Southwood Country Park

DRAFT Interim Management Plan

2021-2023

RUSHMOOR BOROUGH COUNCIL

1. Introduction

1.1 The Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA) is a network of heathland sites that provide habitat for the important ground-nesting bird species Dartford Warbler, nightjar and woodlark. The area was designate as a SPA in 2005 and is protected from adverse effects by European Legislation.

1.2 It is well established that recreational disturbance can affect the SPA bird populations, particularly through impacts leading to reduction in breeding success through nest abandonment and increased predation of eggs or young. The majority of visitors who participate in recreation on the TBH SPA come from within 5km of the site, therefore development providing net increases in housing in this area could particularly lead to increased visitor pressure and disturbance.

1.3 To endeavour to alleviate pressure, a mitigation strategy has been formulated across Berkshire, Hampshire, and Surrey, to provide Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces (SANG). These greenspaces are designed to provide alternative places for residents to visit, away from the SPA. Southwood Country Park has been identified as a SANG to serve new development planned within Rushmoor Borough Council's Local Plan.

1.4 The delivery of the Park has been progressed in two phases. Phase 1 has delivered the immediate infrastructure required by Natural England to enable the former Golf Course to provide SANG mitigation. This included the provision of signage, car parking, fencing and circular walks. An Interim Management Plan was prepared for the initial 12-18 month period (Southwood Country Park Interim Management Plan 2019-2021).

1.5 Phase 2 will enable the Park to fulfil its purpose of alleviating recreational pressure on the SPA in the longer term, by undertaking further habitat work to naturalise the site and to provide additional facilities to attract visitors. The Council has been exploring options and progressing the delivery of the following facilities and services in phase 2:

- The employment of staff including a ranger to manage the SANG
- A visitor centre, café, toilets and ranger's office

- All weather paths, which will be suitable for use by cyclists, wheelchair users and pushchairs.
- A pedestrian crossing on Ively Road to provide a safe link between the eastern and western sections, subject to traffic assessment and Hampshire Highways
- A playground constructed of natural materials close to the Ively Road car park.
- A fenced dog exercise area and washdown facilities
- Creation of focal points and/or adventure structures
- Educational aids such as a pond dipping platform for use by schools and clubs to study wildlife

2. Progress of Phase 2 planning since 2019

2.1 Due to Covid and other factors, Phase 2 of the Country Park has been delayed. As a result, the Council needs to prepare an updated Interim Management Plan for the next 2 years. There are interim arrangements currently in place to manage the SANG on behalf of the Council and options are currently being explored for the longer-term management of the site. A longer term (10 year) Management Plan will be prepared once these arrangements are in place.

The Southwood and Cove Brook Floodplain Improvement Project

2.2 The Cove Brook is a tributary of the River Blackwater, part of the wider Loddon and Thames catchments. The closure of the golf course and the plans to create Suitable Natural Alternative Greenspace now offers an opportunity to restore the habitats and physical processes associated with the Cove Brook corridor and associated floodplain, creating a more resilient ecosystem for the benefit of people and wildlife. Therefore, the Council has entered partnership with the Environment Agency, to progress a project which will achieve river floodplain and habitat improvements on the Southwood Country Park and Cove Brook as part of the Phase 2 development. The objectives of this project include:

- Improve the Water Framework Directive Status of the Cove Brook and its tributaries through physical habitat enhancement
- Enhance the biodiversity and ecosystem functioning of the project area
- Re-establish hydrological connectivity between the river and its floodplain (where this does not compromise the SANG)
- Increase tree cover within the former golf course to provide woodland and wet woodland habitat within the headwaters
- Create opportunities for nature-based recreation and education
- Identify any opportunities to secure flood risk benefits for local people (including the consideration of natural flood management interventions)
- Improve the biodiversity value of the four associated Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) namely
    - Cove Valley, Southern Grassland
    - Cove Brook Grassland
    - Southwood Woodlands (adjacent)
    - Southwood Country Park
- Improve the landscape value of the project area

2.3 Consultants have been appointed to manage and lead on this project. A Baseline Report and Longlist of Options and draft Concept Designs has been prepared. The draft Concept Designs will be published for public comment in October 2021. Work is currently underway on the detailed design and the flood modelling work. Once we have finalised the detailed design, the implementation will be planned to take account of the work being undertaken by Esso (see paragraph 2.6 below). It is likely that for this reason the improvements will be undertaken over the next 3 years.

Southwood Country Park Visitor Centre

2.4 The Council has also been considering the options regarding a visitor hub on the site and is now progressing the design development for a Visitor Centre and Café. The designs will be published for public comment in October 2021.

Pedestrian Crossing

2.5 It is proposed that a crossing is provided on Ively Road between the two parts of the Country Park. The crossing is subject to approval by Hampshire County Council as the Highway Authority.

ESSO Pipeline

2.6 A Development Consent Order (DCO) was granted in October 2020 for the Southampton to London Pipeline Project that will replace 90km of aviation fuel pipeline. Part of the new pipeline crosses the western and eastern sections of the park. A phasing plan has been published by Esso and is available, along with further information on the project, at www.slpproject.co.uk. Works affecting the park are expected to take place between May and October 2022, with some vegetation clearance in December 2021. Any interim or Phase 2 works will need to take the pipeline route into account. This and subsequent management plans will have regards to the requirements for Esso to replant / reinstate habitat lost to construction of the pipeline. Site management plans will, as far as possible, ensure that Esso implement vegetation reinstatement and 5-year ongoing aftercare in line with current ecological site baseline and ecological enhancement ambitions.

3. Site Description

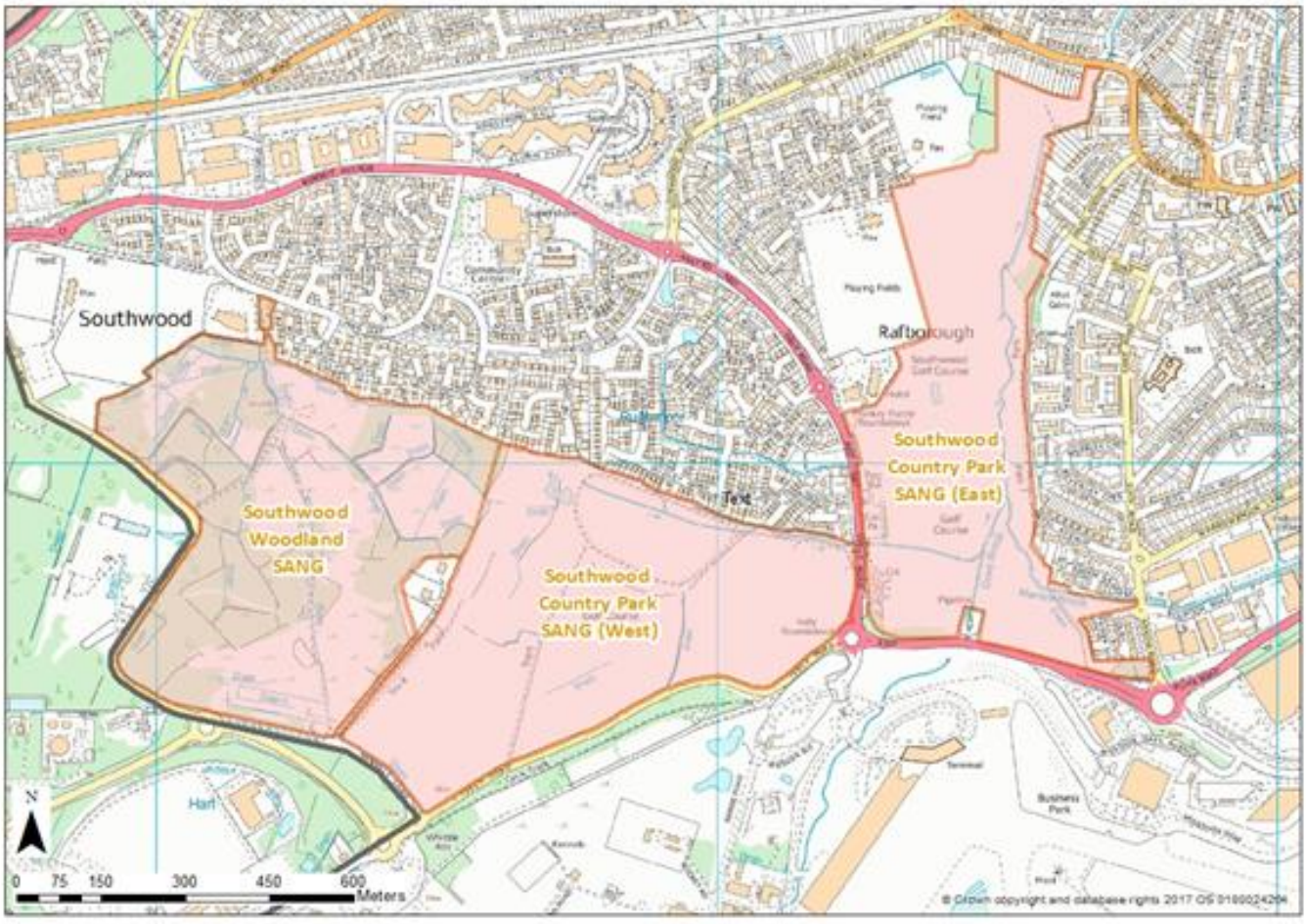
3.1 Southwood Country Park is a 57ha site, owned by Rushmoor Borough Council (the Council), incorporating a former golf course and adjacent land. The site includes within its boundaries three Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs). A SINC is land that has been formally selected to published criteria, as containing habitats or species of County importance for wildlife conservation. The Cove Brook, and the three Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs) support the most biodiverse habitats on site, however since the last interim management plan natural habitats have started regenerating across the site.

3.2 The Park is made up of two distinct parts – the area to the west of the A327 Ively Road (‘western section’) and the area to the east (‘eastern section’). The Country Park was opened to the public in September 2019.

3.3 Southwood Country Park is located to the south west of Farnborough, within the Borough of Rushmoor in Hampshire, OS grid reference: SU8554. It forms a green oasis in a heavily urban environment and is a prominent natural feature within the local landscape. The site is visible from busy roads leading into Farnborough from neighbouring Fleet. Due to the size of the site and the habitat connectivity with Southwood Woodland and other open spaces views from the golf course are largely of naturalised habitats rather than urban sprawl.

3.4 The Country Park is directly adjacent to Southwood Woodland SANG to the west, comprising 30ha of oak/birch woodland and wet woodland, containing open acidic grassland glades and bog habitats. The head of the Ively stream is located within the woodland. This stream than forms the northern boundary of the site throughout the western section of the Country Park.

Figure 1: Southwood Woodland and Southwood Country Park SANG boundaries



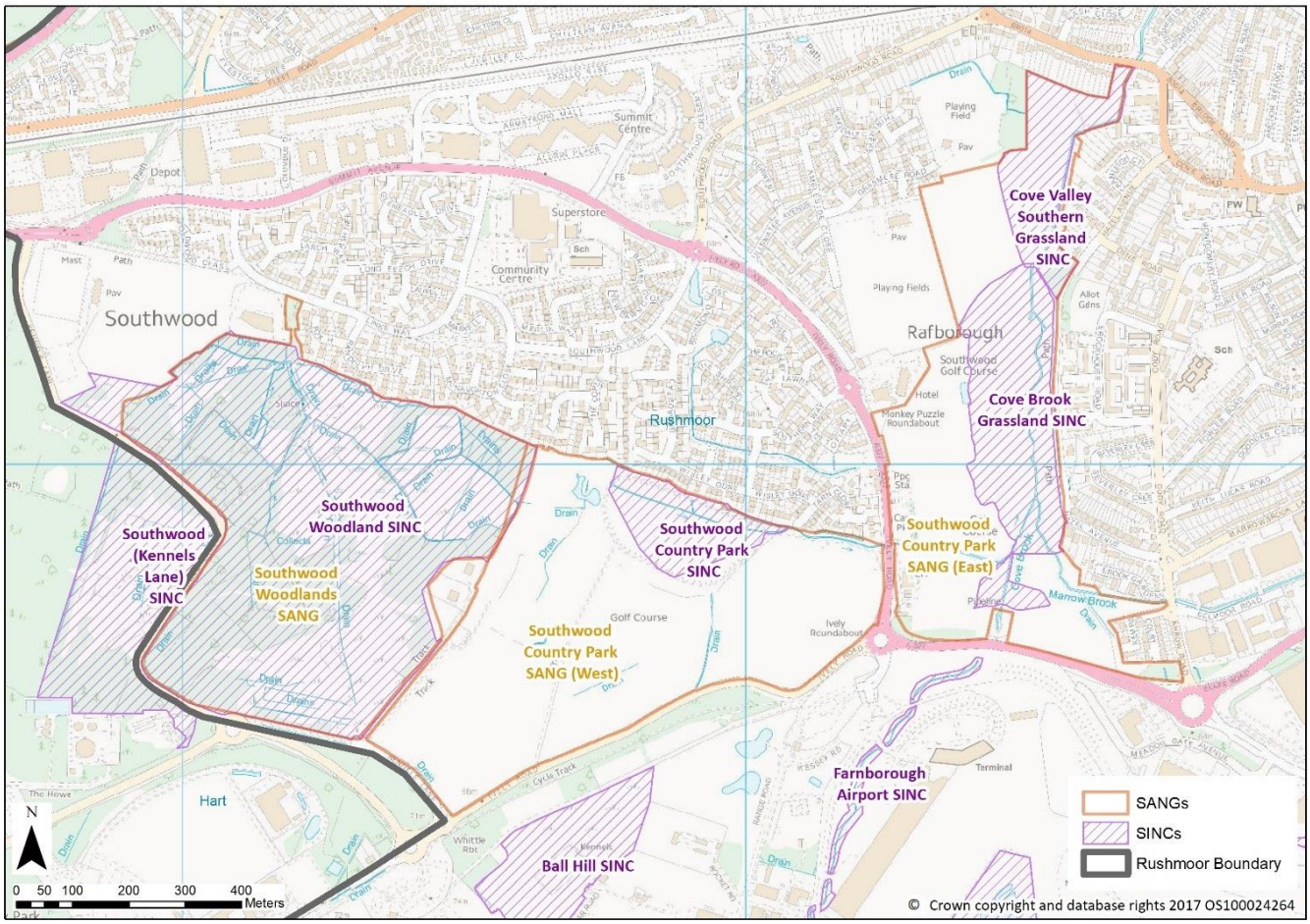
3.5 Southwood Playing Fields and the EA Flood Mitigation area are to the north of the SANG with Cove Brook bordering to the east. Cove Brook then runs under Cove Road and the Five Arches railway bridge before continuing through the Cove Brook Greenway and Hawley Meadows, before joining the Blackwater within Blackwater Valley.

3.6 The site is predominantly flat though in a few places, the topography has been altered. The underlying geology is based on Windlesham Formation (sand, silt & clay) beds. Both the geology and recolonization of acid grassland indicate that there are likely to be opportunities to extend the acidic grassland habitats throughout the site.

3.7 Due to the site being low lying floodplain, it is prone to seasonal water logging. Surface water from the site is passed down open ditches and culverts towards the Ively stream, which then flows away to the east into the Cove Brook. The eastern land parcel drains into the Marrow Brook, which then flows into the Cove Brook before meandering northwards through Cove Brook Grasslands SINC and Cove Valley Southern Grasslands SINC into Cove. Floodplain grazing marsh and wet woodland habitats are present v within the SINCs, along the drainage network and within low lying areas of the site.

3.8 Cove Brook Grasslands SINC supports a wide range of marshy grassland, swamp and floodplain habitats, with willow Carr scrub further diversifying the habitat complex. Cove Valley Southern Grasslands SINC is less diverse with much of the scrub having developed into species poor wet woodland. Within the area of open grassland, a good diversity of species is still present. Southwood Country Park SINC is designated for its wet woodland and remnant grazing marsh habitats.

Figure 2: Sites of Nature Conservation Interest (SINCs) within and around the Southwood Woodland and Southwood Country Park SANGs



4. Changes within the natural habitats since 2019

4.1 Since the golf course closed there has been limited management on the site. The ecological management detailed within the initial plan was felt to be inappropriate once the invertebrate surveys were analysed, and the habitat was seen to be regenerating naturally. It was decided, in consultation with Rushmoor Borough Council, the Environment Agency and Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, that the habitats should be unmanaged for a few seasons to allow them to recover from former intensive management, with regeneration being monitored. Habitat surveys of the Country Park will be undertaken during this Interim Management Plan timeframe to track floristic changes on site as a result of more sympathetic management regime. Surveys will be conducted in accordance with best practice survey guidelines by professionally qualified consultants.

4.2 Within the east, acidic grassland has become increasingly biodiverse. The surveys undertaken in the park identified an important community of terrestrial invertebrates, with many rare and vulnerable species noted. The bog habitat within the Cove Brook Grasslands SINC and the wet woodland within Southwood Country Park SINC were hotspots for terrestrial invertebrates, with some evidence these species were recolonising the regenerating habitats within the east.

4.3 The western side of Southwood Country Park is less biodiverse than the east, however there are signs of early acid grassland colonisation in some areas. The bunkers and areas within the grassland now contain acid grassland species, with the wetter areas beginning to form wetland flora communities. The rough grassland previously recorded on site appears to be diminishing, being replaced by fescue dominated grassland.

4.4 The habitats now require significant work to bring them into rotational management. The Council will bring the habitats into active management, within the Interim Management Plan period, in partnership with Blackwater Valley Countryside Project (BVCP) and the Environment Agency. This will ensure that the habitats and the associated fauna become increasingly diverse

4.5 In addition to the habitat work site, signage will be reviewed throughout both Southwood Woodlands and Southwood Country Park to provide better way marking and information on the habitats and species present on site.

5. Interim Management

5.1 This Interim Management Plan relates to the management of the Country Park for the next 12 to 24 months (2021 – 2023). Within this time the Council, in partnership with the Environment Agency, will have undertaken the Phase 2 works and a longer term (10-year) management plan will need to be prepared and agreed.

5.2 The immediate infrastructure and changes required by Natural England to enable the former Southwood Golf Course to provide SANG mitigation at the earliest opportunity have now been delivered on site. A new car park was opened adjacent to Kennels Lane in April 2020, over 9km of mown paths were provided including

circular walks and the site was fenced in 2019/20. Temporary signage was erected at all official entrances providing a map of the site and the footpath network. An all-weather path of 2.4km is to be constructed this summer within the western section, however due to the route of the ESSO pipeline it is unlikely that the all-weather path proposed for the east will be delivered, until the pipeline work is complete.

5.3 Under the interim arrangements, Southwood Woodlands and Southwood Country Park are now being managed as a single site by BVCP, with ranger and materials costed for both sites. Calculations show that the two sites require 1.5 rangers to undertake the habitat works and visitor engagement within the sites. As visitor engagement increases additional budget may be required to provide another 0.5 ranger, to provide staff to the level budgeted for within the original SANG calculations. Funding for the rangers, infrastructure and habitat works will come from developer SANG contributions for new residential development.

6. Management of the Habitat Complex

Grassland Management

6.1 An annual mowing regime will commence on site, within the grassland habitats in 2021 to reduce the predominance of invasive grass species and ensure the ground remains depleted of nutrients. The mowing will be undertaken on a three-year rotation to ensure there is shelter and overwintering habitat for reptiles, amphibians and invertebrates present on site. Care will be taken to ensure that reptiles which may bask on the close-cut paths, are not harmed. Mowing will take place late July/early August (as appropriate).

6.2 In the west, the grassland will be topped in the spring 2022 to control the invasive grass species and enable the tender species to grow and seed. Mown paths will continue to be maintained by SERCO as currently.

Wetland Creation and Management

6.3 Cove Brook Grassland SINC supports the most important habitat currently present on site. The bog and grazing marsh habitats contain rare flora species with both the

habitats and species identified within the SINC designation. The habitats provide ideal conditions for many rare invertebrate communities as well as protected amphibians and reptiles.

6.4 The Cove Brook Grassland SINC will be managed on rotation with a percentage of the site mown each autumn. Habitats on the periphery of this site have become over-run with aggressive dominating species such as reeds. In these areas, scrapes will be provided to provide opportunities for recolonization by more valuable flora species and provide additional habitat for wetland birds, reptiles, amphibians, and invertebrates. Scraping and scrub clearance will be undertaken to help to maintain a complex of habitats in different stages of growth.

6.5 There are opportunities to create wetland habitat adjacent to the Southwood Country Park SINC where the grassland is naturally wet. This habitat will provide opportunities for the invertebrate population within the woodland to expand into this habitat, as well as providing additional grazing marsh habitat to compliment that found within the SINC. This will be considered as part of the environmental design.

Woodland, Copses, Hedgerows, Scrub and Trees

6.6 Work to the woodland blocks at Southwood Country Park SINC and Cove Brook Southern Grasslands will be delivered as part of the Southwood and Cove Brook Floodplain Improvement Project. The canopy will be thinned in these areas to increase light at ground level allowing natural regeneration of bankside vegetation in line with waterway restoration ambitions.

6.7 It is proposed to plant a woodland edge, copses and the re-establish the historic hedgerow network throughout the western section of the site within the interim period. Opportunities for some of this planting to be undertaken by volunteers will be explored.

6.8 On opening the Country Park to the public, a schedule of works was drawn up to undertake health and safety works on a number of trees, most of which were conifer. The high and medium priority works were undertaken in 2020, after the trees had been surveyed to ensure that tree works did not disturb active bat roosts.

The low priority works will be completed in 2021/22, with appropriate bat surveys undertaken on all trees that require work.

6.9 Within the wider management plan the vision is to restore the landscape back to the 1800s and add a number of small woodland copses planted with native species of local provenance, to increase the habitat diversity on site. It is ecologically beneficial to remove the conifer species on site to reduce the rate of reseeding. The conifer trees present at the Country Park represent historical human intervention and would not naturally be found in this location. Their removal will aid restoration of habitats present to more natural habitat. Conifer removal will be undertaken sensitively and alongside tree safety works, to a timeframe to be agreed within the long-term management plan.

6.10 To ensure a diverse habitat complex within the Country Park, it is important that we provide some scrub habitat in which the reptiles. amphibians and invertebrates can shelter. Currently there is little scrub on site, with Poplar regeneration dominating the scrub habitat present. To create biodiverse scrub habitats mowing will not be untaken in strategic areas. Poplar scrub will be kept under control using hand tools to ensure no harm to the taxa using the habitats. To ensure this habitat remains as scrub, the areas selected will be coppiced on a rotation envisaged to be every 7 years.

`Cove Brook, tributaries, and the ditch drainage network

6.11 It has been agreed that due to the extensive works to be undertaken to Ively Stream and Marrow Brook as part of the River enhancement, and the poor ecological quality of the bankside vegetation along these tributaries, any works and management required will be undertaken within and after the wider river restoration works in 2022/23.

6.12 The drainage network is currently very engineered with water piped into ditches. It has also been noted that this system can cause flooding to the surrounding properties and therefore needs to be cleared to ensure the safety of the properties. By naturalising the ditch network, the system will better fulfil its natural function as part of the floodplain. Improved in-ditch vegetation and recreated wetland

habitats will absorb excess flows before the water reaches the properties. The ditch network will be naturalised and connected into the riparian system as part of the Southwood and Cove Brook Floodplain Improvements project. Ditch renaturalisation works will have regard to ongoing ditch management work already undertaken by Rushmoor Borough Council.

6.13 Work along Cove Brook will be undertaken to clear the overdominant vegetation, particularly the bramble, to enable bankside flora to regenerate and become more biodiverse. The bramble will be cleared on a two-year rotation to ensure cover is present throughout the river corridor for the fauna that use this corridor. The vegetation will be cut in 200m stretches, with 200m being cut on one side of the river, with a staggered 200m stretch cut on the alternate bank. The two-year rotational management will ensure a contiguous corridor of cover. This management will be undertaken in the winter months to avoid harm to nesting birds, reptiles, amphibians, and invertebrates.

Bare Ground habitat, The Bunkers

6.14 Bare ground habitat is essential for many of the invertebrate species present within the site, as they use these areas to hunt. Bare ground also creates basking opportunities for reptiles. However, it has been noted that acidic grassland habitats are establishing on many of the bunkers. Therefore, to endeavour to establish a balance between these two important habitats, the bunkers will be reprofiled to create south facing slopes and scraped on a 10-year rotation. There are 30 bunkers on site which will be reprofiled and scraped on rotation. This will provide habitats in different phases of regeneration, increasing opportunities for colonisation by a wider and more varied invertebrate assemblage.

7. The benefits of habitat creation, management, and enhancement to species

Bats

7.1 Five species of foraging bats were recorded on site, common and soprano pipistrelle, Daubentons, noctule and an unidentified Myotis species. Most of the bat activity was focused along the tree lines and the woodland. This management

plan will provide a diverse woodland edge and linear foraging routes providing greater areas over which the bats can hunt. By increasing the invertebrate populations bats will also be provided with more plentiful food. In the longer term, as the copse habitat matures, additional roosting opportunities will become available, enabling a greater number and diversity of bats to roost on site.

7.2 Due to the presence of nocturnal species on site, we will seek to achieve no net increase in exterior artificial lighting at the Ively Road car park and adjacent buildings. Where lighting is deemed necessary for safety reasons, lighting installed will comply with the recommendations in BCT & ILP (2018) Guidance Note 08/18. Bats and artificial lighting in the UK. Bats and the Built Environment. Bat Conservation Trust, London & Institution of Lighting Professionals, Rugby". The Kennels Lane car park is located adjacent to optimal bat foraging, commuting and roosting habitat. In order to avoid disturbance of bat species present, the Kennels Road car park will be retained as dark, with no lighting installed. If works are required on mature broadleaved trees, bat surveys will be undertaken, with the appropriate licences obtained if roosts are to be impacted.

Badgers

7.3 Badger setts have been recorded within the boundaries of the Country Park and adjacent Southwood Woodlands. Latrines and evidence of badger foraging were noted within both the eastern and western parcels. The woodland complex will increase the foraging potential, providing fruit, nuts and berries and more varied invertebrate and vertebrate food sources. In the longer term the copses will provide shelter for sett creation, enabling the badger community to grow and expand.

7.4 All major projects and infrastructure works will be undertaken in a precautionary way, having regards to the presence of badgers across the site, to ensure that individuals do not become trapped in trenches, culverts or pipes. Works undertaken in the vicinity of active badger setts will be undertaken only in accordance with good practice to avoid disturbance.

Birds

7.5 36 bird species have been recorded on site. Bullfinch, house sparrow, reed bunting, song thrush and starling are listed in the Biodiversity Action Plan due to the sharp declines in numbers in recent years. The complex of habitats proposed within this management plan will increase habitat for species already using the site and encourage a greater diversity of birds. The woodland/copse/hedgerow habitat will enable woodland birds to expand their territory, with the heathland and wetland habitat providing additional foraging and nesting habitats for species which use more open habitats. The proposed scrapes within the bog area will provide habitat for wetland birds.

Reptiles

7.6 A peak count of eleven common lizards were recorded, comprising 5 adults and 6 juveniles, comprising a medium breeding population of common lizard. All common lizards were recorded within Cove Brook Grasslands SINC. A peak count of 20 slow worms were recorded comprising 10 adults and 10 juveniles, with the site supporting an exceptional breeding population of slow worms.

7.7 The woodland/ copse/hedgerow network will increase shelter and provide a greater diversity of fauna for reptiles to hunt. This complex will be supplemented by log piles and other hibernacula positioned in strategic locations. The sympathetic management of open grassland habitats will increase foraging and basking opportunities, with rotational scaping of bunkers creating a variety of basking and hunting conditions. The proposed works to renaturalise watercourses and enhance the associated floodplain will increase wetland habitats for common lizards by recreating and enhancing the riparian, floodplain, pond, and ditch network.

Amphibians

7.8 A peak count of 20 Palmate newts were found within the bog habitat indicating that good population is present within the Cove Brook Grasslands SINC. A peak count of 4 Common frogs were also found indicating a low population of this species.

7.9 The watercourse and floodplain enhancement proposals, creation of wetland scrapes and the management of marshy grassland habitats will increase foraging and breeding opportunities for all amphibians.

Aquatic Macroinvertebrates

7.10 The waterbodies and watercourses are considered to support aquatic macroinvertebrate communities of moderate to low ecological value. The pond in the north/north east is of highest value, whereas the ditches in the western section are of lowest ecological value. The presence of concrete artificial banks, thick layer of silt and leaf litter and the slow sluggish flows within the ditch/ stream network is having an adverse impact on the aquatic invertebrates, suppressing diversity. Renaturalising watercourses and enhancing associated floodplain habitats will improve water flow and bankside vegetation, which in turn will help improve water quality. Provision of scrapes within the marshy grassland will also support the restoration of aquatic invertebrate populations.

Terrestrial Invertebrates

7.11 A terrestrial invertebrate survey, undertaken in 2019 found 596 species of which 37 had conservation status. Looking at the site at a landscape scale, including Southwood Woodlands, an impressive 952 species have been recorded overall, with 73 having conservation status.

7.12 Within the Country Park the invertebrate interest was largely focused around the marshy grassland habitats in the east and the wet woodland in the west. Some species have spread into the Country Park since the management has been relaxed, but the golf course habitats and the intensive mowing have blocked most of these specialist species from colonising new areas

7.13 As the site supports an important biodiverse invertebrate population, further surveys will be undertaken, in accordance with survey best practice guidance, to monitor how populations respond to proposed changes to habitat management. Survey results and management recommendations will inform ongoing long-term habitat management proposals.

7.14 Due to the importance of this taxa, this management plan has focused heavily on providing for their needs. Within the west the Woodland/copse/hedgerow network will provide routes out of the Southwood Country Park SINC into newly created wet woodland interspersed through the site. The rotational management of grassland habitats will ensure provision of additional overwintering habitat and shelter during the summer months. Rotational scaping of the bunds will provide habitats in different stages of progression, including bare ground in which many species hunt.

Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS)

7.15 Four non-native invasive species listed within schedule 9 species under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) were noted within the survey. These are three plants (New Zealand pygmy weed, variegated yellow archangel and Himalayan Balsam) as well as Signal crayfish. Unfortunately, Signal Crayfish cannot currently be controlled.

7.16 The variegated yellow archangel is spreading through the site and its origins are thought to be due to garden waste dumping from the adjacent housing. This is also an issue within Southwood Woodland. Garden waste needs to be removed from the site as far as possible and a concerted effort made to try to stop this practice. The ranger will contact the properties surrounding the park with information regarding the damage done to ecological habitats from dumping and endeavour to persuade the occupants to dispose of their waste responsibly. If garden waste dumping continues on the site, as it is an offence to spread schedule 9 species onto other people's land, legal action may be considered. The variegated yellow archangel will be sprayed this year to try to limit spread, but it is likely to require digging out which will be very labour intensive.

7.17 The Himalayan Balsam is contained within a small area adjacent to the Environment Agency bund. A work party has already hand-pulled much of this growth to remove it. The site ranger will regularly check for regrowth and control as required and as part of the longer-term site management plan.

7.18 The New Zealand Pygmy Weed has now been sprayed for two years and has not spread further than first recorded. This will be reviewed as part of the longer-term management plan.

8. Access and Infrastructure

Natural England Requirements

8.1 Natural England has published criteria for SANG to be used as mitigation or avoidance land to reduce recreational use of the Thames Basin Heaths SPA. Some of these criteria are considered essential and others are desirable – further details of these criteria and how they have been met in the Southwood Country Park are set out in Appendix A.

Car Parking and Access

8.2 The former golf course car park, consisting of 75 spaces with approximately 20 spaces in the overflow area, serves the eastern parcel, with a new 29-space car park, with 2 additional accessible spaces and cycle provision, off Kennels Lane serving the western section. There is capacity to extend this car park, if required, and this will be reviewed once the visitor centre is open. There is some informal parking along Kennels Lane which serves the Southwood Woodland SANG and Southwood Country Park SANG.

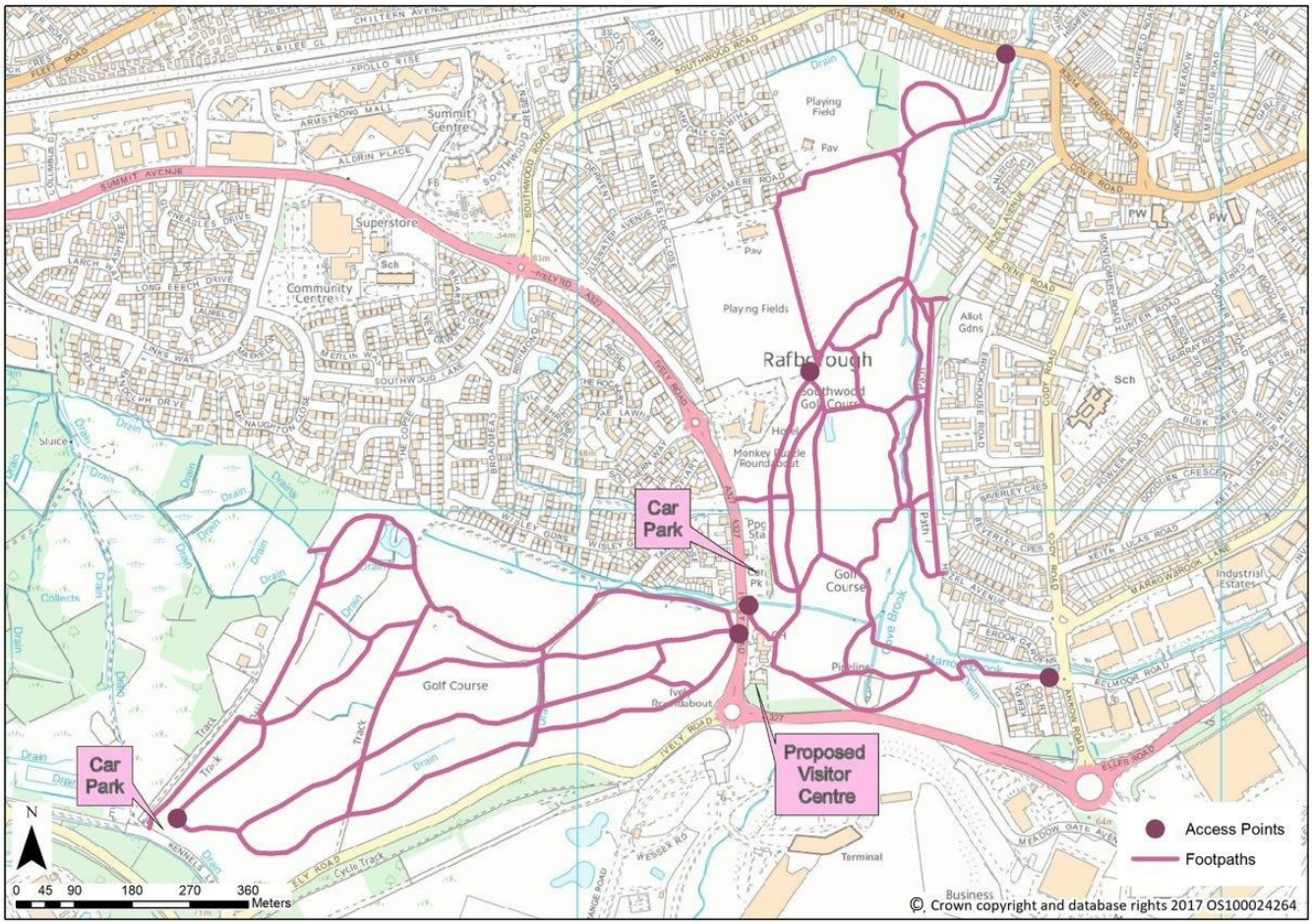
8.3 Pedestrian access points are via Ively Rd and Kennels Lane for the western parcel and via the Southwood Playing Fields, Ively Rd, Kempton Court and Cove Brook Greenway (Bridge Rd) for the eastern parcel.

8.4 All vegetation will be controlled to ensure clear sight lines into the site for pedestrians, cyclists, and motorists. Chicanes have been placed within the eastern car park to secure access onto the site, with field gates to ensure access for vehicles required to manage the site. We will review the need for directional signage to be provided to inform the public of the location of the site. In addition, planting will be provided to screen the Council's compounds off Kennels Lane and Ively Road.

Circular routes

8.5 2.4km circular routes are available through the eastern and western parcels of Southwood Country Park. Paths are already significantly longer than the minimum required, at over 5 km within the western parcel and over 4 km within the eastern parcel. The network comprises existing hard surfaced paths linked by mown areas, providing strategic links to Southwood Woodland in the west and Southwood Meadow and the Cove Brook Greenway in the east. Due to the wet nature of the site an all-weather path of 2.4km will be constructed in the spring/ summer of 2021, with a further 2.4km all-weather path planned for the east or as soon as the ESSO pipeline is completed.

Figure 4: Existing Footpaths, Access Points and Car Parks



Signage and information

8.6 Temporary signage has been erected at all entrances, with a view to permanent signage being installed once the visitor centre is open. Interpretation signage will

inform visitors of the reason for the SANG designation, the scale and diversity of the site, and provide a site map of the Southwood Country Park with a range of routes marked.

8.7 Fingerposts and way markers will link the SANG to Southwood Woodland and other long-distance paths, providing a clearly marked route within the more informal areas of Southwood Country Park.

8.8 Information about Southwood Country Park will be made available on websites and via social media to promote the site as a SANG and encourage its use as an alternative to the Thames Basin Heath SPA, especially by new residents moving into the area.

Fencing and gates

8.9 Dog-proof fencing has been provided along the busy and open boundary with Ively Road, the southern boundary of both western and eastern parcels (Ively Rd), along Kennels Lane (western parcel) and Bridge Rd (eastern parcel). The requirement for additional fencing is being considered as part of the plans for the all-weather path on the eastern part of the site.

8.10 A field gate has been provided at Ively Road to limit access of vehicles into the western area with an accessible kissing gate along the Ively Road boundary as pedestrian entrance. A secure entrance at the Ively Road car park creates a sense of entrance.

Other infrastructure

8.11 Combined litter and dog refuse bins have been provided close to all entrances accessible by road. New site furniture is planned to be erected in 2021 to enhance the visitor experience by providing a welcoming and attractive appearance and facilities that can be used by all residents regardless of age, or disability. Site furniture will include picnic benches and seating at strategic points around the site.

8.12 Work will be undertaken to decommission the golf course infrastructure, including the pumps and pits in the summer of 2021. Bridges over the small ditches and

watercourses within the site will be replaced or removed in 2021 to manage access and improve safety.

9. Maintenance

9.1 All hard infrastructure, including car parks, fencing, gates, signage etc will be checked on a regular basis to ensure it is safe and accessible, with repairs or vegetation clearance undertaken as necessary.

10. Visitor Usage

10.1 A visitor survey was undertaken by Footprint Ecology in 2018. However, since closure as a municipal golf course, the site has become publicly accessible, visitor numbers have increased, and the site is now very busy. The Council will commission BVCP to undertake an updated visitor survey, in the spring/summer of 2021, to monitor the increases in visitor numbers and provide an estimate of the total numbers of visitors likely to use the site when Phase 2 is delivered. This data will be used to inform the design of the visitor centre and provide evidence of use to Natural England in relation to the SANG. People counters will also be positioned in all official entry points to monitor use.

11. Monitoring and Review

Habitat Monitoring

11.1 The site will be managed by Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership (BVCP) until at least January 2022. Details of how the SANG will be managed, and the organisation that will be responsible for the management in the longer-term will be set out in the 10-year Management Plan, likely to be approved after the delivery of Phase 2 in 2022/3. The SANG charge includes provision for a 10-yearly review of the management plan and a review of the habitat and species monitoring regime.

11.2 Habitat and targeted species monitoring will be undertaken throughout the interim management plan period in accordance with best practice survey guidelines. Survey results will be used to evaluate success of habitat restoration and enhancement measures, and influence management priorities.

Service Level Agreement Management and Monitoring

11.3 The SLA is overseen by a steering group consisting of officers from the Council and BVCP. There is ongoing communication between the Council and the BVCP Ranger and monthly reports are provided by BVCP detailing the works undertaken and the hours worked.

12. Conclusion

12.1 This Interim Management Plan has been developed to provide a schedule of works for Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership to deliver over the next two years, during the delivery of Phase 2 of the Country Park and prior to the preparation of a longer-term management plan. The Plan will provide benefits for access and the visitor experience as well as restoring and enhancing the habitat and species diversity within the site.

12.2 The long-term management of the SANG will depend on the final environmental design, on which decisions are expected to be made in 2021/22. The long-term management plan will contain a detailed schedule of works and will be signed off by Natural England, the Environment Agency, and the Council.

Appendix A
Criteria for Suitable Alternative Natural Green Spaces

SANG criteria below, as specified within Natural England's "Guidelines for Creation of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) – August 2021".

SANG Criteria	Phase 1	During Phase 2 and ESSO pipeline works	Phase 2
For all sites larger than 4ha there must be adequate parking for visitors, unless the site is intended for local use within 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 SANGS and the SPA	The car park serving the western parcel can accommodate 29 cars, 2 accessible spaces and cycle provision. An overflow car park is available for events. The car park serving the eastern parcel can accommodate 75 spaces with approximately 20 spaces in the overflow area.	Both car parks will remain fully operational, with unimpeded access during the works	There is space for further car parking spaces to be constructed in the Kennels Lane car park if required.
It should be possible to complete a circular walk of 2.3km – 2.5km	Walks of over 9km have y been created throughout the Country Park	Some paths may need to be closed to pedestrians but there will always be at least one 2.5km walk available.	
Car parks must be easily accessible by car and should be clearly signposted	The eastern and western car parks are easily accessible from Ively Road and Kennels Lane respectively. The Country Park will be clearly signposted	Both car parks will remain open, with access unimpeded during the works.	
The accessibility of the site must include access points appropriate for the visitor use the SANGS is intended to cater for.	There are many access points throughout the site which enable pedestrians, car drivers and cyclists to access the site from any direction.	All access points will remain open throughout any works.	
The SANGS must have a safe route of access on foot from the nearest car park and/or footpaths	All access points are safe Some of the pedestrian routes into the site are along busy roads and dogs should be kept on lead.	If routes adjacent to Kennels Lane require closure, alternative routes will be clearly signposted	A pedestrian crossing over Ively Rd will provide safe access between the eastern and western parcels.
All SANGS with car parks must have a circular route that starts and finishes at the car park.	Both car parks serve at least one 2.5km circular route around the park	Throughout the works at least one 2.5km route is available from each car park.	
SANGS must be designed so that they are perceived to be safe by users; they must not have tree and scrub cover along parts of the routes.	The routes within the SANGS have been designed to mirror the desire lines of existing users. All-weather paths will improve accessibility within the winter months	Any areas impacted by works will be fenced off and clearly signposted with alternative routes provided.	
Paths must be easily used and well maintained but most should remain	Existing hard surfaced paths have been retained and	Paths will be kept open wherever possible.	

SANG Criteria	Phase 1	During Phase 2 and ESSO pipeline works	Phase 2
unsurfaced to avoid the site becoming too urban in feel	linked by mown paths boardwalks or hard surfaced routes are required due to inaccessible wetland habitats.		
SANGS must be perceived as 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.	See Management Plan for proposed habitat creation and management	There may be some disruption to the natural feel of the site during the works and until the new habitats have established,	The Southwood and Cove Brook Floodplain Improvement Project will complement the rewilding of the site
All SANGS larger than 12ha should aim to provide a variety of habitats for users to experience.	The relaxation of the management has increased the diversity and spread of acidic grassland and wetland, Phase I habitat creation and management will enrich the habitat complex present on site.	The variety of existing habitats will remain during the works with restoration and mitigation providing further habitat enhancement.	With the completion of Phase 2, the site could contain a riparian, acid grassland, grazing marsh, hedgerow, scrub, and wet and dry woodland habitat complex.
Access within the SANGS must be largely unrestricted with plenty of space provided where it is possible for dogs to exercise freely and safely off lead.	The 57ha site comprises largely open habitats and provides plenty of space for visitor's dogs and nature to co-exist.	Only a small proportion of the site will be inaccessible at any time	
SANGS must be free from unpleasant intrusions (e.g. sewage treatment works, smells)	There are no intrusions on the site except for a large structure associated with Farnborough Airport	There may be localised disturbance due to the works.	
SANGS should be clearly sign posted and advertised in some way	Signage will direct visitors to the Country Park and demarcate the routes within the site.	No change	
SANGS should have leaflets and/or websites advertising their location to potential users. It would be desirable for leaflets to be distributed to new homes in the area and be made available at entrance points and car parks.	Information about the Southwood Country Park will be made available on websites and via social media.	Websites and social media will be used to keep the public informed of the works and any impact on visitors	
It would be desirable for an owner to be able to take dogs from the car park to the SANGS safely off lead.	Fencing will be provided along busy roads abutting the site. The Kennels Lane car park will lead straight onto the site.	Some areas in or near both car parks may be disrupted due to planned works to restore the headwaters (Kennels Lane) and works to the buildings (Ively Rd).	There may be a need to keep dogs on leads around the car park off Ively Road as this area is likely to contain a playground, café, and visitor centre.
Where possible it is desirable to choose sites with a gently undulating topography for SANGS	This site is largely flat however there is some slight gradients.		Some of the topography maybe altered as part of the

SANG Criteria	Phase 1	During Phase 2 and ESSO pipeline works	Phase 2
			Phase 2 works, but this will not impact on the paths
It is desirable for access points to have signage outlining the layout of the SANGS and the routes available to visitors	Signs have been erected at all access points containing maps of the path network.	No change	Permanent signage and information boards will be designed and erected by 2022.
It is desirable that the SANGS provide a naturalistic space with areas of open (non-wooded) countryside and areas of dense scattered trees and shrubs. The provision of open water on part but not the majority of sites is desirable	Copses/hedgerow/ woodland/ scrub complexes will provide a more varied experience and biodiversity links into Southwood Woodland beyond. The site will support predominantly open habitats.	Works may impact on the natural views within the site for a short period of time, but this will be limited to small areas of land.	Small collections of ponds and scraps are planned within the works, but no large waterbodies are being created.
Where possible it is desirable to have a focal point such as a viewpoint, monument etc within the SANGS	There are views looking across the SINCs and towards Southwood Woodland that are particularly attractive.	No change	Phase 2 will include visitor facilities aa trim trail, a nature trail and pond dipping facilities. Education will be provided.