

North West Biodiversity Forum
Business and Communications Plan

www.biodiversitynw.org.uk

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1. Introduction

Biodiversity encompasses the whole variety of life on Earth. It includes all species of plants and animals, but also their genetic variation, and the complex ecosystems of which they are part. It is not restricted to rare or threatened species but includes the whole of the natural world from the commonplace to the critically endangered.

The world is losing biodiversity at an ever-increasing rate as a result of human activity. In the UK we have lost over 100 species during the last century, with many more species and habitats in danger of disappearing, especially at the local level. On a world scale the rate of loss is now recognised to be a cause for serious concern, requiring concerted international action to prevent continued loss of biodiversity.

The natural environment and the species it contains have immense value not only in terms of environmental quality but also in terms of social wellbeing and sustainable economic growth. From tourism and recreation, to job creation and skills development, biodiversity rich environments bring a wealth of benefits to society.

In response to the threats to biodiversity, there is an England Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan, which identifies priority species and habitats. The North West has a significant proportion of England's species and habitat biodiversity targets. At the regional level, regional biodiversity targets have been established for habitats delivering the North West Region's contribution to the UK biodiversity targets.

Local Biodiversity Action Plans (LBAPs)

Over the past 5 years Local Biodiversity Action Plans (LBAPs) have been created by local Biodiversity Partnerships. These documents are sets of action plans for individual species and habitats and identify a lead partner who will work on the plan. The development and the delivery of these plans has varied according to local partnerships and resources. Some projects have been funded and are delivering benefits to the target species or habitat. Some plans need revision for SMART targets and priority actions. There is a big opportunity from 2006 – 2008 through new funding from DEFRA/ English Nature, Environment Agency and the Local Biodiversity Steering Groups for regional and local biodiversity managers to work to actually enable the delivery of the biodiversity targets. The arrival of these managers has prompted the North West to create this regional and 5 Local business and communication plans to ensure the managers are focused on delivery and that they work effectively together. The SITA Enriching Nature programme offers a significant boost for project delivery over the next 3 years.

Northwest Biodiversity

The North West is a region of great contrasts in the character of its landscapes and countryside. It possess four distinct landscapes, each with characteristic wildlife and conservation challenges:

- The coast, stretching from the Dee Estuary to the Solway Firth;
- The rural uplands of Cumbria and the Pennines;
- The mixed urban and rural lowlands including the rich agricultural land of Cumbria, Lancashire and Cheshire;
- The Mersey belt including much of Merseyside and Greater Manchester along with the urban core of Manchester and Liverpool.

Beyond the conurbations of Greater Manchester and Merseyside, the North West remains predominantly rural. The region contains some of England's most beautiful and unspoilt countryside, from the central fells of the Lake District, to the farmland of the Cheshire Plain and the stunning Lancashire Hill Country. As a consequence 18% of the land within the North West has been protected through designations, such as National Park and Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

However, Industry has had an enormous impact on the North West, and the region's natural resources were exploited from the earliest times. Industrial decline has left a legacy of derelict, underused and neglected land. For example, over 96% of the once extensive Mersey Basin mires and mosses have been lost with conversion to agricultural use, drainage, development, waste disposal and the removal of peat.

Further to this, post-war agricultural has resulted in significant declines in habitats and species across the region, such as skylarks, song thrushes and brown hares. Unimproved lowland meadows are now very rare in the North West, as well as nationally and internationally, with many lost as a consequence of more intensive farming practices resulting in improved grasslands, which have a low biodiversity and are of limited nature conservation interest.

Upland and lowland river systems are prominent landscape features and several canals cross the Region. Natural Lakes are a very important part of the landscape of the Cumbria Fells and Dales. One of England's rarest fish species, the vendace, is found here. Eighty-five percent of the Region's water supply is collected and stored in upland reservoirs. There is a wealth of water bodies in the Cheshire Plain and Mersey Valley, including meres, ponds and subsidence flashes. However, river floodplains across the region have been heavily modified. The creation of new wetlands is a priority within the region providing opportunities for rare and endangered species such as the bittern.

The North West's coastline and estuaries offer an ever-changing landscape of sand and pebble beaches, intertidal silts and muds, salt marshes and cliffs, which have in parts been heavily modified through coastal defences and urban development. However, the region also has almost one third of England's sand dunes, with some 20% of the English total lying on the Sefton Coast, Merseyside.

The Northwest has a woodland cover of only 6.7% (compared to 8.4% nationally). Of these existing woodlands, many are in need of active management and restoration, in particular our precious Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland which total 1.6% of the region's land mass. In this context, the creation and stewardship of woodlands for biodiversity is a high priority, as reflected in the Regional Forestry Framework.

2. Purpose of Plan

This Business and Communications Plan and the attached Delivery Matrix are concerned with delivery of biodiversity projects and activities initially during the period from March 2006 – March 2008. This plan is concerned with new, significant biodiversity activity rather than current ongoing or historical biodiversity projects. Existing biodiversity activity in the Northwest region is captured in a separate companion matrix but does not form part of the 2 year Business and Communications Plan, initially, but will be a 3-year rolling plan.

The purpose of the North West Biodiversity Forum’s business and communications plan is:

- To set out the regional and sub-regional framework for biodiversity delivery.
- To set out priorities for delivery within a 3 year rolling programme.
- To build on the extensive work undertaken through the creation of Local Biodiversity Action Plans.
- To create a plan which is focussed on delivering priorities and targets at a strategic level.
- To enable the NWBF to look ahead, allocate resources, focus on priorities and react to both problems and opportunities.
- To be a tool for potential investors, managers and stakeholders.
- To ensure the work of the group is managed through a streamlined plan, which is realistic, measurable and complete.

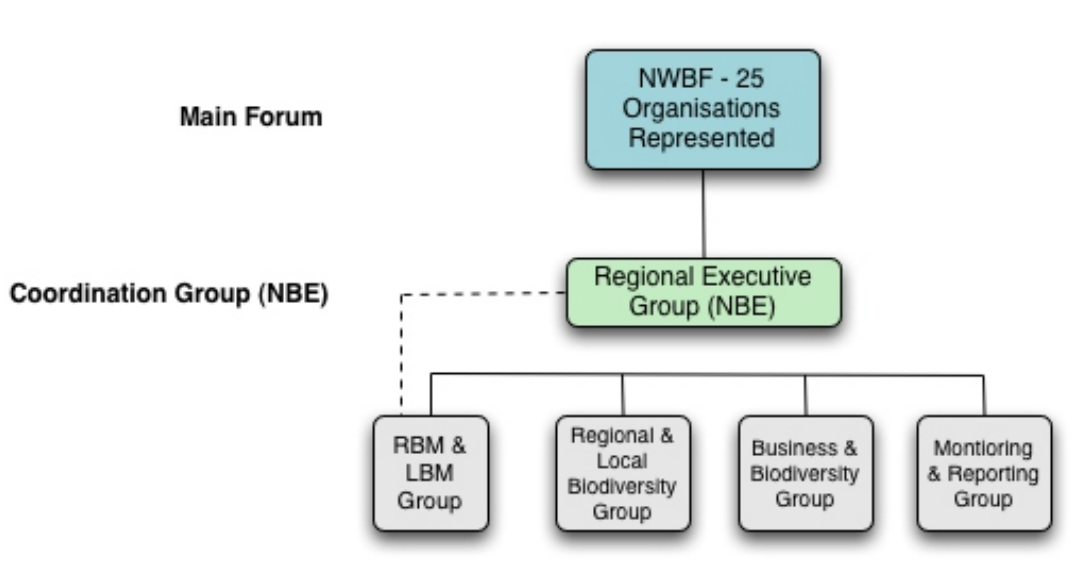
3. Organisational Vision

The North West Biodiversity Forum’s vision is for a region with its landscapes and water bodies, coasts and seas, towns and cities – where wild species and habitats are part of healthy functioning ecosystems; where we nurture, treasure and enhance our biodiversity, and where biodiversity is a natural consideration of policies and decisions, and in society as a whole.

4. Organisational Structure and governance

The North West region has a Northwest and local Biodiversity Service made up of the North West Biodiversity Forum and five sub-regional Biodiversity Groups, The Countdown Programme (Cheshire region Biodiversity Partnership), Cumbria Biodiversity Partnership, Greater Manchester Biodiversity Partnership, Lancashire's Biodiversity Partnership and Merseyside Biodiversity Group. Each local partnership has a Biodiversity Manager who works in coordination with the Regional Biodiversity Manager, who ensures coordination across the local areas takes place and that best practice is shared across the region.

The NWBF is a partnership of over 25 organisations from the public, business and voluntary sector, covering Cumbria, Lancashire, Greater Manchester, Merseyside and Cheshire. (These are listed in Appendix 1.) The partnership is made up of the following organisational structure:



The **Northwest Biodiversity Executive (NBE)** is the executive group working on behalf of the NWBF, with responsibility for the Regional Business Plan, managing relationships and contracts with major funders for regional programmes and projects, and managing relationships with the North West Regional Assembly (NWRA), Government Office North West (GONW) and the North West Development Agency (NWDA) on the regional biodiversity service.

The **Regional and Local Biodiversity Service Group** is made up from the Regional Executive Group and the Chairs of the five Local Partnerships to manage the logistics of delivering the regional and local service including relationships between Business and Communication Plans, Manager posts and funding.

The **Business and Biodiversity Group** aims to facilitate the development of better engagement between business and biodiversity particularly championing the benefits for business.

The **Monitoring and Reporting Group** coordinates the reporting of regional biodiversity and natural environment targets and submits these to NWRA for Regional Planning Guidance (RPG), Action for Sustainability (AFS) and Regional Economic Strategy (RES) reporting. The remit of this group will be reviewed to take into account AFS and RPG changes as well as BARS reporting.

The NWBF's aim is to support, encourage and positively influence the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity as a strategic issue in the NW, for the benefit of wildlife and people, as well as business and sustainable development. This aim will be delivered through the objectives listed above. The Forum does not have a constitution. Decisions are taken collectively by the Forum itself. The Executive Group works on behalf of the Forum.

5. Core competencies

The Northwest Biodiversity Form have been working collectively to enhance and conserve the biodiversity value of the Northwest region since the early 1990s. Collectively the NWBF have a broad range of skills, experience and knowledge to contribute. A summary of the core competencies that each member of the group brings is outlined below:

English Nature – biodiversity targets and priorities. It focuses biodiversity delivery on SSSIs, providing statutory advice on nature conservation & biodiversity to national, regional & local government. It also provides guidance on biodiversity in sustainable development and quality of life agenda.

Environment Agency - work includes tackling flooding and pollution incidents, reducing industry's impacts on the environment, cleaning up rivers, coastal waters and contaminated land, and improving wildlife habitats. The EA is currently the lead organisation for 39 species and 5 habitats through the U.K. BAP and is actively involved in BAP delivery at a local, regional and national level.

Government Office North West

Local BAP representative

North West Regional Assembly - as a partnership of local government, businesses, public sector agencies, education and training bodies, trade unions, co-operatives and the voluntary sector, works to promote the economic, environmental and social well-being of the North West of England, and takes a leading role on ensuring that sustainable development principles and priorities are integrated into regional policy and project delivery.

RSPB

Wildlife Trust

6. Core services

The Northwest Biodiversity Forum and each sub-regional Local Biodiversity Partnership is committed to delivering seven Core Services, which have been developed in partnership with Defra. These core services provide the structure for this Business and Communications Plan. A report is submitted every 6 months to Defra on the delivery of these Core Services.

The 7 Core Services are as follows:

1. Partnerships

To establish and maintain a broad biodiversity partnership by engaging all relevant sectors.

2. Biodiversity delivery

To ensure you have regional biodiversity objectives with SMART targets for habitats and species, taking into account national and local BAP targets and linking with social and economic themes.

To work with the partnership to agree a range of projects to deliver the regional biodiversity objectives and targets.

3. Resources for delivery

To develop and implement the fundraising strategy for BAP delivery, for national and local sources of external funding in support of projects and to sustain the funding for the Region's biodiversity service in the long term. To collaborate with strategic funders e.g. SITA Trust. To maintain an overview of LBAP funding within the region and provide support to LBAP partnerships to help them raise funds for coordination and delivery, particularly leading on collaborative funding opportunities that benefit several LBAPs.

4. Monitoring and reporting.

To report and monitor progress through using the Biodiversity Action Reporting System (BARS) for the implementation and delivery of actions initiated regionally.

5. Regional influencing

To actively promote the inclusion of biodiversity objectives into relevant regional policies, programmes and strategies.

6. Promotion

To promote the BAP regionally through developing a communications plan with partners to raise awareness in support of biodiversity. To facilitate LBAP networking in the region, including promoting best practice and ensuring a joined up approach to regional objectives. To ensure that all LBAP partnerships across the region are achieving biodiversity delivery in support of national and regional objectives.

7. England Biodiversity Strategy

To coordinate work with other regional biodiversity partnerships, to learn from their experiences and share examples of good practice. To work with partners at regional and national levels of the BAP process.

7. Implementation

Implementation of this regional business and communication plan is driven by the regional share of the UK BAP targets as expressed by the regional biodiversity targets and the targets in the 5 sub-regional plans covering Cumbria, Lancashire, Greater Manchester, North Merseyside and Cheshire and Wirral. These 5 LBAP partnerships are delivering biodiversity improvements and enhancements on the ground through their partnerships and through other regional organisations including the Forestry Commission, Environment Agency, English Nature, RSPB etc. The purpose of the regional plan through regional action for influencing, coordinating and facilitating, to provide a regional framework and an overview of this delivery, facilitating the development of projects at the sub-regional level and supporting the LBAP partnerships.

The delivery of the Northwest Business and Communications Plan will not be the responsibility of any one organisation or body. The Northwest Biodiversity Forum is a partnership of organisations all working to increase the biodiversity value and quality of the area. This Business and Communications Plan is shared and owned by the partnership as a whole and a range of individuals and organisations are vital to its successful delivery.

The regional role is to add value to this work. The role of the Northwest regional biodiversity service can be summarised as follows:

- Coordination of existing activities and new opportunities
- Communication, both internal and external
- Infrastructure, to establish mechanisms and methodologies to enable to joint working
- Best practice, to facilitate and encourage the sharing of good practice

- Training, to provide and deliver training opportunities to priority audiences
- Positioning, to increase the profile and understanding of the value of biodiversity in the region for biodiversity, sustainable development and quality of life outcomes.
- Data-sharing, to enable LBAP partnerships to achieve more by sharing data and intelligence
- Signposting, to provide a biodiversity signposting service for LBAP partnerships and partners

In implementing this plan, there are a number of assumptions, drivers, barriers and threats to successful implementation. These include:

Assumptions: It is assumed that current interest and involvement by the NWBF will continue. Further to this, that policy officers in those organisations which are members of NWBF will continue to be encouraged to work on integrating Biodiversity Action Plan work into regional and local policy. Also, that PR officers in member organisations should be briefed about the NWBF and its objectives and, that their assistance in promoting key communications should be requested.

Principle Drivers: The main driver for this plan is the UK BAP and the England Biodiversity Strategy, and regional delivery of the targets set within the national strategy. At a regional level, there are multiple drivers to implementation. These include: the Regional Spatial Strategy and the biodiversity indicators within this; the North West Natural Economy Project pushing forward biodiversity as a driver within the Regional Economic Strategy of the NWDA; regional urban and rural regeneration projects, such as Newlands, Northern Way and the many regeneration programmes across the region. All of these require improved advice on how biodiversity can be incorporated into social and economic programmes to ensure the sustainable development of the North West. A further driver is the creation of Natural England, which will combine many of the roles and functions of the current Countryside Agency, English Nature and the Rural Development Service. This development is a new opportunity to ensure biodiversity is positioned at the core of regional landscape development and management.

Barriers and Threats: One of the main threats to regional delivery is the reliance on delivery at the sub-regional level through local delivery. The regional partnership must work with the LBAP partnerships to support and ensure that delivery. Changes in funding regimes are a potential threat such as the Aggregates Levy Scheme. Also, there is an expectation of wide biodiversity delivery through Environmental Stewardship schemes and the impacts ELS and HLS may make on the ground.

8. Delivery

The detail regarding delivery of the Northwest Biodiversity Business and Communications Plan is contained within the attached Delivery Matrix. This document is regularly updated and reviewed and is a living document which both informs and directs the work of the partnership.

[\[Link to Excel Delivery Matrix\]](#)

9. Financial overview

The successful delivery of the Northwest Biodiversity Service Business and Communications Plan and the five sub-regional plans is relies significantly on the funding of five full time Local Biodiversity Managers and the Regional Biodiversity Manager. This funding is in the process of being secured for three years as outlined below:

Funding Package for Regional and Local Biodiversity Service agreed by English Nature, Environment Agency and the Chairs of the 5 LBAP partnerships			
FUNDING	0506	0607	0708
EN	£116,700	£120,000	£120,000
EA	£35,000	£50,000	£50,000
LBAP partnerships	£25,000	£50,000	£50,000
TOTAL	£176,700	£220,000	£220,000

To fund a service with the aim of delivering UK, regional and local biodiversity targets, with the employment of a Regional Biodiversity Manager and 5 Local Biodiversity Managers over the 3 years and in 2005/06 a consultancy contract to produce Business and Communication Plans for the region and for each of the 5 LBAPs.

10. Communications

The work of the Northwest Biodiversity Forum aims to bring partners together to achieve more by working together. Good communications is an essential part of our work. Biodiversity projects contained within the Business and Communications Plan have specific communications actions attached to them. At a strategic level, our communications activity is as follows:

There is currently no formal NWBF communication strategy in place. However, the Group currently utilises the following for communication:

Target audiences:

- The environment and regeneration sector in the Northwest
- Major landowners in the Northwest
- Large corporates in the Northwest
- Key decision-makers and influencers
- Northwest MPs
- Senior decision-makers of Northwest Local Authorities

Purpose of communications:

- To demonstrate the value of regional biodiversity
- To promote biodiversity good practice in the region
- To raise the profile of the wider value of biodiversity in terms of social and economic impacts

Communications activity:

- Regular meetings of the whole partnership – there are currently four held per year, with all Forum members invited to participate

- Regular sub-group activities – with output from sub-groups reported back to the whole Forum meetings
- Minutes from the meetings are circulated by email, and made available through NWBF website
- Website – a dedicated website (<http://www.biodiversitynw.org.uk>.) This site contains two specific locations: (i) an open access public site that contains general information for public consumption; and, (ii) an internal members only site for Forum members.
- A range of regional publications are produced and made available to partners and the public where appropriate.

10. Monitoring and review procedure

This Business and Communications Plan and the accompanying Delivery Matrix are ‘living’ documents which are designed to be updated and revised as projects and activities develop. The Business and Communications Plan will be reviewed and monitored by the Northwest Biodiversity Forum and will be tabled for updates at each meeting of the Forum. A thorough review will be undertaken by the Regional Executive Group annually.

11. Contact information

Dr Will Williams
 Chair, North West Biodiversity Forum
 English Nature
 Juniper House, Murley Moss
 Oxenholme Road
 Kendal
 Cumbria
 LA9 7RL
 Email: chair@biodiversityNW.org.uk

Dr Amanda Wright
 Regional Biodiversity Manager
 North West Regional Assembly
 Wigan Investment Centre
 Waterside Drive, Wigan
 WN3 5BA
 Email: A.Wright@nwra.gov.uk

Website: www.biodiversitynw.org.uk

Appendix 1. Forum partners.

Cheshire County Council
Cheshire Wildlife Trust
CLA North West (Country Land and Business Association)
Countryside Agency
Cumbria Biodiversity Partnership
Cumbria County Council
Defence Estates (MOD)
DEFRA
English Nature
Environment Agency
EPIC (Exmoor Ponies in Conservation)
Forestry Commission
FWAG (Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group)
Government Office North West
Greater Manchester Ecology Unit
Highways Agency
Lancashire County Council
Landlife
Mersey Basin Campaign
Merseyside Environmental Advisory Service
NFU (National Farmers Union)
North West Development Agency
North West Regional Assembly
RSPB (Royal Society for the Protection of Birds)
Sustainability Northwest
The National Trust
The Wildlife Trusts
United Utilities
Woodland Trust

Exec Group members:

Chair – Will Williams
Environment Agency – Gail Butterill
English Nature – Michelle Young
Government Office North West – Kirsty Martin
LBAP representative – Suzanne Waymont
North West Regional Assembly – Jon Lovell
Voluntary partner – RSPB – Andrew Gouldstone
Regional Biodiversity Manager – Amanda Wright