

Appendix 2 SAMM Update Natural England

THAMES BASIN HEATHS
JOINT STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP BOARD

Date: 27th November 2015

Subject: SAMM Project update

Report of: Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMM) Project

Recommendations:

- To NOTE the contents of the report on SAMM project activity.
- To AGREE the 2016/17 SAMM project budget forecast and work programme

Purpose of the Report:

To provide the JSPB with an update on SAMM project activity during 2015, and provide a forecast of the project's activities in 2016.

Summary

This paper sets out for Members the SAMM project's activities and achievements during 2015, as well as the projects predicted budget for the year. It also sets out the project's projected budget for 2016/17 for information. The budget is dealt with in more detail in the Hampshire County Council SAMM project finances paper.

1. SAMM project staffing and recruitment

- 1.1 The project is currently fully staffed, with 4.4 FTE Wardens (slightly higher than the agreed 4 posts due to a job-share arrangement), an Education and Communication Officer, and Project Manager.
- 1.2 The necessary approvals for the recruitment of the ten seasonal wardens, which Members requested all be in post for 2016, are in place. Three of the posts will be hosted externally, by Hampshire County Council, Surrey Wildlife Trust and Horsell Common Preservation Society, under a grant funding agreement with Natural England. The remaining seven will be employed directly by Natural England as short-term appointments (6 months). Requests for expressions of interest for the posts have already been made, and the SAMM project has already received a number of c.v.'s from potential applicants.

2. SAMM project base

- 2.1 As previously reported the project is currently based at the Alice Holt Forest Research Station near Farnham. However, the current accommodation only has space for six members of staff, so will be unsuitable once the seasonal staff are added to the team. The

project is therefore currently looking at options for alternative accommodation which is suitable for the number of staff the project will have in 2016. DEFRA approval to rent a non-DEFRA estate office has been granted in principle, and the project manager is currently in discussion with a number of organisations regarding potential accommodation.

- 2.2 The office accommodation at Alice Holt is relatively low cost (£3000 p/a), and therefore any change of office base is likely to be at increased cost. Any increase in accommodation costs will lead to an increase in the project budget for 2016 onwards, further information will be provided to members at the next meeting.

3. SPA Wardening

- 3.1. The SAMM project commenced wardening on the Thames Basin Heaths in March 2015. Initially the project had two wardens deployed, but this increased to 5 wardens (4.4 FTE) in July when the remaining posts were filled. The project now provides a warden service on the SPA seven days a week from 7.30am to 18:30pm (daylight hours permitting).
- 3.2. The SAMM team now comprises:
- Simon Thompson – Project Manager
 - Katie Breach – Education and Communication Officer
 - David Haskell – Senior Warden
 - Michael Taylor – Warden
 - Karina Theseira – Warden
 - Sarah Bunce – Warden (part-time 4 days per week)
 - Nicola Buckland – Warden (part-time 3 days per week)
- 3.3. The Wardens and the Education and Communication Officer have met with each of the land managers of the particular areas of the SPA to highlight the locations on the site with highest visitor pressures, and agree any specific messages they wish the wardens to impart, prior to wardening commencing.
- 3.4. We currently have agreed access licenses with the following landowners/land managers: Surrey Wildlife Trust, Berkshire Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust, Bracknell Forest Borough Council, Forestry Commission, Horsell Common Preservation Society and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. Furthermore, whilst the license is still under negotiation we have been wardening on Ministry of Defence land on an accompanied basis.
- 3.5. Licenses are still being finalised with the Ministry of Defence, The Crown Estate, Guildford Borough Council, Surrey Heath Borough Council, and Hampshire County Council. In all cases other than The Crown Estate it is expected that licenses will be in place ahead of the 2016 bird breeding season. The situation with the Crown Estate is more complex, as due to an ongoing discussion over eligibility with the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs, who Natural England are an Agency of, they are unwilling to commence any discussion over allowing the project to access their land. The JSPB will continue to be regularly updated on progress with regard to SPA access.
- 3.6. The warden output for the project over the 2015 breeding bird season was as follows (all figures are averages):
- 295 on-site warden hours per month

- 1110 people engaged per month
- 176 leaflets issued per month

3.7. It should be noted that the above figures are averages for the period from July to September inclusive, which is the period during which the warden team has been at full strength.

4. Communications, promotion and Events

4.1 The Education and Communication Officer has spent 2015 focusing on the communications element of her role, due to the need to establish promotional and information materials to support the deployment of the new SPA warden service.

4.2 The project has produced three printed leaflets, one which introduces the 'Thames Basin Heaths Partnership' which is the brand under which the SAMM project delivers. A second which focusses on the importance of heathland and the rare species it supports, primarily focused on ground nesting birds but also covering other species; and finally, a good behavior code for dog owners.

4.3 The Education and Communication Officer, and the Wardens have been undertaking a programme of visits to all of the SANGs in the Thames Basin Heaths area. This programme has recently been completed, and written details and photographs have been drafted for each site. It is intended that this information will be used to produce a SANGs directory and a series of SANGs leaflets, as well as be published on the internet.

4.4 The project has purchased a fully branded gazebo and display boards and uses this equipment to attend events around the Thames Basin Heaths area, as well as for holding 'pit-stops' – an opportunity to speak to SPA users over a cup of tea and a biscuit for dogs - in SPA car parks.

4.5 Branded dog-poo bags have been printed, which in addition to the Thames Basin Heaths logo, have the messages:

- Keep these heathlands special. Please always pick up after your dog. Thank you.
- Protect ground nesting birds. Please keep dogs in close control on paths from March-September.

The bags are handed out at dog based events we attend with dog treats in them, and are carried by all the warden's so that they can offer them to dog walkers on the heaths.

4.6 The project has launched both a Facebook page and a Twitter feed. Both are regularly updated (usually at least daily), with informative information as well as lighter hearted content such as the recent 'meet the wardens' feature.

4.7 Horsell Common Preservation Society has kindly offered to host a website on behalf of the project. This is still in the early stages of development but should be on-line by the end of March. It is intended that the site be used to promote the project's key messages and also to promote SANGs sites. It is intended that whilst the site is technically hosted alongside the Horsell Common Preservation Society site, it will have its own distinctive identity and have a completely separate identity – hopefully tbhpartnership.org.uk

5. Partnership Working

- 5.1 Project partners have identified that commercial dog walkers are a significant cause of disturbance on the SPA, this is reinforced by the experiences of the SAMM wardens. The SAMM project is therefore coordinating an SPA wide approach to the licensing of commercial dog walkers. A licensing pilot is being planned, with The Crown Estate and Horsell Common Preservation Society due to trial the approach from Spring 2016, with a view to rolling-out the project to the whole Thames Basin Heaths area in 2017.
- 5.2 The project's Education and Communication Officer has been working closely with some of the developing SANGs to assist with their promotion to ensure maximum uptake of the new facilities. The project has worked to assist in the launch events for Wellesley and Heather Farm SANGs sites.

6. Strategic commissioning of future SANGs surveys by the SAMM project

- 6.1 As set out in the February update paper, the SAMM Project had been requested to take on the commissioning of all SANGs visitor surveys. This has subsequently been agreed by the JSPB Officers group.
- 6.2 It was agreed with JSPB Officers that SANGs monitoring would be commissioned by the SAMM project on a strategic basis. However, as the SANGs review has been on-going the project decided to await the completion of the SANGs review and any monitoring recommendations, prior to commissioning a programme of strategic SANGs monitoring. It is intended that an initial 12 month monitoring contract will be secured, followed in 2017 by a three year monitoring contract – this is to comply with the hosting agreement.

7. SPA Monitoring

Automatic people counter installation

- 7.1 The automatic people counter sensors were installed on all land, except Ministry of Defence, between January and March 2015. The project is currently in advanced discussion with the Ministry of Defence with regard to installing the remaining sensors on their land. The delays have been caused by the understandable concerns over introducing sensors which require regular digging-up on active military training land. However, we are confident that the remaining sensors will have been installed by March 2016.
- 7.2 The locations for the counters were advised in a report by the consultants Footprint Ecology and the data from them will be used to provide accurate information on total visitor numbers to the SPA, and information on temporal variation: through the day, between months and over the course of each year. Throughout 2015 the project has been calibrating and trouble-shooting various issues with the sensors, as there have been various unexpected issues including water ingress, physical faults, software problems, and physical damage and theft. We are confident that all problems will have been resolved ahead of the 2016 bird breeding season and that we will have a complete data set for next year. The project will be analysing the 2015 data, but the aforementioned problems are likely to limit the quality of the information.

Car Park Counts

7.3 The SAMM project has now reached a staffing level which enables us to begin undertaking the car park counts ourselves. This will enable us to move to a more robust methodology of undertaking one set of transects on a monthly basis, rather than the previous methodology of six transects once a year.

7.4 We received training from Footprint Ecology (as they were previously commissioned to undertake the annual surveys) in October 2015, and we are now ready to commence a programme of monthly car park surveys.

8. SAMM Project Budget

8.1 The expected SAMM project expenditure for the current financial year is set out below, it should be noted that the budget is based on 2014 Natural England pay scales, as we have not had a 2015 pay deal agreed yet. When any pay deal is concluded it will be backdated to July, and therefore the salary costs are likely to rise from those set out below.

8.2 The other variable to highlight, is that should Members decide to re-commission Footprint Ecology to re-write the Interim Review of SANGs in Thames Basin Heaths, then an additional programme spend will be incurred over the figure shown.

2015/16 SAMM project costs

Salary costs (at June 2015 Natural England payscales)	£188,452.37
Non pay running costs	£ 32,243.33
Total staff costs	£220,695.70
Programme costs (including monitoring)	£ 54,970.68
Admin Fees (Natural England and Hampshire County Council)	£ 30,160.00
Total project costs	£305,826.38

8.3 The projected budget for 2016/17 is set out in the table below, again at this stage the salary costs are based on June 2015 Natural England pay scales, so will increase when any 2015 pay agreement takes effect, and also should there be a 2016 pay increase. Updated figures will be provided to the next Members meeting, at which point the 2015 pay agreement will be in place.

2016/17 SAMM project costs

Salary costs (at June 2015 Natural England payscales)	£ 298,877.93
Non pay running costs	£ 42,593.33
Total staff costs	£ 341,471.26
Programme costs (including monitoring)	£ 54,440.52
Admin Fees (Natural England and Hampshire County Council)	£ 30,160.00
Total project costs	£ 426,071.78

8.4 The project budget projection for 2016/17 is below the figure presented to the JSPB in the SAMM business plan, although as stated above the salary costs are likely to rise, although this is unlikely to lead to an increase of more than £15,000.

9. SAMM project activity for next 6 months

9.1. Indicative SAMM project activity for the next six months is shown in Annex 1. This sets out the main delivery elements of the project over this period.

Annex 1. Gantt chart for SAMM project activity November – April 2015-16

Task	November 15	December 15	January 16	February 16	March 16	April 16
Seasonal Wardens commence wardening						
Recruitment of seasonal wardens						
Training of Seasonal Wardens						
SAMM wardening on the SPA						
Access Management & Monitoring Partnership meetings						
Installation of sensors on MoD land						
Sensor data analysis by Footprint Ecology						
TBH SPA car park counts						
SANGs strategic visitor survey commissioning						
SANG visitor surveys undertaken (if required)						
JSPB meeting (anticipated)						
Licensing of commercial dog walkers trial to commence (The Crown Estate and HCPS)						