



**MINUTES OF THE HEREFORDSHIRE BIODIVERSITY PARTNERSHIP
PROJECT MANAGEMENT GROUP (PMG), HELD AT THE TOWN HALL
ANNEX ON WEDNESDAY, 28th JUNE 2006**

Present: Bill Bloxsome – Chairman, Conservation Manager
Nicky Davies – Biodiversity Partnership Co-ordinator
Steve Roe – Biological Records Centre Manager
Jo Hackman – Ecologist (Nature Conservation)
Geoff Perrott – Partnership Environmental Co-ordinator
Francesca Griffith – Conservation Manager, HNT
Jeff Edwards – Regional Biodiversity Co-ordinator for West Midlands
Biodiversity Partnership

1. Apologies

Apologies were received for Mark July.

2. Introduction to Jeff Edwards

WNB welcomed Jeff Edwards to the meeting, the Regional Biodiversity Co-ordinator for West Midlands Biodiversity Partnership.

JE explained briefly his role and the relationship of the West Midlands Biodiversity Partnership and the local Biodiversity Action Plan.

He gave a brief history and explained the original Biodiversity Partnership was established several years ago. Three years ago there was a funded project from Hereford Lottery called Rebuilding Regional Biodiversities. Funding is now running out. During that time a programme which was established three years ago for delivering biodiversity action across the region was worked on and most of that has been delivered. One of the products was the Regional Biodiversity Strategy, which most people have seen, and this strategy has been adopted as one of the documents under the Regional Information Strategy, it is a key document and sets out five key challenges and sets regional targets. His post has come in with funding from DEFRA and he is one of nine posts

throughout England, one within each of the regions. Attached to his post is a set of core services, which are similar to the core services for the LBAP services around the region and he is employed by English Nature but works to the Partnership. The Partnership delivers the core services as well as undertaking any other work which is necessary.

One of those core services is assistance with, and sharing, a good BAP Partnership across the region, as a support in co-ordinating facilities for co-ordination of biodiversity activity across the region.

JH asked how does Jeff allocate time between two counties. JE replied “as opportunity has arisen”. He has only had one visit to Warwickshire and the first one was formerly to the Partnership meeting. It is as and when issues arise or the offices require some assistance.

Also, other LBAP officers come along to a meeting quarterly and all co-ordinators and JE have to discuss common themes. There is a representative of the LBAP officer on the West Midlands Biodiversity Partnership Steering Group.

WNB asked JE to explain more about the Biodiversity Partnership.

JE explained that the regional biodiversity strategy has got five key challenges and within that is climate change, monitoring this and data, delivery of biodiversity and area based deliveries in other matters challenged. The other is the sectorial approach ie making sure that all the other sectors are adopting biodiversity and achieving biodiversity gains through their agenda as well. There is a full list of members of the Partnership on the back of the Strategy but particularly over the last 12 months, there has not been full communication with all of them. Any of the members can attend the Partnership meeting and most do. Some have not attended for some time. There is a question mark, therefore, in Jeff’s mind as to new members and how can new members join. They have quarterly meetings and a Steering Group. The Steering Group is made up of English Nature, DEFRA, the Wildlife Trusts and an LBAP representative. At the moment, both are meeting quarterly but there is a proposal for changing this. Previously there has been a group set up for data delivery and policy. Suggestions have been put forward for data delivery for climate change. The Landscapes for Living is already set up as a sub group. JE is going to suggest a communications sub-group as well.

WNB wanted to know if the strategy covered more than just the LBAPs. JE confirmed it does and that it has a more sectorial approach to it. Also, WNB wondered what part do local government play in this. JE said there is The Association of Local Government Ecologists and there is also the West Midlands Local Government Association. WNB also asked who takes on the work for the task and finish groups. JE said this was to be decided, anyone interested can join them.

Most people have day jobs and it takes time and commitment and undertaking any actions required, in order for them to be effective. It is hoped people from the counties will participate. WNB asked if JE will be writing to the local authorities asking them to participate. JE said LBAP would write to people as things developed.

SR mentioned membership composition re sub-groups. He said he had attended several meetings but did not know what was expected of him. It requires a lot of commitment and any sub-group needs to be carefully thought through. FG said most of the groups seem to be short-lived because it seemed they felt it their duty to be involved. JE said they set an Agenda which needs to be met within a certain timescale and he gets the feeling that, generally, over the time, there has been a lot of requests from the region requiring information, and may be not a feedback of the same balance. This is a general feeling he gets which is why he is going to speak at LBAP meetings, making sure the LBAP co-ordinators meetings are held more regularly than previously. He is hoping to 'tip the balance'. SR remarked it was very good to see JE at the meeting.

FG felt that there was a degree of reluctance to become involved regionally within the county. WNB felt there was certainly a willingness for key personalities to get involved with the biodiversity. GE was referring to counties as a whole.

3. Launch Feedback

ND gave report of Launch on 16th June 2006. She explained that a lot of time was put aside for it and initially she had some resistance from the Partners to actually attend the meetings, but after she put a little pressure on, things turned out fine and there was a relatively good turn out, approximately 45 people. They were lucky with the weather. Cllr Edwards introduced it, he talked about his childhood etc. ND then gave a brief on what has been happening and what will be happening with LBAP in Herefordshire. Chris Stubbs gave a presentation on the Woolhope Dome Project. Afterwards they all went to Haugh Woods in the coach where they split people in to two groups. ND felt it was an excellent communication session. Following this went back to the hall for organic locally produced buffet lunch. She has had excellent and positive feedback and a lot of people asked Nicky if they could have an event like this more often, to which she did not commit!

ND said it helped that it was a lovely day and lovely venue, Haugh Woods and Jones Hill Farm, this contributed to it being a success. **ND to do write-up in Newsletter on return from her holiday.**

JH said "well done" to Nicky and WNB added his congratulations to her.

4. Work Programme and Co-ordinators Report

ND explained she has been doing this for the past three months and will be continuing. With reference to the Website, ND now has the software in place and she is hoping to have some tuition on how to use it, to enable her to modify the Website. She has asked for link on Council Home Page.

With reference to Key Performance Indicators, ND has had lots of meetings with people and response has been positive. FG enquired whether Nicky had had meeting with Highways Department. ND said she had but it was not specifically a KPI meeting.

ND has meeting with Paula on 17th to discuss roadsides. She will also be having several meetings, including one with WNB and JH in a few weeks time. She will then need to set aside some time to enable her to put some effort in to this.

SR asked if the land managed developed biodiversity sector was the only indicator that she was reporting on. ND replied that she is working with certain units of the Council ie Highways, Bereavement Services.

She reported that she was still very much behind on BARS.

With reference to Regional News, ND said that apart from the West Midlands Biodiversity Partnership, there were some other issues she would like to comment on. One was creating links with neighbouring LBAPs, one of whom, Emma, turned up on the Launch event. She is quite keen to do some Partnership working, also Gareth Ellis.

ND to have meeting with Gareth Ellis, she has already sent some information. ND will report feedback.

ND said they had opened the West Midland Biodiversity Partnership Photographic competition at the gallery/museum for six weeks but had not had much feedback. It has now moved out of Herefordshire.

ND will be starting to create a business plan financial strategy in July. She envisages it will involve quite a lot of work. ND went on to say there is a need to establish how they could get LBAP out over counties, regionally and nationally ie outlining how often they will be having meetings, how are they going to publicise the LBAP, how are they going to reach schools and Partnership groups etc. ND said with the different plan, they need to outline how they are going to achieve the objectives relevant to ensure sustainability. JH agreed there is a need to define quite a few projects within it.

With reference to Lead Partner Guidance, ND has just completed this. **ND to produce newsletter (work programme over the next three months).** FG suggested she keeps it as simple as possible.

ND needs to do sub-section to Lead Partners Guidance, following regional co-ordinators meeting recently.

GP explained the Climate Change Event (Natural Environment Network Event).

WNB wanted the Geodiversity Action Plan for Herefordshire explained. He understood that at one stage they were actually looking at reviewing the criteria of designated rates and is that going to be part of this process or has it been done? ND stated that Debbie Klein has taken quite a significant part in this. **ND will consider what she can contribute to it.**

ND said that she had been asked to assist the judging panel in this year's Herefordshire in Bloom Competition.

5. Breathing Places

ND explained that this is something being run by the BBC. The BBC have £5m which is to be spent over the next three years. First part will be getting people involved in public events so anybody interested needs to contact the local co-ordinator or Nicky so that she can pass that information on. There are grants available, £1m available for local Breathing Place initiatives, then £4m released later.

WNB enquired what the objective is. ND explained it is publicising Breathing Places and getting people involved in green places, which is open space with public access. WNB suggested Parks and Countryside service should be looking at this but he understood they had financial difficulties at the moment. **ND to speak to Geoff or Colin.**

WNB said given the opportunity, then plug it!

6. Organisational sign-up to Herefordshire LBAP

FG said she had not had time to do presentation for this yet and she did not have CD.

7. F Griffith/J Edwards visit to Netherlands – “Landscapes for Living”

FG and JE gave an account of their visit. FG said they went on a study tour to look at the Netherlands approach to landscape and large area work. There were three main sites. The first one was OVP, this was an area reclaimed from the sea. She explained the dykes and that the whole area had been cut off from the sea since 1968. There is a fresh water lagoon there. The OVP area was designated for light industry but they found there were no businesses developing on the site so they had to look for alternative use. It was very rich

agricultural land, however, as it was soaking wet they decided to turn it in to a massive wetland area. Originally, they just left it, then they found that grey land geese were coming in, in large numbers. They decided to start bringing in large grazing animals, they now have three different large grazing animals there, conic ponies, hex cattle and red deer. The natural processes are left to run their course. The only drawback is that there are not any large predators so they have to do a certain amount of culling. You can go in to the main bulk of the reserve on a small bus to see the animals. The animals that die are naturally left on site. The only thing lacking are the large predators. It is a large experiment and there are numerous questions to be answered. There are 5,600 hectares.

JE added that the site is managed by five people and is government owned. FG said some of the area is designated National Park, most of it is just project area. The Dutch have a different approach for getting land for conservation. An option is for people to sell their land to the government, they then give it to the NGO with funding, then manage it. Another option is to sell it in effect, then liaise a plan with the government ie he has land under wheat, would like to take wheat off, then leave it to go wild again back to wheatland, but he wants to retain ownership of the land. The government would then say may be your land is worth £5,000 per hectare with wheat on it. The heathland on it is worth £2,000 per hectare, therefore, we will pay you £3,000 per hectare as a one off payment, followed by a small amount every year just to keep doing nothing with it. Basically, they take large areas, take the crop off and if it is very heavily improved they will take off the top soil and leave it. There is one area which was taken out of production 20 years ago but they did not have time to go and see it. They understand it is just left for wild animals to graze on.

One of the other things they were doing there was eco ducts. Roads are a real problem with movement of animals between these large areas, therefore, they have designed eco ducts which go across motorways for the animals to use. They leave areas of soil on them so that they can monitor the animals that use it by the footprints. The scrub developing is grazed by deer.

In the Veluwe area the government is taking out the industrial area, 2/3 have already gone, to relocate it somewhere else completely. There is also river restoration going on on the Lower Rhine. The dyke had been dug several years ago in order to keep the river back and they have now removed the dyke which is causing flooding back on to the pastures (controlled flooding). Eventually they want to introduce more animals to roam up and down the flood plain.

There was some economic and social drive to change the industrial estate. They wanted to give something back to the local community which was green. They have lots of money from tourism. Everyone is very open to discuss things and look at alternative options. The otters have been extinct in Holland for many years and they have had problems trying to bring them back in.

8. Role of Herefordshire LBAP in the delivery plan for the Regional Biodiversity Strategy and Vice Versa

ND has had had several discussions recently looking at how they are taking LBAP forward within the county and how committed Partners are. ND at present, creating a spreadsheet/database on how all actions, objectives and targets are being achieved, who is doing what and how committed Partners are to the LBAP. She is collating all information and recording on data sheet, this will enable her to identify any gaps.

WNB asked if Nicky is actually asking organisations to physically sign up for the Climate Change project, for instance. Nicky said this was a possibility although they have not got that far yet, but she is definitely not ruling this out. She thought it would be useful to have some kind of formal contract. SR suggested Partners could dial in on web to see how things are going. Nicky agreed.

JH expressed that some actions in up-date will need to be modified. However, FG said lead Partners should not be expected to deliver all actions. FG also asked how will people be notified things have been modified? A newsletter was suggested.

JE asked if target terminology was going to be changed and WNB asked that, if targets are going to be changed, will group be consulted first? JH reported many things were put in that were not negotiated so it was inevitable that there would be some changes.

WNB wanted relationship between LBAP and RSS and RBS (Regional Biodiversity Strategy) explained. JE said that the RBS was launched last March. It sets out a sectorial approach and five key challenges. At present, he is writing a delivery plan for the RBS, which is a requirement with regional assemblies requiring a plan in line with the regional quality framework delivery plan. The strategy has a set of key challenges, objectives and milestones. Jeff has tried to convert that in to actual delivery actions and it is in very early stage. This has been divided in to regional activity and local activity. A report for the regional assembly was being prepared based on reporting on how they were succeeding in the RBS. LBAP activity is concerning delivery on the ground, whereas regional activity is not. The Action Plan is coming out for consultation and available for comment. The links with LBAP is more concerning the delivery of the LBAP actions, making sure that the local action plans are addressing the regional priorities and that their contributions are being monitored and reported. WNB said group should see it, however, JE advised not available on website.

WNB raised the question that if there are targets within the RBS, how will JE work out the contributions of counties. JE explained that a lot more work

had to be done i.e. what habitat there is around, what delivery mechanisms are available in order to meet targets. This is still a problem area.

WNB wanted to know how they were looking at the issues of monitoring, and wondered whether there was going to be annual monitoring statements as used in planning, especially as this is a part of the RSS. JE said the annual monitoring statements are an issue. **JE to action.**

SR enquired that, as we learn more about the targets, how tightly bound are we with reference to targets, monitoring. JE answered that the RSS and LBAPs need to be reviewed on an on-going basis and that it is just a matter of taking in information at the time of the reviews. Many targets have come and gone already, but at the same time, by setting those targets, it has helped focus attention and habitats have been restored, so process is good.

9. Project Budget Situation

ND said MJ wants to timetable accessing money from English Nature for the project. Already in action.

WNB said there is money coming in for ND and her obligations etc. (not a large amount). FG suggested Nicky should have a grant. JH agreed this would be useful.

WNB said he would look at his budget and put something to next meeting as Mark July was not present.

10. PMG Terms of Reference/SLA

Nicky has made amendments to the SLA that came up at last meeting. **ND to prepare draft.** MJ to see for approval.

11. AOB

GP mentioned the event in September. He advised the date and venue had been booked. **GP to send out list of names.** He needs some help with content. Needs to work on Agenda. **WNB advised GP to organise meeting with relevant parties.**

JH raised the subject of water voles and River Monnow. A brief discussion took place.

SR has had consultation documents on orchards. FG requested clarification on it. JE said there may be meeting this week on it. **JE to investigate.**

ND asked WNB to mention Juliet. WNB advised Juliet Wheatley had been appointed to replace Jane Patten. She starts officially on Monday, 3rd July. As Team Leader she will Chair future meetings.

WNB advised he and GP are hopefully having a meeting with MJ to talk about BAP.

GB and FG advised the Climate Change went well.

WNB thought there needs to be some sort of business approach and within the community strategy, Herefordshire Partnership, in theory, should be the Partnership of Partnerships (the Biodiversity Partnership should be representative of the Herefordshire Partnership), so in order to have a Partnership, to be able to say we want the representative there, the group may need to start having some sort of formal Partnership arrangement. The Partnership will consist of politicians and representatives of various groups.
All partners to consider.

Nicky thanked Bill for 'Chairing' the meeting.

12. Date of Next Meeting

Tuesday, 26th September 2006. Venue and time to be advised.

The meeting closed at 4.00pm