

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

Introduction

This paper seeks to explain the various links in the chain of UK initiatives to deliver biodiversity as these relate specifically to Lancashire County. As a number of Government initiatives 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 Lancashire for many years is leaving us increasingly behind most of the United Kingdom. If we are to catch up we need to do the following:

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

We need to re-establish and operate a fully functional Biological Record Centre or Network for Lancashire; we need to encourage organisations and individuals recording data on wildlife and wildlife habitats in and around Lancashire to submit past, present and future data to it; and we need to integrate it with the established National Biodiversity Network.

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 Lancashire Biodiversity Action Planning processes as internationally, nationally and/or locally significant in the county and its districts are expanding or contracting in area and improving or declining in quality. We also need to determine if the species identified as significant in the county are expanding or contracting in distribution and increasing or decreasing in abundance.

By and large these habitats and 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, Biological Heritage Sites and Geological Heritage Sites.

Monitoring the condition of the international and national sites is within the purview of Natural England.

Monitoring the condition of the Lancashire Biological Heritage Sites and Geological Heritage Sites comes within the purview of the Lancashire Biological Heritage Sites Partnership, serviced by local government; a responsibility recently reinforced by published Defra Guidance on "Local Sites", the Section 40 duty of the NERC Act 2006, and the adoption of National Indicator 197 on Improved Local Biodiversity.

We Need To Make It Better And Keep It That Way

We need to direct effort and resource to sustaining locations identified as important for Lancashire's significant habitats and species and linking these in the landscape to allow necessary change and movement resulting, directly and indirectly, from climate change. This can be done through the 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 – and the restoration of ecosystem services in partnership with other local authorities, government agencies, and the business and voluntary sectors.

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. Projects delivering targets in this plan should be reported to the Lancashire Biodiversity Action Plan Manager for input into the *UK Biodiversity Action Recording Scheme* (BARS). For this to happen there needs to be such a manager in

post. In Lancashire, funding for such a post has almost run out on two occasions since its establishment (on a three-year, project-funded basis) in 2002.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

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

Local authorities in Lancashire 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 (NERC) 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/wildlife-countryside/pdfs/biodiversity/la-guid-english.pdf>.

Biodiversity Action Plans - United Kingdom and Lancashire

The United Kingdom’s approach to biodiversity conservation recognises the need to prioritise resources. There are 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. 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. Our LBAP is the Lancashire Biodiversity Action Plan (Lancs. BAP). Like others in the UK, this is based on a partnership approach – the Lancashire Biodiversity Partnership - with local authorities often playing a key role in plan development and delivery. The Lancs. BAP identifies key local contributions to national targets as well as targets and actions for species or habitats of local distinctiveness. For more information see the *Lancashire Biodiversity Partnership’s* web site at www.lancspartners.org/lbap.

The UK and Lancs. 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.

Section 74 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 provides information on priority habitats and species. A list of these sifted for species and habitats specific to individual districts of Lancashire County may be viewed in Appendix 5 of the Lancashire Joint Structure Plan Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) document, '*Landscape and Heritage*', at: www.lancashire.gov.uk/corporate/web/view.asp?siteid=3654&pageid=11650&e=e.

Since the adoption of the Landscape & Heritage SPD, 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 NERC Act 2006. Those for England may be viewed through <http://www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-countryside/biodiversity/sect41-nerc.htm>.

Local Sites (Biodiversity and Geo-diversity)

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, regional 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, in Lancashire County the sites are known, for historical reasons, as “**Biological Heritage Sites**”.

There is a parallel system of Local Geo-diversity Sites for areas of substantive geological or geo-morphological value. In Lancashire County these are known as “**Geological Heritage Sites**”.

The UK Government publication *Local Sites, Guidance on their Identification, Selection & Management* (PB 11684) may be downloaded from: <http://www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-countryside/ewd/local-sites/localsites.pdf>.

More information on Lancashire’s own ‘Biological Heritage Site’ system may be found at: <http://www.lancashire.gov.uk/environment/ecology/bhs.asp>.

More information on Lancashire’s ‘Geological Heritage Site’ system may be found through: <http://www.lancashire.gov.uk/environment/ecology/ghs.asp>.

National Indicator 197: Improved Local Biodiversity

This indicator, promoted by the UK Government to assess improvements in local biodiversity, has been adopted as a “stretch target” in the Lancashire Local Area Agreement. It assesses 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.

Detailed rationale and definitions may be found at the Communities & Local Government web site at: <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/localgovernment/pdf/735143.pdf>. The relevant section is on pages 142-144.

Local Biological Record Centres

Local Records 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 Local Biological Record Centres (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.

Though many parts of the UK have well established LRCs, Lancashire’s was lost as part of the fall out from the local government reform of 1974. As a result, for a generation biodiversity data for the county has become 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 integrated repository or network.

The Wildlife Trust is working in partnership with Natural England and Lancashire County Council to attempt to remedy some of the consequences of this chronic deficiency before these become unmanageable.

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 Lancashire LRC 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>)

For background information see Natural England's 2007 publication *Review Of Local Records Centres in the United Kingdom*. This may be downloaded at: <http://naturalengland.communisis.com/naturalenglandshop/docs/nerr004.pdf>.

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://www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-countryside/natres/dea.htm>.

D. Dunlop, The Wildlife Trust for Lancashire, Manchester & North Merseyside, 2008