

# East Court & Ashplats Wood

## Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace

### Strategy



October 2014

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All photographs taken by Mid Sussex District Council unless otherwise stated.

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Ashdown Forest Special Protection Area and Special Area of Conservation

The Natura 2000 network consists of sites across Europe designated for their nature conservation importance. It aims to be an ecologically coherent network of designated sites that protect threatened species and habitats. The Natura 2000 network is formed of Special Areas of Conservation for species, plants and habitats (designated under the Habitats Directive) and Special Protection Areas for bird species (classified under the Birds Directive).

The Ashdown Forest Special Protection Area (SPA) was classified in 1996. It is a 3,200Ha site comprising predominantly of lowland heathland and woodland. The Ashdown Forest SPA is an internationally important habitat classified because of the presence of breeding populations of Dartford warbler *Sylvia undata* (Figure 1) and European nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus*. It is also a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

The Ashdown Forest Special Area of Conservation (SAC) was designated in 2005 and covers 2,700Ha. It has a different boundary to the SPA, but the two designations overlap (Figure 2). The qualifying features for the designation are the Annex I habitats: Northern Atlantic wet heaths with *Erica tetralix* and European dry heaths, and the Annex II species: Great crested newt *Triturus cristatus*. It is also part of the SSSI.



Figure 1 - Dartford warbler (Photograph: Hugh Clark).

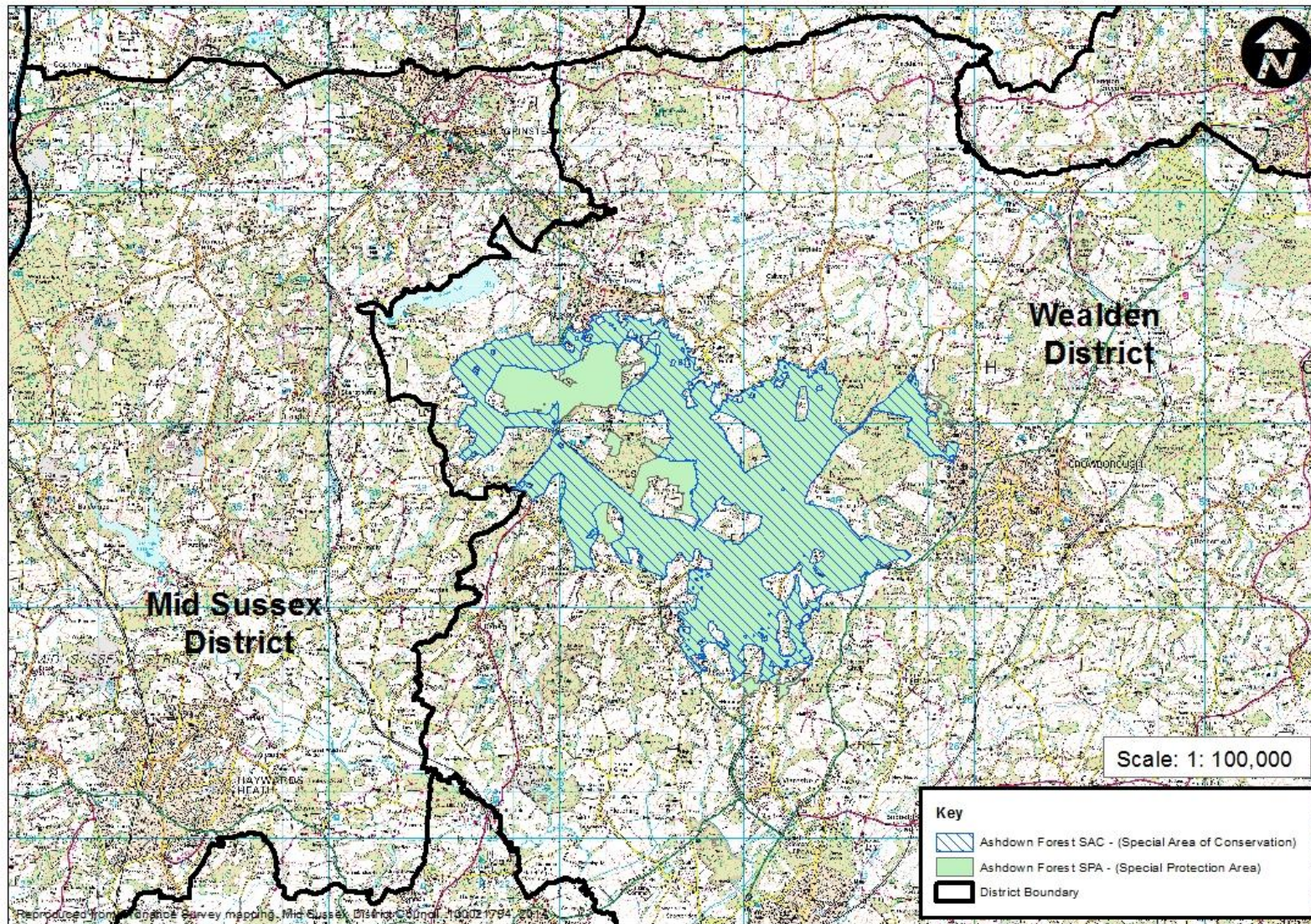


Figure 2 - The Ashdown Forest SPA and SAC.

## 1.2 Habitats Regulations Assessment for the Mid Sussex District Plan 2014-2031

Although Ashdown Forest lies adjacent to the north-east boundary of Mid Sussex and within Wealden District (Figure 2), under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 (the Habitats Regulations), the competent authority – in this case, Mid Sussex District Council – has a duty to ensure that any plans or projects that they regulate (including planning policy and planning applications) will have no adverse effect on the integrity of Ashdown Forest. For example, an adverse effect on integrity would be something that impacts on the site's ecological structure and functioning and/ or affects the ability of the site to meet its conservation objectives.

The potential effects of development on Ashdown Forest were assessed during the Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) process for the Mid Sussex District Plan 2014-2031. The screening exercise carried out in late 2007 and early 2008 found likely significant effects<sup>1</sup> on the Ashdown Forest SPA as a result of increased recreational activity arising from new residential development and related population growth that is likely to disturb the ground-nesting birds.

A 2008 survey investigating visitor access patterns at Ashdown Forest found that the majority (83%) of visitors originated from a 7km distance from Ashdown Forest<sup>2</sup>. Natural England is of the view that 'residential development proposals within 7km of Ashdown Forest SPA/ SAC are likely to have a significant effect, alone and in combination, on the interest features for which the SPA and SAC has been classified. The potential impacts arise from increased recreational pressure, having an adverse impact on habitats and the ground-nesting birds which are a notified feature of the site'<sup>3</sup>.

Within this 7km 'zone of influence' (Appendix A), measures to reduce recreational pressure would be most effective, therefore, residential development leading to a net increase in dwellings will need to contribute to an appropriate level of mitigation. There are two parts to the mitigation. By providing an alternative option, Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) is the name given to greenspace that is of a quality and type suitable to be used as mitigation to offset the impact of new development on the Ashdown Forest SPA. A SANG site could either be provided on the development site itself or through a financial contribution towards a strategic SANG.

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<sup>1</sup> Based on current evidence, it cannot be shown that there will not be a likely significant effect, so applying the precautionary principle, it is considered that proposals resulting in new residential development will have a likely significant effect on Ashdown Forest.

<sup>2</sup> Habitats Regulations Assessment for the Mid Sussex District Plan (September 2014: p32).

<sup>3</sup> Letter from Natural England – 2<sup>nd</sup> August 2012.

The second part of the mitigation is to provide a financial contribution towards a Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMM) strategy. This aims to manage visitors on-site at Ashdown Forest and the strategy will involve joint working with the other affected local authorities, the Conservators of Ashdown Forest and Natural England. This work on a SAMM strategy is currently in progress, although the District Council is currently implementing an [interim SAMM mitigation strategy](#) applicable to relevant planning applications.

Further detail can be found in the [Habitats Regulations Assessment for the Mid Sussex District Plan](#).

### **1.3 Importance of SANG**

SANG is also used as part of mitigation at other heathland sites, such as the Thames Basin Heaths and the Dorset Heaths. The principle of SANG as mitigation was established through considerable work undertaken through the South East Plan for the Thames Basin Heaths. The importance of SANG as part of this mitigation is highlighted by the retention of policy NRM6: Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area, which was the only policy of the South East Plan not revoked on the 25<sup>th</sup> March 2013. The SANG mitigation considered through the Habitats Regulations Assessment of the Mid Sussex District Plan is thus seeking to follow existing good practice.

In order for SANGs to be effective mitigation for the Ashdown Forest SPA, the SANG site should be functional from the point at which any relevant development is occupied. It should also seek to provide a similar visitor experience to that of Ashdown Forest, although it is acknowledged that it is very difficult to replicate that environment. In designing the enhancement works, however, it is necessary to consider the characteristics and features that draw people to Ashdown Forest.

In particular, the visitor survey<sup>4</sup> undertaken at Ashdown Forest during September 2008 found that the most common reason for visiting was to walk the dog (60.0%) followed by walking (30.%). Of those people visiting Ashdown Forest on a daily basis, the primary reason for 90.3% of them was to walk the dog. The average dog walk length is 2.5km (whilst the average length for walkers is 2.8km), and 79.3% of dog walkers allowed their dog off the lead for the majority of the walk. 87.0% of people travelled to Ashdown Forest by motorised transport. The most common reason for visiting Ashdown Forest was for its 'openness' as well as for the views.

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<sup>4</sup> UE Associates (2009: piii) [Visitor access patterns on Ashdown Forest](#).

#### **1.4 Identification of a SANG**

Mid Sussex District Council has identified a site at East Grinstead and the suitability of this site as a SANG has been agreed with Natural England. The site description and potential for a SANG is described below in later sections of this document.

#### **1.5 Purpose of this Document**

This document details the strategic SANG provision for Mid Sussex District Council; the SAMM mitigation is described elsewhere. The SANG will provide appropriate mitigation for residential development within the 7km zone of influence in Mid Sussex District alongside SAMM contributions.

It is understood that with regards to recreational disturbance, Wealden District Council and Lewes District Council will be making provision for SANG and contributing to the wider Joint SAMM Strategy that is currently being prepared. Any development in Tunbridge Wells Borough only needs to make a contribution towards SAMM measures.



## 2. Site Description and Potential for a SANG

The purpose of SANGs is to provide alternative greenspace to attract visitors away from the Ashdown Forest SPA. It aims to reduce overall visitor and recreational pressure on Ashdown Forest, and to provide for the needs of dog walkers in particular.

A SANG site can be created from:

- Existing open space with existing public access, which could be enhanced to become a SANG site.
- Existing open space of SANG quality with no existing public access, which could be made fully accessible to the public.
- Other land which could be converted to a SANG site.

The discussion for the 2008 visitor survey<sup>5</sup> outlined the key features for sites that could act as alternative spaces to visit to Ashdown Forest:

- Proximity to new and existing development
- Feasibility to recreate a sense of the wide open countryside
- The presence of attractive views
- Nature conservation interest to provide the opportunity for people to feel in touch with the natural world, and which could include nature trails and other forms of interpretation
- A sense of security, particularly for dog walkers who are most likely to visit alone and at either extremity of the day
- Accessibility and ample parking.

### 2.1 SANG Location

East Grinstead is an appropriate location for a SANG because it is only 5.10km from the Ashdown Forest SPA and is, therefore, within the 7km zone of influence. The 2008 visitor survey at Ashdown Forest showed that 50% of visitors interviewed lived within 5km of Ashdown Forest and 76% within 10km. The data analysis predicted that 100 new houses at East Grinstead would generate an additional 4.1 visits to the Ashdown

<sup>5</sup> UE Associates (2009: p68-69) [Visitor access patterns on Ashdown Forest](#).

Forest SPA (per 16 hours of daylight in September). This can be compared to Haywards Heath (9.48km from the Ashdown Forest SPA) where there is predicted to be an additional 1.2 visits from 100 new houses<sup>6</sup>.

East Court & Ashplats Wood is located to the east of East Grinstead and comprises 41Ha, of which 25Ha is woodland (Ashplats Wood itself). East Court is an area of amenity open space, including sports pitches. The site is bounded by housing to the south, west and north, but there are open fields and woodland to the east, with connections to the wider public rights of way network (Figure 3).

OS grid reference: TQ 403 387

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<sup>6</sup> Clarke, R. T., Sharp, J. and Liley, D. (2010: p7 and p33) [Ashdown Forest visitor survey data analysis](#).

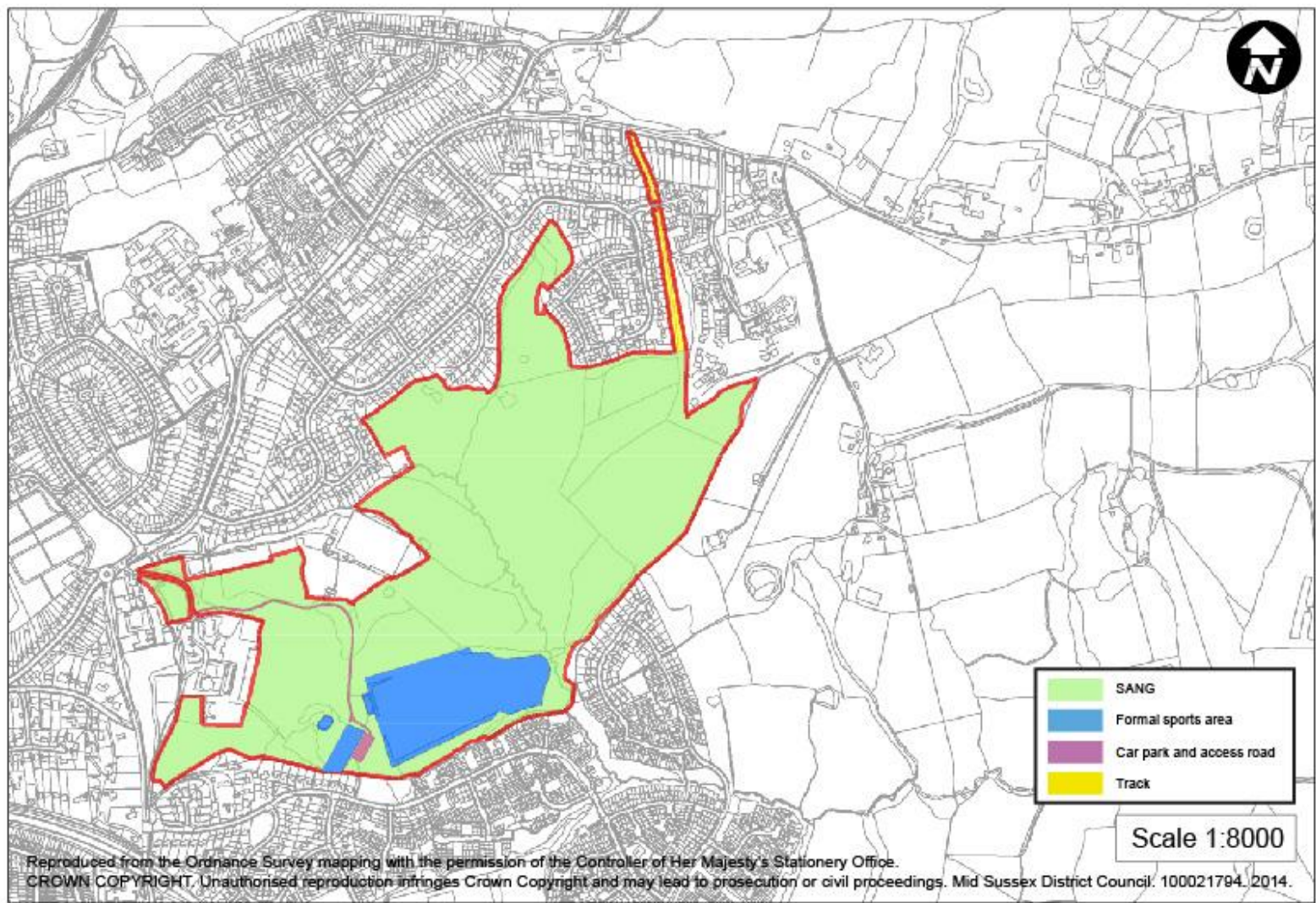


Figure 3 - Location of East Court & Ashplats Wood, East Grinstead.

By locating a SANG at East Grinstead, more residents from new development might be persuaded to visit an alternative open space to Ashdown Forest. This is supported by a visitor survey of East Court & Ashplats Wood in April 2013<sup>7</sup> that found 76.4% of people interviewed arrived on foot and 20.0% arrived by car/ motor vehicle. The vast majority of visitors were from East Grinstead and 61.7% were visiting to walk the dog (23.1% of people were walking without a dog). The top four attractions of visiting East Court & Ashplats Wood for people interviewed were that the site is a convenient location (close to home), it is peaceful and quiet, there are no restrictions on dogs, and there are a variety of natural habitats.

This demonstrates that with enhancements, East Court & Ashplats Wood is in a suitable location for a SANG. East Grinstead is the largest settlement within the 7km zone of influence and is likely to have the greatest number of people from new residential developments.

## **2.2 Site Ownership**

In 1949, East Grinstead War Memorial Ltd was set up to own and manage the estate for the enjoyment of the townspeople as a war memorial to the people of East Grinstead who lost their lives during World War II.

The East Court Estate (including Ashplats Wood) is owned by East Grinstead War Memorial Ltd, however, the majority of the land is leased to Mid Sussex District Council. The site is managed by Mid Sussex District Council: East Court for formal and informal sport and recreation, and Ashplats Wood as conservation woodland.

A revised lease for East Court Estate has secured it in perpetuity from 2014 (this is taken to be 125 years) for use as a SANG, however, the area for formal sport will continue to be used as sports pitches and this does not form part of the SANG area.

## **2.3 Physical Characteristics**

The site is a mix of grassland to the south-west and woodland to the north-east. The grassland slopes away from the East Court buildings towards the sports pitches, pavilion and car park, and a yew hedge path leads down to the lake. There is a network of paths in the woodland along with a small meadow, a glade, streams and a couple of ponds (Figure 4).

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<sup>7</sup> The visitor survey was conducted by Ecology Solutions as part of work to support a planning application (12/01588/FUL) in East Grinstead.

- Topography:** The land falls from 130 metres above sea level in the north east corner of the wood to 95 metres at the southern tip. The wooded area mainly lies on a southerly slope, the mansion lawns are on a northerly facing slope.
- Geology and soils:** The northern part of the wood is underlain by Tunbridge Wells Sand and the lower slopes and adjoining fields are on Wadhurst Clay. The junction between the permeable sand and the impermeable clay is marked by the presence of seepage lines and springs on some of the slopes in the wood.
- Drainage:** The site is drained by two streams which are tributaries of the River Medway, running from the north-east and north-west corners, converging at the southern boundary of the site.
- Vegetation types:** Comprises of a range of woodland, scrub, ornamental plantings and lawns, ponds, meadow and meadow-edge habitats.

East Court & Ashplats Wood is fully or partly covered by the following designations:

- High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
- Site of Nature Conservation Importance
- Ancient woodland
- Estcots and East Court College Lane Conservation Area
- East Court is a Grade II listed building

East Court & Ashplats Wood forms a valuable part of the green infrastructure<sup>8</sup> in Mid Sussex District. The proposed works for the SANG will enhance the site recognising its importance as part of a connected network of multi-functional greenspace including its role to biodiversity, public rights of way, health and well-being, and community facilities.

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<sup>8</sup> As defined in the [National Planning Policy Framework](#), green infrastructure is ‘a network of multi-functional green space, urban and rural, which is capable of delivering a wide range of environmental and quality of life benefits for local communities’.



Figure 4 - The mix of habitats at East Court & Ashplats Wood.

## 2.4 Biodiversity

East Court & Ashplats Wood has a rich biodiversity and a variety of species can be found reflecting the different habitats on the site (Figure 5). Ashplats Wood is typical of the High Weald landscape and the woodland ground flora is carpeted with bluebells and wood anemones in the spring. The re-introduction of coppicing and restoration of glades allows light to penetrate into the woodland which benefits the flora, butterflies and insects. The ponds contain aquatic plants and insects, as well as providing a source of water to woodlands birds and animals.

Some of the species found at East Court & Ashplats Wood include:

### Fauna

- Badger
- Roe deer
- Fox
- Dormouse
- Great crested newt
- Buzzard
- Bats
- Butterflies

### Flora

- Bluebell
- Primose
- Wood anemone
- Sorrel
- Cuckoo flower
- Common orchids
- Wild garlic
- 'Lords and ladies'

### Trees

- Sweet chestnut
- Oak
- Birch
- Yew
- Beech
- Holly
- Ash
- Spindle



Figure 5 - The varied biodiversity of Ashplats Wood (Photographs on this page: Christopher Nunn, Ashplats Conservation Group).



## 2.5 Car Parking and Access

The car park for the SANG is located to the south of the site next to the pavilion and playing fields, and is accessed via the road adjacent to the ambulance station at East Court. This is a free car park and has around 40 spaces. There is the potential for this car park to be extended if monitoring shows it to be necessary.

In addition to the routes from the car parks, there are several pedestrian entrance points (Figure 6), both formal public rights of way (PROW) and informal paths:

### East Court

1. Footpath from Escots Drive adjacent to one of the vehicle access points to East Court
2. Informal footpath from East Court car park
3. Footpath from Holtye Road adjacent to one of the vehicle access points to East Court
4. The pavilion car park leads directly onto the playing fields and there is also a formal footpath from Escots Drive leading towards the pavilion car park and crossing the Sussex Border Path.

### Ashplats Wood

5. Informal footpath from Lancaster Drive
6. Informal footpath from Pegasus Way
7. The Holtye Track (formal public rights of way) leading from Stirling Way and Holtye Road
8. Formal footpath from the north-east of the site (the Sussex Border Path which links to the wider public rights of way network and the countryside)
9. Formal footpath from Mindelheim Avenue (this also links to the wider public rights of way network and the countryside)

There is the potential for users of the site to extend walks into the wider countryside using the existing public rights of way network, including the Sussex Border Path which stretches for nearly 150 miles around the inland boundary of the county of Sussex, as well as a 'Mid Sussex Link' following the administrative boundary between East and West Sussex.



Figure 6 - Pedestrian entrance points at East Court & Ashplats Wood.

## 2.6 SANG Suitability and Proposals

The assessment of the suitability of a site as SANG is made against a number of criteria developed by Natural England. Essential features are those that will be required in order for land to become a SANG site and additional features are those that are desirable and can be implemented to enhance a SANG site.

To identify the improvement works for the site, East Court & Ashplats Wood has been assessed against the Natural England SANG criteria (Appendix B), along with consideration of the above points from the 2008 visitor survey (to be found at the beginning of this Section 2.0) and factors influencing future use of the site from the 2013 visitor survey. This assessment includes both the essential and desirable features of SANGs. The assessment has resulted in proposed works that are in addition to the existing management and maintenance of the site.

**Essential Features:** Provision of these features will be required in order for the site to fulfil its purpose as a SANG.

SANG Criteria	Assessment
<b>LANDSCAPE</b>	
Natural greenspace with areas of open (non-wooded) countryside and areas of dense and scattered trees and shrubs. Land should preferably not be entirely flat.	The site comprises open space and woodland with some areas of coppicing and streams running through the woodland. The woodland has slopes leading down to the streams. It is not a completely flat landscape and there are views towards Ashdown Forest. Various paths lead from the woodland onto the wider PROW network into the countryside to the east. This allows the site to feel part of the wider countryside.
A range of habitats should be provided for users to experience if the SANG site is larger than 12Ha.	There are a few different habitats on the site, including open space, woodland, ponds, and meadows. There are also variations in the density of woodland across the site. The designations covering the site highlight the range of habitats which support a variety of species, both flora and fauna. The management plan proposes enhancements to these habitats. Visitors are able to roam freely over the open space, whilst a large network of paths through the woodland provides

	<p>several options for routes.</p> <p>It is recommended that biodiversity enhancements form part of the management plan to ensure the ongoing conservation of species present on the site. For example, bird and bat boxes could be installed.</p>
Perceived as semi-natural with few buildings or artificial structures except in the immediate vicinity of car parks.	The site comprises open space and woodland. The more formal landscape is close to the East Court car park and East Court mansion (East Grinstead Town Council). The only building on the site is the pavilion next to the car park and further artificial structures will be kept to a minimum. Necessary structures such as bridges and steps have a functional and safety role.
Perceived as safe – no tree or scrub cover along parts of the walking routes.	<p>Most of the site is woodland so some paths may become partly overgrown. Undergrowth management and general maintenance works will help ensure that paths remain clear and accessible.</p> <p>Bridges to cross streams and boardwalks to cross boggy areas will be used where necessary.</p>
No unpleasant intrusions (e.g. sewage treatment smells etc).	No unpleasant intrusions were noticed on the site visits.
<b>CAR PARKING AND ACCESS</b>	
Parking should be provided on all SANG sites larger than 4Ha (unless the site is intended for use of developments within 400m only). The amount of car parking space should be adequate, determined by the anticipated use of the site and reflect the visitor catchment.	The car park for the SANG will be the pavilion car park on the site itself and if ongoing monitoring shows a need, there may be scope for improving this to avoid extra visitors parking in nearby residential areas. The pavilion car park is located outside of the High Weald AONB. There is also an existing car park at East Court adjacent to the East Grinstead Town Council buildings, which is for visitors to the Town Council offices. Access to the site is also available from the surrounding residential roads. Due to its location in East Grinstead and as shown by the 2013 visitor survey, visitors may also walk to this site, and there are several pedestrian access points around the site.

	<p>If there was a car parking charge, 22.3% of people interviewed for the 2013 visitor survey would visit the site less, however, 69.4% stated their visiting frequency would not change. Currently, there are no proposals to implement a car parking charge for East Court &amp; Ashplats Wood.</p>
<p>Car parks must be easily and safely accessible by car and should be clearly sign posted.</p>	<p>The car park is accessible by car from East Grinstead and East Court is sign posted, although improvements could be made to sign posting, particularly from East Court to the pavilion car park.</p>
<p>Safe access route on foot from the nearest car park and/ or footpath(s) to the SANG.</p>	<p>The pavilion car park leads directly onto the playing fields which then lead on to the woodland and the network of paths on the site. The start of the circular walk will also be from the pavilion car park, so it is considered that there is safe pedestrian access onto the SANG site. The East Court car park leads directly onto the SANG site and it will be possible to join the circular walk here too.</p> <p>All access points identified in section 2.5 are available for both existing and new residents.</p> <p>If dogs had to be kept on a lead on the site, 51.8% of people interviewed for the 2013 visitor survey would visit the site less, although 38.6% considered it would not affect their visiting frequency. There are no plans to require dogs to be kept on a lead, and it is, therefore, important that there is safe access from the car park/ entrance points onto the SANG.</p>
<p><b>WALKS</b></p>	
<p>It should be possible to complete a circular walk of 2.3-2.5km, which starts and finishes at the car park (if the site is larger than 4Ha). It is desirable to have a choice of routes available, extending to up to 5km in length.</p>	<p>The Sussex Border Path runs alongside the site to the east and south, providing an opportunity for walks of greater length. There is also a network of paths in the woodland, and circular walks of varying lengths can be completed using the existing paths or it should be possible to create new ones. A key enhancement to this site will be a</p>

	<p>new circular walk of around 3km that mainly runs around the perimeter of the site and through the woodland. This is essential to fulfil SANG criteria and it is anticipated that a new circular walk would enhance the visitor experience to East Court &amp; Ashplats Wood, as it would provide an all-weather path surface. Although primarily starting and finishing at the pavilion car park, it will be possible to join the circular walk from several of the pedestrian entrance points onto the site. The provision of a circular walk will also not prevent users from exploring the site using informal routes across the grassland. The new circular walk should be one of the first projects to be implemented, as it is important that this is completed in readiness for the residents of new development.</p>
<p>Paths must be easily used and well-maintained, but most should remain unsurfaced to avoid the site becoming too urban in feel.</p>	<p>Some paths through the woodland may need to be improved to ensure a less muddy surface, particularly on the new circular walk. It is proposed that surface treatments will be appropriate to the location and remain as natural as possible. The circular walk will have an all-weather surface and boardwalks where necessary using appropriate materials.</p> <p>It is anticipated that the majority of the circular walk will be accessible to all users. Only one small section has steps, but it is possible to use other existing footpaths if step-free access is required. It is recommended that this route is signposted and identified on the interpretation board.</p> <p>Although 48.2% of people interviewed for the 2013 visitor survey said there would be no effect on the frequency of their visits, 40.9% of people considered that better pathways would mean they visit the site more.</p>

**Additional Features:** Provision of these features on the SANG site will increase its attractiveness to visitors and enhance their experience

SANG Criteria	Assessment
<b>LANDSCAPE</b>	
Focal point such as a view point, monument or feature of interest within the SANG.	There are views of the site from East Court and towards Ashdown Forest, but a focal/ view point could be improved and provided. For example, views of the lake could also be improved by clearing vegetation or the yew hedge could be restored. There are also views of East Court Mansion which is a Grade II listed building. The circular walk will take in all these features.
<b>ACCESS</b>	
The SANG site should be clearly sign posted or advertised in some way.	It is likely that the sign posts will need to be improved and the site more clearly advertised, particularly at the entrance points.  It is expected that the SANG site will be advertised through the Mid Sussex District Council website, the Mid Sussex District Council offices, East Grinstead library, and town and parish council offices within the 7km zone of influence. There may be the potential for the SANG to be advertised in other locations and through various media resources, including social media.
It is desirable for access points to have signage outlining the layout of the SANG and the routes available to visitors.	Additional notice boards and visitor information could be displayed as well as using way-markers, particularly for the new circular walk. It would be useful to have the interpretation boards close to the car parks and at appropriate entrance points.  28.0% of people interviewed for the 2013 visitor survey would visit the site more if there was better provision of information on the site such as leaflets or interpretation boards, however, 62.4% of people stated that it would not change their visiting frequency.
It is desirable for leaflets to be made available at entrance points and	There is some information already on the Mid Sussex District Council

car parks.	website. There is the potential for additional information to be published on the website and leaflets could be made available at entrances, car parks, the Mid Sussex District Council offices, libraries etc.
<b>WALKS</b>	
Visually-sensitive way-markers and some benches are acceptable.	Additional way-markers and some benches should be provided, particularly for the new circular walk. It would also be helpful to signpost any step-free routes suitable for all users.



## 2.7 Issues and Opportunities

There are opportunities to improve the site which will help to enhance East Court & Ashplats Wood (Figure 7) and make it a suitable alternative to visiting Ashdown Forest. These opportunities will be considered further in the management plan for the site.

- The majority of the main routes through the site would benefit from upgrading since they often become muddy during wet weather. It would also be beneficial to upgrade some routes so that they can be accessible to all users.
- The meadows would benefit from management to control encroachment around the boundaries and increase the wild flower diversity.
- Additional signage would help users navigate around the site, particularly in the woodland.
- General habitat management, including coppicing and the control of invasive species, should be ongoing.
- The lake and yew hedge leading from East Court Mansion would benefit from restoration to improve views and the visitor experience.



Figure 7 - The yew hedge and lake at East Court.

## 2.8 Potential SANG Capacity

A minimum standard of 8Ha of SANG per 1,000 net increase in population has been established through the mitigation work at the Thames Basin Heaths. This standard is equivalent to 0.008Ha per person. As this is now a recognised standard for SANG, it has been applied to this capacity calculation for East Court & Ashplats Wood. The majority (68.9%) of people interviewed in the 2013 visitor survey stated that if the site became busier, it would not change their frequency of visits to the site. This suggests that there is capacity for additional visitors to the site.

Of the total 40.8Ha available, 4.2Ha is used for formal sports pitches. It was agreed with Natural England, that the area of sports pitches at East Court should be discounted from the overall SANG area as they do not meet SANG suitability guidelines.

East Court & Ashplats Wood is already accessible to the public and the existing visitor use should also be discounted from the SANG area and capacity. A visitor survey of Ashplats Wood has been conducted by Ecology Solutions (published July 2013) on behalf of the applicant for a planning application for 74 dwellings at land south of the Old Convent, St. Michael's Road, East Grinstead (12/01588/FUL)<sup>9</sup>. This visitor survey calculated that there were 159,231 visits to East Court & Ashplats Wood per year and an average visitor would visit 369 times per year. This means 432 visitors are using the site and based on the 8Ha per 1,000 net increase in population standard, the study concluded that the existing visitor use equates to 3.45Ha.

Total Site Area	Less Formal Sport Area	Less Existing Visitor Use	Area Available for SANG	% of Total Site Area
40.8 Ha	4.2 Ha	3.45 Ha	33.15 Ha	81%

The area available for a SANG as shown above is 33.15Ha. Using the 8Ha per 1,000 population standard, East Court & Ashplats Wood has capacity for an additional 4,143 population.

Dividing this population figure by average household size (2.44 residents per household, Census 2011), this calculates that East Court & Ashplats Wood can act as a SANG for up to 1,698 dwellings.

<sup>9</sup> The visitor survey and other details for this planning application can be found using the [Online Planning Register](#) on the Mid Sussex District Council website.

Work has commenced on two sites for residential development that due to their proximity are likely to increase visitor numbers at East Court & Ashplats Wood and so the number of dwellings expected to be built on these sites should also be deducted from the capacity figure. Development of a further 117 dwellings on land to the north of Ashplats Wood at Ashplats House has commenced, with existing footpaths connected to the development, and permission has been granted for 74 dwellings at an allocated site on land south of the Old Convent. Both applications seek to use East Court & Ashplats Wood as alternative open space for future residents and so the sum total of 191 dwellings is deducted from the remaining capacity.

With this discount taken into account, there is a residual capacity at East Court & Ashplats Wood of 1,507 dwellings.

Based on an occupancy of 2.44 residents per household, the residual capacity is an additional population of 3,677 people.

## **2.9 Summary**

This section demonstrates that East Court & Ashplats Wood is suitable to be used as a SANG. Certain enhancement works will be required to increase the effectiveness of the site as SANG and these are detailed below. The area available for SANG is 33.15Ha and the capacity calculation concludes 1,507 dwellings can be supported by this SANG. This should be sufficient for the District Plan period from 2014-2031, dwellings allocated through neighbourhood plans and windfall sites<sup>10</sup>. Ongoing monitoring will ensure that the capacity of the SANG to mitigate the impact of residential dwellings on the Ashdown Forest SPA is not exceeded.

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<sup>10</sup> As defined in the [National Planning Policy Framework](#), windfall sites are 'sites which have not been specifically identified as available in the Local Plan process. They normally comprise previously-developed sites that have unexpectedly become available'.

### **3. Site Management and Maintenance**

Mid Sussex District Council will be responsible for the management and maintenance of the SANG site, using external consultants and contractors where appropriate.

Ashplats Wood also has an active and well-subscribed volunteer group. The Ashplats Conservation Group undertakes the practical maintenance of conservation initiatives within the woodland.

A steering committee intended to comprise Mid Sussex District Council, East Grinstead War Memorial Ltd and East Grinstead Town Council will be set up to advise as and when required on the implementation and operation of the management plan.

#### **3.1 Management Plan**

During the first year of operation, a 10-year management plan will be produced for East Court & Ashplats Wood. This will set out the works required to manage and maintain the SANG. The new management plan will be produced by an external landscape architect. Part of this work will be to update the existing East Court Masterplan for the site which was produced in 2001 by Parklife Ltd. For the first 12 months, an interim management plan will guide the management of the site.

#### **3.2 Management Objectives**

The following provide the existing overarching management objectives for Ashplats Wood:

- To manage the woodland to maintain and increase species diversity and varied age structure of trees.
- To promote and develop recreational use of the site in line with SANG criteria.
- Agree and implement a programme for rotation cropping compartments to provide a range of habitats from open glades to densely shaded areas.
- To manage ponds to provide good aquatic and semi-aquatic habitats.
- To control the populations of Rhododendron, Sycamore and Silver Birch.
- To encourage education, field study and research.

- To maintain and enhance woodland rides and paths.
- To preserve the high landscape value of the area.
- To protect and monitor protected species.
- To encourage public access, but directed along set routes to minimise wildlife disturbance.

The following provide the existing overarching management objectives for East Court:

- To promote and develop recreational use of the site.
- To preserve and enhance the high landscape value of the area and the views across the High Weald.
- To develop the pitch sport facilities in line with the Estate Management Plan (note that this will not form part of the SANG proposal).
- To encourage 'good citizenship' through interpretation and education.
- To manage and maintain the landscape features of East Court.

### **3.3 Costs and Funding**

Estimated costs for enhancing the site to a SANG standard are listed below as well as other works required. Further detail will be provided through the development of the 10-year management plan. These estimated costs have been used to inform the SANG tariff. An additional allowance will be made in the tariff for visitor surveys and the ongoing management and maintenance costs of the site in perpetuity (this is taken to be 125 years).

The costs for the creation of the new circular walk will be met by Mid Sussex District Council and so this is not included in the table below. Since a circular walk is a key feature of the SANG criteria, it will be one of the first projects to be implemented.

Prior to the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), planning permissions for relevant development within the 7km zone of influence will be granted subject to a planning condition which requires that no development shall take place until a scheme for the mitigation of the effects of the development on the SPA has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. In the event that the approved scheme relates to the payment of a contribution in accordance with the SANG tariff, such contribution shall be collected to facilitate the

delivery of SANG and to fund the management and maintenance of the site in perpetuity (this is taken to be 125 years) and shall be secured by way of an agreement with the District Council.

The timing and phasing of works will depend on the number of planning permissions requiring a financial contribution to the SANG and the total 'pot' of money available. In addition some works are seasonal and can only be undertaken at certain times of the year.

### Initial set-up works

Category of Works	Works	Estimated Cost
Survey work to inform the Management Plan	Detailed inventory and condition survey of landscape structures, surfacing and furniture	£1,500
	Tree and woodland survey to look at the diversity of species and the condition of trees	£1,500
	Ecology survey to look at the diversity of flora and fauna, and to inform species conservation	£2,000
Management Plan	Appoint a landscape architect to draft the 10-year management plan and update the Masterplan	£6,000
	Promotion and marketing of the SANG site	£1,000
Landscape	Undergrowth management within Ashplats Wood	Volunteers
	Initiate remedial works with the removal of any dangerous trees	£8,000
<b>Total initial set-up costs</b>		<b>£20,000</b>

### Other longer-term works

The longer-term works will be brought forward into later versions of the management plan and tariff through a rolling programme.

Category of Works	Works	Estimated Cost
Landscape	Landscape improvements to East Court lake	£75,000
	Implement rolling programme of tree management initiatives, including coppicing	£8,000
	Wildlife corridors/ green infrastructure enhancements, including management of invasive species	£5,000
	Shrub planting along lower East Court wall	£4,000
	Yew hedge restoration	£6,000
	East Court parkland restoration	£10,000
Access and routes within the Estate	Path work improvements to wider site	£50,000
	Surfacing of the Holtye Track	£25,000
	Access point(s) improvements	£20,000
	Resurface and extend car park if necessary	£15,000
Site furniture	Supply and install additional site furniture as identified by inventory/ survey, e.g. benches	£3,000
	Improve access signage to the Estate plus signage within the woods to identify routes	£2,500
	Interpretation boards	£2,000
	Bridge repairs within Ashplats Wood	£10,000
	Additional dog waste bins	£2,000
<b>Total other works costs</b>		<b>£237,500</b>

## 4. Type of Development Covered by the SANG Tariff

Residential development will not be permitted within 400m from the boundary of the SPA as mitigation measures are unlikely to be capable of protecting the integrity of the SPA<sup>11</sup>. From 400m to 7km (the zone of influence around the Ashdown Forest SPA), residential development leading to a net increase in dwellings will need to contribute towards the SANG as well as the interim SAMM mitigation strategy, which will be superseded in time by the Joint SAMM Strategy. The relevant area in Mid Sussex District is shown in Appendix A.

The following types of development are clarified in Appendix D:

- Permitted development
- Affordable housing
- Studio flats
- Outline and reserved matters applications, and other types of applications
- Redevelopment sites
- Staff residential accommodation
- Holiday accommodation
- Residential care homes and nursing homes
- Retirement and age-restricted properties
- Houses in multiple occupation (HMOs)
- Mobile and temporary dwellings
- Permanent pitches for Gypsies and Travellers
- Replacement dwellings
- Annexes
- Planning applications outside the 7km zone of influence

<sup>11</sup> Clarke, R. T., Sharp, J. and Liley, D. (2010: p31) [Ashdown Forest visitor survey data analysis](#).



It is recommended that applicants contact the District Council for advice specific to the proposals in a planning application. Applicants are also strongly advised to contact the District Council prior to submitting a planning application should they be considering providing other forms of mitigation.

Development Management  
01444 – 477566  
[planninginfo@midsussex.gov.uk](mailto:planninginfo@midsussex.gov.uk)

Mid Sussex District Council  
Oaklands  
Oaklands Road  
Haywards Heath  
West Sussex  
RH16 1SS

## 5. SANG Tariff

The SANG contribution will be applied to a zone of influence around the Ashdown Forest SPA. This zone of influence extends from 400m from the boundary of the SPA to 7km from the boundary of the SPA.

The SANG tariff sets out the financial contribution required from development where there is a net increase in residential dwellings.

The SANG tariff payable depends on the number of bedrooms in a dwelling and this is calculated from local occupancy rates. This results in a scale of four different tariffs that are proportionate to the number of bedrooms.

Further detail on the SANG tariff is provided in Appendix E.

## 6. Monitoring and Review

This SANG strategy including the tariff will be monitored and kept under review. Initial revisions are likely to be once the 10-year management plan has been completed and when the Mid Sussex [Community Infrastructure Levy](#) (CIL) is in place.

A monitoring framework has been developed to record progress on delivery of the SANG and to provide transparency on income and expenditure. This information will be presented in an appropriate annual report, as part of the planning policy monitoring work.

Monitoring Area	Monitoring Aspect/ Indicator	Reason	Source of Data	Frequency of Monitoring/ Reporting
SANG delivery	Total value of contributions agreed and received	To monitor the amount available for management of the SANG site.	s106 monitoring Housing commencements	Ongoing internal monitoring and annual reporting
	Total expenditure on the SANG site and breakdown of expenditure	To monitor the amount spent on the SANG site in managing and maintaining the land in accordance with the management plan.	Internal monitoring	Annual reporting
	SANG capacity	To ensure there is sufficient capacity at this SANG site to mitigate the impacts of future planning permissions.	Housing land supply data including: Planning permissions Housing commencements and completions	Ongoing internal monitoring and annual reporting
	SANG tariff	The tariff will be reviewed regularly to ensure it remains relevant and	Internal monitoring	Ongoing internal monitoring and reporting if and when the tariff is

Monitoring Area	Monitoring Aspect/ Indicator	Reason	Source of Data	Frequency of Monitoring/ Reporting
		up-to-date as the variables are subject to change.		adjusted
Site monitoring	SANG visitor surveys	To monitor visitor numbers, patterns, attitudes and behaviour towards the SANG site and consequent associated effects on Ashdown Forest.	Observations and recording on site	Monitoring every few years and reporting when data available
	Pavilion car park	The pavilion car park will be monitored for use and if considered necessary and appropriate, it may be extended to accommodate more cars.	Observations on site	Ongoing ad hoc monitoring and annual reporting
	Ecological surveys	To ensure that the ecology and designations of the site are conserved and enhanced through appropriate management.	Observations and recording on site	Monitoring and reporting when data available

## 7. Further Information

For further information on the SANG, please contact:

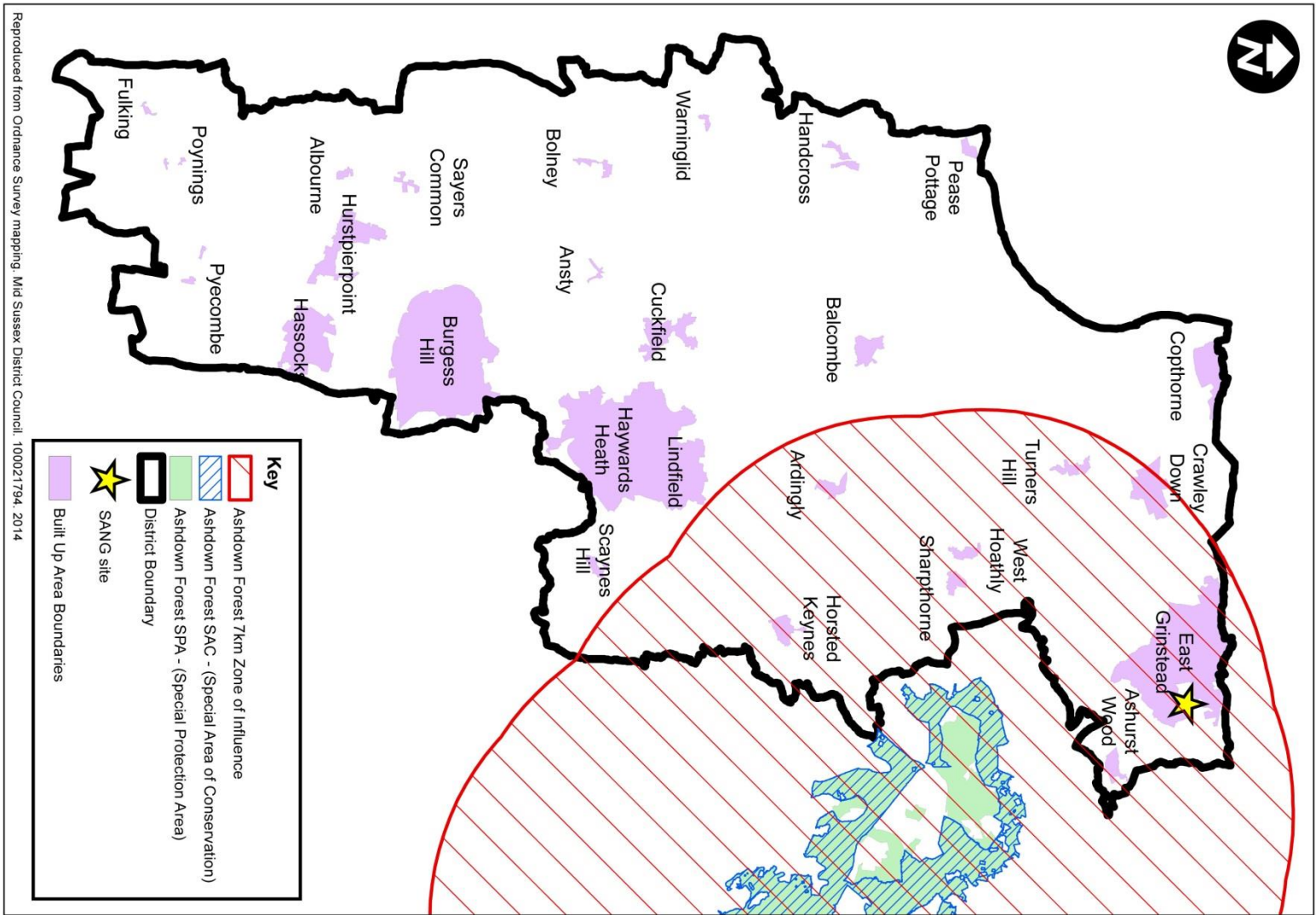
Planning Policy  
01444 – 477053  
[planningpolicy@midsussex.gov.uk](mailto:planningpolicy@midsussex.gov.uk)

Mid Sussex District Council  
Oaklands  
Oaklands Road  
Haywards Heath  
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## Appendices

Appendix A	Map of the Ashdown Forest 7km Zone of Influence
Appendix B	Natural England SANG Guidelines
Appendix C	Proposed Circular Walk Plan
Appendix D	Guidance Note on Type of Development Covered
Appendix E	SANG Tariff Calculations

# Appendix A Map of the Ashdown Forest 7km Zone of Influence



Reproduced from Ordnance Survey mapping - Mid Sussex District Council - 100021794 - 2014

## Appendix B Natural England SANG Guidelines

The SANG guidelines were developed by Natural England for the Thames Basin Heaths in 2008.

The wording used is precise and has the following meaning:

- Requirements referred to as 'must' or 'should have' are essential.
- The SANG should have at least one of the 'desirable' features.

**Essential Features:** Provision of these features will be required in order for the site to fulfil its purpose as a SANG

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.

It should be 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 clearly be signposted.

The SANG must have a safe route of access on foot from the nearest car park and/ or footpath(s).

All SANGs with car parks must have a circular walk which starts and finishes at the car park.

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.

Paths must be easily used and well-maintained but most should remain unsurfaced to avoid the site becoming too urban in feel.

SANGs must be perceived as semi-natural spaces with little intrusion of artificial structures, except in the immediate vicinity of car parks.

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Visually-sensitive way-markers and some benches are acceptable.

All SANGs larger than 12Ha 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.

SANGs must be free from unpleasant intrusions (e.g. sewage treatment works smells etc).

SANGs should be clearly sign-posted or advertised in some way.

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 car parks.

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**Desirable Features:** Provision of these features on the SANG site will increase its attractiveness to visitors and enhance their experience

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

Where possible it is desirable to choose sites with a gently undulating topography for SANGs.

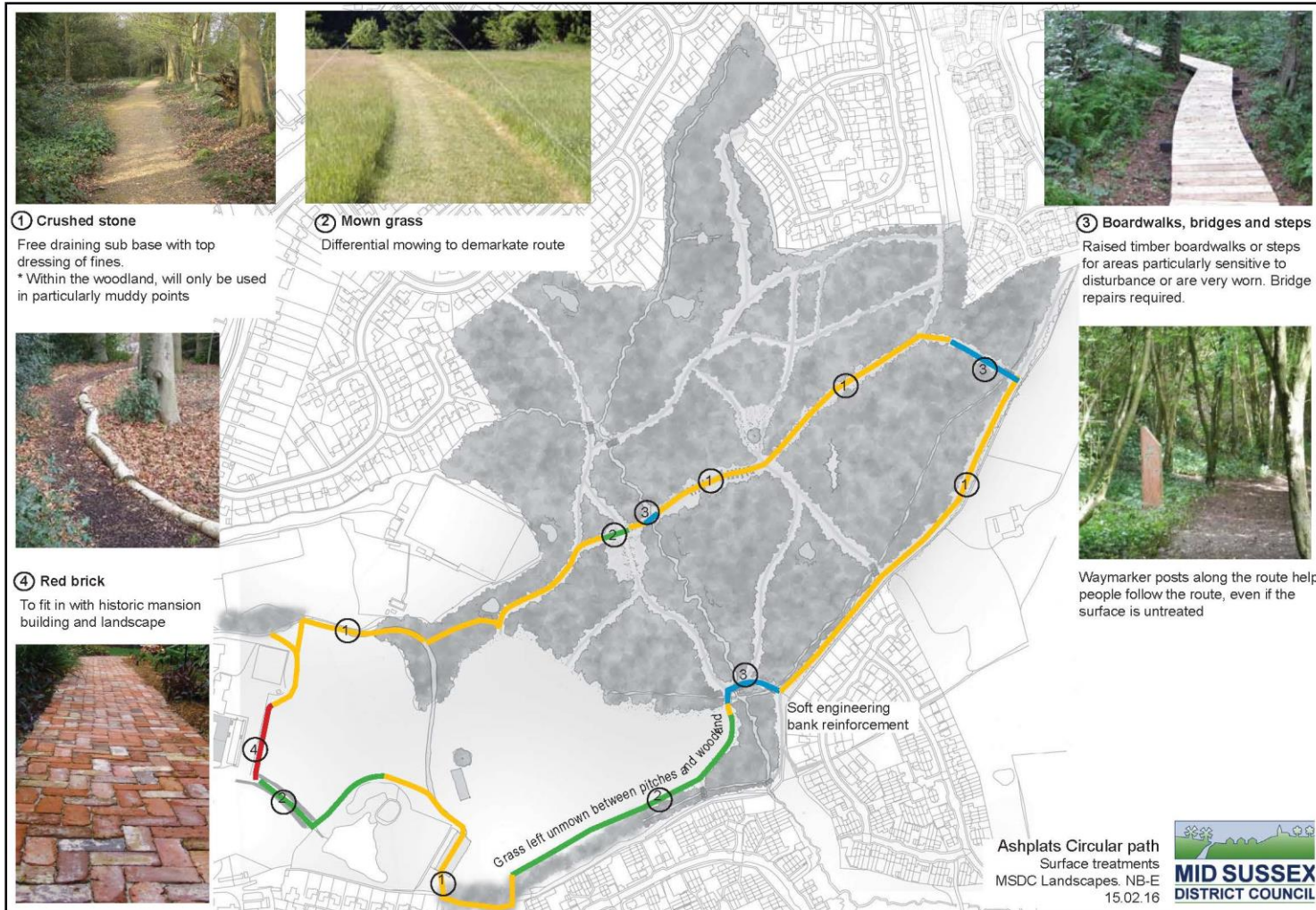
It is desirable for access points to have signage outlining the layout of the SANG and the routes available to visitors.

It is desirable that 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 the site is desirable.

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

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## Appendix C Proposed Circular Walk Plan





## **Appendix D      Guidance Note on Type of Development Covered**

See separate document:      East Court & Ashplats Wood  
   Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace  
   Tariff (Appendix D and E to the SANG Strategy)

## **Appendix E      SANG Tariff Calculations**

See separate document:      East Court & Ashplats Wood  
   Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace  
   Tariff (Appendix D and E to the SANG Strategy)