

Cheshire region Biodiversity Partnership

Business Plan

April 2008 – March 2011

Last updated: *March 2010*



Cheshire region Biodiversity Partnership

www.cheshire-biodiversity.org.uk

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1. Introduction

Biodiversity encompasses the whole variety of life on Earth. It includes 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.

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 during the last 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 cause for serious concern, requiring concerted international action to prevent continued loss of biodiversity.

In response to the threats to biodiversity, there is an England Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan that identifies priority species and habitats. The North West has a significant proportion of England's species targets and habitat targets. At the regional level, biodiversity targets have been established for habitats delivering the North West Region's contribution to the UK biodiversity targets.

Local Biodiversity Action Plans

Since 1997 Local Biodiversity Action Plans (LBAPs) have been created by Local Biodiversity Partnerships. These documents are sets of action plans for individual species and habitats, and identify a lead partner who will implement the plan. There has not been a managed approach to this; it has mainly been handled by members of the Partnership. In the past, some projects obtained funding and were delivering benefits for target species or habitats, whilst other plans were outdated and lacked SMART targets.

Between 2006 and 2008 funding from DEFRA (Natural England and the Environment Agency) and the Local Biodiversity Steering Groups allowed regional and local biodiversity managers to work to actually enable delivery and the production of SMART targets for all the LBAP's. These targets can be found on BARS (Biodiversity Action Reporting System) <http://www.ukbap-reporting.org.uk/>. and the Cheshire region habitat targets can be found on the Cheshire region Biodiversity Partnership website <http://www.cheshire-biodiversity.org.uk/useful-resources/>. The appointment of these managers prompted the North West to create six business and communication plans to ensure their managers are focused on delivery and that they work effectively together. Since the UKBAP Review 2007 the number of priority species and habitats has risen. Each of the LBAP's are working on updating and extending their local priority lists to reflect this.

The natural environment and the species it contains have immense value not only in terms of environmental quality but also in terms of social wellbeing and sustainable economic growth. Green Infrastructure, the network of open space, woodlands, wildlife habitat, parks and other natural areas, help to sustain clean air, water, and natural resources which enrich quality of life. A Green Infrastructure Plan provides a way of enhancing biodiversity within an urban area, bringing a wealth of benefits to society which also includes adaptation to climate change within urban environments. Future habitat management must aim to increase the capacity of the natural environment to cope with climate change and therefore to create healthy, resilient ecosystems.

Recent habitat opportunity mapping has generated a spatial awareness in which the priority habitat work can be focussed. Aspects can be seen at a landscape scale, encompassing benefits not only for biodiversity but for economics and society. From tourism and recreation, to job creation and skills development, biodiversity rich environments bring a wealth of benefits to society.

Biodiversity in Cheshire

The Cheshire region occupies the Midland Gap, the low-lying plain between the Pennines in the east and the Welsh uplands to the west. The rivers Dee and Mersey and their wide, level-bottomed valleys delimit the region's western and northern boundaries extending out to the Irish Sea, eventually draining into large estuarine inlets and creating the Wirral Peninsula. Rising from the plain, the mid-Cheshire sandstone ridge effectively divides the county into an eastern and western lowland.

Fertile lowlands cover most of Cheshire, broken up by the rugged mid-Cheshire ridge which runs north-south across the county, and the fringes of the Pennines extending into the far east of the county. In between, rivers, their flood plains and estuaries are a haven for birds, some resident and many more visiting migrants. Cheshire's many lakes and ponds, some glacial in origin and some man-made, make the county a paradise for aquatic life, such as the endangered Great-crested newt (*Triturus cristatus*). Our woodlands include fragments of the WildWood, the ancient forest which covered most of the country in prehistoric times.

Small scale forest clearance was begun by Neolithic man, but it was not until the Iron Age (c700 BC - 47 AD), that large scale removal of tree cover began to make way for agriculture. Forest clearance and the expansion of mixed agriculture continued throughout the Roman period and accelerated in the early historic period. Wood pasture developed where clearings were maintained by grazing domesticated animals.

Woodland now covers only 4% of the Cheshire region, this includes both ancient and secondary woodland (woodland planted after 1600). Cheshire has a comparatively poor woodland cover figure, which is less than half the national average.

The main form of agriculture in Cheshire is dairy farming as the soils, glacial clays and sands deposited during the last Ice Age, are better suited to pasture than to arable. So, grasslands of different forms cover much of farmed areas of the county.



Roadside Verge (Photo: Alun Evans)

Traditional grasslands are made up of many different grass species, along with a great variety of herbaceous flowering species. The latter include Knapweed (*Centaurea nigra*), Betony (*Stachys officinalis*), Bugle (*Ajuga reptans*), Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*), Common mouse-ear (*Cerastium fontanum*), Pignut (*Conopodium majus*), Ox-eye daisy (*Leucanthemum vulgare*), Cats ear (*Hypochaeris radicata*), Meadow vetchling (*Lathyrus pratensis*) and Rough hawkbit (*Leontodon hispidus*). The flowers attract meadow butterflies as well as a range of other invertebrates. Such meadows are a fantastic sight in summer, full of colour and life. Britain has lost more than 95% of its unimproved grasslands and, since 1939, the Cheshire region has lost 99%. In the 1997 Cheshire Grassland Inventory only 860ha of unimproved grasslands were found.

The county of Cheshire (and adjoining areas of NE Wales) have the densest pond landscape in lowland Britain which probably have no equivalent elsewhere in north western Europe. The principle reason for this is the underlying clay, known as 'marl'. When spread on agricultural land marl reduces acidity and increases fertility, so marl was a valuable resource in historical times before chemical fertilisers were widely available, and the practice of digging and spreading marl was widespread. The pits the marl were dug from filled with water and became ponds.

Ordnance Survey maps of the Cheshire region in the 1870s indicated nearly 42,000 ponds. A survey by the Pond Life Project (1995-99) examining aerial photographs (1992-1993 series) found 16,782 ponds, indicating over 60% had disappeared in the last 120 years. Ponds have been lost through natural succession to woodland scrub as well as through infilling.

The extensive saltmarsh and mudflats of the Dee and Mersey estuaries and the adjacent North Wirral foreshore are significant sites for wildlife. These biologically productive habitats, with their characteristic saltmarsh and mud-dwelling communities, are the wintering haunt of tens of thousands of wildfowl and waders in the Cheshire region.

Specifically, the estuaries are internationally important for Pintail (*Anas acuta*), Shelduck (*Tadorna tadorna*), Wigeon (*Anas penelope*), Dunlin (*Calidris alpina*), Oystercatcher (*Haematopus ostralegus*), Redshank (*Tringa tetanus*), Grey plover (*Pluvialis squatarola*), Knot (*Calidris canuta*), Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*) and Teal (*Anas crecca*).



Gatewath on the River Mersey (Photo: Helen Lacy)

The 1995 Cheshire Heathland Inventory, found 71 heathland sites in the administrative county, 26 (96ha) upland sites, comprising 10ha of wet heath and 86.1ha of dry heath, and 45 (60ha) sites of lowland heath, comprising 11ha wet heath and 49ha of dry heath. In addition there are approximately 50ha of heathland on the Wirral peninsula. Upland dry heath occurs mainly in the eastern fringe, together with a small distribution at the southern end of the Central Cheshire Ridge, extending in total to 190ha.

The Cheshire meres form a part of the internationally important North West Midland Meres. Whilst some of Cheshire's meres have originated as a result of subsidence in the area of the underlying salt beds (this is believed to be a factor in the origin of such important sites as Rostherne Mere, Wybunbury Moss and Oakmere), many of the basins were formed as 'kettle holes'. Such sites were created when ice blocks from the retreating ice face were buried in the glacial outwash of clays and sand some 10,000 years ago.

In the Cheshire region fens are often found in a complex of habitat types associated with the meres and mosses as part of the hydrosere succession.

Lowland raised bogs were once extensive habitats, formed in wet climatic phases in the flood plains of major rivers. In the region these habitats were a feature of the river systems at the base of the Pennine fringe, creating large areas such as those at Holcroft Moss and Risley Moss near Warrington, in the Mersey catchment, and at Lindow Moss, White Moss and Danes Moss, further south. Only small fragments of these original habitats remain, covering a total of 159ha.



Delemere Meres and Mosses (Photo: Alun Evans)

An estimated 97% of lowland bogs in England and Wales have been damaged or destroyed. This is due to drainage for agricultural use, peat cutting for fuel in earlier times and extraction for horticultural peat. In Cheshire all areas of lowland raised bog have been disturbed to some extent, although a remnant of Holcroft Moss is thought never to have been cut. Thus conservation of remaining peatlands has become increasingly important, nationally and internationally.

The Area Covered by Cheshire region BAP

The OLD VICE COUNTY OF CHESHIRE forms the area covered by the Cheshire region LBAP (Map 1.). The boundaries of which are still broadly used by the Cheshire Wildlife Trust as their administrative territory and for biological recording purposes by rECOrd. For simplicity, this is referred to as the Cheshire "region".

This area includes the local authority boundaries of:

Cheshire East Council
Cheshire West and Chester Council
Halton Borough Council
Warrington Borough Council
Wirral Council
And the offshore area of Liverpool Bay to the 12 mile limit.

Biodiversity does not, of course, recognise these political boundaries and there is overlap and liaison with other biodiversity action in adjacent areas, particularly the Metropolitan Borough's of Stockport, Trafford and Tameside of Greater Manchester, the Peak District National Park, Staffordshire, Shropshire, Flintshire, Wrexham, the Irish Sea and North Merseyside.

Map 1: Cheshire region Boundary



2. Objectives

This Business Plan and the *Cheshire region Biodiversity Partnership Delivery Matrix* are concerned with delivery of biodiversity projects and activities during the period from March 2008 – March 2011. This plan is concerned with new, significant biodiversity activity rather than current ongoing or historical biodiversity projects.

The objectives of the Business Plan are to:

- Create a plan which is focussed on delivering priorities and targets at a strategic level, set out in a local framework to enable delivery.
- Set out priorities for delivery within a 3 year rolling programme.
- Build on the extensive work undertaken through the creation of Local Biodiversity Action Plans, and to prioritise and accelerate delivery of the most vital projects set out in the Delivery Matrix.
- Enable the Partnership to look ahead, allocate resources, focus on priorities and be ready to act on both problems and opportunities.
- The plan will be a tool for potential investors, managers and stakeholders.
- Create a SMART work programme for the Partnership

3. Vision

Our vision is a Cheshire region richer in wildlife; a place where biodiversity flourishes, where everybody helps to nurture and enhance our biodiversity, and where biodiversity is a natural consideration in policies and in society as a whole.



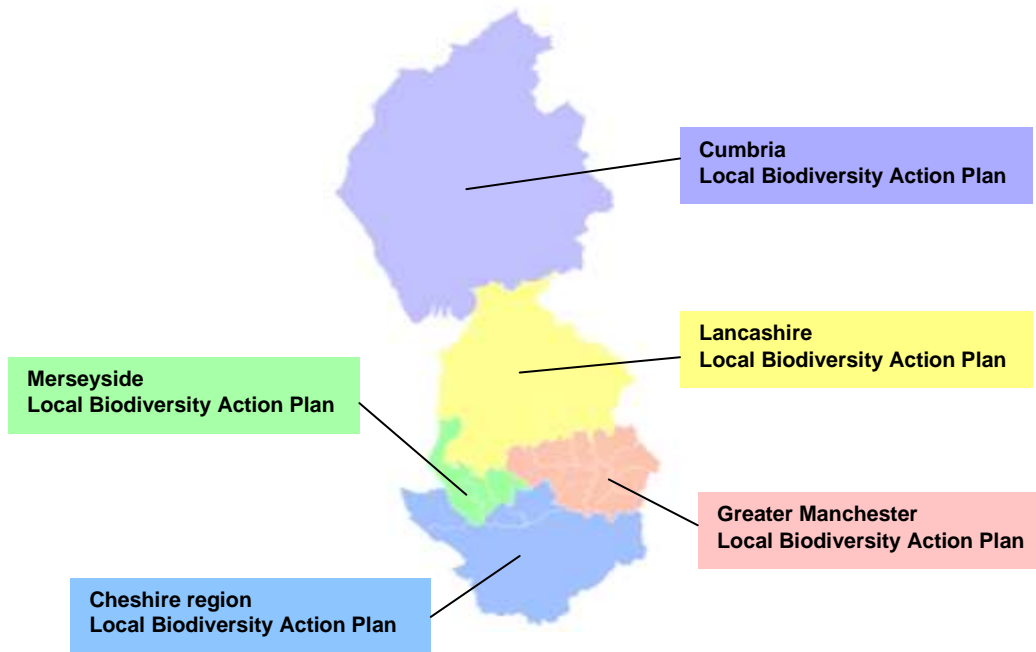
View from Beeston Photo: Helen Lacy

4. Structure and Governance

The Northwest and Local Biodiversity Service

The North West region has a regional and local Biodiversity Service made up of the North West Biodiversity Forum and five sub-regional Biodiversity Groups; Cheshire region Biodiversity Partnership, Cumbria Biodiversity Partnership, Greater Manchester Biodiversity Partnership, Lancashire's Biodiversity Partnership and Merseyside Biodiversity Group. The map below shows the five sub-regional areas.

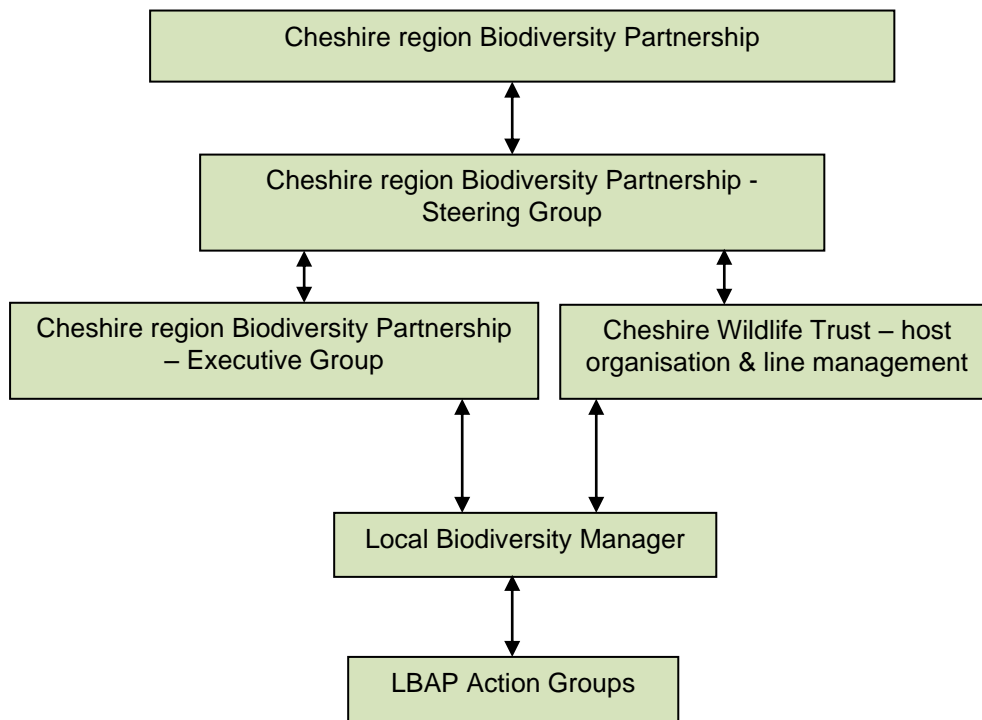
Map 2. North West Local Biodiversity Partnerships



Each local partnership has a Biodiversity Manager who works in coordination with the Regional Biodiversity Manager, who ensures coordination across the local areas takes place and that best practice is shared across the region.

The North West Biodiversity Forum is a partnership of over 25 organisations from the public, business and voluntary sector, covering Cumbria, Lancashire, Greater Manchester, Merseyside and Cheshire.

The Cheshire region Biodiversity Partnership



Steering Group

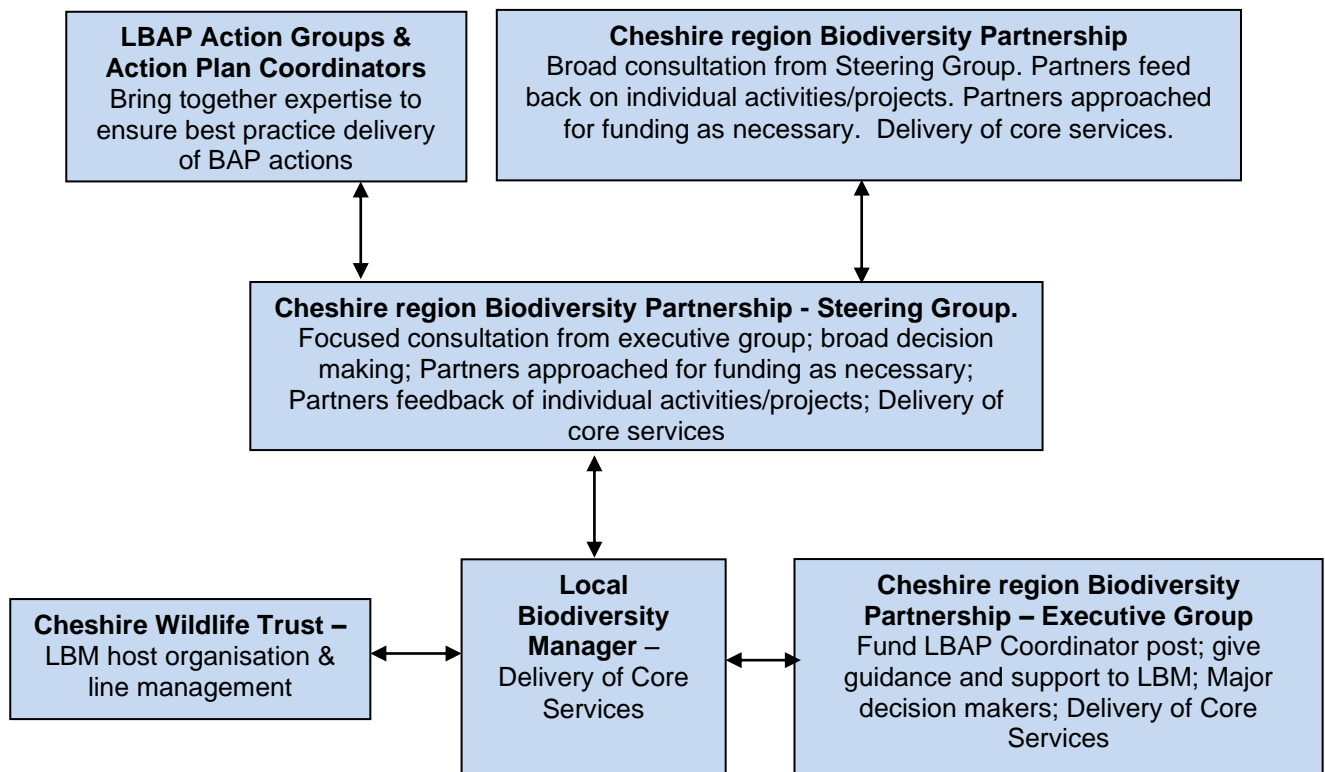
British Association for Shooting and Conservation
Cheshire East Council
Cheshire West and Chester Council
Cheshire Wildlife Trust
Chester Zoo
Environment Agency

Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group
Halton Borough Council
Natural England
rECOrd
Warrington Borough Council
Wirral Council

Executive Group

Cheshire East Council
Cheshire West and Chester Council
Cheshire Wildlife Trust
Environment Agency
Halton Borough Council
Natural England

Governance Structure



A full list of the Cheshire region Biodiversity Partnership’s partners can be found in Appendix 1.

5. Core Competencies

The Steering Group comprises a range of organisations including those whose core work is the protection and promotion of species and habitats, such as Natural England, The Cheshire Wildlife Trust and Chester Zoo, and others whose work has a critical impact on the biodiversity of the county whether through their land ownership, such as the British Association for Shooting and Conservation and the Borough Councils; or through their activities on the land, such as the Environment Agency.

Summary of core competencies:

British Association for Shooting and Conservation

- BASC has 130,000 members nationally, 3000 members in Cheshire of which 270 are volunteers in our *Green Shoots in Cheshire* project.
- Green Shoots is BASC's biodiversity action plan for the shooting community. It aims to identify the BAP priority species and habitats on land under our member's control and implement partnership working projects to conserve these where appropriate.
- BASC have a vital role in extending the countdown process into the wider countryside, on to land previously not surveyed for wildlife, to areas that have been historically closed to partners in the CrBP
- BASC is the only such representative body with its own dedicated conservation department and in addition to a range of conservation expertise can provide specialist advice on wider management tools like predator control in relation to key projects, i.e. Water Vole conservation.
- As part of routine management of shoots, members have demonstrated that they are regularly carrying out hedgerow planting, pond creation and planting wild bird cover, etc all of which contribute enormously to the management of the wider countryside.

Cheshire East Council

- Unitary Council - with responsibilities towards Biodiversity Conservation as per PPS9, Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and European Habitat Regs.
- Contributes to CrBP as landowner/manager of priority habitats and designated sites and potential funder and implementer of LBAP objectives.

Cheshire West and Chester Council

- Strategic planning and development control
- Tree management (TPOs)
- Data management – SBI and SNCV register and habitat inventories
- GIS and aerial photography
- Landowner and manager of designated sites and BAP habitats
- Ecological networks
- Landscape scale initiatives: Sandstone Ridge EConet Partnership (SREP), Weaver Valley Regional Park
- Green Infrastructure
- Stakeholder and community engagement
- Partnership working
- Provision of local funding and securing EU, UK and regional funding
- Links to landowners through projects such as Habitats and Hillforts, REVIVE

Cheshire Wildlife Trust

- Knowledge and experience of securing grants/funds
- Environmental Education and links to schools and young people
- Nature Reserve management including the management of grazing animals
- Nature Conservation expertise and project management
- Links to landowners through Wildlife Sites
- Delivery of BAP habitats and species projects
- Urban and rural wildlife expertise
- Links to local businesses through corporate membership
- 13000 strong private membership
- Media relations and publications
- Natural Know How Training
- Access to ecological consultancy services
- Provision of volunteering opportunities

Chester Zoo

- Specialist knowledge of certain groups - rodents, reptiles and amphibians,
- Ex situ breeding and husbandry skills
- Survey skills - small mammals, riparian mammals, radio tracking.
- Survey equipment - mammal traps, bat detectors, entomological - nets, moth traps, microscopes, radio tracking kit.
- Meeting rooms, lecture theatre, conference and training facilities.
- Zoo estate (400 acres) for ecological research and on site training.
- Vets and veterinary facilities.
- Captive audience – over 1.2 million visitors each year
- More than 30,000 Zoo Members; Zoo magazine going to members quarterly
- Horticultural expertise and propagation facilities.
- Staff for work on projects outside the zoo.
- National/international status and reputation.
- Networking links - Cheshire/North Wales/National/International

Environment Agency

- Act to reduce climate change and its consequences
- Protect and improve water, land and air
- Work with people and communities to create better places
- Work with businesses and other organisations to use resources wisely
- The Environment Agency has agreement on priorities for action for 21 species or species groupings along with 7 habitat groupings in England.

Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group

- FWAG is an independent organisation with charitable status, we have 200 members in Cheshire
- FWAG is the only organisation dedicated to providing conservation advice to farmers and landowners
- We provide vital links to the farming community and have good expertise in agriculture and farming systems
- For farmers Cheshire FWAG undertake: whole farm plans, manure and soil management plans, habitat & species advice, agri-environment advice and grant applications, carbon audits manure and soil testing and protected species surveys

- FWAG has a high level of trust within the farming community and can help deliver the conservation objectives of partner organisations

Natural England

- Government advisor on the natural environment, promoting nature conservation and protection of biodiversity
- Promoting access to the countryside and open spaces and increasing opportunities for everyone to enjoy the natural environment
- Working to reduce the decline of biodiversity and licensing of protected species across England
- Designating Sites of Special Scientific Interest and ensuring their protection and management
- Responsible for the designation of National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and management of National Nature Reserves
- Providing advice on the conservation and enhancement of the landscape
- Experienced at working in partnership with both statutory and voluntary sectors

rECOrd

- Data management
- Species distribution information
- Use of recording and GIS software
- Relationships with the wider natural history community
- Volunteer management
- Training in species identification

Warrington Borough Council

- District Council - with responsibilities towards Biodiversity Conservation as per PPS9, Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and European Habitat Regs.
- Represent the Local Authority as a landowner and manager of priority habitats and designated sites.
- Warrington Nature Conservation Forum, General Secretary
- GIS and aerial photography
- Links to landowners through SINC
- Partnership working

Wirral Council

- Landowner and manager of BAP habitats
- Unitary Authority with responsibility for Strategic planning and development control
- GIS and aerial photography
- Stakeholder and community engagement
- Partnership working
- Ranger service with wildlife education role and visitor facilities

6. Core Services

Each Local Biodiversity Group is committed to delivering 7 Core Services that have been developed in partnership with Defra. These core services provide the structure for this Business Plan. A report is submitted every 6 months to Defra on the delivery of these Core Services.

The 7 Core Services are as follows:

1. Establishing and maintaining a broad partnership

As far as possible, ensure that all relevant sectors are engaged in the local biodiversity partnership.

2. Delivering Biodiversity Action Plan regionally / locally

To deliver regional biodiversity objectives with SMART targets for habitats and species, taking into account national and regional BAP targets and linking with social and economic themes. To work with the partnership to agree a range of projects to deliver the regional biodiversity objectives and targets.

3. Fundraising for BAP delivery

To develop and implement the fund-raising strategy for BAP delivery, for national and local sources of external funding in support of projects and to sustain the funding for the Local biodiversity service in the long term. To maintain an overview of LBAP funding within the Cheshire region and work with other sub-regions and regionally on collaborative funding bids.

4. Reporting and monitoring

To report and monitor progress through using the Biodiversity Action Reporting System (BARS) for the implementation and delivery of actions initiated regionally.

5. Integrating BAP into policy (local or regional)

To integrate biodiversity objectives into relevant sub-regional policies, programmes and strategies. Proactively support local authorities so they are better able to deliver bio-diversity locally and promote the inclusion of biodiversity into Community Strategies and other local plans.

6. Promoting BAP

To promote BAP locally through developing a communications plan with partners to raise awareness in support of biodiversity. Working to increase engagement of local businesses and communities in the BAP process.

7. Representation

To work with partners at regional and national levels of the BAP process. Ensuring the LBAP partnership is represented on the regional biodiversity forum and other relevant regional and national meetings.

7. Implementation

The delivery of the Business Plan will not be the responsibility of any one organisation or body. The Cheshire region Biodiversity Partnership includes over 40 organisations all working to increase the biodiversity value and quality of the area. This Business Plan is shared and owned by the partnership as a whole, and a range of individuals and organisations are vital to its successful delivery.

The delivery of the Cheshire region Biodiversity Partnership Business plan is co-ordinated by the Local Biodiversity Manager working with members of the Partnership and their respective organisations.

8. Delivery

The detail regarding delivery of the Cheshire region Biodiversity Partnership Business Plan is contained within the *Cheshire region Biodiversity Partnership Delivery Matrix 2008-2011* (<http://www.cheshire-biodiversity.org.uk/background/>). This document is regularly updated and reviewed and is a living document which both informs and directs the work of the partnership.

9. Financial overview

Funding for the Cheshire region Local Biodiversity Manager is vital to the delivery of this Business Plan. The funding requirements for the post are outlined below:

Local Biodiversity Manager Post - Funding requirements

Funding sources:

Organisation	Yr 1 2008-09	Yr 2 2009-10	Yr 3 2010-11
NE/EA	21,000	21,000	21,000
Cheshire Biodiversity Group contributions	16,000	16,000	16,000
Total cash contributions	37,000	37,000	37,000

Included in the above there will be in kind contributions from Cheshire Wildlife Trust to an estimated total of £15,000 over three years (based on costs in 2005/06), covering:

- Accommodation and office support;
- Equipment, including safety equipment;
- Training;
- Daily instructions on tasks/roles at place of work;
- Management of individual;
- Coordinating the paying of the individual's salary/sick pay/pension/redundancy.

Management costs £3K p.a. Travel expenses £2K p.a. to be covered by CWT

Chester Zoo provides meeting and conference facilities for the Cheshire region Biodiversity Partnership, and its subgroups, as an in kind contribution to the process.

10. Communications

The work of the Cheshire region Biodiversity Partnership aims to bring partners together to achieve more by working together. Good communication is an essential part of our work. Biodiversity projects contained within the *Cheshire region Biodiversity Partnership Delivery Matrix 2008-2011* (<http://www.cheshire-biodiversity.org.uk/background/>) have specific communications actions attached to them. A separate Communications Plan, (*Cheshire region Biodiversity Partnership Communications Plan 2008-2011*) has been developed that accompanies this Business Plan and can be found at <http://www.cheshire-biodiversity.org.uk/background/>. At a strategic level, our communications activity is as follows:

Purpose of communications

The objectives of the communications plan are to:

- Raise awareness of the CrBAP and threats to biodiversity to key audiences within the Cheshire region;
- To gain funding and support for the CrBAP;
- Ensure the CrBAP plays a full part within the broader UK BAP framework;
- Keep partners informed of CrBAP work;
- Improve representation on the CrBP from all sectors;
- Fulfil the CrBAP's reporting requirements.

11. Monitoring and review procedure

The Cheshire region Biodiversity Partnership meets once every year and receives progress reports from the Local Biodiversity Manager and Partner updates. The Steering Group meets quarterly (April, July, October, January) while the Executive Group meets when necessary.

The Cheshire region Biodiversity Partnership Business Plan will be reviewed yearly, monitored by the Steering Group and endorsed by the Executive Group.

12. Contact information

Local Biodiversity Manager
Cheshire region Biodiversity Partnership
C/o Cheshire Wildlife Trust
Bickley Hall Farm
Bickley Lane
Malpas
Cheshire
SY14 8EF

Tel: 01948 820728

Email: sbennett@cheshirewt.cix.co.uk

Website: www.cheshire-biodiversity.org.uk

Appendix 1. List of Partners

Organisations:

British Association for Shooting and Conservation
British Trust for Conservation Volunteers
BTCV Special Landscapes Project
British Waterways
Butterfly Conservation
Cheshire East Council
Chester University
Cheshire Federation of Women's Institutes
Cheshire Fire & Rescue Service
Cheshire Landscape Trust
Cheshire West and Chester Council
Cheshire Wildlife Trust
Chester Zoo
Country Land and Business Association
Environment Agency
Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group
Forestry Commission
Groundwork Cheshire
Halton Borough Council
Mersey Basin Campaign Action Partnerships
Mersey Forest
Merseyside Police
Nantwich Riverside Project
National Farmers Union
National Trust
Natural England
rECOrd
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
United Utilities
University of Salford
Warrington Borough Council
Wirral Council
Woodland Trust

Individuals:

The following individuals are not employed by any of the partner organisations listed above but are involved with the coordination and/or delivery of specific species or habitat action plans:

Andy Harmer
Bernard Wright
Carl Clee
Hilary Ash
James Hall
John Mycock
Julia Hancell
Julian Whitehurst
Phil Preston
Tony Parker