

Teesside Retail Park, Stockton-on-Tees

Biodiversity Action Plan



Teesside Retail Park



Teesside Retail Park Nature Trail

1 Introduction & Background

Over the last few years the Government has been encouraging businesses to report on Social and Environmental issues. As part of this process, the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Select Committee (2000) and DEFRA and DTI guidelines (2001) have identified the need for business to engage more fully in the conservation of biodiversity.

British Land recognises that its business operations interact with biodiversity. As part of the Company's Corporate Responsibility programme for 2004, British Land has set an objective to *'promote the enhancement of local ecosystems'*.

One of the actions to meet this objective was to:

'Prepare biodiversity action plans for at least two key properties to provide the framework for the development of further biodiversity initiatives.'

Teesside Retail Park is one of the sites selected by British Land for developing an action plan.

Biodiversity is the rich diversity of life comprising all living organisms and the ecological communities in which they live.

2 UK & Tees Valley Biodiversity Action Plans

The UK Biodiversity Action Plan was born out of the 1992 Convention on Biological Diversity, held at the Rio Summit. As has happened for many of the UK's counties and regions, Tees Valley Wildlife Trust in partnership with local organisations and businesses has produced a Biodiversity Action Plan for Tees Valley. Within this are listed a number of habitats and species

groups seen as priorities for the region, to be the focus of targeted and achievable conservation action over the coming years. Those that occur or could be expected at Teesside Retail Park, along with other species of nature conservation importance (e.g. those listed on Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981) are listed below:

Habitats	Species
• Ponds and Reedbeds	• Reed bunting • Reed warbler • Redshank • Lapwing • Mute swan
• River and Margins	• Kingfisher • Linnet • Song thrush • Water vole • Badger • Bats
• Scrub and Trees	• Japanese knotweed

3 Purpose of Site Biodiversity Action Plans

The Teesside Retail Park Biodiversity Action Plan, prepared by British Land, aims to detail the main features of value for biodiversity present, as determined through site survey, and explains the targets for these

features as set within published UK or Local Biodiversity Action Plans. The Site Action Plans will list the measures that are to be taken to help meet these targets or to improve or enhance value for wildlife.

4 Teesside Park - Background

Teesside Park is a retail park adjacent to the intersection of the A66 and A19 trunk roads between Stockton-on-Tees and Middlesbrough. The site is bounded to the south and west by a golf course and the Old River Tees bisects the site in an east-west direction. Although the majority of the site is retail park, there are a number of less developed areas which support valuable habitats and species.

The developed areas are generally comprised of large retail units and associated car parks. Small areas of species-poor amenity grassland and tree planting are maintained around the developed margins and are of little ecological interest. Taller, more species-rich areas of grassland are present alongside the drainage ditch margins and around the large, undeveloped area of rough grassland to the north.

A mixture of tree and scrub species are scattered around the site, mainly functioning as visual screens. Their small area and lack of cohesion reduces their value as a woodland habitat, however they are still important areas for a number of bird species. A badger sett has also been recorded within the belt of scrub and trees to the north of the old river trees, which increases the overall value of these areas.

Three ponds are present around the southern and central areas of the site, with connecting drainage ditches. The ponds and ditches are extensively fringed with common reed, reedmace, rushes and sedges. This type of habitat provides a valuable resource for water voles and a number of important bird species such as kingfisher, reed bunting and reed warbler.

The course of the Old River Tees has been heavily modified, but it still hosts a number of important habitat types. Due to the tidal nature of this section of river, areas of mudflat are exposed at low tide. Mudflats are productive habitats and provide an available food source for a number of bird species such as redshank. Stands of common reed and sea clubrush are present towards the southern limit of the site, which provide additional habitat for various bird species. Along the margins of the river are narrow strips of saltmarsh. Saltmarsh is an important type of habitat which has suffered severe decline in recent years. It is rare within the Tees Valley (only 26.5ha) area, and as such is a priority habitat in both the UK BAP and Tees Valley BAP.

5 Teesside Retail Park Proposed Biodiversity Actions

A number of actions that will result in improvements to the habitats and species present at Teesside Park are described below. These suggested improvements have been devised based on the overall benefit that could realistically be achieved to the site.

Reedbeds and Ponds

These areas are particularly valuable since they are locally scarce habitats that support a range of important species. Within the surrounding area are a number of other small sites with similar habitats and species; although these sites are fragmented, by improving the habitats at Teesside Park the overall value of the network of sites will be raised. The following actions would help to improve the value of these habitats within the site.

5. Continued

Proposed Action 1.

Formal programme of reedbed cutting

The ponds, reedbeds and marginal vegetation would benefit from a formal programme of reed cutting to prevent encroachment of the reeds into the open water areas and maintain vibrant communities of marginal

plants. This would have a direct benefit to a number of important species, including water vole, reed bunting, reed warbler and mute swan.

By June 2005	By December 2005	By December 2006
Arup to advise on frequency, location and extent of reed cutting programme.	Conduct first cut of reedbeds.	Survey ponds to determine extent of regeneration to inform frequency of subsequent cuts.

Proposed Action 2.

Create islands

Creating a small island in the largest pond would provide a safe haven for a number of bird species to build nests where they will not be disturbed by humans

and are at less risk from predators such as foxes. A floating island could be used to minimise the loss of volume available for water storage.

By June 2005	By December 2005	By December 2006
Arup to advise on design and location of island.	Create artificial island.	Monitor island for usage, adequacy for purpose and any emerging maintenance issues.

Proposed Action 3.

Marginal vegetation planting

Thicken and enhance through appropriate planting the marginal vegetation around the Pond 3 to encourage certain species to nest and feed. Water voles, reed

bunting, reed warbler and mute swan would all benefit from an increase in marginal vegetation.

By June 2005	By December 2005	By December 2006
Arup to advise on appropriate species and locations for marginal planting.	Plant 50% of appropriate locations in Pond 3.	Monitor success of previous planting. Plant remaining 50% of appropriate locations in Pond 3.

5. Continued

Proposed Action 4.

Re-profile banks

The banks of the ditches and ponds are generally very steep, which limits the diversity of species that are present. By re-profiling variable sections of the banks to create shallower gradients and a planting shelf the

diversity of the bank sides could be improved and a thicker margin of fringing vegetation established without impeding drainage function. Water voles, reed bunting and reed warble are likely to benefit from this measure.

By June 2005	By December 2005	By December 2006
Arup to advise of locations of banks that would benefit from being reprofiled, and advise on profile design to maximise benefits.	Reprofile 25% of identified sections of bank.	Reprofile 100% of identified sections of bank.

Watercourses and associated habitats

The watercourses, mudflats and saltmarsh form a mosaic of habitats centred on the river corridor. These areas have the strongest links to the surrounding areas, which includes sites designated for their nature

conservation value, through the network of rivers and streams. By improving the habitats along these corridors within the site at Teesside Park, it will aid the dispersal of species from and into the wider area.

Proposed Action 5.

Enhance and create areas of saltmarsh

The existing areas of saltmarsh are quite flat, small and sensitive to encroachment and disturbance. The diversity of saltmarsh vegetation could be improved on the site by scraping small pools within the floodplain to

vary the topography. This measure can only be undertaken with the agreement of the Environment Agency and the landowner.

By June 2005	By December 2005	By December 2006
Arup to advise on methods and locations for enhancing areas of saltmarsh.	Enhance areas of saltmarsh.	Survey vegetation within saltmarsh to determine success and inform further opportunities for enhancement.

5. Continued

Proposed Action 6.

Promote public access to the river corridor

Integrate with the Thornaby trail and promote public access along the Old River Tees. In order to prevent trampling of sensitive areas and disturbance to waterfowl and waders (such as redshank and lapwing

feeding on the mudflats at low tide), the route should be marked and duck-boarding used where appropriate. A hide could be created in due course which would allow people to observe without disturbing the wildlife.

By June 2005	By December 2005	By December 2006
Arup to advise on management of potential disturbance impacts arising from increased public access.	Implement appropriate measures to encourage access while minimising disturbance.	Review route alignment, usage and implemented measures to determine whether disturbance is being adequately managed. Explore feasibility of additional interpretive features and / or bird hides.

Proposed Action 7.

Control the spread of alien species

Japanese knotweed was recorded near to the drainage ditch north of Pond 1. This is an alien species, which is particularly invasive and can exclude native vegetation

from large areas of habitat. The removal of this species through the instigation of a programme of spraying would benefit the overall ecological value.

By June 2005	By December 2005	By December 2006
Arup to advise on programme of treatment and removal of Japanese knotweed.	Conduct a survey of locations and number of existing stands. Apply first round of herbicide treatment.	Monitor control/spread of plants. Apply further treatments of herbicide as appropriate.

Trees and scrub

The trees and scrub on the site consist of a mixture of native and non-native species in discontinuous and unstructured assemblages, much of which has been

planted to improve the local landscape. A number of species of note, including linnet, song thrush and badger have been recorded from these areas.

5. Continued

Proposed Action 8.

Manage areas of continuous scrub

Areas of continuous scrub have become tall and disjointed with large gaps beneath the canopies. By creating a programme to manage the scrub through

coppicing it would become a denser, more cohesive stand that would improve its overall value and nesting potential for bird species.

By June 2005	By December 2005	By December 2006
Arup to identify locations of continuous scrub and advise on a suitable management regime to improve overall habitat value.	Implement management of scrub at identified locations, likely to involve coppicing or similar type of cutting.	Monitor progress of stands of scrub and advise on frequency and extent of subsequent management.

Proposed Action 9.

Structure the stands of trees

The stands of mixed native and non-native trees are even aged. A programme to diversify the structure of the woodland by systematically removing the non-native species and replacing with young native trees and

shrubs should be implemented. The removed non-native trees could be used to create deadwood piles and encourage invertebrates and birds into the wooded areas.

By June 2005	By December 2005	By December 2006
Arup to advise on a suitable management regime to improve overall habitat value of wooded areas.	Implement management of trees at identified locations, likely to involve felling, coppicing, pollarding or similar type of cutting.	Monitor progress of stands of trees and advise on frequency and extent of subsequent management.

Proposed Action 10.

Install bird and bat boxes

To encourage birds and bats onto the site a number of artificial boxes could be installed. Suitable locations would be among the larger specimens of trees to the

north of the river and to the south and west of Ponds 1 and 2, where disturbance would be limited but within view of a bird hide or nature trail.

By June 2005	By December 2005	By December 2006
Arup to advise on locations, type and number of bird and bat boxes.	Install 50% of boxes.	Install remaining boxes. Monitor usage of installed boxes, review locations as appropriate.

6 Implementation and Review

British Land will review with tenants and neighbouring landowners the potential for cooperation on biodiversity actions that meet the objectives of the respective organisations.

The monitoring and review of the actions will be undertaken annually and reviewed as appropriate.

7 Useful Contacts and Links

The following organisations can be contacted for further information on biodiversity and nature conservation in Teesside:

- *Tees Valley Wildlife Trust*, **01642 759900**
- *Stockton Borough Council*, **01642 393939**
- *Environment Agency*, **0191 2034000**

8 Further Information

If you would like further information on this Biodiversity Action Plan, please contact:

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