

Isle of Wight Biodiversity Partnership



Minutes of the 46th Steering Group meeting
10th March 2011, 10.30 am Enterprise House, Newport

Present: Matthew Chatfield - Parks & Countryside Manager, IWC
Claire Hamilton - Biodiversity Technical Officer, Environment Agency
Colin Pope – Senior Ecology Officer, IWC
David Langford – Regional Director, CLA
Helen Rawlinson - Land Mgt & Conservation Advisor, Natural England
Ian Boyd – Head of Environment, Natural Enterprise
Mike Pittock - Beat Forester, Forestry Commission
Jay Doyle – Biodiversity Manager, SE District, Forestry Commission
Richard Grogan - Conservation Manager, Hants & I.W. Wildlife Trust
Tina Whitmore - Biodiversity Projects Officer, IWC

Apologies: Anne Marston, Les Street, Richard Black, Tony Tutton

SG11/08 Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes were agreed and signed.

SG11/09 Matters arising from the minutes (other than agenda items)

a. LNR progress update SG011/02c

Brading Down as of March 1st Brading Down became the Island's seventh LNR and the first to be declared since 1993. 20 delegates attended the launch event including reps from the Partnership, IWC Countryside Team, IWC Councillors, Brading Town Council & IWNHAS. New signage was unveiled and a guided walk given around the site to look at wildlife and management. Fences have recently been replaced, and a substantial amount of chalk grassland transferred from the eastern car park into the main grazing unit where it can be sympathetically managed.

Golden Hill the new management plan has been agreed by Natural England. It has now gone to the regional NE team for approval and if successful we should receive an official letter of endorsement from NE. TW is hoping to hear back on this by the end of March – this is as far as TW can progress Golden Hill before she leaves.

b. Wetland HAP sign off SG11/04

The revised Wetland HAP is now available to download from WOW

<http://www.wildonwight.co.uk/habitats/wetlands.php>

c. Consultation on National Indicators

Following on from the discussion at the last meeting, a letter was sent to DEFRA by MC expressing support from the Partnership that reporting on biodiversity by LA's should be included on the new list of National Indicators following the abolishment of the original list last year. No feedback has been circulated as yet on the consultation, but is expected after April 1st.

d. Recorders' Conference feedback

CP reported on another successful event. 66 people gathered in the Arreton Community Centre to hear talks and look at the displays. The speakers were Helen Roy (Centre for Ecology and Hydrology) on Engaging people in recording wildlife, Tim Callaway (RSPB) on Brading Marshes and Graham Street and Colin Pope on recording bats on the IW.

It is unlikely that IWC Countryside section will be able to co-ordinate next year's conference, but it is hoped that the IWNHAS may be in a position to take on the project and the IWC will provide support where possible.

SG11/10 IW SINC Assessment project (*see attached map & full report from RG)

RG reported that 80% of SINC's have now been visited with all site visits to be completed by the end of March. The project wraps up in May when data analysis will begin with a full report expected in July – this will be presented at the next Partnership meeting on 14th July.

Out of the 278 SINC's visited to date, 43% have been recorded as being in 'appropriate' condition (this is not directly comparable with 'favourable' condition) and 26% were recorded as 'non-intervention' (this mostly applies to small woodland SINC's and may not necessarily be detrimental to these sites in the long-term). There were only 2 sites that have lost their wildlife interest and 10 sites reported as 'neglected' – so overall, the findings are encouraging.

DL raised the point that the current low value of beef and dairy herds will impact on grazed SINC's as more farmers are being forced into selling their livestock.

Action: RG to present final report at next Partnership meeting July 14th

SG11/11 NI 197 & Biodiversity Work reporting

NI 197 CP presented a map depicting the distribution of SINC's and those sites with known management plans in place (derived from most recent NI 197 report). A second map then overlaid the Wildlife Trust's SINC Assessment project findings so far and demonstrated the value of new data the survey has thrown up on gaining an insight into the actual condition of our SINC's.

Biodiversity Work reporting

TW updated the group on progress with the analysis and presentation of data collected from the Biodiversity projects audit recently completed. Several maps were shown onscreen to describe some of the findings of the exercise.

TW pointed out that only members of the Partnership were approached this round, but could be extended in the future to other groups with biodiversity remits e.g. Wight Nature Fund. Data collected from partners is displayed on the maps as point files with a centralised GR as it would have been too time consuming to map all polygons of work carried out (except HLS & Woodland Grants). Where more than one partner has been involved on a project, this has only been mapped the once. Some work was reported as being both maintenance and restoration and so these are represented on both respective maps.

NB All data (spreadsheet, background information and maps) is now available via Google Docs. This is an online data storage space which partners can access, view and download the documents. This is by invite only and will not be publicly accessible.

Action: TW to email all partners shortly with the invite to the Google Docs space and provide brief instructions on how to use the facility.

SG11/12 LRC Report

**Please see attached report by AM for the period October 2010 – March 2011*

SG11/13 2nd IW BioBlitz

AONB are to co-ordinate this year's 2nd IW BioBlitz with Joel Bateman taking the lead role as the IWC are no longer in a position to do so. The event will be held on Weds June 1st (spring half-term) and take place on Brading Down which will be a great venue with lots of different habitats to explore and no problem with parking! This will also contribute towards the public celebration of the new LNR.

JB has met with TW and also Brading Town Council whom are very keen to be involved and promote the butterfly walk. JB hopes to liaise with Mrs Oglander over using Kelly's Copse/Nunwell Beech wood for activities.

FH asked the partners for their ideas for and involvement with the event as that's what made it so successful last year. FH also proposed formulating a working group as with the 2010 event. MP, CP and IB all volunteered to join the working group to help with planning.

Action: ALL put Wednesday 1st June in your diaries

Action: AONB to set up a meeting for the working group

SG11/14 Biodiversity Partnership events insurance

FH raised the issue that it may be increasingly common in the future for the Partnership to pick up aspects of work that the IWC can no longer dedicate resources to. One element being the Walks leaflet. An issue to come out of this is that of Public Liability Insurance for volunteer walks leaders. AONB have their own Partnership PLI.

RG reported that only 2 walks leaders featuring in Wight Summer Walks 2011 are without PLI, some have registered as volunteers with the Wildlife Trust and are now covered, but this means they are carrying out the walk on behalf of the WT and as a result, any donations must be passed on to the WT.

FH said that AONB may be able to assist with PLI coverage if either walk will be taking place in the AONB or if an AONB officer assists.

MC said that most people have overcome this by affiliating themselves with organisations in possession of PLI and though not essential, it is worth considering. If walks/events take place wholly on IWC sites then volunteers would be covered e.g. the 2nd IW BioBlitz would be covered by IW Council insurance as it will take place on a IWC site, but activity leaders will have to provide evidence of PLI if they have it and also complete a Risk Assessment. The Biodiversity Partnership would not be able to get PLI as they aren't a body corporate, but would have to look to covering individual walks leaders by association with partners.

RG to liaise with FH over coverage of 2 remaining walks leaders

SG11/15 Future of the Biodiversity Partnership update

MC reported that the IWC are still in the midst of discussions and interviews for the revised structure for the Parks & Countryside section. MC was unable to provide a full update as there are still personal decisions to be made, but gave the Partnership as much info as possible.

There is a new structure which should be in place by April 1st with fewer officers employed. MC reassured the Partnership that the IWC hopes to be able to continue to support and remain committed to the Biodiversity Partnership in the immediate future, though delivery may change. IWC countryside site management will change because of the reduction of staff and budgets and work will have to be prioritised accordingly. TW is off on Maternity / contract ends on March 31st and will not be renewed.

MC was currently unsure how the LRC will continue, but the IWC have made no indication that it wishes to withdraw its commitments.

JD reported that the Forestry Commission's consultation on selling off public forests has been cancelled. However, FC are facing an internal consultation. 300 job redundancies are expected over the next 3 to 4 years. 11 regional areas are being reduced to 6. A 29% reduction in funding could mean that the FC will be stepping back to focus on core areas of responsibility. Partnership and public engagement duties may be dropped. New structures are expected to be in place by 1st April 2013.

HR reported that Natural England are expecting to know more in May, but is looking likely that NE will not be able to fund Partnership work in the future. HR will be in post until June and doesn't know if she will even be in the South East after this date. It is unlikely that NE would drop their biodiversity

commitments and are probably moving towards 'functions' e.g. a 'Landscape and Biodiversity Function' team could be formulated by April 1st.

CH reported that the EA Biodiversity team are mainly unaffected by the cuts in terms of redundancies currently. The Thames Region will merge with the South East region which reduces the no. of area teams from 5 to 4. The SE area will now be known as the Solent Fisheries and Biodiversity Team (FRB). Their area will also increase in size geographically and as a result FRB staff have been restructured to reflect the changes.

The outcome of this discussion was that the Partnership need to set priorities of what needs doing with the resources that will be available and discuss this at the next meeting.

SG11/16 Any Other Business

- **Munjac Deer SG10/34** – no further reports of muntjac deer since the last meeting, but 2 red deer have been sighted on Chillerton Down following an escape from Chale (up to 7 escaped red deer have been reported).
- **DL announced his forthcoming retirement** as CLA Regional Director at the end of April. DL's replacement will be Island based and it is hoped they will attend the Biodiversity Partnership meetings. MC thanked DL for his valuable contribution to the Partnership over the past few years and everybody wished David a very happy retirement!
- **Sudden Oak Death** – MP reported that *Phytophthora ramorum* a fungal pathogen, is causing extensive damage not to our native oaks (as they seem fairly resilient) but to Japanese larch, an important commercial species in the west of Britain. It is spreading rapidly with confirmed outbreaks in the Western UK (22,000 ha's felled this winter). IW is in one of the vulnerable zones, although there is not a lot of Japanese larch here. Disinfecting procedure is in place for contractors bringing machinery over from the mainland and for officers working on multiple sites.
- **WOW update** - one of TW's last jobs is overseeing an update to the WOW website. 2 new sections 'Benefits of Biodiversity' and 'Biodiversity & You' have been added so far with other changes being made before the end of March. TW urged all partners to take a look and to remember that WOW has a wealth of resources available on it.
- **OPAL climate survey** packs now available <http://www.opalexplornature.org/climatesurvey> to investigate ways in which we affect the climate and how the climate may affect us.
- **Claire made Tina a lovely leaving cake** which everybody thoroughly enjoyed with a cup of tea at the end of the meeting – thanks Claire!

Date of next meeting

Thursday 14th July, 10.30am at Enterprise House