

Appendix 2 - Chilterns Beechwoods Special Area of Conservation

- 1.1. The Chiltern Beechwoods Special Area of Conservation includes 9 separate sites in the Chiltern Hills and spreads across 3 counties. The Special Area of Conservation is an internationally recognised designation with habitats and species of significant ecological importance.

Chilterns Beechwoods Special Area of Conservation (SAC)

- 1) Development proposals which are likely to have a significant effect on the Chiltern Beechwoods Special Area of Conservation (SAC) will be subject to a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA). This applies to proposals which are within the zone of influence of the Chiltern Beechwoods Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and which would result in a net increase of 100 units or more.
- 2) Where development proposals are subject to a HRA they will be required to deliver suitable mitigation and / or avoidance measures in order to address potential adverse effects arising from increased recreational disturbance. This includes provision, improvement and / or maintenance of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) (or a suitable financial contribution towards the same).

Reasoned Justification

- 1.2. As part of its emerging local plan, Dacorum Borough Council has found evidence of visitor pressure in Chiltern Beechwoods Special Area of Conservation as a result of additional residential development from within the zone of influence. The report¹ identified a 12.6km Zone of Influence (ZOI). As a result, large developments in the ZOI will be required to produce a Habitat Regulations Assessment and may be required to provide mitigation measures.
- 1.3. A small part of Three Rivers falls within the ZOI. It was not included in the 'strategic solution' by Natural England as less than 2% of visitors to the SAC were from Three Rivers. However, the requirement to produce a Habitat Regulations Assessment applies to sites within the ZOI. The Council has set a threshold of 100 dwellings or more on the advice of Natural England.
- 1.4. As part of the Habitat Regulations Assessment, development proposals will be expected to deliver suitable mitigation and / or avoidance measures to address any adverse impact on the SAC. Mitigation measures include the provision of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) of sufficient size/quality to divert visitors away from the Chiltern Beechwoods SAC and leading to a creation of a semi-natural experience. Any mitigation measures should take into account information in the most recent Mitigation Strategy.
- 1.5. SANGs must also consist of adequate parking for visitors, unless the site is intended for local use (within 400m walk of developments linked to it); aim to enable completion of a circular walk of 2.3 to 2.5km around the SANG; are designed to enhance safety perceptions by users;

¹ Visitor survey, recreation impact assessment and mitigation requirements for the Chilterns Beechwoods SAC and the Dacorum Local Plan https://www.dacorum.gov.uk/docs/default-source/strategic-planning/dacorum-recreation-evidence-base-200322.pdf?sfvrsn=fbe079e_0

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are free from tree and scrub cover along parts of the walking routes and must incorporate a semi-natural feel with little intrusion of artificial structures.