

Solent Recreation Mitigation Strategy

Fifth Annual Report on Implementation



June 2019

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 125,000 waders and over 10 per cent of the global population of Dark Bellied 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 research shows that 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 breeding 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 1st 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 fifth annual report on implementation of the Partnership's work. It describes the progress made during the year 2018/19 and sets out the Partnership's plans for the year 2019/20.
- 1.5. This reporting period covers a time of great progress as it marks the start of the Partnership operating under the long term Strategy, increased staffing levels facilitating greater outreach and more monitoring work being undertaken. Additionally, the work Partnership has been recognised as exemplary by the Royal Town Planning Institute, with it winning the South East Regions 'Planning for the Natural Environment Award' and the overall 'Regional Winner' award.
- 1.6. 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.

1.7. 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 2019/20 budget at its 4th December 2018 meeting.

1.8. More information about the mitigation strategy and the Partnership can be seen at: www.birdaware.org

2. PROGRESS DURING 2018/19

Overview

2.1. The main strategic focus for the Partnership this year has centred on growing the work and role of the Partnership now that it has a stronger footing through the political endorsement and local approval of the long term Strategy.

2.2. The outreach work of the Ranger team has reached new audiences as their work and interactions have benefitted from a larger team, the strength of the Bird Aware brand, the quality of the website and increased presence on social media platforms.

2.3. Monitoring work has again been undertaken on behalf of the Partnership and the second tranche of Access Management Assessments (detailed assessments of high priority sites) have taken place.

2.4. The Partnership's expenditure during the year is set out in Appendix 1.

2.5. Bird Aware started operating under the longterm Strategy on the 1st April 2018. This offers a comprehensive approach to mitigating against rising recreational pressures on the birds. It draws a higher level of Developer Contribution than the Interim Strategy did, thus affording this more comprehensive approach.

2.6. There is an anticipated delay between the higher charge levels being implemented, and a higher level of income stream (due to the nature of how some of the Developer Contributions are collected, they may not be payable until the point of development starting on site, which can be a considerable time after the granting of the relevant planning permission). This has therefore meant that a phased approach to implementing the wider work streams has been adopted and this is outlined below.

Mitigation measures

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

2.7. 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.

2.8. The ranger team was expanded in January 2018 and now consists of the Lead Ranger, two permanent Rangers and further support from 3 additional seasonal rangers employed for the winter period (their employment is from early September until the end of March, thus allowing for a period of induction and training before the winter season officially starts on 1st October). This is still a relatively small team to cover 254 kilometres of coast, so the rangers continued to give priority to visiting coastal sections where there was the greatest potential for bird disturbance, and those sections that afford high levels of public interaction.

2.9. During the 2018/19 winter period, the rangers carried out the following engagement activities:

Achievement	Figure
Site visits	729
Total number of people engaged with during site visits	12,811
Percentage of people who responded positively to Rangers on site	89
Leaflets distributed by rangers during site visits	5,324
Leaflets distributed via leaflet boxes/local organisations	2,518
Community events attended	40
Number of people engaged with at events	1,881
Twitter followers at 31 st March 2018	1,139
Facebook followers at 31 st March 2018	714
Instagram followers at 31 st March 2018	348

2.10. The rangers are employed by Hampshire County Council (HCC) on the mainland coast and the Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust (HIOWWT) on the Isle of Wight coast under Service Level Agreements. These current arrangements expire on 31st July 2019 and proposals are being worked up to secure a new contract for a further 5 year period, with options to extend this if agreeable to all parties.

2.11. With guidance from procurement colleagues within the Partnership, the proposal being developed is for HCC to employ all the Ranger team, and to work closely with HIOWWT so that the Ranger team continues to benefit from their expertise as well as their network of contacts.

2.12. Outreach work focused on initiatives to encourage responsible dog walking has been further trialled by the Ranger team this year, with them manning stalls at events targeted at the dog walking community. Evidence shows that dogs, especially those off-lead, account for 47% of all instances of bird disturbance resulting in major flights, therefore this is a key group for the Partnership to work with.

- 2.13. Furthermore, the Project Board has given approval to recruit a dedicated officer to lead on dog initiatives. Havant Borough Council will host this post for the Partnership and the role is currently undergoing job evaluation before recruitment will begin. It is anticipated that this new post holder will start in Summer 2019 and they will lead on this area of work.
- 2.14. 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.
- 2.15. The pathway resurfacing and installation of interpretation boards at Shoreburs Greenway in Southampton (also funded by Growth Deal money) has continued apace this year, with the works now principally complete and a public relaunch due this Summer.
- 2.16. Additionally, a business case was approved by the LEP to allow 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. Havant Borough Council is currently in detailed negotiations with the landowner and expect to advance this project in the coming year.

Monitoring

- 2.17. Monitoring the effectiveness of the mitigation measures is vital. During winter 2018/19, there 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 this data can be compared with previous counts and any further counts in later years, so that changes in visitors and their activities can be measured.
- 2.18. 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. Over time, this work will show if there has been a reduction in disturbance over time due to the rangers presence.
- 2.19. In terms of direct monitoring of birds, low tide bird counts were undertaken in Southampton waters by volunteers mobilised by Partnership contacts.
- 2.20. Finally, the 10 footfall counters installed at key points in 2017 completed their data collection within this period.

Information and Communications

- 2.21. 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) have been instrumental in helping us have our messaging understood and actively promoted.
- 2.22. During this reporting period, the Partnership core team has been extended to include a dedicated Brand and Communications Lead (appointed on a 3 year contract), who joined us in July 2018.
- 2.23. This post holder has created the Bird Aware marketing strategy which was approved in January 2019 by the Steering group. Its purpose is to create, connect and seize opportunities to engage with the users of the Solent coast and create a legacy of positive behaviour. Commencing in April 2019 for five years, it concludes at the end of the 23/24 migration season.
- 2.24. The strategy targets the full range coastal users from dog walkers, through to hard to reach users such as paddle boarders and cyclists. It utilises a range of communication channels such as print, press, digital and social media and covers all of the Bird Aware key messages.
- 2.25. Since October 2018 a series of press releases have been distributed to local newspapers, media groups and news organisations. To date the take up of these has been sporadic, but coverage has been secured in a number of significant publications including; The Daily Echo; The Portsmouth News; The Isle of Wight Observer and The Isle of Wight County Press.
- 2.26. In February a press release about Half Term events was picked up by 'That's Solent TV' which led to the Lead Ranger being interviewed for a short news item that was aired on 12th February – watch here - <https://bit.ly/2YGu2wk> – This piece was also covered by The BBC Breakfast Show on 13th February with a reported audience of 1.5 million.

Social Media

- 2.27. The Partnerships presence on social media has grown impressively over the past year. Facebook followers are up 53% to 746, Instagram followers have risen by 44% to 347 and Twitter is up 66% to 1,144 followers. Growth on each platform has largely been achieved through engaging, informative and varied content, consistently being added.
- 2.28. All Partners are reminded that they can help boost our social media outreach and following still further by ensuring that their organisations follow us and share/retweet content.
- 2.29. On Twitter the highest performing tweet reached over 34,000 profile pages, was viewed over 9,000 times and engaged with (retweeted, liked or commented

on) over 1,400 times. The Tweet covered a real life struggle of the birds in their environment. View the tweet here - <https://bit.ly/2YGu6Mz>

2.30. Facebook's best performing post reached over 8,000 people and was engaged with 654 times. The post highlighted why being a ranger is so rewarding and fascinating. See the post here – <https://bit.ly/2UpjqCE>

2.31. Another post that received an excellent social media reaction was the Rangers version of '12 days of Christmas'. View it here - <https://bit.ly/2UfHgRt>

Financial contributions

2.32. 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. From the 1st 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 will be revised annually in line with RPI and rounded to the nearest whole pound. They will also be reviewed every two years.

Planning permissions and appeals

2.33. 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 Solent Recreation Mitigation Strategy, or providing their own mitigation. During 2018/19, planning permission was granted for 2,864 dwellings which were assessed as requiring mitigation. As far as we are aware, all of the planning applicants opted to contribute to the Strategy, as opposed to developing their own bespoke mitigation scheme in consultation with their relevant planning authority and Natural England.

2.34. 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.

The Bird Aware Brand

2.35. Bird Aware and Bird Aware Solent are now registered trademarks, affording us a level of protection from others misusing the brand.

2.36. The Bird Aware branding has attracted significant interest from 3rd party mitigation schemes and the benefits of sharing it with 3rd parties would include having a louder collective voice, more media exposure and economies of scale ensuring that mitigation measures are more effective

- 2.37. Following targeted emails promoting the opportunity for other similar Mitigation Partnerships to join the Bird Aware brand (with their own regional emphasis) the Partnership Manager and the Brand and Communications Manager held meetings with several of the other partnerships.
- 2.38. This has led to a request from the currently titled 'Essex Recreational Avoidance Mitigation Scheme' to move to the more public facing name of 'Bird Aware Essex Coast'. This request is currently being accommodated and formal agreements being drawn up.
- 2.39. Furthermore, Pagham Harbour local nature reserve is looking to extend their staffing levels, with new Rangers joining the team under the Bird Aware branding. Again, this request is being accommodated and formal agreements being drawn up.
- 2.40. There has also been strong interest from a couple of other suitable partnerships and once they have the equivalent of their Board approval to proceed, the Partnership will be in a position to share which ones they are.

Mitigation Meet-up

- 2.41. The Partnership hosted the 2nd Annual Mitigation Meet-Up in Havant on the 15th November. This event was well attended, gave us the opportunity to showcase our work as a Partnership and prompted great feedback from delegates.
- 2.42. The day was attended by 64 people and we were joined by 14 different partnerships/regions along with delegates from NE and the RSPB.

Award News

- 2.43. In November 2018, the Partnership was announced as the winner of the Royal Town Planning Institute (South East region) 'Planning for the Natural Environment' award.
- 2.44. This was then followed by the Partnership being announced as the overall 'Regional Winner' for 2018. The judges' comments related to the Partnership stated that they were 'impressed by the collaborative approach' and 'positive outcomes' which is strong recognition for how we operate.

3. PLANS FOR 2019/20.

- 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 £1,175,000. 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 2019/20 include:-

- Allocation of the first round of funding for the Site Specific Projects. The Partnership has set aside £2 million every 5 years to fund series of capital projects designed to further the aims of the strategy through the provision of visitor management techniques, enhanced bird habitats, enhanced strategic recreational space or public engagement and education initiatives. Project bids have been submitted and will be reviewed during this period;
- Negotiation of a new Service Level Agreement to support the provision of Rangers to the Partnership;
- Recruiting a dedicated Dog Initiatives Lead officer to implement initiatives to encourage responsible dog walking;
- Implementing the first year of the agreed Marketing Strategy, growing our reputation and sphere of influence.
- Actively promoting the use of the Bird Aware brand to 3rd parties
- Completing the third series of site specific access management assessments
- Undertaking the fifth phase of data collection to monitor the effectiveness of the mitigation measures.

Annual Report Appendix 1: ACCOUNTS 2018/19

	£'s	£'s
Income from contributions:		812,178
Expenditure:		
Rangers	(200,657)	
Operating costs	(6,636)	
Monitoring Costs	(49,397)	
Marketing Costs	(8,831)	
Brand & Communication Costs	(35,202)	
Partnership coordination officer	(31,484)	
Total Expenditure:		<u>(332,206)</u>
Balance before transfer to in-perpetuity fund:		<u>479,972</u>
Transfer to in-perpetuity fund		(450,000)
Total contribution to reserves 18/19		<u>29,972</u>

Balances at 31/3/2018

Reserves brought forward @ 31/03/18	848,293
Contribution to reserves 18/19	<u>29,972</u>
Reserves carried forward @ 31/03/19	<u>878,264</u>
In-perpetuity fund @ 31/03/18	534,774
Transfer in 18/19	450,000
Interest received	6,163
In-perpetuity fund @ 31/03/19	<u>990,937</u>

Annual Report Appendix 2: 2019/20 BUDGET

<i>Item</i>	<i>000s</i>
Rangers	210
Dog initiatives	20
Partnership Manager	30
Operating budget	10
Monitoring	50
Brand and Communications Lead	40
Comms operational budget	10
Graphic Design Support	15
Dog Initiatives Lead Officer	40
Sub-total	425
Contribution to in-perpetuity fund	750
Total budget	1175