

HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**ENVIRONMENT
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Agenda Item No

3

TUESDAY 21 JANUARY 2003 at 10.30 A.M.

HERTFORDSHIRE'S BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN – A REVIEW OF ACTIONS TO DATE.

Report of the Director of Environment

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1. Purpose of report

To review the County Council's progress in implementing its agreed actions contained in the Hertfordshire Biodiversity Action Plan.

2. Summary

2.1 The Hertfordshire Biodiversity Action Plan (HBAP) was produced in 1998. The HBAP was co-ordinated by the Hertfordshire Environmental Forum (HEF) and produced under contract by the Hertfordshire and Middlesex Wildlife Trust (HMWT). It was one of the first to be produced nationally, at a time that preceded the publication of national guidance.

2.2 Hertfordshire County Council signed up to the HBAP in 1999. Most of the Council's commitments have been delivered through Environment services and associated partnerships. The HEF commenced a review of progress of the HBAP and the first progress report was considered at a HEF meeting on the 18 September 2002. This work is now being used to inform future development of the HBAP partnership.

A copy of the HBAP has been placed in the Members Room.

3. Conclusion

3.1 There is a general perception that progress under the HBAP has been patchy. This, in the main, has been attributed to a lack of co-ordination, the absence of thorough consultation and involvement of key partners and no defined strategy for implementation missing from the HBAP process from its inception. HEF has now agreed a new way forward that does begin to address these issues for the future.

3.2 Having considered information contained within the report, the Committee is asked to decide if, and how, further scrutiny of this issue will be required. Further scrutiny could be undertaken by the following methods:-

- Questioning Officers and Executive Members;
- Requesting further reports;
- Hearing evidence from relevant partners; and/or
- Visiting relevant locations.

4. Background

- 4.1** The Hertfordshire Biodiversity Action Plan was published in 1998. The Hertfordshire Environment Forum (HEF) commissioned the Plan that was produced by the Hertfordshire and Middlesex Wildlife Trust. The Plan contains action plans for the first ten years for approximately 7 habitat types and 142 species but is set within a 50-year timescale. It should be noted that the number of species represented in the HBAP is based on current but incomplete biological information.
- 4.2** The HBAP was one of the first to be produced in England and preceded national guidance. Subsequently the Government has made it clear that Biodiversity Action Plans are amongst the elements that local authorities must build upon when preparing Community Strategies. The Audit Commission has developed performance indicators for assessing progress in this area.
- 4.3** At its meeting on 12 January 1999, the County Council's Environment Committee endorsed the broad aims of the HBAP. The Committee asked for cost implications to be incorporated into future decision making and for other services to investigate how they might contribute to targets i.e. through service property strategies.
- 4.4** In May 2002, the Hertfordshire Environment Forum appointed a Biodiversity Officer, whom is now employed by Hertfordshire County Council and hosted by the Biological Records Centre, to review overall HBAP progress. The first progress report was considered by HEF on 18 September 2002.

5. Overall Plan review

5.1 Very broadly the review showed that:

- 31% actions completed;
- 32% actions started but behind schedule;
- 16% actions not started;
- 21% actions progress unknown.

5.2 The main issue, however, affecting progress of the HBAP has been the lack of co-ordination and engagement of a committed partnership in its implementation. This partly accounts for the lack of overall progress with some specific actions. It will be a priority for the HBAP partnership to reinvigorate the level of commitment. It is highly likely that some actions will be re-prioritised and re-assigned in light of new information and updated Government policy.

5.3 The review shows progress with actions ascribed to HCC in the HBAP. Most of these have been undertaken by the Countryside Management Service and Biological Records Centre, for example:

- Conservation work in Broxbourne Woods to re-create habitats for the Purple and White Emperor butterfly;
- Development of the Red Data Book which includes records of all Hertfordshire's protected species;

- Several surveys of protected species, such as the native Crayfish, Water Vole, Great Crested Newts and Otter;
- Bat survey examining the effects of barn conversions on populations of different bat species;
- Grassland monitoring survey; and
- Working with volunteer groups on various habitat conservation projects identified in the HBAP.

A full list of actions is shown as Appendix A.

5.4 Monitoring shows a decline in some species, particularly water voles and Crayfish which have disappeared from the majority of Hertfordshire's rivers. The bat survey has shown that there has been a fall in 69% of the bat population due to barn conversions.

This work is showing the importance of carrying out survey work and having good quality information.

5.5 The review has prompted comments from some 48 organisations. Significant points include:

- A lack of consultation when the HBAP was formulated has meant some organisations do not have clear understandings of their commitments;
- An absence of effective monitoring has slowed down the rate of reporting, and of taking any appropriate corrective action;
- The failure to collectively co-ordinate and raise awareness of the HBAP has left some organisations thinking it is no longer topical or relevant to their work.

5.6 The Hertfordshire Environment Forum is now addressing the issues raised through the HBAP review. The actions planned include:

1. To develop and revitalise the HBAP partnership as part of the work of the HEF Nature Conservation Topic Group – and secure commitments from all major stakeholders.
2. To devise a publicity/awareness raising campaign – ensuring, in particular, that stakeholders are aware of their obligations in this area.
3. To undertake a complete review of the HBAP and to bring it up to date with current policy and new information on habitats and species.
4. To implement a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation programme based on Government Indicators.

6. Financial implications

6.1 Delivery of HCC's HBAP targets to date has been achieved within budgets allocated to various Environment services and partnerships. It is not possible at this stage to estimate whether any additional costs would result from a strengthened HBAP partnership as proposed by HEF.

7. Conclusion

7.1 The HBAP's main function has been to provide a framework to foster greater wildlife diversity. The Government now formally promotes integrating biodiversity as a crosscutting theme, particularly as part of community strategies.

7.2 Whilst the County Council has met many of its commitments, through Environment service activity, biodiversity targets do not at present extend into other service areas. However, if, for example, service property strategies were to be covered in this way (as recommended in 1999 by the Environment Committee), biological-auditing work would be required. The cost of this and any subsequent action would need to be considered as part of service planning and budget preparation by the appropriate services.

Background Papers used by the author in compiling this report

Report of the Director of Environment to the Environment Committee on 12 January 1999.

The Hertfordshire Biodiversity Action Plan 1998.

Report to the HEF Board 18 September 2002: The HEF Steering Group Report, Appendix A HBAP Review and Implementation Summary.

Progress with County Council activity listed in the Hertfordshire Biodiversity Action Plan

The HBAP ascribes 62 actions to Hertfordshire County Council. However, the Plan does not always differentiate between County and District Councils responsibilities or functions.

Plan Chalk Grassland

Code	Activity	Start	End	Status
CG1	Relevant local authorities to include chalk grassland habitat protection policies at the next review.	01/04/1998		Underway

Code	Activity	Start	End	Status
CG2	Designate suitable sites as Local Nature Reserves (LNR's). Candidates include Tring Park/Oddy Hill and Weston Hills, Baldock.	01/04/1998	31/12/2002	Not started

Code	Activity	Start	End	Status
CG5	Seek to develop the A505 into a major chalk grassland corridor. Adopt road verge management practises which enhance and maintain the conservation value of the chalk grassland road verges.	01/04/1999	31/12/2002	Unknown

Plan Chalkhill Blue butterfly

Code	Activity	Start	End	Status
CB1	Ensure all existing, and any new chalk grassland sites, with Chalkhill Blue are recognised in relevant Local Plans at next review.	01/04/1998		Unknown

Plan Dormouse

Code	Activity	Start	End	Status
D1	Ensure that all Dormouse Wildlife Sites are protected in Local Plans at the next review and are protected through the development control process. Also ensure Woodland Grant Scheme and felling licence applications take the needs of Dormice into account.	01/04/1998		Underway

Plan Farmland

Code	Activity	Start	End	Status
FA7	Seek to establish at least one arable weeds nature reserve and develop a seed bank of locally distinctive species.	01/04/1998	31/12/2003	Underway (on schedule)

Code	Activity	Start	End	Status
FA8	Establish sympathetic management of roadside verge Wildlife Sites, including hedges, 50% by 2002, 100 % by 2007.	01/04/1998	31/12/2002	Unknown

Plan Generic				
Code	Activity	Start	End	Status
G1	Biodiversity Action Plans to be prepared for each district/borough.	01/04/1998	31/12/2001	Underway (behind schedule)
G5	Local Authorities to support the Wildlife Sites Project.	01/04/1998		Underway
G6	Ensure that all Wildlife Sites are identified in Local Plans at the next review and protected through appropriate development control.	01/04/1998		Underway
G26	Seek to establish projects to help involve local communities in the Biodiversity Action Plan	01/04/1998		Underway
G12	Establish demonstration farms in key areas to raise awareness and provide training and advice. Draw up initial objectives and targets areas by 1999. Key issues include low input mixed farming, unimproved grasslands, hedgerows etc. Establish 2 farms by 2007.	01/04/1998	31/12/1999	Unknown
Plan Great Crested Newt				
GCN1	Ensure that all ponds qualifying as Wildlife Sites are identified in local plans at the next review and protected through the development control process.	01/04/1998		Underway
GCN16	With due regard to the protected status of this species, encourage records for private land and gardens not included in the county survey, through a wildlife gardening leaflet, or specific urban survey. Information leaflets such as "Facts about Great Crested Newts" should be made widely available.	01/04/1998	31/12/2000	Not started
Plan Grizzled Skipper				
GS1	Ensure all sites containing Grizzled Skipper are recognised and protected in Local Plans at next review.	01/04/1998		Unknown
Plan Heathland and Acid Grassland				
H1	Relevant local authorities to include heath and acid grassland habitat protection policies at next plan review.	01/04/1998		Underway

<i>Code</i>	<i>Activity</i>	<i>Start</i>	<i>End</i>	<i>Status</i>
H2	Designate appropriate sites as Local Nature Reserves. The following to be designated by 1999, Colney Heath, Nomansland Common, Bricket Wood Common SSSI, Marshalls Heath, Mardley Heath, Batchworth Heath, Croxley Common Moor SSSI and Chorleywood Common.	01/04/1998	31/12/1999	Underway (behind schedule)

<i>Code</i>	<i>Activity</i>	<i>Start</i>	<i>End</i>	<i>Status</i>
H10	Create a network of heath and acid grassland rides and glades through Broxbourne Wood. Prepare management plan and begin implementation by 2000	01/04/1998	31/12/2000	Completed

Plan Natterer's Bat

<i>Code</i>	<i>Activity</i>	<i>Start</i>	<i>End</i>	<i>Status</i>
N3	Through the Wildlife Sites system, ensure all Natterer's key areas are recognised and protected in Local Plans at the next review.	01/04/1998		Underway

<i>Code</i>	<i>Activity</i>	<i>Start</i>	<i>End</i>	<i>Status</i>
N4	Ensure that all planning applications affecting bat sites take into account their conservation importance. Where bats are known or suspected to roost in a site, the applicant should be obliged by the Local Planning Authority to provide sufficient information concerning the population, evaluation of the importance, assessment of impact and proposals for mitigation.	01/04/1998		Underway

Plan Neutral Grassland

<i>Code</i>	<i>Activity</i>	<i>Start</i>	<i>End</i>	<i>Status</i>
NG1	Local Plans to include neutral grassland habitat protection policies at next Local Plan review.	01/04/1998		Underway

<i>Code</i>	<i>Activity</i>	<i>Start</i>	<i>End</i>	<i>Status</i>
NG2	Designate appropriate sites as Local Nature Reserves by 2005. Possible candidates include Templewood Vale, WGC and Danesbury near Welwyn (both in progress); several open spaces in Hemel Hempstead; and Fairlands Valley, Stevenage.	01/04/1998	31/12/2005	Underway

<i>Code</i>	<i>Activity</i>	<i>Start</i>	<i>End</i>	<i>Status</i>
NG3	All Local Authorities to identify open spaces with potential as wildflower meadows and implement appropriate management regimes by 2005.	01/04/19	31/12/2005	Underway

Plan Otter

<i>Code</i>	<i>Activity</i>	<i>Start</i>	<i>End</i>	<i>Status</i>
OT1	Ensure all wetland Wildlife Sites regularly used by Otters are recognised and protected through Local Plans and LEAPs, at the next review. At the same time endeavour to strengthen river corridor policies where appropriate.	01/04/1998		Underway

Plan Song Thrush

Code	Activity	Start	End	Status
ST2	Local Authorities to review their hedgerow management with a view to improving the wildlife value of hedgerows under their control.	01/04/1998	31/12/2000	Underway (behind schedule)

Code	Activity	Start	End	Status
ST3	Review, and aim to reduce the use of molluscicides in gardens, public parks schools and in agriculture.	01/04/1998	31/12/2000	Underway (behind schedule)

Plan Great Pignut

Code	Activity	Start	End	Status
GP1	Establish sympathetic management regimes on all remaining road verge sites containing Great Pignut.	01/04/1998	31/12/1999	Unknown

Code	Activity	Start	End	Status
GP2	Restore sympathetic management regimes to former Great Pignut sites, particularly road verges, in order to encourage the return of the species and/or create suitable conditions for re-introduction.	01/04/1998	31/12/2001	Unknown

Plan Urban

Code	Activity	Start	End	Status
UR1	Biodiversity Action Plans to be prepared for each district/borough should include an action plan for each major urban area.	01/04/1998	31/12/2001	Unknown

Code	Activity	Start	End	Status
UR2	All local authorities to review management policy for urban spaces in order to incorporate biodiversity objectives where appropriate.	01/04/1998	31/12/2001	Underway (behind schedule)

Code	Activity	Start	End	Status
UR4	Local Authorities to regularly review policy for the use of biocides on all open spaces, including schools, with reference to biodiversity. Annual reports on biocide use to be presented to relevant LA21 or environmental committees.	01/04/1998		Underway

Code	Activity	Start	End	Status
UR5	Local Authorities to recognise urban Wildlife Sites and other significant greenspace such as green corridors in Local Plans at the next review and protect through appropriate development control policies,	01/04/1998		Underway

Code	Activity	Start	End	Status
UR6	Local Authorities to identify areas of greenspace deficiency and include policies in the Local Plan at the next review which seek to create greenspace in areas of deficiency.	01/04/1998		Unknown

Code	Activity	Start	End	Status
UR7	Local Authorities, in partnership with nature conservation bodies, to identify and declare appropriate urban sites as Local Nature Reserves. Each urban area to seek to reach a minimum level of 1 ha of LNR per 1000 population	01/04/1998	31/12/2000	Underway (behind schedule)

Code	Activity	Start	End	Status
UR9	All urban LNRs and Wildlife Sites to have management statements/plans by 2002 and conservation. other urban natural greenspaces by 2007, which incorporate a strategy for the integrated management of recreation and	01/04/19	31/12/2007	Unknown
Code	Activity	Start	End	Status
UR10	Seek to create greenspace (e.g. urban nature parks for local community and school use) in areas of identified deficiency.	01/04/1998		Underway
Code	Activity	Start	End	Status
UR13	Each urban area should seek to develop a network of Green Transport Corridors which link greenspaces and the public transport provision within the urban areas. Include proposals within district/borough BAP.	01/04/1998		Underway
Code	Activity	Start	End	Status
UR14	Aim to double the numbers of urban trees with at least 50% of new planting consisting of native trees	01/04/1998	31/12/2007	Underway (on schedule)
Code	Activity	Start	End	Status
UR15	Develop conservation management regimes for all ecologically important urban roadside verges	01/04/1998	31/12/2002	Underway (behind
Code	Activity	Start	End	Status
UR16	Develop conservation management regimes for all ecologically important urban hedges and identify veteran trees.	01/04/1998	31/12/2002	Underway (behind schedule)
Code	Activity	Start	End	Status
UR22	Undertake survey and evaluation of urban areas in order to catalogue all Wildlife Sites, greenspaces, green corridors and areas of greenspace deficiency. In particular, promote and implement local community based surveys where possible	01/04/1998	31/12/2003	Underway (behind schedule)
Code	Activity	Start	End	Status
UR28	Local Authorities to establish environmental fora (within the LA21 process) which provide local communities the opportunity to be involved in urban biodiversity issues.	01/04/1998	31/12/1999	Underway (behind schedule)
Code	Activity	Start	End	Status
UR29	Provide interpretative facilities on LNR's and other important urban greenspace. Target: 2 sites within each urban area.	01/04/1998	31/12/2003	Underway
Code	Activity	Start	End	Status
UR30	Local Groups to be set up to focus local 'ownership', participation, campaigning and interpretation in wildlife and environmental issues. At least one group should be active for each LNR.	01/04/1998	31/12/2005	Underway
Code	Activity	Start	End	Status
UR31	Prepare a leaflet on wildlife gardening, to be available to all residents in the county.	01/04/1998	31/12/2000	Not Started

<i>Code</i>	<i>Activity</i>	<i>Start</i>	<i>End</i>	<i>Status</i>
UR33	Seek opportunities for increased promotion of the value of urban greenspace through public awareness campaigns, educational programmes, events and guided walks.	01/04/1998		Underway
Plan Water Vole				
<i>Code</i>	<i>Activity</i>	<i>Start</i>	<i>End</i>	<i>Status</i>
WV2	Water Vole Wildlife sites to be recognised in Local Plans, LEAP's and other relevant water environment policies, at next review.	01/04/1998		Underway
<i>Code</i>	<i>Activity</i>	<i>Start</i>	<i>End</i>	<i>Status</i>
WV1	Lobby for Water Vole conservation measures to be incorporated into relevant policies and agricultural schemes. In particular, seek a statutory requirement for an uncultivated strip in rural areas and a development fee band in urban areas, along all river corridors, allowing the planned management of unbroken river corridor habitats. This should be included in all Local Action Plans.	01/04/1998		Underway
Plan Wetland				
<i>Code</i>	<i>Activity</i>	<i>Start</i>	<i>End</i>	<i>Status</i>
WE1	Policies to protect the integrity of river valley corridors and floodplains to be included in LEAPs and Local Plans in the next review. Lobby for a statutory requirement for an uncultivated buffer strip	01/04/1998		Underway
<i>Code</i>	<i>Activity</i>	<i>Start</i>	<i>End</i>	<i>Status</i>
WE15	Local authorities, in partnership with nature conservation bodies, to identify and declare appropriate wetlands as LNR's. At least 1 Wetland LNR per district within 5yrs	01/04/1998	31/12/2003	Underway (behind schedule)
<i>Code</i>	<i>Activity</i>	<i>Start</i>	<i>End</i>	<i>Status</i>
WE20	Seek to promote careful restoration of ponds, aiming to restore 20 ponds per year and increasing the total resource by 1% in 10yrs by pond creation. Ensure that sites for new ponds do not damage sites of existing value e.g. wet hollows.	01/04/1998	31/12/2008	Underway (behind schedule)
<i>Code</i>	<i>Activity</i>	<i>Start</i>	<i>End</i>	<i>Status</i>
WE35	Seek opportunities for increased promotion of the value of wetlands, through public awareness campaigns, educational programmes, events and guided walks. At least 2 events annually.	01/04/1998		Underway
Plan White Clawed Crayfish				
<i>Code</i>	<i>Activity</i>	<i>Start</i>	<i>End</i>	<i>Status</i>
WC4	Identify and protect White Clawed Crayfish Wildlife sites in LEAP's and Local Plans at next review.	01/04/1998		Underway

Plan Woodland				
Code	Activity	Start	End	Status
W3	Ensure the County Woodland Strategy is implemented. Update this strategy once every 10yrs, next review 2007. The strategy to include the targets in this action plan.	01/04/1998	01/01/2007	Underway (on schedule)
Code	Activity	Start	End	Status
W8	Ensure all Local Plans have site and habitat policies protecting and encouraging appropriate management of ancient woodlands, at their next review.	01/04/1998		Underway
Code	Activity	Start	End	Status
W9	Local Authorities, in partnership with nature conservation bodies, to identify and designate suitable woodlands as LNR's. Bishop's Wood (Three Rivers); Sherrardspark Wood SSSI and Northaw Great Wood SSSI Country Park (Welwyn Hatfield); Whomerley and Monks Wood (Stevanage); Howe Wood (Dacorum); Batch Wood (St Albans). At least 8 others to be designated.	01/04/1998	31/12/2007	Underway (on schedule)
Code	Activity	Start	End	Status
W15	Target restoration of ancient replanted woodland to key woodland complexes and Wildlife Sites initially, to achieve the greatest gains for biodiversity. Produce plans and start implementation on all local authority owned ancient replanted	01/04/1998	31/12/2000	Not started
Code	Activity	Start	End	Status
W19	Public authorities and voluntary nature conservation organisations to form partnerships to bid for funding to promote strategic woodland conservation. If required, this should include the purchase of woodlands and the establishment of new woodlands, in key woodland complexes. Prepare strategic approach by 2001.	01/04/1998	31/12/2001	Unknown
Code	Activity	Start	End	Status
W26	Support the Chilterns Woodland Project as an advisory service to private landowners in the Chilterns and as a means of promoting WoodLots.	01/04/1998		Unknown
Code	Activity	Start	End	Status
W35	Establish a Hertfordshire Woodland Working Group linked to the Hertfordshire Countryside Forum to oversee the implementation of the Hertfordshire Woodland Strategy and this action plan.	01/04/1998	31/12/1998	Completed
Code	Activity	Start	End	Status
W32	Organise events in public and conservation woodlands, demonstrating woodland management and conservation and the links with everyday life. Examples include guided walks and woodland craft days. One event per CMS area annually. Also publicise best practise through publications.	01/04/1998		Underway

<i>Code</i>	<i>Activity</i>	<i>Start</i>	<i>End</i>	<i>Status</i>
W38	Encourage community involvement in the management of all publicly accessible Council owned land woodlands.	01/04/1998		Underway