Guidance for Local Biodiversity Action Plans

This is one of a series of Guidance Notes designed to assist everyone involved in the production of Local Biodiversity Action Plans throughout the UK.

The UK Action Plan on Biodiversity published by the Government in 1994, sets out the broad strategy and targets for conserving and enhancing wild species and wildlife habitats for the next 20 years. A further report by the UK Steering Group, published in December 1995 and endorsed by the Government in May 1996, makes detailed proposals for a large number of species and habitats which require urgent conservation action. The UK plan, together with its individual action plans for species and habitats, now provides the framework for effective delivery of biodiversity conservation at a national level, and defines our international responsibilities. It provides the UK commitment to the Biodiversity Convention signed at Rio in 1992.

Successful implementation of the UK Biodiversity Action Plan requires some means of ensuring that the national strategy is translated into effective action at the local level. Local Biodiversity Action Plans are seen as the means by which this can be achieved. This Guidance is aimed at assisting in the development of these plans. It is produced by the UK Local Issues Advisory Group on behalf of the Local Agenda 21 Steering Group and the UK Biodiversity Group.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

- Biodiversity: The UK Steering Group Report, HMSO 1995

UK Local Issues Advisory Group

Chairman Professor David Goode

MEMBERSHIP

Association of Local Government Ecologists
British Trust for Conservation Volunteers
Convention of Scottish Local Authorities
Country Landowners Association
Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions
Department of the Environment (Northern Ireland)
English Nature
Environment Agency
Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group
Local Government Association
Local Government Management Board
London Ecology Unit
MAFF
RSPB
Scottish Natural Heritage
National Parks Authority
The Forestry Authority
The Welsh Office
The Wildlife Trusts

GUIDANCE NOTES IN THIS SERIES:

1. An introduction
2. Developing Partnerships
3. How Local Biodiversity Action Plans relate to other plans
4. Evaluating priorities and setting targets for habitats and species
5. Incentives and advice for biodiversity

These Guidance Notes are obtainable from:
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GUIDANCE NOTE I

An introduction

SUMMARY
This is the first of a series of Guidance Notes designed to assist everyone involved in the production of Local Biodiversity Action Plans throughout the UK. It provides an introduction to the whole series of Guidance Notes, which are being issued as part of the UK programme for Agenda 21, as well as in response to the Biodiversity Convention. In particular it:

• provides a background to the rapidly developing process of biodiversity conservation stemming from the Biodiversity Convention;
• explains what biodiversity means, why it is important and how it relates to sustainable development;
• describes the UK Action Plan;
• explains why local action is needed to protect biodiversity;
• explains the purpose of Local Biodiversity Action Plans;
• summarises the main elements of such plans.

THE BIODIVERSITY CONVENTION
The Convention on Biological Diversity was one of several major initiatives stemming from the "Earth Summit" in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, which together form an International Agreement on sustainable development. The United Kingdom was one of 150 signatories to the Convention, which reflects a world-wide concern that human activities are changing and destroying habitats and natural ecosystems on an increasing scale, with unprecedented loss of species. Signatories recognised that action must be taken to halt this global loss of animal and plant species and genetic resources and that each country has the primary responsibility to conserve and enhance biodiversity within its own jurisdiction. At the same time, they agreed 'to develop national strategies, plans and programmes for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity', and to share resources to help implement such programmes. The Convention on Biological Diversity is essentially a commitment to conserving and sustaining the variety of life on Earth.

WHAT IS BIODIVERSITY AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?
Biodiversity encompasses the whole variety of life on Earth. Not only does it include all species of plants and animals, but also their genetic variation, and the complex ecosystems of which they are part. It is not restricted to rare or threatened species but includes the whole of the natural world from the commonplace to the critically endangered. It includes the plants and animals familiar to all of us in the places where we live or work, wherever that may be.

"BIODIVERSITY: THE VARIETY OF LIFE.
Biodiversity is all living things, from the tiny garden ant to the giant redwood tree. You will find biodiversity everywhere, in window boxes and wild woods, roadsides and rain forests, snow fields and sea shore."

Biodiversity: The UK Steering Group Report 1995

Why is biodiversity important? The intricate network of ecosystems, habitats and species comprising biodiversity provides the support systems that sustain human existence. It provides many of the essentials of life – our oxygen, water, food, clothing, health and relaxation. The value of biodiversity extends from the spiritual benefits to be gained from contact with nature, to the economic potential of wild species for new sources of food or medicines. This includes the potential for new products being produced through advances in biotechnology.

In a local context biodiversity has particular importance in giving a distinctive character to an area whether it be chalk downland, estuary, woodland or mountain. Even in towns and cities oases of wildlife habitat make an important contribution to the quality of life.

However, the world is losing biodiversity at an ever-increasing rate as a result of human activity. In the UK we have lost over 100 species this century, with many more species and habitats in danger of disappearing, especially at the local level. On a world scale the rate of loss is now recognised to be a serious concern, requiring concerted international action to prevent continued loss of biodiversity. The underlying reasons for biodiversity conservation make a compelling case. If we do not take action, we shall suffer both economic and spiritual loss. Moreover, we shall hand on to our successors a planet which is markedly poorer than the one we were privileged to inherit.

The conservation of biodiversity is now widely recognised as a new imperative stemming from Rio. The word biodiversity has been taken by many to mean not simply the variety of life-forms on Earth,
but also the urgent need to ensure their survival. We all have a part to play in safeguarding the Earth's biodiversity and action needs to be taken at every level from local to global.

One of the most compelling arguments for the conservation of biodiversity is that it is an integral part of long-term sustainability. One of the other main products of the Earth Summit is Agenda 21; a comprehensive programme of action needed throughout the world to achieve a more sustainable pattern of development for the next century. Developing a programme for biodiversity conservation at the local level should be one of the core functions of Local Agenda 21 (see Guidance Note 3). Production of a Local Biodiversity Action Plan is seen as one way in which this can be achieved. It is for this reason that this Guidance is issued as part of the UK programme for Agenda 21, as well as in response to the Biodiversity Convention.

THE UK ACTION PLAN
The UK is now well advanced in developing and implementing a national Action Plan. The Government's response to the Biodiversity Convention, Biodiversity: The UK Action Plan, published in 1994 sets out the broad strategy for conserving and enhancing wild species and wildlife habitats in the UK for the next 20 years. The overall goal of the UK Action Plan is:

“To conserve and enhance biological diversity within the UK and to contribute to the conservation of global biodiversity through all appropriate mechanisms”.

The objectives for conserving biodiversity which underpin this goal are to conserve and, where practicable, to enhance:

- the overall populations and natural ranges of native species and the quality and range of wildlife habitats and ecosystems;
- internationally important and threatened species, habitats and ecosystems;
- species, habitats and natural and managed ecosystems that are characteristic of local areas;
- the biodiversity of natural and semi-natural habitats where this has been diminished over recent decades.

One of the main outcomes of the UK Action Plan was the setting up of the UK Biodiversity Steering Group, which was given the task of preparing a detailed programme of action to achieve these objectives. The UK Steering Group Report, published in December 1995 and endorsed by the Government in May 1996, contains the following key components:

- developing costed targets for our most threatened and declining species and habitats;
- establishing an effective system for handling the necessary biological data at both local and national level;
- promoting increased public awareness of the importance of biodiversity, and broadening public involvement and
- promoting Local Biodiversity Action Plans as a means of implementing the national plan.

These key components introduce a number of important new approaches as the basis for biodiversity conservation in the UK. Perhaps the most important of these is the setting of quantifiable targets for both species and habitats, and the production of costed action plans for 116 species and 14 habitats of highest priority for conservation action. By the end of 1998 similar action plans are to be produced for a further 290 plus species and another 24 habitat types. The selection of priority species and habitats is based on a detailed appraisal of the current status of critical species and habitats in the UK, together with the threats to their survival. These national action plans together provide the long-term strategic basis for biodiversity conservation in the UK.

In tandem with this is the ability to monitor progress. The fact that national targets have been agreed for the conservation of critical species and habitats is of crucial importance, not only in defining clear objectives for their conservation, but also because it provides a basis for measuring future success of the whole UK plan. For the first time we have quantifiable targets capable of being monitored in the long-term. This is an essential ingredient of the UK Action Plan.

In making these proposals the UK Steering Group Report also recognises the need to broaden the constituency particularly through extending the range of organisations involved. It recognises that biodiversity conservation should not be confined to those particular sectors of society which have hitherto been concerned with traditional approaches to nature conservation. It argues for a more broadly-based approach involving a wide range of bodies, including land owners and managers who can take responsibility for both promoting the whole approach and being responsible for seeing it through. Because such partnerships are seen as crucially important, the UK Plan includes a programme of action to gain broader public and political commitment to biodiversity at every level.

WHAT ARE LOCAL BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLANS?
If the UK Biodiversity Action Plan is to be implemented successfully it requires some means of ensuring that the national strategy is translated into effective action at the local level. Local Biodiversity Action Plans are seen as a means by which this can be achieved. One of their functions is to ensure that national targets for species and habitats are attained in a consistent manner throughout the UK. But there is
a great deal more to such plans than simply providing a mechanism for meeting the national targets. They provide a means of implementing several aspects of the UK Action Plan which can only be achieved at the local level.

The overall approach is described in "Guidance in developing Local Biodiversity Action Plans" (see Annex C of the UK Steering Group Report, 1995). In summary:

"The purpose of Local Biodiversity Action Plans is to focus resources to conserve and enhance biodiversity by means of local partnerships, taking account of both national and local priorities."

**FUNCTIONS OF LOCAL BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLANS:**

- To ensure that national targets for species and habitats, as specified in the UK Action Plan, are translated into effective action at the local level.
- To identify targets for species and habitats appropriate to the local area, and reflecting the values of people locally.
- To develop effective local partnerships to ensure that programmes for biodiversity conservation are maintained in the long-term.
- To raise awareness of the need for biodiversity conservation in the local context.
- To ensure that opportunities for conservation and enhancement of the whole biodiversity resource are fully considered.
- To provide a basis for monitoring progress in biodiversity conservation, at both local and national level.

In developing a Local Biodiversity Action Plan it will be necessary to address all six of these primary functions. The following guidance is offered to assist in this process:

- To ensure that national targets for species and habitats, as specified in the UK Action Plan, are translated into effective local action.

  It is essential that all such species and habitats occurring in the area covered by a Local Biodiversity Action Plan are identified. National targets will inform and guide the content of local action plans, so that implementation is firmly linked to national priorities. Local Action Plans thus help to ensure successful implementation of the overall UK plan.

- To identify targets for species and habitats appropriate to the local area, and reflecting the values of people locally.

  A local action plan must take account of the full range of ecological conditions within the local area, and their importance to local people. Such plans will provide the focus for a range of initiatives to fulfil local needs in terms of biodiversity conservation. They provide an opportunity for people to be involved and express views on what is important in their own locality. This process may well highlight important features of local significance, which need to be identified at an early stage in development of the plan so that priority can be given to relevant species and habitats in the overall approach. These first two functions should be given equal weight.

- To develop effective local partnerships to ensure that programmes for biodiversity conservation are maintained in the long-term.

  Partnerships are seen as crucial to the success of Local Biodiversity Action Plans (see Guidance Note 2). It is essential that effective partnerships are developed, capable of ensuring that programmes for biodiversity conservation are maintained in the long-term. A local biodiversity plan has, by definition, a shared agenda for conserving and enhancing the biodiversity of an area. This cannot be set by any single organisation but must be built by consensus. Obviously there is a need for a "lead body", but to be successful the process should be owned by all the parties who have a key role in delivering the product. Local authorities are ideally suited to provide the necessary lead for this process working with statutory conservation and countryside agencies, local and regional voluntary organisations, land managers, businesses, local record centres and those with specialist knowledge of local wildlife. The statutory and voluntary agencies will be particularly important members of the partnership. The approach will require considerable consultation and joint working between various sectors, to create the new working partnerships necessary for success. Joint "ownership" of a Local Plan is regarded as essential in building commitment within the local community. It is expected that production of a Local Biodiversity Action Plan will provide the necessary framework for local initiatives to ensure that biodiversity is dealt with effectively as part of Local Agenda 21.

- To raise awareness of the need for biodiversity conservation in the local context.

  Establishment of effective partnerships at the local level will, in turn, assist in raising awareness of the importance of biodiversity, thereby gaining wider public commitment. Annex D of the UK Steering Group Report contains detailed proposals for increasing public awareness and involvement at the local level. Many of these proposals can be implemented through the development of Local Action Plans.

- To ensure that opportunities for conservation...
and enhancement of the whole biodiversity resource are fully considered.
Although rare and threatened species will be of particular conservation concern, and often require urgent action, it must be recognised that local biodiversity plans are concerned with far more than this limited range of species and habitats. In setting priorities for local action plans, consideration should be given to the opportunities for increasing the overall biodiversity resource. It will be necessary to consider appropriate action for areas of differing geographic and historic character and identify generic actions which would encompass common issues affecting the plan area. Plans should identify where it is appropriate and cost-effective to halt recent trends in habitat fragmentation, and to create new and attractive landscapes by habitat enhancement and restoration.

- To provide a basis for monitoring progress in biodiversity conservation at both local and national level.
At the local level it will be possible to assess the effectiveness of a Local Biodiversity Action Plan by a periodic review of the extent to which agreed targets have been achieved. It is suggested that this should be carried out every five years. Such a review will also contribute to the national monitoring programme to assess whether national targets are being achieved. It is essential, therefore, that the data which are integral to Local Biodiversity Action Plans are compatible with the national biodiversity database. Establishment of an effective database at the local level is a crucial element in developing a local action plan. The UK Steering Group Report recognises the importance of local data centres. Where such centres do not currently exist it advocates their establishment as part of the action plan process.

MAIN ELEMENTS OF A LOCAL BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN
The process of developing a local plan involves several distinct elements. Analysis and evaluation of the nature conservation resource is clearly a major part of the process, resulting in detailed proposals for action within a specified period of time. In parallel with this is the development of an effective partnership with key players, particularly land managers, to identify appropriate delivery and funding mechanisms. A third component is the programme for monitoring the effectiveness of the overall plan including the extent to which both national and local targets are being achieved. Underlying all of this is the need for an adequate database at the local level, which is also fully integrated with the national biodiversity database.

A Local Biodiversity Action Plan is both a product and a process. It identifies priority action required to implement agreed targets, and specifies appropriate delivery mechanisms. It also provides a mechanism for long-term implementation through the local partnership. The local action plan is therefore an ongoing process comprising a sequence of steps which form a long-term strategy. The main components are as follows:

**LOCAL AND REGIONAL CONTEXT**
The precise way in which Local Biodiversity Action Plans are produced will inevitably vary according to local circumstances. In many cases, and particularly where they are linked closely to the Agenda 21 process, it can be expected that Local Biodiversity Action Plans will conform with local authority boundaries. The benefits of producing a strategic framework at 'regional' level has also been recognised (see Guidance Note 3). Such a framework can assist in the development of plans at the County, District or UDP level by providing a strategic overview which will promote consistency of approach. The emphasis will differ at various levels in the hierarchy from regional to local, with progressively greater emphasis on implementation of conservation action on the ground, the more local the level. It should be noted that regional initiatives should not be referred to as Local Biodiversity Action Plans as they are quite distinct. Regional Biodiversity Guidance or Strategy would be appropriate. Where such a hierarchy of approach does occur then it is desirable to have conformity of approach within the geographical area concerned.

It is likely, of course, that many other bodies will wish to promote Local Biodiversity Action Plans,
either for land which they manage or to provide a strategic framework for their policies and operations. Such bodies might include National Parks, Regional Park Authorities and major statutory bodies such as the Forestry Commission and the Environment Agency. The production of such plans is to be welcomed and it must be recognised that each will be tailored to the particular needs of the organisation concerned. However, it will be particularly important that any such initiatives should be integrated into other biodiversity conservation initiatives in the area concerned.

It is recognised that many initiatives are already underway and that, so long as the general approach described here is followed, there is no single model for production of Local Biodiversity Action Plans which has to be followed in detail. It can be expected that many different solutions will emerge to meet the purposes of local action plans, particularly in matters such as community involvement and detailed aspects of delivery. There will also be significant differences of approach between plans at various levels from regional to very local. The suggested content of a Local Biodiversity Action Plan is shown in Box 3. These are the topics which will need to be addressed in the plan, and it is important to distinguish between the process of developing such a plan (Box 2) and its detailed content. A suggested framework for species and habitat action plans at the local level is shown in boxes 4 and 5.

**CONCLUSION**

The process described in this guidance is a new mechanism which will present considerable challenges for all involved in creating effective voluntary partnerships, including the local community and land managers, whether in town or country. Participation of land owners and managers through all stages of the process will be crucial to success. The extent of community participation needed is now becoming more widely accepted as an integral part of the Agenda 21 process. Production of local action plans will also help to inform those involved in wider aspects of planning in developing their work on biodiversity conservation.

Experience gained in Local Agenda 21 suggests that training for all participants in the biodiversity process will be necessary to promote effective partnerships. It is suggested that training workshops be introduced as part of normal practice of Action Plan Partnerships.

This Guidance Note forms part of a cohesive series of such notes on the Local Biodiversity Action Plan process. The current titles are listed on the inside page of this Guidance Note. Other titles may be produced in the future to meet specific needs, together with case-studies of local action plans. It is recommended that, wherever possible, the present series of Notes is treated as an integral package of guidance to aid all organisations or individuals involved in the production of a Local Biodiversity Action Plan.

**BOX 3**

**SUGGESTED CONTENT OF A LOCAL BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN**

1. Vision statement with broad objectives of the action plan partnership.
2. Review of the wildlife resource of the plan area identifying national and local priorities for habitats and species.
3. Review of priority habitats and species in terms of current status and factors causing loss or decline in the local context; also action already under way to meet their conservation requirements.
4. Detailed Action Plans for priority habitats and species, covering for example site safeguard, habitat management, habitat creation, reintroductions, policy requirements, data needs, research needs and advisory work.
5. A geographical analysis of biodiversity within the plan area identifying issues specific to particular geographical areas and indicating how implementation of habitat and species action plans relate to areas of different ecological character. This should include biodiversity maps showing locations of key areas for action.
6. Review of generic issues affecting biodiversity within the plan area with recommended action.
7. Proposals for raising public awareness and involvement.
8. Communication and publicity regarding the work of the partnership.
**LOCAL SPECIES ACTION PLANS: A SUGGESTED FRAMEWORK**

1. **CURRENT STATUS**
   Give brief details of the current legal status of the species, its known population and distribution particularly in the plan area, the ecological, habitat and basic management factors affecting its current status, and to what extent the limiting factors are known.

2. **CURRENT FACTORS AFFECTING THE SPECIES**
   Give a general description of the main factors impacting on the species nationally and within the plan area.

3. **CURRENT ACTION**
   Briefly summarise what conservation action is presently underway within the plan area.

4. **ACTION PLAN OBJECTIVES AND TARGETS**
   Set targets for maintaining or increasing the populations and, where appropriate, the distribution of the species. The targets and objectives should reflect any national targets set for the species. Guidance on target setting is contained in Guidance Note 4.

5. **PROPOSED ACTION WITH LEAD AGENCIES**
   Noting the established objectives and targets, set out the actions needed to support them: what is already being done or could be amended; identify the lead agencies/authorities/bodies for each action and the timescale for carrying out actions. Proposals in the following categories should be considered though action may not always be appropriate or necessary in all of them:
   - 5.1 policy and legislation;
   - 5.2 site safeguard and management;
   - 5.3 species management and protection;
   - 5.4 advice to landowners/managers and others involved in conservation and recovery of species within and beyond the plan area;
   - 5.5 future research and monitoring;
   - 5.6 communications and publicity aimed at raising awareness and appreciation of the species needs;
   - 5.7 links to other action plans.

6. **Coordination and Review**
   Explain the means of coordinating action and set out a timetable for reviewing the plan.

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**LOCAL HABITAT ACTION PLANS: A SUGGESTED FRAMEWORK**

1. **CURRENT STATUS**
   Give brief details of the current legal status of the habitat, its known distribution, particularly in the plan area, the ecological and basic management factors affecting its current status, and to what extent the limiting factors are known.

2. **CURRENT FACTORS AFFECTING THE HABITAT**
   Generally describe the main factors causing declines in quality and/or quantity of the habitat.

3. **CURRENT ACTION**
   Give a brief summary of what conservation action is presently underway within the plan area.

4. **ACTION PLAN OBJECTIVES AND TARGETS**
   Set targets and objectives for the maintenance and enhancement of the habitat, for maintaining or increasing the habitat area and indicating milestones towards the targets. The targets and objectives should reflect any national targets set for the habitat. Guidance on target setting is contained in Guidance Note 4.

5. **PROPOSED ACTION WITH LEAD AGENCIES**
   Noting the established objectives and targets, set out the actions needed to support them: what is already being done or could be amended; identify the lead agencies/authorities/bodies for each action and the timescale for carrying out actions. Proposals in the following categories should be considered though action may not always be appropriate or necessary in all of them:
   - 5.1 policy and legislation;
   - 5.2 site safeguard and management;
   - 5.3 advisory
   - 5.4 future research and monitoring;
   - 5.5 communication and publicity aimed at raising awareness and appreciation of the habitat.

6. **Coordination and Review**
   Explain the means of coordinating action and set out a timetable for reviewing the plan.