

**THAMES BASIN HEATHS
JOINT STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP BOARD**

Date: 16 October 2007

Subject: **Joint Strategic Partnership Board Terms of Reference**

Report of: Regional Assembly

Recommendations:

It is recommended that the Board:

- agree the attached terms of reference and proposals for stakeholder engagement.
- agree that a working group with member input be set up to consider detailed delivery and resourcing issues.

Purpose of the Report:

To introduce the Joint Strategic Partnership Board terms of reference, and proposals for stakeholder engagement.

Key Issues:

Key issues for members' consideration include the membership of the Board, the proposed functions of the Board and suggested arrangements for involving a wider group of stakeholders in the work of the Partnership.

I. Introduction

- I.1. Members will be aware that one of the Technical Assessor's key medium term recommendations for resolving the Thames Basin Heaths issue was that a strategic partnership be set up involving the Regional Assembly, the affected local authorities and Natural England to coordinate policy for the management and protection of the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA).
- I.2. At the meeting of local authority members held in June 2007, draft terms of reference were discussed. Further comment was invited from local authorities and stakeholders following this meeting. The draft has been updated in the light of comments received, and is attached at **Annex I**.
- I.3. It is hoped that the document itself is fairly self explanatory, but a couple of important points are addressed in more detail below.

2. Membership

- 2.1. Original proposals presented to local authority members included the following membership structure:
 - i. Full voting rights
 - Affected district / borough authorities
 - Affected unitary authorities
 - Affected county councils
 - Regional Assembly
 - ii. Advisory members (rights of attendance and participation)
 - Natural England
 - Government Office for the South East
 - Berkshire Joint Strategic Planning Unit
 - A representative of the housebuilding industry
 - A representative of the non-governmental environmental sector
- 2.2. From the results of the subsequent consultation it became apparent that some of the major landowners within the Thames Basin Heaths were keen to be included on the Strategic Partnership Board, because of the size of their land holdings and their role as competent authority in relation to the SPA. It is therefore proposed that the following key landowners be invited to sit on the Board in the capacity of advisory members:
 - Defence Estates
 - Forestry Commission.
- 2.3. Additionally, it was considered that it would be appropriate to include an advisory member representing access management interests.
- 2.4. Officers from Basingstoke and Deane, East Hampshire, West Berkshire and Mole Valley have indicated that their authorities do not wish to be represented at member level on the Board at this stage given the peripheral nature of their involvement to date. However, these authorities will receive copies of papers and minutes, and provision is made within the terms of reference for these authorities to be represented on the Board in the future should they wish.
- 2.5. Finally, the description of the RSPB and Wildlife Trusts has been revised to 'non-governmental nature conservation sector' to better reflect their role and interests.

3. Functions

- 3.1. Originally titled 'powers', the functions set out the initial role of the Joint Strategic Partnership Board. It should be noted that, under these arrangements, the Board cannot exercise any of the functions of a planning authority or other competent authority, nor can it fetter any decisions made by such bodies.
- 3.2. The draft Interim Strategic Delivery Plan (to be considered later on the Agenda under Item 3) suggests that the Board will evolve into a body with

greater powers to implement the policies and measures that it proposes. These proposals will be subject to consultation, and in the light of this consultation and future discussion by the Board, the terms of reference may need to be reviewed. Provision is made in the Functions for review of the terms of reference if required.

4. Involvement of other stakeholders

- 4.1. While it is proposed that the key stakeholders with interests in the SPA are included on the Joint Strategic Partnership, there are a wide range of other groups who have an interest in the future of the Thames Basin Heaths.
- 4.2. It is proposed that a stakeholder forum, open to all those with an interest in the SPA and the work of the Joint Strategic Partnership be held a minimum of once per year, and initially two times per year, to enable these interests to come together and discuss and input into the work that is being undertaken by the Partnership. It is proposed that the first meeting be held as part of the consultation on the draft ISDP (see agenda item 3).
- 4.3. In order to better engage and inform stakeholders it is also proposed that a centralised web-based resource be set up, along with the publication of a regular newsletter.
- 4.4. In addition, there is provision within the terms of reference for stakeholders with particular interests or expertise to be involved in officer working groups undertaking work on the instruction of, or for consideration by, the Joint Strategic Partnership Board.

5. Conclusion

- 5.1. Members are invited to agree the terms of reference for the Joint Strategic Partnership Board as an interim document, on the understanding that in the light of consultation on and endorsement of proposals within the ISDP these may need to be reviewed. It is also suggested that a working group be convened to discuss detailed delivery and resourcing issues.
- 5.2. Members are also invited to agree the proposals for the engagement of a wider group of stakeholders as proposed in section 4.

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