



Tees Valley Biodiversity Partnership

Rural Action Group
Tuesday 27 October 2010
Nature's World
Draft meeting notes

Attendance: Ian Bond (Hartlepool BC), David Tallentire (FWAG), Ruth Jackson (Natural England), Martin Allen (Wildflower Ark), Jo Feary (Redcar and Cleveland BC), Rachel Jackson (TVWT), Sue Antrobus (TV Biodiversity Co-ordinator).

Apologies: Terry Douthwaite (Stockton BC), Vic Fairbrother (Teemouth Bird Club), Rachel Sparks (Forestry Commission).

1. Ancient woodland ecological conditional assessment

Martin gave an illustrated update on the project. Tees Valley has an estimated 1425 Ha of Ancient woodland of which 886 Ha are ASNW and 539 PAWS. This season the project has surveyed 42 woods to date, a total of 444 Ha.

Hartlepool	1	7.43
Stockton	14	119.87
Redcar/Cleveland	27	316.77
Middlesbrough	0	0

There was discussion on landowner permissions, the types of woodland communities/NVC types found, and the ecological condition of woodlands surveyed so far. A PowerPoint will be sent with these meeting notes

2. New NVC survey of unimproved grasslands

The TVBP has just received a grant of £9,500 from Natural England to carry out NVC (National Vegetation Classification) surveys on unimproved grassland in the Tees Valley. This will extend the work that the Wildflower Ark carried out in their East Cleveland meadows project. This data will not only add to Natural England's unimproved meadows National Habitat Inventories, but will also help us assess the condition of meadows on Local Wildlife Sites and provide landowners with data which may help them access Higher Level Stewardship schemes. Sue had sent a request for potential sites around the TVBP partnership. It has been agreed by the steering group that this group should decide which sites should be surveyed. The Wildflower Ark have supplied a spreadsheet of unimproved grasslands that they keep of sites where more ecological knowledge would be desirable. In addition to this Phil Roxby has suggested two sites in Darlington, Cocker Beck and the Winnies, Terry Douthwaite has suggested Greenvale LNR in Stockton and Barry Jobson of the Middlesbrough Boro Becks team has suggested a meadow on Saphwood Beck in Middlesbrough.

Many of these unimproved grasslands are actually small herb rich patches within larger fields. On the list are several more sites than could be surveyed within the budget available. It was agreed that the surveys should focus on sites where the survey work could make a difference, either because the site is currently in need of restoration (may trigger HLS) or it has opportunities for expansion. Discussion on various sites took place.

Action: Martin and Sue to trim list to take into account above discussion and email the proposed surveys sites to group members.

Action: Ian, Martin and Phil to think about other areas in Darlington which may have unimproved grassland that is currently not captured.

3. Progress on Tees Valley Grasslands for Higher Level Stewardship

Ruth brought a spreadsheet of the grasslands that had been highlighted through the Wildflower Ark Hunt for Lost Meadows project in East Cleveland. Over half of these sites have been passed on the Yorkshire and Humber regional Office of Natural England. That is because although the meadow may be in North East Natural England Area, if the land owner has any other land that falls within the North York Moors National Park, Natural England's Yorkshire and Humber Region would lead on any work involving that customer.

Of the sites in our area, two have gone into whole farm HLS under a single HLS agreement (both meadows belonged to the same landowner). Many of the remaining sites have potential to be included in an HLS group agreement for meadow sites in the Tees Valley that the Grassland Trust are coordinating. However, there are some difficulties with this approach. Ruth pointed out that because of the small sizes of the grassland areas, often less than a ha, the actual payment makes it often not worthwhile for the farmer or Grassland Trust. Some larger sites are generally required to make a group agreement economically viable, or sites such as those in Local Authority ownership where there is an obligation to manage the site.

Action: Ruth to email spread sheet and YH Natural England Contact to Sue who will contact that team to find out about progress.

Action: Sue to contact Claire at the Grassland Trust to see if there is any more information that she requires to help the group agreement to move forward.

4. Update on HLS

Ruth updated the group about the current funding situation for HLS agreements. Following the Government's Comprehensive Spending Review, the National HLS budget was cut for this financial year. As a result Natural England is undertaking a national review and no more HLS agreements can be approved this financial year in any region. The North East Region's HLS budget for the current financial year had already been spent on around 130 new agreements ahead of this announcement. This is good news as it means our region has not lost any HLS funding this year as a result of the cuts. However, there are HLS agreements currently in the pipeline that will not now be able to go live until April 2011 at the earliest. We will not know future HLS spending levels and no agreement start dates can be guaranteed until the review of HLS is completed. It was agreed that we needed to probably manage down expectations from landowners when we are talking to landowners about outcomes of survey results and possibilities of HLS whilst at the same time ensuring that there is a good pipeline of applications.

5. Update from FWAG

David reported that FWAG are currently very busy delivering a contract that they have with Natural England. This involves visiting 200 farms for 1:1 Meetings about the ELS scheme. Some of these farmers have been in the Tees Valley. It has also been a good way of meeting landowners who they hadn't worked with before. Much of David's work has been on the HLS schemes acting as an environmental land agent.

6. Pondscape update on planned pond creation and restoration this winter

A copy of the PowerPoint presentation will be enclosed with these meeting notes.

Ruth Jackson provided advice on the planned pond restoration work at the Seaton Golf course.

7. East Cleveland IBDA

Since the 4 IDBAs were selected for North East England there has been a change in the pace of the initiative nationally. Now one IDBA will act as a pilot for each region. For the North East this is in Durham. Our East Cleveland is still recognised at a regional level and is also identified as a Wildlife Trust "Living Landscape.

Action: Sue to pull meeting together of key players to progress a way forward.

Date of next meeting-: Did we set one?