

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

TRANSPORT, ECONOMY & ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

7 NOVEMBER 2012

BIODIVERSITY UPDATE – BEES TASK GROUP UPDATE ON WORK ACHIEVED AS OF NOVEMBER 2012

Report of the Corporate Director – Business and Environmental Services

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Biodiversity is the variety of life on earth, and includes all species of plants and animals and the natural systems that support them. Biodiversity is a core component of sustainable development, underpinning economic development and prosperity, and has an important role to play in developing locally distinctive and sustainable communities.
- 1.2 Conservation of biodiversity is vital in our response to climate change and in the delivery of key ecosystem services such as food, flood management, pollination and provision of clean air and water.
- 1.3 Local authorities have a key role to play in conserving biodiversity, through their role in: developing and influencing local policies and strategies; planning and development control; owning and managing their estates; procurement; education, awareness raising and advisory functions.
- 1.4 Local authorities have a Duty to have regard to the conservation of biodiversity in exercising their functions. This Duty was introduced by the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act and came into force on 1 October 2006. The Duty affects all public authorities and aims to raise the profile and visibility of biodiversity, to clarify existing commitments with regard to biodiversity, and to make it a natural and integral part of policy and decision making.

(From the Defra document “Guidance for Local Authorities on Implementing the Biodiversity Duty

www.defra.gov.uk/environment/biodiversity/documents/la-guid-english.pdf.)

2.0 BEES PROJECT

- 2.1 The NYCC Biodiversity Officer, Matt Millington, was invited to brief the Environment and Heritage Scrutiny Committee in July 2009 on the decline of bees, what NYCC work was occurring to combat this decline, and what future work could be carried out.
- 2.2 After highlighting the work of NYCC Countryside Service with other services within NYCC and with external partners, the Biodiversity Officer proposed that work could be done to enhance NYCC landholdings for bees and other biodiversity, as well as taken on a more proactive advocacy role for such practices. The Committee agreed to set up a Bees Task Group, made up of Members and Officers.

3.0 SCHOOLS

3.1 NYCC Biodiversity Officer and NYCC Grounds Monitoring Officer, Julie Bentley, have now visited at least one school in each district in the county as part of the Bees project. Each of these has received a report on potential amendments to school ground maintenance to allow more wildflowers and bee-friendly habitats to be created. The following schools have been visited since the project's inception:

Malton Community Primary School (Ryedale)
Eskdale School, Whitby (Scarborough)
Barlow Primary School, near Selby (Selby)
Thorpe Willoughby School, near Selby (Selby)
Moorside School, Ripon (Harrogate)
Mill Hill Community School, Northallerton (Hambleton)
Applegarth Primary School, Northallerton (Hambleton)
Bullamoor Junior School, Northallerton (Hambleton)
Aireville School, Skipton (Craven)
Barton Primary School, near Richmond (Richmondshire)
Richmond School (Richmondshire).

3.2 NYCC Grounds Maintenance Officer contacted the above schools September 2012 to determine any progress. The following 5 schools responded:

3.2.1 Bullamoor Junior School – visited 2nd October 2012.

Recommendations implemented include:

- Grass areas have been put under a differential mowing regime to provide longer grass areas around the perimeter creating a wildlife corridor. It is proposed that the grass will be strimmed back in the near future (Photo 1).
- The area has a number of small saplings planted in and these are surviving but are still small and competing against the vigorous grass species.
- The pupils have installed a small number of beastie habitats, including log piles and bird boxes.



Photo 1

Future Proposals, which NYCC staff will assist with where possible:

- Supplement the planting in the shrub border with cornfield annuals.
- Create a butterfly/ nectar bar. Sow a mixture of annual flowers, and plant a suitable range of shrubs.

- Create further numbers of mini-beast habitats, including more log piles, stone piles, beastie hotels as well as bat and bird boxes. Possible partnership working between the school and local secondary school to produce bird and bat boxes.
- School is keen to increase the pupil involvement in fruit and vegetable growing. The copse area would benefit from further planting and NYCC may be able to assist in this as part of the annual tree planting. Julie Bentley will liaise with the arboricultural team.

3.2.2 Eskdale School – visited 3rd October 2012

The school has implemented a large number of the proposals:

- A differential mowing regime has been in place within the amenity grass areas. This has been quite successful under established mature trees that have suppressed the grass and allowed a varied under story to develop.
- School has been in contact with the North Yorkshire Cornfield Flowers Project and has planted a small border of cornfield annual flowers. (Photo 3)
- NYCC has planted around 60 mixed species of tree saplings to form a small copse, they are planted closer than specified so may need thinning in a number of years depending on survival rates. Pupils were involved in the clearance and preparation of the planting areas.
- The pupil garden group has installed bat and bird boxes in a managed area of the grounds. Some new trees, provided by NYCC through the tree planting budget, have been planted to gap up the shelter belt on the top of the slope above the playing field. Some prunings have been piled to create habitats for hedgehogs and over wintering invertebrates.



Photo 3

Future Proposals, which NYCC staff will assist with where possible:

- School is planning more mini-beast habitats, bird and bat boxes, log piles.
- Installation of a bird feeding station within the managed garden and vegetable growing area.
- Increase the number of shrubs that produce berries in the shrub borders. The plantings in the borders are in the main past their horticultural best and replacement planting could be more wildlife friendly in terms of pollen and berries. Single flowered forms are advised to ensure pollen availability.
- School is keen to source native bluebells and wood anemone for under-planting beneath established trees.

- Increase the area of cornfield annuals. Pupils have collected and processed the seed from the cornfield annuals and will use this to sow larger areas.
- NYCC Grounds Monitoring Officer has advised the school to consider joining the RHS Gardens in Schools initiative to further the pupil involvement and demonstrate the relevance to the national curriculum.

3.2.3 Barlow CE VC Primary School

School has implemented some of the proposals. A small annual border has been created to provide a pollen and nectar bar. (Photo 5) A corner of the grass area under established trees has left uncut and supplemented with logs and stones to provide beastie habitats.



Photo 5

Future Proposals, which NYCC staff will assist with where possible:

- Leave some other smaller grass area uncut to see what plant species are naturally occurring within the area.
- Install some bat and bird boxes. Possible partnership working between the school and local secondary schools to produce bird and bat boxes. School may wish to consider parental/carer involvement in producing these, perhaps as part of an environmental action day.
- Annual border could be replaced with a sowing of native cornfield annuals.

3.2.4 Thorpe Willoughby Community Primary School

The school has implemented some of the biodiversity proposals but have not had a recent site visit:

- It now has a differential mowing regime along the perimeter of the playing field area.
- The pupils have planted a small copse of mixed tree species.
- The previous environment area has been revamped. The pond has become a bog garden, partially on safety grounds and to ensure that pupils have free-flow access to the area. This area has been planted with further copse planting.
- Some of the existing willows and hazel have been pollarded to rejuvenate the shrubs and produce some longer stems for bean poles and weaving.

3.2.5 Richmond School

The school is attempting to progress biodiversity action as part of an after school club.

- 3.2.6 The Biodiversity Officer is keen to contact the remaining schools to determine if any work has been progressed, and if not, whether support can be offered to initiate changes to ground maintenance.

3.3 Schools Template

A draft 4 page leaflet has been produced to promote the project to other schools, with the aim it will appear on the Schools Intranet site. The leaflet consists of an outline of the project and a map of a theoretical school with areas showing different management options that can be adopted by a school to increase biodiversity. It will also highlight flagship schools that can be contacted (as well as the NYCC officers) to find out more about the project. The leaflet is supported by 5 guidance notes on how to create the options in the leaflet, e.g. wildflower meadow, cornfield annual bed.

3.4 Howardian Hills Schools

2 schools in the Howardian Hills AONB have contacted the AONB team at Hovingham, asking for support on wildlife planting. The staff have promoted bee friendly options and made links to the NYCC Bees project. These schools are Crayke and Welburn. The Biodiversity Officer visited Welburn School to provide advice, whilst Crayke School have made an application to the AONB's Sustainable Development Fund for an outdoor classroom with bee-friendly landscaping.

4.0 NYCC TENANT FARMS

- 4.1 The Biodiversity Officer has been provided with a database of NYCC tenant farms by Corporate Property, as well as information from Natural England on stewardship uptake in the county. By cross referencing these he has identified a number of NYCC farms not in stewardship, and is in the process of contacting them to find out if they would be interested in Environmental Stewardship options to promote bee and other wildlife friendly options.

- 4.2 The Biodiversity Officer has remained in contact with the Campaign for the Farmed Environment, which is keen to assist the tenant farmers if possible. Assistance is also available via Natural England. For more information on the Campaign, please visit <http://www.cfeonline.org.uk/>.

5.0 SITES OF IMPORTANCE FOR NATURE CONSERVATION

- 5.1 NYCC Countryside Service continues to lead a county-wide programme of managing the networks of Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation, now linked to a new Government Target on the Single Data List for Local Authorities, SDL 160-01. In 2011/12, target for the number of SINC sites in positive management was exceeded by the Natural Environment Team (target of 15 sites, with 18 sites entered into management). These sites will all benefit biodiversity across the county.

5.2 The Biodiversity Officer proposed 2 SINC sites owned by NYCC for monitoring in 2012, which was carried out, one in Ryedale, one in Harrogate district. The sites are still in good ecological condition, so the Natural Environment Team will contact the tenants and confirm current management practices, so they can be counted towards the SDL 160-01 target. 3 wildflower-rich verges in Harrogate district were also proposed for SINC status and all were successful.

6.0 B-LINES

6.1 The charity Buglife has set up a national project to create corridors of high quality wildflower habitat across the county for bees and other pollinating insects, and has chosen to pilot it in Yorkshire, with the majority of the work targeted in North Yorkshire. The Natural Environment Team has worked closely with Buglife's Project Officer to identify potential sites, and Buglife has been successful in achieving £110,000 in funding from the Landfill Tax body SITA Trust, to restore 30 hectares of grassland over six sites south and west of Malton. The project includes 2 SINC sites.

6.2 Buglife is also applying to SITA for a project in Richmond to restore 16 hectares of grassland over 5 sites. The project includes 2 SINC sites, and the Project Officer has been working closely with the Natural Environment Team on this application as well.

6.3 For more information about the project, please visit:
<http://www.buglife.org.uk/conservation/currentprojects/Habitats+Action/B-Lines/The+B-Lines+Project>

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Author of Report: Matt Millington

Background Documents: None