

Dearne Valley Year 2 Summary of Progress

OBJECTIVE 1 – *Create 61ha and restore 27ha of floodplain habitat and deliver flood storage schemes at Houghton Washlands, Wombwell Ings and Carlton Marsh through direct land management by the partners*

Project 1a Habitat Creation/Flood Alleviation Scheme – Houghton Washland

The Houghton Washland lease-transfer work continues to progress on this, the largest habitat creation scheme in the Dearne NIA program.

The current Environment Agency Tenants have negotiated the surrender of their long term leases.

The potential outcome for the project is significantly more optimistic with one of the current tenants indicating that he would like to continue working the land at Houghton as a grazier. The advantages being:-

- Grazing is the preferred method of management for the wetland suite once established
- The current farmer is familiar with the land and its practical issues such as drainage
- Anti-social activity on the new habitats would be greatly reduced with a grazier that “lives over the shop”
- The farmer would bring more land into grazing with a heard of rare-breed short horn cattle than the initial habitat creation scheme giving an enhanced benefit to the river corridor
- The latest date for a lease surrender by the current farmer is 10th March 2014

Several meetings have been held with the current tenants, current Landlords-Environment Agency and the various land agents, of the land this last quarter in an attempt to build a positive relationship and speed the passage of the lease transfer.

Project 1b Habitat Creation/Flood Alleviation Scheme - Wombwell Ings Extension

Excellent news was received this last quarter regarding the funding gap for the acquisition of this piece of land.

A funding bid ***‘Wings Across the Ings’*** was co-written by the NIA Secretariat and the Garganey Trust to fund:-

1. The acquisition of the Farmland
2. The subsequent management of the land for 3 years and community involvement

The bid achieved phase 1 (development phase) success giving circa £40,000 for the development and planning of the site. The negotiations with the current landowners continue on a regular basis.

Project 1c Habitat Restoration/Flood Alleviation Scheme – Carlton Marsh/Cudworth Dyke

Yorkshire Water has committed to undertake a significant amount of work at Sandy Bridge dyke at Rabbit Ings. This requires partnership working between Yorkshire Water, Land Trust, BMBC and Groundwork DV.

Yorkshire Water contractors have started work on the river restoration / re-meandering project at Rabbit Ings. The first element of work will be around reed beds at Rabbit Ings, this will form part of the 20 year Cudworth Dyke improvement plan. Land Trust has submitted an application to Viola to fund works that will compliment the 20 year plan and Yorkshire Water proposals – fingers crossed that the bid is successful, as it would bring a further £30,000 into the Dearne Valley!

OBJECTIVE 2 - *Restore 150ha of woodland and 1,150ha of farmland habitats in the low ecologically functioning areas through targeted advisory work and uptake of Environmental Stewardship, management advice and training by March 2015*

Integrated Habitat Network Tool (2a)

Forest Research have developed a prototype tool to demonstrate the relative benefits of different habitat creation and management options. The tool incorporates a range of habitat data sets and uses least cost modelling to show the most and least appropriate locations for landscape changes in relation to habitat connectivity. The tool takes into account the permeability of a range of habitats and their indicator species.

Farmland Advisory Group and NIA Riparian Officer (2b)

Steve Meays, NIA Riparian Advisor, has conducted numerous work party days with regular and new skilled volunteers, at a range of sites within the NIA. Their work has helped to progress and facilitate elements of other NIA projects such as 1c Cudworth Duke improvements, and 1b the are around Wombwell Ings extension. Key partner sites such as Rabbit Ings (Land Trust owned, Groundwork DV managed) and several managed by Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council have been surveyed. He has continued to survey for signs of various mammals, including Harvest Mice.

Steve has become a well established member of the NIA team, and will be leading on the biodiversity themed indicators for this year's M&E report.

Local Authority land management for conservation gain (2c)

Woodland

1.85ha of BMBC owned land has been put forward for planting by Russ Boland, for tree planting in winter 2013/14.

On the 19th Dec 2013, BMBC organised a very successful tree planting event at Littleworth Park, where local school children walked to the site and planted a tree whip in pairs. MP Dan Jarvis and local Councillors attended the event, and the press took the opportunity to photograph the event. The story featured in the Barnsley Chronicle. Representatives and volunteers from Volunteer Action Barnsley, BMBC staff, Natural England staff, and members of the core NIA team helped to prepare the site and plant 100's of trees.

Even more recently The Nia tree team has been in action again planting trees with pupils from the Netherwood School in Wombwell.

BMBC has received confirmation that FC approved an EWGS application for 1.16ha of land at Worsbrough Canal.

Grassland

Trevor Mayne has continued to consider and identify new sites for alterations to mowing regimes and potential wildflower meadows. In Q3 BMBC purchased wildflower seed for the establishment of wildflowers on highway verges and various other grassland sites. Trevor has also been working with the NIA Riparian Officer to gain information for the local records centre to aid the project.

Buglife bid

Buglife approached the Land Trust to propose a bid to landfill funders. The broad aims of the project are to work across a suite of reclaimed pit-top sites to improve habitat for invertebrates, monitor changes, and encourage the local community to participate. The DVGH NIA have previously explored opportunities to work with Buglife via their Beelines project, and are delighted that the organisation is to work with the DVGH partnership to propose a project within, and extending to the north-east of, the NIA. If successful, the project is likely to involve the Land Trust, Forestry Commission, Groundwork DV, Buglife and other members of the DVGH NIA. The DVGH have provided a letter of support, and Buglife have found the existing contacts and strong lines of communication within the NIA very helpful in preparing a realistic and exciting bid.

***OBJECTIVE 3** - Embed the NIA principles in Local Planning Policy and create opportunities for biodiversity offsetting by working with local planning authorities through the Dearne Valley Ecovision Partnership by November 2014*

Planning Policy working group (3a)

The NIA Supplementary Planning Document is underway, with contributions and input from all three local authorities. The project has involved nationally renowned specialists, working with Councils on Employment Zone proposals at the very earliest stage of the potential project.

***OBJECTIVE 4** - Build popular support and understanding in the community through community wardens and a programme of events, cycle tours, education visits and community engagement by August 2013.*

NIA Community Rangers (4a)

The NIA Community Rangers have become established in numerous local communities; they provide professional advice, man power, knowledge sharing and/or resources.

An NIA volunteer base and excellent connections with other local sources of volunteers has been developed. The Rangers promote the DVGH NIA at local events, fairs, gatherings and stalls; where they offer free native wildflower seed and mini growing goody packs to get people working on behalf of the NIA in their back garden!

Currently the NIA Community Rangers work with our RSPB specialist and partners to deliver wildflower projects across the Dearne Valley; with current focus on House Sparrow trial seed plots.

Hidden Gems/Discover your Dearne (4b)

The Hidden Gems project has grown from strength to strength, with recent explorations attracting 15 to 25 local people! Local community groups have contributed excellent displays of historic images and key events. Local residents and farmers have led walks and talks, providing a fascinating insight into the cultural, environmental and economic history of the area.

School Outreach in the NIA (4c)

The RSPB Field teachers continue to work with a range of primary and secondary schools, delivering habitat and school ground improvements' and raising awareness of the DVGH NIA. The Ecovision Ecoschools project has been extended to cover the entire NIA and is working in close partnership with the RSPB to deliver sustainability. We have recently launched an exciting competition where schools will submit a piece of illustrated creative writing about the DVGH NIA to win wildlife goodies for their school! In collaboration with Don Catchment Rivers Trust we have also delivered an over subscribed and hugely successful Eels in Schools project, and will be expanding this further next year.