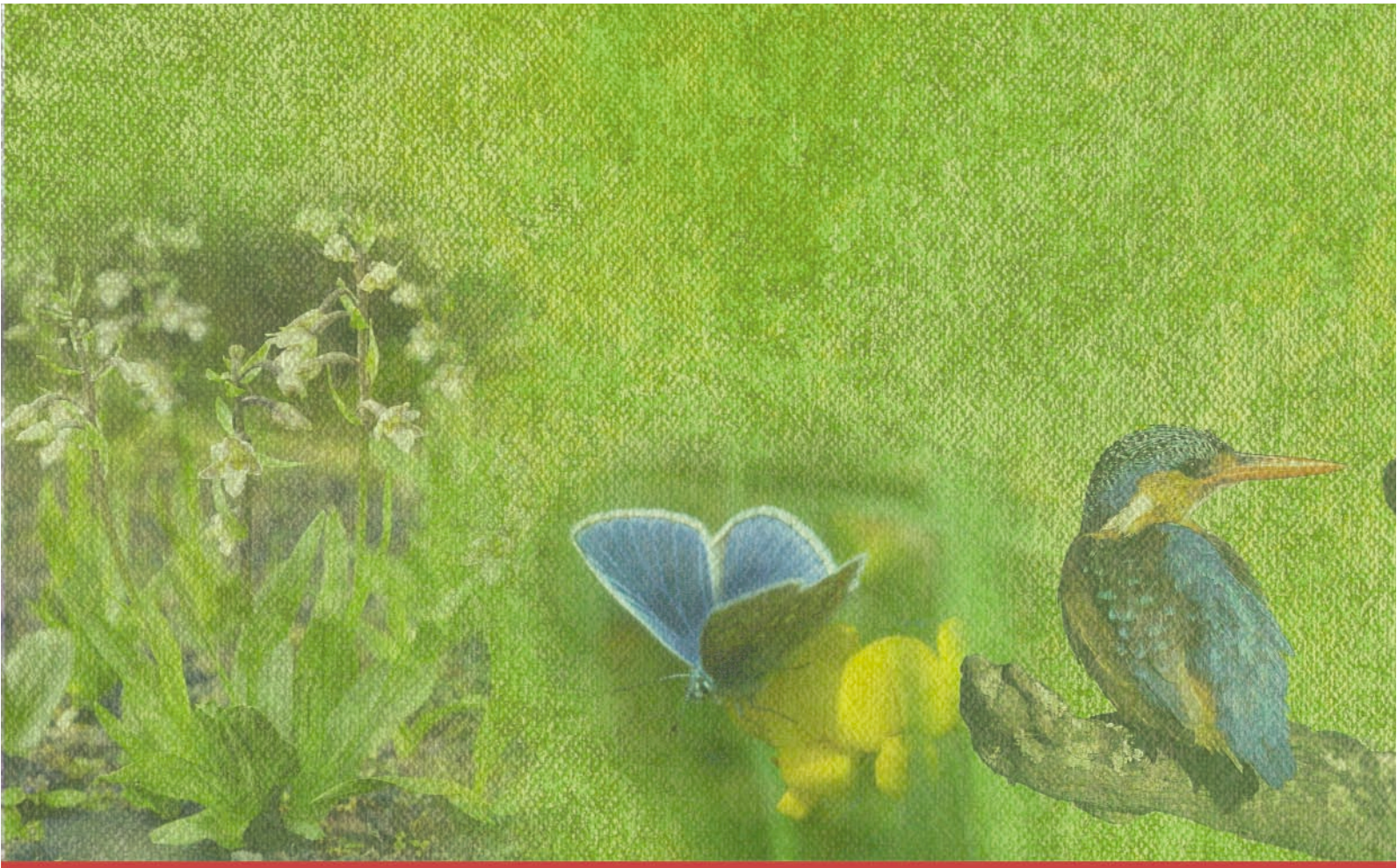

An introduction to the

Kirklees Biodiversity Action Plan

Priority for managing habitats and species in the Kirklees district

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What is Biodiversity?

Biodiversity is short for biological diversity. It refers to the variety of life on earth, from the largest species of mammals and biggest of trees, down to the smallest of plants and most microscopic of bacteria. Humans are part of this web of life.

The Importance of Biodiversity

Many people acknowledge that wildlife is important in its own right. However, the diversity of life - biodiversity - is also important for numerous other reasons related to human lifestyle and needs.

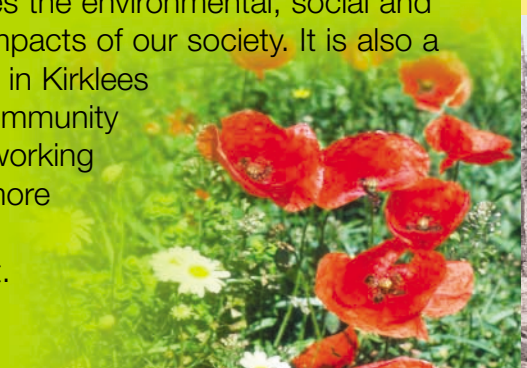
For many, wildlife contributes to their quality of life and its existence is beneficial to human health. We are also dependent upon biodiversity for our food, for our medicines and for the materials we use in our everyday lives, from toothpaste to tables. What is happening to the natural world can also sound the alarm that tells us all is not well with our own living environment.

In addition, a healthy, natural environment is a wealth generator. Most of us want to live and work in an attractive environment and will pay a premium to do so. Even more, we want to visit such areas for relaxation, recuperation and recreation.

Other benefits of managing land for biodiversity include

- Reduced flooding as rain water run-off is slowed down;
- Reduced soil erosion from agricultural land;
- Reduced pollution levels in rivers and other water courses;
- Can help to reduce greenhouse gases in the atmosphere so helping to reduce climate change;
- Wildlife as a monitor of climate change.

Biodiversity is therefore a key element in an environmentally sustainable economy, one that balances the environmental, social and economic impacts of our society. It is also a key element in Kirklees Council's community strategy in working towards a more 'attractive' environment.



Why a Biodiversity Action Plan?

In Kirklees - as across the rest of the UK and the world - wildlife is in decline. The populations of many species are falling dramatically because their habitats are either being destroyed or modified in a way that means wildlife cannot use them.

In some cases, we are over exploiting biodiversity resources so that ultimately they will not be available at all - cod in the North Sea and mahogany trees from the tropics, for example. Also, the impact of genetic engineering is almost impossible to assess.

But not all is doom and gloom!

Some things are changing for the better and the outlook for certain species, which a few years ago were in serious decline, is now hopeful because specific actions were taken to reverse declines.

We can repeat these successes with other species and habitats. We should do this not just for the sake of wildlife but also for our own quality of life and a truly sustainable economy.

A Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) sets out the priorities for habitats and species and how practical measures can be implemented to achieve the conservation of our biodiversity heritage.

National and Local Biodiversity Action Plans

In 1993, the UK government consulted with over three hundred organisations throughout the UK and held a two day seminar to debate the key issues raised at a Biodiversity Convention. The product of this was the launch of 'Biodiversity: the UK Action Plan' in 1994.

The report identified 59 broad activities for conservation work over the following 20 years (the '59' steps) and recommended that a steering group be created in order to take the work forward. It also established some fundamental principles for future biodiversity conservation in the UK. These recognised the need for;

- Partnership action which involves people from public, private and voluntary sector.
- Targets for species population recovery and habitat restoration.
- Co-ordinated policies so that development does not conflict with wildlife conservation.
- Developing ways of managing ecological information more effectively.
- Gaining the support and understanding of the public for wildlife conservation.

Building on these recommendations, Local Biodiversity Action Plans (LBAPs) were developed to implement conservation action for priority habitats and species, and locally important wildlife sites. The content of LBAPs are informed and guided by national targets so their implementation is firmly linked to national priorities.

The Kirklees Biodiversity Action Plan has taken on board these ideas and added to them to reflect the distinctiveness of the Kirklees District. This provides a focus for local initiatives and the regional importance of its wildlife.

The Priorities of the Kirklees Biodiversity Action Plan

Considerable work has been undertaken by the Kirklees Biodiversity Steering Group to identify the key habitats and species which should be prioritised for remedial action. (see separate panel for more details about the Biodiversity Steering Group)

Based largely on the priority species identified in the UK BAP, but supplemented by species of regional importance present in the Kirklees district, a comprehensive list of over 70 different species has been prioritised for action. Some of these priority species are being targeted through **Species Action Plans** to protect, enhance and encourage their continued existence in the Kirklees area.

The remainder of these priority species tend to be associated with particular types of habitat. For this reason, the conservation of the priority species is best achieved through the implementation of **Habitat Action Plans** . Within the Habitat Action Plans, many other non-priority species are also likely to benefit. A summary of those species and habitats for which action plans have been produced can be found in the following section.

Kirklees Priority Species

Species for which Species Action Plans have been developed.

- Water Vole
- White-clawed crayfish
- Great-crested Newt
- Red Wood Ant
- Floating Water Plantain
- Pillwort
- Marsh Helleborine

Species where further work is being undertaken to assess their status in Kirklees

Otter -	may re-colonise our rivers in the next few years
Dormouse-	a small population may be present in the district
Killarney Fern -	could be present within the district

Also a number of insects and fungi are being considered as they have been known to be present but have not been recorded recently.

Kirklees Priority Habitats

Habitats given priority status and for which action plans have been produced

- Blanket Bog
- Upland Heath
- Upland Oak Woodland
- Upland Mixed Ash Woodland
- Ancient Woodland
- Lowland Acid Grassland
- Species-rich Hedgerows
- Species-rich Grassland (Hay Meadows)
- Lowland Heath
- Reedbed
- Cereal Field Margins
- Scrubland
- Semi Natural Grassland
- Riverine habitats

Habitats for which Action Plans have been Developed

The Biodiversity Action Plan is focusing its work on managing and improving key priority habitats for the benefit of plant and animal species living within these areas. With this approach, managing a particular habitat can bring benefits to many species, beyond the priority species.

In addition to the UK priority habitats, Scrubland, Wet pasture and Rough Grassland are important for the extensive variety of life that they support. Although no specific UK action plans have been developed for these habitats, they are regarded as important local habitats.

Blanket Bog

The wettest parts of the UK are important in global terms for the development of blanket bog. In Kirklees this habitat is found on the high moorland plateau, and is some of the most south westerly in Europe. The vegetation consists of acid loving plants and mosses, which help create the peaty soils. The habitat is important for a range of breeding birds such as the golden plover.

Heathland

The UK has a significant proportion of European heathland. In Kirklees it mainly occurs in the dry moorland slopes where water quickly drains away. The vegetation is dominated by heather and bilberry providing an ideal breeding habitat for a variety of bird species. Heathland in more lowland areas often has a greater number of species.

Woodlands

Remaining woodlands occur frequently on steep valley sides within the Kirklees area, particularly in the south west of the district. Those which have retained their semi-natural character often have a rich diversity of wildlife. Although attractive at any time of year, those in the lowlands are at their best in spring when bluebells are in flower.

Species-rich hedgerows

Ancient hedgerows tend to be the most species-rich and, if well managed, may have many species normally associated with woodlands. They are important for wildlife species which are on the UK Biodiversity Action Plan priority list and can form important corridors between other habitats, so that wildlife does not become isolated in particular areas.

Meadows

A meadow full of wildflowers is one of the most spectacular sites in the British countryside. Meadow characteristics vary depending upon the soil type and where they are. Hay meadows are important for farmland birds and mammals such as skylarks and brown hares, as well as numerous insects. Those on upland farms may be important feeding areas for the threatened twite.

Lowland dry acid grassland

This habitat is often found mixed with heathland. The dry, acid soils are low in nutrients and distinctive plant communities develop, which are tolerant of such conditions. Some of these can be species-rich. In the more extreme soils, even the tolerant plants may struggle to survive, in which case mosses and lichens often thrive. Some of the invertebrates which occur in acid grassland are specialist species which do not occur in other types of grassland.

Cereal field margins

Cereal fields once harboured a great variety of plants and insects and were strikingly colourful. They offered cover and food for farmland birds and mammals. In order to help farmland wildlife such as the grey partridge, efforts are being made to recreate similar conditions around field margins. Cereal growing in Kirklees occurs mostly in the east of the district.

Reedbeds

Reedbeds are wetlands dominated by reeds and can support highly specialised species. Within Kirklees reedbeds tend to be small and isolated although there is scope to create larger areas of the habitat in the main river valleys, particularly along the Calder.

Scrubland

Scrub consists of open grassland with a scattering of shrubs and possibly a few trees. The density of shrub cover may vary greatly and there may even be wet areas and ponds present. As well as butterflies, moths and other insects a range of priority species use scrubby areas. Where ponds are present, scrub is good habitat for amphibians.

Semi Natural Grasslands

Semi natural grassland is often characterised by the presence of rushes, sedges and marshy areas. It is particularly important for a range of priority species, like breeding grassland birds. This is especially the case where such habitats occur around the edges of moorland.

Riverine habitats

Rivers form an important, and often diverse habitat particularly if bordered by other semi-natural areas. Also, they are frequently the most significant wildlife corridors through urban areas. Through improved and careful management we can make our waterways much more attractive to both wildlife and people.

Species for which Action Plans have been developed

Species action plans have been produced for 7 species in the Kirklees BAP. Over time, the Kirklees BAP will be updated as more information becomes available. Species Action Plans have been developed for the following;

Photo: British Waterways

Water Vole

The water vole inhabits small water courses, burrowing into the banks and feeding on the surrounding vegetation. In the UK, the population has declined by over 90% in recent decades. It is on the brink of extinction in Kirklees, primarily due to the presence of the North American mink, which preys on it.

White-clawed Crayfish

Although often associated with rivers, within Kirklees this species occurs in some ponds and the Huddersfield Narrow Canal. It is generally active at night and during the day it shelters in the stone retaining walls of canals and mill ponds. The species is threatened because of the introduction of the North American crayfish which is now also found within Kirklees.

Red Wood Ant

This species is more widespread in southern England. Many smaller colonies in the north of England have been lost and the only existing nests in Yorkshire and Humberside occur in Kirklees. It is found in woodland and builds large nests from pine needles. The ants farm aphids and feed on the honeydew.

Floating Water Plantain

Floating Water Plantain is a scarce European freshwater plant. In Kirklees it is abundant in places, particularly around the canal system, where British Waterways has undertaken an extensive conservation programme. It grows in more open aquatic habitats and its survival is dependent upon some degree of disturbance. At some sites it has been lost because of the presence of more invasive plant species.

Great Crested Newt

This large newt (around 125mm long) is the least common newt species and is specially protected. Although it breeds in ponds, the surrounding habitats are also vitally important. It is known to occur at a few sites in Kirklees, but there may be some colonies which remain 'undiscovered'.

Pillwort

Pillwort is an internationally threatened species with a stronghold in the UK. However, it has been declining rapidly since 1970 and has been lost from many counties. It has been discovered at one marshland site in Kirklees where its survival is threatened by Crassula, an invasive plant from Australia.

Marsh Helleborine

Marsh Helleborine is an orchid, which normally grows on alkaline soils. Kirklees holds the only known plants within West Yorkshire, where it occurs within a chemical works, growing in lime wastes disposed of in the past. Orchids are frequently found around disused quarries, industrial sites and other 'brownfield' sites

Marsh Helleborine

What Action is being implemented?

A considerable number of sites have been identified which, with agreement of land owners and through careful management of their habitats, are helping to protect, conserve and encourage many of the Kirklees priority species and habitats.

The type of work being undertaken includes:

- Surveys to identify the whereabouts of priority species and habitats within the district and the mapping of all this information.
- Work to increase the legal protection of habitats and species within kirklees by looking at designating more areas.
- Specific conservation work on priority species identified within the action plan to ensure their continued survival.
- Work with farmers to improve the management for wildlife on farmland.
- Work with a variety of landowners and businesses across the district to bring about improved management of important habitats and help them access funds to enable this to happen.
- Work with numerous community groups to improve the management of urban greenspace for wildlife.
- Work with schools and young people to foster a more responsible attitude to wildlife in the future.
- Monitoring the impact of conservation work to ensure that it is effective and beneficial to the target species and habitats.
- Kirklees Council is also exploring ways of improving the management of its land for wildlife.

New sites are continually being assessed for the development of management plans, and all sites with potential for management are being mapped using a Geographical Information System (GIS). This allows the presence of priority habitats and species to be quickly evaluated.

By May 2002, 390 Hectares of land had been assessed for its wildlife potential while £492,000 of external funding had been brought into Kirklees for practical action to encourage biodiversity.

Mapping Habitats and Wildlife

Essential for the development and monitoring of the BAP, is comprehensive information on the status and location of habitats and species within the Kirklees District. Use of a Geographical Information System allows sophisticated analysis of a wide range of information, from the location of individual species to district wide habitat mapping from aerial photographs.

The GIS is an essential tool in supplying information for strategic management of the BAP. It gives summary information for the whole of the Kirklees District 409Km^2 based on a grid of 2km x 2km squares. In addition, specific site maps can be produced to aid in the production of detailed site management plans.

The Kirklees Biodiversity Steering Group

The Kirklees BAP is managed by a steering group which includes representatives of those groups listed below.

To carry out the work which needs to be done, we need the help of many people and organisations, in particular landowners, farmers, foresters and other land managers.

Encouragingly, some sites are already being managed sensitively for wildlife, helping us to meet our targets.

Everyone can help to make space or to provide for wildlife, in gardens, parks and work place as well as in the wider environment - all it takes is sharing a little knowledge and making a commitment!

Organisations Working to Protect and Enhance Biodiversity in Kirklees

BTCV
British Waterways
Colne Valley Trust
Denby Dale Parish Environment Trust
English Nature
Environment Agency
Environmental Alliance
Environment Concern
Huddersfield Birdwatchers
Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group
Forestry Commission
Kirklees Council
Kirklees Wildlife and Landscape Advisory Forum
National Trust
Royal Society for Protection Birds (RSPB)
Spen Bird Group
White Rose Forest
Yorkshire Wildlife Trust
Yorkshire Forum

Further information about biodiversity and the UK Biodiversity Action Plan can be found at the following websites:

www.ukbap.org.uk - information about national habitat and species action plans and contacts for local biodiversity action plans.

www.english-nature.org.uk - from English Nature's website you can access data about designated sites.

www.ukbiodiversity.net - the website for the National Biodiversity Network. Includes a 'species gateway' to access information about particular species.

www.yhbf.org - the Yorkshire and Humberside Biodiversity Forum website.

We are particularly keen to hear from farmers and other landowners who would like advice in managing their land for wildlife. For advice and any further information, contact:

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