**Chiltern Beechwoods Special Area of Conservation (Ashridge)\_letter received by NMPC November 2022 and shared with Councillors.**

Following receipt and circulation of this letter the proposal was agreed by DBC without going to full committee

At a meeting held on 15 November 2022, Cabinet approved the [**Chilterns Beechwoods Special Area of Conservation Mitigation Strategy**](https://democracy.dacorum.gov.uk/documents/s36836/Appendix%20A%20-%20Draft%20Mitigation%20Strategy%202.pdf). It also approved two Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) Management Plans for [**Bunkers Park**](https://democracy.dacorum.gov.uk/documents/s36827/Appendix%20C%20Bunkers%20Park%20SANG%20Management%20Plan%201.pdf) and [**Chipperfield Common**](https://democracy.dacorum.gov.uk/documents/s36828/Appendix%20C%20Chipperfield%20Common%20SANG%20Management%20Plan%201.pdf).

**Links to DBC reports and agenda papers**

P194 ONWARDS MENTIONS Bunkers Park

Please see the attached –

<https://democracy.dacorum.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=157&MId=3338>

 Go to Agenda Reports Pack, then pages 110 – 277.

“I am surprised and alarmed by the Report that is to be considered by your Cabinet on Tuesday, 15th. It is significantly FLAWED – imprecision, inadequately researched, insufficient consultation – and does not provide a basis for a decision which has permanent and far-reaching implications for a large section of the community. Please circulate this letter to all Cabinet attendees; you will also see below that I have copied a number of others to whom I believe this matter will be of interest.

My focus is on the intentions as they affect Chipperfield Common and surrounds, but many of my comments will be of equal relevance to Bunkers Park and Gadebridge.

The following numbers refer to paragraphs in the report.

2.4 From a survey your consultants estimate 2m annual visitors to Ashridge; the report author thinks it likely this is an underestimate.

If an underestimate is believed, then that casts a shadow over the efficacy of the consultants work and all proposals drawn from it.

What is the target reduction in annual visitors? 100,000, 500,000, 1m, more?

What is the target transfer number of annual visitors to Chipperfield, Bunkers Park and Gadebridge respectively? The report contains no mention.

What measures are intended to discourage/prevent visitors to Ashridge and encourage a transfer to Chipperfield, Bunkers Park and Gadebridge. The report does not say and has no financial provision.

2.5 Damage. The report lists the widespread issues at Ashridge.

There is no equivalent assessment for the current status at Chipperfield or elsewhere.

There is no assessment of the damage/issues that may result at Chipperfield consequent on the increase in visitor numbers.

3.7 New residential development must contribute to SANGs (Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace). 3.10 Dacorum has completed visitor surveys at Chipperfield and Bunkers Park and assesses they have the capacity to support 3,780 new homes. 3.11 The cost per new home is £4,251. 3.11 Demand is likely to outstrip supply. 5.5 SANG contributions to be secured.

NB. The phrase ‘capacity to support’ is used a number of times in the report. Does it mean that the ‘improvements’ to the SANG areas can accept the demand from new home residents in addition to the thousands transferred from Ashridge?

Where are the new homes? The Dacorum Local Plan does not exist, even in draft form. Is the report author privy to information not in the public domain?

What evidence is there that the cost per new home is a sustainable charge on developers? Bear in mind that new residential development is already subject to the Community Infrastructure Levy, S.106 and S.278 Agreements, including for Herts. County Council services.

What is the anticipated cash flow of Developer payments(?); the housing industry is currently tipping into recession yet this is intended as the primary source of funding.

What is meant by ‘demand likely to outstrip supply’? If this means that the new homes will by themselves oversubscribe the visitor capacity at the SANGS then what chance of Ashridge visitors transferring? NB. The phrase ‘capacity to support’ appears a number of times in the report. What does it mean? It is not clarified in the Glossary (page 174).

4.1 Only developments in Hemel Hempstead, Bovingdon and Chipperfield will benefit from the SANGS.

This is an outright contradiction of the aim in 2.4 to reduce the 2m annual visitors to Ashridge and defeats the *raison d’etre* for SANGS (3.6).

The statement ignores the close proximity of Kings Langley to Chipperfield.

Page 117 Those consulted are all Dacorum officers.

Why have no Authorities – Parishes and Districts - in or adjacent to the SANGs been consulted? Tens of thousand, maybe hundreds, of visitors redirected to or through: Chipperfield, Kings Langley, Bovingdon, Nash Mills, Three Rivers, etc.

And why no public information and consultation in these areas?

3.5.26 SANG should target car visitors, 3.4.43 SANGS Management Plans.

The Management Plans contain no reference to, or consideration of, how the impact on adjacent communities will be mitigated and managed. The High Streets of Bovingdon and Kings Langley are daily and frequently congested. In the latter the junctions with Vicarage Lane and Langley Hill – the primary roads off which lead to/from Chipperfield – are hazardous, with sight lines often obscured. Both roads are also severely hampered by parked vehicles.

Although thankfully not frequent, the road through Whippendell Bottom and the approaches to it on either side is the location of accidents, usually serious, some fatal.

The effect of thousands of additional car movements is beyond comprehension. Yet the report studiously ignores such issues.

Page 173 Appendix B. Planned housing growth within the 12.6km Zone of Influence is 10,308 homes.

I return to the fact that the Dacorum Local Plan is extant. So on what basis is this figure calculated and where are these homes located?

Page 181 Appendix A. Total Cost of SAMMS (Strategic Access Management & Monitoring Strategy)

I repeat, what measures are intended to discourage/prevent visitors to Ashridge and encourage a transfer to Chipperfield, Bunkers Park and Gadebridge. There is no mention here, nor financial provision.

Page 230 Chipperfield Common.

Page 235, 2.3 Total existing car park capacity; 100 cars.

Page 243, 2.15 Car parks partly used for village uses.

The car parks do indeed serve village businesses and facilities, as well as walkers, and the aggregate result throughout the year is that they are frequently close to full. If the car Parks are dominated by walker’s cars what consequence does that hold for patrons of, and businesses and organisations such as the Windmill PH, St Paul’s School, Blackwells, St John’s Church and Hall, the Village Hall and The Two Brewers?

No additional spaces are proposed, just improved surfacing. Keeping in mind the purpose of a SANG is to attract car visitors (3.5.26 above), just how is it intended to accommodate the thousands diverted here from Ashridge? The report doesn’t even attempt to acknowledge the issue let alone attempt an answer.

Page 245, 3.5 Funding is to come from new residential development in Dacorum that is likely to have an adverse effect on the Ashridge Chiltern Beechwoods.

This is the same issue and questions as set out in 3.7 above. Where are the new homes? The Dacorum Local Plan does not exist, even in draft form. Is the report author privy to information not in the public domain?

What evidence is there that the cost per new home is a sustainable charge on developers? Bear in mind that new residential development is already subject to the Community Infrastructure Levy, S.106 and S.278 Agreements for Herts. County Council services.

What is the anticipated cash flow of Developer payments(?); the housing industry is currently tipping into recession! How will this affect the funding and implementation of the SANG ‘improvements?

Plus, is it right that developers of homes yet to be built should bear the entire cost for resolving a pre-existing problem to which they are only marginally adding?

Page 268, Community Impact Assessment (CIA).

The public (community) – Bovingdon, Chipperfield, Kings Langley and areas between and around, has not been consulted and deserves better. Neither have the respective Parish Councils nor Hertfordshire County Council as Highways and Strategic Planning Authority. All this is a major omission.

The CIA focusses solely on Chipperfield Common. There is no assessment of social and infrastructure impacts, nor Environmental and Traffic Impact Assessments which, not least, should consider the consequences of added traffic pollution throughout the area and whether the ensuing damage transferred to Chipperfield Common, and the surrounding communities is properly justified by the claimed benefits to Ashridge.

Conclusion.

Whilst I recognise the Council’s desire to remove the moratorium on the grant of Planning Approvals this must not be an excuse to justify ill-informed and permanent decisions on other matters. The issues set out in this letter must be answered and a full exposition of the proposals provided for public and Parish understanding and response.”