

**Thames Basin Heaths  
Joint Strategic Partnership  
3 March 2017  
Council Chamber, Surrey Heath Borough Council  
Notes of Meeting**

**Present:**

Board Members

Councillor Graham Cundy	Woking Borough Council
Councillor Martin Tennant	Rushmoor Borough Council
Councillor Karen Randolph	Elmbridge Borough Council
Councillor Moira Gibson	Surrey Heath Borough Council
Councillor David Hilton	Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead
Councillor Mike Goodman	Surrey County Council
Councillor Gail Kingerley	Runnymede Borough Council
Councillor Angus Ross	Wokingham Forest Council
Councillor Chris Turrell	Bracknell Forest Council
Councillor James Radley	Hart Borough Council
Councillor Brian Adams	Waverley Borough Council

Advisory Board Members

Ken Anckorn	Surrey Wildlife Trust
Heather Lewis	Surrey Wildlife Trust
Heather Richards	RSPB
Andrew Smith	Regional Manager, Natural England
Simon Thompson	Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMM) Project
Jennifer Wadham	Hampshire County Council (Finance)

Officers/Observers

Julie Gil	Bracknell Forest Council
Andy Glencross	Wokingham Borough Council
Jane Ireland	Surrey Heath Borough Council
Judith Jenkins	Elmbridge Borough Council
Gail Wootton	Waverley Borough Council

**1. Apologies**

- 1.1 Apologies were received from Cllr Phillip Brooker (Guildford Borough Council), Ernest Amoako (Woking Borough Council) and Ian Church (Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead).

**2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting and Matters Arising**

- 2.1 Attendance – It was noted that Councillor Gail Kingerley (Runnymede Borough Council), Georgina Pacey (Runnymede Borough Council) and Gail Wootton (Waverley Borough Council) had attended the previous meeting. It was agreed that the minutes be amended accordingly.

### **3. Strategic Access Management and Monitoring Report**

- 3.1 SAMM Project Manager – Andrew Smith, Regional Manager for Natural England, reported that Simon Thompson would be leaving his post to take up a new challenge within the Organisation, project managing Natural England’s input into the expansion of Heathrow Airport.
- 3.2 The recruitment processes for the Project Manager post had commenced and Natural England would ensure that a proper handover period was factored into these arrangements. Simon Thompson would also accompany the new SAMM Project Manager to the first meeting of each body supported by the Manager post.
- 3.3 The Chairman thanked Simon for his considerable input to the SAMM project and for his full and informative reports to the Board.
- 3.4 Staffing – Simon Thompson reminded the Board that 6 full time wardens were supported by 6 seasonal wardens each year. 4 seasonal wardens had been appointed and were undergoing training, with a further 2 to be appointed.
- 3.5 Wardening – The project provided for a warden service on the SPA 7 days a week, from 7.30 a.m. to 7.00 p.m. (daylight hours permitting). In the previous year, this had amounted to over 1,000 hours on site and over 1,350 interactions. It was noted that the Autumn and Winter numbers were always lower than in Spring/Summer.
- 3.6 SANGs Visitor Surveys – As part of the monitoring role agreed in May 2016, SANGs surveys had been used at 16 sites during Autumn and Winter 2016/17. The results were being analysed and would be reported at the next Board meeting.
- 3.7 From the data already reviewed it appeared that positive indicators would include convenience, being close to home locations and well surfaced paths, whilst poor surfaces; particularly if they were waterlogged and insufficient dog waste bins on routes had a negative impact. It was considered that the installation of dry paths would encourage visitors away from SPA land towards SANGs.
- 3.8 In response to Member queries, Simon Thompson agreed to consider the inclusion in future surveys of a question on why people thought that SANGs had been created.

#### **Action:**

- (i) Report to next meeting on SANGs Visitors’ Survey analysis; and**
- (ii) Consider including, in the next SANGs Survey, a question seeking peoples’ understanding of why SANGs had been created.**

3.9 Access to MOD SPA Land – Access to MOD land was currently on an accompanied basis only. Negotiations with the MOD seemed to be moving forward and the Board would be updated on progress.

**Action: Progress report to next JSPB meeting.**

3.10 Access to Crown Estates Land – Simon Thompson reported that, despite attempts to engage with Crown Estates, that Body would not agree to Warden access to its land. Whilst local staff were very supportive, senior decision makers were blocking progress.

**Action: Crown Estates to be invited to attend future meetings to explain their lack of cooperation.**

3.11 Communications, Promotion and Events -

(i) Website – The Partnership website had gone live and could be accessed at [www.tbhpartnership.org.uk](http://www.tbhpartnership.org.uk) .

(ii) SANGs Directory – An A5 booklet entitled “Greenspace on your doorstep”, subtitled “Discover great places for circular walks I the Thames Basin, had been produced, based on material developed for the website and would be handed out by Wardens.

Simon Thompson agreed to arrange for quantities of the leaflets to be circulated to Councils for onward distribution to resources such as libraries.

**Action: Circulate copies of “Greenspace on your doorstep” to participating Councils for onward distribution through resources such as libraries.**

(iii) Heathland Hounds – This dog-owner focussed initiative would be launched in March 2017, as another mechanism to encourage positive behaviour, both on the SPA and elsewhere. This project would include guided walks on the SPA, highlighting ecology and site history.

It was noted that dog fouling had become a significant issue on a number of SPA sites. Wardens already handed out bags, but evidence suggested that many visitors would not carry the bags any distance for proper disposal. The project would draw attention to the human health, animal health and site ecology impact of uncollected dog waste.

Noting Members’ concerns on professional dog walkers visiting SPA land/SANGs with upwards of 5 dogs, Simon Thompson reported that the Project had based its maximum of 5 dogs per walker on the advice of the Kennel Club.

Simon Thompson reported that some professional dog walkers were supporting the Heathland Hounds initiative. He agreed to look at targeting dog obedience classes for additional publicity.

**Action: Investigate targeting dog obedience classes to spread the Projects messages of responsible use of SPA/SANGs.**

- (iv) SPA Guided Tours - Members noted the need to consider sensitivities around guided tours of the SPA lands. It was recognised that the majority of tours would be on SANGs and that any guided tours of the SPA lands would be primarily focussed on education.
- (v) Ground Nesting Birds – With the exception of sites which already had permanent signs and would be captured in due course, it had been agreed to standardise publicity on the timing of the ground nesting birds sensitive period at 1 February to 15 September. Land managers had agreed to the Project putting up appropriate signage.
- (vi) School based education – Simon Thompson reported that the Project had agreed to take on the schools education programme previously operated by BBOWT with funding from Bracknell Forest Borough Council. The whole programme would be run as a one-off from September 2017 and would be used to inform proposals for future years.

There were 3 options currently under consideration:

1. Roll out the current model – unlikely due to the resource/funding intense implications;
2. A touring project covering a small number of schools (probably 3 maximum) in specific Local Authorities at a time; and/or
3. Short presentations at school assemblies, rather than formal class sessions – it was suggested that this could be achieved within existing resources.

Whilst favouring Option 3, Members noted that a number of schools already held materials on ecology. It was likely that at least some schools would take Project material and use it as part of training on the ecology.

3.12 SPA Monitoring -

- (i) Automatic people counter installation – The installation of people counters on MOD land had been slightly delayed due to difficulties obtaining a Statement of Known Hazards, given the need for minor excavations to install the necessary posts.

Data for the period March to March would be analysed to coincide with the bird breeding season and data analysis would commence in April/May 2017.

- (ii) Car Park Points – The Project continued to monitor car park transects across the SPA on a monthly basis and an analysis would be presented at the next meeting.

In response to Member queries, Simon Thompson noted that most SANGs had car parking facilities and that those which did not tended to be very early models.

- (iii) SANGs Criteria - Members noted that the SANGs criteria had remained fairly well unchanged for some time and agreed that a review should be considered.

**Action: Consider full review of SANGs criteria.**

- 3.13 SAMM Project Budget – Further to the paper from Hampshire County Council, Simon Thompson reported on variations from the projected spend for the 2016/17 financial year, highlighting in particular:

- (i) Staff Costs – These were below that forecast due to turnover, including full-time and part-time staff and the retirement of the Senior Warden, who was on the top of the salary scale for the post, due to length of service, but was replaced by an officer at the bottom of the pay scale.
- (ii) Programme Costs – These were likely to be below what had been projected, due to people counting data analysis being delayed till 2017/18. A number of people counters had been damaged through vandalism or water ingress, but these had been replaced by sensors which were more robust.

**Resolved, that the report be noted and any resulting actions, as indicated above, be progressed.**

#### **4. 2016 Bird Survey**

- 4.1 Simon Thompson reported the findings of a 2016 bird survey on the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area, noting in particular that Nightjars had retained their numbers in comparison to previous years. Dartford Warblers had suffered a slight decline, but population numbers were still considered to be healthy. However, there was a notable decrease in the Woodlark population.
- 4.2 Ground nesting numbers peaked in 2014. Following a decline in 2015/16, a significant level of habitat management work had been undertaken by land managers, including changes to grazing regimes and woodland clearance, and, given the impact of habitat availability, it was hoped that improvements in numbers would be seen in future surveys.

- 4.3 It was considered that Nightjars had fared better because they were migratory birds and less habitat-dependent. It was, however, noted that while Nightjar numbers were slightly up on 2015, other trans-Saharan migrants, such as cuckoos, had declined in the same period.
- 4.4 The potential for larger sites to suffer under-recording was recognised and it was considered that the late frosts in early 2016 could have contributed to reductions recorded.
- 4.5 Although there were a number of similar surveys across the UK, most national data was about 10 years out of date and funding for national studies had effectively dried up. Simon Thompson suggested that comparable data was collected in Dorset. He agreed to link with Dorset colleagues and bring comparator data/trend information to the next meeting.
- 4.6 Members noted that, when the current arrangements had been put in place, habitat development had not been included as an area which could attract developer contributions. It was agreed that, at the next meeting, the Board should re-visit this decision, including a review of the basis for the original decision and a comparison of legal advice when the position was agreed and now.

**Actions:**

- (i) A report be submitted to the next meeting on comparator data/trend information from Dorset; and**
- (ii) The original decision to exclude habitat development from attracting developer contributions be reviewed and a report submitted to the next meeting, including legal advice when the decision was taken and now.**

**5. Financial Report**

- 5.1 Jenny Wadham, Principal Accountant from Hampshire County Council, presented an update on the financial position of the Thames Basin Heaths SAMM and seeking Board guidance on whether independent advisors should be appointed to invest some or all of the funds held within the Endowment account.
- 5.2 As at 31 March 2016, there was £2.693 million in the Endowment Fund, with £525,205 in the Maintenance Fund. It was projected that a further £1.857 would be added to the Endowment Fund in 2016/17 and that the fund could rise to £7.058 million by 31 March 2019.
- 5.3 Jenny Wadham noted that, should the board be minded to invest monies generated in the 2016/17 financial year, a total of £4.550 million should be available.

- 5.4 Members noted that , whilst any balances remaining in the Maintenance Fund at the end of 2016/17 could be transferred to the Endowment Fund, this option would need further consideration.
- 5.5 Councillor Mike Goodman reported that CCL, independent financial advisors, already worked with Hampshire County Council on investment advice. He reminded Members that it had previously been agreed that he, Councillor Moira Gibson and Councillor David Hilton be tasked with investigation investment options. He proposed that this small sub-group meet with CCL and Jenny Wadham to consider investment options and to report back to the next Board meeting.

**Resolved, that**

- (i) The current financial position and projected financial position for the 3 years to 31 March 2019 be noted;**
- (ii) The proposed transfer of any unused Maintenance Fund balances to the Endowment Fund be deferred for further consideration; and**
- (iii) A Sub-Group comprising Councillors Moira Gibson, Mike Goodman and David Hilton, be authorised to meet with CCL Investment Advisors and Jenny Wadham of Hampshire County Council, to consider and report back to the next meeting on investment options.**

**6. Date of Next Meeting**

- 6.1 It was agreed that proposals on a date/time for the next meeting be circulated by e-mail.