



Tees Valley Biodiversity Partnership

Rural Action Group
Wednesday 9 February 2011
Nature's World

Attendance: Ian Bond (Hartlepool BC), Terry Douthwaite (Stockton BC), Vic Fairbrother (Teessmouth Bird Club), Rachel Sparks (Forestry Commission), Ruth Jackson (Natural England), Martin Allen (Wildflower Ark), Phil Roxby (Darlington BC), Jessica Harrison (Wildflower Ark), Sue Antrobus (TV Biodiversity Co-ordinator).

Apologies: David Tallentire (FWAG).

1. Hartlepool Hedgerows

Jess gave an update on a survey that she has completed on hedgerows in Hartlepool. A copy of the report is on the TVBP website. This survey was carried out to help meet target 1 of the Tees Valley Hedgerow Action plan. This survey now means that we have baseline data on hedgerows for Redcar and Cleveland, Stockton and Hartlepool. The surveys in the other local authority areas have been targeted on recording ancient/species rich hedgerows and funded by HLF grants whereas the Hartlepool survey was funded by DEFRA and carried out using a random survey technique. The Hartlepool survey used the Defra Hedgerow survey handbook and records ecological condition based on six different attributes, each with a threshold. For a hedgerow to be classed as in good condition it must pass the threshold for all the criteria. 175 hedgerows were surveyed, 8 of which passed. A significant criterion that hedges failed on was the height of the base canopy. In total only 11% passed on this criterion. A discussion followed on how to restore hedges that have a high lower canopy level, for example, the need for coppicing so that growth is stimulated from the base. This may be viable in arable areas as fencing for stock proofing or to protect regrowth. A discussion followed on how the data could be used to stimulate hedgerow management. The main driver is ELS and HLS, however funding is being paired back. The success of Durham's hedgerow funding was discussed; this is funded by Durham Country Council and landfill tax. Wildflower Ark has sent all participating landowners a summary of the report and generic material on hedgerow management including Natural England booklets and a DVD, as well as tailored advice.

Action Jess to send excel information to Ruth with farm names and grid reference

Action Jess to send data to Ian, who from the data may be able to work out which of the hedgerows will fit the Hedgerow regulations criteria

2. Darlington Urban Grassland Project

Phil gave an illustrated introduction to an urban grassland management project in Darlington which started in 2010. This has involved about 60 ha of amenity grassland in parks and open spaces and changing the management from gang mowing 8-10 times a year to a mosaic of cutting regimes that included annual cuts, uncut and close mowing of paths and ball game areas, to enhance biodiversity but also to preserve the

recreational function of these community greenspaces. The project is expected to be both cost efficient and sustainable, with arisings being reused as animal feed, bedding or silage.. Ongoing dialogue with the public and regular updates internally with councillors were vital. The project will be expanded in 2011. Discussions on the practicalities and costs took place that included economies of scale, type of machinery, vehicle access to sites. Also discussed was the success of the wildflower seed planting on the Darlington Eastern transport corridor.

3. Barn owl update

Vic, as the action plan lead gave an update. As the location of the boxes and information on breeding owls is sensitive information, a report will be emailed to action group members to accompany these minutes. Terry was thanked for his work on the construction of boxes. Please continue to send barn owl sightings, to Geoff Myers for locations south of the Tees and for the time being please send records North for the Tees direct to Vic.

4. Small meadow planting project

The TVBP have received a small grant towards meadow plants from the Tree Council. The sites are Summerhill in Hartlepool, Village Park in Stockton and Mill Lane in Darlington. The Wildflower Ark will be providing plants and expertise.

5. Potential landscape project

Sue introduced the planned bid by Groudwork for a HLF Landscape Partnership funding for an area in Stockton/Darlington. A pre-application has already been submitted. A copy will be emailed with these minutes. They are at the stage 1 application phase and currently working up projects for submission with a range of partners. For more information contact Anne- Louise Orange at Groundwork. A discussion followed on what area the project may cover and the four strands that the HLF are able to fund, the timing of the application, and how the HLF fund links to the thinking on landscape scale conservation that is being developed by Natural England, RSPB and Wildlife Trusts nationally. The fund covers much wider aspects including built heritage and heritage training.

6. Updates on reorganisation/restructuring

The changing landscape of local authorities and government agencies was discussed with updates from members on reorganisations and restructuring currently taking place within their organisation. The consultation on the Forestry Estate was discussed and the management of National Nature Reserves.

7. AOB

Tees Valley Fen survey- results were discussed.

Action: Sue to send Ruth copy of the Tees Valley Fen survey.

Date of next meeting: 16 May 2011 at 10 am at Nature's World.