



Report to the Partnership for Urban South Hampshire Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date: 21 February 2017

Report of: Solent Recreation Mitigation Partnership Project Board

Subject: Solent Recreation Mitigation Partnership - progress in 2016/17 and plans for 2017/18

SUMMARY

In December 2014 the Joint Committee endorsed an interim strategy prepared by the Solent Recreation Mitigation Partnership (SRMP) to mitigate the impact on the three Solent Special Protection Areas of the additional coastal recreational pressures resulting from new housing. The main interim mitigation measure is a team of coastal rangers: during 2016/17, the team increased to four and it is proposed to have the same number next winter 2017/18. The rangers have been supported by the production of a leaflet, a presence on social media and the construction of a high quality website. Research undertaken over the last year will enable initiatives to encourage responsible dog walking to be implemented during 2017/18. Two surveys this winter and two further surveys over the winter 2017/18 will help monitor the effectiveness of the mitigation measures. The SRMP proposes a budget of £462k for these various activities in 2017/18 which will be funded wholly by developer contributions. Endorsement is sought for the 2017/18 membership of the Project Board which oversees the SRMP's work.

RECOMMENDATION

It is RECOMMENDED that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

1. NOTES the Solent Recreation Mitigation Partnership's proposed 2017-18 budget; and
2. NOTES the proposed membership of the Solent Recreation Mitigation Partnership's Project Board for 2017/18.

INTRODUCTION

1. The PUSH Joint Committee provides the political governance for the Solent Recreation Mitigation Partnership (SRMP). This report reviews progress so far during 2016/17, sets out the proposed 2017-18 budget, and presents the proposed 2017/18 membership of the SRMP's Project Board.
2. The SRMP's Annual Report which will be presented to the joint Committee next June for approval, will build on the information in this report by describing progress during the whole of the year 2016/17 and will include the SRMP's financial accounts for that year.

RECAP ON THE SRMP'S PURPOSE

3. The substantial amount of housebuilding which is planned around the Solent will lead to an increase in recreational activity at the coast which in turn will impact on the over-wintering waders and wildfowl within the three Special Protection Areas unless mitigation measures are put in place. The interim measures are set out in the Interim Solent Recreation Mitigation Strategy, which was approved by this Committee in December 2014. When the Strategy was adopted, it was recognised that it was an interim one which would be replaced by a definitive strategy in 2017.
4. The two-pronged interim mitigation approach is a team of coastal rangers who will reduce bird disturbance by influencing the behaviour of visitors together with initiatives to encourage responsible dog walking. These mitigation measures are being funded by developer contributions associated with the new homes built around the Solent. The contribution was set in 2014 at £172 per dwelling but is updated on 1 April each year in line with the Retail Price Index (RPI): it is currently £176.
5. The Solent Recreation Mitigation Partnership was established to oversee implementation of the Strategy. It comprises the fifteen Solent local authorities plus Natural England, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust and Chichester Harbour Conservancy. The Partnership's work is overseen by a Steering Group of representatives from all 19 partners, which reports to a Project Board of senior officers. Political governance is provided by the PUSH Joint Committee with the involvement in SRMP-related discussions of the three authorities who are members of the SRMP but not PUSH¹.

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

6. More information about the Interim Mitigation Strategy and the Partnership can be seen at:
<https://www.portsmouth.gov.uk/ext/community-and-environment/environment/solent-recreation-mitigation-strategy.aspx>
7. The amount of developer contributions transferred to the SRMP has increased over the last 18 months. This is mainly because of the time lag between planning permissions being granted subject to the developer contribution towards mitigation (which was only introduced in late 2014) and payment becoming due when the development commences. This upward trajectory is demonstrated by the SRMP having received £407k from developer contributions during 2015/16 compared to £550k which will eventually result from the 3,700 dwellings which were granted planning permissions during that same period.

PROGRESS DURING 2016/17

8. 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 over-wintering birds and their vulnerability to disturbance, in line with the SRMP's philosophy of using voluntary persuasion rather than pursuing a regulatory approach (bylaws etc.). The availability of additional funding has enabled four rangers to be employed this winter 2016/17 compared to three last winter. One is a full-time all-year lead ranger, and the others are winter-only staff. With only a small team to patrol over 250 kilometres of coast, the rangers are giving priority to visiting coastal sections where there is greatest potential for bird disturbance.
9. 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 41% of all bird disturbance. Following a review of initiatives which have been successful used elsewhere and market research with dog walkers, the Partnership has identified an overall approach on this topic. Further work is currently underway to detail that approach, including the resources needed to implement it.
10. The dog walking market research and other surveys show some people would 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 SRMP. Construction of a country park at Horsea Island commenced in autumn 2016, which will complement the new facilities created at Alver Valley and Manor Farm Country Parks during 2015/16.
11. Several communications initiatives are being introduced to support the rangers. A leaflet has been produced and Chichester District Council is

constructing a high quality website which will replace the existing housing developer-orientated web page. The rangers have established themselves on social media (Facebook and Twitter). A Communications Plan is in preparation which will look holistically at how best to communicate with different audiences.

12. Recognising that the name 'Solent Recreation Mitigation Partnership' is a rather long title and is not very meaningful to the public in terms of indicating the work which is being undertaken, the Partnership is adopting the brand 'Bird Aware Solent' for its external communications. Devised by marketing officers in Havant Borough Council, the brand succinctly describes the Partnership's role and is an easy mnemonic.



13. The name Solent Recreation Mitigation Partnership will continue to be used on reports to this Joint Committee because of its familiarity.
14. Monitoring the effectiveness of the mitigation measures is vital. The first two surveys are taking place this winter. They are counts of the number of visitors and their recreational activities at selected coastal sites, and a study of the effect of the rangers' presence on peoples' behaviour. These are the first of a range of different surveys which will be undertaken over the next few winters.
15. In parallel to those activities to implement the Interim Mitigation Strategy, substantial progress has been made in officer discussions about the definitive mitigation strategy. The intention is to present a draft definitive strategy to the Joint Committee in early 2017.

PLANS FOR 2017/18

16. The SRMP's work is funded wholly by developer contributions. The amount which will be received in the future cannot be accurately predicted, so a judgement has to be made annually on what would be the appropriate size of the coming year's budget. The total amount of money which the SRMP received in 2016/17 would be the best figure to guide spending in 2017/18. Obviously, that total is not yet available, but the information in paragraph 7 above about developer contributions received and planning permissions granted during 2015/16 points to a continuation of the upward trajectory of SRMP receipts. So on the

basis of those figures, the SRMP Project Board proposes a 2017/18 budget of £462k.

17. The Board is maintaining a modest financial reserve to cushion the peaks and troughs in development activity and thus money received by the SRMP. So if the money received by the SRMP turns out to be less than £462k, then the shortfall would be met from the reserves.
18. The Interim Mitigation Strategy envisaged a team of four rangers and the SRMP's proposes to have a team of that size again during next winter 2017/18.
19. As explained in paragraph 9 above, the final stage of the dog walking-related research should identify initiatives which can be taken during 2017/18. Budgetary provision will be needed for implementing those together with the same operating budget as in 2016/17 to fund publicity, seminars etc.
20. Further surveys and data collection will be undertaken over the winter 2017/18 to help monitoring the effectiveness of the mitigation measures. These will comprise automated counters at ten key coastal locations to record footfall, visitor interviews and the procurement of data on bird numbers in the Solent.
21. The Project Board sees a dedicated part-time Partnership officer as crucial to maintaining momentum, coordinating the various workstreams, and undertaking the various communication tasks such as preparing reports to this Joint Committee. The current postholder is leaving in early 2017 and recruitment of a successor is underway.
22. 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 SRMP 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. (This is similar to saving to fund one's pension.) 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.

23. The proposed SRMP budget for 2017/18 is as follows:-

<i>Item</i>	<i>000s</i>
Rangers	100
Dog initiatives	20
Operating budget (publicity, seminars/events etc.)	15
Monitoring	30
Partnership coordination officer	30
Spending on mitigation measures during the year	195
Contribution to in-perpetuity investment fund	267
Total budget	462

24. 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 two-year Service Agreements. Those are due to expire in July 2017, but each Agreement includes a clause for a two-year extension with the concurrence of both parties. The SRMP has concluded that the current arrangement is working well, that an extension would mean continuity in service provision, and that after only one year of operation a fundamental change would be premature. So it proposes to exercise the option to extend the existing Agreements and this has been welcomed by the County Council and the Wildlife Trust.

PROJECT BOARD MEMBERSHIP

25. The SRMP Project Board is responsible for overseeing the Partnership's activities, administering its funds, and reporting to this Joint Committee. The current Board membership was approved by the PUSH Joint Committee at its March 2016 meeting. To maintain the legitimacy of the Board, its membership is renewed annually in tandem with presentation to the Committee of the coming year's budget.

26. The composition of the Project Board is prescribed in the Partnership's Terms of Reference. It comprises:-

- i. a representative of PUSH;
- ii. four chief/senior officers from the local authorities of which one will be from an authority which is not a member of PUSH;
- iii. a representative of Natural England;
- iv. two representatives of the three wildlife/conservation organisations (i.e. Royal Society for the Protection of Birds; Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust; Chichester Harbour Conservancy);
- v. an officer representative of any organisation which is employing staff on behalf of the Partnership.

27. In respect of (v), there are now three organisations which employ staff on behalf of the Partnership: Hampshire County Council (rangers), Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust (ranger) and Portsmouth City Council (the Partnership officer).
28. Following an invitation to all partners to make nominations to the Project Board, the following nominations were received for the seats listed in paragraph 26 above:-
 - i. Paddy May;
 - ii. David Hayward (Havant Borough Council), Mike Allgrove (Chichester District Council), Simon Finch (Winchester City Council). (Only three nominations have been received for the four seats.);
 - iii. Allison Potts (Natural England);
 - iv. Heather Richards (Royal Society for the Protection of Birds) and Dr Richard Austin (Chichester Harbour Conservancy);
 - v. Claire Upton-Brown (Portsmouth City Council), David Rumble (Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust) and Deborah Watkins (Hampshire County Council)
29. The Committee is asked to endorse this proposed 2017/18 Project Board membership.

RECOMMENDATION

It is RECOMMENDED that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

1. NOTES the Solent Recreation Mitigation Partnership's proposed 2017-18 budget; and
2. NOTES the proposed membership of the Solent Recreation Mitigation Partnership's Project Board for 2017/18.

ENQUIRIES:

For further information on this report please contact:-

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