

ANNEX C



GUIDANCE IN DEVELOPING LOCAL BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLANS

INTRODUCTION

1 In June 1992, the Prime Minister and over 150 Heads of State or Governments, signed the Convention on Biological Diversity at the “Earth Summit” in Rio de Janeiro. Signatories recognised that action must be taken to halt the world-wide loss of animals and plant species and genetic resources. They recognised that each country has the primary responsibility to conserve and enhance biodiversity within its own jurisdiction. At the same time, they agreed to draw up national plans and programmes and to share resources to help implement such programmes. The Convention on Biological Diversity is essentially a commitment to conserving and sustaining the variety of life on earth.

2 At the launch of “*Biodiversity: The UK Action Plan*”, in January 1994, the Prime Minister announced that a national Biodiversity Steering Group would be established to develop work in this field. This Steering Group has addressed four main areas, namely:-

- ! UK targets for habitats and species;
- ! data requirements;
- ! raising public awareness and involvement; and
- ! guidance for the production of Local Biodiversity Action Plans.

3 The Steering Group reported in December 1995 with detailed proposals on each of these topics as the basis for implementation of the UK Action Plan. It was agreed that the guidance for production of Local Biodiversity Action Plans should be made widely available as a separate document for all those likely to be involved in this process.

4 If the UK Biodiversity Action Plan is to be implemented successfully it requires some means of ensuring that the national strategy is translated into effective action at the local level. Local Biodiversity Action Plans are seen as a means by which such action can be achieved. One of their main functions is to ensure that national targets for species and habitats are attained in a consistent manner throughout the UK. But there is a great deal more to such plans than simply providing a mechanism for meeting the national targets. They provide a means for delivery of several objectives of the UK Action Plan.

5 One of these objectives is to promote the conservation of species and habitats characteristic of local areas. Local Biodiversity Action Plans provide the focus for local initiatives to fulfil local needs in terms of biodiversity conservation. They provide an opportunity for local people to express their views on what is important. Local plans should seek, therefore, to include targets which reflect the values of local people and

which are based on the range of local conditions, and thereby catering for local distinctiveness. However, since it will largely involve land which is in private ownership, the approach will require considerable consultation, guidance and involvement of various sectors, to create the new working partnerships necessary for success.

6 It is expected that a Local Biodiversity Action Plan will act as a catalyst to develop effective partnerships capable of ensuring that programmes for conservation of biodiversity are maintained in the long-term. These local partnerships will, in turn, assist in raising awareness of the importance of biodiversity, thereby gaining wider public commitment. Joint “ownership” of a Local Plan is regarded as crucial to success in building commitment within the local community. Production of a Local Biodiversity Action Plan will provide the biodiversity component of Local Agenda 21.

7 Local Biodiversity Action Plans should also identify where it is appropriate and cost-effective to halt recent trends in habitat fragmentation, and create new and attractive landscapes by habitat enhancement and restoration.

8 Such plans will have a key role in monitoring progress in the conservation of biodiversity in the long-term. The data which form an integral part of Local Biodiversity Action Plans needs to be compatible with the national biodiversity database.

9 In summary:-

The purpose of Local Biodiversity Action Plans is to focus resources to conserve and enhance the biodiversity resource by means of local partnerships, taking account of both national and local priorities.

GENERAL APPROACH

10 A Local Biodiversity Action Plan is both a product and a process. Not only does it identify where action needs to be taken to implement the national targets for habitats and species, but it also specifies appropriate delivery mechanisms. The scale of such Plans can be expected to vary considerably between different parts of the UK, for example they might be developed at local authority level. In England they should ideally be developed at the county or district level of local authorities. In some areas where insufficient data is available, it may be appropriate for Plans to be developed initially at a regional level to ensure that action is co-ordinated and that data is collected to enable further refinement of the Plan to a local level. The process of taking forward Local Biodiversity Action Plans in Scotland should take account of the particular circumstances there.

11 The formulation of Local Biodiversity Action Plans should not be undertaken by a single organisation, but there is a need for one organisation to take the lead. Local authorities are ideally suited to have this role, working with statutory conservation and countryside agencies, local and regional voluntary organisations, land managers, businesses, local records centres and specialist recorders. To be successful, the Plan should be owned by all the parties who have a key role in delivering the product.

12 The process of developing a Plan requires several quite distinct elements. Analysis and evaluation of the nature conservation resource is clearly a major part of the Plan, resulting in detailed proposals for action within a specified period of time. In parallel with this is the development of an effective partnership with key players, particularly land managers, to identify appropriate delivery and funding mechanisms. A third component is the programme for monitoring the effectiveness of the Plan including the extent to which both national and local targets are being achieved. Underlying all of this is the need for an adequate database at the local level, which is also fully integrated with a national biodiversity database.

MAIN ELEMENTS OF A LOCAL BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN

- ┆ Establishing a Plan Partnership.
- ┆ Agreeing broad objectives.
- ┆ Reviewing the resource.
- ┆ Evaluating the existing resource within the national and local context.
- ┆ Developing specific targets and proposals for action.
- ┆ Defining areas for action on a proposals map.
- ┆ Identifying delivery mechanisms and sources of finance and advice.
- ┆ Establishing a long term monitoring programme to measure the effectiveness of the Plan in achieving national and local targets.

ESTABLISHING A PARTNERSHIP

13 The first step is to establish a Plan Partnership, and for a lead organisation to be identified. The local authority is well placed to take the lead in promoting the Plan as part of its Agenda 21 process. Where a local authority is not in a position to take the lead, then it will be necessary to identify another lead organisation. The Plan Partnership will ultimately include all key players with responsibility for the conservation of biodiversity within the plan area, including representatives of land managers. Initial steps should include a period during

which land managers are consulted on the objectives, mechanisms and benefits, as their agreement and co-operation is vital. The Partnership should be established at the outset to encourage the development of a shared vision, and to ensure that all participants are committed to the development of the Plan.

EXAMPLES OF KEY PLAYERS IN A PLAN PARTNERSHIP

Local authority (members and officers)	Local Conservation and amenity groups
Land managers, business and industry	BTCV/SCP
Statutory nature conservation agency	Forestry Authority
Local biological records centre	National Trust (or NTS)
Local wildlife trust/RSPB	FWAG: Woodland Trust
DOE/Scottish Office/ Welsh Office/DOE(NI)	Game or wildfowling organisations
NRA/drainage authorities	Marine conservation bodies.

AGREEING BROAD OBJECTIVES

14 There are two main objectives of a Local Biodiversity Action Plan - to reflect and implement national priorities and, at the same time, take into account local considerations. One of the primary objectives is to ensure the effective implementation of national targets for both species and habitats at the local level. National targets will thus inform and guide the content of local action plans so that implementation is firmly linked to national priorities. At the same time, a local action plan must take account of the range of biodiversity within the local area and its importance to local people. Other objectives include the effective development of a long term process for biodiversity conservation and a means of monitoring progress.

REVIEW OF EXISTING INFORMATION

15 An early requirement is to review existing information for both species and habitats. Such data varies in both quality and coverage in different parts of the UK, and part of the process in developing Plans is to ensure that minimum standards are met. Areas suffering from inadequate information will need to include actions to improve the information base as a matter of priority. The review of existing information will be a highly selective process concentrating on both information relevant

to UK targets for habitats and species, and information needed to set local targets, ie relating to habitats and species characteristic of the area covered by the Plan. This could also include information about species which have been lost from the local area with a view to their reintroduction.

16 The production of a biodiversity map for the local area will be an essential step prior to assessing the resource, evaluating it and identifying areas for action. A biodiversity map shows the location of important semi-natural habitats together with selected information on the distribution of critical species. Inventories exist for a variety of habitats including, for instance, peatland, heathland, grassland, saltmarshes, and other comprehensive information is available for many parts of the UK in the form of Phase I survey data. There is considerable variation in the availability of species information as this depends on individual recording schemes. Information is also available on the location of designated sites. Together, this information will provide the basis for a biodiversity map. Where local records centres exist, data is more readily available. Elsewhere data will be held by different organisations, and it will be necessary to collate existing data and to identify gaps.

17 Shortcomings of existing data should not be regarded as a reason to delay the process. The “best available data” should be used at the same time ensuring that improving the data is given high priority as part of the ongoing Plan.

18 The collation of data on biodiversity is best carried out by local records centres. In areas where such centres do not exist, or where the information is currently inadequate, this deficiency will need to be addressed as part of the Plan. The establishment of new partnerships may be crucial to the development of local records centres capable of maintaining a Plan Database. The most effective long term analysis of appropriate data will often be through a Geographical Information System (GIS) which will enable updating to be carried out at the local level. Local data systems need to be compatible with each other throughout the UK, and with the national biodiversity database.

19 The role of local records centres is dealt with more fully in Chapter 3. They are an essential prerequisite to the successful implementation of *Biodiversity: The UK Action Plan* at the local level, and records centres should ensure that the partners are kept informed about available datasets and their uses.

20 Where appropriate, local authorities will wish to use the data underlying local plans, and the subsequent monitoring component, as part of their ongoing “State of the Environment” reports.

EVALUATING THE RESOURCE

21 A significant part of the Local Biodiversity Action Plan will be devoted to those species and habitats for which targets have been set nationally. These targets result from a critical analysis identifying priorities for action as, for instance, in the case of globally threatened species, or those which have suffered a significant decline in numbers within the UK. Information concerning the distribution and condition of the species and habitats within the Plan area will be required in order to develop strategies appropriate to local circumstances. Priorities for action will be influenced by the national targets.

22 One of the objectives of *Biodiversity: The UK Action Plan* is the conservation and, where possible, the enhancement of habitats and species characteristic of local areas. In considering local characteristics, priority should be placed on the historical and natural context. In England, the Natural Areas Programme will assist this process, as will biogeographical zones in Scotland. Other strategic plans may also assist with this process, such as coastal zone management plans and river catchment management plans. Certain species may be selected because they are characteristic of the local area and are familiar to local people.

23 Elements of biodiversity which are considered to be significant in the local context should be identified at an early stage in the development of the Plan, so that priority can be given to relevant species and habitats in the collation and evaluation of existing data.

IMPLEMENTATION OF ACTION PLANS FOR HABITATS AND SPECIES

24 Action plans specific to particular habitats and species are needed to achieve the objectives of the local Plan. In the case of those habitats and species for which targets have been set nationally, this will require interpretation of the national targets and action plans at the local level. For other species or habitats, considered to be of local significance, it will be necessary to produce specific action plans. To maintain the standard approach, the same framework should be used as with the UK habitat and species action plans. In all cases, action plans should identify the organisations responsible for delivering the required action, and specify a target for its implementation. In addition to the specific action plans, Local Biodiversity Action Plans will contain generic action plans of various kinds. Examples include:-

- ▮ establishment of a local records centre where none exists;
- ▮ action plans which can be applied to a particular suite of habitats, eg all kinds of woodlands;
- ▮ a strategy for a prime biodiversity area;
- ▮ identifying the sources of funds and developing effective policies for allocation.

DEFINING AREAS FOR PRIORITY ACTION

25 As a result of the evaluation, in both the national and local context, specific areas will be identified for priority action.

Prime Biodiversity Areas

26 Areas where particular concentrations of high priority habitats occur are often referred to as prime biodiversity areas. These are not designations but are areas where action is likely to be most cost effective. Such concentrations offer opportunities for proactive programmes aimed not only at managing those sites, but also increasing the level of biodiversity of intervening land through habitat management and enhancement, or by means of habitat re-creation aimed at restoring the natural character of the local area.

Urban Areas

27 Special attention needs to be given to the development of action plans for urban areas, where most people live, as a means of raising awareness of the need for the conservation of biodiversity, and involving local people in positive action as part of the local action plan. A key aspect is the establishment of workable targets for the amount of accessible urban wild space available which can be managed for wildlife and for people's enjoyment of nature.

The Wider Countryside

28 Local Biodiversity Action Plans will need to cater for a host of initiatives which already occur within the wider countryside, such as restoration of ponds, trees and hedgerow planting, and the conservation of headlands. Such activities contribute considerably to biodiversity conservation, and should be encouraged wherever appropriate. Although implementation will be largely dependent on individual land managers, it will be necessary to ensure that generic action plans are developed and implemented through local partnerships. It will also be necessary to link landscape and conservation features with specific habitat action plans. Particular attention will also need to be given to rare and declining species with scattered populations where these are not adequately catered for within existing designated sites or within prime biodiversity areas.

IDENTIFYING DELIVERY MECHANISMS

29 The process needs to be linked to the opportunities of grant funding through local or national schemes to stimulate the interest and co-operation of the land managers on whom the success of the Plan will often depend. The funding map or inventory will need to be kept up to date, and advisory bodies such as FWAG or the key funding bodies such as MAFF or Forestry Authority should be included as lead players.

30 Relevant planning guidance and management advisory documents will need to be available to all participating organisations, especially the organisations responsible for implementing action. Advice on the availability of these documents should be a function of the local records centre.

31 It should be emphasised that Local Biodiversity Action Plans do not require new categories of site designation. Implementation of Plans can be achieved successfully using the range of existing designations and incentives.

32 The lead organisations should ensure that those developing detailed targets for action work closely with individual land managers to agree objectives and to ensure that relevant management advice is available. They should also promote full use of available incentive schemes, including agri-environment schemes and agreements under Section 39 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, to ensure that appropriate management is introduced and maintained in the future so that local targets can be achieved.

MONITORING

33 The Plan should be monitored regularly to assess the degree to which it has been implemented, and how far it meets the targets for habitats and species. This should be a continuous process as different habitat and species action plans will need to be reviewed to different timescales depending on the information available when developing the Plan and the population dynamics of the species.

34 Monitoring changes in the status of species or habitats is required as part of the long term strategy for a Local Biodiversity Action Plan. However, monitoring can be costly, and it will be necessary to be selective. There are differences in the kind of information needed for the overall Plan and the data needed for monitoring. Monitoring should involve not only the species of UK significance, to provide information on UK trends, but should also be related to species of local significance or local interest. Consideration also needs to be given to the selection of species for monitoring in relation to their public appeal.

35 The monitoring process will need to be integrated with monitoring the UK Plan to help evaluate the role of the local area in contributing to national targets. Progress should be reported at the five-yearly period to be adopted for the UK Plan.

THE STAGES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF A LOCAL BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN

Identify lead organisation	Local authority will generally lead. If not, another body must be identified
Establish partnership	Identify main players including statutory agencies, voluntary sector, land managers and business
Agree broad objectives	Agree overall content of plan. Consult with land managers on objectives, mechanisms and benefits
Collect relevant data	Collect best available data on habitats and species relevant to national targets and local significance
Obtain additional data	Where gaps exist in existing information, collect relevant data. Where no local data centre exists, initiate action to establish a centre
Produce biodiversity map	Collate data and produce map showing distribution of key areas
Define prime biodiversity areas	Overlay species and habitat data to show local clusters of biodiversity. Identify prime biodiversity areas on map
Agree priorities for action	Agree priorities based on national targets, local and community objectives, key sites, species, and prime biodiversity areas
Strategy for prime biodiversity areas	Lead organisation to co-ordinate, using species, habitats, local history, geographical data and objectives of natural areas
Strategy for urban areas	Develop strategy for urban areas with a hierarchy of sites to include local needs for peoples enjoyment
Strategy for other areas	Identify priorities for action within the wider countryside
Develop local action plans	Lead organisation to consult on and develop local habitat and species action plans with targets for national and/or local priorities
Delivery mechanisms	Lead organisation to identify funding and other resources available, including sources of advice
Monitor progress	Monitor and review the whole process. Report locally and nationally

36 The provision of this guidance is only the first step towards implementation of Local Biodiversity Action Plans. It needs to be seen in the context of a whole new target led approach to conservation stemming from *Biodiversity: The UK Action Plan*. Implementation will require more than just the guidance to ensure success. It will require training, pilot projects, community workshops and other means to ensure a fully professional product. It would also be necessary to consult with national bodies, especially those representing local authorities and land managers to ensure that the whole programme can be carried forward effectively.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LOCAL AND NATIONAL TARGETS

