

# Solent Recreation Mitigation Strategy

Fourth Annual Report on Implementation



June 2018

## 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. The Solent coast stretches from near Lymington to West Wittering and includes the northern shore of the Isle of Wight from near Colwell to Whitecliffe Bay near Bembridge. 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 Solent Recreation Mitigation Partnership (here after known by its outward facing brand name of Bird Aware) aims to prevent the additional recreational activity from harming the birds. Since 2014, it has been operating under an Interim Strategy, but in December 2017, the longer term, more comprehensive Strategy was endorsed by the Partnership for Urban South Hampshire and was subsequently approved by each local planning authority as a basis for seeking financial contributions to mitigate the impact of housebuilding on the coastline. The new charging rate associated with this long term Strategy came into effect on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2018. This Strategy is set to run until 2034, and includes an in perpetuity element which will enable mitigation to continue until 2114.
- 1.4. This is the fourth annual report on implementation of the Partnership's work. It describes the progress made during the year 2017/18 and sets out the Partnership's plans for the year 2018/19.
- 1.5. The Partnership comprises the fifteen Solent local planning 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 authorities<sup>1</sup>. The PUSH Joint Committee approved the 2018/19 budget at its 5<sup>th</sup> December 2017 meeting.

1.7. More information about the mitigation strategy and the Partnership can be seen at: [www.birdaware.org](http://www.birdaware.org)

## **2. PROGRESS DURING 2017/18**

### **Overview**

2.1. The main strategic focus for the Partnership this year has centred on the development of, public consultation on and subsequent endorsement of the long term Strategy. The outreach work of the Ranger team has continued to grow as their work and interactions have benefitted from the strength of the Bird Aware brand, website and increased presence on social media platforms. Monitoring work has again been undertaken on behalf of the Partnership and the first tranche of Access Management Assessments (detailed assessments of high priority sites) have taken place. The Partnership's expenditure during the year is set out in Appendix 1.

### **Longterm Strategy**

2.2. Bird Aware started the year operating under an Interim Mitigation Strategy. This was adopted in 2014 and whilst it had some limitations, it was recognised that it had successfully enabled some mitigation to be put in place and remove a potential blockage to housebuilding. However it was always understood that it was brought in for a limited period of time, with the intention of replacing it with a comprehensive, long term Strategy.

2.3. A comprehensive draft of the Strategy was presented to PUSH on 27<sup>th</sup> June and following their approval, a period of public consultation took place between 17<sup>th</sup> July and 17<sup>th</sup> September. It took the form of an online questionnaire on the Bird Aware website ([www.birdaware.org](http://www.birdaware.org)) and to make it more accessible paper copies were also made available for sending to a postal address on request.

2.4. The consultation was actively promoted on the Bird Aware twitter account, in press releases and through partner organisations. Additionally an email was sent to around 1,600 contacts with a known interest in development (land owners, developers, land agents, planning consultants) informing them of the consultation and inviting them to participate.

2.5. The press releases were picked up in two national publications, Planning Resource (specifically targeted at planners) and the ENDS Report (covering a wider range of environmental and sustainability issues).

2.6. A total of 49 responses were received. The respondents were asked to identify the capacity in which they (or their organisation) were commenting and the

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<sup>1</sup> Chichester District Council, New Forest and South Downs National Park Authorities

breakdown of this information is as follows: 19 residents, 7 planning consultants, 8 conservation interest, 5 public sector organisations, 3 developers and 7 used the category of 'other'.

- 2.7. As expected from such a wide variety of interest groups responding, the comments varied considerably, with some seeming to be 100% in favour of the Strategy whilst others commented it was misconceived and should be scrapped.
- 2.8. Following consideration of the comments made during the consultation period (a full report on these can be seen at <http://www.birdaware.org/strategy>), several amendments were made to the Strategy and a revised version was presented to the PUSH Joint Committee on 5<sup>th</sup> December to which representatives were invited from the three authorities which are not PUSH members - Chichester District Council, New Forest National Park Authority and South Downs National Park Authority.
- 2.9. The Strategy was endorsed at this meeting and subsequently approved by each of the local planning authorities by the end of the financial year. The new level of charging started across the Partnership on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2018.

### **Mitigation measures**

- 2.10. 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 importance of the over-wintering birds and their vulnerability to disturbance. They advise people on how small changes in their behaviour can be hugely beneficial to the birds.
- 2.11. The ranger team has been expanded during the past year, with 2 new full time, permanent rangers joining the partnership in January 2018. They and the Lead Ranger were further supported by 3 additional seasonal rangers employed for the winter period. This is still a relatively small team to cover approximately 250 kilometres of coast, so the rangers gave priority to visiting coastal sections where there was greatest potential for bird disturbance.
- 2.12. During the 2017/18 winter period, the rangers carried out the following activities and grew their social media presence as follows:

Achievement	Figure
Site visits	466
Hours on site	1759
Total number of people engaged with during site visits	5184
Engagements related to work of Bird Aware Solent	4645
Engagements related to impact of bird disturbance	2831
Community events attended	33
Number of people engaged with at events	1727
Bird Aware leaflets given out	3407
Twitter followers at 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2018	733
Facebook followers at 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2018	381
Instagram followers at 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2018	142

- 2.13. 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 Service Level Agreements.
- 2.14. 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 47% of all instances of bird disturbance resulting in major flights. Literature has been produced which is targeted at dog walkers, aiming to help them keep their dogs safe and happy on the coast, whilst still affording the birds the space they require.
- 2.15. As the project grows, a dedicated Dog Initiatives Officer will join the team and it is expected that the focus of this work will really take off at that point. In the meantime, the Partnership is learning best practice and quick wins from other similar mitigation schemes, whilst building positive relationships with dog walkers we meet on the coast.
- 2.16. Previously undertaken dog walking market research and other surveys show some people may 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 Partnership. Construction of a country park at Horsea Island commenced in autumn 2016, which will complement the facilities created at Alver Valley and Manor Farm Country Parks during 2015/16.
- 2.17. Additionally, a business case has been submitted to the LEP to request the reallocation of Growth Deal funding to assist in the creation of a Brent Goose refuge in Havant. This will comprise of a permanent fenced refuge containing a mix of improved grassland and winter wheat, as well as bird hides and interpretation boards. Should this be acceptable to the LEP, it will use the funding originally intended to support work at Itchen Valley in Eastleigh, which is no longer planned to take place.

## **Monitoring**

- 2.18. Monitoring the effectiveness of the mitigation measures is vital. During winter 2017/18, visitor surveys were undertaken along the coast and 10 footfall counters were installed at key points (these counters will collect data for a 12 month period). The two pieces of work aim to find out how and why people are using the coast, as well as their attitudes towards the birds, alternative recreational areas and other such issues. These will be repeated in future years to see if attitudes and use patterns are changing over time.

## **Information, communications and financial contributions**

- 2.19. Effective communications are key to the Partnership's aim of raising awareness and achieving behavioural change amongst people who visit the coast. Having the Bird Aware branding (i.e. moving away from the less understandable Solent Recreation Mitigation Partnership label) and the website

([www.birdaware.org](http://www.birdaware.org)) have been instrumental in helping us have our messaging understood and actively promoted.

- 2.20. The Bird Aware branding has attracted significant interest from 3<sup>rd</sup> party mitigation schemes and requests have been received to allow the branding to be used in other locations. The benefits of allowing this include having a louder collective voice, more media exposure and economies of scale ensuring that mitigation measures are more effective.
- 2.21. This option was considered by PUSH in October and consent was given to share the Bird Aware branding to third parties who are willing to agree to a memorandum of understanding detailing terms and conditions. These will dictate the careful and diligent use of it by partners, thus ensuring that both the core values of the brand and the professionalism of its presentation are maintained at all times across all channels. It is also envisaged that these third parties will have to pay an annual sum to use the branding, this money will be allocated to fund any additional communications officer resources needed to deal with the third parties use of the brand, thus making sure that locally we are still fully resourced for our needs.
- 2.22. These safeguards are currently being worked up and it is expected that 3<sup>rd</sup> parties will be able to take on the branding shortly.
- 2.23. 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 google analytics information indicates that the 'About the Birds' section is the most popular with those using it. This is a 2500% increase in website use over the similar period the year before. The website can be seen at [www.birdaware.org](http://www.birdaware.org)
- 2.24. The Partnership has developed an Interim Communications Strategy which details such things as key messages, stakeholder analysis and social media guidelines. This sets the path for communication initiatives and is being used to guide the work of the communications support provided to the Partnership.
- 2.25. The Partnership is also recruiting a dedicated Communication Lead Officer (to a 3 year post) who will be responsible for implementing the Communications Strategy and establishing a wider tranche of communications materials.
- 2.26. The partnership commissioned students from Southampton Solent University to produce a 3 minute video to promote key messages. This has been well received and it is intended to commission more short videos within 2018/19.
- 2.27. The Partnership's expenditure (excluding major projects which use Growth Deal funding) is funded by developer contributions in association with planning permissions for new housing around the Solent. The Interim Mitigation Strategy stated that the £172 per dwelling contribution figure would 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.)

2.28. From the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2018, the Partnership started charging the fees set out in the longterm Strategy. These are set on a sliding scale based upon bedroom numbers, ranging from £337 for a one bedroom property to £880 for a five or greater bedroom property. These too will be revised in line with the RPI annually as well as reviewed every 2 years.

### **Planning permissions and appeals**

2.29. 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 2017/18, planning permission was granted for 4,549 dwellings which were assessed as requiring mitigation. All of the planning applicants opted to contribute to the Strategy.

2.30. 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 2018/19**

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 2018/19 totalling £780,000. 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. 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 2018/19 include:-

- a ranger team comprising 3 all-year rangers, and three winter-only rangers (i.e. the same level of seasonal rangers as last year);
- implementing some 'quick win' initiatives to encourage responsible dog walking;
- replying on the new Communications Lead post to continue growing communications activity issuing regular press releases, placing regular items on Twitter, and further developing the website;
- actively promoting the use of the Bird Aware brand to 3<sup>rd</sup> parties
- completing the second series of access management assessments
- undertaking the fourth phase of data collection to monitor the effectiveness of the mitigation measures.



## Annual Report Appendix 1: ACCOUNTS 2017/18

### SRMP 2017/18 Final Accounts (period April 2017 - March 2018)

	£'s	Actual £'s
Income from contributions:		816,888
Expenditure:		
Rangers	(181,492)	
Dog walking initiatives consultancy advice	(3,504)	
Operating costs	(37,647)	
Partnership coordination officer	(29,655)	
Total Expenditure:		<u>(252,297)</u>
Balance before transfer to in-perpetuity fund:		564,591
Transfer to in-perpetuity fund		(267,000)
Total contribution to reserves 17/18		<u>297,591</u>

### Balances at 31/3/2017

Reserves brought forward @ 31/03/17	550,702
Contribution to reserves 17/18	297,591
Reserves carried forward @ 31/03/18	<u>848,293</u>
In-perpetuity fund @ 31/03/17	266,911
Transfer in 17/18	267,000
Interest received	863
In-perpetuity fund @ 31/03/18	<u>534,774</u>

## Annual Report Appendix 2: 2018/19 BUDGET

<i>Item</i>	<i>000s</i>
Rangers	210
Dog initiatives	20
Partnership coordination officer	30
Operating budget	10
Monitoring	30
Comms Officer	40
Comms operational budget	10
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>350</b>
Contribution to in-perpetuity fund	450
<b>Total budget</b>	<b>800</b>