

**Thames Basin Heaths
Joint Strategic Partnership
16 May 2016
Council Chamber, Surrey Heath Borough Council
10.00am – 11.15am
Notes of Meeting**

Present:

Board Members

Councillor Phillip Brooker	Guildford Borough Council
Councillor Graham Cundy	Woking Borough Council
Councillor Roland Dibbs	Rushmoor Borough Council
Councillor Moira Gibson	Surrey Heath Borough Council
Councillor David Hilton	Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead
Councillor Gail Kingerley	Runnymede Borough Council
Councillor Chris Turrell	Bracknell Forest Council

Advisory Board Members

Ken Ankcorn	Surrey Wildlife Trust
Matt Jackson	Berkshire, Buckingham and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust
Simon Thompson	Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMM) Project
Jennifer Wadham	Hampshire County Council (Finance)

Officers/Observers

Ernest Amoako	Woking Borough Council
Julie Gil	Bracknell Forest Council
Philip Gill	Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead
Jane Ireland	Surrey Heath Borough Council
Louise Piper	Rushmoor Borough Council

1.	Apologies
1.1	Apologies were received from Cllr Angus Ross, Wokingham Borough Council, Cllr Radley, Hart District Council (Cllr Parker substituting) and Mark Turner, Natural England.
2.	Minutes of the Previous Meeting and Matters Arising
2.1	Minute 7.15 - It was noted that Cllr Hilton was also a member of the Task and Finish Group.

3.	Task and Finish Group Report
3.1	Councillor Hilton presented a report setting out the findings of the Task and Finish Group initiated to consider the approach to Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA) in its entirety.
3.2	It had been concluded that evidence base used to produce the Footprint Ecology Interim SANG Review Report 2015 had not been sufficiently robust. Consequently it was felt that this report should not be published in its present form.
3.3	The Task and Finish Group had concluded that whilst Natural England's requirements in relation to Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) were important they should not be considered in isolation and that work needed to be done to understand the public perceptions of the SPA and SANGs as well as the factors that made an area of SANG attractive to visitors.
3.4	<p>It was proposed that an online survey would be the most practical way to capture feedback from members of the public. The survey would be based on the latest SANG survey template in use at Chantry Wood with the inclusion of the following two addition questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Why do you visit this site more/less? ii. What would encourage you to visit this site more often? <p>It was agreed that the survey template would be circulated to the group for information.</p>
3.5	It was felt that, in order to obtain high quality feedback from users, any survey work should be carried out at a time when a significant proportion of SANG enhancement works had been completed for example when 75% of the enhancement work was complete. It was acknowledged that a completion rate of 75% was an appropriate figure when considering smaller sites however for larger sites it could take years before this level was reached. It was agreed that Natural England would identify SANG sites where enhancement works were either complete or nearing completion. This list would then be used as a starting point for any survey work.
3.6	It was stressed that, in addition to traditional paper surveys, full use should be made of online surveys and social media channels to gather as much information from the public as possible.
3.7	<p>RESOLVED that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. The Footprint Ecology Interim SANG Review Report 2015 was not to be published. ii. SANG Feedback <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. A standing item be added to the agenda of the Access Management and Monitoring Partnership meetings to enable discussions around 'making SANGS more attractive to visitors' b. SANGS managers, local authority planners and Natural England to meet annually to discuss common issues c. Feedback to be sought via the new website from visitors to SANGs d. An online survey is developed to capture feedback from visitors and non-visitors to SANGs e. Local Authorities and partners to be asked whether SAMM wardens can engage with SANG site managers in order to be better able to

	<p style="text-align: center;">promote SANGs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> iii. The questions in the latest SANG Survey Template supplemented with the following two additional questions be used: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Why do you visit this site more/less? b. What would encourage you to visit this site more often? iv. SANG Surveys would be carried out at an appropriate time in the lifecycle of the sites: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Local authorities be requested to provide information regarding progress of enhancement works at each SANG b. Follow up SANG Surveys to be carried out when SANG enhancement works are completed and a significant proportion of the development allocated to the SANG is complete c. SAMM Wardens to undertake ongoing surveys on SANGS v. The SAMM Project manager to produce an Annual SPA Monitoring Report. vi. Household surveys, including online and social media channels, to be completed to establish a data set relating to SANG usage
4.	Strategic Access Management and Monitoring Project
4.1	<p>The Board considered a report setting out an update in respect of the activities and achievements of the Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMM) Project over the period November 2015 to May 2016. The report included updates on project staffing and recruitment, project accommodation, access to SPA land, communications and promotional work, partnership working, visitor numbers, a budget update, a forward look and a summary of the outcomes of the 2015 Bird Survey.</p> <p><u>Staffing</u></p> <p>4.2 It was reported that the project currently employed 4.4 Full time equivalent (FTE) wardens, 11 seasonal workers (8 FTE), an Education and Communications Officer and a Project Manager. Following a change in Defra's grant funding rules all the seasonal posts were, for the time being, being hosted by Natural England.</p> <p>4.3 A number of areas for improvement had been identified as a result of the recruitment and training process for the seasonal wardens. Consequently, it was proposed that two additional year round warden positions be recruited to in September 2016. This would tie the recruitment process in to the end date of the current fixed term seasonal posts and it was hoped that this would give the project a strong pool of candidates to select from.</p> <p>4.4 It was reported that so far during the 2016 bird breeding season wardens had each month completed on average 371 on-site warden hours, engaged with 892 people and issued 554 leaflets. These numbers were lower than in previous years due to the need to train the seasonal wardens however it was expected that this would increase as the training came to an end and the trainee wardens were able to carry out more tasks unsupervised.</p> <p>4.5 It was acknowledged that using volunteers to assist wardens with their work would increase the amount of promotional and surveying work that could be done. An approach would be made to the Wildlife Trust to explore their experiences with volunteers and an update would be given to the Board at their next meeting.</p>

	<p><u>Accommodation</u></p>
4.6	<p>The SAMM Project was currently based in accommodation at Alice Holt near Farnham. The accommodation was considered to be too small to accommodate the full team and its location meant that project staff spent a significant proportion of their time travelling to and from SPA sites. Work had taken place to identify suitable alternative accommodation and it was envisaged that a move would increase office costs by approximately £6,500 per annum.</p>
	<p><u>Land Access</u></p>
4.7	<p>Access Licenses had been agreed with a range of landowners and land managers. Work was taking place to finalise access agreements with the Ministry of Defence and wardens were making accompanied visits to MOD land until this was signed off.</p>
4.8	<p>Due to a disagreement between the Crown Estate and DEFRA, work to agree access to land on the Crown Estate was proving more problematic. The Board was informed that whilst the Crown Estate had an obligation to ensure SPA sites were managed appropriately because they were not a signatory to the agreement there was no obligation for them to assist with the delivery of the SAMM project. It was agreed that representatives of the Crown Estate would be invited to a future Board meeting to discuss their plans for the SPA sites on their land and to try and develop a workable way forward.</p>
	<p><u>Promotional Work</u></p>
4.9	<p>Work was underway to produce a directory detailing information about each of the SANG sites across the area. This would be published on the website and made available as an A5 document.</p>
4.10	<p>To date, wardens had held five 'pit-stops' across the area to raise awareness amongst SANG users of the SPA. These events had been well received and wardens would be holding these on a weekly basis. The pit stops were currently advertised on an ad-hoc basis via social media.</p>
4.11	<p>It was agreed that QR codes would be added to all leaflets and promotional material to encourage people to engage with the project's online presence.</p>
4.12	<p>A pilot project focusing on the licensing of commercial dog walkers would be launched in the summer and an update on progress would be given at the Board's next meeting.</p>
	<p><u>Bird Survey</u></p>
4.13	<p>It was reported that the 2015 Bird Survey had found that the Dartford Warbler had continued its recovery from its low point in 2010 (451 territories in 2015 compared to 292 in 2010). The species had now recolonised all but one of the sites (Hazeley Heath) from which it had been lost during the harsh winters of 2008/09 and 2019/10.</p>
4.14	<p>The number of Nightjar territories had fallen when compared against 2014 figures (306 territories in 2014 compared to 355 in 2014) however numbers were considered to be within the normal range for the species. The destruction of habitat by fire between Ash and Brookwood was considered to be a significant contributory factor in this fall in numbers.</p>

4.15	The number of Woodlark territories had fallen from 155 in 2014 to 137 in 2015. Whilst the fall in Woodlark numbers was attributed to the recent fire between Ash and Brookwood it was acknowledged that the decrease was a concern that would need to be looked at.
4.16	It was suggested that a representative from the Horshall Common Preservation Society be invited to give a presentation on their work to help increase bird numbers at a future meeting.
4.17	<p>RESOLVED that;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. The contents of the report be noted ii. The 2016/17 SAMP project budget and work programme set out in the report be approved iii. The SAMP project staffing structure is amended to 6 year round wardens and 6 seasonal wardens in September/October 2016 at an additional net cost of £25,000 on 2016/17.
5.	Thames Basin Heaths Financial Statement
5.1	The Board considered a report setting out the financial position of the Thames Basin Heaths Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMP) project as at 31 March 2016.
5.2	It was reported that at the end of the reporting period, Endowment Fund balances stood at £2.693million and £525,205, for project expenditure, was held in the Maintenance Fund. Projections indicated that a further £1.026million was expected to be added to the Endowment Fund in 2016/17, giving an anticipated total of £3.719million that ought to be invested.
5.3	Under the terms of the SAMP agreement, the Board held responsibility for regularly reviewing the value and performance of the Endowment Fund and for procuring the service of an Independent Financial Advisor to help maximise the returns achieved within the Boards' investment guidelines. It had been agreed at the Board's last meeting that a Task and Finish Group would be established to take this piece of work forward and Councillors Gibson, Goodman and Hilton agreed to participate. Expressions of interest would also be sought from members unable to attend the meeting.
5.4	The Board noted the report.
6.	Any Other Business
6.1	It was noted that this would be Councillor Dibbs' last meeting and the Board thanked him for all he had done to support the Partnership.
7.	Date of Next Meeting
7.2	It was agreed that dates of future meeting dates would be circulated by email.