

Gosport Borough Local Plan 2011-2029

Statement on Issues and Questions

Issue 3.12

Should there be specific mention of the biodiversity value of birds in the Wildgrounds SSSI and other sites in the Alver Valley?

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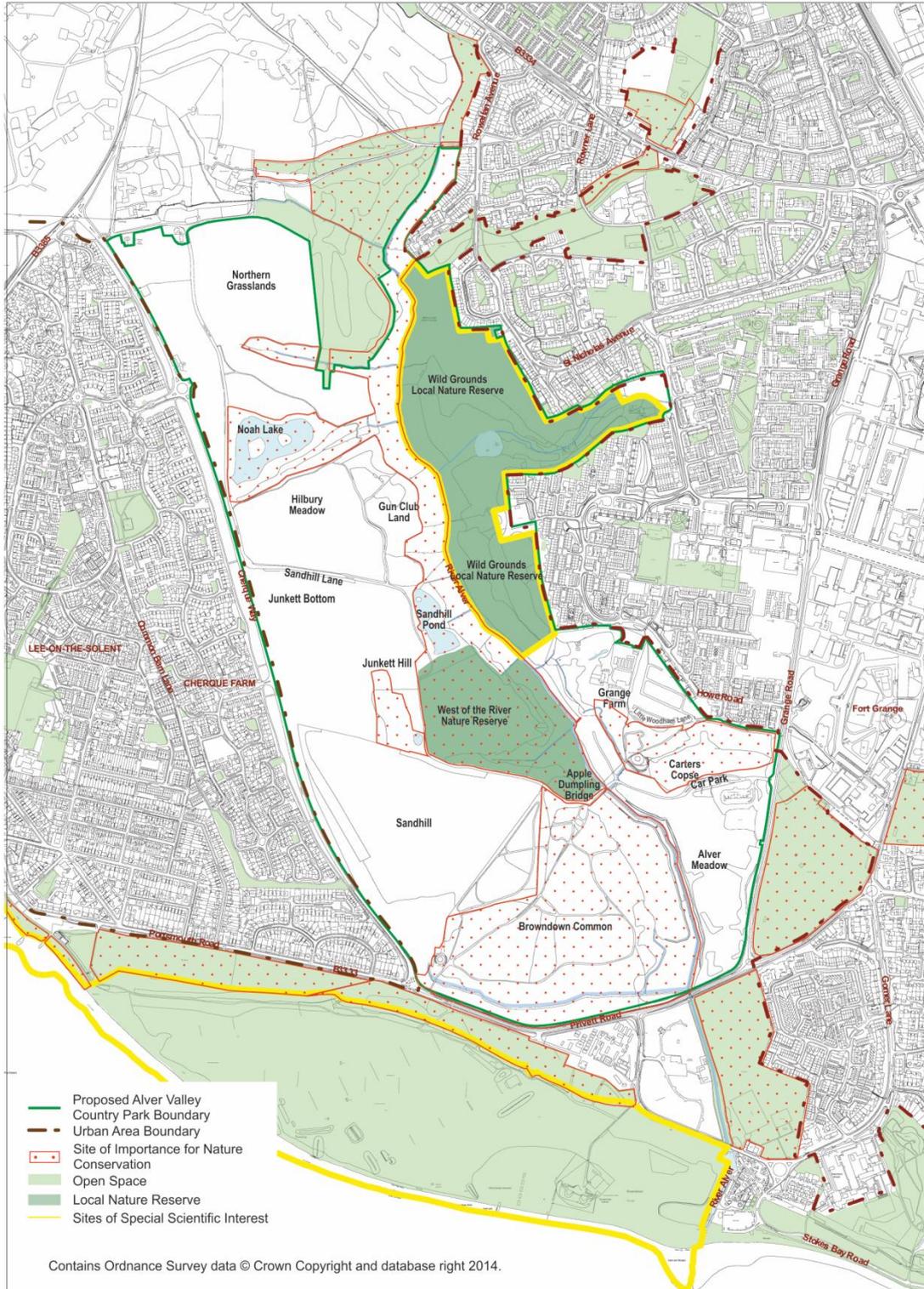


GOSPORT
Borough Council

Background

- 1.1 Plan 1 identifies the Wildgrounds SSSI and other nature conservation designations within the Alver Valley. The Alver Valley is being created as a Country Park and this ambition is set out in Policy LP8 of the Gosport Borough Local Plan 2011-2029 (GBLP) (Submission Library LP/A1/1). This policy and supporting text (point 1 and 3a) clearly recognises the need to protect and enhance the biodiversity on the site.

Plan 1: Location of nature conservation designations in the Alver Valley



- 1.2 The Council's Alver Valley Country Park (AVCP) Strategy (LP/F1/1) includes a key objective, 'to protect, celebrate and where possible enhance the thriving natural environment including its variety of habitats (p16). The Strategy includes a specific section on biodiversity and the natural environment and identifies the importance of a number of habitats and species including nesting bird species such as skylarks. It highlights that the Council has a ten year Higher Level Stewardship Grant on large tracts of the site whereby Natural England (NE) pays a grant to manage parts of the site to promote biodiversity. This includes management in relation to skylarks, linnets, barn owl, kestrel, reed bunting, cetti's warbler, reed warbler, Dartford warbler and water rail in addition to numerous plant, mammal (bat species and water vole), reptile and insect species. This therefore enables NE to monitor how GBC is performing in reaching these targets and funding is dependent on outcomes.

Natural England's representation

- 1.3 It appears in Natural England's representation (Rep 12) they were under the impression that an earlier suggested amendment to the Consultation Version of the GBLP (LP/A1/2) had not been included in the Publication version of the GBLP. However that amendment had been made in the Publication version together with other amendments in order to provide further detail and correct the name of a local nature reserve (West of the River LNR rather than Carters Copse) (see Box 1 below- Natural England's suggested text is shown in red).

Box 1: Changes made by GBC from the Consultation Version (December 2012) of the GBLP and the Publication Version (July 2014)

Para 7.183 (formerly 7.179).

The site contains significant important habitats including the Wildgrounds SSSI and Local Nature Reserve, which will continue to be managed on an 'access by permit' basis, as well as a number of Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs) including the West of the River Carters Copse Local Nature Reserve. A number of species using these habitats are sensitive to disturbance, especially from dogs and such pressures will be managed as part of an overall dog-friendly Country Park management plan. The protection and enhancement of biodiversity within the Country Park and allowing appropriate public access for the public to enjoy such areas will be a key objective in the management of the Alver Valley.

- 1.4 It is therefore considered that Natural England's concern on this matter has been addressed as reference for the need to be sensitive to disturbance especially from dogs has now been identified.

Biodiversity value of birds.

- 1.5 The Alver Valley has a number of important habitats and flora and fauna species and it is considered that the GBLP identifies the significance of this matter in Policy LP8 and the supporting text. Whilst the Borough Council does not have any particular issues about specifically mentioning the biodiversity value of birds in the Local Plan it is considered more appropriate to identify these interests in the AVCP Strategy, the Higher Level Stewardship Management Plan and various management plans that are being produced to support the AVCP Strategy (such as a Dog Strategy and Grazing Strategy).

- 1.6 In terms of management, the Wildgrounds SSSI will remain a dog-free area and access will continue to be on a permit basis only (which has the effect of limiting numbers to the site). The SSSI is only open between restricted hours (open between 10am- 4pm) during the week and is closed entirely during the winter months (November – February). Consequently it is considered that management of the SSSI will protect the biodiversity value of the site including those of bird species.
- 1.7 The Council is currently producing a dog strategy for the Alver Valley Country Park which introduces dog access management zones (red amber and green) which will provide stronger protection for ground nesting birds. This will ensure that areas where birds are nesting on the ground in the spring and summer months, dogs will be required to be placed on a lead (amber area).
- 1.8 The Council is therefore aiming to achieve the balance of increasing visitors including dog walkers whilst at the same time as maintaining and enhancing biodiversity. It will continue to closely work with Natural England as part of its stewardship arrangements. It is also envisaged that more education initiatives can assist in the conservation of species in the Alver Valley. Through appropriate management and monitoring it is considered that this can be achieved in a Country Park of this size and variety.

Conclusion

- 1.9 The GBLP refers more broadly to the sensitive habitats of the Alver Valley rather than specifically to bird species. Further details to measures to protect specific bird species and indeed improve the habitat to increase their numbers is set out in the High Level Stewardship Scheme Agreement and identified in the Alver Valley Country Park Strategy. The Council is undertaking numerous management measures to protect bird species in the Alver Valley from recreational pressure including limiting access to the Wildgrounds SSSI through a permit scheme and various management measures including a forthcoming dog strategy as well as education and awareness initiatives undertaken by the Countryside Rangers based at Grange Farm within the Country Park.