

Urban Umbrella

Local Habitat Action Plan for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough

January 2009

This Action plan provides an umbrella for the Urban Action Plans which are focussing on specific landuse and habitats such as Allotments, Gardens, Managed Greenspaces, Churchyards/Cemetries, Brownfield land and built environment and on species such as the Great Crested Newts, Song Thrush and Pipistrelle Bats. Some of these apply not only to urban areas but also to rural areas, e.g. Churchyards/Cemetries, Built Environment, and the Species Action Plans. All these more specific Urban BAPs should be read in conjunction with this generic Urban Umbrella BAP.

1 Vision

- People recognise that they coexist with nature and that outdoor spaces of all kind are important in fostering biodiversity and enhancing human health and well being.
- Built up areas meet our living, consumer and business needs and allow everyone direct contact with the natural world.
- Biodiversity is seen as an important part of and is cared for by urban planning.
- Everyone living and working in built up areas has easy access to a network and range of outdoor spaces with a variety of wildlife. People participate in caring for their local environment.

2 Current status of Urban habitats

Urban wildlife habitats include buildings & hard surfaces and greenspaces & their associated ecological niches found within built up areas. Greenspaces can be divided into the following categories:

- a) Encapsulated countryside**, enclosed 'semi-natural' habitats such as unimproved grassland, hedgerows and ancient woodland and wetland. Churchyards and Cemetries with their grassland habitats and often occurring veteran trees are an example for encapsulated countryside.
- b) Managed greenspaces**. These include town parks, pocket parks, amenity grassland, allotments, domestic gardens and plantings associated with school grounds, colleges and hospitals. They can, depending on their structure, management and planted species, support a large number of wild species of invertebrate and birds especially in the suburbs. These include regionally and nationally uncommon species, including for example Great Crested Newts and bats and swifts nesting in old buildings.
- c) Naturally seeded urban areas or industrial sites** such as demolition sites, disused railway lands or industrial land. These areas can be particularly rich in species, often reflecting the complex mixture of features. The early stages of colonisation favour many uncommon species including some bees and wasps for which urban areas are now their stronghold and early successional carabid beetles. Later stages of succession - short perennial, tall ruderal and then through to woodland - equally contain many uncommon invertebrates with flies, bees, wasps, including some parasitic species and sawflies. Both plant and animal communities contain recently established species, some of which are virtually confined to urban areas.

An important characteristic of urban areas as a whole, as well as of the greenspaces they hold, is their mosaic of habitats. It is this intimate mosaic of habitats within sites which gives rare ground-nesting bees and wasps and protected species such as the great-crested newt *Triturus cristatus*

the mixture of breeding site, foraging areas and shelter they need within relatively small areas. Several Urban Action Plans apply not only to urban areas but also to rural areas. The Habitat Action Plans on Churchyards/Cemeteries and the Built Environment, and the Species Action Plans are equally relevant in villages.

3 Current factors affecting the habitat

The main factors which alter the overall structure of urban habitats are:

- Simplification of park management
- Reclamation or redevelopment of disused land to a uniform landuse
- Development encroachment onto parks, old cemeteries, long abandoned sites and large established suburban gardens
- Management of greenspaces such as clearing of shrubs, filling in ponds and levelling land with hillocks and hollows making them less attractive to wildlife
- Fragmentation of habitats, with no wildlife corridors

4 Current action

Legal status

Some urban habitats are notified as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) or declared as National Nature Reserves (NNRs), Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) or County Wildlife Sites (CWSs). However, for the majority of urban wildlife areas the protection comes from outside the conservation legislation, notably planning policies in local plans.

Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) are an invaluable way to protect important trees and woodland.

Management

A variety of sources of potential advice and assistance is available in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough from The Wildlife Trust, the Cambridge Green Belt Project and district and city councils who support Friends Groups and Community groups in the practical management of urban habitats.

Current interest in planning for sustainable cities and for low cost management of existing open spaces could help to maintain or improve local biodiversity.

Urban habitats also have considerable potential for local people to take part in enjoyable activities which benefit nature conservation and enable them to take action for the local environment. These areas also form an important education resource informing people of wildlife interests, natural processes and conservation management.

5 Objectives

- **Assess and monitor existing urban habitats:** we need to know what urban habitats we have and which quality of habitat they are. We need to keep monitoring our habitats in regular intervals.
- **Maintain the extent of our urban habitat resource:** we aim to protect and safeguard our current habitat area, so none of it is lost to other land use.
- **Create new urban habitats:** we aim to expand our urban habitat resource.
- **Manage and enhance our Urban habitat resource:** we aim to maintain the condition where it is good and to improve it where it is poor. This objective includes the restoration of habitats.
- **Raise awareness and increase accessibility and involvement:** we aim to promote biodiversity to urban communities, to provide people in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough with the opportunity to access and use urban greenspaces and to enthuse them to participate in looking after the resource and taking ownership for it.

Targets and Actions to achieve these objectives are formulated in the individual Urban Action Plans and will cover the following categories:

- Policy and Legislation
- Site Safeguard and Management
- Advisory
- Future research and monitoring
- Communications and Publicity
- Funding