

Minutes of Tees Valley Biodiversity Partnership Steering Group held on 22nd March 2011 at Billingham Beck Valley Visitor Centre

Present:

Sue Antrobus	Tees Valley Biodiversity Coordinator
Jeremy Garside	Tees Valley Wildlife Trust
Katherine Pinnock	ERIC
Graham Megson	Teesmouth Bird Club
Fiona Morris	Environment Agency
Rob Lunan	Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council
Jo Fearey	Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council
David Askey	Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council
Rob George	Darlington Borough Council
Phil Roxby	Darlington Borough Council
Ben Ralston	Northumbrian Water
Ken Smith	INCA
Jessica Harrison	Wildflower Ark
Martin Allen.	Wildflower Ark
Graham Clingan	Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council
Ruth Jackson	Natural England
Malcolm Steele	Tees Valley Unlimited

1. Apologies

Helen Herring – Wildflower Ark; Anne Gladwin – Middlesbrough Council; Ian Bond – Hartlepool Borough Council; David Braithwaite – RSPB

2. Minutes of last meeting

Accepted as a true record.

3. Matters arising

i) Impacts of climate change on the natural environment – Leanne Wilson (TVU Climate Change Officer) wished to record thanks to everyone who has provided help or comments on the draft project report. A screening matrix has been prepared that includes a variety of detailed adaptation issues and on which further input is needed – Jeremy Garside (TVWT), Graham Megson (TBC) and Ken Smith (INCA) all agreed that Leanne could contact them to arrange a suitable time for discussion. **Action – Leanne Wilson**

ii) Annual Report – this had now been distributed – thanks to those who had contributed and provided photographs. The report is on the agenda for Directors of Environment meeting on 13th May. Funding contributions are also likely to be discussed at this meeting. It was also noted that Hartlepool Borough Council's Senior Management Team had requested an overview of the work of the Partnership

iii) HLF River Tees Corridor Project – submission of an application has been postponed until next year, but work is still progressing on developing ideas and potential projects, and partners, stakeholders and community groups will continue to be involved.

iv) Hartlepool LDF Core Strategy – a Partnership response has been submitted.

v) Stockton Environment DPD Issues and Options consultation – the response submitted on behalf of the Partnership was circulated prior to the meeting. Stockton’s decision to prepare an Environment DPD is very welcome and it was felt that other local authorities should consider a similar approach.

vi) Wildlife Workshops 2011 – these are all now fully booked.

4. NI 197 - reporting of management evidence

Preparation of the NI 197 evidence tables for circulation in advance of the meeting was much appreciated.

Darlington – all sites on the circulated list are managed by the local authority, although it was noted that Broken Scar Sewage Treatment Works, which is managed by Northumbrian Water, should also have been included. Details of the Broken Scar site will be circulated to the Steering Group. **Action – Phil Roxby**

In total 9 out of 26 sites in Darlington are in positive management – issues regarding sites in private ownership need to be progressed/resolved.

Hartlepool – 17 out of 49 sites are now in positive management. Letters sent to private landowners has stimulated interest, particularly around Higher Level Stewardship. Wildflower Ark raised the issue of a couple of privately owned sites that are in good condition but where there is no written supporting evidence – how can this be reflected in the evidence base? Some form of written evidence is however a requirement for NI 197 – all hinges on relationships with private landowners and farmers.

Middlesbrough – most of the sites in positive management are in local authority ownership. All private landowners have been contacted by the Borough Council and offered advice and support.

Redcar & Cleveland – it was noted that for some sites, notably the Easington Beck Complex, only part of the area is covered by a management plan; however Defra guidance demonstrates that having only a proportion of a site in positive management is acceptable.

Stockton-on-Tees – 22 out of 58 sites are now in positive management, all either in local authority or Wildlife Trust ownership. Stockton BC has written to all known landowners stating that advice/support/guidance is available.

On a more general note;

- The RIGs group is producing management plans for geological sites
- Natural England (Ruth Jackson) may be able to offer local authorities on HLS agreements

It was noted that the forthcoming Natural Environment White Paper is likely to include a duty on local authorities to ensure positive management of Local Wildlife Sites.

The Steering Group, in its role as the Local Sites Partnership, agreed to ratify the NI 197 evidence of management for the sites submitted by the local

authorities of Darlington, Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Redcar & Cleveland, and Stockton-on-Tees

5. Stockton Local Wildlife Sites – comments by Teesmouth Bird Club

Following previous discussions ornithological selection criteria for local wildlife sites, Teesmouth Bird Club had agreed to provide more detailed information on bird use of sites in Stockton. A similar exercise has been undertaken for sites in Redcar & Cleveland.

A table had been circulated prior to the meeting – thanks to Ted Parker and others from the Bird Club for their time and effort. Comments are based on data from the recent Breeding Atlas and other annual monitoring schemes. Views expressed at, or in writing before the meeting included:

- Unlikely that most of the sites proposed as O2 would hold more than 0.1% of the national breeding population, particularly sites 3, 6, 7 and 15
- Some sites may be O3, particularly those with breeding Lesser Spotted Woodpecker
- Query why Bowesfield is currently O1?
- Site 3 is not a constant effort site
- Woodland Condition Surveys are currently underway at a number of sites
- Note that beech is not a native species (particularly relevant to sites at Wynyard and R. Leven

TBC's comments were very welcome and will help in the management of sites for bird interest. Graham Megson agreed to amend the table following comments made at the meeting and it is likely to be considered at the Bird Club's Conservation Subcommittee. **Action – Graham Megson**

6. Priority Species in Tees Valley

A discussion paper prepared by Sue Antrobus and Ian Bond had been circulated prior to the meeting. The background to this item stems from concerns that the TVBAP is not comprehensive but concentrates on habitats and species for actions that seem achievable given current resources etc. This leaves a number of habitats and species of conservation concern that do not have a BAP because little can be achieved at present.

There had been a number of offers received before the meeting to undertake further work on species groups – in particular Ian Bond on mammals and herpetofauna, and Robert Wood on moths.

Wildflower Ark offered to undertake further work on plants, in particular compiling a rare and scarce list and plotting these on GIS so that local authorities would be aware of locations etc. There may however be confidentiality issues with some species and the overall issue of how this fits with wider reporting needs to be addressed.

It was agreed that there were three broad areas of work needed to take this issue further:

- Develop an overall rationale and consistent approach – need to develop clear criteria demonstrating the role and importance of species & habitats in a local context

- Further work on species
- Discuss with and obtain input from local planning authorities

Action – Sue Antrobus to coordinate work on the first two aspects; Malcolm Steele to arrange input from local authority planners.

7. ERIC

The ERIC website has been revised and updated – still a few further changes to make but it looks much better than the previous version.

Service Level Agreements are still being pursued with local authorities and other organisations. £15k has been secured from the Environment Agency for 2011/12.

The merger between ERIC and the Durham Biodiversity Database Service is still being progressed.

Katherine Pinnock outlined a proposed North East Reptile and Amphibian Monitoring Project which is being considered as a possible HLF bid. The aims of the project are to:

- Support and increase recording of reptiles and amphibians
- Monitor changes in distribution and numbers
- Raise public awareness
- Promote management of suitable habitat

The project was broadly supported by the Steering Group but any **comments should be forwarded to Katherine Pinnock at ERIC by 21st April.**

8. Update on organisational changes

i) Hartlepool Borough Council now operates an ecological consultancy service, including surveys and ecological reports. This is available to other local authorities or organisations for projects other than those that would require planning permission from Hartlepool BC

ii) Heritage Lottery Fund – the Government has accepted that development work associated with an application does not count as administration costs – this has helped to ensure that admin costs are below 5%. A consultation event is to be held in Stockton for further advice, particularly on match funding

iii) Forestry Commission – reorganisation has seen 8 regional areas reduce to 5 although boundaries have not yet been determined. Estates work is also likely to be sub-divided – main office likely to be Leeds

iv) Natural England -

- New structure to operate from 1st April with 15% less staff on average
- Regions will disappear to be replaced by ‘functions’. Most functions will have local delivery/operations teams
- The teams covering operational areas are likely to be larger than the North East and include parts of Yorkshire and the Humber
- Newcastle will remain as an office location

It was felt that changes in Natural England and the local authorities provide an opportunity to develop and improve relationships and dialogue. A consistent approach among the Tees Valley local authorities is desirable, and it is therefore useful to have Natural England representation at the Biodiversity Partnership meetings.

v) Stockton-on-Tees BC – reduction in level and scope of ranger and countryside activities. No environmental education or countryside events will be led by the Ranger Service from 1st April. Tree & woodland officer posts are also being reduced and any budget deficit will be made up through income.

Discussions are ongoing between the Borough Council and Tees Valley Wildlife Trust regarding help from the Trust with education and management work at Local Nature Reserves. The Borough Council's Asset Transfer Policy allows it to be open to ideas for delivery etc.

vi) Redcar & Cleveland BC – reductions in level of countryside ranger service with implications for the amount of physical work that can be undertaken. Use of volunteers as rangers is being investigated.

vii) Darlington BC – Ranger service reduced from 6 staff to 2. Now concentrating on liaison work with an enhanced brokerage role with local 'Friends' groups. Only statutory Rights of Way work will be undertaken; the Greenspaces Manager will become Ecological manager covering work on habitats and protected species.

viii) Environment Agency – Katy Dickson, who has been a long-standing EA representative on the Tees Valley Steering Group is taking voluntary redundancy. The Steering Group wished to express its thanks for the work Katy has undertaken for the Partnership – **Sue Antrobus agreed to arrange a more formal acknowledgement of thanks to Katy.** Some of Katy's work will be picked up by Deidre Murphy.

It was also noted that Mike McNulty is to leave EA at the end of March.

9. Other issues and updates

- The Tees Valley Geological Action Plan 2011 has been circulated – all the action plans are to be put onto the TVRIGS website (www.tvrigs.org.uk) and will be updated as actions are completed or new actions added. Any suggestions should be forwarded to Beth Andrews
- North Tees Natural Network – access initiatives are being progressed. A workshop on educational access is proposed for the autumn
- Annual Event – it was agreed that this continues to be a worthwhile and valuable event in reaching many individuals and organisations and should be continued. The next event should therefore be arranged for September.

10. Any other business

None.

11. Date of next meeting

10.00 a.m. on 14th June 2011 at Billingham Beck Valley Visitor Centre.

