

WENP Board Meeting

Lewis House, Bath // 11 December 2019 // 14:00 – 17:00

Items

SGr welcomed attendees to the meeting and requested any comments on the draft minutes from the September Board meeting. As no comments were received, the minutes were approved and are now available on the WENP website ([click here](#) to view).

1. Work Programme update and ToRs

The Board approved the updated versions of the Work Programme and Terms of Reference (ToRs) that were distributed ahead of the meeting. SGa updated members on the discussions with Bristol Water regarding their joining of WENP, which should be concluded in the New Year. It was also agreed that Highways England should be contacted regarding membership of WENP.

Members were informed that a meeting of WENP funders had been held in the morning, and it was agreed to hold future meetings of the WENP Board in the afternoon to enable a meeting of funders to be held pre-Board meetings.

Post-meeting note: The agreed versions of the [Work Programme](#) and [ToRs](#) have now been published on the WENP website.

Post-meeting note: The calendar invites for 2020 WENP Board meetings were resent to Board members with the agreed adjusted times.

[ActionSep19/01: SGa to contact Highways England regarding WENP membership](#)

2. Nature Recovery

2.1 Update on work

SGa provided an update of the work done since the last meeting on the Nature Recovery Network (NRN), including the organisations that WENP has coordinated with regarding the NRN. It was agreed that SGa would provide Board members with a brief written summary of the work done so far on the NRN.

Local Authorities and other organisations present at the meeting provided a brief update on their work relevant to the NRN, including:

- Bristol City Council are integrating the NRN maps into their mapping system, to inform how land is repurposed and used.
- North Somerset Council are in the process of preparing an updated Local Plan, for which the NRN will be a key principle, and the NRN will feature strongly in the GI Strategy for North Somerset.
- South Gloucestershire Council are using the NRN to inform their updated Local Plan.



- Bath & North East Somerset Council are embedding the NRN into their thinking, which will include reshaping the climate emergency as a 'climate and nature emergency'. Other projects within Bath and North East Somerset, such as BathScape and WaterSpace, will also contribute towards the NRN.
- The Bristol Avon Catchment Partnership are setting up a Task and Finish Group to work on the 'blue' element of the NRN, as well as the role of bankside vegetation.
- Wessex Water are examining how the land they own and manage fits in with the NRN, and are looking to revisit their biodiversity and land management strategies. The strategies will also incorporate NRNs from other geographical areas.
- The Woodland Trust are using the NRN to inform their spatial targeting for woodlands.

It was agreed that it is imperative for Local Authorities to ensure that local groups, including parish councils, are aware of the NRN so that it can inform their planning and work. It was also decided that SGa would present on the NRN at the next meeting of the Bristol Parks Forum.

HE noted that the opportunities that the declaration of climate emergencies by the four LAs and WECA (as well as other organisations) should be best utilised to help develop the NRN. LA added that the language used was broadening to include the ecological/nature emergency, and that the need for adaptation and resilience to the effects of climate change was increasingly being recognised.

[ActionSep19/02: SGa to send update on Nature Recovery Network work to Board](#)

2.2 Sharing of layers

SGa explained that there had been issues regarding the sharing of the NRN mapping layers, and especially the grassland layers, with third parties as some of the data used had been provided by BRERC. WENP Board members agreed that the layers should be shareable, to facilitate contributions to the NRN, and that the discussions held at the Board meeting would be relayed to BRERC.

[ActionSep19/03: SGa to relay discussions at Board regarding sharing of NRN layers to BRERC](#)

[ActionSep19/04: HE to look into licensing agreements for data used in NRN mapping and how this affects the sharing of the NRN layers](#)

2.3 PhD Proposal

SGa provided an overview of the proposal for a funded partnership PhD to utilise occupancy modelling to estimate robust distribution trends from opportunistic data, such as the ecological records held by BRERC – the details of this proposal were outlined in a pre-meeting distribution paper sent to Board members.

It was agreed that this would be a useful piece of work, but that LAs would require additional assurances that a partnership PhD would be the most suitable way of completing the work (compared to, for example, hiring consultants to do the work). It was agreed that SGa would work with Paul Lintott, who developed the proposal and is part of the WENP Wildlife Index WG, to provide additional justification to the Board.

[ActionSep19/05: Paul Lintott to report back to WENP Board on PhD proposal and its advantages over other models for delivery of occupancy modelling](#)

[ActionSep19/06: HE to determine if Woodland Trust research colleagues could contribute to development of occupancy models](#)



3. Woodland Strategy

SGa updated Board Members on the outcomes of the Woodland Strategy meeting in November 2019, minutes of which can be accessed [here](#). The meeting agreed to develop high-level principles for woodland creation and tree planting in the West of England, building on existing work and evidence.

RB provided an overview of the proposal for a Woodland Delivery Mechanism, as described in a pre-meeting distribution paper sent to Board members. The Board supported the principle of the proposal, and IB noted that it would be useful to integrate the idea with [Vana](#) and with incentives for farmers to create woodland. HE suggested that, as a regional body, the Forest of Avon Trust would be best placed to act as a demand aggregator. It was also agreed that it would be beneficial to learn from and build on the [Replant Bristol](#) initiative, which RE (and Jon Clark of the Forest of Avon Trust) would be able to provide input on.

LA noted that there is a need to be mindful of how such a mechanism links with opportunity areas, and HE added that the mechanism should eventually incorporate other habitats. JF highlighted the need for good quality data to inform the development of a woodland strategy.

IB informed the meeting that the Wildlife Trust was working at a national level to develop 'natural solutions' to climate change.

[ActionSep19/07: SGa, RB and RE to meet to discuss next steps for Woodland Delivery Mechanism](#)

[ActionSep19/08: BG and LA to take proposal for a Woodland Delivery Mechanism to Board of Directors](#)

4. Local Authorities information sharing and Local Sites Group

SGa raised the idea of a dedicated forum for Local Authorities to share information related to their work on the natural environment. The meeting suggested that it would be useful to have a regular, ten-minute presentation from one of the Board Members at each Board meeting on ongoing projects or ideas for projects, to facilitate information sharing. The possibility of a dedicated web page for such information sharing was also raised.

The meeting discussed the status of Local Sites in the West of England. IB noted that the West of England has historically performed poorly in reporting the status of Local Wildlife Sites (LWSs) and suggested that there might be the potential for a West of England project for reviewing the status of LWSs (including SNCIs and RIGs). The meeting agreed that Sites within the NRN should be prioritised for assessment, and JF suggested that the inclusion of the NRN in Local Plans could provide a stronger mechanism for doing so. However, it was recognised that significant funding would be required to do this.

Post-meeting note: SGa contacted BRERC regarding potential costings for a Phase 1 Habitat Survey within the West of England. The response from BRERC was circulated to Board Members.

5. Governance and Funding

SGr provided an update on discussions regarding WENP Governance and Funding. Local Authorities have agreed to roll over their funding for another year, with a view to review funding commitments ahead of the 2021/22 Financial Year (recognising the current uncertainty regarding roles and governance in the natural environment nationally). IB noted that there are opportunities to obtain additional funding from NGOs, utility companies etc.



6. Spatial Planning

LA provided members with an update on discussions regarding the status of the JSP, for which no formal decisions have yet been made. In the meantime, work on the West of England Green Infrastructure (GI) Strategy is continuing (with WENP represented on the Working Group), and the Strategy is seen as a high-profile piece of work. WECA will continue to report to the Board on the GI Strategy and has noted the need to coordinate with all partners on the WENP Board.

7. Nature, Health and Wellbeing

SGr updated members on the work of the Nature and Health Strategy Group to mainstream nature-based health services, explaining that a bid would be developed for making these services commissionable. SGr is also working with a Public Health registrar to look at capacity of delivery partners.

IB noted that AWT has been pioneering work in nature and health for the past 10-15 years and has recently developed a training model that can be used to train employees of other local Wildlife Trusts, which AWT is looking to offer more broadly. As funding for AWT's work in this field runs out in June, there is a danger of losing momentum this year, and so AWT is planning for after that funding runs out.

RB added that Wessex Water is working on nature and health in the Somer Valley, including talking to Commissioners in the area. They are also conducting a piece of work regarding GPs' views on nature-based health prescribing, which will be used to identify potential hurdles.

SGa provided an update on the work of the West of England Practitioner Forum for Nature, Health and Wellbeing, including the [Social Prescribing Network event](#) held in November and the plan to produce a dedicated website for practitioners in nature and health

8. Partner updates

Board Members provided updates on their organisations work related to the natural environment:

- **North Somerset Council** is focusing on '[rewilding' North Somerset](#), through planting trees and letting areas of grass grow longer on amenity grassland, and is working with AWT to develop a lottery bid to engage volunteers in this work.
- **Bath & North East Somerset Council** is continuing their work on [BathScape](#), which is in the first year of the Delivery Phase, and are recruiting a project manager for the [WaterSpace project](#). The Council is also working with Wessex Water on public health projects that can be taken forward.
- **South Gloucestershire Council** is identifying potential areas in which biodiversity can be improved, in order to utilise these areas for biodiversity net gain and district level licensing (DLL) schemes; restoration of ponds for DLL has been started to prepare as many as possible in advance. New wetland work is to be started in 2020 for the Severnside flood defence ecological mitigation project.
- The **National Trust** is also working on the BathScape project, through community ranger working in partnership with AWT. A dam reconstruction project at Prior Park is ongoing.
- **Avon Wildlife Trust (AWT)** is developing its five-year strategy, which will include the Nature Recovery Network and the creation of 'Living Landscapes' (landscapes that work for wildlife and people). Consultation on the strategy will be done in May, as part of AWT's 40th birthday celebrations. AWT is



developing a vision for North Somerset Levels and Moors, as well as for Chew Valley. AWT's [My Wild City](#) project is looking at local wildlife sites in Bristol.

- The **Woodland Trust** recently planted 5,000 trees at Avoncliff as part of the big climate fightback, and is also part of the [Replant Bristol](#) project. The Trust is working with Natural England to update its ancient woodland inventory, which will be more granular and capture trees outside of woods. There has been an upsurge in interest in tree planting due to the climate emergency, which needs to be shaped so the right trees are planted in the right places and to facilitate a sustainable woodland economy.
- **Wessex Water** is working on the Somer Valley public health project, developing data to support sustainable prescribing. Wetland creation at Bromwell is ongoing. PhD students are looking at value of wetlands for habitat and treatment. The construction of a wetland at Nailsea, in partnership with other organisations, is in Wessex Water's business plan to deal with the outflow at Nailsea.
- **Natural England** is working on pilot projects, including for biodiversity net gain, with partners including organisations on the WENP Board. Natural England is also looking at the use of wetlands for social prescribing and is working on a strategic project on bats in North Somerset.
- The **Bristol Avon Catchment Partnership** is working at two levels: facilitating small projects (which is valuable, as they tend to be pre-feasibility) and on higher-level projects. Fifteen smaller projects have been funded, with seven more higher-level projects ongoing. [River Frome Reconnected](#) is a key high-level project that the Partnership is working on.

9. Any Other Business

SGr suggested that an Away Day be held in late April, with Yeo Valley as a potential location.

MM noted that the Western Gateway is a potential opportunity for large scale habitat creation and/or restoration, similar to the development of the Northern Forest as part of the Northern Powerhouse strategy, and suggested building LNP connections within that area.

SGa informed members that Nick Tew would be starting a placement with WENP in January, as part of his PhD focusing on pollinators. Nick will be working on the Bristol Pollinator Strategy and other mapping projects.

The next meeting of the WENP Board will be held on the afternoon on 17th March.

[ActionSep19/09: WENP Away day to be organised for late April](#)



Attendance

Attendees

Selena Gray (Chair) - SGr	West of England Nature Partnership
Ian Barrett - IB	Avon Wildlife Trust
Richard Cresswell - RC	Bristol Avon Catchment Partnership
Richard Ennion - RE	Bristol City Council
Mark Minkley - MM	Bath & North East Somerset Council
Andy Hicklin – AH	Environment Agency
Tom Boden - TB	National Trust
Claire Newill - CN	Natural England
John Flannigan - JF	North Somerset Council
Brian Glasson - BG	South Gloucestershire Council (representing Heads of Planning)
David Villis - DV	South Gloucestershire Council
Ruth Barden - RB	Wessex Water
Laura Ambler - LA	West of England Combined Authority / LEP
Heather Elgar - HE	Woodland Trust
Stuart Gardner - SGa	West of England Nature Partnership

Apologies

Sally Hogg	Bristol City Council (representing Directors of Public Health)
Marion Steiner	Bristol, North Somerset & South Gloucestershire CCG
Matt Postles	Natural History Consortium
Ross Kennerley	Woodland Trust

Actions

Action	Description	Lead(s)	Status
ActionDec19/01	SGa to contact Highways England regarding WENP membership	SGa	Closed
ActionDec19/02	SGa to send update on Nature Recovery Network work to Board	SGa	Open
ActionDec19/03	SGa to relay discussions at Board regarding sharing of NRN layers to BRERC	SGa	Open
ActionDec19/04	HE to look into licensing agreements for data used in NRN mapping and how this affects the sharing of the NRN layers	HE	Open
ActionDec19/05	Paul Lintott to report back to WENP Board on PhD proposal and its advantages over other models for delivery of occupancy modelling	SGa	Open
ActionDec19/06	HE to determine if Woodland Trust research colleagues could contribute to development of occupancy models	HE	Open
ActionDec19/07	SGa, RB and RE to meet to discuss next steps for Woodland Delivery Mechanism	RB	Open
ActionDec19/08	BG and LA to take proposal for a Woodland Delivery Mechanism to Board of Directors	BG/LA	Open
ActionDec19/09	WENP Away day to be organised for late April	SGa	Open