Minutes of a Meeting of the Thames Basin Heaths Joint Strategic Partnership Board
19 September 2019

Present: Councillor Martin D'Arcy, Waverley Borough Council
Councillor Sharon Galliford, Surrey Heath Borough Council
Councillor Jonathan Glen, Hampshire County Council
Councillor Edward Hawkins, Surrey Heath Borough Council
Councillor David Hilton, Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead
Councillor Marina Munro, Rushmoor Borough Council
Councillor James Radley, Hart Borough Council
Councillor Angus Ross, Wokingham Borough Council
Councillor Chris Turrell, Bracknell Forest Borough Council

In Attendance: Ken Anckorn, Surrey Wildlife Trust
Ann Conquest, Natural England
Isabel Cordwell, Runnymede Borough Council
Paul Druce, Surrey County Council
Matthew Ellis, Waverley Borough Council
Julie Gil, Bracknell Forest Borough Council
Michael Jones, Natural England
Dan Knowles, Guildford Borough Council
Anna Lucas, Hart, Rushmoor and Surrey Heath SPA Mitigation Project
Jane Reeves, Surrey Heath Borough Council
Andrew Smith, Natural England
John Thorne, Rushmoor Borough Council
John Till, RSPB
Jennifer Wadham, Hampshire County Council
Rob West, Natural England

Apologies: Councillor Mike Goodman, Surrey County Council

1 Election of Chairman

RESOLVED that Councillor Hawkins be elected chairman of the Thames Basin Heaths Joint Strategic Partnership Board for the 2019/20 municipal year.

COUNCILLOR HAWKINS IN THE CHAIR

2 Minutes of Previous Meeting

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Thames Basin Heaths Joint strategic Partnership Board held on 8th March 2019 be approved as a correct record.

3 Natural England Hosting Agreement Renewal

The Board received a report setting out proposals to renew the hosting agreement for the Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMM) project.

The hosting fee was an annual fee currently paid to Natural England to cover all the organisational costs of hosting the SAMM project including IT, facilities, human resources, facilities and other corporate and finance costs. However there were a number of

additional direct support staff costs associated with the project which were not currently covered by the £10,160 annual hosting fee including business management, technical input from lead advisors, health and safety, audit, technical support and direct line management support. Analysis of this additional work had found that Natural England was spending approximately £8,000 per annum supporting the SAMM project which was not currently being recouped. To ensure that the costs of the SAMM project were open and transparent it was proposed that these additional costs would in future be billed to the administering authority.

To ensure that the SAMM project was able to cover its costs it was proposed that the hosting agreement fee be adjusted in line with inflation when it was renewed in July 2020. Using the Bank of England inflation calculator it was projected that this would increase the hosting fee to £12,283.

RESOLVED that Natural England continue to host the Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMM) project for a further three years with costings based on the proposed hosting fee and staff costs set out in the report.

4 Strategic Access Management and Monitoring Tariff Uplift

The Board considered a report setting out a proposal to review the tariff currently paid by developers to support the work of the SAMM project.

It was noted that the tariff had been set at £630 per dwelling since the inception of the SAMM Project. The tariff was collected by the relevant Local Planning Authority who then passed it onto Hampshire County Council in their capacity as the administering body for the project.

When the legal agreement was initially signed, it had been agreed that the tariff would be subjected to a 10% increase in 2011/12 and then subsequent tariff increases of 15% would be applied every five years. Discussions at a recent JSPB officers meeting had found a lack of consistency in the way that different Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) had applied these tariff increases with many still basing tariff calculations on the original £630 standard.

The Board was informed that whilst expenditure was relatively straightforward to predict, the tariff income being received each year was much more volatile as developments were completed ahead of schedule. In addition, tariff income was also being received for developments where it was not expected.

It had been acknowledged that each planning authority was at a different stage in their local plan and a supplementary planning document would be required in order to implement changes to the agreed tariffs. It was therefore proposed that Natural England conduct a review of the tariff.

The Board acknowledged that there would be a time when the number of new homes being built would fall to a level where the SAMM tariff received would not be sufficient to maintain the project in perpetuity. Consequently, a clear understanding of what the long term costs of the project would be and how these might be funded in the long term future was required to inform a review of the tariff.

It was suggested that increasing the tariff cost to ensure that it kept pace with inflation could be an initial starting point. It was agreed that reviewing the current situation with regard to the SAMM tariff was appropriate and that a more detailed report would be brought to the Board’s next meeting for consideration.

RESOLVED that:

i. Natural England conduct a review of the tariffs charged to developers by local planning authorities.
ii. Local Planning Authorities send their revised housing projection to Natural England by 15th November 2019.
iii. A report setting out the outcomes of the tariff review and a suggested way forward be brought to the Board's next meeting.

5 Strategic Access Management and Monitoring Project Update

The Board received a report providing an update on the work taking place as part of the SAMM project. The report summarised the projects activities and achievements since the Board's meeting on 8th March 2019 and included updates on staffing, warden activity, visitor surveys, educational work and monitoring activities.

Bird Surveys

Surveys of bird territories showed that whilst nightjar numbers had risen since 2017 (366 in 2018 compared to 351 in 2017) the numbers of Woodlarks and Dartford Warblers recorded both showed a decline with woodlark numbers falling from 164 in 2017 to 112 in 2018 and Dartford Warblers falling from 556 in 2017 to 265 in 2018.

It was thought that there were a number of contributory factors to the decline in Woodlark numbers including the quality and availability of appropriate habitat, availability of food, disturbance of nests and the cold weather in February and March coinciding with the start of the birds' breeding season. The decline in Woodlark numbers was reflected nationally and the National Rare Birds Breeding Panel had reinstated the species on its list of rare birds.

The fall in Dartford Warbler numbers was attributed to the cold weather at the start of the year when the birds were at their most vulnerable.

The SAMM project team was keen to carry out comparison work with other areas to ascertain whether the bird populations had reached the natural limits that the habitats available could support and whether there were other factors that could help boost numbers however this would require additional resources.

Staffing

Following the departure of the project's senior warden in April, the SAMM project team had been restructured to better reflect people's workloads and responsibilities.

The restructure would also enable the employment of a Data Officer who would assume responsibility for data collection, monitoring and reporting; work which was currently being done on a piecemeal basis by external consultants.

Engagement Activities

Work to engage with dog walkers through the Heathland Hounds project continued to be positive with dog owner starting to promote the use of different SANGS amongst themselves and to other walkers that they met.

A new SANGS booklet listing the location of all the SANGs available in the Thames Basin Heaths area and the amenities available at each. The booklet continued to gather positive feedback with many residents making a deliberate to visit as many of the SANGs as they could.

After the success of the inaugural Heath Week in 2018, Heath Week 2019 had taken place between 28th July and 3rd August. Over the course of a week, twenty six events involving eighteen partners had taken place across Berkshire, Hampshire and Surrey. The events aimed at raising public awareness of the heathlands diversity had included a variety of natural history walks and talks, arts and crafts, dog behaviour sessions, wild fire awareness and opportunities to meet the cattle and learn about conservation grazing.

To ensure that the aims and objectives of the SAMM project were communicated as effectively as possible, Natural England's Behavioural Insights Team would be carrying out a controlled trial to research the most effective language and means to effect behaviour change and spread the project's key messages. The information gathered during this trial would then be used to determine how future messages and communications work would be framed to ensure that they had the maximum impact possible.

The Board noted the report and commended the enthusiasm of the SAMM Team and everyone involved in delivering the project on the ground.

RESOLVED that:

i. The restructure of the wardening resource and the recruitment of a project data warden be approved.
ii. The SPA visitor survey be published.
iii. SAMM project activity be noted.
iv. The outcomes of the SANG survey report be noted.
v. The outcomes of the people counter and car park transect surveys be noted.

6 Finance Update

The Board received a report setting out the current financial position of the Thames Basin Heaths Strategic Access and Monitoring Project.

It was noted that as at 31st March 2019 the balance of the Endowment Fund was £10.597million, of which £5.952million was held in investments under the management of Arlingclose, the Board's independent financial advisor. The remaining £4.645million was being held by Hampshire County Council in its capacity as the Administrative Body. A further £1million was held in the Maintenance Fund to pay for project expenditure.

It was projected that a further £973,000 would be added to the Endowment Fund during the 2019/20 financial year, giving an anticipated £5.619million held as cash balance and available to be invested.

Over the next three financial years it was projected that the Endowment Fund would increase to £7.256million by March 2022.

RESOLVED that:

i. The financial position for the year end 31 March 2019, as set out in Appendix 1 of the report, be agreed.

ii. A balance of £1million was the appropriate level for the Maintenance Fund, and that approval be given for any resulting transfers from the Maintenance Fund to the Endowment Fund until the next annual review.
iii. The projected financial position for the three financial years to 31st March 2022 be noted.
iv. The actual cash balance held in the Endowment Fund, as at 31st March 2019, of £4.645million and the projected balance of £7.256million by 31st March 2022 be noted.
v. Arlingclose be asked, in their capacity as the appointed independent financial advisors, to provide further advice on potential future investments to utilise the Endowment Fund balance held by the Administrative Body.

7 Investment Working Group

The Board received a report providing an update on the work of the Investment Working Group, a summary of investment performance to date and the development of an Investment Strategy.

Investment Strategy

The Board was informed that the Investment Strategy had been reviewed by Hampshire County Council's Legal Team and it had been concluded that the Strategy conformed with the SAMM agreement. However, it was made clear that this advice was given to Hampshire County Council (HCC) in respect of HCC's position, and was not intended as legal advice to the JSPB.

It was noted that the Board was investing in pooled funds and would therefore be reliant on the policies that governed those funds to ensure that they did not invest in organisations that exacerbated climate change and any changes to these policies to bring them in line with the stated aims of the Government's Climate Emergency declaration would take time. In the meantime, it was agreed that the matter would be raised with Arlingclose the Board's Advisors.

The Board was reminded that it had agreed that the contract with Arlingclose would be reviewed on an annual basis. If a decision was made to terminate the contract with Arlingclose, then the Board was contractually obliged to provide Arlingclose with written notification of this intent to terminate at least three months before the contract renewal date i.e. by 1st September each year. Consequently, the Board would need to review its contract with Arlingclose at its April meeting.

Investment Performance

It was reported that a total of £6million had been invested across three funds (CCLA property Fund, Kames Diversified Monthly Income Fund and Schroder Income Maximiser Fund) with a return of £84,700 as at 31st March 2019.

It was noted that the loss in the investment made in the CCLA Property Fund was attributed to the need for an initial expenditure on property to be made.

It was agreed that in order to best utilise the balance within the Endowment Fund, the Investment Working Group would meet with Arlingclose to discuss potential future investments. A report outlining these discussions and setting out a proposed way forward would be brought to the Board's next meeting for consideration.

The Board noted that any investments would need to be made in line with the Administering Body's Treasury Management Strategy Statement (TMSS) which was agreed in February each year for the year ahead. Consequently, to enable investments to be incorporated into the TMSS, the Board would need to make a decision on potential investment amounts by November each year.

RESOLVED that:

i. The investment strategy as set out in Appendix 1 of the report, be approved subject to a review of section 7.
ii. The Investment Strategy would be reviewed by December 2020.
iii. The annual timescales for the renewal or termination of the contract with Arlingclose be noted.
iv. Arlingclose be invited to a future meeting.
v. The value of the investments made and the dividends due as at 31st March 2019 be noted.
vi. Arlingclose be asked to provide advice on potential future investments in order to best utilise the balance within the Endowment Fund.
vii. The requirements surrounding investment decisions before any investments can be made by the Administrative Body on behalf of the Joint Strategic Partnership Board be noted.
viii. Section 7 of the Investment Strategy to be reviewed to ensure it took climate change mitigation into account.

8 Hart, Rushmoor and Surrey Heath SPA Project Update

The Board received a presentation on the Hart, Rushmoor and Surrey Heath SPA Project. The presentation included an overview of the project and its scope, a summary of the project's methodology, a progress update and the next steps.

The Board was informed that the project had been initiated by Rushmoor Borough Council after encountering difficulties with the identification of appropriate land for SANG and the recognition that an informed approach needed to be taken in relation to exploring potential alternatives. Working with Surrey Heath and Hart, Rushmoor's Housing Market Area partners, the two year evidence based project would investigate alternative and complementary avoidance and mitigation measures and then explore the practicalities of implementing each of the identified measures. It was stressed that any implementation work would be carried out post project and require the agreement of the relevant authorities.

To date, the project's terms of reference had been agreed and a proforma that would be used to review and assess each of the identified alternative options had been developed. The following alternative options had been identified:

i. SANG Networks
ii. Linear SANG
iii. Enhancement or creation of recreational routes
iv. Smaller SANG/facilities with smaller catchments
v. Larger/Enhanced SANG with larger catchments
vi. Habitat Management/Restoration
vii. Expansion of SAMM project – wardening
viii. Expansion of SAMM Project – Education and Communication
ix. Car parking availability/access
x. Dog control/wardening
xi. Access restriction

Assessment of how each option might be used to mitigate any adverse effects, how the measure might be secured and implemented, a view of the degree of confidence in its success, timescales for delivery, monitoring and enforcement and costs and impact on viability would now take place.

The Board noted the update.

9 Any Other Business

SANG Delivery Framework

It was noted that under the terms of the SANG Delivery Framework developments of ten or more dwellings required the SANG to be provided within a set distance of the development; however, the Framework was not specific on where SANG for developments of less than ten dwellings should be located. It was noted that the intention was that SANG should be provided within the designated SPA area however clarification on the matter would be sought.

For clarification on this point, the Thames Basin Heath SPA Delivery Framework sets out:

Developments of less than 10 dwellings do not need to be within a specified distance of SANG provided that a sufficient quantity and quality of SANG land to cater for the consequent increase in population is identified and available in that district or agreed in an adjoining district, and functional in advance of completion

The reason for the approach taken is set out in the following footnote:

The Assessor recommended that only new residential development of 10 dwellings or more would have an impact on the SPA. The Board considers that this approach fails to recognise the longer term cumulative effect of small-scale developments, however accepts his conclusion that individually developments of less than 10 dwellings will not have a significant impact on the SPA. Thus this Delivery Framework recommends a more flexible approach to the provision of SANG in relation to smaller developments. The threshold of 10 is identified on the basis of the definition of major development in the GDPO 1995.

10 Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting of the Thames Basin Heaths Joint Strategic Partnership board would take place on Thursday 30th April 2020 at 10am.