

Isle of Wight

Community Natural Environment Action Plan

A plan to engage the general public in biodiversity and geological conservation

Introduction

This Action Plan has been prepared through consultation with a range of organisations and specialists within the Isle of Wight BAP partnership. It covers a ten-year period from 2005 – 2015, with a review in 2010. This plan sets out the importance and benefits of the natural environment, and proposes actions to enhance community and individual participation.

A series of action plans covering the major habitat types on the Island has been produced in the period 2002- 2004, and some species plans are also in preparation.

However, basing action plans entirely on priority habitats and species has serious shortcomings for several reasons.

1. There is a need to engage decision makers and the general public with issues related to the natural environment. Biodiversity Action Plans are seen as an integral part of local Community Strategies. The Isle of Wight Community Strategy 'Island Futures' is being developed by the Local Strategic Partnership. It is divided in to seven themes; the natural environment falls principally within the 'Attractive Island' theme, although it has a bearing on many of the other themes. The encouragement of a better understanding and greater involvement by people in the management and protection of wildlife and earth heritage is an aim shared by the Isle of Wight AONB Management Plan.

The topic of education and awareness (communications and publicity) is part of all the individual habitat action plans, but these plans are principally produced by and directed at the technical and professional user. The plans may fail to

engage those not directly involved in land management, as that is not their primary function. Different groups of people, each with their own experience and understanding, require different approaches to develop their involvement in biodiversity. The actions proposed by a Community Natural Environment Action Plan can provide opportunity for the involvement of individuals, special interest groups and communities to learn more about their surroundings and indeed to bring about change for the better

2. There are a variety of habitats, falling under the category of 'built up areas and gardens' which have a significant area on the Island, which have not been included to date. There is considerable potential for developing the wildlife value of such areas and so assisting the Island's natural environment.

3. There is a need for businesses and developers to understand that incorporating measures to protect and encourage the natural environment on sites, and to limit the environmental impact of their operations is sound economic sense as well as being best practice. Such considerations need to be in the initial planning for maximum effect. The approach to new proposed development on land at Pan on the outskirts of Newport is attempting to address these issues

4. There are habitats which have a significant recreational use, and are valued for their contribution to the overall quality of life on the Island. Public open spaces such as parks and beaches come into this category.

5. The contribution of the Island's natural heritage of wildlife, landscape and geology to quality of life, social inclusion and as the

backdrop for the tourist industry is not always fully appreciated.

There is no doubt that the environment is greatly valued by local residents (Isle of Wight Cultural Strategy survey 2003). It is difficult to quantify in economic terms the benefits which a healthy functioning natural world provides and it is often taken for granted that there will be wildlife and landscape as the backdrop to our daily lives.

The Isle of Wight is home to a rich diversity of plants, animals and geology set within striking and varied landscapes. This diversity in the natural environment makes the Island a better place to live, work and visit. We can all help to protect and care for the natural environment.

The benefits of the natural environment include

Nature for nature's sake The natural world is a never-ending source of inspiration, wonder and fascination.

A natural source of wealth and jobs Our stunning local scenery and wildlife are big draws for our visitors, and underpin the tourist industry. Equally they enhance our quality and enjoyment of life.

A life support system renewing the quality of the air, soil and water and providing natural flood and sea defence systems

A store of natural knowledge Discovering more about nature is a life-long experience, and an on-going source of interest

A prescription for good health Contact with nature is good for you - relaxation, exercise, just stopping to appreciate a flower, a bird, a butterfly, a sunset, a fossil on a beach....

Common ground for communities Nature is a catalyst for community action - anyone can join in and make a difference to their surroundings

Various groups whose activities will have an impact on the natural environment can be identified within the local community and further afield:

*Landowners Land managers and Farmers
Forestry Commission, English Nature,
Environment Agency, Wildlife Trusts,
National Trust, RSPB and similar bodies
The Isle of Wight Council, both Council
Departments and Elected members
Schools/formal education
Local business users including developers
of new sites
Tourism businesses
Utilities and the Home Office (Prisons)
Community sites/activities
Recreation and leisure groups
Conservation/natural history organisations*

Current status of Habitats, Species and Sites

Geology underpins the Island's landscape and biodiversity. It is a conspicuous element in coastal habitats and also in active and abandoned quarries inland. It is the subject of the local Geodiversity Action Plan.

The Isle of Wight Biodiversity Steering Group have produced Habitat Action Plans for all the priority terrestrial and intertidal habitats which occur on the Island. These include Maritime Cliffs and Slopes, Wetlands, Chalk Grasslands, Heathland and Acid Grassland, Lowland Meadows, Estuarine habitats such as Mudflats and Saltmarshes, Farmland, Wetlands and Woodlands.

However, there are also many habitats which occur in closer proximity to the majority of people which are also important for nature.

Habitats additional to those covered in existing Habitat Action Plans

The principal additional habitats include

- Built-up areas and gardens
- Boundary and linear features
- Arable and horticultural
- Eutrophic standing waters

- Rocky shores

They are to be found in

- Domestic gardens, including walls and hedges
- Allotments
- Public open spaces, including parks and village greens
- Churchyards and cemeteries
- Road verges, public rights of way, and cycleway routes
- School grounds and playing fields
- Beaches which are adjacent to towns and villages

The area covered by Council-managed parks is 180 ha, and school grounds account for another 110ha. There are also allotments in a number of Island towns. In addition there are more than 50,000 houses with some garden surrounding them which could amount to as much as 5000ha of land.

There will also be other habitats such as ancient and species rich hedgerows and lowland meadows found in these areas, but which are principally covered by other Action Plans.

Sites currently designated as local nature reserves are covered by habitat action plans, but the emphasis on their community use justifies their inclusion here also.

The land area covered by each of these can only be an approximate measure but it is significant in terms of the whole land area of the Island

Species

Examples of special species in built up areas include

Plants Several types of Fumitory at Lake allotments, including one found nowhere else in Britain. Rue leaved saxifrage - on old walls at Quarr Abbey, and on the roof of St James's church, Yarmouth.

Lichens *Roccella phycopsis*, a distinctive rare lichen, is found on the church walls of several Medieval churches.

Insects Stag Beetle, discovered occasionally breeding in rotting wood in gardens on the north side of the Island, is a very distinctive species.

A considerable variety of **Dragonflies and Damselflies** can be found in garden ponds

Butterflies and day flying moths which have not been identified on the Species Audit but are distinctive and attractive species such as Holly Blue, Peacock, Small Tortoiseshell, Hummingbird Hawk-moth and Silver-Y.

Reptiles Slow-worms are commonly found in gardens. Wall Lizards are a special feature of old walls in Ventnor

Birds Song Thrush, Bullfinch, Spotted Flycatcher, and wintering Fieldfare and Redwing are important BAP birds which can be found in gardens. Buildings are essential nest sites for declining House Martin, Swallow, Swift, House Sparrow and Starling.

Amphibia Garden ponds are important breeding sites for frogs, toads and newts.

Bats Bat roosts of several species are not uncommon in older and modern buildings.

Other mammals Gardens are important sites for Hedgehogs and sometimes for Badgers. Red Squirrels may use garden trees as a corridor for dispersal.

In addition, **Ancient Trees** are important features of many villages and some towns. Some work has been done to identify them and catalogue their value as landscape features and for the wildlife they support.

Important sites

There are many sites around the Island which are significant to local people, and they are enjoyed for their opportunities for informal recreation as well as their wildlife

and landscape value. Many are managed by large national organisations such as the Forestry Commission, (for example Parkhurst and Brighstone Forests); the National Trust e.g. the West Wight Downs and the downs to the north of Ventnor; the Woodland Trust (America Wood); People's Trust for Endangered Species (much of the Briddlesford Estate); RSPB (a large part of Brading Marshes).

Some are council owned and managed sites; others are managed by local groups, including town councils and area forums, wildlife organisations either alone or in conjunction with IW Council Countryside Section, BTCV or Island 2000 Trust. (Appendix 1).

In addition many churchyards and cemeteries include defined areas managed for wildlife and many school grounds have habitat creation schemes which are used as social spaces and areas to support curriculum work.

Current factors and action affecting habitats, species and sites

Policy

Sites can be designated as European sites, SSSIs or SINCS as a consequence of their habitat and wildlife. These are largely outside the development envelopes, and will be covered by other Action Plans. Some may also be designated as Local Nature Reserves (see below).

The definition of open spaces within settlements in the Unitary Development Plan is given as "Land or water having informal or formal recreation value or general amenity value whether public or private (but excluding gardens of residential properties)". Open spaces may be publicly or privately owned. Village greens and allotments provide additional open space.

There can be pressure to use undeveloped sites (including large gardens) within towns

for additional housing. This frequently causes conflict with the local community as these sites are often valued locally, not least for their value for wildlife. Habitats have been lost particularly on the rural-urban fringe as settlements have expanded.

The draft Planning Policy Statement 9: Biodiversity and Geological Conservation (September 2004) gives current guidance on planning issues. The Government has also recently issued a draft circular on Biodiversity and Geological Conservation; Statutory obligations and their impact within the planning system. When these documents are finalised, they will provide an important framework for conservation of biodiversity and geodiversity within the planning process.

Council owned or managed land

- **Local Nature Reserves.** The purpose of Local Nature Reserves is to provide an opportunity for local people to come into contact with, and appreciate wildlife and geology in an informal way. There are five Local Nature Reserves at present (see Appendix 1). They are declared by the local authority on land which they own or lease, under Section 21 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949.
- **Parks.** The Green Flag Scheme is being considered by the Parks and Beaches department of the Isle of Wight Council as a way forward for managing parks.
- **Road verges.** Subject to road safety considerations, it has been possible to identify a number of special verges which have valued floristic interest, and agree a mowing schedule with the Highways Department which allows for flowering and seeding.
- **Public Rights of Way network and cycleways –** linear routes through

the countryside can often act as important wildlife corridors and unimproved habitats within intensively farmed areas.

- Cemeteries. A number of cemeteries have areas identified for their wildlife interest, and have conservation areas
- School grounds. Wildlife areas have been developed in a number of schools in conjunction with the Contract Management Unit; BTCV Peoples' Places awards have been made for some projects.

Nature Reserves

In addition to Local Nature Reserves, there are a number of reserves managed by the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, Wight Nature Fund, People's Trust for Endangered Species, RSPB and National Trust.

Non-native and introduced species

The presence of Red Squirrels on the Island is something which is greatly valued by the residents and tourists and they are frequent visitors to gardens. A major factor in maintaining this population is the continuing absence of introduced grey squirrels; there are regular reminders of need to report any possible sightings of grey squirrels. These are checked by the Wight Squirrel project. A contingency plan detailing action to be taken has been published in the Red Squirrel Species Action Plan.

The current fashion for water features in gardens can result in the introduction of invasive, non-native plants, such as Parrot Feather and New Zealand Pigmy-weed (*Crassula helmsii*), which can subsequently spread to other water bodies and become a nuisance, smothering native plants. Goldfish are often introduced into garden ponds (and released into the wild) but this is incompatible with their use as amphibian breeding sites.

Japanese Knotweed occurs in urban situations, and although it has not spread

rapidly on the Island, it has the potential to become a nuisance. Himalayan Balsam has very recently colonised a stretch of the Eastern Yar from a single introduced site upstream.

Recreational interests

The environment is the setting for many types of recreation, both for individuals and for groups. It may be quiet and informal or organised for large groups. The purpose of a number of groups is to study the wildlife, or to manage land for wildlife benefit.

The Council manages land as parks, playing fields and open space, as well as cemeteries. Each of these has particular objectives related to the primary purpose of the site, but the inclusion of objectives related to the natural environment within the management plan is both feasible and desirable.

There is a need for businesses and developers to understand that incorporating measures to protect and encourage the natural environment on sites, and to limit the environmental impact of their operations is sound economic sense as well as being best practice. Such considerations need to be in the initial planning for maximum effect. The new development at Pan on the outskirts of Newport is attempting to address these issues

Angling clubs manage reservoirs for their sport, but may have the secondary aim of encouraging wildlife.

Bait collectors dig in some areas of the foreshore. This is unlikely to be problem although intensive commercial bait digging may well be.

Associated with recreational access are issues such as erosion of footpaths, fly tipping, litter, vandalism and dog fouling. Although most of these are relatively minor in scale they are eyesores and require remedial work. The resources needed to clear up and repair damage are then not available for improvements to sites.

The current interest in gardening and in particular incorporating space for wildlife has much potential for promoting the natural environment for its own sake as well as providing an interest and educational benefits. Construction of garden ponds and other water features is popular and events such as 'The Big Garden Birdwatch' have encouraged people to feed birds and put up bird boxes. There are various community gardening initiatives on the Island including New Leaf IW and Growing with Plants.

Community projects

A number of community projects exist, where local groups have been set up to look after specific areas in a neighbourhood

The Friends of Ryde Cemetery group is making a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund for an ambitious programme of works to enhance the cemetery environment for the community, heritage and wildlife.

Play Lane Millennium Green involves a local group on the outskirts of Ryde charged with managing a piece of urban-fringe countryside which is owned by their Trust.

Rosemary Village Green, also on the outskirts of Ryde, has a local community group which are keen to see the site managed in a sympathetic manner.

Batts Copse Improvement Group is a local community group with interest in the management of a LNR on the outskirts of Shanklin.

Growing with Plants is a small gardening project working with residents in sheltered housing.

New Leaf IW based at Pell Lane allotments, Ryde, and Quarr Abbey, encourages the development of gardening techniques using organic methods.

Education

Fort Victoria offers a schools' programme as well as opportunities for informal recreation.

Branstone Farm offers a schools' programme related to farming, countryside issues and wildlife.

Ventnor Botanic Garden runs courses for the general public and informed enthusiast.

Geology is interpreted at the Dinosaur Isle Museum at Sandown. It offers schools' and general public education programmes.

Various field study centres run courses in environmental studies, geography and ecology for schools, and activities in local schools.

Action for species and habitats organised by voluntary groups

There is a good network of specialist recorders, associated with groups such as the Isle of Wight Natural History and Archaeological Society, Isle of Wight Ornithological Group, and RSPB and local branches of national organisations.

The Wight Squirrel Project has a survey programme in various woods across the Island. Members of the public are encouraged to report sightings of red squirrels, and any suspected occurrences of grey squirrels.

Public participation in surveys has been encouraged in recent years by asking for sightings of easily identifiable species such as marbled white butterflies and kingfishers.

The Pond warden Scheme run by the Footprint Trust and sponsored by Southern Water and BTCV has attracted 20 - 30 participants per year over the last 5 years, and has enabled interested individuals to become more proficient in looking after their own ponds, or to assist with ponds on publicly owned land.

Conservation management tasks are carried out by a number of volunteer conservation groups, including Island Conservation Volunteers, BTCV Green Gym, and groups associated with particular sites.

The Gift to Nature Scheme, run by Island 2000 Trust invites visitors to make contributions to specific projects to benefit wildlife. Schemes completed include building a wall for wall lizards in Ventnor, a red squirrel viewing hide in Parkhurst Forest and a wetland walk at Sandown.

Objectives and targets

All these objectives and targets are aimed at raising public awareness of the natural environment and promoting opportunities for involvement of individuals, groups and communities.

A Communication and Publicity is seen as crucial to the success of this plan, and will form the majority of the action in 2005

A booklet highlighting the importance and relevance of biodiversity to all sectors of the community will be produced, aimed at decision makers in public and community life. It will centre on the six points listed on page two of this document. It is seen as the way the Partnership can encourage a greater understanding of the conservation of the natural environment, and engage a wider audience in the delivery of action for biodiversity. A launch event will be planned for the summer. Each section will contain details of how biodiversity relates to the interest area of the target group together, with details of specific projects which are already occurring, ways of developing projects and links to the community strategy

In addition a communications strategy will be drawn up for Steering Group members' use to include

- notes on setting communications objectives
- the key messages to be included in all Partnership communications
- a checklist of potential target audiences for Partnership communications
- methods of communication for reaching target audiences
- notes on the evaluation and monitoring of communications
- case studies to illustrate the selection of mechanisms appropriate to specific target audiences

B Habitat protection, management and monitoring

All publicly owned and managed land to have biodiversity objectives in each management plan for each site. Encourage privately owned land to have action for biodiversity management, access, recording, linked to elements in other action plans).

C Species Action, including survey, research and monitoring

Raise awareness of nationally and locally important species and encourage individuals to take action to assist their survival. Encourage groups and individuals to record certain key species.

Many of the actions listed below already ongoing in terms of action for species and habitats. It is proposed that in 2006, the situation will be reviewed and the list below used to draw out specific actions and projects for the following years

Ongoing* and Proposed Actions

Policy framework		Lead partner
*	Link to Community strategy, LSP, LDF and other policy documents and strategies	IWC
	Produce local planning guidance for biodiversity and development	IWC CS
*	Ensure UDP/LDF policies support biodiversity action	IWC
Habitat and geological site protection and management		
	Set up a Forum to consider the development of action plans for additional habitats identified in this document	WW
*	Promote the production of management plans including natural environment objectives for publicly owned land	IWC CS
*	Promote good practice of the management of rural highways for the natural environment	IWC Highways /Planning Liaison Group
*	Encourage the incorporation of natural environment considerations into community based plans such as Parish Plans, Market Towns Initiatives, Village Design Statements etc	IWC/WW/AONB
*	Promote council managed Local Nature Reserves	IWC CS
*	Encourage local businesses to become involved with natural environment projects	Island 2000, WW Green Island Awards (GIA)
*	Promote Friends of Sites organisations eg. Ryde Cemetery	IWC
	Non technical guides for Habitat and Species action plans	IWC CS
*	Production of natural environment newsletter	IWC CS
*	Promotion of joint activities between groups	All
Encourage individual involvement in natural environment projects		
	Co-ordinate and promote volunteer conservation tasks	
*	Training to be available for those wishing to increase their expertise	WW/AONB
Education and awareness raising		
*	Promote regular publicity in Wight Insight & Finest Landscapes	IWC CS/AONB
*	Annual natural environment event, with review of progress	IW BAP SG
*	Public species surveys, one per year; promote involvement in national surveys	WW/RSPB/IWC
	Produce annual report of progress towards BAP targets and publish on Internet	IW BAP SG
*	Produce a calendar of Countryside walks and events	IWC CS
*	Contribute to national natural environment events	All

Sources of information

Wildlife of the Isle of Wight IW BAP Audit 2000

Life Support - incorporating biodiversity into Community Strategies Defra 2004

Revealing the value of nature English Nature 2002

Local Nature Reserves - places for people and wildlife English Nature 2000

A space for nature - Nature is good for you! English Nature 1996

Natural Communities - The contribution that wildlife can make to Community Strategies

English Nature, RSPB and The Wildlife Trusts

Appendix 1 Examples of important sites managed by the local authority and local groups

Site	Managed by
Afton Marshes LNR	IW Council (Countryside Section)
Alverstone Mead	Wight Nature Fund
Appley Park	IW Council (Parks and Beaches)
Arreton Down	Hants & IW Wildlife Trust
Atkies Copse	IWNHAS
Bembridge Ledges	IW Council
Benstead Marsh, Alverstone	Friends of the Earth
Bouldnor viewpoint car park	IW Council (Countryside Section)
Brading Butterfly walk	Brading Town Council
Brading Chalk pit	Brading Town Council
Brading Down	IW Council (Countryside Section)
Brett's Meadow	Wight Nature Fund
Church Litten	IW Council (Parks and Beaches)
Dodnor Creek LNR	IW Council (Countryside Section)
Eaglehead Copse	Hants & IW Wildlife Trust
Fort Victoria Country Park	IW Council (Countryside Section)
Fort Warden Fields	IW Council (Countryside Section)
Golden Hill	IW Council (Countryside Section)
Green at Gurnard	IW Council (Parks and Beaches)
Lake allotments	IW Council (Wight Leisure)
Mill Copse	Wight Nature Fund
Moor Green Road reservoir	Cowes Community Partnership
Mornington Woods	IW Council (Parks and Beaches)
Mount Joy Cemetery	IW Council (Bereavement Services)
Nansen Hill	IW Council (Countryside Section)
Pelham Woods	Wight Nature Fund
Princes Green Cowes	IW Council (Parks and Beaches)
Rew Down and Watcombe Bottom LNR	IW Council (Countryside Section)
Rosemary Village Green	Local management committee
Ryde Cemetery	IW Council (Bereavement Services)
Ryde Sands	IW Council (Parks and Beaches)
Seaview Duver (Alan Hersey reserve)	IW Council (Centre for the Coastal Environment)
Shide Chalk Pit LNR	IW Council (Countryside Section)
Sibden Hill and Batts Copse LNR	IW Council (Countryside Section)
St Lawrence Bank	Hants & IW Wildlife Trust
Swanpond Copse	Hants & IW Wildlife Trust
The Landslip	IW Council (Countryside Section)
Towngate Pond Newport	Newport Forum
Turville's Field	Totland Parish Council
Yarmouth Common	Yarmouth Town Council
Yarmouth Green	Yarmouth Harbour Commissioners
Youngwoods Copse	Wight Nature Fund