

Dearne Valley Green Heart Nature Improvement Area.

Year One 12/13 summary.

Objective 1: Create and restore floodplain habitat at Houghton Washlands, Wombwell Ings and Carlton Marsh through direct land management by the partners.

Houghton Washland

The DVGH partnership are in advanced negotiations with local land owners regarding the transfer of lease at Houghton washlands, approximately 42ha of land. The site is of strategic importance to the DVGH NIA as it would connect 2 existing core area ,nature reserves along the river corridor The proposed arable reversion project will have a significant impact on the ecological value and connectivity within the NIA through the creation of UK BAP wetland habitat. The Environment Agency has undertaken flood risk modelling, at the site to ensure that the reversion of the area to a more natural system will maintain, if not exceed, the existing flood capacity of the water course and floodplain.

The partnership is also keen to progress a project to use the old course of the river Dearne on the Sothern section at Houghton to by-pass the 3 meter weir for fish passage (WFD). This will ensure that there is continued EA focus on the Houghton project.

Wombwell Ings

The DVGH partnership has broadened the scope of the original Wombwell Ings project to include surrounding land owned by Barnsley MBC, the RSPB, the Gargany Trust and Yorkshire Water. This will significantly increase the ecological and social benefits of the project, and form a large core area of ecological importance. The partnership is in discussions with the local landowner regarding the sale of the 19ha arable site between Broomhill Flash and Wombwell Ings.

The Garganey Trust have had initial conversations with HLF regarding this scheme. A bid application is already drafted and an “Early Stage Enquiry” has been submitted.

The area covered by this ambitious bid has increased from 19 Ha in the business plan.

Yorkshire Water and Barnsley MBC have also discussed opportunities to improve land management of adjacent parcels of land for conservation gain. .Volunteer Action Barnsley is working closely with local residents to undertake practical conservation tasks on the Barnsley MBC nature reserve known as Park Hill Brickworks, with a local community group recently becoming constituted.

Cudworth Dyke and Carlton Marsh

The Environment Agency provided circa £100k of Water Framework Directive funds for drainage works at Boulder Bridge. Delivered by Barnsley MBC Highway Engineers, the work facilitates the monitoring and prevention of contaminants entering the water course. The project has been presented to the Don Network Partnership as a flagship project and fantastic example

of successful partnership working and on-the-ground delivery. Groundwork Dearne Valley is currently undertaking an economic and social review of the works to date, and have engaged with local residents and users of the Carlton Marsh site. Awareness of the NIA has also been increased in the local vicinity by the NIA Community Rangers.

Yorkshire Water commissioned Arup to complete a comprehensive options appraisal of the entire Cudworth Dyke catchment, which extends beyond the initial geographical remit of the NIA project. The scope of the project has therefore increased, and now includes partners such as Groundwork Dearne Valley and representatives of some local businesses in addition to Yorkshire Water, the Environment Agency, and the Friends of Carlton Marsh. The project group are working towards a 20 year programme to include both small and large scale improvements to the water course. A research student linked with Yorkshire Wildlife Trust has undertaken water vole studies at Carlton Marsh, which provides current water vole and other useful baseline data for the site.

The DVGH NIA has commissioned aerial photographs of core sites within the NIA. These have proved invaluable in appraising the current situation, identifying opportunities for development, and demonstrating on-the-ground changes to partners and local residents alike.

Objective 2: Restore woodland and farmland habitats in low ecologically functioning areas through targeted advisory work and uptake of environmental stewardship, management advice, and training.

Integrated Habitat Network (IHN)

In developing the DVGH IHN tool, Forest Research has digitally mapped an initial suite of habitats and species, and developed some habitat networks using least-cost modelling. The tool will help guide the conservation effort to reduce the effects of habitat fragmentation and enhance existing habitats. Forest Research are considering the use of the tool to map other DVGH NIA projects such as the Barnsley MBC grassland and woodland sites, as well as smaller scale improvements for wildlife for example the contributions of school grounds to buffer zones. The partnership hosted a Climate Change Adaptation Workshop, led by Natural England and environmental consultants. The workshop was well attended by DVGH partners and the regional climate change co-ordinator. The group discussed NE climate change tools and their suitability and application within the Dearne Valley, and compatibility with the IHN tool.

Dearne Valley Farm and Land Management Advisory Service

The Natural England Farmland Advisor is now negotiating with key pipelined farms in the Dearne Valley, with focus placed on landowners in expiring Countryside Stewardship Scheme agreements.

Forest Projects, a new environmental body working in the DVGH NIA, has completed the acquisition of Barrow Tip, a large area of reclaimed spoil. The site has been registered with the Forestry Commission and a habitat creation scheme has been submitted. The new organisation has stated that the acquisition and scheme has been greatly assisted by members of the DVGH partnership, especially Barnsley MBC and the Forestry Commission.

Approaches have been made to Environment Agency Operations team to bring grass cutting and tree management into more sympathetic management that is in keeping with the wider aims of the NIA projects.

The post of NIA Riparian Advisor has been created to help meet our monitoring and evaluation needs. Funded by the NIA and hosted by Yorkshire Wildlife Trust on behalf of the partnership, the post will place particular focus on the survey and monitoring of riparian habitats and species, and involve landowner engagement and the provision of expert advice.

Barnsley MBC land management for conservation gain.

Barnsley MBC has consulted with the majority of wards within the NIA regarding changes to grassland management on BMBC land within the NIA. To date, significant changes to mowing regimes have been undertaken at Barnburgh tip, and some schools sites and road verges. In total 16ha amenity grassland have been given over to 3 or less cuts per year, and 31km of highway verges have been reduced from 2 to 1 or no cut per year. Less frequent mowing offers the potential for local biodiversity to increase within and beyond the NIA project, and helps to create buffer zones to the sensitive core ecological areas. The amenity grassland at Barnburgh Tip is now managed by a local farmer, who harvests a hay crop once per annum to feed local livestock. This has reduced from 13 cuts per annum! This success highlights the compatibility of NIA projects with food security and wider land management processes. Both Doncaster MBC and Rotherham MBC are interested in the project, with technical land management advice and training provided by an RSPB specialist. NIA Community Rangers have been investigating and coordinating baseline monitoring of grassland sites to include plant, invertebrate and vertebrate monitoring throughout the three year trial using local volunteers and experts.

Over 2800 native trees have been planted at Barnsley Main by local conservation groups and volunteers. The planting has involved The Prince's Trust, The Conservation Trust, NIA Community Rangers, Volunteer Action Barnsley and local people; with trees supplied by a range of organisations, including 3000 Oak whips from Carpenter Oak Ltd in lieu of an oak framed development. A pocket of amenity grassland, called Tank Row, has been allocated for mixed broadleaved planting. The site helps meet biodiversity, flood alleviation, and climate change targets, and has been planted by TCV and volunteers, with native trees supplied by 'The Big Tree Plant,' a Defra funded initiative. A further eight woodland sites have been sent to RPA for registration in readiness for future planting.

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.

All local authorities (Barnsley MBC, Rotherham MBC, and Doncaster MBC) are cooperating to produce a consistent policy for the Dearne Valley. To date, a draft Guidance Note document for developers has been produced. The next stage is to extend this to produce a Supplementary Planning Document covering developments in the valley.

The partnership has distributed and discussed at meetings, the planning documents and maps produced by each of the three local authorities. This has resulted in a greater awareness, comment, and response from members of the DVGH partnership than in previous years. The priority of Barnsley MBC is the creation of jobs and housing within the authority area. To this end several potential 'employment zones' or industrial estates have been mapped in the consultation documents. The wider DVGH partnership has engaged with Barnsley MBC to discuss the physical make-up of these potential sites, and consider how planning guidance and stipulations can be implemented to ensure appropriate and exemplar development within the NIA. Barnsley MBC and the DVGH partnership will hold a 'planning for real' workshop prior to the second phase of LDF consultation in June to address the design of the Employment Zones. This exciting opportunity to produce national exemplar Employment Zones and housing Growth Points has been progressed through the NIA Planning Best Practice Event hosted by DVGH NIA, held in March at Barnsley Town Hall. Representatives from Natural England, eight other Nature Improvement Areas, Dearne Valley Ecovision, and all three local authorities, with specialist input from green-roof expert Dusty Gedge, discussed the need integration of, SuD's, green roofs, habitat creation, access, and permeability for both nature and people. The successful event also included a tour of the Dearne Valley and some inspirational and informative presentations by local and specialists.

Doncaster MBC is one of the Defra Biodiversity Offsetting Trial local authorities, and is progressing a scheme in partnership with Yorkshire Wildlife Trust. After consideration Barnsley MBC will not currently be progressing offsetting, and is investigating support for environmental project through CIL and Section 106. The DVGH partnership continue to bring partners together to reach Agreement on a pragmatic and robust Biodiversity Offsetting scheme.

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

Community Rangers

In November 2012 the RSPB recruited two NIA Community Rangers! The part-time posts are hosted by the RSPB and funded by Defra. The NIA Community Rangers work on behalf of the DVGH partnership to engage with local communities, lead practical conservation tasks with local people, and provide a visible on-the-ground presence within the NIA. To date they have shadowed the majority of DVGH partners and have assisted with, organised , and led a number of practical tasks to the benefit of the NIA partnership, people and wildlife. Great examples of their work include footpath creation and a clean-up event at Adwick nature reserve, which brought together the RSPB, RSPB volunteers and Barnsley MBC Rights of Way Team; a community consultation at Carlton Marsh in conjunction with Groundwork Dearne Valley, the Environment Agency, Friends of Carlton Marsh and Barnsley MBC.

Tree planting at Barnsley Main was accomplished with Barnsley MBC, Volunteer Action Barnsley, South Yorkshire Forest Partnership, the Conservation Trust, the Prince's Trust and local residents.

Hidden Gems

Following one initial trial at Rabbit Ings, Groundwork Dearne Valley has organised and led 5 explorations at a range of core sites within the NIA. The project had engaged with 64 local people, and involved the support of partners such as Yorkshire Wildlife Trust and the RSPB. The explorations invite local people to visit and learn about their local landscape. Several experts have volunteered their time to lead elements of the explorations, including Professor John Rodwell, running the iwoods project at Wombwell Wood. Integral to the explorations is the capture of local stories and traditions – that give the NIA a true sense of place. These will be captured as sound bites and uploaded to the project website. Groundwork DV has recruited a regular volunteer who has assisted with the organisation and preparation of the explorations to date.

School Outreach

RSPB Field Teachers have engaged and led activities at 10 schools within the NIA and encouraged three schools to visit RSPB Old Moor, a core site within the DVGHNIA. Subsequently, important year one targets have been met. Activities have included informative and fun assemblies, vegetation maintenance and site clearance, habitat creation, and tree planting. RSPB Field Teachers have worked closely with DVGH partners such as Ecoschools (part of the Dearne Valley Ecovision), Don Catchment Rivers Trust, and Groundwork Dearne Valley. The DVGH partnership hosted a 'working with schools' meeting for all local organisations that work with schools, young people and teachers to share their experiences, motivations and knowledge, to improve communications and project uptake within the DVGH NIA. The meeting was well attended and helped to establish and reinforce connections. Don Catchment Rivers Trust, with support from the RSPB and Ecoschools, has organised an exciting 'Eels in Schools' project, to supply several local schools with tanks and eels. The schools will care for the eels and learn about the lifecycle of the important and endangered eel. Sites owned by various partners of the DVGH have been registered in readiness for an eel release event, at which children will release their eels into their local environment to the benefit of local ecology and food chains. This is a fantastic example of a partnership project with great social and environmental benefits.

Ecoschools are having great success with their sustainability focused school outreach and engagement project, with all 46 schools in the Ecovision Area involved at various levels of the programme.

In addition to the 4 core objectives

- DVGH NIA has been successful in securing £1.8 HLF funding for projects in the Dearne Valley. This was one of only 13 HLF Landscape Partnership awards this year which is very motivating for the NIA team.
- Senior Govt Officials visit to Old Moor (RSPB) and to Nostell Priory on 7th September
- Royal visit to RSPB Old Moor