

Minutes of Tees Valley Biodiversity Partnership Steering Group held on 25th January 2011 at Billingham Beck Valley Visitor Centre

Present:

Sue Antrobus	Tees Valley Biodiversity Coordinator
Jeremy Garside	Tees Valley Wildlife Trust
Beth Andrews	Tees Valley Wildlife Trust
Ian Bond	Hartlepool Borough Council
Graham Megson	Teessmouth Bird Club
Ben Ralston	Northumbrian Water
David Braithwaite	RSPB
Katherine Pinnock	ERIC
Anne Gladwin	Middlesbrough Council
David Askey	Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council
Fiona Morris	Environment Agency
Ken Smith	INCA
Phil Roxby	Darlington Borough Council
Jo Fearey	Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council
Graham Clingan	Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council
Ruth Jackson	Natural England
Leanne Wilson	Tees Valley Unlimited – Climate Change Officer
Malcolm Steele	Tees Valley Unlimited

1. Apologies

Rob Lunan – Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council; Helen Herring – Wildflower Ark; Sam Garside – Middlesbrough Council

2. Minutes of last meeting

Accepted as a true record – but noted that Jeremy Garside's name is missing from the attendee's list.

3. Matters arising

i) Bats criteria – Ian Bond has discussed this with Durham Bird Group and the Group is happy with use of the 4 species proposed.

ii) Visit by Natural England Chief Executive – reported as successful with Helen Phillips particularly impressed with proposals to create natural networks in the Tees Valley

4. Geodiversity Action Plans

Beth Andrews (Tees Valley Wildlife Trust) provided a very valuable insight into the work of the Tees Valley RIG (Regionally Important Geomorphology/Geological sites).

The Group produced an Action Plan in 2003 identifying geological skill, local authority policy, conservation and delivery issues. All objectives set out in the 2003 Action Plan have been met and all geological sites are now embedded as part of local authority policy.

The Tees Valley RIGS group is now a fully constituted group and is eligible to receive grants for the production of management plans. So far 8 management plans have been developed. Biodiversity is also a feature within a number of plans.

Work on a 2011 Action Plan is now underway and this will follow a similar format to the biodiversity action plans, and will be uploaded on the website.

Darlington will now be included as part of the 2011 Plan. Natural England is funding the TV RIGS group to carry out geological surveys of Darlington.

5. Responding to the impacts of climate change on the natural environment in the Tees Valley

Leanne Wilson (Climate Change Officer – Tees Valley Unlimited) gave an overview of a project that will identify and prioritise options to improve resilience to current and future climate impacts. The objective is to assess the vulnerability of natural assets and ecosystem functions to the direct and indirect impacts of climate change so that it can inform strategic planning and recommend opportunities for adaptation.

The main features of the project are:

- To use Natural England's Natural Character Area profiles as a basis for initial assessment of the vulnerability of key natural assets to climate change
- Review existing evidence and processes for dealing with current and future climate events
- Develop a GIS database to support adaptation opportunities
- Develop a range of climate change scenarios

Leanne was seeking help from the steering group to discuss interim project findings and to provide expert advice and insight on the biodiversity implications of climate change. The following offered to provide help:

- Ken Smith – INCA
- David Braithwaite – RSPB, particularly on the wetland/saltmarsh habitats
- Katy Dickson – Environment Agency
- Ian Bond – Hartlepool Borough Council
- Jeremy Garside – Tees Valley Wildlife Trust
- Teesmouth Bird Club

The next stage will be to arrange a meeting of interested parties.

6. Tees Valley Recorders Workshop

Following a ERIC regional workshop last year it is now proposed to hold a series of sub-regional workshops for recorders, one of which will be for Tees Valley. The workshop will be an opportunity for recorders and those with an interest in recording to learn more about ERIC and for ERIC to find out more about what is happening locally and what the issues and problems are.

The workshop will be held on 12th March 2011 at RSPB Saltholme. Katherine Pinnock will be sending an email and invite shortly – Steering Group members are asked to circulate this as widely as possible. **Action - all**

7. Pondscape Project

Records of national BAP species have been collated and will be available as a dataset. All numerical data is in EXXL spreadsheet form and all data is listed by pond. Ponds have been mapped on GIS with EXXL files linked as attribute table.

There is an issue over how Partnership members wish to access the data, particularly as not all have access to or use GIS. It was proposed to use a system based on Google maps that would allow users to select a pond and bring up a simplified version of the available data. Full sets of data will be held by the Wildlife Trust and all local authorities and ERIC. AA GIS layer and EXCel table metadata list will be provided on a CD to TVBP steering group members.

The Steering Group agreed this approach.

There was some discussion about the plotting of invasive species and the problems of transferring such species between ponds.

8. HLF Landscape Partnership – River Tees Corridor

Graham Clingan introduced a potential bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund Landscape Partnership Scheme for the River Corridor from Sockburn in the west to the Tees Estuary. The project has been develop by Groundwork NE (Anne-Louise Orange, Stockton River Corridors Programme Manager) and if successful could attract grants of £0.25m to £2m from the HLF.

To be successful the project must demonstrate reasons why the landscape is distinctive and what are its special characteristics. It needs to include projects that will:

- Conserve and enhance built and natural features
- Increase community participation
- Increase access and learning
- Increase training in traditional skills

A meeting of prospective supporters and interested organisation has been arranged for 3rd February 2011. The meeting will discuss whether there is enough evidence and understanding to put forward an application. This preliminary work would represent stage 1 of the application process and must be submitted by the end of February. There is then a 12 – 18 month period to develop a detailed stage 2 application. However it is also possible to delay submission of stage 1 for a further year to prepare a better case.

Member of the Biodiversity Partnership are welcome to attend the meeting on 3rd February.

There was some discussion about whether the project should include the whole of the North Tees Natural Network Area, and whether it might be better to focus on the more urban section of the River Tees rather than the whole length from Sockburn. These are issues that could be discussed further at the 3rd February meeting.

9. Other issues and updates

i) Lower Tees Valley Fen Survey

A survey of 13 sites of herb rich fens and bogs were surveyed in summer/autumn 2010 by Wildflower Ark. The survey has highlighted two main concerns – one is the increasing amounts of fertilisers getting into marshes, and the other is how sites are managed. Full details of the survey are available from the TVBP coordinator.

ii) Meadow Surveys

Natural England has made available a grant of £9,500 for additional meadow surveys to fill gaps in existing coverage. A list has been put together reflecting a spread of sites around the Tees Valley. One of the main issues is obtaining cooperation from local landowners.

iii) ERIC

- New project officer now appointed – Catherine Baldock
- A data sharing agreement has been drawn up with Butterfly Conservation
- A sub-group has been established to investigate sources of funding; currently there is sufficient funding to support staff to January 2013
- Service level Agreements are still being pursued with local authorities
- ERIC volunteers are helping to digitise hedgerow data for Hartlepool
- As part of preparing an exit strategy ERIC will seek discussions with the Wildlife Trusts with a view to the Trust's taking over data responsibilities

Discussion again raised the view that Natural England should be providing the bulk of funding support for ERIC.

iv) Annual Report

Work is progressing on the first draft. The report will be produced as an e-document. It should be presented to local authority Directors of Environment at the appropriate time.

v) North Tees Natural Network

Following a successful workshop to discuss access issues in autumn last year, a sub-group has been established to take forward some of the suggestions and ideas and produce an action plan. Some quick wins sought to keep up momentum. A full meeting of the NTNN Partnership Group was to take place on 25th January 2011.

vi) Local Sites

The database discussed at the last meeting is still being developed.

vii) National Indicator 197

As part of a drive to reduce the burdens of information and data collection on local authorities, the government is proposing to replace the current National Indicator system with a new single list of data requirements. Defra has proposed that local nature conservation/biodiversity should be covered in the new arrangements with “Proportion of local sites where positive conservation management is being achieved” – essentially a continuation of NI 197.

A consultation on a draft of the single list is currently underway (closing 4th February 2011) and it was agreed that the Partnership should submit a response supporting the inclusion of local nature conservation/biodiversity in the new list. Other Partnership members could also respond separately on behalf of their organisations. **Action: MS viii) North Tees Naturally!**

The brochure is now available and is being distributed. It has been welcomed and there has been a lot of positive feedback.

ix) Wildlife Workshops 2011

Workshops have been arranged on:

- Brownfield butterfly – identification & survey skills
- Meadows – species, ecology, and conservation
- Big Sea Survey – coastal survey training

A further workshop on land slugs and snails will be arranged later in the year.

Details of the workshops will be circulated by Sue Antrobus.

10. Any other business

Hartlepool's Core Strategy is now out for consultation. The Partnership had previously commented at the issues and options stage. The closing date for consultation is 11th February. **Action -Please forward any comments on the biodiversity/natural environment policies to Malcolm Steele by 9th February who will then prepare a joint Partnership response.**

11. Date of next meeting

10.00 a.m. on 22nd March 2011 at Billingham Beck Valley Visitor Centre.

Please note that one of the main purposes of the next meeting will be to consider the management reporting on Local Sites (NI 197). Details and papers, preferably using the standard format previously circulated by Sue Antrobus, should be forwarded to Malcolm Steele by 16th March 2011 so that they can be circulated in advance of the Steering Group meeting.