



Bedfordshire and Luton Habitat Action Plan: Reedbed

Updated September 2015



Foreword

We are fortunate in Bedfordshire to have a fantastic range of habitats and species within a relatively small geographical area. It is a county of marked contrasts, with the chalk habitats of the North Chilterns, the heathland and acid grassland of the Greensand Ridge and the woodlands and rolling countryside of the Ouse Valley. The fact that species such as adders, dormice and otters are all now expanding their ranges to varying degrees is something we should be proud of and testament to the work of the organisations and individuals involved, but we should not be complacent. There is much to be done, and these Biodiversity Action Plans set out the scale of that challenge very clearly. Only by continuing to work in partnership, putting the case for nature ever more strongly and clearly, can we hope to build on recent progress, bring the natural environment to the fore of the thinking of key decision-makers and reverse long-term declines.

Jon Balaam, Chair of Bedfordshire Local Nature Partnership



Biodiversity Action Plans Overview

The **UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP)** was created in response to a commitment at the 1992 Convention on Biological Diversity. It summarises the status of the most threatened habitats and species in the UK and then sets out a series of actions to halt their decline and then reverse it. There are National Action Plans for 1150 species and 65 habitats. The last meeting of the Convention on Biological Diversity took place in Nagoya, Japan during October 2010. During the convention the BAP was replaced by the **Aichi Targets**, which were signed by 192 governments. These 20 Targets aim to halt the loss in biodiversity worldwide by 2020. Within the targets there are a range of challenges, from protecting our best habitats and rarest species, to restoring the services our natural environment provides and tackling climate change. The *UK Post-2010 Biodiversity Framework* (July 2012) describes how the Aichi Targets will be implemented across the UK and is underpinned by a Biodiversity Strategy for each Country. In England this is *Biodiversity 2020: A strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services* (August 2011).

Although the Aichi Targets are the focus from the most recent Convention on Biological Diversity, the BAP is still a very valuable reference nationally and locally. It has been used to draw up statutory lists in some of the more recent Acts of Parliament which aim to protect and enhance biodiversity. In 2006 the **Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (NERC)** came into effect. In Section 41 of the Act there is a list of habitats and species which are “*of principal importance for the purpose of conserving biodiversity*”. This lists all the BAP habitats and species which are still regarded as priorities for conservation under the *UK Post-2010 Biodiversity Framework*. The list includes 56 habitats and 943 species. It was included to assist public bodies with the statutory duty placed on them by Section 40 of the Act. This is often referred to as the ‘Biodiversity Duty’ and states that public bodies have to:

“In exercising their functions, have regard, so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity.”

The aim of the Act is to embed nature conservation within all the relevant policies and decisions that public bodies make. Public bodies include a range of organisations from the Borough and Ward Councils to bodies carrying out functions of a public character under a statutory power. There is a Guidance Document that accompanies this Act to assist local authorities to implement the Biodiversity Duty.

Priority species and habitats are also recognised in the **National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)**, which came into effect in early 2012. The NPPF replaced most of the planning guidance which was previously available. It promotes the preservation, restoration and re-creation of priority habitats and ecological networks as well as the protection and recovery of priority species (paragraph 117).

Although the BAP is no longer promoted nationally it is written into legislation and policies which are being currently used. To support this locally, the BAP is still in use to inform and guide many projects and is kept relevant.



Reedbed

National lead organisation(s):
Natural England

County lead organisation(s):
Environment Agency

Reedbeds are wetlands dominated by stands of common reed *Phragmites australis* wherein the water table is at or above ground level for most of the year.

Current status

National status

Reedbeds in the UK are of geographical importance in a global context. It is a nationally scarce habitat supporting characteristic communities. The area of reedbed has declined by 5-10% between 1979 and 1993 due to drainage and lack of management. Reedbeds can be found scattered across the UK although most are concentrated in southeast England. England has approximately 5,000 ha of reedbed in total (JNCC, 2007). Of the 900 or so sites contributing to this total only 50 are greater than 20 ha in size. Dominated by common reed *Phragmites australis*, reedbeds support a distinctive breeding bird assemblage including 6 nationally rare Red Data Book birds: bittern, marsh harrier, crane, Cetti's warbler, Savi's warbler and bearded tit. Reedbeds also provide roosting and feeding sites for migratory birds and have five Red Data Book invertebrates closely associated with them.

Local status

Reedbed in Bedfordshire can be found in ditches, along the margins of rivers, around ponds, lakes and the numerous flooded brick and gravel pits. Most areas of reedbed are very small and the river margin reedbeds may cumulatively be the largest area of reed in the county. However, there are only about 22.3 ha of discrete reedbed in the county; 20 ha of this was created in 1999 at the Marston Vale Forest Centre. The other discrete reedbeds are: Chalton Sewage Treatment Plant (0.4 ha), Sandy Smith Nature Reserve (0.8 ha), Houghton Regis Quarry (1 ha) and Churchways Quarry (0.1 ha).

Current factors affecting Reedbed

- Fragmentation of riparian habitats across catchments and habitat fragmentation between water bodies and surrounding habitat.
- Poor in-channel habitat diversity and structure as a result of engineering and management practices on all types of watercourse.
- Neglect/non-management of some watercourses and wetlands.
- Development pressures in general and in particular on the floodplain.
- Sewage treatment works discharge.



Current action

Management, research and guidance

The Marston Vale Trust – the charity responsible for delivering the Forest of Marston Vale – manages a 20 ha reedbed originally created in 1999.

The Wildlife Trust, Greensand Trust and Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity offer advice on a wide range of wetland management issues and are working to facilitate greater understanding and dialogue among a wide range of wetland users.

The Environment Agency's (EA) operational maintenance regime encourages the development of reed and other marginal vegetation fringes along rivers. This is achieved by leaving strips of uncut vegetation along banks or cutting alternate banks.

Natural England, RSPB and the minerals industry have produced guides to best practice in the field of mineral site restoration to wetland habitat (RSPB 1990, 2008).

Achievements since publication of first Action Plan

- 17 ha of reedbed were brought into management under environmental management, of which, 3 ha were created
- Three out of the four known sites to have reedbed are positively managed in accordance with their management plans. These are Marston Vale Reedbed, Charlton Sewage Treatment Plant Lagoons and Houghton Regis Quarry.
- A digitised map of reedbed in the county has been produced by the BRMC (2010) as part of a habitat mapping project sponsored by Natural England.

Action plan objectives and targets

Objective

Maintain and where possible expand the range of reedbed in Bedfordshire and Luton

Maintain and where possible improve the condition of reedbed in Bedfordshire and Luton

Targets

- A. Maintain the 2007 extent (22.3 ha) and condition of reedbed in Bedfordshire and Luton
- B. By 2020 achieve favourable condition of the 2007 extent of reedbed in Bedfordshire by implementing positive management regimes.
- C. Create by 2030 a reedbed of at least 20 ha on an appropriate area of low biodiversity value

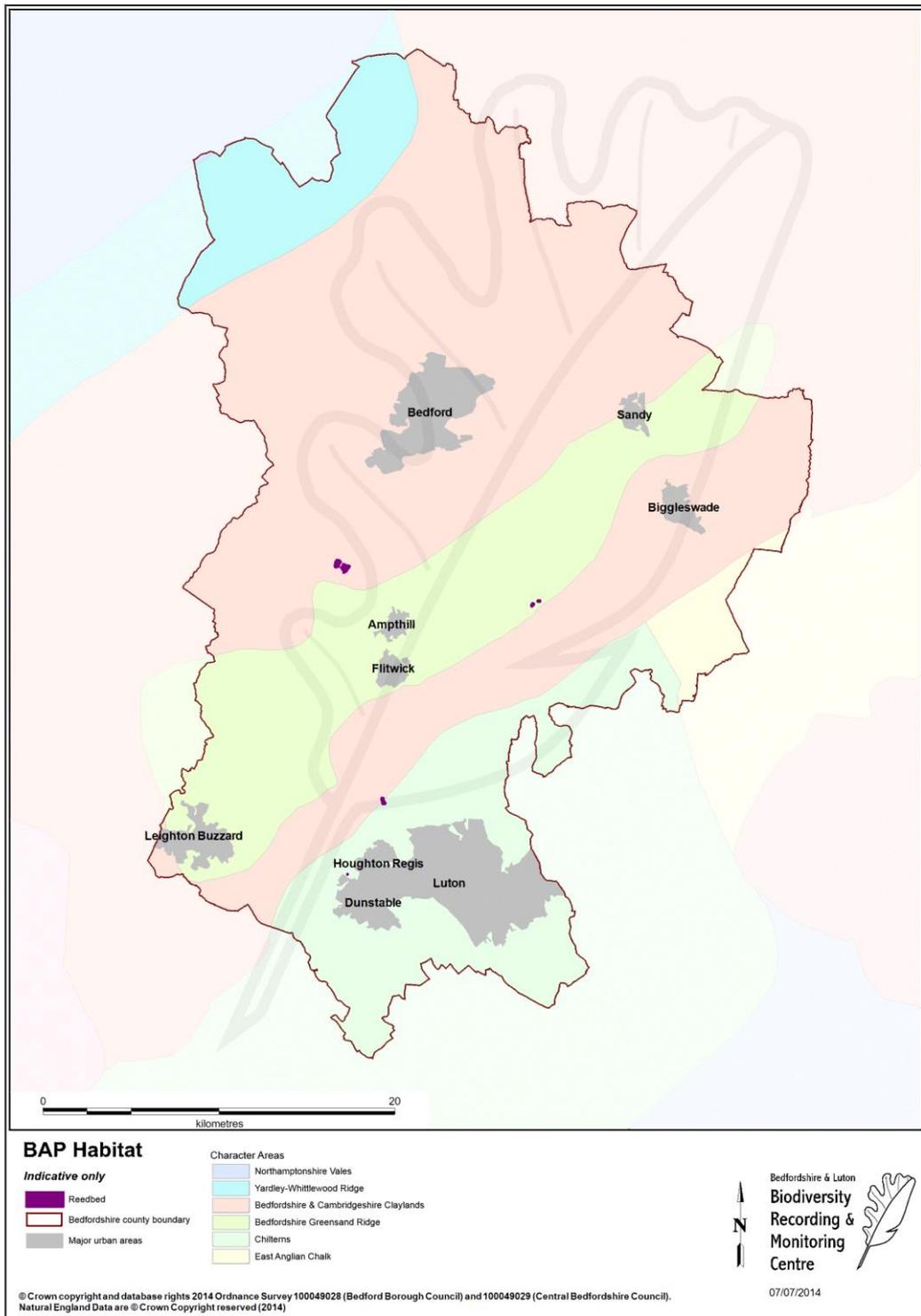


Figure 1: Reedbed habitat in Bedfordshire and Luton

Proposed action

Partners

Anlian Water Services
Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity
Bedfordshire & Luton Biodiversity Recording and Monitoring Centre
Environment Agency

Forest of Marston Vale
Natural England
The Greensand Trust
Wildlife Trust

Action

Policy and legislation

No local action identified

Site safeguard and management

1. The Marston Vale Trust continue to positively manage the Marston Vale reedbed (20 ha) in accordance with the management plan.
2. Anlian Water Services continue to positively manage the Chalton Sewage Treatment Plant lagoons (0.4 ha) in accordance with the management plan.
3. The Wildlife Trust continue to positively manage Houghton Regis Quarry (1 ha) in accordance with the management plan.
4. Seek to implement positive management regimes via management plans at Sandy Smith Nature Reserve (0.8 ha) and Churchways Quarry (0.1 ha) by 2020.
5. By 2020 seek an opportunity to create one reedbed of at least 20 ha in an area of appropriate low biodiversity value (e.g. as part of a restoration project), with a view to creating the reedbed by 2030.

Advisory

No local action identified

Future research and monitoring

1. Produce by 2020 a standard method/record sheet for reedbed monitoring.
2. Establish and implement by 2020 a rolling monitoring programme to assess the condition of each reedbed (Marston Vale (20 ha),

Chalton STP (0.4 ha), Sandy Smith Nature Reserve (0.8 ha), Houghton Regis Quarry (1 ha) and Churchways Quarry (0.1 ha) once every five years.

Communication and publicity

No local action identified



Monitoring the Action Plan

This action plan will be reviewed every five years.

Complementary plans

This action plan links to other Bedfordshire and Luton habitat and species action plans, in particular those for floodplain grazing marsh, rivers and water vole.

Acknowledgements

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