



EDENBROOK COUNTRY PARK  
A CASE STUDY IN COLLABORATIVE WORKING

Berkeley  
Designed for life

NATURAL  
ENGLAND

## KEY FACTS

- 24 HECTARE COUNTRY PARK
- 2.7KM OF NEW HEDGEROW PLANTED
- 4 HECTARES OF MEADOW SEEDED
- 2 HECTARES OF PONDS AND REED BEDS CREATED
- 4.7KM OF FOOTPATHS AND BOARDWALKS
- BAT ROOSTS, BIRD HIDE, PICNIC AREAS AND AN AMPHITHEATRE
- OVERALL £2MILLION OF INVESTMENT IN HABITAT CREATION AND PUBLIC RECREATION
- OVER 300 HOMES INCLUDING AFFORDABLE HOMES FOR LOCAL PEOPLE



## INTRODUCTION

After more than 15 years of planning, the delivery of a sustainable new neighbourhood at Edenbrook is now well underway. Edenbrook will provide over 300 homes, including much needed affordable housing for local people, located on the western edge of Fleet in Hampshire.

However, what makes Edenbrook unique is the magnificent 24 hectare country park which has been delivered by Berkeley in partnership with Natural England and Hart District Council, providing both a haven for wildlife and a recreational asset for the local community.

This case study illustrates the benefits that the Edenbrook Country Park has provided to the natural environment and the local community, and how this success has been made possible through collaborative working between Natural England, Hart District Council and Berkeley.

The objective is to show how collaborative working can facilitate, if adopted as a matter of good practice, the delivery of sustainable growth and create more valuable places for the natural environment and local communities.



## THE STORY SO FAR

The Edenbrook story began during the Hart District Local Plan review in the late 1990's when Berkeley put the site forward as a potential housing allocation.

In 2003 the site was allocated as a reserve housing site and in 2006 outline planning permission for 300 homes, sports facilities and a country park was granted. After 10 years of planning and design, development at Edenbrook began in 2008.

The Country Park is now complete for everyone to enjoy and is due to be handed over to Hart District Council in 2014.

## THAMES BASIN HEATHS SPECIAL PROTECTION AREA

During the planning of Edenbrook there were many challenges that had to be overcome. They would all make interesting case studies. However, the designation of the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area was undoubtedly the most significant and rewarding to resolve.

While the plans for Edenbrook were being developed, a new European protected site, the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA), was being designated and immediately posed a major question – how could the impact of new housing development on the SPA be mitigated?

The SPA is made up of a network of heathland sites across Hampshire, Berkshire and Surrey. It covers an area of about 8,274 hectares and is protected by European and UK legislation for its populations of ground nesting birds. New housing development close to the SPA, including the Edenbrook site, can cause increased disturbance of these rare birds by adding to the number of people visiting the SPA or by increasing cat predation. The potential impact of development on the SPA needs to be mitigated to ensure that no harm is caused to these birds.

## EDENBROOK TIMELINE

2003	Allocation in the Hart District Local Plan
2004	Bespoke SPA mitigation strategy agreed
2005	SPA formally designated
2006	Outline planning consent granted
2008	Construction started
2009	Thames Basin Heaths SPA Delivery Framework agreed



The SPA was formally designated in 2005 and for a time posed a constraint to housing delivery as local authorities and developers sought ways to mitigate the impact of development on the SPA.

A solution was provided by the South East Plan and its specific Thames Basin Heaths Policy, and by the Thames Basin Heaths SPA Delivery Framework which was produced by the Thames Basin Heaths Joint Strategic Partnership in 2009. The framework sets out 'avoidance measures' which require development within 5km of the SPA to provide new green space for recreation, termed Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space (SANG), to avoid increased visitor pressure on the SPA.

The South East Plan and the Delivery Framework have provided a strategy for dealing with the effects of development on the SPA and have unblocked development. However, both were adopted three years after planning permission was granted for Edenbrook. The challenge at Edenbrook was therefore to design a strategy for mitigating the impact of the development on the SPA without the benefit of the Delivery Framework. To do this, Berkeley and Natural England were faced with the challenge of designing a bespoke mitigation strategy for this site.

This strategy centred on the creation of the country park to provide an alternative recreation facility to the SPA. The country park was a forerunner of the SANG concept which is now enshrined within the Delivery Framework.

The principle of this strategy was agreed between Natural England and Berkeley in 2004, together with an initial design and management plan. This showed that the impact of the development on the SPA could be mitigated and cleared the path to outline planning permission being granted in 2006.

However, this was only the first stage in the process. Once planning permission had been granted then the work began in earnest to create a country park which not only provided all the elements required of a SANG, but also provided a place in which wildlife and people could thrive.

## SO WHAT MAKES EDENBROOK DIFFERENT?

### COLLABORATIVE WORKING

The success of the Country Park is testament to the relationship that has been ongoing between Natural England, Berkeley and Hart District Council for over 10 years.

Right from the outset everyone realised that the Country Park was a massive opportunity. To make the most of this, all the parties sought to encourage a positive, can do attitude. Objectives were defined and joint working arrangements put in place to dedicate resources, allocate roles and commit to regular team meetings and a project timetable.

Natural England provided advice on design and management, as well as guidance on what the country park needed to achieve to provide a suitable alternative to the SPA. Berkeley had a clear vision of what was required to build a successful community. Hart District Council wanted to secure leisure, recreation and landscape improvements to enhance the quality of life for residents.

It was not always easy to reconcile objectives. However, a shared commitment to the project enabled interests to be aligned. For example, Natural England wanted the Country Park to feel informal, but recognised that the inclusion of some semi-formal features such as picnic benches, BBQs and the grass amphitheatre would add interest to the Country Park and make it more appealing as a place for local people to enjoy.





**KEY**

	Proposed contours		Existing scrub cleared		Transitional open space
	Existing contour alignment		Existing hedges gapped up		Proposed scrub planting
	Existing trees		Water		Paths
	Proposed native trees		Existing woodland		Overhead electricity lines
	Proposed native woodland				

**Note:**  
For reactive grazing regime see drawing 2000.201906A.



*“The Edenbrook Country Park will provide a valuable green hub for the people of Hart to enjoy. To achieve on this level cannot happen by chance. It requires a strong partnership to develop empathy between the developer and the local community needs.”*

Daryl Phillips, Corporate Director & Monitoring Officer, Hart District Council.

The design of the Country Park has achieved the necessary compliance with European legislation. However, achieving this on its own would not have made Edenbrook the successful place that it is. Instead, collaborative working and shared aspirations to deliver something exceptional turned the constraint posed by the need for SPA mitigation in to an opportunity, the opportunity to create the Country Park which now defines Edenbrook.

#### DOING MORE THAN THE MINIMUM

The Country Park that has been created is far in excess of what was required to simply satisfy European legislation. Rather than just meeting the basic requirements, it has provided a place with a strong sense of identity providing a wealth of benefits for both wildlife and the local community.



NEW FEATURES ADDED AS PART OF THE COUNTRY PARK DEVELOPMENT:

- reedbeds
- pathways
- pond dipping platform
- bird hide
- meadows
- picnic area
- waterbodies
- amphitheatre
- bat house
- wet ditches

Since the Country Park was designed the Delivery Framework has provided guidance in relation to the design of SANG, particularly its size, length of walking routes and semi-natural appearance.

As these guidelines didn't exist when the Country Park was designed, the design adopted a creative approach which did not rely on policy. The shared aspirations of Natural England, Hart District Council and Berkeley meant that the design sought to maximise the potential of the Country Park, rather than simply meet prescribed SANG guidelines. The result goes far beyond meeting minimum requirements.

This is illustrated by the way in which the Country Park integrates with its surroundings and provides a wide variety of habitats and facilities for people to enjoy. Its integration with the housing via swales, trees and hedgerows provides a variety of habitats and brings the natural environment to people's doorstep, while pond dipping platforms, picnic areas and bird hides provide activities for local people.

Hart District Council are continuing to promote the Country Park through the preparation of a management plan and visitor strategy and by developing proposals to enhance the recreational value of the country park through the provision of additional facilities such as a visitor centre and play areas.

Sticking to the basics would have ticked the right boxes, but it would not have produced the diversity of habitats and opportunity to engage with the natural environment that the Country Park now offers. Thanks to the innovative thinking of those involved, and the willingness of these parties to work together, we have an example of good practice and inspired design.

BEFORE



AFTER



## SIDE BY SIDE WITH NATURE

It's almost impossible to imagine now what the site was like before work began on its transformation.

The Country Park started out as a collection of arable and pasture fields with limited ecological value, and was by no means a place that would attract visitors or be a haven for wildlife.

The creative and ambitious design of the country park and the commitment to this design through delivery has released the potential of the site through the retention and enhancement of existing features, and the creation of a wealth of new habitats.

A particularly inspired feature of the design is the way in which the wet low-lying nature of the Country Park site was turned from a constraint to achieving year-round accessibility in to an opportunity for sustainable drainage and habitat creation. Instead of costly land drainage or importing material to raise the site, the excavation of new ponds and wetlands was used to improve drainage, filter surface water from the development and create a network of waterways, providing a rich fabric of natural habitats for a range of specialist bird and invertebrate species.

While the more obvious new inhabitants of Edenbrook may be the people, the Country Park also provides high quality habitat for a host of plant and animal species which have moved in and now live happily alongside their human neighbours.

*"Thanks to the innovative thinking of those involved, and the willingness of these parties to work together, a country park has been created which can be held up as an exemplar of good practice and inspired design."*

Mike Smith, Head of Landuse Operations, Natural England.

## A LIVING LEGACY

The benefits of the Edenbrook Country Park for nature conservation are indisputable. The richness of habitats and opportunities for people and wildlife to interact are a clear achievement.

However, the benefits to the environment will not end with the completion of the development. The Country Park will continue to develop and mature over time. With sympathetic and appropriate management, the Country Park will increase in value as new species arrive and make their homes here. The legacy of the many years of discussion over designs, and the work to make those designs a reality, is in a site where nature conservation and public enjoyment sit side by side, and continue to grow.

The benefits of the Edenbrook Country Park are not confined to the site and its residents. The collaborative design and delivery process has forged better relationships between Natural England, Hart District Council and Berkeley. The legacy of Edenbrook for those involved in the delivery of the Country Park is a better understanding of each other's aims and aspirations and a mutual trust around a shared objective of delivering better places for people and the environment.

*"What has been achieved at Edenbrook over the past few years demonstrates the benefits of collaborative working. We must get better at this in the future to build consensus around what we do to speed up the delivery of new homes."*

Adrian Brown, Managing Director, Berkeley Strategic.

These enhanced relationships will help those involved work better together in the future and the lessons learnt at Edenbrook are already helping to more effectively deliver sustainable development in other locations.

The real legacy of Edenbrook is to share these examples of good practice and apply them more widely to facilitate the delivery of sustainable growth. That is the real purpose of this Case Study: to share the experiences of those involved, demonstrate that constraints can be turned in to opportunities which add value and to foster a more proactive and collaborative way of working.

### EDENBROOK GOOD PRACTICE

- 1) Turn development constraints in to opportunities.
- 2) Make open spaces and natural habitats an integral part of the place.
- 3) Strive to do more than the minimum.
- 4) Encourage joint working and collaboration from the start.
- 5) Establish a consistent vision amongst stakeholders.





Berkeley

Designed for life

