

NOTE OF KEY STAKEHOLDER MEETING

NATURAL ENGLAND & STAFFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL

DATE OF MEETING – 13 JUNE 2007

Officers in Attendance:-

Robert Duff	-	Natural England
Jacqueline Lake	-	Natural England
Matt Cottrell	-	Natural England (Part)
Alex Yendole	-	Stafford Borough Council

- Natural England is split into 3 sections; Government, Land Management and Communities. Natural England has a Northern Area Team which covers Staffordshire, Shropshire and the Black Country.
- The Government section deals with Local Planning Authorities, other Government Agencies, and takes a lead on all planning matters and Appropriate Assessment. Each County Council area has a Land Management Team which facilitates the Countryside Stewardship Scheme and carries out on-site management of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs).
- The Communities section deals with matters concerning access to the natural environment including elements of the health and well-being agenda to make sure the public enjoy the natural environment. There is a particular focus on urban areas as well as community based activities. The Communities section addresses Rights of Way Plans, improved facilities and education regarding the natural environment, which has evolved from previous work done by the now disbanded Countryside Agency.
- The primary purpose and key objectives for Natural England is sustainable use of the natural environment, climate change and energy policy.
- Stafford Borough Council has a number of Local Nature Reserve (LNR) designations and further designations are encouraged by Natural England in order to meet the targets for accessible natural green space. In future green infrastructure will need to be provided through the Local Development Framework process. Natural England wishes to extend its involvement and work with key stakeholders in the future. All new consultation documents from Stafford Borough Council should be directed to Robert Duff at the Shrewsbury office, starting with the Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report in September.
- Natural England has a number of data sets available to external organisations including the Countryside Stewardship Scheme, Lowland Hay Meadows, ancient woodlands, sites of biological importance, sites of special scientific interest, scheduled ancient monuments, biodiversity enhancement areas, grassland inventory, heath land inventory, catchment areas of meres and mosses. Some maps are also accessible including the Agricultural Land Classification grading data and Genesis land datasets from the Agricultural Census. Further datasets are also held at the Ecological Records Office which provides information on species and habitat protection including sites of biological interest.

- A complete list of data sets, which can be made accessible to external organisations by Natural England, will be sent to Alex Yendole by Matthew Cottrell week commencing the 17 June 2007. Matt's contact telephone number is 01902 693477. Files will be transferred through the Geographical Information Systems using esri and map info files. The Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), the Rural Development Agency and English Nature data sets can be made available. However other datasets have been provided by other organisations for sole use by Natural England and therefore cannot be provided to other agencies.
- Stafford Borough Council should meet with the local Ecological Records Office to obtain up-to-date biodiversity data. Natural England's National Geographical Information Services Unit, based in Leeds, holds additional data sets if further information is required. Stafford Borough Council to provide green network and protected open space data sets and maps to Natural England.
- Natural England has provided representations concerning the strategic direction for the preparation of Development Plan Documents through recent work on the Black Country Core Strategy DPD. The Black Country area is promoting an urban park concept which is joined up and can be delivered through management. The Vision for a Core Strategy must be meaningful and assist in the delivery of green infrastructure.
- The West Midlands Regional Assembly's Environment Working Group has produced a document entitled "Green Infrastructure". Key objectives to be facilitated through the production of Development Plan Documents include protecting the waterways, planning for green infrastructure and future species habitat protection through linking gardens within developments. For further information make contact with Nick Young at Natural England as well as guidance from Thames Gateway Authorities and other growth points nationally which are leading in this field.
- Graham Walker at Natural England leads on work concerning Biodiversity Enhancement Areas. A map is being developed of the biodiversity enhancement areas and how further enhancements can be achieved. Natural England wishes to focus on the Sutton Park to Cannock Chase biodiversity enhancement area as a priority within the West Midlands region.
- Work is to be progressed in terms of identifying opportunities for mapping of the biodiversity enhancement area as well as how access areas be improved and registered. What is the effect of the biodiversity enhancement area boundary and its location to the development strategy of a particular Council area?
- The Sutton Park to Cannock Chase Biodiversity Enhancement Area may be less relevant to Stafford Borough Council than other authorities to the south such as Cannock Chase District and Walsall Council. However there are sensitive areas within the biodiversity enhancement area / Cannock Chase area of outstanding natural beauty in terms of car park provision and therefore management of visitor pressure to Cannock Chase must be taken into account. For example significant new development at Stafford may have the following implications:- 10,000 new houses at Stafford would lead to 12,000 people living in these houses with the potential of 2,000 extra visitor days spent on Cannock Chase each week and increased dog fouling activity undermining nature conservation objectives.
- Green infrastructure is relevant when major development is coming forward and must be linked to Core Strategy policies which may lead to Supplementary Planning Documents being prepared regarding biodiversity enhancement areas in the future.

- Urban areas in close proximity to wetlands, such as Doxey Marshes and Pasturefields grasslands, affect the conservation interests and biodiversity of wetlands. Run off from the urban areas should be reduced using sustainable urban drainage systems, with a policy applying to existing and new development. Climate change is leading to Summer flooding due to precipitation hitting hard surfaces and parched dry land causing flash flooding.
- In 2000 a document entitled “Conservation Strategy of Meres and Heaths” was produced in the West Midlands and relates to Doley Common and Loynton Moss sites of special scientific interest within Stafford Borough. In 2007 the Environment Agency produced Catchment Abstraction Management Plans for the river catchments relating to Aqualate Mere, providing information on the levels of abstraction and potential over abstraction. The Site Manager for Aqualate Mere Special Area of Conservation is Tim Coleshaw.
- A key issue regarding the meres and mosses is nutrient enrichment affecting water quality which leads to a decline in plant communities caused by point and diffuse sources. In general point sources are discharges from built development whilst diffuse discharge sources arise from agricultural run off. Discharges from built development in the catchment areas of the meres and mosses could have a significant impact on these areas and needs to be addressed. Significant development relates to more than 5 cubic metres of hard standing and therefore relates to new housing developments coming forward in these areas.
- Expansion of development within the catchment areas with no sewage infrastructure will cause problems and it is important to maintain a high standard of water to avoid impacts on meres and mosses. In certain locations septic tanks are used to deal with sewage. Therefore if septic tanks lead to point source discharge then a sewage treatment plan may be preferable. However it should be noted that sewage treatment plans can also causes point source discharge. It is important that Severn Trent Water are asked about the capacity of sewage treatment works in particular locations in order to establish whether the existing infrastructure can cope with new development or whether it is necessary for more sewage treatment works in the catchment areas to be developed. Natural England may advise that sewage is directed into a less sensitive catchment zone rather than continue discharge into the catchments of the meres and mosses. New water abstractions must be sustainable.
- The Environment Agency considers the minimum ecological requirements through water abstraction licences. It may be appropriate to address limits to water supply through leakage, reduced consumption and finally new reservoirs as a sequential approach, but ecological implications must be assessed.
- Aqualate Mere is silting up due to sediment discharge from the Shropshire Union canal. The water level within Aqualate Mere is between ½ to 1 metre in depth with 1½ metres of soft silt being deposited since 1850. If this process continues then in 50 years time reeds will have infilled Aqualate Mere and the ecological value will have been lost. Natural England estimates that to de-silt Aqualate Mere would cost £1 - 1½ million. Planning permission is required for the de-silting process to take place and therefore Natural England would support Stafford Borough Council with a policy on recreation and restoration of natural areas.

- Cop Mere near Eccleshall has millponds upstream which are silting up therefore saving Cop Mere from this issue. The Sugnall Estate has agreed to de-silt the millponds at a cost of £150,000 to aide Natural England with its nature conservation objectives.
- Species and habitats are registered through Biodiversity Action Plans. The National Biodiversity Action Plan has a new list, revised in 2007, which includes all rivers and streams. New local lists for Stafford Borough and the Staffordshire Biodiversity Action Plan will be revised in 2008. The Biodiversity Action Plans have a spatial dimension and link to PPS 9 Government Guidance. Natural England, the Staffordshire Wildlife Trust, Forestry Commission and Stafford Borough Council should hold a joint meeting to discuss the Biodiversity Action Plan.
- It is important to promote the access agenda with links to natural green space targets. Furthermore broad areas for where renewable energy generation can take place should be investigated. Natural England has been approached in the last few months by a number of companies interested in the location of new wind farms within the Staffordshire area and this issue should be addressed by Stafford Borough Council.
- Natural England provided the following documentation to assist Stafford Borough Council in preparing the new Local Development Framework, in hard copy format:

CD – Green Infrastructure Final Report January 2007
 Biodiversity by Design: A guide for sustainable communities (TCPA) Sept 2004
 Natural England: Our Direction 2006 – 2009
 Natural Areas in the West Midlands Region, English Nature – 1999
 Meres and Mosses of Cheshire, Shropshire and Staffordshire, English Nature
 The countryside in and around towns, Countryside Agency
 Guidance for Public Authorities on Implementing the Biodiversity Duty
 Life-Support incorporating Biodiversity into Community Strategies
 Environmental Quality in Spatial Planning, June 2005

Prepared by Alex Yendole
 Date: 18 June 2007
 Stafford Borough Council