

Agriculture Focus Group Minutes

28th September 2004

0930-1300

Duchy of Cornwall Office

Newton St Loe



Chair: John Martin

Minutes: Jenny Hayward

Action

Attendees

John Martin, RDS; Nick Mould, Duchy of Cornwall; Jan Walters, Bristol City Council; Gordon Milward, Downs Ranger, BCC and Avon Gorge and Downs Project; Jenny Hayward, Avon Biodiversity Partnership co-ordinator; Dan Merrett, Batscapes Project, B&NES/SGC; Craig Stenson, Avon Wildlife Trust; Ben Hole (work experience student) Duchy of Cornwall; Stuart Hales, Avon Wildlife Trust; Elaine Weller, North Somerset Levels and Moors Project; Robin Marshall-Ball, BASC; Nick Ward, BTCV; Susan Stangroom, North Somerset Council; Sally Pattison, Field Boundaries Project, B&NES/SGC; Matthew Bufton, HMP Leyhill; Karen Renshaw, B&NES Council; Mike Rogers, Hawk and Owl Trust.

Apologies: Chris Sperring, Hawk and Owl Trust; Les Davies, Mendip Hills AONB; Mark Connelly, Cotswold Hills AONB Partnership; Rebecca Price, Avon Wildlife Trust; Simon Lee, English Nature.

The role and function of the group

All agreed to use JH's model (see BAP chapter 2 and 'role of groups' model on website) as a starting point - to evolve, if necessary, with the group. Habitats to be covered: Species-rich grassland, arable farmland, hedgerows, purple moor-grass and rush pasture.

Are the right people attending the group?

Need farmers' perspective. Invite chair of a local NFU group to attend meeting (4 groups in Avon area). MS to suggest name, JM/MS to invite to attend and discuss whether they'd be able to feed back to other groups. May be appropriate to feed back to farmers' meetings in future, with particular issues/projects. Another possibility is someone from CLA.

MS
MS/JM

Perhaps too many people attending for group to function efficiently. Need representation from key organisations/groups, as follows: DEFRA/RDS, FWAG, EN, AWT, AONBs, Duchy, Batscapes, HOT, BASC, NFU or CLA. One representative only from each organisation to attend. Other groups would attend when relevant (e.g. UA ecologists, HMP Leyhill, BTCV, AG&DP, Field Boundaries project) and to ensure that they feed into the agendas with issues they want to raise. Very important to ensure that there is feedback to UA processes, if not through a UA ecologist attending, then through project staff and JH.

Issues that are unlikely to be solved through existing work and resources and projects to deal with these issues

1/ Is there a need for a 'grazing animals project' locally?

All knew of grassland sites that were difficult to manage, often due to lack of appropriate grazing animals. Generally felt to be an important issue and that there might be scope for a grazing animals project. Problems of getting these sites managed different on site-by-site basis and so would need to be dealt with sensitively. Suggested starting point for selecting sites: SSSIs in unfavourable condition due to lack of grazing, land with AES agreement where agreement not being met due to lack of grazing, other sites identified through local knowledge and NBN mapping.

2/ Increasing Horse Ownership across the area

All agreed that overgrazing by horses was an issue. Two elements to this a) education: May be lack of awareness of best way to graze/manage land amongst horse owners. Has been a perceived split between horse owners/ environmentalists in past and some awareness-raising would help. Felt that owners often willing to help but don't know how. b/ horses can be used for grazing important grassland sites well. Horse owners often need to find land to keep their horses and might welcome a dating agency type thing to link the horses with the sites, with associated advice on management. Currently no initiatives to help horse owners.

Moving on from here: May be possible to link issues 1 and 2 in a big project dealing with sites and trying to get them grazed but also providing advice to horse owners. However, may be better dealt with in two separate initiatives, one dealing with the education and awareness-raising needed for horse owners (2a) and a second, larger initiative dealing with the grazing of sites. JH to organise meeting with Jenny Phelps (Cotswold AONB grassland project officer) and Jim Swanson (FWAG – regional co-ordinator of GAP projects) and relevant agriculture group members: SH, JW, MR, JM, MS, R M-B and SL, to discuss how a grazing project could be approached and whether horse issues could be included in it. JH to feed back to rest of agriculture group and steering group. Should discuss ideas with representative from horse community. Could also invite someone to later meetings. SP to send JH details of her contact from British Horse Society.

JH

SP

3/ Monitoring sites: Difficult to do well and isn't necessarily done well at the moment. E.g. SNCIs often haven't been surveyed for years and UAs don't necessarily have the money to do it. Issue brought up but not really discussed - something for future agenda/monitoring group.

Monitoring and reporting back on action

Frequency of reporting: 6-monthly in Spring and Autumn (next round in March before next meeting)

Data to be reported: As quantitative as possible with some info provided by JH/steering group on standardized terms/ type of info required (trying to make this fit with BARS so that we're prepared/to avoid duplication of effort).

JH/steering group

Method: Initially in word documents, reporting against each action in action tables.

- JH to provide all with relevant action tables in word format (after December steering group meeting)
- All to determine how monitoring and reporting back will work best for their particular organisation/group

JH

ALL

JM to investigate mapping of BAP habitat info gained through AES survey (asking advisors to break information down to field level).

JM

Issues for other groups? (Monitoring/Funding/Communication + other habitat ones)

Funding: grazing project/horse owner type project once the idea's developed a bit further.

Communications: horse owner awareness-raising project

Monitoring: SNCI survey/monitoring

Steering group: standardized terms/pieces of info required for reporting back.

JM to feed back to chairs of other groups at next steering group meeting

Feeding back to your organisation

All to ensure relevant people in their organisations kept informed of Avon BAP group activities

ALL

AOB

Hedge fortnight: Avon-wide fortnight of events with hedgerow theme, all to be publicised together/co-ordinated by SP/JH. Last two weeks of February. SP/JH need to finalise details by end October. If anyone can help please contact SP/JH ASAP with event ideas or support with other aspects of the fortnight. JH/SP will contact everyone again soon anyway.

**ALL
SP/JH**

Field Boundaries Project: 'Boundaries and Beyond' – the next stage. Sally's funding for existing project runs out in June. SP currently looking at how to take project forward. Up till now has gathered lots of data for SGC/B&NES meaning there is a baseline survey for hedges in much of these areas. Has involved large numbers of volunteers and GIS mapped data. Will now try to move project forward trying to get hedges into better management, perhaps working with contractors and other groups. New project could include action for hedgerow trees, as nothing very co-ordinated happening with these at present. Somerset County Council has leaflets and grants for hedgerow trees. No counterpart to the project in NSC/BCC areas – could be an issue for the future – trying to get something happening in these areas, maybe with some helpful tips from Sally.

How often should group meet?

6 monthly unless special circumstances require more frequent meetings

Next meeting date: March 8th 10am-1pm, Duchy of Cornwall