

Interim Solent Recreation Mitigation Strategy

Third Annual Report on Implementation

June 2017

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 birds, 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 spend the winter here. Three Special Protection Areas (SPAs) were designated on the Solent 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 the birds within the SPAs. Such disturbance interrupts their feeding which can mean they have insufficient energy to survive the winter and complete their migratory journey back 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. It was prepared, and will be implemented, by the Solent Recreation Mitigation Partnership which was established in 2014.
- 1.4. This is the third annual report on implementation of the strategy. It describes the progress made during the year 2016/17 and sets out the Partnership's plans for the year 2017/18.
- 1.5. 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 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.
- 1.6. Political governance is provided by the Joint Committee of the Partnership for Urban South Hampshire (PUSH) with the involvement of the representatives of the three non-PUSH authorities¹. The PUSH Joint Committee approved the 2017/18 budget at its December 2016 meeting, and approved this Annual Report at its June 2017 meeting.
- 1.7. More information about the mitigation strategy and the Partnership can be seen at: <https://www.portsmouth.gov.uk/ext/community-and-environment/environment/solent-recreation-mitigation-strategy.aspx>

¹ Chichester District Council, New Forest and South Downs National Park Authorities

2. PROGRESS DURING 2016/17

Overview

2.1. Increased funding enabled the Partnership to employ a larger ranger team during 2016/17. Their face to face engagement with visitors on the coast was supported by the production of a leaflet and the launch of a new website. Research was completed into the type of initiatives which would best encourage responsible dog walking, and the first two monitoring surveys were undertaken. In parallel to those activities associated with the Interim Mitigation Strategy, a draft of the definitive mitigation strategy was completed for public consultation. The Partnership's expenditure during the year is set out in Appendix 1.

Preparation of the Definitive Strategy

- 2.2. The current Interim Mitigation Strategy was adopted in 2014 and whilst it has some limitations, it is recognised that it has successfully enabled some mitigation to be put in place and removed a potential blockage to housebuilding.
- 2.3. As the name suggests, this Interim Strategy was only brought in for a limited period of time, with the intention of replacing it with a more thorough Definitive Strategy.
- 2.4. Work on preparing the Definitive Strategy is well underway. In December 2016, a presentation was made to the Partnership for Urban South Hampshire (PUSH) about the proposed scope and priorities to be included in the Definitive Strategy, together with the financial implications of these measures.
- 2.5. In February 2017 the Partnership hosted three seminars (at Havant, Romsey and Newport) for development industry representatives. At these seminars, 80 delegates were presented with detailed proposals for the Definitive Strategy and their views were sought on a number of issues. Responses indicated that the majority of those who attended felt that the proposed definitive mitigation strategy measures were appropriate. Additionally, the majority believed that the associated rise in developer contribution to £500-£600 would not prejudice the delivery of homes.
- 2.6. Following these seminars, a first draft of the Definitive Strategy has been completed and is currently undergoing internal review. It is intended to present a finalised consultation draft version of the strategy document to Council Leaders for sign-off for consultation. That sign-off will be sought from the PUSH Joint Committee meeting on 6 June to which representatives will be invited from the three authorities which are not PUSH members - Chichester District Council, New Forest National Park Authority, South Downs National Park Authority.
- 2.7. Following this meeting, a period of public consultation will take place over the summer months

Mitigation measures

2.8. The key mitigation measure is a team of rangers who patrol the coast. The rangers aim to reduce bird disturbance by helping people to better understand the over-wintering birds and their vulnerability to disturbance. The availability of additional funding enabled four rangers to be employed during winter 2016/17 compared to three the previous winter. One is the all-year Lead Ranger, and the others are seasonal winter-only staff. With only a small team to patrol over 250 kilometres of coast, the rangers gave priority to visiting coastal sections where there was greatest potential for bird disturbance.

2.9. During the 2016/17 winter period, the rangers carried out the following activities and grew their social media presence as follows:

Achievement	Figure
Site visits	373
Hours on site	931
Bird Aware leaflets given out	518
Community events attended	14
Interactions with public (bird orientated)	2219
Interactions with public (general rapport building)	1377
Twitter followers	374
Facebook followers	180

2.10. The rangers are employed by Hampshire County Council (on the mainland coast) and the Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust (on the Isle of Wight coast) under two-year Service Agreements. Those expire in July 2017; the Partnership has agreed with both parties to extend the arrangements for a further two years.

2.11. The other mitigation measure in the Interim Mitigation Strategy is initiatives to encourage responsible dog walking. This is because evidence shows that dogs, especially those off-lead, account for 41% of all bird disturbance. Following a review of initiatives which have been successfully used elsewhere and market research with dog walkers, the Partnership has identified an overall approach on this topic enabling actions to be taken over the next couple of years.

2.12. The dog walking market research and other surveys show some people would be willing to walk at inland sites instead of at the coast. The range of recreational greenspaces around the Solent is being enhanced through the Solent Local Growth Deal funding secured by the SRMP. Construction of a country park at Horsea Island commenced in autumn 2016, which will complement the new facilities created at Alver Valley and Manor Farm Country Parks during 2015/16.

2.13. In the case of Manor Farm Country Park, a visitor counter installed at the entrance to the new open access land and walks has shown that they provide an increasingly popular addition. 49,000 people have visited the area since October 2015 with the numbers rising from 3,500 in October 2015 to 5,748 in October 2016.

2.14. The Alver Valley Country Park has two new gateway car parks providing improved access to this major recreational area (157 ha). The car parks include interpretation panels about the attractions of the Country Park showing a variety of routes that dog walkers and other users can enjoy throughout the year. These components have greatly improved accessibility and created a welcoming gateway to this expansive and varied site.

Monitoring

2.15. Monitoring the effectiveness of the mitigation measures is vital. The first two monitoring surveys took place during winter 2016/17. They were counts of the number of visitors and their recreational activities at selected coastal sites, including counts of vehicles in coastal car parks together with counts of people, dogs on/off lead, and activities being undertaken (viewed from vantage points at/near selected car parks) in order that future repeated counts in later years can monitor changes in visitors.

2.16. , The other monitoring work focused on a study of the effect of the rangers' presence on peoples' behaviour. This concentrated on observation of people numbers, activities, bird numbers, and disturbance levels at ten locations with regular ranger patrols. When these are repeated in future years, they will show if there has been a reduction in disturbance over time due to the rangers presence.

2.17. These are the first of a range of different surveys which will be undertaken over the next few winters: together they will enable conclusions to be made on the effectiveness of the mitigation measures. The studies conducted this winter were designed to form a robust baseline and will be repeated regularly every other year, so that changes over time can be seen.

Information, communications and financial contributions

2.18. Effective communications are key to the Partnership's aim of raising awareness and achieving behavioural change amongst people who visit the coast. Several communications initiatives were introduced during 2016/17 to complement the rangers face-to-face contact with coastal visitors. A leaflet was produced in November, highlighting the importance of the birds, providing details about several species that can be seen in winter and promoting how coastal visitors can become more bird aware.

2.19. A new high quality website was launched on February 21st. Built by Chichester District Council, the website contains details of the birds and advice to people on what they can do to avoid disturbing them. It also contains the information needed by developers and planners. In the first 5 weeks of going live, the website attracted 2,850 page views and early google analytics information indicates that the 'About the Birds' section is the most popular with those using it. The website can be seen at www.birdaware.org

2.20. Recognising that the name 'Solent Recreation Mitigation Partnership' is a rather long title and is not very meaningful to the public, the Partnership adopted the brand name 'Bird Aware Solent' for its external communications. Devised by Havant Borough Council officers, it succinctly describes the Partnership's role and is an easy mnemonic. This branding now features on the Rangers uniforms. The name Solent Recreation Mitigation Partnership will continue to be used on technical documents such as this annual report.



2.21. A half-day seminar was held in September for officers in partner and other key organisations. This enabled information about the Partnership's current and future activities to be shared amongst a wider audience. The event was a success and will be repeated at key points in the development of the Partnership.

2.22. The Partnership has developed an Interim Communications Strategy which details such things as key messages, stakeholder analysis and social media guidelines. This will set the path for communication initiatives and will be used to guide the work of the communications support provided to the Partnership.

2.23. The Partnership's expenditure is funded by developer contributions in association with planning permissions for new housing around the Solent. The Interim Mitigation Strategy states that the £172 per dwelling contribution figure will be updated on 1 April each year in line with the Retail Price Index (RPI). The figure was increased to £174 in April 2015, to £176 in April 2016 and to £181 from 1 April 2017. Those rises mirror the RPI increase over the preceding twelve months rounded to the nearest whole pound. (NB: The Partnership recognises that some authorities are not able to implement an increase because the developer contribution figure is fixed in an adopted Supplementary Planning Document and cannot be changed without revising the whole SPD.)

Planning permissions and appeals

2.24. 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 2016/17, planning permission was granted for 6,179 dwellings which were judged to require mitigation. All of the planning applicants opted for the developer contribution option, except one application for 14 dwellings which included a large area of managed woodland. This high rate of uptake underlines that the Strategy provides a way for developers to address the mitigation issue quickly and simply.

2.25. 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 2,994 such properties during 2016/17. (NB: These are included in the total in the preceding paragraph.)

2.26. It is now the established norm in planning appeals for the planning inspector to endorse the principle of the developer contribution or cite the absence of mitigation as a ground for dismissing the appeal. The Partnership is not aware of any planning appeals during the year where the inspector did not support the need for a developer contribution to Solent recreation mitigation.

3. PLANS FOR 2017/18

3.1. The local authorities are pooling the developer contributions through the Partnership. To ensure sound financial management, the Partnership sets its annual budget on the basis of the amount of developer contributions received during the preceding year. On that basis, a budget has been set for 2017/18 totalling £462,000. This budget (reproduced in appendix 2) will fund the implementation of mitigation measures and associated costs including the part-time Partnership officer.

3.2. The mitigation measures described above are being funded by developer contributions from the housing planned in Local Plans over the next 10-15 years, but legislation requires the measures to be provided in-perpetuity. The Partnership is addressing this investing a proportion of the developer contributions received in order to create an investment pot which will fund the mitigation measures in-perpetuity. (This is similar to saving to fund one's pension.) It has been calculated that nearly 60% of the developer contributions received needs to be invested in that way in order to provide sufficient future income to fund the mitigation measures in-perpetuity.

3.3. The decisions, mitigation measures and other initiatives which are planned to be undertaken during 2017/18 include:-

- a ranger team comprising an all-year ranger, and three winter-only staff (i.e. the same as last year);
- implementing some 'quick win' initiatives to encourage responsible dog walking;
- stepping up communications activity including issuing regular press releases, placing regular items on Twitter, and further development of the website;
- undertaking the second phase of data collection to monitor the effectiveness of the mitigation measures;
- holding public consultation on, and then finalising, the definitive mitigation strategy.

Annual Report Appendix 1: ACCOUNTS 2016/17

SRMP 2016/17 Final Accounts (period April 2016 - March 2017)

	£'s	Actual £'s
Income from contributions:		517,665
Expenditure:		
Rangers	(97,973)	
Dog walking initiatives consultancy advice	(7,233)	
Effectiveness monitoring consultancy advice	(22,372)	
Operating costs	(12,982)	
Partnership coordination officer	(33,627)	
Total Expenditure:		<hr/> (174,187)
Balance before transfer to in-perpetuity fund:		<hr/> 343,478
Transfer to in-perpetuity fund		(122,000)
Total contribution to reserves 16/17		<hr/> 221,478 <hr/>

Balances at 31/3/2017

Reserves brought forward @ 31/3/16	329,224
Contribution to reserves 16/17	221,478
Reserves carried forward @ 31/3/17	<hr/> 550,702 <hr/>
In-perpetuity fund @ 31/3/16	143,500
Transfer in 16/17	122,000
Interest received	1,411
In-perpetuity fund @ 31/3/17	<hr/> 266,911 <hr/>

Annual Report Appendix 2: 2017/18 BUDGET

<i>Item</i>	<i>000s</i>
Rangers	100
Dog initiatives	20
Operating budget (publicity, seminars/events etc.)	15
Monitoring	30
Partnership coordination officer	30
Spending on mitigation measures during the year	195
Contribution to in-perpetuity investment fund	267
Total budget	462