

BIODIVERSITY, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND CENTRAL GOVERNMENT in Lancashire – THE LINKS IN THE CHAIN

Version 3d, 30th Sept 2011

“In the past we have undervalued what our natural environment gives us. This White Paper changes that, because we cannot afford to make the same mistakes again. We can all gain from the economic, social, and health benefits nature gives us, but we need to recognise that if we withdraw something from Mother Nature’s Bank, we’ve got to put something back in to ensure that the environment has a healthy balance and a secure future.”

Rt Hon Caroline Spelman MP, Secretary of State for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, 7th June 2011

Introduction

This paper seeks to explain the various links in the chain of United Kingdom initiatives to deliver biodiversity gains as these relate specifically to the counties of Greater Manchester, Lancashire and Merseyside. A number of initiatives from the current and previous Governments are involved, and the links between these are not always immediately apparent. Definitions of terms are included at the end of the document.

Bringing it all together

Having once been leaders in the field, the stop-start, hand-to-mouth nature of the infrastructure that has hampered biodiversity action in Greater Manchester, Lancashire and Merseyside for many years had left us increasingly behind most of the United Kingdom. To catch up, we have done, are doing and will need to do the following:

We Need To Establish An Efficient Way To Work Out What We’ve Still Got

Though many parts of the UK have well established **Local Biological Record Centres** (LRCs), some dating back to the 19th century, the service once based at Liverpool Museum and covering the then County Palatine of Lancaster and its coastal waters diminished as part of the fall-out from the local government reform of 1974. As a result, for a generation biodiversity data for what are now the three ceremonial counties of Greater Manchester, Lancashire and Merseyside (and the adjacent Irish Sea) became increasingly dispersed across a wide range of agencies, charities and individuals operating across a very variable range of geographical areas and specialisms; and with no locally based overview or sustained and integrated repository or network.

In re-establishing, operating and sustaining fully functional **Local Biological Record Centres** or Networks for Greater Manchester, Lancashire and Merseyside we need to encourage organisations and individuals recording data on wildlife and wildlife habitats in and around the three counties to submit past, present and future data; and then integrate it with the established **National Biodiversity Network**.

The Wildlife Trust has worked in partnership with Lancashire County Council, district and unitary authorities, Natural England and other partners to attempt to remedy some of the consequences of this chronic deficiency before these become unmanageable. This process is underway with the establishment of the [Greater Manchester Local Record Centre](#) (GLRC) (2010), the [Lancashire Natural Environment Network](#) (LERN) (2010) and [Merseyside BioBank](#) (2006).

We Need To Work Out What State It's In And If It's Getting Better Or Worse

We need to determine if the wildlife habitats identified by the UK and Greater Manchester, Lancashire and North Merseyside biodiversity action planning processes as internationally, nationally and/or locally significant are expanding or contracting in area and improving or declining in quality. We also need to determine if the species identified as significant in each of the counties are expanding or contracting in distribution and increasing or decreasing in abundance.

Although as much as 40% by area or number may lie outside these, a majority of the best habitats and most significant populations of species are contained, or are assumed still to be contained, in sites identified at some time in the past thirty years as of international, national and/or local significance for them; namely Ramsar Sites, Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protection Areas, Sites of Special Scientific Interest, and Local Sites (*sensu* Defra) for wildlife and for geo-diversity.

Reports from Natural England, published in June 2011, indicate that:

In **Lancashire** about 66% of SSSI by area is classed as in favourable condition and 34% is unfavourable condition but currently recovering. The remainder is unfavourable with no change or getting worse. None has been destroyed since the previous assessment.

Click [here](#) for more detail.

Local Wildlife Sites are defined areas selected locally for their substantive nature conservation value. Their selection takes into consideration the most important, distinctive and threatened species and habitats within a national and local context, making them some of our most valuable coastal, rural and urban wildlife areas. Although 'Local Wildlife Site' is the term in use nationally, for historical reasons in **Greater Manchester** the sites are known as "**Sites of Biological Importance**" and in **Lancashire** as "**Biological Heritage Sites**". In **North Merseyside** the national term, '**Local Wildlife Sites**' has been adopted.

There are parallel county systems of **Local Geo-diversity Sites** for areas of substantive geological or geo-morphological value.

The UK Government publication **Local Sites, Guidance on their Identification, Selection & Management (PB 11684)** may be downloaded from:

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/rural/documents/protected/localsites.pdf>

More information on **Lancashire's** 'Biological Heritage Site' system may be found at: <http://www.lancashire.gov.uk/environment/ecology/bhs.asp>. This includes details of the site selection guidelines.

More information on **Lancashire's** 'Geological Heritage Site' system may be found at: <http://www.lancashirerigs.org.uk/index.asp?pid=21>.

Monitoring the condition of the internationally and nationally important sites is the responsibility of **Natural England**.

Monitoring of **Lancashire's** Local Sites (including those in Blackburn with Darwen and Blackpool boroughs) is the responsibility of the **Lancashire Biological Heritage Sites Partnership**, serviced by local government.

Responsibility for monitoring was reinforced by published **Defra Guidance** on "Local Sites", the **Section 40** duty of the **Natural Environment & Rural Communities Act 2006** and, briefly, by the adoption of **National Indicator 197** on Improved Local Biodiversity – now abolished but replaced by the near identical **Single Data Set** item **160.00**.

National Indicator (NI) 197 ("*Improving Local Biodiversity*"), promoted by the previous UK Government, had been adopted as a "stretch target" in the Lancashire Local Area Agreement, though not by the two Lancashire unitary authority LAAs or by any of those in Greater Manchester or Merseyside. It assessed the implementation of active conservation management of Local Sites as a proportion of all Local Sites where active conservation management had taken place up to five years prior to the reporting date.

In the short period of NI 197's adoption as a stretch target in administrative **Lancashire** the amount of Local Wildlife Site land in positive management increased from 15% to over 23%. Collated data for **Blackburn with Darwen Borough** and **Blackpool Borough** should also be available.

In **Greater Manchester**, NI197 has equated to a 2% increase target across the former metropolitan county.

For **Merseyside with Halton**, increase from 29.4% to 28.2%.

All National Indicators have now been abolished along with local stretch targets. HM Government has introduced a shorter [Single Data List](#) for all local governments in England to provide to it. Item **160.00** on that list is, "*Local nature conservation / biodiversity*", defined as "*Proportion of Local Sites where positive conservation management is being achieved*". It effectively replaces NI 197.

The recent (June 2011) Natural Environment White Paper has a target (2.9) for 90% of UK Priority Habitats to be in positive management. However, without a local

“stretch” target, 160.00 requires local authorities to monitor what percentage of sites happen to receive Higher Level Stewardship and/or England Woodland Grant Scheme or otherwise be in “positive management” without there being, necessarily, any local arrangements in place to advise their owners and managers or to target uptake.

We Need To Make It Better And Keep It That Way

We need to direct effort and resources to sustaining locations identified as Lancashire’s key habitats and species. These then need to be linked in the landscape to allow the inevitable change and movement of species and habitats that will result, directly and indirectly, from climate change.

This can be done partly through the strategic acquisition and management of **nature reserves**, including statutory Local Nature Reserves, the **development control** process, the targeting of grant aid – particularly Natural England’s **Environmental Stewardship** and the Forestry Commissions’ **England Woodland Grant Scheme**, the retention, improvement and provision of **green infrastructure**, and the restoration of **ecological networks** and **ecosystem services** in partnership with other local authorities, government agencies, and the business and voluntary sectors. The process has been addressed specifically by the recently published “**Lawton Review**” and followed up by HM Government in last month’s **Natural Environment White Paper** – see below.

HM Government’s **Natural Environment White Paper** was published on 7th June 2011. The White Paper itself and specific briefing notes for key sectors, including local government, may be downloaded from <http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/natural/whitepaper>.

The three proposals in the White Paper that have the potential to affect local authorities most immediately are those on Local Nature Partnerships, Nature Improvement Areas and Biodiversity Offsetting.

Local Nature Partnerships

HM Government wants existing environmental partnerships to join up and integrate action to achieve multiple benefits – for example, on water and air quality, biodiversity, climate change adaptation and provision of green infrastructure – and will provide £1 million in 2011/12 to build capacity for ‘Local Nature Partnerships’.

Nature Improvement Areas

HM Government will encourage local partnerships to create new ‘Nature Improvement Areas’ (NIAs) where there are significant opportunities to enhance and reconnect nature. To ‘inspire action’ it will set up a competition to identify twelve initial areas across England and will provide £7.5 million to support this.

Biodiversity Offsetting

HM Government expects the planning system “to contribute to our objective of no net loss of biodiversity as part of sustainable development. For example, we are inviting local authorities to pilot a new approach to biodiversity offsetting, working with developers to deliver compensation for unavoidable habitat loss”.

Some work on developing ecological frameworks and green infrastructure strategies and action plans has been undertaken in our three county areas. All are intended to inform the Local Development Framework processes.

Ecological Frameworks

In **Greater Manchester** a [study](#) has been undertaken by the Greater Manchester Ecology Unit in conjunction with the Urban Nature Research Team from the University of Salford and the University of Manchester to establish an **ecological framework** for the whole of Greater Manchester, including all urban areas as well as open land/countryside. It seeks to address the decline of species diversity in the wider environment, over and above ‘protected sites’. In doing so it aims also to maintain and improve ‘day-to-day’ contact with the natural environment where people live and improve people’s ‘quality of life’.

In **Lancashire**, although some pilot projects have been undertaken by the County Council on very local areas no integrated ecological framework has yet been developed.

In **Merseyside with Halton** a **Liverpool City Region Ecological Framework** identifies: the strategic ecological resources of the Liverpool City Region including Core Biodiversity Areas (CBAs) - internationally, nationally and locally important sites plus Habitats of Principal Conservation Importance; a Search Area for possible habitat expansion - a 50m zone around CBAs where habitat creation and expansion will be most effective at reducing fragmentation; a Connectivity Indicator - a 100m zone around CBAs, which provides a basis for identifying distinctive Biodiversity Action Zones (BAZs) to a district level; Linear Features - rivers and transport networks which provide connectivity. The LCR Ecological Framework forms part of the evidence base for the district’s Local Development Frameworks.

Profiles of the City Region districts identify strategically important features such as key wildlife corridors that can play a role in enabling wildlife to adapt to climate change. At a district level, a more locally focused framework provides guidance within BAZs. Each BAZ has a profile that sets out priorities and actions for that area in order to increase habitat quality. The profile identifies areas where new habitat should be created and what needs to be protected in order to maintain a functioning ecological framework within the district.

An interactive map is available at:

<http://seftonmaps.sefton.gov.uk/EcoFramework/html/EcologicalFramework.html>

Green Infrastructure Networks

In **Greater Manchester**, the [Greater Manchester Green Infrastructure Project](#) has been/is being undertaken in 4 phases.

In **Lancashire** (including the two unitary authorities), a [Lancashire Green Infrastructure Strategy](#) and **Action Plan** was developed by a partnership under the leadership of the former Lancashire Economic Partnership (LEP). The latter was absorbed into Lancashire County Council in 2010. Due to recent structural and economic uncertainties a means has not yet been identified to take the plan forward to implementation.

In **Merseyside** with Halton, a [Liverpool City Region Green Infrastructure Framework](#) is being developed. The Ecological Framework is one of the key data sets underpinning the Green Infrastructure Framework

We Need To Keep Track Of What Is Being Done By Whom And To What Effect

Action to restore and sustain Lancashire's biodiversity should be delivered in accordance with the Lancashire Biodiversity Action Plan. This sets out the priorities for action locally and linking to national targets. It enables all organisation to act within a framework to provide best use of resources, target priority action, and help develop added benefit from partnership working.

The broad range of actions required lead to the need for a partnership approach, with a level of coordination to ensure value and added benefits from joint working. This also allows gaps in delivery to be pursued, funding developed and future project to develop. The Lancashire Biodiversity Manager post was originally supported with DEFRA funding and matched by local authority contributions through Lancashire's Natural Environment Service. The future of this post is unsecure post March 2012, though there is still a clear need for co-ordination and project development. This is especially true in light of Local Nature Partnerships, Nature Improvement Areas and the need to develop the ecological network in Lancashire, as set out as priorities in [Natural Environment White Paper](#) and [England Biodiversity Strategy](#).

The new challenges facing Lancashire's Biodiversity Partnership, which manages the local BAP, its partnership, and provides technical expertise on related issues, come from four main elements:

1. Developing landscape-scale integrated delivery and a coherent and resilient ecological network in Lancashire
2. Providing input and technical expertise to the development of Lancashire's Local Nature Partnership
3. To support the advice and/or delivery needs linked to Local Authorities, Local Wildlife Site system and the Local Record Centre.

*D. Dunlop, [updated sept 2011 by Tim Graham]
The Wildlife Trust for Lancashire, Manchester & North Merseyside,
July 2011*

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Natural Environment & Rural Communities ('NERC') Act 2006: Section 40 Duty

Local authorities in Greater Manchester, Lancashire and North Merseyside have a key role to play in the conservation of biodiversity. This is now recognised and formalised within Section 40 of the Natural Environment & Rural Communities Act 2006. This states that: *“Every public body must, in exercising its functions, have regard, so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity”*.

UK Government 'Guidance For Local Authorities On Implementing The Biodiversity Duty' may be downloaded from:

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/publications/2011/03/30/pb12584-biodiversity-duty>.

Biodiversity Action Plans - United Kingdom, and Greater Manchester, Lancashire and North Merseyside

The United Kingdom's approach to biodiversity conservation recognises the need to prioritise resources. There are currently two key elements to this approach:

- a) Integrating biodiversity into public plans, policies and programmes; and
- b) Encouraging conservation action through Biodiversity Action Plans (BAPs) for priority species and habitats at national and local levels.

Species and habitats have been assessed at a UK level against objective criteria including rarity and declining status. The species and habitats identified are therefore UK priorities for conservation action. UK BAPs have been produced that set out clear targets and actions for the conservation of these species and habitats. They provide valuable guidance on the action needed and a vital framework for monitoring progress. For more information see www.ukbap.org.uk.

Local Biodiversity Action Plans (LBAPs) have been produced to complement the UKBAPs and assist with the delivery of specific targets. Like others in the UK, these are based on a partnership approach with local authorities playing a key role in plan development and delivery. The three Local BAPs identify key local contributions to national targets as well as targets and actions for species or habitats of local distinctiveness.

For more information see the the **Lancashire Biodiversity Partnership's** web site at www.lancspartners.org/lbap.

Section 74 of the **Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000** provides information on priority habitats and species in England.

Further guidance on biodiversity priorities has become available through revised lists of species and habitats of principal importance for biodiversity published by central Government under **section 41** of the **Natural Environment & Rural Communities Act 2006**. Those for England may be viewed through:

<http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/conservation/biodiversity/protectandmanage/habsandspeciesimportance.aspx>

No current list of these, sifted for species and habitats specific to individual districts and/or counties, has been published for Greater Manchester, Lancashire or North Merseyside. A list for Lancashire did exist before the abolition of structure plans, but that is now significantly out-of-date.

The UK and Local BAPs together provide a means of prioritising action for local and public authorities. Where there are opportunities to take appropriate and effective action for national priorities these should be taken.

Single Data List Reference 160.00 *Local nature conservation/biodiversity* (Replacing National Indicator 197 *Improved Local Biodiversity*):

National Indicator 197, promoted by the previous UK Government to assess improvements in local biodiversity, had been adopted as a “stretch target” in the Lancashire Local Area Agreement, though not by the two Lancashire unitary authorities or by any of those in Greater Manchester or Merseyside. It assessed the implementation of active conservation management of Local Sites as a proportion of all Local Sites where active conservation management has taken place up to five years prior to the reporting date. In the short period of NI 197’s adoption, the amount of Local Wildlife Site land in positive management in administrative Lancashire increased from 15% to over 23%.

All National Indicators have now been abolished. HM Government has introduced a Single Data List for local government in England to provide to central Government. Item 160.00 on the list is “*Local nature conservation/biodiversity*”.

Defra has highlighted the same indicator in its business plan (page 23) as “*key data, which will be particularly useful to help people to judge the progress of structural reforms*”.

Local Biological Record Centres

Local Biological Record Centres (LRCs) are organisations that have the common objectives of collecting, collating and disseminating a range of environmental information for a given geographical area.

The value of biological records has increased over the past decade and more as planning authorities have to incorporate this environmental information into their decision-making process, and the statutory bodies need to maintain an overview of trends and changes in response to climate change and policy initiatives to improve the quality of cities, towns, countryside and seas. Where LRCs exist and function successfully they are a highly important link in biodiversity data flow, and are often critical in the provision of species and habitat data.

Local authorities have a duty to allow freedom of access to environmental and biodiversity data held by them, or for them, through the *EC Public Access to*

Environmental Information Directive (2003/4/EC) 2003 and the UK Information Regulations, 2004. This duty is often difficult for local authorities to satisfy and the evolving local biological record centres can go a long way to help with delivery.

Established Local Record Centres are now able to link into a National Biodiversity Network (see <http://www.nbn.org.uk>).

Ecological Frameworks

The main mechanisms currently operated through the land use planning system for nature conservation include the identification, designation and protection of sites assessed as being of high nature conservation value and the protection of species considered to be particularly threatened. These mechanisms, although successful in their own right, have not been effective in preventing some significant declines in habitats and species in the wider landscape. National and local policies now require that innovative new approaches to nature conservation be adopted involving habitat creation, repair and maintenance in the wider landscape and the establishment of connections between areas of important habitat. One of these required new approaches is the development of Ecological Frameworks. An Ecological Framework is a spatial model developed using the principles of landscape ecology to inform and guide habitat creation and repair.

Ecosystem services

Ecosystems provide valuable services for people – ‘ecosystem services’. There is no single way of categorising ecosystem services, and they can be described in simple terms as providing:

Resources for basic survival, such as clean air and water; a contribution to good physical and mental health, for example through access to green spaces, both urban and rural, and genetic resources for medicines; natural processes, such as climate regulation and crop pollination; support for a strong and healthy economy, through raw materials for industry and agriculture, or through tourism and recreation; and social, cultural and educational benefits, and wellbeing and inspiration from interaction with nature.

For further information see the Defra web site at:

<http://ww2.defra.gov.uk/environment/natural/ecosystems-services>.

Lawton Review “*Making Space For Nature: A review of England’s Wildlife Sites and Ecological Network*”

An independent review of England’s wildlife sites and ecological network was launched in September 2009. The review considered whether England’s collection of wildlife areas (both the legally protected areas and others) represents a coherent and robust ecological network that will be capable of responding to the challenges of climate change and other pressures. The review was chaired by Professor Sir John Lawton, who was supported by a panel of 14 members.

The Panel reported to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and Defra published the Review, called “*Making Space for Nature*”, on the 24 September 2010.

- [Making space for nature](#) (PDF 1.2MB)

Recommendation 2 in the Lawton Review’s report is that:

“Planning policy and practice should:

- *continue to provide the strongest protection to internationally important sites and strong protection from inappropriate development to SSSIs.*
- *provide greater protection to other priority habitats and features that form part of ecological networks, particularly Local Wildlife Sites, ancient woodland and other priority BAP habitats.”*

Defra identified one of its priorities as “*acting on the conclusion of Prof Sir John Lawton’s review of England’s wildlife and ecological network*”.

United Kingdom National Ecosystem Assessment (UK NEA)

HM Government published the UK Ecosystem Assessment on 2nd June 2011. This is the first analysis of the UK’s natural environment in terms of the benefits it provides to society and continuing economic prosperity. A synthesis of its report is downloadable from the Defra website at <http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/natural/uknea>. It has the following to say in summarising the challenges ahead.

- *Reversing declines in ecosystem services will require the adoption of more resilient ways of managing ecosystems, and a better balance between production and other ecosystem services – one of the major challenges is to increase food production, but with a smaller environmental footprint through sustainable intensification.*
- *Ecosystem services are critically important to our well-being and economic prosperity, but are consistently undervalued in conventional economic analyses and decision making. Contemporary economic and participatory techniques allow us to take into account the monetary and non-monetary values of a wide range of ecosystem services. These techniques need to be adopted in everyday decision-making practice.*
- *Failure to include the valuation of non-market goods in decision making results in a less efficient resource allocation, with negative consequences for social well-being. Recognising the value of ecosystem services would allow the UK to move towards a more sustainable future, in which the benefits of ecosystem services are better realised and more equitably distributed.*
- *Exploring some of the plausible futures open to us shows that there is a huge range of potential outcomes for the state of the nation, its people and its ecosystems in the coming decades. Decisions that we all make now and in the immediate future will have a major impact on these outcomes.*

The Natural Choice: securing the value of nature; Natural Environment White Paper; HM Government

HM Government responded to the Lawton Review and the UK NEA in its Natural Environment White Paper which was published on 7th June 2011. The White Paper and specific briefing notes for key sectors, including local government, may be downloaded from <http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/natural/whitepaper>.

The three proposals in the White Paper that have the potential to affect local authorities most immediately are those on Local Nature Partnerships, Nature Improvement Areas and Biodiversity Offsetting. See above for details.

D. Dunlop, The Wildlife Trust for Lancashire, Manchester & North Merseyside,
July 2011