

TEES VALLEY BIODIVERSITY STEERING GROUP

Minutes of meeting held on 24th March 2009 at Billingham Beck Visitor Centre

Present:

Sue Antrobus	Tees Valley Biodiversity Coordinator
Jeremy Garside	Tees Valley Wildlife Trust
David Askey	Stockton-on-Tees BC
Vic Fairbrother	Teesmouth Bird Club
Nick Brodin	NE Biodiversity Forum
David Spencer	Redcar & Cleveland BC
Rob Lunan	Redcar & Cleveland BC
Andrew Carter	Hartlepool BC
Anne Gladwin	Middlesbrough BC
Helen Herring	Wildflower Ark
Malcolm Steele	Tees Valley JSU

1. Apologies

Ruth Jackson – Natural England; Graham Megson – Teesmouth Bird Club; Ian Bond – Hartlepool BC; Naomi Hewitt – EYE Project; Katy Dickson – Environment Agency; Fiona Morris – Environment Agency; Graham Clingan – Stockton-on-Tees BC; Ben Ralston – Northumbrian Water; Martin Coleclough – Middlesbrough BC; Robert Woods – INCA

2. Minutes of last meeting and matters arising

Minutes accepted as an accurate record; no matters arising not covered in meeting.

3. Guidelines for selection of Local Wildlife Sites

Teesmouth Bird Club proposed two changes to the previously circulated ‘Guidelines for the selection of Local Wildlife Sites in the Tees Valley’ in relation to section 3.4 Birds – ‘O3 Any site regularly holding significantly high numbers of a key breeding or wintering species or unique features of a species or assemblage on a Tees Valley basis.’

TBC proposed:

- deletion of the word ‘high’ on the basis that in the event of a legal challenge local authorities may have to argue that high for a rare or uncommon bird is a low number
- change ‘unique features’ to ‘unusual occurrence’ on the basis that features refer to the site, occurrence refers to the birds, and that unique is a potential hazard for local authorities as it is more open to legal challenge.

The Steering Group accepted TBC’s first proposal to delete the word ‘high’ so that O3 reads ‘Any site regularly holding significant numbers of a key breeding.....’.

Regarding the second proposal the Steering Group considered that the Bird Club’s proposed change still left the wording rather ambiguous – after some discussion the

Group agreed to amend O3 to read ‘...ecologically notable species or assemblage on a Tees Valley basis.’

Nick Brodin pointed out an inconsistency between 3.7 and 3.7.1 in the Guidelines – Jeremy Garside agreed to think about some revised wording for consideration at the next Steering Group meeting. **Action - JG**

It was also pointed out that the paper still refers to ‘SNCI’s’ in a number of places.
Action - JG

It was also agreed that an additional statement should be included in the Introduction to describe the designation process and the consideration of potential sites by the LWS Partnership. **Action - JG**

Hartlepool BC had raised a point about the role of woodland in the Borough – the quality of some of the woodland in Hartlepool is lower than, for example, woodland in Redcar & Cleveland and on the fringes of the North York Moors; in situations where some Hartlepool woodland is thought to be of important local value but does not meet the guideline criteria – in such cases is there a case for amending the criteria? However the Steering Group considered that it did not have sufficient information to make an informed decision on this issue and requested Hartlepool BC to provide some specific examples for consideration at the next meeting. **Action – Ian Bond/Andrew Carter**

4. Review of Local Sites (Wildlife & Geological) for Redcar & Cleveland and Stockton-on-Tees

Draft lists of proposed Local Sites for Redcar & Cleveland and Stockton-on-Tees had been circulated previously.

Jeremy Garside gave a presentation on Local Sites covering:

- background and policy
- role of the Local Sites Partnership
- Redcar & Cleveland review (desk review of 70 candidate sites; new field surveys on 42 sites; reviewing data against criteria; 46 proposed Local Wildlife Sites)
- Stockton review (desk review of 116 candidate sites; new field surveys on 84 sites; reviewing data against criteria; 72 proposed Local Wildlife Sites)
- Site record data (name, grid ref, reason & evidence for designation, comment on boundary, species recorded during 2008 review, site condition, species previously recorded)

Redcar & Cleveland Sites

Wildflower Ark’s significant role in survey work and analysing data was acknowledged by the Steering Group.

It was noted that woodland losses account for most of the difference in the number of previous and proposed sites.

There was some discussion on the location of data – whether with the BAP, the Partnership, or a local records centre. Generally there are few concerns about sharing data widely, but issues around maintaining data and keeping records up to date need to be addressed. One suggestion is that ERIC could eventually maintain a master copy of sites and data.

A specific issue for Redcar & Cleveland concerns the North York Moors National Park which has not been surveyed as part of this exercise but for which the local authority is responsible for NI 197 reporting. The position will need explaining to DEFRA.

With regard to evidence of management for NI 197 it was suggested that it was not necessary to have a ‘Management Plan’ but that a ‘record of management’ would suffice.

The Steering Group, as Local Sites Partnership, agreed to endorse the list of proposed Local Sites for Redcar & Cleveland.

Stockton-on-Tees Sites

David Askey reported that the Stockton were generally happy with the proposed sites, particularly those sites owned and managed by the local authority.

It was pointed out that for some Leven Valley Woodland sites the word ‘None’ appeared in the LWS Designation column. **Action – Jeremy Garside to check the original spreadsheets.**

N.B. JG has subsequently reported that, having checked the spreadsheets, those sites with the word ‘none’ in the LWS Designation column should not have been included in the list of proposed Local Sites for Stockton. A revised list for Stockton has therefore been circulated to the Local Sites Partnership.

The Steering Group, as Local Sites Partnership, agreed to endorse the list of proposed Local Sites for Stockton-on-Tees.

5. National Indicator 197 - update

The recent seminar at Government Office NE had cleared up a number of issues and questions, although there are still some uncertainties. However it was noted that the DEFRA guidance document gives a good description of what is needed in terms of evidence – by the end of June local authorities need a document that describes the evidence and shows where that evidence is held – it does not have to be held all in one place.

It was also suggested that it would be useful to have a designated NI 197 representative in each local authority.

6. Role of Darlington in Tees Valley LWS designation process

Jeremy Garside and Sue Antrobus explained the situation facing Darlington. Darlington is part of the County Durham BAP and the consideration of proposed Local Sites has been done as part of the overall County Durham process. With County Durham about to

become a unitary authority all powers will be within that central authority which will concentrate solely on the County Durham local authority area. Therefore Darlington is faced with either doing everything on its own or joining with the Tees Valley.

There are a number of issues to be considered:

- The ecology and features of Darlington have more in common with the Tees Valley than Co. Durham
- Most of these features seem to fit well with the Tees Valley Local Site criteria
- Tees Valley Wildlife Trust acts as a records centre for the former Cleveland County area and does not hold data for the Darlington area
- Much of the Darlington data is held with the Durham Biodiversity Partnership
- Tees Valley Habitat Action Plans and Species Action Plans do not currently include Darlington

It was agreed that a short paper should be prepared setting out the main issues for discussion at a future Steering Group meeting. **Action – Malcolm Steele**

7. Any other business

None.

8. Next meeting

Previously arranged for 10.00 a.m. on 6th May 2009 at Billingham Beck Visitor Centre.