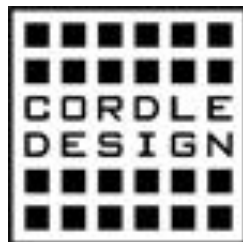


SANG STRATEGY for ST. LEONARD'S HOSPITAL

This strategy describes the provision of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) as heathland mitigation to serve the new development to be built at the former St. Leonard's Hospital, 241 Ringwood Road, BH24 2RR.

The strategy is supported by a SANG masterplan showing how the SANG requirements are to be provided and arranged within the adjoining Hurn Forest.



This SANG strategy & design has been prepared by CORDLE DESIGN

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INTRODUCTION

The former military hospital at St. Leonards has been out of use for several decades and the site is derelict. Owing to the large amount of asbestos that was used in the construction of the hospital there are hazardous contaminants across the site which are to be remediated ahead of site construction. Officially, the public has been excluded from the site for many years although a low level of informal and unauthorised use persists, particularly among local dog walkers.

The proposed development masterplan for the site will create 210 new homes and a care home.

Among other factors, a very low level of disturbance upon the site has allowed a number of rare species and ecological communities to thrive. These communities have been the subject of careful study by Johns Associates as referenced in their documents for the EIA. In order for the site to be redeveloped for housing, they have worked with Natural England and Dorset Wildlife Trust to develop a range of measures set out in their Ecological Mitigation Strategy. This will ensure that the habitats and species will not be adversely affected by construction and operation of the development. A SANG is needed to attract recreation pressure away from the Dorset Heathlands Special Protection Area (SPA), the Dorset Heaths Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and the Dorset Heathlands Ramsar site.

The SANG cannot be provided on site because of the ecological sensitivity of the site and the need to devote a large area in the southern part of the site to a managed nature reserve with very limited public access.

BACKGROUND

The purpose of this SANG proposal is to absorb the recreation and access pressure that would otherwise be exerted upon the pan-European designated and protected conservation areas within the local area. The need for SANG is stipulated in Core Strategy Policy ME2, and is determined by proximity to heathland areas (between 400m & 5km) that are protected by European environmental law and the need to provide mitigation for possible damage by new urban populations. The strategy states that any development within this proximity will provide mitigation through a range of measures as set out in the Dorset Heathlands Planning Framework Supplementary Planning Document, which sets out guidance for: provision of on-site alternative natural greenspace; contributions to off-site greenspace or recreation projects and contributions to heathland management projects. It also states that mitigation measures are to be delivered in advance of the developments being occupied and must provide for mitigation in perpetuity.

The SANG will be evaluated against the criteria set out in Appendix E of the Dorset Heathlands Planning Framework Supplementary Planning Document.

The intention of this SANG is therefore to mitigate the impacts of recreation and access arising from the new residential development, by diverting this activity away from the European designated sites [SPAs / SACs & Ramsar] within the local area to the more suitable location of Hurn Forest, which is adjacent to the development site, and only a short distance away from the new houses.

The Hurn Forest SANG will be hosted and managed by the Forestry Commission on a site that it holds in public ownership. The land is dedicated as Open Access Land under the Countryside Rights of Way Act [2000] which allows people to roam anywhere upon it.

A SANG should represent a 'net gain' in terms of the infrastructure and capacity of a location to accommodate recreation pressure. The proposed works are therefore in addition to existing management objectives and general maintenance of the site carried out by the Forestry Commission.

The mechanism for the SANG provision will be set out in the Section 106 agreement.

CHALLENGES

One of the significant challenges of the Hurn Forest SANG project is that the periphery of the former hospital site comprises numerous ecologically sensitive areas which must be protected. Furthermore, much of this sensitive habitat is situated between the development site and the SANG itself. The new residents must therefore be persuaded to bypass these sensitive areas and walk or ride further in order to access the new facilities.

Good, attractive connections to the SANG through the new development and across the ecologically sensitive areas are therefore essential and are ultimately key to the success of the SANG itself.

Another significant challenge for the design is the projected commencement of the Navitus Bay off-shore wind project which requires a large wayleave through the forest that will temporarily bisect the SANG and may lead to users being diverted to other more sensitive sites unless sufficient preparations are made. The cumulative impacts of the installation of the Navitus Bay cable and the hospital redevelopment are detailed in the accompanying Environmental Statement.

As far as possible, the design must avoid areas and routes where the current proposals for the Navitus Bay wayleave will be situated. Careful consideration has been given to the way that the SANG can continue to function during this period of disturbance.

Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG)

The Hurn Forest SANG is solely intended to provide an alternative recreation and access resource in order to mitigate the pressure created by the development of the St.Leonard's site.

Prior to construction an ecologist will conduct a site walkover to assess the likelihood that any protected species may be adversely affected by construction of the SANG features, and appropriate precautionary measures taken where necessary.

However, in consultation with Natural England, a preferred area has been identified for the SANG which will concentrate the increase in recreation and access pressure within part of the forest which is least sensitive to damage and disturbance, and which historically has provided the least number of species records.

The principal features of a SANG, within the Dorset Heathlands context are set out in Appendix E of the Dorset Heathlands Planning Framework Supplementary Planning Document (SPD).

THE SANG

- In order to be as effective as possible at attracting recreation pressure away from the ecologically sensitive sites in the local area, the SANG needs to be attractive to the widest possible range of users from within the new development. It needs to take account of and provide for a wide range of uses that draw people to the surrounding landscape.
- In order to be as attractive as possible, the selection of SANG routes should be as visually diverse and attractive as possible offering the highest possible variety of natural and aesthetic experiences.
- The routes need to be dependably firm underfoot, well-drained and unobstructed throughout the year.
- Pedestrian and cycle connections to and from the SANG need to be attractive, welcoming, and capacious. They need to be well designed in order to allow for a range of different (and potentially conflicting) user types to pass each other in both directions.
- The SANG needs to be operational in advance of the date when the first Phase One homes become occupied.
- The SANG needs to take account of the potential disruption to the site caused by the Navitus Bay wayleave infrastructure.

The main infrastructure provision of a SANG centres upon a 2.3-2.5km circular route that provides an interesting and varied walking environment.

The proposed route indicated in the SANG masterplan circulates close to the boundary with the new development. There are several benefits to this design approach. First, locating the SANG in the area closest to the new development area will make it more easily accessed to more people. Secondly, this area is the most visually attractive area with shorter and more convoluted paths and rides to choose from, and its diverse character and structure means that this part of the forest has the greatest capacity to absorb the highest number of users without feeling crowded.

At an average adult walking speed (3 mph.) a 2.5 km (1.55 miles) route will take a fit and healthy adult a little over 30 minutes to complete. However, walking speeds for children, adults with infants or pushchairs, people with mobility impairments, and the elderly are considerably reduced. As a result the time taken to complete a circular route can easily take twice as long. Therefore, a single full distance route is not appropriate in this location and is scarcely an acceptable proposal for a new facility, falling short of the level of consideration required by Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA).

This proposal includes 2.5km of all-ability routes, with 1km of that being at a higher specification with even shallower gradients, wider clearances and a smoother wearing surface. These routes are arranged in a network of pathways that offer a range of different

circular routes for people who want a shorter walk or to add variety for those who walk more than once in a day.

SANG Extent & Capacity

The new development is comprised of 210 new houses which will bring an additional population of around 450 to the edge of the forest. The Hurn Forest SANG is extensive at approximately 24Ha and far exceeds even the most capacious requirement of 16Ha / thousand population.

Hurn Forest, which contains the new SANG, together with the adjacent inclosure of Ramsdown is an extensive and continuous area of forest and open habitat of over 490 Ha in total size.

Existing recreation pressure upon Hurn Forest is concentrated close to the two existing car parks. The northern car park towards the A31 end of Boundary Lane. Many existing users arrive by car owing to the fairly sparse and dispersed nature of housing in the surrounding area. Existing pedestrian routes to Hurn Forest from the north are dominated by the A31 and boundary lane which are both hazardous and unpleasant routes to walk, wholly unsuitable for many users. The redevelopment of the St. Leonard's Site will heal the broken links through that area.

Description of Areas

The northernmost area of Hurn Forest is situated to the east of the development site. This area is the most visually diverse as it contains a wide variety of mixed deciduous and coniferous tree species. It also is the area with the greatest diversity in terms of height, structure and age which offers variety in terms of visual enclosure and also a much greater capacity of use because of the visual separation between closely packed pathways and routes. Because of its attractiveness and popularity with the public, this area has been managed as continuous cover forestry CCF for many years. It is proposed within the FDP that this area continues to be managed in this way.

According to the FDP, this area proposed to accommodate the SANG is mapped as:

'Area used for informal recreation. Develop a mosaic of wooded heath and mixed woodland continuous cover to increase landscape and ecological diversity.'

The central area of Hurn Forest is dominated by Corsican Pine, arranged in coupes that are very even in age structure and uniform in size and spacing. The mature blocks are very visually permeable and remain so for at least half a rotation (approx. 25-30 years). This area is much less absorbent in terms of recreation pressure as the people become aware of each other at a much greater distance (easily 500m or more), leading to the forest feeling a great deal busier in these areas. These areas are less visually interesting owing to their uniform character.

Further south in Hurn Forest are extensive areas of heath and open habitats. They are beyond the scope and reach of the SANG project, although the continuous nature and expansive extent of the forest means that they are available to more adventurous walkers and riders using the existing network of forest roads and rides.

There is future potential to design in additional car parking at the existing Boundary Lane car park, however this has been offered by the Forestry Commission and rejected by the local community in recent years. Therefore, additional car parking at this initial stage goes against the widely consulted wishes of the public consultation that informed the Hurn Forest FDP. Additional car parking is considered unnecessary within the stated aims of the SANG project as a dedicated SANG in such close proximity to the development with which it is associated specifically does not require a car park.

Consultation with new residents with a disability, that have a specific requirement for travelling to the SANG by car, may modify this position. The Forestry Commission will monitor the ongoing need in respect of this.

USER GROUPS

Existing Users

The existing users of Hurn Forest are primarily walkers and dog owners from the local area. The forest is served by two small car parks. Parking is free and the recreation infrastructure is very rudimentary. The forest is well-loved by the local user groups who see it as a quieter alternative to the New Forest and Ashley Heath.

A set of clear site rules , 'A Hurn Forest Code', should be posted at the key entry points. This will outline the responsibilities for each of the different types of user and will draw attention to any activities that are not permitted such as fires and barbeques. This is empowering to the community as a self-regulating entity.

Dogs & Dog Walkers

Around 35% of UK households own at least one dog (PFMA). This trend is increasing. By extension the new housing development may be home to between 75 and 90 dogs. Dog Waste Bins are essential if dog owners are to be encouraged to clear up properly after their dogs and a worthwhile expenditure in terms of mitigating the antisocial waste problem.

Many dog walkers do scoop up the mess that their dogs create on pathways only then to fling the bagged waste into the undergrowth.

There is currently one dog waste bin situated close to the Boundary Lane Car Park.

- *Two new dog waste bins will be provided. One will be situated close to each of the access points between the new development and the SANG. This will ensure that dog walkers returning from a walk in the forest or on the outgoing leg of their journey will have the opportunity to dispose of dog waste properly.*

The information disseminated to each new household with the trail map will include an explanation of the ecological sensitivity of the local sites, and the threats posed by enrichment from dog faeces and by disturbance and predation. It will set out 'preferred behaviour' areas (no dogs / dogs on leads / dogs under close control) and politely request that dog owners plan their walks in order to respect them so that the plant and animal communities continue to thrive.

Most dogs defecate very soon after being released from home or car. Differential mowing and the provision of closely mown areas will encourage dogs to use these areas first and foremost.

- A preferred 'dog loop' will be instated to try to influence the direction chosen by dog walkers setting out so that they pass along the line of dog waste bins provided.

A recent large-scale study by the RSPCA shows that the average dog walk is 1.58m per day. This is likely to be divided, however, between two or three shorter walks spread throughout the day rather than as one long walk.

Furthermore, the survey is likely to provide an excessively roseate view as although the sample size is impressive, the methodology relies upon self-reporting by a positively engaged group of dog owners, who doubtless represent only the most active, responsible and caring proportion of the dog owning public.

Walkers

4.38 in the design statement specifies pedestrian and cycle connections should also be made to the Hurn Forest to the east as part of a network of SANG routes. Two access points to the east will create a short loop walk for future residents as well as connecting to this wider network.

- The SANG will provide a range of well-surfaced, dry year-round circular routes that begin and end at the edge of the new development.
- The longest route within the SANG will be 2.5km in length. The shortest possible route will be less than 500m long. However, the SANG is unbounded and numerous longer routes are possible throughout the forest.
- A map station will be situated close to the main access, and this will display a range of selected routes including longer ones, of 5km or more, using the wider network of forest roads and rides.

Children & Young People

4.54 in the design statement identifies that the nearest existing provision of Children & Young People's Space is situated over 2000m from the development site. Statutory provision will be provided within the development area.

To increase the popularity and attractiveness of the SANG this plan includes a range of features to make the site more attractive for families, as well as for children and young people on their own.

1. Denbuilding

Denbuilding is already a popular and widespread activity on the site, particularly in coupes close to the adjacent Oakdene Holiday Park. A range of sample dens will be constructed to illustrate the construction of a Bivouac, a Pole Den, a Leaf Den, etc. The loose parts that children need to build dens safely and effectively will be provided to the denbuilding area from the wider forest. The site will be monitored as a facility and the management of it will be adjusted to cater for the burgeoning use as required.

2. Sculpture Trail

This will be a low-key feature comprised of natural timber carvings and sculptures that will provide interpretation of the wildlife that can be found throughout the site. In order to make the sculptures appealing to children they will incorporate some interactive features or suggest activities such as treasure hunts or wide games.

These timber features will be carefully designed and integrated with the play offer that is proposed for the small park within the development itself to create a unifying theme that reflects and interprets the ecology of the site.

3. Natural Play

The management of the site will allow for children's natural desire to explore the natural environment and test their own physical abilities. An 'opportunities map' will be made to ensure that forest operations do not obliterate the places, the features and the notable trees that local children value most. Forest Management in these areas will be directed towards enhancing play opportunities.

4. Junior Orienteering & Wide Games

Junior orienteering, treasure hunts or other wide games will form part of a scheme to encourage older children to play independently in the SANG area.

The play offer within the new development site and the play offer within the forest will be co-ordinated and unified in such a way as to encourage users to explore the woods and develop confidence and independence.

A range of interactive signage which give point-to-point directions in order to follow a 'secret trail' will be distributed in a way similar to standard orienteering posts. The posts for children will be sculpted and attractively stained in order to make them distinct from the red & white orienteering posts already present throughout the site. As with standard orienteering the directions can be regularly changed via the SANG information available on the website or via the community centre.

Provision for other popular wide games such as hide & seek, 40/40 and in and around the large open area close to the main access point.

People With A Disability

An all-ability spur path will connect the SANG with the Boundary Lane car park.

Toilet facilities are also a key factor for people with disabilities and the mobility impaired who may have an increased need and may not be able to improvise in a convenient manner. The provision of public conveniences is outside of the scope of this SANG project, however, the target end users are all very local to home.

Shelter

It is estimated that between 5% and 8% of people with a disability are wheelchair users. Obviously, not all users are confined to a wheelchair.

Research by the Forestry Commission has shown that the availability of shelter from inclement weather is a principal factor in determining the locations that people with a disability choose to visit. A shelter will be provided in an open and accessible area close to the main access for the SANG. This structure will also form the base for information and interpretation about the SANG and the wider forest.

- The marked trails will be 'calorie counted' and the trail map will display the average amount of calories that a walker would be expected to burn if they complete the full circuit.

Outdoor locations and in particular natural surroundings are associated with positive feelings and reduced stress and can aid recuperation and mental well-being. The designed internal landscape of the forest and the SANG routes maximises the capacity of the forest for recreational users whilst the separation distance and screening between adjacent paths is intended to maintain the sense of remoteness and opportunities for solitude.

Cyclists

Children's bikes will be allowed on the all-ability trails within the SANG. Other bikes if ridden sedately and considerately as though 'riding on the pavement' will also be acceptable. More adventurous cyclists will be requested to utilise the wider network of forest roads and rides that extends to the south for several miles.

Hairpins and chicanes made from felled logs are easily navigable by users of all abilities but frustratingly slow to negotiate without dismounting from a bicycle.

The map station at the entrance to the SANG will offer suggested routes for cyclists with a range of lengths and trail conditions explained. This will assist in separating cyclists from free-running dogs as much as possible.

Serious cyclists will be encouraged to ride out away from the SANG by creating a cycle route that heads out in a southerly direction. This will be shown on the site map and reinforced using the directional signage.

All Users

It would be better to carry out consultation with the new users of the SANG in order to make provision for their actual needs rather than those of hypothetical, statistically average users. Given that the new community is so small in total size this entirely feasible. Therefore, a small 'community chest' will be provided in order to enable specific adaptations to be carried out as residency increases over the early years of the project.

The Forestry Commission employs Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) in order to assess and monitor the fairness and inclusiveness of its access and facilities provision. Although, the SANG is directed at making provision for the residents in the new development, the infrastructure will be available to all and as such needs to conform to the provisions of EqIA. Furthermore, the affordable housing element of the proposed development includes 8 No. homes suitable for wheelchair access.

ROUTES

The SANG is unbounded because the entire of the Hurn Forest is dedicated as Open Access Land under the CROW Act [2000]. Nonetheless, people overwhelmingly tend to stick to the paths, rides and forest roads. This being the case, creating an attractive and inviting pathway network that is well-surfaced and aids good dispersal into the woods is the most essential part of creating an effective SANG.

The principal access to the SANG from the new neighbourhood is proposed in the landscaping strategy for the site, to be enhanced as a generous open space corridor of between 20 and 30 metres in width to allow spreading room. This main thoroughfare will deliver people to Hurn Forest via a gateway feature that will offer shelter as well as map and information panels.

The routes that are on offer need to reflect a range of uses, abilities and objectives. There will be conflicts that need to be resolved and the routes on offer need to be capacious enough to allow cyclists to avoid free-running dogs, for example.

The shortest routes are well supplied with a variety of benches, and a rest point or leaning post will be provided at least every 50m in order that the least physically able users can progress around the trail in stages. The facilities provision will all be subject to EqIA to ensure that the needs of all users are met.

The routes are comprised of existing sections of forest ride, unmettled paths and adopted desire lines, plus a few lengths of newly laid trail. A section of new boardwalk is also required to cross a stream that is ephemeral wet.

The wearing course of the short and most accessible routes will be hoggin (native inert gravel with clay fines) plus a blinding layer of finer material that will be applied to the surface. This will ensure that the surface remains even enough for wheeled users and walkers who are vulnerable to trip hazards.

The longer routes will adopt the existing network of paths and rides. These routes will only be upgraded in local problem areas where persistent winter wet or storm deluges prevent reasonable use.

In this way the SANG will provide a wide range of routes of different lengths with surfaces that make them suitable for a wide range of different users' needs. The supporting infrastructure of way marking and benches, etc. will also reflect this graded approach.

Paths intended for easy access, all-ability use will be wider and vegetation will be cleared back in order to improve visibility along the trail. This will ensure that there are routes suited to different peoples' confidence levels and will help to make the SANG welcoming for all of the new residents.

The Forestry Commission has indicated that it would be preferable not to include the main road through the centre of the forest as part of a principal SANG route. This 'Category 1A' road carries permissive access traffic as well as lorries and machinery during harvesting operations. During these times it will be difficult to keep the route sufficiently clean and free of debris to conform with all-ability access criteria. A suitably well blinded wearing surface for wheelchairs would also be easily damaged by heavy vehicular traffic.

Designing a set of circular paths that do not include the 'CAT 1A' arterial road as part of the route will have the advantage that when the wayleave for Navitus Bay is installed beneath this main spinal route through the forest, the SANG routes will remain largely intact.

During the construction period the mitigation provided by the SANG will continue to be fully effective, as long as temporary access routes are permitted through the development boundary, and at least one temporary crossing point is provided to enable users to traverse the 'CAT 1A' corridor while the cable channel is under construction.

LANDSCAPE

The management plan for the landscape of Hurn Forest is set out in the Forest Design Plan (FDP), a statutory planning document that is publicly consulted upon and which sets out the landscape and management objectives for each Forestry Commission woodland and forest on a 30-35 year cycle.

The Forestry Commission must remain within the provisions of the FDP which identifies permanent open space, rotational open space, production areas and also areas for long term retention in the landscape or minimum disturbance for conservation purposes. However, the confines of the plan do not prevent small-scale changes, for example, in the way that the ride-sides are treated and managed.

Additional pockets of open space will be created alongside the rides in order provide a more varied experience and to permit a better view of the associated wildlife.

One of the key attractions of the forest for existing visitors is the opportunity to get away from the built up environment. The Forestry Commission therefore does not wish to see this locally valued landscape quality eroded by the removal of the trees that currently screen the derelict hospital buildings. These will be partially and selectively retained in belt 30m thick around the perimeter of the development site, in order to ensure that the new development remains invisible from the forest road.

The flat landscape of Hurn Forest and the surrounding areas affords no long distant views and comparatively few internal views other than along the longer, straighter roads and rides and temporally across clear-felled compartments. Therefore, visual interest is offered by the careful selection of a designed route that progresses through a range of different landscape types within the shortest possible distance. Medium distance, internal views are afforded at various points along the route. As such, the SANG fulfils the criteria which supports the concept of focal points and interesting views from within its own bounds rather than being outward looking.

Long-distance views are not obtainable in such a flat landscape. The only sensibly near prospect of a medium distance panoramic view is from a small hill close to the eastern boundary. The view from this location is however impeded by the overgrown and congested field boundaries that are outside of the management control of the Forestry Commission and which in any event screen the low-density sub-urban development that exists beyond. The hilltop is also home to a large electricity pylon that carries several overhead circuit lines. While it could be argued that if you are going in search of a view that this location is the best that you will find locally, it is not in any way impressive or special and suffers from several major detractors.

SITE FURNITURE

Littering & Litter Bins

The amount of littering in Hurn Forest is currently very low. However, a litter picking service should be considered to run in tandem with the dog waste collection. Sites that exhibit a tolerance for a low level of littering quickly deteriorate along an exponential curve. Sites that tolerate zero littering are shown to collect less and less litter overall. In effect, nobody wants to be the first to drop litter in a pristine site, but once littering commences people become less and less considerate.

- Litter bins should not be provided. It is a well proven fact that sites with litter bins are more and not less prone to litter.

Seating

Seating serves a variety of purposes and there are numerous different types which serve different functions. A seat that is designed for peaceful reflection needs to face away from the path that leads past it so that when using the seat, the user is not required to genuflect towards each passer by. A seat aimed at providing a momentary rest along a route should not be too comfortable or it is likely to become blocked to other users for whom it is intended as a brief respite after a long climb or stretch of path.

If seating is primarily a parking space for adults and guardians overseeing the activities of children then it needs to be located with a good prospect of the extent of the activities that are being supervised.

People may or may not be willing to share a bench or seat depending upon their circumstances. Picnickers are unlikely to share a bench or table while they are eating for example. Parents whose children are playing together are much more likely to make space for each other.

Circular tree seats offer tree protection in high pressure locations and face outwards through 360 degrees. People are much more likely to share them (or are much less able to dominate them completely) than picnic type benches where the users face inwards towards a personal space.

Feature benches can be sculptural and are a good method of place-making as a goal for a stage, for embedding interpretation or at the end of a walking route.

Existing users interviewed on site have suggested that they would like more benches. They have also suggested the provision of some sheltered seating where they can take refuge in inclement weather. This is an important consideration for a range of users with a disability or people with mobility impairments.

An incremental approach towards new site furniture is suggested, with a brief assessment after a trial period establishing the effect that each new addition / removal has produced in the use patterns.

Recent research by the Forestry Commission has shown that at low-level recreation sites, people have a preference for naturalistic forms of seating such as carved log benches over the more standard bench types. Respondents favoured natural timber benches over recycled plastic ones for more naturalistic visitor destinations of this type.

The existing picnic bench is poorly situated, very close to the main arterial road through the forest. It does not offer enough privacy to function effectively as a picnic bench.

- New picnic benches will be added in newly created, enclosed glades to give them a degree of privacy from passers-by. The benches will be wheelchair accessible and spur paths will ensure equality of access.
- New benches will offer group seating in the large open area close to the main entrance to the SANG.
- Benches, Seats or Leaning Posts will be situated every 50m along the easiest access trail in order to make this route the most inclusive.
- Single benches will be placed at key locations along the trail network where they offer shelter, or a view, or provide seating for parents & guardians in activity areas.
- All benches, signage and site furniture will be of timber construction.

SIGNAGE & WAYMARKING

In design terms, a surfeit of signage and site furniture is perceived as visual clutter that serves to urbanise the experience of the forest.

A signage and interpretation strategy is proposed that will devise a site specific schema:

In its initial condition, the SANG within the wider Hurn Forest will be very well sign-posted. This is designed to assist new residents with orientation within the forest, and to increase the attractiveness of the location as an alternative site for recreation. It will help to establish habitual patterns of use that will further increase the adoption of the site.

Following occupation of the final phase of the development, the strategy will require a review of the signage schema in order to determine at what point the signage across the site can be reduced to a minimum of way-marking and directional signage.

Visual cues other than signage will be utilised. The routes that form the circular path will be unified in appearance using fine 'blinding' top dressing of 6mm to dust. This will give the entire trail a unified surface appearance which will aid new users in taking the correct turn at junctions.

Keeping the circular routes closer to the home site means that if users do become disorientated, they will nonetheless be close to the housing, and are therefore more likely to recover their bearings more easily than they might in the more uniform and disorientating landscape of the larger Corsican Pine coupes.

In addition to the way-marking signage along the designed trails, a small suite of directional signage will be installed at key junctions in the wider forest in order to direct walkers that have become lost whilst exploring the wider forest back towards the SANG and other key locations such as the car parks and Oakdene Campsite, etc.

- A suite of bespoke timber signage will be commissioned to provide way-marking and directional information.
- The signage and interpretation strategy will be periodically reviewed in order to assess the effectiveness of the directional signage and the extent of continued need.

INTERPRETATION & INFORMATION

There is currently no interpretation at Hurn Forest.

The Forestry Commission has demonstrated in its Community Forests that providing information and explanation about the nature of sensitive sites is highly effective in persuading the public to respect the key factors that contribute to the effective protection of conservation sites.

Information signage is therefore considered more important and relevant as it is more inclusive of the public in the conservation effort, even if that effort is as apparently as insignificant as taking a different route or putting their dog on a lead in a particular area. Compared to fixed interpretation, this information signage needs to be mutable, seasonal and requires a greater degree of consideration and management in order to remain current and effective.

Methods of Interpretation

A common approach to interpretation consists of map illustration panels close to car parks or access points, decorated with watercolour images of some of the wildlife that may be seen on site. However, traditional approaches to interpretation are not favoured on sites with a very high repeat visitor rate. They are quickly ignored by the over familiar users and then just become visual clutter, prone to vandalism. Based upon the known repeat visit rate of 80% for locally popular Forestry Commission sites such as Moors Valley, it is reasonable to expect that the repeat visit rate for Hurn Forest is at the very least 90% and probably well in excess of this.

Local consultation with users during the preparation of the Hurn Forest Design Plan (FDP) demonstrated emphatically that existing-user respondents and representatives of the local community, such as the adjacent Parish Councils, regard Hurn Forest as a preserve for local users. It is comparatively little known and a quiet destination, particularly at the height of the tourist season in the New Forest. The SANG is intended to attract new users to Hurn Forest from within the new housing development only. As such, a 100% repeat visit rate would be desirable.

New handheld technologies such as smartphones and tablets are offering access to the web in an ever increasing pattern of coverage. With access to the web there is no limit to the amount information that can be made available.

Smartphones using NFC (Near Field Communication) technology would be the most cost effective method by which to deliver detailed information & interpretation. This would depend upon a high enough distribution of smart phones among users. This is probably moderate at present but based purely upon national trends is rising all the time. It would also depend upon the availability of phone signals on all major networks across the site. Unlike the majority of Forestry Commission sites, signal strength in Hurn Forest is very good owing to the position of an adjacent phone mast.

NFC tabs would need to be located in areas with the best possible phone reception. The tabs would not hold sufficient data for an interpreted trail and so will need to direct smart phone users to a dedicated URL (a webpage on the FC site or a similar host website), that offers a multimedia download. Once the downloaded content is on the phone, the relevant content

could be triggered at discrete locations either by the user, or by subsequent NFC proximity Tags. An mp3 file format will require approximately 1Megabyte (Mb) of downloaded data per minute of narrated audio. Data transfer rates vary widely but in a moderate to good reception area a 5Mb (approx. 5 minutes of narration) takes about 20s to transfer. Therefore, 30 minutes of content for a trail involving multiple stops or locations (in areas out of phone signal coverage) would take about 2 minutes to upload at an access point, car park or trailhead post with good signal coverage.

File compression is a possibility to reduce file transfer times, but this needs to be weighed against the additional steps required to decompress the content, which may be enough additional complexity to put off less technically minded users.

Blank programmable tags are available at negligible cost. Weatherproof sealed plastic ones with a high capacity, cost around £3 each. They have fixing centres for screws and are suitable for countersinking into a circular rebate on a wooden post, in order to protect them from removal / vandalism. The software for programming them is available free via Android or Apple's iOS. They can be indelibly programmed and locked against tampering if the Android version is used.

All of the Forestry Commissions woods with open access or permissive access have a dedicated web page. Web design services are contracted out by a central webmaster and once the web pages are up, local site staff are able to refresh editable content as required.

- A 'Signage and Interpretation Strategy' will set out the content, the amount and the delivery method for conveying a wide range of information and interpretation.
- Design & delivery will be through specialist contractors managed by the Forestry Commission.
- Information giving web pages and downloadable content will be designed & delivered by web design specialists, contracted and managed by the Forestry Commission.

BIODIVERSITY

It must be remembered that the provision of SANG is a conservation exercise in itself and that the focus of a newly created SANG is to attract recreation pressure away from other areas deemed to be more valuable and sensitive in ecological terms. Nonetheless, opportunities to view wildlife, and especially birds, are key reasons why people visit Hurn Forest itself.

The largest adverse pressure on the ecology of the land immediately surrounding the development will be exerted not by people but by their pets. This will come in three main forms enrichment, disturbance & predation. If pet ownership within the new development is statistically average for the UK then it is reasonable to expect that the families occupying the new homes will bring with them between 75 and 90 dogs and around the same number of cats.

Careful design and management of the SANG will enhance and increase biodiversity in the area, thereby reducing and counteracting the negative impacts of increased pet ownership within the new development.

The principal objective of the SANG is to attract and absorb the recreation and access pressure exerted by the new housing development. However, there are considerable opportunities afforded by the scheme for biodiversity gains.

The landscape treatment of the SANG, including the clearance of ride-sides and construction of new path routes, will provide the opportunity for considerable enhancement of the biodiversity.

Differential treatment of adjacent areas of heather and a more open, graduated edge to paths and rides will lead to a less uniform age structure and an increase in beneficial edge effects.

Selective thinning and individual tree selection will allow more light to the woodland floor to create a patchwork of open spaces within the woodland. As well as being beneficial to insects, this will create basking and egg laying areas for reptiles.

- *Landscape & woodland management interventions towards greater biodiversity within the SANG area*
- *Establish and support a community based Conservation Volunteer Group, focused on the new community but also inclusive of existing users and the wider public.*
- *Public Activity Days to engage with the new community will introduce the biodiversity of the area and explain the sensitivity of particular sites.*
- *A 'Community Chest' is available for tools and materials to support volunteering activity.*

Management of SANG

The Forestry Commission will implement and manage the SANG and carry out directly or under contract, works associated with the construction and management of the SANG infrastructure and the surrounding environment as per the Section 106 Agreement.

Additional management procedures for inspections, maintenance and environmental protection will be integrated into the existing Forestry Commission management plan for the site.

Visitor numbers will be monitored using automatic people counters.

The SANG will be provided in advance of occupation of the new neighbourhood.

EVALUATION

The Dorset Heathlands Planning Framework 2012-2014 Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) sets out the criteria to be met in the design and layout of a new SANG.

Appendix E of the SPD sets out a fourteen point checklist for the quality of SANGS that are appropriate to the Dorset Heathlands locale. The points are clearly met by the Hurn Forest SANG as demonstrated in the tables below.

The following Q&A is set out following the same four categories that feature in Appendix E of the SPD. It clearly shows that the proposed Hurn Forest SANG can meet all of these mandatory criteria for an effective SANG in these terms.

The Hurn Forest SANG also exhibits a number of 'desirable' criteria that Natural England has stipulated in other locations such as the Thames Basin Heaths.

Points 1 - 4 : Accessibility - Reaching the SANG

1. Sites must have adequate parking for visitors, unless the site is intended for local pedestrian use only, 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 numbers using the site and arriving by car.

Yes. Car Parking is adequate for existing users with some spare capacity. Given the layout of the site and the proximity of the new development to the SANG (within 400m) via all-ability pedestrian routes, no additional car parking capacity is required.

2. Car parks must be easily and safely accessible by car, be of an open nature and should be clearly sign posted.

No additional car parking is required by the SANG criteria because of the close proximity to the development, however, as part of EqlA (Equality Impact Assessment) the Forestry Commission proposes to connect the SANG to the existing car park via an all-ability surfaced path.

3. There should be easy access between the car park or housing and the SANG with the facility to take dogs safely from the car park to the SANG off the lead. Access points should have signage outlining the layout of the SANGS and the routes available to visitors.

Dogs will be able to walk safely off of leads, both from the car park and from the new development to reach the SANG.

The main access point from the new development will feature an orientation and information centre within an all-ability accessible shelter. A map panel will display the routes and other features of the recreation infrastructure. All of the way-marked trails will commence from and return to this point.

Hurn Forest is a traffic free environment except for a very limited amount of permissive access and occasional vehicle movements associated with the management of the site. The designed routes have been chosen to avoid the central spine road (CAT 1A) which carries the vast majority of operational and permissive traffic in and out of the forest.

4. Paths must be easily used and well maintained but most should remain unsurfaced to avoid the site becoming too urban in feel. A majority of paths should be suitable for use in all weathers and all year around. Boardwalks may be required in wet sections.

In order to facilitate the highest level of inclusive all ability access the routes will be unmettled with a fine surface finish in order to ensure that they remain dry and passable in all weather conditions. The water table in Hurn Forest is very high.

Points 5 - 8 : Paths, Tracks & Other SANG infrastructure

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

Hurn Forest has an existing car park close by, which is adequate for its current use level.

The SANG area will not have a car park, nor does it require one because of its proximity to the new development.

The SANG will have a wide range of circular walks that start and finish at the points of access to the new development. These points of access are primarily for pedestrian use although they will be inclusive of wheelchairs, mobility scooters and push bikes.

6. It should be possible to complete a circular walk of 2.3-2.5km around the SANGS, and for larger SANGS a variety of circular walks.

The main new walking route provided within the SANG is 2.3-2.5km in length.

The SANG also offers a wide variety of shorter circular walks that offer a range of experiences to a range of people with different expectations and abilities.

The SANG is unbounded within Hurn Forest and as such a range of longer walks are available.

A range of interpreted walks to salient and interesting features will be included in the promotional material.

7. SANGS must be designed so that visitors are not deterred by safety concerns.

A range of walking routes have been designed to satisfy the needs of all potential users. The shortest routes that are intended to be appropriate for the least able and more vulnerable users have been carefully considered to ensure that they are open enough to offer confidence without sterilising them of visual interest. Longer walks pass between trees and under canopy, which is part of varying the experience and enjoying the forest.

No crimes against a person have been recorded in Hurn Forest.

8. SANGS should be clearly sign-posted and advertised.

A shelter incorporating mapping and interpretation will be situated alongside the main access route between the SANG and the new development.

A detailed signage and information strategy will be developed that addresses the needs of all-ability users such as partially sighted users.

The SANG will be sign-posted directly from the new development site. In addition, supplementary information will be available online including the replication of trail maps and interpretation in PDF format.

Points 9 - 10 : Advertising & Making People Aware

9. SANGS should have leaflets and/or websites advertising their location to potential visitors. 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.

The Hurn Forest SANG is in a one-to-one relationship with the St. Leonard's development, rather than a many-to-one or one-to-many relationship as is common with the majority of other SANG provision which may serve a range of different development locations, often at some distance from the new housing. Because the population of new users is entirely contained within the locale, and the SANG is intended to serve only this population, providing information can be carried out directly to each address.

Information will be provided to householders about the SANG in the form of printed material to each address within the development. Additional copies will be available from the community centre.

The SANG will have a web page to make map and interpretation material available to users in electronic formats for use on portable tablets and phones. Temporary notices will also be reproduced here.

10. SANGS must be perceived as natural spaces without intrusive artificial structures, except in the immediate vicinity of car parks. Visually-sensitive way-markers and some benches are acceptable.

The SANG will be screened from the significant and urbanising influence of the new housing development by a visual screen of retained mature trees.

Light pollution from the new housing will be ameliorated by a belt of trees and scrub.

Points 11 - 14 : Landscape & Vegetation

11. SANGS must aim to provide a variety of habitats for visitors to experience (e.g. some of : woodland, scrub, grassland, heathland, wetland, open water).

Sites over 12Ha in extent must aim to have variety of habitat types for users to experience.

The routes chosen have been selected specifically because they offer the best possible range of different aesthetic, habitat and ecological experiences within the shortest possible walking distance. These included mixed woodland, wet woodland, coniferous woodland, open heath and areas of permanent open space.

12. 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.

The SANG is dedicated as Open Access Land under the CRoW Act which places no restrictions upon peoples' freedom to roam widely within the SANG and the wider forest.

13. SANGS must be free from unpleasant visual, auditory or olfactory intrusions (e.g. derelict buildings, intrusive adjoining buildings, dumped materials, loud intermittent or continuous noise from traffic, industry, sports grounds, sewage treatment works, waste disposal facilities).

Hurn Forest is popular with existing local users for specifically because it is free from these intrusions. The FDP is concerned with maintaining and enhancing the protection of Hurn Forest from disruptive and urbanising influences. The design of the new development includes a 30m thick belt of retained trees in order to protect Hurn Forest from the visual impact of the new houses and infrastructure.

14. Pedestrian only sites must have excellent access for people arriving on foot with a range of access points directly linking housing and SANG.

At least two access points will be provided in order to create a circular route to and from the SANG which will significantly expand the available range of circular routes and other walks that can be easily accessed from the development site, both in terms of distance and diversity of experience.

A range of routes of different lengths is important in order for the site to be inclusive of users of all abilities and for users with different expectations in terms of the time that they wish to spend.

Diversity of experience is important in order for the site to remain interesting and attractive to very regular repeat users.

Desirable Features Of A SANG

Accessibility must address all site users.

The initial proposal for one circular walking route with long gradients has been revised in order to make the design more inclusive and offer a wide variety of shorter alternate routes rather than a single, long and challenging one.

Can SANG offer requisite features without compromise to function due to shape, size, location topography or other inherent feature?

Yes. The Hurn Forest SANG is suitable in terms of size, shape and location. The topography is suitable for the provision of a relatively easy-access network of footpaths and rides.

The SANG should provide naturalistic space with areas of open non-wooded countryside and deciduous woodland and water features.

The SANG traverses a diverse range of different landscapes and offers a variety of experiences from enclosed and intimate woodland to wide, open spaces. These include: mixed deciduous / coniferous woodland with heath understorey; wet woodland corridor with dense canopy; clear stemmed, even-aged mature conifers; open spaces with low native scrub and perennial vegetation.

As part of the installation work for the new linking pathways some additional felling along the routes will shape the visual envelope and allow further diversification of the experiences on offer.

A SANG proposal should choose a site with gently undulating topography.

Hurn Forest and the surrounding areas are very gently undulating within about 5m of variance over most of the site.

There is a slight hill to the south-east that ascends to 23m (about 10m above the average in the locale). It is unfortunately marred by a large electricity pylon that sits upon it and also by the low-density development that is visible outside the forest boundary. If you turn your back on the forest edge, this location does offer a filtered view back towards the centre of the forest.

This location is too remote from the new development and the SANG to function as a daily walk for most users. It will therefore be included in the trail guide as an extended walk.

A Focal point or monument is desirable.

A wooden interpretative sculpture will be commissioned for this hilltop location alongside the eastern boundary.

For goal orientated walkers who are a bit less energetic, a low-key naturalistic sculpture trail of interpretative structures is preferable.

Smaller SANGS do not have grazing stock. Larger SANGS to always have areas free from grazing stock.

The SANG and the wider forest currently have no grazing stock. In the event that grazing is employed for habitat management in the future, there will always be substantial areas free from grazing stock.