



# ANNUAL REPORT 2025

## Bird Wise North Kent

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Welcome to our latest annual report, covering the period from April 2024 to March 2025. During this year we have refreshed our five-year mitigation strategy which includes a clear vision, mission and defines our values. You can read and download the strategy via our website [on this link](#).

***Our Mission: “To reduce the impact of human recreation on our coastal birds in North Kent.”***

Our Ranger team have continued to be a consistent presence on the coast, building strong relationships with recreational visitors, businesses and conservation organisations. We have undertaken visitor surveys to determine which areas are popular for different recreational activities and the reasons why people choose them. The results of these surveys are summarised later in this report.

This year has seen us engage with 3500 people in person, whilst our online audience has grown by an average of 9%. Given the small size of our team, and in a year when several large community events were cancelled due to funding reductions, this is a fantastic achievement, and we are exploring ways to increase this engagement further.

Migratory birds across the globe are now facing multiple threats from our changing climate, which is affecting migration patterns, and diseases such as avian influenza. These additional factors make our work to mitigate the impacts of human disturbance from recreational activities even more critical.

Alan Jarrett

*Chair of the Bird Wise North Kent Board*

# PROGRESS THIS YEAR

## On Site Activity

Our Rangers undertake on-site patrols throughout the working week across 28 coastal sites between Gravesend and Whitstable. During these visits they count the number of people they see participating in recreational activities and record each face-to-face engagement where a conversation takes place.

Sites are graded from high to low priority depending on the sensitivity of the site, the number of visitors and the number of birds using the site. High priority sites will receive more frequent visits than low priority, but all sites have been visited at least once this year. A summary of time on site and engagements is shown in table 1.

Table 1: Site visits undertaken 01/04/24 - 31/03/25 sorted by average engagements per visit.

| Site Name                                       | Authority  | No. of visits | Hours on site     | Engagements on site |             |
|-------------------------------------------------|------------|---------------|-------------------|---------------------|-------------|
|                                                 |            |               |                   | Total               | Ave / visit |
| Riverside Country Park                          | Medway     | 36            | 171:43:00         | 368                 | 10          |
| Oare marshes, car P, Oare Creek                 | Swale      | 19            | 81:00:00          | 151                 | 8           |
| Grain Coastal Park                              | Medway     | 17            | 64:40:00          | 126                 | 7           |
| Whitstable                                      | Canterbury | 23            | 54:12:00          | 141                 | 6           |
| South Swale / Seasalter                         | Canterbury | 34            | 141:40:00         | 188                 | 6           |
| Minster Leys                                    | Swale      | 2             | 10:30:00          | 10                  | 5           |
| Swale NNR & Shellness                           | Swale      | 1             | 6:00:00           | 5                   | 5           |
| Long Rock SSSI                                  | Canterbury | 1             | 4:00:00           | 5                   | 5           |
| Faversham Creek east (Standard Quay-Nagden)     | Swale      | 15            | 46:00:00          | 70                  | 5           |
| Leysdown                                        | Swale      | 26            | 160:31:00         | 115                 | 4           |
| St Mary's Island                                | Medway     | 3             | 10:30:00          | 13                  | 4           |
| Lower Halstow to Upchurch                       | Swale      | 11            | 34:05:00          | 43                  | 4           |
| Milton Creek / Kemsley to Ridham                | Swale      | 7             | 36:50:00          | 25                  | 4           |
| Cliffe Pools (RSPB)                             | Medway     | 17            | 69:20:00          | 59                  | 3           |
| Queenborough                                    | Swale      | 14            | 24:05:00          | 41                  | 3           |
| Conyer East (Oare side)                         | Swale      | 6             | 13:20:00          | 15                  | 3           |
| Allhallows                                      | Medway     | 11            | 35:10:00          | 25                  | 2           |
| Chetney Marshes                                 | Swale      | 1             | 4:00:00           | 2                   | 2           |
| Higham & Shorne Marshes                         | Gravesend  | 7             | 28:25:00          | 11                  | 2           |
| Hoo Flats                                       | Medway     | 14            | 30:44:00          | 14                  | 1           |
| Faversham Creek west                            | Swale      | 1             | 2:20:00           | 1                   | 1           |
| Upnor                                           | Medway     | 1             | 13:30:00          | 1                   | 1           |
| Conyer West (Sittingbourne side)                | Swale      | 1             | 0:45:00           | 0                   | 0           |
| Halstow Marshes, Egypt Bay & St Mary's (Site X) | Medway     | 1             | 7:20:00           | 0                   | 0           |
| Stoke Marshes                                   | Medway     | 1             | 0:49:00           | 0                   | 0           |
| Gravesend Prom                                  | Gravesend  | 1             | 4:00:00           | 0                   | 0           |
| Bedlam's Bottom & Funton Creek                  | Swale      | 1             | 0:20:00           | 0                   | 0           |
| <b>Grand Total</b>                              |            | <b>272</b>    | <b>1055:49:00</b> | <b>1429</b>         | <b>5</b>    |

We do not record the time spent travelling from the office to each site and back again, only the hours that Rangers are physically on site.

In addition to site visits, our team have attended and hosted a series of events throughout the year. These have ranged from guided walks, talks, community events and activities for children. We have used Eventbrite along with our own website and social media channels to advertise the events which has resulted in new attendees finding our events.

Due to economic conditions at outside organisations, several larger scale events we had previously attended were cancelled this year but thanks to partnership working with local authorities we were able to find alternative locations for targeted engagement.

The type of events attended or hosted this year were as follows:

- 15 Community events
- 25 Guided walks
- 11 Talks to community interest groups
- 1 School visit.







Events have occurred throughout the entire year but have been focused during school holidays to encourage greater participation. Our school holiday events were geared towards activities for children and their families.



## Summer Events

|                        |                                            |                                          |
|------------------------|--------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| Sat 20 July            | Isle of Grain Fete & Carnival              | St James Playing Fields, Grain           |
| Wed 31 July            | Creature trail & activity day              | Medway Park, Gillingham                  |
| Thurs 1 and 8 August   | Nature trail & games                       | Gordon Promenade, Gravesend              |
| Tues 6 August          | Information & guided walk with KWT and ZSL | KWT Oare Marshes Nature Reserve          |
| Wed 14 August          | Sheerness Seaside Festival                 | Sheerness Beach, Sheppey                 |
| Thurs 15 and 22 August | Nature trail & games                       | Camer Park, Meopham                      |
| Fri 16 August          | Guided walk for Wild About Whitstable      | Seasalter Beach                          |
| Sat 17 August          | Wild About Whitstable Eco Fair             | St Johns Methodist Church, Whitstable    |
| Wed 21 August          | Nature trail & games                       | Riverside Country Park, Gillingham       |
| Fri 23 August          | Nature trail & guided walk                 | Jeskyns Community Woodland, Cobham       |
| Tue 27 August          | Kite making & nature trail                 | Milton Creek Country Park, Sittingbourne |



### The GREAT COASTAL BIRDWATCH

**19 October to 3 November 2024**

Join us for birdwatching walks and pitstops to celebrate the return of our amazing migratory birds to the North Kent coastline this autumn.

**19/10 11.30** The Strand, Gillingham

**21/10 13.00** Allhallows

**23/10 14.00** Conyer Creek

**25/10 10.30** RSPB Cliffe Pools

**25/10 14.00** Gravesend Promenade

**26/10 all day** KWT Oare Marshes - Bird Off

**28/10 10.00** Riverside Country Park

**30/10 12.00** Milton Creek Country Park

**30/10 13.00** Queenborough Harbour

**01/11 13.30** Seasalter



Full details and booking on our website




The Great Coastal Birdwatch took place over two weeks at the end of October with 127 people involved in walks and birdwatching activities across North Kent.

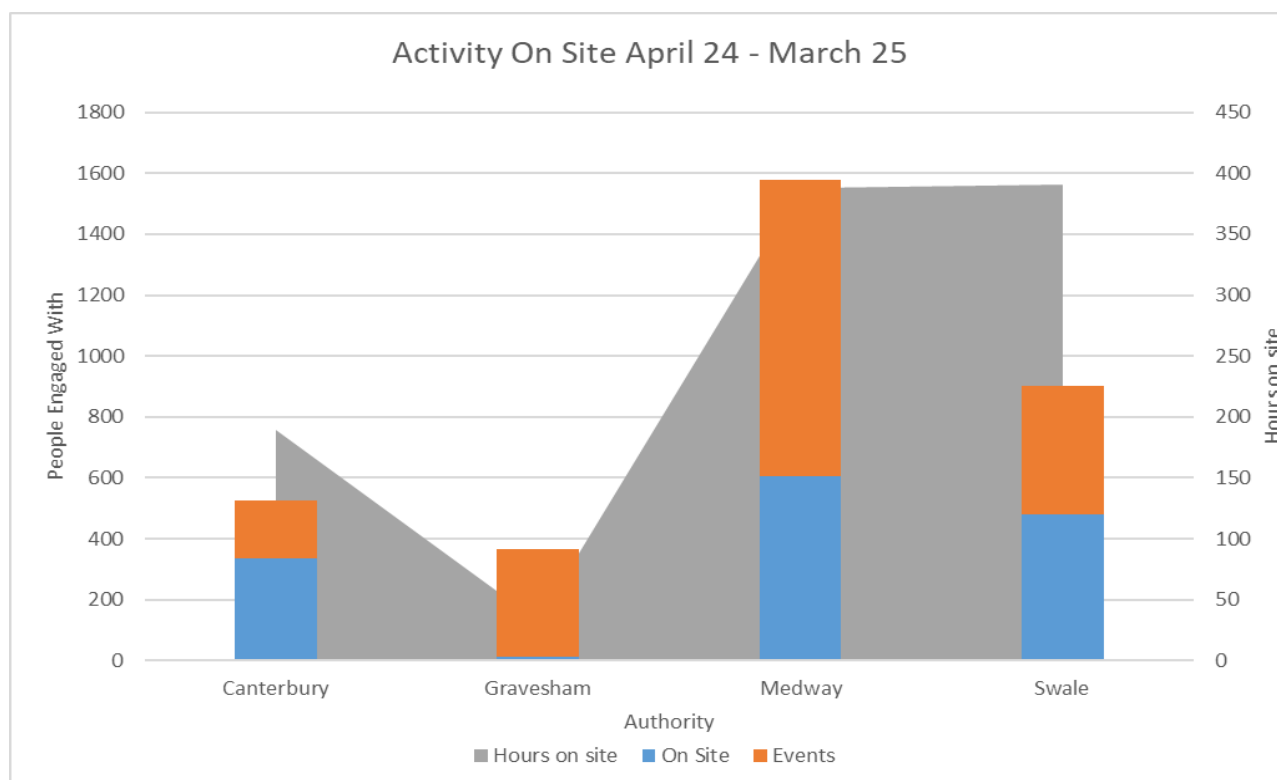
This year we tried some different formats to attract a new audience to our walks. The first was a series of beginners birdwatching walks that were only open to people who had not attended our walks previously. These were held at Riverside Country Park and were popular with attendees, including two people from London. Whilst our target audience is

people living within 6 kilometres of the Special Protection Areas it was useful to know that publishing walks on Eventbrite allows us to reach a wider audience.

In March we hosted our first Women's Wildlife Walk to coincide with International Women's Day. The walk was held at Oare Marshes Reserve in partnership with Kent Wildlife Trust and is certainly something we will be repeating in future as it was extremely popular with spaces sold out within a week of advertising the walk.



Table 2: Face-to-face engagements in each authority area this year.



## Online Engagement

Our on-site activities remain the focus of communicating messages about wildlife disturbance to coastal visitors locally, but online platforms provide us with tools to reach wider audiences and link with other relevant projects and topics.

We use social media with a presence on Facebook, Instagram and X for the main Bird Wise North Kent account. The Bird Wise Rangers also have accounts on these platforms and TikTok. This has allowed us to tailor the narrative and content accordingly to the different user groups that are found on each platform.

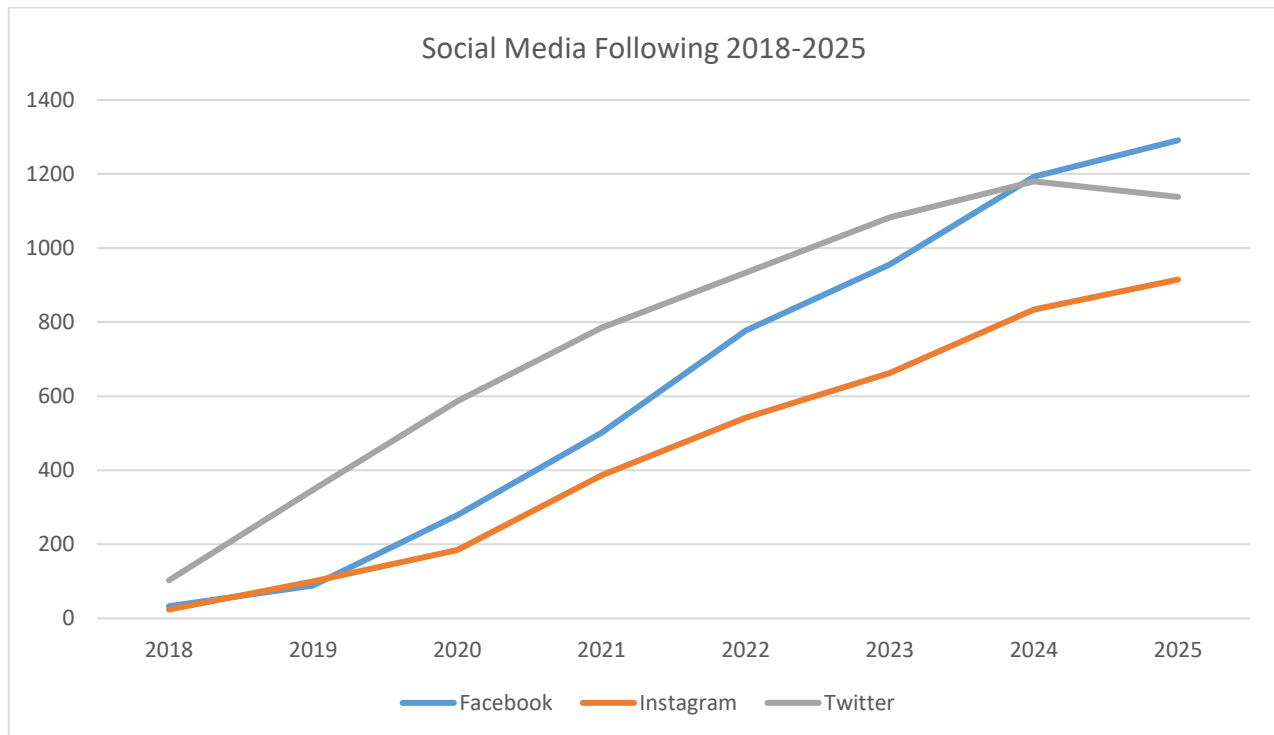
Each platform attracts a different audience, but we have found that engagement on X has reduced significantly this year with many people leaving the platform in favour of Bluesky. Our following on X has reduced by 4% this year.

Conversational engagement has been greatest on Facebook, particularly when posts are shared onto local community groups and forums. Engagement on Instagram and on the ranger TikTok account is mainly likes and follows rather than comments or conversation.



The number of followers on Facebook has increased by 8% this year and Instagram has had the greatest increase at 10%.

Table 3 below shows how our social media following has changed since the creation of Bird Wise in 2018.

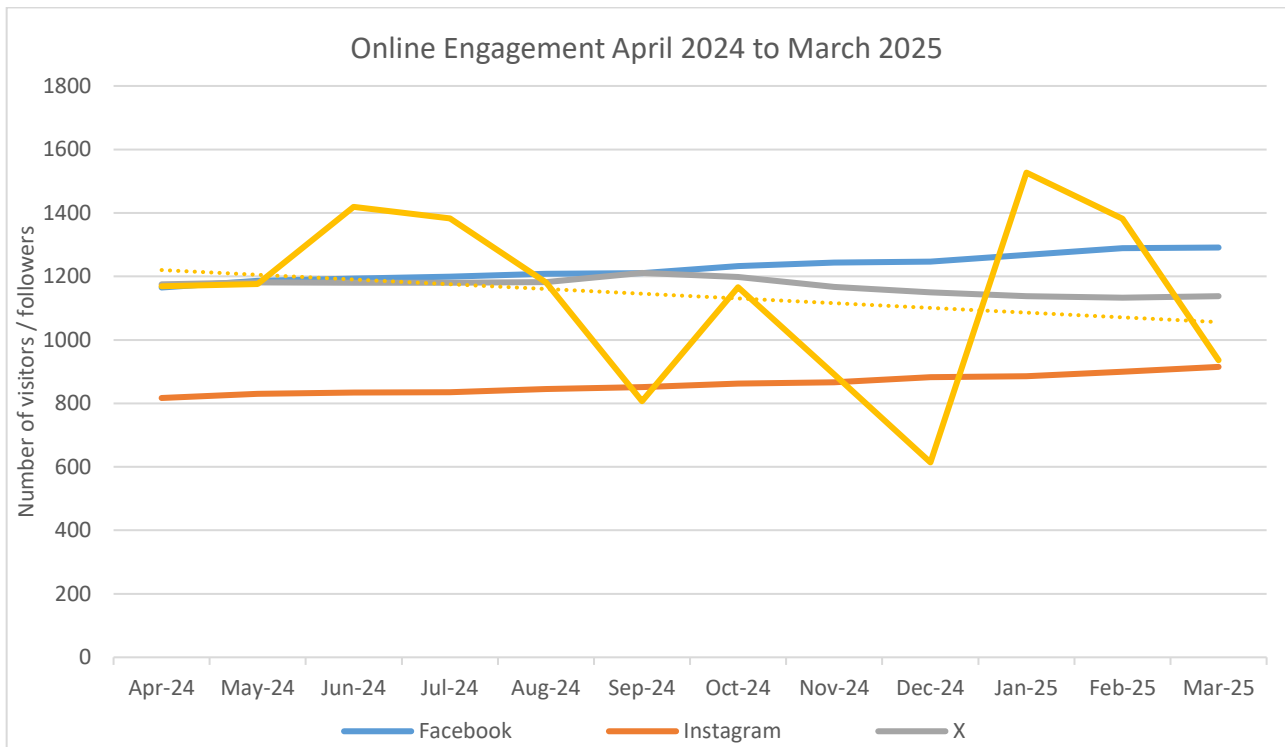


In addition to our social media content, the Bird Wise North Kent website contains all the information people need to understand who we are and what we do. The most popular area on the website is the 'meet the birds' pages which contain information on various bird species found in North Kent. The website is also used to host consultation surveys and provide information on upcoming events with links to the booking system on Eventbrite.

People can subscribe to our mailing list via the website with subscription rates increasing this year. Newsletters are circulated quarterly with updates in between to promote dedicated events or activities.

We have not paid for any advertising campaigns on any social media platforms and use the free version of Eventbrite to promote our events. This means that all growth we have seen online is organic, although our posts are also seen by non-followers on our channels which encourages further growth.

Table 4 illustrates how the number of website visitors and social media followers has changed throughout the year.



## Strategy Refresh

Our mitigation strategy details our plans and priorities and is refreshed every five years. This year we held workshops with our Board to talk through the original mitigation strategy, which covered the period 2018 to 2023, and how access on our coastal sites had changed since that was written.

The Board were keen to include a clear vision and mission statement for Bird Wise, along with identifying our values and purpose, and our objectives for the next five years.

A draft document was produced in June 2024 following input from all the Board member organisations. A public consultation was held throughout August 2024 with an online questionnaire available on our website and opportunities to discuss the strategy at our engagement events during the school holidays.



**Bird Wise**  
North Kent

# Have Your Say

## Mitigation Strategy 2024-2029

We have refreshed our mitigation strategy which details how we will work to reduce disturbance to coastal birds in North Kent over the next five years.

We need your views on our strategy so are running a consultation throughout August 2024.

To view the full strategy and take part in the consultation scan the QR code here which will take you to the consultation page on our website.




Feedback received during the consultation was positive, with all respondents either agreeing or strongly agreeing with the vision, mission and values statements. They felt the

document was easy to understand and flowed well. In response to comments, the sections on bird migration and disturbance were adjusted to better explain why mitigation was necessary and highlight the importance of North Kent for migratory birds.

The consultation feedback was presented to the Board meeting in September 2024 where final comments and amendments were made. The definitive version of the strategy was produced following these updates and was adopted in December 2024. It is available to download on the Bird Wise website here [Strategy 2024-2029](#)





## Visitor Surveys

The original visitor surveys undertaken by Footprint Ecology in 2012 formed the baseline data that informed the zone of influence used to fund our work. The studies found that 75% of visitor surveyed had travelled from within 6 kilometres to undertake their chosen recreational activities on the coastline of North Kent.

To understand whether visitor behaviour has changed since the original data was collected, our team have been conducting visitor surveys throughout 2024. To ensure we could compare the data we have used the same questions and similar methodology. The main difference is the original surveys took place during a two-week period in winter 2012 but our surveys were undertaken throughout the year.

Respondents were asked a range of questions to determine why they chose that location and how far they had travelled. The results were collated using Microsoft Forms and GPS data was added to calculate the distance travelled, as the crow flies, using their given postcode.

The full set of results with comparisons to the 2012 data has been published on our website and can be found here [2025 Visitor Survey Summary Report](#).

In summary, the results showed that during the winter months, the average distance travelled remains at 6 kilometres so we can be confident in the zone of influence applied to the developer tariff. There have been some minor changes to the activities taking place and time of day that people visit the coast, but the frequency of visits and reason for visiting has not changed.

It was encouraging to note that over half of respondents were aware of Bird Wise and had either met the team on site, seen signage or followed on social media. However, that leaves 47% we still need to reach so there is further engagement and promotional work to be done.

# FINANCE UPDATE

All the work undertaken by Bird Wise is funded by a developer tariff which is applied to every new dwelling built within 6 kilometres of the Special Protection Areas in North Kent. The tariff is collected by the local planning authorities in Gravesham, Ebbsfleet, Medway, Swale and Canterbury

Collection of the developer tariff commenced at the end of 2015, initially set at £223.58 per dwelling. The tariff is index linked and has risen in line with inflation since the project began. The developer tariff for the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025 was £328.27 per new dwelling.

The funds are ring-fenced and can only be used to deliver the strategic mitigation measures identified in the original Strategic Access Management and Monitoring Strategy which underpins all our work. Anything that is not spent in-year is rolled forward to the following year. Each year some of the tariff is spent on project delivery but at least 60% is held back to fund the delivery of the project in-perpetuity. This in-perpetuity fund allows the mitigation measures to be in place for the life of the property and is defined as 80 years.

Table 5 below details the income from commencement to March 2025:

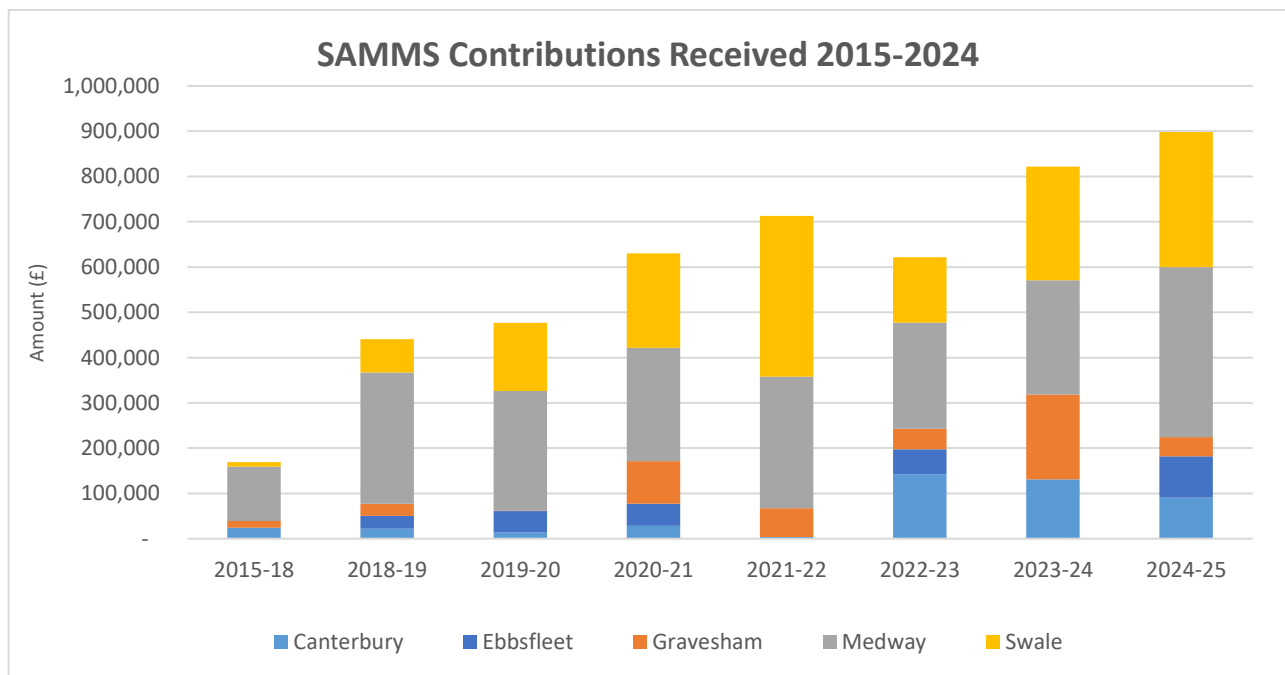


Table 6 details the expenditure for the budget year 2024/25:

| Item              | Budget          | Actual          |
|-------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Staff Costs       | £115,000        | £95,000         |
| Site enhancements | £50,000         | 0               |
| Management Fee    | £15,000         | £15,000         |
| Comms & equipment | £7,000          | £2,600          |
| Dog project       | £5,000          | £1,000          |
| <b>Total</b>      | <b>£192,000</b> | <b>£113,600</b> |

The operating budget rolled forward from the previous budget year was £519,000. The income received in developer tariffs collected by the planning authorities in 2024/25 was £898,000. The total income figure is therefore £1,417,000.

This year the Board agreed to transfer £800,000 to the in-perpetuity fund so the total amount held in that fund is now £3,380,000.

The income, minus expenditure and the amount transferred to the in-perpetuity fund leaves £503,400 which will be rolled forward to provide the operating budget for 2025/26.

The budget agreed for the budget year 2025/26 is:

|                                      |                 |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Staff costs (including vehicle hire) | £120,000        |
| Management Fee                       | £22,000         |
| Site Enhancements                    | £40,000         |
| Comms and equipment                  | £6,000          |
| Dog project                          | £6,000          |
| <i>Total</i>                         | <i>£194,000</i> |

# LOOKING AHEAD

In 2025/26 we are looking forward to continuing with engagement activities in collaboration with organisations across the North Kent area. There are several projects we will be working on throughout the coming year:

## Beach Nesting Birds

Working in partnership with Swale Wader Group, Elmley Conservation Trust and the Shellness Hamlet, we will be helping to monitor beach nesting birds on the Isle of Sheppey. The project involves monitoring nests using trail cameras and staff patrols and this year we have permission from Natural England to trial raised nest platforms for Oystercatchers.

This work is funded by the Life on the Edge Project (LOTE), and builds on initial monitoring conducted in 2024 which demonstrated the effectiveness of signage and screening to restrict public access. This year we are providing our staff time to help with on-site monitoring and reviewing of trail camera footage.





## Wildlife Friendly Water Sports

We will be joining forces with Kent Wildlife Trust and Bird Wise East Kent to engage clubs and individuals taking part in water-based recreation around the Kent coast. Initially we will be gathering data on water sports activities, their locations and the types of activities taking place within our area between Gravesend and Whitstable.

Once we have this information, we will collaborate with clubs to deliver training to encourage people to engage in wildlife friendly practices to protect coastal birds and marine wildlife. We will also design and install signage at launch points along the coast and have a dedicated area on our website with resources and maps to download.



## Dog Exercise Area

Following a consultation in February 2025, we will be creating a dedicated off-lead dog exercise area at Riverside Country Park in Medway. Riverside is our busiest site throughout the year for recreational visitors and the off-lead area will be situated in a less sensitive area of the site.

With secure fencing, benches and dog waste bins, it will provide dog walkers with a secure place for off-lead exercise, away from the coastal pathways near to where birds are feeding and resting.

As part of this activity, we will be reviewing our Coastal Canines Club to provide a more engaging and attractive offering for dog walkers and owners in North Kent.

In addition to the activities noted above, we will continue to have our on-site presence, lead guided walks, give talks and presentations to clubs, groups and schools and attend local events.

