

Chilterns Beechwoods Special Area of Conservation – Update on Mitigation Strategy June 2022

In the interest of securing updates regarding the Chilterns Beechwoods Special Area of Conservation (SAC), we attended the SAC Briefing Session held by Dacorum Borough Council on 22nd June, which offered us some insight into their planned mitigation methods going forward.

It was emphasised that Dacorum Borough Council are unhappy with the situation and are eager to resolve delays alongside National Government, the relevant local authorities, Natural England and the National Trust. For clarity in the meantime, the Council has sought to set out the likely mitigation methods to be applied long term.

The three mitigation methods were addressed in this meeting. These are as follows:

1. Strategic Access Management Monitoring (SAMM)– this is a package of financial measures for the SAC itself
 - A draft proposal has been prepared and detailed negotiations are underway on precise costs and method of securing payment
 - Too early to provide an exact cost, figure under negotiation with relevant local authorities
 - Other effected local authorities, Natural England and the National Trust must be in agreement on final figure required
2. Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space (SANG) to provide alternative open space to draw visitors away from the Chilterns Beechwoods SAC
 - All proposals will need a SANG contribution either onsite or offsite
 - Dacorum specifically are working to identify publicly owned land that could be used and have 3 good prospects at present. Visitor surveys and management plans are being prepared to identify capacity and cost
 - No details have been provided with respect to other local authorities affected
3. A ‘Gateway’ solution is also being considered on land in close proximity to Ashridge Commons to relieve pressure on existing services
 - Relocation of facilities to divert footfall away from the SAC
 - Not deliverable in the short term
 - Will be considered for inclusion in the new local plan

The Council anticipate that SAMMs figures will be finalised and some SANGs capacity will be available from August facilitating the approval of applications within the Dacorum Borough Council area. However, the capacity of identified SANGs is limited, as such whilst consents can be granted following identification of these sites, only a portion of those applications held within the planning system will benefit from them. How the Council will seek to distribute the SANGs available and therefore how they will prioritise sites is as yet unclear. A longer-term solution to SANGs capacity will still be required.

It has been suggested that further briefing will take place. Optimis will attend all future briefings and keep you informed on the changing circumstances and timescales surrounding this issue.