

Wealden Heaths Infrastructure Projects (WHIPs) Background and Guidance

1. Introduction

Countryside sites and green spaces are widely used for recreation and important to local communities. During the recent pandemic, the role green spaces play in providing space has been widely recognised and they are critical for the health and well-being of local people. With growing numbers of people and increasing use of the countryside it is important that there are sufficient opportunities for people to be able to undertake recreation outside and that the right kinds of places are available.

Some of the heathland areas around East Hampshire District are vulnerable to impacts from recreation and with increased development there is a risk that heathlands become damaged from too much recreation use. One way to ensure their protection is to ensure there are sufficient alternative opportunities for recreation nearby.

New homes are important for local communities and one way to ensure they do not increase the damage to sensitive heathland wildlife is to provide local residents with choices to use alternative, less sensitive locations. To this end, East Hampshire District Council will collect money from developers and use this money to fund Wealden Heath Infrastructure Projects ('WHIPs'). A WHIP is a project which enhances the functionality, accessibility and value of an area of existing countryside or parkland for informal recreation. The purpose is to attract residents, workers and visitors away from sensitive heathland sites, such as, although not exhaustive to, the Wealden Heaths Phase II Special Protection Area (SPA).

East Hampshire District Council are keen to locate potential WHIPs and make some funding available. This document provides information for those who might wish to apply, summarising the types of projects and how the application process works.

Types of projects

WHIPs can involve any project that works to draw visitors away from the heaths and provides or enhances opportunities for informal recreation in the countryside (i.e. naturalistic places with a relatively 'wild' feel). Applicants are encouraged to think widely and tailor applications to fit with particular local circumstances and the characteristics of the local area. Projects could involve a number of different elements, for example path improvements might be accompanied with signage, changes to parking etc. Examples of the elements that could be eligible for funding are shown in Figures 2 and 3 and include:

- Enhancements to existing green spaces to make them more attractive or easier to visit for walkers and particularly off-the-lead dog walks for example:
 - Interpretation, signs and way-marking,
 - Increased parking capacity or better parking,
 - Dog bins,
 - Improvements to path network (new paths, surfacing, boardwalks, bridges),
 - Access infrastructure (gates etc.),
 - Planting and landscaping to make areas more attractive.
- New routes to connect existing spaces or make existing spaces work better;
- Visitor surveys and visitor monitoring (if used to help design/inform other measures).

Projects do not have to target or provide for particular types of access. However, we know from visitor surveys on the heaths (see Box 1) that dog walkers account for a high proportion of visitors, followed by walking. Other relevant activities could include: cycling/mountain biking, jogging and family outings. Spaces may work for a range of types of access.

BOX 1: VISITOR SURVEY RESULTS FROM SURVEY ON THE WEALDEN HEATHS

Visitor surveys conducted at 23 survey points, across 5 sites in summer 2018 provide a useful insight into site users on the sensitive heathland sites.

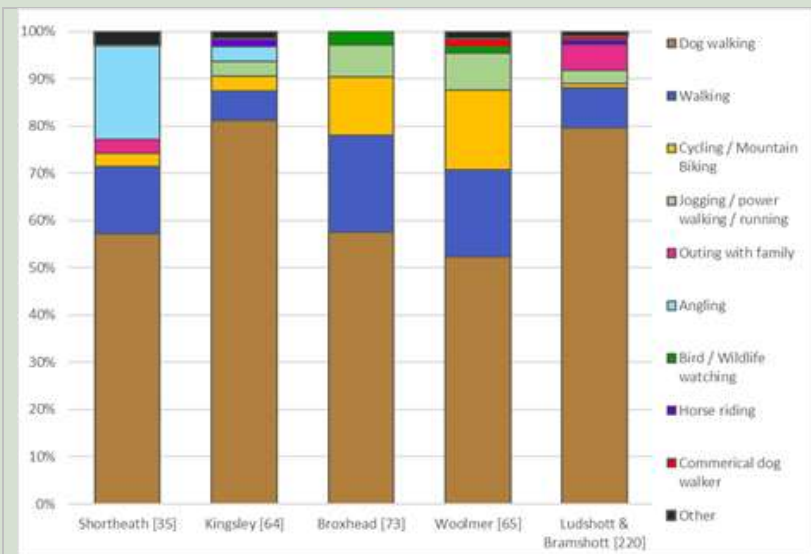


Figure 1: Proportions of different activities on different heaths

The majority of visitors (70%) were dog walkers, followed by walkers without dogs, cyclists/mountain bikers, and joggers, although this did vary between sites.

Most visitors were local to the site with three-quarters living within a 4 km radius of the sites. Postcodes were mostly distributed in Whitehill (including Bordon), Lindford, Headley, Liphook, Grayshott, Greatham, Kingsley and Oakhanger (Selborne parish). Reasonable numbers extended as far as the larger towns of Haslemere, Alton, Liss and Farnham.

The typical route length for visitors was around 2 to 2.5 km. The route length varied between sites. Cyclists and walkers conducted longer routes around 2.5 to 3.5 km. Some of the main reasons visitors went to the heaths sites were because they were “Close to home”, “Good for dog / dog enjoys it” and “Scenery / variety of views”.

Key features visitors to the heaths identified that they would like to see at alternative sites were: “more dog bins”, “the ability to let a dog off lead/ safer for dogs”, “free parking” and “better path surfacing/ path network”.

Locations

Despite their name, WHIPs do not have to be, or involve, areas of heathland. They can involve any green space that provides for informal recreation. Locations must work to provide informal access in the long-term. The locations do need to be a realistic alternative to the heaths and as such be reasonably close (within 7km of the Wealden Heaths Phase II SPA) and rural, countryside sites. In the context of East Hampshire District, they should be delivered around the Grayshott, Headley, Liphook and Whitehill & Bordon area. The broad area of search where projects will be eligible is shown in Map 1.

Levels of funding available

There is no maximum or minimum level of funding and applications can be for 100% of the cost of measures or the money can be used as part funding or alongside other funding sources. Projects likely to cost above £50,000 should check with Footprint Ecology regarding the content of their application before completing the form (see 'How to Apply' section for details).

Wealden Heaths Infrastructure Projects (WHIPs) search area

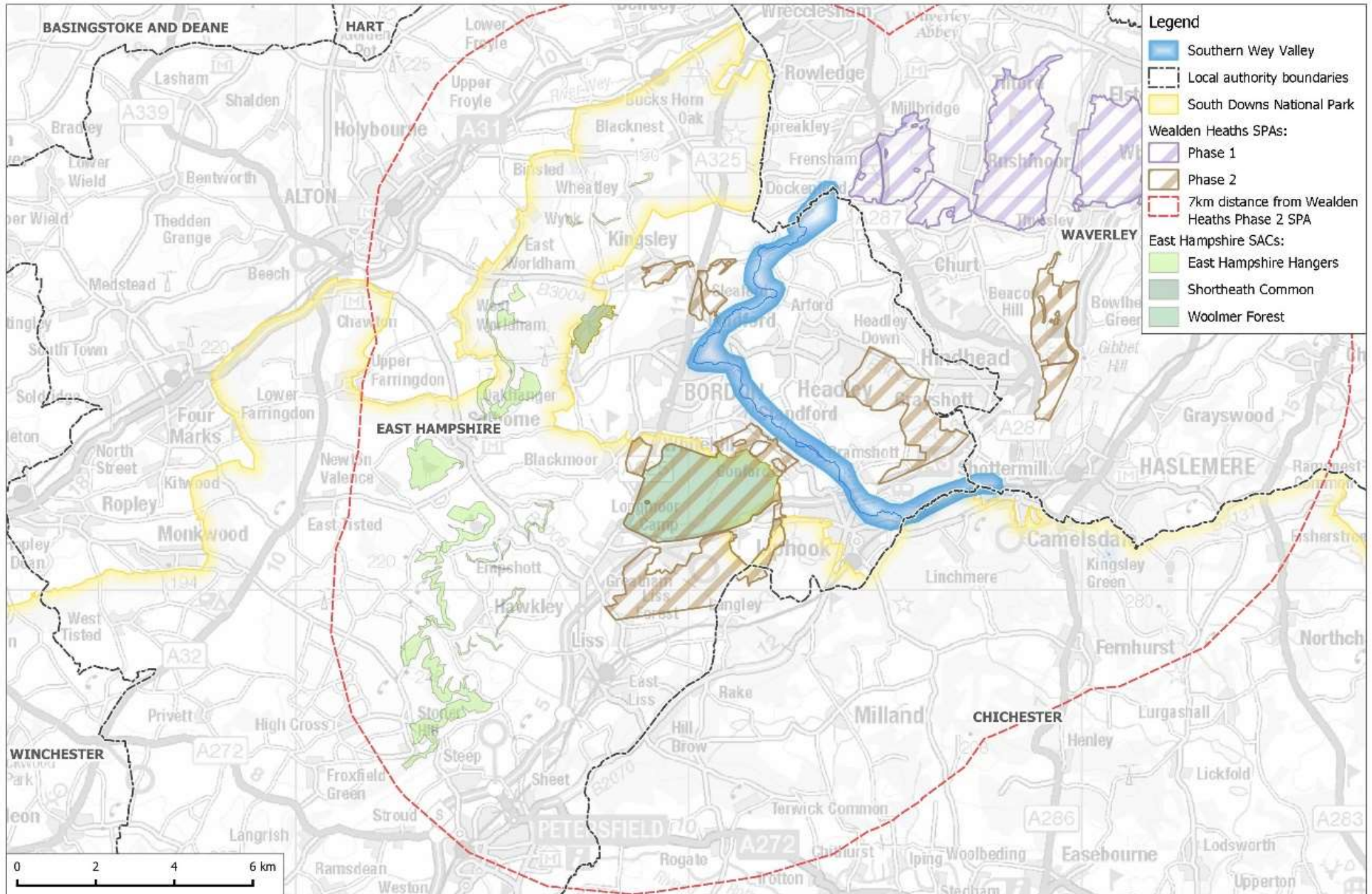




Figure 2: Examples of the potential things that could be funded: top row: boardwalk examples; middle row: path improvements/surfacing; third row down: access to water for dogs (left) new gates (right), bottom row: interpretation.



Figure 3: Examples of the potential things that could be funded: top row: finger post (left) and car-parking (right); second row: signage/apps providing visitor information (left) and natural planting (right); third row down: signage and waymarking; bottom row: dog bins (left) and automated people counter (in post) (right).

2. How to Apply

Contact for advice and support

East Hampshire District Council has appointed Footprint Ecology as an independent body to help find possible projects and support applicants. If you wish to discuss a potential application or require any assistance, please contact Zoe Caals at Footprint Ecology:

Zoe@footprint-ecology.co.uk

01929 552444

We are keen to discuss any potential application or any ideas and are available to help as required, for example with estimating costs or assisting with gathering information needed to complete the application form. This will not prejudice your application. We encourage anyone considering an application to contact us at an early stage.

Deadline for completion of application forms

Applications must be received before 31st January 2021.

Form for submitting applications

All applicants should complete the application form: <https://tinyurl.com/wealdenheaths>.

The form has been designed to be easy to complete and not overly complex. You can copy and paste information into the form and can also upload documents to accompany the application.

At any point, you can click 'Save' at the bottom of the page. You will then be provided with a link to return to your form later. You will need to either save this link, or provide your email address so it can be emailed to you. When you have finished completing the form, you need to click 'Submit' on the final page.

Key information recorded in the form are summarised below. The numbers cross reference to the question numbers on the application form.

1. Project name (a short title that describes your project)
2. Parish name (or main parish if project spans multiple parishes)
3. Brief description of project (up to 1000 characters)
4. Name of project lead (key contact regarding the application)
5. Company/agent (if relevant)
6. Representing (organisation, as relevant)
7. Contact telephone number

8. Contact email address
9. Land ownership details (i.e. who is owner of land in question and any other interests in land)
10. Upload a copy of title register for relevant land
11. If an agent, upload a letter from the landowner confirming landowner consent
12. Current land use (up to 1000 characters, please describe how the area is used at the moment)
13. Public access to the site (please tick 'yes' if there is any right of access, permissive routes or de facto access)
14. Current recreation use (up to 1000 characters, please describe current recreation use, referring to any visitor surveys if available – important information is the levels of current use and types of activity)
15. Contribution towards the Wealden Heaths Phase II SPA (describe how the project could make a difference for recreation use of the heaths, for example which sites it might deflect visitors from, which kinds of access, distance/travel time to heath, proximity to urban areas etc.)
16. Potential partners (list any partners or potential stakeholders, projects can involve multiple stakeholders or a single landowner/organisation)
17. Delivery timeframe (tick the relevant time frame over which the project will take place – projects can involve different elements over a number of years and if this is the case indicate the overall duration)
18. Phasing (tick the relevant box to indicate whether the project will be phased over a number of years or a single one-off works)

Assessment

Applications will be collated by Footprint Ecology and then assessed by an independent panel involving staff from the local authority and Natural England. Projects will be assessed based on their likely success in drawing people away from the heaths, value for money and geographic location (relevance to where increased recreation use is anticipated).