

THAMES BASIN HEATHS  
JOINT STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP BOARD

Date: 8<sup>th</sup> March 2019  
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

Purpose of the Report:

To provide the JSPB with an update on SAMM project activity since the last meeting in September 2018.

## 1. SAMM project staffing and recruitment

### Seasonal wardens

- 1.1 After a successful recruitment programme, 6 new seasonal wardens, cumulatively making up 5.6 FTE, will join the SAMM project from 1<sup>st</sup> March.

### Year round wardens

- 1.2 Two new full-time FTA wardens, Nick Izard and Jamie Neaves, took up their roles in December.

### Education & Engagement Officer

- 1.3 Michael Jones started as full-time Education & Engagement Officer at the end of October and has been actively scoping out opportunities to create and deliver a heathland-centred, curriculum-linked education programme, wildfire education and develop links with partners to enhance public engagement across the SPA (See 7.1 below for further information).

## 2. Wardening and Delivery

- 2.1 The project normally provides a warden service on the SPA seven days a week from 07:00 to 19:00 – This period is shortened during the winter months due to reduced daylight hours.

## SPA wardening

2.2 The following tables set out the number of hours of warden activity delivered on the SPA during September 2018 to January 2019: -

September	Total hours wardened	166.9
	Number of interactions	333
	Number already spoken to	200
	Leaflets handed out	346
	Number of dogs	331
	Number of dog walkers (5+)	13
	Average already spoken to	30.03%

October	Total hours wardened	209.25
	Number of interactions	324
	Number already spoken to	165
	Leaflets handed out	315
	Number of dogs	457
	Number of dog walkers (5+)	9
	Average already spoken to	50.93%

November	Total hours wardened	167.5
	Number of interactions	347
	Number already spoken to	132
	Leaflets handed out	385
	Number of dogs	369
	Number of dog walkers (5+)	9
	Average already spoken to	38.04%

December	Total hours wardened	252.5
	Number of interactions	421
	Number already spoken to	116
	Leaflets handed out	312
	Number of dogs	300
	Number of dog walkers (5+)	8
	Average already spoken to	27.55%

January	Total hours wardened	311.25
	Number of interactions	657
	Number already spoken to	239
	Leaflets handed out	584
	Number of dogs	759
	Number of dog walkers (5+)	21
	Average already spoken to	36.38%

2.3 The tables above show the total hours wardened, the number of interactions undertaken during those hours, the number of people already spoken to, the number of leaflets handed out, the number of dogs with the people/groups spoken to, and the number of dog walkers with five or more dogs. The number of people already spoken to, and the percentage of total interactions which were with people already spoken to provide an indication of how many site users have been made aware of site sensitivities through previous interactions with the warden team.

2.4 The number of hours wardened reduces during the autumn and winter months due to a number of factors: More partnership work is undertaken, days are shorter and colder, SANGs surveys are carried-out and preparation for the summer is completed.

- 2.5 Compared to the spring and summer, interactions decrease during the autumn and winter. Sites are considerably quieter and there are fewer sensitivities on the SPA during this period. Most of our distributable literature is focused on ground nesting birds and their sensitivities during the breeding season, so the number of leaflets handed out falls during this period. That said, there is continued opportunity to distribute our '*Greenspaces on your doorstep*' guide to promote alternatives to using the SPA.
- 2.6 The number of dog walkers with five or more dogs is included. Individuals with large numbers of dogs are likely to be commercial dog walkers.
- 2.7 To summarise, during September 2018 – January 2019 (5 months), the project delivered 1107.4 hours of wardening, had 2082 interactions with people (40.9%) with 2216 dogs, of whom 852 had been spoken to previously. 1942 leaflets were distributed.

### **3 Access to SPA**

- 3.1 The wardening team visited Tweseldown – a racecourse on the SPA adjacent to the MoD's Bourley & Long Valley site – and had an orientation walk around with Elliot Fairs, who is overseeing this winter's habitat management works.
- 3.2 In conjunction with site managers across the SPA, wardens have been putting up ground nesting bird signs in time for the start of the breeding season on 1<sup>st</sup> March.

### **4. SPA and SANGs Monitoring**

#### **4.1 SPA Monitoring**

The report for the SPA visitor survey, conducted by EPR, in the summer of 2018 resulted in the following headlines: -

- The 2018 visitor survey recorded a statistically significant drop in visitor numbers across the 24 access points surveyed in both 2005 and 2018, despite a concurrent 12.9% increase in housing numbers within 5km of the SPA boundary over the same period. A non-significant decrease in the numbers of both visitors and dogs compared to 2012/13 was also recorded, in line with the overall trend.
- The 2018 catchment analysis calculated an indicative 5km driving catchment, measured as a 5km linear distance from the SPA boundary, therefore the 5km 'zone of influence' set out within the JSPB's 2009 Delivery Framework and subsequent local authority plans and strategies remains valid.
- The 2018 survey recorded a similar visitor profile to that in 2012/13 and 2005. The 'typical' SPA user could be described as a local resident making regular, short visits for the purposes of dog walking. The proportion of dogs observed off the lead has decreased, and visitor route lengths on site have increased compared to the previous surveys. Average route length taken on site was 3km. (2.8km for local dog owners)

- Notable increase in commercial dog walkers.
- Factors which could potentially influence visitor numbers and access patterns are discussed. In the absence of clear and/or consistent site-specific factors, it is likely that the implementation of SANG and SAMM measures across the wider SPA since 2005 have had the greatest influence on the survey results. The 2018 visitor profile supports the continued targeting of SANG and SAMM measures at local dog walkers, including commercial dog walkers. Awareness of the TBH SPA designation is very high, which indicates that the SAMM measures and messages implemented by the TBH Partnership are effectively reaching visitors.
- Distribution of new housing in relation to SANG and the SPA and early SANG survey indications are discussed in section 4 and offers the conclusion that SANG provision has affected the level of access on the SPA since their implementation.

[Note: The 2018 visitor survey was an interview survey and tally count of access pressure at 30 access points on the SPA during the summer holidays. This was a repeat of the surveys undertaken in 2005 (24 access points) and 2012 at the same access points]

#### 4.2 Car Park & People Counter Data

Footprint Ecology have analysed the 2017 data and the headlines are as follows: -

##### **Vehicle counts**

- Data collected in 2017, during monthly car park surveys. Analysis suggests:
  - **1)** An overall reduction in use in 2017 compared to 2016.
  - **2)** A move away from many smaller parking locations to single large locations, such as The Look Out. This results in a change in the distribution of visitor pressure, with higher, concentrated densities in a few locations, compared to a more even spread across the whole area.
  - **3)** Weekday use in summer is lowest, especially compared to spring and autumn. Weekend use, however, can be much greater.
  - Additional data is required from further years to determine whether patterns revealed are real and to reduce variability caused by weather and seasonal factors. Methods must also be standard year on year to yield useful comparisons. The report describes the 2017 method as robust enough to be taken forward, and this is the method that has been used throughout 2018 and early 2019 and will be used going forward.

##### **Automated people counters**

- Data collected in 2017 from a set of 36 automated counters positioned across the SPA. All but one sensor was collecting data, with a reduction in the number of errors compared to 2016.

- Analysis reveals:
  - **1)** The highest peak was in April, followed by a slightly lower peak in September. Months with the lowest number of passes were January and February.
  - **2)** The average hourly percentage from all sensors showed a peak value of 9.3% for the hour 12:00, followed by 9.1% for 13:00 and 15:00, 8.6% for 11:00 and 8.4% for 14:00. Most locations illustrate either a single peak or twin peak distributions of busyness across the day.
  - **3)** Variation across the days of the week shows the number of passes is strongly biased towards weekends, particularly Sundays, across most sensors. On average the number of passes recorded was 37% higher at weekends compared to the average across all days, and 21% higher on Sundays (in 2016 this was slightly higher - 38% at weekends and 23% on Sundays). Use in 2017 could be as high as 55% on weekends and 33% on Sundays.
  - **4)** Overall, typical passes per day were roughly equal outside the sensitive period (autumn/winter) compared to the sensitive period (c. spring/ summer). Across all sensors, 55% of recorded passes were in the sensitive period compared to 45% in the non-sensitive period (in the 2016 data this was 50:50).

#### 4.3 SANGs survey

Using SNAP software on iPads, the team carried-out winter 2018/19 surveys at seven SANG sites (eighteen hours at each) and returned a total of 290 completed surveys.

Dilly Lane	Hare Hill	Larks Hill
Peacock Meadows	Popes Meadow	Timber Hill
Hawley Meadows & Blackwater Park		

## 5. **Partnership working**

- 5.1 In addition to our usual wardening duties, we continue to forge relationships within the Partnership and, to this end, have had a presence at a number of partner events on the SPA. These have included the Wildmoor Bash and Burn, Winter Pimms, the Yateley Common Christmas tree event, a number of Surrey Wildlife Trust volunteer work parties and a Forestry Commission scrub bash with the FC, RSPB and ARC. Attending these events supports partners' efforts and provides opportunities for joint-working, as well as raising the profile of the Thames Basin Heaths Partnership across the breadth of the SPA.

It also provides opportunities to engage with members of the public in different ways.

Furthermore, involvement in these types of activities allows jointly tagged social media posts to be seen by partners' followers and shared by partners to spread the awareness of the TBH Partnership further.

## **6. Communications, Promotion and Events**

- 6.1 The Thames Basin Heaths Partnership website ([www.tbhpartnership.org.uk](http://www.tbhpartnership.org.uk)) continues to be used to promote key messages. Regular blog posts have been published to continue engagement with visitors throughout the autumn and winter. Written by a number of the team, blogs have included significant alternative greenspace promotion, education & engagement goings on, promoting insights into habitat management, a focus on heathland fauna and flora and disseminating important messages from partners.

Providing blogs on a range of subjects using a variety of voices helps us to get messages to an increasingly wide, but still targeted, audience.

There has been a significant update of the greenspaces section of the website. All previous entries have been rewritten and enhanced to comprehensively include more information for visitors. More than twenty more-recently opened SANGs have been added. Entries now have links to partners' websites and to wider walks to link SANGs together, when appropriate or to tap into longer routes like the Blackwater Valley Path. A gallery section now allows a wider range of photos to showcase each of the sites and provides scope for members of the public to contribute their efforts.

A 'Meet the Team' section had been added.

- 6.2 The '*Greenspace on your doorstep*' booklet is currently undergoing a significant rewrite to provide updated information, better photos and include the most recent SANGs to be opened. The first version of the booklet, distributed by wardens on the SPA and at events, has proved very popular with recipients and a great way to engage and provide alternatives to heathland visitors. The updated version will enable further engagement with a better resource and replace the current edition, which has proved very popular with the public and partners. (This will complement the updates to the website).

The updated publication will contain sixty-two alternate greenspaces, whereas the first edition detailed forty-four.

- 6.3 *Heathland Hounds*, our dog owner focused initiative, encouraging positive behaviour on the SPA, but also as a tool to promote the alternative greenspaces, continues to grow. The membership of the Facebook group is now reached an all-time high of 673 members and is used to engage with dog owners on a variety of subjects – SANG promotion, responsible use of heathland, encouraging attendance to our guided dog walks and pit-stops, messages from partners, as well as more general information about dogs and dog ownership. Of late, there has been a definite increase in the sense of community within the group and more members are taking part in

interactions, contributing content, and posting more regularly about use of alternate greenspaces.

*Heathland Hounds* pit-stops have been taking place across the breadth of the SPA (14 since the beginning of October, engaging with 406 people) and there have been four guided walks (Heather Farm, Lightwater Country Park, Caesar's Camp and Buckler's Forest), with a combined attendance of 27 dog walkers. These events are added benefits of signing up to the group, help to instill good dog behaviour values and further promote the community aspect of the initiative.

- 6.5 Our Twitter page now has 481 followers (up from 450 at the last meeting). We continue to use it to spread our key messages and over the autumn and winter the focus shifts to promotion of our alternative greenspaces. We also use it to share information from partners and retweet carefully selected messages from other organisations.
- 6.6 Our Facebook page continues to actively spread our key messages and now has just over 616 followers (571 likes – up from 471 at the last meeting). We continue to use it as a tool to share partner posts (MoD flag down days, FC conservation task days, promote visits to our website, highlight examples of the successful partnership working (including Wildmoor Bash & Burn, Surrey Wildlife Trust volunteer days, Forestry Commission networking events with RSPB & ARC, Winter Pimms) and encourage readers to interact - #TBHFridayChallenge is an example of this.

Throughout the autumn and winter, there has also been considerable effort to promote the alternate greenspaces, so that people will have them at the front of their minds as we approach the bird-nesting season.

- 6.7 Following on from the success of last year's event, we will, once again be running 'Heath Week' in 2019. A week of events and activities is scheduled for Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> July to Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> August. The SAMM Project and partners will be providing a range of activities across the breath of the SPA. These will include guided walks, arts and crafts, themed gatherings and historical sessions. Partners have been asked to submit events to the programme.

## **7. Education & Engagement**

- 7.1 Michael Jones filled the newly-created Education & Engagement Officer post at the end of October and, since then, he has been investigating how to make the most of the opportunity to promote the project's key messages, inspire people to value heathland and, more generally, motivate them to get outside and love nature.

As part of the research process, he has been liaising with Thames Basin Heaths partners and has used the opportunity to build links with organisations further afield. A visit to the Urban Heaths Partnership in Dorset – a similar mitigation project – took place in January to learn about their education programme. The education team at RSPB Pulborough Brooks has also been particularly accommodating in providing advice.

After careful consideration, a plan of action has been formulated and will initially have four key strands: -

- The creation and piloting of a curriculum-linked heathland focused education programme.
- Investigation into and planning of wildfire sessions (in consultation with local fire services) to reduce the incidence of heathland fires on the SPA.
- Using the *Year of Green Action* to promote use of alternative greenspaces and encourage communities to get involved in *connecting* with, *protecting* and *enhancing* their local environment. [This is likely to take the form of a series of events at a number of SANGs over the summer.]
- Scoping out opportunities to use the *John Muir Award* to engage with different community group (as a joint venture with partners).

Other education and engagement opportunities will also be taken as and when appropriate.

#### 8. An Evening with Nightjars - Reminder

The Thames Basin Heaths Partnership and Natural England nightjar walk is taking place on Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> June. It will be a great opportunity to learn about the amazing lives of the nightjars of the Thames Basin Heaths SPA and find out about the work being done to safeguard their futures.

Date: Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> June 2019

Time: 20:00 (to finish about 22:30)

Meet at: The Look Out Discovery Centre, Nine Mile Ride, Bracknell RG12 7QW