

**CONFIRMED MINUTES OF THE SEVENTH MEETING OF THE GENERAL COMMITTEE  
OF COUNCIL HELD AT THE SWAN HOTEL, WELLS, SOMERSET  
ON 6 MAY 1999**

**Present:** Baroness Young of Old Scone (Chairman)  
Ms M Appleby  
Mr T Burke  
Dr S Gubbay  
Mrs A Kelaart  
Miss J Kelly (up to item 8)  
Dr D R Langslow (Chief Executive)  
Professor G Lucas  
Dr M Moser  
Professor D Norman  
Professor R C L Wilson  
Mr G N Woolley  
Dr A E Brown  
Ms S F Collins  
Dr K L Duff  
Miss C E M Wood

**In attendance:** Mr M Felton (Strategy Manager)

Chairman welcomed Tom Burke, Anne Kelaart and Mike Moser to their first meeting of the General Committee of Council.

1. Minutes the sixth meeting of the General Committee of Council held on 23 February 1999 (GC M99 1)
  - 1.1 Council **confirmed** the minutes of the sixth meeting of the General Committee.
2. Matters arising (GC P99 19)
  - 2.1 The Committee **noted** the paper. The following issues were raised in discussion:
    - 2.1.1 The letter to the Derwent Ings owners and occupiers will be circulated to members as soon as it is sent.
    - 2.1.2 There is unlikely to be legislation for SSSIs (or access) in the next Queen's speech. Publishing a draft Bill for further consultation will help clarify the best way to implement proposals. It is also important to make progress on non-legislative measures and tackle issues such as marine conservation and species.

3. Chairmen's, Chief Executive's and Directors' topical report to Council  
(GC P99 25)

3.1 The Committee **noted** the report and discussed the following issues further:

3.1.1 EN had advised DETR on peat extraction at Wedholme Flow, Thorne Moors and Hatfield SSSIs. Early cessation will improve the possibility of restoring peat vegetation rather than fen vegetation on the cut-over parts of the sites. We have had no formal response yet.

3.1.2 The consultation on lead shot accommodated all our suggestions and we will support the proposals.

3.1.3 We have maintained our objection to coastal defense works at Castle Haven, Isle of Wight, on the basis of damage to the nature conservation interest. There are about 30 houses at risk. We will meet the householders and explain the basis of our objection.

3.2 The Committee **congratulated** all staff on the Investors in People Award, and commended those who worked on the application. The Committee **requested** a regular review of marketing and communication issues in the Topical Issues Report.

4. Financial and achievement report to Council  
(GC P99 27)

4.1 Derek Langslow introduced the paper by indicating that overall the financial performance was satisfactory despite some increase in the level of March spend compared to last year. The management agreement achievements showed we were avoiding new compensatory agreements and were slowly reducing their overall costs. Overall English Nature had a good year.

4.2 The Committee sought further clarification of the reasons for the 30% of units on SSSIs in unfavourable condition. Some would be due to circumstances beyond the control of English Nature. The Annual Report on NNRs gives an indication of the range of issues affecting the condition of sites. ENSIS is being developed to capture changes in condition and the reasons for changes, as well what needs to be done to improve the condition of units in unfavourable condition. This will help plan, manage and report on our SSSI programme. An analysis of units in unfavourable condition is underway and will be presented to Council later in 1999.

**Action:** Andy Brown

4.3 During discussion the following issues were raised:

4.3.1 the importance of ensuring the financial profile promptly and effectively reflected the additional funding given to English Nature. The steps taken

to ensure effective financial management were welcomed.

- 4.3.2 the delays in the Team Server and Support Project due to initial under-estimates of the cost and the need to go through European tendering. The challenge to increase the level of interaction with others through IT, and the need to realise the benefits of using IT for internal communication and coordination, were highlighted. Council recognised the complexity and importance of our work on IT, and the need to invest in effective systems and training to ensure effective use.
- 4.3 The Committee **thanked** staff for their efforts and the wide range of achievements during 1998/99.
- 5. NNR review: progress report against action plan (GC P99 20)
  - 5.1 Keith Duff introduced this report of progress on the action plan to implement the 1993 NNR policy. Progress over the five years is excellent. The outstanding issues include relationships with the National Trust over S35.1.(c) NNRs, and the reasons why some interest features on NNRs remain in unfavourable condition.
  - 5.2 During discussion the following issues were raised:
    - 5.2.1 English Nature's Chief Surveyor will meet the National Trust's senior Land Agent to discuss S35.1.(c) NNRs. The National Trust Regions are keen to have further S35.1.(c) NNRs. The key issue is where we are asking them to take on additional responsibility on their own land within their own resources.
    - 5.2.2 We need to promote and celebrate the NNR series more. The growth of the series over time is substantial, which could be illustrated through the more significant acquisitions. The Website is too scientific and needs to encourage more visits and a sense of excitement. We aim to attract more people interested in wildlife to NNRs. Planned activities to promote NNRs further include publishing a book in the autumn, the Millennium Celebrations on NNRs and the development of 15 Spotlight Reserves where we will make special efforts to encourage the public. Many Teams have NNR leaflets covering all reserves in their area distributed through tourist and visitor information outlets.
    - 5.2.3 In some cases the timescales for addressing the features in unfavourable condition on NNRs seemed long. The Committee **requested** an analysis of the timescales and the reasons for them, including all cases where action is after 2003. This will be circulated as an information paper.
  - Action:** Keith Duff
  - 5.2.4 The need to realise the potential of using NNRs to contribute to our wider organisational priorities. Suggestions included building links to local landowners and wider groups of owners and occupiers of SSSIs through open days and events to discuss management regimes and to seek

reactions and wider knowledge of the history of management of particular NNRs.

- 5.3 The Committee **welcomed** the report and **approved** the additional proposals for NNR declarations during 1999 - 2001 set out below -:
  - 5.3.1 Sandwich and Pegwell Bay as a S35.1.(c) NNR, managed jointly by Kent County Council and Thanet District Council as Approved Bodies;
  - 5.3.2 Chesil and The Fleet, managed by English Nature under a Nature Reserve Agreement;
  - 5.3.3 Butser Hill (Hampshire), Butterburn Flow (Cumbria), Ebernoe Common (Sussex) and Spitend (Kent) as S35.1.(c) NNRs.
- 6. JNCC Report  
(GC P99 22)
  - 6.1 Chris Wilson reminded the Committee that the paper was an information paper to help Members keep up to date with JNCC business.
  - 6.2 The Committee **welcomed** the report and thanked Professor Wilson for preparing it.
- 7. Access to the open countryside in England and Wales: the Government's framework for action  
(GC P99 18)
  - 7.1 Andy Brown indicated that detail on how to implement the Government's access proposals was still to be worked up with DETR, the Countryside Agency and CCW. The paper outlined the issues we need to address early on to ensure we have some influence over the final arrangements. Our role will be as adviser to the decision making organisations, but the level of work required remains uncertain.
  - 7.2 The Committee raised the following issues in discussion:
    - 7.2.1 The implications of new access arrangements which affect NNRs. This is unlikely to have a significant impact given that we already encourage open access where possible and already have some public liability for ordinary visitors.
    - 7.2.2 The need to consider the implications if access is extended to woodlands, riversides and coastal areas. Our advice needs to be based on clear evidence.
    - 7.2.3 The research base for our advice needs to be reviewed and assessed. The difficulty of carrying out effective research on the impact of access on nature conservation is recognised, in particular the problem of predicting the amount of disturbance and other impacts in advance.

7.2.4 Many of the people benefiting from increased access will not be members of walking and recreation organisations organised and it will therefore be difficult to communicate with them effectively. Finding out what they want will be difficult: it may be well managed linear access will meet many of their needs. The extent to which the measures will lead to additional access is unclear: improved access close to where people live is also important.

7.3 The Committee **noted** the paper, recognised the uncertainty involved and **supported** the programme of work proposed for 1999/00 and the indication of the likely need for additional resources to carry out our role as set out in the paper.

8. Regionalisation - implications for English Nature  
(GC P99 32)

- 8.1 Derek Langslow introduced the paper which provided an update on work since the Council workshop in September 1998. The Regional Development Agencies are now in place. English Nature has identified lead contacts for each at Team Manager level, and appointed a Regionalisation Officer to coordinate our work. Government has recently issued guidance documents on the preparation of economic, sustainable development and rural strategies. We will comment on the draft strategies using a common template to ensure appropriate consistency across the country. We need any information from Council Members about developments and to help identify individuals within each RDA with whom we might work to ensure nature conservation is effectively integrated into their work.
- 8.2 The Committee noted the uncertainties and the variation between different RDAs at this stage. Their future evolution also remains uncertain, and will depend on their future funding. We need to be sufficiently engaged to recognise opportunities and challenges in time to influence them. The impact of RDAs on the interface between national policies and local implementation also remains unclear: this could undermine or reinforce the environmental protection built into national policies.
- 8.3 The Committee asked whether we were devoting sufficient resources to work with RDAs, especially given the importance of the Team Manager role, and **requested** an analysis of the best way of resourcing this work in the medium term whilst the significance of RDAs for nature conservation emerged.

9. SSSI Cases  
(GC P99 16)

Secretariat note: the following Council Members were present and constituted a quorum for this item: Baroness Young of Old Scone, Ms Appleby, Mr Burke, Dr Gubbay, Mrs Kelaart, Dr Langslow, Professor Lucas, Dr Moser, Professor Norman, Professor Wilson and Mr Woolley. The following General Committee Members were also present: Dr Brown, Ms Collins, Dr Duff and Ms Wood.

## 9.1 Notification

9.1.1 Council **approved** the notification of the following site:

Tudor Farm Bank, Gloucestershire. Herb rich limestone grassland (CG3) of special interest.

## 9.2 Renotification

Council **considered** the following cases -:

9.2.1 Durham Coast, Tyne and Wear, Durham and Cleveland. A mosaic of coastal habitats which also support rare plants and internationally important populations of breeding little tern and wintering purple sandpiper. Earth heritage interest includes coastal geomorphology, marine Permian and Pleistocene/Quaternary blocks.

Council **approved** the re-notification of the site with extensions.

9.2.2 Clumber Park, Nottinghamshire. An extensive mosaic of mature woodland, wetlands and acid grass-heath and acid grassland, supporting assemblages of breeding birds and rare beetles.

Council **approved** the re-notification of the site with extensions.

9.2.3 Porlock Ridge and Saltmarsh, Somerset. A site where a naturally breached shingle bank has led to saltwater affecting the existing biological special interest. The site is also a Geological Conservation Review Site for a developing coastal geomorphological system. The site illustrates an issue where sea level change or managed realignment affects the freshwater or terrestrial special interest on an existing SSSI whilst adding a new special interest. English Nature needs to develop a standard approach for addressing these circumstances which reflect the new special interest which replaces the original special interest.

Council **noted** the geological special interest and delegated authority to **approve** notification to Chairman should circumstances require a rapid notification. Council **agreed** that the site should be used to develop a sound process to deal with these types of circumstances and to re-submit the package to the July 1999 meeting.

**Action:** Andy Brown

### 9.3 Confirmation

#### 9.3.1 Lune Forest, County Durham.

Council **considered** 2 objections and 2 representations. The two objections related to land with unworked mineral deposits which they wished to see excluded. Council considered the land to be of special interest as moorland supporting nationally important populations of merlin and golden plover. The damage to the special interest caused by the removal of vegetation and topsoil from the full area with planning permission for mineral extraction at Selset Quarry which occurred prior to notification was noted with concern and Council requested a letter to be sent by Chairman to the owners and relevant authorities. One representation sought the inclusion of Selset Reservoir. Council noted the importance of the reservoir, especially for wigeon, but did not consider this to be of special interest in the wider context of the moorland. One other representation supported the designation of the SSSI and the extension of the proposed SPA. Council also **noted** the deletion of the introductory sentence prefacing the list of Operations Likely to Damage the special interest following legal advice from DETR. Council **confirmed** the site with modification.

#### 9.3.2 Trinity Broads, Norfolk.

Council **considered** one objection concerning the impact of the designation on the activities of the occupier. Council did not consider that this related to the special interest and **confirmed** the notification without modification.

#### 9.3.3 Sheppey Cliffs and Foreshore, Kent.

Council **considered** one objection concerning the boundary of the site. Discussion with the owners representative resulted in agreement on a revised boundary and the owner agreed to erect a fence on this line. Council **confirmed** the notification with modification.

#### 9.3.4 Chapel Common, West Sussex.

Council **considered** two objections. The first objection was on the basis that the owner did not accept any matter which would dilute their rights. Council considered this did not challenge the special interest. The second objection concerned the inclusion of part of a garden within the site. Council agreed this land should not have been included and **confirmed** the notification with modification.

#### 9.3.5 Woolbeding and Pound Commons, West Sussex.

Council **considered** four objections. One concerned the inclusion of an area of sweet chestnut coppice. Council agreed this land should not have been included. Three objections concerned commoners rights. These had

been discussed and assurances given that the exercise of existing rights would not affect the special interest. Council **confirmed** the notification with modification.

9.3.6 Stowe Pool and Walk Mill Clay Pit, Staffordshire.

Council **considered** one recommendation to modify the boundary in light of more detailed plans regarding the alignment of a new road and **confirmed** the notification with modification.

9.3.7 Ludworth Intake, Greater Manchester, Derbyshire.

Council **considered** one objection. This was based on the possible interference the notification could have on current and future possible uses of the site. Council considered this was not an objection on scientific grounds and **confirmed** the notification without modification.

9.3.8 Dee Estuary, Flintshire, Denbighshire, Wirral, Cheshire.

Council **considered** this cross border site which is also being considered by the Countryside Council for Wales. There were no objections affecting land in England. Council **confirmed** the notification of the boundary in England and delegated authority to Chairman to agree any amendments to the citation and OLD list proposed by the Countryside Council for Wales.

**Action:** Andy Brown to consult Dr Gubbay on the implications of the decisions taken by the Countryside Council for Wales and advise Chairman.

## 10. Any other business

- 10.1 The Committee **agreed** the proposed postal consultation on the draft of the Corporate Plan 2000 - 2003. The draft will be discussed with our DETR sponsor unit at the same time. It will be circulated to Council Members on 7 May 1999 and seek comments by 24 May 1999.
- 10.2 Maritime Team will start sending packages seeking Council's approval for the conservation objectives for Marine pSACs in October. They intend to provide an opportunity for Council Members to receive briefing before the first packages are considered. Mr Burke, Dr Gubbay, Professor Lucas, and Dr Moser offered to take part.
- 10.3 The Committee expressed their appreciation of the site visits arranged for 5 May 1999 and thanked staff for the excellent paper work and interesting sites they had arranged.