

AGENDA ITEM No. 9

PEAK DISTRICT NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY MEETING

30 MARCH 2007

CONSERVATION & DEVELOPMENT

PART A

1. MID-TERM REVIEW OF THE PEAK DISTRICT BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN AND PROPOSED IMPLEMENTATION TO THE END OF 2010 (A96991/KS)

Proposal

- 1 To revise Peak District Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) targets in the light of five years of implementation, and in line with the review of the UK BAP; to continue implementation of the Peak District LBAP with partners to the end of 2010; and to raise the profile of biodiversity issues within the LBAP area.

2 RECOMMENDATION:

That:

1. **The progress made by all partners towards LBAP targets is noted.**
2. **The revised LBAP targets are endorsed.**
3. **The outline package of potential delivery mechanisms to address LBAP targets is approved.**
4. **The LBAP to be re-launched on the United Nations International Day for Biological Diversity and members be represented by Chair and Vice-Chair of Services Committee or their nominated representative as an approved duty.**

Policy/Legal Background

- 3 The Peak District LBAP, published in 2001, is a plan for conserving and enhancing the wildlife resource of the Peak District. The plan is at the heart of our aim for a sustainable future, significantly helping to fulfil the first purpose of National Parks, and delivering associated socio-economic benefits to the wider Peak District. The plan is one of a series of Local Biodiversity Action Plans throughout the country contributing towards the UK Biodiversity Action Plan and the international Biodiversity Convention signed at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992. It involves the active engagement of a broad range of partners and stakeholders - the Peak District Biodiversity Partnership is charged with implementation of the objectives and targets.

- 4 The proposal delivers against the following National Park Management Plan (NPMP) and Corporate (NPC) outcomes.

Outcome	NPMP outcome	NPC outcome
Achieving SSSI condition	1	E1, E2
Achieving BAP targets for habitat and species	1	E3
Increased distinctive White Peak habitats	1	
Achieving moorland restoration and condition	1	
Landscape characterisation		A1
Natural resource protection		A3
Providing learning opportunities		G1, G2
Developing volunteering opportunities		G3
Supporting land managers and creating economic benefits		J3

Key Issues

- 5 Progress Against Key Actions –

Throughout the PD LBAP and its Habitats and Species Action Plans there are recurring themes, some of which are central to meeting the BAP objectives and targets as a whole. The BAP therefore identified a number of cross-cutting key actions grouped under seven headings.

Data Collation and Survey – A GIS-based database of LBAP habitats and condition has been developed by the National Park Ecology Team. However information for some habitats is very incomplete or dated, and the use of remote sensing data is being evaluated by Conservation Service and IT staff. Collation of information on conservation action by a wide range of partners remains problematical but has been significantly improved by the allocation of a post within the Ecology Team as an LBAP Co-ordinator, supported by funding from Natural England.

Strategic Policies – Achievement of LBAP targets is now embedded in National Park Management Plan and Corporate Outcomes, and the LBAP is routinely referred to in Environmental Impact Assessments. At regional level the Peak District is identified as a Biodiversity Conservation Area within regional policy documents. The Authority has also used local experience to influence national policy and its implementation, including the Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations for Uncultivated and Semi-Natural Land; regulations relating to overgrazing of land; and the proposed adoption of metalliferous habitats (lead mining remains in the case of the Peak District) as a UK BAP Priority habitat.

Conservation Action and Incentives – Agri-environment schemes have played a fundamental role in helping achieve LBAP targets. The negotiation of Moorland Management Plans under ESA agreements, for example, has been central to achieving recovering condition on SSSI moorland. The replacement of Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESAs) and the Countryside Stewardship Scheme (CSS) by the two-tier Environmental Stewardship Scheme (ESS) is welcomed in principle but limits to available financial support are restricting the higher tier of ESS to a much narrower range of sites. The Authority is using other incentives such as the National Parks' Environmental Enhancement Scheme and the Environmental Quality Mark to encourage delivery of LBAP objectives.

Other Resources - The majority of other work contributing to LBAP targets has been funded independently from the BAP process through core partner funding and projects with external funding, such as Moors for the Future. However, resources specifically

related to LBAP delivery have included 12 months' funding from Natural England towards the LBAP Co-ordinator post and Landfill Tax (via the SITA Trust) for work on grassland conservation and restoration, pond conservation and restoration and haymeadow restoration within the Vision Project area. More recently the appointment of the LBAP Co-ordinator has allowed us to access £6,500 from Natural England for the LBAP area including work on GIS database development, website construction, production of the mid-term review and promotion of the LBAP process.

Monitoring – Assessing progress towards LBAP targets is a central part of the current review and is set out in the next section of this report.

Awareness Raising and Public Enjoyment – The majority of direct public engagement for the LBAP has been achieved through the Vision Project, where the use of a dedicated Community Conservation Officer has been very successful working alongside rangers in engaging local schools, community groups, local residents and others in conservation activities in their local environment. Whilst many of the BAP achievements have been at least facilitated if not delivered by conservation bodies the contribution of individuals, businesses and non-conservation organisations should be stressed. These include quarry companies who manage nature reserves on their holdings and contribute materials for habitat restoration projects, contractors who deliver wildlife benefits alongside routine work, farmers and local businesses who care about wildlife conservation as well as local schools, groups and individuals involved in practical conservation tasks.

- 6 Research – Lack of resources for detailed monitoring and research means that most opportunities for learning have been on an informal basis arising through implementation, with the notable exception of the successful research programmes developed within the Moors for the Future project. Examples of expertise developed in the course of implementing LBAP objectives include dewpond restoration techniques, moorland restoration and practical management techniques for farmland birds.

Progress Towards Targets

The table at Appendix 1 summarises progress towards meeting the targets. Overall progress has been mixed, with greater achievement made where specific projects such as the Peak Birds Project, Moors for the Future and the Vision Project have been in place. Further detail is given in Appendix 2.

Woodland - Targets for conservation, restoration and expansion of ash and oak/birch woodland have been met or exceeded largely due to the Forestry Commission taking an active lead, with significant delivery support by the Authority's Conservation Service, through implementation of the Woodland Grant Scheme, the Ravine WoodLIFE project and the now-expired Native Woodland Challenge Fund. Additional progress has been made through management on partner-owned land (e.g. Alport Dale and the Upper Derwent). Data are deficient for wet woodlands as these usually occur as small elements within other woodlands and are under-recorded. Similarly, data is lacking for parkland and veteran trees but measures are in place to address this (see later in this report).

Grassland - Progress towards grassland targets has been largely dependent upon the success of agri-environment schemes with additional progress through land acquisition and management, SSSI condition work, and targeted projects. Shortfall has been largely due to the lapse of existing agreements, and the unavailability for many holdings of Environmental Stewardship Scheme funding. The shortfall on achievements for limestone heath is due to the inability to negotiate favourable management on the existing sites and the lack of financial incentives for restoration

and creation. Providing an indication of achievement for expansion targets is problematical due to a lack of recording and reporting across the BAP partnership.

Wetland - Data concerning progress towards wetland targets are deficient, largely due to problems with defining the resource, and limited ability of key partners to contribute to the process. Expansion targets have been addressed through cross-cutting projects such as the Vision Project, as well as work on partner-owned land.

Moorland - Conservation and restoration targets are largely met or on target due to large-scale work by Moors for the Future, direct management on partner-owned land, and the completion of ESA moorland management plans. A measure of progress towards restoration and expansion targets for heather moorland will become clearer as reporting methodology is improved.

Species - Mixed progress has been made with species targets, the notable successes stemming from targeted projects such as the Peak Birds Project for lapwing, curlew and twite; and Derbyshire Wildlife Trust's Water Vole Recovery project. There has been notable failure with white-clawed crayfish as a result of crayfish plague and alien species introductions. Substantial measures will be needed to meet targets for 2010 (see later in this report).

7 Revised Targets

The UK BAP review has addressed the lack of a standardised framework for targets. In the past this has caused difficulties with monitoring and measuring progress due to variation in the wording and measures of success used for targets. As a result of the UK BAP review a framework of target types now exists.

For habitats these are:

- Maintaining Extent,
- Achieving Condition,
- Restoration,
- Expansion;

For species:

- Population Size,
- Range.

8 The Peak District LBAP targets have now been revised to simplify and clarify them, and to ensure they are SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound) in line with the UK BAP. The main revision to the targets has been to replace percentages with real numbers, informed by analysis of digital habitat data. The detailed targets are given in Appendix 3.

9 Maintaining Extent refers to no loss of the existing known resource, a standard target across all LBAP habitats. Targets for Achieving Condition have been separated into SSSI and non-SSSI to take account of the different monitoring procedures. For SSSIs, Natural England's Common Standards Monitoring procedure will continue to be used, whilst for non-SSSI other measures will be employed such as entry into appropriate agri-environment scheme. For all SSSI habitats the PSA target of 95% into favourable or recovering condition has been used. Targets for non-SSSI land have been set at appropriate levels in consultation with the sub-groups according to progress made to date, and the availability of appropriate mechanisms to address targets in the future. Restoration and Expansion targets have largely remained the same as the originals, except for those which are now considered unrealistically high in light of resource and opportunity issues. The main quantitative changes in targets are as follows.

- 10 Targets for achieving condition for **limestone dales** outside SSSIs have been reduced from 100% to 50%, and restoration figures reduced from 30 ha to 15 ha, reflecting the limited progress to date and likely reduced availability of agri-environment scheme incentives in the foreseeable future. **Haymeadow** restoration and **heather moorland** restoration targets have been reduced from 500 ha to 100 ha, and 3500 ha to 2000 ha respectively for similar reasons, and **pond** creation targets have been reduced from 100 to 60 ponds to reflect the high cost involved.
- 11 Targets for achieving condition on **rough grazing** land have been increased from 50% to 75%, reflecting success to date, and **limestone heath** restoration targets have been increased from 40 ha to 80 ha to reflect likely opportunities subject to adequate funding incentives/pro-active projects becoming available or land purchase.
- 12 The Action Plan for **rush pasture** is being dropped due to difficulties in defining and mapping the resource. Those which are important botanically will be addressed through the Unimproved Pastures Action Plan, and those which are important for breeding birds will be picked up through the Species Action Plans. Others will no longer be considered a BAP priority.
- 13 Delivery Mechanisms
The methods of delivering against LBAP targets fall into five types: core work by partners; agri-environment and other conservation agreements; area-based projects; habitat/species-based projects; land acquisition and management by partners. Appendix 4 shows existing and additional/future delivery mechanisms required to achieve LBAP targets. The following gives further detail.
- 14 Core work will include SSSI condition work and moorland management plans for blanket bog and heather moorland targets. Management of publicly-owned land by partners will address targets across habitat groups.
- 15 Agri-environment and other conservation schemes are the main delivery mechanism on privately owned land. The achievement of grassland targets is highly dependent on (i) agri-environment schemes being sufficiently available and (ii) the ability of conservation organisations to target important sites into those schemes. Current indications are that the Environmental Stewardship Scheme is unlikely to adequately address either of these outside of SSSIs, resulting in a significant shortfall. The English Woodland Grant Scheme should effectively progress oak/birchwood targets.
- 16 Area-based and holding-based action will be key to delivering against targets for various BAP habitats and species, as well as addressing a number of the 25 key actions. To date this has largely been through the Peak District Land Management Advisory Service for holdings and the Vision Project targeting specific parishes. A White Peak Project is being considered which may, amongst other aims, build on recent experience to address wider landscape scale issues such as habitat condition and restoration of grasslands, woodlands and wetlands across the limestone plateau. A landscape character assessment will be carried out in 2007 to provide a key foundation for this work.
- 17 Habitat/species-based projects such as the Peak Birds Project (National Park Authority and RSPB) and the Water Vole Recovery project (Derbyshire Wildlife Trust) have demonstrated tangible results both for the named species, and for their associated habitats. Continuation of these will be crucial to reaching LBAP targets and contributing to UK targets. White-clawed crayfish (also a UK BAP species) may need a radical new approach requiring a significant input of funds and effort in order to establish viable wild/reintroduced populations. The continuation of the Moors for the Future project will be instrumental in addressing moorland targets. The Great Trees of

Derbyshire project, aimed at surveying veteran trees and providing management advice, is scheduled to work further inside the National Park boundaries this year and will be key to improving our knowledge of parkland and veteran trees and aiding in meeting targets.

- 18 Land acquisition and management by some LBAP partners is expected to play a role in addressing targets for smaller habitat areas such as limestone heath.
- 19 Future LBAP Delivery
On completion of the LBAP review, a public summary document will be produced and launched at a LBAP partnership event planned for 22 May 2007, timed to coincide with the United Nations International Day for Biological Diversity. A technical report for reference by LBAP partners will also be produced as an e-document.
- 20 Partnership working and awareness raising will be aided by the development of the Peak District LBAP website, currently in progress; and the refined GIS database of LBAP habitats and species due for completion in May. Revised targets will be input onto the national Biodiversity Action Reporting System (BARS) website, enabling the LBAP to be a dynamic document and improving the means of reporting on actions by lead partners.

APPENDIX

Background

- 21 The UK BAP review was launched mid 2004, with three remits: (i) to complete a national reporting round of progress towards targets; (ii) to update existing UK BAP Species and Habitats targets and make them SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound); (iii) to ensure that the correct species and habitats are listed as UK priorities. The first of these was completed and published in June 2006. The second was scheduled for publication in the summer of 2006, and the third element at the end of 2006. The UK BAP targets review was published at the end of November 2006. The priority species and habitats list is not yet available.
- 22 It is a core requirement of LBAP delivery that a review should be undertaken at least every five years, and that local biodiversity objectives should include spatially explicit SMART targets for habitats and species, taking into account national targets. Over the last few months the PD LBAP has been reviewed to assess the current progress made towards targets; revise the targets to make them SMART; and to define delivery mechanisms to take the LBAP forward until 2010. As part of this process a GIS database of LBAP habitats has been developed and analysed by consultants. The LBAP Co-ordinator has built upon this work, and liaised with LBAP sub-groups and the Biodiversity Implementation Group to complete the review.

Resources

- 23 Most action and projects have been funded directly through partner funding, either individually or as joint projects, or through external funding generated by individual partners, or through delivery of national schemes. There is scope for greater co-ordination of external funding bids for priority actions, notably where existing mechanisms within the partnership are failing to meet targets. The review of targets partly reflects the known financial options and constraints but also indicates future funding priorities.

Risk Management

- 24 See Appendix 5.

Human Rights, Equalities, Health & Safety

- 25 There are no apparent human rights, equal opportunities or health and safety issues resulting from this report.

Consultees

- 26 Director of Conservation & Development.

Enclosures

- 27 Appendix 1. Summary table of progress towards LBAP targets.
Appendix 2. Detailed progress towards targets.
Appendix 3. Detail of revised targets.
Appendix 4. Future LBAP delivery mechanisms
Appendix 5. Risk Management

List of Background Papers (not previously published)

28 Nil

Report Author

29 Karen Shelley, Peak District LBAP Co-ordinator.

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30 Thursday 22 March 2007