

**Thames Basin Heaths
Joint Strategic Partnership
18th December 2013
Council Chamber, Runnymede Borough Council**

Notes of Meeting

Present:

Board Members

Cllr Keith Bush	Surrey Heath Borough Council
Cllr Chris Turrell	Bracknell Forest Borough Council
Cllr John Furey	Surrey County Council
Cllr Peter Isherwood	Waverley Borough Council
Cllr James Radley	Hart District Council
Cllr David Hilton	Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead
Cllr Jonathan Glen	Hampshire County Council
Cllr John Edwards	Runnymede Borough Council

Advisory Board Members

Ken Ancorn	Surrey Wildlife Trust
Ian Hepburn	Wildlife Trusts in the South East
Mike Smith	Natural England
David Pearce	Natural England
Stan Abbott	Forestry Commission
Patrick McKernan	Natural England
Anne Hibbert	Hampshire County Council (Finance)

Consultants

Helen Fearnley	Footprint Ecology
Durwyn Liley	Footprint Ecology

Officers/Observers

Paul Druce	Surrey County Council
Katie Bailey	Rushmoor Borough Council
Julie Gil	Bracknell Forest Council
Graham Richie	Wokingham Borough Council
Sarah Veasey	Elmbridge Borough Council
Jane Ireland	Surrey Heath Borough Council
Kate Baughan	Surrey Heath Borough Council
Paul Falconer	Waverley Borough Council
Philip Gill	Royal Borough of Winsor and Maidenhead
Richard Ford	Runnymede Borough Council
Jo Hale	Hampshire County Council

Bronwen Keiller
Marc Turner

Natural England
Natural England

1. Apologies

- 1.1 Apologies have been received from Cllr Moira Gibson (Surrey Heath Borough Council), Cllr Angus Ross (Wokingham Borough Council), Cllr Chris Elmer (Elmbridge Borough Council), Cllr Roland Dibbs (Rushmoor Borough Council), Ernest Amoako (Woking Borough Council), Cllr Ashley Bowes (Woking Borough Council) and Jenny Rickard (Surrey Heath Borough Council).

2. Chairman's Announcements

- 2.1 As Cllr Moira Gibson was unable to attend the meeting, Cllr John Edwards (being the member for the host Authority) was appointed Chairman for the meeting.
- 2.2 It was noted that Cllr Mary Ballin had sadly passed away in September of this year. It was resolved that an email of condolence should be sent to Bracknell Forest Borough Council by Cllr Moira Gibson in her capacity as Chairman, on behalf of the Partnership.

3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting and Matters Arising

- 3.1 The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed.
- 3.2 There were some outstanding actions from the October 2012 meeting. It was agreed that best practice on CIL and on Permitted Development rights should be circulated to Members and Officers.

4. SAMM Project Update

- 4.1 Patrick McKernan presented a report seeking approval from the JSPB for Natural England to continue as the SAMM Delivery Body for a further three years from 2014/15. The report also updated the Partnership on SAMM project activity.
- 4.2 It was advised that Natural England's responsibilities as the Delivery Body were for an initial three years from the agreement being signed. Patrick McKernan advised that Natural England was obliged to notify the Partnership no less than 6 months prior to the third anniversary of the 'Commencement Date' whether it would be able to continue to carry out its role as the Delivery Body.
- 4.3 Natural England also wished to ask the Partnership whether it was happy for Natural England to continue as the SAMM Delivery Body for a further three years from July 2014.
- 4.4 The JSPB agreed that Natural England should continue as the SAMM Delivery Body for a further three years from July 2014.**

- 4.5 Cllr James Radley advised that Hart District Council was receiving pressure from Developers in respect to SANGS mitigation costs and sought clarification from Patrick McKernan as to whether they could be given access to the raw data in respect to wardening and survey works so that they could undertake their own costing. Patrick McKernan advised that Natural England had not received any such requests but that the raw data could be released at request, notwithstanding some sensitive data (i.e. the location of nests).
- 4.6 Cllr John Furey sought clarification as to how it would be established that SAMM was working and as to when it could be established that SAMM was financially worthwhile. He also sought clarification as to what the aim and objectives of the SAMM work were. Patrick McKernan noted a number of issues in trying to establish whether SAMM was working, but noted that there was no evidence to suggest that it wasn't working. Cllr John Furey requested that prior to the next meeting of the Partnership, it was clearly set out how success would be determined.
- 4.7 Cllr John Edwards requested that, for the next meeting of the Partnership, Natural England should prepare a report discussing the meaning of success in respect of SAMM.

ACTION: For Natural England.

- 4.8 Ian Hepburn noted that the measure of whether the actions being taken were effective would be whether or not visitor pressure was being stabilised and that the best way to measure this achievably would be to have an appropriate means to audit and check in place. This could be achieved, if required.
- 4.9 Cllr David Hilton concurred with Ian Hepburn. He noted that bird numbers in themselves, would not demonstrate whether the project was working and that it would be additional impact that would form the measure of success. The Questionnaire was considered to be an identifier of success and would also answer developer's questions. Patrick McKernan noted that this was echoing comments made previously in the year and that the questionnaire was a key measure of success.
- 4.10 Cllr John Glen noted that, in the longer term, the Partnership would need to decide what to do about SAMM and SANGS projects, if a high level decision was taken in respect to Europe; however, in the meantime, SANGS were still in an early stage and the only means of establishing whether they worked would be to carry on with them.
- 4.11 Cllr Chris Turrell noted that it was good to have stability but that the Partnership needed to be proactive to demonstrate to developers what the organisations were doing.
- 4.12 It was noted by Ian Hepburn that the intention was always for SANGS to be well signposted (in all respects) but that there was little going on, on the ground. As such, a push as needed to show that this was being worked on.

ACTION: For discussion at the next meeting of the JSPB.

- 4.13 Cllr Keith Bush noted that more professional dog walkers had been making use of the SPA and that placing additions on to land costs may have a detrimental effect on local residents.
- 4.14 Cllr John Furey sought assurance that the meaning of success, in respect of SAMM and SANGs, would be addressed at the next meeting and was advised that this would be the case.

5. SAMM Project Update on the TBH SPA Visitor Survey

- 5.1 Patrick McKernan updated the Partnership on the TBH SPA Visitor Survey results, with the revised report circulated prior to the meeting. It was noted that the findings reinforced a number of understandings upon which SANGs were founded, relating particularly to the 5km zone of influence, the length of a dog walkers route and the need for sites to be 'close to home'. A short presentation was then given by Footprint Ecology, who were commissioned to undertake the survey work.
- 5.2 Cllr Bush clarified the locations of some of the SANGs referenced within the presentation.
- 5.3 Cllr David Hilton noted that The Lookout, which had seen an increase in visitor numbers, was an attraction aimed at physical activity and so, whilst an increase in visitor numbers there would be negative for the SPA, this was also technically a success in respect of economic accomplishment. Cllr Chris Turrell explained the premise of the Lookout to the Partnership. Cllr David Hilton noted that it couldn't be taken that SANGs were not effective based on one location alone.
- 5.4 Helen Fearnley agreed that external factors could impact upon the locations surveyed and advised that, across the whole data set, the findings were not so statistically significant to show an increase in use of the SPA.
- 5.5 Cllr John Furey advised that whilst the report was good, he considered that the statistics were inconclusive and asked how they could be consolidated to get a clearer picture. Durwyn Lily advised that, to get a better idea of trends, ongoing monitoring using automatic counters would be needed. Notwithstanding this, he did not consider the current 'snapshot approach' to be inconclusive, reiterating that the results showed no statistically significant increase in use. It was questioned whether conclusions could be drawn from the data collected or whether a lack of conclusiveness meant that a more cautious approach needed to be adopted; in particular, it was queried whether any one party could conclude what they wished from the data, to suit their own purposes, in terms of the success of the SANGs. Helen Fearnley reminded Members that the research was not to do with the SANGs, but rather the SPA.

- 5.6 It was noted that no statistical difference was good news, but that the acid test would be to support SPA based research with SANGS based research. It was noted that it would be a long term project to determine the success of SANGS and it must be followed through. Cllr Jonathan Glen echoed these comments and supported the need to build trends, asking what surveys and what locations could feed into this data to achieve this.
- 5.7 Patrick McKernan reminded that SANGS were targeted at addressing the impact of new development.
- 5.8 Cllr Glen advised that he expected visitor numbers to SANGS to increase gradually as a trend over the years as word spread.
- 5.9 Ian Hepburn questioned whether the information collected provided data on detailed street address or postcode only. Durwyn Liley advised that, from the data collected, the Partnership could not pinpoint from exactly where visitors to the SPA had originated, but that the Partnership could get a relatively good idea. Cllr John Furey then sought further clarity on how older postcode data was collected and Durwyn Liley advised that the historic data was imprecise.
- 5.10 The JSPB approved the publication of the TBH SPA visitor survey report as a Natural England Commissioned Report**

6. Hampshire County Council Financial Statement Update

- 6.1 Anne Hibbert presented an update to the Partnership on the financial position of the Thames Basin Heaths Strategic Access Management and Monitoring project. The report asked the Partnership to note the current financial position, consider the transfer of any unused maintenance account balance to the endowment account and consider the investment strategy for the endowment account. Anne Hibbert confirmed that, as the Finance Business Partner for Hampshire County Council, she would not be able to advise on the Endowment.
- 6.2 Cllr Jonathan Glen advised that he was an independent financial advisor and as such declared an interest.
- 6.3 Cllr James Radley noted the need to seek advice in determining the investment strategy for the Endowment Account Fund.
- 6.4 Cllr Furey noted that some Local Authorities, such as Woking, were able to invest monies on authorities' behalf.
- 6.5 Cllr John Edwards queried the decision making process with respect to this Agenda Item.
- 6.6 Cllr Jonathan Glen noted that this would not be a trivial task and queried whether someone should be appointed to undertake the work or whether a sub-committee should be formed.

- 6.7 Cllr Chris Turrell requested whether a report setting out the available financial options could be prepared for the next meeting of the Partnership.
- 6.8 The Partnership agreed that a report setting out the available financial options be prepared for the next meeting of the Partnership.

ACTION: Hampshire County Council.

7. SAMM Budget Paper

- 7.1 Patrick McKernan presented a report in respect to the SAMM Project Budget. The revised income figures were noted and three options were set out for on-going project activity. Option 1 provided for a proposed expenditure level similar to 2013/14. Option 2 proposed an increase in project activity from 2014/15 by implementing SAMM wardening on the SPA. Option 3 proposed the implementation of SAMM wardening from 2015/16.
- 7.2 Cllr Jonathan Glen sought clarification from Patrick McKernan in respect to the financial position of the SAMM project budget; it was advised that the SAMM project budget was not in deficit and was in a better position than when work on SAMM was commenced. Cllr Glen expressed his preference to pursue Option 2, as put forward in the report, as this also had the potential to build upon voluntary input, but considered that the added value needed to be sold to stakeholders. Patrick McKernan advised that further justification could be prepared.
- 7.3 Cllr John Furey supported Cllr Jonathan Glen in promoting Option 2 and a move towards increasing voluntary input. Patrick McKernan confirmed that Natural England was unable to commit to providing full time warden posts at present. Cllr Jonathan Glen revisited the issue of wardening or educational posts.
- 7.4 Cllr Chris Turrell also voiced support for Option 2.
- 7.5 Patrick McKernan sought confirmation that Partnership did not need to be reconvened prior to this matter being determined. It was confirmed that it was within the remit of the Partnership to determine this matter.

7.6 The JSPB agreed to pursue Option 2.

8. Monitoring Update

- 8.1 Agenda Item 7 was noted.

9. Any Other Business

- 9.1 Ian Hepburn advised that he would no longer be attending the Partnership on behalf of the Wildlife Trusts in the South East and expressed thanks to the Partnership. Cllr John Edwards expressed thanks to Ian Hepburn on behalf of the Partnership.

9.2 It is noted that Cllr Chris Turrell was now the representative for Bracknell Forest Council on the Joint Strategic Partnership Board.

9.3 Cllr James Radley advised that Hart District Council would be approaching fellow affected Local Planning Authorities to enquire about operational SANGS, with the purpose of making an assessment in respect of the effectiveness of SANGS and whether they could scale beyond supporting the housing numbers assessed under the South East Plan (SEP).

10. Date of Next Meeting

10.1 A further meeting would be arranged for June 2014.