

**Sefton Coast Partnership  
Nature Conservation Strategy**

**Working Group: Water Resources**

**27 April 2006**

Present:

Dave McAleavy	Sefton Council Leisure Services (chair)
Graham Weaver	English Nature (workshop leader)
Alice Kimpton	English Nature (notes)
Philip Smith	Lancashire Wildlife Trust
Paul Thomas	Environment Agency
Rachael Parks	Red Alert
Pete Gahan	Sefton Council Leisure Services
John Crosbie	Sefton Council Environmental Protection
David Taylor	Sefton Coast Partnership Board Member (golf)
Chris Bennett	Merseyside EAS
Jennifer Millington	University of Wolverhampton
Simon Gebbett	Environment Agency
Mike Downey	English nature
John Houston	Sefton Coast Partnership
Sam Dimba	Sefton Council Technical Services (drainage)
Graham Lymbery	Sefton Council Technical Services (coast defence)

**Summary of discussion points**

**Is the main issue drainage or abstraction?**

Environment Agency feel that as the golf courses abstract very little in relation to the total volume of the aquifer the main issue is drainage. Sefton Council have the responsibility for the alleviation of flooding. For example, flooding in Ainsdale and on the Coastal Road caused by water backing up in the Birkdale Hills Local Nature Reserve.

Flooding problems on Royal Birkdale and Southport and Ainsdale Golf Courses need to be addressed and work is needed to allow water to drain off this land whilst maintaining the slack systems with the nature reserve.

**Birkdale is not in favourable ecological condition- what should be done about hydrological issues?**

Phil Smith thinks that the slack system in Birkdale is not dependant on drainage. Drainage appears to be a local phenomenon. Water levels seem more weather related than impacted by drainage.

Graham Weaver. By removing the water (through drainage) are you impacting the dune aquifer elsewhere?

### **Is the data from Ainsdale NNR representative of the whole coast?**

Most studies and modelling have been done using the Ainsdale data ( e.g. current work on climate change impacts on water levels). The EA boreholes don't pick up enough data to confirm that the ASD data is representative. More recent information and revised abstraction data needs to be included in a revised model.

### **What constitutes a dune slack?**

The National Vegetation Classification (a nationally recognised system for identifying plant groupings into units) sets out the groupings of plants, which describe several different types of slacks. They don't have to contain water all year round; some never have surface water (the water table lies just below the surface) and some contain water all year.

### **Who do we get to identify these areas?**

Peter Gateley has mapped the whole coast for the NVC communities and the information is available through Merseyside EAS.

### **How do we know when the restoration of slacks is no longer viable?**

There is some information in the English Nature Report on the eco-hydrology of dune slacks.

**Phil Smith has observed this year that the water table is higher at the north end than the south. Is it drain affected, is it because we are holding water back at Southport or is it recharge affect following very different rainfall conditions?**

### **Is much known about the surface drainage?**

Very little is known and there are few records or plans and there are no proper records of drainage effects.

### **When talking about abstraction licences does 2-4 cm matter?**

We don't know.

**There is a perception that drainage is a big issue. Where is the evidence? Phil Smith**

### **Is abstraction the problem – jury still out? John Houston**

Chris Bennett has noticed that golf courses are changing the nature of their abstraction due to needing to be green year round. They are losing their links character.

Royal Birkdale, for example, is being pushed to produce a green course all year round for the major tournaments and other courses are following. They all now water and fertilise the fairways and green and tees. Dave Taylor confirmed that there has been

an intensification of golf course use and winter use of coastal courses is high due to inland courses being closed due to flooding and bad weather.

John Houston noted that if these trends continue in 50 year's time golf courses may look very different from the rest of the coast.

Graham Weaver was surprised that links courses don't maintain their exclusivity.

Dave Taylor responded that they still do but they are not true links courses, but rather landscapes that have a links character. There is a need to fertilise the course to allow for greater all year use particularly with the increased use of buggies.

### **Can we agree the issues and how to measure the impacts? Graham Lymbery**

We need information on individual impacts/cumulative impacts and localised impacts. Monitoring is essential.

Chris Bennett reminded the group that Sefton Council now has a statutory duty to protect and enhance biodiversity.

### **Who monitors rainfall?**

English Nature and Environment Agency and Greenbank High School since 1880 (apart from 1985-87)

Water measurement is a bit scattergun. All golf courses monitor as part of their abstraction licence.

What about urban drainage?

Water balance approach as with the ENTEC report – does it still need more work?

What is the impact of where the ground water is and when?

### **Is Sefton a priority for EN research resources given that we have 40% of the national resource of dune slacks? Chris Bennett**

Yes but would still need to make a case.

### **How is the other 60% broken down?**

Graham Weaver gave information. Braunton Burrows (North Devon) has a significant amount and the rest is in small pockets. There is under 1000ha nationally

### **Golf courses need water off in winter and on in summer, how sustainable is this in light of global warming? Mike Downey**

This is where the discussions need to be now. Graham Lymbery

It appears that there is no conflict between drainage and nature conservation in times of high water but in times of low water control could be a problem particularly with unfettered drainage. John Houston

**What impact does the pine plantation have on the water table? Rachael Parks**

Work has shown that it lowers the water table by up to 30cm within 100m of the slacks.

What are the impacts of scrub removal? Mike Downey

**Are there any issues concerning water quality? JH**

Sefton Council no longer monitors water quality. John Crosbie

Environment Agency do monitor but not on coast. Will see if some monitoring can be added on coast.

**Research questions and action points:**

Can we come up with research questions and prioritise them? Graham Lymbery

Has anyone collated the spread of the data, What gaps are there, is the data representative of the whole coast? Chris Bennett

There are huge gaps in our knowledge of drainage issues.

What accuracy is needed? What are the temporal and spatial issues? Graham Lymbery

Who and how is this to be done, there are three organisations EN/SMBC/EA. EN see it as a priority but no guarantee of funding. Need to prioritise.

Would EA do the monitoring if funding became available? Dave McAleavy

EA would need to have a business driver.

We all need to work together to deliver favourable condition by 2010.

Need to have evidence in enough detail to be able to defend management decisions.