SEFTON COAST PARTNERSHIP
NATURE CONSERVATION STRATEGY

Report of Working Group Meetings
14 September 2006

Four Working Group meetings were held in April and May 2006, followed by two field visits in August 2006. This first round of consultation and involvement in developing the nature conservation strategy was drawn to a close with a combined Working Group's meeting to agree the list of features to be included in the strategy.

The meeting was divided into a morning session to focus on the habitats of the Sefton Coast and an afternoon session to cover all features (physical, biological and cultural/socio-economic).

Attendance was as follows;

NAME	ORGANISATION	A.M.	P.M.
Reg Yorke	Formby Civic Society	✓	✓
Richard Burkmar	North Merseyside BAP	✓	✓
Julie Kirk	Southport Eco-Centre		✓
Steve White	Lancashire Wildlife Trust	✓	✓
Andrew Hall	Sefton-Planning		✓
Phil Smith	Lancashire Wildlife Trust	✓	✓
Nick Roche	Mersey Forest	✓	✓
Rachel Northover	Sefton Council -Leisure	✓	✓
Sally-Ann Tatlock	National Trust	✓	✓
Steve Cross	World Museum Liverpool	✓	✓
Mike Coles	Formby Parish Council	✓	
Mike Downey	English Nature	✓	✓
Andrew Brockbank	National Trust		✓
Fred Weavers	Sefton Councillor	✓	✓
John Houston	Sefton Coast Partnership	✓	✓
Maureen Miller	Southport Shore Interest Group	✓	✓
John Miller	Southport Shore Interest Group	✓	✓
Rachael Parks	Red Alert / RSPB	✓	✓
Graham Lymbery	Sefton Council –Technical Services		✓
Dave McAleavy	Sefton Council –Leisure Services	✓	✓
John Mulliner	Southport Shore Interest Group	✓	✓
Pete Gahan	Sefton Council –Leisure Services	✓	✓
Alan Hollway	Sefton Coast Watch	✓	✓
Rev. Derek Bowker	Derek Bowker	✓	✓
Pauline Michell	Pauline Michell	✓	✓
Peter Thornton	Formby Area Committee	✓	
Arthur Bowling	Friends of Crosby Coastal Park	✓	

Apologies received from: Cathy Elwin (Mersey Waterfront), Sally Edmondson (Liverpool Hope), Gill Gentles (Formby Parish Council), Dave Earl (BSBI), Paul Rooney (Liverpool Hope), Peter Lucas, Ralph Gregson (Birkdale Civic Society), Gordon White (Sefton Council, Leisure Services), Christine Bennett (EAS), Zoe Freeman, Councillor Tony Brough.

Summary of discussions

A provisional list of 'features' for the Sefton Coast was presented for discussion. This included the statutory elements of the coast (i.e. those habitats and species listed in the supporting

documents for various designations), along with non-statutory habitat features such as the pinewoods and several socio-economic features such as access, tourism etc.
Comments received in the initial period of the consultation had been considered in preparing the list.

Each 'feature' was discussed in turn leading to some deletions, some additions and some moves within the categories of physical, biological and socio-economic. For example a distinction was made between the natural landscape (the product of natural forces) and the cultural landscape (the product of the long association between people and the natural landscape).

Some general points were made. A reasonable perception is that the coast is already being well managed so why the need for another layer of 'bureaucracy'. However, the results of recent studies throw up challenges which must be addressed collectively across the coast as a whole: coastal change (erosion and accretion), climate change, the effect of nutrient deposition from pollution (increased Nitrogen in rainfall) etc. With management across the coast divided up into many land-holdings some degree of coordination is essential.

There is also a perception that there is not enough habitat –of both woods and dunes. This does indeed raise challenges, to ensure that all the 'features' of the Sefton Coast are retained in the long-term. The Forest Plan (2003) has a target of no net reduction of woodland cover. This accepts that over time some woodland will be lost but aims to match losses with new planting with a focus on the continuity of the 'rear woodlands'. Similarly aims for the continuity of the open dune habitats need to be addressed, for example in light of losses due to coastal squeeze.

We need to manage the coast at a number of scales –from the whole coast (macro) approach down to the individual habitat level (e.g. a single pond). Recognising this will be an important aspect of the strategy.

The need for good communications was stressed by a number of participants. Area Committees provide a useful forum for keeping the community informed about projects and plans.

A general comment was made that monitoring of conservation actions is essential yet the current work is piecemeal. Experience has shown that finding resources will always be difficult. This is one of the challenges for the strategy.

Selection of biological features –habitats

Over twenty habitat 'features' characteristic of the Sefton Coast had been identified. For widespread and well-understood habitat types there was little need for discussion: features such as mobile dunes, dune heath and saltmarsh are characteristic.

It was agreed to delete the proposals to include marine issues (these are generally treated at a regional level) and transport corridors (only significant for Sand Lizard –covered as a feature). An additional feature 'ditches' was added.

Following discussion it was agreed to retain shingle habitat, reedbed, lagoons and dunes with Creeping Willow (a special feature of the Sefton dunes).

Other comments were that the ponds of the Sefton Coast are nationally significant.

Woodland and scrub habitats will be divided into coniferous woodland, deciduous woodland, wet woodland (mainly Alder in dune slacks) and scrub. A distinction will be made between native scrub of high biodiversity value and alien scrub (White Poplar and other species). Scrub is of three main types: scrub as a component of open dunes, scrub within woodland and scrub on the interface between dune and woodland.

Selection of biological features –species

Features proposed for species included a number of grouped assemblages (e.g. invertebrates, plants). The approach reduces the need to develop objectives for each species. Sand Lizard and Common Lizard can be treated together as they share similar habitats. It was agreed that Natterjack Toad should be separate from the other amphibians (this group would include Great Crested Newt).

Assemblages of invertebrates and plants were retained, fungi, bryophytes and stoneworts (algae) were retained as important features and lichens were added. Within the invertebrate and plant assemblages some groups (e.g. solitary bees and wasps) and some plants (e.g. Dune Helleborine) are either specially important or 'flagship' species. These 'sub-features' can be brought out more strongly in the strategy.

Bats are considered to be an important feature of the Sefton Coast –further survey work would help to confirm this.

The breeding bird assemblage of the dune area is not nationally important but this is retained as a feature partly due to their importance for people.

There are several designations for the ornithological importance of the Sefton Coast and Ribble Estuary. These relate to breeding, passage and wintering birds. The terminology is rather confusing – a separate meeting is to be convened to clarify the best way to present the features for the Sefton Coast.

Selection of physical features

The proposed selection of physical features included some features of human origin. These are now shown under the 'socio-economic' features. Confirmed physical features include coastal geomorphology (saltmarsh added to list), hydrology, soils (biological element also recognised), geological conservation and the physical landscape. For landscape there is a distinction between the landscape as a product of nature (beaches, dunes and dune backlands) and the cultural landscape.

Dune succession has a physical and a biological component – it is a process.

Selection of socio-economic features

As well as the physical and biological nature of the coast there is also a strong socio-economic component (i.e. all matters relevant to people) which has to be considered. Land-uses, access, tourism etc are component features of the Sefton Coast.

Levels of importance were considered: national, regional, local. Access, for example is certainly regionally significant –possibly nationally important in the future.

‘Community involvement’ was discussed in some detail. It is an underlying principle of the strategy but also, some argued, a feature in its own right. Education is also strongly supported.

From a tourism perspective the ‘Sefton Coast’ is a strong brand, one which a local politician considered could benefit the Borough as a whole.

The confirmed list of features to be included in the draft nature conservation strategy is set out below:

Feature
1. Physical features
Geomorphology-active (beach ridges, mobile dunes, parabolic dunes, saltmarsh etc) –and succession
Water resources including the dune aquifer and dune hydrology
Soils
Physical landscape (features include intertidal foreshores, coastal dunes and dune backlands)
Geological conservation
2. Biological features -habitats
Intertidal foreshores -estuary
Shingle
Strandline
Embryo dunes
Mobile dunes
Semi-fixed dunes
Fixed dunes
Dune heath
Acid dry dune grasslands
Dune slacks
Dunes and dune slacks with Creeping Willow
Ponds
Planted coniferous woodland
Wet woodland
Deciduous woodland
Scrub
Other dune grasslands –dunes and dune backlands
Coastal saltmarsh
Coastal and floodplain grazing marsh
Reedbeds
Saline lagoons
Drainage ditches
3. Biological features -species
Red Squirrel
Bats

Feature
Breeding birds of the dunes
Sand Lizard and Common Lizard
Natterjack Toad
Other amphibians (including Great Crested Newt)
Assemblages of invertebrates
Assemblages of vascular plants
Bryophytes (including Petalwort)
Lichens
Stoneworts
Fungi
Assemblages of waterbirds –to be confirmed
4. Socio-economic, demonstration, education, research and public access
Access
Demonstration, education, interpretation and research
Tourism
Community involvement
Economic use
Cultural landscape
Archaeology