

INTRODUCTION

Background

Biodiversity encompasses the whole variety of life on earth. It includes not only all species of plants and animals, but also their genetic variation, and the complex ecosystems of which they are all part. It is not restricted to rare or threatened species but includes the whole of the natural world from the commonplace to the critically endangered. Biodiversity is also about the wide range of habitats that these animals and plants live in and depend upon.

The intricate network of ecosystems, habitats and species that comprises Biodiversity provides the support systems that sustain human existence. It provides many of the essentials of life – our oxygen, water, food, clothing, health and relaxation. The value of Biodiversity extends from the spiritual benefits gained from contact with nature, to the economic potential of wild species for new sources of food or medicines.

In a local context, Biodiversity has particular importance in giving a distinctive character to an area, whether it be chalk downland, estuary, woodland or mountain. Even in towns and cities, oases of wildlife habitat make an important contribution to the quality of life.

The world, however, is losing Biodiversity at an increasing rate mainly as a result of human activity. It is reported that the UK has lost over 100 species this century, with many more species and habitats in danger of disappearing, especially at a local level. On a world scale, the rate of loss is now recognised to be a cause for serious concern, requiring international action to prevent continued loss of Biodiversity.

The target audience for the Hambleton Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) is landowners and land managers, policy makers and policy implementers, the wider community and businesses, their employees and customers.

Planning Policy Context

Framework

Planning Policy Guidance Note 9 advises how the Government's policies for the conservation of our natural heritage are to be reflected in land use planning. It embodies the Government's commitment to sustainable development and to conserving the diversity of our wildlife.

Regional Planning Guidance for Yorkshire and the Humber to 2016 (RPG12, published October 2001) now requires local planning authorities to identify and develop policies for areas important to the conservation of biodiversity. This is to be done by drawing on Local Biodiversity Action Plans and by reference to the Regional Biodiversity Audit and the National Species Action Plans (Policy NI).

The North Yorkshire County Structure Plan (Alteration Number 3, October 1995) contains policies stating that development will normally be permitted only where it would not harm the character and appearance, general amenity value or nature conservation interests of the surrounding area.

The Hambleton District Wide Local Plan (January 1999) contains policies with clear objectives to:

- protect sites and habitats of nature conservation interest from inappropriate development,
- protect the nature conservation heritage of the District wherever it

is found, and

- improve the number and diversity of sites and habitats of nature conservation value in the District.

The preparation and use of the Hambleton Biodiversity Action Plan is an important part of the planning process because, in addition to providing valuable information and supplementary planning guidance, it also identifies specific and positive actions that can be undertaken to preserve and enhance biodiversity in Hambleton District.

Links to LA21

The Council's Local Agenda 21 Strategy states that the Council will, in partnership with North Yorkshire County Council, 'Develop a Biodiversity Action Plan for the District' by July 2001. This document, therefore, satisfies one of the targets in the Council's first

Local Agenda 21 Strategy (December 2000). It is also one of the Council's targets to develop a Council 'Education for Sustainable Development Strategy', which links throughout the various sections of this plan.

Why a Biodiversity Action Plan?

Why conserve biodiversity?

Biodiversity is an integral part of our surroundings and quality of life, providing a resource for recreation and education, improving our well-being and maintaining a whole range of environmental protection functions such as flood control and climate regulation.

Biodiversity – a quality of life issue

Quality of life is important to us all, and is dependent on a number of factors. Amongst others, these include access to a decent home, work, education, health. It also depends on a healthy environment – clean air and water, and

a rich and diverse natural world.

In the UK the destruction of the countryside and the loss of wildlife has been such that a rich and healthy natural environment is no longer guaranteed. For example, 98% of wildflower meadows, 448,000 kilometres of hedgerows, over two million skylarks and 95% of high brown fritillary butterflies have been lost in less than a lifetime. We need to halt decline and put back, where we can, what has been lost not just in protected areas or nature reserves, but in the wider countryside too. Neither the scale of the task nor the need for urgent action should be underestimated.

Biodiversity is important to us all:

- We must hand over to the next generation a world no less rich than the one we inherited;
- The culture of a nation - music, literature and visual art - is inspired by its landscape and wildlife;
- Respect for the environment encourages respect for ourselves;
- Power over other organisms confers responsibility;
- Life takes time to evolve but can be lost quickly and is impossible to replace;
- Our environment's health determines our own;
- Some organisms are useful to us but we should not limit our efforts to these - we must conserve all those about which we still know little.

Biodiversity is not only significant for those who have a direct interest in nature conservation. It has much wider impact on our daily lives and sustainable development in general:

- Our rich wildlife heritage encourages people to get out and take exercise, helping to improve the health of society and reduce the impacts on the health service;
- It is important to people's mental and physical health and well-being;
- Wildlife-rich landscapes have economic benefits. For example, environment-related economic activity contributes jobs and income to the economy.

The conservation of our natural resources, including wildlife, is a key test of sustainable development, and is of relevance to us all. The threats to

biodiversity cannot be dealt with by targeted species or habitat recovery work alone. Many of the threats and constraints to protecting biodiversity arise from broader issues relating, for example, to the unsustainable use of land, air and water. An integrated approach is needed if positive impacts are to be made, for example through:

- Support for environmentally friendly agricultural methods, and the protection of the rural economy;
- Planning – needs to have a clear approach to avoiding or mitigation of adverse impacts on habitats as a result of development;
- Controls on water management and pollution;
- Protection of areas of high biodiversity interest (e.g. Sites of Special Scientific Interest);
- Action on climate change, through wiser energy and transport use.

The UK Biodiversity Action Plan

The Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) is the UK's initiative to maintain and enhance biodiversity. Through this plan, the Government committed itself to a process designed to conserve and enhance:

- The range and numbers of wildlife species and the quality and extent of wildlife habitats;
- Species and habitats that are internationally important or characteristic of local areas;
- Species and habitats that have declined significantly over recent decades.

English Nature and other organisations from across all sectors are committed to achieving the Plan's conservation

goals over the next 20 years and beyond. Local Biodiversity Action Plans form part of this structure.

Regional Biodiversity

Local Biodiversity Action Plans are being prepared across the Yorkshire and Humber region, based on administrative boundaries and are at various levels of completion. They are complimentary to one another in terms of their priority habitats and species. This is important for species such as the otter, which is best looked at on a river catchment scale, which covers more than one Local Authority area.

There is a particularly close relationship between the Hambleton and Harrogate BAPs where they meet in the historic washlands area of the rivers Swale and Ure, a situation that could also apply to Richmondshire. The Howardian Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty is represented in both the Hambleton and Ryedale BAPs and there are close affinities between the Countryside Agency Landscape Character areas of the northern portion of Hambleton and parts of the Tees Lowlands Area, which is covered by the Tees Valley BAP. At the eastern edge of the Vale of Mowbray, the Hambleton BAP is replaced by the North York Moors BAP, which covers many of the upland habitats of the National Park.

The North Yorkshire Biodiversity Action Group is co-ordinating the preparation of Local BAPs in the county of North Yorkshire, following agreement to produce District BAPs with a county overview.

A number of regional initiatives, such as the preparation of Regional Biodiversity Indicators, is being undertaken. The Yorkshire and Humber Biodiversity Forum has produced a biodiversity audit

covering all of the UK priority habitats and species. This work is to be followed by an audit of regionally important species.

Local Biodiversity Action Plans

One of the important facets of the UK approach to Biodiversity has been the encouragement of Local Biodiversity Action Plans (LBAPs). These plans are being developed to help foster action for UK priority species and habitats at a local level, but also to determine and take action for wildlife of local importance. LBAPs have been produced at a number of administrative levels including parish, district, county and region.

The LBAP can help integrate biodiversity action into the decision making of statutory and non-statutory bodies at a local level. For example, planners can use LBAPs as Supplementary Planning Guidance, to influence planning decisions, both to avoid harming wildlife and to encourage the restoration of habitats through after-use conditions. Business and industry can use LBAPs to highlight the biodiversity priorities which should be taken into account in their environmental management systems.

A Local Biodiversity Action Plan is both a product and a process and it should include the following:

- Establish a plan partnership
- Review wildlife resource
- Identify priorities within the national and local context
- Prepare action plans which set specific targets, identify partners and list actions
- Publish the BAP

- Identify and co-ordinate delivery mechanisms, funding and advice
- Implement action
- Establish long term monitoring programme
- Feed information back to national lead agencies

The Hambleton Biodiversity Action Plan seeks to achieve the following:

- Ensure national targets for species and habitats (in the UK action plan) are translated into effective

action at the local level

- Identify targets for species and habitats of local value
- Develop effective, long term local partnerships
- Raise awareness of the need for biodiversity conservation
- Consider opportunities for conservation of the whole biodiversity resource
- Set up a monitoring programme for both local and national levels

The Hambleton District Approach

A BAP steering group has been established. Membership is given in Annex D.

The overall vision of the Hambleton Biodiversity Action Plan is 'Working in Partnership for Wildlife in Hambleton'.

The Hambleton Biodiversity Action Plan intends to:

- Establish a local process for the delivery of the UK Biodiversity Action Plan
- Deliver action on agreed targets within a stated time scale
- Monitor progress towards targets
- Generate awareness, understanding and involvement in wildlife conservation

The Hambleton Biodiversity Action Plan will tackle wildlife conservation issues. Habitat classification work has shown that the habitats that are of highest value for wildlife are scarce in the District. Referred to as semi-natural habitats, these cover just 2.4% of the District (excluding the National Park). The Hambleton Biodiversity Action Plan aims to safeguard and enhance these rare habitats and their wildlife. Many

are being lost through neglect and the Plan will encourage their management in order to keep them in prime condition for wildlife. It may also be possible to restore habitats lost to recent changes in land use, or to create new habitats, but these measures are much inferior to adequate safeguarding of our existing resources. A rich and varied countryside benefits wildlife by sustaining the habitats they need and also by providing corridors between these key sites.

Large parts of the District are intensively managed for food production and there is huge potential to involve farmers in also managing for wildlife on their farms. This will help to address significant losses of wildlife that have occurred in the countryside over the last few decades.

The Hambleton BAP will also raise the quality of life of residents, by seeking their involvement in managing gardens and community space for wildlife.

Wildlife Audit

The first task for the Hambleton BAP Steering Group has been the preparation of a wildlife audit. This

considered all the habitats and species known in the District and prioritised them for conservation action. The following criteria were used:

Criteria for selecting habitats

- Any habitat for which a UK BAP has been prepared that occurs in the Hambleton District.
- Any semi-natural habitat that occurs in the Hambleton District.
- Any habitat that is characteristic of the Hambleton District.
- Any habitat that is locally distinctive within the Hambleton District.
- Any habitat that supports a priority species and occurs in the Hambleton District.

Some habitats are grouped into broad habitat types, such as 'farmland'.

Criteria for selecting species

- Any species (not including vagrants) that has recently occurred in Hambleton, and for which a UK BAP has been prepared.
- Any species that has been issued with a status showing that it is of conservation concern (such as Red Data Book listing, Nationally Scarce or red/amber listed birds) and has recently occurred in Hambleton.
- Any species that has statutory protection under European Directives or the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and has recently occurred in Hambleton.
- Any species occurring in the District that is considered by experts to be regionally rare.

- Any species that is considered to be locally distinctive.
- Any species that is considered to be locally valued.
- Any species that is considered likely to make a good flagship species for promoting action plans.

The selected priority habitats and species were evaluated and given a score.

Action Plans

Action plans have been written for the top-scoring habitats and species and these form the bulk of this document.

The BAP has identified a general lack of baseline data for some of the priority habitats and many of the priority species. There is therefore a need to establish the current status of many of the priorities before meaningful targets can be set.

Hambleton District Council will seek to develop a computer based mapping system (Geographical Information System) to record data on BAP habitats and species populations, as it becomes available. This information will inform the Hambleton District - Wide Local Plan.

Progress towards targets will be assessed annually and the Hambleton BAP will be fully reviewed after five years. The BAP is a flexible process, which is able to incorporate changes and additions as they occur.

An explanation of abbreviations is given at Annex F.

Hambleton District

The Hambleton BAP covers the Hambleton District-Wide Plan area, thus excluding those parts of the North York Moors National Park that lie within the official boundary of Hambleton.

A large proportion of the District lies within the Vale of York and the Vale of Mowbray. This is essentially low lying, fertile, arable land, dissected by the River Swale and bordered by the River Ure and the River Ouse. In the north the River Leven and Cod Beck are important river systems. The River Swale has been classed as a 'near natural' river. The flat, undulating topography rarely exceeds 100m above sea level and is based on glacial deposits that obscure the underlying geology. Both the Magnesian Limestone, which outcrops in the west, and the Howardian Hills to the east add variety.

Five market towns of Easingwold, Thirsk, Stokesley, Northallerton and Bedale form the main settlements, with numerous small villages, hamlets and out-lying farms scattered across the district.

Most of the area is intensively farmed with fertile, pastoral and arable land surrounded by fragments of woodland cover. There are very few semi-natural grassland or other habitats remaining.

Important habitats and species

Farmland is a major broad habitat in the District and consequently supports populations of farmland birds, a group

that is nationally declining. All the speciality arable flowers, however, became extinct in the twentieth century. There have been many effective conservation projects on farmland in the last twenty years and there is high potential for further initiatives.

The largely urban habitats around towns and villages are significant in terms of both wildlife and the involvement of local communities.

Of the semi-natural habitats, only fragments remain:

Semi-natural Habitat Type	% land area in Hambleton
Woodland	1.0
Scrub	0.08
Neutral grassland	0.6
Calcareous grassland	0.003
Acidic grassland	0.004
Marsh	0.01
Heathland	0.04
Standing water	0.1
Flowing water	0.3
Total	2.4

The European otter has re-colonised some river systems in Hambleton, and nationally declining species such as brown hare and water vole occur. Rare species such as great crested newt and white-clawed crayfish have recently been recorded, and no less than ten UK BAP priority species of bird breed.



