

# ENVIRONMENT AND PLACE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE



Report subject	<b>Heathland Mitigation funding</b>
Meeting date	20 November 2024
Status	Public Report
Executive summary	<p>Heathland Mitigation is an important policy with a long-standing planning context that enables development across BCP, where nearly all development sites are within 5Km of internationally protected heathlands.</p> <p>Examples of Heathland Infrastructure Projects are given that use developer contributions to mitigate the impact of housing on Dorset's lowland heaths.</p>
<b>Recommendations</b>	<p><b>It is RECOMMENDED that:</b></p> <p><b>Members review the information in the report.</b></p>
Reason for recommendations	Within report.
Portfolio Holder(s):	Andy Hadley, Portfolio Holder for the Environment Millie Earl, Leader and Portfolio Holder for Planning Services.
Corporate Director	Glynn Barton, Chief Operations Officer
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Wards	Council-wide
Classification	For Information

## Background

1. Dorset heathland (7,500 ha) is protected internationally by Special Protection Areas (SPA), RAMSAR for birds; and Special Area of Conservation (SAC) for specific habitats and species due to their hosting of protected priority habitats and species. The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (the 'Habitats Regulations') transposes the Habitats Directive 1992 and the

Birds Directive 1979 (European legislation) into domestic law for England and Wales.

2. Dorset heaths are fragmented, and many fragments lie within increasingly urban landscapes in the BCP conurbation. BCP has responsibilities under the protection of European wildlife sites by the EC Birds and Habitats Directives and are advised by Natural England on how to fulfil these duties.
3. Studies have found that public access to heathland from nearby development has led to an increase in wildfires, damaging recreational use, the introduction of incompatible plants and animals, loss of vegetation, fragmentation of heaths, pollution, vandalism and soil erosion. The number of dwellings within 5km of Dorset heathland increased 6.4% between 2007-2021 (Panter et al, 2022).
4. The Dorset Heathlands Planning Framework 2020-2025 is a supplementary planning document (SPD) that has an objective to set out a long-term strategy for the avoidance and mitigation of impacts of new residential development upon the Dorset Heathlands.
5. The overall objective of the SPD is to establish a framework under which applications for development likely to have a significant effect on the Dorset Heathlands can be permitted (or should be refused) so that any adverse effects on the integrity of the Dorset Heathlands are mitigated. The Councils when granting planning permission must be certain that the proposed development will not have an adverse effect on important areas of nature conservation. Any net increase in residential development within 5 kilometres will have an adverse impact on the Dorset Heathlands. Therefore, measures must be put in place to avoid and mitigate all harm caused. By following the avoidance and mitigation measures laid out in the SPD, BCP can continue to grant permissions for development planned within the local plan. The SPD is [here](#) for further detail and information.
6. The mitigation elements fall into two parts: **Strategic Access, Management and Monitoring (SAMM)** focusing on wardening, raising awareness of protected environments and monitoring the effectiveness of the strategy and **Heathland Infrastructure Projects (HIPS)** focusing on the provision of alternative facilities to attract people away from protected heathland sites.
7. **The Dorset Heaths Partnership (DHP)** is in place and managed across the Dorset and BCP Council areas to deliver wardening, monitoring and specific education and information services, such as Dorset Dogs. DHP is funded through SAMM contributions.
8. The information in this report relates to funding collected for Heathland Infrastructure projects (HIPS). HIPS are physical infrastructure works that fall into four categories:
  - Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces (SANGs) aiming to draw visitors from the local area, mitigating one development site

- Strategic SANGs aiming to draw visitors from a wider area, mitigating multiple development sites
  - Heathland support sites, adjacent to heathland area, aiming to spread public access pressure
  - Other HIP projects which are bespoke to local areas and create linkages between greenspaces, recreational facilities and fire access measures.
9. HIPs including SANGs can be delivered and managed by both the public and private sector. HIPs will be delivered from contributions collected through Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) payments or secured through Section 106 agreements.
  10. The mitigation measures required to allow development will need to be in place whilst the adverse effects are arising. For residential development, this means “in-perpetuity”, which for this strategy is considered as 80 years, and hence resources are secured accordingly.
  11. HIPs are monitored, alongside the monitoring of heathland sites, to evidence impact of mitigation strategies on Dorset heathland.
  12. Heathland Mitigation funding is a long-term management approach to creating generational change in use and impacts on protected heathlands. Creating spaces and providing the wardening for enforcement and education that encourage people to use alternative areas to heathlands for recreation.
  13. The current SPD runs to 2025 and will be reviewed in the next year to bring costings and delivery up to date.

## Projects and outcomes

14. Summary of key selected projects:

Project	HIPs Funding	Delivery and Outcomes
Upton Country Park SANG Various phases 2015-2020. 30Ha.	c. £800k Construction and project delivery	<p>Significant extension to the Country Park, utilising land previously managed by the tenant farmer. Created new SANG featuring gravel tracks, access to a stream, routes through pockets of woods and scrub that replicate time on heaths. Free car park created outside of the main Country Park, a requirement of SANGs.</p> <p>Dogs able to be walked off lead across the SANG and features two dog training enclosures that are well used.</p> <p>The SANG creates a safe and very popular space for people to access nature, let dogs run and roam without disturbing sensitive</p>

		wildlife; and links well to local residential areas as well as a destination site.
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Project	HIPs Funding	Delivery and Outcomes
Mudeford Woods 2024 - 25	£221,825	<p>Currently in delivery phase with the following objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Provide an accessible, all-year-round gateway to green spaces with varied routeways and provide for seating and waymarking.</li> <li>b) Improve and provide key linkage between green spaces, green infrastructure and the coast</li> <li>c) Increase Mudeford Woods' resilience, capacity and attraction by creating/enhancing routes, clearing vegetation, and providing for signage, seating and interpretation panels including the history of the area.</li> </ul> <p>Adding resilience to the existing green space (rather than creating new) this project links existing sites, promotes safe access routes and encourages time and contact in the natural environment.</p> <p>Engagement on the project through community centres, engaging with users at events, consultation on specific interventions such as a dog training enclosure have been positive.</p> <p>Practical outcomes will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Signage and Waymarking: Welcome Panel; Information lectern; Waymarker post; Street Signage.</li> <li>• Path Improvements: Non-Slip Sheeting For Bridge; Remove chicane</li> <li>• Infrastructure: Benches</li> <li>• Secure Dog Space</li> <li>• Drinking and Dog Fountain</li> <li>• Place-making (tree planting)</li> <li>• Monitoring: Visitor Surveys</li> <li>• Sculpture.</li> <li>• Engaging Dorset Dogs to promote and engage dog walkers in new dog space.</li> </ul>

<b>Project</b>	<b>HIPs Funding</b>	<b>Delivery and Outcomes</b>
<p>lford Meadows and recreation ground</p> <p>2021 - 23</p>	<p>£185k</p>	<p>Linking the two open spaces at lford, either side of the railway line, this project delivered practical improvements that create and encourage access:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Boardwalk and linkages under the railway line, improving a previously difficult to access narrowing between the two open spaces</li> <li>• Site signage, encouraging appropriate use of the green space, alongside information and interpretation.</li> <li>• Creation of meadows and tree planting to enhance the natural environment. This helps to replicate use of heathlands.</li> <li>• Improvements to paths and access points.</li> </ul> <p>Delivery of the project is complete; monitoring is ongoing.</p>

<b>Project</b>	<b>HIPs Funding</b>	<b>Delivery and Outcomes</b>
<p>Cherry Tree meadows</p> <p>2022-23</p>	<p>£122k</p>	<p>New surfaced car park near the nursery to provide access to the River Stour footpaths, linking through to Kingfisher Barn visitor centre.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gravel car park</li> <li>• Height restrictor with wood carvings, surfacing,</li> <li>• Paths and earth mounding.</li> <li>• Site signage.</li> </ul> <p>Although simple in scope, this car park creates greater capacity than the service road to the water treatment site. Enables quality to natural greenspace, similar to heathlands. Site monitoring is ongoing.</p>

15. Value for money for any funded project is managed through BCP financial regulations, seeking value for money through competitive tender processes.
16. The projects require approval by Natural England and are passed through the Heathland Mitigation Steering group. Within BCP, approval for funding is then required, dependant on level, by Capital Briefing Board or Cabinet/Council and is assessed through that process by Finance, Planning and Legal colleagues.
17. The monitoring strategy for each project is approved by Natural England and the Dorset Heaths Partnership. The monitoring at each HIP is collated by Footprint Ecology and published in an annual report which assess the impact of mitigation across Dorset. The 2023 report can be found [here](#).
18. Heathlands, SANGs and some HIPs have people counters on their entrances, as well as receiving manual car park counts and user surveys. A total of 6 people counters have been installed at Upton Country Park, covering most entrances to the site. There have been 3 counters installed at Mudeford Woods, 2 installed at Iford Meadows and 1 counter installed at Cherry Tree Meadows. The car parks at Upton Country Park and Iford Meadows have also been added to the co-ordinated car park counts undertaken by the Dorset Heaths Partnership and BCP Countryside staff.
19. As part of the site monitoring, face-to-face visitor surveys have been carried out at Upton Country Park, Iford Meadows and Cherry Tree Meadows. A first round of surveys are carried out prior the commencement of any work undertaken (or close to opening) and then repeated in subsequent rounds as advised by the SPD. The surveys are designed to gain a better understanding of site usage. Data collected from these surveys has shown that:
  - When asked which alternative site they would have visited had they not been able to visit Upton Country Park on the day of interview, 30% of locations named were heathland sites. 81% of interviewees suggested that they visit the site at least once or more (2022).
  - 36% of locations named by interviewees at Iford Meadows when asked what alternative site they would have visited had they not been able to visit on the day of interview were heathland sites. 82% of interviewees visit Iford Meadows at least once a week or more (2023).
  - 31% of named alternative locations to visiting Cherry Tree Meadows were heathland sites. 69% of interviewees visit the site at least once a week or more (2024).
20. 2023 introduced 4 new SANG sites and 5 new HIP projects across Dorset, a 7% increase in area available to the public. People counters on the heaths have seen a decrease in usage of 5% over the past 5 years. Vehicles in car parks at heathland sites have decreased by 7% over the last 3 years (Panter, Caals and Rush, 2023).

21. Looking at the impact of mitigation on protected species on Dorset heaths, there has been a 32% increase in woodlark pairs across 20 heathland sites over 3 years, nightjar territory has increased by 11% over the past 3 years and we have seen stable numbers of Dartford warbler pairs over the last 3 years (Panter, Caals and Rush, 2023).
22. Looking at monitoring data affecting BCP sites, visitor counter data shows a 47% decrease in use of Upton Heath and a 13% decrease in the use of Canford Heath over the previous 5 years as well as a decrease in car park use of 16% at Canford Heath over the past 3 years (Panter, Caals and Rush, 2023). Extensive visitor surveys have been conducted at the Upton Country Park SANG following the various phases of mitigation works and research has found that should the SANG not be available, visitors would instead visit Upton Heath, Canford Heath, Hamworthy Park and Baiter instead and so we can be confident that SANG is successfully mitigating urban pressure on Dorset heathland (Lewis, 2018). 31% of visitors in 2022 had been visiting this particular site for less than 9 years (Lewis, 2022).
23. The 2022 report from Footprint Ecology reviewing mitigation delivery and effectiveness to date ([Dorset-Heaths-long-term-analysis-report.pdf](#)) says *"Data are building to show that HIPs/SANGs are effective and working to deflect access from the heaths. While each HIP/SANG is different in character, the data across SANGs show they are well used and use has been increasing over time and increasing relative to the heaths"* (Panter et al, 2022).

### **Options Appraisal**

24. The Heathlands SPD requires review in 2025 and provides an opportunity for further scrutiny or changes to the management of the fund.

### **Summary of financial implications**

25. Details on breakdown of project costs and summaries of financial commitments made to HIPs are available if required.
26. As at September 2024, available funds collected by CIL and ring-fenced in to the two areas of spend are:
  - a. HIPs £2.7m
  - b. SAMMs £1.7m

### **Summary of legal implications**

27. The SPD sets out the legislative and policy background that cover the designations that cover the lowland heaths, their habitats and individual species. In addition, Habitats regulations and the National Planning Policy Framework are also relevant and detailed.
28. The SPD supports various Local Plan policies.

**Summary of human resources implications**

29. N/a

**Summary of sustainability impact**

30. N/a

**Summary of public health implications**

31. N/a

**Summary of equality implications**

32. N/a

**Summary of risk assessment**

33. N/a

**Background papers**



## Appendices

### Extract from SPD – possible types of HIPs projects

Part 2 provides an illustration of the type of infrastructure projects that could be used to mitigate harm. The projects focus on attracting people away from protected heathlands. HIPs are physical infrastructure works, such as the provision of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANGs) or enhancement of existing greenspaces to increase the attractiveness for visitors that would otherwise visit the Dorset Heathlands. The table sets out the type of disturbance, the suggested action from Natural England's Site Improvement Plan (2014), and the possible type of mitigation project. Project costs will be determined on a site by site basis.

#### *Part 2 Possible Types of Heathland Infrastructure Projects (HIPs)*

Pressure	Action from Site Improvement Plan	Possible Type of Project
Disturbance by humans and/or dogs	Prevent increases in damaging recreational pressures from new development	Provision of strategic SANGs, e.g. Upton Country Park, Hicks Farm, Woolslope Farm, Two Rivers Meet
		Developer led SANGs alongside settlement extensions, e.g. Canford Park
		Provide accessible routeways, gateways, viewing points, seating and waymarking.
		Improve access to non-designated sites e.g. Arrowsmith coppice, Delph Woods
		Improve linkages between SANGs and other green infrastructure, e.g. along the Stour Valley
		On-site and access management projects e.g. managing diffuse car parking, improved interpretation, enhancing access in appropriate locations, e.g. Arne, Stoborough & Hartland heathland complex
		Provision of BMX facilities to reduce impacts of BMX usage on nearby heaths
		Provision of heathland support areas around protected sites to dissipate the impacts and make sites more robust e.g. Sunnyside farm, Wheelers Lane, Soldiers Road
		Increasing capacity and attractiveness of existing open spaces including creation of new routes, clearing, signage, small car park, seating and interpretation display
Disturbance by dogs	Prevent increases in damaging recreational pressures from new development	Creation of dog friendly areas to provide alternative secure location for dog owners to train and exercise their dogs
		Managing access to open space for dog walking
Fire	Take appropriate measures to reduce the number and size of arson incidents	On site management and alerting the public at high risk times as well as dealing with generic issues such as BBQs and fire access for emergency services.

### Photos of Upton Country Park SANG





## References

Lewis, C (2018) Summary of Visitor Monitoring at Upton Country Park SANG (Phase 1, Round 2), Dorset Heaths Partnership

Lewis, C (2022) Summary of Visitor Monitoring at Upton Country Park SANG (Phase 2, Round 2), Dorset Heaths Partnership

Panter, C, Caals, Z and Rush, E (2023) DHP Annual monitoring Report 2023, Footprint Ecology

Panter, C, Liley, D, Calls, Z, Saunders, P and Clarke, R (2022) Urban Development and the Dorset Heaths: Long Term Analysis and Evidence Base Review, Footprint Ecology