

## **TEES VALLEY BIODIVERSITY STEERING GROUP**

**Minutes of meeting held on 6<sup>th</sup> May 2009 at Billingham Beck Visitor Centre**

### **Present:**

Sue Antobus	Tees Valley Biodiversity Coordinator
Jeremy Garside	Tees Valley Wildlife Trust
David Askey	Stockton-on-Tees BC
Graham Clingan	Stockton-on-Tees BC
David Spencer	Redcar & Cleveland BC
Robert Woods	INCA
Ben Ralston	Northumbrian Water
Ian Bond	Hartlepool BC
Helen Herring	Wildflower Ark
Anne Gladwin	Middlesbrough BC
Katy Dickson	Environment Agency
Rob Lunan	Redcar & Cleveland BC
Katherine Pinnock	EYE Project
Julia Quinonez	Darlington BC
Jess Cheeseman	Darlington BC
Malcolm Steele	Tees Valley JSU

### **1. Apologies**

Martin Coleclough – Middlesbrough BC; Graham Megson – Teesmouth Bird Club; Ruth Jackson – Natural England; Naomi Hewitt – EYE Project; Fiona Morris – Environment Agency

### **2. Minutes of last meeting and matters arising**

Minutes of meeting held on 24 March 2009 accepted as an accurate record.

Malcolm Steele apologised for not having produced a note on the role of Darlington within the Tees Valley Partnership. To follow up with Rob George at Darlington BC.

**Action – Malcolm Steele**

### **3. Habitat and Species Action Plans**

Three Habitat Action Plans and 1 Species Action Plan were circulated prior to the meeting.

#### Lowland Meadow Habitat Action Plan

This is 1 of 2 grassland HAP's – the other being Calcareous and Coastal Grassland. Comments included;

- Refer to implications of higher level stewardship scheme
- NE Grazing Project will cover the Tees Valley

- Most sites will fit LWS designation criteria – further sites can be delivered by 2012
- Grassland Trust will carry out some work in establishing contact with landowners and identifying potential additional sites

#### Churchyards and Cemeteries Habitat Action Plan

No specific comments made at the meeting.

#### Saline Lagoons Habitat Action Plan

- Refer to Environment Agency flood alleviation scheme which will create inter-tidal habitat and possibly open up further opportunities for habitat creation
- Consider including a location plan of the brine fields as part of the HAP
- Key action is to maintain salinity, especially in the artificial lagoons
- Refer to implications of rising sea levels

#### Barn Owl Species Action Plan

- The Plan needs to focus on what the Partnership can deliver e.g the nest box scheme, monitoring records, communicating data and information
- Key issue is maintaining suitable feeding areas
- Noted that data on, for example, number of breeding pairs is not included in the SAP, but records are maintained by Teesmouth Bird Club

Any further comments on the Action Plans should be forwarded to Sue Antrobus. All Plans will eventually be put onto the Partnership website.

The next tranche of plans for consideration at the next meeting is likely to include:

- Gardens and Allotments
- Marsh and Swamp
- Parks and Amenity Areas
- Sand Dunes
- Water Vole
- Brown Hare

Thanks were recorded to all Action Plan leads for their efforts.

#### **4. Guidelines for selection of Local Sites**

Since the last Steering Group Jeremy Garside has met with Teesmouth Bird Club's Conservation Committee and the meeting proved useful in explaining background and process.

An issue had arisen at the last Steering Group regarding the quality of woodland in Hartlepool c/w woodland elsewhere in the Tees Valley, particularly Redcar & Cleveland. However Ian Bond explained that this may not be an issue – Hartlepool BC were postponing decisions on woodland LWS in the Borough and would probably revisit after Wildflower Ark have had a chance to carry out survey work.

With regard to woodland at Wynyard:

- Ian Bond considered that some parts may qualify as LWS
- Hartlepool is likely to designate a large part of the woodland as a LWS
- This means an inconsistency with the approach taken by Stockton
- There were issues over where to draw LWS boundaries e.g. only include the species rich/ancient habitat or also include parcels of surrounding woodland. Also raises the issue of conflicts with development in the Wynyard area

The boundary issue clearly relates back agreed guidelines and designation criteria. The guidelines will be subject to regular review but JG agreed to look again at the guidelines re. adjoining sites and connectivity. **Action – Jeremy Garside**

IB to email details of sites of concern to Redcar & Cleveland and Stockton. **Action – Ian Bond.**

#### **5. Local Sites and NI 197 reporting**

The DEFRA guidelines propose that BAP Steering Groups have a role in verifying data for NI 197 reporting.

Stockton BC circulated a spreadsheet of sites - this provided evidence to show that 16 out of 58 sites were in positive management. Subject to some minor checking, **the Steering Group agreed to verify the Stockton list.** The Steering Group also agreed to use the Stockton list format as a template for the other authorities.

In order to meet DEFRA and other timescales it was agreed that other authorities evidence for NI 197 should be circulated, on this occasion, to the Steering Group for comment/verification.

It was agreed that the Steering Group should review sites annually.

#### **6. Report of Biodiversity Coordinator**

**Pondscape Project** – successful launch on 5 May; some good press coverage. Just under £50,000 ESME funding agreed.

**Brownfields Invertebrate Project** – part of a national ‘Buglife’ project, working in conjunction with INCA. Funding of £149,000 secured from ESME. A Buglife Brownfield Biodiversity officer has been working in Tees Valley on TVWT reserves and on INCA sites.

**Communication Strategy** – this is a Natural England requirement. A draft report was circulated and it was agreed that this provided an excellent basis for submission to NE.

**Funding Strategy** – again a NE requirement; should show how actions identified in the Action Plan will be paid for. Clearly raises a number of issues of concern including potential funding streams for Action Plans, BAP Coordinator funding, links with the ERIC/EYE project, funding from Natural England and the Environment Agency, links

with Local Area Agreements etc. It was suggested that the Environment Agency's Partnership Agreement could be used as a template.

It was agreed that SA/JG/MS should meet to look at the process. **Action – M Steele**

**Flexigraze Project** – officer now employed by Northumberland Wildlife Trust. Letter of support has been sent from TV Partnership.

**Annual Conference/Site Visit** – probably to be arranged for September; possible venue is RSPB Saltholme but this would be restricted to a max. of 50 delegates. Suggestions for possible speaker topics included:

- Lowland meadows
- Living Landscapes project
- Grass verges (good practice – Sunderland City Council)
- Honey Bees/Buglife project on pollinators

Other ideas should be forwarded to Sue Antrobus.

#### **7. BAP Partnership Annual Report**

SA circulated a draft designed copy. Comments to SA by 11 May.

#### **8. ERIC Project**

Katherine Pinnock provided an update:

- EYE will continue to August 2009 and then be merged into ERIC
- ERIC will be hosted by Tyne & Wear Museums
- Funding is still an ongoing issue; £30,000 p.a. secured from Natural England; other funding sources to be approached
- Katherine Pinnock's post funded to May 2010
- The public access sections of the EYE website have been very successful and it is hoped that this will continue as part of ERIC
- ERIC will have GIS capacity to manage habitat data and there is a mapping agreement with Newcastle City Council

#### **9. Any other business**

**Stockton Green Infrastructure Strategy** – Ian Bond and Robert Woods volunteered to provide comments on behalf of the Partnership.

**Living Landscapes** – Ian Bond queried how this project fits with the BAP process. Living Landscapes is essentially about raising the profile for biodiversity beyond the boundaries of protected areas. The project will work towards creating networks and areas of resilience for biodiversity.

#### **10. Next meeting**

10.00 a.m. on 9<sup>th</sup> September 2009 at Billingham Beck Visitor Centre.