

Wales Biodiversity Partnership Group Chairs Meeting Focus: Priority Mapping to inform Nature Recovery Plan and Area Planning 8 October 2015

Attending: Matthew Quinn (WG); Steve Spode (WG), Caryn le Roux (WG), Sarah Wood (NRW); Jim Latham (NRW), Pete Frost (NRW/Urban & Brownfield Ecosystem Group Chair); Clare Burrows (NRW/ Enclosed farmland Ecosystem Group Chair); Chris Tucker (NRW/Woodland Ecosystem Group Chair); Jan Sherry (NRW/Lowland Grassland & Heathland Ecosystem Group Co-Chair & Upland Ecosystem Rep – by phone); Jonathan Rothwell (NRW Terrestrial Mapping Specialist); Dave Thomas (WG/INNS Group Chair); Tracey Lovering (WBP/NRW); Heather Lewis (NRW/Coastal Ecosystem Group Rep).

AIMS:

- To share and demonstrate the application of terrestrial WBP Priority Mapping work, and related Connectivity Mapping, to area based biodiversity resilience planning, with Welsh Government and Natural Resources Wales.
- ii) To further explore area-based multiple benefits that may be achieved through actioning these priorities. Following the 7 principles of Sustainable Management of Natural Resources (p7-8).
- iii) To provide an approach to inform priority action delivered through the Nature Recovery Plan and Area Plans.

NOTES

1. Matthew Quinn, Chair, set the context for the meeting, and introduced the Natural Resources Policy Statement, outlining the drivers, and risks of not taking an integrated approach. The Natural Resource Plan is planned for completion by Christmas 2015. The Area Plans will need to encompass biodiversity resilience. There is an expectation from local authorities that the area plans will provide clear direction, including to Public Service Boards. The strengthening of the Duty under the NERC Act is clear. MQ suggested it may be useful to re-focus WBP group work to achieve integrated gains while delivering biodiversity action.

http://gov.wales/topics/environmentcountryside/consmanagement/natural-resources-management/environment-bill/?lang=en

- 2. Steve Spode introduced the resilience work of WG Natural Resources Management Board. Seven principles for Sustainable Management of Natural Resources have been distilled from the 12 Ecosystem Approach principles: Building Resilience, Managing for multiple benefits, Adaptive Management, Long-term, Evidence, Collaboration & Cooperation, Working at the right scale. Our understanding of resilience is that we need to ensure: diversity, connectivity, extent, condition, and long-term results. There is a need to build up evidence layers to inform this, using connectivity maps, network analysis and the priority mapping work.
- 3. Clare Burrows provided a useful overview of Glastir species mapping. WG were not able to demonstrate Glastir layering to define targeted areas

'multiple benefits layering' as planned, as the WG Officer was unavailable. Clare highlighted that there is a lot of data available but it's how you bring this together in a meaningful way to inform priority setting that counts. Intelligent analysis of the data is needed by experts – it's not enough to just overlay data. The area of the Elenydd has integrated data – by lucky chance and individual prioritisation, not by planned collaborative work, which is what's needed. The underlying drivers that affect presence or absence of species need to be understood. There are synergies with habitat modelling e.g. dormice resilience and habitat connectivity; again with lesser horse-shoe bat and availability of hedgerows. Network analysis is required. How we select areas as priorities is fraught as prioritising hotspots for action may leave out single species; the Red Kite was given as an example. It is important to understand all factors acting adversely on a species, not just to consider its habitat availability and quality. Protected landscapes offer opportunities for integrated gains.

4. Priority Mapping Workshop -

- 4.1 Jan Sherry, with Jonathan Rothwell, introduced the workshop, providing an overview of available priority maps (developed by terrestrial Ecosystem Groups). CB managed the visual GIS dataset presentation as JS & JR joined the meeting by phone. The series of **terrestrial Connectivity maps** (produced by Jim Latham) were demonstrated; these include Protected Site buffers. Priority networks are available for each terrestrial ecosystem, providing a communication and opportunity mapping tool for Ecosystem Groups, local & regional Biodiversity Partnerships and others. It was agreed that it is important that you determine what it is you want to achieve through any connectivity management. JL has also produced abundance and diversity maps that highlight areas across Wales supporting high biodiversity.
- 4.2 The **Priority Mapping work** highlights national biodiversity priority actions that can be achieved at a local scale. The demonstration highlighted the scarcity of some habitats e.g lowland heathland, and the vulnerability of remaining extensive areas of grassland e.g Southern Heads of the Valleys high development pressure. It will be important to link the Priority Mapping in with the production of NRW area statements (**ACTION 1**). The need to articulate, present and share priorities in a clear form to others will be essential e.g. trunk road agencies (**ACTION 2**). An example of Llantrisant Marsh Fritillary habitat was used; the land is adjacent to business parks and vulnerable to further development, however the marshy grassland provides an important ecosystem service to alleviate flooding in the valley the value of this service should be recognised.
- 4.3 Evidence Gaps & further work needed The Woodland Strategy Advisory Panel need to refine connectivity and priorities in relation to Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS). There is a large resource of PAWS within government and NRW estate that could be restored. How do these relate to flood maps? Increase woodland cover to decrease flood problems and promote habitat resilience. There are opportunities to provide for multiple benefits in PAWs restoration, as include public rights of way network. DEFRA's work on open mosaic habitats needs extending and refining through Wales in urban and semi-urban areas. Data gaps are also huge in relation to priority arable habitat (particularly N Wales) and hedgerow coverage and condition (Wales-wide data gap) (ACTION 3). Land cover change is an issue that hasn't been addressed adequately since Phase 1 Survey (inaccuracies in survey data still exist); satellite data, in combination with ground-truthing, can uncover some land use change but is not reliable across all habitats. Expert analysis is required. A unified peat map is available is it possible to produce priority maps

from this? Peatland restoration techniques – case-studies in N England. Evidence gap in understanding carbon storage of upland grassland and heathland, or in terms of water capture as an ecosystem service (ACTION 4). Diffuse pollution maps would be useful tool to target action. Upland priority action initially focused on small-scale action, but recently has moved to landscape scale action e.g. Migneint. The Upland Framework has been used extensively by NGOs to guide work in the uplands (including resilience/area map), but has not been used much by CCW or NRW. CCW targeted action has centred on upland birds. Freshwater data-sets and maps are available for ponds and lakes, but priorities for river systems including tributaries are not available. WBP Ecosystem Groups need to re-visit their priority maps and associated action synopses, with drivers of change in mind and provide consistent mapping and priority action advice to decision makers in NRW, WG and the wider Welsh biodiversity community (ACTION 5).

- 4.4 In summary priority mapping data can be usefully used at different scales. The priority action requirements can inform SoNaRR. Hotspots where priority actions are required across ecosystems within a defined area, should inform NRW area statements (ACTION 1). Abundance and diversity maps also provide useful tools to plan priority action and aid in understanding which areas support greatest biodiversity and are of high nature value. It would be interesting to see how much overlay there is in the provision of ecosystem services in these areas. Soil type, condition and rock type will influence the level and distribution of restoration possible. Although satellite imagery can be used to an extent, to map land-use and indicate some types of habitat cover, it cannot tell us about the change that has occurred. Protected landscapes have a common integrated purpose, and are important partners in the current and future management of many of the focal biodiversity hotspots of Wales.
- **4.5 Area focus activity** An overlay selection of priority maps were displayed in turn, for two distinct geographical areas: 1. Gower; 2. LI n Peninsula (both AONBs). Discussions centred on highlighted priority action, and associated multiple benefits that may be achieved through targeted management of factors that currently have a damaging effect on biodiversity. Benefits include: to tourism, local communities, access quality and provision, health benefits, agricultural diversification opportunities, bathing water quality, INNS management, benefits to Wales Coastal Path walkers etc.

The success of the LI n Landscape Partnership was discussed, and agreed an excellent model of an integrated management approach that has achieved gains for biodiversity, communities, business and tourism. The Gower is important for its species, the coastal and common heathlands, and woodland. The species integration work carried out by WBP Species Expert, Woodland Ecosystem Group and Lowland Grassland & Heathland Ecosystem Group provides guidance material in developing an integrated approach to species and habitat management. INNS is a key issue as is bracken control. Both have had projects directed at their control; the latter produced compost for local use under the 'Gower Commons Bracken Project'. The Gower also supports the largest area of saltmarsh and important dune communities. The proximity of Swansea, and Gower's annual flux of tourists means that the Gower is well situated as a trial area, to communicate to the public the value and importance of managing our biodiversity that underpins our health, well-being and prosperity. The potential for gaining volunteers and engaging people in citizen science activity is enormous. The LI n in contrast, has a tiny population, swollen significantly in the holiday season by tourists.

4.6 Both areas support N2K sites and are affected by damaging agricultural activities and share coastal management issues, such as land abandonment and coastal squeeze. Trials within both areas could build on lessons learnt from other

coastal landscapes, applying different approaches. Broadening the coastal belt would be a key way to deliver multiple outcomes and would address coastal squeeze, land abandonment, and diffuse pollution providing a buffer between land intensively managed e.g. LI n dairy farms, improve bathing water quality and address N2K habitats and species actions. At the moment coastal squeeze in both areas will limit availability of coastpath into the future as soft cliffs and limestone erode, and land is lost to the sea. Outcome-based initiatives need to be explored learning from case-studies e.g. LIFE Burren, Ireland; a successful outcome-based project (ACTION 6). The RDP co-operative option could be applied (ACTION 7).

- 4.7 Key issues and opportunities included current and future threats e.g. habitats vulnerable to development pressures, agricultural activities resulting in loss and deterioration in habitat quality e.g. diffuse & point-source pollution, local business and engagement opportunities, building resilience through exploring connectivity options, coastal erosion & agricultural management and resulting coastal squeeze, existing partnerships & potential new partnerships, INNs e.g. Cotoneaster on S Gower coast, Wales Coastal Path - opportunities and risks e.g. farmers less willing to graze cliffs resulting in loss of close grazed habitat or desired grassland/heath mosaics, potential mechanisms to address adverse factors, RDP initiatives, and integrated benefits. Action needs to incorporate SMNR principles (see below). A multiple benefits solution-based approach is needed, where visible gains can be achieved for biodiversity, human health & well-being. WBP Groups should re-visit issues facing their respective habitats, and consider producing solution-focused maps. The maps should demonstrate multiple gains from biodiversity action that will deliver the aspirations and goals of the Well-Being of Future Generations Act, the Environment Bill, The Nature Recovery Plan and the NERC Act (ACTION 8)
- 4.8 Priority mapping layers were opened for Gwent as this is known as a hotspot for some species, however much of the land is intensively managed for agriculture, with little quality habitat remaining. Priority mapping did not focus action in this area, however it was agreed that the area would benefit from riparian planting both to alleviate flooding and provide a buffer to slow run off from intensively managed land to watercourses reducing siltation and pollution (and aiding in meeting WFD compliance). The retention of stock away from watercourses would also be of direct benefit to improve water quality and the habitat condition of riparian and freshwater species.

Did the workshop provide a methodology to produce focal areas, which can inform the resilience work? Could this approach be widened across Wales? How do we communicate this to partners and Partnerships?

4.9 The workshop has demonstrated that the Priority Mapping dataset, the Connectivity mapping, a multiple benefit approach and an outcome-based approach that utilises existing case-studies can and should guide area-based decision making by NRW, WG and the wider Welsh community. The importance of using experts to understand and communicate the use of the data-sets is clear. The importance of presenting and providing clear messages on multiple benefits outcomes to decision-makers and funding bodies is paramount. A multiple benefits solution-based approach is needed, where visible gains can be demonstrated and achieved for biodiversity, human health & well-being.

WBP GROUP CHAIRS MEETING 16 - ACTIONS

No.	Action	Who	Ву		
New	Actions 8 October 2015				_
1.	It is important to link the Priority Mapping in with the production of NRW area statements. WG Biodiversity Policy & WBP Chairs need to engage directly with NRW Management & Officers producing Area Plans to ensure Priority Mapping data is understood and incorporated in NRW Area Plans e.g. hotspots of priority action required within a mapped area.	WG Biodiversity Policy & WBP Chairs			
2.	The need to articulate, present and share priorities in a clear form to others will be essential to encourage uptake of actions within others plans e.g. trunk road agencies. Groups to consider how Priority mapping data is communicated and shared, and whether there are new partners the group should engage with to enable action uptake. Groups to agree consistency in message of how the actions can result in multiple benefits, and ensure data is provided in a form suited to the end user.	WBP Chairs & Group reps			
3.	Data gaps huge in relation to priority arable habitat (particularly N Wales), and in relation to hedgerow coverage and condition (Wales-wide data gap). Enclosed Farmland Ecosystem Group to pursue gaps are addressed through mechanisms such as WBP Evidence Gaps Project and through Nature Recovery Plan initiatives.	Enclosed Farmland Ecosystem Group & WG Biodiversity policy			
4.	Evidence gap in understanding carbon storage capability of upland grassland and heathland; also the importance of these systems in water capture – needs to be recognised as an additional ecosystem service and valuable asset to manage. Upland Ecosystem Group to add both above gaps to Evidence Gaps Register, if not already addressed	Upland Ecosystem Group			
5.	WBP Ecosystem Groups need to re-visit their priority maps and associated action synopses, with drivers of change in mind, and provide consistent mapping and priority action advice to decision makers in NRW, WG and the wider Welsh biodiversity community	WBP Chairs to lead groups in delivery			
7.	Outcome-based initiatives need to be explored learning from case-studies e.g. LIFE Burren, Ireland; a successful outcome-based project. Perhaps focus for next WBP meeting?	WBP Chairs (invite NRW & WG reps to share learning)		w	omment [TL1]: Invite speaker here possible – if arrange to
3.	The RDP co-operative option could be applied. Caryn le Roux to follow up and report back to WBP Chairs.	Caryn le Roux		L	ollow on or precede Llyn andscape Partnership celebrat vent in Spring in NW Wales, th
9.	WBP Groups should re-visit issues facing their respective habitats, and consider producing solution-focused maps. The maps should demonstrate multiple gains from biodiversity action that will deliver the aspirations and goals of the Well-Being of Future	WBP Chairs to lead their groups		В	urren project reps may be in /ales, and able to present?

	Generations Act, the Environment Bill, The Nature Recovery Plan and the NERC Act.						
	Carried forward actions						
10.	Matthew to discuss with Ceri whether NRW can reinstate Upland Ecologist post.						
On-going actions for Chairs (Standing items for Group meeting agendas)							
13.	Group Membership : Update Group membership details and send to WBP Secretariat ¹		Group Chairs to lead				
14.	Evidence Gaps Project: http://www.biodiversitywales.org.uk/WBP-Evidence-Gaps-Project All Chairs to share feedback on evidence gaps table with their Groups, provided by Prof Mike Bruford (See columns I.J.K in Nov V2 Register of Evidence Gaps and: 1) Address comments/follow up information/links attached. This may require:	lead	Group Chairs to lead				
	 Project webpage). Breaking down a large scale gap into component sub questions that may suit separate linked projects. 2) Re-visit Group priority evidence gaps and highlight these within the evidence gaps register (red=high, orange=medium, yellow=low). 3) Agree your research project Group lead per high priority evidence gap (if suited to research); lead to develop & submit a completed Project Proposal per research project to TL² 			rs to			
15.	WBP Group web-pages: Secretariat/Chairs to update Group pages on WBP website ² . Populate with Group members list, meeting agendas/actions/work programmes/projects including REF funded/BAP habitats covered by Group/priority mapping/contact details and useful links. Send page updates to Sean McHugh.	lead					
16.	 Priority Mapping: Groups to arrange opportunities to engage locally with biodiversity partnerships/networks/forums to share Priority Mapping data and seek opportunities to deliver action locally and strategically. Species Expert Group to be invited to provide representation at any event arranged. Secretariat to copy WBP Secretariat into arrangements. Check whether amendments required to either area or actions listed on Group's Priority Mapping dataset. Delegated lead to collate any changes and provide completed final revised GIS maps, and associated actions to Clare Burrows³ 	lead	up Chai	rs to			

¹ smchugh@wtwales.org
2 www.biodiversitywales.org.uk/en-GB/Ecosystems--Species-Expert-Groups
3 Clare.Burrows@cyfoethnaturiolcymru.gov.uk

17.	Arranging meetings:	Group Chairs to
	Secretariat to provide dates, agendas, actions, updates for/from all Group meetings to WBP team ⁴ and WG Biodiversity Policy team ⁵ .	lead

SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES PRINCIPLES http://gov.wales/docs/desh/publications/150914-natural-resources-policy-statement-en.pdf

To meet these objectives, the Bill provides for a number of principles which underpin the sustainable management of natural resources and which provide the method by which it is to be delivered. Each principle is applied equally.

Building resilience

A resilient ecosystem is one that is healthy and functions in a way that is able to address pressures and demands placed on it, and is able to deliver benefits over the long term to meet current social. economic and

environmental needs.

Our ecosystems provide us with a wide range of services and benefits. We need to take all of these into account when we make decisions about how we use them, so that they provide multiple benefits for the long term. This includes taking into account their intrinsic value.

Ecosystem processes and functions are complex and variable, and our approach will be adaptive with a focus on active learning derived from monitoring and outcomes and taking into account the time lags and feedback times for ecosystems to respond to interventions. It is about 'learning by doing'.

It is also important to take account of the short, medium and long term consequences of actions, and consider time lags and feedback times for ecosystems to respond to any interventions.

This means gathering information and considering all the social, economic and environmental evidence (including evidence in respect of uncertainties) from a wide range of experts and stakeholders at the local, regional and national level as appropriate, both to identify priorities and opportunities for their management and also in delivering the management actions.

Managing for multiple benefits

Adaptive management

Long term

Evidence

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Collaboration and co-operation

It is about having a two way communication across local, regional, national and international levels and being interconnected between policy, process and people to break down silo ways of working. This approach supports the development and implementation of the new, innovative solutions that are needed.

Working at the right scale

An ecosystem is a functioning unit that can operate at any scale depending on the problem or issue being addressed

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06/11/15