.38 The majority of the common land within the SPA is 'section 15 land', i.e. had access rights prior to 2000.

4.39 Other areas of open access land (open country) exist within the MOD lands, and are therefore 'excepted land', and in small areas within

- Broadmoor to Bagshot Woods and Heaths; and
- Bramshill.

Public Space Protection Orders (PSPOs)

4.40 PSPOs are in place within parts of the SPA and require dogs to be on leads; the orders also ban dogs from some areas.

4.41 There is a PSPO in force across the whole of Surrey Heath that requires people in charge of dogs to put them on a lead when directed to. The PSPO within Lightwater Country Park (within the SPA in Surrey Heath) requires all dogs to be on leads during bird nesting season (1 March – 31 July). Surrey Heaths PSPOs are enforced through the use of Fixed Penalty Notices.

4.42 Hart has a PSPO but it relates to dog fouling rather than dogs on leads. Rushmoor has no PSPOs.

Informal agreements

4.43 Hampshire Country Council's 'Countryside Canines'¹⁸ initiative uses red, amber, green 'paw print' zones to refer to dog control on council sites.

4.44 Coloured signs are used at the site to indicate the level of restriction (red, amber or green) and an online map also shows the different coloured zones. Green indicates that dogs are allowed off the lead. Amber refers to on-site restrictions and dog owners should read the signs – it could be that dogs need to be kept on a lead because of grazing animals or dogs must stick to footpaths due to ground nesting birds. Other amber areas include BBQ and picnic areas; it stops dogs from eating anything harmful and allows people to enjoy their picnics. Red restricts dogs from entering the area, perhaps due to livestock or sensitive wildlife in the area.

4.45 Within the SPA, this initiative only applies to the following locations in Castle Bottom to Yateley and Hawley Commons SSSI:

¹⁶ https://www.forestryengland.uk/sites/default/files/documents/Thames%20Basin%20Heaths%20Introduction_0.pdf

¹⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/open-access-land-management-rights-and-responsibilities>

¹⁸ <https://www.hants.gov.uk/thingstodo/countrysidecanines>

- Parts of Yateley Common: 'green', dogs permitted off lead 'outside ground nesting bird season'; and
- Castle Bottom, near Yateley: 'amber', due to grazing livestock.

Physical restrictions

4.46 In many cases, as shown in the visitor distribution maps in Chapter 5, visitors stick to formal paths within the SPA. However the visitor surveys also refer to visitors leaving paths. How far from the path that people go and where they go will be influenced by various factors, including where they *want* to go versus whether they can get there. Features such as boundaries (e.g. fences or roads) or impenetrable habitats will influence where people go; both within the SPA, or sections of it, and between it and the wider area.

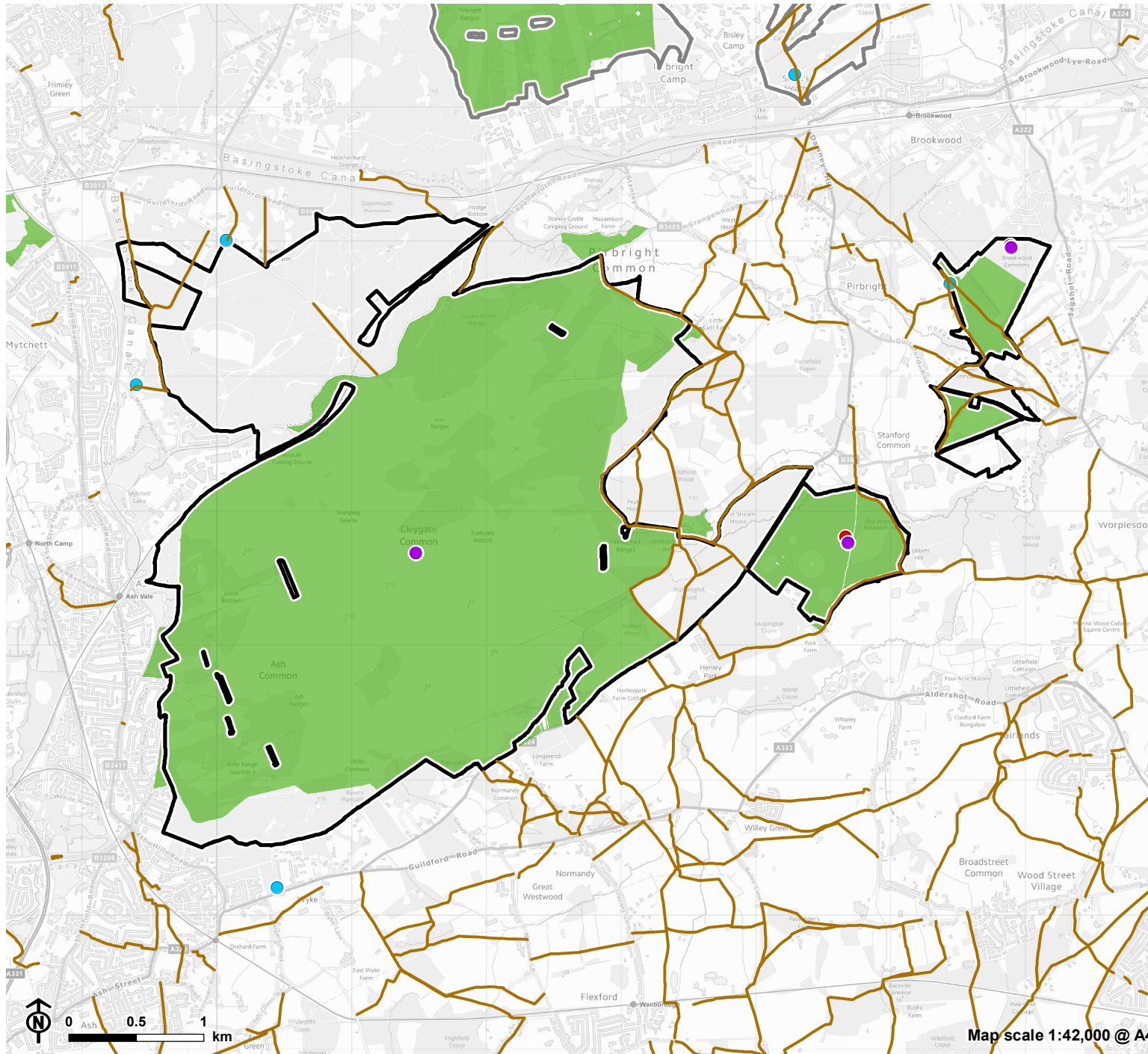
4.47 The 2005 visitor survey took into account "visitable area" which includes areas of the heath within which people could walk or visit and was estimated using GIS. The SPA boundary in most instances was the "visitable area" boundary; however, areas of open undesignated countryside adjacent to the SPA where access is permitted were also included. Therefore, the "visitable area" encompassed land with public access and directly accessible land from the given access point.

4.48 Accessible areas adjacent to the SPA are relevant to this study as they could draw people through the SPA and/or provide alternative areas to use if access was restricted within the SPA.

Key access restrictions across the SPA

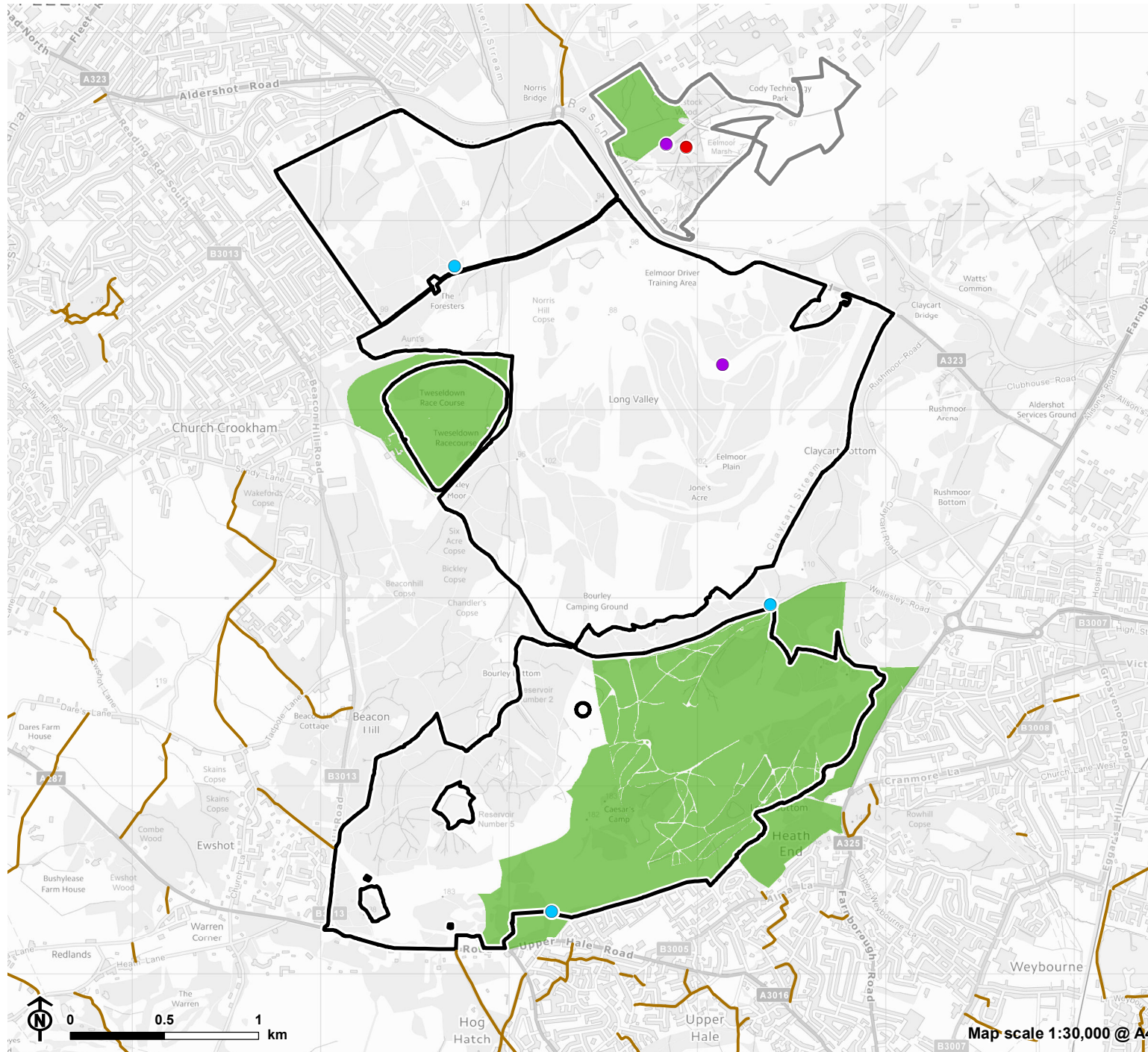
4.49 Access restrictions for each parcel of the SPA are shown on Figures 4.2-4.13, below.

**Figure 4.2: Existing Access
Restrictions: Ash to Brookwood Heaths**



- Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area
- Open access
- Public right of way
- Areas where there is no access
- Areas where there is permanent fencing
- Access point

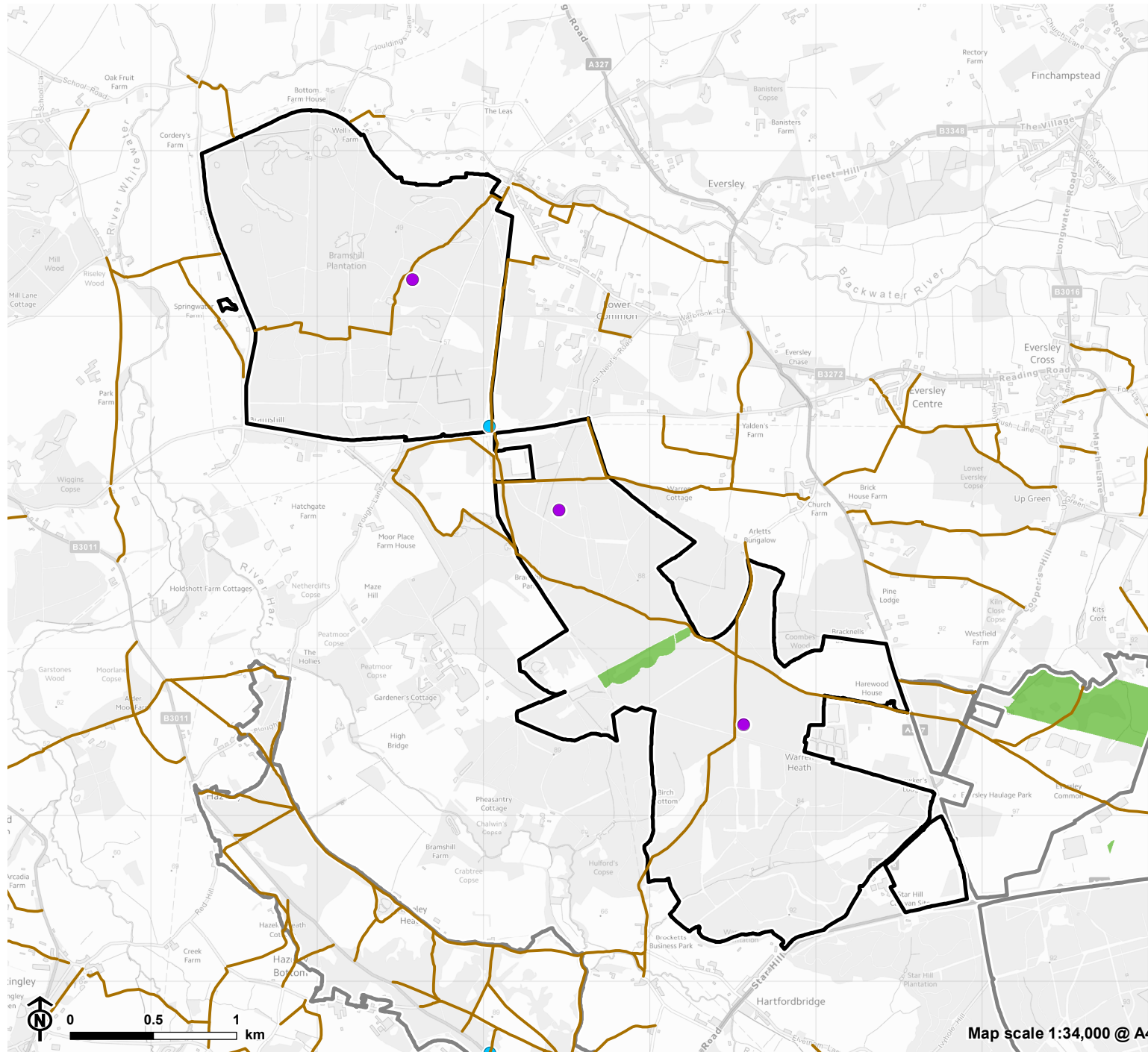
**Figure 4.3: Existing Access
Restrictions: Bourley and Long Valley**



- Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area
- Open access
- Public right of way
- Areas where there is no access
- Areas where there is permanent fencing
- Access point

Map scale 1:30,000 @ A4

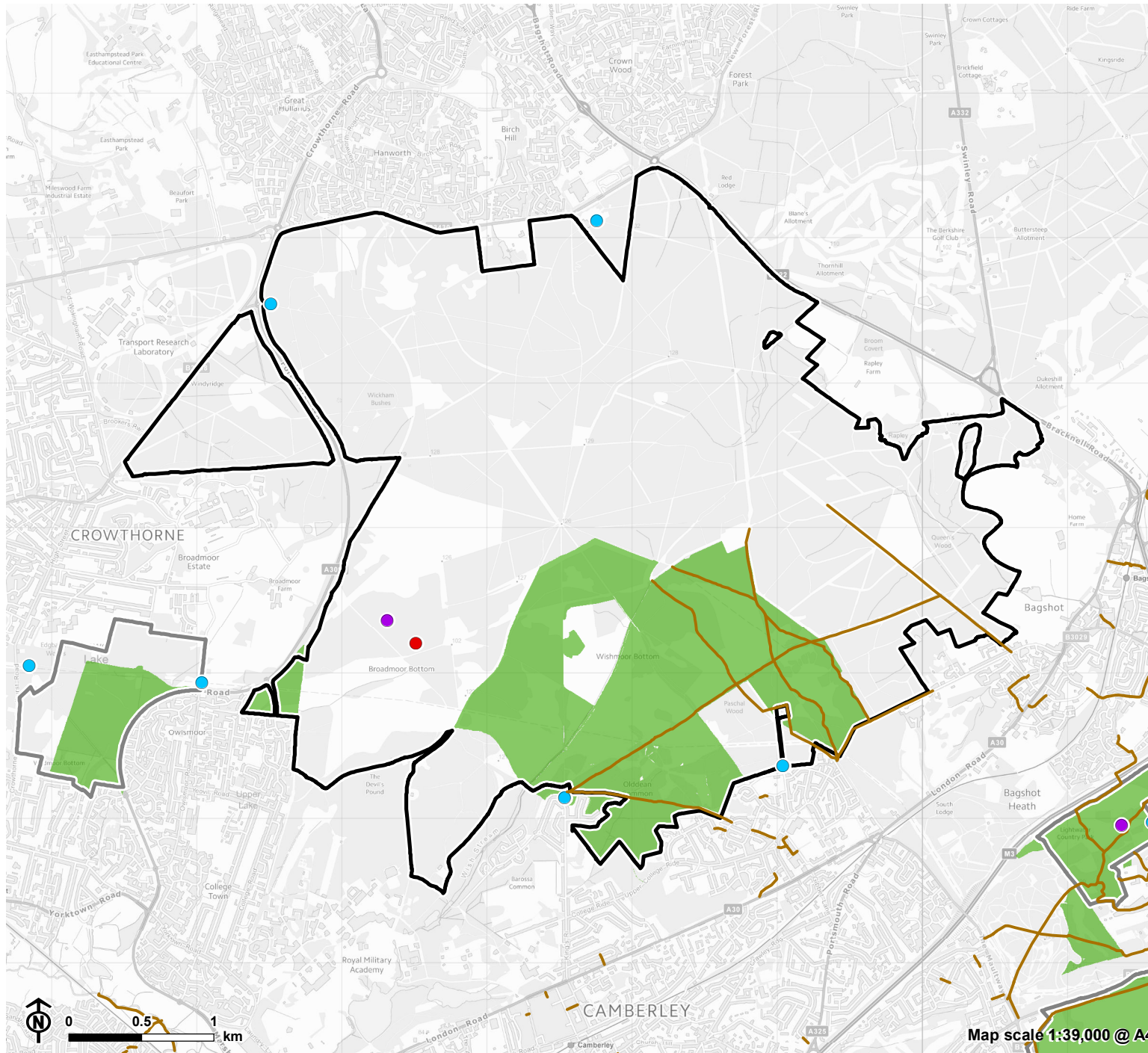
Figure 4.4: Existing Access Restrictions: Bramshill



- Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area
- Open access
- Public right of way
- Areas where there is permanent fencing
- Access point

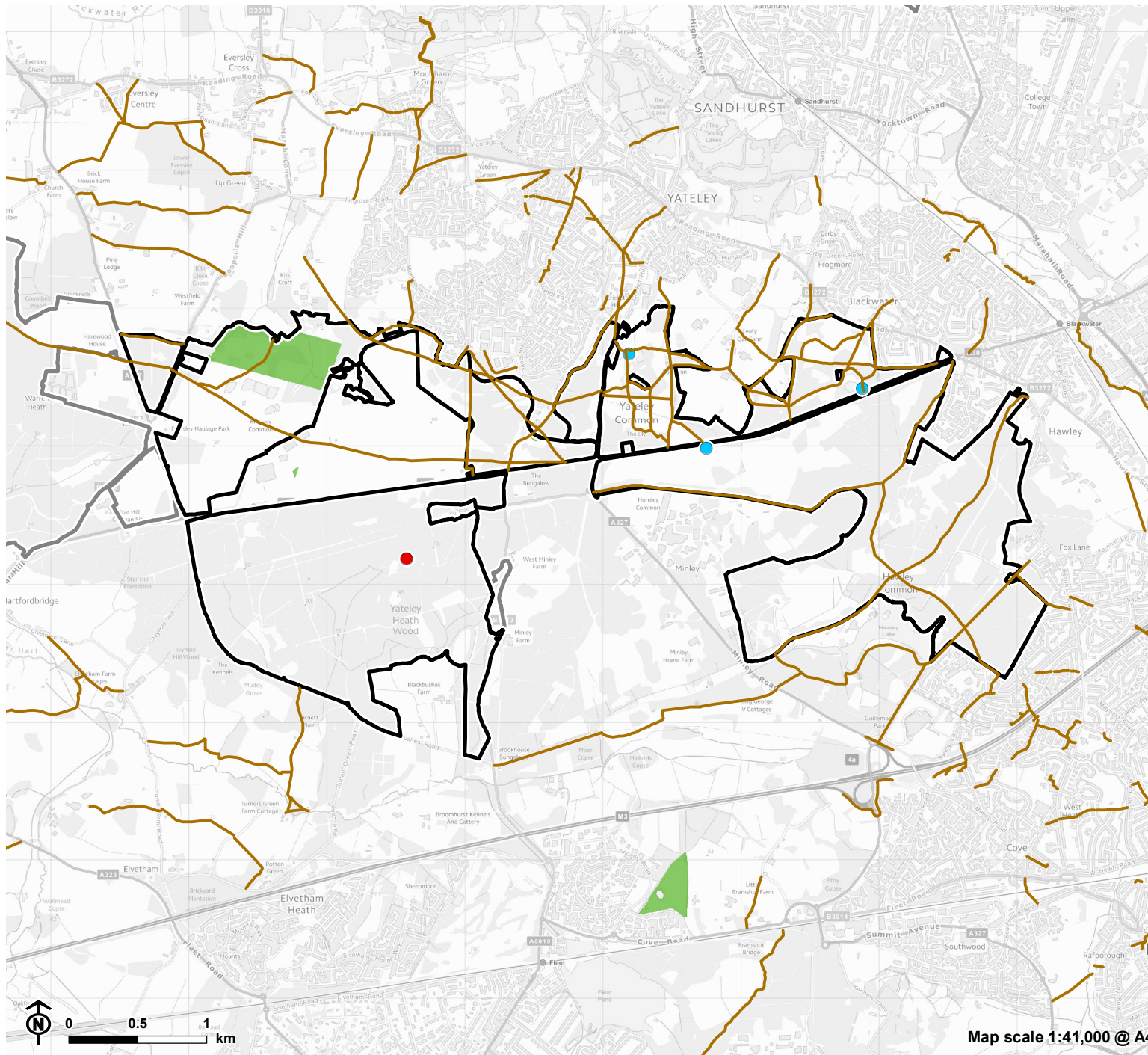
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**Figure 4.5: Existing Access
Restrictions: Broadmoor to Bagshot
Woods and Heaths**

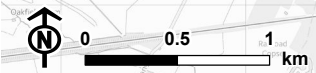


- Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area
- Open access
- Public right of way
- Areas where there is no access
- Areas where there is permanent fencing
- Access point

Figure 4.6: Existing Access Restrictions: Castle Bottom to Yateley and Hawley Commons



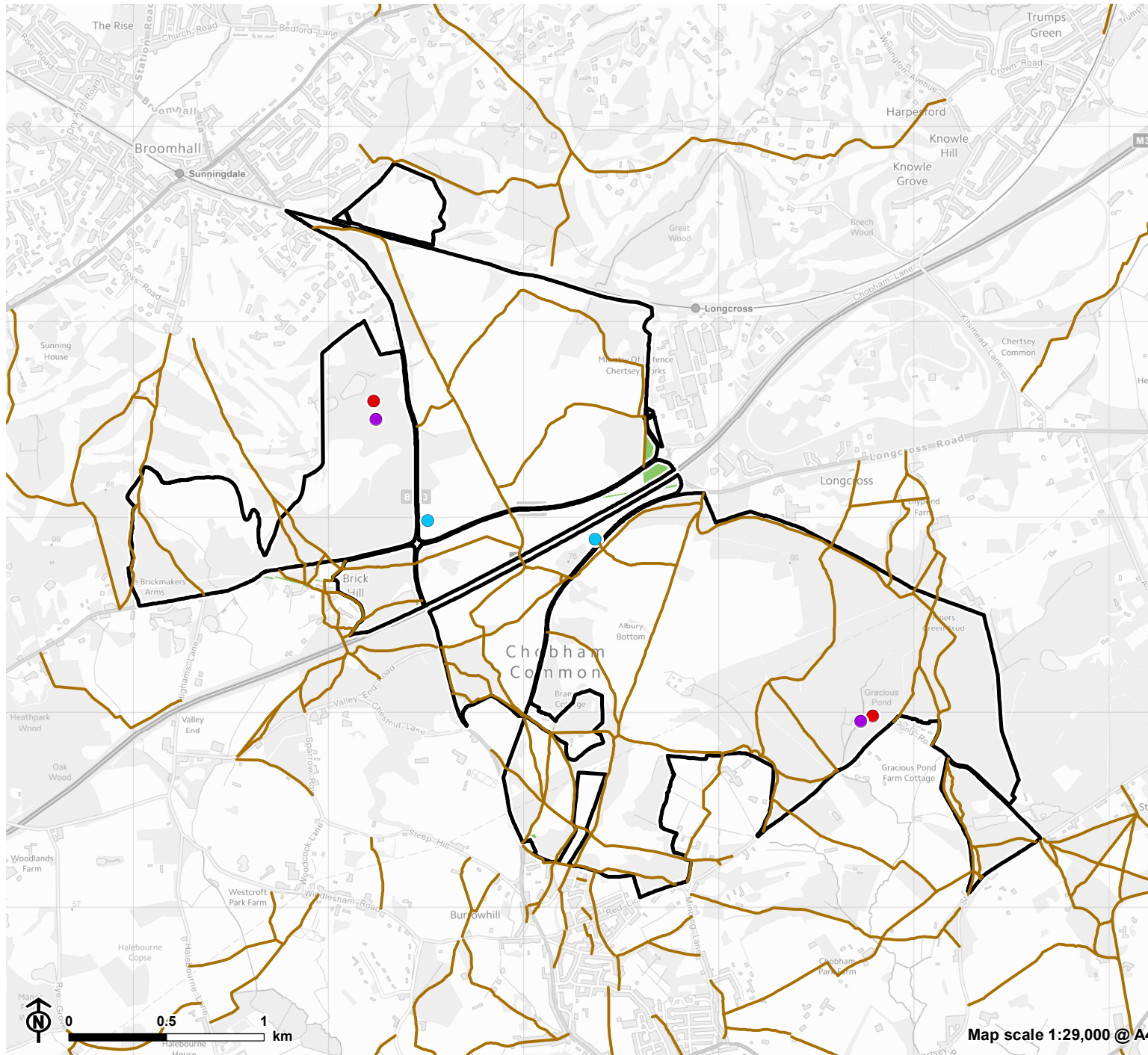
- Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area
- Open access
- Public right of way
- Areas where there is no access
- Access point









Map scale 1:41,000 @ A4

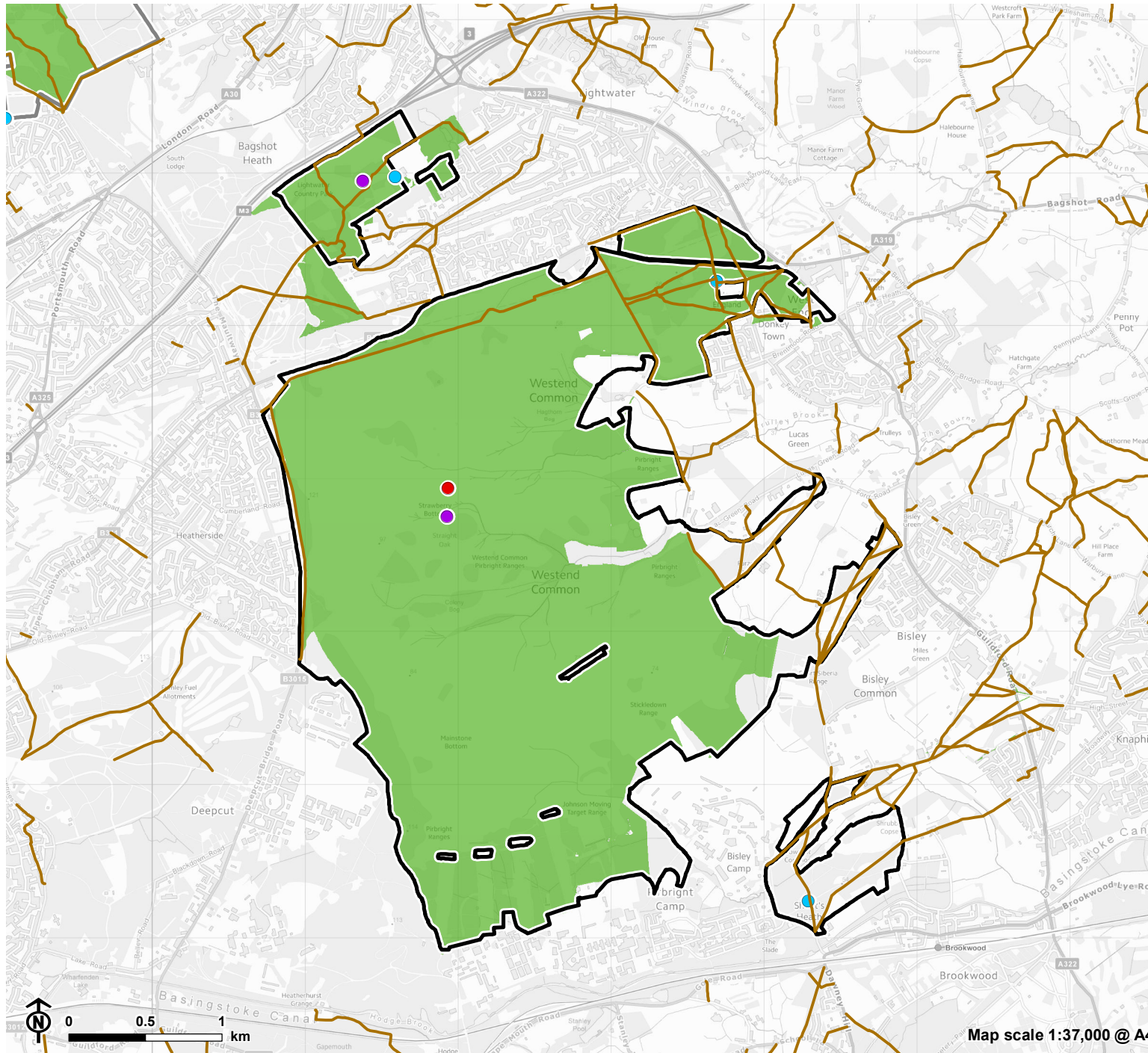








**Figure 4.7: Existing Access
Restrictions: Chobham Common**

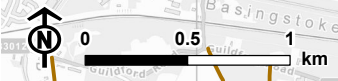


-  Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area
-  Open access
-  Public right of way
-  Areas where there is no access
-  Areas where there is permanent fencing
-  Access point

**Figure 4.8: Existing Access
Restrictions: Colony Bog and Bagshot Heath**

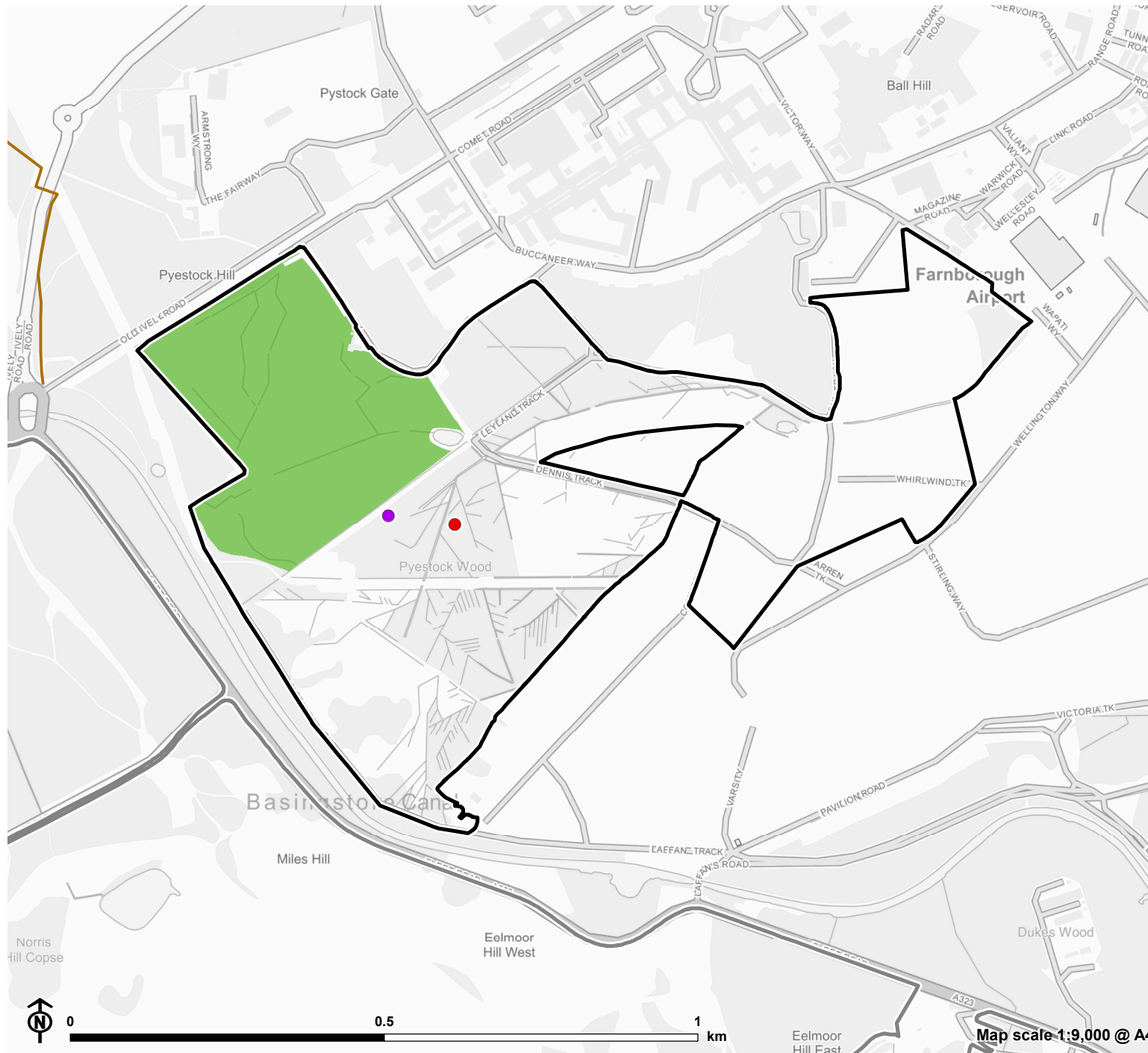


-  Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area
-  Open access
-  Public right of way
-  Areas where there is no access
-  Areas where there is permanent fencing
-  Access point



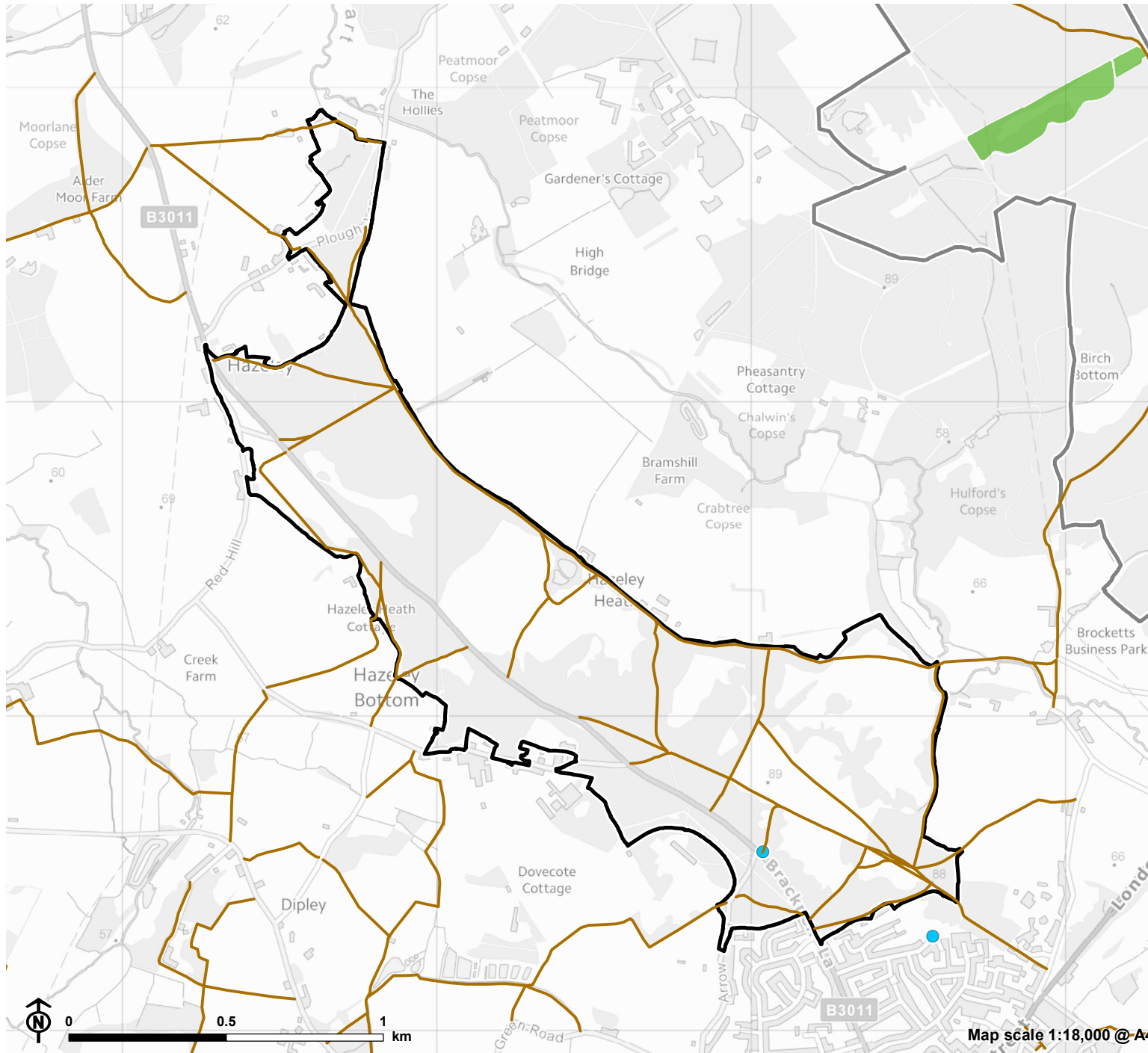
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**Figure 4.9: Existing Access
Restrictions: Eelmoor Marsh**



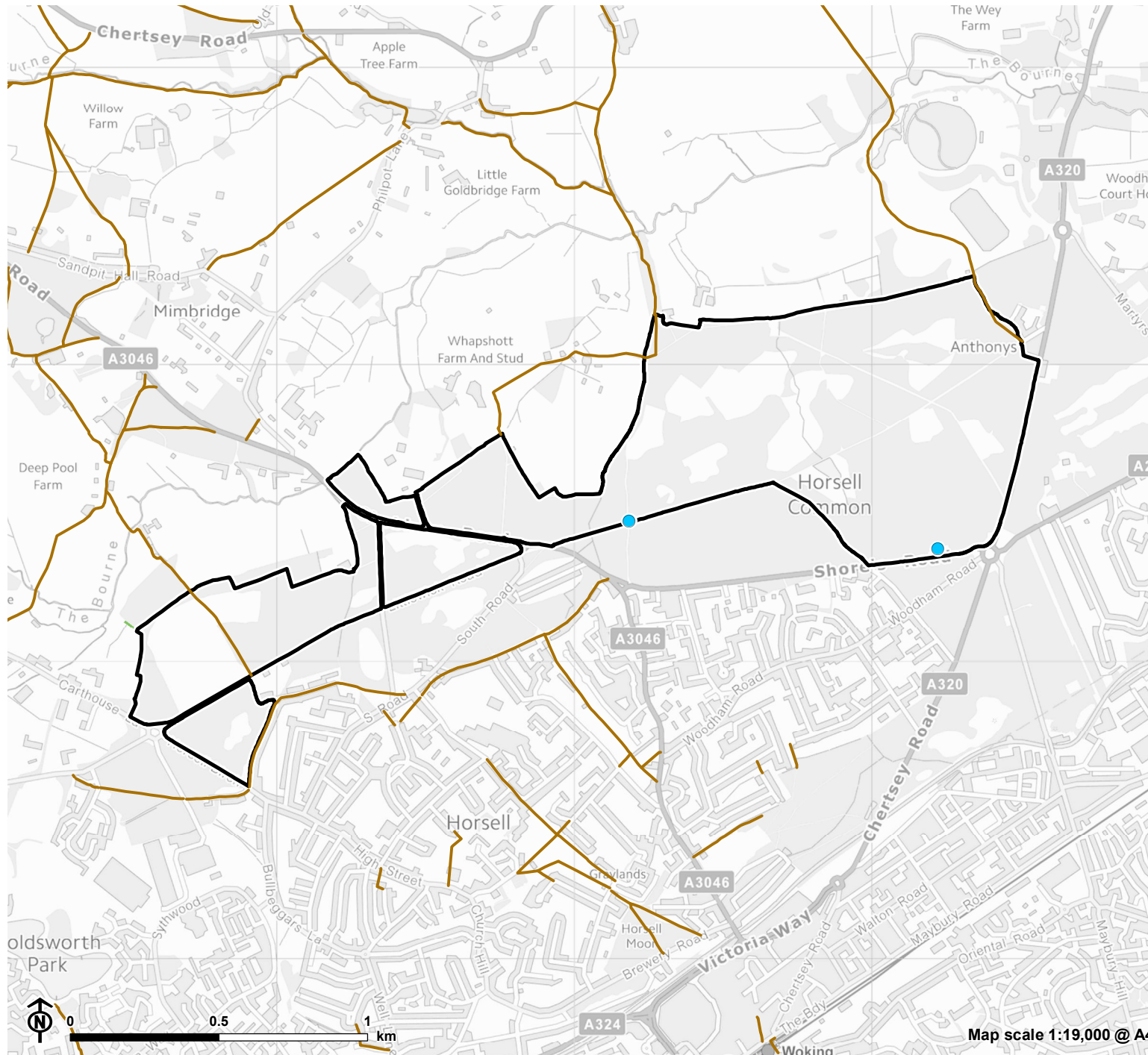
- Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area
- Open access
- Public right of way
- Areas where there is no access
- Areas where there is permanent fencing

**Figure 4.10: Existing Access
Restrictions: Hazeley Heath**



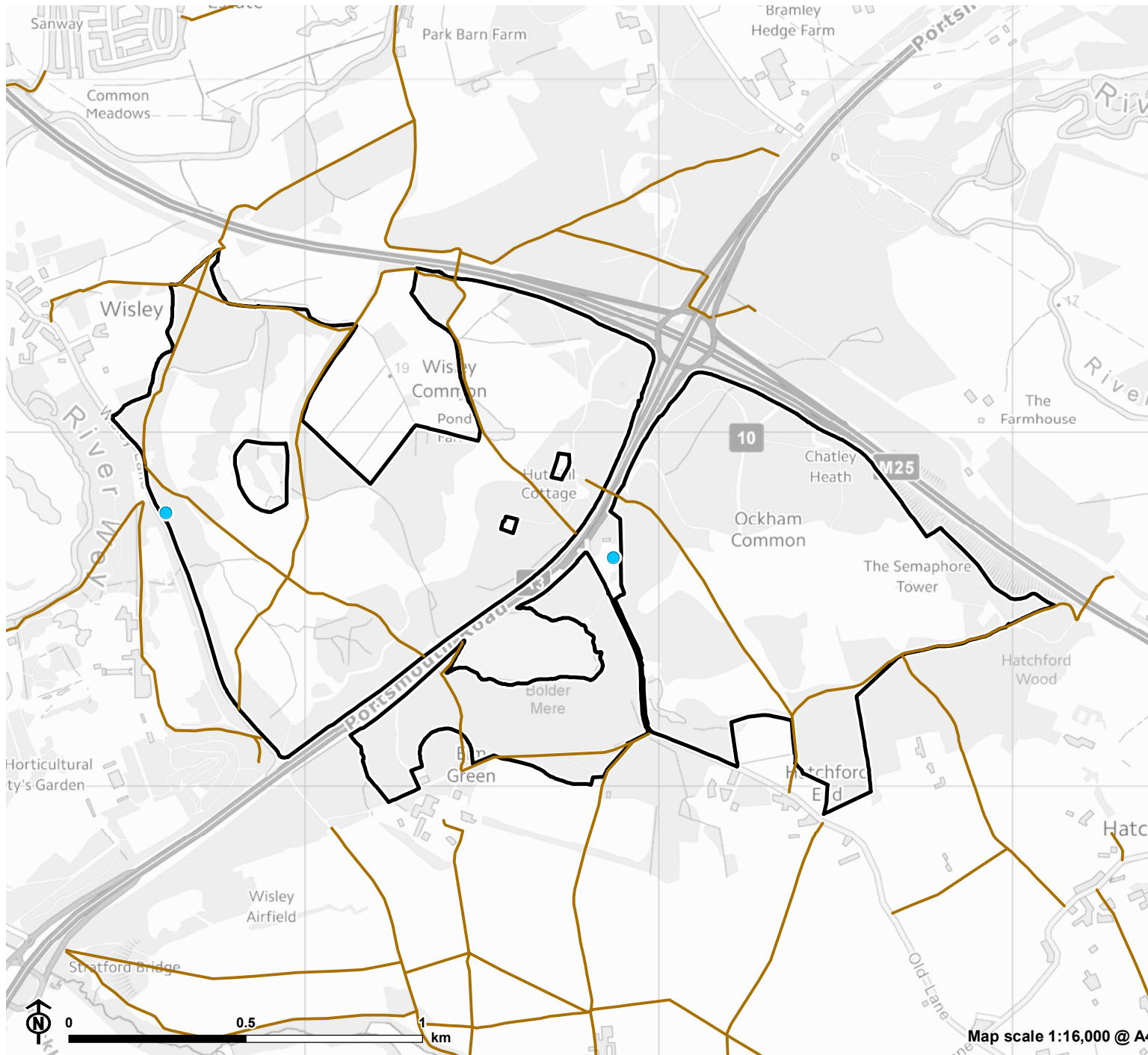
- Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area
- Open access
- Public right of way
- Access point

**Figure 4.11: Existing Access
Restrictions: Horsell Common**



- Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area
- Open access
- Public right of way
- Access point

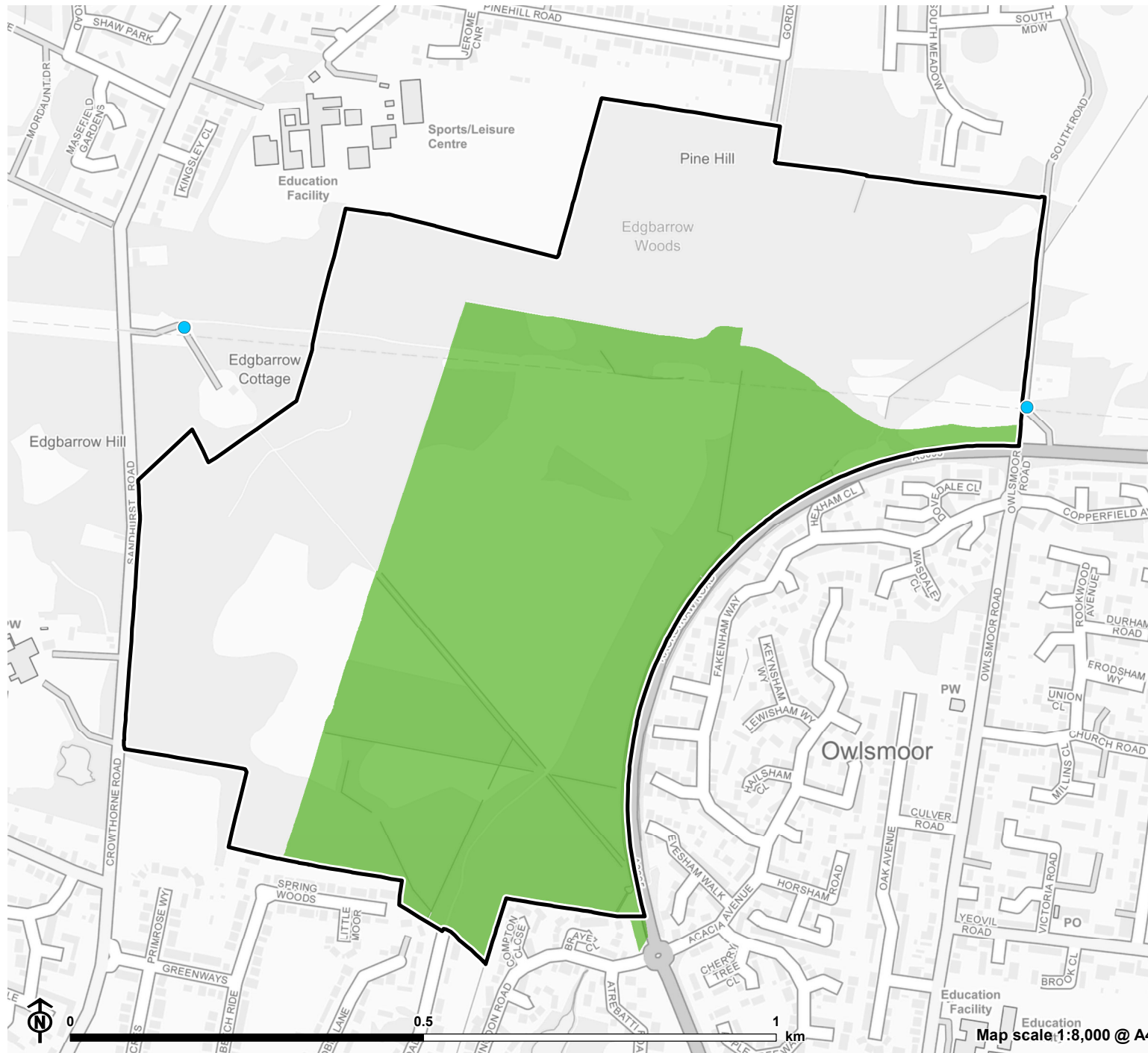
**Figure 4.12: Existing Access
Restrictions: Ockham and Wisley
Commons**



- Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area
- Public right of way
- Access point

Map scale 1:16,000 @ A4

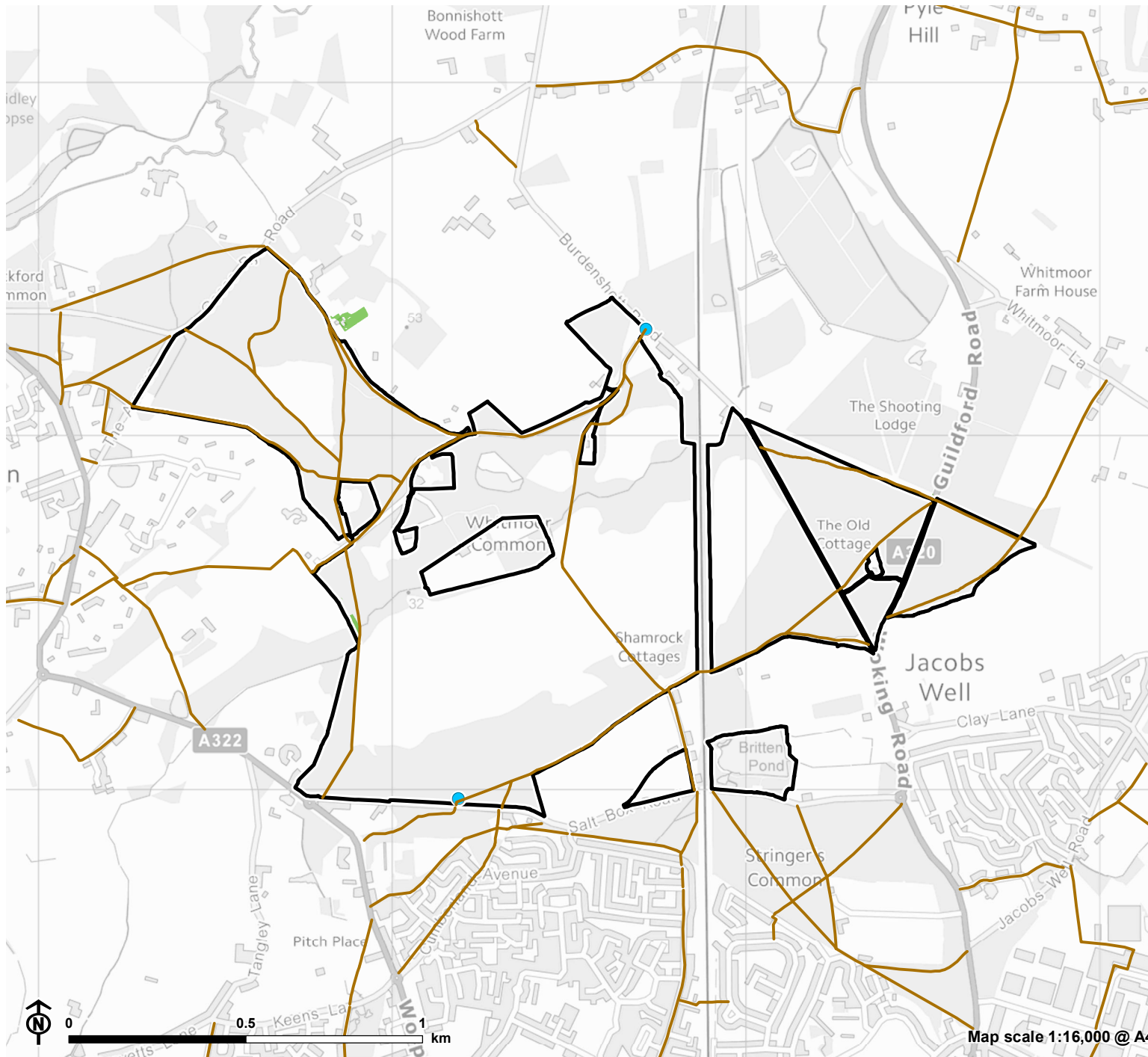
**Figure 4.13: Existing Access Restrictions:
Sandhurst to Owlsmoor Bogs and Heaths**



- Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area
- Open access
- Public right of way
- Access point

Map scale: 1:8,000 @ A4

**Figure 4.14: Existing Access
Restrictions: Whitmoor Common**



- Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area
- Open access
- Public right of way
- Access point

Map scale 1:16,000 @ A4

Chapter 5

Visitor distribution

Where people go within the SPA

5.1 This section responds to the following outputs identified in the brief:

- Distribution of visitors depending on travel method;
- Distribution of visitors across the SPA, including identification of hotspots of visitor activity; and
- The typical distance that people undertaking specific activities penetrate into the SPA.

Data used

5.2 The following visitor survey reports contain key information on where visitors go within the SPA:

- Visitor access patterns on the Thames Basin Heaths SPA – visitor questionnaire survey 2018, 2018 (EPR);
- Visitor survey on the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area, 2013 (Footprint Ecology / Natural England); and
- Visitor access patterns on the Thames Basin Heaths, 2005 (Footprint Ecology / English Nature).

5.3 Some of the data produced for these studies has been obtained from Natural England and supplemented with data held by LUC and Rushmoor Borough Council. A full list of the GIS datasets used is provided in Appendix A.

Distribution by activity and travel mode

5.4 The SPA visitor surveys recorded the length of routes taken by visitors and mapped the routes that were taken.

5.5 There was some variation in the data that was gathered from year to year, for example the 2005 survey recorded route length for all visitors, whereas the 2012/13 survey focussed on 'local' visitors. A summary of visitors' route length, taken from the 2018 survey report, is presented in Table 5.1.

5.6 Note that the data for 'local' groups splits visitors into 'dog walkers' and 'non dog walkers', therefore 'all local groups' is an average. Whereas the data for all visitors is presented for 'dog walkers', 'walkers' and 'all groups'; 'all groups' includes

cyclists, horse riders and runners (who use longer routes on average¹⁹ than walkers / dog walkers).

Table 5.1: Survey data on length of route

Data recorded	Length of route		
	2005	2012/12	2018
All groups	-	-	3km
Dog walking (all groups)	2.5km	-	2.8km
Walking (all groups)	2.3km	-	2.7km
All local groups	-	2.8km	3km
Dog walkers (local groups)	-	2.6km	2.8km
Non- dog walkers (local groups)	-	2.95km	3.8km

5.7 The 2012/13 survey found that dog walkers arriving by car take slightly longer routes within the SPA than dog walkers arriving on foot (a median of 2.36km compared to 2.06km). The survey report does not comment on why, but visitors arriving on foot will have already walked to the SPA entry point, so overall journey length may be similar or greater for those arriving on foot. The effect of travel mode was not analysed for other activities.

5.8 Penetration distance was recorded in the 2005 visitor survey, but not in the later surveys. The 2005 survey found that *"Despite the average dog-walk route being 2.5km, 78% of dog walkers do not penetrate further than 1km onto the heath"*. It is worth noting that, although some of the larger sections of the Thames Basin Heaths are up to 5km across, many are much smaller, so in those cases a 1km penetration distance could cover the whole site. This relates to the 'hotspots of visitor activity' discussed in the next section.

5.9 The data on mean penetration distance from 2005 is presented in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2: Mean penetration distance by activity

Activity	Number of visitors surveyed (2005)	Mean penetration distance into SPA
Dog walking	772	760m
Walking	143	722m
Jogging	39	1,174m
Cycling	44	1,336m
Horse riding	16	807m
Picnicking	10	388m
Other	76	676m

5.10 The survey reports did not comment on whether length of route walked correlated with penetration distance into the SPA; however, penetration distance will be influenced by where routes go within the site.

5.11 The 2005 survey did find that there was no correlation between the size of the site ('visitable area') and distance travelled or penetration distance; ie visitors travel no further in bigger sites than smaller ones, on the whole.

Hotspots of visitor activity

5.12 The mapping of visitors' routes as part of the visitors surveyed shows that, although visitors may not individually penetrate far into the SPA, collectively they access most of the site. The 2005 survey report found that:

"the routes taken by the visitors interviewed have covered a considerable proportion of the SPA. The routes taken create a web like network spreading out from each access point. Were all access points to be mapped, and a similar mapping exercise conducted for each, it is clear that few areas would remain undisturbed. Even on some of the larger heaths, it can clearly be seen from Figure 19 that the routes from different access points overlap, suggesting that the centre of some heaths will be visited by people who have entered from different access points. Depending on the shape and size of site, and also the distribution of access points, it is possible that visitor numbers could be highest away from car-parks."

5.13 Hotspots of activity, as recorded in the 2018 survey are shown on Figures 5.1 and 5.2. As with the 2005 survey, these

¹⁹ The 2012/13 survey report presents a breakdown of route length by all recorded activities (Table 20), which shows that average route length is longest for cyclists, followed by runners and horse riders.

only represent visitor routes taken from a small sample of entry points; however, they show a similar pattern, with most of the SPA subject to visitor activity.

5.14 Areas of high and low visitor pressure are both interesting, from the point of view of the main study. Table 1.1 and Chapter 4 identify some of the factors that may be relevant to the areas of greatest and least visitor pressure, for each portion of the SPA. For example, large areas of the SPA are MOD land subject to access restrictions.

5.15 In some cases, the lack of routes recorded through an area of the SPA will be due an absence of survey data from the nearest access points, or limited access (or lack of attractive routes) from the surveyed entry point, rather than a lack of public access. Similarly, the entry points surveyed may not have been the busiest; there may be hotspots of visitor activity not shown on the survey maps, that are caused by visitors from other entry points.

5.16 The visitor surveys recorded how many people passed through each entry point. Although the number of visitors does not necessarily enable visitor hotspots to be identified, it does provide an indicator of overall visitor pressure at the SPA. The 2005 study reported that *"the number of people counted leaving each site significantly correlated with the number of car parking spaces"*.

Trends in visitor numbers

5.17 Both the 2017 car park transect and 2018 visitor survey recorded changes in the distribution of visitors at the SPA.

5.18 The car park transect report stated that the results suggest:

"1) an overall reduction in use; and 2) a move away from many smaller parking locations to single large locations. This results in a change in the distribution of visitor pressure, with higher, concentrated densities in a few locations, compared to a more even spread across the whole area. Additional data are required from further years to determine whether this pattern is real and future counts need to be conducted in line with the previous counts to give confidence in the findings. Comparisons of data across multiple years will reduce variability in counts from weather patterns and overall seasonal variability to show clearer long-term trends."

5.19 The 2018 visitor survey was more conclusive:

"the most striking change between the 2018 survey and previous surveys in 2012/13 and 2005 is the overall drop in visitor numbers across the access points surveyed, including a statistically significant decrease in footfall compared to 2005, indicating a gradual change over time. The latter is particularly notable in the context of a

12.9% increase in housing numbers within 5km of the SPA boundary over the same time period, together with the general trend towards increased levels of access to the countryside."

5.20 The 2018 report explores factors that could have influenced visitor patterns across the SPA, as summarised in Table 5.3.

5.21 Other changes were identified that may have influenced visitor numbers at individual entry points, including:

- Parking availability and charges;
- Access and footpath provision;
- Habitat management;
- Visitor management and infrastructure; and
- Incidences of anti-social behaviour.

Table 5.3: Factors that may have influenced changes in visitor patterns

Influencing factor	EPR comments in 2018 report
Weather in summer 2018	A mix of weather conditions were experienced in all three survey years. Although hot weather in 2018 may have influenced visitor numbers, it is unlikely to have explained overall drop in visitor numbers.
Distribution of new housing	New housing is spread out across the 5km SPA driving catchment and will have been required to provide/contribute towards mitigation (see below).
Mitigation strategies (SANG & SAMM)	Although there are some gaps in SANG coverage, 99.5% of the dwellings in the 5km SPA catchment are within the catchment of at least one SANG. SANG visitor surveys have shown that people do use them instead of the SPA. It is possible / likely that the increased availability of SANGs has influenced the drop in footfall at the SPA. The visitor survey found a good awareness of the SPA among dog walkers, but no correlation between wardening hours and the proportion of dogs kept on the lead. SAMM is unlikely to be a significant contributor to changes in visitor numbers recorded in 2018.

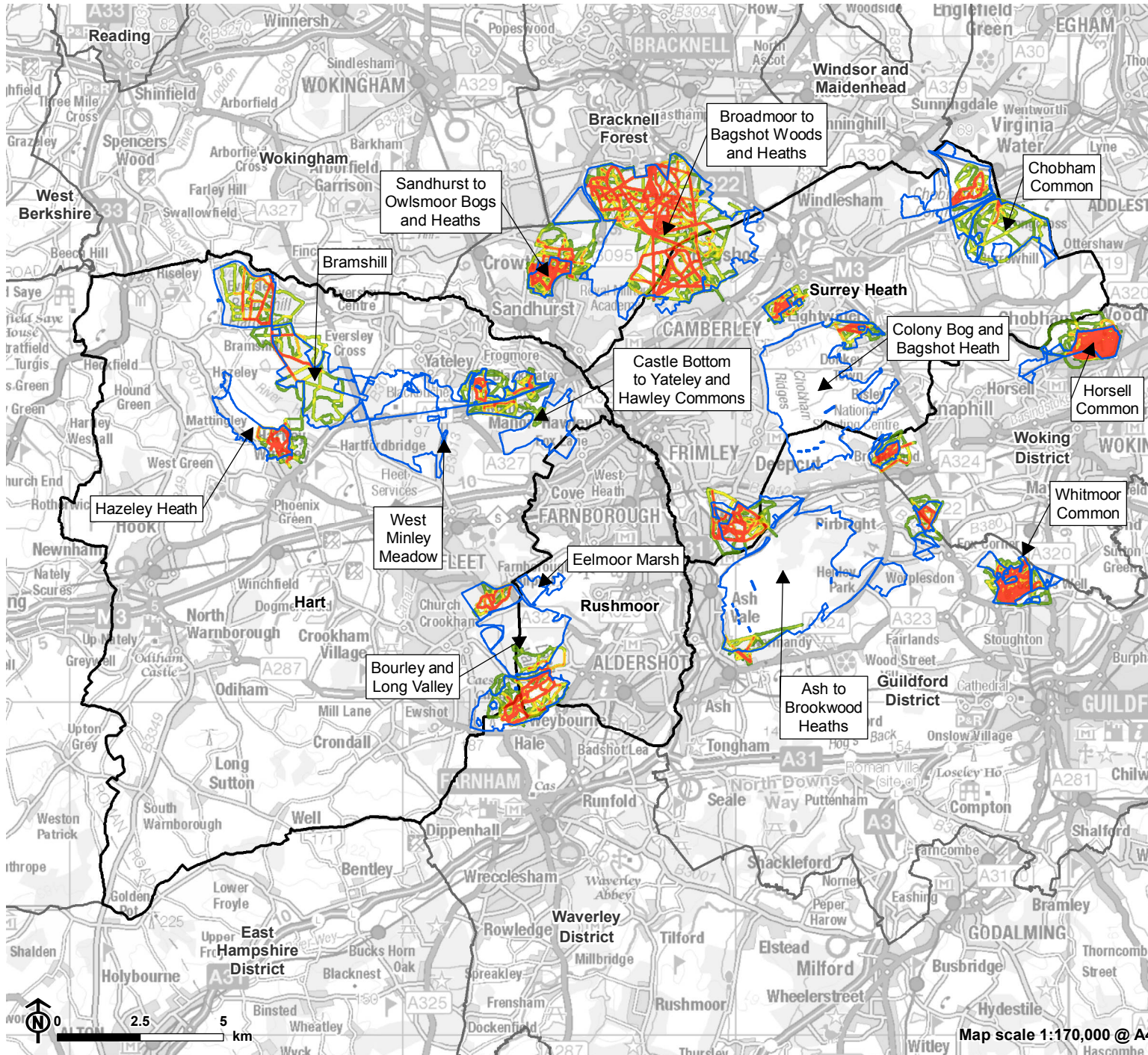


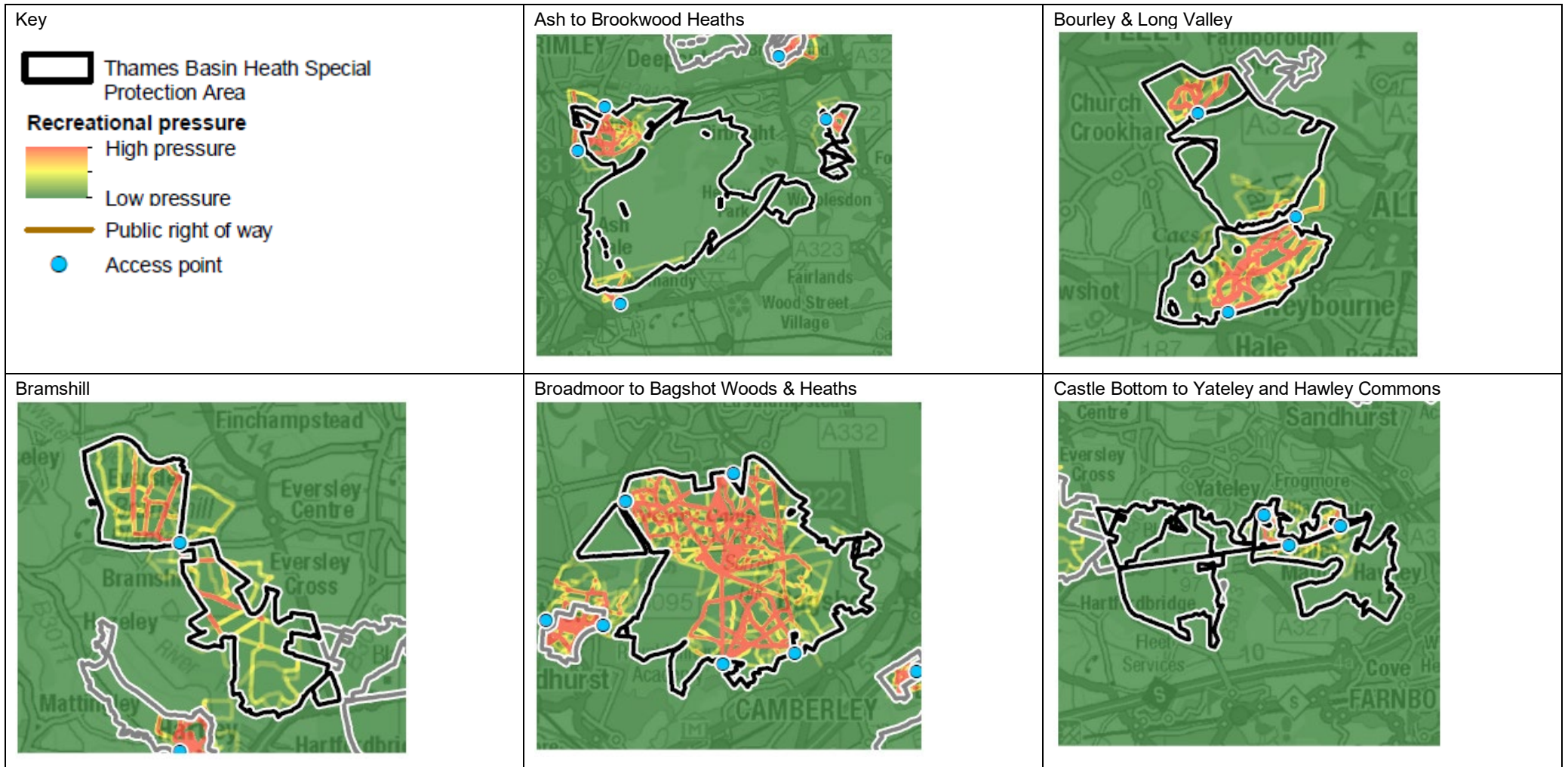
Figure 5.1: Visitor distribution within the SPA

- Hart, Rushmore and Surrey Heath Districts
- Adjacent district
- Thames Basin Heaths SPA
- Visitor hotspot**
- High visitor numbers
- Low visitor numbers

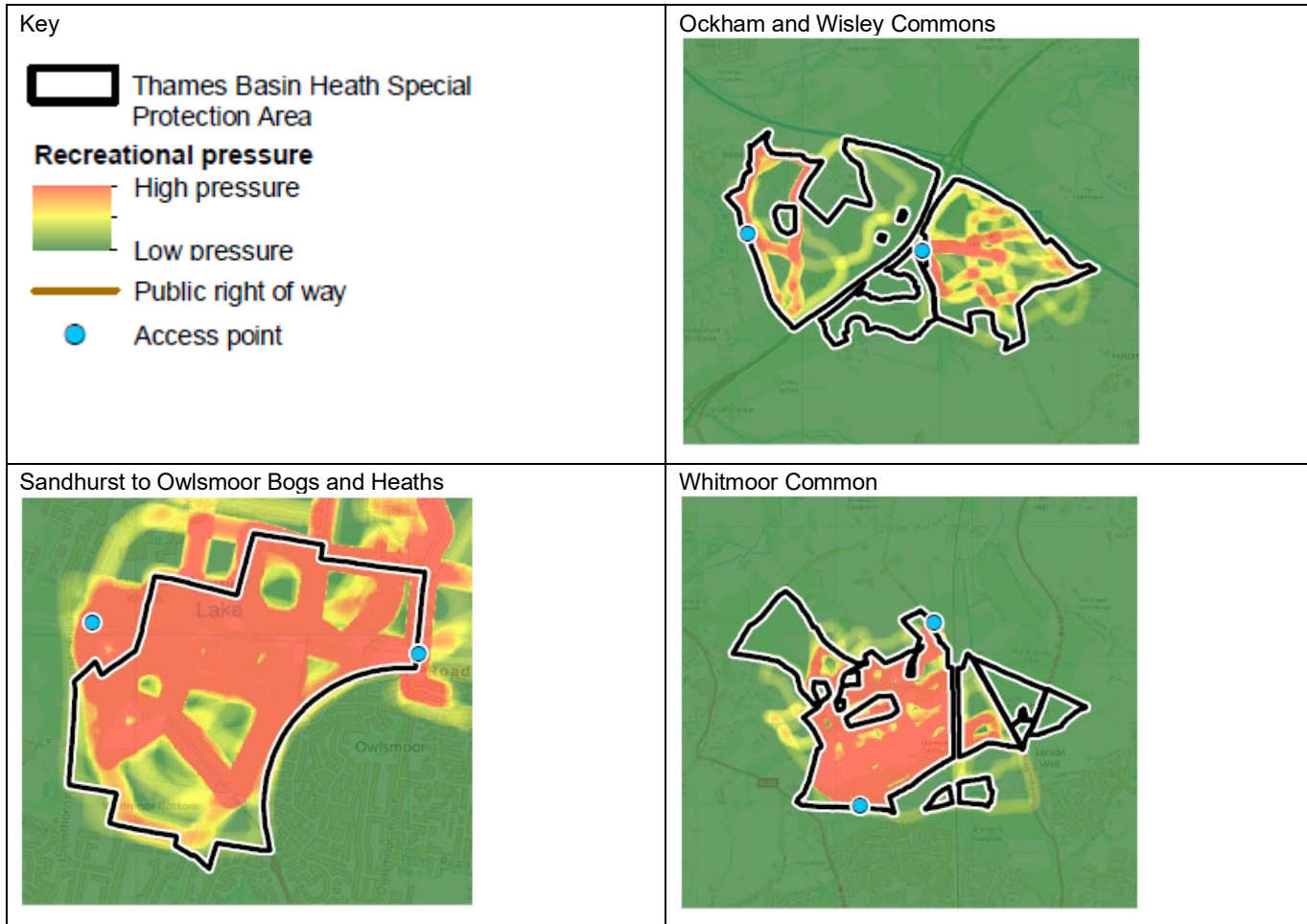


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Figure 5.2: Recreational pressure







Chapter 6

Conclusions and next steps

How to take this information forward

6.1 The main study has involved an initial appraisal of the twelve mitigation options being considered. This background study collates some of the existing data available, to inform the more detailed assessment work of the next stage.

6.2 The mitigation options being considered are:

- Group A: Alternative sites / green infrastructure (SANG variations);
- Group B: Habitat management / restoration;
- Group C: Access management (SAMM variations); and
- Group D: Access restriction / control.

6.3 Findings from this study that might have implications for the assessment of these mitigation options are considered below, followed by a section identifying the next steps that are required.

Implications of this study for appraisal of mitigation options

Group A: Alternative sites / green infrastructure (SANG variations)

6.4 The findings of visitor surveys presented in the 2018 EPR report suggest that SANGs are reducing visitor numbers at the SPA.

6.5 A comparison of data on travel modes and proportion of dog walkers at the SANGs (within the HMA) and SPA shows that modal split overall is similar for the two types of sites. However, there is considerable variation in travel to the SANGs, which may reflect their varying proximity to settlements, features, and the availability of parking. The SANGs in the HMA provide a variety of experiences, with different habitat types and facilities; many have unrestricted parking, but some have none.

6.6 Although there are more dogs per person at the SPA than SANGs, visitors to SANGs are more likely to be in smaller groups; which indicates that there are differences in how dog walkers use SANGs, compared to the SPA. It is not possible to determine the proportion of dog walkers that arrive

at SANGs by car, due to variation between SANG sites and limited data on SANGs within the HMA; but, as with the SPA, it is likely to be the majority.

6.7 The variation in travel mode to the SANGs, particularly given that SANGs (as a whole) appear to be helping to reduce visitor numbers at the SPA, suggests that alternative types of site could play a role as a mitigation measure that complements the existing SANGs. ie dog walkers use a range of sites with varying characteristics, despite some of them not being easily accessible by car.

6.8 A background paper on SANG (A2) is being prepared alongside this report; this will inform a more detailed background study on SANGs that will give further consideration to the reasons why visitors choose to visit SANGs rather than the SPA, and the potential of alternative SANGs / green infrastructure to mitigate the effects of housing on the SPA.

Group B: Habitat management / restoration

6.9 The habitat management and restoration option differs from the others as it is not about influencing or controlling visitors to, or where people go within, the SPA. This background study is therefore less directly relevant to the appraisal of the Group B option.

6.10 However, the collation of data on visitor hotspots and less disturbed areas could help to identify geographical areas of focus for the mitigation. Habitat management / restoration may be more easily achieved away from visitor hotspots, but highly disturbed areas could be the focus of habitat restoration in conjunction with the implementation of access restrictions / controls.

6.11 Further work would be required to explore whether and how this option could work.

Group C: Access management (SAMM variations)

6.12 The findings of visitor surveys presented in the 2018 EPR report suggest that, although visitors are aware of the SPA and its sensitivity (which is the focus of the SAMM wardening and education work), there has been little change in the number of dogs recorded off lead, between surveys.

6.13 It is therefore not possible to demonstrate from this information the direct effect of the SAMM programme in mitigating visitor numbers, but it may be contributing indirectly and could help visitors to accept / comply with future access restrictions or controls, if implemented. The effect of the SAMM programme is being explored in more detail in the SAMM (A3) background paper, and subsequent research study.

Group D: Access restriction / control

6.14 Areas of the SPA with existing access restrictions, e.g. MOD land and private land at Eelmoor Marsh, clearly reduce visitor pressure. Restriction of access at additional areas of the SPA would therefore be likely to reduce disturbance within those areas; however, it could also concentrate visitor pressure elsewhere.

6.15 Survey data shows a correlation between car park capacity and the number of visitors entering at that location; therefore, in theory, restricting car park capacity could reduce visitor numbers. However, this would need to take into account the possible dispersion of parking to other locations. Parking charges, similarly, could be used to influence where visitors go, but experience in Surrey (which was implemented to generate revenue rather than reduce visitor numbers) suggest that enforcement would need to be in place if it was to be successful.

6.16 The access research studies that builds on the information in this report will give further consideration to access restrictions that could mitigate visitor pressure.

Next stages

Narrowing down the mitigation options

6.17 The information in this background study suggests that access restriction / control should be explored further as a potentially effective mitigation measure. Alternative sites (green infrastructure) may also be effective, given the apparent effectiveness of the current range of SANGs.

6.18 The study suggests that access management options are less likely to be successful but could play a role as part of a suite of measures. It is not possible to rule out or support habitat management / restoration on the basis of this study.

6.19 This is broadly in line with the initial appraisal of options in the main study, which found access management measures less likely to be effective; although none of the options were ruled out.

Further work

6.20 This and the other background papers (SANG and SAMM) and studies (SANG, SAMM and access) will be used to inform more detailed exploration of each of the types of mitigation option. It is intended that the preferred option/s will be identified following this.

6.21 Although this study collates useful background information for the next stage, it has limitations:

- It has been difficult to get ownership data for the SPA and to obtain definitive data on MOD land (boundaries and access restrictions), as this is considered sensitive

data. MOD Danger Areas shown in this report are indicative and have been drawn based on OS mapping.

- The SPA and SANG visitor surveys only provide a snapshot of visitors on a given day, at specific sites / access points. For example, areas of the SPA shown as having few visitors on surveyed route maps could have high numbers of visitors from other entry points.
- It was not possible to accurately determine the proportion of dog walkers arriving by car, but modal split is likely to be similar to that of visitors as a whole, at the SPA. This may also be true at SANGs, but there is considerably more variation in travel mode between SANG sites than at the SPA, which makes generalisation harder.

6.22 Further work on the potential effectiveness and feasibility of access restrictions will be undertaken as part of the Access research study (C3).

LUC

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Appendix A

GIS datasets used

GIS data used this study

A.1 The following GIS data has been used in this study

Publicly available data

- Ordnance Survey background mapping
- SPA & SSSI boundaries
- Public Rights of Way
- Open Access Land

Data from Rushmoor / Hart / Surrey Heath

- SANGs

Data from EPR report 'Visitor Access Patterns on the TBH SPA' (2018)

- Access point locations
- Routes taken on site
- Recreational pressure

Data from Footprint report 'TBH SPA Parking Transects and Counter Data'

- Car park locations, capacity and number of vehicles