

Biodiversity Action in Bedfordshire and Luton

The community of organisations or individuals who are able to devote themselves full time to biodiversity conservation is small and can achieve a limited amount on their own. Many more are willing and able to integrate biodiversity conservation with the wide range of social and economic activity in Bedfordshire and Luton. Key figures should have the opportunity to influence and form the broad biodiversity agenda and will then be able to take that with them to inform their input to the whole network of plans projects and programmes that influence the future of the area. For this reason a broad and strong **Biodiversity Forum** is essential to Biodiversity Action Plan implementation. This Forum will have a special biodiversity remit and will be responsible for the strategic direction of biodiversity work. Members would also be expected to work to secure the funding to achieve agreed objectives.

It is important that the Forum is seen as part of the wider variety of mechanisms such as Local Strategic Partnerships (Community Plans), Local Development Frameworks and the Rural Affairs Forum. Members of the Biodiversity Forum will be a part of these groups through their positions in their own organisations but should be able to take with them a shared biodiversity agenda. They should also be able to feed back to the Forum when they perceive a need for further biodiversity input. The Forum should act as a catalyst for cross-sectoral working, it should improve networking and it should set strategic direction. To do all this it needs the stable base provided by a chair and secretariat appointed for at least a year at a time. Its members need to take an active part in setting the agenda and for producing the concise reports or recommendations necessary for decision-making.

The Biodiversity Forum needs to be served by a **Biodiversity Working Group**. This group will be limited to 8 to 10 people who are deeply immersed in the implementation of the biodiversity action plan. This group will be responsible for melding outputs from the whole range of biodiversity initiatives into a clear and coherent programme for biodiversity action which will be offered to the Forum for refinement and adoption. That programme will include the essential prioritisation necessary to ensure that we are not swamped by a series of half finished projects. Wider issues identified by the Forum will be passed to this group for consideration and action. The working group will seek out and adopt examples of best practice and there would be expected to be close contact between this group and the BAP habitat groups. The detailed development and implementation of the BAP will be driven forward by this group. Group members will be expected to generate agendas and supporting papers and develop ideas for issues and projects. As with the Forum this group will need a fixed term chair and secretariat to provide stability and drive for a definable period.

An important feature of the work of both the Forum and the working group will be the establishment of short-term specific **task groups**. An immediate priority will be to sort out the best methods for improved implementation of the habitat BAPs (recognising that different BAPs may require different solutions). Recommendations need to be brought to the Forum as a matter of some urgency. Further topics that require the detailed focus of a task group include:

- Biodiversity and Community plans
- Biodiversity input to the green infrastructure and the new development planning system.

A **Biodiversity Officer** will bring added value to the biodiversity work being developed by the working group and Forum. An officer will have an important role in stimulating the work of the task groups in a similar manner to that pioneered through the successful “guidance to planners” folder and planning seminars held in 2003. An officer will also work

closely with those responsible for species and habitat plan implementation, helping to develop projects, acquire funding and generate publicity. An officer should form the link between the local BAP community and regional or national developments and will work with that community and the BRMC to achieve effective national and local reporting. The officer will also have a key role in supporting the wider BAP partnership, collating an annual review, organising conferences and forging links between members. The work of the officer will be supported by a team of no more than 4 people identified by the officer and the employing organisation and endorsed by the Forum.

The **Biodiversity Recording and Monitoring Centre** will have a vital role in gathering, managing and providing the information which will allow the Forum members to understand progress with implementation of the BAP. The Centre will also enable the Forum to supply the necessary data to national BAP monitoring schemes. The Centre will have its own steering group. It will need to work closely with the working group and with a County Wildlife Site group. Ultimately the Centre could have even more value to the membership of the Forum if it could become an Environmental Record Centre dealing with local data on soils, water, air and waste to support a much wider variety of plans and strategies.

The topic of County Wildlife Site conservation, monitoring and review generates enough work of itself to merit a dedicated **County Wildlife Site Panel**. This Panel would effectively include the same personnel as are currently involved in the Scientific sub-group. The panel would be charged with implementing the previously agreed agenda for CWS and would be expected to keep the system in line with best practice and to work closely with the BRMC in the management of site information.

A **Regionally Important Geological and Geomorphological Sites** group will be established. Its work will be analogous to that of the CWS Panel with a particular education and awareness slant.

Both the CWS and RIGS groups will relate directly to the Working Group.

The Biodiversity Working Group will involve all current BAP convenors in detailed discussions regarding the best way of progressing their various BAP responsibilities. This work should involve clear identification of how all the plethora of existing groups and initiatives relate to each particular habitat BAP. Once proposals have been brought to the Forum and a way forward agreed lead organisations or individuals will need to actively work to progress implementation, review and update of particular BAPs. Periodic progress reports to the Forum will be expected.

This structure should be adopted for a period of two years after which it will be reviewed and amended as appropriate.