

## Summary of WPEG Members' Briefing

Held on 10<sup>th</sup> November 2011 at Worcestershire County Hall, Lakeview Room

For WPEG: Dave Throup, Environment Agency (Chair)  
Dale Bristow, WCC (Strategic Planning) (Vice Chair)  
Rachel Jones, Act on Energy  
Glenys Tucker, Natural England  
Colin Raven, Worcestershire Wildlife Trust  
Nigel Hudson, WCC (Economic Development)  
Matt Maginnis, WCC (Highways and Countryside)

Elected members: Anne Hingley  
Maddy Bunker  
Mary Drinkwater  
Anthony Blagg  
Emma Moffett  
Ken Pollock  
Adrian Hardman  
John Cairns  
Lucy Hodgson  
Robert Banks  
Pamela Davey

Note that all presentations from the briefing are available online at:

<http://www.worcestershirepartnership.org.uk/cms/theme-groups/environment-group/minutes-and-agendas.aspx>

### 1) WPEG: Background and Priorities

Dave Throup explained the purpose of the group.

### 2) Flooding in Worcestershire: Progress since 2007

Matt Maginnis and Dave Throup set out the developments in joint working and flood prevention/flood warning that had been established since 2007. Key achievements include:

- a new joint county and district overview and scrutiny committee;
- closer joint working between county and district through service level agreements signed between WCC and the north/south districts;
- district councils taking responsibility for ordinary watercourses under the provisions of the Land Drainage Act;
- the identification of vulnerable communities;
- a new flood forecasting centre bringing together the Environment agency and the Met Office

### 3) Planning for the Natural Environment

Colin Raven outlined how we need to think differently about planning; it is no longer just about bricks and mortar, but must move to become a more holistic consideration of the wider environment. The M42 motorway services at Hopwood were cited as a good example of development engaging with the environment from the earliest stages to deliver positive outcomes for all. Moving towards an approach where the environment is valued through its

'ecosystem services', including through recognition of the financial value that the natural environment can bring to Worcestershire.

#### **4) The Economic Take**

Nigel Hudson outlined some of the key economic-environmental linkages in the county, and suggested there is a need to capitalise on the potential afforded by the county's resources, including food production in the Vale of Evesham. Having a more holistic approach from the planning system could help economic development. The delays encountered in protected species controls seem to conflict with the government's desire for a faster system. Ideally, developers should be influenced up front at the earliest stage in all the environmental issues they need to consider, including design standards.

#### **5) Joining up Environmental Delivery**

Dale Bristow explained that though WPEG had a string history, it now needed to broaden its approach and spend more time talking to others beyond the traditional 'environmental' arena: notably the economic and health sectors. WPEG is applying to become a Local Nature Partnership, as set out in the Natural Environment White Paper. One of the most successful ways of joining up the different interests and disciplines is through the production of Concept Statements. These act as environmental blueprints for large new developments, and take into account comments from a wide range of environmental organisations to ensure a joined-up approach. It is anticipated that on average 5 concept statements will be produced every year. Community budgets are a new way of giving local people more of a say in where government funding should be targeted. WPEG has a role in helping to identify these priorities.

Dale then showed the video produced by the Worcestershire Green Infrastructure Partnership. The video can be viewed here:

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=etdPM\\_mUGK0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=etdPM_mUGK0)

#### **6) Question & Answer session**

*Q: Is building still taking place on floodplains?*

A: Only exceptionally does development now take place in flood plains contrary to Environment Agency advice. Such developments are so rare that they are no longer monitored in the group's State of the Environment report.

*Q: As driveways and other hard surfacing can contribute to flash flooding, how can we ensure suitable materials are used?*

A: Sustainable Drainage Schemes (SuDs) are already being rolled out by WCC departments to help combat surface water run-off. These will also become a requirement under the Floods and Water Management Act.

*Q: Following the scrutiny that took place immediately after the 2007 floods, has action been taken on the issues identified?*

A: There is now a register of statutory and voluntary 4x4 vehicles that can be used in times of flood. Flooding is now factored into business continuity plans, which include consideration of home-working to reduce the disruption caused by flooded transport networks. The situation is still not perfect, but readiness and response is certainly much better than it was in 2007.

*Q: Are too many delays to valuable developments occurring as a result of protected species requirements?*

A: Natural England have standing advice for developers that tells them well in advance of the issues they will need to consider in relation to protected species. The advice aims to help simplify the process. The provisions should not come as a surprise. It is also necessary to appreciate there is a legal duty, and that WCC can play a useful advocacy role in guiding people through the requirements.

*Q: What can be done about local paths, bridleways and woodland that appear to be poorly maintained?*

A: If the sites concerned are not statutorily protected, there are no powers to compel private landowners to undertake improvements. There is a big role for all partners to help engage local communities and landowners; a clear application of the principles of the 'big society'.

*Q: An increase in the growing of energy crops could mean a major change in landscape terms, and glasshouses can be extremely large. Similarly, large new areas of forestry planting can dramatically change the look of large parts of the county. How can these changes be controlled?*

A: WCC has produced a Landscape Character Assessment Supplementary Guidance document that should help decision-makers and promoters of schemes that could affect the landscape to evaluate their impact. This should lead to better decision-making in relation to large-scale landscape changes.

*Q: Why has dredging not been taken up as a way of reducing flood risk?*

A: Dredging has been done in the past, but it is largely ineffective as the volume of additional space for water to flow is relatively insignificant. The Environment Agency does not dredge, but dredging does still take place (primarily to allow navigation, rather than for flood risk purposes).

*Q: What is the likely impact resulting from some areas of the county being over-abstracted for water?*

A: Where there has been too much abstraction, the Environment Agency has to put a block on any further taking of water. 2011 has been a very dry year, and this will undoubtedly have a negative impact on root crops. It is likely to mean different methods being used on farms in future, including more glasshouses which can make more efficient use of limited water, and the potential need for water storage facilities. The Environment Agency is working with water companies on the need for water storage, and the potential for a reservoir at Longdon may be revisited.

*Q: Are there plans in place to counter the mental impacts of flooding on vulnerable people?*

A: It is recognised that there can be significant mental effects, and the floods recovery plan seeks to identify mental health issues.