

**CONFIRMED MINUTES OF THE SIXTH MEETING OF THE GENERAL
COMMITTEE OF COUNCIL HELD AT NORTHMINSTER HOUSE,
PETERBOROUGH ON 23 FEBRUARY 1999**

Present: Baroness Young of Old Scone (Chairman)
Dr D R Langslow (Chief Executive)
Professor J M Anderson
Ms J Barber
Professor D L Hawksworth
Miss J Kelly
Professor G Lucas
Professor D Norman (to item 6)
Mr S Tromans (from item 9)
Professor R C L Wilson
Mr G N Woolley
Ms M Appleby
Dr S Gubbay
Ms S F Collins
Dr K L Duff
Dr A E Brown
Ms C E M Wood

In attendance: Mr M Felton (Strategy Manager)
Dr P Knapman (for Item 4)
Mr J Burney (for Item 6)

Chairman welcomed Susan Gubbay to her first meeting of Council

1. Minutes the fifth meeting of the General Committee of Council held on 1 December 1999 (GC M98 4)
 - 1.1 Council **confirmed** the minutes of the fifth meeting of the General Committee.
2. Matters arising (GC P99 2)
 - 2.1 Council **noted** the paper and welcomed progress to appoint staff.
 - 2.2 Dr Langslow provided an update on the State Aid rules. The priority is to ensure English Nature retains the ability to give agreements directly. The position is not yet settled.
3. Draft Work Plan 1999 - 2002 (GC P99 13)
 - 3.1 Derek Langslow explained that this was the second draft which incorporated amendments proposed by the Executive Committee. The Work Plan is presented

by Business Process and covers the main areas of our work, not everything we do. The performance measures used in the Work Plan are a subset of the management information and need to reflect the critical success factors and DETR's needs.

- 3.2 Council considered Section 2 , AStrategic Issues and Direction@needed to provide a clearer introduction to the shape of the Work Plan and make better links to the Corporate Plan 1999. It is important to provide a sense of excitement over the difference the additional grant-in-aid will make over the next three years. We need to emphasise delivery of nature conservation, using science to underpin our priorities, advice and decisions. Building up our profile as a leading nature conservation organisation is also important.
 - 3.3 In discussion on the Business Process sections the following issues were emphasised:
 - 3.3.1 The purpose of the Outcome Boxes needs to be clear: setting a context for the three year targets showing the contribution these make towards longer term goals. Nature conservation is a long term process which requires work to secure the future as well as current delivery. The Work Plan needs to be set in this context.
 - 3.3.2 Gaining Supporters needs a stronger focus on our profile as a key issue for the next three years.
 - 3.3.3 The material does not identify new issues and challenges sufficiently.
 - 3.3.4 The highlighted key messages and areas need to be related to the changes in resource levels across the Business Processes. The increase in Influencing Strategic Allies must be linked to the need to change the policy environment to support nature conservation better.
 - 3.3.5 The Business Process sections need introducing to ensure the integration of science, policy, publicity and practical management is clearly understood. The Work Plan covers all important areas of work, and aims to provide a link to all Team Plans so staff can see their work in the context of all English Nature's work.
 - 3.3.6 The performance measures need to present the 1998/99 figures as well as providing an overview of the impact of the additional funds. We need to ensure the targets are realistic and achievable. The targets that influence the balance of work need particular attention.
 - 3.4 Council commended the authors for their efforts, **advised** that the introduction and strategic issues section needed to be clearer and to cover the impact of the new funds, and **agreed** to submit textual comments to Sarah Fendley by 26 February 1999.
4. The past is the key to the future - earth heritage conservation in the new millennium (GC P99 8)

- 4.1 Keith Duff outlined the internal and external consultation carried out to prepare the paper. The paper is the second update of our Earth Heritage Strategy which was originally published in 1990. The UK is a world leader in earth heritage conservation, and one third of SSSIs are notified for earth heritage interest features making it a highly significant component of our work.
 - 4.2 Council **welcomed** the paper and considered this a vindication of the new team approach to work following the re-shaping of the organisation. Council **advised** that:
 - 4.2.1 The tone in paragraph 5.5 should seek to influence Europe and ensure our approach to Earth Heritage conservation is recognised and not compromised. We must not give the impression that we are seeking to impose our approach on other countries.
 - 4.2.2 The inspirational elements could be emphasised more: the huge time periods and the interesting stories provide the basis for a public profile campaign. Ideas such as a **Time Team** for geology should be explored. Some re-phrasing is desirable so the document provides the basis for a wider consultation, as well as a shorter leaflet to promote earth heritage and our strategy.
 - 4.2.3 The need to ensure the present has a future, and the key messages such as maintaining dynamic natural processes, could be emphasised more.
 - 4.3 Council **commended** the paper and **endorsed** the new approach and the strategic themes and looked forward to its publication.
5. Financial and achievement report to Council
(GC P99 11)
- 5.1 Derek Langslow introduced the paper and advised Council that English Nature will achieve a full spend with a slightly larger spend in March than last year. Over allocation is not an issue given a recent receipt from DETR.
 - 5.2 Council **noted** the report and **commented** on the following issues in the achievement report:
 - 5.2.1 The target for SSSIs submitted to Council is an upper limit in terms of workload rather than a planned achievement. We need to adjust the target to reflect the expected number of sites, say 60 next year, to ensure the target is realistic. Council requested a paper on the overall SSSI estate and the extent of further designation which may be justifiable in the autumn.
 - 5.2.2 The percent of site units in unfavourable, declining condition is undergoing further analysis in January against different categories of causes following

a request from the Executive Committee. In general the report needs more commentary to help interpretation and to identify where our activities are effective in improving condition and where other factors outside our control are preventing condition improvement.

5.2.3 Conservation targets for marine SACs are not a problem locally now that framework guidance on marine SACs has been agreed for all parts of the UK. It is hoped that more rapid progress can be made in agreeing the conservation objectives for all marine SACs in England. The actions required to achieve the targets are more controversial and can lead to demands for expensive and unnecessary survey and monitoring.

6. Chairman's, Chief Executive's and Directors' topical report to Council
(GC P99 9)

6.1 Council **noted** the report and received updates on the acid spillage affecting a SSSI on Teeside, GMOs, Ruddy Duck and organic farming.

7. Responses to the DETR consultation document ASSSIs, better protection and management (GC P99 10)

7.1 Andy Brown said there were over 600 responses, some of which were substantial. He updated Council on the views emerging from the Scottish Office which confirmed that the only factors on which sites will be selected are scientific criteria, there will be a new name for SSSIs, and that decisions on management should be informed by social and economic considerations with an appeals process when people face restrictions on their actions.

7.2 English Nature has seconded a member of staff to help DETR analyse the submissions. There is a need for greater progress on actions that do not require legislation and which would improve the protection and recognition of SSSIs. Our aim is to ensure the Minister can announce real changes which will be in place soon after he publishes the Government's response to the consultation.

7.3 Council **noted** the issues raised in the paper and **endorsed** the need for DETR action on non-legislative issues as well as on legislation.

7.4 Council **supported** the work required and **agreed** that Chairman will send a letter to the Minister on the importance of having some non-legislative measures in place when the Government response is published.

8. Review of hay meadow management
(GC P99 3)

8.1 Keith Duff reminded Council that this work resulted from concerns, which arose from Council visits to SSSIs, that farm practices may be unnecessarily constrained on hay meadows. The review involved Professor Anderson, Andy Brown and Keith Duff, as well as the grassland specialists. The review concluded that our advice set out in the Grassland Management Handbook, was basically sound and unlikely to be damaging. Some issues needed clarification, including the impact of application rates of nutrients. MAFF has started a research programme to address this, therefore we are contributing. The Handbook will need reviewing in light of this research and further understanding of changes in agricultural practices..

8.2 Council **noted** the report and raised the following issues in discussion:

8.2.1 Ideally the Derwent Ings case required the restoration of the flood regime, and the nutrient issue could only be resolved by the MAFF research. The practicality of restoring flood regimes needed local exploration. Council **agreed** that Chairman should write to the owners and occupiers met during the visits to explain what we had done to address their concerns nationally and locally.

8.2.2 Council thought the application rates set out in the review of farm yard manure were very low compared to what might be considered traditional norms and good practice. The yields also seemed to be low. These should be checked. The timing of applications, rather than the application rates and the methods used, may have changed because of improved accessibility to the sites with lower water levels.

8.2.3 The joint research needed to take a broad ecosystem dynamics view of grasslands and nutrients, and include consideration of soil dynamics, invertebrates and mycorrhizae as well as the grassland communities. The nutrients considered should include potassium and magnesium as well as nitrates and phosphates, as reviews suggest these are significant inputs from flood waters. This research needs to cover the range of grassland types with high nature conservation value.

9. The use of science in English Nature: issues from staff workshops
(GC P99 14)

9.1 Keith Duff outlined the approach to the workshops for staff that used the consultation paper (GC P98 54) discussed at the December 1998 meeting. He outlined the key issues arising from the workshops, and indicated there were strong feelings about these from some of the staff involved. The workshops had been positive and provided a sound basis for the external consultation which is planned for April 1999.

9.2 Council **noted** the following issues in discussion:

- 9.2.1 Our credibility must be based on how we use science and interpret information as the basis for our advice and actions. There is a need for scientists to develop a pride in our executive role and the contribution science makes to this.
- 9.2.2 Local staff do need reasonable skills as field naturalists to be credible with others rather than research scientist competencies. This should be included as standard in all their personal development plans.
- 9.2.3 Coordination and networking to make the most of the scientific expertise within the organisation is important and a key role for national staff. Developing a sense of how we value science and our scientists is an important aspect of our culture. Whilst it may be acceptable for English Nature scientists to set standards generally for issues such as habitat creation, it is not a high priority.
- 9.2.4 The debate on options for sourcing our science is welcome, including short term contracts, permanent staff and various external sources.
- 9.3 Council made proposals for the participation in the external consultation meeting about the use of science in English Nature. Participants should include appropriate organisations from the NGOs, science institutions, learned societies and professional bodies as well as our partner NDPBs and Agencies.
- 9.4 Council **agreed** the purpose of the external consultation is to:
 - 9.4.1 Explore the criticisms and views about our science and address these in ways that gives confidence in our science and how we use science.
 - 9.4.2 Capture ideas and perspectives from our science partners and from the science community.
 - 9.4.3 Increase the understanding of key stakeholders about our need for science and how we use science.
 - 9.4.4 Ensure we understand the basis of any difference in advice given by research institutes from our own where these conflict.
- 9.5 Council supported the suggestion that English Nature should explore the **AScience Line**, which is an Internet community of scientists, and use this to build up a constituency of professional partners and specialists to help us on key issues.

10. Report on the 41st meeting of the JNCC held on 17 December 1998 (GC P99 15)

- 10.1 Council **noted** the report.

11. River Tweed
(GC P99 4)

11.1 Andy Brown outlined the background of the work on this cross-border river system. The river system in Scotland had been notified under the 1949 Act, but not re-notified under the Wildlife and Countryside Act.

11.2 English Nature hoped to notify the English part of the river system in tandem with re-notification of the Scottish part. This has proved impossible and we now want to proceed alone. This paper seeks approval in principle so that the work to seek formal approval to notify can go ahead.

11.3 Council **agreed**:

11.3.1 Work should start to develop the detailed proposal to notify the R Till catchment for consideration by Council.

11.3.2 To consider notifying the English part of the main R Tweed and to advise Scottish Natural Heritage.

12. SSSI Cases
(GC P99 1)

Secretariat note: the following Members were present and constituted a quorum for this item: Baroness Young, Dr Langslow, Ms Appleby, Dr Gubbay, Miss Kelly, Ms Barber, Professor Anderson, Professor Hawksworth, Professor Lucas, Professor Wilson, Mr Tromans, Mr Woolley, Dr Brown, Ms Collins, Dr Duff, Miss Wood.

12.1 Notification

12.1.1 Council **approved** the notification of the following sites:

West Cornwall Bryophytes, Cornwall: a population of rare and scarce bryophytes of special interest.

Froghall Meadows and Pastures, Staffordshire: herb rich neutral grassland (MG4, MG5 and MG23) of special interest.

Beeston Brook Pasture, Lancashire: neutral grassland (MG5) of special interest.

Trench Meadows, West Yorkshire: herb rich neutral grassland (MG5) of special interest.

Saddington Reservoir, Leicestershire: supports an assemblage of beetles of special interest associated with a diverse range of undisturbed wetland communities.

East Polden Grasslands, Somerset: calcareous grassland (CG2 and CG3) of special interest.

Nicodemus Heights, Dorset: limestone grassland (CG1 and CG3) of special interest.

12.2 Re-notification

12.2.1 Council **approved** the re-notification of the following site:

Carrick Heaths, Cornwall: lowland heathland (H4 and M16) supporting populations of Dorset heath (*Erica ciliaris*), yellow century (*Cicendia filiformis*) and Cornish moneywort (*Sibthorpia europea*) of special interest.

12.3 Confirmation

12.3.1 Bray Meadows, Berkshire.

Council **considered** three objections and considered that the Bray Parish Charities trustees had little choice under its remit but to object. The notification of itself did not change current management, and did not preclude future changes in use and management. Council **confirmed** notification without modification.

12.3.2 Purfleet Road, Aveley, Essex.

Council **considered** one objection and agreed that whilst there is no objection to development in principle on the site, this would need to be agreed in detail if permission was granted. The boundary of the site reflects the evidence from trial pits on the extent of the resource and the practicality of mappable boundaries, which reflect ownership. Council **confirmed** notification without modification.

12.3.3 Allendale Moors, Northumberland.

Council **considered** nine objections. The improvements made to the fields identified in one objection occurred through agricultural development before notification discussions were initiated, and should be excluded from the site. Two areas with agricultural buildings should also be excluded. Two objections sought extensions to the SSSI onto land not considered to have special scientific interest. The remaining objections did not challenge the scientific evidence for notification. Council **confirmed** notification with the modifications recommended by staff.

13. Any other business

13.1 Council **congratulated** staff on achieving the Charter Mark award for the second time.

- 13.2 Key messages for wider publicity from the meeting should include material on the earth heritage strategy, notification of a SSSI for mosses as a follow-up to the Press Release on endangered moss conservation at Kew, and material on the R Tweed decision.
- 13.3 Council expressed warm appreciation for the work and contributions during their time as Members of Council of Professor Anderson, Professor Hawksworth and Janet Barber who retire as Council Members on 31 March 1999.