

## **Morecambe Bay Limestones & Wetlands Nature Improvement Area Progress Summary March 2013**

### **Work with over 100 local communities and businesses by 2015 to promote the growth of a sustainable low carbon economy linked to the natural environment**

This area of the programme aims to help develop the area's woodfuel supply and demand chain and connect businesses and visitors with the area's outstanding wildlife and nature.

Two sustainable community woodfuel projects have been initiated - in Arnside & Silverdale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and in woodlands around Grange-over-Sands. The projects are bringing together landowners, contractors and residents to work in partnership and will be further developed in year 2 of the programme. A total of 9 Woodland Improvement Grants have been submitted working in partnership with woodland owners, all with sustainable woodfuel management elements incorporated; 12 local businesses will be contracted to carry out woodland management and timber extraction as a direct result.

A visitor survey was carried out in autumn 2012. The survey gathered valuable information and data to inform our nature tourism work. 89% visitors surveyed wanted to experience wildlife and nature during their visit to Morecambe Bay and 94% agreed that the area is good for wildlife and scenery. A new nature tourism business network has been launched with 4 four business networking events held in March 2013 involving over 30 businesses.

The partnership has been successful in attracting £0.5 million from the Coastal Communities Fund for a 2-year Morecambe Bay sustainable tourism project.

Four jobs, one internship and one apprenticeship have been created.

### **Work closely with land managers to enhance and restore over 1000ha of priority limestone and wetland habitat by 2015, creating a robust network of high quality sites that deliver a range of ecosystem services**

Bespoke advice and hands on support is being provided to farmers and land managers to deliver enhancement and restoration of priority wetland, woodland and grassland habitats via a range of mechanisms.

A team of three experienced land management advisors were appointed in summer 2012 - a woodland specialist, wetland specialist and a grassland specialist.

Over **600ha priority habitat** will be brought into management as a direct result of their work in the first year of the programme.

The team have focussed on submitting high quality Higher Level Stewardship and Woodland Improvement Grant applications in partnership with farmers and landowners. Delivery has also included enhancement of existing management agreements, volunteer work parties and a series of capital management projects – all designed to deliver habitat management works at key target sites.

Some examples are reinstating management of limestone ancient woodland sites, work towards restoring a peat-rich lowland raised bog, creating wet grassland perfect

for breeding waders and negotiating a grazing management plan for a large limestone grassland site famous for its orchids and other wildflowers.

**Within sustainable land management systems, buffer, connect and create 'stepping stones' between high quality sites to allow development of a coherent ecological network that is resilient to climate change**

Bespoke advice and hands on support is being provided to farmers and land managers to improve functional connectivity for priority habitats and species.

The work of the land management team has had a particular focus on improving connectivity on a landscape scale. Grant applications and land management works have been developed with connectivity requirements for different species in mind, based on previous research. For example, breeding waders need large core and restoration sites linked by smaller stepping stone sites.

Some examples are establishing larger core areas and stepping stone sites for breeding waders, creating rides and glades in woodland for High Brown Fritillary butterflies, linking up a series of small woodland sites important for woodland birds and creating a small reedbed and eel-rich ditches for bitterns.

A research study has been commissioned to gather more information about the connectivity of the ecological network in the NIA.

A series of demonstration events have been delivered for land managers and contractors on conservation grazing, restoring a lowland raised bog, wet grassland management and implementing Environmental Stewardship schemes.

4 sites have been identified as NIA demonstration sites.

**Leave a legacy for future enhancements to the natural environment through improved and effective integration with the planning system and sharing lessons learnt**

This part of the programme aims to improve capacity to achieve gains for the natural environment through the planning system and most of the delivery will come later in the programme. However early work has started and NIA objectives have already been incorporated into Lancaster City Council Local Plan draft Development Plan Documents.

Staff have participated in the NIA best practice network and have attended events and workshops including the Grassland best practice event and BARS II training.

The NIA partnership continues to go from strength to strength and our close and intensive partnership working has helped achieve a series of major funding successes which will all make a significant contribution to delivering the NIA ambition.

**Connect people with nature by involving local communities in shaping habitat restoration schemes and providing a series of inspiring opportunities for people to experience and get involved with the natural world**

This area of the programme aims to raise awareness of Morecambe Bay's outstanding wildlife and increase the number of people taking action for nature. A Community Engagement Officer was appointed in summer 2012 and following a period of planning and development has begun to engage with target communities, playing an important role in bringing together community and landowning representatives and stimulating activity. As a result two community liaison groups have been set up to support both the community woodlands project in Grange-over-Sands and lowland raised bog restoration in the Lyth valley.

A big volunteer day was held in Arnside at which about 80 volunteers took part in managing limestone woodland and grassland at 4 sites around the village. This included 20 school children from the local school who planted trees and cleared scrub.

A programme of practical volunteer events has also been delivered over the winter focusing on practical woodland and grassland management at a range of key sites.

A schools assembly package to celebrate the outstanding wildlife of Morecambe Bay has been developed and piloted, ready to roll out in 2013.

Morecambe Bay Limestones & Wetlands NIA has been selected as one of the 3 official case studies in Natural England's recent successful £250,000 bid to Sciencewise, aimed at promoting and assisting public dialogue on scientific (in this case ecological) issues.