

Chilterns Beechwoods Special Area of Conservation – Evidence Paper – September 2024

Introduction

The Chilterns Beechwoods Special Area of Conservation (CB SAC) is a National Site designated under the Habitats Regulations (Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, as amended, the ‘Habitats Regulations’). The qualifying features (i.e., why it has been designated) of the CB SAC are “Beech forests on neutral to rich soils, dry grasslands and scrublands on chalk or limestone and the Stag Beetle”.

Dacorum Borough Council published a Footprint Ecology (FE) technical Report on 14 March 2022 [[Footprint Ecology Report - March 2022 - low resolution - \(PDF 6MB\)](#)] that directly impacts Dacorum, St Albans, Buckinghamshire and Central Bedfordshire Councils and our ability to give planning permission for residential development. A Zone of Influence (ZOI) was identified in the FE report which extends 12.6km from Ashridge Commons and Woods Site of Special Scientific Importance (SSSI). It includes part of St Albans District and mainly affects the Redbourn parish area. The area affected is set out at on a map at appendix A.

A CB SAC Mitigation Strategy and Statement of Common Ground have been agreed and can be found at the links below.

- [Appendix A - Chiltern Beechwoods Special Area of Conservation \(SAC\) Mitigation Strategy , item 9.](#) PDF 8 MB
- [Appendix B - Statement of Common Ground , item 9.](#) PDF 317 KB

The Mitigation Strategy comprises of two elements, a Strategic Access Management and Monitoring Strategy (SAMMS) and SANG strategy. The SAMMS requires developer contributions per net new dwelling to enable interventions within the Ashridge Estate. A second element in the Mitigation Strategy will be the identification and/ or creation of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) to draw people away from using the SAC.

Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMMS)

Dacorum as the lead Authority, St Albans, Central Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire Councils have agreed Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMMS) measures and costs for mitigation measures within the Chiltern Beechwoods SAC. These have also been agreed with the landowner, the National Trust and Natural England as the Government’s adviser.

All potential developments within the Zone of Influence will potentially be able to utilise the SAMM solution by paying the required per dwelling figure. The developers will be required to pay a tariff of £828.61 for each new home built.

Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG)

All new developments within the Zone of Influence will also need to make provision for a new Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG), or alternatively contribute towards the maintenance of a suitable SANG project elsewhere.

Larger developments (10 or more new homes) must provide their own suitable SANG that meets the guidance from Natural England. Smaller developments (1-9 homes) can contribute towards an existing SANG. A Council SANG site in the District has been identified at Jersey Farm Open Space and agreed as being suitable with Natural England. For smaller developments (1-9 homes) applicants will be able to request use of the Council SANG solution and the Council will consider if it meets relevant criteria. If the criteria are met and capacity is available, applicants will be able to use the Council SANG solution by paying the required per dwelling figure of £6,603.

This position has been agreed as of October 2023.

[Jersey Farm Open Space SANG Management Plan 2023](#) (PDF - 2.58 MB)

Local Plan 2024 Reg 19 Part A

The Local Plan contains the following policy references:

Strategic Policy SP1: A Spatial Strategy for St Albans District

The Local Plan also supports:...Protection and enhancement of the Chilterns Beechwoods Special Area of Conservation (CB SAC);..

LG3 - Hemel Garden Communities Growth Areas Place Principles

Pillar 1 - Green Network has the following requirements:

- a) Provide Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space (SANG) as part of an appropriate mitigation strategy for Chilterns Beechwood Special Area of Conservation (CBSAC);

Strategic Policy SP10 – Natural Environment, Biodiversity and Green and Blue Infrastructure

- f) Make appropriate contributions towards the Strategic Access Management and Monitoring Strategy (SAMMS), where the proposal is for additional housing within the Chilterns Beechwoods Special Area of Conservation (CBSAC) Zone of Influence (ZOI). Such development proposals will also need to make provision for a new Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG), or alternatively contribute towards the maintenance of a suitable SANG project elsewhere;

Local Plan 2024 Reg 19 Part B

The CB SAC has been referenced for the following sites which are wholly or partly within the CB SAC Zone of Influence and will require appropriate mitigation in terms of SANG and SAMM:

- H1 - North Hemel Hempstead

- H2 - East Hemel Hempstead (North)
- H3 – East Hemel Hempstead (Central)
- H4 - East Hemel Hempstead (South)
- B3 - West Redbourn
- M6 – South of Harpenden Lane, Redbourn
- M7 - Townsend Lane, Harpenden
- M16 - Falconers Field, Harpenden
- P3 - Friends Meeting House, Blackwater Lane, Hemel
- UC33 - Land Rear of 53 Snatchup, Redbourn

Due to their location within the 12.6km core recreational ZOI for the Chilterns Beechwoods SAC, there is potential for the residential allocations identified above to result in an increase in recreational pressure on the SAC in combination with other projects and plans and as such appropriate assessment is undertaken. More details can be found in the HRA below.

Sustainability Appraisal & HRA:

The Sustainability Appraisal & HRA can be found at the links below and contain various refs to the CB SAC and related mitigation.

[Sustainability Appraisal \(PP&C Version 23.09.24\).pdf](#)

[Habitats Regulation Assessment \(PP&C Version 23.09.24\).pdf](#)

The HRA concludes:

The Local Plan contains suitable policy wording to ensure that any allocations and any windfall development that falls within the 12.6km core recreational ZOI does not result in a likely significant effect and also adheres to the forthcoming Mitigation Strategy.

Following an analysis of the current position relating to the availability, deliverability and timing of SANG provision in relation to the expected delivery time frames for residential development, it was concluded that, whilst not all allocations have a SANG strategy identified, those without a SANG solution in place are not to be occupied until at least year 6 of the Local Plan. The Council has confirmed that they are confident that appropriate SANG solutions will be delivered for all of the relevant sites within the Local Plan. This confidence is in part demonstrated by the Council's commitment to the Chilterns Beechwoods SAC Mitigation Strategy as agreed in the Council's Policy Committee March 202352. It is considered that with the Chilterns Beechwood Habitats Regulations Assessment SAC Mitigation Strategy in place, and the Council's confidence to deliver SANG in a timely fashion, (acknowledging the excess SANG capacity at Hemel Garden Communities), that no adverse effects on the integrity of the Chilterns Beechwoods SAC would result.

Further information

More information can be found on the council webpage:




<https://www.stalbans.gov.uk/chilterns-beechwoods-sac>

For more detailed information, please see [Dacorum's website](#) as the lead authority on this.

A report on the CB SAC was considered by the SADC Policy Committee in March 2023 and the papers can be found at the links below:

[Chiltern Beechwoods Special Area of Conservation: Mitigation Strategy](#)  PDF
751 KB

Additional documents:

- **[Appendix A - Chiltern Beechwoods Special Area of Conservation \(SAC\) Mitigation Strategy , item 9.](#)**  PDF 8 MB
- **[Appendix B - Statement of Common Ground , item 9.](#)**  PDF 317 KB
- **[Appendix C - Emerging Jersey Farm Open Space SANG Management Plan , item 9.](#)**  PDF 3 MB

Appendix A Zone of Influence (ZOI)

