

Proceedings
2006 Annual Coastal Forum
Sefton Coast Partnership



Proceedings of the 2006 Annual Coastal Forum of the Sefton Coast Partnership

Introduction

The 2006 Annual Coastal Forum of the Sefton Coast Partnership was held at The Floral Hall, Southport on Saturday 11th February. It was chaired and introduced by Mr Ted Jackson, of the Sefton Coast Partnership (the Mayor of Sefton was unwell on the morning and unable to attend).

Background to the Forum

The Forum is intended to provide an opportunity for anyone who is interested in the future of the Sefton Coast to contribute to the work of the Partnership. The aim of the Forum is to improve communication among local communities, businesses and organisations with an interest in the coastal zone. The Sefton Coast Partnership includes representatives of local communities as well as organisations directly involved in the management of the Sefton Coast.

Contents

This was a full day's event including presentations and participatory sessions for delegates and a drop-in session at the end of the day for the general public.

Volunteer Award

This year's Volunteer Award was presented to Gordon Roberts by Ted Jackson, once again recognising the huge value of the contributions made by volunteers to the work of Sefton Coast. Gordon has been an enthusiastic volunteer for both the National Trust and Sefton Coast and Countryside Service for many years and since 1989 has carved a particular position for himself as the Sefton Coast's neolithic footprint expert. He has written papers, appeared on TV, lectured at conferences, given innumerable talks to the local community and involved both professional and amateurs in this fascinating but ephemeral aspect of archaeology. Gordon responded with his usual grace and humour and gave due credit to his wife and his late dog, Kim, his companion on the day he first came across the footprints on the shore at Formby Point.

Presentations

Five presentations took place in the morning session:

1. Keynote Address presented by Anne Selby (Chief Executive, The

Wildlife Trust (Lancashire, Manchester and North Merseyside)

Anne gave a keynote address on the importance of nature conservation and the value it can add to individuals and the community. Anne began by stating that the LWT's remit is to make the County of Lancashire better for Wildlife, a goal supported by its 10 000 members. The UK has suffered a catalogue of losses but every little bit makes a difference and there are signs that things are turning. Over the years, as the LWT and its partners have campaigned on environmental issues, there have been more and more successes and greater confidence gained. At 21 years old, the Sefton Coast Partnership can be said to have 'come of age' with an array of special protections, a red squirrel refuge and dunes in management. Nationally, nature conservation is now seen as a driver, helping the economy, not a restraint and its importance for health and wellbeing has also been recognised – there is even a Minister for Biodiversity!

2. History of Nature Conservation on the Coast presented by Phil Smith (Trustee, The Lancashire Wildlife Trust)

Phil gave a fascinating account of the history of nature conservation on the Sefton Coast over the last 200 years from game management by the 'Lords of the Manor', to the scramble for golf courses and land for development from the late 19th century, to its recognition as a special place for nature from 1915 onwards. It was first recognised as a sanctuary in 1956, from which have followed a suite of local, national and international designations, all of which are helping to ensure that the coast's natural heritage is conserved for future generations to enjoy.

3. Draft Annual Report presented by Ceri Jones (Assistant Director Regeneration, Sefton MBC)

Ceri outlined the main outputs of the SCP over the last year including 'Another Place' at Crosby, Gateway Study, Access and Tourism strategies, appointment of Nature Conservation Project Officer, retaining 3 Seaside Awards, successful events programme, hosting visits and conferences and TV coverage. In addition, the review of the Sefton Coast Management Plan was available for consultation until 24th March 2006.

4. Nature Conservation Strategy and Delivery Plan presented by John Houston (Biodiversity Project officer, Sefton Coast Partnership)

John explained the background to the strategy and the process involved in reviewing the Partnership's co-ordinated approach. The revised strategy will take a landscape-based approach towards identifying current issues and concerns. 9 key issues have been identified so far, including climate change and nitrogen deposition. 6 draft principles are proposed including the need to accept change and to work with it, to actively manage the semi-natural habitats of cultural value, and to support an ecosystem based approach to coastal management. John invited all present to get involved in the consultation process.

5. Climate Change and Geomorphology presented by Graham Lymbery (Project Leader Coastal Defence, Sefton MBC)

Graham presented four potential scenarios for climate change. He explained how the geomorphology of the Coast is affected by natural and man-made influences and how looking to the past helps us to understand the future. He stressed the importance of salt marsh for sea defence and explained that the amount of blowing sand available and the ability of the dune system to recover after storm events would be influenced by climate change. The way forward is to reduce the uncertainty by continued research and to work with and respect natural processes.

Following lunch the afternoon session consisted of a 'soapbox' session, followed by questions on the morning's presentations. Delegates then had the choice of attending 2 of several 'beak out' sessions on nature conservation themes.

Soapbox

John Ashworth gave a personal view of change on the Coast. He described his lifelong interest in the Sefton Coast and how as a child he had had the dunes virtually to himself. He noted that wildlife such as Sand Lizards and Natterjacks had been plentiful whereas predators such as magpies and foxes were fewer. He suggested that there might be a relationship between the rise in predator numbers and the decline in other species. He also noted that at that time few people had a deep interest in natural history – 'how things have changed'!

Break Out Groups: 1st Parallel Session

1. Forest Plan hosted by Nick Roche (The Mersey Forest)

The Forest Plan was approved for implementation in January 2003 after extensive stakeholder consultation and is due to have its first review completed by mid 2007. This session gave an overview of progress and outlined a proposed schedule for the Review. Delegates were given the opportunity to comment on the above and to suggest ways of reaching stakeholders.

2. The Birds Of The Sefton Coast hosted by Steve White (Lancashire Wildlife Trust) & Dave McAleavy (Coast & Countryside Sefton MBC)

This presentation provided an overview of the main bird habitats and sites on the Coast and an overview of the ornithological importance of the Sefton Coast in for breeding birds, wintering wading birds and wildfowl and migrant songbirds.

3. Plants hosted by Dr P.H. Smith (Lancashire Wildlife Trust and Sefton Coast Partnership)

With the completion in 2005 of an inventory of Vascular Plants (flowering plants and ferns), we now know that the Sefton Coast Partnership area supports more than half the flora of South Lancashire – a remarkable 1177 species, sub-species and hybrids, including many rarities! This talk discussed the results of the Inventory, suggesting reasons for this great diversity of plants and speculating on what might happen to our flora in the future.

4. Herptiles hosted by Alice Kimpton (English Nature)

Frogs, toads, newts and lizards are all found on the Sefton Coast. This presentation covered aspects of their lifestyles, habitat requirements, threats, losses and gains including the adaptations that help the rare Natterjack Toad survive in the dunes, why Sand Lizards turn green in the spring and what Great Crested Newts eat for dinner! The presentation also addressed why these animals need managing and what can be done to safeguard their future in Sefton.

2nd Parallel Session

1. Red Squirrels hosted by Fiona Robertson & Steve White (Lancashire Wildlife Trust)

This presentation on red squirrels looked at the success of the refuge designation following last year's forum. There was an overview of the national picture, future funding, monitoring of red and grey squirrel populations and the latest research on the implications of disease for these well-loved animals.

2. Invertebrates hosted by Steve Judd (National Museums Liverpool)

Tiger Beetle, Short-winged Conehead, Sandhill Rustic Moth, Grayling, Vernal Mining Bee - this presentation was a fascinating insight into some of the rare and unusual species of invertebrates of the Sefton Coast. It highlighted the huge numbers of species – 3333 recorded in total – and the range of habitats they inhabit. However our knowledge is far from complete. It seems that habitat management is the key. Adding invertebrates to the SSSI requirements and using the database to inform management in the future was cited as a way forward.

3. Nature Outside Nature Reserves hosted by Paul Rooney (Liverpool Hope University)

This talk aimed to challenge the perception that the only worthwhile nature is to be found within the confines of a Nature Reserve. Using a range of locations on the Sefton Coast as examples it illustrated the valuable contribution to Nature Conservation these make and discussed how this value can be maintained.

4. Climate Change and the Visitor Economy hosted by Prof. John Handley (Manchester University)

This presentation discussed the main findings of the research carried out by the University of Manchester including the implications for the future management of the Sefton dune system, as well as highlighting some key generic messages regarding the impact of climate change on vulnerable locations. The research suggests that the influence of climate change has uncertain implications for the regional visitor economy, though it is likely that as conditions become less comfortable in urban areas, the coast will become even more attractive as a visitor destination. However, what is more certain is that the impacts of climate change, including sea level rise, storm events and changes to the dune system water table, are likely to adversely affect the environmental integrity of the dune system.

Drop-in Session

The general public were invited to drop in and view the stands and poster displays for the last hour.

Forum Close

The Chair of Sefton Coast Partnership, Mr Ted Jackson, thanked everyone who attended and who took part in the planning and execution of the 2006 Forum, a free event funded largely by Sefton Council.