

## LANCASHIRE BAP TEMPLATE FOR HABITAT ACTION PLANS

### URBAN PARKS AND GREEN SPACES

(Line Drawing of Habitat)

#### **Summary**

Urban parks and other public green spaces are immensely important to urban dwellers, contributing to an enhancement in the quality of urban life. Serving as an ecological resource in their own right, urban green spaces can be of considerable importance for biodiversity.

Factors affecting this habitat type include cost, pesticides and herbicides, pressure for increased use and public perception of natural habitats.

#### **Action Plan Aim**

**To assess, manage and promote biodiversity in urban parks and green spaces throughout Lancashire.**

#### **Habitat Description**

Urban parks, squares and other public green spaces are immensely important to urban dwellers, in providing an opportunity to spend time out of doors, near their homes or place of work, in contact with the natural world. This includes its broader aspects such as landscape, skyline, fresh air and open water, and wildlife itself as represented by birds, trees, butterflies and wild flowers, all of which combine to enhance the quality of urban life.

Urban green spaces are, by definition, open spaces that are managed primarily for human enjoyment rather than specifically for nature conservation. Nonetheless, in an increasingly urbanised society, where the expansion of urban development means that true countryside becomes ever more distant from many, and what countryside remains has often lost much of its wildlife interest, parks increasingly symbolise pockets of countryside in town. These can help, consciously or subconsciously, to meet the need for the psychological and even spiritual fulfilment that can be gained by contact with nature. For most park users this will fit alongside other benefits such as meeting friends, taking children to a playground, playing sports, exercising dogs, attending social or cultural activities, or simply enjoying a health-giving walk in pleasant surroundings.

However, urban green spaces also serve as an ecological resource in their own right. For example, they help to sustain populations of birds such as robin, chaffinch, and great spotted woodpecker. Two Priority Species for Action in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan – song thrush and spotted flycatcher – breed in some parks and some

## LANCASHIRE BAP TEMPLATE FOR HABITAT ACTION PLANS

### URBAN PARKS

are of county importance for particular species. Bats such as Pipistrelle and Daubenton's feed in some parks, especially those with a wide expanse of open water.

The varied features that typically characterise urban green spaces may be actually or potentially valuable wildlife habitats. These habitats may also be found elsewhere in the wider townscape and surrounding landscape. Consequently, urban parks may act as wildlife corridors and "stepping-stones", allowing plant and animal life to migrate between and throughout larger areas of suitable habitat.

The range of wildlife in any park is dependent on how it is managed. How far this resource is enjoyed by Lancastrians depends partly on the efforts of parks staff and others in promoting the natural interest, and also on issues such as accessibility, *i.e.* whether people feel safe enough, and welcome to explore what is on offer.

#### **Notable Species**

????

#### **National Status**

In the UK BAP this habitat type is generally referred to in a dual HAP entitled "Built up areas and gardens". More detail may be found in the "Over-arching Urban Biodiversity Action Plan" for Lancashire.

This Habitat Action Plan is being developed at a time when increasing concern has been expressed at the state of Britain's public parks, following financial cut backs over many years.

The House of Commons Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee report on Town and Country Parks in November 1999, emphasised the decline in the quality of parks and called for comprehensive improvement. In the Urban White Paper '*Our towns and cities*' the UK Government expressed a commitment to the value of parks in urban communities and the need for improved management, increased funding and new ideas to meet lifestyles in 21st century society. It set up an Urban Green Spaces Task Force to investigate the important issues and this presented its final report in 2002. In February 2003, the Deputy Prime Minister unveiled the Government's action plan to deliver sustainable communities and decent places in *Sustainable Communities - Building for the Future*. The plan sets parks and public spaces at the core of sustainable places and announced an additional £201 million up to 2005/06 to improve liveability and local environments, including parks and green spaces.

The revised version of *Planning Policy Guidance note 17: Sport, Open Space and Recreation* (published in July 2002) provides local planning authorities with a strategic framework for preparing development plan policies, which reflect the needs of local people for open spaces and ensure that such spaces are better protected from development. Formal recreational areas and "*areas of open space that particularly benefit wildlife and biodiversity*" are included.

*Planning Policy Guidance 9: Nature Conservation* requires local authorities to "*conserve non-statutory sites together with countryside features which provide wildlife corridors, links or stepping stones, from one habitat to another*". Urban

## LANCASHIRE BAP TEMPLATE FOR HABITAT ACTION PLANS

### URBAN PARKS

greenspace provides a large proportion of land that can be useful in maintaining such connections in urban and suburban areas.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) says it is working to ensure that everyone has access to networks of good quality green space, which meet people's diverse needs. *Living Places*, its report published in 2003, outlines plans to:

- improve leadership and organisational structures
- improve the quality of the green space information base;
- ensure better local strategic planning;
- draw together good practice;
- improve standards;
- encourage more community engagement; and
- ensure better use of resources.

To make sure that green spaces are placed at the heart of policies across Government and considered within the broader context of the public realm, an interdepartmental Ministerial group has been established, under the leadership of ODPM.

ODPM has invited the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) to set up the CABE Space unit to champion parks and public space. The unit, which was launched in May 2003, will work closely with the Green Flag Award scheme and deliver against its five main programmes:

- enabling and delivery;
- standards and best practice;
- policy and research;
- campaigns and advocacy; and
- skills development.

To provide direct assistance to those responsible for caring for green spaces, the ODPM has announced two 'enabling' schemes: *Living Spaces*, which will provide £30 million, to help community groups improve their local environments; and the *Strategic Enablers Scheme*, which CABE Space is taking forward, to assist local authorities to prepare green space strategies.

Some native plant and animal species are given special protection under *Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981* (as amended), the *Conservation (Natural Habitats & Species) Regulations 1994* and other legislation. The 1981 Act also prohibits the unlicensed introduction of certain pest species, including Grey Squirrel, Japanese Knotweed and Giant Hogweed.

### Regional Status

???

## LANCASHIRE BAP TEMPLATE FOR HABITAT ACTION PLANS

### URBAN PARKS

#### Local Status

Urban green spaces are found in all the major Lancashire conurbations and can be of considerable local importance for biodiversity. Most were established between the 1850s and the 1930s. Many other green spaces were created as part of urban landscaping projects in the past 30 years.

#### Current factors affecting the habitat

Current factors affecting the urban park habitat are:

- Cost
- Contract specification problems
- Training
- Pressure for increased use
- Pesticides and herbicides
- The need for tidiness and desire for formal landscapes
- Public perception of natural habitats
- Dogs

#### Cost

Parks have long been subject to severe financial constraints, especially since the introduction of Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT) and more recently Best Value. This has major implications for all aspects of management. In 2001 it was estimated that it would cost £3.5 billion to repair and replace the features and facilities in parks in England and Wales that had been poorly maintained and become derelict. (CABE Space web site). Conversely, active management for biodiversity may offer better value than current management practices as it is often less intensive and requires less frequent use of machinery, herbicides and pesticides.

#### Contract specification problems

These are a key issue; for example, how to define shrubbery management which maintains tidiness where necessary but allows accumulation of leaf litter, plus associated invertebrates and cover for hedgehogs. The time scale for contracts may be a disincentive for introducing new ideas. It may be difficult to incorporate flexibility to enable fine-scale 'tweaking' as habitats evolve, or to accommodate the needs of nesting birds.

#### Training

There is a need for training in ecologically sensitive management, including the impact of traditional gardening on wildlife, as well as habitat creation and management. For example, to design a mowing regime for wild flower meadows that encourages butterflies, it is necessary to have access to knowledge of butterfly life cycles. Equally important is the need for training of operative staff employed by contractors: much practical work may currently be carried out by people with little or no training in horticulture let alone nature conservation. High staff turnover can exacerbate this problem.

#### Pressure for increased use

Parks are under pressure to increase levels of use. To the extent that this means more people benefiting from the natural world, this is to be applauded. Nonetheless,

## LANCASHIRE BAP TEMPLATE FOR HABITAT ACTION PLANS

### URBAN PARKS

there are implications for wildlife, for example disturbance to nesting birds and the need to take account of the requirements of ground feeding birds. Major events, which may include loud music and fireworks, are likely to have ecological implications, but scientific data is generally lacking.

#### Pesticides and herbicides

The effects of herbicide and pesticide distribution up through specific food chains have been demonstrated scientifically. However, there is lack of accessible and comprehensive information and knowledge about the complex interactions and long-term effects of these chemical compounds within ecosystems. For example, herbicides may reduce the supply of weed seeds for house sparrow and chaffinch, and they may also affect soil organisms that, in turn, influence plant community development.

#### The need for tidiness and desire for formal landscapes

A potential conflict exists between management of historic landscapes and formal flower displays and the needs of wildlife. A balanced approach is needed, which provides more natural areas away from the most important locations for formal design. Even within formal areas, appropriate structure planting can provide good habitat for birds.

#### Public perception of natural habitats

Natural areas of woodland and scrub may be associated in the public eye with feelings of insecurity, especially for children, women and people on their own. Long grass may appear to be uncared for and may accumulate litter. Introducing new ideas incrementally, with good consultation and interpretation at each stage, can help to gain public support; but a wider policy of education will also be necessary.

#### Dogs

Dog waste is a public health issue, and can also affect native flora through its effect on soil chemistry. People who exercise dogs can increase disturbance to birds. Conversely, dog walkers help to ensure a park is well occupied, hence improving security.

### **Important Sites**

The following are the principal parks, recreation grounds, Local Nature Reserves and Country Parks found in urban areas across the county:

Blackburn with Darwen Borough: The Borough Council manages Bold Venture Park, Corporation Park, Queen's Park, Roe Lee Park, Whitehall Park, Witton Country Park.

Blackpool Borough: The Council manages Stanley Park **and others (no data)**.

Burnley Borough: The Borough Council manages Towneley Park (180 hectares), Thompson Park and Bank Hall, Queen's Park, Padiham Memorial Park and Park Road, Scott Park, and Ightenhill Park. The Council also maintains a large area of informal open space and woodlands including: Byerden Holme Linear Park, Rowley Lake and Woodland, Healey Heights, Grove Lane Wood, Cemetery Wood, Bardon Gardens, Thursby Gardens, and Lower House Lodges. Gawthorpe Hall Grounds are managed by Lancashire County Council on behalf of the National Trust.

## LANCASHIRE BAP TEMPLATE FOR HABITAT ACTION PLANS

### URBAN PARKS

Chorley Borough: The Borough Council manages Astley Park, Duxbury Park, Hic Bibi Local Nature Reserve, Withnell Local Nature Reserve, Yarrow Valley Country Park. The Wildlife Trust manages Cuerden Valley Park (part Chorley Borough) on behalf of the Cuerden Valley Park Trust. Lancashire County Council manages Withnell Fold Local Nature Reserve.

Fylde Borough: The Borough Council manages Aston Gardens, Fairhaven Lake, Hope Street Recreation Ground, Kirkham Memorial Gardens, Lowther Gardens, Promenade Gardens.

Hyndburn Borough: The Borough Council manages Bullough Park, Foxhill Bank Local Nature Reserve, Gatty Park, Haworth Park, Lowerfold Park, Mercer Park, Milnshaw Park, Oak Hill Park, Peel Park, Rhyddings Park, Woodnook Vale Country Park.

Lancaster City: The City Council manages Douglas Park, Happy Mount Park, Highfield Recreation Ground, Palatine Avenue Recreation Ground, Regent Park, Ryelands Park. Williamson Park is managed by a private company.

Pendle Borough: The Borough Council manages Alkincoats Park, Barrowford Park, Bullgrove Park, Heyhead Park, Letcliffe Park, Marsden Park, Sough Park, Valley Gardens, Victoria Park, Victory Park, Walverden Park.

Preston City: The City Council manages Ashton Park, Avenham Park, Grange Park, Haslam Park, Moor Park, Ribbleton Park, Winckley Square

Ribble Valley Borough: Clitheroe Castle grounds

Rossendale Borough: **No data.**

South Ribble Borough: The Borough Council manages Farrington Lodges, Hurst Grange Park, Shruggs Wood, Withy Grove Park, Worden Park. The Wildlife Trust manages Cuerden Valley Park (part Chorley Borough) on behalf of the Cuerden Valley Park Trust. Lancashire County Council manages Preston Junction Local Nature Reserve\*.

\* Also covered under the *Disused Railways and railway sidings* urban HAP.

West Lancashire District: The District Council manages Coronation Park, Ormskirk, and Burscough Water Gardens.

Wyre Borough: **No data.**

### Current Action / Mechanisms

- *Policy*

Lancashire's local authorities are developing or have developed parks strategies, as required by the ODPM.

## LANCASHIRE BAP TEMPLATE FOR HABITAT ACTION PLANS

### URBAN PARKS

Existing Local Plan policies in all districts afford a degree of protection to urban green space.

- *Site Safeguard*

None are currently designated as all or part of a cSAC, SPA, or SSSI.

Some are identified as BHS.

- *Land Management*

The author is not aware of any general measures being undertaken to maintain or enhance the value of Lancashire's urban parks as wildlife habitat. Wildlife Trust Projects operate, or are planned to operate in urban Blackburn with Darwen, East Lancashire and Preston City; and, with BTCV, in urban Burnley. BTCV (Lancashire) projects and Groundwork-Lancashire projects also operate in urban areas, as do various local authorities' projects and local community organisations' projects. However, so far as the author is aware, there are no measures in any of these projects specific to the biodiversity of urban parks. No other Lancashire projects are known to the author.

- *Advisory*

No steps specific to urban green spaces in Lancashire are known to the author to be being undertaken to advise relevant landowners/managers on appropriate management.

- *Research and Monitoring*

None is known to the author.

- *Public Relations*

None is known to the author.

### Indicators of Habitat Quality

To the best of the author's knowledge, no generalised indicators of urban park habitat quality have yet been developed, in Lancashire or elsewhere. However, there is potentially a very wide range of indicators from which to choose! Some would need to relate to assessing the quality of particular park habitats, others to the park as a complete ecological unit, and others to public accessibility and quality of life.

### Habitat Targets

Target	Area	Measure	Timescale
Identify and assess biodiversity resource for Urban Parks and green spaces in	Lancashire	Resource assessed	2008

## LANCASHIRE BAP TEMPLATE FOR HABITAT ACTION PLANS

### URBAN PARKS

Lancashire			
Ensure that the urban parks of Lancashire are managed to maximise and enhance their value to biodiversity	Lancashire	Site specific BAP's established for all parks	2015
Raise awareness of the value of urban parks to biodiversity	Lancashire	Events held at 1 park per district annually	2010

### Proposed Actions

Action (priority: H, M, L)	Area	Measure / Milestone	Partners	Timescale
<b><i>Research and monitoring</i></b>				
Develop a programme to assess urban parks and green spaces for their existing and potential biodiversity resource	Lancashire	100% urban parks identified. Assessment programme identified.	LAs, LCC	2010
Collate existing records on habitats, flora and fauna	Lancashire	Existing records collated	LAs, LCC	2010
	Lancashire			
<b><i>Site safeguard and monitoring</i></b>				
Work with land owners /managers to initiate a rolling survey programme for urban parks to identify and record those supporting BAP habitats and species, and species specially protected by law Identify and record BAP and designated Habitats and species within Lancashire's urban parks and green spaces	Lancashire	75% of parks surveyed.	LA's, TWT, LCC	2012
Target and encourage	Lancashire	Conservation measures	LA's, TWT	2010

## LANCASHIRE BAP TEMPLATE FOR HABITAT ACTION PLANS

URBAN PARKS				
conservation measures to improve existing and urban parks for appropriate species and habitats.		identified and promoted to land managers.		
<b>Habitat protection and management</b>				
Integrate biodiversity action into <i>existing</i> park management plans & regimes	Lancashire	100% management plans to integrate biodiversity actions.	TWT, EN, Bat Groups, Bird Clubs, <b>LAs</b>	2012
Integrate biodiversity action into <i>new</i> park management plans & regimes	Lancashire	100% management plans to integrate biodiversity actions.	TWT, EN, Bat Group, Bird Club, <b>WLDC</b>	2010
Encourage dissemination of existing best practice guidance on the importance of wildlife habitats and their retention and enhancement to Lancashire's urban park managers	Lancashire	Best practise guidance distributed to all park managers.	TWT, LCC	2010
<b>Advisory</b>				
Lancashire's urban parks and squares to adopt biodiversity-friendly maintenance practices	Lancashire	25 %	LCC, EN, TWT, LA's	2010
Provide or direct training and advice on appropriate management	Lancashire	Training programme established.	LCC, EN, TWT, LA's	2010
Organise 1 seminar per District for park managers and nature conservation practitioners to share best practice	Lancashire	Seminars established.	LCC, EN, <b>TWT</b> , LAs	2010
Encourage local	Lancashire	1 Green space	LAs, LCC, EN,	2010

## LANCASHIRE BAP TEMPLATE FOR HABITAT ACTION PLANS

URBAN PARKS				
communities to participate in surveys of the biodiversity of Lancashire's urban parks and green spaces.		training day established per year.	<b>TWT</b>	
<b>Publicity</b>				
Identify and publicise sites of best practice	Lancashire	Best practise sites publicised to all managers.	TWT, LCC	2008
Raise public awareness of biodiversity in Lancashire's urban parks and green spaces	Lancashire	1 event held per District per year	LA's	2008
Organise events to highlight and celebrate the biodiversity of Lancashire's urban parks	Lancashire	Programme of events identified and publicised. At least one major event (i.e. awareness day) to take place annually.	<b>LAs</b> , LCC, EN, TWT	2010

### Abbreviations

EN = English Nature

LA = Local Authority

LCC = Lancashire County Council

RSPB = Royal Society for the Protection of Birds

TWT = The Wildlife Trust for Lancashire, Manchester & North Merseyside.

### Related Action Plans

Amenity Grassland, Sportsfields & School Grounds; Mosslands; Broadleaved & Mixed Woodland, Neutral Grassland, Calcareous Grassland, Limestone Pavement, Song Thrush; Great Crested Newt; Bats; People

### References and additional reading

Barker, G., *A Framework for the Future: green networks with multiple uses in and around towns and cities*, English Nature Research Report No.256, English Nature, Peterborough, 1997

BTCV (1998) "*The Urban Handbook: a practical guide to community environmental work*", Wallingford

DETR (2001) "*Urban White Paper*"

## LANCASHIRE BAP TEMPLATE FOR HABITAT ACTION PLANS

### URBAN PARKS

DTLR (2002) "*Green Spaces, Better Places*"

DTLR (2002) "*Improving Urban Parks, Play Areas and Greenspaces*"

Gilbert, O. (1989) "*Ecology of Urban Habitats*". Chapman & Hall, London

HDRA "*Organic Grounds Maintenance Manual*".

The Lord Rogers of Riverside, "*Towards an Urban Renaissance: report of the Urban Task Force*", DETR, 1999

Wheater, C.P. (1999) "*Urban Habitats*" Routledge, London

#### **Web Sites**

*Greenspace Online*, incorporating the Urban Parks Forum:

<http://www.urbanparksforum.co.uk/>

Date (30<sup>th</sup> June 2004)

Draft No. (4)

Author (David Dunlop)