

Judges' Citation RTPI South East Awards for Planning Excellence 2018

Category: Excellence in Planning for the Natural Environment

Winner: Bird Aware Solent

Bird Aware Solent



The wider Solent coastline covers some 254 kilometres and is a beautiful and popular destination for both people and overwintering birds too. Over 125,000 birds return to the 3 Special Protection Areas along the Solent shores each winter, to rest and feed before they fly to their summer breeding grounds.

A decade ago, ornithologists noted that human recreational disturbance to these overwintering birds was increasing and that alongside further planned housing, the disturbance would increase.

This was confirmed by a consultants' study commissioned by the 'Solent Forum', an independent coastal partnership promoting greater understanding of the use of the Solent.

Natural England subsequently informed all 14 LPAs that unless a strategic solution was forthcoming, they would have no choice but object to residential planning applications in the Solent area from April 2018.

This led the 14 LPAs to form a strategic partnership, which extended to four nature conservation bodies and a County Council, now known as Bird Aware Solent. The Partnership has developed a comprehensive long-term strategy, based on ranger support, public education and providing recreational opportunities away from the coast, funded by an opt in contribution scheme for developers looking to meet their 'in-combination effect' as part of the HRAs.

The Bird Aware Solent project has resulted in a number of outcomes, including;

- Residential development continuing seamlessly by meeting HRA requirements;
- Overwinter birds being protected through the outreach work of the Partnership; and
- Continued open access to the coastline so people can still participate in coastal activities.



The judges were impressed by:

- the collaborative approach;
- the positive outcomes;
- the fact that the Partnership, with the full backing of Natural England, is now promoting the Bird Aware approach and branding to other mitigation partnerships; and
- particularly, the degree of involvement and leadership by professional planners in the development and operation of the strategy; the planning expertise of Partnership members was crucial to interpret the plethora of potential planning scenarios and a senior planning officer was deliberately chosen as the Chair of the Partnership.