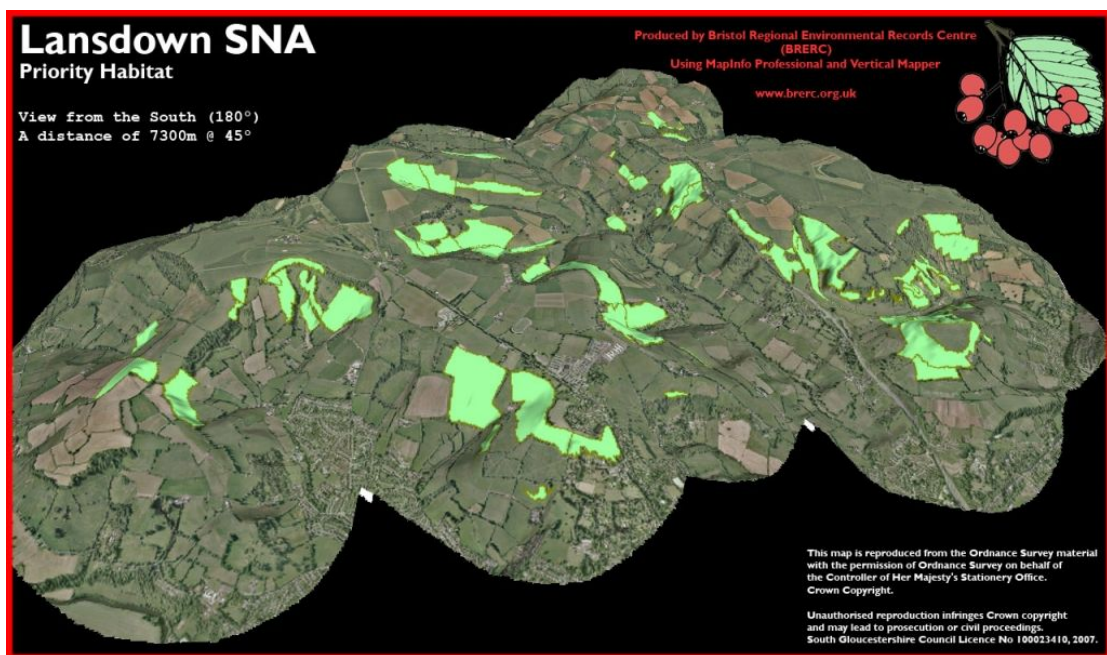


## South West Nature Map

### South West Nature Map Phase 2 Project – Visioning Workshops

#### Report to Biodiversity South West



Report compiled by John Waldon

September 2008

## Context

**The principle aim of this project is to agree an unconstrained vision for the restoration of key ecosystems within a Strategic Nature Area, for the year 2050. The main output from the workshops will be a visual representation of the agreed vision.**

Biodiversity South West had previously stated *“that it wants to work with Local Biodiversity Action Plans (LBAP) and their partners to make Nature Map a reality and to do this effectively each Strategic Nature Area needs an agreed vision for the year 2050 and a plan to get there. Only by working with other sectors and addressing their needs will we achieve this. Biodiversity South West therefore wants to run a series of workshops across the region to explore the process to achieving this vision and outcomes that can be used by each LBAP to enable this”.*

John Waldon was contracted to work with Naomi Brookes, of Biodiversity South West, to pilot the process of securing a vision for selected Strategic Nature Areas (SNAs) in the region and to report on the process. The work included feed back of the initiative to the Biodiversity South West Partnership. The contract was funded by Natural England (South West region).

## Introduction

A project was proposed that would:

- Pilot different approaches to securing a biodiversity vision and record the outcomes and lessons learnt.
- Provide the opportunity to check the environmental value and potential/opportunity of the areas selected for the pilots, ideally one SNA per county.

This would be achieved by offering the opportunity to capture a shared vision for a chosen area. It would encourage engagement with local experts, enthusiasts and the relevant statutory agencies. Ideally this would encourage joint ownership of the outcomes. The outcomes potential role in benefiting future or existing projects was also considered.

This short report sets out the progress and lessons learnt following the pilots throughout the South West region. Although the number of initiatives was small the variety amongst the SNAs and the approaches adopted provided sufficient diversity to enable the results, successful or otherwise, to be identified and reported.

**The objective was to capture a shared long term vision for an area (SNA) and describe what the participants would like it to look like in 50 years time. The process would provide an opportunity for mapping opportunities.**

The process had three distinct stages:

### ***Stage 1 - selecting the area***

*Biodiversity SW* asked each Local Biodiversity Partnership to identify an SNA suitable to be a pilot area. It also offered funding and additional resources; in the form of a facilitator and additional Bio SW staff time, to enable a workshop to be held. The workshop or workshops were designed to develop a vision for the selected SNA. In some counties the County Wildlife Trust took the lead.

Guidance was offered to encourage the selection of an area where the visioning process might provide an outcome of benefit to an existing or proposed project. There was for example a clear need for a biodiversity vision for the Clay Country (Cornwall) and in Wiltshire the New Life for Chalk project is expected to benefit from the work undertaken during the pilot.

Devon had started their pilot. Two adjoining SNAs within the Blackdowns AONB had been selected and a work shop held. The meeting included a wide range of interests and the participants included ecologists, artists and local landowners. The outcomes are available elsewhere.

The focus of this report was on the remaining counties within the region apart from Gloucestershire. There was not a pilot in that county.

### ***Stage 2 – the initial meeting.***

LBAP coordinators and/or the Wildlife Trusts selected an area or areas. They were encouraged to consider two questions; what do they want to get from this process and is there an outcome that would help another initiative or ambition? The Local Biodiversity Plan partnership in most cases selected one area. In Dorset three potential areas had been identified, these were reduced to two by the LBAP partnership and the final decision on which area to select was taken by the LBAP co-ordinator.

A meeting with small number of key people (2 to 6) was held attended by Bio SW and JW. The meeting discussed and agreed:

- The area to be addressed and the quality of information available.
- The focus of the process (biodiversity or wider) and therefore who should be invited to participate.
- Who should participate?
- Whether a single or multiple workshops were required.
- What else this initiative could help inform and add value too.
- Organisation of the first workshop including responsibilities, format and materials (maps).

The SNAs selected proved to be very different in size, dominant vegetation type and potential. This was useful and enabled different approaches to be explored. The relationship of the area selected and the SNA(s) was equally varied. In two cases the area chosen was a single SNA (Avon – Lansdown, Dorest - Kingcombe), in another two the area encompassed several SNAs (Wiltshire – Ebbel Chalk, Somerset – Brue valley). Cornwall chose an area largely adjacent to SNAs and included only parts of them in the area subjected to the visioning process. The areas varied from 2,000 ha to 10 square miles. The principle habitats addressed included chalk grassland, woodland, wetland, heathland and a matrix of habitats.

### ***Stage 3- the workshops.***

(Five counties progressed to this stage).

It was originally planned to hold one workshop per county. Discussion at an early stage identified that it would be unlikely that a vision would be captured in one workshop and that the opportunity for further workshops should be offered. This proved to be the case and only one initiative (Lansdown SNA) captured a vision during the first workshop. This was largely due to having a discreet SNA, few contentious issues and the right mix of people present; including representation from the relevant Local Record Centre and the provision of data in an easily understood format.

The objective of each workshop was the same for each pilot; it was to see if there was a shared vision for the area and whether such a collective vision could be captured using opportunity mapping.

Identifying who should participate was a very important part of the first meeting. Ensuring that all the key participants could and would attend the first workshop required significant resources and time. The invitation list proved critical to success and Attendance and participation by the key players was essential. Where a multi-objective vision was sought it was even more important to have invited individuals and organisations covering all the potential issues including those who understood the biodiversity value and potential of the area.

Prior to the workshop contributing organisations and individuals were informed about the nature of the exercise and what was expected of them.

The format for each workshop included:

1. Setting the context; explaining Nature Map and SNAs.
2. A description of the selected pilot area (what was known).
3. Providing an opportunity for everyone to provide further information
4. Time for the group to decide if a shared vision was achievable.
5. Time to capture a vision (on a map or words) if applicable.
6. Time for the group to decide on the next stages

Throughout the workshop it was stressed that:

- There was no pre-conceived outcome.
- The outcome had to be of value to the contributing members of the workshop.
- The group had to take collective responsibility for the process and eventual outcome.
- Someone had to take the lead and move the initiative forward.

The format of each workshop was flexible enabling flashes of inspiration and blind alleys to be explored. Possibly as a result of this approach each event was very different from the others.



*The Lansdown SNA workshop*

The workshops were well attended and were generally lively affairs. An independent facilitator was provided.

**What did we learn?**

The process must be seen as a collaborative exercise without any one organisation or individual dominating the outcomes. However someone has to take ownership of the process.

Selecting the right participants and venue were essential to success. Delaying the workshop to ensure key individuals can and do attend should be considered. Drawing up a comprehensive attendance list proved difficult for some organisers. The Local BAP partnerships should support and ensure the list of invitees is comprehensive and correct. Those attending must be empowered by their organisations, if relevant, to participate. The most successful workshops were those that contained the correct participants. This included those empowered and encouraged to participate by their organisation. Participants that remained parochial in their approach or failed to be convinced of the value of the exercise could prevent progress.

The inclusion of farmers was a highly contentious issue for some groups. Some thought it wrong to exclude them from any stage of the process; whilst others wanted to bring them into the process once a biodiversity vision had been drafted. Experience from elsewhere (Dartmoor Moorland Vision, Dartmoor National Park 2005) suggests farmers welcome inclusion at a stage when the “professionals” have begun to set out their views as long as this remains available for comment and change.

Too much data and information could at times stop the creative process. The same was true for too little information. However a perceived lack of information was often seized upon by those not fully supportive of the initiative as an excuse not to progress. The participants were frequently reluctant to “best guess” future scenarios preferring to look back to the past and whether the vegetation of a particular time could be re-instated or restored.

A quality outcome takes time. If all the information is at hand and easily understood then progress can be swift. If there are significant gaps or controversial information time has to be provided for this to be rectified.

The main issues identified were:

- Ensure that those organising and chairing the event are fully supportive. Any negativity can prevent completion.
- Select the participants carefully. Ensure the expertise, experience and knowledge base reflects what areas are to be covered, especially biodiversity.
- An independent chairman and facilitator are essential to steer around possible barriers and ensure full engagement.
- Don't put maps and information (especially pictures) in front of the participants too early on in the process if you want them to listen and participate. They are a distraction.
- Don't try to do everything at once, approach the vision step by step ensuring everyone is happy with the progress.

- All participants must understand and be supportive of the objective (to capture a shared vision).
- Keep the workshop to under 20 people and offer more opportunities if you need to engage with a wider group.
- Don't let the participants get absorbed in detail or volume of data.
- All participants must feel empowered to participate fully and be encouraged by the organisation or group they represent. Senior managers of those participating must be supportive and encourage participation.

Also:

- Conservationists are basically conservative in their outlook and very cautious. The less experienced members of the group were often the ones who found the process difficult to engage with. A mix of older experienced people proved the most constructive.
- Each group will work at its own speed (and it's difficult to change it).
- There is a reluctance to think into the future (caution over big issues).
- The process can be as important as the outcome; strengthening partnerships and over-coming incorrect perceptions of others.
- You need the right people there especially those with local knowledge.
- You need to capture something to show they have not wasted a day.

. Table 1 sets out the number of workshops held and the outcomes.

Table 1 Workshops and outcomes

county	workshop 1	workshop 2	workshop 3	draft vision map	engagement with existing initiative
<b>Avon</b>	x			x	
<b>Cornwall</b>	x	x	x	x	x
<b>Dorset</b>	x				
<b>Somerset</b>	x				x
<b>Wiltshire</b>	x	x		x	x

In only one pilot did the first, and only, workshop lead to capturing a biodiversity vision.

In two of the other pilots a partial vision was captured at a second workshop and there was general agreement on the final outcome.

The other two workshops failed to capture a vision. At one workshop it was decided against defining boundaries, as lines on a map, as this might antagonise a perceived delicate situation with landowners. However the process was agreed to have been helpful and constructive. In the other workshop there was little (but some) support for capturing a biodiversity vision. This workshop chose to try to move directly to a more multi-objective vision at a later opportunity having failed to agree on a biodiversity vision. If the outcome will be used to inform or help another project or opportunity then it should be in a format that will be most useful. Such However a clear role for the outcome and process needs to be established to avoid the biodiversity vision becoming lost in a wider socio-economic project.

### **Resources provided**

Maps: each workshop was provided with large (A1) maps showing the outline of the boundary of the area chosen. Some of the maps also included areas of existing priority BAP habitats.

Markers and crayons: an assortment of crayons and marker pens were provided. Those sold for young children (Early Learning Centre) were used to deter too much detail.

Existing information and data: information was provided in many forms including, maps, projected spread sheets, reports, aerial photos, photographs and data bases.

### ***The outcomes.***

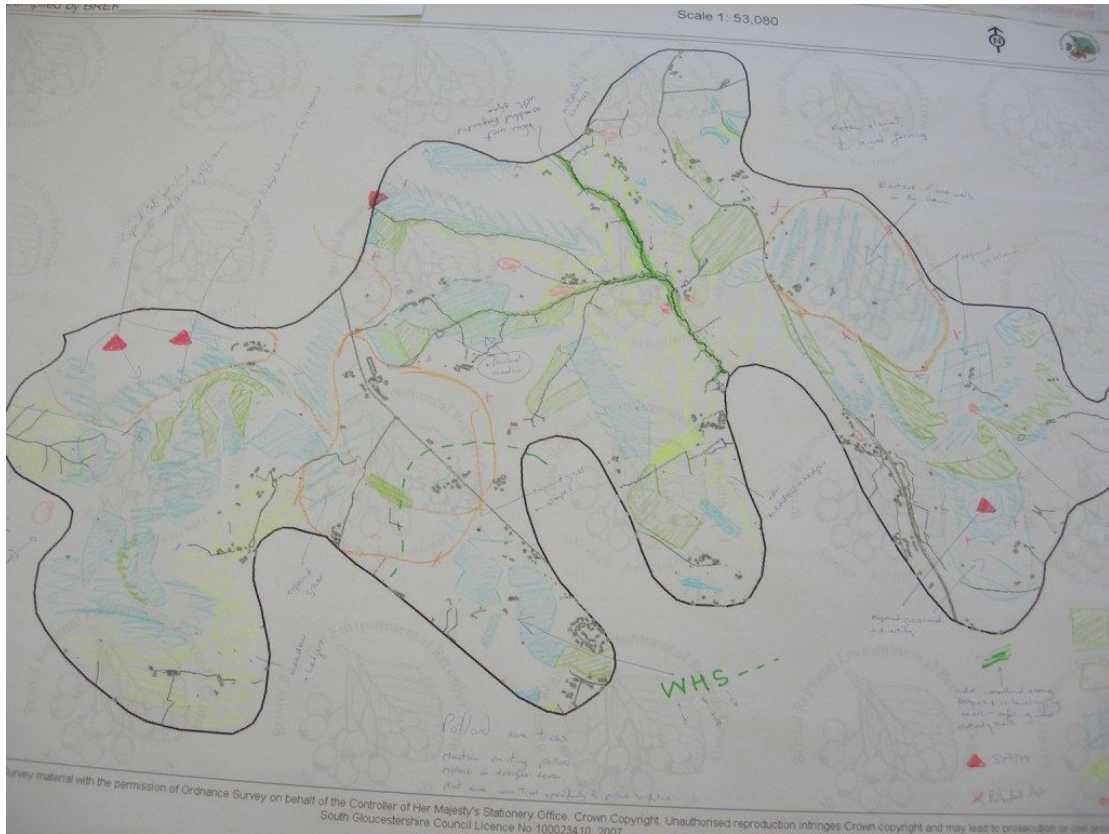
#### Mapping a biodiversity vision

Marking up areas of future habitat together with existing areas attracted wide spread support. The maps had to be large (A1+) and contain only the SNA boundary and the minimum of information if they were not to constrain the imagination. Some found previously mapped areas of existing priority habitats useful and provided something on which to build corridors and linkage. This was particularly true for the large complex SNAs. Complex maps, containing lots of information, were less successful as a base map.

It proved very important to avoid too much detail. Not only did this create problems over the correctness of specific data but it also worked against a collective approach. Bickering over detail turned other participants off. Offering an opportunity to return to certain areas to capture more detail proved useful.

If the mapped vision is to be the basis on which to enter a dialogue with other people then it is essential that the map does not give the impression that it is final version. It is important not to imply by the design, content or appearance that it is a final stage and that there are no further opportunities to take on the comments of others. Offer it for comment as a shared vision open to comment and in draft. Avoid inferring that the vision (even in draft) is a “done deal”.





*The draft Lansdown biodiversity vision*



*The China Clay country draft vision*

## A set of guiding principles

The Cornwall workshop adopted the collective endorsement of a set of guiding principles as a step towards the mapped vision. Their guiding principles were to remain as part of the final vision, (copy attached).

It is important to Use language that all participants understand and that is suitable for a wider audience. Avoid general principles that are too generic and could be applicable to anywhere; ensure they are relevant and pertinent to the area. However also avoid very prescriptive comments and detail.

What did we learn?

- Capturing the vision for an area onto a map can be successful.
- Agreement on a set of guiding principles for an area can be a useful step towards a vision.
- Providing a biodiversity vision can inform and help progress a multi-objective vision.
- The vision map, if it is to be offered for endorsement or comment to a wider set of people, should remain as a draft.
- opportunities should guide the final outcome.

## **Conclusion**

The methodology used to attempt to capture a shared biodiversity vision can be successful. It requires commitment and a clear understanding of what is being attempted from all the participants. Engagement with the correct mix of people who all desire a positive outcome is crucial. Time spent briefing potential participants and ensuring they are empowered to fully engage is essential to achieving a useful outcome.

Sufficient time must be available. Delaying the start to ensure all the key players are available will pay off in the longer term. Setting dates to ensure commitment and to keep the momentum going is useful. The process moves faster where there is adequate information and area is well understood by all the participants.

The commitment of time, resources and people's time will prove to be a barrier to rolling out this approach for every SNA. But for those where there might be an initiative to take the vision forward it will prove to be a useful process. It will secure wider ownership of the outcomes and make it a much more useful product.

Failure to convince the participants to the value of the exercise will prevent progress. A predominance of participants that fail to see the benefit of a vision can stop the process. This was particularly true of younger less experienced colleagues who lacked the confidence to think outside of their normal work

areas. In such cases it is essential managers of such staff convince them of the benefits and empower them to fully engage.

Moving directly to a multi-objective vision appears to be difficult. A step by step approach is more successful and a biodiversity vision should be a crucial step. Where a biodiversity vision was not secured the move towards a more ambitious multi-objective vision appeared difficult and was unsuccessful at the time the pilot ended.

An independent chairman or facilitator can ensure everybody participates and that the workshop moves towards its chosen outcome. A committed chairman and clear leadership by the LBAP partnership are essential to the process. Where this was lacking the process was slow and not inclusive. However balancing leadership with ownership is delicate and more experienced colleagues should consider taking on such a role to free up the other participants to be fully involved in constructing a vision.

*This short report was provided by John Waldon with additional comments by Naomi Brookes. Further information is available from Biodiversity SW.*

*September 2008.*

**Additional information:**

1. A Template of the process
2. An example of an invitation letter to the first workshop
3. An example of an agenda for a workshop
4. photos of maps
5. An example of a set of guiding principles
6. note on the maps
7. Copy of the task list
8. An example of an SNA profile