

Executive Summary

In the last 200 years more species have become extinct than at any time in the last 65 million years.

Healthy natural systems are needed to sustain biodiversity. Habitats and their characteristic flora and fauna rely on specific physical conditions and ecological processes for their survival.

Conservation and enhancement of biodiversity has been identified by the government as a key indicator of sustainable development, which in turn forms a cross cutting theme throughout the Leisure and Cultural Trust's and Council's wider policy frameworks.

The Borough of Wigan contains a wide diversity of wildlife and habitats providing a measurable 'green' richness to its character and attractiveness. This biodiversity enriches both the quality of life and the economic value of the borough.

Within Wigan there are a number of key habitats, which include regionally important woodlands, wetlands and mosslands. A variety of other important habitats such as acid grassland, remnant heath, river and canal corridors and in the more built up areas gardens and local parks provide an urban refuge for wildlife.

The Challenges

This Biodiversity Strategy for Wigan aims to focus attention on the most important priorities in the borough set out in six key challenges generated from the main objectives.

- generate wide partnership and community support for Wigan's biodiversity
- protect Wigan's wildlife sites
- create more habitats
- promote Wigan's Greenheart
- engage with and involve the community in biodiversity
- enhance the quality and diversity of the environment

Meeting these six challenges is vital in achieving the strategy's main aim of 'protecting and enhancing Wigan's biodiversity'. It requires a co-ordinated response from the region involving all relevant partners, and for biodiversity

objectives to be embedded into the wider working of the borough. The success of the strategy will ultimately be measured in our ability to conserve existing wildlife and restore lost species and habitats.

Implementation

The development and implementation of Local Biodiversity Action Plans will provide the mechanisms to achieve the practical functioning of the strategy.

A Biodiversity Partnership will involve all organisations and sectors of the community that can influence, contribute to and implement the Strategy. There will also be a Steering Group who will oversee the development, implementation and monitoring of the Local Biodiversity Action Plans.

Each Local Biodiversity Action Plan will identify priorities for the protection and conservation of distinct habitats and species. These will range from UK priority habitats and species, to more common 'broad' habitats and locally distinctive species.

This document provides a strategic framework for the development and implementation of a Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) for Wigan. The strategy aims to draw together the work already undertaken in managing biodiversity within the borough of Wigan and set the future management approach within the national and regional context. This should ensure there is a clear relationship between what is happening in Wigan and the overall Greater Manchester Biodiversity Action Plan.

This strategy then identifies an approach for engaging with stakeholders and partners to agree and gain support for implementing action plans for key habitats and species in Wigan.

Wigan's Biodiversity Strategy

Introduction

Biological diversity, biodiversity for short, is the term given to the variety of living things, the places where they live and how they interact with one another.

Biodiversity is the result of millions of years of complex interactions, natural processes and increasingly of man's influence on the natural environment. It is fundamental to the Earth's life support system, providing basic natural processes, which we have always taken for granted, such as available fossil fuels, the provision of fresh water, fertile soil, clean air, a stable climate and predictable weather conditions. The number of species that are key to this process, how these species interact with each other, and how they contribute to this 'natural provision' is still largely unknown.

At the moment extinction is running at more than 1000 times its natural rate and unless drastic action is taken immediately many once common species will be lost.

In June 1992 the Earth Summit was held in Rio de Janeiro. An important product of this conference was the Convention on Biological Diversity, part of which requires the contracting countries, including the UK, to develop "national strategies, plans and programmes for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity".

Importance of Biodiversity

We must always consider the vital need to protect biodiversity as part of our everyday lives. If we don't maintain biodiversity there will be major impacts upon the following:

- Genetic diversity – the ability of species to adapt to varying conditions;
- Irreversibility – once lost species cannot return and there are some species that may have the potential to be useful in ways which are as yet unknown;
- Inter-dependence – no organism can be isolated from all other living things, variety provides a balance;
- Economics – a monetary value can be placed on species that provide products e.g. food, clothes, medicine. These are a finite resource and can be exploited faster than they can reproduce themselves, thus some degree of management is necessary. The development of Eco-tourism has the potential to bring significant economic and environmental benefits;
- Natural functions – e.g. vegetation reducing the erosion of soils, woods and hedges acting as natural wind breaks, forests reducing atmospheric pollution;

- Conservation for its own sake – species are seen to be beautiful and enrich our lives. We should hand on to the next generation an environment no less rich than the one we inherited.

The National Biodiversity Action Plans have set targets and actions for protecting priority species and habitats. There are approximately 375 species action plans and 31 habitat action plans.

Within the North West of England a Biodiversity Audit was produced in 1999 to identify habitats and species of conservation importance at a regional level. This was to help inform the production of Local Biodiversity Action Plans. An Audit and Action Plans have also been produced for Greater Manchester.

Wigan has its own very distinctive flora and fauna communities, which over time, have adapted to local conditions and now form the basis of our 'biodiversity'

Locally species and habitats have been selected for inclusion within the Local Biodiversity Action Plan because of their strategic importance within the borough and neighbouring areas.

There is now a growing amount of evidence that shows a tangible connection between biodiversity and people's health and well being. For example recent research demonstrates most people's heart rate measurably drops when they enter countryside areas. Whether urban park, Country Park or open countryside, being surrounded by nature makes us feel more relaxed.

Aim

This strategy aims to develop a framework for the 'protection and enhancement of Wigan's biodiversity'.

Objectives

The strategy will seek to ensure the most effective use of all resources to:

- generate political, inter-departmental, partner and community support for Wigan's biodiversity and establish clear lines of responsibility;
- protect and promote effective management of Wigan's sites of nature conservation importance;
- provide opportunities for the enhancement and creation of habitats and to foster species conservation and diversity;
- develop, protect and promote Wigan's countryside under the 'Greenheart' umbrella;

- raise awareness of, and provide a framework for voluntary and community groups to be involved in biodiversity enhancement and conservation;
- ensure that Wigan's countryside enhances the quality and diversity of the environment, the life of local communities and actively promotes social inclusion.

The Strategy

One of the key drivers identified by the strategy will be the development of policies to ensure 'no net loss' of biodiversity. This will be achieved through

- protection of designated sites
- designation of new sites
- environmental gains via the planning system

Implementation

Several delivery mechanisms will be associated with the implementation and achievement of the strategies main objectives.

These will include:

- the formation of a Wigan Biodiversity Steering Group;
- refocusing of the present Wigan Wildlife Action Group to the Wigan Biodiversity Partnership;
- developing a framework for community engagement and involvement;
- the development and implementation of biodiversity action plans;
- through the Partnership continue to develop volunteer opportunities within Greenheart.

Biodiversity Steering Group

A key priority for the development and implementation of the Biodiversity Strategy is the formation of a Biodiversity Steering Group. This will provide guidance and support for the development and implementation of Local Biodiversity Action Plans in Wigan. It will assist partners and groups by developing standards of good practice and training.

The group will be responsible for:

- Steering the work of the Wigan Biodiversity Partnership;
- Contributing to regional co-ordination to promote consistency of approach and to recommend standards of good practice in the production and implementation of Local Biodiversity Action Plans;
- Promoting good practice by providing guidance and to review it periodically;
- Providing guidance on how best to involve the local community in Local Biodiversity Action Plans;
- Monitoring progress on proposed actions for raising public awareness at the local level and advise on good practice;

- Liaising closely with the council, GMEU and Wigan Biodiversity Partnership
- Investigating appropriate funding opportunities;
- Encouraging community education, awareness and participation in biodiversity issues;
- Considering other local issues as appropriate;
- Providing an annual report to the council, Wigan Leisure and Culture Trust and the Wigan Biodiversity Partnership.

The core membership of the steering group will consist of representatives from organisation such as:

Wigan Leisure and Culture Trust
 Wigan Council
 English Nature
 Greater Manchester Ecology Unit
 Lancashire Wildlife Trust
 Environment Agency
 Forestry Commission
 Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
 Red Rose Forest

Biodiversity Partnership

A successful partnership with the voluntary sector and local communities is integral to the delivery, implementation and monitoring of the biodiversity strategy. Establishing links to these organisations and communities will provide a significant and diverse range of contributions and opportunities to the implementation of the strategy.

The Partnership will be formed by refocusing the current Wigan Wildlife Action Group. This group has been in existence for over 20 years and will provide an established base on which to build a successful partnership.

One of the main priorities will be to establish formal channels for communication between partners and local communities/stakeholders. These will allow all sectors of the community to have opportunities to input into the biodiversity process.

Community

The achievement of the key aim of the strategy requires community awareness, understanding, ownership and support. In particular there is a clear need to promote biodiversity as much more than just the protection of threatened high profile animal species such as otter, red squirrel, peregrine falcon and plants such as lady's slipper orchid for example.

Community awareness of lesser-known groups such as invertebrates is especially lacking, as is the understanding of the functioning of ecosystems. One of the supporting actions of the strategy is to produce practical information/interpretation aimed at the community to improve the knowledge

and understanding of how these systems affect and shape Wigan's biodiversity.

As previously stated conserving Wigan's biodiversity requires the support of the whole community. In many cases it is the community that is leading the way in driving efforts in biodiversity through self-initiated grass root schemes as simple as feeding the birds in their gardens. Gardens and allotments provide opportunities for people to learn about biodiversity whilst improving their own environment.

A key objective of this strategy is to provide a framework to enable Wigan's 'Biodiversity Partnership' to engage with and involve as wide range of the community as possible in the strategies delivery and implementation. It will enhance community and individual understanding about biodiversity. The implementation of the strategy's objectives will inform, motivate and support widespread and co-ordinated community action to conserve and sustainably use biodiversity. It will also enable communities and individuals to equitably share responsibility for, and benefits from, conserving and sustainably using Wigan's biodiversity.

Community access to 'biodiversity' through Wigan's formal and informal greenspaces although amongst the highest in Greater Manchester still falls short in achieving the recommendations for minimum provision of natural greenspace produced by English Nature.

English Nature's definition of natural greenspace is 'Land, water and geological features which have been naturally colonised by plants and animals and which are accessible on foot to large numbers of residents'.

This includes obvious areas such as country parks, nature reserves, managed woodland, meadows, heathland and marshes but also includes a broad range of other sites for example derelict land that has been naturally colonised, ponds, ditches, rivers, lakes, reservoirs, allotments, orchards and gardens. Less intensively managed parts of parks, school grounds, sports pitches, golf courses, church yards and cemeteries can also be taken into account.

The recommendations set out by English Nature are that:

- Everyone should have an area of natural greenspace within 300 metres of home.
Currently this has not been quantified although it is likely that the majority of homes will have this provision.
- There should be 1 hectare of land designated as Local Nature Reserve per 1000 population.
Currently there are 250 hectares of land designated as LNR, target is 304 hectares to achieve desired level.
- There should be at least one accessible 20 ha site within 2km of home.
Over 80% of homes in the borough achieve this.
- There should be one 100ha site within 5km of home
The majority of homes in the borough achieve this.

Achieving these levels of accessibility will be integral to the objectives of the biodiversity strategy. In some areas this will be hard to achieve in the short term, but it will be a long-term aim.

The Wigan Biodiversity Steering group will engage with the community through the Biodiversity Partnership and provide up to date, reliable, relevant biodiversity information.

Information will be provided on how both individuals and communities can:

- become involved in local conservation;
- become involved in wildlife surveys and recording;
- become involved in monitoring local projects;
- become more sustainable in their everyday life.

Framework for Action

The six objectives identified in the strategy each have a series of necessary actions that will be implemented. These actions will underpin the delivery of the strategy and allow for the development of individual projects to achieve the strategy's aim. The following tables set out each objective, the necessary actions, identifies who the key deliverers will be, highlights the timescale for action and the present status.

The timescale chosen has been classified within one of four ranges:

- Immediate – action already underway or proposed within next six months
- Short term – action to be implemented within 12 to 24 months
- Medium term – action to be implemented within 3 to 4 years
- Long term – action to be developed over 5 plus years.

The status of each action has been classified as:

- Achieved – already delivered
- In progress – work is underway
- Ongoing – action that will continue
- Pending – awaiting resource allocation/funding
- In development – preliminary work to set up systems to achieve action.

Objective 1: generate political, inter-departmental and partners support for Wigan's biodiversity and establish clear lines of responsibility.

ACTION	DELIVERY	START	STATUS
Establish Wigan's Biodiversity Steering Group	WLCT & Wigan Council	Immediate	Achieved
Form a Biodiversity Partnership	Wigan Wildlife Action Group, WLCT & Wigan Council, Wigan's Biodiversity Steering Group	Immediate	In progress
Develop a Biodiversity Charter	WLCT & Wigan Council	Short term	In progress
Involve elected members in biodiversity initiatives	WLCT & Wigan Council	Immediate	Ongoing
Promote the benefits of higher profile biodiversity	Biodiversity Partnership	Short term	Ongoing
Engage with local business communities to promote 'local biodiversity'	Biodiversity Partnership	Short term	Ongoing
Implementation of the Biodiversity Strategy	WLCT & Wigan Council, Biodiversity Steering Group, Biodiversity Partnership	Immediate	Ongoing

Objective 2 : protect and promote effective management of Wigan’s sites of nature conservation importance

ACTION	DELIVERY	TIMESCALE	STATUS
Continue to develop and implement relevant planning policies	Wigan Council in conjunction with all stakeholders	Immediate	Ongoing
Use the planning system to provide and protect benefits for biodiversity	Wigan Council in conjunction with all stakeholders	Immediate	Ongoing
Development and implementation of BAPs	WLCT & Wigan Council, Biodiversity Steering Group, Biodiversity Partnership	Immediate	In progress/ Ongoing
Designation of one Local Nature Reserve per annum	WLCT & Wigan Council, English Nature	Immediate	In progress/ Ongoing
Continue to develop and implement Partnership Working	Biodiversity Partnership	Immediate	Ongoing
Identify and secure funding sources and streams to resource/facilitate effective site management	WLCT & Wigan Council, Biodiversity Steering Group, Biodiversity Partnership	Long term	In progress/ Ongoing
Education of landowners and stakeholders on the benefits of biodiversity	WLCT & Wigan Council, Biodiversity Steering Group, Biodiversity Partnership	Long term	Ongoing
Working with partners and stakeholders develop best practise standards/guidelines	WLCT & Wigan Council, Biodiversity Steering Group, Biodiversity Partnership	Medium term	Pending
Implement the co-ordinated/consistent management of sites through the development of site specific management plans.	WLCT & Wigan Council	Medium term	In development/ ongoing

Objective 3 : provide opportunities for the enhancement and creation of habitats and to foster species conservation and diversity

ACTION	DELIVERY	TIMESCALE	STATUS
Development and implementation of BAPs	WLCT & Wigan Council, Wigan's Biodiversity Steering Group, Biodiversity Partnership	Immediate	In progress, ongoing
Identify and acquire sources of funding	WLCT & Wigan Council, Wigan's Biodiversity Steering Group, Biodiversity Partnership	Immediate	In progress, ongoing
Information/interpretation sheets	WLCT & Wigan Council, Biodiversity Steering Group	Immediate	In progress, ongoing
Complete a habitat audit	WLCT & Wigan Council, Biodiversity Partnership	Long term	In progress, ongoing
Phase 1 review	WLCT & Wigan Council,	Medium term	Pending
Adopt and implement a recording system	WLCT & Wigan Council, Biodiversity Steering Group	Short term	In progress, ongoing
Use planning system to provide benefits for biodiversity	WLCT & Wigan Council, Biodiversity Steering Group, Biodiversity Partnership	Immediate	In progress, ongoing
Consideration of appropriate re-introductions/translocations	WLCT & Wigan Council, Biodiversity Steering Group	Long term	In progress, ongoing

Objective 4: develop, protect and promote Wigan's countryside under the 'Greenheart' umbrella

ACTION	DELIVERY	TIMESCALE	STATUS
Development and implementation of BAPs	WLCT & Wigan Council, Wigan's Biodiversity Steering Group, Biodiversity Partnership	Immediate	In progress, ongoing
Continue to support development of Curriculum centre	WLCT & Wigan Council	Immediate	In progress, ongoing
Continue to progress Regional Park status	WLCT & Wigan Council	Immediate	In progress, ongoing
Develop and implement 'interpretation strategy' for Greenheart	WLCT & Wigan Council	Long term	In progress, ongoing
Work with partners and stakeholders to maximise opportunities to promote Greenheart	WLCT & Wigan Council,	Medium term	Pending
Co-ordinate activities through the Greenheart Steering/Working Group	Greenheart Steering/Working Group	Long term	In progress, ongoing

Objective 5 : raise awareness of, and provide a framework for voluntary and community groups to be involved in biodiversity enhancement and conservation

ACTION	DELIVERY	TIMESCALE	STATUS
Continue to support WigWAG/oversee development into Wigan's Biodiversity Partnership	WLCT & Wigan Council, Wigan's Biodiversity Steering Group	Immediate	In progress, ongoing
Continue to provide environmental education opportunities for all	WLCT & Wigan Council, LWT	Immediate	In progress, ongoing
Continue to offer volunteer opportunities	WLCT & Wigan Council, LWT, BTCV, Groundwork	Immediate	In progress, ongoing
Engage with local communities to promote 'local biodiversity'	WLCT & Wigan Council, Biodiversity Partnership	Long term	In progress, ongoing
Continue to develop education/ interpretation opportunities through the GSYTE programme	WLCT & Wigan Council, LWT	Immediate	In progress, ongoing
Continue to develop an effective partnership with local press	WLCT & Wigan Council, Wigan's Biodiversity Steering Group	Immediate	In progress, ongoing

Objective 6 : ensure that Wigan’s countryside enhances the quality and diversity of the environment, the life of local communities and promotes social inclusion

ACTION	DELIVERY	TIMESCALE	STATUS
Development and implementation of BAPs	WLCT & Wigan Council, Wigan’s Biodiversity Steering Group	Immediate	In progress, ongoing
Promote community access to Wigan’s countryside	WLCT & Wigan Council, LWT, BTCV, Groundwork	Immediate	In progress, ongoing
Continue to provide recreational opportunities through the GSYTE programme and Health Walks	WLCT & Wigan Council, LWT	Immediate	In progress, ongoing
Continue to develop safe, accessible, well managed greenspaces	WLCT & Wigan Council, LWT, BTCV, Groundwork, Forestry Commission, Woodland Trust and other land-owning partners	Long term	In progress, ongoing
Provide co-ordinated/ consistent management of sites	WLCT & Wigan Council, LWT, BTCV, Groundwork, Forestry Commission, Woodland Trust and other land-owning partners	Medium term	Pending
Involve local communities in the development and management of ‘greenspaces’	WLCT & Wigan Council, LWT, BTCV, Groundwork, Forestry Commission, Woodland Trust and other land-owning partners	Long term	In progress, ongoing
Promote ‘active life’ opportunities with partners to encourage community access to a ‘healthy’ countryside	WLCT & Wigan Council	Immediate	In progress, ongoing