

Biodiversity South West  
**Towns Cities & Development Working Group**  
Minutes of the meeting Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2007

**Chair:** Imogen Davenport (SWWT)

**Attendees:**

**Imogen Davenport (SWWT)**

Naomi Brookes (SWRBP)

Neil Sherwood (SWRBP)

Mike Oxford (ALGE)

Ray Perrins (SWO)

Charlotte Rose (Wiltshire WT)

Basil Greenwood (NE)

Matt Low (NE, Devon)

Catherine Turtle (Cornwall County Council)

Kathryn Deeley (Plymouth City Council)

Gavin Bloomfield (RSPB)

Tim Corner (BRERC)

Sian Parry (Avon WT)

**1. Welcome and Apologies:**

Cheryl Marriott, Alison Slade, Matt Hamilton, Charles Routh, Tim Quintin

**2. Minutes and matters arising of the meeting on 15<sup>th</sup> June**

- **ID still to update the draft action plan**
- **NB still to produce summary leaflet for Nature Map & LDFs document**
- There is a REN session on LAAs on 18<sup>th</sup> Oct (EA, Exeter 11-3pm)

**3. Standard Application Form**

MO gave a presentation on the proposed electronic single application form (1App), now due to be introduced on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2008. He pointed out that no LA in the UK currently asks a biodiversity question, so no wonder we don't have the answers. The proposed nature conservation question asks about protected & priority species, sites & habitats and geological features. Help text guides applicants through it. It was acknowledged that other species - the 'rare and scarce' – could miss out – it has been difficult enough to get it set up for protected species, but at least there is scope to include BAP species.

There is also concurrent work on validation checklists – **MO to send NB a web link to draft page on biodiversity**. Government guidance refers to criteria and thresholds – if met then surveys will be required – if not received the application is not validated. A template has been drafted which it is suggested LAs customise with help from LRCs and LBAPs (eg some work has been done in the North East). LAs have to consult on their checklists so there is a chance to check whether biodiversity is included. There is some guidance on what constitutes a decent survey, but need to also publicise what is required.

ALGE are producing a template for biodiversity SPD – hopefully would be easy to use for individual areas (though in the SW additions for Nature Map and GI would be needed). MO is looking for case studies and funding for this. Hoped to be ready early 2008. A lot of this is based on work done in the Peak District, where they have done some monitoring of their SPD and its outcomes.

**Anyone wanting to be involved contact MO.**

MO and the RTPi are looking at issues of wilful disregard of statutory biodiversity requirements by some LAs – article to appear in 'Planning' that states this is a serious matter and could result in

disciplinary action by RTPI to help set an example. Concern was raised that NE and WTs are doing less work on protected species, and LAs are not doing it either. It is LA's responsibility and awareness needs to be raised along with tools provided to help them.

A further ALGE proposal is for a web-based biodiversity toolkit for planners – the Planning Portal have offered to host it and funding is coming from CLG. This would include model conditions, case studies, survey requirements, etc.

It was asked how many LAs are using PAS 2010 – about 400 copies have been sold but whether they are being used is not known.

Other useful info:

- LRCs will be strongly pushed in all the above
- Hants CC have engaged David Tyldesley to develop model LDF policies – these will be made available to ALGE
- A recent court ruling says consultees should only be expected to give a substantial response when they have sufficient information to base it on

#### **4. Green Infrastructure**

The GI policy seems to be going to get through the RSS process; now consistency of delivery is needed. Promotional work is required to build understanding among regional organisations and produce more packaged guidance on delivery. Growth Point work in 8 areas of the SW is producing some good work – GI strategies are specifically required for some and for the rest CLG guidance includes GI. Swindon & Exeter are good eggs (also wider eggs from Suffolk and Glasgow) – in Exeter looking at linking with Nature Map into a single policy.

The need to 'up our game' to bring in more funding was discussed – better negotiation skills are needed to get GI treated seriously. The benefits of wrapping GI in with issues such as climate change, health and transport were agreed, both as an aim in itself but also to make a bigger package for initiatives like Growth Points which have serious money and therefore will look at GI more seriously if it can compete in budget terms with other objectives.

BG is still intending to reconvene the GI group – this was supported. MO suggested a mapping exercise to bottom out what we mean by GI and what needs to be done – as a biodiversity sector 1<sup>st</sup> to get agreement, then roll out to planners. **BG to organise a workshop in November.**

MO – ALGE are thinking about negotiation skills workshops for ecologists – agreed this would be very useful.

#### **5. RSS update/next steps**

BG – the Panel Report is due in December, after which there will be a further round of consultation on proposed changes in Jan-Feb. JSA groups are still being encouraged to operate – to include biodiversity partners. There is still a strong push for increased housing – JSA groups will be involved in reviewing the figures.

There is a firm proposal for the planning and transport functions of regional assemblies to transfer to the RDA, with one single regional strategy combining the RSS and Reg Economic Strat. The RA would be phased out by 2010. This will require primary legislation, a consultation is expected in Dec – important to ensure sustainability duties etc are strong. Also tacked on to this would be changes to how LAs operate – a statutory economic delivery duty put on to LAs and LAA will become the central delivery function. There is a useful summary of this on the SWRA website (papers for 2<sup>nd</sup> Oct Regional Planning Group).

#### **6. LRCs/monitoring systems for LDFs**

RP presented ideas for a monitoring & planning workshop (November) focussed on LDF Core Output Indicator 8 (ie biodiversity). Also to be discussed at BIRG meeting – they have discussed a combined system to monitor for multiple reporting requirements based on a sample of BAP habitats. How to monitor species still a tricky issue. It was agreed that a workshop would be a good idea – if focussed on defined outcomes rather than just talking around the problems – and there are still some fairly fundamental issues to discuss. Points raised in discussion included:

- LAs have the impression that LRCs and others are out there monitoring, without providing any funding towards this.
- It is crucial to push for up to date robust evidence bases. If plans were found to be unsound due to lack of evidence base then money would be found for survey etc.
- What is in the Core Strategy affects what is monitored so getting the policies right in this is crucial.
- The NBN inventories for the SW were done in 2004 – so out of date in 2009 – how do we update these?
- LRCs can only work out what they can do and how much it will cost when they know more precisely what's being asked of them; meanwhile others are looking to LRCs for answers on how to set monitoring up – so a chicken & egg situation.
- We need to come up with a saleable package to persuade LAs to operate these monitoring systems – if it is tied in with other agendas it may make a better case.
- SEA also an important tool.
- Need to make it relevant to both urban and rural areas, and link to GI.
- Growth Point funding will be an important source in relevant areas.

**RP to organise LDF workshop for November.**

## **7. Severn Barrage**

BG gave an update. Government press release giving strong support for a full feasibility study pre-empted a Sustainable Development Commission report on feasibility which has just been issued. NE have issued a press statement giving general support for renewable energy but pointing out the major env constraints and the absolute requirement to comply with the Habitats Regulations. GB pointed out the SDC report does pick up on a lot of the difficulties, eg with Habs Regs – 60% of intertidal habitat could be lost; finances are also a big issue - £15billion – therefore the report does not give the green light by any means. **BG/others to alert NB/ID if any assistance from Bio SW would be useful.**

## **8. Updates**

- Biodiversity SPD in Cornwall is still out for consultation.
- There is a joint Heathlands DPD for SE Dorset out for consultation – it does have regional and national implications.
- Teignbridge Core Strategy has been pulled as it was found unsound. It did have some good policies for enhancement – in SNAs and for Cirl Buntings – so worry if these were not retained.
- Plymouth Core Strategy has been approved, so is available as a case study is useful. The Biodiversity SPD is now within the design SPD. 3 AAPs also about to be issued. A planning obligations SPD is being put together – would include a contribution to biodiversity.

## **9. AOB**

ID pointed out that all old Local Plan policies have now been discarded, except where specifically retained under direction of GOSW – tend to be site-specific policies though there are some more generic policies retained from Structure Plans and RPG 10.

Plymouth want to run an event for the general public about planning and biodiversity – **anyone with any ideas contact KD.**

## **10. Date of next meeting**

Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> January 2008 10.30 at RSPB office, Exeter