



SEFTON COAST PARTNERSHIP Nature Conservation Strategy

Working Groups Meeting - 14 September 2006

Background Notes

Introduction –where are we in the process?

The outline of the revised nature conservation strategy was presented at the Sefton Coast Forum in February 2006. Consultation and Working Group discussions have helped to confirm the **principles** which will underpin the strategy. The comments made by respondents have been noted and published by the Board of the Sefton Coast Partnership. Its response of June 2006 confirmed the importance of access, the value of tourism, the desire for communication, the need to continue to develop our base of information and knowledge and to present the strategy with the layperson in mind.

Where it is considered important to propose restoration actions for hydrology, physical processes, habitats or species the background issues (the problems) will be explained.

We are now at the stage of moving on to develop the objectives for management. These will include **long-term objectives** (more visionary), **medium-term objectives** (5-10 year) and the development of a rolling **work programme**.

There are several terms commonly used which we need to explain;

Features

The starting point in preparing the strategy is the identification of ‘features’. Perhaps these can be more easily explained as the elements (physical, biological and cultural) which make up the Sefton Coast.

Some of the better-known **features** of the Sefton Coast are listed in the ‘citations’ for the UK Sites of Special Scientific Interest and the EU Special Protection Area and Special Area of Conservation. These identified and named features will have to be included in the strategy, although our presentation can allow for some simplification. We can, for example, present a list of rare plant species as an ‘assemblage of plant species’.

In designating a Site of Special Scientific Interest, English Nature will prepare a list of ‘features of interest’. **Conservation Objectives** and definitions of **Favourable Condition** are then prepared for these features and are linked to a UK-wide monitoring system (**Common Standards Monitoring**). This CSM system allows all similar sites in the UK to be compared and is used for reporting to the UK Government and the European Commission.

So, features relate to international, European, and national status and to other ‘lists’ such as the Red Data Books of species. But features can also be identified from local Biodiversity Action Plans, any other local priority, aesthetic values and cultural values.

We have prepared a ‘long list’ of possible features for the Sefton Coast¹—for its physical nature, habitats, species and value to society. We want to use the discussions with the Working Groups to confirm the set of features to be included in the draft strategy.

Can you think of anything to add to this table?

In the first workshop we will discuss the range of features for habitats and species to confirm which should stay. If features are retained in the strategy we then go on to define their ‘attributes’, e.g. size of population, area of habitat etc.

In the second workshop the full list of potential features will be discussed. These will include geomorphology, hydrology, landscape, access, tourism etc.

In all this, we are asking non-conservationists if it makes sense. If, for example you were to develop a community plan would you go about it in much the same way? The process has a logic which asks first what have we got, then goes on to say what affects these elements from both a positive and negative perspective. So, having set out a list of features, we can then turn to the factors.

Factors

Any feature, take fixed dunes for example, will be influenced by a range of ‘factors’ some which will be positive (e.g. light recreation pressure) and some negative (e.g. spread of non-nature scrub). A factor is therefore something that management can influence. We can encourage access and remove scrub.

The identification of factors is useful for;

- The selection of attributes –which aspects of a feature should be measured to detect change (for example the extent of a habitat or size of a population).
- Limits for factors can be set –for those factors which determine the condition of the habitat or species (e.g. amount of scrub set at 5%, 10% etc).
- Factors may have to be considered individually and collectively. A number of factors may be acting to stabilise a dune area, countered by factors which act to de-stabilise.

¹ *Note: this was presented as a Table for discussion –see report of meeting for discussion and final version*

The second table² prepared for the workshop has started to list the range of factors (positive and negative) which may have an impact on the features.

It is far from complete and would benefit from some brain-storming at the meeting.

Take a relatively simple habitat, the strandline. Its extent is influenced by natural coastal processes –storms, erosion and accretion (over which we have very limited influence) but it can also be destroyed by vehicles driving over it or by mechanical beach cleansing. So, quite simply, we can identify the main threats to this important ephemeral habitat and take the necessary action. The logic works the same way for other habitats –although things start to get more complicated.

The outcome of the workshop should be fairly good agreement on the features which collectively describe the Sefton Coast. Some features have to be addressed under UK legislation. Others can reflect local conditions (land uses etc) and values of local people. In some cases there will need to be balance or compromise. The Sefton Coast Partnership provides a mechanism for facilitating discussion.

Once we have identified the features, work will continue on listing the factors which impact on the feature, agreeing which **attributes** of the feature should be measured and preparing draft **objectives** for management. This will form the basis of a draft nature conservation strategy for consultation.

In the table of factors we have used columns for natural factors and man-induced factors. Other factors can be considered, for example;

Land owners and stakeholders interests –for example the presence of golf courses is a factor which impacts on the natural development of habitats and which any management must take into consideration.

Legislation and tradition – we have to accept that a large amount of management work on the Sefton Coast has to comply with wildlife legislation. Coast Protection Acts also limit some options for management work.

Organisational policies –Sefton Council, for example, has an organisational structure which has an impact on the delivery of work on the ground.

Physical factors – some potential work is constrained by sites being small, narrow or constrained by housing and infrastructure.

Some factors have the potential to affect many features. **Climate change** would fall into this category and can be treated as a key issue in the strategy.

Outcomes of the workshops

² A final version of this Table will be published with the Draft Strategy

The meetings of the Working Groups will complete the first phase of stakeholder discussion on the strategy. The process has been valuable and will help to develop a draft strategy which takes into consideration the statutory responsibilities for biodiversity conservation alongside the special nature of the Sefton Coast for people.

Our outcomes from the working groups should be;

A level of agreement amongst conservation specialists and land managers as to the main features which can be considered across the coast as a whole (accepting that there may be additional features at a site level)

An understanding amongst non-conservationists of the logic of the process and the reasons for including other features important to the nature of the coast

An understanding of the factors which influence the nature of the coast and some discussion on the setting of objectives.

An understanding of the difference between long term objectives (which are more visionary), medium-term objectives (linked to programmes of work) and annual work programmes.

An understanding that the process could be useful for making management decisions on potentially conflicting interests.