

Minutes of Tees Valley Biodiversity Partnership Steering Group held on 20th October 2010 at Billingham Beck Valley Visitor Centre

Present:

Sue Antrobus	Tees Valley Biodiversity Coordinator
Ian Bond	Hartlepool Borough Council
Sam Garside	Middlesbrough Council
Graham Megson	Teesmouth Bird Club
David Braithwaite	RSPB
Robert Woods	INCA
David Askey	Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council
Graham Clingan	Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council
Helen Herring	Wildflower Ark
Rob Lunan	Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council
Stephanie Halton	Natural England
Jo Fearey	Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council
Phil Roxby	Darlington Borough Council
Malcolm Steele	Tees Valley Unlimited

1. Apologies

Katy Dickson – Environment Agency; Fiona Morris – Environment Agency; Ben Ralston - Northumbrian Water; Katherine Pinnock – ERIC; Ruth Jackson – Natural England

2. Minutes of last meeting

Accepted as an accurate record.

3. Matters arising

The Partnership Annual Event held on 30th September had been very successful and a number of positive comments have been received. The Steering Group thanked Sue Antrobus for her work in pulling the event together and arranging speakers.

4. Defra discussion document – An invitation to shape the Nature of England

Thanks to SA, Wildflower Ark (and TVU Climate Change Officer) for providing comments for the draft response circulated before the meeting.

A thorough discussion took place on the discussion document and the draft response. Comments included:

- more young people should be encouraged to make a career in the environmental sector; this will require adequate funding as well as guidance and accessibility to relevant courses
- include reference to the role played by NI 197 in conserving, managing and enhancing local sites
- climate change makes the need to develop connectivity between sites much more important to allow for more opportunities for migration and adaptation
- consumers need to be given more information to make informed decisions about impacts on the natural environment
- more effective labelling on supermarket goods is needed – the government must take the lead

- more engagement with the private sector is critical – initiatives such as ‘Sustainable Food & Farming’ have successfully engaged with landowners in the past and their value should be recognised
- businesses undertaking ‘flagship’ environmental projects should be encouraged to pass on their experiences and the potential benefits to other businesses; can be facilitated by organisations such as INCA
- more emphasis on mechanisms for effective cross-boundary working and cooperation must be put in place
- provide some examples of the value of natural resources
- the government should pick up more on some of the key messages from organisations such as CABE and reflect these in the white paper
- need to address the concerns of landowners and others about taking part in landscape/conservation projects
- refer to the biodiversity value of UK dependencies
- delete reference to privatisation

Action – MS to amend response to reflect comments and forward to Defra; copy also to be forwarded to steering group members.

5. Local Sites

i) Database

JG/SA gave a presentation on the development of the Local Sites database. The aim is to bring a consistent approach to information on local wildlife sites that can be made readily accessible on websites. Key issues that still need to be resolved include:

- level of detail on designation criteria – perhaps limit to just 5 main features
- Management Plan details and dates when management work has been undertaken
- How to keep the database up to date
- Signpost to relevant contact for management details
- Details of public/other access arrangements
- Proposals for ongoing management works – particularly in the light of the abolition of NI 197
- Provide some indication of the ‘vision’ for a site – perhaps based on the aims/targets in the HAP

ii) Bats criteria

IB had done some research to compare the Tees Valley proposed criteria for bats with those of other site systems across the country. This is principally in relation to bats using water bodies that do not meet other criteria for designation as a LWS. Some Partnerships had found the issue too difficult to resolve while others had based designations around significant bat roosts.

A number of suggestions were made including assessing population numbers rather than number of species, and assessing the importance/role of a water body in the wider landscape.

In the end it was agreed that IB would have further discussion with Durham Bat Group and investigate linking criteria to the results of the Pondscape Project.

iii) NI 197

The demise of NI 197 was generally felt to be a retrograde step. NI 197 had provided a useful system for measuring local sites in positive management as part of improving biodiversity. The Steering Group considered that reporting on the management of local sites was still valuable and, particularly in view of the NERC duty, should be continued.

iv) Policy criteria for LDFs

No progress – deferred to a subsequent meeting.

6. Action group updates

i) Wetland/Coastal Group

The group has 2 new members – Ben Lamb (Tees Rivers Trust) and Heather Sugden (Dove Marine Laboratory). A form for recording mink sightings and dispatches has been prepared. SA will undertake further publicity within the Partnership and promote use of recording form.

Re. the Pondscape Project – site plans for pond creation and restoration for the final winter were discussed by the group and work on site has started. The issue of the invasive species *crassula* is becoming a problem with ponds in Middlesbrough, Stockton and Redcar & Cleveland being affected.

ii) Rural Group

Current focus is on woodlands, unimproved grassland and orchards. The TV Ancient Woodland condition assessment has reached its mid way point; meadow creation at Pickards Meadow, Wynyard led by Stockton Borough Council and Wildflower Ark; TVBP has received a £9.5k grant from Natural England to carry out NVC surveys on grasslands and other lowland BAP habitats to contribute towards National Habitat inventories. The group will be selecting sites for survey within the next week.

7. Other updates

i) Annual Report

An annual report is valuable for maintaining the profile of the Partnership and promoting its work within partner organisations. SA proposed that the next report should cover the calendar year 2010 so that it could include a wide range of project and coordination work.

ii) East Cleveland Integrated Biodiversity Development Area (IBDA)

Although East Cleveland was originally one of four areas selected as an IBDA, the England Biodiversity Action Plan Group has now revised its plans and will only be taking forward one area from each region as a pilot – in the North East the area selected is in Co. Durham. There appears to be no funding for the pilots. East Cleveland is still identified as a regional landscape area by the North East Biodiversity Partnership and a living Landscape by the Wildlife Trusts. It was agreed that SA pull together a small meeting of key people with an interest in East Cleveland to look at opportunities for landscape scale biodiversity projects in that area.

iii) Woodland Surveys

The TV woodland condition assessment surveys on ancient woodlands has finished field work for this year. So far 42 woodlands have been surveyed. Permissions from

some key landowners have now been obtained – including Guisborough Estates and Skelton & Gilling Estates – but there have been some refusals and some reluctant landowners.

iv) North Tees Valley.....Naturally brochure

This is now with the designer. Anyone wishing to comment on a first designed draft should contact SA. This will be available next week.

v) Wildlife Workshops for 2011

The programme for 2010 was very successful but time consuming in terms of administration and delivery. A smaller programme for 2011 is proposed with 4 workshops. A further suggestion is to provide learning/training opportunities for practitioners if the opportunity arises, such as the woodland condition assessment training provided earlier this year.

vi) ERIC

Some progress is being made on Service Level Agreements with a number of local authorities, agencies and stakeholders, but this is still ongoing. Some members of the Partnership expressed concern that ERIC was still in a precarious position regarding funding, particularly in the light of constraints on local authorities, and that the backing of Natural England was important. It was also felt that an exit strategy should be developed.

It was noted that a successful recorders workshop took place on 1st October, giving local wildlife recorders an opportunity to learn more about ERIC and the importance of their records, particularly for planning purposes.

vii) North Tees Natural Network

An access workshop was held on 15th October. The suggestions made at this workshop will be considered by the Natural Network Steering Group who will produce an action plan to take the initiative forward.

viii) Consultation responses

Responses have been prepared on the following:

- Natural England's consultation on dealing with protected species through the planning system
- Darlington Borough Council's Draft Tree & Woodland Strategy

ix) Visit by Natural England Chief Executive

Natural England's Chief Executive Helen Phillips is visiting RSPB Saltholme on 21st October to discuss natural networks, among other issues, to an invited audience.

8. Any other business

MS referred to a recent Defra publication 'What nature can do for you' that may be helpful in understanding the ecosystems approach and how it can be applied in policy making. The report is available at:

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/policy/natural-environ/documents/nature-do-for-you.pdf>

GM highlighted a number of issues on behalf of Teesmouth Bird Club:

- Bird information has been provided for Stockton local wildlife sites
- The Club is still intending to look at issues around the birds criteria for LWS designation
- Infilling of Reclamation Pond has now started
- The Environment Agency's proposal for the Greatham North flood cell seem very positive for birds
- Results from a comprehensive Rookery Survey are now being compiled
- Planning permission has been received for a new Phil Stead Memorial Hide at RSPB Saltholme
- The Club is currently in the final year of coordinating input to the BTO Bird Atlas

9. Date of next meeting

25th January 2011 – 10.00 a.m. at Billingham Beck Valley Visitor Centre.