

Avon BAP Agriculture Group Meeting  
 Agenda  
 September 5<sup>th</sup> 2007  
 10am – 12.30pm



Duchy of Cornwall Office, Newton St Loe  
 Chair: Chris Westcott (NE)  
 Minutes: Matt Hamilton

Item	Actions
<p><b>1. Introductions &amp; apologies</b></p> <p><b>Present:</b> Chris Westcott (NE), Matt Hamilton (ABP), Tim McGrath (AWT), Robert Moreton (Tortworth estate), Dan Merrett (B&amp;NESC), Ann Fay (British Horse Society), Lucy Rogers (AWT), Mark Smith (FWAG), Nick Mould (Duchy), Bill Morris (NT), Mark Connelly (Cotswold AONB), Emma Hook (AWT)</p> <p><b>Apologies:</b> Susan Stangroom (NSC), Stuart Hales (AWT), Robin Marshall-Ball (BASC), M. Gordon Milward (Avon Gorge &amp; Downs), Dave Villis (SGC), Les Davies (Mendip Hills AONB), Matthew Bufton (HMP Leyhill), Mike Rogers (Hawk &amp; Owl Trust), Nick Ward (BTCV), Sally Pattison (SGC), Tim Corner (BRERC), Helen Hall (BCC), Samantha Jarvis (NSC), Rupert Higgins (Wessex ecological consultancy).</p>	
<p><b>2. Minutes of last meeting and matters arising</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MH reported that most members had now returned their Terms of Reference</li> <li>• CW reported that JM had found some information on yew and its implications for grazing. MH to circulate around the group</li> </ul>	<b>MH</b>
<p><b>3. HLS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CW gave an update on HLS:</li> <li>• In the Avon, Glos. and Wilts area, 12 HLS agreements were approved in the August round, 3 of these were in Avon. The next round will take pace in November, with 9 more farms being approved, one of these – Brown’s Folly – is in Avon.</li> <li>• NE have been using Nature Map and other information to construct priority maps to help target HLS at the areas in which it is most needed. Priority areas (~30% of the south west) have been identified for Avon and roughly consist of: the south tip of the Cotswolds, parts of the North Somerset Levels and Moors and the north edge of the Mendips.</li> <li>• There was no time to consult on Phase 1 of the priority maps, which will be launched on September 18<sup>th</sup>. These maps will be used for three or four rounds of applications, while the Phase 2 maps are produced in consultation with relevant partners.</li> <li>• Applications from outside the priority areas will be considered, but must be of ‘high value’ and include for example: ancient monuments, BAP habitats, hotspots for farmland birds, or areas</li> </ul>	

<p>that are part of strategic projects.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The pre-FEP consultation process is now up and running, allowing unsuitable applications to be weeded out before undergoing the costly FEP process.</li> <li>• High quality applications rejected in the previous rounds are being reconsidered in current rounds.</li> <li>• CW advised that any applications containing SSSIs (especially in un-favourable condition) should be submitted as soon as possible.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>4. Horse Grazing</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• AF outlined some of the issues surrounding horse grazing, namely: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Horses (especially domestic horses) are selective grazers, although picking up droppings can ease this issue</li> <li>○ Over-grazing – often as result of horse owners only having access to small plots of land</li> <li>○ Many horse owners rent their paddocks and so are unable to undertake management techniques that would ease grazing pressures.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• AF reported that FWAG are running a pasture management course in Taunton and asked if one could be run more locally as well</li> <li>• MS reported that FWAG have been developing leaflets on horse grazing that should soon be available on their website. FWAG could run a course locally, but would need funding. CW to see if funding would be available through NE</li> <li>• MC reported that grazing native breeds of horse and pony can be very beneficial for conservation, but that a growing problem is the effects of grazing domestic horses in smaller paddocks.</li> <li>• MC reported that the BHS had recently increased their minimum recommended area need to graze a horse, and suggested that horses could be included in a GAP style grazing animals project.</li> <li>• LR said that it could be considered as part of Living Landscapes, but AF warned that horse owners may not like the idea of rotating their horses between fields as there are other issues such as shelter to be considered.</li> <li>• AF reported that South Glos are developing a Horse Supplementary Planning Document. MH to circulate to group.  <i>&lt;SP reported after the meeting that the document would be out for public consultation in the autumn – MH will ensure he passes it on as soon as its available&gt;</i> </li> </ul>	<p>CW</p> <p>MH</p>
<p><b>5. Grassland project update</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MS gave an update on the Grasslands Project:</li> <li>• Little Solsbury – Fencing contractor went on site in March, but the rain forced him off with only a quarter of the fencing complete. Contractor seems reluctant to return to site, so MS is investigating alternative contractors. As a result, site has been ungrazed this year, but grassland botanical surveys have been done and photo's taken.</li> <li>• Goblin Combe – Boundary has been cleared and fencing issues resolved. A mixture of stock netting, and dropper fencing will be used, contractors have been found and will start next month. Botanical surveys have been completed, and a local owner of</li> </ul>	

<p>Hebridean Sheep has agreed to graze.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MS reported that as the fencing had cost more than anticipated, there was less money available for scrub clearance, and negotiations were underway with contractors for the steeper areas.</li> <li>• BM reported that they had been trialing new method of scrub clearance in the Avon Gorge – leaving the scrub on site, but scraping the bark away and applying herbicide direct to the stem – good results seen so far.</li> <li>• Horsecombe Vale – funding has only just come through and work will be started in October.</li> <li>• CW suggested that the group visit one of the sites at the next meeting. MH to investigate the possibility of holding the next meeting at Goblin Combe Environment Centre.</li> </ul>	<p>MH</p>
<p><b>6. Living Landscapes Project</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LR reported that the bid was being prepared for submission to Tubney on September 14<sup>th</sup>. Should hear by November. The aim is to start the project next April, to allow time to raise the remaining 60% of funding needed.</li> <li>• LR thanked all those who have agreed to support the project so far, but said there is still a lot of money left to raise and further funders and partners are being sought.</li> <li>• The project will cover around 19 SNAs and already has support from new partners such as Yeo Valley and the Soil Association.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>7. Arable Farmland Project</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MH reported that as the project would be working on private land, HLF would not be a suitable grant source. It was suggested that as the two known hotspots are fairly small, the project is started at a local level, possibly involving parish councils and the South Glos. Environment Body.</li> <li>• CW asked if there was any data on the areas since Phil Quinn's survey 7 or 8 years ago. No-one was aware of any.</li> <li>• It was decided that the first stage in the project was to map the hotspots for scarce arable plants, and find out what farms with that area are in stewardship. MH to progress with TM and CW</li> <li>• MS reported that FWAG had been involved in a similar and highly successful project in Wiltshire, and that he had access to the files from that project in his office.</li> <li>• CW emphasised the importance of farmland birds in the project, especially as they are one of the criteria that allows HLS applications from outside priority areas.</li> </ul>	<p>MH/TM/ CW</p>
<p><b>8. Updates around the table</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• RM reported that the Gloucestershire Water Vole Project on the Cam and Little Avon was getting underway, with the new project identifying landowners and looking at mink control.</li> <li>• MC reported that the new Cotswolds AONB management plan was due soon and that their grassland management project was coming to an end in December.</li> <li>• MC reported that they were looking at starting a farmland birds project in the Cotswolds. MC to update the group on progress at the</li> </ul>	

