

THAMES BASIN HEATHS
JOINT STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP BOARD

Date: 28th March 2018

Subject: SAMM Project update

Report of: Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMM) Project

Recommendations:

- To NOTE the contents of the report on SAMM project activity
- To APPROVE the recruitment of an education officer in August 2018

Purpose of the Report:

To provide the JSPB with an update on SAMM project activity since the last meeting in December 2017.

Summary

This paper sets out for Members the SAMM project's activities and achievements since the last meeting in December 2017.

1. SAMM project staffing and recruitment

Seasonal wardens

- 1.1 After a successful recruitment program involving 12 interviews, 7 new seasonal wardens started with the SAMM project on 1st March making up a total of 6 FTE between them. The team has been working hard together to familiarize the new wardens with the role and the sites over the last month.

<https://www.facebook.com/thamesbasinheathspartnership/posts/704295096361292>

Year round wardens

- 1.2 The post for the vacancy for a fixed term appointment was advertised and 4 candidates were interviewed. None of the candidates achieved the criteria necessary for the role, so this post was offered as an additional short term (STA) contract. Unfortunately one of the STA candidates was unable to start with the project on their first day. The post has been partially backfilled by one of the year-round wardens increasing their hours to full time, but there remains a 0.5FTE shortfall which will be recruited as soon as is practicable.
- 1.3 In July 2018 the SAMM project would like to appoint a full time education officer to support the existing education and communication coordinator to deliver more school visits. The project would like to extend the provision of educational sessions to school children on the species that live on heathland, the important features of the habitat, and threats to the Annex 1 bird species from humans. This fits in well with the Year 6 curriculum of food

chains and habitats and extends the pilot project which was very well received by schools participating in the pilot project taken over from BBOWT. Children are our future and messages around behavior change are well received if children are engaged in the first instance and the messages are then readily accepted by older family members. The associated costs of a recruitment are set out in the project bid. The appointment of an education officer will also allow the project to maximize the opportunity of the space available at Heather Farm to provide education to non-school groups. Approval is sought from the JSPB board for a recruitment in summer 2018.

2. Wardening and Delivery

2.1 The project currently provides a warden service on the SPA seven days a week from 07.30 to 19:00 (daylight hours permitting).

SPA Wardening

2.2 The updated warden output for the project for 2017/18 is set out below. The following tables set out the number of hours of warden activity delivered on the SPA during the period November 2017- February 2018

November	Total hours wardened	314.25
	Number of interactions	681
	Number already spoken to	240
	Leaflets handed out	716
	Number of Dogs	543
	Number of Dog Walkers (5+)	10
	Average spoken to	35.24%

December	Total hours wardened	248.75
	Number of interactions	481
	Number already spoken to	250
	Leaflets handed out	388
	Number of Dogs	260
	Number of Dog Walkers (5+)	7
	Average spoken to	51.98%

January	Total hours wardened	135
	Number of interactions	282
	Number already spoken to	112
	Leaflets handed out	243
	Number of Dogs	211
	Number of Dog Walkers (5+)	4
	Average spoken to	39.72%

February	Total hours wardened	175.25
	Number of interactions	319
	Number already spoken to	82
	Leaflets handed out	400
	Number of Dogs	265
	Number of Dog Walkers (5+)	6
	Average spoken to	29.33%

2.3 The tables above show the total of hours wardened, the number of interactions undertaken during those hours, the number of people already spoken to, the number of leaflets handed out, the number of dogs with the people/groups spoken to, and the number of dog walkers with five or more dogs. The number of people already spoken to, and the percentage of total interactions which were with people already spoken to provide an indication of how many site users have been made aware of site sensitivities through previous interactions with the warden team.

2.4 The number of hours wardened reduces during the winter months due to several factors: More partnership working is undertaken, days are shorter and colder, SANG surveys are undertaken and preparation for the summer season is completed.

- 2.5 The level of interactions is expected to be lower during the autumn/winter than in the spring and summer due to the sites being quieter, and there being fewer sensitivities on the SPA during this period. The number of leaflets handed out is also lower than in the spring and summer, as the majority of our literature relates to the ground nesting bird sensitivities on the SPA, which is less relevant outside the bird breeding season.
- 2.6 Individuals with large numbers of dogs are likely to be commercial dog walkers, which are considered to be a growing problem on the Special Protection Area (SPA), so their numbers are included above.
- 2.7 The “number of people already spoken to” figure provides the project with an indication of the level of saturation that has been achieved. In 2017 (Jan-Dec) the average percentage of people on the SPA who have been previously made aware of the project, and its key messages, is 38.3%, with this figure rising to an average of 40.3% of people during the sensitive period.
- 2.8 The tables also show the number of dogs walked by the people spoken to by wardens: This was, on average, around 1 dog per interaction (although an interaction may be a group rather than an individual). The number of dog walkers with five or more dogs provides a suggested level of commercial dog walkers interacted with, although some will be individuals who just own a large number of dogs. The highest number in any single month in 2017 was August when 52 dog walkers with 5 or more dogs were spoken to. (However it is feasible that these could be the same people spoken to twice)
- 2.9 To summarise, during 2017 the project delivered 5978 hours of wardening on the SPA, handed out 9824 pieces of literature and spoke to 11,741 people or groups who had 11,587 dogs.

SANGs Visitor Surveys

- 2.10 A new methodology was recommended by Footprint Ecology to undertake the 2017 winter SANG surveys using an app called SNAP, hosted on iPads. The recommendation was that this would facilitate easier and more accurate data collection, be user friendly and remove the need for data to be transferred from paper to digital form once the surveys had been completed, hence being more efficient and removing error due to multiple data handling. This recommendation was taken forward and 6 i-Pad devices were purchased in December 2017 to facilitate this.
- 2.11 The team took the iPad survey methodology and questions that had been used last year by the Urban Heaths Partnership in Dorset and re-formatted the survey to suit our sites. The survey changed from our previous year’s format: free form answers were replaced with tick boxes making the survey easier to answer and analyse and questions were reformatted. The running order was also changed so that the survey flowed as a conversation with site users and ensure that it was around 5 minutes in length. Then Footprint Ecology set up the software for the survey, which was then rolled out to the wardening team in the second week of January.

2.12 The team and the public found the survey very user friendly and also much more efficient at collecting the data than in previous years. Despite the late start to the survey season due to the delay in procuring iPads, getting the survey set up, and very inclement winter weather, the team completed 7 full SANG surveys (18 hours on each) in 8 weeks before the sensitive period began in March.

2. Access to SPA



3.1 On Tuesday 9th March Lieutenant Colonel Dickie Bishop – Commander Service Delivery Training South East. (Comd SD Trg SE) and Natural England Area Manager Andy Smith signed the agreement to allow the SAMM project wardens access to the military training estate on the TBH SPA. The agreement is the first of its kind nationally and Defence Infrastructure colleagues and the SAMM team are working effectively together to implement this on the ground. This will allow the team to engage with users of over 50% of the SPA so is a groundbreaking and very exciting development.

3.2 To facilitate this, the SAMM wardens attended a training safety brief on 9th March hosted at the Pirbright training centre by Mark Sumner, Access & Recreation Advisor (Environmental Support & Compliance Team) with the Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO). We had a safety brief by Tom Greely, Senior Training Safety Marshal, and Lieutenant Colonel Mark Ludlow – Training Safety Officer (Security and Access) South East (TSO(S&A)SE) briefed us on the issues and challenges that the DIO face in undertaking military training on the sites locally, given their proximity to an expanding population. Sarah Jupp, Ecologist DIO Environmental Support gave us an insight into the challenges of combining military training with ecological, access and site management considerations given the huge amount of very special wildlife that the MoD sites support.

- 3.3 The SAMM project manager, Ann Conquest is meeting with the Crown Estate in conjunction with Des Sussex from NE on to discuss with them the possibility of SAMM wardens accessing Crown estate land as part of a wider land management agreement with NE on 9th April.
- 3.4 The SAMM wardens have worked in conjunction with site managers throughout late February and March to place new signs up across a large proportion of sites on the SPA, including MoD sites.

4 Communications, Promotion and Events

- 4.1 The Thames Basin Heaths Partnership website can be accessed at www.tbhpartnership.org.uk and continues to receive positive feedback. We are currently reviewing the website and additions to content are being finalized, to include a calendar of events, downloadable resources and links to partner websites as well as a dedicated page for our Heathland Hounds initiative.
- 4.2 Our Communication and education officer is in the final stages of producing a new leaflet for the project, planned to be going to press just after Easter. This has been produced in consultation with our AMMP members, who have provided valuable feedback.
- 4.3 Our 'Heathland Hounds' project continues to grow, with a leaflet promoting the group being produced late last year and more focused pit stops, including joint pit stops with local Guildford dog warden Pete Burnage, which were very well received by the public. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/HeathlandHounds/permalink/950153261799633/>
- 4.4 The project has been developing links with the South Downs National Park initiative, Take the Lead Campaign, to share ideas, tools and best practice to maximize public engagement opportunities. The project manager, Comms officer and Heathland Hounds lead all visited the South Downs partnership on 24th January to explore how we can share resources. This will result in direct cost savings and maximize the effectiveness of the SAMM project.

- 4.5 We ran themed pitstops on over the Christmas period : wreath making at Chobham and Wisley, offering a perfect opportunity to engage with site users in an informal way and spreading our messages whilst having a bit of fun and spreading some Christmas cheer.



- 4.6 Our team also been visiting and updating the SANG database we hold in order to promote SANGs effectively. We have produced several Facebook posts, including this one for Bramshot Farm, Hart's newly opened SANG <https://www.facebook.com/thamesbasinheathspartnership/posts/679928935464575> which had over 7000 hits, due to being shared on local community social media sites. This contributed in a doubling of visitors to the site according to the people counter from around 500 to 1000 per week for 6 weeks following the post. A small informal survey conducted on

site revealed that more than half of the visitors spoken to had heard of the new SANG through this social media promotion. Other users cited seeing the brown signs on their way to nearby sites such as Fleet Pond and finding out through word of mouth.

- 4.7 We also have other positive feedback on our Website and Facebook presence. For instance, users cite that they have found the sites due to seeing articles online, often quoting the message that they chose to come following this information. A user of Chobham Water Meadows had seen that this was a place where she could walk which was less sensitive for ground nesting birds; a user at Ether Hill SANG had found it through a social media post. Many users also give feedback that they have tried other sites in the Greenspace on Your Doorstep leaflet or say they have come to pitstops through our social media promotion of them.
- 4.8 We had a very successful evening to thank the TBH birds surveyors at Heather Farm, which was well attended and built some useful relationships between surveyors and site managers, thus improving the overall feedback and management for the TBH birds on site. It also built links with academic contacts, with potential for university research into the approach.
- 4.9 We also had a morning of training with Natalie Light – dog behavior specialist - at Heather Farm on 16th March. AMMP project partners also attended. The training focused on how to engage and interact positively with dog owners and how to behave safely around dogs.

5. School Based Education

The project manager has been in touch with numerous local education providers to gather information to support and inform the bid to JSPB for an education officer. The organizations contacted were local AMMP members as well as South Downs National Park Authority, Dorset County Council and a Local Forest School leader. We have summarized this in the supporting documents.

6. SPA and SANGs Monitoring

Automatic people counter installation

- 6.1 9 New Chambers radiobeam sensors have been procured by the SAMM project with an expected delivery date of end March 2018. These sensors will replace faulty or unreliable sensors already installed and the project are working closely with Footprint Ecology to ensure that the sensors are placed effectively across the SPA following the analysis of the 2016 sensor data.

Car Park Counts

- 6.2 The Project continues to undertake monthly car park transects across the SPA area, and the project is now in the third year of undertaking this work.

- 6.3 The second 12 months of car park transect data collection were completed in December 2017, and Footprint Ecology will be commissioned to undertake an analysis of this data in Summer 2018.

SANGs monitoring information

- 6.4 In order to produce an annual report, and to inform SANGs promotion and monitoring, the SAMM project asked Local Authorities re-introduce the practice of recording SANGs data for their own borough, so that the SAMM project manager can collate SAMM, SANG information and bird data to produce an annual report on the strategy. LAs and SANGs managers have also been asked to provide people counter data to the project, which will be used to aid on-site promotion and monitoring in conjunction with site managers. The SAMM project asked Local Authorities for this data at the JSPB Officers meeting in early January 2018 and the data is currently being collected. At the time of writing, 8 of the 11 Local Authorities had responded, with a revised deadline of 20th April 2018.

7. Other rather exciting news



- 7.1 In January 2018, the Project took delivery of 3 new branded lease vans, which now provide us with a great opportunity not only to maximize our visibility on the SPA, increasing awareness of the project, but also allow us to take full use of the project gazebos, including a newly purchased set of gazebos for the third van with less logistical juggling. This will also help us to develop our pitstops to be even more engaging to the public, especially where we are providing fresh engagement materials with repeat uses. These vans are already being noticed - . We are in discussion with AMMP partners about how these vans can be best used logistically to ensure an even coverage of livery and pitstop opportunities across the whole of the area.
- 7.2 Following negotiation and signing of the licence agreement, the SAMM project moved into the new office at Heather Farm in early January 2018. The office move went smoothly and the telecoms and office infrastructure are now in place and fully operational. This has already presented excellent opportunities for partner working and networking, allowing us to put people at the heart of what we do.

