

DRAFT MINUTES: Pagham Harbour Local Communities Forum: 29 June 2012

St Ninian's Church Hall, Pagham

On the panel: Chair: Cllr Mike Coleman (WSCC); Charlotte Eastley (Head of Countryside Services, WSCC); Nick Brooks (RSPB West Sussex Reserves Manager); Rob Carver (RSPB Pagham Harbour Manager); Adrian Thomas (RSPB Project Manager)

Attendees: 41 people attended, with representatives of local organisations as follows:

- WSCC (Cllr Margaret Whitehead), Chichester District Council (Cllr John Connor); Arun District Council (Cllr Len Brown); Selsey Town Council (Cllr Nick Jones); Pagham Parish Council (Cllrs Ray Radmall and Mike Cole); Sidlesham Town Council (Cllrs Adrian Harland and Liz Smart); Pagham Yacht Club (Mike Cole); Sussex Ornithological Society (Dr Barrie Watson and Adam Webster), Ramblers Association (Neville Wells); Chichester RSPB Local Group (Kerry Jackson); Pagham Beach Residents (David Huntley); Pagham Beach Flood Trust (Alan Miller).

These minutes attempt to distil the key points and actions of the meeting rather than provide a full verbatim account.

Q = Question or comment from the floor

1. **Welcome:** AdrianT welcomed everyone. Explained that the Forum was being set up so that the RSPB, as day-to-day managers of core areas of the nature reserve, can share their plans, hear views, concerns and advice from local people, and seek to address issues. Meeting is focused on those areas where RSPB has management control. Explained there will be public participation throughout meeting. Hand to MC to chair
2. **Update about transfer of management (NickB)**
 - Since taking over day-to-day management of core area of the Local Nature Reserve, key activity has been to integrate staff team and volunteers into RSPB systems, eg financial procedures, IT installation, data transfer, web pages, Health and Safety audit and actions, small suite of new signage around Visitor Centre, two Meet the RSPB Days.
 - RSPB has employed Debbie Barnes as permanent Education Officer.
 - Exhibition about Medmerry scheme being planned for the Visitor Centre.
 - The process of working with third party landowners around the rest of the LNR to sign new leases and management agreements is still underway, and going well.
3. **Update about Management Planning process (AdrianT)**
 - RSPB will run site to a 5-year publicly consulted Management Plan, to start 1 April 2013. Plan is currently being drafted by AT, will seek internal and WSCC approval, before public consultation this autumn. Consultation will be widely notified.
4. **Update about the Boating Code of Conduct (CharlotteE)**
 - (WSCC remain the lead on this subject as designating authority of the LNR). In February 2012, WSCC took the decision to end the boat permit system, and replace with voluntary Code of Conduct that better reflects the general right of navigation in the Harbour.

- WSCC held a meeting with interested parties in 2011, from which a subgroup was formed and agreed to draft a Code that would reflect the special nature of the Harbour and the difficulties of boating here.

Q: Who is in the group, how many meetings have been held, what progress has been made, and how does a member of the public have their say?

- The group is composed of Charlotte Eastley (WSCC), Mike Cole (Pagham PC & Pagham Yacht Club), Chris Bond (Sidlesham PC), Phillip Hawes (Southern Wildfowlers and Wetlands Management Association), Nick Jones (Selsey TC), Rob Carver RSPB Pagham Harbour Manager; Owen Mitchell (RSPB Pagham Harbour Byelaw Officer), Adrian Thomas (RSPB Project Manager).
- The group has met twice.
- The Code is up to draft 12. Code is currently 1 side of A4, with maps on reverse. It references the British Canoe Union MOU. NE and EA have seen drafts. EA is happy with the pragmatic approach being taken; no reply yet from NE.
- Members of the public can make their views known through one of the representatives above, or through CE. But WSCC is not dictating membership and is happy to accommodate more people if they feel strongly. This is about creating something together.
- The Code will be advertised at Sidlesham Quay and Harbour entrance, although WSCC will need to work with EA. The signage will be incorporated into the wider RSPB signage review.

The meeting then concentrated on questions submitted in advance by stakeholders and members of the public.

5. What does RSPB plan to do about camping and fishing in contravention of the byelaws?

- (NickB) If a visitor contravenes the byelaws, they will be made aware by RSPB wardens and asked to stop. If they persistently offend, RSPB will collect evidence and work with WSCC who can decide whether to prosecute.

6. Will the RSPB consider improved signage for dog walkers?

- (NickB) Yes. RSPB is currently undertaking a full signage audit of the entire site, and will plan revised signage once that is complete.

7. What are the RSPB's views on cycling and dog walking, particularly round the harbour from Pagham spit and along the North Wall? What are the plans for access improvement on the North Wall?

8. What if any are the RSPB's plans on footpaths around the harbour and along the North Wall in particular?

- (NickB) RSPB has no plans to reduce any of cycling or dog walking access. RSPB in due course would like to work with eg Councils, Sustrans, to explore the potential to create cycle links between Pagham and Sidlesham, but there are no firm plans here.

Q: Money had been previously been raised to make improvements to North Wall surface, but EA couldn't give permission as didn't own, and wall is in unknown ownership. Have you found out who owns the wall?

- (NickB) No, but RSPB is liaising with EA.

Q: The kissing gate makes wheelchair/motorised wheelchair access difficult. Can this be resolved?

It was noted that the current path can be accessed by wheel chairs and is part of the WSCC 'Easy Countryside Trails'.

- **ACTION: (CharlotteE): WSCC will work with the Rights of Way team and RSPB to find solution**

9. Does the RSPB plan to promote recent wildlife sightings other than at the Visitor Centre?

- (NickB) Yes. By end of summer, aim to have blog twice a week on Pagham Harbour pages of RSPB website.
- **ACTION: RSPB to seek on-site solution at North Wall, including seeing if Wildfowlers who lease Salthouse would like to play a role.**

10. What are the plans for Pagham Spit Hide?

- (NickB). We are aware it needs attention, but we won't decide until we have finished visitor experience review. Plans will be in the new Management plan

11. Are voluntary arrangements with local landowners over protection for over-wintering species in the Breach Pool, Halsey's Farm and surrounding fields still in force?

- (NickB) Yes

12. What plans is RSPB making for car parking at Pagham given the closure of the spit car park?

- (NickB) RSPB has no immediate plans

Q: The car park has been opened for RSPB events. Will contributions to the upkeep of the road be made?

- (CharlotteE) The decision to close the car park to the general public was made by Pagham Beach Holdings Ltd, the owners. It was agreed that the car park could be used for educational visits and events, run by RSPB. RSPB is WSCC's managing agent. WSCC has the right of access along Harbour Road, and is not legally required to contribute to the maintenance of the road. The area's legal status is still as a car park and WSCC is liaising with Pagham Beach Holdings Ltd regarding the Lease.
- It was accepted that in the past WSCC had made voluntary contributions on a 'without prejudice' basis but WSCC does not accept any liability under the terms of the Lease to make payments towards the maintenance of the road.
- **ACTION: RSPB to keep records about who is accessing the car park.**

Q: There is a dangerous gatestay that should be removed.

- **ACTION: (CharlotteE) WSCC will look into that with RSPB.**

Q: Concerns about who is accessing the car park and when.

- **ACTION: RSPB to investigate.**

- The meeting concluded that further discussions should be with PBHL.

13. Is the RSPB planning to keep the eastern side of the Harbour generally quiet and relatively undisturbed?

- (NickB) Yes.

Q: The effectiveness of electric predator fencing for Little Terns was raised; protest was registered that the fence is an eyesore; and commitment to take down fences once breeding season was over was questioned.

- **ACTION: NickB to investigate and report back.**

14. What management leases or leases for land have been transferred to the RSPB and the boundaries of the reserve managed by the RSPB?

- (NickB) It would be inappropriate to comment in detail about negotiations with third parties while they are ongoing. In general, negotiations are going well.

Q: Is Slipe Field in or out of the reserve?

- AdrianT clarified that Slipe Field is not within the LNR boundary at present (that would require redesignation) but it is being managed as part of the nature reserve.

Q: Would designation of Slipe Field as part of LNR have any effect on possible flood defence options in future.

- AdrianT felt that this was highly unlikely, and reiterated desire of RSPB to work with local communities to find solutions that worked for all.

15. Is the service level agreement going to be made available?

- **ACTION: It will be made available on RSPB website as far as legally possible.**

16. When will the Management Plan be available? We have a long standing interest in shingle breeders particularly terns and would want to know what is planned for them.

- (AdrianT) Confirmation that public consultation on Plan will be in the autumn.

Q: How will this marine Special Protection Area (SPA) idea affect the area? Will it include onshore areas?

- (AdrianT) Marine SPAs are entirely about protecting feeding areas offshore. Our understanding is that Natural England plan to collect information this year and then publicly consult.

17. When will the byelaws review be complete and will the Forum have an opportunity to comment on the byelaws?

- (CharlotteE) The steps in order will be to:
 - Finalise the Management Agreements
 - Redecclare the LNR boundary
 - Advertise the byelaws (the Forum will be made aware of when this happens)

- Confirm the bye laws
- This will take time, and we won't be exerting undue pressure on landowners. CE reminded the group that the byelaws have been advertised once before and amended following comments which had been received.

Q: Does RSPB have any specific objections to local community plans to cut through Church Norton spit

- AdrianT clarified that the RSPB must act consistently in opposing any development proposal that stands to impact on nationally or internationally protected wildlife, and so by far the best approach is for us to seek win-win solutions by working with communities ahead of developments being submitted so that we can help them develop plans that won't affect wildlife. Dialogue is essential.

18. Any other issues/questions?

Q: Any intention to increase number of fishing permits? Might it be an idea to increase the fee?

- (CharlotteE) An increase would need a Habitats Regulations Assessment. Better solution would be to review how the 25 existing permits are administered.
- ACTION: RSPB and WSCC to review system

Q: How is Pagham Harbour Advisory Board being replaced?

- MikeC clarified that this Local Communities Forum is the replacement to PHAB, as set out in a paper at the final allowing issues to be addressed in a much more constructive way.

Q: Case law on bait digging is that the activity can be controlled, not the number of people doing it. Is this the case with fishing?

- ACTION: WSCC to ask legal team to look into this.

Q: There is concern that sluices at North Wall were not working at capacity, helping to cause flooding of land upstream. There is possibility that there will be extra freshwater flow from Chilgrove that might have an effect.

- AdrianT confirmed that flood risk management is by the Environment Agency, and RSPB does not (and cannot) manage the sluices.
- **ACTION: RSPB to seek confirmation from EA what happened during the rains, and what is happening regarding Chilgrove, and feedback to stakeholders.**

Q: A footpath post has gone up pointing across Slipe Field when Footpath 110 should go along Bourne Leisure.

- **ACTION: CharlotteE to discuss with appropriate WSCC Access Ranger**
- AdrianT invited anyone not receiving RSPB monthly Pagham Harbour e-newsletter to add their names to the list.

19. Date for next meeting

- **ACTION: RSPB and WSCC will confirm a date pre Xmas 2012.**