

The First Soil Action Plan for England: update on progress (5)

The following table outlines progress from 06 May 2006 – 08 November 2006 on all 52 actions included in the Soil Action Plan. Any progress made since 08 November 2006 will be included in the final progress report to be completed in May 2007. The table is split according to Advisory Forum sub-group interest, with all completed actions recorded at the end.

Note: The traffic light system is used to give an indication of our progress against actions.

General/overarching

	Action	Progress	Traffic Light
6	Defra will agree a framework with other departments to help ensure that Government's wider policies take proper account of their impacts on soils and recognise soil as a strategic national resource	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continued engagement with Department for Education and Skills, Department for Communities and Local Government, Department of Trade and Industry on specific work areas – education and the built environment. Engaged with a wide range of Government stakeholders in relation to the EU Soil Thematic Strategy. We are adopting a workstream approach to develop the UK negotiating line on the Thematic Strategy package and are involving a number of Other Government Departments (e.g. Cabinet Office, Department for Constitutional Affairs, Department for Communities and Local Government, Department for Transport, Department of Trade and Industry, HM Treasury, Ministry of Defence) in these, due to the wide ranging implications of the Commission's proposals. 	G

9	Defra will work with the European Commission, UK stakeholders and other member states to try and ensure that outcomes of the EU Soil Thematic Strategy are appropriate to UK soils and the pressures on them	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • European Commission adopted the Thematic Strategy for Soil Protection on 22 September 2006. This includes a Communication, proposals for a Soil Framework Directive and an Impact Assessment. • We have established a Project Team to take on day-to-day developments with the strategy and will be engaging stakeholders through workstreams and wider consultation in developing the UK negotiating line on the Commission's proposals. • As we understand it the Germans will be taking this strategy on under their presidency in the first half of 2007. 	G
52	The Defra Soils Team will measure and report progress on all actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As well as providing twice yearly progress reports, informal monthly newsletters of progress are produced. • The Second Annual Report for the Soil Action Plan was published on the Defra website in July 2006. • The English Soil Strategy from 2007 is currently being developed, taking stock of progress under the Action Plan. 	G

Sustainable soil management (SUS)

19	The Environment Agency, Defra and partners will continue to develop soil guideline values for protection of human health from contaminants in soil	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building on the work of the Soil Guideline Values Task Force, Defra has outlined to stakeholders the emerging ideas for improving the suite of technical guidance on human health risk assessment. A Defra discussion paper is now being finalised which aims to set these out in more detail and invite responses. Work on developing individual substance reports (SGV and TOX reports) is continuing, and further reports will be published once decisions on the proposed way forward have been taken. 	G
24	Defra will consider whether controls on the use of metal-containing veterinary medicines are appropriate to balance environmental and livestock interests and	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This action is being tackled alongside Action 29. • A gap analysis is being undertaken by Defra to determine where further work is needed to balance environmental and livestock interests with the use of metal-containing veterinary 	

	how they are enforced	<p>medicines. Report expected end-2006.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> We are addressing comments on the final report from the ADAS led project on sources and impacts of past, current and future contamination of soil and hope to publish this in the near future. This will feed into the gap analysis. 	G
26	Defra will ensure that appropriate measures are in place or in train to achieve the requirements for 2010 as set out in the National Emissions Ceilings Directive and Gothenburg Protocol	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ongoing preparations within Defra for the proposals (following the review of this Directive), which are expected in late-2006/early-2007. 	A
29	Defra will work with the veterinary medicines industry and other partners to gain better understanding of the potential impacts of veterinary products on soil biodiversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This action is being tackled alongside Action 24. See Action 24 for detail. 	G
32	Defra will review the Code of Good Agricultural Practice (COGAP) for the protection of soil	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> First draft of the integrated soil, water and air code was consulted on (internally) during September. Discussions on the purpose and content of the code continue. We will seek to minimise the duplication of information included in existing advice documents, such as the cross compliance handbook. There will be further consultation with stakeholders before the document is finalised. 	G
36	Defra will work with partners to re-examine current soil management advice, to take account of the potential impacts of inappropriate management on flooding, aquifer recharge and water and air quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This action will be taken on in conjunction with Action 32. See Action 32 for detail. 	G

Awareness and education (AWE)

10	Defra will work with stakeholders to develop a programme of education and	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project piloting Soil-Net in Hampshire schools was completed in August 2006. A positive and enthusiastic response was 	
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	awareness of soil issues	<p>received from teachers and a number of additions have been made to the Soil-Net site as a result of feedback.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A communications plan for Soil-Net has been established and we are working with colleagues in Department for Education and Skills to market the resource via teacher press and websites, as well as at events. • The final <i>Soil Works</i> materials were sent to all institutes within the post compulsory education sector (including educational establishments, prison services, work-based learners and job centre plus) in October 2006. 	G
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Soils in the built environment/planning (BUI)

4	Defra will engage with DTI and other professional bodies to raise standards of sustainable construction practices, and disseminate knowledge throughout the development and construction sectors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First meeting of the steering group for the joint Defra/DTI Code of Practice for the sustainable use and management of soils on construction sites took place in August 2006 to discuss the draft specification for consultants to write the CoP. This project has since been delayed unfortunately due to the spending moratorium imposed on Government Departments by HM Treasury. • A draft revised version of BS3882 (British Standard for Topsoil) has been produced by the topsoil standards working group. This has been passed to the British Standards Institute for approval and will then go for public consultation. 	G
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14	Defra will consider with DCLG and Local Government organisations how to increase understanding of soil issues throughout the Regional and Local Government structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A new Environmental Advisory Service website has been launched by the Local Government Association, including a section (developed with Defra input) on soils. The service is intended to provide a single entry point for local authority officers working on environmental issues to the various sources of good practice, advice and guidance which are available at a national level. • The LGA issued a report in October 2006 setting out planning policies for sustainable building for use by local authorities. The Code of Practice for the sustainable use and management of soils on construction sites will feed into this once produced. • A workshop for Government Office colleagues was held in May 2006, to update them on latest soils policy developments and to help them better understand how soils can be accounted for in the planning process. • Natural England are developing a site-specific planning toolkit for local authorities, giving ideas for soil sustainability and mitigating the effects of threats to soils. This will be produced in 2007. 	G
15	Defra will work with DCLG to clarify the use of existing mechanisms, including the Building Regulations, to ensure proper consideration of soil implications during the planning and development process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This action is being taken forward in conjunction with Action 14. See Action 14 for progress. 	G
16	Defra will work with DCLG to ensure that soil issues are taken into account, where appropriate, in the creation and implementation of plans at both the regional and local level under the proposed new planning system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This action is being taken forward in conjunction with Action 14. See Action 14 for progress. 	G

47	Defra will promote with industry better understanding of the potential benefits to sustainable construction through specific tests and British Standards for soil use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This action is being taken forward in conjunction with Action 4. See Action 4 for progress. 	G
49	Defra will examine the practicality of introducing and monitoring a programme to integrate minerals and waste policies which will increase the recycling of materials for re-use or for restoration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proposals for a Quality Protocol on Compost are out for consultation by the Environment Agency and Waste and Resources Action Programme (with input from Defra and the Devolved Administrations). This will encourage the recycling of compost to land, under set controls. The consultation closes 4 December 2006. 	G
50	Defra will consult the Environment Agency and local planning authorities to improve monitoring of use of soils in relation to built development, compliance with soil protection conditions of planning permissions, and for reducing off-site impacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This action is being taken forward in conjunction with Actions 4 and 14. See these actions for progress. 	G

Evidence and access to information (EVI)

11	Defra will work with stakeholders to identify indicators which should be built into a national soil monitoring scheme, aiming to develop a scheme meeting national and European requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project to evaluate environmental monitoring schemes for contextual information for soil monitoring is due to report end-November 2006. Project to design a new UK soil monitoring scheme is being commissioned to commence in January 2007. SQID2 project testing 13 biological indicators is being carried out by the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology and is due to complete end-2008. The project is being run in parallel to the Countryside Survey 2007. A headline indicator for Soil Organic Matter was published under the Sustainable Farming and Food Strategy in July 2006. See Action 44 for current position with development of heritage 	G
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		indicators.	
13	Defra will work with other Government Departments and Agencies (including the Devolved Administrations), and other soil data users, to develop and provide better access to information on soils	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We are working with Defra Communications to determine how best to disseminate the tool developed under the Government soils information project of who holds what soils information across UK Government. We are developing a strategy to improve access to soils information across Government. 	G
17	Defra and the Environment Agency will commission work to assess routes of contamination by heavy metals and persistent organic compounds to soils, and to examine the feasibility of new criteria to protect the long term functioning of soils	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This action is being tackled together with Actions 25 and 28. We are addressing comments on the final report from the ADAS led project on sources and impacts of past, current and future contamination of soil and hope to publish this in the near future. We will need to determine policy implications from this – see action 18. 	G
18	Defra will work with partners to examine results from the inventory of metal inputs to soils, to ensure that necessary controls are in place to retain the long term functioning of soils	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work has begun to assess the results of the ADAS led project on sources and impacts of past, current and future contamination of soil to determine the way forward for the English Soil Strategy from 2007. 	G
25	Defra and the Environment Agency will review and evaluate the impacts of contaminants mobilised and transported by floodwaters, on diffuse pollution of soils	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This action is being tackled together with Actions 17 and 28. See Action 17 for detail. 	G
28	Defra will work with partners to examine current data sources of the burden on soil resource from diffuse sources; and assess the implications of the results for policy and research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This action is being tackled together with Actions 17/18 and 25. See Action 18 for detail. 	A
31	Following on from Action 30, Defra and partners will undertake further research (including development of tools to	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A soil carbon policy workshop was held in May 2006 to discuss the implications of soil carbon dynamics and the influence of climate change for policy development. 	

	manage the risks to soils from climate change)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Following this an expert workshop was held in October 2006 where these policy needs were refined into knowledge gaps. • Defra will distil and prioritise the R&D ideas developed at the above workshops and will explore opportunities with other UK funders for future soil carbon research. 	A
39	Defra will work with the Environment Agency and other partners to continue to examine a range of policy options for the control of sediment and soil-bound nutrient losses to water	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have funded a 2 year project (managed by Natural England and involving GY Associates and Rothamsted Research) to develop agricultural organic matter management advice. The project is designed to run alongside the Catchment Sensitive Farming programme and aims to monitor farmers' attitudes to soil organic matter management and develop short-term indicators of SOM status in the soil. 	G
40	Defra and partners will review and synthesise the published material on links between biodiversity, pollution, contamination and land management, to identify an initial list of biological and biochemical indicators of functional diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This action is being taken on in conjunction with Action 11. See Action 11 for detail. 	G
48	Defra will continue to support the development of recycling and composting to provide alternative growing material and soil conditioners to peat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proposals for a Quality Protocol on Compost are out for consultation by the Environment Agency and Waste and Resources Action Programme (with input from Defra and the Devolved Administrations). This will encourage the recycling of compost to land, under set controls. The consultation closes 4 December 2006. • Defra is also working with the Composting Task Force, examining what materials can be applied to land under exemption and what requires further control. • The <i>Protection of soil during the recycling of organic materials to land</i> will form a core section of the English Soil Strategy from 2007. 	G

Biodiversity and cultural heritage (HER)

41	Defra will consider with English Nature and other partners the benefits which might arise from the establishment of a national series of benchmark sites for soil biodiversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A research project was planned to tackle this action, but EN and Defra have agreed to hold this project pending results of the wider research on site monitoring network proposals. EN is supporting phase 3 of Scottish Natural Heritage's project on soil conservation values which also supports this objective. 	G
44	English Heritage will monitor the state of the landscape and historic environment and, where needed, develop new indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Defra/English Heritage project on assessing potential soil indicators for the preservation of cultural heritage has 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. 	G
45	English Heritage will research into the threats and mechanisms of loss and degradation of soils supporting historic landscapes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A revised draft of the EH Research strategy for the preservation of archaeology <i>in situ</i> is in preparation. 	G
46	English Heritage will improve understanding of soils and the historic landscape through research on the importance of the landscape and historic environment to the economy, and to quality of life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plans for research in this area are under active discussion following the appointment of a new Head of Social and Economic Research. 	G

Completed actions

1	Defra will implement the CAP cross compliance conditions in such a way as to foster basic good management of soils in the farming industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Four specific soil standards included in cross compliance to prevent erosion, maintain soil organic matter and maintain good soil structure. The Cross Compliance Soil Protection Review was published in December 2005, following farmer testing. This is a whole farm 	
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		<p>assessment of risks to soil requiring farmers to identify any soil issues on their farm and to record and implement any measures they will take to tackle these.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cross Compliance Guidance for Soil Management was published in January 2005. This was updated in December 2005 to incorporate feedback and include new sections on managing land not in agricultural production and managing soils under set-aside. • As part of their cross compliance advice contract, Momenta has delivered training on the soil standards, including the SPR. • The Rural Payments Agency will be undertaking the inspection role for the SPR. Inspections will commence in May 2007. • A process for monitoring the impact of cross compliance and how far it has delivered better soil management is being considered and will be followed up in the English Soil Strategy from 2007. 	Complete
2	Defra will encourage better management of agricultural soils that goes beyond the requirements of the Single Payment, through the provision of incentives under the Agri-Environment Scheme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Environmental Stewardship scheme was launched in March 2005. Soil options are included in both the Entry and Higher level schemes. • Full guidance on producing a Soil Management Plan as part of Entry Level Stewardship is available on the Defra website. • 40% of ELS agreement holders have signed up to at least one soil option. Interest in the SMP has been particularly high. • A process for monitoring and evaluating the impact of Environmental Stewardship and its impacts on soil protection is being developed and will be followed up in the English Soil Strategy from 2007. 	Complete
3	Defra will develop a strategy for providing farmers and other land managers with practical information and advice for building good soil management into overall farm planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant progress has been made in developing practical advice/guidance (e.g. controlling soil erosion guidance has been reviewed and made electronically available; a Soil and Water Management Certificate, offered by the National Soil Resources Institute and accredited by BASIS, commenced in 	Complete

		November 2004; a soils module has been included in the Whole Farm Approach). We will maintain regular contact with others in Defra to ensure that future advice considers soil.	
5	Defra will engage with key stakeholders across Government Departments and Agencies to seek to deliver improved Training/Continuing Professional Development programmes for Defra-funded conservation and environmental advisors that incorporate soil function and protection techniques	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recruitment of Catchment Sensitive Farming Officers (including staff from the Rural Development Service and Environment Agency) has been completed. Officers are working with farmers to reduce diffuse pollution, including improving soil management. National Soil Resources Institute Soil and Water Management Course commenced in November 2004 to equip farmers and their advisors with relevant skills and knowledge. 	Complete
7	Defra will work during the Spending Review 2004 process to embed soil protection into it's forward strategies and, if appropriate, targets on natural resource protection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resources were secured during the Spending Review 2004 process to take forward the Soil Action Plan and other policy areas which have an impact on soil. 	Complete
8	Defra will ensure that, during the process of reconstructing the Government's rural delivery landscape in response to the Haskins report, all new and reconstructed agencies concerned with land management issues have regard to the proper management of soils alongside other requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have worked with the Environment Agency and Natural England in agreeing relevant sections of their Corporate Plans to ensure that the need to protect soils is recognised. Natural England was formed on 1 October 2006. There is a <i>Geology, Landscape and Soils Team</i> within the agency, who we will be working with. The English Soil Strategy from 2007 will formally recognise our working relationship with our delivery partners. 	Complete
12	Defra will review its soil research programme in light of the recently completed UK Soils Research Audit, and issues identified in this plan, to ensure that resources are focussed on the most urgent questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Priorities for the 2005-08 Soil Protection research programme have been established. Approved research objectives are available on the Defra website. 	Complete
20	Defra will seek to negotiate the proposed revisions to the Sewage Sludge Directive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Soil Thematic Strategy (adopted September 2006) states that the Commission will review the Sewage Sludge Directive in 	

	to ensure that controls on the application of sludge to land recognise potential benefits, while ensuring that sludge does not impair the long term functioning of soils	<p>2007.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Defra is currently considering the way forward with the UK sludge regulations. A seminar was held in July to discuss stakeholders' views on the merits of additional regulation and other options for delivering Defra's policy objectives of supporting the recycling of sewage sludge to agricultural land and maintaining the necessary protection of the environment and human and animal health. 	Complete
21	Defra will seek, during negotiations on the proposed Bio-Waste Directive, to agree arrangements which encourage the return of organic material to the soil	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The European Commission is no longer considering a separate Biowaste Directive. The published text on the Waste and Recycling Thematic Strategy suggests that the Commission is looking to develop a technical standard for biowaste. We are mindful of the time this will take and the need for greater market certainty before commencement. This area will be considered under the <i>Protection of soil during the recycling of organic materials to land</i> section of the English Soil Strategy from 2007. 	Complete
22	Defra, the Environment Agency and partners will work to deliver changes to Waste Management Licensing Regulations to ensure that applications of licensed and exempt wastes does not impair long-term soils functions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Draft changes to the Waste Management Licensing Regulations were submitted to Ministers in October 2004. These were approved and came into force on 1 July 2005. Defra re-consulted on the requirement to source-segregate wastes prior to their mechanical and biological treatment to produce compost-like outputs, as required by the 1 July 2005 Amendment to the Waste Licensing Regulations. The results were published on 10 October 2006 (available on the Defra website). For now, the source-segregation requirement will remain in place as a temporary safeguard against the landspreading of any sub-standard wastes to agricultural land in order to protect the environment and human health. However, Defra will carry out work to find a longer term, more sustainable solution that will encourage the development of technologies that will produce high standard outputs which 	Complete

		could be safely spread to land.	
23	Defra will work with partners to ensure the effective enforcement of regulations on permissible metal concentrations in animal feeds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A paper has been produced, in consultation with the Food Standards Agency, explaining developments in this area, changes to permissible levels and how enforcement is regulated. • We will retain contact with the FSA to chart progress, including how permissible levels of undesirable substances change in the future and noting compliance with the regulations on an annual basis. 	Complete
27	Defra, the Environment Agency and partners will seek to explore the need for technical material to assist in considering the impact on and benefits to soil functional capacity from remediation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report on the impacts on soil functions of different remedial techniques, and the impacts of current regulations on these, has been discussed with Environment Agency colleagues. Dissemination route has been identified via the EA once report is finalised. 	Complete
30	UKCIP and Defra will establish a scoping study of the impacts of climate change on soil types in England	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project was let to the National Soil Resources Institute and reported at the end-2005. See Action 31 for resulting action. 	Complete
33	Defra will work with the farming industry to examine current and/or novel means of encouraging voluntary change in soil management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defra is working with industry stakeholders to assess the merit of a voluntary initiative for nutrient management. An industry (Agricultural Industries Confederation, National Farmers Union, Linking Environment And Farming, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Country Land and Business Association) outline plan for a voluntary initiative for nutrient management was presented in February 2006. This is set within a timeframe of the next 2-3years and envisages the development of existing tools/systems rather than creating new structures. Soil management is part of this consideration and wider engagement is expected to develop this plan. 	Complete
34	Defra will work with partners to fund further research on the relationships between farm soil management practice, physical characteristics, functions of soils	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is ongoing research in this area, for example, projects are being undertaken on sludge to land; impact of organic carbon returns to soil quality; and documenting soil erosion rates. Details of all Defra-funded projects can be found on the 	Complete

	and subsequent impacts	Defra website.	
35	With the Forestry Commission, Defra will examine the scope for inclusion of soil issues in the England Woodland Grant Scheme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A review of the England Forestry Strategy was prepared for consultation by Defra, the Forestry Commission and the England Forestry Forum. Consultation closed on 9 August 2006 and results are being considered. A new England Forestry Strategy is expected to be published in the New Year. Soil issues have been included in the review e.g. the need to protect the soil resource, retain soils coverage and retain stores of soil carbon. 	Complete
37	Defra will complete research, and take account of results, to provide further understanding of the role that land and soil management might play in flood management at water catchment level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First Government response to 'Making space for water' consultation exercise was published in March 2005. Within this it states that priority research will be undertaken into the role rural land management techniques might play in managing flood risk at catchment level. Pilots will also be funded to test different approaches to integrated management. These pilots will look at upstream catchments where appropriate and may include encouraging rural land management changes. 	Complete
38	Defra will research the capacity of different soils to attenuate substances in relation to the protection of groundwater	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Considerable research has been undertaken in this area and we have agreed with the Environment Agency that as it is sufficiently understood no further work is required at this time. • We will need to consider further research requirements as necessary on the basis of EA advice. 	Complete
42	English Nature will prepare a position statement on the role of soil management and protection within statutory nature conservation sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • English Nature's Council discussed a paper on soils and nature conservation at its June 2005 meeting. Copies of the paper are available on the English Nature website. • Minutes of this meeting are also available (on the EN website) detailing Council discussion and approval of the paper. EN is no longer publishing formal position statements because of the impending change to Natural England, so it has been agreed with Defra that these papers act as EN's position and complete this action. 	Complete
43	English Nature will publish guidance on	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project has been completed. The main report is being 	

	the use of soil information in the restoration of wildlife and wildlife habitats	published as an English Nature Research Report (<i>ENRR712: Guidance on understanding and managing soils for habitat restoration projects</i>), available on the English Nature website. It is intended that a glossy overview leaflet will be produced in the near future.	Complete
51	Defra will continue to work closely with DCLG, minerals planning authorities, and the industry, to promote and develop practical guidance on minerals site restorations and aftercare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rural Development Service guidance on site restoration has been sent to mineral planning authorities and is also available on the Defra website. 	Complete