

Soil Action Plan Advisory Forum Newsletter

Issue 14: October 2006

Actions

1. Please send any information to be included in the next newsletter to [Becca Taylor](#) by **Friday 24 November**. It is our intention to circulate the newsletter at the end of each month unless the volume of material is insufficient.

General

1. The next Advisory Forum meeting will be held on Tuesday 28 November. The meeting will be held at One Great George Street, London, SW1P 3AA, commencing at 11am. Full details, including agenda and associated papers, will be circulated in due course.
2. A soil policy internal challenge meeting was held at the end of August to explore our future plans for soils policy from 2007, focussing on priorities, ways of working and gaps. This was very useful and gave us a number of ideas to consider in developing the English Soil Management Strategy from 2007. We are currently working on the next draft of the strategy and we hope this will be out for consultation in the near future.
3. *Message from Sharon Ellis:* As most of you will know, I am leaving Defra on 27th October to take a post on loan to the Department for Transport. I have really enjoyed working with you all and am grateful for your support and encouragement, and the valuable views you have fed into me and the team over the last 3 years. My new job, whilst not coming at an ideal time, matched very well on to what I had planned to do next, so was too good and opportunity to miss. No doubt I may come across a number of you again on my return to Defra in the future.

BUI (Soils in the Built Environment/Planning)

1. A scoping study was commissioned by the East Midlands Regional Assembly and partners to provide a overview of soil resources within the East Midlands area. The study detailed the extent of the different soil types present within the East Midlands area and considered the various functions that they provide. This information was then cross-referenced with potential drivers of change in soil quality to prioritise the threats to the soil resource in different parts of the region. The final report from this project is [available](#).



2. A workshop to produce a draft version of a revised British Standard for Topsoil took place on 27-28 September. Significant progress was made over the two days with all involved pleased with the result. Comments on this document are now being sought from the Topsoil Standards Working Group (TSWG) and Defra and wider Government colleagues. A further meeting of the TSWG will be taking place during October to ensure that the revised Standard meets the Terms of Reference established by the Working Group. Once all comments have been addressed the document will be formally passed over to the British Standards Institute who will then make what changes they see fit before putting it out for public consultation.
3. Issue 13 of the newsletter reported on the 3 August inaugural meeting of the steering group for the proposed joint Defra/DTI Code of Practice for the Sustainable Use and Management of Soils on Construction Sites. A few days prior to the meeting Defra had announced a moratorium on spending for new projects although we had hoped that this would not have a significant bearing on letting the work to write the Code. Currently the moratorium remains in place, although we are putting together a business case to release the funding.

SUS (Sustainable Soil Management)

1. The European Commission adopted the Thematic Strategy for Soil Protection on 22 September. This was something of a surprise with no recent discussion by the College of Commissioners but as anticipated the package contains a Communication, a Framework Directive and an Impact Assessment. We are currently scrutinising the text from a UK perspective and will be following a project management approach to ensure our handling of this dossier conforms to Cabinet Office guidelines for transposing and implementing EU legislation. Advice suggests that the Finnish Presidency are unable to devote time to this dossier in 2006. We will keep you informed of any developments and will wish to ensure that stakeholder views are brought into the UK plans for implementing these requirements.
2. A new consultation on producing compost has been launched by the Environment Agency and WRAP. Proposals outlined in a *Quality Protocol on Compost* will make it easier for businesses and industry to produce more compost and reduce the amount of organic waste sent to landfill. Once finalised and put into practice the *Quality Protocol on Compost* will:
 - provide users with confidence that the compost they buy meets agreed quality standards comparable with those of composts made from materials of a non-waste origin;
 - protect the environment (including soil) and human health - by setting standards for the use of quality compost on land;
 - and ease regulatory burden - by defining when the compost ceases to be waste and no longer needs to be subject to regulatory control.

The consultation is running until 4 December and more details can be found [online](#).

EVI (Evidence and Access to Information)

1. The Defra/English Heritage project on assessing potential soil indicators for the preservation of cultural heritage has now reported. It provides a clear definition of how soil performs its heritage function and proposes two headline indicators: pH and soil organic carbon. Area and volume/depth of superficial deposits removed by mineral extraction could also be a relevant indicator with some development. Many other potential indicators identified as highly relevant to cultural heritage preservation are not currently practicable because of the level of current technology, lack of baseline soil data and/or a lack of knowledge about the response of the resource to monitored changes. This group includes erosion (including tillage erosion and peat wastage), plough depth, and dewatering, and the report recommends that each of these warrants further research with the aim of developing indicators. The final report will shortly will [available](#).
2. As part of a Defra project on *Analysis of historical datasets to look for impacts of land use and management change on flood generation*, FloodRiskNet - an information hub for practitioners and researchers in flood and coastal risk management - is hosting a [discussion board](#) for users to record their thoughts and experiences on land management impacts on runoff.