

**THAMES BASIN HEATHS SPECIAL PROTECTION AREA
JOINT STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP BOARD**

18 June 2009, 10.00 – 11.30
Mandolay Hotel, Guildford

NOTE OF MEETING

Attendance:

Board Members

Cllr Mary Ballin	Bracknell Forest Borough Council
Cllr Jenny Wicks	Guildford Borough Council
Cllr Jonathan Glen	Hampshire County Council
Cllr James Radley	Hart District Council
Cllr David Hilton	Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead
Cllr Geoff Woodger	Runnymede Borough Council
Cllr Roland Dibbs	Rushmoor Borough Council
Cllr Moira Gibson	Surrey Heath Borough Council
Cllr Angus Ross	Wokingham Borough Council

Advisory Board Members

Stan Abbot	Forestry Commission
Susan Barnes	GOSE (for Lesley Creedon)
Laura Warren	Natural England (for Wanda Fojt)
Samantha Dawes	RSPB
Ian Hepburn	Wildlife Trusts in the South East

Apologies

Cllr Barry Cheyne	Elmbridge Borough Council
Cllr David Harmer	Surrey County Council
Cllr Graham Cundy	Woking Borough Council
Hayley Fry	Federation of Master Builders
Kate Ashbrook	Open Spaces Society

Officers/Observers

Andrea Davies	Hampshire County Council (for Bevis Ingram)
Cath Rose	South East England Partnership Board
Phil Allen	Hampshire County Council
Andrew Hunter	Runnymede Borough Council
Jenny Rickard	Surrey Heath Borough Council
Lesley Waddell	Guildford Borough Council
Richard Hawkey	Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead
Paul Druce	Surrey County Council
Kathy O'Leary	Woking Borough Council
Joanne Bettany	Hart District Council
Graham Ritchie	Wokingham Borough Council
Lt Col Paul Norrington-Davies	Defence Estates
Claire Beaumont	Woking Borough Council
AB Healey	Hart District Council
Allison Hulbert	Bracknell Forest Borough Council
Graham Parrott	Waverley Borough Council
?	Member of the public
Stephen Miles	Member of public/British Entomological and Natural History Society

1. Apologies

- 1.1 Apologies had been received from Cllr Cundy, Cllr Harmer, Cllr Cheyne, Hayley Fry, and Kate Ashbrook. Susan Barnes was substituting for Lesley Creedon, and Laura Warren for Wanda Fojt.
- 1.2 Cllr Gibson explained that she was no longer Chairman of the Regional Planning Committee, as the Regional Assembly had now been dissolved; but that she would now represent Surrey Heath Borough Council on the JSP Board.

2. Minutes of the last meeting and matters arising

- 2.1 Ian Hepburn requested that para 1.1 of the minutes of the last meeting be amended to clarify that Matt Jackson was substituting for Ian Hepburn, representing Wildlife Trusts in the South East.
- 2.2 Cllr Ross confirmed that he now Wokingham Borough Council's representative on the JSP Board, replacing Cllr Cowan.
- 2.3 Cllr Ross also updated the Board that there had been no further news on the joint Regional Infrastructure Fund bid made by Wokingham Borough Council and Hart District Council, although there may be a decision by the end of the month.
- 2.4 Cllr Dibbs asked whether the minutes of the member steering group should be made available to the JSP Board. It was **agreed** that the minutes of the last member steering group would be circulated by email to Board members and that in future they would be included on the agenda as an item for information.

3. Strategic Access Management and Monitoring Project

- 3.1 Laura Warren, Natural England (NE) gave a short presentation to the Board about the background to, and content of, the outline Business Plan for strategic access management and avoidance measures. In particular she highlighted that:
 - The principles within the Business Plan had already been discussed and agreed by the Board
 - There were risks associated with the project but provision for regular monitoring and review of the proposals
 - The priority over the coming months was to complete the appointment of a project coordinator and agree memorandums of agreement (MoA) with local authorities and service level agreements (SLA) with delivery partners.She requested that the Board agreed the Business Plan as a robust basis on which to move the project forward.
- 3.2 Discussion of the Business Plan followed:

- Cllr Woodger and Ian Hepburn thanked Laura for her work on the Business Plan.
 - Cllr Hilton sought reassurance from Hampshire County Council that a proper investment strategy for the long term fund would be put in place. Cllr Glen confirmed that it would be.
 - Cllr Dibbs questioned what provisions were for built into the costings for the wardening service, and whether Surrey Biodiversity Information Centre would be paid for their work.
 - Cllr Radley highlighted that the South East Plan now requires local authorities to implement strategic access management measures. He identified the potential for different authorities to negotiate different MoAs, and asked how NE would address this. Cllr Woodger highlighted the ongoing need to look carefully at income stream projections.
 - Cllr Ross suggested that the Board should make a clear recommendation about the date by which local authorities should start collecting access management and monitoring contributions.
 - Cllr Woodger felt that it would not be possible for all authorities to undertake the appropriate work and consultation needed to allow collection of contributions by the October 'start date' agreed at the last JSP Board meeting. This view was supported by Cllr Ballin who explained that it would certainly take Bracknell Forest longer than this given the need to review adopted SPD.
 - Cllr Wicks, Cllr Ross and Cllr Radley were concerned about the implications for the project, and perceived message from the Board, if the 'start date' was delayed. Given the requirements in the South East Plan, and the fact that the Board had previously discussed the principle of these strategic measures, it was important that local authorities moved forward quickly to implement the proposals. Cllr Glen and Ian Hepburn expressed concerns about the implications that delaying collection of the tariff would have on the delivery of monitoring and wardening services.
 - Cllr Hilton questioned whether, in the light of the possible delay in collecting contributions, Natural England would be able to forward fund some of the other access management and monitoring posts to ensure that the project got underway quickly.
 - Cllr Glen suggested that it was most important that NE had written agreement from local authorities (through the MoA) that they would collect funds as soon as possible – this should minimise the financial risks to NE.
- 3.3 Local Authority officers present confirmed that some authorities may not be in a position to collect the tariff by October, given the need to revise adopted miniplans or SPD and consult on their proposals to ensure that they were sound, although actual timelines would depend on at what stage in the LDF process each authority was. Officers also highlighted the risk inherent in collecting money on commencement of development (rather than permission) in the current economic climate.
- 3.4 Ian Hepburn confirmed that he could assist with the provision of a more detailed breakdown of wardening costs.
- 3.5 Laura confirmed that:
- NE was aware that negotiating the MoAs and SLAs may throw up issues, and it was a priority to resolve these as soon as possible. Whilst there

may need to be minor variations in the wording of these documents for different organisations, the tariff itself was non-negotiable.

- The wardening costings had been provided by the Wildlife Trusts and confirmed by Bracknell Forest Borough Council, but that a further breakdown of the costs could be provided; and that Surrey Biodiversity Information Centre would be paid out of the monitoring contributions being collected.
- It was important that contributions started to be collected as soon as possible, and that finalising MoAs would provide important reassurance to NE. Whilst the amount of wardening provided would be dependent on the level of contributions collected it was vital that monitoring be undertaken next spring, to coincide with the breeding season - that this would be a priority in the allocation of funds.

3.6 The recommendation that the Board accepts the Outline Business Plan as the basis on which to move forward with the Strategic Access Management and Monitoring of the Thames Basin Heaths SPA was **agreed**.

3.7 In addition:

- It was **agreed** that memorandums of agreement with all local planning authorities should be signed by 30 October to provide assurance to NE of the authorities' commitment to collecting contributions for the project.
- It was **agreed** that the Project Board should consider in detail the priorities for allocating funds over the coming year.
- It was **agreed** that the Board should ask Natural England to consider whether they could provide additional forward funding for the project to ensure provision of monitoring and wardening in the short term.
- It was **agreed** that all LPAs should write to Natural England with a statement of intent in relation to the collection of contributions for strategic access management and monitoring.

3.8 Cllr Woodger reported that Runnymede Borough Council did have a citizen's panel, contrary to what was reported in the Monitoring Report. Laura Warren confirmed that NE could amend the strategy accordingly.

4. Joint working on cross boundary SANG

4.1 Cath Rose, South East England Partnership Board, introduced the paper, explaining that:

- Authorities were starting to consider options for cross boundary SANG.
- Whilst in some cases there may be reluctance to share SANG between authorities there were clear local and strategic benefits to doing so.
- It was important that discussions about cross boundary SANG were clear and transparent. Whilst it was not appropriate for the Board to agree prescriptive guidelines, endorsing the high level principles in the paper would help ensure that opportunities for cross boundary SANG were progressed efficiently and effectively, helping secure the best use of a limited resource for the shared aim of protecting the SPA.

4.2 Cllr Glen welcomed the idea of cross boundary SANG and highlighted the need for the process to be flexible and voluntary. Cllr Dibbs also welcomed the principles set out within the paper.

- 4.3 Cllr Woodger was concerned that options for sharing SANG would be limited given that authorities would have to consider their long term need for SANG to deliver houses into the future, and the high costs associated with purchasing land.
- 4.4 Cllr Hilton welcomed the opportunities provided by cross boundary SANG for authorities with limited options for SANG within their own boundaries – such as the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead – and explained that his authority would be pleased to enter into discussions with adjoining authorities on this matter. However, he could see that tensions might arise due to the different tariffs in place in different authorities.
- 4.5 The JSP Board **agreed** the high level principles for joint working on cross boundary SANG set out in section 4 of the officer report.

5. Items for Information

Update on LA avoidance strategies and levels of developer contributions

- 5.1 Cllr Dibbs drew attention to the fact that although Rushmoor did not have an avoidance strategy the Council had identified substantial amounts of SANG to enable major development in the Borough to proceed.
- 5.2 The Items for Information were **noted**.

6. Any Other Business

- 6.1 Sam Dawes updated the JSP Board on three issues:
- The recent appeal decision at Crowthorne where the inspector had agreed with the RSPB and Wildlife Trusts about the need for large developments within very close proximity to the SPA to provide bespoke packages of avoidance measures to higher standards that set out in the Delivery Framework.
 - The latest bird monitoring data, which indicated that populations of Dartford Warblers on the Thames Basin and Wealden Heaths had dropped by 80-90%, largely as a result of the cold winter. The importance of populations in Southern England was increasing as populations in Spain were also declining considerably.
 - A RSPB Nightjar walk is being held on 26th June, to which Board members and their families are invited.
- 6.2 Cllr Woodger invited Natural England and the RSPB to participate in the preparation of avoidance measures for the proposed development at the DERA site in Chertsey.

7. Date of Next Meeting

- 7.1 The next meeting will be held on 15 October at 10am at the Mandolay Hotel, Guildford.