

## Draft Minutes

### **Pagham Harbour Local Communities Forum, Weds 25 Nov 2015**

On the panel:

- Chair: County Cllr Tony Sutcliffe
- Charlotte Weller (WSCC Countryside Services Manager)
- Tim Callaway (RSPB Pagham Harbour Site Manager)
- Adrian Thomas (RSPB Project Manager, Minutes)

Representatives present from: WSCC (Cllrs Simon Oakley and Margaret Evans); Pagham Parish Council (Cllr Ray Radmall), Sidlesham Parish Council (Cllr Adrian Harland), Bersted Parish Council (Cllr David Meagher), Pagham Beach Residents (David Huntley), Chichester RSPB Local Group (Kerry Jackson).

RSPB Pagham Harbour team members present: Jan Atkinson (Little Tern People Engagement Officer), Ivan Lang (Warden), Roy Newnham (Visitor Experience Officer)

1. **Welcome** by Adrian Thomas (RSPB) and Cllr Tony Sutcliffe (WSCC).  
Apologies from Mrs Catherine Morrish.

#### **2. Minutes & Actions from last meeting**

- Minutes approved
- Outstanding Action: RSPB to speak to Cllr Meagher re Bersted Brooks

#### **3. RSPB Update (TC)**

- Winter waterfowl numbers: after a mild winter thus far, counts of Dark-bellied Brent Geese are similar to those in winter 2014, but there are very few juveniles indicating a poor breeding season in the Arctic. There are high numbers of Teal at Pagham Harbour/Medmerry combined, but Pintail numbers remain low, part of an international trend. Black-tailed Godwit numbers are currently low but are expected to rise if and when there is cold weather.
- Breeding highlights, 2015: Little Terns had an excellent season at Pagham Harbour, with 18 pairs producing 16 chicks, the best total since 1979. There were good numbers too in Chichester Harbour, compared with a poor year elsewhere in the South East.
- First records of confirmed breeding of both Water Rail and Nightingale on the reserve
- Better numbers of breeding Lapwing and Redshank than in 2014.
- Little Egret breeding numbers almost doubled.
- Habitats: It has been possible to start reed cutting for the first time in 3 years.
- The Environment Agency has agreed to protocols for the management of Pagham Rife near the North Wall (an area where the RSPB does not have management control).
- Brighton University has concluded an ecological study and report into Pagham Lagoon. It concluded that the flora is recovering well but the fauna is not responding so well, and that it is nutrient levels rather than salinity levels which is the problem. The nationally-rare Starlet Sea Anemone has not been recorded now since 2001. The RSPB is planning to work with Pagham Beach Holdings Ltd, the owner of the site, to reinstate the working group to look into causes and solutions.
- Management work under the Environmental Stewardship scheme includes grazing and tree planting at Church Norton and arable work at Slipe Field.
- The RSPB team has engaged with 1340 students and young people this year.

- The RSPB has hosted 30 events for the public, including a very successful astronomy evening.
- There has been a welcome increase in the number of families visiting, important if we are to connect young people with nature.
- Jan Atkinson's *Birds on the Beach* work engaged with 600 people.
- The total number of hours put in by Pagham Harbour volunteers is up 8% from 2013/14
- 40 of the volunteers met up for a very enjoyable Volunteers BBQ
- The Environment Agency has now completed sheet piling of the Pagham Lagoon causeway to complete flood risk management work on that section of the inner harbour defences.
- Cllr Harland asked if it was known if the Environment Agency had made progress with regard to inner harbour defences in the Sidlesham Quay area. Cllr Radmall reported that Tamsin Spence has taken over from Nick Gray at the Agency. The Agency has not yet undertaken public consultation on this matter.

#### **4. Uplift Project at Visitor Centre area**

- Between now and 2017, the RSPB will be undertaking improvements to the facilities in and around the Visitor Centre, including: a new disabled toilet and main toilet block in the same location as the existing facilities, improvements to the Discovery Garden including a shelter for children (the classroom will remain in its current location), new walkways around the Visitor Centre to help all-user access, new signage, car park tidying, classroom redecoration, and replacement of the Ferry Pool viewing facilities.
- As plans are developed, they will be made available at the Visitor Centre, through the e-update, and through workshops with key stakeholders.
- Some aspects will require Planning Permission and government authority consents.
- Initial work will start in early 2016.
- Funding sources include through the WSCC Service Level Agreement, core RSPB funding and donations from the Friends of Pagham Harbour.

#### **5. Redecoration of the Local Nature Reserve boundary, and subsequent review of the byelaws**

- CW confirmed that the process to declare the revised boundary was now complete. The map is available from WSCC offices and will be on Natural England's website in due course. CW also confirmed that the North Wall was not included in the Reserve
- The next step is to review the byelaws, some of which are defunct. WSCC has asked Natural England whether they can be made more user friendly; a response is awaited.
- Once WSCC has heard back, a revised draft can be drawn up and taken out for consultation.
- A member of the public expressed unease should a document drawn up by legal experts at Defra be turned into 'plain English'. CW explained the first step is to await feedback from Natural England on behalf of Defra.

#### **6. Pagham Beach situation**

*(Although the matter is in the control of the flood defence authorities and not the RSPB, it was deemed useful to ask those experts present to provide an update.)*

Cllr Radmall and David Huntley gave an update on the current situation:

- With Church Norton spit now extending 1.4km and parts of the frontage so eroded they have passed the 'trigger level' for flood risk management work, Pagham PC is now the 'Promoting Authority' for intervention work

- The Parish Council has submitted a Planning Application to cut through Church Norton spit in the same position the breach was in during 1964-2003. There would be no man-made structure. It is modelled that the 'dominant ebb scour' would flush the Harbour mouth clear.
- The plans are currently going through a validation process so are not yet publicly available. Extra work was required to deal with an area of spit in unknown ownership. It was confirmed that the fencing on the spit is only seasonal.
- The works would cost £860K, and will include creation of compensatory habitat as islands in the Harbour.
- Cllr Radmall explained that bulldozer work 15 years ago was to replenish a thinning Church Norton Spit, not to keep the entrance clear.
- Pagham PC has put aside £120K for 8 years of maintenance.
- Cllr Sutcliffe noted that the key thing aim is to keep the wildlife and the houses.
- Cllr Oakley asked who had jurisdiction for the works, especially as the works would include land within both CDC and ADC boundaries. Cllr Radmall confirmed ADC would be the Competent Authority.
- Cllr Oakley asked whether there would be a change in the volume of water coming into the Harbour, putting pressure on the inner defences. Cllr Radmall confirmed that modelling suggests volumes won't change, and that there could be some 'material benefits' to the better flushing of the Harbour mouth.
- It is possible works may start in August 2016, if permission is given.
- The Parish Council wants to reinstate a group of conservation volunteers to help with the work of the Harbour

7. CW offered Cllr Sutcliffe thanks for Chairing the Forum for the last year. For clarity, Cllr Sutcliffe remains the Chair until the next meeting, which is the point where Cllr Oakley takes over.

#### 8. AOB

- There will be an update on Pagham Harbour at the next WSCC Environmental and Community Services Select Committee, as is appropriate three years after the transfer of day-to-day management, Members of the public are welcome to come along. The report will be published on the WSCC website ahead of the meeting, and any questions or representations can be put through people's local members.
- A member of the public asked if more people might attend the Communities Forum if it was held at a different time.

**Action: RSPB agreed to pose the question through the Pagham Harbour eupdate.**

- Cllr Radmall suggested it would be good to have periodic direct liaison with Pagham Parish Council.
- A member of the public asked what the WSCC plans were for Yeoman's Cottage, which is owned by the Council. CW confirmed that it is now being managed as part of the Council's property portfolio.