

THAMES BASIN HEATHS
JOINT STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP BOARD (JSPB)

Date: 6th December 2023

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 NOTE and ratify the decisions since 2020
- To NOTE recruitment updates

Purpose of the Report:

To provide the JSPB with an update on SAMM activity since the last meeting in July 2023.

Summary

This paper sets out for Members the SAMM project's activities and achievements since the last meeting in July 2023, recent monitoring work and plans for the next 6 months.

Brief Project Overview

In July we were asked to provide a very brief project overview for the newly elected councilors who are now sitting on the JSPB. We have included this again and added a review of the strategic decisions of the last 3 years. We hope this is useful.

The Thames Basin Heaths Partnership is a landscape-scale partnership of local councils, land managers and nature conservation bodies working together to conserve the heathland of the Thames Basin Heaths (TBH) Special Protection Area (SPA) across Surrey, Hampshire, and Berkshire. The story of this innovative and nationally significant project began back in 2005 when the SPA was notified. The designation occurred due to the areas international importance to three rare Annex 1 birds, the Nightjar, the Woodlark, and the Dartford Warbler.

In 2009 the JSPB in conjunction with Natural England produced a delivery framework to mitigate the impact of an increasing residential population on the SPA. A 'buffer zone' (400m to 5km) was established around the SPA and each new residential development built within the zone is required to provide 'Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace' (SANG) for the new residents to use. Alongside this, each development pays a tariff that supports the work of the SAMM project in perpetuity. An additional zone has been established (5km to 7 km) which carries a smaller portion of requirements. Payment of the tariff and its investment is managed by Hampshire County Council. We currently use approximately

30% of the annual income to fund the SAMM project activities and the remaining 70 % is invested. An update on the investment fund forms part of each JSPB meeting.

The team of highly trained and deeply knowledgeable SAMM wardens focus on finding innovative ways to connect local people with nature, to get them talking about heathland and share our three simple messages. These are 1. Please keep to main paths (#PawsOnPathsPlease); 2. Please be wildfire aware (#BeWildfireAware) and 3. Please visit your nearby SANG (#GreenspaceOnYourDoorstep). Our focus is to conserve the rare heathland species of the SPA. The team host quarterly meetings of the 'Access Management and Monitoring Partnership' (AMMP) to enable all 26 partners to discuss issues and share best practice. We also gather and analyse data about usage of the SPA and SANG's. We share our findings with as wide a group as possible and provide information about the populations of the Annex 1 birds. More details about the project's activities are housed in the body of this report.

Brief review of the strategic decisions in the last 3 years

In October 2020 we asked the board to approve a tariff uplift. The tariff was set in the original framework agreement signed in 2011. The framework stated that the tariff would be uplifted every 5 years for the project to be funded to perpetuity. The board approved the uplift.

In June 2022 we asked the board for their advice regarding two elements of succession planning for the project. Our current communications officer has informed us she plans to retire in a few years. We wanted to ensure knowledge retention within the project and asked the members if we could create a second communications officer role to help us navigate this period. We forecast a 5% increase in salary costs as a result of this decision. This was approved by members. We also wanted to discuss the options and seek guidance regarding the collection of the bird data. It was agreed by members that it would be desirable to continue to collect the data. We continue to explore our options in this area and full details are available in section 6 of this report

In November 2022 we reminded the Members that a full visitor survey of the entire SPA has been conducted on a 5-year cycle since 2013. As this is a large piece of work beyond the warden team's capabilities, an external contractor has been engaged each time. The members agreed that an external contractor would be engaged to conduct the SPA visitor survey in the summer of 2023 with costs based on previous estimates for this work.

In July 2023 we informed the board that the SPA visitor contract had been let and the work had begun. We also reported on our continued difficulties with recruiting seasonal wardens. We requested a notable change to the staffing of the project to mitigate this. The change would result in fewer seasonal wardens and a larger team of year-round wardens. There would be an increase in salary costs for this financial

year which would be offset by the SPA visitor survey coming in at a lower cost than expected. The board members agreed to this change.

Based on these decisions our current forecast for the project costs are as follow.

Table 1. Forecast of project costs

	Forecast of project costs updated Oct 23		
	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Salary	£506,625.28	£489,630.22	£514,111.73
Travel and subsistence	£24,727.22	£29,672.66	£35,607.19
Organisational support	£37,249.36	£41,346.79	£45,894.93
Hosting fee	£13,634.13	£15,133.88	£16,798.60
Programme spend	£99,337.90	£152,478.92	£158,251.60
Total	£681,573.89	£728,262.47	£770,664.05

Contents of report

1. SAMM project staffing and recruitment	page 4
2. Wardening	page 4
3. Access to Special Protection Area land	page 9
4. Communications	page 9
5. Education	page 18
6. SPA and SANGs monitoring	page 30
7. Looking ahead	page 32

1. SAMM project staffing and recruitment

- 1.1. We are delighted to inform Members that former seasonal warden Kay has been successful in achieving a year-round warden role. As we reported in July our year-round warden Nicole Buckland was successful in her application for the second communications officer role approved by members in June 2022. Kay was successful in her application for the year-round role vacated by Nicola.
- 1.2. We are also delighted to inform Members that Sonia, also a former seasonal warden, has been successful in achieving a year-round warden role. Following your approval from July's meeting to change our seasonal warden recruitment strategy we advertised the year-round warden role and Sonia was the successful applicant.
- 1.3. We identified the need for additional resource for our heathland hounds group. Please see section 4 for more detail. We have tailored the second year-round warden role to focus on engaging with Dog owners. This role is currently being advertised on the Civil Service Jobs website and on our website and we hope to interview in December for a start date of early next year.

- 1.4. Our Data Analyst Dr Daria Dadam left the project in August, and we are in the process of recruiting her replacement.

2. Wardening

- 2.1. The project provides a warden service on the SPA. During the September to April season, we cover 5 days a week, and from March to mid-September we work 7 days per week from 07.00 to 19:00 (daylight permitting).
- 2.2. Heath Week 2023 (24th-30th July) went really well this year. We had a record number of attendees for some events (over 100 people) despite the rain and wind on some days. We also had new events this year such as the Horsell Treasure Hunt and a trip to the movies and TV on Chobham. The treasure hunt attracted over 100 people and was a lot of fun. Attendees said it was 'well organised with imaginative and interactive questions' which was great to hear as we had a particular focus on sensory elements. The TV event on Chobham attracted a different group of people to a Heathweek event that we wouldn't have otherwise engaged with. People were shown around particular parts of Chobham where popular films and TV have been filmed. We spoke to a total of 1,277 people face to face over the week. Heathweek next year will be 29th July – 4th August 2024.
- 2.3. The Ministry of Defence (MOD) are the landowners for close to 60% of the SPA. We have been working very closely with their Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO) this summer delivering joint pop-ups. The MOD's Access team have an Access & Recreation Advisor who wants to use pop-ups to engage with the public and potentially bring along a soldier to highlight how well hidden they can be in the landscape. Warden Kay booked in regular popups spread out across MOD land on the SPA to facilitate this. They have described us as 'vitaly important' to their work.
- 2.4. The DIO also invited us to the MOD Access Forum where all the partners gather to share best practice. The MOD wanted to showcase our approach and recommend it as their preferred template for engagement. We informed their other partners about the Thames Basin Heaths Partnership and why we do things the way we do. This was well received, and our presentation and example pop up generated lots of interest and questions.
- 2.5. Over the summer season, the wardens successfully completed all 78 summer SANG surveys, surveying each SANG for one hour, counting and interviewing people. This is the first year we have trialed summer SANG surveys. We plan to do 80 winter SANG surveys this season (2 new SANGs this year). This will hopefully allow for some interesting comparisons. As we are currently without a Data Analyst, we have asked Footprint Ecology to analyse the data.

- 2.6. This autumn, wardens Ruth and Kay held a presentation during a local church service and spoke to a new audience of over 70 people about our three key messages, specifically relating them to their local heath. This was a great success and was the first time we had participated in an event such as this.
- 2.7. Also in autumn, the team visited two mitigation projects which have a strong focus on visitor education and engagement, one at Burnham Beeches and the other at Ashdown Forest. This was really useful for knowledge sharing of ideas between our projects as we face similar issues.
- 2.8. During half-term in October, we held a Halloween event in each county, two of them at sites we'd never used before. We spoke to 225 people and 95% were a new audience. We are running two Christmas events this year, one as Thames Basin Heaths wardens and another as Heathland Hounds. We have requested to attend several partners' Christmas events too. Surrey County Council had positive things to say about the wardens after we did a wreath making event at one of their sites last year. They said we were 'the stars of the show'.
- 2.9. Over winter we will be attending some volunteer work parties with our partner organisations. During these events we give short talks to groups about the project and make leaflets available to everyone. We have already attended a number of these since the start of the winter season.
- 2.10. The following table (Table 2) sets out the number of hours of warden activity delivered on the SPA between June and October 2023, inclusive:

Table 2. Wardening activity delivered on the SPA between June and October 2023.

June 2023	Total hours wardened	570.55	July 2023	Total hours wardened	597.17
	Number of interactions	1936		Number of interactions	3320
	Interactions per hour	3.39		Interactions per hour	5.56
	Number already spoken to	553		Number already spoken to	709
	Leaflets handed out	1789		Leaflets handed out	3572
	Number of dogs	972		Number of dogs	782
	Number of dog walkers (5+ dogs)	18		Number of dog walkers (5+ dogs)	16
	Average % already spoken to	28.56		Average % already spoken to	21.36

August 2023	Total hours wardened	486.32	September 2023	Total hours wardened	203.65
	Number of interactions	1184		Number of interactions	763
	Interactions per hour	2.43		Interactions per hour	3.75
	Number already spoken to	286		Number already spoken to	100
	Leaflets handed out	1108		Leaflets handed out	1074

	Number of dogs	860		Number of dogs	274
	Number of dog walkers (5+ dogs)	11		Number of dog walkers (5+ dogs)	1
	Average % already spoken to	24.16		Average % already spoken to	13.11

October 2023	Total hours warded	204.75
	Number of interactions	1595
	Interactions per hour	7.79
	Number already spoken to	80
	Leaflets handed out	1696
	Number of dogs	130
	Number of dog walkers (5+ dogs)	4
	Average % already spoken to	5.02

2.11. The number of interactions per hour were higher in all but one month (August) in 2023 than in the previous year as shown in Figure 1 below. Special notice should be taken of the interactions per hours in July, with over 5.5 per hours in 2023 compared to 3.8 in 2022, a new record for the team.

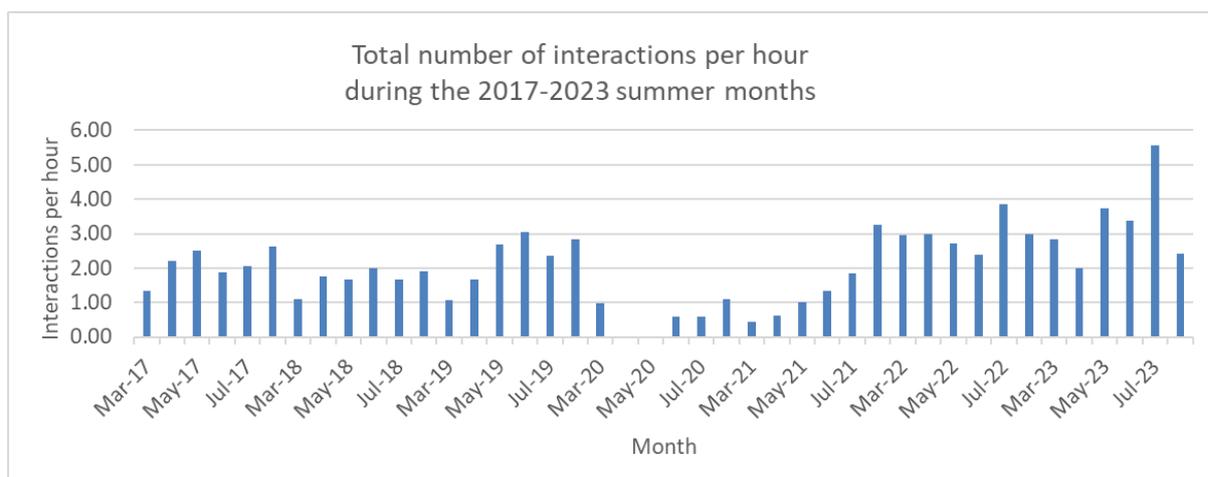


Figure 1. Total number of interactions per hour during the period March to August between 2017 and 2023.

2.12. Nineteen pitstops/pop-ups (eight of which connected to Heathland Hounds) and 52 events were possible between June and October 2023, including nine Heathland Hounds ones.

2.13. The Team interacted with 661 people during pitstops/pop-ups (226 of whom were met as part of Heathland Hounds pop-ups), and 2,092 during the TBH events. In the summer months, in particular, the number of interactions with people already spoken to was higher than in 202, suggesting that we are interacting with more regular users of our SPA, a very positive outcome in itself.

2.14. Figure 2 shows the percentage of monthly interactions on the SPA with members of the public that were already aware of the SAMM project since March 2018. On average, 28% of individuals encountered whilst ‘normal wardening’ said that they were already aware of the project between June and August. This figure was virtually unchanged from the period to March to May 2023 (27.8%), but still lower than the pre-pandemic average of 35% between March 2018 and February 2020. However, with an increase in the number of users to the SPA since the Pandemic began, it is not surprising that a lower proportion of people had previously interacted with the Team .

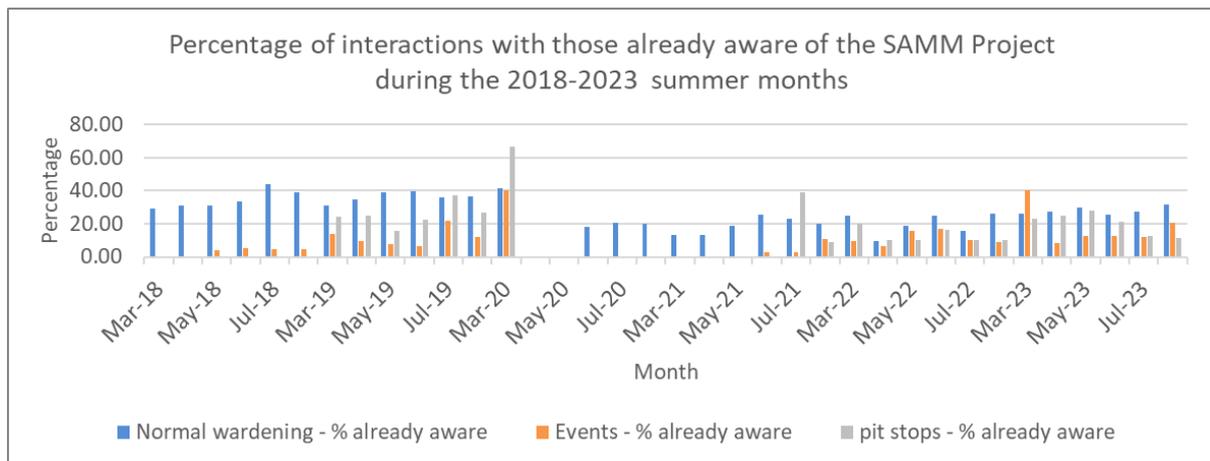


Figure 2. Average percentage of monthly interactions with members of the public that were already aware of the SAMM project during the period March to August between 2018 and 2023.

3. Access to Special Protection Area land

- 3.1. There have been no issues or changes. Feedback from landowners remains very positive and we thank all partners for their ongoing support.
- 3.2. Extensions to our existing access agreements have been agreed by all Partners. The agreements are in the process of being renewed through to 30th June 2026.

4. Communications

- 4.1 Highlights for this period include the publication of a new booklet listing 82 SANGs, Suitable Alternative Nature Greenspaces. We are also very proud of the work we delivered during Heath Week, with 27 events run across Surrey, Hampshire & Berkshire. Our social media presence continues to gradually increase, with new Communications Officer, Nicola Buckland, bringing fresh ideas to our content.

Website

- 4.2 The project's website can be found at www.tbhpartnership.org.uk and continues to be used to promote our key messages. The website content is designed to inform and inspire visitors and to promote usage of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces (SANGs).
- 4.3 Our directory of SANGs is called 'Greenspace on your doorstep' and is consistently the most visited part of the website. As of November 2023, it lists 84 SANGs across Surrey, Hampshire, and Berkshire.
- 4.4 Four new additions since the last report:
 - The Ridge is a greenspace managed by the University of Reading. Adjacent to May's Farm Meadows, Ryeish Green, Shinfield, near Wokingham.
 - Sunningdale Park is a landscaped parkland, once the grounds of Northcote House in Sunningdale. Now part of a development managed by Berkeley Homes.
 - Poulter's Meadows has a pretty knoll and water meadow walk. Find it behind the Zebon Community Centre, Crookham Village in Hampshire.

- Oldlands Copse, Tithebarn Lane, West Clandon. Managed by Surrey Wildlife Trust on behalf of The Land Trust.

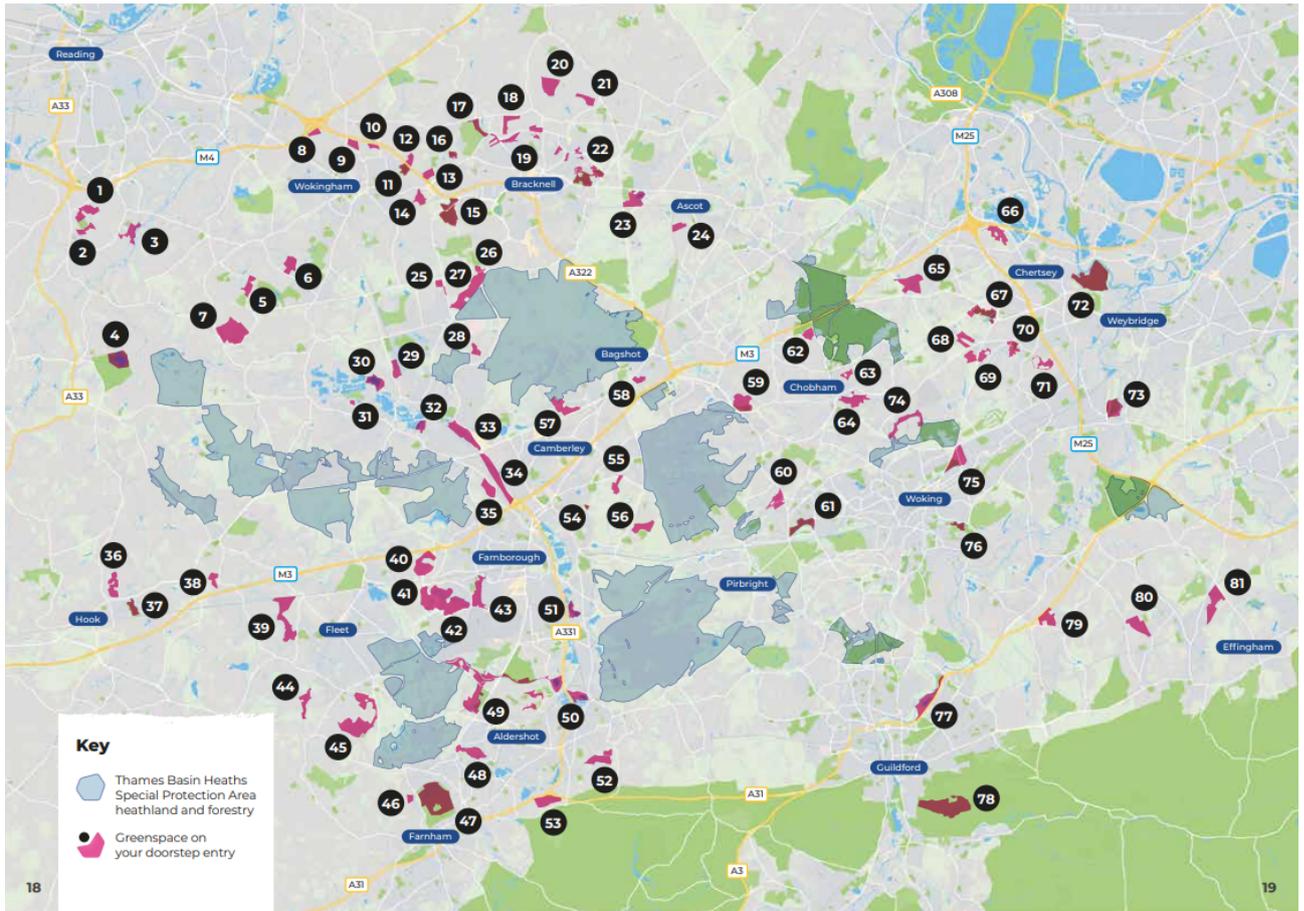
4.5 Looking at the period since the last report. In the period 1st July to 9th November 2023, 20,570 users visited the website, compared to 8,800 in the same period in 2022. There have been 49,785 page views across the whole website. Compared to 34,571 page views in the same period in 2022.

4.6 Top 10 most visited areas of the website since 1st July 2023 have been:

- Greenspace on your doorstep 18,608
- Home page 12,117
- News & blogs 5,674
- Event listings 8,805
- Wildlife gallery 1,511
- About us 741
- Heathland Hounds 459
- Activities for children 211
- Long Valley opening times 191
- Meet the team 151

Leaflets

4.7 As well as the online directory of SANGs on our website, we also produce a popular free booklet. The current edition was created in 2019 and lists 62 SANGs. A new 36 page edition is ready for publication, listing 82 sites. We're excited to have this new piece of literature to hand out. The map for the new booklet looks as follows:



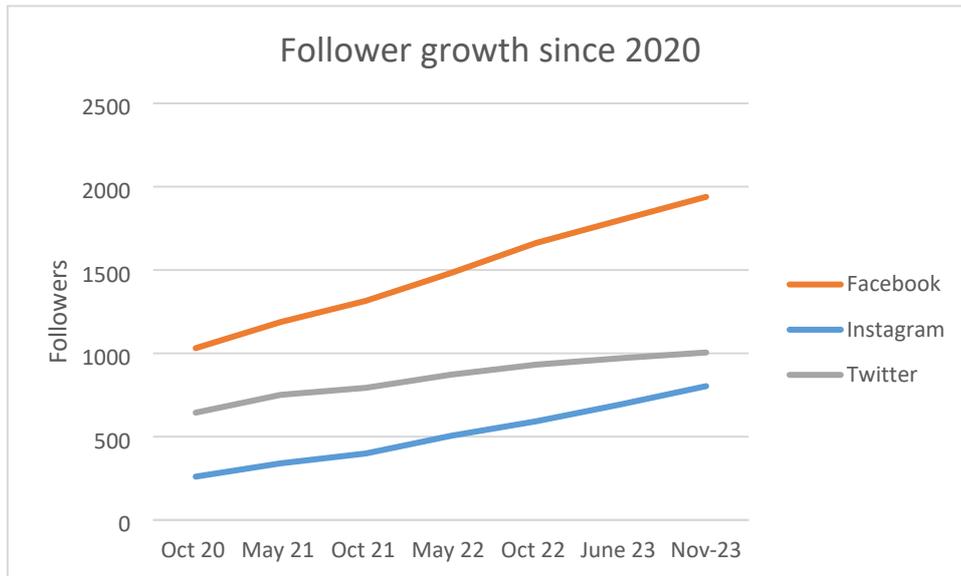
Social media

4.8 We continue to use social media platforms to spread our key messages and engage people with what’s happening on local heathland. We are on Facebook, X (Twitter) and Instagram.

4.9 Social media statistics as of 9th November 2023 (Table 3) show our following is gradually increasing as we become better known.

Table 3. Social media followers as of 9th November 2023.

	Oct 20	May 21	Oct 21	May 22	Oct 22	June 23	Nov 23
Facebook	1,031	1,188	1,315	1,482	1,662	1,801	1,939
Twitter	644	751	793	872	932	971	1,005
Instagram	260	340	399	505	592	694	803

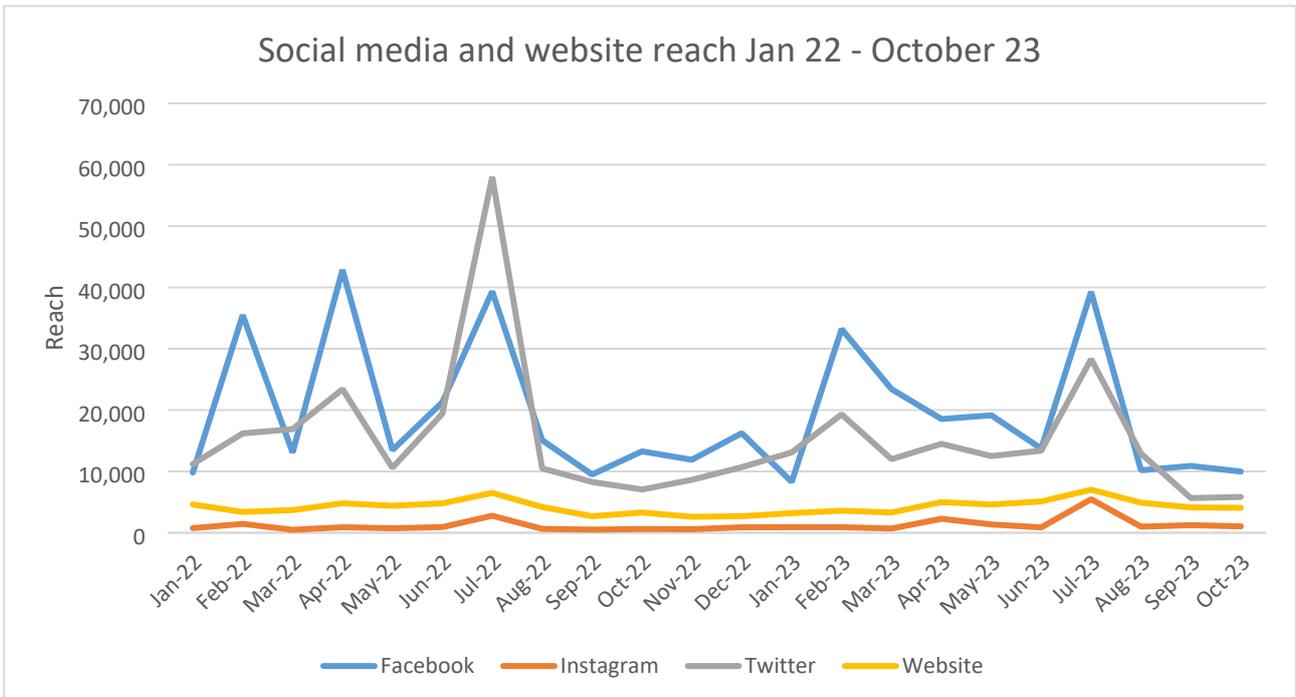


4.10 The number of followers (Table 3) does not adequately reflect our reach on social media (Table 4).

Table 4. Social media reach as of as of November 2023.

Reach	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct
Facebook	8,299	33,205	23,421	18,547	19,147	10,106	39,278	10,190	10,898	9,980
Twitter	13,100	19,300	12,000	14,500	12,500	4,500	28,300	12,900	5,650	5,843
Instagram	912	914	690	2,282	1,357	560	5,467	995	1,242	1,044

4.11 You will notice that engagement is at its highest level during February and March when we are reminding people about keeping to paths and again in July, when we are advertising Heath Week.



4.12 A few examples of recent high-performing posts:

Posts About Photos Mentions

Thames Basin Heaths Partnership 22 Oct

If you haven't already, we think you'll enjoy discovering this beautiful parkland. As you explore, you'll discover delightful views, ancient trees and a lovely ornamental garden 🌿

It's always great to be able to share news of new walks opening. We're a bit behind the curve on this one, because it's been open a little while, but it's just been added to our [#GreenspaceOnYourDoorstep](#) directory at: www.tbhpartnership.org.uk/greenspace/sunningdale-park/

[#Sunningdale](#) [#SunningdalePark](#) [#Ascot](#) [#Surrey](#) [#RBWM](#)

Sunningdale...
Sunningdale Park
Free car park off Linnet Drive, Silwood Rd, Sunningdale SL5 0LS.

NEW

Directions and more local country walks at: www.tbhpartnership.org.uk/greenspace/

TBHPARTNERSHIP.ORG.UK
Sunningdale Park - Thames Basin Heaths [Learn more](#)

29 likes 9 comments 5 shares

Like Comment Share

Post impressions **4,868**

Post reach **3,543**

Engagement **617**

Posts

About

Photos ▾

Mentions



Thames Basin Heaths Partnership

1 Sep · 🌐

Saddleback Hill at Barossa is one of our favourite viewpoints on the Special Protection Area and it's barely a stone's throw from Camberley town centre!

Although it's a military training area, the MOD allow public access when it's safe to do so and simply ask that we follow the displayed Byelaws and notices, and that we use the land respectfully, avoiding any military training that's taking place.

Find out more and take a look at the photo gallery at:

www.tbhpartnership.org.uk/news/barossa/
#ThamesBasinHeaths #Surrey #Berkshire
#Camberley #RespectTheRange Ministry of Defence



TBHPARTNERSHIP.ORG.UK

Barossa - Thames Basin Heaths

Learn more

👍❤️ 76

5 comments 4 shares

Post impressions **4,571**

Post reach **2,971**

Engagement **537**

Posts

About

Photos ▾

Mentions



Thames Basin Heaths Partnership

14 Aug · 🌐

We'd like to thank all those who have kept their dogs on paths over the last five and a half months and helped reduce disturbance to ground-nesting birds trying to raise their young.

Some of our Special Protection Area Nightjars have already had their second brood, but did you know that if that second brood failed, they could well be trying for a third now? Equally, good weather at the end of the summer could prompt them to try for a third. Likewise for Woodlarks and Dartford Warblers!

Henry dog would therefore like to remind everyone that #PawsOnPathsPlease is still great practice until mid-September!

#ThamesBasinHeaths

Photo credits: Woodlark with young and juvenile Dartford Warbler – Rob Solomon. Nightjar chicks – Surrey Wildlife Trust.



👍❤️ You and 29 others

5 shares

Post impressions **2,087**

Post reach **1,917**

Engagement **96**

Top Tweet earned 1,025 impressions

Remember all the fun we had last year for Heath Week? We're doing it all again starting Monday 24th July! There are loads of FREE activities for kids and the rest of the family for [#HeathWeek2023!](#)

tbhpartnership.org.uk/heath-week/
[#Summer](#) [#SchoolHolidays](#) [#Surrey](#)
[#Hampshire](#) [#Berkshire](#)
pic.twitter.com/8h38oY5kB7



🔄 2 ❤️ 5

Heath Week

- 4.13 We are very proud of the work we deliver for Heath Week during the last week of July. Timed to run at the beginning of the school holidays, the emphasis is on free, family-friendly activities to engage children with nature. This season there were 27 events on the programme, run by ourselves, the Fire & Rescue Services, Surrey Wildlife Trust, RSPB, Hampshire Countryside Service, Horsell Common Preservation Society, Hart District Council, Amphibian and Reptile Conservation, Forestry England, Chobham Commons Preservation Committee and Hampshire & Isle of Wight Amphibian & Reptile Conservation.
- 4.14 During the run up to Heath Week, and during the week itself, the Comms team are busy creating content. This starts in late May when the longer magazine print deadlines fall. We advertise in local publications including parish magazine, and really appreciate the support we get with this.
- 4.15 The number of social media posts we issue increases during July. We work hard to advertise forthcoming events, post pictures of the public engaging with heathland and lots of other engaging material. This year, for example, we ran a heathland bird quiz and each member of the year-round team shared a 'memorable moment' they'd spent on the heathland. There were over 100 social media posts across July. Our biggest audience was on Facebook, where we reached 39,278 accounts across July. All the content is still available by searching for hashtag [#HeathWeek2023](#).

4.16 Across the week we engaged with 1,277 people face to face, at 27 free public engagement events, across 10 different Special Protection Area heathlands. 147 of the people spoken to were recorded as having been spoken to before, 1,129 leaflets were given out, 108 dogs were brought along. The team booked just less than 300 hours of wardening time at these events.



Figure 1 Children enjoying craft activities during Heath Week 2023

Heathland Hounds

4.17 The private Facebook group has 1,635 members as of November 2023.

4.18 This season's Heathland Heroes initiative, show-casing responsible behaviour, was a great success, with 25 well-behaved dogs photographed on the SPA between mid-May and mid-September and showcased within the group. Some photos were highlighted to use on TBH social media and were well received by our audience.

Wider partnership dog groups such as Dorset Dogs were impressed with this initiative and are hoping to roll it out within their own projects.

4.19 Administrators Jo Wilsher and Nicola Buckland are looking forward to gaining support from the soon to be recruited warden with a Heathland Hounds focus.

4.20 Pop-ups continued over the summer and events such as Paws in the Park in Bracknell were attended, reaching over 100 people living locally.

5. Education

Our Amazing Heathlands

5.1 Introduction

Our Amazing Heathlands, is a heathland-focused schools programme, run by Michael Jones – our Education & Engagement Officer. The aim of the programme is to meaningfully connect school children and their teachers to wildlife and their local heathlands through fun and engaging curriculum-linked activities. People are inspired take an active role in protecting our heathlands – from minimizing disturbance to ground-nesting birds to reducing wildfires to getting involved in biological recording through citizen science. The programme also seeks to connect community groups and residents with their local heathlands with the focus being on nature connections and what it is to be a responsible visitor.



5.2 Engagement data

During the period since the last report, the “Our Amazing Heathlands” schools programme has reached more schools and their pupils. Word continues to spread about our educational offering and feedback has been incredibly positive.

In the period from **1st June 2023 to 10th November 2023**, the activities of the Education and Engagement Officer directly engaged with **3842** children and adults through the schools’ programme, sessions for uniformed groups, guided walks and talks.

During this time, **84 sessions** were delivered – including **66** to children of primary school age (including uniformed groups).

The remaining sessions included heathland talks to local groups, guided walks and conservation careers talk to students.

Month	Number of engagements	Number of sessions
January 2023	855	17
February 2023	1161	20
March 2023	648	19
April 2023	19	1
May 2023	1144	29
June 2023	583	20
July 2023	1335	22
August 2023	49	4
September 2023	374	7
October 2023	1094	20
November 2023 (to 10 th November)	407	11
Totals for 2023 (to 10th November)	7669 engagements	170 sessions

These high-quality engagements take place in sessions ranging between one-hour and up to three-hours. There is time for a deep level of engagement and considerable nature connections.

There were fewer sessions in April (due to the Education Officer’s paternity leave) and August (School summer holidays).

5.3 Engagement data over time

Year on year, the reach of the “*Our Amazing Heathlands*” education programme continues to grow:

Year	Number of engagements	Number of sessions
2019	853	38

2020 (Pandemic year)	644	19
2021 (Pandemic year)	1068	34
2022	3589	107
2023 (to 10 th November)	7669	170

Teachers are encouraged to get their children to help spread the word about how amazing heathland is, but also how fragile it is and how they can raise awareness of issues like wildfire and disturbance. This often takes the form of designing posters to ‘*Help the Heath*’.

5.4 Schools – “Our Amazing Heathlands” overview

Sessions focus on:

1. Nature connections.
2. Heathland and its species.
3. Threats to heathland.
4. How to help look after heathland and its species.

These curriculum-linked sessions can be delivered remotely, in school or out on the heath and are designed to introduce fantastic plants and animals (including rare ground-nesting birds) and cover threats to the landscape – including wildfire and disturbance.

The aim is for children to go home after a session inspired by their nature experiences and tell their family and friends about our amazing heathlands and what everyone can do to look after them. This helps to spread our key messages about responsible heathland beyond the direct interactions.

There are onward opportunities for the children to join in with ‘Help the Heath’ and design posters encouraging visitors to do the right thing when visiting. (*#BeWildfireAware*, avoid disturbance, pick up dog waste and not littering).

We continually develop our resources (based on feedback and research) and also produce new ones to expand our offering. These resources are designed to be used during sessions to provide focus and give the children something to take away with them as a reminder of their learning. Other resources are available to provide teachers with activities to embed learning after the event and provide extra value to the experiences.



5.5 Advertising our offering

220 primary schools have been identified within 5km of the SPA (62 within 1km) and contact is being made with them as and when possible – identifying the best teachers to contact. Schools are offered a range of curriculum heathland-themed engagement and learning opportunities for the children. This offering takes the form of assemblies, classroom sessions and heathland visits, if possible. A number of schools are within walking distance of their local heath, with these children often visiting in the company of their teachers.

Educational and engagement opportunities and celebrations of success are regularly promoted via social media and blogs on the website.

5.6 Heathland as an outdoor classroom

There are agreements in place with partners to run educational sessions on the following heathlands:

- Chobham Common (Surrey CC)
- Whitmoor Common (Surrey CC)
- Ockham and Wisley Commons (Surrey CC)
- Bramshill (Forestry England)
- Wildmoor Heath (BBOWT/Bracknell Forest)
- Horsell Common (Horsell Common Preservation)

This allows schools across the SPA buffer zone opportunities to visit their local heathland and spread our sessions across the three counties.

Sessions have also been run at Yateley Common Country Park (Hampshire County Council) and Lightwater Country Park (Surrey Heath Borough Council) but these are currently arranged on a session-by-session basis. The same goes for Caesar's Camp (MOD).

Heathland education sessions have been run for the first time in partnership with Hart District Council at Elvetham Heath and there are plans to do similar with the Surrey Heathland Partnership (Sheets Heath, Brookwood Heath, Smarts Heath, Prey Heath etc.)

We are always looking to add to this list to make it easier for schools across the Special Protection Area to visit – often without the need to arrange transport (the cost of which is often a barrier to participation).

5.7 “Our Amazing Heathlands” – Feedback from schools

Feedback has been incredibly positive from children and teachers alike. Teachers are rebooking sessions when they get a new class each academic year and are happy to act as referees for new schools that are interested in recommendations.

Here is a small selection of feedback:

Wendy – Teacher (New Scotland Hill School)

“It was a fabulous outdoor learning day and always great to have you involved, the children (and parents) really enjoyed it and learnt a lot too. THANK YOU from us all!”

Child: *“I learnt about the slow worms and adders on the heath and it's our job to protect them otherwise they could get burnt.”*

Parent: *“I learnt so much about the heath, the staff were very knowledgeable and kept the children engaged with the activities.”*

Vanessa – Year 1 & 2 Teacher (Aldryngton School)

“We really enjoyed our visits to Wildmoor Heath - Thank you for three thoroughly enjoyable sessions that you led for our classes. Your passion and knowledge about the heath was very impressive and really inspired the children. You had them hooked from the start! We hope we're able to book another trip with you in the future.”

Students – Year 1 & 2 (Aldryngton School)

“My favourite part was when I saw the Stonechat flying”.

“I liked looking at the different trees”.

“I liked searching for the things on our list and ticking them off”.

“I liked the adventures that you showed us”.

“Thank you for showing us Wildmoor Heath, it was really fun there.”

“I enjoyed sitting and talking together.”

“I loved when you showed us what to look for.”

“It was cool when we saw a yellow ladybird with no spots.”

“Thank you, Michael and Sonia, for teaching us about wildlife and nature. I liked it when you said, ‘don’t sniff the spiders.’”

“My favourite part of the trip was learning about nature in its habitat.”

“I loved the dragonfly and the butterfly. I loved the trip because it was interesting.”

“I really enjoyed our trip because we got to see insects.”

“I loved the trip because I love nature. Nature is amazing!”

“My favourite part of the trip was everything.”

“I really enjoyed looking for nature, it was amazing. You are the best staff!”

“I really enjoyed the adventurous trip because we learnt about animals. My favourite part was when Michael showed us the slow worm.”

“Thank you for the adventure. I enjoyed it all! My favourite part was meeting Michael, Sonia and Kay.”

Beth – Teacher (Hammond Junior School)

“I just wanted to thank you for today's sessions which pupils and teachers alike really enjoyed. The children talked about it all day. My colleague, Nadine, has shared your details with the rest of the staff and I hope we can do more sessions with you. We're so close to the country park and it's great to celebrate it throughout the year.”

Alex – Teacher (Horsell Village School)

“Huge thanks again for this week’s sessions! A great success. The children love it. If maybe even 10 of those 90 children develop a deep interest in heathland, living things and our natural environment we’ll be doing a great job.”

Jemma – Parent (Horsell Home Educators Group)

“Thanks so much for the insect session. It was fantastic as always. We have some more learning going on following on from it at the moment. Thank you - it’s brilliant and always appreciated. It helps us massively in extending the learning.”

Laura – Nursery Teacher (New Scotland Hill School)

“Thank you so much for such a lovely morning. The children absolutely loved being out in nature and they were all so engaged!”

Paula – Year 4 teacher (The Marist Primary School, West Byfleet)

“We thought that the session was excellent - so informative and highlighted lots of plants and creatures that the children (and adults) had not considered or come across. The way it was presented engaged and fascinated the children especially with all of your little stories and nuggets of extra information. We would definitely like the session again in the summer term for our year 4 pupils.”

Sarah – KS1 Phase Leader and Maths and Science Lead (Weyfield Primary Academy)

“The children really loved the assembly, some of the staff told me they heard the children say after ‘I want to go and try to find the animals on the heath’. One of the teacher has said you were very enthusiastic, passionate about what you did and very inspiring for adults and children.”

Fleur – (Eagle House School)

“Thank you so much for Wednesday, I have had lots of staff come and see me and say how brilliant you were, and how engaged the children were.”

5.8 “Our Amazing Heathlands” – Uniformed Groups

There continues to good demand from uniformed groups (especially in the summer term) and we have sessions designed to introduce children to their local heathlands and enable them to work towards badges. To meet further badge requirements, the on-heath activities can be supplemented with the ‘Help the Heath’ poster challenge. In the winter, when it is too dark for evening sessions outside, talks are offered.

Feedback:

Tom – Leader (1st Crowthorne Beavers)

“Thanks very much for coming to run the session with us last night. The session was very educational and I personally learnt a lot from it. I'm sure the beavers will have learnt an enormous amount. The memory game and preliminary talk about ground nesting birds/staying to the path was a really good idea. It was a good way to show the beavers what they might want to look out for. I was very impressed at how you were able to point out interesting insects as we went along. We must have been through Wildmoor Heath tens of times, but I've never noticed a bee wolf before (and wouldn't have known what it was anyway). Being able to show the beavers the potential effects of dropping glass was a great opportunity too. Special thanks for bringing the snake along - a lot of the beavers were clearly fascinated by this.”

Alex – Leader (1st Bisley Cubs)

“Thank you so much for giving the Cubs such an interesting and informative session last night! I was amazed by how engaged and knowledgeable they all were! I have to admit that I learnt a lot too! I think we will have quite a few budding naturalists!”

Jenny – Leader (6th Woking Guides)

“Thank you for a fantastic session last night, lots learnt and a great opportunity to get out into the wonderful heathland we have on our doorstep.”

Paul – Leader (Horsell Explorer Scouts)

“Just wanted to say a massive thank you for taking us all out on Chobham Common last night. It was a great evening, and only possible because of your knowledge and passion for the heath.”

Simon – Leader (1st Woosehill Scouts)

“I’d just like to pass on our thanks to yourself & Sonia for the evening walk last week. It was really informative & the scouts (and leaders!) had a great evening out - it's the best way of learning about this kind of environment.”

5.9 Wildfire Education – www.tbhpartnership.org.uk/wildfire

Wildfire education is covered in all sessions, so all participants learn about the causes and consequences of a fire. They also find out about what to do if they discover a fire.

In October 2023, the Education Officer participated in [Junior Citizen](#) at Lingfield. Junior Citizen sessions teach Year 6 children about being safe in the countryside.

Through these sessions, **841** Year 6 children and their teachers from 17 schools learned about their local heathlands, the significant issue of wildfire, how to avoid it and what to do if they spot one (Safe place / Ring 999).

These events are a great way to engage with a large number of local children about one of our key messages.

This takes the total of engagements about wildfire in Junior Citizen sessions in 2023 to **3063**.

At the end of each Junior Citizen event, children are asked to design a poster about something they have learnt during their sessions – something memorable – and for the past two events, the winners have designed posters about protecting heathland from wildfire. A ringing endorsement.



The plan is to attend upcoming Junior Citizen events in Reigate and Guildford and, if possible, Woking. There are efforts underway to start new Junior Citizen events in other areas across the Thames Basin Heaths area.

Progress is being made in developing a school-based response to local wildfires with Surrey Fire & Rescue Service – most likely assemblies in schools near wildfire areas directly after a fire. These sessions will hopefully commence in 2024.

5.10 “Our Amazing Heathlands” webpage

The education webpage continues to be updated. See www.tbhpartnership.org.uk/schools.

It provides information for local teachers about free educational offerings and how they can get involved.

5.11 Noticing Nature – www.tbhpartnership.org.uk/noticing-nature

Following on from last winter’s ‘*Noticing Nature*’ wellbeing walks pilot at Caesar’s Camp near Farnham, Education Officer Michael ran a taster day for members of the local community and interested parties from Farnham Primary Care Network, Farnham Integrated Care Network, Surrey County Council and local GPs. This gave organisations with a potential interest in wellbeing walks to provide insight into how they could best meet the health needs of local residents.

Out of the taster day, a plan was formed to launch a weekly walk at Caesar’s Camp on Friday mornings. Initial walks will be run by TBHP staff, but the aim is to recruit someone from the local community to take ownership and meet and lead attendees each week. The walk will then be self-sustaining – run for the community, by the community.

These wellbeing walks introduce local people to the wonderful heathland on their doorsteps. Participants are encouraged to slow down and notice the nature around them. From looking for fungi, to smelling Gorse flowers to listening to the birds close by everyone was able to make meaningful connections with the landscape around them.

Aside from the wellbeing benefits for participants, people discovered just how special heathland was – from its amazing species, like nocturnal Nightjars, to how fragile the landscape is. Lots of birds nest on the ground, so are at risk from disturbance (especially from dogs) and destructive wildfire are a real threat.

Connecting people with their local heathland introduces them to the special species that live there, encourages them to look after the area by taking ownership for this special habitat. They can then encourage others to get involved and help protect the landscape.

Data will be collected via the ‘Natural England Wellbeing Survey’ and be submitted on Natural England’s Connecting People with Nature Toolkit portal. This will be used to monitor wellbeing changes, discover barriers to participation and get feedback on the walks themselves.

The first walk was on Friday 3rd November and dates are in the diary until the end of 2023.

Thank you to the MOD for being so accommodating. Thank you to Magdalena from the Farnham PCN for her enthusiasm and support and Elinor from the South Downs NPA for coming along to the taster day to run some mindfulness activities. Also, to Warden Kay for helping with walks.

Two events were also run at the Hale Community Centre in order to meet local residents and promote the walks. One of these was a craft activity for children and their families. Posters advertising the event are up on local bus stops, noticeboards, local GP’s surgeries and at the Community Centre. There is a webpage with all relevant information at www.tbhpartnership.org.uk/noticing-nature.



Michael Jones – Education & Engagement Officer (November 2023)

6. SPA and SANGs monitoring

- 5.1. As we informed members in July very five years since the project began, we have conducted a survey of the Special Protect Area visitors. This is a very large piece of work and beyond the capacity of the wardening team to deliver and so is let to an external contractor each time. Previous survey results can be found on our website here [Published reports - Thames Basin Heaths \(tbhpartnership.org.uk\)](https://tbhpartnership.org.uk).
- 5.2. We were delighted to inform members that Footprint Ecology won the contract and the survey work commenced is now complete. The results are currently being analysed and we will share the results as soon as they are available.
- 5.3. We forecast a cost for this element of the project spend however as we discussed in our July meeting the contract came in below the expected figure. This gave us the opportunity to suggest a change to our staffing structure without incurring additional costs which the board kindly agreed to.
- 5.4. This summer the wardens conducted a summer SANG survey. This was a new undertaking, and we will be interested to see the results. As previously mentioned, Footprint Ecology have agreed to

analyse the data collected by the team during this survey. We will be able to update you on progress in this area next time.

- 5.5. The team are currently in the process of conducting this year’s winter SANG survey. Footprint have agreed to analyse this data also.

Annex 1 Breeding Bird data collection

- 6.6. The surveying of the extremely important Annex 1 birds the Nightjar, the Woodlark and the Dartford Warbler has been completed for 2023. 2Js Ecology are currently producing a report for us detailing the findings and we will be able to share that with you in our next report.
- 6.7. As agreed in the June 2022 JSPB meeting, we are seeking to ensure robust succession planning for the collection of this important information. At that meeting we presented four options for the board’s consideration.

Option	Description
1	Outsourcing survey coordinators and use of professional surveyors.
2	Engage a new data provider that can coordinate volunteers
3	We expand the team and employ in-house surveyors
4	Current provider continues to supply surveyors and our team take charge of managing data collection, methodology and data quality

- 6.8. Following a discussion during the meeting it was decided that we would explore option 1 listed above.
- 6.9. To this end we invited external contractors to submit bids to collect the data. We advertised the opportunity and had seven companies download the relevant documents. Of these two submitted bids for the work. Unfortunately, neither company were successful in their bids. One company did not possess the required competencies and the other whilst extremely competent far exceeded the budget available. As a result, we were unable to award the contract.
- 6.10. We now suggest we explore Option 2. Conversations between Natural England and the British Trust for Ornithology have begun, and we will update Members on progress in this area next time.
- 6.11. The project forecast continues to allow for an expected spend of up to £100k for this element of work.

7. Looking ahead

- 5.6. Our change in project staffing structure as agreed in July will see a smaller intake of seasonal wardens this coming March.
- 5.7. We will continue with our core message of asking heathland visitors to stick to main paths and keep dogs out of vegetation.
- 5.8. We will continue to build on our 'Be Wildfire Aware' messaging and build our relationship with Surrey Fire & Rescue Service's Wildfire and Rural Partnership. We will also continue to work with Berkshire and Hampshire fire services and to support 'Wildfire Awareness Week'.
- 5.9. Interconnectedness continues with the newer heathland related groups, the Western Thames Basin Landscape Partnership hosted by RSPB and 'Heathland Connected' also hosted by Natural England. We will continue to share knowledge and enable a uniform message across the region.
- 5.10. Our work this year with the DIO and other mitigation projects also works towards delivering a uniform message across the region. We will continue to seek opportunities to further this as a uniform message aids compliance.
- 5.11. We continuously update the 'Greenspace on your doorstep' section of our website with each new SANGs as it opens ([tbhpartnership.org.uk/greenspace/](https://www.tbhpartnership.org.uk/greenspace/))<https://www.tbhpartnership.org.uk/greenspace/>. We promote these through wardening, social media and the Heathland Hounds website ([tbhpartnership.org.uk/heathland-hounds/](https://www.tbhpartnership.org.uk/heathland-hounds/)).
- 5.12. As this is written we have gone to press with our updated 'Greenspace on your doorstep' leaflet. The current leaflet has 64 SANGs in it and this new one will have 82.
- 5.13. We expect to secure the new method for collecting the Annex 1 Breeding Bird data soon and will provide an update when possible.
- 5.14. We will be continuing to build on our excellent range of educational activities.