

TEES VALLEY BIODIVERSITY STEERING GROUP

Minutes of meeting held on 16th October 2007 at Billingham Beck Visitor Centre

Present:

Rob Lunan	Redcar & Cleveland BC
Robert Woods	INCA
Mark Morris	Northumbrian Water
Graham Megson	Teesmouth Bird Club
Jeremy Garside	Tees Valley Wildlife Trust
Sue Antrobus	Tees Valley Biodiversity Coordinator
Debbie Scott	Tees Forest
Ruth Jackson	Natural England
Helen Herring	Wildflower Ark
David Askey	Stockton-on-Tees BC
Ian Bond	Hartlepool BC
Nick Brodin	North East Biodiversity Forum
Anne Gladwin	Middlesbrough BC
Keith Matthews	Stockton-on-Tees BC
Katy Dickson	Environment Agency
Malcolm Steele	Tees Valley JSU

1. Apologies

Geoff Barber – INCA; Graham Clingan – Stockton-on-Tees BC; Mike Leakey – Natural England; Martin Coleclough – Middlesbrough BC

2. Minutes of last meeting

Accepted as an accurate record.

3. Matters arising

None.

4. Steering Group – role and terms of reference

Draft terms of reference for the Steering Group had been circulated prior to the meeting.

The principal comments during discussion included:

- ‘Promote biodiversity in the Tees Valley and raise awareness at local, sub-regional, regional and national levels’ should be the first ‘main task’ of the Group as it relates directly to the Group’s role. There should also be an acknowledgement of the links between biodiversity and sustainable development, health, and climate change;
- Clarify that references to ‘Local Sites’ mean wildlife sites, as opposed to geological sites (RIGS);
- However there should be closer links between the Biodiversity Steering Group and the Tees Valley RIGS group, possibly by minutes of respective meetings

being circulated between the groups. **Action – Jeremy Garside to speak to the chair of the RIGS group;**

- Undertaking an annual review of Local Sites was considered to be onerous and impractical – this should be amended to read ‘Undertake a review, when appropriate, of Local Sites.....’
- Further consideration should be given to the development of Local Site indicators – this may help to relieve some pressure on local authorities. It was understood that consultation/guidance on Local Site indicators may be due in November;
- Production of an annual report was generally supported – the report should use BARS as a basis for showing what has been achieved in the Tees Valley and what we would like to achieve;
- Reference should also be made in the annual report to monitoring the delivery of DEFRA core services;
- The ‘Biodiversity in your pocket’ publication may provide some useful base data for the annual report. **Action – Sue Antrobus to consider headings/outline for the annual report for discussion at the next Steering Group meeting;**
- Rural Development Service – DEFRA should be removed from the list of Steering Group members – this is now part of Natural England;
- There was strong support for the Steering Group responding to key local, sub-regional and regional policy documents. To spread the burden of this it was agreed that a sub-group should be established comprising Sue Antrobus, Geoff Barber, Graham Clingan, Jeremy Garside and Malcolm Steele. A list of forthcoming strategies/policy documents should be prepared prior to the first meeting of the sub-group. **Action – details of any such documents should be forwarded to M. Steele as soon as possible; Sue Antrobus to arrange a date for a sub-group meeting;**
- Additional roles of the Action Groups should be to co-ordinate implementation of local BAP actions, and deliver local BAP projects.

With regard to Steering Group membership it was suggested that some representation from the agricultural sector would be beneficial. It was agreed that the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) should be invited to join. **Action - Malcolm Steele to send a formal invitation letter.**

Action – Malcolm Steele to amend the Terms of Reference as discussed and circulate prior to the next Steering Group meeting.

5. Progress/update since last meeting

Sue Antrobus expressed thanks to the members of the Steering Group (and others) who have provided help and assistance since she took up her post.

Her main tasks since starting have included:

- becoming more familiar with the BARS recording system and entering data – at a rate of about 2 plans per week;
- identifying main gaps and making contact with relevant people;

- presentations to the Directors of Environment of all 5 Tees Valley local authorities;
- presentations to Local Strategic Partnerships.

Funding for the Biodiversity Co-ordinator post has been secured for 12 months and there is a Memorandum of Agreement for a further 3 years – (£16,000 for each LBAP).

Nick Brodin reported that a habitats and species review has been underway at regional level, feeding into the national review. Some species are now on the list due to local and regional monitoring results, along with wider habitat work.

Robert Woods reported that INCA has undertaken some survey and database development work on urban grasslands, with a focus on slag/alkaline habitats. There has also been some progress in identifying important areas for Skylark, Brown Hare and Grey Partridge on farmland as well as brownfield sites.

6. Review of Biodiversity Targets and Actions

Sue Antrobus tabled a discussion paper and gave a presentation on the ‘Proposed Review of Tees Valley LBAP’. A number of questions and issues were raised during the presentation and the main feedback included:

- some degree of priority must be given to habitats
- consideration should be given to combining some habitat plans
- some identified actions are taking place at national level – the Tees Valley BAP should concentrate on its own, local actions
- need to acknowledge that progress is often dependent on the actions of other partners
- additional training on the use of BARS would be useful; **Action – Sue Antrobus to try to arrange**
- there should be more integration of species with habitat action plans, although it was acknowledged that some separate species plans will be still be necessary
- there should be an annual update/review of targets – this could feed into the proposed annual report
- priority should be given to the following 5 habitat action plans:
 - ancient & species rich hedgerows
 - grazing marsh
 - mud/sand flats
 - ponds
 - brownfield sites

Action – Sue Antrobus to take to the Action Groups and begin review.

7. Response to Regional and Sub-regional Strategies

This was discussed under agenda item 4.

8. Newsletter

The next newsletter will be in electronic format. Sue Antrobus had circulated a request for articles prior to the meeting.

9. National and Regional events, updates and feedback

a) Regional Grazing Project – Nick Brodin referred to ‘Flexigraze’ – a group of conservation site managers working together to make specialist grazing of conservation sites more attractive to farmers and graziers. For more details see attachments and for further information contact Stephen Comber, the regional grazing coordinator, on 01207 524880 or stephen.comber@necf.org.uk

b) Regional Veteran Tree Group – set up to share information and establish a regional database to link into the national database. For further information contact Andy Lees at Durham Wildlife Trust.

c) SITA Enriching Nature – now open to applications for funding; applications must be within 10km of a landfill site

d) Integrated Regional Framework – currently out for consultation

e) Regional Climate Change Partnership – action plan expected by early 2008

10. Any other business

None.

11. Date of next meeting

Tuesday 15th January 2008 – 10.00 a.m. at Billingham Beck Visitor Centre.