

# Bedfordshire and Luton Biodiversity Forum

## Memorandum of Understanding

This document clarifies functions and operational relationships within the Biodiversity Forum in particular: -

- (1) The strategic role of the Forum and relation to the wider BAP partnership,
- (2) The role of the Co-ordinator
- (3) The role of the Co-ordinator's host organisation (currently Bedfordshire County Council),
- (4) Financial arrangements.

### The Strategic and networking role of the Forum

- 1) Following the Government's commitment to the United Nations Environmental Programme Convention on Biological Diversity of 1992, also known as the Earth Summit at Rio de Janeiro, a number of biodiversity initiatives were started, including the development of the Bedfordshire and Luton Biodiversity Action Plan.
- 2) Biodiversity describes the variety of life from the rare to the abundant, and our vision is to ensure that in Bedfordshire all species thrive throughout the town and countryside. The Forum members are committed to accepting this challenge through communication and consensus building, the preparation, implementation, review and updating of biodiversity action plans, and encouraging everyone to play their part in the biodiversity process both in their professional and private lives.
- 3) The Forum will encourage and support members of the the partnership to implement the Bedfordshire Biodiversity Action Plan appropriately and also ensure that achievements are recorded in the standard way to deadlines required. The Forum will also take every opportunity to engage in the wider BAP process, to ensure that the Bedfordshire and Luton Biodiversity Action Plan coincides with regional and national as well as local priorities.
- 4) The Forum forms the core of a wide partnership of organisations and individuals committed to implementing some or all of the Bedfordshire and Luton Biodiversity Action Plan. Forum members will steer and stimulate evolution of the partnership. *Membership and objectives of the Forum are at annex 1 of this memorandum.*
- 5) The Forum shall appoint a Biodiversity Working Group with membership renewed biennially by the Forum, by ballot if necessary. This group will be responsible for driving action plan processes forward. It will reflect policy recommendations upwards and make decisions at a more detailed level on behalf of the Forum. *Objectives are at annex 2 of this memorandum.*
- 6) The Forum members shall appoint chairs of both the Forum and the Working Group on a biennial basis.
- 7) The Forum shall meet at least twice per year. It is responsible for setting and reviewing the overall aims and objectives of the partnership and approving the annual budget. It also ensures that its joint efforts and concerns are efficiently and effectively co-ordinated and executed. When necessary It sets and reviews the accountabilities and goals of the Biodiversity Co-ordinator or other posts and projects accountable to the Forum and ensures appropriate supervision arrangements are in place for all aspects of the agreed work programme.
- 8) The Biodiversity Working group shall meet as and when necessary to perform its role in support of the Forum.
- 9) The Forum may establish either permanent or time limited task groups as it sees fit. Each group will have clear terms of reference agreed by the Forum Group and suitable administrative and chairing arrangements. Champions for habitat or species action plans will be

endorsed by the Forum and will in turn be expected to report annually to the Forum on progress towards BAP targets and objectives.

10) The Partnership shall agree one of its members to act as a host organisation for the purposes of employing staff and managing funds.

11) Each partner organisation has an equal representation on the Forum. All members of the Forum have equal access to the Co-ordinator and the right to raise issues of relevance to the partnership through the agenda planning process.

12) The partner organisations contribute to the workings of the Forum financially or in kind, according to the objectives of the Forum and Biodiversity Working Group and an agreed funding strategy.

### **The Co-ordinator**

13) The Co-ordinator prepares the agenda for Forum meetings in conjunction with the Chair who also approves minutes prepared by the Co-ordinator

14) In discharging the responsibilities set out under the Accountabilities and Goals in his/her job description the Co-ordinator is accountable to the Forum, and subject to the host organisation's code of conduct, financial regulations and HR procedures. In practical terms this means that the Co-ordinator is expected to be largely self-directing. S/he will report progress regularly to the forum. S/he will also work closely with the Forum representative of the host organisation and may form a small mentoring group as necessary to review progress and for effective personal and professional development.

### **Host Organisation**

15) The host organisation acts as the legal employer of the Co-ordinator and its employment policies and procedures will apply. *Annex 3 sets out the specific terms of this arrangement.* The host organisation shall nominate a senior officer to represent it on the Forum.

16) The host organisation will be responsible for ensuring that the Partnership agree accountabilities, goals, work programmes, and budgets.

17) The host organisation is responsible for making arrangements for the appointment, appraisal and professional development in respect of the Co-ordinator or any other appointees funded by the Forum, in consultation with the Chair. The procedures for appointment, appraisal and performance matters will follow those of the host organisation. Appointment of a Co-ordinator will be based on a recommendation by an agreed committee of partners including the host organisation.

18) For the purposes of the appraisal and in respect of any performance matters the Chair will collect and represent the views of the partnership to the Forum representative of the host organisation.

19) The annual performance appraisal meeting shall be conducted according to the host organisation's practice and will involve the Forum representative of the host organisation. The Forum representative will report back any agreed specific issues arising to the Forum.

20) In exercising its responsibilities as employer the host organisation will only take action in respect of conduct, or performance in consultation with the Forum Chair.

### **Financial Arrangements**

21) The host organisation (currently Bedfordshire County Council in respect of the co-ordinator) acts as banker for the Forum's budget. The banker will appoint a budget reviewer

(normally the administrative manager or forum representative) to oversee the Co-ordinator's management of the budget, in order to protect its financial interests.

22) The Banker and Co-ordinator will draw up a draft budget for each financial year in autumn of the preceding year. The budget will be approved by the Forum, and will also comply, in its preparation, management, control mechanisms and accounting with the bankers financial systems. The Co-ordinator will be responsible for income and expenditure according to the budget agreed by the Forum, and will bring recommendations for variations from the budget to the Forum or, in emergency, to the host's forum representative.

23) The Forum, via the Co-ordinator, is responsible for ensuring sufficient funds exist to fund the work programme of the Forum. This includes employment and other costs of the Co-ordinator other than those specifically covered by the hosting organisation and mentioned in Annex 3.

Signed on behalf of the Partnership

date

Signed on behalf of the Host Organisation

date

## Annex 1

### Bedfordshire and Luton Biodiversity Forum

#### Membership;

*Members are expected to play an active part in setting the agenda and for producing concise reports or recommendations necessary for effective decision making.*

All Local Authority Planning Departments, Local Authority ecologists/conservation officers, Wildlife Trust, RSPB, English Nature, Bedfordshire Natural History Society, BTCV, The Greensand Trust, The North Chilterns Trust, Forest of Marston Vale, Ivel and Ouse Countryside Project, Environment Agency, FWAG, Internal Drainage Board, DEFRA/RDS.

#### Objectives

1. To identify strategic priorities for biodiversity action in the County
2. In conjunction with the biodiversity working group produce a coherent programme of biodiversity action
3. To identify and pursue opportunities to integrate biodiversity with other initiatives
4. To promote a wide understanding of biodiversity issues.
5. To ensure the effective implementation and monitoring of the Biodiversity Action Plan
6. To secure the resources necessary to make substantial progress
7. To facilitate networking between members and encourage partnership working.

## Annex 2

### Biodiversity Working Group

#### Membership:

Elected biennially by the Forum. First election autumn 2004

#### Objectives

1. To manage the biodiversity process to enable implementation of the biodiversity action plan
2. To monitor and report back on progress with the biodiversity action plan
3. To maintain links with national and regional biodiversity initiatives to ensure compatibility
4. To support existing partners and the work of the groups.
5. To raise the profile of the BAP and the work that we are doing.
6. To share and disseminate good practice
7. In conjunction with the biodiversity forum produce a coherent programme of biodiversity action.

### **Annex 3**

Bedfordshire County Council, as host organisation for the post of Biodiversity Co-ordinator, undertakes to provide the following in addition to any financial support it provides to the Partnership. This hosting arrangement is subject to annual renewal as part of the annual budget round but is expected to last to March 2008 in the first instance.

- a) A desk, chair, telephone, filing space and computer (with standard County Council computer packages) of an equivalent standards to other members of the County Council's Heritage and Environment Section.
- b) Appropriate training and support to ensure the effective and safe use of the above equipment.
- c) Appropriate health and safety arrangements including risk assessment, personal protective equipment, training and appropriate procedures.
- d) Arrangements regarding the payment of pay, benefits, and expenses and access to these benefits in the same manner as other employees.
- e) Management arrangements for appraisal, leave, sickness and performance and other issues.
- f) Appropriate human resources advice regarding employment and the Council's performance management schemes.
- g) Access to appropriate financial processes for managing the Forums budget.
- h) A manager to ensure Council procedures are followed and the provisions of this Annex are delivered in a satisfactory manner.
- i) The Council's PR function for the purposes of managing PR activity.

In addition the Council will provide discretionary access to the following, subject to other pressures on resources and appropriate prior agreement with the Council's nominated manager:

- j) Administrative support.
- k) Storage space for Partnership material.

The Council does not consider itself responsible for:

- l) Professional development costs incurred by the Co-ordinator. These will be funded through the project budget by agreement with the Forum or its representative in the host organisation.
- m) Any other costs associated with the employment of the Co-ordinator which are not listed here