

## Minutes of Tees Valley Partnership Steering Group held on 14<sup>th</sup> June 2011 at Billingham Beck Valley Visitor Centre

### Present:

Sue Antrobus	Tees Valley Biodiversity Coordinator
Jeremy Garside	Tees Valley Wildlife Trust
Rob Lunan	Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council
Anne Gladwin	Middlesbrough Council
Robert Woods	INCA
Ian Bond	Hartlepool Borough Council
Phil Roxby	Darlington Borough Council
Ruth Jackson	Natural England
Graham Megson	Teessmouth Bird Club
Nomousa Martindale	Hartlepool Borough Council
Ben Ralston	Northumbrian Water
Helen Herring	Wildflower Ark
David Askey	Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council
Graham Clingan	Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council
Malcolm Steele	Tees Valley Unlimited

### 1. Apologies

Katherine Pinnock – ERIC; David Braithwaite – RSPB; Jo Fearey – Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council; Fiona Morris – Environment Agency.

Also noted that Stephen Duncan will attend future Partnership Steering Group meetings on behalf on the Environment Agency, but submitted apologies for this meeting.

### 2. Minutes of last meeting

With reference to item 6 (Priority Species in Tees Valley) regarding Wildflower Ark's offer to undertake further work on plants, this should also have stated that this offer is subject to Wildflower Ark obtaining appropriate funding.

Otherwise the minutes for 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2011 were accepted as a true record.

### 3. Matters arising

- i) Impacts of climate change on the natural environment – being progressed by Leanne Wilson at TVU
- ii) Feedback from Directors of Environment – SA, JG and MS attended the Directors of Environment meeting on 13<sup>th</sup> May 2011. There was very positive feedback from the meeting both on the annual report, and on the overall work and priorities of the Partnership. A key priority is to spread the message about the benefits of biodiversity to as wide an audience as possible
- iii) Teessmouth Bird Club comments on Stockton local wildlife sites – these had been revised and should be circulation to Stockton officers. **Action – MS**  
It was also noted that the Bird Club is to undertake a similar exercise for local sites in Middlesbrough.
- iv) Priority species in Tees Valley – there has been some progress since the last steering group meeting but is an action that will still be pursued. However it will be undertaken without taking too much BAP Coordinator time as there are other

priorities for the Biodiversity Partnership. A steer will be sought from Buglife about how to deal with insects. **Action: SA**

v) Stockton Environment Development Plan Document – following the consultation exercise earlier this year most of the comments and suggestions made on behalf of the Partnership Steering Group had been included within a revised draft. MS and JG had been sent an advance copy of the DPD as part of an internal consultation prior to further public consultation later this year. One concern is that climate change is no longer one of the overarching principles in the DPD to inform other policies. A written response has been sent to Stockton covering this point.

#### **4. The Natural Choice – the new Natural Environment White Paper**

The long awaited Natural Environment White Paper was published on 7<sup>th</sup> June. Using a short Powerpoint presentation SA ran through the main points in the paper:

- It draws on conclusions and recommendations in the Healthy Lives-Healthy People white paper, the Natural Ecosystem Assessment, the Lawson Review Making Space for Nature, and the report on the Economics of Biodiversity in National and International Policy Making
- Key initiative is the creation of Local Nature Partnerships
- Other initiatives include Nature Improvement Areas and piloting Biodiversity Offsetting with local planning authorities

The Tees Valley Biodiversity Partnership is considered to be in a good position to apply to become a Local Nature Partnership. The deadline for applying to a one-off Defra fund to help with the transition is 31<sup>st</sup> July, although the application process for Local Nature Partnerships themselves will take place over the coming winter. An unsuccessful funding bid does not prevent an application to become a Local Nature Partnership.

The Tees Valley Partnership already undertakes many of the roles proposed for a Local Nature Partnership, as well as encompassing many of the suggested members of an LNP. The White Paper also expects Local Nature Partnerships to have a close working relationship with Local Enterprise Partnerships. On this point MS explained that he had been informed that the priority of TVU and the Tees Valley LEP was job creation and economic development/investment. Although the White Paper does emphasise the important role that the natural environment should play in securing sustainable economic growth, it is up to individual LEPs to determine their own priorities. In the Tees Valley's case this does not include environmental issues, although TVU/LEP may be prepared to offer broad support if it did not have to commit to any resources. Additionally TVU is unable to continue chairing the Biodiversity Partnership Steering Group in the future.

The meeting expressed disappointment at this news. However it was agreed that the existing Biodiversity Partnership should make a case to become a Local Nature Partnership. This was considered to be vital if it was to continue to engage with Natural England and other key stakeholders, and take advantage of all funding opportunities and take part in biodiversity and natural environment initiatives.

## 5. National Indicator 197

Confirmed that former NI 197 'Proportion of Local Sites where positive conservation management is being achieved' has been included on the new single list of data requirements from local government. This was welcomed by the Steering Group.

Some concern had been raised following the last Steering Group meeting about the management works being undertaken at Broken Scar LWS in Darlington, and the relevance of those works to the criteria for which the site was designated. Phil Roxby explained that the management works have included work on the water body and emergent vegetation, and also reducing invasive vegetation. **Action: Phil Roxby to revise the text in the Darlington LWS schedule and forward to MS for circulation to the Steering Group.**

## 6. Local Wildlife Sites

Graham Clingan referred to correspondence he had received from private landowners of local wildlife sites in Stockton. There were two particular issues that the Steering Group needed to be aware of:

- Norton Bottoms – the owners have stated that the whole site is subject to a reclamation scheme and is being capped with 2m of clay. It was agreed that this site now has little or no wildlife interest and should be removed from the Stockton LWS list.
- Air Products Reed Bed (Norton) – the owners object to this site being designated a LWS on the basis that it might lead to further designations in the future and could restrict operations. It was agreed that a response should be sent to the owner stating:
  - LWS designation does not necessarily impede the functional use of the reed bed
  - LWS designation leading to further LWS designations
  - the Biodiversity Partnership, including the local authority, Wildlife Trust and others wish to support landowners and are willing to work with them to maintain both nature conservation and the owners interests
  - reference could also be made to the BAP policy statement on reed beds

### **Action: Graham Clingan**

Graham also referred to liaison with landowners of local geological sites. Stockton BC has not yet contacted owners of geological sites and queried whether any other local authorities had experience of dealing with owners. Rob Lunan agreed to forward a copy of the letter Redcar & Cleveland had used – **Action RL**. It was also noted that Beth Andrews of the Tees Valley RIGS Group may have already contacted some geological site owners. **Action: Graham Clingan to speak to Beth Andrews**

## 7. Updates

- i) Wetland Action Group – an application had been made through SITA for work on the creation of ponds and parks in Hartlepool; The Rivers Trust was also developing a project to monitor and improve habitat for eels
- ii) Rural Action Group – some funding has been received from the Tree Council for wildflower planting, with all these projects now successfully completed. Wildflower Ark is submitting a project to HLF for hedgerow surveys.
- iii) ERIC – the merger with Durham Biodiversity Data Services (DBDS) is now complete and fully operational; a data sharing agreement has been signed with

Butterfly Conservation; thanks to everyone who provided feedback on the proposed reptile & amphibian project – responses will be collated and reviewed and the project will be taken forward; ERIC is assisting with Northumbria Mammal Group's Mammals of the North East project; Natural England funding for 2011/12 has been committed although at a lower level than 2010/11 – probably two-thirds of previous core funding

iv) North Tees Natural Network – good progress on the creation of a seal viewing platform at Greatham Creek; a sub group of the NTNN had met to discuss opportunity mapping and ecological connectivity and a number of action plans will be prepared for sites; an education workshop is planned for this autumn

v) Annual Event – agreed that the over-arching theme for the event should be the Natural Environment White Paper; the event is still planned for September.

#### **8. Any other business**

Graham Megson reported that £1400 had been raised for Teesmouth Bird Club's ringing group by a collection among birders visiting Hartlepool Headland to see the White-throated Robin.

Sue Antrobus reported on a successful project working with Hartlepool Water Company to transplant wildflowers from Dalton Piercy Reservoir to a number of other sites throughout the Tees Valley. Both Hartlepool Borough Council and TV Wildlife Trust were involved and a large proportion of the plants are being cared for by Wildflower Ark prior to transplanting in the autumn.

#### **9. Date of next meeting**

10.00 a.m. on 4<sup>th</sup> October 2011 at Billingham Beck Valley Visitor Centre.