

Blackwater Valley Countryside Strategy 2011-15

**This document has been prepared by
the Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership**

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1. Executive Summary

The Blackwater Valley lies on the western outskirts of the London Green Belt in one of the busiest areas of SE England. The Valley forms the boundaries of Berkshire, Surrey and Hampshire as well as many other local authorities and organisations.

This Strategy has been produced and will be implemented by the Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership (BVCP), a joint body funded by the local authorities to co-ordinate a unified approach in the Valley, working towards the vision of:

‘A continuous green space along the Blackwater Valley; attractive to wildlife and the community.’

The *Blackwater Valley Countryside Strategy 2011-2015* is the quinquennial review of the Strategy produced to steer the improvements to the Valley’s open green spaces and outdoor facilities. A conscious decision was taken to undertake a ‘light touch’ review, limiting this to an update of facts with a targeted consultation. Even so the achievement over the last five years together with a rapidly changing national picture on government, economic situation, planning policies and legislation have resulted in significant changes to the Strategy since its last version.

The next five years is a key period for the Valley with four mineral sites totalling 200ha due for completion of restoration in this period and an intensified search for new sites for public access.

The main factors that are likely to affect the Valley in the future have been identified. These include the pressures on public finance and the need to cater for a growing population, in particular to provide Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace to prevent damage to the Thames Basin Heaths SPA.

The focus for the BVCP over the next five years is to meet aims for five key topics:-

- Landscape
- Recreation
- Biodiversity
- River Blackwater
- Community Empowerment

The outcome is the identification of 53 annual management needs, 65 projects for the next five years and 36 long-term proposals to keep an eye open for opportunities when they arise. Each of these actions provides a challenge to organise, secure permissions and resources, but when achieved will contribute to the continuing enhancement of the Valley’s appearance and value to local people and wildlife.

The general policies, provided as a guide for developing facilities and uses in the Valley, have been updated and provided as an Appendix.

2. A Strategy for the Blackwater Valley

2.1. Vision

The vision for the Valley remains unchanged from the *Blackwater Valley Countryside Strategy 2006-2010*. The vision describes the aim for the Valley which can only be obtained through the long-term and sustainable improvements achieved through consistency of approach. It is right it should not be changed every few years.

This vision is of:-

‘A continuous green space along the Blackwater Valley; attractive to wildlife and the community.’

The Strategy puts forward the vision for the Valley as held by the Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership of 13 County, District, Borough, Town and Parish Councils that border the River Blackwater. Further views have been sought from the statutory, non-statutory, community and voluntary organisations, private companies and landowners with an interest in the future of the Valley. (For a full list of consultees see Appendix 6.)

2.2. Aims

The specific aims of this Strategy are:-

- i. **Landscape**
To enhance the Valley’s landscape to create a continuous area of naturalistic countryside and maintain the important open gap between urban areas.
- ii. **Recreation**
To realise the full potential of the Blackwater Valley as an outdoor recreation resource, with an emphasis on providing Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace as an alternative recreational venue to the heathlands of the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area.
- iii. **Biodiversity**
To improve the Valley for wildlife by enhancing existing habitats, expanding the areas of ecological value by the creation of new habitats, and developing links between habitats.
- iv. **River Blackwater**
To improve riparian habitat and the water quality of the River Blackwater and maximise the flood protection role of the river and its floodplain.
- v. **Community Empowerment**
To maximise participation from all sections of the community in decision making and practical action.

3. Introduction

3.1. Background

Being a forgotten corner of three counties for many years, by the mid 20th century the Blackwater Valley had become a general dumping ground, compounded by much gravel extraction and other typical 'urban backyard' activities. In the early 1970s the three County Councils of Hampshire, Surrey and Berkshire got together and drew up the first *Blackwater Valley Landscape Strategy*. This advocated major landscaping, restoration and the development of planning policies to prevent the urban centres melding together to form a vast conglomeration.

Work went well with a number of major restoration projects overseen by County Council staff. In the early 1980s the County Councils joined forces with the town and district authorities in the Valley and the Countryside Commission to form the Blackwater Valley Project, dedicated project officers were appointed to co-ordinate operations. Recognising the recreational potential of the Valley's many water areas, the Sports Council appointed a recreation development officer to the Project in the mid 1980s.

Project funding from the Countryside Commission and Sports Council finished in 1990 but the local authorities formed the Blackwater Valley Recreation and Countryside Management Service to ensure work continued. Throughout this period the emphasis of work was on developing new projects e.g. gravel pit restoration or redevelopment of backyard industrial areas, but site management and community involvement became increasingly important.

In 2002 the name was changed to 'Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership' (BVCP) to reflect not only the co-operative arrangements of the many local authorities but also the critical role of the many organisations who do not contribute to the core budgets. These include the Environment Agency, conservation volunteer groups, the three Wildlife Trusts, mineral companies and other landowners.

The continuing reduction in local authority budgets has enforced cuts in staff and attention to be directed towards projects where extra income is available e.g. via grants. In 2003 the Blackwater Valley Countryside Trust was formed as an independent charity with the aim of supporting conservation work in the Valley by developing projects and accessing funds that are not available to local authorities.

3.2. Achievements

The 40 years of environmental improvements have seen major successes including:-

- 26 sites totalling 433ha restored.
- 16 sites totalling 214ha opened to free public access.
- 11 commercial/formal recreational facilities opened.
- 6 nature reserves totalling 117ha created.
- The creation of the Blackwater Valley Path.

- 420,000 trees planted.
- 27ha woodland and 18ha of species-rich grassland created.
- 14,000 days of community involvement.
- Continuing improvements to the river's water quality and fish stocks.

The challenge is now threefold, continuing the restoration work, managing the land in the long term, and maximising public benefits.

Extensive areas of mineral working currently under restoration will see major new facilities designed for nature conservation and public access completed in the five-year timescale of this Strategy. It is essential the work of the Partnership continues to maximise the public benefit of these projects.

3.3. The Role of the Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership

Since 1971 when the first strategy was published the local authorities along the Valley have been working in partnership to improve the Valley's environment and open it up for public recreation. Over time and as improvements have been implemented the priorities have fluctuated, partners have changed, and the organisation has changed names reflecting its evolving role.

In 2011 there are two County, six District/Borough councils and five Town/Parish councils that contribute to the core annual budget.¹ In addition Surrey CC, Hampshire CC and Rushmoor BC have contracted Partnership staff to carry out extra site management work on sites they own. These sites are mostly but not all within the Strategy area.

Many other organisations are also active in the Valley carrying out projects that help meet the vision and are best regarded as non-core funding partners. These include governmental bodies, such as the Environment Agency and Natural England, as well volunteer and non-governmental bodies, such as the Wildlife Trusts, site-based management groups, and sports associations.

Today the BVCP plays a vital role in co-ordinating work in the Valley and provides a focus for the efforts of organisations and individuals by providing the Valley-wide overview essential for the success of the Strategy.

The role of the BVCP is to deliver an expert, experienced and centralised resource to:-

- Co-ordinate projects and actions of all involved parties and stakeholders in the Blackwater Valley for mutual benefit.
- Increase sustainable usage of the Blackwater Valley especially for informal outdoor recreation.
- Ensure wildlife and landscape protection.
- Provide site management expertise for landowners and authorities who do not have an in-house resource.

¹ The local authority Partners are: Hampshire CC, Surrey CC, Wokingham BC, Hart DC, Surrey Heath BC, Guildford BC, Waverley BC, Rushmoor BC, Sandhurst TC, Yateley TC, Farnham TC, Finchampstead PC, Blackwater & Hawley TC.

3.4. Aim and Status of the Strategy Document

The aim of this document is twofold:-

1. To provide a long-term vision for the Valley's countryside.
2. To set out the priorities for the BVCP for the next five years.

The long-term vision gives the big picture so that all with an influence in the Valley - landowners, developers, recreation providers, wildlife and nature conservation organisations, community groups and the public - understand the aims the partners have for its future development.

This Strategy document itself has no statutory planning status on its own, the various planning authorities in the Valley have taken varying approaches to the open gap and the strategy. The authorities will be encouraged to adopt this Strategy as Supplementary planning guidance within their individual Local Development Frameworks.

As well as providing general policy guidelines for conservation and recreation provision in the Valley, the Strategy also highlights specific actions within 12 defined geographical areas. Accordingly, it is intended that the Strategy will do as much to encourage positive action as it will limit any further loss or erosion of what already exists.

The vision includes major projects and small but key projects. It is accepted many will not be achieved during the next five years, but it is important they are shared so that opportunities are taken when they arise, for instance through changes in landownership, availability of resources or planning proposals.

But it is not sufficient to await opportunities so a five-year work programme is given for the BVCP and its individual partners that will drive forward improvements. This identifies the management issues for sites and organisations, these are already being met through existing resources and it is important these resources are retained. The work programme also identifies the projects for which resources are not secured but which it would be most timely to move forward in the next five years. These are the key projects on which the success of the Strategy depends.

3.5. Definition of the Strategy Area

It is widely recognised that the Blackwater Valley towns form a social and economic unit. Unfortunately there is no agreed boundary to the 'Blackwater Valley', each organisation working to its own definition some much wider than others. The River Blackwater forms the boundary not only of local authorities but of many organisations e.g. the Wildlife Trusts. The boundary used in previous Blackwater Valley strategies has evolved to show a narrow belt of green space beside the river. Most current local statutory plans show 'Strategic Gap' or 'River Valley' policy areas that together define a continuous area either side of the River Blackwater with specific policies to prevent it being built on and to promote its use for outdoor recreation. The evolving Local Development Frameworks are less consistent.

This Blackwater Valley boundary used in this document contains minor differences to the previous strategy and as mapped in individual Local Authority

plans. This reflects a consistent approach e.g. following physical features across borders, and updating where development has occurred.

This Strategy reconfirms the mission of the BVCP to protect and improve the 'Blackwater Valley Countryside' as defined in this strategy area.

However to achieve this requires work outside the defined boundary. For example to increase sustainable usage, the BVCP team will work within local communities such as schools and community organisations. Maximising recreational use of the Valley requires good footpath and bridleway links into the Valley from adjacent communities e.g. circular walks linking green space in the Valley to the wider countryside. To protect the river, work on its feeder streams is required, whilst wildlife requires links across the wider catchment based landscape. The BVCP also uses its expertise to advise and assist and even manage sites and projects outside the defined area when requested.

Core funding will be used to support work within the strategy area, other work within the surrounding area will be undertaken so long as it contributes to the vision and aims for the Valley and can be funded with extra income either from individual partners or from external sources.

3.6. Strategy Update

Since the *Blackwater River Valley Landscape Restoration & Recreation Study* was published in 1971 a great many improvements to the Valley's landscape, wildlife and outdoor recreational facilities have taken place. These have been planned via a series of strategy documents, being reviewed roughly every five years, the last one being the *Blackwater Valley Strategy 2006-2010*.

Updating the Strategy every five years has proven to be most useful as it:-

- Allows a medium-term review of progress, updating the partners and all interested bodies on what has been achieved over the last five years.
- Keeps the document fresh and relevant. Projects that have been completed or are no longer feasible are removed and replaced with ones that meet new needs.
- Enables a review of factors affecting the Valley so the role of the BVCP can be refined for greater effectiveness in an ever-changing world.

The approach to preparing this Strategy has been:-

1. To audit the existing resource of landscape, recreational facilities and wildlife present in the Blackwater Valley.
2. To analyse the public benefits of urban green space and forecast how these will change over the next five years. To identify which public benefits are most relevant to local communities surrounding the Blackwater Valley.
3. To identify potential projects and facilities that could be developed or improved, and assess potential conflicts or symbioses between these projects.
4. To update the co-ordinated long-term vision for the Valley.
5. To produce a five-year action plan of management needs, priority projects and long-term proposals.

4. Factors Influencing Change

4.1. Current Resource

The source of the River Blackwater lies in Rowhill Nature Reserve to the south-west of Aldershot. The River flows in a large arc for 33 km (21 miles), first eastwards then northwards and finally westwards, to eventually join the River Loddon at Swallowfield.

The upper (southern) end of the Valley has been heavily influenced by urbanisation, with the settlements of Aldershot, Farnborough, Ash, Frimley, Mytchett, Camberley, Blackwater, Sandhurst and Yateley creating a near continuous built area either side of the River. These settlements and the linking roads and railways have impinged upon the floodplain leaving a narrow belt of countryside varying in width between 100m down to, in a few extreme cases, no more than the river itself. Downstream (north) of Sandhurst the Valley is much less developed, bordered by the small villages of Eversley, Finchampstead, Lower Common and Swallowfield, it retains its rural landscape.

Within 15 minutes travelling time are the towns of Farnham, Fleet, Crowthorne, and together with the communities already mentioned provide a population of over 300,000 people who are the main audience for the facilities in the Valley.

The strategy area as defined in this document totals just over 2,000ha. Probably the most significant land use both in terms of area and numbers of users is informal access. Twenty-two sites are freely available to the public providing 254ha of public open space.

The Blackwater Valley Path extends almost the whole length of the Valley providing a route of 37km (23 miles), a 2km section at Sandhurst is missing requiring walkers to use a detour away from the river through the town centre. South of the M3, 11km (7 miles) are classed as suitable for multi-use including cyclists and wheelchairs, although use by cyclists frequently occurs on other sections as well.

The Valley contains over 200ha of open water with 120 water-bodies ranging from small ponds to lakes of over 10ha, although the vast majority (93) are smaller than 2ha. Forty-five are used for angling with a potential capacity of over 1,000 anglers on any one day. Most angling sites are managed by clubs for the benefit of their own members, but four commercial venues operate solely on a day ticket basis whilst some club waters also have day tickets available. The concentration of angling venues and the quality of fish stocks has given the Valley a high reputation as a leading area for coarse fishing.

As well as the angling sites other outdoor recreational facilities include: three watersports centres, two cricket clubs, a nine-hole golf course with driving range, a children's zoo/activity park, and seven playing field complexes.

Due to the diversity of facilities and the fact that most are not used on a day ticket basis it is extremely difficult to estimate overall usage. However a figure of about 500,000 visits per annum maybe conservative.

The River and its main tributary Cove Brook have an ecological quality of 'moderate' (see 4.2.3 Water Framework Directive). Fish stocks in the upper river are believed 'poor' but in the lower river are 'good'.

Downstream of Eversley the Valley remains unaffected by large-scale urbanisation or gravel extraction, the landscape is rural with flat and fairly small fields mostly permanent pastures with mature hedgerows. Upstream of Eversley much gravel extraction has occurred, but it has tended to be small scale within the existing field boundaries. The retention of the mature hedgerow trees, new plantings and natural regeneration has resulted in most lakes being surrounded by woodland fringes. This together with screening planting on various restoration schemes, in particular on land surrounding the Blackwater Valley Road, has created a landscape dominated on first view by woodland. For those who leave the roads the presence of water and grasslands becomes apparent. Agricultural intensification has missed the central part of the Valley and many small areas of ancient grassland have survived.

The combination of grasslands, woodlands and water gives the Valley substantial ecological value. Five sites are managed as nature reserves, but many support important wildlife. The most important area is the nationally designated Blackwater Valley SSSI. Thirty-three other sites have been designated for wildlife value at a county level. Terminology varies but in this document these sites are referred to as Local Wildlife Sites. The 43 designated sites total 495ha, about a quarter of the strategy area. The Valley forms a continuous green corridor of riverside habitat which is of much greater value to wildlife than the sum of its individual parts.

A few nationally and regionally rare species are present e.g. Great Burnet *Sanguisorba officinalis*. Many species remain common in the Valley that are declining nationally e.g. Soprano Pipistrelle *Pipistrellus pygmaeus*, Stag Beetle *Lucanus cervus*, and Grass Snake *Natrix natrix*. Species reliant on the water bodies are well represented e.g. breeding and wintering wildfowl. Signs of Otter *Lutra lutra* in the river system are still rare but predicted to increase as the national recovery of this species continues.

Four mineral sites are currently in active extraction or restoration totalling 195ha, all of which are expected to be completed in the next five years. They will provide important new areas for public access and wildlife habitats.

A small number of sites remain as eyesores, all are difficult to tackle as they remain in private ownership and are used for intrusive uses or are unused held for hope value for future development. Three sites provide valuable locations for backyard industry but are damaging to the recreational value of the nearby area. Although a large proportion of land in the upper part of the Valley is in public ownership and open to access, some parcels are in private ownership and have high potential for access, wildlife and landscape improvements.

As the BVCP has restoration of eyesores and gravel workings at the core of its work, the delivery of this Strategy will see the continued reduction of problem sites and the improvements to access, wildlife and landscape.

Figure 1. Blackwater Valley Strategy Area Showing Local Authority Boundaries and Special Protection Areas.

4.2. European Legislation

A number of directives adopted by the European Community and translated into national law have an important impact upon countryside and landscape management. These include the Birds Directive, Habitats Directive, Waste Water Directive and Water Framework Directive.

4.2.1. Birds Directive

Under the Birds Directive member states have had to identify areas of habitat as Special Protection Areas (SPAs) to ensure sustainable populations of certain bird species. Extensive areas of heathland surrounding the Blackwater Valley have been designated as the Thames Basin Heaths SPA due to the presence of nationally important populations of three birds: Nightjar, Woodlark and Dartford Warbler. These birds are vulnerable to recreational use of the heaths. It is acknowledged that planned house building over the coming decades could lead to increased recreational use of the heaths and so damage the bird populations. Under UK and European law, housing and other developments that could significantly damage the SPA must be subject to an assessment of its effects. If planning authorities think harm or 'likely significant effect' could occur they are legally obliged to not approve the proposed plan or project unless appropriate avoidance and mitigation measures can be put in place. For a development in any one district opportunities for mitigation could be in a number of other neighbouring districts.

In February 2009 the Thames Basin Heaths Joint Strategic Partnership agreed a Thames Basin Heaths Delivery Framework to enable the delivery of housing in the vicinity of the SPA without that development having a significant effect on the SPA as a whole. The Delivery Framework sets out a series of strategic principles and guidelines to offset the potential damage to the SPA from new residential development. Measures include the provision of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) to attract people away from the heathlands and access management on the SPA itself. SANGs need to be of a specified standard to make them sufficiently attractive to perform their function and need to be provided at a rate of 8ha per thousand new population and maintained in perpetuity. The Valley has an important role to play in providing SANG being in a unique position to provide cross-boundary co-ordination.

4.2.2. Habitats Directive

The Habitats Directive provides the overall framework for nature conservation across Europe. A major plank being the *Natura 2000* network of sites which adds Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) designated to protect specified habitats and species (other than birds) to the SPAs designated for bird interest. A large area of heathland to the east of the Valley has been designated as a Special Area of Conservation.

Article 10 of the Habitats Directive requires member states to endeavour, where they consider it necessary, in their land use planning and development policies to encourage the management of features of the landscape which are of major importance for wild flora and fauna. These features are those which, because of their linear and continuous structure or their function as 'stepping stones' are essential for migration, dispersal and genetic exchange. Examples given in the

Directive are rivers with their banks, traditional field boundary systems, ponds and small woods.

4.2.3. Water Framework Directive

The Water Framework Directive has introduced new and more stringent ways of measuring river quality, with the target to improve all rivers to 'good' by 2015. Currently the river status is assessed as 'moderate', although in the lower river fish are 'high' and invertebrates 'good'. Meeting the target by 2015 is thought unfeasible and it is not expected to raise the ecological status to 'good' until 2027.

The Thames River Basin Catchment Management Plan lists a number of actions needed to meet these targets. The BVCP is the most relevant organisation to co-ordinate projects on the river particularly to improve its physical condition and address the problems caused by alien species.

4.2.4. Urban Waste Water Directive

Under the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive, the River Blackwater is designated as a Sensitive Area (Eutrophic) for much of its length below Aldershot Town Sewage Treatment Works. 'Sensitive Areas' are identified where sewage requires extra treatment before discharge. One type of sensitive area is 'eutrophic waters', where additional nutrients, mainly nitrogen or phosphorus, stimulate the growth of algae and other plants, damaging the natural environment. In these areas, larger sewage discharges must be treated to reduce their load of nutrients.

Heavy investment in the water treatment works have taken place to reduce these nutrients, including phosphate removal, however nutrients already in the sediments of the river and from continuing diffuse sources such as agricultural run-off will support a heavy growth of weed and cause low oxygen levels in the river for many years.

4.3. National Factors

4.3.1. Government Policy

The change of government in May 2010 has initiated a major change in financial policy. With cuts of up to 40% in public spending budgets being sought. In anticipation of this contributions from partners were not increased for the financial year 2010/11. There is likely to be further cuts to core BVCP budgets and it is possible some partners may even consider withdrawing.

Long-term resource stability is a critical factor in maintaining and continuing the enhancement work in the Blackwater Valley Countryside for maintaining premises, sites and keeping skilled staff. The Partners signed a commitment to support the BVCP for 10 years from 2003. This brought stability to the organisation, but 10 years is a short time in landscape evolution and the level of core financial support will only fund a fraction of the proposals in this strategy.

One of the main policies of the new government is the 'Big Society', the empowerment of local communities to take decisions and deliver services. BVCP has long been working to this ethos to deliver the programme of green space improvements to the Valley. Experience has shown volunteers and

community involvement is most effective with the back-up of professional staff, for instance to provide expertise, set up groups, organise projects and training etc. If the Big Society leads to the loss of professional resources in the belief it can all be done by volunteers it risks long-term decline of volunteer input.

4.3.2. State of the Economy

The downturn in the economy is also affecting the private sector, slowing developments and the associated opportunities to negotiate with developers for projects on land they own or for contributions. Some plots of land in the Valley are held in hope of future development and these are likely to remain in this state.

Sponsorship from local companies as well as developer contributions are likely to be harder to come by. Grants through such schemes as the Landfill Community Fund and Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund, have less funds available as they are dependent on volume of activity in the construction industries.

It is clear that financial resources will be at a premium for the Partnership during the next few years. However the Partnership has an excellent record of raising extra funds. The BVC Trust is increasing income generation year by year and volunteer input continues to rise so that the BVCP is highly cost effective in the delivery of public services. Continuing adequate core funding from the partners is vital if opportunities available through grants and project funding are to be realised.

Opportunities for new income streams for the Partnership need to be sought. The changing emphasis to the urban rural fringe nature of the Valley and the role that it can play in promoting health, community and education may provide new avenues for funding, both directly from local authority partners and external grants, for instance site management for SANGs or involvement in wardening the Thames Basin SPA. If this does happen it must be to support and not detract from the core business of landscape improvement in the defined strategy area.

If the Partnership does move towards access-related projects it is probable the Blackwater Valley Countryside Trust may want to focus on projects to benefit the Valley's countryside. It will be important for the Trust to retain involvement in access projects where funds are not normally available to local authorities e.g. charitable contributions from local companies.

Changes to the farming support grants were introduced in 2005. The intention is to move subsidies away from production and so help support other environmental objectives. The impact of the changes on the Valley are yet to be seen but could affect the more urban fringe areas which are horse grazed as well as the lower Valley which is still dominated by agriculture.

4.3.3. Statutory Duty to Conserve Biodiversity

There is now a statutory duty under Section 40 [1] of the *Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006* for every public authority to have regard to the purpose of conserving biodiversity.

One of the ways authorities can meet this duty is the implementation of Biodiversity Action Plans (BAPs). The UK Biodiversity Action Planning process

has put in place a structured approach to identifying species and habitats requiring action. A review in 2007 increased the number of national priority species that occur in the Blackwater Valley and also added new habitats and revised some existing habitat definitions. There are now 11 national BAP priority habitats, and at least 35 national BAP priority species present in the Valley. (Details are given in Appendix 3 and Appendix 4.)

Local BAPs have been prepared for Surrey, Hampshire, Berkshire, Wokingham, Rushmoor and Bracknell Forest. The South East Biodiversity Strategy has identified the Blackwater Valley as one of the Biodiversity Opportunity Areas (BOA), aiming for landscape scale conservation projects. The three counties have separate BOA statements and targets .

The catchment based approach of The Loddon Catchment Strategy gets around problems created by political boundaries. Unfortunately this pre-dates the national revision of BAP targets and the advent of Biodiversity Opportunity Areas. This is currently under review to reflect changes as well as the better information on habitat occurrence now available. The Loddon Strategy lists Otter and Water Vole together with wild birds and bats as significant target species for the catchment, these are unlikely to change.

Achieving the given targets will be challenging, for instance: where to find locations to create new habitat without impinging on other users; how to secure the establishment of Otters back to the Valley without creating conflicts with the angling community; or how to control invasive alien species. However it is clear the Valley can make a major contribution towards the national, regional and local BAP targets especially for aquatic and wetland habitats and species.

The work of the BVCP with its role in direct land management of publicly owned sites, links to private landowners and mineral restoration schemes, support for local conservation groups and valley-wide biodiversity projects helps the partner authorities meet their statutory duty. National Indicator 197 - the management of Local Wildlife Sites - introduced a means of assessing an authorities' performance for conservation, the state of Local Wildlife Sites throughout the Valley can be used to indicate BVCP success although work to link the designated sites is equally important.

4.3.4. Statutory Duty to Improve Access

The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 introduced a duty on local authorities to prepare a Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) and form Local Access Forums, composed of representatives of interested parties, to discuss issues and advise on improvements.

There are four ROWIPs relevant to the Valley, for Surrey, Hampshire, Wokingham and Bracknell Forest, each with an associated Local Access Forum. They all have taken a broad approach looking at wider countryside access issues and not being limited to Rights of Way. The access issues around the Thames Basin Heaths SPA and the plan to provide SANG clearly provides an opportunity for the local authorities in the Valley to increase countryside access provision..

The BVCP has a large role in enabling the local authorities meet their duties to improve access through the provision of SANG in the Valley, new access upon

quarry restoration, the completion and maintenance of the BV path, and provision of information to users.

Specific actions from the ROWIPs relevant to the Valley have been incorporated into this Strategy. The BVCP will need to maintain liaison with all four forums so that work in the Valley meets their aspirations and to ensure co ordination of projects across the Valley.

4.3.5. National & Regional Planning Policies

The statutory planning system is undergoing a modernisation programme. This is taking longer to implement than originally planned as guidance has developed during the process requiring many early documents to be revised.

The new system was envisaged as being based on national Planning Policy Statements (PPS), and a Regional Plan. Counties would prepare Minerals and Waste Development Frameworks and local councils Local Development Frameworks (LDFs). The Development Frameworks were themselves to be comprised of a bundle of documents that could be updated individually. It was intended that the Development Frameworks would be specific to their local areas and not include policies on issues addressed with the national and regional plans.

With a change of government in May 2010, planning came within the remit of the Department of Communities and Local Government. The SE Regional Plan was swiftly revoked and the national PPS's (and their predecessors Planning Policy Guidance [PPG's]), already under review by the previous government, are being looked at afresh.

Spatial planning has a great deal of uncertainty at the moment. All issues addressed in the national PPS's and the Regional Plan are still relevant, policies on such things as housing numbers are now expected to be made at the local level but it is unclear how much guidance or incentives will be made nationally.

The South East Plan had contained a specific policy about the wider Blackwater Valley area, which refers to the need for integrated planning focussing on improvements to the quality of the built and natural environments.

The SE Plan also contained policies on Landscape and Countryside Management, Countryside Access and Rights of Way Management, Sustainable Water Resource Groundwater and River Quality Management, Sustainable Flood Risk Management, Conservation and Improvement of Biodiversity, Strategic Gaps and Managing the Urban Rural Fringe. All of these are relevant to the work of the BVCP, loss of the regional policies which were deliberately not repeated in LDFs will have led to gaps in policy

It is too soon to see how all this will affect policies and time scales for the Local Development Frameworks being prepared by the Blackwater Valley councils, but a number have delayed publication or consultation on documents whilst they consider their position.

Currently national documents still relevant for planning in the Valley include:-

PPS 1. Delivering Sustainable Development

PPS 7. Sustainable Development in Rural Areas

PPS 9. Biodiversity and Geological Conservation.

This includes the recommendation that local authorities' plans should aim to avoid or repair fragmentation of habitats giving the example of extending open space and access along rivers in urban areas.

PPS 25. Development and Flood Risk.

Directing planning authorities to prevent development in the functional floodplain.

*PPG 17. Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation**MPS 1. Planning and Minerals**MPS 2. Controlling and Mitigating the Environmental Effects of Mineral Extraction in England.*

A PPS, Planning for a Natural and Healthy Environment is under preparation dealing with the natural environment, green infrastructure, open space, sport, recreation and play. This will replace PPS9, PPG17 and parts of PPS 7.

4.3.6. Local Planning Policies

Just two of the Blackwater Valley councils, Bracknell Forest and Wokingham Borough, have an adopted Local Development Framework Core Strategy. The other core strategies are in various stages of preparation with planning policies currently in force being those saved policies contained in the existing Local Plans.

Most of the local plans contained specific Blackwater Valley policies usually referring to Strategic Gap or landscape and recreational improvement projects. The adopted and emerging Local Development Frameworks have a more mixed approach to the Blackwater Valley, some have policies specifically referring to a Blackwater Valley Strategic Gap, (e.g. Guildford and Hart), some refer to the Valley as a gap defined in other documents (e.g. Bracknell Forest), others rely on more general Countryside policies to restrict inappropriate development but do refer to this Blackwater Valley Countryside Strategy (e.g. Surrey Heath and Rushmoor). The variation in approach will inevitably lead to a lack of coherence between authorities. This Strategy with the mapped Blackwater Valley area and Appendix 7 General Policies for the Blackwater Valley will go some way to providing a unified approach.

One of the main planning issues for the Blackwater Valley councils has been mitigating damage to the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area that may be caused by increased house building leading to rising population levels. Together the councils have agreed the Thames Basin Heaths SPA Delivery Framework and individual authorities have produced avoidance strategies for their own areas. (See para. 4.2.1.)

4.4. Infrastructure

4.4.1. Water

The Environment Agency's Thames Catchment Flood Management Plan has classified the Upper and Middle Blackwater as within 'expanding towns in floodplain locations' these are described as: "*Areas of low, moderate or high flood risk where we are already managing the flood risk effectively but where we*

may need to take further actions to keep pace with climate change.”

The urban nature of the upper catchment makes the River Blackwater prone to flash flooding. Development has already taken place in the floodplain especially above Blackwater, roads and properties are occasionally affected in flood conditions. Non-urbanised land in the lower catchment is frequently flooded. Predictions are for increased flood events, so there is a need to protect the floodplain and increase its capacity especially in the urbanised areas.

The Environment Agency wish to see the predicted new developments cater for potential flooding avoiding the need to manage flooding after the development has been built, and also want rivers to be part of the urban landscape not hidden in culverts, reverting to natural conditions where possible.

The Environment Agency has defined a Water Resource Management Unit (WRMU) for the River Blackwater that includes the surface and groundwater of the river and its tributaries down to the confluence with the River Whitewater. The combined rivers flow into the River Loddon and eventually to the Thames. In the Blackwater WRMU there are 15 abstraction licences, however the bulk of water used by the domestic and industrial users of the Blackwater Valley towns is extracted from the River Thames. Once used, water is discharged into the River Blackwater via seven sewage treatment works. In summer months 74% of flow is treated effluent, greatly increasing the flow of the river above natural levels.

The Blackwater WRMU has been assessed as ‘no water available’ to protect flows in the River Thames. Any new consumptive abstraction licences would be subject to conditions preventing abstraction during low flows in the Thames. Climate change is predicted to make low summer flows more likely so restricting abstraction. Mineral workings are major abstractors in the Blackwater WRMU but as they return water to the River they are non-consumptive and unlikely to be restricted by low flows. The Basingstoke Canal is affected by low water levels especially in summer, it is increasingly unlikely to get new abstraction from the Blackwater. There is concern that the Blackwater Valley SSSI is deteriorating due to drying out.

4.4.2. Mineral Extraction

The active extraction sites at Badshot Lea and Eversley are likely to be exhausted and restoration completed during the strategy period. Both sites have restoration plans aimed at landscape and nature conservation with provision for some public access. Operators at both sites have expressed a desire to submit alterations to permitted restoration plans. This is not unusual as factors often change during the extended period of operation of mineral sites. It is important that the gains originally envisaged by the approved restoration plans are achieved, even if details vary, and that the operating plant is removed and not converted into permanent industrial areas.

The operation at Eversley/Finchampstead should see a major c.100ha extension to the Moor Green Lakes Nature Reserve. This could be a regionally important facility and opportunity should be sought to provide appropriate visitor facilities to service it. The site at Badshot Lea is smaller but still significant in the Valley context. Operators for both sites are considering future management

arrangements and considering options for this to be community led.

A small amount of unworked mineral deposits remain in both the north and south of the Valley. The area at Monkton Lane, Farnham identified as holding mineral reserves has since been given planning permission for a sports complex and so is unlikely to be worked. Extracting deposits at Aldershot Park would lead to the loss of well used sports fields. At Eversley a significant part of the remaining identified mineral resource is designated a Local Wildlife Site and there are other practical constraints which may prevent the site being worked. It is possible mineral extraction in the Valley will cease in the next few years.

4.4.3. Transport and Services

The nature of the Valley, a linear green gap linking urban areas, makes it highly attractive as a site for communication, transport and other essential urban infrastructure. Existing examples include the Blackwater Valley Road, railways, power lines, sewers and gas pipes. Providing a location for this infrastructure is one of, if not, the most valuable roles of the Valley, preventing disruption to the urban areas during maintenance and construction.

The Valley is crossed by three railway lines and proposals to improve connectivity have been considered over many years. Land has been earmarked for this but with no immediate prospect of it going ahead.

The infrastructure is invariably damaging to the Valley's landscape, ecology and recreational value, and mitigation needs to be in place for new schemes. The landscaping alongside the Blackwater Valley Road sets a good example of this and it is essential this is managed effectively in the long term.

4.4.4. Green Space

The value of urban green space is increasingly recognised and recent research shows the value in economic terms is highly significant.

Natural England recommends that all urban residents should have easy access to nature. In their Accessible Natural Greenspace Standard (ANGSt) model they recommended minimum provision for at least 2ha of accessible natural greenspace per 1,000 population, with a tiered system of sites, larger sites having a wider catchment. (See Appendix 5.)

A recent report by The Faculty for Public Health² reiterated the importance of green space and its organised use for mental and physical wellbeing.

The Woodland Trust³ showed urban green space had significant value not just for health benefits, but for air quality, flood control, business investment and biodiversity; the value of green space for health care alone was estimated at £2.1 billion nationally.

The concept has been recognised with the term Ecosystem Services and the open spaces are being identified in planning documents as Green Infrastructure. A Green Infrastructure study of the wider Blackwater Valley Authorities' area is currently being carried out by Natural England.

² *Great Outdoors: How Our Natural Health Service Uses Green Space to Improve Wellbeing.* Faculty of Public Health 2010

³ *Space For People.* Woodland Trust 2004

The Green Flag scheme run by CABI Space to recognise parks that are managed to a high standard is expanding.

There is increasing expectation that facilities will cater for all abilities. Whilst disabled users appreciate this can be difficult to achieve in a countryside environment, technology and equipment is continually being improved for countryside access.

Recent higher density and housing and loss of private gardens due to infill developments has led to increasing demand for community gardens and allotments. Requests for facilities within mineral sites will compromise existing restoration plans.

4.5. Ecological Factors

4.5.1. Landscape

The Valley's landscape is dynamic, and rapidly changing. The vision of the 1976 Strategy of a Valley with more trees and water has largely been realised. Planned measures such as restoration of gravel working and the mitigation measures for the BVR have introduced carefully thought out elements to the landscape. Many trees have self set on unmanaged grasslands and the margins of lakes, increasing the tree cover in places to a level it restricts views and is detrimental to the site's recreational use or wildlife value. More harmful to landscape are the cumulative effects of the urban fringe such as roadside signs and telephone masts. Horse grazing has largely replaced agriculture as a use of pasture in many areas. Well managed horse grazing can preserve the countryside character but frequently poor management and overstocking has caused landscape degradation. The aim to increase recreational use of the Valley can also be detrimental bringing discordant features e.g. hard surfaced tracks, changing rooms, stables, boat storage compounds, interpretation signs etc.

To enable the public to appreciate the Valley it is important to prevent the open riverside areas being hidden behind a screen of trees. Views, especially of water and open grasslands, need to be secured. Maintaining the countryside character of the Valley is crucial and there is a need to resist the area taking on the appearance of an urban park.

In the Countryside Agency's national Landscape Character Assessment the Valley largely falls into the Thames Basin Heath Character Area. This area is typified by open heathlands which are dissected by river valleys that have wide grazed floodplains, drainage ditches, restored gravel workings and lush wetland vegetation. Cultivated farmland and pasture is typically enclosed within small and irregularly-shaped fields divided by hedgerows, with small areas of wood and heath heavily used for horse grazing.

South of Aldershot the strategy area forms the westernmost tip of the Thames Valley Lowlands Character Area as it rises to the North Downs Character Area.

Most partner authorities have carried out more detailed Landscape Character Assessments that mostly identify the Valley as a distinct zone. These national and local assessments should form the basis for the continuing evolution of the Valley's landscape.

4.5.2. Biological Change

Regardless of the Biodiversity Action Plans, biological changes are occurring in the Valley, some possibly as a result of climate change. These changes are hard to control and may have a detrimental impact upon the Valley's characteristic habitats and landscape. Their potential impacts need to be factored in and projects identified that will be effective in preventing or mitigating the problems. Biological changes known to be currently acting include:-

- The recent arrival of a number of phytophthora fungal diseases in the UK. Many Alder are already suffering in the Valley and Acute Oak Decline is of national concern. The death of Alder trees is especially worrying as they comprise a high proportion of the Valley's typical landscape. Potentially phytophthora disease could kill a high proportion of trees in the Valley and substantially alter its landscape. Making the dead trees safe could prove costly.
- The continuing spread of alien plants, the most problematic being: New Zealand Pygmy-weed *Crassula helmsii*, which is dominating many local ponds; Himalayan Balsam *Impatiens glandulifera*, which is dominant in many shady wet areas; Japanese Knotweed *Fallopia japonica* is established in places and may be spreading.
- The establishment of alien animal species. American Mink *Mustella vison* is established in the Valley and is probably the main cause of the disappearance of Water Voles *Arvicola terrestris* and breeding failure of water birds. Signal Crayfish *Pacifastacus leniusculus* are now established in the River and many still waters and are the cause of extinction of native White-clawed Crayfish *Austropotamobius pallipes* and possibly other invertebrate species.
- The coarsening of vegetation, through nutrient enrichment and difficulties in management especially preventing grazing. The traditional meadow and open stream-side vegetation is being overtaken by unwelcome species such as trees, nettles and rank grasses even in nature reserves. The problem is often made worse by fencing pathways.
- Changing hydrology affecting the floral communities i.e. drying of fields in the Blackwater Valley SSSI leading to loss of the rarer species.

4.5.3. Climate Change

Predictions are that the South East will experience warmer weather, drier summers and wetter winters. Wetter winters could lead to an increased need to deal with flooding. Drier summers could lead to increasing demand for outdoor recreation both in numbers and extended season. Hotter and drier summers could lead to increased blue-green algal blooms in water bodies causing fish deaths and closure of recreational water bodies. The overall effect of climate change will probably lead to changes in species and habitats that can survive in the Valley. This makes it essential to manage wildlife at a landscape level. The better the linkages between habitats, both within the Valley and the wider region, the easier species will be able to move to adapt to change.

Development and promotion of the Valley's paths and tracks for sustainable transport use will contribute to the national aim to reduce carbon emissions that

are the cause of global warming.

4.6. Summary of Factors

The impact of the factors identified in this section have been assessed against the five Strategy Aims, see Table 1. Impact of Factors. This assessment summarises the impact each factor is having, or is predicted to have on sites and work topics in the Strategic Area.

Some factors are entirely negative others all positive, but most have both positive and negative impacts. The overall impact is predicted to be slightly negative with all aims except Community Empowerment having more negative than positive outcomes. Clearly the factors will not have equal impact and the loss of funding due to the downturn in the economy could be the most influential factor affecting the work of the BVCP and this has entirely negative outcomes.

Another major factor is the need to mitigate potential harm to the Thames Basin Heaths SPA, as the Blackwater Valley towns are expected to be a focus for house building. The combination of these factors is predicted to influence BVCP work toward the provision and maintenance of SANG.

Table 1. Impact of Factors

	Landscape	Recreation	Biodiversity	River	Community
Birds Directive - utilising the Blackwater Valley for SANG with increased site infrastructure	-?	+	-?		+
Water Framework Directive - need for rivers to be 'good' quality	+		+	+	
Water Framework Directive - extended timescale for river quality improvements			-	-	
Urban Waste Water Directive - need to reduce eutrophication of river			+	+	
Government policy - public spending cut backs	-	-	-	-	-
Government policy - Big Society					?
Economy - less sponsorship and grant monies available	-	-	-	-	-
Economy - less development and associated opportunities	+	-	-	-	
Economy - sites held for hope value	-	-	+		
Statutory duty for conservation - need for better site management raised by NI 197 and SSSI targets		-?	+		+
Statutory duty for conservation - BAPs			+	+	+
Statutory duty for increasing access	-	+	-	-?	+
Planning - loss of SE plan decision at local level on housing numbers etc	+?		-?		+
Planning - loss of strategic gap	-				
Water - need for flood mitigation, increased channel works, weed cutting and increased floodplain area	+	-	?	+?	
Water - limits on abstraction		-	+	+	
Minerals - completion of restoration and opening for use	+	+	+		
Minerals - involvement of community in future management and final restoration		+	+		+
Minerals - future extraction unlikely	+	-	-	+	-
Transport - improvement projects	-	-	-	-	
Green space - Green Flag		+			+
Green space - achieving 'Access for All'	-	+			+
Green space - demand for allotments	-	+	-		+
Landscape - horse keeping	-	+	?		
Landscape - fragmentation and small size of habitat units	-		-		
Biological change	-		-	-	
Climate change		+	-	-	

+ overall trend positive. **-** overall trend negative. **?** impact uncertain

5. Areas with Actions

This section highlights the spatial strategy for the Valley laid out in 12 Geographic Area plus a 13th section for actions outside the strategy area.

Actions have been spilt into three categories:-

- Management Needs - sustaining the annual ongoing needs that are already in place.
- Projects - the key actions for the next five years. Agreements and funding will need to be secured if these are to progress.
- Proposals - the long-term improvements to the Valley. These often rely on opportunities arising that are outside the control of the BVCP such as land ownership agreements, funding or planning coming together.

Each action has been allocated to the BVCP (the core staff team) or an individual partner as lead organisation. BVCP will keep an overview of actions allocated to individual partners to remind them, if necessary, of opportunities and report back to the other partners on progress.

Undoubtedly some opportunities not foreseen will arise that will help meet the vision for the Valley and a flexible approach to seize these opportunities is required.

The future success of the Strategy will depend upon the ability of all partners to think flexibly and seize opportunities beyond the strict confines of the defined Strategy Area when necessary, and also beyond county and district boundaries.

Figure 2. Location of Geographic Areas

Figure 3. Legend to Proposals Maps

5.1. Area 1: Rowhill Copse to Badshot Lea

The source of the River Blackwater lies within Rowhill Copse, an ancient species-rich woodland. Rowhill has a field centre and the centre and reserve are managed by a volunteer society, with emphasis on maintaining traditional woodland skills, easy access and education.

The area around Badshot Lea was once dominated by horticultural nurseries, some are still active but others are now abandoned. Large sections of landscape in this area show signs of urban fringe degradation of dilapidated fencing, unmanaged hedgerows and poor quality stock shelters.

Many horses are kept in the area including a riding school, but bridleways are limited.

An area west of Badshot Lea off Monkton Lane has planning permission for a private sports centre and playing fields for Farnham Rugby Club.

Waverley Borough Council have identified extensive areas of land south and west of Badshot Lea for potential housing development. If this does go ahead it will create demand for nearby SANG as well as general recreational facilities.

The management needs for this area are:

1. Support Rowhill Nature Reserve Society to maintain the Reserve and its visitor and educational facilities. **(RBC, BVCP)**
2. Support 'Friends of Brickfields' to manage Brickfields Country Park. **(BVCP, RBC)**
3. Continue habitat improvements and management at Weybourne Nature Area. **(WaBC)**

The projects planned in the next five years for this area are:

4. Negotiate with landowners to extend roadside landscape and habitat improvements concentrating on grasslands, hedgerows and woodlands. **(BVCP, SCC)**
5. Improve signage at the start of the BV Path. **(RBC, BVCP)**
6. Seek improved access and wildlife habitat at Monkton Lane when developed. **(WaBC, BVCP)**
7. Decide if the area is required for house building, integrate recreation and biodiversity into proposals, identify SANGs. **(WaBC)**

The long-term proposals for this area are:

8. Improve bridleway network, linking to Area 2. **(BVCP)**
9. Improve routing of BV Path at Badshot Lea Lakes or Brook Avenue. **(RBC, WaBC)**
10. Seek footpath and cycleway link to Farnham Park. **(BVCP, WaBC)**

Figure 4. Area 1 Proposals Map

5.2. Area 2: Badshot Lea to Ash Road

Views from the busy road network on the higher ground to the south make this area an important gateway to the Valley and the Blackwater Valley towns generally. Farnham Quarry is a dominant feature as it is highly visible from the busy A31, as are the fields rising to the Hogs Back. Landscaping around the Blackwater Valley Relief Road is well established, roadside trees and shrubs now require intensive management as do the areas of floristically-rich chalk grassland.

Gravel extraction at Farnham Quarry is due to be completed by 2012. This is an important site for landscape. Restoration will be to grassland, woodland and scrub. Public access will be encouraged close to the River but nature conservation will take precedence further away.

Tongham Pool has remained unmanaged since being dug. It has developed a good ecological value and is well used by local walkers. Efforts continue to bring this site into positive management with proposals for use as SANG currently being pursued.

Rushmoor Borough Council are seeking to develop a sports academy at Aldershot Park, which will increase the recreational value of the site but require careful design to integrate the built elements into the landscape.

The existing sites of Aldershot Park and Tongham Wood, together with the proposed access sites of Tongham Pool and Farnham Quarry, will form a large block of access land and need to be managed as a co-ordinated unit. This could potentially be extended south of the A31/A331 if opportunities arise.

Outline planning permission exists for a roadside service station adjacent to the A331/A31 interchange, this is at the centre of the access block and will be a major intrusion into the Valley, it requires careful landscaping.

The management needs for this area are:

1. Manage the roadside landscaping. **(SCC, BVCP)**
2. Continue management at Tongham Wood, support local group. **(SCC, BVCP)**

The projects planned in the next five years for this area are:

3. Negotiate with landowners to extend roadside landscape and habitat improvements concentrating on grasslands, hedgerows and woodlands. **(BVCP, SCC)**
4. Ensure the restoration and arrangements for long-term management of Farnham Quarry to enhance landscape, public access, wildlife habitats and improve flood defences. **(SCC)**
5. Improve surfacing of BV Path north and west of river. **(BVCP)**
6. Seek improved route of BV Path within Farnham Quarry on restoration. **(SCC)**
7. Bring Tongham Pool into management as SANG. **(SCC, GBC, RBC, BVCP)**

The long-term proposals for this area are:

8. Improve bridleway network, linking to Area 1. **(BVCP)**
9. Minimise impact of proposed service station on the landscape and wildlife corridor. **(GBC)**
10. Integrate proposed sports academy at Aldershot Park into the landscape. **(RBC)**
11. Expand area of Tongham Wood. **(BVCP)**

Figure 5. Area 2 Proposals Map

5.3. Area 3: Ash Road to Lakeside Road

This section contains important water recreation and conservation areas in the northern part (Willow Park, the Basingstoke Canal, Spring Lakes and Lakeside Park LNR). The Valley is relatively narrow here and is dominated by the Blackwater Valley Road. Lakeside Park and Shawfield Meadows contain excellent wildlife habitat.

The BV Path is complete to multi-user standard through here although the crossing of Ash Road is poor. Guildford BC own Rowan Fields an area for informal recreation.

Vehicle movements over the A331 from the east are limited restricting access to Shawfield Lake for anglers.

Spring Lakes and Willow Way are day ticket fisheries, both are overlooked from the canal aqueduct. Management is intense creating an open character with few trees or marginal vegetation to the fished lakes. The angling sites supports some wildlife e.g. bats, but associated buildings and signage are detrimental to the overall landscape value. An area in Spring Lakes is being used as a temporary works depot adding to the problem.

Gold Farm is a long-standing issue having permission for industrial storage, it is currently being used for soil and rubble processing, creating noise, traffic and visual problems.

The management needs for this area are:

1. Manage Lakeside Park as SANG to maximise its potential for informal recreation and maintain its nature conservation value. **(GBC)**
2. Manage the BVR landscaping to provide access and maximise wildlife and landscape value. **(SCC, BVCP)**
3. Manage Rowan Fields for access. **(GBC)**
4. Manage Ash Meadows. **(APC)**

The projects planned in the next five years for this area are:

5. Dedicate BV Path as public footpath retaining permissive cycle use. **(HCC, SCC)**
6. Meadow habitat improvements at Rowan Fields. **(BVCP, GBC)**
7. Improve safety at BV Path crossing of Ash Road. **(HCC)**

The long-term proposals for this area are:

8. Seek use for Gold Farm that enhances its landscape and complements adjacent land uses. **(RBC)**
9. Improve access and car parking to Shawfield Lake for anglers. **(SCC, BVCP)**

Figure 6. Area 3 Proposals Map

5.4. Area 4: Lakeside Road to Lynchford Road

The lakes at the northern end of this section are typical of the older lakes in the Valley, used for angling with well wooded surrounds valuable for recreation, landscape and ecology. In the past most of the southern end has been used for refuse disposal sites, but this is no longer obvious. Sites have been restored producing a distinct 'hilly' landscape of scattered tree cover over grasslands with an increasingly valuable wildlife value.

Hollybush Lakes, Hollybush Hill, Hollybush Alder Carr and Camp Farm Lake have Local Wildlife Site status.

The BVCP is based at Ash Lock depot shared with the Basingstoke Canal Authority. The site is not ideal for BVCP as it has no visitor facilities and the Canal Authority wish to make more intensive use of it which may conflict with BVCP use.

The former processing plant in the Hollybush Lakes complex is now disused and an eyesore. Large-scale dumping of rubble here has compromised the floodplain.

Aldershot Stubs industrial site is visibly and audibly intrusive. A line of mature Oaks provide important screening but are gradually dying.

The BVR severs the area in the southern part. However the BV Path has been provided along the entire length of this section and provides a pleasant riverside walk. The path is suitable for multi-user standard.

Hollybush Lakes and Chalk Farm provide club fishing. All land to the west of the BVR is owned by the army garrison, it has public access but is not promoted.

The Aldershot Urban Extension is planned to increase the size of Aldershot by 4,500 dwellings. Even though the developers intend to provide SANG on land outside the Valley it is inevitable that with such a large population increase so close to the Valley demand for use will increase.

The management needs for this area are:

1. Manage Hollybush Hill. **(BVCP, RBC)**
2. Manage Hollybush Park. **(BVCP, GBC)**
3. Manage BVR landscaping. **(BVCP, SCC)**

The projects planned in the next five years for this area are:

4. Dedicate BV Path as public footpath retaining permissive cycle use. **(HCC, SCC)**
5. Improve screening of Aldershot Stubs backyard industry site from west and east. **(HCC, RBC)**
6. Improve safety at BV Path crossing of Lakeside Road. **(HCC)**

The long-term proposals for this area are:

7. Improve Ash Lock for canal depot use and appearance. **(HCC)**
8. Find positive use for land at the Hollybush Lakes disused processing plant. Ensure angling use and floodplain around the Lakes are maintained and wildlife and landscape value enhanced following any developments. **(BVCP, RBC)**

Figure 7. Area 4 Proposals Map

5.5. Area 5: Lynchford Road to Coleford Bridge Road

The majority of this section has a rural feel despite its urban fringe location. Two large lakes and a smaller one create a substantial amount of water and dominate the area but they are all but invisible due to the surrounding trees. The narrow strip of woodland to the west of the BVR forms an important buffer between the road and residential areas. The majority of these trees are Alder, with many dying from disease.

Grasslands in the area are used for low intensity grazing, which has helped preserve the landscape and pastoral feel. Some fields have been ungrazed for a number of years and management of these will determine the future landscape.

The BV Path is complete through this entire section and is multi-user standard. The path is currently managed on behalf of HCC by BVCP, along with the roadside landscaping. For the most part this forms a pleasant route, however the southern section has to utilise the verge of the very busy BVR and needs an alternative location.

In the south of this section Snaky Lane Wildlife Area is managed as a community wildlife area by local residents.

Lynchford Lane Industrial Estate lies either side of the River and is very intrusive and visible from the BVR. Ecological and landscape improvements should be sought in any redevelopments.

Mytchett Mere and its surrounds has been recognised as a Local Wildlife Site, but the boundaries need reviewing after gravel extraction. This site has planning permission for commercial recreational use including a golf driving range, although built this has never been opened.

The area is mostly in private ownership but has good potential for SANG if brought into public management.

The management needs for this area are:

1. Ensure management of Snaky Lane Wildlife Area by supporting community group. **(GBC, BVCP)**
2. Manage BVR landscape as linear nature area with public access. **(BVCP, HCC)**
3. Manage Alder woodlands, plant other species to retain wooded landscape if Alders suffer die back. **(BVCP)**

The projects planned in the next five years for this area are:

4. Negotiate with landowners to extend roadside landscape and habitat improvements concentrating on grasslands, hedgerows and woodlands. **(BVCP, HCC)**
5. Dedicate BV Path as public footpath retaining permissive cycle use. **(HCC, SCC)**
6. Review boundaries of Mytchett Mere Local Wildlife Site. **(SCC)**

The long-term proposals for this area are:

7. Improve route of Blackwater Valley Path away from verge of A331, possible link via Meadow Close. **(BVCP)**
8. Negotiate with landowners to dedicate SANG or if remaining in private ownership opportunities to increase public access or recreational use are taken. **(SHBC, BVCP)**
9. Seek habitat and landscape improvements to Lynchford Lane Industrial Estate when opportunities arise. **(RBC, GBC, EA)**

Figure 8. Area 5 Proposals Map

5.6. Area 6: Coleford Bridge Road to Frimley Bridges

This whole section has landscape formed by mineral extraction. The BVR is also a dominating influence. Despite this views of the mature lakes and wetlands are limited by the surrounding young woodland.

As in Area 5 the narrow strip of land to the west of the BVR forms an important buffer between the road and residential areas, access is permitted but poor. The old station sidings have recently changed ownership and are in the process of being cleared leading to loss of screening. A small area of land north of Coleford Bridge remains semi derelict after temporary use as a site depot during road construction.

The BV Path is complete and is very well used for both leisure and commuting on foot and by bike. The cross valley bridleway is very well used, even if not by horse riders, its crossing over the railway are of concern as potentially dangerous.

Coleford Meadow is designated a Local Wildlife Site for its grassland flora but is in private ownership and not managed for wildlife.

The Quays Lake is used for recreation with water skiing, wake boarding, fishing and swimming. A restaurant overlooking the lake makes it a particularly popular venue. The land around the lake is the only site in the Valley classed as Open Access under the CROW Act 2000 but in practice is not accessible .

Frimley Hatches has four angling lakes plus lakes, swamp and reedbed of conservation importance. Frimley Bridge Lake was restored for nature conservation it is shallow with reed fringes for conservation. The southernmost lake was well used for informal access before being fenced off. Anglers have difficulty finding places to park which is causing problems in surrounding streets. A management plan has been written but requires implementing to co-ordinate angling, access and ecological interest on the site.

The management needs for this area are:

1. Manage BVR landscaping. **(HCC, BVCP)**

The projects planned in the next five years for this area are:

2. Improve safety of railway crossing. **(HCC)**
3. Sort out status of open access land at The Quays. **(SCC)**
4. Dedicate BV Path as public footpath retaining permissive cycle use. **(HCC, SCC)**
5. Negotiate with landowner of Frimley Hatches and implement a management plan to integrate angling with conservation and to resolve car parking / public access issues. **(SCC, HCC, BVCP)**
6. Negotiate with landowner of old sidings to retain screening. **(RBC, BVCP)**
7. Habitat and path surface improvements to west of BVR. **(HCC, BVCP)**

The long-term proposals for this area are:

8. Bring unused land north of Coleford Bridge into positive use. **(BVCP, RBC)**
9. Improve BV Path crossing of road at Frimley. **(SCC, SHBC, BVCP)**

Figure 9. Area 6 Proposals Map

5.7. Area 7: Frimley Bridges to A30

The main landscape elements are the large riverside fields with surrounding trees. Small semi-mature Oak woodlands are important features in the north and south, whilst south of the M3 the River and BV Path go through the modern landscape of Frimley Business Park.

The BV Path is complete through here, with the section on Hawley Meadows being a dedicated Right of Way. There are good stocks of fish in the river here and the angling rights are leased to a local club.

Blackwater Park is a small area of woodland, together with the open fields of Hawley Meadows it is being considered as a SANG, although negotiations between landowners and the three planning authorities who would use it are not complete.

A new footbridge from the car park off the A331 gives access to the site and use is already growing. The fields south of Cove Brook are mostly designated as a Local Wildlife Site for their meadow flora. Land to the north of Cove Brook was lowered to form an important and often used flood storage area. This destroyed its floral interest and makes use of the path difficult in winter. The continuing programme of traditional management by grazing is starting to show results especially in restoring the meadow flora. Tree planting around Hawley Meadows is now mature enough to screen the surrounding housing and industrial areas from the path, but conversely it blocks views across the meadows from the road itself. Future management will need to be careful to balance increasing usage for SANG with ecological improvement.

Watchmoor Reserve provides a small wooded open access area with low key usage.

Land west of the railway is open pasture, important as they provide pleasant views towards Hawley Park.

The management needs for this area are:

1. Manage Hawley Meadows to agreed plan. **(HCC, BVCP)**
2. Manage Blackwater Park to agreed plan. **(SHBC)**
3. Manage Watchmoor Reserve to maximise access and conservation. **(SHBC)**

The projects planned in the next five years for this area are:

4. Designate Hawley Meadows and Blackwater Park as SANG. **(BVCP, HCC, SHBC, HDC, RBC)**
5. Improve BV Path surface to allow all season use. **(BVCP)**
6. Floodplain and grassland habitat improvement project. **(BVCP)**

The long-term proposals for this area are:

7. Link BV Path to Cove Brook Greenway. **(RBC)**

Figure 10. Area 7 Proposals Map

5.8. Area 8: A30 to Swan Lane

This section is grassland with small woodlands and hedgerows but all confined within an urban envelope. Much of the land is designated as the Blackwater Valley SSSI. Its ecological value for grassland and wet woodland needs to be retained. Land to the north-east of the railway line is owned and managed by local authorities.

Shepherd Meadows is well managed for nature conservation (with grazing and hay making) and informal recreation.

Sandhurst Recreation Ground is very heavily used with a variety of outdoor facilities and sports pitches. The Recreation Ground jointly with Shepherd Meadows holds Green Flag status.

Land to the south of the railway (Darby Green Meadows) is part rough grazed and part un-managed. Fencing is in a poor condition, an incongruous two metre high wire netting fence bisects the old field pattern with a large sewage treatment works fronting Swan Lane. Despite ancient field boundaries the landscape quality is poor and in need of improvement.

The BV Path in this section is complete although undedicated to the south of the railway. The crossing of the busy A30 is poor.

The management needs for this area are:

1. Manage Sandhurst Memorial Park and Shepherd Meadows to retain Green Flag. **(BFBC, STC, BVCP)**
2. Manage Blackwater Valley SSSI to maintain 'favourable' status. **(BFBC, BVCP)**

The projects planned in the next five years for this area are:

3. Improve BV Path crossing of A30. **(BVCP)**
4. Upgrade BV Path to multi-user status between A30 and Sandhurst Recreation Ground. **(BFBC, STC, BVCP)**
5. Dedicate section of BV Path as public footpath across Blackwater Fields. **(BVCP, HCC, BHTC)**

The long-term proposals for this area are:

6. Bring land at Darby Green Meadows into sympathetic ownership and management to retain ecological and landscape value. **(EN, BVCP, HDC)**
7. Dedicate BV Path as a public footpath across Darby Green Meadows. **(BVCP, HCC)**

Figure 11. Area 8 Proposals Map

5.9. Area 9: Swan Lane to Mill Lane

The landscape of this section is dominated by older gravel workings surrounded by mature trees and secondary woodland. Views from outside give the impression of woodland not water. This wooded nature gives the sector a rural feel despite the urban areas on either side. This woodland character should be retained.

All the lakes are used for angling, Yateley Lakes are of national renown for the quality of angling they provide. They are also all identified as Local Wildlife Sites, containing rare plants and being valuable for wildfowl and bats. Tri-lakes provides a small animal park and facilities for children's activities.

The BV Path is missing in this section. An informal agreement to route the Blackwater Valley Path through Church Farm on completion of restoration has not yet been implemented. Agreements for the other sections of riverside path are dependent on planning permission already granted being implemented.

Clark's Farm, is now being used as a sustainable waste materials recycling facility and a planning application for this use is under consideration. The local plan envisaged redevelopment for office use with provision for public open space and wildlife habitats on the undeveloped areas. Land east of Sandhurst Road (River Valley) has been unused since restoration of mineral working. Proposals include a mixture of industrial and commercial recreation, but uses are subject to highway constraints.

The potential for recreation in the area has not been fully realised. Achieving good schemes for Clark's Farm and River Valley will be key to securing the vision for this section of the Valley. Priority needs to be given to the completion of the Blackwater Valley Path.

The management needs for this area are:

None identified

The projects planned in the next five years for this area are:

1. Resolve use of land and lakes at Clark's Farm to ensure landscape is enhanced, access and recreational use is maximised including section of BV Path. **(HCC, HDC)**
2. Negotiate with landowner and angling club to secure future of Church Farm for angling and nature conservation including route of BV Path. **(BVCP, BFBC)**

The long-term proposals for this area are:

3. Secure route of BV Path from Derby Green Lane to Sandhurst Road. **(BVCP, HDC)**
4. Secure route of BV Path from Sandhurst Road to Mill Lane. **(BVCP, BFBC)**
5. Resolve use of land and lakes at River Valley, ensure landscape is enhanced, access and recreational use is maximised including section of BV Path and adequate resources for long-term management are secured. **(HDC)**

Figure 12. Area 9 Proposals Map

5.10. Area 10: Mill Lane to Longwater Road

This is the first section of Valley that is not hemmed in by urbanisation on both sides. The town of Yateley is close to the south but on the north side the land retains its traditional landscape of pasture, hedgerows and small woodlands as it rises gently to the wooded Finchampstead Ridges.

The valley floor of this section largely comprises gravel workings, many of which have already been restored, all have finished extraction and restoration is largely complete. The plant site is still active as it serves Fleet Hill Farm Quarry in Area 11.

Moor Green Lakes, Horseshoe Lakes, Blackwater Valley Watersports and Bluebell Wood are all Local Wildlife Sites.

Horseshoe Lake is the main watersport centre for the Valley, offering a wide range of activities specialising in teaching dinghy sailing, windsurfing and canoeing. South of the River lies Blackwater Valley Watersports specialising in powered craft, Blackwater Valley Golf and the playing fields of Sean Deveraux Park.

Moor Green Lakes is managed as a nature reserve particularly for its birdlife. The adjacent Manor Farm Quarry is undergoing extraction and restoration and on completion will add 50ha of reedbed, lakes and grassland to the nature reserve, together with footpaths and bridleways.

The western part of Eversley Quarry has already been restored to provide sports pitches and associated facilities for the Eversley Sports Association. Continuing restoration here will also provide a match fishery. Already this area is one of the most important sections of the Blackwater Valley for organised recreation facilities. When all restorations are completed (c.2015) this value will be significantly enhanced. A visitor centre or similar facility to enable people to make the most of this area is desirable in the long term but there is a need to avoid potential conflicts such as access or noise between the various users and with local residents.

The management needs for this area are:

1. Continue to manage Moor Green Lakes Nature Reserve to a high standard including sustaining the strength of the Moor Green Lakes Group. **(BVCP)**
2. Maintain support to landowners for environmental management. **(NE)**

The projects planned in the next five years for this area are:

3. Extend car park at Moor Green Lakes. **(MGLG)**
4. Ensure restoration of Manor Farm to extend Moor Green Lakes Nature Reserve, ensure improvements to access and car parking are included in scheme. **(BVCP, WoBC)**
5. Ensure restoration of gravel working at Eversley Quarry to approved plan, incorporating angling. **(HCC)**
6. Ensure separate restorations provide complementary improvements to the path and bridleway network, including circular routes. **(BVCP, HCC, WoBC)**
7. Negotiate with mineral operators to agree proposals for long-term management of sites. **(BVCP)**
8. Improve bridleway surface for horse and pedestrian use. **(BFBC)**

The long-term proposals for this area are:

9. Co-ordinate management and access to recreation sites and nature reserves to provide major visitor facility. **(BVCP)**

Figure 13. Area 10 Proposals Map

5.11. Area 11: Longwater Road to Eversley

The native broadleaf woodland of Fleet Copse, a Local Wildlife Site, forms a strong visual backdrop at the northern side of the strategy area, the ribbon development along roads defines the southern boundary. Old field patterns are evident but many hedges, especially to the north of the River, are now lines of mature trees. A plantation of Grey Poplar south of the River is noticeably at odds with the traditional landscape.

Gravel extraction is taking place north of the River. Restoration will retain the mature trees and incorporate these into blocks of woodland expansion, wet grasslands and open water as a further expansion to Moor Green Lakes Nature Reserve. A network of bridleways and paths are included in the plans. Exact details of restoration will depend on the amount of mineral removed as final ground levels will be critical in determining habitats created.

Gravel deposits exist south of the River. However the presence of the Eversley Meadows Local Wildlife Site may make the site uneconomic to extract.

A route for the BV Path avoiding the use of the road verge at Eversley would be beneficial, as would extra routes south of the river.

Wokingham Borough Council have designated this section of the Valley as an Area of Special Landscape Importance, proposals that impact the landscape should reflect this.

The management needs for this area are:

1. Maintain support to landowners for landscape and environmental management. **(NE, WoBC)**

The projects planned in the next five years for this area are:

2. Ensure restoration of Fleet Hill Farm Quarry to approved plan with resources for long-term management. **(BVCP, WoBC, FPC)**
3. Ensure restoration provides complementary access improvements to Area 10, pedestrian, cyclists and horse riders including circular routes. **(BVCP, WoBC, FPC)**

The long-term proposals for this area are:

4. Negotiate with landowners to re-open the historic Longwater Lane linking Eversley Cross to the River. **(BVCP)**
5. Improve route of BV Path to minimise road use and improve safety at Eversley. **(BVCP, WoBC)**

Figure 14. Area 11 Proposals Map

5.12. Area 12: Eversley to the River Whitewater

In this section the River runs on the northern edge of its naturally widening floodplain. The northern boundary of the strategy area is marked by field boundaries on the edge of the floodplain, but the southern boundary ignores topography being demarked by housing at Lower Common and the wooded edge of Bramshill Plantation. The area is narrow and features a pattern of small fields, small ancient woods, ponds and hedgerows.

The BV Path follows a quiet road and paths mainly away from the River. It is little used due to being so far from centres of population and lack of parking is a problem. Moving the BV Path to avoid the road section would improve the route but the majority of the River should remain undisturbed for ecological protection.

The River Blackwater still acts as a barrier to movement and communication as Eversley Bridge is the last main road crossing. This allows the area to retain its quiet and attractive atmosphere. Any developments that would jeopardise this atmosphere should be resisted. Two fords present foci of interest for visitors.

A riding school is present in the area and the many privately owned horses place heavy demands on the existing bridleway network.

Bramshill Plantation lies immediately to the south of the strategy boundary, this extensive woodland is progressively being worked for gravel and restored to forestry. It contains many ponds and heathland areas and is an SSSI and a Special Protection Area for its bird life. It is also used for walking and horse riding. Although outside the strategy boundary it has much in common with the vision for the Valley. The Hampshire ROWIP seeks a number of access improvements here.

The management needs for this area are:

1. Maintain support to landowners for landscape and environmental management. **(NE, WoBC)**

The projects planned in the next five years for this area are:

2. Improve BV Path furniture to allow easier use. **(BVCP)**

The long-term proposals for this area are:

3. Improve the route of the BV Path between Eversley Bridge and the confluence with the River Whitewater, especially around roads; ensure any path improvements are not detrimental to wildlife. **(BVCP, WoBC, HDC)**
4. Improve the footpath and bridleway network in the area especially with better links south of the River, to and through Bramshill Plantation. **(BVCP, WoBC, HDC)**

Figure 15. Area 12 Proposals Map

5.13. Site-based proposals outside the strategy area

Downstream of Area 12 the Valley is relatively rural, untouched by the problems higher in the Valley, there is little need for landscape improvement work. However the BV Path extends to Swallowfield largely following country roads and could be significantly improved if an off-road route could be negotiated. The ultimate goal is to extend the route to the River Loddon.

Slightly further west Wellington Country Park is a privately run and busy outdoor recreation facility that also meets the vision for the Valley and could be linked better.

The BVCP is involved in some projects outside of the defined strategy area on behalf of individual partners where it is the best delivery agent to do so. This is carried out separately to the central partnership funding so that core partnership work is unaffected. It is possible this type of arrangement may increase.

Currently two site management projects (Cove Brook and Southwood Woodland) are carried out by the BVCP on behalf of Rushmoor BC who do not have their own in-house ranger service.

The management needs outside the strategy area are:

1. Work with Cove Brook Greenway Group to manage the Greenway in order to maximise its wildlife and access benefits. **(RBC, BVCP)**
2. Manage Southwood Woodland as SANG, develop site-based group. **(RBC, BVCP)**

The projects planned in the next five years outside the strategy area are:

3. Improve safety of BV Path at roadside south of Swallowfield. **(WoBC)**

The long-term proposals for this area are:

4. Improve existing sections of the BV Path downstream of the River Whitewater especially by re-routing road sections to alongside the river. **(BVCP, WoBC)**
5. Seek opportunities to extend the BV Path to the River Loddon. **(BVCP, WoBC, HDC)**

6. Valley-wide Projects

To gain maximum benefit from the current facilities in the Valley and the planned improvements as laid out in Section 6, it is necessary to implement a series of actions that are not linked to geographic sections of the Valley. These are listed below and will be led by BVCP unless stated otherwise. Like Geographic Area actions these have been prioritised as management (M), priority projects for the next five years (P) and desirable long-term aims (LT).

6.1. Co-ordination of Activity

The individual partners of the BVCP and many other bodies that work in the Valley carry out a multitude of functions that could affect the implementation of this Strategy. This is complicated by high numbers of staff with an inevitable turn-over, and the Valley's situation crossing political and administrative boundaries. The activities of non-partner bodies, other authorities and landowners will affect and in turn be affected by the delivery of the Strategy. There is a need to ensure partners, other organisations, landowners and relevant individuals are kept up-to-date on the Strategy and its progress. It is also important that the activities of the BVCP team are monitored and directed by the individual partners.

The management needs are:

1. Organise an annual meeting for elected members of the Partnership authorities, produce an annual financial report.
2. Organise quarterly meeting for officers of the Partnership, produce quarterly and annual reports detailing progress to implement the strategy. Produce annual work plans.
3. Review and comment on all documents and strategies produced by individual partners that contain projects and policies that may impact upon the Valley.
4. Co-ordinate valley-wide projects including obtaining funds and resources.
5. Develop staff and resources of the BVCP team to enable delivery of a professional service. This includes securing improved accommodation and depot facilities.

The projects planned in the next five years are:

None identified

The long-term proposals are:

None identified

6.2. Landscape

The Valley's landscape is changing rapidly; new housing, redevelopment of riverside industrial sites and new roads all bring urbanisation into the Valley, often to the detriment of its countryside character. Mineral extraction brings the biggest changes, usually turning pasture into areas dominated by open water. Planning requirements to plant screening tree belts together with natural regeneration has led to many of these water bodies being hidden with the overall impression being that of woodland.

Alder woodlands and riverside trees are a feature of the Valley but Alder *Phytophthora* disease is prevalent and increasing in the Valley, this has the potential to drastically alter the wooded character of the floodplain landscape.

Lack of management, Dutch Elm disease and agricultural intensification have caused the loss of many hedgerows even in the most rural northernmost section of the Valley.

Despite its name the Living Landscape project is more a biodiversity initiative see section 6.4.

The management needs are:

1. Work with private landowners to advise and help with site management.
2. Monitor all planning applications for sites in, or adjacent to, the Valley and seek appropriate landscaping as a condition of any approval.
3. Ensure the use of species native to the Valley in all planting schemes, where possible use local provenance stock.

The projects planned in the next five years are:

4. Work with mineral companies and other landowners to advise and assist on site restoration and aftercare.
5. Identify and protect trees of interest for landscape or heritage
6. Survey the health of trees in the Valley with particular reference to Alder. Use results to inform future plantings.
7. Identify and screen sites that are eyesores.
8. Identify viewpoints to maintain vistas over grassland and water.
9. Instigate project to identify special trees, protect, restore or plant new woodlands and hedgerows.

The long-term proposals are:

10. Build links with site managers of angling facilities to advise and help maximise value of their sites for landscape and wildlife.

6.3. River Blackwater

The River is central to the Valley's landscape, it provides a focus for walking, angling and informal access, it is important for the wildlife it supports and is a source of water for agriculture and industry. Water quality of the River is greatly

affected by discharges from sewage treatment works. Investment in the treatment works has been successful and the water quality of the river is improving year on year but there are still concerns that the river will fail to meet future quality targets phosphates, the Environment Agency are investigating. The open fields alongside the River provide important floodplain giving flood protection to the urban areas.

The management needs are:

1. Ensure development proposals alongside River take the opportunity to improve it through sustainable drainage schemes or other habitat works.
2. Maintain contacts with angling clubs, attend Loddon Fisheries Consultative.

The projects planned in the next five years are:

3. Survey River and develop a River-long project proposal to improve the riparian landscape and habitats.
4. Work with the Environment Agency and other relevant groups and landowners to implement River projects.

The long-term proposals are:

5. Continue work with the Environment Agency and all other relevant groups to implement River improvements.

6.4. Wildlife Conservation

The River and its tributaries, the associated riverside meadows and woods, together with the wetlands created by recent gravel pits, form the basis for a continuous riparian ecosystem. The wildlife value of the Valley is increasing as more sites are sensitively restored, the water quality of the River improves and habitat creation and management takes effect. The Valley now supports a wide range of regional or county-rare species and has strong populations of common species that are declining in many other areas.

A number of National and Local Biodiversity Action Plans, which prioritise habitats and species for action, apply to the Valley. The Living Landscape initiative recognises the need for action on a landscape scale. The Valley is identified as a Biodiversity Opportunity Area.

Up-to-date knowledge of the wildlife of the whole Valley is essential to implement a conservation strategy and identify areas requiring action. Data is still lacking on many wildlife groups such as lower plants and invertebrates.

The Loddon Catchment BAP incorporates the targets of other relevant BAPs and it is clear the Valley has a significant role in meeting many targets for the Loddon catchment. (See Appendix 3 and Appendix 4.)

The management needs are:

1. Work with private landowners to monitor and increase number of Local Wildlife Sites under positive management so meeting National Indicator 197.

The projects planned in the next five years are:

2. Promote biodiversity in the Valley by implementing relevant actions from the Loddon Catchment Biodiversity Action Plan and other relevant BAPs. In particular by management, creation and restoration of key habitats. (Appendix 3 list habitats selected in national and local BAPS with targets.)
3. Implement conservation projects for key species best served by a catchment wide approach rather than separate site-based management projects. This includes Otter, Water Vole and bats. (Appendix 4 lists all BAP target species relevant to the Valley.)
4. Implement a co-ordinated programme of both species and habitat surveys and monitoring. BVCP will work with partner authorities and local wildlife record centres to maintain a valley-wide database of ecological records.

The long-term proposals are:

5. Monitor the extent and distribution of alien invasive species in the Valley and help to co-ordinate the production and implementation of a strategy to deal with them.

6.5. Access and Recreation

Most recreational activities in the Valley such as angling and watersports are provided by private commercial concerns or clubs. BVCP's role is more of promotion than provision.

The Blackwater Valley Path has become a key facility for informal recreation within the Valley. The multi-user southern section in particular is very heavily used by both walkers and cyclists.

Apart from the long-distance riverside Path, many sites in the Valley provide opportunities for informal access to green space. This can take the form of other Rights of Way, permissive routes and even unrestricted access over open space.

Rights of Way Improvement Plans have been prepared by the four relevant authorities identifying potential opportunities.

The London Olympics 2012 provides opportunities for a sports legacy project.

The management needs are:

1. Co-ordinate the management of the BV Path to ensure that it is maintained to a consistently high standard. BVCP to manage sections not covered by ROW authorities.
2. Liaise with landowners and planning authorities to identify and seize opportunities to improve the existing route of the Path.
3. Prepare, distribute and update material promoting the Blackwater Valley Path and access in the Valley.

4. Co-ordinate the development of cycling facilities in and adjacent to the Valley, including the dissemination of information to the public and the promotion of good cycling practise.
5. Provide information on the availability and level of access at sites throughout the Valley including cycling, angling and access for all.
6. Use the Blackwater Valley Users' Group for consultation and input on all issues related to access development in the Valley.

The projects planned in the next five years are:

7. Work with planning authorities, Natural England and landowners to identify and develop SANG sites suitable for mitigation of future development that may affect the Thames Basin Heaths SPA.
8. Improve the furniture and signage of the BV Path including: benches, milestones, interpretation boards and 'entrances'.
9. Continue Walkers' Link information service.
10. Develop a network of volunteer 'Rangers' to look after sections of the Path.
11. Work with local partners and landowners on projects to integrate, promote and widen access networks for all including walkers, cyclists, families, wheelchair users, horse riders and the visually impaired. Projects may include improving paths and producing booklets and leaflets.
12. Develop a project to improve sport and recreation facilities in the Valley using the Olympic legacy theme.

The long-term proposals are:

13. Provide a continuous route suitable for cyclists, people of limited mobility, wheelchair users, and people with pushchairs and prams between Badshot Lea Road and Sandhurst Memorial Park.

6.6. Promotion

Effective promotion is essential to enable local residents to get the most out of the developing facilities, be aware of new facilities and fully appreciate the improvements being made.

The management needs are:

1. Develop the 'Blackwater Valley Countryside' brand and encourage its use as widely as possible. Encourage the use of the Blackwater Valley Countryside logo and standardised interpretation and signage throughout the Valley.
2. Co-ordinate and promote the activities and facilities of the Partnership members throughout the Valley via: the Blackwater Valley web-site, regular issues of *Blackwater Valley News* and the *Discover* leaflet, and organisation or attendance at events.

The projects planned in the next five years are:

3. Enter regional and national awards to gain greater public awareness and appreciation.
4. Develop use of new social media for promotion through outlets such as Twitter and Facebook.
5. Digitise historical photographs & records for use in future promotions

The long-term proposals are:

6. Seek opportunities and funding for improved facilities for visitors including visitor centre.

6.7. Community

Working with local people provides a mutual benefit to both the individual and the Valley and the BVCP.

Regular contact with users of the Valley gives the community a say in the development of new facilities. It enables problems to be identified and solutions found. Such problems may be too small to be brought to the attention of the BVCP as a complaint but solving them quickly prevents them escalating.

Work of the volunteers enables BVCP to manage work loads that would be impossible without their help, while for volunteers the involvement gives them a voice in site management, and provides worthwhile, healthy and enjoyable activities.

The countryside can provide a wide variety of opportunities to learn and experience new things that are suitable for all age groups and backgrounds. Some sites in the Valley suffer from vandalism and anti-social behaviour, targeting the disaffected and disruptive youth may help to resolve problems for the future.

The value of access to green space and participation in outdoor activities in improving mental and physical health is increasingly being recognised. The Valley provides opportunities for many levels of activity and has an important role in preventative and recuperative treatment. Some patients are being referred to the volunteer groups as part of their treatment and this role could be expanded.

The management needs are:

1. Develop the Blackwater Valley Countryside Trust.
2. Support the work and development of all local conservation volunteering groups in the Valley, provide training, promote and publicise their activities, attend open days.
3. Organise and run weekly tasks for the Blackwater Valley Conservation Volunteers. Provide appropriate training and social opportunities for members of the group.

4. Provide work placement opportunities for students.
5. Work with BVC Trust to provide evening and weekend talks and courses on natural history, the local countryside and countryside techniques and crafts. Wherever possible use local experts to provide training.
6. Co-ordinate and promote guided walks throughout the Valley. Organise walks where a gap in provision is identified.
7. Respond to requests from social groups and schools for visits and talks.

The projects planned in the next five years are:

8. Develop and distribute a series of guides on local wildlife and where to see it.
9. Support the Rushmoor Healthy Living 'Step Into Nature' walks programme.
10. Promote the value of outdoor activity in the Valley for health benefits.

The long-term proposals are:

11. Set up and develop new conservation volunteering groups where opportunities arise.
12. Develop a project with local park and countryside services, police and youth groups to provide opportunities for young people to experience the active outdoor recreation facilities in the Valley, e.g. watersports, cycling, golf, conservation work and angling.

7. IMPLEMENTATION

7.1. Background

To execute the Strategy the Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership is dependent on a co-ordinated approach and commitment from all its partners, councils, landowners, and other organisations, volunteer support and sufficient funding. This section identifies the key dependent organisations and specific support required.

To further clarify the responsibilities of implementing the Strategy, the roles of the public, private and voluntary sectors are discussed below.

7.2. Public Sector

7.2.1. Partner Authorities

The local authority partners (two County Councils, seven District/Borough Councils and four Town/Parish Councils) in the Valley have been central to the improvements to Blackwater Valley Countryside in the past 30 years. A 10-year agreement between the partners to continue to support the work of the BVCP remains in effect until 2013. The renewal of this agreement and support of the partners beyond 2013 is critical if work is to continue.

It is envisaged that the main contributions of the local authorities will be in the following areas:-

- Support to the BVCP - particularly long-term commitment to the core financial support.
- The ownership and management of land in the Valley for recreational purposes. Local authorities are encouraged to seize opportunities to acquire new sites for recreation and conservation in the Valley and especially to provide for those uses which are currently not adequately represented in the area and which are unlikely to be provided by the private sector.
- As local planning authorities, to include policies in Local Development Frameworks and other planning documents to reflect the aims and objectives of the Strategy.

As successive schemes are completed, facilities and habitats improved, and usage increased, the task of looking after these grows. In order to achieve the shared aspirations for the Blackwater Valley Countryside as an important recreational and conservation asset in an attractive landscape the local authorities need to rise to meet this challenge. To help in carrying out this role, the local authorities have a number of duties and powers, these include:-

- The duty to further conservation.
- The duty to maintain SSSI in their ownership.
- Power to declare and manage Local Nature Reserves.
- Power to enter management agreements with private landowners.

- Power to include specific Blackwater Valley policies in their Local Development Frameworks.
- Power to enter agreement with planning applicants.
- Power to declare and protect public Rights of Way.

7.2.2. Government Bodies

The Environment Agency (EA) has an important role to play in the future of the Valley, particularly because it has duties and responsibilities relating to land drainage and water pollution control, with a statutory duty to further wildlife conservation and water-related recreation.

It will be important for close liaison to be maintained between the EA and other public authorities involved in the Valley. The EA is undertaking a long-term programme of work to the River Blackwater to enhance it for flood prevention and nature conservation, several successful projects have been carried out, more are planned.

It is hoped that the EA will be able to make financial contributions to conservation schemes based on the River and to other opportunities associated with any major land drainage scheme.

Natural England has an important role in providing grants to land owners for environmental land management. They also notify SSSI and provide advice on the establishment of SANGs and Local Nature Reserves.

Bodies set up by the Government to oversee distribution of monies such as ENTRUST and / or the lottery boards have significant influence as to which projects can be supported.

7.3. Private Sector

The majority of land and facilities for active recreation in the Blackwater Valley are privately owned, and the important role of the private sector is very likely to increase. In order to fulfil the objectives of the Strategy the co-operation of the private sector is needed, especially in the following aspects:-

- Bringing more land into recreational use, e.g. by the conversion of surplus farmland and the restoration of sites following gravel extraction.
- Managing land in a way beneficial to landscape and nature conservation interests.
- Providing facilities or funding via planning Section 106 agreements.
- Entering into partnerships and sponsorships with the BVCP and the public bodies.
- Operating non-commercial as well as commercial activities. Free access for walking and picnics should be made available wherever possible.
- Making facilities accessible to disadvantaged groups such as the unemployed, OAPs, disabled people etc., for example by reduced rates.
- Allowing the local authorities or BVCP to buy in facilities to cater for special groups.

- Incorporating sections of riverside Path and important path links, where needed.
- Allowing access to the River, in appropriate situations, for fishing etc.
- Making recreation facilities accessible to all by providing courses for beginners and the more advanced where needed.
- Managing sites and recreational facilities to a high standard.
- Co-operation between potentially competing landowners to benefit the overall image and identity promoted throughout the Valley e.g. adopting a uniform signage.
- Allowing the use of sites and facilities for interpretation and education.
- Providing information about facilities, activities, courses etc., for the comprehensive information service operated by the BVCP.

The privately operated facilities benefit in various ways from the co-ordinating work of the BVCP, especially the information service which provides the basis for effective marketing and promotion of the Valley.

7.4. Voluntary Sector

The input of the voluntary sector has continued to increase as local residents see the successes and benefits of the improved facilities. Much of this is through the organisation of recreation activities by clubs and the practical work of volunteers such as the Blackwater Valley Conservation Volunteers.

The role of volunteers will be especially important in the following areas:-

- The operation of the clubs and societies to organise recreation and conservation events and activities.
- Practical conservation work.
- Collection of ecological data.
- Interpretation, e.g. leading guided walks and helping to run fun days.
- Education through leading courses and providing instruction e.g. WATCH groups and conservation awards.
- Teaching beginners at various recreational activities.

Voluntary sector organisations such as the Wildlife Trusts or site-based societies have an important role to play in the future of the Valley they can also own and manage land and provide expert advice and knowledge.

The Blackwater Valley Countryside Trust has aims allied to this Strategy and is growing in both membership and experience to handle larger projects As well as the roles of individual volunteers and voluntary organisations mentioned above, the BVCT has the advantage of being able to source funds not available to the BVCP partner authorities. Although currently a small organisation the BVCT has the potential to grow to be a most influential body in the Valley's countryside.

8. Work Plan 2011-2015

This section details the actions selected as projects for the next five years. The year when work is planned is indicated.

The projects are key to continuing the improvements to the Valley's Countryside. They have been selected as being priorities to progress because they will achieve the greatest public benefit or the opportunities to progress them are expected to fall in the Strategy period.

The management actions and long-term proposals are not included in the plan. Management actions are annual, ongoing and already in place. The long-term proposals are mostly reliant on situations outside the control of the partners and so timings cannot be planned. Vigilance is needed to ensure the opportunities for these are spotted and taken as they arise. Dependent on the workload this entails this could lead to some of projects within the five years being delayed.

Many of the actions and proposals require securing resources or negotiating management agreements. Funding of the BVCP supports staff and running costs but leaves little for projects or site maintenance. It is expected funding will be increasingly difficult to obtain in the five years of this Strategy, just maintaining the current management levels will be a major challenge.

The success of the Strategy is heavily reliant on BVCP sourcing outside income or volunteer help, or individual partners or landowners providing funds for new projects and long-term maintenance. An indication for possible source of funds for each project has been identified.

Table 2. BVCP Work Plan - Area Projects

Ref	Action	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Area 1						
4	Extend roadside landscape and habitat improvements	√	√	√		
5	Improve signage at start of BV Path	√				
6	Seek improvements at Monkton Lane	√	√			
7	Determine house-building allocation, allocate SANG	√				
Area 2						
3	Extend roadside landscape and habitat improvements	√	√	√		
4	Restore Farnham Quarry	√	√			
5	Improve BV Path surface	√				
6	Improve BV Path route			√		
7	Start management of Tongham Pool		√			
Area 3						
5	Dedicate BV Path		√	√		
6	Habitat improvement Rowan Fields		√	√	√	
7	Improve Path road crossing		√			
Area 4						
4	Dedicate BV Path		√	√		
5	Improve screening Aldershot Stubs			√	√	
6	Improve Path road crossing			√		
Area 5						
4	Extend roadside landscape	√	√	√		
5	Dedicate BV Path			√		
6	Review Mytchett Mere LWS boundaries	√				
Area 6						
2	Improve safety of rail crossing	√				
3	Sort out status of open access land at The Quays		√			
4	Dedicate BV Path		√			
5	Manage Frimley Hatches to management plan	√				
6	Negotiate landowner re screening	√				
7	Habitat and path improvements			√		

Area projects (cont)

Ref	Action	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Area 7						
4	Designate SANG	√				
5	Improve BV Path surface					√
6	Habitat improvement project			√	√	
Area 8						
3	Improve BV Path crossing of A30		√			
4	Upgrade BV Path to multi-user				√	
5	Dedicate BV Path at Blackwater Fields	√				
Area 9						
1	Resolve use of Clark's Farm	√				
2	Church Farm	√	√	√		
Area 10						
3	Extend Moor Green Car Park	√	√			
4	Restore Manor Farm		√	√	√	
5	Restore Eversley Quarry			√	√	√
6	Co-ordinate restorations for path/bridleways			√	√	√
7	Agree long-term management proposals		√			
8	Improve bridleway	√				
Area 11						
2	Restore Fleet Hill Quarry			√	√	√
3	Access improvements				√	√
Area 12						
2	Improve BV Path furniture			√		
Outside strategy area						
2	Improve safety of BV Path		√			

Table 3. Work Plan - Valley-wide Projects

Ref	Action	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Landscape						
4	Work with mineral companies and landowners	√	√	√	√	√
5	Identify and protect trees of interest	√	√			
6	Survey health of trees	√	√			
7	Identify and screen eyesores			√	√	
8	Identify viewpoints			√	√	
9	Trees & woodland project			√	√	√
River Blackwater						
3	Survey river, develop project	√				
4	Annual habitat improvement project	√	√	√	√	√
Wildlife Conservation						
2	BAP habitat creation projects	√		√		√
3	Key BAP species projects		√		√	
4	Surveys	√	√	√	√	√
Access & Recreation						
7	Identify potential SANG sites	√	√			
8	Improve furniture on BV Path	√		√		
9	Walkers' Link	√	√	√		
10	Volunteer path rangers				√	√
11	Access projects			√	√	√
12	Olympic legacy	√	√			
Promotion						
3	Seek awards		√		√	
4	Develop social media	√		√		
5	Digitise photographs & records	√				
Community						
8	Develop guides			√		√
9	Support 'Step into Nature'	√	√			
10	Promote health benefits			√		

Appendix 1

GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS

APC	Ash Parish Council
BAP	Biodiversity Action Plan
BBOWT	Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust
BFBC	Bracknell Forest Borough Council
BHTC	Blackwater and Hawley Town Council
BVR	Blackwater Valley Road (A331)
BVCP	Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership
BVCT	Blackwater Valley Countryside Trust
EA	Environment Agency
GBC	Guildford Borough Council
FPC	Finchampstead Parish Council
HCC	Hampshire County Council
HDC	Hart District Council
HWT	Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust
LDF	Local Development Framework
LNR	Local Nature Reserve
LWS	Local Wildlife Site
MPS	Mineral Policy Statement
NE	Natural England
PPG	Planning Policy Guidance Note
PPS	Planning Policy Statement
RBC	Rushmoor Borough Council
RNRS	Rowhill Nature Reserve Society
RSPB	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
SAC	Special Area of Conservation
SCC	Surrey County Council
SHBC	Surrey Heath Borough Council
SPA	Special Protection Area
SSSI	Site of Special Scientific Interest
STC	Sandhurst Town Council
SWT	Surrey Wildlife Trust
WaBC	Waverley Borough Council
WoBC	Wokingham Borough Council
WRMU	Water Resource Management Unit

Appendix 2

RELEVANT DOCUMENTS

Statutory Planning Documents

Core Strategy and Development Management Policies. Proposed Submission Document. Surrey Heath BC, 2010.

Core Strategy Development Plan Document. Bracknell Forest BC, 2008.

Guildford Borough Core Strategy Consultation, Further Options March 2009. Guildford BC, 2009.

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Thames Basin Heaths Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy - Interim Note (January 2010). Rushmoor BC, 2010.

Waverley Borough Local Plan 2002. Waverley BC, 2002.

Wokingham Borough Local Development Framework. Submission Core Strategy. Wokingham BC, 2008.

Non Statutory Local Authority Publications

The Rushmoor Sustainable Community Strategy 2010-2016. Rushmoor Strategic Partnership, 2010.

Assessment of Housing Development within Hart District on the Integrity of the Thames Basin Heaths pSPA. Jonathon Cox Associates, 2001.

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Guildford Borough's Cultural Strategy. Guildford Borough Council, undated.

Hart Landscape Character Assessment. Hart District Council, 2007.

Interim Avoidance Strategy for Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area. Hart DC, 2009.

Joint Minerals and Waste Development Framework Core Strategy Preferred Options Regulation 26. Berkshire Unitary Authorities, September 2007.

Rights of way improvement plan for Surrey. Surrey CC, 2007.

Rights of Way Improvement Plan. Wokingham BC, undated.

Rushmoor Biodiversity Action Plan 2009-14. Rushmoor Borough Council, 2009.

Surrey Minerals Plan Core Strategy DPD Proposed submission to Secretary of State. Surrey CC, 2009.

Thames Basin Heaths Delivery Framework. Thames Basin Heaths Joint Strategic Partnership, 2009.

The Countryside In and Around Towns. Groundwork and the Countryside Agency, 2005.

The Hampshire Countryside Access Plan, County Overview. Hampshire County Councils Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2008-2013. Hampshire CC. undated

Water in Hampshire. Hampshire CC & Environment Agency, 2000.

Waverley Borough Cultural Strategy. Waverley BC, undated.

Other

Accessible Natural Green Space Standards in Towns and Cities. A Review and toolkit for their Implementation. English Nature Research Report No.526. English Nature, 2003.

Thames Catchment Flood Management Plan. Environment Agency, 2009.

Biodiversity Strategy, The Loddon Catchment. Environment Agency & Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, 2003.

Great Outdoors: How our Natural Health Service Uses Green Space to Improve Wellbeing. Faculty of Public Health, 2010.

The River Loddon Catchment Abstraction Management Strategy. Environment Agency, 2004.

Water for Life and Livelihoods, River Basin Management Plan: Thames River Basin District. Environment Agency, 2009.

Appendix 3

BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN HABITAT TARGETS FOR THE VALLEY

Despite its relatively small size the actions in this Strategy give a regional significance to the Blackwater Valley in delivering BAP habitat targets.

The Blackwater Valley has been identified as a Biodiversity Opportunity Area by all three counties. This table summarises the target habitats selected by the BOAs and the estimated area that will be created or restored in the Valley over the next five years. Much of this, but not all, is based on the restoration of gravel workings.

Biodiversity Targets for Blackwater Valley

Priority Habitat	Hampshire BOA	Berkshire BOA	Surrey BOA	Blackwater Valley create/restore
Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland		√		15ha
Wet Woodland	√	√	√	15ha
Hedgerows		√		2km
Lowland Meadow	√	√	√	5ha
Purple Moor Grass and Rush Pastures	√	√		5ha
Floodplain Grazing Marsh	√	√ ¹	√	7ha
Lowland Fens		√ ¹		5ha
Reedbed	√	√ ¹		15ha
Ponds				10 No.
Eutrophic Standing Waters		√		10ha
Traditional Orchards		√		Maintain only

¹ Included under general term wetland habitats

Appendix 4

BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN TARGET SPECIES FOR THE VALLEY

Significant species from the Loddon Catchment BAP

Otter <i>Lutra lutra</i>	Bats
Water Vole <i>Arvicola terrestris</i>	Populations of wild birds

National BAP priority species

Adder <i>Vipera berus</i>	Lesser Spotted Woodpecker <i>Dendrocopos minor</i>
Bittern <i>Botaurus stellaris</i>	Linnet <i>Carduelis cannabina</i>
Brown Long-eared Bat <i>Plecotus auritus</i>	Noctule <i>Nyctalus noctula</i>
Brown Trout <i>Salmo trutta</i>	Otter <i>Lutra lutra</i>
Buff Ermine <i>Spilosoma luteum</i>	Pillwort <i>Pilularia globifera</i>
Bullfinch <i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>	Reed Bunting <i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>
Common Cuckoo <i>Cuculus canorus</i>	Song Thrush <i>Turdus philomelos</i>
Common Lizard <i>Zootoca vivipara</i>	Soprano Pipistrelle <i>Pipistrellus pygmaeus</i>
Common Toad <i>Bufo bufo</i>	Stag Beetle <i>Lucanus cervus</i>
Crystal Moss-animal <i>Lophopus crystallinus</i>	Starling <i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>
European Eel <i>Anguilla anguilla</i>	Skylark <i>Alauda arvensis</i>
Grass Snake <i>Natrix natrix</i>	Slow-worm <i>Anguis fragilis</i>
Harvest Mouse <i>Micromys minutus</i>	The Cinnabar <i>Tyria jacobaeae</i>
Hedgehog <i>Erinaceus europaeus</i>	Water Vole <i>Arvicola terrestris</i>
House Sparrow <i>Passer domesticus</i>	White Admiral <i>Limentis camilla</i>
Hedge Accentor <i>Prunella modularis</i>	White Ermine <i>Spilosoma lubricipeda</i>
Lapwing <i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	Yellowhammer <i>Emberiza citrinella</i>
Lesser Redpoll <i>Carduelis cabaret</i>	

Appendix 5

ACCESSIBLE NATURAL GREENSPACE STANDARDS

Natural England believes that local authorities should consider the provision of natural areas as part of a balanced policy to ensure that local communities have access to an appropriate mix of greenspaces providing for a range of recreational needs.

In their Accessible Natural Greenspaces Standard (ANGSt) model Natural England recommends that provision should be made of at least 2ha of accessible natural greenspace per 1,000 population according to a system of tiers into which sites of different sizes fit:

- no person should live more than 300m from their nearest area of natural greenspace of at least 2ha;
- there should be at least one accessible 20ha site within 2km from home;
- there should be one accessible 100ha site within 5km;
- there should be one accessible 500ha site within 10km.

The purpose of the model is to guide local authorities in identifying the current level of provision of accessible natural greenspace and to assist with the production of local standards and targets. While it is expected that local authorities should aspire to meet the provisions of the standard, it is recognised that this will be more difficult in some urban contexts than in others. Local authorities are therefore encouraged to determine for themselves the most appropriate policy response in the light of a sound understanding of the standard, the needs of the local community and the value of accessible natural greenspace to it, the existing greenspace resource and funding constraints.

Note that this national model should not be confused with SANG provision (Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace) which is specifically aimed at mitigating recreational pressure upon the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area.

Appendix 6

CONSULTEES

The Blackwater Valley Countryside Partners

Blackwater & Hawley Town Council
 Farnham Town Council
 Finchampstead Parish Council
 Guildford Borough Council
 Hampshire County Council
 Hart District Council
 Rushmoor Borough Council
 Surrey County Council
 Surrey Heath Borough Council
 Sandhurst Town Council
 Waverley Borough Council
 Wokingham Borough Council
 Yateley Town Council

Other authorities

Ash Parish Council
 Swallowfield Parish Council
 Eversley Parish Council
 Bracknell Forest Borough Council
 Natural England
 Environment Agency

Community groups

Blackwater Valley Countryside Trust
 Blackwater Valley Users' Group
 Cove Brook Greenway Group
 Loddon Fisheries Consultative
 Moor Green Lakes Group
 Rowhill Nature Reserve Society
 Snaky Lane Improvement Group
 Southwood Woodland Group
 Tongham Wood Improvement Group
 Yateley Society

Local landowners

Cemex PLC
 Hansons PLC
 Lafarge Aggregates
 Thames Water

Other

Berkshire, Buckinghamshire & Oxford Wildlife Trust
 Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust
 Surrey Wildlife Trust
 Sustrans
 Defence Estates

Appendix 7

GENERAL POLICIES FOR THE BLACKWATER VALLEY

These policies have been developed by the BVCP to give a consistent approach for assessing plans and proposals that affect the Valley's landscape, recreation facilities and wildlife. It is not expected these policies will be incorporated into Local Development Documents but they will be used internally by BVCP when responding to planning applications or advising on proposed recreational or habitat creation schemes.

It is acknowledged that individual partners, when exercising their statutory planning role, will have a wider range of factors to consider including other relevant and statutory planning criteria. However referral to these policies when making decisions by the partner authorities will help give a consistent approach across the Valley.

LANDSCAPE POLICIES

The need to maintain the Blackwater Valley as an open and attractive green space between the surrounding urban areas is of prime importance. Landscape improvements should be designed to support policies for wildlife and recreation contained within this document.

Policy 1. The Blackwater Valley authorities will maintain the open gap through policies contained within Local Development Frameworks.

Policy 2. Landscape improvements will be sought through the planning process and by working with individual landowners, both to enhance existing features and to soften the impact of new development.

WILDLIFE CONSERVATION POLICIES

High quality sites are the cornerstone of the conservation strategy, as well as their intrinsic value they provide the reservoir of species that will be able to colonise recently enhanced or newly created habitats in the Valley.

Site protection relies on designation appropriate to its level of significance e.g. international, national, regional or local.

Non-legal protection mainly consists of the establishment of nature reserves, especially those owned or managed by the county Wildlife Trusts or the mineral companies.

The value of the green spaces between designated sites must not be overlooked, both for the species and habitats they support and the connections they provide between the higher quality sites.

The ever-changing landscape of the Valley provides opportunities to improve and enhance the natural resource both in- and outside designated sites.

Policy 3. Sites important for wildlife in the Valley will be identified and designated to give protection from any development that would diminish their ecological value.

Policy 4. Proposals that would increase the number, size or value of Local Wildlife Sites will be supported.

Opportunities will be identified that will:-

- i. Increase the area of existing sites of high value.
- ii. Enhance the value of sites that have potential for improvement.
- iii. Create new habitats of interest.
- iv. Restore degraded areas of land in ways that will maximise wildlife value.

Policy 5. Management practices that will maintain and increase the wildlife value of the whole Valley will be encouraged.

Good management of the Valley's wildlife is crucial to its future and can be implemented by:-

- i. Ecologically sensitive management of all publicly owned land within the Valley.
- ii. Enabling conservation organisations to manage land within the Valley.
- iii. Encouraging private owners to manage land sympathetically by providing advice, practical assistance, management agreements and financial assistance. In certain cases, purchase of important sites to ensure appropriate management may be proposed.

Policy 6. Public access to all Local Wildlife Sites in the Valley will be encouraged except where such access would damage the wildlife interest.

To enable people to enjoy their local wildlife, access to sites throughout the Valley is important. Special provisions may be necessary in certain cases to enable access without disturbance to wildlife; i.e. controlled and improved access, surfaced paths, viewing hides, easy access for people with a disability.

Interpretation to explain the significance of the wildlife through site information boards, leaflets, guided walks etc., is seen as an integral part of any access arrangements.

Policy 7. The use of the Valley as an environmental education resource will be encouraged and developed.

The Valley is ideally suited to meet the environmental education needs of the surrounding urban population. The national curriculum as well as higher levels of study regard fieldwork as important; many Valley sites are suitable to meet this demand.

The Rowhill Nature Reserve Field Centre provides the Valley's only base for education and interpretation at the time of writing, the work of the centre will be supported.

LAND BASED RECREATIONAL POLICIES

The Strategy's recreational aims are to provide a diverse range of outdoor recreational opportunities in the Valley. In the main informal recreational access in particular management of sites for SANG will be given priority, but in some localities formal activities will be considered appropriate.

Policy 8. Opportunities will be sought to create Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace where this will not be detrimental to landscape, biodiversity or existing recreational uses.

Policy 9. The loss of any recreation facilities or land used for informal recreation in the Blackwater Valley will be resisted.

Policy 10. Encouragement will be given to recreation uses that contribute to, or do not conflict with, the conservation and enhancement of the semi-rural character of the Valley.

Policy 11. When determining development proposals within the Valley, the local planning authorities will seek recreational benefits for local communities.

Policy 12. The developers of any recreational projects will be expected to make proper provision for access and use by people with disabilities.

Policy 13. Noisy sports will be allowed only where the environmental impact is shown to be acceptable, and noise can be controlled to minimise disturbance.

Examples of noisy sports include jet skiing, clay pigeon shooting, and motorcycling. Noisy activities will be resisted where they introduce noise to an extent that causes disturbance to nearby communities, recreational users or wildlife. Provision for a noisy sport will be supported where a demand can be proven, there is a significant lack of alternative local provision and the criteria above can be met.

Policy 14. Artificial lighting will be kept to a minimum on facilities within the Valley. Lighting will not normally be provided on the Blackwater Valley Path.

Lights have an urbanising effect on the Valley environment and have been proven to have a detrimental effect on wildlife. Only lighting necessary for any essential night-time operations, safety or security should be provided. Lights should be aimed downwards, and be of the minimum power necessary to perform their role.

Lighting paths within the Valley may be considered in more urbanised areas where safety issues and public demand dictates. This should be of a low-level type, both in terms of output and physical height. Waist height, 'Bollard' type lights are a suitable option.

Policy 15. Small car parks will be created where considered necessary i.e. in areas poorly served by public transport.

Policy 16. Links will be sought between facilities in the Valley and public transport.

Walking

Many sections of the Valley Path have been completed and a route exists from Farnham to the River Loddon, although this requires the use of roads through Sandhurst. In addition many green spaces provide opportunities for walking in the Valley. The Blackwater Valley Path gives opportunities for circular routes when linked to the wider countryside, whereas the public transport links (in particular the railways) enable linear routes.

Policy 17. Access for walking will be sought at every opportunity.

Policy 18. The Blackwater Valley Path will be completed as a matter of priority, and dedicated as a statutory Right of Way wherever possible, particularly where its future as a publicly accessible path could be threatened (i.e. on privately owned land).

Policy 19. Improved routing of the Blackwater Valley Path will be sought for sections where safety or the quality of countryside experience is a concern.

Policy 20. Footpath links will be provided and/or improved between the Blackwater Valley Path and:-

- i. Local communities.
- ii. Related facilities such as the Basingstoke Canal and Yateley Common Country Park.
- iii. Public transport.
- iv. Other important walking routes.

Policy 21. In any existing and proposed recreation schemes, opportunities to extend provision for walking and informal access will be sought.

Policy 22. Encouragement will be given to the provision and way marking of circular walks, extending from the Valley into the surrounding countryside.

Running / Jogging

The demand for using the Blackwater Valley for running and jogging is particularly high in the summer months and in areas close to housing. In the layout and design of walking routes, attention should be given to their potential for running, bearing in mind the need for :

- Access to routes of varying length and of a circular nature.
- Suitable running surfaces.
- Routes to be as safe and attractive as possible for people to use alone, whilst considering landscape design considerations.

Cycling

Around 30% of users of the Blackwater Valley Path do so by bike, mainly for recreation but with some work/shopping trips. Use is frequently by family groups, looking for safe accessible places to ride, potential conflicts with walkers exist but appear minor. Most local bridleways are unsuitable for use by cycles due to the high level of use by horses and the two uses require separate facilities. There is a need to co-ordinate the provision made by the various highway authorities to enable cross valley routes to be established and an overall vision maintained.

Policy 23. The BV Path between Badshot Lea Road, Aldershot and Sandhurst Memorial Park will be upgraded to form a continuous route of a standard that allows access for people of limited mobility, wheelchair users, cyclists and people with pushchairs and prams.

Policy 24. Existing and proposed sections of the BV Path between Sandhurst and Eversley Bridge will be upgraded/created to enable multi-user access.

None of this section is currently suitable for multi-use and many sections are missing. Individual sections will provide valuable links to the Valley's current and proposed public green spaces.

Policy 25. Cycling links will be provided and/or improved between the relevant sections of the Blackwater Valley Path and:-

- i. Local communities.
- ii. Related facilities such as the Basingstoke Canal and Yateley Common Country Park.
- iii. Public transport.

Links to the developing network of cycle routes crossing the Valley should be made, providing connections into the wider countryside, towns and places of employment and interest. The potential to combine rail and cycling trips will require good links to be developed between railway stations and cycling routes in the Valley.

Horse Riding

A large number of horses are kept within or near the Valley and there is a continuing demand for more horse pasture, stables and riding routes. Horse grazing is an important land use in the Valley. However, the existing bridleway network in the Valley is poor and use of the riverside Path by horses causes conflicts with other users. Riding schools can generate increased levels of horse riding on busy or narrow lanes (creating safety issues for riders and other road users) and on local bridleways (to the detriment of walkers).

Policy 26. The bridleway network will be improved where opportunities arise, by provision of new routes and links between existing routes.

Statutory and/or permitted routes will be actively sought, with emphasis on the provision of circular rides. The selection of routes must take account of the wider network of bridleways, and the location of riding schools with the segregation of horses from other users desirable.

Policy 27. Horse riding will not normally be permitted on the Blackwater Valley Path, or on any other footpaths or cycleways in the Valley.

Horse riding can conflict with other users and damage path surfaces. However where these issues can be addressed strategic sections may be used to link with other bridleways.

Policy 28. Proposals for stables and other facilities for horse keeping and exercise will be supported where they are unobtrusive and in proportion to the correct density of stock.

Well managed horse keeping maintains the visual and ecological value of pastures and hedgerows. Unfortunately urban fringe horse keeping can often be unsightly with poor quality stabling, fencing and exercise facilities, over dense stocking leads to overgrazing, whilst disposal of manure is problematic. The British Horse Society recommends a minimum of 0.5 ha of pasture per horse, stabling in the Valley should observe this density. Lighting for exercise facilities should conform to Policy 14.

Policy 29. The provision of riding schools in the Valley will be supported, where it can be demonstrated that an adequate network of riding routes exists in the locality or on site, or will be provided as part of an overall development plan.

Motorcycling

As most urban fringe areas, the Blackwater Valley has a problem with unauthorised motorcycling on paths and cycle routes. Trouble spots tend to be localised. Nearby heathland areas have been traditionally used by serious motor cross users for training and competition, these areas have now been closed to motorcyclists but demand still exists. No site has been identified as suitable for motorcycling within the Valley. The issue needs to be looked at from a regional viewpoint.

Policy 30. Proposals for motorcycling will be considered that conform to the policies for noisy sports (Policy 13).

Un-powered Wheeled Sports

This includes such activities as BMX riding, skateboarding and rollerblading. A demand has been demonstrated for this type of facility - especially amongst the youth population. Several partner authorities have provided facilities often within public parks that lie in the Valley.

Policy 31. Facilities for un-powered wheeled sports will be sought in the Valley in public parks.

Formal Sports

This category comprises traditional outdoor sports that require pitches etc., such as football, cricket, rugby, hockey, athletics and tennis, and also indoor activities including swimming, squash, tennis and fitness centres. Outdoor sports require some buildings e.g. changing rooms, and frequently facilities will cater for both indoor and outdoor sports. Built facilities can be large and highly intrusive into the landscape. Demand for formal sports is known to exist in communities adjoining the Valley and in some cases few locations exist outside the Blackwater Valley where provision could be made. Some facilities for formal sports exist in the Valley already, and it is important for these facilities to continue. Schemes for new formal sports provision may have to be limited in size in order to minimise the visual effects on the rural character of the Valley.

Policy 32. The loss of formal sports facilities will be resisted, unless suitable alternative provision can be made in the locality.

Policy 33. The use of land in the Valley for new formal outdoor playing pitches will be acceptable, providing that:-

- i. It would not be detrimental to any features of landscape or nature conservation interest.
- ii. Any buildings and hard surfaces are essential to the efficient operation of the facility and occupy the minimal area.
- iii. Landscaping is of an extent and character sufficient to integrate the pitches and buildings into the surrounding countryside.

Policy 34. Facilities for indoor sports will not normally be permitted in the Valley, unless:-

- i. They constitute a low-rise facility in association with buildings serving outdoor sports. OR
- ii. They are necessary to ensure the financial viability of a package of outdoor recreational proposals.
- iii. In either case criteria in Policy 33 will also apply.

Golf

The demand for golf facilities has now been largely met with a nine-hole course and driving range within the Valley, and several full size and nine-hole courses are in the vicinity. A driving range constructed at Mytchett Mere remains unopened.

Policy 35. No new opportunities will be sought to extend golf provision

Orienteering / Wayfaring

Orienteering requires extensive woodland. There are no suitable locations for it in the Valley and demand is reduced as there are many good sites in the surrounding area. Where woodland exists (e.g. on Yateley Common, Rowhill Copse) orienteering needs to be restricted or even prohibited in order to avoid damage to important habitats. Wayfaring courses for beginners require smaller areas and one has been provided at Wildmoor Heath on the fringe of the Valley, other sites in the Valley may in future become suitable for small training or wayfaring courses.

Policy 36. No new opportunities will be sought for wayfaring provision.

Shooting

This is a noisy sport that also causes pollution problems due to the remains of 'clays' and lead shot.

Shooting has taken place in the Valley in the past to control numbers of feral geese. General wildfowl shooting can be in conflict with conservation. It is also inherently intrusive and potentially dangerous to adjacent recreational participants.

Policy 37. Shooting facilities must take into account ecological constraints and comply with policies for noisy sports (see Policy 13).

Policy 38. Wildfowling and rough shooting will be discouraged in those parts of the Valley close to sites used for recreation or conservation.

Skirmishing / Paintballing

Good facilities require large expanses of wood, heath or farmland and can be very noisy as well as damaging to ecologically sensitive sites. Opportunities in the Valley

to provide facilities will remain limited. The MOD considers it highly unlikely to give permission for use of their land for this purpose as it may compromise its use for army training.

Policy 39. No opportunities will be sought to provide skirmishing or paintballing facilities.

WATER BASED RECREATION POLICIES

The demand for water-based recreation is partly local, and partly from a wider catchment area. For some watersports the Blackwater Valley provides facilities that are not available elsewhere in the sub-region and it is for those sports that demand covers the widest geographical areas.

The Valley has regional and sub-regional importance in providing water-based recreation and this should be retained.

Policy 40. Encouragement will be given to schemes that improve casual access to water or bring more water into recreational use, provided that such schemes are appropriate to location and have no detrimental effect on landscape, natural environment or wildlife.

Angling

The majority of water in the Valley is already used for angling, with facilities on many lakes, on the Canal and along the River. Fishing is generally well managed and promoted in the Valley, with a number of clubs, syndicates and commercial operations, many waters offer day-tickets. There appears to be an insatiable demand for water to increase facilities for all types of angling.

As angling sites comprise such a large area their management is crucial to the Valley's landscape and ecological value. Angling sites need to take this into account and should incorporate measures to maximise these aims. It is important that some waters are managed with their prime aim being wildlife conservation.

Policy 41. Opportunities for angling will be acceptable in water-based schemes, providing that there will be no conflict with other forms of recreation or with nature conservation interests.

Policy 42. Opportunities to increase casual access to fishing through day -ticket or free access schemes will be sought.

Policy 43. The Environment Agency will be encouraged to continue to improve the fishery value of the River, through water quality controls, enhancement of habitat and access to water.

Sailing / Windsurfing

Only two lakes in the Valley's Strategy Area are suitable for sailing due to size, shelter and nature conservation reasons: Horseshoe Lake and The Quays. However at present only Horseshoe Lake is used.

Facilities for windsurfing in the Valley exist at Horseshoe Lake and Coleford Bridge Lake. Horseshoe Lake provides a first-class sail training facility aimed at beginners and has well-developed links with local schools and community groups.

Hawley Lake Sail Training Centre lies within the hydrological catchment, it provides sailing and windsurfing and provides courses and a sailing club. A number of other sailing centres are close enough to be used by local residents and there appears to be no demand for more water.

Policy 44. Proposals that would improve the facilities for sailing or windsurfing in the Valley will be supported providing they do not conflict with other interests.

Canoeing

Canoeing takes place at Horseshoe Lake, Hawley Lake, on the Basingstoke Canal and at Aldershot Lido. There is occasional demand to use the River Blackwater, especially its lower reaches for canoe touring. Due to the high percentage of treated effluent the river water has a high chance of being a potential health hazard, users need to be aware of this and water contact activity will not be actively promoted.

Policy 45. Loss of canoeing from existing lake and canal facilities will be resisted.

Policy 46. Access to the River Blackwater for canoeing will not be promoted. Users will be made aware of the water quality issues.

Water skiing / Jet skiing / Wake boarding

At present powered watersports are catered for at The Quays, Blackwater Valley Watersports and Hawley Lake. Jet skiing is probably the most disturbing, generating both noise and wash and is incompatible with most other recreational and conservation activities, as well as causing offence to nearby residents. Providing centres for these activities reduces uncontrolled use at other sites where damage can be much more disruptive.

Policy 47. The loss of powered watersports from sites with extant planning permission will be resisted.

Policy 48. Proposals for new sites for water skiing or jet skiing will only be supported provided they do not conflict with other interests and conform to the policies for noisy sports (Policy 13).

Swimming

Demand for open water swimming has increased recently with the formation of the Open Water Swimming Society but is still a comparatively small niche. The Quays provides supervised open water swimming sessions aimed at those training for events rather than the recreational swimmer.

People, especially children, find the lakes attractive for swimming in hot weather and will enter lakes without permission. This can conflict with wildlife and other recreational users as well as exposing inexperienced swimmers to danger, drownings have occurred.

The River is not considered suitable for swimming due to its small size and water quality issues.

On local authority sites swimming will not be encouraged in any lakes. Although there is no control over private water areas, the local authorities will request landowners to discourage swimming in lakes that are considered unsafe, especially where there is no supervision.

Policy 49. Proposals for swimming facilities will be supported where adequate facilities and supervision can be provided. The BVCP will discourage unsupervised swimming from taking place on lakes in the Valley.

OTHER POLICIES

River Blackwater

In the past, the poor quality of the river water and the many over-engineered sections of the River (by straightening and dredging), have greatly diminished its ecological, recreational and amenity value. A major factor determining the quality of the river water is the effluent discharged from the seven sewage treatment works. At periods of low flow, this effluent can form over 70% of the River's volume. The urban nature of the catchment can also lead to pollution incidents.

However, the overall quality of the River has improved greatly in recent years, the result of a number of river channel improvement works and an ongoing programme of upgrades to the sewage treatment works along the River. This is demonstrable through both increased fish stocks (it is now regarded as one of the most productive fisheries in the Loddon catchment) and improved wildlife value.

The demand for recreational and amenity use of the River is large, especially for angling and riverside walks. Due to the high levels of treated effluent in the River concerns over the safety of water contact activities e.g. canoeing and river dipping, remain.

Policy 50. Initiatives that seek to restore or enhance the natural elements of the Riparian environment or improve water quality will be supported. There will be a general presumption against developments that have an adverse effect on the water environment.

Policy 51. Increased access to the riverside for amenity and leisure use will be encouraged where it will not conflict with wildlife or other recreational interests.

Policy 52. Activities on the River Blackwater with a high degree of water contact will not be encouraged and the public will be given information on the dangers associated with the river water quality.

Agriculture

In the north of the Valley agricultural interests still dominate the landscape. In other areas agricultural management is required to maintain ecological and landscape value. Sites such as Hawley Meadows and Shepherd Meadows are grazed, while public access for informal recreation is maintained.

Policy 53. The loss of agricultural land within the Blackwater Valley will be resisted, unless it is to be restored or used for nature conservation and / or recreation purposes within the guidelines contained in this document.

Policy 54. Farmers will be encouraged to diversify, wherever appropriate, to include forms of access, recreation and ecological enhancement within farm management.