

Pagham Harbour Community Forum: Minutes

2 July 2014, Hunston Village Hall

On the panel:

- Chair: Cllr Bernard Smith
- Charlotte Eastley (Countryside Services Manager WSCC)
- Rob Carver (RSPB Site Manager)
- Karen Rigby-Faux (RSPB Sussex & Surrey Area Manager)

Welcome and reminder of how the forum works

Actions from previous meeting:

Parish Councils had been directly contacted and informed in advance about the meeting date and venue, due to concerns that some Parish Councils had not previously received notification.

Site Manager's Update (Rob Carver)

- Healthy overwintering populations of waders and wildfowl despite mild and exceptionally stormy conditions. Brent Geese 2300+, Black-tailed Godwit 1000, Wigeon 1500, Teal 1300
- Winter flooding had prevented reedbed cutting but all other habitat management took place - woodland restoration work at Owl Copse and Norton Priory Woodland (FC Woodland Improvement Grant), arable creation at Slipe Field including nectar/pollen and wild bird seed mix for Turtle Dove, a scarce breeding bird in the UK, the re-introduction of sheep grazing adjacent to Church Norton Castle, and the clearance of vegetation and installation of electric fencing on Tern Island
- Significant success on Tern Island for nesting shorebirds: 1 Little Tern, 13 Common Tern, 1 Sandwich Tern, 5 Oystercatcher, 2 Ringed Plover, 44 Black-headed Gull, 1 Mediterranean Gull (pairs)
- Also on Church Norton Spit: 11 Little Tern, 6 Ringed Plover, 6 Oystercatcher and 3 Skylark (pairs)
- Pagham Harbour part of EU Life + funded Little Tern project lead by RSPB with 11 partners, with the aim to prevent disturbance and predation, improve the quality of habitat, and raise awareness. Jan Atkinson had been appointed seasonal People Engagement Officer for the project focussing on outreach and was also leading on school visits at the Reserve
- Breeding waders, another RSPB priority have fared reasonably well this spring with 7 pairs of Lapwing and 4 pairs of Redshank. Also 4 pairs of Shelduck had fledged 24 young
- The Reserve also supported 10 pairs of Heron and 9 pairs of Little Egret this summer
- Staff had co-ordinated a 24 hour warden watch for the pair of nesting Black-winged Stilts at Medmerry. Only the 2nd or 3rd time this species had attempted to nest in this country. 3 chicks had hatched and had been taken by the adults from the flood storage area near Bracklesham into the intertidal area where they were still defending the young against gulls etc and in a week or so should fledge. Avocets had also bred well at Medmerry, with 20 adults and 4 young moving onto Ferry Pool
- Full breeding bird surveys for the season had yet to be completed and the data analysed
- A wide range of non-bird/all nature wildlife surveys (mammal, reptile, invertebrate and botanical) are undertaken many by volunteers. Initial indications were that invertebrate had

been affected by the wet weather last year with in particular reduced numbers of butterflies on the wing

- The mild winter may have reduced the high mortality of Water Voles at this time but the flooding will have displaced many. However it is hoped that this may have enabled them to colonise new areas. No mink had been reported on the peninsula this year or last
- We now have 122 volunteers and last year they gave almost 6000 hours to the Reserve. More volunteer support is being sought for the Welcome Team, events and administration in particular as it is hoped that further volunteer co-ordinators can be appointed to support these roles
- The Reserve held 9 events during the autumn/winter since the last forum meeting with a further 22 over the summer, and these were proving popular. Good attendance at the Dawn Chorus at Church Norton despite bad weather, although the conditions got the better of our first Bluebell Walk at Priory woods. Last year's events totalled 40 with 567 participants. In 2014 the Reserve hopes to exceed this as it celebrates its 50th year with a Picnic Party family event on Sunday 24 August
- So far 4 schools have visited this year (184 pupils Primary to FE) with another 4 booked for the summer (177 pupils) with further interest expected for the autumn. Last year 14 schools visited with 446 pupils
- Wildlife Explorers (club for 8-12 year olds) goes from strength to strength having been launched a year ahead of schedule in November meeting monthly with up to 18 children supported by 6 volunteer leaders/helpers
- Pagham Lagoon had been sampled by the Environment Agency following public concerns over the smell and discoloration of the lagoon. The results showed the water quality to be good, with the condition of the lagoon due to the natural breakdown of vegetation and algae due to the warm temperatures. No toxic blue/green algae were present. University of Brighton will be undertaking a flora & fauna survey of the lagoon, including sampling for the rare Starlet Sea Anemone, late summer to monitor the steady improvement of the lagoon since a decline in interest features was identified back in 2005. RSPB, Natural England, the Environment Agency and Southern Water are working together to put measures in place to prevent pollution of the lagoon resulting from winter flooding

Jan Atkinson – People Engagement Officer (seasonal) – Little Tern EU Life + project

Jan introduced herself and explained her outreach work this summer to inspire the local community about the Little Terns on their door step, to encourage people to visit Pagham Harbour and to gain support for our work to protect this rare migratory breeding shorebird which is synonymous with the Reserve

Local Nature Reserve agreements update

The following statement was read out to summarise the current position:

“Replacement LNR agreements have been discussed with all parties who own or occupy land at Pagham Harbour, and draft agreements have been sent out.

To date, of the 21 parties excluding WSCC who own or occupy land at Pagham Harbour, 16 have either signed up to renewed LNR agreements or have agreed to the principle of their land being included within the LNR subject to the finalisation of agreements. We are currently finalising agreements with all those who have agreed to the principle, which in some cases involves the resolution of some legal issues.

We hope to be in a position to start the re-designation process in the near future, and if all those who have agreed in principle proceed to complete agreements, and if WSCC as designating authority decide that the proposed area for designation is appropriate, the designated area would be excess of 550ha.

We would still warmly welcome dialogue with the 5 landowners who have not agreed to enter into renewed LNR agreements at this point in time should they have a change of heart.

It is for WSCC as the designating authority to decide on the extent of designation. We have made recommendations to them, and will be meeting them shortly to discuss the re-designation process and to agree the respective roles and responsibilities of the two organisations through that process.”

Questions from the floor

Ray Radmall, Pagham Parish Council

Q: Explained that the beach at Pagham was in a worse state and the Arun Emergency Planning Officer is looking at evacuation plans. PC is working with Royal Haskoning to develop intervention plans and the majority of the funding would have to be found locally. One of the options includes cutting through the Spit and Ray asked if any terns had nested here as they were considering the type of compensatory habitat that would need to be provided.

A: Rob confirmed that 11 pairs of Little Tern had nested on the spit this year

Q:Ray reported that the bat box in his garden had been taken over by bumble bees and asked if this would this be a problem

A: Rob commented that this wouldn't be a problem for the bees as they would not be prey items for bats but may prevent Pipistrelles (the most likely bat species) taking up residents.

Trevor Guy, local resident

Q. What is being done to prevent antisocial behaviour in Pagham Spit hide?

A: RSPB are looking at designs that would prevent antisocial use (i.e. unenclosed)

Q: Will the spit be re-signed?

A: RSPB is looking to put in place a new suite of signage across the Reserve, for which fundraising is currently being pursued. Signs will include those relating to dog walking

Peter Driscoll, Friends of Pagham Harbour

Q. Are there plans to graze cattle at Chapel Meadow and Yeomans Field in Sidlesham?

A. Yes, it is intended that Chris Spiby, our tenant farmer, will commence grazing of these fields late summer/early autumn after they have been cut for hay

Catherine Morrish, Friends of Pagham Harbour

Q. What are the worst predators for the shorebird/wader chicks?

A. Generally gulls and crows

Q. Does allowing gulls to nest alongside the terns cause a conflict of interest?

A. It is not possible to prevent gulls nesting nearby. They also need to raise young in the Harbour – everything has a place in the ecosystem. Terns may also be predated by other species we want to encourage such as Peregrines. The greater the number of terns nesting together the greater the protection from aerial predators

Ray Radmall, Pagham Parish Council

Q: Reported a lot of local interest in the Lagoon because people had been expressing concern that it was polluted

A: Rob re-iterated the points that he had made in his presentation. The colouring and smell in the lagoon was from natural causes. The water quality had been tested and was fine, being in line with bathing water standards. A plea was made to ensure that the message was spread.

Q: Ray reported that a resident on Pagham beach has built a wall to protect his property from tidal surges. Natural England have confirmed to Ray that they would not object to measures which had been put in place to protect homes. Ray asked what the RSPB view is?

A: Rob explained that as this was on SSSI land outside the LNR this was a matter for Natural England to comment on, not RSPB

Adrian Harland, Sidlesham Parish Council

Q: Reported that travellers are in the area and were on the Southern Water sewage works site, and suggested that all should be vigilant and ensure that their property is secured

A: Karen reported that a Section 61 Notice had jointly been served by Southern Water and RSPB as the encampment is on both of their land. Rob reported that the team had secured the Reserve gates as much as possible

Catherine Morrish, Friends of Pagham Harbour

Q: When are the Visitor Centre toilets going to be sorted out?

A: RSPB needs to have insurance in place to carry out any works on the landfill and this has to be agreed by the Environment Agency. RSPB has a fundraising officer who has been assigned to the Reserve one day a week to raise funds for their replacement and it is their top priority

Brian James, Local Resident

Q: Can the RSPB please make sure their members are aware of the fact that people are allowed to boat in the Harbour. When out boating Mr James had been verbally abused and had stones thrown at him. Could it be mentioned in a newsletter?

A: The Code of Conduct is available and on display at the Visitor Centre and is being published on the website

ACTION: The RSPB will look to include a piece in a newsletter

Adrian Harland, Sidlesham Parish Council

Q: Has the code been agreed now by Natural England and the Environment Agency and where are the signs that have been promised at Sidlesham Quay? No one will look at the internet

A: The code has been approved and the group which developed it was informed a number of months ago. At that time it was agreed that the signage would be put in place as part of the wider signage project around the Reserve.

ACTION: The RSPB will consider whether any temporary signage could be put up

Trevor Guy, Local Resident

Q: Jet skis had been seen along the foreshore / harbour entrance channel over the weekend

A: Everyone was encouraged to report anything like this to the Reserve at the time of the incident so that they can follow it up

Brian James, Local Resident

Q: When will the Environment Agency sign at the entrance to the Harbour be removed or changed as it is now incorrect given the public right of navigation?

ACTION: RSPB to follow up with the Environment Agency

Ray Radmall, Pagham Parish Council

Q: Ray reported that the inner harbour defence works along the east side agreed by the Environment Agency and Bourne Leisure would be completed by end of September.

Also the Parish Council has been writing its Neighbourhood Plan and has to provide recreational mitigation for the additional footfall (particularly dog walking) which will arise from the 160 new homes. The Parish has identified an area of Accessible Natural Open Green Space for this purpose and Ray asked if he could discuss this further with Rob/RSPB

A: Rob said he would be happy to help

Adrian Harland, Sidlesham Parish Council

Reported that the Sidlesham flood defence enhancement works would run from the Ferry to Pagham North Wall and were due to be constructed in 2016. The RSPB are working with the Environment Agency on this project

AOB

Rob Carver, RSPB

Rob thanked the Friends for contributing funding for the purchase of a display trailer and cost of interpretation material for the EU Life+ Little Tern Project

Next meeting: Proposed for end November/early December, date to be confirmed