

Strategic Approach to Access Management at Pagham Harbour

Introduction

Pagham Harbour is located on the south western extent of the Arun District Local Planning Authority Area. Pagham Harbour is a designated SSSI, SPA and Ramsar site, forming part of the overall Natura 2000 network along the south coast. It is a designated Local Nature Reserve and the day to day running of the site has been carried out by RSPB since April 2013. The administrative boundary between Arun and Chichester District Councils runs through the centre of the Harbour.

Pagham Harbour has been designated due to its importance as a breeding site for Common and Little Terns and also provides a habitat for overwintering Ruff. In addition there are Pintails and Dark-bellied Brent Geese that are important in terms of overwintering migratory species, plus to a lesser extent Black-tailed Godwits. This assemblage, especially the Little Terns, means that the site is important year round rather than on a seasonal basis. Pagham Harbour SSSI is currently classified as being in a Favourable condition.

The Council is required to ensure that they are meeting the requirements of European law, which has been transposed into English law through the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010. For plan making, this means at least maintaining, if not improving the existing condition of the site. This requires an assessment of whether proposals in any plan or programme may have likely significant impacts on the conservation objectives of any designated sites.

Evidence and policy formulation

Both of the District Councils' current development plans include policies relating to protection of the wetland and international sites. These are set out in policy RE7 of the Chichester Plan and AREA13 of the Arun Local Plan 2003. Additionally, the following details the further work that has been progressed since 2006, in the formulation of both authorities' emerging plans.

The combination of national and localised evidence produced since 2007 (listed under 1-6 below), has shown that with respect to coastal sites, the attraction to visitors is such that it is not possible to fully mitigate impacts on these through provision of alternative natural green spaces. This has therefore governed the formulation of the approach taken.

1. Proposed Mixed –Use Development on Land North of Bognor Regis: Potential Impact on Pagham Harbour

A visitor survey covering three differing locations around Pagham Harbour was done in 2006-2007 as a result of an application at that time. Though this included 508 visitors there was a focus in the conclusions on 32 that were from two postcode areas encompassing the built up area of North Bersted. Overall these were

considered to represent approximately 2% of visitors during the period of the surveys. The main conclusion that was reached in respect to these visitors was that

“a picture emerges of a small number of local people, driving down to the harbour, on their own or accompanied by other people, and whose principal purpose in doing so, is to exercise a dog and/or go walking and/or bird-watching. In general, they visit the harbour on a frequent basis and their stay tends to be of a short duration. Compared to other visitors, they are more likely to visit the harbour just as frequently during the spring and winter months.”

2. Appropriate Assessment Report for the Arun District Core Strategy

The Appropriate Assessment for the Arun Local Plan (2010) concluded that recreational disturbance from the increased local populace to result from the Core Strategy may occur, although mitigation proposed in the policies meant there was not expected to be a significant effect. This included work that showed that 87% visitors to the Arun sections of the Harbour come from within 500m, 49.7% from within 5km; 52%.9% from within 6km and 57.4% from within 10km.

3. Habitats Regulations Assessment for the Arun District Local Plan

The Habitats Regulations Assessment of the Arun Local Plan (March 2013) similarly concluded that the only issue that may be of significance was recreational disturbance associated with the increased local populace. This concluded that there were sufficient mitigatory actions included within the policies of the Arun Local Plan but that additional work was required to establish a delivery and funding mechanism to ensure that these policy provisions are implemented in an effective and timely manner.

4. Postcode analysis

A further technical note was done in 2013 that analysed the postcode information gained from this exercise to establish whether a proposed buffer zone of 5km from the site would be appropriate. This concluded that 62% of visitors to the site were from within 5km and therefore that this was an appropriate level within which to require mitigatory measures to be applied.

5. Pagham Harbour Visitor Survey

In 2012, Chichester District Council commissioned another visitor survey to inform the Habitats Regulations Assessment of their emerging Local Plan, to specifically investigate the potential links between increased development leading to increased access and disturbance impact to the interest features of Pagham Harbour. This concluded that 84% of visitors travelled from home and that 77% spent 1 to 2 hours at the site. In the winter visitors spent more time at the Visitor Centre and the shortest trips were at the Greenlease Farm access. Again this showed that the majority visited the site throughout the year. One difference was that in terms of

the activities of visitors was determined or influenced by a particular wildlife interest closely followed by being ‘close to home’.

The postcode information related to this exercise was used to identify the linear distance between the survey locations and the visitor’s homes. The result of this showed that there was a marked difference in winter between the distance of those arriving on foot and by car. In the summer visitors travelling on foot travelled further with 90% living within 3.5km. When looking at the postcodes of visitors in terms of settlements, the highest proportion of visitors came from Selsey, Chichester and Sidlesham.

6. Chichester Local Plan: Key Policies Submission 2014-2029 Habitats Regulations Assessment

The Chichester Local Plan: Key Policies Submission 2014-2029 Habitats Regulations Assessment included a section on Pagham Harbour. This concluded that large amounts of new development in Selsey (in particular), along with Sidlesham and other areas ‘south of Chichester’, would potentially have the greatest effect on visitor pressure within Pagham Harbour. As such Chichester District Council applied a precautionary approach and roughly reflected the approach that had been set out within the Arun Local Plan, but linked this to a development within 3.5km based on the content of the visitor survey work.

As a result there is an expectation that access levels will increase at Pagham Harbour as described within the respective Habitats Regulations Assessments. A robust approach is therefore needed to ensure that this level of development, in combination, does not have an adverse effect on the integrity of the site.

Expected and planned development in Local Plans

The emerging Local Plans of both Chichester and Arun District Councils propose housing and expect the number of residential dwellings to be delivered in the buffer zones of the Pagham Harbour in their plans, as set out in Table 1 below.

Table1: Expected and proposed housing numbers

Arun District Council		Chichester District Council	
2014-2019	2019-2029	2015-2020	2020-2029
519	336	322	105
Total	855	Total	427
Overall	1282 dwellings		

The Arun Local Plan 2011-2031 Publication Version contains policy ENV DM2 specifically relating to Pagham Harbour and the Chichester Local Plan: Key Policies Submission 2014-2029 includes Policy 51. These set out the respective but similar approaches to mitigatory measures that will be required.

Agreeing a Strategic Approach

A key characteristic of any actions or strategic projects is that they need to be above the existing day to day work to manage the current level of visitors to the reserve (which correlates to the same area as the SPA) but be complementary. It also needs to be ensured that the strategy can be applied fairly and is proportionate to the potential impact that is expected to be created. Two other important characteristics are that any strategy should have reasonable certainty that it can be implemented in a timescale to allow for actions to be put in place prior to any occupation of new developments. Actions proposed should be secured in-perpetuity to ensure effects are avoided in the long run, and include monitoring. Additionally, due to a relatively low level of expected housing within the buffer areas of the Harbour, viability was also identified as being a potential issue.

On the basis of the suggested actions that had been proposed within the Arun Local Plan, reflecting those in the HRA Report on the Arun Local Plan¹, 5 potential measures and their applicability to Pagham Harbour were considered. These were:

- wardening/visitor management;
- dog projects;
- new access infrastructure to divert people away from sensitive areas;
- codes of conduct and
- interpretation/signage.

Wardening/visitor management

Current evidence suggests that this aspect is shown to be effective when applied in a variety of scenarios across the Country and more widely. This generally involves having wardens present to be a visible presence that behaviourally tends to prevent inappropriate behaviour. Additionally this also helps in terms of interaction with visitors and providing information.

The benefits of this are that it can tend to be established relatively quickly, is a mobile and targeted approach that can be tailored towards areas where there are known issues. This also has flexibility to vary the level of wardening in the future potentially linked to the results of monitoring. The main benefit would be that this would supplement the existing amount of visitor engagement.

The disadvantage of including this aspect is that a large pot is required to fund wardening posts in perpetuity.

Dog project

This is a slightly newer approach but there is evidence from other areas that this has been effective. One particular example of this would be the 'Dorset Dogs' project. There could be a number of measures that might be applicable to this aspect, which could include or link to the last element of Codes of Conduct. Most commonly this focuses on activity most associated with disturbance and engages local dog walkers.

¹ Habitats Regulations Assessment for the Arun District Local Plan (March 2013)

This may suggest particular sites to dog walkers and generally raise awareness of and potential changes to habits that could reduce impacts.

The main problem with this is resulting in 'preaching to the converted' due to the fact that there is high potential that engagement would just be with those already engaged and so more responsible. However, there is the potential that by increasing the dissemination of information this might increase peer pressure.

New infrastructure to divert people away from sensitive areas

Experience has shown that this can be very effective where people are given an attractive alternative, but is highly dependent on location. These projects tend to be discrete and focussed that can be phased with development. The significant concerns related to this are that often only a finite number of projects can be possible, especially due to the fact they can often be labour intensive. A further disadvantage to this is the size of the Harbour limiting potential options.

Codes of Conduct

This approach is seen as being unlikely to be successful on its own, but combined as part of some of the other options, such as the dog project, as an important vehicle by which to raise awareness and explain the package of other measures. The main advantage of this is the application with other actions. Other advantages would be that they may be cheap and easy to produce; they can be distributed to all new residents and could be important groundwork if enforcement is required. The disadvantage of this option is that they are voluntary and there is no way of enforcing or assessing the effectiveness.

Interpretation/Signage

Though this is a relatively well used approach, and can be a useful tool in awareness and education, it is unlikely to be successful as a measure on its own. It is, therefore, most useful when reinforced by wardening. . It is relatively cheap and easy to produce. Usefully though the RSPB are currently in the process of doing an audit of the existing signage and interpretation boards around the site, giving the opportunity to replace boards with information specifically aimed at dog walkers and other recreational users.

As RSPB are involved in the day to day management of the site, the most likely measures that the RSPB could potentially deliver are wardening; new infrastructure within the reserve, and signage. However, opportunity to construct new infrastructure that would actually be over and above what was already planned, is likely to be limited. As a result, it has been difficult for discreet infrastructure projects to be identified.

It was agreed by all partners (NE; RSPB; Chichester and Arun Districts) that on a broad level it would be appropriate that elements of each could be applicable to any approach agreed. Further detailed work and meetings² between the partners has resulted in this access management strategy, which will include:

² 23rd February and 27th March 2015

1. Wardening;
2. Dog projects, including provision of information, such as Codes of Conduct;
3. Interpretation/signage; and
4. Monitoring

It is felt that due to the expected workload, it would be unwarranted to have an additional full time warden. As such it was felt that a more realistic solution would be a part-time warden. In terms of a dog project, this would be expected to include webpages and/or leaflets relating to the birds that Pagham Harbour is important for, the sensitive times of year and what actions can be taken, i.e. keeping dogs on leads for specified parts of the reserve or year, plus raising general awareness. There is also an element of cross over here as interpretation boards and signage will likely link to or enhance this. Finally in terms of monitoring this was felt to be something that would most easily fit with the local authorities commissioning work to be done on an agreed timescale of every 3 or 5 years’.

The costings for these are included below:

Table 2: Costings for each element of the mitigation strategy

Action	Costing (£/per year)
0.5 FTE Warden	12,400 (inc overheads and accommodation)
Operational	1,600
Dog project and signage	2,000
Monitoring	1,000
Total	17,000

These have been informed by current costings for such posts and associated with operational costs. As such these are felt to be robust and strongly grounded for the purposes of calculations.

Delivery

In addition, to the conclusions from the respective Habitats Regulations Assessments of the two District Councils, representations from RSPB and Natural England were also received to the Arun Local Plan 2011-2031 Publication Version. Though these supported the proactive approach the Council is taking to address this issue, they also identified that more detail was required in terms of exact implementation and that this needed to be agreed as soon as possible to allow timely consideration of applications.

The following sets out details of the work that has been undertaken to identify the best way forward in terms of delivering the increased access management measures at Pagham Harbour.

It was felt that the most efficient way of ensuring delivery would be through tapping into existing networks or access management projects. There was awareness by all parties that there was specific overlap with aspects, such as the dog project and monitoring, being proposed by the Interim Solent Recreation Mitigation Strategy. On

this basis, the preferred approach for delivery is Options A: a Service Level Agreement (SLA) between Arun District Council and the Solent Recreation Mitigation Partnership (SRMP).

The advantages to this are largely in terms of economies of scale but also help in terms of other practicalities as well. The other important value of this will be to ensure that coherent messages are being spread across all areas where there are potential for there being effects. Additionally, through a joining of the approaches it would be expected that there will be a reduction in terms of viability issues, through the removal of differing tariffs. Further this provides the benefit of reducing the risk and providing greater certainty over the delivery of actions/projects.

Option A: Service Level Agreement with SRMP

December 2014 - January 2015

Contact was made with the SRMP in December 2014 over the potential for consideration of the Interim Strategy to include or cover Pagham Harbour. Officers from Arun District Council attended and presented a paper at an Officer Group meeting of the SRMP on 20th January 2015. This proposed that either a Service Level Agreement could be entered into between Arun District Council and the SRMP, or that there may be an extension of the partnership to include Pagham Harbour and as such Arun District Council.

Further discussion was had between the SRMP Officers once Arun had left and following an email conversation with members of the Project Board, there was endorsement to work on entering a SLA with Arun District Council, with a view in the longer term to consider the expansion of the Partnership's area as part of the preparation of the definitive mitigation strategy.

February 2015 – April 2015

On 10th March 2015 an email was sent across to the SRMP representative requesting the Partnership to investigate the cost of 2 differing scenarios. These were:

1. Additional information to be made available through any website established for the Solent Partnership, or centres that may be used for distribution, to provide educational and informative information, plus a couple of events scheduled at Pagham in the year; and
2. Monitoring.

In addition, as a reflection of the slightly unknown situation in terms of the wardening aspect and the exact delivery of this part, it was also requested for two quotes or costings to be worked up – one including the wardening and one without. This is intended to be used for comparison so that all partners are fully informed going forward.

Option B: Interim Agreed Approach

In parallel, due to applications received by the respective District Councils, in the buffer zones of the Harbour, Option B: an Interim Agreed Approach is being progressed between the partners to ensure that access management measures can be delivered if these were to be approved in the interim. Email conversations over agreeing a strategic approach for access management at Pagham Harbour also began on 20th January 2015, between Natural England, RSPB and Chichester and Arun District Councils.

The first meeting was on 23rd February 2015. At this meeting there was discussion of expected housing numbers expected to be delivered in the buffer zones from the respect plans of the District Councils; actions considered necessary to form any interim strategy and therefore what level of charge may be applicable. A key emphasis of this meeting was about whether a tariff based system would be appropriate and workable, in the new context of the Community Infrastructure Levy and pooling restrictions.

The outcomes from this meeting were:

- The strategic approach would involve a half-time, all year warden post; access management; education and interpretation measures; and monitoring.
- The RSPB will send its costings for the half-time warden post to CDC, together with information on signage costs.
- CDC will work up the full mitigation cost, to include the RSPB's figures, as the basis for identifying a per dwelling tariff.
- Arun will produce a draft position statement to provide the interim underpinning of the strategic approach.
- RSPB happy to be delivery agent for the authorities for the wardening and interpretation/signage aspects

Further email conversations on these points occurred during March 2015. One of the implications that resulted was a change to aspects that should be included to come up with a robust figure. As a result of the points raised through these, a further meeting was held on 27th March to reach agreement over exact information to be inputted for formulating any tariff.

It was agreed that the initial parts agreed at the previous meeting for inclusion were appropriate. In particular, it was felt that as these were on the basis of RSPBs current costings for similar roles and operations, that these were well grounded. However, both RSPB and NE advised that in terms of treatment of time periods and the application of interest rates, those that had been applied by the Solent Partnership in the formulation of their tariff would be best.

Additionally these discussions made it clear that a 0.5 FTE wardening post was the minimum that could be effective and practicable in the delivery of mitigation measures

Conclusions

As mentioned above the first main outcome so far has been the agreement for progressing a SLA between Arun District Council and the SRMP regarding the dog project and monitoring elements of the strategy, with longer term view to consider the expansion of the Partnership's area as part of the preparation of the definitive mitigation strategy.

It has been agreed between the 4 partners that once an agreed tariff has been applied and collected, that the amount relating to the 0.5FTE warden, operational costs and signage/interpretation will be passed to the RSPB, as delivery agent.

Status of this document

In the interim, the 4 partners agreed that this document will be used as the basis for negotiations on individual applications until its aims have been integrated into the respective authorities' (Arun and Chichester Districts) advice over planning contributions.