

Minutes of a Meeting of the Thames Basin Heaths Joint Strategic Partnership Board 21 September 2018

Present: Councillor Moira Gibson, Surrey Heath Borough Council (Chairman)
Councillor Richard Billington, Guildford Borough Council
Councillor Jonathan Glen, Hampshire County Council
Councillor Mike Goodman, Surrey County Council
Councillor David Hilton, Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead
Councillor Barbara Hurst, Rushmoor Borough Council
Councillor Chris Storey, Waverley Borough Council
Councillor Chris Turrell, Bracknell Forest Borough Council

In Attendance: Sarah Bunce, Natural England
Sam Cartwright, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire & Oxford Wildlife Trust
Ann Conquest, Natural England
Julie Gil, Bracknell Forest Borough Council
Amar Jandoo, Arlingclose
Heather Lewis, Surrey Wildlife Trust
Louise Piper, Rushmoor Borough Council
Greg Readings, Arlingclose
Jenny Rickard, Surrey Heath Borough Council
Debbie Salmon, Rushmoor Borough Council
Robert Sarfas, Hampshire County Council
Andrew Smith, Natural England
Jenny Wadham, Hampshire County Council
Gayle Wootton, Waverley Borough Council

Apologies: Zoe Belton, Elmbridge Borough Council
Robert Paddison, Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead
Councillor James Radley, Hart Borough Council
Councillor Angus Ross, Wokingham Borough Council
Mark Turner, Natural England

15 Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting of the Thames Basin Heaths Joint Strategic partnership Board held on 20th April 2018 were agreed as being a correct record.

16 Investment of Thames Basin Heaths Endowment Fund

Investment Working Group Update

The Investment Working Group gave an update in respect of their work to explore how the best returns might be obtained from the Thames Basin Heaths Endowment Fund in order to ensure the sustainability of the project in perpetuity.

Hampshire County Council administered the fund on behalf of the Partnership and currently approximately £1million was kept in cash for day to day project use and the remaining £7million was invested.

The Board had previously acknowledged that unless the endowment fund was actively managed the project ran the risk of running out of money. Consequently the Working Group had drawn up the following principles and objectives which it considered should be used to guide any investment decisions:

Proposed investment principles:

- The Endowment Fund would be used for the future long term funding of the project and the long term protection and maintenance of the Special Protection Area (SPA)
- The Endowment Fund would be managed by Independent Financial Advisors to maximise the return achieved.
- The Endowment Fund would be managed within investment guidelines set by the Joint Strategic Partnership Board (JSPB).
- Performance of the Endowment Fund would be reviewed regularly by the JSPB.
- The Accountable Body would act as instructed by the JSPB and ensure that instructions were in accordance with the independent financial advice.
- Investment risks would remain with the JSPB.

Proposed investment objectives:

- Approximately £1million should be kept in cash in the Maintenance account to fund projected expenditure for a period of two years to provide a buffer to fund ongoing costs.
- The primary aim would be to generate income rather than capital growth.
- Investments should be subject to the lowest risk possible to achieve investment return and should not be susceptible to big fluctuations.
- A target rate of return on investment should be calculated using the current balance held in the Endowment Account plus a reasonable assumption of future income to give a target percentage rate of return required to meet the projected costs in perpetuity.
- Independent Financial advisors would be asked to advise on a recommended mix of investment types.
- It would be acknowledged by the Board that the target rate of return would vary depending on actual income and expenditure and that the target percentage rate of return may not be achieved.
- An investment strategy would be developed and both the Strategy and any investments would be formally reviewed by the Board on an annual basis.

The Board noted the update.

Independent Financial Advisor Presentation

Independent financial advisors Arlingclose gave a presentation in respect of the services that they could provide if they were contracted by the Board to assist with the investment of the Endowment Fund. The presentation included an overview of the range of advice that Arlingclose could provide and a summary of the various strategies that might be adopted when considering how to place investments.

The size of the fund available for investment was relatively small and consequently it was felt that investing in Pooled Investments would provide the Board with the best returns for the least risk. Pooled Investments, where funds from many individual investors were aggregated for the purposes of investment, enabled smaller investors to benefit from: economies of scale (which allowed for lower trading costs per dollar of investment), diversification and professional money management. Pooled funds were actively

managed and investing in pooled funds provided investors with access to the expertise of a fund manager and a more diverse portfolio.

The Board thanked Arlingclose for their presentation.

Arising from the subsequent discussion, the following points were noted:

- The proposed fees of £10,000 for Arlingclose's services was considered good value for money.
- Hampshire County Council already worked closely with Arlingclose and if the Board decided to appoint Arlingclose to advise them then the Council would be willing to manage the contract through their existing contract with the firm.
- Achieving financial self-sufficiency should be considered the primary purpose of any investment activity.
- For the sake of clear and transparent decision making the Board would need a governance strategy for any investment work.
- Hampshire County Council indicated that they would be willing to continue supporting the Investment Working Group.
- Deciding where to invest would be key and it would be the responsibility of the independent financial advisors appointed to recommend to the Board where investments should be made.
- The length of time between Board meetings could make it difficult to make a decision quickly. It was agreed that the possibility of members agreeing decisions requiring a fast response by email between meetings would be explored as part of work to develop an Investment and Governance Strategy
- It was agreed that the Investment and Governance Strategies needed to be approved as soon as possible so that active investment of the Endowment Fund could start without any further undue delays.

It was agreed that because Hampshire County Council already had a working relationship with Arlingclose they would abstain from any vote on whether the Board should appoint the Company to advise them on financial matters.

RESOLVED that:

- i. Arlingclose be appointed to act as Independent Financial Advisors to the Board.
- ii. The Board's contract with Arlingclose would be managed through Hampshire County Council's existing contract with Arlingclose
- iii. The Investment Working Group be tasked with drafting Investment Governance Strategies.
- iv. The draft Investment and Governance Strategies would be brought to the Board's next meeting for approval.

17 Financial Update

The Board received a report setting out the financial position of the Thames Basin Heath Strategic Access Management and Monitoring project at the end of the 2017/18 financial year.

It was noted that although fees and charges were adjusted each year to keep them in line with inflation the project's costs were not. It was agreed that this would be raised with Natural England.

The Board noted the report.

18 Strategic Asset Management Monitoring Project Update

The Board received a report providing an update on the work taking place as part of the Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMM) Project. The report summarised the project's activities and achievements since Board's last meeting and included updates on staffing and recruitment, warden activity, SANG visitor surveys, access to SPA land, educational work and monitoring activities.

Key highlights included:

- The reorganisation of the SAMM team following the departure of key individuals. This reorganisation had been received positively by staff and had provided opportunities for staff to develop their skills into new areas
- A new access agreement to warden Tweseldown Racecourse had been agreed.
- The extended hot, dry conditions over the summer had contributed to an increased number of wildfires across the SPA area and the Project Team had worked closely with the Fire Brigade and other partners to raise awareness amongst the public of the risks wildfires posed.
- The project team have worked closely with the Forestry Commission to standardise the information provided on signs to raise awareness of ground nesting birds during the nesting season.
- The first season of wardening on Ministry of Defence land had gone well with positive feedback from range marshals and the access specialist.
- The inaugural Heath Week event had proved particularly successful. During the event, which had taken place between 29th July and 7th August 2018, the Project Team had run 10 guided walks and 7 themed events included bird ringing, moth trapping, conservation grazing, wildfire awareness, a treasure hunt and history and arts and crafts activities. Overall the feedback had been extremely positive and the event would be repeated next year.
- A stakeholder meeting had been held on 5th September when research papers looking at the role of SANGs in protecting high value wildlife sites and the conflict between visitor access and conservation work had been presented. The papers had been well received and the subsequent discussions had suggested a number of potential areas for future research.
- The website update had been completed and new leaflets publicising the variety of SANGs available in the Thames Basin Heaths area had been produced.

The Board noted the report.

19 The Role of Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space in Protecting High Value Wildlife Sites

The Board received a report setting out a summary of an academic thesis focusing on the role of Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space (SANG) in protecting high value wildlife sites.

It was noted that there were opportunities to host MSc students and make use of their skills and expertise to explore areas in more depth than might otherwise be possible and it was suggested that this was an area that might be explored further.

Arising from the subsequent discussion the following points were noted:

- Using research opportunities to establish beyond doubt that SANG was an appropriate mitigation against development could be one area of potential research.
- Imperial College had a satellite campus with a well regarded ecology department based in the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead and developing links here could be worthwhile
- The possibility of utilising small scale projects that were not being conducted at PhD level should be considered.
- Winchester University were active in the field of ecology and an approach could prove worthwhile.
- Initial discussions had established that the Ministry of Defence was supportive of using their land to link existing SANGs together. However it was stressed that this work was at a very early stage and if it was taken forward it would be a project of considerable size.

The Board agreed that they would be supportive of further work in this area and it was agreed that a report outlining the project would be brought to the Board's next meeting.

Any Other Business

Post SANGS Options

It was reported that Rushmoor Borough Council had appointed an officer to take forward the Post SANGs Options project and an initial meeting to discuss the scope and direction of the project would take place on 17th October 2018. It was agreed that an update on the project would be brought to a future meeting.

21 Dates of Future Meetings

It was agreed that the next meeting of the Board would take place in November to enable the Draft Investment Strategy and Governance proposals to be approved.

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