

Wales Biodiversity Partnership Conference 2007

The inaugural Wales Biodiversity Partnership Conference took place in Wrexham on the 12th & 13th September 2007. Jane Davidson AM, Minister for Environment, Sustainability and Housing gave the opening speech with over one hundred delegates in attendance. Jane spoke about the key priorities of tackling climate change and promoting sustainable development in Wales and emphasised climate change effects on our habitats and species is not fully understood but that it is likely to be profound. She then went on to acknowledge that habitat fragmentation and degradation coupled with climate change poses a serious threat to Welsh biodiversity.

Cynhaliwyd Cynhadledd gyntaf Partneriaeth Bioamrywiaeth Cymru yn Wrecsam ar 12 & 13 Medi 2007. Traddododd Jane Davidson AC, y Gweinidog dros yr Amgylchedd, Cynaliadwyedd a Thai, yr araith agoriadol o flaen mwy na chant o fynychwyr. Siaradodd Jane am y blaenoriaethau hollbwysig o daclo newid hinsawdd a hyrwyddo datblygu cynaliadwy yng Nghymru. Pwysleisiodd nad yw effeithiau newid hinsawdd ar ein cynefinoedd a'n rhywogaethau wedi'u deall yn llwyr, ond eu bod yn debygol o fod yn sylweddol. Aeth yn ei blaen wedyn i gydnabod bod darnio cynefinoedd a dirywiad mewn cynefinoedd, ynghyd â newid hinsawdd, yn fygythiad difrifol i fioamrywiaeth Cymru.

Day 1. Breakout session 1.

Special sites in favourable condition: how can we deliver Outcome 21 of the Environment Strategy through partnership? (Andrew Peterken: CCW)

- **WARNING!** Do not overdo the targets system – emphasis will be on taking action
- Importance – connecting what we do for BAP targets and this target (Outcome 21) 2026 target is also a BAP target e.g. standard methodology for deciding what is favourable. Also relationship with BARS.
- Ensure efficient relationship between R. 34 for EMS and “Actions Database”
- Real facts are in the field – database is a collaboration tool.
- In assessing what has been achieved, do not forget to measure **quality** and how well it has been done.
- Separate the assessment of achievement i.e. different people monitor/cf external audit
- Set personal targets in such a way that it does not encourage false reporting

Day 1. Breakout session 2

CCW “When the Tide Goes Out” Intertidal Phase 1 Data Report – the next steps

The programme for the workshop was as follows:

1. Powerpoint talk about the 10 year CCW Intertidal survey, its uses and the data available from the survey.
2. Interactive demonstration of the mapped layers and associated data for the survey. Maps and data from intertidal areas, of interest to the workshop participants, were viewed and discussed .
3. The participants were asked to fill in a brief questionnaire outlining if and how they would like the data from the survey made available.

The responses received from all of the participants indicated that the maps and data would be useful to biodiversity officers from a wide range of organisations including the EA, SFCs, LAs, RSPB and MCS. Most wanted the data made available over the web.

Day 1. Breakout session 3.

Invasive Species and Climate Change in Wales (Niall Moore and Alison Smith)

Key with people. Some species doomed to extinction look at what people value. Cost of eradicating some species that may become helpful.

- Use of Japanese knotweed? Used to produce fungicide?
- Economic benefit of some species
- Money spent on UK but its not solving problem! Not seeing treatment through.
- Patchy attack on large areas of Japanese knotweed.
- Landowners/organisations who aren't aware how to treat Japanese knotweed, education needed.
- Enforcement of eradication may help stop spread.
- Lack of education still apparent, lack of resources to tackle problem
- Variety of ways to treat JK
- Need to learn from invasive species now and use knowledge to tackle future species.
- Increase money to tackle JK. Himalayan balsam people see as pretty, not as big a problem.
- Cost to dispose of JK to normal people.
- Rate of increase??
- Research on JK to be used in partnership with other control measures.
- Other success of biological controls. Rigorous testing, research protocols.
- Public awareness, free training in N.E. to water way uses. Training in courses.
- Action – public awareness in main users/industries
- NERC = ban on sale of invasive species

- Target garden centres; Anything in place to assess if species is invasive? Pet shops too. Action ??
- Industry/gov using protocols?
- Garden centres to sign to responsibility for not selling invasive species
- Research spread of species north? What's coming our way? What's likely to spread north
- Always non-native species? Some species extinct anyway irrespective of human help.
- Marine controls needed too
- Codes of practice for species transfer?
- The fact invasive species need to be controlled by herbicides mainly, problems with certain sectors.
- No one's enforcing certain types of eradication of species, no incentives!
- Guidance on control is poor – soil association
- Shouldn't just eradicate species coming in. Get it when it becomes a problem - no lead agency on this.
- Balance prevention with rapid response
- Resistance to eradicating “cuddly” species need incentive. Public perception problem!
- Need to moralise demoralise people! Give them hope – Action?

Day 1. Breakout session 4.

Biodiversity funding and good application practice (Matt Young: Grantscape)

Funding

Good applications	Bad applications
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Eligible2. Need (consultation)3. Clear4. Funding budget5. Relevant (match funding)	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. impractical2. Vague3. Lack of evidence4. Spelling5. Outside deadline
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Good relationship2. Answering questions	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Bad budgets2. Wrong funder3. Lack of need4. Timescales poor

Day 1. Breakout session 5.

BAP developments at the UK level – implications for Wales (Liz Howe: CCW)

Group 2. Question 2:

If the best delivery for many species in particular is through country level action and organisation, how much will LBAPs be able to contribute to that implementation with their work at an individual person, local or collective LBAP level? E.g. if a species is either entirely in Wales, or mostly, or in 1 or 2 LBAP areas only (*Odontomyia hydroleon*, *Sorbus leyana*, Gwyniad, *Osmia xanthomelana*, *Cotoneaster intergerrimus*) could or should WBP and the UK Steering Group expect the relevant LBAPs to do everything?

- Where practical, YES
- BUT it's a complex issue – needs a lot more time to work out.

Group 3. Question 3.

Which current UK SAP and HAP leads work well for the Welsh LBAP community and why – and why not for those that don't? Should we change to a Welsh lead if we are not happy with the incumbents?

- Need Welsh representative (lead?)
- Welsh lead for habitats
- Welsh contact for species leads
- Good lead
 - UK org e.g. Environment Agency
 - An org rather than an individual
- BAP champions: Yes
 - Top level contact
 - Wales level
 - Local level

Group 4. Question 4.

With the potential need for an increase in communication between Agencies, NGOs, Countries and LBAPs how can BARS be used to smooth the path and keep everyone in the loop?

- Incorporate mapping (GIS)
- Move BARS up list of priorities
- Create test/practise page on BARS, 'fake' info to put on

- BARS forum
- Conditions on funding for outcomes to be reported on BARS e.g. councils, NGOs, agencies.

Day 2 Workshop 1: Who enters what and where in BARS (Loraiza Davies: Natural England) - computer session, no specific outputs

Day 2 Workshop 2: BAP Guidance on building capacity for biodiversity to adapt. (Clive Walmsley/Rob McCall: CCW)

Workshop Facilitators – Clive Walmsley & Rob McCall

Participants:

Sarah, Brown, Flintshire County Council, sarah.brown@flintshire.gov.uk

Kate, Burgess, Denbighshire County Council, kate.burgess@denbighshire.gov.uk

Dolores, Byrne, Newport Borough Council, dolores.byrne@newport.gov.uk

David, Childs, Newport Borough Council, ?

David, Cowley, Anglesey Council, DCXPL@anglesey.gov.uk

Becky, Groves, Conwy County Council, becky.groves@conwy.gov.uk

Vicki, Hickin, North Wales & North West Sea Fisheries Committee, nwnwsfc@lancaster.ac.uk

Sinead, Lynch, Merthyr Council, sinead.lynch@merthyr.gov.uk

Andrew, Peterken, CCW, andrew.peterken@ccw.gov.uk

Kate, Stinchcombe, Monmouthshire County Council, katestinchcombe@monmouthshire.gov.uk

Melanie, Sutherland, Caerphilly Council, sutherm@caerphilly.gov.uk

DEFRA Guideline 3 – Heterogeneity & Space to Adapt

Spokesperson – Becky Groves

This group saw the main challenges and solutions to be the following:

Summary

- Land ownership. Excellent relations are required with landowners to make this kind of initiative work
- Agri-environment schemes – could already be helping to deliver this objective, but currently often focussed on other targets
- Political will – a sense of a general mismatch between overall political objectives and the nuts and bolts of policy and legislation that will deliver objectives
- Development pressure, especially with future demographic and economic change, if left unchecked, threatens to sideline most of the Guidelines
- Knowledge transfer of skills, techniques etc between organisations is key to implementation

Idealised Guideline Implementation

- be able to compulsory buy land/give reasonable compensation payments for landowners to enable key areas of land to be managed for wildlife conservation.
- Industrial development on key areas would not be a threat.
- Agricultural policy would promote landowners to carrying out mixed/traditional farming methods – therefore creating a greater mosaic of habitats across the countryside.
- A flexible agri-environment scheme would be in place to give both compensation payments and allow new innovative habitat management methods.
- Wildlife Conservation is given good political backing.
- Gain a better level of resources – both long term staffing and financial commitment.
- Ensure that the removal of non native invasive species are pushed up the priority ladder.
- More research carried out- more resources put into research and also monitoring of current projects.

Real World Constraints

Really these are just the converse of those above:

- numerous landowners, landowners not willing to sell land or accept compensation payments, or there not being enough funding for compensation payments
- Industrial development – breaking up connectivity and effecting flood management etc
E.g. in Conwy there are threats to the connectivity of a good quality piece of heathland by

- a wind farm development, plus of course on going issues of houses that have been build on flood plains etc.
- Agricultural policy - although it has improved it still promoting mono cultures/farming and is not allowing farmers to gain enough reward for farming in ways that are sympathetic to wildlife.
 - Agri environment schemes are still not attracting all landowners and their in-flexibility and bureaucracy still put many landowners off. E.g. Many of the farmers I deal with take part in the grant that I run as it is more straight forward than Tir Gofal, which the landowners tell me is not worth the effort of all of the paperwork involved.
 - Gain although improving (e.g. through NERC, Habitat regs etc), legislation and policy of wildlife conservation can still be improved.
 - Same old story – lack of resources, short term staff contracts etc.
 - Not fully understanding species and habitat - and how species might use habitats – e.g how dormice use and move through our habitats in Wales, may be restricting the most effective ways in which we should be focusing conservation efforts for them.

DEFRA Guideline 4 – Connectivity

Spokesperson – Kate Stinchcombe

This group saw the main challenges and solutions to be the following:

Summary

- Lack of knowledge. What does connectivity mean to different taxa.
- How do we add connectivity
- Can connections be supported by long-term commitments (longer than political terms or standard 10 year agri-environment tenure)?
- A legal framework may be needed to help support these new initiatives
- The issue of overriding public interest threatens to jeopardise establishment of enhanced connectivity and may lead to further fragmentation
- Other conflicting land-uses and the rise in value of agricultural land may thwart attempts to enhance connectivity.
- Existing infrastructure may pose physical barriers to connectivity that are difficult to circumvent.
- Public buy-in is essential if such initiatives are not to lose momentum

Idealised Guideline Implementation

- Large quantities of Money
 - To buy land to create and protect networks (Compulsory purchase)
 - To pay grants to landowners to create networks
 - To manage networks
 - To carry out research (see knowledge)
 - To monitor ecological networks
- Power
 - Legislation to acquire and protect land for ecological networks
 - Ecological (Environmental) Dictatorship
 - To prevent unsustainable development
- Knowledge
 - Best areas to target
 - Best practice for restoration and management
 - Habitat and species requirements
- Green Infrastructure (to enable green networks in the urban setting)
 - Buildings, bus tops etc. (green roofs)
 - Road networks and associated bridges
 - Open Spaces managed for Biodiversity value

- Local Biodiversity Action Plan
 - Stronger in legislative and policy terms to influence development
 - More resources for implementation of LBAP within Local Government
 - Training to enable ‘climate-proof’ action plans to be prepared

Real World Constraints

- Very limited amount of money available
- Political Will – lack of long-term commitment (more than 4 years)
- Lack of Knowledge
 - Best areas to target
 - Best practice for restoration and management
 - Habitat and species requirements
 - Are networks the right approach?
- Legal framework (currently doesn’t encourage long term vision) ‘ Overriding public interest’ and is unclear on scale...Favourable Conservation Status not necessarily relevant to Networks.
- Lack of skills
 - Landowners: What to do? Where to do it?
 - Strategic Planning: Incorporating sustainable development into Networks, avoiding further fragmentation of semi-natural habitats.
- Public perception of ecological movement on such a large scale particularly if large areas of land are purchased ‘Jack-boot ecology’
- Recognition of the need to consider Biodiversity in a changing climate: not just about being energy efficient
- Power of developers and current planning system
- Agri-inflation in the UK particularly as crop growing capabilities of other parts of the world decrease and as the demand for bio-fuels increases.
- Conflicts between habitats and species (specialists) e.g. ground nesting birds
- Fragmentation caused by existing infrastructure

Overcoming Constraints?

- Money
 - Re-direction of funds
 - Taxing commercial companies
 - Integrated and sustainable Agri-Environment scheme
 - Training Provision Survey and Monitoring (get developers to contribute)

- Politics
 - Ability to find money
 - Climate change at the top of the agenda
- Raising Awareness
 - Education
- Sustainable growth of crops
 - Planning
 - Methods
 - Incorporation of Biodiversity e.g. headlands

DEFRA Guideline 6 – Incorporate adaptation and mitigation measures into conservation management and planning

Spokesperson – Andrew Peterken

This group saw the main challenges and solutions to be the following:

- Regular review of direction of progress and plans
- Need for site specific information to be incorporated into predictive / modelling exercises to generate outputs that can be used on a site-level scale.
- Guidelines on the carbon footprint of different management options would be helpful
- Larger-scale coordination of climate change objectives between sites over larger geographic areas is needed – especially relevant as local population changes need to be viewed in context of wider distributional change in response to climate change.
- A flexible approach to features designation would reflect the changing nature of special sites
- Perhaps appropriate to anticipate ecological needs for likely incomers and manage accordingly.
- Management for ecosystem processes rather than individual species
- Creation of a species / habitat climate change audit – this would convert the Guidelines into a plan-specific checklist (Rob – Could this be part of Special Sites Database)
- Need to know which habitats and species are not likely to change due to climate – so these can be lowered in priority for CC adaptation measures.
- There was a generally pessimistic sense that societal needs are often overwhelming and thus ability to deliver these guidelines is hampered.
- It was felt that legislation was often not flexible enough to deal with change – especially for protected sites.
- Pressure group interest for particular species can derail more holistic approaches
- Such considerations are likely to add further to an already complex system of site management

Action to take forward from workshop: Carbon / Ecological Footprint Guidelines for Common Management Procedures

The workshop participants collectively highlighted lack of information as one of the key limitations on guideline implementation. In particular, there was a sense of not knowing the wider climate consequences of different management options.

It was suggested by a number of participants that a simple-to-use carbon calculator for land management practices would assist the selection of appropriate routine management procedures from a mitigation point of view – and would prevent conflicts with mitigation through implementation of proposed adaptation measures. The analogy of the “traffic lights” food labelling scheme used by some supermarkets was used – as a positive example of providing appropriate information that allows a beneficial decision to be made with positive outcomes, without recourse to complex analysis. Caution was expressed by some, that such simplification should not be at the expense of accuracy.

Progress is being made on this calculator and it is hoped a draft will be available early December 2007.

Other Contributions

Since the workshop a number of contributions by email have been received. Becky Groves was particularly helpful – providing a case study on how a climate adaptation plan is implemented (or not) in the real world. A cautionary tale.

Conwy Valley

As I'm sure you know....The Conwy Valley has a history of flooding, which came to a head in February 2004, when exceptionally heavy rain led to damage and heartbreak in the Conwy Valley. Flood protection embankments that had given good service for forty years were overwhelmed. Many homes and businesses in Llanrwst and Trefriw were flooded, and three people had to be airlifted to safety from a stranded lorry. Just under a year later, another series of exceptional storms breached the defences again. Over forty houses were flooded, some for a second time in one year.

The Environment Agency have been putting together the Conwy Valley Flood Alleviation Scheme over the last couple of years. They held a meeting with us Conwy County Borough Council (CCBC) and CCW to discuss how the scheme might impact on wildlife and how it might be used to improve the habitat for wildlife. Out of the options given, the most favourable option for wildlife (agreed by us and CCW officers at the meeting) would have been to let the land in the Conwy Valley (which is mostly heavily improved by agriculture, compacted by sheep grazing etc) to flood by removing the current flood defenses back and letting the river burst its banks. This was predicted to happen only approx 5-10 times a year.

Ideal scenario

Habitat improvements that could have been made (and were on the table being proposed):

- reed bed establishment
- changing intensive grazed fields into grazing salt marsh
- Installation of Barn Owl boxes
- Restoration and planning of hedgerows to increase connectivity between habitats. (especially beneficial for linkages between the Lesser Horseshoe Roosts in the Conwy Valley).
- Enhance river bank habitat for sand martin Colonies i.e. re-profile existing banks or installation of artificial sand martin wall.
- Creation of a smelt refuge north east of Trefriw.
- Planting of black poplar trees on floodplain. SK to liaise with Dave Thorpe (EA) about supply of saplings and to investigate using cuttings taken from Conwy Valley trees in 2005 by Conwy Biodiversity Volunteer.

Additional works could have included:

- Tree planting higher up the Conwy valley to increase absorption and prevent the speed/amount of run off in times of heavy rain (as has been carried out at Pont Bren)
- This may have increased tourism opportunities if bird hides etc could be installed – the osprey project has shown how powerful bird watching tourism can be. This would go hand in hand with the RSPB reserve up the valley.
- An education program to help educate and involve the local communities about the importance of conservation and using traditional farm methods – using salt marsh grazing – how to market the meat etc.

Constraints

However the scheme has been hugely downsized to just reducing a couple of the flood defences - to let the water through into the flood plain in times of flood and doing the same in another section of the valley to let the water back out again – basically letting it flash flood. So just about all of the suggested improvements are now not going to be made (apart from planting black poplars). This (as far as we know) did not/will not happen primarily because:

- there was an urgency for the Environment Agency to be seen to be doing something quickly – as peoples properties were being flooded. I guess the over –riding public interest will always come above wildlife conservation?!
- Meetings with landowners concluded (as far as we know) to be fairly unsuccessful as landowners did not want their land to be flooded – not only for the financial repercussions, but also because of tradition – their grandparents, great grandparents etc had taken years to make the land in good condition for farming and they did not want to be the ones to let the family down by letting it revert back to ‘wild land’.
- Lack of a funding package to be able to offer landowners – either for land purchase or sustainable management of the land to graze it more like salt marsh.
- We assume that funding may also not have been available for other habitat enhancement works – reed bed establishment, building hides etc – but this may have been more easily found

I’m sure there are many more reasons that these that I don’t know about/haven’t thought of!

Over-coming constraints:

I guess to over come other examples of this there will be a number of key events:

- Landowners and local communities will need to be educated that flooding can be reduced by managing the countryside in a certain way – reducing speed of flow from the uplands, less compacted ground etc. Until they understand this, they will not understand the need for changes in grazing practices etc
- There will need to be funding packages in place or changes in agricultural policy to enable farmers to manage the land more appropriately – as salt marsh for example (one farmer I know of in the valley is now turning organic and selling her ‘organic salt marsh beef and lamb’ to Rick Steins restaurant – I guess it’s all about marketing!).
- There would have to be good political backing to allow this to happen.
- Obviously there would have to be the basics – staff resources – preferably long term for continuity – building up a good trusting relationship with landowners takes time!

Ends. 25/10/07

Day 2 Workshop 3 Meeting the WAG target to reverse wild bird declines by 2010: Reversing declines in birds of farmed habitats in Wales-identifying the key actions. (Katie-jo Luxton/Tim Stowe: RSPB Cymru)

	Agree	Disagree
Tir Mynydd should have environmental outputs	8	2
Tir Mynydd should be integrated into agri-environmental schemes	8	1
More farmers should be able to access agri-environment schemes. <i>(added comment: a lot if farmers will not want to go into TG etc because of rising milk/wheat prices.)</i>	10	
We need better scheme monitoring <i>(linked to species outcomes / environmental outcomes)</i>	10	
<i>(Present)</i> agri-environment schemes can only ever be broad brush – expecting them to solve species declines is a bridge too far.	2	3
Is cross-compliance delivering?		5 No
Marketing opportunities need to be supported.	3	

<i>(comments: links to food chain – labelling complex: but still limited / supermarket power.)</i>		
In context of declining funding have to have targeting (<i>esp on landscape scale projects</i>)	4	
Localise the prescriptions to local priorities (<i>provide menu, complex, higher running costs, exceptional cases but makes scheme more complex</i>)	4	
Outcome-focused prescriptions (<i>difficult to monitor and expensive</i>)	3	
Payment by results / bonuses (<i>difficult to monitor/expensive</i>)	3	
TG is seriously underfunded (<i>payments good – availability poor</i>)	6	
Public money for public goods delivery (<i>link to food</i>)	4	
We need more flexibility in the schemes (<i>and simplicity</i>)	6	
More part farm schemes (<i>need to safeguard existing nature cons, TG should be basic level with higher tier schemes on top</i>)	4	4
Landscape scale/top tier/catchment scale schemes are a vital part of the agri-environment suite	5	1
Does it matter if species go extinct in Wales?	Yes-8	
Project officers input is key to achieving outcomes. (<i>Facilitators could be individual farmers that have a lot of local knowledge and skills that can encourage collaboration and cooperation – not necessarily government/ key to achieving more complex objectives</i>)	8	1 – too expensive
Expansion of project officer type support key to biodiversity outputs		
Maintain stock and stockmanship skills, esp in uplands	2	
Predation – crows etc	2	
Entry level – first rung but TC not very popular- no evidence (<i>TC good entry-level intro to AE concept</i>)		
Access/cats/dogs – role in bird decline		