

**THAMES BASIN HEATHS
SPECIAL PROTECTION AREA**

REVIEW OF POTENTIAL SANGS

Report for Waverley Borough Council

By

Jed Griffiths

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report has been compiled by Jed Griffiths MA DipTP FRTPI, Principal of Griffiths Environmental Planning. It was commissioned by Waverley Borough Council in connection with a review which the Council is undertaking of potential Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space (SANG). The provision of SANGs is required by Policy NRM6 of the South East Plan (the Regional Spatial Strategy for South East England) in order to protect the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (the SPA) from the pressures of development.
- 1.2 Waverley Borough Council is a member of the Thames Basin Heaths Joint Strategic Partnership Board (JSPB), which in February 2009 published The Thames Heath Delivery Framework. The principal aim of the document was to set out recommendations to the local authorities within the vicinity of the SPA of measures that allow the delivery of dwellings without having a significant effect on the SPA as a whole. A significant element of this approach was the provision of SANG within a zone of 5 kilometres from the boundaries of the SPA.
- 1.3 As part of the approach, most of the local authorities have been producing more detailed frameworks, to show where potential areas of SANG could be provided. In May 2009, Waverley Borough Council published a draft Avoidance Strategy for the SPA. Public consultation on this document took place during the period from 8 June to 20 July 2009.
- 1.4 The area of the SPA within Waverley lies to the north of Farnham, but the five kilometre Zone of Impact extends across the town to the Bourne area to the south. As a result the focus of the draft Avoidance Strategy was on Farnham, and the bulk of the responses to the consultation came from local people and organisations.
- 1.5 Two years earlier, in March 2007, the Borough Council had published an Interim Strategy, which had provided SANG at Farnham Park. The initial area of SANG has now been used up, and the 2009 Avoidance Strategy discussed whether the Council should expand the area of SANG in the Park or whether alternatives could be provided at other locations in the Farnham area. All of these potential sites were selected by the Borough Council on the basis of discussions with Natural England.

2. The Brief

- 2.1 Before making a decision on the allocation of SANGs, the Borough Council decided to carry out a further assessment of the sites. The consultant was engaged to assist in this exercise, with the following brief:

“1. To independently evaluate the alternatives to Farnham Park proposed in the consultation against Natural England’s criteria. In addition, the assessment should give guidance on timescales for the SANG being available together with any barriers to delivery.

2. To undertake an assessment of what other potential sites are available – these could include sites in other Council areas where existing or proposed SANG exists, which could allow more housing in Farnham. Notably Guildford, Hart, and Rushmoor.”

- 2.2 As elaborated in the Council’s brief, a key issue is the timescale for the provision of potential SANG to a standard which would receive the support of Natural England. The current capacity of SANG at Farnham Park has been exhausted, and the Council has been unable to grant any planning permissions for residential development in Farnham since March 2009.

3. Approach to the Project

- 3.1 As outlined above, the consultant was given a very specific brief for the project, with a tight deadline for completion and report back to the Council. Almost all the work was undertaken in a two week period at the beginning of September 2009. The methodology consisted of the following elements:

- desk top research of published material, council reports, and other background information;
- meetings and contacts with Waverley Borough Council officers;
- telephone contacts with officers of other local authorities and Natural England;
- visits to existing and potential SANG in the area around Farnham;
- detailed analysis of these sites against the Natural England Checklist;

- assessment of other potential sites, and:
- presentation of initial findings to the Borough Council Special Interest Group of Councillors.

3.2 In the limited time available, the work has focused on the analysis of the sites. In all eight sites were selected, as follows:

- Farnham Park (FP)
- Farnham Quarry (FQ)
- Tongham Pools (TP)
- The Area to the East of Farnham Park (EFP)
- The Area to the South of the A31 Bypass (S A31)
- The Water Meadows to the North of the A31 Bypass (N A31)
- Bourne Woods (BW)
- Alice Holt (AH)

Note: A Map identifying these sites is appended to this report

3.3 Seven of these sites were included in the Borough Council's draft Avoidance Strategy. For this project the consultant has included one other potential candidate – at Tongham Pools. Excluded from consideration of this exercise, but included in the Avoidance Strategy was an additional area to the north of the A31 Bypass known as Riverside, towards the eastern end of the town. This area has recently been granted planning permission for the re-location of the Farnham Tennis Club, so is no longer available for consideration as SANG.

3.4 Each of the sites listed above in paragraph 3.2 has been analysed against the Natural England criteria. These guidelines were published by the former SEERA on June 2008, and were reproduced as Appendix 2 of the Waverley Borough Council Draft Avoidance Strategy. The full checklist is set out below as Table 1 – to assist in the assessment process, each of the criteria has been numbered. The detailed description and analysis of each of the sites is set out in the next section.

TABLE 1

SITE QUALITY CHECKLIST FOR AN INDIVIDUAL SANG **For the creation of suitable SANG, produced by SEERA June 2008**

The wording in the list below is precise and has the following meaning:

- Requirements referred to as “must” or “should have” are essential
- The SANGs should have at least one of the “desirable” features

Must/Should have

- 1. 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 of the developments linked to it. The amount of car parking should be determined by the anticipated use of the site and reflect the visitor catchment of both the SANGS and the SPA
- 2. It should be possible to complete a circular walk of 2.3 – 2.5 Km around the SANG
- 3. Car parks must be easily and safely accessible by car and should be clearly sign posted.
- 4. The accessibility of the site must include access points appropriate for the particular visitor use the SANGS is intended to cater for
- 5. The SANGS must have a safe route of access on foot from the nearest car park and/or footpaths
- 6. All SANGS with car parks must have a circular walk which starts and finishes at the car park.
- 7. SANGS must be designed so that they are perceived to be safe by users: they must not have tree and scrub covering parts of the walking routes
- 8. Paths must be easily used and well-maintained but most should remain unsurfaced to avoid the site becoming urban in feel
- 9. SANGS 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.
- 10. All SANGS larger than 12ha must aim to provide a variety of habitats for users to experience
- 11. Access within the SANGS must be largely unrestricted with plenty of space provided where it is possible for dogs to exercise freely and safely off lead.
- 12. SANGS must be free from unpleasant intrusions (e.g. sewage treatment works smells, etc.)
- 13. SANGS should be clearly sign-posted or advertised in some way.
- 14. SANGS should have leaflets and/or websites advertising their location to potential users. It would be desirable for leaflets to be distributed to new

homes in the area and be made available at entrance points and at car parks

Desirable

- 15. It would be desirable for an owner to be able to take dogs from the car park to the SANGS safely off the lead.
- 16. Where possible it is desirable to choose sites with a gently undulating topography for SANGS.
- 17. It is desirable for access points to have signage outlining the layout of the SANGS and the routes available to visitors.
- 18. It is desirable that SANGS 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 on part, but not the majority, of sites is desirable.
- 19. Where possible it is desirable to have a focal point such as a view point, monument, etc., within the SANGS.

4. Assessment of SANGS

- 4.1 This section summarises the results of the assessment undertaken by the consultant and deals with each of the SANGS in turn. It is linked to the background research work undertaken by the consultant, but is based mainly on the field surveys of the sites. ***In the following assessments, the opinions and views given are entirely those of the consultant and not those of either the officers or Members of the Waverley Borough Council.***

Farnham Park

- 4.2 Farnham Park is owned by Waverley Borough and is former mediaeval deer park with a total area of 130ha. Around 85ha of the Park consists of semi-natural grassland, woodland and scrub which was confirmed by Natural England said in 2007 as an area of SANG quality. At the time, however, Natural England said that the actual amount of land that could be utilised as SANG and linked to development contributions was much less – a figure of 21.25ha was estimated.. This is because of the existing visitor capacity and the range of potential enhancement measures which needed to be implemented A detailed discussion of the potential SANG capacity is set out in the Borough Council's draft Avoidance Strategy.
- 4.3 The conclusion reached in 2007 was that up to 10.9ha of SANG was available at Farnham Park pending the completion of a visitor survey. By March 2009, prior to the publication of the Avoidance

Strategy, this figure had been exhausted. A further allocation of SANG was therefore an option which was canvassed in the Avoidance Strategy. As the Strategy points out, this additional capacity, to bring the total to 21.25ha is dependant on bringing into use the parking area off the Six Bells Roundabout, together with improved signage to the Park and continued investment in enhancement measures.

- 4.4 In terms of the assessment carried out for this report, the consultant has carried out an objective examination of the existing facility against the Natural England Checklist. With regards to car parking and access, the criteria have been fulfilled, within the limits agreed between the Borough Council and Natural England. Within the Park the paths are well-managed, well-signed and free from obstruction. The semi-natural elements, generally to the centre and north of the area, are very distinctive, with open areas and distinctive ancient trees. There are no unpleasant intrusions, although the consultant was advised about occasional flooding from foul water drains. The Park is clearly signposted and advertised locally. At the main entrance, there is a good poster display on the wall of the Warden's office with leaflets freely available.
- 4.5 In addition, the Park has most of the desirable features in the checklist. There does not seem to be a focal point within the SANG area – nevertheless there is a strong focus around the main entrance to the Park, around the Warden's office, the golf course café, the Cricket Club, and the backcloth of the castle.
- 4.6 In summary, Farnham Park shows up strongly against the Checklist. As noted above, there is a need to raise the SANG capacity. The main way to achieve this would be to provide the additional area of car parking at the Six Bells roundabout to the east of the Park. This is discussed below. In terms of the possible timing, this is something which can be achieved in the short term, coupled to the existing arrangements for management and financing.

Farnham Quarry

- 4.7 Farnham Quarry is an extensive area (of about 25ha) to the south of Badshot Lea. It has been used for the extraction of sand and gravel for many years, but is coming to the end of its working life as a quarry. Hanson, the current owners have estimated that mineral extraction will cease in April 2010.

- 4.8 The consultant has assessed this area in terms of its potential as SANG. As it is still a working quarry, none of the elements identified in the checklist are existing. Nevertheless, there are clear signs that it could be brought forward as SANG in the future. Current access to the site is from a roundabout at its eastern end, part of the interchange between the A31 and A331 roads. It is assumed that this could continue to operate, with additional car parking in the north east corner of the site, close to the boundary with Aldershot. In the view of the consultant, it would also be possible to provide access and car parking from the western edge, adjacent to the Badshot Lea Village Hall ("The Kiln").
- 4.9 It is assumed that the site would be designed according to a master plan. There is clearly sufficient space to provide circular walks within the site from the possible car parking areas. Safety for potential users and the design of paths can be accommodated in a master plan, together with detailed landscaping to provide a variety of habitats for users to experience. The only current intrusion, apart from the sand and gravel plant, is traffic, especially from the A31. This could be mitigated by landscaping of the southern boundary.
- 4.10 There are also a number of desirable features which could be provided. Access and signage could be provided as part of the master plan. With a mostly vacant site, there is clearly an opportunity to provide a gently undulating topography via landscape design measures. There are already some areas where natural regeneration is occurring, but the area is large enough for a variety of habitats to be provided. The existing areas of water could be incorporated into the overall design, perhaps as a focal point within the site. With a vacant site, there would be considerable scope for an imaginative design.
- 4.11 The delivery of this site as SANG depends on a number of factors. Although Hanson have stated that they intend to cease production in 2010, the future business intentions of the firm are not clear. For example, the company could decide to continue to use the existing plant for the foreseeable future. It has also been suggested to the consultant that a waste processing plant could be proposed for part of the area. Discussions need to be held with the Surrey County Council Restoration Officer and Hanson to establish what may happen in the future.
- 4.12 The consultant was shown a restoration plan which was prepared in accordance with a previous planning permission. This plan, however, would not be sufficient to justify the inclusion of the site as SANG. What is required is a detailed Master Plan, together with a

Management Plan – this would set out the landscaping proposals, together with access provision and planting proposals. Ideally this should be completed before sand and gravel working ceases.

- 4.13 In terms of timing, it is suggested that detailed master plan proposals could be in place within 18 months. The restoration of the area, together with landscaping and planting would then take place. Judging by the progress on similar restoration schemes in the sand and gravel industry, the SANG could be fully operational within 3 – 5 years, i.e. 2013 – 2016.

Tongham Pools

- 4.14 Tongham Pools is an existing area (9.4ha) of potential SANG to the west of the A331 Blackwater Valley Road. It is owned by Surrey County Council and is managed by Guildford Borough Council, within whose area it is situated. In its draft Avoidance Strategy, Guildford Borough Council has listed Tongham Pools as potential SANG. As it is within 5Km of the SPA, the consultant has assessed this site and its potential to contribute to the network of SANGS in the Farnham area.
- 4.15 Although the area has been identified in the Guildford Avoidance Strategy, it does not fulfil all the attributes in the checklist. There are problems with accessibility and car parking, mainly because the site is separated from the village of Tongham by the A331 dual carriageway. The main pedestrian access is from the north, but car parking is limited in the area. The nearest large car parks are at Aldershot Park, to the west, in the Rushmoor Borough Council area. It is a considerable walk to Tongham Pools, however, across the football and rugby pitches. There is no signposted access, and the only way in is over a ditch which marks the local authority boundary.
- 4.16 Within the area, there is a circular walk of about 2.5Km around the pools, which is reasonably well-maintained by the Countryside Service. It cannot be perceived as safe, however, because for the most part the route is fringed by trees and shrubs. On the eastern edge, there is intrusion from traffic noise. Although it is advertised on the Guildford Borough web-site, the site is not clearly advertised or sign-posted. The only positive feature is that the site does have a strong naturalistic feel, despite being dominated by the areas of water. The variety of water birds is noticeable, and the planting around the lakes has become well-established.

- 4.17 The conclusion is that Tongham Pools by itself does not fulfil the Natural England criteria. It is, however, an existing feature, which does have nature conservation attributes. The site does appear to have more of a local function, particularly as car parking and access is so poor. It is suggested that it could fulfil a more positive role if were linked to other sites in the Blackwater Valley. From the site visit it would appear that it could be linked to a Farnham Quarry SANG, which would lie immediately to the south.

Land to the East of Farnham Park.

- 4.18 This area of 7.4ha was originally suggested in the Interim Mini-plan in 2007. Since then, a proposal has been made by a private owner of the land for part of it to be used as a green burial area. The consultant has had access to the detailed plans which seem to suggest that the green burial area would be located on the northern part of the site, adjacent to the church.
- 4.19 It has not been suggested that this area could be used as SANG in its own right. In the draft Avoidance Strategy, the Borough Council have made it clear that it would be connected to the main area of Farnham Park. The Avoidance Strategy also suggests that it would help to raise the total area of SANG available at the Park. The consultant has assessed the site on that basis.
- 4.20** It would appear that most of the criteria in the Natural England checklist could be satisfied. An area of car parking could be provided, with an existing access from the Six Bells roundabout. This would give safe access to Farnham Park from the east, thereby taking the pressure off the existing car parks to the west and the north. Some of the public response to the suggested access, however, has been critical, and there is a view that the narrow footpath into Farnham Park via Hale Road and the Six Bells public house would be inadequate and unsafe. This route has been supported by Natural England. From a survey of the surroundings, however, it would appear that a more direct pedestrian (and dog) route could be from the old Hale Road into the field at the western edge of the area.
- 4.21** In terms of the semi-natural features of this area, these are limited to field and hedgerow, with a number of mature trees. At the western end, there is an attractive vista from Hale Road into the field beyond. As the area would be linked to Farnham Park, there is no serious problem in terms of its semi-natural characteristics. There is no major intrusion on the southern edge of the area, but

there is a line of electricity pylons to the north, where the green burial ground is proposed.

- 4.22** As indicated above, this is a proposal which could be implemented in the short term. The main possible barrier would be the detailed proposal for the green burial ground and how this might affect the overall framework. Nevertheless, there would appear to be strong potential for establishing a car park at Hale Road, and providing a new access at the southern edge of this area, with a footpath link to the main area of Farnham Park.

Land to the South of the A31

- 4.23** As explained above this area was formerly linked to the Riverside area to the south of Farnham Town centre, where planning permission has been granted for the re-location of the Farnham Tennis Club. Accordingly, the consultant's assessment has been concerned only with the land to the south of the A31 bypass.

- 4.24** From the site visits to the area, it was clear that it failed on practically all the criteria in the checklist. No car parking is available, and pedestrian access onto the area is practically impossible. There is one track way which skirts the southern boundary, and no connection with the bypass. The land is low-lying and damp, and there is a dense network of trees and undergrowth. Because of its isolation, the area would appear to have a high biodiversity ranking, but arguably this is its only asset. Accordingly, this site has been rejected.

Water Meadows – Land to the North of the A31

- 4.25** This site has an area of 18.3ha and lies to the north of the A31 road, on the southern edge of Farnham Town Centre. In landscape terms, it is an attractive feature, part of the setting for the historic centre of Farnham. In overall terms, the site could satisfy many of the SANG criteria, but there are some limitations.

- 4.26** Existing arrangements for car parking are limited. The nearest and most convenient car park is at Waggon Yard. For pedestrians, the main point of access is from the eastern end, via the St. Andrew's church yard. From the church yard, however, the footpath passes through a narrow passage, which cannot be perceived as safe, particularly in the winter months. On the site itself, there are a number of foot paths, the main one of which provides a route to the south of the town, via a foot bridge over the bypass. From observation, these appeared to be well-used and well sign-posted.

The main footpath was well-maintained, with a hard surface. It would be possible for circular walks to be provided within the site.

- 4.27** Although attractive in landscape terms, the area lacks biodiversity. Most of the area consists of grassland, which was used as grazing land but is no longer managed. There have been large areas of nettle invasion and the variety of grasses appears to be small. To improve the area, there is a need for a management plan, to restore the area as water meadows, with a greater variety of flora and flora present.
- 4.28** In terms of the suitability of this area as SANG, the accessibility to the Water Meadows would need to be improved. At the eastern end, it would be necessary to provide a separate footpath from the Waggon Yard car park, to avoid the existing narrow passageway from the church yard onto the meadows. There would appear to be no car parking at the western end of the site – this should be investigated, with an entrance from West Street.
- 4.29** There are a number of barriers to be considered. The precise capacity of the site as potential SANGS must be constrained by access difficulties, its physical characteristics, and the lack of variety in the range of species. In addition, the land is in private ownership. It is understood that there are four owners, which would make acquisition costly and difficult to negotiate. The conclusion must be that, although this site has some potential, it can only be considered as a long term option.

Bourne Woods

- 4.30** The Bourne Woods are a large area (51 ha) of Forestry Commission woodland to the south of Farnham. It is managed by the Commission as commercial woodland, and is composed mostly of coniferous species, typically Scots pine, Corsican pine, and Japanese larch. The woods are open to the public and there are a number of access points on the periphery, with limited areas of car parking.
- 4.31** As an existing area for public recreation, Bourne Woods does display a number of positive aspects against the Natural England criteria. The areas of car parking, however, are small, although these are probably appropriate against the capacity of the site. Car parking is accessed directly from the public road, and there would appear to be some issues with safety and security. Pedestrian access is generally good, however, and there are several circular walks. Within the site, the footpaths are wide and well-maintained,

with good visibility. From personal observation, the area seems to be popular with local people. It is, however, commercial woodland, and there is a distinct lack of variety in the habitats present, despite some pleasant woodland glades. Access within the site is subject to some restrictions, particularly in the centre. There are no unpleasant intrusions and the site is well-signed posted at the entrances and is displayed on the Forestry Commission web-site.

4.32 The site has some of the desirable feature on the checklist. In particular, it has an undulating topography, and there are good signs at the main access points. Dogs can be let off the lead from the car carks, although this should be done within the site beyond the access gates.

4.33 The overall conclusion would appear to be that this site has great potential as SANG, particularly as it is already in existence and is popular and well-used. The main barrier is that it is in the ownership of the Forestry Commission and is a commercial enterprise. In discussions with the Borough Council, the Commission have indicated its reluctance to include Bourne Woods as SANG. In addition to the harvesting of timber, the Commission also hires areas of land at the centre of the area to media companies for filming purposes. This would prevent free public access to much of the site.

4.34 There is also the issue of the lack of habitat variety within the woods. Bourne Woods are adjacent to the Farnham Heath Nature Reserve, owned and managed by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB). Here the RSPB has been clearing areas of woodlands and is engaged in a project to restore the reserve as heath land. This has caused a degree of controversy, but the RSPB would probably be reluctant to support an increase in visitors to the surrounding area. For these reasons, there would appear to be no realistic possibility of adopting Bourne Woods as SANG.

Alice Holt

4.35 Alice Holt is a large area of woodlands to the south west of Farnham, and is owned and managed by the Forestry Commission. The overall size is 800 hectares, located on both sides of the A325 road. Only part of the area is run and managed with full public access – this is to the east of the A325 main road, with the main entrance from the minor road to the south east of Bucks Horn Oak. The consultant has assessed this site against the Natural England criteria as potential SANG.

- 4.36** To summarise, Alice Holt ticks all the boxes. It fulfils all the requirements and is an exemplar of what should be achieved on SANG. The area is extremely well managed and its focus is around the site entrance, where there are two areas of car parking, an Education Centre, a café, play facilities, a 3D Maze, toilets, a cycle hire centre, and the Forest Office. There are also smaller car parks – one is in the north eastern corner of the forest, and the other is to the south of the road to Batt's Corner. Around the area there are five way-marked circular trails, each of which is colour coded. There is an extensive network of forest paths and footpaths, some of which is surfaced as a cycle facility. There is also a way-marked foot path from the Bentley railway station. From the forest centre, it is possible to hire cycles, covered wheelchairs and prams. Although the bulk of the area is wooded, there are a variety of habitats to experience, with ponds, streams, meadows, and heath. Sign-posting and interpretation facilities are first-rate, linked to the Education Centre.
- 4.37** Alice Holt also has the desirable features listed by Natural England, although for good reasons dogs must be kept on the lead in the central area. The area does possess an undulating topography, with three marked view points around the site. Arguably, the main focal point is around the central area, with the café and other facilities. The only negative point is that there is a charge for the car parks in the central area.
- 4.38** With such a high quality range of facilities, Alice Holt has clear potential as SANG. Nevertheless, there are barriers. The area is owned and managed by the Forestry Commission and lies entirely within East Hampshire District. For the site to be adopted as SANG there would need to be detailed negotiations between Waverley Borough Council, the Forestry Commission, East Hampshire District Council, and Natural England. It would also be prudent to involve Hampshire County Council, as the authority is a member of the Joint Strategic Partnership (East Hampshire is not). Discussions would need to focus not only on the principle of SANG allocation, but also the amount of land, given that the forest is on the edge of the 5Km SPA protection zone.
- 4.39** Despite the possible difficulties, it is clear that Alice Holt does have the attributes to be a SANG. Should negotiations be successful, the existing management arrangements could be extended to include the Joint Strategic Partnership. This would ensure that SANG would be provided in perpetuity.

5. Other Potential Sites

- 5.1** As part of the brief, the consultant has considered the possibility of other sites which could be examined as SANGS. Guildford Borough Council has published a draft Avoidance Strategy, which was under consultation in early September. The conclusion was that there were no additional areas available in Guildford Borough. Only two of the sites listed in the Guildford Strategy were within the Blackwater Valley and close to Farnham. One, Tongham Pools, was assessed by the consultant. The other, the Riverside Country Park, would appear to have no additional capacity.
- 5.2** Rushmoor Borough Council has not published any proposals, but is likely to issue a strategy in the late autumn of 2009. From telephone conversations with officers, it would appear that the possibilities of identifying potential SANGS are limited. In the area around Farnham, there is the Rowhill Copse Nature Reserve, which is close to the Waverley Borough Council boundary. This is only a small area, however, and would not appear to have all the qualities specified in the Natural England checklist. Its primary purpose is nature conservation.
- 5.3** Hart District Council also has an Interim Avoidance Strategy (2008), but the two main sites identified as SANG are at Fleet and Hook - too far away to be connected with the Farnham area. The consultant has been made aware of tentative discussions about the possibility of a series of linked sites, along the Blackwater Valley. This does have its merits, and could form the basis of a linear feature, similar to the Colne Valley Park, the southern end of which is in Surrey. It is understood that this concept would not be supported as SANG by Natural England. Nevertheless, it is a concept which could be discussed by the members of the Joint Strategic Partnership, which could form the basis of a Committee to fund and run such a feature.

6. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1** In conclusion, the assessment has confirmed that there are potential areas which could be allocated as SANG in and around Farnham. The results of the analysis are summarised in symbolic form in Table 2 below. The initial views of the consultant were presented to a group of Borough Council Members on 11 September 2009. Having considered the views of the Members and the results of the assessment process, the consultant offers the following guidance to the Borough Council.

- 6.2 From the list of eight sites in the assessment, it is clear that the **Area to the South of the A31** should be withdrawn from further consideration. It would appear that **Bourne Woods** should also be withdrawn, despite some positive attributes against the Natural England criteria. It is highly unlikely that the Forestry Commission would welcome this area as SANG. **Tongham Pools** is also not worthy of further consideration – it is too small and constrained and could only be considered as part of a larger-scale proposal linked to other sites.
- 6.3 Of the other areas studied, the **Water Meadows to the North of the A31** has some attributes, but difficulties around ownership and accessibility mean that it is only a long term possibility. There are also doubts as to its semi-natural qualities, although it presents a fine prospect of the town centre.
- 6.4 For the medium term, the possibility of developing **Farnham Quarry** is attractive, particularly as this site would be vacant. With positive plans for restoration and management, SANG could begin to be established within 3 – 5 years. Progress, however, would depend on the attitudes of the owners and negotiations with other stakeholders in the Joint Strategic Partnership. It is suggested that discussions should commence as soon as possible.
- 6.5 In the short term, the Borough Council should investigate the possibility of implementing the proposals for the **Area to the East of Farnham Park**. As has become clear this site is inextricably linked to **Farnham Park**, which contains existing SANG, but which has reached capacity. To increase this capacity, it would be essential to include the area to the east, to which there are no physical barriers. Delivery would depend on negotiations with the owners and the proposal to develop the green burial area.
- 6.6 Finally, the possibility of including part of **Alice Holt** should be given serious consideration, despite the fact that it lies within East Hampshire District. There is clear evidence that the forest is used by residents from the Farnham area and its adoption as SANGS would be of great benefit. It is recommended that discussions should be initiated with East Hampshire, the Forestry Commission and other stakeholders. The advantage is that this is an existing facility displaying all the characteristics of SANGS, which could be adopted in the near future.
- 6.7 It is to be hoped that this assessment will assist the Borough Council in its future decisions on the choice of SANG. Although

there has been limited amount of time, there do appear to be some possible options which are worthy of consideration. The Natural England Checklist is extremely rigorous, however, and there are many areas which will not meet the standards required for SANG status.

6.8 In these circumstances, it will be extremely important for the members of the Joint Strategic Partnership Board to work together to find solutions. In an area such as Farnham and the Blackwater Valley, municipal boundaries are very tightly drawn, and this makes joint working essential. The notion of a linear park along the valley, with a string of linked sites, is one that should be given serious consideration.

Jed Griffiths

Hertford

September 2009

TABLE 2

COMPARISON OF SANGS AGAINST SITE QUALITY CHECKLIST

MUST/ SHOULD HAVES

	SITES							
	FP	FQ	TP	EFP	S A31	N A31	BW	AH
1. Car Parking	√	o	?	o	x	o	√/?	√
2. Circular Walk	√	o	√	?	x	o	√	√
3. CP Accessibility	√	o	x	√/o	x	o	√/?	√
4. Access Points	√	o	x	o	x	?	√	√
5. Safe Route Access	√	o	?	√/?	x	o	√	√
6. Circular Walk CP	√	o	x	?	x	?	√	√
7. Safe Design	√	o	√	o	x	√/o	√	√
8. Path Maintenance	√	o	√	o	x	√	√	√
9. Semi-natural Sp	√	o/√	√	o	√	?	√/?	√
10. Variety Habitats	√	o	N/A	N/A	N/A	x	N/A	√
11. Access within	√	o	√/?	o	x	√	x	√
12. Intrusion	√	√/?	?	√	x	x	√	√
13. Clear signposted	√	o	x	o	x	o	√	√
14. Leaflet/website	√	o	?	o	o	o	√	√

DESIRABLES

CRITERIA	SITES							
	FP	FQ	TP	EFP	S A31	N A31	BW	AH
15. Dogs off lead	√	o	x	?	x	?	√	√
16. Undulation	√	?	x	√	√/?	√	√	√
17. Signs at Access	√	o	x	o	x	o	√	√
18. Natural space	√	?	√	√	x	?	x	√
19. Focal point	√	o	x	x	x	x	x	√

LEGEND

- √ Positive against Check List
- x Negative – not present
- ? Not present – questionable whether this factor could be achieved
- o Not present – but could possibly be achieved

