



## **NOTES FROM WORKSHOP 4B; MAKING THE BEST USE OF THE PLANNING SYSTEM IN PROTECTING BROWNFIELD HABITATS**

The group discussed a wide range of topics relating to the above issue, influenced by personal experiences and problems identified with the planning system at present in protecting brownfields of biodiversity interest.

While the points discussed here dealt with broad issues rather than specifics, these were felt to be the key stumbling blocks to brownfield biodiversity conservation. These would need to be addressed before any specific measures would be taken up.

### **POLICY**

The group thought that Government policies to protect biodiversity through the planning system, whether local, regional or national, need to be carefully considered. General policies and associated targets, without standards, may lead to a lot of time and money being spent on measures that achieve little for biodiversity conservation. If implementation of these policies are used to justify development, then biodiversity could, in fact, be reduced, rather than conserved. Targets for **Green roofs** in London were discussed as a potential example of this. It was admitted that such measures could have increased benefit if opportunities were also taken to incorporate biodiversity mitigation into existing developments, and that opportunities to maximise planning gain for biodiversity in urban areas were being missed. Any targets would need to be justified against proof of their value, and given the variability in design and construction of such measures, further work would be needed to achieve this. This situation was regarded as common for a lot of mitigation, which is largely unproven when it comes to effectiveness, especially for brownfields.

Vagueness in policy was also identified as an issue. This is especially problematic where you have conflicting policies – specifically brownfield development targets of Planning Policy Statement 3 and biodiversity conservation requirements of PPS9. Policy needs to be more prescriptive, or at least guidance created, that would allow for easier setting of priorities.

### **STANDARDS**

The concept of Standards was further discussed. It was felt that, given the inability of Phase 1 and NVC to assess brownfield sites, Standards, preferably backed by a professional body, would need to be developed and promoted. This should promote consistency, and enable comparison between sites, rather than relying upon the experience of the assessor in dealing with such sites.

Such standards should deal with processes and procedures, especially with regards to invertebrate survey, an area that has the greatest potential to deliver biodiversity information, but one that is the most neglected. It is often the most relevant survey for brownfield sites, so is especially important in light of brownfield development targets.

## **BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN**

This was discussed briefly. The group was optimistic that all the new BAP species associated with brownfield sites, and the 'Open mosaic habitats on Previously Developed Land' BAP habitat would increase opportunities for protection of brownfield sites.

## **ATTITUDES**

The group felt that attitudes towards biodiversity within the planning system were driven by tangible economies. Vague notions of Ecosystem Services were hard to quantify, and thus hard to justify protecting. Against these, lack of awareness of brownfield biodiversity was incidental. More work was needed by biodiversity professionals, including NGOs and consultants, to raise the profile of biodiversity with planning authorities and clients. It was felt that what was needed was an attitude that biodiversity should be celebrated, rather than hidden away, and planning for biodiversity around developments should appeal to the end-users' environmental aspirations. NGOs and consultants should work with developers to change the status quo, so the environmental value of the development is used to judge the occupier of the space, rather than how neat its lawn is. Biodiversity needs better Public Relations within the planning and development spheres in general.

## **GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE**

Green Infrastructure is a hot topic at the moment, and can add a premium onto the development, especially residential developments. The problem comes in ensuring that that infrastructure is functional, rather than manicured greenspace of low biodiversity interest. The best way the group thought that this could be achieved was to ensure that there was a cross-over of professionals, so that those designing this green infrastructure were a mixture of planners, landscape architects and ecologists.