

Natural Environment Service

Annual Forum, 18th November 2011, 10.00-12.30

The Barn, Bamber Bridge, Preston, PR5 6BY

1. **Attendees:** Chris Binney (Pendle BC), Alison Boden (Wyre BC), Nik Bruce (Lancashire CC), Simon Colderley (LWT), James Dalglish (Rossendale BC), David Dunlop (LWT), Tim Graham (Lancashire's Biodiversity Partnership), Zoe Harding (South Ribble BC), Rachael Hulme (Chorley BC), Rebecca Jackson-Pitt (Natural England), Gwen Kinloch (Blackburn with Darwen BC), John Lamb (LWT), Tim Mitcham (LWT), Andrew Mullaney (Lancashire CC), Colin Peacock (Association of Parish Councils) and Keith Williams (GeoLancashire).

Apologies: Dominic Carr (West Lancashire DC), Phillipa Clarke (Wyre BC), Matt Kelly (Preston City Council), John Halton (Pendle BC), David McGrath (Blackpool BC - sick leave), David Penney (Pendle LSP), Tamzin Percival (Rossendale BC), David Thow (Wyre BC), John Wells (Lancashire Environment Forum) and Jill Wesolowski (Lancaster City Council - maternity leave).

2. **NES Review 2009-11** (John Lamb) - powerpoint circulated.

NI197 (number of Local Sites in positive management): Baseline:15% of sites in 2008-9. Target: 3% annual increase, i.e. to 21% by Oct 2011. Outcome: 26.3% (not including sites brought into positive management following site survey and report production in 2011) therefore exceeding the target by at least 2.3% (=17 sites).

Lancashire environment Record Network (LeRN): Number of records increased from 681,000 to 1,206,096. Launched during the Bioblitz at Cuerden in August 2010. Website: www.lancspartners.org/lern

Local Sites (Biological Heritage Sites and Geodiversity Sites): 144 of the 1,180 BHS surveyed. All but four of the 103 LGS surveyed.

Lancashire's Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP): Involved in strategic consultations such as the Lawton Review, Natural Environment White Paper, England Biodiversity Strategy, Lancashire's Local Nature Partnership and Nature Improvement Areas. Assisted funding bids for the NIAs, Upland Peat Project and West Pennine Moors HLF bid.

3. **The Natural Choice and England Biodiversity Strategy** (Tim Graham)

The 'Lawton Review' of ecological networks produced recommendations that can be summed up as "Better, Bigger, More and Joined". In the UK we failed to meet the Countdown 2010 target of halting the loss of biodiversity. At Nagoya, the government signed up to Countdown 2020 and a consultation documented on the Natural Environment led to the White Paper entitled 'Natural Choices'. A new England Biodiversity Strategy was published in August 2011 and targets include 200,000 hectares of new habitat creation, 17% of land being managed for nature conservation and restoring 15% of land

as a contribution to climate change adaptation. The draft National Planning Policy Framework includes provision for a new Greenspace designation. A Rio+20 conference is to be held in 2012.

4. Project Forecast & future work priorities

4.1 Lancashire's Biodiversity Action Plan (Tim Graham) - powerpoint circulated.

Various changes going on from a change in national policy with key priority projects being developed or continuation sought.

- The Natural Choice and Biodiversity 2020 setting out changing ambitions for the sector
- Local Nature Partnerships and Nature Improvement Areas as priorities
- Lancashire has a successful bid to Defra Local Nature Partnerships Fund to engage of possible future LNP
- Working on modernising the Lancashire BAP to be fit for purpose for Landscape scale and Ecosystem Approach focus.
- Outlining possibilities for a Lancashire Ecological Framework and where BAP, GI, and landscape ecology can compliment work.
- Lancashire Upland Peat Partnership and development of a Restoration Plan in early 2012 to support wider coordination of funding applications and delivery.
- As well as above priorities, there are pipeline projects through HLF over the West Pennine Moors, Biodiverse Society working with communities to build skills and survey Local Wildlife Sites, and Your Wildlife Corridors. Also pursuing continuation for North west Lowlands Water vole Project, together with priorities for grassland projects within North Lancashire, Forest of Bowland AONB and East Lancashire (linking in with Forever Meadows continuation).
- Linking in with priorities for LERN and BHS system – key gaps linked to NNIS and management needs of BHS sites, Lancashire Collections and Fleetwood Project, BHS woodland, restoration and wood-fuel potential projects.

4.2 Biological Heritage Sites, BHS Review and Single Data List (Andrew Mullaney)

Despite the recent cuts, Lancashire's Environment Directorate will continue to be the 4th largest in England. Two of the three staff employed for NI197 work have been retained and will spend 2/3 of the time working on planning applications and 1/3 on maintaining the BHS system, annual review and monitoring the condition and management of BHS through applications for Higher Level Stewardship and english woodland grant scheme, which will feed into reporting on Single Data List 160.

4.3 GeoLancashire (Keith Williams)

There are 2,400 geological Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in England, based on the Geological Conservation Review. There are 50 geological sites groups plus 10 Geology Trusts, all run by volunteers. Lancashire currently has 16 geological SSSIs and 93 GeoDiversity Sites. Through the NI197 process all but four of the 103 sites were assessed, which resulted in nine sites being denotified, four combined into two and four new sites identified.

Future plans include identifying more 'landscape' sites, promotion of geological conservation through "Geo Conservation Everywhere", a Ribble Way Geo Trail, post graduate research at Brockholes and the Building Stones Project.

4.4 **LeRN, Lancashire environment Record Network** (Nik Bruce)

The local authorities have been consulted over GIS, data collection and access to information. Factors such as remote working, limited access to computers with GIS has led to possible ways forward such as free GIS viewers but there is no simple universal solution and each situation will need to be viewed on a case by case basis.

Future plans include Lancashire profile (an environmental section on the LCC website), Local Transport activities being kept up to date in light of changes in the Habitat Regulations and working with local authorities on the Local Development Frameworks (LDF), especially impact of land use allocations on biodiversity (habitats, sites and species) and protecting sites through the LDF process (including District sites).

4.5 **Single Data List 160.01: Local nature conservation/biodiversity** (John Lamb)

As previously explained, LCC will continue to maintain the BHS system and report on SDL 160.01 in response to consultations over planning applications, Higher Stewardship Schemes and English woodland grant schemes. However, if local authorities want proactive work to be carried out (landowner liaison, site survey, management recommendations and follow-up) then the Wildlife Trust is able to offer this as an optional additional extra to the NES at a rate of £250 per hectare (i.e. the average rate that was achieved over 2.5 years of NI197 work).

4.6 **NES Financial update** (Tim Mitcham)

The NI197 work was largely funded by a grant from the Lancashire Partnership, topped up by an amount in the NES ask. The LeRN funding has been reduced and the BAP funding has stopped but can continue with existing funds until the end of March 2012. GeoLancashire will continue to be run by volunteers but a small amount is needed and the BHS system is being maintained by LCC.

When the agenda and covering letter were sent out it was anticipated that the NES ask would be in the region of £1,500 per local authority but a review of the overall budget has meant that the service needs to continue to ask for a similar amount to that of the past two years, i.e. £3,500 and slightly more for the two unitary authorities. This would cover the 18 month period, October 2011 to March 2012.

A letter will be sent to local authority contacts in the very near future and the deadline for the ask will be mid-December 2011.

5. **Relationship between the NES and the Local Nature Partnership (LNP)** (Tim Mitcham)

The Lancashire LNP funding bid was successful and will cover the transition of the Lancashire Environment Forum into the LNP. A meeting of LEF is to take place in December 2011 and workshops involving partners are scheduled for January/February 2012 with draft recommendations available in February and finalised by the end of March 2012. It is envisaged that resources will be

needed to fund the LNP to move forward and to work with and alongside the Lancashire Enterprise Partnership (LEP).

The work of the NES underpins the work of the LNP and the relationship of the two will need to be investigated as part of the consultation process.

6. Questions and discussion

It was pointed out that there are 200 Parishes in Lancashire and there will be an average of six BHS per parish. Local people could get involved in assessing the status and condition of Local Sites if they knew where they were and had some training. In addition, a meadows project in the Forest of Bowland AONB is looking at the involvement of volunteers.

Some sites may be in positive conservation management but were not looked at by the NI197 team. There should be a way of capturing this information and engaging with volunteers who are keen to get involved.

District sites form part of the network of sites, corridors and stepping stones and there is a need for their functions to be recognised in the LDF and be linked to public access and health benefits. It was suggested that a workshop on the mapping of the network through the LDF process be held in the new year.

The link between greenspaces and gardens was raised - that each supports the other and there is an important relationship between the two (e.g. butterflies and frogs).

The Barrow NIA bid showed that 57% of the area is nature reserve and made an important link between greenspace and social cohesion of the different communities of people that have settled there over time.

The Trust's "Biodiverse Society" bid to HLF includes volunteers being involved in Local Sites and leading guided walks etc. The stage 1 bid was unsuccessful but with a request to be resubmitted. The draft is almost ready and will be circulated very soon.

It was pointed out that there is no reference to the NES via a websearch, including google. It was thought that a gateway would be useful and could direct queries to the BAP, LERN and GeoLancashire websites as well as being signposted on the LCC and LWT websites.

The following handouts were circulated:

Biodiversity, local government and central government in Lancashire - the links in the chain.
Version 3d, 30th Sept 2011.

Benefits of the NES to local authority areas (table)

Biodiversity 2020: Notes on the Biodiversity Strategy

Engagement over a Lancashire LNP

Reference was made to a handout produced by the Association of Local Government Ecologists (ALGE) and the National Biodiversity Network (NBN) and a joint Northwest Record Centre paper. Details to be provided.

7. NES Annual Forum: 16th or 23rd November 2012