

REFRESHING THE BIODIVERSITY PARTNERSHIP IN ENGLAND NOTES OF A WORKSHOP ON 1 MARCH 2007

Introduction

This is a note of a workshop chaired by Barry Gardiner, Minister for Biodiversity, Landscape and Rural Affairs on 1 March 2007 with the objectives of (1) exploring the ecosystem approach as the guiding principle for future action planning, to help place site and species conservation in a more dynamic context to meet challenges including climate change and (2) streamlining the bureaucracy surrounding the BAP in England. A list of participants is attached at Annex , and action points at Annex B.

Summary of presentations

Where we are now - Paul Rose, JNCC

Paul gave a brief summary of the development of the UK BAP since 1994, including the country strategies and local and regional groups. There had been progress against 281 of the 1139 targets under UK BAP, but we could perhaps have expected to make more progress, given that the effort that BAP had harnessed was greater than could ever have been imagined. One of the 12 key principles of the ecosystem approach was that management should be decentralized to the lowest appropriate level, and local and regional groups were ideally suited to delivery of much of the action. The signposting exercise currently being conducted as part of the priorities review would be an important vehicle for further embedding the ecosystem approach.

Pointers for the future I : signposting the priority list - Steve Lee-Bapty, Defra

The BAP was a strong brand –name and BAP priorities featured in the funding strategies of Government and other funding bodies. Nevertheless, the successes secured for individual species might be taking up resources that would be better devoted to addressing some of the cross-cutting issues or more holistic work. The priorities review had identified some 1193 species, and experts had been asked to identify up to three most important mechanisms, from a list. The next stage in this process would be for the Priorities Review Group to use feedback from experts to produce a list of those species needing help from each particular mechanism, with the aim of avoiding the need for a multiplicity of individual plans re-addressing familiar issues. The role of ensuring that a habitat made a contribution to an ecosystem was best done at the regional scale. Overall, diversity itself suggested that the group was unlikely to recommend a one-size-fits-all approach.

Pointers for the future II – Isabel Alonso, Natural England

The lowland heathland HAP had held an extra-ordinary meeting to (a) clarify relations among groups involved in BAP at national, regional and local level

and (b) improve communications between local groups and UKBAP groups. Elements of BAP that had worked well included awareness raising and bringing partners together, a target-based approach that was easy to understand, helping funders to target resources and find leverage, and protection and restoration of BAP habitats/species. Areas for improvement included more efficient administration, improved BARS reporting, stronger linkage with FCS reporting requirements, stronger embedding of the policy implications of devolution, climate change and landscape approach, stronger influencing regional and local policy (RSS, LDFs, etc), and better communication. Overall, there was a need to recognise the strengths of BAP process; clarify roles and responsibilities, particularly in relation to the different geographical tiers, improve communication at all levels. HAP groups could have a stronger role in providing expert advice to R/LBAPs. The group was in favour of retaining UK HAP groups.

Pointers for the future III: The role of the biodiversity process in delivering large scale habitat restoration and ecosystem services – Mark Avery representing Wildlife and Countryside Link

Mark set out Wildlife and Countryside Link's vision to protect the best, restore the rest, but also re-create some of what had been lost. In general, if we had more, better and bigger habitats, that would deliver both for priority species and for ecosystem services. However, just creating more habitat would not deliver everything we wanted; while we needed more woodland, existing woodland also needed to be better managed. Doing the 'right thing' with habitats would deliver many species targets at once, but doing the 'right thing' with habitats wouldn't deliver *all* species targets. Measures of species success were important to indicate the success of a habitat-based approach. There was often not a strong direct link between species and ecosystem services, although *Sphagnum* moss exemplified a species group that were important for storage of both carbon and water; mismanagement of the uplands had led to a both a loss of species and ecosystem services. In conclusion, habitat protection and re-creation will deliver increased ecosystem services and BAP species targets if we are clever and if we take action!

Pointers for the future IV: Paul Rose, JNCC

Paul returned to the key principle within the ecosystem approach that management actions should be undertaken at the scale most appropriate for the issue being addressed, with decentralisation to the lowest level, as appropriate. Within a devolved, country-led framework, the UK dimension depended on what the countries collectively chose to do. Paul proposed roles at UK level for providing a shared vision and overarching approach, UK nature conservation priorities (including OTs & MEAs), UK strategy for surveillance / monitoring, UK strategy for biodiversity research (building on work of BRAG), NBN as the first choice data supply mechanism, guidance/standards, for example on the sustainable use of ecosystems and a coherent network of protected areas, an appropriate reporting framework (including for MEAs & EU Directives) and effective co-ordination and communication. Roles to be undertaken at country level would include action

planning, target setting, and policy influencing, through country biodiversity strategy workstreams; at regional level: Spatial planning (including helping to prioritise action for local level), and at the local level, delivery by local partnerships and national organisations working to the regional plan.

Report back from breakout groups:

Each group considered two questions:

- How can we re-shape BAP along ecosystem/habitat lines?
- How can we streamline the bureaucracy surrounding the Biodiversity Partnership in England?

Group 1. Chair: John Everitt; Rapporteur: David Henshilwood

Embedding the ecosystem approach

- Need to broaden basis of valuing biodiversity – cannot continue to rely on “existence value” as justification for securing resources. Need to consider social and economic values; informed choices need to be made by society.
- How does one square national target-setting with the needs/wishes and aspirations of local communities? Who decides on the value of an ecosystem service?
- Need to consider biodiversity in a wider, European context and square this with what the people who like to walk their dogs in the biodiverse places value.

What is the appropriate level to translate these ideas into practice?

- Regional spatial planning (“Regional Environment Partnerships”) is where one can make climate change adaptation/ecosystem services “real”.. Regional spatial planning is bringing together partners. Same habitat could provide different ecosystem services – Tees and Eden.
- A four-fold increase in species does not necessarily imply a four-fold increase in the resources required.

Streamlining bureaucracy

- Need to broaden the membership of England Biodiversity Groups to include soils, air, water colleagues – not just a “biodiversity centric” approach.
- Strengthen relationship between EBS and UK BAP – complementary approaches, but joint strengths are not being adequately harnessed.

- Much better harmonisation of reporting and monitoring between BAP and other processes;
- Look to reduce emphasis on such detailed monitoring by making better use of proxies;
- Clarity of expectations and responsibilities of different groups.
- Better subsidiarity – decisions taken at the lowest appropriate level.
- Clearer deadlines - processes fit for purpose.
- Test for better administration is how we handle the new species priorities.

Group 2. Chair: John Robbs; Rapporteur: Pete Brotherton

Embedding the ecosystem approach

The group agreed priority habitats need to form a stronger focus for BAP work in the future. Taking up the themes raised in Mark Avery's talk, we agreed that species objectives and ecosystem services would both be better delivered if we get habitat delivery right. This will need us to:

- (i) Make the best use of species-based research and evidence to ensure that habitats are managed better for the species they support. An example of this was the shift of lowland heathland management to include more bare earth for invertebrates.
- (ii) Incorporate species-based success measures into habitat action plans, such as species indicators, species targets, or targets for habitat features required by groups of species.

In adopting a habitat-focus we also need to improve the way habitat groups work together and to communicate what we are doing carefully to a wider audience. We noted that the general public would always be more interested in hearing about species conservation successes than the ecosystem approach!

Action required: Assess existing HAP groups to learn from relevant experience and establish good practice.

Streamlining bureaucracy

If we are focussing more on habitats, how does the bureaucracy need to change to cope?

HAPs are currently at UK level, and the groups agreed that this level would remain important for communication, research and reporting functions. However, there needs to be a shift of authority and responsibility for delivery to the country level. In addition, the HAP groups may need greater authority

and influence over resources and/or policy development. In England, this would require closer links to EBS workstreams.

Overall, there needs to be much greater clarity of responsibilities at the different levels of the BAP process (national-regional-local) and between organisations. Natural England has a key role to play across all HAP groups, although this will vary between HAPs – in some Natural England will lead all aspects of delivery, in others it will have more of a facilitation role.

Group 3. Chair: Martin Brasher; Rapporteur: Glyn Davies

Embedding the ecosystem approach

The need to underpin sustainable development is an important political focus at UK level.

Biodiversity helps to support ecosystem resilience although unclear how much resilience is delivered.

Ecosystems Approach over a decade old. Fully signed up to by UK but not fully implemented. The ecosystem services agenda contributes to one of the 12 key principles of the Ecosystem approach which was to understand and manage the ecosystem in an economic context. Non-commercial values important: well-being; water/air, and need the holistic economic assessment to link species – habitats – ecosystem services. Defra economic study useful to help bring links between BAP and ecosystem services.

Ultimately, we will need to use species, as well as physical/structural measures to indicate the health of ecosystems.

Defra's ecosystem approach to Natural Environment policy may encourage a more holistic approach by bringing together policy leads for the terrestrial environment, air, water and marine. It may also offer a stronger opportunity to incorporate public engagement more effectively (eg the services to people dimension helped justify HLF funding for lowland heathland HAP group).

Streamlining bureaucracy

The original concern raised by Wildlife and Countryside link was not so much about the bureaucracy, but rather to reinvigorate links and engagement between partners.

Many actors required to deliver, but lack of clarity on who is accountable: Lead Partners; steering groups; expert organisations. There was a particular need to clarify what actions need to be taken by whom – to clarify and empower people to deliver on the target. May be useful to determine who is accountable for delivering actions / targets.

What were the roles of BRIG and BRAG that were relevant to local groups?

Need to do things at the right level; devolution implies a slimming down of UK involvement in action planning – general agreement with Paul's proposal that UK role should be concerned with surveillance, monitoring and reporting, with a minimal coordination role. This is an evolution that is already well under way, but could perhaps benefit from being set out formally, to confirm those who are already doing this in their ways, and to encourage those who aren't to move towards this.

Plenary discussion: where do we want to be?

A number of points were raised during the plenary discussion, covering:

- rebuilding biodiversity through the landscape scale approach;
- the need for a more people-orientated approach, both promoting the bigger services to society from biodiversity and holding a conversation with society about what they value;
- the importance of maintenance of species within ecosystems for their resilience;
- the savings resulting from good biodiversity management in both flood defence and catchment management;
- the prospect of two-tier targets, distinguishing between those that are deliverable with current resource, and those that are more aspirational;
- the importance of using the NERC Act biodiversity duty to promote powerful and rigorous engagement at the highest level; and
- the need to avoid duplicating work at UK, country and regional levels. The draft points of consensus are attached at Annex B.

How Natural England will lead on delivery– Helen Phillips, Chief Executive, Natural England

Faced with tight resources, we needed to think carefully about where we take action for single species. NE was developing proposals to apply clearer, sharper eligibility criteria to Higher Level Stewardship to enable the targeting of limited resources not only to protect and conserve but also to re-build biodiversity resources. With regard to climate change, Helen noted that ruthless prioritisation meant investing in success and not fighting losing battles. NE would play an active role in the England Biodiversity Strategy work to overcome policy obstacles and maximise opportunities, e.g. from the new NERC biodiversity duty. It would also strongly support the local and regional biodiversity network; if national targets were to be translated into local action then we would need to help them to become even more effective. Natural England was committed to helping re-build the Biodiversity partnership.

Summing up and next steps – Barry Gardiner, Minister for Biodiversity, Landscape and Rural Affairs

The Minister thanked participants for their contributions. A key point to emerge was the need to clarify at different levels what the responsibilities and

obligations are. While it is important that we get this right, it was also important that we maintained the energy, enthusiasm and commitment of all the players. Part of that was not just about giving responsibilities, but also giving resources. Barry Gardiner asked officials to think about ways of releasing that energy. A further point to emerge was the apparent conflict between the overall contribution of biodiversity to ecosystem resilience, on the one hand and the fact that the most endangered species were making a minimal contribution to ecosystem functionality on the other. The discussion today will only be of value if it helps us to deliver "more, bigger and better" habitats for biodiversity to flourish. We had a responsibility to communicate the results of this workshop to the wider community. The Minister therefore asked officials to draw together the strands of the discussion in terms of consensus reached (attached at Annex B) and propose the action arising from this discussion within the next month. The partners around the table today would then be asked to make their responses so that the Department could take these on board and move forward. The Minister suggested sitting down together in 9 months' time or so to take stock and review whether what we have done has made a difference.

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ANNEX A

Points of consensus

- The exceptional, productive partnership that exists between Government and the NGO sector, with our respective roles and strengths, as a result of the BAP process was recognised, valued and reaffirmed
- The BAP process required leadership to re-energise it and take it forward, both in terms of thinking/approach and in terms of delivery.
- The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment has raised awareness of the relationship between ecosystems and human well being, and highlighted the need to take action to reverse ecosystem degradation by addressing the key drivers and valuing ecosystem services. In doing so it has highlighted the importance of biodiversity and the current rate of biodiversity loss.
- The challenge posed by climate change underlines the need for a long-term ecosystem based approach.
- This implies a shift of emphasis in the role of Species and Habitat Action Plans within the Partnership and England Biodiversity Strategy.
- In order to achieve resilient ecosystems, the future emphasis will increasingly be on Habitat Action Plans (HAPs), although we need to ensure that habitat –based working delivers more for species.
- We need to learn from experience to date to identify what has worked well in HAPs and what has been less successful.
- Species objectives should be integrated within HAPs but in some circumstances separate Species Action Plans will continue to be the best focus for action.
- HAPs should also reflect the wider value of ecosystem services and contribute to increasing public understanding of the value of what they are working to achieve.
- In addition, there was a need to consider the inter-relationship of HAPs (and their actions) within a spatial ecosystem framework, bringing together actions from different habitats and species in a particular targeted area.
- Large scale habitat restoration helps deliver for both the agendas of ecosystem services (connectivity, resilience, flood management etc) and for priority species and habitats

- We will need to use species, as well as physical/structural measures to indicate the health of ecosystems
- It is important to bring a more spatial dimension to BAP, using layers of data to help inform decisions about biodiversity action at national, regional and local levels. Equally we would want to ensure that actions at different levels complemented rather than challenged the delivery capacity of lead partners, particularly those in the NGO sector.
- HAPs should inform and enable regional and local initiatives.
- This will contribute to achieving greater clarity over the roles of different groups and committees within the Partnership.
- There is a shared aim of streamlining and reinvigorating the architecture of the Partnership.
- At the same time the opportunity should be taken to benefit from the potential offered by the creation of Natural England as a key partner both in leading thinking on biodiversity and in delivery of the England Biodiversity Strategy.
- There is likely to be a range of improved delivery mechanisms and efficiencies.

ANNEX B

PROPOSED ACTIONS

1. Defra to promulgate the note of the meeting widely to the biodiversity partnership to stimulate discussion and initiate action.
 2. Defra to request Natural England to review the functioning of Habitat Action Plan groups and make proposals for the better brigading and working of these groups in England, taking into account the following three questions:
 - How can HAPs better deliver the actions needed for priority species?
 - How can HAPs work with the EBS workstreams so that their policy needs of habitats can be better taken into account?
 - How can HAPs collaborate to deliver habitat and species targets through an ecosystem approach?
 3. Natural England to improve delivery at a regional level through the network of local and regional biodiversity partnerships, by articulating the implications of the revised England targets by providing regional subsets of revised HAP and SAP targets by June 2007, and advising on prioritisation and delivery in each of the 9 English regions.
 4. Defra and Natural England to promote joined-up working between HAPs and local and regional partnerships, perhaps through the LBAP conference planned for September 2007.
 5. Defra, in consultation with JNCC, Natural England and devolved administrations to propose an outline of responsibilities within the Biodiversity partnership at the following levels:
 - UK
 - Country
 - Regional
 - Local
- Structure to be incorporated in the Strategic Statement on Biodiversity to be published at the UK Partnership Conference in October.
6. Natural England to champion the general biodiversity duty on public bodies under Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act, including by promulgating the forthcoming guidance nationally and in each of the 9 regions. Natural England to support Defra in championing the duty to other Government Departments.
 7. The England Biodiversity group to agree a strategy for biodiversity communication.