

Summer 2010
Volume 3 Issue 1

This newsletter is aimed at anyone in the Cheshire region with an interest in biodiversity including site rangers, planners, conservation staff, species recorders, local community groups, families and individuals.

The Cheshire region Biodiversity News is produced two times a year.

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CrBP YouTube Channel

The CrBP now has its own YouTube channel.

Set up in May the channel was off to a flying start with video footage of an otter in Cheshire filmed late April 2010. The 30 second footage sees an otter come right up to the camera highlighting the magnificent feet and an amazing close up of the face.

To visit the channel and see the footage visit

<http://www.youtube.com/user/TheCrbp>



New Species Found in the UK: Bees and Bats

The International Year of Biodiversity 2010 has had a great start with the discovery of new species in the UK. The Southern Cuckoo bumblebee has been spotted in Scotland for the first time in 50 years, near the border with England at St Abbs in Berwickshire. It is black and yellow like other types but the male has distinctive antennae and is named after the cuckoo because it moves into the nests of other bees.

Meanwhile earlier this year a new bat species has been added to the list of Britain's native species. Researchers led by Prof. John Altringham and Prof. Roger Butlin have identified *Myotis alcathoe* or Alcatthoe bat for the first time in the UK. Alcatthoe bat is relatively new to science being first identified in 2001. It is thought that Alcatthoe bat has been here in the UK for generations and has only recently been identified due to its similarity to two other native bat species; whiskered and Brandt's bats. This new discovery takes the total number of bat species in the UK to 17. To find out more visit www.bumblebeeconservation.org.uk and www.bats.org.uk.

New Report on State of UK Biodiversity

The 2010 edition of the UK Biodiversity Indicators has been published by Defra. The 18 indicators are broken down into 34 measures, which vary from monitoring populations of particular species of animals and plants to assessing the sustainability of fishing and agricultural practices and analysing the impact of invasive species.

Overall it's not good news as nearly a third of the 34 measures have shown a deterioration over the long term, and a further third have insufficient data to assess them. The worst affected measures are populations of farmland and woodland birds, populations of specialist butterflies, bat populations and plant diversity. The data also show that the long term threat to biodiversity in the form of invasive species is increasing.

DEFRA Biodiversity Duty Review

DEFRA have undertaken a review of the biodiversity duty contained in section 40 of the NERC Act 2006 – WCO788. Section 40 [1] of the *Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006* requires that every public authority must have regard to the purpose of conserving biodiversity (the biodiversity duty).

The findings of this study demonstrate that, although many public authorities were undertaking work that is relevant to the duty, this cannot be taken to indicate a high overall level of performance relating to biodiversity as, in many areas of work, there were opportunities for further action to implement the duty. Better integration of biodiversity across the whole suite of public authorities' functions is one of the main opportunities for improvement.

The full report can be found at www.defra.gov.uk.

International Day of Biodiversity CrBP Event



Life on the Mersey: CrBP Partnership Event 24th September

To celebrate both the International Year of Biodiversity 2010 and the International Day of Biodiversity, the CrBP held a Wildlife Family Fun Day at Delamere Forest on Saturday May 22nd.

The event was a great success with a whole host of CrBP partners turning up with exciting activities and displays.



Families enjoying the event activities. Photo: Sarah Bennett

The weather was scorching and lots of families turned out to enjoy the activities which also included short walks to go and record the wildlife on site.

CrBP Small Grant Scheme

The small grant scheme funded by a Service Level Agreement with Cheshire West & Chester, Cheshire East, Warrington and Halton local authorities has been re-launched following previous successful rounds of the grant scheme.

The grant scheme is open for applications until the 24th September. Projects must take place within the local authority areas of Cheshire West and Chester, Cheshire East and Warrington or Halton. Projects should contribute towards LBAP Targets and preferably work towards achieving condition of local wildlife sites. To find out more visit www.cheshire-biodiversity.org.uk.



This years CrBP Partnership event is to be held at Wigg Island on the 24th September.

As there is such a lot of activity happening around the River Mersey we thought it appropriate to hear from a host of partners about what's happening and celebrate some of the successful projects taking place. Presentations in the morning will be followed by lunch and then a guided walk around Wigg Island.

Further information will be sent out nearer the date with the opportunity to book your place.



River Mersey. Photo: Paul Oldfield

Mapping New BAP Habitats

Since the UKBAP Review 2007, when the list of BAP habitats and species was extended, the Cheshire region now has five new BAP habitats. These are: Rivers, Inland Rock Outcrop and Scree, Open Mosaic Habitats on Previously Developed Land, Sabellaria Reefs and Estuarine Rocky Habitats.

Whilst waiting for more information from the Rivers BIG before proceeding with mapping that particular habitat, the CrBP is looking for help in mapping where the other habitats are in the region. If you can help, please contact sbennett@cheshirewt.cix.co.uk



Record Brown Rats in Cheshire

Brown Rat - (*Rattus norvegicus*) - send in your sightings! – Dead or Alive all records welcome!

Record is the local biodiversity records centre for Cheshire and offers facilities for the storage, validation and usage of Cheshire based biological data. As a charity and non-profit making organisation, Record provides as wide access as is possible to both species and habitat records for the Cheshire region and provides data upon which ecologists, planners, and other individuals and organisations can base conservation decisions.

Brown Rats are one of the most serious mammalian pests on the planet, spoiling grain and carrying disease, yet they remain one of the most successful. The secret of the brown rat's success lies in its opportunistic way of life and extraordinary ability to reproduce, with a pair multiplying to near 200 in just one year. Brown rats usually have a litter of 11 young, which may be born to a large female in a nest of warm dry material. The female may have as many as 5 litters per year. Originating from Asia, brown rats rapidly colonised Europe in the early 18th century. Brown Rats are also expert jumpers, climbers and swimmers.



Brown rat. Photo: Shirley Freeman

They thrive in a variety of different habitats from woodlands, riverbanks and farmland to rubbish tips, sewers and urban areas. They are a very distinctive species with a thick scaly tail, which is always shorter than its body, coarse grey-brown fur and small finely haired ears. Many people find the brown rat to be vermin, and often put down poison. This maybe the reason why in the last thirty years there have only been 358 records of Brown Rat added to the RECORD database.

“The secret of the brown rat's success lies in its opportunistic way of life and extraordinary ability to reproduce”

BBC news recently reported that the Brown Rat was one of the most invasive mammals in Europe. Swiss researchers found that Brown Rats were having the greatest ecological and economic impact. See over a http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/science_and_environment/10100907.stm for more information.

You can help improve our knowledge and understanding of the Brown Rat population by recording what you see and sending your records to Record. Rat dropping records are also accepted. A record consists of a species name, a date, your name and as much location information as possible. A grid reference or post code is ideal. The keen eyes of amateur naturalists are key to the conservation of many of our threatened species. To send your records go to: <http://www.record-lrc.co.uk>

RECORD

www.record-LRC.co.uk

USE WATER WISELY THIS SUMMER

The North West has had the driest start to the year since 1929. Without substantial rainfall, there is a risk of drought this summer that could impact on both the environment and water supplies.

Despite receiving record-breaking levels of rainfall in November 2009 in Cumbria, the North West's drinking water relies on water from rivers, lakes and reservoirs, which are all sensitive to changes in the weather, responding quickly to heavy rainfall or dry periods.

We have had below average rainfall from December 2009 to June 2010 which means our reservoirs across the region are very low.

The Environment Agency is closely monitoring the impact of this dry weather. Plans are already in place, and we are working with United Utilities to manage water resources in the region, whilst ensuring there is no adverse impact on the environment.



Haweswater Reservoir taken 21st June 2010.
Other reservoirs within the NW including Wales
are in a similar position.



Water is a precious resource, and we urge people and businesses to use water responsibly at all times of the year. For useful hints and tips on how you can use water wisely log on to

www.environment-agency.gov.uk/homeandleisure/beinggreen

Pollution Prevention work in Bar Mere SSSI

Cheshire FWAG has recently undertaken a project aimed at tackling agricultural pollution impacts on Bar Mere SSSI.

The Environment Agency funded project provided advice to 30 farms in the Bickley Brook catchment which arises on the eastern slopes of the Bickerton Hills and drains south towards the mere at Bickley.

The brook currently fails Water Framework Directive standards for phosphorus and suspended solids, and water quality in Bar Mere exceeds SSSI thresholds for phosphorus by over 3 times, severely threatening the ecosystem supported by the mere. Poor water quality impacts observed by Natural England including significant loss of plant life and increasing algal blooms. Soil sediment deposition is also increasing, resulting in extended areas of common reed developing on sediment deposits, which threaten to dominate the mere to the detriment of other species.

“Water quality in Bar Mere exceeded SSSI thresholds for phosphorus by over 3 times”

The catchment has a high proportion of intensively managed dairy farms and issues such as slurry storage capacity and spreadable area for livestock manures affect many farmers in the catchment. The purpose of the visits was to raise awareness amongst farmers of diffuse or point source pollution risks on their farms, and to promote good soil and nutrient management.

Soil sampling was used to map out high phosphate risk fields on the farm, and an action plan identified practical measures to reduce or eliminate these risks. FWAG NVZ Healthchecks were completed to help



Bar Mere. Photo: Amy Zamora

farmers with their cross compliance requirements for management of organic manures and fertilisers. Farmers were advised on measures to reduce risk of soil erosion and run-off, including fencing ditches and watercourses, creating buffer strips along watercourses, and methods for slurry application such as shallow injection, which can be used to reduce the run-off risk. Many farmers are currently renewing ELS agreements, providing an opportunity to increase the contribution from buffer strips and low input grassland options in targeted areas in the catchment.

For more information on the project or resource protection issues, contact nicola.hall@fwag.org.uk.



Artery of Life Project



Local people are being asked to get involved in this new initiative to put residents in touch with the landscapes and wildlife around them, using the upper Mersey Estuary as the focal point.

Lottery funding has been awarded enabling a project officer to take on board this exciting three-year initiative and engage with people to fully utilise the many natural resources and sites around the Mersey Estuary for the benefit of communities, both in an ecological and social sense.

“Gatewarth O.S. Ref. SJ57-87 is situated on the north bank of the River Mersey below Penketh, and is a disused landfill site now being developed as a nature reserve.”

Extensive views across the Mersey, to the north of Fiddlers Ferry take in the surrounding countryside of Runcorn, Moore and the Sandstone ridge, whilst Richmond Bank is nationally important for wildfowl and waders, and especially white-

winged gulls – breeding birds of the high arctic, such as Glaucos and Iceland gull.

In terms of biodiversity the Gatewarth site itself has yielded several ornithological goodies over the years, including Long Eared and Barn owls, overwintering Stonechats and is a great site for the scarce Willow tit, summer days bring the melodic songs of migrant warblers, whitethroats, blackcaps Chiff–Chaffs and Willow warblers are common – around mid June Grasshopper warblers reel close to the paths by the meadows. Floristically the site has common grassland/scrub species Yellow Melilot, Ox-eye daisy, Teasel and Birds foot trefoil, these in turn provide cover and food for common blues, meadow browns and day flying Burnet moths – those pictured mated on the AOL officers hand during a guided walk! As night takes over foxes and a number bat species are found onsite and a diverse selection of Moth species have been recorded.



Burnet moths

We are due to start a public consultation into the future use and management of Gatewarth, and with a WREN bid recently submitted and match funding from other sources we are hoping to develop a community led approach to future site management – with plans for improved access and environmental artwork onsite and a series of public events throughout the next 3 years – our first Artery of Life event in our ‘Extra-ordinary Encounters’ will look at the Pleiades meteor shower – with the help of the Ferry Tavern pub!



Admiring the view

As a traditionally neglected habitat, the management, sympathetically, of the grassland will encourage biodiversity by opening up areas and maintaining a range of swath heights and ages, some disturbed ground will be created to encourage insect diversity – hedges will be layered, screening will be provided for viewing and paths will be improved.

The initiative is the first Artery of Life project strand to look at the future management for biodiversity – our next project for year three is to create a brand new wetland for water voles and farmland BAP species in Runcorn – watch this space for further details.



For further details, and to get involved, contact Anthony on 01928 583905 or e-mail anthony.brandreth@halton.gov.uk And look out for the new Artery of Life.co.uk website online soon!

Environment Agency Projects

Balsam Bashing

The Environment Agency's Mersey Life Project Team have joined forces with the Bollin Valley Partners to deliver a week of balsam bashing events along the River Bollin.

The Big Balsam Bash aims to raise awareness of Himalayan Balsam and the problems it causes. We want to get local people to take action by joining the Big Bash.

A recent mapping study of invasive plant species on the Bollin, funded by the Environment Agency, found dense stands of balsam particularly in the upper and mid reaches of the catchment. It is hoped that a concentrated effort in problem spots will help to eradicate this alien invader.

Invasive species like Himalayan Balsam can increase the risk of flooding, reduce opportunities for angling and other recreational activities, increase river bank erosion and harm our native wildlife.

If you would like to join one of our events please contact Emma Houghton at the Bollin Valley Partnership.



Himalayan Balsam. Photo: Paul Breslin

Emma Houghton
Community Projects Officer
Bollin Valley Partnership
County Offices, Chapel Lane,
Wilmslow, SK9 1PU
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Email: emma.houghton@cheshireeast.gov.uk

European Eel Help

European Eel (*Anguilla anguilla*) numbers across the UK have reduced dramatically over the last 20 years, which is why this species has now been included in the UK BAP. There are many possible reasons for this decline, including changes in sea temperatures, varying ocean currents, barriers to migration and disease.

The European Union has initiated a recovery plan, which has led to the implementation of the Eel Regulations (2009). It provides important guidelines for eel protection, including a closed season on netting, powers to re-stock a proportion of elver (juvenile eel) catches, and greater powers to enforce the building of eel passes over migration barriers.

Rivers in Cheshire contain many barriers which restrict upstream eel migration to vital feeding habitats. The Environment Agency, with support from Defra, have devised Eel Management Plans for each region of the UK, which will help target key areas and highlight local constraints.

The NW Eel Management Plan and fisheries monitoring data has shown the River Gowy to be an important watercourse for eels. The Environment Agency's Operations Delivery Team, based at Winsford Depot, have installed specially designed passes on a number of weirs on the River Gowy, with guidance from our Fisheries and Biodiversity teams.

This will help more eels reach vital feeding habitat upstream, contributing to important conservation and enhancement objectives for this new BAP species in Cheshire.

Duncan Revell
duncan.revell@environment-agency.gov.uk

“Numbers
across the UK
have reduced
dramatically
over the last 20
years”



CW&C Biodiversity Audit

Work is currently underway to produce the Local Development Framework (LDF) for Cheshire West and Chester. The Core Strategy will set out the spatial vision for the area and the broad development principles and proposals that will help achieve that vision over the coming years. To ensure that decisions are based on a robust evidence base we are reviewing the biodiversity information for the borough and the current Local Wildlife Sites systems.



Penny Anderson Associates have been appointed to produce a Biodiversity Audit for this purpose and it will include a Phase 1 field survey of all existing Sites of Biological Importance (SBIs) and Sites of Nature Conservation Value (SNCV) in the borough (some 500 sites). If further funds become available other areas without any formal recognition will be surveyed.

The Audit will also include a review of the impacts of climate change and make recommendations to inform new policies on biodiversity and geodiversity in the Core Strategy.

For further information contact:

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Cheshire West and Chester Council

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Backford Hall, Backford, Chester CH1 6PZ

Visit: cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk

Count Me In!

Count Me In! (CMI!) is a two year wildlife recording project jointly run by Chester Zoo and RECORD and funded by the HLF and EF. The main aims of the project, now well into its second year, are to enthuse and equip participants with the skills to become new wildlife recorders and, in particular, to encourage recording in parts of Cheshire where current records are either absent or minimal – ultimately “Creating Wildlife Recorders of the Future”. With 17 workshops and fun days already ‘in the bag’ the best is yet to come.

All sessions are completely free of charge, including transportation to some of Cheshire's unique wildlife locations, often to sites normally inaccessible to the general public.



The next event in the CMI! calendar is in support of National Insect Week, which runs from the 21st-27th June. On the 20th June we will be taking CMI! afloat for the first time, with Insects Level 1 at the National Waterways Museum in Ellesmere Port. Booking is essential as numbers are limited.

On 11th July we are teaming up with the Wirral Rangers and Liverpool Museum for our Beach Party, with a difference - the first of our family fun days.

All ages are welcome and no experience is necessary, so why not come along and let us Count You In!

For more information, to sign up for our newsletter, keeping you ‘in the picture’ or to order a copy of our calendar, please visit the RECORD website: www.RECORD-LRC.co.uk, email us at: countmein@record-lrc.co.uk

or call 01244 383749.

“Creating
Wildlife
Recorders of
the Future”



Widnes Warth and Saltmarsh Ecosystem Services

An exciting research project was started in April at Widnes Warth, on the Upper Mersey Estuary, investigating methods of increasing biodiversity in saltmarsh habitats.

The research is being conducted by post-graduate researcher, Damian Smith, of the University of Salford in conjunction with the Halton Borough Council and is part of a long term plan to manage saltmarshes to increase their delivery of ecosystem services and biodiversity on the Mersey Estuary's saltmarshes as a whole.



River Mersey. Photo: Helen Lacy

Damian's research will focus on understanding the ecosystem services associated with Widnes Warth marsh i.e. those benefits which marsh ecosystems provide to society which not only add to the basic requirements for living but also increase the value of our lives. The ecosystem service concept provides a link between scientists and policy makers in that ecosystems are valued in a tangible way and was encapsulated in the seminal United Nations' Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, published in 2005, which provided the now accepted and evolving four categories shown in Table 1.



Gatewarth. Photo: Helen Lacy

In saltmarshes, an obvious ecosystem service is habitat provisioning for birds - nesting, migratory and over-wintering that Mersey Estuary marshes are known for. Then there is the cultural service – rich and diverse saltmarshes provide a service to bird watchers, dog walkers and people enjoying just being in the surroundings and the sense of serenity that we know results in such activities.

The project provides an opportunity to evaluate management methods and will identify how management, both manual and through conservation grazing, may best accomplish targets of increasing biodiversity. Certainly other projects have shown how different intensities of grazing can increase or decrease biodiversity as the sward reacts to different pressure. It is envisaged the project will introduce the preferred management option in 2011 as a pilot and will measure how the bird assemblage and vegetation are changed.

Damian is happy to involve interested conservationists and can be contacted at d.j.smith@pgr.salford.ac.uk.

Table 1: Categories of ecosystem services and examples as per the 2005 UN's Millennium Ecosystem Assessment.

Ecosystem service category	Example
Supporting	Nutrient cycling, providing habitat for nature.
Provisioning	Food, timber, fresh water, fibre.
Regulating	Carbon sequestration, flood prevention.
Cultural	Intrinsic value, spiritual, recreation, aesthetic beauty.

Saving the Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary

The Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary (*Bolaria selene*) is a beautiful orangey-brown butterfly which gets its name from the string of "pearls" that run along the outside edge of the underside of the hind-wing. Numbers of this butterfly have undergone a severe decline in England, and it is now a UK BAP Priority Species. Bagmere is home to the only population of Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary in Cheshire.

Bagmere is Cheshire Wildlife Trust's newest nature reserve taking over the lease in May 2009. The site was originally a small lake created by glacial action at the end of the last Ice Age. Over the millennia since then the mere was colonized by Spagnum mosses which gradually filled the lake basin with peat. In the present day there is only a small area of open water at the centre of Bagmere, the rest of the site is bog, fen, marshy grassland and wet woodland. It is home to an extraordinary botanical diversity: 8 different species of Rush and 12 species of Sedge have been recorded there, along with many other wetland plants.



Volunteers removing scrub at Bagmere.

Bagmere is one of a series of peatland and wetland sites across the north west that are of International importance because of their origin and the rare plant communities they support. This is one reason Bagmere has been designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI); the other is that it supports the last known colony in Cheshire of a nationally rare butterfly, the small pearl-bordered fritillary (*Bolaria selene*).

When CWT took on the lease of Bagmere much of the site was covered by willow and birch scrub, the trees absorbing huge quantities of water, drying out the bog and letting more common species colonize. More seriously, they were shading out the smaller marsh plants which are such an important part of the site. The plants under threat include the marsh violet, the main food source for the caterpillars of the small pearl-bordered fritillary, and plants such

as marsh cinquefoil, marsh thistle, ragged-robin and meadowsweet which are all nectar sources for the adult butterfly.

Last winter CWT undertook a massive scrub and bramble clearance over much of the reserve. Lines of trees were left along the fences and ditches, the rest was cut and burnt, leaving wide open glades. Already there are signs of the original wetland plants re-colonizing these areas. But scrub clearance is only a beginning, without further management the scrub will re-appear within a few years. To prevent this we are now grazing this with a small number of our Dexter cattle. We hope that by grazing, browsing and trampling the cattle will prevent the scrub re-growing and allow the delicate plants to flourish. CWT will be undertaking careful monitoring of the site over the next few years to see that the cattle grazing is having the effects we want.

"Acquiring its name from the string of "pearls" that run along the outside edge of the underside of the hind-wing"

The small pearl-bordered fritillary prefers marsh land and clearings in damp woodland. It has a short flight period: in Cheshire the adults are on the wing for the first couple of weeks in June. The male will patrol over potential breeding sites, waiting for the females to emerge. Both sexes are relatively sedentary, so they rarely colonise new sites, which may have contributed to their decline. The caterpillars feed on Marsh violet (*Viola palustris*) and Common Dog-violet (*Viola riviniana*), so the butterfly can only flourish when there are abundant populations of these delicate plants. The caterpillars enter hibernation in August, not emerging again until the following spring. They then pupate, the adults emerging about 10 days later.



Small pearl-bordered fritillary (*Bolaria selene*).

Events

Cheshire East Council

www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/leisure_and_culture/anger_service/ranger_events.aspx

Cheshire West & Chester Council

www.habitatsandhillforts.co.uk/
www.discovercheshire.co.uk

Halton Borough Council

<http://www2.halton.gov.uk/pdfs/tourismandleisure/parksevents0910>

Warrington Borough Council

www.warrington.gov.uk/images/WBC%20Warrington%20Parks_lowres_tcm15-34324.pdf

Wirral Council

www.wirral.gov.uk/events/

Cheshire Wildlife Trust

www.cheshirewildlifetrust.co.uk

Count Me In!

<http://www.record-irc.co.uk/c1.aspx?Mod=Article&ArticleID=Countmeineventscalendar>



2010 is the International Year of Biodiversity are you doing something to promote it?

If so, contact sbennett@cheshirewt.cix.co.uk to add it to the Cheshire list.

Can you help make this events section better?

To advertise your countryside events in the next issue of this newsletter contact sbennett@cheshirewt.cix.co.uk.

The work of the Cheshire region Biodiversity Partnership is coordinated by the Cheshire region Biodiversity Manager who can be contacted at:

c/o Cheshire Wildlife Trust, Bickley Hall Farm,
Bickley, Cheshire, SY14 8EF
Telephone: 01948 820 728

Email: sbennett@cheshirewt.cix.co.uk

Shoreline Management Plan 2

The Shoreline Management Plan 2 (SMP2) sets policies for how the coast will be managed over the next 100 years across the region. It will be used by Local Authorities and the Environment Agency as evidence which will contribute to local coastal plans and strategies.

Consultation response document now online.

The North West England and North Wales Coastal Group (a group made up of Local Authorities, the Environment Agency, Natural England and others) recently consulted with the public about the draft SMP2. We received many responses and have been busy going through them and assessing the comments and suggestions.



There have been several changes to policies across the region as a result of responses received. We have produced a consultation response document which details how we consulted with the public, all the responses received and our comments on these responses (including whether policies will be changed as a result of the consultation). This document can be found at http://www.mycoastline.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=170&Itemid=155. If you do not have access to the internet please contact North West and North Wales Coastal Group, c/o Fiona Crayston, Blackpool Council, Westgate House, Squires Gate Lane, Blackpool, FY4 2TS

SMP2 – the next steps

We are currently making the final changes to the draft SMP2. Once these are completed the document goes to a number of different people or groups to get agreement that it will be used.

- Late summer and early autumn - taken to Local Authority Councillors
- October – taken to the Regional Flood Defence Committee (a group made up of from Local Authorities, the Environment Agency and Defra representatives that steers flood and coastal defence work across the Region)
- December – taken to the Environment Agency's North West Regional Director and the Welsh Assembly Government for final sign off.