

Pilot River Catchment Meeting

Monday 5th December 2011 14:00 - 16:00, Lewis House, Bath

Present:

Mark Minkley	Team Leader – Environment, B&NES Council
Kären Renshaw	Ecologist, B&NES Council
Dave Laming	Councillor, B&NES Council/Bath Avon River Corridor Grp
Nikki Wood	Environmental Gain Ltd/Bath Avon River Corridor Group
Edward Nash	Nash Partnership/Chair, Bath Avon River Corridor Group
Tom Blackman	Major Projects, B&NES Council
Roisin Tobin	Operations, Employment and Training Manager, Groundwork SW
Heather Barker	Senior Environment Planning Officer, EA
Steve Micklewright	Avon Wildlife Trust
Paula Spiers	Avon Frome Partnership Co-ordinator

Apologies:

John Rattray	Wiltshire Wildlife Trust
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(1) Bristol Avon River Catchment

The West of England Partnership area covers the former Avon area of North Somerset, Bristol, South Gloucestershire and Bath & North East Somerset. The Avon Frome Partnership currently covers a similar area. However, the pilot offers an opportunity to work strategically on a catchment basis, rather than being limited to administrative boundaries. For the pilot it makes sense to include the whole Bristol Avon catchment, including Wiltshire. Initial contact with Wiltshire County Council and Wiltshire Wildlife Trust has been positive.

The pilot should work at both the local and strategic level – this will provide an opportunity for scoping ideas and applying learning and knowledge before rolling it out to a wider area.

(2) Background from groups

Bath Avon River Corridor Group

B&NES Council commissioned the Group to investigate how the Avon in Bath could be better valued. They produced the Bath Avon River Economy Report in summer 2011, which sets out a framework for the economic and ecological regeneration of the Bath to Keynsham section of river for the next 20/30 years.

The Group is independent of B&NES Council. The Council is encouraging the Group to become reconstituted as a Trust and to become a delivery agent and a catalyst for change.

The Group is familiar with the work of the EA and has developed a partnership approach, working with many different groups.

Groundwork SW

Groundwork SW is a regeneration charity currently working in Plymouth, Devon and Cornwall. They have been established for 20 years but are new to the West of England area. They heard about the pilot through Groundwork UK.

Groundwork is open to how their role within the pilot develops and is keen to act as a delivery partner for community engagement, facilitation and communication.

Avon Frome Partnership and Avon Wildlife Trust

The Avon Frome Partnership was formed in 1993 and co-ordinates strategic projects that enhance the Avon and Frome river corridors for wildlife, habitats, accessibility, heritage and links to local communities. The rivers cross local authority boundaries and the Partnership enables key partners and stakeholders to develop and deliver a co-ordinated approach to the rivers.

Key partners: Bristol, B&NES and South Glos Councils, the EA and BTCV.

For the purposes of the river catchment pilot, a wider partnership has been created to include the above partners and Avon Wildlife Trust. AWT works to create a Living Landscape where wildlife habitats are coherent and connected, people can enjoy them and they deliver economic benefits. The Trust delivers two living landscapes programmes in the region and has aspirations to see the Avon catchment managed in a holistic way. AWT co-ordinated the Avon Biodiversity Action Plan and has extensive experience in bringing disparate partners together to work on joint initiatives.

The Avon Frome Partnership is currently involved with two catchment wide river projects: one tackling invasive non-native plant species, and the River Revive project which aims to link up existing favourable freshwater habitat to create more effective ecological corridors, using the otter as a flagship species.

West of England Partnership

The West of England Partnership (WEP) is comprised of the EA, Natural England, and the 4 West of England authorities – Bristol, B&NES, South Glos and North Somerset. Each partner signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) earlier in the year, which underpins collaborative working around strategic planning for sustainable development. From this an action plan was drawn up to focus on five themes:

- Flood Risk
- Water Framework Directive
- Waste
- Green Infrastructure
- Energy

There are obvious overlaps with the proposed WEP WFD work and the pilot catchment. This includes a similar geographic area, the same partners (although potentially more partners in the pilot catchment), and ultimately the same outcomes to make improvements across the catchment for WFD. It therefore makes sense for the two groups to join forces.

HB will invite catchment pilot partners to the first WEP WFD meeting which will be largely led by the EA who have the expertise to provide all partners with background info on WFD plus how to incorporate planning for WFD. It would then be down to partners to work collaboratively, form a steering group, share information and compile a delivery plan.

(3) Areas of overlap / common ground

All agreed that it was advantageous to have these different groups with different specialisms and areas of expertise working together on the pilot.

(4) Roles and responsibilities

It was agreed that the Avon Frome Partnership would be the lead contact for the catchment pilot, working closely with Avon Wildlife Trust and the Bath Avon River Corridor Group. Groundwork SW's role within the pilot will be flexible. They are likely to have a role as delivery partner for community engagement activities.

Other important stakeholders are likely to include Wiltshire County Council, Wiltshire Wildlife Trust, Bristol Water, Wessex Water, British Waterways and the K & A Trust.

A discussion was held on whether the catchment pilot group should set itself up as a river trust. However, the Rivers Trust (formerly the Association of Rivers Trusts) already has plans for setting up a river trust for the Bristol Avon. If this goes ahead, the trust would be a stakeholder for the catchment pilot.

(5) Next steps / agreed action points

An early step will be to differentiate between the steering group and catchment stakeholders. The steering group will be responsible for the production of the catchment plan.

Funding

There is currently no indication of how much funding might be available and HB doesn't know if the EA have a sum in mind for a 'typical' pilot. The EA might be able to provide a facilitator to help set up the catchment pilot but clearly a long term, funded co-ordinator will be needed. HB will investigate.

It was agreed that steering group partners should estimate how much funding will be needed and then approach Defra with a proposal.

Likely costs:

- Steering group costs, facilitation, venues etc.
- Project testing costs / ground truthing
- Co-ordinator and community / stakeholder work

Actions

- PS to respond to Defra to let them know the outcome of this meeting
- PS/SM and partners to provide draft costs for setting up the pilot and producing the catchment plan
- PS to invite Wiltshire County Council, Wiltshire Wildlife Trust, Bristol Water and Wessex Water to join the steering group
- HB to find out more about stakeholders for the River Tone catchment pilot
- HB to investigate whether the EA can provide a facilitator to help get the pilot up and running
- HB to contact the group shortly with a new date for the WFD background information session

Related projects / links / opportunities / resources:

- 'City of Ideas' (Bath City Riverside Enterprise Area)
- Sainsburys redevelopment, Bath
- Cadburys site redevelopment, Keynsham
- RoSPA (preventing falls into the river)
- Bath Western Riverside
- Bath Avon River Economy Report, Summer 2011
- Maximising the Ecosystem Value of the River Avon in Bath & NE Somerset report (River Restoration Centre, October 2011)
- Bid for Local Nature Partnership funding
- Kennet and Avon Canal Trust (report on the value of their regeneration work)
- HM Treasury Green Book (British Waterways work to this)