

Urban Action group

20 November 2007

Meeting notes

Attendance - Debbie Scott (Tees Forest), Sam Garside (Middlesbrough BC), Andrea Ellsworth (Stockton BC), Francine Marshall (Middlesbrough BC) Rob Lunan, (Redcar & Cleveland BC), Geoff Barber (INCA), Sam Garside (Middlesbrough BC), Sue Antrobus (BAP Co-ordinator).

Apologies - Ian Bond (Hartlepool BC), Claire Gallagher (Groundwork) Helen Beaman (Hartlepool BC) Steve Ashton (Tees Valley Wildlife Trust), Mark Fishpool (Middlesbrough Environment City).

Why are you here (why do you come to these meetings/today's meeting)?

- To find out exactly what the urban BAP group are about
- To see what the aims of the group are
- Achieve involvement in raising biodiversity awareness
- I want to get local people involved
- Because I like to meet like-minded people from other councils/organisations
- Because it helps me learn new things
- It keeps my job varied and interesting
- Opportunity to meet up with colleagues in the wider area
- To ensure a co-ordinated approach to biodiversity action
- Revamp biodiversity targets
- The promise of muffins
- Need to be involved-most of sites I work on are urban/urban fringe locations
- To find out what others are doing in urban habitats
- To share ideas on good practice in biodiversity
- To find out what is happening in urban habitats in other areas
- To find out where I can support what other organisations are doing
- INCAs key role is urban habitats so it is central to our work
- Insure action on industrial areas fed into BAP process
- I want to be here
- I like the people in the group
- Because I want to help biodiversity in the area
- Networking opportunity
- To keep up to date for national, regional and local BAP news
- To hopefully input something from Middlesbrough
- Opportunities for INCA to contribute in survey, policy and habitat creation

What is the purpose of the Tees Valley BAP?

Working in pairs we tried to come up with five main roles of the Tees Valley BAP

1. Work as partnership to set and deliver local targets that nest into regional and national BAP process
 - Provides a link between national and local policy
 - To give a local moulding to national BAP
 - To ensure a local slant on BAP for local people
 - Fit local work into national framework
 - Work we do on a local level fits into regional and national targets
 - Russian Doll principle
2. Mechanism to ensure conservation of species and habitats
 - To improve biodiversity habitats in the Tees Valley area
 - Ensure habitats are not lost.
 - Mechanism for protection, enhancement and improvement of wildlife habitats
 - Have clear targets can work from and to
3. Partnership approach
 - Setting collective objective targets
 - Co-ordinated approach both on recording and delivery
 - Enables us to sing from same hymn sheet
 - Co-ordinate action across Tees Valley
 - Each organisation is able to contribute to implementing a plan

4. To promote biodiversity understanding and action within Tees Valley

- Raise profile of biodiversity issues and encourage activity
- Educate and inform a wider public
- Raise awareness and profile of biodiversity to public and other professions
- Encourage involvement in biodiversity
- People relate to “local wildlife”

We then compared these to the functions of LBAPs given on the England Biodiversity Group website and discussed

- To translate national targets for species and habitats into effective action at the local level
- To identify targets for species and habitats important to the local area and reflecting the values of local people
- To stimulate effective local partnerships to ensure programmes for biodiversity conservation are developed and maintained in the long term
- To raise awareness of the need for biodiversity conservation and enhancement in the local context
- To ensure opportunities for conservation and enhancement of biodiversity are promoted, understood and rooted in policies and decisions at the local level
- To provide a basis for monitoring and evaluating local action for biodiversity priorities, at both national and local levels.

Skills/knowledge/experience

- Knowledge and experience of local habitats and issues
- Enthusiasm - openness to learning
- Community engagement/education/appreciation
- Group members are parts of networks e.g. industrialists, local; authorities. Agencies. Recorders, volunteers etc
- Experience of countryside access issues
- Ecological experience of hedgerows, woodland, wetland, brownfield sites, urban habitats
- Experience of integrated green infrastructure management
- Up to date knowledge of hedgerow regulations/laws
- Political awareness
- In-depth understanding of planning process

What is the urban action group, what is our remit and where should we focus our work?

Some past successes of the group

- Production of Albert Park Group
- Heritage Trees Project
- Filtering biodiversity into Councils “Clean and Green”
- Provision of toolkit talk to ground maintenance staff in local authorities
- Organisation and delivery of wildlife law workshops
- Creation of churchyard and cemeteries HAP
- Harvest mouse project
- Biodiversity training for Middlesbrough parks staff for Green Flag status
- Roadside verge maintenance for biodiversity in Redcar and Cleveland
- Group has enabled members to network on issues, sharing information, and moral support.

Discussion on role of group

Points raised:

- Raise the profile of urban biodiversity
- Influence people especially decision makers and new audiences on urban habitat conservation, maintenance and creation
- Biodiversity enhancement on industrial land (INCA)
- Responsibility for valuable Teesside habitats-brownfield slag grasslands.
- To celebrate biodiversity in urban areas and encourage people to do more

It was noted that many of the people attending meeting felt that their role was influencing and encouraging but that they themselves did not always have the power within their organisations to make decisions and that this could be frustrating.

Urban Habitat and Species Action Plans

The following HAPs and SAPS are down as belonging to the urban group

- Churchyards and cemeteries
- School grounds
- Brownfield sites
- Roadside verges
- Parks and amenity area
- Allotments and gardens
- Grayling butterfly
- Dingey Skipper

Some members of the group felt that they worked on “rural “habitats located in urban areas such as woodland and that they found it harder to contribute to the urban Haps because they ere managed by other people in local authorities and these areas were not part of their job so it was hardier for them to find time or to justify time working on them.

It was also noted that the experience members of the group had in managing more rural habitats was invaluable experience in managing other habitats for biodiversity such as churchyards or school ground

The NERC Biodiversity Act was discussed and this was felt to be a valuable tool in persuading and encouraging public authorities in managing their green infrastructure more sensitively.

Brownfield HAP

INCA (Robert Woods) is the plan lead for Brownfield sites. Geoff and Robert will be working to write new smart targets and actions for this plan. Progress will be reported at the next meeting by Geoff

Parks and amenity land HAP

With so many local authorities seeking green flag and green pennant status (that has a biodiversity element) it was felt that there was scope to reinvigorate this HAP. It was thought that Jim Moody of Middlesbrough Parks and Countryside would be a good champion and plan lead because he has shown a real commitment to bringing biodiversity into Middlesbrough’s parks and through his role as a green flag judge, he has many contacts in other local authorities. Action-. Sue, Francine and Sam to meet with Jim to take forward

School Grounds HAP

Although it is not envisaged that this group will be setting up school projects there is a lot going on in Tees Valley with initiatives such as Eco schools and work by Tees Forest, MEC, Groundwork and Tees Valley Wildlife Trust that should be quantified through the BAP process. Steve Ashton was suggested as a plan lead. Action: Sue to discuss and review plan with Steve report back to next meeting for views and feedback.

Roadside verges HAP

Considered to be a good plan to work on as good tie in with NERC duty and some good successful pilot work by Redcar and Cleveland Council. Stockton Council has expressed an interest and we discussed opportunities in Middlesbrough for the Parkway which is managed by Highways Authority. Andrea volunteered to be plan lead with support from Sue and Jo. Action. Andrea, Sue and Jo to meet and present ideas to next meeting.

The Jewish Prayer house was felt to be a good venue but a little more heating was needed.

The next meeting will be on 23rd January at 2pm