

## LANCASHIRE BAP TEMPLATE FOR HABITAT ACTION PLANS

### RAILWAY SIDINGS & DISUSED RAILWAYS

(Line Drawing of Habitat)

#### **Summary**

Disused railway lines in Lancashire are of variable quality and character. They can act as wildlife corridors and public walkways or cycleways with the most biodiverse supporting a mosaic of species-rich grassland, scrub and wetland. Active railway lines can also provide a species-rich habitat, especially in sidings and embankments

Some of the sites have been identified as Biological Heritage Sites, mostly on disused railway lines.

Current factors affecting this habitat include development, neglect, recreational pressure and fragmentation and isolation.

#### **Action Plan Aim**

**To assess, monitor and improve the biodiversity of railway sidings and disused railways.**

#### **Habitat Description**

Disused railway lines can act as wildlife corridors and public walkways and cycleways, often through intensively managed farmland or heavily built-up areas.

The length of disused railway line that occurs within Lancashire is not recorded. However, it is of variable quality and character. The most biodiverse stretches are likely to be those supporting a mosaic of species-rich grassland, scrub and wetland, particularly when located within a cutting or upon a raised embankment (thereby creating a wider wildlife feature). The best known examples include Preston Junction (South Ribble Borough), and Haskayne Cutting (West Lancashire District). These have been identified as Biological Heritage Sites. Most of Preston Junction has also been designated as a Local Nature Reserve. The Wildlife Trust manages most of Haskayne Cutting as a nature reserve under licence from United Utilities plc. Informal access may exist on some stretches of disused railway, though many are private. A few stretches have minimal nature conservation value because they have become

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completely scrubbed over or are excessively grazed. Some have been built over or been completely absorbed into agricultural land.

Much apparently species-rich habitat is associated with active railway lines, especially sidings, embankments and “trapped” land between larger junctions. Health and safety issues mean that these are inaccessible except by special arrangement with the owner and or manager, usually Network Rail.

#### **National Status**

Unknown.

#### **Regional Status**

Unknown.

#### **Local Status**

Preston Junction BHS, Colne Fulridge Railway BHS, Hayskayne Cutting BHS, Fleetwood Marsh LNR, Withnell LNR

#### **Current factors affecting the habitat**

Factors affecting this habitat are:

- Development
- Neglect
- Unsympathetic landscaping or restoration of disused railway sidings
- Fragmentation and isolation
- Recreational pressure

#### ***Development***

Disused railway sidings fall into the category of previously developed land or brown-field land, which is seen as a more desirable location for development than undeveloped or green-field land.

#### ***Neglect***

Neglect can lead to substantial encroachment of scrub, bramble, rank grassland and even secondary woodland, which can reduce biodiversity if species-rich grassland, ruderal habitats or open wetland become too diminished as a result (though the same process can help create valuable habitat mosaics, where managed). All sites are likely to need some management to maintain their value in the long-term, and some would benefit from the creation of wetlands and features such as humps, hollows and small cliffs.

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***Unsympathetic landscaping or restoration of disused railway sidings***

Current planning procedure should help to ensure restoration plans include nature conservation issues as a major consideration. However, practices such as regular mowing, tree planting and hard surfacing may reduce the biodiversity resource of some sites. Resurfacing of the middle of disused railways can be damaging to stretches of species-rich grasslands and important invertebrate populations. Encouraging natural regeneration of vegetation directly upon subsoil or spoil, and allowing human trampling pressure to maintain pathways along desire lines can be better for species diversity than using fertile top-soil, artificial seed mixtures or artificial surfacing. Tree-planting may cause damage where open, floristically-rich habitats or wetlands are more desirable. Resumption of active railway services can lead to impact from some of the other factors identified in this section. Restoration of steam railway services also introduces an increased risk of fire damage.

***Fragmentation and isolation***

Many species using these sites are highly mobile (e.g. plants with wind-dispersed seeds), and some isolation can promote useful variation between sites. Isolated sites may also act as refuges for scarce, less mobile species that have disappeared from the surrounding countryside and townscape. However, small sites may only be able to support weak and vulnerable populations of these species. The quality of surrounding land may also be crucial as mobile animal species may use surrounding farmland, parks and garden habitats (e.g. hedges and flowery margins) or nearby woodlands for foraging.

***Recreational Pressure***

Light disturbance benefits early successional habitats and can increase habitat diversity. However, it can occasionally be a problem for birds, and excessive dog-fouling can promote species-poor grassland by enriching the soil. Some sites may suffer from regular arson, fly tipping and/or anti-social behaviour. This could result in sites losing popularity with local residents and politicians and increased vulnerability to redevelopment pressures.

**Important Sites**

Burscough North West Curve, West Lancashire District BHS 41SW02;  
Chapel Lane Cuttings, Hoghton, Chorley Borough BHS 62NW08 (*active line*);  
Disused Railway, Much Hoole, South Ribble Borough BHS 42SE01;  
Haskayne Cutting, West Lancashire District BHS 30NE01 - part TWT nature reserve;  
Preston Junction LNR and Adjacent Habitats, Penwortham/Lostock Hall, South Ribble Borough - part BHS 52NW08;  
Rufford Railway Hollows, West Lancashire District BHS 41NE02;  
St. Anne's Old Links Golf Course and Blackpool South Railway Line, Lytham St Annes, Fylde Borough BHS 33SW02 (*active line*);

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Withnell LNR, Withnell, Chorley Borough  
Colne to Skipton line

#### **Current Action / Mechanisms**

- *Policy*

Network Rail Biodiversity Action Plan (in preparation, building on the former Railtrack BAP)

- *Site Safeguard*

No sites have been identified as biological SSSI.

Some sites have been identified as BHS, the vast majority on disused railway lines.

- *Land Management*

Most of Haskayne Cutting is managed by The Wildlife Trust as a nature reserve. Preston Junction LNR is managed by Lancashire County Council Countryside Service.

Withnell LNR is managed by Chorley Borough Council.

- *Advisory*

No specific measures are or have been underway.

In the recent past, owners and managers of railway sidings and disused railways identified as BHS have been offered general advice as part of the wider brief of the Biological Heritage Sites Project.

- *Research and Monitoring*

None is underway outside of nature reserves.

- *Public Relations*

None is underway outside of nature reserves.

#### **Indicators of Habitat Quality**

- supporting a mosaic of species-rich grassland, scrub and wetland
- located within a cutting or upon a raised embankment (thereby creating a wider wildlife feature)

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#### Habitat Targets

<b>Target</b>	<b>Area</b>	<b>Measure</b>	<b>Timescale</b>
Assess the quantity and quality of the resource by 2010	Lancashire	Quantity and quality assessed	2010
Protect and, where practicable, enhance existing biodiversity resource	Lancashire	Resource protected and where practicable enhanced	2012
Raise awareness of the value of the habitat	Lancashire	Awareness raised	Ongoing

#### Proposed Actions

<b>Action (priority: H, M, L)</b>	<b>Area</b>	<b>Measure / Milestone</b>	<b>Partners</b>	<b>Timescale</b>
<b><i>Research and monitoring</i></b>				
Locate, compile and analyse existing datasets <b>(H)</b>	Lancashire	Existing data collated.	LBRC, LCC, TWT, NE, NHSS	2010
Deliver survey or resurvey as necessary <b>(M)</b>	Lancashire	100% railway sidings and disused railways surveyed.	LBRC, LCC, TWT, NE, Network Rail	2012
<b><i>Site safeguard and monitoring</i></b>				
Identify and liaise with owners & managers <b>(H)</b>	Lancashire	100% of site landowners identified and contacted.	TWT, LCC, LAS, Network Rail	2010
<b><i>Habitat protection and management</i></b>				
Ensure LA policy protects biodiversity rich railway sidings and disused railways. <b>(M)</b>	Lancashire	Planning policies produced which take account of biodiversity rich railway sidings and disused railways.	LA's	2012
<b><i>Advisory</i></b>				
Advise owners and managers	Lancashire	100% land owners and	LCC, TWT, NE, Chorley	2012

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on land management practises which are sympathetic to biodiversity. <b>(M)</b>		managers advised of management practises which are beneficial to wildlife.	BC, Network Rail, railway companies, landowners & managers
<b>Publicity</b>			
Produce, maintain and promote web sites and leaflets which promote biodiversity on railway sidings and disused railways. <b>(H)</b>	Lancashire	Websites to include biodiversity	Network Rail, LCC, TWT, NE, railway companies
			2010

### Related Action Plans

Calcareous Grassland; DUN Land; Species-rich Neutral Grassland; People

### Abbreviations

EN = English Nature  
 LAs = Local Authorities  
 LBRC = Local Biological Record Centre  
 LCC = Lancashire County Council  
 NHSs = Natural History Societies  
 TWT = The Wildlife Trust for Lancashire, Manchester and North Merseyside

### References and additional reading

*The Management of Lineside Vegetation: A guide to good practice*; Civil Engineering Department Handbook No. 43: 1985; British Railways Board; London, 1985

### Contacts

Active lines: Ms Liz McMurtry, Network Rail, 40 Melton Street, London NW1 2EE;  
 TEL: 02-075-578-754

Disused lines: BRB (Residuary) Ltd, Whittles House, 14 Pentonville Road, London N1 9RP

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