

NFNPA/PDCC 251/17

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

PLANNING DEVELOPMENT CONTROL COMMITTEE – 19 DECEMBER 2017

SOLENT RECREATION MITIGATION PARTNERSHIP STRATEGY UPDATE

Report by: David Illsley, Policy Manager

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Solent coast is internationally important for its wildlife interest and is also extensively used by millions of people each year for recreation. Significant stretches of the coast are designated due to species and habitats they support. These internationally important designations include the Solent & Southampton Water Special Protection Area (SPA) which covers the whole of the New Forest National Park's 26 miles of coastline.
- 1.2 Following extensive research undertaken between 2009 – 2013, Natural England advised that the projected increase in recreational use of the Solent arising from the 64,000 new dwellings planned for the area by 2034 is likely to have a significant effect on the designated sites and therefore avoidance and mitigation measures are required. Based on the evidence available, Natural England recommended that avoidance and mitigation measures are sought from all residential development within 5.6 kilometres of the SPA¹.
- 1.3 In response to this advice, the 15 local planning authorities on the Solent coast agreed to work together to establish a strategic approach to mitigation and in 2014 the interim Solent Recreation Mitigation Partnership (SRMP) Strategy was launched. The aim of the Strategy is to manage recreational pressures on overwintering birds in the Solent from an increasing population arising from new housebuilding.
- 1.4 The Authority has been a member of the partnership since its launched and Authority officers are also part of the team that assesses projects put forward for site-specific visitor management (working alongside Natural England, RSPB and the Wildlife Trust). In accordance with policy CP1 (Nature conservation sites of international importance) and policy DP15 (Infrastructure provision and developer contributions) of the adopted Core Strategy, the Authority has sought financial contributions towards the current SRMP Strategy from developments within the National Park that lie within 5.6 kilometres of the Solent since 2014. This catchment area includes the defined villages of Ashurst, Sway and most of Brockenhurst. Contributions from development within the National Park are pooled with financial contributions gathered by the other planning authorities along the Solent coast. This paper seeks the endorsement of the updated Solent Strategy.

¹ This 5.6 kilometre area is the zone from which 75% of coastal visitors live. The zone boundary is defined by using straight line distances from the SPA boundary. This approach is the same as that adopted for Thames Basin Heaths and Dorset Heathlands SPAs.

2. Update to the Solent Recreation Mitigation Partnership Strategy

- 2.1 The interim Strategy was introduced in 2014 and since then work has taken place on the preparation of a longer term definitive Strategy. This will provide the necessary mitigation for planned housing up to 2034, with an in-perpetuity fund to continue to mitigate against the recreational impacts of this additional house building for a further period of 80 years.
- 2.2 Public consultation on this updated draft Strategy took place between July and September 2017. It took the form of an online questionnaire on the Bird Aware website (www.birdaware.org) and paper responses were also made available for sending to a postal address. As part of the consultation, around 1,600 contacts (land owners, developers, land agents, planning consultants) were directly informed of the consultation and invited to participate. During the two month consultation, responses were received from 49 individuals and organisations and a full report on the responses received is available on the Bird Aware website at www.birdaware.org.strategy.
- 2.3 The updated Strategy aims to prevent bird disturbance from recreational activities through a series of management measures which encourage all coastal visitors to enjoy their visits in a responsible manner, including:
- A team of 5 – 7 coastal rangers
 - Communications, marketing and education initiatives
 - Preparation of codes of conduct for a variety of coastal activities
 - Site-specific projects to better manage visitors and provide secure habitats
 - Providing new and enhanced greenspaces as alternatives to visiting the coast
- 2.4 The implementation of these measures (and the monitoring of their effectiveness) will be funded by developer contributions, calculated according to the bedroom numbers of the property. The Authority's Submission draft Local Plan proposes a floorspace limit of 100 square metres on net new dwellings and this equates to a 3-bed dwelling. Under the updated SRMP Strategy, a new 3-bed dwelling in the National Park would be required to contribute £637 to habitat mitigation measures. As is currently the case, contributions will be required from new dwellings built within 5.6 kilometres of the SPAs.
- 2.5 The cost per unit in the new Strategy is higher than the interim Strategy (£637 for a 3-bed dwelling, compared to £181 per dwelling). However, given that a £637 financial contribution represents just over 0.1% of the average house price in the New Forest National Park, it seems highly unlikely that it will render any developments in the National Park economically unviable. The mitigation costs will be clear up-front so can be factored in when land is acquired. As with the interim Strategy, there is no obligation for a developer to make contributions to the new SRMP Strategy and it is open to them to pursue other ways to mitigate the effects of their scheme if they wish.
- 2.6 The updated Strategy endorsed by the Partnership for Urban South Hampshire (PUSH) Joint Committee on 5 December 2017 is attached as Annex 1 to this report. Following this PUSH endorsement, it now falls on each of the constituent planning authorities to adopt the Strategy. Once adopted, the Strategy will be made available on the Authority's website and will be cited in discussions with developers, at Planning Committee meetings, in development management decisions and appeal statements where appropriate. It will also be cross-referenced within the Authority's Local Plan Review.

3. Relationship with the Authority's own Habitat Mitigation Scheme for the New Forest

- 3.1 Members will be aware that since 2012 the Authority has separately sought financial contributions towards a package of mitigation measures designed to mitigate the impacts of new development on the Natura 2000 sites in the New Forest (including the New Forest Special Protection Area). This mitigation scheme was developed following liaison with Natural England and a total of nearly £90,000 has been received in financial contributions from new development in the National Park since 2012. These contributions continue to be sought from all new residential development in the New Forest and habitat mitigation contributions are not affected by the Government's introduction of a site size threshold for developer contributions in 2016 as they are required to ensure legal compliance. There is a general agreement between the planning authorities in and around the New Forest that in the longer term it would be beneficial to develop a cross boundary approach to habitat mitigation for the New Forest based on the model developed for the Solent.
- 3.2 The Authority's own habitat mitigation scheme is being revised in parallel with the Local Plan Review. This will ensure the New Forest mitigation scheme reflects the increase in the quantum of development planned within the National Park under the new Local Plan, and also secures funding in perpetuity for the mitigation measures proposed.
- 3.3 As has been the case since the Authority started seeking financial contributions towards the SRMP Strategy measures in 2014, the two habitat mitigation schemes will continue to operate in tandem. The Authority's habitat mitigation scheme focuses on the heathland habitats at the core of the new Forest and is unaffected by the updated Solent scheme.
- 3.4 Finally, it should also be noted that the increase in the level of financial contributions for the New Forest and Solent habitat mitigation schemes (which combined will come to around £4,000 per new dwelling) has been factored into the economic viability assessment undertaken as part of the evidence base for the Local Plan Review.

4. Conclusions

- 4.1 The updated SRMP Strategy (Annex 1) builds on the existing partnership working between the Solent planning authorities, including the National Park Authority. This joint work has ensured a consistent approach to habitat mitigation along the Solent coast and the updated Strategy represents an effective mechanism to mitigate the increased recreational pressure resulting from planned house building within 5.6 kilometres of Solent Special Protection Areas (SPAs). Reviews of the SRMP Strategy will take place every 5 years, or more frequently if changes in the legislation or evidence necessitate.
- 4.2 To ensure consistency across the Solent planning area, the revised contribution rate will apply to all relevant planning consents granted within 5.6 kilometres of the Solent coast from 1 April 2018 onwards. The Habitats Regulations - allied to policies CP1 (Nature conservation sites of international importance) and DP15 (Infrastructure provision and developer contributions) of the Authority's adopted Core Strategy (2010) - provide the legal and planning policy justification for seeking contributions towards mitigation measures for the Solent coast.
- 4.3 Members are asked to endorse the adoption of the updated SRMP Strategy as a strategic solution to ensure the requirements of the Habitats Regulations and the Authority's development plan are met with regard to the in-combination effects of increased recreational pressure on the Solent SPAs arising from new residential development.

RECOMMENDATION

Members endorse the updated Solent Recreation Mitigation Partnership's Strategy as a mechanism to mitigate the effects of increased recreational visits on the Solent Special Protection Areas which will arise from planned new house building in the vicinity of the coast to 2034. The new charges will be applied to consents granted from 1 April 2018.

Contact: David Illsley, Policy Manager
david.illsley@newforestnpa.gov.uk
Tel: 01590 646672

Papers: PDCC 251/17
Annex 1 – Solent Recreation Mitigation Partnership Strategy

Equality Impact Assessment: No issues arising