

# **Interim Solent Recreation Mitigation Strategy**

## **First Annual Report on Implementation**

**October 2015**



## 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. The Solent coast stretches from near Lymington to West Wittering and includes the northern shore of the Isle of Wight. It is internationally important for its wildlife, with 90,000 waders and over 10 per cent of the global population of Brent Geese. Many of these birds travel thousands of miles to over-winter on the Solent. Three Special Protection Areas (SPAs) were designated to protect these over-wintering waders and wildfowl.
- 1.2. A substantial amount of housebuilding is planned around the Solent and this new housing is likely to have potential impacts on the SPAs. One of these potential impacts is increased recreational activity at the coast resulting from population increases associated with the new homes. Increased recreational activity is likely to lead to increased disturbance to waders and wildfowl within the SPAs. Such disturbance reduces the birds' opportunities to feed which can mean they have insufficient energy to survive the winter or to complete their migratory journey to their summer-time habitats. If that occurred, there would be a reduction in the bird population.
- 1.3. The Interim Solent Recreation Mitigation Strategy aims to prevent the additional recreational activity from harming the birds in the SPAs. It was prepared by the local authorities and partner organisations, who established the Solent Recreation Mitigation Partnership to implement the strategy.
- 1.4. The strategy includes the following package of mitigation measures:-
  - a team of rangers who will work on the ground to reduce disturbance by influencing the behaviour of visitors;
  - initiatives to encourage responsible dog walking and encourage dog owners to go to less sensitive parts of the coast;
  - a monitoring scheme to track the implementation of mitigation measures and to assess their effectiveness;
  - a project officer who will coordinate and help implement the mitigation measures, undertake monitoring and prepare the definitive mitigation strategy;
  - a financial contribution towards a pilot project to test the effectiveness of providing alternative recreation opportunities.
- 1.5. This is the first report on implementation of the strategy which will be published annually by the Partnership. It describes the progress made during the year 2014/15 and sets out the Partnership's plans for the year 2015/16.
- 1.6. The Partnership comprises the fifteen Solent local authorities, Natural England, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, and Chichester Harbour Conservancy. The local authorities are: Chichester District Council, East Hampshire District Council, Eastleigh Borough Council, Fareham Borough Council, Gosport Borough Council, Hampshire County Council, Havant Borough Council, Isle of Wight Council, New Forest District Council, New Forest National Park Authority, Portsmouth City Council, Southampton City Council, South Downs National Park Authority, Test Valley Borough Council, Winchester City Council.

## **2. PROGRESS DURING 2014/15**

### **Overview**

2.1. Many of the homes which were built during 2014/15 and some which will be built over the next few years were permitted before the introduction in 2014 of the requirement for a developer contribution towards the mitigation measures. In addition, the requirement is generally for the developer contributions to be paid on the commencement of dwelling construction. For these reasons, the money available for implementing the mitigation measures will only increase gradually. Consequently, 2014/15 was a year of preparatory work for implementation of the first mitigation measures during the ensuing year 2015/16.

### **Procedures, protocols and political governance**

2.2. In early 2014, the Solent local authorities pooled sufficient money from their own reserves to recruit a part-time officer to move things forward. That appointment enabled the preparation of the Interim Solent Recreation Mitigation Strategy.

2.3. The Solent Recreation Mitigation Partnership (SRMP) was established during 2014 by the Solent local authorities and other key organisations to implement and monitor the strategy. It was agreed that the political governance for the Partnership should be provided by the Partnership for Urban South Hampshire (PUSH). The three local authorities who are part of the SRMP but are not members of PUSH - Chichester District Council, the New Forest and South Downs National Park Authorities - participate in PUSH meetings when SRMP matters are discussed.

2.4. As well as formally approving the Interim Solent Recreation Mitigation Strategy, the December 2014 PUSH Joint Committee meeting endorsed the Terms of Reference and organisational structure of the Solent Recreation Mitigation Partnership.

2.5. A web page was established to provide access to the strategy, related documents, and information about the Partnership. The web page is hosted by one of the partners - Portsmouth City Council - at:  
<https://www.portsmouth.gov.uk/ext/community-and-environment/environment/solent-recreation-mitigation-strategy.aspx>

2.6. The mitigation measures are being funded by a developer contribution from each new dwelling and the local authorities are pooling the contributions through the Partnership. Administrative arrangements were agreed during 2014 for the transfer of money at the end of each quarter, and the first transfers took place in January 2015. None of the money transferred to the Partnership during 2014/15 was spent in that financial year, but is being budgeted for expenditure during 2015/16 (see below).

## **Mitigation measures**

- 2.7. The Partnership's Steering Group established two task-and-finish groups to take forward the two key mitigation measures - a team of rangers and initiatives to encourage responsible dog walking. In anticipation of sufficient developer contributions being received to enable the employment of the first rangers in 2015/16, the rangers task-and-finish group drew up job descriptions and associated employment documents. The dog walking initiatives task-and-finish group drew up a brief for commissioning a consultant to advise on initiatives which have been successfully deployed elsewhere and to market test potential Solent initiatives with dog walkers.
- 2.8. Monitoring of the effectiveness of the mitigation measures is vital. A task-and-finish group established by the Partnership's Steering Group prepared a detailed brief for the commissioning of a specialist consultancy to advise on how to undertake that monitoring in the most economical and robust way. That work will be commissioned during 2015/16 - see below - with the aim of the monitoring itself being undertaken during 2017-9 and thereafter at intervals of, say, every five years.
- 2.9. Separate but complementary to the visitor management measures described above (paragraph 1.4), the Solent Recreation Mitigation Partnership and PUSH made a successful bid for £1.4 million from the Solent Local Growth Deal to enable the creation of four new strategic greenspaces. With walking trails, car parking and other visitor facilities, the four greenspaces will provide an alternative to going to the coast within the SPAs. Two will be started in 2015/16 and the other two in 2017/18.

## **Planning permissions and appeals**

- 2.10. Developers whose schemes will have a recreational impact on the Solent SPAs have the option of paying a developer contribution towards mitigation measures as set out in the Interim Solent Recreation Mitigation Strategy, or providing their own mitigation. During 2014/15, planning permission was granted for 2,302 dwellings which were judged to require mitigation. All but one of the planning applicants opted for the developer contribution option, which underlines that the Strategy provides a way for developers to address the mitigation issue quickly, simply and at minimal cost.
- 2.11. Portsmouth and Southampton city councils judge that purpose built student accommodation in their city centres will have a lesser impact on the SPAs, so consequently they require a developer contribution which is half of that for other residential properties. Planning permission was granted for 664 such properties during 2014/15. (NB: These are included in the total in paragraph 2.10.)
- 2.12. During 2014/15, there were three appeal decisions on individual planning applications in which the principle of the developer contribution was supported/endorsed. Two resulted in the approval of eight dwellings, with both planning inspectors endorsing the need for a financial contribution to mitigation (Appeal refs: APP/J1725/A/14/2214722; APP/A1720/A/14/2223314). In the third

case, the inspector decided that the absence of a financial contribution to mitigate the adverse effect on the integrity of the SPAs was a reason for the dismissal of an appeal for one bungalow (Appeal ref: APP/D1780/A/14/2228796).

- 2.13. In a fourth appeal concerning five proposed dwellings near Emsworth, the appellant accepted the need for a developer contribution to mitigation, but the planning inspector questioned how the contribution figure was calculated and how it would be spent. He did nevertheless state that in accordance with the precautionary principle, he was unable to conclude that the proposal would not adversely affect the integrity of the SPA. (Appeal ref: APP/L3815/A/14/2223287).

### **3. PLANS FOR 2015/16**

3.1. To ensure sound financial management, the Partnership's annual budget will be determined by the amount of developer contributions received during the preceding year. On that basis, an expenditure budget has been set for 2015/16 totalling £128,000. This budget (reproduced in appendix 1) will enable a start in 2015/16 on implementing the mitigation measures. It will also fund the employment of a part-time officer who will coordinate implementation of mitigation measures and prepare necessary documentation such as this annual report.

3.2. The mitigation measures and other initiatives which are planned to be undertaken during 2015/16 are as follows:-

- finalisation of Service Level Agreements for the provision of rangers, with the first rangers starting work in the autumn;
- identification of initiatives which will be effective in encouraging responsible dog walking in the SPAs;
- preparation of answers to commonly-asked questions about mitigation which will be published on the Partnership's web page;
- organisation of a half-day seminar for local authority planners and lawyers to facilitate a sharing of knowledge and experience with the various types of legal agreements which can be used to secure developer contributions;
- commissioning of expert advice on how to monitor the effectiveness of the mitigation measures;
- commencement of preparation of the definitive mitigation strategy;
- regular updating of the web page and preparation of this annual report (which next year will include financial accounts).

## APPENDIX: 2015/16 PARTNERSHIP BUDGET

<b>Item</b>	<b>£000s</b>
Whole-year ranger (part-year cost)	30
Winter-only ranger	20
Dog walking initiatives consultancy advice	15
Effectiveness monitoring consultancy advice	15
Operating budget	14
Visitor survey to assess the success of Alver Valley Country Park as a SANG	7
Partnership coordination officer	26
Awareness raising and engagement seminars/events	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>128</b>