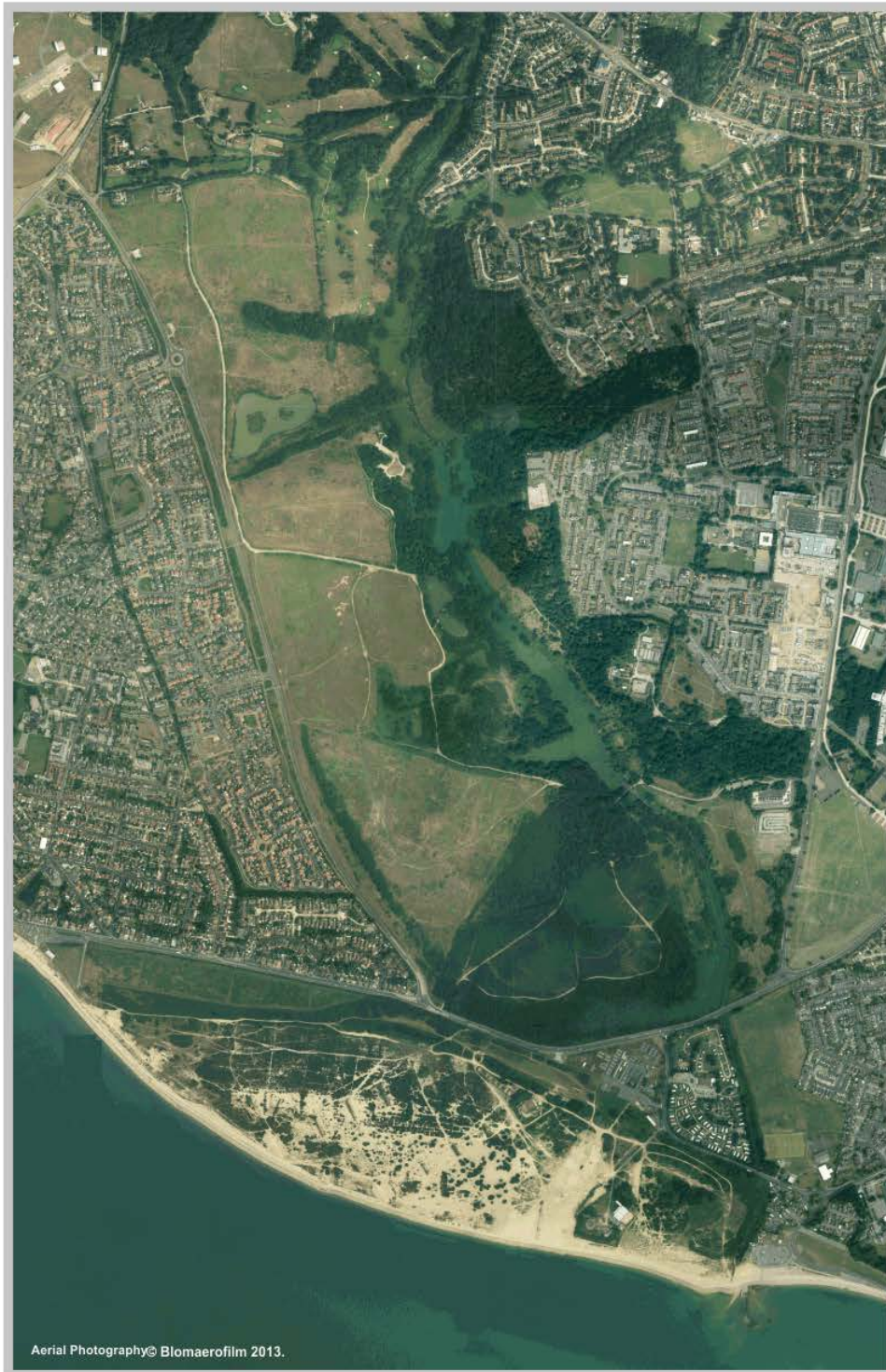


# Alver Valley Country Park : Strategy



**GOSPORT**  
Borough Council

**April 2014**



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## The Vision for the Alver Valley

The Alver Valley Country Park will be an interesting and exciting natural location for all the community incorporating a variety of recreational and educational activities for the whole community. It will be a place for having fun, exercising, exploring and socialising. More local residents and others in South Hampshire will be able to enjoy all the Country Park has to offer and utilise the enhanced facilities and services. The Country Park will be a well-managed, safe and desirable place to visit.

It will offer wildlife experiences and splendid views across the Solent, the Borough of Gosport and beyond. Habitats will continue to be managed and where possible enhanced; and the net increase of biodiversity will be integral to the establishment and ongoing management of the Country Park. Heritage assets will be managed, their significance understood and this will be communicated to visitors.





## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

### Overview

- 1.1 The Alver Valley forms a significant undeveloped gap between Gosport and Lee-on-the-Solent. Part of the Alver Valley has been used for gravel extraction and subsequent restoration works have largely been completed. The area encompasses a great diversity of habitats and landscapes including a range of wetlands, woodlands and grasslands. It is an important corridor linking the open land to the north with the coast. The River Alver itself drains land from Peel Common through to Browndown and into the Solent.
- 1.2 The Borough Council's aim is to create a Country Park within the Alver Valley with a range of informal recreational opportunities for local residents and visitors to enjoy. The proposed recreational uses include picnic areas, trails, footpaths, cycleways and interpretative facilities which will be supported by other appropriate country park facilities.
- 1.3 A great amount of work has already been undertaken with a number of partners to restore the land from a quarry and landfill to a more natural looking landscape including the creation of Sandhill and Junkett Hill. In addition Noah Lake has been created as a balancing pond which provides an attractive feature in the Park. A number of facilities have already been provided including a range of trails, a fishing lake, a BMX track, an adventure playground as well as various habitat creation initiatives. The Borough Council has also maintained a popular programme of countryside events for the public as well as working with local schools. The Wildgrounds has been operating as a nature reserve since 1979 with a permit entry system. In addition a volunteer group run the 17<sup>th</sup> Century living history village. Therefore the Alver Valley will already be familiar to many in the Borough.
- 1.4 The key step now is to consolidate the work undertaken to date and ensure the Alver Valley becomes a cohesive country park with a clear identity and a range of features that will attract and welcome families. It is the Borough Council's ambition that the Alver Valley Country Park becomes fully established and meets the criteria of Natural England's accreditation scheme (Appendix 1). Over time the Country Park will be able to welcome a greater number of local residents and visitors from the sub-region as well as provide an expanded programme of educational and recreational activities. It needs to be managed for a wide range of activities in a way that everyone feels safe and included; whilst still ensure the park's important habitats are maintained and wherever possible enhanced.

### Purpose of the Alver Valley Country Park Strategy

- 1.5 The purpose of this document is to:
- recognise the progress that has been made so far;
  - identify key proposals for the Alver Valley Country Park;
  - identify key issues which need to be addressed in order to implement these proposals;
  - be used as part of funding bids for various projects in the Alver Valley;
  - provide a basis to develop a comprehensive management plan;
  - be used for developing detailed project briefs for specific facilities in the Country Park; and
  - to supplement local and sub-region strategies relating to green infrastructure.
- 1.6 The preparation of this document draws on a number of sources including:
- work prepared by Hampshire County Council's (HCC) Countryside Service to assist the Borough Council with producing a new strategy for the Alver Valley. This work incorporates HCC's considerable experience of delivering and managing country parks within the County. HCC have provided a useful perspective on the Alver Valley and how to shape it into a modern country park and these ideas have largely been incorporated within the latest Alver Valley Country Park Strategy;

- partnership working with the Environment Agency on water quality and flooding issues in the Alver Valley;
- the original Alver Valley Masterplan which has been used where it is still applicable. This document was subject to considerable consultation and has influenced many current aspects of the Country Park seen today. However certain aspects of this work need to be re-assessed due to changing circumstances, evidence and other considerations which are set out in this document;
- the emerging Gosport Borough Local Plan 2011-2029 and subsequent public consultation which provides a wider planning framework for the Country Park;
- the Solent Disturbance and Mitigation: Stage 3 Report (Footprint Ecology 2013) which identifies the potential for the Alver Valley to help mitigate recreational disturbance impacts on internationally important habitats around the Solent.

### **Next Steps**

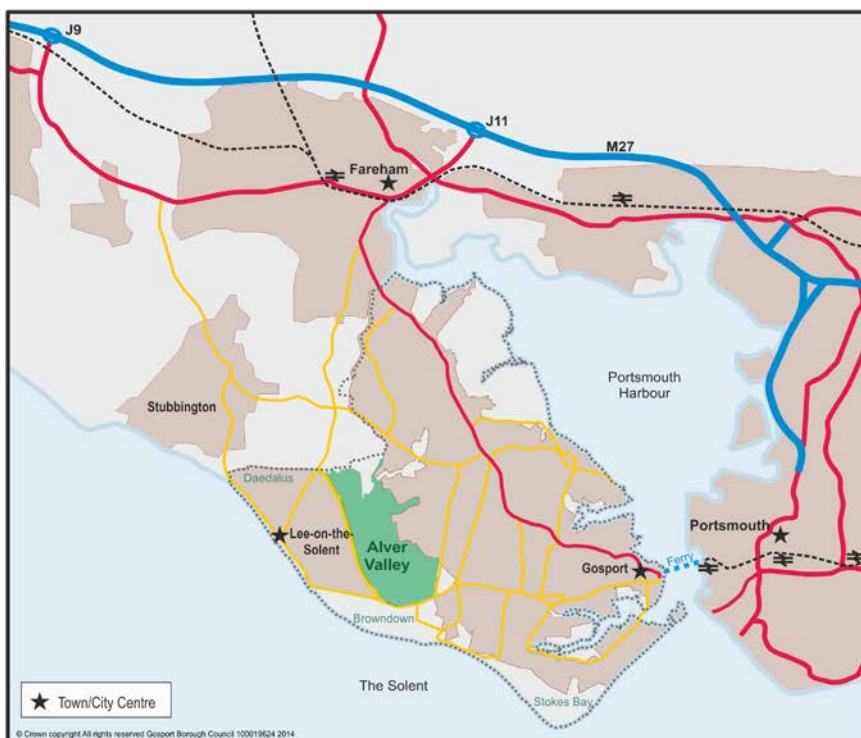
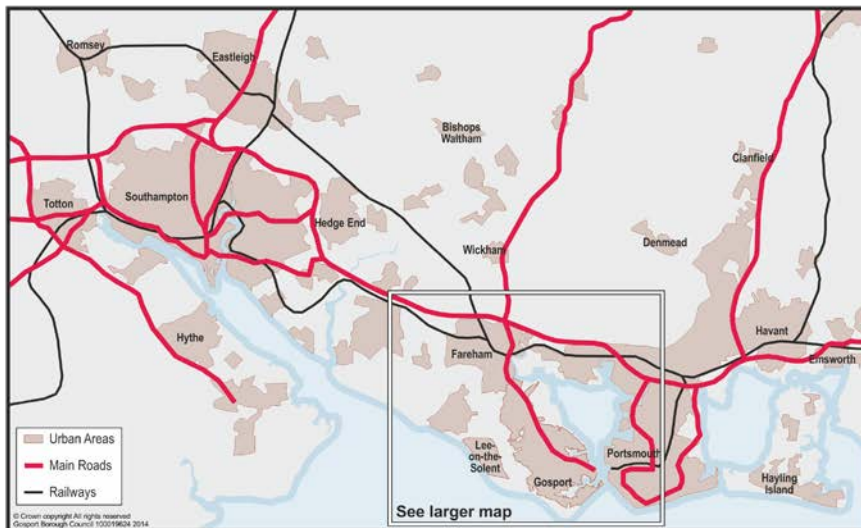
- 1.7 Once the Strategy is approved it will be necessary to work up projects which deliver the vision and objectives of the Country Park. These project briefs will be supported with a financial appraisal so that when funding opportunities arise the Borough Council is in a position to take the projects forward.
- 1.8 A comprehensive management plan of the site will also need to be produced by the Borough Council outlining the operational arrangements for the Country Park. Appropriate consultation for particular proposals with relevant groups and organisations will also need to take place.

## 2.0 SITE AND SURROUNDINGS

### Location

- 2.1 The Alver Valley is located on the Gosport peninsula in Hampshire between Gosport and Lee-on-the-Solent (see Plan 2). It lies immediately to the west of Gosport’s urban area running north-south following the course of the River Alver, connecting to the open coastal area of Browndown and the river mouth at the western end of Stokes Bay. It provides a rural gap which includes a great diversity of habitats and landscapes including a range of wetlands, woodlands and grasslands.
- 2.2 It represents the largest area of green infrastructure in the Borough with the potential for improved linkages to the coast, other strategic open areas and the wider countryside between Gosport, Fareham, Stubbington Lee-on-the-Solent and Titchfield. It occupies the southern end of the countryside gap between these settlements.

**Plan 2: Location of Alver Valley Country Park within Sub-Region**





- 2.3 Plan 3 identifies the immediate surroundings of the Alver Valley. The largely residential area of Rowner is immediately to the east of the Valley including the Alver Village area which is undergoing significant regeneration including new housing and a new retail area (which has recently been completed).
- 2.4 Lee-on-the-Solent is located to the west of the Alver Valley and includes the sizeable residential development of Cherque Farm. This was completed over the past decade and bounds the western side of the park adjacent Cherque Way.

**Plan 3: Alver Valley and its surroundings**



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- 2.5 The Country Park is also in close proximity to the Solent Enterprise Zone at Daedalus which is a major employment-led mixed-use development site currently being developed. Consequently the Alver Valley offers recreational opportunities for those working and living on the site.
- 2.6 The military still has a presence locally; HMS Sultan is a short distance from the Alver Valley to the east and is the home of the Defence School of Marine Engineering and the Royal Naval Air Engineering and Survival School.
- 2.7 A number of primary and junior schools are within 2 km of the Alver Valley boundary including the Siskin, Grange and Lee-on-the-Solent schools. The Borough's three secondary schools and Crofton School in Stubbington are all within 3km; with Bay House School only 700 metres from the boundary.
- 2.8 The Stubbington Study Centre is a residential centre used by schools for environmental, adventurous and cultural activities and is approximately 4 km from the Country Park.
- 2.9 There are other recreational facilities within the immediate vicinity of the Country Park including the Lee-on-the-Solent Golf Course at the northern end of the park and playing fields associated with HMS Sultan and Bay House School at the southern end. The Kingfisher Caravan Park which includes a bar and catering facility which are open to the public is also situated to the south of the Country Park.
- 2.10 Adjacent to the Kingfisher Caravan Park is a public footpath from Privett Road to Browndown Road which runs adjacent to the River Alver. This allows for a pleasant access link between the Country Park and the Stokes Bay area. The extensive beach and greensward at Stokes Bay overlooks the Solent and the Isle of Wight and is popular for walking. It includes several nature conservation areas and a number of heritage features including Number 2 Battery used as a Diving Museum and the impressive Fort Gilkicker. The Stokes Bay area has a number of visitor facilities such as two cafes, a hotel, toilets, crazy golf, tennis and the Splashpark. It is also popular for activities associated with the sea including a sailing club, windsurfing, and angling. The Alver Valley and Stokes Bay areas therefore offer significant complimentary coast and countryside recreational opportunities providing an all-day attraction.
- 2.11 The extensive Browndown Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is owned by the MoD and is located south of Browndown Common site, adjacent to Privett Road. Access from the north is restricted by a long high fence. People can access from the east and west along the coast although access is restricted during military training exercises.
- 2.12 There is a small buffer area owned by Hampshire County Council, known as the Browndown Coastal Area. This allows for an off-road link between the Country Park and Lee-on-the-Solent sea front, again providing complimentary leisure opportunities.
- 2.13 The Browndown Camp area, adjacent the Browndown SSSI and Kingfisher Caravan Park was formerly a military training base, with some ongoing use by local cadets. However the site has been sold to a private landowner and their future plans are not yet known.

### **Accessibility**

- 2.14 The Gosport Peninsula has two main road accesses to the north; the A32 Fareham Road, and B3385 Newgate Lane. Both routes converge south of Fareham town centre and connect via the A27 to M27 Junction 11. Titchfield Road (B3334) offers a route from Stubbington heading north-west to M27 Junction 9.

- 2.15 The Grange Farm area of the Alver Valley is located around 9.6km (6 miles) from Junction 11 of the M27 and is reached via the A32, Grange Road, Howe Road and Little Woodham Lane through the new regenerated housing area known as Alver Village.
- 2.16 There is also access from the west to a small car park off Cherque Way on the eastern edge of Lee-on the Solent. From the north this can be reached via Broom Way either from Newgate Lane (from Fareham) or Gosport Road (from Stubbington).
- 2.17 Bus routes run along the eastern edge of the park with a number of bus stops that could be used to access the Country Park particularly the stop nearest Alver Meadow.
- 2.18 There are a number of cycle paths close to the Country Park including: along the western side of Cherque Way; along Privett Road/Portsmouth Road to the south with connections to Stokes Bay and Lee-on-the-Solent seafront; and adjacent to HMS Sultan to the east. These routes connect to the wider cycle network within the Borough. There are a number of cycle and pedestrian crossing points close to the Country Park.
- 2.19 There is a network of paths for walking and cycling in the Country Park although it is not clear which can be cycled on and which only walked on and some have developed as 'de facto' routes through use rather than design.
- 2.20 Further analysis of the key accessibility issues are considered in Section 5.

#### **Local demographics characteristics**

- 2.21 Gosport Borough has a population of 82,600<sup>1</sup> which is all within approximately 5 km (3 miles) of the Alver Valley Country Park and is set to grow to 84,400 over the next 15 years. The city of Portsmouth is located 6.5km (4 miles) to the east and Southampton City Centre is approximately 23km (14.5 miles) to the north west. Within approximately 10km there are the significant population centres of Fareham (6km to the north) as well as settlements such as Park Gate, Locks Heath and Whiteley all within easy reach of the Park. The South Hampshire sub-region itself has a population of approximately 1 million people.
- 2.22 The Country Park is located within the wards of Lee East, Grange, and Rowner and Holbrook Wards with a combined population of 16,334. These three wards also have the highest proportion of under 18's in the Borough, with Grange Ward having the highest proportion of children in the whole of Hampshire (including Southampton and Portsmouth) with 35.7% of its population under 18.<sup>2</sup> Consequently it will be important for the Country Park to engage with this considerable number of young people in its immediate vicinity and provide suitable facilities and activities.
- 2.23 The Borough's age profile is set out in Appendix 2 and consequently will need to be considered when developing facilities in the Country Park. This profile is ageing due largely to a longer life expectancy and a low birth rate, which is in line with the national trend. The proportion of over 65's will increase to 24.6% in 2029 with the number of residents over 65 increasing by approximately 6,000 people. This may also have implications for the type of facilities offered including the implications of a larger active retired population.
- 2.24 There are a number of pockets of multiple deprivation<sup>3</sup> including health deprivation within the Borough. The Borough also has one of the highest levels of residents with excess

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<sup>1</sup> 2011 Census

<sup>2</sup> Rowner and Holbrook is 9<sup>th</sup> (out of 278 wards) with 27.6% of its population under 18 and Lee East is 25<sup>th</sup> with 25.7%

<sup>3</sup> According to the Indices of Multiple Deprivation produced by the Government in 2010 based on 2009 data- see Gosport Sustainability Profile for further details.

weight (including those overweight and obese) in England<sup>4</sup>. Consequently the Alver Valley is an opportunity to ensure that local residents potentially benefit from these facilities to improve both physical and mental health and well-being. There are also areas of employment and income deprivation where residents could benefit from the facilities in the Alver Valley, particularly if access to a car is limited or travelling further afield for country park activities on a regular basis is financially prohibitive.

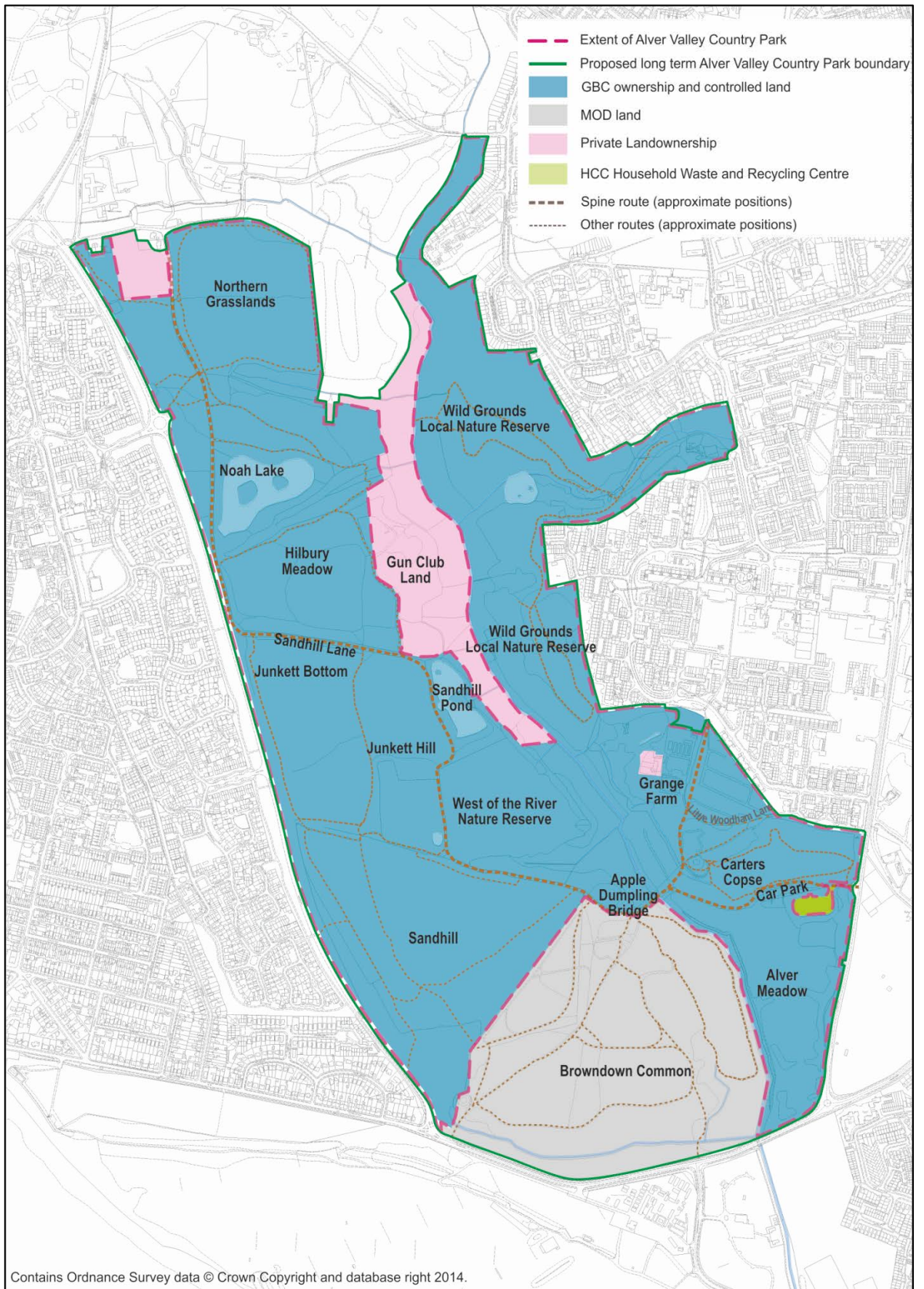
### **Size and Tenure of site**

- 2.25 The Alver Valley is approximately 203 hectares of which approximately 155 ha is controlled by Gosport Borough Council (see Plan 4) including land owned by GBC and leased for 999 years from Persimmon Homes.
- 2.26 A further 34 ha is owned by the MoD at Browndown Common, which whilst not forming part of the official Country Park, is used by current visitors in close association with the rest of the Alver Valley. It is occasionally used by the MoD for training purposes and at these times is not available for public use.
- 2.27 There is a large tract of land of 12 hectares in the centre of park owned by a private landowner which is used by a gun club and not available for use by the general public. There is also an area of land (approximately 2 hectares) at the northern end of the site owned by a different landowner which is fenced off and does not appear to be used and is an area of scrub. In addition Grange Farmhouse, adjacent the Borough Council's Grange Farm facilities, which includes three dwellings and the associated land is in private ownership.
- 2.28 The GBC land will form the current boundaries of the Alver Valley Country Park but it is envisaged that additional land could be added later. Further details about land ownership issues are considered in Section 6.

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<sup>4</sup> Public health statistics (Feb 2014) <http://www.noo.org.uk/visualisation> which indicates that Gosport has the 6<sup>th</sup> highest levels of excess weight (72.9%) including 29.1% being obese (25<sup>th</sup> highest local authority in England).

**Plan 4: Land tenure in the Alver Valley**





**History of the Alver Valley**

- 2.29 Historically the Alver Valley has formed part of the wider open countryside of South Hampshire and includes some relic features of this past including the ancient woodlands which form part of the Wildgrounds Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) within the Alver Valley.
- 2.30 There is evidence of Neolithic presence in the Alver Valley and there may also be evidence of Saxon settlement near Grange Farm. Early settlers cleared much of the woodland exposing the fertile soil for agriculture. The land has been used for agricultural purposes for many centuries and there is evidence that it was used by the Cistercian Monks from Quarr Abbey on the Isle of Wight. The current Grange Farmhouse dates largely dates from the seventeenth century although parts of the building date back to a much earlier stone-built building dating to 1295. Maps from 1803 show an intensively farmed landscape of small enclosures, commons and water meadows.
- 2.31 Apple Dumpling Bridge has been a historic crossing point which gave it strategic importance and hence the construction of the near-by motte and bailey. The present bridge dates from the 1940s and was constructed to withstand heavy vehicles.
- 2.32 Other evidence of the military presence in the Alver Valley includes an extensive system of First World War training trenches on Browndown Common, which is still owned by the MoD. There are also Second World War pillboxes within the Alver Valley.
- 2.33 The course of the river itself has changed due to military requirements and it currently enters the sea through an outfall at Browndown rather than near Fort Gilkicker as it once did.
- 2.34 The Alver Valley was transformed from the 1950's onwards when large areas were used for sand and gravel quarrying. This was followed in the 1970s when much of the quarried area was used to bury refuse. This has ultimately provided the opportunity to create the Alver Valley Country Park.

**Current activities within the Alver Valley Country Park**

- 2.35 Today the Alver Valley is a mosaic of different habitats some more established than others depending on whether the land was quarried or not.
- 2.36 Over the past decade through various projects undertaken by the Borough Council in partnership with other organisations, the Alver Valley has been transformed from a largely industrial landscape of quarry pits and landfill to a much more natural looking scenery. It is also clear that the number of visitors and types of activities have also increased over this period. The opening up of Cherque Way and the development of the Cherque Farm residential area has significantly increased the number of visitors to the Country Park.
- 2.37 Current activities in the Country Park include specific activities associated with certain attractions such as fishing, BMX riding and playing on the adventure playground; visitors to the 17<sup>th</sup> Century Village and the Wildgrounds; and the popular events organised by the Borough Council's Countryside Section. A number of informal recreational activities take place including walking, dog-walking, cycling and nature watching. However the levels of participation are generally low when compared with established country parks of this size. There is therefore significant potential to increase activity levels for all these activities and introduce new activities to attract additional visitors. There is significant scope to increase the use by families and the over 60's.

- 2.38 An assessment of the characteristics of different parts of the Alver Valley are considered in Section 7 together with key issues relating to each part of the site and an outline of facilities and activities proposed.

### **3.0 POLICY CONTEXT**

- 3.1 In preparing this Strategy particular regard has been given to national, sub-regional and local policies, strategies and guidance. These are briefly outlined below with more details in Appendix 3.

#### **National Policy and Guidance**

##### **Country Parks Accreditation Scheme**

- 3.2 Natural England in 2009 launched the Country Parks Accreditation Scheme which aims to identify and recognise sites that actually deliver the core facilities and services expected of Country Parks.<sup>5</sup> Details of key features are contained in Appendix 1.

##### **National Planning Policy**

- 3.3 National planning guidance is set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). A brief overview of the key guidance and its relevance to the Alver Valley site is set out in Appendix 3.

#### **Sub-Regional Context**

##### **South Hampshire Strategy**

- 3.4 The South Hampshire Strategy (October 2012) prepared by the Partnership for South Hampshire (PUSH), which includes Gosport Borough Council, recognises the importance of green infrastructure to provide for the considerable demand for recreational opportunities which will increase as a consequence of new house building. It also recognises the importance of green infrastructure to improve the quality and character of places, enhance biodiversity and help avoid/mitigate increased recreational pressures (arising from new development) on sites of European importance for nature conservation. It can also help address climate change both mitigation (because trees and vegetation absorb carbon dioxide) and adaptation (through shading, evaporative cooling). It also recognises the need for a sub-regional network of green infrastructure at various scales.
- 3.5 Policy 14 of the sub-regional strategy states that the South Hampshire authorities will work together to plan, provide and manage connected networks of multi-functional green spaces including existing and new green infrastructure. These networks will be planned and managed to deliver the widest range of environmental, social and economic benefits.

##### **South Hampshire Green Infrastructure Strategy and Implementation Framework**

- 3.6 The South Hampshire Green Infrastructure (GI) Strategy has been produced on behalf of PUSH by UE Associates in order to recognise the importance of GI in the sub region and the role it has in assisting sustainable development. The preparation of the Strategy was supported by a number of organisations in addition to the PUSH local authority partners, including the Environment Agency and Natural England. It was adopted by PUSH in June 2010.
- 3.7 The Strategy provides the framework for more detailed proposals to enhance the area's GI. The aims of the Strategy are to:

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<sup>5</sup> Further details can be viewed at <http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/enjoying/places/countryparks/accreditation/default.aspx>

- Identify sub-regional strategic initiatives and projects to provide a high quality of life for the people who live and work in the sub-region.
- Seek to maximise multifunctional use of open space and natural spaces for a range of benefits.
- Promote connectivity of all types of greenspace at a range of scales.
- Provide a key element of the sub-regions mitigation strategy in relation to the Habitats Regulations.

3.8 In total 46 projects were proposed under five headings of:

- The Green Grid
- Coast for People, Wildlife and Improved Water
- The Forest of Bere Land Management Initiative
- Country Parks and Woodlands (which includes the Alver Valley Country Park)
- Greener Urban Design

3.9 The Strategy did not examine in detail how the projects could be delivered and did not propose an order of priority. It also recognised that there would be other projects which could come forward. To support the delivery of the Strategy, PUSH commissioned the preparation of an Implementation Framework (PUSH Oct 2012)<sup>6</sup> to support the development of the area's existing GI, the delivery of a number of key strategic projects and assist partner authorities to develop their own mitigation strategies where new development is being considered. Following the assessment of the merits of the original 46 projects a number of projects were identified as being of sub regional importance and ones which PUSH together with its partners would focus their resources to bring forward. The Alver Valley Country Park has been identified on the shorter list of a dozen or so projects. The Implementation Framework identifies a number of delivery mechanisms which PUSH will try to use in partnership with the relevant local authorities to develop those projects including the Alver Valley Country Park.

### **The Solent Disturbance and Mitigation Project (Solent Forum et al): Mitigation Strategy**

3.10 In order to understand the issue of recreational disturbance and its potential impact on internationally important habitats, detailed research has been undertaken as part of the Solent Disturbance and Mitigation Project (SDMP)<sup>7</sup>. This work has been coordinated by the Solent Forum and has involved a number of organisations including Natural England, Environment Agency, all the local authorities around the Solent, relevant harbour groups and the RSPB. The work has concluded that existing and new residential development is likely to have an adverse impact on protected bird species that use the European sites as a result of recreational disturbance generated by local residents.

3.11 Natural England<sup>8</sup> have made it clear that the SDMP work represents the best available evidence and therefore avoidance and mitigation measures are required in order to ensure a significant effect, arising from new housing development around the Solent, is avoided. Consequently it will be a requirement of new residential development to contribute towards the measures identified by the Project and others that may be considered appropriate. A broad level Mitigation Strategy<sup>9</sup> has been produced as part of the SDMP and work is being undertaken to implement a package of interim measures which will form part of a longer term action plan. The creation of the Alver Valley Country Park has been identified in the

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<sup>6</sup> [http://www.push.gov.uk/pjc-121002-amo-r04-app\\_a.pdf](http://www.push.gov.uk/pjc-121002-amo-r04-app_a.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> [http://www.solentforum.org/forum/sub\\_groups/Natural\\_Environment\\_Group/Disturbance\\_and\\_Mitigation\\_Project/](http://www.solentforum.org/forum/sub_groups/Natural_Environment_Group/Disturbance_and_Mitigation_Project/)

<sup>8</sup> [http://www.solentforum.org/forum/sub\\_groups/Natural\\_Environment\\_Group/Disturbance\\_and\\_Mitigation\\_Project/Advice\\_to\\_PUSH\\_and\\_Solent\\_Forum%20310513.pdf](http://www.solentforum.org/forum/sub_groups/Natural_Environment_Group/Disturbance_and_Mitigation_Project/Advice_to_PUSH_and_Solent_Forum%20310513.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> [http://www.solentforum.org/forum/sub\\_groups/Natural\\_Environment\\_Group/Disturbance\\_and\\_Mitigation\\_Project/Phase3\\_Avoidance\\_and\\_Mitigation\\_Strategy.pdf](http://www.solentforum.org/forum/sub_groups/Natural_Environment_Group/Disturbance_and_Mitigation_Project/Phase3_Avoidance_and_Mitigation_Strategy.pdf)

Mitigation Strategy as a potential mitigation measure which can deflect pressure from sensitive parts of the coast.

### **Local Policy and Strategy**

#### **Gosport Borough Council's Corporate Plan**

- 3.12 The creation of the Alver Valley Country Park is identified as a priority in the latest Borough Council Corporate Plan<sup>10</sup>.

#### **Gosport Borough Local Plan Review (adopted 2006)**

- 3.13 The 'saved' policies of the Gosport Local Plan Review (May 2006) remain a key element of the development plan for Gosport and will be used in determining planning applications for the Alver Valley site. A summary of key policies are set out in Appendix 3. The Local Plan Review identifies the Alver Valley as the site for a new country park for a range of activities (Policy R/OS6) within the Strategic Gap (R/OS2).

#### **Emerging Gosport Borough Local Plan 2011-2029**

- 3.14 The emerging Gosport Borough Local Plan has yet to be subject to a formal Examination in Public and therefore it is not anticipated that this document will be adopted until early 2015. However as it has been through several stages of public consultation it is useful in providing the Borough Council's latest position. This Plan includes a more detailed policy relating to the Alver Valley and identifies it as an area of Regeneration for Green Infrastructure. Its importance to the Borough and the wider sub-region is acknowledged. The Regeneration Area covers the whole Alver Valley including those tracts of land where there is a longer term aspiration to incorporate within the Country Park (Plan 1). However in the short term due to land ownership constraints it is acknowledged that the Country Park will cover the land owned and controlled by the Borough Council.

#### **Alver Valley Park Masterplan Study May 2003**

- 3.15 The original Alver Valley Masterplan was produced by the Borough Council together with Groundwork Solent and consultants H/E/D. It was the result of significant public consultation between 1999 and 2003 which confirmed that the Alver Valley should retain its integrity as a large tract of open countryside and should not be compromised by over-development. These consultations had ensured that all the proposals contained within the original masterplan, as far as possible have the approval of the community and interested parties.

- 3.16 As mentioned previously many elements of this earlier document have been delivered and it is proposed to adopt alternative approaches on some of the schemes as outlined within this Strategy.

### **Planning History**

- 3.17 Outline planning permission was granted for a Country Park in 2005 and there have been a number of relating applications since relating to features such as trails, the BMX track, play areas and car parking. Further details are including in Appendix4.

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<sup>10</sup> <http://www.gosport.gov.uk/EasysiteWeb/getresource.axd?AssetID=15219&type=..>



## 4.0 DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

- 4.1 The Alver Valley has a number of attributes which give it great potential to be a successful country park and can deliver significant benefits to the local population. Further assessment of these strengths and opportunities are contained in Appendix 5 which has informed this Strategy regarding the main proposals for the Country Park.
- 4.2 The Development Strategy sets out the key objectives for the full establishment of the Alver Valley Country Park and outlines the main proposals for the Country Park as well as other potential facilities and activities which require further investigation. This section provides details of the broad locations for such facilities and some justification of why such facilities would be appropriate for the Alver Valley Country Park.
- 4.3 Further details regarding accessibility and development considerations relating to these proposals are contained in section 5 and 6 with an assessment of how these facilities would fit together within each character area detailed in section 7.

### Key Objectives

- 4.4 The key objectives for the creation of the Alver Valley Country Park are as follows:
- To create a significant multifunctional green infrastructure facility in close proximity to a dense urban area providing a wide range of appropriate recreational activities for residents of Gosport and the wider South Hampshire sub-region;
  - To create a cohesive country park with clear legible boundaries and an identity within the surrounding community;
  - To create a country park with clear gateways with good orientation and flow around, across and through the Country Park;
  - To create a real countryside experience where visitors feel safe in a community setting;
  - To protect, celebrate and where possible enhance the thriving natural environment including its variety of habitats;
  - To conserve and enhance the high quality heritage of the Alver Valley and encourage people to understand the special qualities of the Country Park;
  - To provide a well-connected and family friendly Country Park which is a place that is welcoming, open and inviting for all;
  - To provide and develop a wide range of outdoor informal activities and attractions which will provide physical and mental health benefits to local residents and be a place for visitors to enjoy and want to gather and dwell;
  - To provide a range of specialist activities and events that are compatible with the setting of the Country Park;
  - To build-upon the strong well-established cycling participation in the Borough by providing a range of cycle routes to and within the Country Park as well as providing a range of additional cycling activities;

- To encourage strong community involvement and support of the Alver Valley Country Park whereby people are involved and engaged with a local sense of ownership and community pride ;
- To incorporate measures which improve the water quality of the River Alver;
- To deflect recreational pressure from internationally designated habitats by providing a suitable attractive green space for visitors including areas and facilities for dog walkers.
- To reduce the need to travel by car and provide opportunities to access a large area of green infrastructure by foot or cycle rather than using facilities off the Peninsula.
- To provide an important link in the green network between coastal areas such as Browdown, Lee Clifflands and Stokes Bay with the countryside to the north and protect the function of the gap between Gosport and Lee-on-the Solent which forms part of a wider gap between these settlements and Stubbington, Fareham and Titchfield.

**Proposals**

- 4.5 Arising from the identified strengths and opportunities, and the work already undertaken, the Country Park will have a number of facilities to serve people living in, and visiting the area, which will deliver the objectives set out above.
- 4.6 The key proposed or potential facilities are set out below with a short comment on each. The boxes with the **green** titles are considered definite proposals whilst **orange** identifies a potential scheme that requires further investigation on suitability.
- 4.7 Further details are contained in Section 7 in relation to each character area and approximate locations of key facilities are shown on the Masterplan.

*Visitor basics*

<b>Proposal: Car Parks</b>	
<i>Location</i>	<i>At the Grange Farm, Western and Eastern Gateways</i>
<i>Comments</i>	<i>It is important that the site has adequate and well-designed car and motorcycle parking arrangements to serve the increased number of visitors. Each gateway will have a car park and will be sensitively designed with permeable surfacing (where appropriate), welcome signage, interpretation and site plans. Each will incorporate attractive landscaping.</i>  <i>It will be necessary to develop a car parking strategy as part of the forthcoming management plan. Further details are included in Section 5 regarding Accessibility.</i>

<b>Proposal: Toilets</b>	
<i>Location</i>	<i>Grange Farm</i>
<i>Comments</i>	<i>Currently there are public toilets located in the Grange Farm complex, however these are not open at all times.</i>  <i>The public toilets will need to accommodate increased visitor numbers and meet modern expectations.</i>  <i>The main new toilet facilities will serve the Grange Farm Gateway and the rest of the Country Park. The toilets will need to be well designed to fit with its setting.</i>

<b>Proposal: Food and Drink with facilities for visitors</b>	
<i>Location</i>	<p><i>The main café will be at the Grange Farm Gateway and be linked to the proposed garden centre facility.</i></p> <p><i>There is potential for a kiosk or a mobile concession as part of the Eastern Gateway.</i></p>
<i>Comments</i>	<p><i>Most popular country parks have some form of catering provision and encourage people to spend more time at the country park as well as bringing in revenue. They are often seen as an integral part for any trip out. A café would therefore represent an essential part of the visitor hub at Grange Farm.</i></p> <p><i>The type of facilities will depend much on the market and anticipated visitor numbers. It is considered that due to the increase in the number of people in their sixties, this more active retired market are an important demographic for café use throughout the week. The café would also need to be accessible and quite spacious to accommodate people with wheelchairs and families with pushchairs.</i></p> <p><i>The café needs to be an integral part of the Country Park communicating messages about the Country Park activities and reflecting its themes. It needs to be designed to represent the distinctiveness of its setting within the Country Park. The café will need to include space to provide information and displays about the Alver Valley and there may be potential for additional facilities for visitors (such as a function room/events space) depending on the space available.</i></p>

<b>Proposal: Picnic areas</b>	
<i>Location</i>	<i>Various locations in the Country Park including Alver Meadow (Eastern Gateway), Northern Grasslands(Western gateway) and Oxstall Meadow (Grange Farm Gateway).</i>
<i>Comments</i>	<i>Picnic areas are popular with all age groups particularly families. It is intended that a picnic area with suitable picnic tables and litter bins will be located in association with each gateway so families can enjoy other facilities located close-by.</i>

<b>Proposal: Barbeque areas</b>	
<i>Location</i>	<i>Associated with the Eastern and Western Gateway</i>
<i>Comments</i>	<i>Barbeques are very popular and have the added benefit of bringing an income into the Country Park. There are concerns that BBQ areas can pose a fire risk and certainly some country parks have experienced problems. The risks and management of barbeques therefore needs to be considered further in the forthcoming Management Plan.</i>

<b>Proposal: 'Gathering areas'</b>	
<i>Location</i>	<i>These would including: Apple Dumpling Bridge and its surrounds; Sandhill viewpoint; and areas associated with the Eastern, Western and Grange Farm Gateways</i>
<i>Comments</i>	<p><i>Gathering areas will include a sensitively designed seating area set in a pleasant location with the potential for an eye-catching feature (natural feature, public art). The areas should however avoid clutter. These will be places where people will want to meet and linger.</i></p> <p><i>Public art in a suitable location which can be clearly identifiable with the image of the Country Park can add interest.</i></p> <p><i>Currently Apple Dumpling bridge area is a popular meeting place to sit and enjoy the river and let the dogs swim but this area can be improved significantly as a meeting area with perhaps a picnic area and additional seating within the vicinity. There is the potential on the west side of the river</i></p>

	<p><i>to include a viewing platform to enable views across the reed-bed.</i></p> <p><i>Sandhill has superb views and a well-designed feature which helps visitors interpret the 360° view would be appropriate in this location.</i></p> <p><i>In addition to the identified sites, other gathering areas will develop informally as the Country Park becomes increasingly used by visitors.</i></p>
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*Main Attractions at the Grange Farm Gateway*

<b>Proposal: Oxstall Meadow-outdoor family-focussed activity space</b>	
<i>Location</i>	<i>Oxstall Meadow, Grange Farm Gateway</i>
<i>Comments</i>	<p><i>Oxstall Meadow is currently underused and in need of refurbishment (see Oxstall Meadow Character Area) and has the scope to be a family focussed education and adventure area. There is potential for a mini farm yard type experience and petting zoo for young people as well as woodland and meadow trails encompassing various nature activities including a view of the reed beds. Ideas should draw on the current strengths of this area.</i></p> <p><i>Currently this area is fenced off and closed off to the general public. Further consideration should be given to future access arrangements once this area has been redesigned/refurbished. In many ways it would be desirable to remove the current fencing and gates to the site and allow the general public to move through this area. It should remain a dog-free area where young children can enjoy.</i></p> <p><i>Further design and consideration is required to provide a cohesive area.</i></p>

<b>Proposal: Wildgrounds</b>	
<i>Location</i>	<i>Wildgrounds- new access point from Grange Farm Gateway</i>
<i>Comments</i>	<p><i>The Wildgrounds is a Special Site of Scientific Interest and Local Nature Reserve. The site includes mature oakwood, meadow and reedbed habitats.</i></p> <p><i>Access is currently via a permit basis (daily and monthly permits available) which can be purchased on the site or at the Council offices. The access is currently via Rodney Close and there is a small car park located here.</i></p> <p><i>It is proposed that a new access point will be via the main visitor hub at Grange Farm and tickets can be purchased from here.</i></p> <p><i>It is considered that the Borough Council in liaison with Natural England will need to review access arrangements for the site in due course to consider whether there is scope to widen accessibility to the site and the wider park whilst still protecting the nature conservation features of the site which is the paramount objective.</i></p> <p><i>Potential aspects of any review would need to be incorporated as part of the forthcoming Country Park Management Plan and the relevant habitat management plan.</i></p>

<b>Proposal: Little Woodham- 17<sup>th</sup> Century Village<sup>11</sup></b>	
Location	17 <sup>th</sup> Century Village, Grange Farm Gateway
Comments	<p>This interesting living history attraction has had an exhibition on the site since 1984. It includes a number of replica 17<sup>th</sup> Century buildings typical of a village setting. Volunteers act and dress in character and interact with visitors providing factual and entertaining stories of life in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century village. There are various displays of rural skills in action. The volunteers are an essential part of this attraction. Opening hours are restricted and the site would need to be closed-off when the volunteers are not running their demonstrations.</p> <p>The 17<sup>th</sup> Century Village will be retained as a key attraction of the visitor hub at Grange Farm.</p> <p>The entrance of the site (including signage) will need to be improved and the site needs to be viewed as part of the wider Country Park. Tickets could be sold from the visitor facilities within Grange Farm.</p>

#### Ancillary and associated retail at the Grange Farm Gateway

<b>Proposal: Garden centre</b>	
Location	Grange Farm
Comments	<p>It is considered that a garden centre as part of Grange Farm would be a source of revenue for the Country Park's overall upkeep as well as increase footfall bringing visitors to use other facilities and enjoy the attractions. The garden centre would incorporate the café and visitor information and facilities.</p>

#### Main informal activity areas and play areas

<b>Proposal: Informal activity areas</b>	
Location	Alver Meadow (Eastern Gateway) and the Northern Grasslands (Western Gateway)
Comments	<p>These are mown to encourage a range of informal activities such as kick-about, rounders and frisbee. They are located close to the main car parks, picnic areas and play facilities. A number of country parks have these areas and are often the busiest areas of the country park.</p> <p>Sites on both sides of the Country Park will ensure that the Borough's population has good access to these large spaces for informal recreation.</p> <p>Such spaces also have the flexibility to be used for events and other activities.</p>

<b>Proposal: Outdoor Play facilities at each Gateway</b>	
Location	Grange Farm Gateway(Oxstall Meadow/Home Heath) , Western Gateway (Northern Grasslands) and Eastern Gateway(Alver Meadow)
Comments	<p>Each gateway will have a playground to suit a range of age groups. Each one could include an eye-catching piece which forms part of the park-wide play trail and reflects a theme of the park (flora, fauna, river, reedbeds, woods, history) and/or the wider area.</p>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.littlewoodham.org.uk/>



<b>Proposal: Play Trail</b>	
<i>Location</i>	<i>Park-wide</i>
<i>Comments</i>	<p><i>This would include a trail of bespoke or customised play equipment (6-8 large pieces) to reflect characteristics of the Alver Valley at several sites across the Country Park to encourage families to move through the Alver Valley and experience different types of play equipment in a variety of settings. Key pieces of equipment can be located close to picnic areas and other areas where families are encouraged to gather and stay. Potential sites for the trail could include the Grange Farm Gateway, Alver Meadow, Apple Dumpling Bridge area and the Northern Grasslands Recreational Area.</i></p> <p><i>It is proposed that this will include extended play areas at the three gateways with linking pieces of specially designed play equipment across the Country Park, made largely from wood. The main Country Park leaflet can show the sites of these features and/or there could be clues of where to find the next one.</i></p> <p><i>The features could reflect characteristics of various natural features of the parks (animals, trees) historic features (a motte and bailey type feature) and/or other distinctive feature of the wider vicinity and Borough (aircraft at the Daedalus end)<sup>12</sup></i></p>

<b>Proposal: Natural Play<sup>13</sup></b>	
<i>Location</i>	<i>Across the park</i>
<i>Comments</i>	<p><i>This normally does not involve any designated areas as such but an encouragement of children to engage with the environment around them rather than a discouragement of children to roam and play freely. This includes enabling children to make dens, getting muddy, playing with sticks and climbing trees.</i></p> <p><i>Natural play provides challenge and adventure and provides opportunities for children to develop their life skills, benefit their health and wellbeing and develop a strong connection with the natural environment.</i></p> <p><i>There may need to be some control in particular sensitive areas or times of the year (nesting sites) but this should be considered as part of the forthcoming management plan including how dogs are managed.</i></p>

*Other recreation attractions*

<b>Proposal: Fishing Lake<sup>14</sup></b>	
<i>Location</i>	<i>Fishing Lake</i>
<i>Comments</i>	<p><i>Currently managed by the Portsmouth and District Angling Club. This site has a detached feel from the rest of the Country Park. It is proposed to integrate it more with the rest of the Country Park with a round the pond path which would not interfere with the angling function.</i></p> <p><i>As part of any tenancy agreement it will be necessary to consider the current arrangements including vehicular access, appearance of club storage facilities, whether non-members could fish by having a day-pass or taster sessions could be operated as part of the Country Park’s activities.</i></p> <p><i>Consideration could be given to using an area of the lake for a dog-dipping area.</i></p>

<sup>12</sup> The trail in Moors Valley Country Park is a mile long and they recommend at least an hour to complete it.

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/enjoying/linkingpeople/learning/naturalplay.aspx>

<sup>14</sup> Current arrangement can be found at <http://www.portsmouthdas.co.uk/page.php?3>

*Trails and paths*

<b>Proposal: Network of trails within an overall hierarchy</b>	
<i>Location</i>	<p><i>Park-wide with links to key access points to areas outside of the Country Park (see Section 5).</i></p> <p><i>A spine cycle route will be developed across the Country Park (based on Sandhill Lane) linking Alver Village with Daedalus.</i></p>
<i>Comments</i>	<p><i>It will be necessary to ensure visitors can access and explore different areas of the Country Park by foot and cycle. Many routes will be accessible to those people using wheelchairs, mobility scooters and pushchairs.</i></p> <p><i>In relation to cycling, Gosport is known for the high number of cycle journeys and the Alver Valley Country Park can play an important role as a cycling destination; providing family friendly cycle paths, facilities and links to the wider cycle network.</i></p> <p><i>Most of the paths are already in place however some will need to be created to link with new facilities; and some existing paths will need to be upgraded or repaired to an appropriate standard to allow greater accessibility for cycles and those using wheelchairs and pushchairs.</i></p> <p><i>Further consideration will also need to be given to sensitive waymarking of paths and associated information for visitors.</i></p> <p><i>Much more detailed information is included in the Accessibility Section. A full audit of paths will need to be considered as part of a specific project brief. Ongoing management will need to be included in the forthcoming comprehensive management plan.</i></p>

<b>Proposal: Second crossing point of the River Alver</b>	
<i>Location</i>	<i>To be investigated and determined</i>
<i>Comments</i>	<p><i>A second river crossing of the River Alver would be a great asset for the Country Park enabling greater views and appreciation of the river and reedbeds. It will also improve connectivity across the Country Park, enabling circular routes and increasing footfall between both sides of the Country Park and could be an attraction in its own right.</i></p> <p><i>Presently a second crossing is constrained by land ownership issues as the gun club occupies a significant stretch on the western side of the river. It is therefore very important that this land can be incorporated within the Country Park. There are also restrictions on access within the Wildgrounds which occupies a long stretch of the eastern side of the river. These management arrangements will be reviewed.</i></p> <p><i>There may also be issues regarding the length of the bridge which due to the width of the reedbeds would need to be a long bridge/boardwalk. There are also associated issues with the management of the habitat including the reedbeds.</i></p> <p><i>That said there may be scope to provide a link from Oxstall Meadow to the West of the River Nature Reserve. In the longer term it may be desirable to provide a link further north if the gun club land could be incorporated into the Country Park and the review of the Wildgrounds accessibility arrangements concluded that greater access would be permissible.</i></p>

<b>Proposal: Horse route</b>	
Location	To be investigated and determined
Comments	<p>Desire has been expressed for a horse route through the Country Park which would not have the legal status of a bridleway. There are issues arising from encouraging horses into the Country Park including damage to trails and paths, and potential conflict with other visitors and dogs.</p> <p>Consideration could be given to a single route through the Country Park rather than a network of paths. This would allow riders to enjoy the Country Park and gain access to other parts of the Borough and the countryside to the north. Consideration could be given for a horse permit scheme which helps pay for the upkeep of the horse route.</p>

### Cycle Facilities

<b>Proposal: Cycle facilities: BMX Club</b>	
Location	BMX Track as part of the Eastern Gateway, Alver Meadow
Comments	The BMX track built as part of the Alver Valley Country Park has proved to be a very successful attraction with a strong local club and set of volunteers. There have been a number of regional and national events held at the track. There may be scope for further improvements.

<b>Proposal: Cycle facilities: Cycle hire (with the possibility of cycle repair facilities)</b>	
Location	Grange Farm Gateway
Comments	This would encourage greater cycling in the park allowing visitors to see a range of areas within the Country Park. This will also provide an income stream for the Country Park. Further consideration of the business model is required.

<b>Proposal: Cycle facilities: Cycle parking</b>	
Location	Grange Farm, Western and Eastern Gateways and picnic areas
Comments	To provide secure parking for visitors who wish to visit attractions or take part in activities without their cycle including areas where no cycle use is permitted (e.g. the Wildgrounds).

<b>Proposal: Organised cycle activities</b>	
Location	Grange Farm (meeting point) and activities across the park
Comments	<p>To build upon the success of the BMX club and the success of cycling events in other country parks it is proposed to extend the activities offered in the Country Park including investigating the potential for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cycle tours within the Country Park and the wider area (to highlight other attractions in the Gosport and Lee area)</li> <li>• Night cycling (occasional events)</li> <li>• Taster BMX and Mountain Bike sessions</li> </ul>

### Facilities for dog walkers and their dogs

<b>Proposal: Dog-friendly areas including extensive areas where dogs can run off the lead and others where dogs are welcomed on a lead.</b>	
Location	Significant areas across the Country Park to be determined by a more detailed management plan.
Comments	<p>Approximately 30% of households own a dog and over 50% of all visits to the countryside are taken to exercise a dog or dogs. Alver Valley is used by local dog walkers and many of those, given the local population, are likely to have children in the family also. Specific areas can be designed in more robust locations that enable families to enjoy the Country Park with their dog whilst minimising any of the impact that they may have on the wildlife.</p> <p>Dog walking is already popular in the Alver Valley and there is significant</p>

	<p><i>potential to increase levels. Dog walking can provide significant recreational and health benefits to residents of the Borough and further afield. The Country Park also has an important role to mitigate against recreational disturbance of internationally important habitats for over-wintering birds. By providing dog-friendly areas with a variety of walks, habitats and landscapes as well as sea views and connections to the coast at Stokes Bay it is considered that the Alver Valley is an attractive alternative site for dog walkers. With additional facilities such as toilets and café as well as dog friendly areas the site will become an increasingly important draw.</i></p> <p><i>There may be the potential to increase dog off-lead areas in the Autumn and Winter once birds such as skylarks have finished nesting. This would coincide well with deflecting pressure from coastal mudflat and salt marsh sites during the winter months.</i></p> <p><i>Consideration should be given for dogs to be allowed in parts of the proposed café. Dog drinking facilities will be made available.</i></p> <p><i>A Dog Management Plan will be required as part of the forthcoming comprehensive Management Plan. This would need to identify areas where dogs can be off-the lead, areas where dogs are on the lead and area where no dogs are allowed (e.g. children’s play areas and the Wildgrounds). Further details in Section 5.</i></p>
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<b>Proposal: Dog- activities and events</b>	
<i>Location</i>	<i>Based at the Grange Farm Gateway</i>
<i>Comments</i>	<p><i>Further investigations will be required but activities could include:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Dog training sessions</i></li> <li>• <i>Dog club- (could incorporate ideas from the Dorset Dogs Project<sup>15</sup> and there may be a similar initiative across the Solent)</i></li> <li>• <i>Dog agility course sessions</i></li> <li>• <i>Investigate the potential for dog dipping areas</i></li> </ul>

*Nature conservation attractions (in addition to Wildgrounds and other habitats managed with the Country Park)*

<b>Proposal: Hide/Viewing areas</b>	
<i>Location</i>	<i>Noah Lake and various spots along the river</i>
<i>Comments</i>	<i>Such facilities would enable visitors to enjoy and appreciate these water habitats. It is proposed to construct a number of podium on areas adjacent the river in order the visitors view the extent of the reedbeds which are some of the most extensive on the South coast.</i>

<b>Proposal: Sand Martin Cliff</b>	
<i>Location</i>	<i>Noah Lake</i>
<i>Comments</i>	<i>When the site was a quarry sand martins were a common nesting species in this area. Now there are no nesting sand martins. It is proposed to build an artificial cliff to encourage the species back to the Valley.</i>

<b>Proposal: Nature Conservation activities and events</b>	
<i>Location</i>	<i>Grange Farm as base but activities across the Park</i>
<i>Comments</i>	<i>The Borough Council’s Countryside Rangers have run a series of popular and well-attended seasonal nature conservation focussed events for a number of years. It is envisaged that this programme will be maintained with an expanded range of events and activities to attract additional visitors.</i>

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.dorsetdogs.org.uk/>



	<i>It is envisaged that there will be a programme of holiday events for children, a year-round nature club with appropriate charges. There is currently a conservation volunteer programme. There is scope also to develop a programme of training young people in conservation skills and investigate the potential for a forest school. There is also the potential for adult education classes relating to species identification and other ecological issues.</i>
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*Historic asset attractions*

<b>Proposal: Motte and Bailey</b>	
<i>Location</i>	<i>Motte and bailey at Carter’s Copse</i>
<i>Comments</i>	<i>It is proposed to improve the interpretation and management of this historic feature.</i>

<b>Proposal: First World War Training Trenches</b>	
<i>Location</i>	<i>Browndown Common</i>
<i>Comments</i>	<i>Whilst not strictly within the Country Park boundary in liaison with the MOD more could be made to manage and interpret this feature. The feature could be included on Country Park publicity material.</i>

*Other activities*

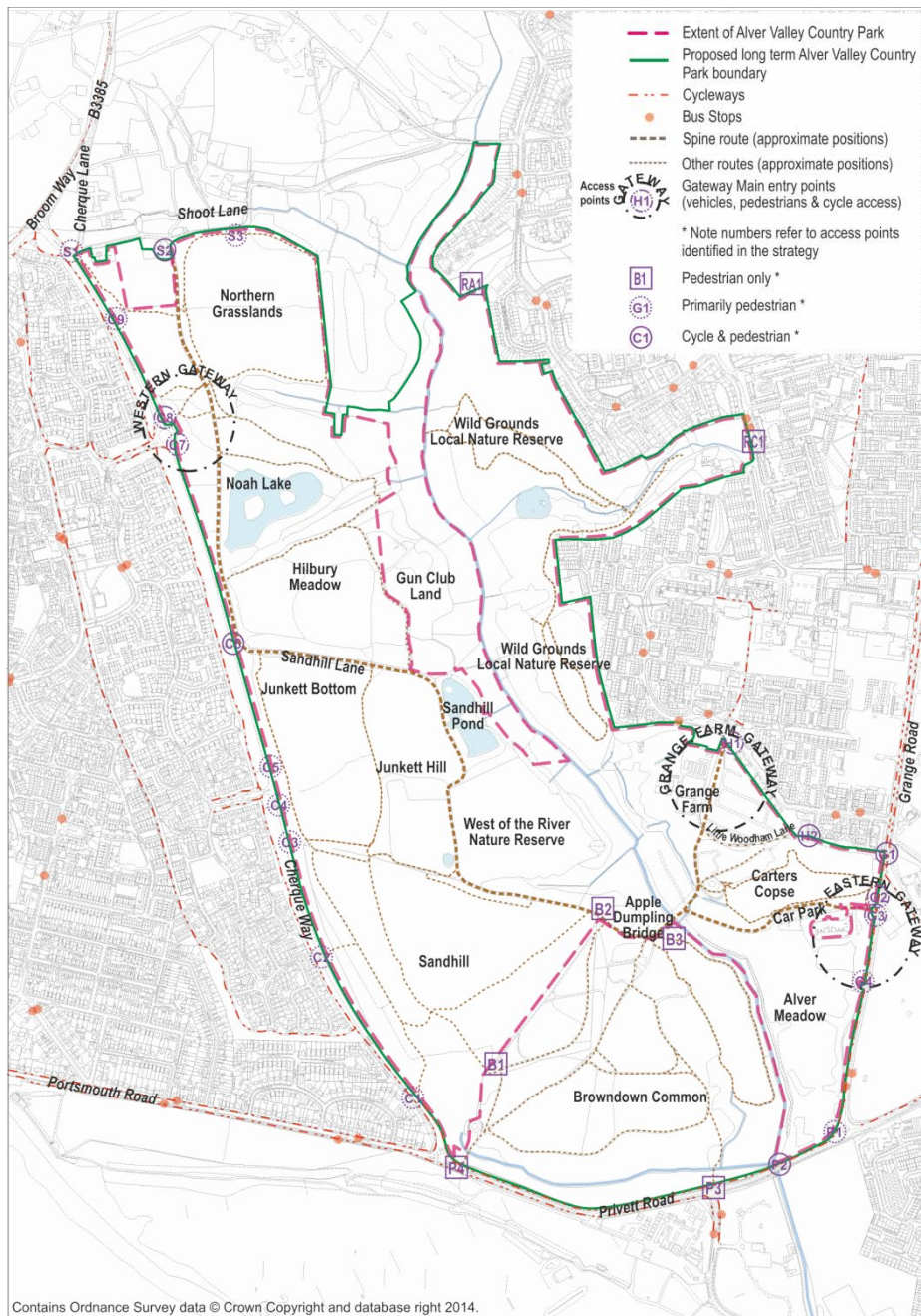
<b>Proposal: Other activities and events</b>	
<i>Location</i>	<i>Grange Farm gateway as hub</i>
<i>Comments</i>	<p><i>Activities and events increase footfall and encourage a wider range of visitors to the Park. They provide educational, social and recreational opportunities for the local population as well as in some cases potentially providing additional revenue for the Country Park. The objective of the programme is to provide a complimentary range of events and activities to the Discovery Centre with a nature and recreational focus.</i></p> <p><i>Activities to be investigated</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Geocaching</i></li> <li>• <i>Orienteering (running and cycling versions)</i></li> <li>• <i>Park Runs (weekly 5km runs)</i></li> <li>• <i>Nordic walking</i></li> <li>• <i>Other compatible activities with taster sessions</i></li> <li>• <i>Cycling –focussed activities</i></li> <li>• <i>Dog-walker focussed events and activities</i></li> <li>• <i>Nature focussed events and activities</i></li> <li>• <i>Range of children-focussed events particularly during holiday periods (ranger-led activities, stories, nature club, art activities)</i></li> <li>• <i>Astronomy taster sessions</i></li> <li>• <i>Use of facilities for talks and clubs</i></li> <li>• <i>Educational visits</i></li> </ul> <p><i>A well-designed and managed website will be required for the Alver Valley Country Park with specific pages for events. Leaflets will also be required for regular events and annual/seasonal programmes. This will need to be considered further in the management plan.</i></p>

## 5.0 ACCESSIBILITY CONSIDERATIONS

### Accessibility to the Country Park

- 5.1 It will be necessary to ensure that the Country Park is easily accessible to car users, cyclists, pedestrians and public transport users.
- 5.2 Arrangements for vehicular access to the Country Park will need to cater for increased visitor numbers and will need to ensure that highway safety is not compromised. There needs to be sufficient car parking available in order to not detract from the operation of the local road network or have a detrimental impact on adjoining residential areas. There is a Traffic Regulation Order in place on Cherque Way to prevent users from parking on Cherque Way itself. There are a number of access points around the Country Park that link to existing and proposed cycle and pedestrian routes and local bus stops. These are detailed below (see Plan 5).

**Plan 5: Access to, and within, the Country Park**



*Travel Plan*

- 5.3 As part of a full comprehensive Management Plan for the site it will be necessary to incorporate a travel plan with a car parking and charging strategy, and investigate methods to encourage visitors to arrive on-foot, by cycle and by public transport.

*Gateways*

- 5.4 Currently there are no clear main entrances for those visiting the Country Park. It is therefore an imperative to create a small number of primary gateways to the site. These gateways need to create a sense of welcome and arrival for those visiting by car, on foot, by cycle, or by bus. It is proposed that there should be three key gateways (see Plan 1 & 5) which are:

- Grange Farm Gateway (off Howe Road)
- Western Gateway (off Cherque Way)
- Eastern Gateway (off Grange Road)

- 5.5 The Grange Farm Gateway will be located off Howe Road via a new access associated with a later phase of the Alver Village regeneration scheme. This will serve the main hub for the Country Park which includes facilities for visitors, the main café, a garden centre, events, children's facilities, picnic areas and other attractions. This is likely to be developed over the medium term. The existing access off Howe Road via Little Woodham Lane will be closed off to visitors but remain available to residents and for vehicles servicing facilities at the hub. A car park should be laid out for approximately 75-100 vehicles (on part of the Home Heath site) with scope for further expansion. This may need to be reconsidered as more is known about the precise mix of facilities at Grange Farm.

- 5.6 The Western Gateway will be taken off the existing roundabout on Cherque Way and will incorporate a new car park which has already been granted planning permission (Ref 12/0006/FULL). The new car park can accommodate 45 cars and would replace the existing temporary car park just to the north which accommodates about 8 vehicles. There is also potential to extend the new car park in the future should the need arise. It is also proposed, for the time being, that the Western Gateway could also be used by permit holders to access the fishing lake. Subject to agreements with the gun club it may be possible to remove existing access rights via Shoot Lane and instead divert these rights to the Western Gateway. The western access would also be used by vehicles associated with the Country Park (such as rangers). This would therefore negate the need to use the access from Shoot Lane in most cases, and therefore improve the general safety of users of the proposed recreational areas of the northern grasslands.

- 5.7 The Eastern Gateway will be established off the existing access off Grange Road which serves HCC's Household Waste Recovery Centre (HWRC) and an existing well-used car park (of approximately 50 spaces) which serves the Alver Valley. It is likely that this access will need to be improved to cater for additional traffic and avoid potential conflict with users of the HWRC. The access will require the appropriate directional brown signs and welcome signage with the Alver Valley Country Park branding.

- 5.8 The car park to serve the Eastern Gateway will need to be extended to accommodate additional visitors to approximately 100 spaces with scope to extend further as the need arises. There may also be scope to use some of the adjacent land as temporary parking for particular events.

- 5.9 There will be a need to improve the environment of this location given its position adjacent the HWRC. There may be scope for this gateway to include attractive artistic screening panel which also act as welcome boards identifying features of the park and there may also

be potential to recognise the role of HWRC and include attractive artistic information regarding recycling. There will also need to be clear waymarking to the proposed facilities at Grange Farm from the car park.

- 5.10 The Western and Eastern Gateways will need to be developed in the short term together with all the required directional signing, car park improvements, large welcome signs, and information and environmental improvements to provide an attractive and welcoming place. The Grange Farm Gateway will need to be developed as part of the development of the facilities at this location

#### *Car parks*

- 5.11 The car parks serving the gateways will include a number of disabled parking spaces in accordance with the Council's Parking Standards set out in its Parking Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) as well as motorcycle parking. Consideration should be given to the inclusion of charging points for electric cars.
- 5.12 The car parks will need to be sensitively designed with appropriate materials for a country park setting with soft landscaping, large welcome signs, way marking and interpretation boards. They will need to have a welcoming feel and a cared-for appearance.
- 5.13 The Borough Council will need to consider a car parking charging strategy. Any charging would need to be set at a reasonable level in order not to be prohibitive or deter a significant numbers of visitors. Car parking charges are common at many country parks and have a number of benefits including:
- providing much needed revenue-funding for the park;
  - encouraging the use of non-vehicular modes of travel for those within a reasonable distance from the Park;
  - managing numbers at peak time through a variable pricing structure.
- 5.14 There are currently a number of informal car parks serving visitors. It is considered that the arrangements for these are as follows:
- Two informal parking areas along Little Woodham Lane, which are not much more than lay-bys, will be closed as there will no longer be vehicular access by the general public to these areas.
  - The informal parking serving the BMX track and Alver Meadow will be closed off as during busy times there are too many vehicles including vans trying to use the informal parking which can interrupt the flow of traffic on Grange Road. Instead an extended car park as part of the Eastern Gateway is conveniently located to serve the BMX track. An appropriate path will be required from the car park to the entrance of the BMX Track.
  - The existing Wildgrounds Car Park (off Rodney Close) will be closed to the general public and instead visitors can access the site from the south, using the car park at the Grange Farm gateway. There is the potential to retain a pedestrian access at Rodney Close but this will need to be considered as part of a wider review of accessibility of the Wildgrounds.
  - The existing small car park off Cherque Way will be closed and replaced by the larger proposed car park off the roundabout on Cherque Way as part of the Western Gateway.
- 5.15 Due consideration must be given to potential impact on the surrounding areas. The availability of parking to existing residents should not be compromised. Appropriate parking capacity must also be provided for larger vehicles that are likely to service the Alver Valley.

#### *Other vehicular arrangements*

- 5.16 The three gateway sites identified above will be the only vehicular access points for the general public which will provide car parking with no vehicular access through the park. However there are current access arrangements in place off Shoot Lane at the north end of the Country Park which serve those using the Gun Club Land and the Fishing Lake.



- 5.17 It is proposed that once the Western Gateway access and car park is in operation these particular users will use this entry point rather than Shoot Lane subject to appropriate legal agreements.
- 5.18 Over the longer term if the Gun Club Land is incorporated within the Country Park, vehicular access for this particular use would cease. Consequently, vehicular access will be restricted to the countryside rangers and associated work vehicles, emergency vehicles and those visitors using the fishing lake. The arrangements for the fishing lake will be kept under review as the number of Country Park visitors increase to ascertain whether there are any potential conflicts and whether it may be possible to restrict access to particular times. Further consideration will be required as part of the forthcoming management plan.
- 5.19 Little Woodham Lane will continue to be used by the residents of Grange Farmhouse and for vehicles servicing the facilities at the main Gateway. It will remain available for cycle and pedestrian use.
- 5.20 Other vehicular access points (such as the access off Little Woodham Lane towards Apple Dumpling Bridge) would also be available for the countryside ranger and emergency vehicles with Sandhill Lane forming the main spine route through the site.

*Cycle and pedestrian access points*

- 5.21 Many access points are generally poorly defined and uninviting, with the network within the Country Park unmarked although there have been some recent improvements. Access from the east of the site is particularly restricted and crossing the valley is difficult. The restricted access to the Wildgrounds, Grange Farm complex and the private land at the centre of the site currently limits access opportunities.
- 5.22 Key proposed points of access are identified on Plan 1. These will need to link with the cycling and pedestrian routes in the immediate vicinity with appropriate crossing points, including toucan crossings where appropriate. The cycle routes will need to link with the wider strategic routes across the Borough to allow easy access for cyclists from across the Borough and beyond.
- 5.23 The Gateway sites will be the most notable access points but there will also be a number of other joint cycle and pedestrian access points and pedestrian only points around the Country Park. These will have a varying degree of prominence, signage and surfacing depending on their position in the overall route hierarchy. The proposed access points (see also Plan 5) are as follows:

Off Howe Road

- H1- As mentioned above this is the proposed new access for the Grange Farm Gateway to serve the main visitor hub. It will serve vehicles, pedestrians and cyclists. Pedestrians and cyclist will be able to access the wider Country Park from this point and pedestrian visitors can also visit the Wildgrounds and 17<sup>th</sup> Century Village.
- H2- This is the current vehicular access to Grange Farm off Howe Road via Little Woodham Lane. It is proposed that as this road is unsuitable for increased levels of visitor traffic it will be closed off to vehicles used by the general public. It will continue to be used by the residents of Grange Farmhouse only, beyond the residential car parking areas associated with the new dwellings on Howe Road and service vehicles. It will remain available for cycle and pedestrian use. This cycle route will link with the existing pedestrian/cycle route off Grange Road (G1). There are also a small number of footpaths that currently lead off existing of Little Woodham Lane that serve as entrance points to the Country Park. These will be maintained and improved where necessary as pedestrian routes.

#### Off Grange Road

- G1- This is an existing pedestrian and cycle access created as part of the new Alver Village development and is well-served by a toucan crossing over Grange Road linking with a pedestrian and cycle route adjacent HMS Sultan to Military Road. This access route will be given greater prominence with blue pedestrian and cycle directional signs pointing to the Alver Valley.
- G2- This is an existing informal access into Carters Copse and due to its proximity to G3 which is the proposed Eastern Gateway it is proposed that this access point is incorporated as part of the Gateway with clearer defined paths with waymarking to Grange Farm and the Eastern Gateway. There will be a need for the vicinity to have a more welcoming presence.
- G3- As mentioned previously this existing access road which serves the household waste recycling centre will be improved to become the Eastern Gateway with car parking and a range of facilities adjacent an extended car park. The route will also need to accommodate cyclists.
- G4- This is currently an informal car park used by visitors to Alver Meadow and the BMX track and often overflows onto the main road. It is proposed to close this car park and for visitors to use the main Eastern Gateway car park. The existing route for pedestrians and cyclists will be retained.

#### Off Privett Road

- P1- Primarily a pedestrian point- This is an existing access point adjacent the roundabout serving the Grange Road and Privett Road junction. This will be an informal access serving local residents. There is a traffic island in Privett Road and Grange Road which serves this crossing.
- P2- Cycle/pedestrian point- It is proposed that this will be a new prominent access point incorporating an appropriately surfaced riverside pedestrian and cycle route to Apple Dumpling Bridge. Pedestrians will be able to cross Privett Road to continue the riverside walk along the Alver to Browndown Road. From there visitors will be able to reach Stokes Bay. Cyclist will be able to join the main cycle routes to Gosport, Lee-on-the-Solent and Stokes Bay. There is a toucan crossing point close to the junction with Browndown Road which can be used by both pedestrians and cyclist wishing to walk towards Stokes Bay and the Kingfisher Caravan Park. Over the longer term depending on the level of use there may be the need for a traffic island in Privett Road to serve pedestrians wanting to continue the river walk in the meantime they can use the existing toucan crossing.
- P3- Pedestrian use only (no cycles) – This existing access points enables entry to the Browndown Common area and consequently may be restricted at certain times if in use by the MoD. Normally people can use this access to enter the wider park. Close to the entrance is a boardwalk across the reedbed which needs to be repaired. This access is well served by the toucan crossing point close to the junction with Browndown Road.
- P4 - Pedestrian use only (no cycles) – This existing access points enables entry to the Browndown Common area and consequently may be restricted at certain times if in use by the MoD. Normally people can use this access to enter the wider Country Park. There is also a gate here for MoD and emergency vehicular access only. This access is well served by the pedestrian crossing over Privett Road close to the junction with Cherque Way.

### Boundary with Browndown Common

For all three access points consideration will need to be given over time on whether improvements can be made to enable a wider range of users through these access points which are restrictive to wheelchair and pushchair users. This would involve negotiations with the MoD who own the land.

- B1 Pedestrian use only (no cycles) - This is accessed via a sty and enables access to the Sandhill area of the Country Park.
- B2 Pedestrian use only (no cycles)- This is accessed through a type of 'squeeze gate' and allows people to access the main spine route west of Apple Dumpling Bridge at the north eastern base of Sandhill.
- B3 Pedestrian use only (no cycles) - This is accessed through a type of 'squeeze gate' and allows people to access the main spine route immediately to the west of Apple Dumpling Bridge.

### Off Cherque Way

- C1- Primarily a pedestrian point- This is an existing access point on the south west side of Sandhill and is well-served by a toucan crossing on Cherque Way. It currently is a fairly low key entrance serving local residents but it may be possible to give greater prominence given its linkages with Lee-on-the Solent seafront via the Browndown Common Coastal Area (Hampshire County Council's wildlife area). It will require pedestrian directional signs towards it and a new welcome sign.
- C2- Primarily a pedestrian point- This access is opposite Proctor Drive and serves local residents and can be accessed via a pedestrian refuge on Cherque Way
- C3- Currently a cycle and pedestrian desire line- This access is not served by any pedestrian crossing but evidence on the ground appears to show that this point is well-used. Further investigation may be required on the suitability of this access as a main cycle access and whether there is a need for improved crossing arrangements.
- C4 and C5- Primarily pedestrian but with scope for cycle access- Both access points are close to David Newberry Drive and each are served by a pedestrian refuge
- C6- Cycle/pedestrian point- This access is served by a refuge across Cherque Way and due to its proximity to Sandhill Lane, the proposed spine route through the Park, it has the potential to be one of the main cycle crossing points on the western side of the Country Park.
- C7 and C8- Western Gateway cycle/pedestrian points- These will be the main cycle and pedestrian points into the Country Park associated with the Western Gateway. They are currently served by refuges on Cherque Road. It will be necessary to ensure arrangements will be safely compatible with the car parking arrangements.
- C9 Potential to be a cycle and pedestrian access point. This site currently serves residents entering the site from areas on the north side of Lee. It is opposite Fitzroy Drive and there is no crossing point over Cherque Way. It has the potential to have increased prominence and the potential for a refuge to be located here.

### Off Shoot Lane

- S1- Primarily a pedestrian point- These are currently two very low key informal pedestrian accesses at the north- west corner of the Country Park. However this access will need to be given greater prominence in the future to serve workers and students at the Solent Enterprise Zone at Daedalus as well as residents in this part of Lee. The access is served by a crossing point over Cherque Way and a path that leads

to Shoot Lane. Consideration will need to be given on the best position and remedial works will be required to improve its accessibility. This path will need to be surfaced with appropriate material (hoggin for example) with a medium sized welcome sign and appropriate pedestrian direction signs.

- There is the possibility for pedestrians to use this access to link with Cherque Lane to walk towards other parts of the Daedalus site and towards Stubbington via the proposed new recreational area at the north east corner of Daedalus. From here access is available to the wider countryside. Consideration will need to be given for a traffic refuge at the junction of Cherque Lane and Broom Way.
- S2- This access is currently only used for those accessing the Gun Club and Fishing Lake. It is proposed that subject to agreement with the gun club these users will in future access the site via the Western Gateway and that this Shoot Lane access would have access only in case of emergencies. Issues regarding the ownership of this access will need to be fully resolved.
- It is envisaged that this access would become an important cycle access to the Country Park which can also be used by pedestrians. This will link well with potential improvements to Shoot Lane which would create a pleasant cycle and pedestrian route to the Country Park from the Rowner area and other parts of north Gosport. This entrance would require a welcome board and a plan of the Country Park.
- Other options may also need to be investigated if these issues cannot be satisfactorily resolved, such as the potential for access points S1 and/or S3 becoming the main cycle access points to the Country Park from Shoot Lane.
- S3- This is an existing informal pedestrian access through a gap in the hedge. This is potentially a very useful access for pedestrians and cyclists living in the Rowner area and area to the north of Rowner who could potentially access the site via Shoot Lane. As mentioned previously a number of measures will need to be undertaken to make Shoot Lane an improved, safer and more desirable link from neighbouring residential areas. This access would need to have a small/medium 'welcome' sign.

#### Off Rowallian Avenue

- RA1 (uncertain at this stage) - There is currently no access at this point but a path leads from Rowallian Avenue to a dead-end against a fence enclosing the Wildgrounds Nature Reserve. There is therefore scope for residents in the Rowner area and areas to the north to have a much closer pedestrian access only (not for cycles) into the Alver Valley. However this would mean changing the access arrangements into the Wildgrounds reserves. This will need to be subject to a review as part of the forthcoming Management Plan.

#### Off Rodney Close

- RC1- This is currently a vehicle access to a car park serving the Wildgrounds Reserve with a pedestrian access into the Reserve itself. There is a requirement to obtain a permit to enter the Reserve. It is proposed that the main access to the Wildgrounds will be from the south at the Grange Farm Gateway and consequently at that stage the car park and access for vehicular access for the general public will be closed and the access will only be for rangers and the occupants of the dwelling house. However there may be scope to retain a pedestrian access at this point but, as mentioned above, this will need to be considered as part of a review.

5.24 There will also be a number of informal pedestrian/cycle access points which will generally be used by those from the immediate vicinity.

#### *Bus access*

- 5.25 There are a number of bus stops in close proximity to the Country Park (as shown in Plan 5) although services are currently limited and the number of bus passengers arriving at the park is currently at low levels. However as the Country Park becomes established with more visitors it is envisaged that Park will be able to attract additional bus passengers from across the Gosport and Fareham area. It will therefore be important to improve access from existing bus stops to entrance points to the Country Park, making it clear that certain bus stops serve the Alver Valley Country Park. This can also be promoted by Country Park leaflets.
- 5.26 The area best served by bus services are in the Rowner neighbourhood although there are very limited access points to the Country Park in these areas due to access restrictions to the Wild Grounds.

### **Accessibility within and through the Country Park**

#### *Overall access arrangements within the Country Park*

- 5.27 It is imperative that the overall hierarchy of routes through the Country Park encourage exploration of the Alver Valley and are well-defined, managed and form a waymarked network of paths.
- 5.28 It will be necessary for the Borough Council to identify and clarify the access network throughout the Country Park. This work will need to make it clear what people are able to do in each part of the site, for example in relation to walking only routes, cycling routes, restricted access areas and dog walking areas. This information will need to be communicated clearly with appropriately designed signs as well as maps at the main gateways. This work will be considered in the forthcoming management plan.

#### *Cycle and pedestrian routes within the Park*

- 5.29 The Country Park already has a network of routes available for pedestrians and cyclists. Some of the paths are relatively good, with firm surfaces and interesting routes. However, they do not form a cohesive network, with many routes being unsurfaced desire lines which can be difficult to use, particularly in poor weather. Some of the routes are historical, formed by previous users of land; others have been created as part of the creation of the Country Park; whilst others are strong desire lines formed by the current visitors. Plan 5 shows a large proportion of the known key routes although there are further minor informal paths that have been formed by visitors<sup>16</sup>.
- 5.30 As part of the forthcoming Management Plan a detailed audit will need to be undertaken of the existing routes in the Country Park to establish a cohesive hierarchy of routes and what improvements if any are required for each route. Key routes may need to be upgraded with materials appropriate for a country park whilst others can be maintained in their current form. The audit should also consider what waymaking is required whilst avoiding visual clutter.
- 5.31 As part of the Management Plan there may be the need for additional routes or diversions to be provided in connection with new facilities and activities in the Country Park. This would also be the case if additional land was incorporated within the Country Park.
- 5.32 The hierarchy of routes through the Country Park will need to be connected to the access points outlined above. Again these may be subject to change depending on the final location of particular facilities and other matters arising from detailed survey work. The key principle is that there will be a spine cycle/pedestrian route through the Country Park largely following the Sandhill Lane route which will also provide a pleasant through-route

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<sup>16</sup> This is not a definitive plan of routes and in some cases an indicative route has been shown to simplify a multitude of desire lines.



connecting Alver Village with Daedalus. Other routes will be connected to the main spine route.

- 5.33 There will be a number of routes which will be more suited for pedestrian use only and consideration will need to be given on how this would be managed.

*Access for users of wheelchairs, mobility scooters and pushchairs*

- 5.34 It is important that there is a clear and coherent network of routes for wheelchair users, mobility scooters and pushchairs to ensure key parts of the site can be reached by as many people as possible. Certain informal routes will not be suitable for all users. The forthcoming Management Plan will need to address these issues further in liaison with relevant groups and the general public.

*Access management for different users*

- 5.35 The management of the Country Park for different users will be one of the most difficult elements for the management plan and will need to be adapted over time as issues arise. However it is important to establish a number of key principles from the outset which are set out below.

- 5.36 The most important principle to establish is that the Country Park is aimed to cater for a wide range of people with different abilities and interests who want to take part in different activities. It will therefore be important for the Borough Council to establish a Country Park Code which is promoted in appropriate locations and included on literature and websites. This can be amended as the Country Park becomes established.

*Access for dogs*

- 5.37 Dog walkers are currently the largest user of the Country Park and this use is to be encouraged. It is one of the aims of the Country Park that additional dog walkers can enjoy the Alver Valley with enhanced facilities and services for dogs.

- 5.38 It is also strongly acknowledged that one of the key attractions of the Country Park at present is that dogs can run freely off a lead and can socialise with other dogs. It will be necessary to establish as in many other country parks a clear and enforceable management of dogs within the Country Park to ensure that the interests of small children, other users and wildlife are catered for.

- 5.39 Some country parks have a red, amber and green system of clear but discreet signage whereby in the green areas dogs can run free, in the amber area they should be kept on leads and in red areas they would not be allowed. The red areas would include the Wildgrounds SSSI and plays areas for children. The extent of the areas will be a challenging decision and will need to form part of a wider dog management strategy including issues of dog fouling, dog behaviour, the provision of dog facilities and services and enforcement issues. This will need to be undertaken in consultation with the wider community.

## 6 DEVELOPMENT CONSIDERATIONS

6.1 The following section sets out key requirements that will need to be considered when devising proposals for the Country Park. Key considerations are set out below and the Borough Council will consider the relevant policies of the Local Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework when determining any planning applications (see Appendix 3). Key considerations are set out below.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Country Park boundary</li> <li>• Country Park identity</li> <li>• Design</li> <li>• Biodiversity and the natural environment</li> <li>• Built heritage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flood risk</li> <li>• Contamination issues</li> <li>• Amenity issues (such as noise, light)</li> <li>• Utilities</li> <li>• Skill and training opportunities</li> </ul>
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### Country Park boundary

6.2 The land currently owned and/or controlled by Gosport Borough Council (see Plan 1) will be considered the boundary for the Alver Valley Country Park for the short to medium term.

6.3 As part of the Council’s longer term ambitions it considers it important to incorporate the other three tracts of land within the Country Park (as identified on Plan 4). These objectives are set out in the emerging Gosport Borough Local Plan 2011-2029 and the wider boundary is also shown in Plan 1.

6.4 The inclusion of this land within the Country Park would: make the facility more cohesive; enable the objectives set out above to be fully met; and reduce the risk of incompatible activities being undertaken on neighbouring sites which could affect the enjoyment of visitors to the Country Park.

6.5 Browndown Common, to the south of the current boundary of the Country Park, is used as part of the wider Country Park although it is owned and managed by MOD. It is occasionally used for MoD training purposes and at such times not available for public use. Arrangements with the MoD will need to be formalised regarding the future management of this site and potential further integration with the rest of the Country Park. However in the short-medium term it is desirable to negotiate agreements to improve links and accessibility through the area as well as other measures which make the site more welcoming to visitors. This could include:

- improved gate access between the Country Park and Browndown Common;
- a new or refurbished board walk to Privett Road;
- a welcome sign for visitors which still maintains any appropriate necessary warnings/risks;
- management and interpretation of historic assets (WWI and archaeological features);
- management and interpretation of natural features (heathland).

6.6 The significant area west of the river is in private ownership and is used on a regular basis for clay pigeon shooting. The vehicular access for the gun club users is via the entrance off Shoot Lane and then along Sandhill Lane through the Country Park itself.

6.7 The Borough Council considers that this land needs to be incorporated within the park for a number of reasons including:

- The site which include a significant element of the western side of the River Alver forms an integral part of the Alver Valley and therefore its inclusion in the Country Park will ensure the Alver Valley can be managed in a comprehensive way to meet recreational and biodiversity objectives;

- It would enable routes to be improved through the Country Park and allow further consideration of a second crossing point of the River Alver;
- It is considered that the clay pigeon shooting activity is not compatible with the Country Park due to the noise of gunfire, occasional stray fragments of the clay pigeons and traffic arrangements to access the shooting sessions.

6.8 The Borough Council will therefore need to negotiate with the landowner over the possible incorporation of the land within the Country Park and consider fully all options available to achieve the objective of establishing a cohesive Country Park.

6.9 The third smaller piece of land at the northern end of the Country Park is also in private ownership. Its incorporation within the Country Park would provide a logical northern boundary to the site adjacent Shoot Lane and would give more options relating to the proposed recreational area at the northern part of the Country Park which would serve the residents of Lee-on-the-Solent and those further afield.

### **Country Park identity**

6.10 There is a lack of awareness that the Alver Valley Country Park exists locally as it does not have a recognisable presence in the community<sup>17</sup>.

6.11 Similarly the only road signs direct visitors to the 17<sup>th</sup> Century Village and there are no roadside welcome signs to alert people to the presence of the Country Park.

6.12 Consequently there is a need to develop both a brand identity for the Country Park as well as heighten its physical visibility when viewed from outside with a strategy of directional sign for vehicles, cyclist and pedestrians.

6.13 The site needs effective and appropriately designed 'welcome signs' at key gateways. The branding will need to be easily used for a variety of media including welcome and information signs, waymarking, websites, leaflets and other printed literature,

6.14 The welcome information such as map boards and interpretation boards will need to be easily updatable maintaining a consistent branding in order to incorporate changes to the Country Park. It is likely for example that initial information boards will be in place before the facilities for visitors centre at Grange Farm will be completed.

### **Design**

6.15 The Council requires that proposals for the site have a high standard of design that retains the feeling of countryside and avoids over-urbanisation and clutter. The design and layout of the Country Park will need to reflect the natural features of the site that protect and take opportunities to enhance biodiversity. It will also be necessary to conserve and where possible enhance historic assets within the Country Park and their setting. It will be necessary to ensure facilities can be well-managed and remain safe.

6.16 There are a number of key elements that will need careful design consideration including:

The Grange Farm Gateway- the overall design and layout including:

- The re-use of the Grange Farm Buildings;
- Landscape of the new access point, parking and associated areas;
- Layout and facilities of Oxstall Meadow for family-focussed activities.

The Eastern Gateway

- Improved access and car parking area;

<sup>17</sup> Observation by HCC as part of the work to support the Strategy

- Associated environmental improvements landscaping and screening;
- Potential BMX improvements.

#### The Western Gateway

- The layout of the recreational facilities and visitor information associated with the Western Gateway car park and Northern Grasslands.

#### Other features

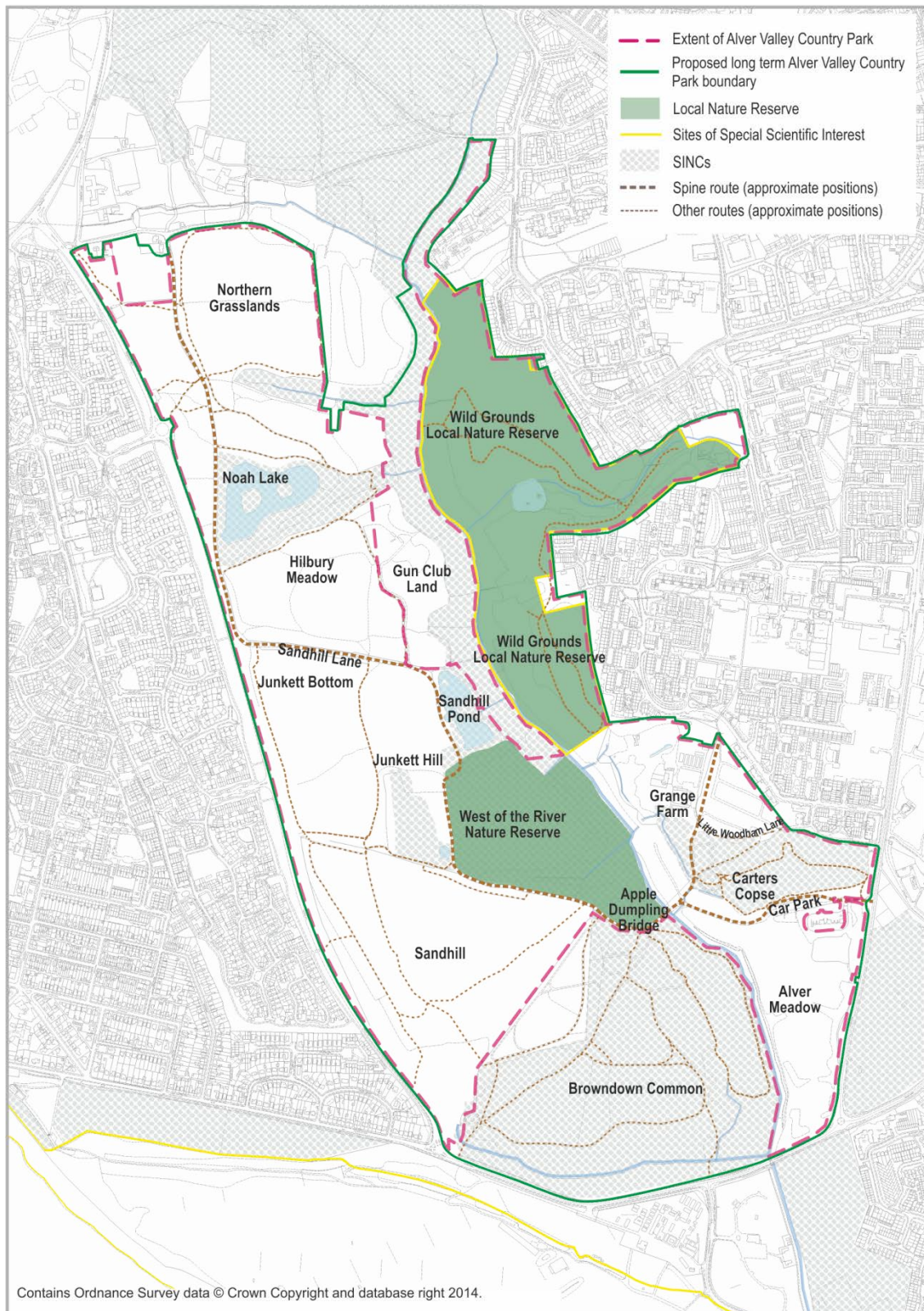
- Landscaping of the Apple Dumpling Bridge area as a place to meet;
- Feature at Sandhill which can be used to interpret the views;
- Play trail; and
- Welcome signs, interpretation, waymarking and country park furniture (bins, seats etc.).

- 6.17 Proposals in the Country Park should reflect a number of design principles set out below:
- Natural materials are used wherever practicable to do so;
  - Surfacing materials are in keeping to country park setting e.g. hoggins, gravel;
  - Interpretation and signage is appropriately located to be most effective;
  - The main gateways and access through the Country Park are clearly marked to help people explore further with confidence;
  - Buildings should incorporate sustainable construction techniques where appropriate, for example measures relating to energy efficiency, renewable energy, sustainable drainage, green roofs;
  - The interiors of new buildings are of a high quality finish and reflect key themes of the Country Park;
  - The buildings are accessible to all;
  - Incorporate features which achieve a net gain in biodiversity.
- 6.18 It will be important to employ designers and architects to provide high quality design solutions for the Country Park and ensure buildings are complimentary to each other and appropriate for their setting. Further consideration of design issues is outlined in Section 7 in relation to each character area.

### **Biodiversity and the natural environment**

- 6.19 The Country Park benefits from a wide range of habitats including wetlands, woodlands and grasslands (see Plan 6). There are two designated Local Nature Reserves (LNR); West of the River and the Wildgrounds. The Wildgrounds is of national importance and has been designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest due to oakwood and tussock grassland and sedge fen on the edge of the River Alver flood plain.
- 6.20 In addition there are a number of locally designated Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs) which have been identified for a range of habitats and species. The Alver Valley also includes a number of protected species including water voles as part of a recent reintroduction programme, numerous nesting bird species including skylarks as well as a range of habitats and species that are included in the UK and Hampshire Biodiversity Action Plans.
- 6.21 Much of the Country Park is covered by a ten year Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) Grant whereby Natural England pays a grant to the Borough Council for different parts of the site to be managed to promote biodiversity. The scheme includes a number of specific actions required to maintain and increase biodiversity including a number of indicators of success and prescribed management measures for each particular habitat.

**Plan 6: Nature Conservation designations in the Country Park**



6.22 In addition to the HLS measures there may be other possible initiatives to enhance biodiversity in the Alver Valley. These include:

- Consider working with the Ministry of Defence to include Browndown Common as part of the HLS and wider site management measures;
- Develop new habitats within Noah Lake area to increase the variety of species.



- 6.23 Biodiversity is therefore considered one of the Country Park's key features, particularly as it represents a mosaic of different habitats. It is therefore necessary that proposals for the Country Park not only respect the existing important biodiversity but that every opportunity is taken to enhance it. Therefore each proposal in the Country Park should consider whether measures can be incorporated which will deliver a net gain in biodiversity.
- 6.24 Importantly one of the key functions of the Country Park is to encourage visitors to enjoy and appreciate the nature of the site and consequently this requires appropriate levels of access to wildlife areas within the Country Park with relevant interpretation. Such work requires careful management of both the natural features and the visiting public. Consequently a number of measures are recommended and will require further consideration including:
- Opening the southern end of the Wildgrounds LNR in order that it can be reached directly from the facilities at Grange Farm;
  - Review existing access arrangements to the Wildgrounds LNR. This would need to include whether opening hours can be extended during the day or the site can be opened in the winter months. This review would need to consider the reasons for the current arrangements and the advantages and disadvantages of providing greater access.
  - Develop viewing areas of the reedbeds, lakes and the river.
- 6.25 As part of an ongoing process a series of management plans will be required for different parts of the Country Park to manage habitats and visitors. The presence of people and dogs can cause disturbance to different species at different times of the year, for example in breeding season, through their physical presence or noise. Therefore important habitats will be managed as part of habitat management plans to ensure that any issues from noise and disturbance from recreation use is minimised. This may include restricting access to limited areas at certain parts of the year such as restricting dog access to ground nesting sites during the breeding season. There is the potential to introduce a variable dog access management arrangement through the year to accommodate this and encourage dogs off the lead in the Autumn and Winter.
- 6.26 An important way of involving the public with the nature of the Country Park has been the long-established and successful series of events throughout the year. This work will be maintained as an important Country Park attraction. It may be necessary to review and expand the programme to meet the requirements of new visitors.

### **Built Heritage**

- 6.27 Proposals for the Country Park need to celebrate the heritage of the Park and enable visitors to understand and appreciate the different historical assets (see Plan 7). Proposals will therefore need to accord with the relevant planning policies (see Appendix 3).

#### *Known assets*

- 6.28 Grange Farmhouse is a Grade II Listed Building which is largely seventeenth century with thirteenth century elements. It was originally constructed as a 'grange' or farmhouse for Cistercian lay-brothers and after the Reformation was converted into a larger secular farm. It is now used as three separate dwellings. Proposals for the Grange Farm visitor attractions and supporting facilities will need to ensure that the setting of the building is not significantly harmed and opportunities are taken to improve its setting.
- 6.29 The Grange Farm buildings themselves are locally listed and therefore proposals will need to respect the significance of these buildings preserving their cohesiveness as a range of buildings. The Middle Barn Cottage and associated thatched barn at the entrance to the Wildgrounds is also locally listed.

- 6.30 The Country Park also includes a motte and bailey near to Apple Dumpling Bridge, known as Castle Mound, which is a scheduled ancient monument. It is proposed that the visibility and interpretation of this feature will be improved for visitors in consultation with English Heritage.
- 6.31 The Tank Traps at Apple Dumpling Bridge are also locally listed and will need to be retained as part of any redesign of the Apple Dumpling area and there are also Second World War pillboxes in the Wildgrounds and Carters Copse.

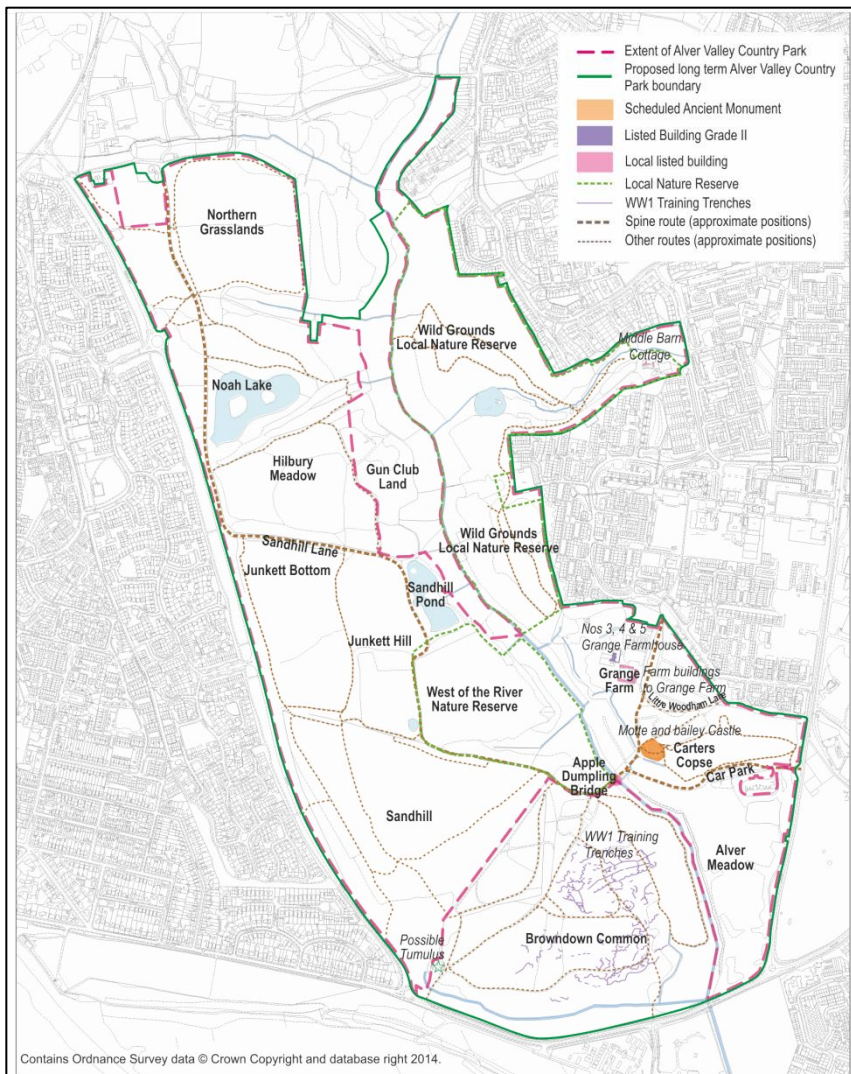
*Archaeology*

- 6.32 Whilst large areas of the Alver Valley has been disturbed due to the sand and gravel quarrying and subsequent landfilling, there are a number of areas of the Country Park particularly east of the river and along the course of the River Alver which may be of archaeological interest in relation to early settlement. Further guidance will be required from the County Archaeologist at Hampshire County Council in relation to specific projects in the Park.

*Other historic assets of note*

- 6.33 Whilst not currently in the Country Park it is known that there is a comprehensive series of First World War training trenches within the Browndown Common area currently within the ownership of the MoD. There may also be evidence of a tumulus within Browndown Common (as identified on the Ordnance Survey map for this area).

**Plan 7: Historic assets in the Alver Valley**



## **Flooding Issues**

### *River Alver Outfall*

- 6.34 Flooding is one of the key issues that need to be addressed in the Alver Valley. In particular the regular flooding of the Apple Dumpling Bridge area, which is the only bridging point across the River Alver. This consequently significantly affects how the Country Park operates by severing access between the west and east sides of the Alver Valley for most visitors.
- 6.35 This flooding is caused by the blockage of the River Alver tidal outflow at Stokes Bay by shingle. This is becoming an increasing occurrence and when incidents happen the Environment Agency (EA) have staff available to use an excavator to unblock the outfall. The EA acknowledges that this is a reactive measure and that the repeated incidences of blockage have caused water to back up causing the flooding of the Apple Dumpling Bridge area. It also has implications for water quality as these incidences cause spikes and troughs in salinity which affects the habitat potential for the river as well as allowing concentrations of leachates to build-up.
- 6.36 The EA have therefore commissioned specialist consultants to evaluate a number of options to overcome or at least minimise the blockage incidences taking into account environmental costs and benefits, financial and staff resources and other potential implications.
- 6.37 As a result of this work the EA wish to conduct a pilot study involving the Borough Council, the Eastern Solent Coastal Partnership and Natural England on a proactive programme to transfer significant amounts of shingle along the beach at Browndown to a site further along Stokes Bay (close to the seawall at the junction of Stokes Bay Road and the access to the Alverbank Hotel) and then monitor how regular any clearance will be required.
- 6.38 This pilot study will be part of ongoing work in partnership with the relevant agencies to minimise flooding incidences which will have significant benefits for the Country Park.

### *Other flooding issues*

- 6.39 It is important that the proposed limited new buildings and car parking in the Alver Valley do not increase surface water run-off and that sustainable drainage systems are incorporated where appropriate which can also assist with local biodiversity.

## **Contamination Issues**

- 6.40 Due to the site's history as a landfill site it will be necessary to undertake a site assessment for each proposal in order to establish the nature and extent of contamination. It will be necessary to ensure that proposals for new facilities and associated drainage systems do not act as a pathway for pollutants. For example soakaways in areas of contamination would not be acceptable due to the risk to the water environment. Practicable and effective measures will be required to treat contain or control contaminants in order to protect proposed users or prevent the spread of contamination to adjacent land or cause pollution to groundwater, the River Alver or the Solent. Further advice will be required from the Council's Environmental Health officers and the Environment Agency.
- 6.41 The Environment Agency's objective for the River Alver is to ensure the water is of fair quality suitable for coarse fish populations (River Quality Objective 4). Unfortunately the Alver has failed to meet this level every year since 1997 due to a low measure of dissolved oxygen and the ecological status of the River Alver is highlighted as being 'bad'. The River Alver can consequently adversely affect water quality at Stokes Bay after heavy rainfall.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Eastern Solent Coastal Partnership River Hamble to Portchester Coastal Flood and Erosion Risk Management Strategy (SEA Scoping Report )(Dec 2012)

- 6.42 The Environment Agency in liaison with the Borough Council have been conducting detailed surveys regarding the potential sources of any contamination. As a result of this it is considered that the most likely source is leachate from the former landfill site at Sandhill.
- 6.43 Work is now underway with the Borough Council and the Environment Agency to create a number of reedbeds to naturally filtrate the leachate before it reaches the river. This is considered a potentially cost effective and least intrusive method with several nature conservation benefits. There will be a programme of ongoing monitoring to ascertain the effectiveness of this work. Further action will need to be considered if this initial scheme is not effective.

### **Amenity Issues**

- 6.44 The site is adjacent a residential area and it will be necessary for proposals to consider the impact of development on local amenities including existing residents in the vicinity. Key considerations are set out below.

#### *Noise*

- 6.45 There will be a range of activities across the Country Park and these will generate certain levels of noise at different times of the day, week or year. It is necessary that these activities be managed in such a way in order that it does not have a detrimental impact on local resident amenities or wildlife interests.
- 6.46 Fortunately given the size of the park it is possible to accommodate a number of recreational activities sufficiently distant from residential properties, for example the large BMX events.
- 6.47 Many areas of the Country Park will be used for relatively quiet activities such as walking and cycling and these are unlikely to have an impact on adjacent residential areas in Rowner and Cherque Farm.
- 6.48 One of the key issues to consider is to ensure that the proposed facilities at Grange Farm do not cause a significantly adverse impact on the resident of Grange Farmhouse or the residents of the new dwellings of Alver Village which back onto the proposed Grange Farm gateway. Detailed assessments to determine the likely noise impacts from operational activities will be undertaken at the planning application stage to determine suitable mitigation measures.

#### *Lighting*

- 6.49 The Alver Valley will continue to be regarded as a 'dark area' which respects the setting and habitats of the Country Park and allow opportunities for local people to enjoy an unlit area if they wish. The only area which will include some lighting will be at the Grange Farm Gateway which will enable people to visit there in the evening for particular activities and events. It will be necessary to take into account the following considerations:
- the need to consider the proximity of the setting of the Country Park;
  - the potential impact on the amenities of local residents;
  - the need to consider highway safety issues;
  - the need to reduce wasted light to limit light pollution and reduce energy consumption; and
  - the need for a safe environment for users at night.
- 6.50 All lighting should be the minimum necessary to be effective and be designed to limit spillage above the horizontal plane. It should be directed downwards onto the target rather than upwards towards the sky.

*Other amenity issues*

- 6.51 The layout of the Grange Farm Gateway will be particularly important to ensure a satisfactory standard of privacy for existing residents adjacent the site.

*Security and Safety*

- 6.52 Issues relating to safety and security will need to be addressed as part of a more detailed management plan for the Alver Valley Country Park and will need to consider the following issues:

- vandalism and arson
- potential conflicts between users including location of noisier activities in relation to those requiring/ desiring a more quiet setting
- unsuitable activities /behaviour and enforcement
- risk of illegal encampments

- 6.53 The management plan will need to address on-going staffing resources to deal with these issues and which parts of the park need additional security arrangements.

**Utilities**

- 6.54 The Grange Farm site has access to water supply, waste water, electricity, gas and broadband. Further consideration will need to be given to the capacity of these facilities when considering the Grange Farm Gateway proposals in detail.

- 6.55 Similarly access to these utilities will be possible as part of any facilities proposed for the Western and Eastern Gateways in the future due to their proximity to urban areas. Further detailed consideration will be required as proposals are devised.

- 6.56 The use of water and energy efficiency measures will need to be incorporated in the buildings of the Grange Farm Gateway and the other relevant proposals.

**Skills and Training Opportunities**

- 6.57 The Alver Valley Country Park has the potential to create a number of training opportunities, particularly, but not restricted to, nature conservation work. The site has the potential to train people wishing to have a career in ecological management as well as volunteers wishing to learn new skills. Such opportunities should be included in the management plan for the site.



## 7.0 Character Areas

7.1 This section includes an assessment of the various areas (as identified on Plan 1) of the Country Park highlighting the key issues, which have largely been identified from work carried out by Hampshire County Council in consultation with the Borough Council and advice from the Environment Agency. Key facilities and activities proposed for each area are identified as well as a number of design and management consideration which in many cases require further detailed assessment.

### Grange Farm complex, Home Heath and 17th Century Village

#### Current Use

7.2 The Grange Farm complex consists of the former farm buildings around three sides of a courtyard, with a wall closing the fourth side. It has a floorspace of 525m<sup>2</sup>. This courtyard complex includes a barn, storage sheds, rangers' offices and toilets. An area of gardens and animal pens are beyond the wall and to the south of the complex. Access to Oxstall Meadow is also via this area. The Grange Farm House itself is a private residential property comprising three dwellings.



Grange Farm complex



Existing toilets at Grange Farm complex

7.3 In front of the Farm House lies an area of grass, with some parking, across which is a compound containing disused glasshouses, offices and service buildings. Access to the 17th Century Village is through this compound. The 17th Century Village is a "living history" attraction, run by volunteers as a separate trust. It contains reconstructed buildings and is used as a visitor attraction and for educational visits.



Parking outside Grange Farm



Entrance to 17<sup>th</sup> Century Village

- 7.4 Home Heath lies between the complex and the new development known as Alver Village which is part of the Rowner Renewal initiative, a major regeneration project. Home Heath was a former caravan site for the MoD. This is within an area of recognised archaeological potential.



Home Heath



Entrance to Home Heath

**Proposals**

- 7.5 The Grange Farm complex and associated area will become one of the three main gateways to the site and will be the main hub in terms of visitor attractions. The site will include a garden centre with a café and facilities for visitors such as displays and visitor information. The site will include toilets (including baby changing facilities and toilets for disabled people). There may also be scope for cycle hire. These visitor facilities would be to a standard expected of a modern country park.
- 7.6 The whole visitor hub will need to be a welcoming place with clear branding, where people can find their way around easily within the Grange Farm area and to the wider Country Park. Outside the car park it should be as traffic free as possible. The only vehicles allowed beyond the car park are those used by the rangers and service, delivery, and emergency vehicles as well as those of the three households at Grange Farmhouse. This access will need to be managed to ensure the safety of visitors.
- 7.7 It is envisaged that the former nursery site will be used as part of the garden centre function. There is also the potential to relocate the Council's Countryside team from the Grange Farm buildings to the existing nursery office/storage buildings within this part of the site.
- 7.8 It is envisaged that the 17th Century Village would be integrated into the hub as an additional attraction. Further negotiation will be required on how the attraction would be run in connection with the volunteers who themselves are the main attraction of the site. The

signage and boundary treatment will need to be refurbished to complement the wider Grange Farm hub.

- 7.9 Access to the Wildgrounds would be through the Grange Farm gateway. It would also be the access to Oxstall Meadow which is envisaged to be a space that can offer education and family friendly activities in a safe and welcoming environment close to visitor facilities.
- 7.10 A woodland car park on part of the Home Heath site will be sensitively designed appropriate to its setting on the edge of the Alver Valley in terms of surfacing and landscaping. It will be important to include tree planting to break-up the visual impact of the parking. The existing hedgerow on the west side of Home Heath will be retained and where required enhanced to provide screening between the car park and the residents of the Grange Farm House. From the car park visitors can access the Grange Farm facilities and associated facilities on the site of the old nursery. The remaining part of Home Heath will be a landscaped area to soften the edge of the Park and could incorporate a picnic area and play facilities.
- 7.11 In order to deliver these proposed uses there are a number of issues that need to be addressed which are outlined below.

*Main access point*

- 7.12 One of the key issues to be addressed relates to the need to improve the main access in the visitor hub. The existing access to Grange Farm is via Little Woodham Lane which is accessed from Howe Road via a sharp turn in the new housing estate. It is considered that this access point and the route is not the most suitable to cater for the anticipated higher number of visitors and servicing vehicles.
- 7.13 Instead it is considered that a wider new access point with sufficient visibility splays could be introduced off Howe Road straight into a visitors' car park on part of the Home Heath site. From this main access it may be possible to serve Grange Farm. The design of this layout will need to be undertaken in conjunction with the developers of the Alver Village as a number of new dwellings are proposed in the vicinity of the proposed junction.
- 7.14 Once this access point and the service road is complete it is proposed that Little Woodham Lane will be closed to public vehicular traffic and be used only by residents of Grange Farmhouse and service vehicles associated with the Country Park.

*Connectivity with the rest of the Park*

- 7.15 The Grange Farm Gateway will be the starting point for many visitors to explore the wider Country Park but many visitors will enter the Country Park from other points and consequently it will be necessary for there to be appropriate waymarking so these visitors can find their way to the Grange Farm. Importantly there will be a particular issue to improve connections with the Eastern Gateway at Alver Meadow, which will be a popular entrance point for those arriving by car as it is a visible and convenient entrance point. It is proposed that two routes could be offered. One involves improving one of the existing woodland paths through Carters Copse making it wider with a durable natural material that could be used in all weather. The other route is along the existing track towards Apple Dumpling Bridge then turn left on the existing path towards the recycling centre which would be suitable for visitors using wheelchairs and pushchairs.
- 7.16 Subject to the review of the access arrangements to the Wildgrounds site, there is potential for Grange Farm to be better connected to different parts of the Country Park and the residential areas to the north. This would enable the potential for circular routes to pass through the site, which would assist with footfall.

*Local amenities*

- 7.17 The amenities of residents of Grange Farmhouse and the residents of the proposed and existing dwellings on Howe Road backing onto the former nursery and Home Heath will need to be fully considered as part of the proposals for this area. This could potentially have implications for facilities such as BBQs and play areas but further consideration on this issue will be considered including the need for appropriate landscaping.

*Buildings*

- 7.18 The existing condition of the Grange Farm buildings is an issue and further work is required to ensure that they can be refurbished and maintained in a financially sustainable way. Work will need to respect the character of these locally listed buildings and the setting of the Listed Grange Farmhouse. The genuine rural character of the buildings should be retained.
- 7.19 It is considered that the existing buildings of Grange Farm are of a sufficient size to accommodate the uses outlined above but will need to be carefully designed to limit conflict between the different uses.
- 7.20 The old glasshouses are in poor condition and will need to be cleared to make way for the garden centre operations and other Country Park uses.
- 7.21 Where possible sustainable construction features should be incorporated into retained buildings. However these should not detract from the historic character or setting of the buildings.
- 7.22 There are a number of key actions that need to be investigated to realise the overall objective of creating the main visitor hub and gateway at Grange Farm, including that the Borough Council will:
- market the Grange Farm site for plant and garden sales with ancillary facilities to ascertain the level and nature of market interest.
  - determine the precise new road access from Howe Road to the Grange Farm gateway, in liaison with developers of the Alver Village development, and consider the arrangements for car parking and vehicular access for residents and service vehicles;
  - produce a landscape plan for the visitor hub including Home Heath and Oxstall Meadow;
  - produce an access and orientation plan for visitors arriving by car, foot, cycle and public transport to ensure the hub is easily reached with appropriate waymarking and improved routes with the rest of the Country Park.

**Oxstall Meadow****Current Use**

- 7.23 This area is an enclosed, protected education area adjacent to the Grange Farm complex. It contains sculptures, seating areas and some cover with a small viewing platform over the Alver Valley reedbeds and a wildlife pond. It is generally closed to the public.
- 7.24 At the southern end of the Meadow is a former timber store, with access through the gate near Apple Dumpling Bridge.





Oxstall Meadow

**Proposals**

- 7.25 It is proposed to retain this area for family-focussed activities to be accessed from Grange Farm. There is a good range of structures and areas offering a good education/play resource. However some of the structures are looking tired and there will need to be some refurbishment of the features. There is potential for a picnic area. Parts of the area, such as the former timber yard could also be potentially be incorporated into the wider Apple Dumpling Bridge landscape area. There may be scope to encourage wider public access of this area although it is intended to remain a dog-free area.

**Carter’s Copse**

**Current use**

- 7.26 Carter’s Copse is an area of woodland lying between the Eastern Gateway including Alver Meadow; Apple Dumpling Bridge; and the proposed Grange Farm Gateway including the main visitor hub. It contains a motte and bailey which is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM). The woodland is of no great age, but the southern section is a wet woodland, with the entire copse designated as a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC). The motte and bailey was built to defend the strategic crossing at Apple Dumpling Bridge, as was the Second World War pillbox that also lies in Carters Copse.



Motte and Bailey



Entrance to Alver Valley from Little Woodham Lane

**Proposals**

- 7.27 It is proposed that this area will remain a pleasant wooded area with a number trails and boardwalks providing an attractive initial area for visitors arriving at Grange Farm as well as visitors arriving at the Eastern Gateway wishing to access facilities at Grange Farm.



- 7.28 Therefore it will be important that this area loses the neglected feeling that has been identified<sup>19</sup> this could include ensuring pathways through the Copse are maintained with appropriate discreet waymarking (avoiding visual clutter) to encourage people to use some of the smaller paths through the Copse.
- 7.29 The motte and bailey is a key feature of this area and as located close to the two main access points on the eastern side of the park should be viewed as an important feature. Consequently its prominence should be increased with appropriate interpretation and continued management. The Second World War Pillbox could also include some interpretation and be identified as a feature.

### Alver Meadow and Eastern Gateway

#### Current use

- 7.30 This area is mainly short amenity grassland and used for recreational activities such as dog walking. There is a play area and public BMX track which is very popular and has an associated BMX club run by volunteers. Access to this area is past the household recycling centre to a car park which caters for around 50 cars.



Entrance to Alver Meadow



BMX Track

#### Proposals

- 7.31 It is proposed that the Alver Meadow will include the Eastern Gateway to the Park with the following facilities:
- Improved and more prominent access off Grange Road using the existing road serving the Household Waste and Recycling Centre (HWRC) and car park.
  - The car park will be extended and the immediate environment improved to be more welcoming and become an attractive setting as a main entrance to the Country Park. This would include:
    - directional signs off Grange Road and pedestrian/cycle direction signs from the car park to other key areas of the park (such as Grange Farm);
    - a main welcome sign;
    - a welcome interpretation board and map;
    - an imaginative way to both screen the HWRC but also educate visitors regarding its importance.
  - Potential improvements for the BMX track.
  - The existing adventure playground area would be enhanced with additional play facilities for both older and younger children including a bespoke feature which would form part of the Alver Valley-wide play trail.

<sup>19</sup> HCC Countryside Section work for GBC

- A new cycle/pedestrian route to be located close to the river linking Apple Dumpling Bridge to Privett Road with connections to Stoke Bay.
- Large amenity grassland area will be maintained for informal activities such as walking and dog walking as well as informal games (kick-about, rounders, frisbee etc.)
- The area will include picnic areas and consideration given of whether this area is suitable for BBQs.
- This informal area will also be suitable for events such as the national and regional BMX competitions that have been held here.
- Further consideration will be required on whether any additional paths are required and these should be surfaced with materials appropriate to the Country Park. New paths could include a path from car park/clubhouse to the entrance to BMX track.
- The main existing route from the car park towards Apple Dumpling Bridge will need to be resurfaced (currently suffers from very large potholes which make the path difficult to use in wet conditions).
- The existing informal car parking used by visitors (including BMX track users) would be closed off and instead visitors will be required to use the main car park as part of the Eastern Gateway. This entrance will remain available for pedestrian and cycle access.

### **Apple Dumpling Bridge area**

#### **Current use**

- 7.32 Apple Dumpling Bridge is the sole crossing point between the east and west side of the Country Park. The site of the original crossing point was guarded by the Norman motte and bailey. There is a revetted area with a combined seat and interpretive panel immediately adjacent to the bridge.

#### **Proposals**

- 7.33 As this is currently the only crossing of the river through the Country Park it is therefore the point where those accessing the park from the Western Gateway (and other access points on the western side) need to cross to visit the attractions at Grange Farm and Alver Meadow or visit the Wildgrounds Reserve. Similarly those accessing the Country Park from the east need to use the bridge to walk and cycle the large tracts of land on the western side including the viewpoint at Sandhill.
- 7.34 It therefore is an important place in the Country Park where visitors should be encouraged to dwell and meet and consequently the area around the bridge should be landscaped to reflect this. There is the potential to create a raised platform to view the reedbed habitat.
- 7.35 The area around the bridge is liable to flooding caused normally by the blocked outfall pipe of the river as it meets the sea at Stokes Bay. As mentioned previously the Environment Agency and the Borough Council are looking at measures to ensure that incidences are minimised as such flooding incidences can restrict access to a large proportion of visitors to the Country Park.



Apple Dumpling Bridge

## **The Alver River**

### **Current Use**

- 7.36 The River Alver is the main artery through the Country Park and forms a significant part of the biodiversity and amenity value of the site, along with their associated habitats and wildlife.

### **Proposals**

- 7.37 The Environment Agency working in partnership with the Borough Council are undertaking two key projects which it is envisaged will improve the water quality of the River Alver These are:
- the creation of, and recreation of reedbeds to filter any leachate from Sandhill entering the watercourse;
  - Measures to reduce the instances of the blockage of the outfall pipe of the River Alver at Stokes Bay which not only causes flooding in the Apple Dumpling Bridge area but affects the water quality by causing leachate concentrates to rise and causes unnatural peaks and troughs of the salinity and flow of the water which affects the quality of the river habitats.
- 7.38 Given the importance of the river to the Country Park there are limited opportunities to view it (currently primarily Apple Dumpling Bridge). It is therefore proposed to improve and manage the riverside path for pedestrians and cyclists between Apple Dumpling Bridge and Privett Road. There may also be additional opportunities for views of the river and reedbeds within the West of the River Nature Reserve.
- 7.39 Further opportunities to view the river or walk beside it will arise if the Gun Club land and Browndown Common are incorporated into the Country Park. Additionally if a second suitable bridging point can be established this would certainly make the river at the heart of the country park with the potential for more circular walks. Potential bridging points that require further investigation are:
- The Wildgrounds (perhaps using existing boardwalk to the river and then extend across to the western side). This would need to be considered as part of the review of wider access arrangements for the Wildgrounds Reserve;
  - North end of the West of the River Nature Reserve to land to the north west of Grange Farm (indicative suggestions are shown on Plan 1).

## **West of the River Local Nature Reserve**

### **Current Use**

- 7.40 The West of the River Local Nature Reserve (LNR) lies on the banks of the River Alver, near Apple Dumpling Bridge. There is a network of paths and boardwalks running through the area.

### **Proposals**

- 7.41 This is an attractive area but as the Country Park becomes established there will be a need to improve the management of the key paths in this area to allow people to enjoy exploring the reserve. Currently there are paths that appear to lead to overgrown dead-ends. There is also a need to refurbish some of the boardwalks and provide some limited sensitive interpretation of features (perhaps at the entrance of the reserve).
- 7.42 It is also proposed to create/recreate some reedbeds in this area at the foot of Sandhill to filter potential leachate entering the River Alver. There is also an opportunity to improve footpath access.
- 7.43 Further investigations will need to be considered regarding a second crossing point of the river towards Grange Farm as well as other opportunities to view the river and reedbeds.

## Sandhill Pond

### Current Use

- 7.44 Sandhill Pond is leased to the Portsmouth and District Angling Club. In addition to fish species it is used by wildfowl. A small metal container is located adjacent the lake and is used by the club. The anglers arriving by car access the site via Shoot Lane to the north.



Entrance to Sandhill Pond



Sandhill Pond

### Proposals

- 7.45 It is proposed that the lake is maintained as a fishing lake. However at present the site has a feeling set apart from the rest of the park where non-anglers are excluded. There is currently poor quality signage and facilities at Sandhill Pond.
- 7.46 It is proposed to encourage other visitors to walk around the pond through an improved footpath. The incorporation of the adjacent land used by the gun club within the Country Park would greatly assist with improving the area around the pond.
- 7.47 It is proposed that the appearance of the club store is also improved.
- 7.48 The continued vehicular access by anglers is not ideal and these arrangements will need to be reviewed as the Country Park becomes more popular as part of future tenancy arrangements. It may be possible to restrict access for vehicles at peak times.

## Hilbury Meadow, Junkett Hill and Sandhill

### Current Use

- 7.49 This area is reclaimed land from sand workings and capped landfill. Sandhill and Junckett Hill have the highest viewpoint in Gosport and has great views of the Isle of Wight, the Solent, the Country Park itself, the rest of the whole Borough, as well as parts of Portsmouth.
- 7.50 Hilbury Meadow is grazed by cattle as part of wider landscape and biodiversity objectives and is consequently fenced.



View from Sandhill

**Proposals**

- 7.51 It is proposed that the land will remain an important part of the Country Park for walking and enjoying the view. It is proposed to encourage the top of Sandhill as a gathering place with the opportunity for a simple well-designed feature made from largely from natural materials to allow visitors to interpret the view. Sensitive waymarking will be required at the base of the hill to encourage people to visit.
- 7.52 Other proposals will be focussed on delivering biodiversity improvements to improve this former quarry and landfill site.

**Noah Lake**

**Current Use**

- 7.53 The lake was designed as a balancing pond to store surface water from the Cherque Farm development and is used by a range of waterfowl species. There have been recent works to increase its potential for biodiversity including the provision of a scrape. There is an interpretation board serving the site with an informal path along the northern edge of the site. There is a steep slope on the western edge of the pond which is adjacent Sandhill Lane and separated off by a tall fence and hedge.



Fence at Noah Lake

**Proposals**

- 7.54 Further investigations should be considered for increasing the biodiversity of the pond. The current boundary treatment on the western side currently limits views across the lake. Consequently there may be scope to improve the appearance and viewing opportunities at this point. This could include some form of hide. There may also be scope to introduce a new type of fencing which is more appropriate to a country park setting whilst overcoming any safety concerns.



## Northern Grasslands and Western Gateway

### Current Use

- 7.56 This area is the northernmost part of the site on the west side of the river. It was intended to be part of a sports complex, acting as the Portsmouth FC training grounds with community access. This proposal was subsequently abandoned which provides a new opportunity to maintain a more natural feel to this part of the Alver Valley whilst encourage recreational features. The latest evidence contained in the Borough Council's Playing Pitch and Sports Facility Assessment (2013) identifies that currently there is no requirement in the Borough for additional sports pitches.<sup>20</sup>
- 7.57 The site includes a large expanse of grassland as well as a small section of alder carr woodland.

### Proposals

- 7.58 It is proposed that the Western Gateway of Cherque Way will be located on the southern edge of this character area. The Gateway will include a parking area and incorporate a large welcome sign as well as interpretation and a plan of the Country Park. The western car park will also act as a new service link road to Sandhill Hill Lane which will enable vehicular access to Shoot Lane to cease, subject to the appropriate legal agreements, and thereby allowing this area to be more suitable for recreational uses.
- 7.59 It is proposed that the grassed areas closest to the parking area will be managed as amenity grassland where a range of informal activities will be encouraged such as kickabout, rounders frisbee etc. There will be also be a picnic area and it will be necessary to investigate whether the provision of BBQ units will be appropriate in this location (drawing from experience elsewhere).
- 7.60 A range of play equipment will also be located as part of the amenity grassland to accommodate a range of age groups. This will also include a specific element of the cross-park play trail, perhaps designed to reflect the characteristics at this end of the Country Park.

## The Wildgrounds Local Nature Reserve

### Current use

- 7.61 The Wildgrounds is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)<sup>21</sup> as well as being a Local Nature Reserve (LNR) since 1979. It represents a woodland type formerly widespread on coastal commons in Hampshire. Its natural origins and age structure, dominated by old trees which will be permitted to live their natural life span, are of great ecological and historical interest. The site also includes a lake and also includes a stretch of the River Alver reedbeds.
- 7.62 It is run as a limited access site, wardened mainly by volunteers, with permits available to be purchased at the Town Hall or on-site. It is closed during the winter months.

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.gosport.gov.uk/sections/your-council/council-services/planning-section/local-development-framework/gosport-borough-local-plan-2029/gosport-borough-local-plan-2011-2029-consultation-draft-december-2012/evidence-studies/open-space-and-sport/?Open%20Space%20and%20Sport> Instead existing sports pitches should be retained ; the quality improved and arrangements for increased shared use with MoD and school facilities should be considered.

<sup>21</sup> Natural England's citation for the Wildgrounds designation as a SSSI can be viewed at

[http://www.sssi.naturalengland.org.uk/citation/citation\\_photo/1003440.pdf](http://www.sssi.naturalengland.org.uk/citation/citation_photo/1003440.pdf)

**Proposals**

- 7.63 The Wildgrounds will remain an important local nature reserve and will continue to be a special place. It is proposed that access to the site will be relocated to the south of the site adjacent Grange Farm where daily permits can be purchased. This will encourage an increased number of visitors to enjoy the reserve. It is proposed that once this arrangement is in place the car parking adjacent Rodney Close will be closed to the general public.

**Land not currently within the Country Park****Gun club land****Current Use**

- 7.64 This area is in private ownership, with clay pigeon shooting taking place. There is an established vehicular access right for participants. The land lies centrally in the Alver Valley and forms a significant barrier to potential access arrangements within the Country Park and can detract from the overall atmosphere of the Country Park.

**Proposals**

- 7.65 It is the aspiration of the Borough Council to acquire this site and incorporate it within the Park. This will provide enhanced opportunities for a number of proposals including:
- additional routes to link with existing ones for an enhanced walking experience;
  - additional viewing opportunities of the river and reedbed;
  - further habitat improvements;
  - the possibilities to investigate a second crossing point across the river along a boardwalk over the reed beds giving greater opportunities to appreciate and understand this feature. This would need to be considered with improving access arrangements from the north and east;
  - potential to use some of the land for active recreational pursuits for adults and older children as well as 'adventure play' activities for children.
- 7.66 It is considered that this land is an integral part of the Country Park due to its position in the centre of the Alver Valley and that it occupies a long stretch along the western side of the River. Therefore its incorporation within the Country Park is essential for the long term management of the Alver Valley both in terms of a recreational and habitat resource. The current activities of clay pigeon shooting and the visiting vehicles, have, and will continue to conflict with Country Park users and the overall vision for the Alver Valley. Key issues that have arisen include: the presence of clay pigeon shot over the Borough Council's land; the detracting nature of the intermittent noise which can affect the enjoyment of visitors; as well as incidences of visitors driving their cars above appropriate speeds. There is therefore a strong case to acquire this land and incorporate it within the Country Park.
- 7.67 In the meantime it is proposed to work with the gun club to minimise any potential conflict with an increased level of visitors. This includes ensuring the vehicles travelling across the Country Park to the Gun Club travel at no more than 15 mph. It is proposed that the Shoot Lane access will be closed to vehicles and instead vehicles would use the access off Cherque Way as part of the Western Gateway. This would be subject to the appropriate legal arrangements.

**Browdown Common (MoD land)****Current Use**

- 7.68 Browdown Common is an MoD training area at the southern end of the Country Park. It contains significant areas of heathland and is regularly used by walkers as part of the wider park.

## Proposals

- 7.69 These could include if the land was formally included within the Park:
- improved signage with necessary warnings to encourage use of the site in connection with the wider Country Park;
  - improved access points for visitors and on-going maintenance of boardwalk to Privett Road;
  - potential to combine the management of the land with the Alver Valley Higher Level Stewardship agreement and other nature conservation initiatives;
  - scope for more views of the River Alver;
  - management and interpretation of historic assets on the site including the First World War training trenches.



Entrance to Browdown Common

## 8 IMPLEMENTATION and DELIVERY

- 8.1 There are a number of further actions and considerations which are necessary in order to implement and deliver the proposed facilities for the Alver Valley Country Park. The key mechanisms are set out below.

### Project Briefs

- 8.2 This Strategy provides a basic framework to undertake further work including the need to produce individual project briefs with a financial appraisal. These specific project briefs will be required to understand further specific constraints and costs, design issues and the availability of funding sources. In several instances it will also be necessary to establish market interest from a commercial operator as well as user interest from the general public.

### Management Plan

- 8.3 It will also be necessary to devise a detailed management plan for the running of the Park and a number of issues that need to be considered have been highlighted throughout this strategy document.
- 8.4 The Management Plan will need to consider the following:
- staffing arrangements;
  - maintaining site appearance;
  - health and safety and other legal requirements;
  - customer services and bookings;

- activity programme;
- charging strategy for different activities and car parking;
- codes of behaviours for different users (this would be communicated in a customer friendly manner on the appropriate targeted leaflets);
- habitats (including land covered by Higher Level Stewardship grants) as well as other measures to secure net biodiversity;
- managing activity within the Park;
- marketing, branding and awareness and the use of electronic media.

### **Sources of Funding**

- 8.5 Work associated with the project briefs and the management plan will need to investigate further sources of funding. Local government funding has been subject to cuts in funding over the past few years and many authorities are struggling to fund the management of green spaces. There is clearly continued support for the Alver Valley Country Park and an interest in developing and investing in the future of the park. In order to reduce the burden of managing the park in the long term there is a need to maximise the income potential both through grant aid and income generation. Long term management will need to consider the financial sustainability of the facilities proposed and consequently it will be important to include a number of commercial facilities in the park which will provide a sufficient level of funding.
- 8.6 Potential income generating sources to fund the management of the Country Park requires further investigation. This includes:
- Car parking- most country parks charge for car parking- a pricing strategy will need to be considered with appropriate concessions for regular users and other concessionary rates.
  - Revenue from facilities such as a garden centre, café, cycle hire - the precise business model for each of these will need to be considered further.
  - Hiring out venues for private functions;
  - Issuing business permits for certain commercial activities (commercial dog-walkers, outdoor fitness instructor programmes)
- 8.7 A list of existing and potential sources of funding is outlined below:
- Developer contributions: Section 106 payments for open space- The Borough Council can use Section 106 developer contributions<sup>22</sup> to fund proposals in the Country Park. These contributions are particularly suited to the Alver Valley as the Country Park will provide significant outdoor recreational opportunities for residents across the Borough.
  - Section 106 payments may also be used for the mitigation of the recreational disturbance impact on internationally important habitats. Natural England have accepted, for the time being, that developer contributions for the Alver Valley can be collected as mitigation for the recreational disturbance generated by the residents of new development on sensitive internationally important habitats, as the Country Park can deflect pressure from such sites. This measure forms part of the Solent Disturbance and Mitigation Project<sup>23</sup> which Natural England have stipulated is necessary to mitigate the recreational pressure resulting from new development in the Solent area.

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<sup>22</sup> the play space and other sports categories

<sup>23</sup>See [http://www.solentforum.org/forum/sub\\_groups/Natural\\_Environment\\_Group/Disturbance\\_and\\_Mitigation\\_Project/](http://www.solentforum.org/forum/sub_groups/Natural_Environment_Group/Disturbance_and_Mitigation_Project/) for further details

- Developer contributions: Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) - Once CIL is adopted by the Borough Council (likely in 2015), it can resolve to collect contributions for particular infrastructure projects such as the Country Park<sup>24</sup>.
- GBC Budgets- The Borough Council over the years has had an allocation in its capital budget for improvements to the Alver Valley as well as ongoing budgets for staffing and maintenance.
- Higher Level Stewardship Grant (via Natural England) - The Borough Council already receives funding from Natural England for habitat management which requires the land to be managed to enhance biodiversity.
- Partnership work with the Environment Agency on flooding and contamination issues.
- PUSH funding- The Alver Valley is identified in the PUSH Green infrastructure Plan and Implementation Framework and there is potential to access funding streams.
- Hampshire County Council for initiatives linked to countryside services, education, health, and minerals and waste.
- Shoot Lane improvements (HCC Highways)
- Various sources (National Lottery etc.) that can be accessed by community groups (such as Lee-on-the Solent Residents' Association).

### **Partnership Working**

8.8 The establishment of the Country Park will be delivered with Gosport Borough Council working in partnership with a number of organisations including:

- Environment Agency- the Borough Council is already working with the Environment Agency regarding flooding and contamination issues and it is envisaged that this close cooperation will continue.
- Natural England the Borough Council is already working with Natural England as part of the Higher Level Stewardship Fund and it is envisaged that this partnership working will continue on this and other nature conservation initiatives.
- English Heritage- There is scope for working with English Heritage on improving the management and interpretation of historical features in the Country Park as well as within the adjacent Browdown Common.
- Ministry of Defence- The Borough Council will continue on-going partnership with the MoD with regard to access arrangement of the adjacent Browdown Common.
- Hampshire County Council – This includes the potential for joint procurement for particular countryside services, activities and events utilising HCC's experience of managing a number of successful Country Parks within Hampshire. There may also be opportunities for initiatives related to countryside access, health, education, biodiversity and the adjacent Household Waste Recycling Centre.
- Other local authorities in the area that operate or are proposing to operate country parks- Similarly there may be opportunities for joint procurement of services, activities and events.
- Partnership for Urban South Hampshire- as part of the implementation of the South Hampshire Green Infrastructure Strategy.
- Solent Local Enterprise Partnership- including the potential for the Alver Valley to mitigate some recreational disturbance impacts on internationally important habitats which would therefore enable further development to take place within the sub-region.
- Hampshire Local Nature Partnership- There may be scope in the future for the Hampshire LNP to work with the Borough Council on delivering a number of habitat initiatives in the Park and linking it with the wider countryside and coast.
- Private businesses- there are a number of opportunities for businesses to operate a range of facilities in the Country Park which will bring revenue to the upkeep of the Country Park.

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<sup>24</sup> It will not be possible in most circumstances to continue to collect Section 106 contributions. This is due to particular limitations imposed by the CIL Regulations which come into force on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2015 which limit the number of contributions that can be used for a single infrastructure project (to 5 development sites).



- On-going community involvement with local organisations and the general public (see below for further details).

### **Ongoing Community Involvement**

- 8.9 There is some existing outstanding community involvement associated with the Country Park including:
- volunteers who work with the Borough Council's ranger team on habitat and other related initiatives;
  - those associated with the successful BMX Club;
  - the living history volunteers who represent the main attraction of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century Village;
  - the Lee-on-the-Solent Residents' Association which have played an active role and have been successful in securing funding for various projects in the Park.
- 8.10 There are opportunities to work with the local community to help design, establish and maintain the Country Park as well as undertake certain functions and club activities within the Country Park.
- 8.11 The creation of a 'Friends' group dedicated to Alver Valley Country Park may be considered appropriate. This type of group are independent of the Country Park and can assist in implementing the strategy through volunteer effort and the ability to obtain external funding that may not be available to the Borough Council.
- 8.12 There is also further scope to involve the local community, including schools, local clubs and community groups and the military. Projects and initiatives should be designed to provide opportunities to engage with local communities and generate a sense of ownership. There may be opportunities to involve the local community in the development of the Alver Valley through a variety of means such as: competitions, projects, encouraging groups to be interested in specific areas of the Country Park for wildlife, community growing project, community orchard etc. It will also be useful to explore opportunities to deliver learning and skills development in partnership with others.

### **Visitor Monitoring**

- 8.13 Very little is known about the current visitors to the Alver Valley Country Park; how many people visit, where they come from, how often they visit, who they visit with and what activities they come to do. It will therefore be necessary to undertake some qualitative surveys to understand the current market as well as wider surveys of the Borough which consider views of residents who could potentially visit the Country Park but don't currently visit or do so on an infrequent basis. This research will also be required to ensure that the Country Park is providing effective mitigation for deflecting recreational pressure on sensitive internationally important habitats in the locality as part of the Solent Disturbance and Mitigation Project.
- 8.14 The Borough Council has now begun monitoring footfall in the Country Park. There are a number of entrances into the park making counting numbers difficult and consequently it has been necessary to monitor footfall information at particular points around the Country Park. This started in October 2013 and will continue to September 2014. With follow up counts in two further years (Oct 2015-Sept 2016 and Oct 2017-Sept 2018). This information is useful to establishing a baseline and can be used to assess how improvements to the Country Park have increased visitor numbers over time. The information is also useful to understand how the Country Park is used at different times of the day, week and year and the impact of weather conditions.

## Appendix 1 – Country Park Accreditation Criteria (Natural England 2009)

See <http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/enjoying/places/countryparks/accreditation/default.aspx> for further details.

Sites must demonstrate all 15 Essential criteria and 10 Desirable criteria. These criteria form the core of the Application form for the scheme and should be considered alongside the evidence requirements.

Essential	Desirable
<b>Area</b>	
At least 10 hectares (25 acres) in size	
Must have an identifiable boundary	
<b>Accessibility</b>	
Readily accessible to the population which it is intended to serve	Green transport policy or plan for the site
Entry free of charge	Additional facilities for less able visitors e.g. easy going trails, accessible seats and picnic benches, relevant site information in an accessible format, play equipment
Evidence of a Site access plan in place that has been developed following an access audit and addresses the requirements of the DDA (Disability Discrimination Act) to ensure indoor and outdoor facilities provided are inclusive and accessible. Evidence of commitment to Equality Standards or equivalent level of delivery	Evidence of progress towards the next level of equality standards or equivalent level of delivery
<b>Character</b>	
Must predominantly consist of natural or semi-natural landscape, e.g. woodland, grassland, wetland, heathland, parkland	Management and promotion of the site's biodiversity, geo-diversity and historical environment
Less than 5% total area of buildings	
<b>Facilities</b>	
Easily followed paths, bridleways and cycle paths, e.g. waymarked or with a leaflet	Outdoor recreation facilities e.g. water sports, adventure sports
Toilets on site or within 2 minutes walking distance	Promoted self-guided health promoting activities
	Visitor centre
	Play facilities

	Catering provision
	Cycle or horse trails
	Art or sculpture
<b>Links to local communities and neighbourhoods</b>	
Opportunities for the local community to have an influence over the management and development of the site	Outreach programme to engage and involve local people
	Active promotion to less represented sectors of the community
	Outreach programme to engage and involve local schools and lifelong learning delivery
	Links from the site to the rights of way network, permissive access routes or other adjoining public open space or open access areas Connectivity between site and where people live
<b>Management</b>	
Daily staff presence	Permanent staff presence during the daytime
Up to date management plan	Opportunities for community involvement in practical or management tasks
	Annual Action Plan / Work Plan
	Achieved or working towards Green Flag Award (GFA) status
<b>Activities</b>	
Available for public or educational events	Programme of walks or events
	Programme of activities and events that promote healthy living and environmental awareness
<b>Information and interpretation</b>	
Clear entrance signage	More detailed information and interpretation about the site and other issues
Information about where visitors can go and what they can do	Brown and white tourist directional signs
	Shown on OS map

**Appendix 2: Current and Predicted age profile within Gosport Borough**

<b>Age groups</b>	<b>Proportion with each age group: 2011</b>	<b>Proportion with each age group 2029:</b>
<b>0-4</b>	6.3%	5.5%
<b>5-15</b>	12.4%	12.2%
<b>16-29</b>	19.7%	17.4%
<b>30-44</b>	19.7%	18.6%
<b>45-64</b>	24.3%	21.7%
<b>65-74</b>	8.9%	11.2%
<b>75-84</b>	6.3%	8.9%
<b>85+</b>	2.4%	4.5%
<b>All Ages</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Population projections prepared by HCC (2012) on behalf of GBC

## Appendix 3: Planning Policy

### National Planning Policy Framework

The Government's National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2012) sets out a number of core planning principles including a number relevant to the creation of a country park including:

- Always seek to secure high quality design and a good standard of amenity for all;
- Contribute to conserving and enhancing the natural environment;
- Recognising that some open land can perform many functions (such as wildlife, recreation, flood risk mitigation, carbon storage, or food production);
- Conserve heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance;
- Take account of and support local strategies to improve health, social and cultural wellbeing for all, and deliver sufficient community and cultural facilities and services to meet local needs.

The NPPF looks to local planning authorities to set out a 'strategic approach in their Local Plans, planning positively for the creation, protection, enhancement and management of networks of biodiversity and green infrastructure' (para 114).

Proposals should be located and designed to give priority to pedestrian and cycle movements and have access to high quality public transport facilities. There needs to be safe and secure layouts which minimise conflict between traffic and cyclists or pedestrians. The needs of people with disabilities need to be considered. A key tool to facilitate this will be a Travel Plan (para 35-36).

The Government attaches great importance to the design of the built environment including individual buildings and public spaces. Proposals should function well and add to the overall quality of the area over the long-term. They should establish a strong sense of place and create an attractive place to visit. They should respond to local character and history and create safe and accessible environments (para 56-58).

The planning system can play an important role in facilitating social interaction and creating healthy, inclusive communities.

The NPPF sets out guidance relating to the location of retail and leisure floorspace out of centres (Paras 24-27) which may be applicable for any proposed commercial development ancillary to the Grange Farm visitor hub.

### Gosport Borough Local Plan Review (Adopted 2006)

Key 'saved' relevant policies could include:

- *Policy R/OS6- Recreation allocation in the Alver Valley.* This policy allocates land in the Alver Valley for a country park to be used for a variety of associated recreational uses.
- *R/OS1- Development outside of the urban area-* The Alver Valley is outside the urban area. This policy presumes against most form of development outside the urban area but does allow for appropriate recreation uses. Such development would need to meet the criteria of R/DP1
- *R/OS2- Strategic gaps.* The Alver Valley is within the strategic gap. The Policy aims to prevent development that would diminish the visual and physical character of the gap
- *R/OS4- Protection of existing open space-*The policy aims to protect open space from development



- *R/OS5- New open space provision-* This policy sets out criteria to ensure new areas of open space meet a number of criteria relating to accessibility, amenity and habitats
- *R/DP1- General standards of development within the urban area.* This policy is also relevant for appropriate recreational facilities outside of the urban area and relates to design, heritage, nature conservation, contamination, amenities, infrastructure and parking and flood risk issues
- *R/DP3- Provision of infrastructure, services and facilities.* This policy enable the Borough Council's to seek developer contributions for important infrastructure required in association with the development including areas of green infrastructure such as the Alver Valley.

Other relevant 'saved' policies include

- *R/DP9- Outdoor advertisement-* This will ensure notices associated with the Country Park are appropriate for its setting.
- *R/T2, R/T3, R/T4, R/T9, T/T10, R/T11 -Various transport policies* which aim to ensure that proposals have appropriate access and parking arrangements for vehicles and suitable provision is made for cycles, pedestrians and public transport users.
- *R/S2- Location of additional shopping and leisure floorspace.* This policy together with later guidance contained in the NPPF aims to ensure that any additional retail and leisure floorspace which could form an ancillary element to the Alver Valley Country Park does not have a detrimental impact on existing centres.
- *R/CF8- Provision of built leisure facilities.* The Alver Valley will contain some built leisure facilities and potential other ancillary attractions. This policy sets out the key criteria to be considered.
- *R/BH3- Development affecting listed buildings.* This policy will be applicable where proposals affect a listed Building and/or its setting (such as the Grange Farmhouse).
- *R/BH6- The Local List.* This policy is applicable for proposals affecting Local listed buildings such as the Grange Farm buildings.
- *R/BH8- Archaeology and Ancient Monuments.* This policy aims to protect important archaeology including scheduled monuments (such as the motte and bailey).
- *R/OS8- Recreation space for new development.* This policy enables developer contributions for housing developments to be used for off-site open space provision such as the Alver Valley.
- *R/OS11- Areas of National Nature Conservation Importance.* This aims to protect sites such as the Wildgrounds Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).
- *R/OS12- Locally designated areas of nature conservation importance.* There are a number of Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs) in the Alver Valley which are afforded protection by this policy.
- *R/OS13- Protection of habitats supporting protected species.* The Alver Valley contains a number of protected species which are afforded protection by this policy.
- *R/OS14- Biodiversity Action Plans.* This policy aims to protect and enhance habitats which contain or potentially contain species identified in national and local biodiversity action areas.
- *R/ENV2- River and groundwater protection.* This policy ensures that development proposals do not have an adverse effect on the quality of surface, ground or coastal water quality.

- *R/ENV3- Water resources-* This policy aims to ensure that there is a sufficient supply of water and measures are included which minimise its use.
- *R/ENV4- Treatment of foul sewage and disposal of surface water.* This policy aims to ensure that where practical the use of sustainable drainage systems are used.
- *R/ENV5- Contaminated Land.* This policy aims to ensure that effective measures are taken to treat, contain and control contaminants.
- *R/ENV10- Noise pollution.* This policy aims to ensure noise sensitive sites are not adversely affected by noise generating uses.
- *R/ENV11- Minimising light pollution.* Sites like the Alver Valley will be sensitive to light pollution.
- *R/ENV14- Energy conservation.* This policy aims to ensure the development proposals incorporate energy efficient measures as well as other measures which reduce the consumption of water and reduce waste.

### **Emerging Gosport Borough Local Plan 2011-2029: Consultation Draft version (Dec 2012)**

The Alver Valley is identified as a regeneration area for green infrastructure in Policy LP3 which outlines the overall spatial strategy over the Plan period. Policy LP8 is a detailed policy relating specifically to the creation of the Alver Valley Country Park. The Plan contains a number of other policies covering similar issues outlined above, although at this stage these are subject to change as part of a further consultation process and an Examination in Public by a planning inspector.

**Appendix 4: Planning History**

<b>Reference (alternative ref)</b>	<b>Proposal</b>	<b>Decision</b>
12/00006/FULL (18038)	Installation of new car park with associated access, boundaries and barriers Reg 3)	Permit 12/4/12
10/00151/FULL (17075/1)	Extension to existing BMX Track within existing footprint to include installation of metal race pens and levelling off and regrading part of the north embankment, Alver Meadow	Permit 10/6/10
10/00077/GREG (17777)	Construction of a public play area comprising of play equipment in natural materials, Alver Meadow (Reg 3)	Permit 26/3/10
08/00225/FULL (17571)	Erection of training facilities and construction of 14 outdoor pitches (7 full size) and ancillary facilities including parking and access for Portsmouth Football Club and construction of 2 community pitches and associated changing facilities	Permit 22/7/08
06/00003/GREG (17075)	Construction of BMX Track with associated landscaping works	Permit 16/2/06
<b>03/00080/GREG (16510)</b>	<b>Outline application for the development of the Alver Valley for recreational purposes (Reg 3)</b>	<b>Permit 13/9/05</b>
05/00188/FULL (12063/8)	Erection of a timber building as entrance kiosk and gift shop- 17th Century Village	Permit 26/5/05
03/10573/GREG (16447)	Construction Of Pathway (1.3km) for Pedestrian, Cycle And Wheelchair Access And Boardwalk (35m) (Reg 3)	Permit 6/11/03
03/10287/FULL (16220)	Erection of timber-framed interpretation centre for Oxstall Meadow Ecology Park, Grange Farm	Permit 9/4/03
02/00318/GREG (16110)	Construction of cycleway and bridge improvements (Howe Road to Apple Dumpling Bridge) (Reg 3)	Permit 14/8/02
(15000/5)	Cherque Farm balancing pond and pumping station.	Permit Aug 2001
(15000/1)	Outline permission for residential development of Cherque Farm. This made provision within a Section 106 legal agreement for the transfer of approximately 60 hectares of land to the east of Cherque Way to the Borough Council for recreational purposes	Permit Aug1999
98/00275/FULL (12063/7)	Erection of two additional exhibition buildings, Grange Farm	Permit 1998
97/00272/FULL (12063/6)	Erection of replacement exhibition building (17 <sup>th</sup> Century Village)	Permit 1997
95/00169/GREG (14329/1)	Erection of 2 timber sheds for use of nature reserve warden, Middle Barn Cottage, Grange Lane (Wildgrounds)	Permit 22/2/95
95/00264/FULL (12063/5)	Siting of portable building for use as site reception off and store and retention of existing 7 exhibition building (17 <sup>th</sup> Century Village)	Permit 1995
94/0004/GREG (14404)	Erection of a composting facility, Oxstall Meadow (reg 3)	Permit 1994

93/00090/GREG (12063/4)	Renewal of consent for retention of 7 traditionally constructed buildings for exhibition purposes (17 <sup>th</sup> Century Village	Permit (temporary consent) 4/10/93
Various	Earlier mineral and waste consents relating to gravel extraction and subsequent landfilling	1950's- 1970's

## Appendix 5: Opportunities/Strengths and Challenges

The table identifies a number of key opportunities/strengths and challenges/weaknesses that apply to the whole site and were identified from workshops, site visits and conversations with Hampshire County Council's Country Section drawing on their experience of managing a number of successful country parks, the Environment Agency and Natural England.

### Challenges and Opportunities for the Alver Valley

<p><b>Opportunities/Strengths- The Development Strategy in Section 4 aims to utilise these strengths and create additional opportunities</b></p>
<p><b>Good size area for country park (200ha)</b> Therefore can accommodate a number of activities whilst maintaining a pleasant countryside feeling.</p>
<p><b>Large population on the doorstep and new growing communities</b> The site has a large and growing population in close proximity within the Borough and the wider sub-region. The Country Park can deliver a mix of activities for all ages and abilities who can derive health and well-being benefits. The location, scale and naturalness of Alver Valley Country Park close to a developed urban environment mean that it has the ability to deliver huge social and cultural benefits.</p> <p>To become a destination in its own right the park needs to have sufficient infrastructure to support visits and a dwell time that will make the journey worthwhile. The park would link to other attractions in the area and have significant attraction or focus that people will want to come and experience.</p>
<p><b>Important in delivery of green infrastructure in the sub region and potential to link to other green spaces</b> The site has been identified by PUSH as an important strategic site in its Green Infrastructure Strategy.</p>
<p><b>Varied habitats including open grassland, woodland, wetlands and heathland</b> Thus it is important to continue to manage and enhance biodiversity in the Park which can become one of the Park's key reasons to visit and provide opportunities for recreation, education and engagement.</p>
<p><b>The River Alver provides a potentially strong focus for the Park</b> The river itself is an important asset for the Country Park which in many ways is currently not fully appreciated due to limited opportunities to view it. Apple Dumpling Bridge is the only crossing-point. It is a popular place to view the river and for people to gather.</p>
<p><b>Good viewing points across the Solent and Isle of Wight, the Park itself and the rest of the Borough</b> The site includes the Borough's highest point, Sandhill following restoration of a landfill site and consequently viewpoints are key features of the Park that can be enjoyed.</p>
<p><b>Strong heritage features</b> e.g. motte and bailey and First World War training trenches</p>
<p><b>Grange Farm buildings and disused glasshouses with potential to act as a visitor hub</b> The under-utilised Grange Farm buildings which are locally listed have the potential to be more intensively used as part of the main visitor attraction focus. From here there is easy access to the 17th Century Village and the Wildgrounds Nature Reserve.</p>
<p><b>Good cycling links and potential for a range of activities to take place</b> Gosport has one of the highest cycling rates for commuting and recreational cycling in England.</p>
<p><b>Popular BMX track run by active volunteer group</b> The site has hosted regional and national competitions. It is a very good example of how by being ambitious the Alver Valley Country Park can generate its own market for certain activities and attract additional visitors.</p>
<p><b>Includes a number of attributes preferred by dog owners</b> Therefore has the potential to serve the recreational needs of a significant proportion of households in the Borough as well as the potential to deflect recreational pressure on sensitive habitats along the Solent coast.</p>
<p><b>The 17th Century Village.</b> This successful attraction has operated on the site for 30 years and attracts visitors from across the sub-region.</p>



<b>Opportunities/Strengths- The Development Strategy in Section 4 aims to utilise these strengths and create additional opportunities</b>
<b>Enormous potential for more volunteers to help create the Park, run certain activities, help manage aspects of the Park</b>
<b>Good attendance at events</b> A well-attended nature-focussed seasonal programme is very popular and is attended by visitors from across Hampshire.
<b>Dedicated and experienced rangers supported by nature conservation volunteers</b>
<b>Proximity of schools with opportunities for involvement in the Park</b>
<b>CIL could be used to fund improvements particularly for play/recreation</b>
<b>Grant income from HLS agreement and potential for greater income</b>
<b>Opportunity to create a country park that meets the criteria and becomes a focus for the local community as well as a destination for visitors.</b> The country park can help to deliver health improvements, provide opportunities for learning and the development of skills and play a role in supporting a thriving local community. It is well documented that greenspace offer places where people can ease the stress of work or daily life and are places to exercise and keep fit. As well as physical and mental health benefits, including helping to tackle the high levels of excess weight in the Borough, parks bring a sense of community and opportunities to spend time with family and friends as well as enabling a connection with nature.  The Alver Valley Country Park should offer a safe experience of the countryside helping people to build confidence and explore further. Improvements made within the park need to be implemented in a way that retains the feeling of countryside and should not lead to over urbanisation.
<b>Potential to link with other coastal and countryside areas</b> The site potential for links with other areas including the countryside to the north and the coast at Lee-on-the-Solent and Stokes Bay to the south.

<b>Challenges/Weaknesses – see section 5 and 6 of how these weaknesses and constraints could potentially be addressed</b>
<b>Large site disconnected with poor visitor orientation and flow</b>
<b>Lack of signage, clear identity and recognisable presence in local community</b>
<b>No clear boundary to the park and does not meet Country Park essential criteria (Appendix 1)</b>
<b>Privately owned land within the boundary of the park including private houses at Grange Farm complex</b>
<b>Flooding issues especially Apple Dumping bridge (only east/west link)</b> The Borough Council is currently working with the Environment Agency to consider how these incidences can be minimized through action relating to the outfall at Stokes Bay.
<b>Contamination issues potentially relating to previous use as landfill and leaching into the River Alver which has poor water quality</b> The Borough Council is currently working with the Environment Agency to create reedbeds in the Alver Valley to help alleviate this issue. On-going monitoring will be put in place.
<b>Limited access from Rowner area and lack of east/west links.</b>

<b>Challenges/Weaknesses – see section 5 and 6 of how these weaknesses and constraints could potentially be addressed</b>
<b>Poor condition of Grange Farm buildings and glasshouses</b>
<b>No real sense of arrival and welcome - likely to be difficult to achieve due to access road</b>
<b>Conflicts between users, dog walkers, cyclists and car use to access shoot land</b>
<b>No information or clear understanding of the people currently visiting the Park</b>
<b>Small ranger team reduces flexibility of management and limits potential to engage with community and partners</b>
<b>Educational visits that take place are only self-guided</b>
<b>Legal issues relating to access and ownership need further consideration</b>