

## **Minutes of a Meeting of the Thames Basin Heaths Joint Strategic Partnership Board 16 November 2022**

**Present:** Councillor Chris Turrell, Bracknell Forest Borough Council (Chairman)  
Councillor David Cornish, Wokingham Borough Council  
Councillor Martin D'Arcy, Waverley Borough Council  
Councillor Jonathan Glen, Hampshire County Council  
Councillor Marisa Heath, Surrey County Council  
Councillor David Hilton, Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead  
Councillor Adrian Newell, Rushmoor Borough Council  
Councillor Victoria Wheeler, Surrey Heath Borough Council  
Councillor Sylvia Whyte, Runnymede Borough Council

**Advisors in Attendance:** Daria Dadum, Natural England  
Tom Hayward, BBOWT  
Robert Hutchinson, Surrey Wildlife Trust  
Victoria Huth, Natural England  
Greg Readings, Arlingclose  
Stephen Rudd, Natural England  
Ruth Shelton, Natural England  
Zoe Shorter, Natural England  
Jack Thompson, RSPB

**Officers in Attendance:** Simon Cridland, Bracknell Forest Borough Council  
Julie Gil, Bracknell Forest Borough Council  
Jennifer Wadham, Hampshire County Council

**Observers:** Councillor Jerry Hyman, Waverley Borough Council

**Apologies:** Councillor James Radley, Hart District Council  
Councillor Karen Randolph, Elmbridge Borough Council

### **10 Minutes of Previous Meeting**

#### Minute 3: Strategic Access Management and Monitoring Project Update

It was agreed that officers would be asked to confirm that annual tariff increases in line with inflation were being implemented. It was noted that some partner authorities would need to revise Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) or produce new SPDs to facilitate this. Board members were asked to check with their authorities the status of the tariff increases.

#### Minute 4: Natural England Strategic Overview

It was reported that this item would be deferred to a future meeting following the departure of Mark Turner, from the SAMM Team. It was requested that once they were in post, the new post holder was to produce a report on the matter within the first month of their appointment.

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the Thames Basin Heaths (TBH) Joint Strategic Partnership Board (JSPB) held on 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2022 be confirmed as being a correct record.

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### **Strategic Access Management and Monitoring Project Update**

Ruth Shelton, Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMM) Project Manager, Natural England, gave a presentation in respect of the work taking place as part of the SAMM project. The presentation summarized the project team's activities since the Board's last meeting on 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2022 and included updates on staffing, wardening activity, educational work and monitoring activity.

It was reported that recruitment for next year's seasonal wardens was now underway with the expectation that the SAMM Team would recruit 6 full time seasonal wardens to work between 1<sup>st</sup> March 2023 to 1<sup>st</sup> September 2023. Recruitment for both seasonal and year round roles in 2022 had been difficult both for the SAMM Team and the wider conservation sector during the past year and work was taking place to explore how potential applicants might be encouraged to apply for roles within the SAMM Team in future years for example through the use of job shadowing and work experience; notwithstanding this a number of seasonal wardens that had worked on the SAMM Project previously had expressed interest in working for the team again in 2023.

Between June 2022 and September 2022 a total of 1,826.72 hours of wardening activity had been delivered, the wardening team had 5,537 interactions with members of the public and 27 pitstops and 49 events had been held across the TBH area. In July 2022 the number of interactions had been almost double those in 2019, 2,415 compared to 1,311 with only 12% more hours wardened in 2022 compared to 2019.

Heath Week 2022 which had run from 25<sup>th</sup> to 31<sup>st</sup> July 2022 had again been popular; over the course of the week, 27 events had been hosted by both the SAMM Team and partners. In late October Halloween events were held in Yateley, Wildmoor Heath and Lightwater Country Park and the Team would be working with Surrey County Council to run Christmas Wreath making workshops across the area. Looking forward to 2023, work was underway to progress Heath Week 2023 and the Team was working with Surrey Fire and Rescue Service on Easter Fire Week, a new venture aimed at raising awareness of wild fires. Following complaints about litter, originating from open bins in HMP Coldingley in Bisley, blowing across Bisley Common, a litter pick had been held and one of the seasonal wardens had worked with the Prison Governor to find a solution to the problem including moving the bins inside the prison fence line and the employment of a full time litter picker.

The Team was also developing better relationships on the ground with community volunteer groups including Horsell Common Preservation Society, Surrey Wildlife Trust at Whitmoor and Ockham and Surrey Countryside partnership at Bullswater and links had been made with the owner of a collection of vintage fire engines that would be displayed alongside modern fire engines at future wildfire awareness events, to ameliorate any disappointment if the Fire Service was required to attend an emergency and was not able to be present.

The Education Programme continued to be developed with 90 sessions being delivered to 3,145 children and adults between 1<sup>st</sup> January and 31<sup>st</sup> October 2022. In October 2022, the Team participated in the Junior Citizen programme for the first time engaging with almost 700 children.

The Team was also looking at ways to develop the Access Management and Monitoring Partnership meetings and make them more valuable to partners. The quarterly meetings with landowners and land managers provided partners with an opportunity for networking and education with hybrid meetings themed on a particular subject for example habitat development and wild fires. The last meeting had been attended by 23 people from 17 organisations. A closed area of the JSPB's website had been developed specifically for partners and this had received positive feedback with Surrey County Council exploring the possibility of developing a similar area on their website.

Data collected from the visitor counters showed that whilst visitor numbers to the Special Protection Area (SPA) had fallen since the lifting of Government pandemic restrictions the number of visitors continued to be higher than pre-pandemic visitor numbers. It was not yet clear whether the increase in numbers was due to an increase in the number of individuals visiting the SPA or whether it was due to a change in behaviour for example repeat visits from particular individuals; it was hoped that the 2023 visitor survey would help answer the question.

Arising from the Board's questions and comments the following points were noted:

- Concerns that the wrong stones had been used on the paths along the Esso pipeline which meant that horses were no longer able to use them and the new paths were wider than the ones they replaced were noted. It was agreed that the matter would be followed up.
- It was acknowledged that the education programme promoted the SPA which in turn would encourage people to visit however it was considered that educating people about the SPA would give them a greater understanding of the rarity of the habitat which in turn would encourage people to protect it.
- It was confirmed that Heathland Hounds linked with Fire Service Dog wardens and the K9 patrols.
- It was agreed that data on the use of Chobham Common would be shared with Councillor Wheeler.

The Board noted the update and commended the work of the SAMM Team.

## **12 Thames Basin Heaths Strategic Access Management and Monitoring Project Financial Update.**

The Board received a report summarising the current financial position of the SAMM project.

It was reported that the projected balance in the Endowment Fund on the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023 was £17.279million, of which £13.632 million is expected to be held in investments and £3.647million held in cash.

At year end, 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023, Hampshire County Council, in its capacity of Administrative Body, was expecting to receive £3.061million of income for the year. Of this £2.666million would come from tariff income collected by Local Planning Authorities, £317,264 forecast dividend income and £78,000 forecast interest due on cash balances held. In the first six months of the 2022/23 financial year, a total of £1.365million of tariff income had been received, approximately 50% of the full year forecast. Due to the impact that rising inflation was having on index linked fees, it was forecast that year end expenditure would be slightly over budget at £575,768.

Based on the information provided by partners, it was projected that £2.5million of tariff income would be received in the 2023/24 and 2024/25 financial years taking the projected tariff income to £28.623million by March 2025. Current projections saw the total tariff income increasing by a further £6.535million to £35.158million during the 2028/29 financial year, with no further tariff income receipts expected after that date.

**RESOLVED** that:

- i. The projected financial position for the three financial years to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025 is noted.
- ii. The projected balance held within the Endowment Fund at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023 of £17.279million, consisting of £13.632million held in investments and £3.647million in cash, and the projected cash balance of £8.678million before any further investment by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025 is noted.

### **13 Investment Working Group Update**

The Board received a report providing an update on the work of the JSPB's Investment Working Group.

It was reported that since the JSPB's last meeting, the Investment Working Group had met twice when there had been significant discussion about the recent changes in the economic climate, the significant increase in inflation levels and the impacts that these might have on the Board's investments both in the short term and the long term. It was acknowledged that it had been agreed that investments would be made initially due to the historically low interest rates which exposed partners to the risk that it might not be possible to continue the SAMM Project in

perpetuity and the Board was investing with a view to the long term future of the project.

The Board was reminded that Arlingclose had been contracted to provide financial advice to the JSPB on a twelve month rolling contract until the Board gave written notice to terminate the contract at least three months prior to the contract renewal date, i.e. by 1<sup>st</sup> September each year.

Concern by some Board Members that the Board's adopted Responsible Investment Policy did not accurately define environmental, social and corporate governance and the role they played in responsible investment was noted. It was agreed that this would be followed up by the Investment Working Group separately.

The Board was reminded that because it was not a separate legal entity any investments approved by the JSPB were in actuality made by Hampshire County Council in its capacity as the Administrative Body and any investments would need to comply with Hampshire County Council's approved Treasury Management Strategy.

**RESOLVED** that:

- i. The existing Investment Strategy, as set out in Appendix 1 of the report, be noted
- ii. The existing Responsible Investing Policy, as set out in Appendix 2 of the report be noted.
- iii. The annual timescales for terminating the contract with Arlingclose be noted.
- iv. The amounts available for investment, as set out in Table 3 and the projected cashflow scenarios set out in Appendix 3 of the report be noted.
- v. The JSPB note the requirements and practical implications and limitations specifically outlined in paragraphs 37-44 of the report, surrounding any investment decisions made by the JSPB before any investments can be made by the Administrative Body on behalf of the JSPB.

#### **14 Exclusion of Public and Press**

**RESOLVED** that the public and press be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of the Financial Advisor's presentation as it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

- (3) Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

#### **15 Investment Update**

Greg Readings, Arlingclose, gave a presentation in respect of the performance of the investments made by the Board to ensure the long term financial security of the SAMM project.

The Board was reminded that to date a total of £11.7million had been invested in a variety of funds recommended by Arlingclose, the Board's appointed financial advisors and investment of a further £4.2million in CCLA Diversified Income Fund and Fidelity Global Enhanced Income Fund was pending. An unrealized capital loss of £940,891 was noted however it was stressed that this money would only be lost in the event that the holdings were sold.

It was noted that interest rate increases allied to changes made to the structure of the CCLA Diversified Income Fund meant that it no longer aligned with the Board's stated income targets and it was recommended that the pending investment of £3.2million agreed by the Board on 19<sup>th</sup> November 2020 should be suspended and the funds returned to the cash balance and invested elsewhere. Following delays to the opening of the account with Fidelity Global Enhanced Income Fund it was recommended that the pending £1million investment agreed by the Board on 18<sup>th</sup> November 2021 should be put on hold and the funds invested elsewhere.

It was acknowledged that the current economic climate and the predicted recession would cause a fall in investment income however it was stressed that the Board's investments were a long term investment aimed at ensuring the continuation of the SAMM project in perpetuity. It was also noted that falling share prices meant it was possible to buy a larger number of shares than might otherwise be possible.

**RESOLVED** that the Thames Basin Heaths Joint Strategic Partnership Board (JSPB) agrees:

- i. To instruct Hampshire County Council (HCC) as Administrative Body not to make the pending £3.2m investment in CCLA Diversified Income Fund, and to instead return these funds to the cash balance available for investment as recommended by Arlingclose. Thereby rescinding the original instruction by the Board for investment on the JSPB's behalf at the 19<sup>th</sup> November 2020 meeting.
- ii. Recognising the delay in opening the Fidelity account, to instruct Hampshire County Council (HCC) as Administrative Body to put on hold the pending £1.0m investment in the Fidelity Global Enhanced Income Fund originally approved by the Board for investment on the JSPB's behalf at the 18<sup>th</sup> November 2021 meeting, and to return these funds to the cash balance available for investment as recommended by Arlingclose.
- iii. To instruct Hampshire County Council (HCC) as Administrative Body to make on the JSPB's behalf the following investments as recommended by Arlingclose as soon as practically possible within the constraints of the Administrative Body's own governance:
  - £1.5m Aegon Diversified Monthly Income Fund
  - £1.8m Ninety One Diversified Income Fund
- iv. To instruct Hampshire County Council (HCC) as Administrative Body that once the year end position is known for the 2022/23 financial year, to make on the JSPB's behalf the following investment as recommended by Arlingclose as soon as practically possible within the constraints of the Administrative Body's own governance:
  - The remaining balance available within the Endowment Fund as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023 in the Fidelity Global Enhanced Income Fund, subject to a minimum investment of £500,000 and maximum

investment of £4.0m. This investment to encompass and not be in addition to the £1.0m approved investment in this fund put on hold above.

The Board noted:

- 1) That the Administrative Body (Hampshire County Council) cannot provide financial advice and will not be involved in decision making, and therefore accepts no responsibility for any decisions made by the JSPB.
- 2) That the Administrative Body (Hampshire County Council) will not progress making the investments until the minutes documenting the investment instructions have been approved by the JSPB. Approval by e-mail from a majority of the JSPB members will be taken as sufficient evidence that the minutes accurately reflect the instructions of the JSPB.

#### NOTES

Councillor Jonathan Glen, Hampshire County Council, abstained from the vote due to his being an elected representative of the Administrative Body.

Councillor Sylvia Whyte, Runnymede Borough Council, abstained from the vote due to this being the only meeting of the Board she had attended.

## **16 Dates of Future Meetings**

It was agreed that future meetings of the Thames Basin Heath Joint Strategic Partnership Board would take place on the following dates:

- Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> July 2023 at 10am
- Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> December 2023 at 10am.

It was agreed that, for the benefit of new members, a brief precis of the purpose of the SAMM Project and the Board's role would be included in the agenda of the July meeting.

The Chairman thanked all those councillors who were not planning to stand for re-election in 2023 for their support.