



# ANNUAL REPORT 2018



**Bird Wise North Kent**

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## Bird Wise Objectives

- To raise awareness of the importance of the SPA and Ramsar Sites in North Kent
- To prevent further bird disturbance despite an increase in recreational visitors to the coast
- To promote visits to the coast whilst educating on the impacts of bird disturbance and encouraging responsible behaviours
- To deliver enhancements to sensitive sites allowing birds to continue using the coastal areas without disturbance from recreational visitors.



# INTRODUCTION

## Welcome to the first Bird Wise Annual Report

The North Kent Strategic Access Management and Monitoring Strategy (SAMMS) was established in 2015 and this report covers our activity during the period from commencement to the end of the financial year in March 2018, as well as a look ahead to our plans for the coming year.

## Background

Significant development is planned for North Kent to meet the growing demand for homes in the South East. The area is popular due to excellent links to London and major ports, and a growing population will lead to an estimated 15% increase in recreational visitors to the coast.

Not only is the coast popular with people, it supports an internationally significant population of birds throughout the year, particularly during the winter months when waders and wildfowl arrive in their thousands to benefit from the warmer temperatures and food-rich habitats offered by the estuaries and marshes between Gravesend and Whitstable. For this reason, the Thames, Medway and Swale estuaries and marshes are protected under European and international designations.

Bird Wise is a set of strategic measures designed to mitigate the impact of additional recreational visits to the coast on the bird populations that depend on it. The aim is that people can continue to visit the coast and by encouraging positive behaviours birds will return to North Kent for generations to come.

**Alan Jarrett**  
**Chair - North Kent SAMMS Board**  
**May 2018**

## PROGRESS TO DATE

Collection of the mitigation tariff commenced in October 2015. Many of the homes that have been built since then were permitted prior to the introduction of a required developer contribution towards mitigation measures. This will also be the case for some of the properties being built over the next few years. Because of this, money available to implement mitigation measures will build gradually. Between 2015 and 2017, activity focused on establishing the North Kent SAMMS Board, agreement of governance arrangements and financial protocols. In July 2017, a full-time project manager was appointed to take responsibility for taking the project forward.

### Governance Arrangements

The North Kent SAMMS Board consists of the following organisations:



The first Interim Board Meeting was held on 30 August 2016 and Medway Council was appointed the accountable body for the strategy. Subsequent Board meetings were held on 17 January 2017, 19 July 2017, 11 December 2017 and 27 March 2018.

A Steering Group was formed as a sub-group of the North Kent Environmental Planning Group, comprising of officer representation from the organisations above but including Dartford Borough Council. The initial meeting of the Steering Group was held on 21 November 2017.

The roles and responsibilities of the Board and the Steering Group are detailed in the initial Memorandum of Understanding Document which was agreed and signed in January 2017. An updated version of the MoU has been adopted to cover the 5-year period from 1 January 2018 to 31 December 2022.

Medway Council is the accountable body, with financial procedures documented in the financial protocol that was agreed by the Board in August 2017.

## Staffing

At the interim Board meeting, it was agreed that a full-time dedicated project manager was necessary to drive the SAMMS mitigation projects forward. The SAMMS Project Manager was appointed in July 2017, with Natural England confirming that this marked the commencement of the SAMMS project in North Kent.

The first Seasonal Ranger was in post between January and March 2018. The ranger visited all of the sites identified in the original Footprint Ecology reports to assess the level of disturbance and to rank them in priority order. They presented their findings at the Board meeting in March 2018 and produced a report that will be used to prioritise ranger activity in future years. A summary of this report can be found in Appendix 1.

## Communications and Marketing

The 'North Kent Strategic Access Management and Monitoring Strategy' is not particularly user friendly as a project name so a priority for the project manager was to create a brand identity. Created by the project manager, the name 'Bird Wise' was designed to represent the activities of the North Kent SAMMS Board and to achieve the following:

- Focus on the core aims of the project
- Places a level of responsibility on the audience
- Allows for usage in a variety of locations
- The tagline 'Wising up to bird disturbance' can be used to add emphases to the aims and objectives.

The logo depicts a Curlew as it is on the red list for conservation status due to declines in population both nationally and locally.

The Bird Wise brand was adopted by the Board in December 2017 and will be used on all digital and printed communications and printed on staff uniforms and promotional materials.

With the branding agreed, the focus was on creating a digital presence for Bird Wise. A dedicated website, [www.birdwise.org.uk](http://www.birdwise.org.uk), was designed and launched in January 2018. The website contains information on the partnership, about the birds, for people with dogs, news and events, a section covering frequently asked questions and links to the contact details for the project. The site attracted 1031 page views in the first 8 weeks since launching, with the most popular pages being 'About' and 'Protecting the Birds'.

In addition to the dedicated website, social media accounts were created with pages on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Each platform attracts different audiences, so having a presence on each will reach a wider demographic. Since launch, early engagement on social media has been encouraging and has grown steadily, our following is currently: Twitter - 103, Facebook - 33 and Instagram - 24. Several of our followers are using the Twitter feed to report disturbance as they witness it on the ground. This will provide a useful tool to inform our ranger activity in future years and demonstrates that the aims of the project are being communicated effectively. The social media feeds are linked to the Bird Wise website, with the latest post from each platform showing on the home page, to provide regular news updates.

A printed leaflet that provides introductory information on the Bird Wise project, along with pictures of the birds that over-winter in North Kent was produced. The leaflet was placed in visitor centres, cafes and other locations that are used as starting points for walks along the coast in North Kent. It was also handed out on site by the Seasonal Ranger and project manager and has been well received by the public as it encourages further engagement with the project.

Our initial Mitigation Strategy and the Business Plan 2017-22 have been produced and both are available on the Bird Wise website.

## LOOKING AHEAD

With initial activity concentrating on creation of the Bird Wise brand and establishment of the necessary governance arrangements, the focus can now move to delivering a series of improvement works on site and increasing awareness of the project.

Although the focus of Bird Wise is on over-wintering birds, it is important that the good behaviours we encourage are adopted throughout the year. During the summer breeding season, we will use our social media pages to promote projects and initiatives that fit with our objectives of reducing bird disturbance in North Kent.

Through the summer of 2018 we will be planning activity for the 2018/19 winter season, with the Steering Group compiling a pipeline list of projects to be delivered as the funding collected from developer contributions grows. We will work with others in the area to ensure that Bird Wise funding is providing new money for new projects that mitigate recreational bird disturbance and would otherwise not take place. The Steering Group will develop the pipeline project list which will then be scrutinised and signed-off by the Board.

Initial site enhancements will be in the form of new signage and interpretation at locations that experience the greatest number of visitors or high levels of disturbance. We will continue to work closely with Natural England to ensure that Bird Wise messages are included on signage that is being installed along the route of the England Coast Path through North Kent.

The ranger team will be increased to two Seasonal Rangers that will be in post between 1 October and 31 March. They will engage with members of the public on site, promoting the project and providing feedback on visitor numbers and levels of disturbance.

We will actively increase communications with press releases to local newspapers and articles in local authority residents' publications. Our digital presence on social media will be increased by encouraging engagement on all platforms with 'like and share' promotions and a photo competition for inclusion in the next version of our leaflet.

In addition to digital and printed communications, Bird Wise will attend events across North Kent to promote the project to a variety of coastal visitors, particularly those with dogs. Promotional, branded items that can be given out at events will be purchased to encourage engagement at events and further promote the Bird Wise brand name.

# FINANCIAL SUMMARY

The Bird Wise project is entirely funded via developer contributions from new housing built within 6km of the Thames, Medway and Swale SPAs. The original baseline tariff of £223.58 per new dwelling was calculated in the 2014 Footprint Ecology report using the total number of new housing planned in North Kent and the total cost of delivering the required mitigation. The original baseline tariff is index-linked to maintain its value and will be increased annually.

To allow mitigation measures to be delivered in-perpetuity, approximately 60% of contributions collected will be invested in an 'endowment pot' and 40% will be spent in-year on mitigation. Although collection of the tariff commenced in October 2015, many of the properties built since then were granted permission prior to the requirement for a developer contribution towards mitigation measures. For this reason, the funding available has grown slowly and has provided the base budget to allow employment of the project manager, Seasonal Ranger and production of initial communications.

## Contribution Summary:

| Authority    | Tariff Collected to January 2018 |
|--------------|----------------------------------|
| Canterbury   | £24,399                          |
| Gravesham    | £14,774                          |
| Medway       | £120,000                         |
| Swale        | £10,117                          |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>£169,190</b>                  |

The contributions are pooled by each authority and paid to the accountable body upon receipt of invoice. Some of the contribution received will be held back by the authority to enable refunds to be processed in the event of permission being refused after the payment has been made.

The contributions collected provided the operating budget for the financial year to 31 March 2018. The spend for this period is detailed below:

| Expenditure Item  | Amount         |
|---|----------------|
| Recruitment cost  | £1,179         |
| Salaries - Project Manager July - March and Seasonal Ranger Jan - March | £40,148        |
| Mileage and car user allowance  | £2,037         |
| Communications - Website design and hosting and printed leaflets        | £3,867         |
| Clothing and equipment  | £850           |
| Management & Admin - to accountable body                                | £15,000        |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>£63,081</b> |

The surplus £106,109 will be rolled forward to provide the base operating budget for 2018/19 which has been agreed as follows:

| Item   | Amount          |
|--|-----------------|
| Salaries - Project Manager plus 2 x Seasonal Rangers including mileage | £86,060         |
| Recruitment  | £750            |
| Management & Admin - to accountable body                               | £15,000         |
| Site Enhancement Projects  | £10,000         |
| Communications, clothing & equipment                                   | £3,500          |
| Dog Project  | £5,000          |
| Monitoring - accrued annually to allow for 5 yearly monitoring         | £1,000          |
| Total Spend  | £121,310        |
| <i>In-perpetuity funding - calculated at 136.7% of total spend</i>     | <i>£165,830</i> |
| <b>Total Funding Requirement 2018/19</b>                               | <b>£287,140</b> |

The amount of in-perpetuity funding will depend on the total contributions received in year and will be agreed at the Board meeting in March 2019. Surplus funding will be rolled forward to cover the operating budget for 2019/20.

The tariff is collected on commencement of development and it can be difficult to predict exactly when this will happen, meaning that available funding is not easy to forecast. In theory, if less housing is built then mitigation requirements should reduce. As a guide, we

have used the 5-year housing supply targets that are published by each Local Authority and the current completion rate to give an estimate of the funding coming forwards to 2022. This is shown in the table below:

| 5 Year Supply | Requirement P/A | 2017/18     | 2018/19     | 2019/20     | 2020/21     | 2021/22     | Total        |
|---------------|-----------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|
| Canterbury    | 800             | 400         | 951         | 1949        | 1806        | 1647        | 6753         |
| Gravesham     | 363             | 530         | 510         | 446         | 244         | 468         | 2198         |
| Medway        | 1000            | 915         | 1204        | 1467        | 1559        | 1863        | 7008         |
| Swale         | 776             | 432         | 387         | 585         | 1394        | 1773        | 4571         |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>2939</b>     | <b>2277</b> | <b>3052</b> | <b>4447</b> | <b>5003</b> | <b>5751</b> | <b>20530</b> |

- Using the 5 year housing trajectory figures, approximately 20,500 homes are planned across Canterbury, Gravesham, Medway and Swale from 2018-2022.
- In Canterbury, a very small percentage of their allocation falls within the 6km boundary - so a revised figure of 15,000 is more accurate.
- Based on the average current completion rate across the North Kent authorities of 58%, approximately 8,700 dwellings could be achieved.
- Using this figure and income of £1,945,146 will be generated between 2018 and 2022, based on the average baseline tariff of £223.58 per dwelling. This will be in the region of £389,029 per annum which covers the funding required to meet the operating budget and the necessary endowment investment to deliver mitigation in-perpetuity.

# APPENDIX 1

## Summary of Seasonal Ranger Report

During the 3 months that the ranger was in post, 79 individual site visits were recorded across the whole of the Bird Wise area. The busiest sites for engagement with the public were Riverside Country Park and Grain Coastal Park in Medway and Oare Marshes, South Swale Reserve and Milton Creek Country Park in Swale.

One of the main findings was that the sites with the lower footfalls, but with medium to high bird numbers can pose more of a disturbance issue compared to sites with higher footfall. As the low footfall of a site means the birds are less habituated to human presence, so become agitated easily and likely to take flight sooner. This could be an issue on these types of site and end up resulting in more disturbance events and these sites becoming even more sensitive. A potential way to mitigate this is through signage at such sites to strongly encourage the public to keep dogs on leads, and where possible keep below the sea wall to reduce disturbance.

During the site visits, no major disturbance issues were witnessed by the ranger. However, there were several issues which could potentially result in disturbance issues. These included vehicles out on the water, specifically Jet-Ski's and Hovercrafts, both were seen travelling at high speeds. The Jet-Ski was seen travelling on the River Medway around St. Mary's Island at high tide so there very few birds around and only displaced a few gulls; however at low tide when more birds are feeding along the water's edge this would create more of an issue. The Hovercraft was seen off Horrid Hill at Riverside Country Park; it passed very close to a high-tide roost, but as it was still approximately an hour prior to high-tide birds hadn't congregated in great numbers on the roost. But as with before, at a different time this could produce an extremely high disturbance event. Another potential issue is professional dog walkers that use the marshes to walk a large number of dogs at once, mainly off-lead. This may become a larger issue and require the involvement of the Dog Warden at the relevant Local Authority.

Based on observations during site visits, the site priority list was altered slightly to better match the characteristics of each site. For example, Bedlams Bottom was given a lower priority. Even though this site has high bird numbers, footfall was low as access to the site is not easy. On the other hand, Hoo Flats was given a higher priority due to the high number of birds and the high footfall of the site, especially dog walkers.

Sites have also been split into three categories based on their priority:

### High Priority

- If sites have high footfall and high numbers of birds. These sites should be visited at least once every two weeks and if possible once a week.

### Medium priority

- If sites have low to medium footfall and low to medium bird numbers. These sites should be visited once every two to three weeks.

### Low priority

- If sites have low footfall and low bird numbers, these sites need only be visited once a month.
- If site visits can be incorporated as part of other site visits (such as Little Murston can be checked as part of visits to Milton Creek and Conyer Creek), these visits will take place at the same frequency as the site visits with which they are being incorporated.
- Finally, sites such as Elmley which are managed with plenty of signage and therefore do not present too much of an issue. These sites need only be visited once or twice per winter.

| High Priority   | Medium Priority    | Low Priority           |
|-----------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| Riverside CP    | Lower Halstow      | RSPB Northward Hill    |
| Oare Marshes    | RSPB Cliffe Pools  | Elmley NNR             |
| South Swale LNR | Swale NNR          | Little Murston Reserve |
| Hoo Flats       | Grain Coastal Park |                        |
| Conyer Creek    | The Strand         |                        |
| Leysdown-on-Sea | St. Mary's Island  |                        |
|                 | Bedlams Bottom     |                        |
|                 | Milton Creek       |                        |
|                 | Allhallows         |                        |
|                 | Higham Marshes     |                        |

In addition to carrying out site visits locally, the ranger also gave a presentation to the Kent Ornithological Society (KOS) to promote engagement with Bird Wise. A visit in February to the Bird Aware project in the Solent provided an insight into what the Bird Wise project could look like after a few years of delivery. It was helpful to see how the rangers were engaging with the public and what tools they were using to promote responsible access.

Initially public engagement was difficult due to having a lack of materials, such as not having any branded clothing, leaflets to give out or social media and a website to talk about. Conversations were mainly with birdwatchers using the sites. However, once the leaflets were printed and the social media and website were up and running it became a lot easier to interact with all members of the public as there was something physical to give them and somewhere to point them if they wanted more information. Often there would be no members of the public to speak to during site visits due to either being a low footfall site, poor weather conditions or a combination of the two. In these instances, the biggest disturbance ends up being the Ranger. This is a concern which sometimes cannot be avoided as sites need to be visited. However, in certain circumstances it could be mitigated, for example if a low footfall site is due to be visited the weather should be considered, if it forecast to be poor (i.e. raining), it would be possibly better to visit a higher footfall site as more members of the public are likely to be encountered and less disturbance events occurring.

## Recommendations

- Branded clothing will make the Ranger more obvious to members of the public. Will make public interactions easier and may even encourage members of the public to initiate conversation and ask the Ranger questions.
- Have branded merchandise such as pens and key rings to give out at events
- Supply the Ranger with a Bird Wise Flag and Chalk 'A' board. This would mean the Ranger staying in one place and talking to people as they pass.
- Arrange events for public participation such as bird-walks and beach cleans where the Bird Wise project can be spoken about as well as wider environmental issues.
- Keep in contact with the KOS.
- Potential for recruiting 'Bird Wise Volunteers'
- Improve signage across all sites