

DRAFT work programme outline – wetland BIG 2009 – 2011

1. Background:

The Strategic Framework requires the Biodiversity Integration Groups to agree and implement a three-year work programme for England-level action to deliver the relevant habitats and species targets. The terms of reference for the BIGS also require a range of other activities which will need to be incorporated into an overarching work programme (see Annex 1).

This paper proposes in outline a work programme for the wetland BIG for discussion at the meeting on 20 January 2009.

2. Principles:

A number of principles behind the new Biodiversity Framework should guide our work plan:

2.1. A key principle is the importance of adopting an ecosystem approach, and embedding climate change adaptation principles.

2.2. The emphasis on future UK level work is:

- Information exchange and guidance
- Research and standard setting
- Some reporting

2.3. At country level and below, the scope of work includes:

- Target setting
- Planning and prioritising action
- Implementing delivery mechanisms
- Embedding biodiversity into policy and programmes

2.4. The work programme will need to look different to previous, particularly in improving integration of:

- Species and habitats work
- National through to local delivery
- Across sectors (eg between BIGs)
- Policy delivery via EBS

3. Further considerations:

3.1 The wetland BIG is well-placed in promoting an ecosystem approach – a target for “landscape scale wetland mosaics” has already been agreed as part of the Habitat Action Plan, and objectives and potential locations for landscape scale schemes as well as principles behind these have been agreed under the wetland Vision – including many of the wetland BIG partners. However the way this is translated into Regional and Local targets needs further thought, as does the integration of species targets. Key issues for us are:

- How should LBAPs or others responsible for delivery of wetland HAPs and SAPs, understand their contribution to national wetland BIG targets; and
- What guidance / help should we develop to enable this.

3.2 The Lowland Agriculture BIG is discussing the use of Joint Character Areas (JCAs) to define HAP and SAP contribution required at local level and to identify habitats and species that will require specific individual attention in each Character Area (see Annex 2). In the case of the Lowland Agriculture BIG this approach is driven in part by the JCA focus of ELS/ HLS targeting, and because these schemes

are key routes for delivery of the HAP targets for that BIG. The Lowland Agriculture BIG is anticipating an extensive work programme within each JCA . The Lowland Ag BIG paper expresses the need for partnership with the wetland and forestry BIGs, since action under that BIG is relevant to our targets as well. We will need to discuss how far we go down the detailed planning route being discussed within the lowland agriculture BIG, and how far our approach to national targeting, based on subcatchment analysis in the wetland Vision, is compatible with that being discussed by lowland agriculture BIG.

3.3 Regional partnerships are required to confirm local and regional targets (including incorporation of National Parks and AONB objectives) and to develop regional delivery plans with priorities. We will need to understand how they will seek advice from national BIG groups, or to align with national priorities.

3.4 Although accountability for the wetland BIG delivery lies with Natural England as the lead partner, we will need to ensure our programme recognises the accountabilities lying with others with wetland responsibilities, eg EA and IDB with responsibility to achieve specific Defra habitat creation “outcome targets”, and other relevant HAPs within wetland mosaics – eg lakes, rivers and pond HAPs.

4. Draft outline work programme:

A draft outline work programme with suggested priorities, for discussion and refinement by the wetland BIG group, is set out below. I suggest that once we have agreed an outline, we agree leads for each of the components, to set up subgroups to work up work programmes and assign responsibilities and timescales for individual actions.

Generic activity	Programme	Project	urgency	responsibility	
Communications	Ensure good community of practice in each region	Establish wetland networks	High		
		Link with regional EA programmes	Med		
		Link with regional agri env targetting	Med		
	Communicate policy requirements to EBG	Seek advice from regions on policy blockages	Low		
		National liaison	Liaison with other BIGs	Med	
			Ensure links to national strategies	Low	
	Dissemination of advice locally	Website maintenance	High		
			Review need to update guidance – eg “Getting Wetter..”	Med	
		Reporting	Plan reporting via BARs	Low	
	Research and information	Understanding landscape scale requirements	Requirements for habitat linkage / permeability	Med	
Translating national to local targets			V High		
		Ecosystem services	Med		

	Wetland HAP management requirements	Collating and disseminating recent R&D	Med	
	Integrating species work	Identify species based success measures	Low	
		Complete analysis of SAP and HAP integration	V High	
		Pilot areas to trial SAP integration	Med	
	Inventory work	Standardise regional wetland inventory work	High	
		Develop a national inventory / survey strategy	Med	
Guiding and assisting delivery	Setting regional targets	Agree landscape schemes	V High	
		Review disaggregated regional targets	V High	
		agree further regional priorities	High	
	Ensuring local delivery	Agree process for local – national accountability	med	
		Agree 3 year work programme	High	Complex activity > 1 lead
		Develop programme for local species delivery	Med	
	Funding programmes	Develop good practice for HAP /SAP funding bids	Low	
		Strategy for research funding bids	Low	

Annex 1: Extract from Biodiversity Framework – BIG terms of reference

The Biodiversity Integration Groups will be asked to:

1. Drive the delivery of habitat and species targets:
 - Agree the most urgent and important actions to meet the collective needs of the habitats and species within the overall group
 - Set objectives/targets (incorporating existing SMART targets).
 - Identify priority areas (e.g. within regional 'vision' maps) for delivering biodiversity enhancements at a landscape scale.
 - Engage appropriately with regional/local partnerships to align delivery.
 - Agree and implement a three-year work programme for relevant England-level action, with agreed accountabilities for delivery. Work programme to be agreed and implementation underway by 30 November 2008, and annual progress reports are to be provided to the England Biodiversity Group via BARS.
 - Identify opportunities for leveraging resources
2. Identify species-based success measures for habitats, e.g:
 - Indicator species
 - Habitat features
 - Aspects of habitat condition
 - Size of habitat patches
 - Habitat context (including connections with other habitats)
3. Identify knowledge gaps and either address these directly or recommend to the England Biodiversity Group how they could be filled.
4. Identify policy blockages and, through representation on relevant EBS workstream(s), help drive policy development.
5. Ensure appropriate links are made to relevant national strategies or policies including the Invasive Non-natives Strategy, the England Trees, Woods and Forests delivery plan, and the Ecosystem Approach action plan¹.
6. Ensure reporting is carried out to agreed standards and timetables for component habitats and species, including the use of the Biodiversity Action Reporting System (BARS).
7. Provide representation to any over-arching UK habitat group established by the UK Biodiversity Standing Committee.

¹ <http://www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-countryside/natres/eco-actionp.htm>

Annex 2

DRAFT Paper from Lowland Agriculture BIG:

Some thoughts on the Lowland Agriculture Biodiversity Integration Group

Purpose:

This is set out in the strategic framework “securing biodiversity”. Basically I see this as driving delivery in an integrated way by developing an ecosystem approach to the delivery of priority habitat targets, integrating species requirements.

Context and background:

Delivery is always local: outcomes are achieved in real places. We need to secure effective integration at the local level and do this in ways that positively addresses the key ecosystem services biodiversity provides and depends on, and incorporates positive provision for adaptation to climate change and resilience to defined pressures. This places LBAP partnerships at the core of delivery: it is important that they incorporate essential contributions to national targets into their local plans.

Agriculture is the dominant land use across most of lowland England. Agricultural managers also manage a significant area of woodland and other habitats including wetlands, open waters and have direct influence on running waters. Agricultural use runs across the spectrum from near urban through to remote rural, and thus the day to day experience of “countryside” of many people. We need to set priorities and focus delivery effort across this broad spectrum of places influenced by lowland agriculture.

A proposition:

We can identify “Lowland Character Areas” (c.120) to define the geographic extent of our attention. This provides a framework that captures the diversity of the lowlands in terms of mainly landscape, geology and land form. This was also used to outline preferences for ELS and to specify targets for HLS when Environmental Stewardship was launched in 2005. The Defra rural/urban definition provides another framework to capture the diversity of these areas in terms of proximity to urban areas and patterns of settlement. Character Areas are already embedded in some of the key tools we have to secure biodiversity benefits from agriculture, ELS and HLS, so provide a reasonably familiar framework for setting priorities and focusing efforts to secure delivery.

Using Character Areas:

For each Character Area we need to:

- Define its contribution to HAP targets (in practice also to securing favourable conservation status of EU priority habitats and the habitats of EU priority species including birds)

- Specify the SAPs that occur in the Character Area, especially the restricted range species (and in practice do the same for EU priority species). We need to differentiate between species that depend on the mosaic of habitats that make up the landscape (eg bat species, brown hare, barn owl, and invertebrate examples) as a “large scale”, those that depend on more local mosaics (dragon fly species, amphibians, door mouse) and those that depend on the condition of individual habitats and features and on attributes that occur within these. We have been provided with material by John Webb that relates to lowland agriculture HAPs (grasslands, heathland, orchards, hedgerows and field margins) and to habitats dependent on agriculture (wetlands, ponds, lakes, rivers)
- Define the locally characteristic habitats (and species) that give the JCA its distinctive biodiversity character within which the nationally important HAPs and SAPs occur or are part of. (This is a UK BAP target in its own right)
- Identify habitats and species that will require specific individual attention in the Character Area to secure the current status of these and consolidate them to establish viability, resilience and the capacity to adapt to climate change and other pressures
- Specify the key ecosystem services and natural processes relevant to the Character Area and agree the implications this has for the best approach to delivering the biodiversity targets and ecological integrity of the assets that are important for achieving this: I see this as providing the basis for setting priorities for habitat creation and restoring heavily degraded habitats in order to secure ecological resilience for the existing biodiversity assets in reasonable condition.

Much of this is the realm of LBAPs: they will have the local knowledge necessary for developing sound local plans, but will need to know what is of particular importance nationally in each Character Area and the priority given to the assets in the Character Areas that make up their patch, so they can make practical and appropriate plans.

We can probably group Character Areas into “types” that have particular issues, ecosystem services and natural processes that shape priorities:

- Areas with IDBs
- Calcareous well drained
- Higher areas with boulder clays
- Sandstone well drained
- River flood plains
- Etc

For every Character Area we need to:

- Establish what the preferred ELS options are to contribute to biodiversity and ecological integrity across the landscape
- Specify the best way to use HLS to consolidate and secure the integrity and resilience of existing areas of good biodiversity value, especially for HAPs and SAPs (and compare these to the existing HLS targeting maps and statements to ensure they are appropriate). Even in impoverished Character Areas with very limited extant wildlife habitats, those that do exist often do so in clusters that would benefit from locally targeted habitat restoration to reduce fragmentation, which will also provide a demonstration of the potential for restoration of the landscape and its ecological condition. This could include a programme of hedgerow gap filling and laying to restore the ecological integrity of the hedgerow system in a particular locality, a similar programme for pond creation, ditch re-profiling, tree and scrub removal, etc.
- Identify the key ecosystem functions and natural processes that are relevant to biodiversity and develop advice and guidance on management, habitat creation and wider good farming practice that will maintain these (eg run off, aquifer recharge, pollination services, water storage, refuges etc).
- Specify additional targeted work needed to maintain the rare and restricted range habitats and species that the Character Area contributes to, including activities managed through national programmes and partnerships relevant to the JCA
- Identify any community linked projects that could be funded through other sources (Lottery, Access to Nature, Landfill tax, etc) and support their development, approval, incorporation into SCSs and implementation
- Develop a monitoring and recording programme relevant to agriculture in the Character Area. I see this as -:
 - identifying areas of landscape that are “excellent”, “typical” and “poor” for the desired characteristic biodiversity in the Character Area (and “excellent” might be as good as we’ve got but not good enough, so would need to include a specification for what is required to secure the improvement we would look for)
 - then having places (for me 1km squares, but it could be some farms) that we engage with and record habitat condition, species, and understand the management to give us local knowledge of current ecosystems and their condition under current management.
 - these examples provide both a trajectory that represents improvement, reference areas so we can interpret what we see elsewhere (allowing us to calibrate according to the particular year and eventually to accommodate differences due to climate change),
 - places where we can develop recommendations for optimal use of

ELS, HLS, and optimal implementation of cross compliance obligations and other regulations

- an inventory of sites that contribute to the biodiversity of the Character Area which will include contributions to HAPs as well as other habitats and sites for important species
- a map of places of good ecological integrity and important for landscape scale species (defined as 1km squares, and likely to include boundary areas)
- a recording programme coordinated by the LBAP and supported by the LRC that covers the reference areas, including reference sites for the key habitats, and a sample of all the main habitat types covered in the inventory for the Character Area. This requires a strong programme for recruiting and supporting volunteers to carry out this monitoring activity
- a programme to link volunteers to farmers to support the farmers interest in and delivery of biodiversity as an integral part of their farming activities

Background assumptions:

- Environmental Stewardship will be promoted locally through Natural England supported advice programmes and partnerships, and this will include advice to enhance the take up of ELS with the right options
- There will be Natural England enabled farmer led groups that will help promote the take up of ES and the adoption of good practice on farms who will be able to help recruit good exemplar farms to demonstrate good practice
- The LBAP partnership will be represented on the Local Strategic Partnership and be in a position to promote and champion farmland biodiversity so this is included in the Sustainable Community Strategy, does lead to community partnerships to develop projects and programmes that will benefit from improved biodiversity, and ensure this is included in the LAAs developed by the Local Authority with the Government Office
- Access to the countryside is similarly championed through the LSP with partners including the relevant Local Access Forum, and this includes access to areas with good quality wildlife and the contribution this can make to wellbeing and the quality of life, including through education in the outdoors

Thus the focus on realising wider benefits lies elsewhere, and we need to focus mainly on ensuring wildlife is delivered in the right places through agriculture in the lowlands.

Partnerships with the various freshwater and wetland BIGs, and the Forestry BIG will be critical as lowland agriculture is relevant to their targets as well.

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