

Isle of Wight Biodiversity Action Plan

Minutes of the 35th Steering Group meeting held on 3rd July 2008, 10.30 a.m.
Enterprise House, Newport

Present: Matthew Chatfield, Parks and Countryside Manager, IWC
Richard Grogan, Conservation Manager, Hants & I.W. Wildlife Trust
Jackie Kelly, English Nature
David Langford, Country Land and Business Association
Anne Marston, Assistant Ecology Officer, Isle of Wight Council
Jackie Mellan, Environment Agency
Hugh Milner, Forestry Commission
Mike Pittock, Forestry Commission
Colin Pope, Ecology Officer, Isle of Wight Council
Nicky Rogers, AONB Planning Officer
Les Street, South-East Project Officer, RSPB

In attendance Tracy Underwood, Island 2000 Trust
Olivia Varley-Winter, Island 2000 Trust

Apologies: Rowan Adams, Landcare Officer
Ian Boyd, Island 2000 Trust
David Rumble, Hants & I.W. Wildlife Trust

SG08/16 Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes were agreed and signed.

SG08/17 Matters arising from the minutes (other than agenda items)

SG08/02BAP newsletter

Published in the Finest Landscapes issue of May 2008. The next edition of Finest Landscapes is due towards the end of the year.

SG 08/05c Wild on Wight BAP website

The re-vamp of the site is now complete. The content of the site is comprehensive but tends to be static. Websites which have frequently changing content are better,

Action: Anyone has items for inclusion please contact AM or MC.

See www.wildonwight.co.uk

SG07/14 Promoting the NERC duty.

Merrick Denton Thompson, board member of Natural England gave a presentation to elected members and senior officers of the Council on 30th May in the Council Chamber. Further information has been requested by members. A 'reminder' postcard entitled 'Putting the ecology into Eco Island' which gives contact details for the BAP website and the ecologists has been produced for Council departments. The next stage is to go around sections of the Council explaining what the biodiversity duty means for them. A meeting has been arranged for the property services section for 11th July.

RG asked whether any sanctions could be applied if this duty was ignored. In discussion, it was compared to the AONB duty of regard which has assisted in raising the profile of the AONB especially in plan-making processes. It also fits well with the Eco Island concept in the public's view.

SG08/02 Eco-Island initiative

The Big Green Picnic took place over the weekend of 24th/25th May on the car park by Newport Quay. There was a biodiversity display in the Council tent and some of the BAP Steering Group organisations were also present. It was an opportunity to raise biodiversity across a broad spectrum of the public.

SG07/20 Species review

The BAP species database has now been restructured and work will begin shortly on incorporating the information received from local specialists.

JM asked about the timetable for the SINC review as she was concerned that the opportunity to obtain survey data might be missed. Proposed SINC's have been mapped and there is enough data to justify and defend their selection. The boundaries for the Kitbridge site have been submitted as this area is under development pressure. Once the LDF timetable has been clarified, a subgroup of the BAP Steering Group will need to meet to review the proposals.

SG08/05b Water Vole SAP

Environment Agency and Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust have a water vole survey going on. Eastern Year and some of the Newport streams are completed.

Action: RG and JM to look at progress to see whether a draft SAP could be made available for the next meeting.

SG08/10 Progress with Habitat Action Plans

Grassland

AM outlined the assessment of condition of grassland habitats which is currently underway using various data sets on the GIS – IWC mapped habitats, BGS geology layer, NE SSSI condition assessments, Countryside Stewardship and ELS/HLS layers.

Maintenance agreements cover about 85% of the known calcareous grasslands but only in the region of 50% for both acid grassland/heathland and lowland meadows. Schemes for restoration/recreation can be identified to area but are difficult to quantify as some of the data lacks precision. Preliminary figures indicate that the areas of calcareous grassland and acid grassland in schemes exceed the targets put forward in the respective habitat action plans but that for neutral grassland is well below.

However if those fields in arable reversion schemes do not show sufficient progress in terms of species diversity they will not qualify for further funding once the existing schemes come to an end. As the price of wheat rises and the market for sheep meat and wool continues to decline, there will be pressure to plough up some of this land currently under pasture. The role of the biodiversity partnership is to record change and report it via BARS. There is agreement in the south-east region on how reporting will be carried out to give a consistent picture.

Maritime Cliffs and Slopes

DL expressed concern over the coastal access strip being developed – a 4m strip with 'spreading room'. On SSSIs Natural England will have to reconcile the conflicts between nature conservation and access. There may be greater demand for paths and steps down cliffs.

The Marine Bill may bring a lot of positive benefit for wildlife immediately offshore but the coastal access may dominate the debate. Removal of the liability on owners of

straying animals (as a result of the carelessness of walkers) needs to be included in the access legislation.

The BAP Steering Group needs to debate these issues at the appropriate time.

SG08/18 LAA Biodiversity Target

a) Declaring new LNRs

RG introduced the paper he had circulated with the agenda. The national target for measuring biodiversity and this has been selected for inclusion as one of the Island's voluntary local targets.

The short term aim is to create 3 new Local Nature Reserves. A list of possible sites was circulated with the agenda; those in bold do not seem to fit the criteria readily.

Additional reasons for selecting the sites were discussed including

- Sites which have considerable community support already existing e.g. Mill Copse, Spring Hill Wood
- The sites as a whole should contain a range of habitats
- Sites should be readily accessible from major settlements
- Areas with little or no current provision

Action: Parks and Countryside Section to circulate a medium list of 10 sites with supporting information to enable members of the Steering Group to recommend a short list of sites.

b) Active management of Local Sites

The first stage in this process will be to establish a baseline for reporting the data. Statistics about active management (percentage of local sites under active management in the last 5 years) will need to be available by the end of the first year. From this, targets will be developed to increase the amount of active management. In future years it may be possible for the IW Council to develop a small grant funding scheme to assist management in parallel with the AONB Sustainable Development Fund and the West Wight Landscape Partnership.

Active management can be recorded if a SINC

- is in an agri-environment or forestry scheme (or has been in the last 5 years)
- has management guidance and advice given
- has a management plan
- has a relevant BAP target specific to the site

The reporting this year will relate to the development of a data management system, and the collection of data to enter into the system. Data management will be a function of IW Local Records Centre. Development of the SINC Access database is being planned to take in the information and link it to the GIS. Initially data can be obtained from GIS files such as Natural England environmental stewardship and Forestry Commission woodland schemes.

This will still leave a considerable number of sites (about 95) and the assistance of

members of the Steering Group will be required to complete the data set.

**Action: JK to investigate whether FEP data is available from Natural England
HM to arrange EWGS files to be made available.**

**CP/AM to organise discussions with members of the Steering Group
regarding sites for which information still needs to be obtained.**

SG08/19 Appointment of a BAP project officer and agreement of work programme

CP reported that Tina Williamson, currently Histree Trail Officer with IWC, had been appointed as BAP Project Officer. It was proposed that she will start work as BAP Project Officer on 1st September 2008 but that some of her time would need to be spent winding up the HLF funded Histree Trail project. This is almost complete but, as it would be desirable to give the Histree Trail some momentum into the future, it is proposed that some of the work involved with the Histree trail could be carried forward by the BAP Steering Group (to include the biodiversity of veteran trees for example).

He introduced a paper outlining the work programme for the post which was agreed.

SG08/20 HLS targeting

Natural England held a meeting for the first stage of the process some months ago and the proposed areas of biodiversity importance seem now to have been accepted. The second phase, where landscape and heritage are now being incorporated, has produced a composite target map. The proposed Isle of Wight Target area is quite small especially when viewed in the light of the regional map. Investigation of the reasons for this suggested that the AONB had not been given a high priority, as a landscape change category had been used and our landscape was judged to have not changed significantly. CP and Fiona Hanna from the AONB have been in discussion with Tom Butterworth and Michael Knight of Natural England and have submitted with justification, additional squares (south facing chalk scarps and the south west coast) to be included in the Isle of Wight target area.

A third phase of the targeting will take place in the autumn.

RG commented that good schemes outside the target areas are currently being accepted into schemes and he hoped that this would continue to be the case.

SG08/21 Any other business

a) RG listed a number of notable dates in 2009

- 150 years since the publication of Darwin's The Origin of Species
- 100 years since Morey's publication, Natural History of the Isle of Wight
- 90 years since the foundation of the IW Natural History and Archaeological Society
- 10 years since the IW Biodiversity Action Plan partnership was established.

The Steering Group has already agreed to an event highlighting ten years of LBAP. He suggested that the BAP Project Officer could develop an event/events to highlight all of these.

b) MC has received an approach from Roger Herbert of Medina Valley Centre concerning the Ecochallenger bus, an interpretation and education facility which has been widely used across the Island. This project was set up under Leader + funding, which has now come to an end. He is developing a scheme to continue it into the future and is looking for offers of match funding. MC has details if any organisations are able to help.

c) HM introduced the Re-growth project being developed by Alistair Chisholm. It relates to carbon sequestration and tree planting to accommodate the expected climate change. He is attending a conference in Oxford shortly. It is suggested that Alistair Chisholm be invited to draft a paper for circulation before the next BAP Steering Group and then make a presentation.

d) CP introduced an initiative by the Pond Conservation Trust – The Million Pond project to create a further 600,000 ponds in the next 50 years to bring the total nationwide to 1,000,000. See <http://www.pondconservation.org.uk/ourwork/conservation/millionpondsproject/>

e) West Wight Landscape Partnership
RG announced that the West Wight Landscape Partnership had been awarded £1.7 million from the Heritage Lottery Fund. 17 projects will be taken forward and the biodiversity element involves restoration and recreation of habitat.

f) European Protected species and Forestry
HM referred to Roger Trout's recent talk to the Woodland Forum. Forestry Good practice will minimise the number of licences required for working in areas with populations of protected species. If management is done in stages, any problems will be minimised.

g) LS mentioned to RSPB Nature of Farming Awards and encouraged votes for Michael Poland who farms on the Island.

h) NR advised that the post of AONB Lead Officer has been re-advertised; the closing date is 18th July.

i) Information was circulated from Rowan Adams relating to

- Farm Slope Maps which can be supplied to farmers to assist with the management of soil erosion
- A project to develop an Island Fruit and Nut scheme

SG08/22 Date of next meeting

Thursday October 23rd
Enterprise House at 10.30 am

Action: Anyone having an item for the agenda please send it to AM 3 weeks before the meeting date so that it can be incorporated and any necessary papers circulated.