

## **Soil Action Plan Advisory Forum - Actions**

### **Wednesday 24 May 2006: Broadway House, Tothill Street**

**Present:** [Defra unless otherwise stated] Daniel Baird, Helaina Black (CEH), Jonathan Burney (English Nature), Sal Burgess, David Calpin, Brian Chambers (ADAS), Paul Davenport, Sharon Ellis – Chair, Sharon Fortune (BBSRC), Andy Holden, Derek Holliday (CLA), David Hopkins (BSSS), Dan Houseago (National Trust), Pamela Kempton (NERC), Mark Kibblewhite (NSRI), Andy Moffat (Forest Research), Archie Montgomery (NFU), Jane Morris (Environment Agency), Phil Murray (IGER), Stephen Nortcliff (SSAC), Sebastian Payne (English Heritage), Steve Robinson, Carol Somper (Forum for the Future), Judith Stuart, Becca Taylor – Minutes, Roger Unwin, Graeme Willis (CPRE), Alan Woods (CIWEM)

**Apologies:** Daryl Brown, Peter Costigan, Jim Densham (RSPB), Caroline Drummond (LEAF), Richard Findon, Rob George (Soil Association), Keith Goulding (Rothamsted Research), Tom Oliver (CPRE), Simon Price (Highways Agency), Colin Pritchard (Countryside Agency), Christine Seaward (Hampshire County Council), Paul Shaffer (CIRIA), Gill Shaw, Anne Wood (ODPM)

#### **Discussion of SAP progress**

[SAP AF\_May06\_Paper 1] outlined progress on all actions in the Soil Action Plan from 4 November 2005 to 4 May 2006. The following points were raised in discussion:

- **Biowaste Directive:** a meeting is being held next week with 4 Member States looking to lobby the European Commission to get proposals for a Biowaste Directive back on track. Recognition that it will be a hard task to convince the Commission of the need for such a Directive.  
**Action: Soils Policy Team to be informed of outcomes of this meeting.**
- **Contamination:** work to date on Actions 17, 18, 25, 28 has focused on what the issues are and commissioning projects to develop our evidence base. Next steps will be developed from this.  
**Action: Soils Policy Team to inform AF of next steps as these develop.**
- **Spending Review:** willingness from AF members to support Soils Policy Team in the next round of bids for financial resource (Action 7), so that soils can be incorporated in future planning. HMT are working to determine spending; climate change and natural resource protection have been identified as key areas for Defra and the importance of soils has been fed into this process.
- **Cross compliance advice, Momenta:** delivery of advice has been agreed but feedback is welcome. Positive feedback on the Momenta delivery of advice was received, farmers able to complete their soil protection review at training events.  
**Action: AF members to feedback any further comments/thoughts to be passed on to the RDS Farm Advice Unit.**

- Carbon: concern that carbon is not used as the main gauge of soil health. Although carbon is a good indicator in itself the UKSIC monitoring scheme will cover many more indicators.
- CSF project: a project seeking to establish whether or not management practices can be encouraged that could lead to a sustainable increase in, or reduced loss of soil organic matter is being planned. Whilst the project will seek to add value to the CSF Programme, it will be independent of this work, focussing on carbon loss and organic matter build up, rather than the specific concerns addressed under the CSF Programme.

**Action: Soils Policy Team to share further details with AF once plans are clear and agreed.**

- Climate change: recognition of the need to look at issues other than carbon. Initial research went wider than carbon and next steps need to be determined from this, the focus will continue to be wider than carbon.
- Soil Thematic Strategy: current adoption date is 7 June, though this is subject to change. Following adoption we will, in consultation with a wide range of stakeholders, consider impacts for the UK and what we will do in response. Specifics, such as the definition of “at risk areas”, are not yet known but text seems to be lighter than previously. Scientific support for policy for the European Commission is being developed by 37 partners under ENVASSO (**ENV**ironmental **AS**essment of **S**oil for **MO**onitoring). This will produce technical guidance for soil monitoring in relation to the Thematic Strategy and will help inform the eventual monitoring network. ENVASSO will link to the work of UKSIC with the UK line being fed into developments.
- Environment Agency:
  - summary of Corporate Strategy has been published and the full version, along with the Corporate Plan, should be available soon.
  - content of the Soil Strategy is being slightly revised. Issues (agriculture, built environment, interaction with air and water, biodiversity, and information) were confirmed through consultation, but climate change and sustainable development are being added at the broader scale, as well as a section on working with partners. More detailed actions will also be included as a means of addressing what will be done as a result of the strategy.
  - soil management training course is being developed for EA staff (e.g. environment officers, CSF officers) as a means of raising awareness. Training materials will be more widely available.
  - inputting to manual for CSF officers explaining what they need to tackle etc, including the level of detail required in relation to soil.

**Action: Soils Policy Team and delivery partners to meet to develop and finalise the draft delivery matrix to ensure joint-up working, clear roles and responsibilities.**

### **Natural England update**

A brief update was given on developments in Natural England. All staff have now been given an indication of the area they will be working in and it seems that expertise has been distributed correctly. There will be five directorates, two of which will be of significance to soils: Delivery (regional organisation, working with stakeholders) and Policy & Science (use of evidence in policy,

roles not yet clear). The role of soils and where it fits in the organisation is not yet known. Board has been established, though it has not yet met, and a corporate plan is emerging.

### **Soil Protection Policy in England from 2007**

A presentation (attached) was given based on [SAP AF\_May06\_Paper 2]. Discussion followed based on the gaps in action identified beyond 2007 and benefits and disbenefits of the strategy approach.

Gaps identified:

- Involvement of others in delivery of policy e.g. community ownership of assets, local composting initiatives etc.
- Good progress has been made in the built environment, need to ensure that this work areas continues to move forward, with links to the Water Framework Directive etc developed.
- Responding to climate change: current focus is on trying to attenuate carbon change, but should be looking at how to respond to it. Role of nitrous oxide as well as carbon. Carbon work needs to be compatible with overarching controls on agriculture and mechanisms for incentivising land management. Link to the sustainable management of soils so that they remain capable of delivering a wide range of functions. Awareness that climate change will effect different land uses and parts of the UK in different ways.
- Links to water and air should be a key priority.
- Recycling of organic materials to land, focus on the improvements to soil that can be achieved, not on any associated risks to the environment and human health. Look at best practicable *sustainable* option as well as best practicable environmental option.
- Current drivers e.g. energy, waste management, should not prevent future drivers from coming to light.
- Potential to develop links to ecology, landscape and biodiversity e.g. link what biodiversity does with resilience of soils.

**Action: Soils Policy Team to map out relationship with research bodies more clearly, how does soil fit into their remit, what research is being undertaken?**

Benefits and disbenefits of the strategy approach:

- Support for a strategy approach. Recognition that an Action Plan was valid as a starting point, as it allows progress to be demonstrated more easily, but now soils policy is more established a strategy approach will be more flexible. Need to retain reporting mechanisms.
- Should set out essential strategic priorities with sub-objectives also outlined. Soil Framework Directive as an overarching objective, capturing the different issues identified.
- Need to link with higher level strategies e.g. fundamental role of soil in Natural Environment Protection.
- Language should be positive e.g. *Soil Management Policy* rather than *Soil Protection Policy*.
- Link more closely to the work of OGDs and the Devolved Administrations.

- Ensure that there is clarity in who does what, who develops outcomes, who develops strategies to meet outcomes etc.
- Recognition of the role of other parts of Defra; Soils Policy Team does not lead on many of the identified future work areas, so in essence the outcomes of these work areas are out of our control.

**Action: Soils Policy Team to revise paper in light of comments received and advise AF members of the consultation process for developing our strategy.**

### **Soil carbon**

A presentation (attached) was given to inform the AF on work undertaken in relation to the decline in soil carbon levels. Discussion followed and the following points were raised:

- Consensus that the National Soils Inventory (NSI) contains useful data though there are gaps in the data contained. Some parameters were not included in the survey(s) as they were seen as non-essential at the time; new questions are now being asked of the data so there is a need to examine other datasets to try and fill the gaps. Support for the *Nature* paper as it raised awareness of the need to address concerns, gaps etc.  
**Action: Defra to bring interested parties (including soil scientists, modelers, and possibly representatives from other countries) together to address the gaps, what data we have and how does it help us address the questions we now have?**
- NSI sites are classified between three land uses. Need to recognise that the previous landuse of sites could have an impact on the current situation.

### **English Heritage presentation on indicators to monitor the state of the landscape and historic environment**

A presentation (attached) was given to inform the AF of work being undertaken to meet Action 44. The following points were raised in the resulting discussion:

- As wide a range of stakeholders are being consulted on this work as possible, including those with an interest in archaeology, soil, landscape, countryside. Stirling University to give a broader presentation of the project at the next UKSIC meeting  
**Action: AF members to express their interest in either the consultation process or the broader presentation to Sebastian Payne.**
- Gradual decline in pH will be a concern for archaeology; as it becomes more acidic and reaches levels of 4-5 there will be concern for some preservation.
- Protection of cultural heritage will not be included in ENVASSO as it was not identified as a “threat” in the Soil Thematic Strategy; focus of ENVASSO is on the original “threats”.

### **AOB**

Next AF meeting to be held in November 2006. This meeting will include the presentation of our strategy for the next phase of soil policy, where we will be seeking final AF comments.

**Action: AF members to inform Becca Taylor of their availability for November.**