

**Thames Basin Heaths
Joint Strategic Partnership
25 February 2015
Council Chamber, Surrey Heath Borough Council**

Notes of Meeting

Present:

Board Members

Cllr Graham Cundy	Woking Borough Council
Cllr Roland Dibbs	Rushmoor Borough Council
Cllr John Furey	Surrey County Council
Cllr Jonathan Glen	Hampshire County Council
Cllr David Hilton	Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead
Cllr Chris Turrell	Bracknell Forest Borough Council
Cllr James Radley	Hart District Council
Cllr Geoff Woodger	Runnymede Borough Council

Advisory Board Members

Ken Ancorn	Surrey Wildlife Trust
Mary Tomlinson	Natural England
Clive Chatters	Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust (Also representing BBOWT and SWT)
Jennifer Wadham	Hampshire County Council (Finance)
Simon Thompson	Natural England
Marc Turner	Natural England

Officers/Observers

Ernest Amoako	Woking Borough Council
Katie Bailey	Rushmoor Borough Council
Sarah Veasey	Elmbridge Borough Council
Paul Druce	Surrey County Council
Phillip Gill	Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead
Julie Gil	Bracknell Forest Council
Jane Ireland	Surrey Heath Borough Council
Dan Knowles	Guildford Borough Council
Graham Ritchie	Wokingham Borough Council
Gareth Williams	Waverley Borough
Wai Po Poon	Woking Borough Council

1. Apologies

1.1 Apologies have been received from:

Cllr Moira Gibson (Chairman, Surrey Heath Borough Council), Cllr Mike Goodman (Surrey County Council), Cllr Peter Isherwood (Waverley Borough Council), Cllr Angus Ross (Wokingham Borough Council), Carrie Temple (RSPB), Kate Ashbrook (Open Space Society), Richard Ford (Runnymede Borough Council).

Councillor Cundy chaired the meeting in the absence of Councillor Gibson.

2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting and Matters Arising

2.1 The minutes of the previous meeting, held on 30 October 2014, were agreed.

Comments regarding the minutes were as follows:

- SANGS Review - page 3 — Members were advised that the review was on track for a draft to be prepared for June 2015 and the report submitted in July.
- Heathland Restoration - page 5 paragraph 6.6 — it was noted that the restoration of woodland areas were not SANGS.
- Any other Business – page 6 paragraph 7.3 – it was noted that Cllr James Radley was not present at the meeting on 30 October. Cllr Stephen Parker had been in attendance instead.

3. SAMM Project Update/SANGS

3.1 The recruitment of the staff for the SAMM project was advised, with three out of five posts filled. The two unfilled posts would be advertised again shortly. Two posts were accepted but withdrawn when the previous employers offered a significantly improved employment package. This had highlighted shortcomings with regard to the recruitment time line. This would be reviewed and streamlined when trying to recruit further warden posts in the future.

3.2 The wardens would commence their work on the SPA by next week with a view to locating the wardens to areas where they would be visible to a maximum number of people. The focus would be on heavily recreational sites, particularly at weekends and early mornings. The wardens would also meet with SSSI Officer's and land owners to consult regarding SAMM issues; to encourage the focus on recreation being moved away from sensitive areas.

3.3 The warden's work vehicles would be left on site after work hours. If they were taken home it would become a taxable item. It was important to ensure that there would be no constraint on the delivery of the project. There would be three branded vans on site once all wardens were employed. It was suggested that a letter be sent to HMRC in case there was a possibility of a tax dispensation with regards to the warden's vehicles.

3.4 Consideration was given to outsourcing the employment of the wardens to other organisations, perhaps to SWT. Organisations like this would be on site and available. Natural England suggested the wardens could be seconded to another

organisation, which would allow working with partners with a presence 'on the ground'. However, it was noted that Natural England's agreement was set up so only they could draw down funds.

- 3.5 SANGS Review – tenders had been received and they would be reviewed this week. The successful tender would be notified next week. It was re-iterated that the draft report would be available in June with a final report being submitted in July. There would be an analysis of all the SANG visitor surveys to date; post codes would also be gathered from visitors so an analysis could be carried out to see how far people travelled to the SANGS. It was noted that Councils had access to data in the SANGS in their areas which could be shared. The SANGS guidelines would also be reviewed. There had also been a proposal that the monitoring of the SANGS visitor surveys be taken over by the SAMM project.
- 3.6 Automatic Counter installation was complete across locations in the SPA, except on MOD land. The MOD was not entirely comfortable with the counters on their land, but there was confidence that installation would go ahead in April. A map would be circulated to members of the partnership which would identify the location of all the automatic counters. The counters held data for up to a year but the information would be downloaded at least every six months. The download time would take about ten minutes. The information was not able to be transmitted but would have to be physically downloaded by wardens.
- 3.7 The figures for the annual SPA wide bird survey were all positive. There were increases in all three bird populations. The increase in the Woodlark could be attributed to the habitat restoration work which had been carried out. The Dartford Warbler and Nightjar figures were probably more attributed to the mild winter in 2012/13. It was suggested that the bird population be looked at after the wardens had been in post for a year, to see whether their work would have an impact on the populations. This would be considered. In addition the breeding success would be another indicator regarding the warden's work.

It was also suggested that some positive PR could be carried out in view of the increased bird populations.

It was noted that it would be useful to have historical data on the bird populations. Data was available from 2002 and it was agreed that this would be circulated to the partnership members in the form of a table.

- 3.8 The SAMM project objective was discussed and also the key actions to be carried out in order to reach the objective. It was commented that awareness needed to be looked at more widely and not just in the SPA. It was also mentioned that the first two bullet points under 'Measurable Performance Indicators' could be combined. It was noted that a web page and Facebook page had not been developed yet but this was being developed. Once the web page had been rolled out, it was mentioned that it would be useful for Local Authorities to add a link to this web page on their own websites.

- 3.9 The sensitivities of local wildlife needed to be recognised particularly with regard to new residents, including location of visitor paths, car parks and the possibility of designated routes for residents to follow on SPA land. It was noted that Councils had detailed knowledge of their own areas and could provide valuable information and skills when educating residents. It was commented that a vast majority of users on the SPAs would probably be dog walkers, who would need to be made aware of the sensitive areas.
- 3.10 Natural England had details of the nesting locations for the past 10 years. This information would be made available to the wardens.

Resolved that:

- i) the SAMM project activity update be noted;**
- ii) the proposed SAMM project actions and measures of success be noted; and**
- iii) the suggested measure of success for the SAMM project was considered.**

4. Hampshire County Council Financial Statement Update

- 4.1 Cllr Jonathan Glenn declared an interest as he had been a financial advisor for an IFA Group and would leave the room during the consideration of the recommendation to seek the services of a financial advisor.
- 4.2 The financial statement was considered. It was clarified that funds from the endowment fund would be needed to fund the wardens' salary. The projected income for 2014/15 was significantly lower than the budgeted £868,000 but this was offset by the reduction in expenditure due to the further two full time wardens and no seasonal wardens being employed.
- 4.3 With regard to paragraph 2.7 which outlined the annual expenditure projections, Cllr Furey felt that the 10 seasonal wardens would be best employed now as per the budget, with the numbers dropping to 8. This would ensure that the seasonal staff would be recruited at the level of income and not eat into the endowment fund. After discussion it was suggested that a level of funding be made available for when Natural England felt it was necessary to employ extra wardens.
- 4.4 Consideration was given to local authority pension funds which were more likely to produce better interest rate returns (currently 0.5% bank rate). Jenny Wadham would go back to Hampshire County Council and enquire whether they could consider taking on the endowment fund at a better interest rate. Other members would also ask their respective county pension funds about interest rates. Having considered this Jenny advised that the position at the moment allowed easy movement between endowment and investment funds as the money was located in

one place. If the monies were moved to a dedicated investment account this could make transferrals more difficult.

- 4.5 If the full complement of wardens was recruited and the income levels went down there would be the danger of staff being made redundant; this was another issue to consider.
- 4.6 To move the debate forward with regard to the employment of the wardens, it was suggested that a steering group consisting of 3 members of the partnership be established to consider the employment of wardens. After further consideration it was proposed by Cllr John Furey and seconded by Cllr James Radley, that 10 seasonal wardens be recruited for 2016/17 and 2017/18 and the projective expenditure to come out of the endowment fund.
- 4.7 It was suggested that applying for charity or Trust status could be considered. Cllr Glenn advised that he would look into charity or trust status.
- 4.8 It was also advised that the endowment accounts would be included in an appendix for the next meeting. Natural England Accounts could also be made available.
- 4.9 With regard to the procurement of the services of an independent financial advisor, this would be held in abeyance until the investigations had been carried out regarding the use of local authority pension funds.

Resolved that:

- i) The current financial position and projected financial position for the three financial years to 31 March 2017 be noted;**
- ii) The transfer of any unused Maintenance Account balance to the Endowment Account was considered;**
- iii) the use of pension funds for the use of the investment of the Endowment Account fund be investigated and the results be forwarded to the partnership via the Chairman;**
- iv) Investigating the services of an independent financial advisor be held in abeyance until responses from local authority pension funds are received.**

5. Any Other Business

- 5.1 Some Councils advised that they did not have a Local Plan which meant that CIL or S106 payments could not be used. Other local authorities which also did not have a local plan advised that the developer could buy SANGS from another developer of local authority. Another Council without a local plan did use CIL but informed the partnership that this process was difficult.
- 5.2 Natural England would circulate an updated note on CIL to the partnership via the Chairman and to the Thames Basin Heath offices.

5.3 Thanks were expressed to Woking Borough Council for hosting the meeting and to Cllr Cundy who stepped in as Chairman.

6. Date of Next Meeting

6.1 A further meeting would be arranged for mid to late July, the venue to be confirmed.