

Morecambe Bay Limestones & Wetlands Nature Improvement Area Progress Summary March 2014

Work with over 100 local communities and businesses by 2015 to promote the growth of a sustainable low carbon economy linked to the natural environment

This area of the programme aims to help develop the area's woodfuel supply and demand chain and connect businesses and visitors with the area's outstanding wildlife and nature.

Two sustainable community woodfuel projects are in progress - in Arnside & Silverdale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and in woodlands around Grange-over-Sands. Trained volunteer groups are now in place and are working with landowners and contractors to manage networks of woodland sites in these areas.

Across the NIA, Woodland Improvement Grants covering almost 300ha woodland habitat have been secured working in partnership with woodland owners, all with sustainable woodfuel elements incorporated; over 30 local businesses are being contracted to carry out woodland management and timber extraction as a direct result.

A visitor survey was carried out in autumn 2012. The survey gathered valuable information and data to inform our nature tourism work. 89% visitors surveyed wanted to experience wildlife and nature during their visit to Morecambe Bay and 94% agreed that the area is good for wildlife and scenery. Our new nature tourism business network now involves over 70 businesses and they have helped us to produce a Sense of Place Toolkit and ten 'Nature on Your Doorstep' Guides to help develop the area as a top destination to experience wildlife.

Work closely with land managers to enhance and restore over 1000ha of priority limestone and wetland habitat by 2015, creating a robust network of high quality sites that deliver a range of ecosystem services

Bespoke advice and hands on support is being provided to farmers and land managers to deliver enhancement and restoration of priority wetland, woodland and grassland habitats via a range of mechanisms.

A team of three experienced land management advisors were appointed in summer 2012 - a woodland specialist, wetland specialist and a grassland specialist.

Over **1500ha priority habitat** will be enhanced as a direct result of their work in the first two years of the programme – beating our original target.

The team have focussed on submitting high quality Higher Level Stewardship and Woodland Improvement Grant applications in partnership with farmers and landowners. Delivery has also included enhancement of existing management agreements, volunteer work parties and a series of capital management projects – all designed to deliver habitat management works at key target sites.

Examples include reinstating management across large areas of limestone ancient woodland sites, work towards restoring the area's peat-rich lowland raised bogs, creating wet grassland perfect for breeding waders and negotiating grazing

management plans for limestone grassland sites famous for orchids and other wildflowers.

Within sustainable land management systems, buffer, connect and create 'stepping stones' between high quality sites to allow development of a coherent ecological network that is resilient to climate change

Bespoke advice and hands on support is being provided to farmers and land managers to improve functional connectivity for priority habitats and species.

The work of the land management team has had a particular focus on improving connectivity on a landscape scale. Grant applications and land management works have been developed with connectivity requirements for different species in mind, based on previous research.

Some examples are establishing larger core areas and stepping stone sites for breeding waders, creating rides and glades in woodland for High Brown Fritillary butterflies, linking up a series of small woodland sites important for woodland birds and work towards creating a large new reedbed for bitterns.

A series of demonstration events have been delivered for land managers and contractors on conservation grazing, woodland management and wet grassland management. 6 sites have been identified as NIA demonstration sites.

Leave a legacy for future enhancements to the natural environment through improved and effective integration with the planning system and sharing lessons learnt

This part of the programme aims to improve capacity to achieve gains for the natural environment through the planning system and most of the delivery will come later in the programme. However natural environment objectives have already been incorporated into some local authority Development Plan Documents.

Staff have participated in the NIA best practice network and have attended events and workshops.

The Morecambe Bay Local Nature Partnership, which is managing the NIA programme, continues to go from strength to strength and our close and intensive partnership working has helped achieve a series of major funding successes which will all make a significant contribution to delivering the NIA ambition into the future. The partnership is managing a portfolio of projects which is investing over £5million in the Morecambe Bay area.

Connect people with nature by involving local communities in shaping habitat restoration schemes and providing a series of inspiring opportunities for people to experience and get involved with the natural world

This area of the programme aims to raise awareness of Morecambe Bay's outstanding wildlife and increase the number of people taking action for nature.

Our Community Engagement Officer is working with a range of groups and schools to engage and involve them in work to learn about and help conserve the area's special habitats.

For example, over 100 volunteers took part in the third NIA big volunteer day held in Warton in February 2014 at which they carried out vital management work on over 1.3ha of limestone woodland and grassland. This included 50 school children from three local schools who coppiced trees and cleared scrub.

A programme of practical volunteer events has also been delivered over the winter focusing on practical woodland and grassland management at a range of key sites.

Morecambe Bay Limestones & Wetlands NIA is participating in the Sciencewise programme, aimed at promoting and assisting public dialogue on scientific (in this case ecological) issues. Introductory work is focusing on three key sites across the area.