

Sandwich Bay Strategic Access Mitigation and Monitoring Strategy (SAMM)

June 2026

Annual Monitoring Report

Prepared by Helena Lane – SAMM Officer
White Cliffs Countryside Partnership
wccp@dover.gov.uk
01304 241806
www.WhiteCliffsCountryside.org.uk



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Introduction

This is the second annual report on the implementation of the Strategic Access Mitigation and Monitoring Strategy (SAMMS) for Sandwich Bay, which stretches from the north of Deal up to the mouth of the River Stour. It describes the progress made during the financial year from April 2025 to March 2026.

Sandwich Bay is internationally and nationally important for birds and other wildlife and habitats. The Thanet Coast & Sandwich Bay Special Protection Area (SPA) hosts overwintering populations of a variety of waders and wildfowl, including both turnstone and golden plover. Many birds travel hundreds or thousands of miles to overwinter in, or pass through, the area. These birds are at greater risk of disturbance because of increased human recreational activity resulting from population increases related to new housing.

The SAMMS aims to mitigate the potential in-combination impacts of new housing development in the vicinity of the Thanet Coast and Sandwich Bay SPA. The purpose is to encourage responsible and positive coastal behaviours, so that people visiting the coast can enjoy the wildlife that depends on the Bay alongside recreational activity. The SAMMS was finalised in March 2023 by Dover District Council (DDC) as part of the Dover District Local Plan and builds upon the previous monitoring strategy. White Cliffs Countryside Partnership (WCCP) is working with DDC to deliver the SAMMS at Sandwich Bay. The SAMMS requires contributions from all residential development within the 9km Zone of Influence of the SPA.



Progress during 2025/26

Overview

This financial year represents the first full year that the part-time SAMM Officer (0.44FTE) has been in post, and so a full year of project activity. Steering group meetings were held quarterly (3 June 2025, 9 September 2025, 9 December 2025, and 10 March 2026). These comprised of the SAMM Officer, the director of WCCP, later also the engagement lead of WCCP, as well as Officers from DDC's planning department. Representatives from Natural England also attended.

Mitigation Measures

Staff Activity

A core aspect of the project and the SAMM Officer role is on-site presence and engagement. This involved regular visits to Sandwich Bay SPA and the surrounding area, talking to people on the coast to raise awareness of the designated features and how visitors can modify behaviour so that birds are not disturbed. This included making visitors aware of any restrictions in place, active intervention of recreational activity causing disturbance, building an on-site presence, and increasing understanding of the site, including access, usage and disturbance issues. Although the focus is on wintering birds, the activities affecting wildlife occur all year round, and so site time has been spread out across the whole year.

Time on site was spent reactively according to the conditions and need. The level of engagement on site depended hugely on footfall, in turn affected by the weather, which was highly variable over the winter months, including long periods of rain and cold snaps. As expected, sites were quieter over winter, and busier over summer, as reflected in time spent on site and subsequent interactions. A total of just under 200 hours of SAMM Officer time was spent on site delivering this aspect of the project, averaging out at 0.76 interactions per hour.



Whilst on site, records of observations were kept, enabling a high-level analysis of interactions and activity, as well as disturbance. These data are explored further in Monitoring.



Another key aspect of the SAMMS project is organising and delivering outreach and education on site and in local communities within the Zone of Influence, raising awareness of the wildlife of the SPA and of the impacts of recreation on designated features.

This has largely been done alongside other organisations, and as such is covered in more detail in **Partnership Working**. A “pit-stop” style set-up was trialled at the beach car park last summer which had limited success, as did a family guided walk and build-a-bird kids’ craft event at Betteshanger Country Park over August Bank Holiday Monday. However, regular guided walks held during the week at Betteshanger Country Park have been popular, and well-attended by local people.

The wider outreach offering has continued to be developed this year, such as guided walks and attendance at community events, and particularly with the drafting of a leaflet, which will be finalised in the summer of 2026. Attendance of the SAMM Officer at community events such as the Deal Pirates Sandown Castle Picnic in August 2025 provided opportunity for engagement with local communities.

Further to this, the SAMM Officer has been in attendance at the North East Kent Marine Protected Area (NEKMPA) Management Group / Scientific Advisory Group and Sandwich and Pegwell Bay National Nature Reserve (NNR) Steering Group meetings, as well as organising a biannual meeting for the Kent SAMM Project Officers. The latter involves counterparts from both Bird Wise North Kent and East Kent meeting on-site to get regular updates about the seasons, discuss opportunities for collaboration, discuss any issues, and to share best practice and knowledge.



In May 2025, the SAMM Officer attended the annual mitigation meet-up conference, hosted by Bird Aware Solent in Portsmouth. The event proved very useful for networking, sharing knowledge and information, workshops, and seeing examples of resources other SAMMS projects or similar organisations use.

The SAMM Officer attended the Managing Dogs in the Countryside conference in Poole in September 2025, hosted by Dorset Dogs. The conference provided the opportunity to learn about different approaches to dog access management and resources, including those which could potentially be used around Sandwich Bay to effectively engage dog walkers. It also provided a closer look at a case study: Dorset Dogs professional dog walker's charter. Engagement with professional dog walkers is part of the Sandwich Bay SAMMS, and so this provided insight into an existing strategy approach.

The SAMM Officer is also responsible for the provision of annual monitoring reports, reporting on the year's activity.

Partnership Working

This year we have worked very closely with Sandwich Bay Bird Observatory Trust (SBBOT) and their education officer Faye Kavvadias-Large, delivering a variety of guided walks, and workshops, including family activities. These included a Christmas bird-building activity, co-delivering three sessions focused on wintering birds. In March 2026, WCCP and SBBOT co-led two guided walks to celebrate International Women's Day (IWD): one at SBBO and another working with Kent Country Parks, Kent Wildlife Trust (KWT), and Bird Wise East Kent at Pegwell Bay. Kent Migration Day fell on September 2026, and again we worked closely with SBBOT to support two guided walks for families, with the opportunity to discuss migratory birds and disturbance with attendees.

We have continued to work closely with KWT this year. Through the summer the SAMM Officer was conducting regular site visits with the Protected Area Warden, who sadly left the role in winter 2025 and has not yet been replaced. This has meant a decrease in uniformed on-site presence, working to reduce disturbance. In collaboration with both SBBOT and KWT, a litter pick and craft event were held in National Marine Week during the summer holidays, providing further opportunity to discuss responsible coastal behaviours and the area designations.

Liaising with neighbouring Bird Wise East Kent has also been valuable to share best practice, attending and collaborating on events, and joint site visits. This has included free guided wildlife walks at Betteshanger Country Park in both November 2025 and March 2026. These have been well attended, received positive feedback, and reached local people. As such, we plan to hold these quarterly and appreciate the support of Betteshanger Country Park to do so.

The success of these events highlights the importance of collaborating with local organisations, communities, stakeholders, and SAMMS projects.





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Excellent guides from WCCP and Bird Wise.
Very knowledgeable and informative. –
Betteshanger, March 2026

Experiencing a new venue for me in the
company of knowledgeable guides. I will
definitely be returning. Thank you to
Helena, Richard and Sam for leading a
most enjoyable walk. - Betteshanger,
November 2026

The weather was kind, the guides
consistently demonstrated their expertise
in an accessible way and I learned so
much about birds, fungi and trees. -
Betteshanger, November 2026

Although I am familiar with the area, I did
learn a couple of new things during that
talks. We were fortunate to see a Blue Tit
in the hand of a ringer who happened to
be around at the same time. I brought a
friend who had never been to the reserve
before and she really enjoyed it. In terms
of improvement, we were quite a large
group and I think we disturbed some
other birders in the hide. I wonder
whether one of the 2 hides could be
closed to casual visitors for half an hour
or so during the event. – IWD at SBBO,
March 2026

It all worked well and was very informative. –
IWD at SBBO, March 2026

Guided Walk Feedback

Exploring an area new to me. The
enthusiasm and diverse knowledge you all
shared - Betteshanger, November 2026

All three of today's guides were very
welcoming and engaging, and very
knowledgeable. Their interactions with the
group and with each other made for a very
enjoyable walk. They were also very well
prepared, for example Helena with
photographs of the birds that we could
hear but could not see. - Betteshanger,
November 2026

Helena was a fantastic guide, personable,
enthusiastic and informative. It was a good
number of women (not too many). Faye
from SBBOT was a great addition to the
walk. – IWD at Pegwell Bay, March 2026

Perfect tour of reserve land and informative
talk about the wildlife inhabiting it - IWD at
SBBO, March 2026

The two walk leaders were really excellent,
so knowledgeable and helpful. The length
of the walk was good. Would love to go on
another one. - IWD at SBBO, March 2026

Communications and Marketing

The Sandwich Bay SAMMS project page and Sandwich Bay site pages went live on the WCCP website in May 2025.

Social media elements for the SAMMS project have so far been run through the WCCP social media account and engagement team, rather than a separate account accessed by the SAMM Officer.

A preliminary draft for a leaflet was finalised by the steering group to be sent to DDC's Comms team to work on at the start of FY26/27. The leaflet will be a pocket-sized guide to visiting Sandwich Bay, including a map, information on birds and designations, and the SAMMS project.



Monitoring

Starting in April 2025, a preliminary way of recording site visits and interactions has been drafted and put into use over the course of the year. Informal records of observations have been kept whilst undertaking site-visits, including interactions with the public, activities observed whilst on site, and disturbance.

The SPA area and main public footpaths providing access to the SPA were sectioned and numbered as shown below (Figure 1).

Long-term analysis of this data will allow the SAMM Officer and steering group to consider project priorities in terms of disturbance and interactions, site time, and on-site outreach. It may also assist with planning signage. So far it has allowed tracking of time spent on site, recording of interactions and disturbances seen, and showing the steering group the different activities Sandwich Bay is used for and how site visits have changed seasonally.



Figure 1: A map of the routes and site sections visited as part of SAMM Officer site visits. FP = footpath; S = Section. Note that areas within the SBBOT reserves (around FP 6, FP 9, FP 10, and FP 8) are not individually marked on this map, but are recorded individually in the data.

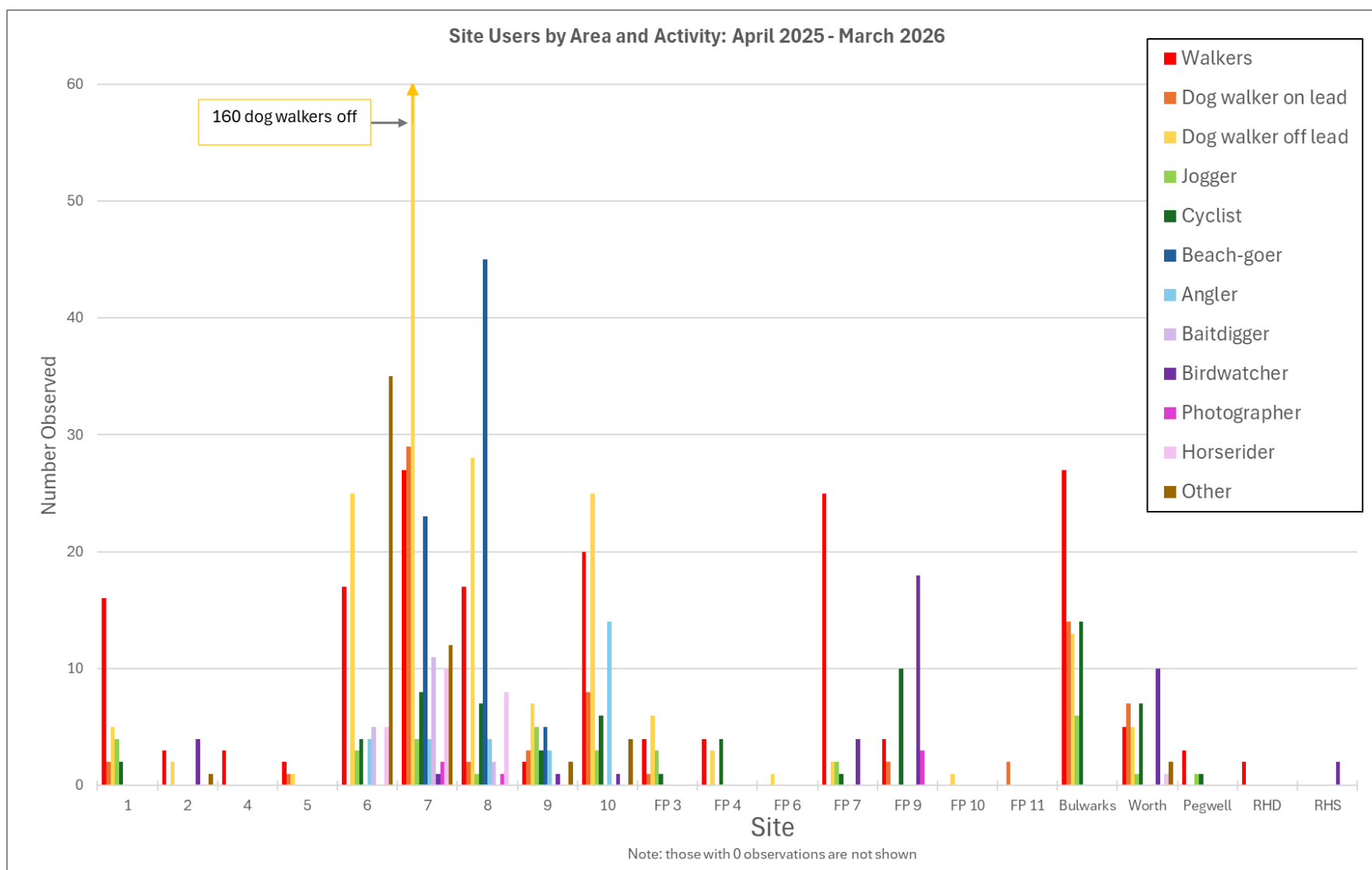


Figure 2: Activities observed while undertaking site visits, split by activity and by site. Note that off lead dog walkers in Section 7 go past the axis maximum, up to a count of 160. Note that sites with no observations are not shown in this figure. RHD = Restharrow Dunes; RHS = Restharrow Scrape.

Figure 2 shows the activities observed whilst on-site at Sandwich Bay, totalling 610 “visits” to each section (this could be more than once in a day). The main activity is off-lead dog walking with 284 observations in total. This was followed by walking (181), beach-goers (73), on-lead dog walking (71), and cyclists (68).

The site with the most recreational activity was Section 7 (part of the NNR, north of the car park on Princes Drive along the beach). Higher levels of activity were also seen in the adjacent sections, nearest the car park area: Section 8 (115 observations) and Section 6 (98 observations), though this was skewed by high numbers of beach-goers in the summer in Sections 7 and 8. The high number of “Other” activities recorded in Section 6 and Section 7 corresponded to groups of KWT volunteers working to control sea buckthorn in Princes Beachland LNR and the dunes in spring.

Error! Reference source not found. shows the total time spent on each site section alongside the number of interactions on site. Over the year, the majority of SAMM Officer time on-site (54%) was spent on the beach sections of the SPA (Sections 6 through 11), mostly (45%) in Sections 6,7 and 8, where the most activity was observed. As expected, the busiest sections, where most time on-site has been spent, generally corresponds to a higher number of interactions. Interactions can be limited by a multitude of external factors, such as the weather, time of day, presence of a dog, activity being undertaken, and avoidance.

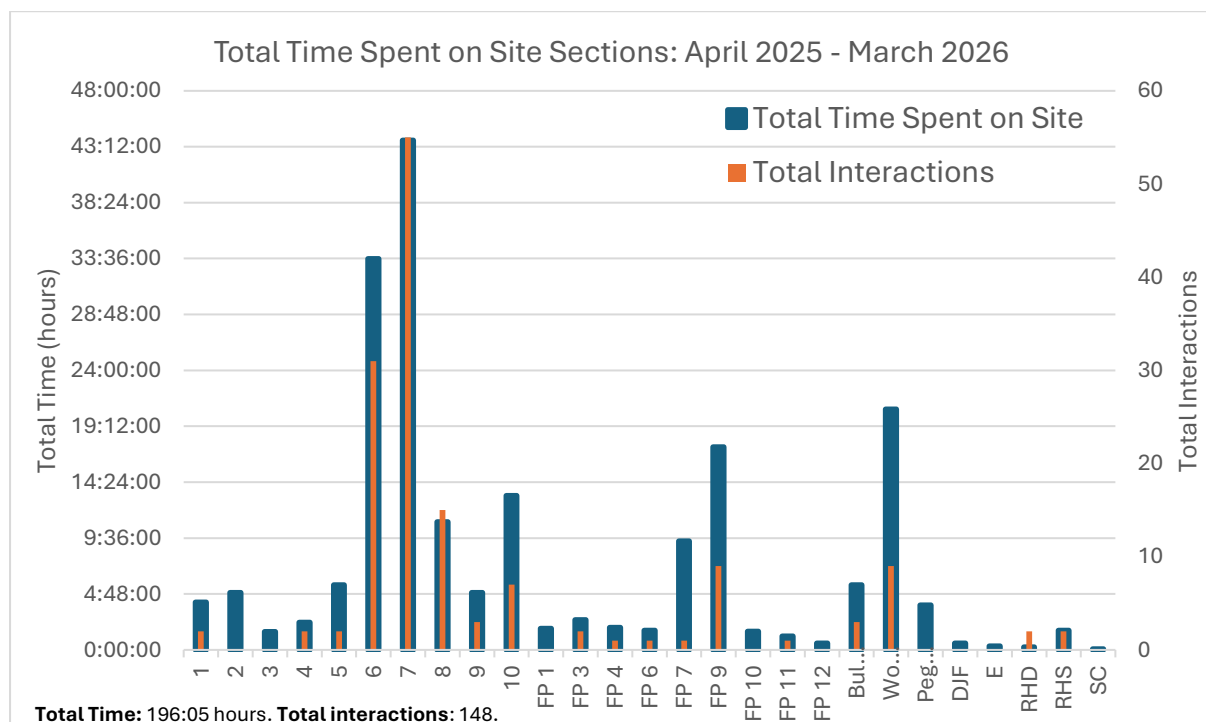


Figure 3: Total time spent and interactions had on each site section. Note that sites where site time and interactions are zero have not been shown here. DJF, E, RHD, RHS are all parts of the SBBOT reserve. DJF = Dragonfly and Jubilee Fields; E = The Elms; RHD = Restharrow Dunes; RHS = Restharrow Scrape.

Error! Reference source not found. shows the total time spent on events at each site section, alongside the total number of interactions. Working closely with SBBOT (as described in **Partnership Working**) has seen just over 100 people engaged with the SAMMS messaging through collaborating on events held at the Observatory and its reserves. Other collaborative events held within the SPA have resulted in over 100 people engaged with, as well as a further 43 reached through guided walks at Betteshanger in partnership with Bird Wise East Kent. A total of 12 events resulted in 260 engagements.

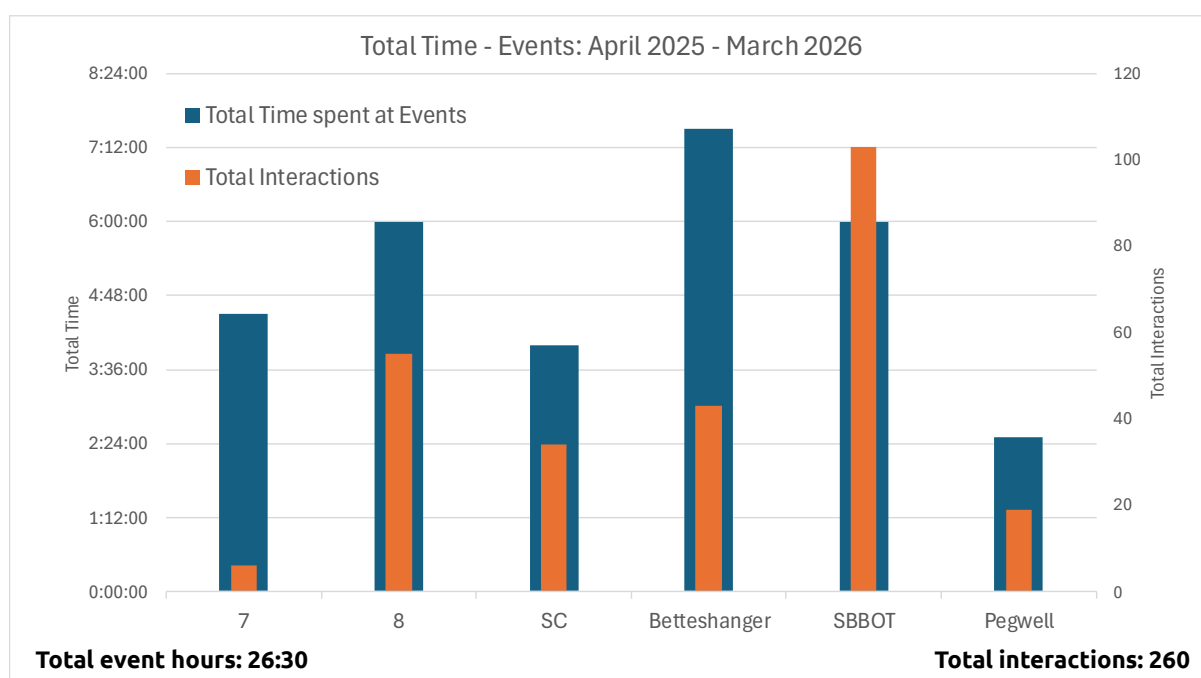


Figure 4: Total time spent at events on each site section, and total interactions had. Note that sites where events have not been held are not shown here.

In terms of bird disturbance observed on site, the average disturbance level is less than 1 across all sites (as outlined in disturbance levels and behavioural responses in Table 1). Single events causing disturbance levels of 4 have been observed only twice whilst on site. Disturbance levels of between 1 and 4 have been observed at Sections 2, 6, 7 and 10. On the majority of site section visits, no birds or no disturbance have been observed. This probably reflects that overwintering wading birds tend to be concentrated in certain sections of the SPA, such as sections 6 and 7 (Figure 1). The majority of disturbance observations rated at a severity level of 1 and 2 occurred in Sections 6 and 7 (16 out of 18 observations, 89%).

Disturbance Level	Observed behavioural response	Count (out of 368 observations)
NA	No birds present	255
0	Normal behaviour (roosting, resting, feeding)	93
1	Increased vigilance, alarm calls, reduced feeding, anxiety behaviour – but no movement away from source	12
2	Minor disturbance – birds move away, but return to same place OR another place within 10m	6
3	Local displacement - birds move to different position, but remain within sight	0
4	Major displacement – birds abandon area and move out of sight	2

Table 1: Reaction level of disturbance to birds, including observed behavioural responses. As used in the baseline disturbance surveys and SAMMS evidence report.

As well as monitoring disturbance in this way, partners and the public report disturbance via email or word of mouth when the SAMM Officer is not on site. This has resulted in the collection of 9 reports of disturbance this year, including that caused by helicopters, runners, dog walkers, and fast boats. To aid this, and to put disturbance reporting in one place for the locality, Bird Wise East Kent kindly added Sandwich Bay and Worth Marshes as locations on their disturbance reporting page on their website: [Reporting | Bird Wise East Kent](#).

Regarding the SAMMS monitoring schedule, the bird disturbance and visitor surveys were undertaken this winter season (winter 2025/2026). This followed the deferral of both surveys for a year as agreed by the steering group in FY25 (at the Steering Group meeting on 21 January 2025). The final reports will be delivered in July 2026 and the Steering Group will review the outcomes and recommendations to inform any areas of SAMMS focus for winter 2026/27 and beyond.



Looking ahead

Looking forward, we will be hosting, supporting, and attending summer and autumn events. Collaboration with landowners, local groups, and the neighbouring SAMMS projects is expected to continue.

The next main step for 2026/27 is to finalise designs and produce a Sandwich Bay SAMMS leaflet. This could allow for better quality engagement, with the opportunity for follow-up interactions with people who take a leaflet.

We will also continue to explore how we can work with local groups and schools in and around the 9 km Zone of Influence boundary to deliver talks, workshops, or lessons on migratory birds and disturbance, linked with the national curriculum.

Conclusions and recommendations from the 2025/26 monitoring will be reviewed and inform areas of SAMMS focus for winter 2026/27 and beyond.

Financial Summary

The SAMMS is entirely funded via developer contributions from new housing built within 9 km of Sandwich Bay and its SPA. The tariff of £268 - £1074 per new dwelling (depending on number of beds) is set out in the SAMMS report, and was calculated in order to deliver SAMMS measures for the length of the Local Plan and the lifetimes of the developments. This also includes funding that was secured through the previous monitoring strategy.

At end of financial year 2025/26 the balance was £424,723.28.

Table 2: SAMMS Income and Expenditure 2025/26 (provisional figures prior to account reconciliation)

SPA / SAMM Mitigation	2025-26
Opening Balance	£ 282,658.96
Income	£170,087.47
Spend	£38,477.08
Closing Balance	£ 414,269.35
Average Opening: Closing Balance	£ 348,464.16
Interest calculated at 3% of the average balance for the year. Average Balance £384, 464.16 X 0.03	£ 10,453.92
Closing Balance + 3%	£ 424,723.28

