

Action plans for Common Themes

The action plans for individual species, habitats and geological features, presented in this document relate specifically to the conservation and enhancement of those elements of our biodiversity and geological resource which are in most urgent need of conservation attention, and are therefore highly focused. For example, in the plan for dormouse actions regarding the provision of advice to land managers refer only to the advice which is required to conserve the dormouse. This targeted approach is not a fault of the biodiversity action planning process but is a necessary element of it and ensures that particular conservation priorities are incorporated into action on the ground.

Certain themes run through many of the individual action plans. For example, many of the plans call for the continuation and improvement of agri-environment schemes (as they relate to the feature in question) or the need for increased availability of information on the distribution of a species. This section identifies these “Key Themes” and proposes a plan of action that is required to address them. Furthermore, it identifies those themes in need of conservation attention but which are not addressed in individual action plans. Action Plans for Common Themes apply not only to the features selected for individual action plans, but to all that is valued in the biodiversity and Earth heritage resource of the County, the rare and the common alike.

Action Plans for Common Themes are organised under the following headings:

1. Data and information
2. Legislation and planning
3. Policy for the wider environment
4. Public awareness and involvement
5. Land management and advice

1. Data and information

The Issues

- A sound knowledge of the biodiversity and geological resource of the County is an essential starting point for the meaningful and effective implementation of conservation measures.
- Although Devon is widely acknowledged as having a tremendous wildlife and geological heritage, this resource is often poorly documented. The information which does exist is disparate, held by many separate bodies and individuals with little coordination between them or published in a wide range of different journals or other works. Those who need to access information in the interests of nature conservation have been faced with a daunting task in trying to locate all such sources, in the absence of a single point of reference for biodiversity and geological information.
- The development of a Biodiversity Records Centre based at the Devon Wildlife Trust has helped is beginning to rectify this situation, by generating partnerships between funding bodies and data holders. Substantial investment and effort is required in the coming years to secure and build upon this progress.
- No such equivalent resource exists, however, for the County's geological heritage and this remains a major challenge for the future. Devon now needs a Geological Records Centre where site-related data including monitoring information can be not only stored, but also be made available to those that might need it (including researchers, educationalists, conservation agencies and environmental consultants).

Objectives

1. Ensure the easy availability of quality data on habitats, species and geological features, and the co-ordination of sources of information.
2. Establish a co-ordinated programme for the survey and monitoring of species, habitats and geological features, to update and improve our knowledge of Devon's natural environment.

Actions and targets

Action	Key Partners
1. Maintain a funded, fully-functioning Devon Biodiversity Records Centre. Target: ongoing	DWT; NE; LAs; DBRC
2. Collate existing information on habitats, species and geological features. Target: ongoing	DBRC; Las; DRIGSG
3. Review current information to identify gaps in knowledge, and develop a co-ordinated programme of monitoring in Devon. Target: 2007	DBRC; DWT; NE; RSPB; EA; LAs; SWRBP; DRIGSG
4. Target resources towards survey of priority habitats & species. Target: ongoing	DWT; NE; RSPB; EA; LAs; SWRBP
5. Complete the programme of surveys for the identification of County Wildlife Sites and County Geological Sites. Target: 2008	DBRC; LAs; DWT; DRIGSG
6. Establish a Geological Records Centre for Devon. Target: 2010.	DRIGSG; DCC; museums; universities.
7. Develop mechanisms to ensure information can be best used to deliver effective conservation action. Target: ongoing	DBRC; LAs

2. Legislation and planning

The issues

- Development plans and the development control process are important arbiters of the fate of biodiversity and geological heritage. The degree to which strategic planning policies reflect the needs of bio- and geodiversity conservation, and the degree to which planners and development control committees are aware of bio- and geodiversity issues, have fundamental consequences for land of high bio- and geodiversity importance affected by development proposals.
- Conventional approaches to evaluating land proposed for development have tended to work against the interests of bio- and geodiversity, given that the conventional economic value of land, and its bio- or geodiversity value, tend to be inversely proportional. Only in the last dozen years has nature conservation begun to gain a place amongst the factors taken into consideration in the determination of planning decisions.
- The recognition of bio- and geodiversity in the planning process has tended to be largely in the context of statutory nature conservation designations only, with land outside statutory sites afforded less protection. Though this approach helps to ensure that land of the very highest importance for bio- and geodiversity receives fullest consideration in the face of development threats, it does not enable a fuller, more holistic approach to be taken to ensuring that the planning system supports the interests of bio- and geodiversity conservation. The development of local bio- and geodiversity action plans such as this one offers the opportunity for planning policy formulation to be linked more closely with bio- and geodiversity priorities, in order that planners can frame their policies in the context of a strategic understanding of the needs of the natural environment.
- The development of local BAPs offers a valuable framework to assist all levels of strategic resource planning in formulating effective policies which contribute to biodiversity conservation. Not only development plans, but also catchment-based management plans, Strategies for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, integrated forestry strategies and site management plans are amongst the strategic planning exercises which stand to benefit from a clearer biodiversity context in which to develop.
- A number of Geological Conservation Review sites remain to be formally notified as part of statutory Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) in Devon, although the great majority of these lie within existing sites notified for other reasons. In addition, at a few sites the scientific interest lies largely outwith the current SSSI boundary, for instance due to the lateral movement of quarrying operations. Another related issue is the relationship between the GCR/SSSI coverage and the County Geological Site (i.e. RIGS) network. The latter now includes sites of clear national or

international importance, which according to the GCR selection criteria established by the JNCC should lead to their inclusion in the latter networks and hence eventual SSSI notification. It is now essential that this range of GCR related issues is resolved to ensure that sites of national and international geological heritage importance are not lost or damaged due to non-awareness of their existence within the planning system.

Objectives

1. Ensure that policies within statutory development plans fully recognise the importance of the biodiversity and geological features of Devon, and the need to maintain them.
2. Ensure full consideration of nature conservation issues in the implementation of all planning and regulatory functions, in order to maintain the full range, extent and quality of Devon's biodiversity and geological heritage.
3. Seek to reconcile the objectives of bio- and geodiversity conservation with the need for economic and social development in Devon, to achieve environmental sustainability.
4. Establish a dialogue with all relevant authorities leading to the identification of all sites of national or international geological heritage importance in Devon which do not yet benefit from formal SSSI designation.

Actions and targets

Action	Key partners
1. Maintain the continued support of partner organisations for the Devon Biodiversity Action Plan. Target: ongoing	All
2. Integrate bio- and geodiversity targets into the policy documents of partner organisations. Target: ongoing	Defra; EA; FC; NE;
3. Ensure that the emerging Regional Spatial Strategy and Local Development Frameworks give proper consideration to the conservation of biodiversity and geodiversity(including specific targets), and the protection of environmental resources such as air, water and soils. Target: by 2007	RA; LAs; NE
4. Ensure that formal planning and regulatory policies and procedures recognise the importance of non-statutory sites of wildlife and geological heritage importance (including County Wildlife Sites & County Geological Sites). Target: ongoing	LAs

Action	Key partners
5. Ensure that biodiversity conservation concerns are adequately addressed in standards set, and policies devised, for air quality and water quality. Target: ongoing	EA; Defra; NE
6. Establish a working group or dialogue to identify key geological heritage sites in Devon of national and international geological heritage importance and ensure that all benefit from adequate statutory protection, including GCR listing and SSSI designation. Target: Establish a timetable for action (e.g. GCR listing, SSSI designation, etc) by 2010.	NE; DRIGSG; DCC; LAs; universities
7. Maintain close liaison with statutory undertakers and other bodies whose developments and actions are not subject to planning controls, in order to prevent or minimise any conflict with nature conservation interests. Target: ongoing	LAs; NE; DWT

3. Policy for the wider environment

The Issues

- Devon's bio- and geodiversity occurs beyond SSSIs and nature reserves, and includes the common as well as the rare. Biodiversity conservation extends the conventional concept of conservation of special creatures in special places and demands a more integrated view of the natural world. Once it is recognised that wildlife and geology are a defining and fragile feature of the whole landscape - rural and urban, terrestrial and marine - and that the wildlife of special places depends upon the wider wildlife of the landscape in which it sits, then it becomes clear that policy and management practice must take account of this all-pervading biodiversity, if a successful strategy for conservation is to be realised.
- Similarly, Devon's rich geological heritage is not restricted to a relatively small number of listed sites - almost any excavation almost anywhere in the County could yield important information, including rare fossils or minerals. It is essential, therefore, that mechanisms are established to ensure that this heritage is recorded and sampled, rather than being lost forever.
- Conservation measures are needed for the network of linear features which makes up a complex web over the Devon landscape. This wildlife web embraces hedgerows, rivers and streams, artificial waterways, disused railway lines and roadside verges, urban wildlife corridors, private gardens and public open spaces. All of these features are important as the main focus for wildlife in areas of intensive land use or built development, for the linkage they provide between areas of semi-natural habitat and for the way in which they help wildlife to move and spread. They are also hugely important for giving the landscape its natural beauty and much of its human character. Although frequently taken for granted, their continued presence and richness for wildlife requires a range of active conservation policies from all sectors and very substantial investment in practical management.
- In the marine environment the site-based approach to nature conservation is even less appropriate or meaningful, and the integrated nature of the environment demands an integrated policy approach.

Objectives

1. Focus upon and invest in the further development of environmentally sustainable forms of forestry, farming and fisheries production in Devon and its inshore waters, which conserve and enhance biodiversity rather than reducing it.

2. Maintain and where necessary seek to improve the quality of air and water in Devon, to provide a sustainable environment for a healthy biodiversity.
3. Safeguard the integrity and promote the sustainable management of linear features in Devon, such as hedges, rivers and streams, disused railways and roadside verges.
4. Establish mechanisms to ensure that temporary excavations are adequately recorded and sampled, including through planning conditions and raising public awareness of the significance of geological heritage. Ensure that adequate networking provides opportunities for appropriate specialists to study such sites.

Actions and targets

Action	Key partners
1. Promote and encourage the uptake by farmers and land managers of Environmental Stewardship with the aim of ensuring that all eligible land is within the Entry Level Scheme. Target: ongoing	FWAG; Defra; NE; LAs; RSPB; DWT
2. Encourage appropriate targeting of the Higher Level Scheme. Target: ongoing	FWAG; Defra; NE; LAs; RSPB; DWT
3. Ensure basic environmental standards are met through the cross-compliance element of the Single Farm Payment.	Defra
4. Support measures to increase woodland cover within the County, predominantly of oak and avoiding planting or regeneration on land of higher conservation value.	FC; SWFP; Silvanus; WT; NE; DWT
5. Maintain adequate funding and support for the Woodland Grant Scheme in order to benefit biodiversity. Target: ongoing	FC
6. Recognise the important function of linear features, such as hedges, rivers and streams, disused railways and roadside verges, in providing modes of dispersal and spread, and as habitats, for the biodiversity resource of the County. Target: ongoing	All
7. Seek to introduce mechanisms which limit the use of fishing gear and fishing practices which have damaging effects on important marine habitats and species in Devon's coastal waters. Target: ongoing	DSFC; Defra; NE; DWT
8. Establish a process or mechanism through which recording of temporary geological exposures can take place, including through the planning system. Target: Produce guidance leaflet by 2009.	DCC; LAs; DRIGSG; museums; universities
9. Implement practical measures to contribute to the maintenance and improvement of air quality and water quality and quantity, in everyday business, leisure and domestic activities, to benefit biodiversity. Target: ongoing	All

4. Public awareness and involvement

The issues

- Although conservation organisations, government departments, agencies and local authorities all play a key role in promoting biodiversity and geological conservation, it is public awareness and appreciation of the natural environment which ultimately dictate the degree to which such conservation measures are implemented. Active public or community involvement in conservation measures at the local level is critical to the achievement of global environmental objectives.
- Education and interpretation have an important role to play in promoting public interest and understanding of biodiversity and geological conservation, in the context of wider environment education. School teachers have a large role to play, in the context of the national curriculum, in instilling an interest and understanding about biodiversity in children, and school grounds projects and links to local nature reserves can supplement these efforts usefully. However, education in this sense applies not only to school children, but to all sectors of Devon's population, and the routes and methods to its achievement are many and varied. New, innovative approaches to increasing public awareness of the natural world combine information with enjoyment, and teach people to see nature from a fresh perspective.
- Universities and other higher educational establishments also have a key role to play, in providing training for environmental and educational professionals. They also have the facilities and expertise needed to help promote public understanding of the science which supports conservation.
- Efforts of these kinds should be seen in the context of the development of Local Agenda 21, which seeks community solutions to environmental and social issues, in the pursuit of environmental sustainability. Awareness, contact and involvement with biodiversity should be seen as a central objective of LA21 initiatives.

Objectives

1. Forge closer links between the objectives of the sustainable development process and biodiversity planning.
2. Enhance understanding and enjoyment of wildlife and geology by people of all ages.
3. Enhance opportunities for people to have direct contact with wildlife and geology.

4. Maximise opportunities for practical involvement by the public in wildlife and geology conservation.
5. Ensure that the educational system at all levels integrates the message of biodiversity conservation into curricular and extra-curricular activities.

Actions and targets

Action	Key partners
1. Establish liaison between Community Strategy officers, Local Agenda 21 promoters and biodiversity planning initiatives at County and other levels, to ensure complimentary aims. Target: ongoing	LAs; the Partnership
2. Increase the existing network of publicly-accessible nature reserves and geological sites to enhance people's opportunities for contact with the natural environment. Target: each Parish in the County to have at least one accessible "wildlife site" and/or geological site by 2010	DWT; NE; RSPB; LAs
3. Encourage schools to use their grounds and the curriculum to contribute to nature conservation in Devon. Target: ongoing	LEAs
4. Use events and publications (including web sites) to explain ways in which varied sectors of the wider community (including schools and businesses) implement biodiversity and geological conservation. Target: ongoing	All
5. Review and improve interpretative provision at accessible wildlife and geological sites throughout Devon. Target: ongoing	DWT; NE; RSPB; LAs; minerals industry
6. Promote gardening for wildlife in Devon. Target: ongoing	NE DWT; DCC
7. Maximise the use of the broadcast media, and other means of communication, to disseminate information on biodiversity and geological conservation issues to the widest possible audience. Target: ongoing	All
8. Encourage wider membership of local and national wildlife and geological organisations. Target: ongoing	All

5. Land management and advice

The issues

- The conservation of features of value for bio- and geodiversity requires more than simply the prevention of damage to those features from development or active land use change. Habitats, species populations and many geological features also require active and sympathetic management in order to maintain their value. Furthermore, sympathetic management can result in the enhancement of the existing nature conservation importance of a site, the restoration of value which has been lost, or even the creation of value which has never been present.
- Central to guiding land managers in their stewardship of the land in this way, are the advisory services offered by a range of organisations around Devon. These services include field officers able to visit land managers and advice them directly, and literature resources on a variety of conservation management topics. Future advisory provision needs to be rationalised, co-ordinated and extended in order to make most efficient use of the resources available, to improve the service to land managers, and to increase the effectiveness of efforts towards meeting biodiversity targets.

Objectives

1. Achieve appropriate, sympathetic management of Devon's wildlife and geological features, in order to maintain, enhance and restore their value.
2. Provide an enhanced and co-ordinated range of advisory services to guide land managers in the sympathetic management of Devon's wildlife and geological resource.

Actions and targets

Action	Key partners
1. Ensure bio- and geodiversity conservation objectives are incorporated into the management of land under the control of public bodies and utilities. Target: ongoing	LAs; EA; HA; Utilities
2. Encourage public bodies to further the conservation and enhancement of SSSIs (as part of their general duty under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000). Target: ongoing	EAs; NE; EA
3. Ensure that 95% of SSSIs by area are in favourable or recovering condition. Target: 2010	NE

Action	Key partners
4. Increase the number of Local Nature Reserves within Devon. Target: each Local and Unitary Authority to designate at least one new LNR by 2010	LAs; NE
5. Improve the availability and quality of information and advice on grant schemes. Target: ongoing	Defra; NE; EA; LAs; FWAG
6. Maintain and seek to increase financial provision for advisory services through the voluntary and statutory sectors. Target: ongoing	DWT; RSPB; NE; Defra; LAs; FWAG
7. Target advisory schemes towards County Wildlife Sites and Country Geological Sites. Target: by 2008	LAs; DWT; FWAG; DRIGSG
8. Seek to integrate considerations of biodiversity and geological conservation objectives into all advisory mechanisms operating in Devon, including those other than conservation-orientated ones. Target: ongoing	The Partnership
9. Promote the Devon BAP (and other local BAPs) to advisors. Target: ongoing	The Partnership
10. Ensure that advisors and associated literature incorporate advice on the features highlighted in the Devon Biodiversity Action Plan. Target: ongoing	The Partnership
11. Collate and disseminate information on best practice management. Target: ongoing	FWAG; LAs; NE; EA; FC; RSPB; DWT; Las; DRIGSG