

**Outline Business Plan for the
Thames Basin Heaths Strategic Access Management and Monitoring Project**

Executive Summary

This project will deliver one of the two component measures required to avoid and mitigate against the impacts of housing development on the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA). Through delivery bodies it will provide a strategic visitor management and monitoring service across the SPA, funded by a Section 106 tariff per net additional dwelling collected by affected Local Authorities. This service will provide an additional complement of full time and seasonal wardens to support and supplement mechanisms already in place to direct and educate users of the SPA and contribute to a reduction in disturbance. Implementation of a monitoring strategy will provide assurances to developers that their financial contribution is being spent appropriately and that the agreed measures are effective. A strategic SPA – wide access management and monitoring programme is required, in perpetuity, by the South East Plan Policy NRM6: Thames Basin Heaths SPA.

1. Background¹

- 1.1 Lowland heath is an extremely rare habitat with England holding the bulk of the EU resource, approximately 42-46% of which is situated in the South East (Edgar 1995)². The largest remaining blocks are in the New Forest, with other significant areas in the Wealden Greensand and in the Thames Basin. The Thames Basin Heaths SPA covers 8400 hectares of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) within the boundaries of nine Local Authorities in Berkshire, Hampshire and Surrey. The SPA is designated for breeding populations of Dartford warbler, nightjar and woodlark, which are protected species under the EC Wild Birds Directive (1979). Two other authorities are also affected as they are within the 5km zone of influence around the SPA.
- 1.2 Special Protection Areas are protected in UK law by the Habitats Regulations 1994 (as amended 2007 –SI 2007/1843). Under the Habitat Regulations, development proposals must not give rise to adverse effects on the integrity of the SPA, either alone or in combination with other plans and projects, and if they are likely to, measures must be secured to remove this impact, otherwise the Competent Authority is obliged to refuse permission.
- 1.3 Housing targets in the South East Plan will lead to a significant rise in population within the boroughs and districts around the TBH SPA. Based on the visitor patterns of current residents, it is likely that this new population will use parts of the SPA for recreation purposes. Evidence demonstrates the damaging effects of

¹ For a fuller background please refer to following documents; Delivery Framework, Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area Strategic Access Management and Monitoring Arrangements – Briefing for Members

² Edgar R. (1995). *South East England Habitat Resources Survey*. Compiled by Edgar 1995, NCC, Lewes

human disturbance (and in particular people with their dogs) on the three heathland bird species – woodlark, Dartford warbler and nightjar – for which the SPA is designated. Without appropriate and proportionate avoidance and mitigation measures, this will damage the populations of these birds breeding within the SPA, and would be contrary to the Habitat Regulations.

- 1.4 Due to the large number of local authorities involved and the cumulative nature of the impacts (a result of many individual housing applications) a co-ordinated approach to the mitigation has been necessary and the Thames Basin Heaths Joint Strategic Partnership Board (JSP Board) has been set up to provide the vehicle for joint working between local authorities and other organisations responsible for protection of the Thames Basin Heaths SPA.
- 1.5 In February 2009 the JSP Board endorsed a strategic Delivery Framework. The Delivery Framework recommends a combination of two avoidance and mitigation measures to protect the Thames Basin Heaths from the impacts of new residential development:
 - i. The provision of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces (SANG), and
 - ii. Access (or visitor) Management and Monitoring co-ordinated across the whole of the publically accessible SPA
- 1.6 Whilst SANGS can, in many cases, be secured and delivered by individual Councils or developers, access management and monitoring requires strategic joint working by all affected 11 Local Authorities and other land managers of the publically accessible SPA, in order to avoid displacing visitors from one part of the SPA to another. This Business Plan sets out how this will be achieved.
- 1.7 As a first step, in November 2007, organisations with a responsibility for the management of visitor access within the SPA, formed the Access Management Partnership whose objectives include providing technical advice to the Board, sharing information and skills amongst its members, delivering consistent public information and education initiatives and other associated activities. This Partnership meets quarterly and provides a degree of co-ordination to Access management until this project is fully implemented, when it will be an additional forum to deliver consistent SPA –wide Access management, provider training and support, and develop good practice in managing SANGS effectively.
- 1.8 In order to fund the Strategic Access Management and Monitoring project the JSPB, which includes Member representation for each affected Local Authority, endorsed the principle of a tariff (calculated at £630 per dwelling) to fund access management and monitoring measures across the SPA, in perpetuity; and agreed that constituent Local Authorities should seek to endorse this tariff and implement mechanisms to collect it by October 2009.
- 1.9 The Strategic Access Management and Monitoring project will secure the employment of a project co-ordinator initially³, then an education officer and wardens who will work with existing rangers and wardens to provide consistent messages to SPA visitors and promote use of the SANGs.
- 1.10 The project also includes a monitoring strategy which will measure both visitor use (of the SPA and the SANGs) and bird populations on the SPA sites to ensure

³ Natural England is forward funding the first year of the Project Co-ordinator and will be reimbursed from the developer contribution fund. See section on Risks

that the avoidance and mitigation measures are functioning effectively to prevent any adverse impact of development on the bird populations.

2. Aims and Objectives

2.1 Working in partnership, the overall aim of the Strategic Access Management and Monitoring Project is to protect the SPA from new recreational pressures arising from new housing development through education (both on and off site) and the diversion of users to alternative SANG sites.

2.2 Objectives

- i. Finalising and securing implementation of mechanisms of collecting developer contributions from Local Authorities and redistributing them to the Project:
- ii. Promotion of new access opportunities for local people (SANGs)
- iii. Monitoring of Planning Permissions granted
- iv. Monitoring of visitor use of SANGs and SPA
- v. Monitoring of Annex 1 birds on SPA sites
- vi. Analysis and reporting on monitoring data
- vii. Provision of an SPA wide on-the-ground wardening service to support and supplement existing management mechanisms
- viii. Provision of education programme
- ix. Appropriate branding of SANGs and SPA
- x. Creation of new volunteering opportunities (within the monitoring process)
- xi. Demonstration of best practice for strategic access management of visitors and visitor infrastructure; particularly where the supply of open space is heavily dependent on protected areas.

3. Organisational and governance structures

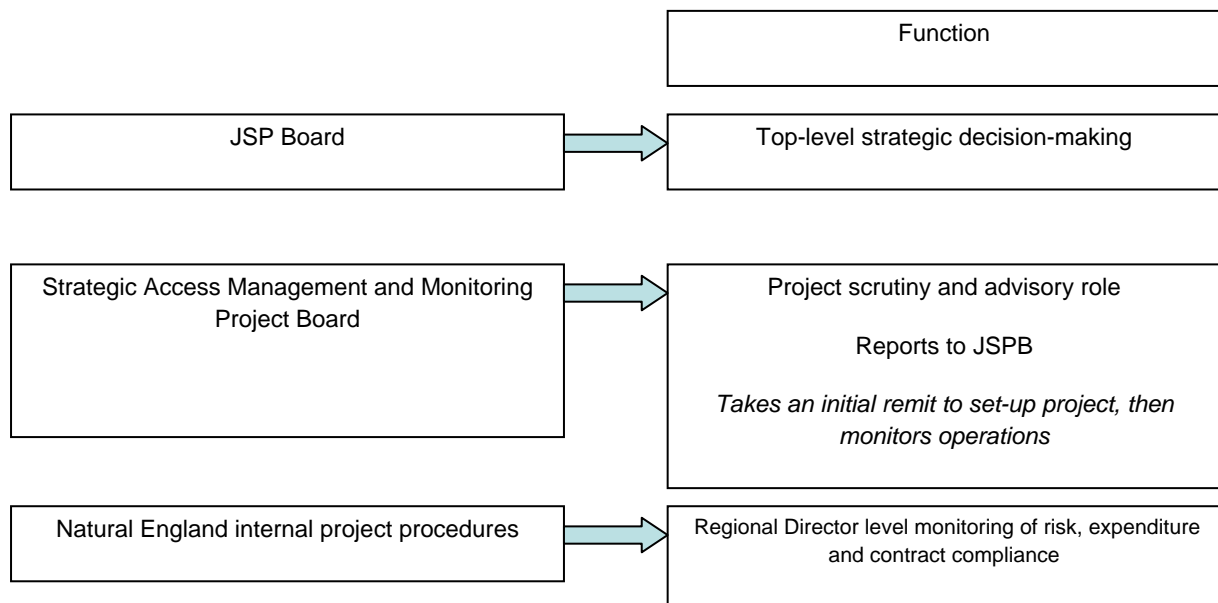
3.1 The Strategic Access Management and Monitoring Project will be overseen by a Project Board who will steer the direction of the project, ensure that objectives and service level are being met and that value for money is being achieved. The Project Board will also oversee the development of annual work programmes for the delivery agents (wardens, project treasurers, information centre). The Project Board will report to the main Joint Strategic Partnership Board who will act as an Executive Board giving final approval to the reviews and recommendations made by the Project Board.

For Terms of Reference for Project Board see Annex 2

3.2 The Strategic Access Management and Monitoring Project Board is made up of Core members (with voting rights) and delivery bodies. The Core members consist of a balance of elected Members and Advisory Bodies covering a range of expertise including land management, visitor management, ecological monitoring, financial management, and project governance protocols. The Delivery bodies consist of those organisations and individuals providing a service to the Project, including Natural England (via Project Co-ordination), Hampshire County Council for financial management, Surrey Biodiversity Information Centre for collation and storage of monitoring data, and others for providing the wardening service. The Project Board will meet every three months during the first year of the Project and six monthly thereafter. *For current membership see Annex 3*

3.3 Through its own internal protocols Natural England will also monitor delivery against a project plan and maintain a project overview.

Fig 1 Diagrammatic representation of governance structure



3.4 The Project will seek to fund the following posts:

- i. One Full-time Project Co-ordinator
- ii. One Full-time Education and Communications Officer
- iii. Four Full-time Wardens
- iv. Ten Seasonal Wardens

3.5 The posts of Project Co-ordinator and Education Officer will be hosted by Natural England and have an Office base at either Natural England's Guildford or Reading Offices, and will report to the Project Board and work in accordance with the Strategic Access Management and Monitoring Project work programme.

3.6 The tender for the wardening service will be administratively owned by Natural England and the wardens will work in accordance with the Strategic Access Management and Monitoring Project work programme.

4. Operations

4.1 The Strategic Access Management and Monitoring Project will undertake the following operations in two Phases.

4.2 Phase 1 will involve setting up the project in the first year and Phase 2 will involve operational delivery in years two and three. Contractually, Natural England can commit to its coordinating role for up to three years (Agenda item 5 February JSPB) after which this arrangement will be reviewed.

4.3 Phase 1 (to be carried out by the Project Co-ordinator)

- i. Overseeing production of Memorandum of Agreement defining funding arrangements and relationships between the 11 Local Authorities, Hampshire County Council and the Access Management delivery bodies (Surrey Biodiversity Information Centre, wardening service)

- ii. Overseeing production of two Service Level Agreements with Natural England, for the funding arrangements agreed with LAs and the delivery agreements with the delivery bodies
 - iii. Finalising Business Plan
 - iv. Writing specification for wardening plan
 - v. Launch tendering process for wardening service
 - vi. Writing job description for Education and Communication Officer
 - vii. Writing draft Communication and Engagement Plan
 - viii. Once cashflow is established, appoint Education and Communication Officer and wardening service.
- 4.4 Phase 2 will see the implementation the Strategic Access Management and Monitoring service which consists of:
- i. a wardening service,
 - ii. a monitoring service,
 - iii. an education and communication service,
 - iv. a facilitation role.
- 4.4.1 Wardening service: This is an additional on-the- ground presence to the existing wardening resources on the SPA (which need to be maintained at existing levels to cope with existing pressure). The additional wardens will integrate with existing management teams to deal with pressures arising from new residents, and their primary roles will be:
- i. Raising awareness amongst visitors of the importance and sensitivity of the SPA
 - ii. Encouraging visitors to behave responsibly on the SPA
 - iii. With existing land managers, assessing visitor infrastructure and focussing on the practical experience of visitors to identify on the ground improvements
 - iv. Promoting alternative recreational areas, including SANGS.
- 4.4.2 Monitoring Service: Delivering key elements of the monitoring strategy specifically within the framework of this proposal, the following roles:
- i. Natural England Project Co-ordinator: Responsible for Annual Reports, financial reporting on monitoring expenditure, co-ordinating analysis in partnership with the Surrey Biodiversity Information Centre of surveys, data etc, works with land management organisations to install visitor counters, commissioning key items of work.
 - ii. Natural England Education and Communication Officer: Volunteer co-ordination for bird surveys, car park counts and evaluating potential for using volunteers and/or wardening service for visitor questionnaires in the future.
 - iii. Surrey Biodiversity Information Centre – Receives data on planning permissions and s106 agreements, visitor surveys and numbers (from pressure pad counters), bird data. Carries out data analysis with the NE Project Co-ordinator
 - iv. Wardening Service (e.g. Wildlife Trusts and BFBC) – Includes monitoring changes in visitor behaviours, recording incidents, car park counts, working with volunteers.
- See monitoring strategy Annex 4*
- 4.4.3 Communication and Education Service: Supporting the on-the-ground work of the wardens to help people fully understand, value and respect the natural history of the SPA and encourage them to increasingly take action to conserve and enhance it. It will establish a project identity and relationships with key organisations. (local authorities, Wildlife Trusts, Forestry Commission, The Crown Estate),

including a volunteer network and partnerships with schools and communities (police, fire service etc).

- 4.4.4 Facilitation role: Enabling the land managers to work together to share resources and best practice co-ordinated through the Access Management Partnership (See para. 1.7)

5. Budget and Financial Arrangements

- 5.1 Natural England has set out the level of contribution from developers needed to provide the required level of access management and monitoring.
- 5.2 These calculations were produced in partnership with Hampshire County Council (HCC), who are taking on the role of Treasurer for this project for an annual contribution of £20,000.
- 5.3 The HCC treasury role will consist of:
- i. Billing the partner Local Authorities for their contributions
 - ii. Receiving and holding the income
 - iii. Making payments to delivery bodies
 - iv. Reconciling the accounts
 - v. Providing regular financial reports to the Strategic Access Management Project Board and through them to the Joint Strategic Partnership Board
 - vi. Providing appropriate and relevant financial information as required by the Strategic Access Management and Monitoring Board, the Joint Strategic Partnership Board and Natural England
- 5.4 The base line annual running costs of the full Strategic Access Management and Monitoring Project have been calculated as £491,000 per annum. There is an initial set up cost of £105,000 (for Access Infrastructure such as people counters and for base line surveys) which will be split into additional annual contributions over the 17 years of the project.

One-off set up costs:

Capital	£55,000	<i>Such as people counters</i>
Establishing a baseline	£40,000	<i>Surveys and analysis</i>
subtotal	£95,000	
contingency @ 10%*	£10,000	
Total set up costs	£105,000	

Base line Annual cost:

Project Co-ordinator plus		<i>Staff costs for posts hosted by</i>
Education &		<i>Natural England</i>
Communication Officer	£80,000	<i>4 full time, 10 seasonal wardens</i>
Wardening	£310,000	<i>See monitoring strategy</i>
Monitoring	£36,000	<i>proposal</i>
Hampshire CC finance	£20,000	<i>Costs for Treasurer function</i>
Subtotal	£446,000	
Contingency @ 10%*	£45,000	
	£491,000	

- 5.5 In establishing tariffs, Natural England and Hampshire County Council Treasurers provided a breakdown of costs for these measures per dwelling for the next 17 years and for establishing a capital fund to finance the measures post 2026 (the end of the current SE plan) so that strategic measures to protect the SPA are funded in perpetuity, (which is taken to mean from 18 years onwards for all time) as required by the South East Plan.
- 5.6 The combined annual contribution for the first three years of the project per dwelling is £630, consisting of an annual maintenance contribution of £190 and an annual contribution to the capital fund of £440. These figures assume an annual inflation rate of 3% per annum and a bank interest rate of 3% and will be reviewed at the end of Year Three with a view to fixing contributions for a further fixed period.
- 5.7 Recent experience demonstrates that interest rates and inflation may fluctuate. We do not know what future years' rates will be and potential year-on-year variations produce complex calculations. For demonstration purposes Hampshire County Council have provided some simplistic examples of differing variations (Annex 5) and how these would influence contributions.
- 5.8 The South East Plan has allocated around 65,000 new houses across the 11 Local Planning Authorities over the next 17 years April 2009 – March 2026, and it has been estimated that approx 48,000 of these will be provided within 5km of the SPA.
- 5.9 Assuming that the 48,000 houses are built at an even rate over the remaining 17 years, a total of 2,824 houses would be built each year, so with the tariff set at £630 this will bring in an income of £536,560.
- 5.10 In reality, building is unlikely to proceed in a regular pattern and will be slower in the initial years of the project due to the recent economic downturn. It will therefore be necessary to prioritise certain work areas and appointments:

Posts and related activity	Cost	Time Scale
Project Co-ordinator	£40k	1 st year
Education and Communication Officer	£40k	1 st year (could be part time initially)
Warden Team leaders (x4)	£30k x 4 = £120k	Part in the first year
Seasonal Wardens (x10)	£19k x 10 = £190k	Proportion building over time

- 5.11 LPA contributions will be transferred to Hampshire County Council every 6 months. Funds will be allocated to delivery agents in 6 monthly advancements; commencing once enough cash-flow is available.

For Gantt chart of first year activities see Fig 2

Fig 2 – GANTT chart Year 1

Task	July 09	Aug 09	Sept 09	Oct 09	Nov 09	Dec 09	Jan 10	Feb 10	March 10	April 10	May 10	June 10
Preparation of Memorandum of Agreement / Service Level Agreements				M1								
Preparation and circulation of tender for wardening service						M2						
Draft Comms Plan and Job Description for Comms and Education post						M3						
Arrangements set up for monitoring in line with monitoring strategy^												
Bird monitoring on SPA												
Baseline visitor survey												
Communication and Education Officer in post									M4			
Wardens in post									M5			
Car Park surveys												

^includes installation of pressure pads where needed as new SANG comes into use, liaison with Surrey Biodiversity Records Centre for collation and storage of monitoring data and arrangements for professional analysis of data

Milestones

- M1 All LPAs sign Memorandum of Agreement and Service Level Agreements
- M2 Tender for Wardening service advertised
- M3 Communication and Education Officer Post advertised
- M4 Communication and Education Officer appointed
- M5 Full –time Wardens appointed and seasonal wardens come on line according to funding income

6. Risk Management

- 6.1 There may be a 'time lag' between preparing the MoAs and SLAs and the money coming forward to fund the Project Co-ordinator role. This situation has been managed by Natural England by forward funding this post on a one Fixed Term Appointment, to be recouped in future years (not necessarily in year one but over the first three years).
- 6.2 Preparation of the Memorandums of Agreement (MoA) with local authorities and Service Level Agreements (SLA) with delivery bodies may require considerable negotiation. Agreeing these in a timely manner will be vital to the success of the project. In order to reduce the financial risk to Natural England of this appointment, priority will be given to activities involved in all 11 Local Authorities signing the Memorandum of Agreement as outlined in the Gantt chart in Fig 2 – the Project Co-ordinator will carry out these negotiations as a priority and resolve any associated issues with Local Authorities or with landowners/ managers.
- 6.3 Establishing the warden presence on the SPA will require careful negotiation with existing landowners and managers and close working to ensure consistent and complementary messages.
- 6.4 The risk of changing interest and inflation rates will be managed by holding reviews of the tariffs. This could be more regularly than the every three years proposed in this plan.
- 6.5 If building drops below the 800 dwellings per annum which is needed to maintain to cover annual costs it would be at the discretion of the JSPB to either reduce the staffing levels of the wardening service (given that less building would produce less potential effect) or use the capital fund provided it was replaced with interest.
- 6.7 If in future years, for any reason, the approach to Strategic Access Management and Monitoring outlined in this plan is discontinued, repayments would be made pro-rata to LPAs. Further details about this process will be specified in the memorandum of agreement.

June 2009