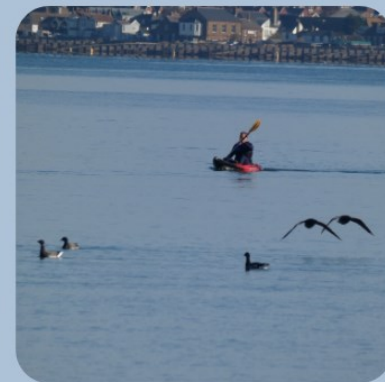




Mitigation Strategy

2024-2029



Foreword

Welcome to our refreshed mitigation strategy which details how Bird Wise will work in partnership to mitigate recreational disturbance to coastal birds across North Kent.

We have seen much change across our coastline since the original Footprint Ecology Strategic Access Management and Monitoring Strategy (SAMMS) was first published in 2014, including changes in our working patterns and recreational habits influenced by the Covid-19 pandemic, Avian Influenza outbreaks and changes caused by our warming climate. All these factors put pressures on our coastal birds which means our work to reduce disturbance is more critical than ever.

Thankfully, the Bird Wise North Kent partnership has been developing and adapting since its formation in 2017. We now have established staff working throughout the year, installed signage in high-footfall areas and built effective partnerships with a wide range of stakeholders across the coastline between Gravesend and Whitstable. Our Coastal Codes have been developed to include the most popular recreational activities and our social media feeds reach thousands of coastal visitors.

The partnership is taking steps to ensure our work is as sustainable as possible. We have defined our Mission, Vision and Values to put nature first whilst listening to the views of all recreational coastal communities. We believe that people can benefit from enjoying time outdoors, and by working closely in partnership we can all make a positive difference to the coastal wildlife with which we share our shores in North Kent.

Alan Jarrett

Chair of the Bird Wise North Kent Partnership Board

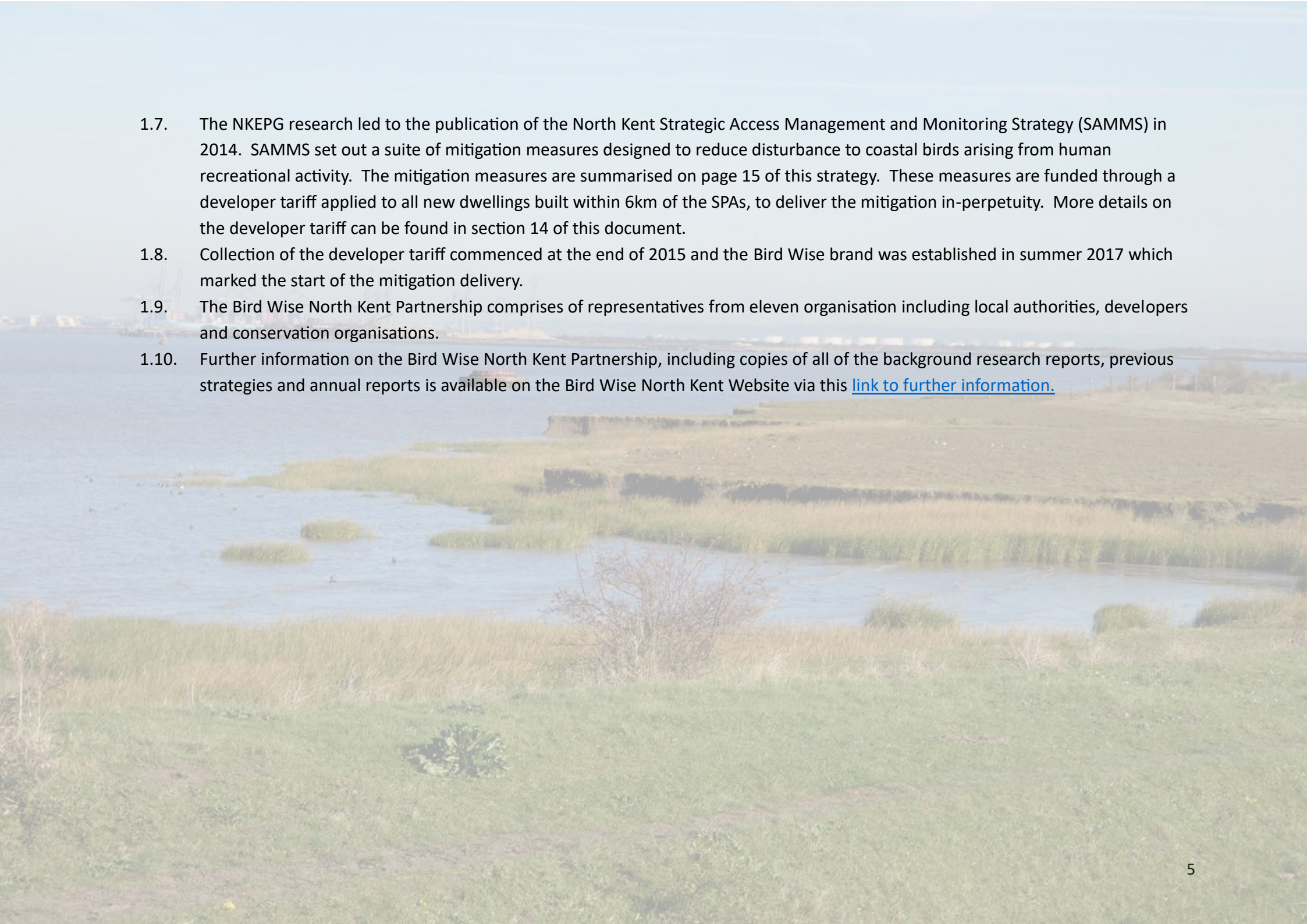
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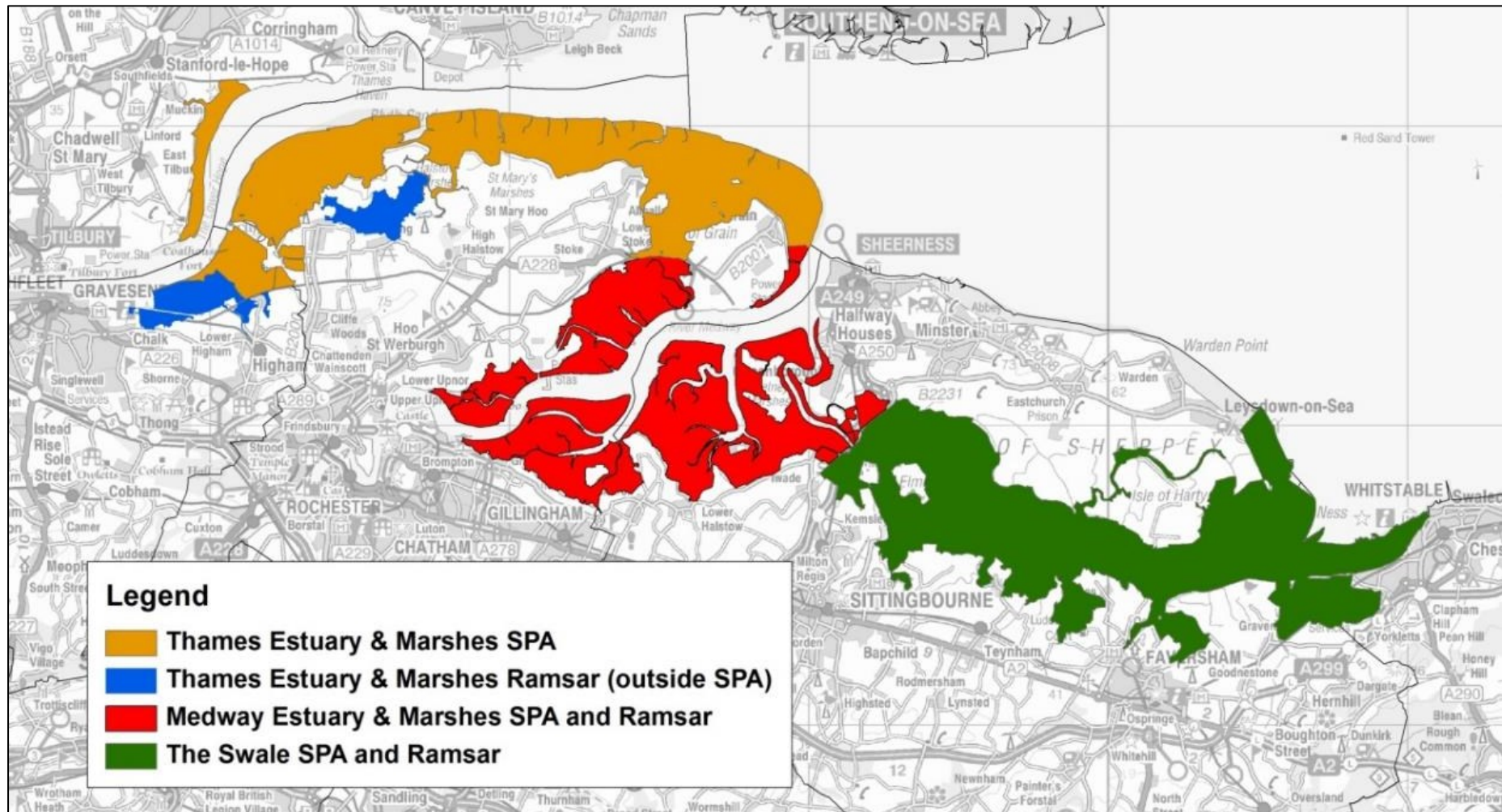
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1. Background and Introduction

- 1.1. The North Kent Marshes is the continuous swathe of coastal habitat stretching 70 miles eastwards from Gravesend through to Whitstable. Comprising of approximately 17,000 hectares of grazing marsh, saltmarsh, shingle beaches, mudflats and reedbeds, this diverse habitat mix provides food and shelter for hundreds of thousands of migratory birds every year.
- 1.2. Due to the internationally important populations of migratory birds that depend on this coastline, with hundreds of thousands of birds gathering here each year to overwinter, the North Kent Marshes includes three Special Protection Areas (SPA) and Ramsar sites. Ramsar sites are areas recognised as wetlands of international importance under the 1971 Ramsar Convention. These designations are The Thames Estuary and Marshes SPA and Ramsar, The Medway Estuary and Marshes SPA and Ramsar and The Swale SPA and Ramsar site.
- 1.3. In addition, the area also includes Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Marine Conservation Zones (MCZ) and the UK's largest Nursery No-Take Zone which comprises of 4.6 square miles of habitat where fishing is prohibited to protect fish species.
- 1.4. Alongside all these designations, North Kent is a popular place to live, work and visit. Proximity to London with excellent transport links to Europe make this a desirable location with commercial and residential development moving forward at pace. Population growth close to the protected areas and the development required to accommodate this increase can put pressure on sensitive migratory bird populations protected by the environmental designations.
- 1.5. Research undertaken between 2009-2014 by the North Kent Environmental Planning Group (NKEPG) found that areas with high levels of human recreational activity on the coast had seen the largest declines in bird numbers. It also established that 75% of coastal visitors surveyed had travelled from within 6 kilometres to undertake their chosen activity. The research also suggested that if left unmanaged, increased recreation arising from new development could lead to a 15% increase in disturbance.
- 1.6. The Conservation of Habitats and Species (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019 (known as the 'Habitats Regulations') set out how local planning authorities must deal with planning applications that have potential to impact on Special Protection Areas and other protected sites. The legislation says that local planning authorities must not grant consent for a development that would, either alone or in-combination with other developments, have a likely significant effect on a protected site, unless full mitigation is provided.

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- 1.7. The NKEPG research led to the publication of the North Kent Strategic Access Management and Monitoring Strategy (SAMMS) in 2014. SAMMS set out a suite of mitigation measures designed to reduce disturbance to coastal birds arising from human recreational activity. The mitigation measures are summarised on page 15 of this strategy. These measures are funded through a developer tariff applied to all new dwellings built within 6km of the SPAs, to deliver the mitigation in-perpetuity. More details on the developer tariff can be found in section 14 of this document.
 - 1.8. Collection of the developer tariff commenced at the end of 2015 and the Bird Wise brand was established in summer 2017 which marked the start of the mitigation delivery.
 - 1.9. The Bird Wise North Kent Partnership comprises of representatives from eleven organisation including local authorities, developers and conservation organisations.
 - 1.10. Further information on the Bird Wise North Kent Partnership, including copies of all of the background research reports, previous strategies and annual reports is available on the Bird Wise North Kent Website via this [link to further information](#).

1.11. Map Showing the North Kent Marshes Special Protection Areas and Ramsar Sites



1.12. The Bird Wise North Kent Partnership Organisations



2. Our Mission

To reduce the impact of human recreation on our coastal birds in North Kent.



3. Strategic Purpose

- 3.1. The original SAMMS document published by Footprint Ecology in 2014 provided the building blocks for the mitigation measures delivered by Bird Wise North Kent and can be found on our website via this link [SAMMS 2014](#)
- 3.2. The mitigation is entirely funded via developer contributions calculated using the measures identified in the 2014 strategy and has the support of Natural England.
- 3.3. The purpose of this document is to provide an update on the progress made since the Bird Wise project commenced in North Kent in 2017. This updated five-year strategy will also detail how and where the mitigation measures identified in the original SAMMS strategy will be delivered over the period 2024 to 2029.
- 3.4. In 2027, a full review of the SAMMS mitigation strategy will be undertaken by external consultants. The findings of this larger piece of work will feed into the next five-year strategy from 2030 allowing any recommended changes to be fully implemented and costed in accordance with relevant legislation.

4. Our Vision

Working in partnership with communities, landowners, and authorities to enable people to enjoy our coastline in harmony with birds and all other wildlife.



5. Our Values

5.1. Our values detail how we will work in all our activities to achieve our vision and mission.



Collaborative

We respect that our coastline is important to people for a wide range of recreational activities. We will work with all user groups to reduce the impact these activities have on coastal birds.



Sustainable

We will minimise our environmental impact by adopting sustainable working practices.



Evidence-based

We will use data collected from local studies and examples from other similar projects to inform the mitigation measures we implement on site.



Transparent

We will publish annual reports, monitoring data and other relevant publications on our website along with the baseline data that informs our activity.



Nature Focused

We will put nature first in our decision making.

6. Bird Migration in North Kent

- 6.1. The North Kent Marshes are located on a migration superhighway known as the East Atlantic Flyway. This stretches all the way from the high Arctic regions down to the southern tip of Africa.
- 6.2. Birds make their way along this migratory route at different times of the year. In spring and summer, birds fly northward to escape the hot temperatures of Sub-Saharan Africa to breed in Europe. At this same time, hundreds of thousands of ducks, geese and wading birds are heading further north to their breeding grounds in Siberia, Scandinavia and Canada. Then in autumn and winter the birds fly southward to escape the cold weather.
- 6.3. For North Kent, our coastline is busiest in autumn and winter when large assemblies of over-wintering shorebirds fly here to find food and shelter through the harsh winter months. The size of these over-wintering populations and the significant numbers of threatened species, such as the Brent Goose, are the main reason why the Thames Estuary, Medway Estuary and The Swale and surrounding wetlands are classified as Special Protection Areas and Ramsar sites.
- 6.4. In addition to the internationally important assemblage of over- wintering birds, North Kent also provides habitat to breeding shorebirds such as Avocet, Ringed Plover, Lapwing, Redshank and Oystercatcher. Several Gull and Tern species nest on shingle beaches and islands throughout the estuarine environment, and a large heronry is established at Northward Hill RSPB reserve in Medway.
- 6.5. The North Kent Marshes form part of England's East Coast Flyway, 170,000 hectares of coastline stretching from the Humber to the Thames. Such is the significance of these wetland habitats for migratory birds and other wildlife that the East Coast Flyway has made it onto the UNESCO World Heritage Sites UK tentative list.
- 6.6. Migratory patterns in birds are long established behaviours but these can be influenced by a range of factors. Food availability, weather conditions and physical changes to coastal habitats can all impact on the suitability of a site. Climate change is already changing migratory behaviour in birds with some flying shorter distances to find suitable conditions, known as short stopping. More frequent severe weather events resulting from climate change are also affecting the routes taken by birds during migration.

The East Atlantic Flyway



7. Defining Bird Disturbance

- 7.1. Birds that arrive on the North Kent Marshes for winter will have travelled thousands of miles from as far afield as Siberia. This epic migratory journey requires huge energy reserves which the birds need to replenish as soon as possible on arrival. The time available for feeding is limited by tides and weather conditions so every available opportunity is vital. Birds also need to rest and recover from these long migratory flights and conserve energy to survive the challenging winter months.
- 7.2. Human recreation activities along the coastline can cause birds to become alert and stop feeding or move away from their feeding or resting areas. Anything that interrupts birds' ability to feed or rest is classed as disturbance.
- 7.3. Depending on the nature, frequency and level of the disturbance, some birds may take flight temporarily but return after the disturbance ends. Other birds may modify their feeding habits or, ultimately, desert the site.
- 7.4. When a bird is forced to take flight, feeding stops and energy use greatly increases. At times of cold weather or when food supply is limited, this could be life threatening for certain species.
- 7.5. Birds that breed on the North Kent Marshes during spring and summer are also vulnerable to disturbance. If parent birds are forced to fly away during nesting, their eggs are unprotected against predators and are not being kept warm. If disturbance is frequent the parent bird may abandon the nest site altogether. Ground nesting species are particularly susceptible to disturbance from human activity.
- 7.6. To summarise, disturbance can lead to a lack of feeding or resting time, causing reduced fitness and depleted energy reserves which impacts on the birds' ability to complete long migratory flights. It also reduces incubation time on nests and protection of chicks resulting in reduced breeding success.

8. Mitigation Activity

8.1. The original SAMMS report considers a range of measures to mitigate disturbance to birds arising from human activity. It explores how successful each measure is likely to be and focuses on the most effective measures that can be implemented in North Kent.

Rangers

- Engaging with the public on site to raise awareness of bird disturbance and advise on how to reduce it. Monitoring how sites are being used and reporting changes in activity and identifying where mitigation is needed.

Education

- Working with schools, clubs and recreational user groups to deliver information on the birds that share our coastline and offer practical advice on how to reduce human impacts.

Dog Project

- Developing the Coastal Canines Club to encourage dog owners to adopt wildlife friendly behaviours and create a positive community in North Kent.

Site Specific Works

- Undertake physical works on site to reduce recreational disturbance as identified in the original SAMMS strategy document and updated using monitoring data and local knowledge.

Events

- Attendance at events across North Kent throughout the year to raise awareness of the project and reach a wider audience.

Online Presence

- Use our website, mailing list and social media channels to provide up-to-date project information about our activities and communicate our core messages to raise awareness of bird disturbance impacts.

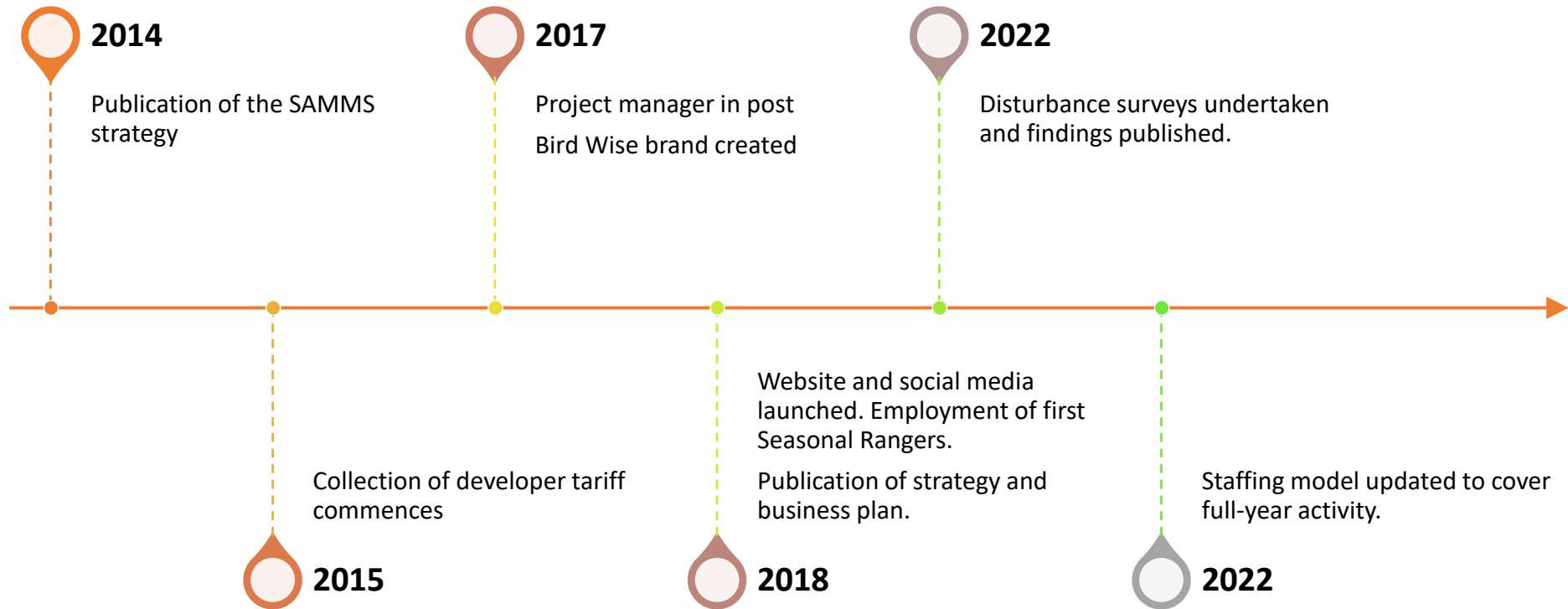
Partnership Working

- Working in partnership with landowners, environmental organisations, local authorities, recreational clubs and groups and other relevant stakeholders to deliver our mitigation measures across North Kent.

9. Progress to date.

- 9.1. The North Kent SAMMS Board was formed in 2015 following publication of the Footprint Ecology SAMMS report. Collection of the developer tariff commenced at the same time and a project manager was appointed in 2017, which marked the start of mitigation.
- 9.2. The Bird Wise brand was created in 2018 to deliver the mitigation measures detailed in the SAMMS report. Initial work focused on building the brand identity and creating an online presence with a dedicated website and social media pages on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.
- 9.3. The first seasonal rangers were appointed in 2018. They were employed for six months from October to the end of March to provide an onsite presence through the autumn and winter season when large over-wintering bird populations are present. Over the summer season, between April and September, only the project manager was in post so public engagement over this time was limited.
- 9.4. During 2020 and some of 2021, Covid-19 restrictions meant changes to our engagement methods. Whilst onsite activity was not permitted, our focus shifted to our digital channels to communicate our messages about disturbance. Rangers created a series of articles giving information on responsible birdwatching, then as restrictions were lifted, we focused on accessing the coast safely without causing disturbance.
- 9.5. Our onsite activities returned to normal in September 2021 with three part-time seasonal rangers working the winter season. However, there were concerns raised by local conservation organisations about the absence of any ranger presence during the bird nesting season through spring and summer. The project manager also raised concerns about seasonal posts due to declining applications for the seasonal roles and time spent on the recruitment and induction process each year. In 2022, the SAMMS Board agreed to appoint two rangers on a permanent basis working part time but throughout the whole year and in August 2022 the posts were filled. Whilst the focus of mitigation measures remains on the overwintering bird populations in North Kent, our presence through summer allows us to communicate messages relating to disturbance of nesting birds and attend public events which largely happen during this time.
- 9.6. Through the winter season 2021/22, KWT Consultancy Services were appointed to undertake monitoring of the Bird Wise North Kent mitigation measures. They repeated the original bird disturbance surveys using the same methodology, timescales and locations to provide a snapshot of disturbance and compared to the baseline data. This monitoring illustrated that recreational activity on the coast during winter had increased by 34%. The levels of disturbance, thankfully, had not increased, and despite an overall increase in the number of dogs being walked, 40% of these were kept on a lead compared with 26% in 2011. You can read the report [here](#).

9.7. Project Milestones





Increased recreational activity 2011-2021



More dogs being walked on a lead 26% in 2011 up to 40% in 2021

Staff in post year-round



Average 1358 website visits per month



3892 people engaged with face to face in 2023



Social media following up each year
Now 3207 followers



10. Our Plans for the Next Five Years – In Summary.



Dog Walkers

- Relaunch of Coastal Canines Club and produce dog walkers guide to North Kent booklet and online resources
- Create an off-lead dog exercise area at Riverside Country Park and investigate options for other locations
- Create community through dedicated dog focused walks & events



Water based activities

- Create guide to wildlife friendly watersports with signage, workshops and leaflets in partnership with KWT and Bird Wise East Kent
- Collaborate with boating and water sports clubs to promote best practice
- Work with port authority and landowners to reduce landing on restricted areas



Walking and nature watching

- Additional signage at high priority sites
- Fencing and planting to screen sensitive areas
- Create videos of suggested walking routes and lead guided walks



Education

- Deliver educational programme to key stage 2 pupils in school with teacher resources
- Collaborate with recreational user groups for all activities to increase awareness of migratory birds and protected habitats in North Kent

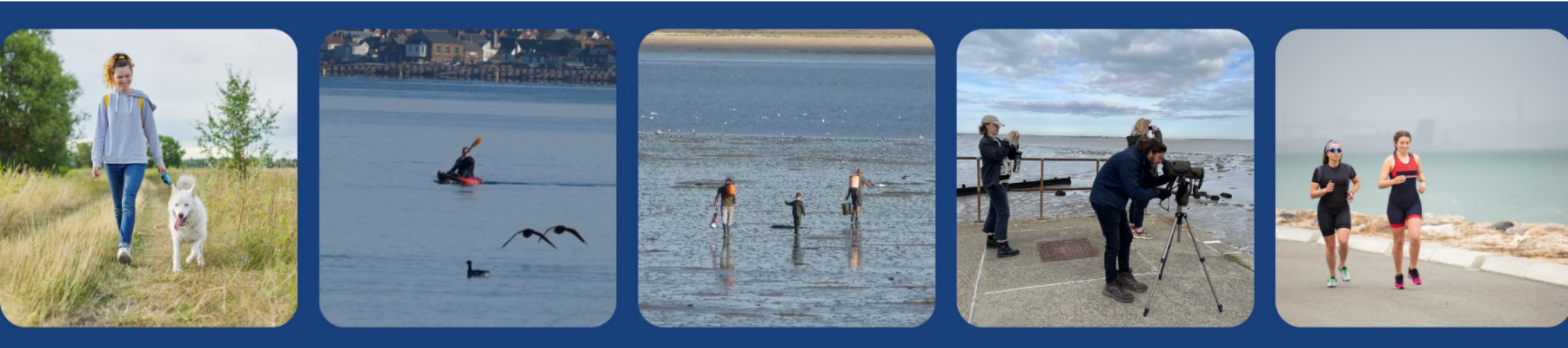


Digital Engagement

- Increase engagement across existing social media platforms and explore options for new activity
- Refresh website content to increase accessibility
- Increase use of YouTube to deliver information on birds and responsible recreation in North Kent

11. Recreational Activities in North Kent

- 11.1. The original visitor surveys, bird disturbance surveys, SAMMS strategy documents and subsequent monitoring identified the various recreational activities taking place on the North Kent coastline during winter.
- 11.2. Birds' reaction to human presence varies according to the activity being undertaken. For example, in the original bird disturbance surveys conducted by Footprint Ecology, dog walking accounted for 55% of disturbance events recorded but cycling was only 1.5%.
- 11.3. The distance between the birds and the recreational activity taking place is significant with birds reacting when our activities take us closer to them, particularly the case for activities on the water or for dog walking when dogs are off-lead and free to approach birds.
- 11.4. In our most recent disturbance surveys, which took place in winter 2021/22, similar results were observed, however the research demonstrated that birds at the busiest sites for recreational activity were less responsive to disturbance. This suggests that birds using busier locations are more habituated to human activities but those in quieter sites are more likely to react to disturbance threats. You can read the full monitoring report on our website [via this link](#).
- 11.5. A range of mitigation measures can be applied to tackle individual activities to reduce their impact on birds in North Kent.



Dog Walking

Why is mitigation needed?

Walking with one or more dogs off-lead was the major cause of disturbance recorded in our research and again during our monitoring. However, we know that when dogs are walked alongside their owner, under close, effective control or on a lead, birds are less likely to react to their presence. Dogs bring joy to their families, are excellent companions to combat loneliness. Spending time with dogs can reduce stress and improve mental health. For this reason, our work aims to champion responsible dog walking and encourage dog walkers to look out for birds and other wildlife during their walks.

Progress to date:

We have created a Coastal Canines Club which is free for dog walkers to join. Upon registration they receive a copy of our coastal canine code, a certificate for their dog, our leaflets and a branded dog waste bag dispenser.

There is a section on the Bird Wise North Kent website dedicated to the [coastal canines club](#) which includes our coastal code, places to enjoy a dog walk and a video on how to be birdwise.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, dog ownership increased as many families spent more time at home, but access to dog training was difficult with many classes unable to offer face-to-face tuition. We created five short videos, each focusing on a basic command, to help people train their dogs at home. These videos were posted on our YouTube channel and shared on our social media channels. There are also links to these on the coastal canines' section of the Bird Wise website.

We have installed dog-focused signage at key locations and our Rangers engage with dog walkers on site to raise awareness of birds and encourage responsible dog walking.



Plans for the next five years:

- Develop the Coastal Canines Club and promote a Facebook group to create a community of responsible dog owners and walkers that advocate for our birds and champion responsible dog walking behaviours.
- Work with vet practitioners, dog trainers, commercial dog walkers and other dog related businesses to adopt our wildlife-friendly messaging and share with their customers. Create a directory of dog-related businesses that sign up to our ethos of responsible behaviours.
- Lead guided walks aimed at dog owners to showcase our coastal birds and demonstrate responsible behaviour.
- Produce a dedicated booklet for dog walkers in North Kent detailing places to walk without disturbing wildlife, places where on-lead restrictions exist, our coastal codes and links to further information on our website.
- Create a secure off-lead dog exercise area at the busiest sites to encourage off-lead activity to take place away from the sensitive shoreline. Initially this will be at Riverside Country Park in Medway, but other locations will be investigated subject to landowner permission and set-up costs.
- Host dog-focused events in Gravesham, Medway, Swale and Canterbury. These will promote responsible dog ownership and allow businesses to promote their services whilst signing up to our coastal codes and growing the Coastal Canines Club community.
- In cases where positive engagement has not proved effective, we will work with the relevant authorities' dog warden to pursue enforcement options.



Walking Without Dogs

Why is mitigation needed?

Walking without a dog was the second most popular recreational activity recorded in our disturbance studies. The benefits to our physical and mental health from spending time exercising outdoors and connecting with nature are well documented so we want to encourage people to enjoy the great outdoors. The problem comes when people get too close to birds that are feeding or resting, or enter areas where access is not permitted, as this causes disturbance to birds and other wildlife.

Progress to date:

We have installed signage at key locations advising people to keep on marked paths and encourage responsible behaviour. This includes specific signage and interpretation completed in partnership with Natural England as sections of the King Charles III England Coast Path have opened across the North Kent area.

Our Rangers have led guided walks and activities at various locations to raise awareness of the diversity of birds we share our coastline with and the migratory journeys they undertake to get here.

A printed leaflet is available on site from our Rangers or to download on our website which has information on Bird Wise, locations to enjoy wildlife responsibly and pictures of birds seen throughout the year.

Rangers engage with walkers out on site across the coastline, pointing out birds they can see on site and advising on walking routes that avoid our more sensitive locations.



Plans for the next five years:

- Produce videos and maps of suggested walking routes across the North Kent region with information on birds and how to avoid disturbing them.
- Use planting at sensitive locations to screen walking routes from wildlife and reduce disturbance whilst allowing activities to continue.
- Collaborate with walking groups across the region to raise awareness of coastal birds and reduce disturbance.
- Install further information signage and interpretation at busy access points.
- Install fencing at sensitive areas that are used as high-tide roosts by over wintering birds.
- Re-route paths where appropriate to create circular walks away from sensitive feeding and roosting areas.



Activities On the Water

Why is mitigation needed?

The number of disturbance events caused by activities on the water recorded in the disturbance studies in both 2011 and 2021 are relatively low compared with other land-based activities. This is because the surveys took place between December and February when less people are taking part in water-based activities.

The most recent [Water sports Participation Survey](#), published in 2023, suggests that participation in water sports across the UK increased during the Covid-19 pandemic when restrictions prevented overseas travel. In the years following the pandemic, participation levels remain high with approx. 13.2 million adults trying a boating activity in 2022. The popularity of stand-up paddle boarding (SUP) continues to rise with equipment being more accessible to a wider range of people with lower cost options available. The Swale Paddlers Facebook group, a group created to share tips and training for people wanting to access SUP in Swale, now has over 1400 members.

The islands located in the Medway estuary and The Swale are used as a high tide roost by birds throughout the year and as nest sites to breeding gulls, terns and waders during spring and summer. These places provide a safe place for birds but are vulnerable to disturbance if more people are accessing the water and able to get closer to the islands or land on them.

Progress to date:

Our Coastal Codes booklet includes guidance for wildlife friendly activities on the water and is available at our events and from our Rangers. We also have information on the Coastal Code section of our website.

We worked with RSPB in 2021 and 2022 to raise awareness of the sensitive island habitats in Medway and Swale including their campaign to protect nesting Sandwich Terns on Burntwick Island. We also spoke with local hovercraft users in 2023 to explain why the birds need space, resulting in them avoiding landing on the islands during the nesting season.



Plans for the next five years:

- Use examples from other successful campaigns around the south coast to create a 'wildlife friendly water sports' campaign in Kent, working with Bird Wise East Kent to ensure consistency in messaging.
- Collaborate with local boating associations, sailing clubs, water sports clubs and user groups to raise awareness of the impacts of disturbance to birds on our coastline at different times of the year and ask them to help us spread the word.
- Partner with Peel Ports, Natural England and landowners to install signage on the islands in the Medway Estuary and The Swale to stop people landing there. Also, design and install signage at known launch sites to raise awareness of the sensitive habitats on these islands and the reasons why access is prohibited.



Airborne Activities

Why is mitigation needed?

Drone flying is becoming more widespread across the North Kent region as equipment advances and becomes more affordable and accessible to a wider range of people. The use of drones for video photography in documentaries and films has shown the beauty of our coastline from above and understandably, more people wish to see this for themselves.

Flying of drones close to areas where birds are feeding, roosting or nesting causes disturbance to the birds and causes them to fly away. In some cases, birds may see the drone as a threat and try to defend their nests by attacking it which can result in injury to the bird.

The majority of coastline in North Kent is protected as SPA and Ramsar sites so drone flying is not permitted without a license from Natural England. Some landowners, such as local authorities, also have rules prohibiting drone flying over country parks and play areas so there are very few areas that drone flying without a license is permitted. Despite these restrictions, our staff have encountered people flying drones along the coast without the necessary permits as there is an absence of information.

Kite flying, in particular fighting kites, takes place on The Swale and our team have retrieved debris from these kites in the form of long, tangled lines which can cause injury to birds and other wildlife that become entangled in these sharp lines. Birds can also be disturbed by the presence of the kites during flying matches if these take place close to feeding or roosting areas.

Low flying aircraft have been observed close to birds around Cliffe Pools, Grain and Allhallows in Medway, which has caused disturbance.

Progress to date:

Our Coastal Codes booklet and website has a page dedicated to airborne activities with links to the Dronesafe codes of practice and other information on how to fly safely without causing disturbance.

Our Rangers have retrieved kite debris from sites at South Swale reserve and Oare Marshes on The Swale and disposed of this safely. When they posted about this on social media it was widely shared to raise awareness.

We have reported instances of disturbance caused by low flying aircraft that we witness on site to the Civil Aviation Authority.



Plans for the next five years:

- Continue to promote our coastal codes to drone pilots and ensure this information on our website is kept updated with the current rules and regulations about flying around SPAs.
- Locate and engage with groups involved in flying fighting kites in North Kent to raise awareness of bird disturbance and potential injury to wildlife. By encouraging them to avoid areas where birds are feeding or roosting and to remove all debris from their matches, we can help them to enjoy their activities whilst minimising the risk to wildlife.
- Work with the flying clubs that fly across the North Kent coastline to raise awareness of areas which are sensitive to disturbance from their activities and promote our codes of conduct. Work with them to develop codes of practice that reduce the impact of air sports locally.



Nature Watching and Photography

Why is mitigation needed?

Spending time watching birds and other wildlife is a past time that has been around for centuries, with generations of people observing the natural world and recording their findings.

The improvement of photographic technology, particularly the advancement of cameras on smartphones means that nature photography is now accessible to everyone. Online forums where people can share their images have grown in popularity and are making people more aware of the nature that exists around them.

There are existing fieldcraft guides that advise how these activities can take place without harming the subject being observed but not everyone follows these. When photographers or birdwatchers are so keen to view a new species or take that special photograph, they sometimes get too close or access sensitive areas causing disturbance to their intended subject and other birds nearby.

Progress to date:

We have developed positive relationships with the local birding community in North Kent and have given presentations on our work to the Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) counters and the Kent Ornithological Society (KOS), RSPB Groups and the Faversham Natural History Society. We appreciate this partnership working which raises awareness and helps to spread our messages to reduce recreational disturbance.

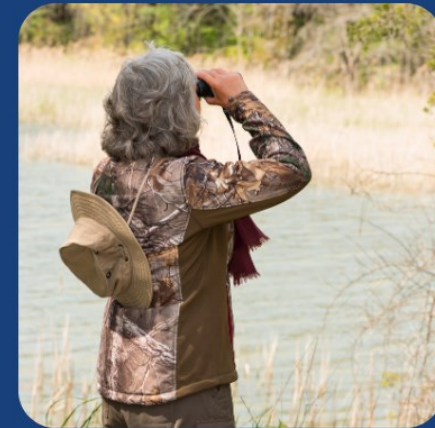
Our Coastal Codes contain a dedicated page in our booklet and online advising how to enjoy watching and photographing nature without causing disturbance. This has been shared at events and by our Rangers on site.

We have shared our information on photography groups on social media and use our own social media feeds to share photographs and promote responsible behaviour when watching and photographing nature.



Plans for the next five years:

- Continue to build positive relationships with local birders and contribute to online forums and communities to share best practice.
- Host guided walks to encourage responsible fieldcraft and promote less sensitive sites suitable for viewing birds without disturbance.
- Run dedicated photography workshops and guided in partnership with local photographers to give hints and tips to get the best images and enjoy wildlife without causing disturbance.
- Contact local photographers and photography groups online to raise awareness of disturbance and encourage responsible behaviour and field craft.
- Host a North Kent photography competition to showcase our local coastal wildlife whilst promoting positive behaviours that reduce disturbance and use as an opportunity to share information and raise awareness of the birds found on our coastline.



Other Activities



Bait Digging and Fishing

- Bait diggers go out onto the mud to collect worms from areas where birds also feed. In North Kent there are two main locations used for bait digging, one at Motney Hill in Medway and the other at Seasalter on the border between Canterbury and Swale.
- Bait digging can cause disturbance to birds as bait diggers walk out to their digging areas causes birds to fly away. Some bolder birds, such as gulls, will stay and wait to collect scraps left behind. If too much bait is collected it can reduce the food available to coastal birds.
- Codes of practice exist for bait digging in Kent and good practice guidance is widely shared. Our Coastal Codes include information for bait diggers.
- We will continue to engage with local bait diggers to raise awareness of disturbance, and we will work with local fishing tackle supply shops to communicate our good practice guides.
- Most fishing activities occur at high tide and cause minimal disturbance to birds, but we will report any fishing that we witness taking place within the no-take zone on the Medway Estuary between Upnor and Kingsnorth to the Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority (KEIFCA).



Running and Cycling

- Our bird disturbance monitoring demonstrates that cycling and jogging along the coast causes very low levels of disturbance. This is because the participants keep moving and tend to keep to main paths.
- If disturbance is witnessed or reported to us, we will work with clubs and individuals in those areas to reduce that disturbance.



Tourism

- The coast is popular with both residents and visitors, and all have the potential to cause disturbance. The recreational activities undertaken by tourists are covered by the sections above.
- We will work with coastal holiday parks to engage with their visitors and promote wildlife friendly holiday activities.

12. Education

- 12.1. Having our Rangers on site, engaging with coastal visitors, is the most important part of our mitigation package but due to our small team it is not possible to be on site all the time. To reach as wide an audience as possible we must utilise other tools to communicate our messages and raise awareness of bird disturbance.
- 12.2. Children and young people are the next generation of recreational coastal visitors so getting our messages about disturbance through at an early age will help our birds in the future. Today's young people are aware of conservation issues relating to litter, pollution and climate change so sharing information about migration and the challenges birds face along the way goes hand in hand.
- 12.3. We have given presentations to key stage 2 pupils at schools in Swale and Canterbury and to Brownie groups in Medway. Our presentations include fun facts and can be adapted to working with large or small groups. We have also produced a guide for teachers to link bird migration to different subjects.
- 12.4. During school holidays, we have attended events and provided nature trails and activity sheets for children in parks and play areas close to our coastal areas in North Kent.
- 12.5. We have supported the Medway Swale Estuary Partnership and participated in their Wild Estuary education programme to deliver lessons on the estuary in Medway and Swale.



Plans for the next five years:

- 12.6. We will produce worksheets and lesson guides for key stage 2 pupils in different subjects linked to bird migration.
- 12.7. Engage with primary schools across the North Kent coast in Gravesham, Medway, Swale and Canterbury located within the 6km zone to deliver lessons to key stage 2 pupils.
- 12.8. Work with local clubs and groups for young people located in North Kent to give talks and facilitate activities about migratory birds.
- 12.9. We will continue to attend public events with nature-themed activities for children in school holidays across North Kent.

13. Digital Communications

- 13.1. Websites and social media allow us to reach people in their own homes and use a variety of media to communicate our messages to engage a wider audience.
- 13.2. Since our social media pages were launched in 2018, our online following has increased steadily year on year. We now have 1172 followers on X (formerly Twitter), 1164 on Facebook and 812 on Instagram.
- 13.3. Our dedicated website is viewed by an average of 1358 people each month.
- 13.4. In 2023, the Bird Wise Rangers created their own social media accounts on X, Instagram, Facebook and TikTok which has helped us to engage with new audiences and share images and videos of their onsite activities.
- 13.5. The increased following is all organic as we have not used any paid advertising or marketing online.
- 13.6. We have introduced QR codes on signage and leaflets to allow people to access our online information directly from site.



Plans for the next five years:

- 13.7. We will continue to grow our social media presence and reach out to local community groups on Facebook to reach local residents and recreational activity participants.
- 13.8. Our YouTube channel has not been utilised to its full potential so we will use this to create videos showcasing our local sites, giving ideas for walking routes and sharing information on our migratory birds.
- 13.9. Our Coastal Canines page on the Bird Wise website will be refreshed and the Facebook group will be relaunched to encourage participation in a dog-focused community in North Kent.
- 13.10. We will continue to monitor the number of followers on each channel and use online metrics to measure engagement so future efforts are targeted to those formats that encourage greatest engagement.

14. Monitoring

- 14.1. The table below details the data we collect to monitor the success of mitigation measures we have implemented and how we will use this in future.

Type of data	Purpose	Collected by	Frequency
Bird Disturbance Studies	To gain a snapshot of disturbance in different locations and identify hotspots for mitigation activity	Environmental Consultants	Every five years Completed in 2022 – access report the here
Visitor Surveys	To understand why people visit the coast for their chosen recreation, where they travel from and identify changes how areas are being used	Bird Wise Rangers	Commenced in 2023 and continuing
Social media following	To assess how successful online campaigns are and which media platforms to use to reach target audiences	Using insights captured by social media platforms	Monthly
Website engagement	Number of people visiting the site along with demographic details of audience	Google analytics	Monthly
On site activity surveys	To monitor how many people engage with Rangers, where they are spending their time, and which activities are taking place	Bird Wise Rangers	Daily

- 14.2. Every five years we will appoint consultants to undertake the bird disturbance surveys to gain comparative data on how birds are using sites in North Kent and where disturbance is happening. This will be used to assess whether there has been an increase or decrease in disturbance levels compared to levels of recreational activity.
- 14.3. Every ten years we will appoint consultants to undertake a full review to assess whether our mitigation measures are having the required impact and suggest any changes that need to be implemented to ensure effectiveness. This will take place in 2027.

15. Funding

- 15.1. All activity delivered through this strategy is funded via a developer contribution collected for each new dwelling built within 6km of the Thames, Medway and Swale Special Protection Areas (SPAs).
- 15.2. The 2014 SAMMS strategy produced by Footprint Ecology demonstrated that 75% of recreational visitors surveyed at coastal sites along the SPAs in North Kent had travelled from within 6km to undertake their chosen activities.
- 15.3. Using data from Local Plans, it was calculated that 35,000 new dwellings were due to be built within 6km of the SPA boundaries between 2014 and 2040.
- 15.4. The total cost of mitigation measures identified in the strategy was calculated over an in-perpetuity period of 80 years and divided by the total number of new dwellings to give a per-property cost of £223.58.
- 15.5. Collection of the developer tariff commenced in autumn 2015 and will continue until 2040.
- 15.6. To allow mitigation to be delivered for the life of the property, identified as an in-perpetuity period of 80 years, approximately 60% of funds collected will be placed in an in-perpetuity fund. These funds may be placed in long-term investment funds to allow growth and ensure sufficient funding is available after 2040 for the remaining life of the mitigation.
- 15.7. The developer tariff is index linked and is reviewed annually. Inflationary increases have been applied to the tariff each year and the baseline tariff is currently £328.27 per property. Canterbury City Council have a stepped tariff linked to the size of the property to stay consistent with the East Kent SAMMS scheme which applies to properties in their district.
- 15.8. The annual budget for mitigation activities and in-perpetuity contribution is calculated and agreed by the partnership Board in April each year.
- 15.9. Other than inflationary increases, no changes have been made to the developer contribution since the SAMMS strategy was published and collection of the tariff commenced in 2015.

16. Glossary of Terms

Habitats Regs. The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, the UK conservation laws that give important habitats and species high levels of protection from harmful practices.

In-perpetuity A period of 80 years defined as the life of the mitigation required

MCZ Marine Conservation Zone – an area of the marine environment protected from certain activities for the benefit of wildlife

Ramsar A wetland designated to be of international importance under the Ramsar Convention, an international agreement that promotes conservation of wetland habitats across the globe

SAMMS Strategic Access Management and Monitoring Strategy, the document published by Footprint Ecology in 2014

SPA Special Protection Area – areas of habitat that support rare, vulnerable or migratory birds that are protected under the European Union Directive on the Conservation of Wild Birds

SSSI Site of Special Scientific Interest – a UK designation to protect habitat for vulnerable wildlife features

ZOI Zone of Influence, the 6km zone from the boundary of the SPAs in North Kent that the developer tariff is applied to

