

THAMES BASIN HEATHS
JOINT STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP BOARD

Date: 3rd March 2017

Subject: SAMP Project update

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

Recommendations:

- To NOTE the contents of the report on SAMP project activity

Purpose of the Report:

To provide the JSPB with an update on SAMP project activity since the last meeting in September 2016.

Summary

This paper sets out for Members the SAMP project's activities and achievements since September 2016, in addition it sets out plans for the 2017 season, and arrangements for the replacement of the Project Manager who will shortly be leaving the project.

1. SAMP project staffing and recruitment

Seasonal Wardens

- 1.1 Following the Board's agreement in May to amend the SAMP project staffing structure to 6 year round Wardens and 6 seasonal wardens from September/October 2016, the project completed the recruitment of the 6 seasonal wardens in February, with 4 positions already filled and a further 2 commencing in the coming weeks.
- 1.2 The new Seasonal Wardens are Bryony Davidson, Michael Jones, Daniel Creech, Fiona Hayes, Martin D'Arcy, and Ilona Livarski. All the new staff have a background in conservation and/or heathland management and are well qualified for the roles.
- 1.3 A comprehensive induction programme has been put in place for the new Seasonal Wardens, which is being delivered by Sarah Bunce our Senior Warden this week.

Project Manager

- 1.4 Simon Thompson will be leaving the position of Project Manager in the next two months to take on a new role project managing Natural England's input into the Heathrow Airport expansion. The role is due to be advertised shortly, and the role profile, specification and pay grade is intended to be the same as that of the current project manager. An outline timetable for the recruitment of the new project manager is set out below:

Role profile and specification agreed	w/c 6 March
Post advertised	w/c 20 March
Interviews	w/c 10 April
Commencement	Early May (depending on notice period)

- 1.5 The existing Project Manager will remain in post until a new Manager has been recruited, and a full hand over can take place. The current Project Manager will also remain available to assist the replacement Project Manager following the hand over period. There will therefore be no impact on the delivery of the project as a result of the change in personnel.

2. Wardening and Delivery

- 2.1 The project currently provides a warden service on the SPA seven days a week from 07.30 to 19:00 (daylight hours permitting). In addition, as agreed at the May 2016 Board Meeting, the warden team have also been undertaking visitor surveys on SANGs sites during the autumn and winter of 2016/17.

SPA Wardening

- 2.2 The warden output for the project since the last meeting in September 2016 is set out below. The following table sets out the number of hours of warden activity delivered on the SPA during the period September – January. The total number of hours delivered on the SPA has been reduced due to time being diverted into SANGs survey work.

September to January	Total hours wardened	1012.2
	Number of interactions	1358
	Number already spoken to	469
	Leaflets handed out	418
	Number of Dogs	1449
	Number of Dog Walkers (5+)	79
	Average spoken to	34.54%

- 2.3 The table above shows the total of hours wardened, and the number of interactions undertaken during those hours. The level of interactions is expected to be lower during the autumn and winter than in the spring and summer due to the sites being quieter, and there being fewer sensitivities on the SPA during this period. The number of leaflets handed out is also lower than in the spring and summer, as the majority of our literature relates to the ground nesting bird sensitivities on the SPA, which is less relevant outside the bird breeding season.
- 2.4 The number of people already spoken to, and the average number spoken to percentage figure provide an indication of how many site users have been made aware of site sensitivities through interactions with the Warden team. The data shows that the project has reached – on average – around a third of site users.

2.5 The table also shows the number of dogs which people interacted with were walking, it can be seen that this is over 1 dog per interaction (although an interaction may be a group rather than an individual). The number of dog walkers with five or more dogs provides a suggested level of commercial dog walkers interacted with, although some will be individuals who just own a large number of dogs.

SANGs Visitor Surveys

2.6 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 were reviewed and a revised questionnaire produced. The SAMM team then commenced visitor data collection on SANGs in October.

2.7 The methodology for the SANGs surveys is contained in Annex 1, but to summarise each site received 18 hours of survey time between the hours of 08:00 – 16:00, with 6 hours being at the weekend and 12 hours during the week. The following 16 sites have been surveyed during the autumn and winter of 2016/17:

Farnham Park	Chantry Wood
Southwood Woodland	Riverside Country Park
Rowhill Nature Reserve	Crookham Park
Heather Farm	Englemere Pond
Lilly Hill Park	Brooklands Community Park
Rooks Nest Wood	St Anne's Hill
Homewood Park	Brookwood Country Park
Allen's Field	White Rose Lane

2.8 The SANGs visitor surveys were only completed in mid-February so there has not been an opportunity to analyse the data yet, but from an unscientific scan through a small number of the surveys convenience, close to home, and well surfaced paths are among the top attractors, whilst more dog waste bins appears near the top of the list of suggestions for improvement.

2.9 The following table shows the amount of warden time spent undertaking visitor surveys on the SANGs alongside the amount of time spent on the SPA for each month from September to January. It should be noted that the time on SANGs only relates to time actually on site, and does not include the significant amount of time the wardens spent undertaking data entry for all the paper questionnaires completed during the surveys.

	September	October	November	December	January
Total number of hours on SPA	174.75	292.8	221.75	152.9	170
TOTAL NUMBER OF HOURS ON SANGS	0	66	194.75	91.25	121
Total hours out	174.75	358.8	416.5	244.15	291
Proportion of time on SANGs	0%	18%	47%	37%	42%

2.10 It can be seen that the total hours (combination of SPA and SANGs) varies considerably from month to month. The lower level in September is due to this being the period when the additional year-round Wardens were being recruited, as well as the previous Senior

Warden retiring, therefore the team was at a lower staffing level during September. The October and November hours represent a 'normal' level of delivery, whilst December and January reflect the Christmas and New Year break combined with this being the period when the wardens started spending more time in the office undertaking the data inputting from the SANGs surveys they had already undertaken.

3. Access to SPA land

3.1 The project is still accessing Ministry of Defence land on an accompanied basis. However at the time of writing this paper the Project Manager is in dialogue with Colonel Ludlow in an effort to get a firm timescale for full access to the publically accessible parts of the Ministry of Defence estate.

3.2 There is no progress to report with regard to accessing the Crown Estate owned SPA, and it is recommended that the JSPB Board invite a representative of Crown Estate to future JSPB meetings to discuss their lack of co-operation.

4 Communications, Promotion and Events

4.1 The Thames Basin Heaths Partnership website is now live and can be accessed at www.tbhpartnership.org.uk Thank you to all the JSPB Officers and Board members who commented on the development version of the site. The website provides an on-line SANGs directory and provides information on the project and on the sensitivities of the heathland habitat. It is intended that the website will continue to evolve over time with new content added regularly. Some of the website content is set out in Annex 2 for information.

4.2 Using the SANGs related content compiled for the website a SANGs directory booklet has also been produced, this booklet entitled: ' Greenspace on your doorstep' with the sub-title 'Discover great places for circular walks in the Thames Basin' will be handed out by the wardens on-site and at the pit-stop events in SPA car parks. The A5 booklet contains details of all the SANGs listed on the website along with a pull-out map, and is intended to provide a useful guide to SPA users to promote the use of SANGs for their regular dog walks.

4.3 During March 2017 the project will be launching 'Heathland Hounds' which is a dog owner focused initiative which is intended to provide another mechanism for promoting positive behavior specifically on the SPA but also more generally in the area. Heathland Hounds will have a social media presence through facebook, with people invited to join the Heathland Hounds group via promotion by the Wardens and through temporary signs placed on SPA site notice boards.

4.4 The Heathland Hounds brand will be used by the project when attending external events, as well as for dedicated Heathland Hounds events which the project will be running ourselves, primarily guided dog walks on SANGs to promote the sites to new users.

4.5 During the 2017 bird breeding season the project will build on the experience gained in 2016 when we trialed a small number of guided walks on the SPA. The project is planning an enhanced programme of guided walks on the SPA for this year focusing primarily on ecology, but also covering the history of the sites.

- 4.6 The Access Management and Monitoring Partnership (AMMP) group have highlighted the increasing issue of dog fouling on many of the SPA sites, something which the wardens have also highlighted as an increasing issue. In response to this the project is planning to undertake a campaign to raise public awareness of this issue. The project is exploring various options but currently favours the use of spray paint to draw attention to uncollected dog waste supported by signage to explain why this has been done, and what the potential impacts are to human health, animal health and site ecology.
- 4.7 Through the AMMP group it has been agreed to standardise the ground nesting birds sensitive period publicised across the various SPA sites by the land managers. All sites should now have signage stating the sensitive period as being 1st February – 15th September. To further assist in promoting the sensitivity of the sites during this period, the project has now agreed to put up our own signs on many sites which haven't previously benefitted from signage relating to ground nesting birds.
- 4.8 In addition to the new activities and initiatives listed above the project will be replicating the programme of event attendance and SPA car park pit-stops as undertaken in 2016.

5 School Based Education

- 5.1 The project has agreed to take on the schools education project previously delivered by BBOWT with funding from Bracknell Forest Borough Council. The project has agreed to deliver this on a one-off basis commencing in September 2017 in order to inform our future schools education plans. Having considered our available resources it has already been determined that it would not be possible to expand this project across the Thames Basin Heaths area, however our experience of delivering the project in 2017 will enable an informed decision to be made about future schools based education work.
- 5.2 The project is considering various options for future work with schools which are set out below for information only at this stage. These options will be further developed and put to the Board formally following the experience of delivering the education work in the autumn of 2017:
- (a) Roll out the BBOWT education project across the area – Would require very significant additional resources which are not available without an increase in the SAMM tariff due to the need to recruit a new education team.
 - (b) A 'touring' education programme based on the BBOWT project visiting a small number (potentially 3) of schools each year – would require a minor increase in resources to employ an additional education officer to support the existing Communication and Education Co-ordinator.
 - (c) Short presentations at school assemblies – limited delivery possible within existing resources.

6. SPA Monitoring

Automatic people counter installation

- 6.1 The installation of people counters on Ministry of Defence land has been delayed due to difficulties obtaining a Statement of Known Hazards (ensuring there are no dangers in the proposed locations due to the need to undertake minor excavations in order to install the posts). However the Statement of Known Hazards was received on 14 February 2017, and

an installation period of 14 days from the 13 March 2017 has been agreed with the Ministry of Defence.

- 6.3 It was intended to let a tender for the analysis of the 2016 people counter data during Autumn 2016, with the intention of presenting the results to this Board meeting. However the project decided that the data would be best analysed over the period March to March to coincide with the bird breeding season. The commissioning of the data analysis will therefore take place in April or May of 2017.

Car Park Counts

- 6.4 The Project continues to undertake monthly car park transects across the SPA area, and have now moved into our second year of undertaking this work.
- 6.5 The first 12 months of car park transect data collection was completed in December 2016, and quotes were obtained in early February for the analysis of the data. Footprint Ecology has now been commissioned to undertake the analysis of the data, and to undertake a comparison to the data they previously collected in previous years. We are expecting the report in late March and it will be presented to the next Board meeting.

7. SAMP Project Budget

- 7.1 The financial information is set out in the Hampshire County Council paper, but set out below is a brief summary of any variation from the projected spend for the 2016/17 financial year.

Staff Costs

- 7.2 The Project staff costs are below the forecast amount due primarily to staff turnover. A number of the 2016 Seasonal Wardens left their posts early due to securing permanent employment elsewhere, however in all cases this occurred relatively late in the season and it was therefore not possible to replace these staff before the end of the Seasonal Warden contracts.
- 7.3 The Senior Warden retired in September 2016 and was replaced by one of the Warden team who secured a promotion to take on the role. However this required the back-fill of a Warden post, which led to the team being under staffed for a brief period. Also, the staff costs budget was calculated using the previous Senior Warden's salary, which was at the top of the scale due to length of service, whilst the replacement is at the bottom of the salary scale leading to a reduction in monthly salary cost to the project.
- 7.4 One of the full-time Wardens also left their post in October, and whilst most of the recruitment exercise was undertaken during the notice period, there was another brief period of being under staffed before the replacement Warden was in post.

Programme Costs

- 7.5 The programme budget is likely to be slightly under committed due to deferring the people counter data analysis until 2017/18. However, a number of people counters have suffered physical damage due to either vandalism or water ingress and this has led to a slight over-spend on replacement people counter sensors which has absorbed some of this under-

spend. The replacement people counters are of a more robust design than those which had been damaged so should prove more durable.

Annex 1. SANGs Survey Methodology

The following methodology has been developed for the Thames Basin Heaths Partnership team in order to enable them to survey strategic SANGs sites on behalf of the Thames Basin Heaths Local Planning Authorities. Bespoke or development specific sites will therefore not be surveyed as part of this exercise.

The survey methodology broadly follows that used on the Thames Basin Heaths SPA visitor survey undertaken by Footprint Ecology on behalf of Natural England, however the timings for the surveys have been changed slightly in recognition that these surveys will need to be undertaken during autumn and winter when daylight hours are shorter.

Weekday To be undertaken twice	Morning survey	08:00 – 10:00 = 2 hours
	Morning survey	11:00 – 13:00 = 2 hours
	Afternoon survey	14:00 – 16:00 = 2 hours
	Afternoon survey (summer only)	(17:00 – 19:00 = 2 hours)
Weekend To be undertaken once	Morning survey	08:00 – 10:00 = 2 hours
	Morning survey	11:00 – 13:00 = 2 hours
	Afternoon survey	14:00 – 16:00 = 2 hours
	Afternoon survey (summer only)	(17:00 – 19:00 = 2 hours)
		18 hours total (excluding summer survey)

The weekday surveys should be undertaken twice for each time slot, and the weekend surveys will be undertaken once for each time slot. Hence a total of 18 hours survey for each SANGs site (excluding the 17:00 – 19:00 time slot).

Visitors will be interviewed and counted as they leave the site, interviews will be undertaken at the site's main access point – usually located at the main car park. Paper survey forms will be used and the data inputted into a spreadsheet once each survey has been completed. The number of people leaving the site (passing the surveyor) will be counted on a hand held tally counter and the total for each 2 hour survey period will be recorded.

Only one person shall be interviewed from each group. Children likely to be under the age of 16 will not be surveyed or approached, but will be included in the tally count of the total number of people exiting the site from the surveyed access point. All survey work should be undertaken using the standard set of questions (appendix 1). Maps may be used to aid interviews and ensure the surveyor is clear about which sites the interviewee is referring to.

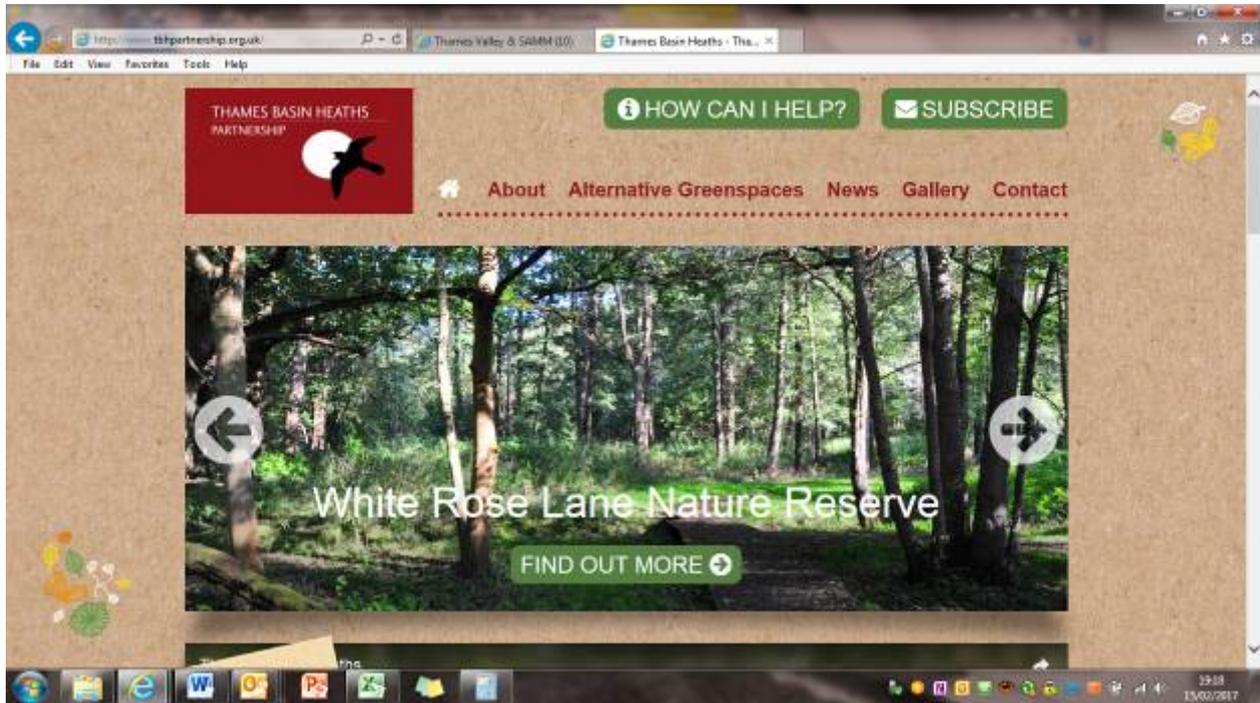
As part of the questionnaire, visitors will be asked to provide their home postcode. Subsequent GIS analysis can be carried out to determine visitor origins and distances travelled to each SANGs site, and the distance they live in relation to the SPA.

All reporting will be made available to the JSPB and Natural England.

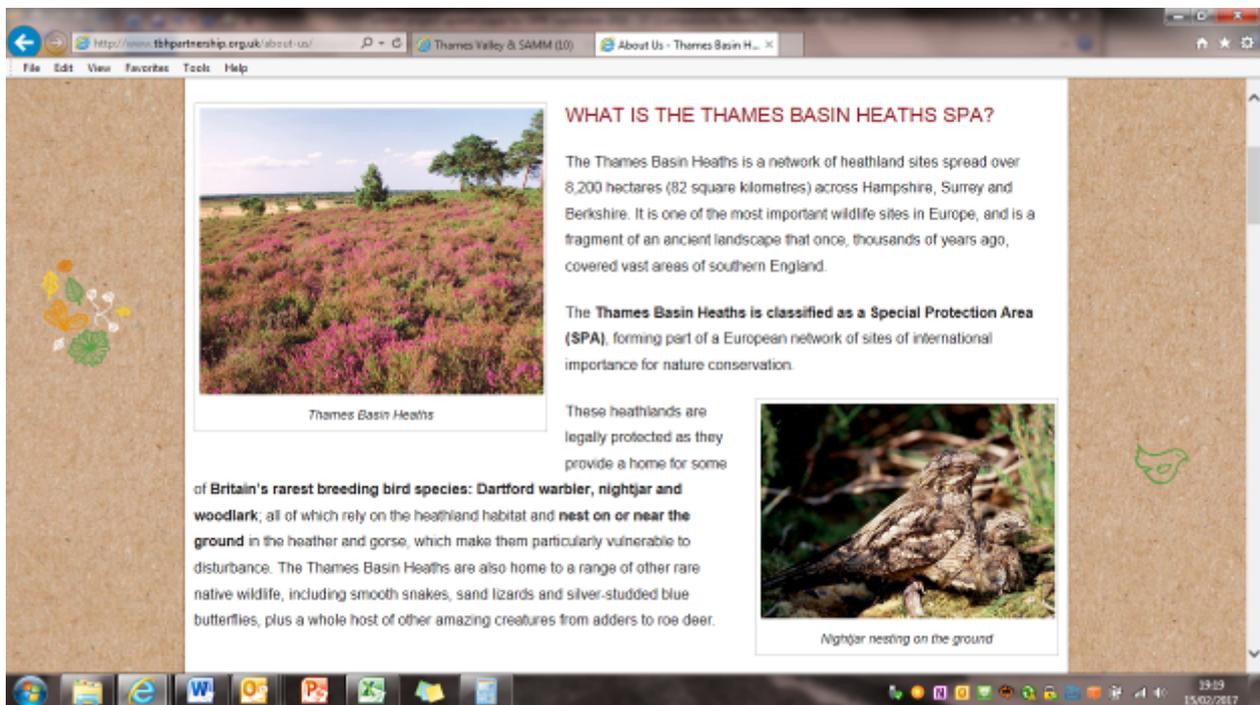
Annex 2 - Website

Screen shots of the various website sections.

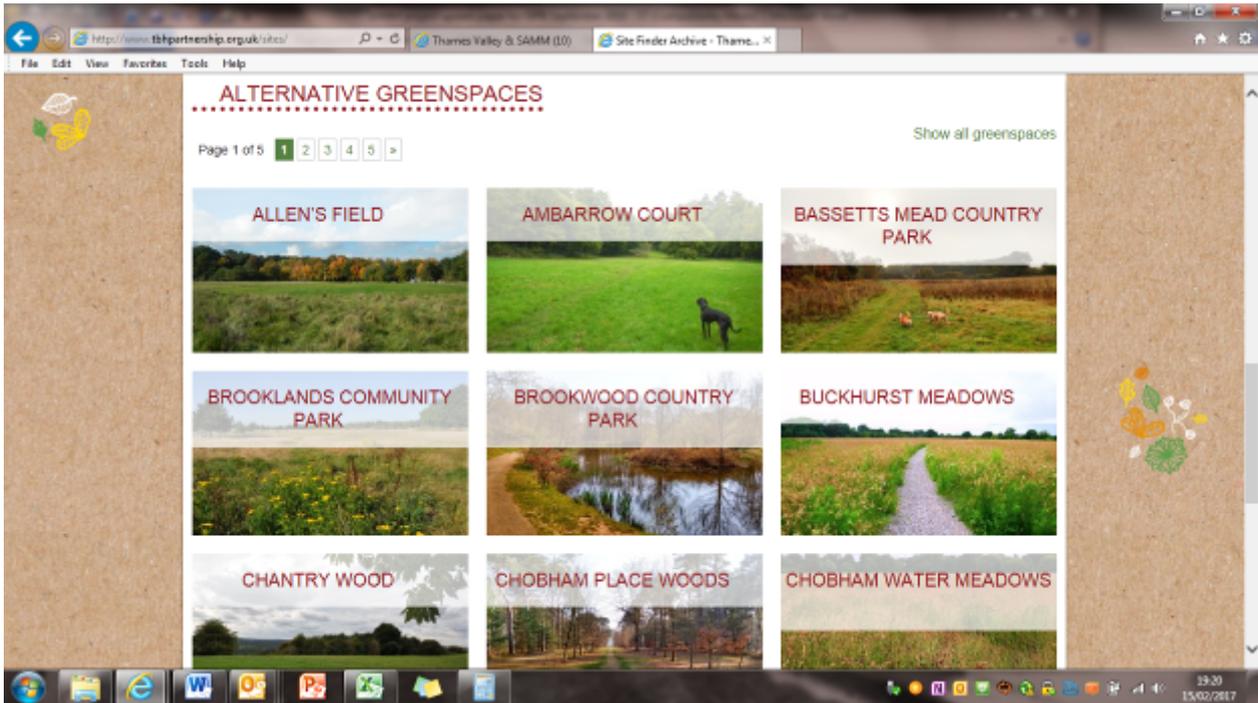
Home page



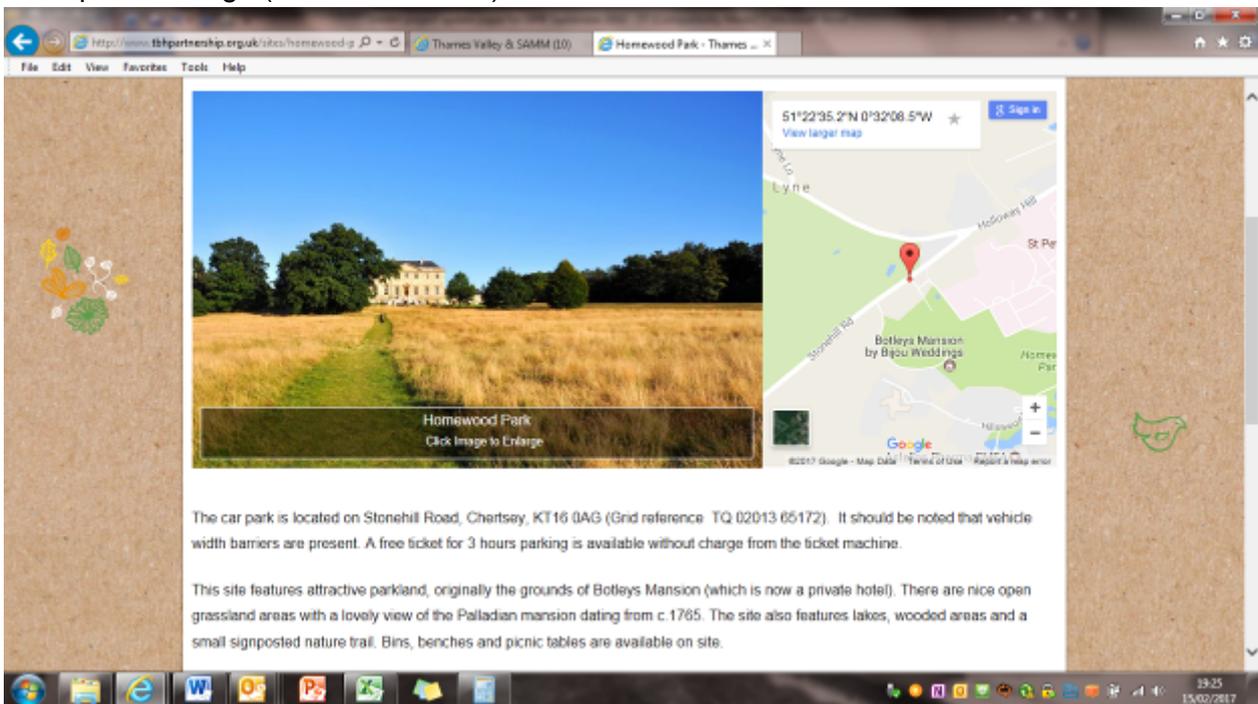
About



Alternative Greenspaces



Example Site Page (Homewood Park)



News

The screenshot shows a news article on the Thames Basin Heaths Partnership website. The main headline is "WOODLARKS RETURN TO THE HEATH" with a date badge for "FEB 09 2017". Below the headline are social sharing buttons for "SHARE", "TWEET", "SHARE", "PIN IT", "EMAIL", and "1 SHARES". The article features a photograph of a woodlark perched on a rock, with the caption "Woodlark Click image to Enlarge". The text below the image reads: "It may feel like the depth of winter, but the woodlarks are already looking to spring! Male woodlarks are now returning to the Thames Basin Heaths to setup their breeding". To the right of the main article, there are two sidebar boxes. The top one is titled "Woodlarks return to the heath" with the date "9th February 2017". The bottom one is titled "POPULAR POSTS" and lists two articles: "Introducing our new Wardens and Senior Warden! Tuesday 4th October 2016" and "Woodlarks return to the heath Thursday 9th February 2017". The browser's address bar shows the URL "http://www.tbhpartnership.org.uk/news/woodlarks-re...".

How can I help?

The screenshot shows the "How can I help?" page on the Thames Basin Heaths Partnership website. The page has a navigation bar with "HOW CAN I HELP?" and "SUBSCRIBE" buttons, and a menu with "About", "Alternative Greenspaces", "News", "Gallery", and "Contact". The main content area starts with a breadcrumb "You are here: Home » How can I help?". The section title is "HOW CAN I HELP?". The text explains: "The Thames Basin Heaths is one of the most important wildlife sites in Europe. It is however under pressure, and your help is needed to ensure its preservation for both wildlife and people." It then lists ways to help: "When visiting the Thames Basin Heaths, you can really help make a difference by:" followed by a list of five items: "Sticking to paths", "Keeping dogs on paths and under your control", "Always bagging and binning", "Reducing the risk of fire", and "Consider visiting alternative greenspaces". The browser's address bar shows the URL "http://www.tbhpartnership.org.uk/help/".