



An Introduction to the Swindon BAP

What is a Biodiversity Action Plan?

In 1992 the largest ever collection of world leaders gathered in Rio de Janeiro to discuss the global problems associated with the environment and development. The gathering was held in the light of the growing realisation that the world's environment was declining rapidly while at the same time the quality of life of most of the world's population remained unacceptably low. Among the chief environmental concerns were the destruction of natural habitats such as forests and the extinction of rare species.

One of the key outcomes was the Convention on Biological Diversity, which required governments to take a wide range of actions to halt (and if possible reverse) the steady decline of species and natural habitats. The UK government, as one of the signatories, was required to produce Biodiversity Action Plans at local and national level. Biodiversity Action Plans (or BAPs) are plans to protect and enhance species and natural habitats. Their aim is to provide a clear focus, prioritise actions and set targets against which progress can be measured.

Why a Swindon BAP?

In the UK over 100 BAPs have been produced, on a number of different geographical scales. There is a UK BAP, an England Biodiversity Strategy, a South West BAP and a Wiltshire BAP. The varying scales reflect the fact that wildlife priorities will differ significantly from one area to another. BAPs are produced wherever it is felt that they will help wildlife.

Swindon is an exceptional place in many ways. Formerly part of Wiltshire, it has since 1997 been a Unitary Authority and has very different concerns and pressures. First, most of the population lives in the urban area, contrasting with the predominantly rural districts of Wiltshire. It is one of the fastest growing towns in

Europe, and pressures on the urban fringe are intense. However, the surrounding landscape is of exceptional wildlife value, making it imperative that wildlife conservation is taken into account as part of development.

The Legal Status of the BAP

In addition to the UK government's commitments as a signatory of the Convention on Biological Diversity (see above), the BAP process is referred to in various pieces of legislation, policy and guidance, some of which are outlined below.

Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (the CRoW Act): ministers and government departments have duties towards the conservation of biodiversity as set out in Section 74 of the CRoW Act. The Act places a duty on these bodies to "...have regard... to the purpose of conserving biological diversity in accordance with the Convention". This implies a duty to have regard to the BAP.

Local authorities' responsibilities for preparing their own local BAPs are not covered directly by the CRoW Act 2000 but are referred to in section 4 of the Local Government Act 2000. The responsibility is described clearly in DEFRA Circular 04/2001 on the CRoW Act as follows:

"[Local BAPs] are among the elements local authorities should build upon when preparing the overarching community strategy required by section 4 of the Local Government Act 2000. Local wildlife sites will be important components within local BAPs."

The DEFRA publication Local Public Service Agreements – a Rural Information Pack elaborates further on the relationship between biodiversity and the community planning process by giving specific examples of how enhancement

of biodiversity can be included within Local Public Service Agreement (PSA) targets. The guidance mentions “...working with partners, local biodiversity partnerships and local strategic partnership to deliver actions for biodiversity” as a key activity.

Structure and Layout of the BAP

The Swindon BAP contains a great deal of general information about Swindon’s wildlife and the issues it faces. It also contains more detailed information about particular species and habitats, and a large number of specific actions and targets. The BAP is intended to be useful to anyone with a general interest in wildlife as well as planners, policy-makers and conservation professionals. The Swindon BAP has been structured so as to make it as easy as possible for these different groups to access the information they need.

Chapter 2 sets out the vision for Swindon – what we are seeking to achieve in the long term. Chapter 3 considers key generic issues affecting the Borough and its environment, including challenges and opportunities, and how we address them.

The next seven chapters focus on particular habitats and species. There are 14 Habitat Action Plans (HAPs) and one Species Action Plan (SAP), for bats. For ease of reference, these action plans have been grouped under general headings such as woodland, water & wetland and grassland. For example, chapter 5 (grassland) includes the amenity grassland, neutral grassland and downland HAPs. Each action is given a code (see Appendix 3).

Each HAP and SAP describes the wildlife that currently exists in the Borough, why it is important, key threats and opportunities and what we wish to achieve for that habitat or species. Each HAP and SAP concludes with a number of actions, identifying lead organisations, targets and, where appropriate, a timescale. The actions are coded with a letter to indicate the

HAP or SAP and a number (see Appendix 3 for details).

Every effort has been made to explain terminology and acronyms in the text. However, a glossary has been provided in the appendices, along with references and coding for the HAP and SAP actions (see above).

Timescale and Review

The visions and concepts set out in the Swindon BAP are long term. It may take fifty years or more to achieve the vision described in the next chapter. Such a vision is vital if we are serious about safeguarding Swindon’s environment for the benefit of future generations. However, specific actions and targets need to be set within a shorter timescale if they are to be realistic. Thus, most of the actions listed in the HAPs and SAP are set within a five to ten-year timescale.

The BAP is an ongoing process. Experience nationally and in other counties shows that successful BAPs have reporting processes and regularly review targets and progress. It is intended to conduct a thorough review of the entire BAP, and particularly targets and actions, on a five yearly basis. However, it is expected that specific targets and actions will be reviewed as appropriate on an ongoing basis.