



Lowland Grassland HAP Group Meeting 29th March 2006, DWT Office, Belper.

Present:

Dan Abrahams (English Nature), **Chair**
Kieron Huston (Derbyshire Wildlife Trust)
Andy Heath (Bolsover Countryside Partnership, DCC)
David Griffiths (Highways Agency)
Gareth Wilson (Amscott - local agents to HA)
Nick Smith (Derbyshire Wildlife Trust)
Debbie Court (LD Biodiversity Partnership) **Note taker**

Apologies:

Carl Hawke (National Trust)
Tim Brooks (Groundwork Erewash Valley)
Barney Parker (FWAG)
James Couzens (DEFRA RDS)
Adam Kwolek (DEFRA RDS)
Gemma Gregory (Derbyshire County Council)

Dan reminded everyone that the Habitat Action Plan we have for grasslands covers neutral, dry acid and calcareous grasslands. It was completed last year after many months in draft. The Grassland Group had not met since December 2003.

1. Progress towards HAP

The group went through the action plan commenting on actions that have been completed and updating the status of actions. It was agreed that Debbie would update the action on BARS **Action: Debbie**

Grassland information:

English Nature is looking at updating the county Grassland Inventories which are now 13 years old. For lowland Derbyshire the Inventory only contains grassland sites within SSSIs. Kieron said that the semi-natural grassland layer that Derbyshire Wildlife Trust (DWT) has put together contains about 750 sites, only a third of which have information on status and condition.

Action No. 5 There was discussion on which organisations had and should have a copy of the semi-natural grassland layer. Currently Derbyshire County Council, DWT, English Nature had copies. Discussion took place as to whether Local Authorities should have copies. Kieron was concerned about the possible implications this may have on the DWT planning work. Dan said that he would be prepared to respond to planning application issues on semi-natural grassland that was outside the remit of DWT's Service Level Agreement with the local authorities.

Kieron to check the current GIS situation with the National Forest, Forestry Commission and DEFRA RDS **Action: Kieron**

The Highways Agency/Amscott may find the layer useful for the M1 and Trunk road corridor. Gareth will find out whether they already have that information as part of their data trawl. **Action: Gareth**

Action No. 6 is to have a GIS layer/register of sites that could be used as a seed source for grassland creation/restoration projects. It was agreed that the Value in Meadows Project would start this and request further sites from other LBAP partners. **Action: Nick**

Action No. 9 It was agreed to alter this action to surveying 50% (873ha) of the resource. DWT surveyed 132.65ha (2003) and 79ha (2004) of semi-natural grassland to Phase II level in the LBAP area. Kieron to send Debbie a list of sites surveyed in 2005 **Action: Kieron**

Action No. 11 It was agreed to have a GIS layer/list for created grasslands (in the last 25 years) and one for restored grassland sites. Debbie will start the creation one with information from the mineral sites and DEFRA and National Forest. **Action: Debbie**

Action No. 15 It was agreed that partners would submit student projects (BSc, MSc and PhD) to Debbie who will circulate then to relevant Universities etc **Action: All**

Action No.16 Kieron agreed to write something on monitoring for next meeting **Action: Kieron**

Action No. 17 Currently there is no link between the DWT grassland database and DEFRA's system so that tracking species-rich grassland that is in CSS and HLS etc.
Nick Smith to talk to James Couzens about this. **Action: Nick**

Action No. 20 There is currently a moratorium on English Nature declaring any new SSSI's unless the site is under urgent threat. Therefore we should create a list of sites that could be suitable for SSSI designation. Dan to compile list **Action: Dan**

Action No. 22 HLS targeting still needs a bit more refining to get small pockets of grassland in. Are DWT consulted on HLS applications that involve semi-natural grasslands? Nick and Kieron to talk to DEFA RDS **Action: Kieron and Nick**

Action No. 23 About half of the grassland SSSI's in the LBAP area are in favourable condition. Dan to give figures to Debbie for BARS **Action: Dan**

Action No. 37 The Value in Meadows Project will be doing awareness raising as part of the work programme. **Action: Nick**

2. Road Verges

Following a meeting between DWT, Peak District National Park Authority (PDNPA), the Biodiversity project officer and the Highway Engineers at Derbyshire County Council 30 road verges will be managed for nature conservation from this year. 22 verges in the Peak District and 12 outside the Park will be marked by posts and have the sign opposite on them. These verges will have prescribed management which will be written down and passed through to the contractor. The verges will be put on a GIS layer which will be checked as part of any utility company inquiry. The PDNPA have produced a flier explaining about the Road Verge Project. This will help achieve targets in the Lowland Derbyshire Grassland HAP, Peak District LBAP as well as the National Forest BAP.



The Highways Authority is also managing some areas of grassland on the verge for nature conservation (including along the A38, M1 Junction 29 meadow, and the Kingsway Roundabout on the A38) and agreed to use the signs too to give continuity across the county. Debbie will order 300 signs.

More road verges will be added to the list every year.

3. Value in Meadows Project

Derbyshire Wildlife Trust's 'Value in Meadows Project' has been funded by the Esmée Fairburn Foundation and English Nature's Countdown 2010 fund. It is currently fully funded for 2006/7 and partly funded for 2006/7. Nick Smith, the Project Officer has now started, although the Project officially starts on 1st April. The Project has two main target areas but it will not work exclusively in these.

The areas are:

1. Between Carsington Reservoir and Shining Cliff Woods, south of Wirksworth and north of Turnditch. This area contains 64 known semi-natural grassland sites.
2. Between Tansley and the A61, south of Clay Cross and north of Crich. This area contains 79 known semi-natural grassland sites.

The Project targets include:

- Surveying 40 sites to Phase II level
- Secure management on 25 neutral grassland sites
- Secure management on 10 dry acid grassland sites
- Increase awareness of the value of species-rich grassland
- Involve volunteers
- Set up a seed register

The main objective is to get sites into HLS or get verbal management agreements.

4. Feedback from the UK Grassland HAP

Debbie attended the UK LBAP Conference last week where Clare Pinches from the EN Grassland Team gave a presentation on a project that was funded by EN, DEFRA and JNCC. They surveyed 484 grassland sites in England, 250 sites were in agri-environmental scheme and the rest were not. The results showed that 27% of the sites in agri-environmental schemes were in favourable condition and 14% of the sites outside agri-environmental schemes were in favourable condition. The main threats were undergrazing and agricultural improvement.

When the conference is written up Debbie will circulate details of the presentation **Action: Debbie**

5. Awareness Raising

The Wild About Grassland Project (Groundwork and DWT) had received money from EN's Countdown 2010 fund. One of the elements of the Project is to host a grassland seminar Tim Brooks from Groundwork wants to know which year in the work programme to put it in. This can be done jointly with the Value In Meadows Project. Tim/Kieron to liaise with Nick to sort out timings.

Action: Nick and Kieron/Tim

Debbie is proposing to have Grasslands the theme for the Lowland Derbyshire LBAP Forum on 14th September. There are a number of presentations arranged for the morning, including Value In Meadows, National Trust's arable reversion at Hardwick and the Road Verges Project. The afternoon session of workshops etc is still to be finalised.

6. Priorities for 2006

Highways Agency: Trying to sort out finances for a slipped embankment on the A38 near Hilltop Farm. Continued management of Kingsway Island and Junction 29 Meadow.

Derbyshire Wildlife Trust: Survey work as part of Wildlife Sites System and Value In Meadows Project. Also to work with Groundwork Erewash to revise the SITA bid which will match the Countdown 2010 money.

Bolsover Countryside Partnership (BCP): Continue scrub manage along the Teversal Skegby cutting, continue management of grassland on Pleasley Pit and other sites in Bolsover. Also to work with BCP partners to resolve issues and achieve management at Woollen Meadows, Creswell.

English Nature: To get SSSI grassland into HLS.

National Trust: To carry out arable reversion on 10ha of land at Hardwick Hall. Under Countryside Stewardship the Trust sowed 15ha of arable reversion last year using locally sourced seed/hay.

7. Funding

There was discussion of putting together a SITA bid for grassland work in the Bolsover, Chesterfield and North East Derbyshire area. DWT registered their interest in the proposal, other partners could include Derbyshire County Council, Bolsover District Council, Chesterfield Borough Council, Creswell Crags, Highways Agency, English Nature and Groundwork Creswell.

Debbie agreed to arrange a meeting so that a bid could be submitted before the next deadline of 29th June 2006

Action: Debbie

11. Date of next 12th October 2pm at Derbyshire Wildlife Trust's office, Belper

Debbie Court
30th March 2006.