

Sandhurst Neighbourhood Plan

Appendix 4 (Regulation 15 version)

Local Green Space Study

Introduction

From the initial Neighbourhood Plan liaison with Sandhurst residents, including questionnaires, it was apparent that there was an overwhelming desire that key elements of open space within the Sandhurst boundary be protected from development and be retained for future enjoyment. To comply with the desires of the Sandhurst residents the Sandhurst Neighbourhood Plan elected to designate key elements of these areas as 'Local Green Space'.

The areas that the residents considered to be fundamental to their desire to continue to enjoy comprised two main parameters: smaller sites within or adjacent to the settlement areas and 'most importantly' the key area incorporating the land in and around Horseshoe and Grove Lakes. The latter area being within countryside, albeit very near to the settlements of Sandhurst and Yateley.

The definition of Local Green Space was recognised by the Government's need to provide, protect and enhance the natural environment. **The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)**, in March 2012, introduced the designation. It was subsequently included within later revisions. **This was intended to afford protection from development other than in very special circumstances. Land designated as Local Green Space is subject to the similar strong development restrictions as Green Belt.**

The NPPF notes (para 107 of that document) that Local Green Spaces should only be designated where they are: -

(a) in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves.

(b) demonstrably special to the local community, and holds a particular significance because of their beauty, historic significance, recreational value, tranquillity and richness of its wildlife.

(c) local in character and is not an extensive tract of land.

Government Guidance relating to Local Green Space designations note the following: -

How big can a Local Green Space be: - There are no hard and fast rules about how big a Local Green Space can be because places are different, and a degree of judgement will inevitably be needed. However, the NPPF is clear that Local Green Space designation should only be where the green area is not an extensive tract of land. Consequently, blanket designation of open countryside adjacent to a settlement should not be a 'back door' way to try to achieve what would amount to a new area of Green Belt by another name.

Access: - Land could be considered for designation if there is no public access (e.g., green areas which are valued because of their wildlife, and or beauty).

Does land need to be in public ownership: - Local Green Space does not need to be in public ownership. However, the local planning authority or qualifying body, in the case of neighbourhood plan making, should contact landowners at an early stage about proposals to designate any part of their land as Local Green Space. Landowners will have the opportunity to make representations in respect of proposals in a draft plan.

Would designation place any restrictions or obligations on landowners: - Designating a green area as Local Green Space would give it protection consistent with Green Belt, but otherwise there are no new restrictions or obligations on landowners.

Who will manage Local Green Space: - Management of land designated as Local Green Space will remain the responsibility of the owner. If the features that make a green area special and locally significant are to be conserved, how will it be managed in the future is likely to be an important consideration. Local communities can consider how with the landowner's agreement, they might be able to get involved, perhaps in partnership with interested organisations that can provide advice or resources.

Additionally, it is recognised that Local Green Space designations should not include sites where planning for permission for development has been given or have been allocated for development within a Local Plan.

None of the Local Green Space designated sites referenced within this Study have current planning permissions for development and additionally none

have been allocated for development within the Bracknell Forest Local Plan (BFLP)

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2 Local Green Space Study Summary

2.1 The Local Green Space Study sets out to provide a summary of the Sandhurst Local Green Space designations, as noted within the Sandhurst Neighbourhood Plan document. It includes related evidence and information to substantiate their designation compliance with the NPPF, with particular reference to clause 107 of that document and the government’s guidance notes on the interpretation of the NPPF’s intentions.

2.2 To assist with the understanding of this Study the following summary describes the content of each of the Study’s sections: -

Section 2, Local Green Space Study Summary.

Section 3 includes a summary of the Local Green Space designated sites.

Section 4 of the study provides further and specific information regarding the designated sites, including evidence to support their designation.

Sections 5 to 11 inclusive, provide background for the broader understanding relating to the designation of LGS sites 6 and LGS 7 and why these sites are considered to comply with the intentions of the NPPF (section 107). Sites LGS 6 and LGS 7 are located within countryside adjacent to the settlements of Sandhurst and Yateley. Their background history, together with related data and evidence, sets out to support the consideration that they are close to the communities they serve, are demonstrably special and are not extensive tracts of land: -

Section 5 includes historic planning history and related restoration strategy.

Section 6 includes the area's previous and current designation under respective BFC Local Plans.

Section 7 records the benefits of areas LGS 6 and LGS 7 to the community.

Section 8 relates to a BFC report that includes data collected and confirmation that an element of area LGS 6 has SANG status.

Section 9 records visitor and wildlife/wildfowl data.

Section 10 refers to supporting evidence provided by the Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership (BVCP).

Section 11 includes a summary of the evidence to support the view that areas LGS 6 and LGS 7 are compliant with the NPPF para 107.

Section 12 includes a summary of all Sandhurst Neighbourhood Plan Local Green Space designations, together with their respective Local Green Space scoring.

2.3 Some elements of the Local Green Space Study have been duplicated from the Sandhurst Neighbourhood Plan. They have, however, been included for ease of understanding of the Local Green Space Study's evidence and supporting information.

2.4 References to specific NPPF sections and paragraphs referenced within this Appendix relate to the December 2024 edition. Should the NPPF be updated during the duration of the NP then the current and equivalent sections and paragraphs would apply.

3 Local Green Space designations

3.1 Local Green Space (LGS) site index: -The LGS areas below have been identified by the community as being important and needing enhanced protection: -

- 1 Snaprails Park (map reference LGS 1)
- 2 Owlsmoor Park (map reference LGS 2)
- 3 School Hill (map reference LGS 3)
- 4 Sandy Lane/Grampian Road (map reference LGS 4)
- 5 Cheviot Road (map reference LGS 5)
- 6 Horseshoe Lake and surrounding countryside
(map reference LGS 6)
- 7 Grove Lake and surrounding countryside (map reference LGS 7)
- 8 Moray Avenue, College Town (map reference LGS 8)
- 9 Waterside Lane (map reference LGS 9)
- 10 Berrybank Copse (map reference LGS 10)

LGS 1 and 2 are green public parkland spaces, contain many mature trees, and are used for informal activities by the community such as dog walking together with children's play areas. They also have high architectural importance as they provide a significant green backdrop to the adjacent suburban scene.

LGS 3, 4 and 5 are green spaces containing many mature trees. These areas are open to the public for walking and enjoyment of natural green space. They additionally provide a significant contribution to the architectural appearance to Little Sandhurst and comply with the recommendations of the Sandhurst Character Study. They contribute a significant and pleasant backdrop to the urban housing in the area, sites LGS 3 and 4 also being located in elevated positions. Reference to the 'Chapter 2 Sandhurst Study Area' (NP Appendix 5) under design 'Recommendations' notes *'The backdrop of woodland should be retained throughout the character area as it adds significant distinctiveness'*.

LGS 6 and LGS 7 provides a unique area within the Blackwater Valley Corridor that has not been urbanised. It being one of the key areas that attracts a wide variety of wildlife and wildfowl. The wildlife and wildfowl being able to benefit from the ambience of the current rural feel of the lakes and its surrounding open and part wooded countryside. Due to the fenced footpaths in and around the lakes the public can enjoy and observe wildlife and wildfowl without interference of their habitats. LGS 6 and LGS 7 possess connectivity to provide a wider greenspace for visitors to enjoy. Both sites have high local visitor numbers.

LGS 6 Includes part of the Horseshoe Lake SANG area and countryside to the north and east of Horseshoe Lake. The related Leisure activities include walking, nature observation and within the Horseshoe Lake area, water sports (dinghy sailing, canoeing and waterboarding) together with associated facilities. The areas of open fields north and east of Horseshoe Lake are generally of equestrian usage.

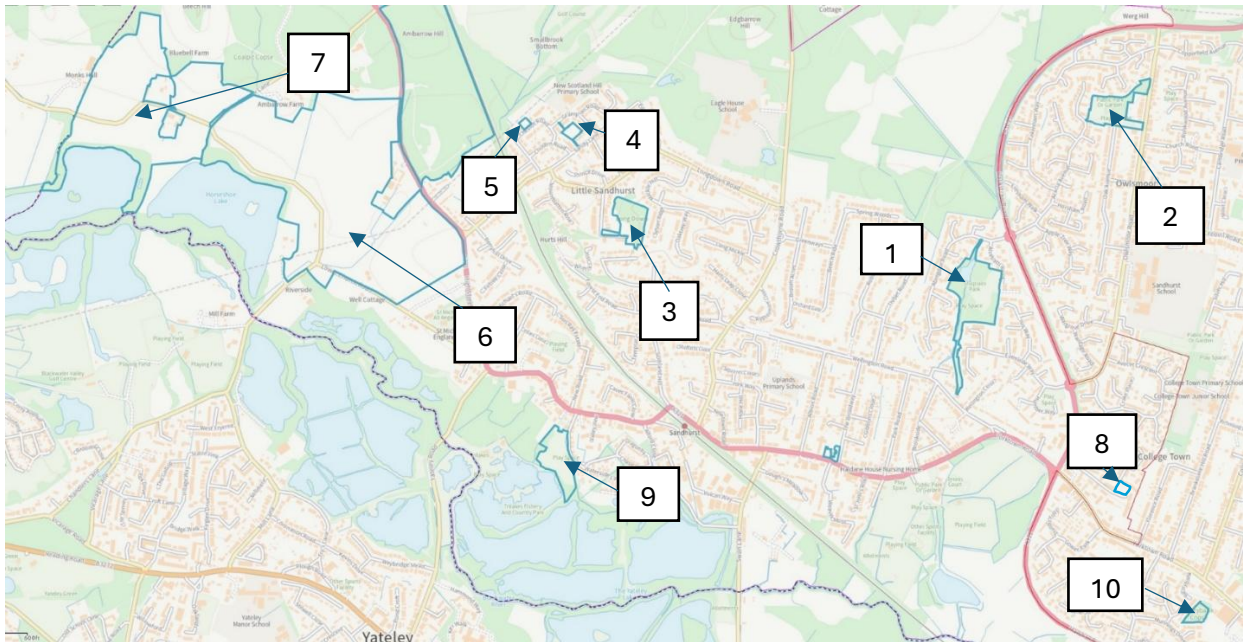
LGS 7 Includes areas surrounding Grove Lake and elements of the countryside to the north of the Lake. Grove Lake and its immediate surrounding area are utilised as a **nature reserve** and has nature viewing hides and observation points.

LGS 8 provides a publicly accessible green area of land within a built-up urban area in College Town, Sandhurst. The site provides access for dog walking and additionally contributes to provide a pleasant background appearance of mature trees in an otherwise urban landscape.

LGS 9 relates to publicly accessible land for nearby residents to enjoy. The availability of the site was part of the planning approval given by BFC on 26th January 2018 associated with the nearby erection of 108 dwellings. The site has been landscaped and provided with footpaths and a children's play area. The site enjoys a background to the southwest and west of mature woodland, much of this woodland possessing extensive TPO tree protection. It additionally provides a beneficial architectural backdrop to the recently constructed dwellings.

LGS 10 relates to a delightful copse of mature trees that provide a significant enhancement to the character of an otherwise very urban scene of dwellings and commercial/retail properties within the College Town area of Sandhurst.

3.2 Local Green Space location map.



The above illustration shows the location of the designated Local Green Spaces (LGS) referenced 1 to 10. The LGS numbered areas on the above map are in sketch form and are only to be used as approximate locations.

3.3 Inset Maps of Local Green Space (ref LGS 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10) are included within Section 12 of the Neighbourhood Plan.

4 Local Green Space designation evidence

4.1 Snaprails Park (LGS 1)

The park provides an important publicly accessible green space park of grassy areas, a stream, pond and native woodland. It is located near to central Sandhurst, Owlsmoor and College Town. It occupies 3.5 hectares. The park provides an important recreation facility, picnic benches, a children's play area and a walk through, all for residents to enjoy. The pond provides a good habitat for wildlife. It additionally provides a beneficial wooded backdrop to an otherwise urban scene. The trees also assist in reducing unwanted pollutants. The Park is close to the community it serves. The site is not an extensive tract of land.



The above photographs show the open and accessible park areas within Snaprails Park. The top photograph includes a lake.

4.2 Owlsmoor Park (LGS 2): -

Owlsmoor Park plays a key role as a community leisure park and includes a well-used children's play area. Its mature trees additionally play an important contribution to the beneficial character of the related urban scene. Owlsmoor Park occupies circa 1.7 hectares. The site is close to the community it serves. It is not an extensive tract of land.



The photograph above shows a general open area of the park, with the children's playground in the background. The playground is also accessible from Owlsmoor Road.



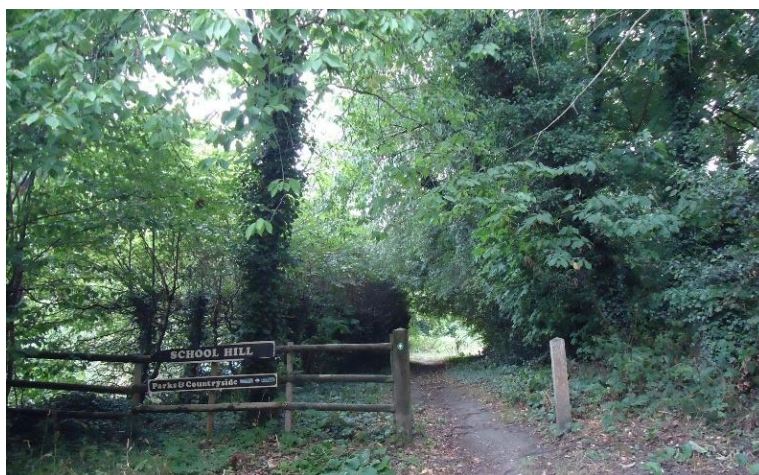
The photograph above shows the Oakwood Avenue access to Owlsmoor Park.

4.3 School Hill (LGS 3): -

School Hill provides a densely wooded area of mature trees on an elevated and undulating site in Little Sandhurst. The trees on the site dominate the urban scene in Little Sandhurst and make a major contribution to the recommendations made within 'Chapter 2, Sandhurst study area' document in providing a local amenity, which includes an attractive setting and outlook for surrounding residential properties. The site is open to the public and provides a natural habitat for wildlife. The site is close to the community it serves and is not an extensive tract of land. LGS 3 is accessed from School Hill, Little Sandhurst. LGS 3 has an area of circa 1.4 hectares.



The photograph above shows an aerial shot of School Hill (LGS 3).



The photograph above shows the entrance and public footpath into LGS 3.

4.4 Sandy Lane/Grampian Road, Little Sandhurst (LGS 4): -

The site occupies an area of mature trees and open grassland on an elevated position within a 1960's/70s housing estate in Little Sandhurst. It is accessed by the public via a footpath from Sandy Lane and Grampian Road. The footpath provides a good walking link to New Scotland Hill Primary and Nursery School. The site being a key backdrop to provide the area with a countryside feel rather than urbanisation. The Sandy Lane side of the area is partially elevated from that of Grampian Road and coincides with the intentions of 'Chapter 2, Sandhurst Study Area' recommendations that the wooded area provides a beneficial backdrop to an otherwise urban scene. It adds to the local amenity, providing an attractive setting and outlook for surrounding residential properties. The site is close to the community it serves and is not an extensive tract of land (Area 0.22 hectares).



The photograph above shows, and aerial shot of the open green space between Sandy Lane (bottom right) and Grampian Road (top).



The photograph above shows the open and natural area between Sandy Lane and Grampian Road, with its linking footpath. The area is open to the public.

4.5 Cheviot Road Little Sandhurst (LGS 5): -

This site is open to the public and contains many mature trees. These trees provide a very pleasant backdrop to a housing estate. The trees in addition to complying with the recommendations of 'Chapter 2, Sandhurst Study Area' document and is a tranquil space. The site is open to the public. Area 0.082 ha.



The photograph above shows an ariel shot of Local Green Space area 5.

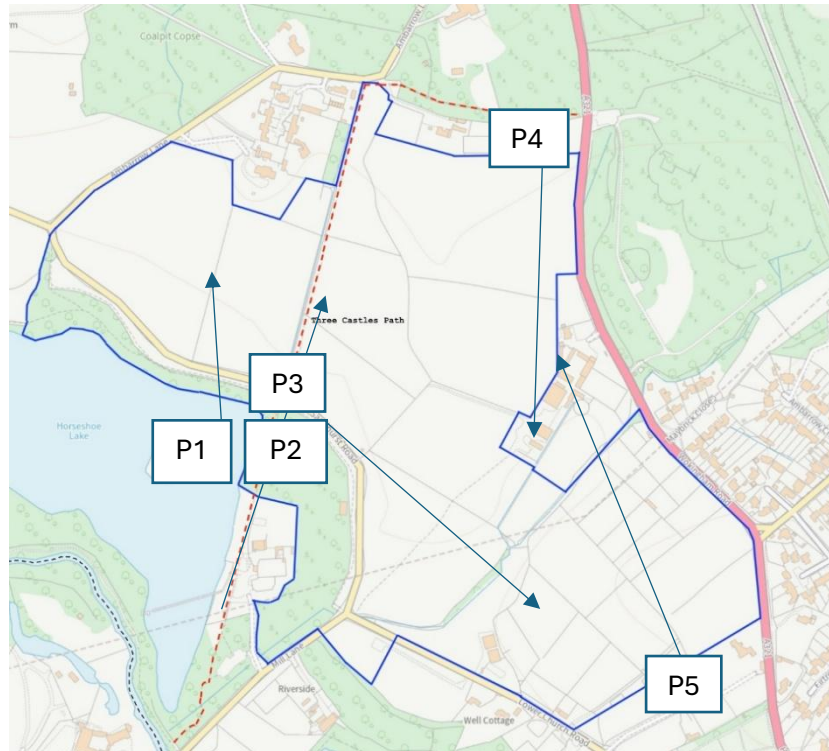


The photographs above, were taken from Cheviot Road; they show the mature trees, eight in number. that occupy land between two of the Cheviot Road dwellings. These trees are considered an amenity benefit and provide a delightful backdrop to enhance the architectural ambience of the area and is open to the public.

4.6 Horseshoe Lake and surrounding countryside (LGS 6)

- 4.6.1** This area contributes to form one of the community's countryside gems in respect of beauty, tranquillity, leisure, nature/wildlife/wildfowl habitat.
- 4.6.2** Its key attractions include rambling, nature observation, water sports (canoeing and dinghy sailing) and equestrian usage.
- 4.6.3** The land immediately adjacent to Horseshoe Lake is in the ownership of Bracknell Forest Council and has public access within defined and fenced areas and footpaths. This area has a SANG (Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace) status.
- 4.6.4** The rolling hills to the north and east of the Horseshoe Lake area are in private ownership and apart from the public right of way known as 'Three Castles Path' do not have public access. The rolling hill areas, however, provide a significant benefit to the beauty and tranquillity of the area. They provide a much-desired countryside backdrop to the publicly accessible grounds that surround the lake and contribute to the publicly assessable areas having the feel of a rural setting. This rural setting playing a significant contribution to attracting visiting residents to the SANG area and additionally encouraging wildlife and wildfowl to form their habitats in the Blackwater Valley Corridor areas. The rolling hills to the north and east of Horseshoe Lake have a significant equestrian use and related grazing.
- 4.6.5** Map LGS 6 has an area of circa 29 hectares.

4.6.6 Nearby areas contain some dwellings and commercial facilities that are unrelated to the green space and therefore have been excluded from the Local Green Space designation to avoid potential policy conflict. These include the facility buildings at Horseshoe Lake, Perrybridge Farm buildings, and dwellings within Lower Church Road and Ambarrow Lane.



The above shows the area referenced LGS 6 (outlined with a blue boundary). The arrows and box identifications show the related position and direction of photographs P1 to P5 inclusive, these are illustrated within the following text. For ease of location, the road to the right (in red) of the illustration is the A321 Wokingham Road. The dwellings shown in the bottom right are within the settlement of Little Sandhurst. The red dotted line shows the location of the Three Castles Path. The indent within the boundary, middle right, are the Perrybridge Farm buildings.



The photograph above (P1) shows the leisure area of Horseshoe Lake together with the rolling hillside to the north of the Lake.



The photograph above (P2) shows the rolling hillside to the north and east of Horseshoe Lake, as viewed from the public right of way the 'Three Castles Path'.



The photograph above (P3) shows a northern shot of the Three Castles Path viewed from footpaths near Horseshoe Lake. The path occurs on rising land from the lakeside.



The photograph above (P4) was taken from the Three Castles Path, near to the A321, in an easterly direction towards St Michael's Church in Lower Sandhurst Road. The farm buildings of Perrybridge Farm can be seen in the foreground with the spire of St Michael's Church in the background.

The background hills fall approximately 20m from their peak down to the paths adjacent to Horseshoe Lake. The hills in the background are primarily of equestrian usage and related grazing.



The photograph above (P5) is taken as an aerial shot from Ryefield, a dwelling in Lower Church Road. Perrybridge Farm buildings are mid-shot in the photograph. The 'Three Castles' path is located on the brow of the hills in the background. The A321 Wokingham Road is to the right of the photograph. The fences in the foreground show the areas with equestrian usage.

- 4.6.7** A section of the Three Castles Path illustrated in the above photographs passes from Ambarrow Court through countryside to and adjacent to Horseshoe Lake. The route was inspired by the 13th century journeys of King John between Windsor and Winchester, via the Castle built for him at Odiham. A part of this path remains as of today as a public footpath enjoyed by many as it passes through the rural countryside north of and including Horseshoe Lake. The Three Castles Path runs through a significant element of map LGS 6.
- 4.6.8** **Albeit that the areas immediately surrounding the lakes are open to the public there are significant restrictions in place whereby footpaths are clearly defined and fenced such that much of the area enables wildlife and wildfowl to flourish without close contact with the public, albeit that wildfowl can be seen via nature observation points.**
- 4.6.9** As noted previously the wildlife and wildfowl habitats are enhanced by the surrounding fields and wooded farmland areas. Key to providing the rural ambience of the lakes are the rolling hills, grassland and local wooded areas that form their northern and eastern background. The lakes being at circa 55 metres AOD (Above Ordnance Datum) and the rolling hills to the north and east of the lakes having an AOD of 76 metres. Much of the fields within the rolling hills are used for equestrian purposes, including significant areas of equestrian grazing land.
- 4.6.10** **The Lakes and the surrounding public rights of way are used by in excess of 30,000 visitors per annum (BFC and BVCP surveys). Statistics would indicate**

that over many years visitor numbers have increased by an average of 5 % per annum. Indeed, within the following years when large housing developments allocated within the BFC Local Plan nearby to the Sandhurst boundary (including Derby Fields) come to fruition it is inevitable that the visitor numbers will further increase. Information regarding the visitor numbers is included within sections 7 and 8 of this study.

4.6.11 For related summary evidence regarding the designation as Local Green Space of area LGS 6 please refer to sections 5 to 11 inclusive in this Report. The summary includes the planning history of the site.

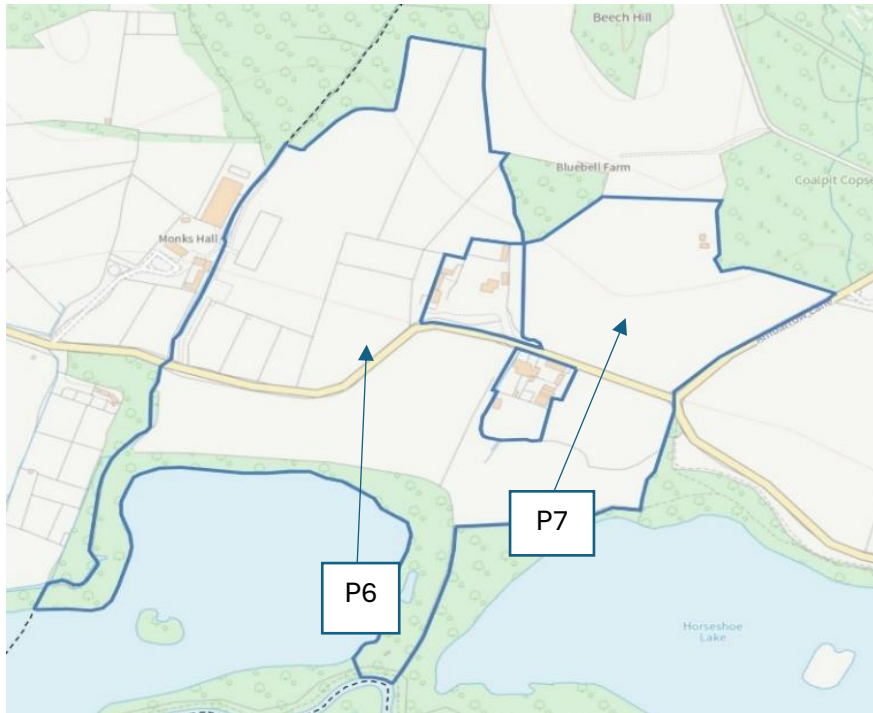
4.6.12 LGS 6 is of particular importance to the communities of Sandhurst, and additionally the nearby communities of Yateley Finchampstead, and Crowthorne.

4.7 Grove Lake surrounding countryside (LGS 7): -

4.7.1 Grove Lake and its surrounding countryside is located to the west of Horseshoe Lake. Areas near and adjacent to Grove Lake have a **nature reserve** designation. The area occupied by the nature reserve is illustrated within Appendix 1 of the Neighbourhood Plan, the Sandhurst Statistics and Supporting Information document, section 2.2.3. The nature reserve has been managed by the **Moor Green Lakes Group** since its formation in 1993. The area is linked via public footpaths to those in and around Horseshoe Lake. Public access to the Grove Lake nature reserve is limited to defined and fenced footpaths. Grove Lake provides nature viewing facilities via a hide and observation areas. The grassland and wooded rolling hills to the north of Grove Lake nature reserve are in private ownership and do not have public access.

4.7.2 Evidence gathered by the **Moor Green Lakes Group** would indicate circa 30,000 visitors per annum to the nature reserve area within map LGS 7. The LGS 7 area covers circa 15 hectares.

4.7.3 Part of the site contains dwellings and commercial facilities that are unrelated to the green space and therefore have been excluded from the Local Green Space designation to avoid policy conflict. The dwellings and commercial facilities that have been omitted from Map LGS 7 Local Green Space designation are in Lower Sandhurst Road.



The above shows the area referenced LGS 7 (outlined with a blue boundary). The arrows and box identifications show the related position and direction of photographs P6 and P7, these are illustrated within the following text. The road shown in yellow, running from left to right is the Lower Sandhurst Road. The righthand side of the boundary coincides with the side of Ambarrow Lane. The western boundary (left hand side of the map) coincides with the Sandhurst Town and Bracknell Forest boundaries. As noted previously, the dwellings and commercial buildings and their immediate grounds that are accessed from Lower Sandhurst Road have been omitted from the Local Green Space designated area.



The photograph above (P6) shows the Grove Lake nature reserve with the rolling hill countryside to the north of the lake.



The photograph above (P7) shows the rolling hills to the north of Grove Lake that contribute to the rural ambience of the scene. Visiting wildfowl can be seen in the foreground.

4.7.4 The rolling hills of fields and woodland are considered fundamental to the area possessing a rural ambience. This rural ambience being key to attracting visitors to the nature reserve areas and most importantly also playing a significant part in attracting wildlife and wildfowl to form their habitats. Clearly without a rural ambience the area would be far less attractive to both visitors and wildfowl/wildlife.

4.7.5 For related summary evidence regarding the designation as Local Green Space of LGS 7 please refer to sections 5 to 11 inclusive of this Report.

4.7.6 LGS 7 is of particular importance to the communities of Sandhurst, Yateley, Finchampstead, Eversley and Crowthorne.

4.8 Moray Avenue, College Town (LGS 8): -

The land is located at the cul-de-sac end of Moray Avenue in College Town. It is a wooded and grassed area open to the public. It provides an open green space containing quality and mature trees together with a surrounding grassed area for general leisure use/ dog walking. The key attribute to the land relates to its significant natural enhancement of an otherwise urban scene. It is considered that it has high amenity value to the community it serves. The land additionally provides high architectural backdrop appearance to the area and contributes to

the desired recommendations contained within Chapter 2, Sandhurst study area document.



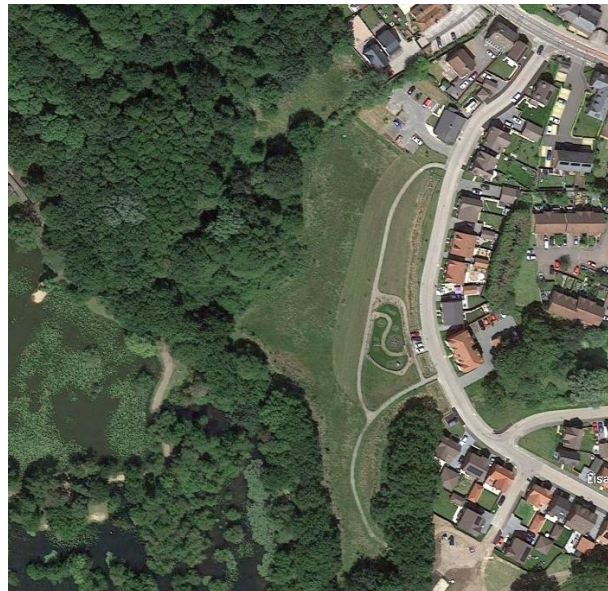
The photograph above shows the location of the green space adjacent to the cul-de-sac end of Moray Avenue in College Town, Sandhurst.



The photograph above was taken from the western side (looking east) of LGS 8. It shows the quality wooded and open accessible land. The adjacent dwellings can be seen in the background.

4.9 Waterside Lane (LGS 9): -

The land to the west of Waterside Lane became available as publicly accessible open green space, following the planning approval in January 2018 of 108 dwellings and the subsequent construction completion of the dwellings in Waterside Lane, Dragonfly Chase and Bywater View. The land includes landscaped greenspace, footpaths and a children's play area. LGS 9 occupies circa 1.2 hectares. Beyond the western boundary of the land there is a wooded backdrop of mature trees, the trees possessing TPOs. The open space provides a delightful green backdrop to the nearby dwellings in Waterside Lane and adjacent roads. The land has high amenity value and is close to the community it serves.



The photograph above shows an aerial view of the land to the west of Waterside Lane. The photograph illustrates the footpaths and children's play area. The site was planted with sapling trees prior to it being made publicly accessible. These trees will mature in the coming years to further improve the amenity value of the site.



The photograph above was taken from the north looking to the south of LGS 9. The children's play area is top left of the photograph.

4.10 Berrybank Copse (LGS 10): -

Berrybank Copse occurs within a part residential and part commercial area in College Town, Sandhurst. The Copse is covered by an area Tree Preservation Order (TPO 108). The Copse provides a key green and tranquil backdrop of mature trees to enhance the character of an otherwise plain urban scene. The Copse is located within the community area that it serves. The Copse is accessible to the public via Berrybank. LGS 10 occupies an area of circa 0.4 hectares.



The photograph above shows the mature trees that cover the entire area of Berrybank Copse. The mature trees add an amenity value to the College Town area of Sandhurst.



The left-hand photograph shows the entrance to Berrybank Copse which is accessed from Berrybank. The right-hand photograph shows a footpath inside the copse.

5 Further Evidence Relating to the Classification of areas LGS 6 (Horseshoe Lake and surrounding countryside) and LGS 7 (Grove Lake and surrounding countryside) have been allocated Local Green Space designations. This includes data and evidence supporting compliance with Local Green Space designations under NPPF para 107.

5.1 Restoration Strategy of the County Councils of Hampshire, Surrey and Berkshire: -

The following information additionally sets out to explain the planning history of the Blackwater Valley Corridor and in particular the importance of the areas of land defined within areas LGS 6 and LGS 7. These areas considered of fundamental importance to be protected from development to ensure that the majority desires of the Sandhurst residents are achieved.

5.1.1 Prior to 1970 elements of the Blackwater Valley Corridor within the Sandhurst boundary were used for gravel extraction. The areas used for gravel extraction being gradually reduced in size following 1970. Gravel extraction in areas associated with Sandhurst concluded in circa 1990.

5.1.2 As early as 1971 the County Councils of **Berkshire, Hampshire and Surrey** published a 'Landscape Restoration and Recreation Study'. This study included proposed planning strategies for the Valley following the completion of gravel extraction. **It included both the gravel pit remediation and the surrounding countryside.** A further comprehensive Blackwater Valley Landscape report was produced by the three County Councils in January 1976. The report was an advisory document with its aim being to provide a desired and undeveloped 'green' landscape for future generations to enjoy and wildlife and wildfowl to benefit.

5.1.3 The culmination of agreement of the County Councils, led by an initiative by Hampshire County Council, concluded in the setting up of the Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership (BVCP) in 2000. The aim of the BVCP was to coordinate an agreed way forward with Authorities and organisations that had an interest and/or planning involvement within the Blackwater Valley Corridor. The Authorities and organisations taking part in the consultations, resulting in the BVCP's planning strategy agreement were: -

Blackwater and Hawley Town Council

Farnham Town Council

Finchampstead Parish Council

Guildford Borough Council

Rushmoor Borough Council

Surrey Heath Borough Council

Sandhurst Town Council

Waverley Borough Council

Wokingham Borough Council

Yateley Town Council

Other Authorities included: -

Ash Parish Council

Swallowfield Parish Council

Eversley Parish Council

Bracknell Forest Borough Council

Natural England

Environment Agency

Community Groups: -

Blackwater Valley Countryside Trust

Blackwater Valley Users' Group

Cove Brook Greenway Group

Loddon Fisheries Consultative

Moor Green Lakes Group

Rowhill Nature Reserve Society

Snaky Lane Improvement Group
Southwood Woodland Group
Tongham Wood Improvement Group
Yateley Society

Local Landowners: -

Cemex PLC
Hansons PLC
Lafarge Aggregates
Thames Water

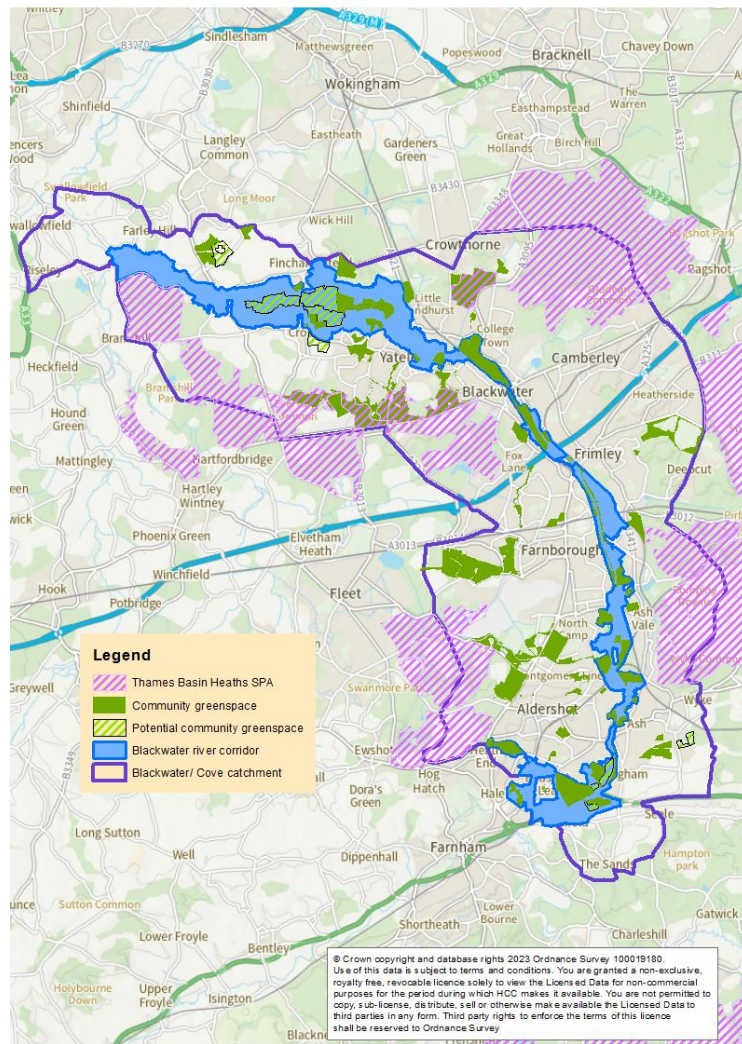
Others: -

Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxford Wildlife Trust
Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust
Surrey Wildlife Trust
Sustrans (currently the Walk Wheel Cycle Trust).
Defence Estates.

5.2 The Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership subsequent planning recommendations: -

- 5.2.1** The Blackwater Valley Corridor was defined by the BVCP. The intention of the BVCP was to promote a strip of natural green space along the River Blackwater between Aldershot and Eversley to be provided for the public's enjoyment and outdoor recreation purposes.
- 5.2.2** The original initiative, as noted above, of the three County Councils, coordinated by the BVCP, was to bring together other nearby Authorities and instigate a coordinated and unified approach to achieve their original objectives. Sandhurst Town Council were one of these Authorities.
- 5.2.3** The long term aims of the BVCP, and its supporting Authorities, was to obtain continual and sustainable improvements to enable a continuous green space along the Blackwater Valley Corridor; attractive to wildlife/wildfowl and the community to enjoy. Their specific aims being: -
- a) To enhance the Valley's landscape to create a continuous area of naturalistic countryside and maintain the important open gap between urban areas.

- b) **To realise the full potential of the Blackwater Valley Corridor as an outdoor recreation source with the emphasis on providing Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) as an alternative recreational venue to the heathlands of the Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area (TBH SPA).**
- c) To improve the Valley for wildlife/wildfowl by enhancing existing habitats, expanding the areas of ecological value by the creation of new habitats and developing links between habitats.
- d) Improve riparian habitat and the water quality of the Blackwater River and to maximise the flood protection of the river and its floodplain.
- e) To maximise participation from all sections of the community in decision making and practical action.



Map BVCP key plan.

- 5.2.4** The map above was produced by BVCP at the start of their coordination role. It shows the complete length and extent of the Blackwater Valley Corridor within the area shaded in blue. The specific area of the BVCP key plan that occurs within the Sandhurst Town Council boundary is detailed below (para 5.3.1) on Map BVCP/SNP 1.
- 5.2.5** It should be noted that one of the only remaining areas within the Blackwater Valley Corridor that still has a rural ambience are the areas within the Sandhurst Town Council's boundary in and around Horseshoe and Grove Lakes (Map areas LGS 6 and LGS 7). The rural ambience apparent to the visitors to the Lakes (areas LGS 6 and LGS 7) is attributed to the rolling hills of woodland and fields that occur to the north and east of the lakes. The background hills are circa 20 metres above the footpaths round the lakes and shield from view the settlements beyond. **The areas covered by areas LGS 6 and LGS 7 being of paramount importance to retain as undeveloped land.**
- 5.2.6** In recent years the vision of the Blackwater Valley Corridor has taken on a wider recognition of the value that it provides in respect of public greenspaces for

health and climate change mitigation. It additionally provides the expansion of areas of land that can be enjoyed by the public as 'Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space (SANG)'. SANG's were introduced with the intention of reducing the number of visitors to the Thames Heaths Basin Special Protection Area (TBH SPA). The Special Protection Area being recognised as an internationally important habitat for rare ground-nesting birds.

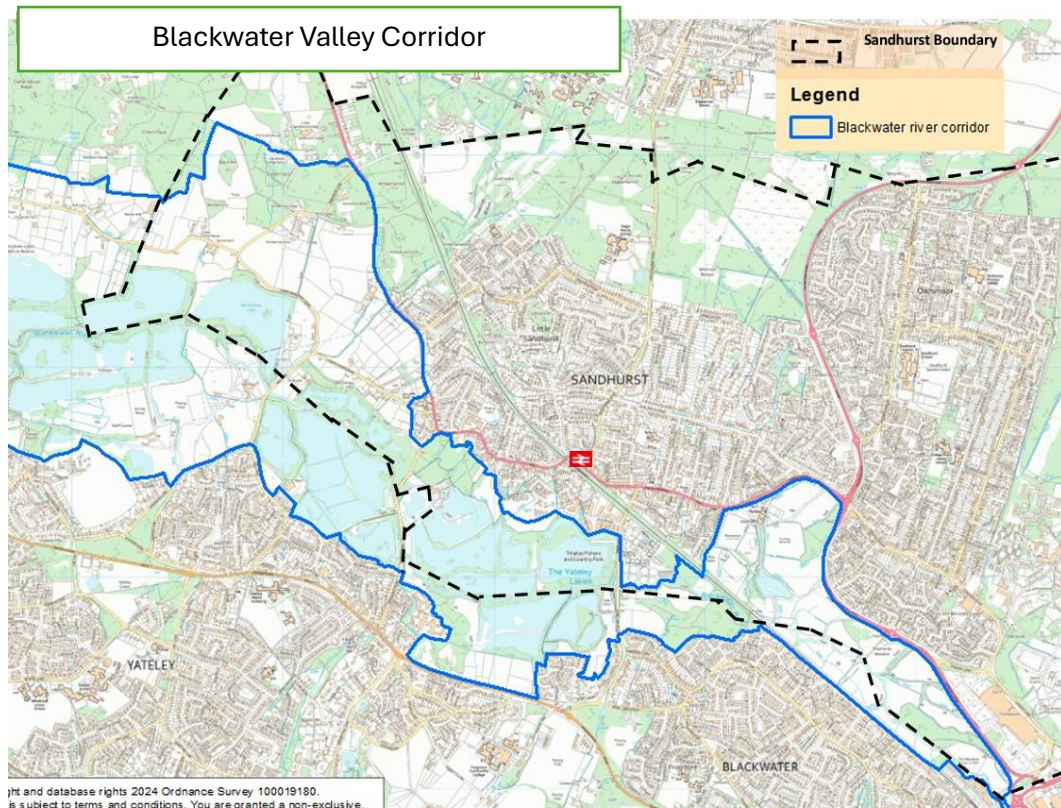
5.2.7 SANG areas designated by BFC include areas in and around Horseshoe Lake and Shepherd Meadow, both within Sandhurst. For details of the precise SANG designated areas please refer to **Appendix 1 of the Neighbourhood Plan, the Sandhurst Statistics and Supporting information document section 2.2.7.**

5.2.8 In the years to come the SANG area is expected to become of more importance following the future completion of nearby large developments included within the BFC Local Plan, albeit that these developments are not within the Sandhurst Town Council's boundary.

5.2.9 The instigation of the BVCP objectives to retain the local area of the Blackwater Valley Corridor as undeveloped natural countryside would enable the nearby settlements of Sandhurst, Crowthorne, Yateley and Finchampstead to have greater attraction for inward investment, retaining skilled staff and increasing investment. It would additionally provide health and wellbeing benefits to the local communities. Local Green Space area LGS 6 and LGS 7 contributing significantly to these objectives.

5.3 Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership's Strategy

5.3.1 The map below (BVCP/SNP 1) was produced by the BVCP and reflects the original strategy, as noted previously, that was proposed and accepted by thirteen Authorities that had an interest in the development of the Valley following the completion of gravel extraction. The boundary of the Blackwater Valley Corridor is shown by the solid blue line with the hatched black line showing Sandhurst Town Council's boundary.



Map BVCP/SNP 1.

5.3.2 Areas LGS 6 and LGS 7 are included within the area designated by the BVCP as ‘the Blackwater Valley Corridor’.

6 Bracknell Forest Council’s Blackwater Valley Corridor planning history

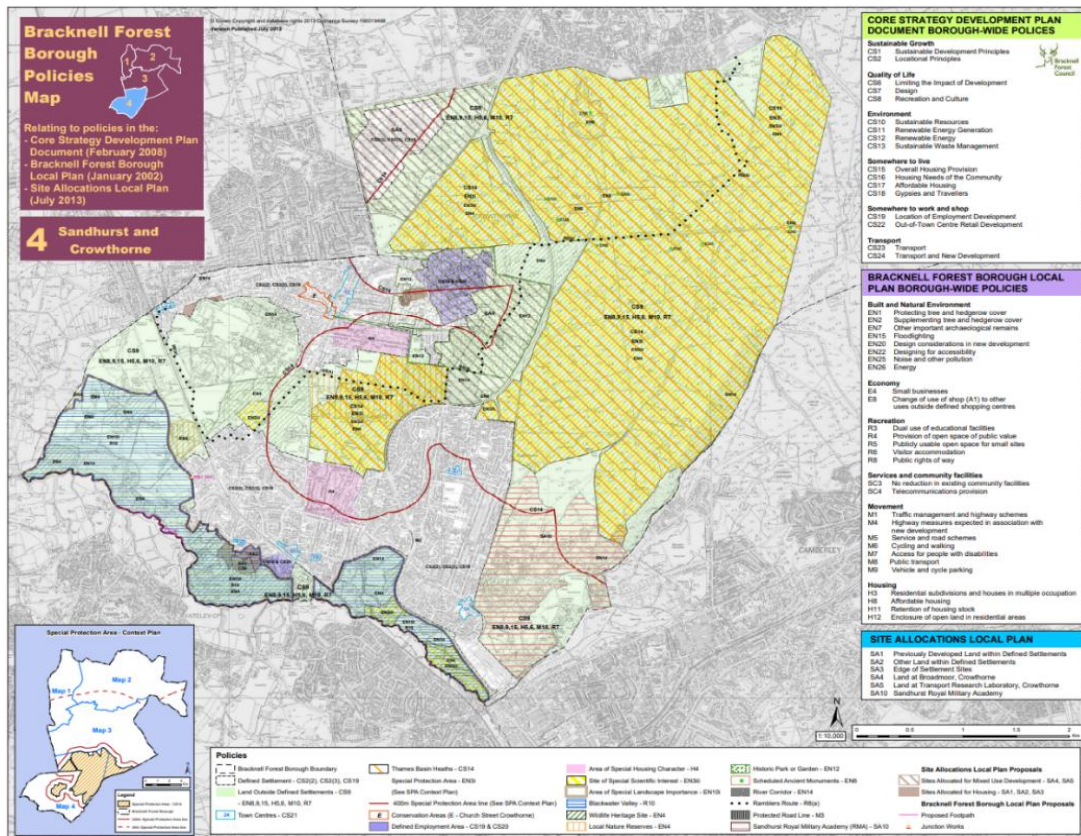
The following commentary (section 6) sets out to record the planning history of the Blackwater Valley Corridor and related policies that have been included in both the current and previous BFC Local Plans.

6.1 BFC’s 2002 Local Plan designation of the Blackwater Valley Corridor: -

6.1.1 BFC’s 2002 Local Plan recognised the importance of replicating the BVCP’s intentions and strategies by designating the area within the Blackwater Valley Corridor that occurred within their boundary as an area as possessing ‘**Special Landscape Importance**’.

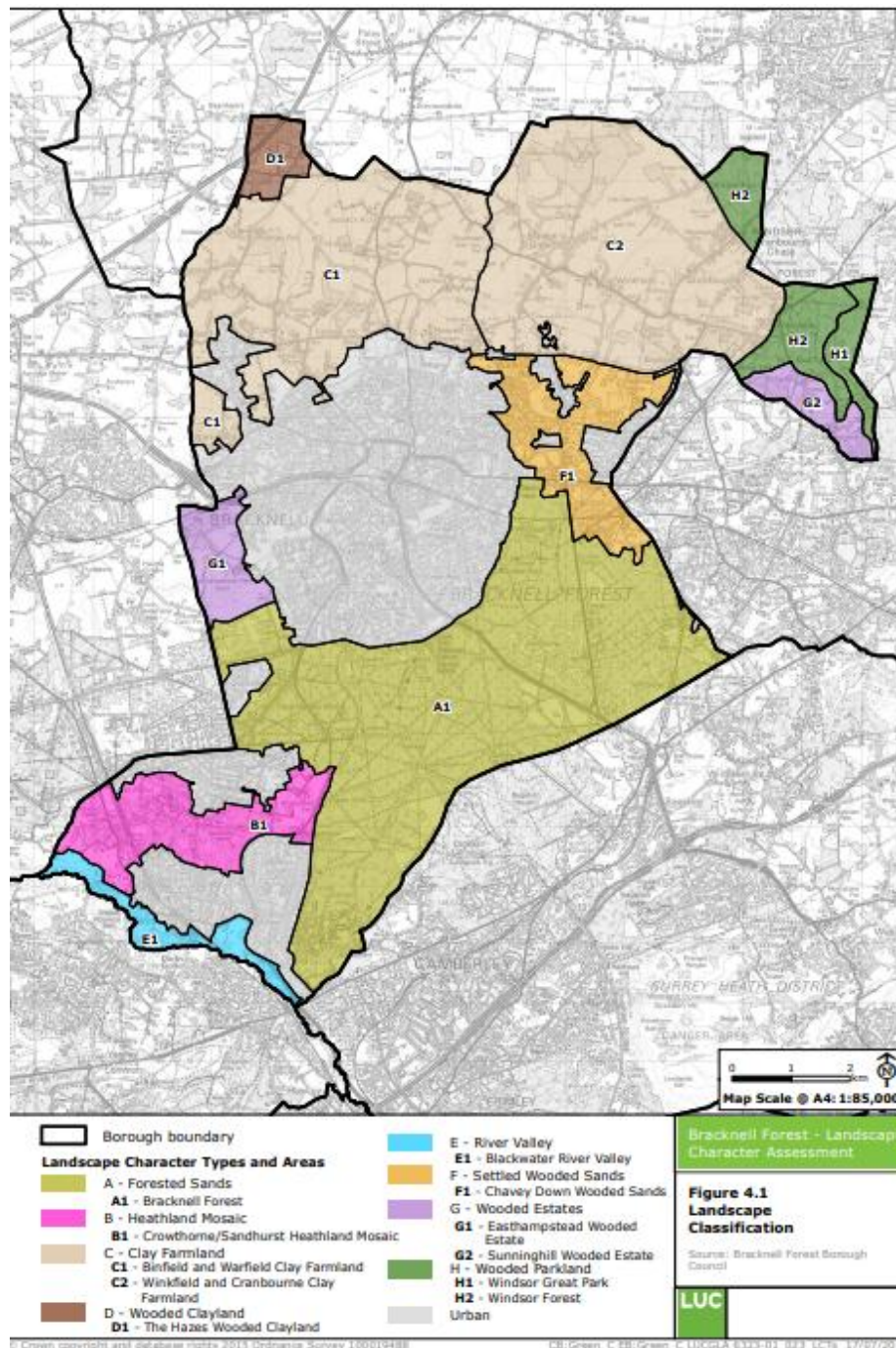
6.1.2 It should be noted that the whole of the areas LGS 6 and LGS 7 are within the BFC 2002 Local Plan that was designated as an ‘Area of Special Landscape Importance’. This substantiates the consideration that areas LGS 6 and LGS 7 cannot be considered as ‘blanket countryside’.

Bracknell Council Policy Map, 4 Sandhurst and Crowthorne



Map 4 to be read in conjunction with the Bracknell Forest Local Plan of 2002 and the related superseded policy R10. The Area of Special Landscape Importance is defined within the solid brown line area to the bottom left of the map. The overall area within this definition is also shown in blue horizontal hatching to define that it is within the Blackwater Valley.

6.1.3 BFC carried out a further ‘Landscape Character Assessment’ in 2015. The previous designation relating to an ‘Area of Special Landscape Importance’ was split into two redefined areas, (E1) the Blackwater River Valley and (B1) the Crowthorne/Sandhurst Heathland Mosaic, refer to Figure 4.1 Landscape Clarification below: -



6.2 BFC's current Local Plan's designation of the Blackwater Valley Corridor.

In respect of the current Bracknell Forest Local Plan (BFLP) the *definition of 'Area of Special Landscape Importance' has been replaced by Policy LP37 'Landscape Character (outside of defined settlements)'*.

6.2.1 The current BFLP notes that the area of the Sandhurst Town Council's boundary, within the Blackwater Valley Corridor, are defined on two Landscape Character Area maps: **Map 31 Landscape Character Area B1, Crowthorne/Sandhurst Heathland Mosaic** and **Map 35 Landscape Character Area E1, Blackwater**

River Valley. The current BFLP was adopted in 2024 and covers the period to 2037.

6.2.2 The significance of both the superseded BFLP and the current BFLP is that both recognise the importance of the land contained within areas LGS 6 and LGS 7 to remain undeveloped. These recognitions supporting the view that BFC fully appreciate the significance of these areas as having landscape qualities over and above general blanket countryside.

6.3 Recent planning applications relating to Local Green Space designation LGS 6: -

6.3.1 In respect of significant planning applications, there have been two that related to land included **within LG 6; the first application was refused, and a second application was dismissed at an Appeal.**

The two planning applications were: -

- 1) Application reference 19/00286/OUT (for 165 dwellings), refusal dated 18th October 2019
- 2) Application reference 21/00478/OUT (for 150 dwellings), there was no decision made in respect of the original application. The application was progressed via appeal reference APP/R0335/W/21/3287383. The Appeal was dismissed by the Planning Inspectorate on 1st November 2022.

6.3.2 Salient comments made by BFC within their refusal decision dated 18th October 2019: -

i) Page 9 of the refusal decision: - Key comments made by BFC in respect of the Blackwater Valley area that includes LGS 6: - *The Borough Council (BFC) attaches great importance to the protection of these areas **for the intrinsic benefit which they offer the local community.** They will be protected from development which would be prejudicial to their open, rural or undeveloped character and to their landscape qualities.'*

There are numerous BFC references on page 9, and within other sections of the refusal notice, that records the area as possessing ASLI (Area of Special Landscape Importance).

ii) Page 10 of the refusal notice: - *'The proposals include the area of suburban housing in the highest point of the site where it can be visible from several viewpoints outside the site. The proposed mitigation of tree planting would partially screen the proposed housing **but would also prevent the attractive long views of the rolling countryside that should be conserved.***

*‘However, a development of 165 dwellings along with the associated highways works, footpaths, lighting and hardstanding will result in a **fundamental change to the character of the character and appearance of the countryside, which forms part of the Blackwater Valley Area of Special Landscape Importance.**’*

iii) Part of Para 20 of the Appeal Decision note: - ‘In line with the policy stated in the Framework the Council (BFC) is not seeking to redesignate the ASLI (Area of Special Landscape Importance) in the eLP (the emerging Local Plan). At the time of the Appeal BFC’s Local Plan (2002) applied. The emerging Local Plan related to the current Local Plan which was adopted in 2024. **This statement demonstrates BFC’s intention to maintain the areas LGS 6 and LGS 7 as possessing an Area of Special Landscape Importance within the emerging (now adopted) Local Plan.**

iv) **The assertion by BFC of the importance of LGS 6 and LGS 7 as Areas of Special Landscape Importance reinforces the Neighbourhood Plan’s designation of these areas as Local Green Space, particularly as they make a significant contribution to the local communities of not only Sandhurst but also of nearby Yateley, Crowthorne, Finchampstead and Eversley.**

7 The Benefits to both the local community and other nearby areas: -

7.1 The designated areas of locations LGS 6 and LGS 7 provide desired places of natural and undeveloped countryside; lakes, and river for residents to enjoy sports, walking/ rambling, equestrian, water sports, children’s activities, and nature trails. The **BFC Landscape Assessment** makes detailed reference to the areas of heathland and woodland having a particularly strong sense of place, scenic beauty and are important to wildlife and wildfowl habitats.

7.2 The importance of this area to be retained as undeveloped countryside, as noted in the foregoing, was fully recognised in both the previous BFLP and indeed the current BFLP.

7.3 The responses from the residents’ questionnaire indicated that there was overwhelming satisfaction with the current countryside areas surrounding the Town. These views also concurring with the strategies set out by the BVCP. These areas were highlighted as one of the main joys of living in Sandhurst. Therefore, there were strong and majority views that these areas should be protected from development. The area contributing as a high-quality open space important to the health and wellbeing of communities with wider benefits associated with open space, sports and recreation facilities, tranquillity and richness of wildlife/nature. These areas also provide a beautiful and part elevated backdrop to the land surrounding the southern and western sides to the Town.

- 7.4** Furthermore, the visitor enjoyment to the areas LGS 6 and LGS 7 (as noted previously) are also experienced by those not only from Sandhurst but also from the nearby settlements of Yateley, Finchampstead, Eversley and Crowthorne.
- 7.5** The areas included within LGS 6 and 7 are easily accessible by the communities within Sandhurst, Finchampstead, and Yateley, together with nearby Crowthorne and Eversley. The areas can be accessed by either foot or by road. Car-parking to access these areas is provided by a large and recently extended carpark off Mill Lane and within the Horseshoe Lake complex. This carpark provides access from an easterly direction. There are additional carparking spaces within Ambarrow Court that enable foot access to areas LGS 6 and LGS 7 from the north, utilising the public footpath known as the ‘Three Castles Path’. Additionally, there are further car-parking spaces in Lower Sandhurst Road that provide a westerly approach to the areas LGS 6 and LGS 7. Overall, there are seven formal foot access points (including carparks) from nearby Sandhurst, Yateley and Finchampstead to gain access to publicly accessible areas contained within LGS 6 and LGS 7. The areas of public accessibility within LGS 6 and LGS 7 are generally defined by fenced footpaths. The northwestern area of Yateley is very close to the southeastern area of LGS 6. Elements of LGS 7 are near to residential areas in Finchampstead, Eversley and Yateley. Areas LGS 6 and LGS 7 are also relatively close to Crowthorne. It should also be noted that improved footpath access to LGS 6 and LGS 7, via the main public access point near Horseshoe Lake, is an objective of the NP. Refer to NP para 5.4.1.
- 7.6** The **Moor Green Lakes Group** manage the nature reserve that is included within **Map LGS 7**. The Group is largely run by volunteers. **Please refer to NP Appendix 1, the Sandhurst Statistics and Supporting Information document, section 2.2.3;** this shows the area of Grove Lake, within the Sandhurst Town boundary, which is managed by the Moor Green Lakes Group. The area of the nature reserve that the Moor Green Lakes Group help manage is owned by the original gravel extraction company Cemex (as of early 2025), (post 2025 it is understood that the area is now in the ownership of Finchampstead Parish Council).
- 7.7** Yateley Town Council, Finchampstead Parish Council, Crowthorne Parish Council, Eversley Parish Council, Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership and the Moor Green Lakes Group were fully consulted during the drafting of the Neighbourhood Plan and attended a number of related workshop meetings. All supporting the intentions of retaining the green space included within LGS 6 and LGS 7. Indeed, BVCP supplied much of the related data associated with visitor numbers and wildlife and wildfowl.
- 7.8** The above reasons significantly contributed to the decision within the **Sandhurst Neighbourhood Plan to designate areas LGS 6 and LGS 7 as Local Green Space.**

7.9 Further evidence that supports the designation of areas LGS 6 and LGS 7 as Local Green Spaces: -

- 7.9.1** During late 2025 a large area of ex quarry workings was released for public access. The Land had been prepared by the original quarry owner Cemex in readiness for use as a nature conservation area. It has specific fenced areas round its perimeter together with wide gravel footpaths that can also be used in a similar fashion as bridleways. The fences prevent public access to the land used for nature conservation.
- 7.9.2** The area is located immediately west of LGS 7 within the Parish of Finchampstead. The new paths together with the existing bridleways form a very pleasing and delightful circular and extensive path for potential equestrian use (in addition to walking). Its size and extent, together with its tranquillity and beautiful countryside feel could make it one of the best equestrian areas in the south of England. The fields/pastures contained within Local Green Space designation LGS 6 and LGS 7 can, when well-managed, provide related horse grazing facilities. Indeed, their current use does involve equestrian grazing.
- 7.9.3** The above will add to the aim of the BVCP and the NP in preserving the countryside character. The areas of pastureland within LGS 6 and LGS 7 being the prime pastureland west of Sandhurst. These areas are additionally accessible to the bridleways within Finchampstead.
- 7.9.4** We would also emphasise the comment that the bulk of the pastures that are used and could be used for equestrian activities are located within areas LGS 6 and LGS 7. Areas adjacent to the recently released conservation lands in Finchampstead are primarily used for fruit and vegetable production.
- 7.9.5** **The opening of the Finchampstead Nature Conservation area has the potential to provide significant economic benefits to areas LGS 6 and LGS 7 in the form of enhancing and expanding the related grazing areas. The area has the potential to be one of the most important equestrian areas in the south of England.**

8 Bracknell Forest Council's report of June 2020 regarding the designation of Horseshoe Lake and related grounds as a SANG

- 8.1.** BFC previously instigated a detail survey of the usage of the Lake areas, the results of that survey were summarised within their document **'Horseshoe Lake, Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space Plan for Special Protection Area (SPA) Mitigation Works' (dated June 2020)'**
- 8.1.1** Salient matters noted within the BFC document: -

- i) **Section 2.3 of the BFC document:** - The document noted that during a survey they interviewed many of the area's visitors. The salient responses relating to the reasons for visiting the lakes were: -
- a) *Close to home, 45%.*
 - b) *Scenery and views, 45%.*
 - c) *Wildlife and nature, 39%*
 - d) *Water features 65%*
- It was noted that the interviewees were able to give multiple responses.*

8.1.2 The above summary supports the beauty and wildlife benefits that the area provides residents and indeed the nearness of the area to settlements. It is therefore averred that the BFC survey substantiates the NPPF Local Green Space designation requirement that the area is demonstrably special to the local community and holds a particular significance because of their beauty and recreational value, tranquillity and richness of wildlife. The area is very much local in character.

8.1.3 In respect of the importance of the area to wildlife the BFC document (section 2.1.8) notes: - *'The site supports a variety of wildlife including numerous water birds, 12 species of dragonfly and 18 species of butterfly. There are 20 species of bird wintering on the lake and the surrounding habitat including large numbers of wigeon, gadwall and coot along with notable regular wintering goosander'.* Other species recorded include barn owl, bullfinch, and bats.

8.1.4 **Section 2.3 of the BFC document also notes:** - *'26% of Visitors to the Lakes access them by foot'.* The lakes are a visitor's attraction from a wide area a significant number of the visitors from the nearby settlement visiting by foot is extremely high.

8.1.5 The date of the survey was noted as being carried out during January and February 2018 (page 7 of the BFC document). It is very likely that the January and February visitor data may be an underestimate of the average visitors travelling by foot to Horseshoe Lake. It being fairly apparent that foot visitors during the spring, summer and autumn would be higher than in January and February.

8.2 Notwithstanding the above comments It is averred that there is evidence to demonstrate compliance with the NPPF requirement for Local Green Space to be reasonably near to the community it serves. In this regard it is reiterated that it also benefits the Community of Yateley, northern Yateley being a very short walk from the southern elements of area LGS 6 and LGS 7.

8.3 Based on the above sites LGS 6 and LGS 7 are considered to be close to the community they serve. The BFC report also provides evidence of the importance of its rural ambience being the prime reason for the attraction to the area to such a wide range of wildlife and wildfowl.

- ii) **Section 2.2.5 of the BFC document acknowledges:** - *“The site lies in the Blackwater Valley Area of Special Landscape Importance, a designation that within the Bracknell planning policy which seeks to safeguard the special landscape character of the area”.* **It should be noted that the area referenced by BFC coincides with the Neighbourhood Plan’s Local Green Space designation. This includes the area local to the lakes together with the rolling hills and countryside to the north and east of the lakes. It is therefore averred that BFC also recognise the importance of the area as having special landscape importance and therefore concurs with the NPPF designation requirements relating to Local Green Space.**
- iii) **Section 1 of the BFC document:** - The document summarises the importance of the area to act as a Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space (SANG) such that visitors will be attracted to the Lakes and thereby relieving visitor pressure on the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (TBH SPA). In this regard it is averred that the designation of the area as Local Green Space will only improve its visitor attraction and relieve pressure on the TBH SPA. Clearly any development within the areas designated as Local Green Space would detract from the area’s rural beauty and reduce its attraction as a wildlife and wildfowl habitat. The SANG occupies the area in and around Horseshoe Lake. **The success of the Horseshoe Lake SANG to attract visitors away from the TBH SPA is very much dependent on the adjacent countryside and rolling hills to the north and east of Horseshoe and Grove Lake retaining a rural ambience. Without this rural ambience the lakes would be less attractive to both visitors and wildfowl/wildlife.**

8.4 The BFC document supports the view that areas LGS 6 and LGS 7 are suitable for designation as Local Green Space in that they are in reasonably close proximity to the community they serve and are demonstrably special to the local community.

8.5 The BFC document, in respect of the importance of the Lakes to retain their rural ambience would appear to fully concur with the intentions of the Neighbourhood Plan. Fundamental to this intention is that the countryside adjacent (to the north and east of Horseshoe and Grove Lakes) remains as countryside.

8.6 BFC Horseshoe Lake SANG report of 2007: -

- 8.6.1** The BFC report of June 2020 additionally made reference to an earlier visitor survey that had been instigated for SANG report reasons in 2006. The report included a survey of visitors to Horseshoe Lake that was instigated in the first half of 2006. The report was drafted in 2007. It would appear that the head count of visitors to Horseshoe Lake had been taken over a very short time span as only 215 visitors were asked to provide visiting related data.
- 8.6.2** The report did not note the precise date the data gathering took place and did not report whether the weather was inclement or otherwise. Of the 215 Horseshoe Lake visitors who responded to the survey 26% were recorded as walking, 5% cycling, and 69% by car. The report recorded that 8% had walked 1 kilometre or less. The report noted that the area 'could be enhanced to encourage visitors away from the SPA (the TBH SPA) as existing users go to these areas too'. The indications are that the report took place in early 2006 and did not reflect the much higher number of visitors that are experienced during better weather and seasonal conditions.
- 8.6.3** **The real time visitor data recorded by the BVCP (refer to section 9.1 below) is considered to demonstrate a more accurate readout of all visitors throughout the year, albeit that it generally concurs with BFC's surveys.**

9 BVCP Visitor data to areas LGS 6 and LGS 7, together with wildlife and wildfowl data

- 9.1 BVCP visitor data: - BVCP log the number of visitors to the River Blackwater footpath near Horseshoe Lake and Grove Lake.** Between the years 2009 to 2021 visitor numbers were recorded via a PIR (passive infra-red) counter. From April 2022 the original counter system was switched to a mobile phone recorder. **Records indicated that 82% of visitors came from local postal codes.**

9.1.1 Salient visitor data: -

- i) 2009 to 2021 showed an average of 47,000 visitors registered per annum.**
- ii) During the COVID lockdown period the visitor numbers increased to circa 87,000 per annum.
- iii) Mobile phone data from 2022 recorded circa 50,000 visits per annum.
- iv) Historically the visitors' numbers were increasing by circa 5% per annum. This trend appearing on a continue**

basis following the completion of the original gravel extraction.

- v) Recognising that some of the foot traffic and mobile phone counters may have recorded a visitor walking in and then out of the areas this would support the BFC data recorded at Horseshoe Lake that the area tracks at least 30,000 and probably more, visitors per annum. The mobile phone related data should be considered a minimum as not all visitors may possess a mobile phone. This would apply particularly to school pupil visitors.

9.1.2 The BVCP data showed the high number of visitors to the Horseshoe Lake and Grove Lake areas. Historical data (noted above) showed that visitor numbers were increasing by circa 5% per year. It is averred that this demonstrates the success of the area as a SANG and to encourage visitors to these areas rather than the TBH SPA. **It is considered that the rural feel of these areas was and is one of the main attractions. Should for any reason the rural feel to these areas be diminished it is considered inevitable that many visitors could well consider visiting the TBH SPA instead.**

9.2 Wildlife and Wildfowl data relating to the Horseshoe/Grove Lakes (areas LGS 6 and LGS 7)

9.2.1 BVCP also log the BTO (British Trust for Ornithology) Wetland Bird Survey. The survey demonstrates this area is the best, by far, of all the sites in the Blackwater Valley Corridor for attracting wildfowl. It is additionally recorded to be the second-best site in both Berkshire and Hampshire (inland) for numerical wildfowl observations. BVCP note that this can be attributed to this part of the Blackwater Valley Corridor being undeveloped and not hemmed in by **urban development**.

9.2.3 Furthermore, the area has also been recognised as a 'Wildlife Site Designation' by the Wildlife Trust.

9.3 The Berkshire Ornithological Club data: -

9.3.1 The Berkshire Ornithological Club also record wildfowl data relating to the Grove Lake area (part of the Moor Green lakes nature reserve as included within area LGS 7) in respect of the number and key resident and visiting wildfowl to the lakes. These include: -

- a) Resident: - Little and Great Crested Grebes, Little Egret, Barnacle and Snow Geese, Egyptian Geese, Sparrow Hawk, Buzzard, Lapwing, Snipe, Barn and Little Owl, Kingfisher, Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Stonechat, Linnet, Reed Bunting, Bullfinch and Yellow Hammer.
- b) Seasonal Visiting Wildfowl: - Little Ringed Plover, Black Headed Gulls, Common Terns, Warblers, Goosander, Golden Eye, Smew, Brambling and Short-eared Owl.
- c) There are also a wide range of spring and autumn passage wildfowl visitors.

10 Blackwater Valley Countryside Strategy 2024-2029

10.1 For further information regarding the related history and current countryside strategy of the Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership (BVCP) please refer to the '**Black Water Valley Countryside Strategy 2024-2029**' document.

10.2 The document notes: - *'To enable the public to appreciate the Valley it is important to prevent the open riverside areas being hidden behind a screen of trees. Views especially over water and open grasslands, need to be secured. Maintaining the countryside of the Valley is crucial and there is a need to resist the area taking the appearance of an urban park'*

10.3 The BVCP Data and Strategy document provides evidence that supports the view that areas LGS 6 and LGS 7 are suitable designations as Local Green Space in that they are in reasonably close proximity to the community they serve and are demonstrably special to the local community.

11 Designation Summary applicable to areas LGS 6 and LGS 7 (referencing the NPPF Local Green Space designation requirements of clause 107 of their document)

11.1 They are in close proximity to the community they serve (NPPF, section 107 a): -

11.1.1 The closeness of **LGS 6 and LGS 7** to the proximity to the community they serve is substantiated by BFC's document '**Horseshoe Lake Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space Plan for the Special Protection Mitigation Works (dated June 2020)**'. This document records the high percentage of those visiting by foot.

11.1.2 The areas are also a short walk from the northern element of the settlement of Yateley. Elements of residential areas within Finchampstead are near to LGS 7. LGS 7 is also within a short walk from the northeastern settlement of

Yateley. As noted previously area LGS 6 and LGS 7 are additionally reasonably close to Eversley and Crowthorne.

11.1.3 The northern element of the area is close to the settlement of Sandhurst in respect of dwellings in Maybrick Close, Wokingham Road, Lower Church Road, High Street Sandhurst, Lych Gate Close and indeed much of Little Sandhurst.

11.1.4 In addition to the visitor statistics obtained by BFC from their 2020 surveys, the BVCP have also instigated a log of visitor numbers. These (as noted previously) were initially recorded via a PIR counter and more recently via a mobile phone monitor. BVCP's mobile phone recorder noted that 82% of visitors came from nearby postal codes. This would indicate a figure of a minimum of circa 30,000 per annum. Clearly this figure could be an underestimate as it would not pick up those without phones.

11.1.5 The BVCP data is considered to be a more accurate visitor indicator than the limited visitor research that BFC instigated in 2006 and 2018 (BFC published reports of 2007 and 2020). The BVCP data collated on a 'real time' and continual basis. Although BFC data collection has relevance and aids the visitor data summaries it was instigated on isolated days, during 2006 and only involved 215 visitor interviews. The BFC 2018 visitor update (collated within the 2020 document) was carried out during the winter months of January and February and therefore is likely not to have represented a combined average of what would have been anticipated for the whole year. Clearly it is inevitable that during spring, summer and autumn times the number of foot visitors would be much higher than in winter weather conditions. It is therefore considered more weight should be placed on the real time BVCP data and that the BFC data should be used as substantiation and endorsement of the BVCP visitor summaries.

11.1.6 The NPPF does not define the 'close proximity to the community they serve'. It is therefore contended that this NPPF requirement be considered on an individual basis and take cognisance of the size of the Local Green Space and the value placed on it by the community. Clearly when these parameters are taken into account, and substantiated by visitor data, it is averred that the NPPF requirements are achieved in respect of areas **LGS 6 and LGS 7**.

11.1.7 Summary Comment relating to visitor data: - The BVCP's visitor data figures, supported by the BFC data, substantiate that a high proportion of visitors to map references LGS 6 and LGS 7 travel emanates from nearby postal codes, with many travelling by foot. This also demonstrates that the areas are close to the communities they serve and complies with the Local Green Space designation requirement of NPPF section 107 a).

11.1.8 Natural England comments in respect of their Green Infrastructure Standards for England -Summary/Green infrastructure Framework-Principles and Standards for England (January 2023) version 1.1: - Although this document is not noted within the NPPF or related Government guidance in respect of guidance appertaining to section 107 a) of the NPPF regarding the interpretation of what constitutes '*In reasonable close proximity to the community it serves*', it does provide recommendations associated with '**Accessible Greenspace Standards**' (within Appendix 2) of that document.

Table 1 (within Appendix 2) of the document sets out to denote the recommended approximate walking /cycling time related to the size-proximity of the greenspace: -

Medium sized greenspace (minimum 10 ha within 1km), 15 minutes.

Medium large greenspace (minimum 20 ha within 2 km), 35 minutes.

Large greenspace within 5 km of home (minimum 100 ha), 15 to 20 minutes cycling time from home.

11.1.9 As the areas of LGS 6 and LGS 7 serve multi-communities they are considered to accord with the general intentions of Natural England's '**Wider Neighbourhood Green Space**' guidance as noted within Figure 2 of their Green Space Infrastructure Standards for England-Summary document. **This accords with their 'Medium large greenspace' designation.** As described above the guidance notes that maximum distance to the green space from the community should be 2 km and a minimum of 35 minutes' walk.

11.1.10 A pro-rata interpolation of the distances from nearby communities would indicate that slightly more than 2 km would be applicable to LGS 6 and slightly less than 2km for LGS 7. Elements of the settlements of Sandhurst, Yateley and Finchampstead are considerably less than 2 km from LGS 6 and LGS 7. Similar pro-rata walking distance time would also apply.

11.2 Areas LGS 6 and LGS 7 are demonstrably special to a local community and hold particular local significance, for example because of their beauty, historic significance, recreational value, tranquillity and richness of its wildlife (NPPF para 107 b): -

11.2.1 The landscape significance of the two areas (LGS 6 and LGS 7) has been substantiated by BFC's previous and current landscape Local Plan designations: -

- i) **BFC Local Plan 2002 noted that LGS 6 and LGS 7 occurred within an area designated as possessing 'Special Landscape Importance'.**

- ii) **BFC's current Local Plan (to 2037) notes that LGS 6 and LGS 7 occur within Landscape Character areas; (Maps 31, Crowthorne/Sandhurst Heathland Mosaic and Map 35, Blackwater River Valley).**

11.2.2 Areas LGS 6 and LGS 7 are also demonstrated as being special to the local community as they are enjoyed by at least 30,000 visitors per annum.

11.2.3 Areas LGS 6 and LGS 7 are additionally recognised as demonstrably special by the BVCP (reference their Blackwater Valley Countryside Strategy 2024-2029 document). Paragraph 6.10 (Area 10) of their document notes: - *'This is the first section of the Valley that is not hemmed in by urbanisation on both sides'*. The report goes on to say, *'Already this area is one of the most important sections of the Blackwater Valley for organised recreation and nature conservation'*.

11.2.4 Areas LGS 6 and LGS 7 significantly contribute to relieve the potential increase of visitors to the nearby TBH SPA area. **Key to maintaining the visitor numbers to areas LGS 6 and LGS 7 is to ensure that these areas retain their beautiful, tranquil and rural ambient feel. Clearly if these areas, for reasons of future developments, had their ambient rural feel removed and possessed the appearance of an urban park, their attraction to visitors would be reduced with the subsequent inevitable increase in visitors to the open heathland within the TBH SPA.**

11.2.5 To benefit the areas that wildfowl and wildlife can inhabit, without interaction with visitors, there are clearly defined footpaths and fenced footpaths that restrict areas to limit where visitors can access. This enables vast areas within and surrounding Horseshoe and Grove Lakes to be only accessible for wildlife and wildfowl habitats, albeit that visitors have the opportunity to view the wildlife and wildfowl from key viewing points and hides.

11.2.6 There could well be significant economic benefits (as outlined within para 7.9 above) that the potential equestrian use can make to this rural element of Sandhurst and nearby settlements. This relates to enhancements to equestrian usage within LGS 6 and LGS 7, albeit that they will need to comply with BFLP Policy LP 49 and its related text.

11.2.7 The designation of LGS 6 has the additional advantage in that it prevents the unrestricted sprawl of the built-up area of Sandhurst, its assists in safeguarding the key countryside from encroachment and it contributes to preventing the merging of Sandhurst with Yateley.

11.3 Summary Comment (areas LGS 6 and LGS 7): - Previous BFC Local Plan designations, including being an 'Area of Special Landscape Importance' substantiates that the areas are demonstrably special to the local community and hold local significance. This view is additionally supported

by the BVCP. The significance of the area relating to its attraction to nearby residents for reasons of its beauty, recreational value, tranquillity, and richness of its wildlife is demonstrated by the measured visitor numbers/data and the wildlife/wildfowl records of both BFC and the BVCP. The area's significance is additionally demonstrated by the designations provided to it by the British Trust of Ornithology and the Wildlife Trust. It is therefore considered that these views support the compliance of the intentions of the NPPF Local Green Space designation, under section 107b.

11.4 Local in character and is not an extensive tract of land

11.4.1 The areas of LGS 6 and LGS 7 are very much local in character, there are no other similar areas within many miles of this location that can boast of possessing such beauty incorporating lakeside views with a woodland/countryside backdrop of rolling hills. Additionally, there are no nearby similar areas that can in anyway compare with the wide range of wildlife and wildfowl that inhabit LGS 6 and LGS 7. In respect of being local in character the areas would score very highly.

11.4.2 The NPPF does not specify what an extensive tract of land is, however, it is considered that this definition was introduced to avoid arbitrary and blanket areas of countryside being given a Local Green Space designation. As noted above the areas of **LGS 6 and LGS 7** can in no way be considered as arbitrary and blanket areas of countryside, as they form a very demonstrably special element of beautiful land with recreational, tranquillity and wildlife/wildfowl benefits. The areas of LGS 6 (circa 29 hectares) and LGS 7 (circa 15 hectares) are well below designations of similar quality land containing similar qualities elsewhere within England. They also fall within Medium Large Greenspace definition of Natural England's Green Infrastructure Framework Steering Group's definition.

11.4.3 It is therefore proffered that areas **LGS 6 and LGS 7** fully comply with NPPF Local Green Space intentions and are not extensive tracts of land. This comment is also considered to comply with the Government's guidance notes.

11.4.4 It should also be reiterated that the following attributes applicable to areas LGS 6 and LGS 7 also demonstrate they are local in character and a not just "a tract of land" of typical blanket countryside: -

- i) BFC previously, within their 2002 Local Plan, defined the areas as of 'Special Landscape Importance'.
- ii) BFC within their current Local Plan define the area as landscape areas of the Blackwater River Valley and the Crowthorne / Sandhurst Heathland Mosaic.

- iii) BVCP record the area as having significant importance to retain as undeveloped countryside.
- iv) The British Trust of Ornithology's survey of 'Wetland Birds' records that their surveys show the habitat of the area as 'the best by far of all the sites within the Blackwater Valley for attracting wildfowl'. They also note that the area has recorded the second-best inland site in the whole of Berkshire and Hampshire for numerical wildfowl observations. This being attributed by the BVCP as this part of the Blackwater Valley is undeveloped and is not hemmed in by urban development.
- v) The area has been recognised by the Wildlife Trust as possessing a 'Wildlife Site Designation'. **Previous BFC Local Plan designations, including being an area of Special Landscape Importance substantiates that areas LGS 6 and LGS 7 are demonstrably special to the local community and hold a particular local significance. This view is additionally supported by the descriptions and designations of the area by the BVCP. The significance of the area relating to its attraction to nearby residents are for reasons of its beauty, recreational value, tranquillity and richness of its wildlife. This is also demonstrated by the measured visitor numbers/data and the wildfowl and wildlife records of both BFC and the BVCP. The area's significance is additionally demonstrated by the designations provided to it by the British Trust of Ornithology and the Wildlife Trust**

11.5 Summary Comment: - The above is considered overwhelming evidence that Local Green Space maps reference LGS 6 and LGS 7 are not just plain and blanket countryside but are very much local in character. It is taken that NPPF 107 c) was included to avoid areas of plain and blanket countryside being given a Local Green Space designation. Due to the key and unique attributes that the land included within LGS 6 and LGS 7 possess, it is averred that these areas cannot be deemed extensive tracts of land and therefore they comply with the NPPF Local Green Space designation requirements of their document under para 107 c).

11.5.1 The countryside to the north and east (within area LGS 6) is not considered 'blanket' countryside' as it is fundamental in providing a background beauty for the enjoyment of those visiting the defined footpaths and public areas (SANG areas) within Horseshoe Lake. This area of land also possesses the

economic benefits to the rural area by expanding its use as a significant equestrian centre.

11.5.2 Likewise the countryside north of Grove Lake nature reserve is considered to be fundamental to the enjoyment of those visiting and using the defined footpaths near the lake. This also has potential to expand its equestrian usage.

11.5.3 The related countryside, appertaining to both LGS 6 and LGS 7, are also considered to be of prime importance in attracting the numbers and variety of wildfowl to form their habitat (including the nature reserve). Without these countryside backdrops it is considered extremely likely that wildfowl and wildlife habitats would reduce.

12 Summary of Sandhurst Neighbourhood Plan Policies associated with Local Green Space designations together with their scoring: -

LGS Ref.	Location	Beauty	Recreational Value	Tranquillity	Richness of wildlife
1	Snaprails Park	High	High	High	Medium
2	Owlsmoor Park	High	High	High	Medium
3	School Hill	High	Medium	High	Medium
4	Sandy Lane/Grampian Road	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium
5	Cheviot Road	High	Low	High	Medium
6	Horseshoe Lake/Surrounding countryside	Very High	Very High	High	High
7	Grove Lake/surrounding countryside	Very high	High	Very high	Very high
8	Moray Avenue	High	Medium	Medium	Medium
9	Waterside Lane	High	High	Medium	Medium
10	Berrybank Copse	High	low	Medium	Medium

The above Local Green Space designations are considered to have little or no historical significance.

The scoring above is based on the parameters set out within para 106 and 107 of the NPPF.

Objectives, Local Green Space: -To provide enhanced protection from development by defining Local Green Space designations in key natural areas, both within and outside the settlement of Sandhurst. These spaces provide recreation and enjoyment benefit to residents. Areas within the settlement of Sandhurst also providing a delightful, green and wooded backdrop to enhance the appearance of urban areas.

To protect from development the areas occupied by Horseshoe Lake, Grove Lake and key adjacent countryside such that the rural ambience of the area can be maintained both for the benefit of residents to enjoy and additionally as a valued natural habitat for wildlife and wildfowl.

Policy NP/EN 5. Local Green Space: - The following areas as defined on the foregoing maps are designated as Local Green Space: -

- 1 Snaprails Park
- 2 Owlsmoor Park
- 3 School Hill
- 4 Sandy Lane/Grampian Road
- 5 Cheviot Road
- 6 Horseshoe Lake and surrounding countryside.
- 7 Grove Lake and surrounding countryside.
- 8 Moray Avenue, College Town.
- 9 Waterside Lane, public open space.
- 10 Berrybank Copse.

12.1 Inset Maps of Local Green Space areas LGS 1 to LGS 10 are included within section 12 of the NP.

References, that are in addition to the general references noted within the Sandhurst and Supporting Information document: -

Berkshire Ornithology Club website (Country Sites, Moor Green Lakes).

BFC delegated report (Planning Application 19/00286/OUT)

BFC document: - Horseshoe Lake Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space Plan for the Special Protection (SPA) Mitigation Works (dated June 2020).

BFC SPA Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy (2007).

Bracknell Forest Local Plan 2002.

Bracknell Local Plan 2020-2037.

Blackwater Valley Countryside Strategy 2024-2029.

The Countryside Charity document Local Green Space, February 2022 (page 13 notes: - *“Sizes vary greatly across this section from as much as 46.5 hectares to as little as 0.001 hectares. This indicated that what constitutes an area of green space that is ‘not an extensive tract of land’ has remained relatively open to interpretation”.*

Government Guidance: - Open space, sports and recreation facilities, public rights of way and local green space.

Moor Green Lakes Nature Reserve, thirty first annual report 2023.

**Natural England, Green Infrastructure Standards for England-Summary.
Green Infrastructure Framework-Principles and Standards for England
(January 2023, version 1.1)**

The Planning Inspectorate, Appeal Decision (Appeal reference APP/R0336/W/21/3287383.