

England Biodiversity Group

**Minutes from
EBG Meeting
March 28th 2007**

**England Biodiversity Group
11.00am to 2.30pm , Wednesday 28 March 2007**

Rooms A & B , Nobel House, London

Minutes

Present:

John Robbs (Defra, Wildlife & Countryside)

Sarah Webster (Defra, WHB)

Phil Lewis (Defra, WHB)

Andy Stott (Defra, LLS SD)

Steve Marfleet (Defra, WHB)

David Henshilwood (Natural England)

David Goode (UCL)

Mark Tollitt (Defra, CD)

Julian Hughes (RSPB)

David Pape (ALGE)

Paul Cobbing (GOWM)

Fiona Howie (National Farmers' Union)

Simon Pryor (Forestry Commission, England)

Alex Tait (LGA)

Doug Hulyer (Independent consultant)

Amy Coyte (WCL)

Andrew Wood (Natural England)

Brian Eversham (Wildlife Trusts)

Apologies

1. Welcome and Introductions

The Chairman, John Robbs, invited members to introduce themselves for the benefit of guests.

2. Minutes of last meeting and matters arising

EBG-07-01

The minutes were accepted without amendment

Alex Tait asked whether the action to circulate paper EBG-06-23 (benefits of local and regional partnerships) had been completed. Sarah Webster (SW) confirmed that it had.

In Response to a request from David Goode for an update on the NERC Act guidance, SW advised the group that the draft document had been circulated for comment in December and that a wide range of comments had been received. The revised document had now received ministerial approval and was being translated into Welsh. There would be a launch following the Welsh elections. Julian Hughes asked what consideration was being given to the requirement to review the impact of the duty after 3 years. BPU were considering the detail of this including the potential to use the ALGE questionnaire as a baseline as far as local authorities were concerned.

ACTION: BPU to report back at the next meeting.

3. Fourth Quarter Workstream Achievement Reports **EBG-07-02**

The Group noted that all workstream updates had been completed in a timely manner, this achievement was welcomed by all.

DG raised the matter of the loss of a key Natural England (NE) post for urban biodiversity as a possible obstacle to progress. Phil Lewis added that a similar situation had arisen with the Business & Biodiversity workstream. John Robbs noted this and invited Andrew Wood to respond. Andrew said that NE were as committed to urban environments as they were rural and that he was, together with David Henshilwood, in the process of reviewing the biodiversity portfolio as a whole. Andrew would ensure that these workstreams had suitable support from NE staff.

David Goode stated that a national seminar on Health & Greenspace had taken place on 27 March and that this linked with the urban agenda. David would provide a note on this to the secretariat.

ACTION: DG to send note to Secretariat

4 & 5. Refreshing the biodiversity partnership in England – feedback from 1 March workshop & Revised biodiversity targets: Natural England's advice on prioritisation and delivery **EBG-07-03**

Given the strong link between agenda items 4 & 5 it was agreed to take these two items together.

John Robbs reminded the group of Barry Gardiner's request for advice from NE on prioritisation, noting that delivery may be constrained by resources even though our ambitions were not. He then invited Andrew Wood to comment on this and the link with the points of consensus from the ministerial workshop.

Andrew Wood stated that the advice had been finalised on Monday (26th). NE had not responded with a long list of priorities, which it felt would not be helpful, but rather had set out an approach to prioritisation and delivery. This would be based at the habitat level, tying in with the landscape scale/ecosystem approach and ensuring resilience to climate change and a 'safety net' for those species not otherwise covered. NE also acknowledged that they would need to take a greater role in supporting the department and in the regions on delivery. David Henshilwood emphasised the point of consensus (from the workshop) that the Regional Spatial Planning system would be the fundamental mechanism to achieving delivery on the ground.

John Robbs welcomed this helpful summary and invited comments.

Paul Cobbing linked the statement on Regional Spatial Planning to Helen Phillip's comment at the workshop that regional and local working would be key to success. It was clear that RSP would be crucial but that we also needed to consider the Planning White Paper and delivery in a changing landscape.

Julian Hughes emphasised the importance of the "safety net" and urged that this be kept firmly in place until the large scale habitat approach delivered.

The increasing significance of the landscape scale approach and the benefits this could bring in trying to sell the benefits of biodiversity to commercial sectors were highlighted by AT. We should take all available opportunities to show that the environment can be a driver rather than a constraint to economic regeneration.

John Robbs noted that this approach would fit with the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment and the demonstration of the link between biodiversity and human well-being. David Goode mentioned the Royal Commission for Environmental Pollution's report on urban ecosystems, which made significant proposals, encouraging local authorities to think more in terms of ecosystem function in urban areas.

Andrew Wood believed the actions were sensible and was happy for NE to take the lead role in catalysing delivery. He believed that the point on the function of HAP groups was key and that discussion was needed to prioritise across habitats and recognise impacts. It was also clear that delivery of national goals would be through local and regional actions and that to further this the support needed to evolve. The link from local through regional and national to the UK level would be important as biodiversity does not recognise national boundaries.

John Robbs agreed with this and said that we had a fairly clear idea of our strategic direction and would need to strike the right balance between planning and starting to move – we don't need to consider all the HAPs before proceeding. He supported the need to get the planning system as reflective of our needs as possible, but this was only one ingredient.

Amy Coyte was concerned that much valuable work focussed on species might be lost as the emphasis shifted to habitats. However, David Henshilwood and Andrew Wood gave reassurance that this would not be the case, pointing out that the areas where much species-related work was focussed would also become a focus for landscape scale working.

Paul Cobbing emphasised the need for integration with relevant policies at each spatial scale – different approaches were needed at each geographical tier.

David Goode said that the RCEP report had highlighted the failure to take account of the ecosystem in urban planning that taking an ecosystem approach could alleviate management costs. Brian Eversham noted the importance of

urban habitats in terms of landscape permeability, as new development could be more permeable than arable. This could be as significant as or more significant than large-scale habitat restoration.

Julian Hughes drew attention to the need to get the right mix of organisations round the table for HAP delivery; some HAPs had suffered from not drawing in some of the policy sectors they needed and should think in terms of the routes needed to access the resources of people and money needed to help HAPs deliver. It was clear that the main dynamism for delivery was at country level.

John Robbs felt that where there was a clear case for England-level working, we should get on and do this, while there might well be a case for some groups to continue at UK level.

David Goode felt that it was hard for those working at the local level, for example in District Councils, to appreciate how their work interfaced with some of the macro-issues such as climate change and landscape scale approaches. There was a great deal of variation in delivery at that level at present and there might be benefit in organising a joint workshop with the Association of Local Authorities on how they could key in to delivery of the macro-issues. David Pape felt that it would be helpful to look across the HAPs to develop topics – such as agriculture, climate change and so on, rather than packaging everything in terms of habitats as local authorities do not think in terms of habitats.

Defra would agree actions to take forward with NE and report back to the next meeting of this Group.

ACTION: Defra/NE to discuss follow-up and report back

6. Towards adaptation to climate change – presentation and discussion

EBG-07-05

Andy Stott presented the report on “Towards adaptation to climate change” - a report on climate change adaptation for the deliverables of each of the EBS workstreams (copy of presentation at Annex A).

John Robbs reminded the Group of the need to provide comments on the report, using the comments document provided, by 5th April. The recommendation of a ‘one-stop shop’ sounded promising as long as this was not overly complicated. Some clarity over the ‘proofing’ process was needed.

The Climate Change Adaptation (CCA) group envisaged that the guidance would be introduced to the workstreams through a workshop and that the onus would then be on the workstreams to carry out the proofing process for their deliverables, seeking guidance where necessary from the network of experts. John Robbs suggested that we needed to guard against the assumption that this

issue was uniform across the workstreams and that it might be wise to trial this approach first. The Group was invited to comment.

Paul Cobbing said that he had had experience of UKCIP using best practice examples and that could be a useful model for this work. Julian Hughes noted that without pressing forward with this we would risk losing the benefit of the good work done for the report. David Henshilwood had concerns over the workstreams' capacity to undertake this work and Sarah Webster suggested that the CCA group would need to work with the other workstreams on this. Andrew Stott said that this had been the thinking behind the suggestion for a workshop as the CCA are as resource limited as other groups. This was understood but perhaps more thought was needed on this.

David Goode congratulated the CCA group on the completion of this work but said that it was possible that the full picture had not been captured. Urban areas may be experience changes quicker than other habitat types (due to the heat island effect) and that lessons learned here might be useful for this work – he would provide some thoughts on this to Andrew Stott. David Pape added that here may be benefits from initiatives such as green buildings and SUDs.

Paul Cobbing suggested that it may be useful to present this in terms of the environments we want to live in in the future.

John Robbs summed up by saying that we need to get the guidance used, that a case study or two might be useful and while we couldn't provide a tailored service we could make it more accessible for others to take the message out.

ACTION: Comments on the guidance document to Andy Stott by 5th April

7. Communication Strategy – presentation by Doug Hulyer

EBG-07-06 (a) & (b)

Doug Hulyer gave a presentation on his paper (copy attached as Annex B).

Whilst John Robbs had reservations over the full series of recommendations, he did support the first stage – ie for the England Biodiversity Group to comment to Doug by 13 April with a view to reviewing these at the next EBG meeting. The strategy would then need to be discussed between Defra and NE, particularly to ensure that we did not have two parallel processes reproducing work. Initial reactions were invited in the short time remaining.

Andrew Wood agreed that this should be discussed ex-committee and asked the Group to include in their responses to Doug Hulyer thoughts on the campaigns

as this would aid NE in framing its communications. He emphasised the value of ownership of the strategy across the range of organisations involved in the partnership.

8. AOB

No items of AOB were raised.

9. Details of future meetings

Weds 27th June 2007

Rms A & B, Nobel House, London.

Weds 5th Sept 2007

Rms LG 05 & 06, Page Street, London.