

Link2Nature: Wiltshire & Swindon Local Nature Partnership (WSLNP)Board Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, 1st October, 2013 – 9am–12pm
Wiltshire Wildlife Trust Office, Devizes

1. Present:

Hugo Brooke (HB) – Trustee, Butterfly Conservation
Frances Chinemana (FC) – Consultant in Public Health, Wiltshire Council [representing Maggie Rae]
Stephen Davis, (SD) – Head of Conservation Policy, Wiltshire Wildlife Trust
Fleur de Rhe-Philippe (FdRP) – Cabinet Member for Economic Development & Strategic Planning Wiltshire Council (WC) [Representing the Swindon & Wiltshire LEP]
Gerry Hamersley (GH) – Area Manager, Natural England
Gary Mantle (GM) – Director, Wiltshire Wildlife Trust (Chair, WSLNP)
James Sheppard (JS) – Deputy Chair, Wiltshire National Farmers Union (NFU)(Vice-Chair, WSLNP)
Toby Sturgis (TS) – Cabinet Member for Waste, Property, Environment and Development Control Services, Wiltshire Council
Steven Waygood (SW) – Head of Environment & Chemistry, RWE Npower
Bill Blumsom (BB) – WSLNP Coordinator

Abbreviations used within this document:		
CIL	Community Infrastructure Levy	
LAG	Local Action Group	
LNP	Local Nature Partnership	
WSLNP	Wiltshire & Swindon Local Nature Partnership	
SWLEP	Swindon & Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership	
DEFRA	Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs	
GI	Green Infrastructure	
MOD	Ministry Of Defence	
NE	Natural England	
WWT	Wiltshire Wildlife Trust	
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy	
NIA	Nature Improvement Area	
JSA	Joint Strategic Assessment	
EU	European Union	
WC	Wiltshire Council	
Minutes		Action
1. Welcome and Apologies GM welcomed those present and introductions were made by each individual. Apologies had been received from Hayley Bamborough (Voice and Influence Team, Wiltshire Council), Maggie Rae (Director of Public Health & Public Protection), Philippa Read (Chief Executive, Community First),		
2. Minutes The Minutes of the meeting on 15 th May 2013 were approved with no amendments.		
3. Matters Arising 3.1 GM had requested thoughts regarding potential additional Board members. In particular there is a gap in terms of MOD representation. FdRP agreed that she will speak to Piers Hankinson, Brigadier in Charge, 43 Wessex Brigade. Mike Jelf was		

<p>suggested as another possibility. Mike is the former Commandant of Salisbury Plain Training Area.</p>	<p>FdRP</p>
<p>4. Link2Nature’s role in Local Plans and proposed developments across Wiltshire and Swindon</p> <p>4.1 The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Swindon Borough Council (SBC) and Link2Nature had been sent to the board in advance of the meeting. The MoU was submitted by Russell Weymouth on behalf of the council having been approved by Councillor Dale Heenan, Cabinet Member for SBC. The SBC MoU was approved for signature. GM will sign the document on behalf of the WSLNP.</p> <p>4.2 TS indicated that a similar MoU had been approved by Wiltshire Council (WC) the day before and that this was being sent to BB in due course. Given that the content is broadly similar it was agreed that the Board were happy to approve the WC MoU subject to BB receiving and reviewing content. GM will sign the document on behalf of WSLNP.</p>	<p>GM</p> <p>GM / BB</p>
<p>5. EU Strategic Investment Fund Strategy</p> <p>5.1 The Board received a short presentation from Lorelei Hunt (LH) the Project Manager who is supporting the SWLEP develop their EU SIF Strategy. The strategy will drive how the available European Funding will be used over the next seven year funding period.</p> <p>5.2 Previously referred to as European Union Strategic Investment Fund Strategy but now being called European Structural Investment.</p> <p>5.3 LH explained that the LEP role is strategic not tactical. The LEP is not a legal entity. It has a strategic responsibility but no contractual or legal responsibility.</p> <p>5.4 LH explained that about 43 million Euros are available with about 50% ERDF (European Regional Development Fund) aimed at business and 50% ESF (European Social Fund) aimed at individuals. This European funding has to be match funded from “domestic” sources. Further funding, yet to be specifically determined, will be available from the European Agricultural Farming and Rural Development Fund (EAFRD).</p> <p>5.5 The funding is a notional allocation and if spending targets are not achieved over time there have been strong messages received that money can be de-allocated. However, money can also be allocated from underperforming areas to areas that are doing well against target.</p> <p>5.6 As well as the European Funding, DEFRA will still be funding other activities at a national level.</p> <p>5.7 Some key messages from the presentation include that money needs to be spent on creating “additionality”. Areas that are additional to that which usual</p>	

<p>government spending allows, so the money cannot be spent on provision of normal, routine services. The freedom to act should be much greater as government restrictions on spending are more relaxed and less prescriptive i.e. restrictions on age groups for employability skills training.</p> <p>5.8 BB and Jenny Hawley of WWT are attending the priority Task and Finish Groups for: Social Inclusion; Low Carbon; SME Competitiveness; Priority Sectors and Military & Civilian Integration. The first five meetings have been held with further meetings planned in October and December. The final strategy has to be delivered to Government by the end of January 2014.</p> <p>5.9 FdRP asked LH whether the funding involved LAG funding. At this stage it is still uncertain how DEFRA wants to manage such funding in the future. It needs to be determined whether LAG will come from local EU Funds or a National Programme in future. LH also mentioned that LAG's can now be set up in urban areas but that there is currently little appetite for establishing these.</p> <p>5.10 GH mentioned that DEFRA transition funds will be available until 2015 for existing programmes.</p> <p>5.11 GM highlighted that from the list of 11 objectives Environmental Protection and Climate Change had not been prioritised. LH stated that they were, but in a different way. Businesses and how they deal with these issues such as resource effectiveness and climate change mitigation are important. It is clearly emerging in the Low Carbon group for instance, that innovation and new products and services linked to renewables and energy efficiency will be an important part of the emerging strategy. Future opportunities will present themselves for SME's in MOD developments, private developments and through research areas such as Porton Down and the new Bath University testing centre at Wroughton Science Park. FdRP stated that the LEP is focussed on Economic Growth and that it is not likely that there will be much to spare from the MOD budget. A worry was expressed that all the MOD funds would be spent "behind the wire" and none outside. LH felt an opportunity existed to encourage MOD Investment by matching with EU funding.</p> <p>5.12 GH stated that the LNP was more about natural capital and rural rather than urban in focus. LH felt this was the whole aim of the consultation and where the LNP and other partners could contribute. We need to look at ways of achieving both sets of objectives together – economic growth and environmental benefits. We are talking about relatively small sums of European money which are not available for capital programmes but for skills and knowledge development for example, agricultural skills succession planning or renewable energy skills and expertise development.</p> <p>Action: Continue engagement with and attend all LEP task and Finish Groups.</p>	<p>BB</p>
<p>6. Designation of Nature Improvement Areas</p> <p>6.1 SD updated the board on progress and summarised the briefing paper that had been circulated with the board agenda. The Biodiversity Work Group had met on the 1st August with about 20 representatives from a range of organisations including Jemma Batten from the Marlborough Downs NIA. Within this workshop we had used the Landscape Biodiversity Area framework mapping to inform discussion to identify priority areas and assess these against the criteria.</p>	

6.2 As indicated in the discussion paper three priority areas were identified although we clearly should have an NIA in each of the 11 biodiversity areas identified as they all have potential for significant ecological improvement. The question for the board was whether we should be setting a broad scope i.e. all 11 areas or focusing on the 3 priority areas to take forward initially?

6.3 The discussion clarified that measurement was in hectares rather than acres when discussing scale. FdLP mentioned that an important part of designation was whether a landowner would feel part of a particular landscape and identify with the area. TS was interested in cross-boundary proposals and whether we would work together with the Cotswold Water Park and Gloucestershire.

6.4 GH felt that the SPTA proposal although greater in scale than the criteria specified by DEFRA was an exceptional area. It was felt more important to be aiming at a coherent land mass than an arbitrary size limitation. In terms of the Thames / Braydon Forest proposal it was wondered whether two smaller NIA's would provide more of a local community sense to the NIAs proposed. FdLP explained that the Local Action Groups (LAGs) has been working as a group over 8 years, on Salisbury Plain, which does give it both an ecological and socio-economic coherence. Not looking specifically at the environment but at what unites the villages around the Plain and also what unites the groups working with the military on their various projects. It was generally felt that you couldn't split the Plain up.

6.5 TS felt we had to be very careful about the areas along the county borders or cross border as it was not efficient to duplicate effort.

6.6 GM felt that a weakness in current paper was that it didn't set out the longer term vision for the county. It might be helpful if it set out the vision that established the long-term goals. We may only want to start with three new NIAs for practical reasons but the vision was more than that. Also as we implemented we would learn on route and transfer the learning as the next stages of the vision were realised. This needed to be done fairly swiftly as other developments were likely to impact such as government biodiversity offsetting proposals which government were consulting on at present GM explained that initiatives such as Biodiversity Offsetting could mean that there would potentially be significant sums of money available to mitigate developments and those NIAs as approved by the LNP could potentially be the areas that this money was targeted at. We would therefore want this to be more widespread than just three areas. We therefore need to keep a close eye on the progress likely with Biodiversity offsetting and its implications for the county.

6.7 GH indicated that the Government were very keen on offsetting. So far 6 pilots had been run, none of which had concluded in an offset. The main issue was not developers coming forward but landowners not coming forward with receptor sites. GH felt this was a marketplace issue around confidence and understanding of the process rather than a lack of market. The first offset was likely to be the Earth Trust at Didcot. It may also be due to the fact that offsetting is not mandatory.

6.9 TS stated that offsetting was likely to be tested through the courts. Offsetting was all very well through Section 106 agreements but a lot of organisations vie for the money from the "106 pot". Likely to be arguments about what offset monies should be spent on and where. Long term maintenance funding was also likely to be a major stumbling block..

<p>6.10 TS felt it was important to get more certainty about NIAs as this would potentially be of value as we understood more about offsetting and allocation of funds. JS liked the idea of only three initially and of joining the Marlborough Downs NIA with the new proposals. TS said if offsetting goes ahead we need to be transparent about where it is spent. It would not be popular if money for developments around Swindon were spent on projects near Salisbury Plain.</p> <p>6.11 GM felt we needed a comprehensive set of NIAs for the county – may start with three but a long term vision and plan for all. TS and others agreed we want to start working on three but also progress others. He is also keen that there is co-operation with CWP / Gloucs LNP.</p> <p>Next Steps: As Board in broad agreement over proposals BB to liaise with GM & SD to develop broader vision and also develop plan for progressing first three proposals and progressing discussions to test assumptions.</p>	BB
<p>7. Wiltshire Council Green Infrastructure Strategy</p> <p>7.1 Jay Gascoigne (JG) from Wiltshire Council gave a short presentation on progress and approach with developing WC GI Strategy. One challenge they had was that of different designations of GI from the 5 local authorities that made up WC. There was huge disparity between the data sets which they have been “trudging” recently and seeking to establish a single standard definition.</p> <p>7.2 Mapping of GI assets was discussed and GM hoped that the existing mapping and bio-diversity information that was available was being taken into account in developing the strategy. GM felt that it would be helpful if the GI strategy linked into the Landscape Biodiversity Areas and NIA vision. It is essential that the GI strategy contributes to the establishment of ecological networks. GM is keen that liaison and discussion occurs to ensure that the strategy is convergent with these initiatives.</p> <p>7.3 TS raised the concern of future CIL funding and raised that there might be a potential timing mis-match before the GI Strategy is adopted. It was felt that a marker for GI had to be put down and a bid put into CIL asap otherwise it might be too late.</p> <p>7.4 GM asked TS about Asset Transfers from the Council. TS indicated that there had been limited discussions to date. TS said he will send the WC policy to GM. Transfer of Council assets to be posted as an agenda item for a future Board meeting.</p> <p>7.5 FC commended JG for having Public Health at the top of the list of strategic priorities for GI.</p> <p>ACTION :TS to send copy of policy to GM. BB to put Asset Transfers on agenda</p>	BB / TS
<p>8. Brief Updates</p> <p>8.1 State of the Environment report 2013</p> <p>JH gave an overview of the launch of the 2013 State of the Environment report, which was welcomed by the Board. Jenny was commended and thanked for her hard work on this excellent report. There was a short discussion as to the appropriateness of the high quality of the materials used and also from a cost viewpoint whether it should be produced once every two years rather than every year. It was agreed that the</p>	

<p>report should be produced every two years.</p> <p>8.2 Small Grants Fund (SGF) BB explained that the SGF had been launched in July and the first 6 grants approved. Next steps were for BB to advise the applicants and arrange publicity and payment of grants. There is still just over £2000 available for further grants. BB will be attending a number of community events over the coming weeks to further promote the grants and Link2Nature.</p> <p>8.3 Executive Group and Working Groups SD informed the Board that the Executive Group had met three times since the last Board to progress initiatives discussed above. The Executive Group will continue meeting prior to Board meetings to help inform the Board's work and support decision-making.</p>	BB
<p>9. Dates of next meetings</p> <p>Next meeting is scheduled for Friday 13th December from 9 am to 12. TS indicated that County Hall may be available. BB to follow up. BB to "doodle" meeting dates for 2014.</p>	BB
<p>10. Any other business</p> <p>10.1 GH advised that Natural England will be going into a new restructure shortly based on a more local model, planned to be in place for April 2014.</p> <p>10.2 Funding of the LNP co-ordinator role and other future LNP activities was discussed. Funding received to date has been very much appreciated however funding for co-ordinator post was only in place until March 2014. The LNP agenda is likely to get bigger in the future so there is a need to ensure funding is secured to enable this work to progress longer term. FC asked whether any other sources of funding had been identified as yet. GM indicated that they hadn't yet. Funding needs to be put on the agenda for December and board members are asked to give this matter thought between now and the next meeting.</p> <p>Actions. All consider funding options. BB place on next agenda.</p>	ALL BB
<p>Summary of action points</p> <p>All Board members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider suitable additional Board members • Consider funding options for 2014 and communicate to GM/BB <p>Toby Sturgis :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Send copy of Council Asset Transfer Policy to Gary. <p>Gary Mantle:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sign copies of MoU's for SBC & WC • <p>Fleur de Rhe-Philippe</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speak to Piers Hankinson re potential MOD representation on the Board 	

Bill Blumsom:

- Maintain engagement with LEP and ensure LNP attendance at all Task & Finish Group meetings.
- Confirm dates of future meetings.

- Book venue for next meeting
- Review WC MoU once received and pass to GM.
- Develop broader NIA vision document and plan next steps for NIAs
- Future Asset Transfers to be placed on next agenda.