

NATURE IMPROVEMENT AREA GREATER THAMES MARSHES

Advisory Group Meeting
Friday 21st September 2012

Introduction

Jill Goddard Thames Estuary Partnership
Lead Contractual Body for NIA and Project Steering Group (PSG) member

Jill welcomed all to the meeting and thanked everyone for coming. Jill introduced everyone to the NIA PSG members in addition asking everyone present to introduce themselves and state what organisation they work for.

Item 1: Presentations from NIA Partners

A) *Introducing the Greater Thames Marshes NIA – Martin Hall*

Martin started the introduction of the Greater Thames Marshes Nature Improvement Area project by giving a brief history of the bidding / application process. The projects emerged from Professor Sir John Lawton's Making Space for Nature: A review of England's Wildlife Sites and Ecological Network. The Natural Environment White Paper set out Government ambition. Out of 76 bids received only 12 NIA projects around the country received full funding. These include a wide range of environments such as: urban, rivers, woodland, marshes, arable, coalfields, chalkland and grassland.

The Greater Thames Marshes Nature Improvement Area initially covered 48,981ha of estuarine and marshland landscape. The Greater Thames Marshes is an extremely important area containing internationally significant sites in addition to a suite of threatened species. The area is also under threat of increasing pressures of climate change and development.

Our vision for the Greater Thames Marshes NIA is for a *“living and vibrant marshland and estuary landscape where the **skills and enthusiasm** of residents, visitors, businesses and technical experts are **harnessed to work in partnership**, delivering more wildlife, more public understanding and enjoyment of the environment and **greater resilience** by the natural world to the changes brought about by **development and climate change.**”*

There are five objectives within the business plan:

1. Facing up to Change

This will set out all the evidence to date for existing biodiversity value and the anticipated pressures for change in the NIA as a basis for opportunity mapping to allow us to identify where to deliver targeted action that will make a difference.

2. Delivering on the Ground

Through practical NIA-led action in the form of new and extensive on-the-ground projects for habitat creation, management and restoration. This will include creating and enhancing habitats for the scarce Thames terrace invertebrates and for breeding waders.

3. Partnership Working

Delivery on the ground by working with others and adding value to existing initiatives and establishing innovative tools for continuing delivery and investment through stakeholders and business partners.

4. Communication and Access

Through a variety of activities and projects we will place local community and stakeholder understanding and participation at the heart of the delivery in the NIA.

5. Sustainability and Legacy – (capital and resources)

To ensure the sustainability and continuation of delivery after the first three years we will provide a long term legacy and the resources to fulfil this commitment, keeping the momentum going through continued funding bids, investment in community involvement, stewardship and fostering long term stakeholder engagement.

The NIA was granted £570k over the three years. Identifying the needs and cost potential – Objective 5 has funding to support this project of £150K. The NIA are looking to obtain funding from 4 significant bids worth £3-4 million each.

Your Support:

Finding new ways of doing things:

- Government Agencies are already helping – Natural England, Environment Agency, Forestry Commission
- Grant-giving bodies – Lottery and the Trust sector – there will be opportunities to support major conservation projects in the Marshes, by prioritising the NIA
- Private Companies and Businesses – there will be opportunities to show “green credentials”, Corporate Social Responsibility, and real support for your local environment

Question:

Have you made any changes since the business plan?

Answer:

Yes. The map of the NIA area has already been extended. During the bid process, NIAs were limited in size to 50,000 ha. It was realised that other NIA's had larger areas, so with support of NE, the Project Steering Group's (PSG) suggestion of including the Essex Islands as part of the estuary habitat was granted. The initial bid was a conservative estimate at the time, the successful track record of PSG members supports higher potential. The potential funding is well in excess of £4m.

B) How will the Advisory Group work – John Meehan

The NIA Advisory Group (AG) is to act as a sub-forum of the Project Steering Group (PSG) to promote and deliver wider engagement and discussion from stakeholders and to provide advice to the PSG on the delivery of objectives and projects of the Greater Thames Marshes NIA:

- Members of the Advisory Group (AG) are to act individually as Ambassadors for the Greater Thames Marshes NIA by promoting the NIA and encouraging their peers to engage.
- To provide a forum for stakeholders to engage with the PSG, leading to increased awareness and shared understanding of the Greater Thames Marshes NIA objectives.
- To identify barriers and solutions to ensure effective delivery of NIA objectives across partner organisations escalating statutory and regulatory barriers to the PSG.
- To seek a joined-up approach to continuing activities across the Greater Thames sharing with the group other relevant work being undertaken by your respective organisations, for example, Local Nature Partnerships (LNP's) and action planning.
- To act as an open forum for discussion where all members hold an equal say and conflicts are resolved through discussion and debate, with the remit to provide advice and recommendations to the PSG regarding the delivery and legacy of the NIA.
- To bring together interests across east London, south Essex and north Kent on NIA issues, building a common understanding of issues affecting biodiversity, green infrastructure, climate change in relation to the natural environment and a way forward to deal with these changes
- To have complementary policies within neighbouring Authorities' LDF, facilitating the duty to co-operate, where there are cross boundary natural environment issues, such as policies relating to the SPAs, Climate Change, Biodiversity, Water Framework Directive, Flood Risk and Green Infrastructure.
- The Advisory Group are able to hold the PSG to account, requesting access to information regarding the decision-making, budget management and delivery process of NIA objectives.
- The Advisory Group does not have decision-making powers, but can put forward recommendations and advice to the PSG. The PSG are obliged to give full consideration to these recommendations, but hold final decision-making power.

The PSG are looking for active engagement between them and the AG members between meetings and others to promote delivery on the ground. If the demands of the project require it then additional meetings can be organised and a thematic 'Task and Finish Groups' may be formed to cover specific projects or sectors involved in the NIA.

The Advisory Group meetings will take place 3 times a year with alternating locations; London, North Kent and South Essex. They should last approximately half a day with a possibility of a site visit for the rest of the half day.

Question:

Is there a place for a forum in order for AG members to communicate if there are only 3 meetings per annum?

Answer:

We are in the process of setting up a website on which we could set up a forum in addition to having papers and other documents placed there. In addition to this, sub groups could be set up e.g. farmers, etc., to have a target approach and more local meetings. Thematic groups may also be possible.

Item 2: Discussion

A) NIA Objective 3: Partnership delivery on the ground – John Meehan

During this section John Meehan mainly focused on Biodiversity offsetting, however there are other aspects of Objective 3 as outlined out in the Business Plan.

Essex County Council (ECC) is leading on one of 6 pilot projects funded by Defra although there is no funding, they gain expertise. They aim to trial this new methodology of replacing lost habitat with no net loss and in most cases, habitat gain. The aim of this project is to use existing funds from an old section 106 payment to trial the use of the Defra metric for biodiversity offsetting. The project will aim to restore an area of land within the Thames Marshes NIA. ECC are working in conjunction with Thurrock Council but does have a wider objective to work across the whole of Essex and Kent.

Objectives for the pilot project:

- Create a new area of habitat within the Thames Marshes NIA replacing the loss of Ferry Fields in Thurrock - lost to development.
- A long term management plan for the new site.
- Establishment of a long term maintenance revenue scheme to manage the site in the long term
- Test the metric for calculating offset value.
- Test the overall Biodiversity Offsetting methodology from start to finish

Farmer Advisor

A new position has been created by RSPB as part of the NIA and is now filled by Emma Sheard. Her role will be managed by a partnership group, including GGKM, Essex Wildlife Trust, RSPB and Natural England. The main objectives of this project will be to work with farmers and land managers to identify barriers and opportunities for best practise wildlife friendly farming, including setting up focus groups and recruiting Farmer Champions.

Question:

Are you able to use CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) to increase / improve connectivity for greenspace?

Answer:

This can be used as an additional tool / form of funding. Other members of the PSG will be informed on how offsetting works to avoid fragmentation and to promote transparency. It was highlighted that in a project run by Thurrock Council, they have increased connectivity however; they use education and other transport infrastructure. It is really down to individual Local Authorities to assess priorities when allocating funds. In addition to this project, there is another pilot in Norfolk which has used the metrics set out by Defra. In this project they are testing whether they can use both of these together – CIL and biodiversity offsetting – it appears that it can be done but whether the market will stand for this is yet to be seen.

Question:

Is there going to be an active effort to make sure offsetting is kept within the NIA or are there plans to increase the area beyond it?

Answer:

Ideally, we are looking to make the offsetting occur within the NIA area; however, it is partially led by opportunities that arise. The criteria are to create like for like, however, the right land may not be available within the NIA. There will be a series of metrics to be applied to monitor the impact of; loss of habitat / habitat improvement / difficulty to recreate.

Question:

Is there a reason why land can't be relocated outside the NIA to offset habitat taken within the NIA? Local Authorities will have spatial plans for offsetting and identifying areas within NIA/and outside NIA could encourage investment inside the NIA in return.

Answer:

This could potentially be a useful opportunity. It will be a strategic allocation of land and a business opportunity. Part of the mapping as we go forward will be to add more detail. Identifying values and habitat requirements come with that and linking this with development plans.

Question 4:

Perhaps the use of mapping tools to identify areas of development risk and habitat value could be used? How does it work in terms of bids and offsetting candidates – for example; screening for heritage historical value. How does it link with biodiversity offsetting?

Answer

In terms of mapping, English Heritage has a development control remit with historical environment. Within the NIA heritage and historical value will be taken into consideration. There is a process of identifying and evaluating. As a reference, the Essex Biodiversity offsetting project involves English Heritage to help with the process of evaluation.

Question 5:

How does offsetting fit with compulsory greening to farmers?

Answer:

It provides land in perpetuity, separate to the green single farm payment. It was emphasised that biodiversity is not all equal. Land in perpetuity excludes some species and therefore need a more holistic approach. As an example mentioned by Keith Moore (Environment Agency), the 'Total Environment' project in Suffolk, is a project that manages the coast with live initiative principles to bring a myriad of organisations to work together 'to process development consent for sea defences and other forms of coastal flood and erosion management along the Suffolk Coast' – connecting and linking parties together. More information can be found on both the Natural England and Environment Agency websites. It must be remembered that from a planning point of view, offsetting is the last resort.

B) NIA Objective 5 – Legacy and Resources – Jo Sampson (RSPB)

The ambition of the NIA is 'More, bigger, better and joined' as introduced in the paper by Professor Sir John Lawton.

The PSG are tendering out to consultants to write grant proposals for potential funding in addition looking for spin-off projects that could all feed back into the overall objectives of the NIA. We need to look past the 3 years of the project, the period beyond April 2012- March 2015. It is a two way process of gaining funding as well as providing match funding now and in the future. As an example, TEP is working with Thames 21 charity to deliver the Water Framework Directive pilot project in the Tidal Thames catchment. The two pilots clearly benefit each other and both provide a direct line to Defra.

Question 6:

Are there any plans for themes of projects?

Answer

The aim is to identify good consultants and get them to come and talk to the Advisory Group in terms of what projects are happening and what they would like to see. The PSG can then put all the project ideas out to everyone as a group before they are chosen and finalised. An example of themes may be wetting marshes, Thames Terrace Invertebrates, communication, etc. however, there may be many themes that have not yet been thought of.

There's a need for identifying projects and sharing ideas. With regards to bidding for the funds, we need to devise a way of merging 5-6 projects into one big project. The PSG will continue to work with funding bodies at a national level. Submitting 3-4 bids – Landscape Area Partnerships / Heritage lottery fund, etc.

A concern regarding the funding was raised in which the Rural Development Programme (for England) must be kept unified. The NFU are concerned NIA's don't deplete funding from the rest of the system. Land owners will go back to their old system if funding doesn't continue. Farmers local funding has declined. National Parks can give us useful lessons in protective landscapes. During these times we are facing significant change on policy.

Item 3: Mapping and Opportunities

Martin Hall introduced the work that he at Greening the Gateway Medway and Kent has been undertaking under his objective of facing up to change. The aim is to map existing biodiversity value and anticipated pressures for change as a basis for opportunity mapping, this therefore demonstrates where targeted action will make a difference and increase resilience. There are three steps to this process:

1. Develop credible data sets and a comprehensive GIS mapping tool
 - assets
 - mechanisms for improving
 - sites earmarked for management (TE2100), SMP
 - Biodiversity Opportunity Area

2. Obtain NIA wide data to build a suite of maps capturing environmental, social and economic pressures impacting on current / future ecological functionality of the NIA.
 - Work with AG / stakeholders to:
 - refine maps
 - tease out key issues
 - Climate change, sea level rise, bird numbers, homes and jobs, tourism and recreation etc.

3. Prioritisation
 - Aggregate biodiversity and pressure maps to produce opportunity / need maps
 - Hold AG workshop to challenge results and identify opportunities for new investment and / or adding value
 - Place results in a GTM NIA Action Plan

In terms of timescale, GGKM are looking to have the maps completed in 4 months time. A strong emphasis was placed on the difficulty of gathering mapping information. Any map information that is produced will be set to a standard i.e. index, key, scale etc. As a suggestion, theoretically it could be possible to capture data from actual farmers, who naturally would know their land best; however whether it is possible to map this is questionable. Turning data and information into knowledge and narrative is key. We need to find a way of implementing this.

Item 4: Draft Terms of Reference for Advisory Group

Everyone had previously been sent a copy of this. However, due to a lack of time, it was suggested that any comments and suggestions should be emailed in.

Item 5: Any Other Business

Conclusions / next steps and key communication messages:

- It was agreed that information will be sent to all regarding biodiversity offsetting. A brief presentation will be given on this at the next meeting in addition to putting up documents on our website - once it is up and running.
- If people could let the Project Steering Group know of any bids or spin off projects that they feel would benefit NIA.
- The maps that have been produced so far will be available online on our website
- Please come forward straight away with sharing data for the maps.
- All Comments regarding the AG Draft Terms of Reference to be emailed in and amendments made (j.roche@ucl.ac.uk).
- All agreed that a rotating venue is favourable between London, Essex and Kent as long as fairly easily accessible by public transport links.
- Please note all power point material at the meeting will be available as PDFs and downloadable from NIA website once completed.
- The next meeting to be held in late January 2013. Possible dates and location to be confirmed.

Attendees	Company
Jill Goddard	Thames Estuary Partnership (PSG Member)
Martin Hall	Greening the Gateway Kent and Medway (PSG Member)
John Meehan	Essex County Council (PSG Member)
Jo Sampson	RSPB (PSG Member)
Fran Davies	Natural England (PSG Member)
Keith Moore	Environment Agency (PSG Member)
Peter Massini	Greater London Authority (PSG Member)
Adam Ingleby	Environment Agency
Sarah Henshall	Buglife
Greg Hitchcock	Kent Wildlife Trust
Rob Wise	CLA
Alister Hayes	London Wildlife Trust
Stephanie Buell	Kent County Council
Peter Harvey	Essex Field Club
Charles Tassell	National Farmers Union
Tony Witts	Kent Biological Record Centre
Debbie Priddy	English Heritage
Stuart Connop	UEL Lecturer
Ian Frood	JM Frood & Son – Farmers and Contractors
Clare Lambert	Thurrock Council

Apologies	Company
Neil Jacobson	Crown Estate
Andy Brown	English Heritage
Andrew Day	Countryside Properties
Richard Moyse	Plantlife
Ian Moodie	Association of Drainage Authorities
Katherine Fletcher	English Heritage