Background to Natural England

Natural England is the government's adviser for the natural environment in England. We help to protect and restore our natural world. Natural England is an executive non-departmental public body, sponsored by the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA).

Natural England was established by an Act of Parliament in 2006, and our purpose is to help conserve, enhance and manage the natural environment for the benefit of present and future generations, thereby contributing to sustainable development.

Our vision is 'Thriving Nature for people and planet'.

This project is a partnership between the Protected Sites Strategy and the English Seabird Conservation and Recovery Pathway, and has the title "Bird Disturbance: public engagement research to inform user-defined protected site management".

Background to the specific work area relevant to this purchase

The UK’s seabirds are internationally important but populations are in a worrying state of decline. The Lock review identified human disturbance as one of the four most impactful pressures affecting England’s breeding seabirds, with 100% of Special Protection Areas being affected by bird disturbance. Similarly, some of the same sites are affected in the non-breeding season when coastal waterbirds are present.

Protected Site Strategies offer the opportunity to address widespread problems like human disturbance in a holistic way. Key to success will be research into effective techniques, including land-manager insight, which can underpin public engagement materials to be created once and used many times in different locations.

Materials including animations could be used at local (site level), regional (local interest groups) and national (social media) levels to inform and educate stakeholders, with the ultimate aim of reducing seabird and waterbird disturbance at protected sites.

Requirement

Protected Site Strategies are powers Natural England hold to design strategic solutions for complex, inter-related and widespread problems affecting sites, including Special Protection Areas (SPAs) classified for bird features. Birds are highly susceptible to human disturbance, which can stem from a range of sources including recreation. Disturbance can lead to increased energetic demands and may impact breeding success if birds have to vacate nests at crucial times. Often these impacts can be managed through public engagement, targeted at site visitors and / or interest groups.

Two groups of birds that may be especially susceptible to human disturbance are breeding seabirds and non-breeding waterbirds (such as waders and wildfowl). Both use coastal habitats where people frequently exercise, walk dogs, or engage in pastimes which could be impactful.

Whilst this project is too limited in scope to focus on individual user groups, as far as possible the research (and subsequent materials) should consider a broad range of potentially disturbing activities, including walkers, dog walkers, anglers, drone fliers, paddle boarders, kayakers, rock climbers / coasteerers, wind / kite surfers, boaters, and commercial boaters (e.g. wildlife tours).

The English Seabird Conservation and Recovery Pathway ([ESCaRP](https://sciencesearch.defra.gov.uk/ProjectDetails?ProjectId=20777)) specifically recommends measures should be put in place to safeguard breeding seabirds against disturbance, including increasing education and stakeholder engagement on the issue. There are also individual site initiatives targeting non-breeding bird disturbance, such as ‘[Bird Aware](https://birdaware.org/solent/)’ in the Solent.

This contract would draw upon existing knowledge, including focused research involving site-managers, to make recommendations about effective approaches to raising awareness of the impacts of human disturbance. We envisage these to include animations which can be shared via social media to specific locations or interest groups.

Natural England have created several animated short films for public engagement which can be effective in communicating messages to wide groups of people through rapid channels including social media. Two examples are listed below.

1. Seagrass Heroes:  [Why Do Seagrass Meadows Matter? Carbon Storage, Coastlines, Water Quality and Biodiversity (youtube.com)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aW9WJZaD9Ds)
2. Boat moorings: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rx-xuo9tRgk](https://eur03.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.youtube.com%2Fwatch%3Fv%3Drx-xuo9tRgk&data=04%7C01%7CLouisa.Knights%40naturalengland.org.uk%7C38fca123ad004bb7fc2708d9e0c81735%7C770a245002274c6290c74e38537f1102%7C0%7C0%7C637787972252912618%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000&sdata=Xf4KZq9pfW%2BKeBTDqvwS3A4B9hYqS6OKx2sIbPEIsiI%3D&reserved=0)

We believe animations will enable us to grab the attention of the viewer, and give succinct and visual messages, in a user friendly-format that can be used in person onsite at relevant locations (via a screen or a QR code on a smartphone), in talks and presentations to interested user groups, and more widely via YouTube and social media channels.

We would like the contractor to deliver three main objectives for this project.

1. Undertake a review of existing public engagement approaches to bird disturbance management, with a focus on the UK. This should explore a) literature demonstrating which approaches are likely to succeed, for example from social science studies; and b) any learning from existing initiatives attempting to manage bird disturbance through public engagement.

2. Form a small group of lead site managers from the organisations most responsible for managing protected sites of relevance to seabirds and waterbirds in England (likely to include RSPB, National Trust, the Wildlife Trusts and Natural England). Through structured interviews or other appropriate techniques, gain insight into the views and requirements of site managers in relation to public engagement and human disturbance.

3. Create an animation which reflects the findings of 1 and 2, which can be shared through digital channels to reach relevant audiences, and list recommendations for follow-up activities which could support this.

The Animation

The animation should be short (maximum 2 minutes) and focussed on engaging the public with the importance of protected sites for birds, the benefits they can bring to us, the threats they face from recreational disturbance, and simple measures that people can take to reduce or remove those threats.

Based on the findings of the research, the animation should highlight the main sources of possible disturbance and the steps people can take to reduce their impacts.

Secondary social media friendly ‘shorts’ should be produced using the same style and artwork on each of the main themes of disturbance. The number of shorts is to be agreed at the start of the project, but likely to be no more than four.

Impact assessment aims

Profile – all ages and backgrounds reached

Engagement – increased awareness of the impact of recreational disturbance

Understanding – increased understanding of behavioural change to avoid or reduce disturbance

Connection – increased connection to the subject, leading to a desire to make changes/act to protect birds and their environment

The animation should be suitable to reach multiple audiences on multiple platforms. For instance:

Online – the animation could be published on YouTube, with shorts shared via social media channels.

Onsite – the animation could be played at relevant protected sites on screens in visitor or interpretation centres, or it could be shared via a QR code that visitors can use to access the animation on their smartphones.

Offsite – the animation and / or shorts can be used for presentations and talks locally, regionally or nationally.

Sustainability

Natural England protects and improves the environment and is committed to reducing the sustainability impacts of its activities directly and through its supply chains. We expect the Contractor to share this commitment and adopt a sound, proactive sustainable approach in keeping with the 25 yr environmental plan/our commitments compliant with all applicable legislation. This includes understanding and reducing direct and indirect sustainability impacts and realising opportunities, including but not restricted to; resilience to climate change, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, water use and quality, biosecurity, resource efficiency and waste, reducing the risk of pollution, biodiversity, modern slavery and equality, diversity & inclusion, negative community impacts.

As a delivery partner, the successful contractor is expected to pursue sustainability in their operations, thereby ensuring the Contracting Authority is not contracting with a supplier whose operational outputs run contrary to the Contracting Authority’s objectives. The successful contractor will need to approach the project with a focus on the entire life cycle of the project

Outputs and Contract Management

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Reference | Deliverable | Responsible Party | Date of completion |
| Research element | Literature review and site manager interviews | Contractor | End December 2024 |
| Written report | A written report in MS Word format, summarising the key findings from objectives 1 & 2, delivered in draft to Natural England by early January 2025 | Contractor | Early January 2025 |
| Animation production (draft) | Animation (and associated shorts) produced and shared with Natural England in draft by beginning of March | Contractor | 04/03/2025 |
| Animation production (final version) | Animation (and associated shorts) produced and shared with Natural England in draft by 20th March 2025 | Contractor | 20/03/2025 |

Weekly or Fortnightly MS Teams meetings will held throughout the duration of the project (November 2024-March 2025), following a startup meeting post contract award.

Draft storyboards for the animation (and associated shorts) should be created during the research phase and tweaked to reflect the findings.

Draft written report (MS Word format or similar) due in early January (suggest 08/01/2025) in digital format via email.

Final written report (MS Word format or similar) due on 20th March 2025 in digital format via email.

First working version of the main animation is anticipated to be ready in mid February, with associated shorts in draft to follow. There is likely to be several weeks needed for comment and minor changes following consultation with various interested parties within Natural England. However the first fully finished version (draft) of the main animation and associated shorts is not due until the beginning of March (4th March 2025), with the final completed versions of all products (following any changes required) to be delivered on the 20th March 2025, when the contract should be completed.