

# West Berkshire Reserves and Commons A Business Plan



## **CONTENTS**

- 1. Introduction**
- 2. Partnership Rationale**
- 3. Vision**
- 4. Objectives**
  - 4.1 Public Engagement
    - 3.1.1 Access
    - 3.1.2 Events
    - 3.1.3 Environmental Education
    - 3.1.4 Volunteering
  - 4.2 Biodiversity
  - 4.3 Integrated planning
    - 4.3.1 Monitoring and evaluation
- 5. Context**
  - 5.1 West Berkshire Council
  - 5.2 BBOWT
  - 5.3 The Reserves and Commons
    - 5.3.1 Commons and Commoners' Rights
    - 5.3.2 Privately-owned Sites
  - 5.4 Public Engagement
    - 5.4.1 Access
    - 5.4.2 Events
    - 5.4.3 Environmental Education
    - 5.4.4 Volunteering
  - 5.5 Biodiversity
  - 5.6 Integrated planning
    - 5.6.1 Monitoring and evaluation
  - 5.7 Financial Context
- 6. Realising the potential**
  - 6.1 Public Engagement
    - 6.1.1 Access
    - 6.1.2 Events
    - 6.1.3 Environmental Education
    - 6.1.4 Volunteering
  - 6.2 Biodiversity

- 6.3 Integrated Planning
  - 6.3.1 Monitoring and Evaluation
- 7 Measuring Success**
  - 7.1 Agreeing Measurable Outcomes
  - 7.2 Outcome/output Targets for Year 1
- 8 Staffing, management, finances and administration**
  - 8.1 Management and staffing
  - 8.2 Steering arrangements
    - 8.2.1 Management Committees
    - 8.2.2 Greenham and Crookham Commons Commission
  - 8.3 Project timetable
  - 8.4 Capital Costs
  - 8.5 Revenue Costs
  - 8.6 Additional sources of funding
  - 8.7 Projected budget
  - 8.8 “Frontline” Contact with the Public
  - 8.9 Branding and Recognition
- 9 Appendices**
  - 1 Stakeholders
  - 2 Outline details of sites included in the Plan
  - 3 Maps
    - 3a Map showing West Berkshire Council sites included in the Plan
    - 3b Map showing BBOWT Nature Reserves in West Berkshire
    - 3c Map showing the West Berkshire Living Landscape
    - 3d Map showing the Education Centres in Berkshire
  - 4 Measurable Outcomes
  - 5 Priority Broad habitats in the Berkshire BAP associated with the Reserves and Commons
  - 6 Key skills brought to the Partnership by BBOWT
  - 7 Current Volunteer Groups Regularly Supported by the Partners
  - 8 Current Site Management, Steering and Liaison Groups
  - 9 Common Land proposed for Transfer and the relevant legislation and Schemes of Management

# **West Berkshire Reserves and Commons**

## **Business Plan**

### **1. Introduction**

This Business Plan is for a collaborative programme of work between West Berkshire Council and the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT) to deliver management for nine countryside sites (see Appendix 2 and 3a).

These sites collectively provide an invaluable area of open-air access for people who live, work and visit West Berkshire. Of the 1,185ha of land, 1,060ha (89%) have full public access on foot (either under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 or in the case of Greenham Common through byelaws reflecting the Open Access Land provisions of that Act). They include significant areas of international, national and local importance for biodiversity.

This programme will be underpinned by a legal agreement between the two parties and a series of leases and management agreements which will cover the entirety of the sites for a period of 50 years. A grant or series of grants will be made by West Berkshire Council to BBOWT to support the programme of works necessary to enhance these sites for the benefit of local people and biodiversity.

A long-term agreement is recognised by both organisations as being essential to the successful future of the sites. Only with security and stability will BBOWT be able to secure long-term benefits for wildlife and people, through the investment of its own resources and the attraction of funding from others. Short-term perspectives cannot secure and enhance the long-term future of the sites.

West Berkshire have sought guidance and based on this have decided that a grant or series of grants is the most appropriate mechanism to support the collaborative approach needed. BBOWT have followed their guidance in this matter.

When this Business Plan is fully developed and agreed by both parties it will form part of the Agreement entered into, with the intention being that the Agreement allows for the Business Plan to be revised in the future as jointly agreed.

### **2. Partnership Rationale**

The on-going future financial uncertainties for this Council, on top of previous service reductions, make this an ideal time to consider how this service is most effectively provided. In the future the Service will struggle to meet public expectation and perhaps even to carry out its basic functions in terms of site management and delivery of its statutory functions regarding the Council's Sites of Scientific Interest and obligations to manage Commons under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act and the Commons Acts. These are likely to place increasing burdens on the Service, as is increasing public use of open spaces for recreation.

BBOWT are an ideal partner for the delivery of the Countryside Service. They are an existing partner and are familiar with the key issues and constraints faced by the authority. BBOWT are experienced and successful fundraisers and can apply for sources of funding which are not open to local authorities.

Most importantly however, BBOWT are an organisation which has conservation and public appreciation of the countryside at the core of their business activity, offering the best possible opportunity to further the good work and projects that the Service has delivered over the years whilst meeting the challenges which face this Council over the next decade.

BBOWT is keen to develop further its partnership with West Berkshire Council, which has already proved successful in delivering benefits for people and wildlife. BBOWT recognises the importance of the Reserves and Commons for wildlife and sees the potential to enhance this importance. BBOWT relies on public support to deliver its work and is keen to take the significant opportunities these sites offer to engage positively with the people of West Berkshire.

West Berkshire Council has a deep understanding of the communities within which it operates and will bring to the partnership its knowledge of the needs and expectations of the local community and visitors to the Countryside. The Council also has strong relationships with the key players and stakeholders at both a local and regional level.

The Council is acutely aware of the financial challenges which the partnership will face and how these may impact on future service delivery. However there is a positive recognition within the Council of the advantages in working more closely with partners to overcome these issues. The Council welcomes and encourages positive change and is prepared to explore and establish more effective ways of delivering services. The Council has an excellent track record of working in partnership with others.

The Council can call on the expertise of others within the organisation. Input from the Countryside Planning and Rights of Way teams will be invaluable to the partnership.

Staff have developed and driven the successful elements of Service provision and the staff who will transfer have significant experience and the ability and willingness to embrace new and better ways of working, which will help deliver the objectives of the partnership.

The Council and BBOWT are natural partners.

### **3. Vision**

Our joint vision for these sites is to deliver increased and lasting benefits for people and wildlife through effective and sustainable site management.

### **4. Objectives**

Our shared objectives for the programme are:

#### 4.1 Public Engagement

To promote and improve public access to the countryside, balancing the needs of the local community and visitors with conservation interests.

##### 4.1.1 Access

To improve physical access to enable the widest range of the population to enjoy the Reserves and Commons, in balance with the countryside nature of the sites.

##### 4.1.2 Events

To deliver a programme of high quality events of wide interest attracting increased participation.

##### 4.1.3 Environmental Education

To stimulate interest in, and encourage public engagement with wildlife through a programme of activities and events relevant to both schools and the wider community which foster appreciation of both local and global environmental issues.

##### 4.1.4 Volunteering

To involve people in the management of the Reserves and Commons: existing steering and volunteer groups will be supported and enhanced and new groups developed. Local people will be effectively involved in decision-making.

#### 4.2 Biodiversity

To deliver management that will produce measurable improvements to the current conservation status of sites.

#### 4.3 Integrated planning

To ensure that management planning systems are put in place for all sites to ensure that practical management for people and wildlife is delivered effectively and in an integrated manner.

##### 4.3.1 Monitoring and evaluation

To ensure that appropriate data is gathered and evaluated rigorously so that: wildlife and people outcomes arising from practical delivery can be demonstrated robustly; planning can be refined through learning and delivery enhanced.

### **5. Context**

#### 5.1 West Berkshire Council

West Berkshire Council was created as a single tier (unitary) authority after the dissolution of Berkshire County Council in 1998. The boundary of the district corresponds with that of the former Newbury District Council.

The mid-2009 population estimates produced by the Office for National Statistics show West Berkshire's population to be 153,000. West Berkshire covers an area of just over 704 km<sup>2</sup>. Almost two thirds of the population live in settlements on the western Reading fringe and along the Kennet valley. The largest urban area in the district is Newbury / Thatcham, where a third of West Berkshire residents live. Just under a fifth of people in West Berkshire live in the suburban area to the west of Reading borough. Other significant towns in the district are Hungerford with just under 6,000 residents and Theale with a population of about 2,500. The remainder of the population are dispersed in small rural settlements across the district. West Berkshire has one of the most dispersed populations in the South East with 204 people per km<sup>2</sup>.

Overall for deprivation, the district of West Berkshire ranks 329 out of 354 local authority areas – i.e. is the 26th least deprived district in England. As with other areas, there are differences in the extent of deprivation across the district. Areas ranked as being more deprived largely cluster around Newbury – with other areas in Lambourn, Thatcham and Calcot in Reading. Pockets of rural isolation occur across parts of west Berkshire.

The 2001 Census shows that when compared nationally, there is a significantly lower proportion of people in West Berkshire who define themselves as coming from a black or ethnic minority (BME) background - 2.6% of West Berkshire residents as a whole, compared to 10% of people in England and Wales more generally. This reflects the spatial concentrations of minorities in the UK. Although this is a relatively small proportion of the total population, this amounts to some 4,000 residents in the district.

Being predominantly rural, the countryside and open spaces are an important characteristic of the area. In 2006 the 'inventory of Green Space in West Berkshire' identified over 4,000ha of publicly accessible green space in the district. The Council owns and manages some incredibly interesting and important countryside locations which provide excellent opportunities for quiet recreation and the enjoyment of wildlife. The district generally has a high quality and diverse landscape character which can be divided into five national Countryside Character Areas:

- Thames Basin Heaths;
- Hampshire Downs in the extreme south west
- Berkshire and Marlborough Downs;
- Chilterns, in the extreme north east; and
- Thames Valley, to the east.

There are 51 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) - covering an area of 1,349 hectares - which are of national importance for flora, fauna or geology. SSSIs are designated by Natural England for their nature conservation importance at national level. There are also three designated Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) - the River Lambourn, the Kennet and Lambourn floodplain and the Kennet Valley Alderwoods. SACs are of European importance and are given extra levels of protection in law. The Council has also identified around 500 Local Wildlife Sites

(LWS), which are of local importance and essential to ensuring biodiversity in West Berkshire. The combined areas of SSSI and LWS amount to over 7,600 hectares, or about 11% of the district.

There are over 700 miles of public rights of way (footpath, bridleway and byway) within West Berkshire, with over 75% being classified as easy to use including 2 National Trails which pass through the district's boundary.

Conserving and enhancing the distinctive local character of both the natural and built environment of the district is a key issue for the Council. The high quality, diverse landscape character with its rich cultural and natural heritage contributes to the overall quality of life of everyone in the district, and using this as a positive tool in accommodating necessary change will be an important consideration.

Access to nature is important to people living in West Berkshire, with around a third of residents saying that this is one of their top priorities for making an area a good place to live. However, only around 2-3% of West Berkshire residents think that this is an issue that needs improving in the area, indicating the value that people in the district place on their natural environment and a level of contentment that they have in access to it in West Berkshire.

West Berkshire Council remains committed to partnership work to improve understanding of the landscape of West Berkshire and its sensitivity to change. Developing an understanding of these issues and using them to develop appropriate policies for the protection and enhancement of the landscape will allow West Berkshire to remain distinctive.

## 5.2 BBOWT

BBOWT was founded in 1959 (as the Berks, Bucks & Oxon Naturalist Trust - BBONT) by local ecologists who could see the extent of harm being done to the wonderfully rich natural environment of the three counties. For over 50 years we have worked with local people to make Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire richer in wildlife.

BBOWT currently has about 54,000 members and more than 1,300 active volunteers. It is thanks to our members and volunteers that we are able to keep going - we do not receive any core governmental funding. Our income comes from a range of sources including grants, legacies, business support and charitable trust donations, but most important of all are our membership subscriptions.

BBOWT organises over 200 events each year, including walks, talks and family events. 50 training events are also delivered, covering practical skills, species identification and safety training. BBOWT provides formal education for over 7,000 schoolchildren, mainly through its three environmental education centres.

BBOWT has been active in Berkshire from its very beginnings and acquired its first nature reserve in the county in 1964, a site it still owns today. Prior to entering into this collaborative programme, it owns and manages 23 reserves in Berkshire, (see Appendix 3b) covering 333 hectares and is working to deliver the West Berkshire Living Landscape, both through site management and, most importantly, through working with landowners in this area. BBOWT currently employs nine full-time staff in its Berkshire team and four seasonal posts.

By entering into this collaboration BBOWT seeks to achieve the joint vision and shared objectives, which fully meet its charitable objectives. BBOWT already works closely with West Berkshire Council to deliver the West Berkshire Living Landscape and this Reserves and Commons Programme will increase opportunities to achieve this landscape-scale vision. BBOWT has brought in over £400k of cash and in-kind benefits to enable delivery of the West Berkshire Living Landscape. Working collaboratively will significantly increase BBOWT's profile in the area and enhance opportunities for BBOWT to engage with the public. BBOWT will make effective use of this profile and engagement to attract resources to increase its ability to achieve benefits for wildlife and people and to sustain itself into the future.

BBOWT believes that this partnership in West Berkshire will contribute significantly to achieving its overarching aim of "A region rich in wildlife for all to enjoy".

### 5.3 The Reserves and Commons

#### 5.3.1 Commons and Commoners' Rights

Of the 1,185 ha of land subject to this proposed partnership 1,060 ha (89%) is Registered Common. The commons are a remarkable survival from pre medieval times and are important for their environmental, cultural, landscape, historical and social benefits. Both parties understand that there are many legitimate interests to be considered and will work to balance the various, sometimes conflicting needs in order to avoid conflict and therefore provide the best outcomes for people and wildlife. All of the commons are protected by statutory instruments and the partners will be bound by the legal regulations in place for these sites.

Both parties recognise that commoners have statutory rights over the various West Berkshire commons and further that they are fundamental to the future survival of the important habitats which exist on commons. It is after all commoners' grazing animals which have helped preserve the commons to date and which contribute so effectively to the more recent on-going conservation objectives. Both parties will work and consult with commoners on the management of these important landscapes so that our actions do not conflict with the rights of commoners.

It is not the Council's intention to abrogate any of its statutory duties through this partnership and it is the intention of both parties to work together to deliver relevant statutory duties. BBOWT are fully aware of the obligations laid down in the relevant acts and also in the relevant Schemes of Management relating to the Commons (see Appendix 9).

#### 5.3.2 Privately-owned Sites

Three of the sites are privately-owned: Bucklebury Common, Paices Wood and Wokefield Common. WBC currently carries out management work with the owners to manage access, recreation and biodiversity on these sites: for the two commons under Schemes of Management. Under the terms of the Grant Agreement, BBOWT will deliver those management activities currently delivered by the Rangers.

BBOWT recognises the unique position in each case of the private owner and will work collaboratively with them to achieve agreed objectives for each site. BBOWT will work closely with local management committees, where these exist, to consult on management and meet the needs of the owners and local people in the best possible balance. BBOWT's vision will be to achieve a coherent management plan for each site which will achieve objectives for the owners, local people and wildlife.

West Berkshire will retain the delivery of Rights of Way work and grounds maintenance activities (through contractors) on all sites proposed for transfer, including those in private ownership.

### 5.4 Public engagement

West Berkshire Council's Countryside Service encourages public engagement with nature, wildlife conservation, and environmental education through a programme of activities and events relevant to both schools and the wider community. The aim of this programme is to foster appreciation of both local and global environmental

issues and encourage greater public access to Nature Reserves while also retaining their unique wildlife value.

Residents and visitors also use the areas for recreational activities, exercise and relaxation, providing essential green spaces around the district which add to the quality of life and sense of wellbeing within communities.

For a few sites there is information on the number of visitors and who they are, where they come from and how they use the sites. Across the whole suite of sites, users will include:

- Members of local communities and the wider public - for recreation, exercise, relaxation and education. As well as informal walking, cycling and horse riding, the sites are used for organised walks and rides, orienteering, etc.
- Individuals and specialist interest groups - to study habitats and species, local history, culture and archaeology.
- Informal youth and children's groups.
- Conservation volunteers and corporate work parties who use sites for undertaking tasks, healthy activity and learning conservation skills.
- Where appropriate, licensed anglers.

The facilities and staff at the Nature Discovery Centre enable a greater range of uses, such as:

- School Groups from pre-school to university; studying both independently and through the RSPB teaching programme.
- Visiting artists and performers who use and interpret sites, e.g. artists in residence programmes.
- Local groups and societies using the Centre facilities for meetings.
- Appropriate commercial and corporate groups who use the Centre for restricted commercial activities, e.g. as a venue for conference and meetings.
- Groups with Special Needs.

Inevitably, some of the users of the sites are unwelcome and management will continue to involve the discouragement of anti-social behaviour. The partners recognise the benefits of encouraging positive use of sites in reducing negative abuse.

#### 5.4.1 Access

The Reserves and Commons have an extensive network of paths: Public Rights of Way, permissive routes and informal routes created by visitors. This network is well-used and provides a hugely important leisure resource for people living and working locally and visitors. Paths are used by a wide variety of users and on bridleways users include horse riders and cyclists.

The Council has a statutory responsibility to manage Rights of Way. Management of other routes is not obligatory and information on the condition of these more informal routes, such as surface condition, structures and waymarking, is incomplete.

Mapping and route descriptions for circular walks could encourage increased and/or more appropriate use of the sites, with significant health benefits. This will need to be underpinned by user surveys and local consultation.

#### 5.4.2 Events

A twice-yearly News and Events leaflet invites the public to visit all countryside sites managed by West Berkshire Council. Activities are promoted using web pages, local publications and media coverage.

Many of these events are run by the Rangers, but additional specialist activity sessions are run by experts who are hired in during the school holidays, mostly at the Nature Discovery Centre, to help produce a varied programme of activities for all age groups.

Many other partners and community organisations are involved, such as Thatcham Town Council, Newbury Corn Exchange, Greenham Arts, The Open Studio Scheme, Adult and Community Learning and West Berkshire Museum, to provide a diverse range of exhibitions, workshops, and cultural events, which complement the more traditional countryside events run by the Service. The Nature Discovery Centre in particular, is a vital part of the local community and residents regard other sites as their local parks.

#### 5.4.3 Environmental Education

The RSPB's Living Classroom's project has been running in partnership with West Berkshire Council at The Nature Discovery Centre, Thatcham and Snelmore Common for over 18 years.

The RSPB employed a part-time Education Officer to expand the existing provision of outdoor education in West Berkshire. There is currently a team of 4 field teachers who work on a sessional basis, supported by a team of 2 volunteer Field Teaching Assistants.

During 2011-12 almost 1,400 local school children were able to experience first-hand the wonders and delights of the nature reserves and outdoor learning on Habitats and Sensory courses and new courses on subjects such as Sustainability and Water Conservation.

In 2011, the Council were awarded the Quality Badge by the Council for Learning Outside the Classroom. As an organisation, the RSPB has put all of its education schemes through the more rigorous Route 2 of this award – and the scheme was graded as 'Very Good' overall with many 'Outstanding' qualities.

Events for families and adults at various countryside sites aim to give visitors an opportunity to learn about their environment in an entertaining way. Local groups and companies can also book time with the West Berkshire Rangers to take part in environmental activities, wildlife walks and practical conservation.

The Nature Discovery Centre holds a fortnightly nature group for children aged 8-14 years, giving children the chance to socialise with friends, learn new skills and find out more about their local environment. The group aims to inspire a love of nature in children, which they will in turn pass on to their families and take with them into adult life.

#### 5.4.4 Volunteering

Both West Berkshire Council's Countryside Service and BBOWT have strong track records of attracting local volunteers to engage with their work. These volunteers make significant contributions to site management, surveying and recording species, organising and supporting events and to the task of keeping an eye on sites.

A list of some of the key groups supported by the partners is included as Appendix 7.

Both partners provide support to their volunteers and have systems in place to ensure that volunteers are trained to work effectively and safely, and have the necessary resources, including insurance, to enable them to deliver the work, which they undertake both for their own benefit and the benefit of others.

There is some co-ordination of volunteers between the partners, for example through the West Berkshire Living Landscape, but this is limited. Both partners believe there is scope to increase significantly the contribution made by volunteers to management of the Reserves and Commons and delivery of public engagement.

#### 5.5 Biodiversity

The reserves and commons represent the range of species and habitats of conservation importance in West Berkshire. Over half of the land to be managed by the partnership is recognised and designated as of national importance for wildlife. Some of that land is designated for its importance at a European level. Other sites have been locally recognised for their value for wildlife. See Appendix 2 for details of the sites, including their designations.

These sites sit within a matrix of nature reserves (including BBOWT's) and other land of importance for wildlife. BBOWT has identified West Berkshire as a focus for Living Landscape work. Enhanced management for biodiversity on the Reserves and Commons will make a valuable contribution to achieving the partners' vision for impact at the landscape scale. See Appendix 3c for a map of the Living Landscape area showing priority habitats.

Key habitats identified within the Berkshire Local Biodiversity Action Plan found on the Reserves and Commons are listed in Appendix 5.

#### 5.6 Integrated Planning

The Council-owned sites all have plans for their management in place. However, these plans are in a variety of formats and are at different levels of detail. The plans do not allow effective allocation of resources, as they have not been drawn up in an integrated manner. BBOWT has used management planning software to develop plans for all of its reserves and has found this invaluable in delivering management effectively and efficiently.

##### 5.6.1 Monitoring and Evaluation

###### Biodiversity

Resources have not been made available to support effective monitoring of species and habitats across the Reserves and Commons and therefore data is currently patchy. Volunteers undertake some excellent surveys but these, to a large extent, are determined by the interests of the volunteer, not by any systematic approach to

gathering data to assess the impacts of management or to provide an evidence base for future management decisions.

BBOWT has a Reserves Ecology Team whose role is to design and deliver robust and cost-effective monitoring and evaluation of biodiversity across BBOWT's reserves. Much of the data gathered is provided by volunteers, whose efforts are co-ordinated and supported through a continuous training programme.

### Visitors

Data has been gathered through visitor feedback questionnaires on some of the Reserves and Commons. This data and new data gathered on a greater number of sites will be evaluated and used to influence management decisions. BBOWT has gathered visitor numbers and feedback data at its College Lake Reserve and Visitor Centre and evaluates this to inform management decisions.

## 5.7 Financial Context

The partnership was discussed during the period of significant financial uncertainties of 2011 and 2012. This situation had sharpened the focuses of NGOs and local authorities to ensure that both took opportunities to maximise financial efficiency - in terms of reducing costs and increasing income. Local authorities were faced with unavoidable tough decisions about budgets. Membership NGOs such as BBOWT needed to ensure that they maintained unrestricted income to deliver their core work and to ensure that project income met as fully as possible the costs of delivery. Both sectors had to think very carefully about their priorities in the face of a long-term period of financial restraint.

The collaborative approach offered the opportunity to realise efficiencies through the economies of scale by creating a larger "estate" to be managed through a single, co-ordinated team, sharing resources more efficiently.

BBOWT, as a charity is potentially in a stronger position than a local authority to attract external resources to deliver site enhancements for people and biodiversity. BBOWT has secured £300,000 cash income for work on the West Berkshire Living Landscape.

Both partners were clear from the outset that the most important objective was to see enhanced delivery and that targets for cost saving and income generation must be realistic.

## **6. Realising the potential**

### 6.1 Public Engagement

#### 6.1.1 Access

We want everyone in West Berkshire to have access to wildlife and our activities and that is why we will set targets for increasing the size and breadth of our audiences, which will reflect the variety of the communities who live, work and spend their leisure time in West Berkshire.

We will carry out regular visitor surveys, firstly to create a baseline against which we can assess the development of the number and range of visitors. We recognise the need to gain a better understanding of current visitors and their needs and also to

understand more about those that do not come and why. Progress on delivery of visitor surveys and the headline findings of data analysis will be reported by BBOWT on an annual basis and will inform annual workplans and targets.

Building on the knowledge we gain, to help us widen participation we will complete a detailed Diversity Action Plan for the Reserves and Commons.

Maintenance and enhancement of informal access will be built into the detailed management planning for each site. Stakeholder consultation will be carried out to inform the design of enhanced access and to gain feedback on issues and concerns from local people.

Further and more user-friendly information will be made available through the partners' websites to encourage and steer informal access to the sites.

The Nature Discovery Centre currently acts as an Interpretation Centre for the Countryside Service and houses skilled staff who are responsible for the development of interpretation and visitor services for all of West Berkshire's Reserves and Commons.

BBOWT has a long track record of delivering access and interpretation on its sites and staff skilled in the design of both. The skills in both sets of staff will be brought together to develop an even stronger programme of work.

A review of access and interpretation will be carried out during the first two years. Some work will be delivered during this period to ensure that on-site branding appropriately reflects the collaborative approach.

Among the aims of the review will be to ensure that:

- All access routes, formal and informal are mapped;
- All access structures are detailed and mapped;
- Condition information is collected on all routes and structures;
- Action is taken where condition dictates;
- An action programme is developed to improve access for less able visitors;
- Waymarking is sufficient to encourage use of access and to make the experience of that access enjoyable;
- An action programme will be developed to improve interpretation on site, consistent with the nature of each site.

This work will be carried out in close collaboration with Rights of Way staff, site owners and in consultation with the local community, wherever appropriate.

The Nature Discovery Centre itself has a key role in the delivery of interpretation of the natural environment. The review will also look at the scope for developing this role further, building on the experience of NDC staff. BBOWT and the other 46 Wildlife Trusts have extensive experience of designing, developing and running visitor centres. Learning from throughout the Trusts network will inform future development at the Discovery Centre.

Information for the public available through the Internet and on leaflets will also be developed. Details of access to each site will be made more comprehensive and more user-friendly. All sites will be listed in BBOWT's Where to Go for Wildlife

handbook at the next reprint, in a common format with existing reserves (this is sent to all new BBOWT members signing up through Direct Debit). It is intended that much-improved information will be available on the Reserves and Commons will be available through the websites of both partners.

A formal agreement will be in place to establish the protocols for recognition of both organisations for all appropriate media. See Branding at 7.9 below.

### 6.1.2 Events

For the Reserves and Commons, the partners recognise that these sites must continue to play a role in delivering social and health benefits for the people of West Berkshire and in supporting community cohesion. Therefore the sites will continue to be managed to support appropriate organised activities that produce these benefits and cohesion.

BBOWT has an *Activities on Reserves Policy*, which has been drawn up under three Guiding Principles:

1. To safeguard important habitats and species.
2. To inspire people to take action for wildlife.
3. All activities must meet one or both of the above aims without impacting on either the habitats and species or the quiet enjoyment of other visitors.

However this policy explicitly recognises that these principles may be varied where the owner of a site is not the Trust and the owner has their own specific principles which may not be the same as BBOWT's.

Events will be supported in ways that fit as closely as possible with BBOWT's guiding principles. For example: events which might disturb ground-nesting birds will be permitted on sites important for such species only outside the nesting season; events which might disturb quiet enjoyment of casual visitors will be limited in number and duration and planned to minimise any negative impacts. Wherever possible, groups using sites for non-wildlife related activities will be provided with information to help their members to appreciate the wildlife of the site being used.

The partners will agree annual targets for numbers and types of events to be run across the Reserves and Commons, taking into account the constraints of specific sites.

A wide range of events appropriate to the countryside character of the Reserves and Commons will be delivered, building on the highly successful programmes delivered currently. Events will benefit from being promoted by both partners. Relevant events will be included in BBOWT's Wildlife Diary leaflet, produced three times each year with a current print run of 28,000.

The annual work planning meeting between the partners will agree the overall priorities for the events programme for the year ahead.

### 6.1.3 Education

Currently much of the formal and informal education provision across the Reserves and Commons is provided through the Nature Discovery Centre. Centre staff and

staff employed by the RSPB have developed programmes of activities which have proved popular with schools and during school holidays.

The RSPB have indicated that they will not be able to continue to provide the services they have delivered through the Centre in the future. The current agreement with the RSPB will run until September 2013. The loss of this service, which has been provided at no cost to the Council, is clearly a significant loss to the Centre and West Berkshire.

BBOWT intends to cater for a similar number of children initially and to investigate opportunities for developing an enhanced service, if resources allow. BBOWT already provides education programmes in Berkshire at its centre at Woolley Firs and would seek to utilise skills and resources based at this centre to support delivery at the Nature Discovery Centre. BBOWT will employ education staff to facilitate activities at NDC. This has been included in the financial projections attached – BBOWT will cover the costs of this provision.

The focus of this service will be on primary school visits and holiday/out of school programmes.

#### 6.1.4 Volunteering

The partners want to see increases in the number of volunteers engaged in work on the Reserves and Commons and in the range of inputs they provide. Opportunities will continue to be developed for volunteer teams and for individual volunteers assisting with a wide variety of tasks.

The bringing together of the two current groups of volunteers will produce synergies immediately. The partnership will allow joint delivery of volunteer support such as training and social events and only a single set of systems will be required.

Volunteers will work under BBOWT's insurance and covered by BBOWT's health & safety policies. Volunteers working on the Reserves and Commons will be treated absolutely identically to volunteers working elsewhere for BBOWT, with access to training programmes for essential skills such as First Aid and leadership, certificated training for power tools and chemical use, BBOWT's e-newsletters for volunteers and the Volunteer of the Year awards.

BBOWT has specific policies and practices which relate to Key Volunteers. Key volunteers are especially important to our work and can be defined as:

- Those with responsibility for assets of the Trust (nature reserves)
- Those with responsibility for handling Trust monies
- Those with responsibility for organising other volunteers (including vulnerable groups)
- Those with responsibility for a significant representational or ambassadorial role on behalf of the Trust.

These Key Volunteers receive a formalised package of support, which reflects their commitment and responsibilities. BBOWT will develop opportunities for Key Volunteers on the Reserves and Commons and at the Nature Discovery Centre.

BBOWT volunteers in Berkshire will be part of the resources brought to the Reserves and Commons. BBOWT in Berkshire has full-time trainees under the HLF-funded Developing Green Talent scheme, full-time Conservation Trainees (volunteers) and roving groups of conservation volunteers who would work across all sites in the county. BBOWT also has a network of skilled volunteer surveyors who would be encouraged to contribute to monitoring on the Reserves and Commons.

An immediate aim will be to develop a volunteer group for the Nature Discovery Centre and the Reedbed Nature Reserve, which would assist with a wide range of activities such as running events and general maintenance, as well as conservation tasks.

The partners would continue and develop provision of work placement opportunities and to work appropriately with the whole range of groups seeking volunteer opportunities in West Berkshire: from employer-supported volunteers to excluded school students.

## 6.2 Biodiversity

The partners want to ensure that the biodiversity value of every site is enhanced. While the sites have been well-managed, both partners recognise that there is scope to achieve further enhancement across the sites through more targeted management. BBOWT will bring its expertise and resources as a specialist biodiversity delivery organisation to bear. This will include skills, systems and resources relating to management planning, delivery of practical management, and the gathering, analysis and evaluation of biodiversity data. Currently resources do not allow sufficient, systematic biodiversity data gathering on the sites, although valuable data is gathered by volunteers in an *ad hoc* manner.

Each site will have its own detailed management plan which will outline aims, objectives and a work programme for biodiversity conservation and access, as well as details of the formalised monitoring activities that will be carried out to assess biodiversity outcomes. Future management plans will be informed by data gathered through site monitoring

All data gathered will be shared with the Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre.

## 6.3 Integrated Planning

Management planning for all the sites will be carried out in an agreed priority order, resulting in all of the sites having rigorous, appropriate and consistent management plans in place. These plans would be created and managed using the Countryside Management System (CMSi) software.

- CMSi helps to write and implement management plans and to monitor and review management, creating a single management system that works across multiple sites.
- CMSi ensures that site management is well-planned, evidence-based, objective and rational.
- CMSi automates routine tasks such as creating work programmes, budget forecasting, and conservation status reporting, etc.

- CMSi brings all important site information together accessibly, in a form that survives organisational and staff changes.
- CMSi enables best practice to be shared within and between organisations.
- CMSi provides reporting including graphs, maps and photos.
- CMSi has comprehensive in-built mapping functionality.

BBOWT has staff highly trained in CMSi and all necessary licences.

The aim will be to use this powerful tool to produce management plans which allow for effective targeting of resources, not only across the Reserves and Commons but across the whole suite of BBOWT managed reserves in Berkshire. This will produce efficiencies of scale, utilising resources, including skilled personnel, efficiently.

### 6.3.1 Monitoring and Evaluation

Effective conservation management must be based on sound evidence. To protect wildlife BBOWT carries out detailed monitoring of species and takes appropriate steps to prevent their decline. Monitoring allows the identification of species and habitats that are under threat, and, most importantly, helps to ensure that conservation management is actively making a positive difference for biodiversity.

As part of the management planning for each of the Reserves and Commons, key habitats and species for conservation will be identified. Species which will act as indicators of positive improvement may also be determined. Baseline data will be gathered for habitats and species and monitoring put in place which will enable progress to be assessed in achieving the goals of conservation management. This data will enable management activities to be modified appropriately to ensure that they are meeting conservation goals most effectively.

BBOWT has a Reserves Ecology Team with experienced staff, supported by a network of experienced volunteers. Training is provided to widen this pool of volunteers and deepen skills as required.

In the same way, the success of improvements in physical access and the delivery of engagement activities can only be assessed if appropriate data is gathered about visitors and participants. This may be as simple as counting visitors or people attending events but may involve questionnaires with responses analysed thoroughly to produce recommendations for future work. BBOWT and the Council have worked successfully together recently on visitor attitude surveys associated with the West Berkshire Living Landscape. All participants on organised events will be given appropriate mechanisms to provide feedback on their experiences.

## **7. Measuring Success**

### 7.1 Agreeing Measurable Outcomes and Workplans

The partners will agree outcomes on an annual basis, at the same time as the broad workplans are agreed. The period of review of outcome targets will vary appropriately according to the nature of the activity. For example, the management planning targets may be longer term (e.g. over four years) and reviewed less often than specific targets for site management activities (annually).

Achievement against targets and workplans will be formally reported to the Council by BBOWT **on an annual basis**.

Broad output/outcome areas are detailed in Appendix 4. These will evolve over time as baseline data is collated and to reflect changing priorities for each partner.

Initial outcome targets will reflect the priority of putting in place effective management planning for the Reserves and Commons in Council ownership.

## 7.2 Outcome/output targets for Year 1

Outcome/output targets for Year 1 will include:

- Programme of site management planning agreed with completion targets.
- Management Plan completed for highest priority site.
- Condition status targets agreed for designated sites.
- Baseline surveying of habitats and key indicator species underway.
- Number of volunteer workdays supported on the Reserves, Commons and at TNDC.
- Diversity monitoring system agreed.
- Number of events and participants on the Reserves and Commons.
- Number of events and participants at TNDC.
- Reserves, Commons and TNDC integrated into BBOWT website.
- Initial reporting on traffic to West Berkshire content on the BBOWT website.

## **8. Staffing, management, finances and administration**

### 8.1 Management and Staffing

BBOWT will meet all obligations under TUPE regulations in relation to staff transferred to it as part of this arrangement. BBOWT will work at all times to maintain its reputation as a caring and reasonable employer.

The management of delivery will be through the BBOWT staff management structure, with the intention that the transferred staff will, in due course, be fully integrated into the BBOWT staff team. BBOWT policies will apply to all work carried out.

BBOWT has assessed the staff resources currently in place and has decided to increase the staff team, at least for the first few years of delivery. This increase in staff will enable BBOWT to tackle some initial issues:

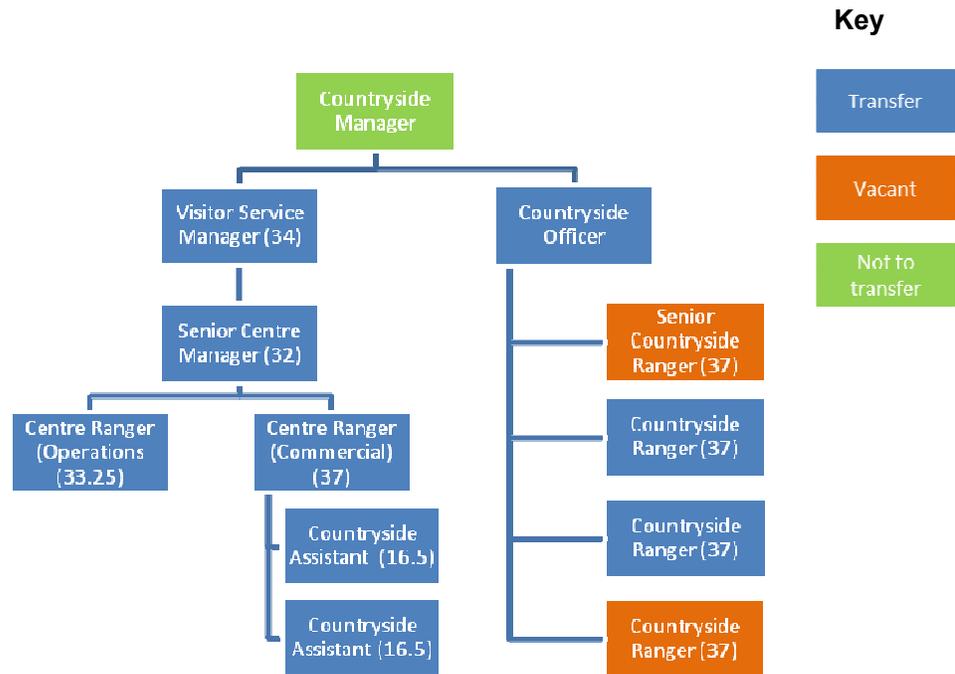
- providing effective management of the transition period; and,
- delivery of significant improvements to management planning for the Reserves and Commons

An experienced team and project manager will oversee the first year after transfer and to make recommendations for structure, procedures and priorities after this

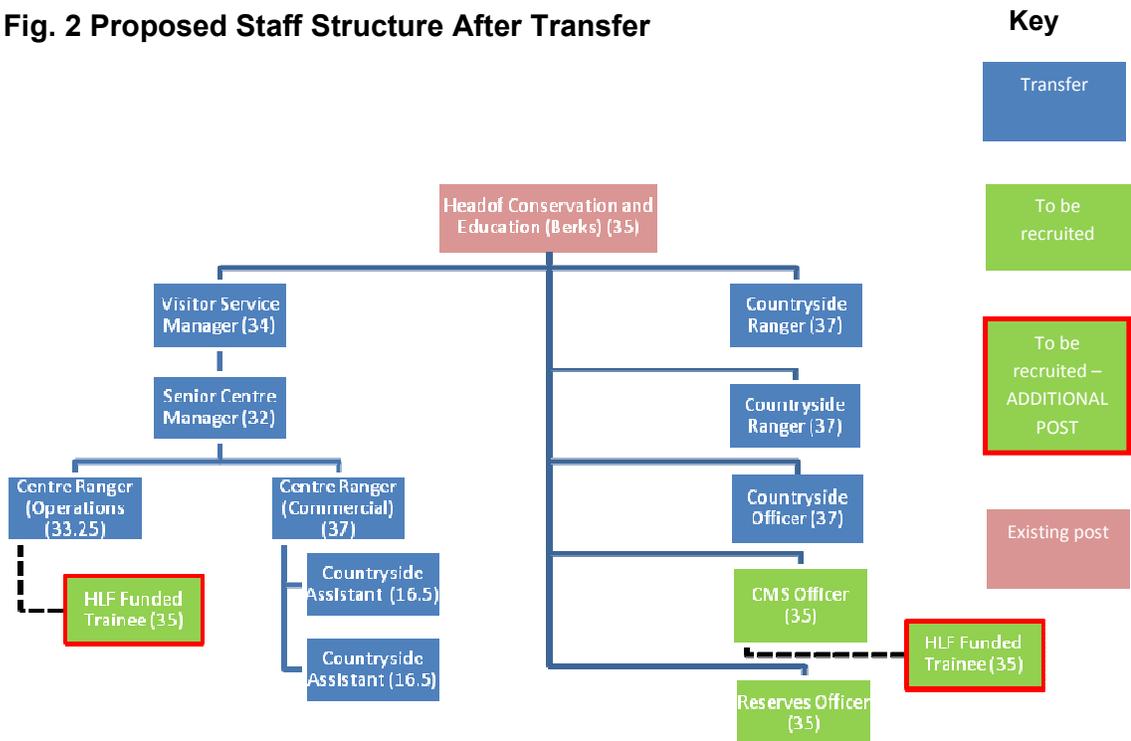
period. BBOWT will backfill major parts of her current duties to enable sufficient time to be focussed on this transition process.

The CMSi system will produce significant long-term benefits but in the short-term essential data entry will create a significant workload. Therefore it is planned that a CMS Officer will be employed for the first two years to undertake this work.

**Fig. 1 Current staff structure**



**Fig. 2 Proposed Staff Structure After Transfer**



Developing Green Talent Trainees are paid positions, enabling individuals to gain significant experience in a broad range of skills relevant to BBOWT’s work. These positions are funded through HLF. BBOWT has chosen to re-allocate two of these positions from elsewhere in the organisation, recognising both the opportunities West Berkshire would offer to the Trainees and what the Trainees would add to the work delivered.

## 8.2 Steering Arrangements

A joint steering group of senior officers and portfolio member from West Berkshire Council & BBOWT will meet at least annually to discuss relevant issues to the management of the sites.

The initial membership of this group will comprise of the following:

<b>West Berkshire Council</b>	<b>BBOWT</b>
Head of Planning and Countryside	Chief Executive
Countryside Manager	Head of Conservation & Education (Berks)
Relevant Portfolio Member	Head of Finance and Business Administration

Governance: Business plans and all major items of an exceptional nature will be agreed through the normal governance structure of each organisation.

Day-to-day liaison between the two partners will be initially through

<b>West Berkshire Council</b>	<b>BBOWT</b>
Countryside Manager	Head of Conservation & Education (Berks)

The Steering Arrangements may vary throughout the life of the partnership within limits laid down in the transfer agreement, which will also include a mutually agreed resolution mechanism to resolve any disputes regarding the funding or management arrangements for the sites.

### 8.2.1 Management Committees

WBC has been working collaboratively for many years with the various management committees set up to help manage common land in the District. These committees have contributed significantly to the positive management of the commons and have helped the Council to develop work programmes and priorities for each site. Both WBC and BBOWT will continue to work closely with these committees in the future and will continue to consult on important management functions and actions.

Both parties recognise that the committees have a great deal of local knowledge and are perhaps under-utilised in terms of assisting with public consultation on specific projects. This is something we will seek to address over time.

Most importantly, these committees provide direct forums for discussion with the various lords of the manor who are critical to the future management of the commons. BBOWT want to understand better how they can work more closely with these landowners to bring about improved management of the commons.

#### 8.2.2 The Greenham and Crookham Commission

This is a statutory body under the Greenham and Crookham Commons Act. BBOWT recognise the important role that this body plays in the management of these Commons, that they have a statutory right to be consulted and that in some instances they have a decision making role. BBOWT intend initially to act in an advisory capacity alongside the Council in order to ensure that the Commission has access to the best possible advice whilst conducting its business.

### 8.3 Project Timetable

Action	May-13	Jun-13	Jul-13	Aug-13	Sep-13	Oct-13	Nov-13	Dec-13	Jan-14	Feb-14	Mar-14	Apr-14	May-14	Jun-14	Jul-14	Aug-14
Agreements & Leases signed			1st													
TUPE Consultation with WBC Staff																
TUPE Consultation with WBC Staff completed			1st													
Staff Contracts Issued			1st													
Office moves completed			1st													
Insurances in place				1st												
Transfer Date				1st												
IT equipment acquisition and installation																
Extra/vacant posts advertised and recruited																
All staff in post					1st											
All staff receive BBOWT induction																
Carry out assessment of volunteer training needs																
Deliver volunteer training																
Entry of site management information into CMSi																
First two reserves with completed CMSi plans																1st
Develop access and interpretation strategy																
Access and Interpretation strategy completed															1st	
Relationship building with stakeholders																
Delivery of conservation and access management activities																
Evaluate working practices and patterns within W Berks team																

#### 8.4 Capital Costs

BBOWT will work to secure external funding for appropriate aspects of delivery of management of the Reserves and Commons and TNDC. The ability to secure any such funding will depend on the partnership appearing secure, sustainable and genuine to external funders. Funders will be extremely unlikely to provide funding for capital items where there is any doubt that their investment will produce long-term benefit.

External funders are most likely to fund activities which can be packaged as “projects” which appear to be discrete and new areas of activity and which can provide recognition for the funder, which enhances their reputation. External funders are therefore not keen to fund aspects of work that appear to be routine management or on-going running costs. BBOWT will therefore seek funding for proposals attractive to funders but will include appropriate core costs within applications wherever possible. In this way there may be opportunities to cover the core staff costs associated with capital works, for example.

There are likely to be occasional significant capital programmes of work for which it will be difficult to attract external funding, for example the replacement of essential infrastructure which has simply reached the end of its serviceable life or the installation of significant fencing to establish grazing on larger sites. BBOWT will be able to bid into West Berkshire Council’s capital programmes when this is the case, though this will be on a competitive basis and success cannot be guaranteed.

BBOWT will not be obliged to expend its own resources on major capital programmes where these cannot be funded from elsewhere.

#### 8.5 Revenue Costs

BBOWT’s ability to attract revenue funding is even more restricted by the preferences of funders than for capital funding. BBOWT will be likely to attract revenue funding only for new activities carried out wholly or in part in West Berkshire.

The exception to this might be through agri-environment support which is available to be spent on revenue costs. BBOWT will investigate the opportunities to increase agri-environment support for the Reserves and Commons but this is already limited and may become more so in future.

BBOWT will seek to recruit new members through their involvement in delivering this partnership work in West Berkshire. At this stage it is envisaged that the opportunities for developing income through this route will be limited, but this opportunity will be reviewed as BBOWT gains a greater understanding of the visitor numbers and behaviours across the sites and at the NDC.

#### 8.6 Additional Sources of Funding

BBOWT will seek to introduce capital and project funding into the management of the Reserves and Commons. It will do this in two primary ways.

BBOWT will work to improve the income generated by the Reserves and Commons in ways which fully meet the objectives of the partners and which are appropriate to the nature of each site. This may include the promotion of voluntary donations for facilities at sites and attendance at events run as part of the work programme and

working with service providers on sites to ensure that the return for the Reserves and Commons is maximised sustainably. BBOWT will also explore opportunities for increasing income through agri-environment schemes across the sites.

BBOWT has an incredibly strong track record of attracting funding to carry out its work for wildlife and people, including raising £300,000 cash income for work on the West Berkshire Living Landscape.

BBOWT will attract funding to support improvements to the Reserves and Commons from charitable trusts and foundations, the Landfill Tax Communities Fund, Lottery funding bodies, corporate supporters and individual philanthropy.

Previous experience has clearly shown that the likely funders of this work will be unwilling to support the day-to-day costs of the overall partnership. Success will rely on creating “projects”, which are new initiatives or which will have a significant impact on wildlife or people engagement. Wherever possible, BBOWT will seek to gain support to cover the Full Costs of these projects, including staff time.

The ability to attract funding will depend on the arrangements in place being seen by funders as long-term and appropriately secure. BBOWT will be able to access funds not available to the Council but only if the arrangements create a genuine distance between the sites, their management and the Council. Funders will be very wary of any arrangement that they perceive as a “marriage of convenience”.

#### 8.7 Projected Budget

A ten year grant agreement secures funding from WBC in the first instance, with a 10% reduction in year 3. This grant represents the Councils existing Countryside budget, and BBOWT will seek to add additional funds. BBOWT has therefore allocated core monies in years 1 and 2 for this purpose. It is anticipated that by year 3 BBOWT will have secured various other funding for the Reserves and Commons in West Berkshire. The expectation is therefore that the budget will increase over time, and BBOWT will make every endeavour to ensure this, so that the current level of service can be enhanced. BBOWT are aware that at the point of transfer, the ranger team in particular have suffered staff cuts, so providing additional support to ensure there is adequate resource to deliver the outputs proposed within this business plan will be a primary aim. Transferring staff will feed into BBOWT’s annual budgeting process, thus ensuring their expertise and site based knowledge is not lost.

#### 8.8 “Frontline” Contact with the Public

BBOWT will take on the majority of responsibility for management of the Reserves and Commons and for the Nature Discovery Centre. Therefore it will be BBOWT’s performance which will produce reactions within the public, both positive and negative. BBOWT will seek to ensure that the public contact the Trust when they wish to comment on their experiences and other issues relating to the sites or Centre.

However, both partners recognise that it will be inevitable that many public communications will initially continue to be routed through the Council’s main switchboard or through specific officers. These communications will be passed quickly and effectively to BBOWT so that they can be dealt with.

BBOWT has a Complaints Procedure to which all staff work. BBOWT will ensure that this meets the requirements of the West Berkshire Council Corporate Complaints Policy in place at all times. BBOWT will report to West Berkshire Council its performance on dealing with complaints on an annual basis.

#### 8.9 Branding and Recognition

Branding and Recognition will form part of the Grant Agreement signed between the two partners. The intention will be that the use of logos and wording will give due recognition to each partner, reflect the partnership approach and that the Reserves and Commons are being managed for the benefit of local communities.

Media releases will be approved by each partner before release.

Media coverage will be reviewed annually by the partners.

## Appendix 1 Stakeholders

Ashford Hill with Headley Parish Council	Hanson Aggregates Ltd (ARC)
Basingstoke and District Orienteers (BADO)	Health Walks Volunteers
Berkshire and S Buckinghamshire Bat Group	Hills Aggregates
Berkshire Conservation Volunteers	Kennet Valley Fishery
Berkshire Geoconservation Group	Lords of the Manor - Snelsmore Common
Berkshire Mammal Group	Mid and West Berks Local Access Forum
Berkshire Moth Group	Natural England
Berkshire Ornithological Club (BOC)	Network Rail
Brimpton Parish Council	Newbury Angling Association
British Horse Society - Berkshire	Newbury Athletic Club
Bucklebury Common Advisory Committee	Newbury District Ornithological Club
Bucklebury Heathland Group	Newbury Green Gym
Bucklebury Parish Council	Newbury Parkrun
Butterfly Conservation Upper Thames Branch	Newbury Ringing Group
Canal & River Trust	Newbury Spokes
Conserve Reading on Wednesday	Northfield Developments Ltd
Ecchinswell, Sydmonton & Bishops Green PC	North Wessex Downs AONB
Environment Agency	Open Spaces Society
Flying A Services	Padworth Common Advisory Committee
Friends of Audrey's Meadow	Reading & Basingstoke Ringing Group
Greenham & Crookham Conservation Vols	Riding for the Disabled
Greenham & Crookham Commons Commission	Rivar Ltd
Greenham Common Community Trust	ROAR - Supported Volunteering in Countryside and Environment Maintenance
Greenham Parish Council	Rosemary and Thyme
H Barr & Sons Ltd	RSPB

## Appendix 1 Stakeholders (continued)

Snelsmore Scrub Bashers/ Thursday Group
Sparsholt College
Team Kennet
Thames Water
Thatcham Angling Association
Thatcham Town Council
Theale Area Bird Conservation Group
Thornford Hospital
TVERC
Wallis (David)
West Berkshire Countryside Society
West Berkshire Cycling Forum
West Berkshire Disability Alliance
West Berkshire Heritage Team
West Berkshire Living Landscape Group
West Berkshire Ramblers
Wokefield Common Advisory Committee
Youth Offending Team
Young Estates & Land Ltd

## Appendix 2 Outline details of sites included in the Plan

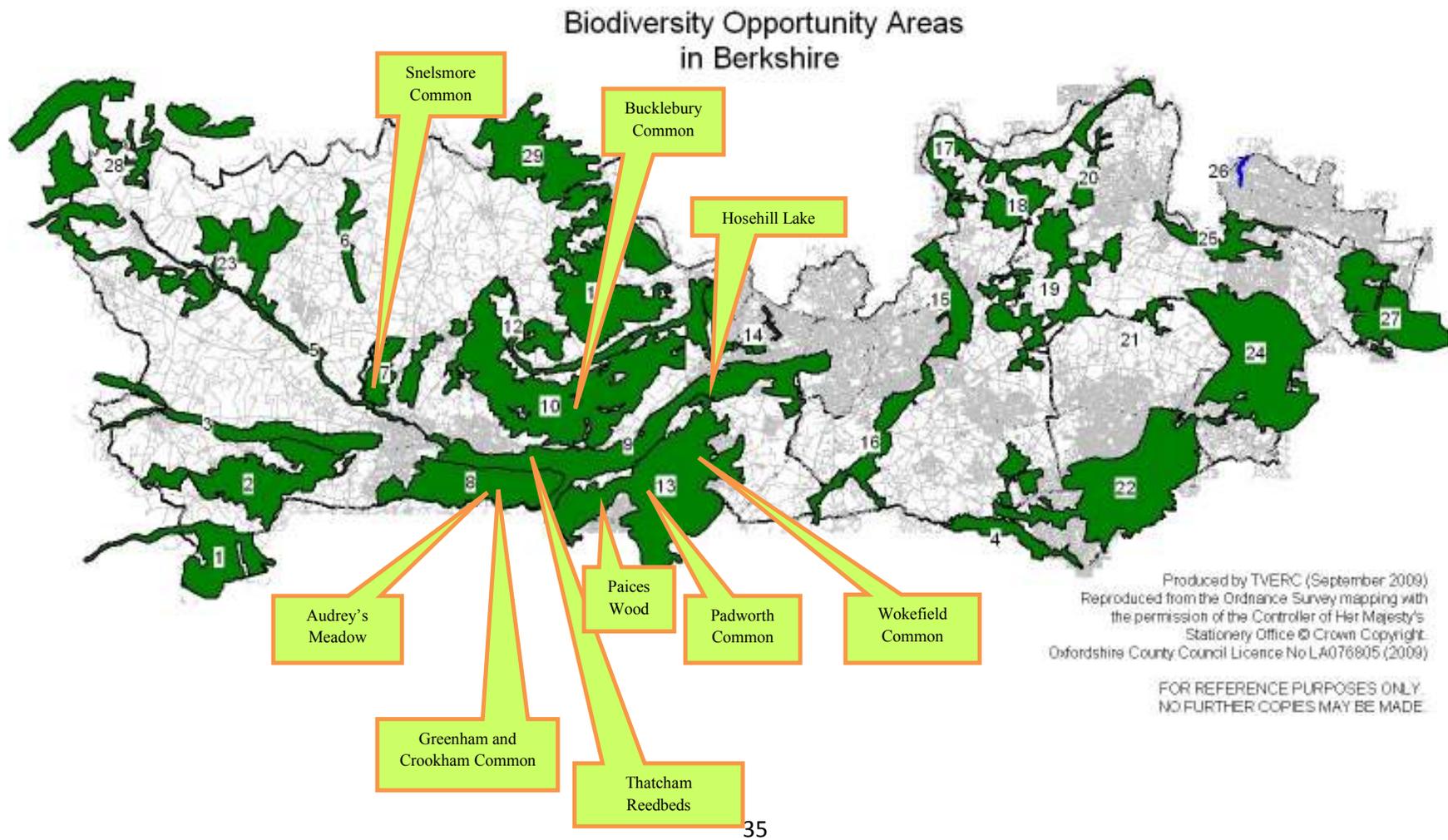
<p><b>Greenham and Crookham Commons</b></p>	<p>512ha common owned by West Berkshire District Council.</p> <p><b>SSSI and Registered Common</b></p> <p>Most of the common is now being restored to lowland heath although there are other key habitats - wet alder gullies, mire, acid and neutral grassland, semi-natural ancient woodland, ponds and lakes. Cattle and Exmoor ponies now graze the area formerly occupied by the airbase. Greenham &amp; Crookham Commons are in the Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) scheme.</p> <p>Within the West Berkshire Living Landscape Area</p> <p><b>Key species:</b> Nightjar (<i>Caprimulgus europaeus</i>), Woodlark (<i>Lullula arborea</i>), Dartford Warbler (<i>Sylvia undata</i>). Grayling butterfly (<i>Hipparchia semele</i>), Small Blue butterfly (<i>Cupido minimus</i>). Heath Spotted Orchid (<i>Dactylorhiza maculata</i>), Pyramidal Orchid (<i>Anacamptis pyramidalis</i>), Rue-leaved saxifrage (<i>Saxifraga tridactylites</i>), Adder (<i>Viperus berus</i>), Slow worm (<i>Anguis fragilis</i>). Great-crested newt (<i>Triturus cristatus</i>). Cross-leaved heath (<i>Erica tetralix</i>), Heather (<i>Calluna vulgaris</i>), Bell heather (<i>Erica cinerea</i>), Common Gorse (<i>Ulex europaeus</i>), Dwarf gorse (<i>Ulex minori</i>).</p>
<p><b>Snelsmore Common</b></p>	<p>100ha country park and owned by West Berkshire District Council.</p> <p><b>Registered Common, SSSI and Local Geological Site</b></p> <p>Lowland heath, biologically-rich valley mires and semi-natural ancient woodland. A small herd of Exmoor ponies graze the site all year round and Dexter cattle are turned out onto the common in the summer. Snelsmore Common is in the HLS scheme. The site has significant infrastructure to support local access and recreation.</p> <p>Within the Snelsmore Common and Woodlands Biodiversity Opportunity Area (BOA)</p> <p><b>Key species:</b> Nightjar (<i>Caprimulgus europaeus</i>), Woodlark (<i>Lullula arborea</i>), Dartford Warbler (<i>Sylvia undata</i>), Tree pipit (<i>Anthus trivialis</i>), Nail fungus (<i>Poronia punctata</i>), Adder (<i>Viperus berus</i>), Slow worm (<i>Anguis fragilis</i>), Cross-leaved heath (<i>Erica tetralix</i>), Heather (<i>Calluna vulgaris</i>), Bell heather (<i>Erica cinerea</i>), Common Gorse (<i>Ulex europaeus</i>), Cotton grass (<i>Eriophorum virginicum</i>), several species of Sphagnum moss, Bog pimpernel (<i>Anagallis tenella</i>), Heath milkwort (<i>Polygala serpyllifolia</i>), Bog Asphodel (<i>Narthecium ossifragum</i>).</p>
<p><b>Hosehill Lake</b></p>	<p>21ha site owned by West Berkshire District Council.</p> <p><b>Local Nature Reserve and Local Wildlife Site</b></p>

	<p>A large flooded ex-gravel pit, small reedbed, wildflower meadow and ash woodland. Managed jointly with Theale Area Bird Conservation Group. Exmoor ponies now graze the meadow.</p> <p><b>Key species:</b> Bittern (<i>Botaurus stellaris</i>) –winter visitor-), Reed warbler (<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>), Sedge warbler (<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>), Reed bunting (<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>), Brown Hawker dragonfly (<i>Aeshna grandis</i>), Water vole (<i>Arvicola terrestris</i>), Wild Service Tree (<i>Sorbus torminalis</i>).</p> <p>Within the Kennet Valley East BOA.</p>
<b>Audrey's Meadow</b>	<p>2ha site owned by West Berkshire District Council.</p> <p><b>Not designated</b></p> <p>Close to Greenham Common and providing a useful area of layback grazing for the management of the common. Also contains woodland and accessible to the local community.</p> <p>Within the West Berkshire Living Landscape Area</p>
<b>Thatcham Reedbeds</b>	<p>67ha site, under multiple ownership, but with West Berkshire District Council as the owner of the largest part.</p> <p><b>Part SSSI (of which part SAC); part Local Nature Reserve</b></p> <p>One of the largest areas of inland reedbeds in Southern England (67ha), this includes open water, fishing lakes and alder carr woodland). The reserve is adjacent to the Nature Discovery Centre and Lake. Thatcham Reedbeds is currently in the Countryside Stewardship Scheme but a Higher Level Stewardship application will be submitted shortly.</p> <p><b>Key species:</b> Bittern (<i>Botaurus stellaris</i>) - occasional winter visitor -, Cetti's warbler (<i>Cettia cetti</i>), Grasshopper warbler (<i>Locustella naevia</i>), Reed warbler (<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>), Sedge warbler (<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>), Kingfisher (<i>Alcedo atthis</i>), Desmoulin's whorl snail (<i>Vertigo moulinsiana</i>), several scarce moths and evidence of Otters (<i>Lutra lutra</i>). Badger (<i>Meles meles</i>) A good selection of dragonflies and damselflies.</p> <p>Within the West Berkshire Living Landscape Area.</p>
<b>Padworth Common</b>	<p>28ha common with the largest part owned by West Berkshire District Council.</p> <p><b>Registered Common, Local Nature Reserve and Local Wildlife Site</b></p> <p>Site comprising lowland heath, acid grassland, alder gullies, scrub and several ponds. Padworth Common is in the Higher Level Stewardship Scheme. Application to fence has been submitted and</p>

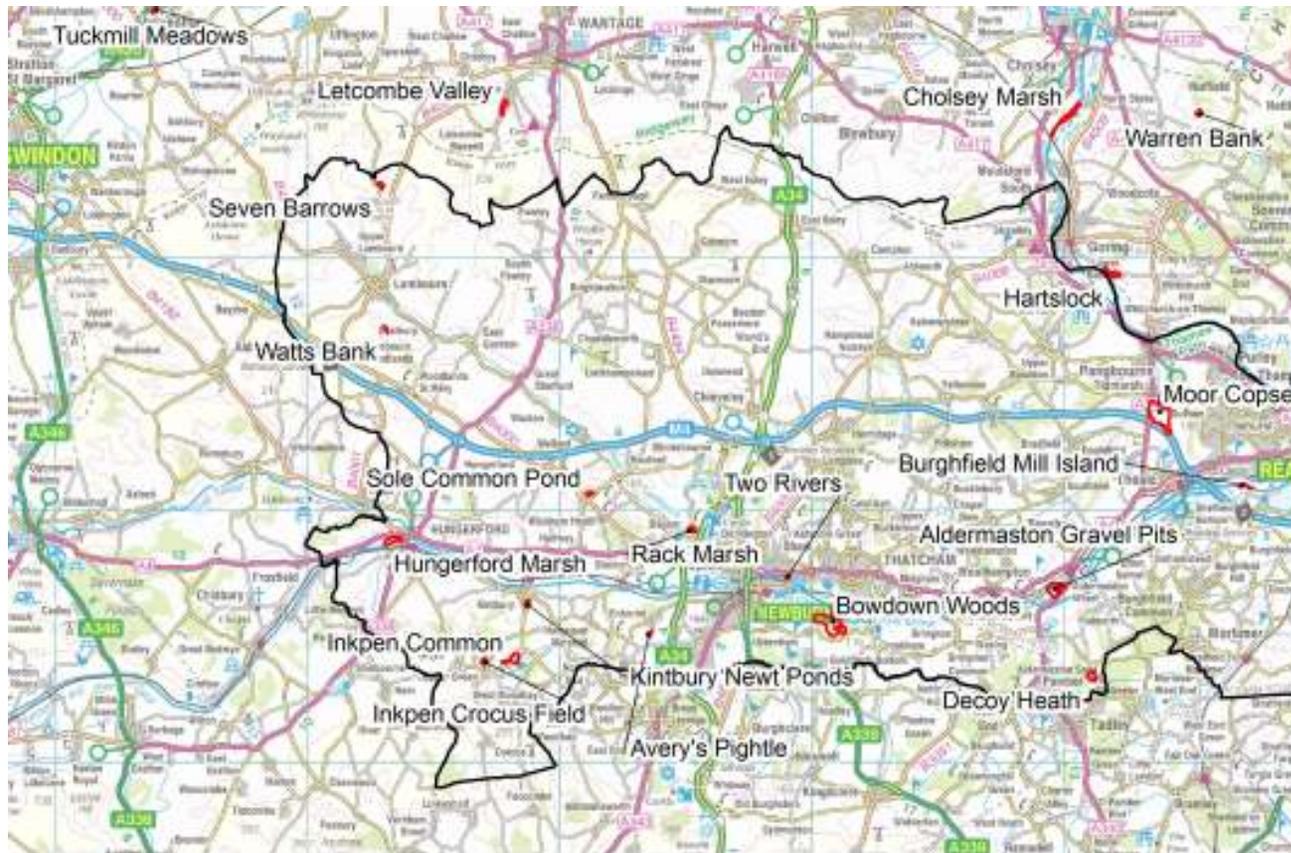
	<p>due to be decided around the time of proposed transfer. Significant biodiversity gain hinges on getting go-ahead to fence.</p> <p><b>Key species:</b> Nightjar (<i>Caprimulgus europaeus</i>), Woodcock (<i>Scolopax rusticola</i>), Woodlark (<i>Lullula arborea</i>), Dartford Warbler (<i>Sylvia undata</i>), Stonechat (<i>Saxicola torquata</i>), Grayling butterfly (<i>Hipparchia semele</i>), Adder (<i>Viperus berus</i>), Slow worm (<i>Anguis fragilis</i>). Cross-leaved heath (<i>Erica tetralix</i>), Heather (<i>Calluna vulgaris</i>), Bell heather (<i>Erica cinerea</i>), Common Gorse (<i>Ulex europaeus</i>), Dwarf gorse (<i>Ulex minori</i>) Blinks (<i>Montia fontana</i>).</p> <p>Within the Burghfield to Tadley Plateau BOA.</p>
<p><b>Bucklebury Common</b></p>	<p>360ha common, privately owned by the Bucklebury Estate.</p> <p><b>Local Wildlife Site and Registered Common</b></p> <p>West Berkshire District Council has agreements to provide limited management relating to a specific area of the common and access routes throughout. Scope to achieve more for biodiversity but will require development with full agreement of owner in due course.</p> <p><b>Key species:</b> Nightjar (<i>Caprimulgus europaeus</i>), Woodcock (<i>Scolopax rusticola</i>) Adder (<i>Viperus berus</i>), Slow worm (<i>Anguis fragilis</i>) Woodlark (<i>Lullula arborea</i>)</p> <p>Within the Bucklebury Plateau BOA.</p>

<p><b>Wokefield Common</b></p>	<p>60ha common in private ownership.</p> <p><b>Registered Common and Local Wildlife Site</b></p> <p>West Berkshire District Council has agreements to provide limited management relating to specific areas of the common, and have entered these into HLS. This management focuses on heathland restoration within a largely wooded site. Scope to achieve more for biodiversity but will require development with full agreement of owner in due course.</p> <p><b>Key species:</b> Nightjar (<i>Caprimulgus europaeus</i>), Woodcock (<i>Scolopax rusticola</i>) Adder (<i>Viperus berus</i>), Slow worm (<i>Anguis fragilis</i>) Woodlark (<i>Lullula arborea</i>)</p> <p>Within the Burghfield to Tadley Plateau BOA.</p>
<p><b>Paices Wood Country Park</b></p>	<p>35ha site owner by Young Estates Ltd.</p> <p><b>No designation</b></p> <p>West Berkshire District Council currently provides aspects of the management for the site, which has woodland, grassland and a series of seven lakes created by previous gravel working on site. These lakes are run by an angling concern and are stocked with coarse fish. The site has good facilities for access and recreation.</p> <p><b>Key species:</b> Lapwing (<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>), Lesser spotted woodpecker (<i>Dendrocopos minor subsp.</i>), Wood lark (<i>Lullula arborea</i>), Marsh tit (<i>Poecile palustris subsp.</i>) Slow worm (<i>Anguis fragilis</i>) Frog (<i>Rana temporaria</i>) , Toad (<i>Bufo bufo</i>), Grizzled skipper (<i>Pyrgus malvae</i>), Dingy skipper (<i>Erynnis tages</i>), White admiral (<i>Limenitis camilla</i>), Drab looper (<i>Minoa murinata</i>), Chicken of the Woods fungi (<i>Laetiporus sulphureus</i>).</p> <p>Within the Burghfield to Tadley Plateau BOA.</p>

**Appendix 3a Map showing West Berkshire Reserves and Commons included in the Plan**



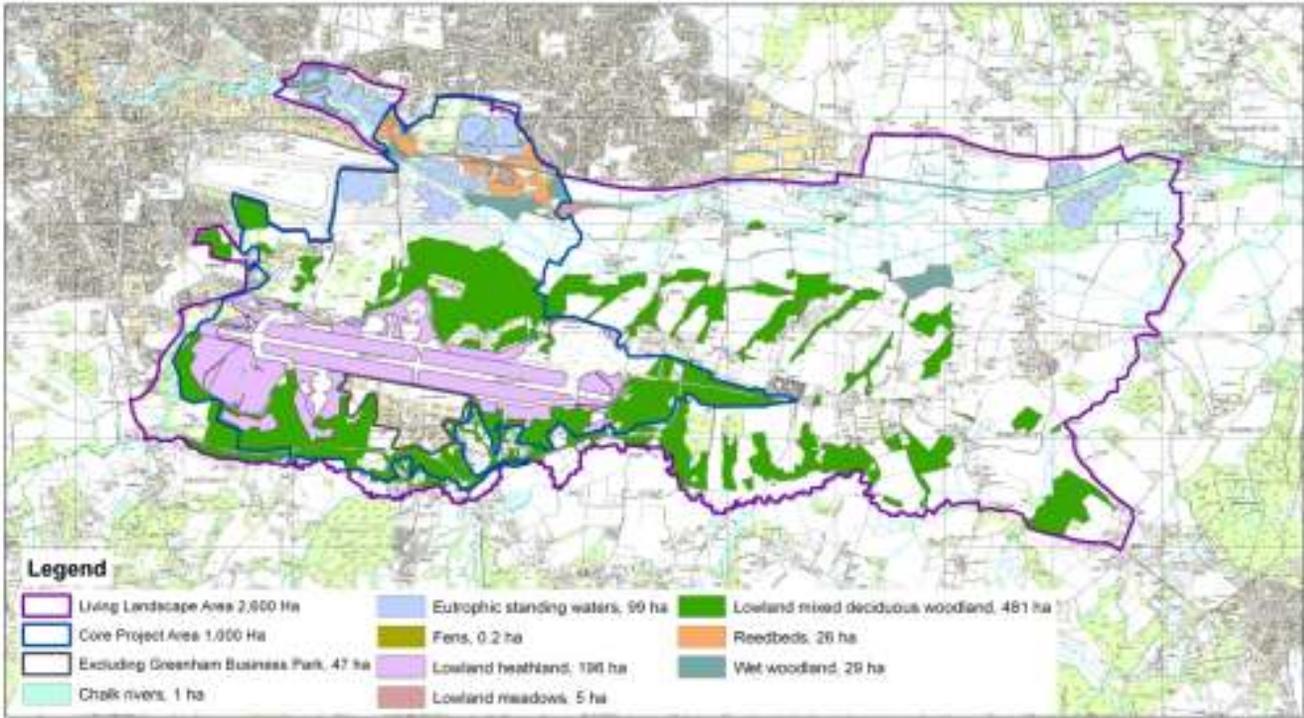
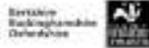
## Appendix 3b BBOWT Nature Reserves in West Berkshire



© Crown copyright and database rights Ordnance Survey Licence Numbers: 10000301 and 10002644; eMapbox Licence Number: 0100031472  
Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right 2010  
All other trademarks and database rights 2008 and 2010.

## Appendix 3c

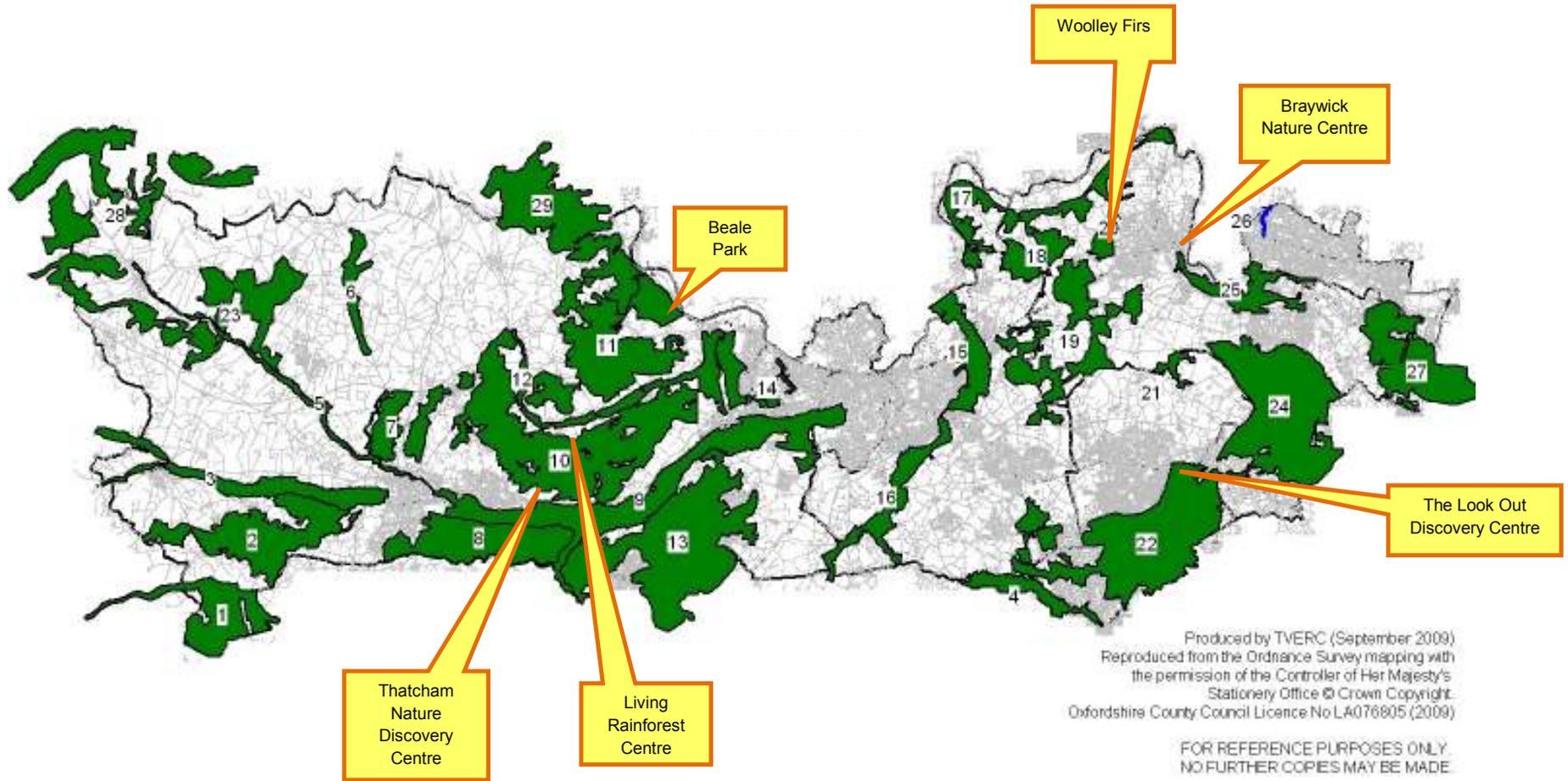
# West Berks Living Landscape BAP Priority Habitats & Core Area



"This map is reproduced from the OS map by BBOWT with the permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of The Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, © Crown copyright. All rights reserved. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown Copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust Licence Number: 100026443, (2004)."  
 © copyright West Berkshire Council, TV ERC working on behalf of West Berkshire Council



### Appendix 3d Environmental Education Centres in Berkshire



## Appendix 4 Measurable Outcomes

Output Area	Potential Target Types	Comments
<b>Management Plans</b>		
Satisfactory management plans in place for <b>all agreed sites.</b>	Against agreed timetable in place at handover: timetable reviewed at 4 year intervals.	Management plan writing will be programmed on the basis of agreed priorities. Some sites may have a basic management statement. Management plans and statements will cover access and community as well as conservation outputs.
<b>Delivery of agreed conservation objectives</b>		
For SSSI sites achievement of agreed condition status targets.	Unit condition status targets, i.e. favourable, unfavourable recovering.	Natural England will be key to determining targets and providing official condition status.
For non-SSSI sites, progress against agreed conservation targets, as outlined in management plans and statements.	Progress against management plan delivery.	Longer term targets will be developed for habitats and species, based on baseline survey data and on-going monitoring results.
<b>Encouragement of public access</b>		
Progress against agreed access-related targets.	Progress against management plan delivery of physical access works.	Access-related targets set as part of the four-year planning cycle, annually reviewable and which may include specific target groups for the period in question.
	Improvements to web-based site information.	BBOWT monitors site traffic to help to refine its Website design. This will be reported annually for W Berks content.
	Number of events, e.g. health walks/green gym/forest schools activities, and numbers of participants.	
<b>Customer service and stakeholder communication</b>		
To seek to maintain customer service and stakeholder communication (including more information on a more accessible web site).	Progress against agreed programme – communications plan	

#### Appendix 4 Measurable Outcomes (continued)

Output Area	Potential Target Types	Comments
<b>Volunteer and community engagement</b>		
Levels of volunteer involvement against agreed targets.	No. of volunteers/workdays against agreed targets.	Using agreed conventions for measuring volunteer inputs.
	No. of work experience placements provided.	
	No of volunteers engaged from specific target groups.	Young offenders, day centres, people with disability, etc. Targets set as part of the four-year planning cycle, annually reviewable and which may include specific target groups for the period in question.
This includes volunteering from all sections of our community.	Diversity monitoring, evaluation and reporting.	Working closely with West Berkshire Council Equalities Officer.
For agreed sites develop opportunities for greater community involvement.	Progress against agreed objectives which will be reviewed every four years.	
	Number of advisory and management committees meetings attended	The representativeness of commons advisory groups will be reviewed.
	Number of active community groups	While BBOWT might enable community groups, this needs to be done carefully to ensure that it is not a net drain.
<b>Thatcham Nature Discovery Centre</b>		
Progress against agreed targets for environmental education and learning at the NDC.	Number of events and numbers of children and adults participating. Effective feedback gathered and evaluated.	
Progress against targets for use of the site as a local recreational amenity.	Visitor numbers.	Combined with evaluation of impact of visitor numbers on sensitive areas of the site.
	Visitor satisfaction surveys.	Surveys at frequencies which are manageable and which provide useful material.

## Appendix 5 Priority Broad habitats in the Berkshire BAP Associated with the Reserves and Commons

Berkshire Priority Habitats	Greenham & Crookham Commons	Snelsmore Common	Hosehill Lake	Audrey's Meadow	Thatcham Reedbeds	Padworth Common	Bucklebury Common	Wokefield Common	Paices Wood
Wetland	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Woodland	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Grassland	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
Heathland	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓	
Hedgerows		✓	✓	✓	✓				✓

## **Appendix 6 Key Skills Brought to the Partnership by BBOWT**

### **Management**

Dr Kate Dent, Head of Conservation & Education (Berkshire), has been with BBOWT since 2001, initially working within the reserves team in Berkshire, but more recently (since January 2010) leading the Trust's operational development and delivery within the county. The Berkshire team is multi-disciplinary, encompassing reserves management, community engagement, environmental education, the West Berkshire Living Landscape and wider countryside work. Most recently Kate has led the delivery of Berkshire's newest Environmental Education Centre, from Business Planning to grand opening and beyond. She has also taken a key role in the development of Berkshire's Local Nature Partnership, and has extensive experience of working in partnerships particularly with Local Authorities.

### **Interpretation**

Liz Child, BBOWT's Interpretation & Digital Marketing Officer, has built experience of developing a wide range of wildlife-related interpretation materials and instructional signage for BBOWT reserves and visitor centres over the past 2 years. Her experience includes copywriting, working with designers and artists, managing the production of signs and also designing signs and leaflets in house. As manager of BBOWT's Digital Communications Officer she is currently supporting the enhancement of BBOWT's web content and development of an interactive touch screen display. Other aspects of Liz's experience include producing in-house publications, e-newsletters and developing content for website.

### **Community engagement/events delivery**

Dan Akam is the Berkshire Community Wildlife Officer. BBOWT has considerable experience and expertise in this area and has equivalent officers in the other two counties.

### **Visitor Centres**

The staff at the Nature Discovery Centre are clearly highly experienced at running the centre, which attracts high numbers of visitors. BBOWT has one comparable centre of its own at College Lake, near Tring. We hope that staff from both centres will be able to share experiences and developed shared best practice.

Across the Wildlife Trusts there are 116 visitor centres ranging in size from small huts through to nationally famous tourist attractions, such as: Cley Marshes, Norfolk where the Centre attracts over 100,000 visitors each year, Brockholes, Lancashire which has welcomed over 200,000 visitor in the 18 months since it opened; and the two visitor centres at Rutland Water, serving over 400,000 visitors each year.

### **Reserves Management**

BBOWT has been managing nature reserves for approaching 50 years. The Trust is currently responsible for 79 reserves, covering a total of 1,740 hectares and including many sites with national and international designations. To deliver this management, BBOWT has a team of fourteen reserves staff and hundreds of skilled volunteers. Within these teams is a vast amount of experience and practical skills, which will be

available to assist in the management of the Reserves and Commons, as well as resources, such as tools, machinery, livestock and specialist vehicles.

These staff also have significant experience of delivery of programmes of work to meet the requirements of external funders, including HLS, and regularly liaise with Natural England over the management of designated sites.

The Berkshire Reserves Manager, Andy Coulson-Phillips, has been in post for four years, having previously worked for West Berkshire Council's Countryside Service.

### **Biodiversity**

Debbie Lewis manages BBOWT's Reserves Ecology Team within the Conservation Policy & Strategy department. Debbie has extensive experience of setting up and implementing surveying and monitoring schemes on BBOWT nature reserves, to provide consistent and accurate ecological data and management advice to our nature reserves teams. She has worked with BBOWT for ten years and is very familiar with the West Berkshire Living Landscape. Her skills are therefore extremely well-suited to fulfil the role of developing the landscape-scale monitoring programme for work on the Reserves and Commons.

The Reserves Ecology Team also supports Reserves staff in the use and development of the CMSi software for site management planning and the monitoring of management activities.

### **Grazing Animals**

BBOWT employs an Agricultural Officer to provide specialist advice on stock management to reserves managers across the Trust. Louise King has years of experience with livestock having grown up on a farm and been a shepherdess.

Over the last two years with BBOWT Louise has improved livestock welfare, reduced the costs of running stock, developed staff and volunteers' stock handling skills and confidence, provided invaluable advice on grazing management and on developing income from reserves through effective agricultural practice. These inputs will be extremely valuable on a number of the Reserves and Commons.

### **Fund-raising**

Ruth Grice has been the Trust's Senior Fundraising Manager for four years. She manages a team of three staff responsible for raising income from Trusts, Foundations, Lottery funders, Landfill Tax Communities Fund and corporate supporters. Ruth and her team are experienced and very successful. Over recent years, this team has, for example raised over £300,000 to support work to deliver the West Berkshire Living Landscape, as detailed in the table below.

<b>Funder</b>	<b>Grantscape</b>	<b>SITA</b>	<b>Biffaward</b>	<b>Other Funders</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Amount</b>	£176,602	£60,746	£41,981	£43,178	<b>£322,507</b>

**Education**

Lynn Hughes is BBOWT's Education Manager running the programmes at the Woolley Firs Environmental Education Centre, which have exceeded all targets under her management. Lynn has been an educator for twelve years, with a PGCE in Secondary Science from the University of Oxford. Lynn has been heavily engaged in developing mobile technologies to deliver outdoor education.

**Media & Communications**

Wendy Tobitt joined BBOWT in October 2010. Her role is communicating the work of the Trust, and our brand values through different media. Her work includes handling all enquiries from journalists and programme researchers on TV, radio, newspapers, magazines, film companies and websites. She also writes and distributes press releases, writes articles for magazines and newspapers, writes text for the Trust's website and organises campaigns.

Before joining BBOWT, Wendy was self-employed, working in the environmental sector on projects such as BBC Breathing Places, and with Flora locale, the North Wessex Downs AONB, Thames Valley Farmers' Markets Co-op and the BBO Food Group. Wendy has also worked for the BBC, Thames Valley Police and British Rail.

## Appendix 7 Current Volunteer Groups supported regularly by the Partners

Group	Notes
<b>BBOWT</b>	
Berkshire Midweek Team	Works across the county. Weekly
Bowdown Woods	Site based. Monthly
Inkpen Common	Site based. Monthly
Moor Copse	Site based. Monthly
<b>Joint</b>	
West Berkshire Living Landscape Team	Various sites. Weekly
<b>West Berkshire Countryside Service</b>	
Snelsmore Common	Site based. Monthly
Theale Area Bird Conservation Group	Hosehill Lake and other sites. Weekly
Newbury Green Gym	Various sites. On West Berkshire Council site at least monthly.
Berkshire Mammal Group	Various sites. Monthly
Bucklebury Heathland Group	Site-based. Monthly
Thornford Hospital	Greenham & Crookham Commons. Weekly
West Berkshire Countryside Volunteers	Various sites. Monthly
Conserve Reading on Wednesday	Various sites. Occasional
Pang Valley Conservation Group	

## Appendix 8 Current Site Management, Liaison and Steering Groups

Site	Group
<b>Greenham &amp; Crookham Commons</b>	Greenham and Crookham Commons Commission
<b>Snelsmore Common</b>	Snelsmore Common Country Park Management Committee
<b>Hosehill Lake</b>	
<b>Audrey's Meadow</b>	Friends of Audrey's Meadow
<b>Thatcham Reedbeds</b>	
<b>Padworth Common</b>	Padworth Common Advisory Committee
<b>Bucklebury Common</b>	Bucklebury Common Advisory Committee
<b>Wokefield Common</b>	Wokefield Common Advisory Committee
<b>Paices Wood</b>	

## Appendix 9 Common Land proposed for Transfer and the relevant legislation and Schemes of Management

Site	Legislation	Scheme of management
Greenham & Crookham Commons	Greenham and Crookham Commons Act 2002	n/a
Snelsmore Common	Commons Act 1899	12 August 1969
Padworth Common	Commons Act 1899	20 December 1946
Bucklebury Common	Commons Act 1899	02 July 1929
Wokefield Common	Commons Act 1899	29 July 1953

### Legal constraints on the management of Common Land

The owners and managers of common land have to take the following legislation and legal rights into account when making changes to the land:

- the Law of Property Act 1925
- Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000
- Commons Act 2006
- Greenham Common is also subject to the Greenham and Crookham Commons Act 2002 and the governance of the Greenham and Crookham Commons Commission
- the legal entitlements of commoners who use the land