

THAMES BASIN HEATHS
JOINT STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP BOARD

Date: 30th September 2016

Subject: SAMM Project update

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

Recommendations:

- To AGREE Natural England's intention to continue hosting the SAMM project until 2020.
- 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 May 2016.

Summary

This paper sets out for Members the SAMM project's activities and achievements since May 2016, in addition it confirms Natural England's commitment to continue hosting the project for another three years until 2020.

1. Natural England to continue hosting SAMM project

1.1 Following a presentation by the SAMM project manager to Natural England's Senior Management Team in August 2016, Natural England have confirmed that they wish to continue to host the SAMM project for an additional three year period after the current agreement comes to an end in July 2017.

1.2 There are no changes proposed as part of the agreement by Natural England to continue hosting the project, and therefore no changes will be required to the legal agreement.

1.3 The JSPB Board is asked to AGREE to the continued hosting of the SAMM Project by Natural England until July 2020.

2. SAMM project staffing and recruitment

2.1 Following the Board's agreement in May to amend the SAMM project staffing structure to 6 year round Wardens and 6 seasonal wardens from September/October 2016 at an additional cost of £25,200 in 2016/17. Recruitment commenced in August 2016 with interviews held on the 25th August. The additional Wardens (2 FTE) have now been recruited, and will commence employment during September 2016.

2.2 The new Wardens due to take up post are staff who previously worked with the project as Seasonal Wardens and will therefore not require any training when they take up their posts. The new Wardens are:

- Victoria Huth – Full-time
- Ruth Papworth – 0.5 FTE
- Joanne Wilsher – 0.5 FTE

2.3 The project's Senior Warden will be retiring on the 30th September, and the post of Senior Warden is also currently being recruited, with interviews held on 8th September. It is anticipated that the new Senior Warden will be in post prior to David Haskell (the existing Senior Warden) leaving the project.

2.4 At the time of writing this paper the successful applicant has not been confirmed, but a verbal update will be provided at the meeting.

3. SAMM project base

3.1 Further to the update provided to the May meeting, the SAMM project is continuing to negotiate the office move. Defra estates have requested additional information from the landlord prior to formally agreeing to sign a lease or license, but all indications are that agreement will be reached. The project still hopes to have relocated to the new office before the end of the year.

4. Wardening and Delivery

4.1 The project currently provides a warden service on the SPA seven days a week from 07.30 to 19:00 (daylight hours permitting).

4.2 The warden output for the project for the 2016 bird breeding season will be provided as a verbal update at the meeting, as due to the early call for papers the data had not been fully compiled and analysed in time to be included.

4.3 The SAMM project is now empowered to be actively engaging the public on SANGs sites (primarily outside of the bird breeding season) in order to fulfil the monitoring role detailed in the paper from the SANGs Task and Finish Group presented to the Board in May. The project commenced a trial of a SANGs users questionnaire in September, and the outputs of this will be reviewed and a revised questionnaire produced. It is anticipated that the SAMM team will commence visitor data collection on SANGs in October.

Access to SPA land

4.4 The project is still accessing Ministry of Defence land on an accompanied basis. However a meeting was held with Colonel Ludlow in July at which he confirmed the Ministry of Defence's continued commitment to the project. Reassurances were made that all necessary agreements would have been put in place to enable the Wardens to access Ministry of Defence land unaccompanied before the next breeding period.

4.5 A meeting has been held with local representatives of the Crown Estate, and the local team have agreed to produce a paper to present to their senior management making the case for allowing the SAMM Wardens to be granted access to their land. They were also informed

of the JSPB Board's intention (as agreed at the May meeting) to invite Crown Estate to attend a future meeting, this proposal was fully supported by the local team.

5 Communications, promotion and Events

- 5.1 As updated to the May Board meeting an agreement has been reached with Horsell Common Preservation Society to host the project's website. This has been designed and the information regarding SANGs sites gathered, and the content is in the final stages of being uploaded onto the site. It is anticipated that the site will be ready to launch imminently.
- 5.2 The project has 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. The pit-stops have proved to be a very successful mechanism in engaging the public, and the project has been undertaking an average of 1.5 pit-stops per week during the 2016 bird breeding season.
- 5.3 Branded dog-waste 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, and pit-stops with dog treats and informative literature in them, and are carried by all wardens so that they can offer them to dog walkers on the heaths. The project has become more proactive in handing out dog waste bags particularly on sites which have a particular issue with site users not picking up after their dogs.
- 5.4 The project's Facebook page and Twitter feed are regularly updated (usually daily), with informative content about the project, heathland management, fire-risk and updates on wildlife observations.
- Facebook 237 likes
 - Twitter 222 followers
- 5.5 The project will be attending relevant events in the Thames Basin Heaths area during the year to promote responsible behavior on heathland sites and to promote the use of SANGs. We are currently due to be attending 20 events during 2016, with 13 attended by the end of August.
- 5.6 At the May Board meeting a request was made for some examples of our communications work, and for information to provide a feel for the work of the Warden team. With this in mind an article which was published on Natural England's website is provided for information in Annex 2, and some examples of the project's facebook posts from the last couple of days are included in Annex 3.

6. SPA Monitoring

Automatic people counter installation

- 6.1 The automatic people counter sensors were installed on all land, except Ministry of Defence, between January and March 2015. Sensors will be installed on the Ministry of Defence land this autumn.
- 6.2 Throughout 2015 the project calibrated and undertook trouble-shooting of 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 we have a complete data set for 2016 (except MoD).
- 6.3 A tender will be let for the analysis and interpretation of the people counter data for 2015 and 2016 during October and the results will be presented to the next JSPB Board meeting.

Car Park Counts

- 6.4 The SAMM project has now reached a staffing level which enables us to undertake the car park counts ourselves. This has enabled 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. Monthly transects commenced in January 2016.
- 6.5 It is intended that the analysis of the car park transect data is undertaken once 12 months of car park transect data has been collected. Therefore it is anticipated that this analysis will be commissioned in January 2017.

7. SAMM Project Budget

- 7.1 The budget for 2016/17 agreed at the last meeting was £441,971.78 (plus an additional £5,000 should the office move occur during this financial year).
- 7.2 The project expenditure through to 31 August is set out in the table below.

Salaries	£163,618.91
Travel and Subsistence and Non-pay Running Costs	£25,314.84
Programme Expenditure	£1,145.52
TOTAL	£190,079.27

8. SAMM project activity for next 6 months

- 8.1 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 September 2016 – February 2017

Task	September 2016	October 2016	November 2016	December 2016	January 2017	February 2017
Additional 2 Wardens recruited						
Recruitment of 2017 seasonal Wardens						
SANGs visitor questionnaire trialled						
SAMM Wardens to undertake public engagement on SANGs						
SAMM wardening on the SPA						
Access Management & Monitoring Partnership meetings						
Installation of sensors on MoD land						
SPA Sensor data analysis						
TBH SPA car park counts						
SPA Car park transect data analysis						
SAMM Project office lease agreement						
SAMM Project pit-stops in SPA car parks						

Managing increasing access to sensitive sites



It's all in a day's work for Sarah Bunce, a warden on the Thames Basin Heaths SPA...

My office is 8,200 hectares of lowland heath habitat - fragments of an ancient landscape dispersed across Hampshire, Surrey and Berkshire. The area is collectively known as the Thames Basin Heaths and recognised as a Special Protection Area (SPA) for internationally important populations of Annex 1 ground-nesting birds.

Managing access

Like many places, the SPA is under pressure from increasing visitor numbers – over 5 million a year. In the south east this is magnified by housing demand. With over 290,000 homes built within 5km of the SPA's boundary and another 50,000 new homes planned by 2026, a strategy was needed! That's where the Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMM) Project comes in.

Hosted by Natural England and funded by contributions from new housing developments, the project monitors visitor trends and provides coordinated visitor engagement. It also promotes Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG), a catchy title for another aspect of the mitigation strategy, greenspaces designed to mop-up the recreational pressure on the SPA generated by all those new houses! Some are new spaces open to the public for the first time, others have been enhanced to cope with more visitors. Either way, the idea is that they're convenient, provide free parking, poo bins and a pleasant natural environment for a stroll with the dog.

About my role

I joined the project's wardening team in July 2015. Armed with informative leaflets, friendly advice and free poo bags, we're engaging with visitors across the SPA to raise awareness of the sensitivity of these special places and to encourage responsible behaviour, particularly by dog walkers. And in our striking claret uniforms, perhaps our very presence is enough to improve



behaviour! We're also extra eyes and ears on the sites, reporting issues and visitor comments back to our site management partners.

For me, becoming a warden is a wonderful opportunity to spend time in beautiful places. To appreciate the heathland in bloom, the vibrant pink of bell heather, the purple flush of the ling that gives way to an autumnal tinge. To get to know the silver-studded blue and grayling butterflies. To learn the haunts of the ground-nesting birds. So vulnerable to disturbance, the Dartford warblers, nightjars and woodlarks that call the heath their home, are, of course, why I'm here.

The challenges



But joining the SAMM Project presented a few initial challenges. First there's all the terminology, was I joining the SAMM Project or the Thames Basin Heaths Partnership Project? Same thing when it comes down to it. And all the acronyms! Like SANG, places I have been getting to know very well over the last few months; and AMMP, the Access Management and Monitoring Partnership, a quarterly discussion group; and the JSPB, the Joint Strategic Partnership Board, comprising the 11 local authorities with

land within 5km.

Then there are the sites. 13 Sites of Special Scientific Interest and over 40 SANGs to get to know, covering 3 counties, under the management of around 20 organisations! It's no mean feat to find your way around and remember everyone's names. I'm getting there though and very much enjoying building new partnerships.

Fly-tipping and fungi

I'm on a rota to visit part of the SPA each day and each visit has its highs and lows. Take last week, arriving to warden at Chobham Common NNR, the car park I pulled into was full of asbestos, fly-tipped overnight, reported immediately to site management. And in fungi season of course, the first people I engaged with were keen to know who to report illegal pickers to. The next pair were looking for their missing friend (thankfully found safe and well). And then a lovely smile from a well-known local as he jogged by!

I'm getting to know some of the people who walk here and it's a joy to find that many care about our heathlands. There are those who don't of course, letting their dogs run riot in the heather and not picking up after them. But that's why I'm here, to spread the word about this amazing habitat and try to change people's behaviour for the better.

More information

Sarah Bunce is a Warden for the Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMM) Project.

For more information, find the project [on Facebook](#), or follow them [on Twitter](#), or [contact Sarah](#).

Sympathetic access to sensitive sites

For further information about facilitating sympathetic access to sensitive sites in the Thames Basin Heaths SPA, see  [the attached article](#) by Simon Thompson, Project Manager for the Thames Basin Heath's Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMM) project. It was originally published in the December 2015 issue of In Practice and reproduced with the kind permission of the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management.

Annex 3 – Examples of some recent facebook posts



Thames Basin Heaths Partnership Project added 6 new photos.

31 August at 10:15 ·

For followers in the Sandhurst area, here's our pictorial guide to Horseshoe Lake! If it inspires you to explore, start from the free car park on Mill Lane, at the entrance to the activity centre. #TBHSANG



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Matthew Jackson, Janet Hulbert Byers, Charlotte Edwards and 11 others like this.

[Comments](#)



Remove

Nicki Paton Great place to visit

1 · 31 August at 11:14



Thames Basin Heaths Partnership Project shared Surrey Wildlife Trust's post.

1 hr ·

The bird nesting season may be officially over, and we've sadly said goodbye to this year's seasonal wardens, but the birds don't always read the manual! There may still be a few active nests, as this post from last year shows. These tiny nightjar chicks were ringed as late as the end of August! Please help any stragglers make the most of the continued good weather, by sticking to paths and keeping dogs close. Thank you .



Surrey Wildlife Trust added 3 new photos.

18 August 2015 ·

These wonderful nightjar chicks were rung on Chobham Common today by a licensed ringer to help monitor population, distribution & migration.

Rare summer visitor...

[See more](#)