

Isle of Wight Biodiversity Action Plan

STEERING GROUP

Minutes of the seventh Steering Group meeting held on 9th March 2001 10.30am IWC Seaclose Offices, Newport

Present: Matthew Chatfield, Senior Countryside Officer, Isle of Wight Council
Paul Davies, National Trust
Andrew Gordon, Conservation Officer, English Nature
Richard Grogan, Wight Wildlife Officer
David Langford, Regional Director, Country Landowners Association
Anne Marston, Assistant Ecology Officer, Isle of Wight Council
Angela Mawle, Local Agenda 21 Officer, Isle of Wight Council
David Moore, Planning Policy, Isle of Wight Council
Colin Pope, Ecology Officer, Isle of Wight Council
Joe Stevens, Environment Agency

Apologies: Paul Airey, Policy and Environment Manager, Isle of Wight Council
Ian Boyd, Island 2000 Trust
Sarah Dawkins, Conservation Officer, RSPB
Fiona Dixon, National Farmers' Union
Tony Tutton, Property Manager, National Trust
Debbie Wicks, Conservation Officer, Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust

In attendance: Jonathan Cox, Consultant

SG00/24 The chairman welcomed Joe Stevens from the Environment Agency, who will share attendance at the meetings with Judith Beard, and Paul Davies who was standing in for Tony Tutton. The minutes of the last meeting were agreed and signed

SG00/25 Matters arising from the minutes (other than agenda items)

SG00/04 The BAP audit has sold well and less than 50 copies are remaining. We are rapidly approaching the situation whereby we will no longer have spare copies for sale.

SG00/20 Following the delayed start to the HAP process, a letter relating to funding has been received from English Nature, agreeing to some re-scheduling of their contribution to the IW BAP project. English Nature is happy for the project to run into the financial year 2003/2004 but cannot guarantee funding for this year until the outcome of AG's request to the national office has been received.

Action: AG to follow up

SG00/21 Newsletter circulated recently. Contributions will be required for the next one, probably issued in the autumn

SG00/20 Report back on the CROW Act. AG outlined the main issues relating to nature conservation, which is one of five major sections in the CROW Act. English Nature has greater powers with respect to SSSIs, relating to Sections 28e), g), and i) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act. The purpose of the powers are to bring all SSSIs into favourable condition by the year 2010 and there is money available to do this. They can refuse consent for damaging operations and vary and /or remove notifications. They wish to work with landowners to achieve favourable management but can serve notices to bring in management schemes as a last resort. Local Authorities have additional

responsibilities and it is important that they are fully aware of their new duties. A summary of the new powers, published in English Nature's Site Lines, was circulated for information. There was insufficient time to discuss changes to protected species legislation.

SG00/26 Education and Awareness

Angela Mawle gave an account of the Agenda 21 process which has resulted in the publication of a strategy at the end of last year. The four groups which developed the strategy will be reconvened shortly, and there will be the potential to develop public awareness. The profile of biodiversity needs to be raised in the Environmental Stewardship group and there is a need to link BAP into the Agenda 21 process. There is a meeting on Thursday 15th March 2001, 6.30pm at the Riverside Centre.

Following on from SG00/21, AEM circulated a summary of Steering Group members' potential involvement in raising the profile of biodiversity with the target groups previously identified, and requested feedback as to its accuracy and feasibility. **Action: All**

The question of education and awareness as part of each action plan, as well as the potential for a separate plan has yet to be progressed. There are a number of initiatives existing or planned on the Island which it could be useful to link with, including the recently-launched Rights of Way Strategy; there are also national schemes which could stimulate local action. However, for programmes such as National Biodiversity Month, planning will be required in the next few months for action next year. The Environmental Education Providers' Forum, who have experience of both formal and community education may be willing to take some of these ideas forward. It was suggested that the process should build on successes, for example recycling initiatives. It was proposed and agreed that the formation of a sub-group should be investigated. Membership will be drawn from the Steering Group and groups with an expertise in education be invited to join.

Action AEM to discuss with Angela Mawle, and approach groups who may be interested in contributing. A report will be made to the next Steering Group.

SG00/27 Grazing Animals Project report

The object of the Grazing Animals Project is to get environmentally sensitive land in favourable condition. Several problems have been identified: the need for an Island abattoir; the necessity to fence land and provide water troughs; and the need to create demand for the products.

A model plan is required to stimulate discussion, and AG proposed that this might be found in the Chilterns Chalk Downland Project. English Nature, the Countryside Agency and the Chilterns AONB project have collaborated to produce an audit which has demonstrated the need for the project. The potential for local branding has also been assessed.

The audit has identified the ownership and tenure of key sites, and has met with owners and occupiers to assess what is required on sites. Archaeological features, landscape, permissive paths etc have been taken into account. Costed work plans for scrub removal, ragwort control etc have been drawn up. A register of graziers has been drawn up and finishing land identified. A branding and marketing scheme has made contact with specialist retailers, caterers, graziers and farmers and a broader range of products has been discussed. Some information on the Chilterns project is enclosed.

A project officer is required to progress the plan. It is estimated that up to £30,000 will be required for a feasibility study of which £12,000 has been raised so far. The project has been discussed with Helen Slade, the AONB officer, who may be able to acquire matched funding from the Countryside Agency. Island 2000 and the Isle of Wight Partnership may also be able to offer assistance.

DL and PD offered general advice on the Island situation, and pointed out some of the difficulties and

opportunities eg

- size of unit; 20-50 animals not economically viable
- there is a niche market for specialist high quality animals, but it is fairly small
- cattle grazing is needed in the marshes; but fencing off water courses will be required. This may be contrary to English Nature's wishes and a degree of flexibility is essential.
- having itinerant stock men to check animals may be a possibility
- sheep grazing is probably an easier option
- fencing must be good, but is a recurring cost every 10-15 years
- hedges which are well-laid can last for up to 60 years
- badger setts can potentially be the cause of harm to animals

The Steering Group will be kept informed of progress.

SG00/28 Red Squirrel Strategy/Species Action Plan

CP reported that the Island's Red Squirrel strategy, produced in 1996, had been very successful in terms of promoting interest and funding. It is due for review after five years, and one possibility would be to combine the revised strategy with elements of a species action plan. This approach was agreed. A draft would be circulated to members of the Steering Group in due course. Their input would be valuable in ensuring that the plan complements the relevant HAPs.

SG00/29 Progress with HAPs Maritime Cliffs The draft paper produced by Jonathan Cox and previously circulated was discussed and amendments proposed.. MC and DM emphasised the political sensitivities of coast protection within the Local Authority and the need to address these issues with care if the plan is to receive the wider support of the Council.

Coast protection and maritime cliff biodiversity

An action which may be addressed in the HAP is the further description/analysis of habitats and micro-habitats.

National and international designations are already in place; English Nature is undertaking survey work this year to see if there should be further designations.

The HAP should seek the best management of the maritime cliff habitat, irrespective of designation.

There is a great deal of information already available on coastal processes. A Shoreline Management Plan for the Island has already been completed. More detailed strategies are now being worked out, ie. the North-east coast (at consultation stage); Sandown Bay (just beginning); and the North-west coast (next to be tackled). The South-west coastline is unlikely to have a strategy as it is not considered to be defensible.

The strategies will inform the action section of the HAP.

There are nature conservation conflicts on the cliffs eg the loss of ancient woodland to coastal erosion and the loss of grazing marsh by managed retreat.

There will have to be a balance of the ideal with the practicable. It may be beneficial to slow the rates of erosion.

Cliff top management.

Cliff tops down to grass have less erosion compared to those with arable uses, but there are problems with grazing animals on unfenced cliff tops.

Agricultural use of cliff tops requires consideration in the HAP

Erosion requires fences to be moved back and diversion of rights of way. Access infrastructures (eg steps) are a major consideration and Heritage coasts have a requirement for recreational access. Management of collapsed structures falling onto eroding cliffs needs consideration.

Recreational pressure should be considered with the management of cliff tops

Is biodiversity compatible with geological conservation? How are conflicts between geological SSSIs and biological SSSIs resolved?

Conflicts need to be considered but habitat squeeze is considered to be a greater problem.

What is the extent of the maritime cliff resource? It was considered that protected cliffs eg. Along the Sandown /Shanklin frontage should be included. Also inner cliffs where they clearly support maritime vegetation. Chines would be included - how do they continue to migrate inland into agricultural land?

All maritime cliff features would be included but not the bench of the Undercliff.

Climate change

Climate change is likely to increase the frequency of landslides, and the rate of foreshore erosion. Existing coastal defences are likely to be put under greater pressure.

Are there species at the edge of their range which are likely to be under greater pressure, or are there species which could expand into the habitat?

Habitat squeeze may be an issue.

Progressing the plan

The first seminar would be an Officer seminar - those with a statutory responsibility to manage the cliff IWC :Coastal Management, Rights of Way, Countryside Section, Planning Policy; English Nature; Environment Agency.

A meeting would be set up as soon as practically possible. JC to produce a discussion paper in advance of the meeting.

The second meeting, which would involve a wider audience, including coastal landowners would require a different approach. The format could be discussed as part of the initial meeting.

Dates for these meetings to be arranged between CP and JC and circulated as necessary.

SG00/30 Any other business There was no time to discuss any other business.

SG00/31 Date of next meeting: Thursday 17th May 2001 at 10.30am Seaclose Offices