

Sefton Coast Nature Conservation Strategy and Biodiversity Delivery Plan

Summary of Presentation to the Sefton Coast Forum 11 February 2006

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Introduction

The Sefton Coast Partnership has now begun its work to prepare a nature conservation strategy. The new strategy will be a component of the Coast Management Plan. The presentation at the Sefton Coast Forum in 2006 outlines the timescale and methodology for the preparation of the strategy and introduces an Issues Report prepared by the Nature Conservation Task Group.¹

This launches a first period of wider consultation to help us confirm the issues, problems and opportunities facing nature conservation along the coast, prior to the preparation of a draft strategy later in the year. To open the consultation we present a set of draft principles, which, once debated and confirmed, will underpin a long-term vision for nature conservation.

English Nature's dune restoration project at Ainsdale Sand Dunes National Nature Reserve has raised issues about the conservation of habitats and species which need to be considered across the coast as a whole. The nature conservation strategy will therefore cover all the open land within the coastal zone, and will consider all aspects of management and restoration work, so that the contribution of individual projects can be set within a landscape-scale or ecosystems approach.

The preparation of the nature conservation strategy will follow current best-practice guidance. The document 'Management Planning for Protected Areas' can be found on the Eurosite website www.eurosite-nature.org (follow links to publications/new guidance). This sets out a step-by-step approach towards agreement on conservation objectives.

Main steps

1. ***Establishing rapport.*** Following the ethos of the Sefton Coast Partnership we will be working with land owners and the wider community of interest represented at the

¹ A sub-group of the Nature Conservation Task Group has been formed to coordinate the development of the strategy. The group comprises Steve White (Chair – Wildlife Trust), Dave McAleavy (Sefton Council), Alice Kimpton (English Nature), Andrew Brockbank (National Trust), Tony Baker (RSPB), Chris Bennett (EAS) and Dr Phil Smith (Wildlife Trust). Minutes of the sub-group are posted on the SCP pages of www.seftoncoast.org.uk/part_natcon.html

Forum to respect views and to develop a feeling of ownership for the management strategy. This part of the process has already started with a workshop for conservation land managers and continues at the Forum.

2. ***Sharing perceptions, identifying problems and developing solutions.*** The initial consultation period will run until the end of March 2006. During this period we will be finding out more about people's perceptions of nature and convening four consensus building workshops to help identify problems, look at the possible reasons and consider solutions. Individuals and organisations attending the Forum are invited to register their interest in these meetings.
3. ***Inverting problems to gain solutions.*** We want to encourage lateral thinking and innovation in finding solutions. When a problem is clearly identified the solution is often the opposite. So, for example, if there is not enough grazing to prevent scrub encroachment the solution would be to ensure that there is sufficient grazing.
4. ***Gaining support.*** Throughout the process we wish to receive the views of stakeholders to develop a broad base of support for the principles and objectives for nature conservation. We will confirm the statutory obligations for meeting nature conservation targets which emanate from the national and European designations and will explain why certain actions have to be completed.
5. ***Developing the work programme.*** Supporting the objectives of a strategy for nature conservation will be a rolling work programme identifying priorities, timescales and funding. This will be set out across the coast in a similar way to that for the Forest Plan.

Time-table

A timetable for the preparation of the strategy has been agreed by the Board of the Sefton Coast Partnership. We hope that this gives the right balance between consultation time and the need to make progress towards the strategy and action plan. It is the intention that the principles will be agreed at the Board meeting in June 2006 and a draft strategy agreed at the Board meeting in October 2006. Following a second phase of consultation the aim then would be to present a final draft of the strategy and work plan at the Forum meeting in 2007. The preparation of the strategy, however, will not delay essential management work and we will identify potential funding sources at an early stage.

Issues Report

An Issues Report and summary has been prepared by the Nature Conservation Task Group following initial discussions with conservation land managers². We have focused first on the dune system; as it is here where there are the greatest concerns. The final

² National Trust, Wildlife Trust, English Nature, Sefton Council and RSPB with additional information from Mersey Forest, Environment Agency and English Nature.

strategy, however, will address all nature conservation issues relevant to the Sefton Coast.

The impacts of climate change are likely to be significant in the medium to long-term. All sectors of society will have to consider responses to cope with the irreversible elements of climate change.

The issues raised by the conservation land managers include coastal change, trends in plant communities, fragmentation of habitats, conservation of water resources and the need to manage at the landscape level.

From the issues we have developed a set of draft principles. Six principles are put forward at the Forum for discussion and consultation. These are based on principles of integrated coastal zone management (ICZM), advice from current Government initiatives and the policies of partner organisations. Agreement on a number of principles will strengthen future decision making by setting out some of the 'ground-rules' for the Sefton Coast Partnership to follow. It is therefore worth spending time at this stage to fully debate some of the issues raised and to find a set of words acceptable to a wide range of interests.

1. ***A coastwide approach.*** Different terms are often used but mean much the same thing; ecosystems approach, landscape-scale, coastwide etc. In practice actions at any one site should be set in the wider context of the Sefton Coast, the northwest region or UK. Networking with other sites and sharing experience will become increasingly important.
2. ***Working with nature –adaptability.*** In long-term planning the potential or predicted impacts arising from climate change will need to be considered. The monitoring of trends also needs to set against the national background. Wherever possible nature should be allowed to take its course.
3. ***Working with coastal processes –a dynamic approach.*** Accepting both erosion and accretion as natural responses of a dynamic coastline. The same principle should apply within the dune system recognising the ecological value of bare sand habitats.
4. ***Active management- continuity.*** Many habitats require a level of intervention to retain their open character or species. Across much of the coast conservation land managers are aiming for sustainable management practices.
5. ***Restoration.*** It is expected that restoration projects will be necessary, at least in the short to medium term, if the natural values of the coast are to be maintained.
6. ***Involvement.*** Although there are a number of statutory obligations which direct much of the conservation work on the coast it is vital that local people and the nature conservation 'community of interest' feel part of the process.

Consensus-building groups

Four stakeholder consensus-building working groups will be set up after the Forum. We envisage about 10-20 participants in each group representing land managers, statutory agencies, community groups and specialist expertise to discuss the themes of *habitats and species conservation, coastal processes, water resources* and *integrated land management*. A first meeting of each group will be held before the end of March and a second meeting in April or May. The second meeting will consider a summary of the responses to the consultation. We may also find it useful to hold a field meeting for each group to discuss issues on site.

The wider consultation period will be drawn to a close in mid-2006 with a workshop to confirm the guiding principles and discuss draft objectives.

Contact and further information

For further information, to register your interests in the working groups or to request a meeting or presentation please contact John Houston on 0151 934 2962 or 0151 934 2967 (to leave a message).

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The Issues Report is available on www.seftoncoast.org.uk/index_consultnature.html