



Submitted to
Purbeck District
Council

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Exploring Heathland Mitigation in Purbeck

Final Report

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1 Glossary

CIL	Community Infrastructure Levy
CRoW Act 2000	Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000
DCLG	Department for Communities and Local Government
DPD	Development Plan Document
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
HLS	Higher Level Stewardship
HRA	Habitats Regulations Assessment
MoD	Ministry of Defence
NIA	Nature Improvement Area
PLP1	Purbeck Local Plan
pSPA	Proposed Special Protection Area
S106	Section 106 Agreement
SAC	Special Area of Conservation
SAMM	Strategic Access Management and Monitoring
SANG	Strategic Alternative Natural Greenspace
SHMA	Strategic Housing Market Assessment
SPA	Special Protection Area
SPD	Supplementary Planning Document
SSSI	Site of Special Scientific Interest

2 Executive Summary

2.1 Introduction

- 2.1.1 In October 2015 Purbeck District Council commissioned AECOM to provide a critical review of the existing Dorset Heaths SPA mitigation approach in order to consider other potential (and actual) approaches to managing development impacts on heathland SPAs and SACs. In particular, the study is intended to investigate whether alternative distributions of housing could be explored for the Partial Review of PLP1 (for example, any justification for delivering housing within 400m of the Dorset Heathlands SPA/SAC) or whether there are different ways of delivering sufficient mitigation where, and if, SANG prove difficult to achieve.

Alternative mitigation approaches: Other European sites

- 2.1.2 In line with the requirements of Matter 2, AECOM first undertook a desk-based review of the other UK SPAs that have been designated for Dartford warbler, nightjar and woodlark in order to establish whether the mitigation approach being applied at Dorset Heathlands SPA/SAC/Ramsar site is being applied to other SPAs with similar interest features. The mitigation approaches for ten other UK European sites are analysed: Thames Basin Heaths SPA, Wealden Heaths Phase 2 SPA, Thursley, Hankley & Frensham Commons SPA, Breckland SPA, Ashdown Forest SPA, East Devon Pebblebed Heaths SPA, New Forest SPA, Sandlings SPA, Thorne & Hatfield Moors SPA and Minsmere – Walberswick SPA. Examples from Europe are also considered and discussed. Ultimately it is concluded that the scale of existing development (and thus pressure) around the Dorset Heathlands SPA is sufficiently high that the overall mitigation strategy is justified.
- 2.1.3 For example 58% of existing dwellings within Purbeck District lie within 400m of the Dorset Heathlands SPA, which is a much higher percentage than with any of the other European sites examined. Equally, the number of houses within the 5km zone also bears greater similarity to the Thames Basin Heaths than the other SPAs, with c. 249,000 dwellings within 5km of the Dorset Heathlands compared to c. 31,000 within a similar distance of the Wealden Heaths SPA, c. 19,000 within 5km of Sandlings SPA and c. 56,000 within a similar distance of Breckland SPA.

Flexibility in applying the 400m zone

- 2.1.4 The application of the 400m 'no net new residential development' buffer zone was scrutinised. Although numerous other European sites have no specific prohibition on housing within 400m of the SPA, there are fundamental differences between those sites and the Dorset Heathlands; namely:
- a) the existing density of housing within 400m of the Dorset Heathlands is typically between ten and thirty-five times greater than that around those SPAs where no 400m exclusion zone exists, and as such this SPA/SAC/Ramsar site can be reasonably considered to already be under much more pressure from existing development than those other SPAs; and
 - b) given this historic trend for large amounts of housing to be delivered very close to the various components of the SPA/SAC/Ramsar site, it is likely that (in the absence of any exclusion zone) the Dorset Heathlands would experience a much greater number of future housing proposals within 400m than is the case with the other SPAs. One of the main reasons for the decision not to apply a 400m exclusion zone around those other SPAs was that there is little expectation many applications to deliver housing will be received in any case, since it would not match previous patterns of development.

- 2.1.5 This means that the risk posed to the SPA/SAC/Ramsar site in the absence of strict controls on development within 400m is also much larger for the Dorset Heathlands than is the case for most other SPAs, particularly within the context of long-standing concerns about the trend towards urbanisation and fragmentation of the Dorset Heathlands.
- 2.1.6 Consideration was given to whether there is a special case to develop a) brownfield sites, b) sites for affordable housing or c) gypsy and traveller provision within 400m of the SPA/SAC/Ramsar site, even if other types of development are prohibited. However, it was concluded that no technical justification to exclude those sites existed since they could all result in the same impacts as other forms of net new residential development.
- 2.1.7 Consideration was also given to whether any features within 400m of the SPA constituted a sufficient barrier to access that they could be exempted from the 400m zone. It was concluded that this would only apply to the A35 between Lytchett Minster and Upton. This passes within 400m of the SPA/SAC/Ramsar site both at Lytchett Minster and Upton. As the dual carriageway ends at Lytchett Minster and reverts to a single carriageway road, it cannot be considered to act as a barrier to dispersal. However, it has been agreed with Natural England that the portion of dual carriageway at Upton that passes within 400m of the SPA/SAC/Ramsar site can act as a barrier to dispersal of people. At present the 400m zone in this location is being adjusted accordingly.

How can the Council best deliver mitigation for development within the 400m-5km zone

- 2.1.8 The approach to mitigation within the 400m and 5km zone is considered. It is concluded that a mitigation solution is required and that, where they can be delivered, SANG may be the easiest and most cost effective solution to delivering alternative recreational access and open space for other activities close to developments. In many parts of Purbeck district the semi-natural greenspace outside the SPA, to which access could be provided as an alternative is actually very constrained by a combination of landowner acceptance, existing high levels of public accessibility, inappropriate location to the probable main locations of development or presence of constraining features such as nesting nightjar, Dartford warbler and woodlark in the plantations outside the SPA. It is also established that Natural England have agreed to a number of SANG such that for most housing the local authority needs to deliver over the Local Plan period SANG are likely to be an achievable solution.
- 2.1.9 However, it is also identified that there are locations (such as around Swanage) where delivery of SANG may prove more difficult. It is identified that, given the relatively small number of dwellings likely to be involved, there may be opportunities in the local area to achieve alternative solutions to providing public access to areas outside the SPA. For example:
- Building on initiatives in the South East Dorset Green Infrastructure Strategy¹, which covers an area that borders Swanage and which is defined as a habitat restoration zone but which is not identified as currently providing good access corridors. The Purbeck Local Biodiversity Action Plan covers one of 24 Biodiversity Action Partnership zones that integrate to form a South West Nature Map². This seeks to integrate habitats across the south-west region in a co-ordinated approach to landscape level management and which has fed into the GI Strategy. The strategy covers physical opportunities for developing and enhancing green infrastructure, definition of standards for green infrastructure, and mechanisms for implementation and delivery. There may be opportunities to combine the planned habitat restoration with improved public access to serve as strategic access management;
 - Potentially improving access to the (non-SSSI) areas of lowland meadow to the south of Swanage and semi-natural woodland to the west of Swanage via improved footpath linkages from Swanage itself towards and through those areas, coupled with promotion of those paths as routes for public access where dogs can be allowed to just run off the lead, and funding for management of those areas for public access in perpetuity;
 - Investigating any forthcoming proposals or ambitions from nature conservation organisations for acquiring land to convert into nature reserves, which could be adapted to perform a dual function and provide significant new public access; and
 - Investigating any initiatives that were delivered in the area around Swanage as part of the Nature Improvement Area project and identifying whether they could be extended and improved to serve a strategic access management role.

¹ Investing in Green Spaces (2011): South East Dorset Green Infrastructure Strategy.

² <http://www.biodiversitysouthwest.org.uk/bdas-map.html>

- 2.1.10 It is ultimately considered that even if approaches are developed for the small amount of housing concerned, no amendment to Purbeck's existing policy approach to protecting the Dorset Heathlands SPA/SAC/Ramsar site would be required.

Conclusion

- 2.1.11 In conclusion, there appears to be no evidential basis on which to conclude that mitigation for a net increase in dwellings within Purbeck district over the Local Plan period is not required to avoid adverse effects on the Dorset Heathlands SPA, SAC and Ramsar site. There is also no evidential basis on which to move away from a 400m 'no net new residences' zone, given the high level of existing housing within very close proximity (400m) to the European sites and the likelihood that a similarly high level of net new housing would come forward without strategic controls. There is also no basis on which to exclude gypsy & traveller sites or previously-developed land from the prohibition on net new residential development within 400m.
- 2.1.12 SANG appear to be an achievable solution for much of the new housing expected in Purbeck district, particularly if this is focussed on large developments that will provide their own bespoke SANG. However, it is considered that in cases where SANG cannot be achieved, such as may well be the case around Swanage, there is potential, given the small number of dwellings likely to be affected, to explore opportunities for improving strategic access to the wider countryside as an alternative to actual SANG. Individual proposals for this would require consideration on a case by case basis.

3 Introduction

3.1.1 In October 2015 Purbeck District Council commissioned AECOM to provide a critical review of the existing Dorset Heaths SPA mitigation approach in order to consider other potential (and actual) approaches to managing development impacts on heathland SPAs and SACs. In particular, the study is intended to investigate whether alternative distributions of housing could be explored for the Partial Review of PLP1 (for example, any justification for delivering housing within 400m of the Dorset Heathlands SPA/SAC) or whether there are different ways of delivering sufficient mitigation where, and if, SANG prove difficult to achieve.

3.1.2 Specifically, the study was asked to explore the following matters:

1. Whether stakeholder feedback from town and parish council workshops and through consultation on a Partial Review of the Local Plan (Issues and Options) could be implemented through amended planning policy;
2. Whether there are any examples of different approaches being used elsewhere in the UK or Europe which could be applied in Purbeck;
3. Whether any amendments can be made to the current policy in regard to the 400m zone, to introduce an element of flexibility around residential development within this zone (including consideration as to whether there is a special case to develop brownfield sites for housing in proximity to heathland, or sites for affordable housing or Gypsy and Traveller provision);
4. Consideration as to whether sites which are within the 400m buffer zone but are at a further walking distance than 400m from the heathland, and sites which are separated from the heathland by a major road, or other significant barrier (e.g. MOD fencing or a water course) could be suitable for development;
5. Consideration as to whether there are any alternatives to SANG in Purbeck, given the large amount of open space (particularly for dog walkers) in the district, whilst ensuring that any alternative approach is able to be delivered and monitored;
6. How best the Council can deliver heathland mitigation for development within the 400m-5km zone, including how best to optimise the funding available through S106 and the Community Infrastructure Levy to get maximum benefit whilst still avoiding impacts on the heaths;
7. Potential alternative and/or additional policy approaches to achieving compliance with the Directive, including consideration of spatially distinct approaches in different areas of the district;
8. Implications of all perceivable alternative and/or additional approaches for biodiversity; and
9. Implications of all perceivable alternative and/or additional approaches for local planning authorities, developers and other stakeholders.

3.1.3 The report is therefore structured around these matters, with a section for each matter in the order presented above.

3.2 Housing Development and Spatial Planning in Purbeck

3.2.1 The Purbeck Local Plan was adopted in November 2012, and includes housing policy that sets out provision for delivery of 2,520 new dwellings between 2006 and 2027, at a rate of 120 per annum.

3.2.2 The Plan was subject to Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA), and the HRA of the 'Core Strategy – Proposed Changes to the Pre-Submission'³ was able to conclude that:

3.2.3 *"As the Core Strategy has progressed, our assessment of the development proposals has shown that, without mitigation measures, adverse effects would be likely as a result of the Core Strategy alone, either as single elements or as a combination of elements within the plan for each of these issues... However, mitigation measures, which would eliminate these effects, have been developed alongside the progression of the plan, and now, at this Proposed Changes to Pre-Submission stage, the*

³ Liley, D. and Tyldesley, D (2011). Habitat Regulations Assessment of the Purbeck Core Strategy: Proposed Changes to the Pre-Submission Version September 2011. Footprint Ecology

mitigation measures are considered to be adequately integrated into the plan, providing a robust mechanism to ensure that development will not adversely affect the European sites.”

- 3.2.4 The Purbeck Local Plan is now being subjected to a Partial Review for 2017, which will consider, amongst other issues, the potential for higher housing growth rates. A Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) was undertaken for Eastern Dorset and this indicated an Objectively Assessed Need for 4,760 or more additional dwellings in Purbeck district, equating to a total delivery of 238 dwellings per annum between 2013 and 2033⁴.
- 3.2.5 The Partial Review has undergone Issues and Options consultation between January and March 2015. The Partial Review Issues and Options have been subjected to HRA⁵.

3.3 Current Approach to Heathland SPA Mitigation in Purbeck

- 3.3.1 European designated sites contained within Purbeck District that contain significant heathland components are;
- Dorset Heathlands SPA;
 - Dorset Heathlands SAC; and
 - Dorset Heaths (Purbeck & Wareham) and Studland Dunes SAC.
- 3.3.2 Appendix B contains the Natura 2000 data sheets for these designations. Additionally there are pSPAs and areas of land that are functionally linked to existing SPAs through supporting populations of birds for which the SPAs are designated.
- 3.3.3 Beyond the boundaries of Purbeck there are European sites where recreational pathways have been demonstrated to exist with residents of Purbeck traveling to visit sites containing heathland – notably The New Forest SAC/SPA.
- 3.3.4 The Local Plan included a range of mitigation measures, based on evidence derived over a number of studies, in order to avoid likely significant effects on heathland within Purbeck. Measures were set out in a Heathland Supplementary Planning Document (SPD).
- 3.3.5 The Local Plan (section 8.8.6.1) states that *“All residential development and tourist accommodation within 5km of the heathlands must provide effective mitigation measures. More direct impacts increase substantially where residential development occurs within proximity to heathlands and therefore residential intensification will not be permitted within 400 metres of heathland.”*
- 3.3.6 Policy DH (Dorset Heaths International Designations) states that *“development will not be permitted unless it can be ascertained that it will not lead to an adverse effect upon the integrity, of the Dorset Heaths’ International designations. The Council is jointly preparing a Heathlands DPD with affected neighbouring authorities to set out a long-term mitigation strategy to ensure that the growth planned for South East Dorset can be accommodated without having an adverse effect upon the integrity of the Dorset Heaths.*
- 3.3.7 *This policy will apply until the Heathlands DPD supersedes it:*
- 3.3.8 *The following forms of development (including changes of use) will not be permitted within a 400m buffer around protected heathland:*
- *Residential (C3) development that would involve a net increase in dwellings;*
 - *Tourist accommodation including hotels, guest houses, boarding houses, bed and breakfast accommodation, tented camping and caravans which require planning permission (C1 uses) and self-catering tourist accommodation; and*
 - *Equestrian-related development that may directly or indirectly result in an increased adverse impact on the heathland.*

⁴ Eastern Dorset Strategic Housing Market Assessment: Interim Findings for Purbeck District (2015). GL Hearn.

⁵ Liley, D. (2015). Habitats Regulations Assessment of the Partial Review of the Purbeck Local Plan Part 1. Footprint Ecology.

- 3.3.9 *Between 400 metres and 5km of a heathland, new residential development and tourist accommodation will be required to take all necessary steps on site to avoid or mitigate any adverse effects upon the internationally designated site's integrity or, where this cannot be achieved within the residential development, to make a contribution towards mitigation measures designed to avoid such adverse effects taking place. Measures will include:*
- *Provision of open space and appropriate facilities to meet recreation needs and deflect pressure from heathland habitats;*
 - *Heathland support areas;*
 - *Warden services and other heathland/harbour management;*
 - *Access and parking management"*
- 3.3.10 The mitigation for the Dorset Heathlands derives from the approach adopted for the Thames Basin Heaths SPA and is comprised of two strands: provision of alternative greenspace for recreation in order to reduce pressure on the European sites, and management and monitoring of access on European sites, to minimise the pressure exerted by recreation that is not diverted by alternative greenspace provision. The provision of alternative greenspace for the Thames Basin Heaths is delivered by cross-authority partnership working, with each local authority involved having flexibility to tailor their own delivery within a partnership framework.
- 3.3.11 The Dorset Heathlands has a more consistent approach over five local authorities allowing one jointly agreed strategy adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document within each local planning authority.
- 3.3.12 Without mitigation, the following effects of increased numbers of residential dwellings may be anticipated on the Dorset Heathlands SPA/Ramsar site and Dorset Heaths SAC:
- Predation of Dartford warbler, nightjar, woodlark and reptiles by domestic cats;
 - Increased fire risk; and
 - Disturbance of SPA birds (and also associated trampling, littering, introduction of non-native species and eutrophication of SAC/Ramsar designated habitats).
- 3.3.13 Mitigation projects have previously been approved by a stakeholder group incorporating relevant local authorities, developers and statutory bodies. More recently delivery of mitigation has been led by local authorities independently, being responsible for 85% of funds through contributions. Purbeck employs one part-time warden with a heathland mitigation role. Mitigation in Purbeck comprises on-site management measures, with commitment to deliver Strategic Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG), by mechanisms to be agreed. Funding for delivery of mitigation is through a combination of Section 106 agreements and Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) contributions.
- 3.3.14 Funded approaches to mitigation have included:
- On-site wardens;
 - Education
 - Improvements to areas off-heath for public access;
 - Creation of alternative sites for public access;
 - Land purchases adjacent to existing heathland for public access;
 - Fire-fighting infrastructure;
 - On-site management; and
 - Monitoring.
- 3.3.15 Purbeck area has been included in funding to support Nature Improvement Areas supported by Defra, DCLG, Environment Agency, Forestry Commission and Natural England. The projects being undertaken through partnership working (2012-2015) have included:
- Fire Management Planning;
 - Landscape Permeability; and
 - Visitor Management Planning – visitor surveys from this work have led to reports by Footprint Ecology including analysis of heathland use by visitors and management recommendations. The 'Wild Purbeck NIA Recommendations towards a Visitor

Management Strategy' report⁶ includes several recommendations to achieve improved co-ordination of use of the heathlands, but these do not directly relate to delivery of increased levels of housing, focussing more on integration, communication and management regarding existing uses of Purbeck's landscapes. They do identify, through discussion with key stakeholders, a map of conservation priority areas in relation to vulnerability to recreational pressure – the most sensitive areas are clustered around Poole Harbour and along the Purbeck Ridge to the west of the harbour.

3.4 Purbeck Local Plan Review Consultation and Workshops

- 3.4.1 Matter 1 essentially sets the background for this entire report in that it asks whether stakeholder feedback from town and parish council workshops and through consultation on a Partial Review of the Local Plan (Issues and Options) could be implemented through amended planning policy.
- 3.4.2 During October and November 2014, Town and Parish Council workshops were held in order to discuss the Purbeck Local Plan Partial Review and the implications for heathland management. The current approach to heathland management in Purbeck was discussed. The main strengths were considered to be that the existing approach:
- Enables residential development within 5 km;
 - Is consistent across SE Dorset; and
 - Is a consistent approach, which has been tried and tested.
- 3.4.3 The major weaknesses of the current approach were considered as being:
- Restrictions in the 400m zone puts extra pressure on greenfield sites whilst brownfield sites remain undeveloped;
 - The 400m zone could potentially be more flexible; and
 - A direct link between monitoring data and SANG in particular, was felt to be unproven.
- 3.4.4 The following possible opportunities worthy of exploration going forward were identified:
- Review the rigidity of the 400m boundary;
 - Consider whether there are areas within the 400m-5km zone where mitigation is not required; and
 - Improve working between heathland owners, managers and projects.
- 3.4.5 Concerns raised were:
- There can be no development if we cannot demonstrate no adverse impact on heathlands;
 - The escalating costs of delivering mitigation and managing SANG in perpetuity; and
 - That development which is exempt from CIL must still be mitigated.
- 3.4.6 Consultation of the Purbeck Local Plan Partial Review Issues and Options was undertaken in 2015. Responses were published in June 2015.
- 3.4.7 All of the statutory agencies supported the retention of the 400m exclusion zone and mitigation between 400m and 5km. They also highlighted that the 400m zone was established following robust research into how heathland is affected when houses are built in near proximity. The Borough of Poole also supported this view and reinforced the lack of any new evidence and the positive track record of the current partnership approach.
- 3.4.8 Natural England emphasised that the approach is supported by a substantial and scientifically robust evidence base which has been tested at Local Plan EIPs, Public Inquiries and numerous public hearings determined by competent authorities from the Secretary of State to the Planning Inspectorate as well as by Purbeck District Council.
- 3.4.9 Those that disagreed with the current approach regarded the 400m zone as inflexible and suggested that perhaps more account should be taken of accessibility of the nearby heathland and any barriers there might be to access. There were few additional comments from those that disagreed with the 400m – 5km mitigation zone but included: getting the SANG in the right place; giving consideration on

⁶ Lake, S., Cruickshanks, K. & Phillipson, P. (2014). Wild Purbeck NIA Recommendations towards a Visitor Management Strategy. Footprint Ecology.

a case-by-case basis to allow specific mitigation; and keep payments to a minimum to reduce impact on dwelling cost.

- 3.4.10 Other suggestions included working with the National Trust on delivery of SANG and that alternative approaches should be considered, e.g. allowing developers to pay for offsite improvement works to enhance existing spaces or to provide contributions towards the provision of visitor facilities at less sensitive heath locations. The Council has responded to the latter point by stating that in very exceptional circumstances the Council will consider alternative approaches, with the support of Natural England. There are a number of examples in south east Dorset where existing sites have been enhanced to function as a SANG. The draft joint Dorset Heathland Planning Framework 2015-2020 Supplementary Planning Document states in paragraph 5.3 that '*Other (than SANG) projects are likely to be more bespoke to local areas and for example may consist of creating linkages between open green spaces, recreational facilities such as BMX tracks ...*' and in paragraph 5.4 that '*Third parties may bring forward proposals for consideration by the local authorities and Natural England*'. This could not be as an alternative to CIL as CIL is non-negotiable but it was considered that it could be achievable where, for example, a settlement extension is expected to provide a SANG, or for a significant tourist development.
- 3.4.11 The Council also noted that developers have attempted to show that their developments could be mitigated through the use of cat proof fences to stop cats getting onto heathland, or covenants on new housing preventing ownership of cats and dogs. At appeal, inspectors have consistently followed Natural England's advice and dismissed applications within the 400 metre buffer. The buffer has been implemented consistently and upheld at appeal since its introduction in 2007. In February 2012, following the call in by government of a planning application granted by the Borough of Poole for 400 dwellings within the 400 metre buffer at Talbot Village, government overturned the planning permission. The Secretary of State agreed with the Inspector who felt that the mitigation proposed by the developer was not suitable. The cat proof fences would create a prison environment and any covenants on dog or cat ownership would be unenforceable in the longer term. Many protected heaths are also Open Access Land as defined by the CROW Act 2000 and people literally cannot be excluded from them. The Urban Heaths Partnership provides an education programme which encourages appropriate behaviour when visiting heaths and other countryside sites.
- 3.4.12 The remainder of this report considers some of the issues raised through the consultation and workshops; specifically:
1. Whether there is useful precedent from other SPAs designated for nightjar, Dartford warbler and woodlark which could be drawn upon for the Dorset Heathlands SPA;
 2. Whether there is a basis to apply flexibility in treating the 400m exclusion zone; and
 3. Whether there is merit (in terms of effectiveness and best use of funds) to delivering SANG for development in Purbeck in areas where SANG delivery is otherwise very constrained.

4 Alternative Mitigation Approaches – Other European Sites

4.1.1 In line with the requirements of Matter 2, AECOM first undertook a desk-based review of the other UK SPAs that have been designated for Dartford warbler, nightjar and woodlark in order to establish whether the mitigation approach being applied at Dorset Heathlands SPA/SAC/Ramsar site is being applied to other SPAs with similar interest features. The other SPAs designated for nightjar and woodlark in the UK are:

- Thames Basin Heaths SPA (also designated for Dartford warbler)
- Wealden Heaths Phase 2 SPA (also designated for Dartford warbler)
- Thursley, Hankley & Frensham Commons SPA (also known as Wealden Heaths Phase 1 SPA) (also designated for Dartford warbler)
- Breckland SPA
- Ashdown Forest SPA
- East Devon Pebblebed Heaths SPA (also designated for Dartford warbler)
- New Forest SPA (also designated for – among other species - Dartford warbler and wintering hen harrier, as is Dorset Heathlands)
- Sandlings SPA
- Thorne & Hatfield Moors SPA; and
- Minsmere – Walberswick SPA.

4.1.2 Not all of these are predominantly heathland but they all contain heathland elements which support many of the species for which the Dorset Heathlands SPA is designated. It is clear from this review that the approach being taken to the Dorset Heathlands SPA is being applied to several other SPAs (particularly the Thames Basin Heaths SPA, Pebblebed Heaths SPA and Ashdown Forest SPA), but is not being applied to the majority of SPAs for which Dartford warbler, nightjar and woodlark are designated interest features. In particular, the majority of the above SPAs do not have any prohibition on net new housing within 400m and the different SPAs exhibit a range of alternative mitigation approaches which have passed scrutiny at Examination in Public. These sites are therefore the focus of the analysis to ascertain the site-specific reasons for the difference in approach.

4.2 Wealden Heaths (Phase 1 and 2) SPAs

4.2.1 The mitigation approach to the Wealden Heaths is:

- Net new housing is permitted within 400m of both SPAs (Phase 1 and 2) but there is a limit on the amount of net new housing that is accepted in this zone. That limit is currently set at 33 dwellings for each SPA, including new gypsy and traveller sites, which equates to a c. 1% increase in the number of net dwellings within the zone. The number of dwellings is not an 'impact threshold' but is rather an estimate of the number of dwellings for which the Councils expect applications. It was agreed with Natural England that the expected development pressure within 400m was sufficiently small that the matter could be dealt with on an application-by-application basis and no actual prohibition on net new development within 400m is required;
- The core recreational catchment is defined as a 5km buffer around the SPA. This has been established via bespoke visitor surveys of the SPA, with the 5km zone reflecting the point of origin of approximately 75% of visitors. There is no blanket requirement for all net new housing within the zone to provide mitigation. Rather, it was agreed that since the vast majority of new housing within 5km of the SPA (c. 75%) would be focussed on two development sites (known as 'Whitehill-Bordon' and 'Lovesley Farm') those two sites should provide mitigation similar to Thames Basin Heaths (i.e. SANG at 8ha per 1000 population and access management contributions). By mitigating 75% of the new housing this way it was agreed that there was no strategic requirement for the other new housing in the

catchment to provide mitigation since the overall change in population (discounting Whitehill Bordon and Lowesly Farm) was sufficiently small that no in combination effect would arise;

- Instead, mitigation requirements for other new housing within 5km of the SPA would be determined on a case-by-case basis taking into account the proximity of the development to the SPA and the number of houses involved. No formal rules for this have been devised, but in general developments of more than 50 dwellings located within 1km of either SPA are being required to provide mitigation on the basis that they are large enough and close enough to have a site-specific impact on the SPA. Smaller developments or those situated further away are not being required to provide mitigation.

4.2.2 The mitigation to be provided is therefore identical to that for Dorset Heathlands (i.e. SANG at 8ha per 1000 population and financial contributions to access management) but the manner in which it is being applied differs. It is not being generically applied to all new housing within 5km of the SPA but rather is being applied only to the two sites responsible for 75% of that new housing, on the basis that the residual unmitigated increase in recreational activity would be sufficiently small that Natural England agree no adverse effect on integrity of the SPA would result. Equally, there is no prohibition on housing within 400m of the SPA, on the basis that the expected number of new dwellings within that zone is small.

4.3 Breckland SPA

4.3.1 The SPA habitat in this area of relevance to nightjar and woodlark is primarily plantation rather than heathland (although blocks of heathland do exist). No strategic recreational pressure mitigation solution exists, or is being required by Natural England, around this SPA. Rather decisions appear to be being made on a case-by-case basis. There is no prohibition on net new housing within 400m of those parts of the SPA that support nightjar and woodlark unless they also lie within 1,500m of those parts of the SPA supporting stone curlew.

4.4 Sandlings SPA

4.4.1 The HRA for the Suffolk Coastal Core Strategy determined that the new housing provisions within Ipswich Borough or Suffolk Coastal District were considered likely to result in an increase in visitor recreation on European sites within 1km (for people walking) and 8km (for people driving to a car parking location). It was judged that a c. 8% increase in visitors to Sandlings SPA could be expected to arise from new housing planned for Suffolk Coastal District and Ipswich Borough over the plan period. It was concluded that the current visitor levels are causing harm and that a further 8% increase in visitors would therefore be 'not insignificant',

4.4.2 The mitigation strategy outlined in the HRA is not particularly specific but does recommend that mitigation would ideally take the form of a new Country Park *'in order to provide strategic green space for the population of greater Ipswich, particularly the northern part of the Borough'* and the provision of wardening and visitor management measures, guided by a visitor management plan, to manage and monitor recreational access and birds on designated sites. There is however no detailed mitigation strategy assigning mitigation to distance bands, determining the financial contribution required from new dwellings in each distance band or defining a scale of natural greenspace provision per 1,000 population. There is no prohibition on net new housing within 400m of the SPA.

4.5 Thorne & Hatfield Moors SPA

4.5.1 Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council has produced an Open Access Management Plan for Thorne and Hatfield Moors. This includes measures that will help to alleviate the pressure of increased numbers of visitors on Thorne and Hatfield Moors. Specifically the plan includes measures such as employing wardens, using interpretive signs and managing the habitats on site. Policy 17 of the Doncaster Core Strategy on Green Infrastructure acts to support the Thorne and Hatfield Moors Access Strategy by seeking to provide sufficient quality open space both within new and existing developments. As discussed in the supporting text this should help to prevent increased recreational pressure on Thorne and Hatfield Moors. In addition, Policy 16 requires new developments within 3km of Thorne and Hatfield Moors to provide a net gain in nightjar foraging habitat. This will act to prevent development impacting upon the nightjar population on Thorne and Hatfield Moors.

4.5.2 The mitigation requirements are expressed in broad terms. Although mitigation is assigned to distance bands, and that mitigation includes both contributions to access management and provision of

greenspace, there are no generic thresholds for provision set (e.g. no equivalent to the 8ha/1000 population criterion) and no detailed standards for provision of that greenspace. There is no prohibition on net new housing within 400m of the SPA, probably because the open moorland nature of the area renders it unlikely that proposals for housing within that zone will arise.

4.6 The New Forest SPA

4.6.1 The most recent publication of particular relevance is the Footprint Ecology Report "Urban development and the New Forest SPA", prepared for the New Forest National Park Authority. In discussing potential mitigation measures, the report finds little merit in establishing a development exclusion buffer zone around the New Forest's existing settlements such as the 400 metre zone used for other heathland SPAs in southern England. This reflects, in part, the particular travel patterns of the New Forest's recreational users. Instead, the report recommends that resources are pooled into a strategic mitigation scheme focused on people management and designed to complement the National Park's existing Recreation Management Strategy. Recommended elements of mitigation include:

- A survey of all parking locations within the National Park to inform management options.
- Heightened ranger presence at key locations during March-August to ensure responsible access.
- Promotion of routes for local residents away from sensitive areas, particularly during the bird breeding season.
- Management of pathways to influence visitor use.
- Community work to communicate issues to local residents.
- Reduction of disturbance around honey buzzard nest sites, for example by providing dedicated bird watching points.
- Further research to identify the factors determining distribution and abundance of Annex I bird species in the New Forest.

4.6.2 SANG, as such, are not recommended for the New Forest. However, this is due to the unique historic and cultural role of the New Forest and the extent of its visitor catchment which spreads across the South-East and further afield. The argument is made that it would be effectively impossible to replicate the New Forest visitor experience in SANG and therefore resources would be much more efficiently and effectively deployed on enhanced access management.

4.7 Analysis

4.7.1 This demonstrates that there are certainly other solutions in the UK available, other than the Thames Basin Heaths/Dorset Heaths approach, and which have been tested at Examination in Public as the basis for Core Strategy/Local Plan mitigation. To judge whether these approaches would be more appropriate for application to the Dorset Heathlands than the existing approach, it is necessary to compare the geographic and demographic settings of the SPAs. The Dorset Heathlands is a very large SPA in terms of total area (almost 8,165 ha) but is also extremely fragmented; within Purbeck district alone it consists of over fifty separate parcels of land dispersed across the district, some of which are extremely small (less than 0.5ha in area). The Wealden Heaths Phase 2 is in East Hampshire and southern Surrey and consists of six large contiguous parcels of land: Woolmer Forest (which is split into two parcels by the A3), Ludshott Common/Bramshott Common, Kingsley Common, Broxhead Common and Hindhead Common. The smallest parcel is Kingsley Common, measuring almost 40ha. The largest parcel is Woolmer Forest, measuring over 820ha. Overall, the Wealden Heaths Phase 2 is a much smaller SPA than the Dorset Heathlands, but is also largely unfragmented. In general this means that its designated bird populations are much less vulnerable to edge effects⁷ than the designated bird populations of the Dorset Heathlands.

4.7.2 The setting of the Wealden Heaths and Dorset Heathlands also differs. The Dorset Heathlands are mostly within a rural setting but, because there are so many small dispersed parcels, there is a high population density within they key distance bands (400m and 5km). Undoubtedly this is at least partly

⁷ The term 'edge effects' refers to the fact that impacts from activities outside a site are likely to be felt more keenly at the edge of the site than further towards the middle. Small sites have a high proportion of edge to middle and therefore are more vulnerable because very little of the site is far enough away from the edge to be undisturbed.

due to the close proximity of both Bournemouth and Poole, which are two of the largest towns in south-west England with a combined population of 332,000 residents. The Wealden Heaths is also in an essentially rural setting, but unlike the Dorset Heathlands there are no large urban areas within 5km (the largest settlements within 5km are Bordon and Haslemere, with a combined population of 27,000 residents).

- 4.7.3 The differences between the sites are clearest when presented in a table of demographic information. In Table 1 below, data for Dorset Heathlands and Wealden Heaths Phase 2 SPA are provided for comparison. Data for Thames Basin Heaths are also included as this is considered to be a highly urbanised heathland SPA for which a mitigation strategy very similar to that for the Dorset Heathlands has been adopted.

Table 1. Comparison of the demographic setting for Dorset Heathlands SPA/SAC/Ramsar site with that for Thames Basin Heaths SPA and with other relevant SPAs for which a different mitigation approach is known to have been adopted

	Site Area (ha)	Number of existing dwellings within each key zone		Dwelling density per ha of designated site	
		0-400m	0-5km	0-400m	0-5km
Dorset Heathlands SPA	8,164.82	33,431	248,749	4.09	30.47
Thames Basin Heaths SPA	8,286.92	30,253	312,559	3.65	37.72
Breckland SPA ⁸	39,283.96	9,165	56,044	0.23	1.43
Wealden Heaths Phase 2 SPA	2,050.69	2,909	30,959	1.42	15.10
Thursley, Hankley & Frensham Commons (Wealden Heaths Phase 1) SPA	1,874.90	1,777	30,736	0.95	16.39
Sandlings SPA	3,391.19	1,147	18,557	0.34	5.47
Minsmere-Walberswick HRA ⁷	2,018.92	908	10,760	0.45	5.33
Thorne & Hatfield Moors SPA	2,449.20	6	9,142	0.02	3.73

- 4.7.4 These data indicate fairly clearly that the Dorset Heathlands SPA bears a much closer demographic resemblance to the Thames Basin Heaths than to the Wealden Heaths Phase 2 or to any of the other SPAs designated for similar species in England for which alternative mitigation strategies have been adopted.
- 4.7.5 The number of existing houses within 400m is actually slightly greater at Dorset Heathlands than at Thames Basin Heaths and more than tenfold greater than around Wealden Heaths Phase 2 SPA, Thursley, Hankley and Frensham Commons SPA, or Sandlings SPA. It is also three times greater than around the Breckland SPA. The number of houses within the 5km zone also bears greater similarity to the Thames Basin Heaths than the other SPAs, with c. 249,000 dwellings within 5km of the Dorset Heathlands compared to c. 31,000 within a similar distance of the Wealden Heaths, c. 19,000 within 5km of Sandlings and c. 56,000 within a similar distance of Breckland⁹. Therefore, although relatively few SPAs designated for Dartford warbler, nightjar and woodlark have a 400m exclusion zone surrounding them, this mainly appears to be a reflection of a) the low development pressure already present within 400m and b) the small amount of new housing that would be expected in the absence of such a zone. In contrast, for those SPAs where the existing density of development within 400m is already high and a substantial further increase could realistically be expected in the absence of a formal exclusion zone, it is justifiable that such a zone should be applied. This certainly would apply to the Dorset Heathlands SPA/Ramsar site and Dorset Heaths SAC.
- 4.7.6 Even if one looks at Purbeck district alone, the density of housing within 400m of the Dorset Heathlands SPA/SAC/Ramsar site is high. At the time of the 2011 Census, Purbeck District had a total of 19,583 households and 22,129 dwellings. As such, the district-wide proportion of households to dwellings is 0.8849. This is substantially lower than the national average of 0.96 and reflects the relatively high number of holiday homes and second homes in the district. Using postcode points as a geographic plotter, and a database of households per postcode point it is established that 11,333 of Purbeck's households are within the 400m SPA/SAC/Ramsar site buffer. This indicates that $(11,333/0.8849=)$ 12,807 of Purbeck's dwellings are within the buffer. In other words, 57.87% of all existing households/dwellings in the district lie within 400m of the SPA/SAC/Ramsar site. This is a very high proportion compared for example to the Wealden Heaths authorities (approx. 3% of

⁸ The numbers for Breckland SPA and Minsmere-Walberswick SPA are more difficult to compare with the other SPAs because large parts of both are designated for other birds and are unsuitable for nightjar and woodlark.

dwelling in Waverley and East Hampshire districts lies within 400m of the Wealden Heaths Phase 2 SPA) and largely reflects the highly fragmented and geographically dispersed nature of the SPA/SAC/Ramsar site.

- 4.7.7 If one moves from consideration of the 400m zone to considering the current proposals for future housing within 5km of the Dorset Heathlands there remains a greater similarity to the Thames Basin Heaths than the Wealden Heaths Phase 2. Current adopted Core Strategies and Local Plans propose to deliver approximately 35,000 dwellings (including windfalls) within 5km of the Thames Basin Heaths over the period to 2030 and a similar number within 5km of the Dorset Heathlands. In contrast, the current Local Plans for East Hampshire District, Waverley District and the South Downs National Park expect less than 4,000 new dwellings (including windfalls) in total within 5km of the Wealden Heaths Phase 2 SPA over the period from c. 2011-c. 2030. While the proportional net increase in dwellings within each 5km zone is therefore similar (c. 12%) the total number of expected dwellings is much smaller at Wealden Heaths. Moreover, as discussed, 75% of the new housing around the Wealden Heaths Phase 2 will be on just two development sites (and as such, mitigation details can be more easily deferred to individual planning applications), whereas in the Dorset Heathlands area it will be much more dispersed.
- 4.7.8 The ultimate conclusion of this analysis must be that the Dorset Heathlands is not very comparable to the Wealden Heaths Phase 2 SPA or any of the other UK SPAs for which a significantly different mitigation strategy has been adopted, either geographically or demographically. In contrast, the Dorset Heathlands is very comparable both geographically and demographically to the Thames Basin Heaths. As such, there is little basis on which to argue that the Dorset Heathlands should be treated more like the Wealden Heaths, Sandlings, Minsmere-Walberswick, Thorne & Hatfield Moors or Breckland than like the Thames Basin Heaths.
- 4.7.9 Precedents elsewhere in the country cannot therefore be drawn upon to justify a different approach to mitigation for Dorset Heathlands SPA, since it seems fairly clear that current and future demographic pressures apply to this SPA which do not apply to most other sites for which nightjar and woodlark are the designated interest features.

4.8 Outside the UK

- 4.8.1 There are over 2,500 SPAs across Europe designated for either nightjar, Dartford warbler, woodlark or a combination. However, many of these only support relatively small numbers of birds as opposed to the hundreds supported by the Dorset Heathlands. It is possible that other European countries have devised mitigation solutions from which Purbeck could draw. As a starting point the online resources of the European Environment Agency (www.eunis.eea.europa.eu) was used, along with the associated Natura 2000 data forms, to identify likely sites. Following the identification exercise we then used online facilities to explore whether recreational pressure/development mitigation solutions are identified and if so whether they can be transferred to a UK context.
- 4.8.2 The most likely areas where potentially useful strategies could exist were considered to be the extensive heathlands of the Belgian/Netherlands borderlands and parts of Germany. Much of the information available online did not discuss the specific issue of recreational disturbance (or urbanisation) in relation to these sites. It was however discussed at some length with regard to Kalmthoutse Heide SPA (part of the De Zoom – Kalmthoutse Heide park). This is a merger of two former parks, the Kalmthoutse Heide in Belgium and De Zoom in the Netherlands. The SPA itself measures 22km² (2,200ha). A very large part of the park is covered with heathland and it is designated for woodlark and nightjar, although only a few pairs are recorded (for example, 30 breeding pairs of nightjar and 40 pairs of woodlark). Disturbance by recreational pressure is acknowledged as an issue according to the EU LIFE Project for the site: '*Lack of recreational measures such as paths, watchtowers, look-out points, ... cause damage to important natural values such as woodlark (*Lullula arborea*) and European nightjar (*Caprimulgus europaeus*) ... It is important that this project solves these issues by constructing a watchtower and look-out platform*'¹⁰.
- 4.8.3 The mitigation measures being offered for this site consist of a series of access management measures, although they are intended to address recreational pressure generally rather than being

⁹ Of course, the Wealden Heaths Phase 2 SPA is a considerably smaller site in terms of total area (and total perimeter) and would therefore be expected to have a smaller total number of dwellings surrounding it, but even adjusting for that (by conversion to a ratio of housing density per hectare of site, in the last two columns of the table) the relative housing density within 400m of the Wealden Heaths Phase 2 is only a third of that around the Dorset Heathlands, while the relative density within 5km is half that of the Dorset Heathlands.

¹⁰ <http://www.grensparkzk.nl/threats-project-area>

specifically associated with planned new residential development. The measures include information alongside walking paths, new targeted recreational infrastructure (such as a watchtower, intended to focus recreational activity away from more sensitive areas) and zoning of the site to create areas where walkers are not allowed access. The broad nature of the measures that are being deployed on site is similar to those being deployed in the Dorset Heathlands area. However, the concept of SANG (or something similar) is not utilised, presumably because a large National Park is involved and there are no realistic prospects of drawing people away to other locations. Moreover, it should be noted that because the nightjar population (in particular) is quite localised and small within the SPA it may be easier to control disturbance through access management compared to those SPAs with much larger populations (such as Dorset Heathlands SPA, which supports almost 400 pairs of nightjar compared to the 30 pairs supported by Kalmthoutse Heide SPA).

- 4.8.4 Most of the sites on mainland Europe for which nightjar and woodlark are designated interest features support relatively few pairs compared to the Dorset Heathlands SPA, which is inevitably likely to make it easier to manage recreation. One of the relatively few sites that could be identified outside the UK and which support over 100 pairs of nightjar is Militair Domein en Vallei van de Zwarte Beek SPA (Black Brook Valley and Military Area). This site supports c. 100 pairs of nightjar and 50 pairs of woodlark and has a total area similar to that of the Dorset Heathlands. Recreational pressure is also recognised as a concern on this site, and a site management strategy exists to tackle it. A first step in this recreational aspect was the development of a vision for the control and zoning of recreation. However, once again there appears to be no explicit link between this issue and development plans for surrounding local authorities.
- 4.8.5 A general theme across all the continental European sites we examined is that, although disturbance of nesting nightjar and woodlark from increased recreational pressure is recognised as a problem that needs to be managed, it appears to be treated primarily as a site management issue and there does not appear to be any clear link between mitigation measures proposed and particular planned future development in the surrounding area.
- 4.8.6 In general, it does appear that the UK is a European leader with regard to strategic multi-authority assessment and mitigation solutions tied to planned future housing growth. As such, there are very limited parallels between the UK and other EU countries with regard to this specific issue. This is reflected in the fact that European literature reviews of recreational disturbance and urban pressure on nightjar and woodlark (which appear to be dominated by work in Dutch) tend to rely heavily on British research, including specific reference to the research conducted on the Dorset Heathlands¹¹.

4.9 Conclusion

- 4.9.1 There appears to be no substantive argument for an alternative strategy, fundamentally departing from the use of the 400m exclusion zone and 5km mitigation zone, and the application to mitigation requirements to all net new dwellings within the 5km zone. Although alternative strategies do exist, clear differences between those sites and the Dorset Heathlands can be identified. The rest of this report therefore focusses on a) whether it is possible through more detailed examination of the 400m zone (in particular) to achieve a more subtle zonation for development around the SPA/SAC/Ramsar site and b) the best way to utilise funds achieved.

¹¹ For example as cited in: Bijlsma Rob G. September 2006. Effecten van menselijke verstoring op grondbroedende vogels. In 'De Levende Natuur'.

5 Potential for refining the 400m exclusion zone

5.1.1 Matters 3 and 4 asked us to consider:

- a) Whether any amendments can be made to the current policy in regard to the 400m zone, to introduce an element of flexibility around residential development within this zone (including consideration as to whether there is a special case to develop brownfield sites for housing in proximity to heathland, or sites for affordable housing or Gypsy and Traveller provision); and
- b) Consideration as to whether sites which are within the 400m buffer zone but are at a further walking distance than 400m from the heathland, and sites which are separated from the heathland by a major road, or other significant barrier (e.g. MOD fencing or a water course) could be suitable for development.

5.1.2 This section therefore seeks to address both of these matters, in succession.

5.2 Flexibility in the principle of the 400m zone

5.2.1 To an extent, the potential for flexibility in the 400m zone in principle has already been discussed in Section 2. Numerous other European sites have no specific prohibition on housing within 400m of the SPA, although some do apply the mitigation requirement in a flexible manner (e.g. the Wealden Heaths Phase 2 SPA, where new housing within 400m generally does not require mitigation). However, Section 2 established that there are fundamental differences between those sites and the Dorset Heathlands; namely:

- a) the existing density of housing within 400m of the Dorset Heathlands is typically between ten and thirty-five times greater than that around those SPAs where no 400m exclusion zone exists, and as such this SPA/SAC/Ramsar site can be reasonably considered to already be under much more pressure from existing development than those other SPAs; and
- b) given this historic trend for large amounts of housing to be delivered very close to the various components of the SPA/SAC/Ramsar site, it is likely that (in the absence of any exclusion zone) the Dorset Heathlands would experience a much greater number of future housing proposals within 400m than is the case with the other SPAs. One of the main reasons for the decision not to apply a 400m exclusion zone around those other SPAs was that there is little expectation many applications to deliver housing will be received in any case, since it would not match previous patterns of development.

5.2.2 This means that the risk posed to the SPA/SAC/Ramsar site in the absence of strict controls on development within 400m is also much larger for the Dorset Heathlands than is the case for most other SPAs, particularly within the context of long-standing concerns about the trend towards urbanisation and fragmentation of the Dorset Heathlands.

5.2.3 We were also specifically asked to consider whether there is a special case to develop a) brownfield sites, b) sites for affordable housing or c) gypsy and traveller provision within 400m of the SPA/SAC/Ramsar site, even if other types of development are prohibited. We deal with each of those in order below.

5.2.4 Brownfield sites and affordable housing

5.2.5 We can see no ecological justification for treating brownfield sites or affordable housing differently from any other forms of net new residential development.

5.2.6 The impact on the SPA/SAC/Ramsar site stems from a relatively basic question: *'Will the development in question result in a net increase in the residential population (and cat population) of the 400m zone?'* If so, then it must be concluded that a net increase in urbanisation, cat predation and recreational pressure will result and, given the existing high density of residential development/cats within 400m of the SPA and the conclusion that this is already having an adverse effect on the SPA, it must also be concluded that an adverse effect on the integrity of the SPA would result without mitigation. Since it is also concluded that there is no feasible way to prevent cats from accessing the SPA (except where major rivers and roads intervene, see below) it must be concluded that no

effective mitigation is possible. Nothing inherent about brownfield sites or sites intended for affordable housing would make the occupants significantly less likely than other types of residential accommodation to either own cats or visit the SPA/SAC/Ramsar site if it is within easy walking distance.

Gypsy and traveller sites

5.2.7 In general, there is a discussion to be had as to whether the provision of gypsy and traveller sites is actually associated with a net increase in the gypsy and traveller population or whether it is more a matter of providing legal and properly serviced facilities to replace unofficial sites. In addition, unlike permanent conventional dwellings, there is a question as to whether gypsies and travellers utilise the pitches provided on a sufficiently regular and frequent basis to meaningfully increase the traveller population of a given area. For example, if past experience indicates that the majority of new pitches are likely to remain unoccupied most of the time (and particularly bearing in mind that woodlark and nightjar are most affected by disturbance during the spring and summer rather than the autumn and winter) then there may be a basis for excluding them from the considerations that would apply to other residential development.

5.2.8 The existing pattern of gypsy and traveller usage within Purbeck is understood to be as follows¹²:

- There are currently two authorised gypsy & traveller sites in Purbeck, both at Coldharbour. One of these (3 pitches in total) is a private site that lies entirely within the 400m zone. The other is a public site with 16 pitches, of which 2 lie within the 400m zone. It seems reasonable to estimate that approximately 23-36 people typically occupy the two camps combined.
- There are two unauthorised camps currently present within Purbeck (at Woolbridge and Hethfelton). However, both of these are over 400m from the SPA/SAC/Ramsar site; these two camps between them appear to accommodate c. 15 people;
- There are therefore a total of 5 pitches that currently lie within 400m of the SPA/SAC/Ramsar site in Purbeck;
- It appears reasonable to conclude that at least two, and potentially all five, of these pitches are essentially occupied all-year round. As such, a population of up to c. 9 people is reasonable¹³.

5.2.9 It appears that there is potential for an official site to replace the unofficial sites at Woolbridge and Hethfelton. However, there appears to be no particular need for any official replacement site to be located within the 400m zone, given that neither unofficial site is within that zone.

5.2.10 It therefore appears that in Purbeck any new gypsy & traveller pitches within the 400m zone would likely involve a net increase in the gypsy and traveller population within that zone (if not in the district), rather than a replacement of a legal site for an unofficial site, since there are no unofficial sites currently within the zone. Based on existing patterns of use it also seems very likely that, while individual families may come and go through the year, any new pitches have a good chance of being in effectively permanent use. On this basis we can see no reason to separate gypsy and traveller sites from other forms of residential accommodation that would lead to a net increase in the population of the 400m zone.

5.3 Flexibility in the practice of the 400m zone

5.3.1 As already documented, there are concerns over the intensification of residential development in South East Dorset and the resultant pressures placed upon Dorset Heaths SPA/SAC/Ramsar site by new occupants of developments living in close proximity to the heathlands. These are similar to the impacts being observed within the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area. Various studies¹⁴

¹² Based on data supplied via email from Keith Childs, Purbeck District Council

¹³ on the assumption of an average occupancy of c. 1.8 occupants per pitch based on current estimated occupancies of both sites

¹⁴ De Molinaar, H.J.G. (1998). On-the-spot appraisal of the Dorset heathland, UK. Report and recommendations to the standing committee on The Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats. Strasbourg: Council of Europe.

Haskins, L.E. (2000). Heathlands in an urban setting - effects of urban development on heathlands of south-east Dorset. *British Wildlife*, 4, 229-237.

Underhill-Day, J.C. (2005). A literature review of urban effects on lowland heaths and their wildlife. English Nature Research Note 623. English Nature(now Natural England)

have found that public access to lowland heathland, from nearby development, has led to an increase in wild fires, damaging recreational uses, the introduction of incompatible plants and animals, loss of vegetation and soil erosion and disturbance by humans and their pets amongst other factors have an adverse effect on the heathland ecology. These effects are most marked where development is within 400m of the SPA/SAC/Ramsar site. It is within this 400m zone that Natural England advises additional residential development is likely to have a significant adverse effect upon the Dorset Heathlands SPA/SAC/Ramsar site, either alone or in combination with other developments.

- 5.3.2 In order to investigate possibilities for flexibility in the 400m zone a high level assessment was undertaken to determine the presence of barriers within 400m of the SPA/SAC/Ramsar site that could prevent the movement of people and animals into the SPA to enable an increase in dwellings within 400m of the SPA/SAC/Ramsar site without resulting in a likely significant effect from effects of urbanisation and recreational pressures. A desk based study was undertaken reviewing mapping and aerial photography to identify the presence of potentially suitable barriers to the dispersal of people and/ or animals. Barriers considered include:
- Significant waterways – a barrier to both people and animals;
 - Dual carriageways – a barrier to both people and animals;
 - Railway lines – a barrier to people only.
 - MOD fencing – a barrier to people only.
- 5.3.3 From the desk based review, it is not possible to determine the presence of MOD fencing without undertaking a site visit to determine the presence or absence of fencing surrounding MOD sites. Time and budgetary constraints prevented the undertaking of site visits to record barriers. However, as a general principle it is considered that, while MOD fencing could act as a barrier to people (provided it is of a long enough extent and does not include any suitable entry points such as public rights of way), it is unlikely to act as a robust and suitable barrier to prevent smaller creatures such as agile cats and rats from crossing the fence and passing into the SPA/SAC/Ramsar site. The use of a covenant on any new dwelling within 400m of the SPA/SAC/Ramsar site has been suggested which could be included within new house deeds to prevent cat ownership. However, in reality it is not possible to enforce or police this, even within rental accommodation, and could not therefore be relied upon to prevent the presence of cats within 400m of the SPA. In light of the reasons detailed above, it is considered that the presence of an MOD fence would not act as a suitable barrier to prevent likely significant effects resulting from new housing within 400m of the SPA/SAC/Ramsar site and that any new housing within 400m of the SPA/SAC/Ramsar site would result in increased predation on nesting birds and reptiles by cats and rats.
- 5.3.4 When drilling down to a finer scale (e.g. to within 400m of the SPA), the only potential barrier features identified were significant waterways, motorways and railway lines. The locations of significant waterways, dual carriageways, and railway line within Purbeck District Council area are illustrated in Figure 1. No motorways exist within 400m of the SPA/SAC/Ramsar site.
- 5.3.5 On further inspection, many of the barrier features present within 400m of the SPA bisected or entered the SPA/SAC/Ramsar site rather than acting as a barrier between development (or potential development land) and the SPA. Barrier features bisecting and entering the SPA include the Swanage Railway Line and the South Western Main Line passing through Winfrith Heath SSSI, Holton and Sandford Heaths SSSI, Poole Harbour SSSI, Povington and Grange Heaths SSSI, Stoborough and Creech Heaths SSSI, and Blue Pool and Norden Heaths SSSI portions of Dorset Heathlands SPA/SAC/Ramsar site, and the rivers Frome and Trent/ Piddle along with portions of their smaller tributaries. However, the way in which these potential barrier features are located does not actually create a barrier between people and/ or animals and the SPA/SAC/Ramsar site since they still enable parts of the SPA to be accessed. Where a feature is present within 400m of the SPA that could provide a barrier to dispersal of people and/ or animals into the SPA/SAC/Ramsar site, access is generally offered across the feature via a crossing such as a road or a public right of way. The presence of these crossings essentially creates gaps in the barrier to allow for the dispersal of people and/ or animals into the SPA/SAC/Ramsar site, making the barrier penetrable and no longer effective at preventing people and/ or animals entering the SPA/SAC/Ramsar site and resulting in likely significant effects. Whilst the presence of a railway line could potentially prevent penetration by humans, it would not act as a barrier to cats and rats.
- 5.3.6 There are two portions of dual carriageway within the Study area. These are along the A35. The westernmost is located to the west of Bere Regis (Figure A1). This portion of dual carriageway is not located within 400m of the SPA/SAC/Ramsar site, so is not considered further. The eastern portion of

dual carriageway on the A35 within the study area is located between Lytchett Minster and Upton (Figure A3), continuing further east and out of the study area joining the A350 just east of Upton. This passes within 400m of the SPA/SAC/Ramsar site both at Lytchett Minster and Upton. As the dual carriageway ends at Lytchett Minster and reverts to a single carriageway road, it cannot be considered to act as a barrier to dispersal. However, it has been agreed with Natural England that the portion of dual carriageway at Upton that passes within 400m of the SPA/SAC/Ramsar site can act as a barrier to dispersal of people. At present the 400m zone in this location is being adjusted accordingly.

- 5.3.7 A further aspect of Objective 4 was to consider potential development sites which are within the 400m buffer zone but are at a further walking distance than 400m from the SPA/SAC/Ramsar site and whether there is a basis in these areas to conclude reduced impact on the SPA/SAC/Ramsar site. The first argument against this point is that cats and rats will still be able to go directly to the SPA/SAC/Ramsar site even if access for humans is more difficult. It is highly unlikely that small animals (such as cats and rats) will have to walk such a long and convoluted route to the SPA/SAC/Ramsar site as people due to their small size and agile nature. It can be considered that cats and rats will still have direct access to the SPA/SAC/Ramsar site to predate upon sensitive species (thus resulting in a likely significant effect). In addition to this, whilst a walking route for people may not be direct to the site and may be longer than 400m, it is unlikely that the distance for people to travel to enter the SPA/SAC/Ramsar site when their homes are located so close will be significantly longer.
- 5.3.8 As such, it can be considered that if housing were permitted within 400m of the SPA/SAC/Ramsar site, but the residents had a longer walking distance than 400m to the SPA, levels of recreational pressure and urbanisation would still exist and would still result in likely significant effects upon the SPA/SAC/Ramsar site.

6 How can the Council best deliver mitigation for development within the 400m-5km zone

- 6.1.1 Matters 5 and 6 in the brief were all intertwined with each other in that they asked us to consider how best the Council can deliver heathland mitigation for development within the 400m-5km zone. This included consideration of:
- Whether there are any alternatives to SANG in Purbeck; and
 - How best to optimise the funding available through S106 and the Community Infrastructure Levy to get maximum benefit whilst still avoiding impacts on the heaths.
- 6.1.2 As we have established in Section 3 of this report, there is no basis on which to conclude that mitigation for the impacts of net new residential development within 5km of the SPA is not required, Access management of the SPA/SAC/Ramsar site in some form or other is certain to be an unalterable mitigation requirement. Although the alternative mitigation strategies explored for other SPA's vary in their responses, when mitigation is identified as being necessary there is always an SPA management component. As such, funds towards access management of the SPA/SAC/Ramsar site are likely to be an ongoing requirement irrespective of what other solutions are devised.
- 6.1.3 We were asked to look into whether, accepting that mitigation is required, SANG are an essential component of the mitigation strategy in the Purbeck area, and whether there is scope for an alternative use of developer contributions in Purbeck in areas where SANG are proving challenging to secure.

6.2 SANG and possible alternatives where SANG cannot be delivered

- 6.2.1 A much larger proportion of Purbeck's existing population live very close to the Dorset Heathlands than is the case for the population of the Thames Basin Heaths authorities or Bournemouth/Poole. For example, almost 58% of the district's existing population lives within 400m of the SPA. This means that because of the attractiveness and proximity of heathlands in Purbeck, providing effective alternatives in parts of Purbeck is sometimes very difficult and even, for some potential housing locations, not possible.
- 6.2.2 Whilst the Council hasn't yet identified preferred options for providing additional homes through the Local Plan Partial Review, there are a number of large (200+ homes) housing sites which are being promoted to the Council for potential allocation. Potential SANGs have been proposed for some of these sites, and agreed in principle with Natural England. As such, if the Council chooses to allocate these large sites for development, it is likely that heathland mitigation will be able to be provided through SANGs. The fact the SANG, acceptable in principle to Natural England, have already been identified for a significant proportion of the new housing expected over the plan period (see Appendix A for details of SANG that have been agreed in principle for large developments) indicates that SANG appears to be a deliverable solution for most of Purbeck.
- 6.2.3 Since it has been tested at Examination in Public and Public Inquiry in several authorities (including in the Thames Basin Heaths area) it will be the most defensible solution to delivering alternative recreational access. In some parts of Purbeck it would potentially be very difficult to deliver any alternative to SANG, since so much of the countryside is already widely accessible; there are likely to be very few opportunities to provide further accessibility without creating specific honeypot sites. Moreover, where SANG are on agricultural land there can be a dual function in securing nutrient offsetting required for Poole Harbour SPA/Ramsar so avoiding issues of having to provide double mitigation (for both Dorset Heathlands and for Poole Harbour).
- 6.2.4 The Thames Basin Heaths experience tells us that even a modest SANG can be expensive to deliver and then manage in perpetuity (perpetuity being generally defined by the Thames Basin Heaths authorities as c. 80 years). Precise costs will vary depending on what is required to bring the site up to standard, but a budget of several million pounds is generally necessary for capital works and (in particular) to put aside an adequate sum to ensure certainty of long-term management, even with a fairly modest SANG of c. 10-15ha. The SHMA for Eastern Dorset has identified an Objectively

Assessed Need for a further 4,760 dwellings in Purbeck District between 2013 and 2033. Taking a maximum commitment of £1,524 per new dwelling, this would allow a maximum total of £7.25 million for heathland mitigation funding. A significant proportion of this must go to SAMM. However, the remainder is available to fund SANG delivery. It is understood that large developments would be expected to provide their own SANG without drawing upon this central pot. As such there are likely to be sufficient resources for delivery and management in perpetuity of sufficient SANG to accommodate the residents of 4,760 new dwellings. It is acknowledged however, that the Council, in collaboration with Natural England have begun the process of identifying suitable SANGs that would be delivered by individual developments as part of a development package.

- 6.2.5 However, the Council would still be expecting an element of windfall development, and may also wish to allocate smaller development sites or sites where SANGs cannot be agreed. In these circumstances, an alternative to SANGs may need to be considered. It is acknowledged that there are some parts of Purbeck for which SANG may be more difficult to deliver, for example in the Swanage area. It is in these areas, once the ability to deliver SANG have been investigated but exhausted, that other alternative mitigation measures may be able to be effective for the relatively small number of new residents likely to be involved.
- 6.2.6 In contrast to the Thames Basin Heaths area or Bournemouth/Poole, a large amount of the 5km zone around the SPA/SAC/Ramsar site in Purbeck district consists of open countryside crossed by relatively few roads (and even fewer major roads). Purbeck has a large percentage of its area covered by green space. SANG are intended to be honeypot sites that are sufficiently well located, easy to access, appealing in the experience presented and unconstrained in how they are used that people (particularly new residents) utilise them as an alternative to the SPA itself for the majority of their recreational visits if not for all of them. In areas where there is otherwise a paucity of open access countryside, and where what does exist imposes significant constraints on walkers and dog walkers (such as a large number of significant roads that require dogs to be repeatedly placed back on the lead over a fairly short distance), there are no real alternatives to SANG. For example, large areas around the Thames Basin Heaths SPA consists of urban conurbations with Bracknell, Sandhurst, Camberley, Frimley, Fleet, Farnborough, Aldershot and Farnham blending into one another to the west of the area and Guildford and Woking doing a similar thing to the east. As such, a large proportion of the core 5km visitor catchment of the Thames Basin Heaths SPA is predominantly urban rather than countryside and the relatively small amount of countryside that does exist is crossed by numerous substantial roads (such as the M3, A3, A31 and many others) and has relatively low accessibility. Inevitably therefore, the residents of these areas (particularly some districts such as Surrey Heath) have relatively little access to open unbroken 'natural' countryside. The same is true of the eastern part of the Dorset Heathlands core catchment, which consists essentially of the large urban conurbation of Bournemouth/Poole. SANG were a fundamental part of the mitigation solution chosen for the Thames Basin Heaths because it was recognised that a) one of the reasons the heathlands were so popular were that there were relatively few alternatives for many residents and b) that very lack of alternatives essentially meant that they had to be created from scratch.
- 6.2.7 The greater amount of semi-natural countryside in Purbeck means that there is potentially greater opportunity to provide improved access and a satisfactory recreational experience in the wider countryside than is the case in Poole/Bournemouth or the Thames Basin Heaths area. In areas of Purbeck where SANG prove extremely challenging to deliver, and depending on the specific details of the proposal, it may therefore be possible to address the few residual dwellings in these locations not already catered for by SANG (such as Swanage) by taking opportunities to maximise accessibility to the local semi-natural countryside.
- 6.2.8 In many parts of Purbeck district the semi-natural greenspace outside the SPA, to which access could be provided as an alternative is actually very constrained by a combination of landowner acceptance, existing high levels of public accessibility, inappropriate location to the probable main locations of development or presence of constraining features (such as nesting nightjar, Dartford warbler and woodlark in the plantations outside the SPA).
- 6.2.9 However, Natural England have commented in preparation of this report that, in parts of Purbeck district where strategic SANG cannot be delivered, such an approach would potentially be acceptable depending upon the details of what alternative countryside access was put forward and how it would be managed and facilitated in perpetuity. This differs from the situation in the Thames Basin Heaths where a much more rigid adherence to SANG is practiced and if a strategic SANG cannot be delivered, the associated housing cannot be delivered either.

6.3 Improving general resilience of Purbeck's natural greenspace and networks

- 6.3.1 Rather than an inability to deliver strategic SANG being an effective block on development therefore, what may be effective in areas where specific SANG prove unachievable is to target resources to generally improving the ecological attractiveness, physical accessibility and awareness of the countryside generally. For a given Purbeck resident, this would provide a range of options for entering the countryside within a short distance from home and walking (with dog off lead) for many miles in a circular walk through a range of habitats. As the general ecological quality and accessibility of the wider landscape increases the small number of residents in question should begin to disperse in how they choose to undertake recreation and thus reduce the current heavy focus on the SPA/SAC/Ramsar site.
- 6.3.2 One positive approach to improving the value of the landscapes is through better linkages between isolated pockets of heathland. This would involve liaison with existing stakeholders for habitat parcels of land outside the SPA/SAC/Ramsar site in order to determine if further opportunities exist to enhance current management in a manner that would be beneficial to the qualifying features of the SPA/SAC/Ramsar site. This is more likely to be effective for those settlements (such as Swanage) that are located several kilometres from the SPA/SAC/Ramsar site than for those located much closer.
- 6.3.3 Examples of potential areas that may merit further consideration around Swanage (which would clearly require more investigation, development and discussion before they could be worked up into actual proposals) include:
- Building on initiatives in the South East Dorset Green Infrastructure Strategy¹⁵, which covers an area that borders Swanage and which is defined as a habitat restoration zone but which is not identified as currently providing good access corridors. The Purbeck Local Biodiversity Action Plan covers one of 24 Biodiversity Action Partnership zones that integrate to form a South West Nature Map¹⁶. This seeks to integrate habitats across the south-west region in a co-ordinated approach to landscape level management and which has fed into the GI Strategy. The strategy covers physical opportunities for developing and enhancing green infrastructure, definition of standards for green infrastructure, and mechanisms for implementation and delivery. There may be opportunities to combine the planned habitat restoration with improved public access to serve as strategic access management;
 - Potentially improving access to the (non-SSSI) areas of lowland meadow to the south of Swanage and semi-natural woodland to the west of Swanage via improved footpath linkages from Swanage itself towards and through those areas, coupled with promotion of those paths as routes for public access where dogs can be allowed to just run off the lead, and funding for management of those areas for public access in perpetuity;
 - Investigating any forthcoming proposals or ambitions from nature conservation organisations for acquiring land to convert into nature reserves, which could be adapted to perform a dual function and provide significant new public access; and
 - Investigating any initiatives that were delivered in the area around Swanage as part of the Nature Improvement Area project and identifying whether they could be extended and improved to serve a strategic access management role.
- 6.3.4 Purbeck was one of twelve areas selected for Nature Improvement Area (NIA) funding with projects ongoing from 2012-15 supported by Government through Defra, DCLG, Environment Agency (EA), Forestry Commission (FC) and Natural England (NE). As part of this work, 467ha of heathland restoration has already been undertaken. One project focused on restoration of high quality heathland – *“this project aimed to restore 71 Ha of high quality heathland through increased management and aftercare. 26 ha were cleared in the first year at Wareham and Affpuddle, and enhanced aftercare (including raking and Rhododendron clearance) carried out the following winter. Felling has been undertaken in Rempstone Forest during 2014, with enhanced aftercare over the winter of 2014/15.”*¹⁷

¹⁵ Investing in Green Spaces (2011): South East Dorset Green Infrastructure Strategy.

¹⁶ <http://www.biodiversitysouthwest.org.uk/bdas-map.html>

¹⁷ <http://www.dorsetaonb.org.uk/our-work/wildpurbeck/132-landmanagement/562-high-quality-heathland>

6.3.5 As part of the NIA project (or inspired by it):

- The Forestry Commission have committed to over 1000 hectares of further heathland restoration from existing plantations over the next 20 years.
- Funding has also been obtained for heathland restoration elsewhere, which has led to, in total around 400ha of heathland restoration, through scrub removal and fencing to allow grazing to be undertaken.
- A landscape permeability study identified existing high value habitat networks for the purpose of identifying potential extension and enlargement through more permeable (i.e. semi-natural) land use.
- The data from the first stage was then used to pro-actively target holdings with advice on landscape restoration and creation. It was used to look for new opportunities and to compare with habitat restoration under way in HLS agreements. Opportunities for restoration / habitat creation were identified. Although direct heathland linkage on the scale proposed above was not identified, as previously stated, linkages that provide for a functional connectivity for species for which the SPA is designated may still enhance the resilience of the SPA qualifying features (bird populations).

6.3.6 While the principal purpose of Nature Improvement Areas is to achieve significant enhancements to ecological networks by improving existing wildlife sites, they are also intended to improve the connection between the countryside and their local communities. Some of the stated objectives of the Nature Improvement Area by 2020¹⁸ involve making the area's natural assets richer and more resilient to changes and ensuring that the landscape contributes more strongly to the local economy, particularly around sustainable tourism (and products from land and sea). We do not suggest that measures which already form part of the NIA should simply be 'claimed' as mitigation for development, nor is there a suggestion that funding should be diverted from the NIA to deliver such mitigation. The NIA project has now finished. However, there may be opportunities over the plan period until 2031 and beyond to build upon the achievements of the NIA using developer contributions which would otherwise be used for SANG in those areas where SANG have not proven to be deliverable and achieve a more dispersed spread of recreational access opportunities incorporating some of the new habitat areas created through the NIA project.

6.3.7 As outlined at the start of this section, these are initial thoughts as to the potential for an alternative to SANG in those parts of Purbeck district where SANG may not be achievable and the applicability and appropriate value of such an approach would require dialogue with the NIA, statutory consultees including Natural England, conservation bodies and organisations responsible for land management in Purbeck.

6.4 Further investment in specific initiatives to be delivered through SAMM

6.4.1 As discussed, in our view SAMM targeted at the SPA/SAC/Ramsar site itself will remain an essential requirement whether or not an alternative to SANG is deemed acceptable for Purbeck. Monitoring and management of visitors on designated areas should remain a priority for channelling of funding alongside SANGs and improving the resilience of the landscape. This is particularly the case because such a high proportion of existing Purbeck residents lives so close to the SPA/SAC/Ramsar site. It will always be more difficult to draw existing residents who are well-used to visiting the SPA/SAC/Ramsar site away to other areas but in order to make any significant impact on recreational disturbance on the SPA/SAC/Ramsar site within Purbeck the effects of the existing population need to be tackled.

6.4.2 We note comments in paragraph 4.7 of the HRA of the Purbeck Local Plan Part 1 Partial Review that (at the time of writing) Purbeck employed only 1 part-time warden with a heathland mitigation role, despite the large amount of heathland SPA/SAC/Ramsar site within Purbeck. In terms of specific SAMM measures likely to be effective, wardening is likely to be one of the most effective solutions. As such we would strongly recommend Purbeck using SAMM contributions to achieve an increase in wardening with a heathland mitigation role.

6.4.3 The same HRA report also identifies deficiencies with access management around Wareham Forest. Key issues with recreation management are lack of information and public perception of the site. It can be hard to find out about routes and where certain activities are permitted due to freeholder reluctance to designate permitted routes. There is only limited interpretation about importance of the site to wildlife and how visitors might experience it. The perception is therefore of a robust woodland

¹⁸ http://www.dorsetaonb.org.uk/assets/downloads/wild-purbeck/2012-02_wild_purbeck_summary.pdf

and people are apparently thus more careless. We would therefore recommend that these specific deficiencies are addressed via the SAMM.

7 Policy Approach and Implications for Biodiversity and Stakeholders

7.1.1 Matters 7, 8 and 9 of the brief asked us to investigate:

1. Potential alternative and/or additional policy approaches to achieving compliance with the Directive, including consideration of spatially distinct approaches in different areas of the district;
2. Implications of all perceivable alternative and/or additional approaches for biodiversity; and
3. Implications of all perceivable alternative and/or additional approaches for local planning authorities, developers and other stakeholders.

7.1.2 In the remainder of this document we discuss whether a movement away from SANG and towards a broader approach to countryside access in areas where SANG cannot be achieved would require an alteration to the existing policy framework and, in broad terms, outline some thoughts regarding the implications of such a move for biodiversity and for relevant stakeholders.

7.2 Existing policy framework

7.2.1 The current Purbeck Local Plan Part 1 policy for Biodiversity and Geodiversity contains elements of relevance to heathland biodiversity as follows:

7.2.2 *'Purbeck's biodiversity and geodiversity will be protected, managed and enhanced through:*

- *The promotion of Strategic Nature Areas as identified on the Nature Map;*
- *Efforts to enhance, link and create habitats to enable adaptation to climate change;*
- *Projects associated with the Purbeck Nature Improvement Area and the achievement of 'Wild Purbeck'; and*
- *Encouraging development proposals to incorporate biodiversity having regard to District design guidance'.*

7.2.3 It goes on to state that new development:

- Will need to ensure that there are no adverse effects upon the integrity of European protected sites (SPA, SAC, Ramsar, possible SAC, potential SPA).
- Within the vicinity of areas that support nationally significant numbers of Annex 1 bird species (nightjar and woodlark), undertake a risk based approach to ensure that there is no significant adverse effect upon these species and their habitats.
- Will need to ensure that there are no adverse impacts upon SSSI, for example an indirect effect of disturbance from increased public access.
- Will need to demonstrate that it avoids significant adverse impacts upon Sites of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI), National Nature Reserves (NNR), Local Nature Reserves (LNR), Ancient Woodland, aged or veteran trees, wetland interests (for example, watercourses, ponds, reedbeds), and Habitats of Principal Importance. Any significant adverse impacts on these sites and features which cannot be avoided through location on an alternative site, must be adequately mitigated, or, as a last resort, compensated.
- Should incorporate any opportunities for biodiversity in and around the development. In considering the acceptability of proposals, the Council will assess their direct, indirect and cumulative impacts relative to the significance of the nature conservation value, and balance them against other sustainable development objectives.

7.2.4 As stated in Section 1 of this report, the Local Plan contains a specific policy with regard to the Dorset Heaths that states that:

- *'Development will not be permitted unless it can be ascertained that it will not lead to an adverse effect upon the integrity, of the Dorset Heaths' International designations. The*

following forms of development (including changes of use) will not be permitted within a 400m buffer around protected heathland:

- *Residential (C3) development that would involve a net increase in dwellings;*
- *Tourist accommodation including hotels, guest houses, boarding houses, bed and breakfast accommodation, tented camping and caravans which require planning permission (C1 uses) and self-catering tourist accommodation; and*
- *Between 400 metres and 5km of a heathland, new residential development and tourist accommodation will be required to take all necessary steps on site to avoid or mitigate any adverse effects upon the internationally designated site's integrity or, where this cannot be achieved within the residential development, to make a contribution towards mitigation measures designed to avoid such adverse effects taking place.*

7.2.5 Measures will include:

- *Provision of open space and appropriate facilities to meet recreation needs and deflect pressure from heathland habitats;*
- *Heathland support areas;*
- *Warden services and other heathland/harbour management;*
- *Access and parking management measures;*
- *Green infrastructure*

7.2.6 The policy on Green Infrastructure, Recreation and Sports Facilities states that:

7.2.7 *'New residential development will be required to make provision for green infrastructure. Where possible, facilities should be provided on site, as an integral part of the development. However, where on-site provision is not appropriate, off-site provision or a financial contribution will be sought. The level of contributions will be set out in the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Charging Schedule. Settlement extensions and major employment sites will be expected to contribute towards the delivery of significant areas of new green infrastructure and the management of a connected, coherent and functional network of new and enhanced green spaces corridors and public rights of way in accordance with the Green Infrastructure Strategy standards. All open space areas will be protected. Any loss will only be permitted where there is a proven excess of such provision and the proposed loss will not result in a current or future shortfall in the plan period and/or suitable replacement facilities are provided. Any replacement provision will take account of the needs of the area and current standards of open space, but should be equivalent to, or an improvement upon, the existing resource, in terms of size, attractiveness, quality and accessibility'.*

7.2.8 Unlike in the Thames Basin Heaths area the adopted Dorset Heathlands SPD does not make an absolute link between new development and SANG. In the Thames Basin Heaths area all net new residential development within 5km is expected to contribute towards SANG, either providing a bespoke SANG linked to the specific development site (for large developments) or (for small developments) making a financial contribution which the local authority then uses to deliver strategic SANG. This effectively makes the delivery of new development in the Thames Basin Heaths area wholly dependent on the delivery of SANG in one form or another. In contrast, the Dorset Heathlands SPD and the Purbeck Local Plan Part 1 do not make SANG such a universal and essential component of the mitigation framework for the SPA. The Local Plan policies do not explicitly refer to SANG at all, while the SPD states only that *'For large sites of approximately 50 or more dwellings provision of SANGs should form part of the overall infrastructure provision of that site, particularly where urban extensions or development on greenfield sites are proposed'* (paragraph 5.5), rather than requiring SANG for all net new housing as is done in the Thames Basin Heaths area.

7.3 Adequacy of existing policy framework

7.3.1 In terms of amendment to existing policy, it is therefore considered that significant changes are not required to accommodate the delivery of alternative countryside access initiatives as an alternative to strategic SANG where such SANG have proven undeliverable. Commitment within the current policies exists for promoting habitat enhancements, linkages and creation of new habitat areas. Based on the analyses in Sections 2 and 3 of this report we do not think that there is a justification for spatially distinct approaches in different areas of the district. Such an approach would also substantially

complicate the process of determining whether a given development has made the necessary contribution to mitigating adverse effects on the SPA.

7.4 Implications of an alternative mitigation approach for biodiversity and for local planning authorities, developers and other stakeholders

Broad implications for biodiversity

- 7.4.1 Clearly one of the benefits of SANG is that it concentrates recreational users in specific ‘sacrificial’ areas, thus protecting other areas from disturbance. Backdating the number of dwellings to be delivered in Purbeck to the beginning of the Local Plan period, Purbeck would intend to deliver a total of 5,600 dwellings between 2006 and 2033¹⁹. If all these dwellings were to be occupied by new residents this would be a c. 20% increase in the population within 5km of the SPA. A SANG approach in Purbeck this would therefore takes the opportunity to concentrate new residents in specific new recreational sacrificial areas.
- 7.4.2 It should be noted that the provision of improved access and an improved visitor experience to the wider countryside should not be considered an easy alternative to delivery of SANG but rather something that could potentially be explored once strategic SANG options have been exhausted. For example, there may be opportunities to improve access to semi-natural woodland areas and (unrelated to Swanage) the aforementioned forestry plantations, but these may not be cost effective or acceptable to the landowner and (for the plantations) there would also need to be significant consideration given to the fact that the plantations also support SPA birds and it would not be acceptable to simply move disturbance of such wildlife from the SPA to other areas where they nest or (in the case of hen harrier and merlin) over-winter. As such, in many (if not most) areas SANG may actually be the easier and simpler option to deliver.

Broad implications for stakeholders

- 7.4.3 In Table 2 below we summarise the broad implications of any amendment to relax reliance on SANG in Purbeck and increased focus on expansion (in terms of geographic coverage and technical scope) of the NIA Visitor Management Strategy.

Stakeholders	Implications
Purbeck District Council	<p>In our view Purbeck Council would not need to alter their existing policy framework to facilitate the change we have identified.</p> <p>The removal of a reliance on strategic SANGs when such features are considered undeliverable would increase opportunities to consider options relating to the quantity and distribution of deliverability of development in the district.</p>
Other relevant local planning authorities (Bournemouth, Poole, East Dorset and Christchurch)	<p>We do not propose extending the approach to Bournemouth, Poole or Christchurch since these are largely urban authorities, and the majority of new housing to be delivered within 5km of the SPA would be within those authorities.</p> <p>There would thus be no implications for how they delivered their own mitigation for impacts of development on the SPA. Clearly deviation from a specific SANG solution to mitigate for some of Purbeck’s new housing would mean that the mitigation solution across Dorset Heathland authorities was not consistent. However, there is no requirement in law that mitigation for impacts on SPA must be identical across all relevant authorities and there is good</p>

¹⁹ In the Local Plan (2012) Purbeck included provision for 2,520 new dwellings between 2006 and 2027. The SHMA for Eastern Dorset has identified a need for a further 3,080 dwellings between 2013 and 2033.

Stakeholders	Implications
	<p>justification for a different approach to be deployed in Purbeck compared to Bournemouth, Poole or Christchurch.</p> <p>There is potential for East Dorset to consider a similar approach to Purbeck but the case would have to be made on a district-specific basis. The two districts are not comparable: far less of East Dorset lies within close proximity to the Dorset Heathlands SPA and East Dorset does not have the same large extent of coverage by other high quality semi-natural habitats or a Nature Improvement Area Management Strategy on which to build.</p>
Developers	<p>There would be little change for developers. The financial contribution they were required to make and the manner in which they would need to make it could remain unchanged. It would simply be the case that an amended approach would allow channelling of funds into more diverse approaches to heathland mitigation than SANGs in situations where strategic SANG could not be achieved.</p> <p>Developers would be free to offer SANGs if they wished to do so, and we do not propose deviating from SANG for large developments, but the approach to requirement of SANGs provision could be relaxed to provide opportunity to contribute to alternative effective mitigation.</p> <p>The removal of a reliance on SANGs would increase opportunities to consider options relating to the quantity and distribution of deliverability of development in the district.</p>
Landowners (other than developers)	<p>Clearly a proposal to utilise funds that would otherwise be committed to SANG to instead seek to maximise public access to the wider countryside has implications for landowners in terms of the acceptability of public access across their land. This is the biggest issue requiring investigation in terms of the feasibility of delivering the alternative solution, since strong opposition by landowners would considerably constrain the ability to build on the achievements of the NIA.</p>

8 Conclusions

- 8.1.1 In conclusion, there appears to be no evidential basis on which to conclude that mitigation for a net increase in dwellings within Purbeck district over the Local Plan period is not required to avoid adverse effects on the Dorset Heathlands SPA, SAC and Ramsar site. There is also no evidential basis on which to move away from a 400m 'no net new residences' zone, given the high level of existing housing within very close proximity (400m) to the European sites and the likelihood that a similarly high level of net new housing would come forward without strategic controls. There is also no basis on which to exclude gypsy & traveller sites or previously-developed land from the prohibition on net new residential development within 400m.
- 8.1.2 SANG appear to be an achievable solution for much of the new housing expected in Purbeck district, particularly if this is focussed on large developments that will provide their own bespoke SANG. However, it is considered that in cases where strategic SANG cannot be achieved, such as may well be the case around Swanage, there is potential, given the small number of dwellings likely to be affected, to explore opportunities for improving strategic access to the wider countryside as an alternative to actual SANG. Individual proposals for this would require consideration on a case by case basis.

Appendix A.

Date: 24 September 2015
Our ref: Purbeck Partial Review
Your ref: [Click here to enter text.](#)



BY EMAIL ONLY

Customer Services
Hornbeam House
Crewe Business Park
Electra Way
Crewe
Cheshire
CW1 6GJ

T 0300 060 3900

Dear Mr Tapscott

Planning consultation: Purbeck Partial Review allocated sites

Natural England is a non-departmental public body. Our statutory purpose is to ensure that the natural environment is conserved, enhanced, and managed for the benefit of present and future generations, thereby contributing to sustainable development.

Habitats Regulations 2010, as amended

Option 4a North and west of Wareham, Natural England has worked closely with the promoter to consider in some detail the location and scale of development and the suitability of avoidance and mitigation measures. The promoter has supplied an acceptable development layout, Ref: 1451-SANG1, Sept 2015. Natural England have agreed that the areas indicated as SANG provide a sound basis for the development blocks 1-6 coming forward for further consideration as an allocation. Block 7 is not agreed at this time. The more detailed Masterplan for the SANG and development can be agreed prior to any EIP in liaison with yourselves and the promoter if the sites come forward.

The proposed development will be able to meet its Strategic Access and Management contributions through the CIL or S106 mechanisms.

The promoter has confirmed to Natural England that at this stage of consideration there are no known significant biodiversity considerations (habitats or species) which may not be avoided or mitigated at a later stage.

The scale of the development area of land coming forward in areas 1-6 (at 30 units per ha) combined with the SANG land proposed, excluding the minerals site would allow the development to be nutrient neutral with respect to Poole Harbour SPA/Ramsar. There would be sufficient capacity for area 7 to also be neutral should it come forward for consideration.

At 40 units per ha the development of areas 1-6 would require an additional 1.5ha of agricultural land to achieve neutrality, well within the landowners scope of delivery.

Natural England advises that there are no reasons why areas 1-6 on the submitted plan should not come forward.

Option 4b West of Wareham

The promoter is proposing a development of c.500 units with a SANG of c.94ha. Natural England has discussed in detail the proposal and visited the site. Natural England can confirm that the size and naturalness of the SANG as well as other key criteria such as capacity are substantially delivered by the Masterplan layout (RG-M-AI01). There remain concerns about the deliverability and impacts on viability of key infrastructure requirements such as a railway bridge and access into Wareham. It is likely that the SANG will provide an attractive and effective avoidance measure for new residents but concerns remain about avoiding net increases in access by attracting existing users to the new SANG. This aspect remains to be examined in further detail.

The applicant has entered into discussions with locally based voluntary bodies which provide Natural England with a high level of comfort that the SANG can, in principle, be suitably managed and responsible access encouraged.

The proposed development will be able to meet its Strategic Access and Management contributions through the CIL or S106 mechanisms.

Based on a nutrient budget for 500 units and a development on existing agricultural land totalling c. 16.5ha the proposal does not provide sufficient nutrient offsetting to show neutrality. The shortfall represents c. 4ha. Natural England anticipate that further consideration of the proposal details will enable this to be modified and the alternative of a contribution may be acceptable to the authority. Natural England advise that the applicant is likely to be able to demonstrate neutrality in relation to Poole Harbour SPA/Ramsar and that this should not form a reason for rejecting the promotion.

The proposal lies within the Dorset AONB, the applicant has submitted some evidence which has been considered by the Natural England and the AONB Team. There is agreement that the proposal within the AONB will lead to a level of harm. The applicant has submitted evidence concerning mitigation options, however the authority will need to weigh the strict tests in the NPPF in paragraphs 115 and 116 (such as exceptional circumstances and the weight to be afforded to the AONB directly and in the setting) against the evidence submitted with advice from Natural England and the AONB.

Transport related issues, air quality and congestion issues in Sandford remain concerns to be further considered.

The promoter has confirmed to Natural England that at this stage of consideration there are no known significant biodiversity considerations (habitats or species) which may not be avoided or mitigated at a later stage.

Natural England advises that there are no compelling reasons why the submitted proposal should not come forward for detailed consideration.

Option 4c South east of Sandford

Natural England and the promoter have entered into detailed discussions. The proposed scale of development is in a very sensitive location with direct access to European and internationally designated heathlands as well as nationally important SSSI sites within 400m, the SANG location (Plan : 1564/SANG1) includes land which is a county wildlife site (SNCI) as well as land identified as priority biodiversity habitats. Natural England has concerns that the development would lead to a decline in the adjoining SSSI due to direct impacts from public access as well as effects on the management regime in the long term. The development would undoubtedly further increase the fragmentation of these important features. No compelling justification for this site was presented to Natural England that harm to the designated sites could be avoided. Natural England cannot therefore conclude at this stage that the proposed avoidance/mitigation measures would not lead to harm on the specially protected sites in conflict with government and local policy.

Natural England advice is that this site is not taken forward

Option 4d Lytchett Minster

Natural England and the promoter have entered into detailed discussions and visited the area. The applicant has consulted Natural England on a proposal of 550 up to 650 (Option1)and presented two further Options (2 and 3).

Option 1 The proposed SANG area meets the key criteria requirements in respect of quality, size naturalness, length of walks etc. Natural England is however concerned that the proposed SANG is somewhat remote from the residential area particularly for those in the south and east who are likely to consider using their car which brings into consideration nearby heathland sites as an option. However there are some advantages as it is well located to attract other visitors from Lytchett Matravers. Natural England has discussed the precise location with the owner and the proposed site could be adjusted southwards to bring direct access closer to the proposal. Natural England advise that on this basis further discussion will allow the existing pSANG to be modified to better meet the requirements for functionality and effective mitigation. Natural England is particularly concerned about the area of housing at the far south east which is of a scale (c50) and location (over 900m away) as to merit a SANG on its own account. Natural England advise that this area should be reduced in scale. Initial proposals by the promoter have been tabled.

Option 2 includes residential land within the 400m area and hence is contrary to Local Plan policy and Natural England strongly recommend it is not taken further by the authority.

Option 3 is for up to 1200 units, Natural England was only consulted about this proposal in September and has not visited the areas proposed. The additional SANG capacity proposed lies adjacent to the A35 which is not ideal due to the external influences and the main SANG area is not ideally located with narrow linkages along a road edge and a narrow linear park bounded by housing. For residents in the eastern part of the proposal the SANG becomes separated by a significantly more substantial urban area. The urban area extends substantially westwards and Natural England are not convinced that the proposed heathland avoidance/mitigation measures will be effective. Natural England recommend that this option is not taken forward by the authority.

The proposed development will be able to meet its Strategic Access and Management contributions through the CIL or S106 mechanisms.

The promoter has presented information about the land uses which have allowed Natural England to consider the required nutrient neutrality. The Option 1 would result in an excess of nutrients requiring a further mitigation of c. 5.2ha of land without nutrient applications. However detailed consideration is likely to refine this figure and the owners land holding is of sufficient size that delivery options are likely to be secured. Therefore Natural England conclude that nutrient neutrality requirements for Poole Harbour can be secured.

The promoter has confirmed to Natural England that at this stage of consideration there are no known significant biodiversity considerations (habitats or species)which may not be avoided or mitigated at a later stage.

Natural England advises that the submitted Option 1. 550-650 units, is capable of addressing the necessary issues and should come forward for further consideration.

Option 4e Moreton Station and Redbridge area

Natural England and the promoter have entered into detailed discussions and visited the area. The promoter has provided a Masterplan (24 July 2014) indicating 500-600 units. The proposed SANG comprises an area estimated at 24ha which is suitable in scale. Whilst much of this area is a county wildlife site which would under normal conditions not be an appropriate location the nature of the

SNCI, a fringe of relict heathland and pine scrub woodland with the main area being under minerals working or restoration, means that the SANG proposal can facilitate biodiversity restoration/enhancement. The minerals operations are a concern for Natural England because the restoration to a suitable natural greenspace is uncertain in the critical early years of establishment and early phases of a development. There is a high risk that new residents would develop a pattern of use of the nearby European sites at Tadnoll a straightforward drive from the site. However the promoter has also proposed that a large field adjacent to the designated sites could be used to support the designated sites visitor/habitat management. This 24ha area (referred to as the Triangle Field) would allow the relocation of a car park and the dispersion of visitor pressure and a proportion of effects prior to access into the designated sites. Discussions with local voluntary bodies indicate that there is a willingness to work with the applicant to secure the SANG and support area which provides a good level of comfort that the measures will be secured. This proposal assures Natural England that there is a reasonable and robust chance to avoid additional pressure on the designated sites.

The proposed development site does not include any existing agricultural land and so a consideration of nutrient neutrality leads to a requirement for land 35.5-42.6hectares to offset the additional nutrients. The Triangle Field referred to above can meet about 21.6ha as it is currently under maize. This leaves a shortfall of between 14-21 ha, the proposer is considered to have the delivery of this scale of mitigation within their scope and so it is concluded that with further discussion this requirement can be secured for Poole Harbour SPA/Ramsar.

The proposed development will be able to meet its Strategic Access and Management contributions through the CIL or S106 mechanisms.

The promoter has confirmed to Natural England that at this stage of consideration there are no known significant biodiversity considerations (habitats or species)which may not be avoided or mitigated at a later stage.

Natural England advises that there are no reasons why the submitted plans should not come forward for consideration.

Option 4f Land west of Wool

The promoter has provided an outline plan for a strategic SANG of c.48 ha. The SANG is semi-natural woodland with a high level of naturalness. The proposal would lead to substantial enhancement of the woodland resulting in significant biodiversity gains. The ecological evidence provided concludes that the SANG use will not lead to any harm to biodiversity which cannot be avoided or mitigated. The SANG is not co-located with all the land parcels however the size of the SANG and provision of a small carpark will make it an attractive destination.

Fields to the south of the development are designated SAMM but at risk, it is under discussion that access on foot can be secured across the SAMM and a degree of protection afforded by combining nutrient offsetting requirements resulting in permanent pasture which is likely to be acceptable to Historic England.

The site is in close proximity to the Dorset AONB, the applicant has submitted evidence and design modifications to avoid or mitigate visual effects. The proposal will require consideration by the AONB Team but there do not appear to be significant concerns such that the proposal cannot progress.

The scale of the development proposed to Natural England , 980 to 1144 units within a total development area of 87ha does not provide complete nitrogen neutrality. The additional land required will be in the range of 6-18ha which Natural England consider is well within the scope of the landowner to provide. Further detailed assessment will be required to resolve a masterplan but Natural England conclude that it will be reasonable for this promoter to demonstrate compliance

with the requirement for Poole Harbour SPA/Ramsar.

The proposed development will be able to meet its Strategic Access and Management contributions through the CIL or S106 mechanisms.

The promoter has confirmed to Natural England that at this stage of consideration there are no known significant biodiversity considerations (habitats or species) which may not be avoided or mitigated at a later stage.

Natural England advises that there are no reasons why the submitted plans should not come forward for consideration.

Option 6b: focus employment development at Holton Heath

Natural England and the promoter have entered into detailed discussions and visited the area. The promoter has worked with Natural England to develop a proposal which provides a heathland link from Holton Heath NNR south to Blackhill SSSI and Sandford Heath NNR for protected species. The promoter has submitted initial plans for land under their control indicating that the *principle* is agreed. Natural England has not as yet reached full agreement about the boundary of the allocation with the promoter, particularly adjacent to Holton Heath NNR.

A number of other issues have been addressed in discussions, the promoter owns the Blackhill SSSI which is currently unfavourable and has now indicated that they will bring forward actions to restore this neglected area and have the potential support of a local expert voluntary body. The potential area includes buildings which were part of the former munitions factory and have the potential to support bats a European Protected Species. A survey has confirmed that there is scope to avoid harm to any bats using areas directly affected by enhancing other buildings. The principle of enhancing the former factory land as at Holton Heath NNR for heathland biodiversity has been agreed as areas are already identified for biodiversity mitigation relating to other sites. It is intended that further discussions will establish a way forward to enable the development proposed to secure the link and that the owner will be committed to enhancement (for bats and heathland habitats) on other areas of the site which are SAMM and SNCI over the long term. The area is particularly problematical in relation to public safety issues such as access and likely presence of contamination. Secure boundary treatments will be required.

Natural England advises that the proposal should come forward for consideration and confirmation of a suitable boundary.

Option 16a develop land at Morden for public open space and around 80-100 holiday chalets

Natural England and the promoter have entered into detailed discussions and visited the area. The promoter has provided an outline proposal for the area (plan: OXF9222 Fig 2 Rev A). The promoter has identified two suitable SANG locations. Option 1 is Natural England's preferred location to deliver the strategic avoidance/mitigation set out in the Local Plan. Option 2 has not been formally considered by Natural England before 21 September 2015, it includes land designated as SSSI and adjoins land which is SPA.

The proposal does include the possibility of a limited number of chalets in close proximity to designated sites. At this time Natural England advises that suitable management options are present in principle to manage the potential recreational pressure from the proposed development. Further detailed work will be necessary to firm out the proposed options.

Morden Park has existing as well as significant biodiversity potential. The owners representative has confirmed that a number of key actions will be delivered such as avoidance of ancient woodland, establishment of a larger management area around designated sites within the Park (including rhododendron removal). These potential benefits offer opportunities for sustainable priority habitat gains and enhancement of the Parkland ancient trees which will greatly enhance the areas contribution to SPA bird foraging and biodiversity generally.

The strategic SANGs proposed will provide the authority with additional nutrient neutrality capacity for Poole Harbour SPA/Ramsar.

The proposed development of 100 chalets would require 3.3ha of land to be taken out of agricultural use, the two proposed SANG locations easily provide suitable levels of nutrient neutrality for Poole Harbour SPA/Ramsar.

The proposed development will be able to meet its Strategic Access and Management contributions through the CIL or S106 mechanisms.

The promoter has confirmed to Natural England that at this stage of consideration there are no known significant biodiversity considerations (habitats or species) which may not be avoided or mitigated at a later stage.

Natural England advises that there are no reasons why areas 1-6 on the submitted plan should not come forward.

Additional proposal West Fossil Farm

Proposed 750 units. Suggested amenity area 40acres. Natural England has met with the applicant and received some information on the layout and land use distribution. The site lies directly adjacent to the Dorset AONB. The indicative areas which might be used as a SANG are in part on inert landfill and largely fragmented. Natural England conclude that the proposal does not meet any of the published SANG criteria, particularly in quality, size, distribution and length of walk available. It is considered unlikely that this site could show that there was no net increase in access to the nearby attractive heathland sites. SAMM may be delivered through CIL mechanisms.

The plan was assessed for nutrient neutrality in relation to Poole Harbour SPA/Ramsar, the proposal falls short of achieving neutrality by a small margin and is therefore not compliant on the basis of submitted information. It should be noted that this may be resolvable.

The site lies adjacent to the Dorset AONB, no information/assessment was available and the site clearly impacts on the AONB setting and so is not compliant with existing policy.

Natural England recommends that this site is not taken forward

Transportation issues

A number of promoters have provided the authority with evidence relating to increased use of transport infrastructure. Natural England advise that the authority will need to carry out an assessment of the effects of proposals moving forward in-combination as well as alone to be satisfied that this issue will not lead to air quality issues or a need for harmful transport infrastructure in designated sites.

We would be happy to comment further should the need arise but if in the meantime you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact us.

For any queries relating to the specific advice in this letter only please contact Nick Squirrell. For any new consultations, or to provide further information on this consultation please send your correspondences to consultations@naturalengland.org.uk.

Yours sincerely

Nick Squirrell

Conservation and Planning Lead Advisor
Dorset and Hampshire Team
Dorset, Hampshire and Isle of Wight Area Team
Natural England
Mob: 07766 133697
Email nick.squirrell@naturalengland.org.uk

Note

In calculating nutrient neutrality Natural England have used plans and figures supplied by the promoters. One key figure is dwelling occupancy (2.42) which has been taken from the figure in the draft Dorset Heathlands Planning Framework SPD. This is a worst case scenario and Natural England awaits advice from the authority on any new evidence. Discussions with individual promoters will enable the initial consideration to be refined.

Appendix B.

NATURA 2000

STANDARD DATA FORM

FOR SPECIAL PROTECTION AREAS (SPA)
FOR SITES ELIGIBLE FOR IDENTIFICATION AS SITES OF COMMUNITY IMPORTANCE (SCI)
AND
FOR SPECIAL AREAS OF CONSERVATION (SAC)

1. Site identification:

1.1 Type 1.2 Site code

1.3 Compilation date 1.4 Update

1.5 Relationship with other Natura 2000 sites

U	K	9	0	1	0	1	0	1
U	K	9	0	1	0	1	1	1

1.6 Respondent(s)

1.7 Site name

1.8 Site indication and designation classification dates

date site proposed as eligible as SCI	199810
date confirmed as SCI	200412
date site classified as SPA	
date site designated as SAC	200504

2. Site location:

2.1 Site centre location

longitude	latitude
02 09 36 W	50 39 03 N

2.2 Site area (ha) 2.3 Site length (km)

2.5 Administrative region

NUTS code	Region name	% cover
UK631	Dorset	100.00%

2.6 Biogeographic region

Alpine

Atlantic

Boreal

Continental

Macaronesia

Mediterranean

3. Ecological information:

3.1 Annex I habitats

Habitat types present on the site and the site assessment for them:

Annex I habitat	% cover	Representativity	Relative surface	Conservation status	Global assessment
Northern Atlantic wet heaths with <i>Erica tetralix</i>	6	A	C	A	B

Temperate Atlantic wet heaths with <i>Erica ciliaris</i> and <i>Erica tetralix</i>	0.1	D			
European dry heaths	57	A	C	A	A
<i>Molinia</i> meadows on calcareous, peaty or clayey-silt-laden soils (<i>Molinion caeruleae</i>)	0.3	B	C	A	C
Depressions on peat substrates of the <i>Rhynchosporion</i>	1	A	C	A	A
Calcareous fens with <i>Cladium mariscus</i> and species of the <i>Caricion davallianae</i>	0.1	B	C	B	C
Alkaline fens	0.1	B	C	B	C
Old acidophilous oak woods with <i>Quercus robur</i> on sandy plains	0.1	B	C	B	C
Bog woodland	0.1	D			

3.2 Annex II species

Species name	Population				Site assessment			
	Resident	Migratory			Population	Conservation	Isolation	Global
		Breed	Winter	Stage				
<i>Coenagrion mercuriale</i>	Present	-	-	-	C	B	B	B
<i>Triturus cristatus</i>	500	-	-	-	C	C	C	C

4. Site description

4.1 General site character

Habitat classes	% cover
Marine areas. Sea inlets	
Tidal rivers. Estuaries. Mud flats. Sand flats. Lagoons (including saltwork basins)	
Salt marshes. Salt pastures. Salt steppes	
Coastal sand dunes. Sand beaches. Machair	
Shingle. Sea cliffs. Islets	
Inland water bodies (standing water, running water)	1.0
Bogs. Marshes. Water fringed vegetation. Fens	8.0
Heath. Scrub. Maquis and garrigue. Phygrana	86.0
Dry grassland. Steppes	1.0
Humid grassland. Mesophile grassland	1.0
Alpine and sub-alpine grassland	
Improved grassland	
Other arable land	
Broad-leaved deciduous woodland	1.0
Coniferous woodland	1.0
Evergreen woodland	
Mixed woodland	1.0
Non-forest areas cultivated with woody plants (including orchards, groves, vineyards, dehesas)	
Inland rocks. Scree. Sands. Permanent snow and ice	
Other land (including towns, villages, roads, waste places, mines, industrial sites)	
Total habitat cover	100%

4.1 Other site characteristics

Soil & geology:

Acidic, Clay, Nutrient-poor, Peat, Sand, Sedimentary

Geomorphology & landscape:

Coastal, Lowland, Slope, Valley

4.2 Quality and importance

Northern Atlantic wet heaths with *Erica tetralix*

- for which this is considered to be one of the best areas in the United Kingdom.

European dry heaths

- for which this is considered to be one of the best areas in the United Kingdom.

Molinia meadows on calcareous, peaty or clayey-silt-laden soils (*Molinion caeruleae*)

- for which the area is considered to support a significant presence.

Depressions on peat substrates of the *Rhynchosporion*

- for which this is considered to be one of the best areas in the United Kingdom.

Calcareous fens with *Cladium mariscus* and species of the *Caricion davallianae*

- which is considered to be rare as its total extent in the United Kingdom is estimated to be less than 1000 hectares.

- for which the area is considered to support a significant presence.

Alkaline fens

- for which the area is considered to support a significant presence.

Old acidophilous oak woods with *Quercus robur* on sandy plains

- for which the area is considered to support a significant presence.

Coenagrion mercuriale

- for which this is considered to be one of the best areas in the United Kingdom.

Triturus cristatus

- for which the area is considered to support a significant presence.

4.3 Vulnerability

The Dorset heathlands have become a fragmented heathland area through extensive losses to agriculture, forestry and urban development. In recent years these land-use changes have been almost halted through changes in national and local policy. However, the scale of previous fragmentation and development has left a number of adverse pressures and many heaths in or near urban areas suffer recreational pressure and a high incidence of wildfires, and are sometimes also disturbed by infrastructure works.

The heaths are affected by several old mineral extraction permissions, some still active. These will require review under the Habitats Regulations to ensure no adverse effect on integrity. Agreement has already been reached on drawing back the possible working of some permissions. In and around the urban areas there are now well-established initiatives to manage and contain recreation uses and to more effectively control the occurrence and spread of fires.

The decline in use for traditional agriculture has resulted in a successional trend to scrub and woodland together with invasion by conifer and introduced scrub species, especially *Rhododendron*. Financial support schemes and management initiatives, which aid the removal of scrub and encourage the re-establishment of traditional management in the form of extensive grazing, now cover much of the heath area. About 43% of the site is now held as NNRs, LNRs and non-statutory nature reserves.

Fragmentation has increased edge and patch size effects on the heathland ecology. This is being addressed through re-creation projects to expand and link heath fragments by removing areas of conifer plantation and converting some agricultural land back to heathland.

5. Site protection status and relation with CORINE biotopes:

5.1 Designation types at national and regional level

Code	% cover
UK01 (NNR)	10.2

UK04 (SSSI/ASSI)	100.0
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Information Sheet on Ramsar Wetlands (RIS)

Categories approved by Recommendation 4.7 (1990), as amended by Resolution VIII.13 of the 8th Conference of the Contracting Parties (2002) and Resolutions IX.1 Annex B, IX.6, IX.21 and IX. 22 of the 9th Conference of the Contracting Parties (2005).

Notes for compilers:

1. The RIS should be completed in accordance with the attached *Explanatory Notes and Guidelines for completing the Information Sheet on Ramsar Wetlands*. Compilers are strongly advised to read this guidance before filling in the RIS.
2. Further information and guidance in support of Ramsar site designations are provided in the *Strategic Framework for the future development of the List of Wetlands of International Importance* (Ramsar Wise Use Handbook 7, 2nd edition, as amended by COP9 Resolution IX.1 Annex B). A 3rd edition of the Handbook, incorporating these amendments, is in preparation and will be available in 2006.
3. Once completed, the RIS (and accompanying map(s)) should be submitted to the Ramsar Secretariat. Compilers should provide an electronic (MS Word) copy of the RIS and, where possible, digital copies of all maps.

1. Name and address of the compiler of this form:

Joint Nature Conservation Committee

Monkstone House

City Road

Peterborough

Cambridgeshire PE1 1JY

UK

Telephone/Fax: +44 (0)1733 – 562 626 / +44 (0)1733 – 555 948

Email: RIS@JNCC.gov.uk

FOR OFFICE USE ONLY.

DD MM YY

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Designation date

--	--	--	--	--	--

Site Reference Number

2. Date this sheet was completed/updated:

Designated: 01 October 1998

3. Country:

UK (England)

4. Name of the Ramsar site:

Dorset Heathlands

5. Designation of new Ramsar site or update of existing site:

This RIS is for: Updated information on an existing Ramsar site

6. For RIS updates only, changes to the site since its designation or earlier update:

a) Site boundary and area:

** Important note: If the boundary and/or area of the designated site is being restricted/reduced, the Contracting Party should have followed the procedures established by the Conference of the Parties in the Annex to COP9 Resolution IX.6 and provided a report in line with paragraph 28 of that Annex, prior to the submission of an updated RIS.

b) Describe briefly any major changes to the ecological character of the Ramsar site, including in the application of the Criteria, since the previous RIS for the site:

7. Map of site included:

Refer to Annex III of the *Explanatory Notes and Guidelines*, for detailed guidance on provision of suitable maps, including digital maps.

a) A map of the site, with clearly delineated boundaries, is included as:

- i) **hard copy** (required for inclusion of site in the Ramsar List): *yes* ✓ -or- *no* ☐;
- ii) **an electronic format** (e.g. a JPEG or ArcView image) *Yes*
- iii) **a GIS file providing geo-referenced site boundary vectors and attribute tables** *yes* ✓ -or- *no* ☐;

b) Describe briefly the type of boundary delineation applied:

e.g. the boundary is the same as an existing protected area (nature reserve, national park etc.), or follows a catchment boundary, or follows a geopolitical boundary such as a local government jurisdiction, follows physical boundaries such as roads, follows the shoreline of a waterbody, etc.

The site boundary is the same as, or falls within, an existing protected area.

For precise boundary details, please refer to paper map provided at designation

8. Geographical coordinates (latitude/longitude):

50 39 00N 02 09 33W

9. General location:

Include in which part of the country and which large administrative region(s), and the location of the nearest large town.

Nearest town/city: Poole

Dorset Heathlands lies adjacent to the coast of central southern England

Administrative region: Dorset

10. Elevation (average and/or max. & min.) (metres): **11. Area** (hectares): 6730.15

Min.	1
Max.	72
Mean	27

12. General overview of the site:

Provide a short paragraph giving a summary description of the principal ecological characteristics and importance of the wetland.

Extensive and fragmented, these heathland areas are centred around the estuary of Poole Harbour and are adjacent to the urban conurbation of Bournemouth and Poole. The heathland contains numerous examples of wet heath and acid valley mire, habitats that are restricted to the Atlantic fringe of Europe. These heath wetlands are among the best of their type in lowland Britain. There are also transitions to coastal wetland and fen habitat types. The wetland flora and fauna includes a large assemblage of nationally rare and scarce species, especially invertebrates.

13. Ramsar Criteria:

Circle or underline each Criterion applied to the designation of the Ramsar site. See Annex II of the *Explanatory Notes and Guidelines* for the Criteria and guidelines for their application (adopted by Resolution VII.11).

1, 2, 3

14. Justification for the application of each Criterion listed in 13 above:

Provide justification for each Criterion in turn, clearly identifying to which Criterion the justification applies (see Annex II for guidance on acceptable forms of justification).

Ramsar criterion 1

Contains particularly good examples of (i) northern Atlantic wet heaths with cross-leaved heath *Erica tetralix* and (ii) acid mire with *Rhynchosporion*.

Contains largest example in Britain of southern Atlantic wet heaths with Dorset heath *Erica ciliaris* and cross-leaved heath *Erica tetralix*.

Ramsar criterion 2

Supports 1 nationally rare and 13 nationally scarce wetland plant species, and at least 28 nationally rare wetland invertebrate species.

Ramsar criterion 3

Has a high species richness and high ecological diversity of wetland habitat types and transitions, and lies in one of the most biologically-rich wetland areas of lowland Britain, being continuous with three other Ramsar sites: Poole Harbour, Avon Valley and The New Forest.

See Sections 21/22 for details of noteworthy species

15. Biogeography (required when Criteria 1 and/or 3 and /or certain applications of Criterion 2 are applied to the designation):

Name the relevant biogeographic region that includes the Ramsar site, and identify the biogeographic regionalisation system that has been applied.

a) biogeographic region:

Atlantic

b) biogeographic regionalisation scheme (include reference citation):

Council Directive 92/43/EEC

16. Physical features of the site:

Describe, as appropriate, the geology, geomorphology; origins - natural or artificial; hydrology; soil type; water quality; water depth, water permanence; fluctuations in water level; tidal variations; downstream area; general climate, etc.

Soil & geology	acidic, neutral, sand, clay, peat, nutrient-poor, sedimentary
Geomorphology and landscape	lowland, coastal, valley, slope
Nutrient status	mesotrophic, oligotrophic
pH	acidic, circumneutral, strongly acidic
Salinity	fresh
Soil	mainly mineral, mainly organic
Water permanence	usually permanent
Summary of main climatic features	Annual averages (Everton, 1971–2000) (www.metoffice.com/climate/uk/averages/19712000/sites/everton.html) Max. daily temperature: 14.0° C Min. daily temperature: 7.0° C Days of air frost: 32.5 Rainfall: 763.7 mm Hrs. of sunshine: 1750.7

General description of the Physical Features:

The Dorset Heathlands cover an extensive complex of heathland sites at the western edge of the Hampshire Basin in southern England. The area is centred around the large estuary of Poole Harbour and lies in close proximity to the urban conurbation of Bournemouth and Poole. Past losses of the heathland (an estimated 75% during the 20th century to development, agriculture and afforestation) have left the remaining heaths in a highly fragmented state. Despite this decline and fragmentation, the heaths show a high degree of ecological cohesion. They contain large areas of dry heath, wet heath and acid valley mire, all habitats that are restricted to the Atlantic fringe of Europe. The examples of the Dorset Heathlands are among the best of their type in the UK. There are also transitions to coastal wetlands and floodplain fen habitats.

17. Physical features of the catchment area:

Describe the surface area, general geology and geomorphological features, general soil types, general land use, and climate (including climate type).

The Dorset Heathlands cover an extensive complex of heathland sites at the western edge of the Hampshire Basin in southern England. The area is centred around the large estuary of Poole Harbour and lies in close proximity to the urban conurbation of Bournemouth and Poole. Past losses of the heathland (an estimated 75% during the 20th century to development, agriculture and afforestation) have left the remaining heaths in a highly fragmented state. Despite this decline and fragmentation, the heaths show a high degree of ecological cohesion. They contain large areas of dry heath, wet heath and acid valley mire, all habitats that are restricted to the Atlantic fringe of Europe. The examples of the Dorset Heathlands are among the best of their type in the UK. There are also transitions to coastal wetlands and floodplain fen habitats.

18. Hydrological values:

Describe the functions and values of the wetland in groundwater recharge, flood control, sediment trapping, shoreline stabilization, etc.

Recharge and discharge of groundwater

19. Wetland types:

Inland wetland

Code	Name	% Area
Other	Other	77.8
W	Shrub-dominated wetlands	8.9
U	Peatlands (including peat bogs swamps, fens)	7.5
O	Freshwater lakes: permanent	1.7
Xf	Freshwater, tree-dominated wetlands	1.3
E	Sand / shingle shores (including dune systems)	1.2
Xp	Forested peatland	1
Tp	Freshwater marshes / pools: permanent	0.3
4	Seasonally flooded agricultural land	0.2
M	Rivers / streams / creeks: permanent	0.1

20. General ecological features:

Provide further description, as appropriate, of the main habitats, vegetation types, plant and animal communities present in the Ramsar site, and the ecosystem services of the site and the benefits derived from them.

This site contains large areas of dry heath, wet heath and valley mire, and these often occur together in mosaics and zonations of heathland vegetation. Typically the wet heath occupies areas of impeded drainage on the lower valley sides and less steeply-sloping ground. The vegetation is mostly of the *Erica tetralix* -*Sphagnum compactum* type, locally characterised by *Drosera* spp. and *Rhynchospora* spp. In almost all instances the wet heath gives way to base-poor, acid mire vegetation in the valley

bottoms. The mires are commonly dominated by *Molinia caerulea*, with scattered areas of the more floristically rich *Rhynchospora alba* habitat

South of Poole Harbour *Erica tetralix* is joined by *Erica ciliaris*, which occurs extensively and often in abundance, growing on moist soils ranging from wet heath to mire situations. Outlying stands of *Erica ciliaris* occur towards the north and west of the site.

In places conditions are influenced by sources of base-enriched water, giving rise to rich fens. Several types of vegetation occur, and these include valley mire communities characterised by *Schoenus nigricans* and, where there is livestock grazing, flood plain fen and fen-meadow characterised by *Carex rostrata* or *Molinia caerulea* - *Cirsium dissectum* vegetation. Adjacent to Poole Harbour there is *Cladium mariscus* fen and transitions to intertidal areas of *Phragmites australis* swamp.

Ecosystem services

21. Noteworthy flora:

Provide additional information on particular species and why they are noteworthy (expanding as necessary on information provided in 12. Justification for the application of the Criteria) indicating, e.g. which species/communities are unique, rare, endangered or biogeographically important, etc. *Do not include here taxonomic lists of species present – these may be supplied as supplementary information to the RIS.*

Nationally important species occurring on the site.

Higher Plants.

Erica ciliaris, *Cicendia filiformis*, *Gentiana pneumonanthe*, *Hammarbya paludosa*, *Illecebrum verticillatum*, *Rhynchospora fusca*, *Deschampsia setacea*, *Elatine hexandra*, *Isoetes echinospora*, *Pilularia globulifera*, *Lycopodiella inundata*.

Lower Plants.

Sphagnum pulchrum, *Sphagnum recurvum* var *amblyphyllum*, *Cladopodiella francisci*.

22. Noteworthy fauna:

Provide additional information on particular species and why they are noteworthy (expanding as necessary on information provided in 12. Justification for the application of the Criteria) indicating, e.g. which species/communities are unique, rare, endangered or biogeographically important, etc., including count data. *Do not include here taxonomic lists of species present – these may be supplied as supplementary information to the RIS.*

Birds

Species currently occurring at levels of national importance:

Species regularly supported during the breeding season:

Dartford warbler, <i>Sylvia undata</i> , Europe	418 pairs, representing an average of 26.1% of the GB population (Three count mean 1991-2 & 1994)
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Species with peak counts in winter:

Hen harrier, <i>Circus cyaneus</i> , Europe	20 individuals, representing an average of 2.6% of the GB population (Count as at 1991/2)
Merlin, <i>Falco columbarius</i> , Europe	15 individuals, representing an average of 1% of the GB population (Count as at 1991/2)

Species Information

Species occurring at levels of international importance.

Invertebrates.

Coenagrion mercuriale.

Nationally important species occurring on the site.

Invertebrates.

Bidessus unistiatus, Buckleria paludum, Chrysops sepulchralis, Crambus silvella, Cryptocephalus biguttatus, Cyclophora pendularia, Donacia bicolora, Eristalis cryptarum, Formica candida (=transkaucasia), Graphoderus cinereus, Graptodytes flavipes, Heliothis maritima, Hydroporus cantabricus, Libellula fulva, Longitarsus nigerrimus, Nabis brevis, Pachybrachius luridus, Parhelophilus consimilis, Phragmataecia castaneae, Plecocera tricincta, Sphaerophoria loewi, Stenoptilia graphodactyla, Stenus kiesenwetteri, Stethophyma grossum, Tipula marginata, Zora armillata, Sedina buettneri.

23. Social and cultural values:

Describe if the site has any general social and/or cultural values e.g. fisheries production, forestry, religious importance, archaeological sites, social relations with the wetland, etc. Distinguish between historical/archaeological/religious significance and current socio-economic values.

- Aesthetic
- Archaeological/historical site
- Environmental education/ interpretation
- Livestock grazing
- Non-consumptive recreation
- Scientific research

b) Is the site considered of international importance for holding, in addition to relevant ecological values, examples of significant cultural values, whether material or non-material, linked to its origin, conservation and/or ecological functioning? No

If Yes, describe this importance under one or more of the following categories:

- i) sites which provide a model of wetland wise use, demonstrating the application of traditional knowledge and methods of management and use that maintain the ecological character of the wetland:
- ii) sites which have exceptional cultural traditions or records of former civilizations that have influenced the ecological character of the wetland:
- iii) sites where the ecological character of the wetland depends on the interaction with local communities or indigenous peoples:
- iv) sites where relevant non-material values such as sacred sites are present and their existence is strongly linked with the maintenance of the ecological character of the wetland:

24. Land tenure/ownership:

Ownership category	On-site	Off-site
Non-governmental organisation (NGO)	+	+
Local authority, municipality etc.	+	+
National/Crown Estate	+	+
Private	+	+

25. Current land (including water) use:

Activity	On-site	Off-site
Nature conservation	+	+
Tourism	+	+
Recreation	+	+
Current scientific research	+	+

Collection of non-timber natural products: (unspecified)	+	
Commercial forestry	+	+
Rough or shifting grazing	+	
Permanent pastoral agriculture	+	+
Hunting: recreational/sport	+	+
Industry		+
Sewage treatment/disposal		+
Harbour/port		+
Flood control		+
Mineral exploration (excl. hydrocarbons)	+	+
Mining/quarrying	+	+
Oil/gas exploration		+
Oil/gas production	+	+
Transport route	+	+
Domestic water supply		+
Urban development		+
Non-urbanised settlements		+
Military activities	+	+

26. Factors (past, present or potential) adversely affecting the site’s ecological character, including changes in land (including water) use and development projects:

Explanation of reporting category:

1. Those factors that are still operating, but it is unclear if they are under control, as there is a lag in showing the management or regulatory regime to be successful.
2. Those factors that are not currently being managed, or where the regulatory regime appears to have been ineffective so far.

NA = Not Applicable because no factors have been reported.

Adverse Factor Category	Reporting Category	Description of the problem (Newly reported Factors only)	On-Site	Off-Site	Major Impact?
Acid rain	1	Modelling by the relevant air quality authority indicates that the average or minimum deposition from airborne SOx and NOx exceed the maximum critical load for acidity on at least part of the site.	+	+	
Pollution – unspecified	1		+	+	+

For category 2 factors only.

What measures have been taken / are planned / regulatory processes invoked, to mitigate the effect of these factors?

Is the site subject to adverse ecological change? NO

27. Conservation measures taken:

List national category and legal status of protected areas, including boundary relationships with the Ramsar site; management practices; whether an officially approved management plan exists and whether it is being implemented.

Conservation measure	On-site	Off-site
Site/ Area of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI/ASSI)	+	+
National Nature Reserve (NNR)	+	+
Special Protection Area (SPA)	+	
Land owned by a non-governmental organisation for nature conservation	+	+
Management agreement	+	+
Site management statement/plan implemented	+	
Special Area of Conservation (SAC)	+	

b) Describe any other current management practices:

The management of Ramsar sites in the UK is determined by either a formal management plan or through other management planning processes, and is overseen by the relevant statutory conservation agency. Details of the precise management practises are given in these documents.

28. Conservation measures proposed but not yet implemented:

e.g. management plan in preparation; official proposal as a legally protected area, etc.

No information available

29. Current scientific research and facilities:

e.g. details of current research projects, including biodiversity monitoring; existence of a field research station, etc.

Contemporary.**Habitat.**

Condition monitoring from ground; regular aerial photography; periodic review of extent and distribution from ground survey.

Fauna.

Surveys of heath areas for rare and scarce species, especially invertebrates.

Flora.

Monitoring response of vegetation composition to management, especially scrub clearance and extensive livestock grazing.

Habitat re-creation, monitoring colonisation by heath vegetation on land converted from forestry and agriculture.

Miscellaneous.

There are two research stations bordering the site (Centre for Ecology and Hydrology and Freshwater Biological Association).

Completed.**Habitat.**

Historical changes in extent (Moore 1962; Webb 1990); vegetation types and distribution in the site (Cox 1994).

Flora.

Individual species: plants. Historical changes in occurrence (Byfield & Pearman 1996); occurrence of rare and scarce species in the site (Edwards 1997; Chapman, 1975; Cox, 1994; Hill & Edwards 2003; Edwards & Pearman 2004).

Fauna.

Individual species: invertebrates. Survey of *Coenagrion mercuriale* sites (Winsland 1994; Brash 2001a, 2001b); ecology and habitat requirements of *C. mercuriale* (Purse 2002); occurrence of rare species in the site (Cox 1994; Booth 1998; North 1998; Warne 2001); ecology and habitat requirements of rare species in the site (North 2000; Cheeseman *et al.* 2001).

Habitat.

Habitat fragmentation. Effects on vegetational diversity and invertebrate fauna (Webb 1989; Webb & Rose 1994; Webb & Vermaat 1990).

Habitat conditions. Environmental and management characteristics of wet heath and mire (Shaw & Wheeler 1990); acidification (Bisset & Farmer 1993); bog pool acidity and nutrient status (Schwagerl 1996); wildfires (Bibby 1976; Bullock & Webb 1995; Webb 1997; Kirby & Tantrum 1999).

Habitat re-creation. Identification of areas of greatest potential and ecological benefit (Rose & Webb 1995; Veitch *et al.* 1994).

Misellaneous.

Public attitudes. Attitudes of people to heathland (English Nature 1998).

30. Current communications, education and public awareness (CEPA) activities related to or benefiting the site:

e.g. visitor centre, observation hides and nature trails, information booklets, facilities for school visits, etc.

Visitor attractions: Two visitor centres serve the heaths close to the urban area and a third is planned. Conservation organisations and local authority countryside services offer a well publicised programme of events throughout the year, including guided walks, nature identification and management tasks. In summer there is a 'heathland week' with special events such as a heathland fair and traditional craft demonstrations.

Formal Education: Local authorities and several schools regularly use their local heaths for wildlife and cultural education. A computer programme on local heathland ecology has been developed by and for infant schools. There are three field study centres near the site offering educational courses. The heaths attract many project assignments from schools and further education students.

Interpretation: Large parts of the site are well provided with signs and, in places, interpretation panels. There are also many nature reserve leaflets, some self guided trail leaflets and booklets on the heathland.

31. Current recreation and tourism:

State if the wetland is used for recreation/tourism; indicate type(s) and their frequency/intensity.

Activities, Facilities provided and Seasonality.

Land-based recreation:

Walking, dog -walking, horse riding, birdwatching, jogging and child play occurs on many parts of the site throughout the year. Locally on some heaths, mainly those in and near the urban area, the level of use is high and can have detrimental effects on habitats and species. There is an ongoing programme of managing these recreational pressures through management plans and educational work implemented by nature conservation organisations and local authority countryside services, in particular through funding under the European Commission LIFE programme.

The urban fringe heaths attract unauthorised motor bike and mountain bike scrambling throughout the year. An ongoing programme of access control, police action and wardening has reduced motor bike scrambling to a few remaining localities and is continuing to target regular problem localities for mountain bike scrambling.

There are several caravan and camping sites adjacent to parts of the heathland, used mainly during summer. The disposal of waste water from some sites may be a source of poor water quality locally and consents for these discharges are to be reviewed by the Environment Agency.

At Studland very large numbers of visitors are attracted to the beach and dunes, especially during high summer. Wetland behind the coast is little impacted.

32. Jurisdiction:

Include territorial, e.g. state/region, and functional/sectoral, e.g. Dept. of Agriculture/Dept. of Environment, etc.
 Head, Natura 2000 and Ramsar Team, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs,
 European Wildlife Division, Zone 1/07, Temple Quay House, 2 The Square, Temple Quay, Bristol,
 BS1 6EB

33. Management authority:

Provide the name and address of the local office(s) of the agency(ies) or organisation(s) directly responsible for managing the wetland. Wherever possible provide also the title and/or name of the person or persons in this office with responsibility for the wetland.

Site Designations Manager, English Nature, Sites and Surveillance Team, Northminster House,
 Northminster Road, Peterborough, PE1 1UA, UK

34. Bibliographical references:

Scientific/technical references only. If biogeographic regionalisation scheme applied (see 15 above), list full reference citation for the scheme.

Site-relevant references

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NATURA 2000

STANDARD DATA FORM

FOR SPECIAL PROTECTION AREAS (SPA)
FOR SITES ELIGIBLE FOR IDENTIFICATION AS SITES OF COMMUNITY IMPORTANCE (SCI)
AND
FOR SPECIAL AREAS OF CONSERVATION (SAC)

1. Site identification:

1.1 Type 1.2 Site code

1.3 Compilation date 1.4 Update

1.5 Relationship with other Natura 2000 sites

U	K	0	0	1	9	8	5	7
U	K	0	0	3	0	0	3	8

1.6 Respondent(s)

1.7 Site name

1.8 Site indication and designation classification dates

date site proposed as eligible as SCI	
date confirmed as SCI	
date site classified as SPA	199810
date site designated as SAC	

2. Site location:

2.1 Site centre location

longitude	latitude
02 09 33W	50 39 00N

2.2 Site area (ha) 2.3 Site length (km)

2.5 Administrative region

NUTS code	Region name	% cover
UK631	Dorset	100.00%

2.6 Biogeographic region

Alpine

Atlantic

Boreal

Continental

Macaronesia

Mediterranean

3. Ecological information:

3.1 Annex I habitats

Habitat types present on the site and the site assessment for them:

Annex I habitat	% cover	Representativity	Relative surface	Conservation status	Global assessment

3.2 Annex I birds and regularly occurring migratory birds not listed on Annex I

Code	Species name	Population			Site assessment				
		Resident	Breed	Winter	Stage	Population	Conservation	Isolation	Global
A224	<i>Caprimulgus europaeus</i>		>436 P			B		C	
A082	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>			20 I		B		C	
A098	<i>Falco columbarius</i>			15 I		C		C	
A246	<i>Lullula arborea</i>		>41 P			B		B	
A302	<i>Sylvia undata</i>		>418 P			A		B	

4. Site description:

4.1 General site character

Habitat classes	% cover
Marine areas. Sea inlets	
Tidal rivers. Estuaries. Mud flats. Sand flats. Lagoons (including saltwork basins)	
Salt marshes. Salt pastures. Salt steppes	
Coastal sand dunes. Sand beaches. Machair	1.0
Shingle. Sea cliffs. Islets	
Inland water bodies (standing water, running water)	1.0
Bogs. Marshes. Water fringed vegetation. Fens	6.0
Heath. Scrub. Maquis and garrigue. Phygrana	83.0
Dry grassland. Steppes	4.0
Humid grassland. Mesophile grassland	
Alpine and sub-alpine grassland	
Improved grassland	
Other arable land	
Broad-leaved deciduous woodland	1.0
Coniferous woodland	4.0
Evergreen woodland	
Mixed woodland	
Non-forest areas cultivated with woody plants (including orchards, groves, vineyards, dehesas)	
Inland rocks. Scree. Sands. Permanent snow and ice	
Other land (including towns, villages, roads, waste places, mines, industrial sites)	
Total habitat cover	100%

4.1 Other site characteristics

Soil & geology:

Acidic, Clay, Nutrient-poor, Peat, Sand, Sedimentary

Geomorphology & landscape:

Coastal, Lowland, Slope, Valley

4.2 Quality and importance

ARTICLE 4.1 QUALIFICATION (79/409/EEC)

During the breeding season the area regularly supports:

Caprimulgus europaeus

at least 12.8% of the GB breeding population
Two year mean, 1991-1992

Lullula arborea

at least 6.8% of the GB breeding population
Three count mean, 1991-2 & 1994

<i>Sylvia undata</i>	at least 26.1% of the GB breeding population Three count mean, 1991-2 & 1994
Over winter the area regularly supports:	
<i>Circus cyaneus</i>	2.7% of the GB population Count, as at 1991/2
<i>Falco columbarius</i>	1.2% of the GB population Count, as at 1991/2

ARTICLE 4.2 QUALIFICATION (79/409/EEC)

4.3 Vulnerability

The Dorset Heathlands have become a fragmented heathland area through extensive losses to agriculture, forestry and urban development. In recent years these land use changes have been almost halted through changes in national and local policy. However, the scale of previous fragmentation and development has left a number of adverse pressures and many heaths in or near urban areas suffer recreational use pressure and a high incidence of wildfires, and are sometimes also disturbed by infrastructure works.

The heaths are affected by several old mineral extraction permissions, some still active. These will require review under the Habitats Regulations to ensure no adverse effect on integrity. Agreement has already been reached on drawing back the possible working of some permissions. In and around the urban areas there are now well established initiatives to manage and contain recreation uses, and to more effectively control the occurrence and spread of fires. At two old waste sites within the Heathlands leaching has occurred. This has been addressed through re-capping.

The decline in use for traditional agriculture has resulted in a successional trend to scrub and woodland together with invasion by conifer and introduced scrub species, especially *Rhododendron*. Financial support schemes and management initiatives, which aid the removal of scrub and encourage the re-establishment of traditional management in the form of extensive grazing, now cover much of the heath area. About 43% of the site is now held as National Nature Reserves, Local Nature Reserves and non-statutory nature reserves.

Fragmentation has increased edge and patch size effects on the heathland ecology. This is being addressed through re-creation projects to expand and link heath fragments by removing areas of conifer plantation and converting some agricultural land back to heathland.

5. Site protection status and relation with CORINE biotopes:

5.1 Designation types at national and regional level

Code	% cover
UK01 (NNR)	18.9
UK04 (SSSI/ASSI)	100.0

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