

## **Minutes of Tees Valley Biodiversity Partnership Steering Group held on 14<sup>th</sup> January 2010 at Billingham Beck Valley Visitor Centre**

### **Present:**

Sue Antorbus	Tees Valley Biodiversity Coordinator
Jeremy Garside	Tees Valley Wildlife Trust
Ian Bond	Hartlepool Borough Council
David Askey	Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council
Katy Dickson	Environment Agency
Graham Megson	Teesmouth Bird Club
Robert Woods	INCA
Helen Herring	Wildflower Ark
Ruth Jackson	Natural England
Sam Garside	Middlesbrough Council
Philip Roxby	Darlington Borough Council
Graham Clingan	Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council
David Spencer	Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council
Miriam Baines	Natural England
Malcolm Steele	Tees Valley Joint Strategy Unit

### **1. Apologies**

Ben Ralston – Northumbrian Water; Martin Coleclough – Middlesbrough Council; Rob Lunan – Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council; Naomi Hewitt – ERIC/Eye Project; Anne Gladwin – Middlesbrough Council

### **2. Minutes of last meeting**

Correction to minutes of last meeting held on 29<sup>th</sup> September 2009 – under item 4 Habitats & Species Action Plans – Brownfield Butterflies HAP it should read “Noted that Butterfly Conservation has offered to provide training for undertaking butterfly transects.”

Otherwise the minutes were accepted as an accurate record.

### **3. Matters arising**

#### **i) Funding Strategy and Service Level Agreements**

In consultation with local authority representatives Sue Antrobus has drawn up a draft Service Level Agreement setting out funding arrangements and services to be provided to each of the 5 local authorities over the next 3 financial years. The Service Level Agreement is to be considered by the local authority Director’s of Environment at their meeting on 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2010.

#### **ii) International Year of Biodiversity 2010**

Following discussion at the Wetland Action Group, and the identification of some funding, a series of 6 wildlife training/recording events will be held throughout the Tees

Valley during the year. The events will include mammals, waders, moths, ecology, and the natural world. Attendance numbers will be limited to 15 and details will need to be provided in advance to feed into the local authority countryside events programmes.

### iii) Definition of gardens

Arose during discussion at the last meeting, in connection with the reptile criterion for Local Wildlife Sites. A search of the 'Planning Law Encyclopaedia' failed to reveal a useful definition but Jeremy Garside has included some wording in the LWS Criteria which should prove satisfactory.

## **4. Partnership Bulletin**

Following a number of comments about the best way of keeping up to date with what is happening, Sue Antrobus circulated electronically a Partnership Bulletin in December 2009. This contains biodiversity news, information, events, details of publications etc and will be produced on a regular basis. It has already received some positive feedback. It is intended to produce the next Bulletin during February and **anyone with news items should contact Sue Antrobus.**

## **5. Steering Group Membership and Responsibilities**

### i) Consultations on LWS with landowners

During Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council's consultation on local sites a landowner had raised a number of issues, including concerns that landowners, farmers etc are not involved in the local sites partnership and process, and that their support is critical. Sue Antrobus and Rob Lunan (R&C BC) are to meet with the landowner concerned but it does raise issues about the involvement of landowners in the LWS process. During discussion it was recognised that landowners and farmers possess a lot of information which could be very useful to the LWS process, and that it was important for the BAP Steering Group to take comments from landowners on board during the LWS process. It was agreed that advice would be sought from FWAG in the first instance about the best way to approach the landowner 'group' with a possible view to including representation on the Rural Action Group. **Action – Sue Antrobus to approach FWAG**

### ii) Comments on local sites

The Steering Group had collectively agreed to a system and process for the consideration and assessment of local wildlife sites, including criteria for the designation of potential sites. The process and criteria were developed on the basis of current knowledge but can be reviewed and amended in the light of new information or changing circumstances. Steering Group members should ensure that the organisation they represent is aware of the LWS criteria and designation process.

### iii) Hartlepool Local Development Framework Core Strategy

Hartlepool Borough Council's LDF Core Strategy will be issued for public consultation in the near future and it was agreed that a Tees Valley Biodiversity Partnership response would be appropriate. **Graham Megson (Teesmouth Bird Club) and Jeremy Garside (TVWT) agreed to draft a response.**

## 6. ERIC update

Malcolm Steele outlined the current position:

- The first Board meeting was held on 7<sup>th</sup> December 2009
- Current Board membership consists of Nick Brodin – Natural England; Gill Thompson – Northumberland National Park (representing protected areas); Naomi Hewitt – ERIC; Jim Cokill – Durham Wildlife Trust (representing NE Wildlife Trusts); Terry Coult – Durham County Council (representing local authorities); Steve McLean – Tyne & Wear Museums; Jackie Hunter – N Tyneside Biodiversity Partnership (representing LBAPs); Malcolm Steele – TV JSU (representing planning interests); Janet Sjimkin – British Lichen Society (representing the recording community)
- Suggestions for additional Board members include Environment Agency, Natural History Society of Northumbria, and Northumbrian Water
- Jim Cokill will be chair for a 2 year period
- Board members are commenting on draft Terms of Reference
- The importance of keeping the recording community informed about ERIC was recognised – ERIC has received funding from the National Biodiversity Network to run a recorder's conference in March 2010, and an e-newsletter for recorders will be investigated
- Relationships with recorders and data owners are critical – this will be kept under constant review; providing help and services to data owners will be considered, for example offering digitisation of data and basic mapping services
- A business plan and future funding strategy are being prepared
- ERIC will be publicised through press releases, partner newsletters etc
- ERIC should be launched on 1<sup>st</sup> February 2010 with the website going live from that date

## 7. Local Wildlife Site Guidelines

Following discussion and comments over the past few months and a revised set of Guidelines, incorporating relevant comments and suggestions, was circulated in advance of the meeting. A few fairly minor comments were made at the meeting and **any further comments should be passed to Jeremy Garside as soon as possible**. The Guidelines will then be put onto the Partnership website, and will be updated on a regular basis

## 8. NI 197 reporting

2009 had been the first full year of reporting against NI 197. It is anticipated that the DEFRA deadline for reporting will again be the end of June. In order to meet this and local deadlines it was proposed that all LWS management reports should be considered by the Partnership at its next meeting (and therefore circulated in advance of the meeting). **Action – local authority representatives.**

## 9. Role of Darlington on Steering Group/Local Sites Partnership

Darlington's role on the TV Partnership has been discussed briefly at previous steering group meetings, and a detailed meeting was held between Darlington BC, Durham Partnership, and the Tees Valley Partnership in early November 2009. Rob George

(Darlington BC) has prepared a paper setting out the main arguments for the local authority to transfer from Durham to the Tees Valley Partnership:

- It should be a gradual process over the next 2 years
- Existing Darlington projects should not be compromised and must continue to be delivered
- Data storage and recording must remain effective
- Current Durham BAP actions/targets that relate to Darlington must continue to be addressed
- There is an opportunity to bring Darlington into new Tees Valley projects
- Darlington's local sites will need to be assessed by the Local Sites Partnership and included as part of the Tees Valley's NI 197 system

#### **10. SITA Enriching Nature Fund**

Sue Antrobus is on the Regional Panel for the SITA Fund. There have been applications from Stockton/Wildflower Ark and Buglife. Contact Sue for assistance in developing potential projects, particularly those relating to strategies and targets.

#### **11. Regional Biodiversity Targets and Opportunity Mapping**

Miriam Baines from Natural England provided a description of the work she is undertaking on regional targets and opportunity mapping.

Regional targets have been derived from targets at national level and the first draft of the Regional Delivery Plan for Biodiversity Targets is being prepared. Most of Miriam's work is now identifying gaps and mapping potential opportunities – identifying areas within the region where there is potential to meet targets. Some mapping has already been done e.g. on wetland creation. The process is on-going and it is time intensive to track down information from different sources. A report and maps will be produced and a workshop is to be held on 5<sup>th</sup> February. Opportunities to meet representatives from the sub-regions are welcome and can lead to useful contacts and information.

There are targets for 15 habitat types – these are normally restoration or creation targets.

The Tees Valley's contribution to targets is likely to be in the following habitats:

- Lowland Meadow Creation/Restoration – mainly about condition, but links to Higher Level Stewardship
- Lowland Acid Grassland Restoration
- Heathland Restoration – no scope for extending Eston Moor
- Calcareous Grassland/Fen – need to identify existing surveys of fen habitat; possibly through SITA funding or HLS
- Sand dune restoration – potential in Redcar and Hartlepool?
- Maritime Cliffs and Slopes
- Coastal grazing marsh
- Calcareous Grassland/Mag limestone – mainly cuttings in Hartlepool
- Parkland and Woodland – limited regional opportunities; potential in Tees Valley could include Wynyard Hall, Stewart Park/Ormesby Hall, Hutton Hall, Guisborough Hall, Skelton Castle

It was noted that a different approach has been taken in the Yorkshire and Humber Region where the designated sites and HLS form the basis of opportunities. However the approach in the North East has benefits in that it targets areas close to main population centres.

Miriam was thanked for attending the Steering Group and explaining her role in the targets and mapping process.

## **12. Habitat and Species Action Plans**

A number of plans were circulated prior to the meeting:

- Sand Dunes HAP – no major comments
- Broadleaved mixed lowland woodland HAP – noted that Rachel Sparks from the Forestry Commission had agreed to be Plan lead; action point W.A2 has secured 50% funding from the Forestry Commission and will be matched by the Wildlife Trust – Wildflower Ark will be a main delivery partner; agreement that the planting of elm should be encouraged; ash could also be encouraged for nesting birds; also agreement that the issue of council woodland planting in the 80's and 90's should be addressed and should be developed as one of the Plans' action points; acknowledgement should be given to the work of Tees Forest; disturbance of the habitat by dogs could be added to the issues; agreed that Black Poplar, principally a Darlington issue, should have its own species plan.
- Intertidal mudflats and saltmarsh HAP – on action point MS.04 it was noted that the Environment Agency was NOT the main lead – Sue Antrobus to speak to Mike Leakey at Natural England; Environment Agency comments on the HAP are still awaited; reference could also be made to the Tees Compensation Strategy
- Bats (all species) SAP – noted that the photo on the front page was a soprano pipistrelle; bridge improvement and lighting schemes should be mentioned as an issue; generally however capacity exists within most habitats to support increased bat numbers.

## **13. Delivery and monitoring of Action Plans**

Action Plans will have been added to BARS by the end of January. This allows easy generation of lists for individual action leads and monitoring of actions will be undertaken every 6 months in February and September. **Sue Antrobus will be contacting action leads as part of this process.**

## **14. Any other business**

David Spencer (Redcar & Cleveland BC) is leaving the authority and this will be his last Steering Group meeting. Thanks were expressed to David for his contribution to the Partnership over the last few years, in particular his work on the action groups.

## **15. Date of next meeting**

13<sup>th</sup> April 2010 – 10.00 am at Billingham Beck Valley Visitor Centre.

