Guidelines for Creation of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) – August 2021

Introduction

'Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace' (SANG) is the name given to green space that is of a quality and type suitable to be used as avoidance within the Thames Basin Heaths Planning Zone.

Its role is to provide alternative green space to divert visitors from visiting the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA). SANG are intended to provide avoidance measures for the potential impact of residential development on the SPA by preventing an increase in visitor pressure on the SPA. The effectiveness of SANG as mitigation will depend upon the location and design. These must be such that the SANG is more attractive than the SPA to users of the kind that currently visit the SPA.

This document describes the features which have been found to draw visitors to the SPA, which should be replicated in SANG. It provides guidelines on

- the type of site which should be identified as SANG
- measures which can be taken to enhance sites so that they may be used as SANG

It also covers the outputs of the recent Thames Basin Heaths Project 2021.

These guidelines relate specifically to the means to provide mitigation for significant impact arising from new housing within the Thames Basin Heaths Zone of influence. They do not address nor preclude the other functions of green space. Other functions may be provided within SANG, as long as this does not conflict with the specific function of mitigating visitor impacts on the SPA.

SANG may be created from:

- existing open space of SANG quality with no existing public access or limited public access, which for the purposes of mitigation could be made fully accessible to the public
- existing open space, which is already accessible, but which could be changed in character so that it is more attractive to the specific group of visitors who might otherwise visit the SPA
- land in other uses which could be converted into SANG

The identification of SANG should seek to avoid sites of high nature conservation value which are likely to be damaged by increased visitor numbers. Such damage may arise, for example, from increased disturbance, erosion, input of nutrients from dog faeces, and increased incidence of fires. Where sites of high nature conservation value are considered as SANG, the impact on their nature conservation value should be assessed and considered alongside relevant policy in the development plan. These sites may require an ecological discount of their proposed SANG area.

SANG continue to need to be delivered in advance of any associated housing stock being occupied. They should also be funded for in perpetuity as is the current process.

The Character of the SPA and its Visitors

The Thames Basin Heaths SPA is made up of 13 Sites of Special Scientific Interest, and consists of a mixture of heathland, mire, and woodland habitats. They are essentially 'heathy' in character. The topography is varied, and most sites have a large component of trees and some contain streams, ponds and small lakes. Some are freely accessible to the public and most have a degree of pubic access, though in some areas this is restricted by army, forestry or other operations.

Survey effort in 2005 showed that more than 83% of visitors to the SPA arrive by car, though access points adjacent to housing estates showed a greater proportion arriving on foot (up to 100% in one case). 70% of those who visited by car had come from within 5km of the access point onto the SPA. A very large proportion of the SPA visitors are dog walkers, many of whom visit the particular site on a regular (more or less daily) basis and spend less than an hour there, walking on average about 2.5km. Almost 50% are retired or part-time workers and the majority are women. Further detailed information on visitors can be found in the reports referenced at the end of this document. These figures have been supported in further SPA wide surveys, the most recent being in 2018.

Guidelines for the Quality of SANG

The quality guidelines have been sub-divided into different aspects of site fabric and structure. They have been compiled from a variety of sources but principally from visitor surveys carried out at heathland sites within the Thames Basin Heaths area or within the Dorset heathlands. These are listed as references at the end of this document.

The principle criteria contained in the Guidelines have also been put into a checklist format which are contained in Appendix 1.

Accessibility

Most visitors come by car and want the site to be fairly close to home. Unless SANG are provided for the sole use of a local population living within a 400-metre catchment around the site, then **the availability of adequate car parking at sites larger than 4 ha is essential**. The amount and nature of parking provision should reflect the anticipated use of the site by visitors and the catchment size of the SANG. It should provide an attractive alternative to parking by the part of SPA for which it is mitigation. **Car parks should be clearly signposted and easily accessed**.

New parking provision for SANG should be advertised as necessary to ensure that it is known of by potential visitors.

Target groups of Visitors

This should be viewed from two perspectives, the local use of a site where it is accessed on foot from the visitor's place of residence, and a wider catchment use where it is accessed by car. **Most of the visitors to the SPA come by car and therefore should be considered as a pool of users from beyond the immediate vicinity of the site.** All but the smallest SANG should therefore target this type of visitor.

It is apparent from access surveys that a significant proportion of those people who visit the sites on foot, also visit alternative sites on foot and so this smaller but significant group look for local sites. **Where large populations are close to the SPA, the provision of SANG should be attractive to visitors on foot.**

Networks of sites

The provision of longer routes within larger SANG is important in determining the effectiveness of the authorities' network of SANG as mitigation. The design of routes within sites will be critical to providing routes of sufficient length and attractiveness for mitigation purposes.

Though networks of SANG may accommodate long visitor routes and this is desirable, they should not be solely relied upon to provide long routes.

Paths, Roads and Tracks

The findings suggest **that SANG should aim to supply a choice of routes of around 2.3 - 2.5km in length** with both shorter and longer routes of at least 5km as part of the choice, where space permits.

Paths have to be of a width acceptable to visitors.

Paths should be routed so that they are perceived as safe by the users, with some routes being through relatively open (visible) terrain (with no trees or scrub, or well spaced mature trees, or wide rides with vegetation back from the path), especially those routes which are 1-3 km long.

The routing of tracks along hill tops and ridges where there are views is valued by the majority of visitors.

Artificial Infrastructure

Little or no artificial infrastructure is found within the SPA at present apart from the provision of some surfaced tracks and car parks. Generally, an urban influence is not what people are looking for when they visit the SPA and some people undoubtedly visit the SPA because it has a naturalness about it that would be marred by such features.

However, **SANG would be expected to have adequate car parking with good information about the site and the routes** available. Some subtle waymarking would also be expected for those visitors not acquainted with the layout of the site.

Other infrastructure would not be expected and should generally be restricted to the vicinity of car parking areas where good information and signs of welcome should be the norm, though discretely placed benches or information boards along some routes would be acceptable.

Landscape and Vegetation

SANG do not have to contain heathland or heathy vegetation to provide an effective alternative to the SPA.

Surveys clearly show that **woodland or a semi-wooded landscape is a key feature** that people appreciate in the sites they visit, particularly those who use the SPA. This is more attractive than open landscapes or parkland with scattered trees.

A **semi-natural looking landscape with plenty of variation** was regarded as most desirable by visitors and some paths through quite enclosed woodland scored highly. There is clearly a balance to be struck between what is regarded as an exciting landscape and a safe one and so some element of choice between the two would be highly desirable. The semi-wooded and undulating nature of most of the SPA sites gives them an air of relative wildness, even when there are significant numbers of visitors on site. SANG should aim to reproduce this quality.

Hills do not put people off visiting a site, particularly where these are associated with good views, but steep hills are not appreciated. **An undulating landscape is preferred to a flat one.**

Water features, particularly ponds and lakes, act as a focus for visitors for their visit, but are not essential.

Restrictions on usage

The bulk of visitors to the SPA came to exercise their dogs and so it is imperative that **SANG allow for pet owners to let dogs run freely over a significant part of the walk**. **Access on SANG should be largely unrestricted, with both people and their pets being able to freely roam**

along the majority of routes. This means that sites where freely roaming dogs will cause a nuisance or where they might be in danger (from traffic or such like) should not be considered for SANG.

Assessment of site enhancement as mitigation

SANG may be provided by the enhancement of existing sites, including those already accessible to the public that have a low level of use and could be enhanced to attract more visitors. The extent of enhancement and the number of extra visitors to be attracted would vary from site to site. Those sites which are enhanced only slightly would be expected to provide less of a mitigation effect than those enhanced greatly, in terms of the number of people they would divert away from the SPA. In order to assess the contribution of enhancement sites in relation to the hectare standards of the Delivery Plan, it is necessary to distinguish between slight and great enhancement.

Methods of enhancement for the purposes of this guidance could include enhanced access through guaranteed long-term availability of the land, creation of a car park or a network of paths.

SANG which have not previously been open to the public count in full to the standard of providing 8ha of SANG per 1000 people in new development. SANG which have an appreciable but clearly low level of public use and can be substantially enhanced to greatly increase the number of visitors also count in full. The identification of these sites should arise from evidence of low current use. This could be in a variety of forms, for example:

- Experience of managing the site, which gives a clear qualitative picture that few visitors are present
- Quantitative surveys of visitor numbers
- Identified constraints on access, such as lack of gateways at convenient points and lack of parking
- Lack of easily usable routes through the site
- Evidence that the available routes through the site are little used (paths may show little wear, be narrow and encroached on by vegetation)

Practicality of enhancement works

The selection of sites for enhancement to be SANG should take into account the variety of stakeholder interests in each site. Consideration should be given to whether any existing use of the site which may continue is compatible with the function of SANG in attracting recreational use that would otherwise take place on the SPA. The enhancement should not result in moving current users off the SANG and onto the SPA. The specific enhancement works proposed should also be considered in relation not only to their effects on the SANG mitigation function but also in relation to their effects on other user groups.

TBH SPA Mitigation Project – January 2021

The Hart, Rushmoor and Surrey Heath Councils worked together with Natural England to complete a project reviewing the approach to mitigation within the Thames Basin Heaths. The work analysed eleven potential alternative options when it comes to delivering SPA mitigation. The report concluded that the role and design of SANG could be clarified further.

To be made very clear from the outset. There remains a hierarchy of SANG provision. Great weight will be given to those SANGS meeting all the existing quality criteria (shown in Appendix 1) which should be delivered in the first instance. Only if this is **not possible**, **for clearly established reasons**, should the delivery of the options outlined in the section below be considered. If any proposed SANGS do not meet all of the Appendix 1 quality criteria, then these SANGS will continue to be assessed on a case by case basis and should be **agreed** with both the competent authority and Natural England. The proposal will need to demonstrate equivalent effectiveness of mitigation being provided to ensure a robust, consistent approach continues. Any shortfall in SANG criteria should be offset by other complementary means, such as an elevated provision rate, size or high-quality features.

The evidence shows that the use of SANG networks, linear orientated sites and small sites of no smaller than two hectares have potential to provide effective mitigation where traditional SANG is unavailable. These SANG areas will be linked and/or in proximity to an already established SANG. If effectiveness can be demonstrated of small or linear SANGs working alone, then we will assess this on a case by case basis, taking in to account the site's context amongst the wider greenspace network.

Historically Natural England have apportioned significant weight to the requirement for a 2.3 – 2.5km circular walk, which is less likely to be achievable in a small or linear SANG. These guidelines do not remove weight from the requirement but do accept that in specific circumstances the walk doesn't have to be included within every single SANG unit. It is however desirable to provide the full Appendix 1 criteria across a local SANG network or on another SANG.

Natural England would urge all Local Planning Authorities to take note, that this approach **could** enable sites previously deemed unacceptable to Natural England, to now qualify as valid avoidance measure. Please come and speak to us if you feel that is the case.

Appendix 1: Site Quality Checklist – for a SANG

This guidance is designed as an Appendix to the full guidance on Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces (SANG) to be used as mitigation (or avoidance) land to reduce recreational use of the Thames Basin Heaths SPA.

Must haves

- For all sites larger than 4ha there must be adequate parking for visitors, unless the site is intended for local use, i.e. within easy walking distance (400m) of the developments linked to it. The amount of car parking space should be determined by the anticipated use of the site and reflect the visitor catchment of both the SANG and the SPA.
- Possible to complete a circular walk of 2.3-2.5km around the SANG.
- Car parks must be easily and safely accessible by car and should be clearly sign posted.
- The accessibility of the site must include access points appropriate for the visitor use the SANG is intended to cater for.
- The SANG must have a safe route of access on foot from the nearest car park and/or footpath/s
- All SANG with car parks must have a circular walk which starts and finishes at the car park.
- SANG must be designed so that they are perceived to be safe by users; they must not have tree and scrub cover along parts of the walking routes.
- Paths must be easily used and well maintained but most should remain unsurfaced to avoid the site becoming to urban in feel.
- SANG must be perceived as semi-natural spaces with little intrusion of artificial structures, except in the immediate vicinity of car parks. Visually sensitive way-markers and some benches are acceptable.
- All SANG larger than 12 ha must aim to provide a variety of habitats for users to experience.
- Access within the SANG must be largely unrestricted with plenty of space provided where it is possible for dogs to exercise freely and safely off lead.
- SANG must be free from unpleasant intrusions (e.g. sewage treatment works smells etc).

Should haves

- SANG should be clearly sign-posted or advertised in some way.
- SANG should have leaflets and/or websites advertising their location to potential users. It would be desirable for social media to be used as well, with the goal of reducing paper use. Although a leaflet for a new home is desirable. It could advertise the TBH Partnership website at https://www.tbhpartnership.org.uk/greenspace/

Desirable

- It would be desirable for an owner to be able to take dogs from the car park to the SANG safely off the lead.

- Where possible it is desirable to choose sites with a gently undulating topography for SANG

- It is desirable for access points to have signage outlining the layout of the SANG and the routes available to visitors.

- It is desirable that SANG provide a naturalistic space with areas of open (non-wooded) countryside and areas of dense and scattered trees and shrubs. The provision of open water is encouraged and desirable on sites. However large areas of open water cannot count towards capacity.

- Where possible it is desirable to have a focal point such as a viewpoint, monument etc within the SANG.

Appendix 2: Further clarification on the TBH Project 2021

Reliance on the length of circular walk could be given less weight in specific circumstances on individual SANG sites. A circular route is still required. This will be agreed on a case by case basis by Natural England and the relevant Local Planning (Competent) Authority and only where equivalence can be effectively demonstrated. Sites will also only be accepted where most of the other criteria from Appendix 1 are met, either individually or as part of a group of sites.

Small SANG – This will be no smaller than 2 hectares in size. Where possible all other Appendix 1 criteria should be met, and the site will be adjacent to, linked in an accessible manner to, or close to a SANG or network which can deliver the required circular walk. Small SANG should be available to residents on their doorsteps.

Linear SANG – This approach allows for the width of a SANG to be reduced, where the walk incorporates an attractive linear feature or links to other open sites. For example, alongside waterways or disused railway lines. Linear SANG should include sites with wider areas, creating irregular shapes and opportunities for dogs to exercise freely off lead. In exceptional cases a there and back walk could qualify. It would require strong evidence and visitor surveys to show that it will provide an avoidance experience like that of a traditional SANG. It would also be preferable for linear SANG to link with wider routes and/or other SANGs to provide opportunities for a variety of walks.

SANG Network – Where several SANGs are in proximity or adjacent, they can be used and visited as one single entity. This approach allows for the use of links between SANG units to deliver a circular walk and meet all the Guidelines in combination. The default position is that the SANG links would not count as having capacity or catchments but would need to be secured in perpetuity. If they happen to be a substantial unit of green space themselves then they could be included within the SANG calculation. The size of an individual SANG catchment can be increased depending on the area afforded by an overall SANG network (excluding links), in line with the quanta figures in the TBH Delivery Framework.

Equivalence – This will be required on all SANG sites not meeting the guidelines in Appendix 1. There will have to be an over provision of something else to offset the lack of the full circular walk. This would be likely to incorporate an increased provision rate, for example providing 12 hectares of SANG per thousand head of population. A significant high quality SANG in terms of amenities and habitats could also demonstrate this requirement. We are happy to discuss this matter further on a case by case basis, either through our DAS Service for developers or our Local Plan Service for Local Planning Authorities.

Appendix 3: Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace: A best practice guide

Natural England would urge that these recommendations are followed unless there is valid justification for a deviation.

A SANG can be greatly improved for visitors and wildlife by implementing some of the suggestions in this guide. They are based on Natural England's Strategic Access Management and Monitoring teams' findings from visiting SANG and undertaking visitor number and questionnaire surveys.

This guide has been produced to provide more advice to Local Planning Authorities and developers up front. These are features found throughout the current SANG suite that we feel have tangible positive impacts on the draw to a SANG. We understand that it may not be possible to adopt them all, especially in a smaller SANG. There are a lot of quick fixes in this list which will generate a substantial uplift in SANG attractiveness. Natural England are likely to raise fewer concerns through the formal planning process on a SANG which provides the majority of the following.

It is essential that Natural England visits and agrees a SANG, before any housing development can be attributed towards it. This is in line with Policy NRM6 of the South East Plan. For SANG development advice please contact Natural England's Discretionary Advice Service:

https://www.gov.uk/guidance/developers-get-environmental-advice-on-your-planning-proposals

It is advisable to contact your local planning authority at the first instance of SANG development.

Naming of SANG:

1. Use a name which highlights any attractive features within the site. E.g. meadow, copse, lake etc.
2. Avoid the use of the word 'SANG' in the name of the site.
3. Keep the name relevant to the location but dissimilar to nearby SANG's.
4. The name is different to any associated development.

Location of SANG:

1. Where possible, provision of connectivity to wider greenspace/other SANG is recommended but should ensure a SANG does not result in new and additional access and visits to sensitive sites.
2. Seek to protect and enhance any existing local wildlife site designations (e.g. SSSI/SINC/SNCI) within or adjacent to the SANG boundary.

Biodiversity:

1. Ensure habitat of SANG complements adjacent habitats. e.g by extending similar landscape or something complementary such as grassland for foraging woodland birds.
2. Ensure appropriate connectivity of landscape scale habitat features. e.g. hedgerows, tree belts etc.
3. Include features such as; dead wood, sand banks, wildflower meadows etc.
4. Where open water is included, separate dog ponds and wildlife ponds. (Case study 4)
5. Avoid frequent mowing as a tool to manage grasslands, it is an expensive technique which produces little biodiversity benefit.
6. Grazing is a good management tool. It is not suitable for all SANG, but if it possible on your SANG, a route must be provided which avoids the grazing area for the benefit of those nervous of cattle.
7. Good practice monitoring of SANG use should be built into in perpetuity management of the site, and work consistently with the SAMM Project.

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) is an approach to land management and/or development that aims to leave biodiversity in a measurably better state than before. BNG does not change existing protections to protected sites, irreplaceable habitats or protected species.

Through appropriate design and implementation BNG can complement the purpose of SANGS. These are designed to provide more natural and diverse green space for communities to benefit from and, consequently, delivering more effective mitigation to alleviate pressure on SPAs. SANG is not an automatic delivery mechanism for BNG but the two can exist on the same site. BNG on SANG is only attributable to such habitat creation or enhancement that proves measurable additionality over and above the minimum requirements of the SANG, demonstrated through use of the Biodiversity Metric stipulated by the consenting body.

For BNG to be delivered on SANG, the SANG should achieve nature conservation outcomes that demonstrably exceed existing obligations under the SANG guidance, as quantified through the metric. It is encouraged that, where applicable, additional or enhanced features at SANGs are informed by local nature or wildlife strategies and priorities, such as Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS). It is recommended that the BNG calculations for the SANG are done separately from the rest of the project calculations, in order to ensure a clear audit trail and allow for simple demonstration of the additional biodiversity unit uplift beyond the minimum SANG requirements. Any additional features provided for BNG purposes should not conflict with the principle purpose of the SANG. Consideration should be given for other ecosystem services provided by the SANG and design should ensure BNG does not compete with these but delivers alongside them. For example, a wildflower rich grassland area created for biodiversity benefits would provide additional ecosystem services but could potentially also conflict with recreational services provided by the SANG. Careful consideration should be given to the design of any additional biodiversity features introduced into the SANG to ensure they did not conflict with the SANGs principle purpose.

For the purposes of the BNG calculation, the baseline value of the SANG is the site with the Habitat Regulation key required habitat features incorporated. Enhancements should be additional to count towards BNG, in that the enhancements would not have taken place in the absence of the BNG funding (or commitment of funding) and the biodiversity benefit (as measured through the metric) should not also be claimed to compensate for another project's biodiversity impact. Further information on BNG is set out in the following guidance and standards

1. The CIEEM, CIRIA, IEMA Good practice principles for development should be followed: https://cieem.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/C776a-Biodiversity-net-gain.-Good-practice-principles-for-development.-A-practical-guide-web.pdf

2. The British Standard for Biodiversity Net Gain (BS 8683) is a process standard that describes the implementation of BNG by a project (to be released in 2021).

Equality Act 2010 Compliance:

1. This does not fall under the remit of Natural England and we will not be giving bespoke advice about it during our pre application discussions. However, we urge developers and Local Planning Authorities alike to consider the requirements of it, when designing their SANG solutions.

Paths:

1. We are concerned about sections of the circular route that seasonally are wet, muddy or flooded, and could put visitors off from visiting. In these cases, we recommend boardwalk or paths are built up, for them to remain as compliant SANG. Relating to this, if applying grip to surfaces, avoid wire netting as it can trap dog claws.
2. Path surfacing needs to remain semi natural. The highest specification surface we would accept is resin bound hoggin.

3. Avoid convoluted paths and pinch points in SANG design. By maintaining a minimum width between paths of 100 m in open ground and 50 m in dense woodland.
   If necessary, look to extend the area of the SANG, or look at a local SANG Network.
4. Avoid paths running through areas adjacent to major infrastructure with prolonged loud noise. For example, adjacent dual carriageways or motorways. Natural England look at a maximum decibel limit of 60, before requiring discounting of SANG area.

Way-marking and signage:

1. Provide a map at the entrances with an easy to follow circular walk.
2. Gates, fencing and planting following natural land features can help distinguish routes.
3. Highlight points of interest and site history.
4. Car parks well sign posted using highways specification. Where possible through use of the brown sign initiative.
5. Provide contact details for site manager at main entrance.

Bins and dog fouling:

1. Dog bins should be in convenient sections of site and near the entrances.

Car park standard:

1. Provide a minimum of 1 parking space per ha.

Safety and security:

1. Where required for health and safety purposes, the SANG should have suitable access for emergency vehicles.
2. Car parks should be designed to reduce risk of anti-social behaviour, break in or feelings of vulnerability for site users.
3. Perimeter fencing secure to prevent dogs getting out.

Amenities:
These are **not a requirement** but have proved an attractive feature in those SANG with the space available.

1. A play area is a feature that attracts those with children to visit the site, as these are not present on the SPA. If a play area is included, it should be made from sustainable natural sources and not be full of bright plastics.
2. A café or food/drink provisions often attracts more visitors to the site. (Case study 4)

To conclude
We sometimes lose track of the basic requirement for a SANG, which is to attract people away from the SPA. When designing all SANG, the visitor experience needs to be put first. Costings and even habitat creation should all fall from a strong Visitor Strategy, which should form part of the SANG Management Strategy. Sites and their information should be created in a positive manner to interest visitors and have them coming back time and time again. Though biodiversity and landscape planning are obviously important, we urge you to start by considering the local populous and what they want and how they want to interact with your site, when creating a new SANG.

Case Studies

1. Edenbrook Country Park – Hart District Council - Well surfaced paths, and provisions for wildlife.

Edenbrook is a 24-hectare country park, delivered by Berkeley in partnership with Natural England and Hart District Council.
The paths are sufficiently wide for a combination of site users (Figure 1). There is also a good network of surfaced paths which are not convoluted and avoids pinch points. This was historically agricultural fields, but through innovative design, they have delivered a site that delivers both for visitors but also for biodiversity. Hart District Council have recognised the SANG network approach here and are bolting on extra area to the SANG and linking to other SANG in the vicinity.

Figure 1: The surfaced paths at Edenbrook are located sufficiently far from one another, and from wildlife rich-areas. They are wide enough for the whole combination of site visitors to use.

2. Farnham Park – Waverley Borough Council - Provisions for dogs and wildlife.

Several of the ponds in Farnham Park are designated as wildlife ponds. These are rich in wildlife, hosting many amphibian and invertebrate species. Dead hedges were built around three of the ponds, using materials cut from Farnham Park. To provide water and an opportunity to swim, 'Friends Pond' has been kept fully accessible to dogs. It is located nearest the main entrance and is easily accessible to all visitors. The wildlife ponds are further away from the main entrance, where visitor density is expected to be lower.

Figure 2: 'Friends Pond' a dog pond on Farnham Park which allows dogs to swim and drink from, whilst other ponds are fenced to protect wildlife.

3. Bucklers Forest – Bracknell Forest Council Comprehensive and engaging interpretation.

At the entrance to the site, Buckler's Forest includes a map that shows 3 options for circular routes (measuring 3.6 km, 2.4 km and 1.3 km). It also includes information on the wildlife that visitors can expect to see on site. As well as this, it highlights the site history. The inclusion of such comprehensive signage encourages users to care more about the site.
Buckler's Forest has showcased its site history by incorporating green electrical boxes, retained from the transport laboratory, into the site design. These have been transformed into benches, bug hotels, and even mini 'museum' exhibitions. The integration of the site's history is beloved by many site visitors and it creates a distinctly 'country park' feel.

Figure 3: A mini 'museum' exhibition including some archaeological samples found on site. Located within a green electrical box present when the site was a transport laboratory.

Figure 4: A bug hotel also within a repurposed green electrical box.

4. Heather Farm – Delivered by Horsell Common Preservation Society in partnership with Woking Borough Council - Provision of amenities.

Heather Farm has proved to be a very popular SANG, particularly for of its amenities, including a café and a large car park. Whilst it is not possible, or advisable, to include a café on every SANG, at Heather Farm, it has attracted a lot of visitors, many of whom would otherwise visit the SPA. After identifying a need for additional parking provisions, Horsell Common Preservation Society added 57 new spaces to the car park. There are currently 109 car parking spaces for visitors. Heather Farm provides 4 spaces per hectare, significantly more than the suggested minimum of 1 space per hectare.

Figure 5: A view of some of the habitat creation at Heather Farm

5. Wellesley Woodlands – Rushmoor Borough Council - Waymarking and signposting.

Wellesley Woodlands has incorporated non-intrusive way-markers to clearly signpost users around the 8 trails included in the SANG. These are easy to follow for site users whilst remaining unobtrusive. Where multiple trails intersect, signposting is clear to ensure that trails can be followed with ease. Both the map and associated markers clearly identify those trails that are suitable ground for wheelchairs and those with restricted mobility.

Figure 6: A signpost clearly defining two all-ability trails, the Birch Trail and the Holly Trail.

Figure 7: A way-marker to signpost users along the Wellesley Willow Trail.

6. Biodiversity Net Gain

Examples of Biodiversity Net Gain delivered within a SANG:

A. If an extra hedgerow was put into a SANG, not for screening purposes, this could count. If it is put in for screening reasons, this is a key SANG feature and therefore cannot count towards BNG unless the hedgerow was of higher distinctives than that needed for screening purposes or maintained in better ecological condition, in which case it could count.
B. Planting wildflower bulbs on appropriately sited amenity grassland within a SANG and in turn converting it to species rich meadow could be counted towards BNG.
C. If the SANG has structures such as a toilet block or café, then BNG could be delivered through the introduction of green/vegetated roofs and/or walls on such structures.

Potential Opportunities for Biodiversity Net Gain

Appendix 4: SANG Information Form

This form is designed to help you gather information about any potential SANG. For more guidance on the creation of SANG, please also refer to the relevant Borough Council's Thames Basin Heaths SPA Interim Avoidance Plan.

Natural England, Local Planning Authorities, and other organisations will then be able to consider the potential suitability of the proposed SANG based on this initial information.

Background information

Name and location of proposed SANG	**Name:** **Address:** **Grid reference:** **(Please attach a map of the site with the boundaries clearly marked)**
Size of the proposed SANG (hectares), excluding water features	**hectares**
Any current designations on land - e.g. LNR / SNCI	
Current owners name and address. (If there is more than one owner then please attach a map)	
Who manages the land?	
Legal arrangements for the land – e.g. how long is the lease?	
Is there a management plan for the site? (if so, please attach)	

Current visitor arrangements

Is the site currently accessible to the public?	
Does the site have open access?	
Has there been a visitor survey of the site? (If so, please attach)	
If there has been no visitor survey, please give and indication of the current visitor levels on site	
Does the site have existing car parking?	**How many car parks?** **How may car parking spaces?** **(Please mark car parks and numbers of car parking spaces on the site map)**
Are there any existing routes or paths on the site?	**(Please mark these on the map)**
Are there signs to direct people to the site? (Please indicate where and what type of sign)	

Site quality checklist

Must/should haves – these criteria are essential for all SANG			
	Criteria	**Current**	**Future**
1	Parking on all sites larger than 4ha (unless the site is intended for use within 400m only)		
2	Circular walk of 2.3-2.5km		
3	Car parks easily and safely accessible by car and clearly sign posted		
4	Access points appropriate for particular visitor use the SANG is intended to cater for		
5	Safe access route on foot from nearest car park and/or footpath		
6	Circular walk which starts and finishes at the car park		
7	Perceived as safe – no tree and scrub cover along part of walking routes		
8	Paths easily used and well maintained but mostly unsurfaced		

9	Perceived as semi-natural with little intrusion of artificial structures		
10	If larger than 12 ha then a range of habitats should be present		
11	Access unrestricted – plenty of space for dogs to exercise freely and safely off the lead		
12	No unpleasant intrusions (e.g. sewage treatment smells etc)		
13	Clearly sign posted or advertised in some way		
14	Leaflets or website advertising their location to potential users		
15	Can dog owners take dogs from the car park to the SANG safely off the lead		
16	Gently undulating topography		
17	Access points with signage outlining the layout of the SANG and routes available to visitors		
18	Naturalistic space with areas of open countryside and dense and scattered trees and shrubs. Provision of open water is desirable		
19	Focal point such as a viewpoint or monument within the SANG		