

2009

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Groundwork Northumberland

Brownfield Biodiversity Report



Blyth Valley Borough Council
Groundwork Northumberland
Newcastle City Council
North Tyneside Council
Northumberland Wildlife Trust
Wansbeck District Council

Contributors:

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Image on front cover: Paradise, SNCI, Newcastle upon Tyne. Emma Cox, Northumberland Wildlife Trust

Executive Summary

The biodiversity value of brownfield land is often underestimated, with sites frequently described as being 'unsightly' and their ecological value misunderstood. However their importance is being recognised with their recent inclusion in the new list of UKBAP Priority Habitats and Species and is named "Open Mosaic Habitats on Previously Developed Land".

The recognition of the importance that brownfield land made to biodiversity across South East Northumberland, North Tyneside and Newcastle, alongside the identification of three Brownfield Biodiversity Areas located within this area in the North East England Regional Spatial Strategy provided the impetus for this project. The aim was to gain a better understanding of brownfield and its biodiversity across south east Northumberland, Newcastle and North Tyneside, working in partnership with Local authorities, Natural England, Northumberland Wildlife Trust, Butterfly Conservation and Groundwork Northumberland.

Several sites within the project area were selected and mapped, and these were then narrowed down to twenty two sites whose biodiversity was measured using a Phase One Habitat survey. The results were recorded, and the reports produced are extremely useful as standalone documents which evidence the biodiversity present at each site and will enable planners to ensure appropriate mitigation is put into place when /if sites are developed. However partners agreed that there needed to be a means of comparing sites to establish those sites of relatively higher biodiversity value, and this required greater protection and/or mitigation. As there was no tailor made mechanism for comparison available, the partners agreed to adapt the Newcastle Wildlife Enhancement Network evaluation system for the quality of Newcastle's urban wildlife habitats, which is based on sound ecological principals and an already tried, tested and applied system.

This Brownfield Scoring System uses traffic light colour coding to show which sites have a high biodiversity value (red), a medium value (amber) and a low biodiversity value (green); thus providing a means to inform planners which brownfield sites need protection or high levels of mitigation if their biodiversity is to be maintained.

Project Outcomes

- Create a better understanding of the biodiversity value of Brownfield sites in South East Northumberland, Newcastle and North Tyneside.
- Provide an in-depth understanding of what species are present on twenty two brownfield sites
- Establish a new mechanism to compare and evaluate brownfield sites as to which are worth protecting or ensuring appropriate mitigation and which need little mitigation and are more suited to development.

Recommendations

- Publicise the project to raise public awareness of the project in local press
- Disseminate this report to relevant personnel e.g. planners and potential developers
- Look at ways of resourcing further brownfield surveys
- Engage with the new UKBAP Priority Habitat type named 'Open Mosaic Habitats on Previously Developed Land' research project
- Open a dialogue at a regional level as to how best protect those areas of brownfield land that have an exceptionally high biodiversity value
- Consider incorporating the UK BAP habitat description criteria (see Appendix Four) for selection of qualifying habitats of high nature conservation in the Brownfield Scoring System to establish which sites should be protected
- Use the Local Wildlife Site System to protect sites of high value